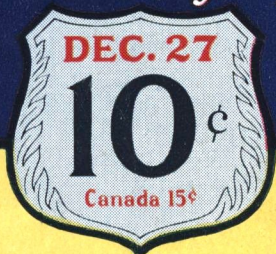


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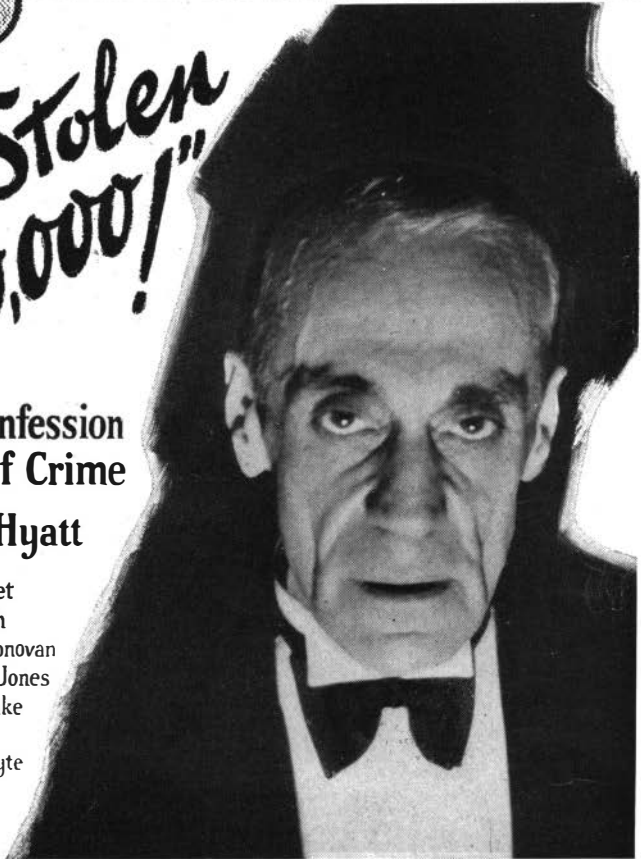
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VOLUME LV

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NUMBER 4

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# The House of Hate

*"No One Has Been Shot!" Dr. Rockne Is Told. But He Searches the House on the Hill and Finds—Murder*

By T. T. Flynn

## CHAPTER I

### A Phone Call in the Night

**A**BLIZZARD was sweeping out of the North this night. The wind howled, moaned, and wailed threateningly through a coal-black sky. Gaunt branches of trees lashed and crackled. Tin roofs rattled. Telephone wires sang. A dry, powdery snow pelted with a force that smarted when it struck the bare skin.

I stopped in to see Dr. John Rockne about a slight cold that I had.

As a matter of fact, I wanted to talk more than anything else. If the doctor were in there would be a crackling fire in the fireplace, warm toddy to be sipped at leisure, an open box of cigars—and stories.

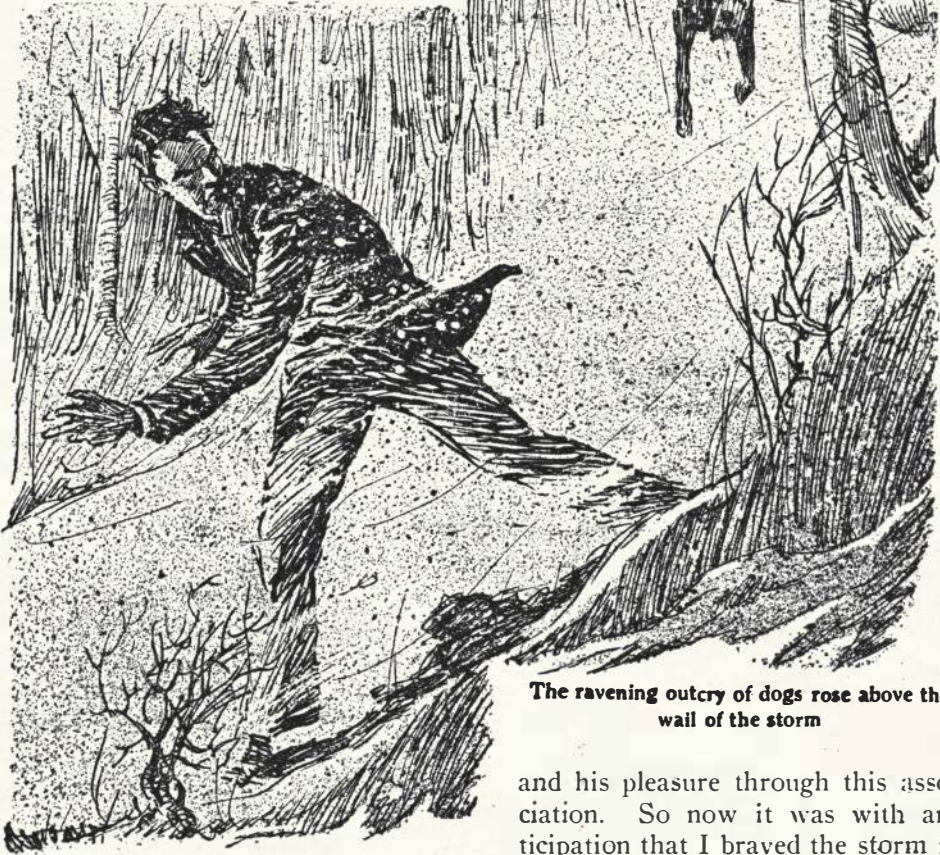
Dr. Rockne had not failed me in the two years I had been in the small town. He had lived there some ten years himself, and was the coroner. Before





that he had been a police surgeon in one of the largest cities of the East. And both in the large city and the small town there had come under the eyes and experience of this man an unending string of varied experiences.

Dr. Rockne was a man obsessed by crime. To him an unsolved mystery was a standing challenge that irked until it was solved. And he liked to talk of his hobby. That was the bond that held our friendship



The ravening outcry of dogs rose above the wail of the storm

together. I liked to hear him talk. He liked to do it. I was interested in what he had done. He was always alert for what could be done. Many a plot—many a story—had evolved to my profit

and his pleasure through this association. So now it was with anticipation that I braved the storm in my sedan, parked it in front of his house, and dashed through the snow to the front door.

Luck was with me. Dr. Rockne himself answered my ring. His face lighted up when he saw me.

"Hello!" he said heartily. "I was just thinking about you. Wishing you would drop by. Come in."

And as I took off my overcoat and muffler and followed him into the big living room he asked over his shoulder: "How would a glass of toddy go this evening?"

"Do you have to ask me?" I replied.

He chuckled and called loudly: "Mrs. Riley! We have a visitor. Better triple the amount of that toddy."

Mrs. Riley, his birdlike little Irish housekeeper, appeared in the doorway of the living room a moment later, saw me, smiled a welcome, and disappeared into her domain at the back of the house. I knew she would work wonders there with the toddy.

There was a crackling fire, as I had thought.

Dr. Rockne pulled another easy chair up by the side of his and dropped his great, gaunt frame down lazily. With a sweep of his left arm he indicated the mantel over the fireplace.

"Cigars and matches there," he said. "Pint of good Scotch, too. Got it on one of my own prescriptions, so I know it's good. Felt a slight cold coming on." And he screwed the side of his long, lean face into a droll wink. Dr. Rockne had, unfortunately, little regard for certain portions of the law. He obeyed them in the letter, and violated them in the spirit.

There was no denying that I had had come to see about a cold. I told him so, a trifle defiantly, as I reached for the bottle and a small glass. He laughed heartily, and as I smacked my lips in indorsement of his good judgment in medicine he urged, "Have another, my boy. As your physician, I prescribe it. Two drinks of that will help any cold."

Being only a patient, I took my doctor's advice, as all patients should.

Then we each lit one of his excellent cigars and talked lazily of affairs of the town, while waiting for Mrs. Riley to appear with the seasoning of the evening's pleasure.

We were both wreathed in curling smoke, and the fire was warm on our faces, when the sharp ring of the telephone bell cut across the room.

A look of annoyance crossed Dr. Rockne's face.

"Suffering cats!" he said with unprofessional slang. "If that's some one with lumbago pains, a sore throat, or anything less than a broken neck I'll tell them to crawl into the ice box until morning. This is no kind of a night to be calling a man out."

He got up slowly and stepped across the floor with a deceptive gait that he had. It seemed a slow shamble, yet carried him where he wanted to go with uncanny speed and smoothness. That was as good a description of the man himself as any, too. He seemed big, awkward, slow, yet his mind was sharp as a razor blade, and it drove right through cluttering facts and fancies until it got to the heart and truth of a matter.

The telephone bell shrilled once more before he picked the instrument up and answered it. I waited disconsolately, disappointed at the thought of a pleasant evening being ruined by the demands of his practice. For, despite his cold-blooded talk, Dr. Rockne never failed a patient. I myself knew of the time he had waded five miles through icy drifts to attend a dying man, when all roads were blocked to even men on horseback. But that's another story.

He stood there on the other side of the room with the receiver to his ear, and through the quiet I could heard



the buzz of a voice speaking to him. It sounded sharp, staccato.

After a moment, Dr. Rockne said briskly: "You don't say?"

The voice spoke again. "Yes," Dr. Rockne said, and his voice suddenly seemed charged with interest. "Yes, I'll go there at once."

I gave an inward sigh for a ruined evening.

Dr. Rockne put the receiver back on the hook and set the phone down on the table with a little thump.

"What is it?" I asked. "Lumbago—or a broken neck?"

"Neither," he said tersely, as he came toward the fireplace. "That was the girl at the telephone exchange. She says a call came on line thirteen. She answered it and there was a cry and the sound of a shot. The receiver was not returned to the hook, and there were no more sounds. She rang every phone on the line. All answered but the Judson house. She called the sheriff and then me."

"Murder!" I exclaimed involuntarily. "Murder at the Judson house?"

"I'm afraid so," he agreed, and his voice was vibrant and eager. He was like a hound quivering at the sight of a warm fresh scent. "You'll go with me, of course," he urged.

"I guess so," I said. "But I certainly wish they'd have selected another time for the deed. This is no kind of a night for a respectable murder."

Dr. Rockne's long, lean face broke into a smile.

"Sorry we can't have them to order in the summer evenings. But I guess we'll have to take them as they come. Let's be going." He moved toward the hall.

With a last regretful look at the warm fire, I joined him. We were donning our overcoats when Mrs. Riley

appeared and gazed at us with astonishment. "Land sakes!" she exclaimed. "Was that a sick call, doctor?"

"No. Some one has evidently just been murdered at the Judson place," he told her, reaching for his muffler.

"Saints preserve us! Murder!" Mrs. Riley's mouth set, and she nodded her head sternly. "I always said there was something funny about that place. That Mr. Judson now—he looked like a murderer. I thought that ever since he first came here."

Dr. Rockne smiled.

"Appearances are sometimes deceiving, Mrs. Riley. The man may have a heart of gold."

"If he had, he'll never die then," Mrs. Riley stated tartly. "Not if the stories about the way he likes his gold are true. I wouldn't be a skinflint like him for all the money in the world."

"Of course you wouldn't," Dr. Rockne told her affectionately. "But I'm afraid if every one was as generous as you, there would be very little business for the savings banks. We mustn't condemn Judson because he watches his money. There may not be much of it."

Mrs. Riley sniffed. "I reckon there's plenty." And then, as we turned toward the door, she cried: "You're not going out without a glass of toddy, doctor! Not on a night like this! It's all ready. I'll bring it in." Without waiting for his reply, she hurried back into the kitchen.

Dr. Rockne waited, a little smile on his lean face.

"No use trying to get away without it," he remarked. "She'd follow us out of the house with it."

I didn't doubt him. There was no secret about who ran Dr. Rockne's bachelor household, and gave him orders for the good of his health until

he sometimes observed that he might as well buy a rattle and pacifier and be done with it. But he really enjoyed being bossed. And there was no doubt that I enjoyed waiting for the toddy. Mrs. Riley had talents that were enough to make one's eyes water with emotion at about the third glass of toddy. I know. Mine have.

She brought two tall glasses in on a tray. We drank them hastily there by the door. And as we turned to go Mrs. Riley asked sharply: "Where are your rubbers, doctor?"

"I forgot them," he answered meekly, and hastily slipped them on. With that we managed to get through the door.

"Might as well go in my car," I suggested. "It's ready."

"Might as well," he agreed, turning up his coat collar to ward off the bombardment of snow particles.

As I headed for the Newberry Pike on the opposite side of town, I commented: "It looks like the Judson house is living up to its reputation."

"It does that," Dr. Rockne answered thoughtfully. "I've often wondered if there was any basis to the stories about it."

"Where there's smoke there usually has to be a little fire."

"Sounds logical," he agreed. "But I wouldn't say it holds true all the time. You know how people are in a community like this. Something queer happens and is not explained thoroughly at the time. Years pass, and it gathers detail and grows into a formidable tale. Something like a snowball rolling downhill."

"After riding past the Judson house at dusk, I'd believe almost anything about it," I declared, half fatuously, half seriously.

"That's one reason I never have

paid much attention to the gossip about the place. It looks like spooks, spirits and crimson crimes, and it would be queer if a few old wives' tales were not connected with it. The place has all the requirements of a good haunted house and murderers' den. Set off from the road on top of a tree-covered hill, with no houses near, and that family burying ground right back of it. And the trick the wind has of moaning through the trees."

"I've heard it," I assured him, and thought of all I'd heard about the Judson house.

## CHAPTER II

### The House on the Hill

IT lay about a half mile beyond the town limits, at a point where the pike curved around the base of a good-sized hill. On the top of the hill, surrounded by a thick growth of trees, was the house, a big three-story building of dark field stone. The surrounding trees, the dark stone walls, the family burying ground in back, cast an atmosphere of gloom over the place. At dusk, when the world looked spooky anyway, the Judson house seemed to crouch there at the top of the hill like a malignant monster waiting to spring upon unwary mortals on the road below.

It had stood there a hundred years and more, and some of the great oaks around it looked as though they had been old when the house was built. The first Judson had owned a great tract of land. Some was farmed, some was rented, and the Judsons were the leading family of the section. Later, the land was divided among heirs. Some was sold, some stayed with the house, but always a Judson lived in the house. And always misfortune came



to each generation. Something violent. The last had happened thirty years before. A Colonel Mark Judson went insane and killed himself and his beautiful young wife.

They left no children—but there were other Judsons. Too many, in fact. The house was boarded up and left to the mercy of time and the elements, while the heirs tried to agree in court and out, as to who would get the place. Finally, they all died off but Jacob Judson, a man whose mean and miserly nature would task the belief of the most credulous. He tried to sell it, and could not. Finally he sold the house he lived in, in town some hundred miles away, and moved into the Judson house.

That was five years before. At first there was Jacob Judson, his spinster sister, Lucinda, the housekeeper, a Mrs. Evans, and a hired man. They lived in the big silent house three years, guarded by two savage great Dane dogs—a mystery, and a source of gossip. Then had come a sick nephew, Ralph Black, and his sister. That was the household at present, and not one soul in the village knew anything more about them than the day they came.

The savage dogs kept trespassers away. No one was ever invited to call. The people in the house did not visit. Ralph Black never went out. Sometimes his sister, Marie Black, or Lucinda Judson, or even the hired man, came in town and spoke to a few people in the course of their business. But they never grew friendly enough to encourage personalities.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Evans, was a thin, silent woman who never spoke unless she had to. Old Judson himself, small, emaciated, with one lame leg, was always scowling and accusing

some one of trying to overcharge him or cheat him. He seemed suspicious of every one—and by the same token, every one was suspicious of him.

All in all, it was just the kind of a household to furnish material for profuse gossip, and the results had been more than profuse. The old stories and recollections about the Judson house had been raked up, relished, and added to. The spirits of the unfortunate past had risen from their graves and given character to the place. It was a house of misfortune, of trial, tribulation, and menace. And all that fitted perfectly with the people who now lived there. The whole district was in a state of mental expectancy, waiting for something to happen. I had been assured a score of times that it would.

And now it had.

A cry. A shot. Silence. What did it mean? Nothing else but murder, surely. Who had fired the shot? Who had cried out? Who was dead or dying? As the headlights cut a swath through the driving snow, and I drove fast, I put those questions to Dr. Rockne.

He shrugged.

"I'm not even trying to figure it out. Just waiting until we get there."

"Best idea," I agreed, and settled down to the business of fast driving.

We left the town behind and rushed along the Newberry Turnpike to the wooded hill that was our destination. There was a gate, and Dr. Rockne got out and opened it.

As the car started up the winding driveway he observed: "No sign of other wheel tracks. We must be ahead of the sheriff."

We reached the trees. The headlight beam struck great tree trunks, standing like dark spirits of the stormy

night, their gaunt branches reaching out with threatening movements.

The drive wound a tortuous way up the hill. Came a last turn. The lights pushed through the veil of driving snow and swept across the dark stone side of a big house. We stopped before wide stone steps. As the motor died a savage chorus of snarls and barks rose above the storm. Two great forms came leaping toward the side of the car.

"Sweet welcome," Dr. Rockne said dryly, looking at the huge dogs, whose slavering jaws bobbed and snapped at the side of the car.

"This is one house I'd never try to break into," I agreed, and blew the horn loudly and impatiently. Some one was going to have to call those dogs away before I stirred off the seat. One death was enough for the night. Doc Rockne evidently felt the same way, for he remained seated also.

Just as I started to again shatter the stormy night with the horn's cacophony, a lantern bobbed around the corner of the house. A man came toward us, shouting at the dogs. I knew him by sight—Phineas Cox, the hired man, a broad-shouldered, thickset man with bushy black brows, and a wide, expressionless face. A slow, deliberate man, whom one could visualize going stolidly about his tasks day after day without a thought disturbing the placid serenity of his brain. At least, that was the impression I had got the few times I had seen him doing errands in town.

The dogs quieted, and he slapped them aside carelessly—for which I respected him the more. Dr. Rockne pushed the door open and called above the sound of the wind: "Safe to get out now?"

"I reckon so. They won't hurt you till I tell 'em to. What you want?"

"I am Dr. Rockne, the coroner. Who has been shot?"

"Shot?"

"Yes."

Cox lifted the lantern up so the rays illuminated Dr. Rockne's face, and his also.

"Got the wrong place, ain't you?" he demanded. "Ain't no one been shot around here."

"Has a gun been fired?"

Cox shook his head. "Haven't heard one."

"Haven't heard a n y t h i n g that sounded like a shot?"

"No," said Cox flatly, and his stolid face was expressionless as he stared at us.

"We'll go in and see Mr. Judson," Dr. Rockne said, and got out. I followed.

"Mr. Judson don't like to be bothered in the evening. Not unless it's something mighty important."

"Our business is important," Dr. Rockne said shortly, and as he finished speaking the front door of the house opened slightly, and a shaft of light slanted across the front porch. Without talking longer to the still reluctant Phineas Cox, Dr. Rockne mounted the steps and went to the door. I was right behind him.

A woman was peering out, and when we loomed up in the light she opened the door a little wider and gazed at us suspiciously.

About fifty, I judged her. A tall, thinnish woman, wearing a dress of some dark silkish stuff, over which was an apron of rather gay flowered material. An apron that should have been on a much younger woman—at least, it seemed that way. And, crowning discrepancy of all, her dark hair was bobbed and curled. She probably once had been pretty; now was clinging



desperately to what had faded and passed.

"I want to see Mr. Judson," Dr. Rockne told her crisply.

The suspicion in her gaze deepened.

"What about?" she demanded, without showing any signs of opening the door and admitting us.

"I am Dr. Rockne, the coroner. I want to find out about the shot that was fired in this house a short while ago."

She closed the door a trifle, and stood as though ready to slam it.

"There wasn't any shot fired here," she declared tartly. "And we haven't any use for the coroner."

He shrugged. "Tell Mr. Judson I want to see him."

"Mr. Judson don't want to be disturbed in the evening."

"Madam," Dr. Rockne said calmly, "I am here to see Mr. Judson. I don't care to wait in the cold. Let us in and give my message to the gentleman."

He did not raise his voice, but there was that in the tone he used that made one hesitate to disobey. So in this case. She opened the door slowly and admitted us. As I walked in I was conscious that Phineas Cox was standing alertly at the steps with the two great Dane dogs by him.

I felt queer. Things didn't seem to be normal. The old house was living up to the atmosphere that had been woven around it. I swear I entered the door cautiously, as though expecting something startling to happen suddenly.

Nothing did, however. We walked into a large hall that had a door on the right, one on the left, and a wide carved staircase in front of us, leading up to the second floor. Back of the staircase some dozen feet the hall

ended, and there was a door in the wall there.

We were not asked to remove our hats and coats, or to sit down. The lady asked in a cold tone of voice: "What shall I tell Mr. Judson your business is?"

"Tell him," said Dr. Rockne, "that I want to know about the shot that was fired here."

"There wasn't any shot. You must have the wrong house."

"Tell him anyway. The sheriff will be here in a few minutes to see about it also."

Mention of the sheriff seemed to carry weight with her. She turned silently and went to the door on the right. I noticed then that her hands had flour on them, as though she had been working in dough.

Dr. Rockne looked at me and shook his head with resignation, as though to say that we were certainly encountering some queer actions. The Judson house was living up to a part of its reputation, at least.

The wailing of the wind and other noises of the storm penetrated inside the house. We heard a knock in the next room . . . another knock.

"Mr. Judson," the woman called, and knocked again. A door opened.

For a moment there were no more sounds. Then, with a suddenness that made me jump, a shrill cry of anguish rang out. "Jacob! Jake . . . Oh-h-h-h-h!"

### CHAPTER III

#### The Body on the Floor

DR. ROCKNE was through the door in an instant, with me at his heels. The room was a library, with shelves of books around the walls. In the opposite wall was another door,

standing open. Through it was coming a low, strangled moaning.

It did not cease as we burst through the door. Before us, on her knees, was the woman who had gone to call Jacob Judson. And the object that she was bending over was the motionless body of Jacob Judson.

Dr. Rockne went to her, caught her shoulders, and lifted her to her feet, saying sharply: "Let me look at him, madam."

Sobbing, she permitted him to raise her to her feet, and stood there twisting her hands together.

Jacob Judson lay on his back, right leg twisted over the left, one arm flung out, the other flexed up by the side by a last convulsive spasm of the biceps. The muscles of his emaciated face had relaxed. The mouth sagged in the semblance of a smile. But what a smile! In death Jacob Judson could not lose the character that had clothed him in life. He seemed to be sneering, leering disagreeably.

In the middle of his forehead was a red hole, standing out in sharp relief against the dead-white skin.

Surrounding the head and shoulders was a pool of coagulated blood.

A child could see that he had died almost instantly.

Dr. Rockne got to his feet slowly, and looked about the room. It was a study, extending out from the side of the house in a small wing, windows on three sides. An old-fashioned flowered rug covered the floor. There was a small bookcase against the left wall, a large library table in the middle of the floor, an old secretary desk against the right wall, with a chair before it. A large old-fashioned sofa was by the far wall, and a big easy chair on the other side of the library table.

A muffled sound vibrated through

the room. I looked around half fearfully. It came again—again.

"What's that?" I asked nervously.

Dr. Rockne also looked around in search of the cause. The woman wrenched out between dry sobs: "The phone! He plugged the bell so it wouldn't make noise!"

I saw then, by the left wall, a few feet from the body, a small stand holding a telephone. The receiver was dangling down to the floor, and the muffled sound was coming from the phone box fastened on the wall. A small wad of paper had been used to keep the striker away from the bell.

Dr. Rockne stepped over and picked the instrument up. "Hello," he said. "Central? . . . Yes, this is Dr. Rockne. It was one of the women of the house . . . Yes, I'll take charge of things now. The sheriff ought to be here any minute. Mr. Judson is dead . . . Nothing until he gets here . . . You couldn't ring any one because the bell was plugged. Good-by." He put the receiver on the hook, set the phone down, and turned back—just as Phineas Cox loomed up in the doorway.

Cox's stolid face was red. He glared at us, head bent forward, shoulders hunched, for all the world like a truculent, snow-dusted bear.

"What's goin' on in here?" he demanded. "I heerd Emily scream!"

"She found Judson dead," Dr. Rockne said curtly, pointing to the body.

Phineas Cox looked. His mouth opened. He took a step forward. Then his mouth closed; his glance flashed to the woman and he pressed his lips together tightly, as though fearful that he would say something unawares.

All that action, from the time that the woman had screamed until Cox



burst in, had taken place in a remarkably short time. Queer, how many impressions can be recorded instantaneously.

At that moment other steps came across the floor of the next room. A man appeared in the doorway. He wore a shabby bathrobe, and his face was thin, haggard, and at the moment astonished. "What is the matter?" he asked uncertainly, staring at the four of us.

"Mr. Judson has been murdered." Dr. Rockne said a second time, and his keen eyes did not leave the young man's face.

"Murdered? My God! Who did it?" Almost before the words were out the young man looked at Phineas Cox. Then at the woman, who by now was standing in stony silence, and then bit his lip as though to stop himself from saying more.

"That is to be determined," Dr. Rockne answered calmly. "Did you hear the shot?"

The young man shook his head. "No. I heard no shot. Who are you?"

"I am Dr. Rockne, the coroner."

"Who called you? How is it that you got here and I didn't know a thing until I heard Mrs. Evans's scream?"

"The telephone girl called me," Dr. Rockne told him evenly. "The receiver of this phone was taken off the hook. There was a cry and the sound of a shot. No one put the receiver back on the hook. Central called the sheriff, and then me. I came at once—and this lady declared there had been no shot. At my request she came in here—and found Mr. Judson. How was it you heard her scream, and yet did not hear a pistol shot?"

The young man shook his head uncertainly. "I don't know—unless it was because I was listening to the

radio. I've had the receivers over my ears most of the evening. Just took them off for a bit of a smoke when I heard Mrs. Evans scream."

Dr. Rockne looked silently at Phineas Cox. That man lifted his head and said with a trace of defiance: "I been working around the kitchen and out back of the house most of the evening. That's why I never heard nothing, what with the wind and so on. This room is sorta cut off from the rest of the house."

Dr. Rockne nodded, and shifted his gaze to Mrs. Evans. She had looked at Cox almost dazedly while he spoke; now she answered the unspoken question in Dr. Rockne's glance.

"I was in the kitchen all evening, making bread and beating up a cake, and so on. I don't know why I never heard anything. I—I just didn't."

Dr. Rockne nodded again, and let his eyes run over the three of them noncommittally. And as he did that the savage chorus of the two dogs broke out again in front of the house.

"That must be the sheriff," Dr. Rockne said to Cox. "Call off your dogs and let him in."

Cox went out silently. A few minutes later the dogs quieted. The front door opened, and Cox brought Sam Wood, the portly sheriff, and his long, lean deputy, Charley Owens, through the next room to us.

"Hello, Rockne," Sam Wood boomed. "Beat us out, I see. I had to go down and drag Charley away from a game of pool. Man here says that Judson has been murdered."

He was at Rockne's side by then, and could see the body on the floor for himself. He stared down at it a moment, and then looked up. "Know who did it?"

Dr. Rockne shook his head, and a

slight smile touched his mouth. "No one in this house heard the shot. They didn't know a thing about it until we got here."

"The devil, you say!" Sam Wood inspected the three members of the household, and there was unbelief on his fat, red face. "Why didn't they hear anything?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Evans here was working back in the kitchen. Cox was there also, and out back of the house. This young man was upstairs with radio phones over his ears."

"Who else is in the house?"

"Two others," the young man said. "Marie Black, my sister, and Miss Lucinda Judson, who is our aunt and the sister of Uncle Jacob, here. I am Ralph Black."

"Where are they?" Sam Wood asked. "How come they didn't hear the shot too?"

"Aunt Lucinda was doing the same thing I was. She still is, I guess. We have a radio set with wires running into each bedroom. Uncle Jacob didn't like the noise of a loud speaker, so I fixed it up that way. The set is in my room. When I turn it on all the other rooms can hear also. We lie in bed in the evenings and read and listen to the music."

"What was your sister doing?"

A fleeting little expression that might have been fear or caution swept across Ralph Black's face. He shrugged. "I can't tell you what she was doing. Probably listening to the radio. I know Aunt Lucinda was, for she came to my door and asked me to get KDKA for her."

"Better get 'em down here," Sam Wood requested.

Ralph Black nodded and went out.

"Maybe," said Phineas Cox stolidly, "he kilt himself."

"Might have," Sam Wood agreed. "But I think it's damn funny no one but the telephone girl in town heard the shot. Five other people in the house here, and not a one knowed about it. Don't sound reasonable."

"If it is suicide, there should be a gun," Dr. Rockne declared. "I don't see it."

I had not noticed that point. Now I saw there was no sign of a gun.

"Also," continued Rockne, "if he shot himself there ought to be some powder marks on the forehead. I don't say for certain there would have to be. But, as a general rule, a gun is held pretty close in suicide. Haven't you found it that way, Sam?"

Sam Wood's experience in suicide and murder cases never would have qualified him for an expert, but he nodded gravely and said that he had found it so. He didn't suspect that Dr. Rockne was trying to make him feel that he was handling the case with wisdom and finesse.

"The gun doesn't seem to be here," Dr. Rockne went on thoughtfully. "That, and the condition of the forehead, makes it look like homicide."

Charley Owens, the deputy, asked at that point: "Who would want to kill him?"

Mrs. Evans flashed a glance at Phineas Cox. Then dropped her eyes again. Doctor Rockne saw it, too, I was certain, but his face gave no indication of the fact.

Sam Wood answered his deputy. "I guess there's plenty would have liked to kill him, if you can believe half the things that were said about him. Looks like he quarreled with most every man he dealt with in town."

"None of them were any good!" Mrs. Evans flashed out, and then locked her lips and gazed silently down



at the floor once more, as though she had not said anything.

Sam started.

"What's that?" he asked.

She did not answer.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### Suspicious Glances

DR. ROCKNE turned away and made a circuit of the room, lifting the window shades and inspecting the catches of the windows. "All locked tight," he said when he finished. "Any one entering the room must have come through that door."

"Maybe," said Phineas Cox, "some one slipped in the front door, kilt him, and then went out that way."

"A stranger?"

"Yes."

"And what," the doctor asked with a trace of sarcasm, "would those dogs of yours be doing all the time?"

"Well—I dunno. Might have missed him."

"I doubt it," said Rockne dryly. "I am entirely convinced that they don't miss people. Even if they had not torn a stranger up, they would have made enough noise to attract attention. You came running quick enough when they flew at us."

Phineas Cox made no reply. I had the feeling that he had not believed in the suggestion when he offered it. Had been merely trying to make talk—or throw attention on a false clew. I was beginning to be a trifle suspicious of this man. Mrs. Evans had looked at him queerly. He had done a little queer looking himself. Something seemed to be going on under the surface. I was certain of it when he spoke a moment later.

"I was feedin' them out in the shed fer a time. Might have happened then."

"That might be so," Dr. Rockne admitted.

Before anything more could be said, Ralph Black returned.

"The ladies will be down in a minute," he said. "Is there anything you can put over Uncle Jacob, so they won't have to see him? He's not a very pretty sight." He spoke calmly. As far as I could see there was no trace of grief in his tones. A little soberness perhaps. Not, however, what one would expect from a loving nephew.

"Have you anything handy? A sheet, or something like that?" Dr. Rockne asked Mrs. Evans.

She nodded silently and went out. Phineas Cox's eyes followed her.

"Did your sister explain why she didn't hear the shot?" Dr. Rockne asked the young man.

"She was running water in the bathtub about that time. And singing. In a small room that makes a lot of noise, you know. And she didn't hear Mrs. Evans cry out because she was in bed then with the radio receivers over her ears."

Sam Wood shook his head. "Them radio receivers sure play hob with the hearing around here," he remarked.

"We are getting some rather loud band music to-night, and there is quite a bit of static," Ralph Black explained. "It fills your ears with plenty of noise."

"Judson's sister doing the same thing?"

"Yes. She has been listening all evening. I thought she was going to faint when I told her about this. But she managed to pull herself together. She's mighty cut up about it, though."

"I imagine your sister is too," Dr. Rockne hazarded.

"I don't know. She—she never got along with him very well. I don't think they cared for each other very

much. She . . ." Black Ralph stopped suddenly and bit his lip.

"Yes . . ." prompted Dr. Rockne encouragingly.

"She has wonderful self-control," Black finished. "If she was grieving her heart out, you wouldn't be able to notice it."

This was what his lips said. But his face, when he had stopped abruptly before that, had said that he was talking too much. Dr. Rockne, however, only nodded, and seemed to accept his words at their intended value.

Mrs. Evans came back as silently as she had gone out, and handed a folded sheet to the doctor. He shook it out and spread it over the still form on the floor. Not a minute too soon either. Steps sounded in the hall. Two women crossed the library and came in to us.

The older was perhaps the age of Mrs. Evans, and, like her, had once been pretty. Prettier, if I was any judge. But now the fifties had thinned her cheeks, etched lines, perhaps hardened her a bit. She was like a faded flower that has the power to suggest bygone glory, but turns into a husk when picked up and examined closely.

Marie Black the younger, was all that Lucinda Judson had been and was not. Lithe and young, with a suggestion of vibrant life. Her cheeks were smooth, her profile striking, her dark hair bobbed and waved.

Both wore dressing gowns.

Marie Black had an arm around the waist of her aunt. The sister of the dead man was crying silently into a handkerchief, but when she got into the room she dabbed at her eyes and tried to gain control of herself. Her glance dropped for a moment to the sheet on the floor. A little shudder ran through her, and then she took her eyes away resolutely and looked at us.

"I am Lucinda Judson," she said simply. "This is my niece, Marie Black. I—I don't know what to say about this terrible thing. I feel as though I am in a dream." She raised her handkerchief to her lips again, and choked back sobs.

Marie Black patted her waist. But the glance that the younger girl turned on the sheet-covered form on the floor was steady. She showed no signs of past or future tears. Like her brother, there was soberness—but that was all I could see. No grief certainly—or, if there was, she was hiding it wonderfully well.

Sam Wood hesitated. In that moment Dr. Rockne spoke soothingly. "This is a most regrettable and terrible occurrence, Miss Judson. But there are certain things that must be done, and it will be necessary to question you. Please forgive us if we seem to add to your grief."

"I realize it," she said with a slight nod.

"First, we are trying to understand how it was possible for the telephone girl in town to know about this, and for us to get clear out here, and find a house with five people in it, all completely unaware that anything had happened. It is most peculiar. Did you at any time hear any kind of sound that might be suspicious, in the light of what we now know?"

She shook her head.

"Not a thing. I have been listening to the radio all evening."

"And you, Miss Black?"

"I didn't hear a thing either. As near as I can think, I must have been running water in the tub when this happened. Or else bathing. I was singing loudly all the time. When I finished, I went to bed with a magazine and the radio receivers over my ears. I didn't



know a thing until Ralph came up and told me."

"This radio sure mixed things up," said Wood sighing. "But it does seem like the ones downstairs ought to have heard something. Pistol shots go a long way."

"The house is big," Mrs. Evans said emotionlessly. "Go back in the kitchen and try to hear anything that happens in this wing. Phineas was out back a lot of the time. I don't know what he heard."

"Too much wind to hear anything," Phineas Cox said stolidly.

"So there you are," Sam Wood commented. "Mr. Judson was shot, and no one in the house knows anything about it."

I was looking, and I'll swear this is the truth. Mrs. Evans glanced at Phineas Cox again. Cox looked at Ralph Black. Marie Black looked at Mrs. Evans, and Ralph Black looked at Cox. And in every furtive, fleeting glance there was an element of suspicion. Not casual wonder, but suspicion engendered by something that each person knew. I was too late to see if Dr. Rockne had noted them. He was looking at the sheriff when my eyes reached him.

"I don't see how any one could have come in from the outside with those dogs around," he stated.

"I don't either," Sam Wood agreed. "They couldn't, that's all!"

"Do you know of any one who might hate your brother enough to do this?" Dr. Rockne asked Miss Judson.

"No one. A great many people disliked him, I know. But—but this . . ." she broke off and shook her head silently.

"Was there a revolver in the house?"

"I—I don't know whether he had one or not."

"He had one," Mrs. Evans said

colorlessly, and then locked her lips again.

"Ah," said Sam Wood. "Where did he keep it?"

"I don't know."

"What kind was it?"

"I don't know."

"How then," Sam asked, with a trace of testiness, "do you know a thing about it?"

"I have seen him with it."

"Where? What was he doing?"

"Walking along the hall. I don't know what he was doing."

Sam shook his head helplessly. "How long ago was this?"

"Last week."

"Ah," said Sam, with renewed interest. "Last week." At that point, however, the portly sheriff ran out of speech. He scratched his head. "Well, there don't seem to be any gun around now," he finally said. And then another thought struck him and he remarked: "Seems mighty funny that his own sister didn't know he had a gun."

Ralph Black came to her defense. "He was most secretive. We rarely knew anything about his private affairs. This part of the house was his own, and we were not supposed to come in here unless he asked us to."

"Well, he had a gun, an' he was shot, and there ain't no sign of a gun," Sam Wood said stubbornly. "Don't take anybody with sense to know that he couldn't hide the gun again, even if he used it. So it's clear that there's others mixed up in it. I want to know who it was."

"So do we all," Ralph Black came back at him. "What do you suggest?"

Sam scratched his head again. Plainly he didn't suggest anything at the moment.

"How about that receiver off the hook?" I suggested.

Sam brightened. "Yes. How about that? He must have been going to call some one when he was shot. And then he cried out, according to the telephone girl. Guess that's enough to show he was killed by some one else. He wouldn't go through all that and then shoot himself."

Dr. Rockne had been standing silent, looking around the room, and at the faces of the people crowding between the body and the door.

"Was any one in here this evening?" he asked.

No one answered. Mrs. Evans spoke for them all. "He came in here after supper. Said he wanted to be alone. I didn't see any one go in." Her voice was emotionless, with no trace of the grief that had first torn at her mind.

"You are certain then, no one could have been in here?" Dr. Rockne asked carelessly, as if idly repeating his other question.

His face was blank. But his mind was not, I knew. Behind his lean features thoughts and surmises were seething; points were coming to the surface, being considered, and either discarded, or filed away for future use. He rarely asked questions that did not have purpose behind them.

Mrs. Evans must have suspected that he was not as innocent as he looked—or sounded. She gazed at him silently a moment, her hands folded in front of her, thin lips pressed together tightly. Then answered with a trace of asperity.

"I didn't say any such thing, and I'm not certain of any such thing! How can I be? I was back in the kitchen all evening. I said I didn't see any one go in. But there was plenty of chance for some one to. Plenty! You listen to what I actually say. Don't try to put words in my mouth.

Jake—Mr. Judson was murdered . . . I don't know anything about it, and I won't be connected with it, no matter how much you want to make it seem that way."

All eyes were on her, all attention, save mine. I had seen too much going on behind the covering of talk and action. I was now on my guard for something else to crop up that was not supposed to be seen by others.

Something did.

I saw it plainly.

Phineas Cox was standing off to one side of the woman. He had been staring with fascination at the sheeted mound on the floor. It seemed to attract him strangely. More so than could be accounted for by mere curiosity. But when Mrs. Evans spoke—and declared that she was back in the kitchen all evening, Phineas Cox turned his head and shot her a quick look. It contained more than mere curiosity; more than the passing interest of the rest of the people in the room were giving her words. I would have been willing to bet a month's pay that Cox knew something, or suspected something that did not jibe with the housekeeper's words.

But what?

That question was churning about in my mind when Mrs. Evans finished speaking.

Dr. Rockne raised a protesting hand.

"You misunderstand my words entirely," he assured her. "I was not trying to put words in your mouth. Nor was I trying to connect you with this affair, any more than I am the other people who were in the house when it happened. You all may as well understand now, that a man was murdered here in the house with you. The circumstances are very suspicious—that is to say, queer. No one is



going to be accused without cause, or be connected with the matter any more than circumstances warrant. I think Mr. Wood here feels that way about it."

"Sure do," Sam Wood agreed. "But, by golly, questions have to be asked, and answered."

"It seems to me you have asked quite a few already," Marie Black observed quietly.

"Huh? What's that, ma'am?"

She repeated her words, meeting the gaze of the portly sheriff as she did so.

"Well, that's right. And I guess we'll ask more questions yet," Sam came back at her.

"Fire away," she invited with a shrug.

## CHAPTER V

### The Flour Clew

I COULD not help but admire this lithe, vibrant young woman and the cool way she was taking the matter. Or was it too cool? One expected a woman to show some shock at least. This Marie Black was as calm and contained as if she were attending an afternoon tea, or looking over the exhibits in a museum.

Sam Wood's fat, red face took on a deeper hue as he stared at her. I guess he would have liked to hurl a great many questions at her, and the very desire rendered him impotent. He cleared his throat, nodded portentously, and then told her ponderously:

"Got to have time to look around a little. A man can't rush into a mess like this and have the whole matter at his finger tips the next minute. I'll look around, and when I get ready to ask the questions, you be ready to answer them. Now I suggest the lot of you go to your rooms and stay there, or go in the living room, while Dr.

Rockne and I look around some more and have a talk. Charley Owens will go along and keep you company."

Sam said the last without rancor, but it was easy enough to see that he did not intend that they be free from surveillance. And no doubt he was right.

Mrs. Evans did not seem to think so. She drew herself up rigidly and informed him frostily: "He can stay in here. We don't need his company."

Miss Lucinda said hesitatingly: "Let him come. I am sure it makes no difference. We have no—no secrets; no desire to escape."

"But it's like putting us under arrest!"

Miss Lucinda drew herself up also. The look she gave Mrs. Evans was barbed, charged with hostility. One could easily see no love was lost between the two women.

"It is quite all right for the young man to go where he pleases in the house," she stated coldly.

"Very well," Mrs. Evans acquiesced, pressing her thin lips together until they made a bloodless gash across her face. And she was woman enough to add, "He will probably go where he pleases anyway."

Sam would ordinarily have chuckled at that, but the occasion was too solemn for humor. He nodded, and said soberly: "I aim to."

Dr. Rockne had remained silent during the exchange of words. His eyes, however, had missed nothing.

They began to file out of the room. I heard Miss Lucinda say nervously to Marie Black: "I don't want to go to my room and sit there alone. It is all too dreadful. Suppose we go into the living room and light the fire. Mrs. Evans can make some coffee, and we will try to be as comfortable as possible."

"Just the thing," Marie Black agreed readily.

Charley Owens stepped close to Sam Wood.

"Is there anything special you want me to do in there?" he asked in a low voice.

Sam shrugged. "Not as I know of, Charley. Keep an eye on 'em. Guess I don't have to tell you to look for any suspicious moves any one might make."

"No," Charley said sagely. "I'll watch 'em like a hawk. Nothin'll get by me. Do—do you think one of 'em did it, Sam?"

"Don't know anything right now," Sam muttered.

Charley closed the door behind him. The three of us were left alone in the room.

Dr. Rockne drew out his cigarette case and offered it to me, open. I took one. Sam declined. "Smoke my pipe," he decided, producing a villainous looking corncob. He filled it from an old leather pouch, tamped the dark tobacco down with the end of his thumb, and then applied a match to it.

The first puffs of smoke were in keeping with the looks of the pipe. They quite drowned out the fragrant odor of the doctor's Turkish tobacco. But it seemed to make Sam feel better. He looked at the body on the floor, and then at us.

"Some mess, eh?" he brought out.

"Quite." Dr. Rockne agreed absently. He was standing in his tracks, staring about the room, thinking deeply. About what, I had no inkling, and knew better than to interrupt and ask.

Sam Wood saw it too, and transferred his attention to me.

"What do you think about it?" he queried confidentially.

I had to smile slightly, not being as

deeply concerned with the matter as the rest of them. "I don't think anything much right now," I confessed, "except that there's something funny about the whole business. Did you see them eying one another, like each had something on some one else?"

Sam frowned. "No, I didn't see that. What was it? Who looked at who? What was it like?"

Dr. Rockne broke away from the thoughts that held him and shot me a keen glance.

"I think you must have been seeing things, Flynn," he observed quietly, and dropped his right eyelid in an infinitesimal wink.

Sam Wood was looking at me and did not see it. I did, however, and had sense enough to know that Rockne did not want me to say anything about the subject at the present time.

"Perhaps you're right at that," I told him quickly, instead of replying to Sam Wood. "If Wood did not see it, then I evidently made a mistake."

Sam Wood grinned at me and said complacently: "You must have been dreaming."

"Undoubtedly," I agreed, wondering even as I spoke what purpose Dr. Rockne had in wanting to keep the matter from the sheriff.

The doc did not enlighten me. He turned his attention to the body on the floor. Stripping off the sheet that covered it, he looked down thoughtfully. Sam Wood drew nearer and looked also, with morbid curiosity. At least it seemed so to me. Sam Wood was a nice fellow, a pretty good man for sheriff of a rural county, but he never would be especially brilliant. Never a man to tackle a complicated murder case, a baffling mystery. Dr. Rockne was examining the body carefully; Sam seemed to be just staring.



After a moment the doctor bent over and caught the left shoulder. Jacob Judson had been a small man; the shoulder came up without difficulty; the body turned over somewhat.

"Ha!" said Dr. Rockne with satisfaction, and turned the body the rest of the way over.

"What's the matter?" Sam Wood asked curiously.

Dr. Rockne straightened up. "I saw some white showing where the coat disappeared under the body," he said with satisfaction. "It looked suspicious. I was right. See?" He pointed to the back of the coat.

I saw it even before he spoke or pointed. A twinge of excitement ran through me. He seemed to have stumbled on a clew that marked the end of the quest for the murderer of Jacob Judson. It was plain. Damning.

Sam saw it also — couldn't have missed it if he had tried.

On the dark cloth of the coat were the prints of two hands. Prints made by flour. And from their position there was no doubt that the hands which left the marks had been encircling the body of Jacob Judson. Had been hugging the man, in fact. There it was in plain sight, for all the world to see.

Sam puffed hard on his pipe as he stared down at the sight. And then took the pipe from his mouth and said excitedly: "Flour marks! And that housekeeper has got flour on her hands! Says she's been in the kitchen all evening baking!"

"Exactly," said Dr. Rockne.

"And she swore she hadn't been in here at all!" Sam was getting more and more excited, driving his remarks home with jabs of the pipe stem.

Dr. Rockne nodded. "She was lying. This proves it beyond the shadow of a doubt, unless she can show that

some one else had flour on their hands. And, if I am not mistaken, her hands will fit these marks exactly."

"Then we've got her!" Sam Wood declared. He jammed the pipe stem between his lips, bit down on it hard, and said again with utter conviction. "Got her! Right off the bat! I'll put her under arrest, and make her come through with the truth."

It was his right to do that. That is to say, he was the sheriff, with the power of making arrests. Dr. Rockne was only the coroner. But the doctor's superior mind was so adroitly directing the situation that he really was its guide, while Sam Wood retained the impression that he himself was.

Dr. Rockne's long, lean face shadowed slightly as the sheriff stated his intention.

"Don't you think there are several points that should be settled before you do that?" he asked quickly.

"What?"

"There is the matter of the gun that was used, for one. It must be hidden around the house. All we have to go on now is the fact that Mrs. Evans evidently lied about being in the room here. That is hardly enough to convict her. She seems to be a strong-willed woman. It may be possible that, if she is warned now that we know she was lying, she will refuse to say anything, and may be able to block us."

Sam took his pipe from his mouth and scratched the side of his head.

"Hadh't thought of that," he admitted. "She is a hard case. I dunno — what do you think we better do?"

"Search her room," Dr. Rockne said tersely. "And the kitchen where she has been working. And then the rest of the house if necessary. The murderer must have had a motive. Perhaps her room will yield it. And, if she

shot him, the gun should be around somewhere."

"If she shot him? Aren't we sure of it?" asked Sam Wood vigorously.

"We are never sure of anything until it is proven. Suppose you keep an eye on the room here, and see if you can find anything in the one adjoining, or the hall. Flynn and I will go up to her room and look through things. And it might not be a bad idea to keep her in the dark about our suspicions."

"Sure," Sam agreed with alacrity. "I'll handle her all right. And go through the place with a fine-toothed comb."

"It might not be a bad idea either, to leave this room alone until we can get together on it," Dr. Rockne suggested carefully.

"That's right."

And so the upshot of it was that Sam went prowling about on a rather meaningless quest downstairs, while Dr. Rockne and I went upstairs to the housekeeper's room.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Picture

MRS. EVANS was in the kitchen at the time, making coffee. The rest of the family were gathered in the big living room across the hall, manifestly ill at ease under the too obvious watchfulness of Charley Owens, who seemed to feel that here was a chance to show his mettle. Dr. Rockne opened the door, looked in, and asked calmly:

"Mr. Black, I wonder if you can spare me a few minutes?"

"Certainly." Black got up quickly and joined us in the hall.

I rather liked him; probably it was mostly sympathy for the rather hag-

gard figure he made in the shabby bathrobe.

"Where is the room occupied by Mrs. Evans?" Doctor Rockne asked in a low tone when the closed door cut off sound of our speech from the rest of the family.

"Upstairs," Ralph Black answered, and then his thin face tensed. "You haven't—she hasn't . . . I mean, you don't think she did it, do you?"

"Do you?"

It might have been surprise at the suddenness with which the doctor snapped the question back; it might have been an effort to not show the thoughts that were in his mind, that made Ralph Black look down at the floor, press his lips together, and make no answer.

Dr. Rockne waited a moment, and demanded crisply: "Do you think she did it? Did she have any motive?"

"Motive?" The young man took a breath and looked up. He seemed to gain in confidence as he spoke. "Motive? I don't know. She and Uncle Judson were very friendly. She had been working for him for years."

"Let's go upstairs," Dr. Rockne suggested.

We followed him up to a hall that ran through the center of the house. There he stopped and took up the thread of conversation that had been dropped. "Your uncle and his housekeeper never had any hard words?"

"I wouldn't say that. No one got along perfectly with uncle. He was—was . . ."

"Go on—say it."

"Well," said Ralph Black a trifle defiantly, "they say you shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but every one knows this. He was hell to live with. The Angel Gabriel couldn't have got along with him without quarreling at



times. Or at least hearing a few nasty remarks."

"He treated Mrs. Evans that way?"

"As much as any of us. Perhaps more."

"What about?"

"Oh, little things. Nothing that ever amounted to anything. Coffee too cold. Bread not baked right. Door left open. Her sweeping or cleaning when he wanted to be quiet—or even coming around when he had one of his solitary spells. He'd go off in the room there and moon and gloom for a day or so. If any one disturbed him, he'd raise the devil. Mrs. Evans was the only one who would take a chance on it. Sometimes she would go in where he was, and then he would bawl her out."

"How did she take it?"

The young man smiled slightly.

"Better than one would think. She always seemed to have a soft side for him—and it wasn't to save her job either. She'd sass him back a little, but she never lit into him like I've seen her do other people. I guess she was sweet on him. Funny, isn't it?" He managed another smile at the thought.

"Have they done much quarreling the last few days?"

"No. They have been pretty peaceable. More so than usual, if anything."

"I see. Well, now that we're up here, set me right about all the rooms on this floor. And tell me again what the people were doing all evening."

Ralph Black did, readily.

The hall we were standing in bisected the house from front to back, or from east to west as the house lay. The front bedroom on the north belonged to Judson, who had been almost directly below, in the wing which jutted out from that corner of the house. Just back of Judson's front

bedroom was the bathroom where Marie Black had been running water in the tub, and making so much noise she could not hear the sound of the shot. Next was a small bedroom used by Mrs. Evans. Back of that was a larger corner room occupied by Marie Black.

On the north side of the house, then, were the bedrooms of Judson, Mrs. Evans, and Marie Black—and Judson and Mrs. Evans had been downstairs all evening.

The south side of the house contained four rooms. The front, across from Judson's room, was used as a sewing room and sun parlor. Next was Miss Lucinda Judson's bedroom; then a spare bedroom for guests—who never came—and lastly Ralph Black's room, across the hall from his sister's.

Miss Lucinda and Black had been in their rooms with radio earphones clamped over their heads.

Phineas Cox, the hired man, had a small room downstairs at the rear of the house. He had been around the kitchen and out back during the evening, or so he claimed.

Dr. Rockne listened carefully as each detail was brought out. When Ralph Black finished, both the doctor and I had a clear map of the place in our minds; and knew the apparent location of each person in the house at the time Jacob Judson was shot.

Of all their stories, only that of Mrs. Evans had turned out false, so far. And she was one of the two who had been downstairs with Jacob Judson.

"That will be all," Dr. Rockne told Black. "You may go back to the others."

Black went downstairs again. Dr. Rockne waited until he was out of sight; then went to the room occupied by Mrs. Evans and entered. I followed.

Ensued a quick, thorough search. Hair trunk, old-fashioned bureau, straw suitcase, chest of drawers, closet, mattress, and a look for secret hiding places.

We found no gun.

Item one of interest was a small unframed picture of Jacob Judson.

I found it in a compartment in the top of the trunk, together with several other articles that had no meaning for us—a faded bit of ribbon, several letters, undated, a tarnished necklace . . .

The whole lot was in an empty candy box, the kind that had big bows of pink and blue ribbon attached to the top, and the picture of a lady with a neat bustle lithographed amid the fluffy setting.

It had been some years since Mrs. Evans had been given, or had purchased, that box of candy. The colors had turned yellow, and the box was grimy and worn where fingers had picked it up countless times and removed the lid. A little treasure chest of memories, just about as faded and worn by life as the lady herself.

The picture of Jacob Judson lay on top, as if it were the chief treasure of all—the one looked at most frequently. Taken some years before, the clothes fitting none too well, the pose stiffish, the face unsmiling, it was not a sight to light the tender flame of love in most feminine breasts. Yet it had evidently done so in the capable and somewhat formidable Mrs. Evans.

At least there was something between them. The way she had acted when she found the dead body, the surmise of Ralph Black, who had seen them together day in and day out, and lastly, the picture, bore that out.

Something between them—and she had lied about seeing him during the evening; and her hand marks were on

Judson's back in a most compromising position.

Most of the room had been searched when I tackled the trunk. Dr. Rockne and I stood together, inspecting the picture and the contents of the candy box.

"Let's see who the letters are from," he said.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Housekeeper Talks

**D**ID I say we had closed the door? We had. Just as we started to look through the letters, the door knob turned quickly; the door swung in. Mrs. Evans stalked into the room, quivering with anger. She must have slipped up easily, listened a moment, and then sought to surprise us.

It was a surprise, too, but Dr. Rockne glanced at her coolly. "We don't need you right now, madam," he told her.

"You—you . . . get out of this room! You sneaks! Thieves! I might have known you would go snooping around as soon as my back was turned! Get out! And my letters! Give them here!" She advanced on him and tried to snatch them from his hand.

Since I was out of it for the moment, I stood there and grinned at Dr. Rockne. He certainly had a handful to manage.

He fended her off with an arm, and put the letters he held in his coat pocket.

"Stop this!" he ordered sternly.

Her anger was increasing, if anything. And it was real, deep. I verily believe that if she had had a weapon in her hand, it would have fared ill with the doctor; myself, too, without a doubt. When a strong woman gets out of control, things usually happen.

"Give them to me!" she panted. "Get out of my room!"

Dr. Rockne evidently saw that the time had come to have it out with her. He caught her arm firmly. "Quiet!" he rapped. "Do you realize the sheriff wants you on a charge of murder?"

If he had struck her with a club he could not have produced as much change as did that one grim statement. Fight went out of her. She swayed, eyes staring wide.

"He—he is going to arrest me for killing Jake?" she brought out in a tight, strained voice.

"Yes."

"But—but . . . I didn't do it. No! No!"

Dr. Rockne released her arm. She caught the apron of gay flowered material in her hands, and twisted the cloth until it seemed in danger of tearing. Her thin face aged years in as many seconds. She looked frightened, dazed.

Dr. Rockne's wise eyes were boring steadily at her, searching under the outer mask of her features, probing with the skill of many years' practice for feelings and emotions that she might be trying to hide.

"You didn't kill him?"

"No!"

"You weren't in his room any time during the evening?"

"No!" She was still twisting the apron edges between her fingers, but a measure of control and strength was returning to her. Her eyes met his steadily as she brought the words out. "No. I wasn't in his room all evening. I told you once. I was back in the kitchen working."

Rockne's eyes held her. "Suppose I told you," he stated slowly, "that I know you were in that room this evening."

"Why—I—you *can't!*" It was plain to even me that she had shifted from agonized protest to bravado. "You *can't* say you know I was in there this evening. How—how can you?"

"Not only were you in there, but you were most friendly with your employer." Dr. Rockne told her with the assurance of absolute knowledge.

"How do you know?" Her confidence was ebbing now. She could see that he did know something, and felt the ground slipping from beneath her feet, figuratively.

He did not tell her; only said again: "I know, and so does the sheriff."

"That—that . . . Phineas Cox told you! He has been spying around again! The deceitful clod!"

Rockne spared me a glance, calling my attention to the fact that a new trail was opening up.

"Has he been spying on you long?" he asked her easily.

"Why—I—I don't know. He *did* tell you then?"

"It is no matter. We know. Suppose you be frank about it. Why did you go in—and why did you lie about it?"

I felt rather sorry for her. Really. Faded, the best of life behind her—and now what was left torn to bits. Hard, indeed.

She confessed what we already knew.

"I did go in there for a few minutes. Just to see Jake, and ask him if there was anything he wanted. He was all right then. When I left, he said he was going to do some reading and writing."

"You had your arms around him," Dr. Rockne prompted.

Thin color stained her faded cheeks. "Yes . . . Phineas Cox was up to his old tricks. That's the only way you



could know. Yes—I did kiss Jake just before I went out. I am not ashamed of it.”

“Why did you kill him then?” Rockne snapped abruptly.

“I didn’t!” she came back vehemently. “I don’t know anything about it!”

“Why did you lie about being in the room?”

Her chin came up; bitterness entered her face and voice. “It was none of their business. They were all snooping and spying on us. I would have cut my tongue out before I would have given them anything like that to talk about.”

“You were in love with Jacob Judson?”

“I—I won’t say anything more. I didn’t kill him. I don’t know who did, though I have my suspicions. Go ahead and do your worst. Put me in jail if you want to.” She had regained control of herself, and was again standing straight and stiff. A hard woman, embittered by life. She had confessed what she assumed we knew beyond a shadow of a doubt. More than that, we could whistle for. And I knew as well as Dr. Rockne that we would probably whistle a long time before she told more.

There we were. Nothing in her room but the letters and the picture. And a few moments examination showed all the letters to have been written by Evans, her husband, dead many years she told us.

“Who is it you think committed the murder?” Dr. Rockne asked suddenly, as we finished with the letters.

It did not catch her off guard. “I won’t say right now. But Phineas Cox quarrelled with him to-day.” She pressed her lips tight together.

That was all she would say. We left

her in her room, rearranging her trunk, and walked downstairs together.

“That woman is interesting,” Dr. Rockne said thoughtfully as we neared the bottom of the stairs.

“She might be. It looks like she is trying to throw the guilt on Cox, the hired man,” I commented.

“She doesn’t seem to wish him a great deal of good,” Rockne admitted thoughtfully, stopping at the foot of the stairs. “But that can be accounted for by the anger she feels over the fact that he spied on her and Judson, and then told. She thinks that, you know.”

“She was in love with him. Plenty of room for motive there.”

“Yes. Plenty. But I don’t know . . .”

“I don’t know either—but if she didn’t, who did?”

“And that brings us to the matter of the glances you spoke about in there,” Rockne said.

“You saw them?”

“Yes. Some, at any rate. Just what did you see?”

I thought back. “. . . Sam Wood made a remark that Judson was shot and no one in the house knew anything about it . . .”

“Yes.”

“Well—Mrs. Evans looked at Cox rather queerly when she heard that. And he’d done some looking of his own at her already. As if there was something between them, or he knew something and was keeping it in with an effort. The rest seemed to know or suspect something. Cox looked at Ralph Black; Marie Black looked at Mrs. Evans; and Ralph Black looked at Cox . . . It all happened quickly, but it seemed to me that every one there suspected something about the other.”

“I saw most of it. Queer, isn’t it?”

No one knows anything about the matter—and all seem to be hiding something down under the surface.”

“One of them must know where the gun is,” I declared.

Rockne nodded agreement. “No doubt of it. But which one—and where is the gun? If we can get that, we’ll have the case solved. Or as good as solved.”

“If Mrs. Evans did it, she must have hidden the weapon downstairs somewhere,” I suggested. “Wouldn’t that be more logical than taking it up to her room, where some of the family might see her?”

“It would. We’ll make a systematic search of the house. I wonder what the sheriff has been doing—”

Before the words were quite out of his mouth, Dr. Rockne darted past me, as if he had suddenly gone out of his head.

I whirled in amazement to see what had come over him.

The door of the living room was not over ten feet from us. It had evidently been standing just ajar by the way Dr. Rockne opened it without turning the knob. He stopped in the doorway and spoke to those in the room.

“Everybody comfortable?” he asked casually, and by his tone one would have thought he had walked slowly to the door and was looking in out of idle curiosity.

Miss Lucinda Judson’s voice answered him firmly. “As comfortable as we can be, under the circumstances, thank you. Have you—are you making good progress with your investigation, doctor?”

“Fairly good,” Rockne told her non-committally. “We are doing all we can.” He stepped back into the hall and closed the door.

“What was the matter?” I asked and

then fell silent as he touched a finger to his lips.

“As soon as we see what Wood has found in the library, I want you to slip in the living room and keep an eye on Cox,” he said under his breath. “That door was being held ajar while some one listened to what we were saying—or tried to. When I opened it, Cox was just moving away.”

“You think he was spying?”

“I don’t know. But keep an eye on him. I’m suspicious. Before you go in, let’s look in here.” He stepped to the library door and opened it.

The single light in the cheap chandelier which had been installed by Jacob Judson, was turned on. Sam Wood was earnestly engaged in detecting.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Phineas Cox Goes Out

I’LL say for the man that he had gone about the matter thoroughly. Cob pipe clenched between his teeth, filling the room with blue curls of smoke and horrible odor, he had worked diligently in searching behind all the books that lined the walls; looking under the rug; behind the pictures above the bookshelves; and in every nook and corner that was big enough to hide a flea. His hands were grimy from the dust back of the books—some of it fully thirty years old I do believe—and the room showed clear evidences of the overhaul it had been subjected to.

Sam Wood finished peering into a space left by some volumes he held in his arm and, returning them to the shelf, faced us.

“Nothing in this room,” he announced with satisfaction. “I’ve been all over everything. What’d you find out up in her room?”

"Nothing," Rockne told him. "Not a thing that will help make a case against her. And I don't think there is any use trying to arrest her before we are prepared to prove she did it."

Sam Wood took the pipe from his mouth and jabbed the stem at Rockne as he spoke. "Sure! But how're we going to make a better case? I don't see as we've got anything to go on."

"Suppose we look farther before we do anything," suggested Rockne as he caught my eye and gave a little jerk of his head toward the door, signaling me to get on the track of Phineas Cox. As I went out, I heard him tell Sam Wood that they might as well carefully search the rest of the lower floor of the house.

Phineas Cox was not in the living room when I entered. Mrs. Evans had not come down from her room. The rest were sitting around the fire warming their hands at the blaze, talking in low tones. Charley Owens sat a little to one side with a look of great responsibility about him.

"Where is Cox?" I asked Charley casually.

He jerked his head toward a door in the back of the room. "Went down the cellar to fix the fire, and then was going to bring some more wood for the fire place in from the back."

Charley evidently thought nothing of it. I don't know why I did. Perhaps it was because I was suspicious of Phineas Cox by reason of his spying at the door.

The Judson house was heated by a hot air plant consisting of the main furnace in the cellar, and hot air pipes running to registers in every room. I had had previous experience with this type of heating system, and knew that if Phineas Cox was down in the cellar poking the fire, shaking it, or throwing

on coal, the sounds would come up through the pipes and be audible in every room. I stepped a little closer to the hot air register—and heard nothing. Cox either was not down in the cellar, or he was doing something other than fixing the fire.

It seemed suspicious, coming just after the man had been listening at the door. Rockne had said we were going to search the lower floor of the house. And Cox had gone out at once.

I walked toward the door that Charley Owens had indicated.

Ralph Black saw me, and spoke quickly as I reached it. "Is there anything you want in the back of the house?"

That was suspicious also. He seemed too quick on the trigger; too ready to anticipate my wishes, or find out what I was going to do.

"Nothing," I told him shortly. "I'm just looking around. Don't let it bother you."

He answered hastily. "It wasn't bothering me. I was only trying to help you."

I was watching them all; Black, his sister, and Miss Lucinda. And when Black spoke a little more earnestly than the occasion seemed to warrant, Miss Lucinda turned her head and sent a covert glance at him. I could not see the expression on her face, because their backs were to the light, and the fire cast shadows in the wrong place. But Miss Lucinda seemed to be another one who knew something.

I filed the incident away, and told Black coolly: "T h a n k s. I'll get along." Then I went through the doorway and closed the door after me.

The whole matter of looking into the library, listening to Sam Wood's greeting, and then entering the living room, speaking to Charley Owens and



Black, and getting through the door. had taken but a few moments.

I was in a dining room—had seen that much while I had the door open. Now that it was closed I stood in pitch darkness.

Outside, the storm was still in progress. It had almost slipped my mind while we were busy thinking about other things. Now the wind wailing through gaunt, bare branches, the swirl of icy snow against the window panes, was clear. It brought back the desolateness of the cold winter night, and the history and eerie location of this house of mystery. I remembered there was an old family burial ground somewhere in the back. Murders had been committed here—and one of them to-night. The house, the people in it, and the weather, were living up to tradition in the fullest sense.

The room was warm, but I almost shivered.

Where was Phineas Cox? What was he doing?

While I stood there listening, a soft step sounded in the next room at the back. A knob turned. A door opened in the rear wall of the dining room, but no light appeared.

I held my breath.

Darkness made sight impossible. There was no sound. None at all. Just the opened door, and silence. But beyond a doubt it was Phineas Cox who had opened the door. What was he doing? Why should he be standing there in the darkness without movement? It had nothing to do with bringing in firewood or going down in the cellar to fire the furnace. It was not natural, under the circumstances. The man must be up to something.

A moment later I was certain of it. The door closed again. Soft steps

sounded on the other side, moving about a room that was evidently the kitchen. I edged toward the door that had opened, and as I did so heard the creak of linges as Cox opened another door. It closed too. The click of a latch came to my ears. Then silence again.

A moment later I had slipped into the kitchen, filled with the smell of baking, and the extra warmth of the cook stove.

Cox was gone. But where?

As I felt my way across the dark kitchen, doing my best to avoid running into the hot stove, I found out. My eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness. Through the windows I could see the ghostly white snow blanket that covered the ground around the house. I could not see very far though, for the driving snow and the darkness soon made an impenetrable wall. But—out back of the house, going away from it, was the faint bobbing light of a lantern. Phineas Cox had left the house, after moving about in pitch darkness, and listening in a peculiar manner.

I suppose I should have been convinced that he was out after wood for the fireplace. That was the logical thing for him to be after. It might have seemed so to me if I had not been keyed up for every suspicious manifestation.

Now, all I could think of was that he had slipped out of the house after making certain no one knew where he was, and was headed back into the trees where the storm and the black night would cover every move he made.

Rockne and I had removed our overcoats and hats. There was no time to go back and get mine. Bareheaded, illy-clad against the chill blasts out-

side, I went out the back door after the man.

The wind was cold. As I went down the back steps it seemed to strike through every stitch of my clothes. I turned up my coat collar, ducked my head down, and hurried after Cox.

His lantern was barely visible now. around a turn in the path, I passed the dark bulk of an open shed and the larger one of a barn; saw the snow-dusted end of a wood pile. It removed the last of my doubt about Cox. He was certainly not after wood. What sinister errand was he on?

The path wound through the gaunt grove of trees, and the force of the wind diminished a trifle, for which I was thankful. I remembered that

somewhere back of the Judson house was the old family graveyard. Was Phineas Cox heading back there? And if so, why?

Then the lantern disappeared.

I ran forward, and then stopped suddenly. Cox was not fifty feet away, in a clear spot among the trees. He had set the lantern down on the other side of him, and was bending over.

While I crouched, shivering, just inside the line of trees, and watched, Cox pulled something up from the ground. Only the dark bulk of his form was visible. I could not see just what he was doing.

And while I looked, the ravening outcry of dogs rose above the moan and wail of the storm.

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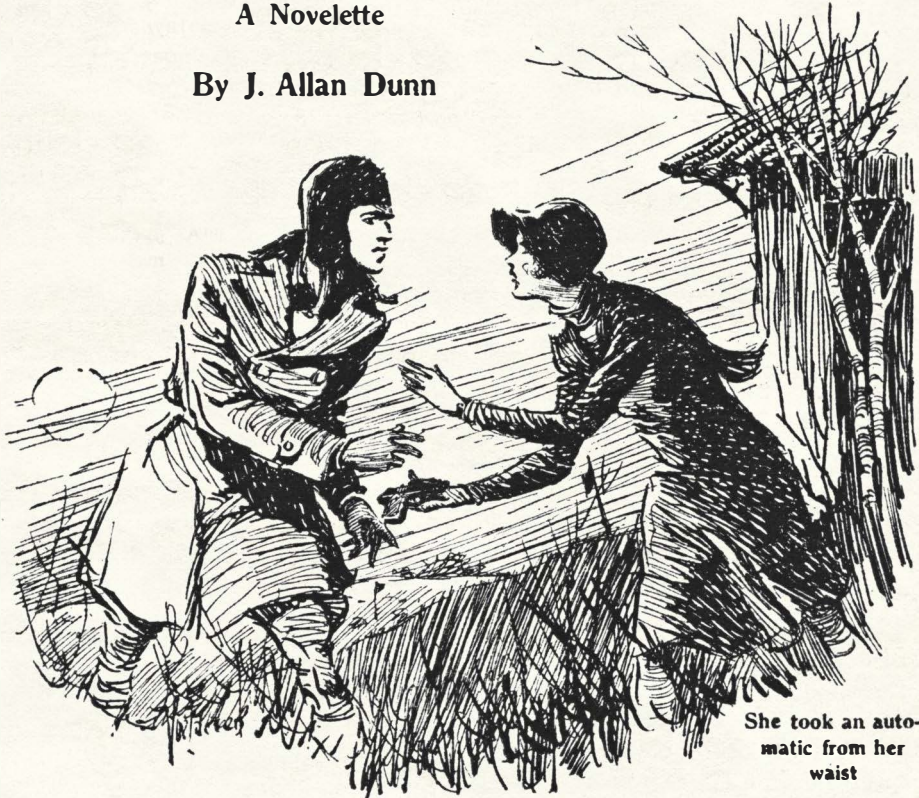
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A Novelette

By J. Allan Dunn



She took an automatic from her waist

*"You Will Want for Nothing—While You Live!" It Was an Amazing Offer—and Sinister*

## CHAPTER I

### The Man with the Beard

THE light had just changed on top of the tall Insurance Building, the deep bells had sounded two o'clock, and it was getting chilly out there on the bench in Madison Square, though the day had been hot. Leaves were falling from the trees, the grass was scorched and scanty. The Eternal Light glowed on its standard, but the windows were dark. Traffic on Fifth Avenue was thin.

Jim Blaisdell had been there since eleven o'clock. He expected to be there until morning, if the police proved friendly. He was tired and he had no place to go. Likewise he was hungry and had nothing with which to get a meal. He was flat broke, down to what he had on, conscious that was showing signs of wear and dirt. He wanted a smoke and that was out also. Right at the minute he craved a cigarette more than anything.

His feet ached from fruitless walking, his stomach complained of neglect,



and his body was stiff from lack of relaxation. As long as he sat up he was inside the unwritten rules. If he lay down he might get his feet rapped.

A smoke might take his mind off things. There was nothing pleasant to contemplate, nor hopeful, nor encouraging. Thousands out of jobs like himself, and the outlook made worse by the big drought and general depression. Some of the others had homes, families where some member, at least, brought in money. He had none.

It had made him a bit sore to see so many windows on so many floors illuminated until late in this business section. It meant people were working overtime, extra wages—and it didn't seem a square deal. They had gone home now; the restaurant signs were extinguished—and that helped some. But a cigarette . . .

"Have you got a match? My lighter refuses to work."

The speaker seemed to have suddenly materialized. Blaisdell had been brooding, occupied with his own thoughts, yet he was wide awake and the square was certainly deserted a moment ago when he had looked up as the hour sounded.

But he had seen this chap before, that same evening, about midnight. He had noticed his tall, lean, active figure, draped in a black cloak that had moved with his striding, silent walk like great wings.

He had been smoking then, a cigar whose aroma had floated to Jim Blaisdell as an added injury. A cigar that had not cost less than half a dollar. There had been the gleam of a white shirt, evening dress beneath the cloak, that was fastened only at the throat. A diamond had flashed on a finger of the hand that flicked the ash from his cigar. He had caught a glimpse of his

face under the soft, unshaped felt hat with the wide brim.

A well-shaped, thin, aquiline nose. Between that and thin lips a slight, black mustache, on the chin a tuft of hair in what the French call a *mouche*. The man had cast a rapid glance at Blaisdell and his dark eyes had glittered as they reflected some light. Jim had fancied it a rather appraising look, guessed the thought that accompanied it. The man must have imagined him a poor sort of customer, down and out.

As for Jim, he did not give much speculation to this striding, arrogant individual who had passed so lithely, swinging a light cane; gone on down Fifth Avenue—to the Village perhaps, for he looked as if he might be some sort of prosperous professional on his way home, or to a party. He would have dined well, and perhaps he would be offered more than he did not really need. For a moment or two Jim held communistic views on life.

Here was the chap again, agreeable enough, though his voice was curiously metallic. Somehow Blaisdell didn't like him. He had a feeling of repulsion as if some obscure sense, once active in his ancestors, warned him that here was some one who did not wish him well. It was idiotic, of course. He was not being normal and the feeling was centered in subconscious resentment of the difference between them.

He was a bit ashamed of it and, as he had a match, he answered, "Sure."

He struck the match, cupped it, stood up with it. And suddenly it fanned or flickered out before his eyes as they failed him, and the buildings about the square began a sidling dance while the ground heaved under his feet.

The stranger caught him by the arm in a firm grip and Jim went back on

the bench—dizzy, faint. The other sat beside him. His voice sounded dim. He was pouring something from a flask into a silver cup that fitted its bottom. Jim got the reek of liquor. It was at his lips.

"That," said the man, "is Napoleon brandy, eighteen hundred and eleven. It came from the Liquor Commission in Montreal and I can vouch for it. Try it."

It was like liquid, concentrated life. It was ichor, the potion of the gods. It went down like delectable oil and it warmed and invigorated him as if by magic.

"Great stuff," said the other. "How about a smoke—if you've got another match? A cigar—or a cigarette?"

He proffered a gold case, thin but heavy, and Jim took a cigarette. His views had changed concerning the man. He was a Good Samaritan, if ever there was one. That the cordial brandy had something to do with his revised opinion he considered later.

It was a good cigarette. He knew that. Any fag at twenty for ten cents would have been welcome, but he was able to distinguish the rare flavor of this one. He took a long drag while the match flamed up and lit the stranger's face with a faint radiance.

Again the eyes seemed to reflect the light curiously, with a lambency like a wolf's at a camp fire. The man's aquiline nose was like a beak; the slight but well-trimmed mustachios, the tuft below the mouth, made him look like a modern *Mephistopheles*. Then he threw away the match and the odor of his redolent cigar rose with the more delicate fume of Blaisdell's cigarette as they sat beside each other in the middle of the night in Manhattan.

Again Jim Blaisdell had been conscious of a swift searching glance,

not so much appraisal, perhaps, as a desire to know what he looked like. It was as if the other had mentally photographed him. That was Jim's reaction. He was mentally alert; the brandy had stimulated but not intoxicated him. By nature, and some training, he was observant and deductive; his most intense study was that of human nature.

He did not think this man the type to spontaneously offer brandy almost a hundred and twenty years old to a derelict on a bench. Not without cause. It was not benevolence. There was a reason here, an object. And, dimly, but strongly, Jim Blaisdell sensed a veiled menace.

A hunch, some would call it. But Jim did not believe in hunches as inexplicable phenomena. Any more than he did in Luck—as men termed Luck. There was always something basic. This man might give out vibrations of evil intention, despite himself, to which a sensitive person would tune in.

Take a dog. A dog's sense of smell has its nerves centered in a gland that is a lesser brain. Its smell stimulates memory of appetite, recalls a buried bone; but also it infallibly warns.

So Jim regarded the stranger while the latter played a perfect rôle of Good Scout, and Jim's physical side, at least, responded to his suggestions of food, of rest, of cleanliness once more. A man cannot help watering at the mouth, especially after privations.

## CHAPTER II

### "While You Live"

"I SAW you earlier," said the man, who had introduced himself as Wilton Lessing; Jim had given his own name. "One can hardly imagine an appointment at this place

and hour, especially as you have been here, to my knowledge, for upward of two hours. Nor is it a spot or the time for a picnic. You must excuse my assumption that you are not here by choice, but of necessity."

"I'm flat broke," said Blaisdell simply.

"You are not alone. It has been a hard year. To come to the point, I think that I—although I am not the sole principal in the matter—can use you. It is not for very long, but it will be a well paid position. If you qualify for certain tests that will be made I can guarantee you that, while you live, you will never be in your present predicament again; in fact, so long as you live you will want for nothing—providing you pass the tests."

Jim did not want to quibble with his good fortune, but the promised pay seemed exorbitantly high, too high to be true. Lessing seemed to sense his feeling.

"If you qualify," he said, "it will be because you are probably the only man available, and it is only fair to suitably reward a proper candidate. Do you mind if I ask you a few leading questions? Have you been to college?"

"No. It couldn't be afforded. I got a good high school education."

"That may prove sufficient. Do you play golf, take up other sports?"

"I have played golf and tennis. I can swim fairly well."

"That should prove sufficient also. You drive a car, of course; perhaps have handled a launch. Do you know anything about flying?"

"No. But I know engines."

"Good. What kind of a job are you out of?"

"I've had a shot at three or four. None lasted long, though no one discharged me for cause, but because of

conditions. They laid me off, with the latest comers."

"All right."

Lessing's cigar did not seem to draw to his liking. He took out his lighter and this time it worked without trouble. Blaisdell had a notion that it had never been out of order, but that he had asked for a match because of its closer illumination.

"I think you may do," Lessing went on between puffs. "I am prepared to make an advance on my own judgment, not only of your qualifying, but your honesty. I am giving you twenty-five dollars to-night. To-morrow, at eleven o'clock, go to the Hotel Commodore, seat yourself in one of the spaces where seats are set in the lounge—the first to the left as you enter from the stairs. Sit facing the hotel desk. You will not see me. You will be under inspection, though you will probably not notice when or how. If you pass this second series you will hear from me before noon. If you are not approved of, the affair is closed. If you are, there will be a hundred dollars for you and a third and final test."

He took out two bills and gave them to Blaisdell.

"You incur no obligation with these," Lessing told him. "I am not Haroun Al Raschid in disguise. This is neither charity nor philanthropy. You will earn what more is to come easily, but we will profit by it."

"I have not asked about your morals," he continued, and his metallic voice held a hinted sneer, "but I can assure you that you will not be asked to do anything that you will regret. Obviously I can go no further into the affair while your candidacy is in doubt. And now, good night to you. At the Commodore, at eleven precisely, if you please."



He got up and strode away, his cigar well alight. Blaisdell saw a long, low car glide up to the Fifth Avenue curb. His man got in, and the car went smoothly and swiftly north.

Jim looked at his sudden wealth. A meal at the Coffee Cup on Sixth Avenue, a good bed on the same thoroughfare. In the morning, breakfast, a bath, new linen and underwear, a shoe shine, cigarettes, and the Commodore. He was well asleep within the hour.

He awakened just before dawn with the broken memory of a dream in which he heard again the phrase—*while you live you will want for nothing!* It seemed in his dream, emanating perhaps from some subconscious summing-up, to hold a sinister meaning. It seemed also that his strange feeling of mistrust and dislike against Lessing had intensified.

He had been promised much—if he passed the tests. So much for so little that those words, *while you live*, might well have a special significance.

He sat up sweating; though he had been warmly blanketed, this was not natural perspiration. An inner mentor seemed to say, "Let this thing alone, it is dangerous."

He had not specified his last job to Lessing because he was afraid of again appearing ridiculous. Now, for another reason, he was glad he had reserved it. He felt that Lessing held him lightly, considered him as a chap not good enough to be of the ones selected to hold down jobs in time of stress but, from some unknown reasons, considering him useful for a special affair.

More than once in the last week Blaisdell had been laughed at more or less openly when he told a possible employer that he had been with the Argus Investigating Agency.

"Detective, eh? Out of a job and can't get on the trail of another one? Too bad, but we've nothing."

He had not been with the Argus Agency long. His work had been largely filing, the running of errands, no chance as an operative, though once he had been set to shadow a man. No opportunity to know anything of the cases, the inside methods of the business. But there *had* been a chance there, after all, and he had tried to make the most of it. The profession appealed to him, the Argus had a fine reputation, and Blaisdell had studied hard. Continental reports, scientific means of detection, allied to psychology, intense reading on unusual cases. He had believed he would make good, and then the head of the firm had called him in.

"Sorry to let you out, Blaisdell, but business is slack. We are forced to reduce the force. You are only one of a score that have to be laid off. We can keep only the most experienced. Keep in touch with us, and if things pick up we'll take you on again."

He went out with two weeks' salary. That was six weeks ago and things had not picked up. The Argus Agency were paid investigators. There were regular clients and routine details, all good accounts. The head had not meant that crime had decreased. It had not. But, save where they were specially called in, that was the affair of the police.

Blaisdell's study, his observation, assured him of the criminal activity in New York. A known, more or less registered and recorded crook, for every two hundred inhabitants. Murder an everyday occurrence. Murder for sale. Life cheap. No class apparently immune. The Murder Mart of Manhattan, one columnist had

styled the city, citing cases where killings had been done, confessedly, from fifty dollars up to five thousand. There had been a book written on it by a gangster that frankly discussed the ways and means of murder and how to get away with it.

Blaisdell's vision might have been influenced by his trend of observation. He still wanted to enter detective work, felt that he had an instinct for it, enjoyed the prospect of adventure, the thrill of pitting his wits against crooks in a warfare where the stakes were good for the winner; for the loser, imprisonment or death. But, even as he shook off the sinister presentiment, resolved to go on with the affair, he retained the judgment that the three words—*while you live*—might hold another meaning than the usual one. Easy to promise a man everything so long as he was alive—and keep that promise—if one meant to get rid of him after his usefulness had been served.

Still, he had taken the twenty-five dollars, spent some of it. He was bound in common honesty at least to show up at the Commodore. Nothing more might come of it. If the opening continued, he would go through with it. This sense of calamity threatening was a spur, after all. Life for the past few weeks had been worse than commonplace. There was no excitation in being out of work and steadily getting out of money, with no prospect of renewing it.

### CHAPTER III

#### Blaisdell Flies

HE got his breakfast, bought clean linen, and then bathed, sifting his impressions of Lessing. He did not place much confidence in physiognomy. He had learned that men who

looked brave and honorable were often the opposite. The gallery of rogues at the Argus Agency was full of facial contradictions. The head of the business had told Blaisdell, on one of the few occasions when he had condescended to commend him and instruct him, that the essentials of a successful detective were the faculty of observation, the wits to segregate the useful from the useless, a brain to study and hold all kinds of knowledge, reasoning powers for deduction and the following-up of lines of thought.

"A face may show lines of weakness and dissipation that serve as a guide," he had told Blaisdell. "But it is the eyes alone that betray the ego of the man. They may be veiled, but their true look is revealing."

Lessing had lines of bitterness, of a sneering outlook on life, Blaisdell reflected, and his eyes had had a certain snakelike quality, a fixed regard that was arrogant and cruel. He had been careful with the use of his words. He had said that Blaisdell would be asked to do nothing he would regret. What if he was given no chance of regret after he acted as they wished?

It was an adventure that challenged. With clothing well brushed and pressed, with shoes shined and his hair trimmed, his chin shaved, a bit shabby but with a full stomach and money for a few days' needs in his pocket, Blaisdell entered the Commodore at precisely eleven o'clock, and took the seat as he had been requested. He lit a cigarette and started to read the newspaper he had bought.

It was a mixed crowd: loungers who were guests or took advantage of the comfortable chairs and couches; men and women in about equal numbers some of whom looked toward the stairs every little while with more or less

impatience; others who waited more patiently. Confidence men — and women—no doubt, among them, looking for suckers. There were caged canaries here and there singing cheerily, bellhops passing about paging or carrying grips, the subdued bustle of a big hotel.

Blaisdell read on. There had been more killings in the Murder Mart. Gangsters' wars, innocent children shot by stray bullets, pay roll and chain store robberies.

He made no attempt to uncover any inspection he might be undergoing. Two or three times he felt he was being closely observed, but he carefully avoided looking up, smoking and reading on, acting naturally. At eleven forty-five he heard his name being paged. The smart bellboy did not immediately offer the note he carried on his tray, clearly trying to identify Blaisdell from a description he had been given.

"Did you expect a message, sir?" he asked.

The mention of Lessing's name convinced him. Blaisdell gave him a tip. The envelope contained a yellow-backed century note and a card of brief instructions.

Pennsylvania Station. Take 3.10 for Garden City, Long Island. You will be met. Do not bring clothes. All will be provided.

Blaisdell knew there was an airport at Garden City. It was obvious, soon after he got into the big car which, with Lessing in the back seat, met him, that they were bound there. The driver, in livery, looked like a dogged, reckless type who would stop short of nothing in his own interests. He touched his visored cap respectfully, but Blaisdell felt a covert mockery in the gesture,

as if part of some play the other secretly relished. Lessing was suave, congratulatory.

"You are flying to the place for your final test," he said. "A questionnaire and a physical examination. I hope they will be satisfactory. Edwards"—he nodded at the driver's broad back—"will pilot the ship. You will be the only passenger. I shall follow in the car. I am not air-minded.

"If any one at the airport addresses you as Clinton, show no denial. If you are asked if you will try out the plane yourself, simply say, 'Not now; perhaps later,' or words to that effect—and as few of them as possible. You will meet Clinton presently, and he will fly the ship back. I don't ask you to impersonate him, but if others appear to recognize you as Clinton, do not disabuse their minds. If you are short it will be in character. Clinton is moody at times. Cutler Clinton is his full name. You may have heard of him."

Blaisdell's retentive memory clicked out vague pictures of a young man who went in for sports in somewhat reckless fashion, flying, motor boat racing, polo. Seen in the brown sheets, at the talking newsies. He had not thought of himself as particularly resembling him, yet now he realized that it might have been some such thought that had made him remember. He mentioned the fact of recollection.

"I'll find it a bit hard to qualify as an expert in his line," he said.

Lessing nodded carelessly.

"You can be off form, under the weather, avoid stunts and competitions," he said. "It is particularly advantageous at the present time for Clinton to have a double, and he can well afford it. We are flying to his place—or rather you are. Later on



you may understand better his reason for needing a twin temporarily. The affair may not last longer than two or three months, while Clinton goes abroad. But we shall want to keep in touch with you—retain your services," he added, a trifle hastily.

Blaisdell noticed his eyes of cold gray, glittering, serpentlike. He believed Lessing, if not deliberately lying, was juggling the truth. To be assured of a competency for life for three months' employment was a bit thick. Lessing might think little of his intelligence—a man out of work. It was as well to be underestimated if there was anything crooked going on. And Blaisdell believed there was.

They might try to use him as a pawn in their chess game—a dummy to be sacrificed early. But pawns sometimes fought their way across the board, or reached the far side unnoticed, and then became the most important piece upon it.

"Is the plane ready, Edwards?" Lessing asked the chauffeur.

"If it ain't, it's no fault of mine, and there'll be somethin' doin'. I told 'em Clint had to have it in shape right after noon or he'd try out some other crate."

They reached the drome, drove to a hangar outside of which a two-seater plane was being gone over by motor macs. She was a biplane, dual purpose, equipped with both pontoons—now drawn up—and landing wheels. A modern machine of metal, with slotted wings and a wide spread.

Blaisdell looked at her with interest. He had been up a few times, had handled controls, though he had not gone solo; and had helped to overhaul airplane engines. To him, a detective should be able to do such things.

The engines of this plane were run-

ning sweetly, revving up as the car stopped, and Lessing led the way inside the hangar to a dressing room. Edwards took two flying suits from a private locker initialed C. C., and handed one to Blaisdell.

"Not much chance of that not fitting you," he said with a familiar grin. "Fastens with a zipper that goes crosswise. It's Clint's. It's only a short hop and you hardly need it, but it's good wardrobe."

"I'm starting ahead," said Lessing. "You'll be there first. I'll telephone to make sure the landing strips are out."

"They better be," growled Edwards. He was a little out of character as an employee, to Blaisdell. "Who'll be there? Hanchett and Martin?"

"Yes. Clinton now; or a little later."

"Okay. I hope Martin got what I told him to." He turned to Blaisdell. "Put on the chute, mister. You ain't going to have to use it, but the bus is new, and these new crates do crack up sometimes. You savvy how to use this? Get clear of the windslip and count ten before you pull that ring, jerk it steady but hard, land with your knees flexed. Right?"

Lessing left them while Edwards adjusted his own pack. He and Blaisdell left the hangar together.

"Taking her up, Mr. Clinton?" asked one of the macs. "She's a nice little ship. Listen to her purr, willya?"

It was Blaisdell's cue. His face, framed in the helmet, had passed muster as Clinton's. Edwards, playing up, looked at him as if inquiringly. Blaisdell shook his head.

"I may bring her back," he answered. "I don't feel overly fit right now."

Edwards grinned approvingly, gave him a wink, winked again at the mac with a gesture that indicated that Cutler Clinton was nursing a hangover.

They got in. The plane had double controls. Edwards, testing the motor, took opportunity to tell him to leave them alone. Then the revolutions increased, the whole fabric quivered as if with eagerness.

They got contact, the chocks were removed, and they started down the runway, getting off quickly, mounting, banking, spiraling for height. And then, with the wind behind them, they headed east at a fast clip. Long Island, the Sound, and the wrinkled Atlantic looked like a map in low relief; the towers of Manhattan behind them, were draped in haze.

Blaisdell sought to keep track of their route and, later, of their destination, watching the coast line, roads, towns, stretches of woodland. It might be valuable information if he could acquire it. Edwards flew as he had driven the car, with easy expertness, a sense of balance that seemed to anticipate air currents and vacuums. An easy plane to handle, Blaisdell thought as they soared.

Edwards was a good deal of a thug. He had hidden a cauliflower ear under his helmet. But Blaisdell felt no idea of present danger. They were not paying him a hundred and twenty-five dollars just to take him up in a plane and get rid of him somehow. That would be risky for Edwards, who wanted to get what he had asked Martin, whoever *he* was, to procure. Blaisdell's idea of that was liquor.

They began to volplane down. Blaisdell saw a white house close to the shore where a launch was riding, only a dot now, but larger than others that dotted the Sound. Gardens, some

trees, a wide, long lawn that led to terraces overlooking the water; the white parallelograms of the landing slips laid out upon it. The pontoons were still tucked up, like a duck's paddles when it flies. They were landing on the lawn. Clinton's estate.

Two tiny figures were looking up, retreating as Edwards brought the ship into the wind and made a perfect three-pointer, taxiing along the clipped turf to a standstill with the expert use of an axle brake.

The two men were coming forward. One, very corpulent, dressed in white flannels, a mammoth of a man with a face that seemed the very model for a mask of good humor. It was to prove Blaisdell's ideas about physiognomy before very long. This was Martin.

"You got here, eh? How are you?" He nodded to Blaisdell, creasing deeply triple chins, his eyes crinkling. "I got your stuff, Edwards. And some limes and mint. Ah, don't worry, Hanchett," he added to the lean, wiry dark man who walked with a limp and whose face seemed lined with distrust of everything. "It's okay. We're all pals together. You'd worry over the death of a newborn louse, Eddy. We'll all have a julep, or a ricky. Clint ain't here. We won't wait for him, or Lessing. Have another when they come."

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## CHAPTER IV

### The Double

THERE did not appear to be any servants but an elderly, dried-up housekeeper and her son, who, if he was not a half-wit, was none too bright. A poor retinue for so big a house. Martin explained it as he mixed the cocktails for dinner.

"Hard to keep servants, hard to get

'em, out here in the sticks. No amusements. We've got a new batch coming out the end of the week. Meantime the old lady can cook, and the dummy can wash dishes. Here's to all of us."

His joviality seemed to include Blaisdell, in marked contrast with the continued sourness of Hanchett. Lessing, who had arrived, was, as ever, suave. Edwards was with the group. Clinton still absent.

"Hanchett's worrying again," railed Martin. "Over Clint. He's all right, Eddy. He'll take care of himself—now."

Nothing showed on the surface—nothing but the slight pause before the last word, the tiny emphasis upon it; but it seemed to Blaisdell as if Martin was projecting a joke that was understood by the others—and not by Blaisdell. For now he was watching straws to show which way the wind blew, and that wind, he knew, was not one that would bring him any good. Edwards's familiarity was too obvious, too irregular. He himself was being treated with a sort of easy-going, tolerance, but he had not been alone for a moment; he doubted if he would be left alone again—or at least unwatched.

He knew by now that all of them carried guns except Martin. Hanchett had one in a neatly fitting shoulder holster. Edwards had revealed his boldly in a shoulder clip. Lessing's was betrayed in his hip pocket, a pocket, Blaisdell fancied, made especially for such a purpose.

"To hell with Clinton," snapped Hanchett. "I don't care if he breaks his neck."

The stout Martin roared at this, tossed off his glass and refilled it.

"That would be a hell of a joke, on

Clint just now," he said, and again Blaisdell had a vision of windstraws in a gale that blew toward him. Why did they want him to double for Clinton? Why? And why would it be a joke if Clinton broke his neck? For, though it was obviously a jest, a grim one, it brought a grin to Edwards and a twitch of the lips that raised Lessing's *mouche*.

"It's the girl I'm worrying about," said Hanchett. "She's been over here twice. Clint was a fool to monkey with a girl living right here. What are we"—he glanced at Blaisdell—"going to do about her? She's no fool. She's seen Clint, kept that date with him in town, but he didn't close her out. I couldn't tell her to stay away. She don't like us, we know that. And she's a nosy wren. She'll spot him"—again he looked Blaisdell's way—"in a jiffy. If she does—"

"Aw, take another drink," broke in Martin. "You can anticipate more trouble than nineteen old women. This young chap 'll do nicely, I think. We'll know better after Clint shows. We can handle the girl."

Hanchett subsided, muttering.

Blaisdell had filled in his questionnaire. It seemed to be approved. It was not entirely accurate. He did not use the name of the Argos Agency in that of his former employments. It seemed to him that the list was prepared rather carefully to find out his affiliations. He represented himself as practically friendless.

To the suggestion, ordinary enough in such documents, that he give a name and address of his closest friend or relative he had made the answer that he had nobody who could act in either capacity, and that he had no permanent address. That, he thought, was what they wanted, an assurance that



no one was specially interested in him or his whereabouts. He informed them that he was neither married nor engaged to be. It all summed him up as a stray, away from his home state, entirely on his own, not likely to be missed or inquired for.

On top of which he let it appear that he did not hold liquor too well. He did not know what they were up to, but it began to look as if they did not value Clinton very highly, as if something might happen to Clinton, while he, Blaisdell, might be used to cover that up until they had achieved their sinister purpose—perhaps to clean up on Clinton's estate and leave Blaisdell holding the bag.

But they were all a little too open and above board. It was as if they did not care what he learned about them. And he was sure that they were all four of them, Lessing, Martin, Hanchett and Edwards, wise, hardboiled guys in some unhallowed partnership.

The cocktails had given his pulses a flip, but not so much as the gradual unfolding of the adventure. That was a genuine thrill. The talk about the servants was faked, of course. Previous ones had been discharged while Blaisdell was being introduced into the game, and until the real Clinton departed. Now there was another actor in the play—the unnamed girl who seemed to be more or less embroiled with Clinton. Hanchett had said she was not a fool, and Hanchett would be a good judge. Blaisdell wondered whether he would see her—and how soon. Not if the rest could help it, though he could see already that they meant his impersonation to take place naturally, to let him be seen, as he had been at the aërodrome—and widely recognized as Clinton. Then—what then?

It was a puzzle he could not even guess the solution of, but he wished he had one of their guns. He could use one; that had been a part of his self training.

A detective who could not outdraw or outshoot a crook had a poor show these days. And, if this quartet were not working a racket, then Blaisdell had no right imagining he would ever be a detective.

It was midnight before a car drove up outside with a scrape of gravel as the brakes were put on hard. Then the front door was opened, there were quick, slightly unsteady steps, and a young man with a flushed face, wearing dinner clothes, entered.

By this time Martin's good humor had abated a trifle, from sleepiness. Edwards had got surly with liquor and he amused himself baiting Hanchett, who looked at him now and then with a glance of malevolence that amused the other. Lessing kept peace between them. He was the actual leader, Blaisdell thought.

And here was Clinton, beyond a doubt. It is not easy for a man to recognize himself in another. An excellent photograph is sometimes surprising to its original, and many actors have swallowed astonishment, if not chagrin, when their film selves are shown.

But this chap was like enough Blaisdell to be his twin. Dress them alike, give them the same mannerisms, place them in like surroundings, and it would be hard, indeed, to distinguish between them.

"Got here, did you?" asked Hanchett with sarcasm.

"To your great relief, Hanchett, no doubt. You would have just hated it if I had smashed. I have seen that same benevolent dread in your eyes

when I take off. I see the new plane's here. And so is my double."

He stood staring at Blaisdell with a strange expression that the latter was not able to interpret. Clinton had signs of dissipation on his face that his youth so far kept light, and there was a certain recklessness about him that seemed deeper. He laughed shortly as he took Blaisdell's hand, and there was neither warmth nor spontaneity in his grasp. His eyes were mean, calculating.

Yet, if there was anything in physiognomy at all these two should act and think alike. Blaisdell knew his own honesty. He doubted the other's. Old Finley, head of Argus, had been right. It was the eyes that revealed the ego, the soul. Clinton's were hag-ridden, beyond all doubt.

He turned to Edwards.

"How did the crate behave?"

"She's all okay," said Edwards, slowly.

These men did not mean well by Clinton, Blaisdell was sure. Their attitude toward him was hidden under a veneer of friendship, good-fellowship. But it was not sincere. It might hide the answer to their need of him.

"I'll fly her back," said Clinton. "I'm not too lit for that. In fact, I want a shot right now. Don't worry, Hanchett. My insurance covers flying. You ought to know that."

Blaisdell saw a red light in Lessing's eyes, a sort of danger signal, as he rose and gave Clinton his drink.

"One or two things to talk over first," he said meaningly. "You'll have to change, Clint—take a tub."

"Suits me. I understand—"

"What we *don't* understand," put in Hanchett nastily, "is why you didn't put over what you said you could with this girl, Edith Renton. She was over here this afternoon."

Clinton laughed as he mixed his highball.

"I did what I could. I knew her long before I met you, you see. I told her the truth, that I was broke, what with the gee-gees, dice and stocks. Acknowledged I was a gambler, a drunkard and all the rest of it. She said she'd stick, that money didn't mean a thing if I'd brace up. Gave me a lecture. Said she loved me when I was myself and despised me when I cut loose. She was right, at that. I've a notion she'd marry me without a cent to reform me. She's a sport, Hanchett—and you'll keep her out of this, understand that?"

"Then she'll stay out of it. She wasn't mentioned in the bargain when we got together. She ain't going to spoil the play now . . ."

Again that red warning signal showed in Lessing's eyes, but not in his manner.

It was curious how freely they talked in front of him, Blaisdell told himself. Curious, but not funny. It gave him too much the feeling he was going to be a pawn that is used for an opening move or two and then sacrificed.

"Talk like that doesn't get us anywhere," said Lessing. "We'll have to solve the question of the girl ourselves, after Clinton goes. Meantime—I'll show you your room, Blaisdell. It is Clinton's, naturally."

This was an order. They all came up to the suite except Hanchett, who sulked below. The bedroom gave to a balcony that looked through trees, growing close to the house, out to Long Island Sound, bathed in moonlight, tremulous on the tide. Roses nodded from a trellis. A man's room, but luxuriously furnished.

The bathroom had a sunken pool, a shower, tiled floor and walls. Clinton

got out pyjamas and tossed them on the bed as he arranged a change for himself. Blaisdell wondered if he had meant what he said when he declared he was broke. If so, what did that mean in the game? It was still obscure.

"We want to compare your body with Clinton's, Blaisdell," said Lessing. "You may have occasion to go in swimming, get under a shower."

There was more to it than that, Blaisdell thought, though he could not see what. And then the idea flashed on him. It illumined his mind as lightning throws up every detail of a dark landscape.

They might want to be able to have him identified as Clinton, not merely in the living flesh, but as a *dead body!*

Why, he could not tell. It did not fit in with the conviction he held that they were not playing square with Clinton, though they might be in the same deal that he was, all as principals. But he knew he was right, and it took all his control to show nothing but go on undressing with a careless consent to their examination.

They looked him over carefully. Even to Blaisdell, as he stood stripped beside Clinton in the bathroom, there was a difference in their bodies. They were about the same weight, but differently built. Clinton was a bit flabby. Blaisdell was in condition, extra lean from short rations. They were not shaped alike. But the others seemed satisfied, though Clinton did not say much. Neither had any blemishes save for a mole on Blaisdell's right arm. That, Lessing said, could, and would, be removed. There was evident pleasure over almost identical vaccination marks.

But any one who knew Clinton intimately, any trainer, for instance, would

never mistake one body for the other. Blaisdell tried to get some comfort out of that after they left him, but could not. He heard the roaring take-off of the plane, the dying murmur of its motors. Clinton would land at the field and they would think him the same man as Blaisdell had been.

Blaisdell was watched. Edwards thrust in his coarse head later.

"I'm just across the hall," he grinned. "With my door open. I ain't going to sleep to-night. So, if you want anything, buddy, I'll be there."

It was grim warning. They were not going to lose sight of him. He might be only a pawn, but he was valuable—for the time.

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## CHAPTER V

### A Game of Mystery

THE program started and continued much as Blaisdell had imagined it would. The plane came back, flown by Edwards, a day or so after Clinton had left. He gathered that the company which built it was anxious to get the endorsement of a sporting flyer as well known as Clinton; the ship was designed for amateur pilots, especially those who lived near water and might commute from Long Island or Connecticut to New York. They would make the question of payment easy, if not eliminate it altogether, for the use of his recommendation in their publicity.

The plane was used several times, always with Edwards as pilot, to take Blaisdell back and forth to the country club for golf and, occasionally, tennis. He itched to handle the controls, but a natural caution restrained him from any suggestion. He might need the plane for a quick get-away.

It had come to his mind that they



might want to use him as an alibi for Clinton, who did not return and whose whereabouts were kept secret from Blaisdell.

True to Martin's suggestion, fresh servants arrived from a New York agency. They naturally accepted Blaisdell as Clinton. The housekeeper and her nitwit son left. Blaisdell had gathered that she was some connection of Hanchett's.

He saw nothing of the girl save once, when Hanchett, who was playing golf with him, pointed her out, driving from the tee they were approaching. She was fairly tall, slender, lissome, her bare head with a wind blown bob of blond hair, her figure rounded, athletic, a young Diana. She sent the ball far and true down the fairway. If she was conscious of their proximity, she gave no sign.

Blaisdell saw dangers in this golf and tennis playing and pointed them out to Hanchett and, later, to the others. They had been urging him to play with some of the men who greeted him daily, or with a mixed foursome. Blaisdell demurred and, argued it out with them.

At present only Hanchett and Lessing played with him, the latter the better of the two. Both had been given visitors' cards by Clinton. A conversation Blaisdell had heard in the locker room when he returned for a cigarette case he had left on a bench, certain remarks made by players and also by the professionals, by greensmen, proved that the plans of Lessing and his associates had flaws.

"You say it's important for me to be seen in usual places, doing usual things," said Blaisdell. "I may look like Clinton, but I don't play like him. I can't go round in less than eighty-five. And my form is not the same as

his. My woods play is poor compared to the length he got. He was a specialist on chip shots and I'm not. They take a lot of practice. I've been mildly kidded about this sort of thing. They think I'm moody, out of sorts, and you say that suits your book, but when they start talking it over, as they are beginning to, they'll tumble. The same with tennis. Clinton was a crack. I haven't got any backhand or anything like his service.

"Some day they'll get on to the fact that I don't fly the plane, though so far they haven't, as the landing field isn't near enough to the clubhouse for them to notice. But they are talking a little. I can't sign the chits because of my signature looking wrong. So I pay cash for what I get. They'll put these things together."

"What did you hear?" asked Lessing.

"Three chaps discussing my disposition and the way I'd gone off my game. It seems they figured on Clinton to win an important match for them. That keeps their eye on my play. One fellow said I played like somebody entirely different. The saving grace was that another commented that it was my mind off form more than my body. Said I was posted at three clubs he belonged to and that he heard I owed a lot of money, a good many thousands, for contract bridge alone. Then your names came into it."

"Don't spare our feelings if there is anything you might feel we wouldn't care to listen to," said Lessing sneering. "We are not the usual type of country club members, and they'll naturally gossip. That was a risk we had to take. As to your pointers on your different style of play there was an oversight on our part. It was smart of you to think of it," he added speculatively,

as if he was beginning to revise his opinion of Blaisdell's intellect. "Go on; what did they say about me, and Hanchett and Martin? I take it they did not discuss Edwards?"

"No. I didn't hear very much. They thought I was gone. I ran the risk of seeming to listen, and that wouldn't have helped, either. But they think Hanchett is a lawyer of some kind . . ."

"Probably a snide mouthpiece," put in Edwards, always present at their talks, never missing a chance to goad Hanchett. His surmise was true, though Blaisdell did not say so.

"They think that you and Martin," he went on to Lessing, "are interested with me—with Clinton—in some business deal that will get Clinton out of his mess; that Hanchett is acting as attorney. And they added that they thought you would get the long end. I came away then without being seen."

"The only thing to do is to advance matters," said Martin, with the geniality out of his voice. "We are not quite ready for the climax, but perhaps we can go ahead with it. We are much obliged to you, Blaisdell, for your ideas."

"Greatly indebted." capped Lessing. Hanchett was sour, half sneering, and Edwards grinned openly.

Again Blaisdell was impressed with the presentiment—it was more than that by now—that he was to be their cat's-paw. His idea that he was constantly watched had been long ago confirmed.

"I could cut out the golf for a while," he suggested. "Still fly over to the club and go in swimming. Announce that I'm stale. There is nothing better than swimming for getting in general shape and, as I won't be competing, no one will notice much. As for the bathing suit, they've seen me under

the showers and I don't think any of them doubt, up to now, but that I'm Clinton."

"That's not a bad scheme," said Martin, brightening up. "I'll go in with you myself. I float more than I swim, but the water is where I shine, if I shine at all."

The others agreed. None of them, it appeared was any hand at swimming.

Martin, as he said, floated like a barrel, paddled himself about handily. One of the others was always handy. Edwards, in the capacity of plane mechanic, was never far away.

Not many used the water. There was a float a quarter of a mile out where Martin hauled out and basked. A small island about a mile off shore where there was a landing stage for boats, a spot used occasionally for picnics.

Blaisdell was at home in the water. He swam almost as he walked, a natural performer. But not knowing how good Clinton had been, he refrained from any exhibitions. His guards—for they were little less than that—did not seem to care how far he went out to sea. It was a good fence.

They were tightening up, closing in. They no longer took him into careless confidence, but held their own talks in private. The climax was coming. As soon as they felt he had been sufficiently exhibited, day in and out, as Clinton, as soon, perhaps, as Clinton had reached whatever destination he had been bound for; the thing they planned would happen. It did not make Blaisdell nervous, but it held him tense. He had to anticipate that moment, be prepared to protect himself and—far more to his purpose—detect and expose them.

If he could pull off a big coup, with the aid of the Argus Agency, he would get his job back and on a different,

souder basis—as one who had proved capacity. This was going to be a big coup. These men were not putting in their time for a few thousands.

## CHAPTER VI

### Unmasked

IT was the third day he had gone into the water, Martin dozing on the float to which he invariably went with a flask of the hooch he provided; when Blaisdell leisurely, but steadily, swam toward the little island. The sun glare was on the water and he kept his eyes from it, using a side stroke that took him along nicely.

He was half way when he noticed he was not alone. A curving arm, tanned golden brown, graceful and strong, cleaved the water in the same stroke he was using. A head flashed, without a bathing cap, though it was a girl's. It was wet and slick, but still gold. Blaisdell knew that this was the girl—Edith Renton—who had been called a sport by Clinton, whom he had endeavored to discourage because her instinct and keen woman's notice might detect their imposture. Hanchett, it had come out, had practically insulted her.

She turned over, swimming back-handed for a while, then shifted and saw Blaisdell. Her hail came over the short distance between them in a voice that was huskily sweet. It sent a thrill through Blaisdell, one that had nothing to do with the complication in hand. It was personal. It was contact, a certain inevitable affinity. If she ever learned of his position, she would despise him, at the least. But the call was a challenge he could not well refuse, he decided, knowing all the time that he wanted to see her closer, to listen to her, whatever the risk. Here

was adventure also, allied to the other, but apart.

"I want to talk with you, Cutler, now we're alone. Can you make the island?"

She seemed a little doubtful of Cutler Clinton's swimming prowess as compared to her own, or to his exploits ashore.

Martin, Blaisdell knew, was snoozing, drowsy from sun and Scotch. Edwards would be mooning about the clubhouse quarters, keeping only a casual eye on the water with Martin on the actual job.

"Okay," he called back, "I can make it."

He let her lead, half inclined to withdraw, fearful of discovery, yet holding a feeling that even that might not be altogether disadvantageous. He should learn something of Clinton from talking with her as Clinton. She would think it dishonorable, if she knew, and he held already a hope he felt was vain enough that some day he might know her as himself, not sailing under false colors.

She had wanted to marry Clinton, penniless or not, to help him be his better self and Clinton had angrily demanded that Hanchett leave her out of things.

Blaisdell was committed now. He watched her perfect body emerge. She walked up the wharf to an open shelter, where she waited for him. His own body was plain enough in his wet swimming togs, but she did not seem to dream he was any one but Clinton.

"You look better, Cutler," she said. "Not so much as if you did with too little sleep and too—"

"Too much dissipation?" Blaisdell asked, playing his rôle as best he could. He felt unmasked, conscious of his different build, that the tones of his



voice were wrong. If this girl loved Clinton, she could not be mistaken in a counterfeit, surely.

"You said that you had lost everything," she went on. "And apparently included me in that catalogue, without consulting my wishes. Why are you tied up with those men you have at your house, with whom you play around the course? They are not gentlemen. One of them, the one called Hanchett, has a shady reputation. I have heard him discussed. He is little better than a shyster lawyer with a criminal practice. The fat one is said to make his living selling rotten stock. As for the other, he is said to be a blackmailer, an exploiter of women, principally those who are fools enough to think they are artists, or patronesses of the arts."

"You seem to have been gathering information," Blaisdell said as she paused. It was his cue to be sulky, he thought, the mood helped to suggest any difference in his voice. He sat huddled with his elbows on his knees, his chin resting on the back of his locked hands. His profile, at least was correct.

"I am naturally interested. You claimed to love me. I told you that I loved you. I did, part of you. If you were only what you look to be, seem to be, at times. I have no love for your making a fool of yourself with a crowd that is only out for your money, either the ones you run with in town, or this outfit, with their impudent chaffeur who pilots you over to the club. Aren't you flying any more? Have you lost your nerve?"

She had evidently seen more than any of them dreamed. She knew he did not fly the plane. What else?

"Cutler," she said abruptly, "you said once that if we married, you would

do me the greatest favor by dying. You were drunk then, or halfway. I had been ragging you and you said you were broke, worth little to me anyway alive, but that if you died I should be wealthy with your insurance. You were in a sneering, nasty mood. You made a lot of wisecracks that I needed money, had always been used to it, that you could not give me clothes or jewels, that the house was mortgaged and that I would be a fool to gamble on your dying.

"That was the first time you tried to break it off with me. You have never said you did not love me. I told you then that I loved you—or part of you—and hated the rest. But I am, I have been, pal enough to see if there wasn't some way out of the mess, and you have got yourself in deeper. Those men you live with are rotters. Crooks. They are after something, at your expense. Tell me one thing. What was the name of the insurance company you had your big policy with? You told me then, but I have forgotten."

"I don't remember."

"That's rubbish. You pay the premiums right along. Tell me?"

She had him cornered. Blaisdell tried to stall the only way he could.

"There's no use discussing this," he muttered, but he began to see things more clearly.

Suddenly she stood up, faced him.

"You're not Cutler Clinton," she blazed at him. "Clinton couldn't swim this far the way you did. You are built differently. Even your face is different, not just changed. Did you and your fellow crooks think you could fool me? They have tried to keep me away, but I got my chance, after I had found out things. The insurance company clinches it. You are an impostor. Something has happened to

Clinton and I am going to find out what it is. I am going to expose you—you dirty sneak—you spy!"

She wheeled, ran down the wharf, dived and started for shore in a swift crawl. It was as fast a pace as Blaisdell could hope to muster, if not better. There was no doubt but what she meant what she said. Purpose dominated her. Her inquiries would break up the plans, tie up Blaisdell himself in whatever criminal scheme there was. He could not hope to clear himself save by his own successful efforts to uncover the racket. She would forestall him, ruin him, ruin also any remote chance he might have had of meeting her decently. No doubt of her ability. She would have the clubhouse by the ears if she used no other methods. The game was up, and he involved in it as a scoundrel, a man out of a job who had hired himself out for chicanery, perhaps for murder.

It could hardly be that. It was not the real Clinton who was in danger. It was the mock one—*himself!* That insurance had been doubled, trebled perhaps, added to the limit. These crooks would have papers to claim it, after Clinton, identified, was dead. After *he* was dead.

Clinton, away, in some country where he could not be traced, or where there was no extradition, probably Venezuela, expected them to join him, of send him his share. He would never get it. They would doublecross him.

The whole plot was plain, simple. He was amazed he had not seen it before. It was their attitude toward Clinton that had misled him, inclined him to think Clinton was to be the main victim.

He was the pawn. He had shown himself moody, was known to be broke.

Did they mean to kill him and make it appear suicide? Or did their deviltry imagine some more natural death, seemingly accidental, to obviate any hitch? That was more likely.

And the irony of it all was that the girl had saved him, while destroying him, for there seemed little chance but what he would soon be serving time behind bars, along with the others, it was true. But that was small comfort.

## CHAPTER VII

### An Agreement

THE girl was halfway to the raft. If he was the skunk she thought him, he would have prevented her, even tried to drown her under the pretense of a rescue. He watched her, debating his own next move. He was not safe for a moment if she started trouble. They would hear of it. Edwards would get it. Blaisdell had only his shorts and singlet on. He might make the clubhouse, get to his locker. They would let him do that even if they detained him, which they might if the girl thought of it, started her tale there where she had scores of friends. Any way he looked at it, he had made a fool of himself, thinking he was smart—a detective.

There was only one thing to do. To face it. He might yet manage . . .

He heard a cry, blown seaward by the breeze off the land. A cry of pain, of despair. He saw the girl's arm tossed up; and then she sank, to rise again and lash about clumsily. There were no other bathers, only the slumbering Martin on the raft. No boats about. The truth was evident. It happens to the fittest swimmer on occasion. The girl had been tremendously upset with anger, fear for Clinton. Whatever the cause, she had cramps and

Blaisdell knew what that meant, out so far from shore, probably unnoticed.

Frightful pain, contracting muscles, certain death. She would breathe properly from sheer instinct for a while until the agony overcame her. Then her floundering would cease. She was thrashing aimlessly now. If any one saw her, they might think she was playing porpoise, fooling. Her skill was well known.

While these thoughts raced through him, he was churning through the water at a pace he had never reached before, trudgeoning his way toward the helpless girl. When he raised his head he lost speed, but he glimpsed her now and then, as he must. She did not call again, she was fighting convulsively. Again she went down, and when she rose it was only the flash of her red suit that showed until her face appeared—twisted, lips back, showing set teeth, eyes closed. She was still fighting. Unconscious, battling from sheer grit.

She fought again—in a frenzy that almost did for both of them as he reached her at last. When he clutched for her hair, barely long enough for a good grip, she locked herself about him with the hold of a desperate wrestler. Blaisdell was winded from his long sprint. They went far down while he strove to retain the buoyancy in his lungs, to free himself and still to cling to her.

He lost balance, sense of direction before he broke her loose enough to kick out and stroke, and then he did not know whether he was going up or down until he saw the water above growing brighter, lighter green as he broke through to the air, gulping at it avidly while he expelled the used contents of his chest.

She had relaxed, and he feared she

had filled her lungs with water. He got her on her back with a hold of her shoulder strap and started to tow her in. There was a current swinging with the turn of the tide that ordinarily he could have cut through. Now, handicapped with the girl, he was borne on.

He had no breath for shouting. The wind was against them and he swam as best he could, making toward the point that helped to inclose the bay where the country club stood. He passed it fairly close in, the girl still senseless.

Now and then he thought she moved by herself, but it might have been the wash of the waves. There was a deeper, indented, but narrower cove the far side of the point, with a house on the shore, a lawn, a wharf, and a bathing float, evidently private. With a supreme effort, Blaisdell broke through the current and got hold of a hand rope on the float, then to a short ladder. It was hard work to get her aboard. He had to weigh down the platform and roll her there.

He called and signaled the house, but got no answer. There were awnings down seaward, and they did not hear him. He laid her on her face, kneeled over her, her face resting on her flexed arm. And then started in compressing her ribs, pumping with her arms, minute after long minute.

Here he was, saving the girl who had announced her intention of denouncing him and would not lightly forego it, however grateful she might feel. If he left her alone, she was gone. He was not at all sure she was not gone now. But he kept at his job. He could not blame her. He admired her for her spirit, aside from the feeling she had roused in him, hopeless as that was.

It seemed an hour before she showed unmistakable signs of life. Every mo-



ment he expected to have Martin, or Edwards, come in search of him. It had not taken actually more than fifteen minutes when she began to revive, the water out of her.

He got her on her back, head raised on his knees. She opened her eyes, blankly at first, then with recognition.

She struggled to sit up. She seemed afraid of him, to regard him with something of horror.

"It's okay," he said. "I wouldn't have lugged you all this way and brought you round if I meant to harm you. You had cramps—"

"I remember now." She looked round. "You saved me, brought me here?"

He nodded.

"You don't have to be grateful," he said. "But if you are, I want you to give me a chance to talk to you. Not now. They'll be after me—the chaps you called crooks. I'm practically their prisoner, but I might get away. I don't want you to think I'm one of them voluntarily."

Her eyes seemed to search him out.

"You look like Clinton," she said. "You *can't* be straight, but you look it. You've saved my life. But you're mixed up with murderers."

Blaisdell shook his head.

"If I am, it's on the receiving end, not the committing," he told her. "If I was found dead, and accepted as Clinton, they'd collect on that insurance."

"But Clinton? Where does he come in?"

"You'll have to figure that out for yourself," said Blaisdell. "He's safe enough. He's gone away. If you'll look up that insurance matter, and I imagine you know the name of the company well enough, if you'll do that and let me know, to-night, not do any-

thing else before that, you can consider my saving you wiped out. I'm not a crook, I'm only trying to catch some. I've got to go. If I'm seen with you the fat's in the fire and you won't land them, and neither will I. How about it?"

She seemed to come to a sudden resolve.

"I owe it to you. All right. I have friends in that house and I go bathing from there sometimes instead of the clubhouse. My own house is inland, and not so convenient. I'll get busy. There can be no time to waste—and I'll meet you to-night, on the links by the tenth where that little house stands they use for rest and the view."

"I'll get there as early as I can." Blaisdell told her.

He slid off the raft, swam out through the current without trouble, turned back, and came up at last to the big club float before Martin had finished his nap.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### At the Tenth

**I**T was eleven o'clock before he got a chance to go to bed. The four had been in conference in the big library, at the far end, but keeping an eye on him. That he was the topic of their talk, was sure enough. Twice he got up to go, and Lessing asked him to wait in a cold voice that fitted his snaky look. The climax was coming soon. They were about to strike; their masks were slipping.

Edwards, coming up with him at last, was pretty well drunk, but watchful until he got on his own bed, half dressed, the door open. Soon he was snoring. Blaisdell bolted his own door. He had done that before and, if they ever tried it, they had been satisfied as

long as the lock was on his side. They had not tried to lock him in, perhaps not to startle him.

He went to the window and once more surveyed the trees, the little balcony, and the rose trellis. He could make it going out; whether he could get back or not was a problem he resolved to chance. He'd get in somehow. The girl must think him a wrong one after all, if she was still waiting.

Clinton had taken some of his extensive wardrobe, but there was plenty left for all purposes. Blaisdell put on thin-soled sneakers, a leather coat that would not rip, an extra aviator's helmet to protect him from scratches that might have to be explained, puttees and whipcord riding breeches.

He made the big bough of the nearest tree and swung in it safely before he dropped to the ground and started running toward the links. It was lucky they had no dogs to give alarm. There were more flaws than one in their plans, clever as they were.

When he reached the little rustic hut, breathless, the girl came out to meet him. She was in dark clothes and she spoke in a low voice. She was a sport for coming, for staying, Blaisdell told her.

He told her everything, from the beginning in Madison Square, of his ambitions. And she listened without comment. But she showed that she believed him.

"I've thought it over, since I found out through a cousin of mine who's a booker, about the insurance," she said. "Cutler Clinton was wild, I knew, and he must have gone a little mad, over-desperate. He must be in this. That insurance of his, in various companies, amounts to over half a million dollars.

"There are no special beneficiaries. Doubtless it was all made over to the

others under the guise of protecting them on some business deal, that is, of course, on paper only, or imaginary. And they would rob Clinton and kill you to get it. You are curiously like him, although I knew the difference—a bigger one than shows outside the skin, I think. You might be what I hoped Clinton was, wanted him to be."

Blaisdell said nothing. This fed his hopes, but they—or he—was still deep in the woods.

"What can we do?" she asked.

"Let me go ahead. I'm on my guard. We haven't got anything on them until they try some stunt to collect."

"You can't run a risk like that."

There was real anxiety in her voice. Blaisdell hoped it was personal. He thought it was.

"That's my job," he said. "I went into it and I'm going through. You can help me by calling up the Argus Agency. You'll find it in the directory, with the night numbers. Ask for Mr. Doane—he's night super and he used to get along with me fine. Give him my name, Jim Blaisdell, and ask him to send some one down here to-morrow to see me. Make him think it's important, but don't tell them so much they'll take it over entirely. I want to make good on this—they can't do it without me. And, by the way, it'll give you a check-up on me."

"I don't need it," she said. "Have you got a gun?"

"No. I wish I had."

"Here."

She took a flat automatic from the waist of her dress. She might have brought it for her own protection, but she gave it to Blaisdell for his. He felt a lot better when he gripped it.

"I'll be getting back," she said. "You must be, too. I've got my car parked over here. Perhaps I can give

you a lift part way. It's only a cheap roadster, but it runs. You see," she added with a little laugh, "I'm not an heiress, if Cutler did talk about my love of nice things. I like them, all girls do, but I can get along without them. There are more important things."

He did not go with her in her roadster, but he wondered why she had gone out of her way to tell him she was not wealthy, that there were better things, more important ones, than riches. She told him more, she wished him luck, said she thought him brave. It was a little staggering, the things that were happening between them.

The rose trellis proved the ladder that got him back to his room unobserved. He got a good night's sleep, what was left of it, with the automatic under his pillow. It was in his pocket the next morning at breakfast.

"We've decided on a new move, Blaisdell," said Lessing, his snaky eyes glittering. "We'll shift over to Newport for a few days. Clint was known there well enough to be recognized. He's got a small villa there. You and Edwards can fly over and we'll follow by car. Better pack a bag or two."

The others sat silent, but Blaisdell could almost see their thoughts working back of their eyes, all fixed on him, as Lessing's were, to see how he'd take it. Lessing was lying, he was sure of it. They were close to the climax. How were they going to play it? They had no intention of going to Newport. He doubted if Clinton owned a villa there at all.

Martin chuckled suddenly, forced a jest about the country club losing out on their tournament and blaming it on Clinton. Hanchett cleaned out the shells of his soft-boiled eggs. Edwards

grinned at Blaisdell—a dirty, half malicious grin.

They were going to try and pull it off in the plane. That was it. That was why they had not bothered so much about his body resemblance. A man who falls or is thrown out of a plane is apt to be pretty badly mangled.

It was up to him. Here was the test, his chance to get them with the goods. He had his own cards. He could handle a plane in a pinch; he had a gun, and he knew that the girl had got through to the Argus.

"Okay with me," he said. "I'd just as soon have a change of scenery."

"You're going to get it," said Edwards. "Scenery and climate. Newport's a swell place."

## CHAPTER IX

### Over the Sound

THE servants saw them leave, Blaisdell in the rear cockpit, Edwards at the wheel by the controls.

That was established. Clinton had left with Edwards. The servants would know nothing about Newport. Edwards was to come back or report in alone.

They flew northwest, making for Rhode Island. It was only a short hop by air. Edwards made elevation. Blaisdell watched, tense.

Suddenly the ship dipped violently, side-slipped. Edwards fought to get it back, succeeded, though his face showed concern. A few minutes later it happened again. Blaisdell was not greatly worried as yet. He knew it was not the fault of the plane, nor was that out of control of the pilot. Moreover, they were still over water and he felt sure they would not want to drop him into the Sound, to lose him.



Edwards shook his head, fussed with his ailerons and flippers, making a great show. They got over the land at last—and went into a tail spin. It looked bad, felt bad. Edwards regained some control, turned to Blaisdell, yelling at him, motioning him to jump.

It was well played. To get him to leap—only to find that the jerk ring would not work; then tell their own story.

Blaisdell shook his head and grinned. It was an illuminating grin, especially when emphasized by the gun he drew on Edwards. The latter's look of surprise was a revelation. They must have made sure early in the game that Blaisdell was unarmed, had not believed he had any opportunity to get one, to be anything but a sucker.

The plane rocked, twisting. Edwards saw the jig was up, that he was going to have to dance one of his own, not to his tune nor liking. His ugly face stiffened. He was up to something. In a plane under such conditions a gun is a bluff that has a poor backing.

Blaisdell realized it and used it another way. Its muzzle came down on Edwards's temple too hard and truly for the helmet to be an efficient buffer. As Edwards slumped, Blaisdell took over.

He lacked experience, but he knew the theory of spins and he worked his rudder until the ship stopped its pendulum swing, giving it the gun at the right moment.

He could fly easier than he could land. Water might be better, or it might not. It was just as resistant as land, and a bad angle might send the engine through the bottom of the machine and both drown. They were not far from Newport. There was a field there. If Edwards needed another rap on the head he could have it.

He came down bouncing a bit, one tip in peril for a second. But he made the landing. Macs came running, seeing Edwards slumped. Blaisdell asked for the police. He kept watch over Edwards, making no charges till the chief came and, to him, he gave his name, the Argus Agency as reference, and saw the surly Edwards, still partly dazed, given into custody on a charge of attempted murder.

"There is more to it than that, chief," said Blaisdell cheerfully. "You'll have quite a distinguished visitor."

Blaisdell talked to the Argus Agency also, after the chief. He got put through to the day superintendent, who was more than cordial. The head himself had gone to Long Island to see him. They knew Martin, Lessing and Harchett of old. The girl had given them ample information, and they had already taken it up with the insurance companies. It might lead to new, big business, Blaisdell surmised.

He rented a plane to fly back in. He chose a biplane so that if seen by the crooks they would not think it was Edwards returning. He imagined that Edwards, if he had got rid of him successfully, would have engineered a fake crash, landing somewhere in Rhode Island.

And he tried his main bit of evidence in the front of expert witnesses—the parachute. It had been contrived, as he thought, so that the ring would not work the rip cord. It was murder, attempted murder, pure and simple, over and above the conspiracy to defraud the insurance companies.

His pilot landed him on the country club field. He found his old chief waiting for him there, comfortably disposed on the wide veranda. He had found out a lot already without giving

out any information. Men hailed Blaisdell as Clinton, and he returned their greetings, hurrying to join Finley.

"Thought I might find you here," said the astute head of the Argus Agency. "What have you been up to this morning? Any developments?"

He whistled softly as Blaisdell outlined what had taken place.

"You seem to have graduated, Blaisdell," he said finally. "Now let us drive over and see your men. I think we'll find them there, as you do. And they are not new acquaintances of mine."

That was plain enough when they walked in on Martin, Lessing and Hanchett at the luncheon which they seemed to be thoroughly enjoying. They lost all appetite at the sight of the man they had thought they had sent to death, and, beside him, Finley of the Argus.

The latter looked at them with an air of satisfaction.

"Three of you got together, did you? Well, this time I think you'll hardly wiggle out of it. Defrauding the insurance people alone will make it interesting for you, but, when you try to murder and bungle it you went quite too far. And you made a bad mistake in choosing one of my ex-operatives for a victim. I understand that was pure luck, save that he had sense enough not to tell you he worked for the Argus. Don't look nasty, Hanchett. Save your black looks for jailers.

"Keep your eye on Lessing, Blaisdell. He'll have a gun. Use yours if necessary."

Martin blustered, and Lessing tried to bluff. Finley cut them short.

"Your partner Edwards was a bungler. He should stick to flying. He gave the whole show away."

"You can't try and glue anything on us that way," said Lessing.

"It was a pity that Edwards didn't like Hanchett," Blaisdell put in. The idea of his having to take the rap and Hanchett go free didn't appeal to him.

Finley looked at him approvingly. Edwards had not come through, but he probably would, and the whipsaw method was working. Martin seemed to actually diminish like a pricked balloon.

"I understand Clinton is well away," said Finley. "He may be beyond extradition. We will see what the insurance companies think about it. You will all be charged also with intent to murder. Sit still. I have men at the village who will be here in a few minutes. I phoned them from the club.

"It would seem, Jim," he said later to Blaisdell, "that we made a mistake in letting you go. There is a job, an active one, waiting for you if you'll take it. You have won your spurs fairly. If there is anything I can do for you specially, let me know. This is a big haul. Well handled."

"I should be glad to come back," said Blaisdell. "There is just one thing. If it is possible to keep Miss Renton out of it I should be glad."

Finley's eyes twinkled.

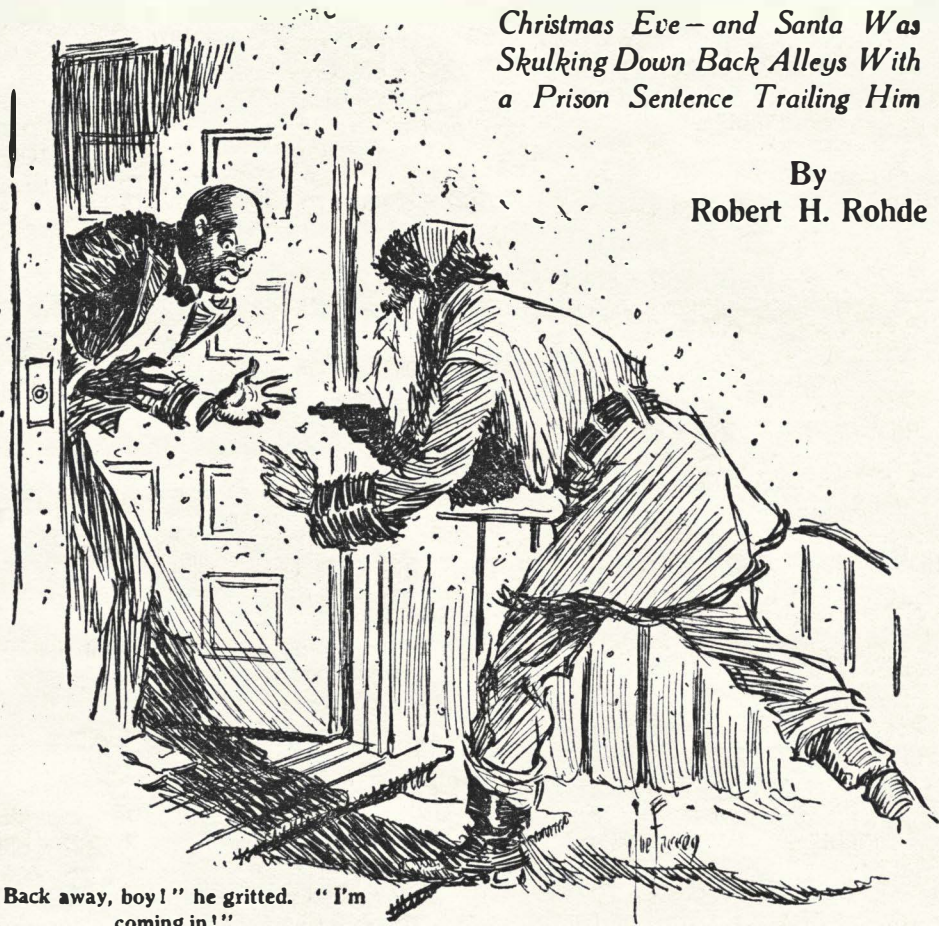
"I think it might be arranged," he said. "A most intelligent young woman. You might do worse than cultivate her acquaintance, Blaisdell."



# Santa Steps Out

*Christmas Eve—and Santa Was Skulking Down Back Alleys With a Prison Sentence Trailing Him*

By  
Robert H. Rohde



"Back away, boy!" he gritted. "I'm coming in!"

**D**OWN town, at Corley & Schneider's, they were holding conference on Harding's case.

"I tell you," Schneider insisted bitterly, "there's only the one thing to do. We wash our hands of him. Let the police find him, and let the law punish him."

"What good?" asked Corley. "We won't get the money back. It's gone."

"Sure," said Schneider. "Gambled away. Eight thousand dollars. Not so much if you say it fast, may-

be—and the loss don't ruin us. But if we've got medicine to take, so has Harding. It wouldn't be right for us to keep our mouths shut and let him get away with it. It's our duty to prosecute."

Corley shook his iron-gray head.

"I don't know," he said. "Is it a duty? Aren't there other things than the money to think about? And other people than Harding? What about his wife and kid?"

"What about them?" Schneider de-



manded. "He should have thought about 'em before he began stealing from us and juggling his books."

"Maybe we should have thought more about them, too," said Corley. "Haven't we been taking him a little too much for granted all these years? We gave him a raise when he got married—yes. But did we ever do any more for him?"

"Did he ask?"

"Some people aren't the asking kind, Max. Harding never was. I believe he told the whole truth in his note. Every penny he had saved went for his wife's operation. And then, when the youngster got sick, he lost his head and took a flyer with a week's pay in that damn gambling house."

Schneider smiled thinly.

"Just so. He dropped fifty dollars of his own—and eight thousand of ours trying to get it back. What does that make *us*?"

"It should make us good and sore at the gambler who bled Harding. That's the fellow I'd really like to go after! A crook beyond question. Hell! There isn't an honest game left in New York. Don't tell me otherwise. I know this town, Max."

The telephone was ringing; Corley broke off to pull it to him across the desk. He motioned Schneider to silence as he listened.

"No, Mrs. Harding," he said. "I'm sorry, but I haven't heard a word. But—but—well, I wonder if you couldn't run down here. Yes; right now. Mr. Schneider and I are staying late to-night. We'll be here."

Corley's hand was trembling a little as he hung up the receiver.

"She's scared to death, Max," he said. "Scared, and flat broke, and alone with the youngster up there. Hasn't had a whisper from Harding,

she says. Wanted to know if there mightn't be a few dollars coming to him that she could draw."

His partner stared at him.

"Well?"

Corley groaned.

"What can we do except tell her? But, oh my God! What a time to have to break a piece of news like this! Christmas Eve!"

## II

CHRISTMAS EVE was promising a white Christmas Day. Snow was falling in great, soft, cottony flakes, clinging to window sills and hats and shoulders. Up in the Eighties it swirled against the hot, unshaven cheeks of a man at an open window—and that was Harding.

It was a shabby little room out of which he was looking; a purgatory in which he had spent three agonizing days and nights, trying to screw up his courage to use the pistol he had taken from the dresser drawer a hundred times, and a hundred times replaced.

Before coming to the window he had taken it out again. He had stood in front of the cracked mirror, holding it to his head—and still couldn't bring himself to pull the trigger.

No; he couldn't check out yet. Couldn't force his hand to that ultimate and irrevocable abandonment of Ethie and the baby. He was a thief, but a thief didn't have to be a coward. Maybe, when the hue and cry had abated, he could slip out of New York; establish himself somewhere else under another name; send to them all his earnings but what he must spend to keep himself alive. Oh, but he'd do that cheerfully! God above! *Gratefully!*

Since he had rented this dingy hide-

away, he hadn't been out. He hadn't dared to go out. Even though he hadn't seen the papers, he was certain that every policeman in the city must be peering into every passing face in the hope of recognizing Walter Harding, the absconder. And for all the help he'd be to Ethie he might as well be dead as in prison.

The snowflakes were cool fingers on his cheek. They brought the season poignantly to mind. Christmas Eve! What a Christmas to-morrow was going to be for Ethie and little Jean! Would there be such desolate unhappiness under any other roof in all New York, or all the world?

Staring down at the white sidewalk, he embarked once more on his endless iteration of reproach:

"You damned fool! You should never have taken the first dollar of the firm's money. You should have gone to Corley—should have gone to Corley! He'd have helped you. He's white!"

He stroked the stubble on his chin and groaned again. He had dug in here with a fanciful notion of growing a beard that would disguise him—that would permit him to walk boldly past the detectives who must be guarding all exits from the city, and start the long trek. But the beard wasn't growing fast enough. He'd have known it wouldn't if he hadn't been in such a thick mental fog. When his week here was up, he certainly wouldn't get by as a bearded stranger; he'd still be Walter Harding, rather badly in need of a shave.

And there couldn't be a second week in this room. He had just two dollars left, and the rent was seven—terms, strictly cash in advance.

Down in the street a youngster with a jingly harness was playing reindeer

for a small sister on a sled. Harding's eyes went misty as he watched them dashing up and down the sidewalk. The reindeer driver was just about Jean's age, and had the same fluffy golden hair. It tore his heart to think how different Christmas would be for this tot and for Jean.

Ethie, frantic with worry, down surely to small change by now, wouldn't dare even to patronize the ten-cent store for a present or two. Jean's Christmas would have to go overboard—the Christmas she'd been excitedly babbling about for weeks; the Christmas which was the first to find her old enough to get the whole show.

"If I could only get to them!" Harding was talking to himself aloud as he had so often during his days of hiding. "Or—or get one of these dollars to them."

And then his hand returned to his chin to assure him that he wouldn't have a chance of sliding past the police.

### III

**D**OWN at the corner, at the foot of the "L" stairs, a bell was monotonously clanging. Harding's gaze wandered in that direction, and he winced. No matter where he looked, the Christmas atmosphere was rubbed in, salt in his wound. There was no getting away from it—the snow; the little yellow-haired girl with her harnessed reindeer brother; the hurrying, smiling people with their armloads of packages; and now, ringing that bell, Santa himself!

He was a girthy, jovial, red-faced fellow, this street-corner Santa. After an elevated train had passed, Harding could hear his voice adding to the incitement of the gong:

"Dig down, mister! Help out, ma'am! Help make it a merry Christmas for everybody!"

"Yes!" muttered Harding. "Help the poor; help the known poor who've got their names on the Christmas list! But who's going to help people like Ethie and Jean?"

A second Santa came stalking around the corner—a long, cadaverous man wholly out of character for his rôle. Evidently they were working two shifts on the collection pot, for the thin Santa took the bell and the fat one walked away. He came as far as Harding's window; then stopped and looked up, trying to locate the voice that had hailed him.

Harding, two stories above him, leaned further over the sill.

"You, Santa Claus!" he called. "I want to speak to you. It's—important. Will you come up?"

Santa stared, but he turned and began to climb the front steps. He climbed slowly, and Harding had the door open as he reached it.

"I was just going to make coffee," Harding said. "Have some with me?"

A yellow grin gleamed through Santa's cotton whiskers.

"Don't care if I do," he said. "I'm asleep on my feet. Been freezin' out there since seven this mornin'." He brushed a resentful hand over his red, cotton-trimmed blouse.

He followed Harding upstairs and silently watched him load a battered percolator.

"Warm here, anyhow," he said comfortably when the percolator was sputtering on a gas-plate. "Gee, I could pass out right here after bein' on me feet all day! The old dogs ain't what they used to be."

Harding faced him.

"I—I was wondering," he began

nervously. "Wondering if the Army could do something for some people I know about. Deserving people—a mother and a little girl of four. They've been deserted, and they're penniless. Unfortunately, there's nothing I can do for them, myself. Now, I thought that if the Army would remember them to-morrow, send them food and a couple of toys for the baby—"

Santa blew out his rubicund cheeks.

"Too late, mister," said he. "I ain't got anything to do with that end of it, anyhow. But I can tell you the last of the Christmas stuff went out this afternoon. Of course, we keep on collectin'. This is the best night of the year, see? And there's always good ways to use money."

Considering a suddenly-shaped thought, Harding meditatively fingered the two dollar bills in his pocket. In the warm room, Santa was having difficulty in keeping his eyes open; the thought sprang from that.

"You *are* tired," he said. "Maybe you'd like to lie down and have a nap?"

Santa Claus yawned and stretched luxuriously.

"Mister," he said, "you're talkin'. I'd rather have a shot a' hooch, if you want the truth, than coffee. But, the way I feel, I'd rather have forty winks than a shot a' hooch. Believe me, it's been one hell of a day for me!"

Harding's eyes narrowed.

"Maybe," he said, "I could have a good drink for you when you woke up. There's the bed. Help yourself. I think I'd pass the coffee if I were you. And why don't you take off that trick suit and the whiskers, and make yourself comfortable?"

"Why not?" grunted Santa Claus. Blinking sleepily, he unhooked the



wires that had been hooked around his ears, holding the vast cotton beard in place. "Say, you're all right, mister. I wish there was somethin' I could do for that family you told me about."

"Perhaps," Harding said, solicitously helping him out of blouse, and boots and baggy trousers; "perhaps there is. I mean. I might go and play Santa to them myself—if you don't mind me using your regalia while you're sleeping."

The red-faced guest grinned appreciation as he flung himself on the bed.

"Sure," he said. "You're a good sport, and you're welcome to me furs."

#### IV

**H**IS guest was sleeping soundly when Harding stood before the cracked mirror, another Santa Claus. The blouse hung loosely upon him, and the trousers flopped far over the boot-tops, but that didn't matter; everybody knew that street corner Santas weren't turned out by Fifth Avenue tailors. The important thing was the cotton beard. That was ideal. It covered his face completely; behind it the features of the hunted Walter Harding were absolutely lost.

It wasn't because he expected to use it that Harding slipped the pistol in his pocket. Simply, a gun wasn't a good thing to leave lying around.

Weighted by it, he started out. It was half past seven, and dark as midnight when he reached the corner and consulted a cigar store clock. The lean Santa there accepted him at whisker-value. He said hoarsely:

"Hullo, cuckoo! Got anything on your hip?"

That startled Harding—made him think of the gun.

"Not a thing," he lied quickly, and passed along.

He had meant to take the elevated, but he changed his mind. The distance wasn't much, and nickels were precious; he'd walk.

He turned south, and for the first couple of blocks eyed warily all whom he met. After that he lost his nervousness, his fear of being pounced upon and unmasked. His first hunch had been right. At this season, Santas were too common on the streets to attract attention; no one who passed him gave him a second glance, and policemen didn't appear to see him at all.

His mind began to travel ahead of him. How much of his two dollars could he spend, and what would he buy with it? Then another, much more disturbing question arose. Would he reach the flat only to be recognized and seized by detectives waiting there? Would *that* be the wind-up of his Christmas masquerade?

It was certainly something to think about—that possibility. He slowed his pace. Finally, at a Columbus Avenue corner in the Seventies, he came to a dead halt. He had stood there for a full minute, debating, before he realized what corner it was.

Barfield's corner! Half way down this block, over toward Central Park, was the gambling house across whose roulette table he had sent Corley & Schneider's dollars spinning in that desperate, senseless effort to retrieve his own.

Harding's hands knotted into fists. He shook one of them at the sedate brownstone house where he had madly gambled away his family's security and his own right to freedom and respect.

"Crooks!" he grated. "You trimmed me by a trick. I know it now. God, don't I wish I had the proof of it?"

Then his finger nails were biting into

his palms, and his shoulders squaring. If Barfield's game was crooked, wasn't this the time to find it out? At eight o'clock the dupes wouldn't have begun to drop in; Barfield would be alone in the place, except for a house man or two.

The impulse wasn't to be resisted. Harding wheeled, and started grimly toward the park. He climbed Barfield's stoop and pressed the bell button in the well-remembered signal—two short rings, two long ones.

The signal got quick results. The big Negro porter swung open the door for Harding as he had many times before. But now, instead of bowing obsequiously, he stared.

"Say!" he ejaculated. "You come to the wrong house, I guess. H-how you know that ring?"

"No; it's the right house," Harding said grimly. "And it isn't the first time I've played Santa Claus here, either. The difference just is—I'm dressing the part to-night."

The Negro still barred the way.

"You make a mistake, mister," he insisted. "This here's a private—"

Then his eyes popped and his teeth snapped together. Santa had made a swift reach under his red blouse, and suddenly had a gun in his hand.

"Back away, boy!" he gritted. "I'm coming in!"

The pistol was an excellent persuader; Harding got right of way. He stepped into the garish hall and passed on to a large room that opened off it, herding the porter ahead of him.

The room was in twilight behind drawn shades; its only illumination came from lamps concealed in shadow boxes around the many paintings crowding the walls. In the foreground were two long tables with roulette wheels hooded under cloth covers.

A door of a lighted office at the rear stood ajar. Barfield, hook-nosed and beady-eyed, appeared as the door was flung wide.

"What the heck have you let in, Sam?" he barked at the porter. "Gone crazy, have you?"

Terror of the gun held the Negro speechless. It was Harding who replied.

"I'm here to make an electrical inspection," he said. "Come out and help!"

Instead, Barfield backed away.

"Two lunatics!" he cried. "What do you mean, electrical inspection?"

"I'll show you damned soon," said Harding.

He ripped the cover off the nearest roulette wheel, and then lifted the wheel itself.

"Stop!" shouted Barfield. "You can't get away with stuff like this!"

"Can't I?" demanded Harding. He yanked harder at the hard wood bowl and broke into a harsh laugh. "But you can get away with stuff like *this*, you think. Look at those wires, Barfield! What would be the reason for them if your wheels were on the square?"

The gambler's eyes were popping; his face went crimson.

"Who the devil are you?" he shrilled. "What do you think—"

He was backing again, but Harding had bounded to the office door before it slammed. His pistol covered Barfield, limply fallen into a swivel chair behind a desk strewn with yellow bank notes.

"A stick-up!" groaned the gambler. He waved a weak hand toward the money he had been sorting. "Well—here's everything. For God's sake be careful with that gun."

Harding's eyes were on a stack of

thousand dollar notes, the backbone of Barfield's "bank."

"No," he said; "it's not a stick-up. Just an adjustment. There's a fee for the inspection—and a fine for those wires. The charge comes to exactly eight thousand and fifty dollars. Count it out!"

v

**W**HEN he turned into West Sixty-Fourth Street, a half hour later,

Harding was carrying many small packages made into one large bundle, and looking more like Santa Claus than before. His eyes were no longer haunted, but showed a Yuletide sparkle. His step was lighter and more confident. He couldn't expect Corley & Schneider to drop their complaint against him—probably the police wouldn't let them if they wanted to. But at any rate, they were going to get their money back, and that would help some. The pursuit wouldn't be as hot as otherwise, certainly, after full restitution had been made.

He saw that people were noticing him now as he walked through the home block, smiling after him. His Christmas burden and his new buoyancy were causing that. In the reaction after his coup at Barfield's he was all swaggering.

Nine o'clock, Christmas Eve! Well, it wasn't going to be such a black Christmas for Ethie and Jean after all!

But he mustn't let his jubilation run away with him; mustn't let the police get their hands on him until he had opportunity to demonstrate that he was returning Corley & Schneider's money of his own accord, and not under duress of the law.

Because of the chance that detectives might be sitting upstairs, hoping to trap him, he cancelled his project of going

boldly up to Ethie, using his key and just walking in on her. The better way of approach, he decided, would be the fire escape, and he found his way to it through an alley.

There was only one flight to climb; then, unseen on the landing, he was looking into his own kitchen. A dim light was burning, and he could see a small stocking hanging hopefully from the shelf back of the gas range. A fog was in his eyes and a lump in his throat as he cautiously raised the window.

That poor little stocking! Thank God that Jean wouldn't be finding it empty in the morning!

He listened, and heard no sound from the front of the house. Ethie and Jean must be sleeping, he thought. And he was suddenly glad of that. Facing Ethie, a branded criminal, wasn't going to be easy. At least he had a little money to leave her, and could look forward to a better chance of rehabilitating himself. When he had done that—then would be the time for a meeting. Not now.

Quietly he climbed over the sill and tiptoed across the kitchen. He filled the stocking with candies and trinkets, piling larger, ribbon-bound packages under it—a doll, a set of doll furniture, a picture book and a box of paints. Then, leaning over the kitchen table, he began to pencil a note to Ethie.

DEAR GIRL:

By now, of course, you have heard the worst at the office. But don't despair. The good days haven't gone forever. By a lucky chance I have been able—

He stopped writing at a sound from the kitchen door. Little Jean was there, barefoot, wide-eyed, raptly adoring him. He put his fingers quickly to his lips, but too late. Jean was clapping her hands and squealing:



"Mummy; Mummy! Hurry! He's *here!*"

Then some one was running down the hall, and Ethie burst in. The cotton whiskers weren't fooling her one bit. She knew who Santa Claus was on the instant, and passionately she flung herself into his arms.

Santa began to talk, his voice strained and breaking. She stopped him.

"Don't, dear!" she begged. "*Please* don't! I understand, boy. Everything you've ever done, you've done for us. Nobody has to tell me that. Oh, I'm so glad you've come. It's all right, boy. Do you hear? It's *all right!*"

Harding swallowed hard before he repeated that. His eyes were dazed.

"All — all right?" he choked. "How—"

She drew his head down, and burrowed with hot lips into the cotton whiskers.

"I saw them this evening, dear—and they were wonderful," she said. "Mr. Corley especially. They've never made a complaint. And to-night—*Christmas Eve*—they told me I was to send you to them as soon as you got in touch with me. They'll take you back. They won't do anything about the money. Some day, they said you may be able to pay them back. Until then—"

Harding stared at her incredulously. But after a speechless moment he knew it was the truth. His hand went into his pocket, and came out clutching a roll of yellow bills.

"Some day!" he cried, with a booming laugh. "Some day is—to-morrow!"



**F**ORTY years he was an outlaw of society. Forty years he defied the law, wresting a living by stealth and deception. Occasionally they caught up with him, threw him in prison to do penance for his crimes. But when the steel cells gave him up, he went back—back to the old game. Forty years of a desperate, wolfish life.

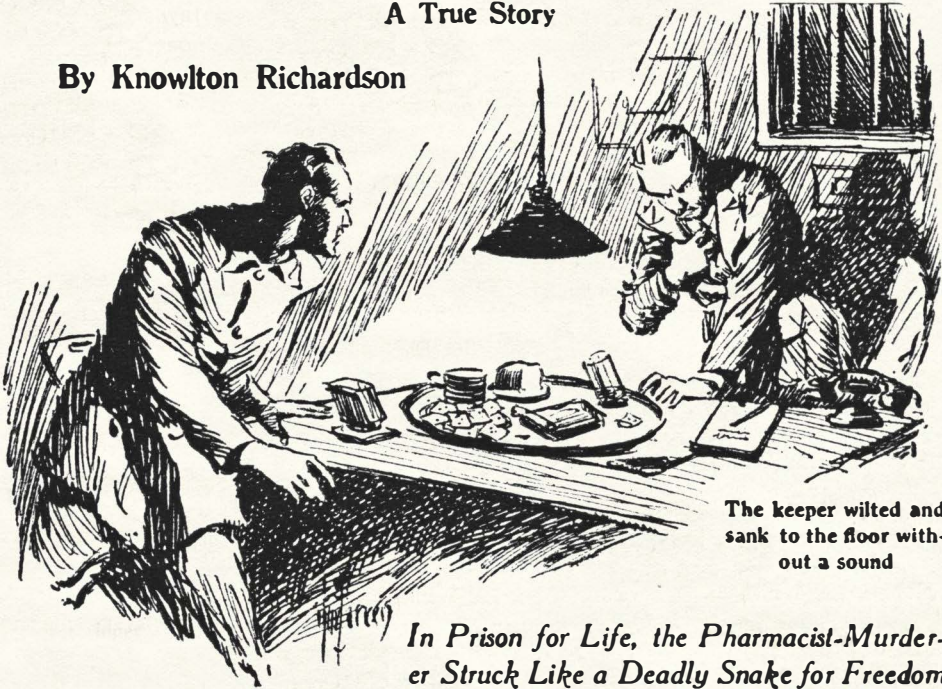
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Make sure you're going to get a copy of the January 17 issue. Hyatt's dramatic confession, "I've Stolen \$1,000,000!" begins then!

# The Cobra Killer

A True Story

By Knowlton Richardson



The keeper wilted and sank to the floor without a sound

*In Prison for Life, the Pharmacist-Murderer Struck Like a Deadly Snake for Freedom*

**A** SLENDER, pallid young man immaculately dressed in black stood beside the open grave, his head bowed, respectful, grief-stricken. All during his father's funeral Irving Latimer had seemed a most sincere mourner. Yet fortunate for him that his thoughts were without embodiment, or very grisly forms, indeed, would have been seen to surround the coffin which others now lowered to rest. He was thinking of the manner of his father's death — how shrewdly and plausibly he had contrived it. And he was thinking that very soon he would have to murder his mother.

The life of Latimer senior had been

insured for sixteen thousand dollars. Irving expected to come into possession of about one-third of that modest fortune. But the amount would be insufficient to save him from a still impending disaster.

He had realized this when preparing the cup of broth which, in two hours time, had caused his father — abed with a bronchial cold — to die suddenly in his sleep of "heart disease." He had even then considered persuading his mother also to partake of the broth. But *two* deaths—one a heart attack, the other caused by the shock of unexpected widowhood — might have provoked a good deal more

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*This is one of a number of fact stories of the most celebrated cases of the Pinkerton Detective Agency. Others will appear in the near future.*

local comment and required some awkward explanations:

Moreover, he cherished the malignant notion that, with his father gone and the benefits of insurance immediately demonstrated, he could prevail upon his mother to take out a policy on her own life, naming him sole beneficiary.

To his elders Latimer seemed nothing less than a model of propriety—temperate, intelligent, dependable, kind. But there was another Irving Latimer who was weak, self-indulgent and evil. And this other, waster and libertine, riotously run into debt, had gambled to save himself, but without any luck, and only succeeded in doubling and redoubling his obligations.

A dark day of reckoning approached. Shame and exposure he dreaded. But in particular he resented the prospect of being denied the happy, dual existence which he considered his natural right. And so he had abandoned his cunning, abnormal brain to plots of homicide.

About seven months after her husband's death Mrs. Latimer was taken violently ill. The family physician, being puzzled, diagnosed her ailment acute indigestion. After a doubtful interval—during which a woman relative nursed her faithfully—she commenced to recover.

Irving had sought several times to prescribe for her. As a licensed pharmacist he professed great confidence in remedies of his own concoction. But the doctor's medicine seemed to be effecting a cure; and so neither Irving's nostrums nor Irving's broths were administered.

Two months passed. Again Mrs. Latimer was peculiarly stricken, her digestive complaint this time being so severe that she hovered for days on

the brink of death. Irving, of course, proved devotion itself.

"I'm going to stay right with her, doctor, regardless of everything else, till you assure me she's out of danger."

"But, my boy—she especially needs a woman's care. I can't say how long a siege we may be in for."

Irving tried in every way possible to avoid having anybody else take charge of the patient. However, his mother's people were a loyal, untiring clan. Two resolute cousins came and nursed her back to comparative health and strength after a palpitant battle lasting more than a fortnight.

Meanwhile, her son's desperation grew apace. With a portion of the father's insurance money she had indulgently set him up in a drug store of his own. They lived in Jackson, Michigan. The store's location was deemed excellent. It was a most promising opportunity for a diligent, ambitious young apothecary.

Irving, however, had straightway mortgaged the business to the limit of its worth, then defaulted his first interest payment. He was already threatened with foreclosure proceedings the day Mrs. Latimer emerged from the sick room after her second and more nearly fatal attack.

A strong constitution, the devotion of her relatives and the skill of their family physician made Irving despair of poisoning his mother. Had the ruin now swiftly overtaking him sprung from any legitimate form of business mismanagement or inexperience, he knew he could have gone to her, explained his plight, and been fortified instantly with every dollar at her disposal. But also he knew her strict ideas of morality, her idealized conception of his own piety, gratitude and goodness.



If he confessed the truth, the blow would be quite enough to kill her. And so would the shock of his public disgrace! Since it seemed almost inevitable that the poor deluded woman must perish, Irving with all his disastrous debts surging upon him made up his mind to permit no further delay.

## II

**M**ADGE BLAKER, the young woman at the moment engaging his attentions, strode into the drug store late the next evening and began talking loudly and abusively about a certain fifty dollars it was her current whim to require. Irving carried in his pocket three new dunning letters wherein the writers resorted to threats. And he knew he had but a scant week remaining in which to fend off the foreclosure of the mortgage and consequent destruction of his business.

"Here—you'll have to be satisfied with this," he told the girl, handing her twenty dollars. She vehemently objected. But he got rid of her after a glowing account of a large sum due him within a very few days.

Left alone in the store, he took a bottle of chloroform from the prescription desk, and a short-barreled .32 revolver from a compartment of the cash drawer. Then he turned out the lights, locked the door, and walked briskly toward his home.

The chloroform he found would not be needed.

His mother lay fast asleep. Yet it wasn't in accord with his carefully wrought plan, having this unnecessary drug to dispose of later on. To be sure, if he put it away on a bathroom shelf it would not seem unusual, in view of his profession. But, like many another criminal who fancies himself super-crafty, Irving Latimer was be-

ing too careful. He went out and around to the back yard, poured the chloroform upon the ground, and with a stone smashed the bottle itself into small fragments.

On tiptoe he reëntered the house, went up the stairs, extinguished the dim light left burning in the hall, and again crept to the door of his mother's bedroom.

He paused to listen for the sound sleeper's tranquil, even respiration. Then he groped his way into the familiar room, halted at the bedside. There was just enough reflection of moonlight to enable him to make out the form beneath the snowy counterpane.

He fumbled a moment at his hip pocket, drawing the small revolver. Then, breathless, he held the muzzle down close to the bedclothes. That should muffle the report. He pressed the trigger.

One—two—three shots!

The acrid smell of gunpowder seemed choking him and he turned aside. Yet it was barely possible the sound of the gun could have been heard—identified as coming from his home. There was need now for haste. All the details of his cunning plan crowded before him.

Snatching up the brass candlestick that stood as an ornament on the table next to the bed, he aimed a terrible blow at the head which convulsively had rolled sidewise on the pillow. He repeated the blow, but with less vigor or accuracy of aim.

Up went the candlestick a third time—but he could not strike. That dark, spreading stain upon the white coverlet!

Terror possessed him as stealthily as he had stolen upon his sleeping victim. And a part of the ordeal remained

which would tax his nerve far more than all which had gone before. He had to convince himself that his mother was really dead.

After botching it twice with the poisons—

Well, he could be certain this time; there would be no recovery. For weeks he had been thinking of little else but his ghastly undertaking. It was the one and only way out for him. He was neither saddened nor overcome with remorse. His own argument had assured him a thousand times that she was going to be "better off."

He wiped the candlestick on the counterpane and then restored it to its place on the table. The revolver went back into his trouser pocket. He ruffled his hair. The agitation he felt would also serve him as a kind of disguise.

Acting out the exact scene he meant to pretend he struck a match and held it high—though not actually looking toward the bed. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed aloud, and repeated it—trying to convert the panic of his tone to a quaver of rage and grief.

The match flickered low and scorched his fingers. He dropped it and turned hastily, ran from the room, along the dark upper hall and down the stairs.

He purposely had left the front door ajar. In case some neighbor heard the shots and came prowling about, investigating, there must be nothing omitted that would help to confirm his story. And now with a frantic gesture he swung the door wide and dashed forth.

Reaching the street, he knew just what next must be done. He had mentally rehearsed it over and over again.

Running on a short distance, he suddenly halted. He gazed all around. Not a sound he had made thus far, it ap-

peared, had been heard. The whole block slept profoundly.

For a moment he wavered in his purpose. Disturbing half a hundred people, proclaiming the horror in his home—and lying, lying—answering endless questions—it seemed foolhardy, a mad thing to start.

Yet he dare not hesitate and alter his course. He must stick to the plan chosen, even though it meant rejecting this cover of hushed darkness.

He remembered the revolver and hastily drew it out, snapped it open and dumped the exploded shells and three remaining cartridges into a drainage grating in the gutter. He wiped the gun carefully with his coat sleeve and pushed it through the grating to vanish with the cartridges.

And now to spread the alarm—

"Help!" He was hoarse and his first outcry did not ring true—sounded, in fact, absurdly weak, considering the panic and excitement he felt. "Help!"—he repeated his cry, and with better effect.

A deputy sheriff, Sam Johnston, lived down the block. Latimer rushed to the deputy's door, and began pounding upon it with his fists.

"Murder—" he started shouting.

But that word chilled him through and through. He resumed his harsh, penetrating calls for help until Johnston and other neighbors were aroused.

### III

THAT both Mr. and Mrs. Robert Latimer should die suddenly within the year did not at first disturb officials of the company that had paid sixteen thousand dollars insurance upon the death of the husband. But then one chanced to notice that Mrs. Latimer had only become a policy holder two months after being left a

widow. Her life she had insured to the amount of ten thousand dollars, naming her only son beneficiary. This young man was known to have already participated in the division of his father's insurance.

An investigator for the company hurried to Jackson and began making inquiries. He came across some vague rumors concerning both young Latimer and the circumstances which surrounded the slaying of his mother, sorely perplexing to the local police. Whereupon, since his was an eastern corporation without facilities for any general survey in Michigan, he communicated urgently with his home office. With the result that the Pinkerton Detective Agency was engaged to look into the past, present and possible future of Irving Latimer. Payment of the money due him from his mother's insurance policy was, on some excuse or other, delayed.

"Big Bill" Pinkerton, Allan's aggressive son and lieutenant, dispatched a trio of operatives, Edwards, Ingham and Barlow, to the Michigan city. Edwards at once became a chronic invalid with an endless series of prescriptions to be filled. These naturally brought him to Latimer's indifferently managed drug store and kept him waiting there patiently, while the powders and liquids he needed were being prepared.

It took him but a day to discover the importance of the flashy Madge Blaker in Latimer's life. Walter Ingham, who had special gifts of blandishment, set out to cultivate the girl's acquaintance. While Tom Barlow worked chiefly after dark, about the Latimer home.

It interested the private detectives to learn that the druggist, since his mother's funeral, had closed the house and moved to a small hotel. "If I

stayed there at home, I'd go raving mad," he had said. "I'd keep on seeing ma the way she looked that night I found her—"

The Pinkertons couldn't question Latimer himself as they did not wish to arouse his suspicions. But from the local authorities they obtained a transcript of the testimony he had given at the coroner's inquest.

Coming directly home from his drug store, he had explained, the front door of his home he had found standing ajar. That instantly alarmed him, for it was a bit later than usual. He rushed in and upstairs, stumbling and fearful. The light his mother always left burning for him was out. He had called to her, but received no answer. Hurrying to her room, he struck a match—looked down at the bed!

"I guess I almost fainted," he had continued, though perceptibly moved by his own recital. "I stood there, horror struck, holding the match till it scorched me." He showed blistered fingers to prove this. "Then I went and felt for a pulse beat—but somehow I knew ma was dead.

"What had happened hadn't been very long past. Her wounds still were bleeding, her body warm. But she was beyond all help. I could only try to catch the villain who had done this monstrous thing. I turned and ran down the stairs and out—along the street to Deputy Sheriff Johnston's house and shouted and pounded till he heard me."

But, of course, not a trace of the alleged intruder had ever been discovered in Jackson.

"And what's more," Edwards commented, after his two comrades had read Irving Latimer's version of the crime, "only a maniac would kill an elderly woman asleep in her bed like



that. Latimer pretends to think it was some burglar. That his mother was disturbed and, waking up, began to cry for help. The crook then shot her three times—just to keep her from rousing the next door neighbors.”

Ingham and Barlow, veteran operatives, grinned at his pointed sarcasm.

“It does sound fishy,” said the latter. “A homicidal maniac might commit such a crime. But there’s none of that breed known to be at large hereabouts. No reported escapes from an asylum—”

“Latimer’s at large,” said Ingham.

“I guess he’s the killer, all right. We can’t prove insurance fraud as our client expects. But maybe we can show them the murderer.”

When William Pinkerton read their combined report on the situation, he set out at once for Jackson. The insurance company would probably have to pay the amount due on Mrs. Latimer’s life. The policy she had taken out in good faith, and two payments of premiums had been promptly made. But if Irving Latimer had murdered his mother to collect the ten thousand, he must be brought to justice. That project was not merely the concern of the company or the Michigan police, but of all law abiding citizens.

William Pinkerton conferred with his three men separately. It seemed that Ingham had assembled the most striking array of information. This operative had found Madge Blaker exceedingly receptive to an engaging new acquaintance. She acknowledged having a “steady,” but that did not appear to absorb all her time. A few small gifts with hints of finer ones to come, and she had pretty well taken the genial stranger into her confidence.

Thus Ingham heard of Irving Latimer’s splendid promises—and his overwhelming indebtedness.

Latimer was flat broke now, but expected almost any day to receive a really considerable sum. And then he would remember everything he’d promised to buy the girl. Ingham learned that the druggist on several different occasions *prior to his mother’s death* had assured her that he couldn’t fail to get the money.

Moreover, Latimer’s financial cares had become acute, not recently, but about a year and a half before. “And his father—with sixteen thousand dollars worth of life insurance—died very suddenly of heart failure something less than twelve months ago,” concluded the detective. “No wonder he took up pharmacy.”

#### IV

“**W**e had better begin at the beginning,” William Pinkerton decided. Which meant looking up the fate and affairs of the older Latimer.

Formerly a resident of Rhode Island, he had there been a manufacturer of woolens and accounted wealthy, but had suffered reverses and gone bankrupt. Upon his discharge from bankruptcy he had moved with his wife and only son to Michigan, where he hoped to make a new start.

Irving at this time was sixteen. Spoiled and humored from infancy, protected in every way from the hard impacts of reality, he was, as an investigator put it: “One of those folks brought up so wrong, their selfishness is like a mania—next door to insanity.”

Records were found which showed that before ever leaving Rhode Island this pampered son and heir had been accused of a petty theft—fifteen dollars being the amount involved. Yet neither of his parents, apparently, had

ever been informed of this blemish. An old friend of the family, sympathizing with them in the midst of business ruin, had himself repaid the money and got the accusation hushed up.

"There—that gives away his whole character," said Pinkerton, when this report was forwarded from the Boston office. "He'll do anything rather than do without. He's wanted his fun and likewise his reputation for being so good, pure and dutiful. He killed both his parents, I believe, expecting to save everything he cherished at the cost of their lives."

"If he poisoned his father I'm afraid it's too late to get far on that count," said Edwards.

"Probably. And as yet we've no tangible evidence to prove he committed matricide. That's what we now have to concentrate on."

Barlow had managed to get hold of a key and enter the locked, shuttered Latimer dwelling. He did not uncover a clew within. But that same night, crossing the back yard, fragments of glass attracted his attention.

He had doubtless passed over them a dozen times when prowling around that abode. The grass needed mowing. It was by sheer accident he had happened to catch a momentary sparkle of reflected moonlight and stooped down to see what caused it.

All the fragments of the chloroform bottle Barlow painstakingly gathered up. He and the others then made an attempt to fit them together. And it was Edwards who pointed out a piece of glass bearing a torn bit of label. "The odor's long since been absorbed into the earth. But that's surely the druggists' symbol for chloroform."

"Probably he made certain his mother would sleep soundly that night he was going to kill her. But, since he

had that burglar story cooked up, he didn't dare leave so suggestive an article as this bottle lying around," said William Pinkerton. "Of course, he had a right to take any drug to his home from the store. And old bottles are easily broken—thrown away. So there's nothing we can do with these broken pieces except convince ourselves. He's a cool hand, shrewd and calculating. You say he's paying much less attention to the Blaker girl?"

"So it seems," said Ingham.

"He may be tired of her and her greed. But if not—he's smart enough, anyway, to realize his pretended sorrow would detach him from the gay life—temporarily, at least.

"In Latimer's case I figure only one method may swiftly succeed. I've already wired my father, and I think he'll agree with me. We must go after him—playing the dumb detectives."

From Chicago came a crisp telegram from Allan Pinkerton, who still directed his sons and their men despite the infirmities of advancing years. William's diagnosis of the "treatment" to be applied was declared worth trying.

Two more Pinkerton agents were on their way to Jackson.

"You three," said William to Edwards and his companions, "have been around here long enough to look familiar. Now you suddenly get too familiar—under foot all day, nosing around, being ridiculously curious.

"I'll arrange to have you, Ingham, put in a room next door to Latimer's at the hotel where he's stopping. And you must somehow let him see you've met Madge Blaker. You, Barlow, will join in Edwards's game at the drug store. But your questions and the remedies you ask for must be so clumsily trumped up, a child wouldn't believe in you.

"Local police have so far given this young devil a mighty quiet time. We'll see how he acts when it dawns on him he's closely shadowed and investigated."

Playing "dumb detective" was an amusing sport to experienced men who had spent years in learning how to avoid the very blunders they now diligently practiced. Latimer knew in six hours' time that bloodhounds of conspicuous ardor were on his trail, coming in to talk to him with transparent pretenses of being customers, asking questions about him, meeting his friends, haunting his hotel. And, good Lord, that sorry invalid, Ralph Edwards, who'd been hanging around for days, was one of them!

A few dark hints which Ingham carelessly tossed to the Blaker girl sped on, as he intended, to the murderer. The insurance company was responsible for this sudden inquiry. That was why his mother's insurance had not yet been paid.

"Just a lot of cheap trickery! Trying to cheat me out of my just inheritance," Latimer sneered.

But he lay awake at night thinking about this clumsy tribe of sleuths, seeking to defraud him. One of them *might* stumble upon some clew he had overlooked. He could hear one of them now—it was Ingham noisily pacing the floor in the hotel room adjoining.

Latimer decided he must have a bit of vacation. He so informed his assistant at the drug store. But he told no one else, not even Madge Blaker whose interest in him was now pretty strictly confined to "when do you get that money?"

In attempting to slip away from the scene of his unnatural crimes, Latimer took elaborate precautions. He meant

to elude Messrs. Edwards, Ingham and Barlow—who had exposed themselves as blunderers. But he did not recognize the two new Pinkertons in town who covered, respectively, his store or hotel, and the railroad station.

V

LATIMER circled about Jackson for almost a day. He was trying hard to seem unaware of his shadows, and not to behave like a man of troubled conscience. Finally convinced by their obvious spying that their wits were no match for his, he walked boldly to the station and bought a ticket to Grand Rapids. He boarded the first Michigan Central train going in that direction. Edwards followed.

The fugitive got off at Hastings just as the train was pulling out. He chuckled to himself—for his inept shadow was nowhere to be seen on the station platform.

However, an elderly man whom Latimer did not notice, had been getting off and on his train at each stop, to the great annoyance of the trainmen. He was already on the platform at Hastings when Latimer alighted. It had been expected the murderer would never so openly disclose his true destination, but would try to give Edwards the slip before reaching Grand Rapids. The elderly man, who was a Pinkerton agent named Burkitt, now followed Latimer all the way to Detroit.

Once he felt safe the young man appeared to recover his spirits. And he presently sent off a telegram to Madge Blaker. Ever afterward he attributed the Pinkertons' success to this lapse into folly. He was lonely, he wired, and invited Madge to join him on a trip to Buffalo.

Actually, the detectives never saw



his telegram. They had all deserted Jackson. And the three—Edwards, Ingham and Barlow—were preparing the final surprise even as the bewildered Madge, who had seen two beaux mysteriously vanish within a few hours of each other, decided that with Ingham gone she had better keep on the track of Latimer by visiting Detroit.

In that city William Pinkerton called at the suspect's hotel and sent up his card.

Latimer was panic-stricken. Stupid insurance investigators were one thing; but the son of Allan Pinkerton was quite a different sort of foe.

"Tell—tell the gentleman," he stammered, "that I'll be down to see him in just a—a few moments."

The bell boy turned away abruptly, deprived of a tip.

Latimer began throwing things into his one small hand bag. Then, with anxiety mounting, he decided a few shirts and collars were not worth another instant's delay. He'd leave the bag here, sneak off down the back stairs—

Furtively he opened the door, peering out.

"Hello, Mr. Druggist!"

It was Edwards. He had been waiting in the hallway, with Ingham and Barlow behind him—all three miraculously gathered in Detroit. They crowded forward.

Latimer was cut off. He tried vainly to slam the door in their faces. But Edwards's out-thrust foot prevented even that feeble defense.

"We've come to see you, Latimer. Don't be inhospitable," said Ingham.

A burly, resolute young man now added himself to the visiting delegation.

"I couldn't wait below," he said. "My name is William Pinkerton."

"What—what do you men want?" Latimer tried to face the four of them boldly.

"First—to tell you that Madge Blaker has talked," was William's bluff.

"What does she know?" the suspect blurted out.

"Not enough to hang you, Latimer."

"Hang me? Good God, I—I should say not—"

"Because there is no capital punishment in Michigan."

Latimer's lips moved to retort—but he made no sound. His face turned red and then went deathly pale. His fingers trembled as he plucked at his collar.

"You must be crazy—" he managed to say at last.

"I hardly think so," William chuckled grimly. "We have come to arrest you, Latimer, for the murder of your mother. And I have brought witnesses to hear your confession."

William Pinkerton had guessed not only the right method to elect, but also the right tone to take in dealing with this pampered killer.

When the detectives escorted their prisoner from the hotel to police headquarters they took along his signed confession. Later he tried to repudiate this, claiming it had been obtained by fraud.

But now every one in Jackson believed him guilty. Circumstantial evidence—mainly that which revealed his desperate need of money just before the sudden death of each of his parents—seemed overwhelming. Locally, feeling ran high against him. The sheriff and police provided a strong armed guard when he was brought back to the city where he had resided. They impreguably surrounded the court during the murder trial, which was brief.

Latimer was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for life. It was observed as a curious irony that he went behind bars right there at Jackson, in a prison so located that he must have passed it time and again in going between the home he had desolated and his drug store.

## VI

ORDINARILY when the Pinkerton detectives had taken part in securing the punishment of a dangerous criminal they heard little more about him—unless at long odds he obtained a retrial, or, on parole years after, resumed his habits of lawlessness. But in the case of Irving Latimer it may be said that the day he entered the Michigan penitentiary really began a second spectacular chapter of his criminal career. William Pinkerton and the other operatives were to hear of him again.

The prison at Jackson was then conducted, as were so many others of that period, in a manner both lax and severe. Professional crooks without funds or influence did the menial or heavy work. While convicted men who had friends on the outside and money to disburse within, often had enforced residence made as comfortable for them as possible.

Latimer, as a murderer whom all the citizens of Jackson abhorred, received no immediate benefits. However, he had been able to collect the insurance which had provoked his crime. After defraying the costs of a vain but formidable legal defense, he had left over a considerable sum of cash to deposit when starting to serve his life sentence. And so straight off he started in to cultivate those officers of the institution whose favor would mean so much as the interminable years rolled on.

He was making good progress at this when suddenly it was checked. A letter written by him attracted the attention of the prison censor, because it smelled so strongly of lemon juice. Its innocuous seeming message was addressed to a relative. But the official tested it with heat for invisible writing. And an amazing postscript written between the lines was thus revealed.

Latimer was beginning to plot an escape with exterior assistance. His plan included the smuggling of several sticks of dynamite into the prison for his special convenience.

All privileges he had so far earned were immediately cancelled. He went down in his keepers' black books as a man to be closely guarded at all times. For his part, he took such defeat with a shrug and a smile. No use trying for a break—his tiny cell was just a home he would have to get used to.

He became meek, apologetic and conspicuously reliable. Every rule he obeyed to the letter, attended all religious services and got to be a favorite of the chaplain. The months passed, and the years. After three years of model behavior he had gradually regained the confidence of those who watched over him.

But Latimer had never for a moment abandoned his resolve to escape. He really thought of nothing else; it was all the "future" that lay ahead of him. Yet he displayed great cunning and patience. His acting ability again came to the fore. Mentally warped he unquestionably was—and having craftily and horribly exterminated his devoted parents, he now began like some venomous snake to work his way circuitously to a point where he might strike at the two men of the prison staff who had shown him greatest kindness.

They were Guard Haight, the keeper

posted outside the gate of his cell block and John Gill, captain of the watch, who possessed keys to all the outer gates.

Latimer at length recovered his privileges. There was no pharmacy in the prison then, and no regularly attending prison doctor. Latimer, having been a druggist, seized a favorable opportunity to suggest to the warden that he be permitted to dispense certain common remedies and patent medicines which his fellow convicts frequently required.

The warden, seeing no harm in it, consented. But he ruled that all importations and purchases made by the murderer must be carefully scrutinized, either by himself, by the principal keeper, or Captain Gill. If it seems peculiar to have entrusted this useful undertaking to such a man, it should be recalled that Latimer was in prison for shooting and beating his mother to death. He vigorously denied having induced his father's sudden and convenient heart attack. And only the prosecutor's insinuations at his trial had ever legally connected him with the arts of a poisoner.

Latimer kept up his shrewd game. He knew he would be watched for a long, long while. He waited for that inevitable chance when some one's vigilance would momentarily waver. He had capital, and he made more, selling apothecary's supplies to the convicts who could afford to buy them. But also he was generous in giving to prisoners hopelessly without funds. Quinine, cough syrups, soaps, liniments, bandages, and various other harmless items were thus put within the reach of all.

In time he was bringing in dangerous drugs, but only when prescribed by a physician, and in such quantity as to meet the immediate requirements of an

individual patient. He was so careful on this score he banished the last doubts of his most suspicious keeper.

With his orders of drugs he began importing crackers, sardines, cheese, chocolate and other delicacies. He next took it upon himself to prepare a hot drink for Haight late at night, when the keeper sat down outside the barred gate and ate the lunch he brought to the prison in a basket. Adroit, persistent friendliness made Haight accept this addition to his cold repast, until he grew to count upon a cup of coffee or cocoa every night.

Latimer worked as ingeniously in winning the full confidence of Captain Gill. He contributed small donations of edibles until this service also grew to be a regular thing. It was but one step further to the suggestion on which his whole project depended.

"I've some fresh supplies to-night, captain. Swiss cheese, sardines and crackers, and three bottles of beer. Suppose—suppose you and Haight and I have a bit of supper together. In the guard room?"

Gill hesitated.

It would be a welcome deviation from routine, yet strictly against prison rules. Latimer would have to be let out of the cell block, admitted to the secondary enclosure of the prison. But the young druggist seemed such an inoffensive, sociable sort—

"All right," Gill agreed. "I'll give Haight orders to bring you to the guard room on special detail."

## VII

THE little feast passed off pleasantly, and after a few nocturnal repetitions came to be regarded in no way as a serious breach of discipline.

The drab, chilling oppressiveness of



prison life is felt by keepers, who do not suffer it without interruption, as well as by convicts, who do. Gill and his subordinate, Haight, worthy officers both, could not resist the catering of Latimer, while he heartily relished his semblance of liberty and equality.

He was well educated, widely read, traveled and witty. He could talk entertainingly enough if he wished to be agreeable, and neither of the favored warders ever found him eager to be anything else. The three ate, drank, smoked and chatted through many dreary midnight hours. Their meetings continued week after week, on Latimer's bounty and with Gill's official permission.

And all this while the scheming killer was patiently at work on his ultimate triumph. He had managed, after months of docile preparation, to make his drug shipments seem so usual, the official inspection when a new batch arrived was merely a matter of form. In this way he obtained sufficient quantities of cyanide of potassium and nitroglycerine—and was not detected.

It was his subsequent claim that he sought to use a poison which would not kill. Cyanide congeals the blood and stops the action of the heart. Nitroglycerine is a powerful heart stimulant. The two in conjunction would paralyze Gill and Haight, but permit them ultimately to recover when he himself was well beyond pursuit.

Latimer mixed the drugs and then coolly experimented on himself, this step alone consuming a month. With fiendish exactitude and perseverance he let nothing hurry him. Bit by bit he increased and varied the amount of each poison until he felt he had reached the limit of personal safety.

Very well, he was ready to strike—his fateful party could be arranged.

But having taken so long he could afford to laugh at his own inward impatience. Nearly six years ago the Pinkerton operatives had delivered him up to justice. And now, after incessantly plotting and shifting and moving every hour of that intervening agony of time, he was ready to deliver himself from imprisonment.

He waited five, seven, nine days longer. What of that? He knew just the kind of night he had to have for ally.

It came. Dusk was early. Wind howled about the bleak stone walls, and rain in angry gusts soon was pelting upon them.

At midnight Keeper Haight got out his lunch basket and began munching a cold, dry meal. Almost at once Latimer stood beside him, coming from the small drug shop he had been allowed to install in one of the larger cells. He carried a tray, and on it were a tin of meat and one of smoked fish. Also on the tray were two glasses and a cup.

"Sorry—I'm a bit late," said the convict of many privileges. "But you can chuck that stuff. I got fresh lemons to-day. Try some of this lemonade."

Haight rose promptly, unlocked the gate and let Latimer pass through. It was like orderly routine to do this. He followed him into Gill's office as so often he had done before.

Latimer put his inviting tray down upon the captain's desk. He reserved the cup for himself, letting the keepers accept the two glasses. Haight, without drinking, made up a couple of sandwiches. With these and the glass of lemonade in hand, he returned back to his post of duty beside the barred gate.

Gill and the prisoner sat close together, conversing and eating. Latimer tasted both food and drink sparingly, but talked a great deal. Gill made him-

self thirsty on fish, and now reached for his brimming tumbler.

Latimer looked away to hide the eagerness, the reptile glitter in his eyes.

Gill half emptied the glass at one gulp. Then choked a little, and screwed up his face. "Good Lord, man—you forgot the sugar," he exclaimed. He swung around in his chair and spat violently into the cuspidor.

"No sugar?" Latimer affected to sip his own drink. "Mine's sweet enough. Maybe it was what you'd been eating made it taste sour, captain?"

Gill took another swallow, and grimaced.

"Not much—this stuff's terrible. Get some sugar," he commanded.

Latimer rose patiently but made some excuse to linger at the door. Gill was plainly uncomfortable, growing pale, feeling ill. He stood up suddenly, blue lipped and stricken. He clutched at his chest, a spasm distorting his features. Then he wilted slowly, sank to the floor without uttering a sound, and lay deathly still.

The convict gave him barely a second glance, but stole forth on tiptoe, and along the passage, till he reached a dark corner from which he could spy upon Haight. The guard, even as Latimer halted, was raising his glass to drain it.

Latimer watched the yellow fluid diminish swiftly as the glass uptilted. Without complaint Haight was gulping it down to the last lethal drop. And then, before he even could put aside the tumbler, a terrific paroxysm seized him.

His hand grew limp. Crash went the glass on the concrete floor. And Latimer nearly cried out at the threat of alarm.

Haight had doubled up with a muffled, strangling cough. He collapsed

beside his chair, and, like Gill, neither stirred again nor groaned.

### VIII

LATIMER waited a moment to get control of his nerves, then emerged from the shadow and drew near to the stricken Haight. He looked utterly slack and lifeless. The convict bent down and took his keys. Hastening now, he turned back to Gill's office. The captain had not moved, but his breathing was perceptible. He might presently revive.

The demented mind of Latimer was quick to suggest a ferocious resourcefulness in this emergency. Gill had barely consumed half the glass of doctored lemonade. Latimer took it from the desk, sniffed at it, smiling with evil satisfaction. He then knelt down, slipped an arm under the head of the unconscious man, and began pouring the deadly concoction between his lips.

He could not make Gill swallow, and the muscles of the throat seemed to have contracted. But he persisted until the glass was empty, spilling a great deal of the liquid, yet managing to trickle a goodly portion of it into the captain's mouth.

"If he starts to revive and cry out," Latimer told himself, "he will swallow. And this second dose will at least put him to sleep again for another long spell."

He searched Gill's pockets, took all his keys, and also a wallet containing twenty-seven dollars. Until the moment his hand rested on the money Latimer, for all his minute interior preparations, had given no thought to finding security once he had slipped away beyond the great iron doors. But now he had some more cash.

In his pocket he had carried the incriminating vials of poison, fearing to

have them out of his possession for a moment night or day. He would take them along.

The rifle chest caught his eye. He went and unlocked it with Gill's key, secured a rifle and several clips of ammunition. A hasty glance around—and he turned and fled from the room.

Along the prison passage he walked briskly, used Haight's key to let himself through the first gate, and then went stealthily down the stairs.

He heard a guard approaching—not the even tread of one who walks a beat, but the more rapid step of a man whose errand is urgent.

The murderer knew he must not turn back. He hid the rifle in a corner, and, steeling himself for his first great gamble, went on.

"Where d' you think you're going?"

The guard had heard the crash of the tumbler that slipped from Haight's hand, and was coming up to investigate. Latimer answered him with easy assurance.

"Cap Gill feels sick and told me to get him some water," he said. "I dropped a glass."

"Oh—that was the noise I heard."

"Yes."

Without waiting for permission, Latimer moved on. His perfect composure deceived the guard, who asked no further questions and did not venture to stop him. This guard, moreover, was content to leave Gill's ailment in other hands. Who better than the convict druggist could attend him?

Latimer safely arrived in the lower hall, but had to tarry there some time in an exposed position, waiting for the gate guard to pass out of sight. At last his chance came. He sprang at the gate, having the proper key ready, unlocked it, slipped through and turned the key again.

He now stood in the prison yard, where wind and rain made the vigilance of sentries doubly difficult. Yet he hugged the wall as he worked his way toward the main gate. There were the new acetylene lamps to penetrate the storm. And if he were seen by a rifleman on the wall he would be fired at the moment his prisoner's garb was recognized.

After an interval he dared sneak up to the main gate and again await his chance to approach while the keeper on duty there moved elsewhere. He got through, and was virtually free—though still visible from the top of the wall and liable to stop a bullet if discovered.

On hands and knees the triumphant prisoner crept the full length of the institution till he reached a far corner of the towering outer wall. He knew the adjacent streets well. It was the last gamble, to stand erect and suddenly run, zigzagging away from the prison until the nearest private dwelling a hundred feet off had screened him.

He waited for a particularly violent burst of rain, sweeping straight in from the direction he meant to take. Here it came. What sentinel wouldn't momentarily turn his back to such a blast? He sprang up, breathing deeply, breasting the storm, and ran for his very life.

There was no challenge, no shot or sound of alarm. He was free. In convict clothes still, but beyond the penal enclosure. He had money, and a quantity of poison that in his hands was as good as a weapon.

He walked hurriedly through a less familiar, squalid part of town, gained the freight yards, and started blindly on a journey of desperate inspiration.

Meanwhile, at the prison, Captain Gill had remained unconscious for



nearly two hours. Then gradually reviving, his memory came back and he managed to crawl to the door of his office and try to sound an alarm. His first efforts exhausted him and he fainted again, but came around some while later to renew his attempt. He this time succeeded in reaching the hall, and tried calling to Haight, but realized suddenly his own fate had undoubtedly been shared by the gate keeper.

At last the commotion he made attracted attention below. Other guards rushed up, and word of Latimer's escape spread over the prison. Both of the poisoned officers were hurried off to the hospital. Gill again had lapsed into unconsciousness. Yet heroic efforts were made to save his life. Haight was pronounced beyond relief. He was dead when they lifted him out of the ambulance.

## IX

THE alarm was spread through the city of Jackson, and search parties, belatedly setting out, scoured the countryside for hours without finding a trace of Irving Latimer. The Pinkerton office was immediately notified. In a day of inadequate criminal records, the files of the Pinkertons were widely depended upon. And it was the hope of the Michigan authorities some clew of the fugitive's most probable destination might lodge in the private detectives' account of their original investigation.

In Jackson, the operative, Edwards, returned to work on the all but forgotten Latimer case. There was nothing either in the Pinkerton records or in those of the Michigan police to indicate what direction the fleeing murderer might take.

"But he's not a professional crook,

and, it appears, made no attempt to tie up with that sort during his years in prison," Edwards reasoned. "So he lacks the usual hideaway opportunities of an escaper with underworld contacts. Whatever he does will be sort of original and amateurish."

"God keep us from such an amateur," said the Jackson prison warden fervently.

"Killing his father was just practice," the Pinkerton agent summed up. "The mother's death put him behind bars—though he claimed we framed him on that confession business, and that public opinion railroaded him.

"Now he's killed again to set himself free. And to stay free there's no knowing how many he'll strike down. Talk about a rattlesnake!"

"A rattler would have warned poor Haight before striking. This Latimer's a cobra on the loose!"

It was true. Five days after Latimer vanished from the penitentiary there came first news of his progress at large. In an uncultivated field near Ortonville, Michigan, the body of a man was discovered. He had been stripped naked. There wasn't a wound upon him. He was soon identified as a vagrant recently liberated from the county workhouse after serving a ninety-day sentence. And an autopsy performed to determine the cause of his death disclosed enough cyanide of potassium to have slain three strong men.

"Latimer!" agreed William Pinkerton when he read Edwards's telegram depicting this find. "I suppose he got away on a freight train, and met this tramp—just out of jail himself and willing to help a fellow outcast. But Latimer didn't want company, he wanted clothes different from his convict outfit. He poisoned this new

friend, probably the first meal they scraped together."

A number of the Latimer relatives had, at the time of his trial, attempted to rally to his defense, scouting the idea he could be guilty of a ghastly killing. It was believed most of these people had not wavered. Letters of encouragement received by him at Jackson had proved that. And Pinkerton representatives, in one guise or another, made it a point to visit the home of each one of them during the next two weeks. However, they found no sign of the fugitive.

Another move of the detectives was to get in touch with all the principal wholesale drug and chemical houses of the country. Some of them already knew Irving Latimer, either as a druggist customer, or a prison pharmacist of sundry small purchases. Good specimens of his handwriting were obtained and filed with the mail order departments of every one of these firms. And the Pinkertons prepared to rely on their integrity, as at that time there were few regulations restricting the sale of deadly drugs.

It was believed by Edwards and other operatives on the "relative front" that some of Latimer's kin knew his whereabouts, and corresponded with him. The Post Office Department was enlisted, and the mail of the suspects passed under the closest scrutiny. But this promising attempt failed to materialize a single genuine clew.

The Ortonville lead had, naturally, been followed up with all possible speed. Several farmers believed they had seen the escaping convict—one or two declared they had talked with him. But it soon appeared that he was doubling back into more populous regions. In Detroit the trail turned cold. Perhaps he passed over into

Canada, or had taken a job aboard some lake steamer. Literally thousands of inquiries were made. Latimer not only belonged in a dungeon—but also it seemed certain he would kill again, and again, if liberty denied him the kind of life he desired.

A year passed. The man hunt had slackened; the press, the public had forgotten such a fugitive as Irving Latimer was still marked "Missing." But all this while the Pinkerton office remembered. Edwards and two other operatives remained restlessly active. Even when on some other assignment they looked for the druggist.

Then one day a messenger hurried to the office of George Bangs, the agency's general superintendent in New York. He brought an urgent letter from one of the largest wholesale drug concerns in the city. "By an oversight which we greatly regret," it began. Bangs read on—and then suddenly sprang to his feet. Latimer!

The letter writer went about explaining "the elapse of time"—"a new clerk handling the mail"—and so forth. What he revealed was that a correspondent signing himself Rufus Crombie had been buying medicines from his company for more than a month. He lived in Oberlin, Ohio. He had written half a dozen times—and one of these orders was enclosed. It was ten days old. The handwriting surely resembled Latimer's neat script. And the order fairly shrieked Latimer, for it included requests for strychnine and cyanide.

## X

**L**ATIMER, in flight, had considered his meeting and disposing of the tramp a phenomenal stroke of luck. Nobody would mind his taking such a useless life. It was an agreeable

change to kill some one who probably hadn't a friend in the world. At the moment the fugitive had no friend himself save the tramp. But now *he* was gulping down Latimer's steaming brew. The coffee had a "queer" taste, objected the tramp. A few minutes later he was dying in horrible convulsions.

Latimer's further progress was ordinary in the extreme. He did ship aboard a lake vessel, and kept afloat for several months. Meanwhile, he avidly read about himself in the newspapers, and also studied the want ads. He realized keenly that it would be years before he dared venture back into the only profession he knew or enjoyed, pharmacy. He had thought of going East, enrolling at a university, and eventually studying to become a physician. But first he must acquire capital. He was still young—twenty-seven—and once possessed of adequate funds his medical training could begin.

More luck came his way when he saw the advertisement of old Roger Crombie. "A wealthy, retired gentleman desires educated, refined young man as nurse and companion—" Crombie, something of a miser, had considerable means. He was a clergyman, but had abandoned that career since the death of his wife about ten years before. He was not precisely an invalid, but one who surely needed a great deal of waiting on. He had worn out half a dozen housekeepers, and now resorted to hiring a young man whose good temper and mobility he hoped would endure.

Latimer had applied post haste and managed to land the job. All the young men of Oberlin had other plans than working for old Crombie. Latimer was the only applicant coming from a distance who seemed to meet the requirements. He had been noted

for tenderness, courtesy and pious ways, remember, before his mania obsessed him. Turning nurse he regarded as a master stroke. And once he really exerted himself to please the old man, Crombie was his slave.

After a few months of this Latimer was ceasing to appreciate mere comfort and shelter from pursuit. He was thinking of the money he needed to try to turn doctor. Crombie had plenty—chiefly inherited from his wife. And Latimer, an expert in devising rapid inheritances for himself, could not help thinking.

However, he had changed his name and thrown away his vials of poison. This he deemed the beginning of an altogether new and improved existence. He had worked on the old man's feelings—told of being an orphan "as long as he could remember"—his name "Rufus Johnson" was possibly not even the right one. There was, of course, just one alleged relative, in California, an old "uncle" who spoke of legally adopting him.

Crombie, grown senile, and cherishing his new content, worried about that. Latimer kept talking about it. One day he professed to have received a telegram. His "uncle" needed him, would adopt him and "put" him in his will if he hastened westward.

Crombie trembled. How soon would he want to go?

"It's such a grand opportunity, sir—I can't be too quick. Just as soon as I can get somebody here to look after you—"

Crombie tottered to his feet, matched the Californian's bid and bettered it. "You take my name. I've no direct heir, my boy—and no relation I like half so well as you. Become Rufus Crombie. I'll legally adopt you and draw a new will."



"It seems mercenary to go back on good old Uncle Ed like this," Latimer said.

"But what about me—don't I need you, treat you like a son?"

"You do, indeed, sir."

"Then it's settled."

Very soon it was, and all down on paper—the name Irving Latimer naturally not appearing anywhere in the transaction.

The newfound heir waited another month. In prison he had learned the value of patience. Moreover, he had no Madge and no debts nagging him as in the hurried, reckless days of killing at Jackson. But after a while he ceased patronizing the local drug stores. Crombie doted on thrift. He chuckled delightedly—a lad after his own heart—when "Rufus" told him he was now saving money ordering all medicines at the wholesale price from a firm in New York.

## XI

**M**R. BANGS'S wire startled William Pinkerton, and set the Chicago headquarters athrob with anxious activity. Latimer, as Crombie, was in Ohio, and buying poisons once more. The order was ten days old and had been filled and shipped immediately. Only a swift pace would save the life of whatever victim he now coiled around.

Arriving in Oberlin with three operatives William Pinkerton moved on the Crombie address without taking time to make the customary inquiries. However, he posted his assistants with the usual precaution. Then he walked up and rang the bell.

Irving Latimer opened the door, and stood facing the detective with immense composure. His appearance he had cleverly altered. At first glance

William did not recognize him, which gave the criminal just an instant in which to get hold of his nerve.

"I wish to see Mr. Crombie," said Pinkerton.

"Who is calling?" the other blandly inquired.

"My name is William Pinkerton—" said the detective, now certain of his man.

"I'll tell Mr. Crombie." Latimer turned away and started to walk through the house, but not upstairs.

"I'll come with you," Pinkerton said, pushing open the door.

Latimer turned back, wanting to run, but having to stand and try one more bluff. "Please be quiet, sir," he said. "Old Mr. Crombie is—is indisposed."

"I'll bet he is, Latimer." William stepped forward quickly, reaching into his pocket for handcuffs.

Latimer thought he meant to draw a gun. In a flash he had snatched up a cheap imitation Japanese vase from a hall table. It was heavy and brittle. Luckily for William he was not the artist in taking aim he was in other pursuits. The vase whizzed past the detective's ear, and struck the glass panel of the front door with a fearful crash.

Pinkerton now did draw his gun; and cornered, shifty Latimer held up his hands. Other detectives hurried in, drawn by the sound of the vase and glass smashing together. "There he is, Edwards! Put your bracelets on him!" William ordered.

Latimer did not resist. He attempted a sneer.

"Take us to old Mr. Crombie—"

The other hesitated—till Edwards gave him a sudden shaking that rocked his sleek head like a cork on a wave.

"Up—upstairs—this way—"

The detectives and their long wanted

murderer trooped into Crombie's front bedroom. On the bed lay an elderly man, his face as pale as the pillow—his body stretched out, limp and still.

Pinkerton and Edwards bent over him. "Just barely alive!" Pinkerton turned to Latimer. "Was it strychnine or cyanide this time?"

The killer blinked. How could these devils know what he had? From New York? What a fool he had been not to guard against that!

"This time, at any rate, Latimer, you swing," the chief detective snapped. "I suppose you forgot—but in Ohio they allow capital punishment."

The effect of this was electrical.

"God, he won't die. I'll get milk, raw eggs," Latimer cried. "Wait—I can prescribe, too, before a doctor comes. Some antidote and cardiac stimulant—"

"You'll prescribe nothing!" Pinkerton swung around, addressing his youngest companion. "Mills, run for

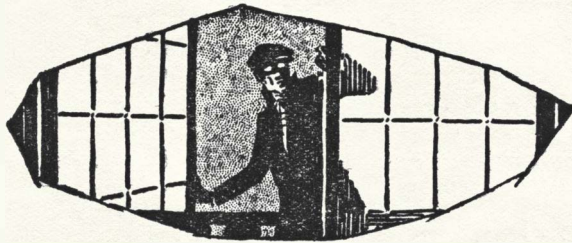
a doctor. Tell him to fetch a stomach pump. And don't waste a second."

"He'll live!" Latimer insisted, quivering with fear.

"If you're lucky," said Edwards, backing him out of harm's way into a corner. "Sit there."

The doctor, two doctors—young Mills was both fleet and thorough—hurried in. Valiantly clinging to his last shreds of life, old Roger Crombie survived those first small doses of the poison with which Latimer had planned very gradually and "naturally" to sicken and to kill him. The Pinkertons saw to it that Crombie's current will was burned.

They then took the train to Columbus, had Latimer's extradition arranged and escorted him to Jackson. He went into solitary confinement, since even for Haight's slaying he could not be executed. But stone and steel and all his keepers' grim suspicion forever after walled him in.



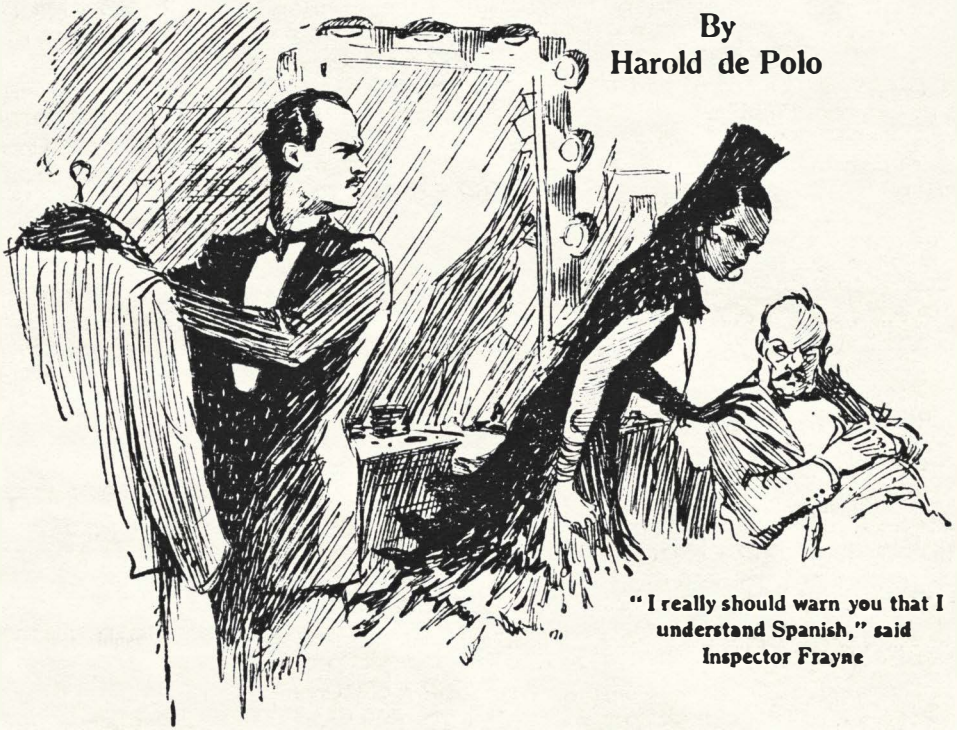
**I** COULD get through any lock that man has made. I could open a locked window so quietly and stealthily that you, sleeping in the same room, would never hear me. I could enter that room and ransack it without you ever suspecting. I could lift you bolt upright in your bed without you waking, and take the watch and the wallet and the gun you had under your pillow.

"Security? There isn't any security when a clever prowler has marked your house for burglary!"

That's what Henry Hyatt says, and he has committed more than five thousand "jobs." See the inside cover of this issue for an announcement of this forthcoming feature.

# La Linda Paloma

By  
Harold de Polo



"I really should warn you that I understand Spanish," said Inspector Frayne

*The Dancer Is Very Beautiful and Very Fickle,  
While Inspector Frayne Is Only Very Clever*

**I**NSPECTOR FRAYNE, as he entered his quarters in the East Fifties, stretched in pleasant anticipation. Although he had immensely enjoyed his dinner and following chat at the exclusive Calabash Club, the task before him was far more interesting. Sir John Colby, the visiting British archaeologist, had been vastly entertaining, but inside and even erudite information on Egyptian tombs faded into insignificance against the current crime news of the modern world.

According to Inspector Frayne, anyway.

The famous manhunter was unquestionably the most diligent peruser of newspapers that New York or any other city had ever known. He had a reading knowledge of seven or eight languages, and he was constantly using it. What he read, furthermore, he remembered. It was photographed, as it were, onto his brain. He could see it all in print again, he had said. Page; column; line; words. He had proven this, incidentally, in friendly argument with one of his few intimates, by going back year after year and quoting sentences and entire paragraphs verbatim.



To-night, he told himself as he removed his overcoat, there was a treat waiting for him. The mail plane from the deck of the fastest boat that plowed the Atlantic had brought him a bundle of the latest Berlin and Paris and Madrid dailies, as well as various other sheets. He thought of these three particular cities, however, because it so happened that each one of them was in the throes of an intriguing murder case. Two of them, in fact, were going on in Berlin. And then there was that strangulation of a Turkish dancer, that closely resembled Apache work—

But Frayne, carefully brushing the snowflakes from the otter collar of his black broadcloth coat lined with Persian lamb, suddenly held the garment rigidly.

The telephone had buzzed.

One of his telephones, rather. He had seven of them. Six in his apartment; the other in his private shooting gallery, in a soundproof room in the cellar. The instrument that had buzzed, though, was the one of which Haggerty—and Haggerty alone—had the number.

Haggerty was his assistant, his protégé, his buffer. It was Haggerty's job to separate the dross from the gold, so to speak; to see that the great man-hunter wasn't pestered with any obvious killings that might be solved by a less important member of the New York Police Department. Otherwise, Frayne probably would have been deluged with each and every ordinary murder that occurred in the five boroughs that comprise the miracle city of the world.

So when Haggerty used that special line—

Frayne didn't drop his overcoat in getting to the telephone. He draped

it over a padded hanger in less time than it would have taken another man to release the garment and acquire his equilibrium.

## II

"**M**URDER, chief! And a peach!" Don Haggerty's voice was so enthusiastic that his superior dryly reminded him:

"All murders are peaches, Don—or quinces! . . . Let's be specific!"

His subordinate took the censure properly. He coughed and cleared his throat and got down to cases, as his superior demanded:

"Excuse me, sir. La Linda Paloma. No, I don't mean her herself. I mean her maid. A French girl. Celeste Valliere. She was stabbed in La Linda's dressing room. In the heart. Clean through it, I'd say. Death instantaneous. Stage property dagger, used by La Linda in one of her dances. Sharp one, though. The Paloma is up in the air, howling for what she calls American justice. So is her manager, that Diego Espinosa bird. He isn't the only one, either. Heaton Sedgewick is up here. He seems to be implicated, too. He—"

"Seems?" drawled Frayne. "Then why the excitement? And what about Geoghan?"

Don Haggerty, seemingly, did some blushing. His voice, at least, sounded that way.

"Sorry, chief. I shouldn't have phrased it the way I did. They all seem to be implicated, I should have said, with nothing pinned on any of 'em. It's this way: It was just after La Linda's last dance. Ordinarily, the maid waits in the wings for her, with a light wrap. To-night, La Linda says, she decided during one of her turns that she wanted to motor to the coun-

try for Sunday. She told this Celeste to hurry and pack her bags instead of waiting in the wings. All right. She says—La Linda, I'm speaking of—that when she came back to her dressing room after her performance her maid was lying on the floor with this dagger in her heart. Her manager and Heaton Sedgewick—”

Don stopped, for a moment. His voice had that slightly apologetic note in it, again:

“I forgot to say that this so-called ‘star dressing room’ here at the Frobisher Theater isn't just a regular dressing room. It's a two-room and bath suite. One first enters—”

“Yes. I know,” said Frayne. “I've entered it. In my more youthful days, Don. Probably they still have that horrible green burlap on the walls.”

“Excuse it once more, chief,” said Don. “I keep forgetting that you know more about New York than any living man.”

“Thanks,” said Frayne, somewhat dryly. He added: “Is this a murder or are we conducting what might be termed A Class in Elementary Compliments?”

The remark speeded Haggerty up.

“It's just that it looks so good that I guess I'm a little up in the air, sir,” he explained. “There was Celeste dead; there was La Linda coming in; there was her manager asleep in his chair in the sitting room, snoring his head off; there was Heaton Sedgewick in the bathroom, where he'd gone to mix a round of drinks, with the door locked on the *outside* and the key in the keyhole!”

“Did I ask about Geoghan?” queried the manhunter.

Lieutenant Geoghan, it so happened, was the department expert on all things theatrical. Lieutenant Geoghan, it

also so happened, knew his onions and all other garden produce.

“You did, chief. Geoghan went to Buffalo last night to personally identify that Greek vaudeville juggler mixed up in the Papadoulos murder affair. The cop on the beat—fellow called Hyman—told Gus Frobisher that he'd better get to you through me. He certainly wants to get to you, chief. It's his theater. He's naturally worried over the unpleasant notoriety it will mean.”

“Speaking from the phone in Raquel's dressing room, Don?” asked Frayne.

“Raquel” was the given name of La Linda Paloma.

“I am, sir,” replied Haggerty.

Frayne took a pencil out of his pocket, then. With it, he tapped a tune on the telephone. It was a private code that he and Haggerty had invented. It was known to the two of them only. The tune was brief. It merely asked:

“Do *you* suspect any one?”

The manhunter's devoted subordinate must have had a pencil handy, himself.

“No,” was his answer.

Frayne yawned.

“Be right up, Don. Reminding you to hold every one in and keep every one out. Except Grady. Ring him when I hang up and tell him to chase along.”

Grady was the coroner. Grady was also Frayne's friend. Grady was one coroner who didn't have the urge to be a great detective some bright day.

“Maybe it is a peach of a murder,” said Frayne, as he replaced the receiver. “We'll find out soon.”

Probably Inspector Frayne would find out soon. Murder was his hobby. It was his only hobby. More than his hobby, to be explicit. It was what made his brain go on clicking and his blood go on pumping. It furnished

him with all the proteins and calories that his system seemed to need.

It was his life!

### III

INSPECTOR FRAYNE, on his journey to a murder case, usually spent the time in mentally cataloguing the principals and the known supernumeraries connected with the affair. He was doing so now, as he lolled back in the taxi he had hailed at his door.

La Linda Paloma—Raquel Riera, she had been christened—could come extremely close to being termed a very dangerous sort of little girl. She was, as far as could be judged, somewhere in her early thirties. For half her life, if not longer, she had been dancing in the gayest cities in the world. Her début had been made in an obscure café in Buenos Ayres, but neither the café nor La Linda had remained obscure after the first night.

A fabulously wealthy coffee planter in Brazil, who had been on what he had deemed a slumming tour, had seen to that.

He had instantly desired and offered to allow La Linda to dance for himself and himself alone, magnificently suggesting that she choose any palatial dwelling on any exclusive thoroughfare. In the morning she would be installed there, he promised, with a retinue of servants and all the other incidentals. They do things with a certain air, these incredibly rich coffee people from the South and Central Americas, as Frayne was well aware.

La Linda, even at that early stage of her career, must have been endowed with a strong sense of innate shrewdness. Perhaps she remembered the Spanish proverb about those who capitulate too soon are apt to be discarded too soon afterward. Anyway,

she rejected the offer. She said that she wanted to dance, that there was where her happiness and joy and life was. *Bueno*. Dance she should, but she should dance for him. And without asking the price the Brazilian had immediately bought the café, giving a blank check that did not prove to be a rubber one.

The episode, naturally, brought her fame. Briefly, she just as naturally eventually surrendered to the coffee planter. She did not accept from him any of the various homes he suggested; she had him build her a marble palace on a wide and swank avenue, and she did not move into it until she had been given the deed in her own name. She did not remain for long in her sumptuous home, the first time. She elected to accept a fat contract at a Parisian dance hall, duly accompanied across the briny by the madly infatuated Brazilian.

He did not remain the tenant of her heart—or whatever it was—for more than five scant weeks after her advent into France. She fell for a Swedish count—a towering, blond young giant. In fact, Inspector Frayne recalled that falling for blond men had been her fetish, her one weakness. Anyway, so she had gone on. Acquiring admirers and possessions; having her purple patches of love, regardless of finance, with Nordic men; but always she danced, although her wealth must have been considerable. There had been much truth, no doubt, in her early statement that her happiness and joy and life were in her work. She was, after all, an artist. Frayne knew that. He had seen her behind the footlights.

The last time he had seen her, he remembered, he had happened to sit next to Heaton Sedgewick. The latter was a



blond young man—a very blond young man.

Heaton Sedgewick—at least in the vicinity of New York—was equally as well known as La Linda. He was one of the best known men-about-town, as the phrase has it, as well as one of the most famous of the Long Island polo and hunting set. He was squash champion, into the bargain. There were few sports, indeed, at which he was not adept. The axiom of jack of all trades and master of none did not apply to him. He was a crack athlete, up among the top-notchers, in any game in which he participated. Almost daily, during all seasons, his name was in the sport pages of the press.

The remarkable thing about him was that he did more proverbial burning of the candle at both ends than any individual the manhunter could bring to mind at the moment. Certainly he upset all the copy book rules about those wishing to excel in sports shunning wine, women and song. Instead of shunning them, Heaton Sedgewick assiduously searched for them. Not that they are so difficult to find, at that, particularly for a socially prominent and financially secure young man who happens to be further blessed with more than a fair share of good looks. With all his popularity, his wildness, it was rumored that Sedgewick had the rare attribute of being extremely cagy. To bear this out, he had never made the tabloids in a breach of promise suit or a blackmail frame-up.

But with all his caginess—rumor was again speaking—he had fallen for La Linda quite as hard and thoroughly as she had fallen for him. He was at the theater almost nightly, watching her from the wings or waiting for her in the dressing room. His faithfulness had

caused comment from more than one Broadway columnist, for Heaton had never been accused of being ungenerous with his affections. Ordinarily, in fact, he could be seen with a different woman every evening at some night club. Sometimes with two of them at two different night clubs, rather. La Linda, however, had changed that. Sedgewick was so faithful that he didn't even object to Diego Espinosa, her manager, being on the party most of the time.

Diego Espinosa?

A rare, although not an unknown type. He was, if Frayne remembered correctly, quite close to sixty. A placid and astute business man—as La Linda's contracts would bear witness—who was reputed to be devoted to her in a purely fatherly fashion. He was from her own country, and it was said that he had met her in Paris—after the affair of the Swedish count—and persuaded her that she needed some one to supervise the details of her theatrical work. He had been doing this supervising since—well, it must have been very much in the neighborhood of over fifteen years, now.

Never, as far as Frayne could recollect, had there been the slightest breath of suspicion in the relationship. Diego sincerely believed her to be the greatest artist, the greatest interpreter of the Spanish dance, that the world had ever known. It was his duty, he had affirmed, to see that this genius was properly presented to the public. She, in turn, had shortly come to realize that she had gained the services of a veritable guardian angel. Her respect for him, her affection, was said to be that of a dutiful child to a revered father. He accepted her amours with a sigh, as something that presumably must occur in the life of a *grande artiste*.

So much for what Frayne knew of

the three of them, waiting there in the dressing room with Haggerty.

The maid? The murdered girl?

What does any one know about the maid of a famous star such as La Linda Paloma?

Frayne, as he alighted from the taxi, told himself that perhaps he'd better start making a mental card index called "Servitors of the Famous."

#### IV

THE walls of the star dressing room in the Frobisher Theater were still adorned with the bilious green burlap that was considered so swell in the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

Frayne was looking at the walls, as he entered. He stood there, in fact, with his eyes going to triangular slits as he scrutinized them almost painstakingly.

He apparently paid no attention to the corpse that was crumpled up on the floor; to La Linda Paloma herself; to Heaton Sedgewick; to Diego Espinosa. Oddly enough, these people who must have been horribly on edge watched him in complete silence. Frayne had the habit of making his audience do this, when he so desired it.

Haggerty knew this. Haggerty, red-headed and blue-eyed and keenly alive, knew a great deal about his superior. He knew that the incomparable manhunter never assumed an attitude, never made a gesture, never uttered a word, that didn't mean something. He knew that Frayne, now, was simply getting his suspects more on edge.

A reporter had once said that Frayne and his subordinate seemed to have telepathic communication, and presently Don lent some credence to the remark.

"Looking for something, chief?"

Frayne, in answer, suddenly turned to La Linda Paloma. He bowed from the waist.

"I *was* looking for something, Señorita Riera," he smiled. "I was looking for an unemployed hanger."

Raquel gazed at him, blankly. Not exactly blankly. She gazed at him with eyes that said that here was one North American who was *truly* mad. Her eyes were exceptionally expressive, incidentally.

Diego Espinosa shook his head and folded his hands more tightly across his protuberant paunch, while Heaton Sedgewick muttered that he'd be damned, by gad.

Raquel, however, was the first to regain her composure, as Don noticed.

"An—an unemployed hanger? . . . What a *love-ly* description you have said, Inspector Frayne!"

Her voice was as gorgeous, as enthralling, as her eyes. It had magnetism. Her English was precise, slow, with high notes that were charmingly accentuated.

"But have you one?" persisted Frayne, politely.

"But surely—but— . . . Don Diego—*Hec-ton*— . . . A hanger. For the *love-ly* fur overcoat of the Inspector Frayne. Unemploy that one. There, that one with the silver and black *jota* costume. I know of the most famous Inspector Frayne. He *all-ways* hangs up his clothes! . . . No, Inspector Frayne?"

"And tree my boots, Señorita Riera," Frayne gravely concurred, as he took the clothes hanger from Don Diego and hung up his fur overcoat after he had carefully draped it.

"By gad, sir," broke in Heaton Sedgewick. "do you know that there's a dead woman right there on the floor beside you? A *murdered* woman!"

"Did you murder her, Sedgewick?" Frayne asked casually.

"Did I murder her?"

"Precisely what I inquired."

The polo idol of Long Island looked as if he wished he had a mallet in his hand. As it was, he took a step forward, his face going angry.

"Damn—"

"Don't damn me," drawled Frayne. "I really don't like being damned. I heartily agree that children should merely be seen, Mr. Sedgewick. You simply *must* control yourself."

"Yes, do not be more of a fool, *Hee-ton*," burst out La Linda. "All-*rcady* you have made Inspector Frayne see that you cared for Cel—"

Raquel broke off suddenly, and it was then—and then only—that Don Diego spoke. He spoke as if admonishing an innocent and wayward little girl.

"Raquel—Raquellita!"

"But has he not been a fool, Don Diego? Saying he loves me? Playing with his other women?" La Linda broke out. "*Madre de Dios*, Don Diego, do I countenance pigs who—"

Raquel Riera changed to Spanish, then. She went into the entire history of her romance with Heaton Sedgewick. It was, to say the least, passably amusing. It accused him, beyond the vestige of a doubt, of not being faithful. It accused him of having become enamored of an insignificant creature who was not even true to *him*. Did he not know she had spoken to her mistress about letters from another—

But La Linda stopped, for a moment, in order to regain her breath, apparently.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Frayne took occasion to say, "but I really should warn you that I understand Spanish."

Raquel clutched at her bosom, sighed, relaxed. Her next gesture was impulsive. She came over and put her hands on Inspector Frayne's shoulders.

"Oh, you must forgive me. I am so-o-o excited. I—oh, but you *will* find the terrible person who killed my poor Celeste, will you not? No?"

"Probably I shall," said Frayne gravely, with another courteous bow, and something in his bearing that said he again demanded silence.

## V

THE manhunter gazed down at the body of Celeste Valliere. She had been a pretty little thing, with legitimate titian hair and a provocative mouth. She might easily have had admirers. She was dressed in an immaculate maid's costume, of stiff black taffeta with apron and cap of real French lace. Her ankles were trim, her feet well shod. Her hands were superbly kept, the fingers slim and tapering, although the sharply pointed nails had too much pink liquid nail polish on them to suit Frayne.

Frayne was an expert on hands. His own were beautifully tended. He looked at them now. Held them out before him. Smiled at La Linda Paloma.

"She had nice hands, didn't she? Too much pink liquid polish on the nails, though. You agree?"

"*Sí, sí*. But, yes. Of course. Surely. I frequently remember telling her so."

Raquel didn't look as if she had frequently remembered telling her. Raquel looked as if she thought this American police officer who wanted hangers and didn't like too much pink nail polish was really *more* than a trifle mad.

Sedgewick was frowning. *He* looked as if he wanted to come right out and



call the much-vaunted Inspector Frayne a plain damn fool. He didn't quite dare, presumably.

Only Don Diego was serene. He was an older man and a philosopher and he took things as they came. He kept his hands folded across his paunch.

Frayne again studied Celeste's hands. As a matter of fact, he knelt down on one knee to do it. He lifted up the right hand in his own, examining it carefully:

"Ah, yes," he said, rising and again smiling at the dancer. "Too much color on them. Particularly on the index finger of the right hand. There's even color under the nail. Sloppy."

La Linda could only gulp at that one, and look as if she were sure that Frayne should be in an asylum for the hopelessly insane right this minute.

She found words, though, finally. They sounded as if she were trying to soothe a dangerous lunatic.

"*Sí, sí.* Of course. But surely."

Frayne wasn't paying attention, however. He was frowning as he brushed the dust from the trouser leg of his faultlessly fitting dinner suit.

"Horribly dusty floor, *señorita.*" he drawled, his voice a trifle testy.

"*Sí, sí,*" she again agreed.

Frayne paid no attention. He was looking for specks of dust on his jacket sleeve, now.

Sedgewick *almost* spoke, this time. He shook his head. The shake plainly said that, although he had to agree that Frayne was the best turned-out police official New York or any other city had ever had, the man had suddenly acquired softening of the brain.

But Frayne, as he faced La Linda, seemed to have turned a trifle stern even though his voice still came in a drawl.

"It's getting a little late, *señorita.* and you've planned to get away to-night for the week-end, I understand. Suppose you tell me precisely how you discovered the body? As simply as possible, please. Or shall I say with as little wasted effort as you use in your superb dancing, *señorita?*"

She bowed, grave herself.

"It was as I told Mr. Haggerty, Inspector Frayne. I had told Celeste to pack my bags, and so she was not waiting for me in the wings. I came in here and—well, and there she was. That is all. She was lying as she is now. Dead. With that dagger just as you see it, Inspector Frayne."

"And you say that Mr. Sedgewick was in the bath, with the door locked and the key in place on *this* side?"

"Yes, Inspector Frayne. So I have said. So I tell you now," she said firmly.

"That's right, inspector. I—"

"We'll ask for your opinion, later. Mr. Sedgewick," said the manhunter dryly.

"Excuse—"

"Granted," said Frayne.

He looked at the bathroom door. There was a wide transom above it, as the more old-fashioned buildings have, and the transom was slightly open. It would be wide enough, when raised, to admit the passage of a man's body.

La Linda, as Frayne glanced at it, stared at it herself. She gasped.

"You also are observant, *señorita,*" said Frayne.

She reddened, then. Tried to avert her eyes. Cast them at her Heaton as if perhaps she hadn't meant all she had said against him.

"And Don Diego?" asked Frayne.

"He was dozing—sleeping. There in the sitting room. He always naps.

my dear Don Diego, when he waits for me here. He drinks too heavy a wine with his dinner, I tell him. It makes him snore. *Dios*, you should hear him."

"Snores are of no account, when we get older," sighed Don Diego. "We have no one with us to wake up with our snores, when we approach sixty. A heavy wine such as I drink is better for the digestion, I find," he added solemnly.

"Possibly," said Frayne politely. "I grieve because I have no time to discuss it with you now. Sometime you must dine with me at the Calabash Club. My own wine— But I mean you must dine with me if you don't burn for this murder, Don Diego," he finished more crisply.

## VI

"DON DIEGO?"

It was La Linda who cried out. "Quite so," said Frayne. "Or Mr. Sedgewick. Or—alas—even yourself, *señorita*. You actually are all implicated, you know."

He turned, then, to Don Diego Espinosa.

"When did you awake, Don Diego?"

"When I heard my Raquellita cry out, Inspector Frayne. I came awake with a start. I heard her cry again. I rushed out. It was as she has said. Poor Celeste was there, as you see her now. Mr. Sedgewick, it is true, was in the bathroom. The key was in the keyhole and the door locked. I opened it myself when he banged on the door and rattled the knob, crying to get out."

"That doesn't give *you* much of an alibi, does it, Don Diego?" Frayne smiled pleasantly.

Don Diego shrugged. A philosopher, apparently, always.

"Neither does it give you one,

*señorita*, does it?" Frayne asked with a cordial laugh.

"It—that is true. It does not seem to. Only—only my *Hee-ton* looks to be safe. No?"

But Frayne didn't answer. Frayne, frowning, had begun to walk up and down the room. He appeared to be nervous, for he had taken out a pencil. With it, as he paused by a dressing table, he began tapping on the surface.

"Seen the stage hands?" he was asking Haggerty in code.

Don's eyes told him yes.

"Any suspects there?" he asked next.

His assistant said no.

"Did any of them see any suspicious character around?"

No again.

"Any of them hear anything?"

"Nothing except her scream," Haggerty replied.

"They saw no one else enter or leave this door?"

A final no.

Frayne, once more, began his pacing. Suddenly he stopped, his eyes narrowed and he began scrutinizing that transom.

This time, as well, La Linda's eyes followed those of the manhunter.

"Oh," she broke out, "but you *must* find the *real* murderer, my *dee-ar* Inspector Frayne. Poor Celeste. Probably it was that man who wrote those letters. Those letters he was trying and trying to get back from her. She was *so* worried. She had told me that he had even threatened her, if she did not give them up. Or give one of them up, at least. She—"

"You did say something about letters, didn't you?" Frayne audibly reminded himself. "What were the letters?"

Raquel Riera raised her eyes ceilingward, making them look larger and more beautiful than ever. She sighed.

"Ah, we women, Señor Frayne. She would not divulge his name. She would tell me nothing—nothing except that some man had written her this indiscreet letter or letters. I could not believe it. She was always so—so modest, so good. Except—except when she allowed my *Hec-ton* to kiss her—"

But she broke off angrily, flushing. Then she smiled, very sweetly, on the manhunter.

"Again you must excuse me—excuse we women. I have loved my *Hec-ton* very, *very* much. His little unfaithfulnesses—"

"Oh, dammit, Raquel. Don't go over that now," Sedgewick snapped out, irritably.

"Why? Has not the great Inspector Frayne asked to know all? Perhaps Celeste told *you*, one of those times when you were kissing her, who this man was that was feared by her."

"Dammit, Raquel—"

Frayne had held up his hand. Frayne, when he did this, had the faculty of obtaining instant and complete silence. He obtained silence now.

He faced Heaton Sedgewick.

"Yes, did she ever confide in you?"

"Dammit, Inspector Fray—"

"Stop 'dammiting' and answer questions. Answer them as squarely as you can hit the ball on the polo field, please."

"Yes, sir," said Heaton Sedgewick, his body instinctively stiffening and his face setting in firmer lines.

"What's your story about the locked bathroom?"

"Just as I told Mr. Haggerty: just as the others have told you. Before Raquel's last curtain, on the nights I've been here, I've always gone into the bath. Raquel feels tired when she's finished and needs a pick-up. Brandy

and soda. From my dad's cellar. I went in there to-night, as I always have, and closed the door. I have to close the door to get at the ice box. The room's small. I was mixing the three drinks—Don Diego always joins us—when I suddenly heard Raquel scream. I tried the knob, but the door was locked. I heard her scream again, and I began banging on the door. Well, the door finally opened—Don Diego opened it, as he said—and—and—"

The idol of the polo and hunting field paused, his eyes going to the corpse.

"Well, sir," he finished, "that's all. Celeste was there on the floor as she is now!"

"Uh-huh," said Frayne.

He paced the room again, thoughtfully, and Haggerty knew that it was done in order to keep his suspects in suspense.

## VII

PRESENTLY he came to a halt before Sedgewick. His voice, although drawling, had a sarcastic twist to it.

"Tell me, Sedgewick, precisely what were your relations with Celeste?"

"I did flirt with her," confessed the other with a flush. "I did kiss her a few times. Raquel's right."

"Is that all?"

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"Not hitting the ball straight, are you?" suggested Frayne.

"Oh, I've always been a damned fool about women, I'll admit," said Sedgewick, his face now crimson.

"Not straight enough, yet," said Frayne. "Understand one thing, please," he added gravely. "This is a murder case. The penalty for murder, in New York State, is electrocution. In other words, this is a serious affair.



Serious affairs of this sort necessitate serious and honest answers. It's one situation where the old saw about honesty paying is really true. Let's be honest, my dear fellow!"

Heaton Sedgewick, with one glance at La Linda, tightened his jaws and became quite honest.

"Dammit, sir. Seeing it's murder, as you say, I won't spare the dead or the living. I—I did take Celeste out one—well, two nights. I admit I'm a damned cad. I—"

"Cad—*cad?*?" La Linda Paloma was shrieking. "You are a devil; a beast; a pig; a—"

But, words failing her, she made a dive for her faithless lover. He, however, did not forget to duck, as Mr. Jack Dempsey has said he forgot to duck when one of Raquel's countrymen, yclept Firpo, knocked him out of the ring.

Haggerty was between the pair, anyway, at a sign from Inspector Frayne.

La Linda, balked in her attempt, looked wildly about the room. Her eyes, finally, seemed to fall on Sedgewick's derby hat, hanging on a peg in the wall over his overcoat. If she could not break the head of the owner of it, at least she would have the satisfaction of mutilating his hat. She threw it on the floor and stamped on it, rending it into fragments.

But suddenly she stopped. Stooped down. Shot forth her hand and clutched a crinkled, folded piece of note paper that had undeniably been hidden under the leather sweatband on the inside of Heaton Sedgewick's derby.

Her face went pale—went literally livid beneath her makeup—and she grasped the back of a chair for support.

"His writing," she gasped. "*Hee-*

*ton's — my Hee-ton's!* . . . He — he wrote—"

"Yes," said Frayne as she paused. "What did he write, if you please, *señorita?*"

As a superb actress usually can, she managed to regain most of her composure. Slowly she unfolded, smoothed out, the sheet of crinkled paper.

She read:

INCOMPARABLY GORGEOUS PERSON:

This is my third note to you, and it will be my last unless it is answered. I am, as I have said, quite mad about you. You must see me, to-night, after the theater. Wherever you say. You have got to be mine, you have got to belong to me. I want you to marry me. I *must*—

La Linda paused, turned over a page, her great black eyes on Frayne:

—*must see you to-night!*

H. S.

P.S. Will you reply by this usher, and let me know my fate?

She finished with her eyes still on Frayne—eyes in which horror, despair, disbelief, were all struggling.

"*Dios—Madre de Dios,*" she was hysterically shouting. "It means that my—my—*Hee-ton* is—*is the murderer of Celeste!*"

## VIII

INSPECTOR FRAYNE said nothing for, a moment. He merely watched his people.

La Linda seemed turned to the proverbial stone as she stared at the man she loved. Sedgewick, his face very white, was gazing with a mixture of horror and incredulity at the letter she still clutched in her hand. Don Diego, for once, almost had his philosophical poise fail him. He shook his head and clucked his tongue against the roof of

his mouth several times and uttered a mild "*caramba*."

Frayne, shortly, put out a hand for the letter, and the dancer gave it to him.

"Note paper from one of your clubs, isn't it, Sedgewick?" was his first question.

"It is!"

"Your writing?"

"It is."

"You wrote it?"

"I—I did, sir!"

"Then it looks as if you're the murderer, doesn't it? It looks as if you stabbed Celeste when you heard Señorita Riera taking her last curtain call. It looks as if you locked the bathroom door, climbed up and opened the transom, and dropped down into the locked room. It *does* look that way, doesn't it?"

"*Dios! My Hec-ton! My—*"

But Frayne, again, had held up a hand. He had nodded at Don, and Don was making for the bathroom doorway, putting a chair under it and examining the transom.

Don had shaken his head, and an amount of surprise had shown in his eyes that should not have shown in the eyes of a good police officer when that same officer was a pupil of Inspector Frayne.

Frayne, however, said nothing. Frayne was gazing at the exquisite black lace mantilla that La Linda was wearing about her bare shoulders. He was, specifically, gazing more at her left shoulder than at any other spot.

Suddenly he frowned. Spoke to his subordinate with what came close to annoyed curtness.

"Hang it, where's Grady? I need Grady!"

"I didn't mention it, sir. You didn't ask! He was out, but he probably will

be here as soon as he gets back. I left word."

"I—my God, Inspector Frayne, sir," cried Sedgewick, unable to hold in any longer, "I didn't murder that poor girl; I didn't write that letter to—"

"Please," commanded Frayne, a rasp in his voice.

"Here we are, Frayne. Sorry to be late. I was—"

It was Grady, swinging jauntily through the doorway. He stopped as he saw the grim expression on his friend's face.

Frayne spoke swiftly, under his breath, so that Grady and not La Linda Paloma would hear the words:

"Look under the nail on the index finger of the right hand for a trace of human blood. It's there!"

"Sure," said Grady airily, as if the order he had been given had not been an important one.

Grady, as well as Frayne, had a hobby. Hobbies, rather. Firearms and bacteriology.

Frayne, as his colleague was presumably going through the perfunctory business of the inquest, suddenly turned to La Linda.

"Have you any iodine here, *señorita*?" he asked.

"I—io—io—*dine*?" she repeated.

"Yes. Or any other antiseptic, for that matter."

"I—let me thenk," she said. "I have—"

"Right, Frayne," said Grady.

"Oh, yes, I have peroxide," the dancer remembered.

"Good," said Frayne.

He stepped forward very swiftly, and raised the lace *mantilla* from the left shoulder of the dancer. He pointed to a scratch on it, perhaps an inch or more long, from which tiny bubbles of blood were still exuding.

"That scratch. It might prove to be dangerous!"

## IX

HER face, beneath her makeup and her clear olive skin, suddenly looked like putty. Her eyes were wider than any eyes that Frayne had ever seen. Her voice was so hollow that it sounded uncanny, as if it came from a spirit from another world.

"That scratch. Yes, that scratch. Celeste—I scratch—we scratched myself—when— . . . when I was getting into my costume. A pin—a safety pin—a— . . . Yes, Inspector Frayne, a safety—"

"That scratch," cut in Frayne, "was made by the right hand index finger of Celeste Valliere when you sent that dagger into her heart, my dear! That letter was written by Heaton Sedgewick, but it was written to *you* . . . Grady, come and see if I'm not right about the blood being the same!"

"Beast! Fiend! Pig! Po—*police-man!*"

She was turning her fury, now, on Frayne. She was going after him with both her hands and her feet.

Frayne, however, had given Haggerty an order with a twist of his head, and Haggerty was conceded to be about the quickest man in the department in getting handcuffs over recalcitrant wrists.

He lived up to his reputation, too.

"Beasts! Pigs . . . That little devil that I picked up from the gutters of Paris and allowed to become my personal maid! That big blond oaf upon whom I spent all my love . . . She *should* have died, and I killed her! *He* should have died, and I tried to make him die seeming to be a fool, in disgrace, for the murder of the little Parisian gutter wench . . . But *I* should have killed

him—I, I, I . . . I should have stuck the dagger into *his* heart! I—"

As she ranted, as her voice trailed off when she went into violent and uncontrollable hysterics, Don Diego Espinosa lost his stoical composure.

He bowed his head and crossed himself and began to mutter a prayer for the salvation of the soul of Raquel Riera!

"Thanks, sir. My God, sir, you don't know how grateful I am," said Sedgewick, stepping forward with outstretched hand.

Frayne looked at the hand, coldly.

"Nothing to thank me for, Sedgewick."

"But there is, sir. If any other cop—I mean police official, had come in here, I'd probably be headed for the chair right now."

"That's why I say you've got nothing to thank me for," drawled Frayne. "Probably better if you *were* headed for the chair. Sedgewick, when this story gets out you won't be allowed on a polo field for the rest of your life, you won't be allowed in a decent home, you—"

"My God, sir, you don't have to let it *all* out, do you?" the other gasped. "Give me a break!"

"Your next break is out the door! Grab your overcoat and beat it!"

Heaton Sedgewick beat it. He beat it with tired shoulders and tired legs and haunted eyes.

Frayne, knowing men as he did, knew that those eyes would always be haunted.

## X

THE famous manhunter who had done his duty had stayed on with Don Diego after La Linda Paloma, her confession signed, had been removed to jail. He was doing



his best to comfort this faithful gentleman who had recaptured some of his philosophical calm.

"It is not as bad as it seems, Don Diego," he was saying. "You see, whereas I hate what I call the cold money killer, I have understanding and compassion for killings of passion. She is young yet, is La Linda, and our American juries are charitable to very beautiful females. Raquel is very beautiful, too. She has another asset. She was double crossed, as we phrase it, by both her lover and the woman she had helped. No, no, cheer up, Don Diego. With a good lawyer, who will see that you have a good jury, she will be dancing again in five years. I shall not testify too harshly myself, it might comfort you to know."

Don Diego nodded. There was gratitude in his nod, and in his eyes. But the gratitude in his eyes, then, turned to wonder and admiration.

"But tell me, my kind Inspector Frayne," he asked, "wherein did my Raquellita make her mistake. It seemed quite perfect, to me. She had her letter that surely was sufficiently damning. She knew that I always slept. She knew that Sedgewick always went into the bath to prepare our brandy and soda. She made a good excuse for having Celeste remain here, instead of waiting for her in the wings. She came in, as she said, and locked the door on Sedgewick, and then she just picked up her dagger and stabbed Celeste. Then she screamed and I awoke. Tell me, where did she make her mistake? You did not notice that scratch until nearly the end, did you?"

Inspector Frayne smiled.

"She made her greatest mistake in planning murder. No one can plan murder. It always fails. Her concrete mistakes? Her worst mistake—her most vital one—was in not brushing off some of the dust on the bottom ridge of that transom. It was horribly dusty, and no human being could have climbed through it without leaving telltale marks!

"Her second mistake? Well, she knew that letter she put in Sedgewick's hat, after she'd killed Celeste, too much by heart. When she was reading it to me, and turned the sheet of note paper over, she kept her eyes on *me* instead of on the writing. In other words, she was reading—she was reciting something she had already memorized, Don Diego. I noticed it instantly!"

Frayne paused, shrugged.

"The third mistake? The most excusable of all. When she was scratched by Celeste she should have looked at the finger nail that did the scratching. That was the most obvious clew. Find a scratched skin and compare the blood. It took me quite a time to discover that little scratch, through the lace mantilla. And yet, Don Diego, *all* murderers always leave just such a clew. One simply has to go out and find it," finished Frayne.

Don Diego was thinking.

"Beautiful," he said—"beautiful!" He added, wistfully. "If you knew as much about wines as you do about these clews and crimes and murder things—"

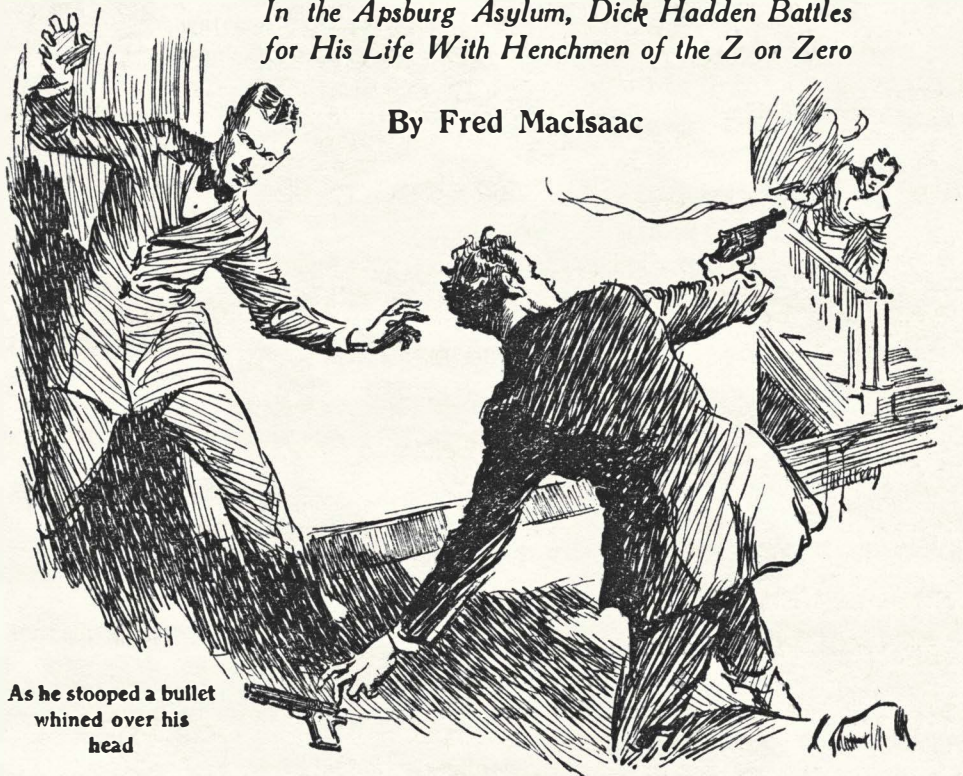
"Oh, well," said Frayne, glancing at his wrist watch of severe design, "I suppose I'm elected. Let me introduce you to a heavy Burgundy I've had in my cellar for a dozen years!"



# The Lottery of Death

*In the Apsburg Asylum, Dick Hadden Battles  
for His Life With Henchmen of the Z on Zero*

By Fred MacIsaac



As he stooped a bullet  
whined over his  
head

**BEGIN THIS STORY HERE!**

**F**IFTY New York millionaires have received letters from "The Assessors" demanding gigantic amounts of money on pain of death. Names of those who refuse to pay are to be drawn from a box every week, and the unlucky man slain. Already two financial leaders have gone, and they were shot down despite utmost precautions.

Dick Hadden is called on the case when his friend Ken Wilcox receives such a letter.

Dick advises Ken to pay the five million demanded, which he does. The

emissary from The Assessors eludes Dick's men.

Dick has no leads, only a suspicion. There is a man in Wall Street called Tiger Tiverton.

And though Tiverton saves John P. Thomas from death, Dick is certain the affair was only a plant to allay suspicion.

Under the leadership of Inspector Droon, a raid is made upon the quarters of Big Bill Loeffler, whom Droon suspects of being one of The Assessors. Nothing is discovered. John Thomas, the biggest multimillionaire

This story began in **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY** for November 29

on The Assessors' list, flees for security to his summer place in the Adirondacks. He invites Tiverton, grateful for the latter's service, and asks Dick to go too as a bodyguard. By an odd coincidence, Ken Wilcox and his wife, and Dick's wife are also guests.

The Adirondacks camp is surrounded by armed guards.

Thomas goes back to New York. Tiverton decides suddenly he will have to leave the Adirondacks too. So Dick returns. He charts a plane to take him, and he is on his way when the pilot sticks a gun in his ribs and orders him to jump.

Dick escapes unhurt after a fight in the plane and a crack-up. He goes to New York, calls on Thomas, and when the latter refuses to see him, grows suspicious that an impostor is playing Thomas's rôle and Thomas has been kidnaped.

He forces a butler in Tiverton's employ to confess that Thomas has been kidnaped and taken to an asylum run by a Dr. Drury. Dick, breaking into Drury's asylum, is caught in a surprise attack and imprisoned in a padded cell.

### CHAPTER XXX

#### The Letter from Plattsburg

**T**HURSDAY, in New York, dawned bright and fair with every indication that it would be a warm day. At 7 A.M., Chief Inspector Droon appeared at his office, unshaven, unshorn and with red-rimmed eyelids. He had not been to bed at all, and he did not expect to sleep until Thursday merged into Friday.

On Wednesday, if the Z-O Committee had kept its word, a name had been drawn from the box of the Lottery of Death, and on Thursday another

wealthy and respected citizen of New York would meet a violent death.

Although Richard Hadden had assured him, and his assurances had been supported by the chief inspector's own judgment, that the Z-O Committee had reaped its harvest and would henceforth be strictly upon the defensive, Droon, charged with the safety of the citizens, dared not assume that the Thursday murders would cease.

The day before, he had been informed by the commissioner that he would be reduced to the ranks if another rich man met his fate, and the commissioner himself anticipated that his resignation would be demanded by the mayor. The entire detective force of the city had been given its assignments. Every advantageous post in the business district was occupied. Plain-clothes men lurked in the lobbies and corridors of buildings which contained the offices of those millionaires whom Droon believed to be upon the lottery list.

Police cars waited in the vicinity of their homes to escort them surreptitiously to their offices in the morning, while detectives hung about their residences all Wednesday night with instructions to arrest any individual whose appearance or actions awakened the slightest suspicion.

The telephone wires of Big Bill Loeffler and Tiger Tiverton and Lewis Bird had been tapped, and the movements of those individuals were closely watched.

Tiverton had thrown a big theatrical party after eleven o'clock at his apartment, the revelry had lasted until two or three in the morning. Bird had remained quietly in his home; Loeffler had not ventured from his nest in East Fifty—th Street. Nothing that an efficient police force could do had been



left undone. Yet Droon was acutely aware of the utter inadequacy of his preparations in the face of the invisible foe.

Though two hundred known gangsters were under lock and key as a result of a series of raids on Wednesday night, there were hundreds of them still at large. If a killing had been determined upon, Droon supposed it would be accomplished successfully despite his elaborate precautions.

The commissioner went into conference with him at nine o'clock, but could offer no further suggestions. The commissioner, nervous, chewed to destruction one unlighted cigar after another.

The morning waxed and waned; noon came. Presently the marked men would sally forth to lunch.

As each one emerged from his office building, police detectives unostentatiously edged close, and escorted them without their knowledge to their luncheon clubs and restaurants. And detectives followed also those men whom Droon suspected.

Tiverton lunched at Whyte's, alone, and apparently free from care. Bird went with two other brokers to the Fifty Club. The lunch hour passed without incident, to the immense relief of Inspector Droon.

And the hours of the afternoon passed with appalling slowness. Three o'clock, four o'clock, four thirty; nothing had happened. Droon was beginning to breathe more freely. It looked as if the Z-O Committee had suspended operations. The great offensive had spent itself, and from now on the criminals would remain in their entrenchments.

At nine o'clock the chief inspector decided to call it a day. All was quiet along the whole New York front.

Droon went home and slept for fifteen hours, and when he woke at two o'clock Friday afternoon nothing had happened to harrow him.

Saturday morning came and no word had arrived from Hadden. Droon took the liberty of calling the Thomas camp and got Ballard the secretary on the phone.

"I would like to speak to Mr. Hadden, if you please. This is Chief Inspector Droon talking."

"He's not here, inspector."

"No? When did he leave?"

"He arrived Thursday just before dinner and left almost immediately."

"Much obliged," said the inspector and hung up.

Where the devil was Hadden! If he had returned to New York, he would have called up headquarters. Was it possible that they finally had put a quittance upon the daring, but much too audacious detective?

His own force wasn't idle in the matter of the Lottery of Death, but judging from results, if Hadden had been killed, the criminals would never be brought to book.

Shortly before five that night he was informed that one Andrew Russell wished to speak to him.

"Inspector Droon, I have a communication here from Richard Hadden," said the vice president of the Wilcox Company. "Came yesterday morning to be held for a couple of days. I ought to hold it until morning, I suppose, but I've made up my mind to turn it over to you."

"A communication? Where the devil is Hadden?"

"Don't know. It came two days ago from Plattsburg. Can you come up here?"

"I'm tied to my desk just now. Can you bring it down?"

"Hardly," replied the big business man with some umbrage. "I'll send it by messenger."

"Don't do that. Send it by some trusted and intelligent employee. I'll be waiting here for it anxiously."

Droon walked up and down his office impatiently for the next ten minutes. It was obvious that something had happened to Hadden. The man was foolishly rash and much too secretive. He had no business rushing north without giving an inkling of his purpose. No doubt he had walked at last into one of the traps the criminals had been setting for him, and this time his luck had not held.

Droon was selfish enough to hope that his last message would be helpful. As things were, while positive of the guilt of Loeffler, Tiverton and Bird, he didn't have an iota of evidence against them and in all probability would never get any.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, a young man was introduced. He handed Droon a letter. He tore it open. It contained six closely written pages which he read with gleaming eyes and augmenting excitement.

DEAR DROON:

The man in John C. Thomas's house on Fifth Avenue is Ronald Dunn, an actor from "Guns Out." Thomas I believe to be imprisoned in a private asylum in Apsburg, New York, near the Canada line, owned by Dr. Paul Drury. He is entered as Ronald Dunn.

In jail at Plattsburg is James Drury, Thomas's butler, awaiting our pleasure. He has confessed to me that he turned Thomas over to two phony Blankerton men, who took him to the asylum. They left in the Thomas Rolls-Royce, but ran it down a country road about ten miles from the camp and hid it in the barn of an abandoned farm, where you will find it, and proceeded in a small car to Apsburg.

Drury admits that Tiverton gave him his orders.

Proctor, you have under your hand in New York. Confronted with Drury's statement, he can probably be forced to repeat the confession he made to me and retracted.

If you do not hear from me, you have, in my opinion, sufficient evidence to force an entrance into the Thomas house and capture Ronald Dunn and the woman, Laura Lawson. I am hopeful that these will squeal on Tiverton and Loeffler. You may take my word that Dunn is masquerading as Thomas. My suspicions were aroused by the presence of his ex-mistress in the Thomas house, but the notion was so incredible that I came north to trace Thomas's steps in hope of discovering that he had not returned to New York.

I am starting at once for Apsburg in hope of releasing Thomas and thus give you positive proof of my statements, but if anything happens to me the statement of Drury the butler will supply all you need. Best of luck,

—HADDEN.

"By God," exclaimed David Droon. "By God, we've got them!"

He glanced at the date and saw that Hadden had written the letter on Thursday night. He must have reached the asylum within a couple of hours. They had trapped him, all right. If he was alive he was confined in the asylum with Thomas. Well, a descent upon that criminal institution would rescue both of them. No doubt it had not occurred to the crooks that Hadden had taken the precaution to supply the New York police with his discoveries before starting upon his foolhardy expedition.

A raid upon the house in which John P. Thomas, one of the richest men in America, was supposed to be living! Was it possible that Hadden was mistaken? Droon had talked on the phone with Thomas and thought he recognized his voice. If Hadden

had disappeared, the butler would dry up, and he had a sample of the stubbornness of Proctor. And by the time he had men at the asylum, the crooks there would have disposed of both Thomas and Hadden.

Thus, if it turned out that Dick was mistaken and John P. Thomas was in possession of his house, his fury would be tremendous, especially if he had shut himself up deliberately to be with Laura Lawson. It meant the finish of his career as chief inspector of police, and the end of all hope of bringing to book the perpetrators of the Lottery of Death.

It was within the bounds of possibility that Donald Dunn was the person who was incarcerated in the asylum at Apsburg. Droon's only chance of vindication was to have Hadden's suspicions verified by the identification of the man in the Fifth Avenue house as Ronald Dunn.

Well, thought the police official, failure to solve this mystery would bring his career to an end anyway. Experience had taught him to have faith in Richard Hadden. If Dick had been wrong, Thomas might forgive the intrusion upon his privacy after perusing the letter which lay on the desk of the chief inspector.

He made his decision, and put in a call for Plattsburg. He would ask that a descent be made immediately upon the asylum at Apsburg.

As he hung up, his phone rang. "Long distance calling, hold the line."

Five minutes later the call came through.

"Droon?" came in familiar tones. "Hadden speaking. Hold everything till morning. Get me a specimen of Laura Lawson's handwriting."

"What's happened. Where are you?"

"Apsburg. Have flagged the Montreal Express and it's coming into the station. Good-by."

With a sigh of heartfelt thanks, Chief Inspector Droon hung up. In some mysterious way Hadden had managed to keep alive and was again on the job. The momentous decision need not be acted upon. Now what did the fellow want of a specimen of the handwriting of the dissolute young woman locked up in the Fifth Avenue house? He had some big reason, of course, and it was up to the police to get him what he wanted.

His phone rang.

"Here's Plattsburg," said the operator.

"Cancel the call. Don't need it now," he said joyfully.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### In the Asylum

RICHARD HADDEN awoke in his padded cell the morning after his capture somewhat surprised to find that they had allowed him to live through the night. He had fallen asleep without even removing coat and collar, nature had demanded rest for his exhausted body. He rose, aching in every limb, from the hard bed, but instantly alert and conscious of his situation.

No doubt the rogues in New York had already been informed by phone or wire that Hadden had come straight to their remote hideaway for Thomas, and the doctor had received instructions to put the detective where he wouldn't trouble them any more. While he slept, a jab from a needle would have made him slumber eternal. In the place of Dr. Paul Drury he would have done just that thing.

He flushed with shame at recollec-



tion of the ruse by which he had been taken. Having entered the place fully aware of its dangers, he should have anticipated that Drury would be able to summon assistance. For a few seconds he had been stunned by the announcement that Thomas had been murdered. He had relaxed long enough to glance at the death certificate, which actually was nothing but a receipt for rental of the establishment, and then the big keeper was upon his back.

In what manner would they devise his finish? Poison in the food? He would refuse to eat it. Perhaps the big Canadian would be sent in to beat him to death. No doubt Alphonse had done that sort of thing before.

He walked to the window and gazed out. He looked down upon a neglected garden beyond which was the wall and beyond that the woods. He made out the birch tree by means of which he had surmounted the wall. His shoes were at the foot of that birch tree. The window was nailed down and the bars outside looked very strong. His eye roamed the room. Nothing which could be used as a weapon of defense.

Hours passed. As they proposed to murder him, they were probably too economical to send him breakfast. Well, retribution would fall on Dr. Drury. Droon was a very efficient individual and the information supplied him in the letter mailed from Plattsburg to Andrew Russell would cause a raid upon the Apsburg Asylum within two or three days. But by that time Richard Hadden would be under ground like John P. Thomas.

He inspected the door. It opened outward. Drury took no chances of a dangerous maniac hiding behind a door, which opened inward, to pounce upon an attendant.

About noon he heard a key turn in

the lock. He smiled with satisfaction to realize that there were no bolts upon the outside. The door opened and the French Canadian entered. The man was six feet three, at least, and his shaven face was both stupid and bestial. He had a bowl of soup and two or three slices of bread on a small tray which he carried in his left hand. He had drawn his revolver and held it menacingly in his right.

"Here you," he said, and thrust the tray at Hadden, who accepted it gratefully. He was so hungry by this time that he was willing to risk poison. The Canadian backed out and locked the door. Dick had had an opportunity to inspect the lock.

He tasted the soup gingerly. It was weak and watery, but its taste was not suspicious. He consumed it gratefully and ate the bread.

As it was reasonable to suppose that he would be left alone for a few hours, he removed his coat and waistcoat, pulled the mattress off the cot, and then turned the cot upside down. Its frame was of wood, but, as he had hoped, the frame was held together by four bent pieces of steel, each about seven inches long, screwed into the wood.

It had not occurred to Drury in his haste to confine a dangerous enemy to search him and, if he had, it is not likely he would have discovered what Hadden now drew from the lining of his wallet. It was a very small screwdriver. It took some time for the little instrument to turn one of the screws in the steel, but he had unlimited time and the necessary perseverance. Finally the first screw yielded, and then the others. After an hour's work he had in his hand a piece of steel about seven inches long, shaped like a right angle. It was about three-quarters of an inch wide

and an eighth of an inch thick, but it resisted all his efforts to straighten it.

This was fortunate, because, if it had bent easily it would have been useless. He restored the cot to its proper position, placed the mattress upon it, and then returned to an inspection of the door.

Hadden was no longer in despair. If they did not murder him this afternoon or this evening, he considered he had a chance. It was probable that they intended to provide him with only one meal a day, but he could not bank upon that. His attempt must be made in the evening.

With exasperating slowness, the day wore on. He was able to tell time by the shadows in the garden and he occupied himself by piecing out the plot upon the evidence in his possession. It was very clear to him that his own death was essential to the safety of the conspirators and that they were fully aware of it. He would never leave this place alive except through his own efforts, and it was unlikely that his death would be postponed another twenty-four hours.

The building was very quiet. Occasionally he heard the tramp of the gigantic Alphonse or another walking along the hall. The shadows lengthened and finally it was twilight and eventually night. He would not be fed, that was certain.

His room grew dark. They had no intention, it appeared, of providing him with illumination. He must begin his work while there was still a dim light. Carefully he inserted the end of the bit of steel in the half inch space at the lock between the door and the frame. It was a tight fit, which was well.

Unfortunately the bent steel was too short to provide leverage. He needed

at least a foot to properly apply his weight, and he had only a few inches. After half an hour's work, he was perspiring like a laborer and he had made no progress.

A skillful burglar can draw the screws out of the wood which holds the lockplate in a door frame in two or three minutes if he has leverage. Hadden was exerting every pound of pressure without result. Finally he felt the thing give slightly and, encouraged, he continued. It was slow work. A dozen times he would have abandoned it as impossible except that was an admission of his own doom.

Perseverance won in the end. After an hour and a half of effort the door swung out and the screws in the lockplate fell into his hand. He pulled the door to. The time was not yet ripe. He lit a match and glanced at his watch. Nine o'clock. He would sally forth about three in the morning.

Hadden lay down again upon the cot. So fatigued was he from his nervous labor that he fell immediately asleep, but his subconscious mind woke him at the hour he had determined upon.

Three ten, his watch informed him. Cautiously he pushed open the door. There was a dim light burning at the far end of the hall. If some one was watching, he would be sure to see the door, which had opened outward. But it was a chance he had to take. He thrust out his head.

Forty feet away, at the other end of the hall, the big Frenchman sat in a chair facing him. His feet were on another chair and his head was on his breast. Sound asleep. Had he ventured it an hour or two earlier, the man would have been awake and all Dick's labor lost.

In his stockings, he glided out of the padded cell and crept toward the sleep-

ing giant. He hardly dared breathe. Now he was only a dozen feet away, now only six feet. On the chair between the man's huge legs lay a heavy revolver. On the floor beside him lay a loaded club. Dick was at the fellow's feet. Cautiously he stooped and lifted the weapon. He eyed the sleeper speculatively. It would be wisdom to put a bullet in the brute's brain, but the shot would alarm the institution. His head was so hard that a blow wouldn't affect him in all probability.

While Dick stood over Alphonse instinct warned the sleeper that he was in danger. He stirred. His head began to lift. Hesitating no longer, Dick grasped the barrel of the gun and brought the heavy butt down upon the man's skull with all his considerable force. Alphonse emitted something between a hiss and a grunt, slumped, and then his heavy body toppled out of the chair and thumped upon the floor. Dick listened. The fall seemed not to have been heard. He passed the unconscious keeper and crept down the stairs to the lower floor.

Where did Drury sleep? He gazed in perplexity at half a dozen doors which opened off the hall. His problem was unexpectedly solved. A door opened at the left and Drury, fully dressed stepped into the hall. In his hand was Hadden's pet automatic.

Their eyes met, but Hadden's weapon covered him ere he could lift his arm.

"Drop the gun!" commanded the detective sharply.

It fell with a thud upon the floor.

"Now you scoundrel, where is Thomas?" he snapped.

"How—how did you get out?" gasped Drury.

"Answer my question!"

The doctor was pale and his lips were quivering. "If—if you mean Dunn,

he died—I told you, committed suicide.

"I believe you lie."

"You can search the building."

"Stand over there three or four feet," Hadden commanded, pointing.

When the doctor moved, Dick stepped forward, still keeping him covered and picked up his automatic. As he stooped, a bullet whined above him. He turned.

A man in white stood on the stairs, not Alphonse. The man fired a second shot. Dick felt a burning sensation in his left shoulder, but let fly with the revolver in his right hand. His aim was true. The keeper dropped his weapon and fell headlong down the stairs.

At the same instant, Drury twisted the automatic out of Dick's other hand.

Hadden had no choice under the circumstances. He turned the revolver in his right upon the doctor, pressed it against his side and pulled the trigger. As the man dropped, a stream of bullets flew wide from the automatic.

Women were screaming in various parts of the house and from above came a roar like that of a bull. Alphonse came charging down the stairs brandishing his club. Dick was bleeding freely. Again he had no choice. He let the French Canadian have a bullet in the breast, and the big man plunged headlong downward and landed upon the body of the keeper who had begun the battle.

Sick from slaughter, Dick knelt beside Drury and realized that the lead had penetrated to the heart. He was dead. Another witness against Tiverton was gone.

A woman, half dressed, came running into the hall from a rear room. At sight of the man with blazing eyes and smoking weapon, she screamed loudly.

"None of that," cried Hadden. "I



am a detective. Quick. Where is Dunn's room?"

"He's dead and buried!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my God, you've killed them all."

"Those two aren't dead," he replied. "You can tend them later. Open the door and gate and let me out of here."

He had to menace her with the gun to make her obey him, but a moment later he stood outside the wall in the road while the woman slammed the gate and locked it against the possibility of his return.

His shoulder pained him badly and he was in deadly fear lest he collapse and fall into the power of the survivors in the asylum. He moved rapidly as possible down the road and reached his car, which was still where he had left it.

He clambered in and started the motor, turned the car with great difficulty, for his left arm was becoming useless, and then drove headlong through Apsburg and into the country beyond.

He had no desire to be taken and questioned by stupid Apsburg constables. On the face of it he might be considered a murderous inmate and be reincarcerated in the asylum.

He drove rapidly, conscious that his strength was ebbing. He shot through two or three more sleeping hamlets, and finally, after about twenty minutes, saw ahead the lights of a large town. It also was deep in slumber, but before he reached its center he knew he could go no further. He had just enough consciousness to shut off his engine and run his car to the curb, and then everything blurred and went black.

It was daylight when he came back to consciousness. He lay in a bed. A doctor was bending over him and a man in police uniform sat beside him.

"How do you feel now?" asked the physician.

"A bit weak, but pretty good. Am I badly hurt?"

"A flesh wound, but you lost a lot of blood. You'll have to lay up for a few days."

He grinned. "Too much to do. What town is this?"

"Chary."

"On the railroad?"

"That's a queer question. Yes."

"What day is this and what time?"

"About five o'clock Thursday. Want the day of the month and year?"

"That will do. I've been out since about 4 A.M. yesterday?"

"You were unconscious at first and then, after dressing your wound I gave you a sleeping draft."

"I've got to take a train for New York to-night."

"Impossible, my friend."

"Couldn't I travel in care of a doctor and nurse if I were able to pay them?"

"Well," said the doctor with an amusing change of manner. "I suppose you could."

"Just a minute," said the uniformed man. "I'm the chief of police. I've been over your papers and know who you are, Mr. Hadden, but you are accused of murder over in Apsburg."

"Is there a phone in this hospital?"

"Oh, yes."

"Get me the chief inspector of police in New York and listen in if you like. Doctor, you and a nurse accompany me and you can come too, chief, if you like."

"The express comes through shortly," said the doctor excitedly. "I'd like the trip. Will you have it flagged, chief?"

"I'd like the trip myself," said the chief, grinning.

"Fine," said Hadden. "Help me dress. We'll all go to New York."

## CHAPTER XXXII

Dictated by Mr. Hadden

**A**FTER a comfortable night on the train, Richard Hadden and suite, consisting of the doctor, nurse and chief of police of Chary, arrived at the entrance to the apartment house where the Hadden family were domiciled, and Dick admitted them with his key.

"Make yourselves comfortable, folks," he said hospitably. "I'll have Chief Inspector Droon up here presently and you can turn me over to him, chief, with a clear conscience."

"Oh, that's all right," said the rural police chief. "I've never been down to New York before and I'm going to get a look at the Aquarium before I go back, you bet."

"Speaking of aquariums," said a cool, female voice. "What's the matter with this one?"

Phyllis Hadden, in pyjamas and kimono, stood in the entrance of the living room gazing with some hauteur upon the assembly.

"Phil!" exclaimed Dick. "How on earth? I thought you were up north!"

"I came home last night, not having heard from you for several days," she said tartly, and then with a sudden change of tone: "Oh, Dick, you're hurt."

"Just a scratch, dear. Nothing to talk about. In a way, I'm under arrest. Meet Chief Fletcher of Chary, New York, Dr. Morton and Mrs. Parsons, who came down with me to see that I wanted for nothing."

"That was kind of you all," said Mrs. Hadden, smiling at them in more friendly fashion.

"And now, folks," said Dick, "you can leave me to the ministrations of my wife. Phil, will you get Droon out of bed and ask him to come right over? He won't like it, but he'll come."

"First what happened to you and where were you? Where is Chary?"

The residents of that young metropolis looked distressed at her ignorance.

"It's near the Canada line in New York," explained the doctor, "and Mr. Hadden was shot."

"Just a scratch. That right, doc?"

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Hadden. It occurred several days ago. The wound was superficial, but he lost a lot of blood from neglect of it. He's all right now. I think we had better go, Mrs. Parsons."

Hadden escorted them to the door and pressed some bills into their hands. Returning he supplied the chief with a cigar and demanded breakfast.

"Who shot you and why?" insisted Phyllis, very white.

"An accident, wasn't it, chief?"

The chief smirked. "In a manner of speaking, I suppose it was."

Inspector Droon arrived while they were at breakfast and quickly satisfied the rural official that his host was not a criminal and could be found when needed. Several more bills changed hands just before Mr. Fletcher took his departure.

"Did you get that specimen of the woman's handwriting?" demanded Hadden.

Droon looked confused. "We did not," he admitted. "We even searched Gaffney's room without finding a scrap. We thought he might have some love letters from her. What the deuce do you want it for anyway?"

"It was a scheme I had," said Dick.

"What woman and what love letters?" demanded Phyllis.

"You remember, dear," said Dick, "a girl named Lawson who was once Tiverton's mistress? She's mixed up this case and—"

"And the police of New York could not find a specimen of her handwriting?" she said jeeringly. "Well you should have asked me in the first place."

"You have it?" cried both men.

"How did you get it?" demanded her husband.

Phyllis smiled. "She was in a show with me once, and a few weeks ago she was terribly up against it and wrote me asking for a small loan. Of course I gave it to her, and I don't think I destroyed the letter."

"What a wife!" said Dick, beaming.

She kissed him and ran out of the room, to return in two or three minutes with a brief note in bold vertical script.

"Great," said Dick. "I presume you can dig up a good forger, Droon."

"That's easy," grinned the inspector.

"All right. Have him copy this note which I'll dictate to Phyllis. Get pencil and paper, dear . . . Well," he began, "I wonder if she called him Will or Bill."

"Called whom?" demanded his wife.

"Tiverton."

"Tiverton?" exclaimed Droon. "Ah, I begin to get you."

"The girls at the cocktail party were calling him Bill," Phyllis proffered.

"Dear Bill—no, in this case, she would be formal. Dear Mr. Tiverton: In view of your very shabby treatment of me, it gives me much satisfaction to inform you that I have a friend now who makes you look like a piker. He can buy and sell you, Bill, and he loves me and is going to give me everything I want. If he didn't have a wife and family, he would marry me, that's the way he feels about me—"

"Of all the idiotic drivel," commented Phyllis. "Are you sure you aren't delirious?"

"He is not," snapped Droon. "Please don't destroy his train of thought."

Dick went on dictating:

"My lover is no less a person than the great John P. Thomas and I am with him and living in his palace in Fifth Avenue. So the girl you treated like the dirt under your feet—"

Her pencil stopped. "Do you mean to say," she demanded, "that Mr. Thomas has taken in that little wretch—"

"Mr. Thomas is dead, dear," said Dick gravely. "We are setting a trap for his murderer—"

"Dead?" exclaimed Droon, leaping to his feet. "Oh, my God!"

"He died in the asylum of which I wrote you, Droon. Let me finish the letter . . . is better off than ever in her life and no thanks to you. Yours very truly, Laura Lawson."

"You mean he has been murdered?" asked Phyllis. "Poor Mr. Thomas!"

"I'm not certain yet, but I think it was murder. Now, Droon, have this copied in the girl's handwriting. Have one of your men get the post office to stamp it, and see that it lands on Tiverton's desk this morning."

"Right. Tiverton will be perfectly furious with Dunn for mixing a woman up in their scheme and he will hot foot it up there to have her thrown out or silenced—"

"And when they are together we'll rush the place. It's the only hope of getting Tiverton, Droon. We might nab Dunn and Lewis and Loeffler without getting our hands on the ring-leader. This letter may do it for us. Is the style of the missive characteristic, Phyllis?"



"Yes," she said. "She was very bitter against Mr. Tiverton and if she suddenly became very well off, she might write him just such a note. I wish you'd tell me what this is all about. I know Tiverton is a dreadful person, but just what has he done?"

"He is the leader of the gang which has committed brutal murders and blackmailed a lot of our prominent citizens, including Ken Wilcox."

"I believe anything of him. I wish I could have helped you."

"My dear Mrs. Hadden," said Droon, "you have placed in our hands the one thing that we lacked. I consider that you have done us a tremendous service in producing that Lawson woman's letter. Tiverton will have the copy before ten o'clock, Dick. I'll have a crew ready, and we'll jump the place as soon as he enters."

"We'll give him five minutes so he can get out of his coat and hat," said Dick with a smile.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

#### A Note for the Tiger

**M**R. WILLIAM TIVERTON arrived at his office on Cedar Street that morning shortly after nine. He was in no jovial mood and he scowled at the employees in the board room as he crossed it on his way to his private office.

Things had gone very wrong in the far north. His tool, Drury, who had so deftly put John P. Thomas out of the way, lay dead up in Apsburg. That would not have been so annoying if Hadden had not escaped from the doctor's clutches and was again at large.

It was an exasperating thing that the most ambitious and effective criminal enterprise in all history should be jeopardized by the pokings of a private

detective whose gift for escaping assassination was miraculous!

The scheme had worked to a marvel and had come to a successful conclusion. Thirty of the suckers had coughed up to the tune of nearly eighty millions. By the artful substitution of Ronald Dunn for Thomas, the gigantic mass of securities could be slipped through the machinery of Thomas and Company without awakening the slightest suspicion, and in a couple of weeks more the conspirators would all be in the safe possession of their harvests.

From beginning to end, the thing had been handled so that it never could be traced to its creator himself. Fortified with the lion's share of eighty million dollars, he could continue in business and be the biggest operator in Wall Street inside of a year. There was no limit to his possibilities.

Of course there were a few vulnerable spots. This Dr. Paul Drury was one. Ronald Dunn was another. Drury, Thomas's butler, would tell what he knew if he were ever given the third degree. But Loeffler and his gangsters could be depended upon, and Loeffler and his men were to have taken care of the doctor, the butler and the actor when they were no longer needed.

Hadden was the fly in the ointment. How much Hadden actually knew, Tiverton wasn't certain, but the fellow was diabolically ingenious and certainly was a menace. If only Drury had lived long enough to lay Hadden with Thomas, Tiverton would not have had a care in the world.

He began to go through his mail in a perfunctory way. His regular business was so piking beside the great enterprise. Presently he came to a letter in a handwriting which he hadn't seen for a long time. What the devil

was she writing to him about? Oh, probably the poor devil was broke and desperate. It wouldn't hurt to send her a couple of hundred.

He tore open the envelope, spread out the sheet of paper, and began to read. He uttered an oath. His eyes blazed, his mouth became like that of a mad wolf.

Oh, the fool, the blasted fool, he thought. Despite an enormous reward, the miserable wretch of an actor couldn't play straight for a few days. That woman of all women in the house.

If the police learned that she was there, they would become suspicious. And Hadden, if he didn't know already of the imposture, would certainly smell a rat. She must be thrown out of there.

But if she were ejected, she might talk. She must be prevented from talking. Well, she loved himself. That letter proved it. It was inspired by the pique of a lovesick woman. About the only safe way to get her out was to have him take her out personally. He could promise her anything. She'd drop an old man like Thomas in a moment if Tiverton were willing to establish her again. Above all, she must continue to think that the man in the house was Thomas. Anyway, she must leave that house immediately.

Why shouldn't he call on Thomas? He was known to be his friend. The police would suspect nothing. Hadden would be eliminated as soon as he reached New York, and nobody else suspected that the real Thomas was buried near the Canadian border. While he had refrained from visiting the Thomas house until now, it was a risk he had to take under the circumstances.

And it settled the fate of Dunn in the mind of the Tiger. The man was

untrustworthy and he would have to die as soon as he was no longer needed in the Fifth Avenue house. One murder seemed to breed another, but against the stake for which he was playing, that was of no consequence.

If Tiger Tiverton had kept track of the career of Laura Lawson since he had dismissed her from his service abruptly, brutally and without compunction, he might not have rushed into the trap so neatly prepared for him, but he was unaware that, until recently, she had been the lady love of the actor Ronald Dunn.

His problem was to persuade her to leave the man whom she supposed to be John P. Thomas without unmasking him to the girl. Dunn he would punish for his folly later, and at his leisure. It was a job requiring diplomacy and finesse, and could not be attended to by phone or by messenger. Having made up his mind, he was not slow in performance.

Half an hour after perusing the letter, he descended from a taxicab in front of the Thomas entrance. A plain-clothes man blocked his progress as he made to mount the steps.

"Headquarters man, sir," he said. "On guard at Mr. Thomas's request. I have to ask your name and business."

"Certainly," said the broker affably. "My name is Tiverton and I am a friend of Mr. Thomas."

"Well, you can ring if you like. I doubt if he'll see you."

"Thanks, my man, I'll make the attempt."

He rang the bell, and the butler who opened the door looked astonished and immediately admitted him.

"Well, I'll be hanged," observed the plain-clothes man to the atmosphere.

"Where's Thomas?" Tiverton demanded as the door was closed.

"In the breakfast room, sir. There is—ahem—a lady with him."

"And well do I know it. How do you get there?"

"I'll show you, sir."

"Take me to the door and don't announce me. How long has this woman been here?"

"Came the day after we moved in. Thought you knew about it, sir."

"Well, maybe I did," said Tiverton guardedly. "You can go."

He pushed open the door and looked upon a pretty domestic picture.

The masquerader sat facing him. His hair was tousled and he was minus the Thomas make-up. He wore a silk Chinese bath robe of black and gold over lurid pyjamas. The woman had on a pink and very frilly negligee.

Dunn turned pale. His mouth opened in dismay as he recognized the visitor. The girl, observing the change in his appearance, swung about in her chair, and it was her turn to be astonished. She recovered quickly.

"Look who has come to call on us!" she exclaimed. "None other than the great Mr. Tiverton. You'd never think he ever wore stripes, would you, Ronald?"

"That will be all from you," snarled Tiverton, bearing down upon the girl furiously. "Who are you calling Ronald?"

"I say now, Tiverton," protested Dunn.

"Now, why shouldn't I call him Ronald?"

"Because his name is John P. Thomas," shouted Tiverton.

Laura emitted a peal of horse laughter.

"When did you ever get the idea I was dumb?" she demanded. "Ronald was my boy friend before he took on this rôle."

"She knows, does she?" snarled Tiverton at Dunn.

"Well, old man, she knew me all the time, don't you know," explained the actor.

"You blithering idiot!" shouted Tiverton, beside himself with anger. "Haven't you any sense? You knew the dangerous game we were playing. Why did you smuggle this woman into the house?"

"I didn't see any harm," stammered Dunn. "It would have been damned dull here alone."

"Oh, my God. Look here, Laura, if you knew him as Dunn, why did you write me that tosh about having John P. Thomas for a lover?" he demanded furiously.

"Me?" exclaimed the girl. "If you were the only man in the world I wouldn't write you a letter. If you'd like to know what I think of you—"

"Wait," exclaimed Tiverton, his cheeks suddenly drained of their color. "I received a letter from you this morning. Of course you wrote it."

"You heard what I said," she replied coldly. "I did not write you any letter."

Tiverton pulled himself together marvelously. He had been lured here for a purpose. A police trap. No use to alarm these fools, but get out quickly.

"My mistake," he said quietly. "Enjoy your breakfast. Good morning."

Dunn suddenly began to choke. "L-look!" he gasped.

Tiverton wheeled. The door of the breakfast room was open and Chief Inspector Droon stood in the doorway. Behind him Tiverton saw the faces of Richard Hadden and others. His mind worked like lightning.

"Droon, come here," he cried. "I denounce this man as an impostor. I



came to see my friend Thomas and I find a play actor."

"It won't wash," said Droon, stepping into the room and pointing significantly at him with a gun. "Lift your arms above your head, Tiverton."

"This is an outrage," the Tiger bel- lowed, but he obeyed.

"Ronald Dunn, you are also under arrest," said Droon. "Charge, murder accessory."

The actor sat stunned.

"Thomas is my friend," exclaimed Tiverton. "I saved his life. You know that. I've been a guest at his house in the Adirondacks. Hadden was there. I have important business with my friend. I forced my way in here and I find this scoundrel impersonating him. You've got nothing on me, Droon."

"You'd be surprised," stated the chief inspector.

"Are you going to let the big crocodile get away with that, Ronald?" screamed the woman. "He knew who you were all right. He's the man who hired you. Speak up, you fool. Do you want to have all the blame dumped on you?"

Dunn pushed back his chair and rose. "No," he said stoutly. "I don't know what you mean by murder, inspector. I admit I have committed an offense. I was engaged by Mr. Tiverton for the sum of fifty thousand dollars to impersonate John P. Thomas. That is all I have done."

"Very well," said Tiverton. "I admit that. Taking advantage of the fact that Mr. Thomas was in the Adirondacks, I planted Dunn here to pull off a big deal in the Street. That's all you'll ever get on me."

"I arrest you, William Tiverton," said Droon solemnly, "for contriving the murder of John P. Thomas, Rufus Handley, and Wentworth, and by

obtaining from a large number of wealthy gentlemen many millions of dollars by means of a so-called Lottery of Death. We have confessions that prove conclusively your guilt, and I think you're bound for the chair. Come in men, and take all these people to headquarters for further questioning."

"I'll be set free in a couple of hours or less," declared Tiverton. "And I'll never rest until I have you reduced to the ranks, Droon. You are doing all this on absurd suspicion."

The chief inspector grinned. "I'll take a chance," he said. "Dunn, for your information I'll state that Mr. Thomas was confined in a private insane asylum upstate under your name and was murdered there and buried."

"Oh, God," muttered the actor. "I knew nothing about it. I'll swear I didn't."

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to make a statement later."

"And what are you holding me for?" demanded the girl.

"We'll find plenty of reasons, no doubt. Give these people time to dress and take them away."

In a moment the breakfast room was empty of all except Droon and Richard Hadden. Droon seated himself at table. "I could use a cup of coffee," he said.

"And I," smiled Dick. "Now, inspector, I think we are going to find that most of the loot is stored in this house. It's a big house and a big job."

"We had better find it," replied Droon, as he sipped his coffee. "We've got Tiverton for complicity in the impersonation, but we've got to find the loot here to tie him to the Lottery of Death. The letter was a stroke of genius, Dick."

"Just one of those ideas a man gets occasionally. In the case of Tiverton, we have the testimony of the butler and Drury. And Dunn will make a clean

breast of all he knows. The death of Thomas being an integral part of this end of the conspiracy, we can send Tiverton to the chair as its instigator."

"Right," nodded the inspector. "We've got absolute proof that Bird has been selling stuff for both Tiverton and Loeffler and I'm going to give the word to pinch them both as soon as I eat this toast. Bird will squeal. I know his sort. Loeffler will admit only what we sew on him."

"Proctor can be identified by Ken Wilcox as having collected from him five millions in cash and securities, and Proctor's connection with Loeffler is well known. He'll tell everything when he finds his chief in jail where he can't give orders to his gunmen. We've broken up the Lottery promoters, all right."

"Well," said Droon, "let's get to work."

They found nearly seventy million dollars in two big wardrobe trunks in the storeroom, and the trunks supplied them with one of the missing links in their chain of evidence.

They had been shipped from Loeffler's apartment to the Grand Central Station, sent to Albany, and checks had been presented there by an individual who had shipped them by express to the Thomas residence.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### Conclusion

THERE had been a cozy dinner for four at the home of Kenneth Wilcox, and Richard Hadden, during the meal, had been the target of a barrage of questions.

Ken laid down his coffee cup and summed up oratorically.

"According to your yarn, Dick," he began, "the evening of the day I en-

gaged you to work on the Lottery of Death, you go out to dinner with Phyllis and, lo and behold, at the very next table you find the big murderer and blackmailer, and all you have to do is follow him round until he lays down and plays dead. It's sublime, but it's not detective work."

"Ken," protested Mrs. Wilcox, "how can you be so unfair?"

"Didn't I say it was sublime?" he retorted, laughing.

"It's true," admitted Dick smiling. "that I encountered the chief criminal by accident at dinner upon the night I took the case. But let us see whether that was the incredible coincidence that you make it out. Having an extravagant wife who bought the theater tickets out of her own allowance, the least I could do was to take her to the most chic, most fashionable speak-easy in the city so that she could gaze upon malefactors of great wealth and the better class of criminals who are regular patrons of the place.

"I had already constructed a theory that the Lottery of Death was much too big a thing for an ordinary racketeer and decided that only a captain of industry was capable of swinging it. Now captains of industry may not be over scrupulous, but they usually stop short in their operations at actual crime. I needed a financier who was also a criminal, and as both multi-millionaires and criminals of the first rank dine regularly at the Colonial, it was the most natural thing in the world that Tiverton should be seated near us."

"'There's my man,' muttered the great detective," Ken jeered.

"No," replied Dick blandly. "At the moment I didn't think of him in that light."

Phyllis laughed musically. "It was

not until Tiverton saw fit to admire me that Dick began to realize the depth of the man's probable depravity," she declared.

"I have no doubt that Tiverton would have occurred to me as a suspect within a few days," said Dick, "because it was my intention to comb Wall Street for fellows with a bad record. As he had actually been in jail and was notorious for years for his lack of principles he was sure to land at the head of my list in the end. And I owed him something for thinking he could add my Phyllis to his collection of conquests."

"There is no doubt of his conviction, I suppose," said Ken seriously.

"Droon thinks he'll get the chair. The case against him is pretty strong. Drury, the butler, has made a confession even more damaging to him than what I learned from him. The police forced a confession from Alphonse, the French Canadian at the asylum, that he first jabbed a needle in Thomas's arm and then opened his veins. Orders from Dr. Drury. Ronald Dunn has confessed that he was hired by Tiverton to masquerade as Thomas in New York, and was to receive fifty thousand in cash for the job.

"Both Dunn and Laura Lawson refute Tiverton's claim that he did not know that Dunn was masquerading as Thomas. The fact that Tiverton arranged with Drury, the butler, to send poor old Thomas to the asylum and planted Dunn in the Fifth Avenue house makes him responsible for the murder of Thomas at the asylum, even though the death of Dr. Drury prevents a confession that Tiverton ordered him to kill Thomas.

"In the case of Lewis Bird, he was engaged by the false Thomas to act as one of his brokers, and made several

visits to the Fifth Avenue house to remove securities. So there is no question that he was cognizant of the deception. He'll get at least fifteen years. We already had one of Loeffler's collectors in jail, and after Loeffler was locked up, Droon collared another, and we have full confessions from these scoundrels that they delivered the loot to Loeffler while half a dozen of the men who were blackmailed have identified them as having called to carry off the stuff.

"And we have traced the trunks found in the Fifth Avenue house which contained the bulk of securities from Loeffler's place on East Fifty—th Street. Big Bill has been identified by the expressman who took them as personally delivering them to him.

"Furthermore, Droon's stool pigeons have squealed on the three men who murdered Wentworth. The killer of Handley is still at large."

"Will they electrocute Loeffler?"

"Without shadow of doubt. It's the first time that the police have ever placed a really big racketeer where he hasn't a chance of escape."

"Well, it's a load off my chest," said Ken. "I thought the gunmen never peached on their bosses."

"A gangster who is arrested keeps his mouth shut because he fears the vengeance of the chief. But when the chief is in jail and certain to go to the chair, he squeals quickly enough in hope of some clemency in his behalf. The only thing I regret is that we have to let off the scoundrel of a butler. He is absolutely necessary to the State to link Tiverton up with the murder at Apsburg."

"Exactly how many of the other fellows on the lottery list paid their assessment?" asked Ken curiously.

"Thirty-one. The total ran over



\$76,000,000. According to Bird's confession, the plot was to have Thomas accept a large part of it in exchange for other securities and lay it away until it was too late to trace it. Part was to be slipped into the market by Bird and innocent brokers upon alleged orders from Thomas. About six millions in cash was to go immediately to Loeffler for his own services, and that of his army of henchmen. We found five millions in big bills hidden in bank vaults, which he had entered under various names. Traced them by the numbers on the keys in his possession. Several hundred thousand had already been spent in various disbursements. As it happened, we found your contribution of securities intact, Ken, but the cash will be prorated. You'll probably lose fifty or sixty thousand dollars."

"Outrageous," he said, with a grin. "Well, fellow, considering everything, you did a pretty good job, though it might have been neater."

"Ken, you are outrageous," exclaimed Alice angrily. "I think it was marvelous of Dick to do this all by himself."

"As a matter of fact," replied Hadden, "the New York police force had about as much hand in it as I. Without the coöperation of Chief Inspector Droon and his department, I am afraid the Lottery of Death might still be in operation."

"What can we do for Droon?" demanded Wilcox.

"Nothing officially. I'm making him take part of my reward."

"You ought to get five or six millions at least for your work," asserted Alice.

"The hundred thousand put up by the business committee will come to me and that's plenty."

"Phyllis," said Ken with a queer smile, "I've always been very sorry for you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Phil hotly. "You needn't be."

"One can't control his feelings. Here you are, young and beautiful, and you are married to a bumptious and arrogant ass who fancies himself as a great detective. I consider that you broke up the Lottery of Death and he is just standing around taking the credit."

"You're just impossible," groaned Alice.

"Phyllis, you dragged him to the Colonial that night and enabled him to encounter Tiverton. And after he and Droon had worked weeks on the thing they were just about where they started when you produced the Lawson woman's handwriting and enabled them to nab the Tiger."

"Tush," said Phyllis scornfully. "I wonder Dick speaks to you."

"He has a nerve to grab that reward. It belongs to you," continued the millionaire. "So I'm rising to the occasion. I wish to present this certified check for five per cent. of the five million dollars your cleverness restored to me—to the most beautiful young woman, with one exception, and the sweetest girl, with one exception, and the cleverest girl, with one exception—"

"Two and a half per cent was the agreement," said Dick dryly.

"Five per cent is the legal agent's commission."

"Grab it, Phyllis," advised Mrs. Wilcox. "When I divorce the idiot I'll come and live with you."

"Invest this money wisely," continued Ken, unperturbed. "It will make you independent of that policeman. It will enable you to buy dia-

mond bracelets without fear of punishment."

"I'll take it," said Phyllis, reaching for the check. "Now, Mr. Richard Hadden. I'm independent. I'm going to leave you unless you agree to one condition."

"What?" asked Dick. He knew that this was all foolery, but the thought of Phyllis leaving him alarmed him nevertheless.

"That you close your office and retire from your horrible business. I made up my mind during the three days that you had completely disappeared that you would never take another case with my consent. You won't always escape the knife and the bullet. I've suffered so much, Dick."

Mrs. Hadden laid her arms on the table and her head on her arms, and shook with sobs.

"It looks like a frame-up to me," said Dick slowly as his hand touched her glossy black hair.

"She's serious," said Ken. "We talked it all over before you came. Quit while the going is good, Dick. I need you in my business."

Dick Hadden laughed.

"I've been aware of this state of affairs for some time," he said. "Of course Phil wouldn't leave me under any conditions, but I know how she feels. Droon is leaving the police department and is coming to take over my business. In the future I will be connected with the firm of Richard Hadden and Company only in an advisory capacity."

"Oh, Dicky darling," exclaimed Phyllis, smiling through her tears. "You make me so happy."

Subsequent steps in the breaking up of the great conspiracy, and the trial and conviction of the criminals, were

carried out with great adroitness by the New York police department.

The presence in the house where the impersonation was going on of the blackmail fortune tied up Dunn and Tiverton to the Lottery of Death as well as the masquerade.

Police visited the Apsburg Asylum and forced the staff of the late Dr. Drury to lead them to the grave of John P. Thomas, who was positively identified after being exhumed.

Lewis Bird broke down and made a full confession. He had conceived the wholesale blackmail plot and confided it to his friend Tiverton without any notion that it would be put into execution. He had not dreamed that murder would actually be committed, but he was bankrupt and bound hand and foot to Tiverton, and dare not squeal.

Loeffler, bluff and brazen as he was, denied everything, but was convicted despite his plea of innocence by the strong chain of circumstantial evidence. As soon as he was under arrest, stool pigeons supplied the police with the names of the actual murderers of Handley and Wentworth, who were run down and dragged out of their holes.

Drury the butler's testimony was even more damaging to Tiverton than Dick had anticipated, and Proctor finally admitted that his attempt upon the life of Richard Hadden was at the explicit order of Tiverton.

With the two brokers in the hands of the law, the victims of the blackmail ring came forward and supplied the police with the numbers of the certificates of bonds and stocks which they had turned over to the collectors, and with these in hand it was an easy matter to trace certain transactions in which Bird had sold or exchanged them.

The police were able to restore to their owners all but three hundred thousand in cash of the gigantic hoard which the conspirators had possessed for a brief time. The missing cash was money which had been paid to various subordinate criminals, and which had slithered into oblivion.

The newspapers were supplied with all the essential facts immediately upon the arrest of Loeffler, Dunn, Bird and Tiverton, and reporters were very useful to the police in tying up loose ends. The part played in the breaking up of the most dangerous gang which had ever preyed upon New York by Richard Hadden was not concealed by Inspector Droon, and there was no question about awarding him the sum of one hundred thousand dollars posted for the arrest and conviction of the murderous blackmailers.

Hadden was star witness at the trials of the four men, whose lawyers managed to secure for them individual trials.

Tiverton's attorneys put up a brilliant fight for him; from beginning to end the evidence against him was mostly circumstantial. Hadden was cross-examined for hours in his case, and the clarity of his testimony in the end convicted the Tiger. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. Loeffler also was awarded the death penalty. Bird, as an accessory after the fact, received twenty years. Ronald Dunn was sent away for seven years and Laura Lawson, whose testimony convinced the jury that Tiverton was perfectly well aware of the identity of Ronald Dunn upon the morning he visited the Thomas residence, was not prosecuted.

Four gunmen in subsequent trials were given the death penalty, and the

two men who had conveyed Thomas to the asylum were sent up the river for ten years each.

The satisfactory outcome of the series of trials of the principals and agents in the Lottery of Death plot, was hailed by the newspapers as the greatest blow to organized crime yet delivered by the State, but Droon and Hadden were aware that such was not the fact.

Organized crime, as such, was not affected by the punishment of Loeffler, Tiverton and Bird and the others. Tiverton and Bird were not really members of the profession, while Loeffler had broken with his old associates and embarked in the scheme independent of them. For that reason, the underworld did not rally to their aid, as is usually the case. There was no political interference, no attempt to pack juries or to terrorize public officials. Justice for once had a clear field and romped in a winner.

Droon very shrewdly resigned from the police department at the height of his fame and was thus able to receive his share of the great money reward. He laughed in Richard Hadden's face when that henpecked husband assured him that he was turning over the business to Droon and wished to be called upon only in an advisory capacity.

"You're a young man, Dick," he said, "and you can't retire. And no live wire like you is going to enjoy being in a business like Wilcox's. Say, the first time we get up against it here, you'll buckle on your harness and hop on the job. Frankly, I'm not big enough to swing this alone. I'd be afraid to tackle it if I thought you were really out."

"I'm out," said Dick firmly.

Droon smiled.

**THE END**





"Mein Gott, it iss a hold-up man!"

## Luigi—Alone

*Mere Stick-ups Were Getting Monotonous,  
So Luigi, the Lone Wolf, Tried Something Big*

By Harry W. Alden

**A** SHARP crack, a spurt of flame, splintered wood and shivered glass. A face outside the cash window, the upper part concealed by a handkerchief with eye-slits in it. A cropped, blond mustache, the smoking muzzle of a gat. A hand and arm thrust through the shattered window, snatching a pile of bills. The arms of every one in the office shot upward.

The man wheeled, stuffed the bills in his coat pocket, dashed toward the door. The shot had been aimed at a partition. No one was injured.

But an aged attendant, entering the room by another door, made a dash for the running figure, clutched the coat. The gun cracked again and he died.

The door slammed behind the bandit and he was out in the public hall. Even before the door slammed his hand swept across his face, jerked off the handkerchief. It was perfectly timed. A girl, some distance along the hall, saw the motion, thought the man was merely wiping his face with his handkerchief, and went into the office where she worked without further thought.

and without an idea of what the man looked like.

He ran lightly down two flights of stairs. These would be unused by others as every one took the elevators. He met no one. Passing a window he jerked the mustache off and threw it into the court. Then he pulled his slouched hat up from over his ears and disclosed black hair. Very simple. The robber had been a blond; he was a brunette.

At the second floor below he sauntered casually toward a down elevator which had just stopped at a signal from another passenger. He shoved in among those already there. At the main floor he came from the elevator and sauntered into the street with the others. The alarm had not reached that point.

He was on the next block, slouching along, when the police wagon clanged by filled with cops. He turned and looked after it as every one else did. Nothing to distinguish him from the rest.

Then Luigi had a feeling of bigness. Ten minutes before he had been an ordinary stick-up man like thousands of the underworld; now he was a murderer.

He was keen, sharp-witted; mere stick-ups had not called forth all his ability. Besides, they were easy — monotonous. Murder was different. He had not intended to kill unless it was necessary. It had been necessary, so he had killed. Now he was alive, awake, alert.

## II

**T**IM CAMPBELL, police captain, flung his men at every exit of the building. Each door and each elevator was guarded, and every person leaving was identified and searched.

The murderer was not among them. Tim did not expect it. He and a picked squad were shot up to the office. The story was told.

Identification: a face partially covered by a white pocket handkerchief, a small blond mustache, gray fedora hat pulled down over the ears. There were no finger-prints.

Tim picked a shred of dark cloth from a sharp edge of the shattered glass in the window, put it in his pocket and said nothing about it.

Luigi slouched to his second story hall bedroom. He looked at himself in the mirror and grinned.

He knew the hunt was already on. He examined himself carefully. There were strands of frayed cloth on one sleeve near the cuff. Small particles of glass were caught in the rent. A clew. He changed his suit and slipped the torn coat underneath so it was not seen.

Smoking a cigarette and whistling, so people might hear him and know he had nothing to conceal, he went down to the basement. He knew the janitor would probably not be there at that hour. Another tenant was coming up the stairs.

"Where's that damned janitor? Too lazy to put coal on the fire. I freeze up in my room," Luigi muttered.

In the basement he stuffed the coat in upon the glowing coals and opened the draft, shut the door and smoked a cigarette as he watched the flames flicker through the openings. The eye-slit handkerchief was in a pocket of the coat and would be destroyed with it. The value of the clew had gone.

The door at the head of the basement stairs creaked. Boots clumped down. Luigi took the poker, swore audibly, flung open the furnace door,

and churned the charred mass until it was underneath the live coals.

"Get away from that furnace, or I'll knock your block off," shouted the janitor.

"Yeah? You will like hell. You want me to freeze upstairs? Have a drink." He produced a flask. "He's O. K. I bring him in myself special."

"Wow, good stuff, Luigi," said the janitor when the bottle finally left his lips. Friendship was restored.

Returning to his room, Luigi turned on the heat. Not that he was cold, but so the janitor and the other tenants would think he was.

He examined the pair of trousers he had worn. They were almost new. He had been forced to economy, for his stick-ups had not been very productive lately. The pants could be worn on rainy days with a coat almost like them and the difference of material would not be noticed. He hung them in the closet. The gat. There was a cache on the floor below, unknown to the janitor or any one else, where he stored it when it was not needed. If found there, he could not be connected with it.

The roll. He would plant it. Giorgio was reliable. Good reason why he should be. He would not last twenty-four hours if there was a squeal or a missing buck. Little Italy would take care of that. Giorgio was tight-lipped. He had many depositors, but none of them knew who the other depositors were, or the amount of the plants. Luigi's roll would go to Giorgio to be withdrawn later in installments as needed.

It was a big roll; the biggest he had ever owned; two grand and more. With his hand in his pocket feeling of it, he walked past the mirror. He looked at himself and felt big with such a big

roll. But he was seedy. He needed new scenery. Tan coat, pants and vest, light blue shirt, pink tie, spats—yes, spats; they were classy. A good looking kid he would be in good scenery.

He sat by the window, the chair tilted back on its legs. One cigarette; two; the third lighted.

News boys on the street yelled extra. He didn't bat an eyelid. He was schooling himself, for, after all, there might be the sizzling chair at the end of the trail.

But he could keep his ears open without showing he was listening. "Extra! Brutal murder on Lexington Avenue!"

He smoked indifferently. "That's *me*," flashed through his mind, but his face gave no indication. Again he felt big. The stick-ups had only been given two or three paragraphs on an inside page. Stick-ups were so frequent they were hardly noticed by the public. Not as much as an airplane crash or a society elopement. Now he was worth an extra. Only big men got an extra. He was a big man. His name was not there, but it was *him*.

No danger in buying a paper. He saw people come out of doors and do it openly. The chair clumped down on four legs and he crossed to the door of the room. Stopped. The chair at Sing Sing. If he were found out he would sit in it. He felt his stomach drop. If he went out and bought a paper, a cop might see him do it and get the idea he was interested in the affair. He didn't buy papers as a rule. A cop who knew his habits might see him do it and think it funny. Better not.

Young Sausanne slouched in. He had a room in the back on the same floor. The two played craps in the same club. Sausanne had an extra. Luigi's eyes sifted to it, but he did not ask.



"Stick-up on Lexington Avenue—bopped off an old guy," announced Sausanne.

"Yeah?" Luigi yawned. "What's that to me? I ain't going to get none of the jack. Any dames going to be at the Blue Bird to-night?"

"Sure," says Sausanne. "Always is."

"That yellow-haired kid with the dimple going to be there?"

"How in hell should I know? I ain't her boy friend," stated Sausanne. "You better lay off that yellow-haired kid. The Greek's staking her to grub, and he's quick with the knife."

"Yeah?" said Luigi. "A gat's quicker."

They smoked two more cigarettes without speaking and Sausanne went out leaving the extra. As the door slammed, Luigi grabbed it.

It was all there. The reporters had it right. He remembered now he had seen a girl in the hall when he came out of the office door. He had paid no attention to her then, but he had a chill as he read about her.

He read on. No; she had paid no more attention to him than he had to her. She hadn't the least idea what the man in the hall looked like. There was absolutely no clew. So the paper stated. O. K. No need for destroying the pants.

He grinned as he read the comments. "Quick as a flash," pleased him. Yep, that was the way he worked. He had done a good job; a perfect job.

After reading the extra, he went out in the street confidently. The police were, of course, combing the district for a blond man upon whom they could pin something. The extra had stressed the blond mustache.

Luigi even crossed the street so as to pass close to the cop on the corner. The cop was indifferent. Luigi

swelled up. If the cop knew what he knew . . .

### III

CAMPBELL returned to headquarters. "Not a thing to work on, Jack," he said to Sergeant Griffith.

The scrap of cloth was not mentioned, even to the sergeant, lest there be a leak. But it was submitted secretly to experts who reconstructed the pattern. It was a cheap material, regulation pattern, sold by rolls to hundreds of second class clothing firms. Readymade suits of like cloth were manufactured and sold by the thousands. Unless the particular coat from which the scrap had been torn was discovered, it was useless to try to trace a particular suit to a particular wearer by means of the scrap.

Campbell went over the police records; played solitaire with them; matched cards. The Duane Street robbery had been much like this. One man; a dash into the office; a gat fired harmlessly at the ceiling; a shrieking cash girl; the money box grabbed and a get-away down an elevator before the alarm could be given. Identical.

Campbell studied the description of the man given in that case where the entire figure had been seen. "Medium height, slim, smooth shaven, black mask over eyes, skin dark, black hair seen under cap as he turned for the get-away.

Campbell pressed the button and the sergeant came in.

"Jack—that murder up in Lexington Avenue—tell your men to keep their eyes open for a slim, medium height Latin—without a mustache. If they find one wearing a dark brown coat with a fine green line and a torn sleeve, bring him in and put the screws to him. Don't waste time looking for a

man with a spiffy yellow mustache; that was phony. That's all now, Jack."

The sergeant went out. Campbell placed the card on one side and went on with the rest of the deck.

Grand Street. A solitary, masked robber had jumped into the room to be greeted by a yell from the terrified male bookkeeper, who then promptly flopped under the desk in a faint. A mass of girls had tumbled into the room to see what it was all about. They had yelled in unison, whereupon the robber had turned and fled without getting anything. They were able to describe him. "Mask over eyes, medium height, slim, black hair, black mustache."

Campbell grinned. "That guy'll sprout a red mustache if we don't nab him P D Q. That's about the only color he hasn't used." Then he muttered to himself, "He's an active little cuss. Quick as a flash."

He went on with the solitaire. East Thirty-Sixth Street. Same tactics; same description.

"He's too blamed active for the good reputation of the police force," was Campbell's comment.

He placed the three cards in a row and studied them more carefully with this result.

Duane Street, November 14, haul four hundred and fifty-eight dollars; Grand Street, December 28, haul nothing; East Thirty-Sixth Street, January 5, haul six hundred dollars, and over. He looked at the calendar. The date was March 3.

The buzzer sang again. Sergeant Griffith came in. "Smoke that cigar, Jack. A millionaire in Wall Street gave it to me; better than we can buy ourselves."

They smoked.

"I'm going to let you have my deductions," said Campbell. "A young

Italian did this job, and he's been in the stick-up game for some time. This is the first real big haul he has made, and it's the first time he has used his gun in earnest. He's been active, very active for the past few months, but he ain't greedy for coin, and he ain't got extravagant ways—not yet. He only goes into a stick-up when he's out of jack, and when he's made a haul he lays low until his funds get low.

"He wears cheap clothes and that means he probably goes to cheap joints. Lives at the rate of about seventy-five or eighty dollars a week, which ain't much for that class of kid, especially if he gambles and has a woman.

"On November 14 he made a haul of four hundred and fifty-eight dollars in the Duane Street robbery, which would last him until the last part of December. On December 28 he was at it again, and made a try on Grand Street but was scared—hadn't got up his nerve to shoot to kill at that time—he was scared, and ran away without getting anything, so he had to starve or try again P D Q.

"The next week, January 5, he stuck up East Thirty-Sixth Street and got over six hundred dollars. That would last him about eight weeks—March 1 about. It is now March 3. See. He has done his first killing in this racket, and it was easy for him to get away, and if we don't nab him for it, somebody else will cross the River Jordan when he needs money again.

"He works alone; apparently doesn't trust anybody but himself, which makes it harder for us. Ain't got any pals to blab. In private, I'll bet he's a clam and keeps everything to himself. You needn't bother looking for him in the hooch joints, for he's the type that don't drink much. A man who ranges alone seldom does. Dance halls more likely.

Young and probably can't keep away from flappers.

"If you find a cheap dresser who has suddenly become a sheik, keep to him close. And if you find one among the skirts who has suddenly taken a steady—ditto. Those are my ideas, Jack, for what they are worth. Tip off the boys."

#### IV

SHE was at the Blue Bird when Luigi got there. Dimple in one cheek when she laughed and she laughed continuously. Pretty as a golden haired madonna and brainless as a lobster. She was alone when he came in, waiting for the Greek, who was her present meal ticket, and she was hungry.

Luigi sat at a table by the wall and, as she swung past, grabbed her by the arm and pulled her down on his lap. She returned a slap in the face, but remained sitting on his knee.

"You are some fresh guy," she announced.

"Sure thing," agreed Luigi, grinning. "The Greek your boy friend now?"

"What's that to you?"

"Not a thing. He ain't got no jack. What do you want me to buy for you? I'll get it."

"Yes, you will." Sarcasm. "You ain't laid out the price of a feed yet. He got me this dress last week."

A man, half drunk, flopped over a near-by table, rolled his head in her direction and opened his bleary eyes.

Luigi peeled two ten dollar bills off the roll in his pocket and threw them in her lap.

"Get yourself a new one, kid, I don't like that one."

She slid into a chair beside him at the table.

"What'll you put in your face, kid?" he asked.

"Cheese sandwich and a slice of onion—a couple of them—slab of cocoanut custard pie—highball—two or three. That'll do as a starter."

"Scotch or rye?"

"Don't care."

They ate.

"You're some swell dame," he said.

She looked at him. Appraised. "You ain't much to look at," was the comment.

"Going to get new scenery to-morrow."

Finally she got up. "Well, I ain't going to wait for that Greek any longer," she announced. "Where do we go?"

They went out together.

Campbell's orders had been carried out and the dance halls of Little Italy were watched. The half drunken one (No. 986), when he reported the next morning said that Luigi's extravagance was unusual.

He had observed further that, in the afternoon, Luigi was dressed in a new, light tan suit, trousers creased, a cream colored fedora hat, light blue shirt, pink tie—and gray spats. A rainbow.

Campbell was told about the new scenery.

But there were ten or fifteen other young members of the underworld who were also under observation because of some suspicious circumstance, and a man cannot be arrested simply because he buys a suit of clothes and takes a girl out.

It would be unwise to run Luigi in and question him. Wait. Observe.

A young Italian hired a room in the house where Luigi lived. Not even the janitor knew that the young Italian found two interesting things in Luigi's



room. One, a book—"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes"; the other, a pair of odd trousers without a coat to match. The young Italian cut a small piece off an inside seam where it would not be observed. Campbell had the experts compare this with the shred from the shattered window. He was pleased with the report.

"Don't let him get wise, Jack. Be careful about that. We ain't got enough yet to let him know we suspect him. There are too many suits of that kind walking around New York to run in a man for owning a pair of odd trousers. Without the coat, it shows nothing."

v

THE young Italian became acquainted with Luigi. That was natural. They roomed in the same house and passed each other on the stairs and in the halls. He occasionally slouched into Luigi's room, when the door was open and Luigi was there. They smoked the same brand of cigarettes. The Italian was somewhat of a rainbow himself. He admired Luigi's scenery.

"New?" he asked, fingering the cloth.

"Yep."

"A lot of jack it cost. Make a big haul?"

Luigi's eyes shot to him. He found the other eying him. "Got through a load of hooch," he explained.

When the Italian went out, Luigi sat by the window and smoked a cigarette. Several of them. His face was a little drawn. His eyes shifted a little nervously at sounds in the hall. Yep, the bulls were looking at him. That one was a dick. Nope, he couldn't make a slip now.

Damn it, didn't the bulls ever for-

get when a man was croaked! The guy was old enough to pass in his checks. Hoped he'd do it before he got as old as that. He was dead anyway. What was the use of killing another man, too? But how in hell did they get the idea? Anybody could sell a few cases of hooch and buy new scenery. Nope, it was not that. What was it that had made them wise?

He was disturbed. He had not been able to get a line on the young Italian. Casual inquiries had brought the information that he had drifted in. No one knew from where.

He felt sick at the stomach. A moment of panic. It was the first time he ever thought suspicion rested on him. Nobody had ever bothered him about his other stick-ups. They had been perfect. This one was perfect, too. The papers kept repeating "Not a trace."

This one was done in the same—He stiffened. The same way. Several crimes committed in the same way indicated that the same man committed them. His brain whirred a moment; then he forced himself to think straight again. Suppose the bulls did think the crimes were committed by the same man, what had made them think he had committed them?

He jumped to the closet, flung open the door as though he expected . . . No; the pants still hung there. There was no key to the door. It could be opened any time—any time when he was not there. If the guy was a dick, he had searched. But even if he had searched, why should he pay any attention to an odd pair of old trousers? He thought of the tear in the sleeve of the coat he had burned. Perhaps a piece of cloth had remained caught on the glass of the window. The pants might be a clew.

He could not go down in the basement and burn them. He had been seen there stirring up the fire when he burned the coat. It would not look so good. Besides, it was a warm day, and he did not need any more heat.

He took them out, rolled them in a paper, and sold them to Goldstein on the corner for two bucks. Goldstein dealt in secondhand clothing. Luigi had sold him other worn-out things. Nothing suspicious in selling him an old pair of pants.

He put the two bucks in his pocket and slouched down the avenue. At the block below he turned to the right, crossed the avenue, and went along the side street. He slipped in the doorway of the fourth house from the corner on the north side. A back door opened upon a way through the yards between the backs of the two rows of houses and led into one on the avenue diagonally across from Goldstein's store. Luigi knew the lay of the land. In the darkened hallway of this house he waited and watched.

The young Italian came out of the building next to Goldstein's and entered his store. The louse. He had been watching. The Italian came out with a package.

Luigi retraced the route to the north side of the cross street and continued down town for several blocks along another avenue. Then he crossed back to his own avenue and walked back toward his own home. On the way he entered Goldstein's store.

"Gimme back them pants, Izzy," he demanded, flinging four bucks on the counter.

"Oy, it is too bad that I sell them already, Luigi my boy. It was a young fellow about your size what wanted them. You are an old customer, Luigi, and I would give them back for the

same price what I paid you for them without making a profit out of you. He gave me five bucks for them and didn't ask no questions."

Luigi went out. The bulls had his pants. He was cold, and felt goose pimples all over him. Now he was sure. The bulls were looking at him. The young Italian was a dick. And the bulls had his pants.

The next day his room was empty.

Campbell's orders to the sergeant were imperative. Luigi should not be watched or trailed in any manner for a couple of months, and nothing should be done to prevent his return to a feeling of absolute security.

"We haven't got enough on him to run him in, and his money will last for five or six months at least. We'll let him ride along for a while. He won't make another try until his roll is about gone."

Campbell did not think the yellow haired girl would eat into the roll as quickly as she did.

## VI

**L**UIGI moved all his things and lived with the girl in the double room which he was paying for anyhow.

It cost a pile to feed and keep the girl. She was always eating and wanting new clothes and jewelry. It was worth the price, though, to feel he was a big man and had a big roll.

But his roll went fast. He cursed with surprise when Giorgio told him he was nearing the end of the plant. Then he acted with decision. He gave up the double room and turned the yellow-haired girl out . . .

A slim young man entered the delicatessen store on the west side of Columbus Avenue between Eighty-First and Eighty-Second Streets late

one Saturday night. The cash register would be full at that hour. There were but two customers. The German proprietor was serving them. His wife was at the cash register beside the door ready to make change.

The young man's head was bent as he approached the door, and his slouch hat was pulled low over his forehead. His face could not be seen. He was looking down. Apparently a shoe lace was untied and it annoyed him. With one hand on the latch he opened the door a crack and fumbled there a moment as he stooped to tie the lace.

When he straightened up there was a mask over his eyes, and a gat in his hand. He had a reddish mustache. He stepped quickly in and left the door open a crack after him.

"Mein Gott, it iss a hold-up man," announced the wife. She fainted and passed out of the picture.

"Was ist das?" inquired the proprietor who was near-sighted.

The two customers didn't ask. They held up their arms.

It was not necessary to use the gat. The man's hand expertly pushed the lever. "No Sale" appeared on the tag of the register. The drawer sprung open. His arm swept over it. The bills disappeared. He was on the street. The door slammed after him. Quick as a flash.

The German ran to the door. The two customers were not eager to get out where the robber might be. The latch seemed to be jammed and the door would not open until jerked and pulled violently. It appeared afterward that a splinter of wood had been wedged in the catch to make it bind. This was probably done when the man held the latch and stooped to relace his shoe.

"Help — police — murder! I haff been robbed!" the German yelled.

People on the other side of the street stared. They had seen nothing unusual.

A policeman, directing traffic on the corner below, grinned and casually came up to see what the racket was about. It took two or three minutes of voluble German to satisfy the cop there had been a stick-up.

By that time Luigi was in a bus with a dozen other passengers riding along the sunken road through Central Park toward the East Side.

Luigi lived in a room by himself now—Luigi alone. When he got back, as soon as the door was locked, he examined the roll. Only one hundred and ten dollars. "The delicatessen man did bum business for Saturday night," he thought.

He then examined himself. He took off his suit, an old one, and looked it over critically from the coat collar to the pants cuffs. Not a frayed place or a missing button. A good job; a perfect job; quick as a flash. But he was not elated. He had become a mere stick-up man again. If the German had tried to grab him he would have plugged him. That would have been more exciting, and he could have made his get-away as easily, for he had plenty of time.

He had bought a nifty new set of scenery before his Lexington Avenue plant was exhausted, and he put on this scenery. In it he appeared at the Blue Bird, which he had never stopped visiting, as his absence would have been noticeable and suspicious, and if the bulls found out they might have got the idea he had done something which made him drop out of sight. The bulls were evidently through with the Lexington Avenue affair. He was sure they hadn't bothered about him since the dick had bought his pants.

But they had his pants. Funny. His



stomach always seemed to drop when he thought of that. He had made a slip then in some way which caused them to look at him. What break had he made? Some little thing, just enough to make them look at him for a while and then let him alone when they found nothing more.

He would not make a slip this time. He would not buy new scenery and he would not buy a new girl for a steady—and—he would not show in any way that he had a new roll.

The entire haul, except ten dollars, he planted that night with Giorgio, who was reliable.

At the Blue Bird he met Tom McGuinness.

"Tom, I am bust to-night. Only got two thin dimes and a quarter. Slip me a five spot."

"Sure," said Tom, passing him ten, for he happened to be flush.

"The spots ain't on the dice no more," said Luigi, explaining his bankruptcy. "Perhaps I win next time, then I pay you back. If I don't win, you wait till I do."

"O. K., Luigi," Tom said and grinned "You'll do as much for me some time."

"Sure thing," said Luigi.

So he gave the impression he was dead broke and of course he was not in a stick-up that netted one hundred and ten dollars.

At that time a girl with curly black hair interested Luigi. He danced with her exclusively that night.

## VII

CAMPBELL was interested in the report of the Columbus Avenue stick-up and visited the delicatessen store. He interviewed the proprietor and got volubility but no identifying facts. The reddish mustache

of the robber made him grin. He followed the trail of the get-away, hoisting his rugged form over a back fence, but found no clew.

Returning to headquarters, he summoned the sergeant. "Jack, Luigi must have got wise to something our detective did when he was trailing him and he thought those pants we got locked up weren't safe to keep."

"Thinking of that Lexington Avenue murder?" asked the sergeant.

"Yep. Same fellow did it that did the Columbus Avenue stick-up last night. He made a couple of slips on the Lexington job and we made a couple. He's too cute to make them again, and we're damned fools if we do. He slipped in telling the dick he made his haul in bootlegging. The bootleggers tell me Luigi was never in the game, and they know. He also made a mistake in selling his pants. The detective made a slip in giving himself away somehow, and I made a slip in thinking Luigi's roll would last longer than it did.

"We laid off of him too long and he's made another try. Not much damage done—only a hundred and ten dollars worth. Thank the Lord he didn't have to use his gun. We may be on the wrong trail, but if he did this job we can't take any more chances. He's too dangerous and too slick and a hundred and ten won't last him long.

"From what I have found out about the Columbus Avenue job, he must have been scouting around for quite a while before he acted. Knew the lay of the land thoroughly. Worked quick as a flash and didn't make an extra gesture. Like clock-work. Knew the cash register was right beside the door; knew exactly how to open the cash drawer; knew just how he could get through the back yards from Columbus

to Eighty-Second. Must have scouted quite a while to get everything down pat.

"Now, my idea is this. Trail him constantly, but do it gently so he won't suspect. Careful about that. If he finds it out, he'll jump the city and we'll lose all chance of fastening anything on him. The U. S. A. is a big place. Change your men often so he won't by any chance see a man more than two or three times. Get in men from the other boroughs so he won't be apt to have seen them before.

"If you find him scouting around a particular neighborhood, that's where he is preparing for his next haul. Then throw a lot of plain-clothes men in that section and keep in touch with him day and night, for he is liable to work any old time."

Luigi was not only disappointed in the size of the haul, but also, that the stick-up only had a single paragraph in the reputable papers, and a quarter column in the tabloids.

He consoled himself with the girl.

He found she had a punch almost equal to his own, and once an argument was started, he could not end it with his fist until there had been a battle. During one of their discussions she yelled and screamed until a crowd collected outside, believing it was murder instead of a domestic discussion over a trip to Coney Island.

A cop came up to the room and told them to cool off or he would run them both in. He gave Luigi the once-over in a way that was disquieting.

The domestic affair was reported by the cop to the precinct. Campbell had ordered everything concerning Luigi sent to him at once.

"Jack," he said, "there's another woman eating Luigi's roll and, if he's

the one we think he is, he's liable to make another try any time. Concentrate on him, but if you want to get him, don't let him know it. By the way he's acting he evidently thinks we've laid off him altogether and I don't want his confidence disturbed."

Then the curly headed girl met a successful hi-jacker and she left Luigi cold. This peeved him. A big man was not kicked out by a dame. If he was to be a big man he must have a bigger plan.

### VIII

SPRING had come. Leaves were showing; robins were pulling worms out of the ground.

"Luigi's got spring fever," the sergeant informed Campbell. "He's walking in the park instead of rolling dice in the Pomonoc."

"Get around him; get around him close," said Campbell. "He's looking over the ground."

Days passed. The reports showed that Luigi's walks continued. He strolled around the ball ground in the park and watched the games, but he never played himself. He lounged on the benches smoking cigarettes.

"Seems innocent," said the sergeant.

"Too damned innocent."

Then Luigi strolled more frequently along the paths bordering the sunken road near Seventy-Ninth Street, and Campbell became more interested.

One morning he found on his desk this report:

"To-night. Was at Loew's Theater at West Eighty-Third Street. After the show, about eleven o'clock, walked through the sunken road to the East Side where he lives. A drunk (No. 376) was behind him and was not noticed. X was interested in the vines growing over the wall about half way

in. He pulled on them hard as though testing their strength . . .”

“Casual, me eye,” muttered Campbell and the buzzer sang.

“Read that, Jack,” Campbell said, “and get your men in hand, ready for a dash. I’m going to move to an uptown precinct and sleep there for a while. I don’t know what it’s going to be, and I don’t know when it’s going to be, but it’s sure going to be.”

Ah Moy, the proprietor of the Golden Dragon, was accustomed to take the cash home in a valise after the chop suey joint closed at midnight. He had a private car and a private chauffeur. The route was from the East Side through the sunken road, and out at West Eighty-First Street; then across to his apartment on Riverside Drive.

That night the chauffeur saw a hooch gatherer staggering along the narrow sidewalk by the road and going in the same direction as the car. The man was so soused he could hardly keep on his pins. He lurched to the gutter and reeled out into the roadway in front of the car. The chauffeur jammed on the brakes and swore at him as he staggered away from the wheels.

The man straightened up and jumped on the running board quick as a flash. A crack of the gat and the chauffeur crumpled over the wheel. The crash of the automobile against the stone wall drowned the second crack of the gat as Ah Moy gasped and lay still. The valise was found in the car with the two dead men. It had been slit open with a single stroke of a sharp knife and the money was gone.

Luigi, grabbing the trailing vines, scrambled up the stone wall on the north side of the sunken road.

A man came running along the narrow sidewalk, his pistol spitting.

Things zinged around Luigi. There was a sting in his shoulder and one arm faltered. But he was at the top of the wall, and disappeared over its edge.

The cop stood at the bottom, helpless. His business then was with the smashed automobile and the dead inside.

At the top were bushes. Luigi crashed through them. On the right he heard something crashing toward him. The electric light from the roadway below flecked through the bushes. It glinted on a police shield, on a cap.

The bulls knew he was there. Had been laying for him. How in hell did they know? In the tangle of shrubbery Luigi found a path he knew was there, made by boys taking a short cut. He raced along it. When he was out on the edge of the shrubbery its crackling twigs would not give him away, and he could sneak silently along in the shadow and crouch behind something.

The cop crashing on his right blew a whistle. He was evidently entangled in the bushes and could not make progress. Good. The whistle was answered by another on the left, but far away. Luigi now knew where his pursuers were located.

It was exciting. He was a big man now for sure. He had killed two men. He was nearing the end of the path. It veered suddenly to the left away from the crashing cop.

A black figure stood there waiting. Luigi’s gat flamed. The other man fired. Luigi’s slim body writhed in the path an instant and was quiet.

The sergeant ran up. “Didn’t wing you, did he, chief?”

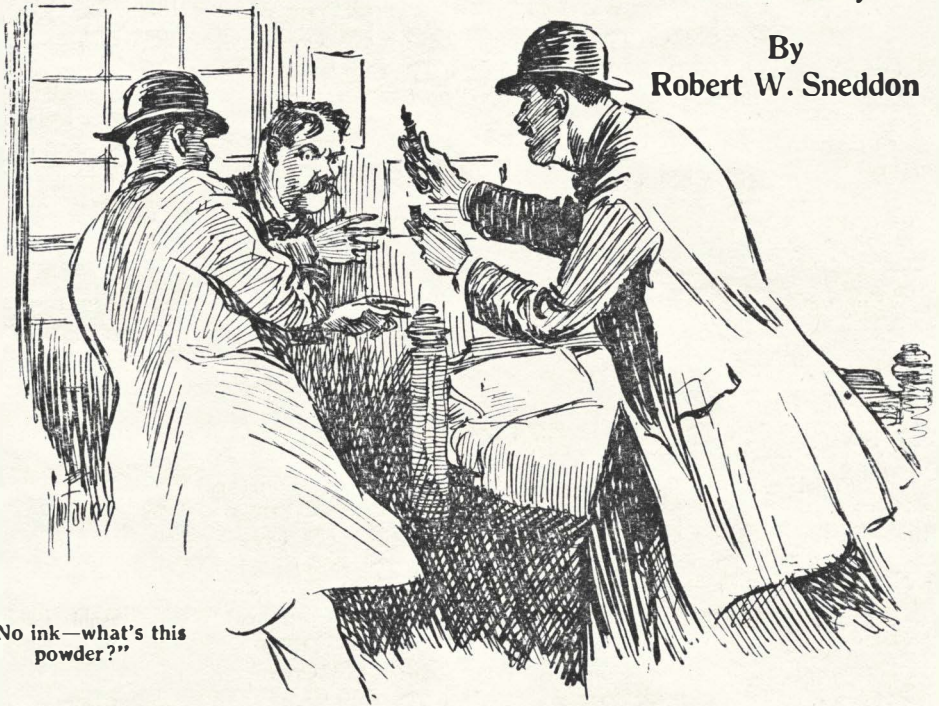
“Nope,” said Campbell. “Call up the dead wagon.”



# The Chicago Monster

A True Story

By  
Robert W. Sneddon



"No ink—what's this powder?"

*Forty Times Johann Hoch Walked to the Altar, and Almost as Many Times He Left Murder Behind Him*

**I**F it were not for desperate women in the world, there would be no tales of Bluebeards. And by desperate women I do not mean those who satisfy their emotions by murdering some rival. I mean those poor souls who are starved for masculine affection. Those wall flowers in the gay ballroom of life who sit by and watch younger and more attractive women carry off the prizes—the left-overs in the matrimonial market.

As years go on, and they see themselves grow older, more remote from the goal of their fancies, they clutch desperately at the man who can give

them companionship, who can even persuade them that they are charming. They are willing to pay for this, to give their money, and, in some instances, their lives.

These women are the ready prey of such monsters as Landru, de Jong, Pel, and Johann Hoch, the German killer of Chicago.

One cold January day in 1905 a neatly dressed, middle aged woman came timidly into a New York precinct station.

"Can I speak to some one?"

"You can that. What's the trouble, lady?"

"I have a man over to my house." The desk sergeant smothered a smile.

"Nothing unusual in that, lady. Husband, eh? What's he been doing, beating you up?"

"Oh, no, indeed. He's a roomer."

"Making trouble for you. How much does he owe you?"

"He doesn't owe me anything. You see, officer, I was looking at the paper last night, this paper"—she held it up—"and I saw this man's face. Well, it's the man's face, but it ain't the same name."

The sergeant reached out a leisurely hand for the paper.

"Holy smoke! John Hoch. Now lady, let me get this straight. You say you've got a man living in your house that looks like this square-head. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"And you think he is John Hoch, the Chicago bigamist that's wanted by the police? What does he call himself?"

"Henry Bartells."

"Can you describe him, lady?"

"Well, he's middle size, stockylike, German, black hair and mustache, black eyes."

"Hum—that might be him. Anything else you can tell about him?"

The caller hesitated.

"Well, I been reading about Hoch and the way he acted with women, and would you believe it—well, I rented him a room—he paid me the money right down, and I left him. I was peeling some potatoes in the kitchen about twenty minutes after and I heard some one give a cough and there was Mr. Bartells. He said could he trouble me for a glass of water, and I gave him one. So he got to talking and I said I was a widow and he said it was a lonely life for a woman like me—that

—that had so much charm—and he hated to see me spoiling my fingers, and could he help peel. Well I didn't know how to act. He might take offense and leave. So I let him peel. And next day he says will I marry him. So I got to thinking this was just the way Hoch got them poor women and—"

"The Dutchman is a quick worker. It looks like him, lady. Now, your name and address."

"Mrs. Catherine Kimmerle, 546 West Forty-Seventh Street."

"All right, Mrs. Kimmerle, you go right home, and a couple of the boys will follow. You let them in, and they'll do the rest."

They found Hoch in his room. He stared at them with narrowed eyes.

"This is a private room," he snarled.

"That's all right, Hoch, we're here on business. You're Johann Hoch, last known address Chicago."

"Sure. What's the trouble?"

"Just a minute. What made you beat it out of Chicago in such a hurry?"

"Oh, that—I had some trouble with my sister-in-law."

"What about all these women on your trail?"

"I flatter them a little, that is all."

"And they hand you every cent they have in the world."

"Business."

"Well, you've done one piece of business that'll take a lot of explaining, Hoch."

"What?"

"Feeding arsenic to your second last wife, Marie Walcker Hoch."

"You are a lot of fools—fools."

"Easy, Hoch. That don't get you anywhere. Here gimme that fountain pen sticking out of your pocket, I left my own home. No ink—what the—"

say, what you got inside, Hoch? What's this powder? By God, I wouldn't wonder but it was arsenic. Come along now and we'll give you a nice little room and bath at headquarters."

The contents of the fountain pen, it was soon disclosed, were fifty-eight grains of arsenic.

Questioned, Hoch swore it was tooth powder. When confronted with the analysis he said:

"Ach, yes. It is arsenic. I bought it so I could commit suicide."

"Where did you buy it?"

Hoch gave the name and address of a New York drug store where he said he had bought both pen and poison salt. This was denied at the drug store. The arsenic had been bought, in all probability, in Chicago, and used in his killing.

So back to Chicago Hoch was transported, where Inspector George Shippy gathered together some facts of the prisoner's history.

And here it may be said that perhaps half of it was never told, for the simple reason that there were intervals in his life which could not be filled in. Had Hoch been tried in Germany, the police system there could have furnished a record of the man's past, but he had come to America, apparently about 1881, leaving a wife in his fatherland.

But what was set down in sufficient confirmation of the story disclosed a career of blackguard villainy and callousness.

Hoch was a good talker in a crude way. There was nothing polished in his manners or mode of speech. He slipped up in his English and had a decided German accent. He was no beauty, and his grossness would have revolted most women, but he found

his prey among those desperate souls who wanted a male and a home.

Hoch worked rapidly. His love making was blind flattery, and the exercise of that hypnotic power which goes with the Bluebeard type of killer. He knew just when to close the deal and force the dazzled woman to sign on the dotted line. She must give him her money as a temporary loan, he always said, his own money being tied up at the time. Once the money had passed into his hands, he was off and away.

If the cash were not forthcoming on the strength of a promise to marry, Hoch went through a marriage ceremony, and fled as soon as he was able.

And if the bride seemed of too determined a nature to forgive and forget her betrayal and desertion, Hoch saw to it that he became a widower and a free agent once more.

When he was arrested, he was going on fifty, and had been many things in his lifetime—machinist, travelling salesman, and showman. He represented himself as employed by a well known Chicago packing concern.

It was whispered that his knowledge of poisons was as deep as that of the Borgias, who carried the art of getting rid of enemies to a high level of efficiency, but he, in reality, was about as skilled in the pharmacopeia of death as a rat exterminator. He knew that arsenic killed, and what the fatal dose was. As an arsenic dispenser he knew his business.

Between the years 1881 and 1892, Hoch worked in the dark. There is some evidence of his having spent some time in the study of hypnotism and following the carnivals, but what he was doing in the way of matrimonial ventures remains a mystery. It



is reasonable to suppose that he did have some victims during that period, but if so, neither they nor their relatives came forward at the trial.

In 1892 this Pied Piper of Chicago started his ill-omened piping with its message of romance to whoever would listen to the music.

Three lonely widows answered the call. Mrs. Mayer enjoyed her marital happiness only three weeks. Three weeks meant something different to Hoch than to Elinor Glyn. To Hoch it meant a period of preparation for crime, the time in which his bride's property could be transferred to his keeping.

Mrs. Mayer died in convulsions. No one seems to have thought much about the matter, or cared, and Hoch went on to another conquest—that of a Mrs. Irick, whose term of bliss was also short.

We have been led to believe that a divine Providence directs the ends of justice, and that murder will out, but in Hoch's case there seems to be a flaw in the idea. For he went on marrying and killing.

A Mrs. Hauck escaped death at the price of losing all her money, and a woman, unknown, who fell for the charmer in Chicago, probably lived to thank her stars.

## II

**I**N 1895 Hoch began to make a business of what had so far been a pastime. He inserted advertisements in German papers in various cities, stating his desire to meet ladies of a more or less mature age and experience, with some property, for companionship and probably matrimony.

Mrs. Martha Steinbacher saw this luring advertisement and replied. Hoch went, saw, and conquered, and within

a few days there was a marriage. It lasted four months. At the end of this time, having made her will, the poor woman was taken sick and, as we know, betrayed every symptom of arsenic poisoning.

Hoch was so assiduous in his attentions to the dying woman that when, in her agony, she cried out she was being poisoned, the neighbors merely thought she was delirious. How could any one suspect the model husband?

The profits on this transaction were four thousand dollars, and blithely Hoch went on to the next prospect. This was Mary Rankin, who was so foolish as to transfer her cash to her wooer before the wedding day, and so had to weep for the parting of the bridegroom the day of the ceremony.

Simultaneously, the bigamist drew five hundred dollars a piece from two other brides. Miss Andrews had scarcely recovered from the emotion of the ceremony which made her a married woman when she was in hysterics. Two hours after the preacher had pronounced them man and wife, Hoch was on his way.

Thinking there might be luck in the name Hoch, the matrimonial magician selected a woman of this name to share her fortune with him.

The experiment was successful, for him, but not for her. A doctor wrote her death certificate within the month.

The funeral procession was continued with Mrs. Huss: net profit after three months: two thousand five hundred dollars; Mary Schultz, fate unknown: two thousand dollars.

San Francisco was the next happy hunting ground. Here Hoch, after a whirlwind wooing of three days, led Mrs. Barbara Brossert to the altar.

This was September 22, 1896. Two days later the bridegroom was missing with one thousand four hundred and sixty dollars.

He had not left the city, however, but had gone to a boarding house in Turk Street. The landlady, Mrs. Tannert, did not see her ideal man in him, and was making a comfortable living without any craving for romance, so that Hoch's advances met with defeat.

He took train for Cincinnati, where he beguiled Clara Bartel to place her hand in his, with her pocketbook.

Three months saw her being carried out of her house on her last trip. And about this time died the lady who had been Barbara Brossert. She did not die of poison, but, incredible as it may seem, of grieving for the vanished lover.

In Hamilton, Ohio, Miss Julia Dose, drew out seven hundred dollars for a wedding trip. Hoch, bridegroom, took the money and the trip alone.

A trifling offense against the law checked Hoch's activities for a couple of years. He was sentenced to prison for selling off furniture on which there was a lien.

It was unfortunate, for he had no need to make the extra money by this sale. He had just placed to his credit the proceeds of two other short-lived weddings. Mrs. Martha Harzfeld, and a Milwaukee widow who passed on after the usual three weeks and left close to one thousand five hundred dollars to the sorrowing relict.

When Hoch came out of jail, he had learned no moral lesson. In fact he had spent the time improving his technique.

In November, 1901, he married, robbed and deserted Anna Goehrke of Chicago. Mrs. Becker was his next bride, married in St. Louis. He gave

her a longer spell of happiness; she did not die till a year had elapsed.

Enjoying his freedom for a little, Hoch did not again marry until January, 1904. Mrs. Anna Hendrickson was the chosen one. She had five hundred dollars, which went the way of all cash on which Hoch cast his longing looks, and eighteen days saw the end of this romance.

Once more the name of Hoch tempted the bearer of the name. Mrs. Lena Hoch of Milwaukee gave her hand and fortune of one thousand five hundred dollars to the gentleman from Chicago. In three weeks, again, Hoch was paying funeral expenses.

You ask, as well you might, where were the police all this time? Did nobody suspect anything in these rapid marriages and funerals? Apparently not. Hoch was moving among stolid, home loving, law abiding, German-American citizens, who seldom find their names on the crime sheets. They accepted Hoch as one of themselves, a nice man who had misfortunes with his wives. Such a nice man!

In October of 1904, a German gentleman of the assumed name of John Schmidt, stepped up the aisle with Mrs. Caroline Streicher on his arm. This was in Philadelphia, where no one knew Johann Hoch, but he was taking no chances.

Once more the lure of freedom called Hoch from his married life, and with two hundred dollars, the profits of eleven days' flattery, he headed for Chicago, registering at Mrs. Bower's hotel.

He was living there when he went to the Chicago City Bank to negotiate the renting of a cottage. He said he was with Armour Co. As he appeared to be a responsible person, the cottage in Union Avenue was rented to him.

A few days later there appeared in

the Chicago *Abend Post*, a German paper, an advertisement to this effect:

Matrimonial—German, own home, like to meet lady without children. Object, matrimony. Address M 422, *Abend Post*.

Life was very drab for Mrs. Marie Walcker, who kept a small penny candy store at 12 Willow Street. Betrayed by a husband whom she had divorced, she was now forty-six years old. Though she put a bold front on it, life was difficult. The rent, the bills, the cost of food, of supplies for her meager stock, each item meant a prolonged and worrying arithmetic problem.

There was no future for her. She was too old to begin again, too old to get a man, too old to regain the hopes of youth.

Seated in the living room back of the store, with her sister, Mrs. Bertha Sohn, she rocked to and fro disconsolately.

"Ach, Gott, I wish I were dead and in my grave, Bertha. I am so tired, so tired. And the business—some day, maybe, there will be no business. Those drug stores—why don't they stick to the drugs and not take the pennies away from a poor woman?"

"You should get you a husband, Marie. A nice German man with a saloon, maybe."

"You must be crazy dumb, Bertha, where would I get a man? A man wants a young girl. No, I guess I got to go on to the end of my days selling two cents gumdrops, five cents jelly beans—and them kids with their sticky fingers all over everything. Ach, do you remember, Bertha, what mamma used to say? 'Enjoy your happiness when you can, maybe come sad days, little ones.'"

"Just listen to this," said Bertha from behind the pages of the paper.

She read aloud the advertisement inserted by the cunning Mr. Hoch.

"Why don't you write a reply, Marie?"

"Why, he don't want any one like me."

"He wants a widow without children. That's you, ain't it? You fix yourself up a bit and try your luck. I'll lend you my new silk dress."

Mrs. Walcker swayed in her chair.

"It ain't possible, Bertha."

"Everything's possible. Gott, didn't that Mrs. Schaus, fifty-six and maybe more, get that nice man in the delicatessen store in the next block? Crazy about her he is. I tell you, Marie, maybe this is your chance come at last. I tell you, write, right away."

"I must write? What could I say? I wonder what kind of a man he is, Bertha."

"You'll never know till you see him."

"Write to him, Bertha. Maybe he won't answer. He says he's got a home. Ach, to have a home and some comfort—"

"And maybe a nice fellow to kiss the hand and make love."

Mrs. Walcker's eyes grew dreamy. She sighed.

"I guess you're right, Bertha. You write the letter. I get you a pen and the ink and a sheet of the linen paper. It's more swell."

With much effort, the following letter was composed. I give the English translation:

DEAR SIR:

In answer to your honorable advertisement, I hereby inform you I am a lady alone. I am forty-six years old and have a small business, also a few hundred dollars. If you are in earnest,



I say I am also. I may be seen at 12 Willow Street.

Respectfully,

MARIE WALCKER.

It was thrust into the nearest mailbox, and breathlessly the sender awaited a reply. In case the recipient should take it into his head to spy out the land, Mrs. Walcker put on the blue silk dress and stood coyly at the door of the store. Every man who headed in the direction of the candy shop set her heart palpitating.

But the day ended without the coming of Prince Charming. And the next. The poor woman, who had let her fancy run away with her reason, was in despair.

And then, on the third day, a gentleman came into the store.

"Mrs. Walcker, is it not?" he said as he removed his hat and smiled. "Such a nice letter you wrote. I had to come and see the charming lady. I am Mr. Hoch, Johann Hoch, and I lost my dear wife two years ago. So I sit by my home and sigh and sigh, and then I say to myself, John—when I speak to myself, I always call myself John—as I hope you will, dear lady—I say, John, it is time you looked about for another Mrs. Hoch before you die yourself of loneliness. And so I put a little ad in the *Abend Post* and out of all the answers I pick yours—"

By this time the desperate woman had forgotten her past, her cares, her regrets. The present was here, the future held promise.

"Won't you come in and have a little something to drink, Mr. Hoch."

He shook a heavy finger at her.

"Did I not say to call me, John? I can see we are going to be good friends, Marie. You have a nice little business here, I can see that. I bet

when you count up at the end of the week you have something good to put into the bank, so. Well, well, a nice glass beer. There is nothing I enjoy as a good glass beer in a lonely woman's company. Health, lady. Ach, that was good. When I get married, and I don't say the name of the lady, we go back to Germany and see my father. Eighty-one years old. When he dies he leaves me fifteen thousand dollars."

"You say you have a home of your own, Mr.—John?" said Mrs. Walcker timidly.

"A nice cottage. Cost me eight thousand dollars. And I got some vacant lots. I tell you John Hoch is a pretty substantial man. She's a lucky woman that gets him for a husband. Plenty girls will envy the future Mrs. Hoch. What a pretty little hand you got. Well a wedding ring would look fine on that finger."

"But—but you don't know me—"

"I have eyes, lady, and my eyes don't tell me lies. I know a nice lady when I see one."

He drew closer to her.

Four days later they were married, and after the wedding went to live in the rented cottage on Union Avenue which the bridegroom had said belonged to him. Mrs. Hoch sold the good will of her candy store to another desperate widow for seventy-five dollars, which sum she gave to Hoch with her bank savings of three hundred and fifty dollars. She had no need for any provision for her old age.

Had she not got a nice, kind man who would love and cherish her until death did them part? Besides her husband said his money was tied up in a deal and he could not lay his hands on ready money. What was

his was hers; she must realize that what was hers was his.

### III

**N**ATURALLY Hoch met his wife's family. Mrs. Sohn he did not much fancy. She was not so much impressed by him, either, and apparently was a better character reader than her other sister, Mrs. Emilie Fischer, another widow.

Mrs. Fischer was no beauty, but she had what Hoch valued more, cash in bank. To be exact, the sum of eight hundred and ninety-three dollars, which was lying idle and benefiting no one. Hoch began to think hard. That money should be in his hands—but how?

The old game started. Ten days after the wedding, Mrs. Hoch was seized with cramps. As she got no better, Hoch called in a doctor, who diagnosed the case as Bright's disease.

Mrs. Hoch was moaning.

"My hands and feet, doctor—they feel crawly—they feel like ants was crawling over them—Ach Gott! Give me something."

The doctor, who was not an expert on poisons, and was obviously deceived by the symptoms, prescribed according to his diagnosis.

"Ach, my poor wife. Married just a week and such a sickness," groaned Hoch. "Will you not help her, doctor?"

He appeared to be in such a state of grief that the doctor spoke sharply to him.

"Pull yourself together, man. You are in no state to look after the patient. Can't you get some relative—a woman to come in?"

"I have it, yes," said Hoch suddenly alert. "I will get Mrs. Fischer, my wife's sister. Such a nice woman."

Mrs. Fischer came, took charge of things, and soon Hoch was saying pretty things to her. He picked up her photograph and said he would like to wear it next his heart. Several days after, he whispered boldly into her ear that had he met her before he married Marie he would have preferred her as his wife.

This whispering and coy corner conversation did not escape the notice of the patient, who, however sick she felt, was still interested in her husband, and one day she bitterly upbraided Emilie for her flirting with John. There were high words, and Mrs. Fischer in a passion took her departure.

She was soon back. Marie's condition was serious and this time she had no strength left to battle with her sister and husband, whatever they did. Hoch kept up his insidious work of winning Emilie.

On January 12, just a month after the wedding, Mrs. Hoch died. The same doctor signed her death certificate as due to the disease stated.

While Mrs. Hoch was lying dead, Hoch was continuing to charm Emilie.

When she remonstrated with him not to forget the dead, he lightly replied:

"The dead are for the dead and the living for the living. It don't make any difference to her, me talking to you this way."

But when the neighbors were around, a different Hoch was on view. This Hoch was the world's most disconsolate widower. He wept, he sobbed, he paced up and down. At the graveside he had to be supported or he would have collapsed.

Three days after the funeral Emilie became Mrs. Hoch. Hoch had told her they would go to Germany for a

honeymoon and see his old father before he died.

"When do we start?" asked the bride eagerly.

"Just as soon I can straighten out my affairs, Emilie. I need a thousand dollars to fix everything nice and then we can go. My money is all tied up just at the minute."

What could the new bride do, but draw seven hundred and fifty dollars out of her savings account and trustingly hand it over to John.

It was coming on to evening and the newlyweds went to the bride's former residence to collect some things. This was a rooming flat which she had at 372 Wells Street.

When they got there, one of the bride's roomers, Mr. Bauerborck answered the door and announced excitedly:

"Don't go in, Mrs. Hoch. Mrs. Sohn is here and she says he"—indicating Hoch—"murdered your sister. She says he's a swindler and a thief."

Mrs. Hoch looked sharply at her husband.

"What are you changing color for? If you haven't done anything wrong, you should not be afraid."

Hoch said nothing, but sat down.

"She says she is going to call the police," added the helpful roomer.

"She is crazy," said Hoch. "Go back you two and calm her down. I will wait here myself for you. Such a talk, Gott!—on my wedding day."

Mrs. Hoch and the roomer went back to the kitchen where Mrs. Sohn was holding forth to a neighbor. There was some excited talk and then the bride came back to the front of the apartment.

But Hoch was gone, and his wife did not set eyes on him again until she saw him behind the bars.

She was then ready to testify that she had seen him give her sister a light colored powder in water two days before her death.

Mrs. Hoch waited two days, and then turned in a call for the missing man, and from all over the country came the cries of the desperate women, still alive, who had been his victims. The dead made no outcry.

The body of Mrs. Hoch was exhumed. There were 7.6 grams of arsenic in the stomach, and 1.25 in the liver.

And, as we have seen, on January 30, Hoch was arrested. He was no way daunted. He was ready to give his views on the weakness of women. Flatter them and they fell like ripe plums. He declared he had no use for women, except as a business proposition. They wanted something; he gave them something—a lot of words that meant nothing to him, and in exchange he gladly accepted their money.

There was not an expression of regret in all this perverted philosophy of life. He prided himself on the quickness of his work, and sneered at the gullibility of the other sex. He always selected women who had passed forty-six. They fell without him having to make any effort. Crazy for a man, crazy for a home. Crazy to have some one to show off to other desperate women.

Hoch had a good lawyer, but casuistry of argument could not persuade a jury that Hoch should go free, and on May 19 a verdict was reached in half an hour. The jury had heard that he had married forty women in fifteen years, and that Marie Walcker had died of poison.

Three ballots were taken. Number one: jury unanimous as to his guilt. Two: ten for death and two for life



imprisonment. Ballot the third: jury agreed on death penalty.

When the verdict was read in court, Hoch collapsed like a pricked balloon.

"I guess it's all up with John now," he groaned.

Later that day he said to the newspaper men:

"I wish they would hang me to-night, now they have found me guilty. I am not afraid to die, and the sooner it is over the better. My life was guessed away by that jury, jah. They did not give sufficient consideration to the evidence."

"Did you really kill your wife, John?" asked one.

"By Gott, no. I hope they don't keep me in jail. I would rather die."

As he was led back to his cell he whistled a lively tune.

Strange as it may appear, this killer made friends in jail. The other prisoners fell under the unaccountable spell of the man. The chaplain who attended his last moments believed he was innocent. The last Mrs. Hoch repented of her squealing to the police and visited him with consoling words.

The execution was set for June 23, but on the morning of the last day a tender-hearted maiden lady advanced sufficient money to make up the sum required to appeal the case. She said she did not know the prisoner, but wanted to give him a chance to prove his innocence.

Early in 1906, the appeals court decided against the prisoner.

His death was fixed now to take place between the hours of ten and two, February 23.

"Well, boys," said Hoch, as he was placed in the death cell on the evening before, "I am ready. I will die game to-morrow. I go to the scaffold with a clear conscience."

A last hour attempt to save the man failed by a few minutes. The stay of execution, secured by his attorneys on the charge that Hoch had been robbed of his constitutional right in being taken out of New York on a warrant charging bigamy to be tried for murder in Illinois, was granted some twenty minutes after the drop fell in the county jail.

Hoch declared just before the last moment, so it is said, that he died innocent, and called on the heavenly Father to forgive his executioners.

An incident which I should have mentioned as occurring at the close of the address made by Hoch's attorney was this.

The attorney said to the jury:

"I ask you to take with you to the jury room a few lines of poetry and consider them. With these verses in your mind I believe you will give this man the liberty which he should have."

He then solemnly presented each member of the jury with a typed copy of the well known hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light!"

There is a story, apparently well authenticated, that when Mrs. Hoch came to claim the body, she in company with her spiritual adviser, went from cemetery to cemetery seeking to give it burial, and that two days elapsed before a last resting place was granted to the remains of the man who had been hanged.



# CHARACTER REVEALED IN YOUR HANDWRITING

EDITOR'S NOTE — *After making character analysis, through handwriting, his hobby for more than a score of years, John Fraser has recently won wide renown in New York City as a popular lecturer on this subject.*

*He conducts a thriving business of analyzing character from handwriting; and many notables in this country*



JOHN FRASER

*and abroad have complimented him on the accuracy of his findings.*

*By special arrangement his personal analysis is given to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY readers for ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE, or free with a \$1.00 subscription for thirteen issues (in Canada \$1.75 for subscription). Please fill out the special coupon.*

*Here is a sample of  
handwriting: T. u. g. - as suqc*

(P. F., Fairbury, Mont.) There is no denying the fact that you are "some man," unmistakably built for the wide open spaces of the world. I would say that Montana is a good place for you. You have the courage of your convictions. You love to speak your mind and tell the other fellow where to get off.

I was looking at an actor in a moving picture last night who would just be your type. They called him "The Sheriff," and, oh, boy, he did do some sherifing. He cowed the whole community into subjection with his personality—and his tongue. He was a bully, and as such, got away with murder. Now, though you are not half so bad as that, at the same time you have all the earmarks of a chap who loves to act the sheriff and do a little bossing around the lot. You have a temper, and a mean one at that. You give way too readily to a quick, hasty, grouchy humor.

As I have said to many another man with your tendencies, when you feel yourself getting hot under the collar retire into the cooling room for half an hour. You have too much animal heat in your system. As for your good qualities, you know about them.

*time for all  
to the air*

(H. O'C., Brantford, Ont.) You seem to be a fellow who is habitually in the dumps. You evidently believe in carrying three kinds of trouble around with you: all you have had; all you have at the present moment and all you expect in the coming year. Remember that a laugh is worth a hundred groans in any market. Why you have got into this condition of mind at your age—twenty-three—puzzles me. At your time of life your outlook should be opening up like a beautiful rose—not closing up like an old cabbage.

Fellows of your temperament are too prone to think that Trouble is another form of gum which they have to be forever chewing at, without throwing it away or swallowing it. Before you can hope for that "ship to come in," that you speak of in your letter, you will have to get another vision of life.

Throw your pessimism overboard. The next time you get down in the mouth think of old Noah. He was six hundred years old before he knew how to build an ark. There ought to be hope for you yet. Your other negative qualities don't amount to much, and as far as your virtues are concerned, they will take care of themselves.

*you to  
handwre*

(Miss H. N., Lagrange, Ga.) I am glad you found some one like myself to tell your troubles to. I don't mind

acting as a "safety valve" to any of my fair correspondents, so long as they confine their remarks to two pages, but when it runs into six, well, that's simply too much for a hard-worked graphologist.

Of course you have to remember you are no angel yourself, and when you were railing about your boy friend's superficiality I was thinking about your own obstinate and stiff-necked nature. If you were my sister I would give you a good scolding. I think the whole trouble between you and your sweet-heart can be traced to your own door. Girls with your disposition are like fish: neither would get into half the trouble they do get into, if they would only keep their mouths shut. Don't forget, little girl, that a wise woman has long ears and a short tongue.

If the truth were told, you belong to the type who are born crying, live complaining, and die disappointed. I feel sorry for the man you are engaged to. I know how difficult it's going to be.

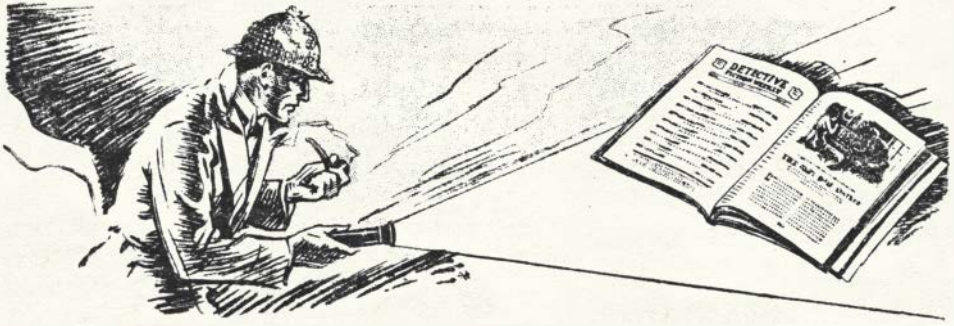
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## FLASHES FROM READERS

*Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind*

ON the inside front cover of this issue is a reproduction of our January 17 cover. We want to put over this idea: Henry Hyatt's story of his life is the most amazing document that has come into this office in a long, long time. And we don't want any of you to miss it.

When we received "I've Stolen \$1,000,000," we read it, absorbed—and incredulous; we could not believe that it was true. We told the author's agent that before we would consider buying it we would have to see Henry Hyatt, alias Thomas L. Duke, etc. So Henry Hyatt came to town.

He was here two weeks. We talked

to him at great length, questioning him about his history, checking incidents in his story. His answers were quick and comprehensive. And he told us more stories out of his glamorous career that we incorporated in the original manuscript. His record was also checked

with the police departments of many of the large cities where he operated—Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco—and some of the penitentiaries where he served time. His amazing tale is genuine, all right!

We're beginning to talk about this feature far enough ahead so none of you will miss the first installment. You had better start thinking right now about having



HENRY HYATT

a copy reserved at your newsdealer's. That issue is going to sell out!

**SINCE 1924 AND GOING STRONG**

DEAR SIR:

Permit me to say that I have been an indefatigable reader of your publication since 1924, having bought my first copy, if my memory serves correctly, either during the month of September or October of that year. It was called *Flynn's* at that time.

You and your staff are to be heartily and sincerely congratulated on your ability to select, from the many manuscripts that you undoubtedly receive, stories of the better kind—stories that have an appeal universally popular.

Personally, I think that the characters of *Riordan* and *Lester Leith* are superior to any, with *Jimmy Dugan* and *Inspector Frayne*, running close seconds. Among the authors themselves, I particularly enjoy Chas. Somerville, Victor Maxwell, and Knowlton Richardson, in his Pinkerton stories.

Is Erle Stanley Gardner as huge an enigma, personally, as is seemingly reflected in his literary contributions? For real versatility in writing, I have never found his equal, unless it would be our friend Odd McIntyre. An example of his antithetic trend is well evidenced in "In Round Figures," "Luck Charms," and *Señor Lobo*—all tremendously entertaining and at the same time vastly different in plot and character. Let us have more of him.

Accept, if you will, my best wishes for your continued success, and believe me to be,

Very truly yours,

JOHN B. DEHAVEN,  
Ferndale, Mich.

**BACK TO HOLLYWOOD**

DEAR SIR:

My wife and I are only six months out of Los Angeles and vicinity and "Projection X" took us right home. Fred MacIsaac certainly knows his Hollywood and vicinity and how to keep us interested.

Am waiting for his next one.

Keep your magazine as it is—perfect.

Sincerely,

C. J. WILLIAMSON,  
Kenosha, Wis.

**HE HAS THEM ALL**

DEAR EDITOR:

I just wish to add my two cents' worth to what has previously been said concerning your publication.

In my business I handle every magazine of the fiction group. That, coupled with the fact I have plenty of leisure time, gives me a chance to read almost every magazine issued.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY certainly stands out at the head of the list. I want to make one comment so far as authors are concerned Erle Stanley Gardner is a first-class ink-thrower writing for you. Maybe I should say typewriter-pounder.

JAMES L. HUDSON,  
Cleveland, Ohio.

**PACKING A "KICK"**

DEAR EDITOR:

I am a devoted reader of detective stories. Your stories seem to pack a "kick" that no other magazine of this type has. It's lucky for your readers that this is a weekly instead of a monthly magazine, because I don't think I could stand the strain of waiting a whole month for it.

My favorite authors are Erle Stanley Gardner, Fred MacIsaac, Edmund Snell. In my mind's eye DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is the best and most thrilling on the market.

ROBIN SIMPSON,  
Thomson, Ga.

Get an artist's illustration of a story in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Please fill out and send us coupon from ten different issues of the magazine.

**"HERE'S MY VOTE"**

Editor,  
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,  
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

6.....

7.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

12-27

# SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

**G**REETINGS, fans! A Merry Christmas to all! And a Bright and Happy New Year! May Santa cram your stockings with good things! And may health, happiness, and prosperity be yours through all the days to come! Incidentally, we also hope you will enjoy this week's puzzles, a special holiday selection! Here's a crossword cipher, with a sort of Christmas tree design, to open the festivities!



M. E. OHAVER

be solved by identifying GUXEJ as *young*. Thus, G occurring mostly as final (4 times out of 5) indicates y; U following y would probably be a vowel; E (used as penultimate 3 times in 7) could be tried as u; and low-frequency J coming after u could be guessed as g. Words 7 and 16, etc., follow.

The phrase LH HSSW LH should not be difficult to guess in Donald Lawes' No. 269, the first of this week's cryptograms. And with the symbol L identified, comparison should give you the words for QLXK, VQKJ, and VQKTF. Substituting the letters thus found, there will remain but two letters to supply in each of the words 1, 5, 6, and 9.

Comparison of symbols in common to the two-letter word ZJ and the endings -ZMJWP and -MWN should quickly effect your introduction into Mr. Nethercutt's "Romantic Party." Having thus become acquainted with some of the "folks," substituted in word 2 and guess the repeated symbol E. LEFEEKP should come next, checking with words 4 and 11; etc.

In Miss Holzinger's contribution you might start with the affixes DL- and -DLV, continuing with ML- and -DPL. These beginnings and endings will supply the key to the long eighth word (note the repeated symbol B), also to word 9. The rest of the message can then be worked out by substitution in the usual manner.

Just as a suggestion, in Ti. Tanic's crypt try for the endings -BCW'C and -YQ (note the use of Q as a final), and then set to work on word 3, where

No. 268—Cryptic Crossword.

1	2	3		4	5	6
7				8		
9			10		11	
		12		13		
14	15				16	
17				18		
19				20		

**HORIZONTAL**

- 1—ACFOA
- 7—PDCCR
- 8—GCVB
- 9—JCNEDG
- 11—GBSEDJ
- 12—KCXBD
- 14—ASBERBDA
- 17—PCN
- 18—OHRBNHAB
- 19—HFKOCATDB
- 20—SDCFCTF

**VERTICAL**

- 1—KUEORA
- 2—KEPHF
- 3—ZCDNEDG
- 4—EFL
- 5—OCHJBD
- 6—ATDBJL
- 10—EPLAA
- 12—YHAJDBAA
- 13—GCBA
- 15—GBKEL
- 16—UHFH

Last week's "Inner Circle" cipher No. 267 (see answer on page 575) may



Q is followed by the ending -RT. G. Fulton has put up an entertaining problem for you, fans, in this week's hardest or "Inner Circle" cipher! Here's wishing you luck with it!

No. 269—A Word to the Wise! By Donald E. Lawes.

PQFTHVULH VTY: QLXK LOO VKUYS-  
FLFJ AKPSFLVTSWH FKUSXKA LWA  
HLMKOJ ATHYSHKA SM LH HSSW  
LH VQKJ QLXK HKFXKA VQKTF  
YGFYSHK.

No. 270—Romantic Party. By B. C. Nethercutt.

ZCMKZV WEZMJWEU GCEKMZV JKN-  
EWMFEZMJWP CJUS XMPPMWN LEFE-  
EKP YKMSEV WMNCZ ZJ JLZEMW  
YOWSP YJK COWNKV JKHCEWP.

No. 271—Good Cheer! By Margaret Holzinger.

ASTTMLDFK PNNPDUE RXVXF ACUD-  
EFDPL VXLXUSEDK FSQPUB MLNSU-  
FMLPFX DLBDODBMPJE BMUDLV  
ACUDEFTPE CSJDBPKE.

No. 272—Cause and Effect. By Ti. Tanic.

XYZABCWC UBVTZU TBCDYFQRT  
GFALRYZJCYQ AFAR CDREBGRV

ZAENBTC. KRFJWBXJY EYZYAC TARU  
RVWNJCBFCWBE EAZUTC TFBYQ.

No. 273—Timeo Saccharia. By G. Fulton.

LIE NBIHU MIHCY BOHUATS APPAR-  
DOSUN LIHSY UIMODY DIBV BOSYE  
COSY: OKIAY RDHGG BIBIOSHU  
LODN; RHODY OROASNU LADY NZIU  
MAUZ TIT BIDS LOCCN, MZACNU  
BIHRZ YDITN ODIHSY OPISR MACY  
LDHNZ.

### LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

263—To the great European honor roll containing illustrious artists' names, America may proudly add four, rightfully placed with immortals: Innes, Whistler, Tryon, Sargent.

264—Alert, farsighted steel construction manufacturers are aggressively promoting greater business by offering superior arc-welded products.

265—Without doubt the bard from Samoa, in drab apparel, sat about eight rods outside our dugout, lunching on soup and cocoa.

266—Oyez! Cranial discomfort resulting from contributors' chaotic platitudes engenders revengeful desires! Anticipate apprehensively future constructive endeavors!

267—Svelte Maori beauty jilts Hindu water boy, weds bold young Zufi chief, cajoles corn-fed jury. Bountiful alimony obtained!

Answers to Nos. 268-73 will be published next week. Last call for the December Solvers' Club, fans! To enroll, just send us the solutions to one or more of this week's puzzles!

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**On most newsstands, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY sells out quickly. Don't risk missing next week's issue and the answers to the puzzles. Have your newsdealer reserve your copy!**

## COMING NEXT WEEK!

"I BĒG pardon, sah, but I would like to have you take a good look at dat dar boat out yonder," the colored chair-pusher said earnestly. "I—uh, seems as though they was somethin' out dar. A—a ghost!"

The gentleman in the chair leaned forward and peered intently at the wrecked schooner on the sand bar.

And on the moldering derelict of the sailing ship, rotten and crumbling from exposure to wind and tide, a misty white figure was moving—moving easily, lightly, as though floating—moving over rotten decks that would crumble under the weight of a person.

"By George, there *is* something out there!" he said tensely. "But—I don't believe in ghosts." Fascinated, he stared at the wispy figure that flitted over the wreck.

But the colored man was not listening to him. His terrorized gaze had shifted to the beach below him. There was a set—a sand sculpture group made and exhibited by one of the beach artists who took in a rain of silver from appreciative onlookers. There were two bathing beauties, the Goddess of Liberty, a soldier, some children, horses, and a lion, all done in life size in the sand.

And then the chair-man screamed, his whole body shaking with fright, teeth chattering, eyes bulging.

"Oh, lawdy, mister, jes' go take a look at them figures!" he cried shrilly. "Them two bathin' girls. They ain't sand—they're *real*!"

There, in the sand below, lay the bodies of two beautiful girls, stretched in the hideous likeness of the two sculptured beauties the sand artist had made, limbs disposed as they had been, grotesque, nerve-shaking.

The moon had risen and illuminated the scene with a white light—a light that showed a misty form still floating over the decks of the Sally Ann.

What was the connection between the bodies in the sand and the ghost that appeared on the wreckage of the schooner? Next week—begin this gripping murder mystery,

## Modeled in Murder

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

And read also fast, exciting stories by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, J. ALLAN DUNN, EDWARD PARRISH WARE, J. LANE LINK-LATER, and other favorite writers. Start the New Year right with the best in mystery fiction in

## DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—January 3

# Action! Glamour! Drama! Romance!

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No field is so replete with all these elements as that confined to two narrow strands of steel, snaking over mountain or plain or desert or swamp. For instance, take



## Dynamite Dan

By James W. Earp

The story of a fighting brakeman who battled because he loved to battle, until he banged his way out of a woman's heart and the only home he ever knew. Here is the main line in all its roaring glory.

## Gangsters of the Rails

By E. S. Dellinger

A serial now running with a breathless speed through dark intrigue in the Ozarks.

- 4 True tales of railroading by men who actually work in and around the moving trains.
- 5 Intensely gripping short stories.
- 6 Profusely illustrated features.

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# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

FOR JANUARY

25c

On sale at all Newsstands

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# They dared Officer Kane to play



## ..and his music held them spellbound

ETHEL'S house party was at its height—when suddenly there came an ominous knocking at the door. Ethel ran to open it and—there stood Police Officer Kane.

"I want to see the man of the house," thundered Kane. "I'm sorry," stammered Ethel nervously, "but my father is not at home."

"Well, what's goin' on in here anyway?" continued the officer sternly. "Every one on the block is complainin' of the noise. I've a good mind to arrest the lot of you."

Ethel was mortified—what a disgrace!

"Oh please," pleaded Ethel. "Please don't do anything like that."

Then Kane burst out laughing.

"Don't worry, lassie—you were all havin' such a fine time I couldn't help droppin' in," he explained.

"Oh," sighed Ethel, "how you frightened me. Won't you join us?"

### Kane Joins the Party

"Ha," laughed Kane, as the Victrola started again, "why must you play that canned music—can't any of you play this beautiful piano? Sure, I'd like to give you a tune myself."

"I dare you to play for us," shouted Ted Strong.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be goin'," stammered Kane, embarrassed.

"Mr. Kane, I think you might play for me after the fright you gave me," smiled Ethel.

"Well, b'gorry, maybe I will," agreed the officer. And as he sat down at the piano everyone laughed. But the noise stopped when he struck the first rollicking notes of the famous "Song of the Vagabonds."

"More—more."

"That's great—play another," they all shouted as the last notes of that snappy march song died away. Kane then started that stirring old soldier song "On the Road to Mandalay," following it with song hits from the latest shows.



"Well," he laughed, as they finally let him get up from the piano, "I'll have to be on my way now."

"Thank you for your lovely music," said Ethel. "You must be playing a good many years!"

"Sure, and I haven't been playin' long at all." Then the questions came thick and fast. "How did you ever learn so quickly?" "When do you find time to practice?" "Who was your teacher?"

### Kane Tells His Story

"Well, to tell you the truth I had no teacher. I've always loved music, but I couldn't take regular lessons on account of my duties as a policeman. Then one evening, I saw a U. S. School of Music advertisement, tellin' of a new way of learnin' to play. I didn't believe it myself but I sent for their Free Demonstration Lesson that showed

me how easy it was, so I wrote for the whole course.

"There were no tiresome scales or tedious exercises. I played real pieces almost from the start. Now I'm playin' classical numbers or jazz, havin' the time of my life."

\*\*\*

This is not the story of just one isolated case. Over 600,000 people have learned to play by this simple method. You can, too. Even if you don't know one note from another you'll grasp it in no time. First it *teaches* you how to do a thing—then it *shows* you how in pictures—then you do it yourself and *hear* it. You teach yourself—right at home—with-out any uninteresting finker exercises, tedious scales or other humdrum methods.

### Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson

To prove how practical this course is, the U. S. School of Music has arranged a typical demonstration lesson and explanatory booklet which you may have free. They show how anyone can learn to play his favorite instrument by note in less than half the time and at a fraction of the cost of old slow methods. The Booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*. Don't delay—act at once—fill in and mail the coupon below today—no obligation whatever.

(Instruments supplied if desired, cash or credit.) U. S. School of Music, 10312 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

### Pick Your Instrument

- |                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Piano                               | Violin    |
| Organ                               | Clarinet  |
| Ukulele                             | Flute     |
| Coronet                             | Saxophone |
| Trombone                            | Harp      |
| Piccolo                             | Mandolin  |
| Guitar                              | Cello     |
| Hawaiian Steel Guitar               |           |
| Sight Singing                       |           |
| Piano Accordion                     |           |
| Italian and German                  |           |
| Accordion                           |           |
| Voice and Speech Culture            |           |
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| Drums and Traps                     |           |
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| Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor) |           |
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Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

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