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FICTION WEEKLY

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ON SET 13**

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DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY



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Formerly FLYNN'S

VOLUME CIX

MARCH 27, 1937

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Death

CHAPTER I

Pay-off



HE had finished a pint of whisky, but he was sober; sober now, suddenly, when a moment before his mind had been fogged, and the fume of the liquor had been on his breath. The thin, fine specks of sweat oozed through his tan grease paint. His face was glistening brown; the eyes bloodshot, yet sharp, little flames burning in them; the loose mouth now in a grim and even line.

He was sober, and he watched the

kid put down his cards and reach over and scoop his last ten dollars into his lap. Jack Swanson's voice was flat, he said:

"You are lucky, Brandon."

Brandon was a chorus boy, fresh out of a Los Angeles college, and he grinned weakly; but there was no humor in it; nor any humor in the faces around the little table.

"Yeah," Brandon said, "I guess I am."

Everyone was looking at Jack Swanson, and the silence was tense and heavy so that he felt it. Everyone was waiting for him—good old Jack whose career had been a long if not glorious



On Set 13

Tony Key, The World's Highest Paid Detective, Was Forced to Earn His Salary, When That Movie Murder Blew the Lid Off Hollywood

By Steve Fisher

one through horse opera to playing a Park Avenue gentleman; and who at fifty, long, lean and gray-haired, was still trying to be cast as a dashing juvenile—to put down his cards and say he was through.

The sound stage was quiet, even back here in the darkest corner where no one spoke. Behind Swanson, a long way behind, it seemed, flood lights gradually reached out shafts of whiteness. Something snapped, like a cracker. A voice called for silence, and another voice: "Camera—Action."

Jack Swanson should have put down his cards to say that he was going over and watch the scene, but he couldn't. He was trembling, and so cold sober that he could feel his heart hammering against his side. He had worked only six days, but each day he had played—telling Ann they were going to pay him by the week, instead of by the day, as they were paying him—and each day he had lost.

Six hundred badly needed dollars. The picture needed him in only one more shot, so after today he would be

finished. He knew, thought he knew, what Ann would say when he came home with only one day's pay envelope.

This work in *Pride of the Nation* had been his first in over a year, and when Central Casting had called him, he remembered Ann, face lined, peroxidized hair with streaks of gray in it; stringy, because she had not had a permanent for months. How bright her eyes had been, how deeply thankful her voice.

"I don't care what you say about Sam Schmidt," she had said, "he is good, and kind. After what we did to him—it would take most men more than ten years to get over it. He's given you this part because he knows we need money, *I* need money. There's something awful decent about that, don't you think?"

"Decent?" Jack Swanson had replied, "don't be silly, Ann. He's still the shrewd producer he was when he coined two million for himself. *Pride of the Nation* is to be a big thing, containing a galaxy. I'm a star, and he knows he can get me cheap. Imagine, a hundred a day—"

"He might have had you cheaper," she reminded him.

"Who said so? Cranston, that agent? What does he know? I'm quits with him. Quits with all agents!"

"Just the same," Ann said softly, "I think he's nice. Seven hundred dollars will save us from—let's not say what from. Let us just say that it will save us. To do that for me, a faithless wife who deserted him for a handsome actor. Well, it brings home to me that there is something in Hollywood except tinsel."

"I tell you his motive is purely commercial," Jack had snapped angrily. "He swore he'd make me sorry someday for taking you, and he hasn't for-

gotten so quickly. He has some other reason."

And now, he sat there, staring at the paste-board cards which lay unshuffled on the table. He was conscious of the embarrassed silence, the eyes of the others. Particularly two of the men who stared at him now, and in whose hearts, as well as his own, lay a deep rooted and mutual hatred.

In Hollywood you drank and laughed and gambled with your enemies sometimes; and suffered the jealousy of their success, and smugly swelled when you did something better than they. It was life: a kind of a game in which the winner took all, and the loser ranted bitterly of injustice to talent.

JACK SWANSON brought a piece of paper from his pocket, fished nervously over his clothing for a pencil. He was sweating too much, breathing too hard. He scribbled awkwardly across the paper:

I O U

One Hundred Dollars

Payable this date at the cashier's booth.

He shoved it to the center of the table, and looked up at Percy Brandon. "Do you mind risking your—winnings, against that?"

The chorus boy's eyes were hot. His face was in the shadow, but Jack could see the glint in his blue eyes, the smooth shine on his blond hair; the weak jaw. Brandon wet his lips.

"Listen, old man," he said, "I—"

"Put up your hundred," Jack said coldly. "And if I ever find out that you've been cheating during these games—I am not saying that you have. Men *do* have uncanny luck, but—" He clipped the sentence there, the flames in

his eyes burning brighter. Brandon shrugged helplessly and shoved five twenties out on the table.

Jack looked at the next man, who, too, had won no small portion in the games of chance.

"You, Chesterton? Straight draw for the pot. No ante, no bidding."

Luke Chesterton was a round-faced little man who wore horn-rimmed glasses, taking them off only when he was acting. He had come from Broadway, where they called him funny, to be part of the galaxy in *Pride of the Nation*. He was one of the men who hated Jack Swanson, and his resigned expression indicated that he was disgusted that things had turned out as dramatically as they had. Although he commanded a high salary, he was a frugal man, and when he had come into the game it was ten-cent ante.

He pushed ten ten-dollar bills out into the table and spoke in a low-toned voice. "This isn't fair, Swanson. We are not debted to you to give you a chance of gaining back what you have lost. I am doing it only because it gives me great pleasure to fill the begging hand of the man who, five years ago, was such a big handsome hero at a certain party in Malibu." Bright eyes shone from beneath the panes of his glasses.

Jack knew what he meant. It had been another time when Luke Chesterton was working in Hollywood and he was head over heels in love with Myrna Bow, who had since made a good marriage. Jack Swanson had been intoxicated, and when an opportunity had arisen to ridicule the dumpy little Broadway comedian, he had been merciless. Until work on *Pride of the Nation* had begun last week, he had not seen Chesterton since, and it was with surprise that he had learned the

comedian still nursed the bitter grudge against him.

Bill Borden, extra and bit player who had never tasted real fame in all his long life, and who had once tried to blackmail Jack, was the next man. His daily pay was only twenty-five dollars and he had a desperate need for the money. Thin, sallow face bitter, he shook his head as Jack looked toward him.

"You can count me out."

But as he stared into Jack Swanson's eyes a change suddenly came over Bill Borden; it was as if he had looked into the face of death. Reluctantly, not knowing himself why he did it, he pushed a great stack of five, ten and one dollar bills into the pot, and came into the game.

Jack Swanson picked up the deck. He gazed at Percy Brandon; at Luke Chesterton; at Bill Borden. The other man at the table had neither won nor lost and could not be asked to risk a hundred dollars.

Jack shuffled, his fingers cold and tingling as he sifted the heavy cards. Silently, he began to deal. When he was through he picked up his cards. A drum seemed to beat wildly in his mind. Two aces! Quickly, he discarded three, glanced around. Brandon took only one, Chesterton two, and Bill Borden, his wrinkled face creased in an expression of hatred, four.

JACK SWANSON squeezed the cards now, looked at them. Bill Borden threw down his hand and got up and left the table. Chesterton laid down a pair of nines. Shaking, laughter bubbling from his soul, Jack put down three aces. Eyes hot, feverish and hot, he looked toward Percy Brandon.

The youth laid down four deuces.

For a moment Jack Swanson could not breathe, could not think. He felt as though cold water were drenching his face, his body, and leaving him shivering. He laughed, although it was more like a hoarse cackle, and it rasped his throat, and then he pushed back the table and got to his feet.

He walked, knowing no sense of direction, nor reason; feeling numb in mind and in muscles, and drunk again suddenly, so that he reeled. He heard music coming from the splendid inside set that was now shooting. *Aloha Oe . . . Farewell . . . Farewell.*

He left the set, went outside, and walked through the dirt of the street, past the big sound stages, past the cottages; and the music did not leave his ears, but played over and over again, making him remember his first picture when he had played as a subordinate to Tom Mix. And then the others, through the years, where he had been a fast riding, hard-shooting hero; or a fast talking, romantic hero.

Suddenly he realized he was walking down the board walk in front of the studio's executive offices. He was in front of the office of the president. Frosted glass door, and gold letters: "*Samuel Schmidt—Executive Producer.*"

He said hoarsely: "Sam will loan me some. He has to. Sam with millions. He still loves Ann. He'll loan me the money. I'm not through yet. Not by a long way."

He did not knock. He put his hand on the cold bronze knob of the door and turned it.

He entered the office. Sam Schmidt looked from his desk, and the cigar that was in his mouth went limp.

Jack Swanson closed the door as though it required great effort to close it. He leaned back, and a half smile,

half stupor fanned weakly over his lined face.

"I came to see you, Sam," he said. "First time in ten years. I want to talk to you. You don't mind talking to anybody so measly as an actor, do you? You aren't so busy that the guy who took your wife can't get a word in, are you? I hope not, because there are some things I want to say, see? Some things I've been wanting to say for a long time."

CHAPTER II

Tony Key

ON the door of a Hollywood Boulevard office was the proclamation:

ANTHONY KEY
Exclusive Representative
Motion Pictures

However, unlike the office doors of movie agents, this one was never locked. And if you were a bit player whose weary business it was to pack a Sunday smile and a big bluff into a brief case and drag it around with you from casting office to casting office, and agent to agent. If you were this, or a faded star, or a writer whose option was up in a week, or any one of the other human beings desperate enough to chance any door that had the mark of "agency" on it, and you entered Anthony Key's office, you would not be surprised at what you saw, unless it happened that you were impressed with lavishness.

You would wade through a thick black rug into which your heels would sink until they were out of sight. You might sit on one of the expensive plush leather chairs and wait your turn, or, if the place were empty, go directly to the girl who sat at the shiny black ebony,

desk, and who wore a patent leather dress that fitted tightly about her hips, and matched, curiously enough, the ebony. You would say: "I am Herman Horowitz. DeMille once told me—"

And she, the lovely girl, her platinum hair a radiant halo against the ominous black; her face warm, the glistening red of her lips curved in a slight and heartening smile, would tell you that Mr. Key was not at liberty, at present, to take on additional talent.

Which was true, for as a matter-of-fact, Anthony Key was not, is not, an agent. Of course you didn't know that. But the Hays office knows it; so does the Los Angeles Police, and the Department of Justice. However, combined with only a handful of the biggest producers and studio executives, they are all who share the secret.

Anthony Key, whose salary was one of the biggest in Hollywood, was known to the general public only as a more or less "minor" agent.

Anthony Key was, is, the world's highest paid detective.

The voice that came through the wire was high, shrill, and very excited. As Tony Key listened to it, he was conscious of a queer feeling surging up through his stomach and into his chest. There had been robbery, and fraud, and blackmailing, but not for a long time had there been murder.

And if he were going to squash all publicity, and get the papers to list Jack Swanson's death as "natural" and save, as Schmidt said, a three hundred thousand dollar production from ruin, he would have to hustle.

He said: "Okay, Mr. Schmidt."

Five minutes later, still on the phone, he said: "Okay, Mr. Schmidt."

Ten minutes later he said it again, and hung up. He swung about in the swivel chair, drew a pad of paper to-

ward him and began writing. His hair was black, smoothly combed; his face was so tan he looked like an actor made-up; the white of his teeth, and the green of his eyes, made contrast. He was young.

A year or so ago he had been a Federal Agent.

THERE was a reason why he got it, of course. He had cracked a half a dozen studio cases, as a G man; and he had chalked up scores in deduction that were almost unbelievable. He could shoot, and fly, and ride horse back; and he handled his fists like Gene Tunney.

He wore a neat blue suit, a white sweater; and a hidden shoulder holster in which nestled a slim blue automatic. He rang the bell on his desk now, and looked up at the platinum blond as she entered.

"We've a murder in our lap, Betty."

Her eyebrows lifted. "That's a break."

He said quietly: "Jack Swanson."

"Hmm. A biggie who's been laying eggs lately. Where was he working?"

"Paramet," Tony answered, and he leaned back and caught his breath; lit a cigarette. Just looking at Betty Gale gave him a throbbing pulse. She had been a stock girl at one of the studios when he "rescued" her; and he was still afraid to let her go near a studio for fear somebody might decide to make her a star. It was his fond idea that if he were persistent enough, he could, eventually, make her Mrs. Key.

"Paramet," she repeated, then snapped her fingers. "Oh, that super-gigantic colossal pic where everybody in the cast is supposed to be a star. It'll sort of freeze the box office, if we don't turn on the hush-hush, won't it?"

"It might also very well freeze our

jobs," Tony said. "Gather the cast." The cast was Tony Key's staff of talent who, the moment a crime occurred, drifted unobtrusively onto the scene, forming his own private spy net.

"Oke," said Betty, and went to the door. She turned. "How 'bout me, too? Daisy will take the office, if—"

He slapped his hand on the desk. "Absolutely not! You stay *here!* On the phone. There may be—"

But she had slammed the door after her.

Twenty-two minutes later Tony Key was in Schmidt's private office where the corpse lay on its side, a knife—hilt deep—in the back.

Jack Swanson's face seemed to be frozen stiff, rigid. His eyes, like pieces of glass, were staring straight ahead. He clutched, half-clutched, in his hand, a little bronze lion paper weight. Tony looked up, his green eyes flickering.

"Why did you kill him, Mr. Schmidt?"

Sam Schmidt's fat, flabby face, was dripping with sweat; half a cigar, unlighted, ragged, bobbed up and down in his mouth as he spoke. His small brown eyes glowed like livid spots of varnish.

"For the love of Pete, you don't think *I* did it? Think I would call you over here if I had did a thing like *that*? You must be mad. *I've* been going crazy waiting for you to get here! I'm nervous; I'm going to pieces! All this time I have been here with him, *that*—" he looked at the corpse, "alone with him, his eyes looking at me, his lips sneering. Dead lips sneering; dead eyes looking—"

"I know," Tony said quietly, "you told me that on the phone." He glanced at an open window, walked over and examined it. "This isn't usually open, is it? In fact, until now, it hasn't been

opened since it was last painted; because chips of the paint fell off when you forced it to open. You told me over the phone that while your back was turned you heard Swanson call out. You looked around, saw a figure vanish past the window. Then you noticed there was a knife in Swanson's back."

"Yes, that's right. That's exactly what happened."

"What was the occasion then, for opening the window?"

"While you're about it, you might tell me *why* you didn't pull the knife out of Swanson?"

SCHMIDT took the cigar from his mouth. "You're on the wrong track," he barked. "Why should I want to kill that ham andegger? The window was open because he came in here threatening me and I opened it so that in the case he became violent I could call out. As for the knife, to pull it out would have caused a profusion of blood. And he was dead before he hit the floor."

"You are *sure* of that?"

"Well, I—I thought I was."

Tony Key grinned, a tight grin that told nothing of what he thought; yet was affable. "Okay, Mr. Schmidt. But you have to admit that the cops would hit you harder than that under the circumstances. You're on a pretty tough spot."

"I know—oh I know it all right. That's what I get for trying to be nice to him."

He picked up a new cigar, bit off the end, and nervously lit it.

Tony looked around, glanced back at the corpse, then up at the producer. "Keep them working. All night if you have to. Tell them there's orders to make it a rush job. And remember, not a word about *this*—" he jerked his

thumb in the direction of Swanson.

"Don't worry," Sam Schmidt assured him, "I—" The phone clattered shrilly, and he picked it up, looking nervously at Tony. "Yes? *What?* I see— Oh! All right, I'll see her." He hung up, his voice was tense. "It was sound stage six where *Pride of the Nation* is shooting. Britton, my director said a crazy woman has been running around there. She's headed for my office now—"

"—But she is not crazy," a voice from the window said.

Tony Key saw what he thought was an old woman. Her face might have been pretty, but there were lines in it, and red streaks where tears had washed off the powder. There were black pockets under her burning eyes; and her thick blonde-gray hair was a disarranged mat.

"Ann," Schmidt gasped, "Ann Swanson!"

She said hoarsely: "Yes, Ann Swanson. I am looking for the man I love, and the man you hate. What have you done with him? Oh, I know you've done something. That it was you who wrote this note. I should have seen through it when you hired him, but I—"

She broke off suddenly; in the next second a high, shrill scream broke from her lips.

CHAPTER III

The Man in the Mask

A FEW minutes later they pulled her, still sobbing, from the corpse of her husband and forced her to sit down in the big leather chair. She was still hysterically accusing Schmidt of the murder. but Tony Key managed to get her to give him the note she had received. While she sat moan-

ing, rocking back and forth, he took it back to the desk and read it.

To Ann Swanson:

You and your husband are going to die.

You know the reason.

I am telling you in advance so you may know, and suffer in the knowledge.

It was printed, and unsigned.

"When did you receive this?"

"A few minutes ago," she answered, wiping her tear-stained face. "We live only down the street, and naturally I hurried right to the studio to see Jack."

Tony Key's smooth face was without expression, and his green eyes were hard. "It says you know the reason. What is it?"

Eyes hot, she looked at Schmidt. "He knows. He can tell you."

For a moment Tony Keys did not move. He glanced at Schmidt, back at Ann Swanson. Then he got up and closed the window, bolting it. He turned the lock in the door, and went back to the phone, he put his hand on it, but before picking it up, said:

"So far as I am concerned, this case starts right now. Schmidt, you and Mrs. Swanson are going to remain in this office. Under guard. Both for your protection, and to prevent either of you from escaping. I suspect you both. If I have made myself clear on that point, I will proceed."

"By all means do," Schmidt breathed.

"All right, if neither of you are the killer, the killer is not aware of how fatal was his knife; even though he may well suspect that he has successfully killed Jack Swanson. But it would have been improbable for him to linger long enough to make sure. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that if the murderer sees Swanson alive, realizes that he has only wounded him, he

will make another attempt to bring about his death as quickly as possible. Do you both agree?"

Ann Swanson said in a heavy whisper: "You are a young fool who is wasting his time. Sam Schmidt is responsible for what has happened!"

"In that case," Tony Key went on, "there will be no attempt made on Jack Swanson's life, and I will know—"

Schmidt leapt to his feet. "What are you talking about? Swanson is dead! He can't return to life! Have *you* gone crazy, or have I?"

Tony Key leaned across the desk, spoke slowly. "I cannot vouch for you, Mr. Schmidt. As for myself, I deem it advisable to assume the role of Jack Swanson. In a few minutes my make-up expert, and a man who will be armed to *protect* you and Mrs. Swanson while you remain here in the office, will be here. In a very few minutes, if Betty Gale has not fallen down on me."

He lifted the phone now, called his own office. His eyes were cold, hard, and his lips were tight; but when Betty came on the phone, without changing expression, his voice became suddenly smooth.

"Hello, Sugar. This is Papa who is already up to his neck, and doing nicely, thank you. Listen. I want you to send Curley and Max down here right away. Mr. Schmidt's office. They are to speak to no one—just use their passes. Tell Max to bring his bag of tricks along. I am going to represent a corpse who got up and walked again. Mr. Schmidt told me when he called, how Swanson had been playing cards. Well—"

TONY KEY came in through the sliding door, and walked straight out to the edge of the South Sea shack set which was numbered "13." He uncorked a bottle of whisky, and

leaning against the scenery, gulped some down. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and jammed the bottle back into his pocket. He blinked now because the slow, powerful klieg lamps were beginning to come back on. The huge camera, cords extending from it to the sound machine, slid down its tracks for a close up. The first cameraman adjusted the big square "eye" and stand-ins for the stars stood in while the second cameraman posed them first one way, then another.

The skinny, second-assistant director was rushing about screaming for the carpenter to bring in a few more buckets of sand for Waikiki Beach; and presently the sun—the biggest and most costly lamp of all—began to come on, and even at thirty feet, almost scorched the grass roof of the hut. Myrna Bow, rich red hair streaming down her shoulders as far as the shapely thighs which were adorned with a grass skirt, stood watching from one of the wings.

Presently the actors came in and took the place of the stand-ins. Britton, the heavy-set director, came forward.

He looked very grim and pompous; wore a white turtle-neck sweater. The script in his hand, he said: "You, Miss Bow. A moment after I have called action. You look to where Harry will enter, saying: 'But you can not go, my darling. You must not go. I am white, but I have adopted these people; and you must adopt them, too.' Say that now, please."

She said it, and Britton faded back even with the camera. The lights were getting brighter each moment. Suddenly the distant slopes of Diamond Head began to tremble.

Britton looked around and his face went white: "*Mr. Swanson,*" he shrieked. "You are leaning on the

scenery! Will you *please, please* get the hell out of the way!"

Tony Key moved quickly away from the scenery, grumbling to himself. Luckily, Britton had shouted loud enough to have his voice heard all over the sound stage, and Tony figured that about now a killer's heart should be up in his mouth; provided, of course, that the killer was here.

He moved back through the scenery that was not in use, back farther into the shadows where various cliques of extras, bit players, and stars who were not needed for the present shot were resting, playing bridge, or poker, or talking in whispers. Deep into the right, rear corner he came upon the flimsy table on which Swanson had lost six hundred dollars and an I O U chit. Six men were sitting about it, deeply intent in a game of poker.

This was Hollywood, Tony Key thought. They paid you for a day's work; paid the actors and extras, and whenever they actually had to get up and go on the set for a shot, they grumbled until they were allowed to retire to the wings again.

It was a great life. They would starve one day, and grumble during work at the next.

BUT there were things more important than summarizing the character defects of filmdom's lesser entities: Percy Brandon's hat was stuffed with money, and the blond chorus boy was wearing a grim, almost mocking smile. Luke Chesterton's eyes were almost popping from beneath the horn-rimmed glasses. The comedian from Broadway had ripped off his tie, and he was sweating profusely. It was apparent that he had been losing. Bill Borden, a stack of five dollar bills in front of him, looked uneasy, unsatis-

fied; it appeared that the old bit player was just breaking even.

There were others at the table, of course, but these were the men Tony Key had gained the information about while Max made a wax—pliable—mould of Jack Swanson's dead face, for him; while his hair was dyed, and grease paint was splashed over him. He even wore the clothes Swanson had been wearing, including the knife-gash and blood on the back of the coat.

The three were so intent on their game that they had not noticed him. "Mind if I get in?" Tony asked in a flat voice.

The three men looked up as one. The smug smile dropped from Percy Brandon's face. He brought out a handkerchief, wiped his forehead, cast a glance at the others. Bill Borden, lighting a cigarette, grunted: "Sure, but no more four hundred dollar pots." Luke Chesterton was trembling, and silent.

One of the extras got up and Tony Key sat down. It was just light enough to see the cards and he knew no one would penetrate the disguise. He flipped a hundred dollar note across the table.

"My I O U, Brandon."

Brandon laughed nervously and tore it up. He put the bill in his hat.

Bill Borden leaned forward. "Where did you get the cash?"

"Friend of mine," Tony Key said evenly. "He wasn't going to do it, but somebody tried to knife me. He wasn't a very good shot. By the way, where did you boys go after I left the table?"

"I didn't go anywhere," Bill Borden said hotly. "Percy and Chesterton were called for a shot. Why? You don't think we tried to knife you, do you?"

Tony Key laughed, shook his head. He passed the bottle around, then took a nip himself. At last he threw two tens

and a five into the center of the table. "I'm for a twenty-five dollar ante. Make things interesting."

Two of the men at the table immediately withdrew, but Brandon, Chesterton and Borden contributed silently, and one of the other men, a dapper little extra, fished the amount out of his pocket to be dealt in.

Tony Key picked up the cards, and he was conscious that they felt heavy in his hands. His eyes were on the players; sharply watching each one of them. Quietly, he dealt, picking up only a pair of fives.

After the discard he picked up another five.

When everyone laid down Chesterton had three tens; Perry Brandon, grinning again now, three jacks.

"I win," Tony Key said quietly. He looked across the table. "And I'll take exactly seven hundred and twenty-five dollars."

CHAPTER IV

Death Comes Again

SWEAT ran, streaked, across Percy Brandon's face, and his blue eyes were hot. For a moment he was unable to move, and then he tried to laugh. But his eyes were directed down at the table where Tony Key's finger pried a card apart, so that it made two separate cards. That was why the deck had felt heavy.

If you knew the trick you could double everything you had, making a pair into four of a kind; and later, in the shuffle, slide the cards together again, dissolving four into two again.

"You play a nice game, Brandon," Tony said softly.

The blond chorus boy shoved his chair back a little; his eyes had not left Tony's. Chesterton was staring at

Brandon; Bill Borden stared also. At last Brandon spoke, in a whisper.

"Don't get sore, guys," he pleaded. "I'll give you the dough, all of it, my own included. It was just that I was desperate. I wanted to get away from Hollywood. Go somewhere and live a quiet, decent life. I—" he choked, "I thought you knew, Swanson, I—"

"Is that why you threw a knife at me?"

"No! I swear I didn't do that." Brandon got to his feet clutching the hat full of money. His face was drained white and Tony could see the throbbing in his temples. The kid dumped the hat on the table. "There take it, all of it, and—"

A scream, the high, shrill scream of a woman echoed and reechoed suddenly through the sound stage. Following the first cry there were more screams, other screams. A babble of voices rising into a furious din.

Tony Key leapt from the chair, raced through the scenery to set number 13. A crowd of people were surrounding a figure who lay prone in the sand. Tony barged through quickly. He saw the beautiful star Myrna Bow lying on her back, eyes closed. Britton was rubbing her wrists.

"Get Mr. Schmidt," he commanded.

Both of the assistant directors took up the call and it was echoed by the script girl. Tony bent down beside the director.

"What's the matter?"

Britton glanced around at him. "Get out of here, Swanson. She's dead. You can see that, can't you?"

"Dead, but I—"

"Get back, Swanson. Get back!"

Tony Key felt the star's pulse. It had stopped, all right, though there were no marks of physical violence on her body. He got up, pushed out through

the crowd, and left the sound stage through the sliding doors. It was getting dark.

He met Schmidt rushing toward the stage in tow of Curley—a squat, heavy-set man whose hair was a mop of black ringlets, and whose nose was squashed back in his face.

"Schmidt said he had to come down here, boss," were his first words.

"He does," Tony Key snapped. "You'll find Doc White inside. Get him to pronounce Myrna Bow's death due to heart failure."

Sam Schmidt whirled about, his flabby face white. "Then she is dead?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Oh my God!"

Curley Conley looked grim. "I don't see how we're going to keep the cops away now, boss."

"Nor do I," Tony Key snapped, "but we've got a head start, and we have to crack this case damn soon, before anything else can happen. I'm going to Miss Bow's dressing room. She looks as though she has been poisoned. Bring Britton over as soon as you can get hold of him."

"Okay, what about Schmidt?"

"You'll have to let him do what he wants. This thing has grown too big for the procedure we had mapped out."

TONY rushed away, back behind the sound stage, and down the aisle off which were dressing room doors. Myrna Bow rated a cottage on the lot, but she was using one of the smaller dressing rooms for quick changes. He came to the one with her name on the door and went inside.

Tony Key did not know what his thoughts were, he knew only that they were not coherent thoughts, and that whatever scheme he had carefully wrapped in his kit to solve a case in a

cut and dried way, had now to be discarded. He had picked up two or three clues, but at best, he was still in the dark, and he could only move forward in the grim way of a crime solving machine.

He glanced about the dressing room, saw the clothes, the make-up box. Suddenly he stooped, picked up a candy wrapper. He examined it carefully, then looked around for the candy. It was gone, had probably been eaten by the star.

"What—what do you want here?" a hoarse voice behind him asked.

He spun about to see a colored maid. She stepped into the dressing room but sagged back against the door suddenly; her eyes rolled until they showed white and hideous.

"Your — your stomach?" Tony asked.

Already she was sliding off her feet. He took her into his arms and laid her down gently. He could see traces of chocolate on her lips, around the corners of her dusky mouth; particles of the poison candy that had clung. It was evidently a poison that did not work until a few minutes after it was taken.

He left her to grab the phone and call for a doctor, but he saw as he picked up the instrument, that she was dead. If nothing else, the poison struck hard once it got working. There could be no mistaking the expression on the colored girl's face. She had eaten the remainder of her mistress' candy, Tony thought, and this was the tragic result.

For a moment he did not move from where he was standing, then he picked up the phone and called his office. His voice was steady.

"All kinds of hell have suddenly broke, baby," he said. He related the details.

When he hung up, the wail of a

siren touched his ears. He went to the door and saw the police cars swinging down the studio street. Detectives hopped out and entered the sound stage.

Tony Key flipped his cigarette away, and there was a strange light in his green eyes. Curley Conley was forcing Britton down the walk toward the dressing room.

"I want to know the reason for this!" the director demanded.

"Just a question," Tony told him. "About Miss Bow. Did she mention that anyone had visited her dressing room?"

"**Y**ES. I think she said—said she had seen Luke Chesterton, an old flame of hers. Although I don't remember whether she had seen him in the dressing room or on the way back from it to the set." Britton shook his head incredulously. "But why are *you* asking me these things, Swanson?"

Tony Key smiled without humor, and partially rubbed off the mask that was on his face. "Jack Swanson has been—is dead," he said quietly.

Britton looked as though his eyes would pop.

Tony nodded. "That is all. You may go back and talk to the detectives if you want."

"But who are you?"

"Just an agent," Tony said, "a movie agent who sometimes interests himself in the solution of crimes. Mr. Schmidt can probably tell you more about it."

Curly Conley asked: "What next, boss?"

"Luke Chesterton. I want to see him. I'll be at the studio commissary."

As he walked in the direction of the commissary, thoughts paraded through Tony Key's vexed mind. The events of the past few hours seemed to be jum-

bled and confused, with nothing to link them together. Yet he knew that somehow they *did* link, they had to all fit into their proper places, and when that was done the solution of the murders would be at hand.

Considering everything that had taken place, he tried to weigh the importance of each thing, and it occurred to him suddenly, that motive for the murders stood before everything else. Schmidt had given him Swanson's version of the card game, and a brief history of Chesterton, Borden and Brandon. He was aware that the solution must be plain from the facts he had already learned, exactly who was guilty. From the standpoint of *motive* and *alibi*, it could be only one possible person. Yet, as he walked, and thought, the name of that person was not yet in his mind.

But by the time he entered the commissary he had already mapped the course he would doggedly follow to the conclusion of the case. The counter girl, the only one present, looked up.

"Yes?"

"I'm seeking information," Tony said. "Do you remember to whom you sold candy within the past few hours?"

She shook her head. "I hope you don't think I keep a list. I must have sold a hundred bars."

Tony Key's green eyes flickered. He laid the wrapper on the counter. "It was this kind. Do you carry it?"

"Uh huh."

He named over the men, and Mrs. Swanson, described them to her. For a moment she said nothing, then at last:

"The tall one—the old bit player. I'm sure he bought that kind of a candy bar here."

"You mean Bill Borden?"

"They called him Bill," she said.

Tony Key put the candy wrapper back in his pocket. "Thanks."

Just then the door slammed. "Hello!"

Tony turned, and gasped. "Betty! What the devil are you doing here?"

Betty Gale, her platinum blonde hair absolutely radiant. She was wearing a green coat, and a green tam hat, and laughed a little grimly. "You didn't think I was going to miss out on the most exciting thing since the advent of talkies, did you?"

"But I told you to stay at the office and I meant it. You're liable to be hurt around here. Besides—"

"Yeah. Besides, they might cast me in the pic to fill Myrna Bow's unhappy shoes. Mr. Schmidt just said 'Why Betty, where have you been lately?' About that time I saw Curly and he told me where I could find you."

TONY KEY'S smooth face was without emotion and his lips closed tightly. He put a cigarette between them, snapped a match and lit it. "Did you bring any little message along from Curly?" he asked coldly.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "he told me to tell you that so far he hasn't been able to find Luke Chesterton; but that he is still diligently looking and will bring him the moment he can lay hands on him. Also, Los Angeles detectives seem to be galloping all over the lot, and I have just cabled Lloyd's in London, betting ten to one that Doc White's pronouncement of natural death by heart failure is going to stand up about three quarters of a minute longer."

"They haven't sent a coroner nor removed the body?"

"No. Technically, though secretly, you are still in charge of the case which oddly enough carries about two tenths

of a gram of weight with them. They aren't boys who go in much for fables, however, and the bad odor of murder is already beginning to hurt their nostrils. If there is a Winchell stooge around, or one of Jimmy Fiddler's—"

Tony glanced at the girl behind the counter, then back to Betty. "Why don't you send your opinions to *Billboard*, then *everybody* will know my status!"

She gulped, flushed.

Tony Key said: "Honey baby, listen to papa just once and go and hitch hike a ride back to the office, will you?"

"But Tony, I—"

A rock flew through the window, crashed out the large overhead electric light globe. Tony Key turned toward the door, sweeping Betty Gale behind him, and going for his gun, as he saw a figure emerging through the frame of the portal.

His hand was still grappling at the shoulder holster when red belched from the doorway.

A screaming slug of lead tore through Tony Key's side.

CHAPTER V

The Killer Strikes

HIS blue steel automatic half-drawn, the flame of pain of a bullet that had skirted his clothing and ripped a crimson stream across his side, the world's highest paid detective had the count of eight on him at the outset of the attack. The impact of the shot spun him around, sent him reeling like a drunken man for the floor.

Key heard the girl behind the counter scream, but he could not see her; could see nothing in the combined darkness of the night and the unlighted interior of the commissary. He could only guess

in that fleeting moment what was in Betty Gale's mind; how safe she now was from a stray shot, how safe she would be as this fight progressed.

He saw red flash again, heard the screaming of a bullet over his head as it thudded into the wall. Pawing at the floor, Tony Key, hot eyes desperately trying to pierce the darkness, gripped the automatic in his hand.

His finger touched the cold trigger.

Wham—Wham!

But the echo of those shots mocked him, for they echoed in a splintering of wood, and now he heard the footsteps of the figure who came toward him through the dark. Pressing his back to the wall, the pain in his side intense, Tony Key forced his legs to lift his body upright. The fire of the attacker sounded again, no more than three feet from him:

Wham!

Tony Key's shoulder first screamed in agonized protest, then went numb. He was jerked back to the wall by the impact; but even as he hit it, and once more braced himself against that wall, he heard the second scream of the counter girl, felt a greater nearness of his opponent, the impending rush forward of the other man. His finger touched twice again on the slim trigger finger of the automatic.

Wham! Wham!

But the twin blasts of hell roared from the muzzle of the steel weapon a second too late. The other man was on him, had his wrist and was pressing it down. He heard one bullet crack into the floor; although he did not hear the second. Something cried into his consciousness the significance of this, and he wondered, for an instant, how in the din of noise and fury he should be aware of his exact marksmanship. The answer was the rigid training under

which he had gone in the government service.

He heard an oath break from the figure's lips. He felt a lessening of the grip on his arm, and jerking back, Tony Key forced the arm that extended from his wounded shoulder, about the attacker's neck. He pressed down with all the weight of his body in a hammer lock.

But it did not work. The shoulder was too weak. And now, his automatic wrested from his grip, and clattering to the floor, he felt a round rod jamming into his stomach. In a moment—a bare moment, that gun muzzle would spit lead, and Tony Key would be no longer.

He brought his right hand down, gripped the barrel of the other's gun; but it seemed impossible to tear it away from its deadly position in his stomach. Writhing with all the strength left in him, Tony Key managed suddenly to jerk his body to one side.

The gun crashed, missing him by an inch. It was not so dark now that he could not see the killer—at least the dark form of him—swinging in his direction. Tony Key shoved himself away from the wall as a fighter shoves himself away from the ropes. He lunged forward.

One hand on the other man's gun wrist, he bore down, and they fell to the floor together. Tony Key kept his hands wrapped about that wrist, kept trying to disarm the attacker. But his opponent suddenly rolled over. Tony's grip was torn away, and in the next instant something blunt—the butt of the gun, slashed at his forehead.

Grimly, his brain suddenly alive with pain, Tony Key tried to keep consciousness. He felt hot blood trickling down his face; felt more than ever now the bullet wounds in his shoulder and in

his side. He lifted his arms, tried to writhe his body.

But the gun butt came down again—viciously.

It caught Tony on the side of the head and tore away flesh and hair; and although Tony Key fought to keep open his eyes, struggled to keep his consciousness; told himself, his mind and his heart, that he must not stop, could not stop, a surge of blackness suddenly overpowered him.

BEFORE he opened his eyes; before even, he knew where he was and what he had been doing, he was conscious of the serene quiet. And then he remembered—and because following the quiet there was suddenly an uproar of voices—he knew that he could have been unconscious no more than two or three minutes.

He opened his eyes at exactly the same time the lights were turned back on, and at first he could not see very well and blinked once or twice before his vision was cleared. People were bending over him, and everyone was talking at once so that he did not know what any one particular person said.

Then, in a moment—it seemed a moment—there was warm water, and someone bathing his head, and his shoulder. After while they put him in a chair and Dr. White—who worked for Tony—came over and put temporary bandages on him. He said: "You will have to go to the hospital at once," and only shook his head when Tony Key grinned. That hard grin that a man could not argue against.

Gradually, as all this went on, Tony found out what had happened in the two minutes that he had been out of the world; and he was surprised that so many things could happen in two minutes.

Briefly, it amounted to the fact that the man with whom he had been fighting, believing him dead, had immediately rushed out of the place. Betty Gale, who during the fray had stood by helplessly, had told the counter girl—had shouted over her shoulder rather—to see that Tony was taken care of at once, and to tell him that she was going to follow the killer at a safe distance so that he would not get away.

"We saw who it was who left the commissary when a light from a sound stage across the studio street dimly reflected across his figure," the counter girl said. "That was when Betty Gale left, leaving that message."

"What did—did this man look like?" Tony asked.

The counter girl could not tell exactly. "But his hair looked very smooth—glossy, I might say."

"The shooting must have attracted attention. Didn't anyone else see him?"

"I don't know," the girl answered. "The fight between you and him all took place in—well, it couldn't have been much longer than a minute or two."

Tony Key knew that she spoke the truth, although she might have underestimated the time. A fight—especially a duel with guns—can seem an eternity although in duration it may not be more than a minute.

"And it wasn't until a couple of minutes after that that people realized something was wrong over here," she concluded.

TONY KEY got up, his legs unsteady beneath him. The remainder of the wax had been washed from his face, and his green eyes flickered grimly now as he made his way through the small crowd. What had taken place had left him one significant clue: his back had been turned

to the window and door of the commissary at the time things started.

Wearing the clothes and wig of Jack Swanson, the killer had believed *he was Swanson! The motive of the killer in murdering Swanson was so strong that, believing himself to be unsuccessful in the first attempt, he had dared it again, in the bluntest and surest of possible ways—by gun fire!*

But, although Tony had what he believed now was the key to the solution, its importance, so far as he was concerned, was washed away by the peril in which Betty Gale had deliberately put herself. He had to take up her trail—where there was no trail—and follow her. He had to find her before the killer discovered she had been following him!

Frenzied though he now was, Tony Key realized that the only way you came through victoriously on a baffling case was to employ every power of deduction in your possession. He still remembered the bullet he had not heard hit. The bullet he had fired from the automatic.

"Did the man who left—limp?" he asked.

"Limp?" she gasped. "He staggered, if you can call that a limp."

Suddenly Tony saw a rotund little figure who wore horn-rimmed glasses trying to push through the crowd.

"Chesterton!"

The comedian turned, eyed Tony Key's bandages in bewilderment. "Yes?"

"Looking for someone?"

"I—I heard that Jack Swanson had been hurt," Luke Chesterton said.

"You *heard* that?" Tony asked sharply. But he went on before Chesterton could answer: "Did you see a man named Conley? Curley Conley?"

"No—I—I didn't. I was out of the

studio, across the street for some supper."

The inter-studio phone in the commissary rang. Tony Key waved back the counter girl, and going quickly to the instrument answered. Betty had said she would call; if this were she—!

"Hello?"

"Tony," she gasped, "I'm way out here at the end of No Man's Land; and just luckily I found a phone that is in a muddy dug-out marked Sector K."

"All right," he breathed, "stay right where you are. I'll—"

"Tony," she cut in, "are you all right?"

"Sure. I'm fine. But you won't be, when I get my hands on you. I'm going to—"

Tony Key's blood suddenly ran cold. Betty Gale was not that kind of girl who screamed easily. But at this second her shrill and terrified cry was coming through the wire. The scream was cut off. The line went dead.

CHAPTER VI

Motive for Murder

STUNNED though he was, Tony Key moved fast. Doc White handed him his gun, and as he raced from the commissary, he was fumbling with a new clip to put in it. He hurried over to sound stage No. 6, hopped into one of the police cars, and before the surprised detectives at the door could call out, was speeding away in it.

The studio was large and K sector, where war scenes had been filmed, was almost a half mile down the bumpy tar road that wound past set after set, huge buildings with false fronts, complete western towns; the set of a huge steamship. And as he pressed the ac-

celerator down, Tony Key already knew who the killer was.

The chain of events, the circumstances surrounding the activities of every suspect, coupled with the most important thing of all—the motive, clearly indicated it could be one person and one person only.

He reached the patchy land that was supposed to represent a shell torn battle field. The road ended here, but Tony Key kept on driving. The car bounced on its springs, almost shook him loose from the wheel.

Then—in the distance ahead—he saw a figure silhouetted in the yellow glare of the headlights. The figure of a man carrying a girl—Betty Gale. He saw another car—a roadster.

Clinging to the wheel of his own car, the motor humming red hot, he raced the machine forward.

Tony Key was out of the car the moment it began to slow down, in its crazy, wild course. He stumbled across the ground, aware that his side had begun bleeding again; aware that there was a terrible painful pounding in his head. But he vowed that this time the killer was not going to get away from him. He drew his blue steel automatic.

"Don't move," snapped Tony, "you're covered!" Key moved forward, brought out handcuffs and slapped them on his prisoner.

Laughing—something in his chest made him laugh because Betty Gale, terrified though she had been, could keep her sense of humor.

He saw her grin, "A letter from Garcia, boss."

She handed him a packet of bills in an envelope on which were the initials "M.B."

"He—the killer—had this?"

She nodded. "It came out of his pocket while I was trying to keep him

from hitting me with the butt of that gun he had. Myrna Bow must have left it out here for him—which was the reason he had to come here before leaving the lot."

"That finishes the case," Tony Key said softly.

Betty Gale said: "It *almost* finished me."

THE ROOM in the old Los Angeles court house was filled with people—the detectives, the District Attorney. Also Sam Schmidt, smoking a short cigar; Ann Swanson, looking more reposed now, even pretty, softly weeping; Luke Chesterton, looking very pale and not wearing his horn-rimmed glasses; Bill Borden, tall, slim, his wrinkled face set; and Percy Brandon, a strange light in his young eyes. Morning sunshine splashed through the dusty windows.

Tony Key stood beside his platinum blonde secretary and saw all of them. Slowly, he moved forward, as Betty Gale opened her note book.

Tony put a cigarette between his lips and lit it; his green eyes flickered. "The motive was the main clue to these crimes," he said, "motive and the actions of the suspects. Carefully checking both of these and even completely disregarding all other evidence, it is quite clear that Bill Borden murdered both Jack Swanson and Myrna Bow."

Bill Borden, his gray hair lying very flat, his sallow face without expression, stood handcuffed, and flanked by two detectives. He stared straight ahead, and past Tony Key.

"Being only an extra and bit player when he *did* work—which was seldom," Tony continued, "he was desperate for money. Like a lot of others who get Hollywood in their blood, he liked to, felt he had to, live high.

"He had once tried to blackmail Jack Swanson, and now—trying the same thing on Myrna Bow—he was sure that from watching his actions during work on *Pride of the Nation*, Swanson had guessed what he was up to. Yet Swanson was not one to butt into affairs not his own, and his scruples not being the Sunday School kind, he figured it was a pretty good bet that Swanson would not voice his suspicion.

"Not until Jack Swanson lost so heavily in the card games. When Swanson got up from the table, both Luke Chesterton and Percy Brandon were called on the set for a shot, *and were occupied for at least twenty minutes. The twenty minutes during which Swanson was killed.* Borden mentioned this himself when I impersonated Swanson and came back to the table, although he stated that *he had remained at the table*, when as a matter of fact, I learned he had gotten up in disgust and *walked away* when he drew a blank hand in the four hundred dollar pot!

"He saw Swanson leave the sound stage and go to Schmidt's office. About to shake money successfully out of Myrna Bow, Bill Borden's desperate mind told him that Swanson could be going to Schmidt for one reason only—to make a loan. And since Swanson and Schmidt were not friendly it occurred to him that the only way Swanson, bitter that he had lost his money, could get a loan would be to reveal the blackmail racket that was taking place right on the lot. So he went to the open window and threw the knife which, although he didn't know it and tried to kill me later because he thought *I* was Swanson, proved fatal to the old actor."

Tony Key dropped his cigarette and stepped on it. The room was hot, and he opened his collar. The silence was oppressive.

He went on: "Then into a murder set-up, Bill Borden did some fast thinking. He wrote the death note which he raced over to Swanson's house and left—to make it look as though Schmidt had committed the crimes in revenge for Swanson's taking his wife ten years ago.

He returned to the studio, and by this time he was panic stricken. He thought of the conversation at cards and Chesterton's past love affair with Myrna Bow, and his hatred for Jack Swanson.

The finger of suspicion, he thought, would point to Chesterton too, if he killed Myrna Bow.

WITH her dead, he would not only have the money she delivered, but be sure she didn't break down someday and tell on him. He was more afraid of her telling than before, because of Swanson's murder. He went to the commissary, bought a bar of candy, poisoned it. He knew Myrna Bow's love for candy but that she got little of it because of her diet. He probably bribed the maid to see that she got this particular piece. The maid was unsuspecting and died too, according to Borden's plan.

"All of this he was able to accomplish in little more than a half hour, after which he returned to the card game, believing the murders had been executed without flaw, and that no suspicion would be directed upon himself.

"But, for reasons I have stated, Chesterton and Brandon were exonerated from suspicion, leaving only Sam Schmidt, who—although he may have had motive for killing Swanson—*would not* have motive for poisoning Myrna Bow and her maid. Therefore, Bill Borden's careful planning, instead

of hiding him, lead straight to his door!"

Tony paused, sucked in his breath, and looked at the sea of faces in front of him. Eyes staring, the sun coming in through the dusty window. His voice lower, he concluded: "When Borden mistook me for Swanson, and attacked me, he got a bullet through his leg.

That wound is my final evidence, gentlemen. And my final plea is that you allow the press stories Miss Betty Gale has written, to be released, instead of giving the reporters your own versions. It will be best that way."

The tension broke, there was the drone of voices, everyone talking at once. Tony Key sat down in a chair, exhausted; he wiped sweat from his face and lit another cigarette. He was conscious of people milling everywhere:

Bill Borden, face white, being taken out; Luke Chesterton, as he departed, his face very pale; Percy Brandon offering the money Jack Swanson had lost, to Ann Swanson, and Sam Schmidt, his face somehow very light, as though transformed, refusing the money and putting his arm about Ann Swanson's shoulders. It was all part of the aftermath of a tough case; part of the human drama of Hollywood.

These things, that happened in this old court room, the world's highest paid detective saw; and he knew that his job was over, and that pretty soon he would have to get back to the office. Then he was aware of Betty Gale beside him.

"Let's relax, boss," she said. "I know where the new Charlie Chan pic is playing, and they say it's box office sugar. Want to go?"

Lie-Detecting Labeled a Myth

THERE is no such thing as a lie-detector, according to Professor Leonard Keeler, brilliant scientist-lawyer, who heads Northwestern University's scientific crime detection laboratory. Professor Keeler states that "there are no instruments recording bodily changes—such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration or galvanic reflex—that deserve the name 'lie-detector' any more than a stethoscope or a clinical thermometer can be called an 'appendicitis detector.'"

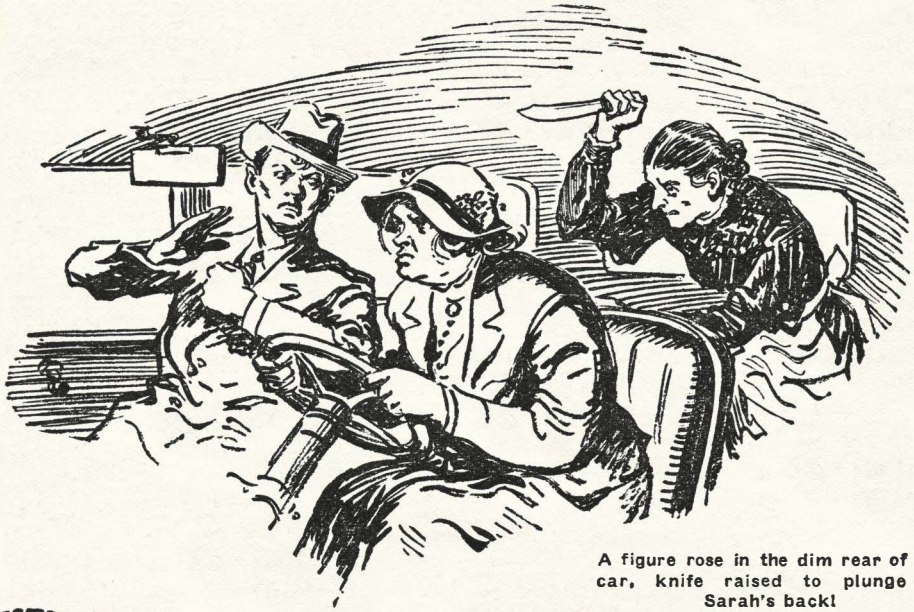
"However," continues the Professor, "deception, guilt or innocence can be diagnosed from certain symptoms just as appendicitis or any other physical disorder can be diagnosed."

—Hartley J. Pinero.

CHARM

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A figure rose in the dim rear of the car, knife raised to plunge in Sarah's back!

MYSTERY
F
D W
SHORT

Too Many Clients

By D. B. McCandless

Author of "The Killer," "The Last Ride," etc.

Sarah Watson Wasn't Invited to Solve the Barns Philatelic Case— But Do You Think That Stopped Her?

THE woman striding down the echoing corridor paused and laid stubby fingers, gloved in black cotton, upon the knob of the door which said: WATSON DETECTIVE AGENCY. In the twilight of the corridor, the woman's craggy face seemed gray, the hard gray of granite, and the nondescript clothes which covered the corseted column of her body seemed gray, too, though strong sunlight would have revealed them as dusty black.

The woman laid one ear to the

opaque glass of the door, listened a moment, with craggy chin jutting, to the faint click-clack of typewriter keys, then straightened the antique headgear on her gray hair and swung in the door, shutting it behind her by the simple expedient of kicking it shut with one square-toed shoe.

The long-legged young man pecking at the typewriter looked up. He said: "'Lo, Sarah Watson! How d'yuh spell philatelist?"

"I don't spell it," said Sarah Watson, hoarsely. "What is a philatelist, Ben Todd?"

"A philatelist," said Ben Todd, "is a guy who monkeys with stamps."

"*Monkeys* is right," said Sarah, crossing the dusty floor with resounding tread. "Now, listen, young feller!

I know the papers say a damn-fool stamp collector named Barnes has had one of his postage stamps stolen, but if you're writing to Theodore Barnes you can stop writing. I'm boss of this outfit, and I'm not going to get gummed up with any postage stamps."

"Listen," shouted Ben Todd. "The Barnes stamp ain't just a stamp. It's unique. It's the only stamp of its kind in the world. It's hoary with age. It has a history. Men have murdered and died to possess it. . . ."

Ben Todd broke off, staring ahead.

"Murdered and died for it," he murmured, and his wide mouth jerked up in the beginnings of a grin "Oh, well, old girl, you're the boss, as you say. We don't want to be gummed up, of course, with murder and death. . . ."

"Bennie," said Sarah, slamming her purse down on her roll top desk, "Bennie, you're about as subtle as a bull. If you think you can egg me into going after a fool postage stamp by rolling your eyes and talking about danger and death! You throw that letter away, Bennie. . . ."

Ben Todd yawned and ran long fingers through his red hair.

"Sarah," he said, "you're right. It's better to keep our noses out of something we ain't fitted to do. The Barnes stamp is insured, of course, and the insurance company will have their best bloodhounds bayng with their noses to the scent. . . ."

"Bennie," said Sarah, firmly, "you're about as wily as a cow. If the insurance company bloodhounds want to bay, let 'em bay. I ain't going to get mixed up with any piddling postage stamp. . . ."

"Piddling!" shouted Ben Todd. "Piddling!" she says. Listen! The Barnes stamp is worth thirty thousand—"

"Thirty thousand? You mean to say one postage stamp is worth—"

"Sarah, the insurance company is offering three thousand for the return of that stamp."

"Bennie, sit down. Finish that letter. Three thousand! Tell Mr. Theodore Barnes we're starting right now to look for his stamp and when we get our hands on it. . . ."

"When we get our hands on it! Listen, old girl, when we get our hands on that stamp, we'll use special stamp tongs. That stamp is fragile, it's delicate, it's precious."

"I don't give a damn what it is," said Sarah hoarsely. "We're going to find it. You finish that letter, and if you don't know how to spell philatelist— Take that grin off your face, squirt! I've changed my mind. We ain't going to write that letter, Bennie. Get your hat."

A BATTERED black box on four wheels rattled and chugged and bumped to a stop on Fairview Drive. The woman under the wheel peered to survey the residence set back from the road.

"Bennie," she muttered, "it looks to me like Mr. Barnes should have sold his postage stamp long since and had his lawn shaved."

Ben Todd stared at the imposing pile of white stone and ivy set in the midst of rank grass. He said:

"The old guy has beggared himself for stamps, they say, mortgaged everything to the hilt. They say, too, that—"

"They say, too, that men never gossip," rasped Sarah. "Stop scandal mongering about our future client. Climb out!"

Ben Todd climbed. Sarah joined him at the sagging gates of the Barnes estate.

Ben Todd said: "Right next door stands the house of Sylvester Barnes, old Theodore's brother. They say Sylvester's a philatelist, too—a rabid one. They say he's been practically foaming at the mouth for years to get the Barnes stamp away from Theodore. They say—"

Sarah turned her back.

"Listen," said Ben Todd, indignantly. "Listen, you old war horse. I got more information."

"Your information's stale," barked Sarah, charging through the gates and up the driveway. "I know all you say they say and a lot more, too. Bennie, there's something going on in that house. Bennie, I heard something. . . ."

The front door of the house flew open. A woman ran out, screaming, stumbling down the wide, white steps.

Sarah put on speed. She seized the screaming woman with competent hands and shook. The woman stopped screaming. She was a middle-aged spinsterish type of woman, with the bright black eyes and jerky movements of a bird. She wore an old-fashioned, black, beaded dress and an old-fashioned, white kitchen apron tied about her waist.

"You Lily Devlin?" said Sarah briskly. "I thought so. Get your chin down on your chest, Lily, way down, and you won't faint. So, you're Theodore Barnes' step-sister? Um! What's going on here? Quick!"

Lily Devlin opened her thin lips. They twisted sidewise as she spoke: "Dead!" she squalled.

"Dead?" repeated Sarah, flatly. "Who's dead?"

"He's dead," moaned Lily Devlin, and slid and fell flat.

Sarah stared down at the crumpled figure a moment, then rounded it and started up the steps.

"Somebody's dead," she said. "Bring her along, Bennie. I'm going to find the corpse."

Sarah strode through the open door. Ben Todd came behind with the woman cradled in his arms.

"Hi!" shouted Sarah. "Hi!"

Sarah's shout penetrated the very cracks of the elaborate ceiling and echoed back. Silence! Sarah wheeled, hands on hips, and stared down at Ben Todd's burden. Lily Devlin opened her eyes. She said: "Theodore couldn't have killed him because Theodore never came downstairs. . . ."

"Good!" said Sarah. "The corpse ain't Theodore, then. That's a relief. Where's Theodore now?"

"Upstairs. I—I went up and called him when the man—the dead man—came. Theodore was lying down. He's sick since the Barnes stamp was stolen. He roused when I knocked and told him a man was here about the stamp—"

"About the stamp?" snapped Sarah. "Go on."

"Theodore must have dozed off again," continued Lily Devlin, "for he never came down and still, the man is dead in there, in the study, with the kitchen knife in his chest!"

Sarah turned toward the stairs with her hands on her broad hips. "Theodore!" she bellowed. "Come down! Theo—"

A figure appeared in the dimness above, a spindle-legged figure in an old-fashioned nightshirt. For a moment, the blob of face on top of the nightshirt bent down over the banister, then the tails of the nightshirt whisked and disappeared.

"Bennie," said Sarah, "go find the corpse."

As Ben Todd started down the hall, Theodore Barnes was coming down

the stairs, now wrapped in a dressing gown which hid his lean shanks. His face was no longer a blob. It was visibly a face, a face patterned with the criss-cross lines of age, but topped with a thatch of jet-black hair.

"Madam!" he demanded, his little black eyes stabbing at Sarah. "Who are you? Your entrance here—your unwarranted familiarity—"

"Theodore," announced Sarah firmly, "this is no time for dignity. I came here, in the first place, about that stolen stamp. The stamp will have to wait. There's a dead man somewhere on your premises, Mr. Barnes, with a knife in him. . . ."

"Sarah!" yelled Ben Todd from the rear of the hall "He's here! He's got a knife in him and an empty envelope beside him, the kind of envelope they use for valuable stamps. . . ."

Theodore Barnes brushed by Sarah and sped toward the voice. Sarah sped after. Lily Devlin collapsed in a hall chair and stayed there, her face buried in thin fingers which curved like bird's claws.

AT the end of the hall, a door stood open. Outside the door, stood Ben Todd, Theodore Barnes and Sarah. Inside, sat the dead.

The walls of the room were covered with books, except for the single oblong of the French window at the back. The dead man sat behind a desk, leaning far back in a mahogany swivel chair.

The dead man's arms extended rigidly, his clenched fists resting on the desk. Between the fists, lights glinted on a small, transparent envelope, crumpled and empty. The dead eyes stared down blankly at the brown wooden knife handle which protruded from the chest.

Sarah stirred. She rapped Theodore Barnes smartly on his thin shoulder. "Who?" she demanded.

"I—I don't know," quavered Theodore Barnes.

"He came to see you."

"I—I don't know."

"He came to see you about a stamp—the stamp. . . ."

Theodore Barnes gave a little cry. He charged into the silent room. He said, gasping: "The stamp! Maybe—maybe it's in one of his hands. . . ."

Sarah strode forward. She laid strong fingers on Mr. Barnes. She said, firmly: "Mr. Barnes, you go use the phone I saw in the hall. Get the police. The stamp must wait. It would be unthinkable to desecrate the dead. Mr. Barnes, before the police arrive. . . ."

Theodore Barnes' small black eyes squinted into Sarah's clear gray ones. He jerked away and ran out into the hall.

Sarah said, quietly: "Step in, Bennie, and close that door behind you. We've got to see what the corpse has in his fists. . . ."

Two minutes later, Ben Todd softly reopened the door. He leaned his long length against one side. Sarah leaned against the other. Ben Todd whispered: "Theodore's coming. Sarah, you can't keep. . . ."

"Hush!" commanded Sarah and opened her square hand. For a moment, she and Ben Todd stared down at the thing which lay on her extended palm, stared at the length of thin black thread, stared at the five black beads strung upon the thread.

"Evidence," whispered Ben Todd. "Evidence found in a dead man's grip! Sarah, it ain't right to double-cross the cops, and it ain't safe. Sarah, you've got to—"

"Careless," muttered Sarah, staring

at the black beads. "Very careless of Lily. I noticed the trimming on her shoulder was snagged."

Running footsteps sounded. Sarah's first closed, hiding black beads. Theodore Barnes appeared, puffing, his parchment-white face mottled.

"The police—!" he gasped.

"Will be here any minute," finished Sarah. "Good-day, Mr. Barnes. . ."

"Madam!" protested Theodore Barnes. "The police will want to question you!"

"The police," interrupted Sarah, hoarsely, "can question me at my office. I'm Sarah Watson, private detective. This is my assistant. We came here to offer you our services in connection with the recovery of the Barnes stamp. . ."

"Ah!" gasped Theodore Barnes, grasping Sarah's arm. "The Barnes stamp! Don't go. We must discuss this. . ."

"Mr. Barnes," countered Sarah, "there is a dead man here—a dead man who came to discuss the Barnes stamp. . ."

Sarah broke off, shook Mr. Theodore Barnes' thin fingers from her arm and pointed a stubby finger at the desk.

"There, Mr. Barnes," she said, "is something I should like to discuss—that little piece of white cloth caught on the side of the desk there. Somebody caught a garment there on that splinter recently, Mr. Barnes, while leaning over that desk. There's a piece like that torn from the hem of your step-sister's apron, Mr. Barnes."

Mr. Barnes bent over the small fragment of white cloth, his face ashen. He said: "Lily! Poor Lily! But, of course, she caught it there when she discovered the body, when she leaned over the desk and looked. . ."

"That," said Sarah grimly, "is what

she will tell the police, at least. Drat it! I'd forgot the police. Come on, Ben Todd. We're going."

SARAH stalked out the front door of the ivy-covered Barnes mansion and surveyed the road from beneath grizzled brows.

"No cops yet," she sighed. "You find Lily, Ben Todd. I'm going around back. . ."

Sarah clattered down the steps with undignified speed and rounded the house. Three minutes later, she came back, breathing rather heavily, to find Ben Todd lounging in the front seat of her car. Ben Todd said: "Lily's disappeared. There's a squad car coming down the road, fast. I'll bet my non-existent salary that our friend, Sergeant O'Reilly, is in it. If he spots this heap. . ."

Sarah charged into the heap like a battering ram. The heap swept down the right curve of the drive as the police car swept up the left. Ben Todd said: "Well, there goes your last chance to turn over those beads. You never had a case yet, you old harridan, that you didn't double-cross somebody, but when you begin double-crossing the cops, old girl, you're in danger."

"At the present moment," growled Sarah, "we're both in danger. Shut up, Let me think!"

Ben Todd subsided. The old car rattled on, one block, two blocks, making audible speed. Ben Todd sat stiffly, his eyes on Sarah. Sarah's driving technique was growing momentarily more erratic. Sarah's eyes seemed more interested in the reflector above her than the road ahead.

The car hurtled a corner, narrowly missed a curb. "Bennie!" screamed Sarah, above the rattle of speed. "I've made up my mind. The thing to do is

take the passenger we got in the back seat straight to the police. . . .”

A figure rose up from the dimness of the car's rear. A knife flashed in that dimness, flashed in a swooping arc toward Sarah's broad back.

Ben Todd twisted, flung himself. Sarah yelled: "Ouch!" Ben Todd's fingers closed over the thin hand holding the knife point between Sarah's shoulder blades.

Sarah said: "Relax, Lily Devlin, and rest yourself. Bennie, don't hurt her. I've changed my mind. We ain't taking her to the cops. Not yet."

Lily Devlin collapsed soundlessly in a corner of the rear seat. Ben Todd remained rigid, half over the back of his seat, staring down at the brown wooden handle of the knife he had taken from Lily Devlin's hand.

Sarah said: "Lily, where did you get that knife?"

"In the kitchen," answered Lily Devlin, and sobbed.

"How many knives like that did you have in your kitchen, Lily?"

"Three. We had four once, all alike, a set, but I gave one to Sylvester's housekeeper. . . ."

"Three?" said Sarah, putting on speed. "One in the dead man. One almost in me. That leaves one—"

"No," Lily Devlin objected. "The third is gone. It was gone when I ran into the kitchen to get one before I hid in your car. I didn't mean to kill you, Mrs. Watson. Mrs. Watson, the police mustn't get me. The police will believe I killed that awful man. They'll believe—Mrs. Watson, I didn't tear that piece out of my apron when I looked at the dead man. I tore it in the kitchen early this morning. But the police will hear all about me and the stamp and the money Theodore owes me for the stamp. . . ."

"Lily," said Sarah, grimly, "you're talking too much. You must never talk too much to the driver of a speeding car."

Ten minutes later, Sarah Watson sailed into her office with Ben Todd and Lily Devlin in her wake.

"Lily," said Sarah, pointing, "sit there. Bennie, stand behind her. Now, Lily. This money you say Theodore owes you—how much?"

"Thirty thousand," moaned Lily Devlin, twisting her hands. "Thirty thousand—all I had. He borrowed it years ago, when he bought the stamp they call the Barnes stamp now. Since then, everything has gone so he could keep that stamp. The house is mortgaged. The servants are gone. And no money for me—only worry and work. I threatened to sue Theodore. He wrote out a paper, promising to sell the Barnes stamp and give me the money. I knew it was a trick to stave me off. I refused to accept the paper until he'd signed it before witnesses. I called in his brother, Sylvester, and Sylvester's housekeeper, and Theodore signed and I knew as he signed that he still thought the paper would do me no good. But I took the paper to a lawyer and the lawyer swore it would stand in court and I went back and told Theodore the paper was legal and he'd have to sell the Barnes stamp and—"

"And," interrupted Sarah, "the next day, the Barnes stamp was stolen out of your step-brother's safe?"

"Yes!" gasped Lily Devlin. "How could you know?"

"I know lots," claimed Sarah, emphatically. "And I guess more. Now, when you told Theodore he'd signed away his precious stamp, he raged, of course, and tore his hair. Wait! That reminds me. Tell me, does your step-brother always sleep in his hair?"

"His—?"

"His toupee," insisted Sarah, firmly. "He had it on when he appeared in his nightshirt at the top of the stairs. I wondered if he slept in it?"

Lily Devlin looked up at Ben Todd as though for help. Ben Todd returned the look coldly. He said: "I'd advise you to answer. I'd advise you to answer all questions, Miss Devlin—even embarrassing questions."

"Lily," rasped Sarah, leaning forward and rapping Lily Devlin's whitened knuckles with stubby finger tips, "Lily, we'll forget the toupee. Just tell me this, Lily—how did the dead man happen to have a hank of black beads off your dress clutched in his dead hand? There, there! Put your head down on your chest, Lily, way down. Bennie, get her some water."

Lily Devlin opened her sharp, black eyes. Sarah wiped trickles of water from Lily's chin. Sarah said: "Lily, you're in a bad fix. You need the services of a first-rate, intelligent, energetic private detective. . . ."

"Sarah," said Ben Todd. "Listen. This dame—"

"Quiet!" barked Sarah. "A client is never a dame."

"Client! By hell, Sarah, you can't take this woman's case! She's guilty!"

"Maybe," said Sarah. "But she means money to us. You hustle her out of here and around to the hotel, young feller, before the cops get any smart ideas about coming here to find her. Move, you long-legged imbecile! Move!"

SARAH WATSON sat alone in her dusty office, the roll top desk open before her. The door flew wide. Ben Todd charged in. "Mrs. Watson," he began, belligerently, "I—"

"I know," replied Sarah, grimly. "You quit. We never had a case yet that you didn't quit."

Ben Todd shuffled his feet. He said: "But look, old girl! You've already offered your services to Theodore Barnes. Now, even if this Devlin dame ain't guilty, how in hell can you reconcile working for Theodore and at the same time giving your services to Theodore's step-sister?"

"Giving!" barked Sarah. "I ain't giving my services to anybody. As for offering our services to Theodore—" Sarah picked up the phone and jiggled the hook.

A few moments later, Sarah hung up her receiver and banged down the phone.

"Well," she said, peering under knotted brows at Ben Todd, "That's that. Theodore is willing to pay a thousand for his stamp, over and above what the insurance company will give. Ben Todd, put on your hat. We've got two clients now, but we could use a third. There's still Sylvester. . . ."

Ben Todd took his head in his hands and groaned.

Sarah said: "Sylvester is mixed up in the Barnes stamp case, somehow, Ben Todd, and I mean to know how. Sylvester Barnes has been hankering after that stamp for years. Sylvester Barnes has one of those brown, wooden handled knives. We're going to see Sylvester, Bennie, before some insurance company bloodhound gets the same sniff I've got."

Sarah's car rattled once more down elegant Fairview Drive. It chugged past the sagging gates of Theodore Barnes' estate and went on.

"Bennie," explained Sarah, "while you were putting Lily Devlin to bed at the hotel, O'Reilly barged into the office. O'Reilly wanted information. I

found out that the corpse in Theodore's study was a gent known in certain circles as Slick Johnny Johns. Slick Johnny was a second-story man out of work. He had a sizable bump on his head, O'Reilly said—a bump the cops are sure knocked him unconscious before he got the knife. O'Reilly also told me that—”

“Wait!” said Ben Todd. “What did you tell O'Reilly?”

“Nothing,” snapped Sarah. “Do you think I'm a fool?”

Sarah swept the car into the well-kept grounds of Sylvester Barnes. She drove in under an imposing portecochère and slowed and suddenly stepped on the gas and sent the car charging toward the rear, and braked.

The back door opened. A buxom Negress stood framed in light. Sarah jumped out of the car. She stalked slowly toward the door, playing the light of a flash on the ground before her as she went.

“Good evening,” she said to the woman in the door, and drew from her capacious purse a shining, wooden-handled knife.

The black woman's eyes rolled down toward the knife. Sarah said:

“I'm representing the Acme Cutlery Company. I understand you have in your kitchen a knife just like this, one of a set of four . . . ?”

“Ain't got it in my kitchen now,” said the Negress, backing a little. “Somebody took that knife clean away.”

“When?” demanded Sarah. “When did they take it?”

“Dunno,” replied the servant. “Missed it tonight.”

“Good evening,” said Sarah. “And thanks.”

Thirty seconds later, Sarah's car shot under the portecochère again and

braked at the front door of the same house. Sarah mounted the steps and placed an invincible finger upon the bell. The door opened. A massive butler stood in the light.

Sarah said: “Good evening. We represent Mr. Theodore Barnes. We want to see Sylvester Barnes and we want to see him damn' quick.”

The butler's eyes goggled at the gun in Sarah's hand. He made a feeble motion with his thick arm.

Sarah said: “Come on in, Bennie. We're invited,” and stalked down the wide hall toward an open door from which voices came.

A replica of Mr. Theodore Barnes rose from behind a desk as Sarah entered. The replica was in much better condition than Theodore. The network of wrinkles was absent and the black hair looked real.

“Mr. Sylvester Barnes?” said Sarah. “I'm Sarah Watson. This is my assistant, Ben Todd. Your brother, Theodore, has engaged us to find his stamp. We've come to find it. . . .”

Sarah stopped abruptly, her grizzled brows knotted as she peered down at the figure of another man, lounging in a chair in the shadows beyond the desk. As Sarah stared, the figure rose and waved a half-empty glass.

“Madam!” exclaimed the figure, “Madam Watson! A pleasure!”

“Humph!” snorted Sarah. “A bloodhound! You're here on insurance company business, of course, John Rankin? You're here with your nose to the Barnes stamp scent?”

John Rankin waved his glass vaguely, and sat down. He said: “The only scent in my nostrils at the moment is the scent of good liquor. I've been enjoying said scent for the past two hours. Mr. Sylvester Barnes and I are old cronies.”

Sarah grunted. She took a chair uninvited. "John Rankin," she said. "How many times during those two hours has your old crony left you, and how long each time?"

John Rankin looked toward Sylvester Barnes and closed an eye. He said: "Crazy! Crazy as a bat out of hell!"

"Maybe," agreed Sarah ominously, shaking a stubby finger under John Rankin's nose. "Suppose you answer my question, bloodhound, before I get violent."

John Rankin put down his glass. He said: "Mr. Barnes has been in this room with me every minute for the last two hours—well, practically every minute. Say, what is this, anyway, you old amateur dick?"

"This, Mr. Sylvester Barnes," explained Sarah, "needs an alibi. There's a dead man right next door, at Theodore's house, a dead man with a knife in his heart, a dead man who called on Theodore to talk to him about the stolen Barnes stamp. . . ."

JOHAN RANKIN lunged out of his chair. He charged for the door.

Sarah chuckled dryly as the door banged. She swung around and pierced Sylvester Barnes with her gaze.

"Mr. Barnes," she called, grimly, opening her black handbag, "Mr. Barnes, look at this!"

Sylvester Barnes made a strange sound. He put his palms on the desk and hoisted himself up out of his chair. He said: "That—that knife!"

"Exactly," agreed Sarah, drawing the wooden-handled knife out of her bag and holding it up. "Sylvester Barnes," she said, "where is the Barnes stamp?"

Sylvester Barnes sat down, suddenly. He sat down with a thump, and he clenched his hands before him.

"It's preposterous!" he said, in a shaking voice. "My brother knows better than to try to intimidate me."

"Your brother may know better," said Sarah, "but we don't. Ben Todd, you got your gun covering Sylvester?"

Ben Todd did not answer. Sarah turned in her chair, her hand grasping the knife. Ben Todd was struggling in the grip of the gargantuan butler. Ben Todd's mouth was covered by one of the butler's expansive palms.

Sarah rose, took a step forward. At the same moment, Sylvester Barnes flung himself over the desk, gripped Sarah's right wrist and twisted. The knife clattered to the desk. Sarah wrenched the hurt wrist free and used it to propel a fist at Sylvester Barnes' jaw. Barnes dodged. The force of the blow carried Sarah sprawling half over the desk, hat askew, arms flailing.

Sarah made a wild dive at Sylvester. Sarah's fingers contacted Sylvester's throat, slipped down, scratching, and closed.

Sarah hoisted Sylvester's meager person half over the desk, got back on her own feet and yanked her prey the balance of the way. Still gripping him, she wheeled and surveyed the butler and Ben Todd, and an unholy, totally unfeminine light of glee danced in her gray eyes as she looked.

Ben Todd's mouth was no longer gagged by the butler's broad palm. Ben Todd's mouth was open and grinning the insane grin of battling youth. Ben was battling with a mountain, but even a mountain will collapse if enough dynamite is exploded at strategic points. Ben Todd was intensely and joyously engaged in exploding that dynamite.

As Sarah watched, the last charge of explosive went off against the butler's jaw. The butler fell down. He exhibited no inclination to rise. Sarah sighed

gustily. She took a firmer grip on Mr. Sylvester Barnes' throat.

"Good work, Bennie!" she cried. "I'll hold Sylvester. You go out to the black woman in the kitchen. Tell her you represent the Ajax Rope Company. . . ."

Ben Todd was on his way. Sarah turned to Sylvester Barnes and stared into his popping black eyes.

"Sylvester," she said, "I know things. I know that you and Theodore cooked up the theft of the Barnes stamp so that Theodore would have the insurance money to pay off his step-sister and still have the stamp. . . ."

Sylvester Barnes made noises in his throat. The noises were unintelligible but the expression in Sylvester's rather slippery black eyes seemed to satisfy Sarah.

"Yes," she continued, complacently, "I know things. I know about Slick Johnny Johns, the crooked gent your brother hired to come over here and steal back the Barnes stamp after you'd refused to return it. I know about Slick Johnny and I know about the knife in Slick Johnny's chest. I know it's the same knife that you took out of your kitchen before you went after Slick Johnny. . . ."

Sarah released some of the pressure of her fingers from Sylvester Barnes' throat. She waited for him to speak.

"S'help me!" gulped Mr. Barnes. "I never used that knife. I've got it yet. It's in my safe. I hid it there. . . .!"

Ben Todd loped into the room with loops of rope over his arm. He said: "Black gal's safe in the kitchen closet. Nobody else in the house."

"Good," said Sarah, complacently, without taking her eyes from Sylvester Barnes. "You tie up the butler, Bennie. Sylvester is going to open his safe for me now," and Sarah cast the wooden-

handled knife she had been holding to the desk and placed the business end of her gun against Sylvester's shrinking middle.

S YLVESTER opened the safe. He pointed a shaking finger at a wooden-handled knife which lay on the shelf. He said: "There! If the man who came here and stole that stamp has a knife in him, I didn't put it there. That's the knife I took with me. . . ."

"Maybe," admitted Sarah, thoughtfully. "On the other hand, that's only the third knife accounted for, Mr. Barnes, and there were four to the set. . . ."

Sarah's voice trailed off. She poked her gun a little deeper into Mr. Barnes and pointed at a large tin box which stood on the top shelf of Mr. Barnes' safe.

"That?" she said. "Is there cash in there?"

Sylvester Barnes gulped. He nodded assent.

"How much?" demanded Sarah.

"Forty thousand. I had it ready to pay Theodore for the stamp. I was willing to pay forty. I never wanted to get involved in this crooked deal. . . ."

"You are involved in it," reminded Sarah. "Deep. Forty thousand, eh? I'll take your case, Mr. Barnes. I'll take your case."

"What?"

"I'll take your case," said Sarah, firmly. "I'll also take the cash, Mr. Barnes—all the cash."

"You can't! This is blackmail! This is robbery! This is a hold-up, a hold-up with weapons. I'll have the police on you! I'll have—"

"You'll carry that tin box to the desk," said Sarah, "and I'll take the cash. After I take the cash, I'll take the

stamp, the Barnes stamp, which you took back from Slick Johnny Johns after your brother had hired him to take it away from you. . . ."

Sylvester Barnes cried out in agony, his sliding eyes moving from Sarah's gun to Sarah's implacable face.

"No!" he screamed. "Take the money! Take all of it! But you can't have the stamp. No! You can't have it. I—I haven't got it! I haven't got the Barnes stamp, I tell you. . . ."

"You've got the Barnes stamp," insisted Sarah, "somewhere in that desk. I saw your eyes slide there when I mentioned the stamp. March! I wouldn't like to shoot you dead, Mr. Barnes, but after all, you may go to the chair, anyway, for Slick Johnny Johns' murder, you know."

Sylvester Barnes moved slowly to the desk. He opened the top drawer of the desk. He lifted with trembling fingers a small, transparent envelope. He held the envelope for a moment, gazing down at the grimy blue stamp it covered. . . .

"Thanks," said Sarah, hoarsely, and plucked the Barnes stamp from his hands.

Sarah dropped the glassine-covered stamp into her bag. She said: "Get busy, Ben Todd, and tie up Sylvester. I need my hands free to take the forty thousand dollars out of the box."

Ben Todd got busy. He was breathing heavily and his eyes were grim as they darted from the ropes he was knotting to the soiled bills Sarah was cramming from the tin box into her purse.

Ben Todd knotted the last knot. He dragged Sylvester Barnes, not too gently, toward the spot on the carpet where the butler lay. Sarah Watson clicked shut the maw of her black purse. She said, briskly: "Handle Mr.

Sylvester Barnes nice, Bennie. He's a client, you know."

Ben Todd dropped Mr. Barnes with a thud. He strode toward the desk and regarded Sarah with baleful eyes.

"Sarah," he said, through thinned lips. "Put that money back where you got it and put it back quick. I'll stand for assorted murderers for clients but I'll be damned if I'll stand for blackmail and downright theft—"

"You'll stand what I tell you to stand," growled Sarah grimly, "until this case is closed." She put her hand purposefully upon the gun which she had laid on the desk.

Ben Todd stepped back. Sarah took the gun in her left hand and held it there. She used her right hand to lift the French phone from Sylvester Barnes' desk.

"Gotham Hotel?" she barked, a few moments later. "Give me room 301. Lily? Don't be scared. It's me. I want you to meet me at Theodore's house, Lily, in ten minutes. Take a cab and stop at the corner. I'll be waiting for you. . . ."

Sarah hung up. She stared for a moment at the freckles which stood out very clearly on the unwonted pallor of Ben Todd's face. Ben Todd's mouth worked. He said:

"You! You damned old— You're going to round out your double-crossing now by selling Lily Devlin to the cops? You're going to lead her into that house next door—that house you know is full of cops! Listen to me. I didn't want you to take that woman's case, but you took it. You took it and I'm not going to see you double-cross her now. . . ."

"You're not going to see me do anything," said Sarah, placidly. "You're going to stay right here, young feller, and keep an eye on Sylvester, while

I give O'Reilly the goods on the murderer of Slick Johnny Johns."

TEN minutes later, Sarah Watson threw open the front door of the Theodore Barnes' residence and stalked in, dragging with her a white-faced, shrinking woman as she went.

A cop stopped leaning against the wall and started forward. Sarah said: "Lo, Tim! O'Reilly here?"

The cop jerked a fat thumb toward the rear.

Sarah asked: "John Rankin, the insurance dick, with him?"

Tim nodded.

Sarah snapped: "Good!"

Tim said: "Mr. Theodore Barnes is in there, too," and his eyes played speculatively over the woman Sarah was gripping by the arm.

Sarah ordered: "Get O'Reilly out here. Whisper I've got the killer for him and he'll come fast."

The cop sprinted. Lily Devlin sagged against Sarah. Sarah muttered something to her and straightened her hat. O'Reilly appeared, big arms swinging.

Sarah said, curtly: "Good! Stay here, O'Reilly. I'm going in with John Rankin and Theodore Barnes."

O'Reilly gasped. "But—but, by thunder, woman, you've got her!"

Sarah said: "Maybe you'd better send a cop around to the back of the house and have him parked near the study window. He can hide in the ivy vines that cover the house back there. Maybe you'd better be ready yourself, O'Reilly, outside the study door. There were four wooden-handled knives in that set, and I've only accounted for three. . . ."

O'Reilly stepped back, jaw slack, at this cryptic utterance. Sarah smiled grimly and swept by him and down the hall to the study door.

Theodore Barnes sat in an easy chair with his back to the desk where the dead man had sat not so long before. Theodore Barnes was smoking a cigarette in a long, amber holder. He took the holder out of his mouth and dropped it as Sarah entered with Lily Devlin in tow.

The other man in the room rose from his seat as she entered, and sat down again, reaching for his half-empty glass as he sat.

Sarah swept past them both. She placed Lily Devlin on a divan near a window. She took her own post behind the divan and focused her piercing gaze on Theodore Barnes.

"Theodore Barnes," she began, "I'm glad the insurance blood-hound is here. He'll make a good witness to the fact that I've recovered the Barnes stamp."

Theodore Barnes sprang from his chair. He slipped on the cigarette-holder which lay in his path and brought up leaning against the desk.

Sarah said complacently: "Yes, Mr. Rankin will make a good witness that I've returned the Barnes stamp to you and that I'm entitled to the insurance company's reward. . . ."

"It's impossible!" shouted Theodore Barnes. "She hasn't got it! She can't have it!"

"I have it," insisted Sarah. "Here it is!"

"Glory!" shouted John Rankin, handing over the stamp Sarah held extended. "Glory! She's done it. The Barnes stamp. She's got it!"

"I've got a good nose, too," said Sarah, complacently, "and I don't spoil it with the fumes of liquor. Show the stamp to Mr. Theodore Barnes, John Rankin."

"The Barnes stamp!" breathed Theodore Barnes. "It is! Let me have it. It's mine. Give it to me. Give . . . !"

Sarah reached out a firm hand, laid it on Theodore's wrist and extracted from his clutching fingers the Barnes stamp.

"Mr. Barnes," she ordered: "Sit down! There, behind the desk. Don't hesitate, Mr. Barnes. The dead man who sat there is gone. Now, Mr. Barnes! I have with me thirty thousand dollars cash. When you have made out a receipt for that sum in favor of your brother, Sylvester, in exchange for the Barnes stamp, I'll hand you—"

"You'll hand me my stamp!" screeched Theodore Barnes. "I won't sell my stamp. Give it to me. It's mine. I'll have you ejected for your presumption. I'll have you ejected for your high-handed methods. . . ."

"My high-handed methods recovered the stamp," purred Sarah, calmly.

"I won't sell it!" shouted Theodore Barnes. "It's mine. I never meant to sell it. Give it to me."

"Lily," said Sarah, without taking her eyes from Theodore Barnes, "Lily, hand over to me the paper your step-brother signed, the paper promising to sell the Barnes stamp, the very legal paper, Lily. . . ."

Sarah broke off, snatched the paper which Lily extended and waved it under Theodore's nose.

"You'll be getting off easy," said Sarah. "There might be certain facts I could reveal, Theodore—facts the insurance company would be intensely interested in—facts about certain little plans made by you and your brother?"

THEODORE BARNES reached for a pen. Sarah opened her hand bag and began to count soiled bills. As she counted, her eyes darted from the bills to Theodore Barnes, hunched over his writing.

Theodore Barnes laid down his pen.

Sarah grasped the paper he had written, read it carefully, waved it in the air to dry. She picked up the thick wad of bills she had counted out.

Theodore reached for the bills. Sarah said:

"Come get your money, Lily. I usually charge ten percent for my services, but I've only taken a grand off the thirty thousand in your case, Lily, because I like to see justice done. And now, I'll just step over to Sylvester's and deliver the receipt for the money and the Barnes stamp. . . ."

Theodore Barnes sprang. Something shining flashed in his rising hand. Sarah fell sidewise against him, her stubby fingers clutching. Lily Devlin uttered a little cry and slid down to the floor. The knife flashed through the spot where Lily had stood a moment before. Sarah's hands reached after the knife.

"Help me, Rankin, you boozy bloodhound," shouted Sarah, and managed to deliver a wallop to the struggling Theodore. "Help!"

The door burst open. The window swung in. Sarah fell back as O'Reilly's big paw wrenched the knife from Theodore's hand and flung it far. Theodore Barnes collapsed, suddenly, in the chair, his face ashen.

"I don't know what possessed me," he muttered, his quick, dark eyes darting from O'Reilly to Sarah to the cop who had come through the window. "Just for a moment, I went wild—seeing the stamp go out of my possession drove me frantic. I didn't mean to hurt anyone. I apologize, humbly. I apologize to you, Mrs. Watson. I apologize to everyone. I'll be myself in a minute. I—"

There was silence for a moment, except for the heavy breathing of O'Reilly. Theodore Barnes lifted his

head. He said: "You all understand, I'm sure. The strain of all of this. Ah, Mrs. Watson, of course I must reimburse you for recovering the Barnes stamp. The special thousand dollar reward I offered still holds, of course—"

"Keep it," said Sarah hoarsely. "You'll need it—for lawyers. I don't take fees from murderers. . . ."

O'Reilly yelped. He pounced on the cringing figure behind the desk. Sarah said, thoughtfully: "Of course, I might have taken your thousand, Theodore, if you hadn't been such a damn mean murderer—a murderer that put a knife into a man already unconscious. . . . Yes, Theodore, your brother Sylvester knocked him unconscious when he took the Barnes stamp away. . . ."

"Stop her!" shouted Theodore Barnes. "She doesn't know what she's talking about. She can't prove it. Nobody can prove it. Nobody saw me!"

"I saw you," roared Sarah, "in my mind's eye."

"She's crazy," screamed Theodore Barnes. "John Rankin, say she's crazy! How could I have killed that man? My sister knows I never came down the stairs from my room. My sister knows I was sleeping."

"Theodore," said Sarah, "do you usually sleep with your toupee on straight?"

"Toupee? Madam, what do you mean? You're mad, woman, mad! I couldn't have killed him. I never left my room."

Sarah stooped. Her square-tipped fingers slid into the cuff of Theodore Barnes' dressing gown sleeve. She held up a leaf. She said: "This is the season when the ivy falls, Theodore. You should have remembered that when you climbed down the back of the house."

Theodore Barnes stared at the leaf. He said: "I'm not guilty. The police

know I'm not guilty. The police know the corpse had a strand of black beads in its hand, black beads that came from my sister's gown."

"Thank you, Theodore," said Sarah, mildly. "That's what I've been waiting for. The police didn't find the black beads, Theodore, because I found them first. Only two people knew that those black beads were there. Me—and the murderer. Take him, O'Reilly. He has confessed."

THE Watson antique chugged down elegant Fairview Drive.

Sarah said: "Well, Bennie, a good night's work, if I say so myself. Everybody pleased. Sylvester pleased, because he's got the Barnes stamp, and it only cost him the forty grand he was willing to pay, plus a little discomfort. Sylvester's black housekeeper pleased because you let her out of her closet and I slipped her five. Lily Devlin pleased because she's got back her thirty thousand and nobody thinks she did murder to get it. O'Reilly pleased because he's got the murderer and the murderer has confessed. Ben Todd pleased because he's proved again that Sarah Watson is a double-crossing, thieving old—"

"Reprobate," supplied Ben Todd and laughed. "You, Sarah, how about you? You pleased, too, old girl?"

"Um," said Sarah, stepping on the gas. "Let's see. Ten thousand from Sylvester, as commission for negotiating the difficult and delicate transfer of the Barnes stamp. One thousand from Lily for getting her money from Theodore. Three thousand from the insurance company for recovering the stolen stamp. Ten and one and three is fourteen, and fourteen divided by two is seven. Well, yes, Bennie, I am pleased. Moderately pleased!"



Straight from the sky, hell came plunging at those rats

Give 'Em the Heat

By H. M. Appel

*On That Houseboat G-Man
Dan Thorpe Had Ideas About
the Main Course*

"SO, after I gets this warning from the G-Man, Dan Thorpe," Al Lencioni boasted, "I figured a fast one that ought to put an ache in that red head of his and maybe a couple of hundred grand in my pocket. I drew out the dough I had on deposit here and told all the hayseeds they'd better do the same, because I had a hunch their bank was going to be cracked.

"Of course, they thought I knew some mob was set to knock it over. A

run started yesterday and most of the rubes dragged down. The bank sent to Miami for cash and it disappeared from the plane that crashed last night. I don't know just exactly how much, but we'll find out when Baldy gets back."

Aboard the houseboat, Baby Mine, tied up near the Edentown jetty on wide Calahachie River, Lencioni played host to several friends beneath a gaudy awning that shaded the after-deck. Recently released from Alcatraz this short and swarthy Public Enemy, once rated No. 1, had come to winter on the West Coast of Florida where he might rid himself of prison pallor

and plan a new racket to replace that which repeal had ruined.

At his invitation sundry "Big Shots" had arrived during the afternoon, by fast car and speedboat, to celebrate with a night of wining and dining—

"Some stunt, kid!" Suave and tastefully dressed Sam Clew, ace diamond smuggler, raised his glass in salute. "Starting a run to insure quick shipment of heavy sugar. Nothing to it—once you knew the cash was on the way."

Rosy Malone, pink-cheeked and dapper, who specialized in bank jobs, looked a little envious but he managed a grin. Cal Horgan, white-mustached kingpin of the gambling houses, with girls as a sideline, curled his thin lips in a smile and queried:

"What if your highjacker disappears? The Miami bank wouldn't have sent any two hundred grand to this small branch. More likely fifty or a hundred. But even that's a lot of money—"

Lencioni's beady black eyes glittered. His flabby stomach shook with silent laughter.

"You think maybe my organization went sour on me while I was away? Guess again! It's as tight as ever, because I'm still the guy who dishes out the dough."

"Okey doke," growled Hump Nelson, stooped and cadaverous czar of the dope racket, "but you've still got to settle with Dan Thorpe. *He's* the guy who dishes out red hell! More of it than any Fed ever sent down to Florida.

"They've got him on Post Office work now, which means you're 'it,' if he tags you. A mail plane carried the cash."

"Don't I know it? Didn't I plan it?" Lencioni's dark face hardened and he cursed. "I *want* to settle with him—for plenty! I'll let him sweat over this case awhile, then I'll take him. Maybe we'll set him adrift with his feet in a tub of cement like they do the boys up in Jersey."

"Tell us how you worked it," Sam Clew coaxed. "How did you crash the ship? A little smooth work at the flying field last night before the take-off?"

"I ain't tellin' nobody nothin'." Lencioni recovered his good humor. "Except that when I leave Florida, as Dan Thorpe so impolitely suggested, you gents won't need to worry about him any more."

"YOU'RE not going back to your island home in California?" Nelson asked, maliciously. "That's where Thorpe promised to send me. Maybe I'll be seeing you—"

"Nuts!" Lencioni turned to aim a kick at a passing Jap who had bumped him when carrying off a tray of empty glasses. "This job was airtight because it was done after dark. Out there in the Everglades there was no one to see—"

Cal Horgan, resplendent in spotless linens, had wandered over to the rail.

"Here come some more of the boys," he said. "You're throwing quite a party."

"Ten of us for dinner at eight." Lencioni glanced at his watch, cocked an eye toward the setting sun. "Won't be long, now. I hope they all get here on time. It's going to be a real spread."

Close upon the arrival of the latest guests came a man in a tiny speedboat powered with a fast outboard motor. The Baby Mine rocked in the wash of his bow wave as he swerved to a stop



alongside and hurriedly climbed aboard.

"Boss," he whispered, nervously, "that guy Thorpe is in town and he's got blood in his eye!"

"Well, what of it? We expected him, didn't we?" Lencioni eyed his stoolie, a squat and ugly cross-breed, suspiciously. "What's got your guts in an uproar?"

"Nothin'—only he's plenty tough. All day he's been out by the mail plane. Another ship dropped him there, then flew back to Miami with the stiff. Sheriff Potts brought Thorpe in this evening."

"So what?"

"They say—" The man wet his lips, uneasily. "That the pilot was a particular pal of his. That Thorpe acts queer. Ain't spoke hardly a word since he came. Just keeps nodding and mumbling under his breath—"

"Mumbling your name, Al," Hump Nelson gibed. "Figuring how he's gonna nail you to the cross. That's swell! Maybe, now, he'll lay off of me."

"You mean—I've got him talking to himself." Lencioni snorted contemptuously. "There's my Jap boy's signal. Soup's on, gents. In you go. We'll hoist a drink to the G-Man who put me on the shelf for five long years. The one I'm going to put on the shelf for keeps!"

DAN THORPE had been out of town when first fears were felt for Swede Nordstrom's safety. Making a night drive back to Miami from Palm Beach he had arrived at his hotel in the small hours of the morning to find Sally McKee crying her eyes out in his room, sure that her fiance, the blond and smiling Swede, was dead.

Thorpe grew sick at heart after

phoning the authorities, learning that the cargo of cash for which armed guards waited on the smooth beach at Edentown, had never arrived.

"Lencioni, of course!" he raged. "I warned that dirty killer to get out of Florida. This is his way of showing defiance and making a piece of change on the side. It looks bad, Sally—" Her moan of grief brought a lump to his throat. "But maybe Swede's a prisoner, or only hurt a little—"

"He's dead!" the girl sobbed. "They've murdered him. I know—"

Thorpe's pitying glance rested upon the slender, shuddering figure. His red hair gleamed beneath the lights. Muscular, compactly built, with a jaw that might have been chopped out of granite, he typified the courageous class of men who are warring relentlessly against our country's Public Enemies and yellow rats.

"Whether it's one thing or the other," he muttered, "you have my promise, Sally. I'll not bring in Lencioni alive. Unwritten orders are to 'Give 'em the heat.' And Swede was the best pal any man ever had."

It was three in the morning when Thorpe left Sally at her home. Nordstrom had taken off at ten. He should have landed at Edentown before midnight. As yet the telephone had brought no report of a crash. Thorpe fumed and fretted at the flying field waiting for the dawn. Two planes were out scouting above far-flung marshlands on the slim chance of spotting a flare, but Thorpe's hopes were low.

Daylight, a morbid hunch told him, would disclose a wreck with a dead or dying man inside. He mulled over a dozen different ways in which the plane could have cracked up, even believing it possible that a stowaway might have hidden aboard the hurriedly dispatched

ship to loose a lethal shot at the proper time and roll out with a parachute.

At the first crack of day he took off in a fast amphibian, nursing the stick, himself, accompanied by a pilot. Dan Thorpe once had flown the mail before he was detailed on his present work. He and Swede Nordstrom had trained together, their comradeship lasting through the years.

Far out over the 'glades, on one of the trembling prairies soggy with water, dotted with clumps of palmettoes, man-high sawgrass, and patches of bulrushes, they found the washout. Thorpe eased the ship to a splashy landing nearby. They struggled through the swamp while buzzards lazily circled overhead. There had been no fire, but the mail plane had plunged head-on into the muck. Swede was inside, his neck broken, face bruised by terrific impact with the instrument board.

SYSTEMATICALLY, Thorpe examined every inch of the fuselage for bullet holes, found none. Nor did he discover any clue that might account for the crack-up. One blade of the prop, exposed in a waterfilled depression, was torn and twisted as though from contact with something more unyielding than soft mud. The rudder had been damaged, but whether in crashing or previously he could not say.

While Thorpe worked a party of men appeared, making slow progress from a highway which bisected the Everglades at a considerable distance from the scene. The leader, upon arrival, introduced himself as Sheriff Potts of Edentown.

"You found him!" the fat old officer gasped, breathlessly. "Was the cash safe? The bank's money—"

Dan Thorpe's lips curled back from straight teeth in a smile of hate. "You look for it! I haven't had time. No use, anyway. There's just one man in the wide world responsible for this job. I'll get him. As soon as I've learned all I can about the murder—"

"Murder? You mean—somebody wrecked the plane? Shot it down, maybe?"

"Never mind."

Thorpe opened the mail compartment, found it empty. To the pilot who had accompanied him he said:

"We'll put Swede aboard and you take him home. Sally will be waiting. Tell her that I'll not be back until I've finished the job I came to do."

For hours afterward the Sheriff could get no word from him beyond an occasional savage grunt.

Thorpe's eyes widened when he found Swede's message, a thing easily overlooked. Just a crazy scrawl on the edge of a flying map which he deciphered as:

Crashed by a gull—

That mystified him utterly until, later, he realized its full import.

"Flying low," Thorpe muttered. "No time to scribble more before he struck. But a *gull*? Would it wreck a metal prop? Do gulls fly at night?"

Painstakingly, he searched every square yard of the swamp for rods around, looking for the shattered body of a bird or even a feather. On one low hummock he found an object that held his attention momentarily. A long, heavy cylinder of cast iron which he recognized as a window weight. How came it in this isolated spot? He remembered that Seminole hunters and fishermen, in certain seasons, frequented these watery flats.

"Some Indian's anchor for his dug-

out, I suppose," Thorpe grumbled. "But no sign of that damned bird—"

Abruptly, he cursed his own thick-headedness.

"Crashed by a gull! My wits are wandering. By a *Percival Gull*, of course—another ship! But how?"

Again he went over the wreck from stem to stern. Only the battered prop and damaged rudder evidenced the cause or consequence of disaster.

"Sheriff!" he demanded. "Did anybody report hearing this plane or another one during the night? Have you rounded up any Indians?"

"Not a word, Thorpe." The officer waved his arm in a vague gesture. "No Indians near here. Had there been any Seminoles in hearing distance of this smash-up a gang of them would have been on hand before you could say 'scat.' They're all miles farther south—"

THORPE asked questions concerning the residents of Edentown. Inquired whether planes ever landed there, knowing that there was no flying field. Potts said that the hard-packed beach would serve, or the river for a flying boat, but no ship had stopped at the village since the winter before.

Toward evening Thorpe went with the Sheriff to his car and they drove toward town.

"Lencioni started the run on the bank I hear," Dan Thorpe commented. "By raising some sort of a scare. What about it?"

"Folks say he passed around word that the bank was going to be robbed. I reckon everybody figured that he ought to know, considering his underworld connections, but when I asked him he just laughed. After he drew out all his own cash—he was keeping

over a hundred thousand dollars there—" The officer shrugged.

"The Miami bank forwarded fifty thousand," Thorpe grunted. "Pin money for that killer! He's worth ten million. He didn't do this to make so small a haul."

"Are you accusing Lencioni? How do you know he had a hand in it?"

"I'm accusing nobody!" Thorpe snapped. "But I'll be doing plenty."

"If I can help—"

"You can help most by keeping quiet. Say nothing, do nothing, just leave me alone. This is once when a personal matter falls squarely in the line of duty."

Dan Thorpe went to the village hotel as dusk was falling and rented a room. He wanted an hour of privacy in which to plan and think. Throwing himself upon the bed in the darkened chamber he lay visioning the last fateful moments Swede Nordstrom had endured before he died, remembering Sally, scrawling the unfinished message.

It must have been a fast ship that wrecked him, unless it had lain in wait along the route and pounced down upon him unawares. How had Swede identified it in the dark? How had they crashed him? With speed enough they might literally have ridden him to earth, but it would have been a dangerous chance for any pilot to take in the gloom of night.

Thorpe remembered some talk of a newly designed Gull, super-powered, amphibian or boat he believed, but no craft of that make that he had ever seen could have forced Swede out of the skies.

"I'll find the answer," he muttered, "on Al Lencioni's houseboat. And when I've got it—"

Tight-lipped, he caressed his gun.

ABOARD the Baby Mine the food was fine and the drinks as excellent as they were plentiful. The ornate dining salon echoed with laughter and song while Al Lencioni and his companions celebrated his clever coup. With guards patrolling the decks and searchlights playing upon the water they felt secure and spoke without restraint. When Hump Nelson mentioned the possibility of a surprise visit by Dan Thorpe, Lencioni exclaimed:

"I hope he comes. I've told the boys to welcome him with open arms—and clamp down hard."

An ebb tide was setting toward the sea and the houseboat tugged at its moorings. Gunmen on watch, accustomed to the sight of driftwood and clumps of water hyacinth floating downstream, paid no heed when one of these dark objects touched the side of their craft and swirled away. Dan Thorpe, releasing his hold of the mass, clutched a propeller shaft beneath the fantailed stern and considered his next move now that he had reached the spot unseen.

Snatches of ribald song came clearly to his ears, but conversation was blurred by distance and intervening planks. Submerged to his chin, automatic strapped to the back of his neck with a thick rubber band, he found himself stymied by the alert patrol which Lencioni's men maintained. At frequent intervals he could hear the steady clump of footsteps passing overhead.

But Fortune soon favored him. Somewhere on the broad bosom of the stream a creak of oarlocks sounded. From his concealed position he saw a rowboat edge into the circle of light. Men went running across the deck above, congregating upon one side. A hoarse voice shouted: "Who's in that

skiff? Speak up or we'll give you a dose of lead."

Thorpe, scrambling over the opposite rail, heard a scared Negro cry: "Gawd, Boss! Don't yo' shoot. It's jes' ol' Sam out fishin'. Should Ah ketch me a mess of mullet, Ah'll brang yo' some."

"Do your fishin' far away from here," some one snarled, "or sharks'll soon be feastin' on you."

Dan Thorpe had squeezed himself into the angle covered by an open door. Two men came marching toward the spot, laughing over the darky's fright.

"Hear him splash!" One snickered. "He is sure gonna bust an oar—"

He broke off, abruptly. Thorpe caught a sibilant whisper: "Wet footprints—" Then a grated command: "Come out of that! With your hands up— before I write 'good-by' on your belly with this typewriter!"

AFTER dropping the gun down the back of his shirt by a lanyard, Thorpe thrust the door aside and stepped into the glare of lights. One of the tense pair yelped: "The red-head! Hey, Al! Thorpe's here. Will we give it to him?"

Within the dining salon a silence fell. Faces massed at the screened windows. Al Lencioni hurried to the deck. At sight of Thorpe, shoeless and bedraggled, he threw back his head and laughed.

"If you don't look like something the cat dragged in! Like a drowned rat—" His porcine jowls quivered with mirth. "You're funny."

"Just thought I'd pay you a visit, Al. Didn't like the grub up at the hotel. Heard you were having a big feed. How about setting a place for me at the table?"

"Absolutely! Boys, take him in—"

Give him a meal. Anything he wants! Why—they do that for any guy that's waitin' in the Death House."

"You've got it wrong, Al." Thorpe's white teeth glinted. "Just an old fashioned custom of mine. Like the hangman—I always eat hearty before I execute a killer."

One of the guards struck him a flat-handed blow across the mouth.

The other gunman leveled a .45 but Lencioni exclaimed: "Hold it! Is that any way to treat a guest? Bring him inside."

The wish to strut, to put on a big show, was uppermost in Lencioni's mind. That Public Enemy who craves No. 1 rating must ever strive to keep the competition faded. Before this half-score of racketeers, each recognized as tops in his field, he would stage an exhibition of nonchalant hospitality and iron nerve climaxed by startling ruthlessness. Punctiliously, he introduced Dan Thorpe to each in turn, naming their lawbreaking specialties baldly, earning angry looks by his action. Hump Nelson, whose activities he mentioned in considerable detail, cut him off with the blunt command:

"Shut up! Thorpe knows enough about me without you spilling more."

"What do you care?" Lencioni grinned. "He won't remember—"

"I suppose you're gonna poison the poor guy? Well, you'd better give him a good dose. I heard his crack out there about an execution. It was you he meant—"

"Exactly," Thorpe agreed. "Before the night is done."

HE backed toward the wall, hoping to hide the bulge of the weapon which dangled beneath his wet shirt. But the eyes of a guard behind him were too sharp. Rough hands re-

moved the automatic, searched him thoroughly. Thorpe said: "That's all. No tools left except these—" He crooked his bare fingers. "I'd rather eat that grub Al promised before I dirty them."

Unaccountably disturbed, Lencioni growled:

"Sit down and help yourself, but don't be long about it. When Baldy comes—"

Cal Horgan, the fastidiously dressed and venerable gambler, lifted a glass of champagne, murmured blandly: "I like courage. Here's hoping Al has planned something painless, Thorpe. But—"

He turned to face his host. "Whatever it is, you must excuse me. It's a little out of my line—"

"And mine," seconded Sam Clew, the hot diamond merchant. "How about having one of your boys row us ashore?"

"Hell, no!" Lencioni's black eyes snapped with anger and his thick lips curled in a sneer. "What's the matter with you gents? Can't you take it—or do you think I don't know my stuff? Do you suppose I'd let them do it here? Sit tight till that plane of mine drops in—"

Several muttered uncertainly, then subsided. By strange coincidence, no doubt, each exit of the dining salon was blocked by a man with a tommy-gun. Lencioni continued, heartily:

"We'll all have another drink while we're waiting."

Somewhere in the dark night sky the roar of a fast-driven ship drew near, sweetly humming motors singing a song of power.

"There he comes!" Lencioni cried. "Baldy Burke getting back from Jacksonville with my new special job. Now, we'll hear the end of the story—"

All save Dan Thorpe's two guards rushed out to the deck.

Peering through a window Thorpe saw the glistening silver shape of an amphibian, ultra-modern in design, taxi into the lighted area. After some maneuvering the pilot and mechanic came aboard and a gruff voice exclaimed, "Everything went off without a hitch."

"Nice goin', Baldy," Lencioni applauded. "Come in and eat. I'll bet you haven't had a bite all day—" He urged the lanky, hairless one toward the cabin door.

"What the—" Baldy Burke paused on the threshold. "Dan Thorpe!" His blue eyes bulged and he rubbed his eggshaped head. "Where'd you catch him?"

The curious company crowded in. Lencioni said: "Why—our old friend was out taking a little swim. He decided to stop by for a bite. When both of you have had all you want you're gonna take him up for a little ride. Maybe you can find a nice soft cloud to drop him on."

Baldy laughed uproariously, sank into a chair, began to wolf his food. "Hear that, Creep?" He waved a breast of chicken at the greasy mechanic who had followed him. "Al's a card, ain't he? A nice soft cloud—" The fat mechanic tittered. "Yeah," Baldy chuckled. "We'll pick him a soft spot—so soft that he'll splash!"

On deck an alarm sounded. A guard cried harshly: "Stop that boat! Who is it?"

"Sheriff Potts! Who's tellin' me to stop—"

Hope that flared in Dan Thorpe's breast was quickly quenched at thought of the elderly, well-meaning officer's inevitable fate if he attempted to come aboard. Loudly, he called: "It's okay,

Potts! Go on home and I'll see you later. "Next week," he added, "if the boys'll fly me to Tampa tonight."

Lencioni inquired: "How much was the take, Baldy? How much did they send aboard that crate?"

"A lousy fifty grand. It's parked in your safety deposit box at Jax, under the name of Henry Grant."

"Nice of you to tell me," Thorpe jeered. "I'll pick up that cash, Al, when I've finished with you."

YOU won't pick up nothing, Wise Guy. You won't even be picked up—after the fish finish with you."

Noting a certain restlessness among his guests, fearing some concerted protest against the G-Man's coldblooded murder, Lencioni said sharply: "Baldy! You've got your gizzard stuffed by now. Let's get this over with. Take the red-head away—but not quite to Tampa—"

"About five miles out and one mile up, wouldn't you say, Al? I'll be back in ten minutes."

At Lencioni's command guards twisted lengths of wire around Dan Thorpe's wrists, attempted to gag him. He jerked back his head, exclaiming:

"Leave the damned tape off! If I was going to yell, I'd have started before now, wouldn't I?"

In his brain hope was blossoming. Aboard the ship with only two men to handle maybe luck would break. Here, on the houseboat, he was helpless.

They bundled him through a door of the amphibian. The mechanic tripped him so that he fell in the aisle between the seats. With another length of wire Baldy bound his ankles. From somewhere up forward he brought a heavy metal window weight.

"In place of a parachute," the pilot

gibed, while fastening it to Thorpe's feet. "It'll take you straight to the bottom of the Gulf if you don't get stuck on that cloud Al joked about."

"That's how you got Swede! You dropped those damned things into his prop—"

"Smart fellow!" Baldy nodded. "Good shootin', too, in the dark and all. Of course, we had speed enough to run circles around that mail crate. He spotted us with a light after I hit his rudder. Tried to zoom into us but I was expectin' that. Out of six tries I got him fore and aft, then down he went—"

Going forward, where the mechanic was busy, Baldy commented: "Not much gas, but we won't be gone long. All right, Creep. Let's wind her up and get back before all that champagne disappears.

"If I gotta weakness, it's nothin' else but bubble water—"

Frantically, as he lay in the aisle, Dan Thorpe began working at the withes of wire that confined his hands behind his back. Longingly, his eyes rested upon the stubby shape of a machine gun racked at the right of the pilot's seat.

"Why didn't you shoot Swede down and be done with it?" he asked, making conversation to cover the slight sound of his movements.

"Why try to bomb him with hunks of iron?"

"You know the answer as well as I do," Baldy called over his shoulder. "There ain't a mark on that crate to show that anybody engineered the crack-up."

THE motor caught and roared. Baldy jazzed it, bellowing to his helper: "She's still hot. Here we go." The ship taxied forward and

headed into the wind. She gathered speed and Baldy gave her the gun. The tail lifted, they were in the air.

Dan Thorpe muttered: "Five miles out and one mile up. I haven't much time—"

While he squirmed and twisted the blood ran over his hands.

From where he lay, Thorpe could see an altimeter glowing in the center of the instrument panel. One thousand feet, two thousand, Baldy holding his craft to a steady climb. Three thousand! Thorpe groaned aloud as the wires bit deep into his wrists, wondering if his sawing and jerking would sever a vein.

The metal gyves grew hot as fire with the bending and twisting but still they held. Once, the mechanic glanced back at him, grinned, and leaned across to shout in Baldy's ear. The pilot also looked, and signaled with his upraised hand to indicate an abrupt nose-dive. Soon the altimeter read four thousand and Thorpe knew that his time was near.

Again, Baldy looked around. He cut the motor and silence filled the cabin, save for the shrill blast of air.

Holding up a flat automatic he said, jovially: "As one flyer to another—maybe you'd like to take it easier? I could let you have a slug behind the ear before we dump you, and Al would never know—"

"Won't this crate climb any higher?" Thorpe railed. "You promised me five thousand." He saw that the altimeter had sagged to thirty-six hundred. "Poke her on up there, if she's got what it takes, and then I'll dive." He grinned. "You can slip that slug to Al, with my compliments, if you want to—"

Baldy shrugged, gunned his motor, dragged at the stick. The splendid ship

shot up in an almost perpendicular climb.

Hundred by hundred the altimeter reading rose.

Still Thorpe's wire manacles held and the pain of his struggle was almost more than he could endure. The indicator ticked off the last thousand feet. Eight hundred. Nine hundred. Then, ten!

Creep, the mechanic, got up and forced open a cabin door. Snapping on a dome light he started back toward the helpless G-Man.

Dan Thorpe jerked his wrists in one last frenzied heave. The wire broke. Creep saw the movement, snatched at a holster beneath his arm. Thorpe clutched the seats on either side and threw up his legs in a desperate, flailing kick. The window weight attached to his ankles lashed against Creep's skull. He sprawled across Thorpe's body.

BALDY BURKE sensed the commotion at his back. He cut the motor, let the ship glide. Raising up, gun in hand, he opened fire. Slugs smashed into Creep's twitching form, pierced it at an angle that barely missed Thorpe's chest.

Dan's groping fingers found the mechanic's automatic. Thrusting the limp body upward and forward he flung it into the stream of lead. His first shot grazed Baldy's cheek, a second caught the pilot between the eyes. The man's sagging form collided with the stick and threw the ship into a shrieking dive.

Thorpe, with his ankles bound and weighted, fell forward in the sharply tilted cabin. On hands and knees he dragged at Baldy's awkward shape which was caught across the two front seats.

"Five thousand feet up!" he gasped. "It won't take long—"

A twist of his shoulders tore Baldy free. Grabbing for the stick, working himself into position where he could reach all controls, Thorpe breathed a sigh of relief when the ship leveled off. He pulled it back into an easy climb. It was but the work of moments, then, to untwist the bonds about his feet. Hefting the window weight he was about to drop it through a window when his harassed brain began to function purposefully.

Wheeling the big amphibian in a wide circle he sighted the scattered lights of Edentown and illuminated buoys that marked the river channel. Nosing down to a height of five hundred feet he followed the luminous waterway.

The decks of the Baby Mine were crowded with a yelling, waving gang of men whose predatory senses were titillated by Baldy's supposed bit of murder. Thorpe heaved the iron window weight when he swept over the boat a few yards above the upturned faces. Faintly, he heard shocked cries that signaled a hit.

"That one was for you, Swede," he grated. "And the next will be for poor Sally."

Throwing the ship into a steep bank he turned back and sat her down on the broad tide of the river.

As he taxied toward the anchored craft Thorpe reached aloft to seize the tommy-gun. With the weapon on the seat beside him, lying as limp as he could manage across the cushions, he jazzed the motor nearly to flying speed.

Lights of the houseboat windows seemed to rush at him out of the gloom. Nearer! "Half the Public Enemies in Florida are aboard," he muttered. "Killers all. They deserve no mercy."

The hull loomed large! Gesticulating figures appeared in the illumination of searchlights turned upon him.

Faster and faster the ship raced forward as he gave her the gun.

The windshield was shattered by a slashing burst of machine gun fire an instant before the rending crash. Dan Thorpe had driven the powerful plane squarely into the houseboat's swarming superstructure.

Screams of agony ripped the night. Flames licked upward in billowing sheets. Here and there upon the deck weapons spurted orange tongues of fire.

Bullets aimed by survivors pierced the cabin, seeking his life.

Numbed by the shocking impact of collision Thorpe lay momentarily inert. Then, he sprang erect. Leaping out upon the crumpled wing he moved his tommy-gun through a blazing arc. Firing from the deck of the Baby Mine ceased.

The boat was filling rapidly. With

it, the plane. Thorpe felt water rise above his knees. A skiff came gliding into view.

The Sheriff's voice hailed: "Anybody left alive?"

"Only me—I hope!"

Thorpe swam away from the wreckage. Sheriff Potts eyed him curiously when he clambered overside.

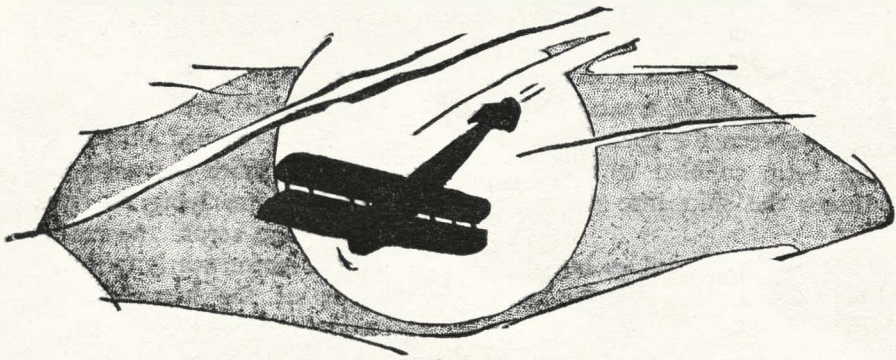
"I know you were out to finish Al Lencioni, but there was a whole mob aboard. Did you have to kill them all?"

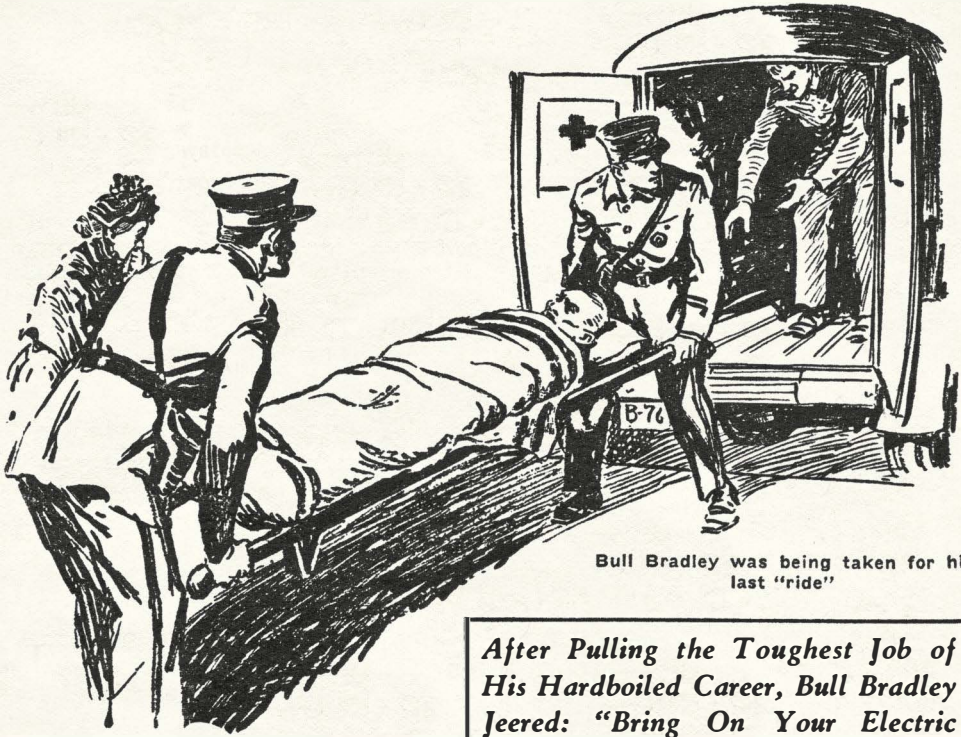
"When you crack down on a boatload of crooks with a few tons of airplane doing sixty," the G-Man said dryly, "you can't call your shots. If I could be sure of just one thing I'd be satisfied."

"Sure of what?"

"That the window weight I dropped got Lencioni! It would be swell," Dan Thorpe whispered, "if it did and if, somewhere, Swede knows. Anyway—" He glanced back at the raging fire. "I certainly gave 'em the heat."

THE END





Bull Bradley was being taken for his last "ride"

After Pulling the Toughest Job of His Hardboiled Career, Bull Bradley Jeered: "Bring On Your Electric Chair! I've Got My Own Way of Beating That Rap!"

Round Trip to the Cemetery

CRIME
D F W
SHORT

By
Cornell Woolrich

THE LITTLE MAN looked very spry and energetic. He hopped down from the cab, scanned the cheap flat, and verified the address with the help of a scrap of paper held hidden in the palm of his hand. He motioned the driver to wait, went into the entrance-hallway and peered at the row of mil-dewed name-plates. The third from the end said: "Amos Alexander, M. D."

The little man hopped back to the

curb without looking any further, and remarked to the driver, "Yep, you got it right, bud," and paid him off from a big wad of bills. He waited till the cab's fiery tail had dwindled to the size of a spark along the wet streets, went into the building a second time, with the briefest possible glance around him to see if he was observed.

It wasn't a very spruce building and it wasn't a very spruce neighborhood. Dr. Alexander's practise either wasn't very flourishing, or he was of a very self-effacing disposition. As a matter

of fact, no shingle was visible from the street. Nothing to show there was a doctor living there but that greasy visiting-card in the mail-box.

Dr. Alexander evidently didn't encourage calls from casual, unknown patients.

The little man tried first to get in unannounced, via the hall-door. That failing, he pushed a bell under the doctor's name. There was a long pause, an inhospitably long one. Just as he was about to repeat the signal, a harsh, distinctly unfriendly voice rasped through the circular aperture of a speaking tube above the bell: "Who's down there? What d'ye want?"

The little man glanced once more at the scrap of paper in his hand, said "Doc?"

"Who wants him?" said the voice. Neither one of them seemed to want to pin themselves down to anything like an out-and-out admission of identity.

The caller answered: "Lefty sent me over," as though he had been coached that this was the best way of getting in.

It seemed to be. There wasn't another sound from the speaking-tube. Instead, the hall-door started crackling loudly, as though a bunch of twigs were being broken under it. The little man pushed himself into a murky hall, smelling of yesterday's goulash and last week's fish; started up a case of badly-jointed stairs that complained and groaned at every step he took.

As he neared the third floor, the stale food aroma changed little by little to a strong odor of carbolic acid. There was no open door waiting to receive him, but a head that had been spying on his ascent from over the banister, straightened up, and there was a man standing there on the landing. His hand

came away from his inner coat-pocket as though he had just finished putting something away in it, something he wasn't going to need after all.

He went back to one of the inscrutable closed doors, jerked his head wordlessly at the little man to follow, and went in. A bar of sinister yellow light bisected him for a moment, like a tiger's stripe, then vanished as the door closed after the two of them.

Dr. Alexander, that peculiar physician, locked it on the inside. He led his caller into a combination waiting-room, consultation-room, operating-room, and living-room. That is, it had a stack of 1912 magazines, so it was the first; a row of bottles laced together by strands of spider-web on a shelf, so it was the second; an operating-table covered with a gangrenous rubber-sheet, so it was the third; a battered piano and an old-fashioned graphophone with a horn, so it was the fourth. Possibly the two musical instruments came in handy drowning out the groans of patients.

The record on the turntable was labelled, appropriately enough, "Ain't We Got Fun." All in all, however, there was an air of dust and decay about the place, as though the doctor usually visited his patients instead of having them come to him.

The floor was covered with linoleum, from which it is easier to remove bloodstains than a fuzzy carpet or bare wood. There was a noticeable absence of any diploma or license on the wall.

The two men looked at each other warily, more like a pair of possible adversaries than a patient consulting a physician. They both seemed to lack confidence in human nature. The doctor took up a cold cigar, lit it, grunted: "What's Lefty's trouble—this time?"

"Nothing," admitted the little man,

"he just told me to mention his name to you, so I'd get in here."

Dr. Alexander didn't seem to like this, not a bit. "Where does he get off, passing my name around?" he demanded surlily. "How do I know who you are?"

"How do I know who *you* are either?" the little man snapped right back at him. "I'm Muller! I could buy you out, and everything you got here—and still think I was paying for a shoe-shine! I'm Bull Bradley's attorney."

DR. ALEXANDER showed a flicker of interest, almost of friendliness; certainly of increased respect, at this news. "Mattress Muller—the guy they all fall back on! So you're Bull's mouth, eh?" he said with a dry smile.

Muller didn't seem to fancy that way of putting it. "Attorney, when you're pulling down what I do!" he corrected. "Lay off that mouth stuff, I only take 'em with dough."

"Who don't?" nodded the doctor sociably. He studied the head of his cigar, which smelled a little like cabbage and burnt feathers. "Tough about Bull," he commented. "I guess I can cross him off my list. You didn't do so well, did you, Matt—for once?"

"I'd like to see anybody else do any better, or half as well!" Muller snarled. "I wasn't up against a jury and prosecuting attorney, the pogue was a fourth offender, it was a mandatory sentence! I put the fritz on the murder indictment, didn't I? They had enough on him outside of that to keep trying him from now till next Fall—the only reason they quit was their adding-machines couldn't count no higher!"

"What'd he bag?" asked the doctor.

"Life, and no chance at parole—on

account of the accumulation of counts. They overlapped them, as soon as he gets through serving one, the next takes effect. If you want to be statistical about it, it set a new all-time high: one-hundred-and-ninety-nine years!"

The doctor whistled, long and flut-ingly. "When does he go up?"

"Morning train." He hitched his chair forward impatiently. "Now, let's get together. I didn't just come here to give you the latest dirt from the police gazette."

"Whaddye want me to do," asked the doctor scornfully, "derail it?"

"There's plenty of dough in this, brother," Muller warned him. "Bull's well-heeled, under a dozen names they couldn't get at; you know that, don't you? But he's plenty smart, too. He's fixed it so I don't get my hands on anything until I get him out; but when I *do*—I can retire for the rest of my life. And so can you! You wanna play ball? Should I go ahead?"

"I wouldn't be rude enough to interrupt," said the doctor cynically.

"It's simple, so simple that I don't know why it hasn't been tried before. And it's got a damned good chance of working, too!"

"What is it, some kind of a break? They never pan out right."

"Nothing of the kind, that's the beauty of it! I don't go near the Big House, and neither do you, and neither does anybody else. We don't lift our little fingers to help the guy in any way. I'm not even bothering to appeal—which wouldn't be any use anyway."

Dr. Alexander, it could be seen, was beginning to be definitely interested. "What is it, then?" he said. "Give us the low-down."

"How ya fixed for bugs?" Muller blurted out elegantly.

The doctor looked blank. "Come again?"

"Germs, microbes, cultures—whatever the hell you call 'em!"

"Viruses, that what you mean?"

"Yeah, yeah. Them little things that cause diseases. I want you to fix up a shot-in-the-arm of them for Bull. Like an inoculation, you might say. Something slow-working, to give him on the train tomorrow.

"Something phony, get me, that won't kill the guy, but that'll give him symptoms like he's dying from an incurable disease."

Alexander chewed his cigar, looked doubtful. "So what'll that get him? They'll say, Go ahead and die, and start measuring him for a coffin!"

"OH, NO they won't, not the way I got it lined up. There's an old hag I'm cutting in for the part of his dear old mother. She used to be a first-class department-store dip, Mother Machree, they call her, but her hand's getting too shaky. Anyway, when the time comes, and Bull's on his last legs, and the prison doctors have examined him and convinced themselves it's no stall, she crops up with a mushful of tears and goes around petitioning 'em to let her bring her dying son home to die in peace in her arms.

"I'm ready to sic her onto the Governor himself, if I have to; you know how he dotes on his own old lady—he'll probably be a pushover. She's got a face that's a natural, all she needs is a lace collar and a pair of rimless specs, and she'll have him raining out of both lamps."

"Not bad, not too good either," commented Alexander judiciously. "Just so-so. Even if they do let him go 'home' to die, they'll put a guard

over him, won't they, until he cashes in his chips?"

"Are you worrying about that? Am I?" quoth Muller. "He isn't himself, so why should we? We get paid off the minute he's outside, after that he's on his own. Let them put ten guards! There's a million ways he can out-smart them. Buy 'em out, fake a death-certificate and a funeral for himself. Or he can give 'em the slip, take it on the lam to one of them places where there's no extradition-treaty in force.

"He's got enough salted away to live like a king the rest of his life, even after we get ours. The old witch is in for five grand, which is a break for her instead of going around cadging drinks in water-front dives like she's been doing. You're in for ten grand—and you don't have to move out of this room to earn it!

"All it costs you is a little of your time and the loan of one of your hypos. The whole thing was my idea in the first place, and I'm the—well, contact man for the various parties—so I'm in for twenty."

Alexander said surlily: "I never yet took up anyone's first offer on a thing, no matter what it was. Sing a little louder, he ain't in a position where he can be a piker."

"Fifteen," said Muller promptly, and added: "You ain't the only pain-killer could be had for this job, you know."

"Oh, yes I am!" contradicted the other. "Very few of 'em would be ripe for it. Fifteen does it. Now, who puts it to him?"

"I got a plant riding the same train with him tomorrow, all primed for it. There'll be two detectives going up with him, and you know how they sit—one on the outside of the seat, one on the seat right behind him—but

that's nothing. Ever hear of Tommy the Tooth?"

"No," admitted the doctor.

"He don't fool around with firearms. I guess that's why you never did business with him. He's the absolute King of Dips. Lays off all year around and just works the suburban trains during the Christmas holidays, when they're crowded. He's a little short guy, and keeps his hands in sight the whole time. He's so good, his whole record could be written on the back of a postage-stamp. He's in for fifteen hundred, and I know he'll get it into Bull's hide before they take him off the train! It's your angle of it I'm worried about."

"I'm not," said the other. "Just let me see a little something on account first, I don't do charity-work."

MULLER took out a fistful of bills, passed them over. "This comes out of my own pocket," he remarked ruefully. "Now, his train pulls out at eight, and Tommy the Tooth's gotta have the thing by seven at the latest. It's our last chance, once they get Bull up there he's sunk."

"It's got to be very slow-working," Alexander said thoughtfully. "He can't just get sick the first week he's up there, it'll look too phony, they'll tumble right away. He'll have to figure on serving out at least a couple months of his stretch, and being sick as a dog toward the end."

Tommy the Tooth had the end seat on the first bench in the waiting-room. In other words he was as close to the ramp that led down to track-level as he could get without actually loitering alongside the ticket-taker, which would have made him too conspicuous to those passing through. He was a short little fellow, five foot three at the most, with buck teeth spearing his lower lip

and a most misleading, sanctimonious look on his face, suggesting a divinity-student.

He had his two-way ticket in his pocket, as far as the next station beyond the Big House and no further; Matt Muller didn't believe in throwing money away on Cooks' Tours for no reason. He had his grip crosswise between his shanks, full of dirty underwear, but with a fake bottom in it to take care of anything he might pick up on the way back, when he was on his own time again.

It didn't have to be opened to make insertions, a couple of short razor-gashes concealed by baggage-labels took care of that. He'd had it a long time, he was superstitious about it, believed it brought him luck. A top-coat was slung over one forearm, traveler-like. That was the forearm that had the syringe attached to it, midway between wrist and elbow—on the underside of course.

The needle itself hung loosely on the end of its little rubber feed-tube, just short of the bottom of his cuff. Alexander had bedded it in a little wad of absorbent-cotton, lest its point inadvertently prick the wearer ahead of time and give him a dose of his own medicine.

Bull Bradley and the two dicks finally showed up, within two minutes of train-time, which was part of their technique in getting a prisoner safely up to the jug. Even someone not in on it couldn't very well have mistaken them. They made no attempt to hide the handcuff. They came along one on each side of Bull, but his left hand was free.

"'Board!" boomed the voice of the dispatcher through a loud-speaker. "8.05 Local for bla, bla, bla—"

Tommy the Tooth seemed to come

to with a start, as though he had just then remembered that was *his* train. He hoisted his valise, showed his ticket at the gate, went down the dimly-lighted ramp.

The trio were just clearing the lower end of it. By the time he got down there himself, they were just boarding the train. He took good note of which car; it was all a matter of timing.

"'Board!" shouted the conductor. He swung aboard. The line of cars jolted a second time, started to move. Tommy the Tooth started to run—although there really wasn't any necessity for that yet. He made it quite easily—the same vestibule they had used, but pretended breathless dishevelment to cover up his arriving after they had.

They were sitting down just like two dicks always do shepherding a prisoner on a train, when he turned in the car-aisle. Bull by the window, the one linked to him on the outside seat, the free one directly behind his mate. They had chosen the last two seats in the row, probably had them held for them, so that they commanded a view of the whole car up ahead of them and no one could sit behind them.

TOMMY THE TOOTH'S choice had to be made almost instantaneously, a step too many would take him past them, and once made couldn't be changed—he mustn't give them the slightest cause to notice him and he knew it. The choice was automatically limited for him, anyway. The opposite side of the aisle was out—he had to be within arm's reach of Bull. The two seats in front were taken. That left only the single seat *alongside the unmanacled detective!* Try and get it!

Tommy the Tooth's heart, or whatever it was pumped air through him,

shrivelled at the thought. The thing's a flop, he thought, I'll never pull it off, good-by fifteen-hundred!

The way the rear-guard dick was hugging the aisle he wouldn't even be able to get away from them and jump the train to save himself; his beautiful record was going to be spoiled! All this in three paces from the car-vestibule to where they were.

Tommy the Tooth showed courage worthy of a better purpose. He never faltered, never hesitated. Reaching up and slinging his valise onto the rack across the rear-guard detective's head, he stood there expectantly, as though waiting for the dick to shove over and make room for him. "I beg your pardon," he said with sanctimonious politeness.

The dick didn't move. The Tooth made a move to wedge in past his knees. The dick's arm clamped to the back of the seat ahead, barring the way. "Find another seat," he said curtly.

The one in front glanced back across his shoulder, but Bull stared straight ahead, a sure sign he'd caught on what was up.

The Tooth knew he mustn't get tough, mustn't even get too insistent, or that finished it then and there. His only chance was to act as though he couldn't understand why they didn't want him to sit with them. They'd never give him the reason of their own accords, he knew.

"Beat it," said the dick, "you heard me."

The Tooth glanced around; luck was with him. There had been until now just two other vacant seats left in the whole car; now a couple of men came in for a smoke and took them both.

"But this is the only seat left," The Tooth said mildly. He beat the dick to the count, flagged the conductor be-

fore he did, which was good psychology. "I'd like to sit down here, and this gentleman seems to object—"

The Tooth usually made a good first impression. And maybe the conductor was the type inclined to side with the underdog in any argument. "Have you men four tickets or just three?" he asked meaningfully.

"Three," said the dick, with a disgusted look that showed he knew the train-regulations had him licked.

"Then I'm sorry, that don't cover this extra seat. You'll have to let this man sit down here for the time being—if he wants it that way."

"I don't see what's wrong with my sitting here," observed the Tooth innocently. He edged past, sloshed his topcoat across the dick's knees, sat down and began studying a row of grimy tenements sliding by outside the window.

He was on the receiving-end of a long, sizzling glare for about five minutes; then the detective turned it off. Finally, when the tenements had become open country, he took out a little pocket-sized book that was an old standby of his on train-trips, "Trigonometry and Higher Mathematics," and began poring over it.

THE back of Bull's neck, thick and fuzzy, loomed in front of him just above the back of the seat. Bull never stirred, but it must have been quite a strain on him; even a needle-jab is enough to make you tense, when you don't know from one moment to the next when you're going to get it.

Tooth hoped he'd have enough muscular control not to rear when it hit him, and give things away. Beyond getting into the seat where he now was, he made no plans whatever. He was a

firm believer in letting things like that take care of themselves.

They did. Inspiration is another name for that. He glanced down at his own feet and saw that one shoelace was dangling to the floor. It wasn't untied, but one end was longer than the other, he'd tied it carelessly in his hurry this morning. The same glance showed him an open seam in the seat that he hadn't noticed until now. The backs of all the seats were reversible, made to face either way.

The detective beside him, who was a large-jointed man, had forced this one up a little out of its usual position to make room for his knees. There was a quarter-of-an-inch gap there, between the flat bottom of the seat and the slanting back. He had been thinking of Bull's neck or shoulder as the possible target until now. This discovery led him to think of quite another part of his person.

THE approaching deadline spurred him to action. One of the men who had come in from another car was finishing his smoke, getting ready to go back again. The dick would ask him to clear out the minute that other seat fell vacant. It had to be now or never.

He stepped on his own shoe-lace, pulled, and undid it. The car-door banged closed and the dick growled hostilely: "Awright, there's a seat up there for ya, now haul your freight out of here!"

"Just a minute," said Tooth haughtily, "let me tie my shoe-lace first." He planted his foot athwart that seam between the two halves of the seat in front, got busy with the two ends of the lace. His upthrust knee and crouched body hid one hand from the detective.

He doubled it back on itself, brought the needle down below his cuff. He flicked off the cotton-stopper, wedged it under his nail so it wouldn't drop to the floor.

He got his thumb on top of the plunger. He aimed the implement at the plush-lipped seam, rammed it home, pressed his arm against his calf to squeeze the syringe, drove the plunger down.

There was a protesting creak from the back of the seat, as though the body resting against it had stiffened spasmodically, if not jolted. It went unnoticed amidst all the other creaks of the moving car.

He held it a second to give the bulb a chance to empty itself, pulled it out again—with an amount of resistance that was a very good omen—and concealed it inside his sleeve once more.

The dick, meanwhile, had gotten up and was standing in the aisle, impatiently waiting for him to vacate. "Hurry up," he grunted, "does it take you all day?" He could see less than before, from where he now was.

The Tooth tied the recalcitrant knot with a flourish, grabbed down his valise, sidled past. "Never saw such a person in my life!" he commented affrontedly. The dick bent his arm backward at him, but more as a gesture than with any actual intention to hit him.

"You dare strike me, sir!" said Tooth outragedly—but from a safe distance away. It gave him a chance, however, to look back at Bull from where he was and find out whether it had worked or not.

Bull's face was suffused a dark, ebbling red all over, like a person who has just had a severe shock when—and where—it was least expected. Their glances didn't meet. Tooth, satis-

fied by the knowledge of a job well-done, turned and went up the car-aisle to his new seat.

THE DYING man was carried off the train on a stretcher by the two prison-guards that had made the trip down with him. A sorrowing little old lady in black, with violets on her old-fashioned bonnet and a handkerchief tightly pressed to her quivering mouth, stepped down next, on the arm of the sympathetic conductor. She crouched down to where the invalid lay stretched flat on the concrete station-platform, carefully tucked the blankets around his neck, patted him consolingly on the forehead. "We'll be home soon now, dear," she whispered, "Just a few more minutes."

The two guards exchanged a pitying look. All the world loves a mother—even prison-guards. And this one had such a sweet face, that got under your skin. They carefully raised the stretcher between them, carried it up the ramp and through the station. Heads turned curiously to stare after the poignant little procession.

"We won't be able to get him into a taxi," she remarked. "Mr. Muller—that's his lawyer—promised to have a private ambulance here to meet us."

It was waiting there backed up to the curb, when they carried him out to the sidewalk. The stretcher was shovelled gently in through the open back, the little old lady was helped up beside it, one guard followed and closed the doors, the other went and sat up front with the driver. The conveyance, which looked more like a private limousine than an ambulance, started off carefully through the traffic-swirls.

It stopped twenty minutes later in front of an unpretentious but neat little two-family house, on the out-

skirts of the city. It was the only dwelling on its particular street, which maybe was why it had been chosen. No neighbors to tell the difference between a home-coming and a first-arrival. The top floor was vacant, but homey little muslin curtains peered from the ground-floor windows.

The little old lady alighted, fumbled in her old-fashioned pocketbook for her latchkey—which was strangely shiny and new-looking. She found out she wouldn't need it after all; the lawyer and the family-doctor were waiting in the open doorway.

"Where do you want him, Mother?" Muller asked, supervising the carrying in of the stretcher.

She stifled a sob. "In his own room," she said, "where he slept when he was a boy."

Dr. Alexander trailed the stretcher on the opposite side, taking the patient's pulse as he went along. The latter looked around "his own room where he slept as a boy" as though he'd never been in the place before. He seemed, however, to feel too low to really care much.

The guards started undressing him between them; the little old lady brought out a pair of candy-striped pajamas from a dresser-drawer, surreptitiously got rid of the price-tag that showed they had never been worn before. They put the coat on Bull Bradley and the sleeves came not much below his elbows. "M-my!" she murmured embarrassedly, "how you've grown! That's the trouble with buying things for people sight unseen."

As they got ready with the trousers, a remark slurred out of the corner of his mouth that sounded like, "Scram, whaddye think this is, a course in plastic sculpture?"

She sidled toward the door, promis-

ing "I'll make you some nice chicken-broth, after that hard ride down."

Dr. Alexander stayed in there with him after he had been put to bed; Muller came out with the two guards, accompanied them to the front door with a chummy hand on each one's shoulder.

Mattress Muller stood at the front door, watched them walk away. When he reentered the house, he was rubbing his hands together delightedly, like some one who expects to come into some money shortly. Very shortly.

HE STOPPED abruptly, stared. Alexander had just edged out of the sick-room, and it was the look on his face that stopped him. The look was a white, frightened one. He jerked his head at Muller, like he had that first night outside his "office," led him into another room out of ear-shot.

"What's the matter?" the lawyer asked sharply, "What's up?"

Alexander fanned his hand at him urgently. "Go in there and get that money—quick! Hurry up, and let's get out of here—before he tumbles!"

"I'm going to," said Muller, "but what's the rush? They've gone back to the train. He's got an unconditional release, the Governor himself pardoned him after he'd studied the findings of the prison medical-board. He's in the clear, he don't even have to beat it anyplace."

"No, but we do!" the doctor almost sobbed, with an apprehensive look over his shoulder at the closed door. "And the quicker the better! He used to be a killer, didn't he? Well, he's liable to be one all over again, the minute he gets wise—"

"Gets wise to what?" Muller was acting a little frightened himself now, it must have been catching.

"No wonder you wangled an unconditional release, no wonder the medical board up there voted to send him home! The joke wasn't on them, it's on him! And unless you get what's coming to us p.d.q., it's going to be on us!

"Listen, I don't claim to be fool-proof, but I do know my stuff. That guy in there's really dying—there's no mistaking it!

"Don't ask me what happened; either the test-tubes got mixed that night in my excitement and he got the thing full-strength instead of diluted, or—or he carried the starvation-act too far, ran himself down until the phony toxin got a grip on him. I know the signs too well, pal; it's not even a question of days like they think, it's a question of hours.

"We gotta get our cut and get out of his reach before he finds out; I know his type, he'll take us along with him to get even! Get in there and go to work fast—if he isn't already delirious—and watch your step!"

"Phew!" groaned Muller. "Nice work, smart guy, I take off my hat to you!" He stopped outside the bedroom-door a minute, rubbed his hand circularly around his face as though to wipe off the dismayed expression, and went in beaming.

Bull Bradley's head was thrust so far back his chin pointed straight up into the air. His hands clutched the covers convulsively, pleating them. His wishbone rose and fell heavily, as though breathing were an effort. A look of renewed alarm crossed the lawyer's face at the sight, but he quickly mastered it. Not that he gave a rap whether Bull lived or died, but he wanted his money.

"Well, they've gone!" he announced cheerfully. "Buck up, boy! Now, how's about squaring things?"

Bull's shaved head tilted forward again. Sweat glossed it and his eyes were bulgy. "I feel terrible," he groaned. "I couldn't feel any worse if it was the real thing! Call Alexander back, ask him what's the matter."

The lawyer reopened the door, signalled with a pitch of the head. "Gimme a hand," he murmured inaudibly as the quack slithered past, "He's beginning to smell a rat." Aloud he informed him, "Says he feels lousy, what do you make of it, doc?"

"What does he expect?" said Alexander artfully. "He's weak from starving himself, that's what's the matter. It'll take him a day or two to get back to himself."

"Are you sure everything's under control?" Bull whined feebly from the bed.

"You'll feel like a million the minute you get something under your belt." He opened the door, shouted through it ungallantly: "Hey, bum! Hurry up that soup!"

BULL'S dotting parent staggered in. She had evidently been busy with a different kind of "soup" altogether. Her silvery hair was down over her eyes, she clutched a gin-bottle tightly in one hand, a hand-rolled cigarette dangled between her lips. "Frankie 'n' Johnnie were lovers, hic!" she cackled in a cracked voice.

"Gimme my fi'e gees!" she demanded raucously. "Come on, gimme my fi'e gees!"

"I'll give you five of these!" the lawyer threatened wrathfully, balling a fist in front of her face. He took the bottle away from her, pushed her back through the door—none too delicately. She sat down with a thump somewhere outside in the hall.

"Use that instead, it'll get quicker

results," Alexander suggested. He held Bull up in a sitting-position, keeping his own face averted. Muller pushed the neck of the gin-bottle through his lips without ceremony. Bull swallowed, gagged. They took it away, waited for him to get his breath back, tried it again. By the time they had done it a third time, two red fever-spots had appeared on his cheeks and the gin-line was below the label. "Not too much, you'll croak him," the quack warned in an undertone. "How's 'at feel, better?" he grinned falsely at the patient.

Bull's eyes were rolling around in his head; the flood of gin must have been going through his weakened system like high-voltage.

"Now, let's get it over with," Muller said. "There's forty-one thousand five-hundred coming to us, counting Tommy the Tooth. You're not gonna hold out on us, are you, after we swung it for you?"

"No," panted the patient, "but I don't think—I can make it—right now."

The two exchanged a look.

"Whaddye mean you don't think you can make it?"

"Ish, ish in cash in safety-deposit box, Shtate Nash'nal, name of Jack Penrose. I'm only one who can get it out."

"Oh, no you're not," Muller assured him grimly. He gave Alexander the eye, brought out a sheaf of cards from his pocket. "I figured it was somewhere like that, got one from every bank in town. State National, eh? He separated one from the rest, passed it to Bull. "Here, this gives me access to your box. Just sign it Jack Penrose. You already gave me power of attorney before you went up, if you remember."

Bull seemed to be sinking into a

stupor. He shook his head vaguely. "But I can't—theresh more there than just forty-one thousand there."

Again they exchanged a look. "How much more?"

"Hunnerd-fifty thousand," Bull muttered sleepily.

"Sign!" cried Muller, sticking a fountain-pen in his hand. "We only want what's coming to us," he said, "we won't touch the rest." Alexander shook him by the shoulder, to bring him back a little. Muller all but guided the hand holding the pen.

"That's it!" he exclaimed elatedly, "Jack Penrose!"

The pen hit the floor, they let Bull flop back on the pillows, they all but tripped over one another in their hurry to get out of the room. Never had a death-chamber been left so abruptly before. Muller stopped a minute to transfer the key to the outside of the door, lock it, and take it out. "Just to make sure he croaks in complete privacy," he snickered.

"He will too, he's a goner!" the quack snickered. "What about Tommy the Tooth and the old hag?"

"The hell with them!" said Muller, "They can't prove anything. Once he dies, what evidence is there of a frame-up. We'll split the whole hundred-and-fifty between us!"

The front door banged after them with jarring force. Out in the street Muller, the signed paper still clutched in one hand, wig-wagged violently. "Taxi!" he hawled.

INSIDE, the house was strangely silent all at once, with only a dying man and a drunken crone left in it. Mother Machree groveled there in a corner of the hall, where they had brushed by her without noticing her. Holding her bruised hip, she tottered

painfully to her feet, glowering after them. She shook a palsied fist. "Gyp me out of my cut, will ye?" she wheezed. "I'll show ye! This ain't over yet!" She was like one of the Furies, breathing venom, white hair awry, as she lurched toward the locked bedroom-door.

A torrent of ice-cold water sluiced cruelly over Bull's head and shoulders. He gasped, revived a little. Violent, stinging slaps brought heat to his cheeks and chest. They began to cut, like whip-lashes. His eyes opened, he tried to ward them off. The old woman of the train-ride was standing over him, flicking him with a wet towel for a goad.

"That's it!" she screeched triumphantly. "I been standing here doing this to you for ten minutes! If you can get up at all, get up—do your dying some other time!"

"I can't—get up," he said weakly.

"Then I'll give you something to get up for!" the virago grimaced. She pointed at the door—what there was left of it. The middle panel, around the lock had been gashed to toothpicks. The lock itself still adhered bodily to the frame. A small hatchet lay on the floor close by. "They lammed out on you, and locked you in here—to die alone!"

"Why?" he asked dazedly.

"To clean up that hundred-fifty-thousand you had salted away—why d'ya suppose!"

"They can't," he said, "I—"

"What's to stop 'em?" she jeered malignantly. "You cant stop 'em! You're dying! Really dying, not just kidding! I heard 'em say so outside. 'He's a goner,' Alexander said. 'I musta mixed the test-tubes up that night in my excitement, giving him the real stuff,' he said. And he laughed when he said it, like he done it a-purpose. Now, how

d'ya like that? Ya gonna lie there and croak, or ya gonna get up?"

RAGE, slow-burning, inexorable, began to mottle his distorted face. Beams of it shot out of his eyes, bright now, not dull any more. "I could've stayed put, and it wouldn't have happened! Even a life-sentence was better than to die like a dog this way! I wanted out—and they've killed me, damn 'em!" He threw the soaked covers aside. She caught him by the hand with both of hers, and tugged and pulled at him, to help him up. "Just gimme strength to last long enough to get my hands on them two!" He struggled upright, swung his legs weakly toward the floor. She let go, thrust the gin-bottle at him. "This'll give you strength, too—without having to pray for it!"

He tilted it, put it down again. "I signed something, didn't I?" He saw the fountain-pen lying on the floor. "Sure I did—and I know what it was, too! It must have been a paper giving 'em access to where I've got the money, that's all they'd want!" He tottered erect. "Is there a phone in this dump?"

"Whaddye wanna do, phone for a hearse for yourself? No there isn't, Muller just rented it for a week the way it was."

"They've probably been there and cleaned me out by now, anyway. But I know where they'll head from there! They won't hang around in the vault, arguing about the split in front of the custodian. They won't go to Muller's office, either, to do it, he wouldn't want his staff to get wise. They'll go to Alexander's crummy place—that's where! That's where I can catch up with them—if I can only make it!"

He took a step forward, another

one—suddenly toppled full-length on the floor, bonelessly like an acrobat. "See—I can't make it!" he cursed, chin on the floor. "That's what gripes most! I ain't so sore about dying now any more—but if I gotta go without taking them two double-crossers with me—!" Moisture filmed his eyes; few times have people shed tears because they couldn't kill! "I haven't even got a gun," he breathed heavily. He stared across the carpet, saw the kindling-hatchet she had used to break in with lying there by the door. "Put that in my hand," he said, "that'll have to do. It'll be plenty—if I can only get to where they are!"

The bloodthirsty old woman picked it up, handed it to him, demanding scornfully: "What good is this—against rods? I don't know about Mattress, but Alexander would catch cold without one."

"You forget," he rasped, fingering it lovingly, "I'm not afraid of dying any more, because I'm going to anyway. They still are. That makes a difference."

He struggled upright to his knees once more, belly showing between coat and waistband of the misfit pajamas. "Don't stand there cringing," he ordered curtly, "If you want to do something for me, run out and bring a taxi back to the door. If I can't make it myself, the driver can come in and carry me out to it."

She turned and hobbled out, hand still clutching her hip where Muller had thrown her down.

BULL BRADLEY took it very slow. He knew exactly what he had to do now, but he had to make every gesture and bodily motion count, he didn't have very many of them left. He heard a machine drive

up and stop outside the house, and a minute later Mother Machree came in, followed by the driver. They sat him up in a chair, and Machree helped him on with one shoe, the driver with the other—over his naked feet.

The driver suggested, "You oughta let me take you to the hospital, Mac, the shape you're in."

"I'm going to my doctor's right now, that's where you're taking me," Bull panted meaningfully. "And I know I'm gonna feel a lot better after I've seen him!"

The old woman cackled vengefully.

"All right, see if you can get me out to your machine," Bull said. He swung one arm up over the driver's shoulder and leaned on him. They zig-zagged down the short hall and out of the house, like a pair of drunks.

The old woman hobbled after them as far as the door, hissing with satisfaction. "Here's hoping you connect, Bradley," she called out after him wrathfully. "See that you make a good job of it!"

"You'll still get what's coming to you, you done your part of the job okay, you were the only one who did," Bull promised her over his shoulder. "I'll attend to it—before I wind up." The driver hoisted him in, hatchet-handle still sticking up out of his pocket, climbed under the wheel and took it away.

Mother Macree limped back into the empty house. "And even if I don't," she consoled herself, "I got this place to live in till next Friday, and there's half a bottle of gin left."

Bull, slumped on the back seat like a bundle of old clothes, gave the driver the address. "And make it fast," he begged hoarsely. He wasn't afraid of getting there too late—they weren't expecting him so they'd take their time—

he was afraid of not lasting until he did get there. The other-world humming, abetted by the cab-engine, was louder in his ears now. The melody of death. Every once in awhile there was a rain of black specks in front of his eyes. Colors blurred and he saw rain-bows.

After it was beginning to seem like he'd been born in the cab and grew up in it, it finally stopped. "Here we are," said the driver. "Want me to give you a hoist in?"

"No," said Bull, "I'm on my own from now on. Just wait here for me—" He didn't have any money on him to pay the guy, anyway, even if he'd wanted to—"I'm coming down again in a little while—maybe—and you can drive me to the police-station if I do."

The dumb driver looked surprised. "Gee, you go funny places," he remarked.

BULL spilled out, stayed on his feet somehow, wavered into the shoddy vestibule. He saw Alexander's name on the mail-plate the way Muller had that night months before, but he didn't push that bell. Instead he pushed one marked "Herskowitz," on the top floor rear. The door opened and he started up the long interminable stairs a step at a time. Not the way well people climb stairs, on alternating legs, but with both feet to a step—and a halt each time. Long before he made the first landing a voice called down shrilly from the heights above, "So who's dot?"

"Sorry," he said quietly, "I made a mistake."

"Schlemiel!" The Herskowitz door banged ill-humoredly. He continued inching painfully up, hatchet-shaft wobbling loosely in his pocket.

A year went by and he was on the

third floor at last. The strong odor of carbolic told him which door it must be. He stepped up very close to it and he listened. There was no sound coming from it. He wilted a little; they weren't in there, and he knew he'd never last to go after them anywhere else. He tried the knob cautiously, found the door locked.

Then abruptly, as though that had broken some long pause or tension on the other side of it, Muller's voice sounded, strident, angry, "All right, you win. Put the gun down. You've got one and I haven't—that's why you suggested coming here, I guess. Take your fifty per-cent cut! But I'm not through with you, Alexander! This little stunt is going under the heading of unfinished business between you and me! This is highway robbery!"

Bull heard the quack give a short jeering laugh. "And the way we high-jacked it out of his box just now wasn't, maybe! Or the way he got it himself in the first place! It's dog eat dog in this game. You oughta consider yourself lucky I don't keep the whole haul and plug you quiet in the bargain! G'wan, take your cut, shut up, and get out of here—while you still got the chance!"

Bull gave a skull-like grin outside the door, his fingers closed around the hatchet-shaft; he didn't have the chance—any more.

Muller's voice sounded a little shaky, as though afraid Alexander might yet carry out the threat he had just made. "Don't worry, I'm going—I dowanna have no more to do with anyone like you."

"And keep quiet about the whole thing if you know what's good for you!"

A key turned abruptly in the lock. Bull pulled, and the hatchet-blade came

clear of his pocket. The door was thrown open in his face.

They stood staring at each other eye-to-eye, he and Muller.

The shyster had been already white from the gun-play with his accomplice; now he went green. His eyes spread until there didn't seem to be any room left for anything else on his face. He acted paralyzed, incapable of movement. A small briefcase he was holding tucked under one arm loosened, fell to the door-sill with a slap.

The hatchet flashed back in an arc. "Warm hell up for me till I get there," Bull said sibilantly. The weapon stayed poised for a split second, reversed, hissed downward. Muller was in the way. It didn't stop until half-way through his head. Muller, hatchet and all, spiralled slowly downward on cork-screwing knees. Bull pried it loose. Only a man already half-dead could have endured the sight it left behind.

HE stepped cat-like across the body, no longer unsure of his balance, somehow, and started closing in on Alexander. The doctor had been standing behind a table-top desk. On it were packages of currency, tied up in red rubber-bands; the same rubber-bands Bull had snapped around them. He was holding two of them in his left hand. He didn't have to snatch up the gun, he'd been holding it in his right hand even before the late Muller had opened the door to leave.

He crouched a little, watchfully, waiting for the normal reaction of anyone facing the business-end of a gun. A dead stop, an attempt at retreat, certainly anything but a continued advance. "Messy," he breathed, "but that's as far as you go—*this says so.*"

Bull didn't give him the normal reaction; or if he did, it was only the

normal reaction of someone already dead facing additional death. He came on—not in a straight line but swinging pendulum-like from side to side, like an animal maneuvering to spring at its prey's least-guarded point. He kept swinging his hatchet-arm at the same time, without bringing it all the way up.

The doctor was already half-disarmed by Bull's maniacal slow-moving advance, that the threat of the gun seemed to have no power to halt him. The sight of what lay on the floor in the open doorway helped to unnerve him, took away his calm presence of mind.

In cold blood, he would have realized that he *could* stop the man, only had to pull the trigger without moving from where he was.

But his blood was hot with panic; he began backing away as Bull came on, in a desperate attempt to prolong the useless threat that was having no effect. His confidence had shattered into little pieces. He could have been behind a tommy-gun and it would have done him no good.

Bull came around on his side of the flat desk, and they were both in the open now, with nothing between them. A wall suddenly, treacherously, seemed to leap forward, caught the doctor behind the back, barred further retreat. He tried to escape sidewise, and Bull moved to that side, covering him; he tried to shift to the other side, and Bull was again before him. The hatchet kept giving those quick little lifts in his hand, without ever coming up higher than his elbow. A zigzag of red dots had followed it across the room.

"Take the money," Alexander whimpered, "and get out! There it is, on the—"

THE hatchet suddenly flashed again, but not high in the air like before. It swiped sidewise, in the gesture a cat uses with its paw when it feels playful. The gun went off belatedly—at nothing. It turned over, fell to the floor. Alexander's hand turned over after it, a red mouth opening across the back of it. Bull snaked again, this time like a colt pawing with its hoof, the gun skittered across the floor behind him, slid under Muller's curled-up body.

Doors began to open outside in the hall. Bull suddenly turned, ran at the one that led in here, scuffed Muller aside, banged and locked it. "They'd only come in here—and save your life!" he gritted.

Alexander, racing blindly around the four walls of the room looking for an outlet, began to howl for help, in a voice that must have carried for blocks. He began to throw things at Bull, futile things, anything at all that came his way. The last thing he threw was a lightweight rubber-banded packet of bills that had stayed in his hand all this while. . . .

Outside the locked murder-door the first few horrified listeners were joined by others, creeping slowly down from above, creeping slowly up from below, hands on bannisters. They all huddled together for mutual protection there on the landing, staying back behind a deadline half-a-dozen yards from the threshold; no one made a move to interfere.

Each newcomer whispered the same thing those before him had, "What is it?" Nobody answered.

Behind the door Alexander's howls seemed to go around and around, like on a calliope. They'd none of them ever heard a man scream that loudly or that long before. "Look!" somebody said,

and pointed to the sill under the locked door, where Muller had fallen.

He wasn't there now, but the signs of it still were. "Better go down and get a cop!" they all urged one another belatedly. No one seemed to want to go; a sort of mass-paralysis gripped them. Finally someone on the fringes of the group turned and ran down the stairs.

The screams broke off short, ended in a swift grunt as though they had been *sliced* off—then there was silence. The pop-eyed knot of tenants fidgeted, edged nervously back, put their hands to one another's shoulders and arms, as if to keep from bolting en masse.

The utter stillness, the electrical tension, held and held—until they were almost forgetting to breathe. From behind that ominous door, nothing. Then at last a single footfall.

The key clicked, the door swung back, and Bull Bradley leaned there against the frame, gazing negligently out at them. He was breathing a little fast from exertion, as though he'd been running, but that was all. He was smiling a smile that wouldn't come off. There wasn't a drop of blood on him. But in the room in back of him—it was better not to look.

They backed nervously away, step by step, the whole herd of them. Somebody in the rear missed his footing on the stairs, went down a step with a *clump*. They parted dead-center, gave him an aisle to pass through, and he didn't move. He could have gotten away a dozen times over. Walked right through them down the stairs and out of the house, and nobody in that crowd would have dared put out a hand to stop him. But he just smiled away, leaning at ease against the door-frame. "Has anybody," he said pleasantly, "got my kind of a cigarette?"

A hand was thrust skittishly out to him, holding a cellophaned package; then was pulled hurriedly in again.

"Much obliged," said Bull Bradley, who had just killed two men.

Finally they got there, the man from the beat below and two from a prowler. Lazy smoke drifted from Bull Bradley's nostrils as he watched them pounding up the stairs, "Took you long enough," he remarked coolly. When one of the dicks came out from that room his face was three shades whiter. "Pretty tame now," he commented sickly, "for a guy that could do a job like that."

Bull snapped his cigarette down, took a hitch in his pajama-pants. "Bring on your electric chair!" he jeered. "I'll never know it!"

HE lived, strangely enough, long enough for the doctors to take another crack at him at the Big House when he went back there. That was after the trial and the sentence. Quick as they'd been over with, he was a little surprised at himself, but he wasn't worrying about it any. He had a new destination up there this time, the death-house, but he wasn't worry-

ing about that either. He was a cinch to beat the Chair to the count, and it gave him a kick just to know how he was going to cheat them after all their trouble and expense; and gyp the executioner out of his fee, too.

Stripped to the waist, he sat up on the examination-table after they'd gotten all through with him, swung his feet to the floor. They'd gone into a huddle.

"Well," he sneered, "whaddye looking so surprised about—that I lasted this long? I had a little business to attend to first, that was all!"

"No," they explained, "we're stumped the way those symptoms have all disappeared. Either our first diagnosis was all haywire, or the excitement and activity of hacking two guys to pieces burned 'em all out of you. We can't find a thing the matter with you any more.

"If it wasn't that you've got a little date behind the black door, we'd give you forty more years—"

Bull Bradley gave a funny little gurgle and leaned over at the floor without moving a muscle.

"Pick him up," somebody said, "he's fainted dead away!"



ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKIE ALLEN



MANHUNT IN THE ROCKIES

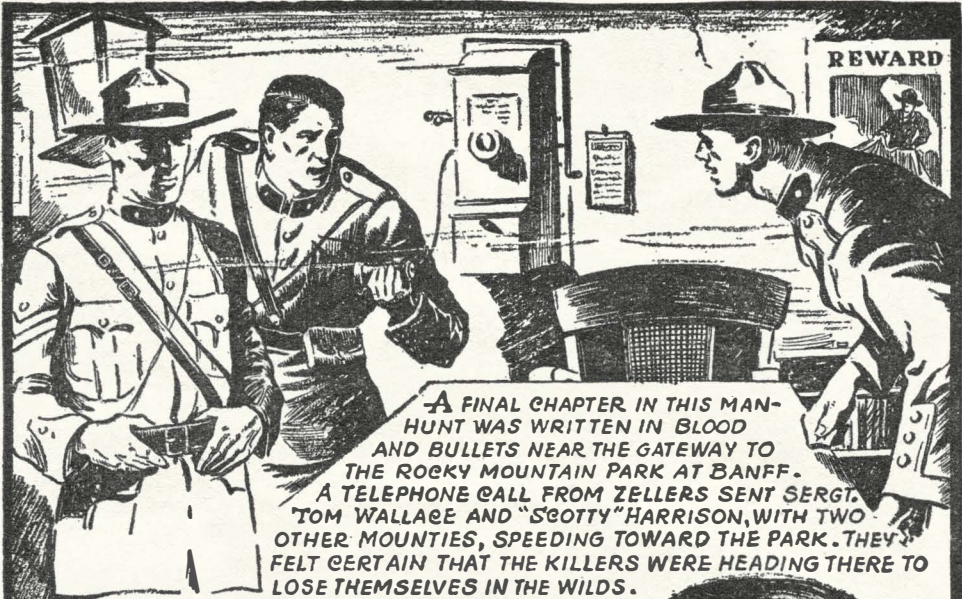
CONSTABLE J.G. SHAW OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE "GOT HIS MEN" BEFORE THEY "GOT HIM" — ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 4, 1935. HIS CAPTIVES WERE JOE POSNIKOFF, PETE VOYKIN AND JOHN KALMAKOFF, YOUNG BANDITS WANTED FOR HOLDUPS IN WESTERN CANADA. AIDED BY BILL WAINRIGHT, A LOCAL OFFICER, SHAW PILED THE TRIO INTO A CAR, THEN DROVE TOWARD THE JAIL AT ARRAN, SASKATCHEWAN. HE NEVER REACHED THERE.

A FARMER FOUND THE BODIES OF THE TWO OFFICERS EARLY MONDAY MORNING. THEIR SLAYERS HAD EVIDENTALLY OVERPOWERED THEM, SHOT THEM AND THEN FLED IN THE MOUNTIE'S CAR. ALTHOUGH THEY HAD A TWO DAYS START, THEIR TRAIL WAS EASILY PICKED UP. THEY HAD ATTENDED A DANCE IN A NEARBY TOWN DIRECTLY AFTER THE MURDERS. ON SUNDAY THEY HAD BULLIED A FARMER INTO GIVING THEM FOOD. ON THE MONDAY EVENING FOLLOWING, ROY ZELLERS, OPERATOR OF A GAS STATION AT EXSHAW, ALBERTA, WAS FILLING THE TANK OF A CAR OCCUPIED BY THREE MEN....

...SUDDENLY THE BROADCAST ON HIS RADIO WAS INTERRUPTED BY A POLICE ALARM DESCRIBING THE TRIO WANTED FOR THE ARRAN MURDER. RECOGNIZING HIS CUSTOMERS AS THE FUGITIVES, ZELLERS STOOD SPEECHLESS WITH FRIGHT, AS THE DRIVER, COCKING AN EAR, STEPPED ON THE GAS AND DROVE AWAY.



Coming Next Week—



A FINAL CHAPTER IN THIS MAN-HUNT WAS WRITTEN IN BLOOD AND BULLETS NEAR THE GATEWAY TO THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PARK AT BANFF. A TELEPHONE CALL FROM ZELLERS SENT SERGT. TOM WALLACE AND "SCOTTY" HARRISON, WITH TWO OTHER MOUNTIES, SPEEDING TOWARD THE PARK. THEY FELT CERTAIN THAT THE KILLERS WERE HEADING THERE TO LOSE THEMSELVES IN THE WILDS.

SOON THE MOUNTIES SAW THE LIGHTS OF TWO APPROACHING CARS. THEY HALTED THE FIRST. IN IT WERE A CALGARY MAN AND HIS WIFE, WHO TOLD THEM THEY HAD BEEN HELD UP, AND THAT THE CAR BEHIND THEM WAS THAT OF THE BANDITS. WALLACE AND HARRISON, STEPPING INTO THE GLARE OF THE SECOND CAR'S LIGHTS, MOTIONED IT TO STOP. FOR ANSWER THERE WAS A FUSILLADE OF SHOTS. THE TWO OFFICERS FELL BADLY WOUNDED. — ABANDONING THEIR CAR, THE BANDITS DARTED INTO THE WOODS AS COMPANIONS OF THE WOUNDED MEN CAME UP.



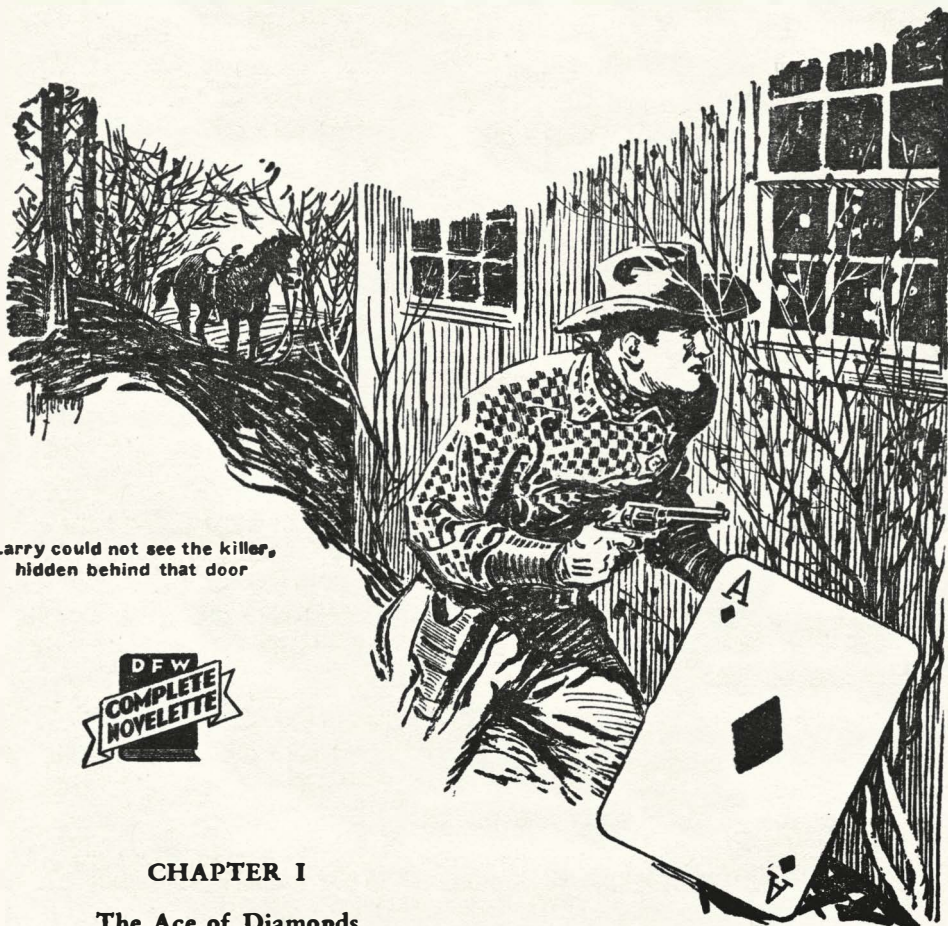
THE MOUNTIES ORGANIZED A POSSE, WHILE TOM WALLACE AND HARRISON WERE RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL. SEARCHING THE WOODS, THE PURSUERS GOT A BEAD ON ONE OF THE FUGITIVES AND, IN AN EXCHANGE OF SHOTS, DROPPED HIM DEAD. IT WAS POSNIKOFF. VOYKIN AND KALMAKOFF WERE SHOT THE NEXT DAY, WHEN THEY WERE CORNERED DEEPER IN THE BUSH. — BOTH OUTLAWS CHEATED THE GALLOWS WHEN THEY DIED IN THE BANFF HOSPITAL NOT LONG AFTER WALLACE AND HARRISON PASSED AWAY THERE.



SERG. TOM WALLACE
LAST VICTIM OF THE BANDITS.

The Ace Counterfeiter

The Red Brand of



Larry could not see the killer,
hidden behind that door



CHAPTER I

The Ace of Diamonds

LARRY DEVOE'S face was bitter and his eyes were turbulent as he unpinned the badge from his checkered shirt and placed it on the desk. "If that's what you gents want," he said, "you can have it. But I'm warning you my resignation doesn't mean I'll quit hunting the Ace of Diamonds."

His words left a hush in the office. The dozen Bar H Bar cowpunchers at the other side of the desk exchanged

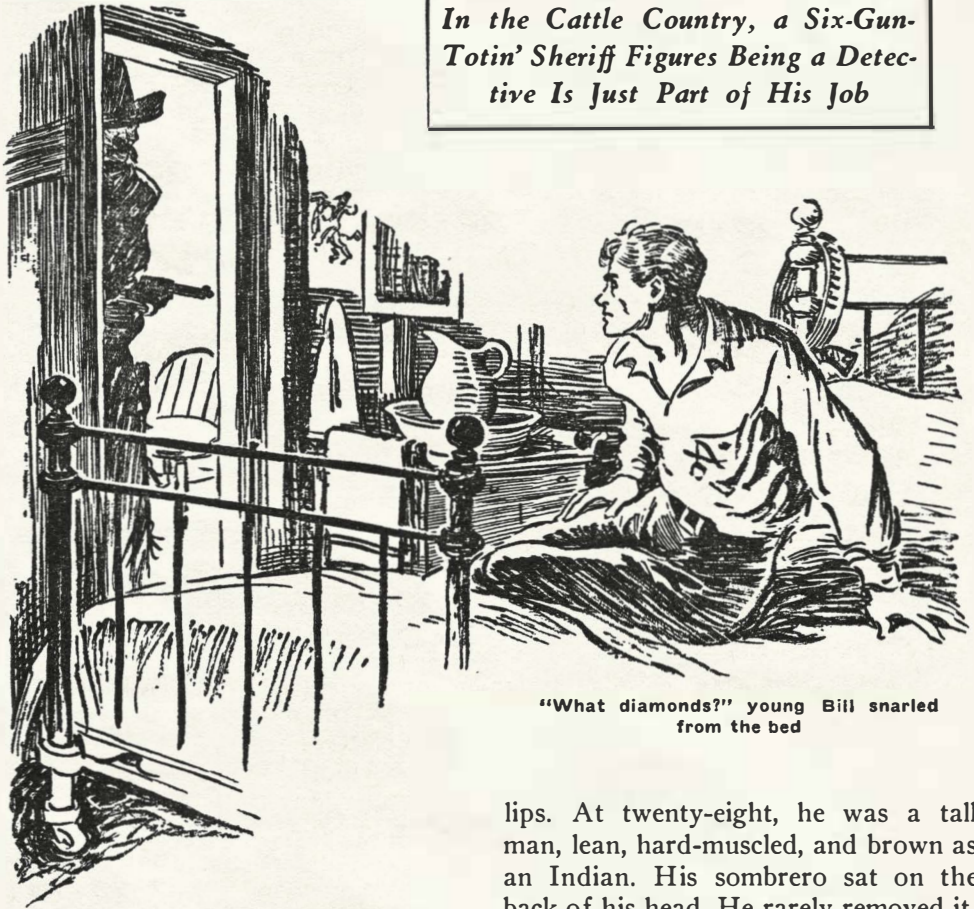
uneasy glances, fidgeted like restless bronchos, cleared their throats. Half a minute passed before Horny Bob Lassiter, foreman of the outfit, growled in embarrassment:

"Nah, Larry. That ain't what we came for at all. Don't get us wrong. We got nothing against you as an officer of the law—except that you ain't been able to stop these Ace o' Diamond murders. We ain't askin' you to give

Murder

By Oscar Schisgall

In the Cattle Country, a Six-Gun-Totin' Sheriff Figures Being a Detective Is Just Part of His Job



"What diamonds?" young Bill snarled from the bed

up the badge. All we want is that—"

"Hell," someone else growled, "shoving you out of office, Larry, is the last thing any of us hanker to do! Up to now, you've been a doggone good sheriff. All we're beggin' is that you spend a little more time on the Bar H Bar spread. We've had killings enough out there!"

Larry Devoe, who had inherited the position of sheriff as the result of a special election following the death of his father, tightened the line of his

lips. At twenty-eight, he was a tall man, lean, hard-muscled, and brown as an Indian. His sombrero sat on the back of his head. He rarely removed it, even in his office. Red hair dangled in dishevelment over his forehead, almost as low as his eyes.

Now, tensely silent, he kept his frown fastened on the discarded badge. And Horny Bob Lassiter seemed to misinterpret the silence, for he said hastily:

"Looka here, Larry. We wouldn't have rode in to put this up to you if— if things wasn't so plumb serious. You got to remember that so far, four cow-punchers have been murdered on Bar H Bar territory. Four dry-gulchin's in

three months, and not a sign o' the killer! Seems to me with a thing like that happenin', you ought to be spendin' *all* your time findin' out who's slingin' those slugs."

Larry Devoe slowly nodded, with a kind of sardonic tolerance. He raised his eyes to fix them on Horny Bob's homely countenance.

"You're right," he said. "Maybe I haven't been spending enough nights on the Bar H Bar. I've given your outfit only about thirty nights a month. Only I've always been at the wrong end o' the ranch, seems like, when any shooting started. Still, if you'd rather I'd keep this badge and—"

"Course we would!" rapped out Horny Bob.

"In that case, reckon maybe I'll just pitch permanent camp somewhere on your spread." There was still a hint of sarcasm in his words. "If I stick at it long enough, I figure I'm bound to stumble over this Ace of Diamonds killer. Meanwhile—" He picked up the badge, tossed it up a few inches, caught it—"I'll ask you hombres to clear out. I got a heap o' thinking to do. I'll mosey over to the Bar H Bar by dark."

Horny Bob Lassiter, gaunt and bow-legged, appeared about to offer some objection. He half raised a hand. Then he changed his mind.

"All right," he said curtly. "That's all we're askin'—the assurance that you'll give the Bar H Bar all your attention. With four of our waddies bushwhacked, there's no tellin' how many more will be killed!"

Sheriff Larry Devoe stood grimly unmoving while the dozen cowpunchers shuffled out of his office. He thought again of the bodies which, during the last three months, had been found on the Bar H Bar range—cowpunchers for whose deaths nobody had yet of-

fered a satisfactory explanation. He thought, too, of the strange symbol which had invariably been found on those corpses. It had been painted in blood on their shirts, over the heart—the crude replica of a playing card. Always it was the same: the Ace of Diamonds.

There was only one theory which might account for the startling repetition of that symbol. And yet, so far, nothing had occurred to bolster such a theory.

Larry Devoe drew a heavy breath, shook his head. The cowpunchers were out of the office now. Through the window, he could see them mount their horses in the street. Yellow dust, stirred by dozens of hoofs, rose in a vast choking cloud. Some of the horses reared. Horny Bob Lassiter called something in his hoarse voice, and the entire cavalcade thundered away in the direction of the Bar H Bar.

Larry Devoe smiled—a thin, humorless smile. As he pinned the badge back on his checkered shirt, he muttered, "Can't blame those hombres for gettin' a mite impatient. If I don't get them some results right soon, some of them are liable to get the notion that maybe—maybe *I'm* kind of shielding this Ace of Diamonds!"

He laughed briefly. For a few seconds he continued pondering. Then, on sudden determination, he tugged down his Stetson, tightened his gunbelt, and strode out to his saddled buckskin, waiting at the hitch-rack in the shade of the office.

"Yes, sir," he snapped, "I got to start showin' results!"

SHERIFF LARRY DEVOE, his features intent, rode out of Blake-town at a steady lope that carried him far across dusty range. To his

left, the Rio Grande ran like a stream of blood in the slanting red rays of a setting sun. The entire country about him looked uncanny in that late light—a hazy, rolling terrain daubed by incredible color. Yuccas threw long, shapeless shadows. Here and there cattle—Bar H Bar strays, for the most part—lifted their heads to stare at him dully. He granted them no attention. He rode on for almost an hour, until, topping a mesquite-covered ridge, he saw a small ranch house in the valley below him.

It was dark now, and he saw the building in moonlight; saw the warm gold of lamplight in its windows. Larry Devoe swallowed hard. The line of his jaws became tougher.

Five minutes later, he dismounted in front of the ramshackle house. He was just pulling the reins over his horse's head when a girl appeared in the door.

She was tall and slim, and she had hair that looked coppery in moonbeams. Always, at the sight of Ellen Traine, something caught in Larry's throat. Tonight was no exception. Slowly he drew off his sombrero as he gazed at her; muttered an awkward, "Evenin', Ellen."

She frowned. "What is it?"

The very sharpness of her tone made him fidget. But he had come on business—official business—and he crushed his unease.

"Your brother around?"

"No!"

Larry Devoe sadly shook his head. "Seems like I never can meet up with him when I hanker to," he observed. "When you expecting him back?"

"I don't know. He's out nighthawking. Quite a few of our cows have been wandering toward the river, across Bar H Bar territory. Bill's trying to poke them back." She hesitated.

"Is there anything I can do for you, mister?"

"Well—" Larry Devoe scowled down at his sombrero. "Maybe so, Ellen. All depends."

"About this Ace of Diamonds business again?"

It sounded like a challenge, and he answered only: "Yep."

"Then I can't help you!" Again her voice became brusque. "I don't know why you persist in coming here with those same questions time after time. You ought to know neither Bill nor I can tell you anything about those murders. If we did, we'd—"

"I'm not saying you've got any information about them." Larry cut in softly. His eyes rose to hold the girl's. His were steady, penetrating. "I do think, though, that you could help me plenty—if only you had a mind to."

"How?"

"I had a delegation of Bar H Bar cowpunchers in to see me a while back. Folks around here are getting mighty impatient about these Ace of Diamonds murders. Reckon you can't blame them much, either. Four killings in three months is plenty for any community—especially when the victims were hombres everybody liked."

"Still, I don't see how I can help—!"

Larry Devoe interrupted, "Look. Here's the whole mess as I see it. Nine months ago a few of the men hereabouts caught a feller named 'Ace' Diamond rustlin' cattle across the Rio Grande. He'd been pokin' wet cows into Mexico for quite a time. When those hombres grabbed him, he tried to shoot his way out of trouble. Killed two waddies and almost got away. But the rest caught him and—and kind of lost their tempers. They strung him up to the nearest tree before the law could step in."

THOUGH Ellen Traine knew the story as well as the sheriff himself, she made no effort to stop him. She stood still, slightly defiant, in the doorway where moonlight splashed upon her. She peered at him with eyes that were hard and challenging, but she allowed him to continue.

"'Ace' Diamonds," he went on in that same level tone, "was pretty bad medicine. Also, he was your cousin. Far as we've been able to find, he never had a real friend around Blaketown—except your brother Bill. He had no other relatives, either. Now, it happens that the four hombres that were murdered during the past few months were part of the lynchin' party that strung 'Ace' Diamond up to that tree. Considering the fact that every one of these four, when his carcass was found, had the Ace of Diamonds marked in blood on his shirt—well, you see how things stand, don't you, Ellen? Folks ain't *sayin'* much, but they're all thinkin'—"

"Yes," she cut in, with something terrible in the very quietness of her voice. "I know what they're thinking. They believe that because Bill and I were 'Ace' Diamond's cousins we're trying to take a family revenge on the community! They believe it's Bill himself who's been killing these Bar H Bar cowpunchers! And if they had the slightest bit of proof, they'd probably string *him* up to a tree, too. Is that it?"

Larry Devoe nodded.

"Well, it isn't true!" the girl cried. "Bill never killed a man in his life—not one!"

"And still—"

"Yes, I know what you're going to say. He's known to be a crack shot. He won the rifle-shooting prize at the rodeo last year. Is that it?" She laughed bitterly. "All right, I'll admit he can

handle a rifle as well as any man within a hundred miles. I'm proud of it, too. But he's never used his aim to murder anybody!"

To this Larry Devoe made no immediate reply. He turned his head to frown across the moonlit range, toward the shadowy, moving bulks that were cows. The Leaning T—the Traine outfit—was one of the smallest ranches in the vicinity. Young Bill Traine, its owner, had acquired the place a couple of years ago and was running less than two hundred head of cattle. He had no help, save that of his sister. He couldn't yet afford to hire men. And so it wasn't strange that he did his own nighthawking. Yet Larry, swinging his intent gaze back to the girl, advised: "I'm thinkin' it might be better if Bill stayed home nights."

"Why?"

"When a man as handy with a rifle as Bill spends a lot of nights out on the range—especially on Bar H Bar land—it starts folks to talking. Some of the Bar H Bar riders are wondering just *why* Bill has to come on their territory so often. One of these nights—especially if there's another murder—he's apt to run into trouble with those Bar H Bar boys."

Ellen laughed in a manner that mingled disdain with nervousness. "You think Bill's afraid of them? He has no reason to be afraid! He hasn't done anything wrong."

"That's not the point. One of these nights some Bar H Bar waddy is likely to lose his temper. Maybe he'll give way to his suspicions and pull iron before—well . . . before questioning Bill."

Larry turned back to his horse, swung into the saddle. Not until he was ready to ride did he tell the girl: "I'd sure appreciate it, Ellen, if you'd keep

your brother home a while. Just nights, I mean. Right now, I'm going to devote every minute o' my time to hunting this Ace of Diamonds killer. It'll be a lot easier for me, knowing that Bill ain't out on the range when—when things happen." He nodded in farewell, touched his Stetson. Then he swung the horse around and loped away.

Ellen Traine, silhouetted by the light in the door, stood motionless, peering after him.

And presently he muttered to his horse, "I'd sure give a lot to know what she's thinking. And I'd give a lot more," he added, his scowl deepening, "to know what her brother Bill is *doing!*"

CHAPTER II

Whine of Bullets

INSTEAD of riding back to Blake-town, Larry Devoe sent his buckskin across Bar H Bar range in the direction of the moonlit Rio Grande. He could catch only brief glimpses of the river; this was rolling country with a hundred sandy hills obscuring his view. Occasionally, where mesquite gave way to grass, he passed a few grazing cows. Occasionally, too, he would hear something scurry away into brush—a jackrabbit, no doubt, or a slithering rattler. He rode on, frowning, his mind crowded with dark thoughts.

Exactly why all the murders of the past few months had occurred on the Bar H Bar, no one had been able to explain. It was a long spread that bordered the shallow river for many miles. Neighboring outfits depended on the generosity of old Pete Harmon, owner of the Bar H Bar, for their water supply. He had permitted many cattlemen to dig narrow canals across

his land, thus bringing the water of the river to their own ranges; and for this Harmon—a one-legged man—had won the respect of the community.

Larry Devoe rode beside one of these narrow ditches until, of a sudden, he heard the thuds of horses' hoofs, the bawlings of a few cows, and the angry voices of men.

Instantly he drew rein. In the shadows of cottonwoods he waited. After a time he saw several longhorns stream over the rim of a low ridge. They were being poked along by three waddies—one of them Bill Traine.

A yellow-haired young giant, Ellen's brother maintained vociferous conversation with the other two cowpunchers. They were, Larry Devoe saw, Bar H Bar riders; apparently they were helping him herd his own strays back toward the Leaning T.

And then Bill Traine saw the sheriff.

The big man stopped his horse. An instant he peered hard, his head thrust forward. Then he came toward the cottonwoods slowly, followed by the other two men. For a while the cows were allowed to graze at peace.

"Devoe!" Bill Traine's voice hardened. "Have you by any chance been over to my place again?"

"Just came from there, yep."

"I thought I told you a week back not to be callin' on my sister!"

"Far as I remember," said Larry Devoe, levelly, "you didn't give me any good reason."

"Reason?" Bill Traine half rose in the stirrups. "Looka here, Larry! We may as well understand each other. You got an idea in the back of your skull that maybe I've got something to do with these Ace o' Diamonds killings. You been telling Ellen what you thought. You're all wrong about it! I don't savvy anything about these mur-

ders. Not a thing! On the other hand, though, I don't aim to have you come sparkin' my sister—with a grudge against me!"

For a moment, Larry Devoe was silent. Then he replied, "I'm not carrying a grudge against you, Bill—nor against anybody else. If I told you and Ellen what I felt, it was my way of warning you to be careful."

"I don't need warning!"

"For your own good." Larry Devoe nodded to the two Bar H Bar cowpunchers. "I notice these gents are helping you get your cows back to your own spread. Why?"

The unexpected query startled Bill Traine. He looked at the two waddies, then shrugged. "They're bein' decent about it. Why shouldn't they help me?"

"I remember a few months back you were always allowed to herd your own strays. Now—" Larry's lips twisted in a humorless smile. "If you want to know why they're helping you, Bill, reckon I can tell you. The boys will back me up, too. You're bein' helped just so Bar H Bar riders can keep an eye on you while you're on their spread!"

It was as if he had leveled a weapon at Bill Traine. The big man straightened. Surprise caught his features; surprise that swiftly changed to outrage. He turned to face the cowpunchers who'd been assisting him.

"That true?" he rapped out.

They looked exceedingly uncomfortable. One of them—a boy who couldn't have been more than eighteen—rubbed a hand on his saddlehorn and muttered, "Well, now, Bill, it's just orders from the Boss. Old man Harmon told us to—"

"So old man Harmon thinks I'm behind the killings, does he?" Bill Traine drove out bitterly. "All right, boys! I

get it. And I won't ask for more help. You can ride back." He glared at Larry Devoe. "I reckon this whole community thinks I'm the killer, eh? If that's the case, I don't want anything to do with *any* o' you! And I'm warnin' you again, Larry—keep away from Ellen. You may be wearin' a sheriff's badge, but if I see you around my place—by thunder, you're goin' to ride plumb smack into trouble!"

Having delivered that ultimatum, Bill Traine roweled his horse, sent it bounding back toward the cows. The three men in the shadows of the cottonwoods watched him in silence, with a feeling that war had been declared. . . .

THAT night, and for many nights thereafter, Larry Devoe rode guard along the shores of the shallow Rio Grande. Since most of the Ace of Diamonds murders had occurred after midnight—the victims being nighthawking cowboys—it was in the late hours that his vigilance became keenest. Fortunately, little else happened around Blaketown in those days to occupy him officially; and so he was able to get ample sleep during daylight.

Riding range alone, his eyes constantly on guard, he found time to think, and his thoughts were far from pleasant. As night followed night with no results, he began to chafe. Was this vigil useless? Would the Ace of Diamonds killer never appear again?

To attempt to establish his identity by studying the lives of his four victims had been futile. All were young cowpunchers, popular enough, who had given nobody cause to murder them. No, the usual procedures of investigation were worthless here. Larry knew he must wait—and hope—that some

new development would bring a new opportunity.

And then, quite suddenly, many things happened within a few wild hours. . . .

It all started at ten o'clock on a Monday night. There was a low moon floating in the east. Larry Devoe, straddling his buckskin, was watching it in reverie when he heard the sound of wagon wheels behind him.

He turned in surprise.

A buckboard, having abandoned the trail, was crossing the range in the direction of the Bar H Bar ranch house. Moonlight revealed two people on its seat. As it came closer, Larry recognized them—and checked his breath.

One was Ellen Traine. She was driving. On the seat beside her was the one-legged, gray-bearded figure of Pete Harmon, owner of the Bar H Bar.

The buckboard came quickly, leaving a long plume of night dust to hang in the darkness. Larry himself was in clear sight. Old Harmon must have muttered something to Ellen Traine, for she slowed the horse, brought it to a stop.

"Hi, Sheriff!" Harmon's cracked voice, full of pain, offered a greeting like a groan.

Startled, Larry instantly prodded his own mount toward them. As far as he knew, the relations between Pete Harmon and the Traines had not been wholly friendly during the past few months. It was astonishing, therefore, to find Ellen driving the old man home.

"Nothin' new around here?" asked Harmon.

"No." Larry frowned in perplexity. "What's wrong, Pete? You sound kind o' down in the mouth."

The old man forced a harsh laugh. "Drove into Blaketown by myself this afternoon. Figured I could make it

back all right after supper. But when I got far as the Leanin' T, my—my old stump of a leg kind of went back on me. Maybe it's the weather. Anyhow, it started achin' like all tarnation."

He placed a tender hand on the torturing spot, then he jerked his patriarchal head toward Ellen.

"Turned the horse over toward her place, 'cause I didn't think I could make home. I—I was kind of doubled up in pain. Ellen was alone and nice enough to offer to drive me."

Ellen Traine herself, Larry noticed, said nothing. She sat rigid and aloof.

Harmon said huskily, "I sure appreciate your givin' my spread so much time, sheriff. Doggone sorry we got to cause you trouble like this. But—" Again the gray-bearded man shook his head—"It's like I told you last time we talked it over. I can't explain these killin's any more than you can. And the sooner you clear 'em up the better we'll all feel. I—I've seen enough blood spilled on my land!"

Larry Devoe didn't speak while they drove on. He watched the buckboard vanish beyond a ridge. It wasn't of Pete Harmon he thought just then. It was of the girl beside him—the girl who invariably quickened the rhythm of his heart. And he knew suddenly that he wanted to talk to her again tonight. . . .

So he swung out of his saddle and began to roll himself a cigarette. Presently, he knew, Ellen must return this way—probably on a horse borrowed at the Bar H Bar. When she came, he intended to be on hand to meet her.

HE was right. In less than half an hour Ellen, now mounted on a spirited white stallion, came loping through the moonlight.

Larry dropped his cigarette, crushed it under his heel. He pulled off his Stetson to reveal red hair dangling over his forehead. His eyes narrowed, became abnormally bright.

"Evenin'," he greeted quietly. "We didn't have much time to palaver last time you passed."

She stopped her horse, looked at him coldly. "I didn't think we had much more to say to each other."

"Can't agree with you there. Seems to me—"

"As long as you think Bill has something to do with these murders, I—I'd just as soon not talk to you." She looked as if she were going to send her horse on, and Larry promptly vaulted into his saddle.

"I'll ride with you a way," he offered, his tone grim. They moved a hundred yards in silence before he added, "If you think I believe Bill is guilty, you're wrong. I don't. It's just that as sheriff I've got to dig into every possibility I can think of."

"Simply because we happened to have been cousins of 'Ace' Diamond—" she began bitterly.

"It's not only that."

"What else?"

Larry Devoe shrugged. "I've been thinking about *how* these four Bar H Bar hombres were dry-gulched," he said. "Four of them dead—and not one of them had pulled iron in self-defense. In every case, we found the dead man's gun still holstered, without a slug fired from it."

"Well?"

"There are two explanations. The first is that the dead hombres didn't see the man who plugged them. If they'd seen anyone around, they'd have drawn their smoke-poles. No, they must have been shot by somebody who didn't come close enough to be spotted.

In every case, too, they were plugged clean through the heart. You know, Ellen, it takes a mighty fine shot to make four bull's eyes in a row that way—from a considerable distance."

"And you think Bill did it?" icily.

"No. I'm tryin' to think of somebody else who might be a crack shot like that. Only, I can't. . . . Then there's the second explanation. It's that these cowpunchers knew the killer so well—and trusted him so—that they saw no reason to draw iron when he moseyed up to 'em. . . . In any case, if ever I can prove that *Bill* has nothing to do with these killings—" He looked at her levelly. "Believe me, Ellen, nobody will be happier than I. Because," he added after a pause, "I'm kind of hankerin' to see you smile at me again, the way you used to."

After that he allowed her to ride on alone. He was coming too close to the edge of the Bar H Bar country. So he watched her until she disappeared in a hollow; then he sighed and headed back for the shores of the Rio Grande.

Two hours later, just after midnight, another thing happened.

Stopping his horse in the blackness under low-branching trees, he was just beginning to roll a cigarette when he heard splashings.

He lifted his head with a start. He stared at the iridescent waters of the Rio Grande. And he saw, in amazement, that a lone horseman was fording the shallows.

Larry Devoe promptly forgot the unmade cigarette. It slipped out of his fingers. Of its own accord his hand sank to the holstered six-gun at his hip.

He watched the stranger come across the river, mount the Texas bank. Obviously the fellow was a Mexican. Silver spangles dangled around the brim of a wide sombrero. He was well-dressed,

and his black horse was as lively as an Arab steed.

On the shore the Mexican halted, looked from left to right searchingly. He muttered something to the horse and started forward—toward Larry Devoe. He came on some fifty yards before Larry's buckskin, impatiently champing, scattered pebbles.

Instantly, as though he'd heard a shot, the Mexican swung his horse around. He bent forward over his saddlehorn, tense, rising. His eyes narrowed in a swift search. Already his hand gripped the six-shooter at his side.

"*Quién eres?*" he called sharply.

There was no longer any purpose in remaining concealed, so Larry sent his buckskin out of shadows into moonlight. And when the Mexican saw him, the man gasped. He straightened with a jerk. Without a word of warning, he drew his gun, aimed straight at Larry Devoe, and fired!

CHAPTER III

Another Death

A FLASH of red in the darkness, a crash; distinctly Larry heard the whine of that first bullet. He yelled, "Put down that gun! Put it down, or I'll—"

The Mexican fired again. Thrice.

The third slug ripped off part of Larry Devoe's hatbrim. There might have been more shots, too, for the Mexican seemed intent on blazing away until he dropped his target.

By that time, however, Larry had drawn his own weapon. He fired from the hip. Fired with the deadly accuracy that had helped to earn him the election to the sheriff's office. Just one shot—not because he wanted to kill the Mexican, but because it was the only way of saving his own life.

When he had squeezed the trigger there were no longer any bursts of flame out there in the moonlight. The Mexican abruptly stiffened in his saddle. His six-gun slid out of rigid fingers to clatter on gravel. Slowly, in a kind of amazement, he lifted his hands to his chest. He swayed from side to side. He made a convulsive grab at the saddlehorn.

But he was too late. Before he could manage a grip he pitched out of the saddle. He landed with a heavy thud—and lay still. His frightened horse shied from him, neighed shrilly, lifted its ears.

"Doggone you!" grated Larry Devoe. He slipped out of his own saddle. "What in thunder did you do it for? You brought it on yourself, hombre!"

His gun was still smoking when he ran forward. Beside the limp Mexican, he dropped to his knees. He rolled the man over on his back. There was agony in the face—a frozen agony destined to remain on those features forever.

For the Mexican was dead.

Through several seconds, Sheriff Larry Devoe bent over him in a daze. He couldn't understand the terror that had made this man draw iron and fire at the very glimpse of a stranger. Why? Was *this* by any chance the notorious Ace of Diamonds? Could this—an alien, an unknown—be the mysterious figure who had, during the past three months, killed four Bar H Bar waddies?

Larry pushed his sombrero to the back of his head. Frowning, he holstered his six-shooter. Who the Mexican might be, he didn't know. Though he'd lived all his life in the vicinity of Blaketown, he was certain he had never before encountered this man.

The fellow's pockets, it occurred to him, might contain some identification.

So he began a swift search. He found a few coins, tobacco, matches, a knife. And then, in a back pocket, he found something that startled him.

It was a little sack made of black velvet and drawn together at its neck by a silken cord.

The thing was no bigger than a tobacco pouch. It produced the curious sound of pebbles rattling against one another. And that perplexed Larry Devoe.

He opened the little bag. He turned its mouth toward the moonlight, peered into it. What he saw elicited a gasp.

Pebbles? No. Pebbles didn't glitter. Pebbles didn't look like highly polished glass beads.

He thrust his fingers into the sack and drew out a few of the tiny stones. One long gaze at them brought an amazed whistle from his pursed lips.

"Diamonds!" he muttered. "Holy turtles — *diamonds!* On the Rio Grande!"

Bewildered, he stared again at the dead Mexican. He knew now why this man had so incontinently fired at the sight of him. The fellow must have been smuggling the stones into Texas. He'd been afraid of being confronted by a Ranger. He'd been afraid of being searched. At any rate, he could take no chances. With those gems in his pocket, he had promptly drawn his six-gun and—

"By blazes!"

The ejaculation burst from Larry Devoe hoarsely. Of a sudden, he straightened to his lanky height. His wide eyes, filled with the glow of a new idea, fastened themselves on the glittering surface of the Rio Grande. He spent several moments in excited thought. Then, on quick resolution, he thrust the bag of gems into his own

pocket. There must have been more than forty diamonds in that sack. The very touch of them made his hand shake.

He kneeled again, picked up the Mexican's six-gun. His hand still shook as he dipped its muzzle into the stranger's blood—blood that oozed gently from a wound over the heart.

And then, using the muzzle as a pencil, Larry Devoe drew a crude Ace of Diamonds on the Mexican's shirt. . . .

Half a minute later he was back in the saddle, riding at a furious gallop. He bent low over the saddlehorn, his eyes narrow, flaming. He rode almost a quarter of a mile before the sounds of distant hoofbeats brought him to a halt.

Then he paused in moonlight, listening intently. He could count the beats of three oncoming horses. And they were charging in this direction.

"Reckon they heard the shots," he panted, as if to the buckskin. "Probably hightailin' this way to see what it was all about!"

A quick, contorted grin gripped his lean countenance. He waited until he saw the three horsemen come over the rim of a moonlit ridge. Then he touched rowels to the belly of his sweating mustang and sent the mount galloping again—galloping back in the direction of the dead Mexican.

HE rode hard, as if he, too, had been drawn to that particular locality by the sound of shots. When the three Bar H Bar riders spied him, Larry Devoe seized the initiative. Turning in his saddle, he yelled: "What happened? What was the shootin'?"

"Don't know!" The distant voice that thundered across the range be-

longed to Horny Bob Lassiter, foreman of the Bar H Bar. It was cracked, hoarse. "It came from down yonder somewheres! Down by the river!"

Larry said nothing else. Half a minute later his path converged upon that of the other three men, and they rode together toward the glittering Rio Grande. Nobody spoke. Horny Bob Lassiter's deep-set eyes glared like those of an eagle. His homely face looked more gaunt and bony than ever. The two young riders behind him—Slim Evans and Lefty Anderson—were grim. They, too, rode in silence until Slim blurted: "There he is!"

He rose in his saddle, pointed. What he indicated was a dark huddle that lay on gravel near the banks of the river. A black horse nuzzled the body.

"It ain't one of *our* riders!" gasped Horny Bob Lassiter. "That ain't a Bar H Bar horse!"

When they reached the dead Mexican, they bounded out of their saddles and fell to their knees beside the still figure, all in a single sweep of motion.

"Dead, all right!" rasped Larry Devoe. His voice was brittle. "And there it is—the *Ace of Diamonds on his shirt!*"

Horny Bob Lassiter drew off his sombrero. He sent an unsteady hand crawling through graying hair.

"By thunder!" he whispered in awe. "Ain't—ain't there *ever* goin' to be an end to this?" His eyes were panicky.

"Any of you hombres," rapped out Larry, "know this gent?"

The answer came in a husky chorus, accompanied by a bewildered shaking of heads. "No."

Larry rose slowly, like a cramped man. "There's one thing different in this here murder, anyhow. This hombre had a chance to shoot. There's his gun."

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"Me," declared Slim Evans, "I heard four shots."

Larry squinted from one cowpuncher to another. "Were you all riding together?"

"No," said Lefty. "We—we was nighthawkin' separate. But we wasn't far apart. Reckon we all heard the shots at about the same time. So we came hightailin' this way."

Slim nervously muttered, "Better search him, sheriff. There may be somethin' in his pockets that'll tell you—"

Larry nodded and made a formal search of the Mexican's pockets.

"Not a thing, eh?" whispered Horny Bob Lassiter when he finished.

"Nothing."

"That—that's sure kind of funny."

"Funny?"

"I mean, you'd figure an hombre would have *something* in his pockets to show who he is or where he came from." Horny Bob suddenly snapped his fingers. "Hold on! Let's have a look-see at the brand on his horse! That may tell us something."

The brand on the black gelding, however, offered scant information. Not one of the men recognized it. A circle enclosed two wriggling marks that might have been snakes. The horse, for all they knew, came from the deep south of Mexico. It might have been sold and traded a dozen times before its present owner acquired it. Certainly that brand belonged to no border *hacienda*.

Horny Bob, shaking his head, scowled. "Queer, all right," he mumbled. "Maybe we ought to take another look through his clothes."

Lassiter's search proved as futile as Larry's. When it was over, the foreman of the Bar H Bar uncertainly scratched his leathery cheek. Like his

two companions, he was profoundly worried.

"There's one thing about this murder," snapped Larry Devoe. "Seein' as how the dead hombre was not a Bar H Bar man, it kind of shows that your outfit wasn't the *only* one against which this Ace of Diamonds carried a grudge."

And then, unexpectedly, Slim Evans ejaculated something. His eyes widened. "Say!" he whispered. "About two hours ago I ran plumb into Bill Traine on our spread. He—he claimed he was out huntin' strays again."

"How far from here?" demanded Larry.

"Maybe three-four miles up yonder. He just nodded to me, sort of, as we passed each other. We didn't talk at all."

"Was he headed this way?"

"Well—no, not exactly."

"*That* wouldn't signify nothing," objected Horny Bob Lassiter. "I mean the way he was headin'."

"Hold on, hold on." Larry Devoe spoke in a flat voice. "No use rushin' to conclusions, gents. Bill Traine has been around here practically every night. The fact that he was here tonight don't make a killer out of him."

"But—!"

"Before you could accuse him, you'd have to prove he was down here by the river and that he had some *reason* for pluggin' this Mexican."

"Still an' all," heatedly declared Horny Bob, "you ought to have a talk with Bill Traine!"

For a few seconds Larry considered. Then he nodded and turned to his horse. "All right," he decided. "I'll leave the body with you gents while I pow-wow with Bill. I'm through with that carcass. You can tote it into town."

Slim put in uncertainly, "There's no use goin' to Traine's place now. If—if he's nighthawkin' he won't get home till dawn. More likely you'll find him on the range."

"I'll find him *somewhere*," Larry promised grimly, and rode off into darkness. "Maybe now," he added to himself, "we'll go places!"

CHAPTER IV

Larry Has Ideas

THE grasslands rose to a low, flat mesa so sandy and barren that it was shunned even by cattle. Larry climbed the rise and headed across the desert flats. Here and there a juniper reared itself starkly against the moon-glow; occasionally he passed patches of mesquite and cactus. This was the short cut to the Leaning T. Larry Devoe rode across it at a steady lope.

His eyes squinted in frowning thought, and the problem that occupied his mind now was not so much the death of the unidentified Mexican as the diamonds he had found in the man's pocket.

Diamonds . . . !

They were strange things to encounter on the Mexican Border. Here you might expect cattle rustling. You might even contemplate the number of Chinese and other aliens who had been run across the Rio Grande. Yet it seemed a queer region for the smuggling of diamonds.

Smuggled, however, they had certainly been. Why else should the Mexican have carried the little velvet sack across the river at one o'clock in the morning? Why else should he have drawn his gun and fired the instant somebody approached?

"Maybe he guessed I was an officer of the law," Larry muttered to his

buckskin, and the horse's ears promptly rose. "Reckon he figured he couldn't stand questioning, anyhow, so he pulled iron and blazed away. Queer, though," he added after a pause. "What did he aim to do with those stones? Was he looking to meet somebody to whom he'd turn them over? Most likely—the way he squinted around. And that—" His eyes became narrower than ever. "That sure begins to explain a few things!"

He rode on slowly, still pondering, until suddenly he saw something that made him draw rein.

A trail crossed the sandy mesa, and on it were fresh footprints. They were extraordinary in the fact that the only prints he could see were those of a right foot. Where the left prints should have been there were only holes—small holes an inch in diameter and a yard and a half apart.

"Well, now!" Larry muttered in wonder.

He lifted his head to gaze about himself. He could see only desolation; a dreary country to which even the moon could bring no cheer. Yet those tracks were fresh. And he knew who had made them. The little holes had been left by a crutch. There was only one man in the vicinity who left tracks like that, and that was old Pete Harmon, owner of the Bar H Bar.

"But what in tarnation is he doing here, two miles from his house, at one o'clock in the morning?" Larry Devoe growled to himself. And then he wondered, "Was it for *him* this Mexican was hunting?"

He dismounted. He tossed his horse's reins over the branch of a little yucca tree. Then, hitching up his gunbelt, he followed the tracks across the sand.

They led uphill. He moved quickly, searching the trail ahead. High up on

the summit of a ridge were a few boulders, dominating the surrounding country like a fortress. Fifty yards below them Larry halted in perplexity. The one-legged tracks led straight up to the rocks.

He was still hesitant, his mind filled with uncertainty, when a familiar voice called from the boulders, "Hi, there, sheriff! Come on up if you got a mind to. I ain't aimin' to fire."

It was the cracked voice of old Pete Harmon. And Larry flung back, "What you doin' up there?"

"Havin' a look-see."

"Meanin'—?"

"Come on up. You'll see when you get here. No sense holdin' a pow-wow by yellin' at each other."

Larry went uphill slowly, with a sense of caution that was almost instinctive. His right hand hovered close to the six-gun. His eyes searched the rocks. He didn't know exactly how to analyze this situation. If Pete Harmon had anything to do with the Mexican, there were excellent chances that the man might fire. And yet Larry Devoe had known Harmon a good many years. Somehow he couldn't ascribe a criminal rôle to the old cattleman. Harmon was rich enough; he had no need to traffic in smuggled goods.

Still, you never could tell . . .

Then he saw the old man. He sat like a patriarch on a throne. Gray-bearded and gaunt, he rested on a flat rock between two larger boulders. The crutch lay beside him. His single leg was stretched out stiffly. He wore two holsters, and from each protruded the pearl handle of an old-fashioned six-shooter. He regarded the coming of Larry Devoe, however, without hostility. In truth, a little smile crawled over the lips under the beard.

"Reckon you're kind of surprised,

eh, sheriff?" he chuckled, when Larry halted in front of him.

"Sure am! This is a queer place to find you, Harmon—especially at a time when you ought to be home in bed."

Again the rancher chuckled. He nodded to the country ahead of him. "From up here," he pointed out, "I can look out over about six miles of my spread. Notice?"

"I didn't know," quietly replied Larry Devoe, "that you're so fond of the place. I mean, to get up in the middle o' the night to come and look at it."

IT seemed for an instant that Pete Harmon would laugh. But the impulse collapsed. Instead, his bearded face hardened. His eyes became wrathful.

"I *am* fond of it!" he lashed out thickly. "This is my country. I took it when it was wilderness and I built it up. I've given the Bar H Bar a good name among Texas cattlemen. I've been right proud of it. Long as I've been here I've tried to keep it a clean ranch; I've tried to keep it free from blood. Now, all of a sudden, everything's changed. There's been more blood spilled on the Bar H Bar in the past three months than ever before in its history. I—damn it, Larry, it's got me! I aim to see it stopped! It's *got* to be stopped!"

Though the old man paused, Larry offered no interruption. He waited quietly, his eyes searching the worn face.

"That's why I been coming up here nights," snapped Pete Harmon. "I get out when everybody else is asleep. It's kind o' hard for me to trek two miles across this country. But I figure it's worth it. Once I get up here I can watch the range. I can see my boys nighthawkin' here and there—and I

can see pretty near everything else that happens down below this mesa. I figured if I waited long enough I—I might spot this Ace of Diamonds killer. I still got pretty good eyes, Larry. Reckon I might be able to recognize an hombre in moonlight, even at a distance."

"Any luck?" Larry asked softly.

Pete Harmon shook his head. "Only stranger I've seen hereabouts lately is Bill Traine. I don't mind his coming. Saves me trouble round-up time. He's always cuttin' his strays out of my herds. Also—" The rancher lifted his head to squint. "I've been seein' *you* pretty often."

Larry Devoe nodded.

"But that's about all that comes under the head of strangers," finished Harmon. "The rest were all Bar H Bar men."

Larry forced a thin smile. "See anything unusual tonight?"

"Tonight? Why, no," Harmon answered in perplexity.

"You mean you didn't hear those shots a while back?"

Pete Harmon violently started. "Shots? *Shots?* Are you tryin' to tell me there's been another—?"

"Yep. Another killing. Only it wasn't one of your boys this time." Larry explained what had happened on the shores of the moonlit river—explained everything except the fact that he himself had been forced to shoot the Mexican and that he had taken the diamonds. When he stopped, Harmon sat aghast.

"No," he stammered. "I—I didn't hear anything! Reckon it was a bit too far from here. Gosh, I—I don't get this at all, Larry! Seems like—"

"Seems like we'll have to do a lot of thinkin'," snapped Larry Devoe. He peered about through the moonlight.

"Reckon there won't be much more happenin' tonight. You can mosey home." He glanced back at the old man. "Need any help?"

"No, I—I can make it all right." Harmon stiffly pushed himself to his feet, leaned on his crutch. The patches of his countenance that were not hidden by the beard looked gray. "Where—where *you* headin'?"

"Hunting," Larry Devoe said softly. "Hunting killers."

He turned and started back for his buckskin. And as he went, one thing worried him; writhed insistently in his brain.

Was old Pete Harmon telling the truth? Was his only reason for coming out on the range his desire to watch for a killer? Or had he been waiting among those rocks in order to keep an appointment with the Mexican? . . .

IT WAS after two o'clock in the morning when Larry Devoe approached the Leaning T ranch house. He was startled to see a light in its windows. Moreover, he could see a figure moving inside the place—the big figure of Bill Traine.

Fifty yards from the door he swung out of his saddle and walked forward slowly, leading his horse. He'd gone scarcely half way to the house, however, when Traine suddenly appeared, a rifle in his hands. He glared through the moonlight. When he recognized the sheriff he stepped out of the door. His grip on the rifle tightened. Even in darkness his face showed quick anger.

"I thought," he flung out, "I told you to keep away from here!"

Larry answered sternly, "I'm not calling on your sister, Bill. I'm calling on you."

"If you think you can horn in here—" The gun rose.

"Don't be a fool!" Larry's eyes flared. "I didn't come to pick a fight. I want to palaver with you, Bill, as man to man."

Traine hesitated. When he spoke again there was something sullen and defiant in his tone.

"If it's about these Ace of Diamonds killings, there's nothing I can tell you! I've said that a hundred times and I'll stick by it till doomsday."

"On the other hand, you may be able to help. There's been another killing tonight."

That jolted Bill Traine. He lowered the rifle.

"Who?" he exclaimed.

"Some Mexican that nobody's been able to identify. He came across the Rio Grande an hour and a half ago."

"Who—who killed him?"

"I did."

Bill caught his breath. He stared incredulously. By this time he completely forgot the rifle. "*You?*"

"Yes—and so far, Bill, you're the only hombre to whom I've admitted it."

"But—"

"Now I want your help. And I'm askin' you as a friend, not as a suspect. How about it?"

Still Bill Traine hesitated, confused. Clearly, he didn't understand what this meant. He rubbed a hand over his lips. "Maybe if you'll explain—" he began.

Larry left his horse at the fence of the small corral, pushed his sombrero to the back of his head, and went to the house. A moment later both men sat together, amicably enough, on the porch steps. Yet Bill Traine, his suspicion not wholly relaxed, maintained a grip on his rifle. The eyes he fixed on the lean features of the sheriff were uncertain, uneasy.

And Larry began drawing the little

velvet sack from his pocket. He exhibited the sack thoughtfully. From the corners of his eyes, however, he maintained a sharp watch on Bill Traine's expression. If the man knew anything at all about the Mexican, he felt certain, he'd start perceptibly at the sight of this bag. He'd betray himself in some way.

But Bill merely seemed perplexed. He looked at the little black sack as if it had no significance at all for him.

Sheriff Larry Devoe began softly, "Bill, let's get each other straight. You know I'm pretty fond of Ellen. Have been for a long time."

"Well?"

"Being fond of her, I can't help kind o'—well, kind o' liking you. That's why I've been lax, according to some gents in this community. They feel I should have stuck a gun into your ribs long ago and forced a murder confession out of you. But I—couldn't do it."

"It wouldn't have done you any good!" Bill Traine retorted. "I've got nothing to do with these Ace of Diamonds murders."

"I'm not accusing you." Larry Devoe still spoke quietly. He peered through the moonlight toward Bar H Bar range. "In fact, I'm doggone sure, Bill, that you're *not* the Ace of Diamonds killer."

"Huh?" That startled Bill.

"I give you credit for some brains. If you were the hombre who's been killing Bar H Bar cowpunchers, you'd keep off that range as much as possible when folks could see you. I don't figure you'd be meanderin' over it every hour o' night and day, just to be seen and rouse suspicion. It don't seem logical. It never did."

"Why—why, thanks," muttered Bill, bewildered. "I—never knew you felt that way about it, Larry—"

"You never gave me a chance to tell you how I felt. You always came swaggerin' along with a chip on your shoulder."

"Well—I'm kind of sorry—"

"The point is that, regardless of how I feel about you, there are other gents around here who think you're guilty as hell. Some of them are totin' the Mexican's body into Blaketown right now. Inside of an hour, they'll probably be here, tearin' across the range to see what happens when you and me palaver about this killing."

BILL TRAINER audibly swallowed. Larry turned his head to regard him intently. "Matter of fact," he said, "I'm *countin'* on their comin' here. I hope as many folks as possible make it their business to join us before morning."

"Why?"

"Chances are some wise hombre will ask to see your gun. He'll want to examine it to find out if maybe it was used tonight. So I want you to shove this little black sack into your holster. When you draw your six-gun, I want the sack to fall out—careless like. *Sabe* what I mean?"

"What's the idea?"

Now it was Larry Devoe himself who paused in hesitation. He scowled at the little black bag. It occurred to him that the only way in which he could enlist Bill Traine's complete and intelligent coöperation was by letting him understand the entire case. So he abruptly straightened and told the big blond rancher the truth about the diamonds. The news left Bill gaping.

"The way I see it," snapped Larry, "this diamond business simplifies everything. I got a hunch that there's some hombre in this part of the country who's been receiving these smuggled

stones regular during the past four months. Probably he's shipped them on to somebody in the East. Anyhow, this is a grand place to smuggle jewels. If you try to do it at some port like New York, the customs inspectors go through your trunks like maybe they're hunting a hairpin. This is the only border where a man can across without bein' seen or questioned too much—this and maybe Canada, too. But it's the Rio Grande that concerns us now."

"And you figure the local hombre who's been receiving these diamonds did the—the killings?"

"Reckon that's an easy way of explainin' it," Larry said grimly. "Look. Suppose some nighthawkin' cowpuncher had seen the killer talkin' to this Mexican. Suppose this nighthawkin' cowpuncher had come up with some idea of questionin' the bushwhacker. The hombre, whoever he was, couldn't risk bein' questioned. He couldn't make explanations. The only safe thing to do was 'kill the cowpuncher who'd seen him accept the little bag from the Mexican. The way I figure it now, Bill, that's exactly what happened. Four Bar H Bar cowpunchers were unlucky enough to see the transaction."

"But—but this Ace of Diamonds drawn on their chests—" in bewilderment. At that Larry Devoe laughed without mirth.

"Just a blind, if you ask me."

"Still an' all—"

"The killer commits his first murder. It leaves him kind of loco with excitement. He knows there'll be an investigation. He knows folks will begin wonderin' why that particular cowpuncher was killed. So he figures maybe the best thing to do is throw folks off the track. He gets a kind of brainstorm. He remembers your cousin 'Ace' Diamond and how he was lynched before the law

could try him fair and square. Then he realizes that you, a relative of 'Ace' Diamond, are still alive and near enough to Blaketown to be—used. So he paints this Ace of Diamonds on the dead man's chest with blood. He hopes it'll make folks suspect 'Ace' Diamond's relatives. He hopes the murders will be put down to revenge."

Wide-eyed, Bill stared at cottonwoods. "By thunder!" he whispered suddenly. "I'll bet you hit it right!" He seized Larry Devoe's arm. "Just how do you want me to help?"

"Like this: If they ask you to show your six-gun tonight, be sure you pull this little sack out with it. Let it fall to the ground. If they don't ask you about the gun, see if you can drop it, casual-like, anyhow."

"What good'll that do?"

"It's a queer kind of little bag. Folks are bound to notice it. They may even question you. You can laugh it off. Say it's something in which you carry coins or keys. Say it's Ellen's. Make up any kind of story you like. But be sure they see that bag. Maybe word of it will get around town. And the hombre who was expecting those diamonds tonight will hear about the little black sack."

"And come after me?" with a nervous start.

"He won't come to kill you, don't worry." Larry Devoe's tones became harsh and dry. "He'll be more interested in getting those diamonds than in buchwhacking you."

"You mean he'll figure that it was me who killed the Mex, that I have the diamonds, and I'm holdin' my tongue about everything so's I can keep the gems?"

"Exactly."

"But in that case—!"

"In that case, he'll move heaven and earth to get the stones back from you."

They're valuable. There are about forty of them, Bill. They must be worth a young fortune. If he kills you, he'll never find out where you hid them. So he'll have to come and maybe stick you up at the point of his smoke-pole and try to make you talk. I'm bankin' on that."

Bill Traine suddenly rose, very tense. "I get it," he snapped. "And you'll be on hand—hid somewhere, maybe—to plug this hombre when he makes his play?"

"Not to plug him, no," quietly corrected Larry Devoc. "I ain't a killer. I'm a sheriff. All I hanker to do is arrest him for murder!"

CHAPTER V

The Little Black Bag

LARRY had hardly risen from the doorstep when a clatter of quick footsteps made him turn in surprise. Ellen stood there—a wide-eyed, astonished Ellen who had drawn an Indian robe around her nightclothes. She looked at Larry Devoc as if she had never before seen him. She stepped close to him, caught his arm.

"Larry," she whispered, "I never knew you felt that way about Bill!"

"No?" he said dryly. "You just took it for granted I was dead set against him like everybody else, eh?"

"You never told me!"

"Like Bill, you never gave me much of a chance, did you?"

There was silence; silence that was pleasant, because it gave birth to a gentle, thrilling smile on Ellen Traine's countenance.

"Thanks, Larry," she said. "You don't know how much I appreciate your—your taking sides with us!"

He took her hand, patted it reassuringly. "If this means we're friends

again," he said, "I'm doggone glad. When all this blows over, maybe we can have a talk."

She said softly, "I'll be waiting for it."

Larry Devoc mounted and rode straight for Blaketown. There was no telegraph office in the border cow town, so he roused a man at the livery stable—a youngster who had often run errands for him—and dispatched a telegram to the Border Patrol. The man was to ride with the message to the railroad, from which it could be dispatched to the nearest Patrol Station.

"After all," Larry told himself tautly, "smuggling diamonds is a job for them, not for me. They'd better be on hand when this case blows up."

With that job done, he paused at a saloon for a much needed drink. It was a place that kept open until four o'clock in the morning. A sleepy bartender and two cowpunchers, too drunk to move, were the only occupants of the place now.

The bartender yawned, "Hi, sheriff. We had quite a crowd in here a while back—big poker game goin' on. But all the boys hightailed over to the Lean-in' T."

Larry raised startled brows. "How come?"

"Horny Bob Lassiter o' the Bar H Bar and two other waddies brought in a carcass—some Mexican they told us you knew about. He's over at the undertaker's right now. Horny Bob said as how he was goin' over to see what Bill Traine had to tell you about the killin'. First thing you knew, the poker game busted up and everybody rode along with Horny Bob. Reckon they were kinda expectin' fireworks."

Larry snapped, "Thanks."

Half a minute later he was in the saddle, galloping hard in the direction

of the Leaning T. He had hoped to be present when the challenging crowd faced Bill Traine. He knew the temper of these men. If they became too excited, too angry, mob lust would rule them. They wouldn't wait for conclusive evidence of Bill Traine's guilt. They might, as they had done in the case of "Ace" Diamond, throw a rope around his neck and—

Larry Devoe rode furiously.

He was half a mile from the Leaning T ranch house when he saw a crowd loping back in the direction of Blaketown. There must have been at least twenty-five men in that cavalcade.

He drew rein in the shade of some cottonwoods on the slope of a ridge. Peering intently, he studied the distant group—sought some trace in it of Bill Traine. After a while, however, he relaxed in relief. Bill was not among them. Moreover, they looked calm enough. They didn't have the aspect of a mob that has just lynched a man.

Larry Devoe made no attempt to cross their trail. Unseen, he waited until they had streamed past some four hundred yards away. Then he continued alone and more calmly to the Leaning T.

Bill Traine and Ellen were in the kitchen. The yellow light of oil lamps revealed the pallor on the girl's worried face. Bill himself was scowling at the empty black sack.

When Larry entered, they looked up quickly. Bill snapped, "Well, you missed the fun. They were here."

"Who, exactly?"

"Practically everybody who was awake within fifty miles, I'd say." There was harsh sarcasm in Bill Traine's voice. "They all sashayed over here with some idea that they could pin the killing of that Mex on me. Even old Pete Harmon was with

'em. He rode double with some waddy from his outfit. The young feller had to hold him up in the saddle."

"Harmon, eh?" Larry frowned. "What did *he* want?"

"Reckon he just aimed to see the fun with his own eyes. Claimed as how he saw the mob from Blaketown headin' this way and he stopped them with a yell. They took him along."

"Who else came?"

"Every rider who'd been night-hawkin'. There was Slim Evans and Lefty Anderson and Horny Bob Lassiter—oh, a whole mob!"

"And what happened?"

Bill Traine smiled twistedly, with a hint of contempt in the expression. It was Ellen, however, who quickly explained:

"When Bill told them he had already spoken to you they started grumbling. Some said you must have been a pretty easy hombre to hood-wink. They seemed set on proving Bill's guilt. Old Pete Harmon insisted on examining Bill's gun—to see if maybe it had been fired tonight. Bill showed it to him, all right."

"And the little black bag fell to the floor?"

"Sure." Bill grinned without mirth. "I did everything you told me. Some of the gents asked what the black bag meant. I said as how I usually carried coins in it. But, not having any coins, I'd been using it to polish the gun this afternoon. That's how come it was in the holster."

"Anybody make any comments?" Larry snapped.

"Nope."

"Were you watching their faces? Anybody look surprised?"

"They *all* looked surprised. Reckon you don't see a black velvet sack fall out of a man's holster every day."

There was a moment of silence. Then Ellen, sighing, turned back to the stove. "It looks as if your plan didn't exactly work out, Larry," she said a bit sadly. "Sit down. I'll be getting some coffee ready."

But Larry Devoe, swinging to the door, rapped out, "Thanks. Never mind coffee. I'll be out yonder, hid somewhere—and keeping my eyes on this place."

Ellen spun around to exclaim, "Why?"

"Because if this scheme works at all, it's goin' to work doggone fast. I got a hunch that before morning some hombre is going to mosey back here alone—just to talk to you, Bill, about that black bag. And that hombre, whoever he is, will be the Ace of Diamonds killer!"

LARRY rode his buckskin to a clump of sycamores several hundred yards from the house. There, in a hollow hidden by the trees, he staked his horse. He consumed a minute in inspecting his six-gun. Then, grim of face, he started back, toward the house. He didn't, however, go all the way. In a tiny hollow he sat down, rested his back against a rock, and patiently waited. From this position he could watch the house and the surrounding country. Yet he himself, obliterated by heavy shadows, was invisible to any casual glance.

He waited an hour, two hours.

The moon vanished, leaving the range eerily black. The lights in the house had long ago disappeared. Larry seemed to be the only creature alive in a dead world. He looked up at the stars, smiled a little, wearily.

"It's a lonely job," he mused, "bein' a sheriff."

After two hours he almost relin-

quished hope for the success of his scheme. Soon it would be dawn. Certainly the killer, whoever he was, wouldn't venture here in daylight. It would be ridiculous to suppose that—

And then, of a sudden, Larry Devoe stiffened. He sat up, listening intently, holding his breath.

Yes, he was sure he heard it now. The thuds of an oncoming horse sounded dully through the night. They drew nearer, more distinct. He peered hard in their direction. But the darkness was so intense that he could see nobody at all.

A few minutes later, however, he could discern a vague, dark silhouette near the Traine house. It was the blurred figure of a mounted cowpuncher. Who the man might be, he couldn't see at this distance. Nor did he want to stir at once. The slightest sound now, he realized, might send the rider galloping away.

So he drew his six-gun and waited. His heart thudded with extraordinary speed. His eyes were fiery.

He saw the black silhouette abandon the horse and move to the door of the house. Then it disappeared. Only the squeak of the door betrayed the fact that the man had entered.

That was when Larry rose. Crouching, he ran forward on his toes. His six-gun was in his hand. His eyes became more brilliantly alert than ever.

He knew it would be futile to enter the house and jab his weapon into the stranger's back. The only way he could collect evidence that would have value in court, he told himself, was to wait—to stand outside the house and listen to anything the man might say.

So he didn't go to the door. Instead, he stooped outside a window and listened.

There were no sounds.

He decided, then, that the visitor to the Leaning T, if he wanted to see Bill Traine, would probably go straight to Bill's bedroom. That was a chamber at the rear of the house. Acting on this probability, Larry hastened around the building until he reached another window—and here, suddenly, he heard voices.

He heard Bill Traine ejaculate, "Put the gun down! Do you expect me to talk with a—a muzzle aimed at my eyes?"

And another voice, so hushed and guttural that it was unrecognizable, rasped, "I'm keepin' the gun poked at you till you answer! What did you do with the diamonds in that bag?"

"Diamonds?" Bill's voice became a snarl. "What in tarnation you talkin' about?"

Larry, crouching outside the window, cautiously raised his eyes until he could peer over the sill. He saw Bill Traine seated in his bed. The big man was glaring across the dark room toward a figure at the door. Larry shifted his position slightly in order to obtain a view of the other man. But he discovered in dismay that the open door blocked his vision. The unknown visitor stood behind it.

Then the stranger's voice came again, savagely: "Traine, I'm giving you a last chance. Either you come across with those diamonds, or I pump lead! I know damn well you got them. I recognized that bag. You got it out of the Mexican's pocket after you plugged him tonight!"

There was a moment's silence. Then Bill Traine, whose mind was probably working fast, said cunningly, "All right. Suppose I *have* the diamonds. Do you think it'll help you get them to shoot me?" He laughed. "They're hid. They're hid where nobody'll ever find

them! I'm no fool. I wasn't going to keep them on me. And if you plug me, you'll never see them again. You can see that for yourself."

"So you figure to keep them for yourself?" harshly.

"I ain't made up my mind about that," whispered Bill Traine. "Matter of fact, I been tryin' to figure what I could do with the things. How could I sell them? How could I explain gettin' them?" There was a pause. "But I reckon I can take my time decidin'. There's no hurry."

"I tell you—" bitterly. The unseen man checked himself. It was as if he had been inspired by a new thought. When he spoke again, it was in a changed tone; one almost conciliatory. "Looka here, Bill. You've got the diamonds, and I want 'em. I *got* to have 'em! Maybe you're right when you say that killin' you won't help the situation. On the other hand, though, keepin', those stones won't do you much good, either, if you can't get rid of 'em. So how about—splittin'?"

Bill Traine seemed surprised. "Are you makin' me a proposition?"

THE man behind the door whispered hoarsely, "Call it anything you like! The point is *you* can't sell those diamonds, and I can. I got a—an outlet! See?"

After a silence, Bill Traine said slowly, "Yeah. I begin to savvy many things. These shipments of diamonds have probably been comin' to you pretty often, eh?"

"That's neither here nor there."

"It sure is, considerin' the fact that I've been suspected of bushwhackin' all those Bar H Bar waddies. So it was you who killed them, huh?" Anger quivered in Bill's voice. "That was a hell of a stunt! Usin' the Ace o' Dia-

monds mark so you'd make folks figure it was me who did the killin'! Reckon you just plumb pulled iron and shot anybody who threatened to bust up your little smugglin' party. Was that it?"

The other man said icily, "No use goin' into that now. I'm makin' you a proposition. Those diamonds are worth plenty. Turn 'em over to me and I'll see that—that you get a thousand bucks out of it for yourself."

"Yeah?" harshly laughed Bill Traine. "Either that or a slug in my heart, eh? Once you've got the diamonds, why should you keep me alive?"

"I tell you—"

"There's only one condition on which I'd split with you. Take it or leave it."

"What's that?"

"You give me till tomorrow. I want to put down everything I know on paper, seal it in an envelope, and leave it with Lawyer Scoggins, over in town. The idea'll be that if anything happens to me the envelope is to be opened. Let me do that, and I'll split with you. If you say no—fire away, and to hell with you!"

"Why, damn you—!"

"Besides, there's somethin' else. How do I know you *can* get rid of those diamonds? How do I know this ain't just a trick to get them out of my hands?"

The man behind the door retorted viciously, "You ought to know I ain't kiddin' about this! What would I want with diamonds? I got an hombre up in Chicago who pays plenty for my help. I been getting shipments from Mexico for him regular, once a month. Sometimes twice. All I got to do is send them on to him. He pays handsome."

"Yeah? Who is he?"

At this, however, the other voice laughed sneeringly. "Figure I'll tell you

that, do you, so you can get to see him yourself? Forget it, Bill. Not me. Once a month I ride up to Cinder Center and mail my stuff from there. Nobody knows—"

Larry Devoe, listening, cried a mental cheer. He knew that the work of the Border Patrol would be easy now. They would simply have to learn at Cinder Center to whom this man had been sending regular monthly mail. The post office there would be pretty sure to supply the information. It was a small town. If the packages had been insured, there'd be records of it. And so the core of this smuggling organization could be reached. . . .

Larry moved for a better view of the door. And in moving he caused calamity.

For he stepped on gravel. There was a grating sound. He was glaring over the sill at the moment. The door jerked, and a startled face stared straight at him.

It was the face of Horny Bob Lassiter!

And Lassiter gasped. His six-gun was in his hand. When he recognized the sheriff, he raised the weapon and fired straight at the face-framed in the window.

Larry Devoe dodged. He heard the bullet click on the sill. By the time he lifted his own weapon he could hear the thunder of running steps in the house. Horny Bob Lassiter—the Ace of Diamonds killer—was racing for the front door.

Pallid, Larry dashed around the house. He reached the front and saw Lassiter already ten feet from the porch, lunging wildly toward his horse. Lassiter was looking back over his shoulder. At the sight of the sheriff he halted, whirled around, and raised his six-gun to fire.

But this time it was Larry Devoe who shot first. . . .

Flame spewed from the muzzle of his weapon. He shot twice. The sounds of the shots were still echoing in the night when Horny Bob collapsed in a limp huddle.

Larry ran to him. From the door of the ranch house Bill Traine emerged, his big face colorless. Upstairs a window burst open. Ellen Traine looked down, eyes stunned.

When Larry reached the gaunt foreman of the Bar H Bar, he found the man still stirring in pain. He fell to his knees, rolled him over on his back.

"Horny!" he rasped.

The homely man, his face contorted, opened his eyes. An instant he looked up at the sheriff. Then a grin came to twist his lips. It was a horrible grin, full of agony and defeat.

"So," he grated, "it—was a trick!

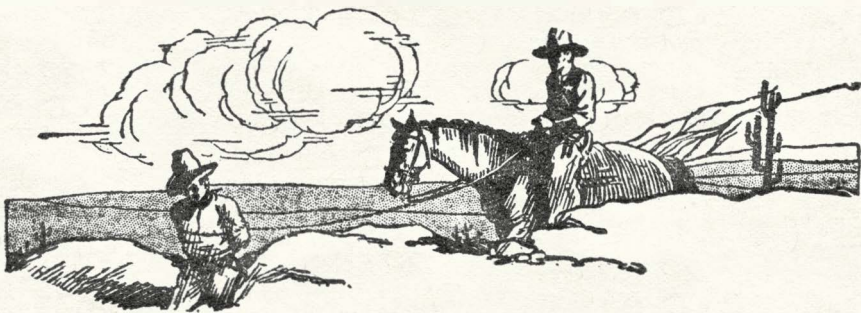
I—savvy it. You're a damned sly hombre, sheriff—"

"Looka here, Horny," whispered Larry Devoe. "I want you to tell me who—"

"All I'll tell you," gasped Horny Bob Lassiter, "is that folks around here won't object anymore to—to your keeping your badge. You—you've caught the Ace of Diamonds killer for 'em!"

SOMETHING happened to Horny Bob. A kind of convulsion seized him. He heaved once, cried out hoarsely, rolled over to sprawl on his chest. For a second, his fingers clawed frantically in the dust; then they went limp. And Horny Bob Lassiter lay motionless.

Larry Devoe stared at him. Presently he rose, sighed, and drew off his sombrero. "It's a tough job, Bill," he whispered, "bein' a sheriff."



Bulldog Drummond's Challenge

By Sapper



"I tell you, it's gone!" the big man roared. "The devil will be to pay!"

Menalin, Shrewd and Ruthless, Resorts to Murder as Most Men Do to Protest; and with Each Passing Hour, the Web of Death He Is Spreading for Bulldog Drummond Grows Tighter!

WHAT HAS HAPPENED—

BULLDOG DRUMMOND and Ronald Standish, British Secret Agents, have gone to South France to investigate the mysterious death of Major Jimmy Latimer of the Secret Service, aboard the Dieppe-Newhaven boat.

In Nice, they learn from Humphrey Gasdon, an Englishman, that implicated somehow in the murder is Menalin—a strange, rootless fellow; immensely wealthy and a

maniac as regards Britain and things British.

They discover also that Latimer had uncovered a gigantic—almost fantastic—plot against England, and the only clue they have as to its nature are three words he spoke: "Sealed fruit tins!"

Menalin appears now in Nice. Drummond and Standish are being watched every instant by his assassins. They have been involved with the police and are in momentary danger of their lives.

At Gasdon's suggestion, they head di-

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rectly for England, leaving their luggage in the hotel at Cannes. At Grasse, Gasdon takes their car, goes on alone toward Paris.

Drummond and Standish go on toward the Swiss border. At Sisteron, they too separate. Menalin's far-reaching organization is hunting them frantically, has duped the police into helping.

It is imperative that at least one of the secret agents return to England immediately with the news of the plot. Parted, each man will stand a better chance of getting through the net of death which Menalin's shrewd henchmen are spreading. . . .



CHAPTER XX

The First Lap

DURING the season, Evian-les-Bains is a charming spot. On the high ground behind the town, there are tennis courts and golf links set in delightful surroundings, for those who will to use. A tiny harbor filled with gaily colored boats abuts the Casino; beautiful women and brave men lounge gracefully over their 'five o'clock.' That is during the season.

Out of the season, Evian-les-Bains resembles a town of the dead. The links are shut; holland-cloth covers encase the Casino furniture. The beautiful women have departed long since; the inhabitants appear to have fallen into a coma. And it was out of the season when Bulldog Drummond, paying off his taxi on the outskirts of the town, proceeded to enter it on foot.

The time was mid-day, and the boat, so he had discovered from the concierge at Aix, arrived at two-thirty. That left him two and a half hours to kill and made him regret that he had left his hotel quite so early. Not that he hankered after Evian in gala mood, but he was so much more conspicuous in the deserted streets.

Strolling towards the harbor, he saw a sports shop in the window of which some knapsacks were hanging. It struck him that it might help to account for his presence if he pretended to be on a walking tour. So he purchased one, and a long stick with an embossed handle. A hunting horn he refused; likewise a little green hat with feathers in it. To overdo a part is bad art. . . .

Leaving the shop, he walked on towards the Lake. And then, finding a small café within sight of the landing stage, he entered and inquired about lunch. It seemed that an omelette and a bottle of wine was all that Madame could run to, so he ordered it and lit a cigarette.

Since the morning before, he had practically not seen Standish. They had traveled in the same train from Sisteron to Aix, but in different compartments, while at Aix they had stayed at different hotels. And now Drummond began wondering where his friend was. The two-thirty boat was the only one he could catch, since the service was greatly curtailed as soon as the summer tourist season ceased.

Slowly the time went by, until suddenly Madame pointed over the lake. "*Voilà, m'sieur; le bateau!*"

The paddle-boat had just heaved in sight, coming from St. Gingolph, and he frowned a little. Standish was cutting it fine. Faint human stirrings in the square outside began to manifest themselves; evidently this was the event of the day. He could hear the thrash of the paddles now, so, paying his bill he rose to go. And at that moment, a car drove up with Standish inside.

From the doorway Drummond watched. The engines of the boat were in reverse: cables fore and aft were

being flung ashore. And then he saw them. Advancing majestically towards the shore end of the gangway were two gendarmes in gorgeous uniforms. Moreover it appeared that they wished to see Standish's passport.

Drummond's eyes narrowed; rapid thought was necessary. They were stopping Standish in spite of his indignant protestations. And if they stopped Standish, they would also stop him. Madame was telling him to hurry if he wished to catch the boat, but he only smiled at her and came back into the café. It would not do to arouse her suspicions in any way, so he told her that he had decided to continue walking, and ordered another bottle of wine. From outside the sound of paddle wheels came again; the boat was leaving. And in a few minutes, peace reigned once more in Evian.

Convinced by now that the large Englishman was more than usually mad, Madame had retired into some inner fastness, leaving Drummond alone in the café. What was the best thing to do? Any attempt to rescue Standish or even to communicate with him would be madness. The police were merely doing their duty, and the only result would be that he would be stopped as well.

Equally would it be madness to wait on with the idea of catching the boat on the following day; the police would still be on the look-out. In fact, any idea of leaving France via Evian must be abandoned. Where, then, could he go?

A MAP was hanging on the wall. Drummond rose and studied it.

There, just across the water—so near and yet so far—lay Switzerland and safety. Should he wait for darkness, steal one of the boats in the har-

bor, and row across the lake? But after a few moment's reflection, he dismissed the idea as too dangerous. The police headquarters were too close; the risk of being seen or heard too great. So the only alternative was to cross the frontier by land.

To the east lay St. Gingolph—only about twelve miles away. But to reach that, he had to cross the square in front of the police station, and moreover do so fairly soon. For it had dawned on him that this café was not too safe. The gendarmes, exhausted by their labors, might decide to recuperate their strength with alcohol at any moment—and the café was very handy.

So there was only one course open. He would strike westward towards Geneva and cross at Hermance. That they would be on the look-out for him there was obvious, but the same thing applied to every customs outpost. So the only thing was to hope for the best when he got there. . . .

He slipped into the street, heaved a sigh of relief when he was finally out of sight of the police station. He had twenty-five miles to cover, and the prospect of walking did not amuse him. On the other hand, if he hired a car and arrived in broad daylight, the attempt was foredoomed to failure.

He strode along, thinking things over, and wishing that he knew the country he would have to negotiate when he came to the frontier. For it had soon occurred to him that by far the best, if not the only chance of getting through would be to cross between *douanes*, or customs outposts. That would entail leaving the road before he got to the frontier; skirting round the village and rejoining the road again farther on when he was safe in Switzerland. What difficulties there would be he had no idea; as a performance, it

was a new one on him. But he assumed that in peace time, any system of patrols between posts would be of a very lax nature.

And so, when it came to action, it proved to be. Save for falling into a wet ditch, the whole thing passed off without incident. As soon as the lights of the *douane* showed up ahead of him in the distance, he struck off toward the left across the fields. Once a dog began barking furiously, but except for that the night was still. Hardly a light was showing; the whole countryside was asleep. And at 11:41 P. M., Drummond stepped back on to the road with France a full kilometer behind him. In the distance glittered the lights of Geneva. A far more welcome sight, however, was a faint chink filtering through the wooden shutters of an inn just ahead. A room was available, and ten minutes later Drummond, having taken off his shoes and coat, was fast asleep. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

Territet

IT was past ten when Drummond awoke next morning and the sun was streaming in through the window. So, at peace with the world, and no longer feeling that at any moment he might feel a gendarme's hand on his shoulder, he drank two large cups of coffee. Then, having hired a taxi, he drove into Geneva over the Pont de Mont Blanc.

It was his first visit to the Hotel les Bergues and the concierge eyed him a little doubtfully. Hugh Drummond's general appearance was not such as is generally to be observed in that hotel. He needed a shave, and his shoes still bore record to yesterday's walk. But at that moment, an exquisite individual came sauntering down the stairs,

paused, stared, then with a cry of amazement held out his hand.

"What in the name of all that's fortunate are you doing here? And why this strange garb with knapsack and things?"

"Hello, Potato-face," called Drummond. "Glad to see you! I didn't know any of you blokes ever got up before midday."

The Honorable James Tagley grinned amiably. A younger son of old Lord Storrington, he had drifted peacefully into the Foreign Office, where he remained a monument of beauty and a joy forever.

"We do every second Friday," he explained. "But joking apart, Hugh, what brings you here?"

"A desire to study Swiss architecture first hand," Drummond replied with a smile.

"Are you up to some of your games?" demanded the Honorable James.

"My dear Potato-face, I don't understand you. I am now a respectable member of society."

"You're a damned old liar," said the other. "I say, what a shocking thing that was—those swine murdering Talbot."

"You're right," agreed Drummond. "Any inside information come through to this center of gossip?"

"No. But the motive must have been political."

Drummond raised his eyebrows. "I shouldn't have said that he was much mixed up in politics. However, doubtless you know best, James. Tell me, how stands the international barometer?"

The other lowered his voice. "Officially, old boy, set fair. Unofficially—not quite so good. There are vague mutterings and signs and portents."

"Are you allowed to tell?"

"The devil of it is that there's nothing to tell. Nothing definite, I mean. But in some ways, you know, this place is as sensitive as the Stock Exchange. Whispers go round in the most incredible fashion, and when you've been here some time, it's amazing how quickly you become aware of them. There's something in the air, Hugh; there has been for some time."

"What sort of thing?"

"I don't know; I can't tell you."

"Do you mean there's a possibility of war?"

"My dear fellow, that possibility is always there—League of Nations, or no League of Nations. But I don't mean war this time. It's something else, and—" his voice sank to a whisper—"we are involved!"

Drummond lit a cigarette. "You interest me profoundly, James," he remarked.

"Mind you, Hugh," said Tagley, "this is not to go beyond you. Oh, good morning, sir!"

A well-known figure in English public life nodded as he passed through the hall. "Do you want a lift?" he called out.

"Thank you, sir! I must go, Hugh. Shall I see you at lunch?"

"Perhaps, Potato-face. I don't know."

FOR a moment or two, Drummond stood motionless as Tagley hurried after the great man to a waiting car. Then he turned to the concierge. "I want to make a call to London," he said. "How long will it take?"

"It depends, sir. But if you will give me the number, I will get through for you. It would be well to remain nearby. Sometimes one connects almost at once."

Taking a pencil, Drummond wrote

down Ginger Lawson's number at the War Office. Then he sat down on a chair. So James Tagley confirmed the fact that something was in the wind . . . Strange! Very strange. . . .

"Damme!" he muttered to himself.

"If only Latimer had put those papers in an envelope and posted them in Paris!"

For perhaps ten minutes he sat there, idly watching the people as they passed in and out of the hotel. Suddenly he saw the concierge approaching him. "M'sieur's call to London."

He entered the booth and picked up the receiver. "Hello! Ginger; that you?"

With remarkable clearness, he heard Lawson's voice from the other end.

"Drummond speaking from Geneva."

"Geneva! What on earth are you doing there?"

"Too long to tell you now, Ginger. I'm writing you a full report this morning but it will be two or three days before I'm back. For reasons I can't go into at the moment, I'm not going through France. I shall either fly from Brussels or cross via Ostend or the Hook."

"Postpone it for a day or two," came Lawson's voice. "It's providential you're in Switzerland. Do you know young Cranmer—Archie Cranmer?"

"Vaguely. He's with you, isn't he?"

"That's right. But he's new to the game. At the moment, he is in Territet, at the Grand Hotel. Will you go over and get in touch with him? I'll wire him to expect you."

"All right, Ginger. It's urgent, is it? Because I want to get back to England as soon as possible."

"It is urgent, Hugh. It concerns the chief's murder. And I'd feel easier if you were helping Archie."

"Nough said, Ginger. I'll get off

my report to you, and then go straight to Territet. By the way, you have Ronald's papers from Cannes, haven't you?"

"Yes. I recognized the writing and opened it. We are keeping an eye on the gentleman. Is Ronald with you?"

"No. I'll explain everything in my report. So long, Ginger."

He rang off, and having paid for the call he wandered upstairs in search of the writing room. It was the part of the job that he disliked most, but he dared not bank on the fact that Standish would get another report off from France. And so, for an hour, he toiled laboriously; then with a sigh of relief he addressed the envelope and slipped it in his pocket. A shave, a drink, Territet—that was the program as he proposed it. And that was the program as he carried it out.

CHAPTER XXII

Drummond Turns Burglar

HE arrived at Territet at three o'clock, having lunched at Lausanne station, and went straight to the Grand Hotel. The first person he saw, sitting in the glassed-in veranda, was Archie Cranmer. "How are you, young feller?" he called. "I don't know if you remember me. My name is Drummond."

"Of course I do!" answered Cranmer getting up. "But it almost seemed as if you expected to find me here."

"I did," laughed Drummond. "I've come over from Geneva especially to see you at Ginger Lawson's request. Have you had a wire from him?"

"No."

"It'll come. And in the meantime, let's hear all about it."

Cranmer shook his head. "Very sorry, Drummond. I'm sure it's all

right but . . ." And once again he shook his head deliberately.

"Good for you!" said Drummond with a grin. "I was only trying you out. In our game, Cranmer, a man ought not to trust his own mother. However, I don't think we'll have long to wait. This bellboy has the appearance of one who bringeth news. A telegram, my lad? There's the gentleman."

Cranmer opened it; then with a smile passed the message over to Drummond.

WORK WITH HUGH DRUMMOND. LAWSON.

"So that's that," Cranmer said. "Sorry if I seemed suspicious, but your appearance was rather unexpected. How much do you know already?"

"Merely that you are here in connection with the chief's murder," answered Drummond.

"I see. Then I'd better begin at the beginning. You remember, don't you, that he always used to walk to and from the office?"

Drummond nodded.

"On the morning of his murder, it so happened that for some reason or other he did not walk, but took a taxi. Incidentally, both Lawson and I are convinced that if he had walked they'd have got him then. However, that is beside the point. The instant he reached the office, he sent for both of us.

"I had a visitor last night," he began. "At my flat. A very peculiar chap."

"You remember that funny sort of clipped way he had of talking?"

"Yes," he went on. "A very peculiar chap. At first I thought he wasn't all there. Mallows showed him into the study, and he kept looking round as if he expected a trap. Little, short, dark man with a whacking great mustache.

Obviously not English though he spoke quite well.

"It came out that he kept a barber's shop down Elephant and Castle way, which he ran under the name of Simpson. Further, that he was naturalized.

"I always believe,' continued the Chief, 'in letting a man tell his story in his own way, but after a bit I got a trifle bored.

"Get down to it, Mr. Simpson,' I said. 'I assume you haven't come here merely to tell me you cut hair?'

"The man leaned forward impressively.

"Colonel,' he said, 'I have very valuable information for you.'

"Good,' I answered. 'Fire ahead.'

"Then one got his real character in his cunning, greedy eyes. 'How much is it worth?'

"That,' I said, 'depends entirely on what it is. If it really is valuable, you won't have any cause for complaint.'

"Very good. I will trust you. Now you will understand, sir, that many foreigners come to my shop, as well as English. And frequently I overhear their conversations. This afternoon there came two. They were speaking French, but it was not the French of Frenchmen. And as I listened to what they said, I realized what they were. They were Swiss. After a while, they were joined by two Englishmen, and they all talked together in low tones. Much of what they said I could not hear, but one or two things I did catch.'

"THE little man's voice sank to a blood curdling whisper. 'And one of them was your name—often repeated!'

"Apparently," continued Cranmer, "the chief sat up at this. Why four scallywags should be discussing him in

a cheap barber's shop was not easy to follow. He pressed this man Simpson as to how he knew it was him, since Talbot was not a particularly uncommon name. Answer was that Orme Square had been mentioned, which seemed fairly conclusive, and the chief waited for more. He soon got it. The two Englishmen were known to Simpson as thoroughly dangerous characters, though he knew nothing about the Swiss. And it therefore seemed obvious that the conversation was not likely to have concerned a presentation of plate to the chief.

"Not that that worries me in the slightest,' he went on. 'In the ordinary course of events I should take no notice at all. But coming so soon after Jimmy's death, I have notified the Yard, and I expect to hear from them at any moment. Why I've sent for you two fellows concerns the one other item of interest that Mr. Simpson gave me. It's an address which he heard the Swiss mention two or three times: Villa Bon Ciel, Veytaux.'

"Where's Veytaux?', asked Ginger.

"Just what I wanted to know myself,' said the chief. 'It's apparently a sort of continuation of Montreux and Territet going towards Chillon Castle. And that's where you two boys are bound for. A nice holiday in beautiful Switzerland.'

"At that moment the telephone rang, and the chief answered it. And when he put down the receiver, his face was grave.

"Mr. Simpson has not yet returned to his shop,' he said. 'His bed has not been slept in. I very much fear that he has more than earned the fiver I gave him.'

"You think they've got him?' said Ginger.

"My flat was probably being

watched,' he said. 'Of course he may have gone on the binge and is sleeping it off, but. . . .'

"The shrug of his shoulders was eloquent; it was obvious what he thought. And then, for a time, he sat there drumming on the desk with his fingers.

"I don't like it,' he said at length. 'There's something going on I can't understand. Anyway, you two had better keep your eyes skinned before, during, and after your visit to Veytaux.'

"With that he dismissed us, and it was the last time I saw him alive. Those swine got him, as you know, when he was walking home that afternoon."

"What of this man Simpson?" asked Drummond after a pause.

"There was no trace of him up to the time I left. You see, the chief's death altered things. Ginger had to stop on in London, so I came over here alone."

"I see," said Drummond absently. "When did you get here?"

"Early this morning by the Orient Express."

"Have you done anything as yet?"

"I took a walk toward Chillon Castle, and located the villa."

"Good," said Drummond. "What sort of a place is it?"

"An ordinary sort of shanty standing way back up the hill, overlooking the Lake. It's got a glassed-in veranda much like this one, only very much smaller of course."

"Any other houses near it?"

"Nothing, I should say, within a hundred yards."

"How close did you get to it?"

"I didn't. I saw it from the main road down below. That's this one that goes past the hotel."

"And what were you proposing to do next?"

"To tell the truth, Drummond," said

Cranmer with an apologetic laugh. "I wasn't quite sure exactly *what* to do next."

"I don't wonder. The problem is not a very easy one."

"I thought I might make inquiries of the concierge as to who lives there?"

Drummond shook his head. "Certainly not that. In a place of this sort, things get round in an incredibly short time. And if it came out that two Englishmen were interesting themselves in the owner of the Bon Ciel, the game would be queered at once. No, nothing so direct as that. You didn't get near enough to find out if the owner kept a dog?"

Cranmer shook his head. "In any event it would probably have been inside the house."

"Not necessarily," said Drummond. "A lot of these people here keep a dog on a long chain, simply as a watchdog. Then they don't have to pay a license. However, we can but find out. Got any rubber-soled shoes?"

"No."

"Nor have I. Now look here, Cranmer, we'll split this job to start with. I will go down the town and buy two pairs of rubber shoes—your size looks about the same as mine. You will get hold of a telephone book, remembering that under no circumstances must you let the concierge know why you want it. You will then go laboriously down the columns on the chance of finding that the villa is listed. If it is, we shall get the name of the owner, though possibly not the present tenant. It may help; it may not. Then when I return, we will both take a walk past the villa to insure that we can find it tonight."

"And tonight?"

"We will take another walk," said Drummond with a grin. "And then we will be guided by circumstances."

"Good grief!" cried the other. "You don't intend to break in, do you?"

CHAPTER XXIII

M. Lénod Talks

DRUMMOND'S grin grew more pronounced. "Let us call it a tour of investigation," he remarked. "Get busy with the telephone book."

He left Cranmer setting down to his monotonous task, and walking down to the station, stood waiting for a trolley. On the opposite side of the lake rose the mountains of Haute Savoie, culminating in the giant Dent du Midi, golden-crested in the westering sun. A thin wisp of fog lay like a serpent against the dark *kuik*, and in the distance the same steamer that Standish had missed the day before was pursuing its slow course.

A trolley came grinding to a standstill and he boarded it. Facing him, two very English old ladies were discussing church affairs with interest; he gathered that all was not going as it should do with regard to the approaching bazaar. And just for a second, a faint smile twitched round his lips. They were so *very* earnest about it, and the ever-amazing contrasts that go to form this thing called life tickled his sense of humor.

He found a shoe shop without difficulty, and made his purchases. Then, strolling through the empty market place, he started to walk back to the hotel along the lake front. Gulls, shrieking discordantly, rose from the railings as he approached, only to resume their perches when he had gone by. And at one corner, a man of unbelievable antiquity, who was fishing with the longest rod Drummond had ever seen, had just landed a fish nearly two inches long.

He arrived back in the hotel, told

the concierge to have the parcel sent up to his room. Then he went through to the bar to find Cranmer who nodded gleefully as soon as he saw him. "Luck's in up to a point," Cranmer said. "The house belongs to a man called Maier, but since Maier is about as common here as Smith is in England, it doesn't seem to help much."

"Still it's something," answered Drummond. "Your shoes are in my room."

"I'll get 'em after dinner," said Cranmer, "Shall we do a spot of scouting now?"

Drummond nodded, and Cranmer rose. "We go out by the other door," he suggested. "My hat's in the hall."

In silence, the two men strode along the main street until they came to a road branching off to the left and leading up into the hills. Below them, about half a mile away, somber and grim, Chillon Castle jutted out into the lake, while above it, far off in the distance, the peaks of the Dent du Midi had turned to purple.

There was a nip in the air, and they walked briskly. At first, the houses were continuous, small ones of the working-man type. But shortly they ceased, and scattered villas took their place—villas which were approached by drives of varying length.

"There it is," said Cranmer. "The next one on the right."

"Good," cried Drummond. "Don't pause; we'll walk straight past."

It stood about thirty yards back from the road and below it. Though obviously inhabited, there was no sign of any inmates. Nor was there any indication of a dog. An upstairs window was open, and the curtains were stirring in the faint breeze. And as they passed, a light was suddenly switched on in the room, and a man leaned out.

His back was to the light, so that all they could see was the silhouette of a broad-shouldered figure. Then he disappeared.

They walked on another hundred yards when Drummond stopped. "About turn," he ordered. "There's nothing more to be found out now. Let's go back to the inn. Two things, boy, may help us. There's undergrowth on each side of the drive, and from the road one can see into the upstairs window. Let us hope that the night may bring us luck."

"Probably bring us a jail sentence," laughed Cranmer. "However, the Swiss are a humane race. I don't suppose they torture their prisoners."

THE bar had filled up when they returned, and having ordered two drinks, they stood by it. In an adjoining room, four people were playing bridge, and in one corner of the bar itself a large cosmopolitan party was drinking cocktails. They were talking French, but some were obviously Germans, and the remainder Americans.

"You see the very tall gentleman facing you, sir?" said the barman in an undertone to Drummond. "That is your consul here—M'sieur Lénod."

"The devil it is!" murmured Drummond. "He's a Swiss?"

"*Mais oui, m'sieur.* But he has spent much of his life in England."

"Thank you," said Drummond and turned to Cranmer. "I wonder if he could help us over Maier," he went on in a low voice.

"No harm in trying," answered the other. "By Jove! he's coming over here!"

It was true; Monsieur Lénod was crossing to the bar to give an order.

"Excuse me, m'sieur," said Drummond, when he had finished his in-

structions, "but I understand you are the British consul here."

"That is so," returned the tall man.

"I wonder if I could have a few minutes conversation with you?"

"If you wish to see me on business," said M'sieur Lénod, "you will find me at my office tomorrow morning."

"I'm afraid tomorrow morning will be too late," objected Drummond. "I should consider it a very great favor if you could waive professional etiquette on this occasion. I can assure you that it is important."

"Under those circumstances, gentlemen, I will join you as soon as I can get away from my party."

With a courteous bow he moved back to his table, and Drummond turned to Cranmer.

"It may come to nothing," he said, "but as you say, it's worth trying. There's a vacant table over there. Let's go and sit down."

Ten minutes later, the consul joined them. "Well, gentlemen," he remarked. "What can I do for you?"

"In the first place," said Drummond, "we had better introduce ourselves. My name is Drummond, Captain Drummond, and this is Cranmer. We are over here, M'sieur Lénod, in connection with the murder of Colonel Talbot in Hyde Park, which you have doubtless read about in the papers."

The consul raised his eyebrows. "Police?" he murmured.

"No, not police. Shall we say—secret service?"

Drummond paused for a moment and lit a cigarette. "It has come to our knowledge," he continued, "that there is a certain villa in Veytaux which is in some way connected with the crime. In what way, we don't know, but this villa was mentioned by men who are believed to be implicated in the murder."

"And the name of it?" asked the consul.

"The Bon Ciel."

The consul nodded thoughtfully. "Monsieur Carl Maier," he said. "Well, gentlemen, I am not altogether surprised. Why he should be concerned in the murder of Colonel Talbot is completely beyond me; but if anybody here is concerned in it, he would be the man I should pick on."

"So you know something about Maier?" Drummond questioned quietly.

"Quite a lot. To begin with—though this is hardly relevant to the present matter—his villa was one of the centers of espionage during the War. As you can imagine, all this shore of the lake was a happy hunting ground for spies, who could enter the country from Germany, and find France just across the water. And though we could never prove it—and, in fact, could do nothing even if we did prove it—Maier's villa was one of their principal rendezvous."

"What sort of a man is he?" asked Drummond.

"He is a German Swiss, born not far from Basle. His age is about sixty. By profession, he is a clock maker, though he has long given up actual work. He is, however, extremely clever with his fingers, at any form of mechanical contrivance. It is his hobby—messing about with springs and cogged wheels. So much for one aspect of the man."

CHAPTER XXIV

No Moon

THE consul paused as if to weigh his words, and the others did not interrupt him. "Now for another and possibly more important aspect," continued M'sieur Lénod. "In his early

days, he was a red-hot revolutionary—practically an anarchist. I gather that he has mellowed somewhat with advancing years, but up till long after the war he was a fanatical extremist. Incidentally, Captain Drummond, the chair in which you are sitting is the one in which Lenin sat—night after night—before he went to Russia, and I have often seen Maier in here talking to him."

"That's interesting," said Drummond.

"But once again, hardly relevant," the consul said with a smile. "However, I really don't know that I can tell you any more about him. I must say I would be interested to know how he can possibly be mixed up in that Hyde Park affair."

"So would we, M'sieur Lénod," remarked Drummond dryly. "By the way, is he married?"

"He was, but his wife died some years ago."

"Does he live alone?"

"Yes. Though sometimes a married daughter comes to stay with him, I believe."

"Has he any servants?"

The consul put down his glass. "Captain Drummond," he countered quietly, "may I ask the purport of your last few questions?"

Drummond's eyes twinkled. "Officially or unofficially, M'sieur Lénod?"

"Well—I'm not in my office."

"A very good answer," laughed Drummond. "But even a better one is what the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina." He beckoned to the barman.

"M'sieur Lénod," Drummond explained, "we are infinitely obliged to you for what you have told us. But I think in view of your position here

it would be better if we now discussed the prospects of winter sport."

The consul gave a little chuckle. "Perhaps you're right," he murmured. "Er—with reference to your last question—one old woman and she's quite deaf."

Cranmer looked a bit uneasy. "You know, it's all right for you," he said. "You're a blinking civilian. Don't forget I'm a H'army H'orficer. Do you really intend to break in?"

Drummond lit a cigarette thoughtfully. "I take your meaning, Cranmer," he answered. "And I can assure you, my dear fellow, that civilian or no civilian, I don't intend to spend the next few months sampling Swiss prison diet. But there can be no drawing back now. The whole matter has gone far beyond us and our little affairs. And if there's the slightest chance of our finding even the smallest ray of light in that villa, it's our obvious duty to go there."

"And you think there is a chance?"

"Most certainly. Once again, you see, we come up against a man of pronounced anti-democratic tendencies."

"Don't forget that I'm still very much in the dark," said Cranmer.

"I'll put you wise during dinner," promised Drummond, glancing at his watch. "And then we'll have to kill time till about midnight. It won't be safe to leave before."

"Won't it look rather peculiar—our sneaking out of here in rubber shoes?"

"We'll have to chance that, unless. . ."

He turned to the barman. "Is there any haunt of vice in this delightful town?" he asked. "A night club, or something really dashing like that?"

"There's the Kursaal, sir. They have classical concerts there."

Drummond's face paled visibly.

"No, no! Nothing quite so immoral as that. I mean some place where my friend and I could go in safety after dinner tonight."

"There's the Perroquet, sir. They dance there."

"That sounds more our form, Cranmer. The Perroquet. Delightful. We will repair to this sink of iniquity and have a look at the pretty girls. And with us," he continued in a lower voice, "we will take my knapsack with rubber shoes complete, into which we will change just before reaching the villa. It is goot—yes?"

Cranmer grinned. "You seem in devilish high spirits," he said. "You're used to little escapades of this sort; I'm not. And by the time it comes to midnight, they won't need any castinets in the Perroquet band: I'll lend 'em my knees."

Drummond roared with laughter. "Let's go and have some food," he cried. "You'll take to it like a duck does to water. And fortunately for us, there's no moon."

CHAPTER XXV

In Luck

IT was just after midnight when they once again approached the villa Bon Ciel. During their walk from the Perroquet, they had hardly met a soul; Montreux is not a late town. One or two belated cars had passed them, and once, in the distance, under the light of a lamp they had seen the stocky form of a policeman.

The night was dark and overcast. Not a star was showing, and there was a damp, raw feeling in the air. But the conditions, though unpleasant, were perfect for their purpose, and Drummond whistled cheerfully under his

breath as they left the main road and started to climb.

Two hundred yards from the villa, they changed their shoes, and hid the knapsack under a bush. Then they stole forward towards a shaft of light which lay across the road, and which proved that someone was still up in Monsieur Maier's household. From far away came the ceaseless murmur of a mountain stream; otherwise the night was silent.

At length, they reached the line of light, paused under cover of some shrubs to reconnoiter. It came from the room in which they had seen the man that afternoon—a bright bar of yellow shining out underneath the blind which had not been quite pulled down.

The window was open, and the blind was moving gently in the faint night breeze. But from where they were standing, it was impossible to see into the room. They were too low down, and Drummond was just on the point of hoisting Cranmer up on his shoulders when a shadow appeared on the blind. It was that of a man standing with his hands in his pockets close to the window; they could actually see a strip of his legs through the chink.

They crouched down, waiting, and after a few seconds, the shadow moved across the window and vanished.

"Our friend is evidently awake," whispered Drummond. "This may take a long time."

"What are you going to do?" muttered Cranmer.

"Wait till he goes to bed, and then sample one of the downstairs windows."

Slowly, interminably, time passed, but there was no sign of the light being put out. Nor was there any further reappearance of the shadow. And at length, Drummond stooped down.

"Get your knees on my shoulders," he whispered, "and hold onto my hands. For the love of Mike don't fall off in the bushes!"

He straightened up, and a moment later heard Cranmer's whispered, "All right!"

"What did you see?" Drummond questioned as he put Cranmer down.

"He's sprawling over the table, asleep," said Cranmer.

"Hell!" answered Drummond. "That's a nuisance. We'll have to chance it—that's all."

And even as he spoke, they heard the sound of the front door opening, and footsteps on the gravel.

"Be still as death," Bulldog breathed in Cranmer's ear. "If he comes this way, I'll deal with him."

The gate opened, and a man came out on to the road not three yards from where they were standing. He paused to shut the gate quietly; then he strode off away from them in the direction of Montreux.

"Thank goodness for that!" said Drummond. "It would have complicated things if I'd had to hop him one. Get up on my shoulders again and see if that other bloke is still asleep."

"Yes."

"Good. Then we'll chance it now, before the other bird has time to return. Let's try the front door."

Cautiously Drummond pushed open the gate, and, followed by Cranmer, crept towards the house. From above them came the tapping of the blind against the window sill as it trembled in the faint breeze. And once their shadows, distorted eerily, were flung on the bushes from the headlights of a car on the main road below.

They reached the door and Drummond flashed his torch on it. "In luck!" he whispered. "Not a Yale."

HE turned the handle, and a moment later they were both standing in the hall. The house was absolutely silent; even the sound of the stream had ceased. But to Cranmer it seemed as if the beating of his heart must be audible in Montreux. His hands were shaking; his mouth felt curiously dry. And he started like a frightened colt as Drummond laid a hand on his arm. "Steady, boy," muttered Drummond with a little chuckle. "Just follow me, and don't make a noise."

Once again the beam of the torch explored the darkness; in front of them were the stairs. And almost before Cranmer had moved, he heard an impatient whisper from the landing above, though of Drummond's movement there had been no sound.

"Come on, Cranmer; there's no time to lose."

The stairs bent round at right angles, and as he joined his leader, they could both see the light shining under the door of the occupied room.

Step by step they mounted till they reached the top. And there Drummond bent down and peered through the keyhole.

"I don't like it, Cranmer," he said quietly as he straightened up. "I can't quite see, but no man has ever slept in that position. Be prepared for something."

He turned the handle, and gently pushed open the door.

Seated at the desk, which was more like a work bench, was a man whose head had literally been battered in. His injuries could only have been caused by an attack of well-nigh inconceivable ferocity. The blood which had formed a great pool on the table had welled over and was dripping sluggishly onto the wooden floor. One hand hung limply down; the other, still clutching a small

hammer, was on the bench.

"For Pete's sake—let's go!" said a voice and Cranmer realized it was his own.

Once more he felt that firm, reassuring pressure on his arm; once again he heard that quiet voice:

"Steady, boy. The poor devil's not a pretty sight, but we've got to go through with it. Stand here by the door, and don't, under any circumstances, let your shadow fall on the blind."

Crouching down, Drummond moved over to the body, while Cranmer, still feeling faint and sick, watched him, fascinated. Watched him as he went swiftly through the dead man's pockets; watched him glancing through the letters he found. Saw him open drawer after drawer of a cupboard that stood against the wall and rummage through their contents; saw him pause and stand motionless as he stared at the last one.

For a moment what was in it conveyed nothing to Drummond; then, like a blinding flash there came back to his memory those last cryptic words of Jimmy Latimer to Madame Pélain as the train steamed out of Cannes station: "Sealed fruit tins."

And there in the drawer were two fruit tins. True they were not sealed; they had been opened, and their contents had been removed. In fact they were just two empty tins, and only by the pictures of fruit on the paper wrapper that was pasted round each of them was it possible to know what their contents had been. . . .

CHAPTER XXVI

Ambush

THOUGHTFULLY, Drummond picked one up and examined it. It stood about four inches high; the diameter was approximately

the same. The label proclaimed that it had contained Fancy Quality Fruit Salad prepared by a firm called Petworth who had packed it in their own orchard factory in Gloucestershire.

He looked inside: nothing. And then a peculiar point struck him. Under ordinary circumstances, when a top is removed with a can opener, the resulting cut has ragged edges. But in the tin which he held in his hand, the top edge was perfectly smooth. And when he looked at it more closely, he could plainly see in places the marks of a file. Why had the owner of the tin taken the trouble to do such a thing?

He put it back and picked up the other one. And at once things became more interesting. To outward appearances, the two tins were identical—but the interior revealed a striking difference. Soldered into the side, about an inch below the top, were three tiny metal cubes, each the size of a small die. Their position formed the corners of an equilateral triangle.

For a long while, Drummond stared at them, trying to think what possible object they could fulfil. In view of the fact that the dead man's hobby had been playing about with springs and things, he might have assumed that the tin was the outer case for some patent model he was inventing. But Jimmy's remark could not be ignored so that that simple solution would not hold water.

He looked at the outside more carefully. No sign of the soldering appeared there. And a moment's reflection told him that even if any mark had shown on the metal, the paper wrapper would have concealed it.

He glanced up; Cranmer was standing beside him looking curiously at the tin.

"I told you about Jimmy's remark,"

said Drummond. "What's your reaction to this? You see the edge has been carefully filed down where the opener has been used."

"As a matter of fact," said Cranmer, "you don't use an ordinary opener with this brand. I happen to know, because I had to open one the other night. They have a key with a slot at the end into which you put a tongue of the metal fastening. Then you roll the key round and round—"

"I know," interrupted Drummond. "Still that doesn't explain those studs."

"It does not," agreed Cranmer. "My soul! What's that?"

Both men stood rigid; the gate had shut and steps could be heard on the gravel. Worse still—voices!

"Quick," snapped Drummond. "Out on the landing and into some other room."

Like a flash, they were through the door, closing it after them. And as they were on the landing, the newcomers entered the hall below.

"I tell you, it's all right," came a guttural voice with a pronounced accent. "The woman is stone deaf. Almost as deaf"—he laughed harshly—"as he is."

Like shadows, Drummond and Cranmer faded into a bedroom opposite as the footsteps came up the stairs.

"It is absurd," said another voice, "returning here at all. You have all that matters. Mother of Mercy!" The voice rose to a scream.

Cautiously, Drummond opened the door a little and peered out. Two men were standing in the room they had just left. One was a big fellow: the other was short and rather fat. And it was he who was covering his face with his hands, as if to shut out the dreadful thing at the desk.

"Squeamish," sneered the big man. "When a man gets hit with a coal hammer, he doesn't generally look as if he'd died of old age. Now then—"

THE words died away, and Drummond saw him take a spring forward. And then there came from the room a flood of fearful blasphemy.

"It's gone, I tell you!" cried the big man when he could again speak coherently. "It's gone."

"It can't have gone," his companion protested in a trembling voice. "You must have made a mistake."

"I tell you, it's gone," snarled the other. "Here is the one without the studs, but the other is gone. Moreover"—into his voice there crept a note of fear—"this drawer was shut. He shut it himself."

"Well, assuredly, he could not have opened it again. Let's go. For hell's sake, let's go. You have all that really matters in your pocket."

"How did that drawer come open?"

The big man came into sight again, stood staring at his trembling companion.

"I know it was shut," he went on. "When he became foolish, he got up and he shut it. I can see him doing it now. He crossed and he shut it, then he returned to the chair and laughed at me."

"It is a little thing, anyway, whether it was open or shut. Let's go!"

"But it is not a little thing that the tin has gone, you fool. Tins do not walk on their own. *He* could not have touched it. *So who has?*"

"Who indeed?" whispered Drummond, and Cranmer could feel his grin of pure joy. "Put the tin on the bed, boy; we'll want both our hands shortly. I'll take the big 'un."

Again he peered out; the fat man

was speaking in a quavering voice: "What does it matter? If we are found here, all is lost. It means prison."

"Shut up, you cur." His companion regarded him with contempt. "You haven't got the nerves of a mouse. Don't you realise that someone has been here since I left?"

"All the more reason for us to go at once."

"It couldn't have been the police or they would still be here."

"No. But whoever it was may inform the police."

The big man continued as if the other had not spoken. "Yes. They'd still be here. Now why should this unknown visitor take such an apparently useless thing as that tin? Answer that."

But the fat man was beyond speech; rivers of perspiration were pouring down his face which he was endeavoring to mop up with a shaking hand.

"Is there any other number in Montreux? Speak, you worm!"

"Not that I know of," stuttered the fat man.

"Then it's an enemy—an enemy who knows. . . . Come on—we'll go."

"Our cue," muttered Drummond, flinging open the door.

His appearance was so utterly unexpected that for a moment or two the big man stood staring dumbfounded across the passage. Which was unwise on his part. He had a fleeting vision of a man as big as himself materializing from nowhere; then something that seemed like a steam hammer hit him on the jaw. He crashed over backwards and his head hit the edge of the bench with a crack like the impact of two billiard balls. And it was perhaps poetic justice that as he lay unconscious on the floor a little rivulet of the blood of the man he had murdered welled over and splashed on his face.

"So much for you," grunted Drummond and turned to a corner from which a series of squeaks were issuing, reminiscent of a rabbit caught by a weasel. They came from the little fat man who was on his knees, as if in prayer, before Cranmer.

At any other time, Drummond would have laughed—the sight was so ludicrous. But speed was the order of the day, and his quick eye had spotted a length of rope behind some lumber.

"Bring him here, Cranmer," he ordered curtly. "Put him in that chair. Gag him with his own handkerchief. . . . No, no! In his mouth, man, and knot it behind his head. Like a snaffle on a horse. That's right. . . . Now his legs; there's some more rope over there."

CHAPTER XXVII

Drummond Laughs

THEY worked in silence, and the result was creditable to all concerned. It would have been hard to imagine a more scientifically trussed and gagged gentleman than the one who gazed at them fearfully from the chair.

"Go through his pockets, old boy," said Drummond. "I'll tackle the other."

He crossed to the unconscious man and felt his pulse: it was beating evenly and steadily. Fortunate! It would have complicated matters if Bulldog had killed him. Then he ran over him with skilled hands, and at once found a prize.

In one pocket was a piece of mechanism that looked like the inside of a clock. For a moment or two he studied it: evidently this was what had been alluded to as 'all that really matters.' He put it on the bench and continued his search. Two private letters; a pocket book which he went through; some money.

"Found anything on yours?" he asked.

"Not a thing," answered Cranmer.

"Then we'll hop it. Get the tin."

And with one last look at the room—at the little fat man whose terrified eyes were roving incessantly; at the dead man whose terrified eyes were fixed and staring; at the unconscious man sprawling on the floor—Drummond shut the door. And a few minutes later, with sighs of relief, they felt the night breeze cool on their faces, and heard from afar off the ceaseless murmur of the mountain stream.

"I suppose I shall wake up in a moment," said Cranmer, as they retrieved the knapsack and changed their shoes.

Drummond gave a short laugh. "It's been a bit hectic for a first try-out," he agreed. "But you did very well, lad—very well indeed. Now everything depends on Monsieur Lénod."

Cranmer glanced at him. "How do you mean?"

"When the deaf servant wakes up tomorrow morning, it will not be long before she enters that room. Then the fat man will be in the fire. By ten o'clock, it will be all over the place. And after our conversation with Lénod to-night it would, under ordinary circumstances, be his bounden duty to tell the police."

"I hadn't thought of that. What are you going to do about it?"

"Persuade him that the circumstances are *not* ordinary. It's our only hope. If he tells the police, the delay will be interminable. And we can't afford delay, Cranmer. We've *got* to get back to England at the first possible moment."

"The fat little man may squeal."

"He may. On the other hand, fear of vengeance may prevent him. Anyway we've got to chance that. He doesn't know who we are."

They turned into the hotel, where a sleepy night porter wished them good-night.

"Come into my room for a moment," said Drummond. "I want to look at this machine a little more closely."

He took it and the fruit tin out of the knapsack, and placed them on the table. And the object of the studs inside the tin at once became obvious. For the diameter of the machine was such that it would just slip inside the tin and then come to rest on the studs.

"So far so good," remarked Drummond. "But what the deuce happens next?"

Cranmer yawned. "Ask me another," he said. "What feels like happening next to me is going to bed."

"Then you push off, Cranmer. If I can square Lénod, I'll want you to fly from Zurich tomorrow. And you'll have to take this machine with you. The tin doesn't matter; we can get dozens in England."

"And what will you do?"

"Go via Basle through Germany, and probably fly from Brussels."

Cranmer yawned again. "Well—I'll hit the hay. Goodnight."

"Night!" said Drummond absently, and the last Cranmer saw as he closed the door, Bulldog was peering earnestly into the bowels of the machine.

Sick with weariness, Archie Cranmer stumbled into his room, and almost before his head touched the pillow he was asleep. And it seemed to him only the next moment that he was awakened by someone shaking his shoulder. . . .

THE daylight was streaming into the room as he opened his eyes to find Drummond standing beside the bed.

"I've been to the consul," said that

worthy, "and luckily, the man's a sport. When he'd got over his very natural wrath at being dragged from his bed at such an unreasonable hour, he listened to what I had to say. I told him the whole story from A to Z; pointed out to him that if we'd had anything to do with the murder we should hardly have talked to him as we did last night; and finally appealed to his patriotism. And though he's a Swiss, there's no doubt about that latter commodity. However, to cut a long story short, he has agreed to forget our conversation here last night."

"Stout fellow," said Cranmer.

"If the fat man spills the beans sufficiently for us to be identified, Lénod, of course, can do nothing. But if we are detained here, he has agreed to see personally that that machine gets back to London, even if he has to take it himself, and to tell Ginger Lawson what happened last night. So that side of it is settled, as far as anything can be settled in this affair."

Cranmer jumped out of bed and began to shave. "Do you want to borrow my razor?" he asked with a glance at Drummond's chin.

"No, boy, I don't," replied Drummond with a grin. "I have long had a fancy to see what I should look like with a beard. And I think it may prove useful in England."

"When do we start?"

"I've been looking up trains, and there seems a good one at 11:15. Part of it goes to Zurich and part to Basle. If we can get that, I think we're quite safe."

And suddenly Drummond began to laugh.

"It seems funny, after my long career of singing in the village choir, that the only two occasions on which I've been really frightened of the po-

lice, are the two when I *haven't* done anything."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Counter Attack

ALGY LONGWORTH was singing in his bath. It was not a pleasant sound, but his servant, though a little white about the gills, was hardened to it, and continued to lay the breakfast. He even survived the sudden appearance of his master clad only in a bath towel, and proceeded to hand him his letters.

"We are in voice this morning, Marsh, are we not?" remarked Algy, glancing through the packet. "Which, my trusty varlet, is surprising, because beneath this outer husk conditions are poor—very poor. Marsh, I could do with a horse's neck."

"Very good, sir. How much brandy?"

"Just as you take it yourself, Marsh. Or is it your opinion that half a pint of champagne would meet the case better?"

"I prefer it myself, sir. I find a horse's neck a trifle sweet at this hour of the morning."

"Spoken like a man. Champagne let it be. What are we doing to-day, Marsh?"

"Your engagement book states, sir, that you are lunching at the Ritz with a tow-haired filly—name unknown, and slightly knock-kneed."

"Impossible, Marsh. Impossible! How could a man of my exalted moral standing know anything about her knees? I wonder who the deuce she can be?"

"That, sir, I fear is beyond me. The entry was made two or three days ago, after an evening you spent at the Golden Boot."

"I was there again last night, Marsh. Tell me, old friend of my youth," he went on, lighting a cigarette, "have you noticed anything particularly attractive about me lately? Have I recently developed some hitherto latent charm of manner which endears me to the world at large?"

"I have noticed no change, sir."

"Last night, for instance, Marsh, I became conscious of an air of solicitude about my goings and comings, so to speak, which touched me greatly, but at the same time a little surprised me. Maidens and men concerned themselves with my poor affairs in a way which, I confess, astonished me."

His servant crossed to the window and glanced out.

"I wonder if it's a part of the same things, sir. This flat is being watched."

"Watched! Are you sure?"

"Absolutely, sir, there's the bloke on the other side now. Same man who was here for a time yesterday."

"Come away from the window!"

Algy Longworth sat down at the table, and his eyes had suddenly grown thoughtful. "When did we last hear from Captain Drummond, Marsh?"

"He rang you up from his club, sir, about eight days ago. I took the message, and you went round to see him."

"And I rang him up two days after that and found he'd gone to France. It's funny, Marsh, all this. Mr. Burton was asking me about him last night. He, too, seems to have become popular. Ring up his house, and find out if he's back in London."

"No, sir," said Marsh returning a few moments later. "He has not come back. I took the liberty, sir, of asking his man, Denny, if anyone was watching his house. He had not noticed it up to date, but he is going to keep a look out in future."

"Good. I'm inclined to think, Marsh, that we may be finding ourselves on the warpath once again. And if so, I must go into training. No more late nights: no more knock-kneed dames. Hullo! who's that?"

The front door bell had rung.

"Get me a dressing gown, and go and see. And don't forget the cautionary period has started."

"Very good, sir."

CAME a murmur of voices from outside, and then suddenly a well-known laugh. "It's all right, Marsh. I'm glad you didn't recognize me."

"Good gravy!" cried Algy going to the door. "Talk of the devil! My dear old boy—what a magnificent make-up! I wouldn't have known you myself."

Hugh Drummond was standing in the hall, though only by his voice would anyone have known him. A master of disguise at any time, on this occasion he had excelled himself. A four days' growth of beard adorned his chin; a greasy cap was pulled down over one eye. And by some extraordinary method, he had managed to alter his actual features: slightly, but enough to deceive anyone. Round his neck was knotted a colored handkerchief in place of a collar; his clothes were in keeping with his cap. In his hand he carried a carpet bag of plumber's tools which he put down on the floor.

"How are you, Algy?" he cried. "I'm just going to get through to Ginger Lawson and then I want a drink."

He dialed at the telephone, while Algy Longworth went back to get dressed. And when he returned to his sitting room it was to find Drummond sitting in an easy chair with his face buried in a tankard of ale.

8D—27.

"What's the great idea?" he demanded.

"Are you all ready for the road?"

"Sure thing," said the other.

"Because we'll want all the boys. Something damned funny is on foot, lad. You know I went over to France?"

"Yes."

"Well I'll just tell you briefly what happened in that delectable country. You'd better make a few notes, because I'll want you to tell the others."

Algy Longworth listened in silence, except for putting in an occasional question. "And you slipped out of Switzerland all right!" he said as Drummond paused for more beer.

"No difficulty there. Young Cranmer flew from Zurich and has duly arrived; I went through Germany and caught the afternoon boat yesterday from Ostend. Strong men shrank from me, appalled at the sight of my beard, but that couldn't be helped. And having suitably disguised myself this morning, the game begins on this side."

He put down his tankard and his eyes were grim. "They've been scoring, Algy, in a way that must cease. First, Jimmy Latimer: then the Chief. And from what Ginger Lawson said over the phone neither Ronald nor Gaddon have rung him up. Which means that they are still detained in France—if not worse."

Algy Longworth shouted for his servant. "Clear these things away Marsh. Look here, are you *absolutely* sure about that man outside?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Rather a jolt, Hugh. This flat is being watched."

"The devil it is!" said Drummond "That's a nuisance."

"And last night, at the Golden Boot several people were infernally inquisitive about you and me."

"Was Burton there?"

"Not last night. But little Alice Blackton told me that the day after you went there, he tried to pump her about you."

"I know they've got me taped all right. And they're on to you because of me."

"You're sure you weren't spotted at Dover?"

"My dear feller, with this crowd one can't be *sure* of anything. But I took one or two precautions on leaving the boat train at Victoria, which insured that I wasn't followed. But I must say that had I thought for an instant that they were favoring you with their attentions, I should not have come here."

"No one would spot you in that rig."

"No," agreed Drummond, "I don't think they would. But although they're clumsy in their methods, there seems to be such an infernal number of them that one can't afford to take any chances. Moreover," he added savagely, "their manners, if crude, are drastic. When I think of poor old Talbot shot in cold blood, and in broad daylight in the Park, it fairly gets my goat."

"Same here," said Algy. "Well, what are orders?"

"First of all warn in the boys—Peter, Ted, the whole bunch. None of them are on the suspect list as yet. Get 'em to the club, Algy, and tell 'em the whole tale. They must cancel every engagement, and literally live at the end of a telephone wire."

INTERRUPTING you for a moment, Hugh, since the affair seems to be so damned serious, can't you get Scotland Yard straight onto this swine Burton?"

"Lawson has put them wise, of course. But at the moment, there is

nothing to go on. The mere fact that he took Menalin's girl friend to the Golden Boot, and that she jeered at us in Nice over the Chief's death, is not enough to hang a fly on. No, old boy, we've got to get something far more definite than that. And we're going to get it."

"Right! Go ahead."

"Warn 'em that this is no jest, but the grimmest thing we've ever been up against. I'll phone orders to Peter—not to you, since you are suspect. So under no circumstances must you be seen with Peter, or go to his flat. In fact, except for the meeting at the club, none of you must be seen together. When you get my orders, you will come separately to the rendezvous I'll give Peter. Clear so far?"

"Perfectly."

"Where that rendezvous will be, I have no idea. When you will get the summons, I have no idea. But this matter is serious, Algy, and everything else must go by the board. Impress that on the boys."

"I will."

"If anything happens to me, leadership devolves on Peter. Tell him that."

"Okay."

"As an additional precaution, if it is easier to send orders by wire, I will sign the telegram HUD. Not Drummond; not Hugh. Just HUD. Over the telephone I will say 'HUD speaking'."

"I get you. I'll warn everyone in. What are you going to do yourself?"

"Try and get on to Charles Burton's trail. What's the name of his house in Sussex?"

"Birchington Towers. It's a biggish place standing on a bit of a hill, and surrounded by trees."

"Sounds promising. Near Pulborough?"

"About two miles from Pulborough on the Arundel road."

"What's happened, Algy, about that girl you said he was keen on—Molly Castleton?"

"Nothing so far as I know. But she'll certainly give him the raspberry. And from what you tell me, it'll be a darned good thing if she does."

Drummond looked at him thoughtfully.

"What sort of a wench is she, Algy?"

"Very nice. Charming girl. Why?"

"Reliable?"

"In what way?"

"Supposing she didn't give him the raspberry. At least, not yet. Supposing she played with him gently, and wangled an invitation to Birchington Towers."

"Hold 'ard, old man! Is it safe?"

"My dear boy, Burton is not going to be such a congenital half-wit as to hurt her. What possible object could he have in so doing?"

"Well, I can ask her. I can ring her up now and suggest a spot of alcohol. But I shall have to give her some reason."

If Charles Burton is really Menalin's man, is there not a good chance that Molly Castleton is going to her death? But with the peace and security of Britain—and the world—at stake, is the risk too great? And in next week's gripping installment, mention of Varda—that little-known and mysterious islet—proves to be a bomb-shell!

"Why shouldn't you? You needn't tell her the whole thing. Just say that Charles is not all he seems on the surface, and that we are very anxious for any information we can collect about him. You can hint that it's a big thing, and that the country itself may be in danger."

"He's not likely to breathe a word of anything to her."

"Perhaps not. But a girl with her eyes open can frequently find out things. Especially if Burton has entered for the matrimonial stakes. Any scrap of news, Algy, might prove of value."

"Well, as I said, I can but ask the fair damsel."

"Her people won't mind, will they?"

"Good Lord! My dear fellow, the old woman will swallow her false teeth in her excitement."

"Then get on with it," requested Drummond, rising. "Do you know where Burton is now?"

"No. But it's possible that Alice might."

"Do you know her number?"

"I do."

"Then give her a ring on chance."





Byrnes pulled down the stove pipe. More scraps of paper were inside

By Dugal O'Liam

A Scrap of Paper



A Handful of Paper Scraps, Pieced Together, Makes a One-Way Ticket to the Death-House for Two Wily Murderers

LIEUTENANT O'BRYAN saw the woman first as he sat at his desk in the Alexander Avenue station of New York's Bronx. It was a mid-January day, sharp and raw, that urged the normal person to quick, decisive steps, but the woman dragged her feet and seemed ineffably weary and enervated.

O'Bryan picked up his pen.

Behind her, as she crossed the threshold, shuffled a tall man, thin-faced and nervous, his hands rumpling an ancient hat, his eyes wide with an

innate fear of all that represented the majesty of the law.

O'Bryan saw the woman's eyes and they were freighted with a bewildered fear. He saw her hesitate slightly as she saw the desk, saw her half turn, as if to hurry out again, saw her struggle to regain control of herself, then walk resolutely toward him, her hands twitching, her eyes on his face.

"Can I help you, madam?" O'Bryan saw that the woman was not old, probably in her middle or late thirties. But her face was deeply lined with grief

and worry and her body seemed bent beneath the weight of a great sorrow. She did not answer him at once and he spoke again, in a kindly voice, because he was a kindly man and understanding of the troubles that were his daily care.

This time she answered, slowly, picking her words nervously. "My husband has disappeared," she said. Her voice was low and tremulous. "I know something terrible has happened to him because he was always so thoughtful and prompt."

A thousand times, even ten thousand times, before O'Bryan had heard this same plaint. So long as there are husbands to disappear, they will disappear and always it is those who have been most prompt and thoughtful in their prior lives and most home-loving and punctual who disappear most frequently. He reached for a paper pad and prepared for the routine followed in these cases.

"When did he disappear and how old was he?" he began. He would have gone on, as she carefully answered—on to height, weight, color of eyes, color of hair, clothing, identifying scars, gait, habits, complexion, birthmarks, dental work, et cetera. But there was an interruption, a quick and apologetic interruption, from the tall, lean-faced, shuffling man who'd followed the woman across the threshold the few minutes before.

"He went away with a lot of money from his rents," the man said. "He told me he was going to the bank, but she said"—indicating the woman—"that he didn't usually go to the bank so late in the day and they told her at the bank that he hadn't been there at all and that he hadn't sent in any money."

O'Bryan sat forward. This was not

the usual case of a disappearing husband. Here was a possibility of foul play, of abduction or even murder. But there was, too, a chance that the man had collected his rents and decided to have a fling. But there was in his favor, or at least in favor of his fidelity, the circumstance of ulterior motive.

"What was your husband's name?" he asked.

"Nathan Reigrod," the woman answered. "He owned a building on Brown Place and he had been there and collected the rents just before he disappeared."

O'Bryan swung back in his chair and peered into the detectives' room. He saw Detectives Judge and Bartley lounging at their desks. He nodded toward the open door.

"Go into the detectives' room," he said. "Mr. Judge and Mr. Bartley are in there. They'll help you with your trouble."

The woman went into the detectives' room and the shuffling man followed. Bartley saw her enter and got slowly to his feet, nudging the half-drowsing Judge. They offered her a chair and the tall man stood behind her, leaning against a window frame.

Carefully she told her story. Her husband had left their home in good spirits and excellent health. He had gone to the Brown Place address. She had heard no more from him. Once more the gangling man took up the story.

"He came to the house," he said, "and collected the money from my building. He had a lot more money than I saw and he told me that he thought he'd walk down to the bank because the weather was sort of good for walking."

"Wait a minute," Detective Judge

interrupted. "Who are you and where do you fit in this story?"

The man looked amazed. "Who am I?" he demanded. "Why, my gracious, sir, everybody in the Bronx knows Henry Edmunds. I've been taking care of Mr. Reigrod's property for years."

"Oh, I see," said Judge. "Well, what else happened over on Brown Place?"

"Well, I told Mr. Reigrod that he shouldn't be walking around with all that money in his pocket. I told him that there were plenty of bad actors around just waiting for a chance to knock him over the head and rob him."

HE said that he had tried to get Reigrod to take a taxicab to the bank, but that Reigrod had refused. Then, he said, he offered to walk with him, but Reigrod had laughed at his fears and reassured him.

"After that," he said, "there wasn't anything I could do and he just naturally went walking off all by himself."

Some time after that, Edmunds said, Mrs. Reigrod had come to the building looking for her husband. He had told her about the money and how Reigrod had decided to walk to the bank. She had gone down to the bank then, he said, and then had come back and told him that Mr. Reigrod hadn't reached the bank and hadn't sent the money.

"I got scared then," Edmunds said, "and told her that she ought to tell the police because there were plenty of ugly characters around who'd hit anyone over the head for money. Anyway, the kind of money Mr. Reigrod had."

"Is that right?" Bartley asked Mrs. Reigrod.

"Yes, it is," she admitted. "I didn't want to come to you at first, but Henry insisted. He said that there were lots

of holdups and even murders going on, especially with times hard and lots of men out of work and he advised me not to lose any time. I wouldn't come then until he promised to come with me."

"Have you any idea how much money he had on him at the time?" Judge asked.

"I should say that he had around three or four hundred dollars," Mrs. Reigrod said. "You see, we live down in the Greenwich Village section, on West Seventeenth Street. He owns several rooming houses in that neighborhood and he always collects his bills on the tenth of the month. He takes all the money to the bank at once. Sometimes he banks in the Bronx and sometimes downtown."

The detective tried to be tactful. "Didn't he ever decide to—well, sort of make a night of it with the boys, or something like that?"

The woman hesitated. Her white, troubled face flushed. Then she answered, deliberately: "Why, yes, he has stayed out to play cards once or twice. But just in friendly games. He always telephoned me to tell me he intended to be out. Then he'd telephone again at midnight and always, if he happened to stay out all night, at seven o'clock in the morning."

"I suppose you've inquired among his friends?" Bartley suggested.

"Of course. But they haven't seen him. If he had intended staying out purposely, he would have telephoned me. There was no reason why he shouldn't have. He never takes a drink. Absolutely never."

Bartley and Judge put their heads together. They talked quietly, out of hearing of Mrs. Reigrod, for some time. Judge agreed that the woman seemed to have a premonition that the

man was dead. Bartley had the same thought. They turned back to her.

"Why are you so positive that your husband has run into violence?" Judge said. "Have you any reason aside from the fact that he hasn't telephoned recently?"

She fumbled in her purse. With trembling hand she drew out a pair of white-gold-rimmed, octagonal spectacles. Her voice broke as she handed them to Bartley.

"Henry found these glasses in the basement of the building," she said. "They are Nathan's. He is almost totally blind without his glasses. He can't even see to walk along the street."

She choked and sobbed, half hysterically. "That," she mumbled, "is how I know he isn't alive."

"Get Byrnes at Bathgate," Judge snapped. "This is a case for the Homicide Squad."

Detective Edward Byrnes picked up the telephone on his desk at the Bathgate station, headquarters of the Metropolitan Police in Bronx county. Bartley was on the other end of the wire. Byrnes was calm. He was young and slim and bespectacled. His face was the face of a student rather than the rough-and-ready face of the old-line detective.

"There's a missing husband case down here that looks like bad business," Bartley said. "Shall we bring the woman up?"

"Hold it," ordered Byrnes, quietly. "I'll be right down."

MRS. REIGROD repeated her story to Byrnes and Detective Joe Gannon of Bathgate. She told of her husband's habits, of his leaving home for the collections, of his failure to return the night before, his failure to telephone and, finally,

the discovery that he had not reached the bank.

Edmunds told his story again, too.

"Just before Nathan left," Edmunds said, "he went down to the basement to look at some plumbing that had been causing trouble. I didn't see him after that."

Byrnes looked at the glasses. He seemed surprised.

"Where did you find them?" he asked.

"In a pile of dust beside an old storage bin in the rear of the basement," Mrs. Reigrod explained. "Henry was poking around in the dust with me and he knocked them out."

"Hmm!" Byrnes said. "Doesn't it seem strange that they weren't broken?"

"I wouldn't know about that," Mrs. Reigrod said, "but I do know that my husband wasn't very strong, physically, and that it wouldn't have taken much of a struggle to subdue him."

Byrnes turned to Edmunds. "Had there been any trouble around the building on that day?"

"No, sir, not that I know about," Edmunds said in his whiny drawl. "Didn't see nobody around there but just the tenants and Mr. Reigrod never had no trouble with any of them. He was mighty easy about the rents and when they couldn't pay, he gave them time and they usually caught up after a little while."

"Did he mention any slow payments yesterday?"

"He did say that one or two people hadn't had the money for him, but he didn't say nothing about trouble, or anything like that."

The building on Brown Place was a six-story tenement. It was an old type building and its tenants unquestionably were impoverished. There were marks

of poorness about it, shoddy windows and run-down stoops, dirty sidewalks and dingy, badly kept halls.

As the police car stopped in front of the building, there was a quick movement at one of the front doors, underneath the stoop, where the outer steps angled down into the basement. A figure leaped from the shadows there, darted suddenly along the walk and disappeared around the house before the officers could see whether it was man or woman or child.

"What in hell was that?" Gannon demanded.

"Probably some of them loafers around here," Edmunds said. "They hang around, but they run like all get-out when they see me coming."

"Pretty hard egg, huh?" Byrnes grinned.

"Me?" Edmunds was swollen with pride, fecund with modesty. "No, sir, not me. I'm a peaceable man. But I sure warn them loafers' hides when I catch 'em fooling around my place."

The man led Byrnes and Gannon to the cellar. It was low and damp and dimly lighted. Gray stone stanchions that upheld the rotting floor were crumbling with age and dampness. There was a heavy odor of leaking gas in the place. Not enough for human asphyxiation, but enough to give the hole a sweetly sickening smell, like black damp in a coal mine.

The walls were lined with trash. The floor was littered with all manner of debris. A man who did not see well couldn't have walked in there at all without some serious accident. That a man whose eyes were as bad as his wife had said Reigrod's were could have managed to move without his glasses was absurd.

A single, feeble light bulb burned in a twisted wire that hung, web-like,

from a joist. It gave off a dull and sickly yellow light that made the faces of those it fell across look strangely jaundiced. A few feet from its rachitic base, it gave up the struggle against the superior forces of darkness and subsided into an ochre ugliness.

Byrnes took out his flashlight. He played it around the walls, white-washed once, but a ghostly gray now. He splayed its drenching light over the broken concrete of the floor. Filth and disorder were everywhere. But there was no sign of a body. Not even any blood stains.

He saw several bins and opened them. In one he found coal. He poked into the coal, told Edmunds to level it off and shovel it against another wall of the bin. There was nothing beneath the coal. There was wood in another bin. It was moved and revealed nothing.

In another there were various pieces of broken furniture, old trunks, packing boxes. They were all opened. They revealed nothing. There were step ladders and paint cans and pieces of lead pipe and all the junk that collects in an old apartment house over a long period of years, but there were no signs whatsoever of the body of Nathan Reigrod.

ONE of the bins Edmunds pointed out was the one near which he had found Reigrod's spectacles. The door was closed. Byrnes opened it. There were half a dozen old gas stoves in the bin. One of them had recently been moved. It stood near the doorway, slightly apart from the others.

Byrnes played the flashlight over the other stoves. No chance of concealing anything there. He looked at the walls and floor around the bin. He played the

light on the accumulated dust in which the glasses had been found.

Suddenly he dropped to his knees. The light was still on the dust. He picked up a handful. It was gray and old. He ran it through his fingers. Three strands of hair, graying slightly—or of that indefinable dryness that heralds the coming of gray—were left in his fingers. He turned the full brilliance of the flashlight on them and studied them closely. Then he turned to Gannon, standing over him, and smiled slowly.

"Blood on these hairs," he announced. "I think we've got something."

He placed the hairs and particles of dust in a strong, heavy manila envelope that he took from his overcoat pocket. He marked it: "No. I, Nathan Reigrod Case." Then he returned it carefully to his pocket and took other samples of the dust and dirt, marking them in consecutive numbers.

He returned to the bin where the stoves had been stored. He called Edmunds to look at the stoves.

"What were they doing here?" he asked.

"They'd been taken out of the flats," Edmunds said. "We put new ones in and I suppose the boss was wanting to sell these."

"Anybody here that day to ask him about them?" Byrnes said.

"No, sir, not that I know of," said Edmunds. "In fact, I don't know of anyone that was talking to him about the stoves."

Edmunds' wife had come out of their living quarters in the corner of the damp basement. Two children trailed after her. One of them clung to its father's legs, peering cautiously out at the officers.

"Henry, you remember Tinsley came

to ask about the stoves," Mrs. Edmunds reminded him. "I mean that John Tinsley from down on East Hundred and Thirty-third."

Edmunds nodded slowly. "Yeah, I recollect now he did talk to the boss about buying one stove, but I haven't seen him for two or three days," he said.

"He was around here yesterday for a while," the woman insisted. "I saw him talking to Mr. Reigrod while you was down to the store."

"'Bout a stove?" said Edmunds.

"Maybe not about a stove," the woman said.

"You didn't see him take any stove away, did you?" Byrnes asked the woman.

"No, he never took any stove away."

"Did you see Mr. Reigrod after he was talking to Tinsley?"

"Oh, sure. Tinsley was here early. Long about the middle of the afternoon, or earlier."

It all led to nothing. Byrnes searched the cellar again. He found a grate rod in front of the old furnace. It was heavy and thick, a dangerous-looking weapon if it should happen to have use as a weapon. But it was clean and shiny. No marks, or at least no visible marks, on that exhibit. Still, he decided he'd send it down to Dr. Gettler, the city toxicologist, with the dust and strands of hair. It couldn't do any harm. And if someone had been killed the next most important thing to the corpus delicti was the means of causing death.

Byrnes was convinced by this time that Reigrod had been slain in the cellar. He asked Edmunds if he had been in the tenement throughout the evening and the night. Edmunds said he hadn't, that it had been his pay day and that he had taken his wife and their two

children to the movies. But there had been no means of anyone reaching the cellar, he said, unless they had the key to it.

"Did Reigrod have a key?" Byrnes wanted to know.

"Oh, yes, he had a key, but he was the only one that had a key," Edmunds said.

Byrnes turned to Gannon. "This must have been a job done by someone who knew something about this house," he said, "and by someone who knew about those stoves and the chances of their being sold. Let's do a little questioning."

"Where?" Gannon said.

"Among the tenants. Someone complained about the plumbing, according to Edmunds, and someone was back in his rent, also according to Edmunds, but he doesn't seem to know just who they were."

THEY took the tenants, one by one, and questioned them. Their third call brought out the plumbing matter. A tenant on the second floor had complained about that and Reigrod had told him that he would personally attend to it. This tenant had other information. He'd heard a tenant on the third floor tell Reigrod that he couldn't pay his rent and what was Reigrod going to do about it. The second-floor tenant also said that the man threatened Reigrod with the "business," as he put it, if he had him evicted.

Reigrod, the man said, had not seemed unduly insistent about the rent and he had noticed the man's actions because they seemed so uncalled-for in view of Reigrod's obvious willingness to give him more time.

The tenant denied that he'd had a quarrel with Reigrod. He also denied

that he owed him any rent. Byrnes asked to see his receipts.

"I misplaced them somewhere," the man said, sulkily. "I ain't got time to be hunting around for receipts."

"In that case," Byrnes said, "we'll take you over to the station and let you think it over there. Maybe you'll find you've got more time than you thought you had."

"You ain't got no call to be taking me to the station," the man bluffed. "I ain't done anything and I'll sue the city for this."

"Produce the receipts, then, and we'll all be saved a lot of trouble," Byrnes said.

"I ain't got the receipts!" the man protested again, losing his bravado and beginning to whimper. "I owe Reigrod for my rent for two months, but I didn't kill him. I didn't hurt nobody."

"Who said anybody had killed him?" Byrnes said. "I didn't even know he was dead."

The man paled and whimpered again. "They told me he was dead—they told me somebody had killed him," he said. "That's all I know."

"Who told you?"

"Everybody — everyone's talking about him being killed. I didn't know anything about it until I heard people talking about the police being here and him being killed."

Byrnes turned the man over to one of the uniformed officers who'd been sent out to guard the place. "Book him for investigation," he said. "I'll hold him until I pick up a few more tips."

He asked Edmunds for the keys to the storage bin where the old trunks, bits of furniture and packing boxes had been stored. Edmunds brought them out and opened the door. Gannon and Byrnes stepped in together. He flashed the light over the floor.

There was a rectangle on the floor about four feet long and three feet wide defined by accumulations of dirt, like miniature walls. Something had stood there until recently and had been moved.

"There was a trunk there," Byrnes said.

"That's right," said Edmunds.

"What became of it?"

"Boss took it out t'other day. Said he wanted it in another of his places."

"What was in it?"

"Nothing. It was just an old trunk some one left here a long time ago."

Byrnes went back and examined the stoves again. There were fingerprints on one of the stoves, the one nearest the door. Obviously it was in the process of being moved, or had been when Reigrod was struck down.

He looked at the stove and took the fingerprints. Then he turned to Gannon.

"I'm loaded with information, but I'm farther from the solution to this case than I was when I started. I'll be seven kinds of a baboon with orange pants if I ever saw a body absolutely drop out of sight like this before."

"Me either," Gannon agreed.

Byrnes decided to question the tenants in adjoining tenements. He went up and down the street, pausing here and there. Finally he found a youth who wanted to talk.

"I was coming along after supper last night," the youth said, "when I saw a cab come up and three men get out and go into the house by the side way. I thought that was kind of funny and I sat down and watched a while. After a while they came out with a trunk and I heard one of them tell another one not to be so doggone clumsy with that thing. Then they drove off and that's all I know."

"What time was that?" Byrnes asked.

"I should say it was around eight-thirty," the youth said.

EDMUNDS had been at the picture show at that hour. No use to ask him about it. But who could have entered the basement? Only he, Edmunds, and Reigrod had the keys. The janitor had said so.

Still, the slayer could have taken the key from Reigrod. There wasn't any great mystery in that. The mystery was in the trunk. The youth hadn't been sure whether they'd taken a trunk with them or not.

"It's pretty dark over there and they were on the other side of the cab all the time," he said. "I could see their heads and shoulders, but they could have sort of drug a trunk in, or carried it down low and I couldn't have seen it."

Now Byrnes called for help. Headquarters sent a squad of men to the Brown Place address early on the morning of the twelfth and began to dig up the basement. They tore down the walls and ripped up the concrete and dug in the back yard and searched the house from top to bottom. Byrnes felt certain that the body had been carried out in the strange trunk, but he wanted to be positive. Without a corpus delecti, he never was going to get very far in solving this murder case.

The digging, naturally, availed nothing. The body had been carried out in the trunk. A general alarm went out from one end of New York City to the other and up through Westchester and Connecticut to be on the lookout for a body answering the description of Reigrod. Or parts of a body. The murderers might have taken it out and

then dismembered it, the better to distribute the gruesome evidence.

In the meantime, the report came in from Dr. Gettler. There had been blood on the wisps of hair and it had been human hair. Byrnes rushed to the Reigrod home. He found Mrs. Reigrod there.

"Have you any bits of your husband's hair?" he asked. She found him some minute combings. He took them to Dr. Gettler's office. The hair found in the dirt and that given him by Mrs. Reigrod fell in the same classification. There was no doubt that the hair with the tinges of blood on it was Reigrod's.

Now there was certain to be some connection between his murder and those discarded stoves. Byrnes sat down to justify that obvious fact and while he was working on this puzzle, the report came from Dr. Gettler's office that there had been blood stains on the grate rod. The rod had been wiped off carefully, probably washed with plain water, Gettler said, but water will not remove blood stains completely from iron or steel. The stains on the instrument were obvious.

Byrnes summoned Gannon. "Get Crosby and Walker," he said, "and a pair of uniformed policemen. I'm going up town to have a little look around."

Gannon asked no questions. He went out and returned with Detectives Crosby and Walker and two uniformed men. They entered a squad car and drove to Fifth Avenue and One Hundred and Thirty-third Street. The patrolmen were ordered to stroll up and down on the south side of the east block and to watch a brownstone house, once pretentious, but now decrepit, in the middle of the block. Crosby and Walker and Gannon followed Byrnes.

Before the decrepit brownstone house he stopped.

"Crosby," he said, "you go around to the rear and keep watch. Walker, you stay here, at the foot of the stairs. Don't either of you allow anyone to leave this house, but don't worry about how many enter. Just get a good look at all who go in, that's all."

With Gannon, he went upstairs. They walked along a dim hall on the third floor to the rear of the building. They faced a soiled, latchless door. They knocked; a kindly faced old woman, enormously fat and gray-haired, opened the door. They asked her if they might come in. With elaborate politeness she threw back the door.

"We thought we'd like to see John," they said. "He lives here, doesn't he?"

"John Tinsley?" The woman beamed. "He sure does. He's my son and he's a mighty fine, hard-working son, too. He's at work right now, but he'll be coming along soon."

Byrnes was a little nonplussed. The old woman was proud of her son. And he was working. Worked every day, his mother had said.

"Mind if I look around the apartment a little?" Byrnes said. It was a shabby place, two tiny rooms with a hole for a kitchen, lavatory outside in the hall, paper falling from the walls and plastering cracked, bits of brown paper pasted over one of the window panes that had been broken out.

"What for?" the woman wanted to know.

"I'm thinking about buying this building," Byrnes lied, "and I'd like to get an idea what it's like."

"Sure enough, then, go right on," the woman said. Byrnes began to go over the place. He looked under the bed, under the covers, behind the sin-

gle chest of drawers, into the drawers, under the linoleum on the kitchen table, in the single, filthy closet.

THE woman watched him intently. Suddenly her eyes were large with suspicion and fright. She began to blubber and her old face was seamed with terror.

"You ain't no buyer," she said, "you're a policeman and you're trying to say my John been into mischief. Well, he ain't been and he never done nothing to nobody and you're just wasting your time trying to make out he been in mischief, because he works every day like a good boy and takes care of his poor old mother."

Byrnes was palliative. He wanted to spare the distressed mother all the pain he could. He knew she had implicit faith in her son and he had no means of knowing that faith was not warranted.

"Don't worry now," he said. "If John's been working steady, he'll be all right. But some people he knew got into trouble and maybe Johnny knows something about it and can help us."

The old woman sat down in a chair in the corner and began to sob. Byrnes and Gannon looked at each other and shook their heads solemnly, but they did not abandon their strict casing of the apartment. In the middle of the room that was used as a bedroom and living room combined, Byrnes saw a cheap, Silbey type of stove, pot-bellied and unpolished. He studied it minutely. It did not look as if there had been a fire in it for some time.

He opened the stove door and looked inside. It was heavy with gray ashes, ashes that were the residue of pine boards chiefly. He looked closely, bringing his flashlight into play again. He saw a small piece of buff colored

paper, a little more than an inch square, atop the ashes. He picked it out and saw another bit, half an inch wide and two inches long. He brought that out, too.

He placed the two together. They did not match, but he saw a few lines of finely printed type in one corner of the square fragment. There were bits of phrases, parts of words, corners of symbols, enough to excite his interest, to urge him to see more.

"Look here," he whispered to Gannon, "this looks like something that will answer all our prayers. You can see these ashes in here are two or three days old. They're white and broken down. There hasn't been any fire in here since these two pieces of paper were thrown in or they would have been burned. That probably means they were tossed in late last night or early today.

"There's an overhead draft, though. It's been a fairly windy day and the draft would suck these bits of paper up the flue. They've probably caught up there in the bend of this pipe. You go outside and keep the old lady interested while I haul this pipe down and see what I can see."

Gannon went outside and pretended to be absorbed in searching a kitchen chest. The old woman rocked back and forth, whimpering and watching him out of one eye. Inside the bedroom, Byrnes pulled down the stove pipe. He looked into the length beyond the elbow where it curved into the wall and then held it up to the light.

There were dozens of bits of paper in there, bits of buff-colored paper, like the two he had in his pocket.

Carefully he picked them out, one by one. As carefully, he put them into his pocket. Then he peered into the lower flue where it drifted into the

wall. He found half a dozen pieces of the paper there. He looked into the upright length of pipe and into the elbow. They gave up four more pieces.

He carefully placed them in his pockets. Then he sent Gannon downstairs. Gannon was to send one of the uniformed men to watch the rear of the house and to stay in hiding as he watched and the other was to watch the front. Crosby and Walker were to wait for John Tinsley and to take him to Bathgate station as soon as he appeared.

Gannon and Byrnes went to Bathgate. There they locked themselves in a room and sat down at a table. Byrnes silently took out the four or five dozen bits of buff paper. He pushed half the pile toward Gannon and began to sort over the other half.

Silently they worked, one hour, two, three, like men working over a jig-saw puzzle. Slowly, ever so slowly, something began to take form. There were lines with bits of crude writing along the lines. There were legends in small type. There were fragments of heavy, black faced type. It all worked itself with crushing lethargy into a reasonably sound whole.

In the middle of the fourth hour, Byrnes arose. He had before him a seventy percent complete American Express receipt!

He could make out one word that had been written in with a firm, sure hand. It said: TRUNK!

THERE were other words. He searched the puzzle. He traced the indicator lines. Presently he could make out two letters, in the same big hand. They were "RI." There was a break then, a missing fragment of paper. Then there were four more letters in the same hand. "M-O-N-D."

Beyond that was a comma, then a "V" and a tiny line of a small letter.

"Richmond, Virginia," exclaimed Byrnes. "Some one shipped a trunk to Richmond, Virginia."

They examined the paper, or its fragments, again. They could make out a scrawled, "Edward Johns" at the bottom of the page. The signature. "Edward Johns." An assumed name, possibly. Possibly a confederate, although it was unlikely anyone would use his own name.

They rushed to the American Express office at the Grand Central Station. The express company officials at once began to trace the bill of lading. They found it. It had called for the shipment of a trunk to Bruno Washington, Richmond, Virginia. The trunk had been shipped on the night of January 10.

Quickly they contacted the Richmond office. The voice came back in a friendly Southern drawl.

"Yes, suh, the trunk's here, but nobody claims it—"

Byrnes needed to hear no more. "Just hold it there until I get there," he said. "This is Detective Byrnes of the New York police. Your manager here will okay me."

The manager gave the okay. Byrnes sent Gannon back to Bathgate. "Don't question that boy until I get back," he said, "provided they get him. Just be nice to him and work on his confidence. I won't be long now."

Gannon went back to Bathgate and Byrnes taxied across town and took a train for Richmond. Gannon found Crosby and Walker already at Bathgate with their prisoner and he took charge. Tinsley had been told he was wanted on a gambling rap.

"He acted kind of surprised," Walker said, "but you never go wrong pick-

ing his type up on that rap, so he came along after sulking a little bit."

The American Express manager at Richmond greeted Byrnes like a long-lost brother. No man likes to have a stray body floating about his premises and the Richmond manager didn't need to be clairvoyant to know that something extraordinary was contained in the battered trunk that remained unclaimed in his warehouse.

He led Byrnes to the trunk. It was an old packing trunk, canvas covered, painted and repainted. It was secured with two new straps, purchased, no doubt, by the consigners to make sure it wouldn't break open under rough handling. Two employees dragged it into the light, handling it gingerly and watching the New York detective warily.

They loosened the straps and pried off the lid, throwing it to the floor when the rusty hinges snapped from the pressure of a crowbar. Byrnes eagerly peered inside.

It was filled with old blankets and quilts.

Byrnes scratched his head. Then he began to dig. He pulled out one blanket, then another, then a quilt, then some burlap.

Then he found a third blanket. It appeared to have been wrapped around something. Probably more soiled bed-clothes. He could look for blood on them later. He pulled hard on the blanket. It ripped and tore. The Richmond agent lent a hand, pulled, too. It finally gave way.

A human hand and arm suddenly appeared!

Feverishly Byrnes tore the other blankets, quilts and folds of burlap from the trunk. The entire body was revealed, cramped into the narrow space with heavy wrapping beneath

and at the sides. The consigners had thought to prevent odors of decomposition escaping, hoping the trunk would lie unclaimed in the Richmond warehouses until the body had been entirely destroyed.

Suddenly Byrnes found quantities of a white substance on the body, on the clothes, in the blankets and in the quilts and burlaps, in the bottom of the trunk and around the sides.

"Lime!" he exclaimed. "They thought this would destroy flesh, bones, everything."

THERE was no question in his mind of the identity of the body.

The partly bald head with graying hair, the close-set eyes with the mark of a spectacles bow across the nose, the pinched, small face, the wide mouth and full, protruding lower lip, the small, ragged black moustache—they fit the picture of Reigrod Byrnes had seen in his home and the description Edmunds and Mrs. Reigrod had given him.

But the cleverness of the crime! It seemed unlikely that a dull-witted, working man of Tinsley's type would be so diabolical, that he would take the time, or have the presence of mind, to go to such lengths to guarantee the complete destruction of the body. Because obviously they had figured on this. The body would lie in the trunk until the trunk was claimed, which would be never. Perhaps at the end of a year, or two years, the express company would throw it in with the unclaimed goods, or send it back to New York, and there, too, there would be an impasse because the New York name and address of the consigner were obviously fictitious. By that time, the lime would have done its work. Not even so much as a bone would have

remained to tell the story. Only white, powdery dust.

Byrnes went back to New York. Mrs. Reigrod identified the body. So did Edmunds. He did not identify the trunk. Byrnes asked him to go to headquarters. Edmunds, enjoying his place in the spotlight, went.

Into a little room Byrnes shoved the big janitor. He stood face to face with Tinsley. Tinsley swallowed hard. Edmunds grinned, said "Howdy-boy, what you doing here?" then sat down.

"Know him?" Byrnes asked, indicating Tinsley.

"Sure," said Edmunds, "he came up to see about buying a stove from Mr. Reigrod."

"Was he there the day your boss was killed?"

"I told you he was, but early," Edmunds said.

Byrnes went to a drawer and pulled out a square of cardboard. On it were pasted, in order, the fragments of an express receipt he'd taken from the Tinsley stove. He walked to Tinsley and showed him the receipt. The man's eyes popped. His fat face twitched. His hands shook. Then he was suddenly sullen.

"What's that?" he said.

"That's the receipt for the trunk you shipped to Richmond," Byrnes said. He turned on Edmunds.

"The one you helped him and the taxi driver carry out of the house on the night of January 10," he said.

Edmunds jumped to his feet. "Golly, Mister, you've gone crazy. I was at the pitchers."

"Sit down," said Byrnes. "You went to the movies. You left your wife and kids there and excused yourself. You went down to a corner and met Tinsley. You got a taxicab and went to your building. You carried a body out

in a trunk—you'd fixed it up earlier—took it to the American Express and shipped it to Richmond. Then you went back and joined your family in the movies and then went home."

"No, sir," objected Edmunds.

"No, sir," chorused Tinsley.

Detective Gannon went outside. He hadn't been idle while Byrnes was away. He brought in a taxi driver. The hackman looked at the two prisoners.

"Know them?" Gannon said.

The taxi driver was taken aback. Then he looked closely, first at Tinsley, then Edmunds. "Yeah, I know them now," he said. "They're the two I picked up and went with to get the trunk the other night. The tall one there had the key. What to hell was in that trunk, anyway?"

"Never mind," Gannon said. "Just wait outside. We'll call you if we need you."

Tinsley darted a sudden glance at Edmunds. Then he twisted his face into a mask of childish terror and began to whimper.

"We killed him," he admitted. "Henry and me killed him."

"You lie! You killed him!" Edmunds suddenly shrieked, leaping at Tinsley. Byrnes and Gannon held him back. He kept on screaming. "You killed him with that rod from the furnace. You hit him over the head and took his money. That's what you did."

"You told me to! You told me he had the money and you got him to go down in the basement for me," Tinsley shouted back. "You led him over there to that bin and told me where that bar was."

EDMUNDS started to shout again, but Gannon threatened him with a burly fist and he was silent.

"All right, go on," Byrnes said.

"We planned it all," Tinsley blabbed. "He told me I could have the money, all but a little bit, and that all he wanted was for Reigrod to be dead so he would be the boss there at the house. He wanted to be the boss there so he could bully everybody around there."

"Who hit Reigrod with the bar?" Byrnes said.

"He did—that Tinsley rat hit him!" Edmunds shouted. "I'm innocent!"

"Yeah, I hit him, but you told me to and you got the trunk and put lime on him and wrapped him all up," Tinsley argued, "and then you went to the pitchers to make things look all right and then you came back and helped me take that trunk out. And you washed off that bar, too, with water, over at the tap. I seen you."

Edmunds tensed, then fell from his

chair to his knees, snatching at Byrnes' sleeve.

"Please, Mister Byrnes, I didn't kill him—my wife and babies needs me—I gotta go home now—let me go home, please—"

Tinsley sneered in his dull, surly way. Edmunds collapsed on the floor. He never went home to his wife and babies, nor to the glory he'd expected to find as the boss.

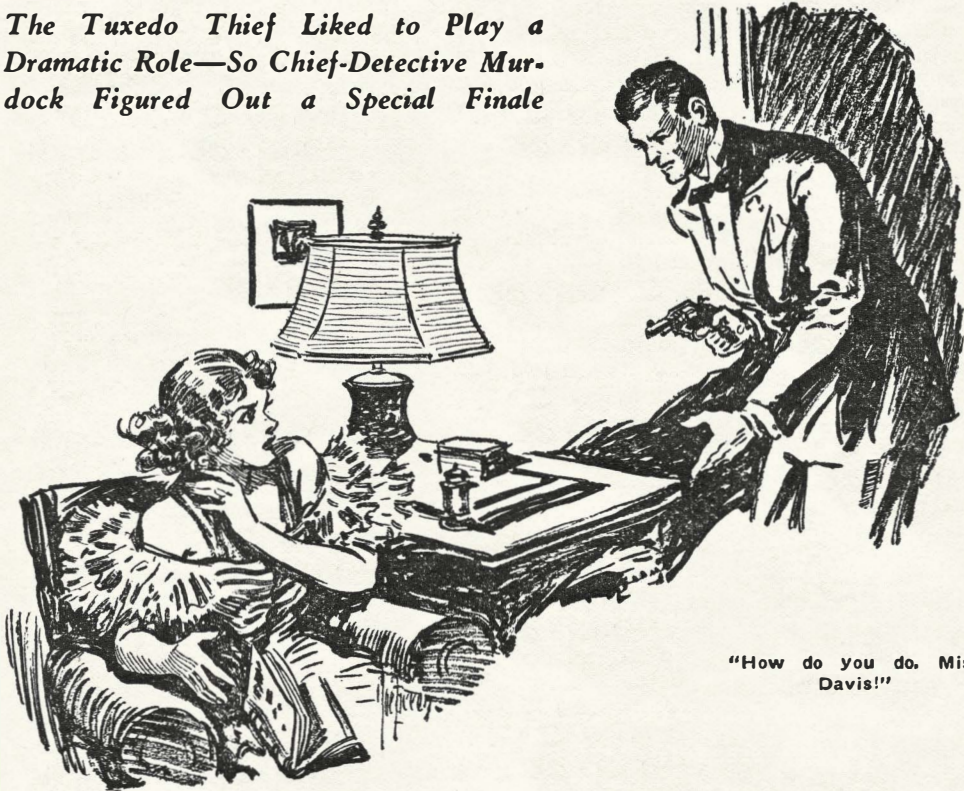
He went to the electric chair in Sing Sing prison six months later, half paralyzed with fear, blubbing about his babies and his innocence.

Tinsley went dully and half defiantly, resigned to his fate in the knowledge that Edmunds had gone first.

"I'll bet he bawled like a yellow rat," were Tinsley's last words and he seemed to derive a new strength from them.



The Tuxedo Thief Liked to Play a Dramatic Role—So Chief-Detective Murdock Figured Out a Special Finale



"How do you do, Miss Davis!"

Curtain Call

By Wyatt Blassingame

Author of "Killer's Brand," "The Counterfeit Counterfeiter," etc.

"WE don't have anything to work on," Murdock said. "When this Tuxedo Thief—I wish that the newshawks had hung some other name on him—holds up a place, he just walks out and—disappears."

Muscle was hunched at the hinges of Commissioner Ballindale's jaw. "I don't give a damn if he turns into smoke and floats away. You catch him. Get me? *You catch him*, or there'll be another man heading the jewelry squad."

Murdock did not answer. There was an election coming up. Either the

SHORT
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THRILLER

Tuxedo Thief was caught or there had to be a goat. Sam Murdock thought of his first encounter with the Tuxedo Thief twelve years before in New Orleans.

Murdock had joined the force about the time he started shaving. Ten years later he was in charge of the jewelry squad. It was the job he wanted and he was very proud of it, proud of the record he made.

Then the Tuxedo Thief had started his amazing series of robberies, each exactly alike: he arrived in dinner clothes at the home or apartment of

some prominent individual, held up the occupants, took money and jewelry, taped his victims, and departed. Once out of the room he vanished, completely.

When the crimes were most numerous Murdock had been demoted. The robberies not only continued, but the crook wrote a comic letter to the papers in defense of the detective. Murdock stuck to the case through all the sour jokes that followed. Then, abruptly, the robberies ceased.

Murdock quit, came to New York and started at the bottom again. Gradually he rose to the one position he wanted.

Now the Tuxedo Thief had started to work again, in New York.

Commissioner Ballindale bit the end from a cigar. "You've caught other crooks, Murdock. You've got a good record. What's so hot about this man? You have an exact description of him."

Murdock's face—high cheekbones, high forehead, and pale gray eyes were expressionless. "Sure," he said, "but no one except the persons he robs has ever seen him. There's not a stool pigeon in the city knows him. We don't have any prints of him. Not one of his stones ever turned up in this country."

Ballindale chewed the unlighted cigar. "What does he do with them?"

"I think I know that," Murdock said. "He smuggles them out himself, gets rid of them in Europe or Asia. But we haven't been able to learn anything from over there. It's my guess that when he finished working New Orleans twelve years ago he went abroad, and probably lived there until recently when his money gave out. I've checked the passport of every person who came in this year or left within a year after he was in New Orleans.

Everyone who looked anything like this fellow, and who could have possibly been guilty, I've investigated." The crow's feet at the corners of his eyes deepened. "I didn't learn a thing."

Ballindale shrugged. "It's your job," he said. "You'll get something quick or there'll be another man in your place trying."

Murdock said, "Yes sir." He stood up, tall, still lean despite the gray in his hair. His lips were too straight, his eyes blank. A little stiffly he turned and went out of the Commissioner's office.

ON the next night the call came through. The Tuxedo Thief had struck again, getting eighty thousand in stones from the Sutton Place apartment of Catherine Davis, the actress. There was a little tightening of Murdock's jaw when he took the report, a slow clenching of his fists. "All right," he said to Detectives Shultz and O'Brien. "Let's see what we can find." His voice was flat.

On his way out the Commissioner stopped him, blocking the door with his great, square-shouldered body. "Remember what I said, Murdock," he snapped.

Murdock said, "I remember," and shouldered past. Detectives Shultz and O'Brien followed.

Catherine Davis was as beautiful off the stage as she was on it. Her hair was long, wavy, and coppery. Her eyes, wide set, were sherry colored. She wore a dressing gown that was only a shade darker than her hair.

"I was reading in bed," she said in the throaty voice that the whole country admired. "I didn't hear anything, but for some reason I looked up. The man was standing there in the doorway. He wore gloves and had a gun."

Murdock nodded. He knew already what the story would be: the same one he'd heard many times. He thought of New Orleans, of the frantic work which had proved so futile, of the demotion. "Incompetent," they'd called him.

"He was very polite," the actress said. "He was almost theatrical."

"Then 'twas him," said O'Brien with great fervor. "For he always acts as though he were on the stage." He had been staring at the actress with awe-bulging eyes, and his mouth hanging open. Shultz, on the other hand, was prowling sour-faced around the room as though he expected a clue to jump at him from under the table.

"But I was afraid of him," Miss Davis went on. "He swore he'd kill me if he had to, and I believed him. He made me get out of bed and open my little wall safe."

"Made you?" Murdock asked quietly.

She hesitated, frowning a little. "Well, he . . . well, the jewels are insured, and I'd rather the insurance company lose its money than I lose my life."

"Faith and yes!" said O'Brien. "There's no one to be blaming you." She smiled and he almost choked.

"After he got the jewels, he put tape around my wrists." She touched a slim forefinger to the discoloration on her left arm. "He put some more over my mouth and around my ankles, but he didn't strap it very tightly. I got free in about ten minutes."

"You're sure it was this Tuxedo Thief?" Murdock asked.

"Oh, yes. It must have been. He looked just like everyone has described him: tall and lean and dark-haired, with the scar down his left cheek. He was rather handsome."

"'Twas him all right," O'Brien said. "And we'll get him for you, Miss Davis." She smiled again and O'Brien was fired with deathless purpose.

Shultz was still nosing around the room, frowning. Murdock said, "If you are through looking, Herman, I'll let the reporters in. Some of them probably have cauliflower ears from pushing against the hall door now."

When they left the building Murdock crossed the street, turned, and looked back at the apartment house. Snow was a wavering curtain behind which the lighted windows dimmed as they mounted upward so that the Davis penthouse showed as a faint blur. There was no fire escape on this side.

Detective Shultz said, "I don't believe that guy robbed her, Lieutenant. He couldn'ta got in there through this snow without leavin' some sorta wet track. And there ain't none. And the doorman, the elevator boy, nobody saw him."

O'Brien swung to face him. "Ye dirty dog, are you accusing the lady? Why I—"

Murdock said, "All right. If Shultz wants to think the lady took her own jewels for the insurance, let him prove it. And if you think the Tuxedo Thief got them, well, damn it, prove that."

"And I will," O'Brien said. "Anybody who's thinking the lady stole them is off his nut. Why I seen her in *The White Angel* once. She *couldn't* be no thief."

"Maybe," Murdock said, and wiped at a flake of snow lodged in his gray eyebrows. He felt old and the chill was eating its way through him. "Haven't got the resistance I had some years ago," he thought. A bit stiffly he turned and went along the walk.

One more week, another robbery, was about all the Commissioner would

give him, he figured. And after his demotion he wouldn't be able to stay with the department. He didn't understand the reasons behind his pride; he only knew that he couldn't go backward. And he was too old to start over again.

CATHERINE DAVIS'S maid had a room on the floor below the penthouse. Two nights after the robbery, when Miss Davis was ready for bed, she dismissed the maid and sat reading in her living room. She had been there for some fifteen minutes when the bedroom door opened without sound. A man in dinner clothes, wearing white gloves and carrying a revolver stood there. He was tall, rather handsome, with dark hair and a scar on his left cheek.

He said, "How do you do, Miss Davis," and bowed from the waist.

The actress looked up, startled. She made a short cry then, the book slipped from her fingers and one hand came up to press bloodless knuckles against her open mouth. "Who—who are you?" she whispered.

"But you must certainly know." The left side of his mouth lifted toward the scar. "You described me very accurately to the police."

Catherine Davis's eyes dilated horribly. There was a pulse beating in her throat. "You?" she said.

Again the man bowed.

"What do you want?" She had lowered her hand now and was gripping the arms of her chair until the sharp nails sliced the ochre colored fabric.

He made a graceful, deprecating gesture with the gun. "Why should I have come, except to share the reward of *our* crime? In this case you've followed too closely the Persian's advice I don't mind getting credit for robbery,

to take the cash and let the credit go. but—" Again he gestured with the gun.

"How—?" She checked herself, leaning tensely forward.

He laughed. "Your description was much too accurate for it to be anyone else who robbed you; so you must have done it yourself. The jewels were insured, and I understand from the papers that you were paid today. But all credit and no cash make Jack an impecunious boy. I want half the money."

A crafty light came in her eyes, and vanished, but not before he had noticed. "I don't have the money here. I put it in the bank. If you'll meet me somewhere tomorrow—"

"With the police?" He shook his head, smiling. "My story against yours wouldn't be much good, would it? I'll take my half of the loot now."

"But I don't have the money here," she repeated desperately.

"Of course not. But you have the jewels. I'll take *them*."

She shrank back in her chair then. "No!" she said. "*No!*"

All the while he had been like a man playing a rôle in some melodrama. Now, suddenly, he changed. He stepped forward, shoulders lowering. His voice was gritty. "Get them, quick! You told the police you thought I'd kill you and you were right. I will if necessary."

She went ghost white. Time ticked slowly before she said, "Yes, I'll get them." She stood up.

The wall safe was in the bedroom. It had a secret back, and from beyond this she pulled the jewels. She turned and handed them to the Tuxedo Thief. "Thank you," he said, putting them in his pocket. "And now—"

A closet door on the far side of the

room swung open. Lieut. Murdock stood there, a police positive in his right hand. "Now you'll drop that gun and put both hands over your head," he said.

The jewel thief had lived with danger too long to be easily captured. His left hand moved with the suddenness of a sprung trap. It closed on Catherine Davis's wrist and jerked her forward. At the same instant he went lunging sideways. The actress was snatched into the exact spot he had stood a split second before.

Murdock's finger, tightening on the trigger, stopped. There was too much chance of hitting Miss Davis.

But in the broken instant that Murdock hesitated, the thief was moving, swinging, about raising his gun. Sam Murdock watched success go twisting out of his fingers and saw death take its place.

He lowered head and shoulders, and dived. There wasn't a chance to make it. The gun exploded. Murdock kept waiting for the bullet to strike. Then he landed on thief and actress, hitting them just above the knees. All three went down in a tangle.

For a moment there was nothing but arms and legs. Murdock got his left hand on the floor and pushed upward. He saw the muzzle of the revolver, grabbed it. A man's head showed and Murdock swung his own gun, hard. He was panting slightly, when he helped the actress to her feet. "You saved my life," he said. "You hit his gun just as he fired."

"And you saved mine. We were all tied up like jackstraws for a moment." She was laughing, a little hysterically.

"Go take a drink," Murdock said. "I don't think young ladies ought to drink the way they do these days, but you deserve one."

A few minutes later he followed her into the kitchen. "I think I'll have one myself, if you don't mind. I'm getting old for fighting."

"You do well enough," Miss Davis said. "Is your prisoner safe?"

"Strapped up with his own tape, and a better job than you did on *your* wrists." He looked at her for a moment, pouring Scotch into a highball glass. "I found how he disappeared so completely." Murdock lifted the glass, looking at the whisky. "His scar was make-up; he used adhesive and it pulled the whole face out of its regular shape. His eyes were blue instead of black: he had those false glass pupils. His hair was a wig. And that tux was one of those two-sided, quick-change artist affairs. Give him ninety seconds and he'd be a totally different person."

Murdock swallowed as though he was having trouble with his throat. "You've done a big favor for an old man, Miss Davis. When I asked you to fake that robbery I didn't think you'd do it. I knew if you did, the papers would play it up big and the Tuxedo Thief would see it. He's always been theatrical, posing before the folks he robbed, picking on prominent persons, writing letters to the papers.

"I thought he'd figure your robbery the way he did, and I didn't believe he'd miss the chance to make easy money and play a rôle opposite you. But I was afraid you wouldn't do it."

She was very beautiful when she smiled. "It was an excellent chance for me to play a rôle also. I enjoyed it."

"You're a fine actress and a fine lady," Murdock said. He drank.

Miss Davis said, "When you came plunging across the room I thought it was my curtain call. And yours."

"No," he said. "It was his." They both drank.

Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

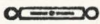
Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Investigator	Parole Investigator
Probation Officer	Prison Keeper
Criminologist	Internal Revenue Agent
Police Radio Expert	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.



Assorted Tests



MASSACHUSETTS civil service tests have long been regarded as a standard for the type of examination that calls for specialized knowledge of the duties involved in each position for which tests are given. Unlike a great many other examinations, Massachusetts tests call for rather lengthy written answers although occasionally a test calls for short form and true/false answers. This week we present an assortment of questions taken from specimen Massachusetts tests. While most of the sample questions require answers based upon conditions in Massachusetts the same questions may be applied to any city or state since the subjects covered are applicable to rules, regulations and conditions prevailing in many American communities. All that is required to answer them correctly is a study of the subjects covered as they would apply to your locality.

PRISON OFFICER TEST

Q 1—(a) Name the state penal and reformatory institutions giving the location

of each, the title of the officer in charge and the class of prisoners committed to it; (b) what institutions are under county control and what public officials appoint the officers?

Q 2—What determines whether a convicted offender shall be sent to prison, reformatory or house of correction?

Q 3—What are the purposes of penal sentences—what gain to the people of the state in sending men to do time? (State them in what you regard as the order of their importance to the public)

Q 4—(a) What is the object of prison industry? (b) Should the same hours of shop work be required as in factories and the men held to the same efficiency? Give reasons.

Q 5—If a prisoner viciously attacks a shop-mate what steps should be taken and by whom? (Follow the case through, stating what you think should be done.)

Q 6—What share, if any, should inmates be given in the government of the institution, and how organized?

Q 7—Write 300 to 600 words on any of the following topics: The Modern View of Punishment, Purposes and Methods of Prison Discipline, Recidivism and How To Reduce It, The Prison of the Future.

MOTOR VEHICLE EXAMINER TEST

Q 1—What records are persons in control of garages required to keep? How does this apply to chauffeurs and operators?

Q 2—What regulations are there covering the use of spotlights on motor vehicles?

Q 3—State fully under what conditions a private owner must give advance notice to the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and other authorities of intention to sell a motor vehicle?

Q 4—Under what conditions will registration be granted motor vehicles owned by non-residents at less than the regular fee as paid by resident owners?

Q 5—What are the requirements of law as to brake equipment on motor vehicles?

Q 6—Fire and police apparatus are not included within the term motor vehicle. What is the law regarding persons operating such apparatus?

Q 7—What effect would it have on the action of an auto on the road if the left hand front tire was fully inflated to its proper pressure and the right hand tire contained half of its required pressure?

Q 8—Describe the difference in the knocks caused by carbon and those caused by loose bearings in connection with the connecting rod?

Q 9—How many cells are there in the ordinary 12-volt automobile storage battery?

Q 10—Why are universal joints required in the drive between the transmission and the rear-end?

Q 11—Describe how an automobile should be handled on a long, steep downgrade.

Q 12—What would you do if an automobile you were driving began to skid?

CLERK TEST

(The examiner will pronounce, define and again pronounce the 25 words which follow. Write each one as the examiner pronounces it) Q 13:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| (a) pree-seed | (n) im-put-us |
| (b) lay-zure | (o) at-tross-city |
| (c) subzid-ee-airy | (p) fir-lo |
| (d) priv-ell-edge | (q) spur-ee-uss |
| (e) prop-ah-gait | (r) ob-soul-eat |
| (f) coll-league | (s) dill-em-ah |
| (g) re-curr-ants | (t) con-she-ent-shus |
| (h) diss-krep-ansee | (u) gree-vunce |
| (i) eks-ore-but-tant | (v) ag-grv-vate |
| (j) in-tricks-a-see | (w) ah-mean-uh-bul |
| (k) emb-buss-see | (x) mur-sun-airy |
| (l) lie-scents | (y) bull-ah-tin |
| (m) add-vur-serry | |

Answers to the above (a) precede; (b)

leisure; (c) subsidiary; (d) privilege; (e) propagate; (f) colleague; (g) recurrence; (h) discrepancy; (i) exorbitant; (j) intricacy; (k) embassy; (l) license; (m) adversary; (n) impetus; (o) atrocity; (p) furlough; (q) spurious; (r) obsolete; (s) dilemma (t) conscientious; (u) grievance; (v) aggravate; (w) amenable; (x) mercenary; (y) bulletin.

Q 14—Write a letter of 150 words on one of the following subjects; Pleasures of travel by train; Tiresome people; Early rising.

Q 15—*Arithmetic*. Draw a line under the largest number and also the smallest number in each column. (A time limit of 3 to 5 minutes usually is fixed on this question)

34	197	279	3049	3491	2968
79	653	183	7367	5421	1456
87	604	162	4751	6522	1274
68	159	798	6319	3887	6920
25	846	193	1855	9786	2513
82	196	290	8180	6426	8959

(Note: Keep accurate count of the time spent in doing the above test. It is often given in clerk tests. Try and get your time down to one minute. In the actual tests the examiner calls time to begin, time to stop and your answer sheet is immediately collected.)

Q 16—Perform the following operation is decimal fractions: 0.4 divided by 0.5 plus 00.0045; 2111 times .001.

Q 17—If marble weighs 145 pounds a cubic foot find the weight of a block 21 feet long, 11 feet wide, 2 feet thick.

Q 18—Divide .300 into parts proportional to 3, 4 and 5.

Q 19—The product of three numbers is 5445. If two of them are 61 and 33 what is the third?

Word Knowledge.

Q 19—Draw a line under the one word in the parenthesis which means the opposite or most nearly the opposite of the word outside of the parenthesis.

(a) UP—(long, down, large, low, across)
(b) TOP—(bottom, end, cover, roof, lid)

(c) EXPAND—(larger, smaller, contract, burst, swell)

Sentence Meaning.

Q 20—Mark a plus sign before each pair of sentences which is alike in intended

meaning; mark zero before each air of sentences which is unlike in intended meaning:

- (a) Idle brains are the devil's workshop
People who are idle get into trouble
- (b) Little strokes fell great oaks
Oak trees are weak
- (c) The early bird catches the worm
Depend upon yourself
- (d) All is not gold that glitters
Suspicious usually have some basis.

Grammar.

Q 21—Which sentences are grammatically correct:

- (a) This typewriter is the better of the two.
- (b) The method was different than any used before.
- (c) None is so fit for the position as he.
- (d) He saw you and I going into the building.

Reasoning Power.

Q 22—Draw a line under one of the words inside the parenthesis so that the underlined word and the third word will have the same relation to each other that the first two words have to each other. Continue until the examiner calls "finish."

- (a) GRASS :: GREEN :: snow- table- hall- mat-white- air.
- (b) TALL :: SHORT :: wide- short- broad- narrow- near- long.
- (c) THREE :: NINE :: four- eight- nine- fifteen- sixteen- ten.

AUDITOR AND ACCOUNTANT TEST

Q 1—Distinguish clearly between the following (a) balance sheet and trial balance; (b) statement of cash receipts and disbursements, and statement of income and expense; (c) capital and revenue expenditure.

Q 2—Discuss the following matters relating to the corporation as a form of business organization, (a) classes into which divided; (b) advantages of corporate form (c) charter; (d) By-laws.

Q 3—Give function of accounts with raw materials, direct labor, goods in process. Name three elements of manufacturing costs. Enumerate six items coming under the head of manufacturing expense.

Q 4—What is the cost of manufacture of 1000 pamphlets, 36 pages each, 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ by

4 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, covers printed in two colors, using the following data:

	Time		Depart- mental cost per hr.
	Hrs.	Mins	
Printing sheets . . .	24	0	\$ 0.65
Printing covers (3 operations)	3	0	.75
Cutting covers . . .	0	36	.48
Folding sheets . . .	9	0	.40
Gathering folded sheets	1	48	.40
Stitching books . . .	4	12	.80
Pasting on covers .	2	24	.40
Trimming covers . .	1	48	.48

The stock for job cost \$115.25 to which amount 8.82% has to be added to cover the cost of handling and storing stock.

Q and A BOX

Questions pertaining to civil service tests will be answered without charge. If a personal reply is desired enclose stamped, addressed envelope.

Anthony Prescia, Baltimore. Here is a brief sample test given to barbers:

What effect does the galvanic current have on the pores?

What is an ohm?

What emotion will increase nervous action?

What blood vessels are in the hair?

How fast do light or electric waves travel?

Why are ultra violet rays so called?

Is the infra red ray very penetrating?

How much blood will the skin hold?

It is obvious that the modern barber must know something of electricity and color. The questions given above are taken from tests for barber's licenses as well as civil service tests for the position of barber in a state institution. In many tests candidates are called upon to give practical demonstrations of their knowledge and ability.

Thomas Page, Salinas, Calif. and others. For full particulars as to U. S. quarterly examinations granted to applicants with 10 point military preference request the U. S. Civil Service to send Form 2867. For U. S. regulations concerning political activities of civil service employees ask for Form 1236. Civil Service acts, rules, laws and executive orders may be found in any well equipped public library.

Coming Next Week—Federal Aviation Jobs



They're Swindling You!

Small Rackets

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the seventy-seventh of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

THERE are any number of small rackets, none of which are deserving of more than a paragraph but judging from the letters which come to me they *are* perplexing to many people.

One man writes that he has received a post card reading, "We have a published item of news concerning you. To receive it, place this card and twenty-five cents in an envelope addressed to us and upon receipt of same, the item will come forward at once. This will be held for a limited time only. Remittance should be in coin or money order."

Don't send a penny. This is an old petty larceny racket which the Post Office has stopped innumerable times. The individual who mails the card obtains copies of small town newspapers but the fact that the post card is mailed from a large Eastern city gives the addressee the idea that the item appeared in a metropolitan sheet. Even a quarter is too much to pay for something you already know.

Don't buy hunting or bird dogs by mail unless you are given an opportunity

to see the dog before you pay for it. T. E. McLendon, who operated under the names of Joe Raiford, Norman Morris and George Stewart at Bartlett, Tenn., and T. C. Harris and Arkansas Coursing Association at Hulbert, Ark., and Davis Realty Co., Memphis, Tenn., was recently barred from the mails after defrauding the public of approximately \$80,000 in his dog selling schemes. According to the Solicitor for the Post Office Department, his advertisements claimed that the animals were full-blooded and well trained but he actually shipped nondescript and unhealthy dogs which were useless for hunting and in some cases, no dog at all. Another dog seller who had been stopped by a fraud order was found to be conducting his business from his cell in the prison, where he was serving a sentence for defrauding his customers by sending them mongrels after they had paid him for trained dogs. Business as usual.

Don't accept a "free" encyclopedia when the salesman tells you that you have been "selected" because the company wants to use your name for "advertising purposes." That's the bunk. You will be required to pay something like sixty-nine dollars for a ten year "upkeep service" in advance, but there is no assurance that the company will

be in business for ten years, and besides, sixty-nine dollars is the regular price quoted to everybody.

THE various "home work" schemes which offer through the classified advertising columns of some publications (the better periodicals do not accept this advertising) a chance to "make money at home" catch many a dollar. "Addressing envelopes" means that you are required to mail circular matter to your friends and acquaintances which advertises some cheap merchandise. If your friends buy this junk, you are paid a small commission on the sale, otherwise you get nothing for your labor.

Every one of these schemes require that you send money in advance for materials and/or samples. When the company, as bait, offers to buy from you the aprons you make, the greeting cards you color, or whatever else you have produced, they send the goods back to you again and again until you tire of sending them and give up in disgust.

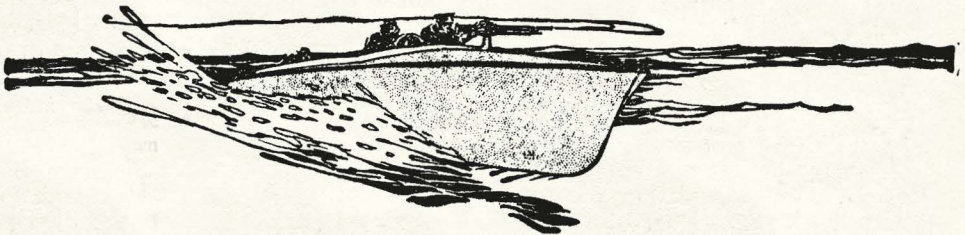
●n one occasion, we employed a professional painter, whose cards were sold

in the New York department stores, to color some greeting cards for us which we then returned to the advertiser we were investigating. A few days later they came back to us stamped "rejected."

These advertisers make their profits from the dollars that *you* send in and they have no outlets or market for the goods they *say* they are going to buy from you. Stay away from the home work schemers.

Some of the letters I receive ask about books and literature on the subjects of frauds of various kinds. May I repeat here what I have previously said, that the Better Business Bureaus in the various cities have considerable literature on the subject. Two recent pamphlets, "What You Should Know About Furs" and "What You Should know About Jewelry" can be obtained without charge from your nearest Bureau or the National Better Business Bureau, 135 East 42nd St., New York City. You should enclose a 3c. stamp to cover postage. These Bureaus in 55 American and Canadian cities are always glad to help you without charge.

Next Week—The Forgers



Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. O'HAYER
Suyam

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

WHILE the full solution of Lethargic's No. X-35, the cryptic magic square of two weeks ago, is too lengthy for publication here, a brief outline can nevertheless be given. It will be recalled that the numbers in the square were consecutive, the sum in each row, column, and diagonal being RHE. Thus but two unit arrangements were possible, a tabulation in which of all ranges, doubles, and totals, showed all values for RHE ending in 5, with RHE = 315 following by elimination; etc. The key and answer to this intriguing problem are subjoined.

58	51	74	67	65
69	62	60	53	71
55	73	66	64	57
61	59	52	75	68
72	70	63	56	54

No. X-35. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
C H A R L E S X I V

*H. F. Wickner's "Irascible Relative" cryptogram, No. 312 of last December 26, carrying a part of 150 solutions, elicited 163 answers from our solvers! This example of final alliteration, with every word ending in e, was a hard nut to crack, according to the fans! And speaking of challenges, be sure to try this week's No. 78 by *Jay Abey. This cipher is both isologic (words of the same length) and pangrammatic (using all 26 letters). Par has been set at 175 solutions! Send us your answers, cryptofans!

This week's cryptic menu starts with Gwynph's division puzzle, the key to which contains successively words of one, two, three, and four letters, numbered thus: 0 12 345 6789. The first subtraction shows the value of symbol

I. to start you! For an opening in Paul Presnell's cryptogram, compare DBE and BD, then FAG and AG, thus completing AB, BA, and FB. Then substitute in HGEDGOFUX YBEYGBPT and fill in the missing letters.

In Ichor's contribution, identify HSK by its use in a series of words separated by commas. Follow up with the similar patterns USAUS and XSAUS; then FULHLU, SNLZ, and ZUXF, noting -Z. Try for the endings -DHB, -DVH, and -DEOE in Mis-Led's message. Next, complete the second word. And thus to OVFLHRXZHO; XDEPFZE and PFZ; and so on.

H. N. Hehr offers a catalogic (word list) construction. Alliteration is also strongly featured, 18 of the 21 words having P as initial symbol. For entry the pattern words look inviting! Spot your own clues in *Jay Abey's Inner Circle cipher, and look for the answers to all of this week's cryptograms in next week's issue. The asterisks in Nos. 74, 75, and 78 indicate capitalization. Send us your answers, fans, also your original contributions for publication!

No. 73—Cryptic Division. By Gwynph.

NNNU)RSTOEM(MTE
SSUO

AERIE
ASSRT

NAMON
NIINN

AMIE

No. 74—Gilt and Glitter. By Paul Presnell.

"AB, DBE FAG *HKELFG *NBO *NPER BD *NBSNGG! AG
SLT LT SKORGN LT SKORGN OBPUN VG, VPF BA AG
SLT HGEDGOFUX YBEYGBPT FB TGG! FAG *HKELFG
*NBO *NPER BD *NBSNGG."—*ZKUNEGN *ZGEEXZLO.

No. 75—Garden Variety. By Ichor.

LOVABLE *ZDULZNHS PVHBLZ NARC FRHSL, FULHLU
GASY, USAUS, HSK TYHS. LOAZ XSAUS FVUKXDYZ
PVUMASP DVYHN UB GYPYLHTRY ZUXF. MOU'Z SXLZ?

No. 76—Unsuccessful Shot. By Mis-Led.

PFZ RLODEOE UZADBTO ARLBZ RFUDZHPZ UFLDHB
YDAADRLU OVFLHRXZHO. PLVSU BREKE STZH
PTRXKDVH XDEPFZE XREEZ, GVLGZDODHB XROPT.

No. 77—Carried in Stock. By H. N. Hehr.

PLEXFDO URXRDNV GFLDR PLXFNYXG: TNPEEB-MNPQ
PLSSRR, PDRNB, PNZZNUR, PKYXN, PVNB, PKLAHRD,
PRVRDO, PYHRD, PNXHO, PLVLUXR, PNEVYSLARD,
PLDX, PVLFKYXU, PLPLN, PYFDLX, PNTYNDR.

No. 78—Youthful Adventure. By °Jay Abey.

ZYXW VUTS *RQRV VUPO ZQUN *YQRM LUYK *JIQH
VRKS, QYSW UXWQ RQYS ORKS YKJU GYTS VIOF,
FIKJ TPKE GYJF NIDF CWOJ, LINB IBUK KRAO,
QRDW VRDH FUNW.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

67—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
O U T L A N D I S H

68—As in other states, springtime brings beauty also to Arizona. In the spring, when soft breezes blow, golden poppies and blue lupins cover our desert and mountains.

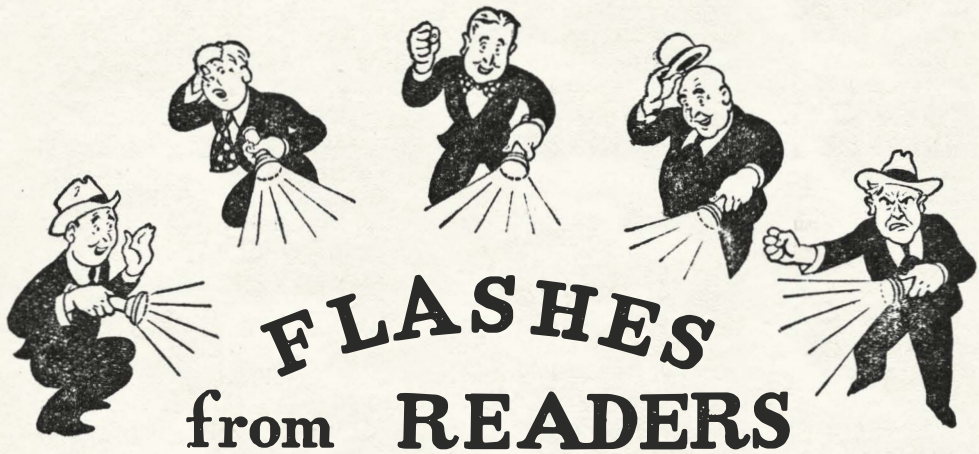
69—"Man alive that mournst thy lot,
Desiring what thou hast not got,
Money, beauty, love, what not."
—Millay.

70—Officers discover inebriate ransacking apartment house in residential district; subdue offender, after fight. Judge jails miscreant for three months.

71—Pacific (ocean), Everest (mountain), Asia (continent), Russia (country), London (city), Mississippi (river), Superior (lake)—each largest in its geographical class.

72—Hungry urchin, scantily clad, luckily found portmanteau underneath empty ash can. Suave fakir, avowing ownership, swindled waif.

Answers to any of this week's puzzles will be credited to the solver in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for March. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



CRIME, like woman's dress, is subject to changes in style from time to time. Before the turn of the century there was a wave of stage coach robberies, followed by train stickups; now the holdup of a train is unusual. Prohibition kindled a wave of smuggling and hi-jacking; propelled gangdom to the heights of notoriety; made the "ride" and "on the spot" infamous; it was, in other words, an age of violence that reached its peak with the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago.

Then came the reaction. Chicago's "Secret Six" went to work and soon had gangland scurrying for cover. The Government stepped in and through the income tax law rushed Capone and other underworld "big shots" to prison.

When the end of prohibition plugged the source of the bootleggers' profits, the Dillingers and the Touhys went in for kidnaping and bank robbery, but Uncle Sam injected new life into the F. B. I. and one public enemy after another was scratched from the list. Now the last strongholds of gangland—vice and racketeering—feel the pressure of special investigators and grand juries in New York and other cities.

We have been thinking of these

"Ages of Crime" for some time. In the end we always come up against the same question: "What type of criminal will come to the fore now?" Will it be the slick jewel thief such as appears in this issue's *Curtain Call*, the international plotter of *Bulldog Drummond's Challenge* or the ruthless, yet cunning, killer-thief that takes the stage in a forthcoming novelette by Fred Mac Isaac?

These thoughts come to a climax in a letter from a reader who, it seems, is beginning to feel the change—a change that will be apparent, too, in detective and mystery fiction. We wonder if others sense a new era. We want to hear from you.

And here is the letter that started all this:

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been reading DFW since it was Flynn's. I have been amused and I have learned a lot by reading DFW. I have only one kick and that is—I don't like dear old *Mrs. Watson* putting slugs through anybody. Tell her to relax and put the rod in hock. She is too smart for that.

Some of the other story writers should avoid so much shooting please. Let's have less bodies to find, less violent action, and more subtle criminals. The true stories are all right. Keep them going.

Here's luck to DFW. Many are the good stories I read in DFW while waiting for an

alarm up at the fire house. I am an engine man in the North Merrick Fire Department.

WILLIAM LUCAS,
Merrick, N. Y.

IF WE were inclined to be lazy we could easily fill this department with letters pro and con on the subject of serials. We are publishing the following, however, for a definite reason. We want to quiet the fears of Mr. Bassett. We have no intention, at present at least, of increasing the number of serials. Occasionally we may publish a second one, but in every case it will be a short serial of two or three parts that in our humble editorial opinion is such a good story that we can not hide it away in our safe until the longer serial ends.

DEAR EDITOR:

We have always felt that DFW owes much of its popularity as a detective magazine to the fact that the mysteries in each story are solved completely in one issue, with the exception of the serial. Most readers of this magazine, we believe, prefer finishing their detective stories while the plot is still fresh in their minds.

When two serials make their appearance in one issue, we become rather alarmed over the prospects of DFW getting the serial habit. We discontinued reading another fiction magazine recently because it is carrying too many serials.

We like the size of type being used in DFW and hope that it will not follow the trend of some other magazines in using smaller type for some stories in order to complete the issue. We feel that we are getting more than our dime's worth out of every DFW.

A small sketch and a short biography of your various writers is a feature we believe would interest the majority of your readers. After being entertained for several years by these DFW authors we have a friendly feeling for them—and would like to know them better. Please introduce us at your earliest convenience. (*We will do that.*—Editor).

RALPH F. BASSETT,
Tempe, Arizona.

THE letter that follows is quite gratifying. It makes us feel that we are doing a good job. That is relief and an incentive as we struggle

through manuscripts, proofs, and illustrations.

DEAR EDITOR:

I have read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY since I was a girl in grammar school. That was over ten years ago. It has always been my favorite magazine. I wrote to you about five years ago to bring to your attention the excellence of some particular story, and now I find I must take time off to tell you how I enjoyed the serial, *The Whisper-Men*, by Judson P. Philips, one of your best authors. I wish you would extend my congratulations to Mr. Philips and urge him to give us lots more of his "brain-children." (*A Park Avenue Hunt Club story has been scheduled.*—Editor).

The first thing I do upon opening DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is to scan the list of writers. When I see names like Judson P. Philips, Fred MacIsaac, Victor Maxwell and Richard Sale, I know I have a lot of good reading ahead.

Your serials are best, in my opinion, so please don't drop them. *Daffy Dill* is tops, and *Fluffy McGoff* provides a good laugh every time.

Before I close, I would like to put in a word of praise for Robert H. Rohde's story, *The Kid vs. the Racket*, and, oh yes, my mother thought *Mogul Murders*, by Fred MacIsaac the best she has ever read.

Long life to DFW and lots of thanks to you, Mr. Editor, for your excellent discrimination in choosing our reading material.

MRS. R. DANKOWSKI,
Bloomfield, N. J.

WE have been receiving a number of letters from "first issue" readers, the veterans who have heroically stayed with us from Volume One, Number One. Though we enjoy every one and take great pride in the number of loyal readers we have, we would like to see more first letters like this one:

DEAR EDITOR.

This is the first time I have written any magazine. I am strong for your magazine. MacIsaac is tops with me no matter what he writes, and Norbert Davis in *5 to 1 Odds on Murder* is splendid. The *Riordan and Halloran* stories are all too few. *Johnny Dolan* is very good; *Fluffy McGoff* is always amusing. *Daffy Dill* is O.K.

At times I wish you published twice a week. I have paid 20¢ for magazines not half as good. And let's have more *Park Avenue Hunt Club* stories, too.

JOSEPH F. RYAN,
Richmond, Va.

COMING NEXT WEEK



RICHARD SALE, whose famous *Daffy Dill* is now busy in Hollywood shooting pictures, presents his new character, *Candid Jones*—camera-toting, Lüger-smart ex-dick—in a long exciting novelette titled: **MURDER ON THE FILM**. . . JEAN FRANCIS WEBB writes a crime story as modern as tomorrow's news-heads, all about three slick killers and an odds-on cop—fighting it out over Hawaii in the *China Clipper*! . . . **MONSTER OF VIENNA** is the title of a gripping true story by RICHMOND DALE which quickens the pulse and stirs the brain. . . ROBERT H. ROHDE writes a long, thrilling, complete novel about a G-man, a girl, a crook with a suitcase full of English banknotes—all liberally spiced with murder—and, here's a hint, entitled **DEATH GOES TO SEA**. . . DONALD BARR CHIDSEY takes a couple of nose-wrinkling bunnies as clues, mixes them with a brace of slug-mad crooks to produce an amazing story entitled: **BLOOD WON'T TELL**. . . There's a real surprise in DONALD S. AITKEN'S story about an ingenious trigger-trap which could work two ways: **NOVELTY KILLER**. . . SAPPER gives us another chance to watch the best brain in the British Intelligence Service at work in the next installment of **BULLDOG DRUMMOND'S CHALLENGE**. . . And then there are still other stories, PLUS illustrated features, cryptograms, racket-exposés and Civil Service Questions and Answers! . . . It's an awful lot for a dime!

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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LJ-1 . . . Ekquisite engagement ring of 14K Solid White or Yellow Gold. Fiery, genuine blue-white center diamond; matched diamond on each side. (Specify color gold desired.) Only \$2.35 a month.



Both for \$29.75

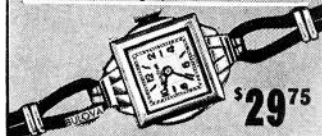
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LJ-6 . . . Perfectly matched "Queen of Hearts" engagement and wedding ring ensemble of 14K Solid White or Yellow Gold. Engagement ring is set with a fiery, genuine blue-white diamond, and the wedding ring with 3 matched diamonds. Specify gold desired. Both for only \$2.87 a month.

If purchased separately:

LJ-6A . . . Engagement Ring only . . . \$19.75
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\$1.00 Down—Balance 10% Monthly



\$29.75

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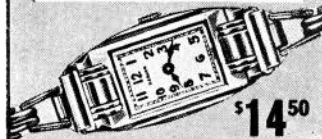
LJ-3 . . . BULOVA'S "Goddess of Time"! Guaranteed 17 Jewel BULOVA movement. Tiny, square case in charm and color of natural gold. Silk cord bracelet. Only \$2.87 a month.



Only \$27.50

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LJ-2 . . . Dazzling ladies' square prong cluster ring, expertly set with seven finely matched fiery, genuine diamonds. Looks like a \$450.00 solitaire. 14K Solid Yellow Gold ring. Only \$2.65 a month.



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**A ROYAL SENSATION!
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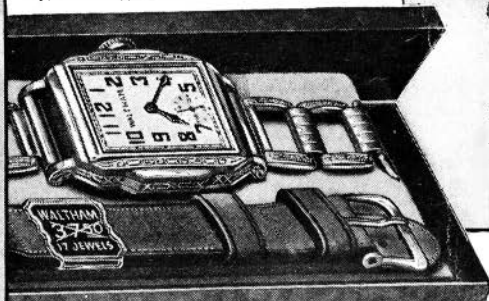
LJ-4 . . . Ladies, baguette type wrist watch in streamlined permanent white case; fully guaranteed movement. Matched bracelet. Only \$1.35 a month.



Only \$16.95

**\$1.59 a month
Diamond, Initial Ring**

LJ-7 . . . Gentleman's initial ring, very attractively priced. 10K Solid Yellow Gold, set with a brilliant, genuine diamond and 2 Solid White Gold Initials on contrasting, genuine black Onyx. (Specify initials desired.) Only \$1.59 a month.



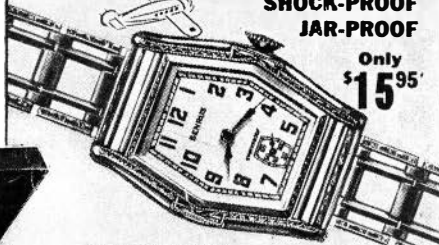
**17 Jewel WALTHAM "Diplomat" Extra Leather Strap FREE!
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LJ-8 . . . Imagine this for only \$2.37 a month! Factory guaranteed famous 17 Jewel WALTHAM "Diplomat" at a remarkably low price. Richly engraved, permanent white case with link bracelet to match and a smart, new leather strap included FREE. Usually \$37.50 — now offered complete as shown at the sensationally low price of only \$24.75 — \$2.37 a month.

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VACU-MATIC
the Carburetor Control that "BREATHES"

"On an International truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas."—James Seelye, N. Y.

"On my V-8 Ford, it works miracles. Its added power, acceleration and top speed has sold me. The results are unbelievable."—Ralph Fields, Mass.

"Very glad to say, the Buick showed an increase of 5 miles more per gallon."—A. V. Grove, Washington.

"On my Plymouth, I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of \$15 a month or \$180 a year."—F. S. Peck, Calif.

"It saves me one gallon a day. I had to buy 5 gallons each day—now only 4 gallons."—L. V. Sweet, Pa.

"My Chevrolet certainly runs smoother, has more power and snap to it since I put the Vacu-Matic on."—J. E. Nelson, Minn.

"On my Dodge 8 I am getting 6 more miles per gal., with more power and pick-up, which is all anyone could ask."—Lee D. Esty, Calif.

"I have twelve Vacu-matics on cars now, and they all show an increase in mileage. The car owners are very well pleased."—Fred Taylor, Okla.

"I averaged 25 miles per gallon on a trip with a model A Ford at 40 miles per hour, where before I only averaged 20. Also better pickup and smoother running."—Wm. Lyons, Calif.

"I have been placing Vacu-matics on expert mechanics' cars. All are well pleased."—J. W. Donahue, W. Va.

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have

smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, quicker starting, greater speed and smoother running.

Automatic -- Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—stream-lining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The sensational money-saving invention! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds.

Vacu-matic is entirely different! It operates on the super charger principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

Agents and Salesmen

VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

Guaranteed Gas Savings

VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. You can instantly tell the difference in added power and motor performance — you quickly notice the cash savings on gasoline.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

Free Details

You owe it to yourself to know all about this remarkable discovery. Mail the coupon below. Start saving gas with VACU-MATIC and enjoy a new driving thrill! There's no obligation—so get the facts now! Write today!

—FREE OFFER COUPON—

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-249 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.
Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name

Address

City State

Check here if interested in selling proposition.

The VACU-MATIC Co.

Wauwatosa, Wis.