

EXCITING MYSTERIES

DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S



He Asked For It

Begging for a Chance to Hunt
Men Who Were Grimly Hunting Him

A Strong, Exciting Novelette by

T. T. FLYNN



Official: "What did you think when you saw those two trains coming in opposite directions on the same track?"

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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Flashes ^{from} the Police Front

(NOTE: It is the purpose of this department to warn readers in all sections of the country of the latest schemes designed to defraud them, and in many instances, the names and descriptions of the operators. If you are approached by any of these schemers, get all the information possible and report the circumstances immediately to your local police authorities. They will know what to do. Rest assured that you will be doing someone a favor. Man is the only animal that can be skinned more than once.)

THRIFT CHECKS

No Money, or Company

Behind These Checks

A. H. CHALK, who claims to be the principal of American Advertisers, Inc., Atlanta, Ga., has a new sales stimulation idea for merchants. He sells "thrift checks" which the merchant is to give to his customers, who, in turn, are to send them to the company for redemption.

The Atlanta street address from which Chalk is supposed to operate this business is actually occupied by a motor company and thus far it has been impossible to locate Chalk, or his company, in Atlanta—or anywhere else.

this receipt as identification, Marlow then proceeds to buy office furniture, supplies, rugs, drapes and other items.

In payment he tenders checks of the company he is supposed to represent in a sum greater than the amount of the purchase and obtains the difference in cash. Usually he works this on Saturday afternoons and leaves town before the forged checks are deposited.

Has used checks in the name of Morse Twist Drill Company, Standard Pressed Steel Company, and Joseph Dixon Crucible Company. Is wanted in Wichita, Kans., Norfolk, Va., Birmingham, Ala., and Memphis, Tenn.

FORGERY

Elaborate Build-up Gets the Money

R. L. MARLOW, alias James R. Simpson, alias R. C. Chalmers, 5 ft. 3½ in., 142 lbs., 52 years old, medium build, gray hair, blue eyes, light complexion.

Introducing himself as the representative of some large Eastern company and stating that he is authorized by them to establish a branch office, Marlow rents office space, usually paying a month's rent in advance to get a receipt. Using

JOB

Standard Oil Name Used by Swindler

A MAN who gave the name of Bosworth, left Oklahoma City suddenly while his job racket was being investigated.

He said he represented the Standard Oil Company—without specifying which one—and wanted to employ three hundred pipe line workers for the Venezuelan operations of that firm. When he tried to collect twenty dollars "cash bond" from each prospective employee to



Flashes ^{from} _{the} Police Front



"insure responsibility and defray the cost of a character investigation," some of the men became suspicious and commenced an investigation of Bosworth. None of the Standard Oil Companies in Oklahoma City had any knowledge of him and said his operations were unauthorized. He will probably show up somewhere else with a similar scheme, so look out for him.

GRASS SEED

"Che-Ma" Grows Two-Inch Grass

DOC FRANKLIN A. MILLER is again covering his favorite territory in the Southwest selling his "Che-Ma" grass seed which, he claims, will grow grass only two inches tall.

Those who bought his seed last year in the hope of being able to discard their lawn-mowers say that "Che-Ma" grows one of the finest crop of weeds it is possible to produce.

FUGITIVE

Minneapolis Wants Fake Stock Seller

OVID E. BARNES, alias Hammond, alias Weaver, is wanted by Federal authorities in Minneapolis, Minn.

Barnes usually poses as a salesman for some reputable firm—which he does not represent—and obtains money for stocks, oil royalties or other securities which he

never delivers. He is now under indictment for swindling a Fremont, Minn., woman out of \$3,100 in cash and bonds. Notify as above.

BEAUTICIANS

"Here's Mud in Your Eye"

OKLAHOMA housewives are receiving visits from a pair of slick first story workers who offer them a free facial mud-pack treatment "for advertising purposes," and who rifle the victim's home while her face is enclosed in the hardening mud.

A blonde, 40 years old, 5 ft. 4 in., weight about 118 and her male companion who is about 45, 6 ft., dark complexion, are quite successful in putting over this fast one.

CLOTH

Cotton Pieces Sold as Wool

E. F. WELPLY, an office-to-office canvasser, who claims to represent a Toronto, Canada, firm of importers, is calling on business executives in Philadelphia offering Bradford Mills (England) woolen suit lengths.

Pieces of this cloth sold previously in New York City are stamped, "Bradford Woolens" enclosed in a diamond design on each suit length, are a fair grade of cotton — not wool. Until retired, Welply will probably continue to circulate in Eastern cities.



DFW
COMPLETE
NOVELETTE



Conyers uttered a horri-
fied cry

He Asked For It

By T. T. Flynn

CHAPTER I

The Coupé and the Torso

THE tires on John Randolph's big sedan stopped sucking on the wet pavement as the car swung to the curb. The late evening drizzle patted softly on the roof. The windshield wipers squeaked briskly across the glass.

John Randolph scratched a match and relighted the big Havana cigar on

which he had been chewing. The yellow match glow limned a frown on his heavy face. His voice was sharp as he took the cigar from his mouth and demanded: "Are you damned sure this thing is on the level, Warner?"

Bill Warner reflected a moment before replying. When John Randolph, publisher of the *Telegraph*, spoke like that everyone concerned on the payroll had better be right.

"I'll bet my job against a lead



Randolph didn't know what to expect

nickel it's on the level," Bill decided calmly. "I've seen the girl twice. She's full of information, but she's afraid. I don't know why she telephoned me tonight, but I think she'll talk to Conyers, if we can get him to meet her."

"She'd better," Randolph growled as he opened the door. "I'll get Conyers out there. Come along."

Randolph was a tall, heavy-set man. He strode through the drizzle without hat or topcoat, as if contemptuous of the weather.

Bill Warner, almost as tall, but not as heavy as the boss, turned up his coat collar and reflected wryly that Randolph mentally attacked the weather with as much energy as he devoted to a major problem.

That was characteristic of the man—and meanwhile this interview with the stormy-tempered Conyers promised to be interesting.

They had parked before the big, brick house which had been built by the first Henry Conyers, who had started the family fortunes on Conyers' Gold Brew

***A Corpse Severed in Half!—
What Answer Could There
Be to That Grisly Mystery in
the Midst of the Horrors
of the Lisa Barnes Case?***

Beer. The third Henry Conyers, now a successful lawyer, had little to do with the management of the brewery business, but he shared in the profits with two younger brothers.

Porch lights gleamed damply through the fine drizzle. Cars were parked in the driveway. Conyers had made it plain—forcibly plain—over the telephone, that he was entertaining this evening.

John Randolph punched the doorbell as if he thought it might wish to impede him. A manservant opened the door.

"Tell Conyers that John Randolph is here," the publisher growled, and Bill Warner suppressed a grin. Randolph could not drop the habit of giving orders.

The name evidently was familiar enough to the man. He promptly requested: "Will you wait inside, Mr. Randolph?"

They stood in a high-ceilinged reception hall while the man went for his master. Laughter and talk drifted from an inner room. Randolph chewed on his cigar, which had gone out again, and scowled at the floor.

Concerned as he was with this interview, Bill Warner watched with amused expectancy the meeting of the publisher and lawyer.

Henry Conyers was short, thin and peppery. Tonight he wore a dinner jacket and *pince-nez*. His lips compressed when he saw Bill Warner there also. He turned back and closed the door, so that they were alone in the reception hall.

"I suppose you've come about that woman," Conyers said without preliminary. In his manner there was more than a hint of challenge.

"We have," Randolph replied curtly. "Warner tells me this woman has

decided, for some reason or other, to talk this evening. And that you refuse to see her."

Conyers adjusted his *pince-nez*.

"A complete distortion of the facts," he replied coldly. "I told this man over the telephone to bring the woman here later in the evening, or to my office in the morning, and I would hear her story."

"And Warner told you," said Randolph heavily, "that she was afraid to come here, and under no circumstances would come to your office. But she will talk tonight at the meeting place she specified. I consider it distinctly your duty, Conyers, to go and see her."

Conyers' sallow face reddened with anger. His reply was frigid.

"You are too ready, as usual, to point out my duty, Randolph. Or to anyone else whom you fancy needs advising. I know my duty—and I'll manage it without your advice."

IT struck Bill Warner that his boss looked like an irritated bear towering over a touchy bantam cock. It was well known of course that neither one cared much for the other. And, characteristically, Randolph did not even try to be pacific. His voice was impatient and accusing.

"My paper raised this whole issue of crookedness in local politics. I hammered at it until public sentiment demanded an investigation. I've told you before, Conyers, and I'll tell you now, I wouldn't have picked you to head the investigation. But as long as you got the job I went along with you. And what's happened? You've dilly-dallied for three weeks. Most of the evidence you've collected so far has been supplied by the *Telegraph*. It's beginning to look as if all you'll ever get is what we turn over to you. And now when

Warner, my best man, turns up something important, you refuse to look into it."

Conyers' flush of anger had deepened. His reply was biting. "Has it occurred to you that I have guests? Must I leave them to satisfy the whim of a strange woman, who probably knows nothing of importance?"

Randolph brushed the words aside with an impatient gesture. "I'll sponsor the woman. Your guests can probably do well enough without you for an hour. I insist you see her."

Conyers replied in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"Are you trying to order me, Randolph?"

Randolph smiled unpleasantly. "I'm giving you good advice, Conyers. Pass up this woman tonight—and I'll open up on you in the *Telegraph*, and keep after you. If you don't think I'll get results, invite me to do it."

Bill Warner held his breath. He wasn't sure what was going to happen. All the enmity between the two was out in the open.

Henry Conyers choked: "Why you—you—"

"Muckraker," Randolph supplied dryly.

"That wasn't the word!" Conyers corrected furiously. "It was worse. But muckraker will do. You own a newspaper to broadcast your distorted views, Randolph, and you use it as a cowardly club to smear and fight anyone who disagrees with you!"

"You're begging the point!" Randolph snapped. "I never go after a man unless he needs it. If you let this woman's testimony get away you'll deserve all you'll get."

Conyers made up his mind abruptly. "I'll go with you and see the woman. She'd better have something pertinent

to give me. I'll join you in a few moments."

The pepperish little lawyer slammed the door as he left the reception hall. Randolph scowled after him, and then turned the scowl on Bill Warner.

"Heaven help you if this is a wild-goose chase," he warned.

"I'm beginning to realize it," Bill murmured sadly.

AS John Randolph drove the big car out on the bay boulevard, beyond the city limits, Bill Warner was distinctly nervous. Suppose this Lisa Barnes didn't show up after all? Her voice had sounded nervous and queer over the telephone. She had refused to explain anything.

The rain had stopped. The highway was a dark, glistening ribbon in front of the headlights. In the back seat Henry Conyers snorted: "The woman must be insane to insist on a meeting out in the country this way!"

"After some of the things that have happened in the city, I don't know that I blame her," Randolph took curt exception over his shoulder.

Conyers snorted again and sat in challenging silence.

They passed a closed gasoline station. Bill Warner bent forward and watched the wet road unfold into the headlight beam. Half a mile beyond the gasoline station the old beach road led off to the right.

Randolph made the turn. The big car began to sway and lurch as it plowed through pools of water and mud. Randolph peered intently ahead. On his side of the seat Bill Warner did the same.

And behind them Conyers demanded with exasperation: "What sort of a place did she pick out? There's nothing down this way!"

"That's probably why she picked it," Bill suggested over his shoulder.

"Well, where is she?" was the testy retort.

Bill was wondering the same thing himself. The bay was just ahead. A few trees grew along the road. Beyond the trees lumpy, barren soil was covered with coarse grass and weeds.

John Randolph's mutter reached only Bill's ears.

"She'd *better* be here!"

A moment later Bill almost sang out with relief. "That must be her car between those trees!"

A small coupé had pulled off the road between two ragged clumps of trees. Its lights were out. No sign of life was apparent as Randolph turned in behind it and cut off the motor.

Conyers found something else to detest as the three of them got out. "Mud everywhere! I never heard of such an idiotic proceeding! Well, where is the woman?"

They were in front of the car, in the headlight glare. Bill gave a confident answer as he went forward. "She's here somewhere. She said her car would be a coupé." He called: "Miss Barnes . . ."

Wind blew through the tree branches. Drops of water patted down with an eerie sound. There was no answer to the call.

John Randolph preserved an ominous silence. But Henry Conyers spoke with irritable satisfaction.

"Not here, eh? I wonder if she ever was *supposed* to be here."

"Here she is," said Bill with relief. "She must have gone to sleep here in the car."

The side door of the coupé was ajar. It swung open as Bill put his hand on it and said: "Miss Barnes . . ."

Henry Conyers stepped around him

impatiently and reached in across the wheel.

"Wake up, young woman!" Conyers snapped irritably, shaking her shoulder. "I haven't much time."

The next moment Conyers uttered a horrified cry and leaped back.

The seat was in shadow, so that at first glance it was possible to see only the bowed head, the arms across the steering wheel. But as Henry Conyers jumped back, the young woman inside the car fell out after him.

Even John Randolph cursed wildly and started back, for into the brighter glare of the other car's headlights tumbled the head and torso of a pretty young woman.

That was all. Only half of her had been sitting there on the car seat.

CHAPTER II

Along the Beach Drive

HENRY CONYERS was promptly and noisily sick. And John Randolph, after his first startled oaths, stood rooted to the ground, as if he could not believe what he saw. Bill Warner felt sick himself, then cold with the gruesome shock. He reached automatically for a cigarette and matches. His hand was shaking.

There at their feet the half-body lay on the muddy ground. A pert little hat had been knocked over to a drunken, rakish angle. A spatter of blood on one smooth cheek was like a macabre beauty spot. The vacant eyes stared up at them as if from beyond the grave. Lisa Barnes mutely asked them why this thing had happened.

John Randolph drew a deep shuddering breath and found his voice.

"*How ghastly!* Who did this infamous thing? Warner, did you have any idea this might happen?"

Boss or no boss, Bill sought an escape valve in a savage reply.

"D'you think I'd have let her run the risk if I'd had any idea? If you can't talk sensibly, get the hell out of here!"

"Of course, of course! I didn't mean it that way," Randolph apologized hoarsely.

Henry Conyers rejoined them shakily.

"We'd better get the police. Let's get out of here. I don't want to look at that—that thing."

"Shut up!" Bill ordered angrily. "And don't mess up the ground with your footprints!" He stepped gingerly to the side of the car and looked carefully inside. "Nothing else in here," he said. "She was planted that way just for us. Randolph, is there a flashlight in your car?"

"Why—why I think so."

"Get it."

Randolph obeyed with the meekness of a clerk in his own office. Following the shock of discovery, Bill was taking the lead, as if it were his right. In a way it was, as Randolph knew, if Conyers didn't. Bill Warner was the top crime man on the *Telegraph*.

Conyers shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. His shoulders were hunched, as if a sudden chill had struck him. His gaze returned in fascination to the object on the ground.

"I don't get the point," he jerked out. "She made an appointment to meet you here, didn't she?"

"She did," said Bill curtly.

"But she didn't come herself. She—she was dead before she got here. She was brought here—and left for us to find."

"You reason things out, don't you?" Bill marveled.

Henry Conyers was too perturbed

to catch the sarcasm, or if he did, to take offense.

"Whoever killed her knew she was to meet us here. She was killed so she wouldn't talk."

Bill said disgustedly, "A Boy Scout could see that. What I want to know is who killed her—and how they knew she was to meet us here. She telephoned me from a pay station."

Bill took the flashlight from Randolph's hand and probed about with the beam. Then looked intently inside the car.

"She was brought out here in this car, on the other side of the seat. Propped there, I suppose, so she looked fairly normal to anyone outside the car. After the car stopped here, she was pulled over behind the wheel. No mud on the running board. He stepped out and stayed out. Look at those big prints. He must have had sacking wrapped around his shoes," Bill judged.

"His fingerprints should be on the car," Conyers guessed.

"Not a chance of it," Bill differed. "If he was clever enough to hide the shape of his shoes, he knew enough to wear gloves. He'll be hard to trace."

Conyers adjusted his glasses and peered up with a belligerent expression.

"Why so certain of that, young man?"

Bill regarded the pugnacious lawyer coldly and thoughtfully.

"You may know law—but you're short on human nature," he said. "What kind of a man do you think it took to drive out here with *that* on the seat beside him?"

Henry Conyers shuddered. He moistened his lips.

"A—a monster."

"I don't want to meet him alone in a haunted house," Bill said. His voice shook with sudden passion as he turned

away. "But so help me, I'll meet him *somewhere!* He can't get by with this! There's nothing much we can do here. Let's get word to the police and the sheriff. This is outside the city limits, but the killing was probably done in the city."

John Randolph remembered he was a newspaper publisher.

"I wonder if there's any way we can keep this away from the other morning papers?" he mused. "That would be a red letter day for the *Telegraph*."

BILL turned the flashlight beam full on his boss' face. "You have the instincts of a money-grubbing pig, and the finesse of a shark!" he told Randolph scathingly. He stabbed the light beam on what was left of Lisa Barnes. "Look at *that!* Less than three hours ago she was talking to me over the telephone! She was frightened, but she had the nerve to offer the information we wanted! She was on her own! She didn't have anyone to turn to! She was pretty near broke! She loved life as well as you do. Look at her *now!* What do you suppose she thinks about the scoop you want to get out of her?"

"Stop that kind of talk!" Randolph begged. "I'm not that callous. If there had been any way in the world to stop it, I'd have done so. But now there's nothing we can do but help get the ones responsible for it. And a newspaper is a newspaper."

"All right—all right, but you're still a louse," Bill said bitterly. "If I'm fired for thinking so, you're still one. And don't back your car out until I look for tire marks in the road. The fellow who drove her out here must have had a car behind to carry him back."

After looking behind Randolph's car for some moments, Bill called: "All right. Turn around and follow after me." He walked back along the dirt road, searching the ground with the flashlight.

Randolph drove slowly behind him for some hundreds of yards. Finally Bill stepped aside and got in when the car came abreast.

"Drive slowly," he directed. "I can't find a sign of another car."

"Then where did the fellow go?" Henry Conyers demanded testily.

"Perhaps he got on a broomstick and flew over the moon," Bill said wearily. "But there isn't a moon tonight, is there? Maybe he rode off on a raindrop."

Conyers muttered something about impoliteness and subsided. Bill was intently scanning the road ahead. He told Randolph to stop just before they came on the highway. He got out and searched along the edge of the pavement. His manner was unbelieving when he got into the car again.

"Not a sign of a muddy tire mark that a car would leave coming off this mud into the concrete. I can't believe it, but it looks like that coupé went in alone. Stop at the gas station. Maybe there's a telephone there."

A small white frame house stood next to the gas station. A light was on behind the curtained front windows. A radio was turned down when Bill knocked. The light went on overhead. The door was opened several inches against a chain: A tall, rawboned young man wearing khaki trousers and a blue work shirt open at the neck peered out suspiciously.

"Got a telephone here I can use?" Bill requested.

"What's the matter?" was the not too cordial answer.

"Police call. There's a dead woman down the road."

"Dead woman?" was the startled reply. Randolph and Conyers had followed to the steps. They received a suspicious look. "You fellows look all right," the man said. "But them two'll have to stay out there. We've been held up several times an' I'm not takin' any chances."

It was clear what he meant.

"Fair enough," said Bill. He noticed a young woman leaving the room as the chain was slipped and he was admitted. The door was locked behind him. A thumb indicated the telephone in the corner.

Bill called detective headquarters.

The bored accents of Mike Schon, the sergeant on duty at the night desk, came over the wire.

"This is Bill Warner."

"Yeah?" said Sergeant Schon amiably. "Howsit doing tonight? Nothing here for you."

"THAT's fine," said Bill. "I've something here for you. Unprop your eyelids, Schon, and show me some action. I'm out about eight miles on the Beach Drive. There's a dead woman out here. Not much doubt she was killed in the city. Get the sheriff's office and work with them. You'll need everything—finger-print man, photographer, moulage for footprints."

"Say, how'd you turn *this* up?" Schon demanded. "Who is she? How was she killed?"

"That's your grief," said Bill. "And I don't want to wait around here all night. I'm talking from 497-J. It's a house by a gas station out here."

The woman was in the doorway, wide-eyed and excited when Bill hung

up. Her husband had lost his suspicion and was excited too.

"Where is she?" he questioned.

"Down the road. Is that your gas station?"

"I run it."

"Why did you close up early to-night?"

The man looked at his watch. "It's nine-fifty now. I usually close about nine-thirty on slow nights like this."

"You can see the entrance to the old beach road from your station, can't you?"

"Sure."

"Did you notice a car turn in there within the last two hours?"

The man frowned as he thought back. He nodded suddenly.

"I sure did. I remember when it went by. A coupé. I was puttin' ten gallons in a sedan, the last car I had in tonight. I seen the headlights of that coupé go out just before it got to the old road. Some of them do that so's no one'll see 'em turn off. I remember thinkin' it was a nasty night for a couple of neckers to be heading over that way. Say, is that where this dead woman is?"

"It is," said Bill. "And now think hard. Was there another car anywhere behind it? Or just ahead of it?"

"Nope," was the prompt reply. "Traffic gets pretty light along here on a night like this."

"How about that car you gassed?"

"That went on. It had three women in it."

"Just that coupé came along?"

"Mister, I could swear to it in court."

"Who was driving?"

The man shook his head. "I didn't see that."

"Okay," said Bill. "And you

might let those other two in now. One of them is John Randolph, the owner of the *Telegraph*. He wants to call his paper."

CHAPTER III

Aline Price, Night Club Girl

WITHIN half an hour Lisa Barnes would not have known the spot she had picked for a rendezvous.

Automobiles from police headquarters, automobiles from the sheriff's office, the county coroner's automobile; newspaper men, photographers, state police and some morbidly curious spectators had turned off the highway onto the old beach road.

State police were holding the unofficial ones back. The first automobiles had been spotted in a wide crescent about the spot. In the glare of their headlights the two clumps of trees and the small coupé stood out starkly, like props on a weird outdoor stage.

Inspector Vaughn headed the homicide detail. Jess Thorne, the county sheriff, was there with three deputies. A police photographer was setting up his camera on a tripod. The flashlights of newspaper photographers were winking like miniature bursts of lightning.

And Bill Warner, John Randolph and Henry Conyers were undergoing pointed questioning.

Sheriff Thorne, who had jurisdiction, was fat and important—and, to Bill Warner's way of thinking, a political incompetent. Thorne was making the best of his chance to shine in the limelight.

"You mean to say the three of you had an appointment to meet her out here in this forsaken place?" Thorne demanded. He teetered on his toes

and looked around for approval of his skepticism.

Bill flipped a match at the sheriff's feet and replied woodenly.

"You heard me. I had two witnesses when she called my hotel room to make the appointment. Are you trying to work up an idea we cut her up?"

Thorne shrugged the suggestion aside. "Why meet her out here?"

"She asked us to."

"But why out here?" Thorne persisted.

"She didn't say. I'm not a mind reader."

Thorne scowled, tried another angle, with a frown at Randolph and Conyers. "Why were the three of you so willing to come out here?"

Henry Conyers was still pale, shaken. But his pugnacity had not abated.

"That should be evident!" he snapped. "The woman had information to give me. She insisted on delivering it out here. And I," said Conyers, turning toward the group of newspaper men, "was willing to go to any trouble in the investigation I'm heading."

Bill grinned sourly and said nothing. Privately he put down a check mark against his belief that Henry Conyers was a four-flusher, who had been saved from shyster lawyer's uncertain career by the Conyers' brewery fortune.

"In other words," Thorne said sarcastically, "in trying to blacken duly elected officials, you were party to a move in which one of your witnesses lost her life in this fiendish manner?"

"Be careful of your insinuations!" Conyers warned sharply.

Inspector Vaughn took a hand. He was a tall, heavy-set man, quiet and

keen, who had a reputation as a square-shooter. Privately Bill was surprised to see Vaughn heading this homicide detail.

"Warner," Vaughn asked, "have you any idea why she might have been killed?"

"It's plain, isn't it?" Bill replied, lifting his eyebrows. "She was loaded with information that would have made front page headlines after it had been proven. In spite of the precautions she took, someone knew she was going to talk tonight, and where she was to meet us. So they shut her mouth."

Sam D'Arcy, of the *News*, chuckled grimly. "They shut her mouth by cutting her in two?"

Thorne grunted, "What fool would bring this part of her out here for you to find?"

"Was he a fool?" Bill asked. "She isn't the only one who can talk. This makes a pretty good warning for others to keep their mouths shut—or else. For instance," said Bill, eyeing the sheriff, "if you decided to talk, *you* might get the same thing."

Jess Thorne's loose double chin wobbled as he swallowed hard; then his chest inflated and he glared.

"What the devil would *I* have to tell?" he roared.

Bill grinned and turned as one of Vaughn's men came up carrying a flashlight and spoke to the Inspector.

"I lost his tracks over there in some heavy grass."

"One man brought her out here, and walked off into nowhere with sacking wrapped around his shoes," Vaughn growled. "What a hell of a case! Warner, d'you know where she was when she telephoned you?"

"It was a pay station. She had to drop a second nickel in. It was four

minutes before seven when she hung up. I telephoned Conyers at once and told him she wanted to talk to him out here."

Jess Thorne came back to his first point again.

"Didn't you think it strange she wanted to meet you and Mr. Conyers out here?"

"I don't think anything is strange that happens during this investigation," Bill said pointedly. "When you lift up a rotten board, anything is apt to crawl out."

BY the scowl he got from Thorne, Bill knew he had made another enemy. Local politicians, state, county and city, were touchy and sore about such matters these days. And with good reason. The dirt was there—if only it could be brought out into the open.

Lisa Barnes had been choked to death. The marks were there on her throat. Her legs had been disjointed and removed by a knife which was not too sharp. A pad of burlap sacking and her skirt had been tied by a length of strong fishing line about the bottom of her torso.

And that was about all the facts that could be noted down on the spot.

The morning papers had a ghoulish front page story with pictures. The law had a baffling mystery. Lisa Barnes had died with the secrets she had learned from her dead sweetheart, Frank Lacy, the racketeer. And Bill had an ultimatum from the boss.

John Randolph was in a surly mood as he drove Bill back to town. Henry Conyers had stiffly elected to return ahead of them with one of the newspaper men whom he knew.

"We've got to break this thing open in a hurry!" Randolph stated violently.

"The *Telegraph* got her into it. Before we know it, the facts will be distorted. All the public will remember is that the *Telegraph's* crusade got an innocent girl killed in a horrible manner. It will undermine a lot of influence we've been able to swing."

"The simple fact that she was killed doesn't matter much, does it?" Bill asked sarcastically.

"Sometimes," Randolph said angrily, "I don't know why I don't fire you, Warner!"

"Sometimes," said Bill with brutal frankness, "I wonder why in hell I'm working for you. I've been offered more money elsewhere."

"I'd be interested to know why you stay," said Randolph.

"I guess it's because you're a newspaper man first and last, in spite of your money," Bill decided. "Even when I think you're a skunk, I know you're sincere. And that's good enough for me."

"And for me," Randolph growled. "It gets you a raise next payday. And now, what are you going to do about this woman?"

"Get out my permit and carry a gun," Bill decided. "If they had nerve enough to do that to her, they'll have nerve enough to get me if they think I'm dangerous too. Right now I'm going to get off alone and think. No one else seems to be able to."

But that was only half the truth. John Randolph would have asked too many questions if he had known the other half. Bill got out at his hotel.

In his room Bill took one of his bags out of its closet, and from under the clothing drew a shoulder holster and a revolver with a sawed-off barrel. The revolver was a thirty-eight calibre, accurate only at close quarters, but lethal then. The Greek gambler who

had once owned it had been dead for three years. The gun he had failed to draw in time had been another weapon. Bill had won this one matching quarters.

From the hotel Bill walked six blocks to the Club Paradise. The Paradise was one flight up, large, noisy, and well patronized winter and summer. Tonight was no exception. It was eleven-thirty when Bill walked in. The lights were dimmed. The last floor show was on. Most of the tables were filled.

Bill looked about for a moment and then spoke to one of the waiters. "Where is Aline Price?"

The waiter shrugged. "I think she's gone home. I saw her going out."

"When was that?"

"About half an hour ago." The waiter stared as Bill departed hastily.

Taxicabs were waiting at the curb. Bill threw an order at the first driver. "Hotel Greville, and make it fast!"

THE Greville was a second-rate hotel, but sizable and popular, with a large banquet and dance trade. Some association was holding a dance tonight. The lobby was crowded. Three noisy couples were in the elevator which Bill entered. No one paid any attention to him when he got out at the third floor and walked back along the corridor. A passing maid ignored him. Bill knocked at the door of 314.

"Yes? Who is it?" asked a voice inside.

"Special delivery letter," said Bill. He was smiling faintly when the door was unlocked and opened. He entered without an invitation in the face of a gasp of surprise. "That was just in case you weren't seeing anyone to-

night," he told the young woman who faced him.

She exploded, "You've got a nerve shoving in this way!"

Bill closed the door and grinned at her.

"Where would I be without a nerve? I dropped in at the Paradise to see you, and they told me you'd gone home."

She was young, seven or eight years younger than Bill, who was twenty-nine. She was a trifle taller than ordinary, slender but not thin. She had gray-green eyes and chestnut hair, and her movements had the grace of a professional dancer. But now, as she faced her visitor, she was distinctly not at ease. She was tense, uncertain.

"I had a headache," she said, "and left early."

"Head all right now?" Bill asked sympathetically.

"No, it isn't. I'm going to bed—if I can get any privacy."

Bill looked across the room, and then back at her. His grin grew broader.

"All dressed up for bed in a street suit and hat, I see. And your suitcase packed. Were you going to put it under your pillow and pull your hat over your eyes, Aline?"

She was stunning, this Aline Price, even in a severely tailored suit and plain little hat. Anger did not make her less so.

"We've been pretty good friends, Bill—but this is the limit! I won't take this even from you! Get out of here!"

"Have a cigarette," Bill invited.

She ignored the proffered cigarette. The first flush had left her cheeks. She was pale now.

"Do I have to call the desk and have them put you out, Bill?"

Leisurely Bill put a match to his

cigarette. "Where were you going, Aline?"

"Nowhere!"

"You introduced me to Lisa Barnes," Bill said. "You were her best friend. I don't know how much she ever told you—but Lisa was murdered tonight."

White, almost ill now, Aline Price protested, "I don't know a thing about it!"

Bill stared at her. His manner changed. His casualness abruptly hardened to a rasp of accusation.

"You knew about it before I told you! You knew about it before you left the Paradise! Knew about it before the news was public! *How did you know?*"

CHAPTER IV

Sudden Visitor

SHE backed off a step from him. Bill caught her wrist and swung her over against the wall.

"Let's have it!" he gritted. "What did you have to do with it?"

Through stiff lips she answered: "Don't look at me like that, Bill Warner! You know I thought a lot of Lisa! You know I'd do anything to help her instead of hurt her!"

"But you knew it!" Bill accused. "You walked off the job, and came here to pack and leave. You couldn't even act surprised when I told you she was dead!"

"Lisa had told me she was afraid something would happen to her. Frank Lacy was too crazy about her. He told her things. And after Frank was killed, some people wondered how much Lisa knew, and if she would talk."

"Do you know what happened to her?" Bill demanded relentlessly.

The hand he held had turned cold. Aline Price was leaning back against the wall. Her gray-green eyes looked desperate. She had to swallow before she could reply.

"You said she was murdered, Bill."

"She was," said Bill coldly. "She was choked to death. Her legs were cut off at the hips. She was put into her car and driven out—"

"No! Don't . . ."

Bill caught her as she crumpled.

He put her on the bed and stared at her gloomily. This was the last thing he had expected. He'd known Aline Price for three years. She had given him many news tips. He had done her more than one favor. Night club work had given Aline a wide circle of acquaintances. She knew respectable people and members of the underworld. But she had managed to keep more or less to herself. No one had any claims on her.

Bill had gone to the Paradise to ask questions about Lisa Barnes, without suspecting Aline knew anything about the murder. Now here she was smeared with guilty knowledge.

Was it possible, Bill asked himself, that Aline Price had had a part in the death of her closest friend? The mere suspicion was enough to shake faith.

Aline Price stirred on the bed, gave a small gasp, opened her eyes.

"That," warned Bill coldly, "didn't help you any. Sit up and get it off your chest."

She sat up. Two tears rolled down through her makeup. She looked older now, older than Bill had ever seen her; and she sat rigidly on the bed as if desperate and at bay. Her voice had a husky note of terror.

"I—I don't know anything, Bill. I haven't anything to tell. You—you've got to believe it!"

"I don't believe anything tonight," Bill said. "Why were you taking it on the lam?"

Aline looked around the room wildly, as if seeking escape or a ready answer to the question. Her face was white, drawn, desperate. Regarding her with cold detachment, Bill lost the last of his doubts that she was innocent of guilty knowledge. Memory of that gruesome discovery out on the old beach road hardened him toward her.

His feelings must have been visible on his face, for when he stepped to the bed Aline shrank away from him.

"Bill," she whimpered, "don't look at me like that!"

"You rat!" said Bill huskily. "You pretty, treacherous rat! You're coming clean on this—if it sends you to the chair!"

Aline tried to smile. It was a travesty of a smile, pitiful at any other time. Her chin was trembling, her voice shook.

"If I weren't so heartsick and frightened, I could laugh at that, Bill."

"You'll have time to laugh at it later," Bill promised. She looked on the verge of hysteria. He didn't want that. He eyed her, trying to think of the best way past her guard.

The silence was broken by an impatient knock on the door.

ALINE PRICE started in fright. It was fright. She began to tremble. Terror was in the look she gave Bill. Her lips moved soundlessly. He couldn't catch what she tried to say. The next instant he spun around as the door opened. His hand went under his coat instinctively as he turned.

The sharp edge of tension which sent him for the gun was all that saved him. For an instant later the man

who entered saw him and grabbed under his coat also. The arm remained rigid under the coat as he faced the stubby little revolver.

"Come in," Bill directed thinly. "All the way in. Bring that hand out into the open—empty. That's right. Away from the door. Back against the wall there."

Bill was grinning with cold satisfaction as he kicked the door shut without taking his eyes off the man.

"So it's Joe Vincent," he said softly. "Smooth Joe, the policy punk, just dropping in with his gun to pass the time of night. That's all it was, Joe, wasn't it? Just passing the time of night?"

Joe Vincent was a thin young man, thin almost to the point of emaciation. His face was a series of bony angles, and his large eyes seemed to rest far back in the sockets, where they gleamed with a curious alert intensity. But despite his lack of flesh, Vincent gave the impression of perfect health. From expensive Panama to white and black leather shoes he was a vision of sartorial splendor, expensively, carefully tailored and turned out.

Now as he stood with his back against the wall, hands shoulder high, Vincent smiled too. Unpleasantly. His sunken eyes smoldered with anger. The lash of it was in his voice as he spoke past Bill to Aline Price.

"So you tried to put a fast one over on the side?"

Bill couldn't turn his head; but Aline's whimper of protest gave him her reaction.

"No, Joe! He walked in here! I didn't know he was coming! I couldn't stop him!"

"Yeah?" said Joe Vincent through thin, grinning lips. "What'd he want?"

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"He—he came to tell me Lisa Barnes was killed tonight."

Joe Vincent lifted black eyebrows. "Was she?" he said to Bill.

"Yeah," said Bill. "She was!"

"So what?" said Joe Vincent.

"So turn around," said Bill. "I'm going to get your gun. And I hope you make a grab for it, Joe. After what I saw tonight, and finding you here now, I want an excuse to put a bullet in that skinny belly of your."

Joe's grin did not change. It was murderous. "You ain't the only one who's had ideas like that, Warner. But I'm still here. If you want the rod, take it. But you're running up the wrong alley. You're asking for trouble."

"And I've heard that before," said Bill. "Turn around, damn you!"

He was suddenly conscious that Joe Vincent's grin was directed at his face—but Joe Vincent's burning eyes were looking past him at the bed, at Aline Price. In that look there was meaning. Bill heard a stir of movement behind him. He didn't dare look around with Vincent standing there ready to go for his gun—yet he had an agonizing flash that he'd better look.

The next instant it was too late. His right arm was snatched around and back as Aline Price caught fiercely at it with both hands. Joe Vincent bounced off the wall as if impelled by springs.

THE odds had shifted with dizzying suddenness. Reaching for his gun with his left hand, Bill caught a glimpse of Aline Price's white, desperate face. On the other side Joe Vincent was snatching under his coat as he bounced off the wall.

Then Joe Vincent's gun hit him on the side of the head.

Bill wasn't knocked out. The room swam and spun before his eyes. His legs gave way. He sprawled helplessly over the bed. But he could hear and think in a blurred sort of way.

He heard Aline Price gasp: "You've killed him!"

And Joe Vincent pant: "He'll get it sooner or later, anyway, damn him! Keep quiet! Let me think!"

The mattress gave as Vincent bent over him. Bill was barely able to feel the pressure of fingers on the side of his head. The place was numb, but inside the bone a dull, burning pain was spreading.

"His head don't seem to be cracked," Vincent muttered. "I guess he'll live." Then fury boiled and Vincent snarled. "What'n hell was he doing in here anyway? Don't lie to me!"

"I told you the truth, Joe. He came here about—Lisa. He's sure I know something."

Their voices sounded far away, faint. But Bill lay inertly, eyes closed, conscious that he should be thinking fast and to the point, and unable to sort out the blurred thoughts.

He heard Vincent say angrily: "How'd he get on your track?"

Aline replied despairingly: "I don't know, but he's sure of it."

"Then if he gets out of here, there'll be hell to pay. I don't know why I got mixed up with a hot coal like you!" Vincent gritted. "Does anyone else know he's here?"

"I—I don't know, Joe. Why?"

"Your window opens on the alley?"

"Yes."

"It's dark down there. No one'll be around. I could shove him out the window and let 'em guess where he came from."

Bill got plainly the horrified protest in her voice. "You can't do that! I

won't stand for it. I—I'll go to the police first!"

"You won't go anywhere but with me now," said Joe Vincent roughly. "And I ain't going to shove him out. He might have someone down in the lobby. Nothing to do but leave him here. He shoved in here without a warrant, and pulled a rod on me when I came to see you. I guess that'll hold him if he makes a squawk. Anyone who works for Randolph and the *Telegraph* ain't going to get much of a break around this town for awhile. Grab that bag and come on."

The door closed behind them. Bill tried to sit up. He couldn't make it. Some circuit in his head was crossed, so that the lower part of his body was helpless. A chill of apprehension gripped him. Suppose it don't go away? Suppose he had to lie here until a maid found him? For the first time in his life he knew utter helplessness, and the feeling brought a touch of horror.

Then slowly sensation entered his legs, and he could move his foot, and finally sit up with an effort. When he got to his feet, he staggered drunkenly, and brought up against the dresser, holding the edge with both hands.

In the mirror a haggard, drawn face stared back at him. A red seep of blood was smeared down in front of the left ear. Bill addressed his reflection with a sick grin.

"You look," he said, "as if a truck hit you."

He walked into the bathroom, bathed his face in cold water and felt better. His voice was steady when he picked up the telephone and called police headquarters. Sergeant Schon was still at the desk.

"Warner again, hey?" said Sergeant Schon. "Well, you certainly

laid a honey on the line tonight. Don't tell me you've got another one."

"All I've got right now's a sore head," Bill said. "Is Inspector Vaughn around?"

"He is *not*," said Schon cheerfully. "And if you ask me he won't be all night. Vaughn's out looking for an odd pair of legs and some dope on this case. Anything we can do for you?"

"Plenty," said Bill. "Send out an alarm for Joe Vincent. He walked out of the Greville a little while ago with Aline Price, a hostess at the Club Paradise. She knows something about this case. I'd try to run her down myself and hog her story, but I'm not giving either of them any breaks on this Lisa Barnes case."

The wire was silent.

"Did you hear what I said?"

Schon cleared his throat audibly.

"Are you sure it was Joe Vincent?"

"I know that smooth bird well enough."

"There's always a chance for a mistake," Schon reminded slowly.

"So it's that way, eh?"

"Don't get me wrong," Sergeant Schon said hastily. "We'll pick Vincent up as quick as anyone—but we want the rap right. You know how it is."

"Yeah—I know how it is."

"Personally," said Schon uncomfortably, "I hope we get him quick."

"Never mind the soap," Bill said shortly. "You might pass the word around that if Vincent isn't found pretty quick, the *Telegraph* will be asking why."

"It won't be the first thing the *Telegraph* has screamed about," Schon retorted heavily. "Are you going out for Vincent, too, tonight?"

"I am not," Bill said. "You might pass that along too—so nobody will

looking for me. Vincent's your baby tonight. I'm going to bed. Good night."

BILL took another look at his face. The seep of blood out of his hair had stopped. He retrieved his straw hat from the bed, his gun from the floor, made a quick search of the room. Aline Price had packed only one bag. Her locked trunk was still there. Bureau drawers and closet had been cleaned out.

He walked down the stairs to the lobby, and asked at the desk: "Has Miss Price checked out?"

The reply was, "No. Miss Price is still here. Shall I ring her room?"

"Never mind," said Bill. He went into the bar and had a drink. It made his head feel better. But he kept seeing Lisa Barnes as she had been when he last saw her alive—and as she had been out there on the wet ground. He caught a taxi and went to the newspaper offices. Bowerman, the City Editor, called to him as he entered the city room.

"Any more dope on that murder?"

"I'm full of thoughts," Bill said.

"Mr. Randolph wants you."

"I had an idea," Bill said, and went upstairs to Randolph's private office.

Molly O'Conner, Randolph's private secretary, looked relieved when Bill entered the reception room.

"It's a good thing you got here, Bill. The boss is—is—"

"Biting the furniture," Bill finished.

"I'll tell him you're here."

"First," said Bill, "the usual greetings, Miss O'Conner."

AGAINST her desk he cornered Miss O'Conner, who some day would be be Mrs. Bill, and kissed her soundly on the mouth. And

just then the inner door opened and John Randolph viewed the sacrilege against his office discipline.

"You're fired!" he yelled at Bill before he thought; and amended it hastily, "No, you're not! What's the meaning of this, Miss O'Conner? Come in here, Warner! Have you seen the *Leader*?"

Bill covered Molly's confusion by entering and grinning nastily at his boss.

"I have," he said. "And I got a laugh. You can't hand it out all the time without getting some yourself now and then."

Randolph was red-faced, angry as he slammed the door, all thought of Molly O'Conner gone.

"I'll ram that down their throats! I want to beat the police in the solution of this mystery! I want the *Telegraph* to do it! And I want it done in a hurry!"

"In fact, you want a miracle," Bill suggested.

Randolph glared at him. "If that's what it takes, then I want a miracle! What do you suggest?"

"I came in to ask you," Bill said. "How much will you back me up in this?"

"All the way!"

"That's a long way. Are you man enough to stand behind it?"

Randolph quieted and stared at him.

"Just what's on your mind, Warner?"

"Mayhem," said Bill. "And a lot more. What I want to know is how much backing do I get after I get into trouble?"

"Hmmm," said Randolph. "So you intend to get into trouble? You must have an idea."

"I'm full of them."

Randolph struck the desk with his fist.

"Go ahead. I'll back you up. But —er—I trust your discretion."

Bill laughed shortly.

"Cold feet already? Well, you do keep your word. Better stay up tonight. I might need you."

"I'll be here," Randolph promised.

"Do you need any help?"

"None," said Bill, turning to the door.

"I'd like to know what you intend to do," Randolph called after him.

"That," said Bill over his shoulder as he went out, "depends on what happens."

Moll O'Conner was disturbed. "Bill, what are you up to? You look as grim as death."

"I was thinking about Lisa Barnes," said Bill. "Kiss me again and wish me luck, Miss O'Conner."

"Bill you're crazy tonight."

"I intend to enjoy the state while I have the chance," Bill said, getting his kiss and departing with a grin.

But Bill sobered before he reached the elevator. He was jumpy and nervous underneath as he thought of what lay ahead.

CHAPTER V

Maury Owen's Fortress

MAURY Owen had the policy racket. Two million—four—six million a year. The take had never been proved, any more than that Maury Owen controlled the racket. But the wise ones knew—and Maury Owen lived on the scale of a millionaire from the income of a night club, a mid-town garage and several small parcels of real estate.

Maury Owen's house had once belonged to a millionaire. It had been modified during the bootleg days, when Owen had gotten his start. Steel shut-

ters and doors, cellar windows bricked up, burglar alarm system installed. The need for all that had passed—but the scarcely noticeable, fortress-like features of the house remained. Bill had looked over the layout a year back when he called one evening on newspaper business.

He had been interested then to observe that the iron-fenced grounds were still patrolled by two guards. Maury Owen had been engagingly candid about the guards, had shrugged:

"I've made enemies. I've a wife and two daughters. I can't take chances—even if I'm only a business man now. Beer? I got out of the beer game when the government wouldn't license my breweries. The laundry racket? Is there a laundry racket? I wouldn't know. I'm inside the law now. But don't try to get into this place after dark. The boys might make a mistake."

Very engaging—Maury Owen. Out of the limelight, seldom seen—well-guarded night and day. Well-guarded to-night, Bill saw as he drove his small sedan along Montrose Drive. In the street light's glow a shadowy figure lounged carelessly inside the closed iron gate. Back through the trees several lighted windows were visible in Maury Owen's big house. Someone was up there.

Bill smiled thinly with satisfaction, turned off Montrose Drive and went several blocks to an all-night garage. He stopped at the gas pumps in front.

"Fill it up," he said to the man who came out. "How about using your telephone?"

"Sure. Help yourself. In the office there."

Bill looked in the telephone directory, found the address he wanted, called Fire Headquarters.

"Fire at 4930 Montrose Drive," he said sharply, and hung up and strolled out.

"Two twenty-four," the man said, and gave change and turned back in the garage without interest in the customer.

Bill drove slowly to the corner, then speeded around the block and back to Montrose Drive. He parked in the shadows under the shade trees fifty yards from Montrose, and hurried toward the corner.

Fire sirens and bells were rapidly approaching. Bill stopped across the street and watched the clamorous arrival of the fire trucks. A hose truck paused at a fire plug down the street, and came on more slowly, stringing hose out the back.

The guard had the gates opened, was on the sidewalk staring when a ponderous hook and ladder swung around the hose truck and turned into the grounds, almost running the guard down.

Bill saw the fellow yell something, stare after the hook and ladder rushing toward the house, and then sprint after it. The hose truck followed, stringing hose.

Bill ran across the street and entered the property unobserved. Other fire sirens were approaching as he went.

The lawn was open and free of trees. But there was no moon tonight. Once away from the driveway Bill was invisible as he made his way to the side of the house.

He regretted the false alarm, then thought of Lisa Barnes and put the thought aside. The front porch of the house was blazing with light. Occupants were out meeting the fireman. The pulsing engines of the firetrucks drowned all sounds, but there was no

trouble in making out the tall figure of Maury Owen talking to the firemen.

Bill sighed with relief, and then watched while firemen ran around the house directing lights up toward the roof. A driveway ran past the house under a porte-cochère. A fireman came out the porte-cochère door and hurried to the back of the house; and Bill walked out of the night and entered the house through the same unguarded porte-cochère door.

THERE was a library in the front corner, on this side. Bill opened the first door to the right and found himself in the deserted library. He stepped behind full length window hangings and relaxed. This part had stumped him—getting to Maury Owen when Owen didn't want to be seen—getting inside the guarded grounds, the fortress-like house.

A bottle and a partly-emptied glass were on a table beside an easy chair. A magazine lay on the floor beside the chair. Owen had been up, wide awake, for some reason or another, when the fire trucks arrived.

Bill heard people coming into the house. A woman's querulous voice was audible. "I *can't* understand it. Why should anyone turn in a false alarm about this house?"

Men called orders out in front. The fire trucks started back. The front door closed with a bang. An impatient voice spoke outside the library door.

"Some crank tried to be funny. Go back to sleep. I'll stay up. That phone call hasn't come yet."

Bill had the stubby revolver in his hand when the library door opened and closed. The palm of his hand felt sweaty. His mouth was dry. He'd written up this sort of thing for years—but it was different now.

Silence followed for a moment. He heard the glass set back on the table. Maury Owen uttered an oath and sat down heavily in the chair. The magazine was picked up. Bill waited a few moments and noiselessly stepped out into the room.

The side of the chair was toward him. Maury Owen caught the movement, looked up with a startled jerk of his head. "*What the hell!*"

"Quiet, damn you!" Bill said under his breath. "I'll shoot you, if you even look cross-eyed at me!"

The rasp in his voice must have carried conviction. Maury Owen sat rigid. The magazine which he had dropped in his lap slid slowly to one side and fell on the floor with a soft rustle of leaves.

Owen was a tall man, well built, showing every evidence of the college degree he was reputed to have taken before empty pockets and a perverted brilliance had thrown him into the beer and whiskey trade in the first illegal days after prohibition.

That same brilliance had kept him alive and on top, and when conditions had changed had guided him to the river of easy money in the policy racket. Even now Bill had a reluctant feeling of admiration as he eyed the good-looking, black-haired figure, barely showing traces of gray at the temples.

"How did *you* get in here?" Owen asked.

"I walked in," said Bill. "I rather thought you'd be here tonight. At home—the perfect citizen, husband and father—while the cops are trying to find who killed Lisa Barnes."

A twitching eyelid was the only sign the name meant anything. "This is going to make you plenty of trouble, Warner."

Bill grinned at him—and at sight of the grin, Maury Owen began to look uncomfortable.

"Trouble?" Bill said softly, in case anyone in the house was within hearing distance. "If I have to kill you, I'll fade out the same way I came in. So what?"

"So what?" said Maury Owen slowly. His hands were on his knees, his body was motionless. His eyes were the only alive thing about him. They smoldered like coals which a breath would fan into flame.

"So we're going to find out who killed Lisa Barnes this evening."

Maury Owens nodded. "I heard about her a little while ago—over the telephone. I hope they find out who did it." An unpleasant smile touched the thin mouth. "But I'm afraid I can't help you, Warner. I was at my garage until ten, and then I came home."

"An airtight alibi, eh?" said Bill. "But this isn't court. I'm not a judge. And Joe Vincent cracked your alibi for me when he slugged me with his gun." Bill pushed his hat over and touched the blood-caked gash on the side of his head which he had not taken time to have dressed.

Maury Owen looked at it calmly.

"What Joe Vincent does is none of my business. Why did he hit you? He probably had a reason he can explain."

"Probably," Bill agreed, with another savage grin. "But can you explain it—to me?"

"I'm not very good at explaining anything," Maury Owen said casually. He lifted his right hand, turned the finger nails in, looked at them, then dropped the hand on the overstuffed arm of the chair, with the fingertips down out of sight.

Bill thought nothing of it until he saw the tendon of the middle finger lifted slightly as it tightened.

"Stand up!" Bill snapped. "Get away from that chair! Turn your back to me!"

Bill stepped to the right side of the chair. His fingers exploring down under the curve of the leather encountered a small push button. He moved the chair, and had to lift the front leg on that side to do it. Flush with the nap of the rug, where the leg had rested, were the twin holes of a tiny electric plug.

"What does that button do?" Bill demanded.

"Turns on lights about the grounds that summon the guards," Maury Owen said over his shoulder. "Hadn't you better make a run for it, Warner? Or put up that gun and get out? I'm willing to overlook this if you are."

"I'll bet you are," Bill said through his teeth. "But I warned you. This is for Joe Vincent—with interest."

Bill palmed the revolver and slammed it against the black, faintly graying hair. He caught Owen as he fell, and dragged him behind the chair and jumped for the door, for already he heard running feet coming up on the front porch.

THE guards carried keys to the house. They seemed to know what to do. The first man to the door inserted a key without knocking or ringing the bell.

Bill stood inside the library door. His heart was hammering, his palms were sweating again. He could see Maury Owen's feet and ankles protruding from behind the chair. They were ominously lax. Bill wondered if he had killed the man.

The front door opened. Steps came into the hall. They paused, came on to the library door. Bill crouched behind the door as the guard entered. It was a burly fellow, breathing hard, who paused with his hand on the door-knob and looked uncertainly about the room. The other hand was under the front of his coat, at his belt.

Running steps were crossing the gravel drive in front of the porch. There wasn't time to parley or risk sound. Bill palmed the blunt, heavy revolver again and jumped as the man turned his head and saw him.

An instant's delay would have been too late. The fellow dodged with unexpected quickness. The gun barely caught him on the slant of the broad, muscular jaw. But that was the better place after all. It knocked him out cleanly, prize ring style. He fell forward on his face. The gun he had been drawing thudded on the rug.

The other man was coming through the front door as Bill jumped into the library doorway. The look on the newcomer's face was a comical mixture of surprise and sudden terror as he saw the gun covering him. His hands went up.

"Come in here!" Bill said under his breath.

The guard sidled in past him, staring at his mate on the floor, and at the pair of legs showing beyond the big easy chair. This one was thinner, with a hooked nose and a tight, furtive mouth; and as Bill closed the door he gulped: "What is it?"

"Bad news for you," said Bill. "How many more out there?"

"No more." The man wet his lips. "If it's a clean-up, I'll string along with you. I don't want—that." He nodded at Maury Owen's feet.

"Owen will be glad to hear how

you feel," Bill said. "Turn around." He took the man's gun, frisked him quickly for other weapons, and then hesitated, not sure what to do with him.

They both started as a telephone on a table against the wall began to ring sharply.

"Lie down on the floor," Bill ordered.

The telephone rang again as the man obeyed. Bill backed hastily over to it and lifted the receiver. The smooth, clipped voice of Joe Vincent said, "That you, Boss?"

Bill grunted assent.

Vincent said: "You sound funny. That big dick Bronson tipped me there's a warrant out for me. That reporter sang to headquarters as soon as he could talk. I shoulda clipped him all the way."

Bill grunted again.

"But I'm okay as long as I don't walk up an' slap their faces," Vincent said. "I've got the break we've been looking for. Louie the Butch seems to be the answer. Want me to see him?"

"Yes," said Bill gruffly, since there seemed to be nothing else to say. "Where's the Price girl?"

"She's in 407. She's jittery, but she'll do all right."

"What's your phone number there?"

"I'm around the corner at the bus station. You'll have to look up the number. Ask for John Pratt, if you call me. She's Miss Van Winkle. Anything else?"

"No," said Bill.

"You'll be hearing from me," Vincent promised. "Better stay up in case you get a call."

Bill slammed the receiver down. Maury Owen was stirring feebly, still

half-unconscious. The first guard was still out.

"Get up and come with me," Bill ordered the second man. He had the lead he wanted. It promised to be as good as he could get from Maury Owen. And Owen did not know the call had come through.

THE guard accompanied him in sullen silence—out of the house down the driveway to the gate. He had to unlock the gate. As they crossed the Montrose Drive toward the side street where the sedan was parked, Bill asked him: "Who is Louie the Butch?"

"Never heard of him. Say, what's the payoff on this? Where we going?"

"I'm giving you a chance to run for it," said Bill. "I told Owen you let me in the gate for a century note. You'd better get out of town and keep going."

"The boss thinks I double-crossed him?"

"You heard me."

"Jeese—you fixed me in this man's town! What'll I do?"

"Start down Montrose Avenue and keep going," Bill suggested.

His prisoner left hastily. Bill jumped into his sedan and drove downtown. There were two bus stations. But only one of them had a hotel around the corner. The Eagle Hotel, as he remembered it. A dingy, third-rate place next to an alley. He recalled nothing about it that led in any way to Maury Owen or Joe Vincent. But room 407 would have the answer to that.

The Eagle Hotel was the name. A colored porter was swabbing the linoleum floor with a dirty mop. An assortment of soiled, tired looking people with cheap suitcases and paper-wrapped packages were at the desk getting

rooms. Off a bus, Bill judged. The clerk and a lone bellhop were busy with the newcomers. A seedy looking individual reading a paper in one of the lobby chairs paid no attention as Bill walked to the elevator. The porter put down his mop and followed him into the elevator.

"Four," Bill said.

The elevator creaked slowly up without an answer from the glum looking porter. The elevator promptly descended as Bill walked along the fourth floor corridor. A light was showing through the transom of 407. Bill knocked softly.

The door was cautiously opened an inch or so. Bill shoved hard with his shoulder, went in with his gun out ready for trouble. But Aline Price was the only occupant. He thought she was going to faint at sight of him. She backed off with the back of her hand going up against her mouth to smother a gasp.

"So it's Miss Van Winkle now?" said Bill. "Where's Joe Vincent?"

She shook her head mutely. She was fully dressed. The room was blue with cigarette smoke. A pint bottle, partly empty, and a glass pitcher of ice water were on the shabby dresser.

"Where can I find Louie the Butch?" Bill snapped.

"I don't know him," she whimpered.

"Come on. And no more of this," Bill ordered. He touched the raw gash in his hair. "I owe you something for that, you tricky little cat."

She whimpered again.

"I hardly knew what I was doing, Bill. I didn't know he was going to do that."

"At least," Bill grudgingly admitted, "you tried to stop him from shoving me out the window. Let's get out of here where I can talk to you."

"You're not going to turn me over to the police, Bill?"

Sheer panic was in her voice. It was understandable enough—in view of Lisa Barnes. "That depends on what you tell me," Bill said. "Not right away, anyway."

SHE put a hand to the bedpost to steady herself. The hand was trembling. "I didn't have anything to do with it, Bill. You've got to believe that. But I was her friend. She did talk to me a little. Some people think more. I'll probably be the next one if you turn me over to the police."

"That," said Bill, "is a laugh. The cops will carve you up too, I suppose."

She answered with an effort.

"Not that. But—but there's no telling what they'll do. Some of them take orders."

"Yes," said Bill. "Too damn many of them. Orders from Maury Owen. From Joe Vincent and such swine."

"I suppose so." She sounded hopeless. "But Joe Vincent is trying to help me, Bill. Trying to keep me out of sight until they find who killed Lisa."

"That," said Bill, "is another laugh. Vincent doesn't know who did it, I suppose. He's playing Sir Galahad, hiding you here, and trying on the side to help the police."

Aline nodded, swallowed. "That's just it, Bill. I don't think he's sure how much Lisa told me. He's not sure what will come out if the wrong people try to make me talk."

"Joe came to the Paradise tonight and told me Lisa had been murdered, and I might be next—and he'd hide me away where I'd be safe until this thing was cleared up. I was frightened, Bill. Joe has been pretty friendly to me. He never got out of line. I took

him up on it. And then you came in and—accused me of having a part in it. Trouble right away—just like Joe warned. I wasn't thinking straight, I guess. Joe seemed the only safe way. So I helped him."

She was so earnest, so desperately trying to make him believe, that Bill eyed her narrowly, wondering.

"Get your hat and come along," he decided. "We'll talk this over somewhere else. The *Telegraph* will see you're safe."

She came rather hopelessly, it seemed, leaving her suitcase. And just before they reached the turn of the corridor, the elevator let someone out and started down. Wondering if it were Joe Vincent, Bill put his hand under his coat on the gun.

But it was only the seedy stranger who had been sitting in the lobby chair. Something in the man's quick side look as they passed made Bill look over his shoulder quickly. The man was swinging around with his hand under his coat.

Bill whirled, snatching out the gun, jumping to one side as he saw the frantic flash of purpose on the stubble-covered face. The gun roared deafeningly in the quiet passage. Bill felt the bullet burn his side. And his own gun, almost touching the other weapon, blew it out of the hand which held it. The man staggered back holding his mangled hand.

Aline Price had screamed. When Bill looked for her, he saw her vanishing around the turn in the corridor. A light came on behind the nearest door transom. The hall would be boiling with people in a moment. Bill did the only thing possible. He sprinted after Aline.

She was just vanishing down the stairs. He followed, caught up with her,

gripped her arm. "Steady!" he panted. "I didn't kill him. Let's try to get out of here without any trouble."

She nodded mutely. They passed the third floor, started down toward the second. And heard doors opening on the third floor, voices. And heard the elevator starting up from the lobby.

"Did you know he was going to do that?" Bill demanded.

Aline shook her head. "I never saw him before, Bill."

The man was not following them. They passed the second floor, started down to the lobby. The elevator had stopped at the fourth floor. Faint, excited voices were audible up there.

Clerk, bellhop, porter had vanished from the lobby. The new guests had evidently been taken up before the shots. And the sidewalk outside was deserted.

Bill blurted with relief, "This way. My car's near the corner." But just before they reached the sedan, Bill swore dismally under his breath. A police scout car had turned the corner—and stopped so abruptly the tires squealed on the asphalt. An authoritative voice called:

"Wait a minute, Warner!"

CHAPTER VI

Sailing Down the Bay

I THOUGHT it was too good to last," Bill groaned as a tall, broad-shouldered figure jumped out of the car. He recognized Inspector Vaughn.

Vaughn took one look as he reached them, and said: "This wouldn't be the Price girl you phoned in about, would it?"

Aline stood silent. She looked pale, desperate.

Bill grinned. He knew it was feeble,

but he grinned. "What makes you think so?" he asked.

"I stopped by headquarters and heard about it," said Vaughn, eyeing her. "There wasn't too much being done about it, I gathered. But as long as your name was coupled with it, I thought it was worth looking up. Joe Vincent's cousin owns the Eagle Hotel back there. I had a hunch, and was on my way there to look around when I saw you."

Bill breathed an inward sigh of relief. He had thought a police alarm had been radioed about the shooting. Evidently phone calls from alarmed guests had been stopped at the desk while the clerk went up to investigate. He took a chance on the Inspector.

"This is Aline Price, Vaughn. Do me a favor. Forget about her for a little while. I'll be responsible. I made the complaint. But I didn't sign anything. I'll withdraw it if necessary."

"What's the answer?" Vaughn questioned, regarding him keenly.

Bill was straining to hear the first sign of alarm back at the hotel. All quiet there. He glanced casually back. No one had emerged from the entrance as yet. But any moment now . . .

"I want to talk to her," Bill said. "Have you had any luck?"

Vaughn spat disgustedly. "None at all."

"Do you know who Louie the Butch is?"

Inspector Vaughn stared at him. "Why bring him up?"

"I heard his name. Who is he?"

"Louis Traux is his name. He used to be a butcher," Vaughn said. "Then he got into Chicago beer and handled a gun for one of the mobs. He was sent up in this state about seven years ago for killing a man he caught with

his wife. About three years ago he was paroled to John Bricker.

"Bricker said the man had been a model prisoner and he wanted to give him a chance, and would keep him in his household. Got quite a sob story about it. Since then Traux has been around Bricker. He drives Bricker's car, attends to his boat and serves as a guard for Bricker—and, I've always thought, keeps a few strings out into the underworld. Louie knows everyone who counts and keeps contact. I've had my eye on him."

"Bricker," said Bill slowly. "I'll be damned! Does Bricker trust this fellow?"

"Why not? Louie got life. He goes back any time Bricker says the word. And he knows if he takes it on the lam Bricker will see he's brought back. With Bricker running politics around here, Louie couldn't get away with it. But why lam? He's got it soft and easy. He seems to like it."

"Would you go after Bricker if you had a case?" Bill asked.

"I'd go after the President if I had a case," Vaughn said promptly. He hesitated. "But it wouldn't do much good with Bricker. No one will ever get anything on him. I'd only lose my job. And I've got a family to support. But why ask? Have you got anything on Bricker?"

"No," said Bill slowly. "Nothing worth your job—right now. Forget it. But do me another favor, will you? Go back to headquarters and hang around near the phone?"

"You're up to something," Vaughn accused.

"I don't know whether I am or not," Bill confessed. "Will you do it?"

"I was going back to headquarters

anyway," Vaughn admitted. "I'll be there. But watch your step. I think you're getting in deep water. Where's Joe Vincent?"

"I don't know."

"I'll stop in at the hotel and ask a few questions," Vaughn decided as they parted.

Bill turned the corner and drove fast out of the neighborhood. Beside him Aline Price was taut with tension.

"He'll find out," she said. "He'll come after us both."

"Probably," Bill agreed. "I'm going to leave you at the paper. You'll come out ahead if you talk straight to Randolph, the owner."

"I've talked straight to you," she defended herself.

BILL parked in the alley behind the *Telegraph* building. Presses were roaring. Trucks were loading bundles of papers. They went in the back entrance, up the freight elevator to Randolph's office.

Molly O'Conner was sitting behind her desk, hat and coat on, pale and worried. "Bill, what have you been doing? Mr. Randolph is in a state."

"Is he in there?"

"Yes," said Molly, eyeing Aline Price with more than a little hostility.

Bill took his companion in without knocking. John Randolph came out of his desk chair with a snort.

"Who is this, Warner?"

"Aline Price, Lisa Barnes' best friend. One of Maury Owen's men has been trying mighty hard to hide her away."

"Maury Owen!" Randolph exploded. His hair was ruffled. His manner had a wild, harrassed look. "Owen called me up a little while ago and said you broke into his house and ran amuck with a gun. What the devil

have you been trying to do? I told you I'd back you up, but—but—"

"Stop butting!" Bill snapped. "You took an order and now it's being delivered. Can't you handle a crook like Maury Owen?"

"In a court of law things are viewed in a different way. What sort of publicity is this for the *Telegraph*?"

"I wouldn't know," said Bill. "Damn the *Telegraph*. You haven't seen anything yet. I'm going out to see John Bricker."

"With that gun? And the same methods?"

"I'll yank him out of bed if necessary."

"I forbid it, Warner!" said Randolph as he visualized the results of such treatment by a *Telegraph* reporter to the big political boss. He pounded the desk. "Stay here! Give me that gun!"

"You asked for it and now you're going to get it," said Bill. "Stay here and see what happens."

"Warner!" Randolph yelled as Bill made for the door. "*I forbid you—*"

Bill slammed the door on the rest.

Molly had her hand over the phone. "Bill!" she gasped. "What does this mean? Inspector Vaughn wants to know if you've come here with a woman. He sounds irate."

"Tell him I've come and gone."

"What does it mean, Bill?"

"Trouble," said Bill heading out the door without stopping. "Better take Randolph a powder. He needs it."

Vaughn had found out about the gunwork at the Eagle Hotel. He was on the warpath now. Vaughn wouldn't try to hush that up. Bill reviewed the outlook as he drove fast through the deserted streets. His conclusions were pessimistic. He was accomplishing things—and at the same time heading

for a court sentence as fast as humanly possible. Vaughn probably had a radio alarm out for his apprehension already.

John—Boss Bricker—Bull Bricker to those who knew him well, was another who had feathered his nest well. In his youth he had been a professional wrestler, and had abandoned that for the surer—and more lucrative—returns of smart politics. His fortune had come from the real estate and insurance business. His business had prospered because it paid to deal with the political boss.

Bricker lived in exclusive Bay Shore Hills, on the south side of the bay, well out, where rolling, wooded hills coming down almost to the water had been developed and landscaped, and the Bay Shore Yacht Club had its headquarters.

Bill was so sure of what he was doing that he did not hesitate when he saw the headlights of an automobile coming out of the Bricker grounds. He turned into the driveway and stopped it.

An angry, impatient voice addressed him as he ran to the side of the other car.

"Well, well, what's this? Get that car out of the way! I'm in a hurry!"

"As I live and breathe," said Bill. "Henry Conyers!"

"Eh? Who is it? Oh!"

"Yes, 'oh!'" Bill said. "Now I wonder what brought you here at this time of the night."

Henry Conyers cleared his throat. He seemed stunned. But he made a peppery attempt to assert himself, "I came here on business, Warner. I won't have this high-handed treatment!"

"Now that I think of it," said Bill, "you own part of the Conyers' Brewery. And there have been rumors about the brewery and politics. And

I've been wondering how in hell anyone could have known where Lisa Barnes was to meet us when only she, myself, John Randolph and you knew it. I begin to see a light. Cut off that motor and come back to the house with me."

Henry Conyers choked. It might have been indignation, anger—or anything.

"I'll make trouble about this, young man!"

"You've found trouble right now," said Bill, and he opened the door and prodded Conyers with the gun. "Come on, you pompous little snake!"

Henry Conyers came, breathing hard, saying nothing. And as they walked to the house Bill demanded, "Who's inside?"

"John Bricker."

"Who else?"

"No one."

THE grounds sloped down from the road. Trees and shrubbery loomed darkly on either side. Beyond the cut stone house, Bill knew, there was a wide stretch of turf to the water's edge, and a small pier and boat-house. But at the moment he was interested only in the house. The porch was dark. One front room was lighted.

The front door was unlocked. Bill tried the knob. The door opened. He shoved Henry Conyers in ahead of him. And from the lighted room to the right of the entrance hall appeared the heavy-set figure of Bull Bricker.

"What's this, Conyers?" he asked, scowling suddenly in the reflected light from the doorway as he saw Bill.

"This," said Bill, "is hell on wheels, Bricker." He gave Henry Conyers a shove that sent him staggering past Bricker into the lighted room.

Bricker had a dark stubble on his

face. His necktie and collar were loosened. He barred Bill's way threateningly. "What the devil are you doing?" His heavy hand fell on Bill's shoulder—and then hastily came away as Bill gouged him in the paunch with the stubby gun barrel.

"That's right," said Bill. "In there with him. And where's Louie the Butch?"

Bill was prodding Bricker in the back as he followed him through the doorway. Bricker didn't have a chance to answer. From beside the doorway a pair of arms shot out and grabbed Bill around the neck and yanked him back off balance.

Bill whipped the gun around and fired a shot. He missed. Bricker whirled as if he had been expecting the attack. In a moment it was over. Bricker had the gun. Bill was on the floor struggling helplessly as he was throttled. He caught a glimpse of the broad, muscular, grinning face behind him. He was gasping and weak when the pressure eased up.

The man spoke in a husky voice.

"What'll I do with him, Boss?"

Bricker spoke to Henry Conyers. "Who the devil is this?"

"He's that fellow Warner, from the *Telegraph*."

"So?" said Bricker. "And what does he want?"

"I think—I think he's here to make trouble. I think he's guessed a lot," said Henry Conyers with difficulty. "He stopped me outside and forced me to come back with him."

"No. He was in his car alone."

"Then he must be alone in it," Bricker decided. "We'll take care of him."

"Not—not another one?" Conyers faltered.

"You fool—what else."

"One thing leads to another! We're getting in worse all the time! If I had known this ghastly business would turn out this way I—I—"

"You wouldn't have called me in such a hurry and begged me to do something about the Barnes girl," Bricker said roughly. He swore at the smaller lawyer. "Sit down. Take a drink. Steady yourself. I'll be back in a few minutes. Clip him, Louie."

Bill saw the fist coming, but he couldn't dodge it. The smash on the jaw knocked him cold.

Very cold.

He came to in darkness, doubled up in a cramped position. His face was against another face. John Bricker was speaking just behind him.

"Well down the bay and tie plenty of iron on them, Louis. And hurry up."

"Okay, Boss."

Bricker left. A motor began to throb. Bill realized he was in a boat and the boat was putting down the bay—and when it came back he would be on the bottom of the bay. And as he moved cautiously he realized he was huddled against a dead man. The flesh was already cooling.

THE gruesome shock cleared his mind. Dimly he could see that he must be on the cabin floor of a small, fast cruiser. Faintly silhouetted in front of him he could see the steersman at the wheel. His groping hand reaching out touched pieces of loose pipe, a coil of wire.

Gritting his teeth, Bill staggered up, clutching one of the pieces of pipe. It was longer than he thought—three feet at least. The steersman felt him moving and whirled around. A gun blasted fire. Bill felt the bullet smash into his leg. A second shot hit him in the left

shoulder as he got the long pipe gripped right and began to swing wildly with it.

He felt the sodden impact of metal hitting bone. And then the fellow was down, the boat was running wildly, and Bill hit a seat as he fell and steadied himself. He drew matches and struck one. The feeble flame was enough. The dead man was Joe Vincent. And the wild blow with the pipe had split the head of Louie the Butch. At least blood was gushing out.

Bill struck another match, found a light with a switch underneath and turned it on. He got the gun. Joe Vincent had been throttled to death also. Louie the Butch had a fractured skull, but his heart was still beating. Bill turned out the light and staggered to the steering wheel and turned the boat around.

A flashlight was winking on shore in some sort of a signal. Bill didn't know what it meant. But he made for the light. The waving flashlight beam showed him the pier and boathouse. He missed them and ran the boat ashore.

The motor was still running, the propeller churning as Bill staggered out of the cabin, dropped over the side in water to his waist, and floundered ashore with the gun cocked to meet the oncoming flashlight.

A familiar voice shouted: "Watch out with that gun, Warner! This is Inspector Vaughn!"

Bill was chuckling a bit wildly when Vaughn reached him. "I almost shot you," he said. "That would have made the night perfect. Where's Bricker?"

"My partner has got him and Conyers back there at the boathouse. I got to thinking about what you said about Bricker, and decided to run out here when I couldn't locate you. We

found Bricker getting into a car in the driveway entrance that looked like yours. Had your initials on the door. He had some wild story about having found it there and wanting to get it out of the way so his guest could leave. We heard the boat motor out on the water and shots, and brought the two of them down here to see what was happening. And what," Vaughn demanded, "is happening?"

"Bring them here," Bill said. "I'm wounded. Louie the Butch did it. Joe Vincent is in the boat there dead. Louie was going to sink us both on the bottom. I guess that's where the rest of Lisa Barnes is."

The three men were approaching. Vaughn's flashlight played over them. But it was Bill who spoke. "You're sunk, Bricker. Your man's in there with Joe Vincent. Both of you will make the chair for this—and Lisa

Barnes. John Randolph will see to that."

Henry Conyers answered, wildly: "You see, Bricker! I knew it! That's what comes of listening to a butcher! You told me you let him play that ghastly farce because it would frighten everyone else who might talk! And instead see what it's done! Maury Owen even sent his man to find out who did it. Damn you! Damn you!"

Bill grabbed hold of Inspector Vaughn to keep from falling.

"You can get it all straightened out now," he said weakly. "Better get me to a doctor or I won't be here to see them tried. And, Vaughn—"

"Sure. I'll have my car back here in a minute."

"When you get time," said Bill blissfully, "call Randolph at the *Telegraph*. Tell him he asked for it—and he got it."

On the Crime Front

IN Missouri, sometimes called the "Show-Me" state, Avery Brown was committed to jail for beating W. C. McKee, 83, over the head with a dog. Brown was tried for assault on McKee. In the testimony, McKee stated that Brown, who took a dislike to the aged man's small terrier, picked up the animal during a heated argument and beat him until the dog was dead. McKee, who was almost fatally injured, has recovered.

—Frankie Lewis.

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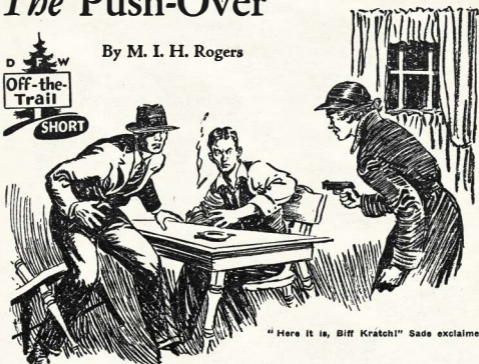
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The Push-Over



By M. I. H. Rogers



"Here it is, Biff Kratch!" Sade exclaimed

SADE NORTON stood tense and pale outside the door of the third-floor flat, waiting for her hand to stop trembling. She slid her key into the lock which she had carefully oiled that morning, floated the door open, and slipped inside, closing it softly behind her.

Here her dark-clad figure was just a shadow, moving stealthily toward the rear. The street lamp shining through a window revealed big black eyes in a white face, and one hand clutching at her throat. Creeping through the dining room, she paused just outside the kitchen and put an eye to the crack of the swing door.

A man sat in the breakfast nook

smoking a cigarette and reading the newspaper spread out before him. He was small and thin and colorless, but Sade's eyes softened as she watched him and she waited patiently.

Sade Norton Wanted Minnow to Go Straight. So When a Stir Pal Rooked Him into One Last Job, Sade Played Her Trump for a Showdown

Someone knocked furtively on the kitchen door and the little man sat up with a startled jerk. He was beside the door in three silent steps and had snapped on the outside light and turned

off the one in the kitchen. He lifted the edge of the shade and looked out. Immediately he pushed both buttons again and opened the door.

A big bulky fellow stepped into the kitchen. A black hat shaded the upper half of his face, leaving exposed a

heavy chin and thick, down-turned lips.

"Hello, Biff," the little man said eagerly, sticking out his hand. "Gosh, it's good to see you. How does it feel to be out of stir?"

Biff Kratch ignored the hand, advanced a step and looked about the kitchen. "Where's your woman?"

"Sade took my kid over to her sister's for a gab. Sit down and I'll set 'em up."

Still wearing his hat, Biff regarded the small green chair sneeringly before easing his huge bulk down upon it. He glowered past his shirt-sleeved host at the shining kitchen, the gay curtains and painted furniture.

The woman in the other room drew back her hand lest its angry trembling set the door in motion. She tightened her lips grimly, vowing this was the last time Minnow Norton played push-over for an ex-con. If he couldn't learn by himself, she was going to teach him.

Biff growled: "Listen, Minnow, I don't want to talk here. Your wife . . ."

"Aw, forget her. Sade and my kid won't be back for an hour." Minnow opened a cupboard and reached a skinny arm for a bottle. "Here, put this slug under your belt and unlap. I'm sure glad you got my word to come right here. I got a box all lined up. Didn't I promise you when I got out three years ago that I'd line up a stake for you? Well, I got it, and it's a push-over."

"I don't like this—" Biff made a violent sweeping gesture with his big arm. "It looks like you're on the up-and-up. That woman of yours must be bearing down and she hates my guts. How you going to square her for another job?" He stared at Norton with the round, unblinking eyes of a prowling cat.

Minnow hurriedly explained: "I have been going straight. It was all a build-up for this haul. It's going to be my last one. I want to lay up a stake for my kid, in case. . ."

Biff grunted. "What t'hell you tie yourself to a woman for?"

"Sade's a good woman." Minnow leaned forward, his eyes shining. "She waited for me while I was in stir and saved enough for us to get married. Being married ain't half bad. You ought to see my kid, Hansum. I call him *Hansum*—he . . ."

"Stow it!"

MINNOW gulped and grinned foolishly. "All right, Biff, but this job is the McCoy, and I've got it all cased. The busiest café in town. Their week-end take runs into thousands. We pull the job together, you blow town and I'm setting pretty."

"What if Sade gets wise?"

"I ain't telling her nothing. After the job's done, she'll come through. Sade's a push-over for me. Maybe I'll give her a fur coat."

"Give her a bust on the nose, for all I care."

"Leave Sade out of this." Minnow threw back his head and tossed off a drink. "She's off you because she wants me to keep my job and stay straight. She don't know what pals we always been. Anyway, I'll do the worrying about that."

"If she puts her face in, I'll shove it clear around her neck."

Trembling with anger, Sade forgot her intentions to remain unseen. She slid her hand into the pocket of her coat and brought out a stubby little automatic. Then she slammed the door back with a bang.

"Here it is, Biff Kratch!" Sade exclaimed.

Both men turned sharply—looked from her angry eyes to the little gun.

"What? You don't feel so much like shoving my face in?"

Minnow threw up his hands jerkily. "Aw, gee, Sade, that ain't no way to talk to a man just outa stir."

Sade ignored him. "You," she ordered Biff, "get out of here and let Minnow alone or I'll empty the whole clip into your vest. Get going."

Biff remained silent, a cold, deadly fury in his pale eyes.

Minnow rushed in again: "Biff came because I asked him to. Don't get so tough. He served full time and . . ."

"He'd 'a' got out when you did if he hadn't raised hell all the time with that rotten temper of his. Don't lie to me. I know why he's here. I ain't going to have you pulling no more jobs. Hear me?" Her voice rose hysterically.

"I tell you I won't have Biff in here. Keep this up and I'll turn him up, so help me." She jerked around and ran back through the dining room out of sight. A door banged behind her.

For a long moment Biff Kratch stared at the swinging door, his heavy face black with rage. Then he stood up with such a savage lunge that the little chair went spinning backwards.

"She can make you sit up and beg," he growled thickly, eyes pinched to a slit, "but she ain't got no call talking to me like that. This was your idea. I'm getting the hell outa here." He lurched toward the rear door and Minnow followed, anxiously conciliatory.

He called:

"Listen, Biff, meet me at Tony's any night after eight. This is too good to pass up. Don't let Sade get your goat." He followed the huge man down the stairs to the first turn, talking and

clutching at his shoulder. Biff brushed him off contemptuously.

A black cat, crouched on the railing, turned its head, eyes green in the light. With a vicious slap, the big ex-con knocked it from its perch and bared his teeth in a silent grin at its yowling skid to the floor below. Then swiftly and silently he disappeared around the turn.

II

SADE NORTON sat on the edge of the bed staring with dismal concentration at the empty crib across the room. The knocking at the door continued and Minnow's voice again: "Sade, let me in. I want to talk to you. Come on, open up, honey. I've got something to say to you."

Pleading was in his voice.

"I've heard it."

"I want to see Hansum."

"He ain't here."

At that, Minnow raised such a howl that Sade rose and opened the door. He brushed past her, investigated the empty crib, and faced her still expostulating.

Sade answered defiantly: "Hansum ain't coming back until you promise me not to have Biff here again. This house ain't safe with that big bully prowling around."

"Okay, if that's the way you feel, I'll promise. Let's go get him right now." The little man looked so unhappy that Sade drew him down beside her.

"Minnow, I want to talk to you. When are you going to get wise that none of them pen pals are friends? They just come here to sponge off you or to get you into trouble. You proved you can go straight and earn a living for Hansum and me. If it ain't enough, I'll get a job. . . ."

"Nix," Minnow said firmly. "Han-

sum needs his mother. Honest, Sade, Biff is different. I didn't want you to know about this, but it's the last job, I promise. It's for you and Hansum. Suppose something did happen? Suppose I got framed, or crippled, or something? Don't you see what a stake would mean?"

"It might mean going back to the pen. We don't need any stake, and the only way Biff is different is he's meaner. Me and the baby are the best friends you got. Can't you see that?"

"But I promised Biff—before I got out of the pen. He might get tough if I renege now, especially after I told him about that box at the café." Minnow put his arms around Sade, gave her a bear's hug and kissed her under the chin.

But she was firm.

"I ain't going to give in this time," she declared. "You said I was a push-over. Guess you're right, but not when you take a chance with the kid. I ain't going to have Hansum's father going to jail again."

"Not a chance, honey! This is safe as picking it off the street. I won't let Biff come here again."

"You might as well know that I mean what I say. If you get mixed up with the law again I take the baby and scam."

"You couldn't get along without me, honey." Minnow kissed her.

"That's what you think."

When Sade laid her ear against a crack in the wall of Tony's back room she heard Minnow's excited whisper: "This job was made for you, Biff. You're big enough to roll that crate over three feet to the partition where it can't be seen from the street. That saves bringing another to split the take three ways."

Sade twisted her neck to place her eye at the crack. Minnow's blue eyes glistened as he leaned elbows on the table, his small eager face framed by high thin shoulders. Biff Kratch sat staring somberly at the small man. He grunted something and Sade hastily applied her ear to the crack.

"How'd you get the combination?" Biff was asking.

"I eat my lunch there every day. About three times a month I spring a big bill on her and she can't always change it. Then I watch her open the safe. Here it is." Minnow handed over a slip of paper. "We don't even have to crack it." He preened proudly.

"Minnow, you fool!" Sade thought. "Biff ain't no heist man. All he's good for is strong arm stuff, and now he don't need you even to open the box. He's apt . . ." She watched Biff shove the paper into his pocket while his light cold eyes surveyed the eager face across from him, and her own went even more pale. Her heart slid down with a sickening lurch.

For three days she had tried to figure some out for her man. If she tipped off the police, Minnow would be pinched when he showed up with Biff. And she wanted to keep him out of jail, not shove him into it. If she shot Biff, they'd be in still worse trouble. All her arguing with Minnow just brought denials that he was planning anything, and taking Hansum away had only made him want to hurry the job, not to give it up. But she wasn't ready to give up.

"Your taxi's here," the waiter told the two men.

Sade's taxi went on ahead because she knew where they were going and they would get wise if she shadowed. Her hands clenched and

unclenched on her lap as she sat on the very edge of the seat, grabbing air when they rounded a corner, her trembling legs braced, lips pinched between tense jaws. "What am I doing here?" she asked herself despairingly. "Darn that Minnow!"

She tapped for the driver to stop and told him to wait. "My husband . . . that is . . . I may . . . oh, you wait. I'll be back." The chauffeur grinned as she hurried away.

Sade turned the corner and flattened against the building. The other cab was not yet in sight. She giggled nervously. Of course they wouldn't drive right up to the joint they were going to crack. She slipped into a doorway and began to move slowly down the street by starts and stops; a head out to reconnoiter, a quick dodge to the next entrance, and so on.

All in black, she blended with the dark doorways to become almost invisible. The butt of the automatic in her coat pocket gave her comforting assurance.

Here was the mouth of the alley beside the café, black as hell and smelling of coffee grounds and decaying refuse. She edged in, sticking close to the wall. Half-way back she stepped into an archway.

It was midnight dark inside.

It was still in the alley, only a faint ghostly slithering not quite a sound, but registering on the consciousness. Rats? Sade stood her ground. She did not hear the men until Minnow's thin whisper drifted across to her:

"This is it. Hold the flash until I get the lock off."

A small round disk of light flattened itself on a padlock in a hasp. There was a tiny grating of metal and then a bulky shape blotted out the light. Minnow was whispering again:

"Didn't I say it was a push-over? Now, for gosh sakes hang onto that temper of yours in case we're interrupted. If I hadn't grabbed your arm last time, you'd a croaked the watchman and we'd both got the hot seat. There! She's open."

"If you hadn't grabbed my arm, damn you, we'd 'a' got away!"

Sade was appalled at the ferocity packed up in Biff's voice. It vibrated in his thick throat, like the snarl of a beast, filled with the fury of long postponed revenge.

"Hey, Biff, I ain't trying to start nothing," Minnow protested. "Pipe down and let's get inside before . . . Ugh!"

Sade's knees felt watery.

In the dark, Biff's first blow, intended for Minnow's chin, landed on his cheek. Minnow stumbled backward and Biff went berserk, roiling with accumulated rage. It seemed to Minnow that the alley was full of fists and boots and that guttural panting voice. ". . . like to kill you right now . . . this gets you another trip to stir . . . been waiting three years . . . temper! Sure. Only split you get is a split lip . . . three years' interest on that rap. . . ."

Sade's heart had turned over at the first smack. Then she heard Biff's jerky monologue and realized he was going to frame his partner, not kill him. Beat him up and leave him for the cops. A pretty spot for an ex-con: back door open—empty safe—she saw the whole picture. If she shot in the dark, the bullet might hit Minnow. If she ran for help, Biff'd hear and overtake her.

Suddenly the almost soundless massacre was over and silence in the alley again, except for the heavy broken breathing of the victor. She heard a

grunt, and then the quiet closing of a door, and ran across the alley, eyes dilated to the blackness. Biff had carried Minnow inside.

Stifling a soft moan, Sade put her hand on the door. It yielded and she glided inside, closing it after her. Hands extended feeling ahead, sliding one foot before the other, step by step she moved into the unfamiliar room. Up front she heard a muffled movement. At the same instant, her foot contacted something soft and inert on the floor.

Sade stooped, felt the bundle and knew it was Minnow. She stood up. Through the open door she saw a tiny spot of light touch for a moment the nicked dial of a safe. Could she waken Minnow without his giving her away? She stooped again, found his throat and laid her fingers on the pulse. He was alive.

For a long moment she crouched beside him, scheming with the desperation of a cornered animal, gathering her forces for what she must do. Then she opened the rear door and returned to kneel beside her slight husband. She

raised up his body, worked it over her shoulder and staggered to her feet.

Outside in the alley, she braced Minnow's hips against the building and softly drew the hasp into place . . . snapped the padlock back through it. Bent almost double, she staggered to the street and; at long last, around to her cab.

The driver jumped to help her, muttering about guys what couldn't carry their booze and that he never knew there was a speak down there what kept open after curfew. Must be some joint, from the looks of this lug.

Sade said yes to everything. As they turned into the next intersection, two police cars, moving with quiet business-like speed, passed them. One continued around the block, the other turned into the alley.

III

BY a great effort, Minnow Norton managed to open one eye and see that he was at home, in his own bed. Sade was murmuring beside him. He hurt everywhere. Sunlight streamed in through the window and there was a



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contented gurgling sound from the crib in the corner.

Minnow groaned and Sade bent down, speaking words that had no meaning: "Poor Biff," she said.

"Biff?" Minnow's split lips formed the word, but no sound came out.

"I'm so sorry I had him all wrong. I thought he hated you while all the time he was with me, trying to make you go straight."

Minnow moaned. Why couldn't she talk sense? It was *poor Minnow!* His head was full of bursting fireworks, giant bells clanged with maddening regularity in his ears, and his mouth felt like salted blisters. "Wha'say?" he asked.

"It's all in the morning paper. You'd be dead right this minute if—if it wasn't for poor Biff."

"Poor Biff? Th' dirty—he beat me! . . ."

"Sure, he beat you. That's the only way some people learn. Then he put you in a taxi. Downright noble, says I." Sade's eyes filled with tears. She turned her head, gulped convincingly, and watched Minnow sideways. His

face was a foolish, blank expression.

"Why keep callin' him poor?" Minnow managed through swollen lips.

"He's dead."

"What t'hell?"

"The paper says the café had a secret burglar alarm. The prowler cops plugged him when he tried to shoot his way out." She choked convincingly, while with one foot she shoved the paper beneath the bed. There was that baffling matter of a padlocked door and bloodstains in the alley. It might break down her set-up if Minnow saw that. She wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"Biff was a right guy. . . ."

"Y'say—sent me home—taxi?"

"Sure, and told the driver to tell me to keep you on the up-and-up, and I'm going to do just that. Maybe you'll listen to me. . . ."

Minnow shuddered and shut his eyes. So that dirty double-crosser was now a dead hero? Listen to her? Sure he'd listen, for the rest of his life.

"Bring Hansum here," he mumbled. Why did everything happen to him? Just a push-over, that's all.

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The Queen's Taste

By Tom Curry

"Hey, you! What's that you picked up?"

SECRET AGENT DEVRITE felt the burning excitement behind his superior Inspector Hallihan's cool voice: "It's more than the solution of the murder, Devrite. Adele Morris is very beautiful and a decent young girl. It's a shame to see her hooked and ruined by this rotten Luis Ortez. Do all you can but — you know your orders."

Those orders were never expose himself. George Devrite was a valuable man

— irreplaceable save by years of training; his natural competence and experience made him Hallihan's star. The Secret Police chief's office was on the second floor of a dingy house near Headquarters. Ostensibly a beaded goods importer, Hallihan spent his time directing the efforts of picked men working dangerously for small pay and no credit.

"If Ortez is what

Secret Agent Devrite Was Ordered to Save Adele Morris from Ex-Triggerman Luis Ortez — Ortez, Who Had Butchered the Girl's Father — and Was Getting Away with It Apparently!

you say," agreed Devrite, "it would be a terrible thing to let him marry her. Now see if I have it. Adele Morris, returning about three A.M. from her work as dancer at the Peacock Cabaret, found her father Kenneth murdered, head bashed in at their Astoria apartment. She had been driven home by Luis Ortez, dancing partner at the Peacock who you say was once a triggerman. Later men from the Homicide picked him up and gave him a thorough examination—why?"

"We found Morris objected strongly to Ortez."

"A father often feels that way about a daughter's choice of young men. Ortez was at the Peacock all through Monday evening; you have Adele's word as well as others."

"She thinks he's innocent."

"If he was at the Peacock from 7 Monday night till 2 A.M. and Morris was murdered around 11 P.M. Monday he must be."

"Nuts," growled Hallihan. "Ortez was at the Peacock and not out of sight more than ten minutes—it takes at least thirty to reach the Morris home. But he might have had someone do it for him. Mulcahy and Cross are still trying to trace his pals. The fact remains, anyway, that he's not fit for this girl. Ortez drove her home from work and let her out at the door. Told her he'd come in a few minutes if her father was asleep—Morris hated his guts. Ortez stepped to the corner drug store and bought her a vial of perfume; Adele discovered the body and screamed, Ortez dashed back. Later we collared Ortez—had to let him go—"

"Warning him. How did he take the quiz?"

"Like a professional. I know, I've

seen plenty." Hallihan jerked open a desk drawer. "You know we try not to miss the smallest details—this was found on the sidewalk outside Morris's."

Devrite stared at the quarter-inch square of paper, glue on its back. Small printed figures said: "\$4.65." At the inspector's order he sniffed it. "Very elegant," he remarked.

"Damn right. Five bucks per smell. 'Queen's Taste' perfume, the real McCoy. The dames love it. That's it. That's the present Ortez bought Adele. Get this: Morris's coat front smelled of 'Queen's Taste.' But Adele bumped Ortez as he ran in to her and knocked the vial from his hand, spilling it all over everything."

"Anything else?"

"Well—we gave Ortez a physical. He had a couple of fresh scratches on his chest a pin might have made. There was very little blood from Morris's wound; the bone was cracked inside."

Devrite took his leave. Dusk was over Broadway as he came out of the subway kiosk near the Peacock. He turned the corner past the cut-rate pharmacy on the corner and a dime-a-dance palace and went up steps to the cabaret, warm odor of food in his nostrils and music growing louder in his ears. He was hungry and, seating himself at a table, he ordered supper.

He had been there half an hour watching the floor show when Adele Morris came out in an abbreviated white costume trimmed with black. She was very symmetrical, legs especially beautiful and body slender yet womanly. Dark bobbed hair set off her fair skin as her brown eyes smiled at her audience. Nothing tawdry about her; the fact she danced so soon after her father's death was a badge of courage. She might be suffering, but a good

trouper never let it show. He knew why Hallihan was so upset: this girl was sweet and decent. If Luis Ortez had anything to do with her father's murder it would be a foul crime to let him degrade her. His hands clenched tight. Ortez must be cleared—or pinned. . . .

Killing two birds with a single rock he had a look at Ortez. The Cuban was very handsome; his not-too-dark skin seemed healthily tanned. He was heavier than Devrite and the evening dress set off his brawny chest. He had poise; nothing villainous about the grace with which he wove around later as a guest's dancing-partner.

There was, however, a certain insolence in his bearing that displeased Devrite; Ortez kept his sultry eyes veiled, but when he glanced up Devrite saw the arrogance in them. The agent knew police investigators had reported his reputation bad; a few years before the Cuban was said to have been a bootlegger's triggerman and the way he had passed through the quiz showed he was no tyro . . .

AROUND ten, Luis left the floor and strolled through a door marked: EMPLOYEES ONLY. This did not bother Devrite, who slipped after him down a flight of back steps. A hooked-open door gave into a yard behind the restaurant. A wire fence separated a narrow parking space allotted to a dozen cars belonging to Peacock people from a larger lot open to the public for a 50-cent fee.

Devrite looked around the door, saw Ortez turning left toward Broadway. He trailed after him. The Cuban entered the cut-rate drug store on the corner. Devrite paused a moment outside but then went in as Ortez was off to the right at the tobacco counter with

his back turned. The white-jacketed clerk nodded at Ortez and reached under the counter, handing him a pack of cigarettes.

As Hallihan had said, the tiniest detail was taken into account during an investigation. Devrite himself seldom missed a trick; his job required the nerve and speed of a hunter stalking tiger barehanded. This place was called a drug store. However, evidence showed everything but chemicals; books, toys, sodas—his gaze paused at the perfumery display. A printed sign announced: SPECIAL: THIS WEEK ONLY. He recalled "The Queen's Taste" and as Ortez swung to leave, he circled closer and saw a dozen dainty vials filled with the amber liquid. The whole collection was as fragrant as an old-fashioned garden. . . .

On the corner, Devrite saw Ortez heading back. Half the Cuban's smiling face was exposed to him and as the agent followed his gaze he understood. Two well-dressed men strolled over there. One was large and the second was larger—immense, inches over six feet and weighing two-hundred-fifty. Devrite recognized Homicide Squad Detectives Cross and Mulcahy, without doubt spotting Ortez. He believed Ortez must know he was shadowed.

Ortez swung back into the narrow space behind the Peacock. Devrite hesitated at the gate. Cross and Mulcahy passed to Seventh Avenue and crossed the side street. . . .

Devrite did not want them to spot him. He did not see Ortez up the alley; in the building shadow it was very dark, though the main parking space was lit by strung lamps. The agent slipped between the line of Peacock cars and garbage cans lining the wall, believing Luis had gone back inside and

himself desiring to keep away from the detectives.

Too late he smelled the sweetish yet acrid smoke; Ortez was leaning against the fender of a shiny coupé and he started forward, bumping into Devrite.

"Pardon me," said the agent, "I—"

Ortez put a hand on his arm and Devrite felt the strength in it. "Outside, bum," growled the Cuban. "This is private." Chin down he glared at Devrite.

Though the cars cut off the light somewhat, Devrite did not wish Ortez to examine him too closely. He shrank, mumbling an apology. Mulcahy's elephantine form loomed close, Cross tagging after him. When Ortez saw them he grunted in disgust and, without waiting to hear Devrite's excuses, threw away his burning cigarette and quickly went inside. The detectives passed on.

Devrite stooped to pick up the cigarette, one end burning and the other still moist from the Cuban's lips. He smelled it and knew Ortez was a marijuana smoker, user of the "weed," a pointer indicating his character.

"Hey, you!" A heavy hand fell on his shoulder and jerked him around—Detective Mulcahy had him. "What's that you picked up? Ortez dropped it. Give it to me."

Cross was behind him. "Frisk him, maybe he has a gun."

But Devrite seldom carried a pistol; it was too likely—just as in this case—to prove embarrassing.

"Why, it's a cigarette butt!" exclaimed Mulcahy.

"Tear it open; maybe there's a message in it," advised Cross.

"No, just tobacco."

"What's the idea?" demanded Devrite. "I—"

"Shut up." Mulcahy shook him so

hard Devrite coughed and wheezed. "See this?" He flashed his gold shield.

"You're a pal of Ortez, ain't you?"

"Ortez? I don't know him—you got me wrong."

"What'd he say to you just now?" insisted Cross.

They were clutching straws and refused to let go the one they had. "Let's take him to 47th Street and book him," suggested Mulcahy.

II

DEVRITE was annoyed; he did not intend to waste the evening at the precinct police station and could not afford to be fingered by detectives. Sometimes he was called upon to check them up. He glimpsed Ortez's sneering face as the Cuban looked from the doorway. Cross did, too, and with an irritated exclamation took a step toward him. Ortez went back up the stairs.

Devrite shrugged, assuming an attitude of bored surrender; Mulcahy was shoving him to the street. Devrite kept giving and his right hand caught the giant's necktie, jerking so mainly Mulcahy's own strength caused the big man to fall flat on his face in the alley. Cross, swinging back to join his partner, cursed and reached for his gun, but Devrite flashed around the wall, leaving them there in the alley.

They were after him as he turned into Broadway. Between the cut-rate and the Peacock was a dime-a-dance palace and Devrite was up the stairs and out on the floor dancing with a hostess by the time the detectives realized he had disappeared off the block.

His hat was checked at the Peacock, his dinner unpaid for—if the detectives found this out they would have a mysterious hat to work on and they would try it on every prisoner for years.

Devrite tried to figure out the damage done as he stepped around the polished floor hidden in the crowd of couples. Ortez without doubt knew he was trailed; Ortez had had a quick look at him, although the light had not been very good. There was also the possibility Ortez would realize it was he who had skipped his check.

As soon as he could he left the hall. The block was clear—Cross and Mulcahy would keep moving in the hope they would not be recognized as detectives; they never froze on a spot. Hatless the agent took a cab to Astoria, timing the run, having told the driver to make his best speed. At that time of night it took 36 minutes to reach the Morris address. It might be a trifle faster with the streets clear, but by no stretch of the imagination could Ortez have left the Peacock, driven over and murdered Morris and been back inside of ten minutes.

In the middle of the long block with trees planted here and there Devrite began to think Hallihan and the other police might be right: Ortez had had a friend of bygone criminal days do the murder. If Luis had been a trigger-man he would have such connections to call upon. But why beat in Morris's head in such a brutal fashion? Why not simply put a bullet through it?

He carefully looked over the site. There was the corner drug store a hundred yards away where Ortez had bought the perfume for Adele while she discovered her father's body. The apartment house was a modest brick one. The Morris quarters were on the end toward the drug store, three windows fronting the street with three more on the side alley. No lights on inside—there was a street lamp forty feet away.

He walked to the corner and looked

at the pharmacy. Detectives had of course checked up and found Ortez had bought a bottle of "Queen's Taste" that Monday night.

Devrite went in. "You carry Queen's Taste perfume?"

"Yes, sir," the clerk replied. "Five dollars."

"What?" cried the secret agent. "Don't you ever sell it for less?"

"Never," replied the clerk coldly. "That's the standard price." He shrugged.

Devrite shrugged too and went out. Under a street light he took out the tiny paper square. "4.65" it said and it smelled of the perfume. He snapped his fingers as he recalled the cut-rate store's display so handy to the Peacock and evidently constantly used by Luis Ortez. **SPECIAL: THIS WEEK ONLY.**

Forty minutes later he was back at the cut-rate on the corner near the cabaret. It took time to cross over and enter while Cross and Mulcahy, endlessly patrolling, were down the block. He went to the perfumery counter.

The same clerk who had waited on Ortez came to him. "How much is Queen's Taste?" asked Devrite.

"\$4.65 this week only—usually five dollars."

Devrite handed over a five dollar bill and receiving his package and change, made sure the coast was clear.

At a safe spot he unwrapped the tiny bottle, narrow at the neck and widening to a heart bulge at the center, and turned it upside down. On the bottom was glued a small white price tag identical to the one Hallihan had given him, reading \$4.65.

There was a deep puzzled wrinkle in his brow as he marshalled his facts. He walked slowly back along the street and stared across Broadway at the cut-rate pharmacy. It was growing late.

Mulcahy's giant form swung the corner, Cross wearily behind him—their feet must be worn out. If they ever got their hands on him it would mean a severe beating for having tricked them.

HE still wore no hat. Ten minutes later he was back in the cut-rate. The clerk made it easy for him by saying:

"Are you workin' around here?"

"Yeah—at the Peacock." Devrite lowered his voice: "Listen. Ortez said I could get a pack of weeds from you. How about it?"

The clerk stared. "Okay," he said, and took a pack of loaded cigarettes from a drawer under the counter. "Two bucks," he said, and Devrite paid without protest.

Contact established and with the lever of the illegal sale Devrite asked casually: "Did you hear about the bulls grabbin' Ortez?"

"Oh, sure. But he was workin' all evenin'. I saw him around myself. He wasn't over in Astoria till 3 A.M."

"That's right. His girl's a peach. I wouldn't mind knowin' her better myself." Devrite winked and the clerk winked back. "He buys her that Queen's Taste—like I just got. He bought a vial of it here Monday, didn't he?"

"Yeah, I remember, it was before they found the body."

After a few more casual words Devrite ducked away again. He had established the fact that Ortez had bought two bottles of Queen's Taste within a few hours, one at the cut-rate and the second at the drug store in Astoria. He ran his fingers through his hair. There must be an answer to it, and he felt the answer would solve the murder and save Adele Morris. He had

inwardly a burning feeling he was close to the solution but it eluded him.

Why should Ortez buy a second vial of the perfume?

"Because," Devrite answered himself, "he broke the first one." Broke it in a struggle perhaps, pointing directly to Luis as the killer. But there was that unsmashable alibi. It was certain Ortez had been at the Peacock all evening so how could he have killed Morris in Astoria?

He had that tantalizing feeling of being so close yet unable to make his touch. Those scratches on Luis's breast—"He must have done the murder himself," he muttered. "But how?"

He was in the cemented alley beside the Morris apartment as Ortez stopped his shiny coupé at the main entry. A taxi drove slowly past—Mulcahy and Cross tagging along. The cab swung the corner out of sight.

Across the way was a building almost identical with the one Adele lived in, windows dark now but looking out on the street. Suppose, thought the secret agent, Ortez *had* committed the murder—or someone—and a denizen of that opposite house had been looking out his window? But no one had had reported anything to the police.

He watched Ortez get from behind the wheel and go round to help the girl out. The Cuban escorted her to the outer lobby where she spent several moments extracting her key from her bag and unlocking the main door. They went inside.

Devrite looked toward the corner. Cross and Mulcahy were not in sight. They knew Ortez's routine and still hoped he did not realize he was being dogged. They could not show themselves on the deserted street as in Broadway crowds.

He slipped out. The rumble seat was unlocked and he lifted it. It smelled of fresh leather and paint. The floorboards he saw were bare—strange in a new machine. At the sides, his fingers felt buttons to which a rug could be clipped. He was checking up everything, his mind waiting to seize significant facts.

He flashed across and stood in the shadowed entry of the opposite house. Ortez might recognize him as the man he had bumped in the alley. He must take care of that and other contingencies.

Five minutes later, Ortez emerged and walked to the coupé. The secret agent, coat collar up around his jowls and shoulders hunched, gave a racking cough to attract his attention. Ortez glanced at him as he descended the six stone steps and ran to the car, pressing against the door as Ortez switched on his ignition.

"Well?" growled Ortez. "It's late for beggars."

"I'm not a panhandler," replied Devrite in a low voice. "I tried to speak to you before—I was up in the Peacock and then in the alley behind it. I live right across the street here."

"So what?" demanded Ortez, definitely suspicious.

"I want to talk to you," continued Devrite quickly. He gave a hollow cough. "A couple of detectives grabbed me in that alley and they shook me up and tried to make me say I knew you."

"But you don't."

"Only by sight and what I read in the papers. A cab drove by just now and I think they're trailin' you."

"You're telling me something?" said Ortez, very sarcastic.

Devrite felt hatred for this suave fellow. But he hid it, coughing again,

hunched over. "I'm—a sick man," he whispered hoarsely. "I don't sleep much. The"—he coughed—"doctors say I need an operation, but that takes money I haven't got—"

Ortez was staring at him, dark eyes unveiled. Devrite could see the grip of his large brown hands on the black circle of the wheel.

"You—don't sleep much. What do you do then?"

"Sit at my window—and watch," whispered Devrite.

He knew he had made a strike and it was with burning excitement that he saw his fish rise to hit the bait.

"You talked to the detectives," growled Ortez.

"I told them nothing. If I had—you'd be under arrest now . . ."

III

LUIS ORTEZ touched his starter and his motor hummed. "Fool," he said between gritted teeth. "I'm being trailed all the time. But I can shake them off. Meet me at the corner of 14th Street and 10th Avenue in one hour. Be sure no one's following you."

Devrite nodded and ducked back across the street. Ortez shot his gears and drove swiftly off. The secret agent waited in the building entry until the Cuban was gone; there came Mulcahy and Cross in their cab, they had waited till they heard his car leave.

Devrite knew that it would be impossible to call Hallihan and have men at the rendezvous. The Cuban would be too alert to be shadowed. He hurried back to Manhattan and visited his room in the Forties. It took only a few minutes to line his eyes and pale his skin with flesh cream. In his callow youth Devrite had aspired to the stage and learned the art of makeup. With his

shoulders hunched and face fixed he looked what he pretended to be: a sick man. A cap and brown-tinted glasses helped further. . . .

He was on the corner as Ortez walked east and strolled up to him.

"Here I am," said the Cuban.

Devrite allowed his teeth to chatter as he coughed. "You're—sure those detectives aren't after you?"

Ortez smiled. The secret agent knew as well as the Cuban that it is impossible to shadow a man who is aware of it. A couple of changes in the subway, a few quick turns, and the tail is off.

"Let's go down here and have a talk. I know a nice little place," said Ortez easily. "I'll walk on ahead. You follow me." He strolled on and Devrite was a hundred feet behind him.

There were cars on the north and south arteries and milkmen were making deliveries but it was still dark.

A third of the way down the side street, Ortez turned into a door. Devrite swung in. The door was ajar and he pushed inside. He knew he was taking a chance, but thought he could take care of himself, this was his work. He found himself in a short dark hall, but at the end was another door under which showed light. The agent walked slowly toward it; the door opened and Ortez beckoned him inside.

It was a drinking place. There was a small bar to the right with half a dozen men at it quietly throwing dice from a leather box. The floor had sawdust on it and to the left were a dozen small tables against the wall. A few more men sat at these.

Everyone was well dressed and gentlemanly. The dark shades were drawn but there was no vulgar noise. The white-aproned bartender brought two whiskies. Devrite shook his head, say-

ing: "I'm not allowed. The doctors—"

"All right, just let it stand," drawled Ortez, looking into his face. "Now let's hear what you have to say."

Devrite looked at his fingers as though embarrassed. "I—live across the street there in Astoria," he said, and coughed.

"Yes, you told me. You are a window-watcher. What's your name?"

"William Crofut."

"Just why did you speak to me?"

Devrite answered in an anxious whisper: "I—didn't want to tell the police. I saw the excitement Tuesday morning when they found that murdered man—"

Ortez had the aplomb of a professional. He showed no outward anxiety or excitement. "Yes?"

"I couldn't sleep Monday night—coughing too much. Hernia, pain. I was at the window. I saw your car drive up about 3 with the—the lady. She went inside. And you—" He broke off and nervously licked his lips.

"What did I do?"

"You—were in a terrible hurry—you opened the rumble seat and—"

The glass Ortez was holding suddenly snapped. The Cuban cursed as the liquid spilled on his trousers. "Sorry—I cut my hand. . . . Yes, Mister—er—Crofut, you are a good window-watcher. And you are sick; you need money, so you did not talk to the police who would only use you and give you nothing."

DEVRITE had been stabbing in the dark, groping for something that would give him his cue. From the Cuban's behavior he knew he had guessed correctly from the few facts he had managed to dig up. He went on quickly, sure he was right:

"You carried something into the al-

ley—pushed it through the side window—”

“Enough,” ordered Ortez. “How much do you need for your operation, Mr. Crofut?”

“About six hundred dollars.”

“You shall have it and as much else as you want. Thank you for coming to me.” Ortez rose. His dark eyes were slits as he pushed back his chair and touched Devrite in a friendly fashion on the left shoulder. “Everything will be fine. You’re sure you told no one else?”

“Positive. I’m no fool.”

Devrite was a sensitive person, being attuned to the dangerous life he led. Suddenly he guessed it. This was a Finger Joint. Devrite was aware there were half a dozen such spots in the city but they were definitely known only to trusted members of the underworld. If you wished to have a man killed all you need do was bring him here for a drink and he would be found dead next day in some out-of-the-way place. You paid when convenient. . . .

Perhaps they would let him out and give him a chance to elude them. But two of the dice players strolled over and a handsome brown-haired young fellow with baby-blue eyes said, “Good evening, Ortez. Won’t you join our game?”

“No, thanks,” replied Luis. “But meet Mr. Crofut, the window-watcher. I am sure he would like to fling the dice, just once. I must be on my way.”

Devrite rose with him. “No, I’ll go, too,” he said brightly.

“Oh, we couldn’t let you,” said the brown-haired youth politely. “You *must* try the dice, sir.”

They weren’t going to let him out.

“I’ll try one throw,” he said, and went to the bar, picking up the box and shaking it. The windows were

barred. The only way out was the door through which he had come. Half a dozen surrounded Devrite in a semi-circle and Luis Ortez, sneer on his dark lips, moved toward the exit.

Devrite cast the dice so they rolled far down the bar top. It was a natural instinct for all eyes to turn for an instant on the rolling dice as they came to rest. There were three aces and two fours, a full house.

“You’re lucky—” began the brown-haired man.

Devrite was already in action, taking advantage of that momentary shift of eyes as he threw himself back. The brown-haired youth snatched at him and the secret agent used the ju-jutsu principle of letting a man injure himself by his own strength. He gave for an instant and as his opponent came with him threw up his wrists. The brown-haired gunman cursed as a bone snapped and Devrite was past him as the rest hurriedly drew automatics from shoulder holsters, and the clicking of triggers as slides jerked back told Devrite he could not get out in time. . . .

Ortez was in his way, too. He seized the sleek-haired Cuban as Ortez put out his arms to block him and whirled Luis around in a waltz that placed Ortez with his back to the company. A quick gun spat. Devrite felt Ortez quiver.

He was at the door and as they came at him he shoved Ortez toward them and jumped. Bullets whirled close to his swift form as he went out the street exit and ran full speed away. A parked milk truck saved him as two of the gunmen dashed out with their pistols ready. Devrite ducked behind it and heard the lead strike his protection.

A harness bull came running from the corner, reaching for his .38, handcuffs at his belt clinking as he hurried

to the fray. The triggermen ran back inside and bolted the door.

"They tried to stick me up," cried Devrite as the patrolman hesitated by him.

"Wait here—till I grab 'em," ordered the policeman, dashing on.

IV

DEVRITE waited only till the patrolman, whistle shrieking, was out of the way. He walked quietly away, keeping the truck between himself and the policeman. At the corner he trotted a block, police sirens diminishing in his ears. . . . He phoned Hallihan:

"You'll find Ortez in a Finger Joint, dead. I think I have the crime reconstructed. Monday night Morris went to the Peacock and waited in the alley. He must have learned something with which to threaten Ortez and keep him from Adele but wanted to do it quietly so as not to hurt her. When Ortez stepped out for a smoke they had an argument. Ortez killed him, probably with a car wrench, stuffed the body in the rumble seat and locked it. There was little blood.

"Ortez went back upstairs and made sure he was seen. At 2.30 he drove Adele home, her father's body stuffed in the back. Earlier he had bought at

the cut-rate store a vial of Queen's Taste perfume and put it in the breast pocket of his street clothes—he changed always at the Peacock. As Morris objected to Ortez, the Cuban usually didn't go in unless the father was asleep. It took Adele minutes to get out her keys to open the front door and then the apartment door, take off her hat and coat, hang them up and enter the living room on the alley corner. Ortez worked fast, took the corpse from the rumble and dumped it in the window, closing it after him. He was too experienced to leave prints.

"Remember the scratches on his chest? When he hugged the body to him to lug it to the window, the vial smashed and he was slightly cut by the glass. The little \$4.65 price tag washed off. . . . Aware that perfume might cause trouble, Ortez ran to the corner and bought a five-dollar bottle, took it back. Adele was screaming. Ortez ran in, pretended she knocked the bottle from his hand, spilling perfume over everything.

"He had time to cover other points, such as disposing of the car mat, and he had a perfect alibi. And say: please give Cross and Mulcahy credit for breaking this case. They proved useful without realizing it—and their feet must be killing them!"

Secret Loveliness

Tiny glints of gold
make dull hair
romantic

USE
MARCHAND'S
GOLDEN HAIR WASH

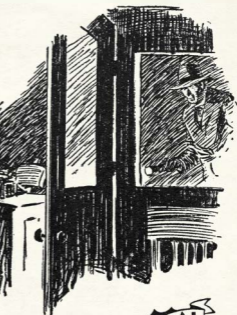
The Duchess Rides a Hunch



"Take it easy, kid. We're in a tough spot"

WHEN he called out: "Look, Duchess!" I realized that Jeff Gervin, of the *Sentinel*, had had a few drinks. Jeff is mean when he's drinking. He has to rib somebody, and the season is never closed on Katie Blayne, who covers the police beat for the *Sun*.

"Look, Duchess!" Jeff spoke out of the side of his mouth, squinting at Katie, one bushy eyebrow higher than the other. "You got a home, Duchess? Some place—any



By

Whitman Chambers

place—you got a home and family?"

Katie Blayne, slim and blond and lovely, strolled placidly to the press-room window and stood looking out on the street.

"Because if you got a home, Duchess," Jeff went on, "why aren't you in it? It's your day off, isn't it?"

Why the postman's holiday?"

Pete Zerker, of the *Bulletin*, picked up a telephone and started to call the beat: northern, eastern, fire alarm, the two emergencies, the

Katie Blayne, Known to the Press-Room Gang as the Duchess, Had a Hunch Which Moved Her to the Head of the Killer's List

morgue. Spike Kaylor, day police reporter for my paper, the *Telegram* continued a desultory game of solitaire.

After a while the door opened and Rosenberg, a handsome six feet and a hard two hundred pounds of shyster lawyer, came into the room. He nodded to us, smiled at Katie and greeted her with: "How's it, baby?"

The Duchess turned on her charm. "Hello, Rosie. How are you?"

"I'm great," the beefy shyster beamed. "Sorry I kept you waiting. Look. I've got a phone call to make, then I'll be right with you."

Rosie went out. The Duchess produced a compact and started making up her lips.

"Baby!" I said, and I guess my voice was pretty bitter. "When did you start playing around with that ton of shyster?"

"Rosie? Why, Rosie and I have been pals for years," Katie said brightly. "Do you mind?"

Well, it wasn't any place for an argument, even if I'd had a good one. I walked over to Jeff's desk and helped myself to a drink. After a minute or two Rosie threw open the door again.

"All right, baby," he beamed. "Let's scram."

I watched them go out, as handsome a pair as you'd see in a day's walk along Hollywood Boulevard. Jeff Gervin started to say something, but I didn't give him a chance.

"Look, you mugs!" I said. "Have any of you got a smart crack to make about Katie Blayne? . . . Or Rosie? . . . Or me?"

No one, it appeared, had any cracks to make.

I helped myself to another shot of Jeff's liquor, found a copy of the *Bulletin's* last edition and took a chair for myself. I heard Jeff whisper to Pete

Zerker something about "can't stand competition. Rosie sure is a handsome shyster, huh?"

I kept busy with the *Bulletin*. After all, I'd laid myself open. I ought to be able to take it if the gang felt like dishing it.

In less than an hour Katie Blayne, looking strangely white, was back in the press room.

"Hi, Duchess!" Jeff hailed. "Where's your handsome ton o' shyster?"

Katie walked abstractedly to her desk and sat down. She picked up her telephone, hesitated, put it back on the desk. She sat staring at the opposite wall, without seeing it. There was horror and hurt in her fine blue eyes.

"Katie!" I said. "What's wrong?"

"Did the naughty shyster get fresh with our sweetsy-weetsy baby?" Jeff Gervin croaked.

We didn't pay any attention to him. I walked over and put my hand on Katie's shoulder. She looked up at me and I was shocked to see her eyes were glistening. It takes something, it takes a lot, to bring tears to the eyes of our hard little Duchess.

"Please, Pinky," she said quietly.

Well, that was that. I picked up my paper. Spike resumed his solitaire and Pete started to call the beat again. From force of habit I listened to him, heard him say at last:

"Hello, morgue. Zerker of the *Bulletin*. Anything?"

And right there I felt my skin begin to prickle.

"Yes?" Pete Zerker said. "Oh, yes . . . Yes, I have it. . . I see. . . Heart failure, you say? Well, he was the type. . . Office of J. G. Gross and Company? . . . Dead when the ambulance got there? . . . O. K., Coroner. Thank you."

Pete hung up. He looked around the room, but his eyes avoided Katie Blayne.

"Rosie Rosenberg," he said quietly, "is dead."

WELL, we'd known it. We'd sensed it as Pete was talking to the coroner. And yet the feeling of shock was heavy in the room. Somehow it didn't seem possible. Big, healthy, handsome Rosie — dead! Packed off to the morgue in the meat wagon like a common floater fished out of the bay.

Yes, somehow it didn't seem possible. And yet there it was. And there was Katie, looking stunned and hurt and, strangely, just a bit vindictive.

Jeff Gervin said heavily: "Well, he was a right guy at that. Anybody want a game of rummy?"

Nobody wanted a game of rummy.

There was a brief silence. Then, abruptly, Katie was on her feet.

"It's phony!" she cried. "Rosie didn't drop dead of heart failure. Rosie—darn it! Rosie was *murdered!*"

I went over and put my arm around her. "Take it easy, kid. Sit down and take it easy. Do you want to tell us about it?"

She shrugged out of my arm and sat down again. I went back to my chair across the room. She had hold of herself now; she spoke in the detached manner of a reporter phoning in a story.

"Rosie and I went up to see J. B. Gross, who's in the oil lease racket and has offices in the Sheldon Building. You probably know him. A thin, sickly, middle-aged bag of bones."

"We know the crook," I said. "Go on, kid."

"Gross has about a dozen stenographers in his main office. His private

office is separated from this big room by a glass partition. Gross sits in there and keeps his eagle eye on everybody."

"He's the type," Spike Kaylor growled.

"I waited in the outer office with the stenos," Katie went on. "Rosie went in to see Gross. They talked for fifteen or twenty minutes. Gross sat like a wax figure in a museum. He never moved. He said hardly a word. Rosie got mad, I guess, because he started striding up and down, talking like a whirlwind and waving his arms."

"Rosie always was excitable," Pete Zerker commented.

"Anyway, all of a sudden Rosie stopped talking. He put both hands up to his throat and collapsed. I ran into the room, along with three or four of the stenos. Gross, even then, didn't get out of his chair. He said:

"'Rosenberg has a very bad heart. Just open the windows, girls. A little fresh air will bring him around. He shouldn't excite himself, with a heart like that.'

"We opened all the windows and let in the cold air. Rosie didn't come around. He looked ghastly and finally I made Gross phone for an ambulance. The interne who came with the wagon said Rosie was dead. Heart failure, he called it. So they carted him off to the morgue . . . and I came back here"—her voice rose in bitter anger—"and Rosie didn't die of heart failure!"

She was pretty close to hysteria by that time and we, even Jeff Gervin, had sense enough not to question her for a while. Finally, when she seemed clear, I asked her what she and Rosie were doing in the office of J. B. Gross.

"The *Sun*," Katie told us, "is working up an exposé of the oil lease racket. Rosie used to be Gross's attorney. He knew all the ins and outs of the game.

Gross owed him money, about eight thousand dollars. Rosie went up there today to tell Gross that unless he paid up he'd spill all he knew. He's been putting the bee on Gross every few days for months."

"There's your motive," I said. "If Rosie ever spilled the works, J. B. Gross would draw a stretch on Mc-Neil's Island."

"Yeah, there's a motive," Spike Kaylor agreed. "But what other reason have you got for thinking Rosie was rubbed out? And how was the job pulled?"

Well, that slowed her down to a walk. It practically stopped her.

"Other reason!" Jeff Gervin sneered. "She hasn't given *any* reason yet."

"Only a motive," Zerker commented.

Well, I saw we wouldn't get anywhere with those three skeptics. I took Katie's arm and went out of the room. We strolled up and down the corridor and talked things over.

Now, although Katie and I cover police for rival morning papers, we occasionally work together. Our offices, of course, know nothing of this cooperation. City editors don't consider it cricket, or something, for their reporters to work with men from a rival sheet.

Now Katie had a hunch. The rest of the gang might laugh at her—had laughed at her many times in the past, to their sorrow—but I'd string along. I know Katie, and I know Katie's hunches . . .

II

BUT first, just to get away from the emotion and sentiment, I tried to talk her out of it. I pointed out it was a well-known fact that Rosie had a very weak heart. Hadn't he stopped drinking four years ago because the

doctors told him a few shots of liquor would knock him for a loop?

"You see, Katie, it was the logical way for an excitable man like Rosie to die."

"And do you think J. B. Gross didn't know that? And count on the fact that everybody who knew Rosie knew he had a bad heart and might drop off any time?"

"That's perfectly true," I admitted. "On the other hand, if Gross murdered him, don't you think the autopsy will show he did it?"

"And do you think," Katie demanded scornfully, "that Gross would be stupid enough to kill him by some method that a nitwit autopsy surgeon would bring to light?"

"Well, what do you want to do about it? Tell your story to Captain Wallis and let him check on it?"

It was a dumb question. There's nothing the Duchess enjoys more than puzzling out a mystery without benefit of the police department.

"I take it then, Pinky, that you want none of it."

"Then you have me wrong, Katie, I want it all. Every bit of it, for you and me. Tell me what you want to do."

"I want to go up to Gross's office tonight, break into it if we have to, and search it from truck to keelson. Are you with me?"

"Count me in. It's burglary, kid, but do we give a hoot? I have the late shift tonight and I won't be off till two. Meet me on the corner of Eighth and Broadway at two-ten tomorrow morning."

The Sheldon Building, where Gross had his offices, should have been condemned thirty years ago. It had no night watchman, no central heating, no elevator, and very few tenants. However, all that was all right with us.

Katie got into Gross's office on the third floor via my shoulders and the transom. Except for a panicky half minute when she was stuck in the transom and I thought we might have to call the fire department to get her out, it was a cinch. She opened the door for me and I joined her in the musty-smelling office, springing the latch behind me.

Switching on my flashlight, I let Katie guide me through the chill gloom of the main office to Gross's private room. The door was unlocked and we went in. I shot the light around the room, careful not to let it strike a window.

It was a small office and there wasn't much in it. Gross's ancient flat-topped desk; two chairs; a circulating room heater, painted in imitation of walnut; a green, single-tier filing cabinet; a water cooler with an inverted five-gallon jug of water.

"Not much here that a man could use to commit murder," I remarked.

"Did you expect to find a machine gun mounted on the desk?" Katie acidly retorted.

We went over the room and its furnishings with a fine-tooth comb. And at the end of an hour we admitted we were licked.

"Any use to try the main office?" I asked.

"No. Whatever he used, if he used anything, would be in here. I was in the outer office when Rosie passed out and the door between the two rooms was shut."

"Then I guess we'd better call it a night."

"I suppose so, Pinky." The Duchess sighed; she was one disheartened little girl. "And I was so sure—so *sure* we'd find a clue. See here! You don't think I'm being foolish, do you? Riding a

hunch so hard? Dragging you into committing a felony?"

"Skip the felony, kid. You can't be a felon till you're caught."

"But, Pinky! Do you think I'm foolish?"

I never answered her. At that instant she jerked the flash out of my hand and switched it off.

"Listen!" she hissed.

I listened, and what I heard wasn't good news. A key was rattling in the door of the outer office. A moment later the rusty hinges creaked and a beam of light, nothing more that we could see, came barging into the big room.

I PULLED Katie against me. "Take it easy, kid. We're in a tough spot, but we've been in other tough spots together. Just sit tight and let me handle this."

The light was advancing down the aisle between the desks and I could tell that the person who carried it knew his way around the office. When he was a dozen feet from the door of the inner room I could make out a lanky angular body behind the flash.

J. B. Gross in person! J. B. Gross stealthily entering his own office in the middle of the night, afraid to switch on the lights!

Gross had stopped short about three paces from the doorway to his private office. And I realized what stopped him. He'd left the door closed and now he found it open.

I heard my heart pounding as I caught Katie by the arm and, just in time, jerked her down below the wooden part of the wall. Gross's light swept the inner office, over our heads. Katie swayed against me and I felt her tremble.

"Don't worry, kid," I whispered.

"I'll take him like Grant took Richmond."

"B-b-b-but, Pinky! He prob'ly has a gun!"

I hadn't thought of that particular angle. And thinking about it, in the three or four seconds I had in which to do my thinking, I didn't like it. Not any.

"Stay right here!" I whispered. "Flat on the floor."

Her fingers closed tight on my arm for an instant, and then I moved toward the door on all fours. Just inside the casing I waited, crouched and ready for Mr. J. B. Gross. Of course if Mr. J. B. Gross was ready for me—well, that would be too bad for somebody and the somebody was a cinch to be Pinky Kane.

Gross's light stopped swinging and centered on the doorway. It came closer and just as it moved into the room I hopped to my feet, dragging a right from my shoetops.

The light behind the flash was dim, but not too dim. I made out Gross's bony head and let him have it right behind the ear. The light went out and Gross went down without a murmur.

I got my own flash from Katie and switched it on. Gross looked like a sack of bones lying on the floor. He was out cold. Beside him lay a long cylindrical package wrapped in a newspaper. I caught it up under my arm and we got out of there in a hurry.

We didn't slow down until we were in my car and a dozen blocks from the Sheldon Building. Then I pulled up under a street light and shut off the motor.

"Well, Katie, what do you think we drew in the grab bag?"

"Something," Katie said confidently, "that will explain how Rosie was murdered this afternoon."

I unrolled the newspaper and brought to light—a section of three-inch stove pipe. Nothing more. Just a section of cheap stovepipe you could buy in any hardware store for fifteen cents. I looked at the Duchess and the Duchess looked somewhere else.

"Now what the hell!" I grumbled. "Does this length of pipe mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing," Katie said unhappily.

"And yet," I said, "here's a guy sneaking it into his own office in the dead of night. What's the answer?"

"The answer is that Gross murdered Rosie Rosenberg and this piece of pipe would explain how he did it. If we were bright enough to figure it out!"

"Yes, if we were bright enough to figure it out," I repeated unhappily. "Well, shall we give up and—"

"And take the pipe to Captain Wallis? Not any! We'll sleep over this, Pinky. And we'll work it out, you and I alone, together."

I got down to the press room about noon the next day. Katie was already on the job, calling the beat like a veteran, while the three other police reporters played rummy.

I sat down on the edge of her desk. "Any ideas, kid?"

She smiled and shook her head. "You?"

"A darb."

I nodded toward the door and Katie followed me out into the corridor. I turned to her and said:

"Duchess, I got a hunch. It's a pip. I'm going over to the library to check something. Then you and I are hopping up to Gross's office. Of course he won't talk, unless he tells us what a terrible heart Rosie had. But there's something there I want to see. And if

I find what I think I'll find—kid, it's the rope for J. B. Gross. Now look! You haven't tipped your office on this murder angle, have you?"

"No"

"Good! Now—"

"Well!"

III

THE word was like a healthy slap in the face. I turned and there was Miss Jane Tobin, probably the one person in the world I had no yen to see at the moment. Miss Tobin, known to her loyal underlings as the Lady, is city editor of the *Sun*. Don't tell me women city editors are as rare as undivorced movie stars. I know it as well as you do. They made one, Jane Tobin, and then broke the mold. Thank goodness.

There she stood in all her virginal glory, slight of build, middle-aged, dowdy, her out-moded peach-basket hat cocked over her left ear, a smudge of printer's ink on her nose—and fire in her steely blue eyes.

"Well!" she repeated, in a bull voice you could hear for six blocks. "And what is it, young lady, that you haven't tipped your office to? And what have I told you about collaborating with these press room tramps? What have I told you particularly about playing around with Pinky Kane? What—well, what in Sam Hill have you got to say for yourself?"

Katie flushed and looked at the floor. Of course, I had to put in my oar and virtually capsize the boat.

"Be yourself, Miss Tobin," I said. "We just happened to be working together on this story and—"

"Working together!" the Lady stormed. "I knew it! I knew it as soon as I saw the two of you whispering. Working together, huh? Damn it,

Pinky Kane, I'm going to tell you a few things about the newspaper business. And then I'm going to tell Katie a few. Yes, plenty! Look here, Kane, you gnat-brained, double-crossing—"

I never found out what she wanted to tell me. I dove into the press room and slammed the door. Ten minutes later, looking meek and chastened, Katie came in. She glanced at me, smiled wryly and not very happily.

"It's no soap, Pinky. I'm on my own from now on. Orders."

"Listen! How long are you going to let that half-witted back number tell you how to handle your beat?"

Katie's eyes flashed as she asserted staunchly: "Miss Tobin's not half-witted, Pinky Kane, and she's not a back number. She knows more about the newspaper racket in five minutes than you and your press room gang know in a year. And she's one hell of a swell boss!"

"Sock him, Duchess!" Jeff Gervin chirped.

I ignored Jeff. "Look, Duchess. What do you want me to do about this story?"

Katie shrugged. "It was mine in the first place, Pinky. I had the hunch, you know."

"Oke!" I snapped. "You can have it. And if you think you can work it out without any help from me, you'd better take another guess for yourself."

"Sure, Duchess," Jeff piped, "take two guesses. And then dust. We want to play rummy."

I got out of there and went over to the library. I was pretty sore, but not as sore as I might have been. After all, you can't condemn a girl for being loyal.

An hour later I left the library on the double, raced back to the press room and found the three rummy

hounds deep in their game. No Katie.

"Where's the Duchess?" I demanded.

"Who cares?" growled Jeff Gervin.

I caught him by the nape of the neck and jerked him backwards over the chair onto his feet.

"Damn it, where's the Duchess?"

Jeff Gervin sputtered inarticulately. Spike Kaylor's jaw dropped. Pete Zerker looked me over with sharp discerning eyes. He rose slowly.

"What's wrong, Pinky?"

"Plenty! If you know where Katie is, tell me."

"Her office phoned about twenty minutes ago," Pete said tersely. "She talked to the Lady for a few minutes and then went out. We don't know where she went."

I caught up Katie's office phone and called for the city desk. The Lady came on with a crisp:

"Miss Tobin speaking. Commence!"

"This is Pinky Kane, Lady. Where's Katie?" I heard her gasp, but I didn't give her a chance to sound off. "Listen! If you've sent that girl to Gross's office you've probably signed her death warrant. Do you get that? Now where is she?"

"She's at Gross's," the Lady shot back. "Get over there in a hurry, Kane. I'll be with you."

As snappy as that. No hows or whys, no wasting time with stupid questions. That's the Lady.

I tossed the phone aside and leaped for the door.

WINDED like a quarter-miler at the end of a tough race, I reached the third floor of the Sheldon Building and tumbled into Gross's office. A dozen typewriters stopped rattling and a dozen startled faces turned toward mine.

Across the room on the other side of the glass partition I saw Katie Blayne and J. B. Gross. The oil lease racketeer was behind his desk. With his angular and hairless head, his dead-white sunken cheeks, his deep-set bright black eyes, he looked like an incarnation of the devil.

Katie sat facing him. Even through the glass, from a distance of forty feet, she looked pale and sick. Talk about arriving in the nick of time!

I raced across the room and through the flimsy door to the inner office without even stopping to turn the knob. Katie heard me coming and swung around in her chair. As I crashed through the door she stood up. And that exertion, slight as it was, got her.

She swayed. She tried to say something and couldn't. I caught her in the crook of my left arm. I grabbed her chair and swung it with a looping motion over my head and through the outer window, conscious all the time of that sinister, motionless death's head across the desk.

Picking up the Duchess, I carried her to the smashed window and as the fresh cold air beat in on her face she stirred. My own head began to reel and I put her on her feet. I took a couple of gulps of air and looked around for J. B. Gross.

He was moving stealthily, with a dead minimum of effort, toward the circulating room heater which stood against the wall midway between his desk and the door. He was watching me with those awful sunken black eyes which never seemed to blink.

Well, it was sheer insanity to do it, to move, to breathe that air. It was sheer insanity, panting as I was, to get away from the window.

But there was something driving me.

With my head reeling, warning caution, I forgot caution and leaped toward J. B. Gross. He retreated to the far corner of the room. He didn't jump, or run. He glided backwards, smoothly and effortlessly, his unblinking black eyes fixed on me with a deadly intensity.

I didn't dare trust my fist. I was too groggy. I couldn't see clearly and my reflexes were all jimmied up. I picked up the other chair and raised it over my head.

As I lurched toward Gross he slid down in the corner in a formless heap. He looked just as I'd seen him last, like a bundle of bones in a wrinkled black broadcloth sack. He raised his bloodless talon hands and locked them over his hairless skull. He croaked: "Don't hit me! Please don't hit me, mister!"

I hated to do it, but not very much. I brought the chair down crashing on his head. And then went out like a light.

When I came to, the back of my neck was resting on the window sill. Katie and half a dozen stenographers were holding me there, with my head out in the cold air. I took a few deep breaths and knew I was coming around O. K.

"I don't know the score, Pinky," the Duchess said. "But I knew you had to have fresh air."

"Smart girl! You all right?"

"Yes. A little shaky still, but getting better fast."

The stenos were babbling questions, two or three of them half hysterical. In the far corner lay J. B. Gross. A couple of girls were bending over him, wiping away the blood that oozed from a deep gash across the top of his bald head.

I shoed them away. "Let him alone.

If the dirty rat dies, it'll save the state the expense of hanging him."

They tried to argue with me, but I wasn't in the mood and I finally ran the whole gang out of the room. Then, still a bit groggy, I staggered over to the gas heater, which was going full blast, and turned it off. By this time, with all the windows open, the office was full of cold fresh air.

Katie came over. "What was it, Pinky? Carbon monoxide?"

"Right. I'll show you."

I pointed to the vent which led from the heater into the wall. It was ordinary three-inch pipe. But midway in the single section there was a damper. And the damper was closed!

"You see, these gas heaters give off carbon monoxide when they're going full tilt. That's the reason for the vent, to carry it off. But that vent is never, under any circumstances, fitted with a damper when it's installed."

"Of course not. If you close the vent the carbon monoxide will escape into the room."

"All right. J. B. Gross was hot. He was so hot that a tip from Rosenberg to the Federal authorities would have sent him over for a long stretch. Rosie was threatening him and he decided to rub Rosie out.

"So he bought a section of three-inch pipe with a damper in it. He substituted it for the section the stove was fitted with and what'd he have?"

"A neat little lethal chamber," the Duchess said promptly.

"Exactly. Yesterday when Rosie came in he flipped that damper and started sending the carbon monoxide into the room. And Rosie died—Today—"

"I get it," Katie said breathlessly. "He talked to me for a while and I gave him the works. I told him I was

working on my own. I let him think I was all by myself up here last night and conked him with a flashlight. And I hinted he might be able to buy me off. That's when he got up, saying the room felt cold, and went over and adjusted the heater."

"You mean, that's when he decided to put you to sleep."

IV

KATIE frowned. "He certainly had nerve, or else he's a bit cracked. Two deaths from heart failure in this office would have looked rather suspicious."

"What of it? If he'd got rid of that section of pipe with the damper in it before the police started checking up he'd have been in the clear, wouldn't he? Even though they found the heater's vent pipe was missing, Gross could plead ignorance, couldn't he?"

"And that section of pipe we picked up last night—" Katie began.

"Was the section he'd removed. He was sneaking up here to put it back and get rid of the one with the damper. When we ran off with it he had to let it wait a day. He couldn't buy another this morning and come up here and install it in front of the stenographers."

The Duchess nodded thoughtfully. "But—but, Pinky!" she cried abruptly. "Gross was in the room all the time himself, breathing those deadly fumes. If Rosie died, and you and I passed out, why did he suffer no ill effects?"

"Ah! There you have the cleverest angle of the whole plot. You see, Gross—"

At that instant a bull voice cried hoarsely from the doorway: "What in Sam Hill goes on here?"

I groaned. Yes, of course. It was the Lady, breathless and disheveled,

her absurd hat cocked on one ear, the inevitable smudge of ink on her chin. She strode into the room in a way that made her seem three times her size. She took hold of Katie's arms and looked at her hard. Then she whirled and confronted me.

"And you, you big palooka, told me I'd signed her death warrant," the Lady stormed. "She looks pretty much alive to me. What's the bright idea, scaring me half to death that way?"

"You tell her, Katie," I said weakly. "I've got something else on my mind."

I went over to the window and lost my lunch. Excitement and carbon monoxide, I guess, are a tough combination. I must have hung over that window for an hour, retching, and wanting to die, and afraid I wasn't going to.

I have a vague recollection of Captain Wallis showing up a few minutes after the Lady. And right on his tail Pete Zerker, and Spike Kaylor and Jeff Gervin. There was a lot of conversation, but I wasn't interested in it.

I recall hearing a couple of wagon men come in and dump J. B. Gross on a stretcher. I heard one of them say: "No fracture, apparently. He'll snap out of it."

My head cleared at last and I stopped retching. Everybody had gone by that time except Katie, Captain Wallis and Inspector Jenkins. Katie and I stayed there for quite a while, answering questions, delving into Gross's records.

When finally we shoved off, Wallis and Jenkins were still rummaging through the office. We drove around for a couple of hours; you can't get too much fresh air after a dose of carbon monoxide. When we got back to the press room it was late in the afternoon.

Pete Zerker was just hanging up the telephone as we walked in. "You

called the turn, Pinky. The coroner says Rosie died of monoxide poisoning. With that bad heart of his, one good whiff was all he needed."

Spike Kaylor looked up from another phone. "The dicks have found the hardware store where Gross bought the pipe with the damper. The clerk hasn't slept since, remembering that hairless mug."

Jeff Gervin, as usual, was pouring himself a drink. "Just talked to the Emergency, Pink. Gross snapped out of it oke. We'll have the fun of going over to Quentin and watching his last waltz."

"Oh, yeah?" Spike Kaylor growled. "I'll offer even-money Gross beats the rap. Why? Because the set-up doesn't make sense. Here you got Gross sitting there at his desk inhaling that stuff, watching Rosie kick off. The same when Katie passed out. And Pinky. How'd he do it? How'd he come out alive himself? I tell you it doesn't make sense. Except for that, it's an open-and-shut case. When the jury hears he sat there and took it himself, there'll be no soap."

I looked at the Duchess. "Shall I tell 'em, Katie?"

"Let 'em wait," Katie said.

THEY didn't have to wait long. A few minutes later, Captain Wallis walked into the press room. "Here's a page, evidently torn out of a book on chemistry," he announced. "We found it in Gross's desk. One paragraph is marked. Thought you fellows would like to know about it. I'll read it to you.

"The speed with which a person succumbs to carbon monoxide is governed by the victim's rate of metabolism. It is obvious, then, that a young person will succumb more quickly than

an older person, a healthy person more quickly than one who is not well. Whether or not a person is exerting himself is also a vital factor. A man might sit motionless, breathing shallowly, and suffer no ill effects in the presence of sufficient gas to kill another person who was moving around and breathing faster and more deeply."

Captain Wallis folded the page and stowed it in his pocket. "Rosenberg was excitable. He was young. Save for a bad heart, he was in perfect health. By contrast, Gross was calm during their talk. He's past middle age. In the bargain he's been virtually a walking corpse for years. That's why, having studied the properties and effects of monoxide, he knew he was perfectly safe in using it to murder Rosenberg. He knew beyond all doubt that Rosenberg would pass out and, with his bad heart, probably die long before he himself felt any effects of the gas.

"Miss Blayne is young and healthy, too. It got her. So is Kane, and it got him faster than either Rosenberg or Miss Blayne because he'd run up two flights of stairs and was panting like a winded whippet when he rushed into the office. Not to mention his exertions when he got in there. Anyway, I think that cleans up the case: I've filed a murder charge and will present the evidence to the grand jury."

Wallis went out. And again Spike Kaylor grinned and started to beef.

"I still don't get it. Here's a guy commits a perfect crime — at least it would have been perfect if the Duchess wasn't addicted to hunches and Pinky Kane wasn't always stringing along with her. He pulls a plenty smart one, and then he balls up the detail by leaving that marked page in his desk. He

must have known something might go wrong, that the cops might get suspicious and search his office. And certainly he knew that even the dumbest kind of a copper, lamping that marked message, would tumble to the whole set-up. I tell you it doesn't make sense."

Pete Zerker nodded slowly. "You're dead right, Spike. Without that marked passage the D. A. would never get a conviction. It was the one thing Captain Wallis needed to slip the noose around Gross's skinny neck. Coupled with the purchase of the damper, and the results of the post mortem on Rosie and the attempt to kill Katie, that page from the chemistry book adds the final touch to the state's case."

"But how a smart hombre like Gross," Spike groaned, "could be so

dumb as to leave that page lying around where—"

He broke off. I felt his eyes on me and I became very busy lighting a cigarette. I felt all the others' eyes on me and I got even busier lighting that cigarette. There was quite a long silence, while I blew smoke rings at the ceiling.

"Look here, Pinky Kane," Pete Zerker began at last. "Didn't you go over to the library early this afternoon?"

"Yes, Pink, and don't you know it's a misdemeanor to tear pages out of library books?" Spike Kaylor piped up.

"Yeah, mugg, and hasn't anybody wised you that it's a felony to plant evidence?" Jeff Gervin demanded.

I winked at the Duchess. "Boys, you can't be a felon till you're caught. So what?"

Cipher Solvers' Club for June

Cryptograms are intriguing miniature mysteries! And interest in them is ever increasing! As evidence of this, please witness that our readers sent us 5,501 answers to ciphers Nos. 133-56, inclusive, published in our cipher department during June, raising our grand total for the year to 37,128 answers! Your name is listed below if you sent us one or more answers to the June cryptograms. The asterisks indicate Inner Circle Club members, who have individual records of 1,000 or more solutions. The Cipher Solvers' Club for July will be published soon. Watch for it! And send us one or more answers to this week's ciphers!

Twenty-four Answers—K. Aaba, Crowland, Ontario, Canada; Aachen, Hollywood, Calif.; Akaby, Detroit, Mich.; Amanovlettus, Franklin, N. H.; P. J. B., St. Petersburg, Fla.; Baab, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; *Herbert E. Batho, Avalon, Calif.; *See Bee Bee, Hamilton, Kans.; B. D. Bill, Chicago, Ill.; S. B. Booth, New York, N. Y.; Ben Brownie, New York, N. Y.; Bugler, Elizabethtown, Ky.; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, Madison, Wis.; How Carso, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; *Blue Hen Chick, Middletown, Del.; CIPHERMIT, Houlton, Me.; Judson H. Clark, Elmira, N. Y.; *Joseph E. Conklin, Riverhead, N. Y.; Gladys L. Couch, St. Louis, Mo.; Donald P. Crane, Quincy, Mass.; Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr.; Cryptanalyst, Clinton, Iowa; Cucumber, Redondo Beach, Calif.; W. E. Dalton, Marion, Ind.; Dogmaamogd, Massillon, Ohio; *Edward J. Drumm, Eagle Rock, Calif.; The Red Duke, New York, N. Y.; *M. E., Scranton, Pa.; *Edmaca, Albany,

N. Y.; *Arty Ess, Scranton, Pa.; Ezymarc, Franklin, N. H.; Farad, San Francisco, Calif.; Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky.; *C. F., Baltimore, Md.; *G. Fulton, Cleveland, Ohio; F. A. Gauntt, Oklahoma City, Okla.; The Griffin, Swansea, Mass.; Makem Harder, Berkeley, Calif.; Dr. S. F. Hedgcock, Glencoe, Ill.; *T. Hegarty, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Helen, Boonton, N. J.; Hitch, Boonton, N. J.; Holly, Dallas, Pa.; *G. M. Howe, Allston, Mass.; Mrs. Opal Hurt, Minneapolis, Minn.; Alter Idem, Welland, Ontario, Canada; *Jayel, Canton, Ohio; *Jayem, Bellingham, Wash.; *U. U. Jeff, Massillon, Ohio; Jonesibus, Austin, Tex.; Kate, Crowley, La.; Ker, Saginaw, Mich.; Doc K, Cicero, Ill.; Edward L. Kowalski, Chicago, Ill.; Lethargic, Los Angeles, Calif.; G. E. Long, Cripple Creek, Colo.; *E. H. Loyd, Jr., Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. Bertha Luckmun, Ochedyan, Iowa; Lynn, New York, N. Y.; *Niche, A. M.,

(Continued on Page 91)

The Treasure of the Bandit Village

By Eugene Thomas

DFW
SHORT
NOVELETTE



Wylie's body suddenly became inert

THE motor car stopped with a jolt and a grinding of brakes. The man at the wheel pointed ahead. "It is only a little way over there," he said. "This is the end of the road—"

"So those last two miles were still what you call a road?" said Adrian Wylie.

"You are sure this is the place?" Vivi-

an Legrand put in very suspiciously.

The man at the wheel answered without an instant's hesitation. "Of course I am sure, *señora*. This is the place. You have seen the map—"

"The map which only you can decipher."

"It is my money," said Cruz Delgado, getting out of the car. "I should know where I buried it."

"You should know. And having saved your life—for

Though the Lady from Hell Had a Huge Contraband Fortune in Her Clutches, How Did She Contrive to Get the Spanish Police to Defend Her Treasure Against the Very Bandits from Whom She Had Just Filched It?

a price — we should also know.”

It was a cat and mouse game that the three notorious criminals played, and now Cruz Delgado, bandit leader known and feared throughout Spain and Portugal, believed that all the advantages lay with him.

Vivian Legrand, whom the international underworld described without exaggeration as The Lady from Hell, and “Doc” Wylie, her talented confederate, had returned to the Continent of Europe after many dangerous and thrilling adventures in South America and the Caribbean. All of them had proved to be immensely profitable, save the last one. The burning of the coasting steamer, *Esteban*, from which horror the pair had only escaped with their lives, had cost them the great

fortune accumulated through their years of cunning and ruthless preying upon rich men only a shade less clever and unscrupulous than Vivian Legrand herself.

With indomitable resolve and a kind of sinister fury the Lady from Hell had at once set about repairing the ravages of that one outrageous stroke of fortune. Wylie was still suffering from the injuries he had received in the panic and tragedy of the burning *Esteban*. Vivian it was who conceived and largely executed the plot which

rescued Cruz Delgado from his police captors.

Extradited from South America, the fugitive bandit chief was a man marked for execution. And not once, but twice had Vivian Legrand snatched him from the Spanish authorities,

She had permitted his recapture in Cadiz—to enlarge her chances of gain—and then had contrived to save him

from the firing squad at the very moment of his long delayed execution. Defying both civil justice and martial law, she had literally exploded the process of condemning Cruz Delgado. And the bandit leader had appeared properly grateful, ready and eager to pay the agreed upon price of rescue.

In a secret place up here in the Sierra de Guadarama the notorious bandit had

hidden his loot to the total sum of seven hundred thousand *pesetas*. Upon helping him dig it up, as their reward for saving his life and restoring his freedom, Vivian and Wylie were to take half of this notable treasure.

“We can leave the car here with perfect safety,” said Cruz Delgado. “Nobody in these parts would even know how to start a Renault. Not many have ever seen an automobile. You have noticed how they stare—”

“I thought perhaps they recognized you,” said Vivian.

A TRIO OF “LADY FROM HELL” STORIES

“THE Treasure of the Bandit Village” is the second of a group of three LADY FROM HELL short novelettes—each complete in itself—but forming a trio of continued and related episodes. These are being presented in three successive issues of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Readers will be interested to know that, although the LADY FROM HELL stories are fiction, they are based on fact. The colorful adventures of the series was the notorious blackmailer, “Babe” Carrington, who called herself “Vivian Legrand” in one or two instances, but never habitually. The famous Spanish bandit, Cruz Delgado, with whom she carries on the most reckless expedition of her entire audacious career in this episode, operated for a time in South America. It was during his extradition from that continent that these two noted personages of the criminal world first met.

"In this chauffeur's get up? Hardly. My own men wouldn't know me."

The green eyes of the Lady from Hell narrowed to thoughtful slits. "Where are your men now?" she asked.

"Alas, *señora*, they are scattered—all scattered. Some killed—some in prison—"

"And a few, I don't doubt, trying to take your place."

The Spaniard turned with easy, cat-like grace. In his dark eyes there was a faint, menacing gleam. "What do you mean, *señora*?"

"MAINLY this, my friend—we're as trusting and optimistic as kids on Christmas Eve. Some of your men had to help you bring the money up here. They had to help you bury it. You later fled to South America, were detected after a time, arrested and brought back. Months, years have passed. But the treasure you are certain is all of it waiting right here, untouched."

"You are tired, *señora*? You wish to turn back?"

"No—and I'm not trying to change the subject, Cruz Delgado. Are you really leading us to the money?"

"But I owe you my life—"

"Owe is right."

"I am guiding you straight to the hiding place. You have seen my secret map."

"An excellent map, worth all of five *centavos* in the open market—"

Delgado glanced at Wylie and shrugged in masculine resignation. "The *señora* is naturally impatient. She will value my map for all it is worth when it brings us to the money—your share and my share, an even split."

"Lead on," said Adrian Wylie.

The alleged mountain road had been rocky and in stretches all but impassable, and now this indistinct mountain "path" which they were traversing on foot in single file surpassed the hardships of the road at every step.

Wylie had not as yet completely recovered from his injuries suffered aboard the flaming *Esteban*. And Cruz Delgado, after weeks of close confinement in the sort of foul dungeons Spanish prisons reserve for criminals condemned to death, was scarcely in the best athletic trim. Only Vivian pushed ahead as one virtually unaware of the difficulties they were arduously surmounting.

"How much farther?" she asked when Wylie signaled his need to pause and rest.

"Just a little way ahead—there, *señora*, beyond that sharply jutting rock—"

She estimated the distance Delgado indicated. "About a hundred yards. Come on, Doc," she urged. "You can make it."

With one of her swift, commanding gestures she relieved her partner of the spade that he had carried from the motor car. Delgado also had a spade, and a well filled haversack slung over one shoulder, containing food and wine for their refreshment.

Vivian had elected to carry a small pick, rather like the entrenching tool one day to become famous in the World War. She shouldered spade and pick together, and kept up the same dogged pace she had set for her male companions from the beginning of their curious adventure.

"Well—" She paused, her suspicions never at rest where Cruz Delgado's plan was concerned. "There's the jutting rock. Sit down, Doc—get your breath."

The liberated bandit chieftain consulted the crumpled sheet of yellowing paper which represented the famous treasure map. "Fifteen paces from that rock—" he murmured.

"In what direction?"

"North—northwest, *señora*—"

"We forgot to bring a compass, Vi," said Wylie.

"I didn't." She produced a small compass, determined the location.

"There—that's north—northwest."

Delgado solemnly paced off the distance. "—thirteen—fourteen—fifteen!"

"We dig there? You're standing on solid rock."

"Patience, if you please, *señora*," the Spanish rogue murmured gallantly.

"Don't tell me you had the cache originally prepared by a firm of surveyors?"

Delgado ignored her jeering remark, consulted his tattered map, squinted at the sun, then fell into a kind of reverie.

"Instead of blowing down that prison wall to save you, we ought to have saved enough dynamite to blow off the top of this mountain. It's rock all around here," Vivian snapped. "Why didn't you warn us that we'd need blasting powder?"

"Because, *señora*, we are going to dig between the rocks."

Delgado was pacing again, but this time he did not trouble to announce his direction, or the number of paces required to conduct him to his goal. Suddenly he paused, dramatic in his triumph. "Here—right here!"

Vivian and Wylie exchanged glances. Neither was convinced, yet neither wished to provoke immediate trouble by denouncing their Spanish ally as a cheat and double-crosser. Vivian had not studied Delgado's thoughtful pose or watched the graceful ges-

tures of the hands. She had looked only at his feet, had noted him cautiously feeling for soft spots of earth where digging might really begin.

"Feeling better, Doc?" she said. "Let's get to work. Can't be down very deep. How deep did you say?"

"As deep as I and my two companions could make it, *señora*. I do not exactly remember—"

"That answers my question you ignored awhile back. Two companions, was it? And what happened to them after helping you hide your fortune?"

"I purposely selected old and trustworthy men. One died while I was in Brazil. The other I have heard was killed not long ago in a clash with the Civil Guard."

"Both are dead," Vivian reflected, her green eyes shallow and expressionless as jade. "And now you are trusting two more companions. I hope there's no bad luck connected with this hiding place."

Cruz Delgado, a bandit leader charged with the taking of more than twenty lives, ostentatiously crossed himself.

THE two men began their digging, but soon Vivian was hard at work beside them, wielding the light but helpful pick.

"You're sure this is the right spot, man?" Wylie demanded. "I've taken a hand at this sort of game several times before. There is no sign that this soil has been disturbed since the old earth's surface began to cool."

They were now knee deep in a short narrow trench. Vivian Legrand held the pick firmly, but from habit or instinct she also felt with her elbow for the small automatic she wore in a holster under her left armpit, its slight

bulge entirely masked by her silk blouse and loose tweed jacket.

"It is possible," said Delgado in an apologetic tone, "that I have slightly miscalculated. But only a meter or two. I am very sorry. Let me do the heavy work. I'll dig along here—"

With a fine muscular sweep of the spade he started extending the length of their shallow trench, which more than ever began to resemble a grave.

Wylie and Vivian, persuaded by his evidently revived enthusiasm, joined in to help with the new attack. Five minutes later there came another pause. The three, warmed by their exertion despite the chill morning air of the mountainside, stopped and took account of their progress.

"It is here—right here, I swear it!" Delgado exclaimed, before Vivian and Wylie could voice further skepticism. "After all—I stand to gain or lose as much by this as you folks do. It is all I have in the world. Willingly I agreed to divide with you, my rescuers. But the half I intend to keep, that also is lost until we dig and find it."

"But, we have been digging," Wylie said. "We can't scrape the topsoil off a whole range of mountains. It's nearly noon already. You're a fugitive with a big price on your head—"

Cruz Delgado's dark eyes flickered ever so slightly. The Lady from Hell, whose lifelong textbook had been Man—stupid, brutal, or heroic, dishonest, timid, cowardly, weak, lustful, sentimental, or cunning—saw on the instant that the Spaniard feared her and her partner, and, fearing, hated them both. He knew that, whether his treasurer should be uncovered or not, they held in him a form of security that tomorrow or any day thereafter could be taken to the police and exchanged for cold cash.

"We can't drive up this mountainside every day for a week, you know, without attracting too much attention," Wylie pursued. "And the going's too rough to come here after dark. It was no cinch driving here from Cadiz, sneaking and dodging—with every village policeman hoping to earn that reward by spotting the great bandit-escaper, Cruz Delgado, who'd been snatched from right under the guns of a firing squad—"

"For which miracle, you and the beautiful *señora* have earned my undying gratitude!" Delgado put in floridly.

"We don't climb mountains for that," said Vivian. She was smiling, but her eyes were cold and hard as bits of emerald.

DELGADO flung down his spade. "Come," he cried, "I am famished, and both of you must be. Let's eat and open a bottle of Manzanilla. Then I shall dig, and you shall watch me find the money buried in this secret place."

And so they joined him in preparing lunch. The haversack yielded its treasures without any groping; roast chicken, bread, olives, fruit and two bottles of wine. Delgado produced wooden plates and three metal cups. He expertly drew the cork from one of the dark bottles and poured out the Spanish wine.

"Your health, *señora*—and yours, Doctor Wylie—my two greatest friends," said the bandit. He tilted his head back with verve and abandon, appearing to drain his cup.

Vivian Legrand took a sip of the wine, a second and a third, swallowing the liquid almost without tasting or savoring it because she was tired and thirsty.

Wylie replied: "And to your health, Cruz Delgado—and to our success here today and the sharing of good fortune." He then drank deeply.

Vivian saw her partner sway drunkenly before she realized that the wine was making her dizzy. Danger threatened him. She looked at Delgado, who held the dark bottle uncertainly in his left hand, the presumably emptied cup in his right. He was staring into the cup.

"This Manzanilla," he muttered, "It's strong—"

Just then Adrian Wylie went limp all over, as though he had been caught unawares by a terrific blow on the back of the head. His cup slipped from suddenly relaxing fingers, struck musically against a projecting rock and rolled away.

"Doc!" The mere exertion of her outcry brought upon Vivian an overpowering surge of dizziness. She saw Delgado still staring into the cup, then glancing up slyly to look at her. His head and shoulders seemed to grow enormous, but then weirdly contracted to midget size.

Vivian threw down her cup, splashing the wine upon her feet and ankles. She snatched up a large slab of bread and, like a greedy child, crammed all of it into her mouth. Her throat, however, now felt strangely parched and contracted, and only unbeatable resources of will power enabled her to chew and swallow the bread.

Poison! was her thought. Cruz Delgado had brought her and Wylie to this nearly inaccessible spot in the Sierra de Guadarrama, tricked them into drinking poisoned wine—and here they would die.

By a further prodigious exertion of will she reached out to break another piece of bread from the round peasant

loaf. She must lift it—an incredible burden—to her mouth, must force herself to choke it down. All around her now the bright, invigorating mountain atmosphere was turning dark.

Delgado, who obviously had drunk no wine but craftily pretended to fill and drain his cup, loomed over her dangerously, a figure vaguely seen and once again gigantic. He struck the bread from her hand. She had only swallowed a little of the wine. It must be poison. He didn't intend to risk even the crudest antidote.

Wylie had crumpled up like a figure of straw, and lay on his side in a contorted position, his breathing desperately labored. Vivian for one minute of unbearable agony continued to resist the stupefying effects of the drug.

She raised her arm heavily, pointing up at Delgado.

"You will not find your treasure—and you will not find *our* treasure—" she managed to rasp in an unnatural, high-pitched tone. Then she, too, collapsed and lost consciousness, the bright sun of noontide streaming upon the burnished helmet of her hair.

II

THE words that from instinct she had spoken to Delgado as she fell over, limp and insensible, really saved her life. The bandit had never previously thought that his alien rescuers might also possess substantial hidden funds. He had rather been disposed to believe that Vivian Legrand and Wylie were badly in need of money—as, in fact, they were.

Their great accumulation of cash and securities had been lost with the burning of the Monteverdian steamer *Esteban*. And a fat money-belt which Vivian had ruthlessly extorted from Miguel, the half crazed skipper of that

doomed ship, had afterward been stolen. Except for the few thousand *pesetas* thus far gained from her individual exploits in twice separating the Spanish authorities from their prize captive, Cruz Delgado, the once wealthy Lady from Hell was flat broke. Wylie shared that uncomfortable condition, and was, moreover, still handicapped by a slow convalescence from his physical injuries.

Delgado, the ingrate, who feared and therefore hated his rescuers, had not poisoned them. He had given them a powerful narcotic, obtained from a former confederate of the underworld to whom he had surreptitiously applied when passing through Toledo on their flight from Cadiz.

It had been easy to open one of the bottles of wine, put in the drug, mark and recork the bottle in such a way that it seemed not to have been tampered with. Cruz Delgado congratulated himself with Latin fervor in being able to outwit such formidable plotters as Vivian Legrand and Wylie.

It had even proved a simple stratagem to pretend to fill his cup and seem to empty it at a gulp with both of them observing him. That, the key to his whole malignant project, had passed off very naturally. But now—intrigued by Vivian's words, "and you will not find *our* treasure"—the bandit was recklessly engaged in ruining his well laid plan.

First he searched the pockets of both of his helpless adversaries. And he found coins and currency, a few hundred *pesetas*, residue of the sum he had originally paid them after deduction of their expenses on the furtive journey from Cadiz, minor bribes, hiring the motor car, and sundries. Wylie carried in his wallet bank receipts—London, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels—

showing that he and Vivian had upward of four hundred pounds at their disposal in the various European cities. Delgado pocketed these, believing he would be able to dispose of them at a heavy discount in the underworld of Spain.

But they hardly would call four hundred pounds a treasure. What else had they hidden and where?

Delgado, supposing that he had plenty of time, even picked his way down the slope till he came to the spot where they had left the Renault. Vivian and Wylie each had a bag in the car. He ransacked them both. Vivian's contained only apparel and a box of ammunition for a .25 Colt automatic. She must have such a gun on her, Delgado decided, and reminded himself to search for it when he returned to finish off his little chore of homicide.

Wylie's bag contained several kinds of paper and inks, also a variety of pens. The bandit found a copy of his own fake "treasure" map so perfectly devised that he couldn't be sure which was the original counterfeit.

SO they had borrowed from him while he slept, and had thought to make sure that he did not trick them. But he had tricked them! He showed his strong white teeth in a wolfish grin. His money lay safely hidden a good distance to the north, far from this isolated section of the Sierra de Guadarrama. He would leave them here, and proceed at his leisure to secure the prize exclusively for himself.

Cruz Delgado had become a notoriously successful bandit leader because he could endure no rivalry, no equals. He had a dictator's temperament, and only worked with followers who obeyed him like serfs. Even when feeling his earliest pangs of gratitude as

Vivian Legrand, only slightly assisted by the convalescent Wylie, rescued him from certain execution, Delgado had resented taking orders from the dazzling red haired woman.

He disliked her alien condescension, her all too evident mental superiority. He had loathed being helped and saved, had hated dependence upon the pair, and dreaded and despised them for being able to hold over him the power of life and death. They had thought they could demand a half share of all his hidden loot, had they?

What a pity they were unconscious and would remain so to the end—unable to realize how completely he had triumphed. Delgado continued searching the car until he was sure nothing had escaped his attention. If any paper or document existed, locating such "treasure" of theirs as Vivian had mentioned, it must be hidden on one of them.

The despicable criminal again trudged up the mountainside, resolved to strip and search both his victims. He jumped a small, brawling mountain brook—and that gave him a new idea. Why not bind the pair securely, bring them to by plunging them into this chilling water, torture one or both till the secret of the "treasure" had been disgorged? Then leave them to perish—

These solacing cogitations were abruptly checked as Cruz Delgado's keen eyes swept the valley below. A moving cloud of dust! A party of horsemen riding two and two! Sun glinting upon uniforms and equipment—

Mounted police, a squad of the Civil Guard, dangerously near and coming this way!

There were many paths they might take. But if they did not turn off, if they discovered the unoccupied motor

car, and then scaled the mountainside to surround and surprise him—he would have a battle on his hands. He was armed only with knife and revolver, while they would have Lebel guns or Mannlicher carbines. And he had a price on his head!

Delgado covered the rest of the distance with the speed and agility of a mountain sheep. He found Vivian Legrand and Wylie lying just as he had left them. The drug had been powerful, indeed; and Wylie, who had swallowed twice as much as his partner, was barely alive.

Far away still was the little cloud of dust, but the armed horsemen, though taking it easy and not pressing their mounts, were inexorably following the alleged road that would bring them to the telltale Renault.

No time, then, for further searching of his victims, no time to try to revive them, or torture them and gloat over their alien despair. Cruz Delgado was too conceited to admit he feared the police. Yet he nourished an abiding distaste for noisome Spanish dungeons and an aching desire never again to face a firing squad or any other type of executioner. It may even have struck him with a twinge of whatever atrophied conscience the desperado owned that he was engaged in destroying the very people who had been able twice to save him.

In his haste he even forgot about hunting for Vivian's small automatic.

THE Lady from Hell, who had sunk so perilously close to some encounter with eternity, revived with the strangest sensation she was ever to experience. Something pattered upon her body, upon her face. Then something heavier struck her sharply and painfully—it was a sliver of rock.

A peculiar grating sound rasped upon her still half benumbed senses. The sound of a spade—

Vivian opened her lips and found them abominable and gritty. She opened her eyes, but cautiously and only peered through narrowed slits.

Her inward ejaculation was an emotional earthquake, but actually she made no sound. Horror of an electric, galvanizing sort, altogether new to one of her nerve and poise, quickened her brain.

Cruz Delgado was burying her alive.

She found herself lying face up in the shallow trench they had dug. Small quantities of earth and stones had already been thrown upon her. The spade had stopped scraping, however. What was he up to? And what should she do?

If her recovery of consciousness was revealed to him, fear and desperation would inspire the monster to split her skull with his handiest weapon—the spade—before she could so much as raise a hand.

It was fortunate that he had thrown her on her back. Face down, she could hardly have turned over without warning him—would, in fact, have already begun to smother.

What *was* he doing? The icy horror of her predicament was too much even for her steel-fibered nerves. Her impulse to scream—a fatal impulse—was so nearly overpowering, she bit hard on the dirt and grit clinging to her lips. And the very human distaste for such substances served as a brake on her throat which ached to yell.

Delgado, whom she could not see over the rim of her impromptu grave, was now making another scraping sound, but this time not with the spade. Vivian suddenly guessed it: she lay

on a hard, rough surface—Delgado had paid her the compliment of trying to bury her deep—and now he was dragging closer and closer the limp form of Adrian Wylie, meaning to bury him in the same grave.

As the sound came nearer, Vivian dared to move a little. She used her left elbow to press her side. It was still there, her ever useful little “rescuers,” the concealed automatic she wore strapped tight underneath her blouse. She tried her right arm. It throbbed and seemed to have been cruelly twisted, yet responded painfully—wrist, elbow and shoulder.

Such a brief, vital gesture would be necessary, her life, as often before, to be staked upon that sudden, swift flexing of elbow and wrist. She kept her eyes closed till the last split-second, meanwhile straining to hear. If she opened her eyes and the dirt on her face sifted in, no instinct of self-control would be strong enough to stop her moving one hand quickly to try to ease that unbearable irritation.

The moment of crisis, she could tell, was all but upon her.

She ventured at last to look up, squinting one eye and seeing but indistinctly. Delgado's head and shoulders were visible. His face was turned away. He stepped closer, twisting half around, arms extending downward.

One of Wylie's feet slid gruesomely over the rim of the grave. Vivian's right hand was stirring, creeping toward her left armpit. Wylie's other foot became visible, his knees—

Delgado was turning, leaning forward directly over her now, to swing the inert body into position, Wylie's head at her feet. Vivian's right hand completed its stealthy journey, then flashed up.

The small automatic barked twice.

Two round dark holes appeared miraculously one above, one below the right eye of Cruz Delgado. He lurched forward, releasing his grip upon the slack form of Adrian Wylie, which slumped awkwardly across the narrow opening of the trench, half sagging into it.

Delgado, dead before he hit the ground, lay asprawl close beside him. This curious, ghastly canopy seemed to pin Vivian Legrand into the space that had come so near to being her brave. And after the masterly exertion with which she had willed herself to aim accurately and shoot swiftly, it took her nearly ten minutes to summon new strength to lift Wylie gently aside, thrust Delgado's corpse out of the way and scramble out of the trench.

Wylie she discovered very faintly breathing. It wasn't safe to give him wine from the unopened bottle. Delgado might have drugged them both; but she briskly knocked the neck off that bottle and showered its alcoholic contents upon his face and head. She exercised her stricken partner's arms and chafed his wrists with a perceptibly stimulating effect. Color came gradually back into his pallid countenance.

Since she herself had not been poisoned, but only knocked out with a powerful drug, it must be that nothing more serious had overtaken him. He had, however, swallowed more of the doctored wine and, in his still weakened condition, had been almost instantly bowled over by that potent draught.

AS soon as Wylie began to stir and Vivian saw that he was going to revive, she gave some attention to Cruz Delgado. That monster of ingratitude and remorseless cunning was dead, very dead. Vivian still had dirt and grit in her hair, on her face, all

over her clothes to remind her that it was no nightmare, Delgado had actually been burying her alive when she shot him.

Intrepid as she was, the thought still made her shudder. Centuries ago men and women had been sentenced to be entombed alive for religious or political offences; and even in those barbarous times burning at the stake had been preferred as punishment.

Vivian used some of the wine remaining from the second bottle to cleanse her face and hands as best she could. There was the mountain brook she remembered no great way off, but she didn't want to venture that far away from Adrian Wylie until he had fully recovered his senses.

Realizing that their expedition to this isolated spot had been only Delgado's special scheme for ridding himself of oppressive benefactors, Vivian now began searching for some clue to the actual hiding place of the loot.

Since he had sought to cheat and destroy them with a faked map, it seemed probable that there really existed a map disclosing his treasure's place and manner of concealment.

The Lady from Hell, given this new and promising objective, quickly regained much of her natural vigor, resource and assurance. She still treated Delgado and his possessions a bit gingerly, yet within a few minutes she discovered that the handle of a knife he carried tucked inside his belt could be loosened and unscrewed.

The handle proved to be hollow, providing a small compartment in which Vivian discovered a tightly folded sheet of tough linen paper.

Spread out it was about nine inches square. Traced in pale green ink on its glossy surface was what appeared to be the ground plan of a house.

"This must be it," Vi said to herself, adding: "Doc will know how to locate the house if these marks give any location."

Her absorbing study was interrupted when she heard Wylie groan. He was just coming to, and she hastened to aid him.

"Just lie still. I'll get some water from the brook we crossed climbing up here. Nothing to worry about, Doc. When you're quite yourself, I'll tell you what has happened—"

SHE carried away the three metal drinking cups and, for want of any other container, Wylie's fine American felt hat. Kneeling beside the running water, she very carefully rinsed the two cups into which Delgado had poured the drugged wine. His own cup had never been touched by the wine, and so it would be safe for Wylie to drink from that. Before risking it, however, she used the cup herself.

It tasted all right. The clear, cold mountain spring water immensely refreshing. With her various containers brimming she started up to climb back to the sheltered ledge where she had left her reviving partner.

But what was happening below in the valley?

Instinctively crouching to hide from possible enemies, Vivian Legrand descried the party of mounted men, now halted at the termination of the alleged mountain road, at the place where they had left their motor car.

Spanish gendarmes — the Civil Guard! Investigating!

She must return to Adrian Wylie as swiftly as possible, making haste without stumbling on the rocky incline and spilling her cargo of water from the brook. Somehow she man-

aged this, though still feeling the powerful effects of the narcotic Delgado had put in their wine. At one treacherous point of the uncertain path a racking wave of dizziness all but overcame her.

She shut her eyes and stood perfectly still. Then, bending down, with the cups and hat on a convenient boulder, she splashed water in her own face till she could convince herself that she was all right again. Reaching Wylie with a stifled sob of relief, she sank down beside him, encouraging, restoring and warning him almost in one breath.

"The police are bound to come up here and find us. How do I look, doc? Delgado came at me after knocking you out — and I shot him. How's that?"

"Vi, you look as though a whole mountain—a volcano had attacked you," he whispered hoarsely.

Then in an agony of mind renewed by her awful recollection, she revealed how the bandit had planned to get rid of them, how he had actually been burying them alive—

"Tell me the rest some other time, Vi," said Adrian Wylie. He took hold of her firm, slender right hand and squeezed it with surprising strength. "Thank God for that steady hand!"

"And for you making me learn to shoot, years ago in Manila."

III

EVEN soiled and disheveled as she was, Vivian Legrand made a striking and unforgettable picture as she knelt beside Adrian Wylie, and turned, still kneeling, to face the Spanish police officers. A jutting ledge of rock cast a broad, blue-gray shadow which protected them from the glare of the afternoon

sun. Vivian's work as a ministering angel was only too apparent. She was never the Lady from Hell when it came to looking after the shrewd, loyal, accomplished man who had been her partner in crime through thick and thin for many years. The Spaniards were astonished and instantly impressed.

Both she and Wylie spoke Spanish fluently. Had he not posed as the Dictator of the Republic of Monteverde?

"The Civil Guard!" Vivian exclaimed. "Oh, thank God, Captain, that you and your men have found us!"

"Señora, what has happened?"

"You heard my shots?"

"Shots! No, señora—were you signaling?"

"I have been in desperate danger," said Vivian, her lovely oval face lifted appealingly. She told her name and that of her stricken companion—Doctor Adrian Wylie.

"We were miles away," said the Spanish Guard captain. "But a report reached us of the passing of your motor car. That is no very common occurrence in this part of the country. It had to be investigated."

"It was the idea of our chauffeur," Vivian explained in her easily simulated tones of semi-hysteria. "He suggested that we come here—"

"But why?"

"He told us that he knew where an old Spanish treasure is hidden. If we would finance him—come here and help him look for it—" She broke off with a desperate sob. Nor was all of this acting. Spells of dizziness still afflicted her; the drug in the wine had been potent, indeed, and it would be hours before its complete effect wore off.

"Señora—I regret to say it against my own countrymen, but the 'Spanish Treasure' is as old a fraud as the 'Spanish prisoner' of which you must have heard."

"Captain, this was more than fraud. He—he tried to kill us!"

"And escaped when you fired the shots calling for help?"

Vivian Legrand was now a pitiable sight, the utmost manifestation of beauty in distress. "I fired the shots to defend myself, Captain—I was so desperately afraid. And I killed him—"

"Here—see here, sir!" One of the police officers had found the body of Cruz Delgado, lying face downward in the trench.

His chauffeur's uniform and the mask of blood and dirt caking his face deceived them for several minutes. Then one of the policemen recognized the notorious bandit.

"It is Cruz Delgado all right," the commanding officer agreed.

"Who?" asked Vivian.

She listened with eagerness and wonder as the bandit's identity and merciless career of crime were related to her and Adrian Wylie. On hearing how he had just recently been rescued from the firing squad in the jail yard at Cadiz, Vivian asked several innocent-sounding questions. Thus she acquired important information: no description of Delgado's accomplices which resembled either Wylie or herself had been spread broadcast to warn the police.

"There is a large reward offered for this rogue, dead or alive, señora," said the police captain. "All Spain today is indebted to you. Our government will be happy to present the reward to so beautiful and brave a lady."

"And I shall insist on sharing it with the police," she replied. Doctor Wylie and I will accept part of the money because Delgado has robbed us, too. We don't want to be left stranded. But I count on you as an officer and gentleman to see to it that the police are given public credit for— for disposing of Cruz Delgado. I dislike publicity—pictures in the newspapers. And I couldn't go on living, Captain, if I had become notorious as the woman who shot and killed a celebrated criminal and murderer."

The officer clicked his heels and bowed very gallantly.

"I quite understand your scruples in this, *señora*. It shall, of course, be as you wish. Only my superior officers, a few heads of the government, perhaps King Alfonso himself, will need to see my confidential report and know the truth of this matter."

HE was smiling very happily, and Vivian knew she had struck the right note and could depend upon him absolutely. It probably meant promotion for him, sums of money for his troopers. And she and Wylie would not be harassed by an avalanche of international publicity, so dangerous to a pair with their past lingering behind them.

The young gendarme captain— whose name, he said, was Rafael de Vargas—thus became one more police official caught by the spell of Vivian Legrand's incomparable enchantments. "*Señora*, you are not only beautiful and generous," he exclaimed, "but a truly astounding pistol shot."

"It was dreadful to have to shoot to kill, even in self-defense," sighed the Lady from Hell. "I have practiced firing at a target, of course. But, Captain, I was too frightened to re-

member any of the rules—just pointed the gun, shut my eyes, and pressed the trigger."

And Cruz Delgado, as the simplest autopsy would prove, had been killed instantly by a brain shot.

Captain de Vargas ordered his men to fetch a blanket and wrap it around the bandit's body before they began moving it down the slope to the motor car. Adrian Wylie, feeling much stronger now and with his physician's pose to maintain, went over to examine Delgado's fatal wounds.

Later he said to Vivian, aside: "Lying flat on your back, half stupefied from the drug—with dirt sifting into your eyes! Vi, it's unbelievable—"

"Delgado's face was all the target I had," she shrugged.

She had been careful to conceal the fascinating, though as yet undeciphered, drawing which she had discovered in the hollow handle of the master bandit's knife. However, she very ostentatiously consulted young de Vargas about the other map, alleged to reveal buried treasure, with which Delgado had lured her and Wylie to this remote mountainside.

"It is plainly a fake. I patrol this district with my men, and know every rod of it," said the captain. "But how could you be so sure it was not genuine? Delgado was cruel and murderous, but also, when he wanted to be, cunning, polite, persuasive. It was characteristic of him to escape from the region of Cadiz, break through our tight police cordon, by getting you people—respectable foreign tourists—to hire him as your chauffeur.

"And any other crook but Delgado would have felt grateful to you for all unwittingly covering his flight. But he,

was immune to every decent emotion. Having imposed on you and Doctor Wylie, he could only think of continuing to prey on you. And when you began to suspect his treachery, he prepared to murder you."

"The fellow was so plausible and efficient, we were completely taken in," said Wylie, playing the embarrassed foreigner and novice traveler.

AN hour later they set out for Madrid, enjoying the compliment and protection of a police escort all the way. This considerate treatment at first made Vivian uneasy.

"You don't suppose that they really suspect us in connection with Cruz Delgado's escape?" she asked Wylie in a hushed tone. "Some of the firing squad were killed when that wall was blown down. We're accessories to homicide and heaven knows what else—"

"Forget it! De Vargas admires you too much to lend himself to a scheme meant to trap you, Vi. This escort business does us honor as visiting foreigners. And don't think they aren't grateful to a visitor who has rid them of Cruz Delgado. Your saying to give the police all the credit was a masterstroke."

Madrid's newspapers lavished acclaim upon the provincial police when it was announced that Cruz Delgado had been trapped in a mountain retreat and shot dead resisting arrest. Rafael de Vargas was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. But General Count Morales, head of the Spanish police, came to call upon Vivian and Wylie at their hotel in the capital. He was accompanied by a handsome colonel of the army staff, who proved to be an equerry of the King.

Morales said he wished to negotiate

fairly the division of the 10,000 *pesetas* reward which the government had posted for Cruz Delgado, "dead or alive." After the Count had studied Vivian's beauty for a few minutes, he acquired the thought that this negotiation of the reward's fair distribution would have to be a pretty protracted affair. Two luncheons at the finest cafés of Madrid and a private little dinner party followed. Vivian Legend and Wylie now as friends at Court. They also came into possession of 4,000 *pesetas* of the promised reward, a welcome gain since they had spent all the money originally derived from rescuing Delgado.

"But four thousand won't last long," Vivian said to Wylie. "I already owe fifteen hundred for my new clothes. It costs money to go about with people like Morales—"

"Money which I've no doubt the Count has offered to provide."

"Certainly. The Count — and others. But," she snapped, "that's never been our game. And even the romantic atmosphere of old Spain isn't likely to change me. Let's get busy and figure out that drawing I took from Cruz Delgado's knife handle."

"I have already deciphered it," her partner grinned.

"Then, good Lord, why not tell me? We stay here, fretting over a paltry four thousand *pesetas*, and you hold the key to a treasure of more than half a million."

Wylie frowned, his expression worried and obstinate. "I didn't tell you, Vi, because I knew you'd want to try to go after Delgado's secret hoard. I'm not yet fit to help you much—and it's just too damned dangerous for you alone."

A deep light had leaped into the

greenish eyes of the woman confronting him. "We've had our rules for years, Doc," she reminded him, "and have never seriously quarreled—"

"Because I let you be the boss."

"I'm still boss. It's always been understood that each of us is to be the only judge of the sort of risk he'll run." She paused and her face, which could on occasion be sinister, cruel and hard, was warmly gracious and persuasive. "Tell me what you have deciphered, and I'll figure how we are to bag the treasure. Doesn't Cruz Delgado owe me something? He tried to bury me alive. And I'll die that death in nightmares for years to come."

THE drawing found in Delgado's hollow knife handle, according to the clever interpretation of Adrian Wylie, located a house in the village of Zucorra,* a small place much avoided by travelers, in northwestern Spain. And the reason people tried not to pass through Zucorra, said Wylie, was its natives' addiction to banditry.

"But there was only the house in the drawing," Vivian objected. "How do you know the house is in Zucorra?"

"Code writing on the margin of the sheet. Zucorra is widely known as 'the bandit village.' An honest, law-abiding citizen is as rare in Zucorra as an atheist at morning prayers. Delgado and all his family spring from the vicinity of Zucorra. It's not surprising that he chose to hide his criminal profits there. But it will be remarkable if he hid the money so well that no neighboring robber has been able to uncover it."

"I'll go to Zucorra and find out."

An argument ensued, but Vivian won it.

"Then," Wylie declared, "if you go—I go. I'm feeling better from hour to hour, Vi. And we've got to stick together."

"But I need you here. That's part of my plan. You wait right here and don't worry until you get a message from me. It'll be marked 'Monteverde' somewhere, to tell you I'm all right and that what I've written for you is on the level." In a swift, enthusiastic undertone the Lady from Hell outlined to him further details of her impromptu and highly original enterprise.

On the following day, therefore—much to the surprise and regret of her new, distinguished friends in Madrid—she left her hotel unexpectedly and was seen no more in the fashionable resorts of the capital. But there were other, less notable Spaniards who were less surprised by her going. And to them, at least, she did not disappear. They were having her shadowed.

Now at that time the police and the underworld of Spain were not any different in their complex relations than the police and criminal elements of other Continental countries. There were stool pigeons who gave information to the Civil Guard; and there were policemen who maintained such useful connections by passing tips back to the underworld.

One of the young de Vargas' troopers had spent his share of the cash reward unwisely. A pretty girl had got him drunk and got him talking, and from that pretty girl had spread the engrossing rumor that not the police but a beautiful red haired foreign lady had shot and killed Cruz Delgado. As Delgado's conquests were a lively part of his legend, and

*A Fictitious Name.

as romance scents the very air of Spain which is not always otherwise agreeably fragrant, Spaniards of both sexes having contact with the world of crime took it for granted that Vivian LeGrand had killed the bandit in a jealous rage.

Perhaps, whispered the underworld, this woman now knows where to look for the fortune that Delgado was supposed to have accumulated and hidden. Watch her closely, whispered the more furtive subjects of Alfonso, and we shall know what she knows.

VIVIAN left the fine Renault in Valladolid and proceeded into the province of León on horseback. She could afford to allow the natives of Zucorra to steal a horse, but hardly an imported motor car. The man who was guiding her had been recommended by a villainous-looking innkeeper as "absolutely trustworthy." Vivian felt sure that the guide, who was also villainous looking, could be depended upon to head her straight into trouble. For that was the plan of the Lady from Hell. The people of Zucorra were thieves and bandits who preyed upon innocent wayfarers — very well, she would arrange to stray into their danger zone, permit them to prey upon her, and locate the hidden wealth of the late Cruz Delgado.

Vivian's first shock of surprise came when she mentioned her real destination to the guide provided by the innkeeper of Ponferrada. "I want to visit Zucorra. One of the strangest villages in all Spain, so I have heard," she prattled. "I am an author and I have to seek out the unusual!"

"We not go near Zucorra," said the guide.

"But I insist. I have hired you.

What's the matter with Zucorra—a lovely place, I am told, with such a splendid view of the Cantabrian Mountains—"

"Nobody goes to Zucorra for the view," he growled.

"Then my book will be all the more original—"

Vivian could play the fluttering, gushing lady tourist to perfection. But her keen eyes were noting every movement of the surly brute, her hired guide, who might become an enemy. Why was his hand fidgetting nervously there at his waistband? A knife?

"On to Zucorra," said the Lady from Hell.

The man instead dismounted and stalked sullenly toward her. Obviously he had decided to terminate their journey here and now, for his own convenience and profit. Obviously he was armed, a knife—and revolver too, perhaps—"

The small automatic that had dictated a well-spaced colon to end the evil life of Cruz Delgado came sliding from its armpit holster and lay at ease in the palm of Vivian's firm, slender hand.

She had chosen just the right second to draw. For the ugly guide's knife was half out—he could not retract his menacing gesture, nor had he time to swing back his arm and try to hurl the glittering blade.

"Put up your hands, you dog! Drop that knife!"

The knife clattered upon the rutted, pebbly road. Malice gleamed in the cold green eyes of the Lady from Hell. It was overlong since her power to dominate men by force had been tested. She had found the coquetry of high life in Madrid a little cloying. Her appetite for sudden, violent measures had regularly to be appeased.

"Just to give you an idea of what a clown you are," she promised, and fired one shot from the weapon she aimed with such seeming nonchalance.

Her erstwhile guide yelped in pain and fell to his knees, pleading for mercy. A small dark hole punctured the very center of his right hand.

"No wonder *you* are afraid of the people of Zucorra," she jeered. "Run whimpering back to Ponferrada. And show our friend, the innkeeper, how promptly I pay for faithful services."

IV

IT was after midnight when Vivian Legrand drew rein in the sleepy village of Zucorra, bent upon carrying out alone the most reckless expedition of her whole audacious and devious career. The large stone dwelling which she sought was plainly discernible by moonlight, for no other building on the single street of the community resembled it or matched the sketch which Wylie had devised after closely studying Delgado's plan.

Vivian dared to ride the length of the village street, then wheel her mount and return to the house whose looming outline engaged her. She raised her voice and called, called again — the musical tone echoing weirdly among the darkened abodes of people whose reputation was the worst in northern Spain.

Their discovery, from the sound of her voice, that this extraordinary nocturnal invader was a woman must have roused the whole village. Heavy shutters parted, and a man's head and shoulders were visible in the frame of an open window directly above her head.

"What do you want?"

"Is this an inn?" she questioned.

"This is Zucorra," he answered

cryptically, as though his conscience, or some rule of sportmanship, required that every potential victim be warned at least once.

"I know that," Vivian called back cheerfully. "I lost my way on the road from Ponferrada. I can ride no farther. I'll pay you well to put me up for the night, and take care of my horse."

"How much will you pay me?" he growled. But the Lady from Hell who habitually played with men, thought she detected an accent of sardonic humor in his query.

"Don't keep me out here haggling with you, man. It's late," she snapped. "I can pay whatever you charge—"

"That's a bargain, then," he chuckled grimly, and pulled the stout shutters to with a slam.

Presently the door swung wide, lights gleamed and there was a poor imitation of the country inn's hospitable bustle. Vivian dismounted. A sleepy, shambling youth took care of her horse. Her host, with whom she had dickered, proved to be a powerfully built and rather handsome man of uncertain age but decidedly formidable aspect.

"I can only offer you bread and wine as refreshment," he explained. His tone and manner were truculent until Vivian Legrand stepped into the lighted room. She heard him catch his breath, and murmur something that sounded like a religious phrase or prayer.

Had the tales of "wicked" Zucorra really been exaggerated? Were its people like most other villages of Spain — law-abiding, devout, impoverished and genial?

The man was staring—staring—as though he had never seen such dazzling beauty before. Well, Vivian

was wholly accustomed to public admiration. Her face, her hair, her exquisite figure had caused a considerable stir of late in the fashionable restaurants and theaters of Madrid.

But her host still stared. His eyes were veiled and guarded, but his hands—Vivian looked at his hands, and knew that she had encountered all and more than her restless spirit of adventure had anticipated.

"Bread and wine will be welcome enough," she said.

Her host turned, and the lamplight carved out his face in a profile of bronze. Vivian, who had thought to be prepared for anything, was not quite prepared for this. The big man confronting her, the man who even now was striding across the room and noisily bolting the door—the man was the father of Cruz Delgado.

His striking resemblance to the bandit leader she had killed but a fortnight ago could only be explained by the closest relationship. And why had he murmured that thankful phrase of prayer when he saw her?

VIVIAN tried to speak casually. "I am really very tired, *señor*."

If you will show me to my room, I think I'll not wait for the bread or the wine. I'm really not hungry, and I need nothing to make me sleep."

"This way, then," said her host. "We have few comforts here. But whatever I have is yours to command, *señora*." He turned aside, and she could not see his face, but his hands—the hands she had been watching—were still clinched and straining, like those of an infuriated man who burns to strike crushing blows. "No one who has ever come to my house has been so welcome as you," he murmured politely.

In a bleak and barely furnished room Vivian Legrand ached to lie down and fall into dreamless sleep, but not for a moment could she dare relax her vigilance. Wylie had been right—this was the maddest of her schemes for acquiring large sums of money. Self-assured as she usually was, she found herself wishing very honestly for Adrian Wylie's aid at this critical turn of events.

Why hadn't it occurred to them that Cruz Delgado's drawing was a plan of his father's house and that, if his fortune were hidden anywhere, it would lie close to that thick walled and frowning ancestral hold?

Vivian put out her light, which was not a peasant's candle but an oil lamp of bourgeois affluence. She tugged at several articles of furniture in the room, hoping to barricade her door securely enough to permit her to get a little rest. But every move she made seemed to raise an alarming sound; and as it was never her policy to let an opponent think her afraid, she abandoned an effort which was bound to inform the household that she was blockading the entrance to her bedroom.

An hour passed. Zucorra had relapsed into a complete and stifling stillness. Vivian paced the floor, sat in deliberately cramped and awkward positions, did everything she could to dissipate the enveloping cloud of her extreme fatigue.

Suddenly she heard a curious scratching sound—it came again—and, holding her gun ready, she walked to the door which boasted a latch but no bolt, and opened it cautiously.

"*Señora*, if you please—" A hoarsely croaking feminine voice begged admittance. Vivian could

dimly descry a small, stooped figure and a hawk-like face with large, blazing eyes. And when she opened her door wider, the visitor drifted into the room as silently and easily as smoke.

"Well?" said Vivian, shutting her door and projecting more hostility than she felt. Indeed, this intrusion, whatever its object, was a welcome relief from her struggle against weariness. "Why do you disturb me?"

"The *señora* has not slept, that is good. I only disturb the *señora* to save her life," she added with husky caution. "You are in the house of your bitter enemies, *señora*."

"Cruz Delgado's house—"

"He is dead. It was you who killed him."

"Who spread such a lie?"

"We live remotely, *señora*, but by secret channels have news from Madrid every day of our lives. Did you think the police would keep your secret?"

"Who are you, and why are you telling me this?" Vivian demanded. She had not returned her automatic to its holster, handy though that always was.

"I am the mother of Cruz Delgado," said the woman.

"And you hate whoever killed him?"

"Cruz was a very bad man. He deserved death. I am only sorry that you had to kill him, *señora*—for his father, my husband, hates you and intends to take revenge."

Vivian's thoughts were racing. "If I had killed your son, would I come here to brag about it?"

"Not to brag, *señora*—not to brag—"

"What then?"

"You will not be killed until my

husband knows the answer to that, *señora*. And I must warn you, he will torture you horribly to make you tell him all of the truth. We are uncivilized, you see, in this part of Spain. I was not always bent like this—and I am not as old as you must think me."

Vivian saw her opening and instantly seized it. "Then he has tortured you, *señora*?" she said with winning sympathy and respect.

"Let us not speak of it—"

"You must hate him sometimes."

"I hate him at all times," the visitor said evenly.

"That is why you have come to warn me?"

"Hardly to warn—what use would a warning be to you, a woman alone, here in Zucorra?"

"To bargain then?"

"Perhaps. Will you tell me, *señora*, why you came alone and at night to the house of Cruz Delgado's father?"

Vivian played a trump with her customary blandness. "It may be since you get both news from Madrid and from the underworld of Spain," said she, "that you have heard of me. You are the mother of the famous bandit, Cruz Delgado. And I am known in many quarters of the world as—the Lady from Hell."

"Then you really did kill him?" the dead bandit's mother questioned immediately.

"For betraying me and trying to trick me, yes. But it was also I who rescued him from the firing squad in Cadiz."

"We have heard of that too. You are a strange and daring young woman, and beautiful as well. You ought not to die."

"I assure you I don't intend to," said Vivian. "Will you mind very much if I make you a widow, *señora*?"

FOR three hours Vivian Legrand slept as peacefully as a small and trusting child. The mother of Cruz Delgado kept watch.

Their uncommon alliance, negotiated in whispers and symbolized by clasping hands in the dismal, shadowy room, was all the help which Vivian believed she would need. The vengeance of Cruz Delgado's father must be frustrated—by standing siege in this room, if need be—for at least a day. The older woman promised to provide an adequate supply of food and drink. Meanwhile an urgent message to Adrian Wylie in Madrid was to be privately dispatched by means of those same secret channels which brought Zucorra, the "bandit village" its regular underground relays of news.

And what had Vivian promised in return?

"You were his mother, while I—I once loved him very deeply," she had lied. "Cruz betrayed me, and in a quarrel I shot him. But we had trusted each other, and after I saved him from execution in Cadiz, he gave me a map showing where his treasure is hidden. You will come with me, and we'll divide that fortune, share and share alike."

Upon which promise the league against the vengeful Tomás Delgado, father of the dead bandit had been founded.

But it all came to nought at the end of three hours. Dawn was breaking when the first rifle shot awakened Vivian.

"What is that?" she exclaimed.

"Some of my husband's enemies," Señora Delgado answered calmly.

"From outside the village?"

"And neighbors within the village. Cruz made us envied at first, but after-

ward, terribly unpopular. When he fled to South America, that time, deserting his comrades, many of them— young fellows from this vicinity— were captured, and either executed or sentenced to prison for life. It became the general belief that Cruz had done this deliberately—betrayed his own band—in order to satisfy the authorities, make the hunt for him less severe—and to keep all the band's treasure eventually for his own use."

Other rifle shots sounded outside in the village street.

"Does this often happen? An armed attack—"

The mother of Cruz Delgado gestured anxiously. "No—until this morning, only threats. But this, I think, *señora*, is on your account. It was heard—what you said last night, that you can pay whatever my husband would charge.

"It is supposed, then, that he is holding you, a rich lady, for ransom. And our neighbors do not intend to submit to that."

"Some of them are afraid of the police?"

"No, but all of them are afraid of losing their promised share of your ransom."

Vivian went to a window and gently parted the shutters a few inches to peer out. Other rifles banged away, and two heavy slugs thudded into the stout shutters, causing her instantly to close them. She hesitated now, for only a spread of seconds, deciding what to do. Then she abruptly produced a copy of Cruz Delgado's drawing which Wylie had deciphered for her.

"Do you see those lines—do you recognize what this means?"

She and the mother of the dead bandit leader bent over the plan Cruz had kept exclusively to himself.

"Then his money is hidden in this very house?"

"So it seems—"

"Come," said the woman, "what is money to us at present? This drawing that my wicked son made will serve one good purpose. It will show us where we can hide, *señora*, and perhaps save both our lives. Come!"

THE battle of Zucorra, as it became known in Spanish police history, lasted throughout the day. Tomás Delgado was not without influence or local partisans. Neighbors might snipe his home to force him to share with them his lucrative opportunity as an "innkeeper," but as soon as he and his followers began fighting back and blood was shed, a serious outbreak of vindictive clan warfare developed.

Guided by her captor's wife, Vivian made her way to the secret sub-cellar compartment which the drawing found in the hollow knife handle had revealed. There they waited, conversing in low tones, seated upon a small oaken chest which held the accumulated "earnings" of the most despicable bandit of modern Spain.

Other events proceeded, but the women in hiding knew nothing about them. Uneasily waiting in Madrid, Wylie had decided that for once he must disobey his partner's explicit orders. He had therefore appealed to their good friend, Lieutenant-Colonel Rafael de Vargas of the Civil Guard, telling him a cooked-up yarn which explained Vivian's restless notion of exploring Zucorra, but did not mention Cruz Delgado's hidden riches.

"Zucorra!" cried de Vargas, springing to his feet. "We must go after her, Doctor. The ruffians of that place will hold her for ransom—at the least.

What else they may do—who can say? A police assault will be necessary to rescue her. I must report to my chief, at once."

The smitten de Vargas was genuinely anxious and excited, yet he must have seen himself rising to command of all the police if so venturesome a lady as Vivian Legrand continued to travel about Spain.

Thus it came about that the combatants of Zucorra, having paused for a dutiful *siesta*, were just about to resume their private form of civil war, when scouts dashed in from the surrounding countryside to warn that strong forces of police and soldiers were converging upon the "bandit village."

News of that nature called for an immediate truce between Tomás Delgado and his foes. All natives of the region, however they might fight one another, could be depended upon to combine in giving battle to the Spanish government.

The steadily increasing rattle of musketry could be heard by Vivian Legrand and her companion in their curious hiding place.

"Other neighbors must be joining in," said Señora Delgado with the casualness of a veteran war reporter.

"No, listen!" Vivian exclaimed. "That chattering sound! Your people haven't got machine-guns—"

"Heavens, the soldiers!" The little woman seemed to grow taller and younger, and Vivian in amazement witnessed a transformation as rapid and startling as any disguise Adrian Wylie had ever contrived.

"Where are you going?" she asked, though the answer was obvious.

"To help fight—fight the soldiers and police," said the mother of Cruz Delgado.

"But they will rescue us, then we'll have this treasure—"

"They may rescue you, *señora*—I cannot begrudge you that. But they will loot the village. Treasure, you say—they won't leave us so much as a hen—not an egg—"

Vivian pried open Cruz Delgado's treasure chest; and while Spaniards in Zucorra were dying to effect her release—or prevent it—she was no less busily occupied discovering what dividend her most recent duel with danger and sudden death might produce.

A real fortune, she found, was packed away in the hidden chest. Bank notes and coins—more than half a million *pesetas*! How to transport it from Zucorra, with or without a police escort, was something which the turn of events would have to help her decide. Growing impatient of her precious but confining place of safety, Vivian at length climbed up through the narrow secret passage and emerged in the house, just as Tomás Delgado and a few of his partizans were preparing to make their final stand.

Vivian, unobtrusive and unseen in the dust and smoke, tried to size up the situation. What ought she do to help her rescuers? What had become of her odd little ally, the wife of Tomás Delgado?

She saw the older woman at the same moment that Delgado himself wiped blood and sweat from his face and discovered her.

Concern about the besiegers of his home dropped from him at a stroke. Vivian saw his carbine swinging up. His expression seemed murderously vengeful as he took hurried aim to shoot her.

With lightning quickness she hurled herself aside, landing behind a massive armchair. The carbine's discharge re-

sounded in the enclosed space of the room. Its bullet tore through the back of the chair, just above Vivian's head.

Her automatic, with the trigger held down, spurted a stream of leaden death across the room.

When the smoke cleared and the soldiers and police, led by de Vargas, crashed in, Tomás Delgado and the last of his belligerent henchmen lay unconscious and dying. Delgado's wife, though still conscious, was mortally wounded also.

"You—you have done for all us Delgados," she gasped when Vivian bent over her. "No—I know you did not mean to shoot me too, and you *had* to shoot Tomás. I—I tried to stand in—in front of him—"

"But you told me yourself that you hated him."

"No woman hates her own man when there is a battle, *señora*."

"And you are safe, thank God!" Rafael de Vargas exclaimed when he discovered Vivian alive and bearing not even a scratch. "My government will have to put you under bond, *señora*, to keep you out of further dangers."

"Or engage me to help you annihilate other nests of thieves."

"Even so, it was a headstrong, foolish thing for any woman to do—venturing alone into Zucorra," he chided her.

Vivian's green eyes were alight with mischief—or was it anticipation?

"But I love Zucorra!" she cried. "Now that you have cleaned out the worst element, I intend to come here and stay awhile. I mean it, Colonel de Vargas. I adore this old house. I'm going to arrange with Tomás Delgado's estate to buy it and all that it contains."

Sinister Stooge



Manzell catfooted forward

MYSTERY
F
D W
SHORT

By
Anthony Rud

Dick Manzell, Down and Out, Is Hired to Commit Murder—Safe Murder—for Ten Thousand Dollars! But What Were the Higher Stakes on Which Manzell Bet Everything?

THERE was a quiet air of desperation about Barclay. Several times Manzell had thought confidences of some queer variety were coming. This day, however, the banker was so absent minded he mislaid his pince-nez on four greens, and had to hold up the golf procession while he searched, in order to putt.

On the way to the bar after the round, Manzell resolved to give the elder man a lead. If this cracked at all, it should be good. And Manzell himself was ready for anything. He had told Barclay his job had folded, and that he was unable to find any kind of work. That had decided the banker—as far as bringing Manzell as a guest to this exclusive club. Now, what would happen?

"I'm not coming tomorrow," said

Manzell in a savage undertone. He did not look up from his hang-dog slouch, but he felt Barclay's eyes turn upon him. "You've treated me fine. The hell of it is, I only feel worse afterwards. Time was I belonged to places like this club. Now I got to get used to being a tramp, I guess.

"There's nothing — *nothing* I wouldn't try, to snap out of this damn vicious circle! Too broke to shave, most days. How in hell can I expect to land a job?" He ended with a snarl and a shrug of wide but bowed shoulders.

Barclay seemed to reach a decision. "Would you commit a safe murder—for ten thousand dollars?" came the banker's quick, intense whisper. "Wait! Don't answer that right off the bat. I'm serious! Wait till you've thought it over, and we've had a highball . . . *I've* been thinking it over for six months!"

"Safe murder!" derided Manzell, but the vicious note in his voice cut like the snap of a bullwhip popper on hide. "That's a contradiction of terms. There ain't no sich animile—but what the hell do I care! Bring on your victim, cash in advance!"

"Sh! Let it wait—till we're dressed. Then I'll drive out somewhere. I mean just—what I said!"

There was a catch of breath, an intensity about the way Barclay said the words, which gave his impecunious companion a chilly sensation along the spine. But Manzell only growled disbelief.

"Ten thousand dollars!" he jeered. "Okay, that's my price!" It was evident that he would take Barclay seriously when and if the banker produced that incredible sum, not before.

In the club grill, thirty minutes later, Barclay drank his third highball and

toyed with a sandwich. Manzell drank no more, but ate with the ravenous appetite of a man long denied quality meals—or even regularity. Then, stuffed, smoking one of the banker's gold-tipped Sobranies, he allowed himself to be piloted out to the banker's convertible coupé, and driven into the dusk eastward along one of Long Island's less frequented four-laners.

On the plain of the great game bird preserve, where Camp Upton was situated during the years of war, Barclay pulled out on a faint road which led windingly into the pine and oak scrub. When they were out of sight of the highway he stopped, and turned off the car lights. He offered another cigarette with a hand that shook.

"All right, give us your fairy tale," mocked Manzell, preserving his corrosive attitude. "What's the great international loan shark Barclay got to do with red and bloody murder?"

The elder man winced, but he was determined. "I—I hope I can make you understand, Manzell," he said with a shake in his voice which he seemed to conquer. "I picked you as—well, as a man who would dare much for a stake. Not that there could be any real risk connected with what I have in mind. But—"

"Cut the fancy talk, I'll judge the risk my own self," snarled Manzell. "As I told you, I'm ready for anything. What've I got to lose? My life? Hell, I'd sign on the dotted line to walk right up and take my seat in the chair, for just six months of *living*!"

"By living, I mean dressing decent, eating good meals, seeing shows, taking out pretty women—oh hell, go ahead, Barclay. I don't believe you—yet."

The elder man pulled out a cowl ash receiver, and jammed his newly lighted

cigarette into it. He was silent while he drew a deep breath and held it four seconds.

"All right, it's this way," he said. "My business is shot. I'm bankrupt in a big way. As you perhaps know, my business has not been that of ordinary banking, but of making risky loans with other people's money—for high returns."

"Like Mr. Ponzi whom we remember, eh?" jeered Manzell.

Barclay's teeth clicked together. "The difference was, I *made* loans and made big money—for a while. It was international usury, really. But financing revolutions is no worse than gun-running. In fact it's a part of that sport.

"I don't need to worry you with details. But I'm in the hole about eight hundred thousand dollars. As you know, I think, my wife has been dead seven years. My only daughter is married—happily. I am alone now. And my doctor has given me less than one year to live."

"Well, why the hell don't you bump this guy your own self, if you ain't got anything to lose?" demanded Manzell callously. "I smell one very high rat in the wainscoat!"

"I'll tell you that—in a moment!" retorted Barclay grimly. "It seems that I've slipped up a little in some of my precautions, and let myself come under the scope and severity of the banking laws. Now I'm summoned on the carpet. If I go I'll probably be indicted—and dishonored!"

"You mean you'll get a stretch in stir, if this guy isn't bumped before he can testify. Is that it?"

"Prison would—would not mean so much now," said Barclay sadly. "Only, I'd hate to have my daughter live the rest of her life, with the finger of scorn

being pointed at her. Especially, as I have such a short time to live, anyhow. You see, this is going to cost her a big fortune, anyhow. I have been carrying three-quarters of a million dollars in straight life insurance. With what remains of my personal property, the \$800,000 deficit would be just about cleared. But my daughter, who has been named as beneficiary under the terms of my big policy, would get nothing—*will* get nothing, since I have made my creditors my sole beneficiaries now!"

HE gasped in a deep breath. Manzell stirred angrily. "Hell, why don't you talk plain English?" he demanded crossly. "I see you're on a spot, all right. But who's the guy you want bumped, and why? All this hooey about your personal griefs doesn't make me burst into tears. Not any. I—"

Manzell jammed out his cigarette in turn. It seemed that his own troubles had been too real for him to sympathize with any millionaire practically "down to his last yacht," as the saying went. In fact, the down-and-outer was proving himself a very different person from the impecunious semi-panhandler who had accepted Barclay's various invitations to meals and drinks so avidly.

The banker, however, was not looking for friendship. Though he shivered so that Manzell felt the tremor in the arm which touched his shoulder, Barclay drove straight on with his strange proposal.

"Just one moment and you'll understand," he said. "There is only one man in the world whose death would benefit me—would benefit my daughter, I mean. The chief of my insurance policies has a suicide clause; and under

circumstances such as mine the company would fight any suspicious death to the limit. I must die in a year anyhow. I want you to shoot me, then take the gun out of the house—so there can be no thought of anything but murder!"

"Good Lord!" breathed Manzell, shocked from his hard-boiled pose. "You—you really mean—"

"Just what I say!" returned Barclay in a shaken voice. "Of course I recoil from the thought of death, same as anyone else. But it's coming, no matter what I do. And the thought of spending a year in jail, while my daughter gets the full benefit of—oh, damn it, can't you see my position, man?"

His voice broke into pleading at the last.

"Huh." Manzell was thinking. He took a proffered cigarette abstractedly, then a light. "Well," he responded grimly at length. "I'd murder somebody else, to get ten grand. So I don't see much difference—provided I've got a chance to get away long enough to spend the money!"

"Ah—thanks!" said Barclay, weary relief in his tone. He passed a handkerchief across his forehead; and although the light was almost gone, Manzell stiffened, suspecting that the banker was masking a sardonic grin.

"Look here!" snarled the down-and-outer. "You playing with me? I warn you—maybe I wouldn't *murder* you for nothing, but if you were giving me the old run-around I'd sure do other things!" He lifted a big fist in a threatening gesture.

"Oh, don't worry! Why should I want—anything like this, if I was joking?" protested Barclay. "No, I mean it. Only too damn' seriously do I mean it!" He shuddered.

Manzell then wanted to know about the money. Barclay offered to place the sum under his pillow in the bedroom. As soon as the intruder shot, he could take the money. Barclay himself had let two of his three servants, a married couple, go on vacation. There remained only a deaf and elderly butler, who retired promptly at ten o'clock every night. Barclay would open a side door, furnish a plan of the house to Manzell so he could reach the bedroom quickly and without noise; and then the banker himself would take a dose of allonal to insure deep sleep.

Manzell shook his head. "Nothing doing!" he denied. "Cash in advance, or no dice!" he stipulated. "Pay me now, and I'll do it any time you say. Right now, if you'd like it that way!"

Involuntarily the elder man shrank away. "No-no, I naturally don't carry that sum on me," he said hastily. He offered five hundred in cash, with the remainder to be left under his pillow, but Manzell, while wanting the five hundred, insisted upon getting the balance on the morrow, before starting the housebreak-murder.

Barclay at last gave in, forced to trust his sinister accomplice. The banker would draw the remaining \$9,500 next morning, and hand it in a brief case to Manzell as they met at a designated street intersection at three P.M. There would be a floor plan of the house, with the money. Manzell had wanted tens and twenties, but at this Barclay demurred. It would look bad for him, a banker, to draw a cash sum in small bills. No use rousing the faintest suspicion at the very last moment. He would bring the sum in hundreds.

"Okay, I guess it doesn't matter," acceded Manzell. "Oh, yes, how about a gun? Want me to buy one?"

"No. Just inside my side door as you enter tomorrow night at twelve midnight, you will find a double barrelled shotgun loaded and ready. Afterwards you must take this outside the house and fling it into the shrubbery somewhere. Use both barrels, so there won't be any chance of my waking up. . . ."

"By the Lord Harry!" marvelled Manzell. "Yoti surely are a cool customer! Well, I ain't particular about how dead I kill my victims. . . ." And he leered malevolently at the complacent banker.

THE shadowy figure of the intruder crept from the shrubbery to the side entrance of Barclay's home, and there paused to listen. The small but luxurious house was set on a knoll overlooking Long Island Sound, with the village of Roslyn downhill and a quarter mile distant. The place had three acres, heavily wooded. Manzell had been told just how to get away and lose himself from any possible pursuit, after firing the lethal shot.

Certainly it would take many minutes for anyone to reach the bedroom, determine that murder had been committed, and give the alarm. The very deaf butler was likely to awaken, listen, and then go back to sleep when he detected no further vibration of the building.

Manzell was cautious, however. He opened the door slowly, listened, then threw the small beam of a pencil flash on the floor and the side staircase, as he left the door almost closed at his back.

Five minutes later, after a slow and noiseless ascent, he was opening the door of the chamber Barclay had designated as his own. The twelve-gauge

Greener shotgun, loaded and on safety, he was holding in both hands.

Now the intruder did a peculiar thing. He located the bed, with something that looked like a bolster dummy shrouded in a sheet. Beside the bed was a table dimly seen, with the vague silhouette of a shaded reading lamp. Manzell catfooted forward, fumbled under the lamp shade, then snapped on the electric light!

It was not a dummy, after all. A man sleeping there stirred now.

"Who is it—you, Barclay?" he yawned, blinking. "Say, what the hell—?" He started, swinging his feet to the floor.

For Manzell, without speaking, had swung the twin tunnels of the twelve-gauge so they covered the strange face staring at him and the gun with dawning terror.

"So-o!" grated Manzell in an ugly voice. "I kinda thought it might be somep'n like this, soon as I lamped the load of slush* he handed me at three o'clock! Thought I couldn't tell it from scratch, the dirty, two-timing son of a slob!

"Who are you, fella? Talk fast! It'd take no more'n one flat fin of real dough to make me do a *couple* o' bumpin's now—with you first in line!"

"M-me, why I'm Kaley! Jack Kaley!" stammered the men in pajamas. He was a slim, pallid fellow with damp brown hair, and had nervous mannerisms. Probably his arm had needle marks above the elbow, Manzell surmised.

"What—what it means, I don't know! Did you come here meaning to k-kill somebody? Or rob—?"

"Yeah. Barclay hired me to come here an' shoot him!" snarled Manzell,

* *Slush is counterfeit money, and scratch is genuine currency.*

keeping the pale youth covered. "What you doin' in his bed, huh?" His words seemed to vary between moderate culture and gang argot, according to the savagery of his feelings.

Jack Kaley began to understand, and he shivered, although the night was warm. "Oh, my God," he moaned, "I was double-crossed too! He asked me to sleep in his bed, and in the morning to lock the door and tell the butler to let me sleep as I was sick. Tom Barclay was going to make a getaway—and then I was going to slip away unseen. The butler would just think I went out for a bit of business, and probably wouldn't begin to wonder very urgently for another full day or more. . . .

"And Tom Barclay meant you to kill me, the dirty liar!"

The fellow's voice rose to a nervous pitch. He began to fidget; and then without apology got out a notecase, drew from it a spill of paper. Unfolding this, he sniffed the white powder it had enclosed. Almost instantly he grew calmer, and his eyes took on a vindictive light.

"I'm going to get Barclay!" he announced. "If he hasn't sailed yet—" He opened long white claws wide, closed them again.

"You were with him in a deal? Was it this slush he handed me?" demanded Manzell.

"Uh—yeh, it was," acceded Kaley with some reluctance. But probably his drug was taking effect now, as he plunged ahead, once the admission was on record. "We've got fake passports. Barclay's wearing a toupee in the picture on his, and using the name of Randolph Johnson. He's sailing on the *Carib Queen* at noon—today, since it's about twelve-thirty now. I was going to fly down, since they wouldn't know

me as in the scheme at all, and meet him in Havana. But he thought he'd save my split, did he? I'll show him!"

"All right, Kaley. Get dressed and come along. We've both got accounts to settle with Mr. Thomas Barclay!" gritted Manzell, laying down the shotgun.

It was significant that while he waited the other man's dressing, Manzell extracted a perfectly good Colt special .38 from the rubber sheath under his left arm, and made certain it was still loaded and in working order.

HOPPED up with his cocaine, Kaley became increasingly vengeful with his plans. Irrational, too. Manzell did not mind how screwy he became, just so he accompanied the double-crossed down-and-outer on board the *Carib Queen*, and was with him when he confronted the treacherous schemer.

"Well take *all* his roll—an' there's over half a million in his grip!" chattered Kaley, his glazed eyes glittering. "You an' I will split right there. Then Barclay won't be able to go at all. He'll land—an' 'en a couple days more, an' I'll bump him. When it's good an' safe. . . .

"Gawd, how I do hate a two-timer!"

"We all do—but sometimes it's necessary," was Manzell's cryptic reply, which went straight over the head of his coked-up companion.

They hailed a cab, and gave the surprised taxi driver a fare all the way in to the river dock where lay the *Carib Queen*. In paying off the charioteer, Manzell was careful to select one of the bills from the original five hundred dollars given him by Barclay. These had been genuine. The banker no doubt had realized that his down-and-out stooge would spend some of that first

installment on the night before the murder was to be committed.

"Wait here till I find out his stateroom—and if he's come aboard," said Manzell, when they climbed the gang-plank of the lighted coastal liner. There were many parties going full swing, and they were not subjected to more than cursory inspection.

It might have made a wiser man than Kaley wonder, when after half an hour Manzell returned with the information the man they wanted had retired—and actually bearing the steward's key to Barclay's room! Also, when they reached the door giving from B Deck, Kaley might have wondered still more at the knot of officers and men which came up quietly behind them . . .

But the pallid youth had improved his opportunity to sniff more of his white powder, and was in a state of exaltation. Wealth lay there beyond that narrow white door, wealth for the mere taking. Then ease—and at his ease, vengeance upon the rattling scoundrel who had meant him, Kaley, to die.

What none of them knew at the moment, but which would lend an added shiver on the morrow, was the fact that right when they came to Barclay's stateroom door and Manzell quietly inserted the steward's key, a slow fuse to gasoline-soaked waste burned to the volatile charge, back there in the basement of Barclay's house. Ten minutes later it was burning fiercely, and only the luck of awakening in time was to save the deaf butler, alone in the place. . . .

Barclay had known that a fire never totally consumes a corpse. Enough would have been left, to show that the man in bed had been murdered. Then, when a shotgun, recently fired, was found outside in the shrubbery, it

would seem like murder and arson, with Barclay of course, the victim.

There was a light in the stateroom—and there was Barclay, right hand holding something which bulged the sheet and light blanket upward!

"Look out!" yelled Manzell, and dodged, whipping out his own pistol.

A muffled shot came, and the bedclothes leapt upward, smudging a wisp of smoke into the air. The slug struck a mirror just where Manzell had been.

With a high-pitched scream, unnatural and unnerving, Kaley flung himself toward the man on the bed—just in time to stop a second slug from Barclay, who now yelled for help at the top of his lungs.

Kaley went down twitching, and pawing at his right side, making queer whimpering, scared noises.

Manzell just had managed not to shoot straight through the dope-taker's narrow back. Then stepping sidewise, leaping forward, he brought down his pistol barrel across the bridge of Barclay's nose.

Claret spurted. Another shot blew the bedclothes away, just as Manzell, carried forward by stumbling across the lifting arm of Kaley on the floor, sprawled over the recumbent absconder.

Something like a cauterizing iron seared Manzell's thigh. It made his second downstroke with the pistol more convulsive and heavier than it would have been. And Barclay went limp. Only the fact that his broken nose still gushed blood, showed that he still lived.

Now the captain, purser, and three burly seamen came and gripped Barclay and Manzell both. The door was slammed and locked.

"It's just as I said, Captain," said Manzell calmly. "This man is a

counterfeiter—or possibly just an absconder who has passed a huge sum of counterfeit money at his own bank. He put it in the vault, I believe, in place of the real money which must be somewhere in his luggage or on his person.

"I suggest you care for this fellow, whose name is Kaley. He used to be a minor shower of the queer for the Findlay mob. When we broke up Findlay, Kaley here escaped—with about a million in counterfeit money, I believe. He and Barclay hatched up this scheme to bilk Barclay's private loan bank. Then Barclay tried to fool me into killing his confederate for

him . . . just see if you can't find that money, Captain, while the surgeon does his best for Kaley."

The gray-haired officer, serious of mien, directed the quick search. And in the false bottom of the banker's steamer trunk packages of money in all denominations were discovered. Counted later, this proved to total more than \$800,000!

"All right, Mr. Manzell—is that your name? Your story holds together so far. And who, did you say, you really were?" demanded the captain.

In answer Manzell held out a disc. "Inspector Richard Manzell, Treasury Department!" he said crisply.

Cipher Solvers' Club for June

(Continued from Page 61)

Indianapolis, Ind.; *Magi, Chicago, Ill.; Bernard McGee, Bloomfield, N. J.; Del J. McLane, East Liverpool, Ohio; *A. Meredith, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Minerva, Marion, Ind.; Mogliatina, Bayonne, N. J.; Mossback, Randle, Wash.; Betty Murray, San Francisco, Calif.; Nedyah, New York, N. Y.; Owleyes, Brandon, Vt.; *Mrs. Anna M. Page, Shelburne Falls, Mass.; Rena Patton, Los Angeles, Calif.; Otto Petke, Jersey City, N. J.; Phoney, San Pedro, Calif.; Piscator, Middletown, N. Y.; *Plantagenet, Paterson, N. J.; Nickle-Plate, Sarnac Lake, N. Y.; W. F. Plette, Galesburg, Ill.; Porthos, Fall River, Mass.; *Primrose, Baltimore, Md.; Qpkwins, Roxbury, Mass.; Isabel Revord, Hartford, Conn.; Don Ricardo, Gretna, La.; *Alvin Robb, London, Ontario, Canada; Charles L. Rohde, Baltimore, Md.; Frank Roman, Kansas City, Mo.; *Romeo, Waynesboro, Pa.; *Mrs. Alice Routh, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Sachem, Washington, D. C.; Harold Schlote, Philadelphia, Pa.; Mrs. H. A. Seals, Cleveland, Ohio; Kay Vee See, Seattle, Wash.; *O. I. See, Caroleen, N. C.; Alice M. Shott, Rickreall, Oreg.; Box 53, Lapeer, Mich.; *Sleepy, Bryn Mawr, Pa.; *G. A. Slight, Newburgh, N. Y.; *A. W. Smith, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Speck, Little Rock, Ark.; Sam Spiegel, Butte, Mont.; Big Stack, Anaconda, Mont.; *Jack-Stay, Tucson, Ariz.; Hot Summers, Minneapolis, Minn.; Superior, Superior, Wis.; *Dick Tate, Battle Creek, Mich.; Teocron, New York, N. Y.; *Old Timer, Guthrie, Okla.; *F. E. Tinkham, Ripon, Wis.; Trams, South Bend, Ind.; Benj. A. Tress, Baskett, Ky.; Paw Tucket, Orlando, Fla.; Uuem, Dayton, Ohio; W. R. W., Chicago, Ill.; Waltraw, Detroit, Mich.; R. W. West, Passaic, N. J.; *H. F. Wickner, Las Vegas, Nev.; Little Willy, Johnstown, Pa.; *E. A. Wilson, Oakdale, Pa.; Sam Wilson, Chicago, Ill.; Lew

Zirn, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.; A. R. Zorn, Perris, Calif.

Twenty-three—Jay Abey, Los Angeles, Calif.; Ymbak Agen, Bay Shore, N. Y.; Arulas, Los Angeles, Calif.; *Mrs. W. C. Bird, San Francisco, Calif.; D. E. Boliver, Hedley, Tex.; *Comrade, Baltimore, Md.; Kenneth Currell, Johnstown, Pa.; Jay Essee, Fort Amador, Canal Zone; Thomas Fletcher, Stettler, Alberta, Canada; Ifaac, San Francisco, Calif.; *Mrs. F. M. Ingalls, Glendale, Calif.; Jaefsee, Accord, N. Y.; Brogan, Roberts & Karns, New Castle, Pa.; Kismet, Corona, N. Y.; Marie Christjansson, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Leotta Lowery, New York, N. Y.; Hard Boiled One, San Francisco, Calif.; Mrs. Bruce Richardson, Saginaw, Mich.; Ruth, Laramie, Wyo.; Stas, Brooklyn, N. Y.; *Doctor X, Kansas City, Mo.

Twenty-two—Avis Belew, Indio, Calif.; Arthur J. Brooks, Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario, Canada; Gold Bug, Newburgh, N. Y.; Mabel B. Canon, Philadelphia, Pa.; H. C. Fetterolf, Palmyra, Pa.; L. H. S., Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Josephine Johnson, Pittsburg, Kans.; Rengaw, Chicago, Ill.; Sherlac, Philadelphia, Pa.; Mrs. Josephine Spalding, Arizona; I. Workem, Bismarck, N. Dak.

Twenty-one—H. H., Coventry, Ohio; L. P. Janlin, Newburgh, N. Y.; J. G. Meerdick, Jersey City, N. J.; W. B. Nye, Flint, Mich.; Edward Stratton, Camden, N. J.; Charles E. Zirbes, Clinton, Iowa.

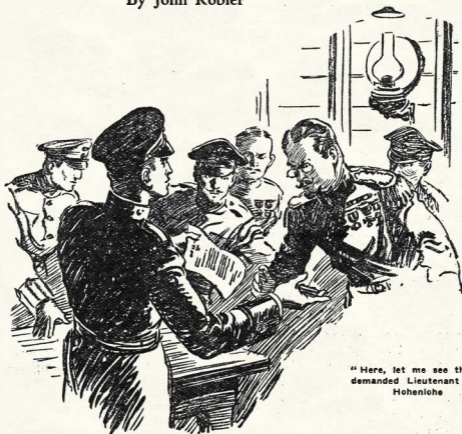
Twenty—Eatosin, Marietta, Ohio; G. N. G., Key West, Fla.; Donald Houghtalin, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Jaleco, Los Angeles, Calif.; Mrs. Altie Mather, West Allis, Wis.; Sue de Nymme, Chicago, Ill.; Cecil T. Partner, Kokomo, Ind.; Quay, Springfield, Ill.; *Hugh B. Rossell, Washington, D. C.; Karl D. Sherley, Tacoma, Wash.; D. G. S., Colusa, Calif.; N. Dak Ump, Gilby, N. Dak.; Mrs. P. F. Wilson, San Francisco, Calif.

(Continued on Page 102)

The Man Who Was Too Clever

By John Kobler


TRUE SHORT
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



"Here, let me see that,"
demanded Lieutenant von
Hohenlohe

YOUNG Captain Richard Mader, of His Majesty, Emperor Franz-Josef's General Staff, found the circular on his barrack-room table when he turned in for the night. It was post-marked "Vienna" and had

Mysterious Death Had Struck at Emperor Franz-Josef's General Staff — and How to Take Precautions Against the Poisoning of the Entire Austrian Army Was Indeed No Little Job!

been mailed that morning. He ripped it open excitedly, hoping it was another letter from his fiancée. A round, flat box tumbled out and rolled to the edge of the table.

He scanned the circular. It was penned in tight, pre-

cise script of the sort used ordinarily on military survey maps.

December 11, 1909
Vienna

Honored Sir—

Herewith we beg to submit for your acceptance a sample of our celebrated nerve-strengthening remedy, perfected after many years of experiment. These pills are guaranteed by the highest medical authorities to be an admirable method of securing their purpose, and to be absolutely harmless. Judge for yourself.

Instructions for use: The box must be opened with care, and the contents swallowed with a draught of water. The pills should be taken immediately as exposure to air spoils them. The result will be startling.

Awaiting your further orders, which will be carried out with discretion and rapidity,

We are your obedient servant,

Charles Francis

Box 5, Post Office, No. 6 District.

Captain Mader grinned boyishly, tickled by the florid appeal. He scarcely required a nerve-strengthenener. He had the nerves of a tiger-cub, the heart of a bullock. He was hale, lusty, dashing, the most promising of the twelve officers who had that year been advanced to the General Staff.

Idly he fingered the absurd pink box with its half dozen multi-colored capsules and amusement gave way to irritation that it should be this instead of the letter he was so anxiously awaiting. "Women—" he growled. His handsome mouth curled in disdain. He drew the oil-lamp closer until it splashed its rays on his stationery and pen.

He began to write. "My beloved—" He faltered, groping painfully for

words. He tore up the first sheet, began afresh. It was useless. He jabbed the pen-point viciously into the table.

There was a hushed restlessness in the night-air. A man couldn't think straight. Far off Captain Mader heard a roll of drums, the jangling of spurs in the icy drill yard as a night-sentry came to relieve his brother officer.

"My beloved—" Perhaps a nerve-strengthenener was the very thing, after all. He wondered mischievously whether it would give him the words to express his love. "The result will be startling." Probably a mild narcotic or stimulant of some sort. The nostrums they peddled nowadays!

Well, he would try anything once. He stirred the capsules with his little finger and chose one, a bright red one, like a child choosing a candy. He popped it into his mouth.

It was as though a blast of arctic wind had swept through the room. His body stiffened, he quivered like an aspen. In the next instant Captain Mader crashed backwards in his chair. He twitched and reeled. He lay still.

Far off the drum sounded again, and above it, the bugler blowing taps.

Some time later, Dr. Liebnitz, the barracks surgeon, raised his head from Captain Mader's body, pointing his lantern-jaw at the officers, standing stiff and tense beyond the circle of lamp-light. Lieutenant Prince von Hohenlohe strode forward.

"I, sir. I found him—like that, when I came in for the night." He was older than Captain Mader, lean and dark and blue-jowled. He was clearly shaken. "Richard was my messmate, my—my friend."

"I see." Dr. Liebnitz resumed his mournful task. He had the dead man's tunic open at the chest and was palpating the heart. All around him in

the shadows of that death-heavy room was a ring of questioning eyes, the officers of His Majesty's General Staff. There were only eleven now. A trifle apart stood General Weigl, commandant of the Vienna barracks, and behind him a number of officers from the War College, friends of the dead man, who happened to be in Vienna on leave.

Dr. Liebnitz rose to his feet. "Of course, gentleman, it's impossible to determine positively in so short a period the cause of death. But I venture Captain Mader died of a syncope—heart failure. I'll seek corroboration, naturally, but—" He appealed to the General.

THE General nodded approvingly with the air of a man who felt that as long as Captain Mader had to die, it was best he had died in a respectable manner. "He was a gallant officer and a gentleman," he observed somewhat irrelevantly. "He shall be buried with all military honors. Someone will have to inform Frau Mader and I believe there's a young lady—they were to be married soon."

"A pity, a tragic pity," murmured the doctor. "And now, if one of you gentlemen will assist me—"

"One moment, doctor!" It was Lieutenant von Hohenlohe. "General, your permission?"

"What is it, Lieutenant?"

"With all respect to Dr. Liebnitz, I don't believe—no, I'll put it stronger—*I know Captain Mader didn't die of heart failure!*"

The room hummed with excitement. Dr. Liebnitz flushed and the General wheeled angrily upon Lieutenant von Hohenlohe.

"What's this? Are you suggesting that—?"

"I suggest nothing, sir. I merely say I've known Richard Mader all my life. He was as strong as a lion."

"Do you realize what you're saying? The scandal—a suicide on the General Staff!"

"Suicide? I said nothing about suicide. Richard was not that sort."

"But then—!" the General said.

The atmosphere had become surcharged, electric. Suddenly Captain Peters, the youngest member of the Staff, sprang forward. "Look!" The others followed the direction of his finger. Their eyes fell on the circular letter and the pill-box, fallen under the table. "I got something like this this morning." He picked them up. "The very same. Same wording. Exactly."

"Here, let me see that." Lieutenant von Hohenlohe took the pill-box from his hands. He turned it over in his palm. "But I received one of these, too."

The others pressed forward. One by one they examined the pill-box. Lieutenant von Hofrichter, one of the cadets, fingered the capsules. "I, too," he shouted. "Why, they're still lying in my hotel room!" They shook their heads, whispered among each other. All of them, with the exception of General Weigl and Dr. Liebnitz, had received one of those sinister appearing pink boxes.

General Weigl made a deprecating sound in his throat. "Come now, gentlemen," he protested, "aren't we allowing our imaginations to run off with us? Surely, it's the most natural thing in the world for the company who manufactures these ridiculous pills to send out as many samples as possible? Probably half Vienna has received them. You see, Lieutenant von Hohenlohe, what an unfortunate impression you've created?"

"If I have, General, I will be the first to acknowledge it."

Dr. Liebnitz laid a restraining hand on the General. "Er, General Weigl, I really think that in view of everything it would be well to let—er—matters take their course."

IN his turn, he picked up one of the capsules and pulled apart the gelatine compartments. A fine whitish powder fell out into his hand. He lifted it to his nose and sniffed. His eyes widened, his face became granitic in its set expression.

"Lieutenant von Hohenlohe," he said solemnly, "just what did you do with your sample?"

"I threw it in the wastepaper basket."

"And you, Lieutenant von Hofrichter?"

"Oh, I ignored it. I have it still lying about somewhere."

"Did anyone by chance sample one of these pills?"

No one had. They had all dismissed them as arrant quackery.

"Then, gentlemen, you are fortunate. *There is sufficient cyanide of potassium in these pills to destroy the entire army!*"

II

EMPEROR FRANZ - JOSEF, side-whiskers bristling, a spot of crimson glowing in his veined cheeks, glared about him furiously. Closeted with him in a private chamber of the palace were Dr. Liebnitz, General Weigl, the Vienna Chief of Police, and Dr. Kunz, the examining magistrate.

At the moment His Majesty's fury was aimed at Dr. Liebnitz. "And so I suppose," he was saying, "there is no possibility of error?"

"None, Your Majesty. An autopsy performed one hour ago confirmed my worst fears. We discovered a gramme of cyanide in the intestines. A centigramme would have sufficed to kill him."

"A pretty pass, a pretty pass!" roared the Emperor. "And what precautions have you taken against the poisoning of the whole army?"

"As for that, Your Majesty," put in the General, "I have personally canvassed the entire barracks. A general warning has been issued. As a matter of fact, the circulars were confined to the General Staff, with the exception of three or four officers. Lieutenant von Hofrichter was one, Lieutenant Schmidt another—"

"And what do you make of it, General?"

"I, Your Majesty? I scarcely know what to make of it. There is a great deal of loose talk about. One rumor has it that it was the work of an anarchist, a Serbian, of course. I hear, too, on all sides, of a blow against militarism, of political revenge. I don't know what to make of it, Your Majesty."

"Talk! Talk! The very thing we should have avoided. Well, the fat's in the fire now. But there must be no more talk. We must have facts. Facts! For my part, I think we are dealing with a madman. What say you, Dr. Kunz?"

"Possibly, Your Majesty. But I should like to make one or two observations."

"By all means."

"Our man has covered his tracks with remarkable ingenuity. Undoubtedly he's a clever fellow, certainly no madman in the legal sense of the word. But there are one or two things—for instance, it's obvious from what Dr.

Liebnitz has found that he was able to procure a huge quantity of cyanide, since he used a great deal more than was necessary. I can think of only two general classes of men who could obtain such an amount without arousing suspicion, a doctor or a photographer. A doctor would never have put so much in the capsules. That leaves a photographer, perhaps an amateur photographer."

The Emperor laid his bony finger along the ridge of his nose, gravely moving his head up and down. "Interesting, doctor. Pray continue."

"Another thing, the handwriting suggests military draughtsmanship and, need I remind Your Majesty, the recipient of the capsules are all officers?"

"Not so fast!" The Emperor gave his chair a resounding slap. "I see what you're driving at—that this unspeakable crime was committed by a member of my own Staff! But that's preposterous!"

"If the investigation is left to me, Your Majesty, I must follow wherever it leads."

"But," interrupted the General, "how could the murderer be on the Staff when all the Staff officers received the capsules?"

"Come now, General, the first thing a murderer would do, unless he were an utter imbecile, would be to send himself a box of capsules. To divert suspicion from himself, General."

The Chief of Police cleared his throat pompously and edged forward on his chair. "Instead of all this suppositional reasoning, Your Majesty, it seems to me our first task is to trace this 'Charles Francis,' if such a man exists. Curiously enough, the name is familiar to me."

"And so it should be, my dear Chief. '*Charles Francis*' happens to be the

name of the American Ambassador. I don't suppose you would want to arrest him. Blockhead!" He turned again to Dr. Kunz. "But if, as you hint, the thing was done by an officer of the General Staff, what possible motive could the fellow have? Captain Mader was popular, genial, without an enemy so far as anyone knows. Why, why in Heaven's name should anyone want to kill him and his friends?"

"Ah, Your Majesty, if we understood the motive we might understand everything. Who can tell? Madness? Perhaps. Ambition—"

"Ambition?"

"Merely a passing fancy, Your Majesty."

The Emperor rose abruptly; the others sprang to attention. "Enough of this," he announced. "You're on your mettle, all of you. I charge you to find the villain who plotted this deed no matter what he is or who. Don't let me see any of you again until you've found him. Also post a reward of 2000 kronen for any man, woman or child who can supply information leading up to the murderer's arrest."

WITHIN twenty-four hours every detective in Austria, professional and amateur, had accepted the Emperor's challenge. The position was defined. Some person or persons unknown had made an effort to wipe out the officers of the General Staff. One of them, Captain Richard Mader, had succumbed. What of the rest? Captain Peters, Lieutenant von Hohenlohe, the cadets who also received the deadly capsules, all were examined, cross-examined, to no avail.

And then occurred a tragic interlude. After long hours of questioning, the youthful, emotional and sensitive Captain Peters retired to his barrack-room

and blew out his brains. Rumors flamed through the Empire. They had trapped the monster of the Vienna barracks and he had cheated the gallows by committing suicide! Only after days of minute investigation was Captain Peters's name cleared. Not the faintest evidence could be unearthed to connect the youth with the venomous capsules. A congenital neurotic, Captain Peters had become mentally unsettled by constant questioning. Thus, the unknown fiend had indirectly continued his bloody purposes. Two officers of the General Staff were dead.

Amid all the frenetic bustling about him, stern, solemn-faced Dr. Kunz rarely abandoned his desk. He sat thinking, deeply thinking, trying to drag to the front of his mind the tantalizing idea which had been lurking there ever since his conversation with the Emperor.

Hourly his keenest agents brought him the results of their spade-work. A woman assistant in No. 6 District Post Office had identified a pill-box as one of a bundle handed over the counter by a man who explained they were too bulky to fit in the ordinary mail-box. She described this man as "fair-haired, with blue eyes and a waxed mustache," and declared he had visited the post office the evening preceding the death of Captain Mader. It was a lead, certainly, but as blond hair and blue eyes were characteristic of Austrian soldiers the description was not helpful.

And then five days after the interview in the palace, when the mystery appeared insoluble and about to enter the records as an unsolved crime, Lieutenant von Hohenlohe presented himself at the examining magistrate's office and demanded to see Dr. Kunz privately. The request was granted.

"Dr. Kunz," the officer began breathlessly, passing over the usual formalities of greeting, "I have remembered something which may prove of the utmost significance."

"You have my attention, Lieutenant."

ABOUT a month before the murder I received through the post a little birthday gift from an old acquaintance at the War College. I—I hesitate to say this, perhaps I am making a ghastly error, but—well, I loved Richard Mader. I will do anything to find his assassin. This gift came in wrappings almost identical with the circulars and pill-boxes!"

Dr. Kunz jumped to his feet. "Good Heavens, man, why haven't you told me this sooner?"

"Frankly, it only just struck me."

"And you know, of course, the identity of the sender."

"Yes." His head dropped in a gesture of puzzlement. He was silent, torn by an inner conflict.

"Well, well, sir, what are you waiting for?"

"It's a terrible thing to say of a fellow-soldier. If I have made a mistake—"

"You must let me judge that."

"All right, then. *The gift came from Lieutenant Adolph Hofrichter, of the 14th Infantry Regiment.*"

"Hofrichter! Good God, but he's one of the officers who received a circular. I believe he was present when Captain Mader was found, on leave in Vienna, wasn't he? Tell me what you know about this fellow."

"He's quartered at Linz, back there now, I hear. He's married, about twenty-eight. He's quite mad about his young wife, a very lovely girl he married two or three years ago. We

used to see her often when we were at the War College in Linz. Just now she's expecting a baby."

"The fellow's character, what of his character?"

"He was very well liked when I was a cadet in the same class, very genial, witty, quite a lively chap. A bit pushing—ambition—you know. He wanted the best of everything for that young wife of his. There were some rumors of a certain shadiness in his past—of, probably just a matter of sowing wild oats. At one time he had a temporary position on the General Staff, but it was not made permanent when the last appointments were filled."

"Tell me," Dr. Kunz put in thoughtfully, "all twelve members of the Staff were graduated from the same class, weren't they?"

"Why, yes."

"Leaving young Hofrichter behind, as it were?"

"I suppose so."

"And before he can be appointed to the Staff a vacancy would have to be created, in fact, such a vacancy as has been created by the death of Captain Mader?"

"Yes—yes. That's about the way of it, but, doctor, you're not thinking—!"

"It's beginning to fit."

"I can't believe that. It's too—too fantastic."

"Have you by any chance a sample of Hofrichter's handwriting?"

"I brought a letter he once wrote me. I have it here." He laid a sheet of writing paper upon the desk. From a side-drawer Dr. Kunz produced one of the circulars and placed it in juxtaposition to the letter. He studied them a moment.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, "there's a definite resemblance. The writing is

obviously in a disguised hand, but they might both easily have been written by the same man."

Dr. Kunz strode across the room and jerked open the door. He beckoned to a uniformed officer seated in the outer office. He spoke in a low voice. "I am leaving Vienna at once. You will accompany me." He turned to Lieutenant von Hohenlohe. "You have rendered justice an immeasurable service, Lieutenant. It is possible, it is extremely possible that you have avenged your friend."

"But where are you going, doctor?"

"To Linz."

III

LINZ, the capital of Upper Austria, jeweled with baroque cathedrals and gleaming white villas, lies on the banks of the Danube, about one hundred miles west of Vienna. Here, at the beginning of the year 1910, arrived Dr. Kunz accompanied by a discreet, mouse-gray, little police officer. They were welcomed at the depot by a local detective, who immediately drew Dr. Kunz aside.

"I received your wire and have made a quiet investigation. The results were startling, doctor, simply startling. To begin with a stationer in the town declares that Hofrichter purchased a quantity of boxes and envelopes similar to those in which the pills were sent. Also we have found a chemist who sold more than a dozen grammes of cyanide to Hofrichter for photographic purposes. The Lieutenant is an amateur photographer!"

"Good work! I knew it! And now to question Hofrichter at once. I think I am ready for him."

The three men climbed into a carriage and rolled off in the direction of the War College. They found Lieutenant Hofrichter alone in his room,

studying a military map. He rose to greet them, quite self-possessed. He was a slim youth, almost feminine in physique. He had a sensitive, woman's mouth ornamented by a waxed mustache. His eyes were wide, blue and innocent, his hair blond. Seeing him for the first time Dr. Kunz suffered misgivings. This mere boy, this strippling . . . the imagination balked at the thought of those white, aristocratic hands wet with the blood of a human being.

If the visit took him by surprise, he failed to betray himself. He bowed courteously. "I haven't had the pleasure of your acquaintance, gentlemen. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes," said Dr. Kunz. "In connection with the death of Captain Richard Mader." He watched the man's face. He couldn't be certain, but he thought he detected a slight narrowing of the eyes. Nothing more.

"Captain Mader? A tragic affair, gentlemen, but I don't quite see where I can be of assistance."

"You were in Vienna just before and during the preliminary investigations into his death?"

"Why, yes. There's no secret about that."

"Why did you purchase a large amount of cyanide of potassium a few days prior to your trip?"

"Photography is my hobby."

"And the capsules? Do you require those, too, for photography?"

"Certainly not. They were to contain medicine for my dog. Worm mixture. I can show it to you."

"One more question. For what purpose did you buy a number of pill-boxes and envelopes?"

"Those were for my wife, sir. To hold a number of trinkets."

The police officer, who had been

poking about in a corner of the room, tapped Dr. Kunz's arm. He pointed to a mechanical copying machine under the bed. Dr. Kunz dragged it out.

"What is this for, Lieutenant?"

"Oh, that? I use that for my private letters. It's speedier."

"I see. Lieutenant Hofrichter, I am going to ask you to accompany me back to Vienna for further examination."

For the first time the Lieutenant lost his poise. His mouth quivered. "What is this, sir? I have done nothing wrong. For what am I being arrested?"

"This is no arrest. I make no charges. I merely ask you to accompany me quietly. It will be best in the end—for all of us."

"Very well. Will you allow me to see my wife before I go?"

"Certainly. We must go with you, of course."

Almost as soon as she saw them and heard the nature of their visit, Frau Hofrichter cried out hysterically: "You're not deceiving me. You're taking him to prison. You think he murdered Captain Mader. I know, you think—"

Lieutenant Hofrichter was at her side, covering her face with kisses. "Don't cry, Anna. It's only through a series of coincidences that I'm suspected. I'll be back soon."

She freed herself from his arms and faced Dr. Kunz defiantly. "My husband had no motive for securing the death of Captain Mader or of anybody else. He was informed that under the fresh regulations, he was not eligible just then for a Staff appointment. As to money, my husband never troubled himself about such things. He married me without a dowry."

Dr. Kunz consulted his watch.

"We will miss the early train," he observed quietly.

THE arrest of Lieutenant Hofrichter and his incarceration in Vienna military prison created a tempest of controversy throughout Austria. There were few willing to believe that this young man, with his lofty background and training, was capable of such a crime. General Weigl rose warmly to his defense, declaring on numerous occasions:

"I am fully convinced of this young officer's entire innocence. Never, I assure you, would my poor Hofrichter do such a thing."

And the Colonel of the 14th Infantry insisted: "If the Lieutenant is guilty, he is mad, and should be treated as such."

But Dr. Kunz was more than half convinced that he had the right man. He could withdraw now only at the cost of his reputation. His task wasn't easy. The case against the Lieutenant was entirely circumstantial and inductively psychological. It amounted to this: An attempt had been made to poison certain officers in whose deaths Lieutenant Hofrichter had a theoretical interest; that he had an opportunity of sending them the poison; that his handwriting resembled the handwriting on the packets forwarded to them; and that boxes and capsules and envelopes similar to those containing the poison had been found in his possession.

But to every one of these points there was a strong answer. All the officers stood to benefit by the deaths of their seniors; virtually every officer in Vienna had had an equal chance of posting the incriminating letters; and the handwriting resemblance was a matter of opinion rather than undis-

puted fact. As for the boxes and capsules, they could have been bought in any stationer's shop.

Furthermore, none of the poison was found in Lieutenant Hofrichter's possession. The capsules were, as he had declared, filled with dog medicine. The dog was actually fed one in the presence of an examining committee and was found to suffer no ill effects whatever.

The evidence was weak. The case was on the verge of collapse. This Dr. Kunz could not permit. The only course left to him was to conduct a searching investigation into each detail of the Lieutenant's past. Certainly, it would be madness to go into court with what the doctor already knew.

There is a sharp difference between the American and the European method of such trials. In America an accused may be tried only on one charge at a time. In Europe it is permissible to drag out every detail of a man's life, relevant or irrelevant. Thus, Dr. Kunz prepared to uncover phases of the Lieutenant's career which would blacken him in the eyes of the public and convince the court that he was capable of anything.

His first efforts appeared successful. Reports came from Leitmeritz in Bohemia of an unsavory affair involving the Lieutenant, at a time when his regiment was stationed there. Like the average Austrian soldier, he was prone to select some pretty village maiden to flirt with. Lieutenant Hofrichter's choice apparently took him too seriously, for when he left the district she swallowed a fatal potion of poison and was buried clutching a note from her lover.

An ugly rumor got about that Lieutenant Hofrichter had supplied the poison. It was cyanide!

But this was not proof. Dr. Kunz required something more devastating. And he found it. His agents uncovered evidence that for some time the prisoner had been leading a double life. As Lieutenant Hofrichter he had revealed himself to his friends as a zealous and well-mannered officer. When on leave, however, he had, masquerading under the name of "Dr. Haller," indulged in an orgy of debauchery and vicious practices. A victim of these exploits identified "Dr. Haller" as the Lieutenant. She was a nursery governess who had answered a newspaper advertisement. It took her to Linz, where she met the advertiser, "Dr. Haller," who explained that he required a nurse for his children.

IV

ON the plea that his wife and children were temporarily absent the governess was persuaded to stop at a hotel where "Dr. Haller" plied her with a dangerous drug and attempted to misconduct himself with her.

This was only one of numerous incidents. The disclosure was deadly. From that moment on Adolph Hofrichter, guilty or innocent, with his wide blue eyes and blond hair, stood convicted as a Jekyll-and-Hyde. His former supporters abandoned him. Only his wife stuck.

"It's all lies," she pleaded pitifully. "Sooner or later he'll be cleared."

Dr. Kunz's brief was complete. He was ready to hand it over to the court martial. It was to be a curious proceeding, this trial. There would be no defense attorney, no jury, in fact, no court. Simply the conclave of a military committee who were to examine the facts and then pass on the

prisoner's fate. Lieutenant Hofrichter had entered a plea of "not guilty" and if he were convicted there could be but one outcome—the scaffold. Conversely, if he chose to plead "guilty," then by a strange law then in effect the extreme penalty could not be inflicted.

As the time for the military hearing approached an incident occurred which strengthened the opinion of the officials that Lieutenant Hofrichter was the murderer of Captain Mader. A letter to his wife which he had managed to smuggle out of prison was intercepted. It read:

I should like to kill myself, for I cannot bear things any longer. Get me a small quantity of hyoscyamine or atropine. Remember, I want it solid, not liquid. Conceal it in a quill, and fasten the end with wax. Then put the quill into a bunch of flowers, hiding it by fastening the stems together with thread. In another flower sprinkle some henbane.

Even at the end of his long ordeal Hofrichter was not without subtlety and cunning. But the game was up.

It was five months after his imprisonment. He was broken in body and mind. His treatment at the hands of his jailers had been inhumanly severe. The hatred against the soft-spoken, gentle-seeming man was deep. He began to show symptoms of insanity, of religious mania. But the physician who examined him declared he was malingering.

Lieutenant Hofrichter made a last move. On the eve of his hearing and the inevitable triumph of Dr. Kunz's painstaking work, he sent for the president of the court martial.

"I wish," he told this man, "to tell you something of great importance. I wish to withdraw my plea."

The President was stunned. "Withdraw it, Lieutenant? Do you realize what you are saying?"

"Yes, but I have made up my mind. I admit that I am guilty of everything with which I have been charged. Do with me now as you wish. I shall deny nothing."

This left the court no alternative. In a tense and solemn ceremony Lieutenant Adolph Hofrichter was brought before the War Ministry. Among the spectators were several of his brother officers. No pity showed on their faces. Only an icy curiosity. A blare of trumpets, the roll of drums. The Colonel in charge, his lips trembling, announced:

"Adolph Hofrichter, you have been unworthy to serve the Emperor and the flag you disgraced. Although you fully merited death, clemency has been shown you. The Emperor has ordered you to be deprived of your rank and herewith expelled from the Army. In addition, you will undergo twenty years' rigorous imprisonment."

The Colonel then wrought upon him the ultimate humiliation. He ripped off his chevrons, his buttons and badges of rank. He broke his sword in two.

At a signal he was manacled and led from the courtroom.

Anna Hofrichter, her tiny son in arms, was standing in the corridor. Her belief in her husband had broken. The last of those who had loved and trusted him turned from him. But as he passed her he shouted in a great burst of grief and remorse, torn from his heart: "What I did, I did for you!"

A few moments later the iron door of his cell clanged shut behind him forever—for he was never to leave it alive.

It was a law of the old Greek tragedies that the only sin is anything in excess—even virtue. Adolph Hofrichter was ambitious, a laudable trait in a young man. But it was a virtue so over-developed that it became a frightful vice.

Cipher Solvers' Club for June

(Continued from Page 91)

Nineteen—Ernest G. Altstadt, Erie, Pa.; R. L. Blaha, Newark, N. J.; Daffy Dill, Bangor, Me.; Carl H. W. Oestreich, Grants Pass, Oreg.; Flo Rogaway, San Diego, Calif.

Eighteen—A. Has-Been, Union Grove, Wis.; Denarius, Detroit, Mich.; H. L. Evans, New York, N. Y.; Ritz-E-Fritz, Berkeley, Calif.; Margaret Holmes, New London, Conn.; A. W. H., Palmetto, Fla.; Joubert, New York, N. Y.; J. C. K., Gary, Ind.; Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill.; *M. O., Bronx, N. Y.; My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Tau Pi, Cincinnati, Ohio; Posius, Brookline, Mass.; Quivira, Kansas City, Kans.; Charles R. Schnerr, Waterbury, Conn.; George Shakeshaft, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; Grace C. Shaw, Milwaukee, Wis.; A. Onyx Starkes, St. Louis, Mo.; Tyro V, Perysville, Pa.; L. J. Yanchus, Masontown, Pa.

Seventeen—Arrowhead, Pawtucket, R. I.; Edna D. Brooks, Attleboro, Mass.; Mrs. Bertrum Craven, Rensselaer, N. Y.; Ah-Tin-Du, St. Paul, Minn.; Susie Pumphandle, Johnstown, Pa.; David Seltzer, New York, N. Y.; Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman, Los Angeles, Calif.; Wash, Portland, Me.

Sixteen—Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Oreg.; Misdled, San Francisco, Calif.; Fae Malon, Englehart,

Ontario, Canada; Ralph B. McEwen, New Bedford, Mass.; Zarkov, Aberdeen, S. Dak.

Fifteen—Myrtle Lee Bunn, Washington, D. C.; G. Hirano, Las Animas, Colo.; Julia Kots, Bronx, N. Y.; Paul Presnell, Pilot Mountain, N. C.; B. P., Miami, Fla.

Fourteen—Lewis C. Moore, Piggott, Okla.; John T. Straiger, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Tricky, Los Angeles, Calif.

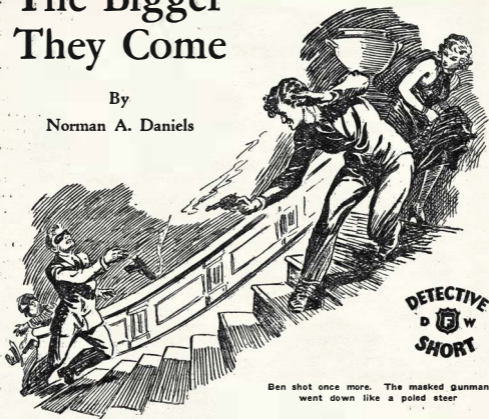
Thirteen—Alice E. Bareerbo, Chicago, Ill.; F. W. Thomas, High Springs, Fla.; Nat. E. Wagner, Maspeth, L. I., N. Y.

Twelve—Abacus, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada; Arthur V. Ball, Ponca City, Okla.; *H Le Care, Norfolk, Va.; L. P. Carr, Soda Springs, Idaho; Cliff II, Nashville, Mich.; Esperanto, Washington, D. C.; H. J. Haewecker, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Earl C. Heatwole, Brawley, Calif.; Hood-wink, Bastrop, Tex.; Isotherm, Ft. Riley, Kans.; Paul S. Kissick, Washington, D. C.; Charles H. Mentzel, Bronx, N. Y.; Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill.; Logan Simard, Pasadena, Calif.; *Nick Spar, Lynchburg, Va.; Albert B. Wooldridge, San Antonio, Tex.

(Continued Next Week)

The Bigger They Come

By
Norman A. Daniels



DETECTIVE
D W
SHORT

Ben shot once more. The masked gunman went down like a poled steer

"HARRY HATCH is the biggest crook this town has ever known." Logan of the

Detective Bureau let both feet drop from his desk top with a thud meant to emphasize his words. "What makes it worse is the fact that he happens to be smart — cleverer than you bunch of nit-wits by a long shot. He killed Schabel—but can we prove it? No! He has the motive, but he also has an iron-clad alibi."

"Maybe," O'Mara, veteran of the

department mused slowly, "he'll get himself bumped by one of his own pals."

"Not Hatch," Logan retorted.

*The Chief Thought Crime
Czar Hatch too Big to Take
—but Third-Class Detective
Benton O'Connell, without
Orders or Plans, Was More
Than Willing to Try!*

"He rules those lice without a hitch. He gives all his swine a fair share in anything they pull and he protects them all the way through. If they happen to slip and take a stretch, he fixes things so their relatives have

it soft. I hear he actually pays a salary to anybody that goes up, while he's in the pen. You can't break that system by hoping somebody will put

Hatch on a spot. It's not in the cards."

For a moment dull silence prevailed. The half-dozen men in that room—all crack detectives—sent billows of cigar and pipe smoke wafting ceilingward.

The door of the detective bureau was flung wide, but nobody even glanced up at the man who filled the doorway completely with his fatless bulk.

"Well, well!" The newcomer rubbed his hands and walked in. "We're as quiet as a country pasture this evening. By the smell of the rotten cigars you manage to get handed you, I'd say something was up. Let a fellow in on it, will you?"

Captain Logan looked up and scowled. "We're in no mood for levity, O'Connell. What's more, the case we've been talking about is none of your affair. It's a job for seasoned men, not rash youngsters like yourself."

"Yes, sir." Benton O'Connell's face fell for a second, but then that same impish grin took possession of his features once more. He leaned against the battered desk and tapped a cigarette against his thumbnail.

"Want me to get out?" he asked.

"No—you can stay. It may help you to listen. Don't think I've got anything against you, personally, O'Connell. It's not that—only we're a little flustered tonight. There's been a murder that ties up with Harry Hatch."

"Oh!" O'Connell put a world of feeling in that one word. "I heard about it. Young Schabel, wasn't it? I knew him. He was a close friend of a pal of mine."

Captain Logan studied the tip of his glowing cigar. He looked up sharply

and addressed his men, paying no further attention to Benton O'Connell.

"It's the same old story, men. Hatch is too smart for us. In one year, there have been a number of killings, he has enlisted almost every crook in the city under his banner. There hasn't been a *gang* murder in months. He keeps the boys contented by feeding them soft, well-planned jobs and dishing out money whenever they need it. He murdered Schabel to protect himself. Schabel lost his shirt at the Golden Shoe. Somehow he found out he'd been cheated and he was going to spill the beans to me about it. He died in an alley ten blocks down the street."

O'Mara looked up. "The coroner says he was stabbed at about one o'clock this morning. I've been checking all day on Hatch's alibi. It stands up all right. Fifty prominent people will swear he was in that damned night club from ten o'clock until almost three."

"Listen," Benton O'Connell broke in eagerly. "Why not give me a break on this? Maybe I could dig up something—"

"You?" Logan grimaced. "It's not a job for you, my lad. Of course, I'm not forgetting how you rounded up that bunch of wharf rats single-handed nor how you lugged two of 'em, one under each arm, to the call box. That got you a third-grade detective's badge, son, but you're still just learning the business. Harry Hatch is big—bigger than any other crook we've ever known. He operates almost openly and he laughs at us. He's an ex-lawyer and he knows all the smart shyster tricks. Now, forget about him, lad. I've an easier job for you. Last night somebody swiped two thousand dollars' worth of diamonds,

emeralds and pearls from Mrs. Penderton of Park Place. Take a run around the pawnshops and check their lists."

"Pawnshops!" Benton O'Connell groaned. "I know every hand-rubbing hock-shop owner in the city. I know every crack and dent in their counters. I've read all the phony names people give when they hock stuff. For six months I've walked in and out of enough pawnshops to reach from here to Gibraltar. I want a break on some other kind of a job. Something big."

"Be yourself, lad," Logan smiled tolerantly. "I can't give you important assignments until you've been seasoned. You're a one-minute egg. When you get hard-boiled, then I'll hand you something better. Now run along and get busy. We all had to do the work you're doing now. It's part of the game."

BENTON O'CONNELL grunted something under his breath, but he saluted and walked out. It had been more exciting on a beat than these six months of pawnshop searching. While the department went into a frenzy over Harry Hatch, crook supreme, third-grade detective Benton O'Connell had to bark questions at reluctant hockshop owners.

His personal coupé was parked in front of headquarters. He got behind the wheel, tuned in the radio on the police broadcast frequency and drove deep into the haunts of the underworld where every pawnshop might hide a fence of importance.

He went through the records of half a dozen and examined recently pawned jewelry without the slightest success. Inwardly he damned Captain Logan for putting him on this kind of

work. What good was a husky pair of shoulders and muscles that bulged from beneath the moderately priced suit he wore? Except to support his big frame as he leaned against the dirty counters of cheap pawnshops, they were of less use than if he were an idler.

His car was parked across the street and he dodged traffic to reach it. Skirting a car parked double beside his own, he glanced down a narrow, filthy alley between two brick buildings long in disuse. A taxi, sweeping around the corner with headlights aglow, threw a ray of light down that alley for a bare fraction of a second. Benton O'Connell came to an abrupt stop. Unless he was crazy or dreaming, he had caught a glimpse of a man's foot protruding from the back of one building.

He looked about before he slipped into the alley. He didn't use his flash and not once did his fingers seek the comforting feel of his gun. But his fists swung in rhythmic unison with his steps. They were huge fists and trained in every phase of defense and attack.

He hadn't been wrong. This was a man who lay sprawled on the cobblestones behind the building. He knelt beside the body and picked up a limp but warm wrist. There was no pulse. Using his flashlight with his fingers pressed against the lens to prevent all but a tiny slit of light to escape, Ben examined the body further. He knew the orders about moving a dead man, but orders printed in the police manual meant nothing to him. He turned the corpse over.

Ben's blood ran cold for a second and then hot. He looked into the agony ravaged features of the man and his own face went grim.

Bill Jerard was dead! Bill, who had been everything that was decent and kind. Murdered—with a knife that stuck horribly from his chest. Bill Jerard who had been a friend of young Schable's—who was also dead.

"If Schable knew anything, he would have confided in Jerard," Ben told himself. "He would have done that to insure the information reaching Captain Logan. Whatever that information was, it concerned Harry Hatch. He's behind this, damn him!"

There was no hesitation in Ben's actions. Defying all rules and regulations, he lifted the body of his friend, carried it into the cellar of the deserted house and carefully laid it down. For the first time he noticed that the pockets were yanked inside out and everything of value stolen. That was to make the kill look like the work of footpads. But the hands that had driven home the murder knife knew human anatomy, knew how to clip off a man's life almost as fast as a seventy-five shell.

Ben walked back toward the street. Halfway up the alley his shoes ground against some abrasive substance. He used his flash for a second and noticed that a pile of sand had been dumped in the alley and later on shoveled to some other spot with only a layer of the stuff left on the cobblestones.

He came out on the street, got into his car and drove straight toward the Golden Shoe. Ben knew the reputation of that place. Important people went there. Often they won at the wheels and tables in the back rooms. More often they lost. But the place was operated on elaborate lines. There was no rough stuff, no leering crooks to eye the glimmering jewels worn about matronly throats.

There was a bar in the basement of the place. Ben started for it, but at the entrance he hesitated while a bold plan began to take life in his brain. He turned about and headed toward the big garage two hundred yards to the rear of the place. Slipping through a small door he surveyed the three heavy cars inside the garage. He tested each by resting his hand against the hood. The sedan was hot to the touch. It had been recently used.

Ben looked about carefully, made certain he wasn't observed and with both hands he grasped the front right fender, placed a knee against it and tugged. When he let go, there was a decided dent in the fender.

II

THE Benton O'Connell who stalked blithely into the barroom was the old patrolman who had a perpetual whistle on his lips and a friendly greeting for everyone not fighting the law.

He stepped up to the bar, grabbed one of the loungers by the arm and whirled him about with startling speed.

"Well, well," he grunted. "If it isn't little pansy face. I haven't seen you since that morning you were in the line-up. Glad to see me, Nosey?"

"Yeah." The hatchet-faced man backed away a little. "Sure I'm glad to see you. I ain't got a thing against cops. Didn't you boys let me go last time when I proved I couldn't have done that safe job at the Colonnade? Of course I'm glad to see you."

"Listen, Nosey," Ben grinned. "The only time you'd really smite at me would be when you gloated over my corpse. Sure I'll drink. Ale, bartender." He faced the crook again. "Seen anything of Harry Hatch's chauffeur lately?"

"Belosi? Naw—I haven't seen him since last night. He's around someplace though. The boss makes him stay close, but he won't let him at the bar. Says Belosi has to stay sober if he's going to drive. Hatch is a careful guy, copper. And he's on the up-and-up too!"

"Coming from you, pansy face," Ben laughed, "that certainly is an unqualified compliment. All you owe him is your freedom and about ten grand you profited from jobs he planned for you. Why shouldn't he be a good fellow—and a careful one, to you?"

"Aw cut it out!" the crook sulked. "And stop calling me pansy face. I don't like it."

"Neither would a pansy," Ben grinned and downed his ale in one gulp. He banged the glass on the bar for another. "Where's Hatch, Nosey? Seen him around tonight?"

"Sure. He's been here ever since nine o'clock when the joint opened up. Don't tell me the cops are picking on him for something again."

"No," Ben retorted non-committally. "Not exactly that, but I'm going to have a talk with him after I've had a couple of more drinks. You know, pansy face, I wish Hatch was different. I wish he'd get tough. I feel like pushing somebody's face in tonight and his horrible excuse for a face would do nicely. Well—here's to you, Nosey. May you spend the next forty years—in jail."

Ben downed his third schooner of foaming brew with a flourish, slapped the glass on the bar again and stalked out. There was a cluster of uniformed chauffeurs engrossed in a small-time crap game near the center of the parking space. Ben looked them over and spotted the dark, Latin face of Belosi,

chauffeur to Harry Hatch. He stepped toward the man, reached down and lifted him bodily from his crouched position where he watched the dice.

"Hello, gorilla," he grinned. "Know me?"

Belosi wriggled free and straightened his uniform.

"Yeah—I know you. What's the idea of grabbing me like that? I ain't done anything."

"No?" Ben said. "Shooting dice happens to be against the law, doesn't it?"

Belosi sneered. "Laugh that one off. Imagine the smart copper raiding a ten-cent limit crap game outside the Golden Shoe where the stakes go as high as the moon and no cop made would so much as step into the joint. Go on, flatfoot. Run around the block or something before I tell my boss and have you put back pounding the pavements."

"Okay, Belosi," Ben said. "Don't get sore. I really do want to talk to you about something important. And I want a peek at the black sedan Hatch owns and you drive."

"What's wrong?" Belosi dropped his voice and pulled Ben away from the chauffeurs. "Why do you want to spot that bus?"

"Let's look at it," Ben suggested. "I'll tell you then and if I'm wrong, we won't have to bother your boss. If I'm right, maybe you can explain."

Belosi was reluctant, but Ben slipped his right arm through the chauffeur's left. He rushed him off toward the private garage. Inside, Belosi turned on the lights. Been looked about as though this was the first time he had ever been in the place. He walked briskly toward the big sedan.

"Step over here!" he called to Belosi. "Take a squirt at this right

front fender. It bumped something. When and what?"

Belosi gaped at the bent fender. "I'm damned if I know," he confessed. "That wasn't there when I waxed the bus this morning. Say, maybe you better talk to the boss, huh? What happened—an accident?"

Ben was non-committal. "This car was seen an hour and a half ago. Two witnesses got the number of it. Were you driving?"

"I didn't leave this place all night," Belosi cried eagerly. "I can prove it. Hell, an hour and a half ago and even an hour before that, I was in that little game you yanked me out of. There's ten chauffeurs who can swear I never left. Go talk to 'em! They'll tell you it's the truth."

BEN nodded sagely. "That's fine. I never did hold anything against you, Belosi. If they say you didn't leave, that clears you. Maybe Hatch took the car. He could have driven out and nobody spotted him. Cars are coming and going here all night long."

"Nobody drove that bus since I parked it here at nine o'clock," Belosi insisted. "Listen, copper, don't burn your fingers by trying to pin some kind of a rap on the boss."

"Hatch?" Ben laughed softly. "That would be a hot one. If there was a crime we could pin on him, he'd switch it so some sap—like you for instance — would get it in the neck. But don't worry, Belosi. He'll have an alibi just as good as the one you got."

"Sure he will." Belosi breathed easier. "Maybe it would be best if you didn't even see him, huh? Listen. I'll tell him all about it."

Ben was idly rubbing his right fist

and a peculiar grin spread over his face.

"Remember the time you were driving Hatch to his tailors and you made an old lady almost die of heart failure when you went through a red light? I whistled you to a stop that day. I was only a harness bull, but you stopped all right. I handed you a ticket and you laughed. So did Hatch. Next morning in court the case was thrown out and you laughed some more. Remember?"

Belosi swallowed hard. "Aw forget it, copper. You can't beat Hatch no matter which way you work."

Suddenly Ben's right hand darted out and grabbed the astounded chauffeur around the neck. Ben's long, thick fingers encircled the entire throat. He drew back his left fist.

"I've been waiting for this chance for months," he grinned. "And do I love it!"

Twice he hit the chauffeur. Once squarely on the nose, once on the chin. Belosi slumped to the concrete floor, unconscious. Ben picked him up. He divested the man of his tie and belt. Using these as bonds he tied his prisoner up securely, inserted a gag between his lips and dropped him into the rumble seat of a sport coupé parked beside the sedan. He closed the back of the coupé.

Ben snapped off the lights in the garage and walked to the main entrance of the night club. A thick-set doorman blocked his way. He looked Ben up and down with deliberate rudeness.

"Who you looking for, flatfoot?" he demanded.

"Hello, little man," Ben smiled. His right hand came up, the hard palm of it cupping the doorman's chin. "So nice to have seen you again."

He shoved hard. The doorman's head went back and hit the wall with a resounding crack. His eyes glazed and though he stood swaying weakly, he was out on his feet. Ben dusted his hands and walked in.

A face stood out in the crowded room like a lily in a field of weeds.

"Doris," he cried and pushed his way ruthlessly to a small table where a brown-haired girl sipped a Martini.

"Ben," she smiled. "Why—I didn't think our upstanding detectives frequented places like this!"

Ben sat down without invitation. "You never can tell, sweetheart, where you'll find a cop. How's that lazy brother of yours?"

"Jerry?" she shrugged gracefully. "I haven't seen him all evening. He promised to meet me here, but you know how brothers are. He hasn't appeared yet."

For a fleeting second Ben's face went grim. He knew where Jerry Jerard was. He lay in cold death upon the cement cellar floor of a deserted building.

Ben felt rather than saw or heard the man who stood precisely behind his chair. He turned around and looked up into a smooth shaven, well-formed face. Harry Hatch was no pug-ugly. He was a polished gentleman with all the manners and ease of one born to wear evening dress.

"Good evening, officer," Hatch said without a smile. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but this happens to be my chair and my table. Miss Jerard has honored me with her attentions tonight."

Ben scratched the back of his neck, looked from Doris' embarrassed face to Hatch's expressionless one.

"You don't forget faces, do you?" he said. "The only time you saw me—and I knew about it—was that night

when I handed your driver a ticket for passing a red light. Yet you call me officer right off the bat."

"I never forget a face," Hatch said stiffly. "I won't be inclined to forget yours again either. My doorman just reported that you forced your way in here. What was the idea?"

Ben arose. "I wanted to see you. I still do. Where can we talk—alone?"

Hatch bowed to Doris. "So sorry," he apologized. "Our mutual friend, a representative of the law, believes my attentions are due him first. I won't be a moment, my dear, and I'll send the headwaiter with another cocktail."

III

DORIS inclined her head just the slightest. Hatch brushed by

Ben and led him up a gilded, curving stairway to elaborate quarters on the second floor. Dimly the click of the roulette games came from the rear. Ben walked into a richly furnished office. Hatch dropped into a chair behind his smooth desk.

"Now what do you want?" he demanded. "What are the police accusing me of this time? Make it fast, officer! I don't like to keep ladies waiting."

"Where were you at ten-twenty tonight?" Ben asked bluntly.

Not a quiver passed over Hatch's countenance.

"Why?" he asked.

"I'll tell you. At ten-twenty tonight your car was traveling down Malta Street, going east. Am I right?"

"I doubt it." Hatch bit off the tip of a cigar and applied a flame to it. "I've been here all evening. My driver wouldn't take the car out without my permission and only he and I have keys to any of my cars."

Ben's eyes glittered. "Then somebody is lying. At the time I mentioned, two witnesses saw your sedan on Malta Street. They got the numbers on your marker plate. This is no simple matter, Hatch. It's serious. Dead men always make a case serious and if this one doesn't live—"

Hatch jumped to his feet. "What do you mean—if he doesn't live?"

"The man your car hit tonight. He hasn't a chance. I fully believe he is already dead. Listen, Hatch, I know the drag you have in this town. I know you're clever, but you can't buy off witnesses that have already made sworn statements identifying your car."

Hatch sank back into his chair. He pulled a black silk handkerchief from his pocket and gently mopped his forehead.

"I can make you plenty of trouble," Ben went on. "There's a dent on the right front fender of your sedan. The motor was hot when I felt the radiator. Perhaps you could get away with it. I'm not doubting that, but I've got a proposition."

"Go on," Hatch said. "I'm neither admitting anything nor laying myself open to any propositions, but I'll hear you out."

"You can't punish a guy with brains like yours, Hatch. The man your car hit is broke. He's going to die and leave a family in desperate need. Now if you could do something for them, it might save you quite a lot of trouble—"

"I'll do it," Hatch broke in eagerly. "I'll pay every cent of his expenses and take care of his family to boot. Now does that satisfy you?"

"Swell," Ben said. "Make the check to the Mercy Hospital. Five hundred will do it nicely for a starter. I don't

know the man's name, but the hospital will take care of things."

Hatch opened his desk, took out a check book and scrawled his signature to a check. He filled in the amount on his check writing machine and handed the oblong paper to Ben.

"Remember," he warned, "this doesn't tie me up with hitting that man. I know nothing about it but, as you say, the circumstances seem against me. Stick around! I want to look at the fender of my car later on. Take a table downstairs. Tell the waiter I said the house is yours."

"Thanks," Ben grinned. "You're pretty swell for a guy with your rep. I'll talk to Doris Jerard while I'm waiting."

Ben closed the door after him. Hatch spat a curse at the detective's back and raised his voice in a peremptory summons. A man with a silenced automatic in his hand stepped from behind a screen at the further end of the office.

"You didn't give me the tip off to rub him out, boss," he said. "Want me to do it now?"

"No, you fool. We can't do it that way. Phone Bull Cornish. Tell him to mask eight of his boys, give them guns and send them over to stick up this place. That fool copper will reach for his gun. He is to be killed, understand? Cornish and his men are to fill him full of lead. And wait—that girl I'm with tonight—see that she stops a few slugs too. I don't like to do it, but her brother may have talked to her. Now get moving and tell Cornish to hurry."

Ben sat down beside Doris. He leaned close to her so that the sharp ears of waiters who hung about wouldn't detect his words.

"I'd get out of here, Doris," he ad-

vised. "This place looks swell on the outside, but sometimes the best-looking apples are full of worms. Hatch is one of these even if I'm insulting the worms by calling him one."

"But I'm waiting for Jerry," she protested. "I can't imagine what is delaying him."

"Jerry won't come," Ben told her. "Don't ask me why—now. Just get out of here and move fast."

HE helped her drape a flimsy silken scarf about her throat, but dropped his hand quickly when Hatch came over to their table. "You're not leaving?" Hatch asked solicitously. "Not leaving so early, my dear?"

Doris glanced at Ben, caught the glint in his eyes and nodded.

"I'm afraid I must. Jerry doesn't appear to be coming and I really must try to find him. You won't mind, Mr. Hatch?"

"One more cocktail," Hatch insisted. "A mild one. You too, officer. Anything you wish."

"Ale," Ben grunted. "Two glasses."

Hatch smiled thinly and moved away from the table. Ben watched him narrowly.

"Don't you think it's odd how he invited us to stay and then walked away from us? Doris—get out of here and get going fast. Never mind your wraps. I'll come back for them tomorrow. Maybe you'd better use a rear—"

Ben's voice tapered off. Four men, masked and armed, were forcing club attendants back to the dance floor. They were peering about eagerly, as if they sought someone. Ben sent his chair skidding backward, scooped up another nearby and hurled it straight at the foursome. It connected with the

closest man and knocked him off his feet.

A gun spat and death whistled close to Ben's head. Patrons were making a mad rush for the exits. Ben saw that the gunmen paid them no heed and that all their attention was focused on himself and Doris.

He grabbed her by the arm. "Run!" he yelled. "Run like hell and don't stop! Make for the stairs and the gaming rooms! I'll hold them in check."

Ben's gun was in his hand. He fired two hasty shots. Both missed, but they served to make the masked men seek cover. Doris ran up the stairs and Ben followed warily. He saw one of the masked men raise his gun and aim squarely at Doris. Ben shot once more. The gunman went down like a poled steer.

Ben went up the stairway, three steps at a time. He pushed Doris through the gilded door and slammed it shut. The game room patrons had already flown through specially created exits for emergency use in case of a raid.

Ben handed Doris his gun.

"You can shoot," he said. "I've seen you do it. Take up a stand at the end of this hall. Those men may look as though they're pulling a holdup, but it's really a murder with you and me planned as the victims. We'll have to fight for it."

"But Ben," Doris cried, "why do they want to kill us? How can you stop them? Can't we go out the back door?"

"They want to kill us because they don't like us," Ben grinned to give her encouragement. "I'll stop them somehow and we can't get away through the back. They'll have men posted outside with orders to shoot. Now do as I ask."

While Doris hurried down the hallway, Ben opened a door nearest the one leading off the steps. He stood there, like the image of a huge god of vengeance. It wasn't often that cold, intense fury raged in Ben's eyes, but it was there now.

Someone crashed against the door. It shook on its flimsy hinges. Again someone assaulted it. This time the lock gave way and the door was flung wide.

Two men slipped into the hallway. From her point of vantage far up the corridor, Doris fired one shot. Both men darted for the protection of the very room where Ben was laying in wait. They backed in quickly. Something with the tenacity of steel and the weight of pig iron, dropped around their gun hands. There were two concerted twists and both guns dropped to the floor. Ben changed his hold, grabbing each man by the back of the neck. He brought their heads together with a resounding crash, let them drop and rushed madly out of the room straight for the third gunman who was hesitating at the top of the stairs. He saw Ben, turned with a yell of terror and raced down the steps. Ben flung himself after the man. He hit his victim and both rolled down. There was a brief struggle at the bottom. Ben arose, dusted off his clothing and glared at Harry Hatch who was cautiously making his way toward him.

"Excellent work, officer," Hatch cried. "You stopped a holdup single-handed. I'll see that there are sergeant's stripes in this for you. There's no telling how much you saved my patrons tonight."

"Thanks," Ben said dryly. "I suppose you phoned headquarters?"

Hatch nodded eagerly. "Of course. Captain Logan and a squad are on

their way now. In fact, I hear the sirens this very moment."

IV

LOGAN and half a dozen detectives barged into the club. They looked about in awe. Logan walked up to Ben. "Looks as though you cleaned up, son," he said. "It's too bad you couldn't have prevented a holdup any other place but here. I'd like to see Mister Hatch get a dose of the same kind of medicine he hands out."

"I resent that," Hatch snapped. "I'm entitled to the law's protection as much as the next man. One of these days, Captain, you'll overstep yourself and find that you have a lawsuit on your hands."

"Yah!" Logan derided. "Try it!" He turned back to Ben. "Now would you mind telling me what you're doing here?"

"I came to question Hatch," Ben explained and his right eye closed in a quick wink. "There's been some trouble about his car. Let's all take a look at it. That is, if you're not afraid, Mr. Hatch."

"What have I to fear?" Hatch put in angrily. "I tell you I wasn't out of this night club since nine o'clock and I can prove it. If my car was involved in any trouble, my chauffeur must have used it against my orders. I've already told you I'd take care of any expenses. Of course I'll look at the car."

Ben brought Doris down first and turned her over to a detective with orders that she was to be carefully guarded. Then, with Hatch, Logan and the other detectives at his heels, Ben led the way to the garage. He entered, snapped on the lights and walked up to the sedan. He pointed silently at the dent in the fender.

"A man was killed tonight, Hatch," he said in a loud voice. "This car was used in that kill. You admitted that only you and your chauffeur, Belosi, have keys to it. If you have an alibi for the time I mentioned, then it must be Belosi who used this car and killed that man."

"Of course it was Belosi," Hatch answered quickly. "I tell you I didn't leave the club tonight. Of course I can't account for every second of my time, but there are enough witnesses to prove I couldn't have left long enough to have committed this—this act you mention."

"Okay," Ben said. "Then Belosi takes the rap for the killing. You agree that it must be him? You're not going to attempt to get him out of it?"

Hatch shrugged. "Belosi had no right to take a car without my permission. If you can prove from witnesses that my car was seen near the scene of the accident—"

"Belosi takes the rap," Ben broke in loudly so that Hatch's last word was drowned out by his own voice.

"He must be responsible," Hatch said.

"Okay," Ben grinned broadly. He walked over to the sport coupé, raised the rumble seat and reached in to remove the gag from Belosi's lips.

"You heard what he said," Ben told the chauffeur. "It looks like your goose is done on both sides."

"He's a liar," Belosi yelled. "I didn't bump Jerard. I won't take the rap for it. He's framing me, that's what he's doing. But he won't get away with it. He fed Jerard a loaded drink. I helped put him in the sedan and Hatch drove off to bump him some quiet place. I was right here all the time and I can prove it."

"Belosi, you fool!" Hatch screamed.

"Stop talking! It's a manslaughter rap he's trying to pin on you. I'll fix that and pay you too."

"That," Ben said dryly, "is what you think. Belosi just talked and talked plenty. You've shown too much alarm for an innocent man, Hatch. Why get so excited about Jerard? You don't even know he's dead, do you?"

Hatch paled and fumbled with his collar.

"Nobody knew Jerry Jerard is dead," Ben went on, "except me—and the man who killed him. Belosi happens to be an accessory to the crime, but not the actual murderer, so he's saving his own skull."

"But you said it was about an accident," Hatch insisted. "You said my car hit a man—"

"What if it did?" Ben grinned. "Can I help it how your chauffeur takes the circumstances? How should I know he'd think you meant he was to take the rap for killing Jerard when we were talking about a man supposed to have been killed in an automobile accident?"

"Just what is this all about?" Captain Logan had handcuffs in his hands and dangled them with open anticipation.

"I found Jerry Jerard knifed to death in an alley," Ben said. "Jerry was a friend of Schable's who was murdered last night. Schable told Jerry about the facts he knew that could send Hatch to prison. Therefore they both had to die. Hatch lured Jerry here and, as Belosi admitted, drugged him, put him in this sedan and murdered him in that alley. Some repairs were being made on the buildings near the alley and sand had been dumped in the driveway. Part of that sand is imbedded in the tires of Hatch's sedan. That will help to show

his car was there, but Belosi's story will complete the picture."

"How'd you work it, lad?" Logan asked.

Ben grinned, began to explain. "By making Belosi think I knew Jerard was dead. I tied him up and stuffed him in the rumble seat where he could hear everything that went on when I questioned Hatch. Then I tipped Hatch off that the car had hit a man at a time to coincide with the hour when Jerry was killed. Hatch didn't know whether or not he had hit anyone. He was in a rush to get back so he wouldn't be missed for any period of time. Belosi would never have squealed if he hadn't thought Hatch was framing him to go to the chair for killing Jerry. That's why Hatch got away with everything so long. He protected his own men and they had faith in him, but when Belosi heard what he thought was a deliberate attempt to frame him, he talked. Why Hatch even gave me a check for five hundred dollars payable to the Mercy Hospital where he thought this phantom victim of his auto ride lay hurt. I'll see that the hospital gets that check. It's the first decent thing Hatch has ever done and, I'm afraid, the last."

Ben rubbed his right fist tenderly and moved closer to Hatch.

"You killed a friend of mine," he said bitterly. "You tried to murder me tonight—and a girl who doesn't even possess the slightest knowledge as to what you really are—murderer of her own brother. She doesn't even know he's dead. I've got to tell her and that's going to be harder than facing your hired gunmen would be, Hatch."

Captain Logan whistled softly in admiration. "You certainly fixed him, lad," he approved. "I said he was a big shot and impossible to get, but—"

There came the sound of hard knuckles striking against bone. Hatch was lifted off his feet and hurled to the side of his sedan. He slumped weakly to the floor.

"The bigger they come," Ben said slowly, "the harder they flop."

Captain Logan laid a finger against his nose and his eyebrows rose in mock surprise. He looked from Ben to the group of seasoned detectives who watched with gaping mouths.

"I do declare," Logan said softly, "if Hatch hasn't gone soft on us and fainted. Look, he hit his jaw against the running board of that car. Too bad! I shouldn't be surprised but three or four of his teeth were knocked out. Still, he won't be eating much longer anyway."



The Red Envelope

JESSE BLOCHER, New York detective, knew the man he wanted was in a certain New Orleans hotel, but did not know what room he occupied. So he wrote a note, using the supposed alias of the fugitive, enclosed it in a long red envelope, and dropped it on the room clerk's counter. A few minutes later he saw that envelope in box No. 420, and so caught his man.

—J. L. Considine.

Detectives Campbell and
O'Rourke Determine to Do
Their Duty if It Kills Them
—and as a Result, They Get
the Surprise of Their Lives!



The Granduca

By
Max Brand

O'Rourke raised his gun. There, outside the window, were the feet of a man!

What has happened—

HENRY TYDINGS, a wealthy art collector, has invited his bitterest enemies to spend a week-end with him prior to his marriage. Gene Chatham, Tydings' arch-foe, is there, only so that he

may be near Charlotte Reid, the bride-to-be, whom he loves. Winifred Staunton, Tydings' former mistress, is also present, and at dinner, when Tydings is baiting his guests, including Rupert Walden, another collector rival, and Dr. Willard Hamblin, resident physician, Winifred

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wounds Tydings with a gun belonging to Lionel Reid, Charlotte's brother.

Sergeant Detective Angus Campbell and his bickering team-mate, Sergeant Detective Patrick O'Rourke, arrive at Tydings Island to learn that Tydings' body has vanished. Only one clue is found. Hamblin's amateurish copy of Raphael's *Granduca* is smeared in the corner with Tydings' bloody fingerprint. A bit later, Campbell surprises a sneak thief, William Kearton, in his room, examining the copied *Granduca* canvas. Campbell is convinced that the copy is the key to the mystery.

Lionel Reid is found struggling with his sister for a canceled check, Campbell recovers it, forces Lionel to confess that it's a forgery which Tydings honored only so that he would have a hold over Charlotte.

Kearton makes a break, tries to escape with the *Granduca* copy, and Walden, the butterfly collector, stops him and betrays his own keen interest in the picture.

In the meanwhile a police launch has recovered Tydings' body, floating in the bay. An autopsy is ordered by Tydings' daughter, Vivian, and it is learned that Winifred Staunton's shot did not kill the collector. He died of accumulative arsenic poisoning. Doctor Hamblin collapses when he hears the news. He had been prescribing an arsenic tonic for Tydings. An analysis proves that it is much stronger than the solution the pharmacist had prepared.

In the midst of the questioning, Kearton, with the aid of someone inside the house—probably Chatham—escapes. Shortly thereafter, Campbell accuses the doctor of Tydings' murder. O'Rourke third-degrees Hamblin, learns that he was the one who moved the dead body around. He had found Tydings, dead, in his room just after the shooting at the dinner table. Afraid of suspicions, he carried the body to the armory, put it into one of the suits of armor. Then he managed to spirit it from the armory to the dumb-waiter, where the cook saw it, and from there to the cellar, where he cast it into the sea.

While O'Rourke goes to lord it over Campbell with this information, Hamblin falls from his window and is killed. On a sudden hunch, O'Rourke goes to the laundry, directly above Hamblin's room, and discovers that a flatiron, tied to a length

of laundry cord, was dropped on the doctor's head as he leaned out the window.

O'Rourke makes another astonishing discovery. The arsenic tonic is still disappearing. Walden complains that he wishes to leave the island. Later that night O'Rourke surprises Kearton, who has returned, cleaning canvases in Dr. Hamblin's room. He is finally forced to show the detectives that Hamblin's copy conceals the real Raphael *Granduca*, stolen by the doctor, at Tydings' orders, from the galleries of the Pitti Museum in Italy. Kearton falls into an exhausted sleep and O'Rourke springs another surprise. The contents of the arsenic tonic bottle is continually diminishing. It is evaporating through a tiny hole in the cork, growing continually more concentrated.

While Campbell is taking a short nap, someone steals his wallet. The Scotchman wounds the pickpocket, discovers it is Charlotte Reid, trying to retrieve her brother's forgery. Campbell is completely stunned during the confusing period while Chatham bandages his beloved. Charlotte, in pain, asks him if they will both be hanged, and O'Rourke, strangely, assures the man that neither of them would remember that. Vivian Tydings rushes in, screaming in a jealous frenzy that she is going to send Chatham to the electric chair.

The detectives leave Charlotte and Chatham alone, have a drink. Something is bothering O'Rourke. Campbell is still terribly shocked that he injured a woman. Bewildered, he goes to get Vivian Tydings' story.

CHAPTER XXVI

Vivian Accuses

VIVIAN TYDINGS took Campbell right in. She kept on smiling. Sometimes the smile stretched a little too far and remained fixed for an instant, and Campbell felt a curious chill.

He said slowly: "Anything you can do to help the law, Miss Tydings—"

"I don't care about the law," the girl answered. "I want to do any-

thing I can to hurt Gene Chatham. I suppose you know why. You have eyes and ears and heard me make a public fool of myself down there, a little while ago. . . ."

"I guess I understand," said Chatham with a nod.

"I loved him," explained Vivian Tydings. "If you could take a thing in your hands and crush it—like this—that was the way I loved him. And when I think of how he made a fool of me—how the two of them must have laughed together. . . ."

"Yeah. That's pretty mean," Campbell agreed.

"You'll have to tell me what you want me to say—how I can hurt him most," the girl announced. "If I should miss anything, I'd blame you—and I'd never forgive myself."

"Shall I ask some questions?"

"Yes. Do that."

He got out his notebook and asked: "Do you think Chatham killed your father?"

"Yes," she replied.

"By poison?"

"Well, I don't know. . . . Yes, poison, or any way."

"How long have you known it?"

"From the moment I knew father was dead."

"You didn't tell anybody what you suspected?"

"Do I have to answer that?" she objected. "If I answer that, won't it weaken everything else I say?"

"I guess we'd better put it in," Campbell insisted.

"I'm not going to answer it," Vivian Tydings stated. And then: "How were they after I left? What did she do? Down there in the room, I mean?"

"He was holding her pretty close," said Campbell.

"Why didn't you shoot straighter?" cried the girl. "I mean—that would have been better for her than the chair. There always might have been a bit of doubt about her, after that. But as it is, the whole truth is coming out."

"They did it together, did they?"

"Of course they did!"

"Well, suppose we go back to the start of things."

"You mean, where they began to come into the picture?"

"Yes."

"Now that I think of it, he came in after she arrived at this house. . . . But take Charlotte Reid first. You see, there wasn't any nonsense about her. About her coming here, I mean. My father simply told me that I would ask her to spend a couple of weeks at the house—and that he hoped to marry her at the end of those two weeks."

"Well, she came here," observed Campbell. "And her relations with your father were—well, what should I say?"

He leaned forward a little, filled with a strange anxiety.

"Do you think that Charlotte would throw herself away? No, not when she could get her price by holding out. That's not a pleasant way of talking, but I have to be frank and open, don't I?"

"Yes," said Campbell, settling back in his chair again with a sigh.

"The price was marriage. That was what she wanted," Vivian said.

"Suppose we look at it this way," urged Campbell, being logical. "She loved Chatham. If she married your father, she would be the heiress to part of the estate—"

"Half," the girl argued.

"And that would make things easier for a life with Chatham . . . who's a poor man, perhaps?"

"He's not poor, but everybody can always use a million or so more. In these days, anyway."

"That's right," said Campbell. "Well, we've got Charlotte in the house. You and she get on?"

"We got on well enough. She knew I hated her and I knew she despised me."

"Why would she despise you?"

"Because she knew that I saw through her. Besides, she pretended not to like the way I acted. She said I was too modern."

"Kind of criticized you?"

"Not so much by talking, though."

"She and your father happy together?"

"There wasn't any pretense. He had a hold on her through Lionel. She wanted father's money. She wanted Lionel in the clear. They agreed to the bargain. That was all there was to her. Father wouldn't be happy before he'd—added her to his collection."

"I see. Now suppose we get to Chatham. Known him long?"

"Always. He was always famous as the man father hated the most. I can't understand why, now. But father and I never were very fond of one another. We lived in the same house. That was all."

"I've heard that. So you knew a lot about Chatham?"

"Of course. Bad things. About his bad temper. And his cunning."

"Cunning?"

The girl paused, drew a deep breath. "He's one of the cleverest dealers that ever handled pictures. Like a fox, father used to say. I wasn't prepared for him when I actually met him. I thought he'd be ten years older, and not so good-looking. . . . This is the point. I met him the day after Charlotte came here to stay on her visit."

"How come that?" asked Campbell.

"Don't you see? He was infatuated by Charlotte. I suppose the same criminal strain runs in both of them and they're necessary to one another. I begin to see a great many things, now. But the point is that when Charlotte came here, I suddenly met Gene Chatham at another house. I was rather cold, naturally, knowing his attitude towards father. He seemed perfectly indifferent towards me, too, until later in the evening when I said something about pictures—I don't know what—and he pretended that I had said an important thing. He came over and sat down by me and talked seriously—as though I was his own age and importance; as though he wanted to know my opinion about things. He was perfectly frank about father and admitted that they despised one another. I was flattered naturally. I hadn't met anyone like him. I suppose it is a fairly old form of hypocrisy, but I didn't recognize it."

"He kind of had you knocked for a loop from the start, eh?"

She looked at Campbell without smiling.

"You can put it that way," she nodded. Only afterwards, she grew a hot red in the face. Although her eyes never flinched.

She said: "He asked if he could see more of me, and I told him that he could. We went two or three places together. He was making love every moment. In a different way. Keeping at a little distance. Silent, very often. And when we talked, I seemed to have clever things to say—about pictures and books and people—and I think that he was building me up so that I would have the chance to shine."

"Kind of a clever one, eh?" asked Campbell.

"Clever as a fox—or a wolf!" the girl replied. "Finally I could think of nothing else. I told father about him. I said that I wanted him here, often, or else I'd go and see Gene in other places. And father laughed and said that it would be a pleasure to receive in his house the most intelligent man he knew. So Gene began to come. It was odd to see how father and he accepted one another. So intimately that it was almost like old friends. Old enemies was the right word, of course. But they had a thousand things to talk about. They looked over all of father's pictures. Afterwards, father would even write down some of the things that Gene said. And I was more dizzy than ever. How was I to notice that Gene and Charlotte were being together a great deal? It's a big house. When Gene remained overnight—and particularly after he accepted father's invitation to join the house party before the marriage—there were a thousand opportunities for him to see Charlotte—and now I know that he made the most of them."

"Tell me one thing. Did he spend any time alone with your father?"

"A great deal. When they started talking about art they forgot their hatred—or seemed to. I suppose Gene Chatham was forcing himself all the while. He and Charlotte had determined on murder. So Gene made himself agreeable. He never made pleasant remarks to father. But he was always interested in the discussions about art. Sometimes they had long talks in father's own room—"

"Where?" barked Campbell.

"In father's room. For an hour at a time."

"Ah?" breathed Campbell. And he wrote down the words slowly, heavily, and then underlined them.

"The plan was to murder my father—just as he accomplished it—and I can say it and prove it in any court. I could stand up before a jury and prove it this moment!"

"That's what I want to hear, of course," said Campbell.

"Well, on the face of it, there's the plan: Charlotte to marry father, and Gene Chatham to marry me. That would put three quarters of father's money into their hands. Later, I could be put out of the way, and they two could marry."

CAMPBELL nodded. "That's likely it," he agreed, "but there's got to be something more than just an idea to put in front of a jury: What sort of facts?"

"If I could prove that Gene Chatham was interested in arsenic . . ."

"Arsenic? Then that would be right up the alley," averred Campbell. "How interested was he and how did he show that interest?"

"I've heard him talking with Doctor Hamblin—and that's why he killed the doctor, I think—because Hamblin knew too much."

"You heard them talking?"

"Things that didn't seem to mean a great deal at the time. But now I can see. I heard him ask Hamblin just what arsenic did, how long it took to operate, what symptoms it caused, and a great many other things."

"If he was thinking about murder," said Campbell, "it's funny that a smart fellow like Chatham would give himself away, like that. Right out before people."

"It wasn't right out before people. It was quite a while ago. We were all out one evening, cooling off in the motor boat. I was sitting forward, alone. Most of the time there was a

roar of wind and the throb of the engines to cover the sound of voices and it was hard to talk. I didn't try. Then as we swung about and came with the wind there was almost a silence; only the sound of the cutwater knifing through the water and the hum and working of the engine. The voices of Doctor Hamblin and Gene came up to me then, not very clearly, but clearly enough. I wasn't paying a great deal of attention. But I could hear them, word for word, most of the time, and Gene was asking, and the doctor was answering, about arsenic. In detail. All the questions that I've just mentioned. I thought at the time that it wasn't important. Perhaps Gene had been reading about some poison mystery and everyone has a little interest in toxicology. But I can still remember how serious Gene was, and how he kept at the subject until the doctor seemed rather surprised."

"Did you know that your father was using an arsenic tonic?"

"I, no—why, yes I think I did. Is that what. . . ?"

"You'd heard about the tonic, then? Do you think other people in the house may have heard about it, also?"

"No doubt."

"Chatham, for instance?"

"Yes. What a hypocrite! I've heard him telling father to take better care of himself, and all that. What a lying, sneaking, murdering hypocrite!"

"Have you got anything more like the arsenic conversation?"

"Other things like it. We can prove the motives. I can give you the background. If you can get one ounce of other proof—anything to connect him with one of the murders would do."

"I suppose I've got enough," said Campbell. "Try to remember other things."

"Try to? I'm hunting through my memory with a fine-tooth comb, right now."

"Did Chatham ever ask you to marry him?"

"Never quite. He was progressing towards the point, you see? That was the great affectation that he adopted—such respect for my mind that he had to go ahead slowly, consulting me, half afraid that I would be displeased by something that he said or did."

"I get that," said Campbell. "The way you work it out, he worked on you to get into the house. He would marry you if he could, and all the while he was having chances to see Charlotte Reid. In the windup, he'd marry you after Charlotte married your father. That would tie them both in on the property. Then you'd be shelved later on and everything would be fixed for them. But they made the mistake of feeding the arsenic too fast to your father?"

"No, that wasn't it. They'd timed the arsenic nicely enough, I suppose, but the shock of that shooting must have hurried the effects of the poison, don't you think? So the scheme was spoiled in part by the death of father. But only in part. Because if Gene married me, he only needed to put me out of the way later on and have the entire property. . . . I don't think it was just the money that he wanted. But he wanted this particular house and the art treasures that are in it. . . . The whole thing pleased him. . . . Sergeant Campbell, have I told you enough to send him to the chair?"

"Not quite," said Campbell, "but I have other things to add to what you you—and if you speak your piece in the right way from the witness stand, you'll send him to the chair. I don't doubt that."

"Speak it in the right way? I'll have nothing else in my mind from this moment. I'll be rehearsing day and night!"

Campbell left her. It was getting very late, but he could hear voices above him and below. Enough had happened again to give that household a sleepless night. Lionel Reid's voice sounded out with the opening of a door. And that was what made Campbell slip the wallet out of his pocket and open it. He was reminded how the forged check had played its part throughout. Charlotte lay badly wounded and still . . .

Here Campbell stopped, with electric needles of surprise thrusting into him. For the check was no longer in his wallet. .

CHAPTER XXVII

Gentleman's Agreement

KEARTON was under guard in one room. Clifford was under guard in another. Charlotte Reid lay on a bed incapable of motion. Big Gene Chatham was in there taking care of her. That disposed of three of the people most importantly concerned in this affair. Vivian Tydings was in her own chamber, and Waldo in his. And everyone was up and awake. Campbell learned of this before he looked up O'Rourke, who was in the room to the left of that which formerly had been headquarters for the two detectives. The Granduca was there with him. And O'Rourke now was juggling in his hand a pair of little flat corks.

Campbell looked at the Irishman with a profound antipathy. Every brutal line of that swollen face was detestable to him. He could hear in prospect the bawling upbraiding which he

would receive when he confessed that the check had been stolen from him.

But, bracing himself, he said: "The check's gone, Pat. Swiped out of my wallet on the table when the crowd came full-steam into the room after the shooting."

O'Rourke merely asked: "Who you think?"

Campbell was amazed by this mildness, betrayed by it.

He said: "I don't know. Lionel Reid, likely. Or Clifford. Or maybe anybody. . . . I've been talking with Vivian Tydings. She hates Chatham, now, and she's ready to do anything in the world to down him, but she doesn't know very many things that will count. She'll be the star witness, anyway. Because of her looks and the way she'll talk. She'll make a dog out of Chatham— But she doesn't know very much. . . . Chatham made love to her so's he could get into the house and close to Charlotte Reid. That's the layout, it seems. But the check, Pat?"

"What's the use of that? If you got it again, you'd lose it again. The only thing you can't lose is money. You got no fishhooks for holding on to phony money. Shut up and listen to what I been doing with my brains."

Campbell shut up. He sat down and fixed a cold eye on the Irishman.

"I been to every room," said O'Rourke, "and I've laid the cards on the table for every person in the house—except the servants. I've told 'em that Clifford has promised to confess everything he knows as soon as he gets safely out of the house and to police headquarters. I advised 'em all to come clean in time to get on the sunny side of the law. I told 'em that the only thing to be was a state witness, in a case like this."

"What did they do, any of 'em?" asked Campbell.

"Nothing," said O'Rourke. "Walden looked the most tired of them all. He's up in his room fiddling at his butterflies. He give me a mean eye when I talked. But I said the same to him as to the rest."

"A bluff like that was a tinhorn idea," said Campbell. "If you stay a while longer on the force, you'll find out that the only kind of a bluff that works is one with a gun behind it."

"I got the gun, too," said O'Rourke.

"What is it?"

"Clifford."

"What you mean?"

"It's the old idea. We had it before. He's the decoy. If there's somebody in the house that thinks Clifford knows something, that somebody may take a crack at Clifford before the morning. . . . If he does, I'll be there waiting for the fun."

"You going in there now?"

"Yes."

"What are those corks?"

"What I was looking for. I found two bottles. You can see 'em for yourself."

CAMPBELL took the small, flat corks, and looked at the light through the small hole which was drilled through each of them.

"How were those holes cut?" asked Campbell.

"I dunno. It has me stopped. A knife wouldn't do it. And I never seen an auger that small."

"We've gotta find what cut those holes."

"Go wake up Kearton. He's asleep again," said O'Rourke. "I'll take care of Clifford. You see what you can get out of Kearton, if you can wake him up and keep him awake. We want

know what his business is. How he happened to come here. Is he hooked up with Chatham?"

Campbell nodded. "I don't like that dodge with Clifford," he said. "I'd rather think about who could of wanted to steal the forged check."

"Everybody in the whole damned house?" exclaimed O'Rourke, "Vivian Tydings for meanness to stick her claws into either of the Reids; and that Chatham to please Charlotte Reid; and Lionel for his own neck; and Clifford to have a handle on young Reid; and Walden God knows why, but there'd be a reason. . . . They're all a gang of thugs, I tell you. I thought so first. I think so still."

"You been back to look in on the girl and Chatham?"

"That's your job," said O'Rourke.

Campbell knew it and therefore he went to the unlucky duty.

At his first tap, Gene Chatham opened the door and stared down into his face. In the corner sat Mary, of the big feet and the small head, close to the bed where the wounded girl was lying, not asleep but looking up at the ceiling like a child.

"All right, come in," said Chatham, quietly. "You have to talk to her or to me?"

"I just wanta see how she is."

Campbell walked over to the side of the bed and looked down at the girl. Her eyes drifted over to him. They rested gravely on his face.

"That was good shooting, Sergeant," she said.

Only after she had spoken a small smile came in her eyes. Campbell made a brief gesture with his hand.

"I got kind of hurried. I got kind of dazzled waking up in the dark. I just sort of saw—"

"I know," said the girl.

"Is it paining you much?" asked Campbell.

"No. Not much."

"She has to rest," said Chatham.

"Thank you for looking in," said the girl.

Campbell went to the door and Chatham followed him into the hall.

The big man said: "When O'Rourke swore that he wouldn't remember what Miss Reid said as she was coming back to consciousness—did that go for you, too?"

It was not so much a request as a threat, Campbell felt.

Campbell said: "You mean when she asked you if you both would hang for it?"

Chatham took his time before answering. The man was dangerous. He had a look that might have meant anything. "That's what I mean," said Chatham.

Campbell consulted his inner soul.

"It depends what else I turn up," he said. Then he added: "I wouldn't let you hang on that only, if that's what you mean."

"Thanks," said Chatham. "I know that you mean what you say."

He made a gesture as though he were about to shake hands, but changed his mind and went suddenly back into the room. His shoulders were so big that they almost filled the doorway as he passed through.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Check

O'Rourke, in Clifford's room, was saying to the tired policeman on guard: "Go get some shut-eye. I'll watch this mug for you."

"You wouldn't think he was a butler or anything, would you?" said the policeman. "He's like one of them

promoters that sells country clubs or something."

"His dirt is all under the skin," said O'Rourke. "Goodnight, George. Have a good sleep."

"Thanks," said the policeman, "So long, Clifford. Good luck to you."

"What you been doing?" asked O'Rourke. "Hypnotizing that poor dummy?"

"The fellow has a responsive mind," said Clifford. "He asked questions and I answered them. That was all, Sergeant. Some people have open minds and some only have hard fists."

"I get that," said O'Rourke. "You know what I'd like? I'd like to bash in that fine high nose of yours, Clifford. How did it feel when Chatham hammered you one on the chin, mug? I would of traded places with him, the other night."

"I'd be delighted to meet you alone at any time, Sergeant," said the butler.

"Would you, guy?" asked O'Rourke, curiously.

"To put my hands on you, without interruption in the offing, would be a consummate pleasure to me, Sergeant."

"Small as you are, eh?" said the sergeant, looking up at the commanding bulk of the butler. "But lemme tell you, brother. Sometimes I find 'em big, but I always manage to whittle 'em down to my own size. Now go to bed."

"I prefer to sit up," said Clifford.

"I've told you to go to bed," said O'Rourke, "You want me to ask you another way?"

Clifford said nothing. He regarded the detective for a moment with a sharp attention. Then he began to undress.

He stripped to B.V.D.'s, pulled back the cover of the bed, folded it, laid it on a chair, and slipped into the bed under the sheet.

"Satisfactory, Sergeant?" he asked.

"Yeah. Now shut your face and go sleep," said O'Rourke.

He went over to the door and switched out the light. Something bright leaped into the room behind him. That was the stream of moonlight, now visible.

He sat down in the darkest corner, pulled out his automatic, and laid the barrel of it across his knee. Then he waited.

In ten minutes the breathing of the butler was deep and regular as he slept. And the moonlight showered through the window like a crystal flow.

A thing like that isn't beer and pork chops, but it goes under the belt just the same. It don't make you any heavier, but it adds something; and the same with music. If a fellow used the bean he wouldn't have to lean so hard just on poker, a baseball game to look at or a prizefight, and the chatter with the boys. A fellow could get hold of things that didn't cost nothing and left the blood dead still while things slipped inside the bean and made you happy. You take like when you put your eyes on a girl—I mean, when you're a kid and don't know anything. If the girl has the stuff, it kind of steals over you. It gives you the shot in the arm. It's kind of too bad that there don't come many times like that. Speaking by and large, the kids have a pretty good deal in life. They keep softened up enough to feel the things that don't graze your hide when you get toughened. But what I mean, after you walk a beat a few years you gotta have a thick skin. Love and music and moonlight and all that don't go so big. They're all right to look at through the smoke, but you wouldn't trade all three for a good cigar. Chatham was young, in there. The gal had knocked him for a loop.

A pretty gal, but not the queen of the May, at that. You take her legs, they weren't so straight in the knees. You take and think of a thing like that and it's a funny thing. All the time and thought that go to a woman's legs, and how few of them are worth a damn, really. Like on the stage you'd think that they'd all be perfect, what with the millions to pick from, but what d'you see? Plenty, but mighty few that are right. How would you say that happened? Now, if it was dogs or horses, they'd be bred for the old straight knee, wouldn't they? But people are funny.

Something snaked across the vision of Sergeant O'Rourke, a thin film of living shadow outside the window. It descended, with jerking curves that sometimes took it out of sight.

He got up from his chair. It was a rope.

There was the windy rushing of the tide making the air alive, but there was no other sound.

The rope was no longer in view. Then something flicked across the corner of the window. A man's feet.

The man himself passed off to the side, it seemed, out of view. Then his shadow squatted on the white moonlight on the snow of the sheet. The shadow was broad and short, like an ape.

THERE'S a story, somewhere, about a thing you couldn't see dropped onto a fellow in a bed and tried to strangle him. You couldn't see it at all. They tied it all up with ropes, and the ropes showed that it looked like a kind of an ape. They kept it a while and it died. Anyway, there was a terrible smell. If you want to read something, you read that story.

O'Rourke was remembering that story as he watched the squat shadows that stood on the white of the sheet.

The shadow lengthened suddenly into a giant. It came wobbling, huge and huger. Then the head and shoulders of a man peered in through the window.

O'Rourke stood flat against the wall. The bigness of that head and shoulders meant Chatham, of course. He decided that he wouldn't use his fist. He'd use the butt of the gun. If he made a slip with a gorilla like Chatham, he'd have his backbone broken and the wishbone sticking out of his chest.

The man in the window put down a long leg to the floor, found it, stepped noiselessly into the room. O'Rourke lifted the automatic, steadied it, aimed the blow—had he put on the safety catch, or was he going to blow a stream of lead into himself as he socked this bird?

He socked him.

The fellow went right down into a pile. Clifford sat up in his bed with a gasp, and then hit the floor, running.

"Tie yourself up," said O'Rourke, "This bozo won't do anything. Not for a while. Turn on the switch."

The switch flicked, and there was Lionel Reid fighting to get back on his feet. O'Rourke helped him. He put the muzzle of the gun under his chin and the sharp prod of the forward sight spurred young Reid up onto his feet.

His face was a blank. There was a visible lump on his head.

O'Rourke said: "I took you for a bigger man than you turned out. That's the way with moonlight. It kind of magnifies everything; mostly the females. . . . What in hell did you want down here with the butler?"

Clifford had climbed into his trou-

sers. He kept wriggling his long, bare toes. There was a tuft of hair on the joint of his big toe. He forgot the detective, and stared at Lionel Reid.

O'Rourke said: "Come on. You're in the soup. Out with it."

Lionel Reid said: "He knows why I came."

"Speak it out, then," said the sergeant. "Why did he come, Clifford?"

"Murder, I suppose," said the butler.

"What a dog you are!" exclaimed Lionel Reid.

"Yeah. He's that," agreed O'Rourke. "How much dog this time, though?"

Lionel Reid lifted a hand to the bump on his head and touched it.

"If my sister would try what she tried, what sort of a man was I if I didn't do the same?" he asked.

"What did sister do? You mean she went for Campbell's wallet in a big way?"

"I saw this rat steal the check out of the wallet when it was lying on the table in the other room," said Reid.

"So you come down to steal it? After you heard that the butler was going to confess in the morning?"

"What did I care about his confession?" asked Reid. "I wanted the check. . . . Where is it, Clifford?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, sir," said Clifford.

"You soggy-faced devil!" said O'Rourke. "Trot out that check or I slam you now!"

He walked up to Clifford with the automatic gripped by the thick of the barrel. The butler looked down at him very carefully, and for a long moment. Then he went without a word to his coat, slipped two fingers inside a pocket, and pulled out that slip of paper.

"I believe this may be what you refer to, sir," said Clifford.

"Blackmail was what you meant, Clifford, eh?" asked O'Rourke.

The astonishing butler said: "I have the feeling that one never should cast away resources which may serve in the future, sir."

O'Rourke stared down at the check.

"Reid," he said, "you were promised to have this check, weren't you? If you came clean, it was going back to you?"

"Sergeant Campbell made that promise."

"And then he double-crossed you?"

"He said that he wanted to check up my story."

"I've checked your story," said O'Rourke. "Anybody that was damn fool enough to come into a room the way you just come, ain't very deep in the trouble of Tydings' house. . . . Got a lighter on you?"

"Yes," said Reid.

"Don't be dumb. Use it."

"For what?" asked Reid, automatically bringing out the cigarette lighter and snapping up the flame.

"For this," said O'Rourke, and touched the corner of the check in the flame. The yellow fire sprang up and ran swiftly over the paper. A still flaming ash floated out of the fingers of O'Rourke and was a dead film of ash before it struck the floor. Lionel put his foot on the ash and crushed it.

CHAPTER XXIX

A Bit of Cork

O'Rourke went back, slowly, down the hall. When he passed the room where Charlotte Reid was lying, he heard the subdued mutter of the voices of men inside, and he tapped at the door. It

was Campbell who opened and let him in. Charlotte Reid was asleep, murmuring swiftly, softly, her face flushed with fever. Gene Chatham, sitting scowling by the bed, laid his large hand on her forehead. The murmuring ceased.

O'Rourke said quietly to Campbell: "I've got something to say to her."

"Go ahead," answered Campbell. "I've been trying to get talk out of Kearton, but it's like talking to a drunk."

O'Rourke went over to the bed.

"Wake her up," he said to Chatham.

Mary, the kitchen-maid sat in the corner with her head flopped over on her shoulder, sound asleep. Her neck seemed to be broken.

Chatham starting up at O'Rourke, hesitated a moment. Then he leaned a little and spoke her name. She opened her eyes. They were baffled and weary.

"He wants to say something to you," said Chatham. "He has some good news."

How did Chatham guess that?

O'Rourke said: "Clifford stole the check. Your brother and I have just finished burning it. There's nothing left. It's wiped out."

"What a dumb, Irish, sentimental fool you always will be!" growled Campbell, from the background.

"Burned," translated Chatham. "The check, Charlotte. O'Rourke burned it. It's gone."

A little light turned on behind her eyes. She started to speak.

"You be still and go to sleep," said O'Rourke.

She did exactly that, as though obeying quickly a command. She smiled for a moment at Chatham. Then her eyes closed. A moment later her lips parted in a smile. She was sleeping

soundly. Chatham got up and stretched the creaks out of his big body.

Then he leaned over to tie up a loose shoestring. O'Rourke stepped back to face Campbell.

"I know I played the fool," he said. "But one of the Reid family was going to jump off a cliff, before long, if that check wasn't accounted for."

"What the hell was riding them, anyway?" asked Campbell. "You can't send a man to the electric chair with a cancelled check, can you?"

"Honor," said O'Rourke. "You know. A lot of people got dumb ideas about the sacred honor, and all that. Prove that a man once forged a name, and he's in the soup. Nothing for him but to change his name and go to hell."

There was a slightly snapping sound, and Chatham swore under his breath. He had given such a jerk to the loose shoestring that it had torn through the edge of the leather flap.

Campbell was a practical man. He went over and looked down at the broken shoe, at which Chatham scowled before he went ahead with an improvised lacing of it.

"I you had a punch you could put a new hole in that leather," said Campbell. "The way they make up high priced shoes with belly leather or splits is a damn shame. But a punch . . . a punch!"

He had been making a condemnatory gesture, and now his hand froze.

"Chatham!" he said.

"Well? Well?" muttered Chatham.

"Go up to Mr. Walden's room and ask him for the paper punch that he's got there. It's a strong-made sort of a thing. I guess that would fix a new hole in the shoe for you."

"I don't ask favors of Walden," said Chatham. "What's the matter, Campbell?"

"The matter is—" said Campbell.

"Quiet," cautioned Chatham, "or you'll wake her up."

"The matter is that I want you to get that punch—or see if he'll refuse it to you."

"He's almost likely to refuse. We're not friends, Campbell."

"Be a good man and go ask for that paper punch, will you?" said Campbell.

"What's the matter, Angus?" muttered O'Rourke.

"Don't be asking me. Wait and see!" urged Campbell. "Go ahead and ask for it real polite. I'll be in the hall behind you, never fear."

"I don't make this out," said Chatham, frowning, "but I'll do as you say, of course, if you think there's something depending on it."

"He's a book detective," said O'Rourke, "and he's always deducing. Maybe you'll deduce a sock on the chin from the paper-punch, Angus."

Campbell was not disturbed. A steady fire of excitement was burning in his tired eyes.

WHEN Chatham left the room, Campbell went at a little distance behind him to the door of Walden's chamber. Walden opened at once to the knock. He was in his shirtsleeves. Weariness had reacted badly on him, sinking purple lines and bruises about his eyes.

"Ah—you!" he said, bluntly.

"Hello," said Chatham. "Just lend me that paper-punch for a moment, will you? The one on the table, there?"

"I suppose so," said Walden. He turned, and Chatham made a half step into the room.

Walden went to the table, picked up the steel punch, and twirled it.

"It's odd," he said. "It's very odd, Chatham, that you should show up here

to ask me even for the loan of a paper-punch."

"I ripped a shoelace out of my shoe," said Chatham, briefly. "Isn't that explanation enough? I'm not asking for your money or blood."

Campbell, standing to the rear, set his teeth hard. He was praying, silently; there was no other word for that devout tension of mind.

"Well, Chatham," said Walden, "the fact is I'm glad that you came up to my room, to-night. It gives me a chance to tell you what I think of you, you damned double-murderer."

"Ah, is that the tune?" said Chatham.

"Don't come nearer," said Walden.

"I'm not coming nearer. I'm leaving, Walden."

"Wait a minute, gentlemen," said Campbell, pressing through.

He closed it behind him.

"Ah, sergeant!" said Walden.

He put the paper punch back on the table and smiled at the sergeant.

"I'm afraid we've been raising our voices a little," said Walden.

"Not a lot," said Campbell. "But I'd like to talk to the two of you for a minute, if you don't mind."

"We're not permitted to mind, Campbell," said Chatham. "Now what the devil have you in mind? You know that I'm busy, this night. This morning, I ought to say. The dawn's about ready to start."

"Ay," said Campbell. He sat down behind the table and picked up the paper-punch. "The dawn's about ready to start, so this is the blackest hour of the night, as they say in the books. For one of the two of you, it's going to be a damned black hour, I could say. Sit down gentlemen."

Walden said: "Very well. Just come to the point with your questioning, if

you please. I'm a very tired man, sergeant."

He dropped into an easy chair.

"Sit down, Chatham," commanded Campbell.

"I'll take mine standing," said Chatham. And he walked up and down with a soft step. It was curious to see how lightly he could handle his weight.

Campbell said: "One of you killed Tydings. The same one of you killed Doctor Hamblin."

"I didn't think you had it in you, Walden," said Chatham.

"Don't interrupt him," protested Walden. "Let him get on with his inquisition, will you?"

Campbell picked up a small blotter and clipped a little round hole in a corner of it. The punch had plenty of leverage in the handles. It made nothing of the soft bit of blotting paper.

Campbell said: "The pair of you knew that a picture called Raphael's Granduca had been stolen from a place in Italy. And you guessed that Tydings had wangled the stealing. Is that right?"

Walden waved both hands.

"Yes, that's right," said Chatham. "Go on from there. I guessed it on a long chance, simply because I knew that Tydings had been in Florence at about the time the theft might have been made."

"How did you find out," said Campbell, "that the real thing was stolen, and a fake put in its place?"

"The gallery sent out word to a number of people who were known to deal in expensive pictures. That's how I had word," said Walden.

"And so you guessed Tydings for the thief?" asked Campbell.

"Yes. I knew, as Chatham says, that Tydings had been in Florence at about the right time for the theft."

Campbell clipped from time to time at the blotter.

"Do you mind stopping that infernal noise?" asked Walden.

"What's the matter?" said Campbell. "Edgy? All right, I'll stop the clicking."

"Thanks," said Walden. "We've been through enough, during the last couple of days, to put all our nerves on edge."

"We have," nodded Chatham. "What are you drilling after, Campbell?"

"You came here, Chatham," said the sergeant, "with Kearton on the side to help you wangle the stealing of the picture. Is that right?"

"Certainly not," said Chatham.

"You wasn't a friend of Kearton?"

"Not a friend."

"Didn't even know him?"

"I won't say that."

"You didn't snake him out of that room through the window, with your rope trick?"

"That's a question we'll keep in abeyance," said Chatham, calmly.

WALDEN laughed. "Have you been run into the tall brush as soon as all this, Chatham?" asked Walden.

Campbell clicked another hole through the blotter, and the sound made Walden jerk around in his chair. Campbell cut another hole. A stiff bit of white cardboard, such as that which composed the butterfly cards of the collector, jumped out of the vent hole of the paper punch.

"You have to make that noise, do you?" asked Walden, irritably.

"What's it remind you of?" asked Chatham. "The click of a trigger, old fellow?"

"S o r r y," murmured Campbell.

"Forgot what I was doing. But just working up the Chatham end of this game for a while, I want to show you what a black picture we're getting of you, Chatham!"

"A hanging picture, in fact," said Walden.

"Just a minute," said Campbell.

"Have you two been spending any time together since you came to this house?"

"Not a minute—if I could avoid it," grated Walden.

"You never found Chatham in here waiting for you at the end of an evening?" asked Campbell.

"He couldn't," said Walden. "I keep my door locked when I'm not in my room. . . . There's the butterflies, you know."

"You always keep it locked?" asked Campbell, carelessly.

"Yes. That's a hotel habit, I suppose," said Walden.

Campbell clicked a new hole through the blotter. And again Walden started.

"Nervous, Walden?"

"You've got a queer manner," said Walden. "Very queer. Have you been drinking, Sergeant?"

"Yeah, but not that much," said Campbell. "I'm doing nothing as queer as locking up my room when I'm the guest in a private house. What about that?"

"It may seem odd," said Walden, "but—"

"But it means," said Campbell, "that nobody else in the house has had a chance to use your paper punch, Walden. And that means that everything inside it is stuff that you've clipped through yourself."

"I suppose. . ." said Walden.

Then, slowly, he rose from his chair.

"Watch him, Chatham!" commanded Campbell.

"Gladly," said Chatam.

"You're kind of a grey, green, funny color, Walden," said the sergeant. "You're sweating. Like a pig."

Walden said nothing. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face hard with it. He stuffed the handkerchief back into his breast pocket.

Here a faint gust of wind entered the room and set the little butterfly cards, on their line, rattling softly together, a clicking noise like the ghost of a typewriter.

"Everything," said Campbell, "in this paper punch, was clipped out by Mr. Walden, except the bits of clean blotter that I've been pumping into the bottom of it. . . . Have you emptied this punch lately, Walden?"

"Yes . . . no . . . I don't know!"

Campbell clicked the punch through the blotter again. Walden drew a quick, small breath. Something hopped out of the top of the punch and bounced on the table. Campbell covered it with the tip of a forefinger.

He said: "The fact is that Tydings was murdered in a strange way. I've seen some smart dodges, but the murderer of Tydings was one of the smartest I've ever heard of. He knew that Tydings was using an arsenic tonic. . . . Chatham, did you know that?"

Chatham started so violently that a slight grunt came from his throat.

"Yes, I knew it," he said.

"Watch Walden," directed the detective.

"I'm watching him."

"What the murderer did was simply to drill a little hole through the cork of each bottle of the tonic . . . a hole that was almost entirely covered up by the round of the wire cork-pull. That tonic was full of alcohol and evaporated mighty fast. For the last couple

of weeks, every time that Tydings used the tonic he was getting a double dose . . ."

"Ah, I had the queer thought about that!" said Chatham. "I questioned the doctor about arsenic one night; I had a queer feeling that the white of Tydings' face meant something."

"Here's the point," said Campbell. "It was hard to think how those holes in the corks were drilled. And then, when you needed a hole punched in your shoe leather, I remembered Walden's paper punch. Walden, if I find a single round of cork in your paper punch, you'll go to the electric chair!"

Walden sank down into his chair.

"Look!" said Campbell. "What's this that I've got under my finger? What's this on the desk?"

Walden settled forward. And Campbell, lifting the tip of his finger, pointed to a slender, fibrous bit of cork which had last jumped from the vent hole of the punch.

Walden swayed forward.

"Watch him!" shouted Campbell.

Chatham gripped at Walden's shoulders, but the body slipped away from him, a loose weight to the floor.

"Not dead!" said Campbell. "Don't tell me that he's cheated me!"

"No," said Chatham, kneeling by the fallen body, his hand pressing over the heart. "But every poisoner is a yellow dog, and Walden couldn't stand the strain. He'll live long enough to burn in the chair."

CHAPTER XXX

Credit

DETECTIVES may have to wear all manner of clothes, but Detective Sergeant Campbell in a morning coat made the office smile a good deal.

Sergeant Campbell himself was not smiling. He went into the Inspector's room with thunder in his face.

"How come that they've managed to get through an appeal for that skunk of a Walden?" he asked.

"Walden's a dead man," said the Inspector. "Don't worry about that. The trouble was that the district attorney went after him for the double murder instead of simply for the killing of Tydings. He might have left the doctor out of it."

"We got the confession," said Campbell. "O'Rourke got it himself and the beast of a Walden confessed that the doctor knew too much and had seen him punching a hole in the cork of one of the tonic bottles. What's wrong with that confession? Walden told how he sneaked up the stairs and got in the room over the doctor, when he knew the doctor was going to make his confession. He even told how he had to hurry, for fear the doctor would pull in his head from the window. So what's wrong with all that yarn?"

"The wrong is the way that O'Rourke got the confession," said the Inspector. "He was a little rough with Mr. Walden, it seems. But don't worry about the appeal. There's not a chance in the world of an acquittal for Walden. You've sealed him up in a bottle, Campbell—you and O'Rourke between you. There's another thing that I want to talk to you about, and that's the good work that the two of you did on this case. I want you to tell me just what you were responsible for, and what O'Rourke did."

"Give all the credit to O'Rourke," said Sergeant Campbell. "Give him everything for this case—if only I can get shut of him from now on. I'd rather go to the funeral of my old woman than have another case with an

ignorant, rotten-minded, cursing, damned Irishman."

"Campbell," said the Inspector, "after the work you've done for the department, every request of yours will be seriously considered. But just a moment—there's another thing I want to ask about before we leave the Tydings case. What of a certain check that I heard rumors about?"

"A check?" said the Sergeant. "I don't know what you mean?"

"Something about a forged check," said the Inspector. "What was it, anyway?"

Campbell jumped to his feet and looked at his watch.

"I'll be late, Inspector," he said. "I've got to go."

"Late for what?"

"Late for the wedding . . . Charlotte Reid and the most man I've met lately, Gene Chatham . . ."

"The check?" said the Inspector.

"Never heard about it," said Campbell, red with haste or some other emotion, and fled from the office.

It was only a moment later that O'Rourke was announced and entered. The secretary who let him in was chewing the inside of his cheek to an agony and still could not keep the smile from his lips. For O'Rourke was magnificent in morning coat and striped trousers. He moved slowly, bending the crease of his trousers with care. When the Inspector pointed to a chair, he started to sit down, checked himself, and then shrugged possible wrinkles out of his clothes as he looked down to the delicate sheen of his shoes. He took the cigar out of his mouth as he made a brief inspection of his swelling front.

"You look fine, O'Rourke," said the Inspector. "Stepping out?"

"Couple of pals of mine getting

spliced, is all," said O'Rourke, with a casual wave of his cigar.

"Winifred Staunton is out in the clear," said the Inspector. "Probation. That was the best we could do for her. And I've had Kearton in here telling me a long story about his chase of the stolen picture. You hear that he'd come all the way from Italy?"

"I heard it all," said O'Rourke. "After we got Walden lashed to the mast, and the Tydings gal quieted. . ."

"The girl acted up a little?" asked the Inspector.

"Nerves," said O'Rourke. "She'd set her heart on seeing Charlotte Reid and my old pal, Gene Chatham, sent to the chair. And the poor little thing sort of broke down and went to pieces when she found out that they weren't going to be touched. Lemme tell you, Inspector, there was a time when old pal Gene and his girl both thought that we had 'em crowded against the wall, and it did look black for them."

"It did," agreed the Inspector. "It looked like a dirty mess all around. What was the yarn that Kearton told you, though?"

"Why, he was simply put on the case by the Pitti Museum. They figured it was an inside job. He worked like the devil till he found out the place where the copy had been sold; he found out the description of the fellow who had bought it; he got on the trail of that description and wound up clear over here in New York, on the heels of the great Henry Tydings. It wasn't hard for him to find out about Tydings, money and all, or about Tydings' worst enemy, my old pal Gene. Gene was working hard to get to the house as often as possible, because he'd gone crazy about Charlotte. Once he was in, he agreed to give Kearton a helping

hand. That was what balled us all up, the pair of them playing hand in glove."

"Pat, it was a great case," said the Inspector. "I've been wondering how I could apportion the credit between you and Angus."

"Credit?" said O'Rourke. "Credit?"

He stepped closer to the desk and laid a fat hand on it. "Lemme tell you something," he said. "The way to please me would be to hand all the credit to that Scotch sour, Campbell. You know there's some things that he can't do, but hand it all to him. Give him a boost. . . I'd rather see him a lieutenant and me a low-life sergeant still, than to work on another case with him. Will you fix that for me?"

"I'll tell you what, O'Rourke," said the Inspector, "a fellow with your record ought to have every consideration. I say that at the risk of spoiling you a little. And so if you don't want to work with Campbell again, I'll gladly take it under advisement. And by the way, there's one point in the case that isn't cleared up."

"What point?" asked O'Rourke.

"I heard something about a foreign check. . ."

"In the Tydings case?"

"Yes. A check. . ."

"Never heard of it," said O'Rourke, "But I've got to be running along. Goodbye, Inspector. . . I can't keep the bride waiting, can I?"

"You look grand, O'Rourke," said the Inspector. "Take care of yourself. That forged check—"

"Never heard of it. . . so long!" said O'Rourke, and broke away through the door.

The Inspector folded both hands behind his head and smiled at the ceiling.

Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Special Agent (G-Man)
Secret Service Operative
Post Office Inspector
Customs Patrol
Immigration Patrol
Anti-Narcotic Agent
Parole Investigator
Prison Keeper
Internal Revenue Agent
Alcohol Tax Agent

Police Patrolman
Police Detective
Policewoman
Fingerprint Expert
State Trooper
Crime Prevention
Investigator
Probation Officer
Criminologist
Police Radio Expert

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

Anti-Narcotic Agent Test

IN the written test for Federal anti-narcotic agent there are three sections, and the candidate must attain a minimum mark of 70 to pass. To rate yourself in the test given below, allow five points for each correct answer to questions in sections 1 and 2; for each correct answer to questions in section 3 allow 5 points. Key answers will be found at the conclusion of the test, but do not consult these until you have completed the entire test. If you are seriously interested in the work and would like to prepare yourself for the next official test, write the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., for a copy of the Federal Narcotic Act. Application form No. 8, and physical fitness form 13, may be had from the U. S. Civil Service Commission, but do not file these unless the commission announces an examination.

If you desire to be notified in advance of the next examination, ask the commis-

sion for the postcard form No. 376, fill it out and return it to the commission.

The test:

DUTIES AND JUDGMENT. In the following questions select the one answer you think correct, indicating your selection by circling the letter which precedes the answer.

Q 1—The United States Penal Code contains this provision: "Conspiracy—If two or more persons conspire to commit any offense against the United States, or to defraud the United States in any manner or for any purpose, and one or more of such persons do any act to effect the object of the conspiracy, each of the parties to such conspiracy shall be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment of not more than two years or both." According to this statement conspiracy is (a) a difficult crime to prove; (b) a serious crime against the Government; (c) a crime which can be committed only by two or more persons; (d) an act of any kind against the government.

Q 2—You, as an anti-narcotic agent, have reason to believe that a quantity of narcotic drugs is concealed in a steel box in the apartment of a suspected drug dealer. You procure a search warrant, proceed to the apartment, and, upon entering it, find the suspected dealer putting the locked steel box in a hole in the floor.

You demand the box, the suspect refuses to give it up and refuses to permit you to inspect its contents. In such a situation which of the following would you do; (a) seize the box; (b) notify your superior officer that you have the evidence you were looking for; (c) place the suspect under arrest; (d) demand the suspect's reasons for putting the box in the hole, and notify your superior officer of the answer he makes.

Q 3—A certain man informs you that a gang of young foreigners are peddling cocaine and heroin, and upon investigation you discover that such a gang exists, but that the addresses and names given to you by the informant are incorrect. Various reputedly respectable persons in the locality where the gang hangs out make statements which cause you to believe that your informant is not only a member of the gang, but has been giving you false tips respecting the gang. In your judgment which is the proper course to take; (a) threaten the informant with arrest unless he confesses; (b) promise him immunity from prosecution if he will secure incriminating documents from the gang; (c) permit him to continue supplying you with false information, and in the meantime make an entirely independent investigation; (d) arrest him, search his rooms and hold him secretly in arrest.

Q 4—A fisherman reports to you that he has reason to believe that a shack along the beach contains a quantity of opium. He points out the shack and, upon entering it, you discover a dozen tins of opium buried under sawdust. About three hundred yards away is a boathouse in which an aged man lives and apparently builds rowboats. You observe a track through the marsh grass running from the boathouse to the shack. You question the man in the boathouse and he states that he knows nothing about the shack, has seen no one enter or come out of it. What is the best evidence that he has knowledge concerning the opium found in the shack; (a) no man could live that close to a shack and not be aware of what it was used for; (b) drug smugglers are often found along the ocean shore; (c) the path from his boathouse to the shack is incontrovertible evidence that he was lying when he said he knew nothing about the shack; (d) the

fact that the opium was kept in the shack and not in the boathouse shows guilty knowledge of the contraband nature of the drug.

Q 5—A young woman, who is obviously a drug addict, calls upon you and hands you a small packet of white powder and states that it is cocaine which she purchased from a Negress whose name and address she furnishes. The young woman further states that the Negress has been selling the drug right along, and that she obtains her supply from a Negro sailor. If her statement is true, a crime has been committed. What procedure would you follow in such a situation: (a) place the young woman under arrest; (b) arrest the Negress and check up on the sailor; (c) send the packet of white powder to an official chemist for analysis; (d) arrange with the young woman to trap the Negress in the act of accepting money for a supply of cocaine.

ABILITY TO INTERPRET. Section 2. Read the statements given below and then select from the three possible answers to each statement, the one answer which you think best.

Q 6—"It is too much to expect local police officials to control traffic in narcotics. The local police are already overburdened with crime problems and regulation and control of motor vehicle traffic. Moreover, expert knowledge of drug ring operations is necessary to successfully combat the traffic and the interstate nature of the traffic requires the intervention of the Federal government." This statement means most nearly, (a) local police cannot be trusted to enforce anti-narcotic laws; (b) local police are corrupt; (c) local police have so much to do that they cannot be expected to control drug traffic—especially since it is of an interstate nature.

Q 7—"The American automobile industry suffers little from foreign competition. Not only are the finest cars made in America, but they are made at a cost and sold at a price that places them within easy reach of the average wage-earner. The development of mass production has made this possible. Foreign-made cars do not successfully compete with American-made cars." According to this statement, (a) foreign-made cars are badly made; (b) wage-earners in foreign countries cannot

afford to buy cars made in their own countries; (c) mass production is the secret of making good cars and selling them at a low price.

Q 8—"Undoubtedly another great war is in the making. The eagerness among foreign powers to conquer colonies in spite of the efforts of the League of Nations to assure peace, keeps Europe on the brink of war. America should take the lead in establishing world-wide peace and protecting the weaker nations. The small powers of the world look to America for help." According to this statement, (a) America should go to war to protect weak nations; (b) America's distant situation relieves her of involvement in European struggles for conquest and she is therefore better able to show the way to peaceful settlement of conflicts; (c) America owes a great debt to the small, weak powers.

Q 9—"Serious-minded and sincere citizens will not tolerate year after year a legislature which does not enact those reforms which the public and the conscience of man demands. Legislators have been known to thwart the public will for years, but in the end the citizenship forced action. It is within the power of organized citizens to compel action by drastic measures, and it is, indeed, drastic when an incompetent, lax and backward legislator is abruptly turned out of office." According to this statement, (a) a revolution brings legislatures to terms; (b) the right to vote is the power citizens wield over legislators; (c) corrupt legislatures deserve radical punishment.

Q 10—"It is the function of the district, county or state prosecutor to present evidence in courts of criminal law and to determine whether evidence is sufficient to warrant laying a formal charge against a person. It is left to the detective or investigator to gather the evidence and to have it ready for the prosecutor. When the evidence is complete and capable of convincing an unbiased person of guilt, it may be well said that the investigator has functioned as he should, and has worked in perfect coordination with the prosecutor." According to this statement, (a) the amount of evidence gathered by an investigator is the test of his ability; (b) the nature of evidence rather than its quantity is the factor which determines an investi-

gator's competence and good judgment; (c) the number of verdicts of guilty is the only way to judge detective ability.

COMPREHENSION AND REASONING ABILITY. Section 3. Circle the letter preceding the answer you select as yours.

Q 11—The phrase, "tenure of office," means most nearly, (a) department in office; (b) term of office; (c) an offer of appointment.

Q 12—The phrase "change of venue" means most nearly, (a) a defendant's change of plea; (b) a change in the place of trial; (c) a list of jurors.

Q 13—"Hearsay evidence" is (a) evidence obtained by confession; (b) rumors and reports; (c) testimony involving a statement the truth of which the witness cannot testify to.

Q 14—When a judge uses the expression, "reasonable doubt," he means, (a) the normal doubt of a person who can reasonably explain why he has the doubt; (b) expert testimony; (c) a fixed opinion.

Q 15—"Evidence" means most nearly, (a) circumstance; (b) situation; (c) testimony; (d) substantiation.

Q 16—"Feigned" means most nearly, (a) pretended; (b) sneaked; (c) injured; (d) thrust.

Q 17—"Bland" means most nearly, (a) suave; (b) white; (c) impressive; (d) bleached.

Q 18—"Noncommittal" means most nearly, (a) reversible; (b) uncertain; (c) innocent; (d) false.

Q 19—"Lawyer" is to *Client* as *Doctor* is to (a) hospital; (b) patient; (c) ambulance; (d) disease.

Q 20—"Incommunicado" means most nearly, (a) deaf; (b) unable to communicate; (c) rebellious; (d) confined.

Q 21—"Verdict" is to *Jury* as *Judgment* is to, (a) court; (b) defendant; (c) public; (d) plaintiff.

Q 22—"Addict" is to *Drugs* as *Drunkard* is to, (a) society; (b) liquor; (c) reform; (d) disease.

Q 23—"Sheriff" is to *County* as *Police Chief* is to, (a) city; (b) state; (c) court; (d) prison.

Q 24—"Biennial" means most nearly, (a) twice a year; (b) every ten years; (c) two years; (d) census.

(Continued on Page 143)

CRIME LABORATORY

by LOGAN REAVIS 4

HOW THE LABORATORY
SAVED AN INNOCENT
MAN FROM ALMOST
CERTAIN EXECUTION

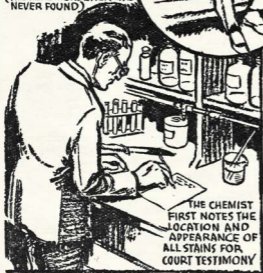


IN A FOREST IN
NORTHERN MICHIGAN
TROOPERS FOUND
A MAN VICIOUSLY
STABBED TO DEATH.
(THE REAL MURDERER WAS
NEVER FOUND)



IN THE HUT OF THE ONLY MAN
IN THAT REGION WAS FOUND
A BLOODY KNIFE AND A
BUCKET. THE HERMIT
DECLARED HE HAD KILLED
A DEER. IN
PRISON HE
AWAITED THE
VERDICT OF THE
LABORATORY

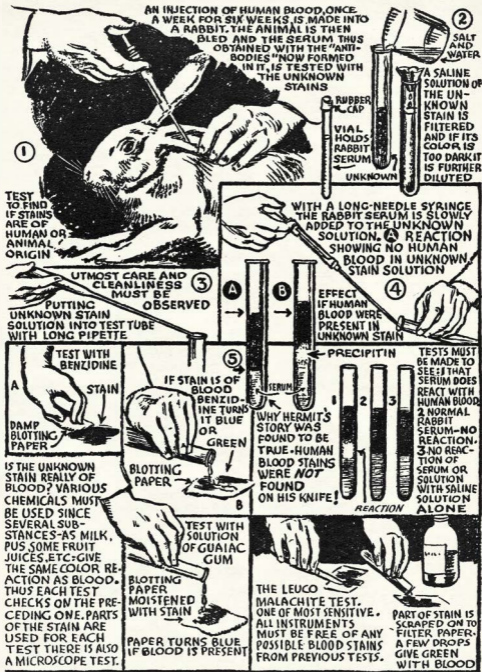
TEST CHEMICAL
TEST. REDUCED
PHENOL-
PTHALEIN AND
PEROXIDE OF
HYDROGEN.
RED COLOR
REACTION IF
BLOOD IS
PRESENT



THE CHEMIST
FIRST NOTES THE
LOCATION AND
APPEARANCE OF
ALL STAINS FOR
COURT TESTIMONY



Only since 1900 have crime-fighters, in the laboratory, been able to make positive identifications of human blood. The problem was formerly aggravated because pus, some fruit juices, milk, saliva, and certain other substances have the same color reactions as blood in individual tests. Therefore, a series of tests, by elimination, proves that blood, and only blood, can give



the final reaction. The microscope is also employed to identify certain crystal formations recognizable as human. Use of the microscope, ultra-violet rays and the spectroscope in the study of blood will be illustrated in another CRIME LABORATORY feature to appear soon.



Picking' Your Own Pocket

Contracts

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the forty-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.

*In an agreement between friends,
Let the writing be clearly penned,
So that friends you will be to the end.*

THUS Benjamin Franklin warned his fellows against the contract sharper. In those days all contracts and agreements were written in longhand and by making certain words or phrases illegible the trickster could put over a contract which was all to his advantage when *he* interpreted it.

It isn't as hard to read contracts today and there is *no* excuse for not reading and understanding fully every instrument you are required to sign *before you sign it*. What is equally important is to obtain a copy of what you sign *with all conditions set forth clearly in writing*. Do not, under any circumstances, accept anyone's oral statements or promises if a written instrument is involved. Insist that *all* representations and promises be incorporated in both copies of the contract *before* it is signed and see that your copy is properly signed before you accept it.

Legally, you cannot go behind the contract. In other words, you are bound

by the conditions of the written agreement. If the courts are called upon to determine the validity of the contract, in the absence of any contradictory evidence, the judge *must* hold you to what you have signed. That's the law. Your pleas that you did not read it before signing or that you did not understand what it meant are useless. The only exceptions to the rule, so far as I know, are two: if you signed the agreement under duress or coercion, or, if you were induced to sign because of fraudulent representations made to you *before you signed*.

Certainly, if someone stands at your side with a gun in your ribs and forces you to place your signature on an agreement or contract, you cannot be held to its terms. Likewise, if you contract to purchase a *new* automobile and you learn, subsequent to the delivery of the car, that it had been registered and used by some other person before being delivered to you, the contract is void, despite the fact that you received the car exactly described in the purchase contract. It is necessary to prove these circumstances to the satisfaction of the court, however, in order to upset the contracts.

Few salesmen are empowered to change the terms of a printed contract, especially when the contract carries a

statement to the effect that the corporation (or company) is not responsible for any statement or representation not in accord with the contract or the printed literature of the corporation. If salesmen paint rosy pictures or give what appear to be iron-clad "guarantees," get them to reduce these day-dreams to writing or if any such changes are to be made in a printed contract the contract should be signed by an *officer* of the corporation and *not* by the salesman.

Don't be afraid to ask questions about any phrase or words in a contract which you do not fully understand and don't hesitate to ask the salesman some searching questions which will help you to understand better his proposition and his company. Reputable companies and salesmen will not resent this as they can always stand the searchlight of investigation. It is only the "gyp" who becomes indignant when you inquire too closely into his scheme and when he does become indignant, that, certainly, is the best evidence to cause you not to sign at all.

Don't sign any paper "to get rid of" any salesman. If he asks you to sign "a receipt" for some article that he claims is to be left "on trial," read every word of that receipt, *especially the fine print*. In that fine print may be concealed a non-revokable order for the merchandise. Many rackets are based on the ability of the salesman to induce the prospect to "sign here" without reading the paper he is signing. Here is an actual example.

A FEW months ago an attractive woman called on a number of girls in offices in Philadelphia inviting them to attend a series of lectures. She led them to believe there

was no charge and then asked them to write their names and addresses on a slip of paper so she would know where to send the tickets. The tickets were delivered in due course. Some attended the lectures and some did not. Some months later, letters were received from an attorney who had been retained to collect a claim of fifty dollars against the signers as the cost of a course of instruction. They had signed binding contracts.

Consider everything you are asked to sign to be a contract unless a careful reading shows it to be otherwise. That's a good, safe rule to follow. The enrollment application of a correspondence school, the "endorsement" you are asked to sign in order to obtain a set of "free" books, the "reservation" a real estate development salesman wants you to sign—all of these may be contracts.

Fraud and chicanery grow by what they feed on. People who sign agreements without reading them and who swallow their losses in silent chagrin, not only fatten the crook but they also expose thousands of others to similar losses, and increase the difficulties of honest competition because of the distrust thus created.

There are at least three good reasons for you to read carefully every contract before you sign it:

- (1) To ascertain the exact responsibilities you are about to assume.
- (2) To protect yourself against those traders who live by fraud and misrepresentation. They are in the minority, but they constitute a dangerous minority.
- (3) To aid the honest concern in detecting intentional or unintentional misrepresentation on the part of sales people.

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

JUST as in ordinary cryptograms, endings often play an important rôle in the solution of cost-mark ciphers, such as last week's No. X-27 by Millexes. The commonest final digits, especially in cost-marks representing the larger amounts, are 0 and 5; and similarly the commonest two-digit endings are 00, 25, 50, and 75. In view of these facts, and bearing the "repeater" in mind, DS, LG, and OG in No. X-27, would yield the values 00, 25, and 75, by comparison, supplying five symbols in the 11-letter key.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 R
P L A Y G R O U N D S

Whereupon, with P.L.G. (\$2.00) showing P as 1, etc., the rest of the symbols could readily be filled in to complete the key-word, as shown above. In this key, the price tag U.D.S. (\$12.50) would signify \$8.00 (\$12.50); etc. There are numerous types of cost-mark ciphers. If you liked this one, others will be published from time to time for you to tussle with!

Our *Solvers' Corps* tasted defeat in their skirmish with L. W. Kelly's "Microphotographing Microforms" message, No. 132 of May 30 last! With par set at 200 solutions, only 145 solvers sent us their answers! And this week, to heighten the excitement, Scorpio offers a challenge cipher containing fourteen "ASPS," all headed right at you!

Last week's Inner Circle cipher, No. 204 by Bud Kistner, yielded through vowel pairs, and endings. Finality marked -F, -Y, and -FY as -e, -s, and -es. While frequency and contact pointed to P, K, and B as vowels, with FK, PK, and KB responding as ea, oa, and ai, respectively. AFKMFY (-ea-es), tried as leaves, thus unlocked ZKALY (-al-s), walks; etc.

Opening this week's ciphers, Effendi observes that the key-word (numbered from 0 to 9) in his division is "particularly peculiar"! Explanation

next week! Compare $T \times F = T$ and $T \times T = F$. In Fae Malon's cryptogram, the phrase VOY TVFX V will start your solution. Next, complete AO, UAAY, and the ending -SOU. HA-AHSOU and the phrase UXH HAUXHTXL will follow.

U, ET, and the phrase EDUZ ZDT provide entry to Minnie Sota's contribution. Next, supply the last letter in ZEL. And so to GTTZ, GLN, KTGLNT, and KT. Note the two-letter words VP and CH in connection with the ending -CVHPR in A. Idem's message. The pattern group RLIRHP will then drop into place, followed by CIRCLE and IRVEL. The asterisk marks a proper name.

In the catalogic construction of Arulas, identify the first three words, noting the question mark and the connective HRP. Par on Scorpio's "snakes' nest" is 150 solutions! Send us your answers! The number of solvers will be announced in a later issue. See next week's magazine for the answers to all of this week's ciphers.

No. 205—Cryptic Division. By Effendi.

TUT) HEOGRE (FHT
GRET

I FUR
I TYG

GHOE
IRHF

THT

No. 206—Mainly Instrumental. By Fae Malon.

ZANX AO, BX NGKSZSVOKI PXHK UXH HAUXHTXLI
DLSOU VPAOU BAGI, FSAPSOK, HLGNMXHK, YLGNK, KV-
EAMTAOXK, DVORAK, VOY TVFX V HAAHSOU UAAV.
HSNXI

No. 207—Powerful Pair. By Minnie Sota.

LF U SVAT ET GOFY ZEL GTTZ KTDOFY, ZEL GTTZ ET
GOFY KTGLNT, KVZ ET RZUFY KTDOFY, KTGLNT ET
GOFY, EDUZ ZDT ZEL KTDOFY KT GLNI

No. 208—Words for the Wise. By A. Idem.

"DIAL THY CIRCLE CLUBHFIFT CLEVYU? FLOIFE SHUI-
CD VP EYL RLIRHP: ODHRH CYFPLCD IRVEL ZFHU OHF-
CDT IRBVFICVHPR, XVALCD CH XIULPC."—*IFCLUIR.

No. 209—Eighteen Varieties. By Arulas.

HRV BXEL, NFPHV?—ZHSU, BGFORPAS, LASSXRK, DHZY-
ASAG, UASZL, EHGDFR, NSFON, MLXNABXEL, ENOSKAFR,
ZHNBXEL, ELHP, UXZYASAG, NHONFK, EDAGN, THEE,
UFSKV, YXRKBXEL, HRP LHGXTON.

No. 210—An Essay on Art. By Scorpio.

ASPSNTZUSGK ASPSULZNTVL, ASPSXFPZARY ASPSYGOR-
KH, ASPSHSPVX ASPSAVHLRY ASPSXF ASPSOSURERPU
ASPSULZAAZO ASPSYTL SAVK, ASPSHSPSGK ASPSHRPHK,
ASPSYTL SRY ASPSHFNVK.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

190—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
F O R T Y W I N K S

200—Recently a letter was returned to the post office at Union Grove, Wisconsin, marked: "Dead. Present address unknown."

201—Being "down and out" isn't very pleasant. But these days, when the bill collector calls, those of us who are "down" often wish we were "out" too.

202—DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY offers thrills, chills, and mystery! Absorbing tales of fact and fancy! And splendid features, including this section for cryptographers!

203—Petulant piano pupil plays polka poorly. Prosaic pedagogue prescribes palpable panacea—purposeful practice. Parents promote project. Presto! Prodigy!

204—Bright lights lure! Country lad packs grip, boards train. Reaching city, leaves depot. Pockets picked. Walks home disgusted!

Last call, cryptofans, for our August *Cipher Solvers' Club!* To enroll, send us your answers to any of this week's puzzles! Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



IT has always been the policy of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, while publishing full-flavored stories of the constant, never-ending warfare between agents of the law and those outside the law, to maintain a high record of accuracy of detail. Most of the stories, it is true, are fiction, but in them, also, we are convinced, there has ever been the substance of truth. And the fact stories and special articles, of course, are exactly that, and present the material as concisely as it is humanly possible to do so.

It is in this connection that we are publishing the two following letters. Mr. Eimer raises a just and serious point. Mr. Maxwell answers him. The actual letters have already been dispatched through the mails. But we were certain that the readers would be interested in the vigilant effort being made to maintain DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY's reputation for honest, realistic fiction.

The gentleman protests.

DEAR SIR:

In your issue of June 30, one of your authors made one of the worst mistakes I have ever seen in a magazine. I can forgive an author if he makes a mistake on subjects such as law, chem-

istry, biology, etc., but a detective magazine is supposed to know something about the way the police department is run.

In a story called "*The Cart Before the Horse*," by Victor Maxwell, in the June 20 issue, the author has an inspector of detectives take orders from a sergeant. In the New York Police Department, an inspector ranks above a captain and consequently is one of the highest officers on the force. In this story, *Inspector Halloran* seems to correspond to a first-class detective, if not less.

As a matter of fact, in the City of New York, if a policeman dies under circumstances which show extraordinary bravery, he is given an inspector's funeral as a mark of high honor. Any policeman could have given this author the proper information, so I fail to see any excuse for this error.

Trusting you will take this criticism in the spirit intended, I am,

Sincerely yours,

CARL B. EIMER,
New York City.

And the author presents his defense.

DEAR SIR:

Thank you for referring to me Mr. Carl B. Eimer's letter about a detail of one of my stories. May I say in reply that Mr. Eimer is perfectly correct as far as New York City goes—but in many other cities, particularly in the West, detectives in police departments either call themselves "Inspector" or are officially known as Inspector. Portland, Oregon, recently passed an ordinance denoting all its detectives with the title "Inspector."

Undoubtedly selection of the title "Inspector" by our sleuths is due to the practice in Scotland Yard, England's most famous detective division, of referring to its operators as "inspectors." To the average policeman's mind there is a sort of

honorary magic in the term, and doubtless, also, it flatters many of them to call themselves "Inspector," whether they are rightfully entitled to the rank or not.

Readers of my stories in *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* have referred to this matter before, and it has been explained before. While in New York an "Inspector" is a high police official, Mr. Eisner will find—if he journeys around—that in the smaller cities the title is assumed by many a common or garden variety of sleuth.

Yours very truly,
VICTOR MAXWELL.

A cryptofan has a word or two to say.

DEAR SIR:

I have been reading DFW for a long time and hope to be able to do so for some time.

What started me with DFW was the department ably managed by Mr. M. E. Ohaver under the title of *SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS*. Back in those days I got the magazine just for the codes and did not read the stories at all, later I read only *The Park Avenue Hunt Club* and *Satan Hall*. You have made *Satan* into a continued story, so I have gone back mainly to ciphers. In other words, there are too many continued stories in DFW. When a person is breaking codes and only has a minute to read the stories, he gets a disappointment to find it is continued. Otherwise you have a great magazine.

In DFW for July 4, I notice a letter by Beatrice Williamson. She wonders why she does not see more letters by cipher fans. The most logical

reason is because most of the cipher fans are too busy trying to break some tough code.

Most of the cipher fans are members of the A.C.A. which sends out ciphers each month or so. Anyone interested in ciphers can do no better than to belong to the A.C.A.

Trusting that this does not take up too much of your time.

Yours truly,
CHI VALOR,
Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

A young lady writes a short letter—but a very welcome one.

DEAR SIR:

Though I am only thirteen now, I have been reading *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* for about four years. I have tried many kinds of magazines, too, but DFW is the one that hits the spot.

I like most of the stories you publish and I suppose I shouldn't kick because other people must like some of them even though I don't. My favorites are *Satan Hall*, *Park Avenue Hunt Club*, *Mr. Strang*, *The Man with the Silver Mask*, *Daffy Dill*, *Lester Leith* and *The Lady from Hell*.

I won't bore you with a very long letter because I have just bought this week's copy of DFW and can't wait to begin the new serial. Let's have some more stories about *Satan Hall*, *Daffy Dill* and *Mr. Strang*.

Yours always,
MARY G. WILSON,
Woodstock, N. Y.

P. S. Mother called it a passing fancy when I began to read your magazine, but I know better.

Civil Service Q & A

(Continued from Page 135)

Q 25—*Intemperate* means most nearly, (a) hot; (b) wavering; (c) excessive; (d) mad.

While the questions above are of the type to be expected in an anti-narcotic agent test, they by no means represent the number of questions which will be asked. Frequently written tests consist of 80 questions and very often they are not presented in sections to the candidate, but instead are thrown at him in mixed array. To attain proficiency in the word-meaning

tests one should familiarize himself with words which a narcotic agent is likely to use in letters and reports.

KEY ANSWERS TO THE TEST

Q 1—(c) Q 8—(b) Q 14—(a) Q 20—(b)
Q 2—(d) Q 9—(b) Q 15—(d) Q 21—(a)
Q 3—(c) Q 10—(b) Q 16—(a) Q 22—(b)
Q 4—(c) Q 11—(b) Q 17—(a) Q 23—(a)
Q 5—(c) Q 12—(b) Q 18—(b) Q 24—(c)
Q 6—(c) Q 13—(c) Q 19—(b) Q 25—(c)
Q 7—(c)

Next Week—

A sample grapevine test given to city detectives seeking assignment to narcotic guard work. If you think you know the lore and law and language of the underworld, try this test.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

DEAD MEN TELL TALES

A Powerful New Novel by Fred MacIsaac

PPRIVATE DETECTIVE TIM DONOHUE has a man-sized job on his hands, for he was determined to prove that his best friend, *Steve Steele*, scion of an old, conservative family, had not been murdered in that Los Angeles dive—as the newspaper scareheads were screaming—but was actually still alive! And *Tim* had a hunch that this was only part of an amazing conspiracy aimed at gaining control of the *Steele Motor Corporation*. But when he began to back his hunch with action, he soon discovered that he was wagering his life and the lives of those dear to him against a ruthless syndicate possessing millions of dollars and the crooked cunning of superb legal talent!

THE PRIZE DUMBBELL

An Exciting Novelette by Donald Barr Chidsey

THEY say fools rush in where angels fear to tread, but it takes a prize dumbbell to do the obvious and to ruin a carefully laid scheme of cops—and crooks!

THE CROSS KILLER AND THE GOLDEN BIER

A Dramatic Lady from Hell Novelette by Eugene Thomas

Plus DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY short stories and features.

ALL IN THE SEPTEMBER FIFTH ISSUE!

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Newest idea advertising makes profit easy, quick and often. Biggest trade \$540.00 cash on first order; Ellis sold six thousand in a few weeks.

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News-stands.**

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Thankful Letters Tell of Remarkable Results without Habit-forming Drugs Helpful Information FREE—Mail Coupon

If you suffer the tortures of asthma attacks or bronchial cough, this message may be the happy turning point in your life! It may lead to relief and comfort such as you've never thought possible. Read every word of it. Then judge for yourself.

A way has been found to combat asthma attacks and bronchial cough without habit-forming drugs or opiates! A way so effective—that hundreds of sufferers report actually amazing results. A formula that sufferers may use right at home!

"A Blessing To Sufferers"

With its effectiveness proved in case after case, this formula is being offered to all who suffer from asthma and bronchial cough attacks. Its results have been so astonishing that people who have tried it say, "Worth its weight in gold"—"A Godsend"—"Wonderful"—"A blessing." It is called Nacor.

Nacor is not an experiment. Nacor is absolutely free from habit-forming drugs. It contains no cocaine, chloroform, morphine or opium. It is a reliable, remarkably effective formula for the relief of

asthma and bronchial cough attacks. Nacor not only brings soothing relief and comfort, but many thankful users report it has helped them gain sound, restful sleep and has improved their appetite, thus speeding the return of their health and strength.

Don't Envy Others—Act Now

If you are the victim of asthma attacks or bronchial cough, you know what misery these ailments can cause. You know what it means to be kept awake nights—to wheeze, cough, fight for breath. You know the agony of those strength-sapping attacks that make you feel weak, depressed, unable to work or play. Nacor brings you new hope—hope justified by the results obtained by thousands of people who have found blessed relief and comfort. It may be just what you need.

Don't envy those who no longer are tortured by asthma or bronchial cough attacks. Benefit by their experience! Many found the way to restful nights and happy days—with Nacor. You, too, should give Nacor a chance to prove what it may do for you.

"I Suffered For Years—Have Not Had An Attack Of Asthma Since Taking Nacor"



MRS. T. L. MCFARLAND

Jan. 9, 1935—"I had been a sufferer from asthma attacks for twenty years. I was weak, couldn't walk across the floor. I choked with every breath. We saw Nacor advertised and sent for a bottle. I haven't had an attack of asthma since taking the first half bottle. I am feeling fine." Mrs. T. L. McFarland, R.R. 2, Box 420, Boulder, Colo.

SEND NO MONEY!

If you want to know about Nacor, mail the coupon and receive FREE a copy of "The Health Question."

It is a booklet written specially for sufferers from the attacks of asthma and bronchial coughs. It contains page after page of helpful information on these ailments. Gives you the exact words of dozens of men and women who have obtained relief.

Act quickly. The longer you delay, the longer you will probably endure the torturing, weakening symptoms of your ailment. What you want is blessed relief and comfort as quickly as possible. So act at once! Mail the coupon now—without obligation.

READ THEIR OWN WORDS

FIRST BOTTLE GAVE RELIEF

Jan. 14, 1930—"The first bottle of Nacor gave me relief. Haven't had an attack of asthma. I owe my good health to Nacor." Mrs. Eva Earnest, 301 W. Ottawa St., Paxton, Ill.

76-YEAR OLD MAN FINE

Dec. 8, 1933—"Am feeling fine. Have had no asthma attacks since took Nacor eight years ago." Jos. Thompson, 935 Tibbs Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

OBTAINED RELIEF

March 18, 1928—"I had asthma attacks so bad I couldn't sleep. But, thanks to Nacor, it is all a thing of the past now." Clayborne Bolan, 2721 St. Louis Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

GETTING ALONG FINE

Aug. 14, 1933—"I cannot tell you how thankful I am for your Nacor and its help to me in the fight against asthma attacks." Mrs. Bessie Yerkes, 11326 Hale Ave., Chicago, Ill.

FREE!

To Asthma and Bronchial Cough Sufferers

MAIL THIS TODAY

The Nacor Medicine Co.
571 State Life Bldg.,
Indianapolis, Ind.

Gentlemen:

Please send me your helpful booklet on the attacks of Asthma and Bronchial Coughs—also letters from people who found relief in Nacor. No cost or obligation.

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