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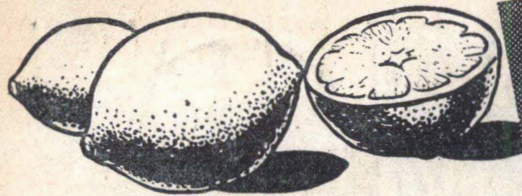
Hot Gold

A New Novel by
Donald Ross

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Right now you may be thinking of just the name we are looking for—the name that will win First Prize! Sometimes the first name you think of is the best name to send in. Send only one name—your favorite to

FLOUR DEPT.

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

VOLUME CXV

NOVEMBER 6, 1937

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HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED--THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY--I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP, IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

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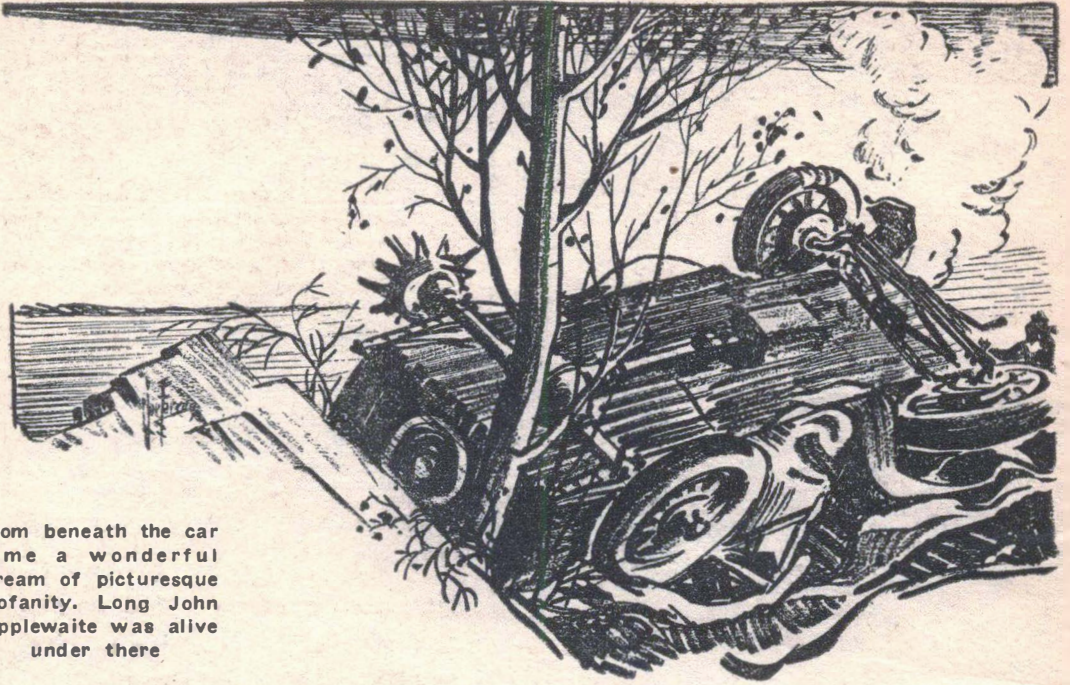
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From beneath the car came a wonderful stream of picturesque profanity. Long John Tipplewaite was alive under there

CHAPTER I

Hot Gold

"COME in, Jack," invited Tom Keefe. The astute ex-cop who operated a powerful mysterious service in Washington had his feet on his desk and his hat on the back of his head as usual. He was smoking a long black cigar, and because it was a hot day, he had his coat off. It was his custom to wear shirts with neckbands so he could remove his collar without taking off his shirt. Tom went in for solid comfort, for which no one can blame him.

"Sit down, Jack," he said. "Have a seegar?"

"Not unless I rate the kind you're smoking," I stated with a grin. Tom was notorious for giving out inferior smokes.

"You get one of my Havanas, kid," he promised. "How's that?"

I felt pretty pleased. That meant that I was high in the Chief's good graces.

"So you ain't going to marry that

HOT

By Donald Ross

Author of "5 Keys to Mystery," etc.

girl?" he inquired, as I fired the smoke.

"No," I replied sullenly. "It's all off."

"Found out you had no money?" he queried slyly.

"No, damn you, she knew all along I had no money."

"Gave you the air anyway?"

"What business is it of yours?" I snarled.

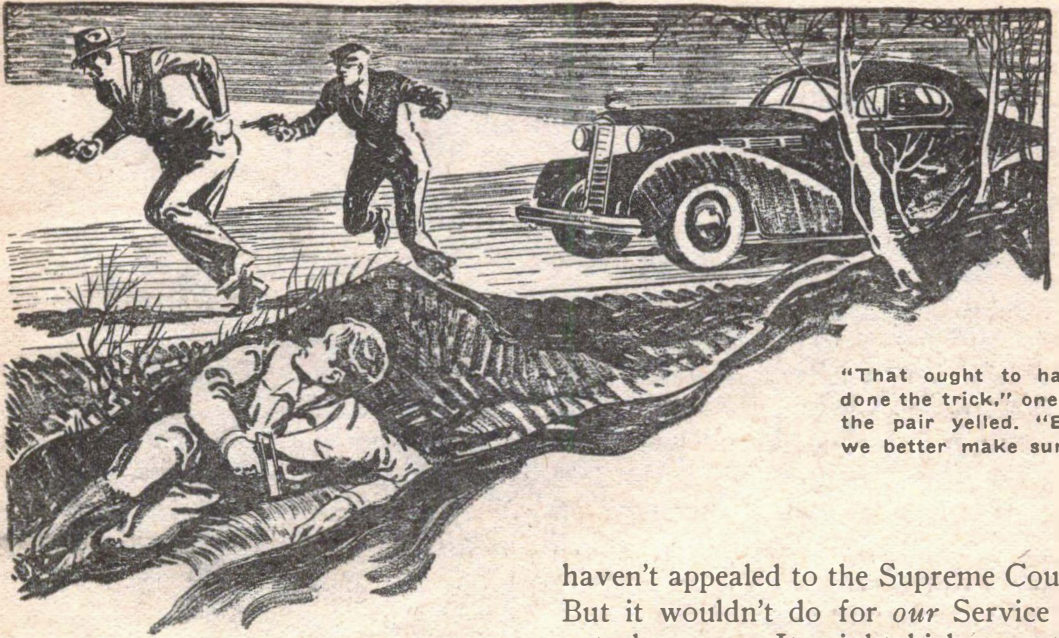
Tom grinned exasperatingly. "Because I got a job for you and it ain't a job that I'd give to a guy that was in love. Want it?"

I nodded.

"Don't give a damn if you get your head blown off?"

"Not much," I confessed. "I'm pretty down, Chief. I crave action."

"Any chance of getting the girl back?"



"That ought to have done the trick," one of the pair yelled. "But we better make sure"

GOLD

Half a billion dollars in hot gold is certain to cause trouble and likely to cause murder

I shook my head. "She's going to marry another man."

"Well, probably that's his hard luck. Lawrence, this service was just about to be recognized—it was going to be a branch of the Department of Justice—but it seems we're unconstitutional. The Supreme Court has put its foot down on a lot of things. Take the G-men. They're unconstitutional, too, only nobody has brought the matter up yet. You see, when a crook robs or kidnaps a baby, that's intrastate. If he takes the money or the baby out of the state, that's only indirectly interstate commerce and the Federal Government can't interfere with it—or maybe I'm wrong.

"For some reason the criminals

haven't appealed to the Supreme Court. But it wouldn't do for *our* Service to get shown up. It might kick over the whole apple cart." He chuckled. "'Bout everything we've ever done so far is unconstitutional so it's sure lucky that the Federal Government isn't responsible for us. You going over to England, now, and putting the kibosh on that big crook, Sir What's-his-name. That was positively unconstitutional but a very swell job. Put this other cigar in your pocket."

"No. To tell the truth, Tom, I can't smoke this one. It's choking me."

"Nobody can smoke 'em but me. You fellows think I'm a tightwad about my cigars but I just don't want them wasted."

"Yeah?" I laughed in his face.

"I've lost a couple of good men since you were abroad—Stevens and Potter. No hair or hide of Potter but we found Stevens' body. Looked like it had been thrown out of an airplane. Hard to recognize. First-class men. Damn' sight better sleuths than you are."

"How come?"

"They were on this job I'm asking you to tackle."

"Pleasant prospect," I remarked.

"Ever been in Utah?" he asked.

"Ridden through on a train. I've seen the Mormon Temple."

"I heard tell a lot of them Mormons, still—"

"Get to the point, will you?"

"Oh, sure!" His blue eyes twinkled.

"Couple of hundred miles southwest of Salt Lake is a desert and mountainous country. Lot of silver and lead up there—platinum, maybe, and considerable gold. 'Bout a year ago, somebody bought up a bunch of abandoned mines—gold, silver and lead—formed a corporation, sold the stock privately, on account of the new Securities Act which makes promoters tell the truth about what they have to offer. Then they started mining in a big way."

"What business is that of ours?"

"I dunno. That's for you to find out."

"Tom, you old windbag, get to the point!"

HE SHRUGGED his big shoulders and laid down his cigar. "Point is that they are getting gold out of the Utah and Universe Corporation mines a lot faster than gold usually comes out of mines. In the last six months, they've sold the Treasury two and a half million dollars worth of newly mined gold. What a lot of suckers the fellers were that owned those mines full of gold and didn't get it out!"

"They couldn't find it. Modern methods of production—scientific processes—"

"Sure. Only why did Potter and Stevens come to a bad end?"

"You sent them out to investigate these mines?"

"Yep. Stevens' body was found in a field in Kansas. Maybe he never got to Utah. I dunno. Anyway something happened to them."

"I still fail to see how it's any of our business."

"If that gold is coming out of the mines, it isn't. The only gold that has a legal right to be at large is what is in the ground."

"It ought to be an easy matter."

"That's what the other boys thought. I had the same argument with them," said Tom wearily.

"This is a big outfit, Jack. About all the crooked engineers in the country are working for it. They have a mob of gunmen patrolling the property. They've had a lot of trouble with prospectors. When word got out they were producing high-grade ore, a gold rush set in. They put up barbed wire fences around their property and took pot shots at anybody who came near the fences.

"There are at least a thousand prospectors camped around the place, digging holes in the desert floor, trying to find outcroppings. Do you know that the total gold production in the United States and Alaska last year was only a little more than a hundred million? If these birds keep on getting it as fast as they have done in the last six months, they'll be the biggest mining concern in the country!"

"More power to them. The country needs gold."

"They have their own smelter. The gold goes to the Mint in bars. Of course, government officials can look at their books but what good are books? I want you to get a job in the Utah and Universe Mines and find out how they do business."

"You're playing one of your hunches," I declared. "You think this is hoarded gold—gold that cost them \$22.00 an ounce and which they are selling to the government at \$35.00 an ounce?"

"I'd just like to find out," Tom countered plaintively. "The twelve stockholders are New York bankers and industrialists, hide-bound old rascals—lions who, when the bottom dropped out of things in 1929, began, hoarding their gold. The Treasury Department knows that half a billion dollars' worth of gold which was in the country in 1933 when the order came to turn it in, was not shipped abroad and is still in hiding.

"It would be nice if it could be sold for three-quarters of a billion, eh? Simon Cameron, in New York, is convinced that Smith, Witherspoon, Hobson, Bright and Hammersworth were heavy hoarders of gold and have not turned it in. They're all stockholders in this corporation."

"The gold coin is brought to the mine, melted down and purified, turned into gold bars and sent to the Mint. Right?"

"That's my notion. A legitimate mining business is going along with it. They are shipping out plenty of silver and lead as well as gold. Maybe they really get gold out of the mines. I dunno."

"A raid?"

"This is a Utah corporation, doing a legitimate business in the state. They have a right to guard their mine, especially with a mob of gold hunters hanging round. Their workings have been inspected. They have been seen taking out gold ore. The Federal Government has nothing on them and, with increasing restrictions on Federal activities, won't be able to get anything on them."

"But we freelances can go as far as we like?"

"Yep."

"I don't know anything about mining whatever."

"You'd recognize a shovelful of

twenty-dollar gold pieces if you saw them going into a smelter, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I'm taking the job!" I said hastily.

"I've four or five men tailing the boys in New York," said Tom.

"Still, Tom, it's not impossible that two and a half millions of gold could be found in six months of operation, is it?"

"It will be five millions in the next six months, seven millions in the following six months, and all the time more until the boys have got rid of their hoards."

"Wouldn't it be easier for them to smuggle it abroad?"

"Every ounce of gold abroad is known; every ounce that comes in is noted and traced. The Federal Secret Service takes care of that. We'd have these bozos in jail if they tried shipping it abroad—all we need is proof of ownership and they have to prove it to get it into foreign countries. This is their last hope. They held onto their hoards until the Supreme Court upheld the Government's decree regarding turning it in at the old price. We get the goods, hand them over to the Department of Justice and move on to the next platform. Go see Cameron in New York. He'll have a check for your expenses." Tom rose. The droll look usually in his eyes vanished. He was serious. He put out his hand.

"Shake, Jack, in case I don't see you again. You're a damn good man."

ON THE transcontinental train, I had plenty of time to think about Tom Keefe's crazy notion. The more I thought of it, the less crazy I considered it. Simon Cameron—that great public-spirited citizen who was financing the unauthorized, unrecognized, de-

tective force which had already achieved much for the Government in fields which Government agents were forbidden by law to enter—had assured me that the twelve malefactors of great wealth who owned the Utah and Universe were entirely capable of a conspiracy of this character.

"I know positively that each of these men was hoarding gold," he said. "With their wealth and influence, they were able to avoid detection. They firmly believed that the Supreme Court would find the Gold Order illegal—in which case they would bring forth their hoards and get forty percent more for their gold than it cost them.

"During the months following the gold embargo, they could easily have smuggled their hoards out of the country—but they would not have made a profit on it. By the time the dollar was reduced in gold content, the Government had tightened things up so they couldn't send the gold outside our boundaries without betraying their ownership of it. That meant jail sentences. I think it exceedingly likely that they have at least a hundred millions in gold among them—that is less than ten millions each. Realize that this money, now, is lost to them. It bears no interest and the principal is subject to seizure. So if they can ooze it into the Treasury at the rate of a few millions a month and at the new price of gold, they not only get forty-one percent profit but salvage the original cost. In short, they get a hundred and forty millions, assuming that their hoarding amounts to a hundred millions."

"But it means taking a lot of people in with them—people who might squeal—"

"They can afford to pay so much that nobody will squeal. In any event, we've got to find out all about Utah

and Universe. Lawrence, you're a bright young man, an amazing type to find in the sort of work you are doing. If we are correct in assuming this corporation is engaged in swindling the Government, the agents of these scoundrels will not stop at murder. We have no way of knowing that Potter and Stevens lost their lives because they tried to pry into the business of Utah and Universe. But if that isn't the reason, what is?"

"I'm going to assume that I'm up against a nest of rattlesnakes," I assured him.

"And they are quite within their rights in keeping you off their property."

"I understand that, too."

I had banked a check for five thousand dollars, ample for my expenses over a period of several months, and I sat in the Club car of the Union Pacific Express, after breakfast the first morning, deep in thought. I had no notion how to proceed. I'd get off at Salt Lake, take the branch railroad to its terminal, go on by bus or automobile, and figure things out as I went along.

I kept my mind on Utah and Universe because I didn't want to think about the girl who had jilted me. It had been two-thirds my own fault, of course. My damned pride. When I met Theodora, she had bowled me over. Our acquaintance had been short—I was engaged in stirring events, working for the Service in England—and I had an unlimited expense account. She had left her family and taken the ship home on which I was traveling and, on shipboard, we had been wildly happy.

Back in the United States, my poverty and her wealth loomed up as a source of irritation. I knew I had be-

haved badly and she was quick tempered, proud, and brought up to think of money as nothing. Anyway we quarreled over some trifle—I had a job to do for Tom Keefe, taking me South, and she objected to my going—I couldn't make her understand that if I didn't work, I couldn't earn money. Oh, well, that was the end of that. A month later she became engaged to Thornton Hamilton, a damned polo player. She didn't send me back my ring because I hadn't saved up enough money to buy her one. Of course it was all for the best. Her money would have bred plenty of trouble after we were married.

Anyway I was trying not to think about her when she walked into the club car. She saw me, turned very pink, tossed her head, smiled and came over and sat down beside me.

"Imagine seeing you!" she exclaimed. "You're looking well."

"You look marvelous," I muttered. All over, eh? The sight of her made me dizzy. She had on a dark red dress of some fuzzy material and a cute little red hat. Her hair was black as jet, her eyes were great black wells of loveliness. Her smile made me feel faint. For half a second I was fool enough to think she might have repented and found out I was taking this train and had come after me. Not likely. Those dark girls don't forgive easily and I had been pretty nasty.

"I'm going to Salt Lake with my fiancé and his uncle and aunt," she announced. "We are four cars ahead—the two drawing-rooms."

"Upper berth seven in car six," I told her.

Her eyes snapped. "One might think you were proud of being penniless," she said tartly. "In my opinion, the upper berth is just swank."

"I'm going to Salt Lake, too," I told her.

"How interesting. You must meet Mr. Hamilton—I'm sure you'd like him."

"I'd rather be excused, if you don't mind, having some human feelings."

"Which I haven't of course?" she fenced. "Oh!"

TWO men came into the car. One was young and upstanding—taller than I and I'm a big man. He had curling blond hair and a long straight nose and he wasn't at all bad looking, confound him. He smiled eagerly at my ex-fiancée. I couldn't jump off the train, so I had to meet him.

We shook hands. He winced a little when he heard my name, but, being a gentleman, affected cordiality.

"My uncle, Mr. Hammersworth," he introduced. Mr. Hammersworth was a big man too, a broad-shouldered fellow with a massive head, hair snow white, face red, nose large with a slightly purple knob on it. Hearty—he had been a bank president and had been retired, with a hundred thousand a year pension when things grew hot after the panic, by a bank which was saved from bankruptcy by President Roosevelt's order closing all banks for repairs.

I'd heard a lot about him but I hadn't known that he was the uncle of the fellow who had caught Theodora on the rebound.

Hammersworth sat down beside me. Obviously, my name meant nothing to him and he didn't know me from Adam. Hamilton sat on the other side of the girl and began to whisper to her. I assumed he was asking how I came to be on the train.

"Going to the coast, I presume?" began the millionaire.

"Salt Lake," I answered curtly.

"So are we! Afterward to Santa Barbara. I have some mining interests in Utah. I'm leaving my wife and the young folks for a few days in Salt Lake while I run up and look them over."

"I thought you were a banker, sir?"

"Retired," he said with some slight embarrassment. "But I'm still too young to be idle. With some friends, I went into the mining business. You see, the west is full of mines which contain gold but which could not be worked profitably at the old price. The depression, of course, kept capital out but we raised a few millions, secured a number of likely prospects in Utah and engaged the best mining men available. As a result, we are already operating at a profit. It looks as though we were not only making a worth-while investment but helping the Government and the world by increasing the supply of gold metal."

"Good business and also philanthropy," I remarked.

He laughed loudly. "Quite so. Quite so! What's your opinion of this attempt to pack the Supreme Court, Mr. Lawrence?"

"See you later," called Theodora, who departed, followed by Hamilton.

My eyes gazed hungrily at her departing back. "Seems to be a lot to be said on both sides," I answered Hammersworth absently.

He grew excited. "There is absolutely nothing to be said for the President's plan! It is an attempt to override the Constitution, to make himself dictator—"

He went into a long heated lecture and he made one remark which I noted and from which I deducted something.

"Why, the Supreme Court absolutely toadied to him when it refused holders of gold the right to dispose of it. The

gold embargo was unconstitutional. You've got to admit that—"

I made tactful answers when he paused expectantly but his wrath about the gold business persuaded me that Tom Keefe hadn't had a bad hunch.

It was lunch time before I could excuse myself and go to my section. Hammersworth was the type which hypnotizes itself. Things he condemned in others, he would not hesitate to do for his own advantage. He had treated the money in his bank as if it were his own private property. He had narrowly escaped going to prison with other bank presidents of his sort. If, as Cameron was convinced, Hammersworth was one of the big gold hoarders, he would consider this mining subterfuge legitimate. And the old swindler was on his way to Utah and Universe to confer with his fellow conspirators. I burned to think that Theodora had engaged herself to the nephew of the scoundrel.

I didn't see her again and I left the train at Ogden to avoid encountering her on the station platform at Salt Lake. I put up at a small hotel called the Joseph Smith because I knew her party would not go there.

I had a very serious problem to consider. When a man is engaged to a girl, he doesn't hold things back. Even before our engagement, it had been necessary to let Theodora know that I was in a service unofficially Federal. Had she told him? She might. She wouldn't see any reason for keeping it a secret from a big business man like her fiancé's uncle.

If she had told him, would it mean anything to Hammersworth? Men of this type, as a general thing, do not engage in murder or robbery; they try not to be aware of the filthy things that underlings have to do in order to deliver the goods for their employers.

It was not likely that Hammersworth was aware that two of my sidekicks had been sent out to investigate the Utah and Universe and had been scragged. He wouldn't tell them about what was all in the day's work.

Just the same, it was bad busines. I'd have to get in touch with Theodora and ask her not to mention my occupation in case she hadn't already done so.

CHAPTER II

Long John Tipplewaite

I PHONED the Utah Hotel. Yes, the Hammersworth party were stopping there. I asked to be connected with Miss Ainsworth but the operator announced that she had left half an hour before on a sight-seeing tour.

Salt Lake City is not a very large place and it doesn't take more than an hour or two to do it. The Mormon Temple is the chief point of interest and it occured to me that I might encounter them, apparently by accident, in that vicinity. I strolled over, went into the grounds, learned that the Temple was not open to visitors at that hour. So I dropped into few public buildings without encountering Theodora and her party and ventured to enter the Utah Hotel. Inquiry revealed that my acquaintances had not yet returned.

After that, I went down to the coffee room in the basement of the hotel for lunch. It was a large café and contained more pretty waitresses than any restaurant I had ever seen before. I had heard that Utah girls were pretty, but their pulchritude didn't interest me except artistically. I was a man with a broken heart.

I sat there, deep in consideration of my problem, while the place filled up. Two young men seated themselves at

my table, natives apparently, well dressed and intelligent. They jollied the pretty waitress, who was not averse to their attentions.

After she had served them, they talked about a film show and one of them said suddenly, "Steve, you'll have to pay the check. I gave away my last five bucks to a guy outside the hotel entrance."

His friend laughed. "Likely story. I'll pay the check, of course, but—"

"I only happened to have a five in my jeans. This was an old prospector—"

"You're killing me. The town is full of panhandlers. Why didn't you give him a dime?"

"I happen to know this one. An old buzzard named Long John Tipplewaite. He and my old man were partners in a cliam thirty years ago. Dad bought John out. He cleaned up and John has been prospecting and on his uppers ever since. Of course we're pretty broke, now, too, but John can always get a few dollars from me."

"That's different. Of course the Utah and Universe strike has brought desert rats from all over the West to this vicinity."

"Sure. John claims he worked all over that country, twenty years ago, and knows an unstaked section richer than the Utah and Universe tract, fifty dollars to the ton—"

"The usual patter. Why didn't he develop it?"

"Needed capital; quartz mining, you know, which meant a mill and machinery. Nobody was interested. He forgot it until he heard about Utah and Universe and trekked down from Dakota. Of course he has no chance. Ragged and broke, the poor old devil didn't even know Dad was dead. I remembered him on sight." He chuckled. "He

looked as old fifteen years ago as he does now. Long brown beard mixed with gray."

"The yarn of his is absurd, of course."

"Probably. Dad never believed that section up there was gold country. Silver and lead, yes."

"But where there is lead isn't there usually gold?"

"It doesn't follow."

The pair paid their check, having given me food for thought.

If this young man's father, an old mining man, hadn't believed that the Utah and Universe section was gold country, it indicated that Tom Keefe's theory wasn't so cockeyed. And I was suddenly very interested in Long John Tipplewaite.

I'm a big fellow, fairly good looking and reasonably adept at disguises. In spite of being a college man and having been brought up in cities, I succeeded in working without suspicion among the San Francisco stevedores while hunting down alien Reds. And I had been chosen for the job in England because I could pass myself off as the type of young American who becomes an expatriate. Not that I had fooled the person I was sent to catch for more than a minute—but the thing had worked out all right.

My present job was to get up to the Utah and Universe country without awakening suspicion and, if possible, get a job in the mines. I didn't even know how a gold miner worked. My ignorance of the business would be revealed in a few minutes' conversation. If Tom Keefe hadn't lost two men better qualified than I for the job, I shouldn't have been sent out at all here. But mention of Long John Tipplewaite gave me an idea.

I paid my check and left the coffee

room. There was no hope of finding the old man on the street outside but there was an excellent prospect that he might be in a nearby saloon. During the next two hours, I visited twenty-five bars within half a dozen blocks and saw nobody answering the description of the old prospector.

AND because I was engaged in that other search, I almost bumped into Theodora Ainsworth, who was coming out of a department store, alone.

"Oh, hello!" she said with that brilliant smile of hers.

"Hello, darl—I beg your pardon."

Her lips drew into a thin straight line. "You had better, considering. What do you think of my fiancé?"

"Rub it in," I muttered.

"Dog in the manger!" she snapped tartly. "You didn't want me but you resent—"

"I wanted you till it hurt but it wouldn't do. We found that out, Theodora."

"You found it out first, I believe. I'm rather in a hurry."

"I won't keep you," I said bitterly. "May I ask a question? Did you happen to mention my business to your fiancé or his uncle?"

"It wasn't necessary. Thornton already knew."

"But how? I don't understand—"

"When our engagement was announced, he received a very enthusiastic letter from my brother Arthur in England. Arthur said he was delighted that I was marrying a gentleman instead of a cheap government sleuth. Those were Arthur's words, dear—I beg your pardon—not my opinion of you, naturally."

"Sounds like Arthur," I answered venomously. Her brother was a mean-spirited snob who had settled in Eng-

land and had stood for Parliament to be soundly beaten. Circumstances had made him cognizant of my occupation.

"It's of no consequence," I said quickly. "I'll say goodbye here, Theodora. I've had a wire calling me back to Washington. I wish you every happiness. You know that."

"I'd hate to think it," she said sharply. "You ought to dislike me and wish me wretchedness, after what I've done to you."

"I—I don't," I answered unsteadily. "I think you deserve happiness. You and I were up against conditions—"

"Goodby!" she called, turning away and hurrying up the street. I gazed after her graceful figure greedily. I might never see her again. Almost my last word to her was a lie. The wire, calling me to Washington was a lie, of course. It was necessary in case my name came up in conversation with Hammersworth or the nephew. Mention of my return to Washington would relieve their minds—assuming they had any reason for being worried.

After a little while I went up to the Mining Museum and inspected the specimens of ore on view and looked up statistics upon Utah mining. Contrary to what the man in the Coffee Shop had said, it turned out that there were a number of rich mines in the state, some of which steadily produced over a period of years gold, running thirty to forty dollars a ton. I discussed the Utah and Universe Mines with one of the officials.

"Of course, this country was well explored in the old days," he told me, "and many gold deposits were found. Methods of extraction of gold from rock, however, were expensive and it had to be pretty high-grade ore to be profitable. We were primarily a silver state but silver mining became un-

profitable when the price went very low. However a number of gold mines made money—nothing terrific, of course—their remote locations, the long distances to the smelters, the cost of trucking, ate into the profits of even fifteen to twenty dollars a ton deposits and any number of good mines were forced to shut down. Up goes the price of gold, but at a time of depression, and when Congress has passed stringent regulations on floating stocks, so most of the closed mines remained closed. Along comes Utah and Universe with unlimited capital, pick up twenty or thirty mines for a song, build their own mills and smelters and find a bonanza."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I understand it's owned by a coterie of New York millionaires."

He smiled. "The Bible says that to him who hath shall be given."

"Do you happen to know an old prospector named Long John Tipplewaite?"

He nodded. "You bet. He comes in here every now and then and drools at the mouth at the specimens of high-grade ore in glass cases. He has been trying to interest somebody to finance him to look for a secret mine he claims to know about. I hear that about ten years ago he interested an Eastern dude with money and took him into the desert but he couldn't find his own mine. Probably he dreamed about it. Those desert rats are all half cracked."

"I'd like to have a talk with him. I'm a New York newspaper man. Just now, the whole country is excited about gold mining. Any notion where he would hang out?"

"Let's see. He's a Mormon. Most of his type go to Mother Carruther's on Dixie Street. It's a very cheap boarding house."

Ten minutes later, I rang the bell of a two-story frame house on a side street. The door was opened by a huge woman with a brick-red face upon which there grew a slight gray moustache and upon the chin almost enough grayish hair to be called a beard.

"I'm looking for Long John Tipplewaite. Does he live here?"

"Until Saturday night, he does," she said. "You'll find him at Smith's beer saloon at the end of the street. He paid his rent until Saturday a little while ago and he had a dollar left so that will be where Johnny is." She laughed, a bass rumble, and closed the door almost in my face.

ABOUT five P.M. I returned to my hotel. I had made a deal with Long John. We were leaving at eight o'clock in an old Model T Ford in search of his secret mine. I had arranged all the financing for the trip and the old man was in the seventh heaven—dreams had come true. I hated to deceive him but I had to have some excuse for penetrating into the Utah and Universe country and John was a wonderful excuse. In any event, he was going to be in possession of more cash than he had had for many years.

I took a bath leisurely—it might be a long time before I would again have the use of a tiled bath-room—and I had just finished dressing when there came a knock on my door. I opened it and gazed in astonishment at Andy Sawyer.

"Hello, Jack!" he said with a mocking grin. "Surprised to see me, eh?"

"Come in," I invited. "So you're out here, eh?"

"You and me, both," he remarked. "You're looking well, kid."

"Same to you, Andy."

We sat down and gazed at each other

like prize fighters who had just come into the ring.

Andy Sawyer was a New York private detective, big, successful and crooked as a mule's hind leg. He was a man in his forties, burly, and powerful with huge hands and feet. He had a rough-hewn face, no back to his head and his hair stood up like bristles on a hair brush. He had a wide mouth and when he smiled, there was an unpleasant expanse of gum above his large, irregular but white teeth. I had come into contact with him in New York a couple of years back when he represented an insurance company hunting evidence of fraud in a big diamond loss. I knew he was retained by a number of large industrial concerns.

"How's my old pal, Tom Keefe?" he inquired. His grin exasperated me but I knew he wanted to rile me and I preserved my composure.

"Fine." I assured him. "On business out here?"

"Yeah." He lighted a cigarette. I lit up too. "Representing a big mining concern. Utah and Universe."

"Never heard of it."

"No?"

"No. Why should a mining company employ a New York private detective?"

"To keep curious people from butting into its business," he stated calmly. "Staying long in Salt Lake?"

"A few days."

"Why not take the train for the Coast? Leaves in a couple of hours."

"I'm not in a hurry, Andy."

"Any idea of going into the desert?"

"Why?"

"It's unhealthy for tenderfeet, that's why," he snapped.

"You wouldn't be trying to scare a feller?" I asked with a laugh.

"Listen," requested Andy. "We got the biggest gold mine in the world. It's

bought and paid for and doing a legal business. It is inspected and supervised by the State and Federal authorities. Its titles are clear. It's producing big. The management welcomes investigation by those that have a right to investigate but it discourages snoopers. Get me?"

"Like Bud Stevens and Joe Potter?" I asked blandly.

"I wouldn't know about them. I mean you, Jack."

"Oh, I'm a snooper?"

"It's about time something was done regarding Tom Keefe's workmen," he said bluntly. "You guys haven't even got the standing of private detectives. You got no rights at all. When you get evidence, you have to turn it over to the Department of Justice. Nobody gives a whoop if you get a line on Communists, but you can't muss around with big business. Not without trouble."

"What's Utah and Universe afraid of?" I asked mildly.

"Not a thing, not a thing. All open and above board to the right parties. You have no standing, Jack."

"What makes you think I'm interested in your gold mine?"

"I'd hate to think you were, that's all."

"It's every citizen's duty to uncover a murderer. Bud Stevens was a friend of mine."

"They found him in Kansas. Go to Kansas, Jack."

"Maybe I shall. How did you know I was in town?"

"It's a small town. I spied your mug on the street this afternoon."

"I missed you."

"I'm giving you a chance. Go back and tell Tom Keefe that he and Cameron better find something worthwhile to do."

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"Then you're going to let me go back?"

He smiled but his eyes were hard. "Why sure! Certainly. Why not?"

"But if I should drift into the desert, what?"

"I told you it was unhealthy."

"I hear a thousand prospectors are camped near your mines."

"Yeah, but they're not working for Tom Keefe."

"Don't you suppose the Department of Justice will want to know why a couple of our boys have been wiped out?"

"That's all right. The Department of Justice can get every coöperation from my people."

"I may take your advice."

"Good boy! Say, what's Tom's interest in our business? Our stockholders are some of the biggest men in the country. We're mining gold that the country needs, helping to bring back prosperity. We're paying heavy taxes."

I laughed. "Why should an enterprise like that hire you to warn off harmless citizens?"

He rose. "I'll be seeing you, maybe," he observed. "Take care of your health, son."

CHAPTER III

The Road from Salt Lake

AFTER he had gone, I smoked a cigarette very thoughtfully. This visit had been entirely unnecessary. He had no intention whatever of letting me go back to Washington to report our conversation to Tom Keefe. He knew that our service was suspicious of the Universe outfit; that Tom Keefe was convinced that two of his men had been eliminated because they had endeavored to get information regarding the mining company. It was either

braggadocio—he wanted to let me see that I was up against Andy Sawyer—or he hoped I'd spill something that might be useful. No doubt his employers were anxious to learn exactly how well founded were our suspicions of them.

I had struck something bigger than anything our Service had tackled before. Here was money, strongly entrenched. I'd been in the Government service, unofficially, long enough to know that money reached high places. They undoubtedly had lines right into the Treasury and the Department of Justice and only unassailable evidence would cause the Government to take action. If, as Cameron believed, a half billion of hoarded gold was to come out of this curious mining enterprise, a multitude of palms could and would be greased.

I wondered if Sawyer knew of my interview with Long John. He knew, of course that, if I had been assigned to this job, no threats would scare me away. I'd have to be eliminated like Stevens and Potter.

I went to the window and looked out. My room was on the fourth floor, back. There was a fire escape to the ground from a window outside in a hallway.

One of Andy's henchmen would be watching the exit but, at this stage of the game, Andy wouldn't think I'd go out by the fire escape. In a city of this size, it would seem to be a futile gesture.

Andy Sawyer had found it profitable in the past to be on the side of the law but he was a man without scruples and, if he were paid enough, he wouldn't hesitate to become an outlaw.

I packed a small bag, abandoned my trunk, and when it got dark I went down the fire escape and landed in a

smelly alley. The alley opened into a dark side street and there didn't appear to be anybody on watch there. In five minutes, I was out of that neighborhood on my way to Mother Carruthers, a little ahead of my appointment.

Passing a dingy tobacco store with a telephone sign outside, I hesitated and then entered. Getting a handful of change from the clerk, I called Tom Keefe at his home in Washington, stuffing the phone box with quarters and half dollars. Tom was at home. He was never very far from his telephone.

"Lawrence speaking."

"Yeah?"

"I'm spotted. Andy Sawyer warned me out of here."

"I knew he was working for them. Should have told you."

"I'm going up that Utah and Universe way with an old prospector in an hour."

"Look here, maybe you better pull out since they've spotted you."

I laughed. "Not built that way, Tom."

"Good boy. Say, wires are being pulled in Washington to call us off. Not being on the Government payroll, we stick. I've lost two good men. Probably lose you, but I'll land this cutthroat bunch before I'm through."

"I guess that's all."

"Watch your step, Jack. You may get help when you least expect it. I'm working on other angles. Good night."

The talk with the old boy made me feel better. Some fellows might have been sore to hear Tom talk of carrying on despite the men he lost when he was safe in Washington himself. But Keefe had a record for personal courage that couldn't be beat.

Long John Tipplewaite was waiting for me at Mother Carruthers. When I

found him in the beer parlor that afternoon, he had been leaning against the bar, a gaunt, hollow-eyed, wretched old man. Hope had rejuvenated him. He looked ten years younger.

John was six feet two or three, bent a little, incredibly thin. He had a long upkempt beard of brown and gray, high cheek-bones, jutting brows with deep-set brown eyes with a bright light in them. He was wearing torn overalls and an old brown flannel shirt and a flopping black hat with a bullet hole through the crown. In the afternoon, with the cash I had advanced him, he had bought himself new riding boots, and a new leather coat, but he clung to the old hat. We sat in the parlor for a while and he told me how he had outfitted us.

"No extravagance, son," he explained. "I had my eye on this old Ford for months. Not much to look at but sound in wind and limb. These new-fangled busses can't scramble over rough ground like the Model T. Course, we got to cache it when we get far in but I know where we can get mules and burros up there. That little flat squirt-gun you got's no good. I bought a couple of forty-five Colts' and plenty of cartridges. I tell you, son, I feel like a boy, starting out again, fully equipped, with a pardner what trusts the old man. Put it thar, again."

We shook hands. Despite his age, his grip was powerful. "I spent five hundred all told," he continued. "I got the rest of the long green safe. I ain't one that goes on a spree because he has some loose change. Nothing wild about Long John. He, he, he!" His laugh was the only thing senile about him.

We walked a block to a small garage where the Ford with our outfit awaited us. I looked frequently over my shoulder. That I should be allowed to get out

of town with Long John was doubtful but I saw nobody shadowing us. In fact, there seemed nobody on the deserted street. My heart sank when I saw our vehicle. It was a touring car with the top up and the top was in tatters. It hadn't been painted for at least ten years. It was a grotesque old relic and that it would travel more than a mile without falling to pieces seemed very unlikely to me. John climbed in confidently and proudly took hold of the wheel. I glanced back. The tonneau was piled high with our equipment, mostly in canvas sacks. The motor started with a snarl and a growl. The thing actually worked!

WHILE the garage man grinned at us, we rolled out into the street, turned right and moved swiftly away from the city. John was right about the motor, it seemed to be in good order and the tires were in fair shape.

"Them duds you got on will do till tomorrow," remarked the old man. "I got a leather coat for you back there and overalls and some high boots on account of the rattlesnakes when we take to our feet. Well, well, well—I was afeared I'd never be starting out again."

Salt Lake City lies in a valley with high mountains at its back and the Great Salt Lake only a few miles away. The mountain air is clear and the city lights were incredibly bright as I looked back. Not a large city but a beautiful one, especially when illuminated.

We were rolling smoothly along a fine state road. The old man was singing softly—some weird old tune that had a *Tra Le La Lee* in it. I lighted a cigarette and twisted about on the broken springs of the seat cushion. It looked as though Andy Sawyer had

been circumvented. I had hardly hoped that he was ignorant of my deal with old Tipplewaite. I had been afraid that the old man would broadcast the acquisition of a partner and had given him a false name, which of course, wouldn't fool Andy.

We fellows of the Service aren't daunted by seemingly impossible assignments. We do the best we can and it's surprising how many times dogged persistence overcomes obstacles that seem insurmountable. I had to get up to Utah and Universe. When I arrived there, I'd follow any line that seemed worth while. One thing at a time.

"Course in those days, a man couldn't waste time with hard rock mining," Long John was babbling. "Most of the prospectors didn't know gold bearing quartz when they seed it. I knew better but I had no money for machinery. I knocked off some specimens and took them up to Salt Lake and nobody gave a damn. Then I drifted up north. You ain't listening, Mr. White."

"Certainly I am!" I had told him my name was Harry White. When I showed him my greenbacks, he hadn't worried about my identity.

We were ten miles out of town, running along at twenty-five miles an hour, which was top speed for our chariot, on the paved road that follows the shore of the Salt Lake. I was looking back, because a pair of headlights half a mile back remained stationary and that meant they were traveling no faster than we were.

As cars travel at high speeds in that country—we were going as fast as antique machinery would permit—the speed of the car behind was suspicious. As Tom spoke, the loiterers stepped on the gas. Their lights grew brighter

every second. I heard the motor roaring. In a couple of minutes the other car was close behind. It turned out to pass us.

"Giddap, Dobbin!" cried Long John with a grin. "The old hoss won't go no faster. I'll let 'em by."

It was amusing since he had no choice, and the other car was alongside.

"Look out there!" the old man shouted in alarm. He began an oath. The other car had deliberately side-swiped us, no accidental collision. There was a severe shock, the grinding of steel against whatever our contraption was made of and the old car was lifted bodily, hurled off the road and over on its side. I had been slammed against the bony shoulder of my companion and then hurtled headfirst out of the machine. I flew through the air six or eight feet at least and landed on my head.

But I landed in a bank of soft sand. The car turned completely over, the top crushed in, and lay in the ditch. I sat up rubbing my head.

The auto which had done the damage tore on for a hundred yards, then braked, turned, and came back. Its headlights bathed the wrecked Ford with light. Fifty feet distant, the car came to a stop and two men got out. Each held a revolver in his hand.

"That ought to have done the trick," one of the pair yelled. "But we better make sure."

And then, from beneath the car, came a string of the most violent and weird profane words I had ever heard in my life. Long John was alive under there and he had his voice, anyway. I was glad to hear him.

Lifting their revolvers, the pair began to run toward the car. I rose, pulled my automatic from my pocket

and aimed deliberately and dropped them with two shots.

Why not? They were killers. The wrecking of the car had been intentional and they were coming back to finish us in case we had escaped. For all I knew, they were the men who had slain Stevens and Potter, two fine chaps.

"What's the shooting fer?" demanded Long John, still invisible.

I rushed into the road and dropped beside the prone men. I had aimed at their chests and that was where they had been hit. Both dead. I had never seen either before.

I lifted first one and then the other out of the road and laid them in the ditch. I then climbed into their car and tooled it to the opposite side of the road because I had a good reason for not wishing to stop traffic. It took only a few seconds and then I was tugging at the old Model T, trying to extricate Long John.

"Are you badly hurt?" I asked anxiously.

"I'm mighty hard to hurt," he replied. "Jest sort of wedged in. Lucky I'm skinny. Who done that shooting?"

"I did. Those were robbers. They were coming back with guns in their hands. Can you push up against the body of the car, John? I'll pull at the same time."

I FELT the body lift a little; such cars are not very heavy. I am a strong man and I exerted all my strength. And Long John Tipplewaite came crawling out from under like a snake out of a hole.

"Gosh almighty," he said. "I thought I was a goner. What call had they to bump us?"

"I don't know," I replied discreetly. "Get behind the wreck. Quick!"

"What fer?" he wanted to know.

I pulled him off the road without replying. A car was coming at high speed down the road going in the direction of Salt Lake.

It slowed a trifle as it passed. Its driver glanced at the wreck and speeded up again. He didn't want to be bothered. I breathed more easily. He hadn't seen the bodies in the ditch.

"Let's see if we can turn over the Ford and get our stuff out," I suggested.

"They certainly wrecked one good old cyar," John said dolefully.

"We'll take theirs. Load our stuff into it. Abandon it some distance away."

"Bad business. Mister, you had no call to shoot them dead."

"Go over there and look at the guns I threw into the ditch with them."

"We got to go back to town and report this hold-up," John said slowly.

"And get thrown into jail, maybe accused of murder?"

"Say, that's right. Say, we could get a hell of a ways in that car! 'Bout seventy-five miles down here, we could take to an abandoned road and travel a hundred miles without anyone seeing us—only it don't seem right, somehow."

"Get hold of the car with me."

We heaved on the machine until it lay on its side and we were able to reach our luggage. It was the work of only five or six minutes to transfer it into the hatch of the big Luxo roadster which had caused the smashup. It was a nice job.

"I hate to leave them good revolvers with those two stiffs," growled the old man. "But they might be evidence, eh?"

"That's right. Leave them."

"Better let me drive this car," I sug-

gested and, to avoid argument, slipped into the driver's seat.

Long John assented gladly. "Never could drive one of them new-fangled geared cyars," he confessed. "I think I got a busted rib when the old bus turned over. No matter. It'll heal by itself. Jest bandage it tight."

I ran down the road a bit, turned around and, in a couple of seconds, went past the wrecked Ford and the bodies in the ditch at sixty miles an hour. I didn't regret being the cause of their death any more than a soldier feels squeamish about shooting his enemy. Yet I'm not cold-blooded; I am a normal human in a war against evil-doers with death the penalty for making a serious error.

I confess to being a bit conscience-stricken about Long John Tipplewaite, an innocent old man who had unwittingly involved himself with a hunted man. If John had met his death in that brief encounter back there, I would have felt very badly. Nor did I wish him involved in the consequences of my gun-play. By taking possession of the enemy's car, I had made him a fellow fugitive. I had played on the outdoor man's fear of incarceration. After what had already happened, I couldn't go back to Salt Lake without utterly destroying my usefulness to the service. Anyway, I drove at sixty-five miles an hour away from the scene of the killing and in the opposite direction to Salt Lake.

The old man produced a corncob pipe from somewhere, methodically filled it and lighted up. "By gum, this is 'bout the same's flyin', I reckon," he remarked. "Never did get a ride in one of these big contraptions before. Go hard with us if they catch us, eh?"

"Maybe." My conscience was gnawing viciously.

"Look it here, young feller. Some-thin' funny 'bout you. Them fellers weren't no bandits. 'Cause why? 'Cause an old cart like ours wouldn't interest no bandits. They come slap-bang into us, turned us over and came back to finish us off. Now me, I ain't got an enemy in the world. All my enemies are a longtime dead. I shot five or six of them myself."

This was a surprise finish. I laughed. "Sure you're not boasting?"

"When I first came out here, they got you or you got them. 'Pears like things haven't changed much since."

"They *were* after me, John," I confessed. "You were an innocent bystander."

He nodded. "Figgered that out fer myself. You got that money you gave me by robbing a bank, eh?"

"Wrong. That's honest money. I'm an honest man, Long John."

"You shoot damn' straight for an honest man, White," he said sharply. I remembered that the Museum clerk had told me Long John was half cracked.

The old man was a couple of miles from being anybody's fool.

That was a laugh. I glanced obliquely at him. He was staring hard at me, and the light from the instrument board showed me his eyes were full of suspicion.

ONE of the rules of our Service is that we must confide in nobody regarding our mission or our status. I had broken this rule once because I was crazy in love with Theodora Ainsworth. For all I knew, her knowledge of my trade was responsible for my present predicament—even though unwittingly, on her part. Well, I broke the rule again. I laid my cards on the table for this queer old desert rat.

"I'm working for Uncle Sam, John," I explained frankly. "That's why I know how to shoot. The Government wants the low-down on the Utah and Universe crowd. I made a deal with you to get into that country. I've given you enough cash to find your gold deposit. I don't want my half interest. It's yours. Do you believe me?"

"Yep," he answered simply. "I can size a man up. But the Government knows all about Utah and Universe, don't it? You mean these apes back there were working for that company?"

"I think they were. I was warned to go back to Washington a couple of hours before you and I started out tonight. We were followed. The idea was to kill us in the auto wreck. Make it look like an accident. You're in danger while you're in my company."

Long John chuckled softly. "You're mighty good company, lad, and I'm going to die pretty soon anyway."

"We'll be pursued of course. We'll be accused of killing those crooks to steal their car."

"Can you make this thing go any faster?"

"Seventy is fast enough for me."

"In an hour and a half we'll be off the highroad. Let her rip, son."

"You're a sport," I said gratefully.

"You're darn tootin'," he declared with a chuckle. "Ask them up in the Black Hills and in Virginia City—both Virginia Cities, the one in Montana and Nevada."

"You don't date back to those days?"

"I'm seventy-seven years old," he replied proudly. "I date away back. When I was a kid, I fit red Injuns. If you're workin' for Uncle Sam, I'm working for you. What's wrong with this outfit at Universe?"

"Where are they getting all the gold they're shipping out?"

"Eh? Out of the ground, I reckon. Though I been all over those hills and I didn't think they was worth a lick."

"If that's so, why are they determined to keep me away from there?"

"I dunno. Gold's gold. You can't fool the government assayers."

"You know it's worth more than it used to be."

He chuckled. "That makes it better."

"Well, I've got to get into their property and find out."

"You make me kind o' curious," he said with another chuckle. "Mebbe I'll trail long with yer."

The miles flew beneath our wheels. We nearly ran out of gas and had to stop at a gas station—a risk, of course. We were coming into wild barren uninhabited country, but the State road was smooth as glass and clear of traffic. Time passed. An hour. An hour and a quarter from the moment when we abandoned the Ford.

"Go slow for a while," suggested Long John. "Got to git my bearings. Kind of hard, with no moon. I packed along here when it was a trail. Took me days to travel fur's we've come in an hour or so. Pretty soon you'll wish you was back in the Ford. These kind of cars ain't so good in rough country."

Reluctantly, I slowed to twenty-five miles an hour while the old man pressed his whiskers against the windshield.

"Slower," he commanded. "Up ahead on the right there ought to be a big cone-shaped rock. By gum, there it is! I wish I could drive this thing. You got to go awful slow, pard. Now, turn right."

"But there's no road!"

"It's hard ground. It used to be a trail."

I glanced back. "Our lights can be seen for miles.

"Nope. You go through a canyon in about a mile."

AT TEN miles an hour, I left the pavement and bumped over gravel. I saw no evidence of a road but John grabbed the wheel while I managed the gas and the brake and we made progress.

"They ain't goin' to follow us in here," he said happily. "So we ain't in much of a hurry. 'Bout fifty miles in, there used to be a Mormon borax mine, thirty or forty years ago. And there were a lot of silver claims twenty-five miles further in that got abandoned twenty years ago. I reckon there ain't even been a Ford over this road for twenty year. Watch out for big rocks that we'll have to lift out of the way."

"But when we get in, what? I want to get to Utah and Universe."

"'Bout fifty miles beyond the silver mines we come on it the back way," he assured me. "'Spect we'll have to walk some. Stands to reason this contraption ain't goin' to hold out all the way."

"About the luckiest thing I ever did was to make a deal with you," I said enthusiastically.

"Mebbe, mebbe. Remains to be seen."

People who cross the continent and skim over perfect roads through the desert states encounter a steady procession of cars. They come upon gas stations, lunch rooms, hamburger stands every ten or fifteen miles and get the impression that the desert isn't so bad after all since there are so many people on it. But let them trek in from

the highway ten miles to get an idea of its awful loneliness and desolation. Let them realize that there are only eight or ten highways crossing a country fifteen hundred miles from north to south and that inside, there are no residents save a limited number of Indians, prospectors, explorers, hunters and cowhands. A terrific expanse of vegetationless plains and treeless mountains, as wild as it was before the white man landed on Plymouth Rock.

Twenty miles off the highway which we had been traversing and we were lost. Our pursuers, if any, would not dream that anybody had been mad enough to take a modern, stream-line low-slung car off the road and "in back of beyond." I wouldn't have dared to do it. Long John Tipplewaite did it.

All that night we crept along, averaging six or eight miles an hour. We took turns clearing the track ahead of us. We wound our way through stark canyons. Finally we passed the tumble-down buildings of the old borax company. We had to stop occasionally to cool off the engine, overheated from too much low gear, but we moved ahead. We passed the abandoned silver miles without even seeing them in the small hours of the morning.

And during that ride, I got well acquainted with one of the finest characters who ever lived.

To John's simple mind, the offense which the Utah and Universe crowd was committing—if it were indeed committing an offense—was incomprehensible.

"But if these fellers owned this gold," he persisted, "it was their'n. The Government had no right to make them take paper for it. Why my father told that back after the Civil War you could get five times as much for hard money as shinplasters—which was what they

called paper money. I like the feel of a few silver dollars in my pocket today better'n greenbacks. Seems like it was a dirty trick to make people turn in their gold and then, when they'd been paid off in paper money, to cut the gold value of it like you say the Government did."

"The Supreme Court says it's legal and that's good enough for me."

"Sartainly. Me to. But it stands to reason—"

"What I can't understand," I said, "is how they manage it. They have hundreds of employees. The miners must know that gold isn't coming out of the ground in millions. And when a multitude of people are in a conspiracy, some of them are bound to talk."

"The mines are scattered over twenty square miles," the old man told me. "The crews of one mine may not be getting out much ore but they think maybe the fellers in the other shafts have struck it rich. It's at the smelter that they'll get wise. If they're re-melting gold bars or dollars, you can bet the smelter crew knows it. How do they get it in? I tell you Jack"—he knew my real name, by this time—"the thing ain't possible."

"Anyway, we have nothing that looks like evidence," I admitted. "But they certainly act peculiar."

"I'm sure ag'in' them for wrecking my Ford," declared Long John, in an effort to strengthen our case against them.

CHAPTER IV

The Desert

ABOUT five A.M., we began to descend from the hills to a flat vast plain studded with stones and sagebrush. At the same time, the car

gave evidence that it was not getting gas regularly. The gas gauge registered zero.

"Pretty near time we abandoned ship," I remarked. "How far from the mines are we?"

"T'other side of that range ahead."

I gazed at a blue jagged line beyond the desert plain. In the clear air, it didn't look nearly thirty miles away but Tom said that was the distance to the range of mountains."

"And we make camp and lay up until the cool of the afternoon," he added. "Can't cross the desert on foot in the heat of the day. No, siree."

The car continued to descend, pulled along by gravity.

"We'll cache this bus along here somehow. No chance of them finding it."

"They'll find where we left the high-road by the tire tread," I told him. "It may take them a day or two, but they'll find it."

"Young feller, you telling me about trails?" Long John demanded. "That was stone and gravel we traveled over for a mile after leaving the road. No tire marks. I'll find a hole to hide this cyar where it couldn't be seen from one of them airplanes. It might come in handy."

Without gas?"

"We can bring some cans of gas on a burro. Anyhow, we don't want them to find out the direction we come."

"They'll be looking for me around Universe. They know I'm traveling with you. Most likely we'll walk into a trap."

He chuckled. "If you're afeared, I'll take you into Nevada."

"I've got to go to Universe, but you don't have to."

He pulled his whiskers and looked at me smiling. "I kind o' like the idea,"

he remarked. "Always was curious as a cat."

We rolled along. To tell the truth, I was nervous about Long John. I have a talent for disguise but John was a striking character, well-known throughout this part of the country. He would be spotted in short order—which would be bad for me. Also for him because, having shot two men and made off with their car, we'd stand an excellent chance of being tried for murder.

"Run into this arroya ahead," he commanded. "Looks like it thins out to a feather. We'll cache the cyar here and camp. The high walls will kind of shelter us from the sun."

I obeyed orders. The ground was very rough, full of holes and hazards but there was a down grade and we bumped along for a hundred yards when we came to grief. There was a rear-end crash where the transmission box struck hard rock and a broken shaft was the result.

We were in a cleft in the hills fifty or sixty feet wide with precipitous walls rising a couple of hundred feet high. It was still dark in there.

"End of the journey," I said cheerfully. "This car isn't going to be of any further use to us."

"Unload," he ordered curtly.

We set to work taking out our sacks of provisions, and tools and piled them on the ground beside the car.

"Got to pick up something to make a fire," said the old man who wandered off toward the trail we had left. He was gone half an hour and came back with his arms full of sage brush, cactus and what not. In a couple of minutes he had a brisk fire going. Then he produced a frying pan, a side of bacon and a loaf of bread. A coffee pot came out of a sack, and a five gallon can

filled with water. In ten minutes we were breakfasting off tin plates and and drinking hot coffee from tin cups. It was very chilly and the coffee hit the spot.

I hadn't realized that I was frightfully tired, but, after eating, I had an overwhelming desire to sleep.

The old man, apparently, was fresh as when we started.

"What you think you're going to do when we git there?" he demanded!

I yawned. "No notion," I told him sleepily.

He produced blankets and removed a seat cushion from the car.

"Get over against the north wall where the sun won't come, and snooze," he commanded. "Maybe I'll take a few winks myself."

I woke up, feeling refreshed, a long time after that. My watch said it was two P.M. Tipplewaite was sitting in the car smoking a corncob pipe.

He grinned at me. "Feeling pert?" he demanded. I nodded, rose and stretched. I hadn't slept on the ground for years and was a bit stiff. Otherwise all was well.

I grinned back at him. "John," I demanded, "how long have you worn those whiskers?"

"Eh? Reckon 'bout fifty years. When I was a young buck, you grew whiskers soon as you could manage. Everybody wore 'em."

"How would you like to see what your face looks like?"

"What's that?" he asked in astonishment.

"You're going to shave off the chin rug. And I'm going to dye your hair black. Your best friend won't know you."

"Look a here," he began angrily. "I ain't agoin'—"

"Otherwise, you and I will have to

part company. You'll be a dead give-away at the mines."

He grinned slowly, emitted a huge cloud of smoke, and nodded. "You're a barber, eh?"

"I've got the necessary in my grip. I'll have to make some changes in my own appearance."

"Well," he remarked, "we ain't got nothin' to do for a couple of hours."

I opened my bag, took out a small leather case which contained scissors, greasepaint, hair dye and other necessities of an actor.

I SET to work upon Mr. Tipplewaite. The change in the old man's appearance, when I was through with him, was startling. It appeared that the old prospector had practically no chin. The lower half of his face, after its half century of protection from a thick beard, was snow white—but I had a stain for that. His mouth was twice as big as it had appeared when draped by mustache and whiskers. It would have been better if I could have bleached his hair snow white but I had no bleach so it became as black as a crow's feathers.

I let him look at himself in my hand mirror and he emitted a yell of horror. "This ain't me, it's somebody else!" he declared. "Gol-ding you, Jack—"

"I'm keeping you from getting hung," I told him. "So you better like it."

"They ought to hang me for lookin' like this," he declared.

Such things as hair dye and greasepaint are all right behind the footlights but they are easily detected in daylight and they don't deceive a trained eye. I counted upon nobody dreaming that Tipplewaite could be Tipplewaite to make him pass muster with suspiciously black hair.

I made comparatively slight changes in my own personal appearance. I broadened my nose, placed a celluloid contrivance over my teeth on the right side to inflate my cheek and change the expression of my mouth. I darkened my eyebrows a trifle and deliberately cut myself on the left side of my nose with a razor blade—over Long John's violent protests. It was a scratch an inch and a half long, which I touched up with mercurichrome, getting the effect of a bright scar.

I knew I wouldn't deceive Andy Sawyer for a minute but I didn't expect to run into him. If descriptions of myself had been sent up to the mines, which was probable, I thought I wouldn't be suspected.

"When do we start?" I demanded.

"'Bout four o'clock." He shook his head sorrowfully. "Got to abandon most of our supplies, Bub. I found a cave, when I was lookin' for something that would burn, where we can hide 'em. We can pack 'bout fifty pounds on our back and that's all."

"I suppose we travel all night?"

"If your feet can stand it."

It almost broke the old man's heart to leave his outfit behind him—a finer outfit than he had owned for many years. I transferred what I needed from my grips to a canvas sack which he strapped expertly upon my back. After that, he slung his own pack over his shoulders and led the way out of the little canyon. I had put on the rough clothes he had purchased for me and the knee-high leather boots fortunately were comfortable.

The sun was still hot but, fortunately, our way was down hill for five or six miles. I had been a school boy when the Great War occurred and I had no experience of being a soldier with full marching equipment. By the time we

struck the desert floor I was uncomfortably aware of the load I carried.

The old man had the springy gait of youth and his pack was apparently a matter of indifference. We had been hiking for three hours when he announced we would stop for supper.

"You lay down and rest, Jack," he said kindly, "while I rustle up fuel."

After eating bacon and bread and drinking some coffee I felt better, but we lay flat on the sand for half an hour before he gave the word to march.

We went on, with rest periods of ten minutes every hour or so, until the sun came up.

"How far have we come?" I asked.

"'Bout twenty miles, I reckon. You think marching is tough, eh?"

I nodded.

"We got to spend the heat of the day right out here in the desert. I'll rig up a shelter with the blankets."

"I'll take vanilla," I said with a weak smile and fell asleep, when he gave the word to halt, from sheer exhaustion.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Cipher Solvers' Club for July

(Continued from last week)

Eleven—Larodu Baduba, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Ellcan, Orangeburg, N. Y. Max Merker, New York, N. Y. †W. G. Valentine, New York, N. Y.

Ten—°Mrs. W. C. Bird, San Francisco, Calif. B. Z. McElroy, Washington, D. C. †Mossback, Randle, Wash. °Plantagenet, Paterson, N. J. Nom d'Plume, Burlington, Vt. L. E. S., Firebaugh, Calif.

Nine—†Denarius, Detroit, Mich. Ian, Nova Scotia, Canada. †Will Will, White Plains, N. Y.

Eight—Amateur II, Bronx, N. Y. Seven-Eleven, Bronx, N. Y. Geodetic, Los Angeles, Calif.

Six—Arbny, Bronx, N. Y. Mrs. P. C. Bradley, Boley, Okla. †Cucumber, Redondo Beach, Calif. Iris Goldthorpe, New York, N. Y. Geo. W. Harris, Baltimore, Md. Kay, Canton, Ohio. Dr. Frederick Lothaire, Pittsburgh, Pa. Harold W. Pickard, Newport, R. I. †Leonard Price, New York, N. Y. †Edward F. Raiford, Holland, Va. †Waltraw, Detroit, Mich. W. X. Y., Los Angeles, Calif.

Five—John P. Brogan, New Castle, Pa. Ron Devoo, Newburgh, N. Y. †H. L. Evans, New York, N. Y. Gilmore Hill, New York, N. Y. †Al. Liston, Columbia, S. C.

Four—C. S. Bruner, Hawesville, Ky. Elsie, Natchez, Miss. Jeane Friedman, Brooklyn, N. Y. Ida M. Volk, Kent, Conn.

Three—Carl H. Borner, Woodcliff, N. J. Donald Frame, Sublette, Kans. Vincent La Milia, St. Petersburg, Fla. Edward Nickerson, Minneapolis, Minn.

Two—Lester L. Eyrich, Dundee, N. Y. Jay-Gee, Santa Monica, Calif.

One—Arthur E. Kaiser, Jr., Los Angeles, Calif. Meb, Baltimore, Md. †Neon, Rochester, N. Y. Tubby, Baltimore, Md. F. M. W., Oklahoma City, Okla.

Corrections—†Neil Johnson, Manchester, Iowa, 23 answers for June instead of 17. °W. F. Plette, Galesburg, Ill., 24 answers for April instead of 23. †Ah-Tin-Du, 24 answers for April instead of 18.

THE END

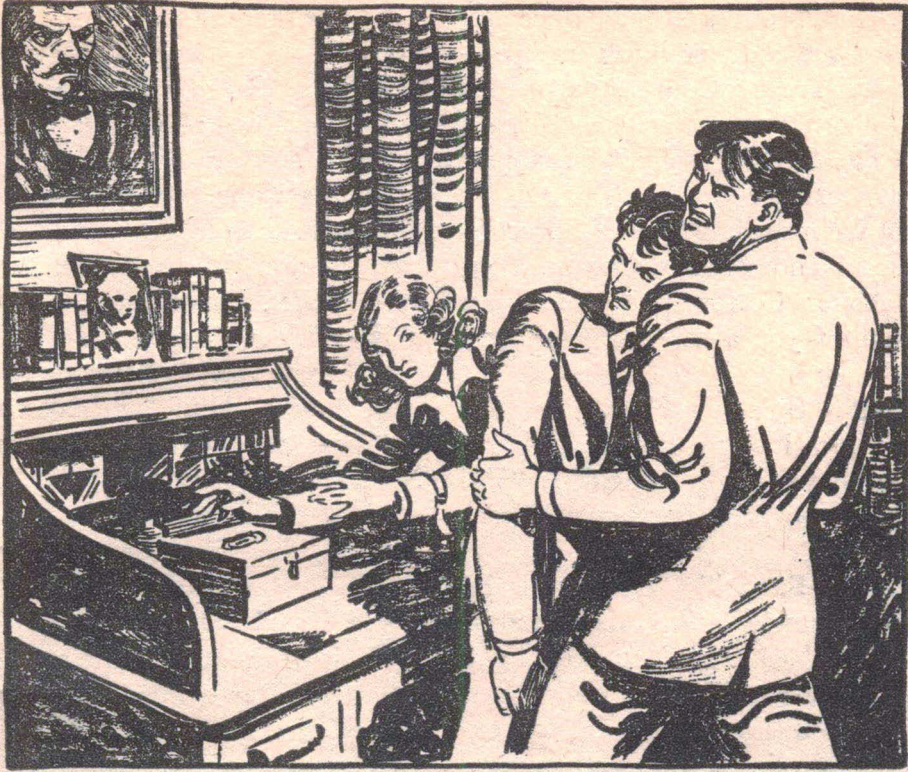


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PROBAK JUNIOR



Not in the Legacy

By Bert Collier

Author of "Honor by Proxy," "Publicity Stunt," etc.

Surprising things will happen when a police reporter inherits six million dollars—but a beautiful lady burglar is more than a surprise

YOU'VE seen my name in the newspapers, I suppose. I'm Sampson Cotton—the Sampson Cotton that inherited all that money from his great-uncle, Abner Cotton, the sly fox of Wall Street. And some things Uncle Abner didn't mention in his will.

But I don't suppose Uncle Abner could have foreseen everything, at that.

Notoriety knocked at the door of the press room at the Court Square Police Station and found me with my feet propped on the desk listening contentedly to Sergeant Hanna, who was in a reminiscent mood. Hanna in a remi-

niscient mood has the qualities of a Homer chanting epics of great heroes—and his heroes are of flesh and blood and are still answering "here" at assembly roll call. The knock on the door was apologetic and I sang out "Come in" without moving. The door opened and a man stepped inside. He was about five feet tall and had a big nose and a mop of wavy hair and wore thick-rimmed spectacles and an air of perpetual surprise.

He consulted a piece of paper in his hand.

"Mr. Cotton?" he inquired and I nodded.

"Mr. Sampson Cotton, police reporter for the *Star*, residing in Apartment 3-C, Trevor Court Apartments, and—"

"Cut out the biography," I snapped. "The answers are yes."

"I am from the law firm of Sprecklebottom and Thomas, Mr. Cotton. Your Uncle Abner Cotton, who died last week, named you as his sole residuary legatee."

I gasped. "Sole what?"

"And now it's my time," Sergeant Hanna said with great placidity. "Did I ever tell you how Patrolman Terry O'Schultz—"

"Shut up, Sarge!" I cut in. "I did have a great-uncle named Abner and he did die last week and I suppose there was a—a—residue!"

"After deductions for taxes, expenses of administration, et cetera," the legal gentleman said gloatingly, "there will be approximately six mill—"

Hanna cried: "Now Terry O'Schultz had a glass eye and—"

"This," the little man said firmly, "is no time for levity. I have instructions to take you immediately to the office, Mr. Cotton."

"Six mill—" I began and found I was stuck, too. And then my journalistic training came to my rescue. "I'm a working man, feller. My job is to stick around here until relieved, to assemble for the public, details of such mayhem, felonious assault, or homicide, as may transpire. Make it nine tomorrow."

"Nine tomorrow," he muttered. He went out, looking a little dazed. Hanna looked dazed, too, and puzzled.

I made a great effort and said: "Go on with the story, Sarge. What about this bird O'Schultz?"

"It's about roll call time, Sam," Hanna said uneasily, studying me out

of the corner of his eyes. "I better be going."

"Okay, Sarge. By the way, I'm busted. How about ten bucks 'til Tuesday?"

Hanna leaned against the door and his eyes showed pain and shock. "Oh, Sam Cotton!" he moaned. "So that's your racket. I'm ashamed of you, Sam. That trick was lousy when I was a rookie cop getting handouts from the back door of Hank Dorfin's saloon!"

"That six million is on the level, Sergeant." I protested.

"Oh yeah?" he scoffed. "So is Pike's Peak!"

AS I said before you probably read it in the papers. It was about six millions, after deductions, and the big house in Lakewood Heights with a sunken garden and a pool with swans on it, and a butler with an Oxford accent.

For a week I listened to lawyers and signed documents. I had to prove that I had been born, and was still alive, and they just wouldn't take my word for it. Larry George, the city editor, said he didn't blame 'em, since he'd been bothered by those doubts for years. But all things end, even legal procedures, and one day about dusk, I stood in Uncle Abner's library with the butler, monarch of all I surveyed.

The butler's name was Jenks, but he didn't look it. From the waist up he resembled Carnera and he had legs like a tap dancer. A nice balance of strength and speed. His eyes were the right shade of blue. I wondered if Jenks hadn't been plastered over a handle like Murphy.

But I didn't like the way he looked down his nose at me.

"Jenks," I stated, "let's get this straight. I don't like to talk about my

relatives, but to keep the record straight I didn't have much in common with Uncle Abner. I didn't approve of his business methods, but let's not speak disrespectfully of the departed. I didn't ask for this, but now that I've got it, I'm going to have some fun. You know what fun is, Jenks?"

"I think so, sir," he admitted doubtfully.

"There'll probably be a lot of folks here from time to time that are not like any you've ever seen before. Curiosities like newspaper reporters and policemen. Most of them are pretty good guys."

Something like a grin flickered across his face and was gone. "Okay, Mr. Sam," he said. I bet he never used such language around Uncle Abner.

"Anything further, Jenks?"

He fished around in his pocket. "Only this, sir. The key to Mr. Abner's desk. His final instructions were to give it to you personally. And now when will you dine, sir?"

We settled the question of dinner and I went over to the desk. It was a battered, old-fashioned, roll-top desk, strangely out of keeping with the richness of the library, its walls lined with shelves of books, and busts of long-haired old-timers with high foreheads scattered here and there.

The key fitted smoothly and the top rolled back with a bang. I scanned the litter of papers, feeling that I was getting pretty close to Uncle Abner after all these years. Here were his private belongings, the kind of things a man keeps under lock and key. There was a bundle of papers held together with a thick rubber band, and a tin box with a snap fastener.

I opened the box first, and gaped at a big bundle of currency—big bills, too, and I never knew before they made them bigger than tens, judging by my

personal experience. There was a thick pile of securities, and a couple of diamond rings. I puffed a little. Even if the six million was a dream, there was enough in the box to keep a police reporter in cigarettes for a long time.

I picked up the papers. Mostly promissory notes. The top one made me blink. It was made out in favor of Uncle Abner, and it was for a hundred thousand dollars. It was signed by Oliver Berge, Uncle Abner's partner in the old firm of Cotton & Berge, that cracked up in '32.

Written across the face of it, in Uncle Abner's spidery handwriting, was: *Paid in full. Abner Cotton.* And the date. I checked back mentally. That was the day Abner died.

"Pretty good deal to close out a career," I told myself. "A hundred grand. I wonder where he put it."

I SLIPPED the note in my pocket and looked around for a safe place for the box. Not being a hardened plutocrat, it unnerved me to have all that coin around. Maybe it had been chicken feed to Uncle Abner, but to me it represented long, long hours of toil.

"Jenks would know if there's a safe," I thought and reached for the bell. A voice behind me said: "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Cotton."

I jumped. And when I looked around I jumped again. There were two of them, a man and a girl, just inside the door. Everything about the man was on a large scale, even his ugliness and his gun. The girl was about half his size and wore one of those belted sport coats and a green scarf knotted around her neck. Her hair was between red and brown, which is about the nicest color for hair I ever saw.

"Scat!" I said. "This is a private residence, not a shooting gallery."

The man grated: "Don't be funny, Cotton. Let's see what you've got in that box."

I climbed to my feet as he followed his gun closer, with the girl tagging along like a shy kid. "Is this a stick up?" I asked her.

"No!" she whispered, looking a little pale about the lips. "No! We only want—"

"Shut up!" the man yelled. "Let's see that box, Cotton!"

"So you know who I am," I stalled. "Why don't you know what's in the box?"

"Maybe I do. What do you think we're here for?"

"I can guess," I said bitterly, pushing the box across the desk toward them. "Go on, take it."

The gun wavered as they ducked for it eagerly. My fist caught the man in the mouth and he straightened up with his lips all puckered up like a boy playing postoffice and the gun slid out of his limp hand and plopped to the carpet. The girl screamed and jumped back and I got between them and the box.

The man said something you never hear in church and came wading in, looking bigger than ever. I blocked his swing and tapped his nose before he could get set. There was a sound in the hall like a heavy person running.

The big man clinched and pinned my arms to my sides. "We gotta scam!" he rattled to the girl, hoarsely. "Grab the box! We gotta scam!"

She came sidling in, scared pink and I heaved to break away. She picked up the box. I jerked one arm free and my elbow caught her in the blinker.

"Excuse me," I panted because she looked like a girl you just didn't hit in the face like that.

She rubbed her eye with a shaking hand.

"You dummy," the man yelled at her. "Now you've cooked it! Quick!" He broke away, clipping me on the temple. I staggered and dived for his legs, getting a grip on his left ankle. He went down with a crash that made the bust of Shakespeare wobble as if the old bard had taken on a pint too much. But before I could yell, the big man drew up his right leg and exploded the point of his shoe against my head. I felt hot and weak all at once. When I sat up, Jenks was bending over me looking worried.

"Is this part of the daily routine?" I gasped.

"What happened, sir?"

"Did you see 'em?"

"Who, sir?"

"A guy who looked like a gorilla— and a girl who looked like a dream."

Jenks appeared distressed. "N-no, sir. Are you hurt? Shall I inform the police?"

I glanced at the desk and saw the tin box was safe. "Better not," I decided, thinking with a shudder of the razzing I would get at the Station if I asked for protection on my first day on the other side of the fence. "Better not. Is there a safe in the house?"

"A wall safe in the master bed room. Your bed room."

"We'll put that box where it won't be a temptation," I said, climbing up weakly. "Know the combination?"

He knew it and rattled it off and I went upstairs and found the safe behind a painting of a buxom wench, without any clothes, eating a bunch of grapes. After the box was behind the round steel door I breathed easier.

DINNER, which I ate in solitary grandeur, was perfect. After that I got out Uncle Abner's coupé and drove down to the station house. I

wanted to rub it in on Hanna for not letting me have that ten bucks, but he was out on inspection and I yelled "Hi, Slaves" in the press room door and took the boys over to Charlie's Place for a drink. For old time's sake I went back with them while they interviewed a guy who'd shot at his mother-in-law and kept saying: "It's a hell of a note, gentlemen. When are the photographers coming to get my picture. It's front page stuff, ain't it?" Then I slid back to Charlie's and sat alone at a table near the door.

I couldn't get that girl out of my mind. She was too lovely to be mixed up in a lousy stick-up.

"Oh, Charlie!" I whooped across the empty room. "A double Scotch and soda!" Gosh! With six million smackers, every unattached female—and some of the other kind, too—would be on my trail. If I couldn't keep from worrying about a little frail with an ape for a boy friend . . .

Somebody came through the swinging door and I looked up and wondered what poison Charlie had been palming off as Scotch. The girl that stood there wore a tan belted coat and a green scarf, and her eyes darted around the room in a frightened way until they came to rest on mine. The color bil- lowed up from that flash of green silk and spread to the roots of her coppery hair.

Except for the peach of a shiner, like a splash of black ink under her left eye.

I grinned but she skated across the room and flopped in the chair at my table. "Mr. Cotton" she cried pleadingly. "You've got to help me, Mr. Cotton!"

"Why?" I wondered as the waiter laid down the tall glass and looked at her. "You better order. What'll it be?"

"A—a—"

3D—6

"Martini, Joe," I finished for her. Martini's being the easiest thing I know to think of, and Joe beginning to wonder at the company I was keeping. "Now, spill it."

"I'm in trouble, Mr. Cotton."

"Really?" I said with my best brand of irony.

"They're trying to put me in jail!"

"Really?"

"Attempted burglary of your house!"

"Really?"

"That man you saw me with. He's trying to force me to—"

Mention of the big lug made me see red. I cried: "Listen, sister, if anybody's going to turn you up for that job at my shack, it's me. What's his idea anyway?"

Her eyes darted this way and that. She murmured: "I—we—I—well, he's going to turn me over to the police if I don't help him finish the job."

"Rot!" I told her fiercely. "He's in deeper than you are. He had a gun. He'd go up for years."

She began to tremble. Her eyes, gazing over my shoulder, went wide. Her high color went into reverse, making the shiner more vivid than ever. "It's a man that's been following me!" she gasped.

She was the clinging type. "Let him come!" I whispered back. "Sit tight. I'll handle this."

I watched his progress in the mirror of her face. At each step she wilted lower and her eyes grew bigger. I rested my hands on the edge of the table until he stood behind me, clearing his throat.

Then I whirled, my fingers closing on the neck of a water bottle and smashing it up into his face. It went right to the button. Charlie, back of the counter, let out a yelp and dropped a bottle. Somebody screamed and I saw

a tall man in a gray suit going down in a wild flapping of arms, upsetting a table and two chairs and nestling in the ruins.

I looked down at him when he stopped moving. It wasn't the gorilla after all. It was Hanley, a young dick just pulled out of a uniform, and he lay in the dust, knocked silly, and chanting out of his dreams: "Brownish hair, green scarf, tan coat, and oh, boy, what a looker!"

I gasped: "Great Greeley, have we played hell now! This is the real thing. And a friend of mine, too."

The girl moaned a long, wailing "O-o-o-oh!" and scurried for the door.

"Bring Hanley around," I yelled to Charlie, running after her. "Tell him I'll come back and square it, if I can."

THE girl was standing on the side walk, just across from the precinct station, trying to signal a taxi. I caught her by the arm and yelled: "Wait a minute, sister. You've got me behind the eight ball. You can't get away with this. You and me are going to march across the street and tell it to the Captain."

Her hands came up pleadingly and grasped my arm. Her eyes were big and full of desperation.

"Listen, Mr. Cotton! You've got to listen. It looks bad, I'll admit, but I can explain it, really. Cross my heart."

Bless me if she didn't make a solemn little criss-cross on the left side of her coat and then look up at me like a scared tyke. It carried me back to my kid days when I could make a sign like that and say: "Now if't tain't so I'll die!" I grinned. "Gosh, sister, you've got what it takes to make a man loopy."

A cab pulled up and we climbed in. She gave the driver an address and we sat close together in the darkness.

Every foot we put between us and Charlie's place helped her breathing. Finally, with a sigh, she rested her head on my shoulder and my arm just slid naturally around her and pulled her closer and she sighed again.

We held it until the cab stopped. She straightened up with a jerk and looked out at the low building, one of those quiet family apartment hotels. A white-coated Negro doorman stood at the curb.

"Good evenin', Miss Eve," he grinned.

Eve! She looked at me out of those big eyes. "You're swell, Mr. Cotton. I'm going to prove to you I'm okay. Will you excuse me a minute, and keep the motor running?"

I said yes, like any muddled fool. She went through the entrance and the minutes began to tick away. I smoked one cigarette and half another before the cabby clicked on his radio. It was Rudy Vallee singing "My Time is Your Time."

I squashed out the cigarette, climbed out of the cab and cornered the doorman. I showed him the tip of a folded bill.

"That girl that just went in—you know her?"

His teeth gleamed in the wide cavern of his mouth. "Yas, sah. I knows her."

I hated myself, but: "What's her name? Eve what?"

"Miss Eve, sah. 'At's all I know."

"She lives here?"

"Naw, sah. Used to visit a couple 'at lived here, but they moved away—lemme think—'bout three-four months ago, I reckon. Fust time I see her since—"

I was already stalking through the door, fury in my heart. When I got in I saw what had happened. It was one of those buildings that go through the

whole block and open on both streets. Eve had walked out the opposite entrance. She was probably miles away by now.

I walked out again and got in the cab.

"Where to, sir?" Cabby asked.

I gave him the obvious answer.

"I used to have a girl once," he said without rancor.

"I never saw her before today."

"I felt just like you do."

"Court Square Police Station," I told him, remembering belatedly that I now owned an expensive coupé and that it was parked in the police lot.

The first person I saw at the station-house was Detective Hanley. He had a strip of court plaster stuck on his jaw. I walked up to him and poked my chin out.

"Go on," I invited. "Sock me."

"Gee, Sam, I didn't know she was your girl."

"I never saw her before today," I said, but he didn't believe me either.

"Somebody tipped us off she had busted in your fancy new domicile. One of those danged smart alecks, I guess. I thought I was doing you a favor, checking on her." He rubbed his chin gingerly. "Gee!"

"Hanley," I said, "I'm sorry. I wish I could square it. If I was still on the *Star* I could plug you. But I'm just a lousy millionaire. Maybe I'll run for alderman just to get you a gold badge."

He grinned, so I knew it was okay. On my way home, I stopped at a florist's and sent his wife a basket of roses with a card: "To the wife of the swell-est guy on the Force."

AFTER I put the coupé in the garage alongside the sleek black sedan, and walked across the wet grass, I got to thinking that money doesn't

keep a man from being a sap. I'd let a girl string me along like a grammar school kid. I kicked up a square foot of Uncle Abner's expensive turf and let off steam through the safety valve of profanity.

The door was locked and I rang the bell. Jenks switched on the entrance lights and the glow of them stabbed past me and out on the lawn, revealing a figure hugging the hedges near the sidewalk. A figure in a tan coat and a green scarf.

I yelled "Hey!" and dashed down the steps. The girl gave a terrified little squeal and began to run. Before I reached the pavement, she was half a block away. I set out in a grim burst of speed, furious to think she had doubled back to my house while I cooled my heels in a cab in front of a two-entrance apartment half way across town. I was gaining fast when a little fox terrier came yelping out of a dark yard and got his teeth in my pants. I stopped to aim a kick at him and he began to wag his tail. When I looked around, Eve was gone.

"You're a big help, partner," I told the pooch. I guess he thought it was a game. Maybe he was right, and I was it.

Jenks was standing in the middle of the sidewalk in front of the house, giving a pretty good imitation of wanting to do something without doing it.

"Did this go on in Mr. Abner's day, or does everything happen to me?" I asked him.

"I can't understand it, Mr. Sam," he cried. "Somebody got in the house tonight and turned your room upside down."

"The dirty little crook," I muttered. "Did she get in the safe?"

"No, sir. Apparently not"

He followed me into the house. Under the hall light, I whirled and faced him, rapping out before he could prepare himself:

"You know anybody named Eve, Jenks?"

"Of course, sir." His quick admission almost floored me.

"Who?"

"The lady in the Bible, sir. Adam's wife, I think it was."

I leaned against the wall. "Why-y-y, Jenks!" I chided, more in sorrow than anger. He looked confused.

"Sorry, sir. It's a weakness, I suppose. If you mean a—contemporary, I'm afraid . . ."

"I was just asking," I said.

I went up to my room and it looked like the night after the big wind. Clothes flung around on the floor and bags open and even the covers torn off the bed. The picture that hung over the safe was tilted at an angle that made it seem as if the lady with the grapes was in a playful mood. I pushed her aside, twirled the dial and took out the tin box for a look.

There was a little more than three thousand dollars in cash. And the securities added up to about fifty grand, par value, but I didn't know enough to tell whether they were negotiable or not. Everything was there.

And then I got sore. "Listen Sam, old kid," I said, "you're supposed to be tough. You've seen 'em come and you've seen 'em go—big ones and little ones, lookers and hags. And you haven't seen one yet that made you think of a little cottage where the rose vines twineth until this kid with big eyes and a tremolo voice comes along. Shame on you, Sam Cotton!"

I slammed the tin box shut and put it back in the safe. I felt tired; I hadn't had so much excitement since

the day the bull broke up the annual Police barbecue. And the night was still young. I wasn't taking any more chances.

I stripped and put on my old dressing gown and slippers and went into the bath. It was one of those things termed, inelegantly, a snowbird's dream. Finished in gleaming black tile with a panel of pale green, with smirking fish and silver accessories.

When the tub was full, I stretched out in the warm water and tried a tentative bass note. The acoustics were startling. The note was hurled back at me with the pitch and tone of one of Chaliapin's best efforts.

There was a tap on the door.

"Who is it?" I yelled.

"Jenks, sir. I thought, perhaps, you—er—needed some help, sir."

"Do I sound like it?"

"Now that you mention it . . ."

"I was singing!"

I didn't like the way he said: "Of course, sir."

"And I don't need any help," I said severely. "Tomorrow you and I must have a talk, Jenks. Until then, as the radio announcers say, good night, all."

"I hope your first night in your new home will be pleasant," he said. It sounded like sarcasm to me. When I got out of the tub and found the door locked on the outside, I knew it was.

"Oh, Jenks," I murmured sorrowfully. "This bathroom's not the only thing that's fishy about this place."

If Jenks had locked me in it wouldn't do any good to yell. I sat down and tried to think. I *could* sleep in the tub. But Jenks knew the combination to the safe, and maybe those securities were negotiable after all. It wasn't that I minded losing the dough. I just hated being played for a sap twice in the same day.

THERE was a small window about six and a half feet from the floor. I balanced on the edge of the tub and looked out. It opened on a ten-inch ledge and as near as I could judge the ledge was broken by one of the windows of my room.

I put on my dressing gown but left off the floppy slippers. Bare feet were best for that straight and narrow path. I crawled out and hugged the bricks, trying not to think about the concrete drive that would make an unhappy landing. The breeze ballooned my robe and I knew how a girl feels when she walks over a radiator. The light from my window seemed a mile away.

Just before my knees went on a sit-down strike, my fingers got a grip on the open window sash and I swung into the room without making any noise on the rug.

The man at the safe wasn't Jenks. It was an oversize man, running mostly to shoulders and arms, and both his hands were busy. His right twiddled with the combination and he was leaning over with his ear to it, like a country doctor examining a farmer for asthma. When I looked at his face, my head began to ache again, because this was the man that had knocked me silly in the library about six hours previously.

His left hand held a gun and my eye traveled in the direction it was pointing.

A girl was on the receiving end and it was Eve.

She looked small and scared and shaky. Her face was pale and the shiner under her left eye seemed to glisten. She was staring at the big fellow with a sort of fascination, her arms rigid by her side and her fists clenched.

The man at the safe said: "Sugar, you shouldn't try to put over anything on your Uncle Henry." They both saw

me about the same time. The man growled and the girl screamed and the gun shifted to a new direction.

"I was hoping this would happen," he rapped and the knuckles of his gun hand grew white as he began to squeeze the trigger. I figured the room was so big it would take about two seconds to reach him and a man can get shot in half that time. But there wasn't anything else to do. I made a flat-footed jump that was pretty good for a guy out of practice, thinking I'd make a sportsman out of him and let him get me on the wing, so to speak. But I hadn't counted on Eve. She moved like a flash. She hiked up that tan coat and kicked out like a burlesque queen and the point of her toe caught Uncle Henry on the wrist. He dropped the gun and yelped: "What did you do that for?"

He was about twice my size, but at first I had the jump on him. My rush slammed him against the wall and on the bounce I got in a couple of crosses to the face. But you can't stop a man mountain like that and he walked right into my fists and fell over on me. It felt like the roof had caved in. He was that big.

I couldn't do much but concentrate on keeping his fingers from my throat. He was clawing like a blind crab. I squirmed frantically and got my head out for a gulp of air, and saw that Eve was dancing around us holding a heavy book-end in her hand. She had her lower lip between her teeth and her eyes were squinting at my head. I ducked back about the time Uncle Henry got a grip on my gullet and closed my windpipe. The room began to go around with little lights like anemic fireflies.

"Hell's bells!" I thought miserably. "I wish I was back on the police run

where these things always happen to other guys."

I didn't care any more whether I was garroted by Uncle Henry or bludgeoned by the girl. Just so they'd hurry and end the agony.

At least I could go out fighting, like a true Cotton. I jerked my fists up and jabbed weakly at the big man's chin. A miracle happened. He gave a surprised moan and air flowed into my lungs with a wheezing rush. As he went limp, I crawled out, thinking perhaps I didn't know my own strength. Then I understood. Eve was standing there holding the book-end and looking at it with those big, puzzled eyes. Uncle Henry had a lump like a golf ball on the back of his head. Obviously the book-end and the head had been in violent contact, and Uncle Henry was out like a cook on Thursday night.

"He might have k-killed you!" Eve said while I swallowed a couple of times to check on the damage to my neck. At least, it didn't leak.

"This game is all tied up, Eve," I told her. "I knock out Hanley. You knock out Uncle Henry. The score is one to one. Wait 'til I get Jenks up here and—"

"Shut up—and open that safe!"

It had me dizzy, all right, hearing that sudden change of pace from her. I snapped out of it and stared at her. She had the big fellow's big gun and it was pointed at the third button on my dressing gown.

"Whose side are you playing on, anyway?" I asked her.

"Open the safe before I s-s-shoot you!"

"Yes'm," I grunted and walked over and began twirling the dial, watching her out of the corner of my eye. She was shaking and couldn't hold the gun still. The way she held it didn't make

my nerves too steady. A scared girl and a gun like that are poor company.

I managed to get the safe open and put the tin box on the table.

"Go ahead and get what you want," I said.

She didn't waste time. Beneath her eager fingers the box came open and she began to rummage inside, scattering bills and bonds. After a while she looked up and her face was white.

"It's not here! You knew it! You knew it all the time!"

"I don't know what you're talking about" I yelled. "There's fifty-three thousand smackers in that box."

"Money!" she sniffed scornfully. "I'm not after money!"

"Well, you're the first female . . ."

Fingers went tap-tap softly on the door. Eve grew rigid and the gun settled on the third button again.

"See who it is!" she commanded with a queer tremor in her voice. "And remember, I've got this p-p-pistol pointed at you."

"You're the general," I told her and went to the door. "That you, Jenks?"

His voice sounded slightly husky through the thick panel. "Sorry to disturb you, sir. A gentleman to see you. Mr. Oliver Berge. Says it's important."

"Oliver Berge." I grinned, watching Eve and the way the shadows chased across her face. I had her in a corner, all right. Her boy friend was out cold, Jenks was just outside the door, and Berge was waiting downstairs. She couldn't do a thing. "Show him up, Jenks."

Jenks' footsteps padded down the hall. Eve said coolly. "You'd better put on some pants."

I remembered my bare shanks and blushed. My trousers were folded across the bed. I picked them up, then looked at her.

"If you're a lady you'll turn your back," I said.

"If you're a gentleman you'll go in the bathroom," she countered and motioned with her gun. The reckless way she did it decided me to be a gentleman.

I went in the bathroom, carrying my pants, but made sure I wasn't going to be locked in again by keeping one foot in the door. I dressed in two seconds flat and rushed out.

UNCLE HENRY had the room to himself, but didn't know it. He was the most knocked-out man I ever saw, and Eve was gone.

I raced to the door, jerked it open, and slammed into a fat little man coming up the hall. He said "Who-o-op" and his nose glasses fell off and dangled from a black cord around his neck. Then he said: "Ha! Ha!" in that forced way of a man who discovers he is sitting on a tack and says: "Boys will be boys."

Mr. Berge had a pleasant, ruddy face, but there were deep creases under his eyes and his jowls were flabby. He put on his glasses, using both hands, with his little fingers curled back, and his eyes fell on the form of Uncle Henry.

"Mr.—er—Mr.—er—Cotton?"

"This is me over here—the live one." I said.

"Oh yes, of course," he said and his nervous fingers twiddled with his glasses.

"You'll have to excuse Uncle Henry, Mr. Berge," I said. I didn't know just where I was and I waited for a cue.

He tore his eyes away reluctantly. "I ought to apologize for coming in like this, Mr. Cotton." He spoke in a jerky, agitated manner. "I've been trying to get you all day. I am—or rather, I was your uncle's partner."

"I know. Seems like there was something I wanted to talk to you about, but it's slipped my mind."

Berge pulled out a large handkerchief and mopped his neck around the rim of his collar.

"Mr Cotton," he plunged desperately, "can I tell you a story?"

"Go ahead," I said. If Eve hadn't run out into the hall she must be around the room somewhere. Maybe a little suspense would cool her off. "Go ahead, Mr. Berge."

"It started six years ago," he began falling into a chair and it sounded like a good, long story. I sat down and got comfortable.

"Your Uncle Abner robbed me!"

I jumped up again.

"Is that your story?"

He waved his hands like flappers. "Now don't get angry, Mr. Cotton. I know he's your uncle, but—"

"Go on with chapter two," I said grimly. "You don't pick your relatives, you know."

He perked up at that. "It started six years ago," he began again rapidly. "The firm of Cotton & Berge was in a bad way. I found out Abner had pledged some securities held in trust, for a loan to keep us above water. They were calling the loan. If they'd sold us out it would have meant—jail!"

The man was suffering. I was sorry for him, but I was glad he'd mentioned jail in that tone of voice. I wondered how Eve felt now. It would do her good to worry a little.

"Abner said he could tap some private resources and save our necks, but he wanted my note for a hundred thousand dollars, and some gold mine stock I owned—worth about half a cent on the dollar."

"Sounds like a squeeze play."

"A squeeze play?" Berge asked

vaguely. "Yes, I suppose so. The stock was in the Vandever mine."

I gulped. The Vanderver mine! Six years ago the whole country was talking of the spectacular strike at the Vanderver mine. It rocketed a little group of Wall Street operators to fortune, Uncle Abner among them.

"I found out he knew what the stock was worth all the time," Berge said dully. "I tried to get him to cancel the note at least—"

Then I remembered. "It's canceled," I told him.

"I've been through hell," he said. "I want to ask—"

"It's canceled," I repeated.

"Canceled?"

"Day he died. Conscience, I guess."

"Conscience?"

"Can't you say anything original at a time like this?" I asked him, reaching for my coat.

"Original? Time?" he parroted in a daze. He took the note from my hands and stared at it through those ridiculous glasses perched on the end of his nose. "Why, it's canceled!" he said with the air of tremendous discovery.

"I've just said that."

He looked at me, suddenly taller, suddenly younger. "I came to explain, hoping you'd give me a little time," he said, and then he wasn't looking at me any more. His mouth was hanging open and his glasses tumbled off again. I jerked around to see what it was.

Eve came out of the linen closet, trailing that big gun.

She said to the old man: "Introduce us, will you, Dad?"

I sat very still. Berge goggled. "What in the name—"

"Introduce me to Mr. Cotton," she said.

He gasped, but he was game. "Mr. Cotton, my daughter, Eve," he whis-

pered like a man sliding under the ether.

Eve looked me straight in the eye. "Mr. Cotton," she said, "you've been a gentleman."

FOR the first time in my life, I couldn't think of anything to say. Then I didn't have to. The big fat man on the floor groaned and sat up and said: "Where am I?"

I jumped over and pushed him down with my foot. "You ought to be in a nice, barred cell," I told him. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Henry Thwaitt, private investigator," he sang out with as much dignity as a fat man can have lying on the floor with a foot on his neck. "That gal hired me to help lift a paper off'n you."

Eve looked at her father. "You didn't owe that money, Dad," she said hotly. "You were worrying yourself to death."

"But you didn't have to steal it," he protested.

I couldn't resist saying: "It was canceled. That's like stealing eggshells to make an omelet."

Berge said: "Eve, you shouldn't . . ." in his muddled way, and I thought how easy he had been for a tough proposition like Abner.

"I'm not sorry," Eve said defiantly, looking at me, and then her manner changed. "But this man found out there was cash in the safe and he was going to make me steal—"

"I get it," I cut in. "Thwaitt, I ought to call in the police. But I'm not." I wasn't telling him my reason—because I hated to involve Eve. But Eve caught in. "I'll speak to the Chief and your license will be revoked. If you've got a license."

"Sure," he bragged. "I got a license."

"You *had* a license," I corrected him.

"My advice to you now, Thwaitt, is to blow."

"Blow?"

"Blow, scram, vamoose. In simple language you can understand, put distance between us and you."

"Yes, sir," the big man said.

I was looking at Eve. "What I can't figure," I said, "is how you got in here so easy."

"Jenks," she confessed. "We're old buddies since the days Dad came here a lot. But Mr. Cotton, he didn't know anything. Don't blame him!"

I went over and touched the bell at the head of the bed. The door opened so quickly Jenks must have been waiting in the hall. He came in with a solemn, straight face.

"I've been thinking about the question you asked me earlier in the evening," he said. "I just recollected. I do happen to know somebody named Eve."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed, acting surprised. "How long since you've seen her?"

"As a matter of fact, sir, she's here now. This young lady is the one I'm speaking of. Quite a coincidence, isn't it sir?"

"Quite."

"And now, if you'll excuse me, sir."

"Where are you going?"

"To peruse the help wanted columns

of the *Star*. Perhaps I can find an item headed: 'Butler wanted.'"

I had to laugh. "Postpone it, Jenks. I know how it is. She's got me that way, too."

He had the gall to grin. "A little job for you, Jenks," I told him. "Remove this—er—ex-private investigator."

Jenks seemed to relish the job. He grabbed Thwaitt by the collar and the seat of his pants. Big as the man was, he dangled on the tip of his toes like a fat baby in a walker.

"Come scum!" Jenks said with lofty disdain. Thwaitt was assisted from the room, his plump, intimidated legs twinkling lightly across the rug.

"We'd better go, too," Berge sighed contentedly. "Mr. Cotton, you surely took a load off my mind. Ready, Eve?"

She said: "Run along, Dad. I've something to say to Mr. Cotton."

He went out and closed the door. She started toward me with a *look* in her eye, still holding Thwaitt's gun.

"You weren't really s-s-scared?" I asked, trying to kid her a little. She kept on coming and the *look* was still there. I gulped.

"Are you going to kiss me or kill me?"

She didn't answer. But she showed me, and I figure I'm still a good risk for Social Security.



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"Come on out, Boots,
with your hands up."

The Way of a Cop

A Complete Novelette

By Frederick C. Painton

*Author of "Some Die Hard,"
"East Side Cop," etc.*

Remember Denny Bourke, the East Side cop?—Here he is again with the proverbial luck of the Irish to save him from his impetuous good nature

THROUGH the dusk of a soft summer day, a lean, tall young man strode swiftly across New York's teeming East Side. He walked with the grim determination of a fixed purpose. His gray eyes, usually good-humored, had a hard, steel quality. Yet he did not vent this gloom on those who greeted his rapid passage.

Workmen sliding home from the

corner saloon with a dime's worth of cold beer, stepped quickly out of his way, calling, "Good evening to you, Officer Bourke."

Denny Bourke waved his hand, gave them a cheery, "Hi-yuh." Women, leaning out of the interminable windows of the brownstone fronts for the cool of the evening, smiled on his young good looks and called, "It's cooler tonight, Officer Bourke."

Bourke greeted them by name without breaking his stride.

They were all friends or acquaintances. An East Side cop is father confessor, adviser and friend to those who live in the teeming tenements near the roaring Elevated. Denny Bourke was an East Side cop.

The kids who played along the curb yelled, "Hi-yuh, Officer Bourke."

Among themselves they whispered, "He's gonna make a pinch. He's putting the finger on Boots Williams."

"Boots Williams," said one. "You're crazy. Bourke and Williams went to school together."

The one boy repeated the rumors which had sped silently as the wind across the East Side. Gossip spread fast here.

Where the street came to a crimson dead-end marker at the concrete pil-ing of the river's edge, an age-blackened old house reared its tired four stories. Bourke swerved to turn into the entrance. Just then a short, power-fully built young man came trotting down the steps. He had red hair, bright blue eyes and a good-natured expres-sion. His blue suit was old and shiny. His shoes were cracked and half-held together by patched and thin shoe laces.

Denny Bourke stopped, his mouth grim.

"Just a minute, Boots," he said.

Boots Williams' bright blue eyes lit with genuine pleasure.

"Denny Bourke!" he exclaimed. "Gee, fellah, I'm glad to see you." He held out his hand.

Without hesitation Denny took Boots' hand and gripped it hard. For a space they stared into each other's eyes.

"I'm no cop at the minute, Boots," Denny said. "I haven't even got my badge with me and I'm in civvies. Maybe you can guess why."

Boots' expression was blank.

"Why, no," he said. "I'm a bad guesser. What's up?"

Bourke said quietly, "Boots, you pulled me out of the river when I was damned near dead. I was grateful then, and I'm grateful now."

"You don't owe me anything for that."

"I do," said Bourke. "That's why I'm here. McLain is looking for you. The detective bureau says that you held up Barton Dean and robbed him of a thousand dollars. The charge will be highway robbery with assault—you socked him, according to what I heard—and that means a rap of five to ten in Sing Sing."

"Sure," said Boots. "So what?"

Denny looked at the broad, short youngster and sighed. It seemed that East Side kids, if they didn't get on the cops, went crooked. It was a dirty shame, he told himself, that Boots had to be rejected from the cops because he was a quarter of an inch under size. A quarter of an inch that turned a potentially good cop into a dangerous crook.

Denny squared his shoulders.

"I don't know officially yet that you're wanted," he said. "But I will when I go on duty. By then your description will be on the radio and the four-state teletype. I'm telling you now, Boots, to scam out of town and do it quick."

He paused, fished in his pocket. "In case you're broke, I've got fifty dollars that should help you on your way."

Boots made no move to take the money, but a gentle, almost hungry expression twisted his face.

"Okay, Denny," he said softly. "You've done a swell thing, and I appreciate it. But I don't need the money. So hop along before somebody sees you talking to me and Detective McLain gets sore and turns you in."

"You mean you're not going to go away?" Denny demanded.

For a second Boots hesitated.

"What I'm going to do is my business, Denny," he replied.

Denny swore at Boots angrily. "What the hell's got into you, Boots? Are you going mobster because the cops turned you down?"

"I'm not asking you for advice."

Denny went on, "You got brains. Why can't you do something else besides hang out in poolrooms and play around with cheap heels in the rackets? What did you want to stick up an influential politician like Dean for? Why can't you—"

"Never mind the preaching," Boots cut in roughly. "You've done your good deed. Scram and keep your date with Noreen."

Bourke's teeth clicked as his jaw set.

"Okay, if that's the way you want it," he said slowly. "But from now on you're on your own. If I see you I'll make the pinch. That's my job and you know it."

"Sure I know it," nodded Boots. He grinned. "My best to Noreen. So long."

He suddenly spun on his worn shoes and walked swiftly west toward Second Avenue. Denny made no move to follow. He stood there, sick inside. What had happened to change Boots so suddenly?

"Hell!" he muttered between his teeth, and went uptown to see Noreen.

MEANWHILE, Boots Williams walked swiftly to Twenty-third Street. Suspense and excitement put ice cubes in his stomach and made the palms of his hands sweat. But he did not falter and when he saw the light in Tony Kozack's office his excitement only grew. Tony's office was on the second floor of an old walk-up building. The hallway was in darkness. Nobody saw Boots go up.

The interior light lit the frosted

office window, making plain the lettered legend there: *Anthony Kozack, Contracting Supplies*. Boots smiled grimly. That was a laugh. He rapped and a harsh voice said, "Come on in."

Boots opened the door.

"Har yuh, Tony?" he said softly.

Tony Kozack was a fat man whose many chins overflowed his thin white collar like the ripples of a waterfall. His small eyes, small nose and small pursy mouth were almost lost in the vast expanse of pale, doughy flesh. His dark feathers of eyebrows knitted in an arrogant scowl.

"What the hell do you want?" he growled. "And who are you?"

His small hands moved stealthily below the edge of the desk. Boots took out his snub-nosed automatic and in the silence of the room the click of the trigger cocking was very audible.

"Don't pull the rod, Tony," he said quietly. "I think I'm going to kill you anyway, so don't press me."

Tony turned pale, and hastily brought his hands up to put them flatly on the desk top.

"Hey, what's the big idea? I don't—"

"Give me two hundred dollars, Tony," said Boots softly. "You know the two hundred I mean. The money you got this afternoon from Marina Railen."

The dark purple gushed up Tony's neck and flooded the moon-like face of him. His pursy mouth opened so that tiny rat-like teeth gleamed.

"Hell!" he cried. "I know who you are. You're Boots Williams. You're the guy that stuck up Barton Dean!"

"Two hundred dollars, Tony, and I want the same bills," Boots said.

Tony went into action with incredible swiftness for one so big and fat. As he leaned back in his chair, a gun

came from somewhere into his hand, and he looked down the muzzle of it at Boots' pale face.

II

NOREEN McLAIN crossed her slender knees and said: "What is the importance of establishing accurately the time of death in a suspected homicide?" She was quoting from a book, *Scientific Criminal Investigation*, that lay open in her lap.

"What is the time of day when you're not beautiful?" Denny countered.

"Blarney again," she told him, trying to frown severely. "But your compliments don't stop a bawling out, young man. How are you going to be a detective if you don't know the answers in the book?"

"I'd rather be a husband than a dick, darling."

"I'll not marry a harness bull and you know it," she said, jumping up. "Oh, Denny, why didn't you study the lessons?"

He put his arm around her and kissed her hair.

"I know I'm dumb," he said contritely. "But I can't concentrate. I've been thinking about Boots, darling. He's in trouble."

She let the book fall to the floor. "You liked him lots, didn't you, fellah?"

"He was always swell."

"You've got a heart as big as a barn door. But if Boots chooses to go crooked, what can you do?"

At that juncture the front door to Detective Mike McLain's flat opened and Mike himself came in. He stopped short at the sight of Denny and grunted. He had made no bones of the fact that he didn't like Denny Bourke calling on Noreen. But since she had

her own ideas about it, he had been forced to stand aside.

However, he was frowning now.

"I went up to River Street just now to pinch Boots Williams," he said. "Boots wasn't there. He'd lammed."

"Is that so?" Denny asked.

Mike snorted. "You know damned well it's so. Fifty people saw you come to his place and talk with him. You warned him the blast was out."

Denny knew that Mike, as a detective first grade, had plenty of power at Centre Street. Could make or break a young cop struggling for promotion.

"Yes," he admitted, "I did. Boots saved my life once."

"That makes no difference," the older man said angrily. "When they pinned the shield of the City of New York on you, you swore to uphold the law and preserve peace and order. Do you think you're doing that when you warn a man that he is wanted for a stick-up?"

Denny made no reply.

Mike said, "I thought so. Nothing to say, eh? Well, I'm reporting this to Headquarters. You will go on the carpet and that's what you deserve." He glanced at his watch. "You're due to take over your beat in a half hour. Beat it. A man wants some peace in his own home."

Denny silently got his hat. Ignoring her father's frown, Noreen followed him to the door. She raised her face and Denny kissed her.

"I'll try to talk him out of it," she whispered. "But don't do anything like that again, Denny darling. Boots or nobody else is worth risking your career."

Denny took the *Scientific Criminal Investigation* book from her and forced a smile.

"I'll try to know all the answers on

homicide tomorrow night." He kissed her again and went out.

NOREEN returned to the sitting room where Mike had sat down, adjusted his spectacles and was reading the headlines of the *Evening Star*.

"Dad," she said after a while.

He put down his paper and his face grew gentle. She was so lovely with her dark hair, her Irish grace; she was as pretty as a poem, he thought, and she reminded him of Maggie, now, Lord save her soul, two years in the grave.

"What is it, darlin'?"

"You won't report Denny. Mike McLain wouldn't do a thing like that to a fine young man—and to his own daughter."

Mike sighed; since Noreen had suddenly become a young woman, Mike had had it in his mind that she should marry his partner, First Grade Detective Dan Slade. But looking at her now he saw that the flush on her cheeks was for the youngster and no other. If that was what she wanted . . .

He frowned and said, "He's a reckless young fool, Noreen. He smokes on beat, and he unbuttons his tunic when it's hot—he's all the time violating some of the police regulations. Besides, he's too damned handy with his gun. He shoots a lot of crooks that we could rubber-hose into confessing other crimes."

"But he's a good cop," she said gently. "And he's studying hard. He'll be a detective some day and a good one. Don't be ruining his chances with a black mark now."

She sat down on the arm of his chair and rubbed her cheek against his. "I love him so, Dad."

"Ah, it's a girl you are who gets her way. He deserves to be reported—

there's no excuse for being a traitor to the shield. But if you want him, then I—"

He intended to say that he would keep quiet, but the telephone rang just then so he broke off. Noreen answered and told him it was Headquarters calling through the precinct. She saw the amiable expression on his face as he went to answer, and her own heart beat faster in glee. Old Mike had a heart.

She was not listening at first to the conversation, but suddenly she became alert, tense.

Her father was saying, "Dead, is he? Shot? Well, Tony Kozack always was a rat so they—what's that you say? Boots Williams killed him. . . . Are you sure?" The grimness in her father's tone deepened. "Okay. Call Dan and tell him I'll meet him in ten minutes at Kozack's office."

The receiver banged up. He turned and faced his pale daughter. His face was stern.

"You heard," he said grimly.

"Boots Williams murdered Tony Kozack?" she spoke falteringly.

"Aye," nodded Mike. "And by the devil himself, it's the fault of Denny Bourke and no other. If he hadn't tipped that young crook, I'd have had Williams safe under lock and key. As it is, Bourke did us both a bad turn. Williams will now face murder and the chair, and I've got to rack my brain to find the rat."

Noreen for once found no answer.

Mike got his hat, slipped into his service holster, and then his coat.

"I'll be turning him in, Noreen," he said flatly. "It's him or me now—because downtown they'll want to know why I hadn't pinched young Williams before he ran wild with a gun."

He kissed her cold cheek and strode out into the night.

NOREEN stood motionless but her mind raced. A cop's daughter, and Irish besides, she foresaw the possibilities of this mess. Denny would be suspended, tried on charges, with a good chance of losing his shield for good. And it would break his heart. She had to find Denny and tell him.

She grabbed her light summer hat that Denny loved, clapped it on her curls and ran down to the street. She found a taxicab and hurried to Madison Square. During the ride her jaw set and her eyes blazed.

"Denny will do it," she muttered. "I'll make him."

The cop on the beat who responded to her hail was not Denny.

"A killing in Twenty-third Street, Miss Noreen," said Puccini, the reserve cop. "He's up there, I expect, keepin' back the crowd."

She hastened to the office building. Denny was not downstairs and she thrust by the policemen on guard and hurried up to Kozack's office. She had no right there, but the cop on the door did not stop her. She saw Denny and the expression on his face crushed her heart.

He had been thrust into the background while the photographers, the fingerprint men, and the assistant medical examiner went through the routine. Mike, her father, and Dan Slade, were examining papers in the desk.

"Denny," she whispered.

He turned a tired, troubled face; and it did not light up at sight of her as it usually did. "Boots shot him," he whispered to her. "They found his gun—his initials on it—damned silly fool he was to leave it."

She ignored this. "Dad's going to report the fact that you warned Boots."

Denny nodded gloomily. "He's already done it. Schultz just told me to

go in and take off my uniform. I'm suspended on charges."

III

THE scene of a murder, even with the corpse occupying the spotlight, is a dull, dreary place. Tony Kozack was certainly no rose. The slug had drilled him through the left chest and he had fallen forward with a five-dollar bill gripped in his right hand, and his chin resting on the desk, so that, his eyes looked ahead with a glassy, tired stare.

The police machinery moved around him on its routine course. The police believed they knew who had killed him, Boots Williams, but a district attorney does not try a case on belief. So the photographers took pictures of the corpse from every angle, these to be produced later at the trial; the medical examiner took the body's temperature and decided the killing had occurred at eight o'clock. A post-mortem would verify this. The ballistics specialist examined the gun and the hole—the slug had been fired at close range and had gone through Kozack.

At the moment, the ballistics specialist was crawling around the room, peering and grumbling, "Now where the hell did that slug go?"

The fingerprint men dusted every available inch of the room, looking for stray prints. The Assistant District Attorney came by to get a first-hand look against the time all this evidence would be placed in his hands and he had to brief the case for the D.A. to argue in court.

Mike McLain and Dan Slade looked around, accumulating a notebook full of things so that when they took the witness stand no defense cross-examination could shake them.

Routine stuff, but Boots Williams

would walk the last mile when they got done.

In all this there was no place for Denny Bourke. He was ignored except that big, ponderous Dan Slade grinned sarcastically and said, "How's Philo Vance today? Got this murder all solved?"

Denny didn't reply; he was trying to remember all the details he saw here.

Once he asked Mike what the five-dollar bill in Tony's hand meant. "Maybe he was going to tip somebody," Mike growled. "Listen, you're done here. Take Noreen home and get out of the way."

"But the five-dollar bill must mean something," Denny protested.

Mike didn't even bother to reply. He stood staring, and the cop at the door finally said, not unkindly, "Take the lady and scram, Denny."

Outside Denny said, "They've got everything to convict Boots except a motive. Now, why would Boots want to kill a heel like Kozack?"

"Leave that job to Dad and Slade," Noreen said. "You've got other work to do."

"What do you mean?"

She stopped and faced him.

"Denny, do you want to go on being a cop?"

He stared. "Why, being a cop is my life."

"Then if you want to go on being a cop, go find Boots Williams. If they find him first, you'll lose your shield. I mean it, Denny."

He looked at her and saw she did. And he knew she was right. If he produced the killer, much could be forgiven.

"You know more about him than any one else," she said. "You know where he could be found."

Denny nodded gloomily.

"Yes, I've got a hunch where he is right now."

Noreen exclaimed aloud and, pulling Denny to the curb, flagged down a taxicab. She thrust Denny in and entered after him.

"Tell him where to go."

Denny looked out at the blazing lights of Madison Square. His stare was hard and fixed. A little muscle in his jaw throbbed. Noreen waited, not daring to speak, knowing the misery in his heart.

Finally Denny squared his shoulders and flung back his head.

"Four-forty-four MacDougall Alley," he said quietly to the driver. "It's in the Village."

Noreen took his hand and pressed it fiercely.

"Oh, Denny!" she said, "Oh, Denny!"

They rode a while in silence, hands clasped.

After some minutes Noreen said, "Who is it?"

"Marina Railen," Denny told her. "That tall, swell-looking Russian girl we saw him with last spring."

"Oh!" said Noreen. "She's lovely. What could he have been thinking of?"

"Hush," said Denny. "Don't make it any tougher than it is."

"But I don't understand," Noreen said. "She has a grand job modeling at Bak's Fifth Avenue. And she loves him. She told me so. And he's crazy about her."

"He must have had a big reason to kill Kozack," Denny said.

THEY rode to Washington Square where Denny took out his gun and spun the cylinder. Noreen saw his face become gray. In MacDougall Alley, Denny said, "You stay here. If Boots is in he may make trouble. If he's not

in and Marina is, what I'll have to do is not going to be pleasant."

He left her there and walked up two flights of stairs. He remembered those stairs. He had kissed Noreen there the night he and Noreen and Boots and Marina had come from a swell picnic at Far Rockaway. So long ago it was now.

He rapped at the door.

There was a long pause. He knocked again. Finally a low, husky voice, pleasant on the ear, said, "Who is there, please?" It had a slight accent.

"Denny Bourke, let me in."

He heard her gasp of horror.

"No, no," she cried. "I am not dressed. I am alone. You cannot come in."

Denny thought drearily, "She knows. So Boots is in there."

Aloud he said, "Marina, I'll have to break down the door. So open up."

He heard the crash of her body as she braced it against the door.

"I'll shoot," she cried.

Denny drew back and hurled his strong young body against the paneling. The door did not yield. As he drew back again he heard her say, "Wait, Denny, please. I'll open up."

Denny growled, "Hurry!"

He wondered if Boots could get out a window.

The lock turned and as the knob twisted in his hand, he thrust forward, almost knocking Marina down.

He faced the tall, lovely blonde. She was pale as ashes and could not seem to still the panting of her breast. She wore a negligee that revealed slim, silken legs to the knees. The negligee was wet and so were her hands. Her eyes blazed.

"Why do you come here?" she asked.

Denny let his eyes swivel past her

wet hands, the spots on her negligee, and so toward the bathroom. He could see the washbowl. It was wet—and pink in spots. Denny tightened the grip on his gun. He raised his voice, "Come on out, Boots, with your hands up."

There was no sound from the bedroom. A tense, almost hysterical silence grew unbearable.

"He didn't do it," Marina gasped. "Boots didn't do it. And if he did—it was for me."

Boots came out of the bedroom.

"Hush Marina," he said gently. "It's okay, Denny, you don't have to point the rod at me."

Boots' hair was wet and a raw cut, still bleeding slightly, ran across his hair just above the right ear. He was pale and his expression was almost sad.

"Leave Marina out of this, Denny," he said. "She was just helping me fix up this scratch. She doesn't figure in this at all."

"No, no," Marina gasped. "Oh, Boots, you must not do this for me. You—"

"Hush," he cut in. "Don't spill a lot of stuff that won't help."

He turned to Denny and there was the old broad grin of his youth, the grin he had worn when he got up after Big Sam Stone had knocked him flat with a terrific hook.

"It's murder, Denny?" he asked

"You know," Denny told him.

"I'm glad Tony's dead," Boots said. "He was a cheap heel. A racketeer all his life. First the poultry racket, then he shook down the bakers and the markets. Later he was—" he broke off and patted Marina on the cheek.

"Denny," he said.

"Yeah."

"Would you let me go for twenty-four hours if I promised you I'd give myself up—to you?"

Slowly Denny shook his head.

"You know better than to ask that." Then his restraint broke. "Oh, you fool! Why did you do it?"

"I'm not so sure I did," said Boots. "Anyway, that doesn't figure. You can't let me have twenty-four hours of freedom?"

"No!"

Boots sighed. He raised his hands. "Then start shooting, Denny, because I'm going to take your gun and go out of here."

Slowly his short, stocky body moved toward Denny.

"Stop, you idiot!" Denny pulled back the trigger.

Boots kept on coming.

There was a hiss of silk against flesh. Marina cried, "You can't!"

She grabbed for the gun. As she did Boots sprang. The gun exploded with a roar. But the slug hit nothing because Marina's dressing gown sleeve caught in the sight and jerked the barrel down. She grabbed Denny around the neck and hung on desperately. Before Denny could get free, Boots raised a chair. Denny tried to dodge but he couldn't. The blow knocked him flat. His eyeballs jiggled. He tried to get up and then a chair leg smashed against his skull. He sighed and fell back senseless.

IV

BOOTs stared down at the prone body. "It was him or me, and I've got to do what I have to do," he muttered.

"You must hurry," whispered Marina.

Gently, Boots carried Denny's senseless form to the bed and stretched him there.

"Get me the other rod, darling," he said. "We'll be needing it."

She got him an automatic and a small .32 with a pearl handle which she clutched determinedly.

"Let me fix your poor head," she said and got adhesive tape from the bathroom.

Boots submitted to the bandage. His eyes were cool and alert now.

She finished and suddenly, passionately kissed him.

"Let's run away," she whispered. "I know places where they'd never find you."

"And have this hanging over us for the rest of our lives?" Boots shook his head. "Come on, we'll see Potuska and settle this thing tonight for good and all."

She followed him out and as they got into a cab she cried, "Oh, Boots, why is there so much injustice?"

"Hush, darling," he said. "Talking's no good now."

The cab rolled crosstown and delved into the crowded, noisy East Side at Eighteenth Street. Here at Boots' order it stopped before a gray, dingy tenement. They climbed the damp staircase, filled with the strange smells of foreign cooking, and Boots rapped at the end door. A woman opened it and stared at him with dull eyes, red-rimmed from weeping.

"Jan ain't here," she said in a flat, lifeless voice. "They kidnaped him."

Her gray hair streamed stringily down and she brushed it back with a limp, hopeless gesture.

"They got him now—maybe they—they kill him."

Marina caught Mrs. Potuska as she tottered.

"Stephen will help you," she whispered in Russian, using Boots' real name. "In the name of the good God, have hope."

Boots' mouth had twisted into a

snarl. He saw the two children, the oldest scarcely eight, cowering in the corner, pale from weeping. For a moment his fury made him tremble.

"What happened to Jan, Mrs. Potuska?" he asked at length.

"He could not pay—two hundred dollars. Where would Jan and I get two hundred dollars? Him earning twenty dollars a week and us with four mouths to feed?"

"Why that much?"

"They suspect he work with you or go to police. They say it is a fine. He did not come home from work. Then a man came, him called Cracker Rhodes. And he say unless I got two hundred I'd never see Jan again."

Boots' face did not reveal the depth of this blow. He had depended so much on Jan's knowledge and courage. He paced the room nervously. Finally he stopped and took from his pocket the two hundred dollars he had taken from the dead Tony Kozack. He fingered the bills for a moment.

"Here is two hundred dollars, Mrs. Potuska. You get in touch with Rhodes or some of them right away. Tell them to come instantly; you have the money. Tell them to come here."

It was pitiful to see hope flood into her eyes. She seized the money, searched in her clothes for a nickel and ran, mumbling to herself, out the door.

Marina looked at Boots. "Why?" she asked.

"We hide in here," he pointed to the bedroom. "And trail whoever comes."

He fished around over the kitchen stove and found a bit of pencil and two slips of paper. He could write in there in the dark.

"They'll come," he said bitterly. "They'd do anything for two hundred bucks."

AT THAT same moment, in Marina's apartment, Denny Bourke was looking down at his gun, aware of a terrible headache and a painful memory of Boots breaking a chair on his skull. He put the gun in his pocket and as he did so his jaw clicked.

"That's the last time I play the fool," he muttered. "Boots made his play and the next turn is mine."

He searched the room but found nothing to indicate where the two had gone. Finding them now, he knew, would be a tough job. He went downstairs, wondering what Noreen would say.

Noreen was not there; there was no car on the entire street. Where had she gone? Why hadn't she waited?

He walked to the corner and then, on the off-chance that she might have gone to his rooming house, he took a cab home. Mrs. Petruelli shook her head.

"No, Mr. Bourke, no one has been here for you."

The landlady looked at him as if wondering what kind of a place he thought she ran. A girl coming here in the middle of the night! Indeed not! While Denny bathed his head, the doorbell rang. He hurriedly wiped his face, thinking it must be Noreen.

But when he went down in answer to Mrs. Petruelli's summons, a man was there.

"Good evening, Officer Bourke," he said. "I am Barton Dean."

He was a tall man, distinguished in his full evening dress. Diamonds were in the studs of his shirt front, and another gleamed on the hand that held his white gloves. He looked, Denny thought, almost like class. But not quite. The eyes were tricky. Denny acknowledged the greeting.

He knew Barton Dean through the newspapers and the political gossip that traveled through New York. Dean was what is called a "big pol." He had influence from the Mayor's office down; he had his fingers in every money pie that was being cut. He was reputed to be many times a millionaire, and in many shady deals. Denny wondered what he wanted here.

Dean brushed at his iron-gray hair. Behind his pince-nez glasses, his eyes blinked nervously, a continuous batting of the lashes. As he talked, his tiny waxed mustache moved up and down, for he talked mostly with exaggerated movements of the lips.

"I understand that you know Boots Williams quite well," he said.

"I know him," said Denny.

"I know also he is wanted for murder," said Dean.

Denny told himself that only a politician with plenty of pull could find out about a murder not yet in the newspapers.

"Mike McLain says it was you who warned Williams he was wanted for assaulting and robbing me."

"That's right."

"And so you're indirectly responsible for the murder of Tony Kozack."

Denny said nothing.

Dean batted his eyelashes nervously.

"I can have you broken out of the department, Bourke," he said. "Or I can have those charges dismissed without even a demerit."

"What's the proposition?" Denny asked.

"I want Boots Williams captured," Dean said. "Captured"—he paused—"dead or alive. He struck me. He robbed me. He nearly killed me. I'm a vindictive man, Bourke, and no man can strike me and get away with it."

He paused. Then: "You can find

Williams where the rest of those clowns might fail. Find him and I'll get you promoted to detective, third grade. If you capture Boots Williams in twenty-four hours, I'll pay you a personal reward of two thousand dollars."

"Why?" Denny asked.

"I've told you my reason. Get him and I'll keep my word. Fail and I'll bust you into civvies."

Denny didn't like the man or his reasons or his manners. But his face remained expressionless.

"It's my job to find Williams if I can," he said.

Dean put on his top hat. He went to the door and opened it.

"That's all then," he said, and went down to his car. "Snap it up, Jake," he ordered the chauffeur and, as the car started, Dean began throwing off his clothes. He had a complete change in the car. He smiled as he dressed again. Dean rather enjoyed the thrill of a tight spot and he was in one now.

Inside the house, Bourke stared at the door through which the nervous man had passed.

"Something smells," he muttered. "And real bad."

V

IN THE dark bedroom, Boots Williams crouched close to Marina, listening. Two men had come. Through the partly opened door he could see a snappy gray double-breasted coat, the top of a snap brim hat, and one very highly polished tan shoe.

Mrs. Potuska was saying, "You've got to bring him back to me. Look at the children. Look at this place. If he don't work, then we starve."

"Never mind the sob stuff," Boots recognized Cracker Rhodes voice. "Where's the two hundred smacks?"

"I have it, but how do I know you will give him back to me?"

"Gimme the dough. You'll get him back."

There were rustling sounds. Then Mrs. Potuska said hoarsely, "You won't ask for no more money, will you? We been slaves—for five years—ever since you smuggled Jan into the country. Sometimes I wish he had stayed in Poland—and us, too."

"Aw, cut the beef," Rhodes growled. "We got him in, didn't we? We got him a job at more dough than he could make in the old country. We got a right to cut in on his pay for what it cost us, ain't we?"

"Slaves, that's what we are," Mrs. Potuska said. "For five years you take ten—fifteen dollars a week. And to pay it, Jan and I don't get enough to eat. The children are cold in winter because we can't buy warm clothing. We hardly keep warm here—all to pay—pay. Slaves!"

"Aw, shut your face," said Rhodes. "If you don't like it we'll report you to the immigration culls and they'll send you back to the old country."

"No, no," cried Mrs. Potuska, "you wouldn't do that. Not now. Not after we paid."

"Keep quiet then," snapped Rhodes.

He moved over toward the door to the bedroom with his companion. Boots put his ear to the door.

"We better go to nine-eighty Clark," he whispered, "and move that guy out. She's liable to go to the cops if he don't show."

"We're due at Mosholu at midnight," said his companion.

"Yeah, but this woman is screwy."

Their steps retreated toward the outside door.

"How soon will Jan come?" Mrs. Potuska asked.

"An hour—two hours, maybe—don't get excited, he'll come home."

Boots heard the door slam.

"Stay with Mrs. Potuska," he whispered to Marina. "I'll tail them and get Jan. Here's the address, 980 Clark. Give it to Denny if I'm not back by morning."

She gasped but forced herself to nod.

Boots reached the street in time to see a dark car pull over from across the street and pick up the two men. Fortunately for Boots, a cab was parked at the corner. He leaped in and said, "Follow that car and five smackers if you're smart about it."

"I always got prizes in school," chuckled the driver and threw the gear shift over.

Boots leaned back, watching the twin tail-lights ahead and thinking hard. As soon as he found Jan, he'd call Denny Bourke. Jan's testimony would prove the existence of this alien smuggling racket and Rhodes and his companion could be forced to name the man higher up.

As for himself—he shrugged; that would have to wait.

The car went up Clark Avenue and stopped in front of an old building.

Boots paid the driver and walked swiftly to the door through which the two men had disappeared. As he started to enter, he felt a hard thump in his back.

A voice said, "Raise 'em, guy."

Boots felt the gun muzzle against his backbone. He put up his hands.

"Okay," said the voice. "You was going in. So keep walking. We'll find out why you was following Rhodes."

Boots cursed himself for a fool then. It had never occurred to him that Rhodes' car might be followed by another just to check against a tail. But it had been so, and now he was caught

and he knew enough about these men to realize that he might not come out of the building alive. Yet pressed by the gun snout he walked in.

DENNY BOURKE was walking up and down in front of Noreen's house. He had called four times and got no answer. For the moment everything was forgotten except what had happened to Noreen. He was thinking of calling Centre Street when a cab drew up and she leaped breathlessly out.

At sight of him, she cried, "Denny! I've been looking everywhere for you. Why didn't you stay home?"

"I came looking for you," Denny took her in his arms. "What happened?"

"Oh, my dear, I thought I did wrong going off and leaving you. I thought maybe Boots—Boots had—had hurt you."

After a while, Denny repeated, "What happened?"

Swiftly she told him how she had been waiting in the taxicab downstairs, and how she had seen Boots come out with Marina and get into a cab.

"I decided he had sneaked out while you were looking for him. And instead of waiting, I followed them."

She told about the trip crosstown and how she had seen Boots and Marina go into a tenement house. How she had waited for a time and they did not come out, but that an old woman, crying, had come out and gone to the corner drugstore and entered a telephone booth. "I'd know her again," Noreen said.

She continued by saying that two hatchet-faced men had arrived in a car which waited with running motor. They came out after a while and then Boots emerged and followed in a cab.

"I tried to follow but lost them all in a traffic jam," she concluded ruefully. "I guess I'm a darned poor dick."

"You're swell," Denny said softly. "But there's something phoney here, darling. Boots isn't trying to run away. He is either trying to prove he's innocent or he's trying to do something else." On a sudden he said, "Noreen, I believe Boots is innocent." He told her about Dean's threats. "I've got to find a motive for all this."

Noreen said, "You've got to find and arrest Boots Williams."

The taxicab was still waiting. Denny put Noreen in it. "Take me to that tenement house," he said.

At his rap the door to the apartment opened and Marina stared, gasped and instinctively started to close the door. Denny pushed inside.

Mrs. Potuska had put the children to bed and sat beside a weak yellow light, rocking back and forth with the eternal patience of the foreign. She stared at Denny and Noreen with flat eyes.

"It's time to start talking, Marina," Denny said gently.

She stood quite still, looking at him but not seeing him. As if she were listening to many voices in her brain. She was silent for a while. And then, as if she had reached a decision she said, "Yes, I will tell you what I know. Boots is in danger and only you can help him."

She handed him a slip of dirty paper with the numerals 980 Clark on it.

"Boots followed a man named Cracker Rhodes and his companion to that address."

Denny took the paper. "Cracker Rhodes!" he repeated. "He used to be a dope-smuggler and—"

"And now," said Marina quietly, "he smuggles aliens from Canada or the

Bahamas. I know. He smuggled me in. I'm a Russian and will be deported if the immigration authorities know of me. That's why Boots got into all this mess."

Denny's eyes gleamed. "And Tony Kozack was in the alien smuggling racket and that's why Boots killed him."

She winced at the word "kill" but when she replied her voice was steady.

"Kozack was the man who got the money. But he was not the chief. There was another above him who—who liked me. Tony got my two hundred dollars and then wanted me to go with him to this other man. I did not tell that to Boots."

"You poor thing!" Instinctively Noreen went to Marina and put an arm around her.

Denny's jaws clicked. Many things were clear now and he could get the rest on the way.

"Nine-eighty Clark," he muttered. "All right. Let's go."

Nine-eighty Clark Avenue was a hideous affair that reared above the black skeleton of the Elevated tracks.

Denny led the way in. On the ride he had heard all about Jan Potuska. His mind was fitting details into place. On the second floor he saw a light gleaming under a door sill. He motioned the girls to stay back. He got out his gun and with his left hand gently tried the knob. The door yielded. He went in, searching the room with quick glances. His gaze halted at the corpse on the floor.

A pool of crimson had spread until now, thickened, it had settled in a queer jagged-edged pattern. The blood had escaped from a man who lay with his legs drawn up, and his arms extended with fists clenched at the end of them. His eyes were open, and his mouth was

open, and a single fly crawled around the lips without being disturbed.

There was a long silence. Noreen called, "Denny, Denny, what's the matter?"

Denny didn't lift his gaze. "They killed Jan Potuska. He'll go home—but in a box!"

VI

MARINA was the first to break the silence after that.

"He was the only alien of the dozen Boots searched out who had courage," she said dully. "The others were afraid for their lives if they talked and they dared not go to the police. And now—" suddenly she broke off into a cry of horror.

"Boots! They'll kill him now."

"Hush!" said Denny gently. "They won't kill Boots—not yet. Who would burn for Kozack's murder if they killed him?"

His eyes told Noreen to comfort her while he examined the corpse.

The bullet had penetrated the heart, bringing instant death. The body had been stripped of everything except pants and shirt and these held nothing of identification. Denny started to get up, discouraged, when he saw that Potuska's right fist held something. He pried open the fingers. There was a piece of paper like the one he had received from Marina.

The writing on it read: *They're taking me to Riverside Drive. The number is on any five dollar bill lower left of the picture of the building in the shadowing of the foliage. Boots Williams.*

Denny read it again. So, that was what the five dollar bill in Kozack's hand meant. He fished in his pocket and found a five dollar bill.

The numbers were cleverly hidden

from casual view but perfectly clear when you were looking for them and knew where to look.

The number Denny read was, 23172. Denny stared down at the corpse. He'd tip off Mike McLain later.

"Let's go," he said. "We'll have to hurry."

The ride up Riverside Drive seemed endless. Denny realized that in a crisis Boots would be killed instantly. But he said nothing of this. However, when the car stopped in front of a modernistic apartment, he told the two girls to stay in the cab.

"If I'm not out in thirty minutes, call Mike," he said to Noreen, "and have him bring the reserves."

She moaned but did not try to stop him. Inside, he described Cracker Rhodes to the telephone operator.

"Oh, yes," she said. "They went up to Mr. Dunnigan's apartment. Fourteen two-eight. But they've gone out now."

"I'll go up anyway," Denny grinned.

He rode to the fourteenth. He pressed the buzzer on apartment twenty-eight. Then he took out his gun. There came no answer—no sign of life. Denny took a swift breath, pressed the gun muzzle close to the lock and pulled the trigger. The roar was deafening. But the lock was smashed and he kicked open the door with his foot and walked in. The man at the other end of the room held a gun but as Denny's was leveled, he didn't try to shoot. The gun muzzle wavered.

"Smart guy," said Denny. "Drop the rod. Where's Williams?"

The man dropped the gun and pointed. Denny foresaw complications here so he got the gun and said to the man, "Come here."

The man did. Denny suddenly clipped him with his gun barrel and

the man dropped soundlessly in a sprawled heap.

"I'll talk to you later," Denny muttered.

He went into the bedroom. Boots was on the bed, bound hand and foot and gagged.

"Punk!" said Denny, cutting the ropes. "Who do you think you are, Sir Galahad?"

He unfastened the gag. "Trying to play a lone hand against tough muggs."

Boots sat up, rubbing his wrists. "This is the apartment of the guy who runs the racket," he said. "And listen Denny, they're all up in Mosholu right now to meet the big shot. You can land them all."

"You're supposed to go to jail," Denny said. "I've had enough trouble finding you."

Boots nodded and stood up to face Denny with frank eyes.

"I'm putting it up to you," he said simply. "Only if you lock me up, keep Marina's name out of it."

Denny saw the decision placed before him. If this Mosholu thing flopped and Boots got away, Denny was finished as a cop. By taking Boots down now, he would be sitting pretty. His eyes studied Boots and then suddenly his jaw clicked.

"Okay. Mosholu it is and you can spill your piece on the way."

VII

THE taxicab spun north to Mosholu Park. Denny had dropped Noreen with Marina, telling her to call Mike to pick up Potuska's body and the man in Dunnigan's apartment.

Now Denny said, "What actually happened in Tony Kozack's office?"

Boots shrugged. "I can't clear myself, if that's what you mean. I went to Kozack to get back the two hundred

bucks he had taken away from Marina. He went for his gun too quick and the bullet clipped the side of my head and I went out like a light. When I knew anything again, I was in a dark closet that gives off his office—I found that out later. I wasn't bound or anything and my hunch is that Kozack thought he had killed me and put me there until such time as his lugs could cart me out and dump me somewhere. Anyway, I didn't find the door locked and I came out into the office."

He paused. Then: "I saw Kozack deader than a slit pig. I heard people downstairs and knew that the shots had attracted attention. I beat it out of there and went to Marina's to get my head fixed. You know the rest."

"You fired your gun once?" Denny asked.

Again Boots paused.

"I don't know," he replied, puzzled. "I had it leveled. Maybe I did." He stopped, startled. "You mean you think that as Kozack's slug clipped me, I might have let go and killed him with one shot?"

Denny said, "It could have been done."

"But then how did I get into the closet if Kozack didn't put me in there?"

Denny shook his head. He didn't know. Aloud he said, "Can you prove you were in the closet? What I'm getting at, man, is that if you tell this story on the witness stand, the D. A. will say your shot killed Kozack—and he'll say you're making up the part about getting into the closet."

"I can't prove I was in the closet," Boots said.

"Then," Denny told him, "I don't see how you can beat that murder rap, no matter how this Mosholu business comes out."

"If Marina keeps out of it, nothing else matters," Boots muttered.

After a while Denny said, "It's one of two things: either your slug hit Kozack or else after he put you in the closet somebody else came in and shot him and never knew you were there."

"The bullet in him could show which," Boots cried excitedly.

Denny shook his head. "They didn't find the slug. It went through Kozack and out the open window behind him."

"Well, I guess that finishes it, then," Boots said. "We'll never know who killed him."

NEW YORK has sent out its prongs of square monolith apartment houses for long miles to the north, and there are those who visit it, and many who have lived in the metropolis all their lives, who do not know that inside it are places where the almost primeval woods thrive as they did hundreds of years ago. Mosholu Park is one of them and its meadows (beyond the golf course) are untouched save by the scythe. The trees stand close and the bush thick and things can happen there to haunt men's minds.

A sense of this unease gripped Denny when the taxicab wound through the blackness, edging past the clubhouse and so toward the meadows.

Just short of where the trees ended in the flat meadowland, Denny told the driver to stop, cut his motor and switch off his lights. He got out and Boots followed him. Without hesitation Denny gave Boots the gun he had taken from the man he had slugged.

"You may need it," Denny said gruffly.

Boots' voice was choked as he said, "Thanks, Denny."

They walked along in the edge of the brush where the moon would not betray

their shadow. And they made little enough noise in the brush, despite the fact that they were city men who didn't know the way of stalking. Denny pressed aside the prickles of a bush and then stopped so that Boots bumped into his shoulder.

He smelled the fragrance of a cigarette.

Fine blue smoke drifted idly on the still night from a spot a few yards ahead. The trees ended just ahead where a tiny dirt road meandered off the main macadam. A car was on this dirt path, lights out, a man's white face dimly visible in the front seat.

A few feet ahead, Denny saw the glow of a cigarette behind a cupped palm; and the crimson gleam illuminated the face of the smoker.

It was Cracker Rhodes.

He sat with his back to a tree and there was another man just beyond him, his features etched in profile by the moon. For a while there was no sound at all. Then Rhodes flicked his cigarette and it described a crimson arc to hiss against the dew of the grass.

"Gimme another one of those pills, Two-way," he said softly. "They sure soothe you down. I didn't know marijuana was so good."

The other handed him a cigarette. "They're easy to take," he assented. Then: "Did you dish that rod you used on Potuska? No use taking chances."

"It's gone. Bottom of the river."

They laughed quietly and again there was silence for a space while they smoked. After a while Two-way said, "Is the boss still nuts about that twist, Marina?"

"I guess not—after the way she mauled him. I hear he's got himself a new one—bringing her in tonight. That's why we're all here. I'll bet she's a honey. He likes 'em tall and blonde."

Denny nudged Boots to find his companion shaking like a leaf. Denny frowned and grabbed Boots. After a delay, he released his grip.

"Let's go, Boots," he whispered.

He was on his way when the words were spoken. Cracker Rhodes turned in time to see a hurtling figure bearing down on him, apparently out of the sky. He tried to shout, grab for his gun and dodge, all at the same time. The gun muzzle in Denny's hand settled everything. The dull thwack of it was followed by the complete collapse of Rhodes, his face mottled with blood where the gunshot had ripped.

Denny kept on going forward. But Boots had lunged at Two-way and they were wrestling on the ground. So Denny raced to the motor car where the driver loafed. The man must have been half-asleep because he stirred only slightly and said, "Is the plane in?"

"No," said Denny, "but you are."

The driver sat up and started a shout. The gun muzzle whipped his temple and he fell back, and the second blow bashed the other side of his skull and he went forward so hard his forehead cracked loudly against the windshield. Denny saw he was out and hurried back. As he did so he became aware of a fire-cracker popping that, with a definite hissing sound, was coming down out of the night sky.

The plane that was expected!

He ran back to the car and put on the headlights. Then he raced to where Boots was sitting astride the man called Two-way, imparting the final smash. Boots was paler in the moonlight than he should be. A sound almost like a sob shook him as he got up.

Denny said harshly, "Get hold of yourself. Here comes the plane. See, they've got the winglights on. They throw enough light so that, with the

moonlight, landing is a cinch. I shouldn't have put on those headlights."

BUT it was too late to do anything about that now. The big high-wing plane circled down slowly, two brazen eyes leaping from the wings to flood the ground with light. And as Denny crouched in the shadow of the brush, the plane lowered itself over the line of trees, and hit the ground with a crunch of shock absorbers.

The huge plane ran swiftly across the field, brakes squealing, and then it halted not twenty feet from where the motor headlights cut a swath across the night.

Denny started forward, and Boots beside him said, "Let me have him, Denny. I've got to settle for her. You heard what he did to her."

"Stop, you fool," Denny called and raced with long thrusting strides, trying to catch Boots. But Boots' short legs twinkled and he ran like a deer. Denny swore at him, but he could not stop Boots then.

The plane door had opened and six people, two of them women, had climbed out. One of these called out, "Cracker, tell Legs to cut that damned light."

Denny's heart leaped. He made a last lunge and thrust Boots to one side. He leveled his gun at the man who had spoken and said, "Keep 'em high, Dean. This is a pinch."

The pilot had foolishly lit the lights within the plane, and these formed a perfect background for the nervous man whose hand was flashing toward his coat. The other passengers cried out in foreign tongues and shrank back from the menace of Denny's glittering weapon.

"Let me have him," Boots panted.

"Let him draw his gat, Denny, let him have his shot."

"Shut up," Denny growled. "Dean, get that hand up where it belongs."

In that space of time, Barton Dean apparently saw that resistance was useless. His hand came away from his inside coat pocket and rose with the other over his head.

"An arrest for what?" he asked smooth. "Smuggling aliens? I'll plead to that rap."

"Yes," said Denny, "and you'll plead to the murder of Tony Kozack, too."

Dean sucked in his breath. "You're crazy. I had nothing to do with Kozack's death."

Denny said, "You didn't know Williams here was in that closet. But he saw you shoot Kozack. Looking through the keyhole. Isn't that right, Boots?"

"Yes," said Boots, "that's right."

"That's why you wanted him captured," Denny said, "You didn't know he was in the room but he was a good fall guy to cover you."

"Not enough evidence," Dean said coolly.

"Along with the five dollar bill in Kozack's hand that had your address on it, it can make you burn," Denny said.

Dean took a big breath. "So it can. I did kill Kozack because he was holding out money, but chiefly because he was two-timing me with the dirty blonde, Marina—"

Boots yelled and charged. Denny grabbed him. Dean went for his gun.

Denny saw Dean's hand streak into his coat and he tried to hurl Boots to one side. But before he could fire his own weapon, Dean shot. Boots shook to the slam of the slug into his body and Dean grinned at the success of his trick as he prepared to fire again.

But before he could pull the trigger, a streak of crimson speared from Boots' right hand. An explosion drummed on the ear.

Dean had a small neat eye between his own two, squarely over the bridge of his nose. He went down and flopped around a few times as men killed by brain shots always do, but he was dead enough. The others from the plane huddled in a little group.

Denny swore softly and lowered Boots to the ground. "How badly you hurt, boy?" he asked.

"Side," grunted Boots. "I'm glad I killed him. I suspected him before when I beat him up for playing with Marina. But—" he broke off, and Denny saw he had fainted.

Denny took Boots' warm gun and put his own in Boots' pocket. When the police came an hour later, Denny said, "I had to shoot Dean. He was resisting arrest."

"You're too damned quick on the trigger," growled Mike McLain. "How do we get all the dope on this racket with you killing off the big shot?"

"You're a detective," grinned Denny.

McLain cursed him and ordered him downtown.

Boots was taken to Bellevue Hospital, technically charged with homicide, two cops on the door to guard him.

NEXT day McLain said, reluctantly, to Denny, "I'll front for you. Even if you warned that Williams, you went out and picked him up."

"Make this kind of a note, too, Mike, however," Denny said. "A cop who thinks an injustice is being done, should be allowed to investigate in his own way. I let Boots go but by doing so we picked up something bigger and cleared an innocent man of a murder charge."

"You'll have to prove that," Mike said.

"I might be able to do that, too," Denny told him.

He had a talk with Noreen that night and, playing his hunch, they went to Tony Kozack's office the next afternoon and carefully searched the closet. It hadn't been touched since the D. A. had put his seal on the door. The first thing Denny saw as he turned the flashlight downward, was a broken shoe lace with the eyelet on it, the prongs of the eyelet still holding pieces of worn leather.

"That's it," Denny cried. "I remember Boots' shoes were falling to pieces."

They hastened to the district attorney's office and showed him their find. He looked at the shoe that the hospital authorities sent in and the eyelet fitted perfectly into the hole.

"Boots told the truth," Denny said. "He was put in that closet unconscious by Kozack who thought he had killed him."

"Humph!" said the D. A. "Looks like you're right." He never presented a homicide charge.

IN LATE September, Denny was walking his beat on East Twenty-first street, with Noreen beside him holding a copy of *Scientific Criminal Investigation*.

"What does the time of death in a homicide often prove?" she asked.

Denny, instead of replying, pointed and said. "Look who's here."

He laughed because Boots Williams' hat seemed too small for his head. Marina with him, however, seemed very proud and happy.

Denny shook hands with Boots.

"How'd it go?" he grinned.

Boots smiled ruefully. "I feel as if

I'd been through a wreck. The guy had me hanging on a stretcher like clothes on a line. And just before I went down to take the physical, he hit me on the head with a wooden mallet."

"Look!" he gestured to a lump on top of his head, the size of a goose egg.

Denny roared with laughter.

"But I passed," Boots shouted. "I'm a probationary cop although the doctor said he damned well knew how I grew three-eighths of an inch since I was last in."

Denny controlled his laughter and shook hands again. Everyone talked for a while about the forthcoming marriage of Boots and Marina.

Finally Boots said, "Thanks for taking the rap for killing Dean. It got me on the cops."

"Forget it," said Denny. "My shoulders are broad."

"Yes," said Boots, "but if you hadn't taken the blame for the Dean kill, you'd have been promoted to detective instead of getting a clasp on your Police Medal."

"I'll be a detective yet, won't I, darling?" Denny said to Noreen.

She sighed. "I don't know. You never seem to learn. Get along, you two, I'm trying to drive some knowledge into his thick skull."

After they had gone she said, softly, "You did all right, Denny, and I can wait if that's all that stops you from promotion."

She looked after the two wistfully and then opened the book.

"What does the establishment of the time of death in a homicide often prove?" she asked.

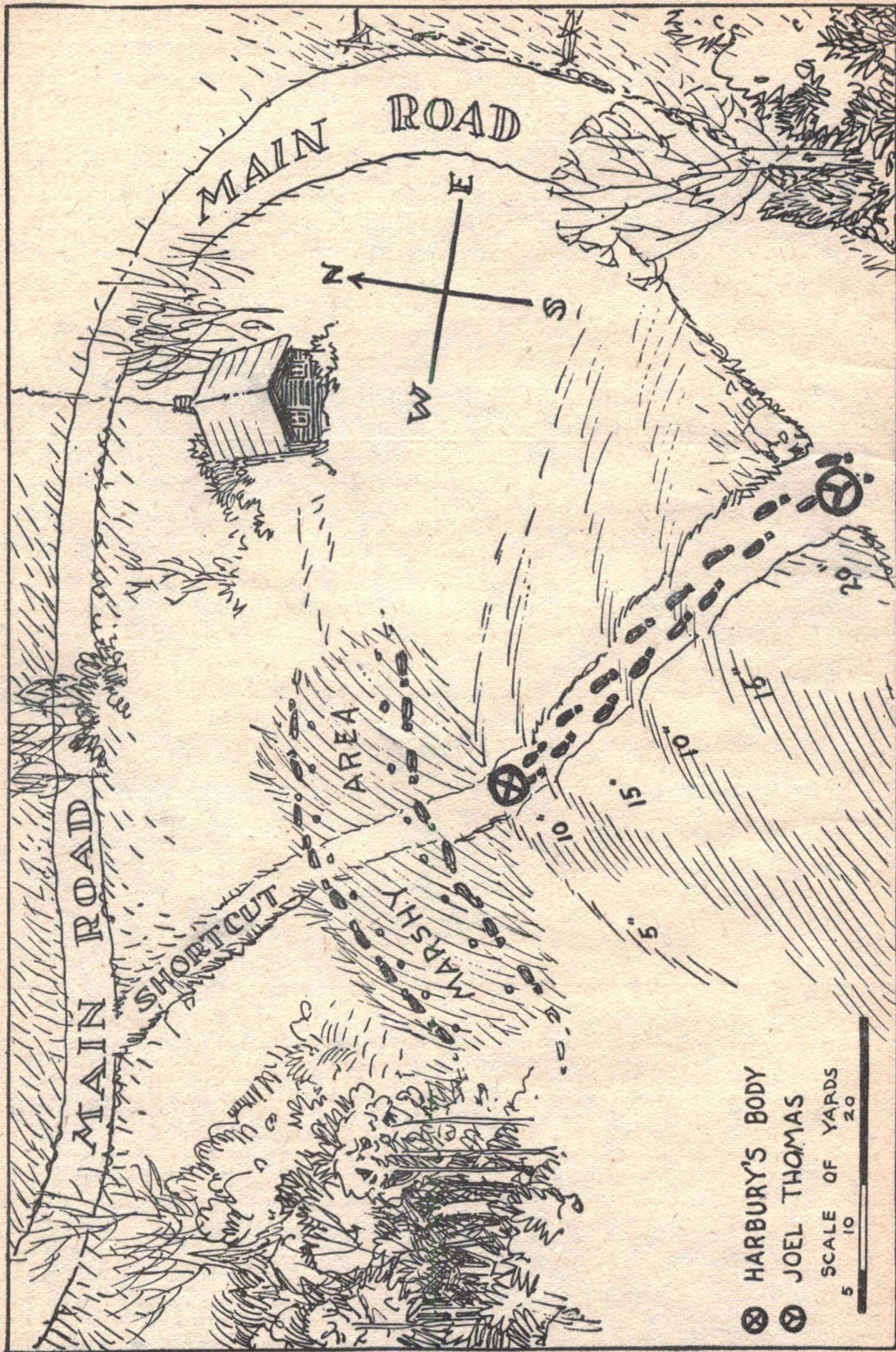
Denny sighed and settled down to think.



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Another Detectogram Will Appear Soon

Detectogram

A Game of Skill

THE BENNINGTON FEUD

By Lawrence Treat

DIRECTIONS

First read the statement of fact, next study the diagram and clues, and then answer the questions in order, by checking the box next to the correct answer.

DON'T GUESS! There is a logical clue to every answer. Find it before checking the boxes.

STATEMENT

The Bennington brothers had threatened to shoot Seth Harbury right between the eyes if he ever again used the shortcut across their property. At 8 A.M., June 23rd, Joel Thomas stood on the hill and heard two shots. A moment later somebody ducked into the Bennington cabin and somebody else scurried into the clump of trees.

Later, Harbury was found dead with a bullet between the eyes. The Bennington brothers were Dan and Stumpy, the latter so called because he had a peg leg.

From an examination of the sketch map, can you determine which of the Benningtons killed Harbury?

QUESTIONS

1. From his position on the hill at Y, could Thomas see both the clump and the cabin? Yes No
2. Was Stumpy on the scene at any time? Yes No
3. Was he presumably the man at the cabin? Yes No
4. At about what range was Harbury killed?
 20 yds. 50 yds. 100 yds. 200 yds.
5. Was the murderer a crack shot? Yes No
6. From which direction was the sun shining?
 north south east west
7. Could Harbury be seen clearly from the cabin the entire time he was using the shortcut? Yes No
8. Did Harbury apparently take any means to conceal himself?
 Yes No
9. Was the clump of trees a good place from which to kill Harbury?
 Yes No
10. Who killed Harbury? Dan Stumpy

Death in Jodhpurs

A girl crouched in front of him, gripping the reins of a black horse



By Dale Clark

Author of "Invisible Witness,"
"Brain-Boy," etc.

A Dutch Uncle got young McTarn in Dutch

NEAR the Park, an asthmatic cab wheezed out of the 2 A.M. bright loneliness of Lake Shore Drive into the darkened loneliness of a narrow side street. The hackman reached a hand to the meter and then to the door. He told his drowsing fare, "Here y'are!"

Andrew McTarn blinked his gray eyes, shook himself awake, and moved large shoulders toward the door. As he did that, a violent crash slammed the door shut, the cab lurched and rocked, and a drumming sound pounded away up the street. The cab driver muttered something under his breath.

McTarn fell back against the cushions. "What was that?"

The hackie turned from peering through the windshield. "It looked like a hoise!"

"A hearse?" McTarn cried.

"Nawh. A *hoise*—wit' a saddle on."

"What's a horse doing out kicking

cabs at this hour of the night?" asked McTarn.

The cabbie looked around, made sure his machine had suffered no damage from the collision. His interest evaporated. "Soich me, pal, I dunno. Dis is duh Gol' Coist, see? Y' can expect *anything* around duh Gol' Coist!"

Andrew McTarn looked around through the back glass, as if to insure himself against another onslaught by the Gold Coast's four-footed denizens. He eased himself and his leather valise onto the sidewalk. The cab coughed away.

There was a very narrow strip of grass and shrubbery between the building and the sidewalk, and it seemed likely the animal had been taking refuge there until frightened by the motor.

"A horse!" growled McTarn.

He looked slowly around, and then fixed his stare on the building. It was an apartment hotel, one of the pretentious kind which dot Chicago's near

North Side. It looked fairly expensive, and this seemed to be an expensive part of the city.

McTarn thought, "Well, radio can't be treating the kid so darn bad!"

And he wondered, with his Scotch caution, whether his brother could really afford to live in a place like this. Camel—the kid's nickname, a lisped abbreviation of Cameron—was the youngest of the McTarns, the baby of the family. He'd always had the best of things, and took the best as his natural right. He *would* choose a Gold Coast apartment, even though a rooming house would suit his budget better.

Andrew McTarn grunted, picked up his valise, and then hesitated. The sound of a ringing neigh trumpeted through the dark side street. McTarn's nerves tightened. The big Scotsman was far from being an unduly sensitive chap, but he sensed an eeriness in that wild nickering which shrilled and shuddered out of the night.

It was answered by a softer whinny from the lakefront.

McTarn swung around and walked briskly to the corner. His gray stare crossed the brightly lighted, empty Drive. On the other side was a darker area of shrubbery and small trees, beyond which he could see ghostly spray phantoms dancing as a brisk wind drove the Lake Michigan waves onto the embankment.

Once more, but farther away, the shrill neigh vibrated out of the darkness behind him, and again the whinny answered.

The Scotsman hurried across the Drive. In a moment his feet were busily crunching the cinders of a bridle path which ran through the shrubbery. It had come from that direction.

He exclaimed, "The devil!" and quickened his step.

A GIRL crouched in front of him. One of her hands gripped the reins of a black horse, an extremely restless and thoroughly frightened animal. McTarn heard the horse's terrified blowing as he approached. Then he saw that the girl's other arm was around a man, lifting the man's head from the cinders.

"Here," McTarn said. "Can I help, miss?"

The girl didn't look up. "He's dead—dead—"

She said this in a stupefied, incredulous way—said it more to herself than to McTarn.

"Dead!" exclaimed the Scot. "Oh, I don't think so! Probably just knocked out."

He struck a match, shielded the flame in his large hands against the lake wind. The yellow light played briefly on the victim. McTarn made out a slackly fleshy, middle-aged face. He glanced at the plump, limp body—clad in an open-necked sweater, jodhpur breeches, and short boots.

McTarn said in a queer tone. "He's been shot!"

He couldn't be wrong about that wound under the man's left armpit. He had seen too many of them.

The girl said, "Yes—I heard the shot." She shuddered. "I—I was riding a yard or so ahead of him. The gun frightened my horse. When I got reined in again, and turned back, I saw Father lying in the path like this! There was a man bending over him, going through his pockets! He—the man ran away—"

Her dark head was bowed over the man as she spoke. Her voice still sounded incredulous, as if she couldn't yet believe this thing had really happened. McTarn let the matchlight play upward against her features. Just a kid, he decided. Eighteen, maybe. And the man

was her father. No wonder it left her stunned.

He touched the man's wrist. Then he straightened, and his face was grim. Up to a moment ago, it had seemed just an equestrian accident, but this was *murder*, no less.

"Get up, miss." McTarn spoke now in a manner of quiet authority, and she obeyed him numbly. "There's nothing to do now except notify the police. I'll stay here. There's an apartment hotel across the street. You can phone from the lobby."

He took the reins from her hand and tethered the black horse to a tree a few yards up the path. For a moment he watched the girl's slim figure as she darted across the Drive. McTarn sighed, and began tamping the bowl of a disgracefully caked briar pipe.

An odd affair, he thought. Why should that girl and her father have gone horseback riding at 2 A. M.?

"Well, it's none of my business," Andrew McTarn reminded himself. He remembered the telegram in his pocket. Addressed to his New York office, it requested his attention to an urgent case; was signed Horace Pewley. There had been a telegraphed money order for plane fare to Chicago.

"The less I mix myself up in this murder," he reflected, "the more time I'll have for Pewley's troubles. After all, I'm here at his expense!"

He walked slowly back to his valise. A bit of whiteness at the side of the path caught his eye. Probably only a piece of wastepaper, McTarn guessed; but he stooped, stretched a hand toward it.

The bushes gave no warning rustle. They were stirred by the wind, anyway. And the breaking of waves on the lake-front would have drowned the warning, had there been one.

McTARN'S startled gaze met the figure as it leaped. It was dark, unrecognizable. All that he saw plainly was the flash of the riding crop as it streaked toward his head.

Dodging, McTarn dropped his face into the crook of a sheltering elbow. He growled as the weighted butt of the whip bit savagely into his forearm. Already stooping, the force of the blow drove him to his knees.

He lunged forward, fingers of his right hand spread hookwise to grapple the assailant. McTarn's left arm was a numbed weight at his side. He caught hold of a knee in the darkness, and jerked the other off balance; but he couldn't get the crippled left up as the whip fell again.

The butt rang thuddingly on McTarn's skull. The Scotchman instinctively rolled with the blow, which probably saved him from a fractured head. He sprawled, losing his grip on the man's leg. The whip kicked cinders into his face as it fell again.

A vivid flash.

Then, his head echoing to a far-off boom-booming of sound.

McTarn pushed his hands into the cinders, lifted himself on one knee. He peered around in a half-dazed fashion. His assailant had vanished. The bit of white material, whatever it was, had likewise disappeared.

The big Scot climbed slowly erect. His strained stare searched the vicinity unhappily. His mouth wore a sour twist. It was no use going on a one-man chase through the bushes, and he knew it.

He walked across the embankment. He wet his handkerchief in the cold floodlets which kept tongueing across the concrete, and slapped the dripping compress onto his skull.

And he was still nursing his head

when an automobile load of Homicide Bureau detectives pulled up to the curb. McTarn made a brief statement to the Lieutenant in charge.

"I'm stopping with my kid brother at the hotel across the street, if you want to get in touch with me again," he concluded. "My name's Andrew McTarn."

The Lieutenant opened his eyes a bit. "That name sounds familiar."

"I was on Homicide in New York until I went into business for myself."

"Oh, yes. I've heard of you. My name's Larrihan." He watched the spotting of flashlights about the scene. "The fellow came back to finish robbing the body when he saw the girl go, I suppose. Well, I'll walk across the Drive with you. She's waiting in the lobby."

As they entered the lobby, McTarn shot a gray glance at the girl. Huddled in a chair, she was weeping bitterly. The blood looked gruesome on her blouse and jodhpurs.

He told Larrihan, "I'd sooner be swatted on the head again than have your job right now," and the Lieutenant agreed he didn't like it, either. And McTarn gave his name to the desk clerk.

The clerk said, "Oh, yes. You're to go right up—it's 311." His eyes glistened eagerly. "That was an awful thing out there, wasn't it?"

Andrew McTarn nodded; he wasn't going to be drawn into conversation about it.

HE FOUND 311, went in on tiptoe. But the room was fully lighted. A young man, maybe twenty-five, with a shock of carrot-hued hair and a sandy mustache, looked up from a book under the bridge lamp.

"Hullo, there! Come on in!" he said, rising as McTarn hesitated. "You're

Camel's brother, aren't you? Well, I'm his roomie—Joel Nesbitt. We're on the same radio program, you know."

McTarn looked around the room. He felt crowded by it. Andrew McTarn was a big man, and he liked space to turn around in. This chamber was as small as the builder dared make it, and the occupants had filled it with a lot of bric-a-brac. There were a good many glossy photographs on the walls, autographed photographs of girls in stacy undress; there were several liquor sets, bottles, and racy magazines. The magazines were scattered over the room.

Andrew McTarn could not help thinking of the kid brother's room at college, six months ago—with pictures of football heroes pinned to the plain walls, with tennis rackets and hockey sticks in the corners. And he didn't like the change.

Nesbitt misread the meaning of the big Scot's glance. "Camel isn't in yet," he explained. "He had a heavy heart date on tonight, you see."

McTarn's gray stare stopped on a photograph on the radio. It differed from the other pictures in having an elaborate silver frame. A little jerk went through his large body, and his lips tightened.

He asked unsteadily, "Who's that?"

The roommate chuckled. "She's the Dutch Uncle's daughter—Ellen Scarlett."

"The what?"

"Dutch Uncle. Didn't you ever hear him on the radio?"

"No."

"I don't care for his stuff myself." Nesbitt shrugged his slight shoulders. "He gives advice to Troubled Hearts. It's bunk, of course. But don't tell Camel I said so. She's his heavy date."

"You mean he's out with *her* tonight?"

"Why, yes." Nesbitt stared. "What's the matter, man?"

It was the picture of the girl downstairs. And McTarn mumbled, gray-faced, "His girl!"

The kid was supposed to be having a date with her right now!

Well, Nesbitt had made a mistake—Camel's date must have been with some other girl. Camel *couldn't* be mixed up in this murder. Not in any way. He couldn't believe it.

Andrew McTarn became aware of Nesbitt's startled gaze. He forced a laugh. "You set me on my heels," he muttered lamely. "Last time I saw the kid, he was at the girl-shy age. He's growing up, I guess. Nineteen, now."

Joel Nesbitt said, chuckling, "Anybody drawing ninety bucks a week can consider himself a man, I'd say."

Camel earning that kind of money! And not paying back a cent of his college debts—even writing to borrow an occasional ten-spot! The kid certainly *had* changed.

"You look tired," Nesbitt was saying. "Better not wait up for him, Mr. McTarn. He won't get in much before daybreak. You can take the bed in there." He pointed at a door.

McTarn peered at the daybed, made up with sheets and a pillow. Nesbitt said, "Oh, that's mine. A guy your size could never sleep there."

"I don't want to chase you out. I can get myself a room easily."

The carrot-topped young man shook his head. "Why, we're always putting somebody up for a night. My friends just as much as Camel's. Go ahead. He'd punch my nose if I let you go to a hotel."

McTarn weighed it, decided to stay. He wanted to see the kid, just as soon as Camel came in. And somehow he wasn't saying anything about the mur-

der to Nesbitt. Not until he'd had a talk with the boy.

He went into the bedroom, lay down on the bed without taking his clothes off. Camel with ninety dollars a week and a girl—probably a flock of girls. Probably nightclubbing around every night! McTarn stared at a tennis racket against the wall. Its gut was broken, slack, dusty. Hadn't been played with in months.

He lay there in the darkness, watching the dragging hands of a luminous-dialed clock.

At four o'clock he was growling, "Deserves a *paddling!*"

At five o'clock he was asleep, scowling.

A VOICE roused Andrew McTarn. He blinked, lifted his head to the morning sunlight. He glanced at the clock; it was nearly eight. Then he heard the voice again, and its meaning was an electric jolt jarring him full awake.

He got up, crossed the room silently, eased the door open an inch. Enough to see Lieutenant Larrihan in the next room.

"Where *were* you at 2 A.M.?" Larrihan was demanding.

Andrew McTarn's stare found the kid brother. Camel stood at the window. He was big, a strapping six footer. His brown, curly hair caught glints from the sunlight, but there was no glint in the lad's blue eyes. They were strained and lusterless. And they evaded Larrihan.

The Lieutenant snapped, "Well?"

"I told you all this before." Camel's voice sulked. "I was here—right here in this room. I and Nesbitt came back from the broadcasting studio shortly after one o'clock. We were both here until the phone rang at 3 A.M. It was

Scarlett's secretary, calling to tell me you were holding Ellen at Headquarters."

In the bedroom, Andrew McTarn's face was a corrugated mask. His heart sank. Camel was lying like a trooper—but why?

He heard Nesbitt's voice from across the room. "That's correct, Lieutenant."

Larrihan shrugged. "It doesn't check with the other facts. The night clerk here tells me that Miss Scarlett asked for you when she came in last night. And he told her that you'd left about fifteen minutes to two."

Camel flushed. "I went out for a package of cigarettes. There's an all-night drugstore around on Oak Street."

"That isn't all," Larrihan growled. "You claim that Scarlett's secretary called you here at three. The clerk says there were no incoming calls between two and six-thirty!"

"Then he's wrong," the boy muttered.

Andrew McTarn balled his hands into fists. The fool, he thought. Thinking he could bluff through a thing like this! And *what was he trying to hide?*

Muscles tightened in Larrihan's flat cheek. He said: "Now, look! We found the gun in the bushes out there! It's Scarlett's own gun! He kept it in his car, and the girl used the car often. That's one point."

He came a step closer to the young fellow. "Here's another point! We found powder burns on Scarlett's sweater. And the bullet went *downward* through his body! He wasn't shot by any bandit standing in the bushes. He was killed by someone riding close up beside him."

"That's a lie!" cried Camel furiously.

"Wait! Or else by someone who stepped out of the bushes and spoke to him. Someone he'd have reined in his

horse and leaned down to speak to—so a bullet fired up into him would seem to have been fired downwards. Which would be someone he knew pretty well!" Larrihan said.

Andrew McTarn measured his brother. *Where had Camel been last night?*

Larrihan's voice went on. "It boils down to this. Either the girl did it, or some man was mixed in the killing. We've got pretty good reason to think there *was* a man. Someone close enough to Scarlett to get that gun, someone he'd stop to talk to or argue with, and someone the girl would cover up! It looks that way to me. What do you say?"

Camel scowled. "Say to what? How should I know?"

"You were in love with the girl," asked the Lieutenant, "weren't you?"

"*I am* in love with her!" The young fellow's eyes suddenly blazed.

"And Scarlett objected," supplied Larrihan. "He objected so much that he was willing to ship Ellen off to Europe to separate the two of you. In fact, he forbade you to see her at all."

Camel wet his lips. "Who told you that?"

"That hurts, doesn't it?" Larrihan grunted. "It sounds too much like a murder motive, huh?"

"I said, who told you that?"

"Good authority," said Larrihan. "I got it from Scarlett's secretary, Horace Pewley."

The name stopped Andrew McTarn's breath in his throat. Pewley. The man whose telegram had brought him from New York.

He had no time to think about it. For now Larrihan was saying: "I'm going to find out whether you were here at 2 A. M. I'm going to get that brother of yours out here and ask him."

ANDREW McTARN palmed the door shut before Larrihan turned. He heard the man's footsteps as he spun around. McTarn's brain worked at lightning speed. He didn't mind cracking the kid's alibi so much. That would be broken, anyway. Even lying about it wouldn't help much. If it was Camel who killed Scarlett and afterward slugged McTarn himself, the boy could easily have returned to the apartment before Andrew came up. No, the alibi didn't mean a thing.

But McTarn had no idea of submitting to Larrihan's questioning. Whatever he said meant going to Headquarters, making a statement, talking endlessly to men from the State's Attorney office.

And McTarn could think of better uses for his time.

Two long strides carried him to the window. The sash was already two-thirds up. McTarn drove his broad shoulders through the opening, dropped lightly to the fire escape outside. Pressed close to the wall, he listened while Larrihan banged the bedroom door open.

McTarn hurried down the fire escape, walked rapidly along an alley, and crossed the Drive a block away. The invariable crowd of curiosity seekers had collected at the scene of last night's murder. One man was scraping a handful of cinders into a handkerchief. "I collect anything with blood on it," he told McTarn. "I've got a scrap of newspaper at home with Dillinger's blood on it."

The Scotchman shrugged, inspecting the scene closely. Finally his head moved in a definite nod.

"It wasn't Camel's doing," he thought. "Absolutely couldn't have been."

He fumbled for the telegram in his

pocket, read its address. On North State Street. He strode to the Drive and hailed a cruising cab.

His destination was a large white brick house in an expensively wide yard, with a garage and stable in the rear. In such a neighborhood, the mere existence of a lawn was proof of considerable wealth. McTarn walked up the stone steps, flanked by white urns, and dug his thumb against the doorbell button.

There was no answer. An old man presently came around the corner of the house, dragging a sprinkler attached to a hose. "You're wasting your time, young man," he said shrilly. "Orders is not to let anyone in today."

McTarn pushed the door open, went in anyway. He wasn't accustomed to obeying orders.

Horace Pewley was a large, fairish man who wore thick-lensed glasses and smoked a cigarette in a long, pearl-colored holder as he sat at the breakfast table in the North State Street house. His spatulate fingers kept knocking the ash from the cigarette with quick, womanish gestures. Mr. Pewley's plump cheeks jellied, and Mr. Pewley's several chins folded and unfolded in accordion pleats as he talked to Andrew McTarn.

"Why, yes, yes," said Horace Pewley. "I sent you that telegram. Mr. Scarlett's orders, of course."

"Why?"

Mr. Pewley picked his words as carefully as a woman selecting bonbons. "It concerned your brother's regrettable interest in Miss Ellen. He thought *you* could make Cameron listen to reason. Frankly, Mr. Scarlett feared those two youngsters would marry, and he didn't feel that your brother was in a position to support a wife."

McTarn growled that men had been

known to support wives on a lot less than ninety dollars a week.

"But not girls like Ellen," Pewley smiled. "She's used to living on a different scale. The Dutch Uncle program, you know, paid fifteen hundred a week. And *that* was the second point, if you follow me."

"How do you mean, second point?"

Mr. Pewley's spatulate fingers went to the pocket of his linen coat. He drew forth a sheet of note-sized paper, removed a paper clip, and said:

"This sort of thing. Read it."

McTarn read the femininely scrawled page.

Dear Dutch Uncle:

Please advise a troubled heart. I am about to be married. Three years ago, I had an "affair" with another man. Should I tell my husband-to-be? He will be terribly shocked to learn of my past and it may kill his love for me. I would say nothing, but unfortunately the first man is a fugitive from justice, wanted for murder! If he is ever caught, the truth will come out at the trial. Then my husband would surely know. Could I have a happy marriage with that cloud over my head? Please give the good advice you have given so many others.

Yours in distress,

Anna Blake,
Ovenly Hill, N. Y.

P. S. I always listen to your program, and use Moondream Soap, too.

Mr. Pewley helped himself to a second cup of coffee, smiling into McTarn's perplexed face.

"There you have it," he said. "The Dutch Uncle received thousands of such letters every month, each with three soap wrappers enclosed. Why? Because the radio public sincerely believed in his ability to solve life's problems! Don't you see how embarrassing the publicity would be, after all he has said against hasty marriages, if his own daughter ran away to Crown Point to wed your brother? And sup-

pose the marriage didn't work out. Suppose those youngsters wound up in a divorce court."

And Horace Pewley waved a plump, white hand. "It'd make the Dutch Uncle ridiculous! If a man can't handle his own daughter, how can he solve other people's problems? There would be no more letters—no more soap wrappers—no more fifteen hundred dollars a week!"

McTarn said slowly, "And that's why he objected to Camel marrying his girl?"

"Well, he wanted them to wait a couple of years to be *sure*."

"And he planned to send Ellen abroad to separate the two?"

Pewley's plump fingers twined into his napkin. "Only as a last resort. He wanted Ellen where he could watch her. He tried all sorts of things. Last night he was talking to Cameron's roommate at the studios. I rather think he offered Nesbitt money for a tip in case Cameron let slip any plans for a runaway marriage."

Pewley had tied the napkin into knots; now he started untying it. "Anyway," he resumed, "that's why Mr. Scarlett and I got home so late last night. We found Ellen downstairs in her riding togs. She expected to slip out with your brother—assumed that her father was already in bed. But she couldn't say so. She had to pretend that she intended riding alone. I could see that Mr. Scarlett was thoroughly suspicious. He said he'd go with her. He went upstairs to put on his jodhpurs, and I overheard Ellen at the hall telephone. She was speaking to Cameron. Telling him not to come, that she'd slip out and meet him at the Frolics Club later on."

Andrew McTarn studied the man's bland face. "And then?"

"I went to bed. At two-thirty, the phone rang. It was Ellen, speaking so brokenly that I could only make out that Mr. Scarlett had been shot to death and that she was being held at Headquarters." Pewley sighed. "Before I finished dressing, the phone rang again. Cameron this time, asking for Ellen. I told him she'd been arrested. And I agreed to pick him up on my way downtown—he was parked in a car across the street from the night club."

McTarn scowled. Parked in a car! Which probably meant the kid had no alibi at all!

Pewley was saying: "We decided not to tell the police that she'd canceled a date with him in order to go with her father. Because they might think she arranged it that way so's to have a free hand to commit murder. I thought at the time *she* was being held for murder, you see."

A darker gleam came into McTarn's gray eyes. "You told Camel what to say?"

"Well, we put our heads together. We *both* decided to say nothing until we found out what Ellen had told them. We reached Police Headquarters about three, and they kept us waiting for an hour. Then they questioned us without really telling us anything. I left to get a lawyer. It wasn't until after six this morning that I found out there'd been a man in the killing. So I told Lieutenant Larrihan the truth, and returned home."

"Camel?"

"He stayed behind. They'd promised to let him talk to Ellen, the lawyer told me."

McTarn scowled at the expensive coffee urn. He didn't like the way the fat man juggled words. So far as McTarn could see, it all amounted to putting a noose around Camel's neck.

He asked, "Where did Scarlett keep his gun?"

"In the automobile. It was in a parking lot near the broadcasting studio last night," Pewley recalled. "The gun might have been stolen when the attendant wasn't looking, perhaps."

McTarn said, "*You* rode home with Scarlett last night?"

"Oh, yes. We were working over his fan mail, leaving the letters which could be answered by form letters for the stenographers there, taking home the ones which he felt required personal answers," Pewley explained.

McTarn thought a moment. "Fifteen hundred a week is a lot of dough. Scarlett must have left quite an estate. Who gets it?"

"The will is involved," Pewley frowned. "Most of the estate goes to Ellen. There are minor bequests to the servants, including a few thousands for me. Ellen's share is in a trust fund to prevent her husband getting it, if she marries. I'll get a copy of the will from the desk in the study."

McTarn watched the other waddle out of the room. His gray eyes wore a balked expression. If his theory was correct, Camel couldn't possibly have slain Scarlett—but so far it remained a theory only, and one which would mean precious little to Larrihan. Especially since the kid had invited suspicion by lying about his actions last night.

Ker-crash!

THE thudding sound came through the hall into which Pewley had gone. McTarn bounded out of his chair, lurching against the table, upsetting the coffee urn. An amber flood crossed the linen cloth, inundated Pewley's cigarette holder and the troubled-heart letter. McTarn swore, ran around the

table, plunged into the hall. There were doors all along it, but a wheezing groan guided him to the study.

Horace Pewley was picking himself off the carpet. His glasses, one lens broken, dangled by a single earpiece. He spluttered, wagging his hand toward the desk by the window:

"Burglar in here—slugged me!"

The drawers of the modernistic desk were open. Breeze from the open window wafted papers across the floor. McTarn sprang to the window. The wide lawn was empty. A sprinkler swiveled water in dancing brilliance on the grass directly under the sash.

Horace Pewley rubbed his jaw, mumbling:

"Hid behind the door—hit me when I came in—"

McTarn glared. "You're not hurt so bad! It didn't knock you out! Where'd he go to?"

"I didn't see," Pewley protested. "Without my glasses I can barely see my hand in front of my face. Oh, dear!" And he fumbled, tried to adjust the remaining lens into place.

McTarn looked around. There was a closed door at the side of the room, and he yanked that open. Just a closet—and empty.

He turned, scowled at the pinkish area on Pewley's jowl. It could have been made by brisk rubbing. Was this a gag, or—?

A bell rang sharply. Pewley, still fumbling with the glasses, said: "The door. You'd better see. I told the servants not to answer. Because of the reporters, you know."

McTarn strode into the hall. He jerked the door open, and peered into Nesbitt's flushed, excited face.

"The cops are coming!" Camel's roommate cried. "I've got to see Pewley!"

A thought flashed into McTarn's mind. He dropped his stare to the young man's freshly pressed, knife-creased trousers. No, Nesbitt hadn't hopped through a lawn sprinkler recently.

Nesbitt was already in the house. He met Pewley in the study doorway, pushed the fat man back into that room, and said hoarsely:

"Get this straight! The kid telephoned you *twice* last night. The first time was at two o'clock exactly! That gives him an alibi—he couldn't have been phoning and hiding in the bushes beside the bridle path at the same time!"

Pewley shrank. "But he didn't call me then!"

"You can say he did!" cried the carrot-top. "Camel hasn't said anything yet. They're bringing him here. He wouldn't believe you'd told them a different yarn. He'll get the idea when you remember that first phone call."

The doorbell shrilled again. Nesbitt released his grip on the secretary's lapel, looked around quickly, and then headed for the closet door. "And don't let 'em know I got here first to coach you!"

McTARN shrugged, walked down the hall, and opened the door again. Larrihan pushed the kid brother across the sill. Outside, a detective grasped Ellen Scarlett's arm. Larrihan eyed Andrew McTarn bitterly and said: "What are you doing here? Never mind! I'll talk to you later! Right now I'm going to break this kid's fool claim that he was in his apartment at two o'clock. Pewley!" He finished with a roar.

"S-sir?" Thoroughly cowed, the secretary came to the study doorway again.

Larrihan said, "Where was young

McTarn when you met him at a quarter of three this morning?"

"Outside the Frolics Culb!"

"And where did he tell you he'd been since one-thirty?"

"Parked there," mumbled the secretary. He wet his lips unhappily. "I forgot to tell you, he telephoned me once before—at two o'clock exactly."

"*What?*" bellowed the lieutenant. "His brother put you up to that!"

And Larrihan glared accusingly at Andrew McTarn. He said wrathfully: "That's a clever move. But I'm no fool, McTarn! The bed was still warm where you lay in that apartment this morning."

McTarn showed no resentment. On the contrary, a grin curled his lips. He followed the others into the study, and said quietly:

"There was no one in the bushes when Scarlett was shot. The killer had to be sure. He couldn't risk just wounding his man in the dark. He was in one of the trees beside the path, perched on a limb there. He reached out, put the gun right against Scarlett, and that's why the bullet went *downward*."

Larrihan stared. McTarn nodded a couple of times, looked at the girl's pale face, and said: "You were ahead of him, you told me. The shot made your horse bolt. It frightened his horse, too. Your father stayed in the saddle a moment, and fell a few yards from the tree. You just assumed that the man had been in the bushes because he was bending over your father by the time you got your horse under control."

Ellen Scarlett said, "Yes, yes," faintly.

Larrihan growled: "Well, don't coach her! And how does this clear the kid, anyway?"

McTarn said, "The branches of those little trees along the path wouldn't hold a guy his size."

Larrihan looked thoughtful. He said, "You're not just guessing about the killer being there?"

"I'm not arguing," McTarn said. "I'm just telling you. The direction of the shot proves it. And so will the tree, when you go over it with a microscope. There'll be scratches on the bark where the fellow climbed. Maybe you'll find green stains on his clothes, traces of bark under his fingernails."

Larrihan frowned. "Who do you figure—?"

McTarn said: "Well. . . . A party who wanted something of Scarlett's bad enough to kill for it, bad enough to risk breaking the desk open here. A party who knew Ellen had postponed a date with Cameron to go riding with her father."

Larrihan was staring at Pewley now, and McTarn grunted: "Not him! He's heavier than Camel! He couldn't get into a tree with a ladder, or the nerve to take a mouse out of a trap. Not him, never. I'd say Nesbitt."

Cameron McTarn jerked his head up, said: "Joel! But why should—"

He didn't finish because the closet door heeled open and Nesbitt came out. His hand bulged largely in his coat pocket. He pointed the bulge this way and that. "Don't anybody move!" he cried, and nobody did.

Not until Nesbitt had backed out into the hall, anyway. Then Larrihan and the plainclothes cop went for their guns, and Andrew McTarn went for the window. He jumped out and landed smackingly in the wet grass beside the sprinkler. He eased up to the corner of the house, peered around it.

McTARN'S stare followed Nesbitt as the carrot-top backed out of the front door. Nesbitt still had one hand in the bulging pocket. The other

reached into one of the stone urns beside the steps.

McTarn jumped. He was as big as two of Nesbitt, and as tough as a dozen of the other. He just slammed the carrot-top once. Then he bent over and jerked Nesbitt's hand out of the coat pocket.

"A clothes hook!" McTarn growled. Unscrewed it from the closet wall."

He said this to Larrihan as the Lieutenant came plowing through the door.

"But why?" Larrihan cried. "He couldn't get away."

"He could, long enough to destroy this—he thought." McTarn reached a hand into the urn, pulled out a coffee-stained piece of paper. "Must have figured we couldn't get enough actual evidence to convict him for killing Scarlett. It was this other murder had him worried."

Larrihan read the letter, screwed up his face in thought, and said: "How do you connect him with *this*?"

"He connected himself to it. By coming here to steal it, knocking Pewley down, running into another room across the hall, getting it from the breakfast table when I rushed to the study," McTarn said. "And then being smart enough not to try to run away, but pretending he came to get Pewley to alibi for Camel."

McTarn went to the door, shouted: "Pewley!"

The secretary waddled nervously down the hall, and McTarn said: "Where'd you get this particular letter? How come it was in your pocket?"

Pewley sounded apologetic. "Mr. Scarlett instructed me to take special care of it."

"What was clipped to it?"

Pewley blinked. "The soap wrappers. Oh, and yes, a newspaper clipping. Something about the murder she mentioned in the letter, I believe. Quite a large clipping, with pictures. Mr. Scarlett stuffed it into his pocketbook."

"That's it!" McTarn turned to Larrihan. "Scarlett thought he recognized Nesbitt in the pictures, you see? He talked to Nesbitt last night, probably asked a few questions. And Nesbitt caught on to what'd happened. He killed Scarlett to silence him, and got the clipping last night—but he wasn't sure what was in the letter, and he had to get that, too!"

He went into the house. And came out, grinning. "Huh! I won't have to!"

Larrihan stared. "You won't have to what?"

"I was going to bawl out Camel for lying to you, Lieutenant. But Ellen's doing a pretty fair job of it alone! I hope she *does* marry him," McTarn said. "She'll make *him* toe the line."



ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKIE ALLEN

The Clue of the Cracksmen's Shoes

IN THE LATTER PART OF THE 19TH CENTURY, TWO BIG-TIME AMERICAN BANK BURGLARS WERE FORCED TO FLEE TO PARIS WHERE THEY WERE SOON IN STRAIGHTENED CIRCUMSTANCES. THEY WERE MARK SHINBURN, A GENTEEL ROBBER WHO SPECIALIZED IN MAKING BURGLAR TOOLS AND PICKING LOCKS, AND "PIANO CHARLEY" BULLARD, AN EX-BANK ROBBER WHO BECAME THE KEEPER OF A SALOON IN PARIS. SHINBURN, WHO HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR A BANK TO LOOT, APPROACHED BULLARD AND GOT HIM TO JOIN IN BURGLARIZING A SMALL BANK IN VIVERES, BELGIUM.

ONE NIGHT IN 1883, THE PAIR VISITED THE BANK TO "LOOK IT OVER." THEY ENTERED BY A REAR COURTYARD WITH A SKELETON KEY. A HEAVY OAK DOOR, WITH AN IMMENSE LOCK ON THE INSIDE, BARRED ENTRY TO THE BANK. AFTER REMOVING THE LARGE KEY-HOLE PLATE ON THE OUTSIDE, SHINBURN PICKED THE LOCK, SLIPPING THE SMALL SCREWS INTO HIS POCKET AS HE REMOVED THEM. BEFORE GOING INSIDE THE BANK, THE CROOKS REMOVED THEIR SHOES AND SET THEM IN A CORNER OF THE YARD.

WHILE THEY WERE INSIDE, A GENDARME, MAKING HIS ROUNDS, NOTICED THE COURTYARD GATE WAS AJAR. OPENING IT, HE FLASHED HIS LANTERN AROUND THE YARD AND NOTICED THE SHOES. HE PICKED THEM UP AND TOOK THEM TO THE POLICE STATION. BEFORE HE RETURNED WITH OTHER OFFICERS, THE BURGLARS RETURNED TO THE YARD. IN REPLACING THE KEVHOLE PLATE, SHINBURN MISSED ONE OF THE SCREWS. SO HE FASHIONED AN IMITATION SCREW-HEAD OUT OF SOME WAX HE CARRIED IN HIS POCKET.

Coming Next Week—



FINDING THEIR SHOES MISSING, THE TWO CROOKS FELT SURE THAT THEY HAD BEEN DETECTED. BUT IT WAS TOO LATE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. SHINBURN WAS CAUGHT AS HE EMERGED FROM THE GATE. BULLARD BOLTED, BUT WAS CAUGHT AFTER AN EXCHANGE OF BULLETS.

NOTHING WAS FOUND UPON THEM EXCEPT A PIECE OF WAX IN SHINBURN'S VEST POCKET AND A SMALL SCREW IN THE LINING OF THE GARMENT. THESE SEEMED UNIMPORTANT AND THE PRISONERS WERE ABOUT TO BE RELEASED, WHEN AN EXAMINATION OF THE BANK'S LOCKS DISCLOSED THE IMITATION WAX SCREW-HEAD. THIS WAX PROVED IDENTICAL WITH THAT IN SHINBURN'S POCKET.



Shinburn



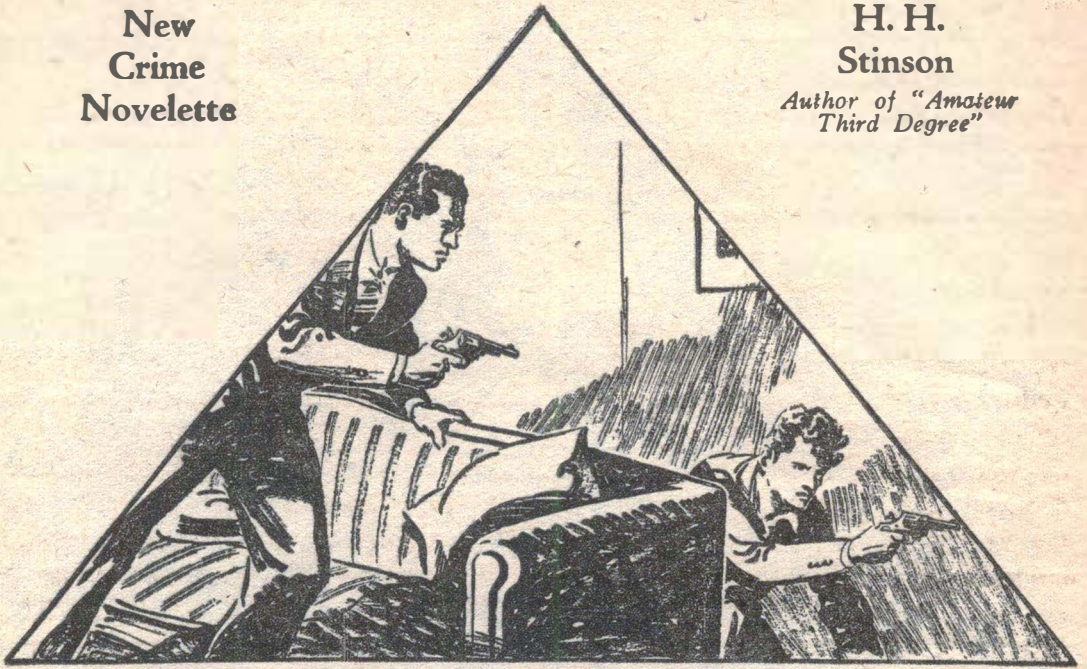
BULLARD

THIS EVIDENCE, AND A SUMMARY OF THEIR CRIMINAL RECORDS CABLED FROM AMERICA, CONVICTED THE PAIR OF ATTEMPTED BURGLARY. AND SO THE TWO CLEVER CROOKS, WHO HAD ONCE PARTICIPATED IN A MILLION-DOLLAR BANK ROBBERY IN AMERICA AND ESCAPED UNSCATHED, WERE CAUGHT AND PUT BEHIND THE BARS FOR A DOZEN YEARS BY A SIMPLE BIT OF CARELESSNESS LEAVING A COURTYARD DOOR OPEN IN THEIR ATTEMPT UPON A SMALL PROVINCIAL BANK IN BELGIUM.

The Gay Masquerader

A
New
Crime
Novelette

By
H. H.
Stinson
*Author of "Amateur
Third Degree"*



There was a gun in his shaking hand, but he wasn't pointing it at Killion

Murder to Spare

When Gerry Killion insisted it was murder, the police were more than willing to take his word for it. . . .

GERRY KILLION had put in sixteen long hours chasing witnesses in a damage suit. He was yawning when he tramped out of an early-morning fog into the lobby of his apartment building, wearily planting one big foot after another on the stairs that led up to the second floor where he had his one-room-and-bath.

The building was heavy with slumber; snoring sounds leaked out into the hallway from various apartments, a dim night-light made a furtive attempt to fight the gloom on the stairs and the transoms above apartment doors were dark and secret.

Passing the landing, halfway up the stairs, Killion yawned again and got his keys out. He bent his head, trying

to see clearly enough to separate his doorkey from the other keys, and so he was standing in front of his own door before he caught the fact that out of all the transoms along the hall, his was the only one that let yellow light shine through.

He broke off in the middle of a third yawn and stood regarding the lighted transom with a cocked, suspicious eye. He hadn't been in the apartment since noon of the day before and he hadn't had any lights on then. After a moment, he shrugged; maybe he had switched on a light absent-mindedly and had gone off without noticing it in the bright daylight.

Nevertheless, he inserted his key quietly, palmed the doorknob and then

whanged the door open fast without stepping inside himself. There was no sound from within the room and finally Killion stepped in cautiously, let his gaze coast around. He saw no one but the air held the faint, acrid odor of whiskey, a trace of cigarette smoke and the light he had seen while in the hall came from a reading lamp beside his sloppy, comfortable Morris chair.

Killion shut the door, began to whistle tunelessly and scaled his shabby Fedora at the lounge in the far corner of the room. He shucked himself out of his roomy, camel's-hair overcoat, dropped that on the lounge and, while the coat was still crumpling on the cushions, skated the lounge out from the corner of the wall. A gun snapped into his hand at the same moment.

In the triangle which had been formed by the back of the lounge and the V of the corner, a thin, youngish man with a widow's peak of curly black hair was crouching. There was a gun in his hand, too, and the hand was shaking and he didn't aim the gun.

He blinked up and Killion looked down at him for a second and then chuckled, saying: "Hi, Miles! Shall I hide now and see if you can find *me*?"

Detective-Lieutenant Miles Hanley rose from his knees. He had a swart, handsome face which was dewed lightly now with sweat. His breath was heavy with alcohol and the front of his light-brown suit was stained as though he had been unsteadily sick not so very long before. But his eyes were sober enough. They shimmered when they looked at Killion.

He muttered, "I wanted to be sure you were alone, Gerry, before I showed myself."

"I am," Killion said. "So you can give yourself up now."

Hanley didn't move. His face jerked

at Killion, his eyes got wide and haunted. He said, "They're looking for me already? You mean they've already located me here?"

"You may be talking sense but it doesn't sound like it, Miles," answered Killion. "Now come on out of ambush and sit down. And if that's my old thirty-eight you've got—and it looks a lot like it to me—be careful. The trigger pull is practically zero pounds."

Killion holstered the gun which dangled from his own hand and stood aside while Hanley came out past him, leaden-footed. Killion steered him to the Morris chair, took the thirty-eight away from him and dropped it into the top drawer of a chest where he customarily kept it.

He looked over his shoulder at the detective, said: "You can't kill pink elephants with a gun anyway. Once I had striped-eared steinboks playing leapfrog all over the room and the only way I could get rid of them was to squirt 'em with a soda siphon. For a week afterward, every time I stepped on my rug, it fizzed."

"I'm not drunk." Hanley sat with his knees apart, his hands braced on his knees, his eyes boring between them at the floor. "Listen, Gerry, I've done you favors."

"Now it comes out. Wait until I get a drink and snap out of this heart attack you gave me. What'll you have? And make it bourbon because bourbon's all I've got."

Hanley shuddered and mumbled, "I'll never touch the stuff again."

Killion grinned. "I usually feel the same way after main-eventing with King Corn."

He went into the dressing-room behind his in-a-door bed and came out with a bottle of whiskey, three-quarters full. He poured himself a drink in a

water tumbler, filling the tumbler half full, and downed it with a backward jerk of his head.

He said, "Whoosh!" and made a rasping, gratified sound in his throat. Then he said: "All right, my lad, get on with it. What happened—'d some irate husband come barging home or did the skipper catch you crap-shooting down in the detective bureau garage?"

Hanley rocked back and forth, still staring at the floor. Then his face tightened and lifted toward Killion. "Gerry, will you go down to the bureau and f-find out for me if Harry Devine is dead?"

Killion put the tumbler back on the table with a bang. He said, "Now it's your partner and he's haunting you—is that it?"

"For cat's sake," Hanley replied, his voice cracking, "get over the idea that I've got the D.T's. Harry Devine is dead. He must be by now because he was dying when I left him."

Hanley ran a hard brown hand across his eyes, began to shake again.

"Take it easy," Killion said. He poured himself another short drink, stood looking at it and then at Hanley with gray eyes which had narrowed and become very serious. "How'd it happen?"

"He—he was shot—in the back of the head—"

"Who shot him?"

"I don't know. I swear, I don't know."

"Okay, but how about starting some place?"

HANLEY'S face was harried, his voice dull: "We pulled off a nice one last night. We turned up better than a hundred grand worth of ice, the Clevenger stuff—"

"You mean the dowager who had

her rocks lifted coming back on the boat from Honolulu?"

Hanley nodded. "We'd been working on it for a month along with Nick Foley, the private dick who runs the Pacific Agency offices. Dressy Dan McCorkle crossed on the same boat with the Clevenger woman and we figured Dan for the job but he was clean by the time we picked him up and so we had to put him back on the street. We kept tailing him, though, and noticed he made several stabs at the Transcontinent Bus Depot but shied off each time as if he figured he was being tailed. So last night Harry gets a hunch and we shake down the check room for parcels checked around the time the boat docked. There were only two and the rocks were in one of them. It made us feel pretty good, so on the way back to the bureau, we stopped at my joint for a few drinks to celebrate. I didn't think I had many but they must have sneaked up on me. About an hour ago, I came to in a chair in the living room. I had a terrific head so I went out to the kitchen for some water and Harry was on the floor by the stove."

Hanley paused, began to beat his right fist against his left palm softly and hopelessly. His face was the color of putty.

Killion swallowed his drink, said, "And then what?"

"He was still breathing so I phoned for an ambulance and then—hell, Gerry, I must have gone ga-ga. I ran out of the house and over to Wilshire, where I got a cab. All I could think of was that my pal had been murdered and it'd look pretty bad for me if they found me there. You and me had always been friends so I came here and let myself in with a skeleton key—"

Killion chewed his long upper lip and stared at Hanley. He said softly,

"And you think you killed him, Miles? Is that it?"

Hanley put his head into his hands, groaned through them. "My rod was on the kitchen table with two shells empty. One slug went into a china closet, smashed a pile of plates. The other—hell, Gerry, when I get too much of a load aboard, I go crazy. A month ago, I slugged my brother-in-law and cracked three of his ribs and didn't remember a thing about it when I woke up next morning. But when I get mean drunk like that, I always want to use my fists. I never went for my rod *before*. Anyway, Harry knew how to handle me. I don't see how I could have done it to him."

"If all this really happened," Killion said, "there's only one thing for you to do."

"I know—surrender. I'll go down and surrender now."

Killion shook his head. "You'll stay here until I find out more about this, kid. It may all be a bourbon dream and it won't do your record any good to go blabbing nightmares around headquarters. It's funny that if two shots were fired in your place somebody didn't hear them and investigate."

"I live with my sister and her husband in a bungalow on a big lot. They're out of town and people around the place might not have heard the shots. Hell, I'll come down with you. I must have been completely wingding to beat it. I even left my gun there and that's why I looked around until I found yours. I'll go with you."

Killion pushed Hanley back into the chair. "You'll sit here and drink black coffee until I get back."

Hanley's body was boneless, his mind and his will sodden. He let Killion shove him back and Killion went into the dressing room, put together hot

water and three spoonfuls of prepared coffee in a saucepan, brought the smoking concoction out to Hanley. He got his hat and coat on, slapped the detective on the shoulder and started for the door.

Standing there, he said, "Stay put."

"All right," Hanley answered inertly.

Killion got the door open and paused, saying over his shoulder, "How about the hundred grand worth of ice?"

Hanley stirred, shoves a hand down into an inside pocket. He brought it out again holding a flat leather case. He snapped the case open and blue-white fire shown in his hand. "Here," he replied, and put the case away once more.

"And that," Killion said, "would be a lot of ice in any man's icebox. Anybody but you and Devine that knew you'd recovered the stuff?"

Hanley shook his head dully. Then he changed his mind and nodded slowly. "Nick Foley knew. I located him over at the Beverly Bowl by phone and asked him over to my spot for a drink. He said he couldn't make it—he was on a job there. Why?"

"Just an idea," Killion said. "And if Nick was a mind reader, he wouldn't be liking my idea."

II

A FOGGY dawn was pressing down on City Hall Park when Killion knuckled the swing door of the detective bureau out of his way and went hard-heeled down the marble corridor, around a corner and into the homicide squad room. There was no one in there but through the half-opened door of the skipper's office came sounds that resembled a peanut-roaster in its last agony.

Killion grinned, raised his voice

above the welter of sound and shouted, "Why doesn't somebody throw a shoe at that cat?"

He went on through the door and a fat, bald-headed man with a red, freckled face took a flute from his lips and glared reproachfully.

"My mistake," Killion went on gravely. "I thought it was a feline and here it's merely Sergeant Dorfmeister with a new instrument."

"You got no feeling for music," Dorfmeister grumbled.

"I have," Killion objected, "and it's when you play that I realize it. But why the flute? The last time I was here, you were practicing on the double bassoon."

"Well, it seems there was complaints, Killion. It seems that when I would get down to my best low notes, the vibrations would get into the broadcast room and go out over the radio and people would phone in and ask did we have somebody sick down here. So the skipper said I would have to quit practicing the double bassoon so I asked him if maybe I could change over to the flute and he said okay if it was a small flute. So that is the reason I'm practicing the flute down here but I am still playing the double bassoon in the police orchestra. And what brings you in at this hour?"

"Just winding up a night of bargaining around. Anything doing?"

"Maybe," Dorfmeister said. "Lieutenant Larkin, who is partnering with me this month on the dog watch, is out on some kind of an ambulance call."

Killion's expression didn't change but his eyes grew very sharp and curious. He said, carelessly: "It wouldn't be anything important, I suppose, or you'd be out on it, too?"

"Yeah," Dorfmeister replied. "I guess I would be, Killion. On all the

small stuff, the Lieutenant says he will take care of it so I can stay here and practice my flute. I tell him I would just as soon go out with him on account of I can practice just as well riding as sitting here but he says he thinks I can concentrate better here alone. For a man who is not himself interested in music, the Lieutenant is very considerate. Wouldn't you say so?"

Killion chuckled. "I would. He'll give himself a break any time."

"How is that, Killion?"

"Skip it, Sergeant. How long has Larkin been out?"

"Quite some time now. He should be calling in any minute."

The Sergeant put the flute to his lips, splayed his fingers along its length and produced a piercing high note. The phone chimed in with a long flat jangle.

Dorfmeister picked up the phone, said, "Homicide squad, Sergeant Dorfmeister at this end." He listened a moment and his china-blue eyes grew wide and shocked. He said, "Well, now that is very distressing, Lieutenant. Harry Devine was not only a swell guy but also the best tuba player we had in the orchestra. It is very distressing and we will certainly miss him."

The phone squawked loudly at Dorfmeister and although Killion couldn't make out from the sounds just what Larkin was saying, he knew it probably had something to do with damning the police orchestra.

"Sure, Lieutenant," Dorfmeister said. "Let me get a pencil so I can put it down and get it right out on the teletype."

He started feeling in his pockets for a pencil and Killion thrust one in his hand.

"Go ahead, Lieutenant," Dorfmeister said and began to write on a scratch

pad. He hadn't written more than a few words before his mouth fell open and he mumbled, "Hey, Lieutenant, am I hearing you right? Did you say Miles Hanley?"

The telephone squawked and Dorfmeister grimaced, said, "Okay, Lieutenant, but if it wasn't you talking, I would say there was some sour notes in this some place."

He wrote rapidly, hung up after a minute and shook his head at Killion. The Sergeant had a fat, kindly face and mild eyes; the ensemble, now, was dismal.

"Tsk, tsk!" he clucked desperately, "this is not good. In fact, it is bad. It seems like Harry Devine, now, has been murdered and he was murdered out at Miles Hanley's home and Miles' gun is there with a coupla slugs fired but Miles has disappeared. So we're looking for Miles; because it seems kinda suspicious. If you will excuse me now, I will get this right on the teletype."

He put Killion's pencil in the flute case and tried to hand the flute to Killion. Killion got him straightened out and heading toward the teletype room. Afterward, Killion went out of the detective bureau and across the park to where he had left his car.

His face looked as though he had been tasting something very unpleasant. He had known Miles Hanley a long time and he liked him. Now he had to go out and tell Miles the bad news was true, advise him to surrender.

"Tough, Miles, tough," he muttered. "A hell of a high price to pay for a few drinks."

KILLION got back to the apartment building at quarter past six, drove his car up on the vacant lot next door, along with the cars of other ten-

ants, and climbed out. He was passing through the lobby when the door of the manager's office opened. Gray-haired Mrs. Conkey, who managed the building, looked out at him.

"Oh," she said, "oh, I'm so relieved, Mr. Killion!"

"I'm glad you're relieved, Mrs. Conkey, and why are you relieved?"

"Well, Miss Schmidt—you know the teacher who lives next to you and complains because you wake her up by singing when you come in at four o'clock—came to me a while ago and said you'd fired a shot in your room. So I went up and listened and knocked and you didn't answer and your car wasn't out on the lot. So I told Miss Schmidt she must have heard a backfire or been dreaming. But then I got to worrying about it, and now—"

Killion spun and headed for the stairs, hitting one out of three while Mrs. Conkey's mouth dropped into a round O of amazement. On the way up, Killion dug for his doorkey, had it in his hand when he slammed to a stop in front of his apartment. He got the door unlocked in a hurry, slung it wide and took one step inside.

Then he said, "Uhn!" in a soft voice and froze where his first step had carried him.

Miles Hanley lay on the floor not half a dozen feet from the door. He was on his face and thin rivulets of blood had trickled down the side of his jaw from a wound just above the ear. Killion took two more steps that brought him beside the body and he stooped, felt for a pulse and realized by the chilling flesh that there hadn't been any pulse for some time.

He stood up, narrowed eyes taking things in. A window was open, morning breeze puffing out the white curtains. Hanley's hat lay on the floor be-

side the Morris chair. The coffee Killion had prepared was still in the saucepan and the cup he had placed beside it was still clean.

The thirty-eight he had taken from Hanley lay on the rug, six inches from the detective's hand. Killion shook his head, said under his breath, "And maybe it was the best way, Miles."

He started to back out, stopped. His eye caught a glint of light on gold tooling and smooth pin seal leather just under the corner of the chair. He stepped around Hanley's body, knelt and craned his neck so that he could look beneath the chair. The jewel case Hanley had shown him was there, open and empty. Killion didn't touch it.

After a moment he got to his feet. His lips were tight, his eyes puzzled.

At the doorway, Mrs. Conkey screamed thinly and Killion turned in time to catch her as she fainted. He carried her down to a couch in the manager's apartment. He found some whiskey, let a little trickle between her lips and took two generous jolts for himself. Then he got on the phone, dialed the police department.

A bit later Killion sat in a corner of the lounge in his apartment and watched Lieutenant Larkin with an expressionless stare. Larkin had listened to his story without comment, without any indication of belief or disbelief on his dry, bony face.

Larkin was on his knees with his eye less than six inches from the right temple of the dead man. Just inside the doorway, Nick Foley, a small plump man with a mane of white hair and a fat, white face that wore a look of genial cunning, was standing beside a girl. The girl was a tall, leggy blonde. She had a mop of bright hair showing beneath a halo hat, blue eyes that didn't miss a trick and a wide, curved mouth.

Killion had gathered from words dropped here and there that the girl was Nick Foley's secretary, that her name was Violet Macy and that she and Foley had been hauled down to the Homicide Squad by Larkin when he learned Foley had been working on the Clevenger case alone with Devine and Hanley.

Foley padded across the room, detouring around Larkin, and sat on the lounge beside Killion. He gave Killion a smile and said, "Hello, Gerry!"

"Hello, Nick."

"How's everything at the Killion & Reddy agency?"

Killion said, "Just fine. Except this."

"It's pretty tough," Foley nodded. "I've known Hanley a long time. A swell guy when he wasn't drinking but mean as a snake when he was. When he realized what he'd done this time, I guess he figured he was in a jam there was only one way out of. You can't blame him much."

"Maybe," Killion said. "Only I don't think he took that way."

Foley raised white eyebrows. He said gently, "I'm afraid you're sort of wet on that, Gerry."

"Okay, I'm wet. Let's skip it."

Larkin got up, dusted one hand against the other. He was a tall, spare man with bleak, humorless eyes. He didn't care much for private cops and it showed in the glance he gave Killion.

He said, "If you'd done what you should have done, Killion, you'd have saved yourself a hatful of trouble."

"Clear that up, Lieutenant," Killion said impassively.

Larkin went on dusting one hand against the other and the sound was like sandpaper being rubbed against sandpaper. "If you'd notified us the minute you heard Hanley's story, he wouldn't have had a chance to commit

suicide and your fingers wouldn't have got the itch."

"So it's suicide and I took the rocks? You could get smarter ideas than that out of a comic strip, Lieutenant."

Larkin moved, stood over Killion. His face was sour and he said, "You private dicks get away with a lot but this time your foot has slipped. Where are those diamonds?"

KILLION got up and the upthrust of his wide shoulders made Larkin give a little ground. There was a hot, irritable look to Killion's eyes but he kept his voice easy. "I've told you I never got closer than six feet to those rocks. I've told you this was murder. If you still want to write it off as a suicide, hop to it. But lay off me until you get solid ground under your feet."

"I've got all the ground I need under my feet—and also your neck, Killion. The picture's plain enough. When you left, Hanley got to thinking over what he'd done, so he decided the best way out was the Dutch route. You admit he knew where your rod was. It's a cinch nobody would come busting in here, all set to bump Hanley, that he'd know where your rod was or that, if he did, Hanley would have given him time to get it. Then there's the powder burns around the wound, showing the gun was held close. And, not so important but backing up the rest of it, the schoolmarm next door says that after the shot she watched the hall for half an hour and nobody left this apartment."

"Take a look out the window," Killion said.

"I have taken a look and what of it?"

"That window wasn't open when I left. Furthermore, even a guy that won his dick's badge in a raffle could see that a car could be parked underneath the window. Standing on top of a car,

a man could see into the window and could climb through it. In addition to that, I know one thing that convinces me this was murder."

"And that's what?"

"Those diamonds were gone when I got back here from the bureau. Somebody got them and it wasn't me. Find the guy that has them and you'll be getting some place."

"Keep talking," Larkin growled. "Every time you open your face, you make it worse. How many guys beside you, do you think, knew Hanley was here and knew he had the diamonds?"

"At least one citizen besides me knew he had the diamonds." Killion turned his head, stared impersonally at Nick Foley. "Miles told me he called Foley at the Beverly Bowl, told him the news, asked him over to celebrate with a few drinks."

"Don't try to tell me my job. I got that information out of Foley hours ago and checked the Bowl. Foley didn't leave there until two hours after Harry Devine was killed. He couldn't have known Hanley was here. So what? So I'm going to toss you in the can. The rocks will turn up later and provide you with a one-way ticket to San Quentin."

Nick Foley cleared his throat, said, "If you ask me, Lieutenant—"

"I'm not asking you."

The leggy girl chuckled suddenly, said in a throaty voice, "That puts us in our place, boss."

"Don't mind the Lieutenant, Violet," Foley said amiably. His small black eyes shone with amused understanding. "That's just his way. Isn't it, Lieutenant.?"

"All right, all right," Larkin grumbled. "What's on your mind?"

"Just that your case against Killion isn't very strong unless you turn up the

diamonds and connect their disappearance with him. Personally, I think it would be a very smart thing to round up Dressy Dan McCorkle and find out where he was during the night."

Killion said, "I can take my own falls, Nick. What now, Lieutenant?"

"I'm going to remove you from circulation for a while," Larkin said heavily. "Maybe for quite awhile. Come on."

Foley began to draw on gloves. He said, "If there's nothing more you want from me, Lieutenant, I'll be getting down to the office."

Sergeant Dorfmeister wandered into the room from Killion's dressing room. In one hand he held a small egg-shaped instrument.

He said, "Well, now, Killion, I didn't know you was a musician, too. Do you play this?"

Larkin snapped, "Sergeant, what have you got there?"

"Lieutenant this now is what they call an ocarina. It is somewhat like a flute but somewhat different, also, because—"

Larkin wagged his bony head despairingly. "I tell you to shake the place down for diamonds and you come up with ocarinas."

"Excuse me, Lieutenant, but seeing as how I am always very interested in things musical, I thought I would take a second off and ask Killion—"

"Back on the job—back!"

"Sure, Lieutenant."

Dorfmeister went back into the dressing room, examining the ocarina with interest and humming the William Tell overture.

"As I was saying," Foley murmured, "I'll have to be getting down to the office. Any objections, Lieutenant?"

"On your way."

"Incidentally, if you'll come down-

stairs to my car I can give you a description of the missing diamonds."

Larkin eyed Killion and called out, "Sergeant, see that Killion stays put."

Then he went through the door after Foley and the leggy girl. He was back inside of five minutes. When he came back, he paid no attention to Killion. He ambled around the room, looked out the window, went into the dressing room and talked to Dorfmeister, came out again and still didn't pay any attention to Killion. There was a look of heavy-handed subtleness on his angular hatchet-face. It puzzled Killion. It wasn't like Larkin to be wily.

Killion got up finally, said, "If it's the bastille for me, let's go. The sooner you throw me in, the sooner I can bounce out."

"Oh, that," Larkin said. "I changed my mind. Knowing you like I do, I figure you wouldn't pull a thing like that. I just got off on the wrong foot; so forget it, forget it. And if you got anything to do, don't let me keep you. Dorfmeister and me can dust the place without you."

"Somebody's been giving you ideas," Killion said.

"Ideas about what?" Larkin queried artlessly.

"Your normal notion of how to be subtle is to promise a guy a sock in the jaw and then kick him in the pants."

"I don't get you."

"And I don't get you," Killion said. "However, I'm going to snatch some breakfast before your brains do another nip-up."

III

KILLION parked his roadster at First and Broadway and went across the street and through the doors of the Woodbine Coffee Shop. He had figured that he would find Della Freel,

who gave the offices of Killion & Reddy a nice touch of femininity, breakfasting there. He was not wrong.

She was at a table halfway down the wall, a small, slim girl with green eyes and a quizzical mouth in an oval, pointed face. A small hat rode becomingly cockeyed on dark red ripples of hair and she was trim and demure in contrast to Killion's large, careless shagginess. She looked up at him with a nice smile as he swung down the aisle between tables. He knew she was getting ready to speak to him.

He said, nearing her, "You don't know me."

Della looked startled. Then she said, "Games this early?"

"Play up, play up," Killion said in a low voice, passing her table. He took a seat at the next table so that his back was to her, to the door. "Don't look at me and don't talk to me. Read your paper and gargle your orange juice and listen."

He took a late street edition of the morning *Tribune* from his pocket, crackled it open, spread it before his face. He talked into the paper in the same low voice and it served as a sounding board that brought his words back to Della.

"There's a little, flower-faced guy with a speck of mustache and a plaid overcoat tailing me. He'll probably come in here after me—"

"He just came in." Her whisper barely reached Killion.

"I told you not to talk," Killion muttered. "As soon as I have a couple of doughnuts and coffee, I'll leave. When he tails me, you tail him. I'll lose him and then you find out where he goes. D'you think you're wideawake enough at this hour not to lose him?"

Della didn't answer but her high, sharp heel rammed back and dug into

Killion's ankle. He cursed under his breath and then chuckled.

"Always an answer from you, Della, always an answer."

Killion dunked his doughnuts in his coffee and looked over the paper. They had bannered the killing of Harry Devine but there was nothing in the story about the death of Miles Hanley. Killion finished the coffee, got his feet under him. The small man, who had features that were doll-like in their regularity, was sitting at a table near the door and Killion noted with satisfaction that he had no more than started on an order of grapefruit, ham and eggs, a mound of buttered toast and coffee.

Killion paid his check, swung out onto Broadway into nine o'clock throngs. When he had gone a hundred yards south toward Second Street, he had a glimpse in the mirror of a gum machine of the small man bursting from the doors of the Woodbine, his overcoat half on, half off. Killion crossed Second Street, slowed his pace. When he got to Third Street the small man was only fifty feet behind.

At Third Street, Killion paused on the curb, hummed through his big nose and waited for Broadway traffic to catch the red light. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Della Freel was sauntering along fifty feet away and that the small man was poised on the curb near him.

The traffic bell jangled flatly, the red light went on and Killion stepped into the street. A black-browed, lantern-jawed cop was working traffic in the middle of the crosswalk. He saw Killion, flipped a salute at him and said, "How's about everything, Gerry, me boy?"

Killion grinned. "Everything's in the pink, Brady. What about you?" He

stopped, got a cigarette out, stood in Brady's lee to light it. He saw the small man hesitate and then, because there wasn't anything else to do in the middle of a street, the small man went on. He reached the opposite walk and loitered in front of a credit jeweler's window. Della Freel pattered across the intersection without looking at Killion.

"Things are jake with me," Brady said, waving on a slow driver, "except me feet raise hell along about two o'clock and I begin showin' me teeth to some of these here ga-ga motorists. What I'd like is to get on a radio car where I could rest me feet."

The signal bell clattered again and Broadway traffic began to inch forward for the second bell. Killion saw the small man turn from the window and dart for the curb.

"Yeah," Killion said. "Well, s'long, Brady."

He dodged in front of a street car, made a sidewise jump away from the bumper of a startled motorist and got back to the curb he had left. Across the street, the small man was fuming, stymied by a steady stream of automobiles, street cars, busses.

Along with a stream of office-bound workers, Killion went through the revolving doors of an office building, past the elevators and out through a rear door into a parking lot. An alley took him to Hill Street. He caught a cab there and rode to the building on Tenth Street where he had a cubbyhole of an office.

Jim Reddy was there ahead of him. Reddy was half way between five and six feet in height with a hard, chunky body and a square face which was given a false air of drollery by a nose that had been broken and badly set. He had been an op for the Seaboard agency before hooking up with Killion and it

had been his money that had given Killion and Reddy a start.

He took his feet down from the desk and tossed a morning paper aside when Killion came in. Cocking his head, he said, "Hello, Gerry. Did Hanley fall or was he pushed?"

KILLION scaled his hat at the clothes-tree, caught it on the top hook before he let his eyes turn around at Reddy. "Morning, James," he said. "How did you know about it? That part's not in the papers yet."

"It was on the seven-thirty news broadcast — Devine, Hanley, you, Foley, the diamonds—the works, in fact. Including the fact that there's a ten-grand reward for the rocks. You didn't bring 'em with you, did you?"

"You've said funnier things." Killion sat on a corner of his desk, fished for a cigarette.

"Excuse it. What's the lowdown, Gerry?"

"Do you want to hear me guess?"

"Why not?"

Killion got his cigarette going, let smoke spurt through his words. "There's a very smart ginzo running around with two murders on his conscience, if any, and a hundred grand worth of ice in his jeans. In other words, I don't think Hanley knocked off Devine and I don't think he committed suicide."

Reddy looked dreamily at the ceiling. He said, "It'd be a very swell idea to locate this ginzo you mention. Killion & Reddy could use ten grand; they could use it."

"There won't be any Killion & Reddy," Killion said grimly, "if I don't get out from under on this. I know I'm clean but the cops don't know it and everybody else will feel the same way about it. I've got to find this ginzo."

"Where do we start? How about Foley?"

"Maybe."

Reddy put his feet back on the desk. He said curiously, "What kind of a guy is Foley?"

"Plenty smart. And if he isn't on the level, at least he's never been caught at it."

"Any other ideas?"

"There's Dressy Dan McCorkle, the guy that originally lifted the rocks from the Clevenger dame. He wouldn't have liked losing—"

The phone rang and Killion scooped it up, said, "Hello?"

Della Freel's voice came over the wire. "Operative Z-1 reporting to the mastermind. And just for that crack about me not being wideawake, Gerry, you can buy me another breakfast in place of the one I paid for and didn't get."

"You ought to thank me. You're beginning to have bulges where you used to have curves, Della. Kidding aside, what'd you find?"

"The flower stewed around a while after you walked out on him and then went to an office building at 569 South Spring. I rode up in the elevator with him and he got off at the seventh floor. I rode to eight and dashed back down the stairs. Our little man had just gone into the Nick Foley's offices. What have you done that Nick should be interested in you?"

"It's a story. Come in and I'll spin it."

Della said something about "ten minutes"; then her voice faded away and after a moment it got stronger again. She said in a hurry, "Gerry, our little man is—"

After that, for a few seconds, Killion heard vague but indecipherable voices. Then there was the click of the con-

nection being broken. Killion swore and cradled the phone.

Jim Reddy said, "What is it? Anything wrong?"

"I had Della tailing a little guy from Foley's office. It sounded as though she'd got jammed up with him."

"Yeah?" Reddy said. He got up, reached for his hat.

Killion growled, "I won't need help. You stand by here in case Della calls again."

"Listen," Reddy said, "if those apes think—"

"Who said they could think? You stay put and I'll let you hear from me later."

IV

THE name PACIFIC DETECTIVE AGENCY, INC., was lettered in gold leaf on half a dozen doors on the seventh floor of the building at 569 South Spring Street. Killion pushed through the one that said *Entrance*, and slammed to a stop in a railed enclosure.

The offices were very swanky, compared to the quarters of Killion & Reddy. There was a desk to one side just beyond the railing. A brass sign on the desk said *Information* and the leggy girl sat behind the desk. She looked at Killion's rocky face, his lidded eyes, and said casually, "Ah, there, Big and Handsome!"

"I want to see Nick," Killion rumbled.

"Sorry," the leggy girl said. "No can do, Killion."

Killion said, "The hell I can't see him!"

He tried the gate, found it locked and put one long leg over the railing, brought the other one over after it. The leggy girl jumped up from the desk and tried to block him off and Killion sat her back in her chair, not

too roughly. He threw her a mocking glance, said, "Be calm, Violet; be calm," and went down an inner corridor toward a door that was marked with Nick Foley's name. There were other doors opening off the corridor into cubicles of office but none of the cubicles was occupied.

There was also no one inside Foley's office but there was a distinct odor of fresh cigar smoke in the air. Another door, unlettered, opened from Foley's office onto the building hallway.

Killion backed out and returned to Violet Macy's desk.

She gave him a derisive grin, said, "Satisfied?"

"Where's Foley?"

"Out. I'd have told you if you hadn't gone into your one-man track meet."

"I'll wait."

It was twenty minutes before the door opened and admitted Nick Foley. He came in breezily, shedding his overcoat, rubbing his hands, shooting a look of buoyant, guileless surprise at Killion.

"Hello, Gerry," he said. "Hello, there. Waiting to see somebody?"

"You," Killion said. At any other time, Foley's affectation of cheerful greeting, of just having arrived, might have amused him. Now it didn't. He said, monosyllabically, "You, Nick."

"Come along."

Killion followed the man down the inner corridor, into the big office. When the door was closed, he said, "What was the idea of the act, Nick?"

"What act, Gerry?"

"Quit clowning. You were in this office when I hit the front gate. The girl gave you the highsign in some fashion and you powdered out your sneak exit, took a walk around the block."

"You're mistaken, Gerry."

"Have it your own way. But here's something I want straight answers to. You had a little pansy-puss tailing me this morning—"

Foley's fat face slid into lines of mirth. He chuckled, "Pansy-puss! Clever, Gerry, clever. I must pass that on to him, he'll appreciate it. He, Gerry, is Tod Carroll, one of the hardest-boiled little ops I've ever worked with. Comes from Chicago. By George, I must pass that on to him. Pansy-puss!—very good, Gerry."

"Whoever he is, you had him tailing me."

Foley was in back of the desk. He rested his fat hands, knuckles down, on either side of the blotter and leaned forward over the desk. His eyes were crafty, merry. "Grant that he was tailing you, Gerry. Should a lad that knows the whereabouts of a hundred thousand dollars worth of diamonds run around without an escort?"

Killion growled, "You and Larkin ought to do your dreaming in bed."

"I do." Foley lifted his brows, made his face a playground for craftiness, sympathy, good feeling. "I'll make you a proposition, Gerry. Just because you and I have been friendly—and because I can use some change—I'll make you a proposition. You haven't a chance of fencing those stones because the cops will be on your neck every minute. I can do it and nobody has to be the wiser. They've just disappeared, that's all. You and I split a sweet piece of dough."

"To hell with the diamonds," Killion said through his teeth. "I said I didn't know where they were and I wasn't kidding and what I came here about, you fat Irish ape, was that pint-size dick of yours and a girl that works for me."

Foley said, "Let's handle one thing

at a time." He leaned over still further until his face was above the box of an office inter-communicating system on his desk and beamed at Killion. "You don't trust me, Gerry. Maybe I wouldn't trust anybody in your shoes. But we could do business this way—hand me half the ice. I'll fence it, turn the money over to you and take the rest of the diamonds as my share."

Killion's eyebrows came down, his mouth warped suddenly. He said, "I thought there was something smelly about this. You've got the switch open on the intercommunicating system, eh?"

HE WENT to the door, opened it fast. Down the length of the inner hallway, he saw Larkin's lanky figure pulling away from the leggy girl's desk. Sergeant Dorfmeister was still leaning over the desk, holding one large red ear near the box of the inter-communicating system. The flower-faced man sat on the edge of the desk, swinging his foot idly.

"If you guys will come into Nick's office," Killion said, "you'll be able to hear better."

Larkin looked faintly sheepish. He came down the corridor, sucking at large yellow teeth, and the Sergeant and Tod Carroll followed him.

"So," Killion said, "that was the reason for Nick's act? He wanted to give you guys time to get over here and listen to me fall for his phony proposition? And then you'd have popped me in the can."

"I'm going to anyway," Larkin said.

Carroll planted himself in front of Killion. He said softly, "I'm a pansypuss, am I?" and exploded a sudden right at Killion's jaw.

Killion bobbed his head, making the small man miss, and the next moment

Larkin had shoved Carroll out of the way.

"The only reason I didn't put the pinch on you this morning, Killion," he said, "was because Nick asked me to turn you loose so he could have you tailed. It seems it didn't work out. Let's go bye-bye."

Killion grinned nastily at Foley. "My pal!"

Foley shook his head regretfully. He said, "I like you, Gerry. I always have liked you. I figured if you were clean, none of this would hurt you. If you'd got your nose dirty, then I had to turn you up no matter how much I liked you."

"Come on," Larkin said.

"Not until I've finished what I've started here," Killion said stubbornly. "I said I tumbled to this little guy tailing me. I had Della Freel, a girl from my office, tail him. When I gave him the slip, she followed him here. Then she got on a phone and called me. In the middle of our conversation she stopped, said something about this little guy coming at her and then—poof—into thin air. I want to know what Foley and his stooge are up to with her."

Nick Foley took on a look of surprise that seemed genuine. "I don't know a thing about Miss Freel, Gerry. Not a thing. Carroll, did you see any young woman in any phone booth?"

The flower-faced man was still glaring vengefully at Killion. He said curtly, "I don't know anything about any dame. After I reported in that I'd muffed on this big palooka, I went down to the barbershop in the building here and I've been there until ten minutes ago. I can prove it."

Larkin grinned sourly. "It's a stall like all the rest of his story this morning. There probably wasn't any gal

and your idea might've worked, Nick, if he hadn't noticed that intercommunicating system open. Come on, Killion."

He got Killion's left arm in his grip, signed to Sergeant Dorfmeister and between them they marched Killion out.

Dorfmeister made conversation because he was embarrassed at having to manhandle Killion. He said, "Science is wonderful, is it not now, Killion? I was thinking about that while we was listening at that gadget. It is a good deal like the radio, which is wonderful, too. Which reminds me I had a big argument with Mrs. Dorfmeister about is a radio a musical instrument or is it not? Me being interested in music of all kinds, I would like to have your opinion on that, Killion."

"Do you know what you're talking about, Sergeant?" Larkin snorted.

"Music, Lieutenant."

"Nonsense, Sergeant."

The Sergeant subsided but he was still embarrassed and his grip on Killion's right arm was mild, much milder than that of heavy-handed Larkin. They went down in the elevator and got out into the narrow lobby.

From the corner of his eye Killion saw an open door at the end of the lobby. It gave onto a dark landing and stairs with steel treads that corkscrewed down into the bowels of the building's engine room. Killion acted more on impulse than on calculation.

He jerked his arm out of Dorfmeister's hand, ground his heel with two hundred pounds on top of it into Larkin's instep. Larkin bellowed with pain and dropped Killion's arm. He spun and let his big right fist go at Killion's jaw. Killion ducked and the punch went over his head and con-

nected solidly with Sergeant Dorfmeister's teeth. Dorfmeister's feet went out from under him, flew into the air and tangled with Larkin's knees.

Larkin was winding up another one for Killion and Dorfmeister's feet unbalanced him, brought him toppling down on the Sergeant.

Killion whirled and darted into the open doorway. He grabbed the edge of the door, whipped the door shut and in the darkness found the knob of a bolt. He shot the bolt and started down the winding stairs. There was pounding on the door, the smack of heavy shoulders against it.

The stairs took him down into a boiler room. An elderly engineer in soiled dungarees looked up at him, startled, and Killion slammed past him toward a freight elevator which stood at the bottom of the shaft. He was aboard the elevator before the engineer hoisted himself uncertainly out of the rocking chair he had been occupying. Killion shook his head, put his hand inside his coat toward his left shoulder. The engineer sat down again in the rocking chair and Killion ran the elevator upward.

He stopped it at the street floor, went without too much appearance of hurry out a rear door and down an alley to Fifth Street. There he flagged a cruising cab, hopped in, said, "Hollywood, doc."

V

WHEN he was well outside the downtown district on Sunset Boulevard, Killion rapped on the glass. The cab driver, in obedience to Killion's gesture, pulled up in front of a drug store and Killion got out, said, "Wait," and went into the drug store.

He got on the phone and got through to his office.

Jim Reddy said, "Ah, my friend, it's too bad you weren't here five minutes ago. A very steamed-up copper by the name of Larkin was in here, claiming you had some diamonds and that you'd stepped on his foot. I don't know which he was worse burned up about, Gerry."

"Both, I hope," Killion said.

"Maybe you shouldn't have tromped on his dog."

"Sure. I should have gone to jail like a good boy. And a hell of a chance I'd have had there of cracking this case or of finding Della."

"Which reminds me," Reddy said, "Della called in fifteen minutes ago and told me to tell you to come out to her apartment."

Killion's, "Swell!" was relieved. Then he said, "Did she sound okay?"

"Yes and no. She acted as though she couldn't say much. If you hadn't told me to stay put here, I'd be on my way out to her place now. In fact, I think I will—"

"Keep on staying put," Killion said. "I'll call you."

He went back to the cab, gave a number on South Detroit and the cab rolled.

Della lived in a neat, new apartment building on Detroit just north of Wilshire. It was four stories of tan volcanic slab with a trim quiet lobby and a serve-yourself elevator.

Killion gave the lobby the go-by, went around the side of the building and up the back stairs. At the third floor, he tried the kitchen door of Della Freel's apartment. It was unlocked and he palmed the door open, stepped quietly in past an electric refrigerator and across shiny linoleum.

He heard a man's voice in the room beyond the kitchen and he got his gun out, hefted it and eased over to a

drapery that hung across the door to the living room. He pushed the drapery aside just far enough to get a one-eyed view of the room and then jerked the hanging aside and went on into the living room, chuckling.

Della Freel said, "It's about time, Gerry. I was getting hand-fag holding the iron on these boys."

However, the small gun in her hand didn't waver, still covered the two men who stood against the wall of the living room with their hands above their heads.

One of the men was well-fleshed, handsome and meticulously dressed in a dark, smooth suiting with edges of pique at the vest opening, a quiet tie, white cuffs that showed an inch beyond his coat sleeves. The other man was short and thin and looked not very far into his twenties. He had a gaunt, pallid face, a mouth full of bad teeth and flat and lusterless black eyes.

Killion mused, "You've made yourself a haul, Della. One of these guys is Dressy Dan McCorkle."

"The other one," Della said, "is a gentleman named Wisey. What the rest of him is named I haven't found out."

"Maybe they'd tell us," Killion said, grinning at the two men.

McCorkle, the well-dressed man, smiled quietly and said nothing. Wisey snarled but also said nothing.

After a moment McCorkle cleared his throat, said, "Listen, Killion—"

"Save it for later," Killion said. "Both of you face the wall. Della, you keep the boys covered."

The pair faced the wall and Killion stepped over behind them, began to shake them down. He found guns, wallets, personal belongings and tossed them to a table in the center of the room.

While he worked, he said, "How come, Della? The last word I had from you was 'our little man' so I beat it over to Nick's office ready to take flower-face apart."

"I said, 'a little man,'" Della said. "It was Mr. Wisey here and he scared me out of ten birthdays by shoving a gun into my bread-basket at the telephone booth. They stuck me in a cab and told me they were ambitious to talk to you so I suggested we come out here and I'd give you a ring to come out, too. When we arrived, they got careless and gave me a chance to find the gun I keep in back of this chair cushion. What's it all about? They seem to think you've got some diamonds of theirs."

"A lot of people have the same delusion," Killion said and went through the wallets he had thrown on the table. He found nothing.

Afterward he said, "Turn around, boys. You can lead off, McCorkle. What put you onto me this morning?"

THE dressy man and Wisey turned around from the wall. McCorkle looked suave, still smiled pleasantly. He said, "Wisey heard a news broadcast this morning, Killion. We heard that a copper by the name of Devine had been shot and killed presumably by his partner, and that the partner later committed suicide in your apartment.

"So we beat it out there, picked you up as you left and tailed you to the restaurant. We noticed another guy tailing you and finally saw Miss Freel get into the game. We wanted very much to talk to you quietly and we thought the girl could arrange it so we picked her up."

"I don't suppose," Killion said heavily, "you know anything about

Devine and Hanley getting themselves shot?"

"Not a thing."

"In that case, how does it happen that in your wallet is a notation of Hanley's address and a card from Nick Foley's Investigators, Incorporated?"

The dressy man lost his smile. He said, "I believe in knowing my way around."

Killion said slowly, "I'm beginning to get a picture. Why couldn't you have seen Hanley and Devine finding the rocks at the bus depot? Why couldn't you have tailed them to Hanley's place and shot Devine with Hanley's rod after Hanley had passed out and Devine was weaving? Maybe you couldn't find what you wanted and tailed Hanley to my place. Maybe you didn't even have to spot the two dicks at the bus depot. Nick Foley could have tipped you off, couldn't he? Only, if I'm guessing right, why put on a play like the one this morning?"

The thin pallid face of Wisey dropped open as though an idea had hit him and the impact had been almost too much. He snarled at McCorkle, "So, you big heel, that's where you was last night? I've had ideas about you ever since you wouldn't let me have a chance to get the rocks outa that check stand."

McCorkle looked startled. He said, "Wait a minute, Wisey, wait now—"

"Yeah, wait! You been shovin' that *wait* at me for weeks. You got the rocks last night and all this stuff this morning was just a gag."

He swore luridly and turned, losing a roundhouse right at the dressy man. The dressy man tried to dodge it. He tripped and spun toward Killion, slammed into him, knocking him across the room and onto the lounge beside Della Freel.

Della was half way to her feet when he lit on the cushions and caromed into her. McCorkle was picking himself up, heading for foyer, and Wisey darted toward the table where Killion had thrown the guns. Killion grabbed at the small gun which Della Freel was still holding dazedly and Wisey changed his mind, whisked toward the foyer in Dressy Dan McCorkle's wake. He was through the doorway before Killion got a good grip on Della's gun. By the time Killion got out to the hall, there was only the drum of feet two floors below. With that start, there was no use of chasing them.

He went back into the apartment, said, "Pour me a drink, Della. No, pour me two drinks."

"Only on condition," Della said, "that somebody tells me what this is all about. Diamonds, diamonds, diamonds. Everybody talks about diamonds but nobody tells a poor girl what's what about diamonds."

Between swallows, Killion told her what was what about diamonds. When he had finished, she said, "There are a lot of things that don't make sense."

"You're telling me?" Killion said. He ran his hand through his shaggy thatch, scowled a little. "It's had me going in large circles. But as I get it now, it has to be McCorkle that got those rocks, either with or without Foley's help."

"Why couldn't it have been Foley all by himself?"

"He has an alibi, at least, one that satisfies Larkin."

"Alibis can be faked," Della said. "Why don't we try that angle anyway?"

Killion looked at her with narrowed eyes. "I hate like hell to think Nick is that sort of a louse. I've always had a sneaking liking for the old monkey.

But, at that, it's worth seeing what we can find out."

He finished his drink and picked up the phone, dialing the police department and getting through to the Homicide Squad.

"Now what?" Della said.

"I want to talk to a man about a sore dog."

A voice came on at the other end, a voice that Killion recognized. He said, "Sergeant Dorfmeister, isn't it?"

"That is me," Dorfmeister answered. "And who is this?"

"Killion."

Dorfmeister said, "Well, now, Killion, it is time you begin to come to your senses. I am very surprised at the way you acted. Lieutenant Larkin was likewise surprised and besides his foot is very painful. And as for me, you should see my lips where the Lieutenant smacked me. I will not be able to play the flute or the bassoon for a month."

Killion chuckled. "I'm sorry, Sergeant. Never mind, I'll buy you an instrument you can play without your lips."

"Wait a minute, Killion," said the Sergeant.

Larkin came on and started barking and Killion said, "How's your foot, Lieutenant?"

What Larkin said was largely unprintable.

Killion waited until he had finished, said, "Now that the pleasantries are over, we can get down to business. I've just finished a conference with Dressy Dan McCorkle and a hooligan named Wisey who runs with him. Judging by what I learned, you'll be getting places on this case if you round them up and make 'em talk. I'm handing you this tip to show you I've got no hard feelings about this morning. I hope you

appreciate it—I may be doing myself out of the ten grand reward by tipping you.”

Larkin's bellow made the receiver vibrate. “You've got no hard feelings, hey? Listen—you get down here and turn yourself in and I'll talk to you. Not before.”

“So be it,” Killion said crisply. “If you sit there and wait for me, you'll grow roots. Just because your yen for me is curdling your brains, is no reason why I should be a crackpot. What I'm going to do is crack this case and hang it around your neck like a horse-collar. It'll go well with your mule blood. Good-bye!”

He slammed the receiver up, turned a wry grin on Della Street. He said, “And all I have to do now is make good on that.”

“I hope you can.”

“That,” Killion said, “makes two of us hoping the same thing.”

VI

THE Beverly Bowl lifted a long white two-story front of modernistic stucco and glass into the air in a swank district far out on Beverly Boulevard. Shortly before noon, Killion pushed out through the chromium and glass doors, came across the street to the cab in which Della was sitting. He climbed in, consulted a memorandum penciled on the back of an envelope and said to the driver, “902 South Lynn Street, skipper.”

The cab made a U-turn, clicked through gears and whirred back toward town.

Della said, “You sound as though you'd run into luck.”

“Maybe,” Killion said. He stuck his feet up on the jump seat, got a cigarette lit. “I found Dale Peavey, the Bowl's press agent, in the office. He

got me the addresses of the hat-check girl and the parking-lot attendant on duty last night. Foley and a couple of his men were shamusing a deb dance and if Foley skipped out for a while, the girl or the attendant would have been most likely to notice him. We'll try the attendant first.”

South Lynn was close to the downtown district, a cheap, shabby, worn-at-the-heel neighborhood in which dingy apartment houses shouldered each other dismally. Killion mounted dirty steps of 902, entered a lobby that smelled of greasy cooking. He consulted name plates in a brass frame on the wall and turned toward the stairs. Two flights up, he went down a dark hallway, located a door with 37 on it and knocked.

When it opened, the tanned sleepy face of a man in his late twenties looked out at him. The man tried to blink drowsiness from his eyes, said, “Whatta you want, brother?”

“You're Charlie Michaels?”

“Yeah. Whatta you want?”

“Information,” Killion said. “You take care of the parking lot at the Beverly Bowl nights, I'm told. Last night did you notice a short, heavy-set man with a mop of white hair put his car on the lot?”

Sleep was beginning to leave Michael's eyes. He said suspiciously, “Who are you, fella, and whatta you want this information for?”

Killion brought his hand out of his coat packet. It held a five-dollar bill. He smoothed the bill, smiled and said, “I want this information for five bucks. And does it matter who I am?”

The man's hand began to reach. “That's different,” he grinned.

When Killion came down stairs again, he had a satisfied look on his face.

He climbed into the cab and Della said, "So Nick's alibi leaks?"

"Like a sieve. The parking lot fellow says Nick drove out of the lot just before twelve and was gone nearly three hours. I hate to do this to Nick but it has to be done."

"Where do we go from here?"

"You'll get on the phone, call him and say you're the well-to-do Sophie Glutz or somebody and you need his personal services in the worst way. Make a date with him for about eight o'clock somewhere we can talk to him quietly."

"My sister has a bungalow in a swank court on Wilshire. She'd get out and let us have that for the evening."

"Swell," Killion said. "And I hope I'm wrong about Nick—but I'm afraid I'm not."

JIM REDDY stepped back from the window, let the draperies swing together. He grinned beneath his off-center nose and said, "Man the guns, m' lads. He's just driven up."

Killion didn't smile. "You know what to do, Jim. Shake his car down and then cover us from the outside."

"Oke," Reddy nodded. He took his hard, chunky body out of the smart living room and toward the rear of the bungalow. The back door slammed in synchronization with the peal of the front-door bell.

"Your play, Della," Killion said and melted out of sight into the kitchen.

From the darkness, Killion saw Nick Foley come into the room ahead of Della. Foley was beaming at her. He said, "You're Miss Alma Jensen, I take it?"

Killion stepped from the kitchen, said grimly, "No, Nick, I'm Miss Jensen and how do you like my disguise?"

Foley said, "You!" and took a step

backward. His fat face congealed into lines of puzzlement—good-humored puzzlement—but his eyes were sly as he let them slide over Killion and Della Freel.

As though he were baffled, he said, "I don't get it, Gerry. Just what is this?"

"This is a swell chance for you to do some explaining, Nick."

"I still don't get it."

"You will," Killion said. He took three fast steps, slid his hand under Foley's coat, pulled the gun from Foley's shoulder holster. He stepped back, said, "That was just in case, Nick. Sit down—or would you rather have it standing?"

Foley shook himself, rearranged his coat. He still looked good-humored but puzzled. "I think you're ga-ga, Gerry, but if you have anything to spring, spring it."

"Right, Nick, I've got you figured as either the Number One or the Number Two guy on the killings of Harry Devine and Miles Hanley and the disappearance of the Clevenger diamonds."

Foley smiled but the smile didn't get into his eyes. He said, "Just call your shots, Gerry."

"Fair enough. For your alibi last night, you claimed you were at the Beverly Bowl until around three A.M. I find you weren't. You drove off the parking lot at quarter to twelve and didn't get back until two-thirty. Maybe you'd like to explain why, if you're clean in this thing, you had to fake an alibi."

Foley began to grin this time. He said, "Gerry, it's a shame a fine lad like you can be so wrong about so many things. Sure, I drove away from the Bowl at quarter to twelve but it was only to an all-night service station a block away. I left my car there for

a grease job and walked right back to the Bowl. Later on, I got the car and brought it back."

"Okay," Killion said. "But you were gone from the Bowl for a while, weren't you?"

"For maybe fifteen minutes each time. So what?"

"Only that midnight's a funny time to take your car for a grease job. That is, it would be funny if maybe it hadn't been an excuse for you to get out somewhere that you could make a very private phone call."

"And who would I be making a very private phone call to?"

"To a guy by the name of Dressy Dan McCorkle."

"McCorkle?"

"To Dressy Dan," said Killion, "who, tipped off by you, could very neatly have pulled the entire job of killing the two dicks and getting the rocks back. I know that McCorkle was out of sight from his pals for a while last night and I know that you've been playing around with him. I had a session with the lad this morning, shook him down and found one of your cards in his wallet."

Foley shrugged. "You can't build anything on that, Gerry. I'm working for the insurance company and I've propositioned McCorkle to turn the diamonds back for ten percent. That's compounding a felony but I'll bet you've worked that angle yourself on a few cases. I'm afraid, my boy, you've built yourself up to a big letdown."

Killion scowled, didn't say anything for a moment. He looked like a frustrated bulldog as he fished for a cigarette, got it lit. He glanced at Della Freel and Della lifted her eyebrows, saying, "It has a plausible sound, Gerry."

"Yeah," Killion said. "It has. Just

the same, Nick, I'm going to put it all in front of Larkin and let him use his brains, if any, on it."

"Fine," Foley chuckled. "He has some talking he'd like to do to you, too. Let's go."

THE front door opened and closed and Jim Reddy came through the foyer and into the room. He was whistling without making much noise and he spun into the air something that shot blue-white light from a hundred facets. He caught the object again when it came down and tossed it again, this time in Killion's direction. Killion let it slap against his palm, held it. It was an inch-wide circlet of diamonds in a brooch setting.

"Fifteen grand is my guess," Reddy said. "Here's some more pretties. The rest of the Clevenger rocks, if my guess is right."

He dug down in his coat pocket, came up with half a handful of clustered gems from which light flowed like a living thing in his palm.

He said, "I shook down Senor Foley's puddle-jumper as directed, Gerry. The stuff was among the tools under the driver's seat."

Nick Foley's face had turned a brilliant, angry crimson under his white hair. His voice crashed at Reddy. "Damn you, those diamonds never were in my car. Or, if they were, you planted them there. This is a lousy, dirty frame!"

Reddy's hard, square face cracked in a chilly grin. He said softly, "You misjudge me, Nickie. D'you think if I'd committed a couple of murders to get these rocks, that I'd cancel all my hard work by turning 'em in just to frame you? Think again, Nickie."

"Exactly," Killion said. "And make your thinking fast, Nick. You had the

answers on your alibi and on McCorkle but I'm afraid you won't have the right answers on this. We'd all better go down and see Larkin."

The anger began to fade out of Foley's face, the red changing to a dull, sick white. He said slowly, "There can be only one explanation of this, Gerry."

"You take the words right out of my mouth."

"It's not what you're thinking. Hanley located me at the Beverly Bowl through my secretary, Violet Macy. He told her why he was calling me."

"A woman never pulled this," Reddy said.

"Not alone," Foley muttered. "Not alone. But Violet is sweet on Tod Carroll, the op I had tailing Killion this morning. If she had tipped Carroll off, he could have done it. He's plenty tough enough. And Violet is the only one that's been in my car since then besides myself. I didn't put that stuff there—so it must have been her. Give me a break, Gerry. Before we call in any cops, let me get hold of that pair and sweat them. I'll break their lousy necks!"

Foley's hands clenched and unclenched and sweat was popping out on his forehead. Della Freel looked at him as though she felt sorry for the fat, sick-looking man.

She said, "Why not, Gerry?"

Killion, himself, felt faintly sorry for the white-maned detective. He said, "I'll take a chance, Nick. But no shenanigans, understand?"

They went out to the curb where Foley had parked his coupé, a new and very shiny small car of the V-8 persuasion. Killion swung the door open, let Foley wedge in under the wheel and followed him.

He said, "Jim, you take Della in

your jalopy and tail us. I don't think Nick will try any funny business but keep right on our heels just the same."

Foley got the motor going, pulled out into Wilshire traffic. He loafed along, kept the speedometer needle below thirty and after two blocks of it, Killion snapped, "Come on, Nicky, goose this crate. Or do you think you're already going to your funeral?"

Foley's face was white and set but he growled back. "Keep your pants on, my boy. I've got less than three hundred miles on this car and I get a new car about once every five years and I'm breaking it in right."

"Where you're headed, Nick," said Killion, "it won't matter whether your car's broken in right, left or center. Get going!"

VII

THE seventh floor of the building at 569 South Spring was quiet and dark, save for a single light back of the door marked, ENTRANCE—PACIFIC DETECTIVE AGENCY, INC., when the night man at the building opened the elevator door and let Foley, Killion, Della Freel and Reddy into the corridor. The elevator sank again swiftly, making small whining noises.

Killion let Foley go ahead but he kept his hand on the gun in his pocket. Foley went through the lighted door and Violet Macy looked up at him from the information desk, her bright mop of hair shining in the beams of the desk lamp. She smiled, said, "Back early, aren't you, chief?"

Then her eyes saw Killion and Della Freel and Reddy and became pools of surprise. Her face jerked around at Foley and she said, "W-what—"

Foley growled deep in his chest. He shot an arm across the desk, grabbed her dress and jerked her upward. He

shook her, said between his teeth, "I'll break your dirty neck," and slung her from him. She staggered backward, caromed against a file, a chair and stopped against another desk.

Foley banged through the gate, bore down on her, grabbed her with both hands this time. He shook her and snarled, "Come clean, you lousy little rat, or I'll shake you loose from your teeth."

The door of one of the cubicles whipped open and the flower-faced little man ran into the outer office, his hand clawing at a gun beneath his armpit.

Killion's gun slid out of his pocket, swung toward the little man. He said, "Freeze, Carroll! I said, *freeze!*"

Carroll stopped abruptly, let his hand drop away from his shoulder.

The leggy girl began to cry. She chattered, "Chief—chief—what is it—what are you—?"

"Don't call me chief," Foley belated. "You slipped the Clevenger rocks down under the seat of my car this morning, down among the tools. Where'd you get 'em?"

"I d-don't know w-what you're talking—"

Foley drew back his fist and Killion said, suddenly and loudly. "Hold it, Nick!"

"Why should I?" Foley growled but his fist dropped.

"Because," Killion said, "you're pretty dumb—and so am I."

"What're you talking about?"

Instead of answering him, Killion swung narrowed eyes at Jim Reddy. He said, "Jim, you found those rocks under the seat of Foley's car among the tools, didn't you?"

"That's right," Reddy said. "Why?"

"Because," Killion said, dragging the words out of him as though they

hurt, "it's just occurred to me that there aren't any tools under the seat of Nick's coupé. It's a new model V-8 and, not being flush enough to be very familiar with new cars, it's taken me this long to realize the tools are kept in a compartment in the rumble. So if you didn't find those rocks where you said, you must have found them some some place else. Keep your hand away from that rod, Jim!"

Reddy's face had gone slack and pasty. After a moment, his hand fell to his side again and he said in a gritty, unnatural voice, "You're fairly smart, Gerry."

"Not smart enough soon enough," Killion told him dully. "Nick, get on the phone and get some law over here. This is going to be dynamite for my little outfit but if that's the way it is, that's the way it is."

Reddy croaked, "Listen, Gerry, if I—if I—"

He took a couple of steps toward Killion, his hands going apart in a wide gesture of pleading. Then he took one lightning-like step sidewise and behind Della Freel. His left arm whipped around her throat and hauled her against his chest where he held her as a screen between him and Killion's gun, between him and the others in the room. Della's scream was choked off by the pressure of his arm.

He said lifelessly, "I'm sorry we end up this way, Gerry, but I've got a gun against Della's back and she takes a slug if you don't drop your rod. I killed Miles Hanley—I guess you wouldn't have much trouble proving that now—and after one murder, a guy has murder to spare. So I advise you to drop the rod."

Killion snarled, "Rat!" in a tone of sick contempt but the gun dropped from his hand, thumped to the floor.

Foley and the leggy girl stood transfixed and Tod Carroll swore thinly. Reddy paid no attention to them.

"Yeah," he said, "I'm sorry we wind up like this. I've always liked you, Gerry, and to prove it, I'll clear you of any part in this before I fade out. I was chasing those damage-suit witnesses last night the same as you and when I finished up, I was near your place so I decided to have a drink with you. I was a block away when I saw you go in. I followed you and when I reached your door, it was ajar. You were talking to Hanley and I listened in. I was around an angle of the hall when you left. Later I knocked on your door and Hanley let me in. We talked for a few minutes. I managed to get your rod without Hanley noticing and then I got around behind him, let him have it, took the diamonds and left by the window. Tonight, things seemed to be getting too hot so I decided it'd be better to go for the ten-grand reward than to be a hog and I put on the play about finding the rocks in Nick's car. It was bum figuring. That's all except that I don't know anything about Devine getting killed. It must have been like Hanley said—he shot Devine in a drunken brawl."

KILLION said through his teeth, "Jim, you can't get away with it. Put the gun down and surrender and I'll do everything I can for you—even if you have turned rat."

"No dice," Reddy said, tightening his hold on Della Freel. She gagged and moved convulsively and he said, "Be a good girl, Della. You can have your breath back in a minute. I'm going out of here now and don't anybody make a move that looks funny."

He backed toward the door, always holding Della Freel so that she

screened him. He kicked the door, already partly open, all the way open and backed out into the darkness of the corridor. His feet and Della's feet made little, scuffling sounds for a moment and then Della screamed, "Gerry!" full-voiced, and there was the sound of feet pounding on marble toward the stairway.

Killion scooped his gun from the floor, already on the run toward the door. He got outside, slammed into Della very hard and saved her from going down by grabbing her around the waist. He said, "You okay, kid?"

Della said breathlessly, "I'm all right, Gerry. Be careful, will you? He's gone crazy."

He let her go, barged toward the stairway and down. Below him, two flights, he could hear feet spitting on the stairs and he went down the dark steps three at a time, hanging onto the rail with his left hand, holding his gun balanced easily in his right. He got as far as the third floor. The footsteps below ceased suddenly and then there was a muted thump. Killion kept on going and brought up a few seconds later against a bronze grille that was locked across the stairs between the second floor and the lobby. Without hesitation, he climbed over the stair railing and dropped the fifteen feet to the lobby floor. The lobby boomed to gunfire and a long, whitish scar jumped into sight on a marble panel by Killian's head. Jim Reddy was just backing through the door.

Killion got his feet under him and rocked in a hurry past a cowering night attendant. He reached the door, went out fast and saw Jim Reddy thirty feet away with one foot on the running board of his roadster. Reddy's back was turned and Killion could have put a slug neatly between his shoulders.

Instead, he yelled: "Jim, I've got you!" Drop it!"

Reddy whirled, stooping, and his gun flamed, waking echoes in the narrow street. Killion felt shock whip from his hand to his elbow and his gun spun away from his grip, slammed against the building and fell a dozen feet away.

Reddy cursed at him wildly, said, "Damn you, Gerry, get back in that building. Get back, I tell you!"

Killion shook his head. His lips drew back from his teeth in a stubborn grimace, his eyes were steely. He said, "I can't let you get away with it, Jim. Not as long as I'm on my feet."

The street shook to gunfire again but the slug didn't touch Killion. For the fraction of a second, he thought Reddy had fired again and missed. Then he saw Reddy take two slow steps to the side, saw him take another step ahead and pitch forward on his face. The chunky body rolled over convulsively and then lay still.

A large, round figure stepped from a doorway parallel with Jim Reddy's body and turned a long-barreled gun toward Killion. Then the gun dropped and Sergeant Dorfmeister said, "Why, it is you, Killion? Now what is this all about?"

Killion didn't answer him. He dragged feet over to the body of Jim Reddy, looked down at it with a bitter, locked-in stare. The Sergeant stood beside Killion.

He said, "Who is this guy, Killion, and what for was he taking pot-shots at you?"

"He was my partner and if you'll look in his right-hand coat pocket you'll see why he was shooting at me."

Dorfmeister knelt and thrust his fat hand into Jim Reddy's pocket. The hand came out, grasping three pieces of

diamond-set jewelry. The Sergeant gaped.

"Why, this," he said slowly, "looks to me like some of that Clevenger stuff."

"It is."

"And this guy was your partner?"

"He was."

The Sergeant got to his feet, said, "Then I must say this does not seem very good for you, Killion."

Killion kept on looking at the body. He said, his throat rasping, "Yeah?"

"Now don't misunderstand me," Dorfmeister said apologetically. "If it was just me, it wouldn't be so bad. But you know Lieutenant Larkin. He is a very suspicious guy."

KILLION slanted a hard, cheerless stare at the Sergeant. He said, "Dorfmeister, I've had a tough night. I've had a partner that I've worked with for five years turn rat on me. I've seen him shot and killed. Now don't ask me to worry about that nitwit, Larkin."

"But even so—"

"Listen, Sergeant," Killion insisted, "I remember I promised to buy you a musical instrument you could play without using your lips. I'll buy it if you'll play it for Larkin."

"Well, now, that is very kind of you, Killion, and I always play my various instruments for the Lieutenant. But why do you bring that up?"

"Because the instrument I have in mind has a wooden mouthpiece and a piece of rubber about two inches long. It goes b-l-a-p!"

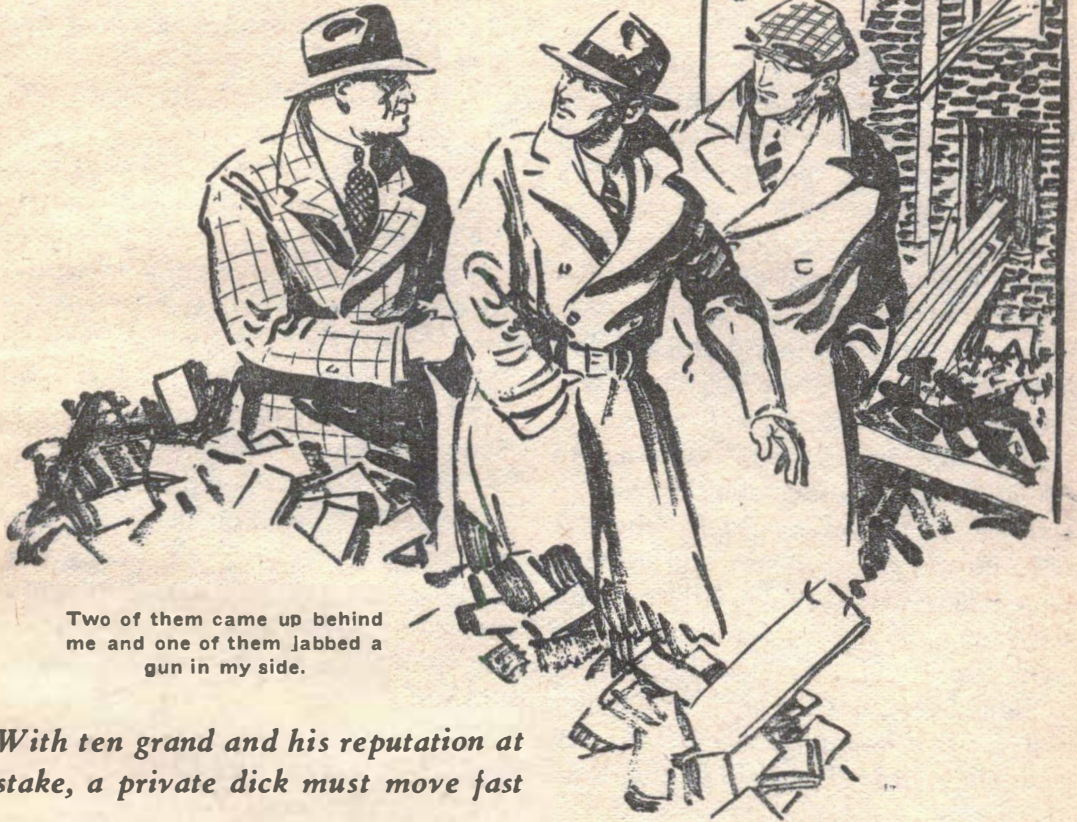
The Sergeant looked shocked. He said, "Why, that is not a musical instrument. It is called the raspberry. You want I should play that for the Lieutenant? The raspberry?"

"The raspberry," Killion agreed without a smile.

Blackmail

An Exciting Novelette
By Roger Torrey

Author of "Payment Arranged,"
"The Hard Way," etc.



Two of them came up behind me and one of them jabbed a gun in my side.

With ten grand and his reputation at stake, a private dick must move fast

THE man was standing by Betty's desk when I went in the office. I slammed the door when closing it and he almost jumped over the desk when he heard the bang. He faced around with his face jerking, and Betty said:

"Mr.—" She looked down at a card she was holding—"Mr. Work to see you, Mr. Gallagher."

She was behind him and she made a face and kissed the card and scratched the palm of her left hand.

I was three weeks behind with her salary and a client probably looked as

good to her as one did to me. I said: "Come in my office, Mr. Work," and opened the door marked *Private* and followed him inside. I waved at a chair and he tried to sit down but it took him some time because of being so jittery. I sat across from him and asked:

"What was it?"

He had one hell of a time getting the words out but he finally made it. He said: "I'm being blackmailed."

I told him that lots of people were in the same fix, if he only knew it, and asked him what he wanted me to do about it. He said, very quickly:

"I want to pay their demands."

"Why don't you?"

"I want to arrange it so I'm sure . . ." He trailed off and I helped him out with: "You want to be sure you're getting the evidence you're paying for. Is that it?"

"That's it. I'm sure they wouldn't give it to me, even if I did pay."

I'd figured him out by then. Half smart but no nerve; and this proved me right on both counts. I kept talking with him, getting him soothed down, and found he wasn't sure just who he was dealing with but that he was supposed to part with ten grand. He side-stepped any mention of what he was buying with the ten grand and I didn't press him on it. All he'd tell me was that it was five letters in all.

The blackmailers were supposed to call him that evening and he was to have the money all ready for them. I told him to get the money and bring it to me and to tell them, when they called, that I had the money for them and to get in touch with me. Then I said:

"While you're at the bank, you might as well make arrangements for my fee at the same time. That will be the usual ten per cent."

He looked startled and asked if that wasn't steep. I told him that if he could do any better he should be out looking for the place. He said, very quickly:

"Oh, it's all right. In advance, I take it."

I told him fifty would be for a retainer and he gave me that in cash. Then he left.

Work came in with the money, about five, and then went to his house to wait for the call. Betty went home, after sticking her head in my office and telling me to be careful. I waited until seven, then telephoned the corner place for some dinner to be sent up, and I

was just eating when the phone rang and some man said:

"Is this Mr. Gallagher? Sam Gallagher?"

The voice was smooth and soft. I told him, "Right!" and he said Work had told him to get in touch with me. He said that contacting me was fine with him because he was really level on the deal. I said:

"I'll level right along with you. How'll we work it?"

"Go out of your office and start walking up Ninth, toward Second Avenue. We'll see you and we want to see you're alone. If you're tailed, there'll be no contact made and it'll be too bad for Work. Bring the dough with you."

"What about the stuff?"

"You do your part and I'll do mine. Start in twenty minutes."

I said: "Okay. You'll see me."

He said: "Yes, you bet," and hung up.

It was a dirty business and I didn't care for any part of it. The only thing was that I hate a blackmailer more than any single thing in the world and there might turn out to be a chance for a cut at this bunch. I couldn't do a thing, though, until I had Work's letters.

I WAITED the twenty minutes and started out. With the money wrapped in newspapers. About the time I was halfway to Second Avenue, I knew I was tagged, and when I got to a stretch where they were tearing up some old houses and the street was pretty well torn up, they made contact.

Two of them. They came up from behind me and one shoved a gun in my side, which I'd rather expected, and the other said:

"Gallagher!"

I said I was Gallagher. He said: "Give me the dough."

I said: "Sure, mister. Give me the letters."

THAT was all I knew until I came to and found two men trying to load me in an automobile. I kicked out and one of them said:

"Hell! He's come to."

He grabbed at his shin, where I'd landed on it with a heel, and I saw they were two coppers and that the car they were loading me in was a patrol wagon. One of them said:

"We got a flash that some guy was lying on the sidewalk. We made the run and found you. How you feel?"

I said I felt like hell. And that I had no idea who'd smacked me down and so couldn't make a complaint.

They drove me to a hack stand and I had the hacker take me to my office. And then I got sore. I started to pay the cabby and found the two yeggs had rolled me for the twenty-two bucks I had in my pocket. This, on top of losing the money and not getting the letters, was the capper. I really burned. I went up to the office, took Work's fifty from the safe and paid off the cab, then went over to the garage for my own coupé.

I had to see Work and couldn't think of an excuse to put it off. But I didn't look ahead to the interview.

WORK lived on 4th Avenue, just off 34th Street. Not a bad looking house, but not at all a prosperous place or neighborhood. Not the kind of place that usually goes with a ten grand shake-down, and about then I figured something was shaky about the deal. I knocked and he opened the door, then held his finger up and whispered:

"Sh-sh-sh." He pointed back over his shoulder. "My wife."

I told him we could sit in my car and talk and he said okay and followed me

out to the street. I could hear his phone start jangling as we did, but he said: "My wife'll answer it. Did you get them?"

I said it was quite a story. The house door opened then and someone called: "Henry! You're wanted on the phone."

He told me to wait a moment and went inside; came back in a little while and said: "That was the man with the letters. He said you didn't follow his instructions. That he didn't see you."

I knew better than this and said so. Loudly. I showed him the bump on my chin. I even told him about losing my own twenty-two bucks.

He said: "I don't believe it. You kept the ten thousand dollars, Gallagher. I know you did."

He was excited or he'd never have had the nerve to make the crack. The dash light was on and I turned in the seat and grabbed him by the front of the coat and said:

"Crack like that again and I'll knock your teeth out the back of your neck."

He said: "Excuse me. I didn't mean it."

He could see me in the light and the only reason he'd said he hadn't meant it was because he could see I *did* mean it. At that, I doubt if I'd have had the heart to smack him; I could see his side of it too well. But the crack didn't set well. He said: "I'll have to dig up another ten thousand dollars and I can't do it. It's up to you, Gallagher. Either I get that money back or I get the letters. It's up to you."

"Why?"

"It's this way," he said, and the slow and quiet way he spoke made me think he meant it. "I can't get the money. It's ruin, if those letters came out. I won't go down alone, Gallagher."

"What will you do, then?"

"Go to the police. It's up to you."

This wasn't so good. In fact, it was very bad. If he got desperate, he might well go to the cops and, if he did, and told them he'd hired me to make contact and that the contact hadn't been made and the money was gone, I'd be behind the eight ball. The best I could do was lose my license and they're hard to get and harder to keep. The law would figure I hadn't been square on the deal and there wasn't a way in the world to prove I had.

I decided I had to get him out of his jam to save myself, if for no other reason. The very fact that he'd come out with an open threat to me like that proved how panicky he must be. He would probably go to the cops.

Also, I had another nine-fifty coming for making the contact and there wasn't a way to collect it. I hadn't delivered the goods, but I needed the money as badly as though I had. I said:

"Tell me about the letters. Who were they to and what was in them? If I can get them for you, it'll clear us both. The way this happened wasn't my fault, but I can see how it looks."

He hemmed and hawed and finally told me the letters were written to a girl he'd met while his wife was visiting her mother. That while they didn't really mean a thing they could get him in plenty bad with her. This was silly. If they didn't mean anything, why would he pay off? I knew damned well his yarn was a phony, but I could see he had to keep his story good. I said again:

"Who are they to?"

"Dolores Del Mar."

"Show gal?"

"How did you know?"

"The name, mister. It's a give-away."

I told him to just sit tight and wait for some word. To call me if he got any. He said I had forty-eight hours

to get the letters and then he was going to the police—and I believed him.

My only hope was to find the girl and who she was working with and Work was no help to me on this. He'd tried to get in touch with her himself, but she'd moved and left no forwarding address.

I left then, and tried to get in touch with Hermie Weinstein, who's a booking agent and who claims to know every show girl in town. I tried until twelve to locate him and couldn't, then figured he was probably out with some girl. It was only logical. And I could get him in the morning.

There was nothing more I could do that night except sleep, so I went home and did just that.

II

I JUST did beat Betty to the office in the morning. She came in, looking bright and fresher than ever, and said: "How'd it go, Sam?"

I showed her the lump on my jaw, which was then black and blue, and told her what had happened. She said: "Well, well, smart Sam Gallagher, the wise private copper. The smart shamus. Didn't I once tell you I could run this office better than you're doing it?"

"All right, wise girl. Just what would *you* have done?"

She had me plenty sore for a minute but she changed when she saw I was, and said: "I'm sorry, Sam. I don't know what other way you could have worked it."

I told her I wanted to get hold of Hermie Weinstein and for her to keep trying to get him for me. This she managed about ten o'clock. I said:

"Hermie?"

He said: "Yes."

He sounded as though he'd had a bad night.

"D'ya know a gal named Dolores Del Mar?"

"What d'ya want with Del Mar?"

"I want some dope on her."

He said, very quickly: "I'm sorry, Sam. I don't know a thing," and then hung up the phone before I had a chance to say another word.

I knew he was lying about not knowing anything about the girl, just from the way he'd spoken. It made me plenty sore. I'd always figured Hermie as a pretty good guy and I'd done favors for him. I'd taken him home from a big game, just a week before, when he'd taken the joint for so much dough that he'd been afraid of being rolled on the way.

And me with only forty-eight hours to do business in and with it going fast. I went out and got the coupé and went to his office.

The girl in the outer office said: "Mr. Weinstein isn't in, Mr. Gallagher," but I walked past her and into his office and there was Hermie sitting at his desk and looking very low. He stood and said:

"Another time, Sam. I'm just going out."

I said: "I won't keep you but just a minute. You know this gal and I need a little dope on her and need it bad. Plenty bad."

"I never even heard her name before, Sam."

"All right, Hermie," I said. "I suppose you can't help being a heel but you're a damned dirty liar right along with it. My pal! My pal, hell! I'll remember this."

He sat down again and said: "Now Sam! Don't be like that."

I said: "Goodby, pal!" and started to walk out and he jumped up and held my arm and said: "Wait, Sam! It's just that I don't want to get in trouble.

I got troubles of my own. I don't want any of yours. Get my side of it, Sam."

I stopped walking out and told him: "Anything you tell me I'll keep to myself, Hermie. You know that. Who is this gal?"

He thought about it a moment, looking as though he was chewing on something he didn't like the taste of, and said:

"Now keep me out of it, Sam. She's Tony Garedakis' girl and has been for the past year. She lives in the Aragon Apartments on Wilson Boulevard. Now whatever she's done, I don't want to know about it."

I thanked him. The way Hermie runs around he knows he might need a private cop for a friend just about any day. Which is why he'd told me what he had.

I'd heard about Tony Garedakis. He was supposed to be a smart boy. The cops had never been able to cinch him on even one case and they'd tried on plenty. He was bad medicine to fool with—but if Work howled to the cops they'd be as bad.

I WENT back to the office and thought it over. I had something, all right, but I wasn't sure just what to do with it. About this time somebody came in the outside office and Betty brought Work in. He sat down and said:

"I've heard from them again. I'm supposed to have the money ready by tomorrow night. I told them I couldn't possibly do it and they said that if I didn't, they'd bring the letters and the girl and come to my house and talk with my wife. The girl intends to sue me for breach of promise, claiming I didn't tell her I was married. You've got to get busy, Gallagher."

I told him I was working along an-

other angle and to give me time. He left on that and Betty came in and I talked the thing over, hoping she'd have an idea.

My mind didn't seem to work so well about then.

After a little of this the phone rang and the same voice I'd talked with the night before said: "Gallagher? Sam Gallagher?"

He sounded as soft and smooth and as easy.

I said it was Gallagher speaking.

He said: "Just a tip to a guy that's supposed to be a smartie. Lay off this Work deal and do it now. The next time you won't just be sapped. We're through fooling, Gallagher."

Betty had already left the office for another phone. To try and find what number the man was calling from. I tried to stall and give her a chance but he hung up right then. She came back and we figured a plan and closed the office. We drove the coupé to the Aragon Apartments, parked in front of it, and Betty went in and found Del Mar had 304.

Then we waited. And then waited some more.

IT WAS about seven in the evening before Del Mar came out and we'd parked the coupé right in front of the place, where we couldn't possibly miss her. The moment she went out of sight, down the street, I went in the place and Betty waited by the front door. She was supposed to ring the buzzer of Del Mar's door if she came back before I got through, and that would give me time to get out before the girl could get up the stairs.

The stairs, on the way up, had a sort of landing and turn, where you could turn off to the apartment on the second floor. I passed this and went up

to the third floor. I found 304, got it opened with a passkey and no trouble, and went right in. It's lucky there was no trouble, because, just as I got inside and closed the door some man came up the stairs.

I didn't think he'd noticed me and went ahead and shook the place down.

Betty had thought the letters might be in the place. I'd doubted it but was desperate enough to make the search. Betty was right. In the dressing room, under a pile of step-ins and junk like that, I found them.

I saw they were what I'd been looking for and started out of the apartment. I had the notion of locking the door after me, so the girl wouldn't know the place had been searched. I turned around to do it, holding the letters in my hands like a fool, and got smacked on the head as I did.

I went down but not out. I knew what was going on but it was seconds before I could move. I felt somebody jerk the letters from my hand and even figured out the man had followed me up the stairs, watched me go in the apartment, and had waited around the bend in the hall for me to come out.

I heard the man run toward the stairs and managed to get twisted around on the floor and get my gun out from under my coat just as he got to the top of them. I shot, just as he took a step down, and I knew he was hit because I saw him pitch ahead. I'd held low, aiming for a leg, and I didn't think he'd been hurt badly.

I was at the top of the steps by the time he'd hit the second floor landing and I went after him fast.

He was lying on his face and I turned him over and almost fell on top of him, I was so surprised. It was a guy named Vogt, that worked for the McGrath Agency.

I could see he wasn't dead and that he was starting to come around, so I grabbed the letters from him just as three more guys boiled up from the ground floor.

All three of them were holding guns and I'd laid mine on the floor while I looked over Vogt. I was stooping over him yet, and I straightened up and the man leading the three strangers said: "Gallagher!"

And to the two heels with him: "Out to the car with him. Fast now."

The two grabbed me, one to each arm, and gave me the bum's rush down the stairs. The four of us went right past Betty, who had brains enough to pretend she didn't notice anything wrong. They shoved me in a sedan that was parked right in back of my coupé, and one of them climbed in front. I was in back with the other two. I managed to twist my head a bit and saw Betty come out of the apartment house and head for my coupé, and then the man sitting on the side I'd twisted toward, gave me a cuff across the face and said:

"Sit straight, you—!"

I did, and this was the first I knew Del Mar was in the car. She was in the front seat and she leaned over it and said:

"Well, dopey! Did you think you could stake my place for two hours and get away with it?"

The man driving, who I'd figured for Tony Garedakis, said to her: "Skip it, baby!"

She said: "I hate a wise guy," still talking to me.

Garedakis kept his left hand on the wheel and slapped her across the face with his right.

"I said skip it, baby."

She turned back to where she belonged. He said, over his shoulder to

one of the men with me: "Take the letters away from him, Bud."

Bud was sitting on my right. He reached over and felt through my pockets, while his partner kept a gun on me. He didn't find a thing and said: "He hasn't got them, Tony."

Tony said: "Don't give me that. I saw them just before we grabbed him."

Bud shook me down again and insisted: "They ain't here."

I could have told him that in the first place, if he'd asked. As soon as I saw the three of them coming up the stairs and saw I wouldn't have a chance to pick up my gun, I'd dropped the letters right by Vogt. I didn't know what Vogt was doing in the case, and he was a dumb Dutchman if there ever was one, but he was working for the McGrath Agency and they're a legitimate outfit all the way. I figured that if he found them they'd be safe, and if he didn't the cops would, when they came to see about the shooting.

Tony said to me, still over his shoulder: "What did you do with 'em, Gallagher?"

"Do with what?" I asked.

He swore and stopped the car and said to the Del Mar girl: "This may be a bum play. Take a cab and go on back and see whether he *did* get them. I'll be at the house."

"The police will be there," she said.

"What of it? Get going."

She did, without any more argument. It was plain enough that she was scared to death of him. We pulled up to a cab stand and she hopped out and I saw a car that looked like my coupé slide by.

III

TONY got going again and nobody said a word until he turned down Marvin Avenue. And then he said:

"I told you we were through playing, Gallagher."

I didn't say anything. There was nothing I *could* say.

He kept on Marvin for five blocks and then swung west, stopping in front of a house I thought was probably his. He told me to get out and I did, with Bud and his partner watching me like cats watch mice. Just as I got on the sidewalk, I saw a car that looked like my coupé parked down the street, but I wasn't sure about it.

The only thing was, even if it *was* Betty, what could she do about it. If she called copper I'd be a cinch to go down when the shooting started.

We went in the house, into a big front room, and Garedakis waved at a chair and said: "Sit down."

I didn't for a moment. He said: "As soon as I find out about the letters, smart guy, I'll know what to do with you."

He was the same man that had spoken with me over the phone. No mistaking the voice. He was dark, curly haired and had the kind of build that would strip twenty pounds heavier than he looked.

I also got a good look at Bud and his partner.

Bud was one of the pretty boys. Blond. Slick haired. About all I could say for his partner was that he had buck teeth—the rest of him didn't stand out past the teeth. He looked more like a beaver than he did anything human.

I hadn't been in any rush to sit down because it was the first real chance I'd had to size the three guys up. I started to sit down but I didn't do it fast enough to suit Buck-Teeth. He shoved me back in the chair, with his hand, and as I landed, I came up with my feet and caught him in the belly and he sat down, too. But on the floor. Bud took

a step toward me, lifting his gun up to smack at me with it, but Tony Garedakis said:

"Hold it! I want to talk to this guy, maybe, and I can't do it if he's got a busted head."

Bud didn't say a word but Buck-Teeth did. He got up from the floor and told me what he thought I was and if I was half of it I'll bet my folks would have drowned me before I was three years old. He kept on with this lecture for about five minutes and all the time Bud kept watching me with a screwy look.

And then the Del Mar girl came dashing in. She said: "Tony! They're not there. I looked."

Tony didn't even look at her. He said: "Bud! Go out and look in the car. Maybe he jammed them in the seat before you looked him over."

Bud went out. Tony asked the girl just what was going on at the apartment house and she said there was an ambulance there, with the crew loading a man in it, and that there was a lot of law beside that. But that nobody had said anything to her that meant anything. They'd just taken her name and found out from the manager that she wasn't lying when she said she lived there.

Bud came back then and said there was no letters in the car. Tony said to me: "Wha'd you do with the letters?"

"I don't know anything about them," I said. "Your guess is as good as mine."

He said: "I don't want to guess," and went out. He came back, with some tape and a towel, and put me in the chair to stay, with the tape. Then he said: "When you want to talk, just nod your head," held the towel against my mouth, and took a cigarette and held it against my cheek. I howled about it

plenty but the towel made more than a fair gag and I couldn't make much noise.

The cigarette went out and I could smell my cheek, where it was burned. Tony said:

"You stubborn fool!" and yanked up on the little finger of my left hand. My hand was taped down to the arm of the chair and he could get a leverage on it. Just when I knew the finger was going to pop in two pieces, I nodded my head and he took the towel away and said:

"That's better. Where are they?"

It was a minute before I could say anything at all. It wasn't so much that my hand and cheek hurt, but the smell of my cheek, where it had been burned, had made me sick. I said, when I could get it out:

"I can't tell you for sure where the letters are but I'll tell you what happened. Vogt and I came downstairs—"

"Who's Vogt?"

"The guy on the landing that was shot."

He didn't say anything more and I went on with: "We were coming down the stairs and—"

That was as far as I got. He lost his temper and smacked me and I went out like a light.

WHEN I came to, things hadn't changed a bit. He was still right in front of me, waiting for me. He said: "Now tell it straight."

"I'm trying to tell it straight. Vogt and I went through the joint upstairs and got the letters and when we got outside I stayed behind to lock the door and he went ahead with the letters. I just got the door locked when I heard a shot and ran down and there he was. I don't know who shot him or who got the letters."

"Who's Vogt?" he wanted to know.

"He's with the McGrath Agency. I figured it was too much for one man to handle and cut them in on it."

He was staring at me and I could see he wasn't believing me. He said, as though he was talking with himself:

"Now Gallagher had the letters because I saw them." Then he thought a moment more and said in the same way: "Del Mar said there was a girl in the car with him and we passed a girl on our way out with him. She was downstairs in the lobby."

And then, as though he had the answer to everything: "Why she'd take them to Work, of course. They're working for him."

He called out then, loudly: "*Felix!*"

A Filipino, wearing a white jacket, came in. Tony said, pointing at me: "Look after him until I get back."

The Filipino took a Luger from some place under his clothes and nodded his head. Tony told the girl: "You stay here," and to Bud and the buck toothed boy:

"Come on!"

Then he changed his mind and told the girl: "You better tag along. You can sit in the car, but I may need you for a bluff."

He started out the door, with the girl and Buck-Teeth following him, but Bud stalled until they were out of sight and came back and smacked me in the face with the side of his gun.

THAT was all I knew for quite a while. When I came back to life, the Filipino was sitting on a davenport that was across from me but closer to the door. He was maybe ten feet from it. He had the Luger pointed at me and looked as though he wanted a chance to pull the trigger. I felt sick as a dog and was still tied up but he wasn't tak-

ing any chances. My face ached all over and my lips were so swollen I had a hell of a time saying to him:

"How long was I out?"

He tightened on the gun and said: "Shut up."

I did. We just sat there and looked at each other. I thought it over while we did and decided it couldn't have been Betty in the car, or there would have been *some* kind of action before then. Just as I got this figured out I happened to look toward the door and saw Betty just outside, looking in, and holding a piece of scantling. The couch, where the Filipino boy was sitting was only about ten feet from her and so I said quite loudly to him:

"Now listen here. You know that—"

I got this far when he heard her. He turned his head and she jumped at him with the two-by-four and hit him on the head with it. He went down as though his neck was broken and she didn't even bother to take his gun. She came over to me and started to cry.

"Oh, your poor face!"

I said: "My poor face hell! Get that gun away from that guy and untie me. Get this tape off me."

She got the gun and the Filipino never moved. She had quite a time getting the tape off me but at last it ripped off. My head was whirling around as if it was on ball bearings. I finally snapped out of the daze and took the Luger from her and looked at the boy. She said:

"Is he hurt much?"

"Oh no! Just knocked out."

He'd fallen as though he'd had a broken neck. But she was still crying and I could see it wouldn't make her feel any better to know she'd just killed a man. As far as I was concerned I wanted to see the whole dirty bunch dead.

"Let's go, kid. Come on," I said.

"Where?"

"To Work's house."

IV

WALKING around had made me feel better. Not too well, but I could move without feeling the top of my head lift up and down. By the time I'd driven from where we were over to 4th Avenue and 34th Street, the air had helped some. I drove past Work's house and saw the sedan out in front and it took a load from my mind because I'd been worrying that maybe the blackmailers had left. I kept on going until the end of the block, turned left and stopped just around the corner, then told Betty:

"Now you take the car and keep going around the block. Park three or four houses back from the sedan. If you hear shooting, you go for the law as fast as you can."

She said: "Why not get them first and let them handle it?"

"Because, babe, there's more than just love stuff in those letters of Work's. There must be, or he'd never have mortgaged the old homestead to get them back. He'd have told his wife and faced the thing out, in the financial situation he's in. There's something in them that's hot and I've got to protect him on it. He's a client. And besides that, the cops would just bust in and there'd be a slaughter."

She started to cry again. "Sam, please, Sam! Let the cops do it. You'll get hurt."

"Use your head. If the cops broke it, I'd lose the nine-fifty that's coming to me. And I want a cut at these guys. At least one cut. Now straighten up and help me, instead of putting on an act."

I don't know whether it was the

nine-fifty angle or the helping-me business that did the trick, but she quit crying and straightened up and slid back of the wheel.

"If there's shooting, I get the law."

I said: "Right!" and walked back around the corner and toward the sedan.

The Del Mar woman was in it all right. I could see her sitting there with her head cocked toward the house. I walked along as though I was somebody heading down the street toward home, but just when I got opposite the car, I switched directions and opened the door of the sedan as fast as I could. I shoved the Luger at her and said:

"Don't make any noise."

She had the car lights on and she could see both the gun and me. Whether it was the gun or me, with the trick face her boy friends had given me, that scared her I don't know. But she was scared. I climbed in the car with her and looked around and all I could find was a piece of oily rag. I dragged out my handkerchief, stuffed the oily rag in her mouth and tied it in place with the handkerchief and then I was stuck. There wasn't a thing I could tie her hands with.

Just then my coupé pulled up behind the Packard, according to instructions. I looked through Del Mar's handbag and found a little pearl handled .25 automatic, so I took that and made her slide out of her side of the car. I edged out after her and marched her back to my coupé and opened the door and made her get in with Betty. I took the safety off the .25 and gave it to Betty and said:

"Now all you've got to do is pull the trigger. Hold the gun in her side and if she makes a move you do it."

I told Del Mar: "If you think she won't, you make the move."

I figured that Betty would shoot, at that. She was so nervous by that time she wouldn't be able to *not* shoot. I went back to Work's house and scouted along outside until I found a long window that had double blinds parted in the middle a couple of inches, and I squatted down there and peeked in.

Bud and Buck-Teeth were sitting on a davenport at the side. Work was sitting on a chair, facing me, and Tony Garedakis was walking up and down in front of him and laying down the law. This put Tony with his back toward me, which was a break, because I was really afraid of the guy.

I listened and could hear Work say: "But I tell you I don't know anything about it. I haven't seen the man tonight. I haven't seen anybody. Nobody has been here."

His voice was squeaky and thin and he sounded as though he was just about ready to break up.

Tony said: "All right," and reached out and slapped Work across the face. Work fell sideways from his chair. Bud and Buck-Teeth were laughing as though the whole thing was funny and Tony leaned over to Work and started to put him back in the chair.

I HAD the set-up spotted and I couldn't see where I made a thing by waiting. I took the magazine from the Luger and saw it was full, then cranked the slide back and saw there was a shell in the chamber.

The window I was peeking through was one of the French affairs that came down within a foot of the floor. The curtains were tied back, so that all that would bother me would be the blinds. I held the Luger behind me and close, so that hand wouldn't be hurt with flying glass, then pulled the bottom of

my coat up across my face with my left hand. I got a couple of steps away from the window, so I'd be sure to hit it hard enough to break it all the way, then lunged. I figured that if I hit it hard enough with the point of my shoulder I ought to go through far enough to clear the blinds and be in the open and ready for action.

It was partly successful. I'd forgotten to make allowance for the sill and stumbled. I fell on my knees, just inside the window, and it twisted me so that instead of facing the center of the room, I was looking square at Bud and Buck-Teeth.

It was lucky that I was. They made a picture. The glass crashed with a bang and it sounded as though the side of the house was falling down. They both had their mouths wide open from the surprise and they looked funny. They held the picture for a second and then both streaked for their guns.

I shot Buck-Teeth right through the middle of them, without getting up from my knees, and then, before he had time to fall, turned the Luger on Bud and tried for him.

Nothing happened.

Bud had his gun half out and I didn't have any time to waste. I jumped ahead and slammed him on the head with the barrel of the Luger, then turned toward Tony. He was the one I was really afraid of.

He had his gun clear and lined on me. He wasn't more than eight feet away. The Luger wouldn't shoot and he was too far away for me to get to him and lay him out as I had Bud. I couldn't stand there and be a target, so I dived at his legs just as he turned loose.

He missed me and I caught him at the knees. But he was moving one leg and that knee caught me on the nose.

Bud had broken it when he'd hit me with the gun, back at Garedakis' place, and this smack on top of the break dazed me for a moment.

Tony had dropped his gun when I'd tackled him, but he was on his hands and knees trying to pick it up.

Then Work came to the rescue. He was still sitting in his chair and the gun had fallen by his foot. Just as Garedakis got his hand on it, Work kicked it over in the corner of the room. Tony got on his feet and I cranked the slide of the Luger and threw out the empty that had jammed the damned thing.

I said: "Hold tight."

He didn't. He must have thought the Luger was still out of commission.

He jumped for the corner where his gun had landed and stooped over to pick it up and when he straightened around, I shot him in the stomach.

That's another thing I've got against a Luger. If I'd busted him center with my own .45, he'd have been all through for the night. But the Luger had no shocking power and he just flinched and came up with his gun.

He was pretty slow about it though, and the next time I busted him in the head. I wanted to quit playing with guns.

Tony went down this time. Bud rolled over on the floor and showed signs of getting up and I went over and kicked him in the face and he rolled back where he belonged.

I looked around and saw everything was under control for a change, and just as I looked at the window a uniformed cop framed himself there and said:

"Drop that gun!"

I did and gladly. I was sick of Lugers by that time. The only good thing I could say about the one I had was that it shot where you held it. I heard some-

body come in the door behind me and started to turn around. The cop said: "Hold it, guy."

He came through the window and made me stand against the wall and I saw that the man who'd come through the wall was his partner. Then I told them who I was and who the dead men on the floor were, and everything was all right.

They looked at Tony Garedakis and Buck-Teeth and saw they were both dead. They looked at Bud and he started to come to. I picked up the Luger and reached past the two cops and smacked him in the face with it, just as hard as I could hit.

IT TOOK about half an hour for the ambulance and the morgue wagon to come. One for Bud and the other for Garedakis and Buck-Teeth. During that time I found out from Work that he'd hired the McGrath Agency to check up on me because he thought I'd gone south with the ten grand. Just while he was telling me this, the phone rang and it was old man McGrath himself. He told Work that Vogt was in the hospital, shot through the leg, and that Vogt had secured the letters. And that didn't the McGrath Agency deliver the goods.

I told Work that I'd had the letters and would have delivered them if Vogt hadn't butted in the play. And that I wanted my nine-fifty. He said he'd bring it to my office in the morning, because he thought I was right.

Then he looked worried. I went on with: "I've got a notion you don't want the cops to see those letters. Don't fret; they won't want to see them. Just tell them they're letters to the Del Mar girl and they were blackmailing you."

"That's what they were doing, Mr. Gallagher."

I grinned and said: "I guess I'll have to ask Vogt what was in them."

Work said, very softly: "All right. I'd taken money from my office to spend on the Del Mar woman. I'd told her about this in the letters. Of course I've straightened it all up now. But my boss would let me go if he knew of it. I've held that job for twenty years and a scandal would kill me."

I told him I'd tell the cops about what had happened and soft pedal the letter angle.

And then, for the first time, I thought of Betty. I couldn't see how in hell she'd gotten the law there so quickly and I couldn't understand why she hadn't been in to see how I'd made out.

I went out and there was Betty, still sitting there with the gun in the Del Mar woman's ribs and with tears streaming down her face. Del Mar was still gagged.

I took the gun away from Betty and told her and Del Mar to get out. I took the gag away from Del Mar and she started to walk past me. I was holding the little .25 down by my side and I forgot the safety was off and squeezed the trigger.

It went *pop*, right into a brand new front tire.

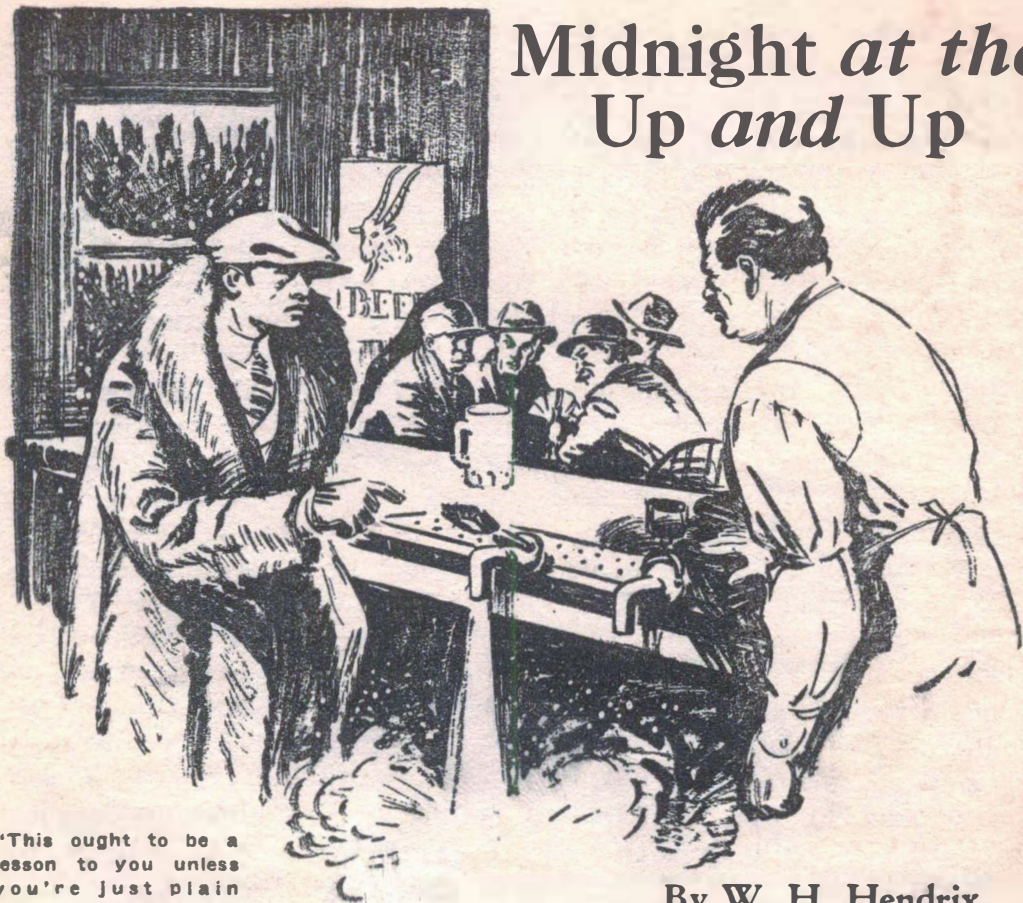
Del Mar screamed. The cops in the house thought another war had started and came boiling out at me and it took me ten minutes to square it.

And then I heard Betty laughing. She was damned near hysterical. "What a build-up for a girl's self respect. Just when I was hating myself for being scared and thinking how smart you were. Now I know I'm smarter."

"How d'ya get that?" I asked.

She said: "At least I'd have brains enough not to shoot holes in my own tires."

Midnight at the Up and Up



"This ought to be a lesson to you unless you're just plain dumb."

A True Story

By W. H. Hendrix

Author of
"Thirty Pieces of Silver," etc.

IT WAS a raw, snowy night in January, 1928. Ota Hermann stood behind the bar in his Clark Street speakeasy, the Up and Up Sandwich Shop, a popular tavern of Chicago's north side, and gazed restlessly at his silent cash register. He wished fervently that a "live one" would drop in.

Just then, one did. But he wasn't a thirsty wayfarer with abundant spendable coin, such as Ota had wished for. This one was expensively dressed in a fur coat, with a cap pulled low over beady, slit-like eyes which quickly sized up the place. Glancing contemptuously at the five customers sipping brew and playing poker at a table be-

The moving story of a Chicago bartender who successfully defied Chicago's crime syndicate and brought about an ironic justice

side the radiator in a corner, he strode behind the bar and opened wide the beer spigot.

He stood in defiant silence beside the stream of beer until the whole newly-tapped barrel had flowed into the sewer. The quintet at the card table looked on, excited but silent, taking their cue from Ota, who stood motionless in the spot where he had been standing when the stranger entered.

Ota knew well what this performance meant. That day he had been

persuaded, against his better judgment, to buy the barrel of beer from a small "independent" brewer who had told him a moving story of hard luck and dire need. Ota had figured that one barrel, more or less, wouldn't be noted by the "syndicate," and besides he had saved ten dollars on the barrel, the "independent" having priced it at forty-five dollars. But, it now appeared obvious that some alert "eye" of the "trust" had spotted the delivery of the outlaw barrel, and this was the penalty. Ota knew well the methods of the big combine, he knew that one word of protest from him would likely bring more severe reprisal than the mere loss of the beer.

And so Ota even affected a half-smile, attempted to appear agreeably indifferent, as the man slammed the beer tap shut and walked with a threatening swagger toward the door. There he turned, faced Ota and, in the manner of a conqueror, snarled:

"This ought to be a lesson to you, unless you're just plain dumb, and you know dumbbells don't prosper or last in this business. I hope I won't have to use much more embroidery to make you understand your own racket."

With that warning he strode briskly out, with Ota's prized poodle, Gypsy, at his heels. One of the men at the card table leaped up to call the dog back, but Ota waved a long restraining arm.

"For Pete's sake, don't follow that bird out!" he cautioned. "He's hot, don't you know that? Don't worry about Gypsy. She goes in and out here all day and knows her way. Let him get away. Don't run out as if you were trying to get his automobile tag number. You can't get funny or inquisitive with those babies."

All the men present knew they had witnessed an occurrence that was far

from uncommon during that era in Chicago—the destruction, by the controlling beer syndicate, of a humble competitor's product. Ota, disgruntled over the loss of his forty-five dollars, forced a joviality he did not feel and waved an invitation to the five.

"Come on, fellows, let's conduct the post-mortem," he said. "If I can't sell the stuff, maybe I can make a fresh start by giving it away. This one'll be on the house. But wait—I gotta go down and tap a barrel of the regular stuff."

Ota went out the front door to descend the outside steps to the basement and tap a barrel. As he passed out into the street, his exclamation of surprise brought the five customers out on the run. All beheld the body of Ota's beloved dog, its throat slit, and the snow stained crimson where it had just died.

Beside the dog's body was a note, crudely written in pencil upon an old paper bag fished from the gutter. *Maybe this will help you remember how to run a business. There may be more to help you remember tonight by, too.* The note was signed with a big, black, ominous X.

Ota's resolution to hold his temper, and to regard the matter as a reprisal to have been expected in the day's experience, was upset by this touch of diabolical cruelty. Flaming with anger, he called on his companions to help him dispose of the slain pet and clean away the scene of slaughter lest his boy, whose cherished pet the dog had been, discover his pal's fate. But Ota didn't have time to conceal the canine tragedy, for just then his wife and Ota, Junior, three years old, who had heard the commotion in their apartment upstairs over the tavern, came rushing down to investigate.

While Ota and his wife heaped bitter denunciation on the perpetrator of the act, little chubby Ota, Junior, a favorite of the whole neighborhood, was inconsolable. His cries attracted the neighbors, and a good-sized crowd soon gathered. Ota finally induced the youngster to go inside, where the men sought, with candy and stories, to make him forget.

Soon the neighbors, their curiosity satisfied, filed out and Ota was left alone with his five companions, who resumed their poker.

"Well, a fine night this turned out to be," Ota grumbled, half to himself and half to his five auditors. "First, I have the lousiest day's business in history. I betcha that till ain't rung up enough today to pay the light bill. Then this hyena comes along and knocks me over for forty-five bucks. And if that ain't enough for one day, he kills my pal, too."

Ota was becoming more bitter. Looking up and down the empty bar, he almost shouted:

"And not a blasted customer, not a foot on the cockeyed bar! I think I'd better call up the poorhouse right now and make a reservation!"

The customers smiled contentedly at their card game. Ota was getting back to his true form. His continual raillery about his poverty was part of the atmosphere of the place which all the "regulars" understood, just as they knew, too, that Ota was getting a comfortable income from the place.

At that moment, as if in answer to Ota's challenge to the world to supply him with a customer, a man softly opened the door and entered with a benign smile. But in all the world perhaps no man less welcome could have appeared.

For the visitor was "Colonel

Whoopee," so called because of his impressive, Kentucky-style mustache, dignified bearing and unvarying habit of becoming boisterous and demonstrative when adequately saturated. The only trouble with the Colonel was that he always came in with not more than three dollars. By the time he had expended that amount, his brain was sufficiently quickened to make him a chiseling moocher of colossal skill. Thus it was that his "tab" at Ota's place was always far too large to make his presence welcome.

The Colonel had been a regular caller, too regular, Ota reflected, for a long time. Nobody knew just where he lived or how he earned the little he sometimes possessed. He was given to frequent stories of an affluent past; of good positions he had held here and there over the world. There was a general belief among the bar frequenters, whose drinks he consumed avidly in payment for his fantastic stories, that he was a sort of "remittance man," perhaps receiving a meager income from some estate.

That he should have drifted in tonight of all nights, perhaps to seek further extension of credit, was added proof to Ota that this was, indeed, the blackest day in history. With growing anger and bitterness, Ota began grimly contemplating what method he might use to vent his wrath the moment the mooching began.

THE Colonel was in an expansive, happy mood. He ordered up a gin rickey and while it was being made he told all present of how, the following Monday, he was to assume a good-paying position with a great corporation, a job similar to one he once held in South America. The men listened with a faint show of interest. This was a

new story. The Colonel invited the men at the table to join him in a drink to celebrate his good fortune. When they had been served and the Colonel had ordered up a second round, Ota hesitated in front of the visitor to collect for the first drink. Unhappily, he was ten cents shy of the check. Ota's big moment had come.

"You old gray-haired bum," he yelled, pounding the bar with one fist, while he menaced the Colonel with the other. "For two cents I'd throw you through that window. What do you mean, trying to buy drinks with your face for security? D' you think that'll pay rent? Listen, if I had what you owe me right this minute I'd close this joint for the weekend and go down to French Lick. Now get th' hell outta here. The bar's closed except for cash."

The Colonel was crestfallen. He had previously encountered a little mild resistance when he needed a few more than he could pay for, but never had been the target of such a venomous attack.

"Now, now," he said softly, to Ota. "I was just explaining to you that next Monday I go to a good position. The little tab I owe here will be taken care of promptly and—"

"Listen, you!" Ota shouted, purple with rage by this time. "I've just been knocked off for forty-five bucks and a dog that's a damned sight better than you. Monday morning I gotta lay in three barrels of beer that I can't pay for with your tabs, even if you signed 'em and drew pictures of your new job all over 'em. So this is the last, the finish, the grand finale. Get th' hell outta here before I lose my temper. And don't come back till you've got better news than a story about how you're going to be secretary of the treasury. Monday."

The Colonel's face reddened in rage, the first time any man present could recall ever having seen him lose his suavity. It wasn't his fault that he had dropped in with the cards stacked against him, a condition he could not have foreseen. He was too embarrassed to leave by the front door and slunk away in chagrin toward the rear exit and disappeared.

When he had gone, Ota smiled sourly and even became a bit sorry he had unleashed such an onslaught.

"The old boy sure picked the wrong night to come in and drink on the house," he told the gang. "I'll betcha that old duck owes me fifty bucks right now on the cuff here. I might of been a little raw at that, though, for at heart he's a pretty good old chap. I often wondered how the devil he gets by. I sure hope he's got that job."

Soon taxicabs began unloading more profitable customers. Ota's geniality returned as his cash register began ringing. Crowds going home from shows filtered into the back room and things were going merrily as midnight came, ushering in the best two hours of trade.

Just then Mrs. Hermann came down the stairway and looked puzzlingly over the barroom.

"Where's Ota?" she asked her husband as he hurried past her with a tray of drinks.

"I thought he was upstairs where he belongs," Ota said. "I haven't seen him since you were down here an hour ago. I figgered you got him away some place to make him forget Gypsy."

SOON the entire place was seething with excitement. The boy was missing. The customers, all of them "regulars" who knew Ota's family, forgot their drinking in their concern over the curly-haired little boy who was

a fixture, having the run of the place and clambering at will up and down the stairs, from tavern floor to his home. Word spread electrically over the neighborhood, where the Hermanns were universally liked, even by those persons who in their own private circles frowned upon the illegal liquor traffic. These people were secretly glad that, so long as outlaw liquor was inevitable, it was possible for their neighborhood to have such a person as Ota to dispense it, instead of a gangster. And so it was that neighbors all joined in the search that was conducted for blocks in every direction. As the futility of the hunt became a reality, Ota underwent a complete change. Instead of his usual calm, deliberate self, he became a human torch of fury.

While clusters of neighbors filled the barroom, Ota and a few of his trusted cronies conferred in the back room. There wasn't the slightest doubt in the mind of any man in the group as to what had happened.

"Here's what he did," said Ota. "When he emptied the beer, he killed the dog and drove around the block. Then he comes back to this rear door and grabs the kid while we was drinkin' that beer there. That's what he meant when he said in that note that there might be more to make me remember tonight by. Well, he asked for it, and so help me, he's gonna get it. Of course, I may be bumped off tomorrow, but I'd rather be dead than to take a thing like this lying down. So me for the cops."

Thoroughly aware of the doom that was foreordained for any man who squealed on the big timers, Ota stepped to the telephone and reported the happening to the Precinct Captain. Grimly, he went to war with the ruling underworld syndicate whose heads were

mythical gods to subordinates and such lesser fry as retailers. These bosses were known to be immune, omnipotent, impregnable, unassailable—unless a man wanted to sacrifice his life by resisting their orders or their whims. But, Ota reasoned, this act broke all rules of the game, destroyed all ethics. He reflected with terrible determination, on how he loved his boy. And as he pictured him in the hands of a man so ruthless that he would kill a dog as a joke, he trembled at the thought of what the same man might do to a defenseless child.

He paused for a second to be certain of his identification of the terrorist. Yes, he said to himself, he couldn't be mistaken. It was Tim McGuire, professionally "Big Tim." In the business world "Big Tim" was what was known as a "trouble shooter." He performed such errands as he had that night in Ota's. He also held business conferences with such gentlemen as the independent brewer who had sold Ota the outlaw barrel, and persuaded such gentlemen to enter other fields. When they didn't, Big Tim was known to function in another department, known to the trade as the "erasing squad." And it was common knowledge to the initiated that he was "a good right arm" of the "Big Boy" himself.

Though he knew all this, when two detectives arrived to handle the report, Ota named McGuire and asked for his arrest, promising to go to the State's Attorney's office the first thing in the morning and swear to a warrant charging kidnaping, which he did.

IN a couple of days, McGuire was arrested. With swaggering bravado he went to jail, to be greeted by one of Chicago's highest-priced lawyers who was waiting for him with the \$25,000

bail already arranged. To the waiting throngs of newspapermen, attracted by what was being called "the biggest story since the flood," McGuire explained without a trace of worry that it was "all a mistake," that he had gilded alibis ready and that he "couldn't understand" how his accuser had managed to think up such a charge against him.

Chicago simmered in excitement. This was the first broadside fired effectively against the "Big Boy" since his reign had begun. And with his grip on the underworld now so accepted by all the figures in that circle, it was amazing that one poor speakeasy owner would dare to invoke annihilation by such a frontal attack.

The next day, soon after Ota opened his place at eight o'clock in the morning, two men entered, identified themselves by mentioning a few familiar names and had a couple of drinks. One of them drew Ota aside and said:

"You know, you seem like a devil of a good fellow. You got a nice joint here, too. How's the take; any good?"

"Oh, nothing to write home about," said Ota, wondering a bit at the interest, "but I manage to get by, in a way."

"Well," said the well-dressed stranger, "if I were you and wanted to keep on getting by, I think I'd withdraw that charge against McGuire and sort of forget about it. You know, it's awful cold and damp and lonesome six feet under the grass out in the cemetery. This is just a friendly little tip, you know. Say, you don't think for a minute you can go on with such a case as this and still live, do you?"

"I was waiting for that," Ota said. "Now, let me tell you something and you go back and tell the boss what I said. I sure as hell am going through with it, or else I'm going out of here

in a wooden kimono with flowers. Regular business is one thing, and if I get pushed around a little, I take it and don't kick. But when my kid is grabbed, all the rules are off. You bet I'm going all the way. Now, both you eggs get the hell outta here and go straight to the boss with my compliments."

There were many more threats and dire ultimatums in the coming days, but luck seemed to smile on Ota. Police reporters daily scanned the list of dead for his name, but it didn't bob up. More than once Ota told his friends around the bar, "I'll be bumped off as sure as the devil, but all I'm after is to put that baby out of circulation before I get it."

FOR days before the trial began, newspapers screamed the almost unbelievable story of the little David trying to slay the Goliath of privileged outlawry. When the trial opened, it was covered by the stars of the Chicago journals and throngs of out of town writers looking for the rare "color" in the remarkable litigation. For Ota was, at the moment, the first individual to dare an open attack on the powerful group that had created Chicago's unpleasant reputation as a city ruled by the mobster.

McGuire was represented by capable and expensive counsel. The State's Attorney, mindful perhaps of the publicity and political values at stake, as well as his own official duty, handled the prosecution personally, scorning the common custom of assigning an assistant.

The State offered in evidence, the note left beside the body of the dog, with the words definitely threatening further acts of reprisal. The five men who had silently watched the emptying

of the beer—all of them responsible citizens, incidentally—testified and identified McGuire; describing to the thoughtful jury, McGuire's look of hate, his parting sneer, his fiendish swagger.

Ota took the stand as the last State's witness and with what the newspapers called "incredible dramatic power" told of how McGuire came into his place and destroyed the barrel of beer; of how he had feared, while the beer flowed, that more serious penalties were coming. Then he told of the disappearance of his child at almost the same instant, giving rise to his theory that the McGuire note, which threatened more lessons "to make him remember," related to this most hideous thing of all.

The defense was brilliant, almost unbelievable in the skill with which alibis were set up, attacks made on every claim set up by the State. The significance of the trial, of course, was Ota's smashing attack on the real rulers of the underworld. For that is what it amounted to. While there was no mention of the name of the real crime czar himself, it was understood by all Chicagoans that he was, in reality, the man on trial. His own counsel served the man on trial; his known agents had threatened Hermann for weeks in the vain attempt to have the charge withdrawn through fear, all of which had formed a blazing chapter in Chicago's newspaper-recording of the stirring episode.

It required but two hours for the jury to convict McGuire and he was duly sentenced to a life term in Joliet for kidnaping. The court denied a plea for new trial, declaring it was "an open and shut case." Then an appeal was taken and bail of \$50,000 was immediately provided, so that Mr. McGuire

was on the loose again pending disposition of his appeal.

If Ota had been fearful before the trial, he was doubly apprehensive now that he had broken the impregnable front of gangland. The powerful mob chiefs were so bitter over the case that Ota realized he was "living on borrowed time," as he confided to his cronies at the bar.

He tried to suppress his jittery nerves for the first few days, while friends and customers crowded in to congratulate him on his legal victory. Then he began to break under the terrific strain. He became jumpy, jerky, when the door opened and an unfamiliar face appeared.

ABOUT a week after the trial, he was opening his place at eight o'clock in the morning when the door opened softly and Colonel Whoopee entered, smiling and benign as ever.

"Hello," said Ota, recalling with a slight pang of regret his stormy attitude the last time the Colonel had called. "How are you? How's the new job?"

The Colonel beamed. He was glad, it appeared, to be received with more grace than that with which he had been sped on his way on his last visit.

"There was a little delay about that job," he said quietly. "But if you think I was only trying to get a drink on my prospects and building up a phoney, take a look at this." He handed Ota a letter.

The letter, apparently genuine, written on the stationery of one of the largest utility corporations in the United States, explained certain details of the job to which the Colonel soon was going, and apologized for the delay in getting him started. Ota handed him the letter.

"I'm glad," he said genially. "That's a swell break for you, all right. I wish I had a thing that good staring me in the face."

"Oh, well," said the Colonel, "I've waited a long time for it. I've been pretty hard up, too, but most of my creditors have been nice. You always were, too, until that last time."

He hesitated, and Ota began suddenly to be a bit weary of the conversation. This, too, was a bad hour for humdrum talk—this was the hour that things happened to people who had a rendezvous with gangland, and Ota was more concerned with watching the front door at the moment than in hearing the Colonel's philosophizing.

"Yes," the Colonel rambled on, "I'll be glad to get back on a payroll at a satisfactory figure again. Doubly so, because right now I am flat as a pancake and terribly in need of one of your delicious gin rickeys. I was wondering if you could strain a point and let me have just one, and add it to the others until I can—"

Ota waved a silencing arm right there. He thought quickly and angrily that the letter he had just read was a phoney and here was this old moocher again.

"Now look here, Colonel," he said, his wrath mounting, "I told you the last time you tried to put a squeeze on here that the next time you did it I'd throw you through that window. If you don't get out of here in one minute flat by golly I'll do it."

The Colonel backed toward the door, then stopped to protest.

"Here, now," he said with a smile. "Would you let me have just one drink if I gave you a bit of news that would interest you?"

"The only interesting news you could give me would be to come in and pay

that old tab of yours—the one so old it has whiskers on it," said Ota. "And," he shouted, "that wouldn't be news—that would be a miracle and miracles are over. So before I get too mad to talk and start throwing things, get th' hell out and this time, stay out."

Defiant of Ota's glare and clenched fists, the Colonel walked back to the bar and leaned restfully upon it. He fixed a gaze of such complacency upon the perspiring Ota that that gentleman became calm and subsided in spite of himself.

"Would you buy me a drink," the Colonel said slowly, "in exchange for some good news about your son?"

Ota straightened up with a cry of wrath. His face revealed both pain and anger. For, despite the conviction of his son's kidnaper, the trial had revealed nothing of the boy's whereabouts. The gangster had contented himself with a straight plea of not guilty, protested throughout that he knew nothing of the affair; had never even seen Ota Hermann; that he was identified erroneously as the destroyer of the beer at the Up and Up, a spot he had never visited. And so it was that the kidnaping trial ended on the singular note of convicting a snatcher without even a hint of what became of the victim.

Ota shouted to the Colonel: "You would bring that up! Ain't I had enough grief over that, and here you are bringing it up again! Now, I am going to throw you right smack through that window!"

But the Colonel again stopped him with that peculiar, hypnotic smile of his, and laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Listen carefully to me," he said earnestly. "And first of all promise me this: if I can give you some news about the boy, swear to me on your honor

that you will respect it as confidential."

"Oh, well, go on," said Ota, subdued but weary. "I promise—but remember, there won't be any free drinks. Not today. That department has just been closed."

"Well just wait here a second," said the Colonel. "I left something in my old car outside that I think you'd like to see. Wait till I fetch it in."

HE went out and in a few seconds reopened the door. Ota, Junior bounded inside, his face lighted with happy smiles, shouting a glad "Hello, Daddy." Ota seized the boy as one returned from the grave, caressed him wildly and shouted for the mother.

"Why, you!" Ota screamed. "You do this, make me liable for weeks to get bumped off any minute, and then . . ."

But the Colonel was recovering his balance. Waving aside Ota's threatening demonstrations, he continued, suave and poised:

"You see by that letter you just read that you misjudged me, that I am not a bum. I've felt awfully humiliated, at times, because circumstances forced me, economically, to the level of a bum but you were the first man ever to so denounce me, that night.

"Then, as I went out toward the back door, I saw this boy playing in that rear room, which otherwise was vacant. I took him by the hand, not thinking at the moment of anything more than merely greeting him. Then the thought struck me of what a grand opportunity it would be to even the score with you. Your words still were burning in my ears. I had never been called a bum before!

"So I told the lad to come along and we'd get a hot dog. He went with me readily.

"When we reached my home, my

wife of course wanted to know what I was doing with the youngster, but I had the answer ready. We have planned for years to adopt a child when the tide of fortune turned with us, and with this good position in sight, I told her, I had gone to an orphanage and adopted this boy."

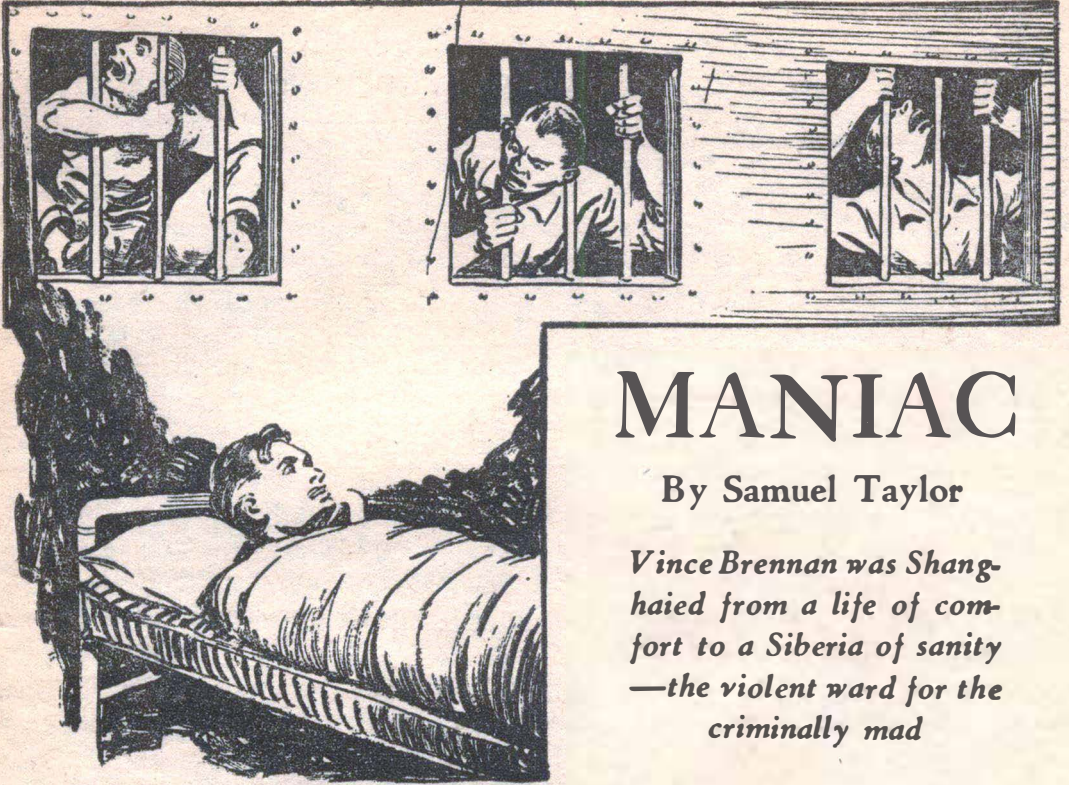
"Now, what do you think I am, crazy?" said Ota. "You mean to tell me your wife hasn't known all the time you were lying?"

"She never suspected it until this morning," said the Colonel. "And it came about like this: all through the trial, I managed to keep newspapers with the boy's picture from her sight. But today she happened to find an old copy in the kitchen as she was preparing breakfast and let out a yell. When I went to investigate, she was holding the paper and shaking an accusing finger at me. And so the jig was up. I told her the whole story—and here's your boy."

Mrs. Hermann had descended the stairs by this time and in the grand reunion celebration that followed, the Colonel stepped through the door and vanished. So busy were the rejoicing parents that neither took the trouble to watch for his automobile or see which way he went.

Years later, when repeal ended Ota's career as a speakeasy operator, he decided to retire with his singular claim of fame—that of being the only man who, during the reign of the Chicago underworld boss, ever managed to convict one of the syndicate's "key" men, despite their long series of flagrant offenses. And that conviction was an error.

The State cancelled the charge against McGuire and he was freed by a pardon which invalidated his conviction.



Fiddle shoved his grinning red face between the bars of the window and kept barking like a dog

MANIAC

By Samuel Taylor

Vince Brennan was Shanghaied from a life of comfort to a Siberia of sanity—the violent ward for the criminally mad

HELL was loose in "Siberia." "Woof! Woof! Woof!" Fiddle was barking like a dog. Across the corridor, Chimp was scaling the bars. Down the line the others imitated bears and lions. Some of them just yelled. It was feeding time in Siberia.

Vince Brennan's angle-iron cot was leaded into the cement floor, and he was wrapped like a mummy atop it. He could twist his head a bit on the straw tick, blink his eyes and move his lips. That was all. Six damp sheets were around him. He'd learned not to fight them. A man *would* go batty, that way.

Fiddle shoved his grinning red face between the bars of the window between the cells and kept barking. That was part of the whole devilish system. Lights always on; utter lack of privacy.

"When you get wise to yourself, Greenbacks," Fiddle advised through the window, "you'll act the right way."

"Keep on barking, you damned fake," Vince snarled. "You're no more crazy than I am."

"Woof Woof!" barked the grinning Fiddle. A stubby hand toyed with the thick cauliflower of his left ear. White scar lines were around his lips and eyebrows. "Sure, ask any of 'em, Greenbacks," he said. "They'll all tell you they was railroaded here. All but me. I like it here. Woof!"

"Good reason," snarled Vince from the cot. "They had you in the death house, all ready to stretch that thick neck, before you caught onto that barking idea."

Fiddle's grin widened. "Listen, Greenbacks, I've got a gun in each hand, see, and I cut down seven of 'em. Seven men—and here I am. I got away with it! Woof! Woof! Woof!"

"But—damn it, Fiddle!" rasped Vince Brennan, writhing impotently against the damp sheets. "You know I was railroaded here! I never killed that Devoe girl. I was a fool to let that crooked Cipowski plead insanity. I've had time to think. Cipowski was—"

"Shut up about Cipowski, or you'll go nuts for sure, Greenbacks," Fiddle advised good-naturedly. "Take it easy—an' wait. Learn how to wait. Me, why, I could stand on my head as long as you've been here. What? Ten months? Why—" Fiddle began barking again as the lock rasped in the corridor door.

Two attendants, Weed and Sneak, came along filling tin basins with stew and shoving them into the cells. The State paid twenty-three cents for the nickle's worth of stew in each of those basins.

"Would you like to dress for dinner, Mr. Greenbacks?" little Sneak was mocking from the grilled door. He unlocked it and came in, setting down his armload of tin basins. The hulking Weed put down the big galvanized stew pail and trailed in.

"Or would you like dinner in bed?" Sneak asked, twisting Vince's nose. The nose was blue and swollen from this petty cruelty. Vince was helpless, bound in the damp sheets. But he took his chance when one of Sneak's dirty fingers brushed against his lips. Vince hung on like a bulldog while the screaming little man smashed him again and again in the face. Then big Weed swung a massive fist and knocked Vince's jaw lax.

Fiddle kept watching through the side window, barking. Sneak danced around sucking his bleeding finger, mouthing shrill curses in a voice matching his rat-like face.

"Not you, Weed!" he screamed at

the big one. "Not you! I'll work this nut over myself! You feed the rest of 'em!"

"Want to watch," said the stolid Weed.

"Feed the rest of 'em, you big ox! I'll wait'll you are finished!" Sneak popped the finger back into his mouth.

The basins scraped on the cement floor as Weed shoved one into each cell. Vince Brennan wiggled his facial muscles, trying to get his nose back in joint. "I'm going to kill you some day, Sneak," he promised without heat.

Sneak took another look at his bleeding finger. "If you last, you'll learn how to act, Greenbacks," he advised. Then added: "But you might not last."

Weed's big feet came clumping down the corridor.

"Want to watch, huh?" Sneak asked slyly.

"Go easy!" hissed the big attendant. "Doc Orth!"

"See *you* later," Sneak advised Vince, then turned with a sniveling smirk as Dr. Orth came down the corridor. "Good day, Doctor! Fine day, Doctor!"

"The corridor door was open," Dr. Orth said. "Watch that, men. You know it means your job if an inmate escapes." Dr. Orth had close-cropped blonde hair and a knobby head as square as a box. He was resident physician at Amherst.

"Brennan," he said to the man on the cot, "Theana and your guardian, Mr. Cipowski, are here. Will you be decent?"

"I don't want to see that damned crook," Vince said.

"I'll tell them you are indisposed."

"No; I want to see Theana. But watch me, Doc, around that crooked lawyer. I might accidentally take a poke at him."

They gave Vince his clothes after unwrapping him. He went down three flights of stairs with Dr. Orth and two attendants.

THEANA was in the reception room with Cipowski and owl-eyed Dr. Foehn, the superintendent. Worry had made Theana even prettier, for the shadows under her eyes gave an added prominence to the large orbs and her face was the type to look best when thin. Vince wanted to grab his twin sister and swing her around a couple of times until she squealed, but a man can't do that in Amherst. Not a man in Ward 21—Siberia, ward for the criminally insane. They're always watching for you to do something crazy. Vince saw it far back in her eyes even as she smiled and shook hands, even as her eyes flooded full. And if you ever got out it would be the same. They'd always be watching for little things, always whispering, "He was at Amherst!"

And Cipowski had put him there; Cipowski with his shovel jaw and firm mouth, smiling now so very nicely, asking with just the right note of solicitude how Vince was feeling. But ten months in Amherst had been a good education to Vince Brennan, in a way. You saw crazy people, so lop-sided, one showing this, one that. And then you get to seeing little hints of this and that in so-called normal people—the same stuff the crazy ones have, but under control. Vince could read Cipowski's face like a book, now. The mouth was the give-away. Training kept the long mouth firm and straight, where naturally it would be loose and full. An insane mouth, but under control.

And Vince could read plenty in the eyes of Dr. Foehn, the superintendent. Thick lenses only magnified it. Both

Foehn and Cipowski were utterly ruled by greed.

"How do you feel?" Theana was asking hopefully.

"All right," Vince muttered.

"I am doing everything, Vince," Cipowski spoke up. "Everything money can do." He sounded so honest.

"Shut up!" Vince snapped. "You damned crook!"

Cipowski swept the room with significant raised eyebrows.

"Thanks for coming, Theana," Vince told his twin sister.

"I'll call again soon. What's wrong with your nose?"

"Nothing. I fell down, is all. Just—Theana!"

The last word was an explosion. He grabbed her, pulled her half around. Fear flared in his sister's eyes. The two attendants pinned Vince's arms.

"What is it, Vince?" asked square-clipped Dr. Orth patiently.

"Theana! Those rings! You're not—are you married?"

Theana glanced at the solitaire and gold band on her slim finger, then at the shovel-jawed lawyer. Cipowski smiled at her, relaxing his trained lips so that the greed showed so plainly to Vince.

"Not married—to that crook!" yelled Vince. "You know he railroaded me here! I never killed that Devoe girl! He put me here and he's keeping me here because of the estate! Theana, can't you see what he is!"

"There, there," soothed Dr. Foehn. The superintendent signaled with his owl eyes and the attendants took a firmer hold on Vince.

"Try not to worry, dear," Theana was saying, as to a baby.

"So sad," clucked Cipowski. But Vince saw just a little fear in that wide mouth. "So very said. . . ."

"You damned crook!" yelled Vince. He lunged at Cipowski, dragging the attendants across the floor with him. The lawyer hopped nimbly behind one of the chairs screwed to the floor. Vince lunged after him, raging, pulling the white-coated men.

"Dr. Orth," purred owl-eyed Dr. Foehn, "show the visitors out."

And when the door closed, Vince knew what was coming.

THEY didn't have to bind Vince up in sheets after they got through. He just lay there on his iron cot, chewing the dirty ticking, trying not to be a baby.

"Woof! Woof!" Fiddle barked through the side window. "I told you to take it easy, Greenbacks. Don't be a fool."

Vince paid no attention. His head was floating. When he heard Sneak's chuckle outside the bars he knew it was the first of the month, when the day attendants worked on until midnight, then came at six the next afternoon and had a month of night shift. That was the only way of counting the months.

First of the month. Vince didn't like to think back, but he couldn't help it.

He'd been an awfully spoiled play-boy. One scrape crowding the heels of another. He and Theana the last of the Brennan line. Scrape after scrape, and money smoothing the way out. Cipowski bailing him from jail, seeing the judge, settling here and there. Cipowski an old friend of the family, legal guardian, administrator of the estate. Vince chasing madly; Theana trying to hold him down.

Then the white end of a polo mallet crashing his temple, and everything changed. "Be very quiet," the doctors advised. Dizziness. Then blonde Daisy Devoe suing for breach of promise.

"Suing me for half a million! I've never *seen* her before!"

"I'm afraid she'll get it," Cipowski said. "Your reputation, Vince . . ."

Then the phone call: "Vince Brennan? . . . This is Daisy Devoe. About that suit of mine. It's a frame-up on you, see? And I'll spill it on account of I'm sore, see? I can tell you a lot, Vince Brennan. What I can say is cheap at ten grand. . . . Don't tell nobody. . . ."

But Vince had to tell Cipowski, to get the money. Then to her apartment. Her platinum hair soaking up the pool of blood on the tile bathroom floor. Dizzy panic. Cops.

"Dead to rights," Cipowski said. "But there's a chance, Vince, on the insanity angle. That polo mallet . . ."

"But I didn't kill the girl!"

"Of course not, Vince"—soothingly "Now, the insanity plea. . . ."

His exploits looked awfully bad, hung on that angle.

"Not guilty by reason of insanity."

But ten months in Siberia, thinking about Cipowski. . . .

The cell door screamed. Dr. Orth's square-clipped head bending over him. Hands feeling for broken bones.

"I'm all right, Doc. Give me time."

"I'm sorry, Brennan. You brought it on yourself. Not this much, but still you started things."

Vince shoved himself to a sitting position on the cot. The eternal lights were bright overhead.

"Doc, do you really think I'm nuts?"

Dr. Orth was a plain man, bleak and homely, knobby, almost ugly. "Let's not talk about that, Brennan," he said.

Vince glanced at Fiddle's red face at the side window, lowered his voice to a whisper: "Doc, you're the only white man in hell. Did you do what I asked you to do?"

A slight nod of the square head.

"Yes. I went over the recorded copy of your father's will. It provides two thousand dollars monthly for you and Theana until majority, then bulk of the estate divided equally. If either dies before majority, his share goes to charity. C. D. Cipowski is recommended as guardian and administrator. The court followed the recommendation. That's the essence of it."

"It's enough," Vince said.

Dr. Orth lowered his voice still more: "Now, listen, Brennan. What I think is my own business. But I'll tell you this much. Inside of two months I confidentially expect a few changes around here. Never mind why. Now, you act like a human for two months, and then I'll take your case up personally. Can you do that, you young fool?"

Vince thought it over when Dr. Orth was gone. The details of the will kept buzzing in his fuzz-coated mind. His head was hammering, and that made it worse.

By the time Sneak and Weed came at ten-thirty on the half hour rounds, Vince knew he couldn't take Dr. Orth's advice. He didn't have two months. Today was the first, and his birthday was on the fifteenth. The will said if he died before he was twenty-one, his share of the estate went to charity. But if he died after, it would go to Theana. He would be twenty-one in two weeks. And Theana was now Mrs. Cipowski. . . .

VINCE had a half hour after the corridor lock grated shut behind the attendants. He got a finger in the corner of the mattress seam, ripped the ticking apart, spilling out the straw. Fiddle watched at the side window, grinning, mechanically keeping up his canine yapping. Vince tore a length of

the striped ticking, twisted it into a rope. The cells were roofed with heavy wire mesh. Vince stood on the cot, reached up and wormed his little finger through one of the little squares, pulled until he could get his ring finger through, then his middle finger. Fingers of both hands were bleeding when he had wedged two holes about three inches apart. He threaded a thin length of ticking up one hole, over the three inches of mesh and down through the other, tied it to the twisted rope and wormed it through, fastened the rope to itself with a bow knot, made a noose in the free end.

Fiddle said, "You poor fool, that's not the way out."

"Maybe it is," Vince said grimly. "Keep on barking."

When the corridor lock grated at eleven o'clock, Vince was standing on the cot with the ticking-rope noose snug around his neck. As hard shoes clumped on the concrete floor he took a deep suck of air and let his heels slide over the edge of the cot. Fiddle kept barking.

Vince swung around a bit as the ticking-rope tried to untwist. A shrill curse sounded from little Sneak. Stolid Weed grunted. The lock groaned open. Weed lumbered in and grabbed Vince to ease the strain on the neck. Then Weed tried to spring away, but Vince had clamped a leg scissors around the big torso and was smashing fists at the massive face. The big attendant knew what to do. He relaxed his knees, so that Vince either had to release the leg scissors or support the weight of two bodies by his neck. Vince grimly kept his legs around the big man, and fumbled upwards along the taut rope for the bow-knot. Couldn't reach it with the rope stretched tight. And his neck would break. It would have to break, with the terrible weight. Weed was pil-

ing sickening fists into his groin. Little Sneak was cackling a chuckle, keeping away.

Something had to give. It was the rotten ticking-rope. It snapped at the noose knot and Vince gasped air in thankful lungs as he fell to the hard floor atop Weed. A leg twisted under the massive face. He glimpsed little Sneak against the wall, emitting that shrill chuckle and clutching a black-jack. The rules said attendants couldn't carry clubs; but a lot of things went on in Amherst that weren't according to the rules. The little guard stood there enjoying the fight, waiting his time to step in and use the sap.

Vince knew he'd failed. But he kept hammering Weed from sheer pent-up fury. The hulking attendant was strong as a bull, and as hard to hurt. When he recovered from surprise he reached up and grabbed a handful of hair, then began swinging his other arm like a boom. Weed wasn't one to pick his spots. His massive arm just kept battering against Vince's face and head, and Weed could keep it up all night. He pulled Vince to one side and began getting up, still swinging that booming arm.

Vince kicked out with his good leg, caught the big man on the point of the jaw, knocking him backwards. Vince hopped him and grabbed the lapels of the white jacket, lifting and pushing, beating the back of the big man's head against the concrete. He kept expecting Sneak's sap. He knew it was coming. But he kept battering Weed's head anyhow.

Then Weed was out. Vince looked up through a haze. Little Sneak was still by the wall. Eyes were ready to pop from his purple face. A pair of stubby red hands were reaching through the barred side window, cinched on the lit-

tle guard's neck. Fiddle was still grinning.

"Let loose, you fool!" Vince snarled. "He's dead!"

Fiddle let Sneak drop to the floor. Vince put on Weed's pants and white jacket, took keys from both men.

"Going with me, Fiddle?"

"Woof! Not me, Greenbacks. Some other time, yes. But there's a dead screw in this break. And if you ever kill a screw, it's just too bad for you when they get you back. Woof!"

Vince said nothing. He'd play hell in clearing himself, now. A dead attendant in his cell. That was murder.

"Now, listen, Greenbacks," Fiddle was saying, "you don't know your way around without money. Do as I tell you. Go to the city. On Thomas Street—number 848—there's a tailor shop. Archie owns it. You tell Archie that I sent you, and tell him that Maizie will fix him up. Got it?"

"Thanks, Fiddle. If I can help you . . ."

"Git out of here, Greenbacks. Woof! Woof!"

Vince limped down the corridor, locked the door behind him, unlocked the outer room door and started downstairs. Two more wards to get through before he reached the ground floor. But Vince knew he couldn't be stopped, now.

ACCORDING to the papers, Sneak wasn't dead after all. Vince was thankful, for himself, and sorry for Fiddle. Sneak wouldn't let Fiddle forget. Vince wished he could get Fiddle out of there. But nothing could bring Vince back to Amherst. Fiddle would have to take it. Vince would die before he went back.

He rested a few days in the room above Archie's tailor shop. Archie was

a swarthy little man who never asked a question. Vince washed his black hair three times in peroxide, smeared sun-tan oil on his white skin. One morning he took a walk, wearing one of Archie's suits, and with five dollars from Archie in his pocket.

The Cipowski home and office were well guarded, according to the papers, with both police and hired detectives. His offices were on the third floor of the Hollbrook building, across from swank St. James hotel. Vince sized the place up, then went to a grocery store and had five empty cardboard cartons wrapped up. He took them in a cab to the railway station and checked them for a dime apiece.

"St. James hotel," he ordered the cab driver.

There, he registered as *Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Wipft*, saying: "I want a east side suite on about the third floor." He tossed four of his five check stubs on the desk. "Wait until my wife arrives before you send for the luggage. She might not want all of it brought up. She's shopping."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Wipft."

Upstairs, Vince examined the three-room suite, experimented with the Venetian blinds. "This will do," he told the bellhop. "But, say, how much is it costing me?"

"Sixteen a day. Hundred a week. By the month."

"Okay. And bring me a bottle of beer. A quart bottle."

The bellhop went. Through the Venetian blinds of the living room Vince could look across the street and see Cipowski sitting at the desk in his private office. The lawyer's sensuous lips were relaxed when he was alone.

When the beer came, Vince gave the boy a dollar. He drank the beer, propped the brown bottle on the arm of

an overstuffed chair with some cushions around it, his hat atop one cushion, the neck of the bottle through a louver of the Venetian blind.

He telephoned Cipowski. Through the blind he could see the lawyer's lips tighten on recognizing the voice.

"Sit still," Vince advised. "Look straight out your big window and across the street to the St. James. Can you see the gun pointing at you? Keep your hands in sight. Don't push any buttons. I'm coming over to see you, Cipowski. I will be packing a box. You keep the telephone right there so I can hear what you say when you order your help to let me in. My name will be Wipft."

Cipowski flipped the cam of his office speaker, said, "Miss Johnstone, a Mr. Wipft will be calling with a box. Let him in."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cipowski. Mr. Wipft, with a box."

Cipowski snapped the cam back, stared with frightened eyes across the street.

"Now hang up the phone?" Vince ordered. "Sit there with your hands in sight and your mouth shut."

Vince took a cab to the railroad station, where he bought a sack of tobacco, then used the check he had retained to get one of the empty boxes. He unwrapped it on the way to the Hollbrook building, put his coat inside and wrapped it up again. He turned up his sleeves, touseled his bleached hair, rolled a brown paper cigarette.

With the box on his shoulder, hand-made cigarette dangling, and "I'm Wipft" as a password, he had no trouble passing the pair of husky guards in the hallway outside Cipowski's office, the boy inside, the switchboard girl, the secretary, three stenographers, and the gimlet-eyed man tilted in a chair

just outside Cipowski's private sanctum.

Cipowski was sitting there with his hands flat on the glass top of his desk. Vince set down his box, looked across the street. The stubby end of the brown bottle was convincing enough in the shadow. Just enough outline of pillows and hat could be made out through the blind louvers.

"You can't get away with this," Cipowski bluffed. Fear was in his face. "You're crazy to try it, Vince."

Vince eased into a chair. The Hollbrook building shaded the face of the hotel across the street at this time of the morning. But the rising sun was moving the shadow downward.

Vince said, "Take a pen and paper and start writing."

Cipowski's trained lips were firm above the shovel jaw. He seemed relieved. "All right. What should I write?"

"The real story of how I went to Amherst."

Cipowski began writing *I killed Daisy Devoe because she was suing Vince Brennan, and I was trying to protect the interests of my client.*

Vince reached over and slammed the lawyer with his open hand. "I want the truth, Cipowski. I wasn't sure until right now that you *did* kill Daisy Devoe. But it adds up. You had to have money to cover up shortages in the estate you were managing for me and Theana. There would be an accounting when we reached legal age and you turned over the estate. So you got the Devoe girl to sue me for a half million. Then Daisy Devoe phoned me she would spill the beans for ten thousand. Like a fool I went to you for the money, and you killed her, seeing a chance to put me away and get control of the estate. The way I'd been wild, and me being dizzy from concussion

after the polo accident, it was easy for you to 'save' me with the insanity plea. The only man you had to fix was Dr. Foehn, the superintendent at Amherst. Meanwhile, you were playing up to my sister. As her husband you would be sitting pretty. And after I turned twenty-one, maybe I could 'die' at Amherst, and Theana—your wife—would get my share of the estate."

Cipowski's eyes were steady. "You want me to write that?"

"It's true, isn't it?"

"Just about. You want me to write it?" There was a sly something about Cipowski's willingness.

"Yes. Write it down."

Cipowski filled a page with even writing while Vince watched. The lawyer signed it, slid the paper across the glass desk. "Is that all?"

"Except for what cash you are carrying." Vince took a roll of bills and the paper, shot a glance across the street. Sunlight had moved down the hotel wall, was glinting on the bottle neck, streaming through the louvers of the Venetian blind onto the pillows and the hat atop them.

"Thanks," he said, keeping his voice carefully casual. "Just keep sitting here, Cipowski, and nothing will happen to you."

Cipowski was staring out the window.

VINCE went to the door, opened it, then closed it without going out. At sound of the latch shutting, Cipowski snapped the cam of his office speaker.

"Miss Johnstone! There's a crazy man leaving—!"

Vince lunged across the office and batted the lawyer out of his chair. A woman's scream sounded through the door. Vince bounded to it, twisted the

bolt. Cipowski was getting up, ready to fight. The office was in the corner of the building, third floor. Vince wanted to try getting out a window, but he couldn't try anything with Cipowski charging at him. Vince smashed him back against the desk and bounded into the washroom, snapping the bolt for privacy.

It was a small room with a tile floor, a single window glazed with moss glass. Vince squealed up the bottom pane. The open window of an office was a dozen feet straight across a narrow service alley between the buildings. A blonde steno had her back to this window, pecking a typewriter.

The doorknob of the washroom rattled.

"You'd better shoot through," came Cipowski's voice. "Remember, he's a maniac."

"We eat maniacs," rumbled somebody. The door began shaking.

Vince crawled out the window and crouched on the sill above the service alley, holding with one hand to the open window. Somebody on the street below and thirty feet to the right stopped, looking up. Other people stopped. The blonde steno in the office across the alley happened to wheel around in her posture chair. She sat there mechanically chewing gum as though nothing was happening.

Vince jumped.

It was farther than he had judged. He heard the washroom door splinter open behind him. From the street came a hungry sigh from the people looking up. The blonde steno kept sitting there chewing gum as he arched through the air toward her. He was dropping fast.

His stomach hit the window ledge, sapping his strength. He began slipping back, and his arms seemed dead. Then the steno came to life. She grabbed his

shoulders and began helping him through the window.

"Watch out over there!" came a bel- low from across the alley. "Get out of the way, girl! We're goin' to shoot!"

The blonde kept helping Vince. In- side, he dropped to the floor and crawled beyond the window, got up feeling his stomach.

"Cops and robbers?" the blonde asked.

"Thanks, Babe," Vince said. "You're the first blonde who ever did me any good."

She said, "Go out this way and the first door to the right is where I keep my things. You'll find my coat and hat and my best slippers. How big are your feet? You can pull your pants up under the coat and pray nobody sees the hair on your legs. But send 'em back, mister; I mean, the clothes. To Ruth Pollard, 1143 Elm Street."

VINCE had sore feet that afternoon, but otherwise felt wonderful. He'd crossed Archie's swarthy palm with a hundred dollars of Cipowski's money, sent another hundred by parcel post with the blonde steno's coat, hat and shoes.

And he had mailed Cipowski's con- fession to the *Chronicle*.

When the extras came out he sent Archie for one. And then Vince began swearing. The *Chronicle* had a big pic- ture of the confession splashed on the front page, deep black heads.

MANIAC FORCES 'CONFESSION' FROM LAWYER!
TWISTED MIND ATTEMPTS CRUDE HOAX
'PROVES BRENNAN HOPELESSLY INSANE'

Vince Brennan swore hopelessly. In- sane. That angle twisted everything around against him. Cipowski had real- ized that. He'd just written anything to passify the maniac, according to his story in the paper.

All Vince had accomplished was to show he was hiding in the city. He read the paper because he couldn't help it. Cipowski's story, the version of the blonde steno, statements from owl-eyed Dr. Foehn, the superintendent, and Dr. Orth. The *Chronicle* had a scoop with that confession, and played it to the limit. Cuts of everybody. One of Vince doctored just a little to throw one eye off center. That was so he would look insane.

Vince stiffened. Dr. Orth's story was headed:

RESIDENT PHYSICIAN PLEADS FOR RETURN.

"Vince Brennan possibly can be cured," Dr. O. L. Orth, resident physician at Amherst, declared in an exclusive interview with the *Chronicle*. "I do not consider his case entirely hopeless if he is returned quickly for treatment.

"However, if Brennan does not return or is not apprehended on or before the fifteenth, I fear his case will be hopeless. According to State law, an inmate leaving the institution in any manner for more than fourteen days must be committed again in the regular way.

"And I greatly fear," concluded Dr. Orth, "that if Brennan stays away beyond the fourteen-day limit, and then has to undergo a sanity trial, the strain will render him permanently and hopelessly insane."

"The only white man in hell," Vince muttered, slowly grinning. "Thanks, Doc, for the tip. So if I hide out until after the fifteenth, then they can't take me back without another trial to see if I'm really nuts, huh? All right, Doc. And when I'm proved sane, I can start in on Cipowski. He'll last that long."

AS THE days passed, Vince had that feverish sort of anticipation a kid has waiting for Christmas. Eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. He marked the days off on a little calendar. The thirteenth was Friday. Other news had pushed him out of the

papers. Not a line about the escaped maniac in the morning editions.

But hell broke loose in the afternoon.

**MANIAC'S SISTER INSANE!
GIRL CRACKS UNDER STRAIN!**

Mrs. Theana Brennan Cipowski, twin sister of Vince Brennan, escaped Maniac from Amherst, today was committed to that institution after a secret sanity hearing.

According to Dr. James A. Foehn, superintendent, the young woman's mind was unbalanced from the shock of her twin brother's escape and subsequent actions of forcing an alleged "confession" from her husband, C. D. Cipowski, lawyer.

Cipowski noticed his wife's strange behavior the morning after Brennan's escape, and placed her under private observation, hoping . . .

"Damn him!" groaned Vince.
"Damn him!"

There was only one explanation. Theana's sympathies would be with Vince. Maybe she was getting wise to Cipowski. He wanted her out of the way. And what better place than Amherst to get a person out of the way—permanently?

"And—day after tomorrow is her birthday," Vince muttered. "Our birthday. Twenty-one. If anything should happen to Theana after she reaches legal age . . . Cipowski her husband . . . a lawyer . . . estate . . ."

Vince paced up and down the room. Up and down. Up and down, from the dresser to the window and back. Four steps. Turn. Four steps; turn. . . . He couldn't do it. He had to stay hid out until the sixteenth. He had to stay hid out.

But Theana was in Amherst. Somehow Cipowski had got her there. Drugs? Suave persuasion? No matter. She was there—there to stay while Cipowski used her fortune. There, maybe, to die when she became twenty-one. No fuss when a mental patient dies. . . .

"Oh—*Hell!*" groaned Vince. "I've got to! I've got to get Theana out of that hell!"

From underneath the mattress he secured the keys he had taken from Sneak and Weed. In the five-and-ten he bought a small pinch bar, a hack saw and a dozen blades, a bar of soap. From swarthy Archie he got an Army Colt automatic, .45 caliber.

IT WAS a black, sultry night with a little wind rustling the tall poplars surrounding Amherst's bleak architectural atrocities. Gaunt and ghastly, the institution had been built against the east hills during the peak of the cupola period. The well-tended grounds couldn't soften the hideous angles. Vince Brennan, coming over the hills from the rear, shuddered at sight of the black pile.

He couldn't go back into that hell, for any reason. Yet the reason was there. He had to go back.

He didn't know anything about forcing locks. And he'd need help in a round-house fight. Fiddle could help a lot in a pinch. And they'd be making Fiddle's life a horror, after what he did to Sneak. Fiddle would be willing enough to leave, this time.

On the rear lawn, Vince went from bush to bush, made the rear of the south wing. Windows of the top floor showed light at the ornate and solid grills. Ward 21. Siberia. At the rear wall he put on the white attendant's coat he'd taken from Weed.

He tried a key in the door. The bolt slid. Locks hadn't been changed. Who would expect anybody to come back? He went into the corridor between kitchen and dining hall. Two high bulbs gave light. He strode briskly to the stairs, went up, rapped sharply at the door of the floor above. The door

opened three inches against the chain latch. Vince had the .45 in his hand.

"Stick your pants cuff in the crack, shut the door on it and undo that latch," he told the white face. "If you pull the cuff out or take more than three seconds getting the door open, I'll shoot through it."

Herding the scared attendant before him, he repeated the operation at the next floor, marched the two of them upstairs and paused at the door leading to Siberia. A vein was pulsing in his neck. He was breathing hard. Beyond that door. . . . And always two attendants for Siberia.

He rapped on the door. Feet scuffed the cement floor. Creak of bolt. Weed's massive face at the crack.

"Say, 'Why, hello, Doctor,' " Vince whispered.

Weed looked at the gun. "Why, hello, Doctor," he said.

"Put your pants cuff in the door, shut it and open it. Quick."

Weed obeyed. Vince shoved his two prisoners before him. Sneak was tilted against the wall in a chair. The front legs thumped to the cement floor and the little man sprang up.

"How come you pair kept your jobs after I escaped?"

Sneak's rat-like face grinned. "We've got friends."

"Open the corridor door."

Sneak obeyed, asking: "Getting lonesome, Greenbacks?"

Vince herded the four of them down the corridor between the cells. The inmates began yelling. Fiddle was barking like a dog. Chimp was climbing around on the bars. Vince's old cell was empty. He put the four attendants inside, locked them there, unlocked the door of Fiddle's cell.

Fiddle was trying to grin, but it was hard, for his red face was puffed and

bruised until it almost was shapeless. The left eye was swollen shut.

"I guess I'll out with you this time, Greenbacks," Fiddle said. "It was my hard luck that Sneak didn't die."

"I'm letting you out, Fiddle, but you've got to help me."

"Help you do what?"

"Theana is over in the women's wing. My sister."

Fiddle whistled, then stood toying with his tin ear, barking absently. Finally he shook his battered head. "I'm game, Greenbacks. But no can do. That cannon is all right with men. But how far would it take you among the ladies? The first female screw which saw it would let out a scream and run for help. That's the way a woman is, Greenbacks. You can't argue with a scared female. You have to shoot 'em. I know."

"I counted on you, Fiddle."

Fiddle's puffed lips tried to grin. "I'm with you, Greenbacks. But first I got some business. You open up here and let me in with these screws. Hold the gun on 'em so's I can lick just one at a time. That's somethin' that I've wanted to do so long I almost went crazy. Woof! Woof! Woof!"

"We haven't got time. The attendants phone a report every half hour. We've got to work fast."

"Then give me that cannon and I'll finish 'em quick!"

Vince cursed. "You crazy fool! You can't start shooting!"

Fiddle squinted his good eye. "What do I git out of this?"

"You get out."

"No," rumbled Fiddle stubbornly. "First I kill these screws."

Then a new voice came from the corridor doorway:

"Perhaps I can settle the argument, gentlemen."

Dr. Foehn was there, owl eyes magnified behind thick lenses. Cipowski was with him, the wide mouth lax and curving. Each held a revolver. Two white-jacketed attendants were alongside with shotguns.

VINCE dropped the .45 to the concrete floor. He began cursing. "You expected me!" he cried, seeing the play when he had walked into the trap.

"Your dear sister's idea," admitted Cipowski, "after I cast a few hints. We thought you'd come back to rescue her. And Theana is so anxious that you receive treatment. We were waiting for you in the women's wing, but when you went upstairs we had to reorganize our plan of action."

"All right," Vince muttered. "You've got me. But now you've got to let Theana go. You'll do that, won't you?"

Dr. Foehn's owl eyes blinked piously behind the thick lenses. "As soon as your sister is normal again . . ."

"That means you'll keep her!" Vince yelled.

Then his voice came in a husky whisper, pleadingly: "Listen, you two vultures. I'll make it easy for you. I'm twenty-one at midnight. You want the estate. I'll give you my share. I'll sign anything you want, and then you can kill me or keep me here or whatever you like. But let Theana loose. And leave her alone. I'll talk with her if you want. The both of us will sign over the estate. But let her go and leave her alone, will you?"

Cipowski sighed. "Unfortunately, an insane person cannot make a contract. We'll just have to do things our own way."

"Put them in their cells, attendant," Dr. Foehn ordered one of the shotgun bearers. "And let those four attendants loose. I've been too lax about things like

this. Friends or no friends, they'll be disciplined."

"You'll do nothin' to me, Foehn!" screamed Sneak.

The superintendent's owl eyes blinded behind the lenses. "Put these inmates in their cells!" he snapped.

"All right," Fiddle shrugged. "But first I got somethin' to do." He stooped for the automatic Vince had dropped.

Dr. Foehn yelled: "Fiddle!"

The very casualness of his move let Fiddle get away with it as long as he did. He had the .45 in his hand, had thumbed the safety and was swinging the barrel up when a shotgun spewed.

Fiddle must have been ripped half in two, but he kept standing there. His first shot centered the eyes of the attendant who had wounded him. A flick of the wrist and he blew the top off the other armed guard's head.

Fiddle picked his spots carefully. His battered face was grinning. His one good eye blinked away the haze. Then he drilled Dr. Foehn, the slug hitting the bridge of the glasses and flinging the thick lenses to the floor.

Cipowski turned to run, then lurched on his face. Or where his face had been.

Fiddle began swinging the automatic around to get Sneak and Weed cowering in the cell. Then he pulled the automatic back as more men rushed in the corridor door. Dr. Orth was leading them, his square-clipped hair and knobby face like a block of rough-hewn stone.

"Fiddle! Don't!" yelled Vince, lunging at him. He crashed into the man, knocking the gun down. The slug flung sparks from the concrete floor. The two of them went down.

"Damn you, Greenbacks," Fiddle muttered. Blood was on his puffed lips. He growled like a dog. Vince had his gun-arm, but Fiddle was possessed of

an inhuman strength, and he put his last effort into bringing the weapon onto Vince and pulling the trigger.

THE room was all white when Vince awakened.

"Well," said Dr. Orth, "you're awake."

"And still at Amherst," Vince remarked.

The square-clipped head nodded. "I'm the new superintendent. You'll find things different here. I tried to hint to you that night when I asked you to wait a couple of months. The Governor was making a secret investigation. The lid blew off after the shooting. A nasty scandal."

"Do you still think I'm crazy, Doc?"

"Yes," admitted Dr. Orth. Then: "*Officially*," he whispered. "Understand, Brennan, you were implicated in that massacre. Fiddle killed four men, and you released Fiddle. You are both equally guilty in the eyes of the law."

"Funny thing about Fiddle," mused Vince. "I always wondered was he really crazy."

Dr. Orth's square face was emotionless. He said, "But an insane person cannot commit a crime. The easiest out for you, Brennan, is to stay here about six months. Then I'll recommend your release—and I'm confident you will be found sane."

He went to the door and admitted Theana, who must have been waiting outside. She looked awfully well. Her smile was so appealing. And that look of fear far back in her eyes was gone. She was dressed fit to kill. That meant she was only a visitor at Amherst.

She said, "Hello, Vince," and then was crying with happiness on his pillow.

"Doc," said Vince, "six months isn't very long. Fiddle used to say he could stand on his head longer than that."



They're Swindling You!

Some Small Matters

By

Frank Wrentmore

*This is the one-hundred-and-ninth 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.*

FROM San Diego, Calif.: "In the past it has been common practice for operators of wildcat busses to collect full fares from passengers and then dump them at the nearest convenient point outside this state, leaving them to get to their destination in any manner possible. Some months ago the State of Arizona passed a law prohibiting wildcat bus traffic. Officials have stopped such cars at the border, arrested the drivers and usually fined them whatever amount of cash they have on hand. Now it appears that many wildcat drivers are taking advantage of this legal coöperation as a means of getting rid of their passengers. Wildcat drivers collect full fares, then secrete all but sufficient funds to pay their expected fines, manage to get arrested at the Arizona border, pay their fines and then come back for another load, always with the alibi that it was the fault of the Arizona officials."

From Providence, R. I.:

"Attorney General John P. Hartigan ordered a real estate developer to discontinue further attempts to sell real estate through the Free Lot scheme,

with the warning that all evidence in his possession would be presented to the Grand Jury if the order was not obeyed.

"Concerning the Free Lot method of selling real estate, Mr. Hartigan says:

" 'Something for nothing apparently remains a universal human desire and Free Lot schemes present another mirage in which something is offered "free," but, in reality, is merely a lure to force the unwary to buy. Unfortunately such vicious schemes often succeed under a cloak of respectability and are especially reprehensible because the victims, in most instances, cannot afford to part with their hard earned savings.' "

"The plan is briefly outlined as follows:

"Agents pass out cards at neighborhood theaters, carnivals, or in house-to-house solicitation, securing signatures on the pretext that a 'free lot' is being offered and persons signing will have a chance to win. Those signing are later visited by a salesman who states that the lot has been won and all that is required is that the winner accompany him to the subdivision and select the lot desired, but in order to obtain it, the sum of \$37.50 is required, which will cover the cost of recording, surveying, taxes, etc. At the subdivision the 'winner' is shown a lot usually in an undesirable location or so small

that it is not useful, and then is urged to apply the 'value' of the lot (\$200) toward the purchase of one priced from \$500 to \$1,200."

From Toronto, Ontario:

"A local individual operating under the style of the Commercial Formulas Service, who has been placing circulars in parked cars, which, among other things, stated that upon receipt of one dollar, they would receive a formula together with simple instructions for its preparation and when placed in their gasoline tank, would effect a considerable saving in their gasoline consumption. This circular claimed that exhaustive tests had proven decreases of 30 percent to 50 percent in the consumption of gasoline. When requested to furnish some evidence that the product would act as advertised, we were informed by this individual that he was going out of business and that no further circulars would be distributed."

From Dayton, Ohio:

"Selling guaranteed 2,000-hour lamp bulbs and representing that the lamps will give more light at a less cost than ordinary lamps, is the basis for sales by several crews of salesmen working in this area. Commercial concerns particularly are warned against dealing with unknown firms when such representations as these are used. Very frequently the lamps are incorrectly marked as to wattage; in other words, the markings show a smaller watt measurement than is actually the case. Further reports indicate that the lamps fail to last the 'guaranteed' 2,000 hours and the purchasers have no redress."

From Los Angeles, Calif.:

"Following receipt of complaints from the Middle West the Los Angeles Bureau has outlined the activities of salesmen who are calling on owners of land at Atascadero, California. In some

instances these salesmen have claimed to represent the Bank of America, and allegedly offer to buy the non-residents' lots. The owner is then instructed to deposit his deed with his local bank and the money is to be paid to that bank as soon as the title company reports a clear title. However, the owner is asked to pay a fee to get the title report, and after this fee is received by the salesman the lot owner hears no further."

From Fort Worth, Texas:

"Certain cemetery promotions have recently been launched in Fort Worth. So-called memorial park and mausoleum promotions have probably caused as heavy a loss to investors throughout the United States during the past few years as any other type of promotion. High-powered sales crews are usually employed, who base their sales appeal primarily on the investment feature and the promise of a resale of the lots at a profit. Sufficient funds are not set aside to guarantee the perpetual care of the property and after a short while the promotions usually collapse. Investors should make certain that they deal only with reliable and well-financed companies and purchase lots on the basis of burial needs rather than on an anticipated profit from a resale of the lots."

And so it goes. The above quotations were selected almost at random from current Better Business Bureau bulletins and although many of these schemes have already been exposed in this series, it is important for you to keep them in mind. What is happening in Providence or Los Angeles today may happen in your city tomorrow or next month, and it may be your money that the racketeers will be after. There is only one way to be safe: Consult your Better Business Bureau before making any investments.

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAYER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

OUR °Inner Circle Club, which is composed only of solvers who have submitted 1,000 answers to this department, opened its mystic portals to four new members in July, raising the total °ICC enrollment to eighty-seven! And in recognition of their skill and perseverance, these cryptofans are now entitled to use the degree sign (°), distinctive symbol of the "thousand club"!

Here are the July members, and to them go our heartiest congratulations: °Mrs. Robert De Noyelles, New York, N. Y., who scored 1,001 answers with the July issue; °Kappa Kappa, (Mrs. C. C. Wouters), Seattle, Wash., also 1,001 answers with the issue of July 10; °Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill., 1,004 answers with the July 31 issue; and °R. L. Blaha, Newark, N. J., 1,002 answers with the July 31 issue.

By the way, °A. Traveller, Washington, D. C., our °ICC "Mystery Man" of last April, and the only "thousand clubber" who never revealed his identity, still remains incognito! To top it all off, °A. T. is no longer sending in his weekly solutions. His next-to-last set bore the Omaha & Oregon R. P. O. postmark. And his final set, to Nos. 169-74, inclusive, of July 17, came from San Francisco.

°Ciphermit, Houlton, Me., endeavors to shed some light in this question. "Your 'Mystery Man' presents a neat problem," he writes. "Obviously his whole name is 'Arkansas Traveller.' The Washington, D. C., postmark seems to indicate that he is a law maker—and has been for the last seven years. A senator from Arkansas died the other day. Have °A. T.'S solutions continued? If so, that's one person he wasn't." So there you are, fans! The riddle of °A. Traveller now appears to be more inscrutable than ever!

Opening this week's puzzles, Wu presents a division problem using a key-phrase numbered

thus: 0123 456789. The first multiplication gives you symbol T; the second subtraction, symbol O; etc. In Chi Valor's cryptogram guess the four-letter word GYBG, noting that the first and last letters are alike. Then find words to fit GL, YBH, and the phrase ZG ZH. Next, use these letters in the last word and supply the rest for yourself.

In Pierrette's contribution, note the phrase ZEX UPV in connection with UPVNF and PZTV. Having identified these words, try to complete OVZODEO, noting the thrice-used symbol O. XZAO and AVZFO will follow. Ace of Clubs gives you the affixes DP-, -DPF, and -DPFX for entry to XHDPFX and DPXNSH. Continue then with CLOBSDLKX; and so on.

Ian's catalogic or list message offers a vulnerable spot in the phrase PDTLT BPTSL. This will lead you to groups 9 and 16. The current "inner circle cipher" (as we term our hardest crypt each week) is by Blue Crescent. Find the clues for yourself in this one, and see next week's magazine for the answers to this week's puzzles.

Asterisks indicate capitals.

No. 265—Cryptic Division. By Wu.

NOT) EDGAR (TPN

NOT

OONA

TENP

DSOR

PGON

PSP

No. 266—Dusty Adornment. By Chi Valór.

BA BAGZFEBDZBA YBH XZHKLMDNX GYBG *KONLUBGDB
EHNX PDNNA RBKN ULSXND. ALSBxBQH ZG ZH VLDN
RBHYZLABTON GL BUUNBD HLUYZHGZKKBGNX.

No. 267—Quarterly Comparison. By Pierrette.

XZAO, KNLV AVZFO, PZTV UPVNF OVZODEO—UPV YDDK
XZHE DS OBFNEQ, UPV EDDEUNXV DS ORGGVF, UPV
XROLA SFZQFZEYV DS ZRURGE, ZEX UPV XZFL ENQPU
DS HNEUVF.

No. 268—Flyers Three. By Ace of Clubs.

UKTTV ZLXMKDHL XHDPFX XDAAV RKHHNOUAV
NZNOFDPF UOLZ SEOVXBADX. EKPF OV XGBOOLJ MKDS-
YAV FKAGX RKTTPDF GNXH. DPXNSH FELXH EBKPHX
CLOBSDLKX RDOQ.

No. 269—Varied Assortment. By Ian.

SEBK HAXTA DHNLT REPEKHZNT REAABTL PDTLT
BPTSL: SNRBKEZT, EXDTLBMT, JEOABGHBX, RDBFPY,
SELREAE, RTKKNKHBX, OEFXTENV, ESSNFBBPHF,
BFLTRPBRBXTL, UCQESEL, XESELG, KBU LPBRGL.

No. 270—Done by a Dog. By Blue Crescent.

MFGUA HSYTBFT OAUZO PSDEGN XSGUTHR, VUAXO
NFXO, FAYPFO NYUTP. RYGNTZ RSYGP OVSBO REX,
TSXVO UKSYB, TUEOFO TYXVYO—BREFL HUYNRB!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

259—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 often rehearsed, seldom refused, and never
 J U S T R E M D I N exactly alike.

260—Gabriele d'Annunzio, Italian poet, received the rumor of his intended suicide "with a chuckle." That made it unanimous!

263—Zealous contortionist practices somersaults amidst surroundings hardly appropriate. Result: ruined chandelier, sunken floor, spinal curvature.

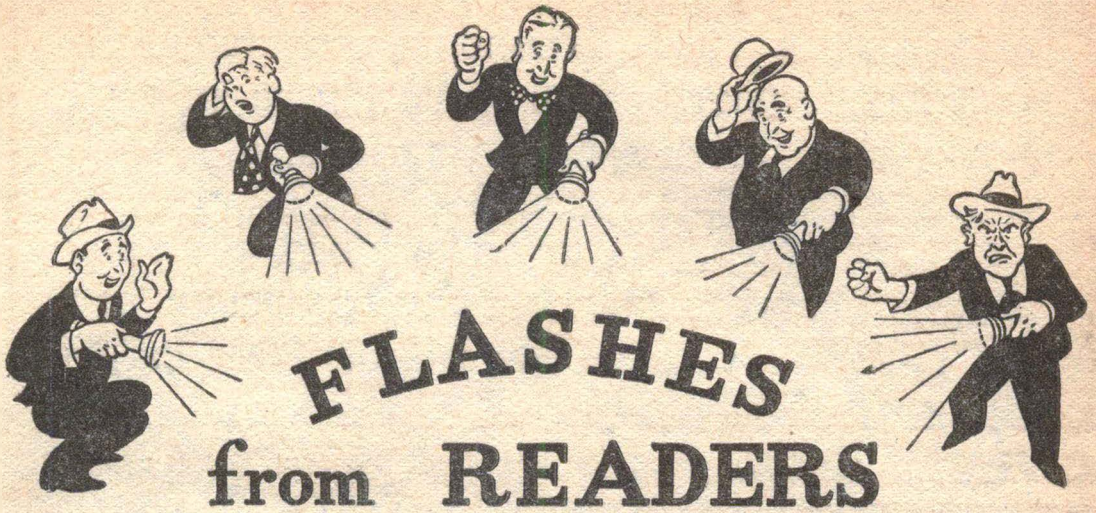
261—Seas of maize wave in my dreams,
'Round domes of gold with flags unfurled.

264—Infamous scamp skimps gondola trip, furthermore scurvily short-changes gracious, portly syndie, autumn carnival patron.

Dawn comes. Awake, again it seems
Sage, cactus, sand form all the world.

262—Inquiring reporter questions people concerning everyday affairs. Answers are quite

Readers submitting answers to any of this week's puzzles will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for November. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



THE Editorial Director—the boss, in other words, and a swell chap to work for—has just finished making the rounds. “Are you giving the readers their money’s worth?”

We held out this week’s contents page. “That’s pretty good,” he said, nodding. “Can you do better?”

So we showed him the bill for next week—you will find it on the opposite page—and he seemed satisfied. Are you?

Because it necessarily takes considerable time to select stories and to print and distribute the magazine, this letter will appear somewhat belatedly. But readers with long memories or those who maintain files—and many do!—will recall the incident which forces

MADALYN FARRELL

to write a vehement protest.

DEAR SIR:

I have been reading DFW for the past two years. Every issue from cover to cover. Naturally, your FLASHES FROM READERS holds as much interest as other departments in your magazine. I do not always agree with your readers’ praises and criticisms, but it remained until this August 14 issue and a letter by Sam Schroeger that I became sufficiently ireful to tell you what I think. My intelligence as a reader had been insulted by his comments on *Crooked Cinderella*.

Authors surely assume readers have a mind capable of grasping some details in their stories without literally drawing a diagram. This story was well written and very well plotted as have been other stories in your magazine by Mr. Plunkett.

Any policeman being called to a certain address hearing gun shots and fighting across the street, and not knowing what to do about that situation, should be dismissed from the force.

Names like Cornell Woolrich, Judson Phillips, Richard Sale, Wyatt Blassingame and others appearing in your magazine always assure the reader of competently told and interesting stories.

Detroit, Mich.

We were fairly firm with Mr. Schroeger at the time, but we’re very pleased that Miss Farrell wanted to come to our support.

WEEK AFTER NEXT

**Death Rides
the Wires**

*A Startling Complete
Short Novel by*

JOHN K. BUTLER

Answers to Detectogram

1. Yes, because he was standing at a point of vantage with no trees to obscure his view.
2. Yes, because his footprints with the wooden stump mark are readily identifiable.
3. No, because his tracks cross the road toward the trees and then return.
4. About 50 yards, according to the scale.
5. Yes, because he plugged Harbury between the eyes at a 50-yard range.
6. From the east, because it was 8 A.M. in June.
7. No, because there is a dip in the path to the 10-foot level where he would be partly hidden from view.
8. No. Judging by his footsteps, he walked straight down the path.
9. No, because the sun, directly facing and still low at 8 A.M., would be squarely in one's eyes. In addition, one would have to look *up* towards the hill.
10. Dan, because the sun in Stumpy's eyes made Harbury an almost impossible target at point X. Stumpy would have waited until Harbury had gone further along the path; then the sun would no longer have been bothersome.

COMING NEXT WEEK

The Big Top Murders

A Novelette

by **Richard Sale**

Candid Jones learns that a circus elephant is more particular than a blackmailer—he is careful where he puts his foot.

Deadline

A Novelette

by **Hugh B. Cave**

Trying to deliver fifty grand for a kidnapped girl, Mack Glynn finds himself working against a conspiracy of Time and Fate.

Masked Death

A Novelette

by **Richard W. Rowan**

"Vengeance is mine!" swore Jake Lehr, forgetting that questions are oft interred with the bones . . .

Short Fiction by

CLEVE F. ADAMS

ROBERT ARTHUR

ARDEN X. PANGBORN

ROBERT H. ROHDE

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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