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FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S

Norvell W. Page
T. T. Flynn — Max Brand
J. Lane Linklater

The Night I Died

*Living Becomes Precious When
You Stumble into a Cunning
Death-Trap—A Tense Novelette*

Anonymous



“That’s not your only offense, mister”

—and then the copper told him . . . told him what his best friends had never had the heart to tell him. It simply stunned Hartley . . . now he understood why people deliberately dodged him . . . why business acquaintances always sat as far as possible away from him and cut his calls to a minimum. Then and there he resolved that never again would he be guilty of an offensive breath.

* * *

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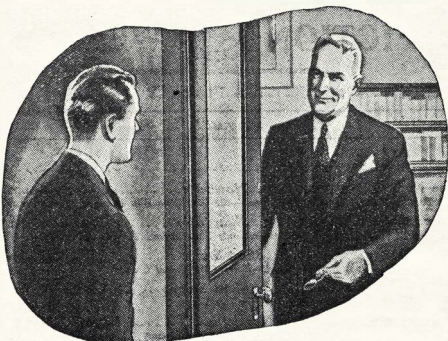
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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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Formerly FLYNN'S

VOLUME CIV

August 8, 1936

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In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

Flashes from the Police Front

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

SURPRISE!

"Banana Oil" Artist Working Middle West

BANANA SURPRISE DISTRIBUTORS, 7676 Cottage Grove Ave. (sometimes Stony Island Ave.), Chicago, Ill., apparently exists only in the mind of one John Willis, who occasionally uses the name of John Miller. John offers out-of-town merchants a "Banana Surprise" machine, quantities of glasses, and the equipment necessary to make and serve banana drinks, including a supply of bananas daily. He claims to be popularizing the banana as a beverage.

Mr. John Willis-Miller is very careful to collect a \$5.00 down payment with each order he secures, but then he vanishes. Merchants find that the only surprise in the deal is the fact that the company is non-existent and there is no such number as 7676 on either of the avenues mentioned.

CASH BOND

Swindler Tricks Men

Who Seek Employment

IF a man giving the name of Robert H. Izor answers your "situation wanted" advertisement and offers you a job, get in touch with the authorities at once. They hold a capias for his arrest.

Izor is about sixty years of age,

approximately five feet six inches in height, weighs 145, pale complexion; gray, squinting eyes, receding chin. He is partially bald and wears light clothes. Strokes his chin while thinking.

In Chicago he responded to "situation wanted" advertisements in the newspapers and collected "cash bonds" from two men to whom he offered employment. One man was supposed to be given a position in a brokerage office, and the other was to be a betting commissioner at a race track.

Following his arrest, Izor provided bond and then disappeared, presumably to seek new fields. The complainants state that he plays the horses and the grain market, and is very familiar with both subjects.

CEMETERY LOTS

Arrests in Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis

EIGHT representatives of the First American Corporation and the National City Sales Company of Cincinnati are under arrest in the above cities for "switching" securities holders out of their stocks and into cemetery lots. One complainant outlined the scheme as follows:

The victim received a letter from First American Corporation, informing him of a supposed plan for

Flashes from the Police Front

recovering on depreciated securities. The letter urged him to forward a list of his holdings to the Cincinnati office of the company. After doing this, he was visited by a salesman, who represented that information possessed by this company enabled it to recover on supposedly worthless securities.

He turned over to the salesman stocks he believed valueless, but which, it later developed, had actual market value. In return, he received a receipt providing for monthly "interest" and a handsome return at the end of two years. At no time was there any mention of cemetery lots, and neither his receipt for the securities nor literature he received from the company refers to a cemetery, in spite of the fact that what he received was cemetery lots.

Grand jury investigations into the cemetery racket in Ohio have forced these companies to seek their victims in other States.

GAS STATIONS

Promises of Promoters Were Not Fulfilled

CERTIFIED TRUCK STATIONS, INC., Cleveland, Ohio, collects a fee of \$18.25 from gas station operators, in return guaranteeing that anywhere from 70 to 240 trucks per month will stop at their station for gas, oil, accessories, meals, etc. In addition, members are supposed to receive a sign to be displayed in front of their station as an indication that

meals, service, rest-rooms, etc., have been inspected by the company.

The complaints received indicate that subscribers do not obtain the amount of business promised by the company. One garage owner in Columbus purchased a membership on the representation that at least 200 trucks would stop at his garage for refueling, etc. When he discovered that the promises made to him were not a part of the written contract, he swore out a warrant for the secretary of the company. The following day the garage owner received a return of his money, and withdrew the charges.

SPECTACLES

Post Office Department Issues Warning

THE Chief Post Office Inspector's office in Washington is warning postmasters and rural letter carriers to look for fakers who falsely claim to represent reputable optical companies that, they state, have sent them out to check up on the victim's glasses.

The warning also recounts the methods employed by fake eye doctors who swindle elderly persons by claiming to remove non-existent cataracts. The removed "cataract" is usually the inside skin of an egg which is concealed in the "doctor's" palm while he performs his "operation."

Knowledge of the whereabouts of such fakers should be forwarded immediately to the nearest Post Office Inspector in Charge.

I was bellowing like a
goaded bull



DFW
COMPLETE
NOVELETTE

The Night I Died

Anonymous

CHAPTER I

Three Sudden Shots

THE point about me is: that I should stay on the right side of the fence all those years, and then when I did go over, go over heart and soul like I did—all in the space of one night. In one hour, you might say.

Most guys build up to a thing like that gradually. Not me; why, I had never so much as lifted a check, dropped a slug into a telephone-slot before that. I was the kind of a droop, who, if I was short-changed, I'd shut up about it, but if I got too much change back I'd stand there and call their attention to it.



"Give it to him quick—
or we're sunk!" she
shrieked

And as for raising my hand against a fellow-mortal—you had the wrong party, not Ben Cook. Yet there must have been a wide streak of it in me all along, just waiting to come out. Maybe all the worse for being held down all those years without a valve, like steam in a boiler. How else can you explain it?

Here I'd been grubbing away for ten or twelve years, at thirty per, trying on suits (on other guys) in the men's clothing section of a department store. Saying "sir" to every mug that came in and smoothing their lapels and patting them on the back. I go home one night that kind of a guy, honest, unam-

bitious, wishy-washy, without even a parking-ticket on my conscience, and five minutes later I've got a murder on my hands!

I think it was probably Thelma more than anyone else who brought this latent streak in me to the surface; it might have stayed hidden if she hadn't been the kind of woman she was. You'll

see, as you read on, that she had plenty of reason later to regret doing so. Like conjuring up the devil and then not being able to get rid of him.

Thelma was my common-law wife. My first wife, Florence, had given me

This Guileless Man Was to Be Slaughtered—and Then, in a Minute's Time, He Himself Turned Murderer, Ruthless and Calculating in the Perfection of His Crime. What Force Was There That Could So Utterly Change a Man?

up as hopeless five years before and gone to England. We parted friends. I remember her saying she liked me well enough, I had possibilities, but it would take too long to work them out, she wanted her husband ready-made. She notified me later she'd gotten a divorce and was marrying some big distillery guy over there lousy with money.

I could have married Thelma after that, but somehow we never got around to it, just stayed common-law wife and husband, which is as good as anything. You know how opposites attract, and I guess that's how I happened to hook up with Thelma; she was just my opposite in every way. Ambitious, hard as nails, no compunctions about getting what she wanted. Her favorite saying was always, "If you can get away with it, it's worth doing!"

For instance, when I told her I needed a new suit and couldn't afford one, she'd say: "Well, you work in a men's clothing department! Swipe one out of the stock, they'll never know the difference." I used to think she was joking.

After she egged me on to tackle our manager for a raise, and I got turned down pretty, she said: "I can see where you'll still be hauling in thirty-a-week twenty years from now, when they have to wheel you to work in a chair! What about me? Where do I come in if a hit-and-run driver spreads you all over the street tomorrow? Why don't you take out some insurance at least?"

So I did. First I was going to take out just a five-thousand-dollar policy, which was pretty steep for me at that, but Thelma spoke up. "Why not make it worth our while? Don't worry about the premiums, Cookie. I've got a little something put away from before I

knew you. I'll start you off, I'll pay the first premium for you myself—after that, we'll see." So I went for ten thousand worth, and made Thelma the beneficiary, of course, as I didn't have any folks or anyone else to look after.

That had been two years before; she had been paying the premiums for me like a lamb ever since. All this made me realize that under her hard surface she was really very big-hearted, and this one night that I started home a little earlier than usual I was warbling like a canary and full of pleasant thoughts about "my little woman," as I liked to call her, and wondering what we were going to have for dinner.

Six was my usual quitting-time at the store, but we had just gotten through taking inventory the night before, and I had been staying overtime without pay all week, so the manager let me off an hour sooner. I thought it would be nice to surprise Thelma, because I knew she didn't expect me for another two or three hours yet, thinking we would still be taking inventory like other nights. So I didn't phone ahead I was coming.

Sherrill, who had the necktie counter across the aisle, tried to wangle me into a glass of suds. If I'd given in, it would have used up my hour's leeway, I would have gotten home at my regular time—and it also would have been my last glass of suds on this earth. I didn't know that; the reason I refused was I'd decided to spend my change instead on a box of candy for her. Sweets to the sweet!

OUR bungalow was the last one out on Copeland Drive. The asphalt stopped a block below. The woods began on the other side of us, just young trees like toothpicks. I

had to get off at the drugstore two blocks down anyway, because the buses turned around and started back there. So I bought a pound of caramels tied with a blue ribbon, and I headed up to the house.

I quit whistling when I turned up the walk, so she wouldn't know I was back yet and I could sneak up behind her maybe and put my hands over her eyes. I was just full of sunshine, I was! Then when I already had my key out, I changed my mind and tiptoed around the house to the back. She'd probably be in the kitchen anyway at this hour, so I'd walk in there and surprise her.

She was. I heard her talking in a low voice as I pulled the screen door noiselessly back. The wooden door behind that was open, and there was a passageway with the kitchen opening off to one side of it.

I heard a man's voice answer hers as I eased the screen closed behind me without letting it bang. That disappointed me for a minute because I knew she must have some deliveryman or collector in there with her, and I wasn't going to put my hands over her eyes in front of some grocery clerk or gas inspector and make a sap out of myself.

But I hated to give the harmless little plan up, so I decided to wait out there for a minute until he left, and motion him on his way out not to give me away. Then go ahead in and surprise her. A case of arrested development, I was!

She was saying, but very quietly, "No, I'm not going to give you the whole thing now. You've got seventy-five, you get the rest afterwards—"

I whistled silently and got worried. "Whew! She must have let our grocery bills ride for over a year, to

amount to that much!" Then I decided she must be talking in cents, not dollars.

"If I give you the whole two hundred fifty before time, how do I know you won't haul your freight out of town—and not do it? What come-back would I have? We're not using I. O. U.'s in this, buddy, don't forget!"

She sounded a lot tougher than I'd ever heard her before, although she'd never exactly been a shrinking violet. But it was his next remark that nearly dropped me where I was. "All right, have it your way. Splash me out another cuppa java—" And a chair hitched forward. Why, that was no deliveryman, he was sitting down in there, she was feeding him!

"Better inhale it fast," she said crisply, "he'll be showing up in another half hour." And then someone went *sslp, slp*.

My first thought, of course, was what anyone else's would have been—that it was a two-time act. But when I craned my neck cautiously around the door just far enough to get the back of his head in line with my eyes, I saw that was out, too. Whatever he was and whatever he was doing there in my house, he was no back-door John!

He had a three days' growth of beard on his jawline and his hair ended in little feathers all over his neck, and if you'd have whistled at his clothes they'd have probably walked off him of their own accord and headed your way.

He looked like a stumblebum or derelict she'd hauled in out of the woods.

THE next words out of her mouth, lightning fizzled around me and seemed to split my brain three ways. "Better do it right here in the house like we said. I can't get him to

go out there in the woods, he's scared of his own shadow, and you might miss him in the dark. Keep your eye on this kitchen-shade from outside. It'll be up until eight-thirty.

"When you see it go down to the bottom, that means I'm leaving the house for the movies. I'll fix this back door so you can get in when I leave, too. Now I've shown you where the phone is, right through that long hall out there. Wait'll you hear it ring before you do anything; that'll be me phoning him from the picture-house, pretending I've forgotten something, and that'll place him for you. You'll know just where to find him, won't run into him unexpectedly on your way in.

"His back'll be toward you and I'll be distracting his attention over the wire. Make sure he's not still ticking when you light out, so don't spare the trigger, no one'll hear it way out here at that hour!

"I'll hear the shot over the wire and I'll hang up, but I'm sitting the rest of the show out. I wanna lose a handkerchief or something at the end and turn the theater inside out, to place myself. That gives you two hours to fade too, so I don't start the screaming act till I get back at eleven and find him—"

He said, "Where does the other hundred-seventy-five come in? Y' don't expect me to show up here afterwards and colleck, do ya?"

I heard her laugh, kind of. "It's gonna be in the one place where you can't get at it without doing what you're supposed to! That way I'm going to be sure you don't welsh on me! It's going to be right in his own inside coat-pocket, without his knowing it! I'm going to slip it in when I kiss him good-by, and I know him, he'll never

find it. Just reach in when you're finished with him, and you'll find it there waiting for you!"

"Lady," he whispered, awe-stricken, "I gotta hand it to you!"

"Get going," she commanded.

I think it was that last part of it that made me see red and go off my nut, that business about slipping the blood-money right into my own pocket while I was still alive, for him to collect after I was dead. Because what I did right then certainly wasn't in character, not for me to do. Ben Cook, the Ben Cook of up until that minute, would have turned and sneaked out of that house (unless his knees had given way first) and run for his life and never showed up near there again. But I wasn't Ben Cook any more, something seemed to blow up inside me. I heard the package of candy hit the floor next to me with a smack, and then I was lurching in on them, bellowing like a goaded bull. Just rumbling sounds, more than words. "You—murderess! Your—own—husband!" No, it certainly wasn't me; it was a man that neither of us, she nor myself, had known existed until now. Evil rampant, a kind of living nemesis sprung from their own fetid plotting, like a jack-in-the-box.

THERE was a red-and-white checked tablecloth on the kitchen table. There was a cup and saucer on it, and a gun. I didn't see any of those things. The whole room for that matter was red, like an undeveloped photographic print, let alone the tablecloth.

The gun came clear, stood out, only after his arm had clamped down on it like a transverse bar, like an indicator pointing it out. My own did the same thing instinctively, but a second too

late; my hand came down on his wrist instead of the gun. The crash of a pair of toppled chairs in the background was inconsequential, as was her belated shriek of baffled fury: "Give it to him now, you! Give it to him quick—or we're sunk!" Whatever else there was in that hell-howl, there wasn't fear. Any other woman would have fainted dead away; you don't know Thelma.

The cry, though, was like cause following effect; he didn't need to be told. The gun was already being lifted bodily between us, by the negation of the two pressures counteracting each other—mine pushing it away from me, his pushing it toward me. Neither of us trying to push it up, but up it went in an arc, first way over our heads, then down again to body-level once more. Outside of our flailing left arms, which had each fastened on the other's mate to it, I don't recall that our legs or the rest of our bodies moved much at all.

She could have turned the scales by attacking me herself with something, from behind. It was the one thing she didn't do—why I don't know. Subconsciously unwilling to the last, maybe, to raise a hand to me in person and thereby incriminate herself in the eyes of the law.

After about thirty seconds, not more—but it seemed like an age—it finally went off. Just past my own face, over my shoulder, and out somewhere into the passageway behind us. Then it started turning slowly between us, desperately slowly, by quarter-inches, and the second time it went off it had already traveled a quarter of the compass around. It hit the side-wall, that time, broadside to the two of us. It went on past that point, turning laboriously in its double grip, and the third time it went off right into his mouth.

He took it down with him, it was his hand that had been next to it, not mine, and I just stood there with both arms out—and empty.

I suppose I would have given it to her next if it had stayed in my own hand. She expected me to, she didn't ask for mercy. "All right, I'm next!" she breathed. "Get it over as quick as you can!" And threw up both forearms horizontally in front of her eyes and shook a little.

I was too tired for a minute to reach down and get it, that was what saved her. I don't remember the next few minutes after that. I was sitting slumped in one of the chairs, I must have uprighted it again, and she was saying: "The ten grand is yours now, Cookie, if you'll use your head."

The way it sounded she must have been talking for several minutes past, talking herself out of what was rightfully coming to her. What she'd been saying until then hadn't registered with me, though. That did.

"Get out," I said dully. "Don't hang around me, I may change my mind yet." But the time for that was over, and she probably knew it as well as I did. The room had come back to its regular colors by now. Only the tablecloth was red any more, that and a little trickle that had come out of his open mouth onto the linoleum.

She pointed at him. "That's you, down there. Don't you get it? Ready-made." She came a little closer, leaning across the table toward me on the heels of her hands. "Why pass a break like this up, Cookie? Made-to-order. Ten grand. Play ball with me, Cookie." Her voice was a purr, honey-low.

"Get ou—" I started to mutter, but my voice was lower now too. She was under my skin already and working

deeper down every minute. I was wide open to anything anyway, after what had happened.

She held up her hand quickly, tuning out my half-hearted protest. "All right, you caught me red-handed. You don't hear me denying it, do you? You don't see me trying to bellyache out of it, do you? It muffed, and the best man won. That's giving it to you straight from the shoulder. But the policy I slapped on you still holds good, the ten gees is yours for the taking—" She pointed down again. "And there's your corpse."

CHAPTER II

A Run-out Powder

I TURNED my head and looked at him, kept staring thoughtfully without a word. She kept turning them out fast as her tongue could manage.

"It's up to you. You can go out to the phone and turn me in, send me up for ten years—and spend the rest of your life straightening the pants on guys at thirty per week. Have it that way if you want to. Or you can come into ten thousand dollars just by being a little smart. The guy is dead anyway, Cookie. You couldn't bring him back now even if you wanted to. What's the difference under what name he goes six-feet-under? He even gets a better break, at that; gets a buggy-ride and a lot of flowers instead of taking a dive head-first into potter's field!"

I hadn't taken my eyes off him, but I already wanted to hear more. "It's wacky, you're talking through your lid," I said hopefully. "How you gonna get away with it? What about all the people in this town that know me? What about the guy that sold me the insurance? What about the bunch

down at the store where I work? I no more look like him than—"

"If it's his face got you stopped, we can take care of that easy. And outside of a phiz, what's so different between one guy and the next? Stretch out a minute, lie down next to him—I wanna see something."

I wasn't hypocritical enough to hesitate any more. She already knew I was with her anyway, she could tell. I got down flat on the floor alongside of him, shoulder to shoulder. He wasn't laid out straight by any means, but she attended to that with a few deft hitches. She stood back and measured us with her eyes. "You're about an inch taller, but the hell with that." I got up again.

She went over and pulled down the shade to the bottom, came back with cigaret-smoke boiling out of her nose. "It's a suicide, of course, otherwise the police'll stick their noses into it too heavy. A farewell note from you to me ought to hold them. Run up and bring down one of your other suits, and a complete set of everything—down to shorts and socks."

"But what're we going to do about his map?"

"A bucketful of boiling lye will take care of that. We got some down the basement, haven't we? Come on, help me get him down there."

"Where does it figure, though? You want 'em to believe he had grit enough to stick his face in that?"

"You went down there and bumped yourself through the front teeth with the gun, see? You keeled over backwards and dumped this bucket on top of your face in falling. A couple of hours under that and he'll be down to rock bottom above the shoulders, they won't have much to go by. His hair's pretty much the color of yours, and

you haven't been to a dentist in years. so they can't check you in that way."

"It's still full of loopholes," I said.

"SURE it is," Thelma agreed, "but what reason'll they have to go looking for 'em, with me there screaming the eardrums off 'em that you were my husband? And waving your good-by note in their faces! There won't be anyone missing from this town. He was a vagrant on his way through, this was the first house he hit for a hand-out when he came out of the woods. He told me so himself, and he never got past here. The police'll be the least of our worries, when it comes to it, and as for the insurance investigator, once I get past the first hurdle I know just what to do so there's no chance for it to backfire: send him to the crematorium in a couple days instead of planting him in the cemetery. Fat lot of good an order for an exhumation'll do them after that!"

I said about the same thing he'd said, this dead guy, only a little while ago. "You're good—damn your soul! I think we can pull it at that!"

"Think? I know we can!" She snapped her cigaret butt at the side of his face—and hit it! "Always remember—if you can get away with anything, it's worth doing. Now let's go! He shouldn't be too hard when I come back from the movies, so we haven't got much time."

I picked him up by the shoulders and she took him by the feet, and we carried him out of the kitchen and down the cellar stairs and laid him down temporarily on the floor down there, any old way. The gun had gone right with him the whole way, at the end of his dangling arm.

The laundry was down there, and

the oil-burner, and lines for hanging up clothes, and so on. There was a gas-heater for boiling up wash. She lit that, then she filled a pail half full of water and put it on to heat. Then she dumped lye into it for all she was worth until there wasn't any more left around. "As long as it takes the skin off his face," she remarked, "and it sure ought to, the quantity I put in there. Go up and get the clothes now, like I told you, and doctor up a suicide-note. Better take something and get those slugs out of the kitchen-wall; it went off twice, didn't it, before it rang the bell? Rub ashes in the nicks, so they won't look new. Let me know when you're ready."

But I wasn't Ben Cook the slough any more. "And leave you alone down here with that gun? It's still got three in it. You're so full of bright ideas, how do I know you won't go back to your original parlay after all?"

She threw up her hands impatiently. "Forget it, will you! It's got to stay in his mitt like it is, you can't take it up with you. We're both in this together, aren't we? We either trust each other the whole way, or we may as well call it quits right now!"

She was blazing with an unholy sort of enthusiasm. I could tell by looking at her I had nothing to worry about as far as she was concerned any more. It was contagious, too, that was the worst part of it—greenback-fever. I turned around and beat it upstairs to the top floor. There were spots in front of my eyes, ten-spots, one thousand of them.

I got him out a complete set of everything. For an artistic finishing-touch I even threw in a spare truss like I wore. That had figured in my examination for the insurance. I took a razor with me and a pair of clippers

that I'd been in the habit of using to save myself the price of a haircut. I chased down to the desk in the living-room, got out a sheet of paper, and wrote:

Thelma my darling:

I've thought it over and I guess you're right; I'll never amount to anything. I haven't had the courage to tell you yet, but Grierson turned me down last month when I asked him for a raise. I'm just a millstone around your neck, just dead-weight; you'll be better off without me. When you come home tonight and read this and go looking for me, you'll know what I'm driving at. Don't go near the basement, honey, that's where I'll be. Good-by and God bless you.

Ben

Which I thought was pretty good. She did too, when I went down and showed it to her. She flashed me a look. "I think I've been underestimating you all these years." She could come out with a remark like that, in the presence of what lay on the floor there!

Clouds of steam were coming from the pail of lye. "Beat it up and attend to the bullet-holes, and the blood on the kitchen-floor," I said, "while I go to work on him—"

I could hear her footsteps pattering busily back and forth over my head while I was busy down there. Just two birds of a feather! After all, though, I reminded myself, I hadn't killed this man; he'd pulled the trigger himself, it had gone off while we were struggling.

IGAVE him a quick once-over with the razor and a cake of yellow laundry soap, clipped his neck a little, so we wouldn't have to count too much on the dye.

I piled his own worm-eaten duds into a bundle and tied it up; outfitted him from head to foot.

It took plenty of maneuvering to slip his arm through the sleeves of the shirt and jacket without dislodging the gun from his hand.

I tied his tie and shoelaces for him like I was his valet, and filled his pockets with all the junk I had in my own, down to the crumpled pack of butts I was toting. I strapped my wristwatch on him, and then I straightened up and gave him the once-over. He looked a lot more like me now than he had before I'd begun. The rest was up to the lye.

She came trooping down again, with her hat on for the movies. "Slick," she breathed. "Everything's all set upstairs. Here's the two wild bullets. What're you doing with his stuff, putting it in the oil-burner?"

"Nothing doing," I said, "that's muffed too often. All they need's a button or a strand of hair left over in there and we go boom! I'm taking it with me when I go and I am getting rid of it someplace else."

"That's the ticket!" she agreed. She handed me a pair of smoked glasses and an old golf cap. "Here, I dug these up for you, for when you light out. Anyone that knows you will know you anyway—but in case anyone passes you while you're on the lam, they'll do."

"Steer clear of downtown whatever you do. Better powder about ten minutes after I do, take the back door, cut through the woods, stay away from the highway until you get over to Ferndale, somebody might spot you from a passing car. You can hop a bus there at midnight—to wherever you decide to hole in, and better make it the other side of the State-line. Now we gotta finish up fast. I phoned the drugstore to send over some aspirin, told 'em you felt kinda low—"

"What's the idea?" I wanted to know.

"Don't you get it? I'm leavin' just as the errand-boy gets here, he even sees you kiss me good-by at the front door. Hold him up a minute hunting for change, so that he has me walking in front of him down the street toward the show. I don't want to get the Chair for something I didn't do, Cookie! Now, what name are you going to use and where'll I reach you when the pay-off comes through?"

I laughed harshly. "You're pretty anxious to see that I get my cut."

"I'm glad you used that word," she said drily. "It's my favorite little word. Nuts! You can't come back here, you know that! I've gotta get it to you. What're you worrying about, we've got each other stopped, haven't we? If I try to hog the dough, all you do is show up, it goes back where it came from, and we both land in clink. On the other hand, you can't get it without little Thelma—"

"We split it seventy-five, twenty-five, and little Thelma's on the short end for being such a smott girl," I growled.

Something gave one corner of her mouth a little hike up. "Done," she said. "Now hurry up, give him his facial. Measure the distance off first."

We stood him upright on his feet, then let him down backwards in a straight line toward the heater the pail of lye was sizzling on. The back of his head cleared it by two, three inches.

"Move him in a little closer," she said, "his conk's supposed to tip it over as he goes down."

"All right, stand back," I said, "and watch your feet."

I took it off the stove, turned it upside down, and doused it on him, arched as far away from the splash as

I could get. It dropped down on his head like a mold; only a little spattered on his body below the shoulders. Just as the pail dropped over his head like a visor, the front door-bell rang upstairs.

The last thing she said as she went hustling up was, "Watch out where you step, don't leave any tracks!"

I CAUGHT up with her halfway down the front hall. "Whoa! Pass over that hundred-seventy-five you were going to stuff into my pocket, I can't live on air next few weeks!"

She took it grudgingly out of her handbag. "It comes off your share, don't forget," she let me know.

"All right, and here's one for your memory-book," I whispered viciously, "I'm Ned Baker at the Marquette Hotel over in Middleburg. Don't put it on paper, but see that you hang onto it; it's easy enough—Cook, Baker, see?"

The bell rang a second time.

"About three weeks, the minute I put the check through," she promised. "All set? Here goes! Loosen your tie—you're staying in and you're in a hari-kari mood. Play up!"

I stayed where I was. She went to the door squalling, "G'by, hon! Sure you won't change your mind and come with me?" She opened the door and an eighteen-year-old kid named Larry whom we both knew by sight said, "Package from the drugstore, Mrs. Cook. Thirty-five cents."

Again she shook the house to the rafters. "Here's your aspirin, dear!"

I shuffled up acting like a sick calf. I separated one of the tens she'd just given me from the rest and offered it to him. He said he didn't have that much change. "Wait a minute, I think I've got it inside," I said. Mean-

while she was sticking her snoot up at me. "G'by, dear, you won't be lonely now, will you?"

He was facing my way, so I tried to look tragic. "Enjoy your show," I murmured bravely, pecking at her with my mouth. I walked down the steps with her and part of the way toward the sidewalk, with my arm around her waist. She turned back to wave a couple times, and I waved back at her. The kid was taking it all in from the doorway.

"They got Garbo tonight," he remarked when I came back. "Don't you like Garbo, Mr. Cook?"

I sighed. "I got too much on my mind tonight, Larry," I told him. I let her get to the first crossing, then I brought out the thirty-five cents and gave him a dime for himself. He thanked me and started off after her.

I locked the door (she had her own key) and then I bolted back to the cellar-stairs and took a last look down from the head of them. Threads of steam were still coming out from under the rim of the lye-pail, upturned there over his face.

I picked up his bundle of clothes, which I'd left at the top of the stairs, and wrapped them in good strong brown paper. The two bullets were in there with them, and the scrapings from his jaw and neck on scraps of paper.

The brownish rag, too, with which she's scoured the little blood off the linoleum.

The latter didn't have a mark left on it to the naked eye—and there was no reason for them to give it a benzidine test. The bullet-holes were okay too, she'd spread them out a little with a knife to look like knot-holes in the wood and dirtied them with ashes. She'd even washed and put away the

used coffee-cup, and the note was in place on the desk.

I LEFT my own hat up on the rack, and put on the cap, pulled it well down over my eyes. I couldn't take any of my own duds with me of course, except just what I had on. That couldn't be avoided, but it wasn't much of a risk; after all there wasn't anyone in town that was so intimate with me they knew down to the last suit and shirt and pair of shoes just what I had in my wardrobe.

I left the lights just the way they were in all the rooms, then I went up to the rear room on the second floor, which was dark, and stood watching for a long time. There weren't any houses in back of us, just a big open field with the woods off to the right.

In the daytime, crossing the field to get to them, I might have been spotted from one of the houses further down, but not at this hour. It was a clear night, but there wasn't any moon.

I went downstairs, opened the screen-door, pulled the wooden one closed behind me, let the screen one flap back in place, and jumped away in a hurry from the square of light that still came through the oblong pane in the wooden one. We would have locked that on the inside if we had both left the house together, but staying home alone the way I was supposed to tonight, it could very well stay unlocked without arousing suspicion.

I cut diagonally away from the house, to get out of sight of the roadway that fronted it and bisected the woods all the way to Ferndale. It took a turn, however, halfway between the two points, so going through the woods was really a short-cut.

Within five minutes after I had left the kitchen-door, and less than a quar-

ter of an hour since Thelma had left the house all told, the first skinny saplings closed around me and hid me from sight. I looked back just once. The house looked cozy, peaceful, with orange light showing from all the ground-floor windows. You'd never have guessed that the only thing in it was a dead body down in the cellar.

By a quarter to twelve the trees were starting to thin out again, this time in front of me, and the lights of Ferndale were glimmering through them. I was half-shot and my feet were burning, but it was worth it; I hadn't seen a living soul—and what was more important, not a living soul had seen me. I'd kept from getting lost and going around in a circle, which could have happened to me quite easily in those woods, by always managing to keep the highway to Ferndale parallel to me on my right. Even when I was out of sight of it, an occasional car whizzing by gave it away to me. Otherwise I might very well have done a Babe-in-the-Woods act and come out again where I'd started from. I'd opened the parcel and retied it again on my way. Took out the two slugs and the bloody rag and buried them in three separate places.

The clothes themselves were too bulky to bury with my bare fingernails, and I wasn't just going to leave them under a stone or anything. Nor could I risk putting a match to them and burning them, the light might have given me away to someone. The safest thing was to keep them with me and get rid of them long afterwards at my leisure.

FERNDALE wasn't much more than a crossroads, but the interstate busses stopped there. I stopped for a minute and brushed my

self off as well as I could before I showed out in the open. I looked respectable enough, but that was almost a drawback in itself.

A well-dressed guy dropping down out of nowhere at midnight to board a bus, without a through ticket, wasn't really the most unnoticeable thing in the world. But I had no choice in the matter. Nor very much time to make up my mind. The last one through was sometime between twelve and one. I decided, however, not to buy a Middleburg ticket from here but ride right through past it to the end of the line, and then double back to Middleburg from that end in a couple of days. That would make the trail a little harder to pick up—just in case.

As for the sun-glasses, which I'd been carrying in my pocket, I decided against them altogether. That was the one detail, it seemed to me, about which Thelma hadn't shown very good judgment. No one in Ferndale knew me in the first place, and they'd only attract attention instead of lessening it. People don't wear those things in the middle of the night, no matter how weak their eyes are supposed to be. As she had said herself, anyone that knew me (God forbid) would know me anyway, and those that didn't—why give them reason to look twice at me?

I straightened my shoulders and strolled casually out of the trees into the open, past an outlying cottage or two, dead to the world at this hour, and onto the single stretch of paved sidewalk that Ferndale boasted. A quick-lunch place was open and blazing with light, and the bus depot was down at the far end. There was a small but up-to-date little waiting-room there, washrooms, a magazine-stand, etc. No one around but the colored porter and an elderly man who looked like he was

waiting to meet somebody getting off the incoming bus.

CHAPTER III

Accidents Will Happen

I WENT up to the ticket-window as casually as I could and rapped on the counter a couple of times. Finally the porter called out, "Johnson! Somebody at the wicket!" and the ticket-seller came out of the back someplace.

I said, "Gimme a through ticket to Jefferson." That was the neighboring state capital, terminus of this line.

He said, "I don't know if I can get you a seat at this hour, usually pretty full up. You shoulda put in a reservation ahead— There's a six-o'clock bus, though."

"Lissen," I said, looking him in the eye, "I gotta get home. Whaddya think I'm going to do, sit around here all night waiting for the morning bus?"

He called over my shoulder to the elderly gent, who was reading a paper, "You meeting somebody on the next bus, mister?"

The old fellow said, "Yep, my nevwew's coming down on it—"

"That's that, then," he said to me indifferently. "'Leven-eighty."

"When's it get in?" I asked, pocketing my change.

"Ten minutes," he said, and went back inside again.

His blasé manner might have irritated somebody else; I could have kissed him for it!

I was down at the quick-lunch filling up on hot dogs when the bus slithered in. I picked up my package and went up toward it. A young fellow of high-school age was getting off and being greeted by the elderly gent. I showed my ticket and got on.

Its lights were off and most of the passengers were sprawled out asleep. The ticket-seller had been right, there was only a single vacant seat in the whole conveyance, the one that the kid had just gotten out of! It was a bum one on the aisle, too.

My seat-mate, by the window, had his hat down over his nose and was breathing through his mouth. I didn't pay any attention to him, reached up and shoved my bundle onto the rack overhead, sat back and relaxed. The driver got on again, the door closed, and we started off with a lurch.

My lightweight bundle hadn't been shoved in far enough in the dark, the motion of the bus promptly dislodged it and it toppled down across the thighs of the man next me. He came to with a nervous start and grunted from under his hat-brim.

"Excuse me," I said, "didn't mean to wake you—"

He shoved his hat back and looked at me. "Why, hullo, Cook!" he said, "where you going at this hour of the night?" And held his hand spaded at me.

A couple of years went by, with my face pointed straight ahead and ice-water circulating in my veins. There wasn't very much choice of what to do about it. Even if the bus had still been standing still with its door open, which it wasn't any more, it wouldn't have done any good to jump off it. He'd already seen me.

And to try to pass the buck and tell him to his face he had the wrong party, well what chance had I of getting away with that, with our shoulders touching, even though it was dark inside the bus? I couldn't stop it from getting light in a few hours, and there wasn't any other seat on the bus. All I'd succeed in doing would be snub-

bing him, offending him, and making him start thinking there must be something phony afoot; in other words, indelibly impressing the incident upon his memory for future reference.

Whereas if I took it in my stride, lightly, maybe I could keep it from sinking in too deeply; maybe I could do something about the timing to blur it a little, make him think later on that it was the night before and not tonight that he'd ridden with me on a bus. It had to be the night before, it couldn't be the same night that I was supposed to be bumping myself off down in the cellar back at Copeland Drive!

"Well, for the luvva Pete, Sherrill!" I said with shaky cordiality, "where you going yourself at this hour of the night?" I shook his mitt, but there was less pressure now on his side than mine.

"Y'acted like y'didn't know me for a minute," he complained, but rapidly thawed out again. "What'd you get on way the hell out at Ferndale for?" he said.

BUT that one had to be squelched at all costs, no matter how unconvincing it sounded. After all, he'd definitely been asleep when they pulled into Ferndale, he couldn't have seen who got on there.

"I didn't, what's the matter with you?" I said in surprise. "I changed seats, come back here from up front, that's all." There was a little girl holding one of the front seats in her own right, but she was asleep with her head on her mother's lap, it looked like the seat was vacant from where we were. "He'll forget about it by the time she straightens up in the morning—let's hope," I thought.

He seemed to forget it then and there. "Funny I missed seeing you

when I got on," was all he said. "I was the last one in, they even held it for me a minute—" He offered me a cigaret, took one himself, seemed to have no more use for sleep. "Where you heading for, anyway?" he asked.

"Jefferson," I said.

"That's funny," he said, "I am too!"

If he could have heard the things I was saying inside myself about him at the moment, he would have let out a yell and probably dived through the window, glass and all. "How come?" I said, between unheard swear-words.

I knew it would be my turn right after his, and I was so busy shaping up my own explanation, I only half-heard his. Something about the manager phoning him at the last minute after he'd already gone home that afternoon, to pinch-hit for our store's buyer, who'd been laid up with the flu, and look after some consignments of neckties that were waiting down there and badly needed in stock. "What's taking you down there?" he asked, like I'd known he would.

I told him I had to see a specialist, that I'd been below par for some time and none of the docs back home had seemed able to do a thing for me. Let him think afterwards I'd found out I had something incurable and gone home the next night and bumped myself!

"When you going back?" he wanted to know.

"Morrow afternoon," I said. "Be home in time for supper—" I had to be "back" by then, I couldn't hope to fog him on the time element by more than twenty-four hours; that I'd even be able to do that much was highly doubtful, but I might just get away with it. A few little incidents in the store had already shown me he didn't

have the best memory in the world, nor was he intimate enough with me to call at the house and condole with Thelma, mix in in any way.

He'd probably think the newspapers had made a typographical error in their timing of the account.

"That's just about when I'll be going back, too," he said chummily. "Be back at work Friday morning."

To say that he was beginning to get on my nerves would be putting it mild; he was twanging them like an angel playing harp-strings! "Watch yourself, guy," I addressed him silently, "or I'll turn you into one!"

I answered with careful emphasis: "Whaddya mean, Friday? The day after tomorrow'll be Thursday. Tonight's Tuesday."

"No," he said innocently, "you've got your dates mixed. Tonight's Wednesday. I know, because we had hash for supper. We always have—"

This went on for about five minutes between us, without heat of course. I finally pulled my horns in when he offered: "Wait, I'll ask the driver, he ought to be able to straighten us out—"

"Never mind, guess you're right," I capitulated. I wasn't keen on attracting the driver's attention to myself in any shape, form, or manner. But I'd done what I wanted to, I'd succeeded in conditioning Sherrill's mind, later he wouldn't be sure whether it *was* Wednesday or not, when he thought back to tonight.

Right on top of that came a honey. "Whaddya say we split expenses while we're there?" he offered. "Share the same hotel room, it'll come cheaper that way for both of us."

"What do I need a hotel room for?" I said shortly. "I told you I'm starting back on the afternoon bus!"

"Hell," he said, "if you're as run-down as you say you are, funny you should be willing to go without sleep a whole night! We don't get into Jefferson till seven. You got a before-breakfast appointment with your doctor?"

THE skepticism in his voice had to be nipped before it got steam up, I could see; the only way seemed to be by falling in with his suggestion. I could let him start back alone, pretend my appointment had been postponed until afternoon and I had to take a later bus. Technically, even one of those could get me home in time for my own suicide.

We had our breakfasts together at the bus depot and then we checked in at a hotel down the street called the Jefferson. I let him sign first, and stalled shaking a clot out of the pen until he'd already started toward the elevator. Then I wrote "Ned Baker" under his name, "Frisco." That was far enough away, that was a big enough place to assure anonymity. I'd met him en route, that was all. I wasn't going to do it to him right here in this hotel, anyway, and there was no earthly reason for him to take another look at that register in checking out, nor for the clerk to mention me by name in his presence; we'd paid in advance on account of our scarcity of baggage.

He asked for a ten-thirty call and hung a "Do-not-disturb" on the door when we got up to the room. Then we turned in, one to a bed. "I'm dead," was the last thing he yawned.

"You betcha sweet life you are, brother!" I thought grimly. He dropped off into a deep, dreamless sleep—his last one. I knew I was safe enough while I had him right with me,

and until he got ready to start back; I wasn't going to do it in this hotel room anyway. So I just lay there on my back staring up at the ceiling, waiting, waiting. The wings of the death-angel were spread over us in that room, there was the silence of the grave.

The phone-peal, when it came, shattered it like a bomb. I felt good, because the time was drawing shorter now. This new self of mine seemed to be agreeing with me. "Toss you for the shower," I offered.

"Go ahead," he stretched, "I like to take my time."

It was a little thing like that changed my plans, brought it on him even quicker, my going in there ahead of him! Just before I turned the water I heard him open and close the door. He called in, "Gee, pretty liberal! They hand you a morning paper compliments of the management in this place!"

When I came out he was sitting there on the bed with it spread out alongside of him. He wasn't looking at it, he was looking at me, he was holding his head as though he'd been waiting for me to show up in the bathroom doorway. There were three white things there on that bed, but it was his face that was whiter even than the pillows or the paper.

"What're you looking at me like that for?" I said gruffly, and then my own got white too, without knowing why.

He began shrinking away from me along the edge of the bed. He said: "They found your body in the cellar of your house—last night at eleven—you committed suicide. It's here, on the first page of this Jefferson paper—"

I dropped the towel and picked the paper up, but I didn't look at it, I was watching him over the top of it. He

was shaking all over. He said, "Who—was that? Who'd you do it to?"

"This is a mistake," I said furrily. "They've got me mixed up with somebody else. Somebody by the same name, maybe—"

His back was arched against the head-board of the bed by now, as if he couldn't get far enough away from me. He said, "But that's your address there—25 Copeland Drive—I know your address! It even tells about your working for the store—it gives your wife's name, Thelma—it tells how she found your body, with your face all eaten away with lye—" I could see beads of sweat standing out in a straight line across his forehead. "Who was that, Cook? It must have been—somebody! My God, did you—?"

I said, "Well, look at me! You see me here with you, dontcha? You can see it's not me, can'tcha?" But that wasn't what he was driving at, and I knew it as well as he did. He knew I was alive, all right; what he wanted to know was who was dead.

I DON'T know what the outcome would have been, if he hadn't given himself away by starting to dress in that frightened, jerky way—snatching at his clothes as if he was afraid of me, trying to stay as far out of my way as he could while he struggled getting his things on. I suppose it would have happened anyway, before I would have let him go back to our own town, knowing what he now did. But not right then, not right there.

I told myself, coldly, as I watched him fumbling, panting, sweating to get into his things in the least possible time, "He's going straight out of here and give me away! It's written all over him. He won't even wait till he

gets back tonight—phone them long distance right from here, or else tip the cops off right here in Jefferson. Well—he's not going to get out that door!"

It showed all over him how frightened he was—not of me; yet, but of the implications of the thing. While he stayed that way, his muscular coordination would be all shot; he'd be a push-over, even if I was no Sandow myself.

The phone was between the two beds. He was bent over on the outside of his, which was nearest the door, struggling with his laces. What was holding him up was that in his frenzied haste he'd snarled them up into a knot. The door didn't worry me as much as the phone. I moved around, naked, into the aisle between the two beds, cutting him off from it.

"Why all the rush?" I said quietly. "What're you going to do?"

"I gotta hustle and get after those ties," he said in a muffled voice. He couldn't bring himself to look around at me, rigidly kept his head turned the other way, which was a dead giveaway he was lying, had something else on his mind.

I moved up closer behind him, my shadow sort of fell across him, cutting off the light from the window. "And what're you going to do about what you just read in the paper?"

"Why, nothing," he faltered. "I—I guess like you said, it's just some kind of mistake—" His voice cracked into a placating little laugh; you wouldn't have known what it was by the sound of it, though. And the last thing he ever said was to repeat, "Nothing—nothing at all."

"You're damn tooting you're not," I rasped. I don't know if he even heard me. I suddenly pulled him down flat on his back, by the shoulders, from be-

hind. I had a last flash of his face, appalled, eyes rolling, staring up at mine. Then the two pillows were over it, soft, yielding, and I was pressing them down with my whole weight—and pinning them down at the sides with my hands to keep any air from getting in there.

MOST of the struggle, of course, was in his legs, which had been hanging down free over the side of the bed. They jolted upward to an incredible height at first, far higher than his head, then sank all the way back to the floor again, and after that kept teetering upward and downward like a see-saw between bed-level and the floor, squirming, kicking, bucking, folding, crossing and uncrossing as they did so.

It was the very fact that they were loose like that that prevented his throwing me off him. He was off-balance, the bed ended just under his hips, and he couldn't get a grip on the floor with his heels and transfer the leverage around a ninety-degree angle to his spine and shoulders and get any lift into them.

As for his arms, they were shortened by the pressure of the big pillows like a bandage, he only had the use of them below the elbows, couldn't double them back on themselves far enough to get at my face, claw as he might. I kept my face and neck arched back just beyond their reach, holding the pillows down by my abdomen in the center and by the pressure of my shoulders and splayed arms on each end.

The bedsprings groaned warningly once or twice of approaching doom. Outside of that there wasn't a sound in the room but my own heavy breathing.

The leg-motion was the best possible barometer. It quickened to an almost frenzied lashing as suffocation set in, then slowed to a series of spasmodic jerks that would slacken inevitably to a point of complete motionlessness in a few seconds more, I knew.

Just before it had been reached, I suddenly reared back and flung the pillows off, one each way. His face was contorted to the bursting-point, his eyes glazed and sightless, but the fingers of his upturned hands were still opening and closing convulsively, grabbing at nothing; he was unmistakably still alive, but whether he could come back again or would succumb anyway in a minute or two more was the question. It was important to me to beat his heart to the count.

I dragged him off the bed, around the second bed, and got him over to the window. I hoisted him up, turned him toward it, and balanced him lightly with one arm against my side, as if I was trying to revive him. I looked, and I looked good. The room was on the fourteenth floor, and we'd taken one of the cheaper ones; it gave onto an air-shaft, not the street. There were, probably, windows all the way down, under this one—but the point was, there weren't any *opposite*, that side was blank. No one could look in here.

I think he would have pulled through; he was beginning to revive as air got into his lungs. The congested blood started leaving his face little by little, his eyes closed instead of staying wide open, but you could hear him breathing again, hoarsely. So I edged him a little closer, threw up the lower sash all the way to the top—and just stepped back from him. I didn't touch him, just took my support away, retreated further into the room. He wavered there, upright by the

open window. Vertigo had evidently set in as his lungs began to function and his heartbeat came back to normal. It was a toss-up whether he'd go back, forward, or sideways; the only sure thing was he wasn't staying on his own feet just then, and was going into a faint.

Maybe there was some kind of a draught pulling at him from the long, deep shaft out there, I don't know. He went forward—as though a current of air were sucking him through the window. It was a good high window. His head just missed the sash bisecting it. He folded up at the waist across the ledge, half in, half out, like a lazy guy leaning too far out in slow motion—and gravity did the rest. Death beat his glimmering faculties to the punch, he was gone before he could fling up his arms, grab at anything. His legs whipped after him like the tail of a kite—and the window-square was empty.

THE impact seemed to come up long afterwards, from far away, muffled, distant, and even the new me didn't like the sound of it very well. I didn't make the mistake of going closer and looking down after him. Almost immediately there was the sound of another window being thrown up somewhere down the line, a pause, and then a woman's screech came tearing up the shaft.

I saw that one of his unlaced shoes had come off while I was hauling him across the room. I edged it back under his own bed, smoothed that from a condition of having been struggled upon back to a condition of just having been slept in, particularly the pillows. I erased a blurred line across the carpet-nap that his one dragging shoe had made, with the flat of my own shoe,

held in my hand like a pressing-iron.

Then I picked up the towel I'd already wet once, went back into the bathroom, turned on the shower full-blast, and got back under it again. Its roar deadened everything, but a sudden draft on my wet shoulder tipped me off when they'd used the passkey on the room-door. "Hey, Sherrill!" I boomed out just as they came in, "can I borrow some of your shaving-cream?" I stuck my head further out and hollered, "What's the matter with ya, didya go back to sleep in there? That's the third time I've asked ya the same question—!"

Then I saw then all standing looking in at me. "What's up?" I yelled, and reached out and shut off the water.

The sudden silence was stunning.

The hotel detective said, "Your room-mate just fell out of the window in there," and pulled a long face to show how he sympathized with me.

"Oh my God!" I gasped, and had to hang onto the rubber curtain to keep from tipping over, myself, for a minute. Some soap got in my eyes and made them fill with water. Through it I could see them all looking at me, from the bellhop up, as though they knew how bad I felt, and felt sorry for me.

CHAPTER IV

A Note from Thelma

THREE weeks to the day, after that morning in the hotel at Jefferson, Thelma's message was waiting for me in my mail-box at the Marquette in Middleburg. I had been holed-up there for two weeks past, from the moment I'd felt it prudent to leave Jefferson. Not that I'd been under arrest or even suspicion at any time, but the detectives there had, naturally,

questioned me about how well I'd known Sherrill, whether he'd said anything to indicate he intended suicide. I seemed to satisfy them on all points.

They kept me waiting another twenty-four hours—and on pins and needles. Then they sent word that I was free to leave whenever I wanted to. I didn't waste time hanging around once I heard that! It struck me that I hadn't been called on to make a deposition at any coroner's inquest, but I wasn't inclined to argue with them on that point. Nor did I bother trying to find out what disposition had been made of Sherrill's remains. I simply left—while the leaving was good! The impression I brought away with me was that Jefferson had a very gullible bunch of detectives on its force.

Beautifully as I'd gotten away with that, though, I had plenty of other things to get jittery about while I was waiting to hear from her the next couple weeks in Middleburg. I kept wondering whether she was going to double-cross me or not, and the suspense got worse day by day and hour by hour. If she did, I had no come-back.

She'd soaped me up by saying all I had to do if she tried to hold out, was show up home and give her away. True enough as far as it went, but there was one thing I'd overlooked at the time: what was to keep her there on tap once she got her paws on the insurance check? All she had to do was blow out in some other direction and—good-by ten grand!

That was what really had me down, the knowledge that she had been holding a trump-hand all through this little game of ours—with me trying to bluff her. And from what I knew of her, she didn't bluff easy. I'd even set a deadline to it in my own mind: forty-eight hours more, and if I didn't hear from

her, I'd head back home myself, no matter what the risk, and land on her with both feet before she took a powder out on me. That is, if it wasn't already too late, if she hadn't gone by now.

NOTHING had muffed at her end, I knew that for a fact, so she couldn't alibi that she wasn't in line for the money. I'd been buying our hometown papers daily ever since I'd been in Middleburg, watching to see if the thing would curdle or start to smell bad, and it hadn't.

It would have been in headlines in a minute if it had, but all I had were the few consecutive items bearing on it that I'd clipped out and stuck away in my wallet. I'd been taking them out nightly and going over them, to reassure myself, and it was as good as television. First, the news-announcement that had sent Sherrill to his death (although he'd seen it in a Jefferson, not a hometown paper).

Then a n inconspicuous obituary the next day, mentioning a date for the cremation. Then a twenty-four-hour postponement of the cremation, with no reason given (this had given me a bad night, all right!) Then finally, two days later, the bare announcement that the cremation had taken place the day before. That was all, but that was plenty. The thing was signed, sealed, and delivered—we'd gotten away with it! What could a jarful of ashes tell them?

Even outside of all that, anyone in my position, naturally, would have been jittery. Just having to sit tight day by day waiting for the pay-off, was reason enough. The one hundred and seventy-five dollars I'd chiselled out of her was starting to run down; I wanted to get my hands on the real dough and

get out of this part of the country altogether. Middleburg, after all, wasn't so very far away from the hometown. Somebody that had known me might drop over from there and spot me when I least expected it; the young mustache I was nursing along was no guarantee at all against recognition.

I stayed in my room most of the time, let them think what I'd told Sherrill, that I was in precarious health. I began to look the part, too, so it wasn't hard to sell the idea. I haunted my letter-box downstairs, that was all, and just went as far as the corner-stand once a day, to get the hometown paper. I always soft-pedalled it by buying a Jefferson one and a Middleburg one along with it, and then discarding them in the nearest trash-can.

And up in my room I always tore the name and place of publication off the tops of every page of each copy, carefully burning the strips in an ash-tray, so the chambermaid or anyone else finding it wouldn't know just where it was published.

I HAD a bad minute or two one evening when the news vendor couldn't find me a copy of the hometown rag. "They usually send me two," he apologized, "but they were one short today, and there's another gent been buying 'em right along, like you do yourself, and he musta got here ahead of you, I guess, and took the only one I had—"

I got very quiet, then finally I said off-handedly, "He a regular customer of yours? How long's he been doing that?"

"Oh, two, three weeks now—'bout as long as you have. He lives right in the same hotel you do, I think; I see him come in and go out of there a lot. Nice guy, minds his own business—"

I said, even more off-handedly than before, "D'je happen to mention to him that I been taking the Kay City *Star* from you too?"

"Nah!" he said emphatically, "I never said 'Boo' to him."

I had to be satisfied with that, and in a day or two my apprehension had dulled again, not having anything further to feed on. The Marquette was no skyscraper honeycomb, I'd seen all the faces in it by this time, and there was definitely no one there that knew me or that I knew, or that I'd ever seen before. Nor did the register, when I went over it without much trouble, show any Kay City entries at all.

The whole thing was just a harmless coincidence, that was all; probably the guy took the *Star* purely for business reasons. There was a pudgy realtor who had the room across the hall from mine, I'd met him once or twice on the elevator, and it was probably he, keeping tab on real estate opportunities in various townships. That reassured me completely; he fitted the newsman's description exactly, and never even so much as looked at me the few times we happened on each other.

One night I eavesdropped while I was unlocking my own door and overheard him having a long argument with somebody over the phone. "That's an ideal site," he was saying. "Tell 'em they can't have it at that price, why it would be a gold-mine if we leased it for a filling-station—"

On the twenty-first morning after Sherrill's death, I stepped up to the hotel desk—and for the first time there was white showing in my letter-box! My overwrought nerves began crackling like high-tension wires. It had a Kay City postmark. In my excitement I dropped it and this real-estate guy, who had come up to the desk for his

own mail just then, picked it up and handed it back to me without a word.

I WENT over in a corner of the lobby and tore it open. There was no signature—probably she hadn't wanted to hand me a blackjack that could be used against her—but it was from her all right. I recognized the writing, although she'd tried to distort it a little, or else her excitement had done that for her. Just this, very cagy:

Jackie has come through pretty. If you want to see him, you know what to do about it. It's up to you to do the traveling, not me. I'm not at the old place any more, so it'll be okay. 10 State Street is where you'll find me.

The way I burned it's a wonder smoke didn't curl out of my ears. So it was up to me to do the traveling, was it? She knew what a chance I'd be taking by showing up home, even if she had changed addresses!

I came to a sudden decision. "All right! for being so smart, she's going to pony over the whole ten grand now! I'm going down there and clean her out! And if she opens her trap, she's going to suddenly quit being alive! 'I know what to do about it' is right!"

I folded the thing up, put it in my pocket, and went out. I hit the seedy part of Jefferson, across the railroad tracks, and picked up a .32 and some cartridges at a hock-shop without too many questions asked, particularly the one about where was my license. I came back and I booked a seat on the three o'clock bus, which would get me to Kay City just after dark. I bought a cheap pair of reading glasses and a flat tin of shoe polish. I went back to my room, knocked the lenses out of their tortoise-shell rims and heaved up my incipient mustache with a little of the blacking. It wasn't much of a dis-

guise, it wasn't meant to be; just so recognition wouldn't be quite instantaneous if I didn't pose under any bright lights—and I wasn't going to.

At half-past two in the afternoon I went downstairs and paid my bill and turned in my key. The clerk didn't say a word, but I saw him stick a bright-red pasteboard strip like a bookmark in my letter-box. "What's that for?" I asked idly.

"That's to show it's available."

"You've got one in the one right next to it too," I squinted.

"Yeah, 919, across the hall from you, checked out about half-an-hour ago too."

The only thing that kept me from getting flurried was that his check-out had come ahead of mine, and not after it; otherwise I'd have suspected there was something phony about it. But this way, how could he have possibly known I intended leaving myself, when the first warning I'd given was this very minute?

"Just the same," I said to myself, "he's been taking the Kay City *Star* like I have every day. I'm gonna take a good look in that bus, and if he's in it, I don't get on. I'm not taking any chances, not gonna lay myself open like I did running into Sherrill on the way down!"

I timed myself to get to the depot just five minutes ahead of starting-time. The bus was standing there waiting to go. I walked all down one side of it, gandering in every window, and then doubled back on the other side, doing the same thing, before I got on. There wasn't a sign of him, or of anyone that looked like him.

I found my seat and sat down on the edge of it, ready to spring and hop off again if he showed at the last moment. He didn't.

I LOOKED them all over after a while, and there wasn't anything about any of them to call for a second look. Nor did I myself get even a first one from anybody. It was fully dark by the time we hit Ferndale, of unpleasant memory, and about nine-thirty when we got into Kay City at the downtown terminus. I slipped on the lenseless pair of rims just before the doors opened, and didn't waste any time lingering about the brightly-lighted depot. Outside in the street-dusk I'd pass muster, I knew, as long as I didn't stop to stare into any glaring show-cases.

State Street was a quiet residential thoroughfare lined with prosperous residences; it was nearer in to the heart of the city than where we had lived, though. I reconnoitered number 10 from the opposite side of the street, going past it first and then doubling back. It was just a substantial brick house, two-storied, without anything about it to make me leery. Only one window, on the ground floor, showed a light. I thought, "What the hell is she doing in a place like that? Don't tell me she bought the whole house for herself!" I decided she must have just rented a furnished room with the family that owned it.

I crossed over further down, and then once more started back toward it. There wasn't a soul on the street, at the moment. Instead of going right up to the door, I edged around to the window where the light was and took a look in, under the partly-lowered shade.

Thelma was in the room there, and she seemed to be alone. She was right in a line with the window, sitting by herself in a big chair, holding a cigaret and staring intently over into a corner which I couldn't see from where I was. I could tell she was under a strain, the

hand holding the cigaret shook visibly each time she lifted it up. I waited awhile, then I tapped lightly on the pane.

She looked square over at me, didn't show a bit of surprise. She jerked her head in the direction of the front door, but didn't get up or anything. I went around to it and tried it cautiously. She'd left it on the latch, for me to walk in without ringing. I closed it softly behind me, tapped the .32 in my pocket, and moved a few paces down the hall, listening. The house was dead; the people were out, whoever they were.

I put my hand on the side-door that led to the room where she was and pushed it open. She was still sitting there, shakily holding that cigaret. "Hello, Cookie," she said in a funny voice.

"Hello, yourself," I growled, and I looked all around the room. It was empty, of course. There was another, leading out somewhere toward the back, standing wide open, but I couldn't see a thing through it.

"Did you get my note?" she said. Then she said: "You've come back to kill me, of course. I've had a feeling it would end up that way all along. Is that it, in your pocket there?" And her eyes rolled around spasmodically, not at all matching the quiet dryness of her voice.

I SAID, "What's the matter with you, you paralyzed or something? Whaddya keep sitting there like that for? Gimme the dough, all of it! Where ya got it?"

She said, "What was our arrangement, again?"

"Twenty-five, seventy-five, with you on the short end. But that's out, now; I'm taking the whole works—and

here's the pacifier—" I took the gun out slowly.

The cigaret fell, but she still didn't move—as though she were glued there or something.

"Up!" a voice said in my ear, and I could feel snub-nosed steel boring into my spine through my clothes. Then half of Kay City seemed to come into the room all at one time, through the door behind me and also through that other one opposite. One guy even stood up from behind the big easy chair she'd been in all along, a gun on me across her shoulder.

I let the .32 drop and showed my palms. I knew the Kay City chief of police by a picture of him I'd once seen. "Well," he purred, "nice of you to drop in at my house like this! Wrists out, please!"

I said to her, "You dirty, double-crossing—"

"I didn't cross you, Cookie," she said wearily. "They tumbled right the very next day—"

"Shut up!" I raged at her.

"That's all right, Cook," the chief of police said soothingly. "The guy was never cremated at all, we saw to that. We inserted that phony announcement in the paper the second time ourselves. She's been in custody ever since, it's just that we were waiting for the insurance-check to come through, to use in evidence. You thought you were good, didn't you? Want me to tell you what you had for breakfast Tuesday? Or what tune you whistled when you were getting ready for bed a week ago Sunday night? No trouble at all!"

They had to hold me up between them. "I didn't kill him," I gasped, "it was self-defense—"

The fat realtor from the Marquette came around in front of me. "May-

be it was self-defense when you pushed Sherrill out of the window in Jefferson?"

"So you were one after all!" I groaned. "I was taking a shower, I didn't have anything to do with—"

"Sherrill didn't die," he said. "A couple of clotheslines at the bottom of that shaft were kinder to him than you were. He's been in a hospital down there with his back in a plaster-cast for the past three weeks. Crippled for life, maybe, thanks to you—but able to talk. He told us all about it, that's how it blew up at this end."

Something seemed to blow up in me too, like it had that night. I was Ben Cook again, who'd never done anything wrong in his life. It was as if the streak of badness had worked itself out, somehow.

I shuddered and covered my face with my manacled hands. "I'm—I'm sorry. Well, you've got me, and maybe it's all for the best—I'm ready to take what's coming to me—"

"Don't worry, you're going to," said the chief of police. "Take him over to headquarters and book him. Take her back to the cooler."

As we were leaving, one of the detectives said: "All for ten grand! If you'da just hung on a little while longer, you'da gotten it without lifting

your finger—like that!" He took out a cablegram from his pocket and showed it to me.

It was addressed to me, at the old address. It had come in only a couple days before. It was from London, from some attorney I'd never heard of. It informed me my first wife, Florence, had died two months before and left me a legacy of two thousand pounds. Ten thousand dollars!

I didn't show any emotion at all. Just turned to them and asked them if they'd do me a favor.

"Give you a swift kick, I suppose," one of them sneered.

"It's mine to do with as I want, isn't it, this dough? Turn it over to Sherrill, will you, for me? Maybe it'll help to get him fixed up so he can walk again. I'll sign whatever papers are necessary."

They all looked at me in surprise, as though this was out of character, coming from me. It really wasn't, though. None of us are one hundred percent bad and none of us are one hundred percent good, we're all just kind of mixed, I guess. Maybe that's why the Judge, the Higher One, feels sorry for us. A whole row of black marks and then a single white mark at the very end. Which cancels which? I'll find out for sure pretty soon now.

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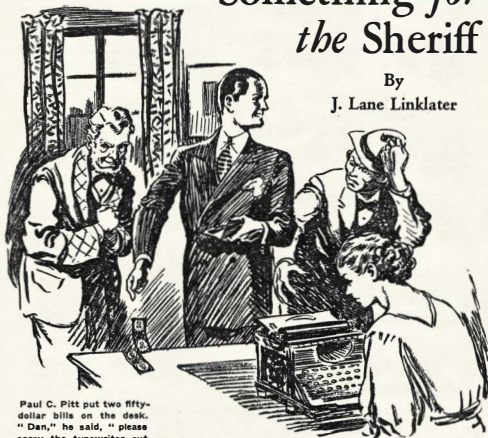
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Something for the Sheriff

By

J. Lane Linklater



Paul C. Pitt put two fifty-dollar bills on the desk. "Dan," he said, "please carry the typewriter out to the car."

THE limousine, of magnificent proportions, had been bowling along the highway for two hours. Paul C. Pitt, the keen-eyed, handsome gentleman in the tonneau, was silent, apparently absorbed in the glories of the countryside. The huge chauffeur was also silent, but his massive, battered face scowled a vague uneasiness.

"You look wor-



Paul C. Pitt, that Outlaw Humanitarian, Risks His Freedom to Save a Pretty Girl and Her Uncle from the Toils of Crooked Politics and a Slick, Greedy Lawman

ried, Dan," Pitt said sympathetically.

"I'll be all right," Dan rumbled, "in half an hour."

Pitt smiled. He understood Dan's frame of mind. Just ahead of them was a town. In half an hour, Dan was calculating, they would have gone through the town and left it behind. Dan didn't like the smaller cities, felt much safer in a metropolis, where they were not

so conspicuous. But Pitt himself had a decided preference for the smaller places, and usually, in their apparently aimless wandering about the country, insisted upon stopping in them.

The name of this town, they found upon reaching it, was Melforde. Dan, at the wheel, seemed intent upon getting through it as speedily as possible.

"You might get arrested," Pitt warned him, "for speeding."

With a grunt, Dan slowed up.

"A courthouse town!" Pitt murmured pleasantly, with his eyes on a large, old-fashioned public building ahead.

Dan grunted again. Courthouse towns were his especial aversion, since they meant the presence of a sheriff and deputies, as well as city police.

"Dan," Pitt said suddenly, "we'll stop here!"

"But, jeez, boss," argued Dan, "it ain't even noon yet!"

"It's a good time to stop," said Pitt, "where we're going to stop."

Dan squirmed uncomfortably.

"Yeah? Where we gonna stop?"

"Just across the street," said Pitt, "from the courthouse!"

Dan groaned. But he slid the limousine into place against the curb opposite the courthouse. Dan seemed to want to sink out of sight, but Pitt was peering with interest at the courthouse. Little groups of people were standing in conversation on the steps.

"It isn't time for lunch, Dan," commented Pitt. "I think I'll see what there is to see."

"Ain't nothing to see," Dan contended, "in a dump like—"

"There's never anything to see," Pitt chided him, "for those lacking the seventh sense of discernment. Really, Dan, there's drama everywhere. Wherever you go, the apparently placid

citizen is absorbed in some troublesome complication. No doubt we shall find one in particular here—"

"But how about dough?" objected Dan. "You've given away over two thousand bucks in the last three days. You need dough, and you can't make none here."

"Money," Pitt retorted lightly, "is incidental." He pushed open the door. "I'll be back shortly, Dan."

"But where you going?" pleaded Dan.

"Into the courthouse," Pitt announced.

Dan watched him as he strode across the street and up the courthouse steps. People on the sidewalk, and at the entrance, turned and looked at Paul C. Pitt, as they did everywhere. His tall, well-clad form, and his strong, aquiline-featured face, impressed both men and women—especially women—with a sense of gracious importance; dominating but not domineering. It seemed to Dan, from his place behind the wheel, that everyone in sight was watching Pitt as he disappeared into the courthouse.

He was gone some forty minutes. Returning, he took his place in the limousine again.

"Is it okay to get started?" Dan said anxiously.

"By no means," said Pitt. "We'll be here some time."

"So you found something, huh?" muttered Dan, disconsolately.

"Of course. A very interesting case just starting in the courthouse, Dan. A murder case."

"But ain't that out of your line?"

"I have an idea," said Pitt, "that the murder case is merely incidental to us. There's a young man on trial for murder—a chap named Paul Hammer."

"Ain't he guilty?" queried Dan.

"On the contrary," Pitt mused, "my judgment would be that he's very guilty indeed. He's got a mean face, Dan. I don't like him. He's charged with murdering a girl."

"A guy ain't got no right," conceded Dan, "to bump off no dame."

"Precisely. But there seems to be a determined effort to get the young man off. And in that effort, another man is being made the victim of a counterplot. I've made a few discreet inquiries among the hangers-on, and even talked to the bailiff. I am inclined to think, from what I hear, that the sheriff is a tool of the young man's father. I—"

"Yeah," growled Dan. "But who's this victim you mention?"

Pitt smiled very faintly. "The judge," he said.

DAN looked startled. "Jeez, boss," he protested, "you ain't gonna fool with no judge! A judge is dynamite—"

"Some judges," Pitt disagreed, "are all right. I like this one. His name is Geary—Judge Walton Geary. He lives on a small estate south of town. He has no family except a niece, whose name is Lily. So much I've discovered by asking questions—"

"And passing out dough," added Dan.

Pitt smiled again. "Oh, a few dollars here and there," he admitted. "But, then, so many people need money these days." He stirred. "The judge, I understand, always eats his lunch at a place just around the corner. Usually his niece is there with him."

"But the next town," Dan pointed out, "ain't far. We—"

"I wouldn't want to miss the judge,"

Pitt demurred. "Recess will be declared in a few minutes, and I must get to the café ahead of the judge." He stepped out. "Better stand by for a while, Dan."

In a moment he was vanishing around the corner. But he was back in less than an hour. Dan sat up, his fingers anxiously fumbling the wheel.

"I been watching, boss," Dan said gloomily. "This town looks like poison to me. Why not drive on through—?"

"The place is too pleasantly exciting," Pitt said serenely, "to leave so soon. Just drive around to the back of the courthouse."

Dan, muttering to himself, swung the car around the block, brought up at the rear of the building. He looked up.

"Jeez," he complained, "that there sign says *Sheriff's Office!*"

"So it does," agreed Pitt. "We'll just wait here."

"But—"

"I found out much in the café," Pitt explained. "With a little help from the waiter, I had a place adjacent to the booth occupied by the judge and his niece. The judge is an excellent old gentleman, Dan. He's a rare jurist of the old school with a great sense of honor. He's also quite poor, since he and his niece are always giving to the needy. He's honest, incorruptible, devoted to the letter and spirit of the law—"

"The worst kind," lamented Dan.

"The only kind," corrected Pitt, "entitled to the aid of such as you and me, Dan. His niece is a pretty little thing, and very loyal to him. Of course, she's the one person on earth to whom he would talk freely about his personal problems, so I was privileged to overhear a very interesting story."

"Yeah," mumbled Dan. "But I wish we could go on—"

"The young man on trial," Pitt continued, "is the son of a very wealthy local man, and he murdered a girl merely because she preferred a poor boy. Paul Hammer, as I see it, deserves the limit. But his father, who seems to control almost everything in town except good old Judge Geary, is determined to get him off."

"So what?" said Dan, with a touch of bitterness.

"From the judge's talk with his niece," explained Pitt, "I take it that before the trial started, Paul Hammer's father tried to get the judge fixed for ten thousand dollars. The offer is still good. The sheriff, apparently, is handling the money. But the judge won't fall for it."

"He's nuts," commented Dan.

"The pleasant insanity of an honest man, Dan," Pitt reproved him. "But it didn't stop there. It appears that the elder Hammer bought a mortgage which someone else held on the judge's estate. This place is practically the judge's sole possession of any value. He figured on paying for it out of his salary in the next few years, before retiring, and leaving it to his niece—"

"Okay," growled Dan. "I can get it—I ain't so dumb. If the judge don't come through the way Hammer wants, he loses his place, huh?"

"Quite right. Tomorrow morning, Paul Hammer's attorney will move for a dismissal on the grounds of insufficient evidence. If the judge sustains the motion, he keeps his estate. If he denies it, he loses everything."

Dan frowned. "Sure. But how could this Hammer guy make these offers to the judge without being hooked?"

"For attempted bribery? Very sim-

ple, Dan. Hammer owns the sheriff. The offers were made to the judge in an indirect fashion in the presence of the sheriff. If the judge tried to make it public, both Hammer and the sheriff would call the judge a liar—two against one." Pitt glanced down the street. "By the way, here they come now."

Dan jerked his head around. Two men were walking slowly along the sidewalk. One was large, with hungry, shifting, little eyes in a long narrow face. The other was much shorter, with strangely similar eyes in a plump, well-fed face. The two stopped a few yards from the limousine, talked in low tones for a little while.

Then the big man plodded down a walk toward the door marked: SHERIFF'S OFFICE. The shorter man cut across the street to a two-story office building opposite and disappeared through the entrance.

"If that's the sheriff," remarked Dan, "he don't look good to me. I still think we oughter get the hell away—"

"The big fellow," said Pitt, "is Sheriff Clumshaw. Keep your eye on him, Dan."

"But what the—"

II

PITT was again stepping from the limousine. He crossed the street and entered the door through which the short, well-fed man had gone. Inside, a stairway led up to the second floor. Close to the landing above was an office door on which was inscribed:

AUGUST L. HAMMER
Real Estate—Insurance—Loans

Pitt pushed open the door. The well-fed man was seated at a desk,

scowling. In a corner, a girl with a worried face was pounding at a typewriter. The well-fed man looked up as Pitt entered, his under-sized eyes taking in every inch of Pitt's immaculately clad form.

"Mr. Hammer?" Pitt inquired courteously.

Mr. Hammer cleared his throat. It was obvious to Melforde's one millionaire, apparently, that his visitor was a person of importance.

"Yes," he said. "I'm Mr. Hammer."

Pitt smiled and presented a card upon which the name, Paul C. Pitt, was richly engraved.

"Well, well, Mr. Pitt," Hammer said unctuously, "Please be seated."

Pitt sat in a chair opposite him. "I'll come to the point quickly, Mr. Hammer." He was gazing placidly out of the window, as if quite oblivious of the close scrutiny to which Hammer was subjecting him. "Perhaps you've heard of me before?"

Hammer looked a little uncertain. "Well—er—I—your name does seem familiar, Mr. Pitt, although, for the moment, I can't quite place it."

"Quite all right," Pitt said tolerantly. "No doubt you've seen it in the papers." He smiled again. "I'm what the papers refer to as a capitalist. From Boston, Mr. Hammer."

"From Boston, eh?" echoed Hammer.

"That's right. A capitalist from Boston," repeated Pitt, who could, with equal facility, have been a lion tamer from India. "But no stranger to politics, either, Mr. Hammer."

"Is that so?" queried Hammer, with interest.

"But that's of no importance," Pitt said, with a careless wave of his hand. "I'm really quite interested in your

beautiful countryside, Mr. Hammer. And I've been considering the purchase of a small place in the vicinity of Melforde to which I could retire to a life of quiet contemplation."

Mr. Hammer's eyes brightened. "Ah!" he said. "You're interested in real estate then?"

Pitt nodded. "Indeed, I've already looked about, and I think I've found the place." Pitt turned his gaze on Hammer for the first time. "It's the place belonging to Judge Geary."

Hammer squinted violently. "The Geary place?"

"Yes. And according to the records, you have a mortgage on the place—a mortgage which comes due tomorrow. It occurred to me that it might be better to deal with you rather than with the judge."

Hammer seemed to be calculating. "Perhaps so," he agreed. "Perhaps so. But in what way—"

"Well, of course, if I bought direct from the judge, he would simply pay off the mortgage and keep the balance. But perhaps it would be better if I bought the mortgage from you!"

Hammer's eyes were closed and his lips pushed out. Then his eyes snapped open briskly. "I'm glad you came to me, Mr. Pitt. Now—er—did you have a proposition in mind?"

"There's the question of price, Mr. Hammer," countered Pitt.

"The mortgage," explained Hammer, "is for seven thousand dollars. But," he added quickly, "the estate is worth all of twenty thousand. And since it's quite unlikely that Judge Geary will be able to take up the mortgage, the holder of the mortgage will be able to refuse an extension, then foreclose, and—and—"

"Acquire a twenty-thousand-dollar estate," Pitt filled in.

"Right," said Hammer, with a chilly smile.

"So that you couldn't consider selling the mortgage for less than twenty thousand?" Pitt went on.

"Right," Hammer said again, still smiling.

"I'm in the mood to accept your figure," Pitt said promptly, "since no doubt the judge would want more than that."

"Indeed he would," said Hammer.

Pitt was slipping a large wallet from an inside pocket. "I'd like a little more time—just a few hours," he said softly, "before completing final arrangements. But if you'll give me an option—"

"How much?" snapped Hammer. "And for how long?"

"A thousand dollars," said Pitt. He was already counting the currency before Hammer's hungry eyes. "And only until noon tomorrow. By that time, I feel sure, final arrangements can be made."

HAMMER'S hesitation vanished at the sight of a thousand dollars in cash. Obviously, the rich man of the town was not averse to adding to his bank account. He reached in a drawer, pulled out a blank, filled it in. In a moment he pushed it over for Pitt to read. Pitt nodded his satisfaction. Hammer called sharply to the stenographer to put the money in the safe.

Pitt lowered his voice. "Of course, Mr. Hammer, it would be better to keep our little deal confidential."

Hammer grinned cunningly. "You can depend on me."

"You see," said Pitt, "Judge Geary is not exactly a stranger to me."

Hammer looked his surprise. "You know him?"

"Slightly," Pitt said calmly. "The judge is acquainted with my political activities. I understand that he's anxious to consult me regarding some problem of his own that is troubling him just now." Pitt raised an eyebrow. "You can rest assured that my advice to him will be eminently practical."

Hammer seemed to be thinking hard. "No doubt, Mr. Pitt, and I—"

Pitt was on his feet again. "I'll see you again, Mr. Hammer, tomorrow morning."

"Of course," Hammer said eagerly. "Tomorrow morning. Glad you came in, Mr. Pitt. Glad you—"

But Pitt was already stalking through the door. He emerged on the street, strode quickly back to the limousine.

"Well, Dan," he said, "I've just invested in Judge Geary's estate."

Dan glared in bewilderment. "You—you done what?"

"I bought an option on the mortgage," Pitt explained patiently. "It is good until tomorrow noon. The total price is twenty thousand dollars."

"You—you're buying it for twenty thousand bucks?" gasped Dan.

"That's right, I—"

"How much dough have you put up?" Dan demanded.

"One thousand dollars, Dan."

"But, jeez, boss, you didn't have much more than that!"

"Only a couple of hundred left in the treasury," Pitt admitted serenely.

"Of course, if we really wanted to acquire the mortgage, we'd have to raise another nineteen thousand by noon tomorrow."

"And what happens if you don't raise it?"

"We merely lose the thousand we put up!"

"But, boss," pleaded Dan, "you know you ain't got no chance of raising nineteen thousand bucks! Why not just drive on and—"

"There's a hotel about two blocks away, Dan. We'll go there now. We'll probably be leaving this town tomorrow at noon—if the sheriff doesn't interfere.

III

PITT took the best suite at the hotel, and at once sent a telegram addressed to William Ravvelock, Washington, D. C. Dan listened uneasily as Pitt dictated the message, which read simply:

USE FORM SEVENTEEN JUDGE
WALTON GEARY HERE

"That guy Ravvelock," complained Dan, "will slip up some day. Maybe he'll use the wrong words—"

"Ravvelock," Pitt said reprovingly, "is a good and efficient friend."

He made himself comfortable with a book, and did not stir until late afternoon.

"Dan," he said then, "now that we've got an interest in Judge Geary's estate we really ought to look it over."

"But how the—"

"We'll just run out there," said Pitt. "The judge should be home by now."

In twenty minutes Dan was steering the limousine through a large gate. A good-sized, old-fashioned house was set in the center of a tree-strewn space covering about an acre of ground. The limousine stopped near the front door.

"Pleasant spot," murmured Pitt. "Nothing ostentatious. Nothing offensively rich. Nothing—"

"I've saw big houses before now," Dan grumbled. "Had to stay in some of 'em. Don't like 'em."

"This isn't your kind of a big house, Dan," Pitt said. "I'll go in and see the judge now."

"But you—you ain't gonna—"

"He's an honest judge, Dan. I'm sure I'll like him."

Pitt got out and sauntered to the front door, tapped the knocker. Presently the door opened. A pretty girl of about twenty, demure brown eyes, and a courageous tilt to her chin, smiled up at him.

Pitt bowed a little. "Is Judge Geary home yet?"

The girl nodded. Her voice was soft: "Yes, sir. Won't you please come in?"

Pitt followed her through the hall and into a library. A man arose from a chair with simple dignity; a small man who strongly resembled the girl. Pitt guessed his age at sixty. He was obviously kindly, and courageous. There was no guile in his face and his voice was gentle.

On the desk beside him was a telegram.

"Ah, my dear Judge!" murmured Pitt.

Judge Geary smiled. "You are Mr. Pitt?"

The judge gestured at the telegram. "That came not long ago. From someone named Ravvelock in Washington, D. C.—one of the government bureaus, no doubt."

"Ravvelock? Oh, yes. He's very close to me."

"So I assumed." The judge gazed at Pitt questioningly. "He says that you're interested in clean politics, and that you've done much good work in cleaning out crooked politicians."

Pitt eyed the judge benignly. "That has been my greatest pleasure—that, and buying things."

"Buying things?" repeated the judge. "What sort of things?"

Pitt chuckled. "You'd be surprised. I buy things that others wouldn't think of buying. Why, only last week I bought an old rug that I saw in a lady's house. You could have bought it new for five dollars—and I paid her fifty for it. And just a few days before that I paid a hundred for a worn automobile tire—"

"Good heavens!" murmured the judge. "What's your purpose in making these purchases?"

Pitt shrugged. "Perhaps," he said, "it's because I enjoy finding some strange use for things that others regard as useless." He turned and stared out of the window. "What a beautiful place you have here!"

"I think so," agreed Judge Geary. The enthusiasm in his voice seemed to fade quickly, as if he were thinking that he was not going to be permitted to enjoy it much longer. "Would you like to stroll about while we talk?"

"Splendid!" said Pitt.

Outside, the judge was absorbed in showing off his favorite flowers. For over an hour they strolled around, between garden plots, their conversation teetering between politics and plants.

When they returned to the house, Pitt found that the judge's niece had invited Dan in, and the big chauffeur was munching sandwiches and trying to answer the girl's questions about his travels with embarrassed pleasure.

"Well," remarked Pitt, "I'll have to be going now. I'm very happy to have met you, Judge—"

"It's been a real pleasure, sir," said the judge, warmly. "But is there anything I can do—any way I can help—?"

"Just one small thing," Pitt said thoughtfully.

"Name it!" said the judge.

"I'm working around quietly," Pitt

explained. "I may have need of the help of honest citizens in this town. But I'll be a stranger to them. So if I had a note from you—just a line or two—"

"My typewriter," said the judge, "is over in this corner. Lily will use it."

"Of course," said the girl.

SHE sat down at a small desk. Pitt himself picked up a piece of typing paper and inserted it in the machine.

"Just a few words will do," said Pitt. "Just say: *The bearer, Mr. Paul C. Pitt, is my friend.*"

The girl typed off the sentence, released the paper. The judge promptly signed it. Pitt was staring at the typewriter as he absently slipped the paper into his pocket.

"That's a very old typewriter, Judge," he commented.

The judge smiled. "Not much good any more," he admitted. "But it takes money to buy a new one. And Lily can still use it—"

"I'd like to buy it!" Pitt put in quickly.

Judge Geary gaped at him. "Buy that? But it isn't worth—!"

"A hundred for it!" offered Pitt.

"I couldn't think of it," objected the judge. "It isn't worth ten! I wouldn't take—"

"But if you can't use the money yourself," Pitt pointed out, "I'm quite sure there are poor people in town who would appreciate a little help from you."

The judge and his niece exchanged quick glances.

"Well, if—er—putting it that way," stammered the judge, "perhaps—"

"Of course!" Pitt beamed. He put two fifty-dollar bills on the desk.

"Dan," he said, "please carry the typewriter out to the car."

There was a look of consternation on Dan's face, but he picked up the typewriter and made for the door. Pitt followed slowly, with the judge and the girl. They halted on the porch outside.

"It is so beautiful here," Pitt said, "that I hate to leave it. I—" He stopped abruptly, his gaze fastened on a pot of geraniums. "Beautiful!" he said.

"You like them?" said the girl, delightfully.

Pitt was still looking at them. The pot of geraniums was placed in a larger, vase-like pot of simple design.

"I like that pot, too," he said. "The ornamented one." He turned quickly to the girl. "I'll give you a hundred for it—for the whole thing!"

The girl gasped. "But it isn't worth anything like it! The ornamented pot in which the other is placed may be worth five dollars, but the geraniums have no great value. And the pot in which the geraniums are planted is just a plain garden pot—"

"A hundred!" urged Pitt. "Think what you can do with the money!"

He was pressing bills into her hand.

"I—I don't know what to say," said the girl. "I—!"

Pitt was taking it for granted that the deal was closed. He picked the geranium pot out of the larger, ornamented one. "I'll take this with me—"

"But the ornamented pot!" put in the girl. "That's the only thing that has any value. Aren't you taking that, too?"

Pitt glanced back at it indifferently. "Just leave it where it is. Perhaps I'll get it later. And I'm grateful to both of you. Good day."

He took the geranium with him to

the limousine, placed it carefully on the floor of the tonneau. Dan watched him, amazed.

"What the hell, boss, are you gonna do with that—?"

"Pretty, eh?" chuckled Pitt. "Let's get back to the hotel."

When they reached the hotel, Pitt had Dan cover the typewriter with a blanket before carrying it up to the suite. Pitt himself very carefully carried the geranium. Both the typewriter and the geranium were put on a table near the window.

"I don't get the idea," grumbled Dan. "What—?"

"The typewriter idea is very simple, of course, Dan. Even the judge might have seen through it, but for his unsuspecting nature. No mystery about it at all. I've got to see the sheriff—and I've got to convince the sheriff that I came from the judge. You saw me put the paper in the typewriter for the judge's niece to type on, and of course I fixed it so that plenty of space was left at the top. I can type whatever I want ahead of the judge's signature very easily."

"Sure. But—"

"It's quite probable, too," Pitt went on, "that the judge's typing is known in the sheriff's office, which will help further to convince the sheriff."

"Okay. But how about this flower thing?"

PITT, however, was too busy at the typewriter to listen. Presently he drew a sheet of paper from the carriage and perused it. Dan watched him with a worried frown.

Pitt was adjusting his hat. "You see, Dan," he said, "you can depend upon these politicians to do things in a roundabout way. They figure it's much safer than direct contact."

"You—you ain't gonna see that sheriff, boss?"

"Of course. He's handling things for Mr. Hammer. But we won't need the car, Dan. I can walk. The building is only a couple of blocks away."

"Yeah," Dan said thickly, "and there's a jail in the same building. Anyhow, it looks like you're stuck. You can't put up them nineteen G's tomorrow, so you lose the bucks you already put up. You paid out a couple of hundred cash this afternoon, and you ain't got nothing left. You—"

"We have a typewriter and a geranium, Dan," retorted Pitt.

"Yeah," shouted Dan, "and you'll give *them* away—"

"That reminds me," Pitt said thoughtfully. "I should give the sheriff a present—something special."

"But, my gosh, boss, you're busted already—!"

The door closed softly behind Pitt. He left the hotel and strolled around to the courthouse. He was back in an hour.

"I had a very pleasant chat with the sheriff, Dan," he said. "He's easy to do business with—especially when you offer him a present." Pitt sank into a chair, sighed lightly. "We'll have a good dinner and retire early. I must get up," he added, "at five o'clock in the morning."

Dan looked startled. "Say, you ain't handling no dough for that sheriff?"

Pitt shook his head. "You should know better, Dan. Why, that would make me a party to crooked politics! No, I'll take no money from him."

"How about the judge?" said Dan.

"He knows nothing, of course. Judge Geary is so thoroughly honest that he'd simply get lost in any sort of practical politics. Don't forget to water the geraniums before you go to bed."

IV

MR. AUGUST L. HAMMER was in his office at ten o'clock the next morning. With him was Sheriff Clumshaw. They seemed to be waiting for something.

Mr. Hammer spoke cautiously, his little eyes placidly calculating: "You sure you did things exactly according to instructions?"

"Sure," said the sheriff, whose thin voice seemed strange. "There couldn't be no slip-up."

They waited silently again. Presently the phone bell at Hammer's elbow rang sharply. Eagerly, Hammer reached for the phone, barked into it.

Then he listened. The expression on his face changed. He seemed amazed, then angry. The soggy cigar in his mouth sagged down over his chin. He dropped the receiver into place, swung about and glared at the sheriff.

"What's the matter?"

"Matter! Matter! Why, he didn't come through!"

"You—you mean that Geary—?"

"I mean he denied the motion to dismiss the case, that's what! My son's trial must go on! We've been gyped. That smooth fellow Pitt must've been in cahoots with the judge."

"I can't believe it," moaned the sheriff.

Hammer clenched his cigar savagely. "Well, I've still got the mortgage on the place, anyhow. Time's up today! That crook Pitt won't have any nineteen thousand to take up his option."

The sheriff was on his feet. "Just let me get my hands on him!" he threatened. "I'll fix—!"

There was a gentle tapping on the door. Hammer and the sheriff looked at each other.

"Come in!" called Hammer.

The door opened slowly. Paul C.

Pitt stood in the doorway, smiling urbanely. He had an unwieldy package under his arm, wrapped in brown paper. He stepped in, closed the door, placed the package on the desk.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted them. "I—"

"You—you crook!" shrieked Hammer. "You—"

"I?" said Pitt, as if shocked. "I, a crook! Not at all! I'm an adjuster—a political adjuster! I—"

"Maybe you can adjust that option?" sneered Hammer.

Pitt shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid I lack the money for that," he admitted. He slipped a piece of paper from his pocket. "Here's the option you gave me—I hereby destroy it!"

He tore it into small pieces, dropped the pieces into a waste basket.

"Of course," jibed Hammer. "You lose the thousand! And the mortgage time is up today. Anyhow, that stubborn old fool of a Geary will lose—"

"That's what I wanted to see you about," Pitt cut in, and he seemed to brighten a little. He went to the door, opened it. "Come in," he called.

Through the door came the judge's

niece. She was obviously puzzled.

Pitt turned to Hammer. "I couldn't take up that option, but Miss Geary would like to pay off that mortgage!"

The girl plucked at his sleeve. "But I haven't got any—!"

"Just leave it to me, my dear." Pitt turned to Hammer again. "Refusal to accept payment, of course, would cause you to lose—"

"Yes, yes," snapped Hammer. "But the money! Where—?"

Calmly, Pitt took a sheaf of bills from his pocket, counted them slowly on the desk. "Seven thousand, five hundred," he announced. "That takes care of both principal and interest. Kindly give Miss Geary a receipt."

The sheriff was gurgling, struggling for words. "I—I—why, that there money," he whined, "is what I paid out, just like you said! Ten thousand! I put it where you—"

"Shut up!" shouted Hammer.

The sheriff was abruptly silent, apparently made aware that he was talking too much in front of the judge's niece. Hammer had suddenly become furtively uneasy. He stared at the money on the desk, then reluctantly



When trouble brings you back to earth,
Give Beech-Nut a chance to prove its worth—
The flavor softens Fortune's Frown,
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When you're down... Pick up



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PEPPERMINT GUM
... is so good it's the most popular
flavor of any gum sold in the United States.

drew a pad toward him, scratched out a receipt. Pitt flipped it up, read it carefully, handed it to the girl.

Pitt spoke very courteously to the sheriff: "By the way, about that letter, signed by Judge Geary, which I handed you last evening—if you'll read it again you'll find that it doesn't commit the judge to anything at all. It merely authorizes me to make any deal I wanted to for him. That's what's happened. No doubt he really had in mind taking up the mortgage all along!"

The sheriff's face was very red.

"You may have been influenced, also," Pitt went on blandly, "by my promise to make you a special present. Perhaps you didn't expect Mr. Hammer to know about that, but I'm sure you won't mind now." He tore the paper off the package on the desk, revealing a potted geranium. "Here it is, my dear sheriff—and I hope you won't forget to water it!"

BOTH the sheriff and Hammer were silent, as if someone had jerked ropes around their necks, throttling them wordless. Pitt took the girl's arm and escorted her to the door.

In a little while they were down on the sidewalk. Dan was waiting anxiously.

The girl turned and gazed up at him, her hand on his arm. "I'm sure," she said huskily, "I don't know how to thank you. I really don't understand it at all. It seems to me that uncle and I have cost you a lot of money—"

"I still have the ornamented flower pot," Pitt told her.

"The—the flower pot?"

"Yes. The one I left on the porch yesterday. Since I'd bought and paid for it, I took the liberty of going out to your place early this morning and getting it."

"But it really isn't worth over five dollars, Mr. Pitt."

Pitt smiled graciously. "Sometimes," he said softly, "there's a lot of money in a flower pot."

"But how could there be—?"

"Perhaps," Pitt said, "the sheriff put it there!" He sighed and took her hand in his. "Well, it's goodbye."

The girl looked disappointed. "But do you have to go?"

"If I don't," said Pitt, "both my man and I will be falling in love with you."

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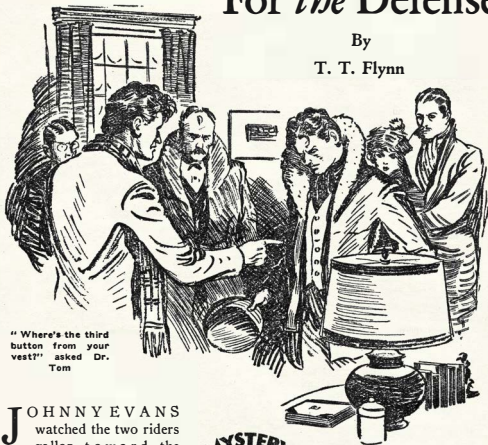
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For the Defense

By

T. T. Flynn



"Where's the third button from your vest?" asked Dr. Tom

JOHNNY EVANS watched the two riders gallop toward the frozen lake where a dozen dudes in gay sport clothes were skating.

Dad Boyle slid a doubtful glance at Johnny's red face, spat in the snow, and spoke, reflectively.

"Annabelle works right hard at her hostess job. She tries to make everyone feel at home."

It was the wrong remark. Johnny's face set hard. Loftquist, the sharp-tongued lawyer from Los Angeles, who was standing with them, said maliciously: "Lynn Brooks never passes

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up a pretty face. It's gotten him into trouble before."

Johnny turned a cold glance on the lawyer and said nothing.

Dad spoke testily. "Ferget that he-beauty. He may be a top hand in the movies but he's only another dude up here."

"Not much to a deputy sheriff like you, eh?" Loftquist suggested with a thin smile.

"I creak a mite in my joints, but I can still back up my badge!" Dad Boyle snapped.

There Are Tricks of the Open Range that a Badman from Hollywood Can Hardly Be Expected to Know About

Loftquist looked at Johnny's beltgun and chuckled.

"Then you'd better keep an eye on Lynn Brooks. He might get a bullet in his back before he leaves."

Dad Boyle stifled an angry retort. Loftquist, gaudy in a blanket coat and loud woolen socks turned down over his leather boots, had baited him on for a chance to dig at Johnny. Some dudes were like that. They seemed to think anyone who lived outside a city was a fool.

Johnny said something under his breath and stalked away. Loftquist's amused smile followed him.

"Johnny looks as if he wants to take a shot at me too," he observed.

"Lay off Johnny," Dad said shortly. "He an' Annabelle had a spat before Brooks registered. Annabelle's gettin' even."

"Risky business, I'd say. Johnny looked murder when they rode by."

"I didn't see it!" Dad snapped, and stalked away also. The more he saw of dudes the less he liked them. Silly clothes. Foolish talk. Crazy ideas.

Johnny had headed for the barn and corrals around the hill from the resort buildings and bungalows beside Little Sister Lake.

He was lugging out his saddle when Dad came up.

"Ridin' out?" Dad asked idly.

"I am," said Johnny through his teeth as he dropped the saddle and shook out his rope.

Dad eyed him narrowly. "I kinda feel like a ride myself."

"You don't have to tag along with me," Johnny said shortly. "I'm not going after them. Go back and tell that fool Loftquist to keep his mouth shut or I'll close it for him."

"Shucks," said Dad placatingly.

Johnny hauled viciously on the top

pole of the corral gate. "I may have something to say to that pretty boy from Hollywood — but not today. Sorry, Dad—I want to be alone."

DAD BOYLE, whose duties around Little Sister Lake were more or less confined to the riding stock in winter, watched through the harness room window the return of Annabelle and Lynn Brooks. They were laughing, talking, enjoying each other's company immensely.

Grudgingly Dad admitted Brooks was handsome. Almost thirty, he looked younger. Exercise had kept him trim, wiry. His face under the slanted sport cap had just the proper degree of leanness. Dad had heard Brooks made eight thousand a week and received one of the biggest fan mails in Hollywood. But Dad's seamed face was stern as he stalked out.

"These hosses are blowed," he observed. "Annabelle, you know better'n to run critters like that."

In riding breeches, gay sweater, scarf and pert little hat, Annabelle looked ravishing in the saddle. Her cheeks were rosy. She was smiling as she dismounted and begged: "Don't be cross, Dad. It was *such* a nice afternoon. This was Mr. Brooks' first ride, you know."

Brooks jerked the curb bit carelessly—and cruelly—as he dismounted and spoke to Annabelle.

"I had no idea what I was missing all this time." His eyes said it was Annabelle he had been missing.

Dad persisted: "These hosses were pushed too hard." He brushed foam off the shoulder of Brooks' roan, and scowled at the lather around the bit.

"I paid for the use of the horse," Brooks said carelessly. "Coming, Annabelle?"

"I'll have to make my peace with Dad," Annabelle laughed.

"See you at the lodge then." Brooks departed, slapping his gloves against his leg.

Annabelle drew off her soft gauntlets and coaxed: "You're not really mad at me, are you, Dad?"

Dad grinned sheepishly.

"You oughta teach that feller to handle a hoss. Look how he sawed on the bit. Johnny'd have a fit if he saw that mouth now."

The smile left Annabelle's face. "Johnny has fits about a good many things that aren't any of his business. I'm not interested in what he thinks anyway." Annabelle departed with her chin up.

"**M**A," said Dad gloomily as he invaded his kitchen that evening, "if you was a purty young girl, would you get all flustered over one of these male beauties from Hollywood?"

Ma was white-haired, buxom and hearty. Her cheeks were flushed with heat as she turned from the cook stove.

"Dave Boyle, you've been up to something," she accused.

"Now, Ma."

Ma sniffed.

"I haven't lived with you forty years for nothing. What have you been doing?"

Dad sniffed. "Somethin' smells mighty good."

"Soft-soaping me won't change the subject, Dave. What pretty girl has you worried?"

"You're the only pretty girl who ever worried me," said Dad gallantly.

Ma leveled her spoon ominously. "Dave . . .!"

"Annabelle's been flauntin' this Lynn Brooks at Johnny today," Dad

sighed. "It's got Johnny stirred up."

"It'll do Johnny good to worry a little," Ma stated vigorously. "Annabelle tells me he gets jealous every time she smiles at another man. Annabelle is paid to be hostess an' smile at the guests, men or women."

"I don't like the way Johnny's takin' this," Dad muttered. "He almost lit into Loftquist for passin' a few misguided remarks. Where's my bottle?"

"I hid it again," said Ma. "Drink some buttermilk. It'll do you good."

Dad remained troubled. Johnny had a bad temper. He worshiped Annabelle. A horse wrangler and guide at eighty a month was not much beside eight thousand a week and fame. Johnny was the proud kind who would feel it deeply.

That evening Annabelle and Johnny quarreled openly. When Dad heard about it he swore to himself. In the days that followed the situation did not improve. Lynn Brooks as a guest was entitled to a certain amount of Annabelle's time. He took far more than his share. The other dudes began to take an amused interest in the situation.

Johnny went into a morose, dangerous shell.

Loftquist, the lawyer, continued to derive sardonic amusement. In fact he seemed to take an exceptional interest for a man who had come to Little Sister Lake with a beady-eyed secretary who seemed to have nothing to do but silently prowl around and watch everyone.

Twice Dad heard Loftquist make remarks to Johnny. Once Dad saw the lawyer speaking to Lynn Brooks. The movie star swore angrily and walked away. Loftquist saw Dad and sauntered over. He was smiling.

"Johnny and Brooks are both on

edge," he commented with amusement. "One of them is going to get violent if this keeps up."

"Watch out you don't get some of it," Dad warned. "You're buttin' in on something that ain't any of your business. This'll all blow over when Brooks leaves."

Loftquist chuckled. "I told Johnny yesterday that Brooks always leaves—when he's through. It won't be long now."

Dad stared at the man angrily.

"You fool!" he exclaimed. "It's a wonder Johnny didn't take you to pieces right there! Johnny loves that girl. He won't stand for talk like that about her. Annabelle's all right, even if she's bein' a little foolish now."

Loftquist did not take offense.

"Foolish is hardly the word," he said. "Brooks won't marry her. Draw your own conclusions."

Dad closed his mouth on an angry reply and retreated from the amused smile.

Little Sister Lake was easily accessible from Los Angeles, Hollywood and other coastal cities. In summer the dudes came to escape the heat, in winter for the snow. They skated on the three lakes within a mile. The Long Mountain ski slide drew champions.

The main lodge had recreation rooms, dining room, a large dance floor and accommodations for those who desired hotel service. Scattered through the trees for a quarter of a mile back were separate bungalows for those who desired privacy. Telephone service connected the bungalows with the main lodge. Loftquist and his secretary, and Lynn Brooks were back in the cabins.

Spring was near. The snow was melting. More guests were leaving than arriving. Dad watched anxiously

for signs that Brooks intended to depart.

But Brooks stayed on. Johnny was taking it harder every day, in a silent, morose, deadly way.

"I wish that Hollywood Apollo would pack an' git!" Dad complained to Ma. "Johnny ain't in a safe state these days."

Ma's flying fingers kept on with her tatting.

"Annabelle could do worse than marry eight thousand a week."

"Loftquist says he ain't got any idea of marryin' her."

"What does he know about it?" Ma wanted to know. "Stop worryin' about other people's business, Dave."

"You women!" Dad snorted. "First you tell me Annabelle an' Johnny will make up. Now you talk about her marryin' Brooks."

"It's almost dark an' starting to snow," Ma said firmly. "Listen to that wind. You've changed out of your heavy underwear an' I've mislaid your rubbers. If you go out again tonight you'll be down with your rheumatism. Sit down, Dave. I'll get your bottle."

Dad hesitated and was lost.

"Tomorrow," he decided firmly, "I'm gonna take Johnny off an' talk to him man to man. I don't like the way he's actin'."

BY the time Ma had buckwheat cakes, sausage and coffee on the red-checked kitchen table cloth next morning, the wan gray dawn revealed a broad sweep of fresh snow.

"The dudes'll be frolickin' today," Dad observed, peering out the window.

"Bundle up good an' warm and stay in the harness room all you can," Ma ordered.

The telephone rang.

"What'd I tell you?" Dad grumbled,

answering it. "Some dude wants to ride out an' look at the snow. As if he couldn't see plenty out the window. Hello . . ."

Ma, watching his face, said suddenly: "What is it, Dad?"

Dad hung up and turned toward her with a troubled face.

"Loftquist was killed last night. His secretary just telephoned the lodge."

"Poor Annabelle!" Ma exclaimed pityingly.

"Why 'poor Annabelle'?" Dad demanded as he caught up his sheep-lined coat.

"I've a feeling she'll be the one to suffer—if Loftquist has been insinuating the things he has," Ma replied ambiguously.

II

CHARLEY SWING, night man at the lodge desk, was wading hastily through the snow when Dad floundered into the path leading back to Loftquist's isolated bungalow. City bred, twenty-six, Charley was pale and excited.

"Loftquist's secretary has been unconscious most of the night!" Charley called excitedly. "When he came to, he found Loftquist on the floor shot in the head! This makes me jittery!"

"Breathe deep an' count to fifty," Dad panted. "No use gettin' boogery. If Loftquist is dead, he's dead. Did you telephone the sheriff?"

"I forgot," Charley confessed. "But I woke up Doctor Willis and told him to come to Loftquist's bungalow at once."

"Glad to see you thought of something," Dad said dryly. "Well, here we are."

The spacious log bungalow stood in a small tree-flanked circle. Dad noted the smooth blanket of snow on three

sides. No one had left or entered all night.

Carter, the secretary, opened the door. He was a slight, beady-eyed, sly little man about forty. Dark circles were under his eyes. He looked haggard, distraught.

"Mr. Loftquist is back there in the hall," he said unsteadily as he closed the door. "I found him there when I recovered. He's shot through the head. I *stumbled* over him."

Carter shuddered at the memory.

Charley Swing peered at the hall door with morbid satisfaction. Dad surveyed the secretary.

"What were you doing all night?"

Carter's black suit was wrinkled, soiled. His hair was disordered. In front of his right ear a raw ugly bruise was crusted with dried blood.

Carter gulped: "I was unconscious. Have you sent for the sheriff? I need a doctor. My head is a wreck."

"Doctor's comin' an' I'm a deputy," Dad said calmly. "What happened?"

Carter rubbed the stubble on his chin and stared at the floor. He looked unhappy.

"He's got somethin' on his mind," Dad thought. "He looks like the guilty pup who stole the steak."

But Dad's seamed face showed only sympathetic interest as Carter shrugged and said:

"It was cold-blooded murder. I don't know who did it."

"Got any idea at all?" Dad persisted.

Carter shook his head.

"Charley," said Dad, "telephone the lodge an' tell 'em to notify the sheriff. Then ring the barn an' ask Johnny Evans to come over. Did you wake the boss?"

"Mr. Stevens said he was coming in a few minutes."

Dad nodded and turned again to Carter.

"Who hit you on the head?"

"I don't know," Carter confessed unhappily. "Mr. Loftquist came in about eleven o'clock and asked me to make him some black coffee. His eye was swollen where someone had hit him. He was upset, angry. I went into the kitchen to make the coffee. Someone knocked on the back door. I opened it and didn't see anyone. I looked out—and something hit me on the head."

CARTER gingerly touched the spot in front of his ear, winced, and continued: "I didn't know anything more until I came to on the kitchen floor a little while ago. I'd been lying there all night. I was weak, nauseated. I couldn't think why Mr. Loftquist had let me stay there. I went into the hall to look for him—and almost fell over him. He was lying there on the floor." Carter shuddered. "He was already cold. You can see for yourself."

"I'll take your word for it," Dad said dryly. "Where was Loftquist when you last saw him?"

"Standing before the fireplace over there."

"Hmmm," said Dad thoughtfully. "I reckon it was snowing hard when you looked out the back door."

"I couldn't see three feet away."

"Didn't you see anything of the feller who hit you?"

"Not a sign. He must have been back against the house. I don't know whether I fell back into the kitchen or he dragged me in and closed the door."

"He musta dragged you in," Dad guessed. "If you were leaning out when he hit you, you'd have fallen on outside. Funny he was so careful to

keep you from freezin' an' so careless about killin' Loftquist."

"Are you trying to suggest I had something to do with it?" Carter questioned irritably.

"Nothing of the sort," Dad disclaimed. "Don't start buckin' until you're spurred."

Just then steps came on the veranda. Carter opened the door. Doctor Tom Willis entered carrying a black professional bag. Doctor Tom was a large man with broad shoulders, a cheerful manner and big hands that could be surprisingly gentle with a patient. At any time of the year Doctor Tom was apt to come up into the mountains for a few days of open air and some yarn-swapping with old friends like Dad Boyle.

But now as he put down the bag, Doctor Tom's smile was bleak.

"Is Loftquist really dead?" he asked.

"I reckon he is. This man says he's cold," said Dad. "He's back there in the hall. Charley, did you get Johnny?"

"He said he'd be right over. Someone else was in the harness room with him. I heard them say something as he hung up."

"They'll come too," Dad guessed. "Go outside an' don't let anyone get off the path. I don't want that snow mused up."

Doctor Tom had stepped back into the short hall behind the living room. Dad followed him. Loftquist, wearing a fawn smoking jacket, was sprawled on the floor at the back of the hall.

Doctor Tom made a brief examination and looked up with a frown.

"He was shot through the head, Dad. The gun was close enough to leave powder marks on the skin. And he had a black eye coming. What happened?"

Dad told what he had learned. They moved into the kitchen while he talked. The neat blue-and-white room was orderly. A coffee pot sat on the stove. The gray-checked linoleum was marked where snow-covered feet had passed.

Dad reached for the back doorknob. "Wait!" Doctor Tom ordered. He laid his handkerchief over the knob and opened the door. "Fingerprints," he explained.

"I clean forgot," Dad confessed ruefully. "I never did take much to these newfangled ideas. In the old days when a gent plugged a man we jest moved out an' looked for him."

Doctor Tom chuckled as he looked out. "You wouldn't have much luck following a man out there, Dad."

The rising sun glinted on smooth new snow. All footprints which had been made during the night were completely covered over. The snow had drifted against the two rear steps and piled high outside the door.

"Not much chance of tellin' where he went," Dad admitted.

"Let's see if we can't reconstruct it," Doctor Tom mused. "He must have looked in the back window and seen Carter in the kitchen alone. So he got Carter out of the way before he entered the house. Loftquist must have heard a suspicious noise and started back to investigate. The intruder met him at the hall door there and shot him. Perhaps they had a few words first."

DOCTOR TOM ran a big hand through his rumpled hair and smiled wanly.

"All we need to know now is who did it and why, Dad."

"You ain't askin' much, Doc. I wonder if he stole anything, or left his gun behind."

They found that the house had not

been ransacked. Carter had seen no gun.

"I found this on the kitchen floor," Carter volunteered, taking a silver button from his pocket. "It wasn't there when I went in to make the coffee."

Dad turned the button in his gnarled fingers. It was a silver concho button, made by the Navajo Indians. A secret little fear that had been gnawing at Dad grew as he inspected the button.

Doctor Tom took the button and examined it with interest.

"How do you know this wasn't on the floor before the man entered?" he asked Carter.

"When I opened the door this mornin' it rolled in front of the door," Carter explained defensively. "It was dropped there after the door was last closed."

"A good point," Doctor Tom mused. "All we have to do now is find where the button fits and we'll have the man who killed Loftquist. Dad, this button looks familiar, but I can't place it. Ever see one like it before?"

"There's a heap of conchos floatin' around," Dad said unwillingly. "It'd be hard to tell—"

He broke off as hurried steps came on the front porch. Johnny Evans stepped in. Annabelle and Lynn Brooks followed him.

"We were at the stable getting ready to ride when you called," Annabelle explained breathlessly.

Johnny said: "So Loftquist was killed last night?" A shade of uneasy challenge was in his manner.

Doctor Tom nodded.

"It happened about eleven o'clock, Johnny. We've just found a clue that should tell us who did it. I think—"

Doctor Tom broke off. He looked startled—then pained—then stern.

Johnny had just opened his sheep-skin-lined coat. Down the front of his brushed hair vest a row of silver concho buttons stood out plainly.

Johnny frowned as Doctor Tom stared at him.

"You found a clue?" he suggested.

"Johnny," Doctor Tom said coldly, "where's the third button from your vest?"

Johnny looked down, smiled wryly.

"I lost it the other day. Been looking for it." Johnny's smile died. "Why?" he demanded.

Doctor Tom glanced uncertainly at Dad. The doctor was Johnny's friend. But Carter burst out excitedly:

"He's the man who hit Mr. Loftquist in the eye last night! And that silver button matches the other buttons on his vest!"

"Why didn't you say who hit Loftquist?" Dad demanded heatedly.

"You didn't ask me. Mr. Loftquist didn't tell me anyway. But I heard him bathing his eye in the bathroom and swearing: 'That damned horse wrangler!'"

Annabelle gasped: "*Johnny!*" And put the back of her hand against her mouth. She had gone white.

Johnny wheeled on her. His face was pale, set. "So you think I did it?" he said bitterly.

Annabelle's face was set too as she faced him.

"I only know what a temper you have, Johnny. And how you've been acting lately. But I never thought—" She broke off miserably and fumbled in her pocket for a handkerchief.

Lynn Brooks, handsomer than ever in his natty riding costume, put a comforting arm about her waist. He said nothing—but his possessive sympathy was enough. Annabelle let his arm stay.

Johnny glared at them. His hand strayed up where the missing concho belonged. A stricken look came over his face. He turned to Dad and requested heavily: "Let's see that concho."

The room was quiet while Johnny examined the concho. His eyes lifted. His mouth tightened.

"Mine all right," he admitted. "I knocked him down last night too. This makes it look like I came here later and killed him, doesn't it?"

Dad cleared his throat. There was an ache there he couldn't stop.

"Why'd you hit him?"

"That's my business," said Johnny stiffly.

"Lemme see your gun," Dad requested.

Silently Johnny held out his revolver. He wore it partly to impress the dudes, partly to kill vermin when he was riding out.

Dad broke the gun and looked through the barrel.

"One empty cartridge an' your gun needs cleaning," he said slowly.

"I fired that shot yesterday at a rabbit," Johnny said woodenly.

Carter's beady eyes were bright with satisfaction. "You'd better lock him up for the sheriff."

"I'm runnin' this show," Dad replied testily. "Johnny won't run away. There's more ways of skinnin' a cat than findin' stray conchos around on the floor."

But Dad knew that was a feeble excuse for Johnny. Even Doctor Tom was convinced Johnny was guilty. And Annabelle?

Annabelle walked blindly out without another word. Lynn Brooks went also, his arm still about her waist. His parting remark as he closed the door was cool and annoyed.

"I suppose the papers will work my name into this some way."

Johnny's jaw muscles tightened but he did not look around. Dad spoke violently as the door closed.

"The more I see of him the better I like a snake!"

But Dad with anguish knew that didn't help Johnny.

THE news spread quickly. Little Sister Lake was quickly in a ferment. Dad posted guards along the roads to prevent anyone's leaving.

Coming back from the main road he met Annabelle. She was still pale. Her eyes looked haunted. Dad remembered Ma's exclamation of pity for Annabelle.

"Where is Johnny?" Annabelle asked.

"I sent him over to have some breakfast with Ma."

"They won't arrest him, will they, Dad?"

"It's hard to tell what the sheriff'll do," Dad parried uncomfortably.

Annabelle's eyes pleaded.

"Can't you do something for him, Dad?"

"*You* didn't do so much when he needed you," Dad reminded.

"I know," said Annabelle miserably.

"I'm sorry and ashamed—and it's too late to tell him now."

"It ain't never too late to tell anyone you're sorry an' ashamed," Dad said. "That'll do Johnny more good than anything right now."

"I'll try it," Annabelle decided.

"What can you do, Dad?"

"I'll try to wrangle the dude detectives when they get to work," Dad said.

He watched Annabelle hurry away. He wanted to call her back and ask what she was going to do about Lynn

Brooks. That was what Johnny needed to know. But he decided there had been enough meddling already.

Dad's eyes were suspiciously bright as he turned away.

"Crazy kids," he muttered to himself.

III

THE sheriff, two deputies and the coroner raced up from the lower country in a big car. Travers, the sheriff, a brusque, solid man with a firm mouth under a short black mustache, listened to Carter's story, Doctor Tom's and Dad's report. He took the silver concho. But his first question went to the heart of the matter.

"Why did Johnny Evans knock Loftquist down last evening?"

"He won't tell," Dad admitted.

"Was there bad blood between them?"

Dad sighed and wondered how he could put it in the best light. "Loftquist kept makin' remarks about Johnny's girl," he said. "I guess he made one too many. I'd have done the same thing."

"Probably," Travers admitted.

"But you wouldn't have killed him later on. I guess this gives us our case. Where is Evans?"

"Over at my house."

"Under arrest?"

"Sort of," Dad said uncomfortably.

"Where's his gun?"

"Johnny's got it. I told him not to clean it. I know that boy, Sheriff. He didn't kill Loftquist."

Travers answered not unkindly: "You old-timers are all alike. Packed full of sentiment against all facts. We can tell whether the bullet was fired from his gun. But he might well have used another gun, since he was so ready to show this one with one shell fired.

If that's the case, it won't help him. The other facts are too conclusive."

"There ain't a smudgin' of proof in any of it," Dad insisted loyally. "Now if there was tracks leadin' from Loftquist's cabin to Johnny's room in the barn, you'd have somethin' that would convince me."

"He was smart enough to choose a time when his tracks would be covered by the snow, Dad. I doubt if a city man would have thought of that so readily. You're letting friendship blind you to facts. The motive wasn't robbery. Revenge or anger is all that can account for it. I'm afraid I'll have to take Johnny Evans back with me."

"I can't stop you," Dad sighed. "But you're thinkin' like a dude, Travers. You're followin' the first sign you see. Johnny never dropped that concho. He'd have picked it up. The jasper who put it there wanted it to be found. A sign don't always mean what it says."

"We're not following a coyote track," Travers reminded with a trace of impatience. "This is murder. We'll make the case with up-to-date methods. I want this Johnny Evans."

"Take him then," Dad yielded. "But you won't keep him if I c'n help it."

They took Johnny away in handcuffs through the bright sunlight that followed the storm.

Annabelle crept tearfully into Ma's arms for comfort.

"They're going to hang him," she wept. "It's all my fault. And he wouldn't listen when I tried to talk to him."

"Dave says they won't hang him," Ma said with serene confidence.

Dad was there. He cleared his throat uncomfortably.

"Cryin'll make your eyes red; Anna-

belle. Go out in the sun an' get cheerful."

"And see those officers taking down statements from everyone," Annabelle said wretchedly. "They'll twist everything in court to suit themselves."

"Dudes!" Dad snorted scornfully. "I'll show 'em a thing or two."

"What?" Annabelle begged.

"I'll sit tight in the sunshine an' watch. Dudes ain't got the patience to do that. Whoever killed Loftquist is still around. I'll grab him when he thinks he's safe."

"Do you know who it is?" Annabelle asked hopefully.

"Nope," said Dad. "I ain't had time yet."

Reporters from Los Angeles arrived. Newspaper photographers snapped pictures. Lynn Brooks' name was brought into the case.

Sob sisters arrived to feature his romance with the pretty hostess of Little Sister Lake.

Newspapers over the country headlined the murder involving the name of the famous Lynn Brooks. A big car arrived bearing excited studio officials.

Lynn Brooks bore it all with remarkable patience. His solicitude was all for Annabelle.

Dad glowered as he thought of Johnny down in the valley jail needing Annabelle, and too bitter and proud to admit it.

The wind turned chinook from the south. The hot sun rolled warm spring over the Sierras.

Dad haunted the veranda of Loftquist's bungalow, warning away all those who tried to come near without official right.

Doctor Tom found him there the next afternoon when most of the outsiders had gone their way. Doctor

Tom's face was troubled as he sat on the porch edge beside Dad.

"They've rushed Johnny before the grand jury and indicted him. It looks bad, Dad."

Dad spat into the fast melting snow.

"Somethin'll turn up."

Doctor Tom looked at him keenly.

"Do you know anything, Dad?"

"I suspect a heap."

The troubled look returned to Doctor Tom's face.

"I thought from what Annabelle said you had some positive knowledge that would help Johnny."

"I know Johnny. Ain't that enough?"

"I'm afraid not," Doctor Tom said regretfully as he tamped tobacco in his pipe. He struck a match, puffed silently for some moments while a jay called raucously from a nearby pine.

"THIS," said Doctor Tom slowly, "is not an ordinary murder. Lynn Brooks' name makes the trial of national interest. Johnny is going to have a hard time."

"First Brooks swiped Johnny's girl—an' now Johnny suffers because Brooks was around," Dad said angrily. "They tell me the bullet which killed Loftquist didn't come from Johnny's gun. So now they're takin' the barn apart to see if Johnny hid another gun there."

"He could have hidden another gun, Dad."

"He didn't," Dad insisted stubbornly. "Don't I know him?"

Doctor Tom soberly shook his head.

"That won't help Johnny. The concho button is the rub. Johnny's story about losing it can't be proved. If circumstantial evidence ever hanged a man, it's going to hang Johnny now. He's got to have a good lawyer. I

suggested to Lynn Brooks it might pay the studio to provide Johnny with the best lawyers they can hire. If Johnny is cleared, Lynn Brooks' name will drop out of the matter."

"What'd he say?"

"He was mighty decent. Said for Annabelle's sake he'd do everything he could. But I'm doubtful."

"I ain't," said Dad. "And I don't like Brooks any better. He's a skunk."

"He's about Johnny's only hope."

"No, he ain't," said Dad stubbornly. "If I sit around here long enough I'll git Johnny out an' show up all these dude detectives."

Doctor Tom got to his feet with a sigh.

"It's a nasty mess," he declared sadly. "If you know anything that might help Johnny, for heaven's sake tell it."

Dad squinted at the sun. "Wait till tomorrow," he said grimly.

Doctor Tom looked doubtful as he departed.

Even Ma was doubtful. "Dave," she said at breakfast the next morning, "Annabelle's taking this mighty hard. She says Johnny's going into court right away. Lynn Brooks is taking her down to watch. He told Annabelle it looked mighty bad for Johnny. I've heard several say Loftquist's secretary might know more'n he tells."

Dad grunted.

"A twitchin' ear can hear most anything, Ma."

"Never mind about my twitchin' ears!" Ma said indignantly. "I set a heap of store by Johnny. And everyone's sure he hasn't got much chance."

"I lost my roll an' outfit in Carson City twenty-eight years ago because I was that sure about my cards," Dad recalled. "Stop worryin' about Johnny. I know what I'm doin'."

"If you're sure about it, Dave . . ."

"I am," said Dad firmly. "Wait till this afternoon."

DAD was sunning himself on the steps of Loftquist's cabin, talking to Carter, the secretary, when Doctor Tom and Lynn Brooks came along the path. Brooks was impatient.

"What was it you wanted with us?" he asked.

Doctor Tom said: "I'm not clear as to why you insisted on talking to us here, Dad. Mr. Brooks is in a hurry. He's going down to see that Johnny is getting the right legal aid."

"Maybe Johnny won't need any lawyers," Dad replied placidly.

Lynn Brooks shrugged. "With luck, he may hope for a short sentence—say twenty years."

"Might as well hang him," Dad grunted.

Doctor Tom reminded: "You promised to have some facts which would help Johnny."

"I aim to," Dad nodded. "The sheriff's due here now. I called him."

Lynn Brooks frowned.

"Why the sheriff? If you know anything that will help Evans, don't give it to the prosecution. Tell me, so I can do some good with it."

"Too late," Dad said. "Here comes Travers now."

Travers was wiping perspiration off his face with a handkerchief when he reached them.

"It's getting mighty hot," he grumbled. "Well, Dad, out with it. You were mighty secretive over the telephone. If I didn't know you so well, I wouldn't have taken the time to come up here. What have you discovered?"

"Nothin' I didn't know was there all along," Dad said placidly. "While

you smart dudes have been runnin' around in circles fixin' to hang Johnny, I've been sittin' here thinkin' and waitin'."

Travers looked crestfallen. "Dad Boyle," he accused, "did you bring me all the way up here to listen to some more of your thoughts?"

"If you thought more an' jumped less at what you saw, you'd have a heap more luck sometimes. Lemme show you somethin'."

Dad's wrinkled face showed faint amusement as he led them back through the house and opened the back door.

"Look out there now," he invited.

Travers stepped out, looked around, and frowned.

"I don't see anything."

"That's because you're a dude," said Dad placidly. "I been keepin' everyone away. Ain't a foot walked out back here since the snow. Look at them footprints showin' now—goin' back to the trees there."

The snow had melted off the steps. Several small packed areas remained. They were roughly the size of a shoe sole.

Beside the steps, and beyond, the snow was sinking into the ground.

A packed area beside the steps and two trails of small packed mounds leading away were melting slower than the softer snow around them.

Dad explained with droll satisfaction: "Any old-timer could have told you tracks that has been snowed over an' lost can be followed after a thaw. The prints are packed down. They take longer to melt. Those tracks there was made by the man who killed Loftquist. He came an' left this way. Let's foller 'em an' see where they lead."

"I'll be everlastingly damned!" Travers swore under his breath. "Dad, I never would have thought of that."

"You're too scientific," Dad chuckled.

Lynn Brooks observed coldly: "Those tracks aren't evidence. Anyone might have made them."

"Anyone didn't," Dad said calmly. "Loftquist didn't have visitors. Carter here'll tell you. I asked him. That trail there'll lead you to the man you want."

"That's right," Carter said uncertainly. He pointed to the packed area beside the steps. "There's where the man who hit me was standing."

"Those tracks will be evidence enough for me," Travers decided. "Let's follow them."

"I don't care to get my feet soaked in that slush," Lynn Brooks objected coldly.

FOR a man who was willin' to ride everywhere with Annabelle in bad weather, an' trouble himself drivin' her down to court an' gettin' lawyers for Johnny, you're all-fired delicate all of a sudden," Dad snorted.

Travers raised his eyebrows. "So you're helping Evans?" he asked Brooks.

"I am," Brooks replied ungraciously. "But not to the extent of making myself sick. However—I'll come along."

Brooks stepped out ahead of them.

"Keep away from them old tracks," Dad ordered. "You're mussin' 'em up."

Brooks shrugged and stepped over.

The snow was deeper back in the trees.

But even there it had melted enough to reveal the old tracks. The trails separated under the trees, but followed the same general direction.

Dad studied them a moment. He

pointed to the tracks leading off to the right.

"He left the bungalow this way. Those lower ends pointing away from us are where his toes dug in deeper."

"Dad, you're better than a pack of bloodhounds," the sheriff complimented.

"Shucks," Dad said modestly. "This was kid stuff where I was raised."

The trail wound uncertainly through the trees and underbrush, showing plainly how the maker had blundered through the stormy night. Gradually it swung in an uneven circle toward the farther bungalows. Now and then it crossed other old sets of tracks. But there was no trouble in following the ones that held their interest.

Abruptly the trail began to zig-zag erratically. Dad followed it to a gaunt, lightning-killed pine. He studied the ground a moment.

"He stopped here," he decided. "See where he knelt down an' packed the snow with his knees."

Lynn Brooks spoke impatiently: "I think you're imagining things. Let's get on. I'm in a hurry."

But Dad hunkered and fumbled around the base of the tree.

"If he knelt here, he had some reason for it," Dad observed over his shoulder.

His hand pushed through the soft drifted snow into a hollow at the base of the tree. He bent forward, feeling around inside. A grunt of satisfaction came from him.

"I thought it looked like he cached somethin' in here."

Dad pulled out a revolver by the end of the barrel. He grinned at Doctor Tom.

"I ain't forgettin' your fingerprints this time, Doc." He examined the gun.

"Thirty-eight," he said. "One bullet fired."

Travers took the gun carefully.

"Loftquist was killed by a thirty-eight. This must be the gun."

"An' there," said Dad, pointing, "is your tracks leading straight to that bungalow over there."

Travers looked. "Who lives there?" he asked quietly.

"Lynn Brooks," Dad said.

Dad made a sudden lunge and tripped the movie star who had started to run in sudden blind panic. A minute later the sheriff had Brooks handcuffed.

Panic and fear had cracked the actor's mask of indifference. Lynn Brooks was almost incoherent as he defended himself.

"Of course I shot him. No jury will convict me. I've been paying Loftquist blackmail for years, for a scrape I got into with his sister. He lived off blackmail. Loftquist followed me up here demanding more money. It amused him to butt into my private affairs with that girl. Last night Loftquist met Evans and made one remark too many. Evans knocked him down.

"Loftquist was in an ugly mood when he stopped by to see me. He de-

manded money at once. He taunted me about the girl. He said if I didn't watch out I'd have more blackmail to pay. I saw there was never going to be an end to it. But I'd be through in pictures if I stopped paying him. So when he left last night, I took the gun and went after him. I tell you I had a *right* to do it!" Lynn Brooks cried huskily, glaring at them.

"What about that concho that was left there to throw the blame on Johnny?" Dad demanded.

Lynn Brooks glowered at him and said nothing.

Dad spat disgustedly. "I knew all along you were a skunk. But I didn't think you were as bad as you are. Bustin' Johnny an' Annabelle up—an' then tryin' to load your dirty work on Johnny while you played sanctimonious about tryin' to help him with good lawyers.

"Your fan mail an' eight thousand a week won't stack up much against that when it's told to a jury."

"And that," said Travers coldly, "is about the way I feel. Come along, Brooks. You can take Evans' place."

"Don't rush off," said Dad. "I'm gonna get a passenger for you. Annabelle will be wantin' to bring Johnny back."

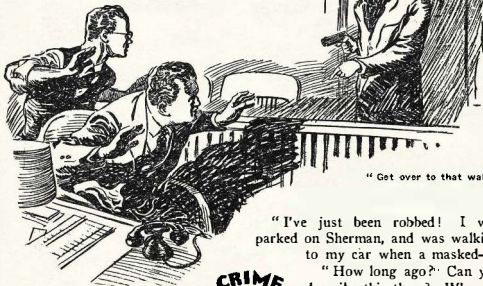
MARCHANT'S
GOLDEN HAIR WASH

Makes Excess Hair
Invisible

The advertisement features a black and white illustration of a woman with blonde, wavy hair, wearing a light-colored dress, reclining on a bed. A man is partially visible behind her, looking towards her. The background is dark, making the figures stand out. The text is positioned in the upper left corner of the illustration area.

The Cop and the Key

By
Stephen Payne



"Get over to that wall!"

"I've just been robbed! I was parked on Sherman, and was walking to my car when a masked—"

"How long ago? Can you describe this thug? Who are you?"

"Not over ten minutes. I'm Frank C. Hutter. H-u-t-t-e-r. Work for the Marlow

Construction Company. Bookkeeper and accountant. Yes, I can describe the hold-up man. He wore "

"Wait a minute, Mr. Hutter," came the voice on the other end of the wire, and Hutter, a sharp-featured individual with pale blue eyes, allowed a

thin smile to twist his tight lips. The police had gotten his name correctly, which was gratifying. "Now, I'm set to jot it down. Go ahead," the voice resumed.

**CRIME
D F W
SHORT**

AT five minutes after ten that Thursday night, Frank C. Hutter, driving his tan coupé homeward from downtown Denver, had crossed Broadway at Seventeenth Street when he emptied his wallet and tossed it out of the window.

Pocketing the currency and other items which the wallet had contained, the man drove on for a few blocks to park near a drug store in the residence section. Entering a telephone booth and calling police headquarters, he gasped excitedly:

**When a Crook Commits One Robbery to Cover Up Another, He Must Have a Good Reason to Risk a Double-
Noose Around His Neck**

"A medium-sized man wearing cheap brown work shoes, badly scuffed and with broken laces," Hutter said. "He had on a dark brown suit, cotton I'd judge, unpressed, soiled and out at the elbows. The coat was buttoned close and the collar turned up. His cap, a nondescript brownish one, was pulled down over the back of his head so I couldn't see his hair or ears. A black mask covered his face."

"Hum-m-m. 'Tain't usual for hold-ups to go masked these days. That all?"

"That's all. Enough to go on, isn't it? . . . Oh, his gun! Nearly as I could judge it was a small automatic."

"A-huh. What'd this bird get off you? Which way'd he go?"

"He took my pocketbook, with nineteen dollars in fives and ones in it, and also—"

"Your name on the pocketbook? A purse or a bill-fold?"

"Bill-fold or wallet. My name was on it, yes. Russet leather and—"

"Guess that ain't important. The guy was on Sherman, eh? But where?"

"Between Seventeenth and Eighteenth."

"We'll let you know if we pick him up, Mr. Hutter. What's your telephone?"

Hutter gave the telephone number of his house and hung up, saying to himself, "They won't pick up that fellow. . . . But tomorrow night they'll really begin looking for him!"

Arriving at his home on Downing Street he put up his coupé and was admitted to the modest house by his sister, who remarked irritably: "Do you know, Frank, I haven't found that second ignition key for the car yet? I can't imagine—"

"Uh? Oh, don't bother to look any more," returned Hutter with a reas-

suring smile. "I had the key all the time."

"Frank! You didn't! I distinctly remember—"

"Oh, yes, I did. I was just joking when I was asking you for it. I took it out of your sewing basket some time ago. Had it in my pocketbook. Everything's all right, all right."

Nevertheless Miss Agatha Hutter did not seem to think everything was all right. With outraged dignity, she sniffed: "I don't approve of jokes, and you know it!"

THE man lived alone with this one sister, a spinster of forbidding appearance, and earlier this evening, while eating his dinner, he had asked abruptly: "Aggie, where's the second key to my car?"

When he bought the tan coupé he had been furnished two ignition keys. One of these he had given to Agatha for safe keeping—retaining the other for his own use.

Miss Agatha had gone to look for the key, and in half an hour reported, in dismayed annoyance, that she must have misplaced it. "Now, where did I put it?" she had worried. "Was it in the black sewing basket or—"

"Never mind," Hutter had muttered. Now, however, upon his return after being absent since six-thirty, he assured her that he had had the second ignition key all the time. *This was a lie, just as his telling the police he had been robbed was a lie.*

"Where've you been this evening, Frank?" Miss Agatha inquired.

"Office," the tight-lipped man replied shortly, and with a curt "good-night" went to his room.

But Hutter had not been at the office of the Marlow Construction Company, where he was employed. He

had been at the Denver Theater, forcing himself to pay minute attention to the feature picture, the comedy, the news reel—everything.

Immediately after the show, he had driven to Eighteenth and Larimer Streets, where he had done some shopping in second-hand clothing stores, which remained open till ten.

In the roomy turtle-back of his tan coupé there now reposed a fifty-cent suit case stuffed with garments which would have caused Agatha Hutter to throw up her hands in horror. Garments which Hutter had described in detail over the phone to the desk sergeant at police headquarters. The suit case also contained a loaded automatic revolver, a couple of bundles of cotton clothes-line and a black mask. Hutter planned to use all those articles the following evening.

The man slept fitfully that Thursday night. But on Friday morning he was on hand for work as usual.

THE Marlow Construction Company's downtown office was far from ornate, yet the company had at present no less than six building jobs under way in Denver, to say nothing of four road-gangs at work on the highways. Hutter, John C. Marlow, and the clerk, named Trent, a colorless individual, comprised the office force.

John C. Marlow, head of the company, was both a builder and a road contractor. It had become customary with him to draw from the bank every Friday the money to take care of his weekly pay rolls. Marlow chose Friday because the cash for the different pay rolls was sent out early Saturday mornings, before the banks opened, to the foremen on the various jobs.

This particular Friday, Hutter was

pleased to see a special bank messenger deliver the money, consisting for the most part of bills, before twelve. There'd be around eighteen thousand dollars in the office safe tonight.

Hutter watched the hand which gripped his pen to see if it shook, and saw with pleasure that it did not. For weeks he had been schooling himself in the matter of controlling his nerves; he had also secretly learned to speak in a voice decidedly not his own.

At twelve he stepped over to Marlow's desk, eyed the bald, four-square, grim-faced man seated there, and said in a matter of fact tone: "By the way, I was stuck up and robbed last night."

Marlow looked up sharply. "You were robbed! Did the thief get anything much?"

"Not much. But, unfortunately, my office key was in pocketbook, also the second ignition key to my car."

"Hum-m-m! Lost your office key, eh?" Marlow asked in a disturbed tone. "S'pose that thug knew you? Knows where you work?"

"Why should he? That's an absurd idea," answered Hutter. "But I'll need another office key. Of course I reported the matter to the police,"—he couldn't keep a slight smile from his lips—"but so far I've heard nothing of their catching the crook."

"I'll have another key made for you tomorrow," announced Marlow. "Sorry you got robbed."

Going out to lunch, Hutter reflected that he was handling this business very well indeed.

II

NIGHT at last, and having eaten his early dinner at home, Hutter was ready for his big theft. He drove downtown, and swung around so as to come up Sixteenth

Street past the brilliantly lighted Denver Theater. Passing one intersection he turned to the right on Tremont, where he was lucky enough to find a parking place. After locking his car he was returning to Sixteenth on foot when he met Patrolman O'Fallon, whom he knew.

"Good evening, Mr. Hutter," greeted O'Fallon, twirling his night stick.

"Same to you," replied Hutter cheerily. "I'm taking in the show at the Denver." The chance meeting pleased him. O'Fallon could later say he had seen Hutter at ten minutes of eight going to a movie.

"Wish I could see that picture," said the officer. Then: "Heard at headquarters you was robbed last night."

"Yes." Hutter gave details, adding something which he had intended mentioning over the telephone when he had been interrupted. "The second key to my coupé—ignition key—you know one always gets two—was in my pocketbook. Don't suppose they've caught the thief?"

O'Fallon shook his head. "No, though you gave headquarters a good description of that guy, of his clothes, anyhow. I'd give a-plenty to put the bracelets on one such just now."

"Why?"

The patrolman grinned. He was young and very dark for an Irishman, with a boyish smile and a mild blue eye. To Hutter he seemed just a kid; a kid over whose eyes a smart man like Hutter could easily pull the wool.

"I'm hankering to get on the detective force," explained O'Fallon, "and the harness bulls are handin' me the raspberry."

Hutter went on to the movie house, where, as he entered, he asked the

head usher, "Good show? Got a full house?" He stopped and waited for a reply, for he wanted the fellow to notice him.

"You must like the picture, sir," replied the usher politely, "for you saw it last night."

For a second the man was disconcerted. This youth had noticed him last evening, though Hutter had made his exit through the side door. "Liked it so well I came back to see it again," he said. Then: "Say, you're an observing lad. I'd like to know you better. My name's Hutter—Frank C. Hutter."

"Mine's Joe Rogers. Very glad to meet you, Mr. Hutter."

"Better and better," thought Hutter, passing into the cool, dark theater. "O'Fallon knew I was going to the show; Joe Rogers saw me enter."

He placed the stub of his ticket in his shirt pocket, was shown to a seat, where he stayed about five minutes. Then the side exit let him out, unnoticed, as far as he could determine.

After a careful scrutiny to see that Officer O'Fallon was not in evidence, he reached his parked car, got in and drove swiftly away from the business area to a side street which was dark and deserted. In the shadow of a huge cottonwood, he stopped, turned off his lights, took the suit case from the rear end of the machine, and inside of his coupé changed his outer garments, even to his shoes and socks. He wadded the bundles of clothes-line into the waistband of his trousers, placed the automatic and mask in his coat pocket. The clothes he had been wearing he put into the suit case and returned it to the turtle back.

Disguised by his cheap, ill-fitting clothes, Hutter drove directly up in front of the downtown building which

housed the Marlow office. Here in the lights from the nearby intersection Hutter's tan coupé could be plainly seen by any chance pedestrian.

However, no one was coming from either direction, and the man slipped out, purposely leaving the ignition key in the switch and the door unlocked. The one elevator in the building now on duty was ascending, and the lobby was empty. Crossing it swiftly, Hutter climbed the stairs to the dimly lighted corridor on the second floor. All was silent, apparently deserted.

HUTTER adjusted his black mask, and pulled his cap down over his ears and over the back of his head. He buttoned his coat, turned up his collar, stole to the door of the Marlow Construction Company's office. Light shone through the transome, so, as Hutter expected, Marlow and Trent were inside, working late to straighten out the pay rolls.

Hutter inserted in the lock a key—his own office key, which of course had not been stolen. As the door swung wide, the man slid through it, past a suddenly petrified clerk. Hutter shoved the door shut with his left hand, while his right dropped the key into his coat pocket and whipped out the pistol.

"Stick 'em up! Not a peep outa you!"

The voice was no longer Hutter's. It was the harsh voice he had been cultivating for several weeks. Two pairs of thunderstruck eyes were upon him; two pairs of hands flew upward. Marlow was a grim, two-fisted old fighter, but in the face of a gun he was plainly at a loss.

"I been snoopin' around and larnt you guys has real dough here Fridays," announced Hutter in his assumed voice. "Stuck up that other guy as

works here, got his keys. Got his car, too. Now get over to that wall. Face it, hands grabbin' the ceilin'!"

While he gesticulated with the gun to enforce his commands, Hutter sidled to the window and drew the blind all the way down.

"Humph!" growled the founder of the Marlow Construction Company. "Stole Hutter's keys! His car, too. Damn you!"

Ha! Marlow was reacting just as Hutter had expected. This was working out as planned. He tossed a bunch of cotton clothes-line to Trent's feet. "Tie that big guy, you specs," he snarled. "Remember, not a yelp outa neither of you or the bullets fly."

The clerk was afraid not to do a good job of tying, and after Hutter had inspected it, he had Trent gag the big man, efficiently and cruelly, and lash his feet together. Then Hutter tied and gagged Trent, and after this pulled the shoes off of both men. Bare-footed, they would be unable to make as much noise as they could if they had their shoes. However, they'd be discovered at ten o'clock, when the building closed.

The night watchman would blink the lights at fifteen minutes to ten, and if he did not see Trent and Marlow leave, he would come to their office to tell them it was time to go. Hutter knew the watchman had done this often.

He lashed one man to the safe and the other to the heavy desk across the room from it. Fortunately, the safe door was open, though this would not have mattered. Hutter had long ago mastered the simple combination. There was the cash, now in envelopes, each bearing a contractor's name. With Marlow glaring at him in helpless fury, Hutter took them all.

Leaving the light burning, the thief left the safety catch on the door so it could not be opened from the outside without a key, and departed. He lurked in the corridor until he heard the elevator going up. Then, like a shadow, he stole down stairs. The lobby was clear, and he scooted across it to the door. Here a quick survey showed a couple of pedestrians about a hundred feet distant, coming toward the building. Hutter waited breathlessly until they had passed, then walked unhurriedly to his car.

Soon he was speeding along a little traveled road which led to open country, a route he had been over before. Drawing aside into the deep shadow of a cluster of trees, he switched off his lights, and rapidly changed clothes, donning once again his usual suit, socks, shoes, hat. The tattered garments, his gun, and also the key to Marlow's office he put into the suit case, adding a sizable rock.

Then, with the suit case on the seat beside him, Hutter went on, soon to stop on a bridge over an irrigation ditch, where the weighted suit case made a dull plop as it hit the deep stream and vanished.

III

RETURNING to the city, Hutter parked half a block from his own residence and slunk along the alley until he reached his own back gate. Silently and swiftly in his own back yard he lifted a certain stone of the walk. The stolen envelopes of currency fitted easily into a cavity under the stone, which settled back exactly into its former place.

Hutter rubbed his tingling hands. Everything was going off like clock work. Paid to plan it all out ahead of time, to rehearse part of it. Still un-

observed as far as his watchful eyes could tell, he turned to his coupé, and drove to a vacant block, in a silent, unlighted area, where he left the car unlocked, the ignition key in the switch—as a thief might be expected to leave a stolen auto for which he had no further use.

It was nine-thirty as Hutter hurried toward the Denver Theater, purposely choosing the less populous thoroughfares. Ah, he was just in time. For the theater audience was pouring out onto the sidewalk, following the conclusion of the first evening show. Edging his way through the happy, jostling throng until he was at the theater's entrance, Hutter turned and mingled with the crowd.

Seeing the head usher standing well out front to one side, Hutter waved to the uniformed lad, and Joe Rogers waved back. "My alibi's perfect!" thought the schemer. Not a chance of *his* getting caught! He'd forgotten nothing. Nothing!

Then, exactly as he had planned, he discovered that his car was missing and called Officer O'Fallon.

O'Fallon came. "Oh, hello, Hutter. Trouble?"

Hutter told the jaunty young officer.

"Car gone? You lock it?"

"Of course!"

"What'd you do with the key?"

"Is that important?" rasped Hutter in the aggrieved manner of a man who has just discovered his car to be stolen. "I put it in my pocket, of course. What'd you think?"

"Thought maybe you might have lost it close here. Kinda hard to steal a car unless the thief has the right key."

"I know that," Hutter almost snorted. Indeed he did. That was just one of the many things he had fig-

ured out in advance of putting over his big steal. "Bot, Great Scott! man, I lost the second key to this car last night. That thief might have—" He paused intentionally.

"Thinking the thug who held you up and got your pocketbook might have swiped your car, huh?" asked O'Fallon. "You was to the movie, Hutter, since I seen you? Couldn't have seen all the show gettin' in as late as you did!"

"I was at the movie, yes. The head usher saw me coming out. . . . Look here, O'Fallon, you were grouching about not getting any thugs and getting a promotion. If you weren't so stupid you'd grab this auto thief and get somewhere."

"I'll report it," replied O'Fallon without rancor. "Come with me while I call headquarters."

They moved along to the nearest call-box. O'Fallon put in his call and had Hutter take the phone to give the chief a description of the missing coupé, as well as describe again the man who had robbed him on the previous night. The young patrolman listened silently, attentively.

"We'll get on the job right away," said the voice on the other end of the wire. "Tell O'Fallon to report to headquarters."

"Hum, I don't see much hope of getting anywhere with this business," said O'Fallon. "Want to go with me, Hutter?"

Hutter did. He turned a sly grin into an expression of aggrieved annoyance. "That thief won't be caught," he stated positively. "Immediately last night I reported being stuck up. But was the thug apprehended? Now my car's been stolen right under your nose, O'Fallon."

The Irish cop flushed, but said

nothing. He hailed a passing patrol car with two policemen in the front seat. "Take us to headquarters, won't you, Dan?"

"Sure. Car stolen on this street, eh? Listen to that radio."

Hutter and O'Fallon got into the sedan, where the radio was saying: "Police, calling all cars. Be on lookout for tan Buick coupé, 1932 model. License, Colorado 1-5794—"

"And so on," grunted Hutter. Then suddenly his interest quickened. The radio voice was continuing:

"Calling all cars. All cars. Robbery at the Marlow Construction Company's office. Over eighteen thousand dollars stolen! Be on lookout for medium-sized man wearing brown suit; a dingy cap, brown or almost black. Was masked. Thug boasted he had stolen Frank C. Hutter's keys and coupé. This is the same coupé which Hutter reported stolen. Redouble efforts to locate this car and man driving it."

The radio began to repeat, and Hutter gasped: "Can that be right? Marlow robbed! The crook using my car! Say, the description of that plug-ugly tallies exactly with that of the bird who robbed me last night."

O'Fallon nodded. "And stole your second ignition key," he remarked. "What you make of it, Dan?"

"Make of it?" returned one of the policemen. "Why, this case has grown up! Here's City Hall."

OTHER cars had pulled up to the curb. From one of these were emerging John C. Marlow, Trent, and a bluecoat. Hutter rushed to his employer.

"Mr. Marlow, I just heard about the robbery. What the dickens? How'd it happen?"

"Come upstairs, please," requested the policeman. "So the chief can hear all the details."

O'Fallon went along. Hutter noticed the youthful patrolman listening attentively to Marlow's account of the hold-up.

"That fellow had a key to our door. That's certain. He boasted he'd robbed Hutter and was making use of his coupé."

"Good Lord, the nerve some of these crooks show!" snorted Hutter.

"Mr. Marlow, describe that thief's clothes as exact as you can," requested O'Fallon.

Marlow did so, went on with his story, concluding with an account of how the watchman had discovered him and Trent just before ten o'clock. Hutter couldn't help a nod of satisfaction. Everything was coming out just as planned. And wasn't it interesting to be listening to an account of a hold-up he himself had staged!

Upon being requested to do so, he told his story all over again; how he'd been robbed by the masked thug on Thursday evening; how he had not thought of it as being serious until he missed his car and remembered the second ignition key had been in his pocketbook, also a key to Marlow's office; how he had gone to the movie this evening, and upon coming out of the theater had missed his car, and then been absolutely dumfounded to hear of the Marlow robbery.

The telephone jangled and the chief answered. "What? Whereabouts? Not wrecked? Okay. Bring it around." He hung up, addressed the room. "Hutter's coupé's been found. Key in the switch. Car not hurt at all. Nothing in it or near it to give any clue of the man who stole it, though."

Hutter found his pulses hammering

with triumph. Everything working neatly! Not a clue! The mysterious case would drag along, one of those things which could not be cleared up. After a reasonable length of time Hutter would leave Denver with his loot. And then for a fling!

"I'll go meet the cop bringing in the machine," said O'Fallon nonchalantly, and went out. If the young Irishman was at all excited, he did not show it. Hutter, Marlow and Trent waited with the Chief of Police, who, from time to time, held brief telephone conversations. After each he merely shrugged, reporting: "No trace yet of the thug in the brown suit."

O'Fallon returned, said briefly: "Your car's out front, Hutter. Fingerprint man has gone over it. Guess you might as well go home if you care to."

Marlow and Trent accompanied Hutter downstairs. O'Fallon held back to speak with his superior for a moment, then he and the chief followed the others. When Hutter saw his tan coupé he cried with just the right amount of relief and joy: "There it is! I was afraid I'd never again see it!"

He seated himself behind the wheel, switched on the lights, felt for the ignition key and suddenly realized it was not there.

"Well, so long, Hutter," O'Fallon was saying. He closed the door. But the coupé did not start.

"My key's gone," said Hutter, annoyed, but by no means worried.

"Eh? Oh, that cop who brought it in must have pocketed the key," returned O'Fallon. "I'll look him up." He vanished, so did Marlow, Trent and the chief.

O'Fallon reappeared. "Can't find Jack Dowst," he announced. "Want to wait for him, Hutter?"

"I'll wait," growled Hutter, recalling vividly how he had told O'Fallon he had pocketed his switch key after parking the car, before we went to the movie. Therefore O'Fallon thought Hutter had a key—and he could not produce it! "I'll wait, because I want that extra key," he went on. "Since it was in the switch when the car was found, it is an absolute certainty that the man who stole my pocketbook also stole this coupé."

"And that same man robbed me!" said Marlow.

"Well, while you're waiting, come upstairs where you'll be more comfortable," suggested O'Fallon.

Hutter complied. Marlow and Trent would have gone with him, had not O'Fallon asked them to go along the corridor to consult one of the detectives. Hutter alone entered the office of the Chief of Police. He sat down, fidgeted restlessly. He was fed up with loitering around headquarters, wanted to get home. That dumb policeman, taking his key. The *only one he had*.

The telephone rang, and after a moment Hutter decided to answer it. A faint voice, yet potent with excitement, came over the wire. "Police Headquarters?"

"Yes," said Hutter.

"Listen! That loot! The Marlow robbery! You've got the serial numbers on them bills? I've located a wad of about the right amount. Found it—" Click! The connection was broken.

"Yes! Yes!" Hutter panted. "Where'd you find it? Who is this?" Silence, save for the buzzing of the wire.

Frantically Hutter jiggled the hook up and down. "Operator!" he shouted.

Finally he got an answer and snapped: "Trace that call! Who made it? Where from?"

"Hang up," answered a sleepy voice, "and I'll see what I can do."

"Make it snappy. Snappy!"

IV

THE man hoped he would not be interrupted now. He wasn't. Yet as the minutes dragged past he felt cold sweat bead his forehead. Eventually the telephone buzzed. Hutter snatched the instrument eagerly. "Yes, yes!"

"Operator speaking. Haven't been able to trace that call."

"Keep trying!" snapped Hutter. Good Lord, had somebody discovered his cache! Impossible! Yet—

Sounded a step outside, and the chief entered, holding out an ignition key. "Here 'tis, Hutter. Dowst apologized. Force of habit, you know? He always takes his own key when he gets out of his car— No need to detain you any longer. Any calls come in while I was gone?"

Hutter hesitated for the briefest part of a second. He was on tenterhooks to get home and see if his stolen money was safe in its hiding place. If it was—and it must be—he was sitting pretty. But if it wasn't—that mysterious call—

"No. No calls," he said, and went quickly out.

O'Fallon was not in sight. Hutter's coupé was where it had been. He got in, inserted his key, and a moment later the car fairly jumped away from the curb.

Straight home drove Hutter, parking in front of his house. A glance to the right and left along the dark street, and he stole swiftly around the dwelling to the back yard. Squatting by one certain stone of the walk, he thrust fingers under it, lifted it clear. His hand dived into the small cavity

now exposed, and felt the envelopes. The money was there! Safe.

Click! A flashlight illuminated a portion of the yard, focused full upon Hutter, upon the displaced stone, the loot in the hole.

The man gasped. Dimly behind the flashlight he saw a policeman, a revolver in his right hand.

"Put 'em round behind your back, Hutter, while I slip on the bracelets," said the calm Irish voice of Officer O'Fallon.

"Uh? Uh? How'd you get here?"

"In the turtle-back of your car. Loot from the Marlow robbery all there? Shouldn't wonder if a stupid cop gets promoted."

"A stupid cop! Stupid cop!" cried Hutter. All his assurance gone, the man was unable to control his voice. "Yes, I called you stupid. But—uh—ah— Look here, man, I was at the movie. I could not possibly have—"

"That alibi ain't so good," said O'Fallon. "I put in some calls. The head usher at the Denver Theater saw you go in all right, but he didn't actually *see you come out*. Joe Rogers further reported how you'd seen the picture last night, Thursday night. That seemed significant. If you'd seen a picture Thursday, why would you go again Friday?"

HUTTER gulped, cleared his throat, thinking fast. Then as his hunted eyes riveted upon the envelopes, he knew that lying would do him no good. O'Fallon had trapped him so neatly there was no hope of escape.

"How'd you tumble?" he blurted. "I figured out every detail—never made a mistake—"

"Didn't you?" returned O'Fallon. Well, what started me to wondering

was because you was so careful to point out how the thug that robbed you on Thursday night got your second ignition key. Coupled to that, your description of the robber was glib, pat. It was too perfect. When men are held up—as you said you were—it's seldom, almost never, they can tell what the thug wore. But you described the bird's coat, pants, cap, shoes, even his mask. You did it three times just alike. Marlow and Trent saw a guy dressed just the same *in the bright light of an office*. But they couldn't give near such a full description."

"Uh," muttered Hutter.

"Then you were so particular to let us know you had an iron-clad alibi that things began to click in my head. And that second key was the thing I worked on."

"Yes?" said Hutter. "Darned if I can see—"

"When you reported your car stolen, you told me you'd locked it and pocketed the key," resumed O'Fallon. "I remembered that, and laid a trap for you. When your car was recovered—as you expected it to be—you got in to drive home and found the key missing from the switch. That key, supposedly, was the second ignition key for your car, and supposedly stolen with your pocketbook. I had it, was watching you and noticed your alarm."

"Uh-huh," mumbled Hutter. "You guessed right then I didn't have any key in my pocket. But you were clever enough to keep still."

"If you had produced a key from your pocket I wouldn't have had a thing on you. My case would have folded up," said O'Fallon. "But you waited for Jack Dowst to return the key which was in the switch when the car was found. I was sure then that you were the Marlow robber. But

there wasn't a bit of proof. We still hadn't a particle of evidence against you. Had to be careful or you'd get suspicious, too."

"I'll say you were careful," growled Hutter. "Never said, 'Why not use the key in your pocket?' The key I'd told you I had. But you piloted me upstairs, left me alone, and—did you put through that phone call?"

"No, but I had it done. The chief and I were watching you with the door open about a quarter inch. Easily arranged when it was all being done on our own switchboard, even to your getting someone you supposed was the operator.

"Pretty darned clever," muttered Hutter. "And I thought I was the clever one."

"Now, where is that second key?" continued O'Fallon. "Your yarn about a thief getting it was a lie."

Abruptly the back door of the house opened, a lane of light streamed out, and a shrill feminine voice demanded: "Frank Hutter, what are you and that policeman doing?"

"At this moment," spoke O'Fallon, "we're looking for the second key to Hutter's coupé."

"Oh, that key!" exclaimed Miss Agatha Hutter. "Frank told me it was in his pocketbook. That he had found it in my black sewing basket. I knew very well I'd put the second key somewhere, but not in the sewing basket. It came to me this evening that I'd hidden it in the hall clock. And *here it is!* However, the important thing now is, whatever under the sun are you two fellows—"

"You'd better tell her, Hutter," interrupted O'Fallon.

"You tell her," gulped Hutter. "Damn that second key!"

Cipher Solvers' Club for May

Continued from Last Week

Look for your name in the following list if you sent us one or more answers to ciphers Nos. 103-32, inclusive, published in our cipher department during May. The monthly total was 6,397 answers, raising our yearly total to 31,591 answers! The asterisks indicate members of our Inner Circle Club, which is composed of solvers who have individual records of 1,000 or more solutions. Keep your answers coming, cryptofans, and watch for the Cipher Solvers' Club for June, to be published in an early issue!

Twenty-four—Arrowhead, Pawtucket, R. I.; A Has-Been, Union Grove, Wis.; Arthur J. Brooks, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada; *H Le Care, Norfolk, Va.; How Carso, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; Eibsirf, Fort Monroe, Va.; Donald Houghtalin, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Isotherm, Ft. Riley, Kans.; Joubert, New York, N. Y.; Charles H. Mentzel, Bronx, N. Y.; Carl H. W. Oestreich, Grants Pass, Oreg.; *M. O. Bronx, N. Y.; D. G. S., Colusa, Calif.; *Nick Spar, Lynchburg, Va.; *F. E. Tinkham, Ripon, Wis.; Tricky, Los Angeles, Calif.

Twenty-three—I'mbak Agen, Bay Shore, N. Y.; *Mrs. W. C. Btrd, San Francisco, Calif.; Thomas Fletcher, Stettler, Alberta, Canada; G. N. G., Key West, Fla.; Mts-Led, San Francisco, Calif.; Nedyah, New York, N. Y.

Twenty-two—H. L. Evans, New York, N. Y.;

Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill.; Mabs, Baltimore, Md.; *Plantagenet, Paterson, N. J.; Paul Presnell, Pilot Mountain, N. C.; Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman, Los Angeles, Calif.

Twenty-one—Denarius, Detroit, Mich.; Farmer Dot, Perry, N. Y.; Rosemary Price, East Elmhurst, L. I., N. Y.; Flo Rogoway, San Diego, Calif.; Ty N. Twist, London, Ontario, Canada; N. Dak. Ump, Gilby, N. D.; Albert B. Woolbridge, San Antonio, Tex.

Twenty—Myrtle Lee Bunn, Washington, D. C.; Eatosin, Marietta, Ohio; Illy, Akron, Ohio; Ralph B. McEwen, New Bedford, Mass.; Wash, Portland, Me.

Nineteen—G. Hirano, Las Animas, Colo.; Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Oreg.; Jerry Phelan, Bronx, N. Y.; David Seltzer, New York, N. Y.

Continued on Page 83

DFW
SHORT
NOVELETTE



Larsen doubled forward as he drew and fired

Copper's Cross

By Norvell W. Page

CHAPTER I

Death on Demand

"BIG, blond and beautiful," a newspaper woman had once dubbed Swede Larsen, and the damnable thing had stuck. Every guy who ever wrote a story about him after that—and they wrote plenty about him in the newspapers—called him the Beautiful Swede. Strangely, they did

it in admiration rather than ridicule. But then it would be pretty hard to be audibly disrespectful toward six-foot-three of muscular Viking flesh. Larsen didn't mind any of it except the Swede part, and that was because he happened to be a Dane. But the rest he translated into his native Danish, and rather liked it. *Vakker*, beautiful. Yes, and fine, glorious. Well, tops. . . .

The Beautiful Swede Could Save His Friend or Do His Duty. And Because They Wouldn't Mix, Larsen Began Tearing Things — and Men — Apart, Indiscriminately

Swede was that all right, the kingpin of the special force of Rangers that the Carson City police had built. Every man of them a one-man army, modeled on the immortal Rangers of Texas. Big men, of course, but more than that, hard, loyal, incorruptible, experts on guns and fists—and rough-house; brown-faced, lean men with quick, glinting eyes.

"Private Larsen, the captain would say, "bring in Blackie Dilling and three or four of his top men."

And Larsen, very serious—not because Dilling was the town's biggest and most deadly crook, but because he was given a duty to perform—would answer, "Yes, Captain. Dead or alive?"

As simply as that, one man did it. The gold badge that was shaped like a star and worn proudly on the breast of their coats was their whole uniform, but they had a reputation like the Canadian Mounties. Everywhere they went men stared respectfully—or scuttled for cover. And women cooed. A fine organization, a thing to be proud of, its gold badge the ultimate accolade of honor . . . until the day politics sneaked in and bounced Captain James Boone Dalton right out of the saddle.

Captain Dalton had to almost fight the Beautiful Swede to keep him from quitting the Rangers, too. Dalton and Larsen had begun this thing together and fought side by side through its toughest battles. It had been Captain Dalton who ran down the Bradley kidnapers and been bundled up by a ten-man gang for torture and death. It had been Swede who crashed through and scattered them in a berserk rage that could not be stopped. And the time Swede had gone to his knees with a bullet in his chest, facing a

roomful of killers, it had been Dalton who stepped in front of him and made a shield with his own body while he shot it out with the gang.

They were like that together, so when Dalton put it up to the Swede that the prestige of the Carson City Rangers depended on his staying, Swede stayed. Dalton took his money and his reputation and opened the *Red Eye Club*. It was being done these days. Heavyweight champions were opening cabarets as were retired home-run kings and public enemies who had made a graceful retreat before the G-men.

That was all right until Carson City went on one of its periodical reform sprees and began shutting down the night-life—and Swede Larsen got a call from Hemingway, the new captain of the Rangers.

You wouldn't have thought Hemingway tough to look at him. He was a sleek man, rosy-cheeked, young-faced beneath a smooth cap of hair that was frosty white. He was a chubby, genial, smiling man. But Swede knew him from way back. There was steel under the padded fat, and there was steel, too, behind the beaming of his blue eyes.

Hemingway nodded, smiling. "Go down and close the Red Eye Club," he said negligently. "Bring Jim Dalton here."

LARSEN'S hand had already started up in an assenting salute. His face had the serious look he always wore when he received orders. But his hand stopped, whipped back to his side. His face suddenly became wooden.

Hemingway leaned forward. "I've got a special reason for sending you, Larsen," he said. "You and Dalton

are friends. There won't be any trouble if you go."

Larsen's mouth shut and angry color began to creep up from his throat. "Assignment refused, sir," he said curtly. He about-faced and had his hand on the doorknob before Hemingway spoke.

"Larsen, the order comes from Van Houtten," Hemingway's voice was oleaginous. "I know that the Rangers have a right to refuse assignments because of the danger of their type of work. Yet it seems to me they make a point of never refusing. Am I wrong?"

Larsen's face was washed with red. Hemingway wasn't a Ranger. He had been captain of detectives before this new régime of politics. He had brought with him to this new post the acerbity which tinged the pride which all the uniform men felt in the picked squad of Rangers. Furthermore, Hemingway had had the knife in Larsen from the first. He knew the Rangers thought the captaincy should have gone to Larsen. He would like, very much, to blacken Larsen's name, to kick him off the force. His refusal of an assignment would be broadcast and Hemingway wouldn't explain to the gossips what the assignment had been.

"I wish you'd take this assignment, Larsen," Hemingway urged, still smiling, his eyelids heavy.

Larsen's jaw began to grow stubborn. To hell with it. Let Hemingway say what he liked. His record . . . But it wasn't his record. It was the whole squad's, all the Rangers. *A Ranger had refused an assignment.* Their prestige would suffer, and if once that broke down . . . But, damn it, he couldn't take Dalton! He could feel the muscles swelling in his shoul-

ders. He wanted to strike out, to hit someone, any one.

"No!" he said thickly.

He opened the door and stepped back respectfully as the Commissioner came in. William Van Houtten was small, wiry. His movements were abrupt, as if wires jerked his limbs. He bobbed his head to Larsen's salute.

"Dalton?" he hurled at Hemingway. "Good. Good. Just the man for the job. But alive, Larsen. Bring Dalton in alive." His grin flashed and was gone. "Don't often bring them in alive, eh, Larsen?"

Hemingway said sorrowfully: "Larsen has refused the assignment."

Van Houtten reached up and thumped Larsen on the chest. "Don't be an ass, Larsen. Dalton would toss anybody but you out on an ear. Start hell of a row. Listen, Larsen . . . You do it. See?"

Larsen stared over the head of the Commissioner and his jaw grew more stubborn. Van Houtten thumped him again and his voice rose.

"Bring in Dalton or you're through. See?" He jerked out of the office.

Swede Larsen faced Hemingway again. He couldn't think clearly for the anger that boiled in his brain, but he was remembering. Dalton had warned him that the new mayor and his appointees, of whom Houtten was one, would try to break the spirit of the Rangers. For among the Rangers, there was no such thing as "going easy" on the boys of the political power transiently in office. And in Carson City, the sinister alliance of crime and politics had not died with prohibition. The Rangers were a potent threat to both. If Larsen were fired from the force for refusing an assignment . . .

Larsen's lips clipped out the words, "I'll bring in Dalton!"

CHAPTER II

When Friends Meet

SWEDE LARSEN had a habit of stopping for a drink at Angelo's whenever he left headquarters and he went there now, not because he needed a drink before he faced the job ahead, but because he was preoccupied and habit took control. He went in blindly, not answering the hails from all sides, the golden star on his breast catching the light gleams richly. He elbowed the bar and the barkeep set *brändeivin* before him without a word. Larsen had downed two shots when the girl took hold of his arm.

"Swede," she cried. "Swede, you've got to help me!"

Larsen turned his big blond head slowly. The liquor was burning through his veins and impatience rose in him. He had explained to so many people, so many times. "I am no *svensk*, no Swede. I am from *Danmark*, and . . ."

He stopped then, looking into eyes that were as blue as his own—pleading eyes.

"Larsen you've got to help me!"

Larsen rolled his thick shoulders. "Later. Now, I have work." He turned away.

The girl tagged along and Larsen came belly-to-belly with a man he knew. A man almost as big as Larsen, big in the shoulders and in the paunch. He held up his hand. "Wait now, Swede. . . ."

It was not often that this Swede business really got under Larsen's skin, but tonight . . . The *brändeivin*, the burning wine, was in his veins. He felt blood in his throat. His head

pulled down an inch. "Quinn," he said thickly, "I am no . . ."

Quinn lifted both hands. "Wait, Swede, it's about Dalton!"

Larsen swayed back, but there was a trembling in his limbs. Anger in him was a mighty force. To check it now . . . The adrenalin made his nerves quiver. He couldn't stand still. He swung toward a booth against the wall, the gill still beside him, and Quinn dropped into an opposite seat. Larsen looked at Quinn, Rocks Quinn, one of the crooks the police knew about but couldn't touch. There was never anything on him, and he had "protection."

"You," said Larsen, and his mouth corners pulled down. "What have you to do with Dalton?"

Quinn was not a soft man, but his voice was pleasant under that scorn. "I have a tip," he said, "that Dalton's place is going to be closed down. I thought maybe you could do something to prevent that."

"You are Dalton's friend!" A deep laughter rumbled in Larsen's chest.

"Oh, please," the girl whispered. She took hold of Larsen's right arm and he looked down at the hand. His muscles swelled at her touch and there was no reason for it. No reason at all. He looked into her eyes that were as blue as his own, and now he saw other things about her, how golden her hair was, how white her skin.

"You are Norwegian," he said.

"I'm in Mr. Dalton's floor show," she told him rapidly, "and I asked Mr. Quinn for help. I know he has—influence."

The sardonic curve of Larsen's lips increased. "He should then use his influence!" He got to his feet and he was imprisoned by the booth and the two about him. He felt trapped in that small space. He lifted the table,

walked out and set the table back in place again. He looked at Quinn, at the girl a little longer. He laughed a single deep note. Swede Larsen stalked out of the bar room.

Outside the door, he did not hesitate, but turned right and stretched out his long thick legs. It was a dozen blocks to Dalton's cabaret. Larsen preferred to walk it. His forehead was knotted in a frown. The girl should beg him to help Jim! He stopped thinking. The thing he had to do, he must do. For the Rangers. . . .

The doorman of the Red Eye hailed him joyously and Larsen moved his head an inch in acknowledgment. Inside the door, he looked up into the great red eye of neon lights at the head of the steps. It winked at him three times solemnly while he made his way up. He went directly to Dalton's office and it was empty except for a girl who was Dalton's secretary.

"I want Jim," he told her.

She gazed up into his eyes. "Oh, yes, Mr. Larsen," she breathed.

Larsen snorted through his nose and went to the window. He looked out on the garden behind the Red Eye. It was festooned with lanterns that kept winking suggestively. Larsen's shoulders swelled with muscle. He ground out a curse and wheeled from the window. It wasn't Dalton who had come in. It was the same blond girl who had been with Quinn at the bar room. She came towards Larsen, running. She put her hands on his chest.

"You can't do this," she said rapidly. "You can't take Mr. Dalton in."

He stared into her face. Hers was not a rosebud mouth, not a child's. . . . It was wide, full-lipped, a woman's mouth. . . . He reflected that Quinn undoubtedly had influence since he had learned so quickly that Larsen had

been assigned to close Dalton's place. He shook his head. His stubborn lips smiled at the girl.

"What's your name?" he asked softly. "It should be Freya, for you are lovely. A goddess of love."

The girl flushed and stepped back, put her hands behind her. "Helga," she stammered. "Helga Eiricksdatter . . . I mean Helga Ericson."

Larsen laughed. Dalton opened the door and came in with a small smile on his thin, hard-boned face. Dalton didn't smile much, but he always greeted Larsen that way. He came forward with his hand thrust out, a man heavy in body, but tall and clean. Larsen forgot the girl. He shook his head at the outstretched hand.

"No, Jim," he said, almost sullenly. "I come not in friendship, but in duty. I must close your place, take you to headquarters."

DALTON'S hand stayed out for a moment. The smile dwindled to his mouth corners, pinched out there. He asked "What?"

Larsen didn't repeat and Dalton shook his head. "You're serious, Lars?"

Larsen nodded and Helga came close to him again. "You can't do this, Lars," she whispered.

Over her head, the eyes of the two men met and the mouth of Jim Dalton compressed.

"Nothing doing, Larsen," he said curtly. "This is a put-up job. I'm running this place straight and clean and there's no reason to close it. There are plenty of crooked places in town, and . . . say, Van Houtten is behind this! He's got a piece of a lot of crooked places in this town, gyp places, and he's afraid me being straight will ruin him. Look here, Lars. . . ."

"You can prove that maybe when it comes in court," Larsen said doubtfully. "Jim, close your place."

Dalton said, deliberately, "Go to hell!"

Helga sobbed. "Oh, can't you see, this is what Van Houtten is trying to do! He's crooked and he knows he can't beat the two of you together. You're dangerous to him and to the politicians. If he can destroy you, the Rangers will fall to pieces. So he fixed it up so you two would quarrel!"

Larsen felt Helga's hands on his chest. He could feel each separate finger, and one of them was over his heart. It throbbled five times heavily while he looked into Dalton's eyes.

"Orders, Jim," he said thickly. "I refused the assignment, but . . ." Hell, he couldn't talk. Jim should understand. It was duty. The words choked him. "Close up, Jim!" His voice rang out hard and challenging.

Helga beat on Larsen's chest. She shouted at him. She ran to Dalton, pleading, and neither man heeded her. They just kept staring into each other's eyes. They couldn't talk. They weren't talking men. Friends, but hard men.

Dalton was smiling again and this was a smile Larsen knew. It had been on Dalton's face that time Dalton had stepped in front of him to take the bullets, to shoot it out with the men who had dropped him. . . .

Dalton whispered, "Go to hell!"

Helga ran whimpering to the door. "Oh, somebody stop them, stop them . . .!"

Out of the tail of his eye, Larsen watched her go. He was so aware of her! . . . In front of him was Dalton's hard grin. He wouldn't yield. He wouldn't! . . . Larsen realized that he would have to hammer Dalton into in-

sensibility if he were to take him captive, hammer him with his fists. His friend. . . . To hell with it! No job was worth that. The whole damned Rangers wasn't worth it. He . . .

The door opened and the girl let out a choked scream, pitched floorward. Larsen, out of the corners of his eyes, glimpsed that—and the reason. There was a man in the doorway with a gun in his fist and he had slapped Helga down. Just a flash in the edge of his vision, all that, and Larsen looking straight at Dalton all the while. He saw Dalton's hand dart toward his belt, and he knew that movement. Dalton carried his gun there, tucked into his waistband on the left-hand side, butt foremost. His draw was greased lightning. Dalton's eyes were glaring into his own. . . .

A frame-up, a trap! Dalton had framed him with that hood in the hallway ready to burn him down! Dalton had known that the close-down order was coming. The girl had known, must have told. . . . A great shout rose in Larsen's throat, his hand clawed toward his gun. He couldn't avoid the bullets, but by—

CHAPTER III

Cop Killer

LARSEN'S thoughts of treachery were a flash across the screen of his brain. His hand moved with the same speed, darting across his body to the gun he carried as Dalton did, thrust into his belt. Dalton had taught him, trained him in that draw, and now they were matching their speed against death, against murder. . . . But first that killer in the doorway!

Larsen doubled forward as he drew and fired across his body at the door-

way. He shot by pointing. There wasn't time to turn his head, not with Dalton ready. . . . A shot across his body, whip the gun about and down on Dalton. . . . The forward lunge of his body had pulled him out of the line of the ambusher's gun, his muzzle was pointed toward Dalton—and he couldn't shoot. He couldn't! Even now that he knew his friend had rigged a murder trap to destroy him, he couldn't shoot.

With a curse, he pulled his gun back to strike and heard the deafening crash of Dalton's gun. An instant later, he drove against Dalton, slapped with the barrel of his revolver, and the two men hit the floor together. The windows rattled with the jar of their fall and a picture crashed from the wall, but Dalton had taken most of the impact. Larsen rolled free, came up on his knees with his gun pointed . . . There was nothing to shoot. The doorway was empty!

Instantly Larsen was on his feet, racing across the room. In the hall he stopped dead. The lifeless body of the gunman lay against the opposite wall, where heavy lead had hurled him. The bullet had drilled through the heart and Larsen cursed under his breath in surprise. That was damned accurate for a snapshot. Damned good! The girl was on the floor, too, rolled over on her back with her arms thrown up like a baby asleep. Larsen cursed again and felt the heat of his anger creep over his body. So pretty. Just like a baby. Footsteps were pounding toward him down the hall, but he ignored them. He kept on cursing and the heat washed over his face and concentrated in his brain.

Rocks Quinn hurried up, his heavy brows pulled down in a scowl. He dropped on his knees beside the dead

man and flipped back his coat to feel for the heart. A badge glittered there. . . .

"Hey!" Quinn shouted. "The man's a cop. Dalton . . . Golly, Dalton killed a cop!"

Larsen stared at Quinn, swaying a little. His eyes were wide and he took a slow step forward. Quinn's mouth flew open. He scrambled to his feet and ran a few steps down the hall. Larsen walked after him, gun at his hip. As he passed a doorway, two men jumped out and tried to slug him with blackjacks. One blow landed on Larsen's arm and his mouth came open in a shout that turned into a roar. He forgot his gun. He seized the man who had hit him by his right arm and jerked him off his feet. Using his great weight, Larsen pivoted on his heel, whirled the man once in a complete circle and let him fly, legs-foremost, against his companion. There was a mingled scream, then silence. Without a second look Larsen stalked along the hall. Men shouted and ran before him. In the arched entrance of the dining hall, he stopped.

On a platform across the room, a jazz band poured out hot stuff. Larsen fired a shot into the ceiling and the music ended on a discord.

"This place is closed by order of the police," Larsen said, and felt the harshness of his own voice. "You will all leave at once."

Five minutes later, the hall was a cluttered, empty mess. Larsen had stood there all that time, gun shoved back into his belt. The heat receded slowly from his brain and he began to think again. He hoped he hadn't killed either of those two thugs who jumped on him. They had only used blackjacks. He fingered his left arm where one of the blows had landed. It hurt.

He walked across the dining hall to the outer entrance and the doorman was standing at the foot of the steps.

"Lock the door, John," Larsen said. "Keep it locked."

He turned on his heel and went back to Dalton's office. He saw the two thugs lay where they had fallen, but they breathed. He didn't know them. Rocks Quinn had revived Helga—had her in a chair in the office. Dalton was still sprawled where Larsen's charge had hurled him. Methodically, Larsen went about restoring Dalton to consciousness. He left off once to go out in the hall and stare down at the face of the dead man. He stooped and stared at the badge Quinn had discovered. Carson City all right, X-517. That X meant he was a member of the undercover squad, and as such, wouldn't be known to Larsen, yet to his trained eye the face was familiar. Larsen went back to Dalton and squatted on his heels beside him.

"Want me to call the wagon, Larsen?" Quinn asked. "The dirty cop killer!"

Larsen stared up at Quinn steadily. "I killed the man in the hall," he said. "Thought he was trying to gun me."

HE looked back at Dalton, who was beginning to stir. This was going to be pretty serious for Larsen, killing a fellow officer. But, damn it, the man's gun had been pointed at him! What a fool he had been to think that Dalton would plant a murder trap like that—Jim Dalton, his friend. His lips tightened grimly. . . .

Quinn laughed. "That's just what anybody would expect you to do, Larsen," he said, "take the blame that way. You're a white guy. But it won't do. That was Dalton's forty-

five that laid him out, if I know anything about guns. You use a thirty-eight. . . ."

Larsen sprang furiously to his feet. He shouted: "I killed him! I did it!" He said it three times, beating his chest, walking toward Quinn. Larsen shook both his fists. "I did it!"

Dalton's voice, coming suddenly behind him, wasn't quite steady. "Don't be a fool, Lars. You didn't come within a foot of him. You were snapping and I took my time. I put a pill right through his heart!"

Larsen faced him abruptly, but understanding came slowly. Dalton said he had killed the X-man and Larsen was realizing there couldn't be any doubt about it. Dalton knew where the bullet had hit, and the body lay out there in the hall where he couldn't see it. So Dalton had shot him. Dalton . . . Jim?"

"Why?" Larsen whispered. "Why, Jim?"

Dalton pushed himself up from the floor, gripped his head, swayed for a moment. But he looked Larsen in the eye. "He was shooting at you, punk."

Quinn strode forward angrily. "Listen, if you two think you can frame this between you! . . . Listen, why would a cop try to plug Larsen?"

Dalton cried hoarsely, "A cop! That gunnie a cop!"

Larsen drew in a slow, deep breath. "He's got an X badge, Jim. Looks like headquarters didn't trust me to carry through and sent him to check up." He sucked in another. "And they're right! I won't carry through!" He caught the golden star on his coat and tore the pin through the cloth. Before he could hurl it to the floor, Dalton's fist closed over his.

"Don't, Lars," he said swiftly.

"To hell with it!"

"Don't, Lars!" Dalton repeated. "Listen, if you're doing it to help me, you can do a lot more on the force than off."

Quinn laughed harshly. "Golly, I'm going to get out of here before you two frame me with the murder!" He strode to the door. "A swell cop you are, Larsen! Duty doesn't mean a damned thing to you. . . ."

Helga pushed in between Larsen and Dalton. "Did you know, Mr. Dalton, that this punk closed the place while you were out cold? He's trying to pull a phony on you now so that you'll take the rap for him. Don't do it, Mr. Dalton. You know he killed that man. . . ."

Dalton stared over Helga's head into Larsen's eyes and read there the truth of what the girl had said. His lips tightened. "You sneaking dog!" he bit out. "You did behind my back what you couldn't ever have done otherwise! And I thought you were a friend!" He whipped back his hand and hurled the star badge, which had come loose in his hand, into Larsen's face. It cut his cheek, clung there for a minute and dropped to the floor. Larsen did not flinch, but presently he stooped and picked up the pin. He fastened it back in his coat.

"All right, Jim," Larsen said woodenly. "I'm taking you to headquarters . . . Right now."

CHAPTER IV

A Challenge

THROUGH a long minute, the eyes of the two men held unswervingly, then Dalton laughed. It was a single, sardonic snort. He threw back his head and laughed until Larsen's ears ached with it. Dalton held out his arms.

"Handcuffs, please, officer," he panted.

Larsen stared at him a moment longer, then he methodically unhooked handcuffs from his belt and clicked them shut about the wrists of his friend. His lips were pressed in upon themselves. There was a heavy thudding in his breast that was his heart. Dalton had killed a man to save Larsen's life, and he must take him in for it. But that wasn't possible, was it, that the X-man had tried to kill a brother officer?

Helga jeered at him. Her face was flushed and she was terribly angry. It wasn't because she was in love with Dalton. Larsen was pretty sure of that. She didn't pay any attention to Dalton. She just called Swede names; she slapped his face. He smiled at her and led Dalton out of the door, through the long halls to the street. He got a taxi and left Helga behind, shouting at him from the curb. He turned slowly to Dalton.

"Helga is not . . . is not your *kjæreste*, your loved one?" he said.

Dalton stared at him, laughed shortly. "If you're doing this to get rid of me on account of her . . ."

Larsen smiled a little. "Now, Jim, you know me better than that. The captain told me I should bring you in. I bring you in, that is all. I thank you for saving my life, Jim. That was a fine shot."

Neither man spoke after that. Larsen was frowning again. It was funny. He could not doubt the X-man had pointed a gun at him, had knocked down Helga. . . . He felt the heat rush to his brain. It was good that he had been killed, this man who had hit Helga. . . . At headquarters, Larsen took Dalton before the sergeant and swore out a short affidavit.

"Operating a cabaret contrary to ordinance," he said. "James Dalton, proprietor of the Red Eye club. I'm taking the prisoner to the captain and will be responsible."

The sergeant stared curiously at these two who were such famous friends. "That's all right," he said. Newspaper men whooped and raced for the telephone. News all right. One of them lingered.

"Office phoned me a man had been killed at the Red Eye," he said. "You know anything about it?"

"Very little," Larsen told him seriously. "I never saw him before. He was shot through the heart." He led Dalton up the broad wooden steps to the captain's office on the second floor and felt Dalton eye him curiously.

"What the hell did you use the cabaret charge for?" Dalton demanded. "You might as well charge me with the murder right now. You know Quinn . . . Hell, ballistics will show . . ."

Larsen went directly to Hemingway's office and was admitted. Hemingway rose behind his desk, smiling. "Sorry about this, Dalton," he said smoothly. "But orders are orders."

Larsen stood at attention before Hemingway and made a full and complete report. Hemingway had sunk back into his chair when it was finished. His lips tightened. "I'll see that you burn for that, Dalton," he said sharply, "if it's the last thing I do! Killing an undercover man!"

Larsen interrupted, "Sir, I think I should tell you before you begin action that the undercover man shot at me, and that Dalton shot to save my life. He had no way of telling he was an X-man. I will testify like that when he's tried."

Hemingway exploded, "Nonsense!

An undercover man shoot at you! That's ridiculous. Let me tell you, Larsen, it will do you no good to lie for your friend. I won't have it. I . . . Larsen!"

Larsen was bending over the desk, his blue eyes wide. "You take that back, Captain. I do not lie!"

Hemingway said hurriedly. "No, no, of course not. But you are mistaken. Why should a fellow officer shoot at you?"

Larsen did not answer. He turned to Dalton. "I take the prisoner to a cell now, Captain."

Hemingway made no answer and in the hallway to the jail section, Dalton spoke hesitantly. "That's fine of you, Lars, but it won't do any good. Nobody will believe you or me either. . . . I'll swear that gunnie was shooting at you. I didn't know he was an X-man and I never hired him."

Larsen said, after him: "You didn't hire him, Jim? But you hired all the X-men while you were captain, and told them what to do, didn't you?"

Dalton's eyes narrowed. "Yes, I told them what to do."

LARSEN said, very carefully, "I am sure I have seen that man before somewhere, this X-517." When Dalton had been locked up, he went back to Hemingway's office and entered without knocking. The captain was lifting a drink to his lips. He set it down hard and liquor slopped on the desk.

"What you you mean, coming in without permission?" he shouted.

Larsen leaned over the desk. "I want to ask you something, Captain," he said. "Why did you put an X-man on this? Why did he cover me at Dalton's?"

"What? What do you mean?"

Larsen nodded. "You have charge of the X-men. Why did you . . .?"

"No!" Hemingway cried sharply. "I don't have anything to do with the X-men! The commissioner took that over himself. Van Houtten has charge of them, since I came into office."

Larsen straightened, gaze still holding Hemingway's. The captain's eyes seemed sunken a little. Larsen nodded, "I am sorry I came into your office without permission." He saluted, walked out. Downstairs, he shouldered his way through the newspaper men who were waiting for him with questions about the killing of X-517. His name, they said, was Riker and the name didn't mean anything to Larsen. He kept his lips shut and went across the street to the saloon. He stood at the bar and stared at his blond, wide-shouldered reflection in the mirror. Very deliberately, he put sentences of thought together.

Helga had said that Van Houtten wanted Dalton and himself out of the way, wanted the Rangers smashed. Van Houtten had an interest in a lot of cabarets and was closing down rivals. Van Houtten, Hemingway said, had charge of the Undercover men. And a new undercover man, hired since Dalton left office, had tried to kill him, Larsen.

That seemed crazy, yet if the undercover man did not intend that, why had he slapped down Helga? And why had Dalton shot him? Larsen began to feel a warmth in him that was not from the *brändeivin* he had downed. He cursed deep in his chest. It added up, it made sense. The undercover man *had* tried to kill him, and Dalton had saved his life . . . and put his own neck into the noose. It was a sweet frame-up, a beautiful frame-up. If the undercover man had

killed Larsen, Dalton would have been blamed. Maybe Dalton would have killed the undercover man and then he would have been up for the murder of two policemen, and all Van Houtten had to do was . . .

Larsen's eyes narrowed abruptly. He was going pretty fast, wasn't he? Quinn had said that Van Houtten had a part of the night clubs around town, but Quinn was supposed to own a big part of them himself. Helga had been repeating what Quinn had told her probably, and . . . How did he know that Hemingway had told the truth? Maybe Hemingway was still in charge of the X-men, and had lied! If that were true, then Quinn had a hand in the frame-up, too. Damn it, either way, Quinn had a hand in it. He had shouted, as he bent over the dead X-man, that Dalton had killed him, and he had had no way of knowing that, no way at all. . . .

Larsen laughed sharply. He crashed a big fist down on the bar and his bottle jumped. And he remembered now where he had seen the X-man, Riker. The last time Quinn had been questioned on a racket charge, Riker had been his bodyguard. Now that same man seemed to be an undercover policeman. . . . Larsen, his lips tight, poured himself another brimming glass. He lifted it to his reflection in the glass.

"Jim!" he said, and tossed it off.

Beside him, Helga's voice said, "Something is rotten in Denmark. I think I know who it is."

Larsen turned to her slowly. He had to make himself do it slowly. "Lille Helga" . . . He said it softly and stood looking at her. She was talking, but he couldn't hear the words. He smiled. "Do you love Jim Dalton, then?" he asked deeply.

Helga stared at him, mouth open a little. She shook her head vehemently. "He was kind to me, gave me a job when I was down and out. He is a fine man."

Larsen nodded cheerfully. "You are a fool, Helga," he said. "This night, I will . . ." he laughed. "Tomorrow I shall be a famous one, I. For I shall put a famous one in prison—or in hell!"

CHAPTER V

—or in Hell!

THESE were tired lines about her mouth, but Helga was a bright fire in the somber, almost empty bar room. Her blue eyes darkened with anger as she stared up in Larsen's big face. Before she could begin the tirade he could see impending, he stalked off. No woman could stand that, Larsen thought. She would follow. At the phone booth in the row against the back of the room, he paused to glance over his shoulder. Helga had followed all right, was only a dozen feet away. He faced her.

"You cannot follow me," he told her shortly. "I have work to do."

Helga lifted her firm chin.

"Go away," Larsen insisted. He waited until she had gone a reluctant half dozen feet away, then he entered the booth and, with a final glance over his shoulder, drew the door shut. Thereafter, he appeared to become engrossed in dialing a number. The glass sides of the booth furnished an excellent mirror and he saw Helga move out of his line of vision. He waited until he heard her enter the booth next to his, then he deposited a coin and actually dialed a number—the number of Captain Hemingway.

"Larsen, Captain Hemingway," he

said excitedly. "Listen, I've got the break in this whole business. Who killed the X-man. Everything. I've got enough on Quinn to hang him, and I'm going over now for a showdown. I would like you to be there, Captain. I think we can even make him tell where he gets protection. Yes . . ."

That much he poured into Hemingway's ear, then he depressed the hook that disconnected the call and continued to talk.

"That's big news, Captain," he said. "You say that the man who was killed wasn't really an undercover man at all? Just a hood Quinn has hired before to do his dirty work, eh? Man, you're certainly putting him on the spot! We've got enough stuff to put Quinn and Dalton behind the bars for life . . ."

"Sure, I know me and Dalton used to be friends. But this is business. Yeah, I'll go right over to Quinn's apartment fast. See you there, Captain."

Larsen hung up the receiver, grinning widely, then he opened the door of the booth a slit and listened. From the next booth, he could hear Helga's low, excited voice as she talked rapidly over the telephone. Maybe he was crazy, eh? He closed the door tightly and made another call. It got Commissioner Van Houtten out of bed, but that was a small matter. . . .

"Mr. Commissioner, this is Larsen," he said. "Yes, one of the Rangers. You remember you sent me to arrest Dalton and close his place . . ." He told all that had happened, the shooting of the undercover man. "I got something makes me think that Rocks Quinn had a big hand in it, Mr. Commissioner. I'm on my way over there now to blow this case wide open, but I'll need the

private file of officer X-517, his prints and photographs, you know. I know Hemingway has the files, but he isn't at his office and I can't locate him. Why don't you get the file and come on over to Quinn's apartment? Yes, sir, I'm going to blow this case wide open, right now. Good night. See you there."

He strode out of the booth without a glance at the one in which the girl hid, his brows drawn in a tight frown. Hemingway had lied then in denying he directed the X-men! Or else Van Houtten had lied to him a moment ago when he said Hemingway had charge. Larsen laughed. He would soon know. But if he were wrong in his deductions, he was as good as fired off the Rangers right now. He couldn't be wrong. He couldn't be. . . . Still, if he were, Dalton would die in the electric chair!

But he was right. Quinn was certainly involved and, with him, either Van Houtten or Hemingway. Quinn couldn't get away with things as he did without police protection. Hemingway, if he were Quinn's ally, would get in touch with Quinn right away. If he thought that Larsen actually could blow the whole thing open, he would want to make sure that Quinn wasn't in a position to confess. That meant killing either Quinn or Larsen. The same applied to Van Houtten.

In a dark doorway, a half dozen doors from the saloon, Larsen drew his revolver and checked it, filled the sixth chamber. *That meant killing either Quinn or Larsen.*

The odds were that they would gun for Larsen. Larsen hoped they would. Violently, he hoped they would. He kept the revolver in his hand, tucked under his coat, as he stretched his long legs out toward Quinn's apartment.

Walking was better than a taxi. He didn't want to get there too early, and walking, he could keep closer to cover. . . .

THE blocks reeled past under Larsen's feet. Twice he thought he detected a trailing taxi, but each time the cab disappeared. He didn't worry about it. The men who were after him wanted him murdered, not trailed. He reached Quinn's apartment house without interference. The desk man was almost as burly as Larsen as he stood in front of him, arms crooked a little in belligerence, head pulled down.

"Nobody goes in without he gives his name," the man said surlily.

"That's all right," Larsen nodded. He flicked his gold star with his left hand. "I'm Lars Larsen, here to see Rocks Quinn. I may arrest him. Want to phone that up?"

The man smiled slowly, "Sure. Sure, I'll phone that up."

He turned away, and Larsen's hand flashed to the man's shoulder, whirled him about to meet the up-swing of a knotted fist. The man's head wrenched back on his shoulders and he slumped into Larsen's arms. Larsen carried him with effortless ease and laid him behind his desk.

The elevator was automatic and Larsen grumbled under his breath as it loafed upward. There was a warmth over his whole body that he knew and liked. He blew happily on his knuckles, then got his gun in his fist again. . . . The guns started blasting up above when he was halfway to the tenth floor, where Quinn had rooms. Was he too late? When the girl relayed to Quinn what she had overheard Larsen say, Quinn would recognize instantly that he had been

double-crossed either by Hemingway or Van Houtten, whichever was his ally. Larsen had hoped to precipitate a quarrel among them which he could overhear, find out enough to free Dalton. If the quarrel had begun with shooting . . .

Larsen strode up to the door of the slowly moving elevator, stepped back again. He threw a quick glance about him and clutched his revolver. The elevator kept drifting upward at the same inexorable pace, Larsen cursed. He got his left hand on the handle of the inner grating of the elevator and waited with his shoulders tense. Upstairs, the guns had stopped. Five sharp explosions, then silence. Was he too late, or had he just stumbled on something, and . . .

The elevator sighed to a stop and Larsen wrenched back the grating, kicked open the outer door . . . and there was nothing. Nothing at all. The hall was empty. Behind him, the elevator door clicked shut and Larsen started, cursed under his breath. He sniffed and slowly a smile spread over his lips. He hadn't been wrong then. The shooting was here or else his nose didn't know the acrid reek of cordite! He pulled his big head down a little and went toward Quinn's door on his toes. Just by the sill, there was a single dark brown smear! . . . One thing sure, he'd be alone in this. No tenants in Quinn's building would report gun shots. Not if they were smart. Well, that was all right, too. The Rangers had always been able to work alone.

Larsen thoughtfully slid a pin out of his coat lapel and jammed it in the bell button. Inside the apartment, it set up a continuous, maddening clamor. Larsen stood to one side of the door and waited, hand out of sight under his

coat, gripping his revolver. It was Quinn who opened the door. He was smiling genially.

"Up to your little tricks, eh, Larsen?" he said pleasantly. "You ought not to ring people's bells like that at night."

Larsen grinned. "That's right." He stepped up close and dug the muzzle of his revolver into Quinn's belly. "Let's go inside, Quinn. Sorry you have to walk backwards."

Quinn's smile did not fade, but it became wolfish. "Sure," he said softly. "Sure, let's go inside and talk this over, whatever it is. Van Houtten called me up and said that you had some silly idea . . ."

Larsen's lips drew tight and cold against his teeth. So Van Houtten was Quinn's ally? That made it bad. Anything he did tonight would be wrong. If he killed Quinn . . . There was nobody in sight when Larsen walked into Quinn's living room. Two seconds later, there were four men with guns on him. One rose from behind a davenport, one from a closet and one in the kitchen doorway. The fourth man was seated in a deep, wing chair that had hidden him.

"Now," said Quinn, "let's talk this over. What is it you've got against me?"

Larsen looked slowly at the four men and their guns. He was pretty close to the one in the chair. He turned his back on him. Larsen's eyes were wide and there were fires in their blue depths. Color began to creep up into his face and it made Quinn wary. He drew a gun deliberately.

"Don't try any of your berserk stuff on me, Swede," he said heatedly, "or I'll pump you full of lead."

Larsen put a smile on his lips. It showed his teeth almost in a snarl.

"Sure, I'll tell you what I've got against you. The man I killed in Dalton's place isn't an undercover cop in spite of his X badge. He's a gunnie you've used before this for dirty jobs like shooting me in the back. He tried to do that in Dalton's office, but he was too slow."

"Go on, Larsen," Quinn insisted softly.

"Your buddy who gave you the badge to pin on the gunnie has gone back on you, Quinn," Larsen went on. "He admitted before witnesses that the gunnie wasn't an X-man. He's on his way here now to cross you and help me show you up." He remembered the shooting, but this brag would force Quinn's hand. If he had gunned out his ally . . .

CHAPTER VI

Death Pays Off

THE kitchen door battled open and a fifth man thrust Hemingway into the room. Blood sogged Hemingway's left trouser leg and his face contorted with pain at every step.

"That's a lie," he said hoarsely. "That's a lie, Larsen. I wouldn't go back on Quinn . . ." His face turned white as he saw the flame leap in Larsen's eyes and realized he had confessed their partnership in crime. He laughed. "That's okay. You won't live to leave here, Larsen, and . . ."

Quinn was looking at Hemingway and only two of the men that Larsen could see had guns on him. Larsen acted without a moment of warning. He hurled himself violently backward on the man who sat in the chair. There was a chance the gun would go off in his back, of course, but he had to take it. His shoulders hit against the man's face and the gun blasted, but Larsen

didn't feel any slug. The chair pitched over backward and spilled the two men to the floor. Larsen let his legs come up over his head and landed on his knees, his gun ready in his fist. The man on whom he had thrown himself didn't stir.

For a split-second, the whole room stood in tableau, heads wrenched toward the scene of the commotion. Hemingway's head was tossed high, his neck terribly strained, his hands rising toward his chest, and Larsen saw that the bullet from the gun of the hood he had crushed under his heavy body had bored Hemingway under the breastbone. He saw that and he laughed. The sound was deep and guttural, strangely menacing. There was one of Quinn's killers in a position to shoot behind the chair which was Larsen's shield. That was the gunnie who stood behind the davenport. Larsen bent his wrist and squeezed the trigger. The bullet caught the man just on the point of the jaw and his teeth popped shut, then sagged apart as he stiffened up. Blood spurted from his mouth and he pitched forward over the back of the davenport like a boy propped up for parental reprimand with a razor strop. He was already quite dead.

Larsen laughed again, and lead poured at him. There were three more men, one there in the closet doorway, one behind the toppling Hemingway, and Quinn. The two hoods were pegging bullets around the edge of the overstuffed chair, but Quinn was smarter. He had a powerful Lüger and he shot right through the stuffing. One of the slugs glanced off wire and ploughed through Larsen's thigh, whirled him off-balance against the wall. The hood in the closet let out a yelp and sprang toward him,

throwing down on him with his automatic.

Pitching backward, Larsen still managed to squeeze off another shot. The man kept coming, but the eager glee on his face became mild surprise. His mouth twisted with pain and his left foot swung wildly to the side, out of stride. He tried to pull it down and couldn't. He hit the floor on his right shoulder, rolled over completely and lay on his back, with his legs twisted. It was nice shooting, Larsen thought detachedly, but Quinn had lifted his Luger deliberately for a sight on him and the other crazy fool was emptying his automatic in a swift drumroll of death.

Larsen jerked his revolver about . . . and the man under his legs, the man he had crushed unconscious with his body, reared up and grabbed his wrist. Quinn's shot came in that split-second. It missed Larsen's heart, because the hold on his wrist had jerked him aside, but it took him just under the collar bone on the right-hand side, smashed out through his shoulder blade. Larsen couldn't know that at the time, of course, couldn't know anything except blackness and pain swarmed over him and his whole chest went numb. He had felt that way before, the time he had been fighting beside Dalton and had been hit. Dalton had stepped in front of him . . . But there wasn't any Dalton now. Only Quinn and his two enemies. . . .

Larsen realized that Quinn was standing over him, leering while he leveled the Luger once more, not at his head for a mercy shot, but at his belly!

" . . . your guts out," Quinn was saying. It sounded like a whisper. A man flanked Quinn on each side, grinning men with guns in their hands.

He was going out and the frame on Dalton would stand! Hemingway was out of the picture. . . .

Larsen still had the gun in his hand, but there wasn't any strength in that arm at all. It was numb from his shoulder down. Sweat popped out on Larsen's forehead. Quinn laughed. . . .

" You and that fool Dalton!" Quinn jeered. " You're both out of my way now. *Take it, copper!*"

HIS face tightened and the Luger pointed at Larsen's belly. Larsen rasped out an oath. He heard an explosion and felt a jar in his right hand. He looked at it slowly and saw that the gun lay beside it, and there was a wisp of greasy smoke oozing from the barrel. Why, he had fired it! Quinn . . . Larsen stared at him and saw that his bullet had crossed Quinn's body just below the short-ribs. It had gone in on the left and plowed to the right and upward. . . . He gasped as Quinn's body smacked down on top of him.

There was some more shooting, but it was as distant as thunder when the storm is over. His eyes were shut. But, by God, he had done it. Hemingway, not Van Houtten, was guilty. He had admitted that before the two punks that were still alive. They'd talk now that their chief was dead. Hemingway and Quinn were both dead. Dalton was in the clear. That was what really mattered.

Why, it was Helga, bending over him! He murmured, "*Lille Helga, little one. . . .*" Tears were rolling down her cheeks. She rocked his head like a baby's. He looked beyond her and saw Van Houtten holding a gun on the two Quinn gunmen. The Commissioner jerked his head at Larsen.

" What the hell you mean?" he de-

manded. "Papers on X-517. Aren't any papers on him. Never were. That guy killed with that badge, Riker. Just a fake, is all. You get me out on a wild-geese chase like this? Hmpf! Who's the young lady? Said she followed you here. Met me at the door crying. Warned me to get my gun out. Some girl!"

Larsen looked up at her blue eyes and smiled. He nodded at her a little. "Kind of figured it like that, Commissioner, I mean about the X-man's

papers," he said. "Dalton wouldn't kill a cop. Now he's in the clear. Those prisoners. Make them talk. Quinn and Hemingway confessed . . . framed things to kill us . . . Dalton and me."

Van Houtten snorted. "Can't kill a dumb Swede like you!"

Helga lifted her head. "Of course, they can't," she said. "But he's not a Swede, Mr. Van Houtten. He's . . . he's . . . a Dane." She began unexpectedly to sob. She bent over and kissed Larsen's mouth.

Cipher Solvers' Club for May

Continued from Page 66

Eighteen—P. J. B., St. Petersburg, Fla.; Eba, Staten Island, N. Y.; H. H., Coventry, Ohio; Marj, Bedford, Ohio; Quivira, Kansas City, Kans.; L. J. Raba, Stevensville, Mich.; Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill.; Snaev, Youngstown, Ohio; Texocron, New York, N. Y.; Us, Chicago, Ill.; Zizi, Shreveport, La.

Seventeen—Edna D. Brooks, Attleboro, Mass.; Bugler, Elizabethtown, Ky.; Cliff II, Nashville, Mich.; Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky.

Sixteen—Akaby, Detroit, Mich.; T. E. Roberts, & W. F. Hall, New Castle, Pa.; John T. Straiger, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Edward Stratton, Camden, N. J.; Superior, Superior, Mich.

Fifteen—D. R. Eason, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Al. Liston, Newark, N. J.; My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Fourteen—Zarkov, Aberdeen, S. D.

Twelve—Wm. Atherton, Fargo, N. D.; Benj. E. Buchalter, New York, N. Y.; The Red Duke, Bronx, N. Y.; Egroeg III, Urbana, Ill.; F. A. Gaunt, Oklahoma City, Okla.; J. A. G., Philadelphia, Pa.; W. G. Valentine, New York, N. Y.; Viceroy, Aliquippa, Pa.

Eleven—Ajax, Staples, Minn.; Ritz-E-Fritz, Berkeley, Calif.; Jer-Lac, Timmins, Ontario, Canada; Sibli, Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Ten—Margaret Chamberlain, Buffalo, N. Y.; Dafty Dill, Bangor, Me.; Lewis C. Moore, Piggott, Okla.; Mrs. P. F. Wilson, San Francisco, Calif.

Nine—Harry R. Bell, Columbus, Ohio; E. Groesch, New York, N. Y.; T. E. McAlpine, London, Ontario, Canada; Tau Pi, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Eight—E. Sthar Odjnu, Atchinson, Kans.; Johnny West, Iowa City, Iowa.

Six—Lola Bodie, Honolulu, T. H.; Dr. Rawlins Cadwallader, San Francisco, Calif.; L. P. Carr, Soda Springs, Idaho; Ah-Tin-Du, St. Paul, Minn.; W. R. G., Maywood, Ill.; H. J. Hae-wecker, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Holly, Dallas, Pa.;

Kappa Kappa, Seattle, Wash.; *Kriptobens, Hope, N. M.; J. C. K., Gary, Ind.; Morris Levine, Pampa, Tex.; F. J. M., Massillon, Ohio; Mrs. B. Pirosh, Milwaukee, Wis.; Edward F. Raiford, Holland, Va.; Mrs. J. C. Saunders, Vallejo, Calif.; Logan Simard, Pasadena, Calif.; Benjamin Skowronski, Yonkers, N. Y.; Tyro V. Perryville, Pa.; Eleanor E. Worthman, Bronx, N. Y.

Five—Arthur V. Ball, Ponca City, Okla.; Alex Brown, Sacramento, Calif.; Ericla, Manorville, N. Y.; Brogan, Roberts, & Karns, New Castle, Pa.; Marie, Denver, Colo.; M. M. Sanders, Memphis, Tenn.; Laura A. Whitbeck, Hollywood, Calif.; Will Will, White Plains, N. Y.

Four—C. O. D., New York, N. Y.; C. B. Gilles, Hallettsville, Tex.; Leatherneck, Pittsburgh, Pa.; John P. McMullen, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Isaac Sachs, New York, N. Y.; Severn B. Witkowski, Chicago, Ill.; *Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.

Three—Aristocratic, Chicago, Ill.; Sid. Hohmann, Minot, N. D.; Richard Lobb, Topeka, Kans.; Pangram, Lakewood, Ohio; Captain St. Pierre, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Grace Shaw, Milwaukee, Wis.; Simple Simon, Brooklyn, N. Y.; R. L. Teissedre (No Address); Yumca, Ocean View, Va.

Two—A. Haynes, New London, Conn.; Tom Westerlin, Chicago, Ill.

One—Mrs. George Currie, Gulfport, Miss.; Medico, South Orange, N. J.; Jess Pruitt, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Herbert Rothra, Westfield, N. Y.; P. B. Spofford, Coral Gables, Fla.; Chi Valor, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Corrections—L. S. H., Washington, D. C., 22 Answers for April instead of 16; Elvin Crane Paynter, Millville, N. J., 12 Answers for April not previously credited; Zarkov, Aberdeen, S. D., 4 Answers for April instead of 3; Jaleco, Los Angeles, Calif., 30 Answers for February instead of 24; Stanley J. Petrowski, Syracuse, N. Y., 1 Answer for January not previously credited.

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKIE ALLEN

The MOSQUITO- POINT MURDER

ON THE MORNING OF JANUARY 8, 1920, THE BATTERED AND MUTILATED BODY OF A MAN, ABOUT 23, WAS FOUND BENEATH THE CULVERT OF THE HIGHWAY NEAR MOSQUITO POINT ROAD, ROCHESTER, N.Y. THE MAN HAD BEEN STABBED AND BEATEN TO DEATH. MOST OF HIS CLOTHING HAD BEEN CUT AWAY TO REMOVE IDENTIFICATION MARKS.

TAXI

IDENTIFICATION MARKS.

THE POLICE WERE POWERLESS TO SOLVE THE CASE UNTIL THEY FOUND A CAB DRIVER WHO TOLD THEM THAT HE HAD DRIVEN TWO MEN AND A WOMAN TO THE POINT NEAR THE SCENE OF THE MURDER ON THE NIGHT OF JAN. 6.

HE SAID THAT HE PICKED THEM UP AS FARES FROM A CAR THAT HAD BROKEN DOWN. AND LUCKILY HE REMEMBERED THE CAR'S LICENSE NUMBER. IT WAS TRACED TO GEORGE B. ARNOLD IN ROCHESTER.

SEARCH OF

THE LATTER'S HOME DISCLOSED A BLOODSTAINED WOMAN'S HAT, SKIRT AND FURS. THE NEXT DAY, JAMES L. ODELL, SON-IN-LAW OF ARNOLD WITH WHOM HE LODGED, CONFESSED THAT HE AND HIS BRIDE, PEARL ODELL, HAD COMMITTED THE CRIME.

PEARL
ODELL

COMING SOON—



THE VICTIM, EDWARD J. KNEIPP, A FACTORY HAND, ODELL SAID, HAD BEEN BRANDED BY HIS WIFE AS HER BETRAVER BEFORE HER MARRIAGE. AND MRS. ODELL, IN DIVULGING THE SECRET TO HIM, HAD COMPLAINED THAT KNEIPP WAS CONTINUING TO ANNOY HER. ODELL CLAIMED KNEIPP HAD ADMITTED HIS GUILT, SO HE HANDCUFFED KNEIPP AND TOOK HIM TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY, IN PEARL'S STEP-FATHER'S CAR. THE CAR HAD BROKEN DOWN AND THEY CONTINUED IN A CAB TO MOSQUITO POINT.



KNEIPP SUBMITTED TO BEING LED INTO THE WOODS AND HAD MEEKLY LET HIMSELF BE BOUND TO A TREE TRUNK. THEN ODELL, IN A MAD FRENZY, BROKE A PISTOL BUTT OVER KNEIPP'S HEAD. KNEIPP ROSE AND STRUCK BACK AT ODELL, BREAKING HIS GLASSES. THEN PEARL CAME UP FROM BEHIND AND BEAT KNEIPP TO DEATH WITH A CLUB. SHE ALSO SLASHED HIM WITH A KNIFE.



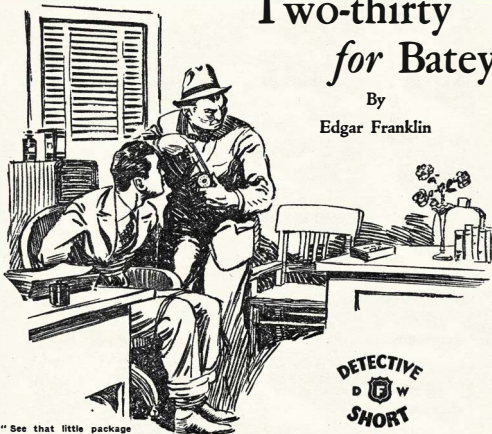
ODELL, FIRST OF THE PAIR TO BE TRIED, WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH AND EXECUTED IN SING SING. HIS WIFE, WHO HAD BEEN AN EXPECTANT MOTHER, GOT A 20-YEAR TERM IN AUBURN PRISON. THERE SHE GAVE BIRTH TO A BABY GIRL WHICH, UNDER AN OLD LAW, SHE WAS PERMITTED TO KEEP WITH HER FOR TWO YEARS. AFTER SERVING 10 YEARS, GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT, INFLUENCED BY HER MODEL BEHAVIOR, PAROLED HER.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW MURDER

Two-thirty for Batey

By

Edgar Franklin



"See that little package on my secretary's desk, Colley? After you tape me, drop it in the first mail-box you find, will you?"

EVEN now, the big mid-evening stickup all over with, the ninety-two dollars from the petty-cash drawer in Colley's pocket and with Colley's gun still trained upon him, dapper little Downer's whimsical grin still persisted.

"Getting back at the old man for giving you the air last week, eh?" Downer said.

"Something like that," Colley said.

DETECTIVE
D F W
SHORT

You could have tramped for a month of Sundays without finding any dumber criminal than this young man Colley. With his receding brow, the thick red features, and his little pig eyes, he suggested only the Missing

Link. "Only — for the luva tripe," he yelped, "what's hit this firm? I figured on getting the best part of a grand!"

"Buy a newspaper some time," Downer said, "and read about the depression and — hey there! You can't

The Chief's Dressing-Down Slowed Batey's Famous Mental Agility. And That's a Bad Spot for a Dick Who Has Both an All-Important Deadline and a Very Dangerous Criminal on His Hands!

walk out on me like this, Colley. I've got to have an alibi for letting you get away with all that cash. Go get a ball of that heavy twine from the shipping room and tie me tight in my desk chair here. Did you bring adhesive plaster?"

"Am I an ambulance surgeon or something?" Colley asked.

"The purpose of the adhesive plaster," Downer explained, "is to stick some of it across my mouth, to show why I couldn't yell for help. Never mind, I've a spool somewhere here in my desk. Go find the twine."

When Colley returned with the twine, Downer—who, oddly or otherwise, had not seized the opportunity for headlong flight—indicated the six inches of plaster on his desk.

"Before you stick it on me, though," he said sharply. "See that little package over on my secretary's desk, Colley? Will you drop that in the first mail-box you find, when you go out? It's all stamped and I want Mr. Brown to have it first thing in the morning. You see, I didn't know I was passing the night here."

Colley picked up the package, grunted over it, stuck it in his pocket, and went clumsily at the job of tying up Mr. Downer. He ended by sticking the adhesive plaster across his mouth, and he straightened up with:

"Here's what you gotta remember, Downer, unless you wanna get your nut blown off later for squealin' on me; you was stuck up by some small, dark party, probably an Eyetalian, you never seen before. Got it?"

"Urrrnk!" Mr. Downer agreed, from behind the plaster, and Colley went his sinful way, avoiding the night elevator and slipping inconspicuously down five flights of stairs.

Alone, Downer dragged his lower jaw free of the plaster without the

slightest effort and yawned, rather happily. Then, for a space, he sat there deep in thought, whistling a soft little tune which caused the plaster on his lip to flip up and down quite interestingly. He moved his wrists and found that there would be no trouble at all in getting them free—yet he left them as they were.

Smiling blandly, he stared at his secretary's desk for another little period; but when ten minutes were gone, Mr. Downer drew a deep breath and commenced to yell for help. He yelled so lustily that the very rafters of the second-rate office building echoed, and he pounded on the floor with his feet as well. Pretty soon, the night elevator man came galloping in, all excitement, and when he had untied Mr. Downer the latter gave his version of what had taken place:

"Yes, I was stuck up by that dumb jackass, Fred Colley, we used to have here for a porter. Mr. Merrivale kicked him out last week. He sneaked in and had a gun under my nose before I even knew he was in the office. And by the way! We'll have to keep this dark, Jones. Old man Merrivale wouldn't want it to get to the police or the newspapers right now for anything in the world! . . . What did he get?" Downer laughed bitterly. "He got fifteen thousand dollars in new five hundred dollar bills, which this firm needs pretty damned badly, that's what he got. Oh, yes, he took along the chicken-feed in the petty-cash drawer, too, I believe—he was fiddling around over there, anyhow. Eh? Oh, eighty or ninety dollars, I suppose."

WE view now the doorway of that cosy three-and-bath where abode George Batey and Sugar, his bride of three months, as George

bids a fond goodbye to the cute little rascal before going to his day's work.

Sugar, be it said, was blond and round and, otherwise, all that her nickname implied. George Batey, the gifted young private detective, was also round and rather rosy. He had vim and speed, this George Batey, but more than all, he had the divine confidence in himself which wafts men to the uppermost heights or, occasionally, kicks them down to the lowermost depths.

Now, having been kissed for the eightieth time, Sugar purred:

"You like it, Georgie? You really like it?"

"Like it, kid? I like it so much that—say, wait, Sugar! *You* got a birthday coming, too!"

"So what, Georgie?"

"So maybe that morning you'd hop downstairs and see a swell little blue coop standing at the curb, with your initials on the door!"

Sugar's mind was practical.

"Gee, Georgie! Are you really doing that good?" she asked. "I mean, with everybody out of a job or getting fired if he has one, these days?"

George Batey's chest swelled a little.

"There's reasons for them that ain't workin', kid. What I mean, *I* ain't the type that gets fired," he said modestly. "The old prune couldn't get a man with my brains for three times the money; he'd cut off his nose before he'd let me out. Start looking over the ads, baby; there might be one coop you'd like better'n another."

And, having kissed her nine times more, he hurried away to work.

Yet, sitting here in the old Chief's office, George was conscious of a craving to be somewhere else. Not to kid one's self, the old prune was boiling this morning, and when the old prune

boiled that way you usually ducked or got slightly scalded.

"I gotcha, Chief!" Mr. Batey said briskly and rose. "Finn found this Colley tramp asleep in his furnished room, and it took five minutes to wake him. Finn brought him in and now has him in the end office, with a scare thrown into him already; and you want me to crack Colley wide open and find out where he hid Merrivale's fifteen grand. Okey doke! It's the same as done, Chief. I'll be seeing you in maybe ten minutes."

"And get this through your head, Batey; Merrivale's firm is damned near on the rocks as it is. His credit wouldn't stand the news of this loss leaking out, not to mention him having to get the cash into the bank as soon as possible."

Then, sitting back with an evil smile, he pursued:

"One reason I'm giving you this case, instead of a better man, Batey, we're short-handed on operatives this morning, a couple having had cans tied to them. Police or private, a bull is a bull and, as such, a he-animal. When he starts getting ladylike, he's all through."

"Meaning which?" George Batey asked.

"Well, our Mr. Jackson turned up wearing what I took to be a pink and green color-card got up by some hop-head in the last stages, but which he claimed was a necktie given him by his sweetie. And no more'n I'd kicked his pants out o' here, our Mr. Cox, who's always kept it parted on the left side, like the rest of the white race, turned up with his pretty black hair glued straight back with asphalt, and had the crust to tell me I could go fly a kite if I didn't like it that way, because the lady he's marrying does! . . .

That, Batey, is the kind of hell love plays with a good detective!" proclaimed the bachelor Chief. "There'll come a day when I'll find one o' these lads powdering his nose and wearing a wrist-watch, and only the laws of this state'll keep me from pleading guilty to murder in the first degree, because—"

II

HE stopped short, for inadvertently George Batey had scratched his chin, and his left sleeve had slid back. Hard hands gripping the arms of his chair until the joints stuck out as white knobs, the Chief stared at George Batey's arm.

"Well, *bless — my — soul!*" he gasped. "You've a wrist-watch *yourself!*"

"Absolutely, Chief, and, laying aside all prejudices, is it a darb or is it a darb?" George Batey responded, as brazenly as might be, for there was no recalling the past ten seconds. "Y' see, it was this way. I got a birthday today, and Sugar went and bought me—"

"Knowing that the love-bug had gnawed holes enough in your poor, soft brain to let you wear it among decent men!" the old Chief finished bitterly. Then he sat up, lips tight. "Yes, I see how it is, Mr. Batey, and I also see how it is with me, and while it's rarely I lose three men in the same morning—"

"Hold it, Chief, before you say something you might be sorry for later!" George Batey cried gustily, as he passed through the doorway. "Just a couple o' seconds and I'll have you a report on this Colley thing that'll probably close the case!"

The old Chief stopped him with: "Hold it, you!" He was smiling rather

horribly and into his voice came a lethal courtesy. "Look, Mr. Batey! I have a right to chuck you and your jewelry through the window, and instead I have decided to give you a break. Get Merrivale's money back to him by three o'clock—or look at your pretty wrist-watch and see is it time to hunt another job. How d'ye like it?"

"Okay for some guy that works slow," Mr. Batey replied jauntily, albeit a sparkling drop ran down his nose. "Only make it two-thirty for me, so's he has time to get it into the bank!"

"Two-thirty it is, then, you sweet-scented son of a—" the old Chief belted; and right there, mercifully, the door slammed after the departing George Batey.

A moment, he stood there in the corridor, breathing heavily, mopping his brow, aflame with a desire to go back and sock the old relic, still living in the age of gold-plated vest-chains, just one for luck and then run for his life. Then, controlling himself in some measure, Mr. Batey stalked down the hall and ripped open the door at the end, thus coming face to face with small, steely Mr. Finn.

"Where the hell's this Colley punk?" he yelled promisingly, as he tucked up his sleeves.

In a matter of ten minutes, he returned to the Chief's office, a trifle blown, brazen still, slightly baffled.

"I gotta be running right along, Chief," he reported, dabbing his forehead again. "I just dropped in to tell you Colley never seen that fifteen grand."

"Paresis," the Chief commented.

"Because here's how it adds up: you chatter two minutes with Colley, and by that time you know he ain't got the tenth part of a brain and no oil

on that, even if it was in working order. What I mean, he swears he got the ninety-two fish and no more, and how I know he ain't lying, by the time that guy'd thought up one good lie, he'd have dropped dead from overwork. Anyway, Finn tells me he searched Colley's room very thorough before he woke the guy up, and all he found was the ninety-two fish and some old clothes. So write that one off, and here's the answer I just found in the back of the book: Colley mailed a package for this Mr. Downer which was exactly the right size to be holding fifteen grand in five hundreds!"

"Addressed to Mr. Downer himself, of course?" the Chief said, sitting up.

"Addressed to some Mr. Brown, Colley thought. He didn't know where it was going, account he says he don't remember reading the address."

The Chief shook his head and sighed.

"You're bungling wicked this day, Batey. That's two he put over on you. First, no man ever mailed a letter or a package for anybody else without reading who it was going to. Second, a dime-a-dozen crook like Colley never mailed it. He figured it had something in it worth maybe a couple of dollars, and he took it home and opened it. So—where's the fifteen grand *now*?"

Mr. Batey glanced wildly at his new watch.

"You got me very excited this morning, Chief, with one thing and another," he accused. "I ain't thinking like lightning, the way I usually do. But I gotta get over and see this Downer quick, supposing he ain't already started for Shanghai. Maybe you'd go in later and see what you make of Colley, huh?"

He was out of the office and into

the elevator before the Chief could formulate any objection to that plan.

MR. DOWNER had not started for Shanghai. He grinned amusedly when George Batey stated the purpose of his errand, and casually asked permission to look around.

This he did in a, for him, unusually superficial and spasmodic manner. That razzing of the old Chief's had done damage to Mr. Batey's mental powers; but even so he glanced into the safe where once had lived the fifteen thousand dollars. He looked over Downer's desk; he scowled perplexedly at the secretary's desk; he even glared into their respective wastebaskets—and *there*, at least, was a giggle for you! Here it was eleven o'clock in the morning, and these boys and girls were still so jittery about a little thing like a stickup that they hadn't even started work for the day! In neither wastebasket was there even one scrap of paper.

Well—you had to say for Downer himself, he was still there and he didn't look like a crook. Mr. Batey considered the secretary, a cute brunette number too dumb to be playing with crime.

"Hey, lissen, sister!" he said suddenly. "Whilst coming through the drugstore downstairs I seen a fine young banana split that was asking to be bought by a beautiful doll. Maybe you'd attend to that, taking at least twenty minutes?"

The girl stared, but, at Downer's nod of assent, departed. Mr. Batey drove his red-hot professional eye straight through Downer.

"Spill, brother!" he ordered, from the corner of his mouth. "And spill rapid!"

Downer merely raised his brows.

"Spill what?"

"The news bulletin about what you done with the fifteen grand."

"Colley—you've heard about Colley, of course?" Downer sighed resignedly. "Colley took it, you know. He knew that I come back here two or three evenings a week and work, sometimes till eleven. He knew the office would be open and that I, like many others, have an aversion to being shot. How the devil he knew that we had fifteen thousand dollars cash in the safe last night I can't tell you."

"And how come you did?"

"No mystery, Batey. The old man went for a trip through the stratosphere yesterday because one of our fairly big accounts slipped us a rubber check. He told 'em if they didn't have it squared by quitting time he'd jump 'em this morning. The junior partner came over with the fifteen thousand in cash just before five."

"And then you done it up in a bundle and had Colley mail it to you?" Batey barked. "He says it was addressed to your house."

"The man was never bright," Downer laughed. "I wouldn't live out there on a bet."

"Out where?"

"In the spot," Downer said blandly, "to which that package was addressed. Glad he mailed it, though. There was no money in it, if that interests you. Cigarette?"

George Batey waved it aside and grunted. He was getting exactly nowhere so fast that it almost took his breath away. Time was passing, too.

"Quite a smart guy, Downer, only it's getting you nothing here. *Nuttin'*, understand? Here you're mailing the dough to yourself under the name of Brown, and—"

"Oh, so far as that goes, I'll admit being Henry Brown, for the purpose of getting that package through the mails," Downer interrupted, and his annoying grin broke out again. "Oddly, Batey, I still think it's a free country and I reserve the right to mail myself one package or ten thousand packages, using any name I damned well please—and just what are you going to do about *that*?"

"Phone the Chief to send over the warrant and we'll stick you in the cooler till we get finished with Colley!" Batey said promptly.

This time Downer did start, although, to Batey's astonishment, not with alarm. He scowled in great annoyance.

"Just a bluff, of course, but—oh, here, Batey, you infernal fool!" he snapped. "If I tell you the simple truth about that package, what assurance have I that you'll keep it absolutely to yourself?"

"You got my word," Mr. Batey said, gazing, for want of a better place to gaze, into Downer's wastebasket, "and I can slap the snoot off any palooka that says I ever broke that. That's always supposing what you tell me don't involve no crime."

"It don't involve no crime!" Downer sneered angrily. "Listen, then. My coming back here to work nights in the office is a lot of bunk. I've been working in their rotten little laboratory down the hall, not being able to afford one of my own, on some formulæ for making flavoring extracts. Formulæ, Batey," he said, with sudden enthusiasm, "that'll knock the eye out of anything else in the market and put half a million in my pocket!"

"Formu—lee, says you?" George Batey echoed, still to the wastebasket. He was frowning now; he was trying

his level damndest to grab at something—and it eluded him.

"Never mind the details, but there are people in this office who have their suspicions and they'd go to any length to get hold of my three note-books. I know that my apartment's been combed over twice in search of them and this desk has been ransacked any number of times. I've been carrying the books in my pockets for weeks, but from something I heard yesterday it appeared that I might be held up on my way home—so I just wrapped them up and addressed them to Henry Brown, who lives—somewhere!" Mr. Downer grinned, in good humor again. "And I meant to drop them in the box on the corner, of course, and laugh quite loudly at the holdup man. First chance I get, I'll sneak off to—er—that locality, pick 'em up and stick 'em in the nearest safety-deposit box I can rent. Now you know, blast you!"

III

MR. BATEY nodded, partly to the wastebasket, partly to Downer. His frown then wandered the floor for a while. The floor was covered with a plain, dark linoleum which seemed recently to have been varnished; the surface was pretty shiny, at all events.

"Why wasn't you keeping these here valuable note-books in a safe-deposit all the time, Mr. Downer?" he asked reasonably.

"Because I've been adding details, correcting details, as I went along, of course. As a matter of fact, Batey," Downer said softly, "lest this all seem too odd to you, this firm hasn't been any too nice to me. They're bringing out a new line in October and preparing to can me, but I'm resigning and beating them to it all around. Any-

thing else you'd like to know about my private affairs?"

At the moment, Batey seemed hardly to be listening. A deep furrow between his brows, he was still grabbing at that elusive something. He stared fixedly, gloomily at the secretary's desk.

But now, with a sigh, he shrugged his shoulders and looked up; because maybe he'd gone goofy, just like the Chief suggested, but it certainly seemed that this grinning ape was telling mostly the truth. That he was sitting here and not in Montreal probably proved something, if it came to that.

"I'd like to see you clear yourself completely by telling me where this package went, so's we can check up," he said colorlessly.

"Find that out for yourself, detective," Downer grinned; but there his patience suddenly cracked. "Damn it all, Batey! Stop snapping your fingers and looking at your watch and get out of here. I've got a day's work to do."

For the moment, Batey just stared fishily at him. No kidding, he couldn't think straight and fast, the way he usually thought. He couldn't tell if this guy Downer had anything to do with the robbery or not. Here it was getting on to twelve o'clock and, so far as George Batey was concerned, the whole case was still as flat as a tire with a butcher-knife stuck through it. No matter how you looked at it—Mr. Batey started violently, for the door had slammed and the Chief was with them!

His hard old eyes shot sparks and the manner of his breathing suggested nothing so much as steam coming out of a pipe. The knuckles of his left hand were barked and bleeding, too.

"Why, what happened your mitt, Chief?" Batey asked concernedly.

"The same as happened Colley's pan, only less so," the Chief spat at his one-time ace operative. "I treated Mr. Colley's memory and got it all restored, about the address on that package. It seems it was an hour after he mailed it that it got to Colley there might have been something in it that he needed. *You* did a very lousy piece of bungling with Colley, Mr. Batey," he said frankly. "You've probably wasted time enough now that the money's been picked up by some other member of the gang. Is this Downer?"

"This is Mr. Downer, Chief. Only he—"

"Get your hat, Downer. We're taking a ride. I have a car downstairs."

Downer shook his unperturbed head.

"Maybe you are, I'm not. I don't know what this new act's all about, but I have to stay here and *work*."

"Oh, yeah?" the Chief said, leaning nearer. "Well, you've got your choice between taking a ride to a cell or a ride to get that package for Henry Brown out of the General Delivery at Mitchikan, New Jersey—so which'll it be?"

"Found that out, did you?" Downer sighed exasperatingly.

George Batey spoke unguardedly: "Listen, Chief, maybe it ain't necessary to go out there. Mr. Downer's explained about that package and I think he's on the level. It seems there are note-books, not money in it and—"

The Chief gripped George Batey's shoulder and yanked him into a corner of the office, where they could confer a little more privately.

"Queer one, get a load o' this!" he hissed. "If I'd the money to spare, I'd have your head opened, to see what's gone wrong inside it. Fifteen years I been working to build an efficient and

dignified agency, and any bracelet-wearing squirt that starts deliberately to make a monkey of it is asking for all he gets. You're riding to Mitchikan with us, and the second I take that money out o' the package, there's one less name on the payroll."

"You have it your way, Chief," Mr. Batey said faintly.

"Let's get this fool trip over with," Downer was saying as he reached for his hat. "The idea is that you won't take a chance on claiming a package belonging to somebody else—and you are wise, at that. Only just one thing! Once you've looked at my note-books, you'll assign this Batey curiosity or come with me yourself, as a body-guard, until I can get the things into a vault. Agreed?"

"Agreed, Mr. Downer," the Chief assented, with great irony.

FOR George Batey, this was no joy-ride. Even yet, the old bean wasn't what you'd call clear, by any means; but he could see at least one point where he'd been wrong. Living with a sweet kid like Sugar, he'd gone kind of soft; instead of one clout over Colley's ear, merely knocking him flat, he should have stripped to his undershirt and smeared Mr. Colley all over the end office, thus getting the results the dear old Chief had achieved. . . . At that, somehow, he still believed Downer and . . . aaaaah, baloney! Why was he trying to hand himself a line like that, when in fifteen minutes the Chief would be counting out fifteen grand in new five hundreds!

"This is Mitchikan post office, unless they've got the sign wrong," Downer said indifferently, as the car stopped.

"The first move you make at a get-away, Mr. Downer," the Chief said

sweetly, "you'll wake up wearing steel cuffs. The chance we're taking here is that someone working with you has already picked up the stuff. In that case, you'll talk fast or else—"

"The chance *you're* taking," Downer broke in with a grin, "is that somebody in Hollywood will hear about you and your funny Batey and hire you at a million dollars a year to play comic detectives. Come on!"

The elderly Mitchikan postmaster poked out a small package directed to Henry Brown, General Delivery, and went on sorting postcards. Downer tossed it to the Chief.

"When you open it, Sherlock, be very careful of the little loose slips in the green one. They're valuable."

He lounged against the dusty writing-desk while the Chief, without comment, cut the thick string and tore off the heavy paper. Then Mr. Downer smiled wearily for, amazingly or otherwise, the good old Chief held just three small note-books, two black and one green. He said something under his breath and rapidly turned the pages, catching the little loose slips as they slid out.

Through the Batey anatomy went a mighty sigh. Why start cheering, seeing the old Chief go down on his nose like this? The headache was, the fifteen grand was somewhere else and he, George Batey, for all his lip and his assurance, would never be getting it back now by two-thirty.

There was something here he could not understand. Again and again, that is, just when he was going down for the third time, some kind of last-minute luck had chucked a rope and hauled him ashore. Well, it seemed that at present his last-minute luck was off on one of those cut-price summer cruises. . . . And, *at that*, there was

some dinky little thing here, always hopping away just when he thought he had it, something his poor dizzy bean was trying to snatch and—

"Enough damned nonsense for one day, I trust?" Downer snapped, and stepped into the car. "I trust that I'm entitled to a free ride back? Please make it snappy, because—well, what's the matter with Batey *now*?"

Definitely, there was something the matter with Batey. His features had contorted until they were almost merged—yet now, in a twinkling, they had straightened again and a smile broke out, of such terrific brilliance that the whole neighborhood seemed illuminated.

"I got softening o' the brain," he announced, joyously. "How long did it take us to get out here? Well, anyhow, it'll take us half that getting back! Hey, Chief! Sit on Downer, will you?" Next he turned to the chauffeur, and by the simple process of placing a palm against his cheek and pushing hard, displaced him from behind the wheel. "Get over, you! I'm driving home!"

He did. He was in high before the post office corner had been turned, and in high he remained, with small regard for traffic lights or cursing drivers or the terrified screams of those fools who always object to having a fender carried away by another car that happens to be in a hurry. Small towns through which that had lately slipped so gracefully now merely whizzed up and past. . . . And then, as they approached the western end of the Holland Tube and traffic thickened, the Chief took occasion to pound on Mr. Batey's shoulder and bellow:

"The hell are you trying to do? Kill us all?"

"Your hard luck, if you can't take

it, Chief," Mr. Batey snapped back. "You're the guy that started this time-limit stuff."

Then, since the uniformed force seemed to be taking an undue interest in him, Mr. Batey slowed down farther and his expression became angelic as they slid under the river—but once upon Manhattan island the police knew the Chief and his car, and Mr. Batey whizzed on, driving with his right hand and genially waving thanks now and then with his left.

"... and if you don't get that lunatic into a strait-jacket, by Judas, I'll—" Downer was frothing, as they shrieked to a standstill before the ancient office building.

"You wanted it snappy, brother," George Batey said briefly, as he hauled out Mr. Downer and glanced at his watch. "Two-twenty-two, hey?"

He yanked again; Mr. Downer, still frothing, still protesting, stumbled giddily on to the elevator, with the Chief just behind.

In the office, the cute brunette was thumping her typewriter when they entered. Mr. Batey cast one swift, unaccountable glance toward her feet and heaved a great sigh of relief.

"We been taking chances, Chief, but I guess it's all okey-dokey, at that. You hold Downer. Will you kindly move over a little, sister, so's I can pull out that bottom drawer of your desk?"

"Let that girl alone!" Downer thundered. "You've done clowning enough for one lifetime and—"

"This ain't clowning, brother," Batey explained. "This is like taking rabbits from a hat. As if you didn't know!"

He laid the drawer on Downer's desk and unhurriedly removed the contents—one vanity case, one best seller, some cigarettes and a packet of hair-

pins, for the girl was letting it grow. Just once he glanced at the Chief. You didn't need a clairvoyant to tell what the Chief was going to do unless Mr. Batey produced some sort of happy ending in about thirty seconds.

"The hand," said Mr. Batey, but there was a catch in his voice, and little beads stood out on his forehead, "is quicker than the eye—and here comes the rabbits!"

With these strange words, he turned the drawer bottomside up on Downer's desk. His iron fingers twisted into Downer's sleeve, the Chief strode forward as Batey silently pointed to the odd arrangement on the bottom of the drawer: a large, light-colored manila envelope securely fastened there with shiny nickel thumb-tacks. Silently, he tore it loose and thrust a finger under the flap.

"The way it was reflecting on the floor, I'd have said it was white," he said more calmly. "If this envelope's got in it what I think it's got in it, they're running good for you today, Chief, on account you don't have to lose a high-class operative. Otherwise—well, it seems you don't have to lose him," Mr. Batey concluded, as he dumped a stream of five-hundred dollar bills on the desk.

The Downer person's knees were sagging. George Batey drew a long, happy breath and consulted his watch.

"When you hear the next musical note," he said comfortably, "it will be exactly two-twenty-nine P.M., Eastern Daylight Saving Time. Toot! Toot!"

IV

"WELL, old man Merrivale wasn't so peeved, at that, when he got back his notebooks of secret formulas he didn't even know was stolen yet, hey, Chief?"

George Batey chuckled. "Quite a guy, Downer! First he steals the secrets of the business, and then he steals capital enough to start up for himself!"

"Quite a guy!" the Chief agreed. They were back in his office now, with Downer elsewhere behind the bars. "Only how the devil—"

"Huh? You ain't got it all yet, Chief. Well, it come from being unable to see why Downer'd be using hairpins and lipstick, see? It was like this: here's me, letting Downer talk, stalling for time to see could I guess the right answer. And there's his wastebasket and all there was in it was three old bent hairpins and a bent paper-clip *and* a lot of such fluff as collects in drawers.

"Well, I says to myself, somebody's been emptying a drawer, and it must 'a' been from the jane's desk, and it couldn't have been the jane herself did it, I says, because she'd have knocked out the odds and ends in her own basket. So it must have been Downer, I says, and *why?* Then I started looking around the floor and, under the little tomato's desk, I seen the floor was much lighter under the legs on the right side than on the left side, and I also seen a bright, new thumb-tack there on the floor—and *still* it didn't click!

"Y' gotta excuse me, Chief," George said earnestly, "but when you take a sensitive, high-strung guy like me for a ride, like you did about my watch this morning, you only hurt the business. What I mean, you got me

slightly goofy and not able to think like lightning, as I usually do, or I'd have had the whole setup ten seconds after I seen that light spot on the floor.

"Instead, it was only when we were in that hick post office I suddenly got the whole thing—well, you heard Downer confess yourself how he originally meant to leave it there till the last minute while he was gathering up his things to scam, in case someone come back unexpected to the office last night and looked in the safe, and you heard how he meant to mail the notebooks, so's all the goods wouldn't be found on him, in case of accidents.

"Then Colley blows in for the stick-up and changes all Downer's plans in one second; and Downer got cold feet afterward, for fear he'd be suspected and searched, and finally decided to leave the fifteen grand right where it was till some time later when Colley'd been convicted. . . . Well! Five-twenty now!" Mr. Batey announced loudly, sticking out his new watch, and defying his Chief. "I gotta beat it for home."

For minutes the Chief had been staring out of the window, whistling through his excellent teeth, and considering and considering. But he was a just man, and in the end he thrust toward George Batey two of the four \$500 bills which had accompanied him home from the final interview with Mr. Merrivale. He unbent entirely!

"Aw, stop off on the way and buy yourself a pair of jade earrings, George!" he laughed.



The Granduca

By
Max Brand



Campbell saw the blue-coats rushing through the garden, searching for Kearton

Detectives Campbell and O'Rourke, Battling Each Other and a Houseful of Suspects, Try Frantically to Solve the Mysterious Murder of Henry Tydings

What has happened—

HENRY TYDINGS, a wealthy art collector, has invited his bitterest enemies to spend a week-end with him prior to his marriage to Charlotte

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Reid. Foremost of these is Gene Chatham, a rich dilettante, Tydings' arch-foe, who has pretended to care for Vivian, Tydings' daughter, only so that he may be near Charlotte, whom he loves.

Winifred Staunton, Tydings' former mistress, is also there, and at dinner, when Tydings is baiting his guests, including Rupert Walden, another collector rival, and Willard Hamblin, a resident physician. Winifred wounds Tydings with a gun belonging to Lionel Reid, Charlotte's brother.

Sergeant Detective Angus Campbell and his bickering team-mate, Sergeant Detective Patrick O'Rourke, arrive at Tydings' Island to learn that Tydings' body has vanished. They soon discover that each of the guests had a motive for the murder, and that each is well alibied. Then Winifred Staunton, more than a little drunk, insists that she saw Henry Tydings in one of the ornamental suits of armor.

Almost immediately thereafter the cook reports seeing Tydings in the dumbwaiter. The detectives are convinced that Tydings, pressed by debt, or in fear of his life, has disappeared on purpose, cutting off the island from the mainland to keep his hated guests helpless while he made his getaway.

Not quite satisfied with this theory, however, they take fingerprints and make an extensive search of the house. Walden is quieting his nerves by mounting butterflies on punched cards, and in the chamber of Hamblin, the doctor, they find a real clue.

One of Hamblin's amateurish copies of Raphael's *Granduca* is smeared in the corner with Tydings' bloody fingerprint. It is also learned that Clifford, the butler, opened the sluice-gate which isolated the island. When the detectives find Clifford for questioning, he obviously has been in a fight.

But before they can discover his opponent, Campbell surprises a sneak thief in his room, examining the copied *Granduca* canvas. He says he's William Kearton, refuses to say more. Clifford informs them that he's the unauthorized messenger whose appearance terrified Henry Tydings just before his death.

"All right," said Campbell. "This job is a crazy quilt, but I guess we got the last piece of it now. Things are going to *move!*"

CHAPTER X

Cross-Examination

WHILE Clifford was talking, William Kearton regarded him with a concentrated passion of disdain, until O'Rourke said: "You'll get colic of the face if you keep twisting it like that. If you don't like Clifford, come out with it. I don't like him neither, if that does you any good."

Kearton shrugged his shoulders. At this, O'Rourke said: "They got our hands tied with the new rules. Oh, boy, for five minutes of the good old days, and I'd of made you talk, Kearton. But now we can't break the skin. . . . Hell, what chance have we got? . . . Here, Angus. You keep Clifford and the sneak thief in here. I'm going to go and talk to Chatham."

He went straight down the corridor to Chatham's room. Chatham's voice answered the knock and told him to enter. O'Rourke went inside. This room had one of those priceless old carved and painted wooden ceilings which Tydings had shipped over from Italy; and the blue and golden richness of it was reflected on the floor, as it were, by the softer colors and the more obscure pattern of a great Persian rug. But O'Rourke paid no attention to the beauty around him.

He strode in, remarking: "Mr. Chatham, how are you?"

"Very well," said Chatham, who was reading a book in a chair drawn up near his window and lighted by a floor lamp. "What can I do for you, O'Rourke?"

"Let me see your hands," O'Rourke ordered.

Chatham looked up at him, paused, then, with deliberation, laid the book on the arm of the chair and extended

his hands. O'Rourke stared down earnestly into the palms.

"Excuse me," he said, and felt the two stiff, calloused swellings at the heel of the palm. "You keep yourself in shape, Mr. Chatham," said the Irishman.

Chatham said nothing.

"Turn 'em over, will you?" asked O'Rourke.

Chatham glanced at the face of the detective again, but he obeyed. O'Rourke instantly fingered the metacarpal bones under the loose skin of the backs of the hands. "How long ago did you bust these?" asked the sergeant.

"I don't know. A long time."

"Didn't know how to hold your hands inside a pair of gloves, eh?"

"That's right. I learned afterward how to squeeze 'em shut as I hit."

"They say that Dempsey used to keep a half of a lacrosse ball, or something like that, inside each hand, and squeeze on the rubber just as he punched. That was for training. He got a pair of mitts that nothing could dent. . . . But you never built up your hands like that, Mr. Chatham. . . . And here's a little ridge just across the knuckles of your right. . . . How come?"

"That was an odd thing," said Chatham. "I was coming into my room this evening and a gust of wind knocked the door shut and caught my hand a bit. It might have been an ugly smash, at that."

O'Rourke stepped back.

"Funny thing," he said, "that the door when it shut only pinched the outside of your hand, ain't it?"

"Perhaps it is," admitted Chatham, carelessly. "What have my hands to do with your business, O'Rourke?"

"I was just thinking," said

O'Rourke, "that there's a kind of a bump there on the side of your skull—just above the ear, and under the hair. . . . You've sleeked the hair down a little too carefully, and it angles out a bit over the bump. . . . When the door slammed, I guess it bumped your head and your hand at the same time, eh?"

"The fact is," said Chatham, "that Tydings should have kept his pergola at the swimming pool in better condition. Some of those big wistaria branches reach down like the elbows of monkeys and give one a rap, now and then."

O'Rourke grinned. "Yeah. For an oversize fellow like you, the head takes a lot of bumps, all right. Mind letting me take a look at the pants you're wearing? Mind standing up?"

"Not at all," Chatham answered. "I'm suspected of something, am I?"

"We gotta suspect everybody," replied O'Rourke. "It's our job, and we'd be out of pay and out of luck pronto, if we didn't keep pointing fingers."

Chatham had risen, and O'Rourke walked around him, staring.

"Hum!" he said, at last. "Mind showing me the coat you were wearing this evening?"

"Not a bit," answered Chatham.

He went to the closet, took out a coat, and handed it over. O'Rourke looked it over with the greatest care, and then sighed. "It looks all right," he said, "only—wait a minute. I see a lot more coats in there."

"Help your self," said Chatham, going back to his chair.

O'Rourke took out coat after coat, squinted, returned each garment to its hanger. At last he turned sharply about to the big man and said: "You come along with me to the room where Campbell is, will you?"

"Certainly," said Chatham. "You're making a lot of hard work out of all this, aren't you?"

"I take my work where I find it," answered O'Rourke, shortly.

HE led the way back to the other room and entered it to find Clifford and Kearton and Campbell sitting silently in three chairs. Clifford rose quickly when the newcomers entered. Kearton yawned.

O'Rourke said: "Look here, Angus. Here's Mr. Chatham with a bump on the side of his head and a ridge across his knuckles. . . . There's another funny thing. He's got a lot of skin rubbed off the tips of his fingers as though he'd been handling something pretty rough—like a big stone ladder, say. And he says that he bumped his head on a branch and got his hand shut inside a door. I dunno how you got the skin off the tips of your fingers, Mr. Chatham."

"As a matter of fact, I stumbled over a rug in the library—they're a bit slippery on top of that waxed floor—and put out my hands to save myself against the stucco wall. That stucco is as rough as sandpaper."

"Keep the big boy here for a while, will you?" asked O'Rourke, and went straight out of the house to the garden. There he paused under the balcony beneath Chatham's room. He paused only a few moments before he returned.

"A lot of footprints around there," he said, "under your balcony, Mr. Chatham. Nobody around this house has got feet big enough to leave those signs behind him."

"Perhaps not," said Chatham. "I remember pausing there this afternoon."

"Now why would you stand around just there?" asked the sergeant.

"It's the only place on the island," said Chatham, "that commands a view of the entire causeway and the garden."

O'Rourke drew in a long, soft breath, and then he smiled.

"You're fast, brother!" he said. "You got the fastest turning over bean that I ever come up against. He's good, Angus, ain't he? Mr. Chatham, you're a knockout, if you don't mind me saying. Look here, Clifford. We got a pair of you cold."

"Yes, sir?" said Clifford.

"You and Mr. Chatham met out there in the garden. You slugged it out. You socked him on the side of the head. . . ."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Chatham," said the butler. "I don't know what Sergeant O'Rourke means."

"This is what they call deduction, Clifford," Chatham replied, smiling. "I've read about it in books but I've never seen any of it before. Every good policeman can do it. It's something like blindfold chess, I believe."

"He's good, eh, Angus?" asked O'Rourke.

"Go on and play your hand, if there's anything in it," the Scotchman growled, bluntly.

O'Rourke glowered at him. Then he shook a finger at the butler. "You swing for the big boy's head, but you're a little high, and he's coming in as you take the sock. You crunk him up on the head—there, there where the little bump is—and then he lets you have it slam under the chin, and leaves a welt across his knuckles and something on your chin that'll be purple by the morning, Clifford."

"I hope this doesn't annoy you, Mr. Chatham," said Clifford, bowing to him, deprecatory.

"No, I like it," said Chatham. "It

isn't often that we have a chance to see the law of the land use its brain. Go on, O'Rourke. I'm glad to hear the deductions."

O'Rourke licked his lips.

"You like it, do you?" he said. "Well, what were the pair of you fighting about? Something that weighed something. Something that a man could carry slung over his back, tied up in his coat, while he jumped for the underpart of his balcony and swung himself up—and a fine bit of work that jumping and climbing was, Mr. Chatham. When you handed me that coat, tonight, you almost sold me. By electric light, I might of passed black for blue, but not quite. And when I looked over the rest of the coats I found what I wanted, fast enough. One with the sleeves a little wrinkled—criss-cross and in waves—and the material was kind of damp, too. Those wrinkles I can put into another coat by tying the sleeves together in a hard knot. . . . Now, Mr. Chatham, what were you carrying in that coat?"

"Every Irishman can tell a yarn," said Chatham, "but you do better than most. Go right ahead, O'Rourke."

He looked toward Clifford, and the butler made a slight gesture of apology, shrugging his shoulders and putting his hands out a little.

O'Rourke said: "Whatever you carried was wet. It was something out of the lake, most likely. What about it, Mr. Chatham? Going to come clean to us, or do we have to spend some more time on you?"

"Why, O'Rourke, you wouldn't slight me, would you?" asked Chatham. "Put some more time in on me, by all means."

"Mr. Chatham," said O'Rourke, "it ain't gonna pay you. Look here, if it's your neck that you gotta save, all right.

Back up and keep raising a breeze. That's what you gotta do. But if you're only mixed into this dirt ankle deep, jump out no matter how much mud people are gonna see on your shoes. Let's wash this up right here and now. . . . Talk to us and we'll talk to you. But if it comes to court, I got enough stuff on you this evening to knock hell out of your reputation the rest of your life. Will you play with us?"

"Certainly, O'Rourke," said Chatham. "I'd do whatever I could to help you get to the bottom of this little mystery about Tydings. But . . . something wet carried in a coat . . . climbing balconies by moonlight . . . fist fights with butlers. . . ." He laughed a little.

"All right, all right," cried O'Rourke, "if you won't play with us, it's gonna be rough on you, Mr. Chatham. We're gonna change the color of your hair and take the champagne out of your eyes, before we're through with you, I guess."

"Lay off, lay off, Pat, will you?" asked Campbell. "Don't you see that he ain't one of the kind that cracks? You could bounce that kind of talk off him all day and he wouldn't come clean to you."

"Yeah, I know, I know," agreed O'Rourke. "But you know how it is—you just sort of take a chance anyway. It don't cost anything."

"Do you want me any longer, my friends?" asked Chatham.

"Not any longer," said O'Rourke.

Chatham turned toward the butler.

"It does look as though something had clipped you on the chin, Clifford," he commented.

"I had a fall, sir," said Clifford.

"Well, good night, everyone," said Chatham.

He had turned toward the door

when a hurried knock came at it. O'Rourke stepped back and opened it. Vivian Tydings appeared on the threshold carrying in her arms the battered glory of the jewel casket; but what she was saying had nothing to do with that.

"Sergeant O'Rourke — Sergeant Campbell!" she called out in a hushed, excited voice. "In Charlotte Reid's room! There's a man and a quarrel! . . ."

CHAPTER XI

The Check

O'Rourke made a lunge, but Campbell went by him in a sprint, grunting: "Hold everything, Pat!" and swerved into the hall at full speed.

Gene Chatham started out of a sudden trance in pursuit; Vivian Tydings scurried in the rear.

Campbell, for all his speed, was quiet enough in the opening of the door. It swung wide, soundlessly, and showed Charlotte Reid in a corner of the room struggling furiously with a man who held her by the arms, saying: "You've got to give it to me, Charlotte. You've got to—"

He saw the others coming, then, and sprang back from her suddenly. It was her brother.

Campbell went to the girl. Chatham grabbed a handful of Lionel Reid's coat and shirt and jammed him back against the wall at full arm's length. Chatham's mouth pulled to one side and his eyes pinched small and bright.

"What d'you mean by it?" he kept repeating. "What d'you mean by it?"

Vivian Tydings, at the threshold, was looking on with a silent laughter, her eyes all alight, while Campbell said to Charlotte Reid: "I'm going to have

to ask you to turn over to me the thing he wanted. Just let me have it, Miss Reid. There's no use holding back. I think you had it in your hand."

She held them out, empty.

"There was nothing, you see?" said the girl.

Chatham led Reid away from the wall. The young fellow was staggering, his head had been so battered by that fierce handling.

Chatham was saying, "I don't believe it. To put your hands on a woman. Any woman. You damned little rat!"

Lionel was by no means little, but he looked it at this moment.

"Don't be rough with him! Don't hurt him, Gene," Vivian Tydings injected. "It all depends on what a girl is used to. The family tradition, you know!"

She began to laugh aloud. Charlotte Reid's eyes found her, dwelt on her without interest, and roved away toward Chatham.

Campbell had stepped on past the girl toward an old Chinese bowl of hand-worked bronze, one of those incredibly antique things which two generations of metal workers might beat out with loving care, year by year, every hammer-stroke a prayer that helped to save the soul—therefore there was no haste and the curves grew reverently. This bowl stood on a tripod of fretted ebony. Campbell reached his hand over the high lip and explored the interior. There was only a single, tiny ball of paper, moist and warm from recent handling.

He took this out and dropped it into his pocket. The Reid girl was watching him with a blank look of despair.

"You want to take things easier in your family," said Campbell. "I hope he didn't hurt you much, Miss Reid."

The girl said nothing, and Campbell left the room at once. Vivian Tydings was standing close to Chatham, looking up at him, still laughing as she closed the door behind her. But Chatham still looked savage and a bit wan, thought Campbell.

He said to Lionel Reid: "You come along with me, will you?"

Lionel went with him down the stairs and then into the library. As they passed down the stairs, the keen ears of the Scotchman could hear Vivian Tydings saying to Chatham in the hall above: "Did you see her face, Gene? Did you see her staring at you? She thought it was all for her—the roughing you gave Lionel. . . . She had her heart in her eyes, the silly little fool. She may have a Renaissance face but her mind never has waked up. . . . She ought to be—"

If Lionel heard this traduction, he gave no sign of it, but went striding on with his head bowed a little and the muscles of the base of his neck lifting his collar a good deal. He was a strong young man, physically, Campbell noted. He had the sort of muscle that gymnastics put on a lad.

When they got to the library, Campbell had Lionel sit in a chair which two floor lamps lighted. Everything else was turned out. Beyond that central glow, the books receded glimmering in their projecting bays, the rich blues and reds of levant morocco and the polished ivory of old vellum. Campbell was aware of those dim streaks of color like so many little watching eyes. Other vague faces lined the walls where the paintings hung, looking down indifferently on the living people.

Campbell, smoothing the bit of paper on the edge of a table, kept his eyes on Lionel Reid.

Campbell said: "You want this, Reid. You want it damn bad. You're figuring what would happen if you made a jump and got your hands on this—but don't you try any jumping. I got something in my pocket, and if I tag you with it, you'll stay 'it' for a long time."

Lionel Reid said nothing. He put his elbows on his hips and leaned forward. He had his jaw set. Now and then there was a slight tremor of his face.

CAMPBELL said: "That fellow Chatham has a lot of strength in his arms, hasn't he? I thought he was going to brain you against the wall. Did he hurt you much?"

Reid dismissed the question with a jerk of the hand.

"Looked to me," went on Campbell, "as though Chatham thought a good deal of your sister. I mean, he gave a kind of a jump when he saw a man handling her, that way. The way he laid hold on you looked like murder to me—until he saw your face and eased off a bit. Kind of fond of her, I'd say, in spite of the way Miss Tydings talks of her."

Young Reid kept his rigid attitude of attention, but without speaking a word of answer.

"This bird Chatham," said the sergeant, "looks to me like one of the free and easy ones with the ladies. He throws an eye at your sister and he certainly keeps thick with Vivian Tydings. What kind of a two-handed liar is Chatham with the ladies, would you say?"

"I say—damn him! That's all," answered Reid. "What do you want with me?"

"You're so nervous you're gonna break in two, before long," said Camp-

bell. "Lemme see what this is all about. A check to you, made out by Henry Tydings, eh?"

He read with much deliberation: "New York, February 14th, 1935. Number 480. Irving Trust Company. Woolworth Office. Woolworth Building, New York. Pay to the order of Lionel Reid, seven thousand, three hundred and twenty-five dollars and no cents. Henry Tydings.

"And here it's marked on the back, and punched, and all that. And endorsed by Lionel Reid. So you collected that money, Reid, and what I don't figure, is what all the shouting is about, when it's only a cancelled check? What's it about—all the fighting?"

Reid was lighting a cigarette. He said through the smoke: "The fact is that I made a fool of myself. A terrible fool. Mr. Tydings owed me some salary. He made out a check for that money and also he told me to use the rest of it on Charlotte. She was in a hole and needed a hand. I was to say that it was my money. I was to give it to her, you see, and play the part of the big brother. But I was doing some betting—making a fool out of myself. I thought I had a sure thing. I put up a stack of money on the tip to make a killing—and I was cleaned out. . . ."

"What was the race?" asked Campbell.

"Oh, down South. You know . . ."

"I mean, what horse?"

"What horse? Why, it was—Trumpeter. Yes, that's right. And he ran out of the money. Every penny went. I couldn't do for Charlotte what Tydings wanted me to. . . . And when she got hold of the check, today. . . ."

"Well," said Campbell, "when I was your age I used to put a little

money on a race every Saturday. And most of the time the money was lost. I tried the game for a whole year before I quit. But talking about this check, how did your sister come to have it?"

"I don't know," said Reid.

"Anyway," said Campbell, "she had hold of it, and asked you what you'd done with all that money. And you were ashamed, and so you tried to grab it away from her?"

"That's it. Yes, that's it."

"The hell it is," said Campbell. "Now, I've got a letter in my pocket with the real signature of Tydings on it. . . . Suppose I lay those two signatures side by side?"

"Go ahead," said Reid.

"You know how you look? Sick is how you look," said Campbell. "Green kind of. Better wipe your face before the sweat starts running on it."

Reid took that advice. Campbell was studying the signature.

"It's not a good forgery," said Campbell. "It's the sort of a job that a fool boy might run off. But forgery is bad business. The law goes for a forger pretty hard. Then there's the disgrace. I dunno. You could change your name and go off to the South Seas, somewhere, maybe. I dunno. It don't work, usually. You get started. You get dug into place in a new job, with new people around you. And then somebody pops up. Funny thing how somebody always pops up. Says two words. Winks. And everybody drops you cold. You gotta pack up and start for Central Africa, or something like that. . . . I'm kind of sorry to turn you over to the law, Reid. I kind of hate to do it. Because you're young. But. . . ."

Reid stood up. He said: "For the love of—"

"Yeah?" murmured Campbell. "I mean, what a fool you were to make it so much. As though a hard-boiled fellow like Tydings would pay over seven thousand dollars to his secretary! . . . By the way, when did you start working for Tydings?"

"January, some time. About the middle—Sergeant Campbell, I want to ask you to. . ."

"It's no good," said Campbell. "You gotta pay for things like this. You gotta pay me in the kind of money I want."

"I can raise money," said Reid. "I *shall* raise it, too! I haven't got much, but I'll give you a note—"

"FORGER—then bribery!" said Campbell. "You're ripe for the pen, kid, is all I can say. Ready for the trip up the river. What you can pay me is not money, but information. Going to come across with it?"

Reid rubbed his face with his handkerchief again.

"What were you and your sister fighting about in her room?" asked Campbell.

"The check. You could see that."

"She was going to use that check to put you in jail?"

"Yes," said Reid.

"Then why didn't she speak right up and tell me that it was a forgery? Why did she stand there looking as though she'd been knifed in the back, when I fished the bit of paper out of the bowl?"

"She wanted to hold the check over me. She thought that I might go wrong, unless she had authority over me," said Reid. "Girls are like that. Crazy. She couldn't understand that any moment the check might come to the attention of people and—"

"Go on," said Campbell. "Tell the

truth. That's all I ask you. But if you slip off the rails again, I'm going to slam you into a jail and let you stew there. Understand?"

"Yes," said Reid. He set his jaw hard again. Campbell could hear his breathing.

"You got a job with Tydings the middle of January. What did it pay?"

"A hundred a week."

"What did you do for the money?"

"I studied his pictures. He used to take me when he made a buy. He said he was going to make a connoisseur out of me."

"For a chance like that, you ought to have been paying money, eh?" asked Campbell. "Mighty kind of Tydings to pay you, and teach you too."

"Yes," said Reid.

"Tydings was a kind man, then?"

"Yes—no," said Reid.

"Damned unkind?"

Reid was silent.

"Tydings—wasn't he the kind that always had an idea in his head when he gave away money?" asked the detective.

"I suppose so," said Reid.

"Then what did he expect to get out of you?"

"I don't know."

"I mean, what did you have in the world that you could give him? Was your family so old that it meant a lot of social up to him to have you around?"

"No."

"You've got a shark playing Santa Claus, eh, to one of the little fish? That don't sound logical, Reid. First place, you take it like a gift. You're grateful to Tydings. You think maybe he *has* seen that you got the makings of a connoisseur, what?"

"I thought he might be right," said Reid.

"You felt pretty good, and you began to spend. You began to step out a little?"

Reid blinked and nodded.

"And you got in the hole," said Campbell. "You said to yourself that if you didn't make a killing, you'd be done for. Borrowed money would choke you, eh?"

Reid moistened his gray lips.

"You forged a check. You went around to the bank to cash it—then what happened?"

Reid stamped out his cigarette. He said: "I'd cashed checks there before. I never thought—I was going to clean up on Trumpeter and fix the things afterward at the bank, so the check never would come through to Tydings—and so I offered the check. The cashier went back out of his cubbyhole. I heard his voice speaking over the telephone, to Tydings. . . ."

"Did you run?" asked Campbell, curiously.

"No. I stood there."

"Gonna kill yourself before the police got you, eh?"

Reid said, slowly: "The cashier came back and said: 'Here you are, Mr. Reid,' and he passed the money across the windowsill. I knew then that Tydings had O. K.'d the check that I'd written."

"That made Tydings look pretty big," said Campbell. "That built him up a lot, didn't it?"

Reid said: "I thought of passing the money back. And then I thought about Trumpeter. It was the straightest tip that I'd ever had, I would clean up on him and then I could take a sort of high attitude with Mr. Tydings—twenty to one. . . ."

"You were going to make a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, eh?" asked Campbell, sympathetically.

Reid answered: "Trumpeter didn't place. That was all—quit like a dog. . . ."

"Just a rotten tip?" asked Campbell.

"No. Trumpeter needed that race under his belt to tighten him up. The next Thursday he ran away from a lot of better horses than the ones that had beaten him on Saturday."

"Going back to what happened when you lost the money?"

"I went out to the club and had a few drinks. I got a room and thought things over. The only way out was to kill myself. Then I remembered that Tydings had O. K.'d the check and it started me wondering."

"Because you knew, by that time, that he never did something for nothing?"

"Yes. I knew that, or began to suspect it. Finally I went to my sister's apartment. She was out. I waited for her to come in."

"You been in the habit of going to her?"

"Yes. Anybody would go to Charlotte for advice."

"Motherly, eh?"

"**N**O. Not motherly. But she just knows. Her brain can be as clear as ice. There's nobody like her. She takes hold of an idea the way a surgeon takes hold of a sick body, and she cuts the bad part away and leaves the good. Women twice her age, and men, come and ask her about things. I always used to go to her. She always could find a way out."

"Did she find a way out this time?"

"When she came in, she told me that she'd been with Tydings. He'd called and taken her for a ride and he'd talked things over with her. Everything. He showed her the check, which he'd got-

ten from the bank. He said that it was a question what could be done to make an honest man of me. He and she would work together and see what could be done."

"What did your sister say to you about it?"

Reid drew a breath. "She said," he repeated, "that she would have to marry him to save my worthless name."

"If she felt that way about you, why was she willing to marry Tydings to help you? Did she like the money?"

"She likes everything," said Reid. "But she knew, right away, that Tydings was blackmailing her. She said that Tydings had built me up for a fall from the start, overpaid me, put me in situations where I'd be tempted to spend money. That was why he'd O. K.'d the check. He wanted the proofs in his hands. Then he'd used them."

"But she was ready to play the game with Tydings—ready to marry him? Was that because she loved you, or because she liked Tydings, and wanted the money, too?"

"I don't know," said Reid.

"Look here!" said Campbell. "The deal you and I make goes through only if you tell the whole thing."

"I'm telling the whole thing. I don't know what's in her mind. I never know. Nobody does. She could keep on smiling if there were a knife at her throat. Nobody can fool her. She's always playing apart. And I never know what stage she's walking on. I know that she told Tydings, afterward, to his face, that it was blackmail. He admitted that it was. He said he loved her so much that he'd do a murder for the sake of getting her."

"Was that true?" asked Campbell.

Reid shook his head. "It's this

way," he explained. "It takes a man with a brain to appreciate Charlotte. She's not so very beautiful. But she gives a man what nobody else in the world can give. A sort of knowing. I don't mean compassionate knowing, but a sort of clear-eyed understanding. It kills off weak men. They can't stand being known. But a man with a brain like Tydings'—well, I think he felt she would be a greater possession than all his pictures. She said she would marry him, but she told him that all her life she would despise every part of him except his brain. He was willing to take that, and then go ahead. He would give her the check immediately after the marriage ceremony. He'd put it in the jewel casket, and she could have it along with the family jewels. Then the wedding day came along. I knew Tydings was a *dévil*, by that time, of course. I decided that I wouldn't let the marriage go through—at the last minute I'd kill him. And then Winifred Staunton got the gun away from me. Afterwards, I mean, after the shooting, Charlotte told me that she'd taken the casket out and dumped it in the pool after she'd tried to open the false bottom of it, and failed. She told me to go out and get it. To fish it out of the pool. I went out and found Clifford already fishing around in the lake, so I came back into the house. Just a little while ago, I went to see her and talk things over again. I was half crazy, thinking that Clifford might know about the casket and what was in it. . . . I went into Charlotte's room, and she showed me the check. I nearly dropped. I told her to give it to me, but she said that she wouldn't."

"How did she get the check?" asked Campbell.

"I don't know."

Campbell squinted his eyes.

"Clifford fishes the thing out of the pool," he said. "Chatham meets him and fights with him and gets the casket. He takes the check out of it. He gives it to your sister—well, go on."

"Chatham?" gasped Lionel Reid. "Do you think that he would have done such a thing?"

"Tell me what happened next."

"Nothing. When I saw that she wouldn't give me the check, I went half crazy. I grabbed her and tried to make her open the hand that held it."

"She wouldn't give it up? Why?"

"She said that unless someone held a whip-hand over me, I'd go to the devil by the shortest road. And while I was trying to get the check—you came in . . . and now I'm here blabbing out everything like a poor, spineless cur!"

Shame and anger jumped him out of his chair; self-pity strangled him and left him helpless.

Campbell folded the check and put it into his wallet.

"Wait!" cried Lionel Reid. "You promised me that if I talked you'd give me . . ."

"I told you that if you talked you wouldn't be jailed for forgery. In the meantime, you toe the mark, Reid, and work with me. And if anything you've told me turns out to be a lie . . ."

CHAPTER XII

Tydings Returns

FROM the library, Campbell started back towards the room where O'Rourke was holding Clifford and Kearton, but he went a roundabout way because he needed some time to put his ideas in order. That was why he passed into the armory, snapping on the lights and looking over the big room, with its figures

in plated armor grouped around the stairs. On the long table, something glimmered. Campbell stared at it a moment, then went at a run up the stairs and broke in on O'Rourke.

He was panting as he came in and the Irishman said: "You hurry so damn much is why you never get anywhere. What's the matter?"

"Clifford, I guess we don't need you any more, for a while. Only—we could ask you how often you go fishing with a rake. . . . You watch your step, Clifford," said the Scotchman.

"Very good, sir," said the butler.

"Can we leave this bird in here safely?" asked Campbell, pointing to Kearton.

"If we lock the window, maybe he'll be safe in here," said O'Rourke.

"He must of come in over the balcony. The only way he could of got onto the balcony was through Miss Reid's room. Listen to me, Kearton, why don't you come out with it? You were working for her to come in here and get at this picture. We're getting the proofs. We know most of the story. But we're going to go easy on the fellow that helps us out. Why don't you declare yourself in on a new deal?"

Kearton said, drily: "New deals cost too much. They start well, and they end up in a headache. I'm not talking today."

Campbell looked at the twine. It had been lashed around the wrists of their prisoner so firmly that the hands were swelling. Campbell grinned.

"This one will keep a while," he said, as O'Rourke closed the shutters, locked them, and did the same with the window. Afterward, they left the room, locked the door, and took the key.

On the way down the stairs, in brief

phrases Campbell repeated what he had learned from Lionel Reid.

O'Rourke said: "It's a game. They all chose up sides and got on the same side. They're all playing in together except maybe the females. And Chatham is the strong-arm guy. He's the killer. He runs the show. I felt it the minute I laid eyes on him. . . . What you got down here that you're so mysterious about?"

They entered the library, and Campbell pointed to the glimmer of the jewel casket on the long table.

O'Rourke went to it, leaned over it with care, gingerly lifted the lid off.

"Look," said Campbell. "By what the kid tells me I know—Charlotte Reid takes the jewel box out and dumps it in the lake—she had to make it disappear in a hurry before the house was searched. After her room was searched, she sends Lionel out to get the box fished up from the bottom of the pool. But Clifford was already there and Lionel comes away. Chatham slams Clifford, gets the box, takes it into the house, finds something in it—the check—takes the check to the girl, Charlotte. . . ."

"Wait a minute," said O'Rourke. "Why does he take it to the girl?"

"How can I tell?"

"You're one of those deducing detectives," said O'Rourke. "You read books and everything. I'd think that you'd be able to spot a thing like this right off."

"Shut your mouth and use your eyes, will you?" asked Campbell. "What do you make out of this box?"

"It's a fancy piece of work," said O'Rourke, "and some one has kicked it around a lot, recently. That's all I make out of it."

"We leave it here, then, where we found it," said Campbell. "It's an

empty egg, but I'm gonna try to find out where the meat was hid in it. You take. . . ."

Something bumped and rolled, dimly, on the floor above them. O'Rourke cocked his head to the side and then started on the run for the stairs. Lithe Angus Campbell slipped easily past him on the way up. They turned into the big vaulted corridor, raced around the turn of the hall, and there found two men struggling on the floor. Walden lay beneath with one arm locked in a stranglehold around the neck of Kearton; and Kearton was banging one elbow repeatedly against the side of Walden's head. O'Rourke kicked Kearton away with a literalness that lamed his foot. Then he picked up the smaller man by the nape of the neck and shook him. Kearton was gasping, his face swollen, his eyes thrusting out horribly. Campbell assisted Walden to his feet. A crimson bruise along the cheek bone and running back into the hair was turning purple momentarily.

Walden said, as he retied the belt of his dressing gown, "It was growing close in my room. I couldn't sleep. So I started down to take a walk in one of the larger rooms downstairs. . . . And out of the door of that room I saw this fellow sneaking with *that* tucked under his arm."

He pointed towards the copy of the Granduca, which lay on the floor.

"I thought that the fellow ought to be stopped," said Walden, "and so I tackled him. I think he would have smashed in the side of my head if you hadn't come just then."

"Why didn't you yell for help?" asked Campbell.

"I did—at least, I thought I did. But he kept me too busy for shouting, even."

"What have you got to say for yourself?" asked O'Rourke of Kearton.

Kearton said nothing. He fixed his expressionless eyes on the distance and was silent.

CAMPBELL said: "I'm mighty grateful to you, Mr. Walden.

You're a man who knows about things like this. Tell me what this picture's worth that the sneak tries to steal it."

"Worth? Why, it's not worth fifty dollars," said Walden. "A very gross, crude copy. I'll take it up to my room and look it over for you, if you please. But I'd say before hand that it's a worthless affair."

"We'll take care of it," said Campbell, "because it has the fingerprints of Mr. Tydings on it. Thanks just the same. Good night, Mr. Walden. Thanks for nailing this rat for us. Good night again."

They took Kearton back to the room where he had been confined. In the bathroom adjoining, there was a shower cased in heavy plate glass. Inside the shower room they locked Kearton and turned on the light. The bathroom window they closed after locking the shutters. As Campbell pointed out, if the prisoner tried to get out of the shower the noise of the breaking glass would rouse the house. And still he would have the bathroom door or window to get through at some expense of time.

In the bedroom, Campbell laid the picture back on the table. O'Rourke was already examining the window, which he opened, and then the shutters. He returned to the door and stared at it, dropped on his knees, glowering into the keyhole.

"Somebody else has a key," said

O'Rourke, "and he sneaks down the hall, opens the door, turns Kearton loose."

"What you think about Walden?" asked Campbell.

"I think he's got a mark on his face that'll last him for a while," said O'Rourke.

"Is he on the level?"

"On the level? Why would he take a beating like that if he wasn't on the level? . . . A big, soft kind of a bum that catches butterflies, you wouldn't think he'd turn on a scrap like that, would you?"

"You hear the first part of his yarn?" asked Campbell.

"Said his room was close. Well, the air's kind of muggy. There's only the noise of the tide, but there's no real wind."

"How do you feel when you walk around in this house alone?"

"Kind of spooky," said O'Rourke. "Why? . . . Idunno. You'd think I'd get over that kind of thing. But like I hear Cyclone Jack Thompson say, once, that he never squared off for the first round without feeling kind of sick in the stomach, it's the same way with me. I mean, when there's murder and that sort of thing in the air."

"But here's this big, soft guy Walden," said Campbell. "And he goes out of his room to take a little stroll and get the air. Intends to roam around through some of the big, empty rooms. Does that sound right to you?"

"No, it don't sound right," said O'Rourke, "when I come to think of it."

"You don't think very often," answered Campbell, "but you got a sort of a brain when you try to use it. . . . Then, suppose you look at it this way. Walden opens the door of that room

with a key that he's picked up, somewhere. He lets Kearton out . . ."

"How would Kearton get his hands untied?"

"Look," said Campbell. "Using the brain is what nobody expects an Irish mug to do, but even a Mick can use his eyes, sometimes."

He pointed to the floor near the corner of the table. The top of the table was a huge slab of colored marble which, at that corner, had been deeply chipped.

"Yeah . . ." muttered O'Rourke. "He chafes the twine through against that. Well?"

"The door's open, and Walden waits to see Kearton sneak away. Kearton sneaks, but he takes along with him the picture—the chromo that Walden says isn't worth fifty dollars. Understand? So Walden jumps him. He wants to get Kearton out of the room, and then dip inside and grab off the picture for himself. But he won't let Kearton run away with the Madonna. Not him. He slams Kearton. They go down together. You notice that Kearton's being strangled and can't yell—and Walden won't! Yeah, funny thing that Walden forgot to let out a yip. Damned funny. Too busy to think of calling for help—and he thinks that we'll swallow that! The thing's as plain as the nose on anything but an Irish mug."

O'Rourke endured the insult without a word. He merely said: "Yeah—and he was pretty willing to take the picture up to his room and look it over. Yeah . . . I *am* a mug. Walden's in on the dirty work, too. They're all in on it. Every damned one in the house. All in on the dirt, and Mr. Murderer Chatham at the head of the list!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in! Come in!" bawled O'Rourke.

Clifford opened the door.

"Mr. Tydings has just come back," said Clifford. "Do you gentlemen wish to see him?"

"Tydings? Come back? The hell you say!" said O'Rourke.

"In the armory, gentlemen, if you please," said Clifford. "Shall I show you down?"

He showed them down the great stairs.

O'Rourke said: "It all kind of peeters out except the chromo about the Madonna and Child. They're trying to swipe that, Angus. The fact is that it ain't a copy. It's the original. And things by Raphael cost millions."

"No," said Campbell, "it's a fake. It's just a copy. I was reading about the look of old paint . . ."

"Ah, to hell with you and your books and the old paint, too," said O'Rourke. "Here we are . . . Maybe there's something in the air, after all."

Two blue-uniformed policemen stood at the door of the armory. One of them saluted the detectives.

"The chief's in there waiting for you with Tydings," he said.

O'Rourke pushed through the doorway first.

He recognized the big man who had been waiting at the foot of the causeway earlier in the night.

"There we are," said the man of law, and pointed towards a couch.

On it lay Tydings with a doubled blanket beneath him. O'Rourke and Campbell went over and looked into the half-opened eyes. The clothes of Tydings were wet. From the sleek of his head, water was distilling in drops at the ends of the hair.

Tydings was dead. O'Rourke turned sharply around and stared at the im-

passive face of Clifford, who waited near the door with the air of the perfect servant, ready to obey.

CHAPTER XIII

Report of the Medical Examiner

DISTRICT ATTORNEY HULL said, yawning: "We had to wait all this hellish time before the motorboat showed up. When we got halfway over, one of the boys spotted something white, like the belly of a fish. It wasn't the belly of a fish. It was Tydings' face, just under the water. The tide was tugging at him, but his clothes had caught on a point of rock. Otherwise, he'd be miles up the bay by this time. We fished him out, and brought him here. I've got an idea the best thing is to ship him straight to the morgue. . . ."

"One moment," said Clifford, still by the door. "I'll see if it's proper for you to come in, Miss Tydings. . . ."

Hull made a wry face.

"This is going to be one of those damned things," he said. "But we can't keep her away from her father's body, I suppose. We've got to ask her pleasure, too. . . . Besides, I've got something to say. Let her come in."

Vivian Tydings came in, wrapped warmly to the throat in a dressing gown of flowered stuff that gave her dark beauty a Japanese cast. Hull went to her and blocked her way, swaying a bit from side to side as though more securely to keep her from looking past him.

"I want to tell you, Miss Tydings," he said, "on this unfortunate occasion—"

She slipped past him and went straight to the couch. She leaned over the dead body, holding the upper part of her robe with one hand as though

she were afraid that the fringe of the garment might touch death. O'Rourke, half-crouching, studied her face and saw no change in it.

Now she stood straight. "I don't have to ask you if he's dead," she said calmly.

"I'm afraid not," said Hull. "What I wondered was—the fact is that the bullet wound was not mortal, so far as we can tell. This is a case that the medical examiner—"

"Do you think an autopsy is in line?" asked the girl.

"I think there'll have to be one," said Hull.

"In that case, the body should be removed to the morgue?"

"That's the usual process, Miss Tydings," said the district attorney, wondering at her.

"Then it had better be done as soon as possible," she replied. "Is there anything more that you wish to ask me?"

"Nothing," said Hull.

"Then I shall leave everything in your hands," she answered, and left the room.

Hull said: "That's the thoroughbred. Stunned, but superior to the shock. She'll probably faint on the floor of her room. . . . I tell you, Sergeant O'Rourke, women like her would mother a race of warriors, an army."

"Sure," said O'Rourke. "They'd mother killers of one sort or another."

"What do you mean?" asked Hull.

"Why, man, couldn't you see that she didn't give a damn?" asked O'Rourke. "Angus, see that the police get Miss Staunton under arrest all proper and formal. I'm going to get some sleep."

He went slowly out of the room. From the stairs, the groan of his prodigious yawn came back to them.

"Animal!" said Campbell through his teeth. "Just Irish animal!"

THE green-gray of the dawn had commenced when O'Rourke went to sleep. When he wakened the day was already hot and the sun slid through the window and lay in yellow fire on the floor. Campbell was shaking him by one shoulder.

"One more drink, boys, and then I've gotta beat it—" said the voice of O'Rourke out of his dream. Then he wakened to the facts.

Campbell said: "We've just got word from the medical examiner. It's a beauty—can you listen? Can you rub the wool out of the thing you call a brain? Hear this: the bullet wound was superficial—could have done little more than cause slight shock reaction—but notice this—the doctor jumped right into the business. Not drowning. No water in the lungs. Body dead before it got into the water . . ."

O'Rourke gaped.

"The doctor makes a hot solution—dips in the copper—it turns gray with copper arsenide!"

"Arsenic!" shouted O'Rourke.

"Chronic poisoning given over a long period. Widespread fatty degeneration everywhere—and him a skinny bird, at that! Arsenic everywhere—tons of it in the liver, plenty in the kidneys—arsenic even in the *brain!*"

O'Rourke sat up on the edge of the bed.

"I knew it!" he said. "The whole gang is going to hang for this. *I'm* going to hang them all!"

"I've sent word to get everybody into the armory," said Campbell. "We're going to slam this news over and see where it hits. Afterwards we'll see who goes up Salt Creek. Come on, Pat!"

6 D—8

"Wait till I get a wash. There's sand in my eyes. Is that Kearton still in the bathroom?"

"Sleeping on the floor of the shower."

They went into the bathroom. Kearton opened one eye, stared at them through the plate glass, and went to sleep again.

"Sort of a calm kind of a mug," O'Rourke observed, soaping his hands. "How does the thing look to you now, Angus? Go one and deduce a while."

Campbell started striding up and down. He could only make a pace and a half each way, but he kept in motion. His eyes were red-rimmed from a sleepless night, but a ferret-like energy possessed him.

"Look at all of 'em," he said. "Vivian Tydings stands to win her father's money when he dies. Charlotte Reid stands to dodge a damned unhappy marriage. Her brother was ready to shoot, so he'd be ready to poison. The doctor—we've got to have a lot to say to the doctor—him living in the house and a man he's taking care of dies of chronic arsenic poisoning. Then there's Clifford. The cook's out, and so are the rest of the servants as far as I can see, but Clifford is too damned wise for his business. There's Chatham, ready for anything. Walden ready to fight for that picture. And the whole lot of them in and out of this house for the whole of the last two weeks . . . Everyone of them except Winifred Staunton."

"Does she go free?" asked O'Rourke.

"Nobody goes free from this house till we say the word. The tide's running again. That'll shut off the sneaks that want to get away. There's never been anything like this, Pat. This is a case that's going to make things hum

—the casket, the check, the marriage, the gun, the shooting, the man in armor and then in the dumbwaiter—and arsenic poisoning! Pat, I ask you, did you ever hear of a finer set-up than this? The females all young and pretty—the men all full of brains and money . . . Hell, Pat, this is going to be printed in brass!”

O'Rourke was drying his face.

He said: “Get Kearton out of his shower room. We'll walk down there and slam the bunch of them, now.”

They took Kearton with them down the stairs to the armory. The heat of the day had been partially shattered away so that a dim light filled the room. Chatham's strong, steady voice was speaking from a corner, where he sat with Walden. The doctor was speaking earnestly with Vivian Tydings, whose head was high, her manner totally indifferent. Clifford watched by the door.

Campbell stood up on a chair. Two policemen lounged by the windows. Winifred Staunton lay back in an easy chair with her eyes tightly shut. Walden was with the Reids at the end of the room.

Campbell said: “Ladies and gentlemen, we've just had a report from the medical examiner of the city. We want to tell you that Mr. Henry Tydings did not die of a bullet wound or by drowning. He was murdered by slow arsenic poisoning!”

Someone groaned. That was Vivian Tydings; and O'Rourke fixed her with a pointing forefinger.

Something else slumped and bumped on the floor.

That was Doctor Willard Hamblin, who lay with his head and shoulders against the wall and his body sprawled loosely out on the floor. His head sagged forward. He seemed to be

studying the tips of his shoes with a drunken intentness.

“So that's it?” said Campbell, stepping down from the chair. “Get him, Pat. The job's done sooner than I thought!”

CHAPTER XIV

Exit Kearton

O'Rourke went to the fallen doctor. Campbell took swift heed of the others in the room in the moment of their reaction.

Vivian Tydings had pushed open a window, saying: “I could stand anything but that!” Walden had muttered: “Arsenic? After all—poor Tydings!” And Charlotte Reid, with her brother, had drawn suddenly close together, as if for mutual support. Or, rather, Lionel Reid had shrunk close to his sister; her own head was high. Big Gene Chatham sat on his heels beside the chair of Winifred Staunton, now, saying: “It's going to be finished in a little while, Winifred . . . Only a little more of going uphill and then you're out of it.”

“Do I look like the devil, Gene?” asked the woman.

“You look twenty-two and *full* of the devil,” he told her.

“It's as though I'd been in the electric chair—I can sit here and see my dead body with the cap over the head.”

“That's silly, Winifred,” said Chatham. “You and I are going to have a party when we're away from this hell-hole.”

“Listen to me, Gene . . .”

The rest of the voice died away. O'Rourke had the doctor sitting up and then on his feet. O'Rourke was being brotherly. He was saying: “There's no use fighting now, Hamblin. Everyone saw you drop. You're

as good as finished now, but a fine confession may get you off with life. Just talk it right out and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble . . ."

Hamblin broke in, panting out the words: "What I gave him was only a tonic. It was a safe tonic. Ask the pharmacy. They'll tell you—"

That was why Campbell was on the telephone a moment later, a temporary wire having been rigged from the broken causeway by the police as they came over. He was talking with the head of Stacey and Martell, and Mr. Stacey was explaining that for two months he had been preparing an arsenic tonic at the perscription of Doctor Hamblin. The contents were high in alcohol. The arsenic was not in a dangerous amount. It was true that arsenic was a cumulative poison and that Mr. Tydings had not been a very strong man. . . .

Campbell went back to O'Rourke. There was one advantage in having police on hand. The members of this strange household could be segregated and kept under guard, and the hands of the detectives were free.

"It looked good," said Campbell. "But it won't be worth a damn unless—well, we'll take a look over Tydings' room."

They went together, Campbell explaining the result of his telephone call, and so they came to Tydings' apartment. It was a great glow of color. The bedroom's lofty ceiling had been turned into a Moorish dome, lifted at the corners on slender groups of columns, with the face of the dome itself lightened by colored arabesques so that it seemed like the inner surface of a gaudy soapbubble. It was a big room, with the bed raised on a sort of dais, approached by three low steps. The four-poster was curtained. The pic-

tures on the walls were of a late period, an Italian school that delighted to paint pretty faces and delicate bodies against a background of heavy architectural ruins. The pictures made no sense but they charmed the eye.

They had been through the apartment before, but O'Rourke paused in the bedroom to say: "He was a kind of a damn king or something, Angus. He claps his hands and the seven-foot Nubian slave sticks his head in through the door and does a couple of salaams. 'Bring on the dancing girls, Alfonso,' says Tydings. 'Coming up,' says Alfonso. 'Are you havin' 'em rare, medium, or well done, sir?' 'Just tender,' says Tydings. 'And give us some music, Alfonso.' 'The Rockaway Jazz Boys have all been hanged by the neck according to your orders last night, sir,' says Alfonso, 'but the Come and Get It orchestra is all heated up and ready to go.' 'Shoot!' says Tydings. That's the way the bird must of lived, in here."

"It's a funny thing and a kind of a sad thing," said Campbell, "how low a mind you got—here's the bathroom."

The bathtub was massive marble, a single piece ten feet long and seven wide having been sunk in the floor, and entered by steps which were guarded with blue rubber matting. A couch was ready so that the master could recline after the labor of bathing himself.

"Here's where the Swedish rubber stands by to rub the last champagne out of Tydings," said O'Rourke. "I tell you what, Angus, if the boys could have a look into a house like this, there'd be a revolution or something, pretty quick. This would make the kind of stuff that Huey Long likes to talk about. We'd have the wealth all divided up in no time."

"Here's the medicine cabinet," said Campbell. "There's fifty things, in here. Wait a minute. I've got it."

He held up a small bottle of blue glass, and took from the mouth of it a shallow cork, with a wire cork-pull fastened in it.

"Here we are, Pat," said Campbell. "It's only a quarter full. And the words as big as life on the outside: ARSENIC TONIC. If Hamblin wanted to poison Tydings, why did he go around holding up an electric sign like this, telling the world what he was trying to do? We gotta have this analyzed."

"Why?" asked O'Rourke. "You've talked to the drug store already and heard that the tonic was all right."

"I'll have it analyzed," said Campbell. "It's the thing to do. We can get the report in an hour or so. . . . And I want to take another look at that picture."

"Book stuff!" said O'Rourke. "The trouble with you, Angus, is you don't know what to do except you can remember seeing it in a book of some kind. . . . I'll have another sleep. Let the cops take care of things for us."

THAT was why a motorboat sped away from the house carrying the sample of the arsenic tonic. And that was why O'Rourke stretched himself for another sleep, while Campbell sat down again at the table. He had asked Walden to come into the room for a few moments to answer questions, and Walden was serenely communicative.

The picture had been done in tempera, he said.

"What's the difference between tempera and the other stuff they paint with?" asked Campbell.

"Oils are clayey," said Walden.

"They are disagreeable to handle and they give a thick, muddy surface which is unpleasant unless one looks at it from a distance. Egg tempera. . ."

"Egg?" asked Campbell.

"It was used as long ago as the Egyptians," said Walden.

"And didn't spoil?" murmured Campbell.

Walden laughed a little. "It endures ten times better than the best oils," he said.

"Then, why would anybody paint in anything else?" asked Campbell.

"Because it goes on wet, and according to the medium it covers, it changes color as it soaks in and dries. The painter puts on one thing knowing that it will turn out a different shade. It's painting in the dark, one might say."

"Yeah?" said Campbell. "There ain't anything easy about pictures, it looks to me. Tell me something about the way the doctor worked when he painted this, Mr. Walden?"

"First," said Walden, "he laid down a thick coat for a background. On this occasion, he wanted to be painting on paint. Perhaps he was not satisfied with the surface of the canvas. I don't know exactly what was going on in his mind."

"Kind of a queer thing to do, maybe?"

"He probably made a bad start and washed it out with another surface of ground-paint."

"People do that often?"

"Quite often. . . . The doctor is an economical painter, as a rule. He doesn't like to waste canvas."

"Can you tell me anything else about this, Mr. Walden?"

"I could talk to you for a long time about painting in general. But what do

you expect to make out of this, Campbell?"

"I dunno," said Campbell. "It's got something to do with things. Why else would Tydings go and lay hands on it after he was wounded?"

"The man was sick with his wound, Campbell," said Walden. "And in his dazed condition I dare say it was natural for him to go to the doctor's room."

"Then why should he touch this?"

"Dizzy, half fainting, he put out his hand to support himself, and it happened to touch this frame. That must be all."

"Why would Kearton try to steal it? . . ."

"Kearton is a poor sneak thief. He got into the house and was sure that any painting he happened to steal would mean a fortune to him."

"There's two happenstances in that," said Campbell. "Tydings 'happened' to touch this picture. Kearton 'happened' to try to steal this one. . . . And look here—what was Kearton trying to do when he rubbed something on this corner of the paint?"

He pointed out a narrow streak from which a good deal of the surface paint had been rubbed away.

Walden leaned suddenly and stared at the picture with narrowed eyes.

"Ah," he said, "that's odd. . . . But then, I suppose I can understand."

"You're sort of seeing through things, today," said Campbell. "Go ahead, Mr. Walden."

"I dare say," said Walden, "that when poor Kearton decided that he would steal a picture from the Tydings collection, he in the first place wanted to find out something about painting. He might learn readily enough about tempera, and he might feel that the only way to make sure

that a picture was in tempera—and therefore old—was to take off a specimen. There, you see, he has done exactly that. He was sure, then, that the picture was an old masterpiece such as the newspapers talk about. . . . Poor Kearton! How could he know that the use of tempera is reviving so much?"

Three pistol shots in rapid succession boomed far away through the house. A door opened within the building. A voice began to shout.

Campbell ran to the door and threw it open.

"What's up?" he yelled.

"Kearton—gone—vanished!" came the shouted answer from a policeman.

CHAPTER XV

The Doctor Doesn't Know

CAMPBELL refused to be excited. He went to the window of his room and saw four bluecoats rushing through the garden, pausing to probe stupidly at translucent shrubbery, yelling to one another, making a circus of commotion as they searched for that vanished Kearton.

Campbell turned back to the table and sat down in front of the copy of the Granduca. Inside the frame he felt, profoundly, was contained an answer to the mystery. But along what road he could follow his investigations, he was unsure. He could only stick out his lean jaw and determine to endure. And the rather maudlin prettiness of the Madonna's face mocked at him constantly.

He had little use for women. . . .

O'Rourke came in, still yawning.

"A rope done it," said O'Rourke. "Top of the house. Somebody stood up there and held onto a rope, that he got out of the boatshed under the house. Understand? Dropped the long

end over. Let it dangle across the window where Kearton was kept by one of the dumb policemen. The fellow swore that he didn't turn his back for ten seconds. But when he looked again, Kearton was gone. He thought Kearton might have jumped out the window. Ran to see. Kearton wasn't on the ground in a heap under the window. Instead, he was swinging off to the side at the end of a long rope, hit the ground, and bolted into the brush. The policemen let out a holler and socked three bullets into the brush. But the men on the force don't shoot the way they used to in the old days. They couldn't hit nothing, even with a garden hose . . . And there you are! They've searched the garden. They don't find Kearton. . . . Hell!"

"Somebody," said Campbell, slowly, "steals a rope out of the boathouse, and goes up to the roof with it. Takes a chance of being spotted all the way up through the house."

"He could have used the servants' stairs. He could have wound the rope around him inside his coat," said O'Rourke.

"Then he stands up there on the roof and dangles the rope over the edge. Been up there?"

"I been up there. I seen the place where the rope chafed against the edge of the gutter and rubbed the paint away. . . . I know what you mean—a man standing up there as big as a tower, eh, for the whole world to look at? But you forget. People don't look up at the shine of the sky when the sun is hanging in the middle of things, burning the eyes out."

O'Rourke sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"It was Chatham, of course."

"Anybody find him near the top of the house?" asked Campbell.

"No. They found him down in the armory, sitting close and talking serious to Vivian Tydings—and that was that."

"They been there long together, did the girl say?" asked Campbell.

"She said only a few moments. But it looked long. She's gaga about him. Get's as bright as a rose when he looks at her—crook that he is."

"He's the kind that they like," said Campbell. "Big and mean and don't say much."

District Attorney Hull came to the room and sat down and wiped his red face.

"Gone!" he said. "No trace of him anywhere. It looks as though he must have dived into the sea. I've sent a boat out to cruise for him. They'll circle and circle until they find something. . . . The damndest thing I ever heard of, O'Rourke—a man fading out through a window, like that."

O'Rourke said: "This whole damn house is full of thugs that are working together."

A rap at the door announced Clifford. He said: "Telephone call for Sergeant Campbell."

Campbell went out into the hall, turned on his heel, and said, as Clifford closed the door: "Don't laugh behind my back, you big soggy mass of poison."

"No, sir," said Clifford.

"When I come to the end of this trail, I'll probably have you up Salt Creek."

"Salt Creek, sir? I'm afraid you have the advantage of me, there."

"The hell I have! I mean the electric chair, and I've got an idea that you'll fry in it."

"I hope not, sir."

Campbell stalked away. He was ashamed of that outburst. He was

ashamed of the tremor all through his nerves and wished most heartily that he had followed the example of O'Rourke and gotten some sleep the night before.

When he got to the telephone a voice said: "Hello! Hello! Campbell? Why the devil don't you keep yourself closer to a telephone?"

"Why the devil don't you give me one to carry in my pocket, then?" Campbell astonished himself by saying.

"You know who you're talking to?" demanded the other.

"I recognize your voice, Inspector."

"I'll have an apology for this talk, Campbell!"

"You'll be damned before you get one," said Campbell.

"You're demoted!" shouted the Inspector. "You're fired! . . . I'm going to kick you off the force! . . . Call O'Rourke to the telephone!"

"Call him yourself," said the demon that was in Campbell.

"Ah—drunk!" he heard the Inspector mutter.

THE brain of Campbell was reeling. His future, his life, his self-respect were based on the broad rock of the Inspector's knowledge of his good deeds on the force. What imp of the perverse had placed those terrible words in his throat and made him utter them?

"Campbell, you're drunk!"

"No, sir. But I wish that I was."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Sorry, sir. I'm going crazy down here, that's all. . . ."

"You can't find the guilty man?"

"Everybody's guilty. The whole house is full of murder!" cried Campbell.

"Does O'Rourke think that, too?"

"O'Rourke doesn't think," said Campbell. "He only uses his brain once a week, and that's to collect his pay."

"Campbell, listen to me. This case has got to be solved. It's filling the newspapers. They're sending off whole boatloads of reporters and photographers to gum things up for you . . . But you've got to have a solution on the way by night. I want an arrest."

"I'll make one," said Campbell.

"It's the medicine," said the Inspector. "Get the doctor and put the cuffs on him. Guard him, and use your discretion about sending him to jail at once. . . . The medicine—the tonic—I've got the analysis here beside me. It's very much condensed. I have the report of the drug store, too. Much condensed above the strength of the mixture that the drug store put up. It's now a very strong poison. Not instantly fatal, but a slow, sure poison. Find the man who condensed that mixture, and you've got the murderer . . . Is that clear? . . . There's nine chances out of ten that the doctor is the guilty man—and we want an arrest. Good-by, Campbell, and mind your manners the next time you speak to a superior officer."

"Yes, Inspector," said Campbell, humbly, and hung up.

He felt old, very tired, very uncertain about the knees.

He had to climb up to the upper floor. In the hall, Vivian Tydings went by on the arm of Chatham. They were walking slowly, she leaning a little towards the big man. When he spoke in return, electric happiness flashed in her face.

They went on, unconscious of the detective.

And it was she who had looked at her dead father in the middle of the

night before! She was already in love, deeply, gloriously in love.

Children were like that. His own daughter would be the same way. Cling to him like a baby until his eyes were closed and then laugh in his dead face.

Staring blankly down the length of the hall, he saw Charlotte Reid turn the farther corner and come suddenly on Vivian Tydings and tall Gene Chat-ham. She shrank from them or merely wavered an instant in her step, then went on past them with her head serenely high.

The Scotchman waited there for her to pass. She was smiling a little. It was only when she went by him that Campbell saw a glint of moisture on the long, dark lashes of her eyes. Then she was gone into her room.

Campbell went back to his.

He found the district attorney theorizing with O'Rourke.

Campbell said: "Ah, shut up, O'Rourke. . . . Mr. Hull, have the doctor put under closer arrest, will you? It was the medicine that turned the trick, after all. Concentrated, d'you see? A lot stronger than what the prescription called for. O'Rourke, will you take a look and see how the doctor faces the music?"

"Take a look yourself," said O'Rourke. "You've been staring at the picture so long it'll rest your old eyes to have a look at flesh and blood."

Campbell did not protest. He went out of the room with Hull and down the hall at his side.

"It's the doctor beyond all doubt, eh?" asked Hull.

"How do I know?" demanded Campbell. "If it's the doctor, what does Kearton mean? What does Chat-ham mean saving Kearton? Why does Kearton want the picture? Why does

Walden want the picture? Damn it, what has the picture to do with the murder of Tydings, anyway? . . . I'm going crazy, is all I know."

They went into a room where the doctor lay on his bed with both hands folded under his head.

Campbell stood over him, staring. "Hello, doc," he said.

"Hello," said Doctor Hamblin, opening his eyes and blinking up at the face above him.

"News for you, doctor," said Campbell.

"What sort of news?"

"Take it lying down, sitting up, or standing?"

The doctor leaped to his feet.

"Go on!" he commanded.

"It's all finished," said Campbell.

"We've got you cold."

The doctor moistened his gray lips. A breath of wind seemed to stir his thin hair. It was only the violence of the shudder that shook his body.

"We've got the analysis from the chemist," said Campbell. "The tonic you ordered for Tydings you boiled down before you gave it to him. . . . It became a strong poison. Easy to cause death. . . . Any statements to make, doctor?"

The big blue-coated policeman in the room strode over and took up a position of readiness behind the doctor.

HAMBLIN had put a hand to his head. He went over to a chair and gripped the back of it, lowering himself slowly into it. His head dropped against the back of it.

"All right," he said, lying there with closed eyes.

"Confess, eh?" asked Campbell.

"Confess? Yes. I suppose so. I don't know."

"You poisoned Henry Tydings,

Doctor Hamblin?" said Campbell, with a gentle insistence.

"I don't know," said the doctor, wearily.

Campbell signed to the policeman.

"Yeah . . . like a hawk . . . the dirty so-and-so!" said the officer.

Campbell went back to the room where O'Rourke was puffing moodily at a cigarette, standing with his left hand shoved into a hip pocket and staring at the Granduca.

"Confessed," said Campbell.

"Yeah?" drawled O'Rourke.

"Don't mean much to you, eh?"

"Why should it—from that darn louse."

"Gotta have a real man even for a poisoning?" asked Campbell.

"Chatham!" said O'Rourke. "He's what I gotta have!"

"The Tydings girl is dizzy about him," said Campbell. "Now the Reid girl cries over him—and she's the iron woman that her brother was gabbing about. He's not a murderer. He's a Great Lover, Pat."

"Is he? Then he'll burn for that, too!" said O'Rourke, and spat ruthlessly on the Persian rug.

Campbell and O'Rourke lose one good suspect—Winifred Staunton—and find another, Dr. Hamblin. But that doesn't solve the mystery by a jugful, and well they know it. Why did Walden fail to yell? Who is Kearton, the silent skulker? Where does Gene Chatham fit in—and Charlotte, and Lionel, and Vivian, and Clifford? An amazing development and hair-raising thrills are in store in next week's installment!



The Legal Counterfeit Racket

NOT only passing counterfeit money, but passing it in such a manner that legal immunity is secured, is the racket engaged in by one who shall here be known by the fictitious name of Bill Smith. When Bill wants to get rid of one of the counterfeit bills, and get good money in return for it, he visits a store, generally a restaurant, and induces the proprietor to give him a meal, for instance, without charge on the grounds that he is financially embarrassed. After eating the meal, Bill allows a counterfeit bill to flutter to the floor in such a manner that the proprietor is sure to notice it. The proprietor then walks over, picks up the bill, and Bill makes a grab for it, but the proprietor rings up the price of the meal and returns the change. Bill departs with the change and the proprietor discovers later that the money is counterfeit.

The joker is that the proprietor can do nothing about it as he seized the bill. The law makes it a crime to pass counterfeit money, but in a case of this kind it has been held that the counterfeit was not offered as legal tender.

—John Berry.

A \$200,000 Jawbone

By
Major C. E. Russell


TRUE SHORT
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



Graham knew he
was on the right
trail

THEY'VE found the body of rival, Graham's thoughts flashed back to the office of this president of a mid-western life insurance company only three weeks before. In response to an urgent telephone call he had made a hurried trip west.

James Watson, Graham!" the excited voice of William Worthington cried. "I'll pick you up in ten minutes." And the receiver banged up before Graham could ask a question.

As he awaited Worthington's ar-

When Big-Shot Racketeers Sprung a New Swindling Game, Investigator Graham Struck Back with Something Original in Baiting Crooks

As Worthington told the story to Graham; seven months previously,

Watson, one of their largest policy holders, had disappeared, leaving letters stating that he was committing suicide. Even if the company had reason to believe that this was a hoax, they had no proof to the contrary, and the family was pressing for payment.

And, now, through none of his efforts, the body of the missing merchant had been found. Aside from the fact that Graham regretted the large loss his client would have to stand; for they had neglected to take out re-insurance on the coverage, he was not sorry that this case had blown up in his face. He had other investigations back east.

"Come on, Graham, I'll drive you out," Worthington announced, bursting in on him.

"All I know is that a couple of hunters stumbled onto a skeleton back in the hills," Worthington informed Graham as they drove along. "Near it was a traveling bag that belonged to Watson. It looks as if the fool carried out his threat."

"Where's the skeleton now?"

"Right where it was found. When the sheriff phoned me I told him to place a guard over it until we got there."

"Won't the sheriff resent my butting in on this?" Graham asked.

"No—I told him you were in town and he was only too glad to have you in on it. He understands that a man of your ability is an asset to him in a case like this. And he'll keep his mouth shut, too," Worthington ended.

The sheriff was waiting for them beside a faint trail. Under his guidance they hurried off into the deep woods.

"It was just luck—the boys finding it," the sheriff volunteered. "They were hunting for a wounded buck and ran across it. It's right over there un-

der those trees," he ended, indicating a cleared space in the midst of a thicket. "You go in alone, Graham. You understand these things better than I do."

Leaving the others outside, Graham walked into the clearing. Scattered around under the trees where the animals had dragged them, were the bones of what had once been a human being. Pieces of a torn and rotted suit had been pulled and pushed to one side. Near by was a sole-leather traveling bag, its top gaping open, its contents in plain sight; the initials "J.W." faintly discernible. On the ground, close to the largest pile of bones, was a .30-30 rifle, rusty and caked with dirt.

Ignoring the too evident clues, Graham crouched low and made a minute search of the surrounding earth. Digging around he finally found three exploded shells from the rifle which he slipped into his pocket. Then satisfied that he had covered all the immediate vicinity he went over and knelt down by the largest pile of bones, to poke around with his finger.

DEEP down in the pile he found the lower jaw of the skeleton.

Slipping it into his pocket he arose and turned away only to catch sight of a pair of shoes tucked far in under some bushes. Going over, he retrieved them and after a casual glance was about to toss them aside when something queer about them changed his mind and he tucked them under his arm.

"That's all, gentlemen," he announced quietly, returning to the others. "I would suggest, Sheriff, that you turn the remains over to the family for burial."

"Don't you want to keep them for evidence?" Worthington demanded.

"No. That's up to the family," Graham declared, leading the way back to the automobile.

"I picked up a few clues that may or may not mean anything, Sheriff," Graham said as they walked along. "Just as soon as I know I'll communicate with you."

"That's all right, Graham, you handle it," the sheriff replied.

"Well!" snapped Worthington, when he and Graham had returned to his office. "Do we pay—or don't we?"

"I doubt it—but of course I can't say just yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. There are several things that indicate that this may be a plant. In the first place there were no bullet-holes in any of the bones. There should have been if that rifle was used—as they intended us to believe—by Watson in committing suicide. In the second place, *that rifle was fired three times!* Here are the exploded shells. The hitting power of that rifle is so tremendous that no human being could stand a second shot, much less a third."

"Well, I'll be damned," Worthington managed to gasp.

"In the third place," Graham went on, "if the suicide had done the usual thing and wanted to make sure he died quickly, as he would out there in those lonely woods, he would have placed the muzzle of that rifle in his mouth. The resulting explosion would have shattered the top of his head. *The top of the skull was intact.*"

"But suppose he was killed accidentally—or murdered, what then?"

"That's possible but not probable in the face of those letters Watson left. Then, too, here's another clue. See these laces?" Graham asked, indicating the shoes he had brought back with

him. "They've been cut straight across. No animal or insect could or would have cut them so clean. The indications are that these shoes were cut off after that body was placed where the animals could get at it."

"All manufactured evidence?"

"Right."

"A very pretty theory, Graham, but I doubt it will convince a jury. The family'll claim that skeleton was Watson's, and we can't refute it—not with what you have."

"Then maybe this will do the trick," Graham smiled, taking the jawbone out of his pocket. "See those teeth? They won't bite you," he hastened to add as Worthington pulled back in horror. "When I find the dentist that worked on Worthington's mouth I'll have the answer to this riddle."

FINDING that dentist proved a harder task than Graham had anticipated. Nearly all of the people in the town were in sympathy with the widow and not inclined to aid the insurance company. It was late one Saturday afternoon before Graham finally found the dentist he was seeking, and even then he had his trouble for his pains.

"I'm not helping you or the insurance company to defraud Mrs. Watson out of what's rightfully hers," the dentist snapped, in answer to Graham's request for a chart of Watson's mouth. "And besides I never made one. Watson was my father-in-law and I didn't need one."

If this man had known Graham better he might have wondered why the criminologist took his rebuff with a smile. However, during the interview, the man had all unconsciously allowed his glance to stray to a small filing-cabinet over in a corner.

Late that same night, Graham, availing himself of the cover of dark doorways, stole along until he reached the building where the dentist had an office. Looking around he fitted a skeleton key into the outside door, opened it, and slipped inside.

Closing it softly behind him he crept up the three flights of stairs to the dentist's office. Reaching it he placed his ear to the door. He did not want to risk discovery if the dentist, suspicious of him, was guarding the place. Satisfying himself that he had nothing to fear Graham took a peculiar looking instrument out of his pocket. It was shaped like a gun, yet wasn't. Inserting the sharp point in the keyhole he quickly shot back the bolts of the Yale lock and stepped inside.

Walking across to the filing-cabinet, another skeleton key put the contents at his disposal. A smile flickered over his face as he found a chart marked "James Watson." Leaving the office just as he found it, Graham hurried back down the stairs to the street. He was congratulating himself upon the success of his raid when the shadow of a policeman flashed across the glass in the outside door. Flattening himself against the wall Graham waited with baited breath while the officer tried the door.

After satisfying himself that it was locked the officer coolly lighted a cigarette and leaning against the door, puffed away in evident enjoyment. Although it was only a few minutes before the cop snapped the cigarette into the gutter and resumed his rounds, to Graham waiting tensely inside, the time seemed hours.

Allowing the officer plenty of time to get away, Graham unlocked the door and stepped outside. He breathed a sigh of relief as he started for his ho-

tel. However, he was not getting away so easily. As he turned the corner he found himself looking into the business end of a gun in the hands of that same cop.

"What brings you out so late at night?" the officer demanded.

"I couldn't sleep so thought I'd take a walk."

"Yeah? Where do you live?"

For a moment Graham debated with himself whether he should chance it and try to make a get-away or tell the cop who he was. He did not know just where the local police stood in the matter. If, like so many of the citizens of the town they were in sympathy with the widow and they found that chart and lock-gun on him the resulting exposure would ruin his chances of breaking the case. However, the cop's suspicion convinced him of the futility of attempting to get away. It would be much better, he decided, to try and talk himself out of the jam.

"Well—why 'n hell don't you answer?" growled the cop.

"I'm living at the hotel."

"Yeah? You can tell that to the captain at the house. Get going!"

There was no choice but to obey. Luckily, however, the route led by the hotel. As they approached it, Graham ventured a suggestion over his shoulder. "If you'll take me inside, the night clerk'll vouch for me."

The cop took so long in deciding that any hope of escaping being uncovered faded rapidly. Then, with the warning that if he tried any monkey business he would get plugged, the officer ordered him to go in.

The clerk readily vouched for Graham and treated the whole affair as a good joke. And so did the cop after Graham had praised him for his alertness.

AS soon as possible Graham got away and went to his room. With camera and developers, he took picture after picture until he was satisfied. Then he dropped off to sleep.

Shortly before midnight, on Sunday, Graham started out again. The one thing he had to do was to replace that chart before it was missed. But he was not to be so lucky this trip. For the second time the fates sent that cop across his trail.

"So it's you, is it?" the cop asked. "What's the matter?. Can't you sleep tonight, either?"

Assuring the friendly officer that was just it, Graham fell in beside him and walked beat. For nearly an hour he strolled along, worrying for fear he could never break away. Finally in despair Graham brought up the subject of Watson.

"Now that's a queer case," the officer remarked. "We're all for the widow, even if the old man did fly high when he was in Chicago. I've been hearing—*sub rosa*, you understand—that the old man was nuts over the ponies. Oh, no, he never played them around here," the officer hastened to say in response to Graham's question, "he did all his betting on 'em in Chicago."

"Is that so?" Graham asked off-hand. "I thought he was one of your most respected citizens?"

"He was—but he was human, too—and that damned insurance company should stop stalling and pay."

"But suppose he's still alive?"

"He ain't, and that damned detective that tried to get the dentist to help the company ain't going to prove it."

Thanking his lucky stars that had kept him quiet the first night Graham succeeded in switching the conversation.

"Yeah—he was no different than most of these small-town merchants," the cop volunteered. "They all like to raise the devil when they get to the big cities."

Graham smiled to himself.

"Sure—" the officer ranted on, "at home butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, but when they hit Chi—oh, boy—"

"What makes you think Watson was that kind?"

"Think? Hell I know. I picked up a guy from Chicago one night and he spilled the beans. He was out here trying to collect a big bet from the old man. But you know how it is—Watson slipped me something to keep my trap shut and it's been shut ever since."

Again Graham smiled. This walk had proven far more productive than he had anticipated.

Eventually he got rid of the cop and slipping into the dentist's office replaced the chart and got back to his hotel without discovery.

It was late the next forenoon before Graham called on the life insurance president. "Well—that bunch of bones we saw out there in the hills didn't belong to Watson," he announced, "of that I'm sure."

"Yes? How can you prove it?"

"See these three gold molars," Graham said, taking the jawbone out of his pocket. "The dental chart of Watson's mouth doesn't show them and it would if they were his!"

"Then that body was a plant?"

"Sure—but you've got to keep it quiet. If the other side knew what we have they'd see to it that a chart was made to conform to this jaw."

"If Watson isn't dead then where in hell is he?"

"Somewhere around Chicago, I suspect. I'm leaving for that city tonight."

II

UPON his arrival in Chicago the next night, Graham lost no time in disappearing into the underworld there. He needed the help of Billy, a gangster that he had befriended several months previous. It took him three days though, before he ran into Billy at a dive out in Cicero.

After the usual greetings, Graham asked Billy if he knew of any mob that specialized in trimming small-town merchants by the use of women and gambling.

"Sure—that sounds like Dapper Eddie's racket," Billy advised. "His cappers and steerers play all the big hotels."

"Can you square me into that mob?" asked Graham.

"I don't know what your racket is, but if you'll take a tip you'll lay off the Dapper. That guy's poison. He's sitting in soft with the Big Boy who runs this town since Al was sent away. It's sure death to try and cut in."

Graham smiled. After all Billy did not know his real business. All he knew was that Graham was a guy who could put in a fix for a friend who was jammed. His warning was just a friendly gesture from one gangster to another.

"I'll risk that," Graham replied. "I've got my own reasons for cutting in on them."

"Yeah? Well, it's your own funeral. I know the Dapper's jane. If she thinks you've got dough, she'll take you on."

"You mean—I can buy her?"

"Not a chance—but she'll see that you're properly trimmed," Billy laughed.

"Fine. Suppose you fix it. Introduce me as a small-town guy out for a fling at the wicked city."

"Okay. Meet me at Pat's place. Here's the address," and the gangster handed over a smudgy card.

Promptly at the appointed time, the next evening, Graham opened the door of Pat's place on the South Side and walked in. The orchestra was blaring and fifteen or twenty couples were dancing. Others were at nearby tables.

"Who you looking for?" a big burly bouncer demanded.

"I had a date with a friend," Graham replied.

"Male or female?"

"Maybe both—" Graham chuckled.

"Oh, yeah? Well, there ain't no friend of any Johnny Law in here! Git to hell out!"

This was so unexpected that for a moment Graham was stunned. He could not believe that Billy had deliberately put the finger on him, yet this bouncer had called the turn. Just as he swung around to leave he caught sight of Billy waving to him.

"There's my friend over there," he said. "That guy with those two janes."

"Oh, yeah? Come on over 'n see if he gives you a tumble—if he don't—" The bouncer's hand stole toward his pocket.

"Say, Kid, this guy says he's a friend of yours. He looks more like a Johnny Law to me."

"Him—a bull? Hell! No. He's a friend of mine from out West."

"We got to be careful," the bouncer said apologetically.

"They're plenty careful in here," Billy said, as Graham took the vacant chair. "They're afraid of those damned G-men. 'Twas in here that they got their first tip on Dillinger, you know."

Graham was introduced to the two girls as a man from a small town who,

having made his pile, was having his fling before settling down. His pose in this character was so perfect that by the time he pulled out a large roll of bills to pay the check, the glitter in the eyes of one named Belle, told him that his ruse had worked. Before they parted Belle insisted that she was the one to show him Chicago and asked him to call on her the following afternoon.

"Don't go," Billy pleaded, as they drove back to the loop. "That Jane's poison. She'd have you bumped off for half the dough you're carrying. And besides, she's Dapper Eddie's private property."

"I know that," Graham replied, "and knowing it I'm hep to her little game."

Billy's warning came back to plague him when Graham, keeping the appointment, entered Belle's apartment the next afternoon to find himself face to face with Dapper Eddie.

"They're not wasting any time," Graham remarked grimly to himself, as he acknowledged the introduction.

However, if they had any plans for trimming him they were careful to cloak them behind a polite invitation to be their guest at the races and a dinner at a swanky night club afterward.

FOR a week or so Graham traveled around with the mob while they tried to get their hands on his bankroll. Then to his amazement one evening while they were dancing Belle whispered that she wanted to see him alone after the party broke up.

"How about Eddie?" Graham whispered back.

"He's got to go out of town for the night. I'm very anxious to talk to you secretly. Come up later."

This sudden invitation puzzled Gra-

ham. He wondered if it was a frame-up and he the victim or whether the girl was in earnest. Graham was not bad to look at. His iron-gray hair and smooth, tanned skin gave him a somewhat dignified appearance. Tall, with the well-set-up figure of a man who knows how to take care of his physical health, he was the type that attracted women. He finally decided to keep the rendezvous but to be on guard against surprise.

Belle, dressed in a soft clinging negligee, let him in when he rang.

"You know why I asked you to come here?" she asked, after the usual small chatter had begun to drag.

"N—no. Why?"

"So that I can warn you that you're on the spot. Eddie's as jealous as the devil of you. I know he doesn't show it in front of you, but I get hell afterward. He isn't dumb enough to allow his personal feelings to stand between him and dough, but he's planning to get you just the same."

"But why should he be jealous of me?"

"Because you're the one man in the mob who's a gentleman and that gets him. He feels his own inferiority and that's bad with guys like him. All the others treat me like the gangster's moll I am. You never do—yet of course you must know."

"Yes—I know."

"That's why I like you. You've got to get out of town quick before they bump you off."

"I'm not afraid."

"But I am," Belle insisted. "Tonight Eddie has gone to his country hideout to arrange to have you bumped off. He's going to invite you there for the week-end. If you go—you'll disappear and never be found. You've got to do as I ask," Belle ended pleadingly.

This was a most unusual experience for Graham. Not because he saw that the girl was falling in love with him, but rather that she would dare double-cross the gangster.

"My cue," he told himself, "is to seem to fall in with her advice to leave town."

"Where can I write you when I get home?" he asked.

"Nowhere. You're not our kind. Just forget that you ever knew me and keep away from the likes of us in the future."

"Was it because Eddie was planning on bumping me off tonight that you fought to keep me from going with him to that place out near the stockyards?"

"Yes—that's where Eddie's mob hangs out."

"Thanks, Belle, if I can—"

"You can do nothing," she interrupted bitterly. "Nothing! Go—and don't come back," she pleaded, pushing Graham toward the door. "Good-by—dear—" And as the door closed behind him, Graham could hear her sobs.

Graham never doubted the sincerity of Belle's attempt to save him. What he had to decide was whether he should accept it. He was no fool, for he knew that no gangster's moll would do as Belle had done unless she meant it. This decided him that he had better get away.

The next afternoon when Dapper Eddie dropped by to invite him to visit the place in the country, the gangster was much surprised to learn that his victim had flown.

III

A WEEK or ten days later, a disreputable-looking bum pushed open the door of a saloon near the stockyards and shuffled up to the

bar. His face was covered by a thick stubble; his clothes hung loosely on his body, his hair was unkempt, and he had a decided limp in his right leg. Altogether, this new arrival was a poor bet for any barroom. Yet before the bouncer could reach him the bum threw a bill on the bar and ordered beer.

"I'm just out of stir," he muttered with a brogue, "and crave company."

As time passed this bum haunted the saloon every day, always disappearing by nightfall. This kept up until he was regarded as more or less a fixture of the place. Then suddenly he started to drop in evenings. Every night he would buy beer until he dropped off to sleep. With his head resting on his arms flung across a table he would remain until closing time and he was thrown out.

This went on for some time before Dapper Eddie dropped in. After stopping at the bar for a moment he strode across the room and seated himself at a table near where the bum lolled in a drunken stupor.

"Who the hell's that guy?" he snapped at the waiter serving him.

"Oh—him? Just a poor bum out of the Big House. He's been hanging around here for months. Has dough enough to pay for his booze so we let him alone."

"Sure he ain't a damned G-man?"

"Him?" the waiter laughed. "Hell—no! We've frisked him a dozen times. He's harmless."

"Okay, then. When Tony comes in send him over here."

Within half an hour Tony put in an appearance and, strolling over to the Dapper's table sat down. He, too, wanted to know who the drunk was.

"Only a punk just out of stir," Dapper Eddie told him.

Behind his disguise Graham smiled

to himself. If he could fool these there was no need to worry.

"Yeah? Well, we got to be careful, Chief," Graham heard Tony saying. "We're shooting at a hell of a big stake, you know."

"How's the guy standing it?" Eddie asked.

"Not so hot. He's jittery, getting fed up with being on the lam. Even the janes don't interest him any more. He wants to grab off his split and beat it."

"So do we—but we can't get our hands on it. He's got to keep still or else—"

Tony nodded. The gang leader did not need to finish. After some more talk about gang affairs, Tony got up and, after obtaining several bottles of whisky from the bar left. Graham wanted to follow him but knew such a move would mean sudden death. He had to wait until closing time and let the bouncer chase him out before he dared to leave.

At last he had something definite to work on. Tony must be shadowed to see if the one he spoke about was Watson. To do this Graham realized that he would need help so he wired his office in New York to send Jackson and Corbin, two of his ace shadow men out to Chicago.

"I think Tony's got Watson a prisoner somewhere outside the city. We've got to shadow him to his hideout," Graham explained when Jackson and Corbin had joined him.

THE next night two cars parked near the headquarters of the mob.

In one was Graham. In the other, Jackson and Corbin. If Graham lost Tony, then the others could pick him up. For several nights these two cars remained around before Tony showed

up in his car. When he drove away hours later, both cars trailed him. Far out on the prairie Tony's car suddenly pulled to the side of the road, and Graham, following closely behind, was obliged to drive on by or be uncovered.

If Tony was using this to shake off a shadow it was useless. Corbin and Jackson in their car had seen the maneuver and had hung back out of sight. Believing himself free of any shadows Tony finally drove on, to turn eventually into a lane just as a car rolled by, its two occupants singing away for dear life.

"It's just a couple of drunken farmers going home," Tony told his companion.

However, if he had looked back he would have been surprised to see that same car stop a short way ahead, pull up to the side of the road, and dimmed its lights. Half an hour later Graham drove back and joined Corbin and Jackson.

"The bum turned in the lane a little way back," Corbin reported.

Parking his car Graham started up the lane alone. He believed he had a better chance to work unobserved that way. About a quarter of a mile from the main highway Graham came upon a house set back and surrounded by a high wire fence. With its lights still on, Tony's car was parked in front. Just as he was to slip inside he spotted a Great Dane as the dog stepped into the rays of the headlights. The dog's head was turned his way, his ears cocked forward. Graham froze in his tracks. He knew he could never reach that house undiscovered as long as that dog was prowling around.

"Gee, that's some brute," Graham muttered to himself, as he watched. "He sure looms up like an elephant."

Knowing that he was licked Graham

returned to where the others were waiting. All the way back to the city he puzzled over the situation. He knew he did not have a chance with that dog around. Neither did he dare to try to poison or shoot him for fear of warning the mob. Yet that dog must be gotten rid of somehow.

There is a breeder of Great Danes living near Chicago who still likes to tell of the time he put a fast one over on a stranger. He sold this stranger one of his culls who was in heat for two hundred dollars. However, if he could have known what this stranger planned he might have wondered whether he was so clever after all. With a dog on a leash Graham hiked off across country until he reached the gang's hangout. He knew he was risking much on the chance that the dog belonging to the mob would follow him away; but that is exactly what happened. By evening Graham had the watch-dog so far away from his job that there seemed no risk in leaving both dogs with a farmer until he could come for them another time.

LATE that same night, Graham, Corbin and Jackson reached the lane.

This time, Jackson was left to guard the car, while Graham and Corbin crept up to the house. Crouching under a shuttered window, the two listened to the hum of muffled voices coming to them from inside.

"You keep watch out here," Graham whispered to Corbin. "I'm going around to the back. Perhaps I can get in from there."

Corbin tried to dissuade Graham from attempting anything so foolhardy as that. But Graham insisted that they must know for a certainty whether Watson was in there before they raided the place.

Going around to the rear, Graham found the door unlocked and standing open. He did not stop to reason why this should be, but took off his shoes, hid them under the stoop, and slipped inside.

He felt his way cautiously ahead until he stood near a stairway in the front of the house which led to the second floor. From here he not only could hear better, but could also distinguish the different voices. Judging by the different tones Graham figured that there were three in there besides Tony.

They were talking about the disappearance of their dog. Graham waited, hoping for some word that would tell him whether Watson was inside. He was just about to give up when he caught a new voice.

"I saw a strange man going by this afternoon leading a big dog on a leash," the new voice said. "Maybe our dog followed that one."

"This is a hell of a time to be telling us that, Watson!" Tony barked, angrily. "Why didn't you come to me with it when you first saw it?"

"I didn't think it was of any account."

"Cripes!"

Graham came near laughing aloud. He had run his quarry to earth. Satisfied he turned to go when he heard the plaintive cry of a whip-poor-will, the warning signal from Corbin that danger was coming. Before he could reach the safety of the yard Graham heard footsteps coming toward the rear door.

He was caught in a trap of his own making. He could neither go forward, nor could he escape the front way. In desperation his hand sought his gun. If there was no other way he could at least take a few of the mob with him. Just as he was about to hazard

all on a bold stroke and face the mob inside his hand accidentally touched a small wooden knob on the wall behind him. He cautiously turned it. At his touch a closet door underneath the stairs opened and he crowded in. He barely had time to close it, too, before a switch was snapped on and the hall flooded with light.

A fifth gangster had arrived.

Walking past Graham's place of concealment, this one went into the front room, but did not close the door.

As quietly as possible Graham opened the closet door a bit. He smiled as he listened to the new arrival recount how he had failed to find any trace of the lost dog in the surrounding country.

"All right then," Tony was heard to announce, "we'll take turns guarding the place tonight. Tomorrow, we'll go in and report to the Chief."

Doing guard duty did not appeal to the others, for they made such a hue and cry that Tony finally gave in and ordered them all to bed.

Still crouched in his cramped quarters, Graham counted them as they stamped over his head on their way upstairs. Half an hour later, he slipped out and rejoined Corbin.

"Cripes, Chief!" Corbin said when they got out of earshot. "I thought you were a goner sure when I saw that guy going in. How'd you escape?"

"By suddenly recalling that many of these old houses have closets built in under the stairs. I managed to crawl in to one before he caught me," Graham explained. "Come on—we're through for the night."

"Why not contact the cops and raid the place now?" Corbin asked.

"We dare not risk it. That gang would sure kill Watson. We lose unless we can grab him alive. We've got

to watch our chance and highjack the place when most of the mob are away."

IV

SEVERAL days passed before Jackson, who had been left to shadow the place, got word to Graham that Tony and two of the mob had left for the city.

Jumping into his car, Graham and Corbin raced for the spot. With Corbin and Jackson to back him up Graham felt they could account for the two gangsters left behind. Under the protection of a drizzle, Graham ordered the advance.

They crept along to the back door only to find it locked this time. Taking out his knife Graham sprang back the catch on a window, dropped into the kitchen and opened the door for the others. With their guns ready for instant action, they stole forward until they reached the front room. Two voices from within informed them that their quarry was still there. With a suddenness that paralyzed all resistance, Graham threw open the door and had them covered before they could reach for their gats.

"Get 'em up!" he barked, "unless you want to push up the daisies!" Their hands went up!

"Stand up and face the wall!"

The two obeyed. At a nod from Graham, Corbin stepped up and frisked them, passing the guns back to Jackson. When they were disarmed Graham ordered Corbin to tear the cords from the window drapes and bind the two to chairs. A rag stuffed into their mouths for a gag prevented an outcry.

Leaving Corbin to guard the prisoners Graham and Jackson turned to the upper floors. Up under the eaves they found a locked door. Smashing their way in, they found Watson in

bed. Under other circumstances his fright at seeing them would have been laughable, as with one sweep of his hands he pulled the bedclothes over his head and begged them to get out and leave him alone. When he refused to get up and dress Jackson grabbed him and pulled him out on to the floor. This was followed up by a brisk foot urging after which Watson was quite ready to obey orders. Back downstairs the three went. Calling Corbin to join them, they trooped out, Watson protesting against such treatment. Propelling him forward, they started back to where their car was hidden.

They had almost reached it when the glaring headlights of another car swinging into the lane came near blinding them.

"Quick, boys! We've got to get away fast!" Graham cried. "They'll find those two guys we left behind and they'll be after us in a hurry!"

Racing forward, they reached the car and clambered in. Corbin took the wheel and headed for the city.

"Turn around and go the other way!" Graham ordered. "They'll figure we'd head for the city. We'll cross them up and drive Watson back!"

Corbin swung the car around and headed it westward. As they dipped over a small hill, Graham glanced back. A smile flitted over his face as he caught sight of the gangsters' car when it sped out of the lane and went roaring away toward the city.

THREE days later, four tired and dirty men reached the sheriff's office.

"This is James Watson, Sheriff," Graham announced quietly. "He's your prisoner."

"Why, I thought he was dead," the sheriff gasped.

"Just a case of mistaken identity," Graham replied. "If I may use your phone I'll get Worthington out here to sign the complaint."

When Worthington arrived a complaint charging conspiracy to defraud the insurance company was sworn out and Watson was clapped into a cell. The next day he made a clean breast of his share in the affair.

"I met Dapper Eddie through an acquaintance in Chicago," so the confession read. "Through him I got to gambling on the races. It wasn't long before I was hopelessly involved. Then the mob commenced to put pressure on me. If I wanted to live I was told I must fall in with their plans and help them stage a fake suicide. I had to agree. Dapper Eddie provided the body found in the hills and sent the two boys to find it while I went into hiding at the gang's hideout. I'm glad, too, that it's all over."

"You better be," Graham remarked dryly. "That mob never intended that you should see a penny of that money."

"But how could they get their hands on it?" Worthington asked. "The policies were made out to his estate."

"I gave them preferential notes for the whole amount and dated them long before I disappeared," Watson said.

Armed with Watson's confession, indictments against the mob were obtained and Graham went with the sheriff to Chicago to get the mob.

At the trial Watson testified for the state and while the mob got long sentences, he got off with a light one for his help in securing their conviction.

"Would you mind giving me that jawbone?" Worthington asked, when Graham called to say good-by. "It's worth \$200,000 to us."

"Sure," Graham laughed, turning it over.

Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Special Agent (G-Man)	Police Patrolman
Secret Service Operative	Police Detective
Post Office Inspector	Policewoman
Customs Patrol	Fingerprint Expert
Immigration Patrol	State Trooper
Anti-Narcotic Agent	Crime Prevention
Parole Investigator	Investigator
Prison Keeper	Probation Officer
Internal Revenue Agent	Criminologist
Alcohol Tax Agent	Police Radio Expert

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

A Job-Seeking Test

RECENTLY, in a number of states, tests were held for the position of placement interviewer, a job made necessary by the large number of youths of both sexes under 20 years who have been unable to secure employment. Usually the work of finding them employment is a task imposed upon state bureaus or departments of labor, and the duties of a placement interviewer are to examine youthful applicants for work, find them employment, and supervise and guide them when employment has been secured.

To assist young job hunters in finding work, and to correct their defects when they have failed to secure the jobs which state placement bureaus have found for them, a self-test has been devised which should be of help to any youth seeking work, whether in private or public service. The test is reproduced; together with key answers.

Q 1—Which is the best time of day to

apply for a job? Give two good reasons for your answer.

Q 2—If an employer promises you a job in the near future, give two things you would supply him with before you leave his office after the interview?

Q 3—Give two reasons why you should frankly tell an employer you do not want the job he offers.

Q 4—In seeking employment, which of the two reasons for seeking work would you give: (a) "I just want something to do to see how I like work"; (b) "I need work for a living."

Q 5—If an employer to whom you have applied for a job invites you into his office and asks you to take a chair beside his desk, what would you do with your hat and why?

Here are a series of questions it will be well to ask yourself if you have failed to get a job although the employer who interviewed you told you he was sure you could do the work:

For boys:

- 1—Did I chew gum?
- 2—Did I reek of cigarette smoke?
- 3—Did I keep on my hat?
- 4—Did I slouch down in a chair or sit on the corner of the employer's desk, while I was being interviewed?
- 5—Were my nails dirty?
- 6—Were my shoes clean, shined?
- 7—Was my collar clean?
- 8—Did I need a haircut?

- 9—Was my necktie neatly tied?
 10—Did I insist on finding out just when I would get a raise in pay?
 11—Was my suit spotted or unpressed?
 12—Was I courteous or "too fresh"?
 13—Did I stand with my hands in my pockets?
 14—Did I make a mistake in taking my chum along when I went for the interview?
 For girls:
 1—Did I chew gum?
 2—Did I have on too much rouge and lipstick?
 3—Was I wearing a fussy dress?
 4—Did I have on too much jewelry?
 5—Was my dress or coat spotted or soiled?
 6—Was my hair neatly done?
 7—Were my fingernails unclean, badly cared for?
 8—Was I courteous or "too loud"?
 9—Did I apply for the job promptly or did I take my time getting there?
 10—Was it a good idea to take my girl friend along?

While these questions may seem like kindergarten stuff, the civil service experts who got them up assert that they represent the "deadly two dozen" reasons why most young applicants for jobs are mysteriously rejected by employers.

KEY ANSWERS TO FIRST FIVE

Q's: Q 1—Morning. The applicant feels freshest then, and morning is usually the time when the employer learns the job is open. Q 2—Give him your address and telephone number; if no telephone, leave with him a post card addressed to yourself. Q 3—It is fair to the employer and fair to others who may be looking for the job. Q 4—(a) Honesty is the best policy, and employers do not want workers who are not certain they want to work. Q 5—If no one takes your hat, hold it in your hand, and under no circumstances should you lay it on the desk, for that indicates slovenliness.

THE "20 SECONDS" I. Q.

A large railroad company recently advertised for five young men between twenty-five and thirty years of age, to fill vacancies in its public information bureaus in five large cities. The jobs called for a fairly wide knowledge of current affairs and general facts, and speed in answering inquiries

directed at them by the general public. Two hundred and twelve candidates took the written test; forty received 100% or perfect scores, twenty-six averaged ninety, and the remainder got eighty or below and did not pass. Below is reproduced the ten-question test and answers. The time limit fixed for each question was twenty seconds, which includes reading the question and making the answer, each answer to be made by number only. For each correct answer, allow ten points.

Q 1—The initials WPA represent: (1) Washington Progress Alliance; (2) Works Program Administration; (3) Welfare Protection Act; (4) Works Progress Administration.

Q 2—Which of these statements is right: Atlantic City is in (1) Pennsylvania; (2) New York; (3) New Jersey; (4) Maryland.

Q 3—The initials DST stand for: (1) Delay subject to transfer; (2) Divisional station; (3) Daylight saving time; (4) Discontinued.

Q 4—One of these figures represents twenty-two thousand, two hundred twenty-two: (1) 2222; (2) 20,222; (3) 22222; (4) 222222.

Q 5—One of these statements is true: Puget Sound is (1) an Indian call; (2) a discord in music; (3) a body of water on the Pacific Coast; (4) jazz music.

Q 6—A slaughtered pig yields how many hams?

Q 7—Which of the following can be caught with a fishing line: (1) tern; (2) petrel; (3) kingfisher; (4) pompano.

Q 8—Which definition is correct: (1) regimentation—a military maneuver; (2) abattoir—one who assists another; (3) censure—to delete; (4) coagulate—to increase consistency.

Q 9—A good watch contains jewels to: (1) ornament it; (2) make it impossible to tinker with movement; (3) lessen friction on bearings; (4) increase its value.

Q 10—If a piece of baggage bore the label "first class," it would mean that that piece of baggage had traveled: (1) in Africa; (2) on a steamer; (3) on a plane; (4) on a customs service cutter.

KEY ANSWERS—Q 1—4; Q 2—3; Q 3—3; Q 4—3; Q 5—3; Q 6—2 hams; Q 7—4; Q 8—4; Q 9—3; Q 10—2. If you had to read questions twice most likely

you exceeded the time limit. And don't be surprised if, in seeking an office job in a large private corporation, you encounter a test like this.

CHARACTER INVESTIGATION

What investigation of a candidate's character is made by the United States Civil Service Commission in the case of persons who have passed the postal clerk-carrier tests? This query comes from several readers, and here is the answer.

The Research Division of the U. S. Civil Service Commission has given extended study to character investigation, and, as a result, a technique has been devised for interviewing persons given as references by a candidate. Twenty-seven questions about the candidate are asked (according to recent data). They are, in part:

1—For how many years have you known him (candidate)?

2—When were you last in touch with him?

3—How did you gain your knowledge of him: (a) through personal contact; (b) through your friends; (c) through his friends; (d) through his enemies; (e) if "a" ask "how well do you know him?" (1) only slightly; (2) well; (3) very well.

4—If you have employed him, for how long, and how long ago?

5—What is his attitude toward his work: (a) shows keen interest and whole-hearted effort; (b) shows interest and effort; (c) is unconcerned, makes no voluntary effort.

6—Has he ever been discharged? (If "yes," write x and ask "Why?")

7—Has he ever been accused of stealing? (If "yes," write x and ask, "What? When? By whom?") If he cannot give details ask him to give name of anyone from whom can be secured more information on this point.

8—Might he take money from mails if he thought that no one would ever suspect him? (If "yes," write x and ask for a specific example or reason for answer).

9—Has he ever been arrested? (If "yes," write x and ask, "for what offense? Where? If he cannot give details ask for name of anyone who can supply details.)

10—Does he pay his debts to stores, landlords, friends, etc.? (a) always; (b) good pay most of the time; (c) will never pay if he can avoid it.

11—Is there any reason why he should not be employed in the post office? (If "yes," write x and ask for specific example or reason for answer.)

12—Is he related to you in any way? (If "yes," write x and ask "How?")

Fifteen other questions usually are submitted to references, but "G-2" is not in possession of the missing fifteen. Suffice it to say that a reference is often interviewed three times, orally or by letter, and his answers on each occasion are checked against each other. It is obvious that when a civil service interviewer places an X opposite questions it amounts to "x-ing" the candidate out of the job. The only way to meet this character test is to be strictly honest when you fill out your test application in respect to references. In many states and cities the same check and double check system is employed.

THE Q AND A BOX

Inquiries pertaining to civil service tests will be answered free. If individual replies are desired, enclose stamped, addressed envelope.

F. C., Detroit—Members of the U. S. Secret Service are officially termed operatives and not special agents. Women were admitted to the secret service operative test held February, 1934.—For information concerning state police school in your state, address R. C. Huston, Dean, School of Applied Science, State College, East Lansing, Mich.

Henry Faller, Duluth, Minn.—For position in Coast Guard Service, write: Commandant Coast Guard, Treasury Department, Washington, D. C.—The U. S. Civil Service Commission does not furnish applicants with copies of their applications.

A CHANCE FOR ASTRONOMERS

From time to time the U. S. Civil Service Commission holds tests for the position of junior astronomer in the Naval Observatory at Washington, D. C. Several readers, who complain that astronomers have little chance of putting their knowledge and skill to work at a decent salary, are hereby advised that the Government pays \$2,000 a year to junior astronomers who pass the tests and are certified for appointment.

Here are the official requirements for the test. **DUTIES:** To assist in making observations and computations, in correcting instruments and preparing publications. Subjects covered in tests, astronomy, general, practical and theoretical, and related branches of physics, mathematics through integral calculus and involving mechanics and practical astronomical computations. Logarithm tables are not furnished in the examination and slide rules are not permitted. Competitors without military preference must attain a rating of at least 70; those granted military preference must attain 65. The last test for this position was given in the spring of this year.

James C., Brooklyn, N. Y.—Much

obliged for kind words about this department. You certainly got a high mark. If the Civil Service Commission hasn't informed you whether your chances of certification are good or bad, by all means write them for that information. And it may be that the eligible list you are on will be used to make appointments to jobs in other agencies of the government.

The questions and answers given above are copied from the official question and answer sheets. "G-2" assumes no responsibility for their accuracy, but if any answer seems debatable or incorrect, please communicate with "G-2," care of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.—THE EDITOR.

Next Week—Traffic Control



A Bargain

IT was midnight and Walter Malinorski, a butcher of Irvington, New Jersey, had just closed his shop and was walking home alone. Under each arm he had a paper bag, one of which contained two hundred dollars, and the other, six pork chops. A bandit who had been lurking in the shadows of the darkened street stepped forth and pressed a gun against Malinorski and demanded his money. The butcher handed him one of the bags and when the robber had disappeared he laughed. The robber had accepted the bag containing the pork chops and had overlooked the one containing the money.

—John Berry.

Thief "Lifts" Railroad

THE people of San Diego heard of one of the strangest thefts ever made in California, or any place else for that matter, when A. M. Shook, a miner, reported to the sheriff's office that his railroad was missing. The thieves had carried away one thousand feet of track as well as the equipment which Shook had used thereon. The work appeared to have been done by a shop-lifter who had gone in for big things.

—John Berry.



Picking' Your Own Pocket

The Installment Gyps

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the forty-fourth 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.

"WANNA buy a watch, buddy?" inquired the man with the small, black sample case to the delivery wagon driver, who had just hopped aboard his car and was about to drive away.

"Naw, got no money," said the driver, as he released the brake.

"Don't need any money with me, buddy. You gotta job. Gotta girl, too?"

"Sure, whadda you think?" said the driver as he hesitated.

"Look at this, then," the salesman replied, as he drew a woman's wrist-watch from his pocket. As he handed it to the driver he climbed up on the seat alongside him and opened his sample case.

"It's nice," said the driver, "but I'm broke. Only got lunch money with me."

"But I told you, you don't need any money with me. I'll trust you with it. What's your name?"

"Jerry Blake, but I don't want to buy a watch."

"You don't need to buy it unless you want to. Tell you what to do.

You take the watch, show it to the girl, see if she likes it and I'll meet you a week from today. If she doesn't like it, you can give it back to me. If she likes it, we can come to some understanding. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Sure, that's fair, but I don't wanna buy it. You'd better get off the wagon, too, because my boss doesn't allow me to pick up riders, and I've got to finish my route. See you some other time."

"Okay, buddy, but put the watch in your pocket. Show it to her anyway, and I'll see you a week from today. Here, just sign this receipt for the watch and take it."

"All right, I'll show it to her," agreed Jerry, as he signed, "but remember, I don't say I'm going to buy it. Are you going to be at the store a week from today?"

"Yes, sir, promptly at five o'clock. You don't think I'm going to give you a watch, do you? So long."

During the week following, Jerry not only showed the watch to his girl but he also had it appraised by a jeweler. He learned that it had a cheap Swiss movement encased in a gold-filled case, and could be duplicated in almost any store for about ten dollars.

He wasn't going to give *his* girl a

ten dollar watch, so he waited rather impatiently for the salesman to appear at the appointed time. After waiting until six o'clock, he gave up hope and went home. The salesman had not put in an appearance.

Another week passed by and Jerry was called to the paymaster's office.

"Your name Blake, Jerry Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"We've had a garnishee for thirty dollars filed against your salary. We don't keep men on our payroll whose salaries are garnisheed. I'm afraid you'll have to go unless you have it lifted."

Jerry was astounded. He explained to the paymaster what had happened, and was sent to the personnel manager of the store to tell his story all over again. An investigation disclosed that the "receipt" he had hurriedly signed for the salesman—without reading—was actually an order for the watch, combined with a confession of judgment.

Everything was in strict legal form, and the installment firm, knowing the strength of their position, would make no compromise. He had to pay thirty dollars for a ten dollar watch.

MANY large corporations have an inflexible rule that men whose salaries are garnisheed must be discharged, and the small in-

stallment sellers know this well. If they can, by a trick similar to the above, succeed in foisting their merchandise on an employee of such a firm they will be able to collect for it quickly, or, if the man is discharged, they can easily effect the return of the bauble and try it on somebody else.

They do sustain some losses, it is true, but their losses are slight. Jerry's thirty dollar watch did not cost them more than five dollars at wholesale.

Following an investigation in New York City, James J. Wilson, Assistant District Attorney, said: "These installment people are payroll ghosts. They haunt the pay lines every pay day to collect a quarter, half a dollar, anything they can get up to ten per cent of the laborer's wages. I've known of an instance where a man's wages were tied up for eight years that way. For a period of two or three years is more common.

"And if the victim can't or won't pay, they start a campaign of coercion, of terror, with a series of continually more threatening letters that often winds up with a fake summons.

"The goods they sold often were inferior, usually overpriced, and they don't make good on their 'guarantees.'"

So New York State is going to do something about it.

Next Week—Telephone Solicitations



Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

WITH the two new English members published this week, and the several Canadian members previously listed, our *Cipher Correspondence Club* is fast becoming an international organization! The purpose of the Club is to put you in touch with others interested in cryptography. Membership is free! Write to these new members, and send in your own name for membership! See next week's issue for Club chatter, changes of address, etc. And send us your name for publication—*now!*

CIPHER CORRESPONDENCE CLUB

(Continued from June 20, 1936)

ILLY, Fred N. Ilijevich, 438 Matthews St., Akron, Ohio.

Edw. C. Benton, 5400 Columbia St, Dallas, Tex.

EBa, Abe Simon, 200 Jersey St., Staten Island, N. Y.

CODEX, James Cottingham, 440 E. 139th St., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

Robert M. Berrie, 23 Ballbrook Ave., Withington, Manchester, England.

EGROEG III, G. D. Foster, 221 N. Broadway, Urbana, Ill.

BOX SIX, F. A. Tinker, Lapeer, Mich.

Elvin Crane Paynter, R. F. O. No. 2, Millville, N. J.

ZARKOV, L. A. Chapin, 615 Congress St. S., Aberdeen, S. D.

J. Bartlett, 64 Wellington Rd., Stoke Newington, London, England.

(To Be Continued)

Harry R. Bell's No. 186, last week's Inner Circle cipher, provided entry through the twice-used ending -KRR (-ses); and the repeated digraph VG, which was suggestive of *qu*. Using these letters, VGXHO KOR (*qu--s-e*), preceding the

quoted group, yielded *quoth she*. And this led to ZXGHTKO (-out-sh), *loutish*; etc. The high-frequency XG (9 times) was disconcerting!

Medico opens the current ciphers with a division using a 10-letter medical term (numbered from 0 to 9) which he says means "a pain in any man's language!" For a quick start, note Y — L = Y for the value of L. Note the last nine words in George's crypt! Compare the phrases KPHK KPA and HK KPA for entry, continuing with YKHKERO, then SHYRDEOA and SHY.

In Zadig's novelty message, note K'RR and YRR, also YUT (after a comma). Then compare FLSU, LS, FLSO, OS, and SYF. Identify LN (frequencies 11-13) in Don Ricardo's contribution, and use the letters thus found to unlock NLOFYORG and FLOY. Follow these with YMHFXRY, HEVFLTSRY, etc.

In Waltraw's construction, you might start with -GZ, noting the high frequency, doubling, and use in the last two positions of symbol G, and the finality of symbol Z. A solution of Zircon's pangrammatic Inner Circle cipher and the answers to all of this week's puzzles will be given next week.

No. 187—Cryptic Division. By Medico.

BAD) BODYIN (IND
BUYL

MAYI
MNYD

MLBN
UAND

YM

No. 188—Service Signal. By George.

ABANFGRTF·ORKELAT KPHK KPA YESO "SHY HOT RED
HOT HEN," TEYUDHFAT HK KPA SHYRDEOA VEDDEOS
YKHKERO, LROKHEOAT KPA XRNTY, "SHY" HOT "HOT"
HOT "RED" HOT "HOT" HOT "HEN"!

No. 189—Virtuous Circle. By Zadig.

K'RR DYB BNE, GN BNE VYU DYB LSH, GN GLS VYU DYB
LKO, GN LS VYU DYB FLSO, GN FLSB VYU DYB OS. FLSU
YRR NP EG VYU SYF, THKUA, YUT XS OSHHB!

No. 190—A Modern Version. By Don Ricardo.

NHAV BOSKYOA NLOFYORG YUCSUYOYB FLAV HEVLF-
LTSRY HPPSBYUVA. ULZHBHGA, ARLZ BOSKYOA PHEAY
FLOY ZOYPOA. HULVDYO YMHFXRY LN DHOY HUB
VLOVLSAY!

No. 191—Happy Companions. By Waltraw.

ERTG-JTGG FXKON JHZDGTUGO ZRL RTXKOP EDGGTF
ERUV JHTG, LXBP EXUHE FRTOZ, ZRON YXBBF LKOGZ;
ADHBZL SGFXOP ZARFHON VHOGZ, KSHMKHLXKZ OHN-
DLDRACZ ADHZLBGP ZDTHBBF.

No. 192—Who Lost? By Zircon.

SVANKY HNYF GOKP RKAU MZGWL PKMNV XUKZ KJZPU
VBLQ TVFX INOE YNYKT XVZCZUO GTKYD UYN-QNP. SV-
TZYKP HZB DZPAULVP GUBO XKTW RNBREKF DLSKFKG.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

181—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 S Q U A R E D I C K

ment head sets new goal for untiring tyros—
one thousand answers!

182—Poets rhapsodize about flashing eyes,
ruby lips, shell-like ears, and flaxen hair; but
none extol the virtues of that romantic organ,
the nose!

185—Cop collars cat caught catching cat-
birds. Chief contemptuously claims, "Cannot
carcerate cat!" Cop calmly coops catcher.
Cat can't continue capturing catbirds.

183—"In the parching August wind,
Cornfields bow the head,
Sheltered in round valley depths,
On low hills outspread."

186—Rough, loutish, uncouth sour-dough,
flush, buys usquebaugh; carouses; arouses
dour dowager. Quoth she, "Enough!" Finale:
gaol.

—Rossetti.

184—Formerly, cryptofans strove for hun-
dred solutions per year. Now, demon depart-

Readers submitting answers to any of this
week's puzzles will be duly credited in our *Cipher
Solvers' Club* for August. Address: M. E. Ohaver,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New
York, N. Y.



BEFORE we begin the letters for this week, we'd like to stop a moment and have a small conference about one of the stories in this issue. We are very much interested in having your reactions to "THE NIGHT I DIED." This story impressed the whole editorial staff as being an exceptional piece of work, and we'd like to know what all of you thought of it. We would appreciate it very much if you will sit right down and write to us what that particular story did to you; how it affected you; whether it made you laugh or cry. And if readers will help in this way, then we can publish in the future similar off-trail stories of strong human emotions and stark manhood.

— — — — —

This sounds like a threat to us.

DEAR SIR:

To get into the argument and protect my interest I want to ask for not more than one serial. I do not feel like paying for two when I do not like to have even one. But I will stand for one to give others a chance.

Wrenmore may pass, but I think he should get busy at the other kind of chicanery. For example, stop the astrological fakers taking the hard-earned money of the people.

You should not rate your puzzle department merely by the number of solvers who write in.

Many persons solve them but do not send in solutions.

Here's hoping I may still continue with my first beloved, DFW, because she will be good and deliver not over ONE serial.

W. M. RIEDER,
Niles, Michigan.

— — — — —

A young reader, but a loyal DFW fan.

DEAR SIR:

Just a line to tell you that your magazine is the best one published. Although I am only thirteen years old, I read at least a dozen magazines a month. Your magazine has developed my detective ability so that I can usually tell how a story will end.

A Loyal Reader,
ROBERT STEINBERG,
New York City.

— — — — —

A reader's statement of policy, and an answer to Mr. Thomas V. Tolliver.

DEAR SIR:

I will start reading "Death Rides the Deep" and "The Convention Murders" when I get the last issue, as I think these two stories are okay. Yet one continued story should be enough.

This guy, Thomas V. Tolliver, could not be in his second childhood—oh, no, he is past that. I think he is in his babyhood or worse.

What other story is there that could come up to *Morton* and *McGarvey*, *Satan Hall* and *The Lady from Hell*? I will agree with Mr. T. V. Tolliver on one thing. That is DFW—regardless of the story, is packed from cover to cover with

thrilling fiction. And true story serials are the bunk—I do not go for them at all.

Respectfully,
THOMAS C. NASH,
Torrance, Calif.

P.S. Well, that's off my chest.

It's just about the best mental game in the world, Mr. Wooley, and anyone can work at it.

DEAR EDITOR:

For many years I have been a constant reader of DFW. I have always found its stories and articles plausible, entertaining and instructive. To be honest, it had been my regretful habit to skip over the Cryptogram page. About two months ago, I chanced to read in your column the lines stating there were readers that had solved one thousand or more cipher problems.

That statement brought realization that cryptogram solving was for all, not a talented few.

Today my realization has been proven. I have succeeded in solving two of the cipher problems. It was hard mental work, but I have been deeply rewarded in anticipation, wonderment and real enjoyment.

Yours sincerely,
IRVING WOOLEY,
New York City.

And this will soften the sting of adverse and bitter criticism for many a day.

DEAR SIR:

Thanks for your courteous letter. One serial, that is fine.

I was about to write to express my appreciation of the splendid stories in the issue dated June 20. So pleased to meet some of our old friends—Halloran, Riordan and others. The novelettes and short stories were all excellent.

I realize, of course, that it is not possible at all times to obtain stories of such unusual merit. Of the difficulties, and the arduous work of selection I am fully aware. The readers of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY can congratulate themselves on having an editor who possesses such keen and discriminating judgment.

I never omit an opportunity to recommend DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, feeling that I am conferring a favor on my friends, by opening for them the door to many hours of enjoyment.

Best wishes for continued success from

A faithful reader,
MRS. E. P. BAXTER,
Mobile, Ala.

THE END OF A PUFF-ECT DAY



LIFE'S too short and marriage too sacred to spoil them with a foul pipe and unholy tobacco. So we urge husbands to keep their briars sweet and clean and filled with Sir Walter Raleigh's milder mixture. No woman ever recoiled from Sir Walter Raleigh burning fragrantly in a well-kept pipe. As a matter of fact, this gentler blend of better Kentucky Burleys makes men more attractive and women more yielding and admiring. Try a tin for the little woman's sake . . . and your sake . . . and our sake. We honestly feel it's the easiest-smoking, best-smelling blend ever offered for only fifteen cents!

SWITCH TO THE BRAND

OF GRAND AROMA



FREE booklet tells how to make your old pipe taste better, sweeter; how to break in a new pipe. Write for copy today. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Louisville, Kentucky. Dept. MS-68



COMING NEXT WEEK!

THE BIG-SHOT'S DAUGHTER

A G-Man Novelette by Franklin H. Martin

JOE LYNCH was under orders from the F. B. I. to put the heat on a syndicate of criminals operating in one of the largest urban centers of the East. Joe was a tough, two-fisted guy who knew little about social etiquette and cared less—when it came to handling crooks who packed their rods beneath the smooth “front” of top hat and tails.

DETECTING DECEPTION WITH THE LIE DETECTOR

By Oscar G. Olander, Commissioner, Michigan State Police

HAVE you often wondered just how the Lie Detector works? In a special article written by a man who has had long experience with this marvelous machine, you will find out exactly what you have wanted to know. Then decide if you would care to submit to the test.

MURDER ON MY MIND

An Amazing Short Story by Cornell Woolrich

ONE of the strangest stories we have ever published! In fact, it is so unusual and startling that we hesitate to give even a slight inkling of its plot. We don't want to spoil for you in any way the gripping suspense of WOOLRICH'S masterly handling of a curious theme.

COMING TO YOU IN THE ISSUE OF AUGUST 15

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

No JOKE TO BE DEAF



—Every deaf person knows that—
Mr. Way made himself hear his watch tick after being deaf for twenty-five years, with his Artificial Ear Drums. He wore them day and night. They stopped his head noises. They are invisible and comfortable, no wires or batteries. Write for **TRUB STORY**. Also booklet on Deafness. **Artificial Ear Drum**
THE WAY COMPANY
128 Hoffman Bldg. Detroit, Michigan



PILES DON'T BE CUT
Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment
for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., 404-A12 Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

LIQUOR HABIT

Send for FREE TRIAL of Nozalco, a guaranteed harmless home treatment. Can be given secretly in food or drink to anyone who drinks or craves Whiskey, Beer, Gin, Home Brew, Wine, Moonshine, etc. Your request for Free Trial brings trial supply by return mail and full \$2.00 treatment which you may try under a 30 day refund guarantee. Try Nozalco at our risk. **ARLEE CO. Dept. 204 BALTIMORE, MD.**

RAILROAD STORIES

A Magazine About Railroading
that Appeals to Everyone!

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine. 6 D—8

New Invention! WITH SUPERCHARGE PRINCIPLE SAVES GAS



MORE SPEED
MORE POWER
NEW MOTOR LIFE
QUICKER STARTING
UP TO 30% GAS SAVINGS

USERS REPORT
3 TO 7 MILES MORE PER GALLON
MOTORIST SAVES
\$180.00 A YEAR

VACU-MATIC
the Carburetor Control that "BREATHES"

"On an International truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas."—James Smith, N. Y.

"On my V-8 Ford, it works miracles. Its added power, acceleration and top speed has sold me. The results are unbelievable."—Ralph Fields, Mass.

"Very glad to say, the Buick showed an increase of 5 miles more per gallon."—A. V. Grode, Washington.

"On my Plymouth, I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of \$15 a month or \$180 a year."—J. S. Pook, Calif.

"It saves me one gallon a day. I had to buy 5 gallons each day—now only 4 gallons."—L. V. Street, Pa.

"My Chevrolet certainly runs smoother, has more power and snap to it since I put the Vacu-Matic on it."—J. H. Nelson, Miss.

"On my Dodge 8 I am getting 6 more miles per gal., with more power and pick-up, which is all anyone could ask."—Lee D. Ety, Calif.

"I have twelve Vacu-matics on cars now, and they all show an increase in mileage. The car owners are very well pleased."—Fred Taylor, Ohio.

"I averaged 25 miles per gallon on a trip with a model A Ford at 40 miles per hour, where before I only averaged 20. Also better pickup and smoother running."—Wm. Lyons, Calif.

"I have been placing Vacu-matics on expert mechanics' cars. All are well pleased."—J. W. Donahue, W. Va.

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, quicker starting, greater speed and smoother running.

Automatic -- Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—stream-lining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The sensational money-saving invention! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds.

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the super charger principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

Agents and Salesmen

VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

Guaranteed Gas Savings

VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. You can instantly tell the difference in added power and motor performance — you quickly notice the cash savings on gasoline.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

Free Details

You owe it to yourself to know all about this remarkable discovery. Mail the coupon below. Start saving gas with VACU-MATIC and enjoy a new driving thrill! There's no obligation—so get the facts now! Write today!

—FREE OFFER COUPON—

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-225 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.
Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name

Address

City State

Check here if interested in selling proposition.

The VACU-MATIC Co.

Wauwatosa, Wis.

Tortures Of Asthma Attacks And Bronchial Cough Can Now Be Relieved

Thankful Letters Tell of Remarkable Results without Habit-forming Drugs Helpful Information FREE—Mail Coupon

If you suffer the tortures of asthma attacks or bronchial cough, this message may be the happy turning point in your life! It may lead to relief and comfort such as you've never thought possible. Read every word of it. Then judge for yourself.

A way has been found to combat asthma attacks and bronchial cough without habit-forming drugs or opiates! A way so effective—that hundreds of sufferers report actually amazing results. A formula that sufferers may use right at home!

"A Blessing To Sufferers"

With its effectiveness proved in case after case, this formula is being offered to all who suffer from asthma and bronchial cough attacks. Its results have been so astonishing that people who have tried it say, "Worth its weight in gold"—"A Godsend"—"Wonderful"—"A blessing." It is called Nacor.

Nacor is not an experiment. Nacor is absolutely free from habit-forming drugs. It contains no cocaine, chloroform, morphine or opium. It is a reliable, remarkably effective formula for the relief of

asthma and bronchial cough attacks. Nacor not only brings soothing relief and comfort, but many thankful users report it has helped them gain sound, restful sleep and has improved their appetite, thus speeding the return of their health and strength.

Don't Envy Others—Act Now

If you are the victim of asthma attacks or bronchial cough, you know what misery these ailments can cause. You know what it means to be kept awake nights—to wheeze, cough, fight for breath. You know the agony of those strength-sapping attacks that make you feel weak, depressed, unable to work or play. Nacor brings you new hope—hope justified by the results obtained by thousands of people who have found blessed relief and comfort. It may be just what you need.

Don't envy those who no longer are tortured by asthma or bronchial cough attacks. Benefit by their experience! Many found the way to restful nights and happy days—with Nacor. You, too, should give Nacor a chance to prove what it may do for you.

"I Suffered For Years—Have Not Had An Attack Of Asthma Since Taking Nacor"



MRS. T. L. McFARLAND

Jan. 9, 1935—"I had been a sufferer from asthma attacks for twenty years. I was weak, couldn't walk across the floor. I choked with every breath. We saw Nacor advertised and sent for a bottle. I haven't had an attack of asthma since taking the first half bottle. I am feeling fine." Mrs. T. L. McFarland, R.R. 2, Box 459, Boulder, Colo.

SEND NO MONEY!

If you want to know about Nacor, mail the coupon and receive FREE a copy of "The Health Question." It is a booklet written specially for sufferers from the attacks of asthma and bronchial coughs. It contains page after page of helpful information on these ailments. Give you the exact words of dozens of men and women who have obtained relief.

Act quickly. The longer you delay, the longer you will probably endure the torturing, weakening symptoms of your ailment. What you want is blessed relief and comfort as quickly as possible. So act at once! Mail the coupon now—without obligation.

READ THEIR OWN WORDS

FIRST BOTTLE GAVE RELIEF

Jan. 14, 1930—"The first bottle of Nacor gave me relief. Haven't had an attack of asthma. I owe my good health to Nacor." Mrs. Eva Earnest, 301 W. Ottawa St., Paxton, Ill.

76-YEAR OLD MAN FINE

Dec. 8, 1933—"Am feeling fine. Have had no asthma attacks since took Nacor eight years ago." Jos. Thompson, 955 Tibbs Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

OBTAINED RELIEF

March 18, 1928—"I had asthma attacks so bad I couldn't sleep. But, thanks to Nacor, it is all a thing of the past now." Clayborne Bolar, 2721 St. Louis Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

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