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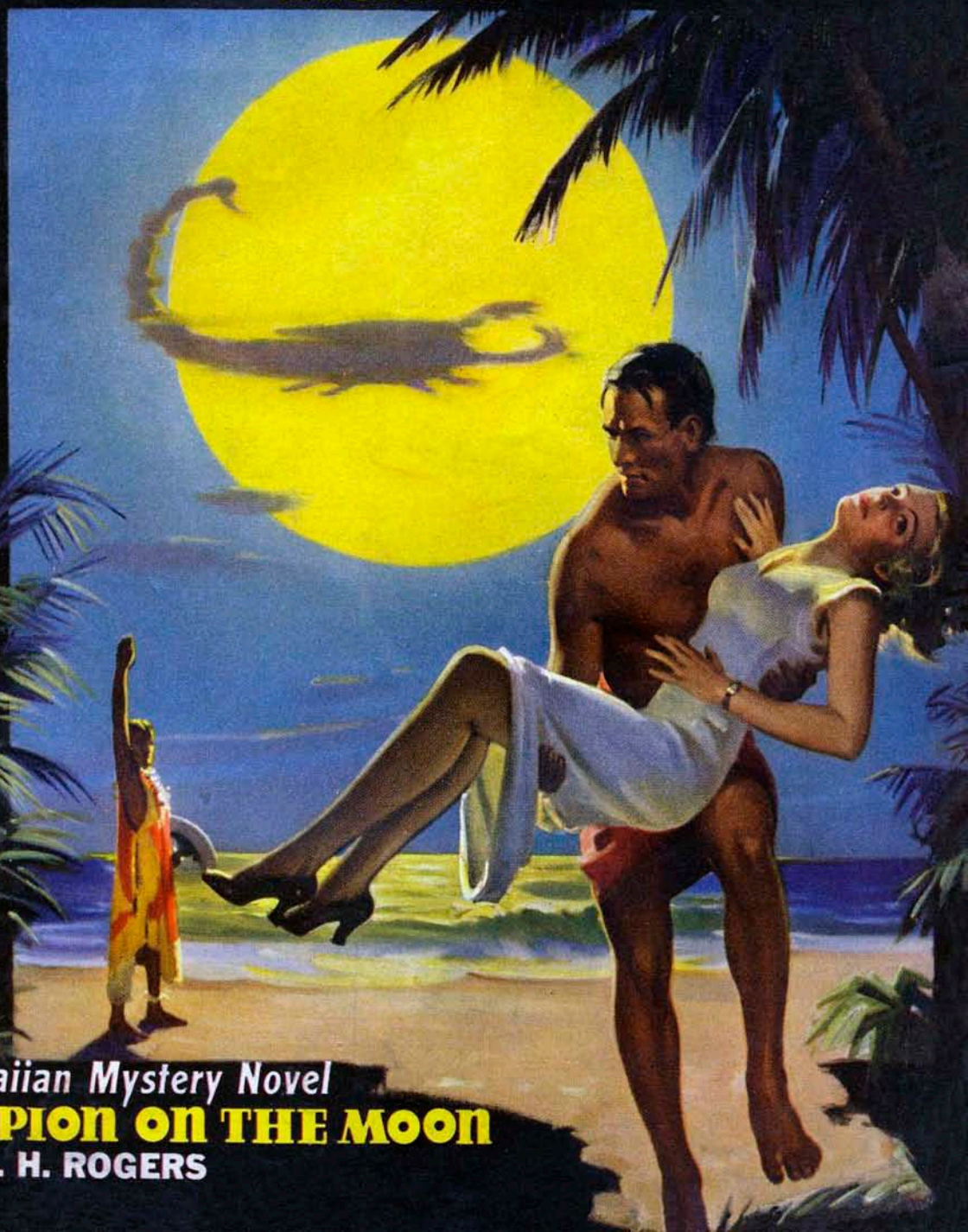
MAY, 1938

DETECTIVE STORY

10¢

REG. U. S. PAT. OFFICE


MAGAZINE



A Hawaiian Mystery Novel
SCORPION ON THE MOON
By M. I. H. ROGERS


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STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY

Title Reg. U. S. Pat. Office

MAGAZINE

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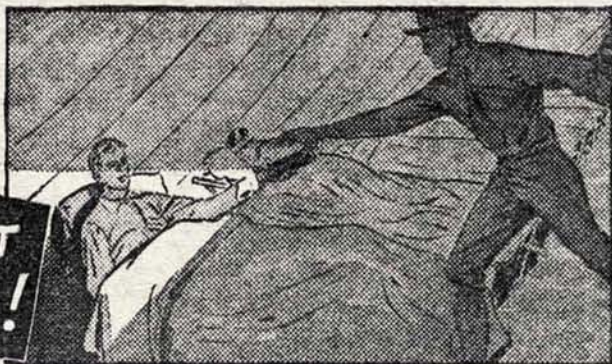
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The Witness Stand

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Dear Sir:

As an old friend—I have been reading DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for many years—may I criticize?

If the March number hadn't been mailed to me on subscription, I doubt that I would have picked it up. Why not put your best, not your worst, writer's name on the cover? Most of all I hate the filth in Harvey. He is almost as bad as Marion Scott.

Ripperger, Booth, and McCulley are your best writers, and in that order. Why not give us one of Ripperger's longer stories, and cut out some of the shorts?

Yours for the best,

Francis J. O'Brien, M. D.

1016 Lake Avenue,

Rochester, New York.

(Ed. Note: See the June DETECTIVE STORY for the finest and most dramatic long novelette by Walter Ripperger which we have read.)

THIS GOES DOUBLE WITH US.

Dear Sir:

I enjoyed the stories and cryptograms very much this month. I wish that DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE could be published twice instead of once a month.

Faithfully yours,

Hammond Annis.

208 8th Ave., New York, N. Y.

A PERFECT ANSWER—TO AN INFURIOUS QUESTION.

Dear Editor:

An author of yours, Mr. John Jay Chichester, lectured entertainingly at our Woman's Club last Friday. I still have to smile at his answer to one question. A fellow member, a rather fussy lady who has tried her hand at writing—unsuccessfully, I think—asked:

"Mr. Chichester, do you have to live out all the incidents in your stories?"

His reply—given solemnly:

"Madam, in the last tale I sold there were three murders. I went out and got myself murdered the first time. But I found the experience so very pleasant I let myself imagine the rest!"

Yours truly,

Vivian M. Bonnell.

Hannibal, Missouri.

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SCORPION ON THE MOON

BY M. I. H. ROGERS

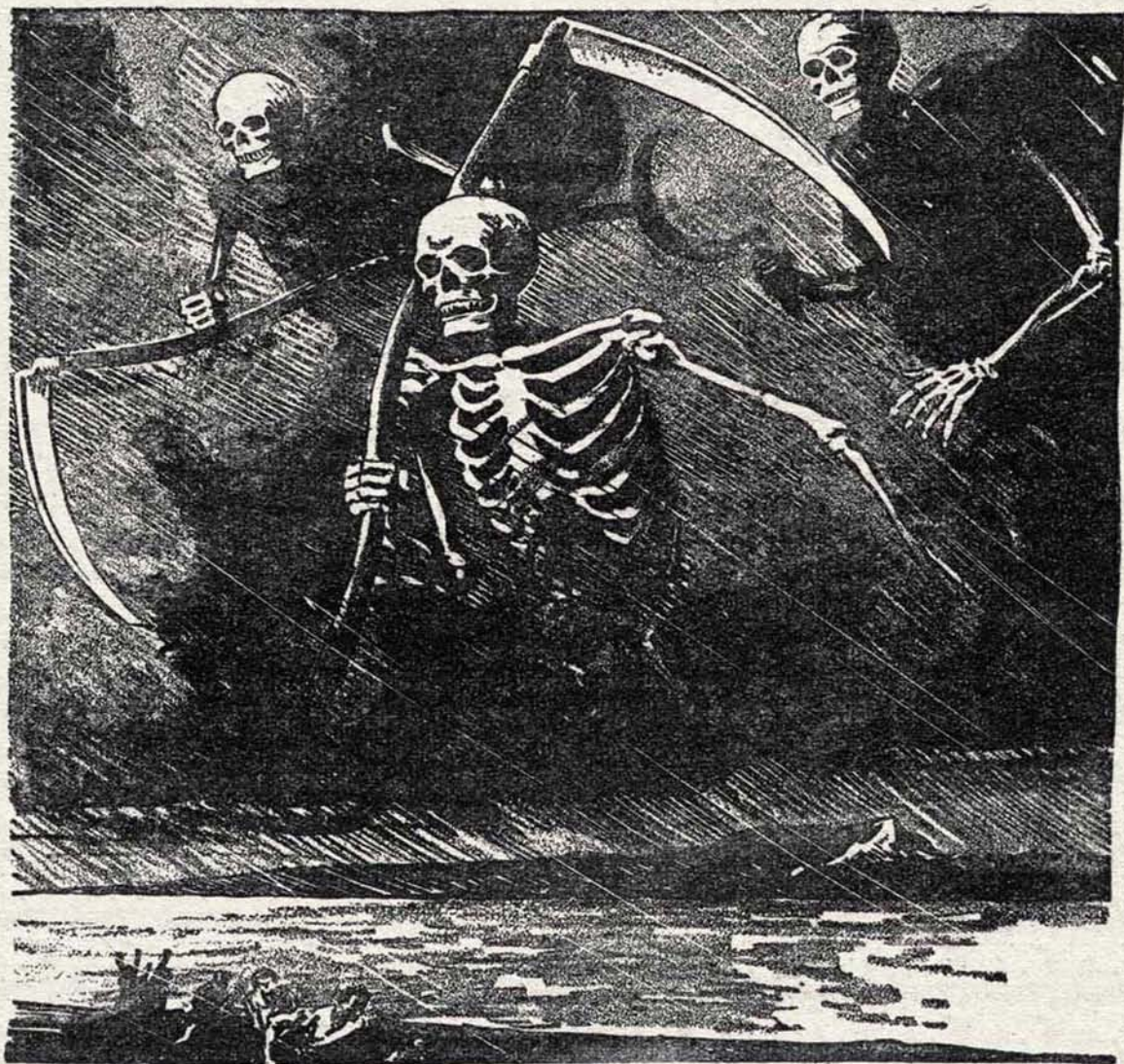
Author of: "Curtains for Three," etc.

CHAPTER I. ISLE OF MYSTERY.

BEHIND Barry Barton's seeming composure burned a hot wary excitement. He sat smoking his after-dinner pipe on the flat end of a bamboo chaise longue in one of the most peaceful scenes he had ever known

—Silas MacGregor's moon-flooded veranda—but Silas MacGregor was the man Barton had come to Hawaii to investigate, perhaps send to prison.

In front of him, marching back and forth across the grass mats, was Lehua MacGregor in white organdy dinner gown, a lovely restless ghost



THE KONA WIND

in tapping silver heels. The breeze lifted her black hair as she turned and a great square emerald sparkled from her breast. Her dark eyes were stormy and her full red lips set in a rebellious curve.

Barton waited for her to speak. No stranger could ever have invaded this tight little island kingdom without an entrée, and Barton had cultivated Lehua during the steamer trip from the mainland with the purpose of being invited. His only excuse had been that he had a job to do; but now he had a feeling that Lehua might need his help before

that job was completed.

Barton's instructions from his client were vague. "Check up on Silas MacGregor. His fire losses have run into six figures—too much to be accidental. Look up Jonah Pelio. He's the one who tipped us off, and he's secretary to our agent, Michael Normand. Be cagy with him. Pelio hints that he's in this, too."

When the steamer docked, Barton had found Jonah Pelio among those meeting Lehua, but there had been no chance to see him alone. Waiting now on the veranda, lanai they called

it here, for Pelio to contact him, he could not guess that this was to be his strangest case; one which he would win only by letting himself appear defeated down to that last grim finale on the beach of Kalani.

In the far shadows, Lehua whirled and came back into the moonlight. She stopped before Barton and started to speak:

"You'll have to help me! I won't be——"

The screen door into the house opened and Silas MacGregor came out; a thin white-haired man with deeply lined, stern face and tight down-drooping mouth. He stood squarely on his feet and puffed his pipe into life, watching Lehua over the match flame.

Behind him was Michael Normand, MacGregor's choice for a son-in-law. Normand was a striking figure, bold featured with a white smile flashing across his tanned face; a big Britisher with blond, sunburned hair and the wide shoulders and slender hard hips of a man much in the saddle. Polo, Barton thought. Tough as barbed wire. No man to trifle with.

Michael Normand spoke: "I have some papers to work on, Lehua. Want me to stick around or am I excused?" His clipped English speech was not unpleasant.

"You're excused," Lehua said coldly. "We're having singers later."

"Oh, are you?" His voice was eager. "I'll be down when I hear them." He turned to Barton: "I never get enough of the island singing. It gets under your skin like no other music on earth."

When he had gone, Lehua said: "There are times when I almost like Michael. He loves the islands nearly as much as I do."

"But ye would marry a mainlander," her father's words struck harshly on the soft air.

"I'll teach Wes to love Kalani." Lehua's voice lacked conviction and she added almost fiercely, "He *has* to!"

"Humph!" MacGregor growled. "I'll be going up. Good night to ye, Mr. Barton." He stumped inside and up the stairs.

Lehua took another swift passionate turn across the lanai and back again. Her tenseness seemed to crackle like an electric spark. To break the strain, Barton spoke casually of the island home of the MacGregors.

"Kalani lives up to its name of heaven, a very small heaven. From the way you bragged, I thought it as big as Oahu and here it's only a tiny islet."

The girl cried angrily: "My island is not tiny! How could it be and have a mountain and an extinct volcano?"

Barton chuckled and she stopped still a moment, laughed more easily, and said:

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell at you."

"O. K., but Kalani *is* small. Say, what is that gorgeous perfume?"

"Ginger blossoms. The singers are here."

There was a rustling from the hibiscus hedge which grew in front of the encircling ironwood trees, and three figures emerged into the moonlight, the lilting notes of ukuleles drifting ahead. Lehua went to meet them and Barton heard her exclaim in pleasure as she threw her arms about a small feminine figure. In a moment she called:

"Come here, Barry; I want you to meet Moana. She's Jonah Pelio's sister and the prettiest hula dancer in all Hawaii."

Barry went down the steps. This lovely child Pelio's sister? She couldn't be over fifteen. Moana wore a skirt of split green ti leaves, a crimson silk sleeveless blouse; and her dark hair was wreathed with ginger flowers. A lei of the same waxy blossoms encircled her neck like small white orchids.

"Moana, why are you on Kalani?" Lehua asked.

There was a perceptible pause before the girl answered: "Visiting grandfather. He's a very old man and lonely."

"I'm so glad that Barry will see you dance. Ready to start?"

Lehua led Barry back to the lanai.

"Watch her hands and arms," she advised him softly. "The hands tell the story. The hulas are the sagas of Hawaii and this one is about two lovers who went to the mountain and took along some okolehao—that's native hooch. They drank too much."

The men were singing gayly as if the words amused them and the tiny swaying body was a miniature poem in motion, when a shadow fell across the lanai floor, there was a firm step behind Barton and a quickly stifled curse.

Michael Normand stepped into the moonlight and for a moment his handsome features were sharp with anger as he stared at the little dancer. Gone was the genial skipper who had piloted them from Honolulu in the big red cruiser that afternoon. Here was a man whose capacities for ruthlessness could only be guessed.

"Michael," Lehua said dreamily, "it's Moana. Isn't she adora—"

"So I see," Michael clipped out the words and sat down on the step.

The peaceful languor of the night was shattered for the second time and Barton felt a chill threat of

unspoken purposes creep and crawl about them. It was borne in on him that these forces were stronger than he was. That this time he must wait instead of act; must follow and try to figure out the strange ways of these people who lived as their emotions dictated. He could wait, but he didn't relish it.

Now Moana was dancing only for Normand. Her big dark eyes never left his face. Her haunting smile was for him alone.

Lehua whispered that she was a little fraud. "Moana always thinks she's in love with some one, but she's fickle as the rain."

The scene delighted and amused Lehua, but Barton could find nothing amusing in the black rage of the Englishman. He knew that Normand was concealing his anger only by an effort. What lay between Moana and Normand? A sub rosa affair? But Lehua had said that Moana and Pelio were of good family. Whatever the answer, Barton felt that Moana was in for a bad time. There was something too still, too controlled about Normand's temper.

So engrossed was Barton in this new element that he was startled when the screen door scraped again. He turned to see Jonah Pelio standing there, his handsome face a frozen mask of anger. His eyes moved darkly from Moana to Normand. Just for an instant he stood, starkly exposed, then moved back into the shadows against the wall.

Unaware of her brother's presence, Moana took a ukulele from one of the musicians and dropped to the grass. She struck a lingering chord, raised her face until the moon drenched it with silver, and began to sing.

Barton felt that he was looking into the very heart of Hawaii and

for the moment forgot the two men and the ugly passions which tore them. Whispering, Lehua interpreted the song. It was of love, possession, desertion, and death, all interwoven with moonlight and the leaping white fire of the sea, and it fitted his obsession that in this place strong natural forces would take precedence over ordinary methods of detection.

The song came to an end. While the four people on the lanai remained motionless under the spell of the moment, Moana slipped silently into the shadow of the trees. The musicians followed.

Lehua whispered, her voice vibrant with feeling: "I could never give this up! I'd rather die!"

Michael Normand rose abruptly, made some half audible comment, and moved across the lawn toward the foot of the garden. Pelio went back into the house without speaking.

Barton asked: "Why is Pelio angry with his sister?"

"Is he? I hadn't noticed. Probably she's in love again. He wants her to marry a haole."

"And what is a haole?"

"Any white person."

"Perhaps," Barry said soberly, "but it's something pretty serious—with Pelio, I mean. He's furious."

"He takes life too seriously," Lehua said absently.

CHAPTER II.

A SCORPION IN HEAVEN.

THE moonlight broadened its path across the lanai. Lehua stirred uneasily, turned to face Barton.

"Will you let me talk to you?" she asked in a troubled voice. "Confidentially?"

"If you're sure you want to."

"Thanks. Perhaps just talking things over will help me straighten them out in my mind. You think I should be happy here, don't you?" She waved one hand at the peaceful beauty. "I could be, if they'd let me." Leaning toward Barton she demanded: "Could you give up this island if you had been born here? Grew up here?"

"I've been told you are your father's only heir."

"I am." She rose and began again her restless pacing. "But he threatens to sell Kalani and buy Liihau, a larger and more profitable island, unless I marry Michael. Father claims it's because he is old and ill and afraid to leave the properties to my handling. That isn't true. He has always planned to let the Fisher Trust Co. handle the estate. There is something deeper behind this. It frightens me!"

Lehua turned, her eyes flashing. "He has never shown me one scrap of fatherly affection. He's selfish and grasping and indifferent. I wrote him that I was in love with Wes. What did he do? He announced my engagement to Michael! That's what he did. And ordered me home."

"If this Wes loves you, he'll wait until you can get your father's consent, or are of age," Barry said calmly.

The next instant Lehua had flung herself down on the chaise longue beside him. "That's just it." Her voice quivered pathetically. "You have to understand about Wes. He's beautiful and strong and lots of fun. His hair is as yellow as the sun and he's big and——"

"Wait up!" Barton interrupted. "I can't take it. Why wouldn't this modern god wait for you?"

Lehua looked at her slipper toe

and said unhappily: "He's poor and there are lots of rich girls who run after him."

"Oh." Barton was brutal. "He's for sale and you're afraid to trust him away from you."

This time Lehua did not flare up. She sounded beaten. "I didn't expect you to understand. Men marry girls because they can buy them. You understand that. Father wouldn't object if I were his son and chose a poor girl. Well, that's how I feel and I've grown to hate him. I can't give up Kalani and I won't marry Michael."

Barton said slowly: "If you understood your father, you'd see that he must acquire, and cling to what he acquires. It's his nature."

"And any one who gets in his way is smashed?" After a moment, Lehua said miserably: "I do know that and it isn't true that I hate him, but he has never let me love him. I wanted to. I might even have married Michael to please him if I hadn't met Wes. I used to like Michael."

"And you don't like him now?"

"I blame him for the way father is acting. Michael is behind this even if I can't figure out how. Perhaps he wants to marry the MacGregor properties."

"It's quite possible that he's in love with you."

"Then he'd help me. You heard him mention papers a while ago? He's a lawyer and he's drawing up a deed to Kalani. If I sign a marriage agreement with Michael, father will sign the deed giving me Kalani. I've refused, but he showed me an option to buy Liihau and I know he'll sell my island if I hold out against him."

"What are you going to do?"

Lehua lowered her voice to a whisper: "I'll sign the agreement, get the deed, and go back to the main-

land until I'm of age and can marry Wes."

"How old are you, Lehua?"

"Almost eighteen."

"It won't wash. They could bring you back."

Her lovely face was suddenly distorted by a primitive rage. "I'll kill them if they drive me too far. I will not marry Michael. I won't!" During that five days on shipboard Lehua had told him of her Hawaiian blood, dating back to when the first Silas MacGregor married the dark-eyed daughter of a king and founded his island dynasty. She was impulsive, willful, generous, and lovable; but he had never before seen her angry. It accentuated this mixture of Scotch and Hawaiian, and it made Barton anxious for her happiness.

"There may be another way," he suggested. "Your signature as a minor is valueless. Why don't you stipulate that Michael Normand is to change his name to MacGregor when you marry? Your father would like that and your prideful Britisher would refuse. That would start an argument and give you time to fight them."

"That's an idea!" Lehua exclaimed. "Michael is very proud of his name. He'd never consent."

For a moment then they sat in silence, each busy with new thoughts. A thin gray cloud drifted across the moon, took the form of a sea horse with arched neck and curving tail. The wind caught at it, distorted it into a loathsome shape. Lehua stirred and shivered.

"A scorpion crawls on the moon," she whispered. "Let's go in."

"Mind if I don't?" Barry asked. "I'll never get enough of these nights. A whole lifetime would be too short."

After Lehua left him he watched

the shadows as the moon lazed toward the west in a night dreamy with sweet trade winds. He was almost sorry when a tall figure crossed the lawn and Jonah Pelio sat down beside him.

Barton said: "She is very lovely, your little sister."

"And very lolo—crazy." Pelio squeezed his hands together tightly between his knees. His face was darkly sad. "Michael Normand has been amusing himself with my sister. He has broken his promises. He wants to be rid of her. To him she is only a hapa-haole — half-white. Tonight he followed her to their meeting place and cursed her for coming here."

Pelio unclasped his hands and struck the step with doubled fist. "If I had only been there! I went to the house of our grandfather and she came in, weeping." His voice deepened and bitter words poured from his heart. "To-morrow when he and I are swimming in the lagoon, I shall challenge him to fight. One of us will be shark meat."

For a brief moment Barton's blood raced hotly. What a fight that would be! Two powerful men as at home in the water as on land, battling to the death, stripped of all but the simple purpose to kill and to keep from being killed. He said:

"You can't do it. Give me a chance to work this out, Pelio. There's a way. I'll find it."

Pelio's head drooped. "I should never have sent for you. I should have killed him. Now to punish Normand I must disgrace Mac-Gregor and break the heart of Lehua. To-morrow I will do what must be done."

Barry tightened his grip on Pelio's arm. Such a move could only result in defeat for all of them. "Give me three days," he urged. "Just these



three days to clear everything."

For a long time Pelio sat silent, then he said: "I will wait three days."

Barry leaned back, relieved profoundly. "Now tell me what's back of this arson talk?"

Barton stared frankly at his companion. Jonah Pelio was the same golden color as his sister; tall, virile, with bulging shoulders, candid dark eyes, and proud handsome features.

"Let's take the facts first," Barry continued. "The Sulsun Insurance Co. has in the past two years paid claims totaling half a million dollars to Silas MacGregor. You believe these fires were incendiary?"

"I've studied them carefully and they are alike in these three things," Pelio said soberly. "First, MacGregor was never present at the time of the fire. Second, each fire occurred during a kona wind; and third, MacGregor had visited the property shortly before the fire, within a week."

Barton mulled over that for a moment. "First, what is a kona wind?"

"It is a hot wind blown by the devil from the south—Kona way. We call it the sick wind. It makes every one ugly and mean and if it lasts long enough, it makes people sick—and murderous.

"Then the fires always happened during a south wind. Let's get this straight. Whom are you accusing, MacGregor or Michael Normand?"

"Both. I figure that the old man caused the fires and Normand helped him cover up and collect. As Normand's secretary I knew that his investigations were too casual."

"Silas MacGregor has always been a heavy insurer," Barry said. "We must go slowly." He waited, but Pelio did not comment. "Why should Normand help MacGregor break the law?"

"Because he wants to marry Lehua and inherit the MacGregor fortune," Pelio answered bitterly. For an instant his eyes glowed with passionate feeling.

"You suggest that Normand is blackmailing MacGregor. It will be tough to prove. First, we'll have to convict MacGregor of arson. Not easy with one of the wealthiest men in the islands. I could have Normand removed as agent."

"That's no punishment," Pelio protested. "Even now he is plan——"

"Planning what?"

"That is something I may tell you later." Again Pelio leaned toward his companion and spoke earnestly: "Don't be fooled by Michael Normand. He's as deadly as a tidal wave. He's clever and wicked and selfish." There was deep sincerity in his voice. "The money does not matter, but I will not let him marry Lehua."

So that was it. "Why don't you come clean with me?" Barry demanded. "Why these reservations? It isn't smart to keep me in the dark."

"Later. There is time."

Barton shrugged. "Then let me tell you that it's dangerous to make threats. Suppose Normand should die in some violent manner?"

The Hawaiian smiled. "To you only do I say these things."

When Pelio rose to enter the house, Barton did not try to detain him.

The night grew still again save for the whispering of the ironwood trees and the surf on the reef. Clouds separated and drifted, but always the cool moon dreamed her heavy-lidded way to her couch in the western sea. Despite thoughts of intrigue and passion, Barry was grinning at a cloud rooster, sailing backward, when a throaty whisper from around the

corner of the house broke into his reverie.

"Moana, why you here so late?" It was the voice of a man in the shadows out of Barton's sight, pleading poignantly.

"So you followed me!" Moana's voice, disdainful and impatient. "Let go my arm!"

"Not until you tell if you come to meet that haole."

"Where I go and whom I meet is not your affair."

Moana and a native lover. Barton reached for a cigarette—his light would warn them they were not alone.

The man went on desperately: "But, Moana, you let me love you. I—"

"Let go my arm!"

They had not heard the match. Another actor now entered the scene. A deep resonant voice speaking the girl's name.

"Grandfather," Moana wailed. "Why are you here?"

"To take you home." Then the old man spoke to the boy in their native tongue, harshly, angrily, and in a moment Moana and her grandfather moved across the lawn. With their going, a sighing sob came from the shadows.

Barton had just crushed out his cigarette when he heard steps. Shifting his glance, he saw the tall white-clad Michael Normand turn in from the road. He passed along the side of the house and when he reached that hidden corner, Barry heard his startled curse.

"Damn it, why are you skulking here?"

"I wait you. It is of Moana. You let her alone. She not for haole."

"You confounded pup. What do you mean by such talk? Keep away from here and keep Moana away,

too. She followed me here. Now get out."

This time Barton rose and went inside, up the broad stairway to his room. There was no peace in Kalani where there are no poisonous snakes but a scorpion crawls across the moon.

CHAPTER III.

STING OF THE SCORPION.



DOOR slammed somewhere. Barton opened his eyes to sunlight. Some one ran through the wide upper hall and another followed as if in pursuit. High-pitched voices, orders, and a babel and confusion going on below. Suddenly he knew that this was not the usual process of bringing the big house to life. Wide awake, he bathed and dressed hurriedly. In the hall he saw Lehua hurrying toward her room with a paper in her hand. She stopped.

"Something terrible had happened, Barry. My father woke up blinded this morning. I've sent Jonah to Honolulu for a specialist. He went in Michael's cruiser."

While Barton expressed shocked sympathy, his thoughts circled this curious happening. Did people go blind overnight, without warning?

"I'll leave with the boat which takes the specialist back," he said. "You won't want to be bothered—"

"No. Don't go. I want you to stay." She put a hand on his arm. "I have a strange notion that I'm going to need you here. Even if Michael invites you to go back with him, please stay. Tell him that I insisted." She laughed shakily. "Heaven knows when you'll get breakfast. The kitchen wahines are excited this morning. Be patient with them. I promise better service for dinner." She turned toward her room, stopped, and came back.

"Barry," she said in a low, troubled voice, "before Jonah left he passed me the deed to Kalani which Michael had prepared. I'm going to ask father to sign it." She saw the look in his eyes and hurried on:

"You think I've no feeling, don't you, to ask him now, but I tell you I feel as if something dreadful were going to happen—that I must hurry. I can't explain it. You go down to breakfast. I'll talk to you later."

Lehua went to her room, opened the deed, and read it carefully, brows knitted. A fever of impatience to get it signed burned in her. Perhaps her father would soften now that his eyes had failed. He had never needed her before. Now he might be more kind, more understanding. She folded the paper into the pocket of her white dress and went to his room.

Michael rose from beside the bed when she came. He shook his head sadly as she took his place.

"Are you still in pain, father?" she asked, as Michael went out.

"It's there," Silas MacGregor said shortly.

"The doctor should be here soon. I'm terribly unhappy over this quarrel. Why can't we be friends? I can't bear to be with you all the time and have you angry at me."

"I have no wish to quarrel, but ye must obey."

"Father, I have the deed to Kalani which Michael made out. Won't you sign it for me—without any strings attached? I've never asked you for much and I'll try to do what you want—later." She caught her breath sharply. "Just give me time."

An odd twisted smile showed on the thin lips beneath the bandages. Lehua waited, breathless, until he spoke:

"Very well. I'll sign for ye."

She put the pen into his hand and

guided it to the signature line. Her heart melted with tenderness and pity and gratitude. Perhaps they could have been friends long ago if she had only tried harder.

"You don't think this is greedy, do you?" she asked. "You know how much I love Kalani."

"Ye are a true MacGregor," he said.

The words chilled her. "You mean that I just love to own things? Like you do? You're wrong. My love for Kalani is all tied up with my childhood and mother."

At that the strange smile broadened on his lips. She stopped trying to explain and haltingly thanked him for the deed.

After a lonely breakfast, Barton decided to explore the grounds. They had arrived the previous evening and this was his first daylight look. Despite the new turn of events, he must go on with his investigation.

He crossed the lanai to the lawn and then down to the coral sea wall where he sat in the sun facing the handsome old-fashioned house. At the south corner he noticed a wire which carried from beneath the eaves to a tall ironwood tree some forty feet distant. An aerial? Wondering idly, he saw the radio aerial on the east side of the house and remembered that the radio stood at that side of the great room. His interest quickened. Barton was, first of all, an insurance investigator. The more he looked at that wire the more it intrigued him. Guest or no, he had to see where it led and why.

He went back into the house and up the stairs to the second floor. Michael Normand was typing behind a door in that slow uncertain way of an amateur and Barry went

quickly past until he came to a boxed stairway leading to the attic. The door at the top was locked, but the outdated fastening yielded easily to his manipulations.

Many dormer windows admitted plenty of light, but it was infernally hot and stuffy in the attic. He took off his shoes and went noiselessly to the south corner. Sure enough, there was the wire, drawn through a short conduit in the wall. Just inside, it was twisted into a loop and a string tied through it. The string led to a wooden box on the floor.

Barton squatted to inspect the box. It had eyelets screwed into two opposite sides and the string was attached to one of these. A rubber band had been looped through the other eyelet. The box was loosely filled with shavings and closely heaped about with rolls of wallpaper, old magazines, hat boxes, et cetera, all inflammable.

Grimly Barton reached down and pushed aside the shavings. His lips tightened. The bottom of the box was lined with coarse sandpaper. His trained mind supplied the missing ingredient. Lacking only was a fat bundle of matches tied head down between the taut string on one side of the box and the rubber band on the other.

Imagination finished the picture. A strong south wind. The tall tree swaying. That wire pulling the line, dragging the matches across the sandpaper and the rubber band pulling them back again. Friction! A flash of fire! The shavings igniting from the matches and flames raging through the dusty attic.

And then? The string would burn away. The wire would snap back to the tree and hang there unnoticed until it could be removed. Another of Silas MacGregor's properties gone up in smoke. Another claim

for Sulsun Insurance to pay. Fiendishly clever, but this would not be the same as those other fires. This was the home of Lehua—the one for which she was fighting.

Barton stood up, dusted his hands, and reflected on MacGregor's viciousness. He didn't doubt then that the old man was the maker of this contrivance. The house was safe for a while—a blind man would hardly burn the roof over his own head—and the matches were still to be installed. Safe unless some one else knew of the box.

He shoved at the box with his foot. It was nailed to the floor. By the time he had tied his shoes again and fastened the attic door, he was soaking with perspiration. As he went to his room, eager for a shower, Normand was still typing.

It was almost noon when Michael Normand pulled the sheet of legal paper from the typewriter with a sigh of relief. He had once been a fair typist, but the task he had set for himself had brought perspiration flowing. Carefully he went over the document. It purported to be the last will and testament of one Silas MacGregor, and its terms made one Michael Normand the legal guardian of Lehua and executor of her estate.

It left all property to Lehua and stipulated that she was to marry Michael Normand. If she refused, she would receive only a stated income until her fortieth birthday and was to have no word as to the management of her properties until that time.

It was a brazenly impudent document and would have called for legal dispute had there been other heirs, or had it been written in any other spot than the baronial island where MacGregor ruled unchallenged. Michael Normand did not expect to record

it. The will was a private weapon which he intended to use as a persuader.

He looked from his window and noted that the red cruiser, *Ulua*, had not yet returned with the eye specialist. Stowing the will in his pocket, he went briskly down the hall to tap on MacGregor's door. Lehua was there and he asked her to leave them alone for a moment. When she had gone, he went in to find MacGregor sitting up, more dour than usual beneath white bandages.

"I've brought the marriage contract," Normad lied. "If you'll sign it I'll see about getting Lehua's signature."

Silas MacGregor chuckled raspily. "Put the pen on the line. Lehua was in here with the deed a while ago. I signed it for her, but she doesn't know that it will not make her owner of Kalani—yet." He wrote his name in shaky letters where Normad placed the pen.

The tall blond man said nothing for a moment. He regarded MacGregor with cynical dislike unveiled in his eyes and something of contempt, while he wondered how Lehua had secured that deed. Had she rummaged through his room or had Pelio given it to her? Normad decided that his clerk might need more careful watching. As to the deed—he'd take care of that when the time came.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PENCIL TREE.

THE eye specialist arrived and was taken to Silas MacGregor's room by Lehua and Normad. Pelio, looking fresh in spite of the long trip, suggested a swim and Barry donned trunks and joined him. The water

was warm and they soon tired of it, to stretch out on the narrow strip of coarse sand under the hau trees.

"Before you leave Kalani," Pelio said in his deep grave voice, "I must take you to the wet caves. They are exciting if you care to explore. Long ago, a native army in flight retreated to these caves, hoping to hide there from the enemy. It is said that there were two hundred men.

"Once inside they had to pass through narrow trails in single file and finally crawl one at a time, through a long tunnel. The pursuing warriors glimpsed the last man to go through, knew they could never attack them in there, and rolled a rock against the entrance. They all died of starvation. Many bones are still there."

"I'd like to see them," Barry agreed.

"I acted as guide one summer for a young geological student from New Mexico," Pelio continued. He shuddered as if a chill wind had blown over him and then said quickly: "There are many strange places on Kalani."

"And strange things, too," Barry said. "Frankly, I'm puzzled and skeptical about MacGregor's blindness. His eyes were O. K. last night."

"You think he's pretending to be blind?"

"I don't know what to think. The specialist will settle that point. It's queer—unnatural."

For a moment Pelio was silent. He rolled on his side and regarded Barry from beneath long black lashes. Then he began to talk in his slow rich voice:

"Perhaps you should know that we have a tree here whose leaves look like green pencils. Its sap

causes blindness and is a deadly poison if taken through the mouth."

Listening to the incredible implications behind those quiet words, Barry held his gaze on the clouds. "You are suggesting that MacGregor could have been blinded accidentally?"

"It is always possible—but I don't think so."

Barton sat up and went to the point. "Are you hinting that Normand did this? Why? He wants to marry Lehua. The two men are partners in many enterprises. Frankly I don't get the point. Has he been stealing from the old man?"

"He couldn't do that. MacGregor is too cautious."

For a long moment Barton sat there, silent. Then he lay back and stared at the irregular line of the hau tree against the sky. "If," he began, "it were MacGregor trying to injure Normand, I'd get it. After all, Normand knows that the old man committed arson and it's only natural MacGregor would like to put him out of the way. No. I tell you there's something wrong with the picture."

"There is another thing," Pelio said. "Michael Normand is broke. Also he is in love with an ugly long-legged woman from Australia, a breeder of horses. He means soon to join her down under. That much I know and this I guess—he intends to take the MacGregor money with him."

"He plans grandly," Barton said and was intensely dissatisfied. What of Silas MacGregor, still several years from the grave? And what of Lehua, so young? What of her? An icy premonition stabbed through him. Only one thing would pry the bony fingers of MacGregor from his moneybags, and Lehua had said she

would prefer death to losing Kalani. If Normand actually contemplated two murders, why should he first blind one victim?

Barry got to his feet. If MacGregor could so easily be blinded, why not Lehua, too? That sinister box under the eaves! Two sightless people groping helplessly through a blazing house! It was unthinkable. No man could deliberately plan such fiendishness, but Barton knew that he must warn Lehua even at the risk of revealing his profession to the impulsive girl and perhaps through her to others.

He hurried to the house to dress, haunted by the cloud scorpion which had writhed across the moon; sternly reminding himself that Hawaiian scorpions are not poisonous; that he was getting the jitters. Instinct suggested that the many-legged creeper which had scuttled into Lehua's heaven might be from colder, more cruel lands.

Pelio did not appear for dinner and Normand had gone to return the doctor to Honolulu, so only Lehua and Barton sat down at the big table. The servants were edgy and forgetful and neither diner had an appetite.

Lehua, exotically lovely in a soft sheer white gown, a red flower in her hair and little bare feet tricked out in high-heeled red sandals, apologized for the service. She looked tired and disheartened.

"What was the verdict?" Barton asked.

"Permanent loss of vision. Some unidentified infection. Poor old man."

"Infection? Lehua, have you thought that he might have been infected intentionally?"

She put down her cup and stared at him with fear behind her big dark

eyes. "Are you serious?"

"I'm afraid I am."

"Go on."

"But that's all. Don't laugh. I have a feeling that— Lehua, be careful of your eyes, will you? Don't let anything come in contact with them—not even your fingers."

The girl stared, her face whitening, poignant unhappiness in her eyes. "That's queer talk," she said.

"Then let's stop it—but don't forget to be careful." He looked at her, his keen eyes softened into gentleness. "What else is troubling you? Tell."

For a long moment she looked into his eyes, white and miserable. Then she reached into the front of her dress and handed him a scrap torn from one of the papers brought that day from Honolulu.

There were the pictures of two young people—a plain, long-faced girl and a handsome youth with reckless mouth and narrowed long-lashed eyes. Barton read the caption. The girl's parents were announcing her engagement to Wesley Beesmaier.

"She's an automobile heiress. They'll live in New York," Lehua said.

Barton looked up to see her eyes bright with tears, but her head was held high.

"That's that," she said.

He wondered if she meant it.

"Will you tell me about those treasures of old Hawaii in the hall?" he asked gently.

"Why not? They're all museum pieces. That's where they should be, only the MacGregors hold tightly to their own."

Her voice was light and bitter. It stirred him to restless anger at the old man upstairs and the young one in the United States who couldn't risk waiting for her.

CHAPTER V.

THE LUNAR RAINBOW GHOST.

BARTON retired that night increasingly troubled and thoughtful. It seemed to him that he was in some strange, ungoverned land far from American soil where men silently meted out their own justice and, behind smooth faces, plotted dark cruelties. He felt that he struggled through a night tangled in a web whose invisible meshes held him like a fly is held.

Moonlight poured into his room bringing a restlessness which kept him twisting and turning. Was Pelio's information accurate concerning Normand's finances and the lady in Australia? What was Normand up to? Did he have guilty knowledge of that box in the attic?

Batron realized that while he now had evidence of premeditated arson, he could not prove in court that the old man had actually placed the box there, and he had absolutely nothing tangible against Normand. For sleepless hours he brooded over the case.

A sudden drumming of rain distracted him and he sat up in bed. The moon was shining brightly and he remembered the lunar rainbows of which he had heard. Hoping to see one he went to the window and was rewarded. There it was. Lovely beyond words. Like cellophane ribbons of pearly iridescence. There was a noise downstairs as if some one had stumbled over furniture. A door slammed and he leaned out to look down. All was quiet. He waited. Shrill voices came from the rear of the house.

Suddenly a shadow moved, close to the house. A tall dark-skinned man, wearing only a pair of white shorts, left the protection of the

house and ran across the lawn. A lunar rainbow floated about his body, waist-high; a huge fairy belt of color, moving with him.

Pelted by the downpour, he ran toward the trees and Barry's first thought was that it was Pelio. Just before the man reached the shadows, Barton saw a curious thing and stared, wondering if the light from the rainbow had touched the fellow's back. No! It was not the rainbow. He caught his breath sharply and lingered there, perplexed, long after the man had disappeared from sight.

The women servants were wailing downstairs. He slipped into his robe and opened the door. The hall, illumined by night lights, was empty. He went quietly along it until he came to Lehua's door and tapped softly. Hearing sleepy stirrings inside, he rapped again. After a moment Lehua, struggling into a white robe, opened her door, dark hair disheveled, eyes big and startled.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is father worse? Why are the wahines making so much noise?"

"Sorry to waken you," Barry told her. "I only wanted to make sure you were all right. Some one, a man, just ran from the house. It was strange. I was worried about you, foolishly, I see."

He told her of what he had seen and she turned troubled eyes on him.

"You say he looked like Jonah? But he is my friend, my guest. He need not run from this house." The clamor below floated up in rising crescendo. "What is the matter with them?" she repeated. "They'll waken father." She came out into the hallway and moved past Barton toward her father's door.

Something sent Barton running past her to reach the door first.

"Wait!" he said. "Please don't

go in. Let me."

"But——"

"I don't know. Let me see."

He turned the knob. The door was not locked—any one could have entered just as he was doing. The room was in darkness. Closing the door he snapped the old-fashioned lock lever and touched the electric switch.

For an instant he stood paralyzed by the horrible sight. The killer who had cut Silas MacGregor's throat had almost severed his head from his shoulders. Blood still ebbed from the red gash. Death must have come in his sleep—there was no sign of a struggle.

Barton drew the sheets over the sickening object and stood for a moment piecing together the threads which had twined about him since he came to Kalani. Lehua tapped lightly on the door, calling in soft urgent tones. Thankful for the inspiration which had caused him to lock her out, he put out the light and went into the hall, taking the key with him. She stared as he turned it in the lock.

As gently as he could, he told her that her father was dead and when she insisted upon going to him, he told her that MacGregor had been murdered.

Her eyes widened and her lips parted, trembled, as she tried to speak: "You—you think the man you saw—Jonah——" She wavered and groped toward the wall for support.

Barton put his arm about her shoulders and steadied her. He couldn't express his suspicions just yet; or his fear that her life, too, might be taken in some such awful way. He could only vow to guard her until there was no longer any need. He could feel her stiffening, gathering herself together.

"I won't believe this of Jonah," she whispered. "He's my friend."

She pushed Barton away and ran down the hall to Pelio's door; knocked demandingly. There was no answer and she went in, looked into the great closet and shower room. He was not there.

She turned stricken eyes to Barton who had followed. "I'll go down and quiet the wahines," she said, "then we'll find Jonah. I'll never believe this is true unless he admits it to me. Get dressed."

Barton watched her as she ran down the stairway, before returning to his room. The wailing of the servant women died away and he heard Lehua come up quietly. He did not have long to wait. She tapped on his door and he joined her. She wore a straight white linen dress with low-heeled sandals and held a flashlight. Her face was composed, almost stern unless you caught the bewilderment and pain in her dark eyes.

"Come," she said. "We'll look for Jonah at the house of his grandfather, Kali Kamalani. Moana is there." She carried herself with a dignity which reminded Barton of her royal blood.

Out of the house, across the lawn to the trees and through trails which were weirdly strange to him, she moved ahead. The light she carried, pointing straight down from her swinging arm, snatched bits of path from the darkness and made them vivid for a brief moment. All around them the night was warm and still; blacker beneath the trees in contrast to the white moonlit spaces where the torch faded to nothingness.

On Lehua went, sure of foot and direction, knowing the way as a nocturnal animal knows its way. She carried the flashlight only so that

Barton might not delay her by stumbling. Suddenly they emerged into a moon-bright clearing. A small high house covered with vines stood before them, deeply shadowed by trees. There was a light inside. Lehua went to the door and rapped.

"Owai kela?" a deep voice asked.

"Open the door, Kali Kamalani," the girl called. "It is Lehua with a friend. We come to speak with those inside."

A moment of silence and then the door opened and Moana and Pelio stepped down into the moonlight. The door closed behind them.

"Jonah," Lehua began, "my father was killed to-night. The wahines in the kitchen quarters were awakened and they say that you jumped from the window and ran away in the rain. They think it was your ghost; that somewhere you lie dead and your uhaue came to kill."

"But you see I am alive," Pelio answered in a puzzled voice. "I have been here with my sister and grandfather. Lehua, you say your father was killed?"

"I knew you would not do such a terrible thing," the girl said. "You are my friend. But what shall we do now? The wahines will tell what they think they saw. You will be taken to jail."

Moana started to cry and Pelio put his arm around her, turned to Barton.

"What do you advise, my friend?" Pelio asked.

"Perhaps you had better hide until the killer is found."

For a long moment Pelio was silent; a tall brown man like silvered bronze in the moonlight, dark eyes brooding. Moana trembled beside him, her head not reaching his shoulder, her pretty face terrified.

"I do not understand," he said finally. "Some one who looks like

me kills and runs away. The wahines say I am a ghost. Some one must be wishing my life away."

He turned and tapped on the door. A huge, white-haired old man came down, walking erect, carrying his head proudly. Pelio drew him and Barry to one side away from the girls.

"My grandfather," he said, "this is Mr. Barton. He tells me that I am in danger. Will you send a friend to Honolulu at once in my boat? Tell him to find out just what the haole, Michael Normand, did when he went there this day with the eye doctor. Tell him to learn if Normand remained at his home or if he returned to Kalani. Bring the message to me. I will wait in the inner chamber of the wet cave. Do you understand?"

"I understand," the old fellow answered.

"What do you understand?" Moana cried. She had overheard her grandfather's answer and came quickly to them. "Listen to me. It is all my fault. I can find the guilty man."

"Hush," her grandfather commanded softly.

A branch snapped in the deep shadows and there seemed to be a movement in the undergrowth. Pelio ran into the house and came down with a small rifle. He vanished into the tangle of shrubbery and they heard him moving about stealthily. Then there was a sharp report from the blackness.

Moana cried out in mortal pain, sagged to her knees, and as she crumpled on the ground they heard another shot. Barton caught Moana and laid her down carefully. Then he ran for the trees and stumbled about trying to make his way to the spot where he had seen that second orange streak of flame.

"Come back!" Lehua cried. "Barry! Jonah! Come back!"

Barton stumbled and fell. His knee came down on something hard, and when he put down his hand to balance himself he found a rifle. His groping fingers next encountered smooth skin and he knew that Pelio lay there, unconscious if not dead. He tried to lift the big fellow, but inert, Pelio was too heavy. Slipping his arms under Pelio's shoulders, he raised the senseless body and dragged it into the open.

Lehua was bending over Moana. Barry laid his burden on the grass and quickly discovered that a bullet had creased the side of his head, laying open the scalp. It was bleeding profusely. Barton tore a strip from his shirt and pulled the wound together, binding it tightly. As he worked he could hear Lehua sobbing and the rich voice of Kali Kamalani chanting a weird wail as he knelt beside his granddaughter. When Barton joined them, Moana lay with closed eyes, red creeping across her breast.

The old man took her by the shoulders. "Little Moana," he ordered sternly, "open your lips. Tell what you know of this."

"Oh, don't shake her," Lehua sobbed. "She's dead."

"Not yet. She lives. Moana, wake! You must tell. *You must.*"

It seemed a horrible act, for Barton, too, thought the little dancer was gone. Then she opened her eyes and looked up into her grandfather's face. Her lips parted: "My playhouse in the guava—" An agonizing cough convulsed the little figure and when it had passed, Moana was dead.

"She was delirious," Lehua whimpered. "What is this terrible thing which stalks around my island murdering people?"

Kali Kamalani rose and looked around. He saw Pelio and moved over to him. Lehua cried:

"Jonah, too?"

"Just wounded. Unconscious," Barton told her. "He'll be O. K. by to-morrow. Lehua, do you mind if we take them to your house? I can carry Moana while you guide Jonah. I must talk with him as soon as he is rational, and he doesn't know his sister is dead. He might want to go to her."

"Of course. But Barry, who did this? There must be a madman on Kalani. First my father, then Moana, and now Jonah. I'm frightened!"

"Maniac?" Barry Barton wondered grimly just how sane any killer is. Would this one strike again to-night? Make a clean sweep of it? He didn't think so; but there was something he had to know. "Lehua, I'm sorry to be insistent to-night when you've been through so much, but I must know if your father signed any papers to-day?"

"I told you about the deed to Kalani which he signed for me."

"Any for Michael Normand?"

"I don't know." She looked at him anxiously. "Why?"

"Was there an opportunity for him to sign them?"



"Michael was alone with him—at noon. He sent me away. He could have had papers with him—I didn't see them."

"I wonder."

Barry turned, gently gathered Moana up in his arms, and carried her over to the two men. Pelio was sitting up, both hands clasping his head, eyes blank and staring. Kali Kamalani stood straight and inscrutably silent in the moonlight.

"Kali Kamalani," Lehua said gently. "I'd like to take them both to the big house to-night. Will you come, too?"

"To-night I will abide under my own roof. I must beseech the gods." He strode into the house and again the wooden bar slid into place.

Lehua urged Pelio to his feet, trying to help him. He mumbled incoherently, but followed obediently where she led. As they moved away, the shutter opened and again the old man spoke, this time in his native tongue, a deep broken chant.

"What does he say?" Barry asked.

"He says that death is riding in on a kona wind." Lehua shuddered. "The terrible konas. They make every one and everything hateful and ugly. But he is right. The trade wind has been dying since midnight."

They moved on through the hot darkness. Barry found the slight form growing heavy in his arms. He could hear the wind rising, beating at them in hot dry gusts. His clothing was wet with perspiration.

At the big house they laid Moana on a couch and covered her. Lehua went to look for the servants while Barton made Pelio comfortable. She came back to announce that the servants had all fled.

"You must get some sleep," Barton advised. "I'll sit with Jonah."

"To-morrow," Lehua said with a

deep sigh, "Michael will be back. He'll take charge. He's marvelous in times of trouble."

Barton bathed Pelio's wounded head and bandaged it properly. The big man had seemingly recovered. He sat up and listened while Barton told him Moana's last words.

"My sister is dead?" Pelio cried.

"Yes. That first shot. It was a horrible thing to do."

Moana's brother dropped his chin on his chest and closed his eyes. Tears squeezed from the lids and dropped on his clenched fists. After a long wait, Barton said:

"Lehua wants you to rest here to-night. In the morning we'll hide you away."

"My little sister!" Pelio cried with savage passion. "Murdered! How can I rest? She tried to tell us something. Remember? She was saying that she knew."

"Yes, I remember. What did she mean—her playhouse?"

"I don't know. I can't believe that——"

"Pelio, did you see the killer? Did you fire your rifle to-night?"

"No!" The big man brushed aside the interruption. "No, but if Moana spoke of her playhouse with her dying breath, she meant we'd find the answer there. I'm going to see. Now! To-morrow, bring Lehua to me at the wet cave. I'll tell you what I have found. Only Moana and I knew about the playhouse."

His face tightened bleakly. "Wait! Normand knew. Moana was meeting him there. She told our grandfather to-night."

He rose swiftly, staggered for a moment, then took a blanket from the bed and spread it on a grass mat, rolling them up together. Without speaking again, he went out. Barton did not try to stop him.

The dry kona blew around the

house. His high-ceilinged room seemed stifling although the curtains stood straight out with the wind. Some great dark god thrashed about in the ironwood trees, shaking them with a persistent, threatening roar in imitation of the deep thunder of surf breaking on the coral reef. The rain clouds were blown from the sky and the moon moved slowly toward the horizon.

To Barton it was a night menacing beyond any he had known. He felt that he knew the man who had taken two lives that night and yet he had no proof. It was a clever man, intelligent, ruthless, and too deeply involved to stop now. He would go on in a desperate attempt to accomplish his purpose, knowing that he gambled with his own life, too.

Barton could only defeat him by being more clever and more ruthless. He had no evidence acceptable to the law. If he merely waited for that evidence, Lehua might also be sacrificed. He chafed at his own inactive rôle. It was worse than humiliating to himself and extremely dangerous for others.

As he lay on his bed, hot and dripping, he tried to remember that he was on American soil. That only a few miles away there were police and prisons. But the feeling that he was in some ungoverned alien land persisted hauntingly. He was impatient for daylight.

CHAPTER VI.

MICHAEL RETURNS.

BARTON opened his eyes the next morning to see the curtains at his windows whipping in the hot wind. Goaded by restlessness, he got under the shower. When he came into the hallway, dressed in whites, he was aware of the hush pervading the

old house. Yesterday it had been full of movement, life, shrill voices. To-day, Silas MacGregor had silenced the gayety in death as he could not do in life.

Barton wandered downstairs and into the kitchen. Lehua stood in the middle of the room. She smiled wanly at Barton and lifted her hands helplessly. She wore a white sleeveless blouse and shorts, her little feet in sneakers. She nodded when he told her that Pelio had left.

"I'm not much of a hostess," she volunteered. "I can't even make coffee."

"That's what comes of being born a rich brat," Barton teased. "You can round up some fruit and I'll attend to the coffee."

Lehua brought golden papaia from the refrigerator and scraped out the black seeds while Barton went deftly about his tasks. When they had eaten listlessly and were dawdling over their coffee, he told her the reason why he was in the islands.

"An insurance detective sent to investigate my father?" she repeated. "But why? And why are you telling me this now?"

"Because I believe you are in danger. I want you to trust me—to believe I know what I'm talking about."

"You think that the person who did those horrible things last night might also kill me?"

"I think you're in danger," he repeated soberly. "You remember that I warned you when your father went blind."

Lehua shuddered, closing her eyes tightly like a frightened child. "Why should some one go around my island killing? What has happened to me, I have no heartache

over my father's death—just horror at the way it came to him?" She opened her eyes and looked at Barton with a haunted expression. "Do you believe my father burned his buildings?"

"Yes."

"I hope you're wrong," she said slowly, "but he might have. He wanted money to buy more land. They called him the Baron because he was so high-handed. What difference will his murder make to you? Will you go on with the investigation?"

"My client will probably tell me to stay on the job and either prove fraud or clear him. If we prove fraud, the estate will be asked for a settlement. But there need be no publicity now."

"Believe me," Lehua said earnestly, "I will pay it back. I am rich and I don't want that kind of money."

"What will you do now, Lehua? Can I help?"

"Yes, by staying here with me. I'm asking you to do this knowing that Michael may not wish it. Father will be buried on Kalani as soon as the inquest is over. After the funeral I'll record the deed to Kalani and tell Michael that I cannot marry him."

"Did I hear my name?" Michael Normand's strong, cheerful voice came from the open window. He was smiling. "By all the gods you look lovely, Lehua. I'm afraid I'll have to insist upon marrying you."

"Michael!" she cried. "I thought you would never come. Dreadful things have been happening."

"Oh, I say!" His face showed instant concern. "Right-o! Coming." His head vanished from the window.

Barton leaned swiftly toward the

girl. "Say nothing of why I'm here," he warned.

Normand came through the door and straddled a chair at the table. Lehua told him of the murder of her father, the tragic death of Moana, and the flight of the servants. He listened soberly and when she had finished, visibly worried and angry, he took her hands, bent over her.

"You poor darling. This is terrible. Some one must go at once for the police and a doctor. Did the wahines see any one? Where is Pelio?"

"That's just it, Michael. The foolish things claim that Jonah's ghost was here last night and killed father. They kept crying: 'Uhane! Uhane!' and then while we were away last night, they skipped out." She poured coffee for Michael.

"That's nonsense about ghosts." Michael stirred his coffee, scowling thoughtfully at the spoon in its amber whirlpool. "And what is this I hear about you not marrying me?"

Lehua flushed, but she met his eyes gallantly. "I hadn't meant to tell you yet, but I'm not going through with it. Father is dead and there's no reason for a loveless marriage now."

Michael said softly: "Not loveless, Lehua. I love you."

Pretending not to hear, she hurried on. "I don't want to buy any more islands. I have Kalani. Yesterday father signed a deed giving it to me."

"The deed's worthless unless you marry me," Michael said. "Silas knew that when he signed. There is a clause specifying marriage."

Lehua remembered then the smile on her father's lips when he put pen to the deed, and deep hurt showed in her eyes. He had known and was tricking her to the last.

Normand said: "I have no wish to persecute you." But there was no yielding in his face.

Speaking to the girl while his eyes met squarely those of Normand, Barry said: "Now that your father is gone, Lehua, the deed probably will not matter one way or another. You are his only heir. Why not destroy the document and forget it?"

There was no change of expression in the Englishman's eyes. He said curtly: "You may be right. We'll get a legal opinion, but that won't help any about the will." To Lehua he said: "Of course you knew about the will appointing me your guardian as well as your husband?"

"Michael, how could you let him do that?"

"Let? Did any one ever let your parent do things? He was the law. But that can wait. You haven't told me where Pelio is."

Barton frowned and shook his head slightly. Missing his signal, Lehua answered frankly:

"Jonah is hiding in the wet caves because of what the wahines may tell. I'll see him this afternoon."

Normand rose. "I'll send at once to Honolulu for the authorities and make the other arrangements."

Barton gave him the key to MacGregor's room, saying that he had thought it best to lock the door.

CHAPTER VII.

TERROR IN THE WET CAVES.

THERE was no auto road around Kalani. The steep cliff formation of ancient lava, eroded in places, came to the very ocean edge. Modern engineering could have hewed a road, but Kalani belonged to the Mac-

Gregors and they had no wish to modernize it. There were many trails and it was on one of these that Lehua and Barry rode to the wet caves.

Lehua had donned white linen jodhpurs and oxfords. A package of food for Pelio and a big flashlight were tied to her saddle. At the moment she was glad that the narrow trail discouraged conversation. She was tired, unhappy, and confused.

"Do you know," Barton asked gently, "that Pelio is deeply in love with you?"

She twisted in the saddle to look back.

"Is he?" she asked vaguely. Her thoughts were too involved with the difficulties of her situation to consider the possible passion of an old playmate. "I thought he got over that years ago."

She faced forward again and Barton said:

"To the contrary. I imagine each year has only deepened it."

Lehua said no more and he fell silent. He had tried to persuade her to return to Honolulu that day and when she had refused, had kept an unostentatious watch over her.

"Did you know," she asked later, "that Michael decided to go for the police himself?"

Barton brooded over that. Strange things had happened while Normand was supposed to be away from Kalani. What would it be this time? As his mount followed the one ahead, Barton's mind was in a turmoil behind his calm gray eyes.

Lehua, Pelio, even little Moana had all seemed so frank and yet what did he know of their thoughts and purposes? Only that each had secret desires and clung to them. Mac-

Gregor had merely tolerated him; the big fair Englishman had kept him at arm's length; only Lehua had been friendly. He felt unhappy and frustrated, heartily weary of his waiting rôle.

"We're almost there," Lehua called.

Her horse crossed a bridge and beyond it they could see the green and blue of the sea. She dismounted and he tied their horses to a tree and took the package of food. Lehua went ahead with the flashlight.

A short trail led to the cave entrance, wide and low in the cliff. Inside, away from the sunlight and hot wind, it was like another world. Lava walls glistened blackly with seeping water; a constant spitting drip was heard, and the rock floor was wet and slippery. They moved forward. Daylight faded. The walls crowded closer and the circle of light from the torch became increasingly important. The narrow tunnel turned and twisted into the body of the old crater like a tortured snake. Barton followed closely, grabbing at the wet walls when his feet slipped.

Almost happily, Lehua cried: "Jonah, Moana, and I used to play here, acting out old legends. We loved it."

"It's not the place I'd pick for my children, if I had any."

She laughed. "We ran wild. It was really quite safe where we played, although now and then we did a bit of dangerous exploring. We're almost to Jonah's hiding place." As she spoke, the passage widened into a low irregular room. She flashed the light ahead and led the way to a small opening in one wall. "Sorry, but you'll have to crawl for a way." She dropped to her hands and knees and disappeared in the hole.

The light, which she held backward toward Barton, bobbed along and he followed her into the tunnel. Beyond he could see a paler light, hear Lehua call and Pelio's answering "Aloha nui oe!" His voice was eager.

Then Lehua laid down the flashlight and slid out of the far end of the tunnel. In another moment Barton had joined her in a great rock chamber. By the light of a lantern he saw Pelio on the mat which made a small island in the damp floor. His head was still bandaged, but he insisted that it no longer pained him. While he ate the food Lehua had brought, he told them that the man sent to report on Michael Normand had returned.

"To report on Michael?" she asked. "I don't understand."

"You'll have to know this," Pelio said. "Michael was on this island last night. He took the eye doctor back to Honolulu, but he did not stay there. At eight last night he left his private dock in a small fast motor boat. He did not return home until four this morning. Then at seven he boarded the *Ulua* openly and came back to Kalani."

Dark eyes glowing in the lantern light, Lehua asked: "What does that mean?"

"It means that he came here secretly last night. That he killed your father, trailed you and Barton to my grandfather's house, and shot my sister when she would have turned suspicion from me to him. Moana knew something and he tried to silence her. When I pursued, he shot me."

"No! You are just guessing," Lehua cried. "How do you know?"

"We know."

"I can't believe it. It's too awful. I won't believe——" Her halting whisper rose in shrill uncontrolled

protest: "Not Michael! He loves me. He wants to marry me. He couldn't kill my father."

"It isn't easy to tell you this but——"

"No, Jonah," she interrupted, her voice gentle now, "you're distracted with grief for Moana. This could not be the truth."

Barton's heart ached at this second gallant refusal to believe evil of her friends; this pathetic faith in their love and loyalty, first Pelio, now Michael. Barton took her small cold hands in his and gripped them tightly.

"You must listen for your own sake. Jonah has good reason for what he says."

"But it can't be true. Don't you remember the wahines said it was Jonah's ghost? You said yourself that the man was tall and dark. Michael is fair."

"There was something I didn't tell you. Michael Normand is like Jonah in size and build. Do you know why the wahines said it was a ghost? Because they saw him change color. I saw it, too. He ran into the pelting rain and it washed his shoulders white. The moon shone like day. I saw this, Lehua."

"White?" she whispered. Her lips quivered.

"Yes. He was disguised with a wash of brown stain, something he could remove quickly. He disturbed the servants deliberately so they would think it was Jonah when they saw him, and then the rain and moonlight betrayed him."

"Lehua," Pelio pleaded, "you remember Moana's last words?"

The girl turned her stricken face to him. Her lips moved stiffly to repeat, without sound, those pitiful words: "—my playhouse——"

"I went there last night," Pelio went on. "Moana must have taken Normand there. I found——"

"You mean that Moana and Michael were——were meeting——"

"Yes. That's what she told my grandfather."

Dramatically Pelio turned back the mat and brought out a wig of wavy black hair and a pair of white shorts streaked with brown dye. He laid them on the girl's knee. She touched them. They were soggy wet and she swept them away with a violent gesture.

"It's too terrible! I can't bear it!" She put her head down on her knees and hard shudders shook her slim shoulders.

Pelio sat looking at her bowed head, in his eyes a desperate, poignant passion; his handsome dark face so rigidly controlled it looked like stone.

Barton said gently: "If you had only gone away this afternoon when I asked you to. We might have spared you this." He put his arm



around her shoulders and held her while she wept.

Pelio repeated the story of the woman in Australia, of Normand's secret love for her, his correspondence, and his intention to retire there and marry her. "Don't you see," he finished, "if you marry him he becomes your heir and there would be only your life between him and great wealth—and the woman he really loves."

Lehua threw back her head. The lantern made little lights dance in the tears on her cheeks and lashes. "Michael is rich! He could go to her without all this——"

"He's broke," Pelio contradicted. "I am his secretary. I know. He knew that your father burned his buildings and used that knowledge to force this marriage on you."

Lehua said piteously, "You want me to believe he is a monster."

"We only want to protect you," Barry said. "Do you think you could act a part? Face him again? Be as you were until I can complete my case? You know we must have actual proof of guilt."

At that Pelio spoke out in desperate intensity: "No! You must not send her back. I tell you he has some other plan. I *feel* it! He does not intend to marry her and he does not intend to wait. It is much better that I go and kill him in fair fight."

"No!" Leahua protested. "There has been too much killing."

"I'll go with her," Barton argued. "He can't claim the estate unless he marries her. She will be safe until they are married and I'll watch out for her. What other plan could he have?"

"I don't know. He is a devil."

Pelio was stubborn, but Barton insisted and it was finally settled by

Lehua that she would return to the house and play her part until Barton had worked out his case. They told Pelio good-by, warning him to stay hidden until he heard from them.

Lehua took the flashlight and crawled into the tunnel. Pelio held Barton back and leaned in to call after the girl:

"I almost forgot. When I typed the deed to Kalani, I left out the clause about you marrying Normand. If your father signed it, the island is all yours."

She shouted her thanks, but still Pelio held Barton back, his dark eyes burning with the pain of unrequited love.

"You will watch over her?" he urged.

"Of course I will," Barton assured him and tried to think of the right words to say. He failed and turned to enter the tunnel. The flashlight lay at the other end, shining in his face as he crawled forward.

His head came suddenly against a rocky barrier with a thud. He sat back and saw that the end of the tunnel was closed with a flat surface of rock. Bewildered, he pushed against it. It was as solid as the side of a mountain. For one moment Barton had a private spell of the jitters. They were entombed, helpless, with his promise to protect Leahua useless.

Where was she now? Who could have done this? Were all his careful deductions haywire? The horror of his helplessness would have increased a hundredfold if he had known the answers to those questions. An unsuspected element had taken a part in the tragic tangle of Kalani.

"What is it?" Pelio called sharply. "What has happened?"

"We've been shut in and Lehua is on the other side."

The sound that came from Pelio's throat was like the death cry of a wild animal.

"Come back and let me see," he ordered.

CHAPTER VIII.

BONES OF THE LONG DEAD.

BARTON backed out, leaving the flashlight, and Pelio moved in. His grunts throbbed through the tunnel as he strained and heaved with his great muscles against the rock. Barton thought he heard the Hawaiian sobbing and called to him to come back. He did not, at once, and Barry waited impatiently, his forehead furrowed, pulses throbbing.

"Ka wahi o ka make!" Pelio chanted. The words echoed hollowly.

"What do you say?"

"The place of the dead!"

So this was where the native army had died long ago! Perhaps that very rock was the one used to shut them in.

Almost in a panic, Barton called: "Come out, Pelio. We must talk." He heard a shuffling movement and added: "Perhaps you were right and I should have——" He stopped, appalled by the terrible look on Pelio's face as the lantern light shaped it strangely with shadows.

The big man crouched in the opening like some dark spirit of the ancient days. His face was set as though he held to life only by the strength of his locked jaws. Anguish and bitter defeat glowed in his eyes. For the space of a moment he poised there, then he slid to the floor, moving his lips by vis-

ible effort. "I should never have let her go."

"What do you fear? Normand is not on Kalani."

"Neither was he here last night, but he killed my sister." Pelio crouched beside the tunnel opening and rocked from side to side. "There is another way out—I alone know it—but it leads through the place of the long dead."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Barton shouted. "We'll be dead, too, if we stay here. Come on, fellow; let's go."

"Where is she?" Pelio cried. "What is happening outside?"

His head fell forward in despair, and chin on great chest, he sat silent so long that Barton touched his shoulder.

"Let's get started," he said crisply.

Pelio looked up, eyes fearful, and shook his head.

"What is it?" Barton demanded. "Can't you find the way?"

"The spirits of the dead will shine against us. I promised never to disturb them again."

Instinctively the white man knew that the modern, educated Pelio was submerged at this moment of stark reality beneath his primitive fears and superstitions. Not far enough had he come from the beliefs of his ancestors who worshiped dark gods of battle and vengeance.

"Pelio," he urged, "the spirits will give back your promise. We are trying to save Lehua. The gods must love her, too. They'll help us."

Pelio searched his eyes and slowly a smile broke the mask of his face. He stood to his full magnificent height and lifted his shoulders. "You are right. They will help us." He took up the lantern and let it shine on Barton. "We must swim

a lake and dive beneath a wall. I must have a rope to guide you. Help me."

He squatted again and began tearing the blanket into strips, tying the pieces together. As he worked, he told a strange story of guiding a young geological student down from the crater through the blowholes. They had penetrated to a new low and found water. The student had argued that they must be behind the wet caves. He stripped and dived, and after several futile attempts, found an underwater passage. He returned to insist that Pelio come, too, and they emerged into the pool over there. He pointed into the darkness.

There they had encountered the ghosts of the dead warriors. Pelio had been too frightened to tell of this experience—too fearful of the revenge of the uhanes. Barton listened, thrilled by the daring of the young student, anticipating somewhat the difficulty of their own escape.

The rope was finished. Pelio tied one end to Barton's waist and the other to his own. Then he led the way with the flashlight. Barry carried the lantern. They crawled through another low wide passage and emerged into a lofty chamber. Something shifted under foot and Barton looked down.

Human bones! Skulls, femurs, ribs—the lost army. No wonder the Hawaiian had feared to enter here. He felt a tug at the woolen rope and picked his way to where Pelio waited. Below them the light was reflected on black water—smooth, silent, dead. The opposite wall seemed very far away.

"We leave the lantern here," Pelio said. "I'll take the flashlight, but it may be no good after the swim. Come."

As Barton put down the lantern, Pelio struck the still water with hardly more splash than a dropped stone. Barton followed. Little blue lights clung to them with a weird glow as they swam to the other wall where the dim rays of the lantern barely carried. Barton knew now that these phosphorescent lights were what Pelio had thought to be ghosts of the dead warriors. It must have taken desperate courage for him to enter that lake again.

Now they had brought up to tread water by the wall. Pelio was muttering about the lake being paved with the bones of the dead, whispering broken prayers for protection.

"The opening under this wall leads to a larger room," he panted. "From that room we can reach the mountain top through blowholes made when the lava cooled ages ago. Wait." He untied the rope from his waist and handed the end to Barton. "I must locate the passage from this side."

Barton watched him vanish with a queasy feeling. Pelio represented his only hope of escape, unless whoever had shut them in should return to free them. Suppose the swimmer never came up from that black lake? But in a few moments tiny blue lights disturbed the water and Pelio's head broke the surface. He took a deep breath and again fastened the rope about him.

"I will dive. You follow. The rope will guide you if the uhanes try to trick you with their lights. Follow me."

His body arched into the water and phosphorescence marked its downward going. That was the last Barton was to see of Pelio for many hours. He filled his lungs, dived in, and swam with the rope, open-eyed.

Down, down, down. Long, vigor-

ous strokes. His lungs began to ache for relief and still they went down. Would Pelio never turn? How much longer could his bulging eyes follow that lighted progress? Ah, the blue specks were rising. Barton followed, turned, and felt a pull on the rope. He shot to the surface to expel his breath in painful relief and fill his lungs again. It was pitch dark, but the air was cool and fresh. Treading water, he heard the Hawaiian draw great gulping breaths.

"Give me your hand," Pelio said. He put Barton's hand on his shoulder, ordered him to hold tight, and struck out slowly through the blackness. After a few yards he said: "Rock! Go easy."

Barton felt his hand taken and let himself be guided out onto the rocks. In another moment he stood dripping beside Pelio in darkness blacker than the eternal night of hell. He felt hollow and lost, and forced his mind away from panic and the insane consequences should Pelio fail to find his way through the crater. Another idea had been giving him a bad time—what if one of the frequent earthquakes these islands endured had clogged the passage above with rock?

He heard Pelio snap the flashlight and throw it to the floor with a furious exclamation when it failed to light. The rope about his waist pulled and Barton drew up the slack as he followed his guide.

Barton could never put into words his experience in the following hours. They were double-distilled torture, always on the edge of panic which would have meant their death of thirst and exhaustion had they given in to it. That slow blind climb in Stygian darkness was the basis for many future nightmares from which he would wake covered with

cold perspiration and filled with the conviction that he was still staggering through the dark depths of a mountain; cracking his head on low spots, falling down inclines, leaving his skin on rough walls, all the time clinging to that rope of wool.

The strange maze of low ceilings, sharp rocky openings, and tilted floors he could only liken to the work of a giant's child blowing soap bubbles with hot lava. A cluster of them had frozen solid into a mountain and the air pressure forced a passage until it reached the top bubble. When that one burst, it created the crater of this dead volcano.

"How do you know where we are going?" he panted once, just to hear his voice in the bleak silence.

He heard Pelio gulp back the lump in his throat before answering and even then his voice was unsteady.

"Partly by instinct, partly by the air—when I take the wrong turn, it goes dead. The kids used to call me the owl. They said I could see in the dark. It is true that I have an instinct for direction, even on strange roads and in strange places."

Barton kept telling himself that it wasn't really happening to him. That he was having a bad dream and would waken soon. Then he'd hear Pelio curse in the blackness ahead, would crouch back against the rock wall to let the big fellow retrace his steps to a new start, and fear would again take him by the throat. Not only fear for himself and Pelio, but for Lehua outside. His best guess as to what had happened to her was only a wild shot, and he knew it.

Their first warning that they neared the surface was a new warmth in the air. The second, a pale-gray blur of light coming around many corners ahead. Finally, with inexpressible relief, they were squirming up through the last fissure to find

the sun had set and a bright moon was rising. Silently they dropped to the earth, exhausted.

Barton's riding clothes were torn and filthy. The bandage on Pelio's head was wet with fresh crimson and their hands, arms, faces, and shins were bleeding. The kona still blew in sultry gusts and black clouds moved swiftly ahead of the moon.

"Where are we?" Barton gasped.

"Far side of ridge. No use hopping for the horses. Normand would not leave them. We must go afoot."

"I don't believe it was Normand. Suppose you walk into a trap?"

"They cannot hurt me now." Pelio rose, a splendid figure, terrible with his grim bloody face. "I go to find Lehua."

Again Barton felt that he was far from cities and laws and the firm hand of Uncle Sam. He closed his eyes against the unreality and tried to remember little common things; the modern kitchen at the big house, the nickel and porcelain equipment, the electric refrigerator. "This is America," he told himself. "I will keep my head! I will."

"Come," Pelio said.

As Barton followed down the rocky side of the old crater, he knew that he must not let this man out of his sight.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRE GODDESS.

DRENCHED one minute by sudden showers, dried the next by the hot wind, Barton and Pelio worked their way through the underbrush on the sides of the volcano until they struck a trail which passed above the cliffs. Below they could hear the surf pounding, piled in huge combers by the wind. As they rounded a cliff

promontory, a dull-red glow lighted the sky.

"Pele!" Jonah cried.

Pele, the fire goddess! Barton's throat grew dry. Was that the big house burning? He thought then of that small box in the attic. Had he been wrong in thinking MacGregor had placed it there? Had some one else supplied the missing matches? Where was Lehua? The stinging odor of wood smoke whipped across his face. He had left the box for evidence. He would never forgive himself if his decision had brought about the loss of Kalani House.

With a wild cry, Pelio plunged ahead on the trail and Barry raced after him, his heart filled with horrified pity for this strange man and his hopeless love. He dared not be separated from Pelio. Without a guide he might be hours finding his way.

"Not so fast," he called and his companion slowed to a swift trot. Partly by sound, partly by help of the moonlit spaces between trees, partly by stark necessity, Barton kept near him. They came at length to the beach and found the horses still tied to the tree. Reeling with fatigue they mounted and turned toward that red glow. A few minutes later they galloped into the clearing and reined up.

Lehua's beloved home was in ruins. The horses snorted and danced away from the blaze, now a welter of flaming timbers and walls. Barton dismounted, turned his horse toward the trees, and gave it a slap. The animal trotted away. He heard a cry and turning his back on the fiery inferno, Barton saw a movement in the heavy foliage and ran that way.

It was Lehua, sitting against a tree, her ankles bound, hands tied

behind her back. She was weeping hysterically. Pelio joined them as Barry attacked the ropes. He talked gently, steadily as he worked, but it was some time before they got her quieted and heard a story of sheer terror and of a majestic tragic gesture to the ancient goddess of Hawaii.

Some one—she didn't see who—had struck her on the head as she emerged from the tunnel, and when she recovered consciousness she was lying on the grass here at the foot of the tree, unable to do more than hitch into an upright position. She was alone, and when she called, old Kali Kamalani paced majestically from the house.

He was wearing the priceless yellow and red feather king's cape from the MacGregor collection. Around his ankles were dog-tooth anklets; about his neck the ancient lei palaoa—necklace of braided human hair with its carved hooklike ornament of human bone.

Lehua had asked him to free her and he refused, speaking only in his native tongue. She begged him to go back and release the men in the cave, but he told her they were to die there and she must never, never tell where they had gone or the gods would be angry.

She was terrified and prayed that she might not lose her mind and leave her friends to a horrible death. She tried to reason with the old man, reproaching him bitterly for what he had done. He insisted that both Pelio and Barton were her enemies; that he had saved her from them. He said that he would not hurt her; but Moana had loved wrongly and been killed so he must pacify the goddess Pele with an offering so she would intercede for Moana's uhanē.

"He turned and stalked away from me," Leahua sobbed. "I called after

him, but he never even turned his head. He went into the house and in a moment flames sprang up about the lower floor. I saw him again at the window of the room where Moana's body lay, his face turned up to heaven, arms raised. I screamed and screamed. No one came." She drew up her knees in the circle of her arms and wept on them.

Rain began to fall again, but the three at the base of the tree did not notice.

"The old boy had what it takes," Barton said and was secretly grateful that the fire had not started with that cute little arson trick in the attic. Drops hissed against the red coals of the fire and steam rose to mingle with the thick smoke.

Pelio knelt beside Leahua and took her hand, pathetically humble and adoring. "You will forgive my grandfather? He was only an ignorant old man who went lolo."

"I forgive him. It was terrible, but it was splendid, too." Leahua drew her hand from his. "Jonah," she began in a troubled voice, "Kali Kamalani told me that this morning he found the body of Moana's lover crushed on the rocks below the cliffs. He brought it to Kalani House. It was cremated with the bodies of Moana and my father. Jonah, he also told me that it was not Michael who shot Moana; that you knew Moana loved Michael hopelessly and that the 'big fair haole' had never made love to her. If that is true, how could you let me think that Michael had been cruel to her; that he killed her to keep her lips sealed?"

"My grandfather did not know what he was saying," Pelio pleaded. His voice rose wildly. "Lehua, be kind to me. I love you so!"

"You must not speak of love. Kali Kamalani said— Oh, look!"

She pointed toward the ocean.

Through the rain they saw Normand's red cruiser rounding the headland, cutting swiftly through the waves to the dock.

Michael leaped to the float, leaving two brown-faced uniformed police and a white man to tie up the cruiser. He hurried ashore and up the path to the group at the base of the tree and took Lehua's hands in his.

"What has happened? Your home—you poor little darling."

She tried to speak, choked up, and began to cry again, but she took her hands out of his. Barton started to explain and Pelio stood erect. For a long moment he stood, as if in a daze, looking at them, then he turned and walked away, toward the water. He had reached the coral wall when Normand looked up and saw him. He rose and raced across the lawn. Barton and Lehua ran after them.

They were in time to see Pelio swing the *Ulua* away from the float. Normand made a splendid running dive into the water and grabbed at the cruiser as it slid past, picking up speed.

Barton feverishly stripped the canvas covering from a small speedboat while Lehua cast off the line. The shower had passed leaving rain and tears blended on her cheeks. The policemen, who had gone up to look at the fire, came running back, one of them in time to jump aboard as they headed for the sea.

They could see Normand hoisting himself over the side of the *Ulua*. In another moment the big cruiser made a wide swing, apparently out of control and headed straight for the reef. Moonlight made the scene as vivid as day. Two figures appeared on her deck, struggling in mortal combat. As Barton watched, they went overboard, locked together, and vanished

beneath the surface. He headed for the spot.

Lehua screamed and pointed. The *Ulua* struck the reef, leaped high, and settled down in a welter of white foam.

"What is Jonah doing?" Lehua cried. "They'll be drowned!"

Barton didn't answer. The small speedboat closed in rapidly on the two heads now bobbing about so close together in the water. It was a struggle to the death. "Na mano," Pelio had said. "One of us will be shark meat." They were still inside the reef and there were no sharks there, but Pelio had been a swimmer almost since birth—it would be murder if—

"Take the wheel!" Barton shouted to the police officer. "Slow!"

He ran to the gunwale and grabbed a boat hook. As they drew alongside, barely maintaining headway, he cracked Pelio over the head with the boat hook. Lehua cried out in protest, but Barton ran along the side and extended the hook to Normand who was now holding Pelio up with his left arm. He grasped the hook and Barton drew them close. The man at the wheel manipulated the speed boat skillfully while Lehua helped pull up Pelio's limp body and then haul the Englishman aboard. The officer headed back toward the float.

"Thanks," Normand panted. "Close call. No match for him in the water. He's part seal and part shark. Drowned me sure if you hadn't knocked him out."

"It was you he was after from the beginning," Barton said.

"Right-o. All those clever lies. Better tie the beggar up before he recovers from that wallop you gave him. He's not to die until he sets a few things right again."

"What are you talking about?" Lehua demanded.

Michael said: "When did you catch onto his game, Barton?"

"I was sure last night when he was shot in the head. I fell down in the dark onto his rifle and the barrel was hot. He denied having fired it. Of course his own wound was self-inflicted."

"And you understand," Michael said sadly, "that he did not mean to kill his sister. He was shooting to frame me. He loved her dearly."

"I believe that, but we have the bullet from Moana. It will hang him." Barton finished tying Pelio's hands and stood up.

"Michael!" Lehua asked again: "What are you talking about? Barry warned me against you. He said you killed my father."

Barton interrupted: "Pelio said it and I let you believe him. I had to make him think I was still blind and dumb."

"Then it really was Jonah?" Her voice was still incredulous.

"All the time, my dear." Michael's face was grim now, his eyes bleak. "He probably aimed at Barton when he shot Moana—must have known he was getting close to the truth." Michael leaned toward the girl, looking her steadily in the eyes.

"Lehua, there never was anything between Moana and me. She told her brother that story because she wanted to punish me for loving you. There never has been any one but you."

"I know. Kali Kamalani told me. But why did Jonah do this to me?"

The bound man groaned and rolled into a sitting position.

"Because he loved you," Michael said simply. "He was sick, heart and soul, with love for you. I think he hoped to drag your father down

to his size that way—to bring you within his reach."

Barton said: "What about last night, Normand? That was you I saw running from the house, wasn't it?"

Michael nodded. He told them about returning to watch over Lehua, frantic with fear for her safety, disguised to prevent recognition should he meet Pelio. "I lost him at the house and went in to search for him. It was then that my clumsiness woke the wahines. I heard him outside and made a run for it, following him to the cabin. I didn't know what he had done in the house until the next morning."

"You played right into his hands," Barton said. "Destroyed your own alibi, and you might have needed one pretty badly. Everything pointed to you. Did you know that Pelio found the wig and shorts you wore?"

"The beggar had all the breaks until his bullet killed his sister."

Lehua whispered: "Kali Kamalani *knew* Pelio killed her. He didn't tell me, but that's why he was so implacable—leaving him to die in the caves. Poor proud old man."

"Confess," Barry broke in to divert Lehua from that terrible memory, "that you faked that second will, Normand?"

Michael grinned. "I had a wild notion that if I could induce Lehua to marry me, I might win her back." He turned to her. "You did love me, once, didn't you?"

He took her hand and she let it stay in his.

Barton leaned down to look into Pelio's face. "Tell me," he asked, "did MacGregor know you burned down his properties?"

For a long moment Pelio remained

silent, a dark figure on the deck. Then: "He did not know. I fixed it so he couldn't prove his innocence, so I could disgrace him unless he let me marry Lehua. But I made one big mistake. I sent for you. I thought I could use you."

The boat rocked gently against the float. Normand had his arm around Lehua and her head lay on his shoulder. Barton and the police officer

helped Pelio out, made fast the boat, and led the big fellow away.

In his heart, the insurance detective was sorry that Pelio had not gone out alone to make his atonement in the night-black sea, to end his life in a savage battle with the sharks. That's what Pelio would have wished, but that was not the way of the law, and at long last the law had come to Kalani.

GHOULS STEAL 3,500-POUND STATUE

IRREREVERENT but industrious thieves stole two historic cannons and a 3,500 pound statue from graves in Rockland Cemetery, at Sparkill, New York. The booming market for scrap metal, on war demands, is presumed to have inspired the taking of the memorials.

The cannons, captured by American forces at Vera Cruz during the Mexican War, were taken from the grave of General John Charles Fremont, famed explorer, a conqueror of California, and Republican candidate for president in 1856. The statue was taken from the grave of Doctor Alexander Johnston Chalmers Skene, internationally known gynecologist.

The statue, of bronze, was six feet in height. It was the figure of a draped woman, standing beside the tomb and holding a palm leaf over the memorial to Doctor Skene.

State troopers believe the thieves chose a moonlight night for their depredations. It would have been impossible to lift the statue to a truck without a derrick, the troopers said. Using crowbars and derrick and a crew of men, the thefts must have required several hours to complete, it is thought. On a hill overlooking the Hudson River, the cemetery is in an isolated spot and the work of the ghouls was not immediately discovered.

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PROBAK JUNIOR

THUBWAY THAM'S THOTHIAL THECURITY

BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of: "Thubway Tham and the Stars," etc.

THE day was fair, pigeons and sparrows fussed in Madison Square, a soft breeze drifted up from the distant river, the warm sun benevolently bathed the earth, men and women hurried about their duties with faint smiles upon their faces, the world seemed at peace and people at peace with the world.

But "Thubway Tham," the little pickpocket whose nimble fingers helped him follow the path of least resistance through life, was not in tune with the fine day.

As was his habit, Thubway Tham sat on a bench in Madison Square early that afternoon, watching the passing parade. But he had no keen interest in it to-day. The comings and goings of the citizenry did not intrigue him. He was thinking deeply, his brow furrowed and his eyes narrowed.

Detective Craddock, wandering around in the hope that he would happen to see a man for whom the police were looking, saw Tham and approached him slowly. Craddock knew from experience that whenever Tham had a deep thinking spell it was followed by an emotional outburst, so to speak, and the outburst generally was followed by an epidemic of watches and wallets being reported stolen by gentlemen riding in the subway.

Craddock finally stopped at the end of the bench and remained voiceless until Tham glanced up and saw him.



"Hello, Craddock," Tham greeted. "Thit down and take your weight off your flat feet."

Craddock sat down.

"Tham," he said, "I've been watching you. Troubles seem to be heavy on your soul. Or is it possible your conscience is awake at last? Are you feeling remorse for your many misdeeds, Tham? Is the day of reformation at hand?"

"How you do go on," Thubway Tham complained. "It ith true, Craddock, that I am troubled. Let uth change that and thay I am puthled. There ith a problem——"

"Perhaps I may be of service, Tham."

"I doubt it, Craddock, but any port in a thtorm. Wath it not a poet who thaid that thometimeth the truth cometh from the lipth of children and foolth?"

"I wouldn't know, Tham. What seems to be troubling you?"

"Thothial thecurity."

"How's that?"

"Thothial thecurity," Tham repeated. "My goodneth, Craddock, don't you keep abreath of the timeth? Don't you read the newthpaperth, Craddock—or can you read?"

"Social security, huh?" Craddock said. "How does that interest you, Tham?"

"I am not growin' any younger," Tham replied. "Thoon, like everybody elthe, I will be in the thunthet of life. And then what, Craddock?"

"Well, what?"

"What ith a man to do when he growth old and hath not any meanth of thupport? He mutht eat and thleep thomewhere."

"True, Tham. But you needn't worry about that. One of these days you'll make a little slip, and then you'll hear the judge sending you to the Big House up the river, and

your old age will be taken care of by legal means. You'll have a roof over your head in your declining years, Tham—and what a roof! You won't have to worry about eats and clothes, and you'll have a number, the same as everybody who's listed under the social security act."

"You amuthe me, Craddock," Tham said, smiling faintly. "Let uth get down to buthineth. The law thayth that you regithter, and tho much ith taken out of your wageth, and your employer thendth in that and ath much more, and the government keepth it. Then, when you are a thertain age, you get tho much a month to live on."

"Something like that," Craddock agreed. "That's the theory, anyhow."

"And it thertainly puthleth me. Thuppothe, Craddock, that I wath a pickpocket——"

"I can do that without stretching my imagination until it hurts," Craddock put in.

"Jutht thuppothe. Tho what? If I lift a wallet and get thome money out of it, that ith my income. But, Craddock, am I the employer or the employee?"

"How's that, Tham?"

"Thould I thay I am the employee, and what I get out of the wallet ith wageth? If tho, I thould give the government a perthentage of what I get. But, if tho, then the owner of the wallet thould remit to the government the thame amount."

"I see. You steal a wallet, and then make its owner send in a percentage of what you stole. Something tells me, Tham, there might be protests."

"If, on the other hand," Tham continued, "I do not athume that I am the employee, then I thertainly am the employer. Tho I thould thend in a perthentage of what I get in the

wallet, and then look up the owner and take from him again enough to thend in for hith thare. But, doin' that, I'd have to thend in another perthentage and make him do it altho. Tho it would go on and on."

"You've got my head whirling, Tham."

"Mine ith whirlin' altho," Tham confessed. "I can't make head or tail of it, Craddock."

"You do not stand alone, Tham, my lad. There are gentlemen in Washington who cannot make head or tail out of it, either. Not to mention other sections of our beloved country."

"It ith not right!" Tham exploded. "If other people are to be taken care of in their old age, it ith no more than right that I should be taken care of altho. Why not? For yearth and yearth I work, and when I get old——"

"And your fingers get stiff and your wits slow," Craddock put in.

"When I am unable to work any more, Craddock, and make my livin', what ith to become of me? And don't thay I'll be taken care of in the Big Houthe!"

"It's a problem, Tham."

"You," Tham said, "are tellin' me! Thothial thecurity! How am I to get it?"

"Maybe somebody'll found a home for retired dips," Craddock said.

"There you go—never theriouth a minute!"

"I'm going to be serious now, Tham. It appears, according to the police reports, that there is renewed activity among those who have the habit of dipping their fingers into pockets not their own."

"I wath thpeakin' about thothial thecurity, Craddock."

"It's the security of citizens' wal-

lets that interests me now, Tham. Why don't you reform?"

"Reform from what?" Tham asked, his face innocent of guile.

"I'd hate to catch you with the goods, Tham."

"Don't worry, Craddock. You never will. You couldn't catch the thmallpox in a peththouthe."

"No!"

"No! You can't even catch a cold when you get your big feet wet. Here I am, wantin' to be theriouth about thothial thecurity and you talk about other thingth. A cop don't have to worry. If you live long enough and don't get kicked off the forth, you'll get a penthion. Everybody theemth to be taken care of but me. Tho I thuppoth I'll have to take care of mythelf."

"Think you can do it, Tham?"

"Yeth, thir! I am goin' to thtart a thinkin' fund."

"A sinking fund. What is that?"

"Whenever I have thome coin, I'm goin' to think thome of it for my old age."

"And where are you going to get this coin, Tham?"

"Wouldn't you like to know!"

Craddock, about to make a warm reply, had his attention distracted. A short distance away, two men indulged in hot words and were inclined to come to blows. There being no uniformed policeman handy, Detective Craddock moved quickly in that direction. Thubway Tham arose from the bench and moved quickly in another.

The idea of a sinking fund appealed to Thubway Tham. He would start a savings account, he decided, make a habit of depositing money in the bank, and watch his fortune grow. He would put by something

against the day when his back would be stooped, his eyes watery, his hair thin and gray, and his hands shaky. But, to do all this, he first had to have the money.

Assured that Craddock was not following him, Tham strolled over to Broadway and up it, enjoying the fine day. He finished a cigarette as he reached Times Square, tossed the remnant of it into the gutter, and descended to the subway platform.

It was too early for the wild rush of humans trying to get home from business, the hour when Thubway Tham did his best work. But he boarded an uptown local and traveled as far as Columbus Circle, where he ascended to the street to kill time.

Fate must have taken him there, for the Circle was not one of Tham's usual haunts. He started walking around it, and stopped at the fringe of a small crowd. In the center of the crowd a man stood atop a box to which a flag was affixed, waving his arms and bellowing in stentorian tones to defeat and overcome the rumble of traffic.

This particular soap box orator interested Thubway Tham because of his appearance. He was a huge man with a mop of dark hair which kept tumbling into his eyes, and which he continually brushed aside with a magnificent gesture. He seemed to be the physical combination of well-known dictator and a fairly well-known labor leader.

"Only another trick to get your dimes," he was roaring. "It's taken from your wages. Oh, yes! The employer has to meet the amount and send it in. But the employer is in a position to cut your wages more than enough to pay his percentage. Social security, is it? For whom? For you, my downtrodden brothers? No! More security for the capitalistic tyrants who grind men's souls into

the dust!"

Tham had heard a lot of loose talk like that, but he remained to listen, because the orator was talking about social security, and because Tham liked to watch him brush his hair out of his eyes.

Without realizing it, Tham moved closer, worked in toward the improvised rostrum as the crowd eddied and surged. Then he was standing almost under the orator's waving arms.

"You, and you are the victims!" the speaker cried. "And you!" He pointed directly at Tham, and paused to gather his thoughts and draw in his breath. "Brother," he asked, looking at Tham, "what's your line of work?"

"Well, I—I'm in the leather buth-neth," Tham replied.

"A worthy pursuit! Here is a gentleman in the leather business, my brothers. No doubt they dock his pay for this social security. His envelope is a few cents short each week. He could use those few cents, no doubt, to buy cheap cigarettes—such as he is smoking now. Cheap cigarettes, while his boss smokes expensive Havana cigars. Is that not correct, my friend?"

"Yeth and no," Tham replied boldly.

"And what do you mean by that, my friend?"

"Thith ith not a cheap thigarette, and I have no bothh."

"He has no boss! There you are! Another man wandering around out of work, perhaps going hungry at times, perhaps sleeping in the park, perhaps looking hopelessly into another dawn——"

"I am my own bothh," Tham interrupted.

"You're your own boss, are you? Perhaps we have made a mistake. Perhaps you are not a brother. Per-

haps you yourself employ poor, downtrodden men and take from their wages. Perhaps——"

"Perhaphth yourthelf," Tham growled.

"Who sent you here to heckle me?" the orator cried. "What millionaire is trying to stop my mouth? But it cannot be stopped! No, gentlemen! As long as I have strength and breath to protest against the cruelties of this modern age with its unjust methods and unfair schemes, my voice'll be heard! Come up here—let the brothers see you!"

The speaker lurched forward, reached down and got Tham by the coat collar, and jerked him forward. Tham was forced to put one foot upon the box to keep from falling. He was as putty in this man's hands. Before he realized what was happening, he was on the box beside the orator, the latter holding him with his left hand twisted into Tham's coat collar while his right arm beat the air in oratorical gesture.

"Look at him—the minion of the plutocrats!" the speaker cried. "Paid to come here and heckle me!"

"That ith a lie," Tham squawked. "I jutht thaid that I am my own botth, and tho I am."

The grasp on the coat collar tightened, and Tham felt himself choking. His reaction was a natural one—he kicked the orator on the shin. The orator howled and loosened his grip, and Tham jerked away as the orator swung at him.

"Let that little guy alone!" somebody in the crowd howled.

"And you keep out of this!" a second barked at the first.

It was all that was necessary. The emotionally stirred crowd was keyed to battle pitch. Somebody struck somebody else, and the fight was on.

Thubway Tham found himself in the midst of a seething, fighting

mass. The orator had been tumbled from his rostrum, and, bellowing with rage, charged into the fray. His friends fought beside him and his foes charged against him. Thubway Tham was in the midst of it, wanting nothing except to get away.

Whistles blew in the distance. Traffic became jammed. Women retreated into shops and men rushed out to learn the cause of the disturbance.

Thubway Tham was knocked down and men trampled over him. He got to his feet and found himself in the midst of the battle, with escape cut off in every direction. He wrapped his arms around his head and tried to protect himself.

Sirens shrieked in the distance.

"The cops! Cops!" somebody screeched.

The fighting mob began scattering, and Thubway Tham rushed for the curb with some of the others. From instinct he made for the nearest subway entrance and shot into it like a hound-chased rabbit into a hole.

On the crowded platform he surveyed the damage. He had lost his cap. His light-colored suit was streaked with dirt and grease. One of his fairly new shoes had a cut across it. But he had managed to protect his head, and his face did not have cut or bruise. Yet his body felt as though somebody had been beating him with a club.

Panting, half exhausted, Thubway Tham leaned against the wall to await the next train. More people came charging down the stairs. And Tham saw the orator again.

He was rather disheveled, but grinning. Another man was with him—an oily-looking individual Thubway Tham distrusted at sight. They stood within a few feet of Tham, not seeming to recognize his presence.

"It worked," the orator was saying. "That sucker planted himself in front of me just in time. We can spread this in our paper. Plutocrats send men to break up meeting—something like that. Right of free speech denied. We'll stir the brothers up. Then, at the meeting in the hall downtown, I'll be a sort of hero. We'll grab off a fat collection for a defense fund—something like that."

"Great stuff!" the orator's companion agreed.

Tham saw the orator brush back his coat tail to get out a handkerchief and mop the perspiration from his face and the blood from his knuckles. In the other hip pocket, Tham noticed, the orator carried a wallet.

Inwardly Tham grinned. Being not an earnest and sincere worker for this and that, but a common chiseler, the orator was open to any wiles Tham wished to work on him. And it would be a pleasure for Tham to get that wallet. He hoped it contained all the orator's available cash.

"The cops nabbed about a dozen," the orator's friend said.

The orator grinned. "Let 'em explain to the judge. They'll come out of it sore at law and order. Here's the train!"

There was a crowd getting on, and Thubway Tham jammed into a car behind the other two. But there was a sudden surge of those inside and he became separated from the orator and his friend. He tried to work toward them, but the train was at Times Square before he could do so. And at the Times Square station the orator and his friend got off.

So did Thubway Tham. He followed them as they crossed to the express side, plainly waiting to catch a downtown express. That was all right with Thubway Tham. He

liked to do his nefarious work on a downtown express. He had a regular routine about it.

"Well, Tham, settled your problem yet?" a voice behind him asked.

He whirled quickly to find Detective Craddock standing there.

"There are almotht theven million people in thith town," Tham said, "and I have to run into you."

"Nothing strange in that, Tham. I've been prowling around here an hour or more. Orders are out to watch for dips. Going to take a little subway ride?"

"I am goin' downtown," Tham replied. "I am goin' to the lodgin' houthe of Nothey Moore, where I live, if it ith any of your buthineth. It ith a fine thing if a thitithen can't go about hith buthineth without you coph pethterin' him all the time."

Tham had raised his voice and men and women turned to look. Craddock's face grew red. The orator had turned to look also and he recognized Tham. He saw that Tham was in an argument and felt he owed Tham something for using him as a cat's-paw.

"What's the trouble here?" the orator asked.

"Thith big palooka——" Tham began, indicating Craddock.

"Annoying you, is he? Maybe I'd better slap him down."

"That's enough out of you!" Craddock snarled. "I'm an officer——"

"A Cossack! Yes, we have them even here," the orator cried. This was an opportunity he could not forego. "A Cossack trying to ride down an inoffensive citizen——"

"Shut up!" Craddock howled.

"Ah! The right of free speech—where it is? You hear, fellow Americans? This policeman, this Cossack, tells me to hold my tongue.

By what right——"

At that instant a downtown local came in and men and women hurried across to catch the express. On the local were certain police officers who had been at the riot in the Circle. One of them recognized the orator.

"There he is—grab him!" he shouted. "Incitin' to riot! Grab him!"

He barged forward with others at his heels. The orator turned to flee. Men and women fell aside before him to give him a path of escape. Thubway Tham thrust out a leg quickly and tumbled the orator on his nose.

Tham fell sprawling on top of him and others hurled themselves on the two until it looked like a scrimmage on the football field. There were blows and shrieks and shouted orders, women's screams and children's plaintive cries.

Tham squirmed from beneath the mass as it started to disintegrate. He reeled back against the wall. He shook his head when Craddock asked if he had been hurt. Howling something about Cossacks, the orator was led away.

Thubway Tham started for the stairs.

"Thought you were going downtown, Tham," Craddock said.

"After thith, I think I need thome freth air," Tham replied. "I'm goin' up to get thome."

"I need some, too, Tham," Craddock informed him, grinning.

Side by side they ascended to the street. Thubway Tham was nervous. Not for nothing had he tripped the orator and sprawled across his body. In the right-hand pocket of his coat Tham had the orator's wallet. He had not had an opportunity to extract the contents and "ditch the

leather." As long as that wallet was on his person, he was in danger.

"Still worrying about your social security, Tham?" Craddock asked.

"That and thome other thingth," Tham admitted.

"What, for instance?"

"Bein' pethtered by a Cothack," said Tham. "Why don't you leave me alone, Craddock, and purthue burglarth and men in the thnatch racket?"

"Most burglars work at night, Tham, and the snatch racket gents are being cared for by the G-men. If I trail along with you, maybe I'll be doing a public service. Perhaps I'll preserve the wallets of some citizens."

"Lithten, Craddock. I promithe that I will not lift a leather to-day. Word of honor, Craddock."

"That's enough for me, Tham. If you give me your word, I can depend on it."

"I am goin' home, Craddock. And I am goin' to thtay there till mornin', unleth I go out to a picture thhow. I have to figure out thith thothial thecurity buthineth, Craddock."

"O. K., Tham! I'll be on my way."

Craddock grinned and swung off down the street through the crowd. Thubway Tham grinned also. He could afford to make that promise to Craddock, for he already had lifted a leather. He would put aside a part of what it contained for his social security bank account, and with the rest he would sit in a poker game that night at "Nosey" Moore's. He never had won in a poker game yet, but perhaps this would be the night. In common with the rest of humanity, Thubway Tham had hope.

He walked leisurely along a side street. His right hand in his coat pocket extracted what the wallet contained. Tham felt a few papers, but could not be sure money was

there. As he passed a trash can, he got the empty wallet out of his pocket and tossed it into the can.

He gave a sigh of relief. The damning wallet no longer was in his possession. He walked on, and slowly drew from his pocket what the wallet had contained.

Thubway Tham growled. He held some newspaper clippings lauding the efforts of the orator—and a social security application blank.

"Not a thent!" Tham muttered. "And I promised Craddock that I would not lift a leather to-day."

It did not occur to Tham to break his promise. That thought, by some strange twist of his character, was beyond him. He started back toward the subway, fumbled in his vest

pocket for subway fare. And another grunt escaped him.

He did not have so much as a nickel. Evidently when he had tripped the orator and made his flying attack on him on the platform, he had lost the two bills and some change he possessed out of his pocket.

"Oh, well! To-morrow ith another day," Tham muttered.

He straightened his shoulders, returned to Broadway, and faced downtown. With short, jerky strides he began his journey. It was many, many weary blocks to the lodging house of Nosey Moore.

"Thothial thecurity!" Thubway Tham mused. "It ith a good thing, if you can get it."

THIRTY-GRAND SLAM BALKS BANDITS

A BANK manager and a clergyman saved a \$30,000 pay roll by slamming the door on two slow-moving gunmen, at Coniston, Ontario.

The bandits slipped into the apartment of Manager John Graham, above the Canadian Bank of Commerce, shortly after midnight, and surprised the Grahams and their visitors, Rev. A. P. Addison and his wife. The gunmen demanded that Mr. Graham open the vault below, in which the pay roll was kept.

After tying Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Addison, the bandits marched the two men down the stairway to the street door. Mr. Graham and the Rev. Mr. Addison stepped quickly through and closed the door, locking the gunmen in. By the time police arrived, the lootless bandits had fled through a rear entrance.



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HEADQUARTERS CHAT

SOME crimes, just as many sins venial or crimson, are committed almost as casually as the lighting and rubbing out of forgotten cigarettes. There is no drama in such mindless, heartless movement. In order to grip the emotions of an onlooker, the principals of any crime or sin drama must be three-dimensional, genuine people. They must be human, likable in some aspects, and have color—personality. And there must be an element of tragedy or comedy even in their environment and atmosphere.

For every story printed in this magazine, the editors try to choose authors who see into the hearts and motives of men, and who sense the elemental conflicts of environments and motives which clash. The next issue of **DETECTIVE STORY** is exceptionally rich in mysteries which concern colorful and likable human beings. We invite your comment and criticism upon it.

First in the issue, lifting itself to lead position by sheer power of human drama and significant action, is a novelette of a genuine superman. You may shiver. You may hold your breath till it hurts. But after you have turned the last page you will know a character to remember—red-haired, blue-eyed, blazing "Red" Barrow, in

RED FEROCITY

BY B. B. FOWLER

Desperation, poignant human suffering, a scarlet thread of romance, and a crime pattern again vastly different from any of this talented author's previous long novelettes, are the ingredients which make a real story of

THE BROW OF DOOM

BY WALTER RIPPERGER

We went along with this one—the way you go along with a speeding motorboat when you aquaplane. The story has swift pace, and many chuckles. We did smile when the villainess was kidnaped, and the heroine allowed to luxuriate in the identity of a celebrated wicked woman. With the headlong action mystery there is a wistful love story of two trapped human beings, in

WINNER TAKE ALL

BY CARL CLAUSEN

And with these long features are short stories of human interest and gripping mystery by M. I. H. Rogers, J. J. des Ormeaux, Paul Ellsworth Triem, and others.

CRIMSON DEADLINE

CHAPTER I. THE REBELS.

THE news room of the Plains City *Express* was almost empty. Desks marched up the barren room in staggered phalanxes. The sun of early evening streamed through the row of windows along one side and made the scarred desks, the dusty and stained woodwork look old and tawdry.

The fellow who called himself Bill Eagles let his gaze march over the rows of desks to the big desk behind the tiny railing where some kind of conference was in process. His wide mouth was drooped at the corners in a smile that made him look as though he were smiling to himself. He was tall and loose jointed,

with a face that was brown and rubbery looking. His eyes were the brown of a spaniel, with little puckers of wrinkles at the corners as though they were perpetually drawn in the smile that rode so easily on his wide mouth.

The man at the desk behind the railing was stoop shouldered and big knuckled. His face was deeply lined and dropped in sour contours. His eyes were small and shrewd and twinkled like bits of gray metal. He rested on his elbows and kept his eyes on the door while he listened to the girl who talked to him.

The girl leaned on clenched fists and wagged her head vehemently as she talked. Light caught in her hair and made it gleam like red gold. Her eyes were as blue as sapphires,



BY B. B. FOWLER

and shone now with something between anger and desperation.

Her voice came across the news room to Bill in little stabbing jerks of sound. "I tell you, Mr. Benson, I've got something. Don't drag me off. Let me go through with this. I can turn this town inside out if you'll only give me a chance."

The man at the desk lifted his head and said, "Hush. Hush." His voice had a bitter edge as he went on: "Why turn it inside out? What would you do with what you found? It would only jump out from under the wreckage and bite your pretty head off. Anyway, the *Express* isn't doing any crusading right now. Forget it."

For just a second the smile left Bill's mouth, leaving it hard and

thin of lips. The brown eyes hardened and narrowed. He knew this layout. He had heard of it before he came to Plains City. The man was "Hush" Benson, city editor of the *Express*. He got his name from his habit of saying, "Hush," when any anyone came in with anything hot. The girl was Joan Digby. Her father had been "Deadline" Digby, veteran newspaperman. He had tried to push something too hot over the deadline and had been found in an alley with four slugs in his chest. It only went to show that turning up hot stuff in Plains City wasn't too healthy.

There was a third person in the news room. His desk was some little way from the railing. He was leaning forward, his elbows on his



desk, his chin resting in his cupped hands. He seemed to be reading a paper spread out on the desk. Bill Eagles saw that he was listening intently, taking in everything Hush Benson and Joan Digby were saying.

Hush Benson's voice drifted across the news room. "When Old Man Craig was alive, this used to be a newspaper. He had a string of sheets that tore hell out of the cities they held down. Dirty politics and hidden crime got pulled out into the open. Craig was a newspaperman. But he had to die. And now who runs the paper?" His voice was harsh and biting. "An estate! A damned, cold-blooded board of trustees, who look after things for a young snipe who plays his way around the world. The trustees want profits. So they put managing editors in who can show profits. To hell with crusading! To hell with the power of the press! To hell with everything but profits!"

His voice got soggy and heavy. "I used to run a paper. Now I run a billboard for Mayor MacGaffery; a sheet for a district attorney made of putty; a bulletin for fat slobs like Chief Anderson to sound off their stuff in. Honest, Joan, if I didn't have a wife and three kids, I'd get the hell out and go into some other game."

All three looked up and saw Bill Eagles at the same time. The dark fellow lifted his chin out of his hands and showed a pair of hard lips, a lean jaw, and hard black eyes. Joan Digby straightened and her red-gold hair made a halo against the light from the windows. Hush Benson's eyes narrowed as he growled:

"Well, what do you want?"

Bill ambled across the room and leaned negligently over the railing,

his battered hat dangled on one long bony finger. The puckers at the corners of his eyes were more pronounced and his wide mouth widened in his easy grin.

"I heard," he drawled, "that you were looking for a newspaperman. I've been working on the *Garrison Blade*. I thought maybe you could use me."

"A newspaperman!" Hush Benson's voice was a snarl. "Hell, we don't want any newspapermen." He stood up, a big-boned man with the tragedy of impotence in his face. He thrust a bony hand toward Bill and raged on.

"I'll tell you what we want. We want a guy who will hoof around town and come back with a story that reads: 'It is rumored that Little Bo Peep is missing some sheep. Interviewed, Chief Anderson declared: 'Little Bo Peep's flock is safe in Plains City. We assure the public that all of them will be back in their fold before this time tomorrow. Every man on the force has his orders to spare no pains. The sheep will be home behind Little Bo Peep.''"

Joan Digby smiled, and the smile wasn't so pretty as a smile should be on a face like hers. The lean fellow pivoted his body on an elbow and stared impassively as Hush Benson raved.

"I'll tell you what we want. We want more stories that read 'Ding, dong, dell, pussy's in the well. Who put her in?' District Attorney Bassett, reiterating his faith in the Plains City police force, said: 'Undoubtedly the work of the Little Johnny Green Gang from Upper Podunk. We will show these out-of-town hoodlums that Plains City makes short work of such as they.' That's what we want. To hell with newspapermen."

He shrugged and his shoulders drooped tiredly. "What the hell!" His face sagged in new lines as he said heavily: "Yes, we want a reporter. See the managing editor, Clint Williams. If he thinks you're safe, he'll hire you."

Bill took his weight off the railing and stood up. He saw that Joan Digby was studying him, measuring him with her eyes. He grinned broadly and she turned with a sniff of disgust.

"When will Mr. Williams be in?"

Benson glanced at the clock. "He'll be here any time now."

As he turned away, Bill caught the eyes of the silent man on him. They were shrewd, calculating eyes that gave no hint of what the fellow was thinking. Bill's smile faded a little. This fellow looked like something other than a mere reporter. He'd have to make it his business to get a line on him.

Bill lounged in a chair by the door until he saw the brisk, well-groomed figure of Clint Williams cross the news room toward the door marked, "Managing Editor." Williams was tall, with a pair of nice shoulders and the carriage of an athlete. He glanced at Bill briefly and strode to his office.

Bill got a better picture of the man as he faced him across the desk. He had a manner as brisk as his walk. He gave the impression of smart efficiency devoid of any sentiment or silly scruples. He sounded like that as he talked to Bill after he had questioned him regarding experience and background.

"The day of muckraking is over in the newspaper world," he said crisply. "The times demand the news, uncolored by romantic nonsense, and clean of innuendoes and implications. The *Express* is the leading paper in a city rather de-

void of melodramatic happenings. We want that kind of news. Do that and you'll be all right. Get boyish ideas of crusading and you'll only run into trouble. I hope you understand me."

"Yes," Bill said slowly. "I guess I get you. I'm kinda like that myself. I know how to keep my nose clean. I figure the other fellow does. If he doesn't, I figure it's none of my business."

"Exactly," Williams snapped. "Report to Benson. He'll give you your assignments. Turn in the stuff we want and you'll be all right."

So Bill went back to the enclosure behind the railing and faced Hush Benson's sour scorn while he listened to orders. The story was all there; part of it in the face of the city editor who represented the school of hard-bitten, hard-hitting newspapermen who drag in the news in spite of hell and high water; the rest of it was in the face of the managing editor who believed in profits with safety and comfort.

Bill thought of men like Deadline Digby, and old Rush Craig who kept his editors on his toes and made his chain of newspapers respected by honest men and feared by every crooked politician in the area they covered. But now old Craig and Deadline were dead and men like Williams bossed the job. Bill glanced over at the weary droop of Hush Benson's shoulders. His gaze traveled over the dark, lean reporter he now knew as Dell Priest, and his jaw tightened. They came to rest at last on Joan Digby's red head and his grin came back.

He tried to know both Joan Digby and Dell Priest better during the next few weeks without much success. Priest met his advances with a cold impassivity that might mean anything or nothing. Joan was

openly contemptuous. Her contempt deepened as she saw the stuff he brought in, nice little stories handed out at city hall; sonorous bursts of hot air from Police Chief Anderson or Hal Bassett, the dapper district attorney.

In a way Bill admired her for her stand on the stories. Sometimes he wondered just how long he could carry in such tripe himself. But always the muscles of the big jaw tightened and the brown eyes glowed with a deep light, and then he went back to his beat, affable, smiling, as harmless in appearance as a stray pup.

All the hot spots in town knew him in time. The bartenders and waiters were his pals. And everywhere he went, he ambled along in the same loose-jointed, indolent way. He never lost his smile. His brown eyes remained as sleepy as ever. But he listened and remembered things he heard. And men talked carelessly in front of him. He had the inborn knack of allaying suspicion and arousing a sort of contemptuous tolerance among the wise boys.

A month from the time when he had first ambled into the *Express* office, Bill lounged through the railing and tossed two sheets of copy on Hush Benson's desk and watched him with his sleepy eyes very bright and expectant. He watched the red creep up under Benson's collar, around his ears, and up into the scanty gray hair, and his wide smile grew more crooked and lopsided.

Benson finished reading the copy, opened his mouth to speak, but only made thick gasping sounds. Out of the corner of his eye Bill saw Dell Priest shift in his chair, his ear toward the city desk, his dark face hard and alert.

When words finally came from

Hush Benson, they came in a rushing torrent. "That I should live to see this kind of drivel pouring through this news room!"

He stabbed the copy with a bony finger and read in a thick voice: "The body found beside the Turnerville Pike has been identified as that of Frank Crossetti, a Chicago gangster wanted in a half dozen cities on various charges ranging from murder down the scale. Police Chief Anderson declared that the killing was, without a doubt, one of gang vengeance. Crossetti had sought safety in peaceful, crime-free Plains City. But his killers had found him, struck, and vanished."

Benson put his head in his hands and rocked it from side to side. "Frank Crossetti has been in this damned sinkhole of a town for six months. He's been taking orders from the higher-ups and doing his stuff for them. He was the big muscle man for the extortion racketeers. Of course he was wanted. Half the crooks in Plains City are wanted. That's why they come here where they can lay up and be safe as long as they play ball with Anderson, Bassett, MacGaffery, and whoever it is heads their unholy line-up. We know that. We know a hell of a lot more than that. And what do we do? We print this sort of cock-eyed hooley."

Clint Williams's voice was like a whiplash. "Benson! You know the policies of this paper. Are you trying to disrupt the news room force?"

Bill swiveled around on one heel and stared at Williams, whose face was white with rage and passion. His eyes were bright and hot. "I've told you a thousand times," he snapped, "that we are running a paper that keeps its nose clean. Maybe things are not just as we'd

like them. The only thing we could do would be to get ourselves involved in libel suits that would practically wipe us out. You know that. You know what happened two years ago. That court decision against us cost us one hundred thousand dollars. A few more like that and we're sunk."

"Libel suits!" Benson rasped bitterly. "Loss of profits! Cripes, man, the city is going to hell under our feet and we're not doing a damn thing about it. Election time three months off and not a decent candidate in the field. We could have Hollister running for mayor if this sheet would back him. An honest man running against a fat crook. And we could put him over."

Williams opened his mouth to speak, but Benson's voice rose to a hoarse bellow. "Libel suits! Sure, we lost our case. And why? Because some dirty son sold us out. Somebody tipped off the crooks and they covered up."

Williams's voice was icy. "You've had your say, Benson. Now I'll have mine. I'm running this paper. I turn in profits and the Craig estate is satisfied. As long as I'm here, I'll run it my way. I suppose I could get all steamed up and launch a program of civic reform. When it was all over, there wouldn't be any *Express* and the same men would still be in office. I know what I'm talking about. I know how this paper is going to be run. If you don't like it, you know what you can do."

Hush Benson's face went gray and cold. "Yeah," he said harshly. "I know what I can do. And I think I'll do it. Maybe I'm through. Maybe I'm licked. But there are worse things than going on relief, Williams."

His somber eyes began to glow

and the lines of his face went deeper and tauter. "I know what I can do. I can use some of the stuff I know. And if some of the rats knew how much I've collected sitting right here at this desk, they'd start looking for holes right now. I know what I can do, all right. And I'm going to start doing it. I'm going to start a one-man campaign of my own. Watch, Williams. Hell is going to open in this town."

Bill jerked farther around as he heard Joan Digby's voice, as cold and sharp as sleet. "Not alone, Hush. I know when I'm through. I'm in on this with you. I've got a few notes to add to your collection of facts."

Her eyes looked very dark and shining against the pallor of her cheeks as she went on in a strained, hard voice: "My father was a newspaperman, Williams. He had too much nerve and honesty to play your game. He went after the crooks. You know what happened. He was killed in the line of duty. And not a thing was done about it. His killers are still loose. I've tried to work on your sheet, hoping to turn something up. I've turned plenty up. Now I'm going to use it."

Hush Benson came through the railing, shrugging into his coat as he went. Joan caught his sleeve and smiled up at him wanly.

"Let's go, Hush. We'll show these cowards that there are at least two on the staff who are not afraid to do something."

Her eyes held Bill's for an instant. The smile she gave him stung like a slap in the face. She glanced at Dell Priest for another second, but the dark impassive face did not change a muscle. Bill thought he saw something deep and triumphant crawl in the dark eyes, then it was

gone and the eyes were veiled and guarded again.

"I think you are a pair of damned fools," Williams said harshly. "I don't like to see you go like this, Benson. You've seen long service here. I'm willing to forget what's been said and let you go back on the job."

To Joan he said: "You are being very foolish, Miss Digby. The *Express* was powerless to do anything about your father's death. All we could do was give you a chance. We did that. You're pulling down a good salary."

"Yes," Joan said thinly, "I'm pulling down a good salary. For what? I'll tell you. To help cover up the crooks who were responsible for my father's murder."

"Yeah," Hush Benson snarled, "we're a couple of damned fools. But, remember this, Williams, we're a couple of honest damned fools." He stared around the news room, his eyes full of contempt that was tragic in its bitterness. "Only two damned fools on a big staff."

Joan tugged at his arm. "Come on, Hush," she said gently. "Don't let it get you. We'll show these worms what we can do."

Hush stopped at the door and looked back. He lifted his head and the contempt was like a flame as he snapped, "Yellowbellies." Then he was gone, clumping heavily through the empty corridor to the street.

Williams stared from Dell Priest to Bill Eagles, then his glance took in the rest of the staff that had pushed up toward the city desk. "You heard what I said," he ground out. "The *Express* will be run my way. You, Compton," he snapped at the tall, blond fellow with the weak chin, "are acting city editor. Get on the job and turn out a paper my way."

"The rest of you," he snapped, "get on the job. Take orders and you'll be all right."

CHAPTER II.

DOOR TO DEATH.

BILL dropped heavily in his chair and leaned back. His brown eyes were no longer sleepy and amused. He was thinking of a line of newspapermen like old Rush Craig, Deadline Digby, and Hush Benson; men who saw that the news was printed without fear or favor; men who swung elections and kept something approaching honesty in public offices. He stared at the door that closed behind Clint Williams and his wide mouth twisted sardonically.

The twist grew more pronounced as he saw Dell Priest get up from his chair and cross the room to the public telephone booth. As he went, Priest let his hard gaze run over the news room. Bill dropped his eyes and leaned farther back in his chair.

He knew now that he had sized Priest up right. He was something more—or less—than a reporter. Right now he was spreading the news of what had just happened. The departure of Hush Benson and Joan Digby was the signal for something. Hell, Bill decided, was ripe to pop.

Cold, consuming rage brought him to his feet. Something was urging him to cross the news room to the telephone booth and tear the dark-faced reporter away from the line. But colder reason told him to wait. Dell Priest was playing a double game. The only way to uncover that game was to play 'possum and wait for a break.

He turned back to his typewriter and the notes he had brought with him from city hall, and began to

hammer out his story, the lopsided grin slowly coming back to his wide mouth. It was there when Dell Priest came back from his desk. The dark man stared at him for a second, then dropped into his chair and hunched over his machine.

Sitting at the bar at the Pelican, Bill could feel the tension in the air. It was all over town. The rats were lying low, planning their moves. The tension in the air was chill with the threat of death. Bill remembered the story of Deadline Digby and shivered. Something like that would happen to Hush Benson and Joan Digby if they had half as much information as they claimed they possessed.

When Bill swung down from the bar stool, he had one fixed idea in his head. He would look up Hush Benson and see if he could help. If hell was to pop, he might help head off the guns that would be looking for Joan and old Hush.

He left the cab on the corner of Myrtle and walked along the quiet street until he came to the modest bungalow where Hush Benson lived. He pulled off his battered hat as the white-haired woman opened the door. Her eyes were dark with secret worry. But she smiled at Bill and he felt a little stab in his breast. These were the kind of people who always took the shock of trouble; the swell, decent people of the world.

"Mr. Benson," she replied in answer to Bill's question, "Mr. Benson went out an hour ago with Joan Digby and Mr. Priest."

Bill hardly knew his own voice. "Did Priest come here after him?"

Mrs. Benson nodded, the fear deepening in her eyes. "Yes. Joan was having supper with us when Mr. Priest came. The three of them went into the living room and talked

for a long time. When they came out, Ron kissed me and said he had to go out for a while."

That was the first time that Bill knew Benson's first name was Ron. He knew no other than "Hush."

As she talked, the shadow in Mrs. Benson's eyes deepened. "Ron was a little frightened. But he was excited too. Mr. Priest must have told him something that upset him."

Bill nodded. He could see it all now. Priest had come to the house to get Hush and Joan away without any fuss. He knew, suddenly, that unless he acted, Hush Benson and Joan would never come home again.

He murmured some futile words to Mrs. Benson and went down the walk to the street, feeling her gaze on his back as he went. It made him cold and savage inside. He wanted to smash someone. He wanted to tear the truth out of someone like Priest.

He called the office and got Priest's home address. He caught a cab and drove to the apartment house on the east side. It was a walk-up affair. Priest's apartment was on the second floor.

All was quiet on the second floor. Bill's knuckles on the door made a dull empty sound. He knocked twice. The second time he knocked harder and the door swung a little. It was not locked. It wasn't even caught on the latch. He swung it open and stepped inside, holding his breath expectantly.

Priest's living room was simply furnished. A few etchings on the wall looked quiet and tasteful. There were two deep easy-chairs and a wide, deep davenport against one wall. A lighted bridge lamp made a cone of yellow light beside one of the big chairs. The room somehow didn't fit with the picture Bill had been building of the man behind

Priest's impenetrable mask.

Across the room a door stood open. Bill could see a bedpost and a straight-backed chair. Dead silence hung like a shroud over the room; a silence made heavy and thick by mystery and something else that made Bill feel cold and taut.

He crossed the bedroom and looked inside. Beyond the bedroom he found the bath. From the bathroom he went back through the bedroom into the living room. A door across the room beckoned him. Something almost like hysteria clutched Bill as he put his hand on the knob of the door. Some warning inner sense was trying to tell him something. He opened the door, then leaped backward six feet to get away from the body that seemed to be trying to fall into his arms.

Down on one knee he turned the body over. The man had been shot through the heart. He must never have felt the death that struck so suddenly. He had a lean, hard jaw and a mouth that even in death was purposeful.

Someone behind him said, "Well, what do you make of it?"

Bill whirled as he came to his feet. The man was just inside the living room. He smiled faintly and some of the chiseled hardness left his face. He had gray eyes that weighed Bill and waited for him to speak. He looked very sure of himself as he stood, one hand in his coat pocket, big shouldered, hard of jaw.

He held out his left hand palm up and Bill saw a small badge.

The big man said, "F. B. I." He nodded toward the man on the floor. "He was my side kick. We were working to bust the rackets in this town wide open. Priest was in on it somewhere. Jake came up here after him. I guess they got him."

His voice was devoid of tone or emotion.

Bill's voice took on a ragged edge. "Priest picked up Hush Benson and Joan Digby. I figured he'd brought them here. I came along and found this." He, in turn, jerked his head at the dead man.

The big man nodded slowly. "You're Bill Eagles, the new man on the *Express*. We've wondered about you. We noticed you got around a lot and did a heap of listening. We just couldn't figure you." There was an interrogative inflection in his voice as if he would like Bill to explain himself.

Bill ignored the question in the voice and said: "Priest killed your pal. He must have hustled Joan and Hush away after that."

"That's what he did," the big man agreed. "He had a couple of thugs with him. When they killed Jake, I guess they got jittery and beat it. But we know where they went. How would you like to come with me while we pay them a little surprise visit?"

"Give me a gun and show me the way," Bill said harshly.

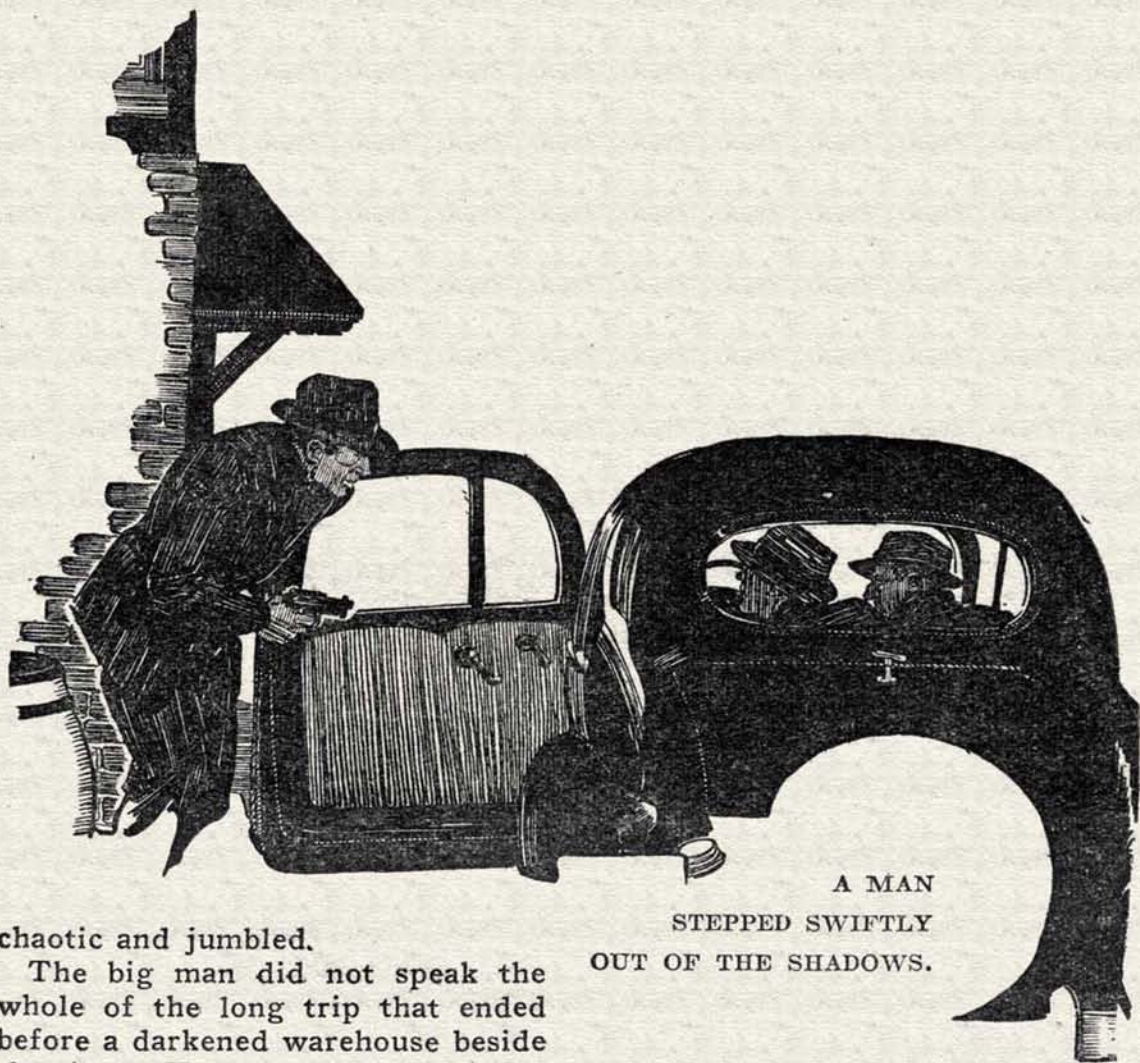
The big fellow smiled. "That's the spirit, kid." He smiled faintly again. "When this is over, you'll have the story you were looking for. It will blow the lid a mile high."

"To hell with the story now," Bill rasped. "The first thing I want to do is get Joan and Hush out of Priest's hands. Then we'll see."

The big fellow handed Bill an automatic as he reached the door, and snapped:

"Let's go."

Bill climbed silently into the coupé beside the big fellow. He kept one hand in his pocket, his fingers curled around the butt of the automatic. He leaned forward, his eyes on the road, his thoughts



A MAN
STEPED SWIFTLY
OUT OF THE SHADOWS.

chaotic and jumbled.

The big man did not speak the whole of the long trip that ended before a darkened warehouse beside the river. He snapped off his lights and said to Bill:

"This is it. Let's step inside."

Something cold rippled along Bill's nerves. There was something phony about this set-up. He jerked the automatic out of his pocket just as someone stepped swiftly out of the shadows and yanked the door of the coupé wide open. The man loomed huge in the semidarkness. Bill saw the glint of light on gun metal just as he squeezed the trigger of the automatic.

The dead click of the gun echoed in his brain. The fellow was coming around the back of the car, a gun in his hand, chuckling as he walked.

"The sap fell for it. He took it like a baby takes candy. Hell, it was too easy." The man's voice had a raspy edge to it. "The damn punk would have shot me if the gun had been loaded." He stepped forward, the gun in his hand raised to slug Bill.

The big man caught his wrists and snapped:

"Don't be a damned fool, Gaff. You knew the gat was empty. I had to give it to him to make him think everything was on the up and up."

Gaff said something thickly as Bill got slowly out of the car. He jerked his wrists from the big fellow's grasp and struck Bill in the

face with his free left hand.

"That's a sample of what's coming to you, sap."

Bill sucked his split lip and stood silent while the man who had duped him snatched the automatic out of his hand. He felt a little sick and empty inside. He had had such wild dreams of coming to the rescue of Joan and instead he had walked like a sheep into a blind alley. The gang now had him as well as Joan and Hush.

"I suppose," he said bitterly, "Priest had it all figured out. He knew I would walk into his place and so he sent you to pick me up."

The big fellow chuckled. "Yeah," he said, "Priest had it all figured out, all right."

Gaff snarled huskily: "You talk too damn much, Dev. Some day the boss will kick you in the pants with a handful of slugs."

Dev laughed again. "There are other guys who will come first, Gaff. The boss knows I got brains. He can use brains. You oughta try and develop some."

Gaff jabbed Bill in the ribs with a gun. Bill could feel the strength of the rage behind the gun. Dev was smart. He enjoyed ribbing this yegg. Just now he seemed highly delighted with the smoothness of the trick he had played on Bill. He chuckled to himself as he walked in front of Bill through the echoing emptiness of the warehouse to a flight of stairs that led upward through the darkness to a gleam of light that marked a door.

The man who lounged in a chair across the room was so thin that he looked emaciated. His cheek bones seemed to be on the verge of breaking through the parchment-white skin. His eyes were deep set in his head and looked dull and dead.

His voice was like his face, dry and lifeless.

"You picked him up, I see."

"Sure," Dev said heartily. "It was a cinch, Vale. It was like leading a lamb."

Vale fixed his dead eyes on Bill and said in his lifeless voice: "We've got most of the nosey ones rounded up now." He stared at Gaff. "The boss is going to be pleased about this. You know, sometimes he hasn't been any too sure of you. He'll like the way you've handled this."

"Sure," Dev said with the same heartiness. "He oughta be pleased. But it's like I told you. I know my way around. I don't know why the hell you guys got to act so suspicious all the time."

"We get to live longer that way," Vale said dryly. "We gotta make sure of our men. There's too many of these damn Feds trying to horn in on the inside."

Dev grinned and took the badge from his pocket. He held it in the palm of his hand again. "I told you about the Fed I bumped. His badge came in awful damned handy tonight."

Vale's dead eyes glowed for a second. "You'll flash that badge once too often," he said hoarsely. "Take my tip and you'll toss the damned thing into the river. Some day a G-man might catch up with you and find that thing in your pockets. Then it would be just too bad."

Dev laughed. "I never let any of them get that close, Vale. I can smell those babies a mile away."

"To hell with this flapdoodle," Vale snapped. "We've got to get going. Tie that punk up and we'll go collect the rest of them. In a few hours, when things quiet down, we'll take them all for a nice boat ride."

Bill shivered. He knew the others would be Joan and Hush. The man who controlled crime in this town didn't miss much. Not a move was made that they didn't have spotted. It would be easy, Bill thought bitterly, with men like Priest on the inside keeping track of all the moves, spotting the ones who might be able to cause trouble.

Only one thing cheered him. The G-men were in on this. Sooner or later they would catch up with these thugs. The trouble was that it might be too late to do him any good, too late to save Joan and Hush.

As Dev tied him very swiftly and expertly, Bill ground out:

"How do you expect to get away with this? You can bump off the odd punk. But you can't snatch and kill two reporters and a city editor and expect to get away with it."

"To hell we can't," Vale said flatly. "It'll make a nice mystery for a while. But you'll go down as missing. No one will ever find you where we'll put you. Don't worry, smart guy; we figure our moves safely."

Gaff came around in front of Bill and hit him another smash in the mouth.

"This damn punk is too lippy," Gaff snarled. "If I had my way, I'd bump him now and get it over with."

Dev finished tying Bill and faced Gaff, smiling easily.

"If you had your way, brainless, we'd all be waiting for our turns in the hot seat right now," Dev added softly: "You want to forget your own ideas. Just because you have them is proof that they're lousy."

Gaff's big shoulders hunched forward and his tiny eyes twinkled with hate. His thick lips pulled

away from his yellow teeth as he snarled at Dev.

Vale's voice snapped coldly: "Stop the fool arguments. Dev, let Gaff alone. He's dumb. But he does what he's told."

To Gaff he said: "Stick around outside the door. The punk can't get loose. But if he does and tries to make a break, plug him."

CHAPTER III.

AGAINST ODDS.

BILL listened to their feet echoing hollowly in the emptiness of the warehouse as they went down the stairs to the street. Gaff slapped Bill once more across the face with a full-armed swing of his beefy hand that made Bill see pinwheels of fire for a moment.

"You would try to plug me, would you?" he snarled and went out.

Bill heard the key turn in the lock. The flimsy wall shuddered as Gaff leaned his big shoulders against it outside.

Bill fought silently with his bonds. As he strained, his heart leaped. The cords that held his wrists were slipping. There was something queer about this set-up. He thought about it as he pulled his wrists free of the binding cords and went to work on his ankles. There was something screwy about the whole series of events. Then he pushed his perplexity from him as he began to figure it out.

He crossed to the window and found he could raise it. He looked down. By letting himself drop from the sill he could make it. He could get away easily enough. Then he halted, sucking his split lips again. He rubbed a palm across the lump that Gaff had made on his jaw, and his mouth hardened. Maybe Gaff

would know where Joan and Hush were being held.

He put the window down silently. He picked up the chair and swung it, smashing the window, glass and frame. He dropped the chair and leaped across the room to the door. He was pretty sure what the slow-thinking, short-tempered Gaff would do.

Gaff's feet thundered in the hall as he leaped to the door. He turned the key, jerked the door open, and leaped through, pausing to stare at the smashed window across the room.

Bill put everything he had into the swing that came up from the floor. All the red rage that had been distilled when Gaff struck him; all his savage wrath at the thought of Joan and Hush went into the punch. He felt pain streak like fire along his arm, numbing it to the elbow as his fist found the angle of Gaff's jaw.

Bill stood looking down at Gaff who fell flat on his face, his gun banging on the floor in front of him. He massaged his right hand with the fingers of his left, wondering for a brief moment if he had broken his knuckles. But life began to flow back into the hand to assure him that it was still serviceable.

He slipped Gaff's gun into his side pocket and began to truss the big fellow. By the time Gaff groaned, the job was completed. Gaff's wrists were fastened to the ankles that Bill had pulled up behind him.

Bill squatted on his heels, the gun in his hand, waiting for Gaff to come back to consciousness. The gangster's little eyes blinked. Then his thick lips twisted and his mouth spouted profanity.

The smile had come back to Bill's wide mouth. But his brown eyes

were cold and deadly as he stopped Gaff's profanity with a left-hand smash to the slobbering mouth.

He slipped a handkerchief from his pocket, rolled it into a ball, and jammed it into Gaff's mouth. He tied it there with another he took from the gangster's pocket. "That's to keep you from yelling when your pals come back with the rest of the party."

He was remembering what Vale had said, that he and Dev were going to pick up the others and bring them here. That meant Joan and Hush, and with them, probably, the punks who were guarding them. There would be heavy odds against him. Thinking of that, Bill's grin widened as his hand tightened on the butt of the big automatic. The element of surprise should work in his favor.

He was at the bottom of the stairs when he heard someone open the outer door and walk softly across the warehouse. He stepped back into the darkness and waited for the man who moved so stealthily. He shifted the gun to his left and stooped with his right balled into a fist as the man approached, walking as softly as a stalking cat.

He could see the gleam of his teeth as he lifted his head to peer up the stairs. He was halted, wary, watchful, listening as Bill stepped in, his fist coming up in a ripping uppercut. The swing of the long arm lifted the smaller man clear of the floor and slammed him back against the wall. He bounced off the wall and fell forward on his face.

Bill rolled him over and lighted a match. His breath hissed through his teeth. The man he had hit was Dell Priest. He was out. But he wouldn't stay unconscious long. In Dell Priest, Bill thought, he had the

key to the mystery. Priest knew plenty. He could be made to talk. It was someone high up in the crime ring of Plains City who had got him his spot on the *Express* to watch and head off any moves.

He was debating what he should do with Priest when he heard the purr of a motor coming into the alley that led to the warehouse. That meant that Dev and Vale were coming back with reinforcements and bringing Joan and Hush with them.

He edged the door open and slid through, to stand glued against the angle made by the doorway. Headlights blazed a white path across the wharf and vanished into the darkness over the river. Then the light was switched off and the car loomed hugely in the light from the lamp at the end of the alley.

He saw Dev and two other men he had not seen before climb out of the car. He heard Vale's voice, flat and dead, yet with an undercurrent of excitement, say:

"Get those two out of the car and hustle them inside. You, Dev, get back at the wheel and take the car to the garage. Then come back and do your stuff."

Dev said, "O. K.," and swung behind the wheel, slamming the car door heavily.

Bill swore silently. He had picked Dev first, lined him for the first slug. The big, easily smiling man was, he, figured, the most dangerous one in the crowd.

Bill waited till Joan and Hush were out of the car with a man on each side of them, and Vale moving ahead of them toward the warehouse, before he called sharply:

"Stand right there. And stick them up. Hush, take their guns."

Joan's head jerked up suddenly as she stiffened into alertness. Her

voice was queer and strained as she said, "Bill! Bill Eagles!" Then it rose in a quick scream, cracked and flattened as she yelled, "Look out!"

Bill saw it first. Vale was diving sideways, pulling a gun from under his arm. It jerked around at a queer angle and spouted orange flame. Bill felt the wind of the slug fan his cheek as he fired at the diving Vale. He saw Vale's body jerk and knew he had hit him.

The other two men were trying to get behind the car. One of them made it. The other went backward as though a hand had pushed him, his arms waving as though he fought to get his balance. The man behind the car was slinging lead.

Bill found his voice. "Jump, Joan! Jump, you darned little fool!"

She ran for the front of the car, around it to the other side, with Hush at her heels.

Bill was yelling again as he fired the gun. Joan was going to run around the car. The fellow on that side would get her. And there was Dev back of the wheel. He was cranking the window down so he might be able to shoot.

The whole action had taken place in swift seconds. The gunshots almost blended one with another. Bill crouched tensely. He had to get that man behind the car. He had to get him to save Joan. He'd have to get him if it meant charging into his gunfire.

Someone behind him made up his mind for him. A shoulder hit him in the middle of the back and he shot forward, sprawling on his face on the wharf. As he fell, he glimpsed Priest, diving for the car. The door slammed and his voice rose sharp and hoarse to Dev:

"Get this crate wheeling. It's the break."

The car leaped forward with a roar of the motor. It almost overturned as Dev wheeled it around. The man behind the car was going over backward. Bill pushed himself up with his elbow and shot the gangster before he regained his balance.

The big sedan came to a full stop before it left the wharf. Priest was leaning out of a rear window, a gun in his hand. Joan and Hush were the only ones standing, frozen momentarily in something like stunned surprise. Bill wanted to scream a warning, and knew that wouldn't help. He lined the gun on the sedan window and pulled the trigger. All he got was a dead click. He had emptied the gun. He dropped it and leaped for Vale's weapon. It was lying there, glinting in the dim light where Vale had dropped it. Bill got splinters in his hand from the wharf planks as he landed. But he had the gun. He aimed at the sedan and blasted lead at the rear window. He could see the slug star the glass. But the sedan was gone with a roar of motor.

For a frozen second Bill glanced around. Vale was lying on his face, his body twisted. The man who had fallen over backward was flat on his back, his arms flung outward. The third man was also on his back, with arms clutched around his middle, rolling from side to side and moaning in time with his rolling.

Somewhere beyond, sirens moaned and screamed. Bill didn't know his own voice as he snapped:

"Come on. Let's get out of this."

They caught a cab and put the wail of the sirens behind them while Hush talked.

"I don't know what the hell it's all about," he said. "Priest came to us tonight and talked. From what he said, he knew more than we did about what was going on. He told

us that our number was up. That word had gone out about us and that we were marked for death."

"The dirty son!" Bill said harshly. "He sent out the word. He's no reporter. He was placed there in the news room. He was telephoning someone before you got through quitting.

Joan said nothing, just shivered. She had caught Bill's hand and hung onto it with trembling desperation.

Hush went on, shaking his head as he talked. "I don't know, Bill. There's something sour about the whole mess. I can't tell who is which and why." Then speculation gleamed in his shrewd eyes. "But how come you stepped into the picture? I thought you were the boy who knew how to keep his nose clean."

"I'll tell you about it," Bill answered. "But it will be later. First, you tell me what happened. Priest came after you. What then?"

"Priest," Hush said. "Priest has got me stumped. I can't figure him at all." Then his voice lost its wondering note and went on. "He came to the house, as I said. He claimed to know plenty. If we would come with him, he told us, he'd help us break the thing right.

"It sounded reasonable, so we went along. He took us to his apartment and left us there, told us to wait till he got back. There's something about that guy; something that I can't figure; something that puzzles me."

"The rat," Bill commented. "The dirty, sneaking rat."

Hush shook his head. "I don't know, Bill." He resumed his story again. "He left Joan and me there and told us to wait till he got back. We waited. We were waiting when the three men came in. Two of

them had guns. The third man unlocked the door for them and came in ahead. Inside, he tried to make a break and one of the thugs shot him and stuffed him in the closet."

Joan shivered violently and Bill's clasp on her hand tightened. It seemed to steady her.

Hush went on: "They hustled the two of us out into a car and drove to an apartment uptown. The two men seemed to be waiting for some word. Finally Vale and the man called Dev arrived and brought us here."

Bill told them briefly how he had walked in on it. The thought of the trick Dev had pulled on him still made him sore when he thought of it. The thought of Priest made him still sorer.

"Priest is tangled up with the mess in some way," Hush said slowly. "Sure as hell he is. But the guy has got me puzzled. I can't figure him out."

"I'll figure him out if I catch up to the rat," Bill said bitterly. "I'll take him apart. He'll squeal when I put the pressure on. And I'll put it on plenty." His voice was thick and heavy with passion.

Then he turned his mind away from Priest and Dev to the two in the cab with him. "How much dope have you got on the gang behind all this?" he asked.

Hush jerked his head at Joan. "She's got some real stuff. I know plenty. Between us we can cause a hell of a lot of trouble for these rats, if," he added bitterly, "we can get any backing."

Joan said sharply: "I know about the Crossetti killing. I can link it directly to Chief Anderson. Crossetti was killed by a cop. He was killed because he knew too much, and was beginning to get greedy. He had a swelled head. So Ander-

son, acting on orders from somebody higher up, passed the word and Crossetti got it."

"That's not much," Bill said morosely. "We want more than that to tack the crimes where they belong."

"Vale worked for the D. A.'s office," Hush said grimly. I can prove that. And we can damn well prove the snatching tonight. Some of the boys on the paper know plenty. If I could sit at the city desk with full authority, I could turn out a couple of stories tonight that would rock this town to its foundations and bring in State and Federal heat."

"That's where we're headed now," Bill snapped. "I've got ideas. I think you'll find a little surprise waiting for you."

Hush leaned forward in his seat. "Just who the hell are you? You've had me puzzled ever since you walked in and asked for a job. I knew you weren't the type of guy to write the drivel you handed in unless you had a damned good reason for keeping your mouth closed. I figured you for a joker of some kind."

"I guess maybe I am," Bill said softly. "But let it ride for the present. We'll see what's waiting for us at the news room."

Hush shrugged. Joan kept her blue eyes on Bill and they were speculative. Hush broke the silence.

"Another thing has my goat. The fellows who were holding us in the apartment had a visitor. Whoever it was, he stayed in the next room and talked to the fellows who were holding us there. That means he didn't want either of us to see him. I couldn't hear what he said to them. I could just hear the rumble of his voice. But it was damned familiar. It was a voice I've heard often."

Hush stared at Bill, his voice

mirroring the mystery with which he wrestled. Then, as the cab pulled to the curb in front of the *Express* office, he shook his head and sighed. "I suppose I'll find out sooner or later."

"We'll find out a lot of things sooner or later," Bill said grimly. "If we can get some action, we may make it sooner."

CHAPTER IV.

PREVIEW.

THE old easy smile was on his face when he walked into the news room with Joan and Hush. The whole staff halted work and stared. An electric tension seemed to run through the room.

Compton got up from the city desk and came across the room. He had a telegraph blank in his hand. He shoved it in front of Bill. His hand shook a little and his eyes were full of puzzled fear.

"What does this mean, Eagles?" he asked.

Bill read the telegram:

WILLIAM EAGLES TAKING OVER
MANAGING EDITORSHIP EXPRESS
TO TAKE EFFECT IMMEDIATELY
CRONIN.

Bill smiled. Cronin was the boss at the top of the Craig chain of papers, answerable only to the trustees of the Craig estate.

The smile got lopsided and crooked as he said, "I guess it explains itself." He handed the telegram to Hush and said: "Do you suppose you could get out the paper you'd like to print tonight if you went back to the desk?"

Hush read the telegram over and over. The import of the message seemed a long time in penetrating. Joan Digby stared over Hush's

shoulder and red spots began to glow in her cheeks. The blue of her eyes was very deep.

She was the first to speak. "Bill, you fooled us. But now——" She broke off to stare.

Hush drew a long heavy breath and got around to answering Bill's question. "Could?" he said in a choked voice. Then his voice mounted and grew stronger. "Could I? Holy cow, could I?"

Bill stared at Compton who had not moved since he had handed over the telegram. Bill's voice crackled as he asked, "Williams knows, of course?"

Compton nodded. Bill turned away with the nod, saying to Hush: "We'd better go see Williams."

With his hand on the knob of the door, the door pushed open a scant inch, Bill froze.

Williams was talking to someone over the phone. His voice was harsh with desperation. "I tell you, this is the smash if you fellows don't stop fumbling. You had Eagles and the other two and you let them go. If you'd hung onto them, we could still pull this mess out of the fire."

Bill pushed the door wide and said, his eyes as steady as the gun in his hand:

"But they didn't, Williams. They didn't hold us."

Clint Williams dropped the telephone into its cradle as though it burned his fingers. His eyes were wide and scared. Then they narrowed as one hand dropped behind the desk.

"I wouldn't try that, Williams," Bill said harshly. "Put your hands on the top of the desk—both of them. And sit tight."

Hush's voice sounded as if he could not himself believe what he was saying. "It was Williams's voice I heard talking to Vale. I

should have known. I should have known."

"I should have known too," Joan said in a stiff, unnatural voice. "I should have known that father was sold out from inside. I should have known that and guessed."

Williams's hands were steady as they rested on the desk. After the first shock of surprise he seemed to have gained control of himself. His voice was as steady, as he remarked, "You should have guessed. You're still guessing. You'll find it difficult to prove anything."

"Not when we start cracking down," Hush rasped. "When we start putting the pressure on the rats who were in this with you, they'll talk fast enough. They'll squeal to save their own skins."

Bill put his head on one side and gazed at Williams speculatively. "You were at the top," he said slowly. "That means you had plenty on the others. You had to have in order to keep them in line. A smart guy like you would have documentary proof that you could hold over their heads."

The old lopsided smile was wider than ever as he saw Williams glance at the safe; the safe that was standing ajar, as if Williams had lately been going through some of its contents. He saw also the spasm of emotion that drew Williams's face into taut lines. For a second he froze, half expecting that Williams was going to make a dive for it. Then the emotion passed and the editor's face became cold and impassive. But now the knowledge of what he faced was in his eyes.

Bill crossed the room in two strides. His left hand struck Williams in the chest and the chair shot backward on its rollers. Leaning across him, Bill lifted the gun he saw in the open drawer.

Without taking his eyes off Williams, he said: "Look in the safe, Hush, and see what's there. You should get some stuff for swell front page stories."

The papers Hush pulled out made loud rustlings in the silence of the office. Out of the corners of his eyes Bill saw Joan leaning over Hush's shoulder. Her breath was coming in quick gasps. Hush said nothing, just stared at the papers in his hands for a long moment, then whistled a long, lingering note.

His big hands shook as he continued to paw through the papers. When he straightened, he stared at Bill with stark unbelief in his eyes.

"There's enough here to keep the electric chair busy for a week," he said. "With this I can blast the whole gang of crooked politicians and crooks loose with one issue of the *Express*."

"Then hop to it," Bill snapped. "Never mind deadlines. Get the boys started. Get an extra out as fast as the works will take it. I'll be here with Williams when the presses start."

Hush's voice was strained and full of awe. He stared from Bill to the papers in his shaking hands. "That I should live to see this day." Then he leaped for the door with his voice rising to a roar: "Come on, you lead-footed sons, and show me you can turn out a paper."

Bill grinned at Joan. "Hop to it, sister," he said. "This is your break. You can write the story of your father and put the responsibility for his death where it belongs. Let's see how good you are."

She halted a moment in the door and stared at Bill, her eyes widening. She smiled faintly, then said, "Mister, I'll show you."

Bill could hear Hush's voice bellowing in the news room: "Hey, Am-

bers, here's the stuff on the D. A. Work in the dope you already know. The proof I'm giving you lets you cut loose with all your guns."

He sounded like the Hush Benson that Bill had heard about, bellowing: "Black, here's the dope on Anderson. You, Cully, blow the dust off your typewriter and bang out this county story."

There was nothing *hush-hush* in the voice that said to Joan Digby: "Kid, I'm giving you your big chance. Make it personal and hard hitting. Smear the story of old Deadline. Give the crooks the works for the snatch tonight. You know where the stuff belongs. Lay it on their doorsteps, kid."

Watching Williams, who did not move a muscle, who leaned back against the wall in his swivel chair with the life and fire flowing out of his eyes minute by minute, Bill felt worry gnawing at his vitals. The gang behind the mess wouldn't take this lying down. There were tough men out there beyond the walls of the *Express* office. They might make a desperate sally and try to get back some of the stuff that was now in the news room.

Something of the same idea writhed in Williams's eyes. He was beaten. But, watching him, Bill knew that the man was tough. He wouldn't hesitate at anything if he could salvage something out of the wreckage.

It was much later that Hush Benson stuck his head in the office.

"Bill," he said, "it's on the way. I did another thing on my own. I called up Captain Hicks. He's a square cop. I told him to dig up all the guys he could trust and fan them out around the building. If the thugs that front for this racket want action, they'll get plenty of it."

Relief flowed in Bill's eyes as hope

flowed out of the man opposite him. He threw Hush a quick grin.

"Swell, Hush! Keep the stuff rolling," he said.

The thought of Priest still prodded him. There was a deeper mystery behind him than had yet been probed. Something told Bill that the stone-faced reporter was tougher than anyone he had met yet.

Through the closed door Bill could feel the tension that suddenly gripped the outer room. Silence dropped suddenly. The machine gun clatter of typewriters was abruptly stilled. Then a murmur ran through the outer room, almost drowning the voice that spoke with quick authority.

Bill backed to the door, not taking his eyes off Williams. He saw hope flare briefly in the editor's eyes. Then the door opened. Before he turned his head, Bill knew it was all right. He saw the stunned, sick look in Williams's face.

He half turned his head and saw Chief Anderson coming through the door. The face of the fat police chief was gray and sagging. His eyes were like the eyes of a dead fish. Behind him the district attorney tried to hold himself together, but his pale jowls were trembling and his mouth was working convulsively.

Before the next man came into his line of vision, Bill stiffened. The man spoke and the sound of his voice was like a jolt to the stomach as he said:

"Just a couple more of the boys to join the party."

Bill jerked around and saw Dell Priest. The dark face was no longer impassive. The tight mouth was dropped in a sardonic smile. His right hand gripped a gun, his left touched the lump on his jaw as he stared at Bill and said:

"You certainly put authority into your swings, Bill Eagles."

Behind Priest was a tall man who leaned negligently against the side of the door and smiled easily. Bill's eyes narrowed. None of this made sense. The fellow in the doorway was Dev, the man who had snatched him earlier in the evening.

Dev said: "Sorry, buddy, but neither Priest nor myself dared spill anything to you. We had to be damned sure, working on the inside the way we were."

Priest said: "When I took Hush and Joan to my apartment, I left one of the boys outside to guard the joint. I know now how they took him: When Dev got word to pick you up, he figured it would be just as well. But he figured you wrong. He thought when you found yourself loose you would jump through the window and make your getaway. Instead of that you backtracked and nearly gummed the works."

"Then you are G-men," Bill said hollowly. He remembered trying to plug Dev first. He wondered if the big fellow knew how close he had come to getting a slug.

"Yeah," said Dev easily, "we're that kind of boys. A bunch of us have been in it here for some time, trying to untangle the mess." He stared at Williams briefly. "It took us a long time to catch up to the head boy. And now that we have, we find you already here. Swell work, kid."

Bill felt the floor beneath his feet begin to tremble. That would be the presses starting. He glanced at the clock on Williams's desk.

Priest glanced at it also, then turned to Bill. "You're kinda pushing the deadline ahead tonight, aren't you?"

"This," said Bill softly, "isn't the

real deadline. This is a sort of preview headline. We're going to preview it right here. I hope the boys like it." He swept the three faces with a sardonic glance.

"Like it?" asked Priest ironically. "Hell, man, they'll love it."

A boy rushed through the door and threw a stack of damp papers on the desk. He smiled at Bill round eyed, let his gaze travel around the room, then backed slowly out saying in a scared voice, "Gee!"

Bill silently passed the papers around the room. Glaring headlines told the story of the death of the crime ring in Plains City.

Hush Benson and Joan came into the room to stand beside Bill quietly. Bill was watching Williams. The former managing editor's face did not change as he read the headlines. Then slowly he lifted the paper till it screened his face.

Bill sprang with Priest's yelp of warning. He moved fast, so fast he reached Williams ahead of Dev who leaped like a panther.

Williams himself jerked the paper down from before his face, his lips contorted in a grimace of agony.

"Too late, boys," he said harshly. "I've pushed my own deadline ahead. I guess Plains City has got a paper at last. That means I'm due to step out."

He pitched forward out of the chair writhing. By the time Bill had him turned over, he was dead.

"He was a nervy guy," Priest said softly. "He must have known that the day was coming sooner or later and made himself ready for it. I guess he was a good enough newspaperman to know that sooner or later there would be a paper in Plains City."

He turned and stared at Anderson and the district attorney. "You boys won't get a chance to pull anything

like that. You'll go to trial along with a raft of crooks just like yourselves. It's just as Williams said, Plains City has a paper. It's a sort of symbol, isn't it? Now we'll just have you boys put away where you can be quiet and think it over."

The procession had long since left the news room, when Bill stood at the city desk, with Hush Benson and Joan Digby beside him, facing the silent staff. From the streets came the hoarse roar of the crowds, crowds that read the *Express* extra and gave vent to their anger.

Bill glanced at Hush and smiled. He looked at Joan and something else came into his smile as he met the gleam of her blue eyes. Then he lifted his head and stared at the staff and the smile faded.

"I'm sorry I had to come in as I

did, boys," he said slowly. "You know now that I'm not Bill Eagles, but Bill Craig. For the past year I've been making the rounds, studying the business firsthand, doing my stuff on a beat, trying to learn something about how to run a newspaper. Plains City taught me how necessary a good paper is."

He paused, then went on: "With your help I hope to run a real sheet here. That's all."

"It's one hell of a lot," Hush said later, as he watched Joan and Bill walk slowly out of the news room. Then he straightened his stooped shoulders and his hard eyes gleamed as he reached for his coat. "The preview is over," he bellowed. "Tomorrow you guys come in here ready to shoot the rest of the stuff. We've got a newspaper now."

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THE BLUE-BLACK FEET



by Christopher B. Booth

Author of "Desperate Dues," etc.

HIS soul sick with dread, Eric Ashley tried desperately to find a way of escape from the situation into which he had trapped himself. He had taken eight hundred dollars of the bank's money, and he knew the shortage couldn't be covered up any longer. His folly had caught up with him.

Behind the steel grille of the second teller's window he pretended to be busy inside his cage, but that was only to conceal his panic as his mind blundered around in the same hopeless circle. It always brought him back to the same place

—flight was his only chance to escape arrest.

"Yes, I've got to get away, and get away fast," he said under his breath. "The bank examiners will be here tomorrow."

He looked down at his cash drawer. The bills there were mostly of small denominations, and the amount wasn't so large as it appeared to be.

"I can pinch out another thousand for get-away money," he thought. "That'll get me to Florida with something to spare. The horses will be running down there. If I can hit

a few long shots and send back the money, maybe that'll square things."

A shadow moved between him and the street window of the bank. Eric Ashley's head jerked up and he forced a smile to his lips. The Queen City National had a slogan: "The bank with a smile."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Kinsella," he said.

Mrs. Martha Kinsella, short and stocky, good-natured and rich—rich, that is, for a town the size of Queen City—was beaming jovially as she thrust a check under the wicket.

"I'll have cash for this," she said. "Ten hundred-dollar bills and the rest in tens and twenties, if you please, Eric."

Eric Ashley picked up the check and looked at it. The amount was fifteen hundred dollars.

"Looks like you're starting on your annual trip South," he said.

"A West Indies cruise this year," she told him. "I'm taking the seven o'clock train to New York tomorrow morning. The boat sails Monday. I'll send you some post cards, Eric."

"Swell!" exclaimed young Ashley with mechanical enthusiasm, and reached for the cash drawer. "How long will you be away?"

"Six weeks, Eric. The cruise takes only two, but I'm going to stop over in New York on my way back. I'm fifty-five years old and have never seen the inside of a night club. Night-clubbing at my age! Keep it a dark secret, Eric."

Ashley counted the money twice before he slid it across the marble slab, and Mrs. Kinsella herself counted it three times. For all her jollity, she was always careful about such things. Not stingy, just careful.

"Right!" she exclaimed briskly,

and put the bills into her handbag. "Well, so long, Eric; I'll not forget the post cards."

Ashley watched her as she moved away from the window. An idea shot into his mind. He looked again at the check.

"She's going to be away six weeks," he thought. "Nobody to watch her account while she's gone. If I could raise this check to twenty-five hundred—"

But he knew the idea was no good. The new girl who posted the paid checks on the bank's ledgers came close to being a handwriting expert. Twice in a month she had questioned signatures that had got past the tellers, and only day before yesterday she had spotted a raised check.

Ashley didn't dare risk it. Flight was his only possible escape; at least it seemed to be until still another idea leaped into his harassed brain. Desperate men think of desperate things, and he was thinking now that Mrs. Martha Kinsella wasn't leaving town until the seven o'clock train tomorrow morning. Tonight she would be practically alone in her big, rambling house out on Maple Avenue—alone with that fifteen hundred dollars in cash!

Eric Ashley caught his breath sharply, his nerves strained taut, vibrating like strands of tightly drawn wire.

"Yes!" he whispered. "That's my solution. The money to cover my shortage, and seven hundred over! Nobody could possibly suspect a fellow who's got a job in a bank turning housebreaker. This is my out!"

The more he turned it over in his mind, the simpler and safer the plan seemed to be. He decided to go through with it.

Eric Ashley lived in Lovelock's

boardinghouse out on Taft Street. On his way home from the bank a little after five o'clock, he caught up with Helen Hamlin, the pretty new school-teacher who taught first-year Latin in Queen City High. She was with Harry Dreen, and they too roomed with the Lovelocks.

Despite his preoccupation with the details of his desperate scheme of burglary, Eric felt a hot flush of resentment. He'd been getting along swell with Helen Hamlin until this Harry Dreen had pushed himself into the picture.

What the hell did she see in the fellow anyhow? Harry Dreen was a nobody, a kid of twenty-two or twenty-three who had drifted into Queen City, little better than a bum. A tramp printer who ran a linotype machine for the *Evening Standard*.

Nobody would call him handsome; his features were too rugged for that. He wore cheap clothes, didn't have a car, and never seemed to have any money to spend. Ashley couldn't understand why this gorgeous girl with the streamlined legs, auburn hair, beautiful eyes, and the most kissable mouth he had ever seen, should prefer the company of a common printer to that of a man who worked in a bank, wore tailored suits, and was willing to buy theater tickets.

For weeks Eric Ashley had detested Harry Dreen with a growing hatred which he was finding it difficult to conceal. Every time he sat down at the boardinghouse table with him, or passed him on the stairs, he had an almost uncontrollable impulse to smash Dreen's face.

Ashley steered his car over to the curb and braked to a stop. He considered himself a very natty figure in his Harris tweed topcoat, pigskin gloves, and rakish hat. Harry Dreen's overcoat was one of those

nondescript garments that are bought in bargain basements for fifteen dollars; the sleeves looked too short for his long arms.

"Hello, there!" sang out Eric Ashley. "How about giving you a lift home, Helen?" He was making it obvious that the invitation did not include Harry Dreen.

Helen Hamlin darted a quick glance up into Harry Dreen's face. The latter was smiling in tolerant amusement.

"Why, sure, Helen," he said, "go right ahead, if you like."

"Some people are so damn dumb they don't know when they're being insulted," thought Eric, and gave young Dreen a long, hard stare of withering contempt.

Helen Hamlin's face flushed. Her voice was crisply cool as she answered: "Thanks, Mr. Ashley, but we prefer to walk." There was the barest emphasis on the pronoun.

In a quick flare of temper Eric Ashley slammed in the gears and released the clutch with a violence that wouldn't do a car any good.

"So help me," he muttered as the roadster lurched forward, "I'm going to find a way to do something to that guy! He burns me up."

At dinner that night Ashley made it a point to laugh heartily at "Old Man" Matson's bum jokes, just to impress the others at the table that he didn't have a worry or a serious thought on his mind. After dinner some one suggested bridge and he played for a couple of hours, continuing his role of being the life of the party.

A little after ten he went up to his room and locked the door from the inside. In his trunk he dug around for an old suit which he no longer used for anything except to wear on an occasional fishing trip. It was pretty worn and shabby,

which exactly suited his purpose.

For the next thirty or forty minutes he experimented with a disguise and studied the effect in the mirror. With an old tweed cap and an improvised mask fastened across his face, he found it impossible to believe that anyone could possibly recognize him as the natty, dapper bank teller who worked for the Queen City National.

"Only one danger," Ashley told himself; "there's a bare chance I might be recognized on the street."

This possibility, however, did not greatly disturb him, for his mirror told him that when he pulled up the high collar of the worn gray sports sweater and yanked the deep visor of the cap over his eyes, his features would be practically unrecognizable in the night gloom of Queen City's none-too-well-lighted streets.

For another half hour he practiced a trick of hunching his shoulders and disguising his voice. He really began to take a vain delight in his masquerade, feeling himself a quite extraordinary fellow.

"Clever!" he exclaimed softly. "Damned clever, if I do say so myself!"

Then he held out his hands and looked at them, amazed to discover his nerves so steady. He gave a stare of appreciation at himself in the glass, grinning.

"I've got to hand it to you, Mr. Ashley; you've got more of that thing they call intestinal fortitude than I thought you had!"

Ashley killed more time, until the clock on his bureau marked fifteen minutes past one. The time was still a little earlier than he had originally planned, but he had now such a feeling of boldness and safety he decided to risk it.

"After all," he muttered, "this

burg is a nine o'clock town. Hell, they even lock up the bars before midnight!"

He switched out the lights within his room and carrying his shoes in his hand to put them on just before slipping out of the house, started creeping cautiously down the stairs. The Lovelock boarding house was wrapped in slumber. The stair treads creaked faintly and the eeriness of the sound did something to his nerves. His hands wouldn't have been so steady if he had looked at them now.

Reaching the bottom landing, he sat down on the last step, put on his shoes, and slipped his hands into a pair of gloves. Then he opened the vestibule door onto the front porch, and it was all he could do to check the outcry of dismay that sprang to his lips.

The whole plan was knocked into a cocked hat. Spoiled, finished! It didn't have a chance.

Upstairs in his room, with the window shades drawn to the bottom of the sashes, he hadn't known that snow had fallen. Snow seldom fell in Queen City so early in November, and it gave him a suddenly terrified feeling that the very forces of nature were in league against him.

The snow had stopped now, but a white carpet covered the ground to a depth of a full inch—a wet, clinging mass of the stuff that would take and hold a man's footprint like a matrix. The very emptiness of the residential streets—the thing he had counted on for safety—made it certain that his own tracks would stand out in a clear trail for the police to follow, straight from the boardinghouse to Mrs. Kinsella's and back to the Lovelock boardinghouse again!

His shoes would fit those tracks, and he would be hopelessly trapped.

The scheme was all washed up.

Overwhelmed by this ironic calamity which had ruined his one and only chance of avoiding the desperate necessity for flight, he crept numbly back up the stairs. It was even too late to take another thousand dollars from the bank. A hopeless sense of futility crushed him down. Escape? How could there possibly be any escape when even the elements had joined in a conspiracy against him?

Harry Dreen's room adjoined his own; as Eric Ashley moved along the second floor hall, he heard the sound of the printer's heavy breathing on the other side of the door. It was more distinct because the door was not completely closed. Only yesterday Dreen had been complaining that the lock would not catch.

In his own despair, Ashley felt a fresh rage against Harry Dreen. He moved on toward his own room when something clicked in his mind. The complete unexpectedness of his inspiration jarred him to an abrupt stop, literally with one foot lifted in mid-air.

That inch of snow on the ground—it wasn't a conspiracy against him after all! It was made to order for him. A trail of footprints leading straight to Mrs. Kinsella's house, and straight back again—but they would not be his own; they would be Harry Dreen's!

Eric Ashley held his breath for an instant.

"Perfect!" he whispered. "Dreen's a stranger in this town. He came here down and out, little better than a bum. He's hard up as hell—his clothes show that. Nobody will believe he didn't take the money—especially if the police find some of it on him!"

The bank teller tiptoed back to the door of Harry Dreen's room, listened. He pushed the panel open a few inches. Enough illumination filtered in from the dimly lighted hall to reveal the linotype operator lying on his right side, his face to the wall.

It was the cheapest and smallest room in the house, and lacked closet space. That, perhaps, was why Harry Dreen had hung his clothes neatly across a chair when he had turned in. His shoes were on the floor beside the chair—worn shoes that told a story of more than one trip to the cobbler's for repairs.

Eric Ashley eased himself within the room. If Dreen awakened, he would say he had heard groans and thought he ought to find out what was wrong.

But Harry Dreen did not waken. Swiftly Ashley scooped up the clothes, including a fresh pair of socks, retreated into the hall and into his own room. Hurriedly he got into Dreen's things, all but the shoes. Again in his stockinged feet—they were Dreen's socks this time, for they must be damp when the police found them—he went a second time down the stairs, jerked on the shoes, and let himself out of the house.

The carpet of snow muffled his footsteps along the narrow driveway as he made his way to the Lovelock garage. The garage door made a little noise when he let himself inside. He easily found what he wanted, the broken section of an old automobile spring which Lovelock used as a tire iron to change the tires of his ancient car. Ashley could think of nothing better with which to pry open a stubborn window.

With the tire iron hugged under his coat, he made his way back to

the street, and walked very fast over to Maple Avenue. He kept looking behind, laughing a little hysterically under his breath to see what a fine trail of footprints Harry Dreen's patched old shoes made in the snow.

"This will take care of you, Mr. Dreen!" he thought. "It'll take care of you for the next five years!"

Mrs. Martha Kinsella's house stood at the corner of Maple and High, a big, roomy place, built in the days of large families and visiting relatives. It was forty or fifty feet back from the street.

Eric Ashley squeezed himself through the hedge, pausing long enough to let one of the hedge thorns snag Dreen's coat and snare a fragment of the cloth.

"You'll never get out of this, Mr. Dreen!" he exulted.

Eric Ashley had been at the Kinsella house many times. In his childhood he had played with the Kinsella boys. They had all married and moved away now.

He slipped around to the back of the house. His feet had begun to feel cold from the moisture of the melting snow which leaked in through Harry Dreen's shoes.

The kitchen window, easily reached from the back stoop, was the one Eric Ashley picked. Using the tire iron as a jimmy, he forced up the sash, and the snapping of the lock made much less noise than he had expected. He began to have a very good opinion of himself as a burglar.

The Kinsella house being familiar, the housebreaking bank teller had no difficulty in finding his way. The furniture seemed to be in exactly the same place as it had always been.

At the bottom of the stairs he paused, tied his homemade mask across his face, then moved stealthily on up the carpeted steps, the tire

iron gripped in his right hand. It made a formidable weapon; a heavy blow with a piece of steel like this could split open a skull.

Ashley knew too where Mrs. Kinsella's bedroom would be. The door was wide open and so was one of the windows. Mrs. Kinsella believed in getting plenty of fresh air.

For just an instant Eric Ashley's desperate courage threatened to desert him; his mouth felt suddenly dry and his knees weak and wobbly.

Suppose his disguise wasn't so good as he thought and Mrs. Kinsella *did* recognize him? Then conceit in his own cleverness, and the realization that he must either go through with the burglary or take the consequences, pulled him out of his funk.

He went on within the room, gently closed the door, and snapped on a light—the farthest one from the bed, to keep himself in the shadows as much as possible.

Mrs. Kinsella stirred, muttered in her sleep. Eric Ashley hunched his shoulders, moved toward the bed, and prodded the woman with the end of the tire iron. He attempted his best possible imitation of a thug as he growled:

"Snap out of it, lady; you and me has got some business together."

Mrs. Kinsella's eyes opened, remained glazed with sleep for an instant, and then bulged wide with astonishment and alarm. Her mouth filled to let out a scream.

"Keep your trap shut, and nobody gets hurt," rasped Eric Ashley. "But one yelp outta you, see, and I bash your head in—with this." He made a threatening gesture with the tire iron.

Mrs. Kinsella did not scream.

"Where's the dough, lady—that big wad of kale I seen you takin' outta the bank this afternoon?"

Come on now! Where you got it?"

"I—I don't know what you mean," whispered Mrs. Kinsella. "I——"

"Cut out the stalling," snarled Ashley. "Where's that fifteen hundred bucks? Or have I gotta give you a good smack with this little persuader?"

Most of the fear vanished from Mrs. Kinsella's eyes, lost in a bewildered expression. Then her terror was gone entirely.

"Eric Ashley!" she gasped incredulously. "What on earth does this mean? Why are you pretending to be a burglar? Or maybe—maybe you're *not* pretending! Still I can't believe——"

Ashley thought she had recognized his voice; he didn't know that his mistake had been to mention the amount of money Mrs. Kinsella had drawn from the bank, and that her wits had been quick enough to remember that only she and Eric Ashley had seen the amount of the check she had cashed.

All Eric Ashley knew was that he was trapped, and that now only one thing could save him—the eternal silence of this woman who knew who he was and why he was here. Perhaps, if he'd had a little more time to think, his hand would have stayed, but panic was hard upon him, and his hand, gripping the tire iron, lifted.

Mrs. Kinsella saw the expression in his eyes; she knew what it meant. Her shrill scream stabbed out wildly through the night's stillness.

"Wait! Eric, wait!"

But Eric Ashley had got in too deep to wait. The two-foot length of tempered steel crashed down and struck. What had been a case of embezzlement was now a matter of murder.

It wasn't pleasant to look at. Ashley reeled back, sick and faint, grop-

ing for the door. He was halfway out into the hall before he remembered that he hadn't got what he had come for—the fifteen hundred dollars.

He forced himself back into the room, began to search. Mrs. Kinsella's handbag was in the second drawer of the dresser, in plain sight. Jerking open the clasp, he groped in his hand, found the money, stuffed it into the outside pocket of Harry Dreen's coat.

Racing down the stairs an instant later, he heard Mrs. Kinsella's maid who slept on the third floor, running for the stairs. He got out of the house before she had a chance to see him.

Pursuit, he knew, would not be far behind. His trail of footprints would lead the police straight to Lovelock's boardinghouse.

On his way back, Ashley cut across a vacant lot to save time, tumbling into a shallow gully that had about a foot of water in it, and got soaking wet, halfway to his knees.

That was all right; they were Harry Dreen's clothes, and the more evidence against Harry Dreen, so much safer it would be for himself.

Eric Ashley reached the boardinghouse, let himself in with his key, and was taking off the wet shoes when he realized he had the money on him—evidence that would doom him to the electric chair if it was found in his possession.

"Where can I hide it?" he whispered thickly. "Not anywhere out of doors; the footprints in the snow will lead the police to any place I go. It's got to be cached somewhere inside the house!"

For an instant, in his terror, he thought it might be the safest thing to leave all the money in Harry Dreen's room—and take the conse-

quences for his shortage at the bank.

But he didn't dare to do that either. Discovery of his embezzlement, Mrs. Kinsella's check the proof he knew she had the money, would put him under instant suspicion.

Eric Ashley stood for a frantic moment, not knowing what to do. Then, because he had to do something, he crept into the dark living room to his left, groped his way toward the old-fashioned bay window where Mrs. Lovelock kept some potted plants. The breath pumping in and out of his lungs in hissing jets of sound, he clawed a hole with his gloved fingers into the dirt of a wooden bucket of ferns, put the money there, and patted the dirt back in place.

He would have preferred a more ingenious concealment, but, in his extremity, with the minutes rushing past and time so important and his mind in a frightened daze, it was the best he could do.

The house still slept soundly as he went up the stairs. In his room, without turning on a light, he stripped off Harry Dreen's clothes with shaking fingers that fumbled with every button, put on his pajamas, then crept back into the hall.

Harry Dreen seemed not to have moved, although he wasn't breathing so heavily now. Ashley put the clothes back on the chair. One of the shoes slipped out of his hand and struck the floor with a loud thump. The bed springs creaked a little as Harry Dreen moved, his sleep disturbed by the sound.

But, to Eric Ashley's relief, the linotype operator did not awaken, and Eric tiptoed in his bare feet out into the hall and back into his own room where he crawled into bed, still without having turned on a light. For a few moments he lay

there, trembling and shivering with dread over the thought there might be something he had overlooked, some detail that wasn't perfect.

Murder! He had committed murder! He kept seeing Mrs. Kinsella, who had given him cookies when he was a kid and had spoken a good word for him when he applied for the job at the bank, with her face all covered with blood. Her scream kept echoing in his mind.

Some of the horror passed; some of the fear was allayed by his confidence that all the suspicion would focus on Harry Dreen.

"Can't let myself go to pieces," he whispered through dry lips which kept sticking together. "Mustn't let anybody see I'm afraid."

The waiting was longer than he had expected, or perhaps it only seemed longer. Presently he heard the sounds he had been listening for—gruff voices, men walking. Hurrying!

Shoes pounded on the porch of the boardinghouse. The front doorbell rang with loud and prolonged persistence. Grumbling drowsily, old Lovelock went padding down the stairs, carpet slippers flapping.

Eric Dreen recognized the rumbling voice of Sam Harker, the Queen City chief of police. Fragments of sentences reached Eric Ashley's straining ears:

"Mrs. Kinsella—murder—trailed the killer here."

"Pop" Lovelock's voice, bewildered and shocked, raised in horrified protest. "Must be some mistake, chief."

Chief Harker replied: "Sure there's been a mistake—the kind murderers always make. This one is dumber'n hell—leaving a clear trail of footprints in the snow, straight from the Kinsella house to here. Damned if I ever *did* see anything as dumb as that."

Pop Lovelock muttered something again, insisting it couldn't be possible that anybody who lived under his respectable roof could be guilty of such a hideous thing.

"These footprints were made by a man's shoes," Chief Harker said. "How many men you got boarding with you now, Pop?"

"Only—only two," gulped Lovelock. "Eric Ashley, who works in the bank, and Harry Dreen."

"Couldn't hardly be Eric Ashley," rumbled the police chief. "There was robbery done too. If Eric was of a mind to steal, he could get a hell of a lot more from the bank than he'd find in a woman's purse."

Eric Ashley felt a great relief. That was the way he'd had it figured in the first place—because he worked in a bank he was free of suspicion as a housebreaker.

"This other one—Dreen," the chief's voice went on. "What do you know about him?"

Pop Lovelock told what he knew about Harry Dreen. It wasn't much.

"He's always *seemed* to be a nice enough feller," said Pop.

"Take me upstairs and show me which is his room," ordered Chief Harker. "Ought to be easy enough to tell if he's the guilty man."

Harker and Lovelock were coming up the stairs. Two other men trailed along behind. Harker pushed open the door of Harry Dreen's room, groped for the light, snapped it on.

Harry Dreen sat up in bed, startled and blinking.

"What's the matter?" he blurted.

Chief Harker's eyes were hard, his mouth grim as he took one broad stride across the narrow room and picked up Dreen's clothes from the

chair. He knew that the legs of the trousers would be soaking wet, even before he touched them with his hand. He stooped down for the shoes; the worn leather was limp from immersion. Then he lifted one of the socks, dangled it in mid-air; a few drops of dark-colored water dripped down on the floor.

Harry Dreen continued to stare. "What is all this?" he demanded. "What's happened to my clothes?"

Pop Lovelock shook his head sadly. "Looks like he done it, all right," he said.

"Stupidest piece of bungling I ever saw," growled the police chief. "How he thought he was going to get away with it, I don't know."

Harry Dreen flung back the bed-covers and swung his legs down onto the floor.

"What is all this about anyhow?" he demanded a second time. "It seems I've got a right to know—"

Chief Harker didn't waste any time. A pair of handcuffs clinked in his hand. Swiftly he leaned forward and snapped them firmly about Harry Dreen's wrists, almost before the latter could anticipate what was happening.

"No use bluffing, Dreen, and how you could have been fool enough to think you could get away with it, is beyond me. The trail of footprints you left for us to follow in the snow—"

"Snow?" repeated Harry Dreen.

"Maybe you figured it would all be melted off the ground before daylight," rasped Chief Harker. "Maybe you didn't know Mrs. Kinsella's maid would hear the woman scream when you broke her skull open with that tire iron, and would get the police station on the telephone within less than five minutes

—and maybe you're just a plain, crazy damn fool who needed some money mighty bad and was willing to commit murder to get it."

Harry Dreen looked at his handcuffed wrists; he looked at his wet clothes, the water-soaked shoes. In a dull, dazed, bewildered way he must have realized the seriousness of his predicament. He stood up in his worn, faded pajamas, his face gone a dead white. The links of the handcuffs jingled as he moved his arms.

"I don't know anybody named Kinsella!" he shouted. "I haven't been outside this house since nine o'clock tonight. I don't know who's trying to pin murder on me, but it's certainly clear that somebody sneaked in here, got my clothes, and is trying to frame me!"

The boardinghouse had been startled awake. Doors were being opened, heads thrust out into the hall. In the adjoining room, Eric Ashley decided that he had better bestir himself also. It might look peculiar if he remained too long without making an appearance. He got out of bed, turned on a light, and slipped into his dressing gown. He almost collided with Helen Hamlin as he rushed out into the hall.

"What is it?" he demanded. "What's all the excitement about? Is the house on fire?"

"I—I don't know," Helen Hamlin answered uncertainly. "I heard—I heard the word—'murder,' and there seems——" They were now outside Harry Dreen's door, and her eyes caught a glimpse of police uniforms. "Yes, it's the police."

Chief of Police Harker had grabbed Harry Dreen roughly by the shoulders and shoved him back down upon the bed.

"You killed that woman, Dreen!"

he roared. "You smashed her head in with a piece of automobile spring! You got that piece of spring out of Pop Lovelock's garage; your footprints go from the house to the garage—and straight from the garage to Mrs. Kinsella's house.

"You jimmed open the kitchen window, went upstairs and killed her in cold blood when she woke up and found you rummaging in her bedroom."

Helen Hamlin screamed. "No, No!" she cried. "It's not true; it couldn't be true!"

Harry Dreen would have been an unusual young man if he hadn't been frightened. His hands were trembling a little.

"Thank you, Helen," he said thickly. "I didn't do it. Somebody has tried to make it look——"

Chief Harker caught a glimpse of Eric Ashley standing in the doorway.

"You, Ashley, come on in here. You sleep on this floor, eh?"

Eric Ashley nodded. "Yes," he answered, "mine is the next room to Dreen's."

"Did you happen to hear Dreen moving about a little while ago—coming in, say, about thirty minutes before we got here?"

For the barest instant Ashley hesitated. His first impulse was to tie Harry Dreen up just so much more tightly by saying that he had heard Dreen come in, but he thought it might look better if he showed no eagerness to clinch the fellow's guilt.

"I'm a pretty sound sleeper, chief; I didn't hear anything until a moment or two ago when all this racket woke me up."

Chief Harker shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I was hoping maybe

you did, Eric, but it doesn't make much difference either way. The evidence we've got here——"

He poked at the clothes, suddenly frowned, looking down at his hands. There was a bluish stain on his fingers. He looked at Harry Dreen's bare feet, and the frown deepened.

"Humph!" he grunted. "That's queer!"

Eric Ashley, for no reason he could name, felt a quick tingle of uneasiness. He knew that Chief Harker was looking now at *his* bare feet; he hadn't stopped to put on his slippers.

"What's queer, chief?" he blurted.

Chief of Police Harker picked up one of Harry Dreen's dripping socks, squeezed it between his fingers. A trickle of darkly discolored water oozed out, left a bluish-black stain upon his hand.

"Yeah," he growled, "that's where it came from, all right. Must be just about the cheapest pair of socks a man can buy—for the color to run in *cold* water.

"What's queer about it, Eric? The queer thing is that Dreen hasn't got any of them dye stains on his feet—and that *you* have!"

Eric Ashley looked down at his bare feet. Both of them had the same discoloration that was on the

police chief's hands—the cheap dye from Harry Dreen's socks! It was sufficient proof for anybody that Eric Ashley had worn them tonight.

The room seemed to be mounted on an axis, spinning crazily about him. His temples were pounding with a rush of blood to his head, a thousand explosions were inside his brain.

Through a mist he saw Chief Harker taking the handcuffs from Harry Dreen; Eric knew that in another moment they would be on his own wrists.

He knew they were going to arrest him—now. There wouldn't be any chance to get the money from the bucket of ferns. Tomorrow morning the bank examiners would discover his shortage, Chief Harker would find out he had cashed Mrs. Kinsella's check for fifteen hundred dollars. It would all be clear. There was no possible hope of escape.

The room whirled faster. In a crazy confusion of mental pictures he saw Mrs. Kinsella with the blood gushing down her face; he thought he heard her screaming again.

But the scream which rang in his ears was his own. It was the cry of a man who knows that he is damned beyond hope.



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HUNCH PLAYER

BY RICHARD WORMSER

CHAPTER I.

A MODEL AND A MURDER.

SERGEANT KEEN and Lieutenant McIntyre, with a little assistance from Detective Blair, were giving the works to Jim Lekton when it all started. Keen was urging a case on Lekton; he was saying: "So if you'd take this job on a contingent fee, Jim, I think maybe I could talk the woman into giving it to you."

"Sure," McIntyre said. "It's good dough for a rising young private detective. A five-dollar dog's lost, and you oughta be able to get him back in two days. The woman'll

give you half the price of the dog, and a dollar and a quarter a day ain't bad pay, Jim."

"Not bad at all," Blair threw in. "And just think; next time she might lose a ten-dollar dog."

"G'wan," Jim said good-naturedly. "Hang the razz on me. Have a good time. And when I quit on my income, you guys'll still be working for the city, and shaving twice a day so the civil service won't know you got white whiskers."

Keen pretended to be hurt. "Is that any way to talk, Jim? When we're trying to throw a case your way? Well, that's the way it is, men. A guy quits the force, and right



JIM LEKTON KICKED OVER THE TABLE. FRITZ HAD A GUN OUT,
FRITZ WAS SHOOTING—

away he's too good for his old pals."

"No fooling, Jim," Blair began. "Have you had a case yet? I mean one that pays——"

He broke off. He even took his hat from the back of his bald head and held it in his hand. McIntyre straightened up on his high bench, and quietly pulled his blouse straight. Keen fiddled importantly with the wires on his switchboard.

Because a girl had come in. Not the sort of woman you might expect in a station house at one in the morning, but an elegant girl, a gorgeous girl, a girl in a red velvet evening dress that swirled and swayed to show very fine ankles in five-dollar hose. A little fur jacket that was white, but was definitely not rabbit, clung around her shoulders.

Jim Lekton looked, and said to DS—6

himself: "Model." Because she had the funny, swaying walk that the girls used in news reels. Not a natural walk, but a walk that was meant to call attention to the walker and to the clothes she wore; well-bred attention.

She walked her way to the desk, and stopped.

"Are you in charge here?" she asked McIntyre.

"Yes, ma'am." The old boy was a little fussed. "Lieutenant McIntyre, ma'am."

Her voice was very cultured, a little tired. There was not a hair out of place on her head. "My escort just died," she said. "In the taxicab."

Blair put his hat on. McIntyre slumped forward on the desk. Keen forgot to play with the wires.

Jim Lekton watched them, and he watched the girl, too. This was a new one. This was a honey.

McIntyre was asking: "You're sure he's dead?"

"Oh, yes," the girl said. "Quite. He doesn't breathe, and he is getting cold. Those are the signs, aren't they? Oh, yes, and he is a little stiff. Rigor mortis, that's called, I think." She did not seem bored; just matter-of-fact. A man was dead, so you dropped him off at the police station on the way home. If you had a thirst, you went to a bar; if you wanted cigarettes, you went to the cigar store; if you had a corpse, you took it to a police station.

McIntyre dry-washed his hands, and said: "Mr. Blair, here, is the detective in charge."

Blair gulped, and said: "Yeah, yeah. The—the cab's outside?"

She nodded.

Blair tried to put on a hat that was already on, and started for the door.

It was none of Jim Lekton's business, but he was interested. "How come you came in, and not the cab driver?"

"He disappeared," the girl said. "I went into the Game Pit to cash a check, and when I came out, the driver was gone and my escort was dead. Poisoned, I imagine. There was a peculiar odor in the car."

Blair, in the front doorway, stopped. "How'd you get here?"

"Why," the girl drawled, "I drove the cab. I mean, one is supposed to report to the police at once, isn't one?"

"Yeah, yeah." The detective banged through the front door.

Jim Lekton suddenly said, "Hi!" and stepped behind the girl, putting up his arms. He was just in time; she had fainted. He stood there,

holding her, looking around helplessly.

McIntyre snapped out of his fog, and said: "In here." He slipped off the bench, held the door open to the corridor; there was a big waiting room there, with a tremendous table in the middle of it.

Lekton hoisted the girl in his arms, carried her in, and put her on the table. McIntyre trotted for a glass of water. Bringing it up, he said:

"She—she seemed to be going fine."

"Training," Jim said, bringing out a handkerchief and wiping the girl's forehead. "She's an actress or something. Was so scared she—well, sort of forced herself to talk that way. Scared me."

"Scared you?" McIntyre said, rubbing the girl's wrists. "Huh! I was so pop-eyed frightened at that cold way she talked that I nearly fell off the desk. Hi! She's wakin' up."

The girl's eyes fluttered, and she whispered: "I'm—I'm all right."

"Take it easy, kid," Jim Lekton said.

Blair slammed down the corridor from the back of the house, saw them, and stuck his head in. "Dead, O. K. Prussic acid, from the smell. I gotta— What happened to the dame?"

"She fainted," McIntyre said. "What'd you do with the cab?"

"Ran it around into the garage. I gotta phone headquarters." Blair went into the front room.

"She's saying something," Jim said. "Shut up, Mac."

The girl whispered: "I'm so—tired. Could I lay here for a minute?"

Jim said: "Sure, sure. Just lie still." He stole a glance at McIntyre; the lieutenant, no grammarian at best, hadn't noticed anything.

McIntyre said: "That dope Blair'll forget to have them pick up the cab driver. I better go tell him." He slammed out, too.

Jim Lekton frowned, and then got the girl's gold mesh bag. He opened it. It contained: an enamel cigarette case; a lipstick and compact to match the cigarette case; three cards, saying the "Jaybella Clothing Co.," and an address in the garment district; and an unpaid light bill for eight dollars, made out to Leah Sturdevant, 1232 Longvue Boulevard.

McIntyre was evidently telling Blair how to be a detective; at least neither of them could be heard outside. Jim Lekton looked at the girl's lovely smooth face, and pocketed the light bill. A lot of things were coming clear to him.

The girl moved again, and he said: "Are you comfortable, lady?"

Her eyelids fluttered. Her eyes were the darkest brown he had ever seen.

"I'll—I'll get up in a second. Are you arresting me?"

He stole another glance at the door. "I'm not a cop," he said quickly. "Just a private dick. They may arrest you; they've sent for the homicide squad and those headquarters dicks are tough."

"I couldn't pay you now," she said. "But if you'd help me——"

He hadn't meant to. There was no money in this; the whole thing was too plain to him. A model for a clothing house, an out-of-town buyer, who might pay the light bill for an evening's entertainment; private detective agencies don't grow on that set-up.

He started to say no, and heard himself saying: "Yes, if you'll tell me the truth. Did you kill him?"

"No. I swear it. But I can't get drug into——"

"I know. Only, for Pete's sake,

watch your English. That's the second mistake you've made. Watch your English, and don't tell them who you are, and——"

Blair came back in. "O. K., lady. She said anything yet, Jim?"

Lekton said: "No. She asked for water once."

The girl tried to sit up, fluttered. Jim carefully maneuvered Blair so the precinct detective was the one who helped the lovely lady to sit up; it was a little funny to see fat, middle-aged Blair getting red in the face because he had his arm around her shoulders, because her head rested on his chest.

A little funny, but very serious. Because the girl's sex appeal and her manner were all that stood between her and prison. He was sure of it, with nothing at all to go on except those two mistakes in grammar. Lay and drug, used in the wrong places. Funny thing to use to construct a whole series of future events on.

Blair was talking. "Now, little lady, we just want to know. Who was this guy?"

"I—I don't know. Just Mr. Farber, that's all I know."

"You was out with him, and you don't know who he was?" Blair was still gentle, but getting tougher. "A nice girl like you, out with a fella you didn't know." He clucked.

Miss Sturdevant shook her head, and big, round tears crept out on those smooth cheeks. "I——"

Blair said: "Now look, lady; come across. Mebbe it wasn't murder, mebbe he just had a weak pump, and see, it wouldn't never have to get into the newspapers——"

Outside, Jim Lekton heard the cars coming into the back yard. The homicide squad cars. Yeah, mebbe it wasn't murder. An accident, maybe. Mr. Farber might have

thought he was a butterfly, and attempted to preserve himself for a collection.

Yeah, maybe. Yes, mebbe.

He lighted a cigarette, and watched old Blair go around and around in circles, like a cow with her tail tied to her horns. Go around and get no place, except red in the face.

The girl was clever. Clever, and an actress. And he was a sap to take this case for no reason that he could put his finger on. Not for money, because if his theory was right, Leah Sturdevant—a phony name, no doubt—had no money. Not for love, because he knew plenty of pretty girls.

Maybe just for the experience. Jim Lekton, the student.

Darrsel, of the homicide squad, stuck his head in the door, said: "Lo, Blair. Poisoning all right—potassium cyanide. This the little lady?"

Blair nodded. Then he looked wise and motioned Darrsel out of the room. Jim Lekton winked at the girl and followed them.

Blair shut the door carefully and said: "Lissen, Darsie. This is some society dame, out with a pick-up for a good time. See? Now, the dame don't want to give her name, and that's O. K. with me."

"How come?" Darrsel asked. "Ten to one she done it."

"Sure," said Blair. Remembering Blair's arm around the girl, Blair's fatherly manner, Jim Lekton was a little amazed that he had ever been a cop himself. "Sure she done it. Only, look. She's got dough. Once she has to tell us who she is, she'll get one of them expensive lawyers down here. We don't insist on her name, and she'll give us all night to work on her without a mouth-piece."

"Something in that," Darrsel said, stuffing his mouth with chewing tobacco. "Yeah, I'll ask the skipper. That ought to be all right." Suddenly he saw Jim Lekton, and said: "Whatchu doin' here? You ain't a cop no more, are you?"

"That's right," Blair said. "Scram, Jim."

Jim Lekton scrambled.

CHAPTER II.

TWO TOUGH MEN.

HE had one theory of the girl and of the case, and the cops had another. Their theory was that the girl was a débutante who had been having an affair with a man unknown to her parents, and the man had tried to blackmail her. So she killed him.

Jim's theory was that she was a model who had simply entertained an out-of-town buyer. And the killing had nothing to do with the dress business.

His theory had started with her walk. He had seen rich women, and they didn't walk like models, or like rich girls in movies. They just walked. This girl hadn't.

Then when he had opened her bag and seen the bill and the business cards, he had known he was right, about the first step, anyway.

Maybe it was because he had been right that he had gone ahead. Maybe that had flattered him into it.

He stopped at the first corner and bought a paper. His theory was going to get tested right now. He looked for the column, "Arrival of Buyers," in the commercial section, ran through it, and found that Lester Farber was staying at the Lincoln. Pat. Too pat. A man couldn't be right all the time.

He caught a surface car for the Lincoln because taxis were beyond

him. He had resigned from the force three months ago, with the grand saved up. It was going fast supporting a license and an agency that had no customers.

It was after two when he slouched into the Lincoln. Three old women scrubbed the lobby floor, and the desk clerk was asleep with his eyes open. But buyers don't court privacy. They want to see as many clothing salesmen as possible while in town. There was a big board—this was a commercial hotel—and one of the thirty names on it said: "Lester Farber, the Busy Bee," and then the name of the Western city in which Farber conducted his store. And opposite all that, the room number, 203.

Still without waking the clerk or arousing the interest of the three scrub women, Jim Lekton climbed to the mezzanine. No. 203 was locked, but hotel locks were no great problem; in a couple of minutes he was inside the living room of the suite.

He switched on the light, tossed his hat on a table, and stood, hands on hips, looking the place over. A long table, where salesmen could lay out their stuff. Easy-chairs. A file of letters.

He tried the file first, looked up the Jaybella Clothing Co. Yeah, here. Mr. Farber was on friendly terms with Mr. Jacob Errin of the Jaybella company. His letters—there were carbons—all ended "with love to Bella."

Ordinary correspondence. "Could use a gross more of the No. 32 \$10.75 if your terms are satis—"

"Have you anything in your line like a suit, sort of a sports—"

Boloney. Here was a letter that told "Dear Jake" that Lester would be in the city next week, and was looking forward to some of Bella's

rinderbrust. Whatever that was.

Jim Lekton pushed the files away and walked around the room whistling.

The door to the bedroom popped open and a head stuck out. Jim drew gun before he thought.

The mouth under the tousled hair said: "What is this, a circus? Or are you selling dresses this hour the night?"

"House detective," Jim said smoothly. "You left your front door unlocked. I was looking over the place to see if anything was missing before I woke you, Mr. Farber."

"Diamonds I'm not selling," Farber said. "But wait, I look at my wallet; it was under my pillow."

He went and came back into the light with the wallet. There was money in it, but Jim, staring over the man's shoulder, didn't bother with that. There were identification cards, too, one with a photograph. This was Lester Farber. Wrong note.

Jim apologized, got out, not exactly sure what to do next.

So the dead man was not Mr. Farber, but Leah Sturdevant had said he was. Jim fished out the light bill and studied it. Might as well go see Miss Sturdevant's place of abode, but there wouldn't be anything there. There wouldn't be anything any place, and Jim Lekton was a sucker to try.

He walked. Up a hill behind the hotel, to the district known as the Heights. Along a parapeted walk there, with street lights making rectangular lines below him. He stopped for a moment and looked down. From here, at this time of night, the city looked like a honeycomb. Only there had been mighty little honey in it for Jim Lekton.

He sighed and turned his thin coat collar up around his neck. Anyway,

this was better than just doing nothing except sit in his office and read.

He turned in from the Promenade, and went through streets—some going uphill, some going down—that got progressively worse. Until he came to Leah Sturdevant's address.

The walk-up apartment in which the girl received her gas bills was a determined attempt to appear classy without expense. Lots of metal strips on plasterboard walls. White metal mail boxes instead of brass. Bad modern decorations.

He worked the front door lock without resistance. Any door that must open to a half hundred keys will open to the fifty-first.

But Leah Sturdevant's door was a little harder. A lot harder. He tried it with everything he had, and then started for the hall window and a fire escape. And supposing some patrolman heard him and turned a light up? Good-by, little license. You never did me much good, anyway.

He was sliding the hall window open as quietly as he could when a voice behind him said:

"Hold it. Just like you are."

He held it. His hands were against the window sill, in plain sight.

A man came down the hall behind him without any noise at all, and took Jim Lekton's gun. Then he said:

"O. K., turn around and come on."

In the dim hall light, the man was Moe McCall, known as "Gumshoe," a two-time loser, holdup man, and occasional loft robber.

Lekton said: "O. K., Gumshoe. Where are we heading?"

Gumshoe said: "You know, copper. Back into the girl's apartment."

Jim Lekton gave a wink that meant anything or nothing, and meekly followed Gumshoe back to

Leah Sturdevant's apartment.

Gumshoe stopped at the door, called: "O. K., Fritz, we're coming in," and opened the door. They went in together, and there was a brief moment when Jim might have made a play for Gumshoe's gun, but Fritz Lieber was sitting across the room, watching them. And Fritz's record was about like Gumshoe's, only Fritz was known to be tougher.

Jim said: "Welcome home, boys. I thought you two were on the lam." He lounged over to a day bed, and sat down, leaning on one elbow, crossing his legs.

"Wise guy," said Fritz.

Jim paid no attention. "Nice place you got here, boys. Shows the woman's touch. Where did you two plug-uglies get a dame to take care of you?"

He kept his face casual, his glances indirect, but he thought maybe he had scored. A little puzzlement passed from one mug to the other.

Jim stretched, and the guns in the mugs' hands moved. "All right, boys. The skipper's waiting downstairs for you. Hand over your guns, and I won't tell any one you were carrying them."

"Listen, copper——" Gumshoe began.

Fritz said harshly: "He ain't a cop. He quit the force months ago."

Jim Lekton sighed. The bluff hadn't worked, not at all. He had taken his cue from Gumshoe's mistake, but Fritz was not only tougher, he was smarter, and he read the newspapers.

"You're a private dick," Fritz said. "So—who you working for?"

Jim grinned. "That would be violating my personal code of ethics."

Fritz Lieber swore, and came across the room on his heavy, bowed legs.

"You cut it out," he said bitterly.

"Cut out them long words. You think we're fooling, you rat?"

Gumshoe yelled: "Easy, Fritz," but it was too late. The barrel of Fritz's gun slashed at Jim Lekton's jaw, yellow lights broke across Jim's eyes, and his head rocked. He had a vague idea he was flying, and then he picked himself up off the floor, while blood began to drip down on his topcoat shoulder.

"Thanks, Fritz," he said quietly. The words came out with difficulty; his jaw felt as though it had been torn loose at the roots. "I'll remember that when I make my pinch."

Fritz leaned forward from the chair he had resumed. There was no apology in his voice. "That's to show you we ain't fooling. Who you working for?"

Jim Lekton felt the cut on his jaw gingerly. "I guess you're not fooling," he said slowly. "I guess not. Listen. If I told you the truth, would you believe it?"

Fritz said: "Try it. It wouldn't sound funny from a guy that used to be a cop."

"All right. This girl you're waiting for came into the station house to-night. The Fourth Precinct. She said the guy with her was dead. Poisoned. I took the case on blind, because I'm broke, and because her clothes looked like money."

Gumshoe laughed. "That's where you was wrong. She's——"

"Shut up, Gumshoe," Fritz snapped. "What'd she say the guy was?"

"A Mr. Farber," Jim Lekton said. "A dress buyer."

Fritz said: "O. K."

Jim Lekton should have expected it. He should have known. But maybe the pistol whipping had made him foggy. He realized, as Gumshoe's gun cracked on his hat, that

this was next. But it was too late, then.

He was out.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNCH.

SOME men are tougher than others. Jim Lekton was tough, as hard as nails. Thus, he was walking around the apartment, walking around in circles, minutes before he was conscious again. There was enough in him to pull his legs together, get him up, start him moving, without the conscious part of his brain knowing what he was doing.

When he found out, he stopped walking and dropped into the chair that Fritz had used. His head felt terrible. The rest of him didn't feel very good. His topcoat was a mess and there was a hole in his hat.

He wandered around till he found the door that led to the bathroom—first starting into a closet, a kitchenette, and the hall—and took three aspirin tablets. They couldn't do much harm. Afterward he found some gin in the kitchenette, and took a slug of it. It couldn't do much good.

When the gin and the aspirin quit fighting for the possession of his interior, he prowled the one-room flat, looking for anything at all that might give him a clue.

Movie magazines, clothes, an old Sunday newspaper, hats, a pamphlet on the "Care of the Complexion," shoes, a fifty-cent fashion magazine, and a letter in a prison envelope.

He backed up to the day bed and turned the letter over in his hands. Not because he was reticent about opening other people's mail, but because this had to be a clue to whatever was going on. Had to be. It was the only chance he had.

He opened it, and it started "Dear Sis," and he began to have hope.

Dear Sis:

So things ain't as bad as I thought. I am in the kitchen now and it is better than the broomshop, at least you get plenty to eat. Chow is plain but not cooked dirty like the cons say, we have to wash our hands before we even peel potatoes.

If you see G. and F. you know who I mean—

Here the prison censor had taken a razor blade and cut out a paragraph. The letter ended:

So I will be out in ten months and glad to see you but not some other people except like I say

Your loving brother
Joe.

Jim Lekton hoped that he was thinking straight. G. was for Gumshoe and F. was for Fritz, and from the last line—which the censor had not been smart enough to cut—when Joe got out of prison, he was going to fix Gumshoe and Fritz. A good job, too.

Lekton put the letter in his pocket, and stood up. He had to lean against the wall for a moment to stop his head from going around, but it stopped, and he went and got the book on "Care of the Complexion." It said Leah Rosow, 314 Sturdevant Street.

That was where she had got the elegant name she had used when her brother was sent up, and she became a model. Rosow, Joe Rosow. Yeah, a year and a day for loft robbery. Offered clemency by the district attorney because of his youth and his clean record—if he would tell the names of his confederates and the whereabouts of the money that had been in the loft safe. Caught because he had given a piece of the stolen silk to a neighbor who'd just had a baby.

Being a dick in a small city had its drawbacks when it came to getting clients, but it was all right when it came to remembering major crimes.

What Jim Lekton would have called a hunch or a more educated man have called deduction began to crawl around in his head.

Joe Rosow hated Gumshoe and Fritz. His sister would know about that. They had got the kid to take the rap, and then run out on him. So there would be only one thing that would make Leah Rosow of Sturdevant Street have anything to do with the two mugs.

Getting Joe out of prison was the answer. So Mr. Farber, miscalled, was the one who was going to engineer either a break or a pardon, and the mugs had left Leah the hard job of contacting him.

Jim Lekton left the apartment, still unsteady on his heels. He walked to a trolley track; there were waiting booths all along the tracks, and they had phones in them.

Leah of Sturdevant, Leah van Sturdevant, Leah de Sturdevant. He must tell the girl all the elegant combinations he had thought out for her name.

Leah de la Rue Sturdevant. That was hot. That was fine.

The cold wind found its way through his torn hat and gnawed at the bump Gumshoe had given him. His heels beat a little tattoo on the pavement.

He found a booth, dropped in a nickel, sighing at the expenditure. "Police Headquarters." Citizens ought to be allowed to call the police for nothing. He put a handkerchief over the mouthpiece, talked out of the corner of his mouth. "If youse guys wanta know somethin' about that Farber kill, you pick up Gumshoe McCall and Fritz Lieber." He

dropped the phone gently back into its cradle while the patrolman operator was still asking: "Who is this calling?" and stumbled away from there.

It was three thirty in the morning, and he had two dollars to his name, and if Darrsel and the rest of the homicide squad ever found out that Leah had a con brother, they would turn her over to the matrons. And there was nothing motherly about some of those headquarters matrons.

What next, what next? If he were still a cop, he could go up the river and talk to Joe Rosow, tell him they were going to put his sister away, and maybe Rosow would help him. But he wasn't a cop.

Well, back-trail. The girl said she had gone into the Game Pit to cash a check. The Game Pit was a roadhouse, and—

The cops would be there. Anyway, it would be closed now.

The taxi driver had disappeared. While she was cashing the check, and she really had cashed a check, because she would know the cops would check on a thing like that.

O. K., then, find the hackie. The cops would be doing that, too, but maybe he could do it faster, or smarter. He knew the other end of the case, knew what it was all about. Those dumb flatties would still be working on the blackmail angle.

He wondered how Leah de la Rue Sturdevant was making out at headquarters. All right, he supposed. Give that doll half a chance, and she would do just fine. Smart girl. Good actress. Pretty girl. Maybe the prettiest he had ever seen.

He constructed little pieces of information and happenings together to make a plausible whole, and then moved crosstown to a street where

he could flag a night owl cab. He spent sixty cents to get to the Fourth Precinct station.

Gin, plus torn hat, plus glassy stare—a drunk. It was good he had had that snort of liquor at Leah's apartment. It made the act work now.

The clock over McIntyre's desk said four. Stumbling in, Jim Lekton gave the desk a sloppy salute, reeled toward the stairs to the detective squad office.

Keen called: "Hey, Jim. Where you think you're going?"

"Upstairs. Sleep."

"You don't work here no more. How'd you get such a big one so quick?"

McIntyre said disinterestedly: "He's been gone about four hours. It is a pretty good one, though."

Jim Lekton kept boring for the stairs. He walked as though he were going into a high wind. Keen came around the switchboard, put an arm around Jim's shoulders, said:

"Now, Jim, you can't sleep in the squad room. You're not a cop any more."

"Wanta go to bed. Wanta take a cold, cold shower, and go to bed."

"Who'd you have the fight with?"

"Shower. Cold shower." The switchboard buzzed.

"Aw, let him go upstairs," McIntyre called. "And come handle your calls. There's nobody up there but Blair. He won't mind."

Keen let Jim go while he answered the switchboard, and Jim made it to the old familiar stairs. A few months ago he had been in charge of this squad; now he was a drunken bum the squad let sleep on its cot. No matter.

He acted a good deal soberer when he hit Blair's office. "Hello, Blairsy. Go'me a skinful and tried to show a truck driver jujutsu."

Blair had been lying on one of the cots. "Shut up and le'me get some sleep."

Jim stripped off his clothes and went into the shower. He could use a shower. He banged around enough to get Blair wide awake. When he came back, Blair was sitting up, dressed except for his coat, a blanket pulled around his shoulders.

Jim Lekton knew he was all right now. You can't kick a friend out without his clothes on. He put on his underwear, caught up a blanket, wrapped it around him, Indian fashion.

Blair said: "G'wan, get outta here. The day shift is due in a couple of hours."

"Three, four," Jim said. He took a cigarette from Blair's package on the desk. "How'd that case make out you had before?"

"You might pass me one of my own cigarettes," Blair said. "Aw, the gal did it, I guess. Headquarters took her away. They'll send up for the taxicab to-morrow," Blair said, and there was no longer any use in Jim Lekton's staying there.

"Let's go get a drink," Jim said. "C'mon, Blairsy; let's go buy a drink."

"I'm on duty," Blair protested. "Anyway, it's after closing hours."

"A drink," Jim bawled. He pounded on the desk. "Gotta have a drink. Mr. Private Detective Lekton, and his friend, Mr. First Class Detective Blair are going to have a drink."

"Shut up," Blair said. "Shut up, or I'll have to cool you. This is a police station."

"So that's the way you treat old friends," Jim said, with drunken dignity. He reached for his clothes. "Who was it made you first class? Me, when I was a sergeant. Me——"

Blair twitched uneasily. "Look,

Jim. No hard feelings, see? Here, here's five bucks. Go buy us a bottle. An' look, you better go out the back way, in case some of the inspector's snoops are around."

Jim nodded. "Knew I could count on old Blair." But he had to fumble dressing, so Blair wouldn't get suspicious. He wandered away finally, down the backstairs, humming a little.

Not bad. He had got a shower to cool his battered head, five bucks to go ahead with, and a legitimate reason to go into the station's back yard and look at the taxicab.

Not bad at all. He endured the cool pity of the cop on guard back there as he stumbled and half lurched into the cab; long enough to find out that the driver's name on the license was Guffson. Unusual name. He endured being helped out of the yard by the cop, like any other drunken has-been.

There was an all-night cab stand down on the corner. He took a cab on the strength of Blair's five-dollar bill, and said:

"Take it home, pal."

The name on this license was Robert Callaly, he noticed idly, as the driver said.

"Where's home?"

"The stable," Jim said. "I gotta make the rounds of the garages. Hack department cop."

Callaly said: "Oh. You're not turning me in for anything?"

"No," Jim said. "What have you done? No, you get paid for this ride, Callaly."

"I was worried," Callaly said, "on account o' there's a crumpled fender. I'm gonna change her to-morrow."

"See that you do," Jim Lekton said, and pretended to make a note in his book.

He leaned back on the cushions. A couple of hours till dawn. Leah

wouldn't tell them who she was. Girls that have convict brothers know enough to realize that they haven't got a chance with the cops if that gets out. And she'd outbluff them—if only nobody spotted her occasional lapses in grammar that gave her away. Without that, they could go on thinking she was a society girl, and as long as they treated the matter as blackmail, they would stay far, far away from the truth.

He must have fallen asleep, because the driver was shaking him. "Here we are, inspector."

Jim grinned and climbed out of the cab, paying the exact fare. Nobody expects a tip from a cop. He strolled into the first garage.

There were only six garages in town licensed by the hack bureau. They were all close together. Across the street were clothiers offering specials in hack uniforms, second-hand tire dealers, accessory stores.

He headed for the light in the office. Looking back, the driver who had brought him here was gone.

"Bonding company," Jim said, showing his private badge. "Just want a look at your books."

The office man said: "Fine time of night."

"Only time I'm sure of catching some of these hackies at home," Jim said carelessly, thumbing through the book. No Guffson. He pretended to copy an address or two, wandered on out.

It was immediately apparent in the second garage that the word had gone out there was a cop making the rounds. He didn't get a chance to use his story about the bonding company. Well, that made him guilty of impersonating an officer, but it was too bad.

The third garage had Guffson's name and an address across town. The office man was a wispy old boy,

as bald as an egg.

"Headquarters dicks in here earlier," he said importantly. "Homicide squad."

"They're big shots," Jim said. "I wouldn't know about that."

"They picked up a stiff in a cab out on the road. Seemed mad about it."

"Every time those guys have to work they get mad," Jim said, and got out.

Oh, this was bad. He didn't dare take a cab to Guffson's. The word was out he was a cop who had been nosing around the stables. Hack drivers had a grapevine; they were a close bunch of—

It was an hour's walk, but maybe he could find a surface car. He walked toward the tracks. Oh, quit it and go home. What's in it for you? Maybe the girl'll get out by herself. Maybe she is guilty. Only, guilty or not, they'll hang it on her if they know about her brother. It isn't right, but who are you, Jim Lekton, to worry about right or wrong? It isn't right, either, that you should starve for lack of business, but it's true. Between being so and being right there is a gap.

It is, Jim Lekton, because you are in love with that girl. The Leah Rosow, that Leah de la Rue Sturdevant, that Leah van Sturdevant. You sap, you sucker, to love a girl you have seen once, a girl with a stir brother, a girl you know nothing about except that she looks like a million dollars and makes little mistakes in her English.

Light fog was coming down over the city and a drunk reeled along, followed by a cat, and panhandled Jim for two bits. He gave the drunk a dime and watched him reel away, the alley cat still following him hopefully, one bum hoping the other



LEAH.

bum would lead the way to a free lunch.

There you go, Jim Lekton. There you go, a dick who was conceited enough to quit the force a sergeant and waive his pension. Conceited enough to start a private agency. There you go, dragging down the gutter, panhandling for drinks of smoke.

And who are you to love a girl named Leah?

A surface car came clanging along and he got aboard.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOUBLE-CROSSER.

THE entrance to Guffson's tenement house was smelly with cabbage and babies and too much living. From practice, Jim figured out the location of the Guffson flat from the location on the wall of the mail box, and climbed the rickety stairs.

Cheap as Leah's place had been, you could get a five-room flat here for half the price of her one room.

Climbing, Jim Lekton did not touch the rail, because he had been in enough of these places before to know that the rail would be greasy. He had a horror of dirt. Maybe it was because he had been born in a place like this himself.

Here, this would be the door. No cop in the corridor, probably no cop inside. He scratched on the splintery panel. Now came the test of all his hunches, now he was either right or wrong. He would know before he scratched a second time.

Right.

Some one was awake, some one was inside on guard, waiting. A woman; she said:

"What do you want?"

"Guffie back yet?" Jim asked. They would call the hack driver

Guffie. Any mugs would.

"What do you want?"

"Gumshoe sent me up here to find out why he ain't showed," Jim Lekton said.

The woman cried: "Oh, Lord, oh, Lordy," and the door flew open as she staggered back. "He—he ain't showed?" the scrawny woman asked, her hand clawing at her throat over the woolen nightgown.

"Not never," Jim said. "Where could he be?"

The woman sat down on a rocker with a wire-mended arm. It was noticeable how, even in her grief, her excitement, she remembered to pull her wrapper aside so it would not catch on the wire. "I told him to stay away from bums like you," she said sullenly. "Cops all over the place at night. The neighbors hanging down the air shaft, hearing the cops in here at night." Evidently she was used to cops by daytime. It was nocturnal police that annoyed her.

"Cops give you much trouble?" Jim asked.

"Trouble?" The woman took a deep breath to tell him how much trouble they had given. "They said if he showed up and didn't report right away, they was going to take away his license. So then where'll we be? I suppose that fine Fritz'll support us. Yes, he will, on the Townsend Plan. Running around with bums and having the cops come in at——"

"It's too bad, Mrs. Guffson," Jim said quickly. "Only—why didn't Guffie come back to the Game Pit?"

"The Game Pit? The Game Pit? So that's where Gumshoe and Fritz went after telling poor Jason to meet them at Borgy's? No wonder he hasn't——" She began to cry. "And all night me sitting here, seeing him dead in a gutter some place, his

poor head——" She choked.

Jim said: "Well, I'll go to Borgy's and pick him up." He edged over to the door.

She had to heap some more contempt on him before she let him go. But inside Jim Lekton was congratulating himself. All his hunches were good hunches. He had had a hunch that Gumshoe and Fritz wouldn't dare show up at Guffson's apartment because they would be afraid of cops. But he had known cop routine, and known they wouldn't hang around Guffson's, because cops believe that hack drivers are so afraid of losing their licenses that they will do what the cops tell them.

He banked and edged and got away.

Borgy's, Borgy's. A restaurant or lunch room. Probably a lunch room, where cheap mugs and hack drivers would meet.

While he rambled the streets looking for a drug store and a phone book, he thought: "Maybe I'm not in love with her. Maybe I just wanted a case to run off, so's I could prove I could still do 'em up neat, like when I was on the force. I'm not tired, I don't need my sleep. I can sleep all night in that thirty-buck-a-month office of mine. I've had enough sleep. What I ought to do is go back on the force. This is what I love, not a girl, not money, but the working out of a case, getting one hunch after another, making them all dovetail in, coming out with the solution."

A lunch room yielded a phone book with a classified section that showed up one possibility: Borgia's Coffee Pot, on Third. Not far.

He went back into the false dawn that made the city streets look dirty and littered. Somewhere near by, paralleling his course, a sprinkler

truck hissed along, washing the litter of yesterday into the gutter in time for to-day's filth to be spread out.

He chuckled a little at a lunch room named Borgia's. Name your poison, gents. Then he came to Third and the water sprinkler met him. He stopped a moment to admire the way it crawled along, the cool jets of water hitting the street, rolling up dust and paper, washing it down into the gutters, and so away.

Like that. You turned your mind on a case like that, and all the mess washed away, leaving it like that strip of black, glistening pavement—a blank for you to write your solution on. To-morrow he would put in his application to rejoin the force. He would lose his first-class pay, but retain his sergeancy. Better than starving, better than letting your mind get rusty.

He walked along, and saw his end ahead of him. He would get to be a captain. Not an inspector, because that required departmental politics, and he was no good at politics. He would get to be a captain, and then sooner or later they would retire him on half pay, and he would take a cottage on the edge of the city, and the neighbors would ask him to see who was stealing their newspapers off their steps, or which kid wrote in chalk on the garage wall, because he had been a detective once.

Well, it was something. It was something high for a slum kid to rise to. Captain of detectives. Only he had seen his fame written larger.

And here was Borgia's. White tile, nicked coffee urn, like a hundred others in this small city. And there were Gumshoe and Fritz, sitting at a marble-topped table, looking unhappy. And a third man with them. Guffson, probably.

All right, boy, think. Think hard. Ten minutes to four. He didn't have a gun, so he would have to get the cops into this somehow. Dumb cops, who had not been able to find Gumshoe, Fritz, or Guffson. Dumb, dumb cops.

Ten minutes to four. Middle shift. On at midnight, off at eight. Dog-watch shift. The city became a map in front of his eyes. Yes, all right. This was radio car patrol stuff, this part of town. And he wanted about ten minutes, though five would do.

He backed away, hunted up another of those trolley-shed phones. First call: "There's a man in my back yard—2217 First. I gotta get back home, we don't have no phone, I'm in a trolley shed in my night-clothes."

Count thirty, and picture the radio cars going there. Getting people up, yelling, carrying on. And leaving their radios unattended, so that the cars from the next district would have to come on for this call. All right, second nickel. Handkerchief, corner of mouth. "You dumb flat-foots want Gumshoe and Fritz and that hackie Guffson, they're in Borgia's, the coffee pot."

Now run. Run like hell, Lekton, and maybe all the pieces will shake down into your puzzle, and you'll have a pretty, pretty picture.

He trotted back to Borgia's lunch room, going as fast as he could without losing his breath. No use arriving out of breath, giving himself away. He stopped outside the door, settled his clothing, strolled in. He was halfway to the table before Fritz's startled eyes picked him up.

Jim Lekton grinned and shook his head, spreading his hands wide to show he had no gun. He didn't hurry in the rest of his walk to the table, but he wished he could. This was nervous work, walking up un-

armed on two gun carriers like Gumshoe and Fritz.

He sat down at the table, yelled "Coffee!" at the counter, and leaned back.

"Well," he said, "morning's nearly here."

"So what?"

Gumshoe was sulky, sleepy. Fritz appeared tired, but still alert; the cab driver only looked sullen.

"So the game ends then," Jim Lekton said. "The cops are on their way here now. Dawn'll find you three in your cells; they already picked up your wife, Guffie, and they've phoned the prison to bring Rosow down for questioning."

"I dunno what you're talking about," Fritz said. But he licked his lips nervously.

Guffson said: "He's bluffing. Huh, Fritz, he's throwin' a bluff, ain't he?" The hackie was pathetic, a stupid, poverty-racked man who had fallen into bad hands.

"Sure," Fritz said. "They wouldn't bother your old lady. He's bluffing."

"Five minutes, ten minutes, and you'll hear the sirens," Jim Lekton said. "Put that gun away, Fritz. Put it away. Better still, throw it out the window, and you, too, Gumshoe, and give me back my rod. You're better off if they don't find you armed."

Fritz told him obscenely to scram.

Jim Lekton had never taken his eyes off the clock on the wall. Time, time, and more time. If he could pull a gun, if he had a half dozen cops at his back, and could start beating on Fritz or Gumshoe, he might hurry this up. They had to talk before the cops got there. Had to, or he was sunk, and the whole thing fell back to—a convict's sister killed a sucker.

"Who's this guy?" Guffson asked suddenly.

"Private dick," Fritz said carelessly.

"Oh, the insurance company?" Guffson asked.

"Yes," Jim Lekton said quickly. "Sure. We want to find out where that money is. We had to replace it. My company'll pay five grand to get it back, five grand in cold money against that hot dough. Or we'll pay five hundred for proof it wasn't all in that safe. Even if Rosow's the only one who knows where the dough is, if he just had proof that they claimed more than they really had in that loft safe. we could——"

"Rosow's the only one knows where the dough is," Guffson said. "Hodson was goin' to get him in his cell, an' show him the note from his sister so's he'd——"

"Shut up!" Fritz said.

There was a car coming up outside. The cops, without their beloved sirens? Jim Lekton held his breath, knowing that if it were the cops now, his chances of breaking the case—while better—were still one in a hundred. But let it be the cops. He was at a dead end, he was through, he was getting no place.

It wasn't the cops. It was a truck that slowed and heaved a big bundle of newspapers at the door of Borgia's. The counter man slopped by, setting Jim Lekton's coffee in front of him, half in the saucer, half in the cup, and then lounged to the front door, fishing a knife out of his pocket. He opened the door, pulled in the pile of newspapers, cut the string that bound them, and shuffled back.

Fritz said: "Give us one of those."

The counter man acted as though he hadn't heard. Jim Lekton sipped

his coffee. It was very bad coffee. Fritz was going up front for a paper. Jim Lekton watched him.

He said: "Take the reward money, and scam."

"You got it with you?" Guffson asked. His voice was eager.

Jim Lekton prayed: "Oh, let the cops come. Let them come. I can bluff this out now. I can break this case."

Fritz said harshly: "You cheap, lying shamus."

He threw the newspaper at Jim Lekton and as it hit the coffee on the table, spilling it, Jim got a quick flash of a large picture of Leah Rosow, and a huge caption: "Who Is This Beauty?"

But Jim Lekton was busy. He kicked over the marble-topped table and Gumshoe squawked as the hot coffee went in his lap.

Fritz had a gun out, Fritz was shooting—

The bullet went two inches over Jim Lekton's shoulder and cracked the table top as the counter man begged:

"Not in here, guys, not in here!"

Jim made a violent grab and got Gumshoe's wrist and Guffson's ankle. He pulled, twisted, and lifted, and the three of them became one mass of bawling, heaving flesh. Somewhere in the middle of this there was a gun and probably two, and in all probability Jim Lekton was doomed.

A face came up at him, and he hit it with an elbow, at the same time sinking his teeth into an offered wrist. Something nearly broke all his ribs—a shoe—as he thought detachedly of the old joke about the wrestler who bit himself.

He rolled, still hanging on to what he had—an ankle and a wrist—and realized that Fritz was still in the front of the shop, emptying his gun.

Something smashed into Jim Lekton's face, blinding him. A bullet, a fist, a head, or a foot.

He couldn't see, but he put the wrist over the ankle and jerked. A bone cracked in one or the other.

The warm stuff running down his leg was probably coffee. Kicked and battered and bitten and butted, a man couldn't tell whether he had been shot, too, or not.

It was the wrist that had broken. It felt loose and floppy in his hand. He let it go, and then, as his sight cleared, saw a face, and used his free hand to grab for the throat under it. He was tightening down on that throat when a gun went off much closer than Fritz's gun, and there was no use squeezing the throat any more, because it was limp.

He rolled, still holding the ankle, and got clear, to his knees. It was Guffson's ankle, and Guffson was lying in a good deal of blood. A revolver was held loosely in his fingers. It was Jim Lekton's revolver.

Gumshoe, he saw quickly, was a dead adjunct to the coffee pot, and Fritz was gone.

Jim Lekton took his gun back and staggered to his feet. He was pretty bloody, and well painted with coffee, but the blood didn't seem to be his own.

He tried to run to the front door, because it was necessary to catch Fritz, and the counter man came up from behind his counter and hit him with a wooden mallet.

Jim Lekton turned and put one shaky hand in the counter man's face and shoved. The greasy vest ducked down behind the counter again, though the push could have had no force.

"Yellow," Jim said. "Just yellow." But he couldn't run after

Fritz, because his feet weren't tracking.

He turned and dragged back to the mess their fight had left on the floor. He went to his knees next to Guffson, and said:

"O. K., hackie. Come clean."

Guffson looked at him, the whites of his eyes rolling, and babbled something. Red, bubbling froth came out of the cabman's mouth.

Jim managed to get water from the counter, spilling most of it in his erratic progress. Maybe water wasn't the best thing for a bullet-pierced hackman, but there was no time to take a course in medicine. He held the liquid up to the hackie's mouth, and Guffson drank, said:

"T'anks. I guess I'm t'rough."

"You're through," Jim Lekton said. "Fritz shot hell out of you. That Fritz is gun-simple."

"Tough guy. I needed—dough."

"Sure. Sure. I saw your old lady. That was a lie I told you. The cops won't bother her."

"Good. Oke. I—I shouldn't 'a' got mixed up wit' Fritz."

"Too late for that," Lekton said softly. "You double-crossed him?"

"Yah. Yah. Rosow an' me was takin' the money to—to him. I talked the kid inta lettin' me stash it, when the cops showed. Under the front seat. Rosow an' me let the cops think he had just picked me up. Easy."

"And then?"

"I was afraid tuh spend it. Fritz was always around. An'—I was afraid Rosow'd get out of stir—come fer me. I—never give him his cut."

"So you killed this Hodgson that was going to spring Rosow."

"Took two grand from his pocket. The—the girl had raised it fer her brother."

"Hodgson's a prison guard?"

Outside, hot sun suddenly took the mist off the street, and the day had started. Somewhere Fritz Lieber was loose, rambling around the city. Somewhere the cops were on their deliberate way to this place. It didn't matter now. Nothing much mattered except that Guffson should live long enough to talk.

The hackie tried. He tried with all that was left in him, but it didn't do any good. He said, "Ugh," once, but that red froth came again, and Jim had to stagger for more water. Then the fool had to say, "Thanks."

"Let that go," Jim cried. "Who's Hodgson?"

"Why, he's——" Guffson said, and died.

On which note, the cops stormed in the front door and a sergeant made the classic inquiry:

"What's going on here?"

CHAPTER V.

ON TRIAL.

JIM LEKTON opened his eyes, and Darrsel said contemptuously:

"Tough luck, fella. You didn't die."

"Thanks," Jim said. "Nice of you."

"But you'll wish you had," Darrsel said. "The skipper don't like cops that go bad." He spat on the floor of the headquarters room where Jim Lekton lay in a bed, and then opened the door, stuck his head out in the hall. "He's come to."

Outside, somebody's big feet pounded away.

"They wanted to take you to a hospital," Darrsel said. "You and your pals sure used up a lot of bullets. The doc took two out of you."

"I didn't even know I was shot," Jim said. "So the story is I was one of them?"

"Yeah," Darrsel said, lighting a cigar. "Stool pigeon for a bunch of crooks. Hanging around the station house, telling them what the cops' next move was."

"Pretty story," Jim Lekton said.

"Yeah, ain't it? When we get through with you, we're going to turn you over to the Fourth. They was sorry for you, thought you hung around 'cause you were lonely."

Jim Lekton said: "I been thinking of rejoining the cops. Now I think I will, just so I can rank you."

Darrsel laughed: "Big-wind Lekton. Sergeant at twenty-seven, convict at thirty, and a big windbag all the time. Well, windy, this is one you don't talk yourself out of."

"It was having to associate with guys like you that made me quit the force," Jim said.

"Yeah?" Darrsel put the cigar in the corner of his mouth and advanced on the bed, his eyes gleaming. "Me, I'm like the skipper. I don't like cops that go wrong, neither."

A knock on the door brought him away from the bed. He opened the door and promptly removed the cigar, came to attention.

Captain Lange, homicide squad chief, followed the commissioner into the room.

The commissioner said: "Feel up to talking, Lekton?"

Jim said: "Certainly, sir. I believe that we should hold a commissioner's meeting, marshal our evidence, and then take it to a magistrate's court for record."

The skipper whistled. "Boy, what nerve! Even gonna run his own trial."

"My trial?" Jim hitched himself up on the pillows, attempted to put a jaunty note into his voice. "Why, I cleaned up that Hodgson killing,

was how I got these. And an old case, too."

"I wish I could believe you, my boy," the commissioner said. "But you were found in a lunch room, after a gun battle with three wanted men. And your bullets were sprayed all over——"

"Where's the girl?" Jim asked. "The society girl who came into the Fourth last night?"

"I'm afraid," the skipper said, "that he's bluffing. Lekton, she's no society gal, she's——"

"A dress model, and the sister of Rosow, who took the rap in a loft robbery a few months ago," Jim said. "And the man she was supposed to kill was named Hodgson, and he was really killed by a cab driver named Guffson, who confessed before he died."

"Got it in writing?" the skipper asked.

"I want a hearing," Jim said. "I can make this thing hang together. You picked up Fritz Lieber?"

"He ran into the squad cars two blocks from that lunch room," the commissioner said.

It was apparent to Jim Lekton that the commissioner wanted him to clear himself. Well, maybe he could. There were a lot of holes in his story.

The commissioner gave himself away. He said: "If you could possibly explain your part in this mess—that is, before the newspapers begin to——"

Afraid of scandal. Afraid they would say the whole Fourth Precinct had been working hand in glove with the mugs. Yeah, and wouldn't the newspapers love it.

He moved experimentally in his bed. "I—I think I could get up. It would be better. And a hearing in the trial commissioner's room?"

"How soon?" the commissioner asked.

"In half an hour. And may I have the commissioner's permission to look up some old records?" He happened to glance at Darrsel when he said this, and the dick looked nervous. Jim grinned at him. "I want the reports on the Rosow case." Darrsel relaxed, and Jim decided to look into Mr. Darrsel sometime. But probably it was no more serious than drinking on duty.

The commissioner said, "Yes." He snapped the skipper to him with his chin, and they marched out.

"Help me dress," Jim told Darrsel. "And then I want to go to the library."

When he came out from the library, he felt as though he had been dieting on broken bottles for a year. There was nothing in him that didn't hurt. Funny, he hadn't known when he was shot, and now that he knew it, it hurt so much. You'd think a shot that you didn't feel couldn't be very serious.

It was eight o'clock when he went into the trial room, leaning on Darrsel's arm. And then he saw the girl—Leah Rosow, Leah Sturdevant. Leah de la Rue Sturdevant—and he knew that it was worth it. He walked over to her, said softly:

"So they drug you in, Leah de la Rue Sturdevant?"

"You're too fresh," she said. "All you cops are fresh."

"But you haven't been crying," he said. "Don't you see, that makes it worth while? You didn't cry. You thought they were going to send you up for murder, but you didn't cry." He changed his voice, feeling Darrsel restive. "Did the cab driver give Hodgson a cigarette?"

She nodded.

He said: "And Hodgson was an official at the prison?"

"A dentist," she said. "He visited the——"

"Got it!" Jim Lekton turned, and Darrsel had to catch his arm, because one of the bullets had been in his thigh.

Jim staggered over and took a seat in the front row. This was the dread room where the deputy commissioner heard the trial of cops accused of bad conduct. Well, he was on trial here, though no longer a cop. He took out his private shield and pinned it on his coat; Darrsel took out his own proud first grade badge and did the same.

A stenographer in a patrolman's alpaca office coat came in and glanced curiously at Jim Lekton. Then they brought in Fritz Lieber, and the hearing was on.

Jim Lekton took the stand. There was no oath, because this was not a trial. He said: "I can't entirely explain my part in this. Not unless you look at Leah Rosow there. When I saw her last night——"

The commissioner said: "Stick to the facts."

Jim Lekton gulped and said: "All right. Say then I had a hunch; a hunch she wasn't guilty. But I opened her bag when she fainted and I saw from it she was poor—an unpaid light bill, so on. Not a débütante. When they threw me out of the station house, I went to her apartment. Lieber, there, and Gumshoe McCall jumped me. So I knew my hunch had been right."

"You're not making sense," the commissioner said sharply. "Your wound——"

"I'm not delirious," Jim Lekton said. "I tell you, I'm talking straight. Listen. This is what happened. Gumshoe and Fritz—McCall and Lieber—wanted to hold up a loft. They got Guffson and young Rosow to help them. You see? Two innocents, two suckers, to do the dirty work and hold the bag if any-

thing went wrong. O. K. Things were hot. They took the whole safe! It says so in the report. Rosow and Guffson were to take the safe some place. Then they'd all meet, open it. But Fritz and Gumshoe wouldn't transport a hot safe. Not they. They took the silks, took them to a fence. On the way, Guffson slugged Rosow, got the money. Maybe he had a pal to open the safe, maybe he dumped it."

"You say," the commissioner said, "McCall and Lieber took the silks. Rosow was caught because he gave a silk scarf to——"

"A neighbor on Sturdevant Street," Jim said. "But did he? Or did one of the others—when things got hot—take the scarf to the woman, say, 'Rosow wants you to have this?'"

The girl cried: "Yes. That's what happened."

Jim grinned. "O. K. Rosow is in prison. McCall and Lieber need the money. Or want it. They've blown in their cash. They go to the girl, say: 'We can spring your brother if he will tell us where the money is. We know the prison dentist. But you do the contacting.'"

"Yes, yes," the girl cried.

"See?" Jim Lekton said. "See, commissioner? They're afraid this dentist—you knew he was a visiting dentist at the State prison—they're afraid this dentist and this girl will cross them up. So they arrange for the meeting to take place in Guffson's car. Then the dentist wants a drink, and the girl gets out to get it, and Guffson slips him a cigarette. Because he can't allow a note to go from the girl to her brother. Or the brother will talk. And Lieber and McCall will kill Guffson."

"Yeah," Fritz Lieber said. "Yeah. If it's murder or robbery, I'll spiel. I'll squeal like hell. Guffson told

us the kid knocked him over, got the dough. So we framed the kid. Easy."

"All right," Jim Lekton said. "That's all. See?"

He got down from the stand. Darrsel held him up.

The commissioner said: "Wait. Wait, Darrsel. Let him sit there, any place. I have to know. How did you figure this? What did you do?"

Jim Lekton said: "My story holds?"

"It fits in with what we knew. It's true," the commissioner said. "But how? How?"

Jim Lekton said: "Listen. Don't laugh." Black specks danced around the room. He shouldn't have come here. "Hunches. Hunch No. 1, the girl was a model, the way she walked. So the man was a buyer, huh? But the man whose name she gave wasn't out. He was in his room. So she would give the first name came into her head—why? 'Cause what she was doing was illegal. Just Hunch 2 that was. Found her room, found letter from her brother. Had to be there. Hunched that the cab driver was in on it. Hunch 5, sic——"

He slumped over. Water, ammonia, a doctor, a nurse were around when he came to.

The commissioner said: "All right, all right. You can go to the hospital. In a minute. But the money?"

"Hunch," Jim Lekton said. "Where's the cab?"

Darrsel said: "In the courtyard here."

Jim Lekton leaned on some one to the window. When he looked down, there were a lot of cars in the courtyard, but only one taxi. "Hunch," he mumbled. "Two tires on one rack. Two spare tires. Huh?"

The next time he came to, the girl

was sitting by his bed. A white bed. She said:

"I want to thank you. You didn't tell them I was bribing this doctor? Why not?"

"I love you," Jim Lekton said.

She said: "All the money I had. I wanted to spend it on the trial, but my brother said no, that he'd be convicted anyway; to keep it till he got

out for him to make a new start on."

"All right," Jim said. "We'll see you're going to be all right. I gotta hunch."

"The commissioner wants you back on the force. He says what you call hunches are productive reasoning," said the girl.

"Hunches," Jim Lekton said. "Hunch, I love you."

"RIDE 'EM, BAD BOY!"

BRONCHOS for bad boys—that's the prescription of W. H. Mitchell, former psychiatrist at the Kansas State Penitentiary. At his Sunset ranch near Boulder, Colorado, he has gone into the business of rehabilitating youths who are on the verge of losing control of themselves.

Mr. Mitchell accepts commitments by juvenile judges, but prefers to discover boys who are on the "ragged edge" before they appear in court. This contact is made through parents who realize that their sons are taking steps which are leading them toward trouble and beyond the barriers accepted by society. The aim is to restore youths to normalcy when they are threatened with losing their grip on contact with others.

Consistent discipline is used by Mr. Mitchell in helping the boys solve problems with which they are confronted. The "split" discipline exercised by a doting mother and a stern father or the reverse is of no help to the maladjusted youth, the psychiatrist believes.

The Sunset ranch boys who become adjusted to school life are enrolled in Boulder High School, while those faced with maladjustment in their school work are tutored at the ranch. Each boy has two horses for which he must care. He makes his own bed, and has certain obligations to meet. Conferences are held with the youths to aid them in freeing themselves of either inferiority complexes or egoism.

Man Can Now Talk With God, Says Noted Psychologist

MOSCOW, IDAHO.—"A new and revolutionary religious teaching designed to show how we may find, understand and use the identical power which Jesus used, is attracting world-wide attention to its founder, Dr. Frank B. Robinson, noted psychologist and author."

"Psychiana," this new scientific teaching, believes that it is today possible for every normal human being, understanding spiritual law as Christ understood it, "to duplicate every work that He ever did."

Dr. Robinson has prepared a 6000 word treatise on "Psychiana," in which he tells about his long search for the Truth, how he

finally came to the full realization of an Unseen Power or force "so dynamic in itself that all other powers and forces fade into insignificance beside it"—how he learned to commune directly with the Living God, using this never-failing power to demonstrate health, happiness and financial success, and how any normal being may find and use it.

Just send your name and address to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, 495—3rd Street, Moscow, Idaho. This fascinating story will be sent free and postpaid without cost or obligation. Write the Doctor today.—Copyright 1937. Dr. Frank B. Robinson.—Advertisement.



MARCH OF CRIME

FLEEING BANDITS STOPPED: By a gun in the hands of Doctor F. L. Hardy, a dentist who maintained offices across from the bank in Midland, Michigan, which was being held up. Because of a wave of bank robberies throughout Michigan, Doctor Hardy had kept his deer gun handy for some months. The doctor is a member of a group of business men who have formed a vigilante organization as a protection against banditry. The doctor's gun killed one bandit and wounded two others.



RUM CONVICTIONS SOAR WITH REPEAL: More persons were sent to prison for Federal liquor law violations in 1937 than in any prohibition year. Prison commitments for liquor law violations reached a high of 5,390 in the fiscal year ended June 30, 1937. The highest during any year of prohibition was 5,045 in 1932.



ILLICIT LIQUOR: Is now generally sold as such. Thus we see the bootleggers openly defying the liquor laws. The past summer saw the arrest and indictment of the largest liquor ring uncovered since repeal. The ring operated by buying denatured alcohol and diverting it in stills in New York, New Jersey and Maryland, then redistributing it and selling it for bootleg beverage manufacture.



ANOTHER HOUSING PROBLEM: The Federal government is planning to establish its own prison for incorrigible women convicts, according to Department of Justice officials. Approximately two hundred women serving Federal sentences now are confined in State and other prisons outside the Federal jurisdiction, under an arrangement made by the government with local authorities. Attorney General Homer Cummings in his report to Congress said the problem of housing women convicts had become acute.

GUARDS FOR THE MILLIONS OF MIDAS: Contrary to general opinion, army regulars are not guarding the United States gold-storage vault at Fort Knox, Kentucky, though they are available for emergency call. The guards at the vault must be civil-service men. They are all stalwart able-bodied men, and trained by officers of the coast guard who are strict disciplinarians as well as very proficient in the use of firearms. The salary is one thousand six hundred and eighty dollars per year. An elaborate system of protective devices has been installed, but no chances will be taken. A regular interior patrol will be maintained.



CRIME IN SLUMS: According to a recent survey, fifty-eight per cent of the criminals arrested in Manhattan were born and grew up in slum districts.



PRISONERS STAGE SIT-DOWN: Three New York City drug addicts staged a sit-down strike in the Criminal Courts detention pen, forcing the three justices of Special Sessions to descend a flight of stairs to sentence them. The three prisoners refused to get up off the floor even when the black-robed judges stood before them. The trio got the limit—up to three years at Rikers Island Penitentiary.



BANDITS BLAME STORK: Each of five young married men arrested in Brooklyn, New York, on robbery charges pleaded that his wife was expecting a baby. The five prospective fathers who said they did it for the unborn, according to police, admitted holding up ten places in Brooklyn.



AS A CURB ON CRIME: All persons seeking employment in Miami Beach, Florida, must carry an identification card. This card is only issued after the applicant has been fingerprinted and the prints cleared of all suspicion by the bureau of investigation at Washington. The same ordinance requires registration within forty-eight hours after arrival, under a maximum penalty of sixty days' imprisonment and a fine of one hundred dollars.

MURDERER'S MAGIC

BY
JACK
STORM



A TRUE
CRIME STORY

WHEN New York City detectives meet to talk about famous unsolved murders, the case always discussed is one that the public knows little about. Yet from a detective's point of view, this case is in a class by itself—the most intriguing and utterly bewildering mystery in the history of the city.

The victim was Isador Fink, a laundryman whose business was conducted by himself in a small front room of a tenement at 52 East 132nd Street. Perhaps the fact that Fink was unknown, and his murder so baffling that there was not one clue, caused the newspapers to pay little attention to it.

To the city police, however, the case was and will always remain the great unsolved classic in murders. Only in fiction have the circumstances surrounding this murder ever occurred before. The whole thing seems utterly impossible and absurd, yet what makes it so in-

triguing is the knowledge that somewhere is a simple and perfectly natural answer to the enigma, an answer that detectives have overlooked.

Fink was young and unmarried. He worked hard and had few friends and among his acquaintances he was known as being somewhat eccentric. He always was possessed with the fear that sometime he would be held up and robbed, and because of this fear, he kept the front door of his laundry locked, with a sliding bolt.

It was locked even in the daytime. When customers called, he would open the door a few inches and peer out. If he knew the caller, he would permit him or her to enter and when the visitor had gone, he would throw the bolt back again.

Behind the small laundry room, a room less than twenty feet square, was an apartment occupied by an aged colored woman. There was a door leading from the laundry into this rear apartment, but it was bolted

and nailed and the lock was rusty because the door hadn't been opened for years.

There was only one window in the laundry, and this was covered with a heavy bar grating. The front door was the only other egress from the room and this was kept bolted day and night. Above this was a small transom, barely large enough to let a small child through.

At ten o'clock on the night of February 21, 1929, Fink returned to his laundry after making a delivery to a customer several blocks away. The time was established later by the police through an acquaintance who saw Fink returning.

It was a little after ten thirty that same night when the aged Negress in the rear apartment heard screams and curses in the Fink laundry, and then followed two shots spaced a few seconds apart and a third one after a much longer interval.

The old woman ran out of her apartment, screaming for a policeman. A small crowd gathered around her, and Patrolman George Fineberg appeared. She babbled her frightened story about the shots and the anguished cries.

Fineberg went to the front door of the laundry and pounded on it. Only a grim and oppressive silence greeted his knocks. He tried the door. It was locked from the inside. There was a light in the laundry, and it filtered through the small transom over the front door.

After trying the door again and knocking loudly, Fineberg went back in the street and found a boy, small enough to slip through the transom. The boy had difficulty in banging the transom open as Fineberg held him up there, but finally it opened and the lad squirmed through and dropped to the floor inside the room.

He opened the door, and Fineberg rushed in. He stopped very abruptly a few steps inside the door. Sprawled on the floor in the rear of the small laundry room was Fink, his head and shoulders in a pool of blood.

He was dead, but the body was still warm. There were three wounds in his body. One in the chest, over the heart, another in the head, and the third in his right arm.

Detectives from the East 126th Street Police Station arrived at the laundry a few minutes later. Patrolman Fineberg had kept the crowd back and had permitted nobody to enter the death room.

The medical examiner came and made an examination of the body of Fink. He announced that death followed almost instantaneously after the bullet crashed into the dead man's heart. He found powder marks near each of the wounds, indicating that the gun had been held within six inches of the body when fired.

Meanwhile the detectives tried to reconstruct the crime. Suicide was the first theory, but on questioning the aged woman and learning that she had heard the voices of two men and that the third shot, which was undoubtedly the one that caused death, was fired after an interval between it and the first two, the suicide theory was quickly abandoned.

A search of the laundry room failed to uncover the gun, and this completely eliminated the suicide theory. Examining the door leading to the apartment of the colored woman, the detectives found it nailed and the lock rusty and cobwebs stretched over it.

The iron grating at the lone window prevented any person from entering through it, and the window beyond this grating was covered

with dust and had not been opened.

Patrolman Fineberg told the detectives that the front door had been locked from the inside when he first tried it. The transom had only been opened by the boy pounding hard on it and knocking the paint away, showing that it had not been used for years.

Then suddenly the detectives realized that they were faced with a strange and baffling enigma. How did the murderer enter the room? How did he leave? At first the full import of these two baffling questions did not impress the detectives, but as the hours passed and the detectives examined every inch of that room and every board in the floor and found no secret panels or hidden doors, the whole case became inexplicable.

The lock on the front door was examined with the idea that Fink might have left it open and the killer, after committing his crime, had fled out of it and the door locked itself when it was slammed shut.

But besides the regular lock was a slip bolt, and Fineberg, backed up by the boy that had entered through the transom, stated that the bolt had been slipped shut when the boy dropped down into the room.

Another puzzling element in the case was the fact that Fink's wallet

was in his coat pocket. There wasn't much money in it, only a few dollars, but obviously the motive of the murder was not robbery.

Did the murderer fire through the transom? This theory was advanced, but the facts quickly ruled it out. The gun that fired the shots was held within six inches of Fink's body, and his body lay fifteen feet from the transom when found. The aged woman heard the voices of two men inside the room, and the transom had obviously not been open for years.

Nine years have passed since the strange murder of Isador Fink. In those nine years, the enigma of his death has intrigued every detective on the force. Numerous theories have been advanced as to where the slayer stood, how he gained admittance to the laundry room, and how he made his Houdini disappearance.

Every phase of Fink's life has been checked. He was found to have no enemies and few acquaintances. The fact that he always bolted the door, however, indicates that he feared for his life.

The police know that somewhere there is a simple answer to the mystery. What is it? They have searched nine years for it and have not found it.

Can you find it?

JAILS CROWDED

PENOLOGISTS, estimating that the Federal prison population will increase fifteen to twenty per cent in the course of the year, are seeking appropriations for more jails. Federal prison reports show that the present prison population is only four hundred short of an all-time record. According to the bureau of prison estimates, normal capacity is thirteen thousand seven hundred and forty-three, but there are fifteen thousand two hundred and ninety-five prisoners housed in Federal institutions.

New crime laws, new liquor laws, and the aggressive campaign against crime waged by the G-men are contributory factors to the increased prison population.

UNDER THE LAMP

BY GERARD HOLMES

If you like puzzles, won't you work on one of your own, send it in, and let the other fans wrestle with it? Answers to problems will always appear in the following issue. Address all letters relative to this department to Gerard Holmes, care of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WARNING: Do not forward money to any one who asks for it.

USEFUL TIPS

A cryptogram is written with a transposed alphabet. Approximate letter frequency: E A O I D H, etc. E is most frequent letter. A and I can stand alone. O seldom ends an English word. O E and Y only vowels that can end common two-letter words. Most words begin with consonants. A consonant is usually followed by a vowel. Middle letter of three-letter word is usually a vowel. Second and third from last are usually vowels. Watch for endings, ION, ING, and S.

We start the meeting with a suggestion for a winter's night when a bleak Siberian wind blasts the icy windows.

1. Midnight Oil

ITJUT DOSQKHU UTKBGP UTRJQUMFR
GRMHUL NOHQKOPL STUUQJ. IPQRO
ITNGLOU LSTNUFU UAGTMPI PTRJSU,
OPEMNEKOH DT CMKRT DTUUFU, LSNQ-
FIS UTRJSQPME NSTLSR.

Mr. E.

Paris, Illinois.

2. Not so easily solved by beginners. However, the last four words are a dead giveaway.

QWERTYUIYO PAIQRS, PDDFYOIWE GYIQ
HWJSYH KL ISYOQYTYMWE NRSB, ATD-
RFEU DPSOYOPF EWUOSYNIYRT PTWTI
RGT ULHNIRHU.

Ruth Austin

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

3. Welcome to a new member of the family. Vowel spotting is important here.

CUOTNGZTCUON TNLHQNKHQOZJ BNAISN-
PKIQZ NAKOGHKZ ZJJZAKONT KH KUHJZ

*Underscored words are proper nouns.

I A T I P W F H A Z J L O K K Z A L F P H L Q N J .

Arthur K. Smith

Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania.

4. Another new fan who also makes us wonder about our vowels. However, there are plenty of short words to start on.

A Z B C Y X D E F Z B U F D V W G D W H G D J J Z -
 F K D B Z H H C Y L C F D H N K B P J L C W Y D P L Z A F .
 X E B U L G U F A Z O G F D H N K B P Z B U J D B F -
 Y L E J Y K D B Y X G K L X D Q Q C . K B V Z J Y
 Y X G L G Z L G F G N G L Z H J L C W Y J H E Q F
 Y X L D E P X D E Y Y X G B Z Y K D B .

Mono Verde

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

5. Here is one especially for beginners. See frequency table and you are all set.

D N I E R O T W J R K D M N V T P O G I X K W R Z L D
 R P D G P K R D B R K O G P D N T W K G Q G P T . U .
 T V I M D D L N G G L M P J N G J K G Q G P D B - X R Q G
 U R W G K D I X I M N L M P J N G J U R W G K K I M D L
 I X U I V R W G , T W T V T U T .

J. F. Older

New York, New York.

6. There are two words in the answer of this long division problem. It is something that the editor finds easy to do. Use the 1234567890 letter arrangement. J. Raymond Eder, Jr., of Baltimore, Maryland, is responsible.

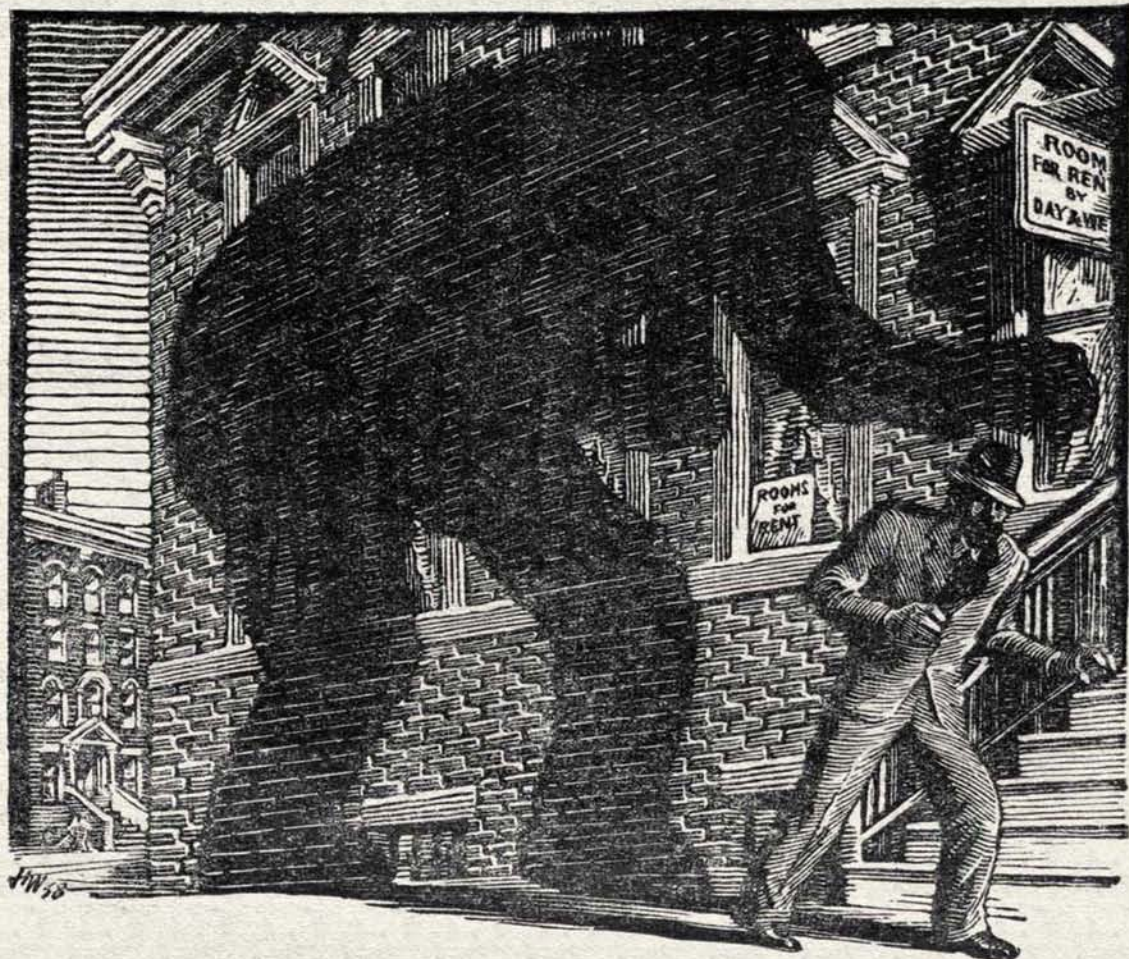
M H L) I L G S E O (N I I
 I N R M
 ———
 R M R E
 R H L G
 ———
 R H M O
 R H L G
 ———
 G H

Answers to Puzzles in the April issue:

1. Definitions of noise: hubbub, to-do, fracas, bombilation, hullabaloo, sound, ado, charivari, etc.
2. Tiny twin wits twit nitwit, twist his thin thigh, hit his wrist with thirty-inch winch. Wit swings high; swish! Sighs, but wins bout.
3. By cracky, favorite expression used by rural life depicitors, illustrates crazy sayings arising to prominence via screen, radio, stage, books.
4. Baseball, football, tennis, and golf are rated as the nation's most popular athletic sports.
5. If you are one who has that type of mind for puzzles such as this, you will not mind short words by such as the likes of me. Quite bombastic, eh what?
5. My First One

PUZZLE FANS' HONOR ROLL

Send in your answers to each issue's puzzles, ye fans, and watch for your name on our Honor Roll.



FOOTSTEPS

BY PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM

Author of "Canceled Life," etc.

UDDERZOOK knew that the sound wasn't real. It was inside his mind—"Clump, clump, clump," the clubfeet of little hunchbacked Klauer, stumping along over floor or pavement.

Then a time came when he had to look round to convince himself that Klauer, with his shaggy gray hair and his bleary eyes, wasn't back there.

"I'm a psychopathic type," he thought, for he had been well edu-

cated. "I'm a 'hysteric'—not the kind that screams and kicks, but the kind that imagines things so hard that they become real. Klauer isn't walking along behind me. He's dead."

His hand went to his belt. It looked like an ordinary dress belt, but on the inner side, just back of the silver buckle, was a zipper compartment stuffed with big bills. That was one way Udderzook knew the clubfooted shoemaker was dead. The

money in the belt had been Klauer's.

Just knowing that the footsteps were imaginary didn't help. The sound of them grew more and more convincing. That was one thing Udderzook had never anticipated. He'd planned the murder carefully. As far as headwork could make it fool-proof, he had cleared the way. But he'd never thought of a splinter of his own brain flying off on this tangent.

Udderzook tried for a time to ignore those stumping steps. Then he tried deliberately listening to them. They were growing louder and louder, as if Klauer were coming along a dark passage, coming toward the man who had killed him.

"It will take more than phony footsteps to beat me," he told himself. "I'll find some way of driving them out of my mind."

He went one night into a cheap eating place down below the "deadline." He'd been hard up for a long time and had had to eat at such places. Part of his plan was to change none of his habits.

So he went into this place, just after dark of a rainy evening. There were tables over at the left, covered with oilcloth, and a counter with round swivel stools in front of it.

Udderzook walked over to the counter. He sat down on the stool nearest the steam-filmed front window. And directly afterward, facing him from the wall, he saw his own photograph.

It was on a sheet of paper about ten by twelve inches in size and at the bottom was the caption, "Wanted For Murder."

Beneath the halftone was a paragraph in coarse type.

For information leading to the arrest and conviction of William Udderzook, whose picture appears above, the undersigned

will pay \$10,000. Wire, phone, or write. All information confidential.

Signed,

John Hanson

Administrator of the estate of Abel Klauer.

A yellow-haired waitress came briskly along behind the counter.

"What you eating to-night, mister?" she asked.

William Udderzook stared for a moment at the greasy menu she pushed toward him, then despite his fear and caution his eyes jerked back to the poster.

The yellow-haired girl glanced over her shoulder.

"A guy came in about an hour ago and stuck that up," she said. "He told me they were plastering the State with them."

Udderzook nodded. Stealthily he examined her face. She was yawning and looking indifferently away.

He ordered ham and eggs, and sat thinking. He remembered early in his acquaintance with Klauer giving the little shoemaker—at the latter's request—a snapshot of himself.

"Just to remember you by, mine friend!" Klauer had explained, with his bleary grin. "I haf not many friends. Always I keep this picture where I can look at it."

But how had the law got hold of it? Udderzook learned the answer to this problem later in the evening. The newspaper which he took to his shabby bedroom carried the story on the front page. He read:

At police headquarters a *Bulletin* reporter learned that the homicide detail has been in possession of a photograph of the man suspected of murdering Abel Klauer, from very early in this baffling case.

It was found under a rug on which Klauer's body lay. Apparently he had lived long enough to inscribe in shaky letters on the back—and with his own blood for ink—the name of the person he accused. But William Udderzook, if

there really is such a person, seems to have vanished completely.

Needless to say the offer of \$10,000 reward will spur every professional and amateur detective in the country to search for the missing man.

Udderzook sat with the limp paper sprawled across his knees. So Klauer hadn't been quite dead? There had been life enough left in his distorted little body to dig out that snapshot from some inner pocket, and to paint the name of his slayer on the back!

"The whole State is plastered with them," Udderzook muttered, and his lip began to jerk as if an invisible fishhook were attached to it.

He stood up and examined himself in the crinkled mirror of his dresser. The beard which he had allowed to grow covered his face, but he knew it hadn't really disguised him. Not only that, but the beard itself—in this day of shaven faces—would attract the attention of every policeman and detective in the country.

"I'm sunk!" Udderzook whispered.

He crouched down into his chair and tried to think. The chances were that he was already under observation. He had maintained two rooms, far apart in the city, and had checked out of the one where he had lived before the murder and had settled down here, where he was already known as Karl McLean.

But ten thousand dollars was enough money to quicken the eyes of every man, woman, and child he met. That yellow-haired waitress must have been as dumb as she looked not to spot him.

For a long time his mind raced like a clock that has lost its pendulum. He just sat shivering and sweating and watching the febrile thoughts race through his brain, unable to check them. Then sheer fatigue gripped him, and he sank back

exhausted. He groaned faintly.

The idea that came to him at last was a bold one. He would go to the police—and tell them that he was William Udderzook. He would admit having known Klauer, but would deny any knowledge of how Klauer came by his death.

"The only thing they have against me is that blood-daubed snapshot," he thought. "If I try to hide, they'll find me—and I'll look guilty. If I confront them of my own free will, they'll have to let me go!"

It wasn't till next day, when he was on his way to police headquarters, that Udderzook realized that the footsteps had ceased. Shock had driven them out of his mind—forever, he hoped.

He went along through the crisp fall sunshine. A policeman came toward him, swinging his club.

"If he looks hard at me or stops, I'll tell him who I am and that I'm on my way to headquarters!" Udderzook decided.

But the man in blue sauntered past, staring casually into Udderzook's bearded face.

"Saphead!" William Udderzook muttered.

He turned into Kearney Street and approached the concrete building which was his objective. He was excited but determined. He'd seen a rash of those "Wanted For Murder" posters about town, and he knew this was the only way out.

He went up the steps and pushed open a brass-bound door. Inside the wide corridor he stared about, then spotted what he was looking for. Over a door down the hall was a sign, "Chief's Office."

Udderzook felt his knees giving under him with each step. But he reached the door, opened it, and pushed into the office beyond.

There was a high counter across the room, near the front. Behind it, at flat-topped desks, three men in blue uniforms sat writing or scowling down at piles of flimsies.

Udderzook approached the counter, and one of the policemen looked up.

"What d'ya want?" he growled.

"I want to see the chief."

The other two policemen sat back to listen.

"Ya got an appointment, I suppose?" the first said surlily.

"No, but——"

"Then be on your way! Roll your hoop! If ya got any squawk to make, go into the sergeant's office, down front!"

They all three sat eying William Udderzook disgustedly.

"Yer just one of them guys that thinks the chief's got nothing to do but palaver," a second of the trio growled. "Fly yer kite out of this, will ya?"

William Udderzook turned and went toward the door. The floor seemed to be going up and down like the deck of a ship in a storm. Something—something immensely important—was whispering to him from the edge of his mind.

He went into the hall and stared toward the front. Not one of those men had recognized him! Nor had the patrolman he met out in the sunlight, nor the waitress, the evening before.

"They meet thousands of people and I'm just one," he realized. "That snapshot probably doesn't look much like me."

He saw the sign near the front, "Information." The door was open and behind brass grillework Udderzook saw a husky, red-faced man writing in a big book.

Out of a closed room across the hall came a tall, wide-shouldered

young fellow wearing a herringbone suit and a snap-brimmed felt hat. He closed the door and stood staring unpleasantly at Udderzook.

"Well," he said, "what do you want? Got any business here?"

Udderzook knew that he was facing a detective. And now he no longer wanted to tell his story.

"I—I came here to look for—for a man!" he muttered.

A derisive grin came about the detective's lips.

"Yeah, I expect so! Well, high-tail out of this! We've had enough lugs hanging around—trying to leave stink bombs in the phone booths, or maybe blow up the building! Beat it, will you?"

Out in the street, Udderzook wiped his face.

"I nearly made a mistake," he thought. "No one is going to recognize me. All I've got to do is to keep still. My first plan was the best."

Instinctively he listened for the footsteps, but they were gone. He ate breakfast and sat in the park, reading a paper. He went home toward night and lay on the bed, thinking.

Those reward notices were just one of the gestures the administrator of Klauer's estate was bound to make. Plenty of innocent men, all over this part of the country, would be suspected and some of them would be held for questioning.

"You can't identify a man from a snapshot," Udderzook realized.

In this sleepy rooming house there was always a chance that some one would ultimately suspect him. Frowsy men and women were coming and going at all hours. They were a suspicious breed.

"I'll move," he thought.

For his next place of residence he chose a room in an old-fashioned

double house. He chose it because most of the rooms facing on the street had "Room For Rent" signs in the windows.

The building was old and decrepit. Only the side with the "Room For Rent" signs in the windows was occupied.

Udderzook routed out a rheumy-eyed old woman from the basement. She hobbled up the stairs and along a dark hall before him.

"You can have your pick," she piped. "I ain't got money enough to fix 'em up nice and pretty, and there's too many rooms for rent in this town, anyhow. You'll have things all to yourself!"

Udderzook chose a back room on the second floor. From the rear window he had a view over the hilly section below. He could see women and children in tiny back yards, could see families eating in squalid kitchens. In the distance were vacant hillside lots, with goats tethered among the rubbish piles.

But this house was still—dead still. He could come and go as he chose.

"I won't get into the habit of sticking in my room all day," he resolved. "I'm inclined to be psychopathic and I've got to keep in the open as much as I can."

So he used to leave early every morning and not come back to his room till night. As he came up the hill, he could see the houses. The two sides of the double house apparently peered with red eyes down at him. That was because the two round windows in the adjacent doors caught the red light of the setting sun.

The days were growing shorter, fall was coming on. And one night, returning after dark from a long walk down the water front, Udder-

zook again heard footsteps.

A thick brown fog had closed over the town as he came up the hilly street. Through it, mysterious, near but invisible, he could hear people talking.

People going by him in the fog. Then he seemed to pass into an area of feltlike silence.

He was nearing the top of the hill when he heard the steps—and this time they were so distinct, so outside of himself, that he froze with one foot ahead of the other and looked slowly and fearfully back over his shoulder.

They were coming uphill after him—the stumpy steps of Abel Klauer's clubfeet! No normal human being sounded like that. And this time they weren't in his feverish mind. They were really coming toward him, through the fog!

Nearer and nearer. Udderzook felt sweat streaming down his face and dripping from his chin. He stood for another moment, then whirled and was about to break into a run. The steps were so close that in another instant he would see something horrible.

His feet seemed glued to the sidewalk. He tugged at them. And suddenly there burst from the fog, not the hunchbacked shoemaker, but a boy on stilts. He came clattering up the cobblestones, his face hidden behind a papier-mâché mask.

"It's Halloween!" Udderzook realized, and felt the tension go out of his muscles.

He walked slowly on home, still dazed by terror.

"I hope that fright doesn't start me to hearing things again!" he thought.

He did hear noises, during the evening. Troops of boys whooped around the neighborhood, tormenting householders till a police car

swooped down and grabbed some of the offenders. Udderzook, glancing from time to time toward the black mirror of his uncurtained window, heard the sounds of festivity gradually fade.

And he heard nothing else, that night or the following day; slowly he forgot the nervous shock he had received.

But next night, back in the silent old house at the top of the hill, he heard the steps again. He'd been reading and he'd forgotten the time.

Without warning he was jerked out of his reverie by a staccato vibration.

Steps—quick, hobbling, coming up the stairs. Coming straight for his door—on the run!

Udderzook dropped his book and sprang erect.

His glaring eyes watched the door. The hobbling feet reached the landing, came along it.

He retreated to the window and laid his hand on the sill. His surface mind had snapped out of gear. Those footsteps were so horribly distinct that he knew he was either quite mad, at last, or that there was something out there—something not human; something like Abel Klauer, come back from the other side of death.

Udderzook couldn't move. He leaned against the wall and his head seemed drawn out of shape by the effort to listen.

The steps had come along the landing—toward his door—and after that they just stopped.

Whatever it was that had caused them must be out there, waiting.

"I'll never open the door!" Udderzook whispered.

His teeth began to chatter as he stood staring at the four battered oak panels of the closed door. He seemed to see through it. To see the

little shoemaker crouching out there, his shaggy gray head close to the keyhole.

"I'll never open it!" he whispered again—and began to creep toward the door.

His terror had reached a point where it drew him like a magnet toward the thing he feared. Everything was quiet—smotheringly quiet.

Udderzook placed one numb foot in front of the other. His eyes were stretched wide open, his bared teeth were clenched.

He came so close to the door that he could touch it, and stood holding his breath. Was that—

It came again—a babbling voice, something like that of a man with a paralyzed tongue and palate trying to laugh.

That was too much. Udderzook's hand lashed out, seized the door-knob, jerked open the door.

But the space outside—the landing and hall—was empty.

He managed to close the door. He lurched back to his chair and fell into it. For a time he was only partly conscious.

He got up later and went to bed. He was numb and stricken from his experience. Morning came and he lay trying to think. There had been a horrible objectivity about what he had heard.

All that day it lingered in his mind. Evidently his sick brain was much worse. Never in all his previous years had he heard anything like this. His hallucinations had always been of thinner stuff than reality. But those footsteps were more real than life.

He considered making another move, but as night came on, he headed back for the old house.

"If I start to run from it, I'll be chased to my grave!" he realized.



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"I might have escaped the police, even if they had recognized me. But I'd be taking this thing right with me. I've got to conquer it—here!"

He let himself in and stood listening. Everything was still. He went slowly up the stairs, testing each step, frowning down at them.

"It must have been an echo from the street," he thought, but he knew better.

That night he couldn't read, although he tried to. He kept looking up over his book at the door, which he sat facing. His sleep of the night before hadn't rested him, but he was afraid to turn out the light.

"I shan't go to bed till I'm sure it won't come again," he whispered—and at that moment he heard footsteps, coming up the stairs.

"Clump, clump, clump!"

Up they came, hurried, purposeful—the steps of Klauer, coming upstairs toward Udderzook's room.

Again he found himself standing, his whole body dripping with sweat, his eyes distended. He backed toward the window—then with a choking cry sprang forward.

This time he'd hurl the door open while the steps could still be heard. If Klauer was out there, he'd confront him!

He got across the floor and laid hold of the knob. It slipped through his wet fingers. He gritted his teeth and twisted.

"Clump, clump, clump!"

Those fearful steps were near the top of the stairs—were just outside, on the landing.

Udderzook slowly drew the door open. He stood clinging to it, staring into the unlighted hall. He could still hear steps, but there was no one here!

Then like the blow of a hammer an idea came to him. This was a double

house. The other side was supposed to be vacant, but whatever was making those ghostly footsteps was over there.

The sound had ceased. Udderzook turned and tried to draw his door shut.

"I'm imagining the whole thing—now that I've faced it here, it pretends to come from beyond the partition!" he whispered.

Suddenly he turned back into the hall. Descending the worn treads with fumbling feet and weak knees, he reached the street door and went out upon the porch.

There was a division here between the two sides of the old house. A dark space ran straight down to the concrete floor of the areaway. But Udderzook leaned over and peered at the windows. There was no light. Dust had made them grimy and almost opaque.

He threw one leg over the iron rail of his little porch, stepped across the areaway, and stood facing that other closed door. He tried the handle and found that it was unlocked.

Udderzook went in, but he left the door open. Evidently this house was a counterpart of the one he lived in.

Light from the street shone up the stairs. Udderzook stood looking up.

Then he walked slowly forward and began to climb. He kept looking up and listening. Everything was still.

"I'll chase you out of here!" he said. "I'll confront you, and turn you into what you started from—nothing!"

He reached the second-story landing, and stopped. No sound. Nothing but the swell and thud of his own heart.

The hall stretched away toward the foot of another staircase, which

led to the third floor. Udderzook laid his hand on the dusty railing and felt his way slowly back—or forward, for he was now facing the street.

He had approached to within six steps of the foot of the staircase when suddenly he heard the steps. They came from the top floor and they seemed to be hopping about in a grotesque dance.

And now they were coming down.
“Clump, clump, clump!”

As real as his own shaking body, as real as his thick, protesting voice! His words tumbled out without meaning—and were answered.

That paralyzed, babbling laughter drove him to frenzy. So Klauer had sounded when he lay dying. He had tried to talk, and the blood welling from his throat had choked him.

Udderzook stood for another instant, his heart bursting, his brain seared and shriveling. Then he whirled and ran.

Down the front stairs—tripping, madly catching himself by the banister, leaping on down. Through the open front door.

His clammy hand gripped the iron railing. He leaped galvanically up and over. His hand slipped and he pitched head downward into the

dark. There sounded a crunching smash.

Udderzook, lying on the cold concrete, wasn't quite dead, for he saw the policeman who came running down the steps. But his eyes opened and closed like those of a decapitated rooster.

Something was coming down the steps—out of the other half of the old house where he had lived.

And, lying there, dying, Udderzook understood. It was only one of the neighborhood goats, caught by some mischievous youngsters, on Halloween, and shut up in the vacant half of the old house.

Only a goat, shaking its head fractionally now as it stood looking down into the areaway.

“You're hurt bad, sor!” the policeman said. “Did ye slip?”

Udderzook looked up, but his eyes were filming.

“Can you hear me?” the policeman asked. “And can ye give me your name?”

Udderzook's lips moved. He was trying to say, “I'm the man who is wanted for murder!”

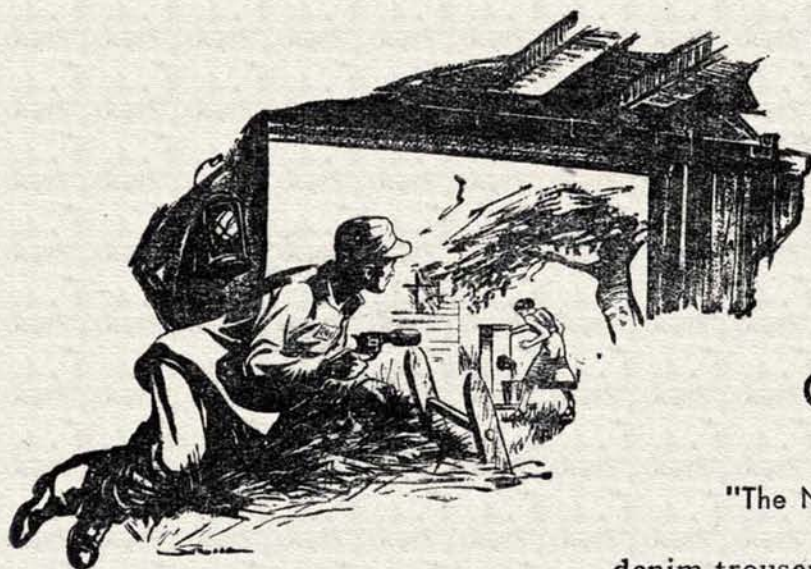
But the policeman had vanished in a great gray cloud, and Udderzook felt himself being whirled away into starless space, perhaps into nothingness.

“So this is death!” he thought.

ALIENS IN SING SING

AMONG the 2,454 prisoners in Sing Sing, a report issued by Warden Lewis E. Lawes reveals that there are 232 aliens included. Of these 53 were born in Italy, 16 in Russia, 18 in Germany, 13 in England, and 11 each were natives of the British West Indies and Poland.

Other nations represented were Ireland, 9; Austria and Cuba, 8 each; Mexico, 7; Chili, China, Canada, and Spain, 6 each; Scotland, Central America, and Puerto Rico, 4 each; Argentina, France, Portugal, and Syria, 3 each; Bahamas, Algeria, San Domingo, Sweden, Hungary, Liberia, Philippines, and Rumania, 2 each; and one each for Brazil, East Indies, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Ecuador, Norway, Japan, Peru, Serbia, and Lithuania.



COP'S WIFE

BY JOHN
JAY
CHICHESTER

Author of
"The Noiseless Cracksman," etc.

S EVEN hours after he had broken his date with the hangman, "Trigger" Haines was only twenty miles from Cole County Prison, where, in the jail yard, a scaffold had been especially built to receive him.

Trigger was lucky to have got even twenty miles. With pursuit so hard upon his heels, it would have been folly to keep to his original plan of trying for a get-away in the automobile that Tessie had left for him at the foot of West Street, the ignition key hidden under the floor mat.

All highways were blocked, all cars being stopped and searched within twenty minutes after Haines had shot his way out of the death cell. A dark night and the confusion of a violent rainstorm had enabled him to take flight across the open country and, so far, slip through the net.

Daylight was danger. As the first graying of dawn began to melt the night's shielding blackness, Trigger Haines knew that his only chance now was to get under cover—and stay there until darkness came again.

The rain had stopped, but his

denim trousers and jacket, which he had been forced to wear in jail, hung soddenly to his short, squat body; the chill of their clammy touch soaked through his skin until the very marrow of his bones was ice. Mud caked his shoes and weighted his feet. Almost completely exhausted, he emerged from a strip of woods into a small cleared field.

Just ahead was a small collection of buildings, dimly silhouetted against a background of dirty gray sky. Breath pumping through his throat in wheezing gasps, Trigger Haines paused, leaning against the sagging fence which inclosed the small meadow. Carefully he took stock of his surroundings.

His flight, made with a confused sense of direction, had evidently brought him into the outskirts of a small town. The buildings apparently belonged to a village farm where a family kept a cow and a few chickens, but the place had a run-down, deserted atmosphere which was noticeable, even in the darkness.

"Daylight soon," muttered Trigger Haines. "Gotta get under cover somewhere. Can't keep goin' much longer, anyhow."

Wearily he crawled through the fence and made his way through the

wet tangle of uncut meadow grass to investigate the buildings and determine how safe it would be for him to use one of them as a hide-away. He reached the barn and found a door that he could open. Cautiously he struck a match, shielding the flame within cupped hands.

The barn was empty. Evidently it had been in disuse for a long time. There was still hay in the loft; he could see that through the opening above the stalls, and the ladder leading up to the space under the eaves. The hay would be warm; he could burrow into the stuff and get some heat into his shivering body.

Trigger Haines climbed the ladder and dug himself in. Slowly, very slowly, a little warmth began to creep back into his blood. The promise of daylight became an actuality as the sun crept up over the horizon and shot beams of light through cracks in the barn wall.

Suddenly, just as the idea of sleep began to take hold of him, he heard a sound which startled him fully awake again. A door had banged; there was the rattle of an empty tin pail. Alarmed, Trigger Haines squirmed his head and shoulders out of the hay and put his eye near one of the cracks which gave him a view of the rear of the house.

A woman had come out of the kitchen. She was young and pretty, and the gracefulness of her body was a poetry of motion.

Trigger Haines wasn't interested in her beauty. He saw only that she was headed toward the barn, and his heavy, vicious face twisted into an ugly snarl as his right hand—the one with the first joint of the thumb missing—moved toward his gun, jerking it clear of the crudely improvised holster which held it under his armpit.

The other hand darted toward the

sagging pocket of his cotton prison jacket, heavy with the cylindrical weight of a silencer. Swiftly he fitted the silencer to the end of the gun muzzle, then he saw that these deadly preparations were, at least for the moment, unnecessary.

The comely young woman wasn't coming to the barn after all. She was making her way to the well. A moment later the pump was creaking plaintively as she drew a pail of water. Trigger Haines gave a grunt as he relaxed, and he was preparing to crawl back under the hay when his hand again tightened its grip on the gun.

The staccato *putt-putt* of a motor cycle beat loudly on the morning air. Topping a small hill, the speeding machine came roaring down the gray sweep of concrete highway, suddenly opening up its siren.

When he heard that, Trigger Haines didn't need to see the State trooper's uniform to know it was a police motor cycle.

At the well, the pretty young woman put down the water bucket and waved her hand. The motor cycle slackened speed, turned off the highway and into the path which led up to the shabby house. It did not stop until State Trooper Fowler braked to a halt beside the kitchen door.

Trigger Haines watched warily, his eyes squeezed almost shut, a deadly light glittering through the fleshy slits, and his fingers tightened about the butt of the gun.

"O. K., copper, get off your bike and have a look around!" he said under his breath. "You're pickin' the quickest way I know of gettin' yourself a ticket straight to hell."

State Trooper Fowler didn't have his mind on the man hunt which had kept the police on the jump through

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the night. He was not, as Trigger Haines supposed, carrying out orders to search all buildings up and down the highway.

Bert Fowler was grinning as he pushed up his goggles, shut off the engine, and parked his machine.

"Good morning, Mrs. Fowler!" he sang out.

"And good morning to you, Mr. Fowler!" the girl at the well answered him, with a happy laugh. "Aren't you getting through a little early this morning?"

Bert Fowler drew off his gauntlets, walked over to the well, and kissed her. They had been married exactly one month and two days.

"Got to check in at headquarters before I can officially call it a night," Bert told her. "They pulled me off my regular patrol to join in the man hunt. Guess maybe you heard Trigger Haines crashed out of jail last night?"

Milly Fowler nodded. "Yes, I heard it over the radio. Have they caught him yet?"

Bert shook his head. "Nope. Looks like he was smart enough to stay off the highways. Some of the boys think he's got away clean, but I believe he's crawled in somewhere and will try to keep under cover until the search wears itself out."

"Somebody must have been terribly careless—to let a gun be smuggled into a condemned man," said Milly.

"That was done pretty smart," explained Bert. "Trigger Haines has got a girl, a tough moll by the name of Tessie. The cops over at Bensonville picked her up last night and put on the pressure.

"Trigger's cell was on the second floor of the county prison, and it had an outside window, as these dinky local jails are likely to have. Well, this Tessie wasn't fool enough to try and smuggle in the gun; she knew she couldn't get away with that.

"Know what she done? She sent

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him the present of a necktie which she took the trouble to knit herself. You're wondering how that hooks up with a gun, eh?"

"I wouldn't have any idea," admitted Milly Fowler.

"Well, listen—this is good! That tie was knitted of very special material—strong silk cord. Trigger Haines unraveled it and he had a stout string long enough to reach the street.

"He drops it out the window, Tessie is waiting down there with the gun, she ties it onto the end of the string, and Trigger hauls it up into his cell.

"A gun with a silencer on it, mind you! That's how he could kill Charley Fay, who was on the death watch, without the shot being heard in the front office.

Fay and Trigger were playing checkers through the locked cell door. Death cells should have tight wire screens on 'em, as they do in the big prisons, but this one didn't. Trigger reaches through, gets Fay's keys and lets himself out. He plugged two other guys in the front office, but I hear they're going to be all right. It just goes to show how big a mistake it is for every county to execute its own prisoners. They'll probably change the law after this."

Bert picked up the water bucket and walked with Milly back to the house.

"No more of this water toting after next month's pay check, honey," he told her. "We'll have an electric pump and running water in Mrs. Fowler's kitchen in no time at all now. Next step—electric lights. The place is a wreck, but we'll get it fixed up."

Milly gave her husband's arm a squeeze.

"It's fun doing things like this—a little at a time," she told him. "Everything's being paid for as we go, and I like that."

Bert put the water pail on the



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Each month we receive scores of unsolicited letters of gratitude and appreciation from users of the Prosager—the following letters are typical of those received. Mr. Milton A. Montgomery, R.R. 2, Rimersburg, Pa., states in his letter: I don't know hardly how to praise your Prosager enough, but think if a lot of sufferers would only risk a little, they could be relieved. Mr. Jos. Weaver, Hopewell, Va., writes: For two years, I have not been able to work for more than four or five days at a time, but thank God for you and the Prosager, I can work every day now. Mr. M. J. Rabbitt, 142 W. First St., Woodstock, Ill., states: I consider it my duty to inform you that the Prosager which you sent so promptly arrived April 12th and has worked wonders in my case. We do not publish our users' letters unless we have their permission to do so.



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kitchen stoop.

"Well, I've got to be shoving along to make the roll call at headquarters. Back in half an hour—with an appetite."

"Breakfast will be ready and waiting for you," said Milly, and kissed him again.

Bert walked back to his motor cycle, pulling on his gauntlets. He swung the machine around, kicked the motor to life, and went zooming down the highway.

Up in the haymow, Trigger spat out a string of muffled profanities.

"Of all the barns there is in this damn country, I'd have to pick the one that belongs to a cop!" he snarled under his breath. "And I dasn't stir outta here until it gets night again! I gotta stay put and take my chances—"

The muttered words mumbled to an open-mouthed pause as his narrow-set eyes popped wide with the impact of a sudden idea. The cunning brain which had concocted the clever scheme of the gun and the knitted necktie had leaped to still another triumph of ingenuity.

"Ah!" he breathed. "Maybe it ain't such a bad break after all!"

Trigger Haines's scheme began to take on form. He was thinking aloud as he swiftly arranged the details.

"Yeah! That's one way to get clear—maybe the only way! The cop's uniform and the motor bike will take me anywheres. Nobody stops a cop! And with them goggles to cover my pan—yeah, yeah! I'm just the same as in St. Louie right now!"

In the kitchen of the cottage, Milly Fowler hummed a bright, happy little tune as she mixed the batter for waffles. Bert was especially fond of waffles, done to a crisp brown, flooded with pure maple sirup, and garnished with three or four small sausages.

She gave a start of surprise when

she heard the rear kitchen door open, and was a little bewildered that Bert could have got back so soon, or that he could have arrived without her hearing his motor cycle. As she swung around from the kitchen sink—the one which was soon to be equipped with running water—a strangled cry arose and clogged in her throat and the stirring spoon slipped from her hand, clattering on the floor.

This short, squat man with the evil face and narrow-set beady eyes—she knew it was Trigger Haines. The denim trousers and jacket, the gun in his hand with the knobbed protuberance at the end of the barrel told her beyond any possible doubt.

"If you start yappin'," Trigger Haines warned her, "I'll have to shut you up."

"I mustn't let myself scream!" Milly Fowler thought. "He'll kill me if I do. No, I mustn't let myself scream."

She stood with the fingers of both hands pressed tightly across her mouth, staring at him. What did he want? Clothes? Money? Food?

Trigger Haines moved closer to the kitchen stove. The heat felt good, but there wasn't enough of it to suit him. Keeping the gun pointed at the cop's wife, he jerked one of the lids from the firebox, jammed in three fresh sticks of wood. Then he opened the dampers, kicked open the oven door, and pulled up a chair to soak up all the warmth he could.

Milly Fowler found the use of her voice.

"You—you'd better get out of here as quick as you can," she told him. "My husband is a State trooper. He'll be back almost any minute."

Trigger Haines leered knowingly. "Sure. His name's Fowler, and he's a motor-cycle jockey. He's gone to headquarters and he's comin' back in half an hour. I'll wait for him."

A fresh wave of terror swept over

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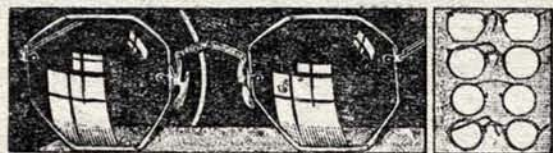
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Milly. It left her limp and trembling.

"Wait for him?" she repeated in a dread whisper. "What—what do you mean?"

Trigger Haines thought himself a very clever fellow, and, in his swaggering conceit, he could not resist the impulse to boast how clever he really was. Grinning spaciouly, he rested the knobby end of the gun muzzle against his knee.

"Why, I got an idea that I'd try to make a little trade with your cop husband, lady. His uniform and the motor bike—I got use for 'em. Maybe I'll trade him a nice bullet for 'em—if he gets foolish ideas about bein' a hero."

The walls of the kitchen swung crazily in front of Milly's eyes; Trigger Haines's hard, evil face became an almost indistinguishable blur, as she realized what was going to happen. She saw it as clearly as if it already *had* happened!

It wouldn't be that Bert wanted to make himself a hero, but he would try to do his duty. A cop's duty is to have courage.

"There'll be shooting; there'll be killing!" thought Milly. Bert won't have a chance. He won't be expecting anything like this."

Then Trigger Haines's harsh voice was saying: "And while we're waitin', what about gettin' me some chow? Some bacon and eggs—that'll be quickest."

Milly Fowler's brain cleared a little, but her mind still had a numb, dead feeling as she acquiesced to his suggestion about bacon and eggs.

"What am I to do?" she thought desperately. "I've got to do something! I can't let Bert walk into a trap like this! I can't let Bert be shot down without a chance!"

There was no telephone in the house, but what difference did that make? Trigger Haines wouldn't give her a chance to use it, anyhow.

"I can scream when Bert starts to come in the kitchen," she told her-

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self. "Then when Haines fires his gun, Bert will know—"

But that was no good either. Trigger Haines's gun had a silencer on it. There would be no explosion to warn Bert. If she screamed, that would only bring her husband a few seconds more quickly—straight into a death trap from which there was no possible escape.

The eggs and the bacon were done. Milly dished them onto a plate. Trigger Haines reached out one of his dirty paws and pulled the kitchen table across the floor so that he could still revel in the heat of the stove. He kept one hand on his gun.

"What about coffee?" he growled.

Milly moistened her lips. "I—I forgot about the coffee," she stammered.

"You're a hell of a cook!" rasped Trigger Haines. "Fix me some coffee."

Milly Fowler turned around to the kitchen sink and reached to the shelf above it where the coffeepot was. Her fingers froze rigidly about the handle as her ears caught the sound—the shriek of the siren on Bert's motor cycle. He always signaled her like that when he was nearing home. She had formed the habit of measuring the time which elapsed between the wail of the siren and the moment when he slammed his machine into the narrow driveway and shut off the motor outside the

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kitchen door after a last dramatic racing of the engine. Usually it took just about two minutes.

And then she saw a chance—just one possible chance. How the idea came to her, what had inspired it, she did not know. It just leaped into her mind—and there it was.

Trigger's eyes never left her, even for an instant. He saw her take the lid from the coffeepot, pour in several heaping tablespoons of coffee from the coffee can. He saw her fill it from an earthenware jug.

He wondered, a little absently, why a good-looking jane like this would want to marry a cop and live in a run-down house where she had to carry water from out-of-doors.

"She must be dumb as hell," thought Trigger. "A doll with her looks could write her own ticket."

For just an instant he had a moment of regret that he was going to have to kill her. But, of course, that was necessary. He didn't dare leave her behind alive, to send pursuit racing after him.

Milly Fowler turned away from the sink and stepped over to the hot stove. The lids glowed red from the heat of the extra fuel Trigger Haines had put in the firebox. Lifting a lid, she set the coffeepot directly over the flames.

"It—it ought to percolate in just—just a minute," said Milly, and withdrew to the far corner of the kitchen. Her eyes had a bright, set look, and she seemed to be holding her breath.

Again Bert Fowler's motor cycle screamed raucously—closer this time. So close that now Milly could hear the explosive spitting of the motor. Closer, closer.

Her eyes were fixed upon the coffeepot and the red-hot glow of the stove upon which it rested. Her lips moved mutely; she was praying silently—that the thing that must happen would happen in time.

Bert's motor cycle had turned into the driveway. She heard it slacken pace, heard the tires make their crunching sound on the spot where there were gravel and ashes, just outside the kitchen door. Trigger Haines's body straightened; his eyes glistened with a malevolent enjoyment. He hated cops, all cops; killing them was a pleasure. The gun lifted in his hand.

Then, without warning, a sheet of flame filled the room as the coffeepot exploded with a dull roar. Blazing liquid shot toward the ceiling, descended in a spatter of fire.

Trigger Haines got a lot of it over his head, on his shoulders. With a scream of agony he dropped the gun and started beating out the flames with his bare hands. The room became pungent with the smell of burned hair.

"Damn you!" he shouted. "What did you put in that coffeepot?"

The gun had struck the floor and slid five or six feet away from him. Milly Fowler made a leap for the weapon, scooped it up in her hand.

"Kerosene," she said. "Stay where you are; I've got the gun!"

By something of a miracle, Trigger Haines had not been blinded. He made a lunge toward her.

"Gimme that gat!" he said between his teeth.

Milly's finger found the trigger. She squeezed it—hard. A ping sound, a little spurt of yellowish fire, and Trigger Haines reeled back, his blistered hands clawing at his chest—a wound not quite low enough to keep them from hanging him.

"I mustn't faint; I mustn't faint!" Milly kept telling herself. "A cop's wife doesn't faint!"

She was still standing very straight, with the gun almost steady in her hand, as Trooper Fowler flung open the kitchen door and pounded into the room.

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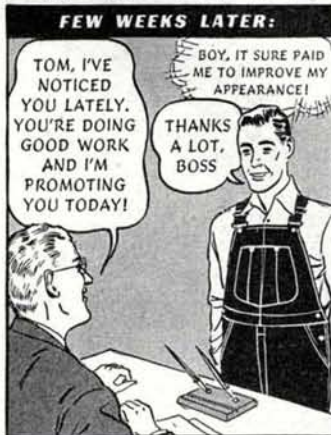
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