

ALL STORIES
COMPLETE

APRIL 1ST

10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

TWICE
A MONTH



KICK BACK

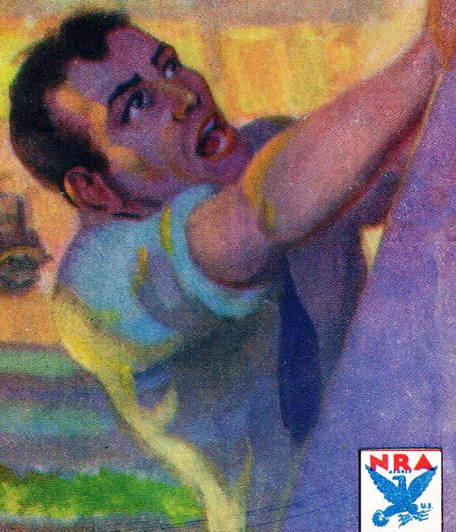
A CARDIGAN STORY

by **FREDERICK NEBEL**

The DEVIL'S PENTHOUSE

By **OSCAR SCHISGALL**

AND OTHERS



CHISELER'S CHOICE

by
**ERLE STANLEY
GARDNER**

Health Authorities **WARN** Against **BULGING** Waistline!

The New York Times

LARGE WAISTLINE HELD HEALTH PERIL

Middle-Aged Man Who Keeps His Small Lives Longer, Government Bureau Says.

FIGURES SHOW DIRECT LINK

Overweight People Have Worst of It in Mortality Tables Covering 15 Causes.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24 (AP).—The man who keeps his waistline small when he reaches middle age is the most likely to win the race for health, is the conclusion drawn from a new study of the relation of weight to physical defects just published by the Public Health Service.

"By the time that middle age is reached, these figures indicate, it is a definite advantage to be under the average weight for height," says the report.

It also shows "a great excess of mortality among overweight persons, whatever the age, and also an excess among young adult underweight persons."

The conclusions are drawn from records of more than 3,000 men from 1909 to 1928, showing the ratio of actual deaths to expected mortality, according to different weight groups. In the following table, figures below 100 indicate less than the expected death rate; those above 100 indicate more than the expected death rate:

Weight Class.	Age Group.			50 and Over.
	20-29.	30-39.	40-49.	
25 pounds or more underweight—				
.118	105	83	77	
10 to 20 lbs.101	94	76	85	
5 lbs. under to 5 lbs. overweight—				
.92	84	87	92	
10 to 20 pounds overweight99	88	94	90	
25 to 45 pounds overweight113	123	125	119	
50 lbs. or more overweight163	143	144	130	

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The **WEIL BELT** will safely **REDUCE** your **WAISTLINE!**

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THE **WEIL BELT**
for **10** days
.. AT OUR EXPENSE !

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YOUR WAIST
3 INCHES IN
TEN DAYS
it won't cost you one penny!

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The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 40 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller—**THREE INCHES OF FAT GONE—OR NO COST!**

THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION DOES IT!

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EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW

Vol. 11

CONTENTS for APRIL 1st, 1934

No. 2

SMASHING CARDIGAN NOVELETTE

Watch out for the lead

Kick Back Frederick Nebel **10**
That's bound to come due when get-rich-quick smarties mix murder with their game.

GRIPPING CRIME ACTION STORY

Make a

Chiseler's Choice Erle Stanley Gardner **30**
And sit in on a slick shyster set-up with six foot two of tiger man.

HAIR-RAISING HORROR THRILLER

Ride up to

The Devil's Penthouse..... Oscar Schisgall **46**
Where, far above the rooftops, a man monster lashes his jungle cats to human flesh-lust.

EXCITING DETECTIVE MYSTERY

Take a shot at a

Clip Killer George Harmon Coxe **73**
As murder comes tumbling down the stairs to land at your very feet.

TENSE MIDNIGHT MURDER NOVEL

Listen in terror to the

Post Mortem J. Paul Suter **94**
Threat of a year-dead corpse as Horatio Humberton, mortician detective, becomes a prisoner of a doctor of doom.

You won't find much

Between the Lines..... Editor **117**
In the thrill-specials DIME DETECTIVE runs. It's all down in black and white. But how much of it do you catch?

Cover—"In An Instant It Would Claw"..... John Howitt
From "The Devil's Penthouse."

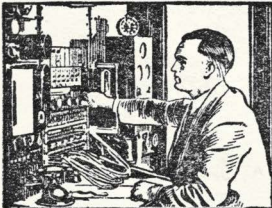
Issued the First and Fifteenth of Every Month

Watch for the April 15th Issue

On the Newsstands April 1st

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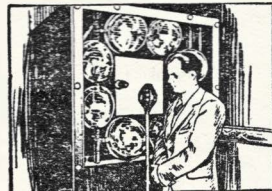
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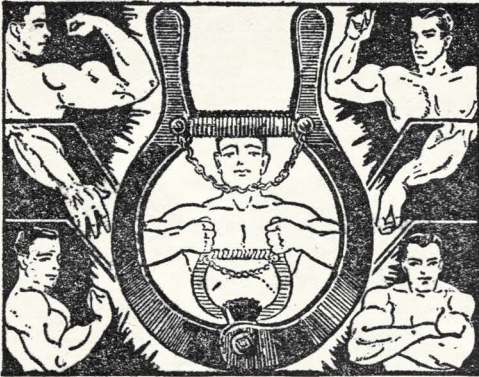


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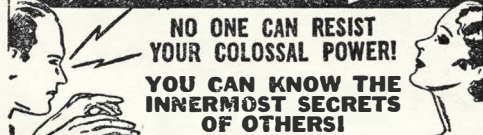
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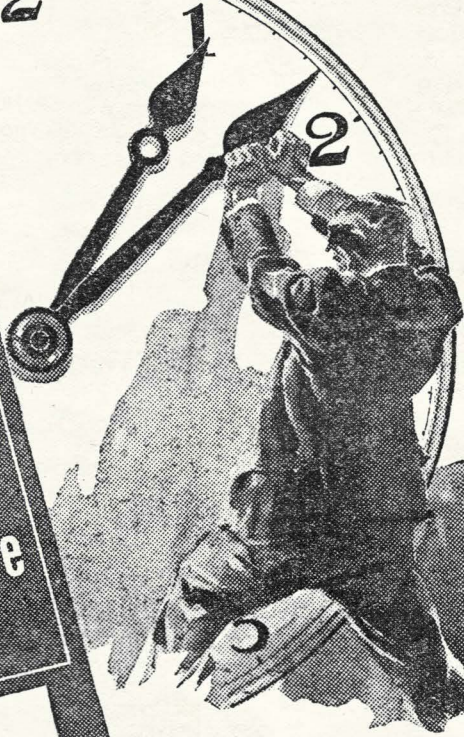
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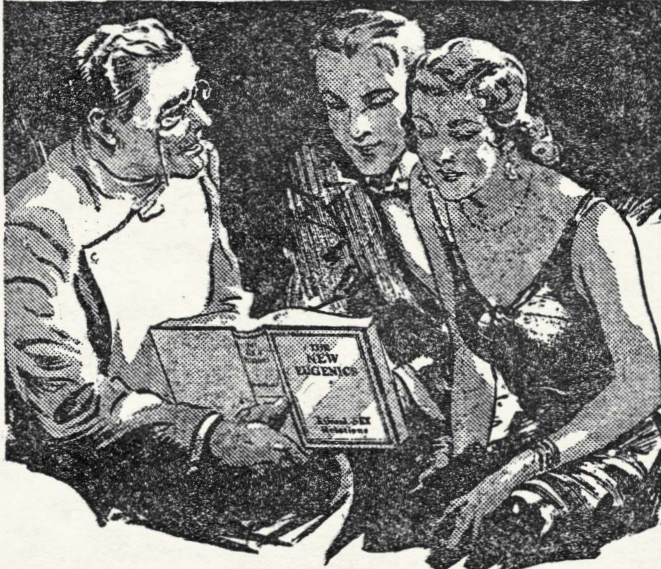
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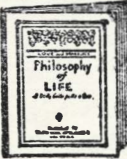
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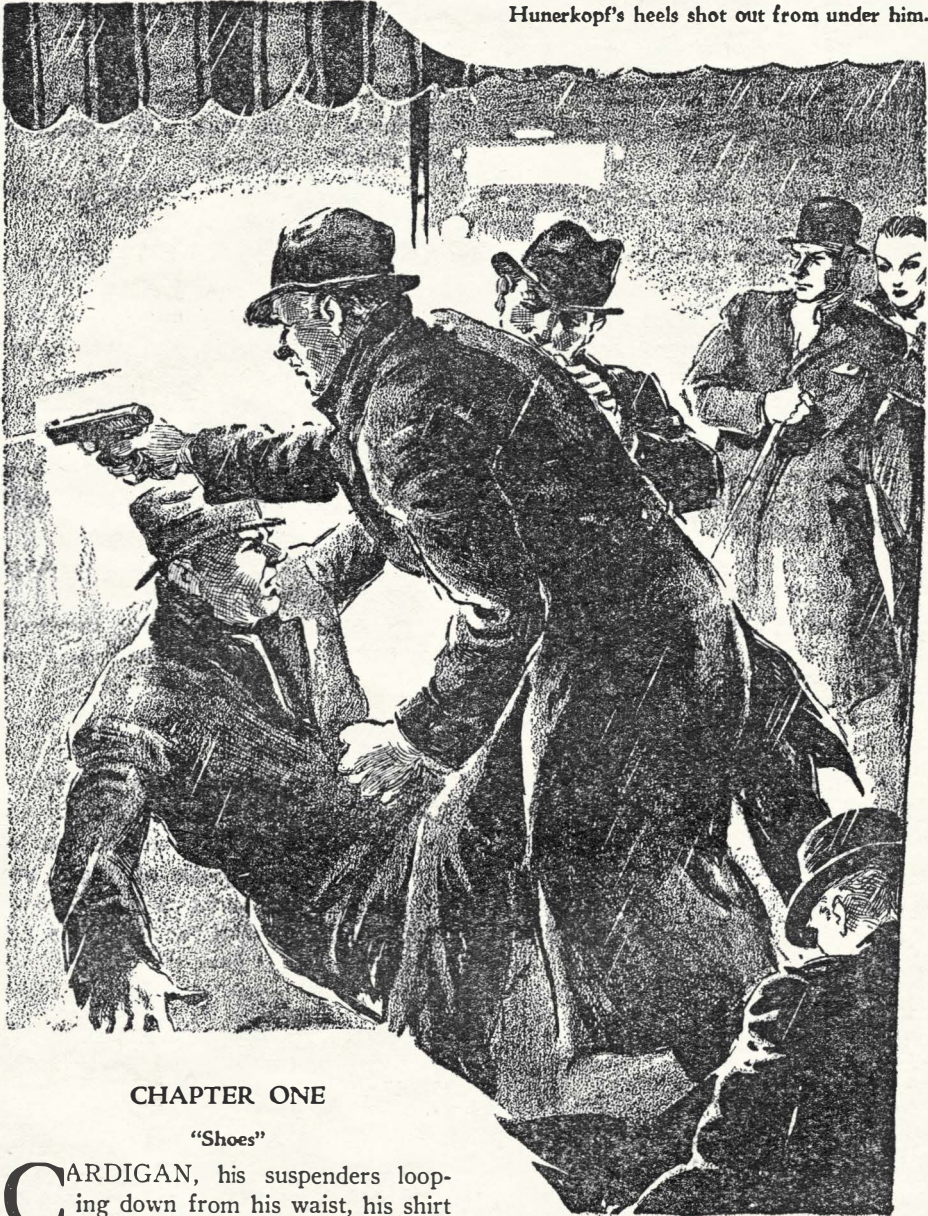


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A CARDIGAN STORY

By Frederick Nebel

Hunerkopf's heels shot out from under him.



CHAPTER ONE

"Shoes"

CARDIGAN, his suspenders looping down from his waist, his shirt off, came out of the improvised pantry of his California Street apartment crackling celery between his teeth and carrying a brace of Scotch highballs. He planked one of the drinks down on the

table, still littered with a haphazard assortment of used dishes, and took a long, noisy swig at the other. Halfway through the pull, he lowered the drink, looked

down at "Shoes" O'Riley and shook his big head.

"Nix, Shoes," he said. "Uh-uh."

Shoes O'Riley looked melancholy. "Geez," his wistful voice said, as he reached absently for the drink.

"And lay off," Cardigan pursued, pointing with his glass, "this crap about the Irish should stick together, and this palsy-walsy stuff and all this slop about my old lady knew your old lady when."

Shoes O'Riley took a drink, gulped, wagged his turnip head. "I guess I'm just a sort of a kind of failure. I'm just like whatcha might call the Forgotten Man."

"Forgotten, hell! There's not a cop in this town or ten other towns that'd ever forget that pan of yours. . . . Listen, you hopeless jail-bird. I had one bad slam in this burg when Jagoe knocked off practically the first client the San Fran branch of the Cosmos had. I cleaned that up—but what the hell"—he hunched his shoulders—"the guy got knocked off and certain wiseacres I don't need to mention have since been calling us the Cosmetic Detective Agency. And then you pop up fresh from a two-year stretch for petty and want to become a private detective. You must think I'm nuts or something."

"What's that?" Shoes said, twisting his head around.

"What?"

"Scratchin' like."

Cardigan drank, said: "Rats. Cold weather drives them in."

SHOES took another drink, looking very sorrowful. "It's just like I want to turn over a new leaf kinda. I got a good heart, Jack. I don't mean no harm. Geez, this time I was wanderin' around in a joolry store and kind of absent-minded like I pick up some jools to look at 'em just. I'm thinking about some gal

give me the boudoir eye outside and then absentminded, like I said, I waltz out with the jools—not meanin' to, y'understand."

"Yeah. And about the stretch you did in Ohio State for slamming that night watchman on the conk with a hunk of lead pipe?"

"Geez, why'n't you set traps for them rats?"

"I'm talking about the Ohio State stretch."

"Oh, that. Well, it's me hard luck again. I go into this warehouse to get outta the rain and the cold, me on me uppers, and suddenly some strange guy I never seen before piles into me. Well, I think it's just an old hunk o' rubber hose I pick up, but it turns out to be a hunk o' lead pipe and—"

"It wasn't lead pipe either, monkey. It was a blackjack."

"Oh," said Shoes, slightly surprised. "It was? Huh, I wonder howcome I got hold of that. Now—let—me—think. . . ."

Cardigan walked across the room, rapped on the wall, as if to frighten away the rat, and said, pivoting, shaking his palms toward Shoes: "Nothing doing, kid. I split a T-bone with you tonight, gave you a couple of drinks, and I'll give you ten bucks as a pick-me-up. That's personal. But the agency's something else. We'd have the cops and the press on our necks if we hired Shoes O'Riley. It's tough, baby, but that"—he spread his palms—"is the lay of the land."

"Ah," sighed Shoes, getting up, "I'm just a failure. I ain't no credit to me mother or nobody. I'm just a port without a ship—I mean a ship without—"

"Take this," Cardigan said, tossing a ten-spot to the table. "Buy yourself some flops with it. I'd hang around here with you tonight but Bert Kine's on a job and I got to meet him at Powell and Bush

in half an hour. I'm not Santa Claus, Shoes but if you ever need a meal, buzz me and I'll stand you. Here's the office card."

"Thanks, Jack. Only back up there in the pen I was lookin' forward to bein' a private dick for a change. Me old woman always wanted me to go on the cops like me old man, and thinkin' about her and all— Well, that's life; there today, here tomorrer. Thanks for the chow, Jack. And I'd do somethin' about them rats. They're right by this door."

He put on his overcoat, a lumpy, misshapen figure, forty-odd and opened the door. He jumped back with a short, hoarse outcry as a man's body, which evidently had been propped kneeling against the door, flopped at his feet, the head making a loud thump against the floor.

"M'gawd!" groaned Shoes.

"Look out," clipped Cardigan, thrusting him aside, dropping to his knees. He started to heave the body around, but stopped midway, and his jaw sagged. "Bert . . ." he muttered. His dark eyes flashed as he glared up at Shoes. "It's Bert Kine!"

"Hanh?"

"Bert—"

"It musta been him clawin' at the door and us thinkin' it was rats."

Cardigan, still kneeling, held the young blond man in his big arms. The blond head lay backward, the eyes wide open. Cardigan felt one of the wrists, then pushed his hand beneath the overcoat. Then he put his ear to the chest, listened. He laid Bert down, got up and went into the bathroom, returning with a mirror. He tried the mirror test. Then he shrugged, his big frame sagging, his eyebrows coming together sullenly, a humid wrath growing in his eyes. He was looking at Shoes, but not seeing him; though Shoes, gulping, retreated apprehensively.

CARDIGAN turned and scuffed his big feet to the telephone, stabbed sullenly at the instrument and scooped it up. He called police headquarters, spoke in a thick, chopped voice, hung up. Shoes still eyed him apprehensively, as a man might eye some strange, dark piece of magic, uncertain as to what course it would take next.

But Cardigan no longer paid any attention to Shoes. He returned to the body, dropped to one knee. He mumbled thickly, "Hell, Bert, old sox," and his mouth was twisted in a half-angry, half-sickly grimace. Bert was so young—hardly more than a kid—and had come on fresh from New York only two weeks before. A guy Cardigan felt he could have trusted anywhere. "Hell, Bert. . . ."

Shoes ventured: "He was a kind of a sort of a pal?"

"Yeah," Cardigan muttered, "a kind of a sort of a."

"Geez," sympathized Shoes, genuinely, removing his hat and holding it piously in front of his chest.

There was a small, artificial rose in Bert's lapel, and Cardigan unpinning it and turned it round and round in his fingers. Just beneath the rose was a small strip of yellow paper with the words *La Rosa Memorial Home* stamped on it.

Shoes pointed: "Looka, Jack. One of his hands is open and the other's kinda shut hard. I been noticin' that, but not wantin' to butt in. . . ."

Cardigan shoved the artificial rose into his pocket, leaned over and pried open Bert's hands. Tiny beads, the size of small peas, fell to the floor; and one by one Cardigan picked them up. They were made of glass. Nine of them. Some were dark red, some green, some blue. Cheap beads. He felt his heart pounding more slowly now within his chest. He rose, went to his desk, took out an envelope and in this placed the nine beads

and the artificial rose. There was a dark, sly and thoughtful look in his eyes, and his thick wiry eyebrows were locked above his nose.

Then he started, said: "You, Shoes—you get the hell out of here! Go on, scram!"

"Hully gee, Jack—I ain't done nothin'!"

"Did I say you did anything? But breeze. The cops are coming. I can't afford to have you here and what's more you, just out of stir, can't afford to be here. Is that plain, Shoes, or do I have to draw a diagram?"

Shoes blinked. "I get you," he panted, nodding. "Them guys, you mean, might think—"

Cardigan took hold of Shoes' arm and marched him to the door. "Exactly."

Shoes was suddenly scared. He had no particular ill feeling for coppers, but the coppers usually did not like him. He reeled away from Cardigan and his lumpy, comical figure went hiking down the corridor. He took the stairway down, almost tripping twice, and rushed to the hall door. Opening it, he barged out into the misty winter rain, went down the stone stoop and, slipping, careened into a uniformed patrolman.

"Hey!" growled the policeman.

"Oh, excuse it please, mister."

The glow of a street light dripped through the rain, shining on the patrolman's black rubber coat, on the black visor of his cap. And Shoes, looking up, frightened stiff by the sight of buttons, a shield, gibbered: "I—I was just—so to speak kinda—"

"Hey, wait a minute—"

"So to speak—"

"Hanh?" drawled the copper, holding on fast. "I seen that mugg o' yours somewhere."

"In the movies, maybe. I was an actor oncet."

"Says you. Take it easy, bud—take it easy. I'm tryin' to think where I seen you—"

A black sedan drew up to the curb. Its rear door opened and Sergeant McGovern, plainclothed, stepped to the wet pavement and spat neatly at a fire plug, hitting it. Detective Hunerkopf, a roly-poly man with a rubicund face, stepped out next.

McGovern said in a tough, fog-horn voice: "What's this?"

"I'm Sleary," said the copper.

"Yeah? And who's this potato?"

"I'm tryin' to think. He came bustin' out o' that house there, piled into me, and began talkin' like he had marbles in his mouth."

McGovern, a bony lean man with a jaw like the bow of a tugboat, bent a ferocious glare on Shoes. "You got marbles?"

"No. Honest, officer—"

"Cram it. Hold up your kisser . . . M'm." He jammed his hands on his hips. "Shoes O'Riley, huh?"

Shoes tried to get off a friendly laugh. "Well, well, Sarge. I—uh—that is—well, how's things?"

"I'll take care of him," McGovern said to the patrolman, and he grabbed hold of Shoes' arm.

The man from the medical office arrived in a flivver coupe and stepped out with his little black bag. "Hello, Mac," he said. "Looks like rain, eh?"

"What I was thinking."

Hunerkopf held out his hand, said placidly: "Yup, it's raining out all right."

"Up here," McGovern said, and, hauling Shoes with him, led the way into the bow-windowed house.

CARDIGAN had not closed the door. He stood in the center of the room, his trousers hung low on his hips, the cuffs doubling on his shoes. He was

taking a drink, his chin down and his dark eyes looking up from beneath his brows at the doorway. McGovern came hustling Shoes in through the doorway, took one look at the body on the floor, one look at Cardigan, and then sent Shoes spinning into the nearest armchair. The man from the medical office strode in briskly, brightly, dropped a smile of clinical delight toward the body on the floor and promptly knelt to his business. Hunerkopf wandered in placidly humming *Ach, Du Lieber Augustin*, and, looking dolefully at the corpse, made his way to the kitchenette, still humming.

"So it's you," McGovern said to Cardigan.

"Yeah, me."

"And the stiff?"

"Bert Kine—a new operative of mine."

"Was," said the man from the medical office, brightly.

"Split hairs; go ahead, split hairs," Cardigan said.

"So," said McGovern, grinning his hard tight grin, expanding his chest, "the Cosmetic Agency is in the limelight again and good old McGovern lands smack into it. Well, what happened?"

"I was sitting here and I heard a scratching at the door and when I opened the door Bert fell in. He was dead when I opened the door. Must have tried to get here and tell me something."

"What do you guess?"

"I can't guess anything."

McGovern laughed. His eyes gleamed and he jerked his chin toward Shoes, who sat crouched in the chair, his face gray-white, his eyes round with suspense. "Take a good look at Little Boy Blue here. I tell you, Cardigan, I'm always on the job. I pick him up outside. Shoes O'Riley's his name. He's just done a stretch. A dead guy up here, and Shoes O'Riley cramming out of the hall door

into a copper's gentle arms. Ain't it beautiful?"

"It sounds swell. Now what?"

McGovern stopped smiling and turned a ferocious dark look on Shoes. He snapped: "Well, so what?"

"Ugh—hanh?"

"What were you doing in here?"

Shoes gulped, flicked a half-look at Cardigan, stammered on: "Well, you see, me shoelace got undid, and I was walkin' along, trippin' over it. I stop outside and try to tie it, but me paws is too cold. So I see the hall downstairs, with a light and all, and I slip in and warm me hands on a radiator, and then I can tie me shoelace. Then I fall down the steps goin' out and—"

McGovern held his ears, made a face. "My God, how you think 'em up, I don't know!"

Hunerkopf appeared in the pantry doorway. "Hello, Cardigan. You got any apples?"

Cardigan scowled at him. "No."

"Any grapes?"

"No."

"Bananas?"

"No!"

Hunerkopf looked crestfallen. "I could go a fig, if you got a fig around."

Cardigan's face seemed to bloat redly with repressed anger, and he quickly took a swig of Scotch.

"Knifed," said the man from the medical office. "He hasn't been dead long."

McGovern spun, knelt and rifled Bert's pockets. "Don't this guy carry any dough?"

"I advanced him fifteen this afternoon."

"Well, he's got none now."

McGovern shot upright, pivoted, made a bee-line across the room and yanked Shoes out of the chair. From one of Shoes' pockets he withdrew a ten-dollar bill. It was folded. McGovern unfolded the bill and a Cosmos Agency

card slipped into his other hand. His eyes suddenly blazed.

"You dirty, lousy piker!" he snarled at Shoes. He laid the hard knuckles of his hand across Shoes' face and Shoes smashed backward into the armchair, fright stark on his face.

CARDIGAN licked his lips. Shoes had tried to use his head when he fabricated that story about the shoelace; Shoes had not wanted to tell McGovern that he'd been in Cardigan's rooms. Cardigan's hands closed tightly in his pockets.

McGovern was still red with rage. He snarled again at Shoes, "Where's the knife you cut him up with?"

"I d-didn't cut nobody—"

"Shut up! What the hell were you doing in the hall?"

"Like I said—"

"Like you said!" grated McGovern. "Listen, you mutt-faced punk. If you spring that bughouse fable again about shoelaces, I'll go out of my mind. Like that time you were found in a guy's car, driving it through the Presidio. Telling us it was a new make of car you wanted to see how it run, so maybe you could buy one for your sister-in-law back East. Listen—" He hauled Shoes out of the chair again, pointed to the body on the floor. "You killed that guy."

"Me? N-no, Sarge. Honest—"

McGovern smashed him back into the chair again.

"You see?" McGovern flung at Cardigan. And then his chest swelled up again. "Guess it kind of makes you feel low, huh? I mean, me walking right in and copping a suspect right under your nose. Why'n't you laugh it off, huh?"

Cardigan was grave, thoughtful. "I don't feel like laughing, Mac. I'm looking at Bert."

"Well," McGovern went on, "this is open and shut anyhow. I'll take Shoes

over and maybe we'll have to slam him up all night, but he'll come through. Get up, punk."

Shoes stood up, looking very desolate, very resigned.

Cardigan's lips tightened. "Hold on, Mac."

"Go ahead. I can listen."

"As usual, you're screwloose. Shoes didn't do it."

"Trying to pull a fast one?"

"I don't have to—on you. The slow ones work plenty." He shook his head. "Shoes didn't do it. Shoes had dinner here with me tonight. He was in here for two hours before Bert fell through the door. Shoes got the ten-spot and the agency card from me."

McGovern scowled, his eyes narrowing, becoming very bright, hard and suspicious.

Cardigan said: "You gave me the horse laugh too soon, Mac. Too soon."

"You're lying!" McGovern snapped.

"Why the hell should I be lying when an operative of mine is dead on the floor there?"

McGovern reddened, looked cornered, stung with chagrin. His eyes danced, but not happily. He shot out: "One of your big jokes again, huh?"

"No. I just happened to know Shoes when he was a kid and I don't want to see you guys play kick-the-wicket with him. He was here—for two hours. I'll swear to that, so don't make a monkey out of yourself by making a collar here."

"Who did kill him then?"

Cardigan smiled ruefully. "You go your way, Mac, and I'll go mine."

McGovern gnawed on his lip. His eyes glittered. "Wise guy now, huh?" He leveled an arm at Cardigan. "Cardigan, the big shot of the agency, consorting with criminals like Shoes O'Riley! O. K., big boy. Go your way. Go it. But this is going to finish you in this city, fella. Wash you up! O. K.!"

Hunerkopf yawned, took a polite but not very intense interest in the goings-on.

"Call the morgue bus, August," McGovern growled.

Hunerkopf did; adding, "And listen, Mike. Tell Louie to pick up a couple of apples on the way . . . Yeah, apples. No oranges, account of I always swallow the pits."

CHAPTER TWO

Blood on the Rose

THE Hotel Citadel stood in the shadow of the St. Francis, around the corner from Union Square. The Citadel was small, decent, with a decorous gray front and a rectangular lobby hung with pictures of the redwood forests, Yosemite, and Half Moon Bay. Cardigan's noisy entry broke up the quietude of the lobby. He bore down on the desk, his big feet smacking the tiles, his battered hat crushed low on his forehead, and all the buttons of his shabby ulster fastened in the wrong buttonholes.

The ancient, parchment-faced clerk was adding a column of figures and the boisterous arrival of Cardigan did not rouse him. He merely looked up, counting to himself, then looked down again and ran his pencil up and down the column. Cardigan shifted impatiently from foot to foot, started to speak several times. Finally he reached over, took paper and pencil from the clerk, bent, and calculated rapidly, dashing off the total in large numbers.

"One hundred sixteen dollars and ninety-nine cents," he said, reversing the sheet of paper, tucking the pencil in the astounded man's breast pocket. "And now," he said, "please ring Miss Seaward and tell her Mr. Cardigan is down here."

The man fled to the small switchboard and, with an astounded glance still dwelling on Cardigan, telephoned Pat's room. Taking out the plug, he said: "Miss Seaward will be down directly."

"Thanks," said Cardigan, and swiveled away.

Pat came out of the elevator a couple of minutes later. She looked small, neat, trim in a brown suit and a short fur coat, high-collared, open now in front. A small round hat, Russian in manner, seemed to ride capriciously on one smartly penciled eyebrow. She saw Cardigan standing in the lobby as if he owned it. There was a worried look on her face.

"Hello, Pats," he said, turning. "Bert got knocked off."

She almost stumbled, the news hit her so hard. Her fingers flew to her lips and through them she said, wide-eyed, "Oh, chief! Oh . . ." She was suddenly at a loss for words, her pretty lips parted and her round eyes searching Cardigan's face anxiously.

"Yeah," Cardigan muttered. "Yeah." He stood tapping one foot and shooting squint-eyed vindictive glances about the higher regions of the lobby, as though Bert's killer might be hiding up there somewhere. "Knifed. He tried to make my place. Maybe he didn't think he was hurt as bad as he was. Probably figured on coming there, telling me something and then getting a doctor there."

Pat touched his arm, grimaced. "I know you thought so much of him, chief. Oh, it's awful, miserable, terrible."

He slapped his big hand on hers, gripped it and led her over to one of the divans. Tears in her eyes, she unbuttoned his overcoat and then rebuttoned it properly.

"You never do it right," she squeaked.

He muttered: "Don't let it get you down, Pat. You go on bawling here and for all I know I may too. So cut it out. . . . You had dinner with Bert, didn't you?"

She nodded, sniffing behind her handkerchief. "Then I came right back."

"What time'd you leave him?"

"Seven thirty—at Powell and Market. He said he was going to drop by the office a minute and then meet you later. He'd left his office key at the hotel, so I lent him mine."

Cardigan had his eyes fixed on space. "He turned up—dead—at my place at eight forty. He was stuck between seven thirty and eight forty. He was working on the Detronius case—Lou Detronius. We were to go over data tonight at my place. He went to the office to pick up those briefs. Poor Bert!"

He stood up. "Come on; let's chase over to the office."

They got in a cab outside and it was only a ride of five minutes through the rain to the agency office in Market Street. The building was a walk-up, and the office was on the third floor. Cardigan unlocked the door, reached in and turned on the lights.

"Pike this," he said, "Pike it."

"Goodness!"

STEEL filing cabinets had been rifled and sheafs of paper lay on the floor of the outer office. Desk drawers were open. In the back office—Cardigan's—the drawers of his desk stood open also.

Pat said in a hushed voice: "They must have fought here."

"Uh-uh," Cardigan said, shaking his head. "No signs of a struggle here, chicken. Chairs in order, nothing knocked over or even off the desks. They didn't fight here. That took place elsewhere. Look at this," he said. "Telephone wires cut." He strode back to the outer office, knelt and began running through the scattered files. "The Detronius papers are gone," he said, and stood up.

"Let's see," Pat spoke up. "The Detronius case is the one—"

"Fake insurance, we think. Anyhow, the Underwriters' Committee thinks so. Like this. The Laborers' Welfare Guild, so-called, was organized by this Greek

Lou Detronius. Not a labor union or anything like that. It was, as a matter of fact, a labor union that finally brought it to the attention of the Underwriters' Committee. The line went this way: a laborer was approached, shown a lot of fancy literature, and told that for five bucks a year he'd get a tin button, addresses of correspondents, and that if he died by accident his family would get five hundred bucks. Well, the gag goes on like this. A number of families have got the five hundred bucks, see? But it was worked this way. The Guild took out a number of accident policies on these guys, some of the policies totaling as much as five thousand bucks each. But the family still got only five hundred. Well, that was O. K. If the Guild took out the policies payable to itself and paid the premiums, which it did, you can't kick back at them. But here's the rub. Quite a number of these insured laborers have accidentally died during the past year. Some here, some in Los Angeles, Denver, San Diego, Seattle and so on. The one two weeks ago—a guy named Rico—took place here. Drowned, ostensibly, after a fall from Fisherman's Wharf one dark and stormy night. Had a bump on his head. Verdict was that in falling over he struck his head on the side of one of the boats. He was drunk. Thing is, chicken, did he—and the other guys—die accidentally or were they pushed?

"We had a lot of data on the Guild, picked up here and there from relatives of some of the guys that died. Pike it. It's gone. It wasn't worth a hell of a lot anyhow, since what's needed is the goods on these guys—red-handed. Not data or ideas—but the goods. That's how and why we're in it. The mugs must have figured we knew more than we actually did—and crashed the office."

"But Bert—"

Cardigan wagged his shaggy head,

scowled. "I don't know. He must have followed them and got jammed up."

"And to think," she cried, "poor Bert had to die for nothing. The ones that killed him—well, it would be like finding, or trying to find, the needle in a haystack."

"I like," said Cardigan, looking angrily about the littered floor, "to look for needles in haystacks."

She pointed. "They even wiped up their wet footsteps. You can see where the floor's been wiped. Which means they wiped away fingerprints too."

"You've got eyes in your head, honey-bun."

He idly reached across the desk, among the papers, and closed an inked rubber-stamp pad, while Pat said: "Should I call the police?"

"Uh-uh," he muttered, shaking his head. "I'll have enough trouble dodging Mac as it is, without inviting him in."

"Oh, chief, I wish you and McGovern would stop it. Fighting all the time. One always trying to cut the other's throat."

"It's only in fun, kitten. Mac's a good egg—a little on the fried side, or maybe the scrambled—but still a good egg . . . We'll clean the office up tomorrow. Come on."

"Where?"

MARKET STREET is the broadest thoroughfare in the world. Pat and Cardigan crossed it in the drizzle—crossed the four lanes of trolley tracks, dodging traffic. The traffic was thick, noisy and fast, and lights blazed up and down the street, crowds jammed in front of theatres; one crowd was pushing into a small store where jewelry was being auctioned off.

Shouldering his way through this jam—it bulged out to the curb—and making a path for Pat, Cardigan ran smack into Shoes O'Riley, and Shoes said: "If it

ain't Cardigan again—Jack, old boy, old boy!"

"You're mistaken. My name is Smith."

"Yeah," grinned Shoes, falling in step beside him. "I'm the Prince o' Wales too—Oh, excuse it; I didn't see the lady right off." He lifted his hat, revealing his turnip head.

"This," said Cardigan to Pat, "is an old college chum by the name of Shoes O'Riley. He got that name because he always would rather spend dough on new shoes than a square meal."

"Yup," said Shoes. "A man's character is told by the shoes he wears. Look, Jack: with them ten bucks you give me I bought me a new pair. Like 'em?"

"Try getting another ten sometime, baby. Go on, scram, Shoes. Beat it. I told you not to be hanging around me."

Shoes grinned. "Geez, I forgot again." He stopped, saluted. "So long, Jack. Be seein' you."

In the next block, Cardigan stopped before a plain-looking young woman who was selling paper roses in front of a movie house. He gave her a quarter, received the rose and looked at it. It bore a small ribbon on which was inscribed *La Rosa Memorial Home*.

"How many of you are working on this tonight?"

"Six of us."

"When did you six come on?"

"At four this afternoon."

Cardigan dropped his voice. "Mind telling me where the other five are stationed. Do you know?"

"Yes, because each night we rotate."

He took out a pencil, used the back of an old envelope. As she told him the points where the others were stationed, he wrote them down. Then he and Pat walked on and stopped beneath a street light, where he peered down at the addresses. Pat got up on her toes, peered past his arm.

He crossed the first address off, saying, "That's another theatre. I don't think that'd do it. Nor the next. This is in front of the Mark Hopkins. Now this one—this is in front of the Casa Domingo. That might do. And this one—the Golden Boot—is a Russian restaurant. I don't think so. This one's at the railway station, of course. Nix on that."

"What do you mean?"

"Come on. See if I mean anything. We'll try the Casa Domingo. Grab a Powell Street cable car."

THE cable car hauled them slowly up Powell Street past the St. Francis. Beyond, the hill became steeper, with Union Square far below. The car went over the hump, then headed for a dark, outlying district. Cardigan and Pat got off at a dimly lighted plaza. Dark buildings rose in the cold drizzle. On the other side of the plaza, an electric sign winked—*Casa Domingo*. It was the only electric sign on the plaza. They crossed toward it, reached the sidewalk and walked along beside a high board fence. A couple of cabs were parked outside the Domingo. A young woman, plainly dressed, was walking up and down. She carried a small basket of paper roses. A liveried doorman stood beneath the red canvas marquee.

Cardigan said to the young woman: "Sell may of those tonight?"

"Oh, a few."

"What do you do, get the taxis as they arrive?"

She smiled goodnaturedly. "I try to."

"Remember selling one to a guy a little shorter than me. He had yellow hair and a small yellow mustache and wore a big tan trench coat and a derby. He probably smiled. Had a swell smile, lot of teeth. Young guy. Maybe it was about eight o' clock."

"I seem to remember— Let me think . . . Do you know if he had a trick of

tossing a coin in the air and catching it behind his back? Because I seem to—"

"That's him," Cardigan chopped in. "Did he go in here?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him come out?"

"I—don't think so. Of course, he may have."

"Thanks."

Cardigan and Pat went into the Casa Domingo. The foyer was hung with dark red drapes touched up with gold brocade. The girl who took Cardigan's hat and coat was small, plump, dark, and wore a Spanish comb in her hair, a Spanish shawl. The man who met Pat and Cardigan at the entrance to the dining-and-dancing room wore black velvet trousers, high-heeled boots and a short red jacket with gold cuffs. There was a rhumba orchestra, small shaded table lamps, more red-and-gold drapes. The place was pretty noisy though only half full. Pat and Cardigan sat down at a table alongside the wall and Cardigan ordered a couple of highballs.

"And the boss," he added.

"Who?"

"The guy runs this place."

"Mr Delbanca?"

"If he's the boss."

A few minutes later a large, elegantly dressed dark man bore down on the table, bowed stiffly from the waist. Cardigan, lighting a cigarette, squinted up at him.

"Sit down, Mr. Delbanca."

Delbanca, looking politely curious, sat down. His hands were plump, pale, and there were rings on them. His hair was thick, black; it began low on his forehead and went over the top of his head in beautiful waves.

Cardigan said: "A man came in here about eight tonight and turned up later, elsewhere, at eight forty-five."

Delbanca put his hands gently together, nodded, but curiously. "And so, meester?"

"So he turned up, I mean, dead."

The liquid black eyes of Delbanca steadied on Cardigan. "Say meester," he said slowly, liquidly, "is this a zhoke?"

"What do you think?"

"I think she's a zhoke, meester."

"Dead guys are jokes, huh?"

"No, meester. Just the way you fell her, meester."

Cardigan went on: "This fellow followed somebody else here—maybe two guys."

Delbanca laughed unhurriedly, good-naturedly. "Meester, what you think for kind of hombre I am? Look around. I got wan big place here, hey? Lots of over'ead, hey? What you think, meester, this she's a clip joint?" He shook his head slowly. "See, I'm sorry your frand he turns up d'ad, but"—he shrugged—"your frand he do not get d'ad in Casa Domingo. Tha's on the op and op, meester, for sure, meester. You want, go gat the police. I'm no' 'fraid. Me, I'm on the op and op, meester." He rose, bowed, smiled. "So sorry, meester."

Cardigan did not try to detain him, and Delbanca walked off calmly, slowly.

"So what?" Pat asked.

"The guy looks O. K. to me, chicken. Somebody's goofy and maybe it's me. But Bert wouldn't have come here for the show." He rose. "You stay here a while."

HE made a casual tour of the entire place, but did not enter the door leading to the talent's dressing rooms. When he came back, he sat down and spoke with Pat quietly for five minutes. And ten minutes later Pat rose, circulated, went to the rear and, while the orchestra was playing loudly, opened the door Cardigan had not opened and found herself in a short corridor which opened into a large, gaudy room alive with the chatter of a dozen-odd girls in tights.

Pat assumed a fatigued attitude, a

slightly, casually hard-boiled manner. "Hello, girl friends. I'm looking around. I'm from the press . . . human interest stuff."

"Sister," said a redhead, "we're both human and interesting. What do you want to know? I've got a past that would put Pompadour to shame."

"Who's Francesca Durango?"

"See?" said the redhead to the others, "By human interest she means the star. We're just the goils in the street. Francesca?" She pointed rearward. "Down at the end of that passage, lady. Door on the left. She goes on in a minute. In fact—"

At this moment a tall, jet-eyed girl swept out of the corridor. She carried her chin high and her long Spanish skirt corkscrewed effectively about her legs. She noticed no one, but went on out.

"That's her," the redhead said.

"I'll wait," said Pat.

In a little while the other girls filed out, and Pat slipped down the corridor, into Francesca's room. In a moment she reappeared and made her way back to Cardigan's table.

She nodded gravely. "Yes," she said.

"That's all I want to know. Which one?"

"The star—Francesca Durango."

"I could go for her myself. And not in a small way."

Pat said: "There's a window in her room overlooking a yard or court, I could not tell which. Except that it's easy to get to, or from. I—I unlatched the window, thinking you might—"

"Pats, you always think of things. Come on."

They went out to the foyer, where Cardigan put on his hat and overcoat. Then they went out into the cold drizzle and walked till they came up alongside the high board fence.

He said: "From now the evening's

yours, kid. Grab a cable car and go home."

"But, chief—"

"Mind your uncle now. Scram. The night air's bad for little girls. Besides"—he nodded upward—"you couldn't hop this fence anyhow. Git along, little dogie, git along, git along. Shoo."

When she had gone, Cardigan reached up, jumped and caught hold of the top of the fence, hauled himself up and then swung over, landing in short, wet grass. Through the drizzle and the dark he could see several lighted windows of the Casa Domingo, and he heard the muffled beat of the orchestra.

CHAPTER THREE

Glass Beads

WEEDS grew along the way he went, and there were the ruins of an old foundation into which he almost fell. Mounds of rocky earth rose from the weeds. There were little puddles and his big feet splashed in them. He came at last to a low window in the rear of the building. The window sill was level with his chest, and inside the room he saw Francesca, in black tights. He thought she looked pretty swell. He stood there, waiting, for twenty minutes—until Francesca, wearing another costume now, left the room. Then he opened the window, stood on his toes to push it all the way up. He had little difficulty getting in, and closing the window, he stood listening. The rhythm of the rhumba band pulsed in the walls, the floor.

Across the room was a large alcove, lighted, with a highboy in it. Hanging across the alcove doorway was a bead curtain—long strings of beads of many colors; glass beads, quite small, suspended from a rod, almost touched the floor. Cardigan crossed to this bead curtain. Something crackled beneath his feet. He looked down. His feet had crushed sev-

eral beads on the floor. He looked up and saw that one of the strings was broken. When he took the beads from the envelope he carried, he saw they were of a size identical with those hanging before him.

The room was rich with the smells of perfume and powder, and there were photographs of Francesca, many photographs, many poses. Cardigan unbuttoned his overcoat, shoved his hat back on his head. He lit a cigarette and leaned back against a steam radiator, his ankles crossed.

When Francesca burst in, flushed from her dance, Cardigan said offhand: "Hello, Francesca."

She had slammed the door before she was aware of his presence, and now she brought up short, a handsome figure of a girl, her breath stifled in her throat.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Clark Gable."

"Pfft! You are not Clark Gable!"

"All right, I'm not Clarke Gable. And pfft back at you, good-looking."

"I weel call a policeman!"

He growled, scowling: "Take your hand off that door, Francesca. Take it off!" He went toward her, lowering. "Nobody's going to hurt you, girlie. And don't yip. Keep quiet. Low voice, see?"

"This," she complained. "is an embarrassment, *señor*."

"It shouldn't be—if you act nice. Look here, Francesca. There was a guy in this room at about eight or so tonight. A young guy. Blond. Pal of mine. He got a knife in his guts, *sabe?*"

The color on her tawny cheeks was very high. Her lovely dark eyes were very round, and from her body drifted a faint perfume. Cardigan saw her full red lips tighten. Black fire flashed from her eyes.

"What is this you talk?" she demanded in her thick liquid accent.

THERE was a knock on the door, and spinning, Francesca opened it and Delbanca strolled in saying, in Spanish, "Francesca, the new dance is a thing of rare beauty—" And then seeing Cardigan, he stopped. He smiled, almost affectionately, and his heavy eyelids drooped.

"Meester, you have what you call magic, hey? First here, then there." And to Francesca, "This wan a frand of yours?"

Tight-lipped, she shook her head violently; then snapped, "He is certainly most not, *señor*."

Delbanca's face seemed to become very drowsy, and his soft voice drawled: "You no want him in here, hey?"

She shook her head, again violently.

"Meester," said Delbanca, "this is no zhoke, meester. You weel please to take the air."

Cardigan took two long strides; they brought him face to face with Delbanca.

"You look like a nice egg, Delbanca, and maybe you are. If you think I take the air when every Tom, Dick and Harry tells me to, you're behind in your lessons. Understand this, *amigos*, a pal of mine tailed somebody here. I know he came in your place. He was knifed. When I found him, he was gripping some beads in his hand." He pointed toward the alcove. "See that? One of those strings was broken recently. I even crushed some beads on the floor. Well, the beads my pal had in his hand were the same as those over there. He grabbed at that curtain, either ducking out of the way or when he was knifed, and broke one of the strings!"

Francesca put hands to her cheeks. "No!" she cried in a low terrified voice.

Delbanca went across, fingered the bead curtain. A couple of beads crackled beneath his foot. He looked down. Then he looked at the curtain again. Then he turned and looked at Francesca; from Francesca to Cardigan.

"No! No!" Francesca cried. "I swear I did no' see any man keeled in here. Oh, I swear it!"

Delbanca looked at her a long time. She shrank from his drowsy speculative gaze. She whimpered. Presently he went to her, took hold of her hand, patted it. Then turned to Cardigan.

"Meester, you come with me, hey? This becomes now no zhoke. We talk, eh?"

"After you, Delbanca."

Cardigan went with Delbanca to the latter's office. Delbanca put on a white silk scarf, a blue Chesterfield and a derby. He took a stick and gloves.

"Come, meester. We go what you call places."

Cardigan stepped in front of him. "What kind of a run-around are you trying to hand me?"

"Meester, this is no run-about; she is serious business. We take a taxi."

They rode away from the front of the Casa Domingo, and Delbanca, producing two fat cigars, gave Cardigan one, slipped one in his own mouth and held up a light. It was an excellent cigar, Cardigan found. But he kept his hand near the lapel of his coat, primed to dive for the gun in his spring holster. He watched Delbanca out of the corners of his eyes.

On the slope of Russian Hill, Delbanca told the driver to stop. He paid the fare, spun his stick, leveled it off, saying: "We go this way, meester."

He looked up into the cold, dripping drizzle. "She is not a good night out, hey. We will drop by and see this frands." He motioned to a doorway and led Cardigan into the broad foyer of an apartment house. He told the elevator operator to take them to the fourth floor, and at the fourth floor they got out and Delbanca, benign, gently smiling, led the way down a warm, rich corridor.

He knocked on a door and presently the

door was opened by a short, squat man in black tie and black alpaca coat.

Delbanca spun his stick. "Meester Delbanca and a frand calling on Meester Detronius."

The houseman blinked stolidly. "Sure. I'll tell him."

A moment later a voice called, "Come in, Delbanca!" and then the houseman appeared to take their coats, but Delbanca, smiling politely, shook his head.

CARDIGAN, startled, confounded, followed Delbanca through the doorway. They came out on a balcony overlooking a long living room where mellow pools of light lay, where cigars glowed and several men sat.

"Yes, yes, Delbanca, my good friend, come right in. It's jolly good to see you!"

Detronius stood now in one of the pools of light, beckoning Delbanca down. He was a very small man, with a white baby face and a tiny, pointed mustache; dancing, happy eyes. He wore a tuxedo. Delbanca, going comfortably down the stairs, smiled in his slow, benign way.

Cardigan, a couple of steps behind, was again startled when he saw McGovern stroll into one of the pools of light. And then he saw Hunerkopf sitting in the largest armchair, with his feet toward the fireplace and a huge basket of fruit in his lap. When Cardigan came into the light, McGovern recognized him and looked blank for a moment.

"This, meester," said Delbanca to Detronius, "is Meester Cardigan."

Detronius' merry eyes danced; his chubby, baby-like cheeks bunched up as his mouth widened in a bright, cheery grin. "So glad to know you, Mr. Cardigan. Over here . . . Sergeant McGovern and Detective Hunerkopf, of the police."

Delbanca's eyes strayed, though he still smiled; but he was a little puzzled. He said: "I be happy to meet you, yes."

McGovern held a notebook in his hand.

"You see," said Detronius, "Sergeant McGovern just dropped in for my contribution pledge to the fund for Patrolman Schmidt's family. Poor Schmidt was, you know, killed in line of duty. Pity, pity. Will you gentlemen have a drink?"

"Please, for me, no," said Delbanca. "You are busy with business now and so, meester, sometime again I see you. She is no great hurry." He lifted his head, smiled. "Very 'glad seeing you, gentlemen," he said to McGovern and Hunerkopf.

And Hunerkopf said affably: "Take an apple along."

"Please, for me, no."

Detronius shook Cardigan's hand zestfully. "So mighty glad to have met you, sir. I do hope we'll meet again."

Cardigan did not smile. His face was heavy, his eyes dull. "Yeah," he muttered. "Yeah." He was puzzled, and he could see by the look on McGovern's face that he also was puzzled.

Then McGovern snapped his notebook shut. "Well, I got to get along, anyhow," he said. "Thanks for the pledge, Mr. Detronius. August, come on."

"But don't hurry," urged Detronius.

"Thanks, but I got to." McGovern had fixed a sidelong, suspicious stare on Cardigan.

Hunerkopf filled his pockets with fruit, and passing Cardigan, he said sorrowfully: "Someday you'll prob'ly regret you didn't eat more fruit. Mark my word, old fellow. Well, well, I guess we all live and learn. Thanks very much for the refreshments," he said to Detronius.

The two detectives went out.

"Maybe now," said Delbanca, "we do not have to make so much hurry." He smiled wistfully, leaned on his walking stick, laid his soft, sad eyes on Detronius. "There has been maybe wan big zhoke,

but me, meester, I guess I have no' the sense of humor."

"Ah, yes you have!" laughed Detronius gayly. "Do remove your coats, gentlemen. Do! Perhaps I can offer you some wine—"

THE buzzer sounded and in a moment Francesca rushed into the room, her face flushed, her breath coming in quick gasps. Her black eyes were bright with anguish and fear, and seeing Delbanca and Cardigan, she was momentarily stunned. Detronius bit into his lip.

"Francesca!" he said, staring toward her.

Delbanca stopped him with a hand. "Meester, this zhoke I speak of is no zhoke, not so much."

Francesca broke into tears.

"Do not cry, *muchacha*," said Delbanca; and to Detronius, "Me, meester, I have been very hospitable with you at Casa Domingo, and I do not like much the big zhoke. Tonight you were in Francesca's room at Casa Domingo. For dinner you came to Casa Domingo. The show she was not start yet, and only Francesca was there. So you go to her room. By and by, soon, two frands from you come in and I say you are with Francesca, you are her frand, and they go back to the room. Francesca comes out and sings wan song, but you and these frands are back in the room. Meester Cardigan says a frand from him goes to Casa Domingo too, but I do not see him. It appears this frand also was in Francesca's room, but she does not see him because then she is sing the song. This frand, meester, is now d'ad, I am told. Therefore it is no' the big zhoke."

Detronius laughed. "Ridiculous! Preposterous!" He turned on his heel and started away.

"Pull up," Cardigan snapped, and his gun came out in his big hand, he looked

now very dark and sinister. "Pull up, Detronius, and watch your step."

Detronius turned, smiled lightly. "Lovely guests, I must say."

"Who the hell said I was a guest? . . . Delbanca, Francesca, you'd better bail out of this. Go on, beat it. I'm dragging the Greek over to headquarters."

Francesca was gripping Delbanca's arm desperately. "Emilio, I am so much afraid! I am—"

"Do not be, Francesca."

Detronius' eyes were dancing, but not happily. "My dear fellow—"

"I'm not a dear fellow," Cardigan rasped. "And never mind getting your hat or overcoat. If you catch cold and die, that'll be swell. Come on, lift your dogs, sweetheart. We're scrambling."

Detronius still chose to hesitate. Cardigan bore down on him, grabbed him by the arm and whipped him toward the stairway. Delbanca and Francesca were already on the balcony. The four of them went toward the doorway. The houseman looked scared. He cleared out of the way.

"This is an indignity," Detronius complained.

"Swell," said Cardigan. "I'm glad it is."

Francesca was crying in her handkerchief as they went down in the elevator and Delbanca held her hand, patted it gently, murmured soothing words in Spanish.

Cardigan marched Detronius across the lobby—so fast that the Greek almost skipped.

It was still raining in the street, and as they went out, Cardigan saw McGovern and Hunerkopf, with Shoes O'Riley between them. Shoes looked very uncomfortable.

"Yeah," McGovern brayed, "I come down and find your pal waiting in the lobby. Imagine! You, the big cheese in

the Cosmos Agency, consorting with criminals!"

"See," said Shoes. "A poor guy can't ever live down his past. Me, that never had a evil thought—"

"Stow it!" McGovern rasped.

"I wouldn't yell so loud," Hunerkopf suggested, "account of it's late and you might wake up the neighbors."

"You shut up too, August!"

Four men came walking across the street from a parked sedan, and one, a tall man in a gray belted raincoat, clipped: "First guy moves, things happen to him. O. K., put 'em up and hold 'em there."

CHAPTER FOUR

Banana Oil

McGOVERN spun, bumping against Cardigan's gun. Hunerkopf, about to eat a banana he had just peeled, dropped it. Delbanca pushed Francesca behind him and Shoes O'Riley's mouth gaped in surprise. All of them stood out in clear relief beneath the lighted marquee of the apartment house. The four men reaching the curb, were still in darkness, but their guns gave off liquid glints.

"What is it, Lou?" the gray-coated young man said.

"A pinch," said Detronius.

"You?"

"Yes."

"O.K., Lou. Go over and sit in the car."

"Thanks."

McGovern brayed: "You lousy clucks, I'm McGovern!"

"What are you bragging about?" asked the gray-coated man.

"Don't irritate them, Mac," Hunerkopf suggested.

The gray-coated man pointed. "You, Delbanca—and the jane, you two get over in the car too."

"Say," McGovern bawled, "what the hell is this? Who is on whose side and why?"

"You heard me!" the gray-coated man snarled at Delbanca.

Delbanca kept Francesca behind him. He said: "Meester, I am no' deaf. I hear' you. You do no' see me move, hey? You take Francesca, meester, first you got to take me."

The gray-coated man ripped out, "Why, you dirty spig, you!" and strode across the sidewalk. Suddenly his feet shot from under him—the banana which Hunerkopf had dropped—and the gray-coated man slammed violently to the sidewalk. Shoes O'Riley stepped on his face, pinned him down and wrenched the gun from his hand. A gun blazed in the drizzle and Shoes teetered a bit and said, "Ouch, Geez," and then loudly, "Who the hell done that?"

"Look out, Shoes!" Cardigan barked. Cardigan shoved Shoes out of the way with his left hand, fired with the gun in his right. Detronius stumbled and fell against the car opposite, but he did not go completely down.

McGovern dragged his gun out and his fog-horn voice boomed: "You muggs out there in the street—drop those rods!"

"Says you!"

"Says me, by God, says me!"

McGovern fired and lead whanged in the body of the car on the other side of the street.

"Oh, Emilio!" cried Francesca.

"Just you stay behind me, Francesca."

McGovern and Cardigan fired at the same time. Glass shattered. There was a low, choppy outcry. Detronius was trying to start the car, but one of the other men apparently had the ignition key. Detronius swore desperately. He yelled: "Where's the key?"

Hunerkopf slipped on the banana and took McGovern down with him, and the

gray-coated man jumped up and down and made a frantic dive for the wet darkness. Cardigan swung to fire at him, but Hunerkopf heaved up, in the way.

"Where's the key?" Detronius yelled frantically.

"In the lock, in the lock!"

"It's not!"

"I tell you it is. I was driving. I oughta know."

"It's—"

A cab drove up, its horn blowing, its headlights flooding the men in the street. Somebody shot the headlights out and the cab stopped, its driver leaped out and, holding his hands behind his neck, galloped away. Detronius, while his men blazed away at the apartment house facade, stumbled from the sedan and jumped into the cab, whose motor was still running.

"In here!" he yelled.

Backing up, still firing, the four men piled into the cab and it lurched away. Hunerkopf, shot in the thigh, was sitting on the sidewalk moodily. Shoes O'Riley was going round in circles while Cardigan was trying to grab him and throw him out of the line of fire. McGovern was running after the cab. He swerved and then made a bee-line for the sedan, and Cardigan reached it at the same time.

Pat turned up and said: "Here's the key. I was watching from that doorway, and when they went over I reached in and took the key out."

Cardigan snapped: "I thought I told you to go home!"

"But I couldn't! I felt I had to cover you and—"

"Stop crabbing, Cardigan," McGovern growled. "Drive it."

THE sedan swung away from the curb, leaving Pat on the sidewalk. Cardigan clicked into high gear and McGovern

rolled down the door window on his side and leaned out.

"Douse your lights," he said.

"Idea," nodded Cardigan, and doused them.

"Now step on it, sweetheart. This baby feels like she could step."

"With twelve cylinders, why not?"

The cab shot out on a wide, dark square, and beyond, the lights of Casa Domingo blinked. It was doing about fifty. Striking the street car rails, it slewed, seemed for a brief instant to straighten out. But it did not. It reeled, heaved, spun round, and smashed head-on into the high board fence, going clean through with the sounds of cracked boards and torn metal screaming through the darkness. The top of the cab was ripped off, and steam, escaping from the broken radiator, hissed and spouted.

Cardigan braked and let the sedan slide over the curbstone, and he was out of it before the car quite came to a stop. McGovern was at his heels, and as they went through the hole in the fence, three figures were seen hopping through the weeds.

McGovern fired and one of the figures began to stumble ahead faster. Then suddenly all three vanished. Short, startled outcries rose, and Cardigan snapped: "They fell down into an old foundation. Watch it, Mac! . . . Here it is!"

"O.K. Let's jump."

"Right."

Without pause, they leaped down into the gloom and Cardigan landed on a head that was just rising. He bore a man down with him into a slough of mud and water. Close beside his cheek a gun blazed, deafening him. Then another gun exploded, and McGovern yelled: "Take that, you sweet so-and-so!"

Cardigan got a grip on the back of an unseen neck and pressed downward. He shoved the man's face into the mud.

Someone else fell into him and he struck out wildly, connecting.

"By cripes—"

"You, Mac? I didn't know!"

"Glug-glug," said the man whose face he was holding in the mud.

Cardigan stood up, hauling the man with him, jamming his gun in his back.

"I got one," McGovern yelled. "I think I killed the other egg."

"I've got one too," Cardigan called back. "There's one in the car yet, I guess."

"Come on; let's get these guys out of here."

"You hurt, Mac?"

"Well, either there's mud in my eye or it's the eye you just closed on me."

By this time they headed toward the cab there were flashlights sweeping about it. People had gathered in the street and there were half a dozen uniformed cops grouped round the car. They had hauled out Detronius, who was now sitting on the sidewalk, bruised and bloody and with his shirt half torn off. The cops swiveled about, and McGovern barked: "McGovern, boys. Got a squad car?"

"Yeah."

"O.K. Take these two potatoes and toss 'em in it and sit on 'em—I don't care how hard. Two of you guys take flashlights and go back to that old foundation. There's a dead heel laying in it. Fish him out. Somebody call the morgue bus. Look at me eye, closed tight."

"Who did that?" one of the cops asked.

"Big beautiful here," McGovern said, nodding toward Cardigan.

The cop took a swing at Cardigan with his nightstick.

"Hey," shouted Cardigan, "I'm the home team, you fat-head!"

McGovern brayed: "Stop that, Homer! Who the hell told you to slug him?"

The nightstick had been aimed with perfect precision, and Cardigan took a

few broken-kneed steps, then collapsed.

"Now look what you done, Homer," McGovern rasped.

A lieutenant walked up and said: "Hello, Mac. What's this all about?"

McGovern scowled irritably. "Now you're asking me something. There's been a fight. There's been a guy or two killed. A cab stolen. I've been slugged. Hunerkopf's wounded. That little guy there looks like he's outward bound and—well, you'll have to ask some other guy what it's all about, Lieutenant. I'm damned if I know anything about it!"

CARDIGAN came to in Delbanca's office in the Casa Domingo, looked drowsily about the room, saw Delbanca, Francesca, McGovern, Pat. He licked his lips.

"Gee, chief," Pat said. "How—how do you feel now?"

"Lousy, thanks." Then he laughed. "Hey, Mac—boy, what a shiner you've got!"

"Something to remember you by, kid."

"Where's everybody?"

"Well, August and this mugg O'Riley are in the hospital, not serious. Detronius died out in the street, but not before he talked. A pal of his, Bughouse Delaney, is dead too. The other eggs are in the can. And to think that me—There I was sitting with Detronius only tonight getting a big pledge from him— It burns me up!"

"Who killed Bert Kine?"

"Him."

"Detronius?"

"Yeah. In a back room of this place. This girl's room. The Greek said Bert Kine walked in on him and two other guys. These other two guys had looted your office and Kine followed 'em. Tailed 'em right to that room and tried to collar 'em. Well, Detronius used a knife. Then they didn't want this girl here to see the

job. They heard the music stop and knew she'd be on her way in. They thought Kine was dead and they just dumped him out the back window and got the window closed just as the girl came in. She never knew anything about it. Detronius used to call on her a lot and she kind of liked him, she said, but not in a big way. They figured on going out a little later and getting rid of the body, but when they did go out, well, Kine was gone. Detronius got a little scared about this and told these two mugs to get two other pals and keep his apartment house covered from the outside. Told 'em that if they seen any dicks walking him out, they should butt in. Well, they did. But the kick back was too much for 'em.

"We got back those papers they swiped from your office. And that laborer, by the way—that guy that drowned—he was pushed over. Other guys before him were pushed too. It was a sweet game, and Detronius cleaned up a couple a hundred grand. But this girl here—she knew nothing about the killing—"

"Please," cried Francesca anxiously, running over to sit on the arm of Cardigan's chair, "you do believe so it is, no?"

He put his arm around her waist. "Francesca, from your lips, hell, anything sounds like the truth. Can I come up some time?" He patted her hip, then said: "Oh-oh, Uncle Delbanca is looking daggers this way. Shoo, little fire-fly."

Delbanca smiled joyously as Francesca returned to him, and he said: "Please, meesters, for to have a drink on me."

Instantly everyone looked very cheerful, and Cardigan, rubbing his hands together, cocked an eye at McGovern. "Well, Mac, I guess the Cosmos Agency came through, again, eh?"

"Came through!" exploded McGovern.

"Why if it wasn't for me, you big mugg—" "Baloney. If it wasn't for Pat there, these babies would have got away. She swiped the switch key."

McGovern gritted his teeth. "O.K. Give her her due. I'm a gentleman. But if it wasn't for August dropping that banana—"

"Phooey on you, Mac!"

"And I'm beginning to believe," said McGovern darkly, "that you gave me this shiner on purpose."

"Yeah? Maybe I don't think you put that cop up to sock me on the head, so you could take all the credit and—"

Pat stamped her foot, cried: "Please—stop it, stop it! You should both thank your stars you're alive! Bickering—bickering all the time; like a couple of school kids."

Both Cardigan and McGovern bit their lips and looked down at the floor.

A cop poked his head through the doorway and said: "Excuse me, Sarge, but Merkel just stopped by on his way from the hospital and told me to tell you Hunerkopf said will you please bring him a bag of fruit—apples and bananas mostly, but no oranges on account of he swallows the pits all the time. That guy Shoes O'Riley asked Hunerkopf how he could be a good cop, and Hunerkopf told him he should eat plenty of fruit, so Shoes is now trying to trade five gold teeth for a barrel of apples."

McGovern groaned and said: "Quick, Delbanca—give me a drink before I go ga-ga! . . . Imagine! That mugg wants to become a cop!"

"That's an idea, Mac," Cardigan said cheerfully. "Why don't you try becoming one?"

"Chief!" cried Pat. "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!"

Another "OKE" OAKLEY novel

THE SILVER DOOM

DIME DETECTIVE for APRIL 15th

Out APRIL 1st



He made a vicious sweep at Malloy's head.

Chiseler's Choice

by
Erle Stanley
Gardner

Author of "Time For Murder," etc.

It was a slick shyster set-up that C. Farnsworth Wright had planned. The only thing he hadn't taken into consideration was six foot two of tiger man—which is enough to ruin any racket. Especially when there are brains behind the brawn.

THEY called him Big Jim Malloy. Six foot two of tiger man with the build of a prizefighter—a punch in either fist, and a speed that was like that of some huge cat.

The sign on his door read simply, "*Jim Malloy — Results.*" There was nothing else.

Jim Malloy stared across the desk at his visitor, picked up the embossed oblong of cardboard and slid his thumb across it.

"Frank C. Larko, M. D.," he read musingly. "Physician and Surgeon, Six Forty-two Antlers Building."

The man across the desk nodded his head vehemently.

"Right," he said.

Big Jim Malloy toyed with the card, stared at the quick, nervous features of the other; at the dark eyes; at the sensitive mouth. He let his eyes drop to the nervous fingers that were beating a per-

petual tattoo upon the edge of the desk.

"Shoot," he said.

"You've been recommended very highly, Mr. Malloy. I've heard of you from several of my patients. You—"

"I get results," Big Jim Malloy interrupted, "and I know you're sold on me or you wouldn't be here. Come to the point."

"It's this way, Mr. Malloy. That is, it's a matter that is, I suppose, an everyday occurrence with you. It's . . . that is. . ."

"Blackmail?" asked Malloy.

His visitor nodded eagerly.

"Go ahead," Malloy said. "Tell me about it."

"I'm afraid I've been double-crossed."

"Begin at the beginning."

"Well, it's this way. I had a very attractive patient, a patient who gave me the name of Stella Laverne. She gave me the history of a past marriage and a divorce. I thought she was free—that is, I thought so when I first commenced corresponding with her."

"Afterwards?" asked Malloy.

"Afterwards, I was so madly infatuated that nothing made any difference. When she told me she was married I kept on corresponding with her."

"Did you mention her husband in the letters?"

"Yes."

"I see," Malloy said. "Go on."

"The letters were indiscreet. They could cause a lot of trouble."

"And what happened to them?"

"They got into the hands of a blackmailer."

"I understand that, but be more specific. What I want to know is, how the demand was first made and—"

"Oh, but you don't understand. This is preliminary only. The letters got in the hands of a blackmailer. He wanted ten thousand dollars for them. I tried to

get a better price; when I couldn't, I paid."

"You what?" Malloy asked.

"I paid."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I didn't get the letters."

"Whom did you pay the money to?"

"I didn't pay the money. My lawyer did it."

"Your lawyer?"

"Yes. Mr. C. Farnsworth Wright."

"Then I should say Mr. Wright was crooked."

"But you don't know all that happened."

"Of course I don't. Go ahead and tell me."

"The head blackmailer, whose name was Oscar Cole, told me that I should have a representative bring ten thousand dollars in new twenty-dollar bills to a certain point that was to be designated, then I would receive the letters. I talked it over with my lawyer. My lawyer, of course, was opposed to the payment of any sum whatever. He wanted to call in the police. He said that the police would handle it in such a way that my name would never be involved; but, I had my professional standing to think of. There were some ugly rumors going around and I was afraid the board of medical examiners might bring me before them."

"Go ahead," Malloy said. "Never mind what you were afraid of, just tell me what happened."

"My lawyer took the money. He went in his automobile just as they told him to do. While he was driving the machine another car came alongside. There were two masked men in it. They held him up and took the money away from him."

"Then what happened?" Malloy asked.

"How do you mean?"

"What happened after that as far as the letters are concerned?"

"We heard from the blackmailer. He

was indignant because my attorney hadn't brought him the money. Mr. Wright told him what had happened and accused him of having put the hold-up men on the job. He, of course, denied it."

Malloy nodded, stretched back in his chair, raised his ponderous arms over his head and sucked in a prodigious yawn.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I want you to get the letters."

"Do you know anything about this man Cole?"

"Only what my attorney has told me."

"Will your attorney talk with me?"

"Yes. I told him I was putting the entire matter in your hands."

"How strong," Malloy asked, "are you willing to go to get the letters?"

"I've paid all the money I can afford to pay. If I had any left, I'd pay it to the blackmailers. I couldn't afford to pay you over one thousand dollars."

"Five hundred now," Malloy said.

The other fidgeted in his chair.

"Two hundred and fifty now," he said.

"Five hundred," Malloy insisted.

The man sighed, pulled out a wallet and counted out five one-hundred-dollar bills. The bills were new and crisp and constituted the entire contents of the wallet, so far as currency was concerned.

BIG JIM MALLOY shoved his pen across the paper at feverish speed. As he wrote, he read aloud the words he had scribbled on the paper: "My own—dearest sweetheart. . . . It seems like years since—we were together. When are you—going to marry me?"

He looked up from his writing into the laughing blue eyes of a very red-headed young woman who sat across the desk.

"What else do I say?" he asked.

"You ought to know," she said.

"Not me, Edith. I never put anything like this on paper in my life."

"It's time you learned then."

"Go on, give me a boost."

"Oh, something about my hair and eyes. Men usually mention that in letters to me, and you might put in a little passion. You know, some of the stuff that would make a man squirm uncomfortably when it was read in front of a jury."

"What do you mean, passion?"

"Do you," she inquired, "want me to draw you a diagram?"

"Hell!" said Malloy and scooped the paper toward him once more. Once more his fountain pen was shoved rapidly across the paper, but this time his lips did not mutter the words as he wrote them.

Across the desk, the young lady watched him with an amused smile twinkling her eyes and rippling the corners of her lips. As Big Jim Malloy's pen traveled across the sheets of paper, the smile faded from her eyes and gave place to a look of curiosity.

Big Jim signed a name to the bottom of the letter with a flourish, put several large crosses at the bottom beneath the signature and shoved it across the desk to her.

"Take a look at that," he said.

She picked up the paper, read the first paragraph, started reading the second paragraph and suddenly gasped.

"Well," said Malloy, "you asked for it."

She looked up from the letter, her eyes indignant, saw the expression of grim, fighting tenacity on the face of Big Jim Malloy, and then suddenly broke into a laugh.

"Oh, all right," she said. "I can take it; but I admit you surprised me. I thought you said you'd never written letters like this."

"I never have," he told her.

"You learn easily."

"That's one of the things I'm good at," Big Jim Malloy mentioned casually.

She returned to reading the letter. When she had finished, she folded it over.

"I should say," she remarked, "that that would be very effective indeed."

"You'll want some more," Big Jim told her.

"Not after that one."

"You'd better have a couple more just to make it look O. K. Have you got some envelopes addressed to you?"

"Sure," she said. "You told me to bring them with me."

She opened her purse and took out three envelopes.

"These had typewritten addresses on them," she said. "That's what you told me to bring."

JIM MALLOY nodded, looked carefully at the envelopes, studying the postmark, the cancelation of the stamps, the texture of the paper.

"Different paper," he said. "And they were written on different typewriters."

"I can make up something that will account for that," she told him.

"O. K.," he said, spreading the three envelopes on the desk. "We'll have to fold the letters so that they'll fit these envelopes."

The envelopes were all addressed to Edith Dalton at the Ansonia Apartments.

"What name are you signing?" she asked.

"I'm just signing them Ned," he told her. "A guy doesn't sign his full name to letters like this."

"You'd better sign a full name to one of them," she said. "It's going to make it look better. Ned Pierce is the name you were going to use, isn't it?"

"Yeah, but it looks kind of phony putting it on a letter that way."

"Oh, that's all right. We've got to have something to tie to. Go ahead and put

it on. And listen, big boy, key down on those other letters. You've got enough purple passion in that first one."

"Think I'd better date them?" Malloy asked.

"If you date them," she said, "date that first one last and make the others lead up to it."

Big Jim Malloy fitted sheets of paper to the envelopes, then scribbled over them in his distinctive scrawling handwriting. When he had finished, he slipped the papers into the envelopes.

"They should be tied with a pink ribbon," he said.

"Not any more," she told him. "The modern girl doesn't do things that way."

"Well, you're a modern girl," he said. "Remember that Ned Pierce is a wealthy dentist. You're going to sue him for breach of promise. C. Farnsworth Wright is the name of the lawyer you're going to consult. He's going to handle the case on a contingency basis. Be sure you impress that on him. That'll mean he wants to keep the letters in his safe. You make him give you a receipt for them, and watch where he puts them. Tell him that you want to make certain they're in a safe place. See whether he keeps them in his safe, or in a safety deposit box somewhere."

"Anything else?" she asked.

"That's all," he said. "Get the information and telephone me just as soon as you get it. Impress on him that those letters are valuable. Make him believe that the biggest fee he ever made in his life is going to be made from a compromise of that breach-of-promise suit, providing he doesn't lose the letters. Do you get me?"

"Of course I get you," she said. "If I was so stupid that I didn't after that line of talk, you'd never employ me when you get in a jam and need a clever young woman to help you out."

"Hate yourself, don't you?" said Malloy.

"Uh-huh," she said adjusting her hair. "All of the compliments you put in those letters sort of went to my head. Really, Jim, I think you've got sort of a complex about me, but you've been a little tongue-tied. When you got to writing those letters, it freed you of your inhibitions and you said the things you really felt."

Big Jim Malloy grinned at her.

"Don't forget that first letter," he said.

She suddenly blushed, got to her feet and flounced from the office.

CHAPTER TWO

A Bit of Burglary

BIG JIM MALLOY picked up the telephone. Edith Dalton's voice came to him, low and distinct.

"All right for me to talk?" she asked.

"Yes. Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"He took the three letters?"

"Yes."

"Did he have you sign a contingency contract?"

"I'll say he did. He seemed to think I was going to double-cross him if he didn't have me tied up so tight I couldn't move. He had me sign away everything to him as trustee, and a lot of other stuff about assignments and settlements and that sort of thing. I didn't pay much attention to it. I knew it didn't amount to anything so I signed it."

"Did he give you a copy?"

"He did not."

"Pretty smooth individual, eh?"

"I'll say so."

"Where did he put the letters?"

"Get this," she said. "It's important. He's got a safe in the office. It's a big cumbersome thing with his name on it. It looks to be about a hundred years old. He started to put the letters in there, then

when I kept telling him how valuable they were, he crossed over to the wall on the side that the corridor's on and pulled at a sectional bookcase. The bookcase is on some sort of a hinge, because it swung away from the wall and there was a wall safe in back of it."

"You didn't get the combination?"

"No. I couldn't have done that without making him suspicious. He stood right up close to the safe while he was opening it."

"It's a small safe?"

"Fairly small."

"Were there any other papers in it?"

"Lot's of papers. He had to make room to put mine in."

"Then he closed the safe and replaced the bookcase?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing," he said. "I just wanted to make certain."

"Now what do I do?" she inquired.

"Go," he told her, "to Doctor Frank C. Larko, 642 Antlers Building. Tell him you're very nervous and can't sleep nights. That you go to sleep when you go to bed and wake up within an hour or so and lie awake all night worrying."

"He'll ask me what I'm worrying about."

"That's just it. Don't tell him. Tell him that you simply can't tell him what you're worrying about. Not until after you know him better, anyway."

"Shall I string him along?"

"That depends on how he reacts. I would say off-hand, string him along."

"Then what do I do?"

"Report to me. He'll make an appointment to see you again."

"Anything else?"

"That's enough for now," he said. "Call me when you've finished with the doctor. If I am out call me every hour until you get in touch with me. I'll come back to the office sometime this afternoon."

"O. K., chief," she said, and hung up.

Big Jim Malloy put on his hat, picked up cane and gloves, paused for a moment to adjust his tie to his satisfaction and went directly to the office of C. Farnsworth Wright, attorney at law.

In the outer office he fidgeted about, giving an appearance of nervous uncertainty. The stony-faced secretary surveyed him appraisingly.

"Name please?" she asked.

"Ned Pierce," he said.

"You wished to see Mr. Wright?"

"Yes. Naturally, of course."

"What is the nature of your business?"

"I want to keep him from starting a breach-of-promise suit against me."

"Oh!" said the secretary. "Who would be the plaintiff in the breach of promise suit?"

"An Edith Dalton who lives in the Ansonia Apartments," Malloy answered.

"Just a minute," the girl told him, and vanished through the door marked "Private."

She was back within ten seconds.

"Mr. Wright will see you," she said. "You may go right in."

C. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT had a bald head and a huge nose. His eyes were colorless and watchful. He sat at his desk in the pose he adopted when receiving clients—an impressive posture of dignified learning. A leather-backed law book held in one hand, a pencil poised over a pad of legal foolscap.

"Ah. Yes. Mr. Pierce," he said in a booming courtroom voice, as he sat down the law book and placed the pencil beside the pad of foolscap. "Just what was it you wanted?"

"Look here," Malloy said. "You've been talking with Edith Dalton. She's employed you to file some sort of a case against me."

C. Farnsworth Wright placed the tips

of his bony fingers together, surveyed Malloy watchfully from his colorless eyes, and then nodded his head in slow assent.

"I am violating no confidence," he said, "in admitting to you that such is the case. In fact, I had just dictated a letter to you explaining that Miss Dalton had placed the matter in my hands, and suggesting that if you would get in touch with me, an amicable settlement might be arranged which would be infinitely more mutually satisfactory than proceedings in court."

"Exactly," Malloy said. "That's why I'm here. I can't afford to have any publicity."

"You should," the attorney said, "have thought of that before you wronged my client."

"We won't go into that," Malloy answered. "You've got me over a barrel. I wanted to get her before she went to an attorney. She told me she was going to go and see you, but I thought it was a bluff. I didn't find out until too late that she wasn't bluffing. Now you've got me. Go ahead and tell me what I've got to do."

"I would, of course, have to confer with my client before any settlement could be agreed upon," the lawyer said.

"You won't do any conferring," Malloy blustered. "You're going to settle right now, or you're not going to settle at all. I can't stand the worry of this thing. I'm either going to get this thing cleaned up right now, or I'm going to skip out of the country before you can file any suit."

"But you can't do that," the lawyer told him. "That would be an admission of all the charges my client is making against you."

"I've got plenty of money," Malloy said. "I can live any place in the world I want to. I'll go to China or some place. You can't bring a suit for breach of promise against me in China."

"We could file the suit here," the lawyer said. "Think of the notoriety. Think of the disagreeable publicity."

"It wouldn't bother me in the least if I was in China," Malloy told him. "I'm here to settle. Go ahead and speak your piece."

"But, I'd have to consult with my client," the lawyer said.

"Oh no, you wouldn't. I know the way you shysters act. You've probably got an assignment of all of her claims against me, and a power of attorney to settle upon such terms as you see fit without consulting her, and all that sort of stuff."

The lawyer pressed the button on his desk. Almost immediately the door of the outer office opened and the stony face of the secretary stared at him in expressionless interrogation.

"Miss Swift," said the lawyer, "you don't need to bother writing that letter I dictated to Mr. Ned Pierce; and will you please see if you can get Miss Edith Dalton on the telephone. You'll find her address in the jacket of Dalton versus Pierce."

She nodded her head, wordlessly withdrew.

"She isn't home," Malloy said. "I tried to get her. If I could have got in touch with her, I'd have settled directly."

"It wouldn't have done you any good," the lawyer told him sternly. "I have had the claim assigned to me. That is, I have had myself placed in the position of trustee, and I have—"

"Bosh and nonsense!" Malloy told him. "If I could have found Edith I'd have settled with her. She was willing to settle for five thousand dollars yesterday."

WRIGHT raised his eyebrows in horrified surprise.

"For five thousand dollars!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"That's what I said," Malloy told him.

"And you don't need to be so damned surprised about it. Five thousand bucks is a lot of money."

"Why!" the lawyer expostulated, "I never heard of any such thing! She told me with her own lips that she wouldn't consider a settlement for less than fifty thousand!"

His pale eyes fastened in shrewd appraisal upon Malloy's face. Then as Malloy showed no surprise but merely a grim tenacity of purpose, the lawyer went on, "I, of course, wouldn't consider any settlement for under a hundred thousand. I don't know if my client would consent to that, but I would do my best to make her see the expediency of settling."

"Oh, go jump in the lake," Malloy told him. "You probably want five thousand for your fee. You'd be damned glad to make a ten-thousand-dollar settlement. Edith wants five. You'd take five."

"Mr. Pierce," said C. Farnsworth Wright with dignity, "you will either refrain from insulting me, or else leave the office. Since you have come here, I don't mind telling you that I will file suit in this case tomorrow, and in the meantime, I will give complete information to the newspapers."

Malloy twisted and squirmed.

"Oh!" he said, "you can't do that. You've got to give me a break."

The door of the outer office opened.

"Miss Dalton doesn't answer her telephone," the secretary said.

Malloy jumped to his feet.

"I'm going to China," he said.

The secretary looked at him for a moment, then closed the door.

Malloy lunged toward the outer door.

"No. No," the lawyer said. "We can work out some sort of a settlement. Think, my dear young man, of what you would be sacrificing if you made yourself a voluntary exile from your native country. You have money. The matter can

be adjusted for money. It will be far more satisfactory to you to make some settlement, and it is the just thing to do. The right thing. The noble thing. You have wronged this young woman. You have—”

Malloy turned on him savagely.

“Save that line for a jury sometime,” he said. “How much? Spill it. Make it a reasonable figure and I’ll settle. Try to stick me and I’ll go to China.”

“Seventy-five thousand dollars,” Wright said.

Malloy reached for the knob of the door.

“Fifty thousand—not a cent less.”

Malloy turned to stare at him. “Forty thousand,” he told him.

C. Farnsworth Wright shook his head, but there was cautious appraisal in his eyes.

“To hell with all of you! You and that gold-digging little red-headed floozy!” Malloy said. “I’m off for China.”

He jerked open the door.

“All right,” the lawyer said hastily. “Forty thousand then.”

Malloy returned to his chair, pulled a check book from his pocket.

“All right,” he said. “Let’s have an agreement of settlement and you turn the letters over to me.”

“I will dictate an agreement of settlement,” the lawyer said; then suddenly added cautiously, “But wait a minute. How do I know that you’re Ned Pierce, the defendant in the action?”

“I’ve got forty thousand bucks that says so,” Malloy said.

“You would, of course, give me a check.”

“Naturally.”

“And you’d want the letters when you surrendered the check?”

“Of course. Do you think I was born yesterday?”

“But the bank has closed,” the lawyer

said. “I’m afraid we’ll have to make an escrow of the matter.”

“Bosh and nonsense,” Malloy told him.

HE REACHED across the desk, took the legal foolscap, ripped off the top sheet, wrote half a dozen lines in his quick, vigorous handwriting.

“Go compare that with the writing on your letters,” he said, “if you don’t believe I’m Pierce.”

The lawyer hesitated a moment, then took the sheet of paper and crossed to the sectional bookcase on the side of the office near the corridor. He pressed a button. The bookcase swung back. The lawyer bent over the combination of the wall safe which was disclosed.

Malloy waited until he heard the click of the door, the rustle of papers, then he got to his feet and with catlike tread, walked around behind the lawyer.

“It compares all right?” he asked.

C. Farnsworth Wright gave a sudden start, shoved the letters back into the safe.

“No, no,” he said. “You mustn’t come around here. Go back to your chair.”

“Say,” Malloy demanded belligerently, “who the hell do you think you’re talking to?”

“I’m talking to you,” shrilled the lawyer, and put out his hands in a futile push.

Malloy frowned, thrust forward his jaw.

“Say,” he said, “what do you think you’re doing?”

Wright swung at the jaw. It was a vicious swing, although the timing was poor. The futile, jabbing punch of a man who has spent much of his time in an office.

Big Jim Malloy kept his chin in its extended position until the lawyer’s fist was within an inch or two of his skin. Then he snapped his head back; and as the lawyer’s swing whistled past his chin, Big

Jim Malloy struck once with his left, a short smashing impact of fist on flesh. The lawyer's head rocked back. He staggered, clutched at the side of the bookcase, then slipped to the floor and rolled over.

Big Jim Malloy jerked open the safe door, pulled out the contents, ran around the bookcase and dropped to the desk. His hands fairly flew through the papers. His eyes caught the name "Stella Laverne." It was on an envelope, the top-most envelope of a bundle of some half dozen—a bundle about which were snapped two thick rubber bands.

Malloy dropped the bundle of letters into his inside pocket. He also picked up the three letters which he had given Edith Dalton earlier in the day. He strode toward the door.

The lawyer, punch-groggy and dazed, scrambled to his feet. He leveled a bony forefinger at Malloy.

"If," he said, "you leave this office with those letters, I shall have you arrested for robbery. Those letters are not yours until you have completed a settlement and paid forty thousand dollars."

He shook his head as though to clear his senses. He groped unsteadily with his hands, but his voice had been steady enough.

Malloy hesitated.

"I mean exactly what I say," C. Farnsworth Wright said. "The minute you leave this office I shall notify the police."

Slowly, reluctantly Jim Malloy reached in his pocket and pulled out the three envelopes addressed to Edith Dalton.

"Put them back on the desk," the lawyer said.

Malloy dropped them on the lawyer's desk.

"Now," said the attorney, "I am going to add to the price of settlement ten thousand dollars, to cover my injuries."

Malloy jerked open an exit door to the corridor.

"To hell with you!" he said.

"Come back! Come back!" the lawyer screamed. "I was only fooling. I lost my temper. We'll settle for forty thousand."

Malloy strode down the corridor. The lawyer jerked open the door.

"Thirty thousand," he pleaded.

Big Jim Malloy's thumb jabbed against the elevator button.

The lawyer came down the corridor on a jog-trot.

"Twenty thousand," he said.

Big Jim Malloy stepped into the elevator as the cage door opened.

"I've decided not to deal with a shyster under any conditions," he said.

The lawyer's lips were moving as the glass door slammed, shutting out the sound. The cage shot downward.

CHAPTER THREE

Five Crisp, New Bills

BIG JIM MALLOY sat in his office writing laboriously. As he finished each letter, he folded it to fit one of the envelopes he had taken from the lawyer's safe, removed the original letter from the envelope and pushed in the letter he had written. He was on the last letter when Edith Dalton entered the office.

"Been telephoning," she said, "and got no answer, so I decided I might as well drop in."

"When did you telephone last?"

She looked at her wrist watch. "One hour ago on the dot," she said.

"You just missed me," he told her. "I've been here for about an hour."

She looked at the letters.

"What are you doing now?" she asked.

"Writing more love letters?"

"Writing more love letters," he told her.

"You should be good at it by this time."

"Did you want any improvement over that first letter?" he asked.

She changed the subject abruptly.

"I saw your doctor," she said.

"Was he," asked Malloy, "a man with dark, soulful eyes, a pasty complexion and a rather sensitive mouth?"

"No," she said. "He's tall, blond and thin."

"You told him you weren't sleeping?"

"Yes."

"Did he ask you why?"

"Yes. He insisted on knowing why."

"You wouldn't tell him?"

"No, you told me not to."

"You've got an appointment for tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"That's fine," he told her. "Go back there tomorrow and be your own sweet self. Tell him that you had written some letters that were indiscreet; that you were being blackmailed and you didn't know what you could possibly do about it, but that someone told you about me; that you employed me and I had the letters back for you inside of twenty-four hours; that you're feeling like a million dollars. Thank the doctor for his interest, but tell him he's fired; that you're cured; that you slept like a top last night and that you're going to sleep from now on."

"If he asks me any questions about the letters, what will I tell him?"

"Just tell him they were mildly indiscreet and don't tell him anything more. Let him draw his own conclusions. Don't be too anxious to talk to him. Be a little bit reticent."

"O. K. Anything else?"

"That," he said, "is pretty nearly all of it."

"Shall I give him your address?" she asked.

"Be sure to do that," he said. "Mention

my address casually at the same time you mention my name."

"If he shows any interest," she asked, "should I . . ."

"He won't," he said. "He'll probably be a little suspicious at first and think perhaps it's some sort of a frame-up."

"Anything else?" she asked.

"That's all," he said. "Unless you want to have some dinner and take in a show as soon as I finish this love letter."

"You don't seem to be writing as fluently as you did when you wrote mine," she told him.

"I'm forging these," he remarked.

"Trying to duplicate a handwriting."

"Oh," she said.

There was silence for several seconds while Malloy laboriously made rather a crude forgery of the handwriting of one of the letters.

After a moment she asked tentatively, "What sort of a show, Jim?"

He looked up at her and grinned.

"There's a good mystery play on at the Plaza," he said.

BIG JIM MALLOY stared across the desk into the dark, nervous eyes of the man who had given him the name of Doctor Frank C. Larko.

"Well, Doc," he said, "we're sitting pretty."

The black eyes seemed to fairly burn with quick interest. The man leaned across the desk.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that I have the letters."

"What! Where were they?"

"In the lawyer's safe."

The man's face set into grim lines.

"My God!" he said. "I'd half suspected that."

"It was a cinch," Malloy said. "The lawyer took your money, went to give it to the blackmailer. He claimed he was held up enroute. He wasn't. He simply

made the pay-off and grabbed the letters. He figured that he could use them for a second shake-down."

"You have them here?" asked the man.

Big Jim Malloy jerked open the drawer of his desk, pulled out the envelopes into which he had placed the forged letters. The man's eager hands reached forward for them.

"Not so fast," Malloy said. "There's a balance of five hundred dollars coming."

"That's all right," the man said eagerly, his voice quivering. He pawed at the letters, inspected one of the envelopes and then sucked in his breath in savage glee.

"By God!" he said, "they're the ones. You certainly do deliver the goods, Malloy! I've heard about you and the things that I've heard about you don't even begin to do you justice—wonderful as they are. You've done wonders. Did you have any trouble?"

"Just about a thousand dollars' worth of trouble," Malloy said. "I'm waiting for the other five hundred."

The man's hand trembled as he pulled a wallet from his pocket. Once more he took out five new, crisp one-hundred-dollar bills, and, as before, when he had taken the five one-hundred-dollar bills from the wallet, the wallet was emptied of currency.

"Here you are. . . ." he said. "Five new, crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. I got them from the bank because I had confidence in you."

"Thanks," Malloy said, "both for the money and your confidence."

His big hand dropped down easily upon the pile of bills, folded them once, thrust them into his trouser pocket. His other hand flipped the package of letters across the desk.

Big Jim Malloy looked at his watch. It lacked thirty minutes of the time he was to meet Edith Dalton for dinner and a show.

"Don't forget," Malloy said, "that any time I can be of service to you, I'm willing to bring you results in return for a consideration."

"I won't forget," the other chattered, and almost ran across the office in his anxiety to reach the corridor.

Big Jim Malloy, his hand thrust into the side pockets of his coat, stood for a moment moodily watching the door through which the other had vanished. Then he put on his hat and coat, picked up his stick and gloves and left the office, switching out the light, taking care to lock the door behind him. He got his car from the garage, drove to the Ansonia Apartments and jabbed the bell-button of Edith Dalton's apartment. The door made buzzing noises and Malloy went up.

SHE met him at the door of the apartment. Her eyes were puzzled.

"What did you do to my lawyer?" she asked.

"How do you mean?" he countered.

"He rang up. He was all excited. He said that he thought he could get a settlement out of you if I'd be reasonable, but that he simply had to see you. That you were planning to leave for China, and that I must get in touch with you no matter what happened and bring you back to his office."

"Wanted to see me, did he?"

"He wanted to see you most awfully bad."

"Did he say why?"

"He seemed so excited that he could hardly talk," she said.

Jim Malloy chuckled.

"Let's go to dinner," he invited.

"You're not going to tell me?" she asked.

"Not yet, no."

"How do I come in on it?"

"You're in on it plenty," he told her.

"Are you going to go see the lawyer with me?"

"Not tonight."

"He said he'd be waiting in his office. That I was to give him a ring if I got in touch with you."

"Did he want you to patch things up with me?"

"He wanted me to get you there no matter *what* I had to do to bring you there."

"Give him a ring," Malloy said, "and tell him that you're playing me along. That you have hopes I'll listen to reason, but that you think it will be tomorrow before I'm in a proper frame of mind to listen to a suggestion that I call on him."

"Shall I tell him anything else?"

"No, that's enough. You might tell him that you think you've talked me out of the idea of going to China."

"He said it would be very much to your advantage if you called," she said. Malloy chuckled.

"Give him a ring," he told her, "and tell him just what I told you, and be sure that you keep your appointment with your doctor tomorrow."

"And tell him that I've slept?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "and when you tell him *that* he may look at you rather enviously."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Simply," he said, "that Doctor Larko may not sleep well tonight himself."

"Jim Malloy," she said, "*will* you tell me what you're doing?"

"Playing both ends against the middle," he said. "Putting two chislers up against a blackmailer and collecting all the way down the line."

She sighed wearily. "And I presume that's all you're going to tell me," she said.

He nodded.

"You're an opportunist," she said.

"What's your definition of an opportunist?" he inquired curiously.

"One who takes advantage of any opportunity that comes his way."

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "you've got to change that definition. I don't wait for opportunities to come, I go out and make them."

CHAPTER FOUR

Malloy's Results

EDITH DALTON'S appointment with Doctor Larko was at two thirty P. M. At two forty-five Big Jim Malloy's telephone rang and Edith Dalton's voice said, "Jim, I have a client for you. A Doctor Larko. He'd like to consult you immediately."

"Send him over," Malloy said. "I'll see him as soon as he get here."

He hung up the telephone, grinned, smoked a cigarette with evident enjoyment, and was halfway through the second cigarette when Doctor Larko entered his office.

Doctor Larko was tall, blond and nervous. He sat down in the big chair across the desk from Malloy and cleared his throat importantly.

"Blackmail?" asked Jim Malloy.

Doctor Larko started.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"Most of my business is," Malloy said. "Tell me about it."

"It isn't that I care for myself," Doctor Larko said. "It's the woman in the case. She tells me that she would be absolutely ruined if the matter came out. Her husband is a wealthy man. Some day she's going to inherit a lot of property. If her husband knew anything about these letters, he'd—"

Big Jim Malloy interrupted.

"This woman," he said, "probably started playing around with you as a single woman and then she told you she was married. By that time you were

hooked. You wrote her letters. Then the letters got out of her possession in some mysterious manner and someone started to blackmail you. Is that right?"

Doctor Larko nodded.

"Did it," asked Big Jim Malloy, "ever occur to you that any woman who would first lie to you about being married, second lead you on to write her incriminating letters, and then have the temerity to ask you to pay out your hard-earned money in order to redeem those letters to keep her out of a jam, wasn't worth the trouble?"

Doctor Larko stiffened.

"That," he said, "is a matter of ethics which I must reserve for my own decision."

"I presume you wouldn't believe me," Jim Malloy said, "if I should tell you that the whole thing was a plant and that the woman was the tool of the blackmailers from the beginning."

Doctor Larko flushed.

"I most certainly would not," he said.

Jim Malloy tossed away his cigarette with a gesture of weary resignation.

"Oh well," he said, "that's what makes the world go around. Go ahead with your story."

"I dealt with the blackmailers through an attorney who was suggested to me by a friend. An attorney who makes a specialty of handling such things. He got the price down to what I considered a reasonable figure. I gave him the money with which to pay it. Unfortunately, he was held up while he was going to make the payment. Of course, there's no question but that the blackmailers were the ones who were back of the robbery. They pulled it in order to make me pay twice. As a result, they have the letters and the money."

"Did they make any immediate demands on you?" asked Malloy.

"No, not immediately after the hold-

up. Everything was quiet for awhile, then last night, this man Cole got in touch with me again. He said they'd waited long enough, that because I'd been unfortunate they'd let me off this time for five thousand dollars, but they had to have it by tonight or they'd sell the letters to the woman's husband. With those letters, he'd get a divorce at once and that would leave the woman utterly penniless."

"You've met this blackmailer, Cole?" asked Malloy.

Doctor Larko nodded.

"Is he a nervous chap with big black eyes, a pasty complexion, and a sensitive mouth?"

DOCTOR LARKO stared, wide-eyed. "Why, yes," he said. "That's a perfect description."

"Where were you to meet him to pay over the money?" asked Malloy.

"At my office at five o'clock this afternoon. He was going to come in with the letters. I was told to pay over the money without any conversation. The blackmailers didn't want to take chances on having dictographs concealed in the walls."

Big Jim Malloy reached in the drawer of his desk.

"All right," he said. "You won't believe me when I tell you that the woman was crooked. Perhaps you will believe me when I tell you that you've been played for a sucker. Here are your letters."

Malloy tossed the bundle across the desk to Doctor Larko.

Larko stared at the letters with wide, incredulous eyes.

"But, my God, man!" he said. "How could you have received these letters? You didn't even know I was coming over here until a few minutes ago. And—"

"That's all right," Big Jim Malloy answered reassuringly. "My creed is getting results. Sometimes I get them fast."

The look of speechless bewilderment on the doctor's face suddenly gave way to one of suspicion.

"Perhaps," he said, "you are. . . ." His voice trailed away into silence.

"No," Malloy said grinning, "I'm not in league with the blackmailers. Those are your letters, Doctor, and they're not costing you a cent. You've paid for them already. I saw an opportunity to make a little honest money on the side, and so I chiseled the chiseler to the tune of a thousand bucks, which was gravy to me."

"But," Doctor Larko persisted, "I don't understand."

Big Jim Malloy patted the doctor's shoulder soothingly.

"That's all right, Doc," he said, "you don't have to understand. You've got your letters and I've picked up a thousand bucks. Now run along and do just as I've told you. When this bird comes in for the money, simply tell him that his letters are forgeries. That you have the original letters in your possession. Show him one of them if you want to, but be careful to have a gun handy. Also, you'd better have someone waiting in your outer office—someone you can depend on if they get rough with you and try to start anything."

"Then what's going to happen?" asked Doctor Larko.

"Nothing as far as you are concerned," Malloy said. "Personally, I may have a little satisfaction out of it."

Doctor Larko stood up as one in a daze.

Big Jim Malloy escorted him to the door, went out himself to do some work on another case, and returned to his office so as to be there at the time of Doctor Larko's appointment with the black-mailer.

He had been in the office some ten or fifteen minutes when Edith Dalton walked in.

"Hello," Malloy said. "What do you want?"

"Just wanted to find out how you came out with Doctor Larko," she said.

"I cured him with the first treatment," Malloy told her. "What's more, I've picked up two hundred and fifty bucks for your share of the work."

He paid her two crisp one-hundred-dollar bills, two twenties and a ten.

"Can you tell me about it?" she asked.

"No," he told her. "You'd better beat it for a while. I'm expecting a visitor. The party may get rough."

"Listen," she said, "suppose I—"

Big Jim Malloy suddenly stiffened as a shadow formed on the frosted glass of the outer door.

"Quick," he said. "Pretend your my secretary. Go out there and sit at the desk and start banging away on the typewriter. Make it snappy."

She followed the direction of his glance, then dashed into the outer office, sat down at the typewriter just as the door opened and two men walked into the room. One of them was the man who had first called upon Big Jim Malloy and given the name of Doctor Frank C. Larko. The other was a big man with a cauliflower ear, a broken nose and a big jaw.

BOTH men filed purposefully through the outer office, closed the door of the inner office with a bang.

"Well, well, Doctor, how are you?" said Malloy. "You aren't in any more trouble, are you?"

The man snarled at Big Jim Malloy.

"You dirty, double-crossing heel!" he said. "You double-crossed me all the way through."

Big Jim Malloy laughed goodnaturedly, but his eyes were wary and watchful.

"No," he said. "I think you were the one who double-crossed me. You had some letters. You blackmailed Doctor

Larko with those letters, using a woman accomplice to play upon the doctor's sense of gallantry. Larko made a pay-off through the lawyer, but you found out that the lawyer hadn't turned over the letters, but was holding them to use a racket of his own later on. You got greedy and decided that if you could get the letters back, you could work a double blackmail. You tried to lie to me so that I'd get them. It just happens. Mr. Oscar Cole, that I wasn't born yesterday."

The man raised a long, nervous forefinger, pointed at Big Jim Malloy.

"All right, Bill," he said. "He's got my thousand dollars. Get it."

The big man moved forward menacingly.

"O. K., buddy," he said. "All we want out of you is the thousand bucks and we want it now."

There was a grin of supreme satisfaction on Jim Malloy's face.

"Come and get it," he invited, getting to his feet.

The big man rushed.

Malloy kicked the swivel chair back to one side, sidestepped the first lightninglike jab from the big man's fist, slammed his own right into the stomach. He took a light left on the forehead, smashed a heavy left hook to the jaw, followed it with a right, countered, sidestepped, and ducked a heavy swing.

Oscar Cole pulled a blackjack from his pocket, made a vicious sweep at Malloy's head. Malloy stepped back, caught the smaller man's descending arm, gave it a quick twist. Cole screamed, dropped the blackjack.

The big man with the cauliflower ear was trying to get around Cole's side so as to come within range of Malloy. Malloy slammed Cole out at arm's length, held him for a moment with his left and then smashed his right full into the man's nose. The impact sent Cole staggering back-

wards against the big man with the cauliflower ear, flung him off balance. At that moment Malloy stepped in with the swift, tigerish grace of a professional fighter, slamming home a terrific right to the jaw, following it with a left to the eye.

The office echoed to the tramp of pounding feet. The furniture crashed. A picture swung from its fastenings, dropped to the floor with a tinkle of broken glass. Cole staggered to the door in precipitous flight. The big man with the cauliflower ear hesitated a moment, then turned to follow suit, but was not fast enough to escape the impact of Big Jim Malloy's right foot as he went through the doorway.

The doorway to the outer office delayed them a moment and Malloy had an opportunity for another smashing kick. Then he turned to grin at the white, startled face of Edith Dalton.

"Now," he said, smiling his satisfaction, "we can put the finishing touches on the lawyer."

"Jim," she said, white-lipped, "are you hurt?"

He grinned and shook his head.

"Haven't had so much fun in ages," he said.

"They'll come back with guns," she told him.

Jim Malloy shook his head.

"Not blackmailers," he told her. "They're yellow. This man, Cole, got some second-rate prizefighter. He was impressed by the busted nose and cauliflower ear, plus the big chest measurement. The man was like a truck horse; he was so slow he couldn't start a right-hand punch without getting set and drawing back his hand. It was a shame to take the money."

"But what are we going to do with the lawyer?" she asked.

"Come along," he told her. "You'll see. . . ."

BIG JIM MALLOY stopped enroute to the attorney's office to pick up a wedding ring. He slipped this upon Edith Dalton's left hand.

"This," he told her, "is going to be good."

The taxicab deposited them at the attorney's office. Big Jim Malloy went up. He didn't bother to announce himself to the cold-faced secretary, but strode across the outer office, jerked open the door of the lawyer's private office.

C. Farnsworth Wright had been given no opportunity to assume the pose that he liked to take when a client was about to enter the room. The leather-backed law book which he usually held in his hand was lying on the desk. The lawyer's feet were propped on a corner of the desk. He was smoking a cigar, his pale eyes thoughtfully regarding the smoke. His startled glance took in the pair who stood in the doorway, then his face flushed indignantly as he dropped his feet from the desk and pushed back the chair.

"You," he said to Jim Malloy, "think you're pretty smart trying to get around behind my back, but let me warn you both of one thing. You've assigned this cause of action to me, Miss Dalton. There's not going to be any settlement made until I make it. You specifically agreed that you wouldn't make any settlement without my consent, and through me."

"Is an assignment like that any good?" asked Jim Malloy innocently.

"It doesn't make a damn bit of difference whether it's any good or not," the

lawyer said. "It's good enough so that I can make you so much trouble, my smart young friend, that you'll be glad to pay through the nose to effect a settlement. Furthermore, I could put a charge against you for burgling my safe."

"Of what?" asked Malloy innocently.

The lawyer clamped his lips.

"We won't go into that at the present time," he said, "but you'll pay for it when you come to settle the case."

"What case?" Malloy inquired.

"The breach-of-promise case."

Malloy's grin was cherubic.

"Oh, that," he said. "There isn't any."

"Oh, yes there is," Wright told him with a voice that rasped with rage. "I've got the papers ready to file suit, and I'm going to file suit against you, and you're going to pay. I've got the most damning letters here as evidence—"

Malloy held out Edith Dalton's left hand.

"But," he said, "there isn't any breach-of-promise suit. You see I told Edith it was all a misunderstanding—that I was ready to go ahead with the marriage any time she wanted to. So we got married. Will you please tell me how you can file a breach-of-promise suit when the promise has already been fulfilled and the marriage consummated?"

C. Farnsworth Wright stared at them with sagging jaw.

Malloy laughed.

"I just thought I'd let you know where you stood, Wright," he said, as he tucked Edith Dalton's arm in his own and they started out the door.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE YOU'LL MEET

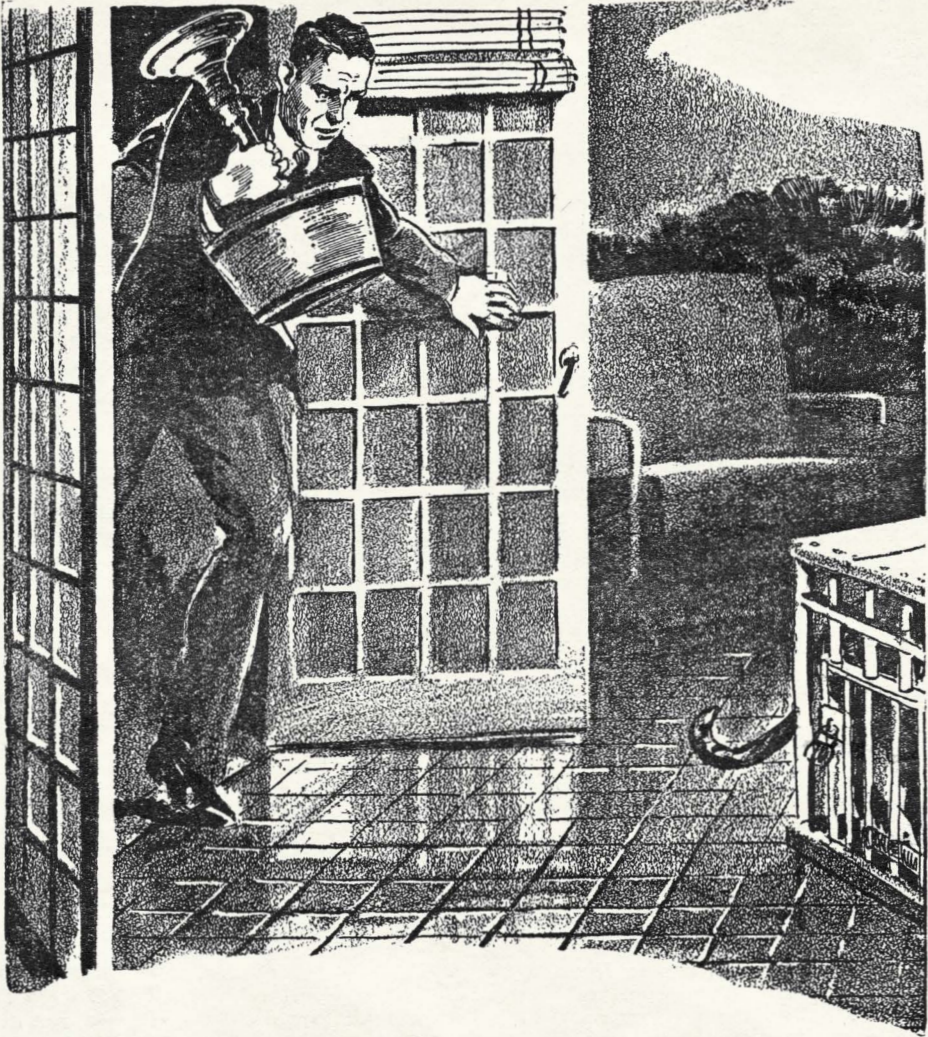
DEATH FROM DOWN UNDER

MAXWELL HAWKINS'

latest master mystery in which those amazing little men, the Jones Brothers, decide to take a vacation from crime only to walk into a murder set-up more thrillingly unbelievable than any they'd ever met before.

DIME DETECTIVE for APRIL 15th

Out APRIL 1st



The Devil's Penthouse

by Oscar Schisgall

Author of "Death on the Dunes," etc.

CHAPTER ONE

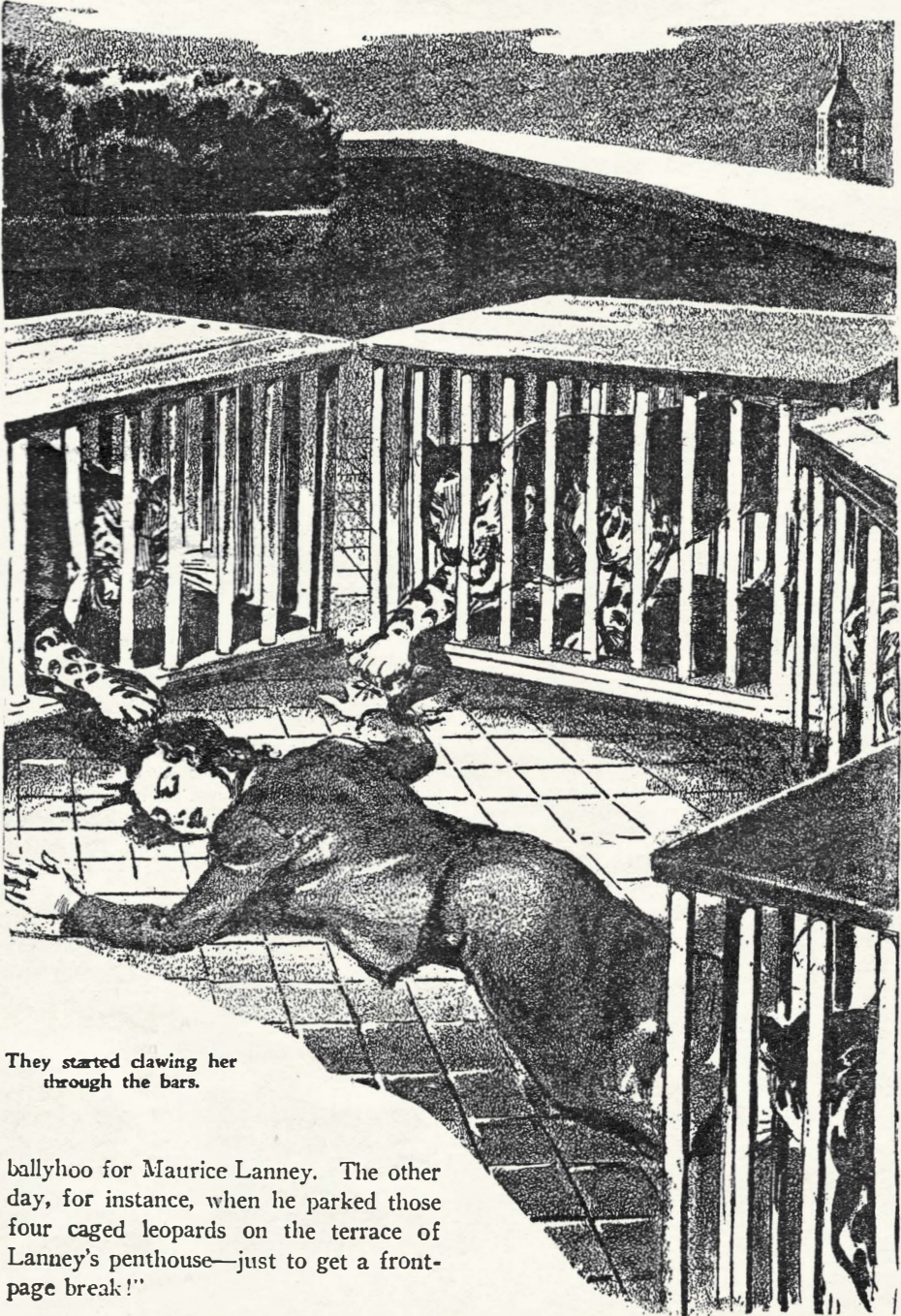
Eag of Bones

WHEN the rumor came that human flesh and bones had been dropped into the incinerator from Maurice Lanney's penthouse, the story

sounded far too fantastic to be accepted as news in a newspaper office. Tillitson, the *Record's* city editor, vented his skepticism in a scowl.

"Smells like another of Bert Van Deever's tricks," he muttered. "As a press agent, the man's a complete lunatic! He's been worse than ever since he started this

There, far above the teeming city, they ranged—four jungle leopards lashed to human flesh-lust by a man no less vicious than the beasts. Who was this monster who fed those giant cats their gruesome ration? Why did he keep them caged outside "Satan's Penthouse?"



They started clawing her through the bars.

ballyhoo for Maurice Lanney. The other day, for instance, when he parked those four caged leopards on the terrace of Lanney's penthouse—just to get a front-page break!"

"And got it, chief," chuckled a deep voice at the other side of the desk. "Van Deever's a rascal, but a clever one. Want me to look into this bone business?"

"Yes, of course," Tillitson snapped grudgingly. "But go easy on it, Judd. Make sure of what's what before you feed it to the presses."

FRANKLIN JUDD, crime reporter for the *Record*, slapped his hat carelessly to the side of his head. He was tall, deep-chested, and broad; a young man with a ready grin and hard, penetrating eyes in a strong face.

"If they're hunting publicity," he promised as he turned away, "they'll get a big laugh. But if there *is* anything in this incinerator yarn, maybe somebody's headed for the electric chair. . . . By the way, chief," he added, with his hand on the door, "who gave us the tip?"

"Gus Arbulick," growled Tillitson. "He's the one who found the bones. Superintendent of Lanney's house."

"Phoned us?"

"Uh-huh. And we've got it before the police. Which," the editor augmented, with sly sarcasm, "gives you a chance to distinguish yourself as a Sherlock."

Judd ignored the jibe. "What's the idea?" he asked.

"Idea?"

"Why does Gus Arbulick, on finding human bones in an incinerator, phone the almighty *New York Record* instead of notifying the police?"

Tillitson shrugged as he lit a cigar. "Seems he once earned a five-spot for reporting an accident to the old *World* before the police got the news. So I guess he's fishing for another check. Go see if he deserves it."

Judd nodded and swung out the door.

He didn't leave the building immediately. Instead he paused in the library to study the previous day's paper—the one

which had granted Maurice Lanney, the actor, a front-page column. The headline brought a dry, faintly contemptuous twist to his lips.

**BROADWAY STAR LIVES WITH
CAGED LEOPARDS
KEEPS FOUR ANIMALS ON TERRACE
OF PENTHOUSE APARTMENT**

Judd read the first part of the column swiftly. Halfway down, however, he allowed himself greater deliberation.

When questioned, Mr. Lanney explained, "In my new play, *Madman's Dream*, I have the part of an animal trainer. I shall spend a good deal of the second act in a tent, with these four leopards in cages around me. I want them to learn to know me, you see. I want to get along with them on the stage. So I obtained permission from the owners of the house to keep these beasts on my terrace for a few days—until the play opens. We're really becoming friendly!"

Mr. Lanney himself, however, doesn't tend the beasts. Nor does his manservant, Donald Waters. They are being cared for by Isram Ramapurgo, an Indian from Bengal, who was for years an animal trainer with the Howells-Link Circus. It was from this circus that the leopards were borrowed for the play, and Isram Ramapurgo, said Mr. Lanney, is to look after them during the entire run of the drama. For the present the trainer, too, is living at Mr. Lanney's home. So far, according to the superintendent of the building, there have been no complaints from other tenants.

Judd tossed the sheet away, shaking his head. As he strode from the library, he thought with a tight smile, "This man Van Deever invents the damndest stunts!"

Then he considered his assignment—to discover if there was any truth in the report that human bones had issued from the Lanney penthouse—and his face became queerly puzzled.

THE Renwood Court, where Maurice Lanney resided, proved to be a new building in the upper Fifties, within a few moments' stroll of the Park. Judd found its superintendent waiting anxiously in a basement apartment—a gaunt man with hollow cheeks, cavernous eyes that burned, and a prodigious black mustache which concealed his lips.

"You from the *Record*?" he asked huskily. A voice which must normally have been as stirring as a roll of tympani now sounded oddly strained, choked.

"That's right," said Judd. "I hear you have—"

"I been wanting to call the police," Gus Arbulick cut in hastily. He had a guttural Slavic accent, but his English was good enough. "After all, maybe I did wrong to call you first. I guess I did. . . How—how much will your paper pay for this, mister?"

"Depends on what you've got to show."

"Bones, I told you!" stridently. "Bones—the bones of a woman!"

"Yes?" Judd said skeptically. "Where are they?"

The gaunt man hesitated, his fingers uncertainly rubbing his mustache. He looked profoundly worried, even fearful. But suddenly, on drastic determination, he flung out: "Come with me!"

He led the reporter quickly into a dimly dark cellar, as complex as catacombs in its labyrinth of corridors.

While they moved across the concrete floor, he explained in that same tense voice: "The—the way I happened to find them was this. One of my helpers was cleaning the brasswork in the halls this morning. That includes the little doors of the incinerator chutes on every floor. When he got up to the roof and was busy in the hall outside Mr. Lanney's penthouse, he smelled something queer. It came from the incinerator chute, and when he opened it, the smell was terrible.

So he called me. We guessed something must be stuck in the chute."

By this time Gus Arbulick had reached the door of a dark bin. It was locked, and he busied himself in finding the proper key on a bunch he took from his pocket. Meanwhile his story continued without pause.

"Nobody was home at Mr. Lanney's just then—though every once in a while you could hear one of those damned leopards snarling. Well, the chute had to be cleared, of course. We didn't know how big a job it might be. I sent my helper down for some strong wire. I put a hook on the end of it and lowered it into the chute—just to find out how far down the obstruction might be. It turned out to be only about fifteen feet below us."

Arbulick unlocked the door. Yet he didn't immediately open it. He turned to face Judd, his eyes burning more feverishly than ever in their deep caverns. Like a magician withholding his climactic revelation while he makes a preparatory speech, the superintendent went on with his account, one hand ready to open the bin's door.

"At first," he said rapidly, "I couldn't catch the obstruction with my hook. So I sent my helper down to the cellar for some other tools. And while he was gone—while I was up there alone—the hook suddenly caught! I pulled on the wire, and a—a bag came up—a burlap sack. One of the things in which they brought stuff for those leopards. It was pretty full, and it had got jammed bad. I looked into it, and—well, you can have a look for yourself!"

ON the last words Gus Arbulick flung the door open. It was a dramatic gesture. He stepped into the bin, switched on an electric bulb that hung above him. In the sudden yellow glare Franklin Judd

frowned down at a bag on the floor. He watched the superintendent open the thing with shaking hands in which veins stood out thick and blue. And though he liked to consider himself pretty callous, Judd was abruptly aware of commotion within himself, heavy, expectant thumping of nerves

"Look!" whispered Arbulick.

Judd frowned into the bag—and instantly felt a little sick. He had to gulp hard; to seize the jamb of the door. A soft oath burst through his teeth.

Bones, yes! He saw the skeleton of a foot and a leg which were indisputably human. And he saw other things—a few scraps of tattered clothing; the remnants of a gray tweed sport suit, of a woman's lacy lingerie, of a brown shoe . . . rags that had been thrown into the bag together with the horrible collection of bones.

"Am—am I right?" hoarsely gasped Arbulick.

Judd speechlessly nodded.

"If—if you ask me, mister, those damned leopards feasted on a woman!" the superintendent grated. "And Lanney is trying to—to hide it!"

Judd muttered: "Who else has seen this, Arbulick?"

"Nobody!"

"How about your helper?"

"No! I found this while he was in the cellar, I told you. I didn't want the man to see it—get sick over it. Besides, I figured your paper might pay a lot for a—a thing like this, and I—well—"

"Didn't want to share the money, eh?"

Judd said grimly. He suddenly fixed narrow, gleaming eyes on the superintendent. "As a good citizen, I must tell you that you should've phoned the police first!"

"Y—yes, I know! But—"

"As a newspaperman, though, I'm damned glad you didn't! This looks like hot stuff."

"Do we call the police?"

"Not yet! Come out of there, Arbulick! For the next few minutes you're going to help me."

AS HE closed the door on the gruesome sight, Arbulick looked dismayed and thoroughly frightened. His large hands were shaking. "But d—don't you think we ought to call the police first?" he insisted. "You got the story before anybody else. That's all you wanted."

"I've just got a hint of the real story!"

Judd retorted. He seized the gaunt man's arm and started him toward the stairs in the murky depths of the cellar. "Look here, Arbulick," he said quickly. "You'll have to notify the police soon; no question about it. But you've delayed this long, and another half hour or so isn't going to matter much to anybody—except us! If I can get a real story on this business—an interview with Lanney and an actual murder case to write up—if I can get it into my paper before anybody else hears of it through the police, I give you my word you'll get a check worth having!"

"S—so you want me to wait some more?" anxiously.

"Only a little while, yes! And I want you to do something else, too.

"I'm going up to Lanney's penthouse. Chances are he'll deny all knowledge about those bones if we put it to him straight. So I'm going to talk about other things. Give me ten minutes. Then come up and tell him that his incinerator chute is blocked! Tell him to have no garbage thrown into it before the thing is cleaned out! Got it?"

"But—"

"No buts! Do as I say, will you, Arbulick? Come up in ten minutes, and leave the rest to me. Lanney's reactions may be worth watching when you tell him his chute is jammed and will have to

be cleared out. Maybe both of us will get something big out of this!"

He hurried the bewildered superintendent up the cellar steps; and his racing mind was already formulating a front-page sensational story concerning the mangled bones of an unknown woman . . . found in a bag . . . in a house which contained four leopards!

CHAPTER TWO

The Penthouse

THE door of the penthouse apartment was opened by a man in a butler's white jacket—a heavy, thick-set fellow whom Judd mentally catalogued as a mixture of gorilla and wrestler. That he should be constricting his powerful shoulders within the confines of servant livery seemed somehow incongruous. He had thick black hair and a nose which had once been broken.

"Mr. Lanney in?" asked Judd inwardly tense.

"Who's calling?" There was a pause, then the man added as if on afterthought, "Sir?"

"Judd of the *Record*."

"Interview?"

"Right the first time."

The man wagged his head. "Sorry. Mr. Lanney isn't seeing anybody—"

Before he could finish, a sudden call, cheery and full of vivacity, issued from within the apartment. "Hi, there, Judd, old horse! What ho!"

There was a rapid, almost feminine pattern of steps. Looking past the startled servant, Judd discovered the lively, dapper figure of Bert Van Deever, press agent extraordinary — "publicity engineer *de luxe*" in his own language. Van Deever, a truly remarkable "stunt man" in the realm of ballyhoo, came through the foyer with his arms extended in warm greeting. A brilliant smile illuminated his shrewd,

lean face, revealing all his teeth. Invariably he welcomed newspapermen as if he were about to marry their sisters. He brushed the burly servant aside as though the man didn't exist.

"Don't mind Waters," he begged, squeezing Judd's hand. "We've had so many cranks up to see these leopards that we've had to set him up as a sort of wall against 'em. Lanney has a rotten headache, and he didn't want to be bothered."

"I'm sorry—" Judd began.

"Nonsense! Newspaper boys are always welcome, day or night. You know that. Come in! Lanney's out on the terrace, tickling the leopards . . . Waters, take Mr. Judd's hat."

Bert Van Deever was a dynamo. He spoke in sentences that tumbled over one another in their eagerness to be uttered. Thin, forever smiling and ebullient, prematurely bald, he dressed in a manner that might have discouraged even Beau Brummel. Now, linking an arm through Judd's, he led the reporter across an ornate drawing room toward two open French windows that gave upon the sunlit terrace.

Judd caught the smell of the leopards just as he spied the beasts, and grimaced.

The four of them were in individual cages on the spacious terrace. At the moment all were dozing in the late afternoon sunshine; stretched out comfortably, their heads between their forepaws, their eyes closed. Why anybody should want to live with that disgusting animal stench in the place, Judd couldn't understand. He decided that Maurice Lanney must be either very weak in character to submit to an idea of this sort from Van Deever; or else he must be just as mad as the press agent.

Lanney wasn't granting any particular heed to the beasts. He bent over the balustrade of the terrace, engaged in conversation with somebody on the other side

of an area. As Judd emerged and glanced past the actor, he had a fleeting glimpse of a young woman in a window a floor below the penthouse, and some twenty-five feet across the court. She disappeared immediately as Van Deever called: "Hi, Lanney! Here's Judd of the *Record*—come to see if we really do have leopards. Know each other, don't you?"

They did. As they shook hands, the actor remembered that they had occasionally exchanged nods in various resorts along Broadway. He was a tall man with a splendidly proportioned figure. His face was darkly handsome. But it was an unusual type of handsomeness, sharp and satanic; Judd recalled that this man had earned his first fame as "The Devil" in *Satan's Mistress*.

"If you've come for an animal story," Maurice Lanney said with a smile that was paintly patronizing, "there it is . . . Did you bring a photographer?"

"Lord, no," laughed Judd. "Didn't the morning papers give you enough pictures to satisfy everybody? I just dropped in to see how the thing works."

"Works?"

"I mean how you get along with these critters. It must be quite a responsibility, after all, to care for a quartet of jungle cats."

"Oh," Lanney assured him, "I don't bother with that end of it, you know. I leave it all to Isram . . . Isram, meet Mr. Judd!"

IT was Maurice Lanney's gesture toward a far corner of the terrace that made Judd aware, with a start, of another man's presence. He looked around. Isram Ramapurgo, the animal trainer, sat in a deep chair, reading. He was an extraordinarily long, thin man with a coppery complexion and raven-black hair. Beyond glancing up to nod stiffly, he ignored Judd.

Almost at once he resumed reading his book.

"Chummy sort," Judd remarked drily.

"An ascetic," confided Van Deever. "And Isram knows more about animals than any man in town. If you want a few facts about his life since he left the employ of the Maharajah of Rajputan—"

"Never mind the circus ballyhoo," begged Judd. He was impatiently wondering how soon Gus Arbulick would arrive with the news about the incinerator. It seemed to him that Maurice Lanney looked uneasy, pale, visibly restless; not at all the composed and worldly star of the stage. . . . He asked casually: "What do you feed these cats, anyhow?"

"Meat," promptly said Van Deever, fingering a dazzling diamond pin in his tie. "You ought to bring your photographer around at feeding time. It's a sight!"

Judd smiled dubiously. As he peered at the leopards, his expression became slightly disappointed. "Van," he observed, "you're losing your grip. No originality. No punch. You told all this to the boys yesterday. I hoped you'd have something new for me today. Something like a yarn about the leopards once having torn somebody apart—"

"Ridiculous!"

The ejaculation, sharp as a shot, broke unexpectedly from Isram Ramapurgo. Turning toward him in surprise, Judd discovered that the Hindu had sprung to his feet. He stood suddenly tense, tall, his black eyes blazing, his fists clenched. . . . But instantly, while the others gaped at him in astonishment, he recovered his poise; relaxed. With an accent whose English purity was almost Oxonian, though faintly derisive, he added: "You do not think, sir, we would work with animals that have a blood record, do you?"

Van Deever put in instantly, with a soothing laugh: "Too bad, Judd. You

touched on Isram's soft spot. He's very proud of these beasts. I'll give you some pictures which show them eating out of his hand, tame as kittens—"

By that time Isram Ramapurgo had again settled into his chair and picked up his book. With the manner of one resigning from the world, he began to read once more—in a spirit of complete mental isolation.

And it was then that Judd at last heard the ring of the apartment's doorbell. Something in him promptly jumped. With the certainty that Gus Arbulick had at last arrived to precipitate a climax, he waited. . . .

Inside, the superintendent spoke to the man-servant, Waters. His raspy Slavic voice came through the rooms distinctly, and those on the terrace could hear every word.

"Just want to tell you," he was saying, "the incinerator chute is jammed up. The men'll probably clear it out first thing in the morning. Meanwhile, don't use it, will you? I'll send up for the garbage."

From the corners of his eyes Franklin Judd was intently watching Maurice Lanney.

To his dismay, however, the actor turned away to look out over the city! For a few seconds he couldn't see the satanic face at all, nor any trace of fear which might have slipped across it! Inwardly cursing, he was moving to one side for a better glimpse, when suddenly—

"Holy heaven! *Ouch!*"

The cry—a scream of pain—exploded wildly from Bert Van Deever!

Judd whirled around in time to see the dapper man leap frantically toward the wall. His lean face was white, terrified, the eyes bulging. His arms were outstretched, as if grasping for something.

But it wasn't Gus Arbulick's news that elicited the amazingly shrill outcry.

It was a leopard!

Van Deever had unconsciously moved backward dangerously close to one of the cages. With a low snarl of warning, one of the spotted beasts had shot a claw through the bars to seize his leg at the calf! . . . As Van sprang into the air, Judd saw a long swathe of his trousers ripped down—and blood streaming over the man's exposed leg!

Instantly, with a hoarse shout of his own, Isram Ramapurgo came streaking across the terrace to hurl his book furiously against the cage. He dropped to his knees, shaking a fist at the leopard and rasping oaths and imprecations in a language Judd couldn't understand.

At the same time Lanney, utterly pallid, sprang to Van Deever's support. There was an interval of mad confusion; and though Judd himself shared it, his mind was groaning in a deeper excitement of its own. For he realized, in inexpressible chagrin, that the reactions to this accident had thoroughly obliterated any effects Gus Arbulick's announcement might have revealed!

CHAPTER THREE

The Woman in Gray Tweeds

TWENTY minutes later Tillitson, the long-faced city editor of the *Record*, picked up his desk telephone and answered its ring sourly. "Yes? . . . Who? . . . Oh, Judd! . . . Well, what happened?"

Judd's voice, crisp and tense, crackled through the wires briskly.

"Chief," he reported, "I think I've got something big by the tail! The bones were human, all right. No question about it. They're a woman's, and a few rags of her clothing are still in the bag with them."

Tillitson at once stiffened, like a hunting dog catching a scent. He yanked the cigar from his mouth, put it aside. His eyes glowed behind their glasses. Auto-

matically his right hand darted out to snatch up a pencil.

"Right!" he snapped. "Let's have the story."

"Not yet, chief."

"What!"

"Give me another hour, and I'll hand you the biggest scoop of the month!" tensely promised Judd. "I think we're in for an exclusive story of how Maurice Lanney's four leopards devoured a woman!"

"For God's sake, Judd, are you going crazy?" Tillitson almost roared. "If you've got a story like that, I'm not going to hold it back five seconds! I'm—"

"If you want to go on being my boss," Judd ominously interrupted, "you're going to sit on the yarn for a full hour! It'll take that long to hatch it."

"Why?" on a bark.

"Because I've only got driblets of the thing now. Suspicions and theories; no facts except the bones themselves. Listen, chief! Within an hour, if I have any luck, I may be able to tell you who the mangled woman was! I may be able to tell you how she got in among those leopards and became their supper. But you've got to give me time."

"Don't be such a fool! Inside of an hour," Tillitson snarled furiously, "the police and every other sheet in town will have the story!"

Judd's voice declared: "Not if you're willing to pay five hundred smackers to Gus Arbulick, the superintendent of Lanney's house."

"Eh?"

"I'm with Arbulick right now," Judd explained. "Calling from his flat. He's afraid to delay reporting this business to the cops. But he thinks five hundred dollars—no less—will make him forget his fears for another hour. I called to get your O. K. on the deal. Am I authorized to promise Gus the five hundred?"

Tillitson hesitated. He sat scowling at the telephone. Then he declared: "This sounds crazy."

"How about my authorization?" insistently.

"Think it's worth it?"

"Worth it! Good heavens, chief, I'm offering you the most sensational death story of the year, involving the idol of a hundred thousand female matinée fans! I'm offering you this exclusively, hours before any other paper even smells the news—and you ask me if it's worth—"

"All right, all right," Tillitson interrupted impatiently. "Use your judgment. I've got an idea, though, that you're heading for trouble with the police."

"Maybe. But they'll forgive me," Judd said reassuringly, "when I hand them plenty of facts and let them take full credit for finding them. For the sake of the story, chief, I'm willing to take the chance. Right with you?"

"We-ell—"

"Thanks! *Au revoir*. I'll ring you back within an hour with a sheetful of hit news."

There was a click, and Tillitson sat staring into a dead transmitter.

AT THE other end of the wire Franklin Judd rubbed his hands briskly in a mixture of satisfaction and eager anticipation. Seated at a small table, he glanced up at the gaunt, worried Gus Arbulick and assured him: "It's fixed. You can go out and buy five hundred dollars' worth of anything you like."

"Wh-when do I get it?" uneasily.

"Tomorrow, probably, unless somebody blows up the *Record* overnight." Judd paused, suddenly frowning at the floor. He snapped to himself rather than to the superintendent: "Too bad our little drama upstairs didn't work out as planned. Those fool leopards interfering—"

"Was the man hurt bad?" Arbulick whispered.

"No-o. Just a couple of nasty scratches. We bandaged his leg, and he's sitting around upstairs, cussing every jungle beast that ever lived."

"You didn't—er—mention the bones to them?"

"Throw out my trump cards at the very beginning?" Judd demanded. He shook an emphatic head. "No, sir. I don't play that way when I sit in on a hand. . . ." He paused again, planning. Then, on sudden decision, he snatched up the telephone. To Gus Arbulick's infinite amazement, Judd called police headquarters!

When the superintendent attempted to blurt astounded questions, Judd impatiently waved him to silence. In ten seconds he was saying into the transmitter: "Captain O'Ryan of the Missing Persons Bureau, please."

"Who's calling?" asked a man's voice.

"Judd of the *Record*. Personal business."

Over the instrument he winked significantly at the staring Arbulick. His fingers pattered hurriedly on the edge of the table. The seconds passed like so many minutes. But at last a hearty, metallic voice greeted: "Hello, Judd! What's on your mind?"

"Plenty, Captain. Remember the steer I gave you last week on John P. Kerry?"

"Of course. I meant to thank you—"

"No thanks expected or required," Judd assured him crisply. "I've got my hands on something else now. If you'll give me a bit of information, I may be able to throw a succulent morsel your way very, very soon."

"What now?" O'Ryan laughed.

"I want to know," Judd said deliberately, "if you've received a report on a missing woman of this description during the last day or two. When last seen, she was wearing"—his mind flashed back to the rags in the sack of bones—"a gray tweed suit, brown walking shoes, and

pastel-blue underwear. . . . Got anything like that?"

"Did you find her?" O'Ryan demanded.

"Maybe," Judd said cautiously. "If she turns out to be anybody you've got listed, I'll ring you back and let you know. I—er—I'm close to her right now."

"How the devil do you know the color of her underwear?" the captain challenged.

Judd groaned. "Is this a time to be personal? Look at your list, will you?"

HE WAITED. There was silence, and again his fingers drummed nervously on the table. His eyes, hard and luminous, were fixed on the wall in front of him. He appeared wholly to have forgotten the presence of Gus Arbulick. He was thinking that the front-page flattery he had written for Captain O'Ryan a week ago was about to yield results. . . . And then the official's metallic voice reached him again.

"Judd?"

"Fire away!"

"Maybe this fits your little friend. **This** morning a Mrs. Cashion, who runs a boarding house at Fifteen Sumner Place, notified us that one of her boarders had disappeared, leaving all her belongings behind—and rent paid. The missing woman is Naomi Putnam, who claimed to have been a movie actress a year ago. Age about twenty-eight. She—are you getting this?"

Judd's pencil was rapidly scribbling every important word on a sheet of notebook paper. "Keep going," he urged.

"When Naomi Putnam left the boarding house yesterday morning, she wore a gray tweed sport suit, brown walking shoes, and a brown toque. Apparently Mrs. Cashion didn't get as far as you, because I've got nothing on the color of the underwear."

"Did Naomi Putnam say where she was going?" Judd pressed.

"No."

"Ever mention having friends or relatives in New York?"

Captain O'Ryan answered: "Mrs. Cashion doesn't know of any. The Putnam woman has been with her only a few days, since arriving from Hollywood. But it seems she mentioned, several times, having friends among our top-notch theatrical stars. Boasted about it, without naming names."

"Fine, Cap!" snapped Judd. His chest thumped in renewed excitement. "This sounds as if it might fill the bill. I'll try it, anyhow."

"What—"

"Don't ask me to go into details now, please! I'll call you back before the day is up," Judd promised, "and give you everything I know. Meanwhile, my most grateful bows!"

Judd slammed the receiver into its hook. He was smiling keenly as he rose, and his eyes raced over the notations he had made in his book. Naomi Putnam. Friends among theatrical stars. Missing since the previous day. Her clothes corresponding to the remnants in the bag. . . .

"Well, Arbulick!" whispered Franklin Judd. "It looks as if we're on our way!"

WITH the hollow-cheeked superintendent anxiously following him, Judd went at once to the entrance hall of the Renwood Court. There was something dynamic in his tall, loose-limbed figure now; an energy that seemed to have increased immeasurably in the past few minutes. His hard, gray eyes were abnormally bright. His felt hat was tugged low over his forehead. He moved with the brisk strides of definite purpose.

His best course, he told himself, was to fling the name of Naomi Putnam straight into the face of Maurice Lanney—and watch the effect.

A bombshell? Maybe.

If the Putnam woman were really the one whose bones Arbulick had found, certainly her name ought to set off some interesting fireworks in the penthouse. And among those fireworks he hoped there would be a few sparks which would start a blaze powerful enough to illuminate the whole mystery.

Instead of proceeding immediately to Lanney's apartment, however, Judd stopped in the lower hall for a few words with the red-haired elevator attendant. Arbulick hovered nervously behind him while he questioned the man.

"I've got to bother you a minute, brother," he began. "Were you on duty yesterday?"

"Yes, sir," somewhat startled.

"All day?"

"From eight in the morning till eight at night. Those are my regular hours."

Judd nodded. "Good. Then maybe you remember taking a lady up to the Lanney penthouse. A lady in a gray tweed suit."

The uniformed boy glanced oddly at Arbulick, then grinned. "Remember her?" he chuckled. "I couldn't forget her!"

A stab of excitement shot through Judd; but it manifested itself only in a brilliant flash from his eyes. His voice remained firm, staccato. "Why wouldn't you forget her?" he demanded.

"Because—begging your pardon if she was a friend of yours, sir—she was pickled."

"Pickled?"

"Dizzy drunk, yes, sir," affirmed the attendant, his grin widening. "I had the smell of gin in the elevator for half an hour after I took her up to the penthouse."

"What time was that?" Judd snapped.

"Oh—four thirty or five, I'd say. Late in the afternoon, anyhow."

"Did you take her down again?"

"No, sir. Not me. She must have stayed up there till after I went off duty.

Stayed alone, too. Probably sleeping off that jag, I guess."

Judd frowned. "What makes you say she remained up there alone?"

"We-ell—I took all the others down."

"You did?" quickly. "Which others?"

Now, however, the uniformed attendant seemed to balk at the inquiry. He glanced uncertainly at Gus Arbulick. It was only the superintendent's vigorous nod that impelled him to continue with his replies. He shrugged and went on: "Why, first I took Waters—that's Mr. Lanney's butler—down with the animal trainer. They rang about five minutes after I took the woman up, and both of them left together. About fifteen minutes later I got another buzz. This time I took down Mr. Lanney himself. None of them came back while I was on duty, so I can't say how long they were gone. But the woman didn't come down at all."

Judd asked: "When you brought Lanney down, did he seem nervous, excited?"

At that the elevator operator thoughtfully scratched his chin. His brows contracted. "Well, I don't know," he muttered. "I didn't particularly notice. I don't remember him being any different than usual."

"All right, thanks," Judd said with finality. "Run me up to the penthouse, will you?" As he stepped into the car, he tossed over his shoulder to Arbulick. "Better let me handle this angle of it alone. I'll be down soon."

The elevator swept him up twelve floors at smooth, silent speed; and as they rose, the red-haired operator inquired uneasily over his shoulder: "Anything wrong up there, sir?"

"That's what we're trying to find out. . . . By the way, did you take anybody else up to the penthouse yesterday, after Lanney had left?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Sure?"

"Positive."

"Thanks," finished Judd as they reached the roof. He thrust a dollar into the boy's hand. "Something tells me you're due to become famous, with your name in the papers. . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

Terrace Attack

WATERS, still white-jacketed, evinced considerable astonishment on his battered features when he opened the penthouse door. "Forget something, sir?" he asked.

"Lots of things," Judd assured him. "Tell Mr. Lanney I'm back, will you?"

He was admitted freely enough this time. As he entered, he tossed his hat to a chair in the foyer. Waters hurried ahead to the terrace. And as Judd moved into the living room, he grimaced unpleasantly at the odor of the four leopards which still drowsed in their cages outside.

He nodded familiarly when the tall, satanically handsome actor came swiftly through the French doors. Maurice Lanney was surprised; puzzled, too. He frowned. "What's up now, Judd?"

"Just dropped back for a chat. . . . Where's friend Van Deever disappeared to?"

"He felt a little better and went home. He had to change that torn suit of his. Too bad he—"

"Well, it doesn't matter," interrupted Judd, taking a cigarette from his pocket. As he raised the flame of a lighter to its tip, he said through the smoke: "I wanted to talk to you, not to him."

"To me?" in perplexity. "About what?"

"Naomi Putnam."

When he uttered the name, Judd watched the actor with narrow-eyed intensity. He peered through his smoke—and was amply rewarded for his vigilance.

Distinctly he saw Maurice Lanney catch his breath. Saw him stiffen, as if jolted by a blow. Saw him clutch at the back of a chair, while sudden pallor flowed into his face, and his eyes grew round.

"Wh-who?" Lanney whispered, incredulously.

"Naomi Putnam. . . . The woman who called here yesterday afternoon."

"What—what the devil are you talking about?" huskily.

"Naomi Putnam. Didn't I make it clear?"

Lanney lifted a hand. His lips parted. But this time no sound escaped him. An instant he stared at Judd, stunned. And then something seemed to snap in him, and a strange thing happened.

He turned on his heel like an officer on parade. To the servant who was still in the room, he said sharply: "Waters, hop out now and buy me those dress shirts. I won't be needing you for an hour."

"Sir?" in surprise. "What dress sh—"

"You heard me! Hop out!" with a gust of irascibility. Then Lanney strode quickly to the terrace. What he said to Isram Ramapurgo out there, the startled Judd couldn't hear. But a moment later he saw the slim, dark-skinned Hindu glide across the room, quite as perplexed as Waters. Both men vanished to get their hats, and Waters to change his jacket.

Gazing after them through the smoke of his cigarette, Judd knew very well that Lanney was simply ridding himself of their presence. In the small confines of the penthouse he probably didn't want this conversation about Naomi Putnam overheard. So Judd, playing the game, smoked in contemplative, patient silence until both men were gone.

He watched Maurice Lanney thoughtfully. With his hands in his jacket pockets, the actor moved about nervously, his tense frown fixed on the floor. It

wasn't until he had heard the elevator door clang on both Waters and Isram that Lanney at last faced the reporter.

"Now," he demanded sharply. "What is all this about Naomi Putnam?"

"Know her, don't you?"

"What of it?"

"Why, this: she's been reported missing to the police. I've traced her as far as your apartment."

AN INSTANT there was silence in the room. Their eyes met in a clash. Then Maurice Lanney mechanically reached into a box for a cigarette, changed his mind, and dropped it from an unsteady hand. "I see," he said softly, thickly. "So that's why you came here before. Why didn't you speak about her then?"

"I hadn't yet traced her to your place," Judd explained. "But since then, I have. . . . What's become of Naomi Putnam, Lanney? Where is she?"

The actor scowled. "How the devil should I know?"

"Who is she?"

"Why, an—an old friend of mine. Somebody I used to know out in Hollywood." Suddenly Lanney bristled. "But I'll be damned if I can see why I should have to answer to you about all this! Since when were you appointed police commissioner?"

"Now, now, no use losing your temper," Judd argued. "I'm digging into this because I believe there's a good story in it; that's all. . . . You left Naomi Putnam here when you went out yesterday, didn't you?"

"How do you know that?"

"Elevator boys have eyes."

"Oh."

"So what?" urged Judd.

"What the hell do you want to know?" in a spasm of harshness. "I can't tell you what happened to Naomi Putnam! I left her here to—to sleep off a jag! She was

drunk when she came, and I had an appointment to keep. So I put her on the sofa and left her alone. When I came home, about ten thirty last night, she was gone. Nobody else was here, either. I simply took it for granted she'd felt better and left. If she's missing, this is the first I've heard of it."

Judd said slowly: "I'd like to believe you, Lanney." His eyes narrowed again, piercing deep into the actor's. "Why did she come here at all?"

"For—for money!" in disgust.

"Why from you?"

"She was broke and drunk, and looked up the first friend she could think of! It was just my tough luck to have her pick on me. . . . But look here, Judd. I don't see that you've got any particular right to dig into my private affairs like this. I've been playing along with you because—well, you're a friend of Van's, and I guess it's natural enough for you to be hunting a story. But—"

"I'll tell you why I'm hunting a story," Judd interrupted thinly. "And I'll tell you what happened to Naomi Putnam. She was ripped to pieces by those leopards out there! They devoured her flesh—or most of it. Then somebody put her remains into a bag and dropped it into the incinerator chute. Whoever it was, he probably hoped the bones would be completely destroyed by fire; hoped there'd be no trace of the woman—no *corpus delicti*—to involve him in difficulties with the law. But those bones were found Lanney! They're down in the cellar this minute. The police will have them before you know it. And then there's going to be hell on earth for somebody!"

MAURICE LANNEY didn't speak. He couldn't. An appalling transfiguration spread over his features during Judd's shocking speech. The man stood utterly frozen, colorless, his eyes round.

Slightly he swayed, like a figure in a mesmeric trance. Judd watched him suck in a broken breath; watched him attempt a reply, and fail. Minutes seemed to pass before Lanney at last recovered some control of himself. And then, in a stupefied whisper, he drove out: "You f-found her b-bones?"

"Arbulick found them," quietly. "We identified them by the scraps of clothes. If you want to make your own identification, Arbulick will show you the things."

"Good—God!"

A moment longer Judd watched the man. Then, frowning, he turned to crush the stub of his cigarette in a tray. "Lanney," he grimly asked, "what are you going to tell the police? It's a bad spot for you."

"But good Lord!" hoarsely. "I—I don't know anything about this! I tell you I left Naomi Putnam here alone!"

"According to the elevator boy, you were the last one to see her. Nobody came up to the penthouse while you were gone. That's going to require a stiff bit of explanation."

At that Maurice Lanney suddenly stepped forward to seize Judd's wrist in a fierce, trembling grip. His eyes were feverish with a kind of terror. His satanic face was white. It seemed unmistakably evident that the news of Naomi Putnam had stabbed him to the heart. Despite himself, Judd could not suppress an unreasonable sympathy for the man.

"Listen!" Lanney shakily whispered. "You d-don't think I did it to her!"

"I hate to think anybody did it," Judd said thickly. "It's hellish! Nevertheless somebody did. Bones don't crawl into a bag of their own accord."

"I—I swear she was all right when I left her! She was right over there, on—on the sofa! I swear to heaven, Judd! She sat there and—"

"Granted. Yet somebody came up

here and put her bones into the incinerator chute. Who?"

"I don't know!"

"Not even a suspicion?"

"No!"

For a while Judd squinted searchingly into the inflamed eyes. Then, as he shook off the actor's frenzied grip, he asked: "Lanney, who had keys to this apartment, besides yourself?"

"Why—only Waters, my man. . . . And I guess Arbulick, the superintendent, who has a pass key. But Waters is all right! He—he's been with me four years!"

With a quick start Judd snapped his fingers. He asked: "Can you get at his clothes?"

"Clothes?"

"Come on, man, let's crank up the old brains! I want to see Waters' clothes. The suit he wore yesterday. If it was he who came up here after you left, he couldn't have gathered those bones without accumulating a few bloodstains."

"You think he—"

"No, I'm not thinking anything yet! First thing to do is investigate."

The idea finally percolated into Maurice Lanney's brain. He started back, appalled and gaping. It was evident that even to suspect Waters of guilt in this gruesome affair demoralized him. Yet he must have perceived the logic of Judd's suggestion, for he suddenly swung toward the door.

"All right, I'll drag out his stuff!" he whispered huskily. "He won't be back for an hour. But I'm dead certain you won't find anything!"

Judd didn't attempt to minimize the man's confidence. He simply followed the actor through a kitchenette into a small bedroom; and realized that whatever happened now, he had already gathered a stirring scoop for the *Record's* front page. But its mystery still remained to be solved. . . .

WATERS, it developed, possessed three suits. When they had been taken from a closet and tossed over the bed, Judd bent over them with a frown. Together with the hard-breathing actor, he spent fully ten minutes in carefully examining the butler's apparel. He inspected even the spare pair of shoes, peering at their soles and rubber heels for possible bloodstains. But in the end he had to toss the things away and shake his head in futility.

Waters' clothes offered no solution.

"I told you so!" Lanney said thickly, yet with manifest relief.

"You told me many things," sighed Judd drily, "but they're not getting us very far."

He left the man to replace Waters' clothes, and moved thoughtfully through the living room to the terrace. Out there he paused a moment, scowling at the four leopards. Then he peered away over the rooftops of the city.

It was almost dusk now, with a few golden lights already glimmering out of surrounding buildings. A smooth, steady wind flowed over New York; and the incessant clamor of traffic, twelve floors below, rose like the muted growl of some unseen beast. Judd glanced back at the cages. It must be near the leopards' feeding time, he reflected, for the huge spotted cats were stirring out of their lethargy; two of them were impatiently fidgeting behind the bars.

It wasn't the leopards he had come out here to see, however. Judd went to the balustrade and peered downward. Two stories below him extended another terrace. Empty of furniture, it was apparently part of an unoccupied apartment. Uncertainly he glanced across the narrow court—and looked full into the eyes of a girl.

The same young woman, he decided, to

whom Lanney had been talking earlier in the afternoon.

She had just come to her window, with a cigarette sending up a plume of smoke from her fingers. A rather pretty, dark-haired neighbor for the actor. Judd almost envied the man; and with sudden inspiration, he smiled.

For a moment she stared up at him in perplexity. Then, perhaps because his smile was infectious or because she considered him a friend of Lanney's, she responded.

"Out for a whiff of leopard-smell?" Judd inquired.

"No, thanks," she laughed. "Fortunately I get it only when the wind is sou'-sou'-east by north. Besides, I've stopped noticing it."

"How about the snarling when these pretty kittens get hungry? Doesn't it give you the willies?"

"I'm getting used to that, too," she assured him. "In fact, I'm beginning to think I'll never be able to sleep again without a jungle chorus for a lullaby."

"Even one like yesterday's?" he chuckled.

"Yesterday's?"

"I understand," he said, "there was quite a rumpus here yesterday evening. The four of them started fighting over—the food."

"Really?" with interest. The girl laughed lightly. "Too bad I missed it. I was out."

Her reply disappointed him. He had hoped she might have been able to tell him what had occurred when Naomi Putnam was torn apart . . . at least how it had sounded, and whose voice might have been audible through the din, for she couldn't have seen anything from her position. . . . But the fact that this possible witness had been away at the time destroyed the idea.

He was about to toss another question to her, but the trill of a telephone bell in

the girl's apartment drew her away from the window.

With a frown returning to his features, Judd hung over the balustrade like a gargoyle and squinted away through the deepening dusk. He realized that if he was to get a complete story before other papers seized upon it, he'd have to resort to some sort of definite action very quickly. He'd have to—

Behind him he heard a step on the terrace.

It was Lanney, he felt, and started to turn. But Judd didn't turn. In fact, Judd didn't even see who it actually was that emerged from the French door.

For at that instant—something whizzed through the air and crashed brutally on the back of Franklin Judd's head! . . . He pitched forward blindly, with a thousand lurid comets streaking through his brain; dived to his chest, into an abyss of utter blackness, while a man stood panting over him, still holding the chair with which he had struck.

CHAPTER FIVE

Snarl of the Beast

JUDD couldn't have been unconscious for more than a minute or two. By sheer chance he had turned just far enough to avoid the full force of the impact; yet his head ached horribly when he stirred and groaned and opened his eyes.

As he forced himself mechanically to his knees, he shook his body like a dog coming out of water. He felt numb. He blinked, trying to dispel the blurs from his eyes. A hammer seemed to be pounding on his skull, and of their own accord husky oaths were tumbling from his lips.

Finally he was able to raise his head and see clearly.

And his first discovery—one that filled him with sudden savage fury—was that the two French windows had been closed

and shuttered! He was locked out here on the terrace! Maurice Lanney must have—

A new sound broke the angry thought. It was a creak at his left. Judd jerked his head sideways—and instantly, as he recoiled, his breath was strangled in his chest. His eyes widened. A freezing chill raced through him.

The door of the nearest leopard cage was unlocked!

Worse, it was swinging open before the pressure of the beast's paws! And the cat's malevolent green eyes were fixed brutally on Judd!

With a hoarse gasp he leaped to his feet. Dizziness made him reel against the wall. He was pallid, wildly disheveled, on the brink of panic. The slow, supple advance of the leopard made him forget everything else—even the thunder in his head.

"God!" he gasped. "What on earth—"

Instinctively he retreated along the wall. The beast steadily followed. . . .

He stabbed a fiery glance toward the shuttered doors. Even to reach them now was impossible. For he would have to pass the crouching leopard. It advanced toward him cautiously, like a cat creeping upon a mouse-hole, its eyes ablaze, hungry, malignant.

Judd's head roared. His heart thundered.

Automatically he stripped off his jacket. He had a vague, frantic idea of hurling it over the feline head; of temporarily blinding the beast while he sought something to grasp as a defensive weapon.

Why this deadly thing had been done to him, he didn't know. Nor was there time to guess. His brain was whirling crazily. His eyes met the green, flaming glare of the leopard with a kind of hypnotic intensity.

And the beast pounced!

Claws outstretched, mouth open in a

horrible snarl, it leaped straight at his head!

In his violent dodge Judd actually fell sideways. His arms hurled the jacket over the huge cat's head. The leopard missed him in that first leap; crashed heavily against the wall. And Judd, scrambling to his feet, hurled himself wildly toward the other side of the terrace. He sought a chair—the only hope of a weapon—and discovered in new horror that there was no chair! Every one had been removed.

When he whirled around, his face was stark, gray. He was breathing heavily. The leopard had shaken off the jacket. Now, with angry, spitting snarls and its jaws so low that they scraped the floor, it was moving toward him again.

Judd looked about furiously.

There was nothing on which to seize. In a moment the cat would be clawing at him. . . . He flung a swift, mad glance over the balustrade. That other terrace, two floors below, offered the only hope. A dreadfully dangerous hope. If he risked breaking his legs by dropping twenty feet—

Two yards from him the leopard crouched for its leap. He sent a last glare into its eyes—and reached his decision. To remain here now meant certain death. He couldn't grapple with a leopard. Any risk was better than that!

So Judd leaped upon the balustrade.

To make his drop as short as possible, he squatted, gripped the stone with his hands, and lowered himself. He was hanging at arms' length when the leopard's savage head appeared above him—scarcely a foot from his own.

In an instant it would claw. . . . Eyes flaming, Judd sucked in a terrible breath to steady himself for the long drop. Vaguely he was aware of screams somewhere behind him. And suddenly, as he was about to let go—

Something nicked the balustrade at his left.

He heard sharp cracks—four of them. The rapid barks of an automatic pistol!

Like the screams, they came from behind him—from the house across the court! As Judd glared up at the leopard's head, he saw a spurt of crimson shoot out from between the beast's eyes! Saw the animal leap high with a scream of pain, its spotted body writhing in agony!

After that Judd didn't have to drop.

In crazy, uncomprehending confusion he pulled himself up again, his feet helping his hands. When he sat astride the balustrade, hardly able to breathe, he saw the leopard stretched motionless on the terrace—dead!

Judd swung his head around to gape at the adjoining roof. He could see nobody there in the gray dusk. He looked downward. The girl to whom he had spoken was again at her window—leaning out perilously—her face a thing of horror, of uncontrolled panic.

Hoarsely Judd gasped to her: "Y-you didn't fire those shots, did you?"

"No! . . . How—how did that leopard—"

"Who did the shooting?" Judd cut in, panting.

"He was on the roof—my roof!" she cried shrilly. "I saw him leaning over when he fired! He—he had a sort of mask hiding his face, but it fell away while he was shooting! Good God, I thought you were done for! It—"

"Who was he?" Judd huskily blurted.

"That—that animal trainer! Isram Something-or-other! That man who looks after the beasts!"

A MOMENT later, when Franklin Judd hopped over the dead leopard and strode across the terrace, his mind was in a turmoil. A passionate rage against the man who had subjected him

to death was confused by a bewildered gratitude for Isram Ramapurgo. What had the Indian been doing on that adjoining roof, anyhow? Why had he been masked, armed? What role had he assumed in the mad mystery?

This, however, was hardly the time for speculation.

Judd retrieved his jacket. As he shrugged into it, his face still pallid, he approached one of the shuttered doors. An instant he paused to steady himself while he buttoned the coat.

Then he tried the shutters.

Locked from the inside. . . . A savage grin, utterly without mirth, twisted his lips. He felt too infuriated to ask the girl across the court to phone for help, too impatient to wait. Judd raised his foot and ramméd his heel, with all the strength he could command, straight at the latticed shutter.

Two of its slats crashed in, splintered.

He kicked again and again. By the time he stopped, both the shutter and the glass door behind it were smashed. He reached in and unlocked them. Half a minute later he stepped into Maurice Lanney's drawing room.

Judd stood still, pushing his disheveled hair back with combing fingers. He was still breathing hard, and his glare was enraged. Moreover, his head ached dreadfully. If he had seen Lanney at that instant, he would have sprung at the actor more viciously than any leopard—with fists ready to annihilate for vengeance.

For he had no doubt, at that moment, that Maurice Lanney was responsible for what had occurred. **Nobody else had been in the penthouse.**

And Lanney was gone.

An oath tore itself from Judd's throat. With bitterness seething in him he started across the room toward the foyer. But he had taken scarcely two strides when abruptly he halted, in stunned incredulity.

Someone was banging furiously on the bedroom door at his left! Maurice Lanney's voice roared out of the chamber: "Open this! Let me out of here! This is a hell of a thing to do! Open up—d'you hear?"

Judd stood dumbstruck, gaping at the closed door. What amazed him was the fact that its key was on the outside! Lanney was in that bedroom—a prisoner locked in.

Who, then, had been responsible for the hideous drama on the terrace?

WHEN he freed Maurice Lanney from his room, the tall actor demanded indignantly: "What the devil's been going on? I've been yelling like mad, and nobody—"

"Have a look," interrupted Judd. He spoke grimly, with a nod toward the shattered door. Turning, Lanney saw the broken shutters and the dead leopard on the terrace beyond it.

"Holy heaven!" in an awed whisper.

"I've been having a grand time," Judd said bitterly, "playing around with your kittens. Nice little fellow, the one who was let out of his cage. He crawled right up to me to be petted—damn his hide!"

"But what—" aghast.

"Don't ask for explanations," Judd rapped out. "I don't know any. Until ten seconds ago I thought it was you who sicked the beast on me, after clouting me over the head."

"I?" Lanney's white face was petrified.

"But I've changed my mind. According to all the evidence, this place is filled with invisible madmen. Who locked you in the bedroom, Lanney?"

"Why, I—I thought it was you!"

"That's a laugh. . . . Let's hear how it happened."

Lanney spread bewildered hands, and his satanic brows rose in twin arches. In

tones that were stammered, uncertain of themselves, he said: "After I put Waters' clothes away, I came in here. Didn't see you around, so I took it for granted you were in a corner of the terrace. I needed a handkerchief. Went into my room for it. And while I was bending over a drawer, my door was slammed and locked behind me. For a while I yelled. Even kicked. Nobody paid any attention, though I could hear somebody—I was dead sure it must be you—moving around in here. Finally I gave up, wondering what was going to happen. I stood still. Heard shots. Heard you smash in the door. Then I yelled again—and you let me out. That's the whole story!"

A curious chuckle, almost a snarl, broke from Judd. In a few terse phrases he summarized his own experience, ending with the life-saving shots which the girl across the court had attributed to Isram Ramapurgo.

To this Lanney listened in a daze; then turned to a squat bottle on a table in a corner and poured himself a stiff drink of whiskey. He shuddered as the liquor warmed him. It was only after he finished that he offered the bottle to Judd.

But Judd ignored it.

Scowling about the room, he was muttering: "So somebody got in here while I was on the terrace and you were in Waters' room. He came out to the terrace first, probably moving on his toes, and knocked me out. Then he—yes, he could have hidden behind those window drapes while you stepped into your room. And he locked you in. That left him pretty free to close the terrace doors, pull in the shutters, and unlock the leopard's cage before he hopped indoors. . . . By the way, who keeps the keys of those cages? Our friend Isram?"

The pallid Lanney, with another drink in his hand, jerkily shook his head. "They're big keys on a bunch. He usu-

ally leaves them on a nail in the kitchenette."

"Oh, yes? Let's have a look-see."

The keys, however, were gone. . . . And Judd, coming out of the kitchenette, said thickly: "Why the devil did he want me killed, anyhow? Whoever he was, he didn't even have the guts to commit an outright murder! Wanted to throw the guilt on the leopard—with Isram indirectly responsible, I suppose, because of the open cage. Well"—Judd swung toward the foyer and picked up his hat—"I'm going to find out who came up here!"

"From the elevator boy?" anxiously.

"Right. You'd better kick aside some of that mess out there. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Though he knew Lanney wanted to accompany him, Judd didn't wait. He went out and rang for the elevator. In fact, he rang four times before he received any sort of response. And then, when the lift finally came up and its door slid open, he gaped at a face contorted by horror.

The red-haired elevator operator seemed speechless. Judd stared at him; demanded: "What in the name of Jehosophat is the matter with you?"

"It—it's the superintendent!" hoarsely whispered the boy, on a prodigious gulp. "Eh?"

"Arbulick's l-lying dead in the cellar—murdered!"

THE news crashed against Judd like a blow. For a second he stood jolted, gaping at the uniformed man. Then, as a rush of color came into his cheeks, he pulled the door shut with a violent clang.

"Run me down!" harshly.

"Y-yes, sir!"

"Who got Arbulick?"

"I d-don't know! Nobody knows. Sorelli—he's Arbulick's helper—he found the body a couple of minutes ago! The—

the head's all bashed in! Gee, it's terrible!"

"Damn!" grated Judd. As the lift shot down, he almost forgot his own experience in the excitement of this new development. They were near the bottom, in truth, before he remembered to ask the operator: "Say, listen! Whom did you take up to the Lanney penthouse while I was up there?"

"Who? Nobody—"

"What!"

"Not a soul! All I did was take Waters and the animal trainer down right after you went up."

Judd scowled. As though talking to himself he mumbled: "There are stairs that go up, of course—"

But the lift reached the basement; and as the operator opened the door, Judd stepped out without finishing the sentence. The red-haired man apprehensively followed him. They moved quickly through corridors eerily lit by a succession of swinging lights. The elevator attendant showed the way—until Judd abruptly halted.

He stared down at the sprawling figure of Gus Arbulick. The gaunt man's head was smashed, a welter of blood . . . and he lay beside the open door of a bin.

It was the same bin which had concealed the bag of bones. Now, as Judd moved forward with a wild premonition, he stared into the compartment and saw he was right.

The bag had disappeared!

Colorless, rugged of face, he swung around to confront the terrified attendant. The man hung back, afraid to approach the thing on the stone floor too closely. He looked actually sick.

"Where's this fellow, Sorelli?" Judd asked thickly.

"He w-went up to phone the police!"

"And left the body alone!"

"We-well—he—I mean—"

"Well what? For God's sake, don't stand there stuttering! What is it?"

The red-haired man gulped. "When Sorelli found this," he whispered, "he told only m-me! We didn't want to start a riot in the house! So we—well, we haven't spread the news. He'll be down in a minute—"

Judd offered no further comment. Himself a little nauseated, he peered down at the figure at his feet. Then he held his breath, knelt, and picked up Arbulick's limp wrist. Though he strained every faculty, he could detect no hint of a pulse. Dead. Murdered by several vicious blows on the head.

IT WAS just as he started to lower the wrist that Judd spied the curious little mark on the back of Gus Arbulick's hand.

At the sight of it he stiffened, bent down quickly. His brows contracted in a taut V. He lifted the lifeless hand so that it would catch a better flow of light. What he saw was a tiny, fresh scar just above the knuckles—a peculiar scar in the shape of an exclamation point—

He stared. His eyes slowly widened in a mixture of wonder and bewilderment, and he whispered a stunned: "Well, what do you know about that!"

In fact, Judd didn't stir again until the elevator operator suddenly aroused him with a husky: "Jimminy! Look at that, will you?"

"Eh?" with a start. "What?"

"Th-there's a regular blood trail!"

Judd turned. The uniformed man was shakily pointing along the concrete floor; indicating a series of small red flecks which showed where blood had dripped. Judd didn't speak. He rose as if a spring had uncoiled under him. With a frightened attendant at his back, he swiftly followed the trail along a corridor. After a few yards the blood-marks became less

apparent; yet they were distinct enough to be discerned when he stooped over them.

His heart was thudding unnaturally, and perspiration oozed out of his body. Judd followed the trail in silence. And it led—to the furnace!

An instant he paused. Then, with his foot, he yanked the small iron door open. Instantly a blast of heat burst over him, and he had to wince, to recoil. The lurid red glow revealed every line in his face; elicited a fantastic, fiery reflection from his narrowed eyes. Squatting on his heels, he peered deep into the furnace. What he saw on the embers brought a savage twist to his mouth.

"So that's where the bag of bones went!" he grated. "And ditto the coal shovel that bashed in Arbulick's head."

"Holy mackerel!"

"Get me a poker, will you?"

"D'you think you c-can still get—"

"Find a poker! You pick a hell of a time to deliver speeches!"

As the red-haired boy dazedly turned away, another voice came echoing through the cellar. It was the excited call of Sorelli, who was crying: "Hey, Red! Where are you?"

"Over here, by the furnace!"

"You'd better hop upstairs! The elevator buzzer's going like mad. I'll stick around down here. The police are on the way. Ought to be here any minute."

Judd scarcely listened to them. He snatched a long poker from the attendant's hand and began the sweltering job of retrieving from the flames as much of the shovel and bones as still remained visible—for evidence. Perspiration streamed down his face. He quite forgot that his head was still throbbing painfully. Nothing mattered now, save those gruesome relics in the fire.

CHAPTER SIX

Front-Page Stuff

JUDD completed the revolting job before the police arrived; and leaving his weird trophies to cool on the concrete floor, he ran out of the cellar. His nerves were tense as wires. He saw no reason to wait for the authorities—not with a red-hot story ready to be rushed to the *Record*. Or almost ready. He felt he could be back here in ample time to tell the police what he knew.

But his immediate plans suffered an interruption. When he reached the entrance hall of the Renwood Court, he all but collided with the tall, thin, dark-complexioned Hindu, Isram Ramapurgo.

The man was just entering; no doubt to return to the penthouse. He looked grave, calm, and utterly detached from the things about him. Judd strode to the Indian with a quick flash in his eyes.

"Isram!" he exclaimed softly. "You're the one man I've been itching to see!"

Isram Ramapurgo stopped; lifted his thin brows. In that cultured English accent of his he offered a quiet: "Sir?"

"I owe you thanks. Lots of them. If it weren't for you and your gun, I'd probably have a couple of broken legs now. Unbend, man; let me squeeze your hand."

"I don't understand, sir—" in astonishment.

"No use, Isram, no use," Judd said with a tight grin. "Take off the beard; we know you. It happens that the lady of the court looked up to the roof and saw your face when the mask fell off. So if you'll drop the incognito—"

He saw the animal trainer bite his lip in consternation. The man frowned. Judd, however, waited for no further denials or pretenses. He slipped his arm through Isram's and drew the Hindu briskly, though companionably enough, toward the

door. As they went, he said: "Believe me, there aren't many men to whom I owe this life of mine. You're one of the élite. If you hadn't popped up on that roof and shot the leopard, the *Record* would carry my name in a black-bordered box tomorrow morning."

Urged out into the street and toward the corner despite himself, Isram frowned sharply at Judd from the corners of his brilliant black eyes. He no longer attempted to dissemble. "It was the leopard or you, sir," he said quietly. "I had to fire. . . . May I ask where we're going?"

"I'm going to make a phone call from that drug store on the corner," Judd explained. "But I couldn't let you drop away from me, Isram; not before asking what in heaven's name you were doing up on that roof—with a mask and a gun."

"Oh. I see," tightly.

"What's the answer?"

"Do I have to answer?"

"Not at all," Judd assured him. "But I'm hoping desperately you will. And look here," he added quickly, "anything you tell me won't be for publication, if you say so. Understand? I owe you my legs at the very least; you can count on me to remember that when you're talking."

They strode ten paces along the dark street in silence, their arms still linked. Isram was scowling. Apparently he was wondering to what extent he could confide in this man. Once more he studied Franklin Judd obliquely, narrowly. And of a sudden, on abrupt decision, he spoke.

"Very well," he said tersely. "Perhaps I had better clear the matter up—for both of us."

"Right!"

"Yesterday afternoon, when that woman came to call on Mr. Lanney, he insisted that Waters and I depart. He wished to be alone with her. In fact, he advised me to go to a theatre—anything

which would keep me away several hours. As a result, it was almost midnight when I returned. The leopards hadn't been fed—as far as I knew."

ISRAM paused, hesitating. Something in the intonation of his final phrase sent a queer quiver through Judd. But he attempted no interruption.

"I—I tried to feed them their regular rations, late as it was," the Hindu grimly continued. "And they refused to eat. Refused all food. It was the first time such a thing had occurred. I couldn't understand it. Even so, it wouldn't have troubled me very much—if I hadn't found the woman's hat and part of her underclothing under one of the leopards."

"What!"

"It is as I tell you, Mr. Judd. The hat was in shreds. So were the garments. They had been hidden because one of the beasts was sleeping on them. . . . Unfortunately, sir, I am a man of keen and rather painful imagination. All night I had dreams and fears which I—well, which I prefer not to express. They increased in the morning when, under another one of the leopards, I found distinct traces of blood—and the beast itself had lost no blood at all. It—it gave me something of a shock. As a rule, I am not easily alarmed. But somehow—"

He checked himself. They were outside the drug store now, but Judd made no effort to enter the place. He stood with Isram on the sidewalk, his face was drawn and grim. In a whisper he said: "Let's be blunt about it, Isram. You thought the leopards had attacked the woman."

"Well—"

"And you were worried stiff. Go on."

Isram Ramapurgo looked down at the sidewalk. He was still frowning, and now his teeth once more pressed tightly into his lower lip. When he spoke again, his deep, fine voice held a strange tremor.

"I—I didn't intend to put it so bluntly, Mr. Judd," he said softly. "Nevertheless, I—yes, I did have horrible fears! And this evening, when Mr. Lanney again asked Waters and me to leave while he remained alone with a guest—with you—I had a premonition which seemed mad!"

Judd merely grunted.

"It isn't that we people of India are psychic," Isram went on tautly. "That's utter drivel. Plain nonsense. Still, I had the most abominable sort of fear! A—a terror that shook me inexplicably. I suddenly felt I must see what Lanney did on that terrace. It was an urge I couldn't control. So presently I left Waters on the sidewalk. Alone, I went to the roof of the house adjoining Mr. Lanney's. No one saw me go up. I went by the stairs, unnoticed while the lift attendant was up in his car. It was dusk when I stepped out upon the roof. My black clothes, I felt, would render me quite invisible if I remained in shadows. But my face—that might be as clear as a white flash. It chanced that I had a dark silk handkerchief in my breast pocket. Call it melodramatic if you like, I bound the thing around my face. And as for the revolver—"

"Yes?" tensely.

Isram shrugged. "I always carry one when tending dangerous beasts. I am licensed to carry it for protection. When I saw the leopard attack you, I drew it."

Judd's face was hard as stone. His eyes were flaming. In a low voice he demanded: "When you were on that roof, did you see who it was that knocked me out? Freed the leopard?"

"No. You were already lying unconscious when I first saw you; and the shutters were already closed."

For a few minutes Judd stood silent, thinking fast. He began to snap his fingers rapidly, impatiently, as if ideas were vexingly slow in coming. At last,

however, he declared on brisk resolution: "We'll go back to the penthouse and have a talk with Lanney! I think he—"

"Mr. Lanney," Isram quietly interrupted, "isn't there now."

"Eh?"

"I met him on the street just before I encountered you just now. He said he had to see Mr. Van Deever. In fact, he'd had an engagement with Mr. Van Deever for dinner. When I left the penthouse on your arrival, he asked me to phone Van Deever from outside and say he'd be delayed because you had come to discuss a matter of importance—"

"Van Deever's, eh? Where does Van Deever live?"

"At the Wentworth on Fifty-first Str—"

Halfway through the word Isram stopped in surprise. He turned, for the wild howl of a police siren was tearing through the street. At reckless speed the department car approached from a far corner, its headlights blinding. Judd saw it, too, and the sight seemed to lash him into activity.

"All right, Isram!" he said quickly. "Thanks for your confidence. I appreciate it. If you'll excuse me now, I've got to grab a telephone and do some fast talking! Hop over to the penthouse; you'll be just in time for a first-rate murder party. See you later!"

He didn't wait for a reply but swung around; and as he ran into the drug store, he grated to himself: "So he's at Van Deever's!"

TILLITSON, the *Record's* city editor, was about to step out of his office when the desk telephone rang. He glanced back resentfully from the door, then returned and yanked the instrument out of its bracket.

"Yes?" he snapped. "Who? . . . Oh, Judd! What did you get?" eagerly.

"Get? I almost got killed!"

"Hey?"

"Listen, chief. Don't ask me for details," Judd's staccato voice begged. "I'm just two hops and a wriggle ahead of the police, and I've got to keep my lead! Can you send four husky lads down to meet me at the Wentworth Hotel on Fifty-first? I want them as fast as they can get here. Pick the biggest gorillas you can lay hands on. Fellows like McGrath, Biff Hogan, Eddie Marshall—"

"Hold on, hold on!" rasped Tillitson. "What the devil's the idea? You staging a raid?"

"Something like it, yes! And listen, Arbulick's dead! He was banged over the head with a coal shovel—"

"Wh-at!"

"I tell you I've got a story that'll set the town on its ears!" Judd cried tensely. "You send me those gorillas, will you, chief? If you can't get reporters, yank a few stout lads out of the press room. It'll take them fifteen minutes to get to the Wentworth in a cab. I can make it in five. Which allows me ten minutes. So if you'll switch me to the rewrite desk, I'll spill the whole story into Kelly's ear right now. He can have it on the presses before any other paper in town even smells the blood. Let's go!"

IT WAS exactly eighteen minutes later that Franklin Judd led four powerful men to the door of Apartment 507 in the Wentworth Hotel. His face was grim and determined, and a strange lustre lurked in his narrowed eyes. His gray felt hat was tugged low over his forehead, at a belligerent angle.

When he halted, he could hear a mumble of voices in the flat—Maurice Lanney's and Bert Van Deever's. He signaled the men behind him, then knocked sharply.

A sudden pause. . . . Then Van Deever

sharply calling out: "Who's that?"

"Judd. Judd of the *Record*."

"Hey? What the—"

"Newspapermen always welcome, day or night, aren't they?" Judd mocked.

Another mumble of voices within the apartment; after which the door opened. When Van Deever confronted those formidable figures, the dapper little press agent fell back in open-mouthed astonishment. He had changed his torn clothes for a suit of chocolate-brown, and he limped painfully on the leg the leopard had lacerated. Behind him Maurice Lanney rose out of a chair, as startled as a deer spying hunters.

"Well!" said Van Deever, a little throatily. "Quite a delegation. What's the occasion, Judd? Newspaper convention?"

"No; just a climax."

"A—what?"

Judd entered. So did his burly companions. The last of them carefully and ominously shut the door, turned its key with a click of gratified finality.

Lanney, going quite pale, demanded: "What in hell is all this, anyhow? What's the idea?"

Judd pushed back his hat, spread his legs slightly, and smiled. It was a thin smile, far from pleasant. His keen eyes darted from Lanney to Van Deever and back again.

"You lads aren't exactly under arrest," he announced quietly, "but you might just as well start saying your prayers. 'We're holding you here for the police. If anybody should ask you, the charge is murder.'"

Silence. . . . A dumbfounded silence.

Lanney raised a hand, but dropped it unsteadily without uttering a sound. He stood inarticulate, his face ashen. Bert Van Deever, on the other side of the room, stiffened. A purplish, zig-zag vein suddenly appeared in his forehead.

"Wh-what are you talking about,

Judd?" he whispered. "Is this a gag?"

"No, Van. We have our serious moments, we newsboys. You'll find that out soon enough. Also, maybe you'll learn never to wear dazzling diamond stickpins shaped like exclamation points."

"What!"

"While you were slamming Arbulick with the coal shovel, he got in one solid punch at you. His fist hit your chest. Smack on the stickpin. It left an imprint on his hand. The mark is still there, Van, clear as day. The police will fit your stickpin into the scar and—presto! Murder indictment!"

Bert Van Deever's fingers instinctively sprang up to the stickpin. He fell back a step, suddenly going pallid. His mouth opened.

Ignoring him, Judd now turned to the tall actor. His thin, sardonic smile had vanished. He stood stern, frowning, and his voice crackled. "As for you, Lanney," he said, "you're facing life imprisonment at best, as an accomplice."

"Me?" hoarsely.

"In person."

"Y-you're crazy!"

"Maybe. I've been called worse. But that doesn't change your status."

LANNEY stepped forward, flung out his arms. "What the devil have I got to do with this?" he gasped. "Just because you think Van's stickpin—"

And then an unexpected thing happened. Bert Van Deever, slowly moving backward as if in a daze, had paused beside a desk. Behind his back he slid its drawer open. His fingers groped. But it chanced that two of Judd's companions noticed the attempt. With a bullish rush they were upon the slim man before he could raise the gun. They crashed against him terrifically, actually hurling him off his feet so that he flew through a door

into the next room and ended in a wild, backward somersault.

Then they seized his arms, yanked him to his feet, and quietly admonished him to behave like a gentleman, lest they feel constrained to give him the works.

The sight of that moment's activity seemed to stagger Maurice Lanney. White, shaken, he fell back against the wall, one hand trembling at his lips.

Judd said grimly: "I think the play is over, Lanney. All over but the applause. You've got your choice now. Either go to trial with Van or play along with us. If you're willing to give us your story, that'll put you on the right side of the law. . . . Which is it to be?"

Lanney cried: "I didn't have anything to do with the m-murders, I tell you!"

"No?" skeptically.

"No! The Putnam woman was his wife!" He stabbed a dramatic finger at Van Deever, who was busy with a handkerchief at his bleeding nose. "He—he'd left her somewhere in California two years ago! When she came to New York, she couldn't locate him. But she heard he was managing me. So she stamped up to my flat. Wouldn't leave unless I told her where she could put her hands on Bert. She was crazy drunk. I couldn't argue with her. So I sent the servants away and went out to tell Bert she'd come! I didn't want to meddle in their troubles! I still don't! I told Bert to go over to my penthouse and face the woman himself. I'd sent everybody away just so he could have a private talk with her. I gave him the key to the place, and he went."

"Even at that time," Judd guessed grimly, "he had some idea of killing her. That was why he went up the stairs, so the elevator boy wouldn't see him."

Bert Van Deever glared over his red-spotted handkerchief. "I didn't murder her!" he rasped.

"No?"

"No! She—she was so drunk she didn't know what she was doing! When I refused to give her as much money as she demanded, she started fighting like a cat! Almost blinded me with her nails. I lost my temper and gave her a violent shove, just to free myself. How could I know she was going to fall over the doorstep and crack her head on the terrace? She fell right in among those cages! The damned leopards started clawing her through the bars! I—I almost went crazy at the sight! Picked up a lamp and tried to beat the damned beasts off! But when I saw one of them actually tear her chest out, I—I guess I fainted dead away. By the time I came to, there—there wasn't much left of her—"

Bert Van Deever ended on a savage, trembling whisper. With his nose still bleeding, he sank to a chair and glared hypnotically at the floor.

Judd said quietly: "So you put her bones into the incinerator chute—and cleaned up the mess—"

"What else could I do?" Van Deever challenged hoarsely. "Bring hell's own trouble on myself?"

Judd nodded, slowly and wisely. "I get the whole picture now," he said with heavy deliberation. "Correct me if I'm wrong. Today, when Isram phoned you to say Lanney would be delayed for dinner because I'd come to discuss something important, you smelled trouble. You hurried over to the Renwood Court. Went up the steps and probably heard us talking through the door. I guess you gathered from what I said that Arbulick and I were the only ones, so far, who knew about the existence of the bones. So—you went berserk and decided to silence us. You tried the door, probably found it unlocked—"

Lanney put in wildly: "Yes, it was unlocked!"

THE interruption seemed to draw Judd's eyes again; and the reporter demanded: "Why didn't you tell me in the first place that Naomi Putnam was Van's wife?"

"Why should I have told you of his personal troubles? Just to throw him into public scandal? I didn't know then that he was a—a murderer!" Lanney snatched a handkerchief from his breast pocket and daubed it over his forehead. "In fact, I—I didn't know it until just now! I came over here simply to tell him what you'd told me—"

"All right," Judd interrupted. "Never mind the rest of it now." He spoke flatly, meanwhile turning back to Van Deever. "I'm interested in your side of it, Van. After you tried to shift the blame for my death on the leopard, how did you get Arbulick to show you the bones? Tell him, perhaps, that I sent you down for a look at them?" drily.

He seemed to have struck the correct answer, for Bert Van Deever—whose features had become sickly in their yellowness—offered no denial. Judd had a terrible vision of this dapper man assaulting the superintendant with a coal shovel as soon as the bag of bones had been revealed. . . . and of the brief fight which had brought the incriminating imprint of Van Deever's diamond stickpin to Arbulick's hand.

Judd dropped a soft oath of sheer revulsion.

With fire in his eyes, he turned on his

heel and strode across the room to the telephone. As he reached for the instrument, Maurice Lanney whispered: "You—you phoning for the police?"

"Hell, no!" snapped Judd. "I'm calling my paper. They get the story first!"

He flung a number into the transmitter, then peered narrowly over his shoulder at the seemingly paralyzed figure of Van Deever. But his words were addressed to Lanney.

"That's why I brought these four boys along with me," he rapped out. "Just to hold Van quiet and steady till the *Record* gets the news on the presses. In about twenty minutes we'll be ready to call the police and hand them the case, all nicely finished and embalmed." Judd's lips twitched. "After that—we'll let the other papers have their party!"

And then, unexpectedly, an unnerving thing occurred. Bert Van Deever laughed! A brief, harsh, horrible spurt of laughter that was almost a sob. He looked up at Judd over his blood-soaked handkerchief. In tones bitter with self-derision, he whispered: "So this is how the story ends?"

"It is," Judd said grimly. "You've press-agented yourself into the front page of every newspaper in New York. Quite a bit of ballyhoo."

Again Van Deever emitted that terrible crack of meaningless laughter, and sobbed: "I was always good at getting free space, wasn't I? The spectacular kid—that's me!"

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He crumpled like a sack of meal.

CLIP KILLER

by

George Harmon Coxe

Author of "Slay Ride," etc.

It was Detective Powell's night off and his girl had told him to forget he was a cop for once in his life. He was all set to please her, too. But what the hell could a guy do when murder came tumbling down the stairs right into his lap?



CHAPTER ONE

Off Night

LOUIS KRESSER, the headwaiter, came over to Powell's table and said: "Good evening. Glad to see you here—er—unofficially."

First Grade Detective Dan Powell, looking as much unlike a detective as he

could, glanced up, said, "Yeah," and went back to his sandwich.

He didn't like Kresser. There was something in the plump, bald man's suave manner that made him appear to be continually bowing and scraping even though he stood motionless, the spare menus held deferentially across his chest.

Kresser smiled. "I hope everything is all right."

Powell continued to eat. Janet Connors said: "Splendid."

Powell stole a glance at the girl across the little table. She was just the type a big, easy-going man would pick—small, dark-haired, with clear blue eyes and a firm mouth and chin that spoke of a capable, slightly aggressive personality.

Powell felt uncomfortable under the girl's gaze. He was at a disadvantage under these conditions and he knew it. His thick chest bulged the gleaming stiff shirt-front against the smooth, satin lapels of his tuxedo. His bow tie was slightly askew; his hair was neatly combed, but it was shaggy and needed trimming.

His face was a weathered brown and his dark eyes, deep-set beside a nose that had been broken and improperly set, were fixed on his plate. He wished to hell Kresser would haul out and leave him alone.

The headwaiter said: "I wondered—I don't want to interrupt—but we have a party in one of our private dining rooms that seems to be getting out of control. If it gets any worse perhaps you will—" He broke off under the steady gaze of the girl and the sentence remained unfinished.

Powell started to speak, caught a glimpse of Janet Connors' expression. She was looking directly at him and her eyes said: "This is our night off, and don't forget it."

He looked up at Kresser, said: "On your way. This is just like you said—unofficial."

THE headwaiter bowed and withdrew.

Powell turned in his chair and followed him with his eyes; watched him circle the small dance floor, crowded by guests moving to the seductive rhythm of the twelve-piece orchestra, and climb the wide staircase to the mezzanine with its half dozen tables; saw him disappear

down the hall that led to the four private dining rooms and Sam Werner's office.

Janet Connors said: "You didn't have to be so crude about it."

Powell tasted his coffee. "Can I help it if I don't like him? I didn't want to come here anyway."

"I don't see why not. The food is good and they have—"

"You don't know the mug that runs it. He's—"

"Don't say mug."

"—a louse," continued Powell, ignoring the interruption. "Sam Werner's been running clip joints for years. Maybe he's still got a couple. As fast as we close one he opens another."

"Clip joints?" Janet Connors' smooth skin puckered over the bridge of her nose. "I've read something about them, but I thought that Repeal—"

"Repeal nothing. Clip joints are just the same. A guy goes in, lets a couple broads kid him along while he buys two or three drinks, and gets a bill for a hundred and thirty-seven bucks shoved under his nose. When he squawks—if he does—the bouncers go to work on him. Sometimes they get him to sign a check; sometimes they stick with him till morning so they can be sure to cash it."

"But"—Janet Connors' blue eyes widened—"I don't see— Why doesn't the man have them arrested?"

Powell snorted disdainfully. "Because nine out of ten are from out of town; butter'n egg men; married. If they squawk they're suckers. Most of 'em would rather pay up and keep still about it."

Powell forgot his surroundings and Louis Kresser as he warmed up to his subject. He chuckled, said: "There was one guy about a month ago that was a honey. He was a college fellow; from Harvard or Cornell or someplace. Played football—or maybe it was crew. Any-

way, he went in one of these spots and when they gave him the bad news he argued.

"He fought his way out and came running to the precinct house. I happened to be there. He was kinda messy. His lips were split; his nose was all blood and one eye was closed. But he went back with us and we got there before they could close up."

Powell laughed at the thought. "All three bouncers had knuckle marks on their pans. And you should see this lad go to work with us. When we got through there wasn't a—"

Janet Connors sniffed. "I think it's disgusting."

Powell's face sobered. He said, weakly: "Well, from now on these college boys are aces with me."

"Anyway"—the girl dismissed the subject with a wave of her hand—"they have the best music in town here, no matter who owns it. Let's dance the rest of this one."

Powell started to shove back his chair. He heard the girl gasp and his eyes flicked up to see her startled face. Then a woman screamed above the muted notes of the orchestra. Other women joined her. A peculiar thudding sound reached him. He turned quickly.

THE man was already halfway down the stairs. He was falling, limp and boneless, like a sack of meal, bouncing, sliding downward. At the top of the stairs a man and two women watched in frightened rigidity as the fellow hit the floor on his shoulders, turned over once from the momentum and lay still.

The orchestra blared vigorously, the brass rose in an ear-splitting crescendo. Men jumped up from tables in all parts of the room; dancing stopped.

Powell stood up, a soft curse on his lips. Janet Connors said, "Wait, Dan.

You don't have to—" but he ignored her and began picking his way past the tables that intervened.

The man lay on his back. There was a bruise on his forehead and his eyes were closed. He was mumbling meaningless words in a thick, indistinct voice.

He was, Powell thought, about thirty-five and he wore a plain, dark business suit in place of evening clothes. The suit was mussed; the shirt was torn and the tie was clumsily knotted. His companion, a small, thin-faced man, obviously drunk, had hurried down the stairs and was trying to get him to his feet.

Kresser pushed through the crowd as Powell dropped to one knee beside the fellow. He said: "Let's get him out of here."

Powell said: "Wait a minute." He saw that the man was alive, that aside from the bruise on his forehead and a spot of blood on the shirt collar, there appeared to be nothing wrong with him.

Kresser spoke impatiently. "Come on. He's passed out cold. We can't put on a show here."

Powell helped Kresser get the man to his feet. Together they guided his stumbling feet toward the coat room in the foyer. The headwaiter turned to the crowd, said: "Please go on with your dancing. He's all right."

In the foyer, a dimly lighted cubicle, curtained off by thick, dark velvet hangings, the music of the main room seemed far away. They propped the man up in front of the coat-room counter and Kresser spoke indignantly.

"I wish to hell people would get wise to themselves. They haven't got used to Repeal yet; seem to think they've only got a little while to get tight in."

Powell, his face a dark bronze in the half-light, looked at the half-conscious man and felt sorry for him. He thought about Janet Connors, and wondered if

this fellow had a wife, wondered if he would have to go home to her in this condition.

He turned to the thin-faced companion, then noticed the two women who stood behind him. They looked at him anxiously and waited.

He saw that one woman was a peroxide blond on the wrong side of thirty. Even in the diffused light he could see the depth of her make-up, the coarseness of her features. The other woman was different. Hardly more than a girl, she was slender, brown-haired. Her complexion was clear and her eyes seemed genuinely frightened.

He said: "This guy's had enough trouble. Call a taxi, Kresser, and let 'em take him home."

"Nothing doing!"

Powell spun about at the firm, smooth-voiced announcement, stared at the heavy-set, aggressive-looking man who had come up behind him. He took a cigar from a thick mouth and the dim, overhead light danced from small black eyes.

Sam Werner said: "They got a thirty-dollar bill and there's been some breakage. This guy"—he jerked the cigar towards the thin-faced man—"says he hasn't got the dough to pay. Take 'em down to the station. They can pay when they sober up or I'll swear out a warrant."

POWELL felt a slow anger churn within him. Even in a place like the Club Altrazar Werner used his clip-joint tactics. For a moment he thought of telling him where he could go and what he could do. But he finally decided that even if it was his night off, it would be better to call up the precinct house.

He made his telephone call and came back to the foyer. Werner had gone, and he tried to get the names and addresses from the thin-faced man. But this fellow had gone into a decline. He dozed with

his elbows hooked over the coat-room counter and his words were unintelligible.

Powell gave it up and turned to the two women. The plump blonde answered him. "Elsie Dubois," she said coldly. "Six seventy-nine Stacey Street." She hesitated while Powell jotted this down on a card, said: "This is Blanche Avery. She lives with me."

Powell said: "Who're these two guys?"

Elsie Dubois shrugged. "Just a couple of heels."

"Yeah?" said Powell sardonically.

"What're their names?"

"Don't ask me. They picked us up in the lobby of the Biltmore"—her lip curled—"and it oughta be a lesson to us."

Powell looked at the contemptuous blonde, was tempted to book her also. Then he saw the frightened whiteness of the other girl and weakened. He said: "O. K. Run along."

"Come on, Blanche." The blonde hunched her fur collar around her ears with a haughty gesture and flounced toward the door.

Blanche Avery gave Powell a grateful, frightened look and followed.

Powell wondered about that girl. Why the fear in her eyes? She had nothing to worry about now. He shrugged and turned to the drunk Kresser still supported. Probably the kid wasn't used to such scenes and the reaction to sober reality scared her.

With the help of the hat-check girl he got the men's coats and hats by the time two uniformed policemen entered the foyer. He gave a brief picture of what had happened, said: "Book 'em as drunk and disorderly. Werner'll be down in the morning."

Janet Connors' eyes were cold and distant when he returned to his table, and he realized he had been gone nearly a half hour. After a first glance at her he kept his eyes averted. He took a sip of coffee.

It was cold. To hide his guilty feeling he said: "Want to dance now?"

The girl said: "Always a cop." Then, "No. Now that my evening is ruined I might as well go home."

CHAPTER TWO

Morning After

POWELL scowled in the mirror as he finished shaving at seven fifteen the next morning. The evening that he and Janet had looked forward to, that started so auspiciously, had been a flop.

In a way he did not blame her. They'd had dinner at the Baker House, seen a good musical comedy, then gone to the Club Altrazar. He hadn't wanted to go to the Altrazar. There were other places and he had said so. It had been a mistake to argue about it. He should've kept his mouth shut.

But women were funny. Then those two drunks. Maybe he should have sat tight at his table. But a first-grade detective who stood Number Three on the sergeant's list had certain obligations, even on his night off. If there had been any serious trouble he would have looked pretty funny.

The shrill tones of the telephone checked his thoughts. He patted some shaving lotion on his face, went into the bedroom and picked the telephone from the bedside table.

The voice in the receiver was Captain Tuttle's. He said: "You'd better get down here right away. That guy's dead."

"What guy?"

"What guy? Why the guy you sent down from Werner's place. The tall guy. They brought him down in the wagon and booked him like you said—drunk and disorderly. They found him on the floor about an hour ago; he died in the night."

Dead? Powell got a quick sinking sen-

sation in the pit of his stomach. Was it his fault? Should he have—

"They thought it was acute alcoholism"—Powell caught his breath in relief—"but the M. E. says he died from a concussion and a fractured skull."

Powell listened in sudden weariness until the captain finished and hung up. He dressed and hurried to headquarters.

Captain Tuttle, head of the detective division, a big-bodied, grizzled veteran with a bushy mustache, motioned Powell to a chair. "Now just what the hell happened last night?"

Powell told his story briefly, but his mind was busy with jumbled thoughts and questions that had no answers. He told of everything except the first trip Kresser had made to his table to tell of the rowdy party that was taking place in that private dining room.

His thoughts hung there for a while. Should he have gone upstairs and stuck his nose in on a private party like that? If Kresser wanted a cop why hadn't he gone out and got the guy on the beat? The drunk might've fallen downstairs anyway. Tuttle was talking.

"In a way I don't blame you much. You weren't on duty. But it don't sound so good. Wasn't he marked up?"

"He had a bump on his forehead. There was a little blood on his collar. But he looked like he'd passed out, was mumbling to himself like any souse."

Tuttle drummed thick fingers on the desk top and scowled. "You got a good record. Ordinarily there wouldn't be anything to it, cause the M. E. ain't sure he could've saved the fella if he'd been sent right to Emergency."

Tuttle sucked his lips. "But a month ago some cop from Station Sixteen picked up a drunk and booked him just like this one. The guy had a bullet in his head—a little twenty-five—and you couldn't see

any blood. The newspapers gave us the razz."

Tuttle spread his hands palms up. "And they got wind of this one already."

Powell said, "Oh," bitterly.

Tuttle said: "Yeah. They'll have the story on the streets by ten thirty—and it'll probably stink."

Powell sat up in his chair as a sudden thought gripped him. "You don't think those two cops worked him over any?"

The captain shook his head. "They say they didn't touch him. I think they're tellin' the truth. They should've looked him over, but you're the one that told them to book those drunks.

"But hell!" grunted Powell. "That guy fell down easy-like; and the stairs were carpeted. I don't see how—"

Tuttle spoke slowly. "He's dead, ain't he?"

He hesitated. "Maybe it'll blow over. I hope so. But if the papers holler enough it'll look like the whole department's to blame. I haven't heard from the commissioner yet, but he'll be plenty hot. He may not blame you, but if there's any loose ends you'd better start to check up if you want to stay in good standing."

Powell slouched against the cushions of the taxicab as it sped downtown to the Club Atrazar, and cursed his luck. He had just come from the address the blonde had given him the night before, had found that Six Seventy-nine Stacey Street was a garage sandwiched in between two old apartment buildings.

He was disappointed but not greatly surprised in not finding the two women. That blonde looked as if she'd been around. And why should she give her right address?

He tried to face the situation sanely. His earlier bitterness was more subdued now. After all, it was just one of those things. He could try to round up as much

information as possible and face the commissioner with all the facts.

He had been on the force for seven years, long enough to know that you had to take the breaks as they came—the good with the bad. This was a tough one, but he could take it; at least he hoped he could, without squawking.

He might have heeded Kresser's first appeal; he might have taken Janet Connors' advice and kept out of it entirely. On the other hand, he might have ridden to the precinct house with the two drunks. Even then he probably would not have examined that fellow. Those stairs did not look dangerous. The bruise, that bit of blood. Most drunks were banged up a bit anyway.

It might have helped if he'd held the two dames. He would have too, if it had not been for that one, the young one with the frightened look. Some subconscious thought made him wonder about that look even now, as the taxi rolled through the kaleidoscopic, noise-filled canyons of the business section. She was scared all right. But if he had been hard-boiled, like he should have been—

"Just a big-hearted slob," he muttered softly. Then, as the taxi pulled up at the awninged entrance of the Club Atrazar he added: "And it would happen on my night off."

He told the driver to wait and went inside.

The place which had been so gay the previous night had a funereal air about it now. The little foyer was deserted and dark. From beyond came the sound of a piano and a girl singing.

He went into the main dining room. On the dais-like orchestra platform a slumped figure played the piano while a fur-coated girl rehearsed a song. A single waiter sat at a table and watched.

Powell walked across the dance floor and asked the waiter where Kresser and

Werner were, when they would be around.

The waiter looked up at him lazily, said: "Kresser don't get down till afternoon—generally late. Werner'll be in most any time."

Powell said: "Tell him I want to see him. What room did that guy that fell downstairs have?"

"Last one on the right."

Powell climbed the stairs, went down a narrow, carpeted hall to the second door on the right. The room was dark and stuffy with stale, tobacco-flavored air. He turned on the light beside the door and looked about him.

The room was square, garish in its hangings and furniture. There was a davenport, two overstuffed chairs, a radio. In the center of a cheap, dark rug was a dining table and four straight-backed chairs. A spotted tablecloth still covered the table and there was an ashtray on it, filled to overflowing with cigarette butts and matches.

Powell walked around the table once, lifted the cloth and looked at the floor between the table legs. He stooped as some object caught his eye, picked up a wadded paper ball. He straightened this out, saw that it was a strip of black paper four or five inches long and perhaps three inches wide. He turned the strip over in his hand, folded it absently and thrust it in his vest pocket.

HE hadn't the slightest idea what he was looking for, if anything, and he mentally checked his findings that morning. He had talked with the two cops who had taken the drunks to the station house. They swore they had not laid a finger on the prisoners—and Powell believed them. They had noticed the blood on the man's neck—but they had not thought much about it and had booked the two as drunk

and disorderly, and put them in separate cells.

He had tried to reach the M. E., but found him out. He talked with the thin-faced drunk who had corroborated the blond's story of the pick-up.

The dead man was Douglas Yates, a bond salesman with independent means. There was a wife and two children. But Yates had the reputation of being a not too particular playboy, and his actions of the night before had been duplicated in the past.

The thin-faced man was Steve Guyer. He was a liquor salesman, he said, but when pressed admitted he was out of a job. He did not know Yates very well, had met him a couple of weeks ago and run into him on the street last night. He was plenty sober when Powell talked to him.

Werner had called up to say that he would not press the charges, but Powell had fixed it so that Guyer would be held while he checked the story. Then he had started out to find the two women.

He heard the door open and turned around to face Sam Werner who gave him a sardonic glance and said: "Looks like you muffed one last night."

Powell caught Werner's small, black eyes, held them as a slow anger mounted within him. He said: "You oughta be satisfied. Yates paid plenty for your breakage."

Werner took a cigar from his vest pocket and removed the cellophane wrapper. His voice was insolent as he spoke.

"It's my fault you cops don't know enough to give a fellow medical attention, huh?"

"It's your fault I'm on the spot. If we coulda put 'em in a cab—"

"Yeah? What difference does it make where he died? That other souse would never got him to a hospital."

Powell realized the bitter truth of the

statement. What difference did it make? According to Tuttle the M.E. had said he probably would have died anyway. "If we'd put 'em in a cab maybe the driver woulda taken the guy to the hospital," he said lamely.

Werner laughed. "You'd be a lot better off if you'd looked into it yourself, wouldn't you, Powell?"

Powell fought the slow anger that rose in his heart. He wanted to smash his fist into the complacent, almost taunting face. But that would only make matters worse.

He said: "Those two broads gave me a phony address."

Werner shrugged. "Can you blame 'em?"

"They ever been here before?" growled Powell.

"If you mean, do I know 'em," said Werner, "no."

"Then gimme a list of your waiters—of all your help. I'll see what they got to say about it."

Werner turned into the hall and stepped to the door at the far end. It led to his private office, a spacious room with an expensive-looking desk and chairs, two large filing cabinets and a safe. He opened the drawer of his desk and copied off a list of names and addresses for Powell.

The detective bought a paper when he left Werner. The story was there—on the front page. There was a picture of Yates. Powell read the lead paragraph, felt the blunt accusation of the attack on the police department, the crusading atmosphere of the story and threw the paper into the street in disgust.

CHAPTER THREE

Murder

AT eleven o'clock Powell tried the medical examiner's office again. The official was out but one of his deputies was

in and the detective questioned him about concussions.

"You can't tell a thing about 'em." The doctor, a young man with dark hair and glasses offered Powell a cigarette and held a light for him. "Brain injuries are funny things." The doctor inhaled and spoke thoughtfully.

"I know a fellow that fell off a fence and cracked his head on a sidewalk. He walked around for three days, then came in and complained of a headache. He was dead an hour later."

Powell said: "But hell. This Yates looked like he'd passed out. He was mumbling to himself, and when we got him to his feet he could stagger along pretty well. I didn't think there could be much wrong with him. And there was no blood."

The doctor wet his lips, glanced at his cigarette. "I know. They're sometimes hard to diagnose. Sometimes they don't bleed at all. You're liable to go off like that"—he snapped his fingers—"or walk around for days."

Powell got back to headquarters just in time to get a telephone call from Janet Connors. She had seen the newspapers. She was nervous, contrite, a bit frightened from what she had read. It was, she said, all her fault. She should not have insisted on going to the Altrazar—she should have taken his advice and gone to a decent place—she'd be worried sick if he lost his standing on her account.

Powell lied like a gentleman. The newspaper account was exaggerated. It wasn't her fault. He was working on it now and he'd have a different story for the newspapers later on. She was not to worry. Everything would be all right.

He hung up and stared dejectedly at the telephone until Tom Hunziker, a tall, lean-faced blond man who often worked as his partner came into the room.

Hunziker said: "Tough. And those damn newspapers!"

Powell's jaws came together so that the muscles behind his cheekbones were white. He told Hunziker what he had done, gave him a description of the two women, and the list he'd got from Werner, said: "Check up on these names for me, will you? See if any of 'em know those two dames. I'll have to tell the commissioner a story—and I gotta make it good."

Powell went out with Hunziker and spent three hours checking up with the taxi company and its drivers before he finally found the man he wanted. The hackman, a stocky, freckle-faced youth, remembered the two women who had come from the Club Altrazar the night before. He drove Powell to an address on Bliss Street.

He even knew the apartment they had gone to. He had waited out front, he said, while he lighted a cigarette and had seen the light go on in a front room on the third floor. He pointed out this window when the cab stopped.

Powell, perking up a bit at his sudden change in luck, told the driver to wait and stepped across the sidewalk into the dim vestibule of the seedy-looking apartment house. He saw from the names under the mail boxes along the right wall that although the blonde had given him the wrong address she had given her right name. Elsie Dubois was there in the name slot for apartment 3-B. He could not find Blanche Avery's name anywhere.

The door to the foyer was open and he crossed this and climbed the imitation marble stairs to the third floor. He knocked at the door of the left front apartment.

Seconds later a knob rattled, a lock clicked and the door inched open. Powell never gave the opening movement of the

door a chance to stop. He had no warrant; he was, legally, in wrong. But he was sure of himself this time and he had long ago decided to try different methods from those used the night before, if he ever got another chance at the blonde.

He slammed his shoulder against the door panel and leaned forward. The door yielded space slowly for the first few inches, then swung wide. Powell stepped inside, kicked it shut with his foot and faced Elsie Dubois.

She looked older than she had last night. Or maybe it was her anger. He caught the quick flash of fury in her eyes as she regained her balance, saw the muscles of her jaws tighten.

He said, "Hello, baby," and watched her for a moment.

SHE was dressed in a worn velvet negligée; the mules on her bare feet were shoddy and her bleached hair was frowsy and disarranged.

"Get out!" she snapped. "You can't come bustin' in here and—"

"I'm here, ain't I?" Powell's thick face was expressionless except for eyes that were smoldering. His voice was even, unhurried.

"What do you want?"

"I want to know more about that party last night. You know your boy friend—"

"Can I help it if he falls downstairs in a pass-out?"

"Maybe not." Powell moved slowly across the flashily furnished living room and the woman backed before him. "But I'm curious about that party."

Powell took out a cigarette, lighted it, blew smoke from pursed lips. "Yates was drunk—so you say; so was Guyer. But you and your girl friend were pretty sober. I been wonderin' about that. And Kresser, the headwaiter, said you'd been raisin' hell up in that dining room. You

wouldn't try to roll him up there or anything, would you?"

"Why you dirty—" Elsie Dubois, who had dropped into a chair, came to her feet with a feline quickness and struck out at the detective. "You big tramp! You—"

He caught her wrists, held them steady until she stopped struggling. He said: "You know he's dead, don't you?"

She said: "I read it in the paper."

Powell glanced about the room. He couldn't see any newspaper. "What paper?"

He saw her lips tighten then, knew she was lying.

He said, taking a chance shot: "I've been thinkin' that your boy friend might've already had his skull cracked when he took that dive. That would make it murder. Let's you and me take a ride to headquarters."

"Wait a minute." The woman's voice was suddenly hoarse and when she tried to pull away Powell let her go. "I don't know anything about this. We go out for a date with these two fellows; we go to the Altrazar for supper and a few drinks—"

Powell did not hear the door open. He was so intent on what the woman said that he thought they were alone until he heard the low command. "Hold everything now!"

Powell spun about. Two men stood in the doorway. One of them was as tall as the detective but his weight made him look almost stocky. He had a swart face and close-set ears. In a thick hand was a heavy automatic. The other man closed the door. He was thin, sleek, with light eyes and a pasty-white face.

The big man said: "Get your clothes Elsie."

Powell started to walk toward the two by the door. The big man said: "Take it easy. We got a date with Elsie."

Powell hesitated a moment. There was no great threat in the big man's voice, but there was in his manner. He knew instinctively the fellow couldn't be bluffed. He had never seen either of them before, but he did not intend to have them play out the hand if he could help it. He had looked too long for this woman to lose her so simply.

And in the back of his head the thought persisted, that maybe he was right, that there was something about Yates' death that had not come to light. But it would be silly to go for his gun. Covered as he was, he'd stand a better chance with his fists.

He walked directly toward the big man.

The sleek man said: "It's a copper, Maxie. Let him have it!"

The fellow smirked and said: "Easy, Joe." Then, "This could be a nice party if you'd behave."

Powell took another easy step. The fellow continued: "Remember, you're askin' for it."

Joe moved a couple feet to one side and pulled out a blackjack. Then it happened. Joe cocked his arm. Powell knocked him sprawling with a quick, straight right and lunged for the big man's gun. He grabbed the wrist, but before he could swing his other fist forward the fellow caught him on the chin with a left hook.

Powell, still hanging to the gun wrist, went to his knees. He felt the wrist being jerked from his grasp, sensed a movement at his side; then something exploded in his head and a blanket of darkness blotted out consciousness.

WHEN Powell opened his eyes he lay on his back in the center of the living room. He was dizzy, felt sick at his stomach. He tried to move, found that his hands had been fastened behind his

back, probably by the same sort of thing that bound his feet: adhesive tape.

He rolled around until he had a look at the entire room, saw there was nothing to help him—except the telephone. He strained at his bindings for a moment until he realized it was useless; then he rolled to the phone table, kicked it sideways. The telephone hit the floor and the receiver flew from the hook.

He shoved the receiver within reach of his ear with his nose, wiggled up so that his lips were near the mouthpiece. He said, "Hello—hello," then listened. He jiggled the receiver arm with his forehead. His eyes followed the cord. It had been yanked out of the box on the wall.

He began to curse in a soft monotone. After a few minutes he stopped and began to think. He could yell. That might bring help. But the thought of being found this way, the thought of what the newspapers would do to this incident after what had happened last night was too bitter. It was bad enough now, without having any further disgrace heaped upon his head.

For some minutes he lay motionless. One thought that he kept turning over and over in his head gave him a bit of comfort. There was something screwy about Yates' death. There might have been some truth in the wild thought he had suggested to Elsie Dubois just before her two playmates had come in—that Yates had been slugged before he went head first down those stairs.

That really was what had thrown him in the hole from the start. He could not see how a man could fall down carpeted stairs and get a fracture so severe that it would give him a fatal concussion.

But if he did not get loose pretty soon and— His eyes fell on the street windows and he remembered the taxi. If he could get the fellow's attention—

He rolled toward the windows and had gained his knees when he heard the door open. This time a grin of satisfaction swept his somber face. It was the freckled taxi driver.

His eyes widened, then narrowed. He whistled softly, came to Powell's side and ripped the tape from his wrists. He said: "You'd been in here a half hour. I didn't know—but I remembered the apartment and I thought I might take a look."

Powell rubbed his wrists. "And what a thought."

THE first thing Powell did when he got back to headquarters was to call the medical examiner's office. This time he got his man and a report on the autopsy. He listened for fully five minutes before he hung up, and when he finished there was a peculiar gleam in his dark eyes, a shining reflection of some inner thought that was both dangerous and shrewd.

He went downstairs to the detention cells and had the keeper open the one occupied by Guyer, who had been moved that morning. The man's thin face was flushed with anger and he took the offensive immediately.

"Say. What the hell's the idea? You ain't got any right to hold me. Werner dropped his complaint. I want a hearing and—"

"Take it easy." Powell dropped down on the cot and his manner and voice were calm. "I just wanted to talk to you before we let you out. I been busy today—first chance I've had."

Guyer's shifty eyes grew wary. "Then you ain't got anything against me?"

"Not exactly." Powell's thick face was composed, tired-looking. Only the intense, shrewd expression in his dark eyes hinted at his feelings, and apparently Guyer was too excited to take note of this.

"You can run along," continued Powell, "as soon as I check over your story. Now see if I got this straight. You didn't know Yates very well. You ran into him last night and the two of you picked up these two dames, took 'em to the Alzarar."

Guyer's thin face took on a sly smile and he nodded assent.

"You had a little party—got plastered." Again Guyer nodded.

Powell said: "Just how plastered did you get?"

Guyer looked surprised. "Why—I don't know. I guess we were right on the edge. The way I figure it, Yates must've got the pass-out just as he started down the stairs."

"And just how drunk were you?"

Guyer spoke irritably. "How do I know? I—"

"I was wondering if you knew what took place in that private dining room—everything that took place."

"What the hell you driving at?" A sudden shifty expression filmed Guyer's eyes.

"I don't know," said Powell evenly. "But I got a hunch—an idea that Yates got his skull cracked in that dining room." He watched Guyer narrowly, saw the man start. He continued quickly before the fellow could reply.

"What I mean is—you were too drunk to know it. But for some reason, somebody came into that dining room and slugged Yates. He already had that fractured skull when he went down those stairs."

"You're nuts."

Powell smiled. "Maybe. But I've got some information you haven't got. If you were drunk enough, it might have happened. But"—Powell hesitated; measured his words for the effect—"those two dames weren't so drunk. They'll know if

I'm right. We're gonna pick 'em up just as soon as I finish with you.

"The papers are after my scalp. I'm gonna give 'em a story. I'm gonna tell them what I think happened, hint that I got information. The reason I'm tellin' you is this: if you're in the clear, O. K.; if not, if there's something behind this and it looks like you squealed, you may get the business. How about it? O. K. to give out the story?"

POWELL waited. His voice gave no hint of the turmoil in his brain. Outwardly, he was a slow, guileless detective. But his question put it directly up to Guyer and he saw the man's nervousness reflecting in his eyes, in his trembling fingers, in the way he wet his lips before he spoke.

"Why sure." Guyer gulped and his Adam's apple moved up and down in his throat. "Tell the papers what you want. I think you're nuts, but it's your funeral. Of course," he added hastily "you might be right. I might've been too drunk to—"

Powell stood up. "I'll send word down to let you out; then we'll pick up the two dames. But don't run out on us. We may need your story when this murder gets to court."

"Murder?" wheezed Guyer nervously.

"Yeah," said Powell as he closed the door, "Murder."

Powell found Hunziker upstairs. The tall blond detective spoke with an undercurrent of excitement in his voice.

"We found your blonde."

"Swell." Powell's face brightened. "Where did you—"

"It wasn't me. I checked those Werner employees, didn't get to first base. But they just found a woman that answered her description in a car down on Second Street—by the warehouses. She had a corset full of slugs."

Powell's eyes widened and his jaw went slack. Then he began to curse softly.

Hunziker said: "They want you to identify her."

Powell stopped cursing. The satisfaction that he was on the right track was small now. It looked as if he would be too late. There was another girl—that scared kid of the night before. If someone had the finger on her—the thought was a bitter accusation. Guyer was his last chance.

"You got your coupe here?" Powell grabbed Hunziker by the arm, spun him about.

"Yeah, but—"

"Get it. I threw a scare into Guyer. I gave him a question that had only one answer. I'm gonna let him out. If he's mixed up in this—and I think he is—he's got to square himself with somebody before the newspapers come out with a story he thinks I'm givin' 'em. We'll tail him. It's the only chance we got."

CHAPTER FOUR

Telephone Clue

WHILE Hunziker got out his own coupe, Powell made arrangements for Guyer's release. Fifteen minutes later the two detectives were a half block down the street from the entrance to headquarters building.

Powell was telling of what had happened to him that afternoon. "—and those two hoods must've come into the room just as the Dubois woman was givin' me her line. It must've sounded like she had been squealing."

"Looks like you got something," grunted Hunziker.

"Yeah. And there's another girl mixed up in this. She might've stayed with the blonde last night, but she don't live there. I checked all the clothes—they were the

same size. If I've put that kid on the spot—"

He broke off as the thin form of Steve Guyer came out of headquarters and hurried toward the next corner.

Hunziker slipped the car into gear and followed slowly. Guyer turned right on Broad Street, walked two blocks and ducked into a corner drug store.

Powell stiffened. "He's gonna phone. He don't know you—I'll stay in the car."

Hunziker hurried down the street and into the drug store.

About five minutes later he came out again. Right after that, Powell saw Guyer step out into the street and flag a taxi.

Hunziker climbed into the coupe, passed Powell a slip of paper. "I got in the booth next to his. He called two numbers. One of 'em was a woman's."

Powell grunted in satisfaction and slipped out from behind the wheel, stepped to the pavement. "Tail Guyer. Don't stop him unless he tries to leave town. But don't lose him. I'm gonna find that dame he called."

The address Powell got from the telephone operator was about two miles from the business district of the city. The house itself was a two-story, plain brick building that looked like a private dwelling.

An elderly woman with gray hair and an old-fashioned black satin dress answered his ring.

He said: "Does Miss Avery live here?"

"Yes"—Powell gave a sigh of relief that turned quickly to dismay—"but she's not in just now."

"Do you know when she'll be back? Is she your daughter or—"

"Oh, no. She has a room here. Since my husband died I've had to—"

"When will she be back?" pressed Powell.

"Why, I don't know. She left about five minutes ago. Two men came for her and—"

"Was one of 'em a big fellow, dark-skinned and—"

"Yes. I believe he was. And the other man was—"

Powell did not wait for the woman to finish. He muttered thanks and ran down the stairs to the taxi. The other telephone number Guyer had called was the Club Altrazar. Powell gave this address to the driver.

He knew what his job was now. There were still some unanswered questions in the back of his head; details that he could not figure. But he had the fundamentals.

Because he could not believe Yates suffered fatal injuries from the fall down the stairs, because he did not trust Werner, he had pushed ahead with an investigation that had no particular goal. The attack in the Dubois woman's apartment had built up a crazy idea of his; the talk with the medical examiner strengthened this; the death of Elsie Dubois clinched his idea. But if he couldn't find that Avery girl—Guyer might get the works too. Then he'd never get proof, would have the death of three people on his hands.

At the moment only one of these seemed to count. That Avery girl reminded him somehow of Janet Connors. Well, Werner might be made to squawk.

There was no gritting of teeth or clenching of fists in Powell's attitude. He had the same feeling about this that he had had about other things in the past. It was a job to be done. There was a certain bitterness in the back of his head because so far he had been unable to accomplish anything definite. But except for the straight, intense eyes that stared at the unrolling stretch of pavement in front of the cab, there was no outward indication of his thoughts.

It was seven thirty and nearly dark when he dismissed the taxi in front of the Altrazar. Street lights had been on for a half hour and the fan-shaped sign which

blazed over the club's doorway spoke of some activity inside.

He strode through the little foyer, took off his hat as he entered the main room and brushed by Kresser's deferential "Good evening Mr. Powell," as though he did not see him. The orchestra was playing a slow fox trot; there were about a dozen couples on the floor and early diners occupied perhaps a third of the tables.

POWELL climbed the wide, carpeted stairs, moved down the narrow hallway past the private rooms to Werner's office. He went in without knocking.

"How many times have I told you—" Werner who was studying some papers on his desk looked up as he spoke. "Oh. Hello, Powell." His manner changed to one of disdainful nonchalance. "I thought it was Kresser."

The detective walked up to the desk, spread his palms on the top and put his weight on them.

Werner lifted shaggy eyebrows, said: "What's on your mind?"

Powell said: "That blonde that was here last night with Yates got knocked off this afternoon."

"Yeah?"

"And we can't find that kid that was with her."

"So what?"

"I want to know where you put her."

"Where I put her." Werner's brows drew down. "Say, what the hell you drivin' at?"

"She and Guyer are the only witnesses left to Yates' murder."

A look of crafty guile suffused Werner's thick face. He shoved his lower lip up so that it overlapped the upper, hesitated, said: "Listen, copper. If you've got business here, get on with it. If you want to make a pinch it's O. K. with me. Just show me the warrant and—"

"If I want to pinch you, Werner," said Powell slowly, fighting the anger that surged through his veins, "I won't need a warrant."

"I'll have your job."

"Yeah?" The detective laughed. "You've practically got it now. I'm due for a month's suspension anyway. I might as well go whole hog. Yates died in the station house. But he was murdered in your dining room. And I'm gonna stay here and work you over till I find out where that Avery girl is."

Werner sneered; his attempted laugh was false.

"But before I start," added Powell, "I think I'll search the place."

Werner came to his feet with a curse. "Not without a warrant you won't."

"That's what you say," growled Powell and started around the desk.

Werner grabbed for one of the two telephones on the desk top. Powell's left hand flicked out and slapped the instrument to the floor.

Werner's right hand shot to his hip. Powell stepped close, jabbed the man's chin up with a sharp left, then crossed his right flush to the jaw. Werner's knees buckled and he would have pitched forward on his face if Powell had not caught him.

The detective lowered the unconscious man to the desk chair, took out his handcuffs and fastened limp wrists behind Werner's back. Then he pushed back the chair, picked up the fallen telephone and began to look through the desk drawers.

He spent five minutes with these and found nothing of any importance to him. He glanced at Werner who was slumped in the chair with his chin on his chest, decided he'd better search the fellow. He found a flat thirty-two automatic in a hip pocket and slipped it inside the waistband of his trousers under his vest.

He started to search the filing cabinets.

Each of them were letter size and five drawers high. In the back of the bottom drawer of the first cabinet he found a square, black leather box.

Bringing this to the desk, he took off the leather cover, pursed his lips, and for the first time that day a slow smile worked at the corners of his mouth. He took out a camera, a squarish instrument with a film pack in the back, then reached in his vest pocket for the black strip of paper he had found that morning in the dining room.

He saw now that Werner was conscious. His chin was still on his chest and he looked up through his shaggy brows with malignant, hateful eyes.

Powell said: "I found this strip of paper this morning, but I was too dumb to hook it up with your idea. It's one of these tabs at the back here that you pull out when you want to take a picture, ain't it?"

Powell thumbed the remaining tabs of the film pack. Werner remained silent.

The detective reached for one of the telephones, gave a number and a minute later was talking with a photographer at headquarters.

"Mike — Powell . . . Yeah. Listen. Come up to the Club Altrazar right away . . . Yeah—Werner's office at the end of the second-floor hall. Don't make any fuss, just come right up—and hurry."

MIKE COYLE stepped into Werner's office fifteen minutes later. Powell was sitting on the edge of the desk, smoking a cigarette. He said: "Did this strip of paper come from this film pack?" He offered the bit of paper and the camera.

Coyle, a thin, bald-headed man with white eyebrows, examined the camera, said: "I don't know—but it's the right size."

Powell said, "Hah," and stood up. "Take that box down to headquarters.

How long'll it take to get me a print of the films that're exposed?"

"A half hour, maybe a little longer. Want me to call you?"

"No. I ain't sure where I'll be. I'll call you back."

Werner sat up in his chair and his voice was thick with rage. "You can't get away with this, Powell. Yates was drunk. He fell downstairs and—"

Powell turned to Coyle. "Get Kresser, the headwaiter, up here."

Werner continued his tirade until Kresser entered. Then Powell said: "Was Yates drunk last night?"

Kresser's pale eyes clouded. "Why, of course."

"Of course, hunh?" growled Powell. "Well, how drunk was he?"

"Why—I don't know. I—"

"How many drinks did he buy here?"

"Sixteen, I think." Kresser seemed to cringe from the detective's steady gaze. "The two men had five apiece—the two girls—"

"You lie!" Powell snapped the words out and grabbed Kresser by the lapels. "That was a stall—coming to my table and telling me you had a rowdy party. The M.E. says Yates wasn't drunk. There was practically no alcohol in his system when he made the autopsy. He might've had a drink, maybe two—"

"He was drunk," snarled Werner. "The alcohol must've evaporated or something."

"He was sober," said Powell evenly. "I put the bee on the M.E. for five minutes. He's got the facts—and he'll take the stand and prove 'em."

The room was suddenly quiet with a silence that could almost be felt. It surprised even Powell and he spoke softly when he continued. "So how come Yates falls downstairs—when he wasn't drunk?"

Werner said: "How the hell do I know?"

"You know," accused Powell. "He got

his skull cracked in that dining room. But he walked, talked and acted like a drunk when he came out. That's why he fell—or was pushed down those stairs."

Werner's rugged face went pale at Powell's words, but he got control of himself with an obvious effort, said: "You talk a good case, but they'll laugh it out of court—if it ever gets that far."

POWELL yanked Kresser around and glared at him. He knew the truth of what Werner said. He had a long way to go—and that Avery girl's life still hung in the balance.

To Coyle he said: "Take this guy with you. Hold him as an accessory after the fact—a material witness, anything, but hold him. I'll take the responsibility."

He grinned at Kresser but there was no warmth in the grin. "You lied yourself into this—maybe you can talk your way out."

Coyle took the frightened headwaiter by the arm and led him protesting from the room. Powell waited until the door closed, then went back to the desk.

He met Werner's stare of hate with eyes that narrowed slightly as he spoke. "I've got a hunch we'll find a picture of Yates on that film—on one of 'em anyway. If we do, we'll know why nobody ever squawks when you put the screws on 'em. Brought your clip-joint methods up to a big business basis, hunh? Went in for—"

The sudden shrill of a telephone on the desk stopped the sentence. Powell stiffened for a moment, looked down at the two instruments as though he were trying to see who was on the other end of the wire. As the telephone repeated its shrilled insistence, he slipped his service revolver from his shoulder holster.

His idea, to force Werner to answer, he discarded as a sudden flash of inspira-

tion showed him the possibilities of the two instruments.

He picked up the silent telephone, glanced at the number above the mouthpiece of the other one. To the operator who answered he spoke in terse, forceful sentences. He had to wait while he was switched to another operator. The other telephone shrilled again as this second operator answered.

His language was not gentlemanly this time; it was curt, a bit profane, but it got results. "Trace the call coming in on Circle Eight-nine-seven-three and don't miss it. I'll call you back."

He pronged the receiver and grabbed for the other instrument, said, "Yeah?" hoarsely.

The voice, a man's said: "We got the other dame. What do we do now?"

Powell glanced at Werner who had struggled from the chair and poised for a leap. He cocked his knee and jammed his Number Ten against the handcuffed man's stomach. Werner flopped back into the chair and yelled, but the detective had his hand over the mouthpiece.

He said, "Hold her till I get there," quickly, and hung up before Werner could shout again.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Little Thing Like a Slug

THE taxi stopped in front of 384 Prospect Street—the address given Powell by the telephone operator who had traced the incoming call—and the detective pushed Werner to the sidewalk ahead of him.

It was a seedy, down-at-the-heels neighborhood of outmoded apartments and three-family houses. 384 was a five-storied building of weatherbeaten brick. Across the wide glass door the words *Braemore Arms* were fashioned in swirling gilt letters.

Powell pushed Werner into a square, tiled vestibule whose stuccoed walls were cracking, guided him up two linoleum-covered steps and through the unlocked door to the foyer. They crossed a well worn carpet and stepped into the single, self-operating elevator opposite.

Powell pushed the button marked 3. A few seconds later he guided Werner to Apartment 3-C and took the handcuffs, which he had shifted to manacle the man's hand in front of him, from his wrists.

He held his service revolver in his right hand and spoke softly. "I'm goin' through this time—and there ain't gonna be any slips. If you think I'm gonna let a little thing like puttin' a slug in you stop me, you're nuts. Because in a pinch I can make out you were resisting arrest."

He knocked on the door, whispered: "Talk nice!"

A voice said: "Who's it?"

Powell slipped behind Werner, jabbed the revolver in his ribs. The man flinched, said: "Sam."

The instant the door opened Powell put his shoulder in Werner's back and charged. Werner was catapulted smack into the tall, sleek man called Joe, and the two of them crashed to the floor. Powell's gun covered the big, swart man before he could react from his amazement. Blanche Avery, white-faced and wide-eyed with a gag over her mouth, sat in one corner of the room on a davenport.

Powell closed the door and stood with his back against it while Werner and Joe got to their feet. Then he said: "Just take it easy now." He backed toward the girl, added: "Maybe you'd better put those hands up a bit."

As soon as the sullen men obeyed reluctantly, he continued to the girl and took the gag from her mouth. He said, "It's O. K. now," and came back to search the two gunmen.

He took a thirty-two automatic from

Joe, pulled open a drawer in the oblong center table and tossed the gun into it. From Maxie he took the same heavy automatic he had seen that afternoon. He smelled of the muzzle, knew at once that it had been fired recently.

He put this with the other automatic, closed the drawer and said: "Well, it looks like we're getting some place."

Werner broke into rapid, excited speech, ignoring Powell for the moment and explaining to his men how he had been trapped and why he was here.

Maxie growled: "Keep your shirt on! He ain't got any proof, has he?"

"I got your gun and when they check it with the slugs they take from the Dubois woman—"

Blanche Avery screamed and Powell thought for a moment she was going to faint. She said: "Elsie—she's not—they didn't—"

Powell exhaled slowly, nodded. "They had to get her out of the way—and you were the next to go."

The words, the obvious conclusion, sobered the girl. She sat erect on the edge of the davenport and her frightened eyes swept to Werner's white face. "Oh," she said. "Oh. I didn't think—" She broke off and started to sob.

"We got your guns," said Powell, turning back to the big man. "And maybe we can find something on that camera that will help." He went to a small telephone table beside the doorway of the hall leading to the apartment's other rooms, pulled out the little stool and sat down.

He turned to face the three men, kept them covered with his revolver, and gave a number out of the corner of his mouth. Then he said: "Gimme the Bureau of Identification." A moment later. "This is Dan Powell. Lemme speak to Coyle . . . In the dark room? All right. I'll hang on here."

He kept the receiver to his ear, but

drew away from the mouthpiece and spoke quietly to the girl. "Are these the two guys that slugged Yates?" He saw the girl hesitate, added: "You'd better come clean, kid. I'll give you a better break than Elsie Dubois got."

THAT did it. The girl nodded her head and spoke in eager, voluble phrases. "Yes. But I didn't know. We—Elsie and I worked in the burlesque at the Bijou. I'd only been in town two months and I couldn't get a job or—" She broke off, fought for control of her emotions.

"I finally got in the chorus. That's how I met Elsie. Mr. Yates came down one night. He tried to date me up, kept at me every day. I told Elsie. Then last night she said she had a date fixed up—that Mr. Yates was all right—that we'd just go some place and dance and then go home.

"We went to the Altrazar. We had one drink. Then these two men came in, held us up. That man"—she pointed to Werner—"came in then. He had a blank check and they made Mr. Yates sign it—it was for five thousand, I think."

"And to make sure he didn't stop payment on it," snapped Powell, "they brought in a camera and—"

"Yes. They told Mr. Yates to take off his coat and vest, to slip off his suspenders. I think I screamed. One of them hit me. Elsie took her dress off her shoulder. But Mr. Yates wouldn't do as they said. He shouted for help and tried to fight.

"This man"—she pointed to Maxie—"knocked him down and when he tried to get up, struck him on the head with a blackjack."

The girl paused to sob quietly. "I didn't know they were going to do anything like that. I only—"

"Go on with the story," said Powell. "Well—Mr. Yates didn't get up. They

had to work over him for a half hour. His head was bleeding a little and they cleaned the blood away. Finally he came to, but he acted as if he was drunk. But they took his coat and vest off anyway and—”

“Did they take a picture?” interrupted Powell. The girl nodded tearful assent and the detective said: “Oke. That’s enough.”

But the girl was not quite through. She continued her confession. “Mr. Guyer took us to the top of the stairs and gave Mr. Yates a shove. They gave Elsie and me a hundred dollars and told us if we ever talked they’d kill us.”

Powell looked at Werner and his lip curled. “The same sort of rat you used to be, hunh? The same clip-joint racket. Married guys with families and money that are on the loose. Dubois and Guyer made the plant for you. And the camera gag is good—a picture to show the wife if your sucker threatened to squawk.”

Powell swore under his breath. “And when the old act boomeranged”—his lips tightened—“you took the smartest way out. Witnesses would prove Yates was O. K. when he came in. If you sneaked him out and we picked him up with a concussion, we might come back to you. But if he fell downstairs and cracked his head there’d be plenty of witnesses to clear you.

“And the cleverest part”—Powell hesitated—“was having Yates pinched for the bill and the breakage. You knew he was damn near gone—knew if you yelled for a pinch we wouldn’t suspect you because your play looked on the level. That was neat, but—”

Coyle’s voice in the telephone receiver checked the sentence. The photographer said: “We got a picture of Yates, all right. He’s in a clinch with that dame that got bumped this afternoon. She’s got her dress half off and he looks—”

“His face,” rapped Powell. “Is it marked?”

“You can see a mark on his forehead,” said Coyle, “and it looks like there was blood on his neck.”

Powell grunted, said: “That’ll do it. We—”

He stopped the next word at his lips as a hard, round object jabbed forcibly at the nape of his neck. He heard Coyle talking, but he heard another smooth voice more distinctly.

“Hang up, and drop that gun!”

Powell stiffened. The voice was Guyer’s and it came from that hall door at his back. The gun in his neck was cold and steady. He hesitated but an instant. Then he let the revolver slip from his grasp, hung up on Coyle’s clicking voice.

WERNER pounced upon Powell’s gun the moment it hit the floor and Maxie and Joe leaped toward him. Powell made no attempt to struggle; the girl screamed at that moment and checked the intended assault on him.

Joe crossed the room and slapped the girl’s mouth. Powell bit his lip and stood motionless as Maxie opened the table drawer and took out the two guns.

There was method in Powell’s attitude. Any struggle, with Werner and Guyer holding guns would be futile. He would be searched. But he still had the flat automatic tucked in the top of his pants. By behaving he might have a chance to use it. Guyer circled around in front of him and his laugh was a leer. “What a sap,” he crowed. Then, to Werner, “I damn near barged in the front door, but I heard the copper speaking his piece, so I went around and came in the back way.”

Werner, his confidence returning, was smiling. His voice was quiet, assured. “Nice work, Steve. It began to look like he really had a case on us.”

Joe finished gagging the almost hysteri-

cal girl, came back to the center of the room, said: "Let's put the slug on him right here."

"No." Werner took Joe by the arm. "We'll put the slug on him, but not here. This is no shooting gallery. We gotta work this right. With him and the girl gone, we'll be in the clear. They can't even hang the Dubois job on you and Maxie if you—"

He broke off and his voice hardened. "What're your brains for?" He glared at Maxie. "What the hell did you hang on to that gun for?"

Maxie shrugged. "I don't know. I like it, I guess. It's a sweet rod and—"

Werner snorted in disgust. "Well I'll handle this job, personally. And that gun goes just where these two go—about five miles out to sea. If they haven't got a corpse, they haven't got a murder rap."

He turned to Joe. "Get out the sedan. Wait for us out front. We'll take a little ride to South Harbor and get the launch."

Joe left the room and Werner told Maxie to search Powell. The detective raised his hands. His broad face did not betray the anxiety he felt, and he stared at Blanche Avery, saw that she was dry-eyed and rigid, as though in a trance. He sucked in his stomach and waited.

Maxie's hands slapped his hips, his coat pockets, opened his coat and felt under both arms. When he stepped back Powell exhaled slowly and lowered his hands. There was one advantage to an automatic at that. He'd never considered its compact flatness any help in his work before.

Werner said: "O. K. Let's get started." He looked at Powell, sneered and repeated the detective's own warning. "If you think a little thing like putting a slug in you is gonna stop me from goin' through with this, you're screwy." He laughed and opened the door.

As they walked through the deserted downstairs foyer Werner spoke his last

word of warning. "Behave, copper!" He took the gag from the girl's mouth, added: "You too, sister."

Powell went through the outer door first, with Guyer following right behind with a gun in the small of his back. Powell felt the hard, flat automatic pressing against his stomach and he wondered how long it would take him to get it out; how many shots Guyer could take before he could return one.

He hesitated on the sidewalk in front of the house. A long heavy sedan was parked about twenty feet up the street. The motor was running; he could see the whitish vapor curling up out of the exhaust pipe. From the corner of his eye he saw Blanche Avery pull up even with him. Maxie and Werner were behind and on either side of her.

Then he saw Hunziker.

IT was intuition more than anything else that told him this. The man who lurked across the street in the shadows of a telephone pole was nothing more than a blotch in the night. Powell could not see the face, could make out no distinguishing features.

But the man looked tall and thin. And he remembered his command to his partner—to follow Guyer. If it was Hunziker, he had been tailing the fellow for hours, had followed him to this apartment house, was waiting for something to happen.

Powell thought: "Will he recognize me? If he does, he'll know something screwy's up. Maybe he'll follow this car, pick up a couple traffic cops on the way. If he'll just take it easy and—"

But mental telepathy could have been nothing but an expression to Hunziker. Or maybe he was immune. At any rate he had other plans. He stepped out from the shadows and started across the street.

Powell had taken two forward steps

while he had been thinking. When he saw Hunziker—he could see it was Hunziker now—start across the street, he knew what he had to do.

He couldn't stop the shooting now. But if he let his partner come, they'd get the girl, get him. And with three or four to one against him, Hunziker would not have a prayer.

Powell turned his head. Blanche Avery was two feet to one side and a half step behind. Without another thought, he leaned quickly toward her and swept his right arm in a quick, powerful swing. The back of his hand caught the girl at the side of the head. She stumbled and fell sprawling as Powell wheeled and reached for the gun at his belt.

He heard Hunziker say, "Hey!" Then a gun barked and he felt a quick shock along his side under his armpit. He had the gun out before Guyer could shoot again, and, spinning as he was, he wrapped his left arm around the man's waist and hugged him close.

Guns roared in salvos after that; roared and sent their crashing echoes through the narrow street. The action seemed like instantaneous bits of a movie film, jumbled together without sequence or timing.

He heard Guyer curse, felt him try to jerk from his grasp. As he struggled, Powell's flank was exposed to the yellow tongues that spurted from two guns ten feet away. He felt the shock of lead on the right side of his chest. He felt Guyer's body jerk twice in his grasp, stiffen, then go limp.

Maxie and Werner were still shooting. So was Hunziker, from a spot in the middle of the pavement. He realized that the shock in his wrist was the slap of recoil from his own gun. Behind him a car roared to life and sped out of his consciousness. He let the dead weight of Guyer's body slip from his arm.

Then a sudden silence swept back through the street, as suddenly as it had fled. For a few brief seconds Powell heard no sound but his own sharp breathing. Hunziker stood spread-legged in the street. Werner was down on his back. Maxie had dropped on all fours. He moved forward about five feet on his hands and knees, then went flat on his face.

The silence vanished again. Windows in apartments overhead flew open. A woman stuck out her head and screamed. Blanche Avery stirred on the sidewalk.

Hunziker leaped forward and slipped an arm around Powell's waist. "O. K., Dan?"

"O. K." He felt tired now, suddenly weak. The wounds in his chest and side had not yet started to pain. He did not think they would be serious. But he was bleeding a lot; his shirt felt sticky.

He sat down on the curb and said: "The girl's O. K. I had to slap her out of the way. Watch her."

Hunziker yelled up at some head framed in a window above to call headquarters and get some men and an ambulance. He went to Blanche Avery and helped her to her feet. He looked at Powell, said: "They did get you, didn't they?"

"Not too bad." Powell glanced at the girl. "You all right, kid?"

"Why—I—" The girl rubbed her cheek, stammered in frightened tones. "Yes. I'm all right."

Hunziker said: "There was a guy in the car. He got away."

"We'll pick him up," grunted Powell. He hesitated, added: "I feel like I might have to go to the hospital. Call up the girl friend, will you? Tell her everything is O. K. and that I'm not hurt much. She's been worryin' her head off about last night. Tell her it looks like I might still be in good standing."

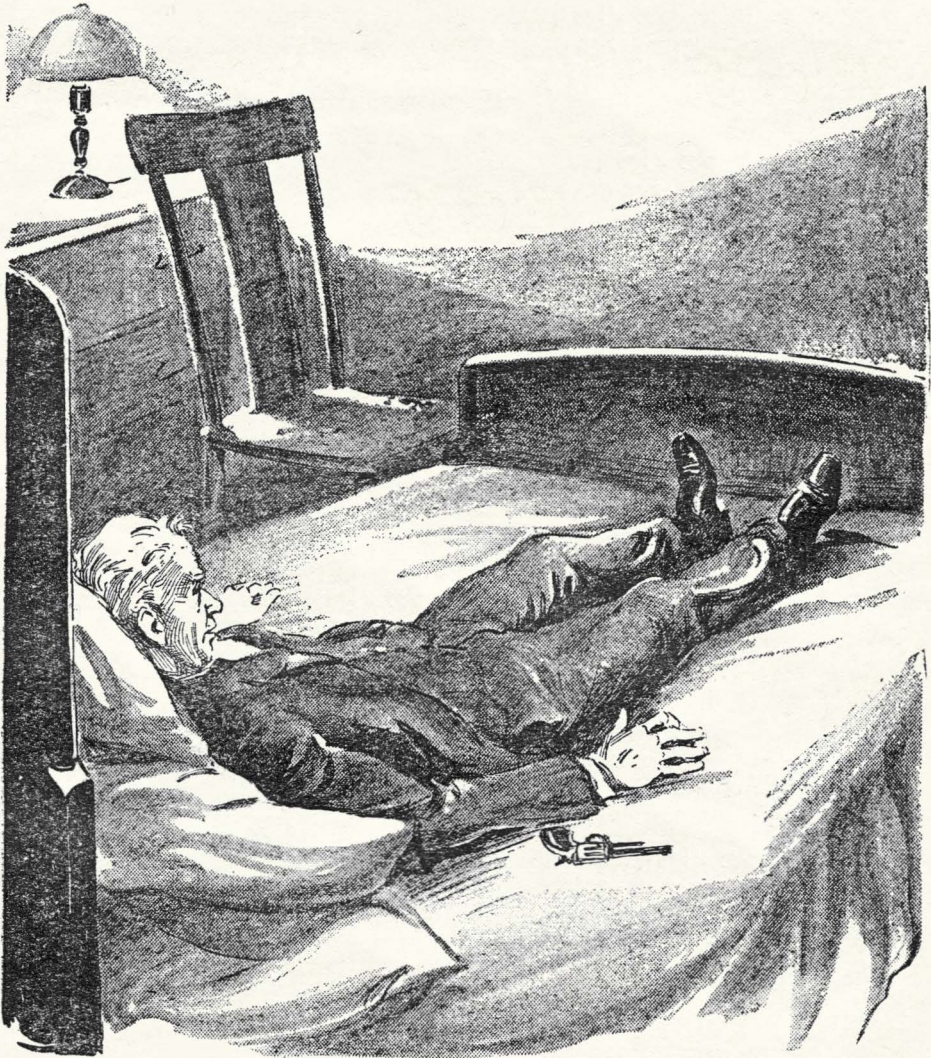
POST MORTEM

by J. Paul Suter

Author of "Shoes for the Dead," etc.

A Horatio Humberton Story

Out of the night had come a leering horror—the face of a man who'd died in the chair months past. Humberton knew such things could never be—or thought he did. Until he remembered the threat of the executed doctor—just in time to become a prisoner of the dead.



CHAPTER ONE

And May God Have Mercy on your Soul!

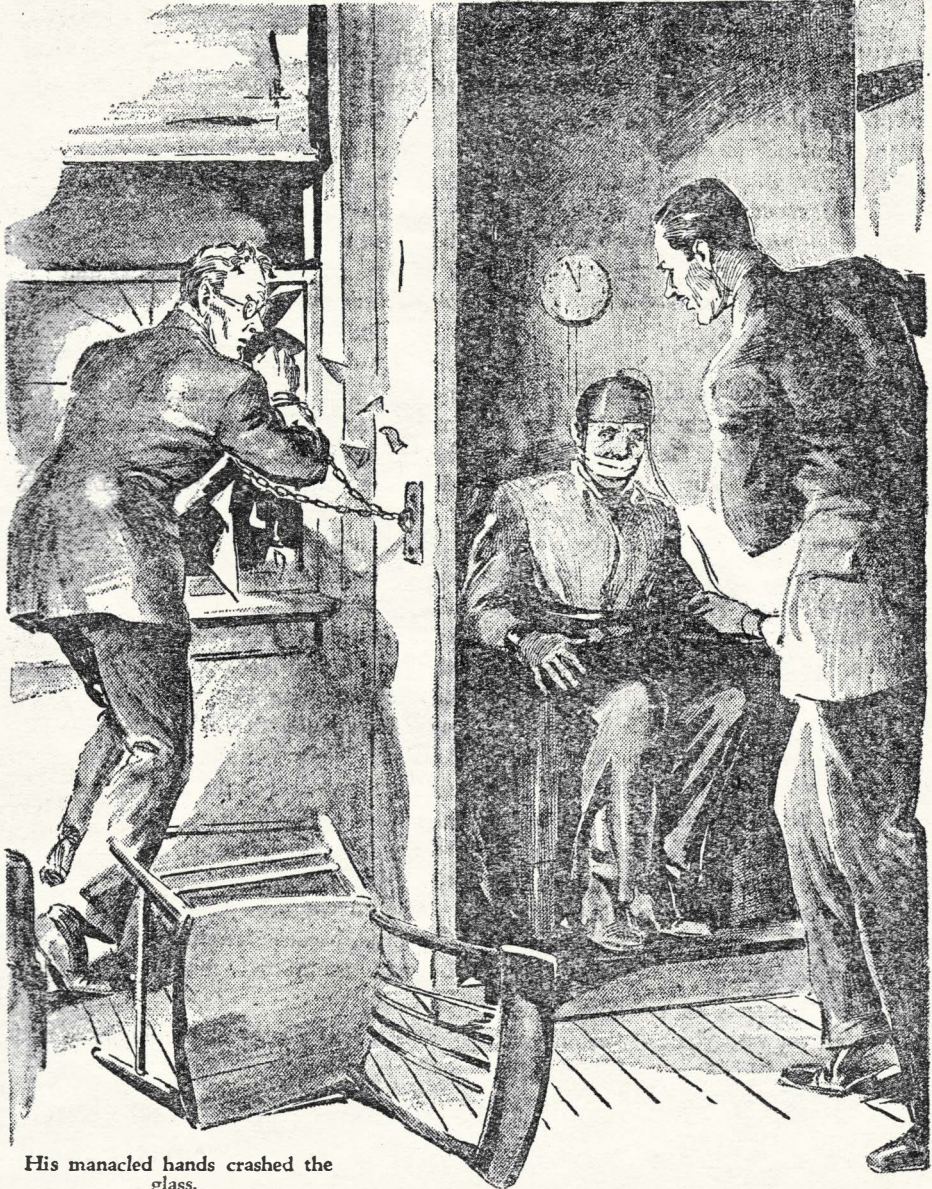
PART of the buzz in the crowded court room, when the prisoner was brought in handcuffed to an officer, was caused by the voice of Ted Spang, senior hearse driver to that well known necrologist and student of crime, Horatio Humberton.

It was a very small part. Ted merely put a question to his chief. "All the judge will have to do is sentence him, isn't it, sir?" he asked, earnestly.

"That is all," Humberton agreed.

"Any choice? I mean," Ted explained, "can he sentence him to anything but—"

At that, both Ted's employer and Jim Clyde, of the detective force, who sat



His manacled hands crashed the glass.

next him, shook their heads. The three of them had come together to see the climax to this celebrated case.

"Doctor Bonifacio Bertini—stand up!"

The prisoner obeyed. He was a large man, with black, glossy hair like an Indian's. He met the judge's gaze without blinking.

"Have you anything to say before sentence is pronounced?"

Ted Spang quivered with attention.

"I have!" The prisoner had very little accent. "Is Doctor Wilfrith Cranston in the court room?" he continued, slowly.

"I cannot permit personalities," the judge said, instantly. "The privilege of speaking before sentence is pronounced is accorded you as a favor, not a right. You will omit Doctor Cranston's name from your remarks."

TED rubbed his hands together. He began to appreciate his chief's wisdom in being here. This was likely to become exciting. His satisfaction was even more pronounced when a tall and very thin man, near them in the rear of the room, rose to his feet. He was pale—evidently under strain. Only a quick smile, which came with his first words, kept his features from appearing unnaturally stern.

"I hope Your Honor will forgive this interruption. I rise to request that if it be consistent with the dignity of the Court, the prisoner be permitted to say what he wishes."

The judge shrugged his shoulders. "As you will, Doctor," he conceded. "You may go on," he said, addressing the prisoner, "but be careful."

"Thank you." The prisoner bowed, with a courtesy rather out of keeping with the grimness of his face. "I should like you to remain standing, Doctor Cranston—so that I can see you."

"Very well, Doctor."

"Now I wish my brother, Josef Bertini, and my uncle, Anthony Savoldi, to stand."

The judge leaned forward, elbows on desk. Unconsciously Ted Spang had assumed almost the same attitude. His elbows were on his knees, however, and he was listening with the full attention of both ears, whereas the judge was speaking.

"For the sake of the record, I desire to explain the presence of these men in the court room. Josef Bertini has been indicted by the grand jury, and is soon to stand trial. Anthony Savoldi is held on a general charge. Ordinarily, neither would be here this morning. The prisoner, however, has particularly requested that they be present when sentence is pronounced upon him. In cases of this nature, where the law deprives a man of the supreme gift of life, I feel strongly that in all minor matters kindness and consideration should be shown. I have therefore granted this request. The prisoner may continue."

The two men had risen: the one slender, immaculately clad, and with a tiny black mustache as smooth and precise as if painted; the other, a little old man with the round, rosy face of a cherub, enlivened by twinkling blue eyes, and crowned with beautifully fine white hair, delicate as silk. The prisoner looked steadily for a moment at each of them, then turned his gaze back to the doctor in the rear of the room, near Humberton and his interested driver.

"You have brought me here, Doctor Cranston, because, from your standpoint, I have committed murder," he said, harshly.

The gaunt doctor in the audience nodded.

"Suppose we get the facts before us," the prisoner went on. "When I was a boy in Corsica, a certain man killed my father.

He was guilty, but they acquitted him. So I swore a blood-feud against that man. He escaped me then—to this country. Later, I too journeyed here. I became a physician. At last, I found this man. Through a curious twist, he was one of my own patients. So I avenged my father by means of poison. I did it so cleverly that I would never have been convicted—but for you. You heard about it. You suspected. You had the body exhumed. You brought me here. You were not even content with that, but you dragged in my younger brother, too, as an accessory after the fact. You—”

The cold level tones of the judge interrupted. “If you have nothing but this sort of thing to say, Bertini, I will proceed to the sentence.”

“Please!” Doctor Cranston lifted a slender hand in protest. “Doctor Bertini is leading up to something.”

The judge glared at the prisoner. “Go on, then,” he said, grudgingly; and the man in the dock did so, with an ironical smile.

“This is where you come in, my brother, Josef, and my Uncle Anthony. I wish you to promise that you will impose no obstacles to the viewing of my body by Horatio Humberton, the well known funeral director. Will you promise me that?”

HUMBERTON glanced at the two men—the little white-haired, roly-poly man and the slender dandy—saw them look inquiringly at each other, and both nod. Meanwhile, Bertini’s expression of contemptuous amusement took in audience and judge impartially. Presently, however, it singled out the doctor.

“Are you wondering why I choose Mr. Humberton, Doctor?” he inquired.

“I must confess that I am, Doctor.

Horatio Humberton is one of my closest friends.”

“So I am aware. When he assures you that I am dead, you will believe him?”

Doctor Cranston’s eyebrows lifted. “Naturally.”

“That is my reason. I wish you to be convinced of my death, because—” He said the rest very slowly. “—It is my intent to come back, *after my death*, Doctor, and take you away with me!”

As the bailiff’s stentorian voice roared a useless protest at the commotion which followed, Detective Jim Clyde leaned across Ted Spang to speak to Humberton. “You heard that, Ho? You heard that?” he demanded, excitedly.

“I’m not deaf,” the necrologist retorted.

“How well do you know this Doctor Bertini?”

“Slightly.”

“I know him pretty well. Too darned well.” Clyde’s round face was still red with emotion, but since the noise in the court room was subsiding he cautiously lowered his tones. “He’s clever—and crooked as a rail fence. We’ve almost had him twice, on dope charges. But let me tell you, Ho”—he managed to reach far enough to tap Humberton on the knee—“I never in my life heard that bird go off half cocked. When he makes a threat, he carries it out. It’s a point of honor with him. So I’m asking you—how in hell can he carry *this* one out? After a guy cuddles down on the hot seat—”

He stopped. The judge was speaking.

“It is the sentence of this court,” he said, ignoring everything but the task before him, “that you be taken from here to the place from which you were brought; and thence, at the discretion of the officers of justice, to the place of execution; and that at some time in the week

beginning at midnight on the twenty-third day of next January, a current of electricity sufficient to cause death be made to pass through your body." He paused, looked at the prisoner and at the breathless audience in the court room, then added: "And may God have mercy on your soul!"

CHAPTER TWO

The Dead Man Looks In

ELEVEN months after the electrocution of Doctor Bonifacio Bertini, shortly after nine o'clock one evening, Horatio Humberton was engaged in embalming a difficult case in his operating room at the funeral parlors.

Ted Spang was out for the evening. The other assistants, who did not live at the parlors, were long since gone home. Humberton worked swiftly, whistling a tune. He loved difficult cases. He was so absorbed in this one that he did not look up when the bell of the big front door rang, nor when the door—seldom locked—was pushed open and footsteps sounded in the hallway. The footsteps stopped.

"Humberton!" said a guarded voice, at the farther side of the operating-room door.

At that, the tall necrologist came to himself. He recognized the voice. "Come in, Cranston," he replied.

The distinguished surgeon entered. He shut the door behind him, and sagged wearily into a chair. The deep lines of his face stood out like gashes in the glare of the intense light above the operating table. He and Horatio Humberton—though intimate friends—were both such busy men that months often went by without their seeing each other. But when they did meet there was no ceremony between them.

"Diabetic case?" the doctor inquired. Humberton nodded.

"They're bad enough to treat when alive. Glad I don't have to pickle them after they're dead. Bother you if I talk?"

The necrologist shook his head.

"Humberton, do you remember Doctor Bertini? Remember what he said in the court room, the day he was sentenced to death?"

At that, Humberton looked around. "I rather wondered what Bertini was framing up," he said. "He never struck me as a man to make idle threats. I examined his body, as he requested. Has he been bothering you?"

"Bothering me?" Doctor Cranston grinned. "You sound like a Spiritualist. Still, I don't know. That may be a good way to put it. It would include imagination and tired nerves—my charity practice is slowly killing me—and other things. One can bother others without being present in person. How soon will you be through with that job you're on?"

"Half an hour."

"Care to come over? That's really what I dropped in to ask. I've been out on a case. I made a point of returning this way."

"Of course, I'll come," Humberton consented, crisply. "You expect this—annoyance—again tonight?"

The doctor's weary smile lighted his face for an instant—the instant while he reached into his coat pocket and brought forth a sheet of paper which he laid on a vacant chair.

"I don't suppose you recall when Bertini was executed," he said. "You have not the reason to recall it that I have. It was April eleventh. He received several stays of execution, you know. Well, I first had this"—he hesitated, then used the same word Humberton had used—"this annoyance—on the very next night.

Since then I have had it ten times; always at midnight, always in my office. It would be there, of course, because that's the place where I invariably sit up late to read, before going up to my bachelor quarters on the top floor of the hospital. When you're through, Humberton, look that paper over."

HUMBERTON, busy on a delicate manipulation with the trocar, merely asked: "It gives the dates?"

"The dates—yes. I'll save you time by telling you something about them. This thing has always happened either on the eleventh of the month—which was the date of the execution, you'll remember—or on the first fine night thereafter. It has never come on a rainy night, or when snow lay on the ground. Maybe you'll get the significance of that. I don't. I merely state it as a fact. And since this is the eleventh of March, and a beautiful night, though a trifle chilly, I look for something to happen tonight. You're sure you don't mind coming?"

Humberton glanced up, instrument in hand. "You couldn't keep me away!"

"I haven't told you yet what the nature of this annoyance is. Now, as to that—"

"I don't wish to know," the necrologist interrupted.

"You prefer to find out for yourself?"

"Infinitely! I don't know what to expect. My imagination has nothing to build on. That is as it should be. Then if I see the same thing you do—or have the same experience, whatever it is—that will be evidence."

"It will," the doctor agreed.

"Ted should be back before I'm ready to start. Ted has no nerves and very little imagination. Suppose I bring him along?"

"By all means!"

The doctor left, and Humberton re-

turned to the work on his deceased client. Before that was done, Ted came in. Shortly after eleven o'clock, the two of them started on foot for Doctor Cranstons's Clinic Hospital, where the surgeon had become famous in the service of the poor.

Ted's mind had even less to work on than his employer's. He had been told nothing except where they were bound. But that was enough for the buoyant hearse driver. He sensed mystery and adventure. He pressed on so eagerly that even Humberton's long legs were stretched to keep up with him.

Once they were inside Doctor Cranstons's private office at the hospital, however, Ted looked about him with frank curiosity. They had been admitted by the doctor himself at the rear entrance, from which a narrow hallway led to the office door. Their host's air of secrecy aroused Ted's interest.

"Any orders, sir?" he asked his chief.

"Only that you use your eyes," Humberton returned. "I am too near-sighted for a task like this. Suppose you begin, Ted, by describing the main features of this office to me, so that I may be sure we agree on them."

Ted stared at his employer with a puzzled smile, then shrugged his shoulders and proceeded to carry out the instructions.

"Two doors," he stated. "We came in by one of 'em. I happen to know the other leads to the waiting room. Almost opposite, aren't they, sir? Then here's the doctor's roll top, to your left when you're facing the door we used. And a window above it. No blind on the window. That because the sun never shines in?" he asked, addressing Doctor Cranstons.

The doctor nodded, silently.

"Then there's a screen at the end farthest from the desk, and a filing cabinet

at the right of the desk." He gazed about, slowly. "Three chairs, including doctor's swivel. Rug on the floor. No pictures on the wall. Reading lamp on the desk. That check up with what you see, sir?"

"What does the window face on?" Humberton demanded of the doctor. "Surely not the rear street, unless my directions are confused."

"On a blind alley off the rear street. I might add that there are no windows whatever in the wall of the warehouse at the farther side of the alley."

"It is ten minutes before midnight. Will Ted and I be favorably situated if we sit at the side of the screen?"

DOCTOR CRANSTON'S deeply lined face swung about slowly as he appeared to consider the advantages of various parts of his office for spectators of whatever it was he expected. At length he nodded. "You'll be as well off there as anywhere. Have you anything else to ask me?"

Humberton shook his head, silently.

"Then I shall sit in my chair sidewise to the desk, with the light falling over my left shoulder. I shall read a book. That is my usual position on—on these occasions."

As he took a book from the desk and sat down, Ted whispered a question to his chief. "Any more orders, sir?" he asked.

"You will sit beside me. If at any moment you experience something unusual tell me instantly."

"Something I'll see?"

"I don't know."

Ted chuckled, enthusiastically. "This is real sport, sir," he declared. "I ain't had a thrill like this since we sat in the Tich Building waiting for it to blow up. Do I do anything besides chirp when whatever it is happens?"

"Use your own judgment," Humberton returned, tersely. "And at present, shut up!"

Ted chuckled again, and was silent.

Humberton studied the dial of his wrist watch with his near-sighted blue eyes. Eleven fifty-five. His hand touched the edge of the screen. He glanced at it, then let his gaze wander speculatively about the room. It rested on Cranston, whose gaunt chin had sunk upon his chest. His attention appeared focused on the book. He seemed to expect nothing more to happen until he should snap it shut for the night and go to bed. Above his head, and directly in Humberton's line of vision, the square black mouth of the window yawned. Against that dark background the glass was blotted out. It might have been an open hole into the night.

Ted made an almost inaudible sound with his mouth.

"What is it?" Humberton asked in a whisper.

Ted's whisper was even lower. His chief barely heard it. "Watch the window!"

Very slowly, the driver rose to his feet. His neck was craned forward with the intensity of his gaze. At the same instant the doctor suddenly swung around as if on a pivot and stared at the window. But all Humberton could see was something white and glowing which seemed to be moving across the black panes as if looking in.

A curious startled sound escaped Ted's lips. His chair toppled. He had kicked it in his leap toward the rear door of the office. Before it fell he had wrenched the door open, and they heard his running footsteps down the hall. Then they heard them in the alley outside.

"What was it?" Humberton gasped.

"Didn't you see?"

"It was a blur to me."

"Ask Ted," the doctor directed, curtly. "I hear him coming back."

THE shaken hearse driver walked in. His face was white, but his usual jauntiness of manner had not deserted him. "Not a soul out there," he reported. "I don't see how anyone could get away. It's a blind alley. I came by the only opening—and I came fast."

"What did you see at the window?" Humberton demanded.

"Just a minute." The doctor laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Before Ted answers, I want to tell you that what he saw is exactly what I have seen—ten times. And I want to ask you something, Ted. Before you came here tonight—before you saw this thing at my window—had you any idea what to expect?"

"Not an idea in the world," the driver replied, promptly.

"You were not even sure you would see anything—is that correct?"

"That's right, sir."

"And your sight is good?"

"My boss says I could spot a dead man through a brick wall and tell whether they'd hired a funeral for him yet."

The surgeon nodded. "I've heard him say that. You'll excuse my putting these questions, Humberton. I want you to be satisfied—fully satisfied—that my nerves are not playing me tricks. Now, Ted, what did you see?"

"Well"—for the first time, Ted seemed to speak with reluctance—"it looked like Bertini to me."

"The brother of the man who was executed? I understand he is still in prison," Humberton objected, rather sharply. "He is to be released next week."

But Ted shook his head. "I don't mean him," he said, slowly. "He don't look a bit like his brother. What I saw

was Doctor Bertini's face—the fellow who died in the chair."

"His face?"

"Just his face. It looked kind of shiny and dead, sir—judging by its color. That's what I saw."

Humberton met Doctor Cranston's eye. A smile was on the doctor's gaunt features.

"Has this ever come twice in the same night, Cranston?"

"Never. Nor twice in the same month. I don't expect to be annoyed this way again till the eleventh of April."

"You won't be, I imagine." The necrologist turned abruptly and shrugged into his overcoat. Ted followed his example. The doctor stood looking at them, still quietly smiling.

"Are my nerves exonerated?" he said, at length.

Humberton returned his smile. "Either that," he admitted, "or else Ted's are badly involved. You will hear from me, Cranston—before the eleventh of April. Meanwhile, I have nothing to say." He paused, and added thoughtfully: "Except that I am still not a Spiritualist!"

But at the rear door of the hospital, as he held Doctor Cranston's hand in farewell, he suddenly changed his mind. "Perhaps I *should* say something. This fellow Bertini—you knew him far better than I did. What kind of man was he?"

"A clever doctor," Cranston answered, promptly; then he hesitated. "I don't like to say so, particularly under the circumstances, but he was unscrupulous, too. You know my hobby, Humberton. I go out of my way to fight the battle of the poor against their natural enemies—against the dope peddler and the various types of gangster who try to exploit them. Well—"

"Well?" prompted the necrologist.

"I won't enter into details. Whatever the man did, he paid for."

HUMBERTON nodded, and glanced reflectively into the darkness of the quiet back street. "I don't want details, either," he said, at last. "Was he in the habit of making vain threats? That's all I want to know."

"He was in the habit of making his threats good, I should say."

"He made one in the court room. How about that?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "After all, when a man's under the shadow of death, he can be excused for speaking a little foolishly."

"He threatened to come back and carry you away."

"I seem still to be here," the doctor laughed.

"And yet something — something at least reminiscent of him—*has* come back." Humberton's voice was so low as to be almost a whisper, but it was charged with an undertone of emotion. "Frankly, Cranston, I don't know what it is—yet. But I do know this: a man now dead threatened to return from the grave to kidnap you. Someone—or something—connected with him is appearing at your window. I wish you'd told me of it before. The mystery might be solved by now. Since you didn't, I want you to call up Jim Clyde tomorrow, and ask for police protection all day on the eleventh of next month."

"Why?"

"It will be just a year since the execution. Then, if at all, the real attempt on you will be made."

The doctor shook his head.

"You won't?"

"You're good to suggest it. I appreciate your interest in me." He shook Humberton's hand again. "And I'm more grateful than I can say to you and Ted for coming here tonight. You've proved that I'm not going crazy. I wasn't so sure

of that—till you saw the thing, too. But we'll keep the police out of this."

"Then let Ted and me stand guard here on the eleventh."

"Thank you." The light above the door revealed a whimsical smile on the doctor's worn face. "I'll think that over."

As they walked down the steps and the door shut behind the doctor, Ted broke out with something like a growl. "Think it over, will he?" he exclaimed. "He's forgotten it already! I know one way to keep him from being kidnaped—kidnap him ourselves! That's the only way there is, there ain't any other!"

"I fear so, Ted," his chief agreed.

CHAPTER THREE

"Doctor Cranston Is Gone"

IT WAS ten in the morning, on the Eleventh of April. Humberton hung up the receiver and turned with a baffled grin to Ted Spang, who sat waiting on a pile of heavy books in one corner of the study. A chair was available for Ted, but he had become used to building impromptu seats for himself from the volumes which always littered the floor of his chief's work room.

"No use, Ted," the necrologist reported.

"If he won't give his permission, how about going over without it?" the driver suggested; but Humberton slowly shook his head.

"I would—with almost any other man, not with Cranston. Cranston's a genius. All geniuses have their peculiarities. His is that no one—not his closest friend—may take a liberty with him. If he won't let us stand guard in his office, we can't force the matter. That's the end of it."

Ted grinned—a quiet, reflective grin, which finished in an outright laugh. "Do you know what I've a good mind to do,

sir?" he asked. "To go out and get myself hit by a machine, right in front of his hospital. I'll bet I could work it. Not hit very hard, of course—but hard enough so they'd carry me in and put me to bed. I know one of Cranston's assistants there, and some of the nurses—not to mention the ambulance crews—and if I couldn't pull that off without any broken bones, and without Doc's being any the wiser—"

The telephone rang. Humberton clapped the receiver to his ear. He listened a moment, and a look of amazement came over his face.

"Humberton? Doctor Cranston speaking. Can you come right away?"

A click at the other end cut off any possible reply.

"Come on, Ted—they're after him!"

Ted's elaborate scheme died. In its place he gave a speed exhibition, which was more to his taste than scheming, anyway. The Humberton sedan was out of the garage and at the door so promptly that its owner was still trying to make sure whether he had put on his own hat, or one taken in exchange somewhere, when he was whirled away. Then followed a masterpiece of traffic dodging which got the necrologist to the Cranston clinic somewhat faster than any ambulance had yet made the distance.

Ted found opportunity, however, for one question as they pulled up to the curb. "Who called you?" he asked.

"He said, 'Doctor Cranston speaking,'" his chief replied.

Ted stopped short with one foot on the running board. His dark eyes sparkled. "Then it wasn't the doctor?" he whispered.

"No, Ted. Though the voice was a fairly good imitation. The doctor would have called himself '*Cranston*,' not '*Doc*-tor Cranston,' to me."

AS HE climbed slowly from the machine, Humberton gazed at the front entrance of the hospital. A steady stream of people—most of them poorly dressed—were going in and out. It was one of the free clinic days.

"Ted, this may be a trap. It very likely is a trap. I think our best plan is to enter through the clinic waiting room and ask Miss Johnson for Cranston. She's the nurse who has a desk there, just outside his private office. Suppose you walk some paces behind me. Be on your guard."

Ted nodded. They found the nurse at her desk in the farther end of the crowded waiting room. Humberton knew Miss Johnson. Behind the exterior of a blond doll, with wide china-blue eyes and a somewhat vacant gaze, she hid a quick brain. When he asked as to the whereabouts of the doctor, she leaned across her desk and whispered.

"He's in his office, Mr. Humberton, but something queer is going on in there. You know Joe Bertini?"

"Doctor Bertini's brother—the man who was released from prison a few weeks ago?"

She nodded. "He rushed in about twenty minutes ago with a gashed hand—been in a fight, I guess. Doctor was free for the moment, so I took him right in, as an emergency case. I helped dress the hand, then Doctor told me he wanted to talk to Bertini privately. But if you'd like me to knock on the door—"

She stopped. The door of the doctor's office had opened. Josef Bertini stood there, immaculate with neat black mustache and clear skin just as he had appeared in the court room a year before; but now his skin was white with prison pallor, and he carried his left hand in a sling. At sight of Humberton his eyes widened, and he ran forward.

"Mr. Humberton! I do not expect to

see you. Perhaps it is well you come, for there is something here I cannot understand." He glanced at the nurse, and at Ted. "Will you all step in here a moment?" he asked, nodding toward the doctor's office. "This is not for the crowd to hear."

When they were inside the office, he carefully shut the waiting-room door.

"Where is Doctor Cranston?" Humberton demanded, glancing toward the doctor's vacant chair.

Joe Bertini shrugged his well tailored shoulders.

"Doctor Cranston is gone. I will acquaint you with what I know. It is not much." His eyes rested on Miss Johnson. "This nurse, she can tell you that Doctor wished to talk to me by myself."

"She has already told us."

"Why did he wish this? To ask why I come to him. That is all. I say it is because I am bleeding to death where an enemy cuts me, and he is the nearest doctor. And I say more. I say that I have for him no ill will. What is past is past. He has injured me, but—"

"Get to the point," Humberton interrupted; and Joe Bertini's white teeth flashed in a smile.

"I am at the point now. While we are talking, there comes a knock on the door." He turned, and raised his right hand dramatically toward the door leading to the rear hallway. "On *that* door. Now you will ask, 'Who knocks?' I do not know. I see no one, I hear no one. But the doctor—he opens the door, he steps outside and shuts it behind him." Once more, his eyes interrogated the nurse. "I should know this, but my powers of observation are not what they ought to be. What did Doctor keep on a chair near that rear door?"

"Near that door?" she echoed. "Why, he generally kept his instrument case there."

He nodded courteously. "That explains. For the door opens again in a moment. I see only a hand and an arm—Doctor's, I think. He picks up something—that will be the instrument case. Then the door shuts, and this time it does not open any more."

"You didn't see him again?" Humberton questioned.

"No!" He backed up the denial by shaking his head, vigorously. "I wait. He does not come. So I open that door myself. He is not there. But the watchman stands at the end of the hall, near the street. I ask him, 'Where is Doctor Cranston?' He does not know. He has not seen the doctor go out."

The necrologist had been waiting impatiently until this point was reached. Now he strode over to the rear door and flung it open. The narrow hallway was revealed. A man stood at its farther end, looking out at the street.

The nurse said: "That's Simmons, the watchman."

EVIDENTLY Simmons had good ears. He turned at the mention of his name and lumbered toward them. His head was set rather far forward, on wide shoulders. He looked up at them from under bushy brows as he approached, with the honest and heavy expression of a mastiff. He was muttering something. Soon the words became plain.

"Doctor didn't go out this way."

"Listen to me!" Humberton glared at the man through his thick glasses. "How long have you been on duty?"

"I comes on at seven."

"How long have you been at that door?"

Simmons was silent a moment, arranging the pattern of his thoughts. "Nine thirty," he said, finally. "That's when I goes on door duty. Clinic's ten to twelve. Doctor he don't want nobody

coming back way. So I stands here nine thirty to twelve thirty. I don't let nobody past."

"Did anyone try to pass, today?" the necrologist inquired.

Simmons considered that, too. "No," he decided; then he added: "Doctor did not go out this way, neither."

Humberton whispered something to the nurse, and with an understanding nod she vanished. Then he turned to the watchman again, with an ingratiating smile. "You left your post for just a minute soon after ten o'clock, didn't you, Simmons?"

"Me?" The man returned his gaze with evident astonishment. "I don't never leave my post between nine thirty and twelve thirty."

"Well, of course, there are times—" Humberton's smile became a knowing grin. He even winked. "Once in a while a man can't help himself. I'm sure you were back almost instantly, but you *did* leave for a moment or two—didn't you?"

But Simmons shook his head doggedly. "No, sir," he declared. "I ain't been off this doorstep since nine thirty."

"Very well," the necrologist said, lightly. "Go back to your door."

Ted chuckled to himself to note how easily his chief abandoned what certainly seemed like a necessary line of questioning. Jim Clyde would have hammered away on it for half an hour. Humberton at once became busy elsewhere. He looked into the two rooms which opened off the passage, one on each side—a cloak-room and a combination washroom and laboratory. There were no other doors. No connection existed between that narrow hallway and the remainder of the building. After that he glanced—rather casually—at the single window of the doctor's office. It was protected with iron bars, set into the brickwork. At that point in his investigations, the door to

the waiting room was thrown open from without, and a large, red-faced man stepped into the office.

Humberton's whispered instructions to Miss Johnson had born fruit. She had telephoned. Detective Jim Clyde, of the official police, had arrived.

For a moment Humberton paid no attention to him. He had thought of a question to ask the nurse. "Was there any accident out on the back street this morning?" he inquired.

She shook her head. "If there had been, they'd have come here for help. They always do."

The door to the rear hall had been left open. Once again, Simmons proved the efficiency of his hearing. "No, there warn't!" he roared. "No accident. A house burned down this morning over on Bargy Street—that's the next street over—but there warn't no accident."

The necrologist smiled—the smile of a man whose plans are working just as they should, and with whom all is even better than could be expected—and pulled his friend, Clyde, to one side, where they could talk without being overheard, even by Simmons.

"An impossible crime, Clyde," he said, sweetly. "Cranston has disappeared. There are two exits to his office—only two. According to veracious witnesses he went through neither of them. The window is barred, as you see."

"Somebody's lying," the detective growled, fiercely; but Humberton shook his head.

"I think not," he demurred. "But browse to your heart's content. You may feel that Cranston will return. I warn you against any such conclusion. And may I call your attention to one interesting fact?"

"Yeah?" Clyde responded. He disliked Humberton's occasional bantering

tone, but he never slighted the eccentric funeral director's suggestions.

"The fire on Bargy Street. You'll find it happened about the time Cranston disappeared."

CHAPTER FOUR

Spang Stands By

DETECTIVE JIM CLYDE, dropping into the funeral parlors at ten fifteen that evening to talk over certain matters with Horatio Humberton, was astonished to run into the necrologist and his lively driver, Ted Spang, just going out. Ted and his chief wore caps; Ted a sweater. In all his experience with the eccentric necrologist, Clyde had never seen him wear a cap. The effect amused Clyde. He laughed heartily. But his merriment lost much of its force when Huberton asked, testily: "Now that you have enjoyed yourself at my expense, perhaps you will tell me just how you expect to save Cranston's life tonight?"

"His life?" Clyde's jaw dropped. "Who's likely to knock him off, Ho?"

"Joe Bertini, I should say."

This time Clyde's laugh was born not of amusement but of genuine relief. "Well, I guess I beat you to it, after all," he said, easily. "For a moment you had me scared. If ever a man had an alibi, Joe Bertini has—you and I and Ted and the nurse and about fifty other people all saw him there at the hospital, so it stands to reason he can't have kidnaped Doc—but just to make sure I put him in a safe-deposit box down at the jail. What do you say to that?"

"He will escape tonight," the necrologist answered, calmly.

"Not where I've got him. You don't know our jail."

Humberton led the way back to his study, and without taking off the derided cap sat down at his work table, beneath

the swinging light blub. Before reaching his chair, however, he threw confusion into Clyde's mind by remarking: "You will let him escape."

Clyde was a good sport. He knew when he was being kidded. At least, he thought he knew. He took the remaining chair in the study, leaving Ted to make himself a seat out of a pile of books, as usual, and grinned at his eccentric friend.

"You're the darndest fellow I ever saw, Ho! You call me up and tell me to hot-foot it over here, and I roll in just in time to meet you going out. Then you stroll back in and sit down. Now you tell me I'm going to let Bertini out of stir so he can murder Cranston. Keep it up. I haven't anything to do. Tell me they're going to start tomorrow and give away samples at the mint!"

"Ted and I intended to meet you half way and save time," Humberton explained coolly. "Since we weren't prompt enough, I have decided to talk in here. Did you look up the fire on Bargy Street?"

Clyde nodded. "You had the right dope there—though I can't see that it helps much. There was a fire—it seems to have happened when Doc was leaving—and the old buzzard of a watchman must have been fairly hypnotized rubbering at it. By standing at the extreme left of the walk he'd still be at his post, but he could see the fire. He's got sharp ears, but the brain of a rabbit. I think Doc walked right past him while he was watching the fire."

"So do I." Humberton waited with a half-smile, and at length asked: "You didn't go any further into the matter of the fire? For instance, did you discover, by any chance, that the burned house belonged to old Savoldi, the ex-actor—Joe Bertini's uncle—the dear old gentleman with the silky white hair, who was finally acquitted and released?" Clyde's crest-

fallen face answered the question without words, and Humberton went on. But there was a change in his voice and manner. He was no longer having fun at the detective's expense. He was in earnest, and in a hurry.

"You and I must work together, Clyde," he said. "The time is short. We mustn't slip. I am convinced that if we bungle our hands, Cranston will die—in all probability at midnight, tonight. When I said that you would let Joe Bertini out of jail, I meant it. Now listen to me!"

CLYDE leaned forward, hands on knees. His blue eyes were bright. He nodded agreement, but did not speak.

"The Bertinis have been deviling Cranston with a spectral face—the face of the dead doctor—which appeared at his office window from time to time. I understand the source of that persecution. Since this never happened except on fine, dry nights, I think old Savoldi must have operated from the roof. But all that's unimportant. He did not break Cranston's nerve, if that was his object. So we can ignore it. Something else is important—the fact that Cranston has vanished on the anniversary of Doctor Bertini's execution. Add to that Joe Bertini's perfect alibi—he even called me up, as I believe, impersonating Cranston, to make that alibi tighter—add the burning of Savoldi's house at exactly the right moment to cover Cranston's disappearance—and can you doubt the desperate peril he is in?"

"I get you, Ho," Clyde said, quietly. Ted Spang rubbed his hands together. Not even the danger to the great surgeon, whom he liked and respected, could mar Ted's happy conviction that he would soon be in danger himself.

"Savoldi's house was not insured," Humberton went on. "He canceled the insurance a month ago. I dug that out

this afternoon, and also discovered that he owns another house in the city. I am somewhat of a gambler, Clyde." The lean necrologist smiled, but there was very little mirth in his smile. "I am gambling on the probability that a man doesn't deliberately burn a house he owns, and take a total loss, unless he is winding up his affairs—unless he is playing for final and complete revenge. And I am gambling on the chance—it seems to me a reasonable one—that Cranston is a prisoner in Savoldi's other house."

"Sounds good to me," Clyde cut in. "Shall I take a squad and raid it?"

"These men won't run from the police, Clyde. You might capture them—yes; but they would kill Cranston first. They intend to kill him, I suppose, at the hour of Doctor Bertini's execution. Yet they would surely anticipate that a little, rather than not kill him, at all. That's where Ted and I come in."

Ted was fidgeting in pleasurable excitement. But the detective slowly shook his head. "I don't like to dispute your judgment, Ho, but I think my boys can pull off a rough-and-tumble of this kind easier than you and Ted."

"No doubt. And you may find plenty of ways to prove that, before morning. But Ted and I, working by ourselves, have the best chance to rescue Cranston. Meanwhile, I have a job for you. It is connected with the escape of Joe Bertini from jail."

Clyde's start was barely perceptible. He was becoming hardened to Humberton's outrageous suggestion. He merely listened gravely as his friend continued.

"My reasoning may be all wrong. Cranston may be in an entirely different place. That's where you and your men come in." He pointed a lean forefinger at the detective. "Clyde, suppose yourself to be Joe Bertini. You have arranged—we'll suppose that, too—for

Cranston's murder, exactly at midnight. To your mind it will be more of an execution than a murder. Would you like to be present at the execution?"

"Sure."

"Of course you can't be present. You're in jail. But suppose that in some way you get out of jail—"

The detective nodded and grinned. "I thought you were crazy, Ho, but maybe not. Anyway, not more than usual. You want us to give Bertini an opportunity to escape in some way, so it'll look like a slip-up on our part. Then we're to tail him. You figure he'll hot-foot it to be in at Cranston's death. So if it should be you're wrong on the house, we'll have a fighting chance to spot the right place in time. O. K. I can fix it." He looked at his watch. "But I'll have to start fixing pronto. It's eleven o'clock."

"Come, Ted," Humberton said; and the driver jumped to his feet with a grin.

IN TWENTY minutes, Ted and his chief were in the heart of the poorer district back of the hospital; the older part of town, reminiscent of the past in its mud and narrow streets, lighted only at intersections, and even there not by arc lights but by bulbs on venerable iron lamp posts.

"The third house from the corner, on the opposite side," Humberton designated, in a guarded voice.

"Are we going to break in, sir?"

"We are!"

"Listen!" Ted edged up close, and spoke only a shade above a whisper. "I've heard this Joe Bertini has a bunch of tough mugs working for him—snow birds and dope hounds. Don't you think likely they'll be on the look-out for us? I mean if this really is where Cranston's tied up?"

"Very likely," Humberton agreed; and his senior driver laughed.

"That's all I want to know, sir. One good thing—they can't shoot straight in the dark. I'm a fair scrapper, if I do say so." He pressed close again, to offer a confidence. "I brought along a tool or two in my pocket. How about letting me jimmy a window? You can stick around here till I come back and tell you the door is open."

"I shall go with you," Humberton replied.

"Very good, sir." There was disappointment in Ted's voice. "Does it strike you it's awful quiet around here for this time of night—nobody on the streets, no lights in the houses?"

"I have noticed that."

"They're up to something, sir! The people in these dumps don't all turn in with the birds, this way. They've been tipped off to hit the quilt early tonight, and keep the wax in their ears. Suppose you let me take charge? I know these holes better than you do."

His chief agreed. Ted was a good leader in time of action.

With Humberton treading closely behind, they crossed the dark street and struck into a succession of back yards.

"Hope they haven't spotted us," Ted said presently, in a whisper. "If we're being followed, we might as well hire a band and march up to the front door."

"Ted," the necrologist began, solemnly.

"Yes, sir."

"I feel that I should tell you something." He laid a hand on the driver's shoulder. "I was careful not to let Clyde know the location of this house. I feared he might come with the police and spoil all our plans. It might have been certain death for Cranston."

"But you figure that Joe Bertini will lead him here, don't you?" Ted inquired.

"Suppose Bertini is too clever to do that?"

Ted was silent a moment. Then he laughed—a short laugh, with no sign of dismay in it. "I get you, sir. You figure that if we get into a jam, it might be nice to know the police were going to drop in, sooner or later. And you want me to understand that that mayn't happen. Don't let that bother you. If we can't come out on top by ourselves, we won't need any police. We'll need a couple of embalmers. I want to get my bearings, sir. Just wait here a minute, while I take a look around."

Left alone in the darkness, Humberton felt a trifle nervous. He was not naturally a man of action. Dark hulks loomed on all sides, against a sky scarcely less gloomy. They made him uneasy. Evidently the yard he was in abutted on its neighbor of the next street. But he could see no fence except the side one against which he leaned.

Soon, light footsteps told of Spang's return.

"The next house is the one we want, sir. I jimmied a window, then sneaked in and unbolted the back door. Shall we make a run for it?"

Humberton grasped the muscular arm beside him. "Am I mistaken, Ted, or is there a light upstairs?" he whispered.

"There is, sir. I didn't take time to scout around much. Suppose I go in again and find out about the light?"

"We'll go together."

Ted sighed, but said nothing. He stalked forward, warily. Close behind, Humberton tried to whip his senses into some foreknowledge of what might await them. All he succeeded in distinguishing, however, was a smell of garbage not far away, and the almost physical sensation of the pressing darkness around them.

Ted stopped, suddenly—listening. His head swung about. "Duck!" he cried.

The words were accompanied by a violent shove. Humberton sprawled on the ground. Above him something swished in the air. The next moment, a man, breathing heavily and cursing, fell across him.

"You would, would you?" It was Ted's fighting voice, keen and rasping. "How d'you like that one? Get your man, sir! Here come the others!"

THREE attackers—vague and menacing figures—closed in out of the darkness. Spang went down. The man who had fallen twisted around, and Humberton sensed a hand feeling for his throat. He lowered his chin, caught the hand between the rows of an excellent set of teeth, and bit, desperately.

Ted Spang was up again, with one of the others down. Humberton disengaged his jaws.

"Shoot, Ted!" he counseled, tersely.

"I've dropped my gun," was the panting rejoinder.

The necrologist's antagonist leveled a savage blow at him. Largely through accident, Humberton dodged, as he struggled to his feet. The launcher of the blow, overbalanced, crashed again.

"Nice work!" Ted Spang, stronger and far quicker than his attackers had reckoned, had left only one of them standing. "We'll make a fighter of you yet, sir! Here comes another one. This is getting good!"

Humberton's opponent remained down. The necrologist had time to glimpse another shadowy figure, closing in on his agile driver. The one with whom Ted had just been engaged was reeling crazily under the impact of a short-arm jab to the chin, delivered with marvelous precision.

Humberton rushed madly into the fray. Seizing one astonished rowdy by the collar from behind, he grasped the man's hair firmly, swung him around, then em-

ployed the first hand to annihilate his nose.

These extraordinary tactics kept that one of the attacking party out of the main argument. But the others seemed too many even for Ted. Though their yelps and oaths testified to the work he was doing among them, they bore him irresistibly down.

"I'll help you, Ted," the tall necrologist promised, calmly. He had poked a long finger into the eye of his own opponent, which perhaps was the most effective action he could have taken. It left him for the moment entirely free. He stood back to pick out an opening in the desperately seething pile, at the bottom of which was his plucky senior driver.

That opening did not appear. Instead, a strange condition developed in the pile of humanity. It seemed to sink in the middle. Fighting ceased for a second or two. The largest man, who had been active on top of the pile, flung himself free, and looked about, with a snarl. One of the others staggered to his feet.

"Ted! Where are you, Ted?"

Then Humberton saw. By some trick of his own, the driver had wriggled from under the fighting mass atop of him. The darkness making it difficult for the attackers to distinguish friends from foes, had aided his maneuver. Ted was now on his feet, too. With a lightning movement, he stooped. A small man who had just reached a standing position rose vertically and crashed a companion. They had not yet reached the ground before Ted had accorded another the same treatment.

Humberton considered himself a fair judge of Ted Spang's fighting skill. He had witnessed more than one exhibition of it, in occasional bouts among his driving staff, where the fast senior member always won with ease. But he watched now in sheer astonishment while the bat-

tle came to its swift end. In the darkness of the yard, most of the movement was vague. Spang seemed everywhere at once. He fought grimly, silently, and with disconcerting shiftiness. Two men remained on their feet; then the remaining one ducked suddenly aside, and ran.

"This is a funny bunch!" Humberton became aware that his senior driver, breathing hard, was standing beside him. "They don't want to shoot. Afraid of the chair, I guess. They just wanted to beat us up, so they seem to have come without guns. Am I a good scrapper, sir?"

"Ted, it was wonderful!" his chief declared, with frank conviction.

"It wasn't so bad, if I do say so, myself. I ought to go in for the prize ring, before I'm too old. What do you want done with them?"

Humberton looked about him. He was again his rather cold self, after the brief access of enthusiasm. Doubtless some of Ted's victims, having sufficiently recovered, had disappeared in the darkness. Two of them remained, however.

"You have your revolver, Ted?"

"Just found it, sir. It dropped on the ground while I was busy."

"Stand guard over these men. If the police come, have them take charge. I am going into the house."

"By yourself, sir?" Ted was worried.

But there was no worry in his chief's voice. "By myself, Ted," he replied. "Now this is over"—he waved a descriptive hand toward the scene of recent conflict—"I hope to find Cranston—and to find him unguarded."

CHAPTER FIVE

Prisoner of the Dead

IN SPITE of his rather awkward build, Humberton could tread lightly. The

uncarpeted stairs in the house he had just entered, leaving Ted below in the yard, were dark and narrow. They creaked. Yet he went up them steadily without using his flashlight, and with little noise.

At the foot of the straight flight he had switched on the electric ray for an instant—long enough to discover torn and dingy wall paper on each side. Halfway up he saw that the murky rectangle of yellow light marking the head of the stairs above him was an open door.

On the next step he stopped short. His ears, far keener than his near-sighted eyes, told him of a movement in the room above. But everything was still again. He climbed another step; and caught himself just in time. He had narrowly escaped falling backward from sheer horror.

From the darkness of the landing above—the blackness opposite the yellow rectangle of the doorway—the countenance of Doctor Bertini, who had died in the electric chair, looked down at him. A moment before it had not been there. For only an instant it remained, illumined by a strange, unnatural light of its own. Then it was gone.

Humberton caught the rickety stair rail with one hand. His throat was dry. He could feel the heavy pumping of his heart. As he reeled, the fingers of his other hand relaxed, and he dropped the flashlight. It struck the stair on which he stood, bumped down to the next one, and stopped rolling.

The slight shock brought back his self-control. He stooped, fumbled a moment, and recovered the flashlight. Then he pointed its beam up the stairs.

The face of the dead Doctor Bertini was still there, against the wall. Only the spectral light within it was gone. This time, he did not recoil at sight of it. He recognized the horrible thing for what it was. No wonder it had jolted Cran-

ston's nerves! He walked steadily up the remaining stairs, his light fixed on the motionless, livid mask at the top, and as he reached the upper landing snatched at it with all his strength.

Blackness descended on him. He fell backward into the room.

"Careful, my dear sir, careful!"

The words registered in his dazed brain, but he could not tell whence they came. He was conscious that the room in which he lay—and in which he suddenly found himself struggling to his feet—was plainly furnished. An electric lamp on a dresser glowed dimly. He had seen no evidence downstairs that the house was even wired. The lamp revealed a picture on the wall, a rag rug, a straight-backed chair.

"My mask was wired to the wall—my beautiful mask. Now you have spoiled it and received a shock. But what could you expect, since you insisted on clawing it loose? It was not wired to shock you, but only to heighten the artistic effect."

The farther end of the room—the street end which could not be seen from either stairs or landing—was occupied by a bed. A little old man—the old man of the court room—with his head of white hair, fluffy and silky like a powder-puff, was in the bed. He was fully clothed, but propped up with pillows. His dark eyes danced and sparkled. His right hand toyed with a revolver.

"Welcome, Mr. Humberton!" The round, compact face dimpled into a smile. "Perhaps you know who I am?"

Humberton had gained his feet, and was almost himself again. He peered keenly through his thick glasses at the little man.

"You are Anthony Savoldi, uncle of the Bertini brothers," he replied. "You are also a retired actor and an expert mask maker. It is your hobby."

"True! Very true!" The little man nodded, smugly. "I am glad that you appreciate me. If you assure me you have no revolver, Mr. Humberton, I will not annoy you by pointing this one at your stomach."

"I never carry a revolver," the necrologist replied.

"So I thought." Savoldi laid his weapon on the coverlet, within easy reach of his right hand. "Now, I must make a request. It pains me to do so. First, you will observe the cabinet that is built into this room, just to your right?"

HUMBERTON looked curiously at the structure beside him. That part of the room was partitioned off from the rest. The partition, extending from floor to ceiling, turned at right angles to form a cabinet, and met the outer wall near a window which overlooked the yard. A chair was backed snugly against the partition. He peered closer, through his thick lenses. Something shiny lay on the seat of the chair—something connected to the partition with chains.

The little man smiled benevolently at Humberton's examination of the cabinet.

"Your eyes do not deceive you, Mr. Humberton," he said. "Those are handcuffs. Left to my own wishes, I should hesitate to have you sit in that chair and snap the cuffs on your own wrists. But what is one to do when he is under orders? You will oblige?"

Humberton eyed the old man thoughtfully. "Suppose I refuse?"

"You must not refuse! My orders are clear—and very painful. If you will not sit in that chair, I am to shoot you."

"As you shot Cranston!"

Having said that, he watched Savoldi's face closely; but there was only the child-like smile, accompanied by a shake of the plump old head.

"Indeed, no! Doctor Cranston is not

dead, I assure you. Sit in that chair and adjust the handcuffs. Then I promise that you will see him before long."

Humberton calculated the chances of a successful leap to secure the revolver. But he decided against it. The old man on the bed, with his dancing, alert eyes, might be waiting for just such an attempt. He made up his mind suddenly and sat down in the chair.

"That is better." The old man nodded—the sly, approving nod of an aged Puck. "You will find the chains attached to the cuffs quite long. They will enable you to watch. Now the left cuff, please. I am far from well. It may be that you have saved my life as well as your own by doing this without violence."

All the while, Humberton was studying his odd captor. He had learned a good deal about Savoldi's career, but had never before come face to face with the man. The purple tinge in his ruddy countenance, his evident shortness of breath, were significant. Whatever he might have been in recent months, he was an invalid just now. But he was an invalid with a revolver.

The old man lifted his pudgy left hand. It trembled a little as he pointed a finger at Humberton. "Your ears, Mr. Humberton! Open your ears! They will give you news of your friend, Doctor Cranston. Listen now. Tell me what you hear."

Humberton obeyed. Having listened for a few moments, he let his gaze wander slowly about the room. "I hear the ticking of a clock, but I see no clock," he said.

"Capital!" The old man's smile conveyed warm approval. "From all the sounds you might have heard, you pick the one which really matters. Though you see no clock, I assure you there is a clock. Soon it will be visible. Visible or not, its ticking is the most important

noise you shall hear tonight. The doctor is alive now—alive, and, I think, fairly well. When that ticking stops he will not be alive!”

If Humberton's face grew a trifle paler, that was his only sign of emotion. “I understand,” he said. “Well—I am ready.”

“You think I refer to an infernal machine? You expect to be blown up? You think, possibly, I will leave in time to save my own life?”

“I don't care whether you do or not.”

The little old man chuckled, and stroked his silky white hair, as if taking time to enjoy fully some very good joke. “Why should you care?” he asked, at length. “What am I to you? But I must correct your impression. You and I are safe from that infernal machine, as you think it. But the doctor—”

He stopped. There was a step on the stair, and Humberton turned. Joe Bertini swaggered into the room, smiling broadly. At sight of the captive necrologist, the smile changed into a laugh, and he saluted the old man on the bed with a flourish of his neatly manicured hand.

“Nice work, Uncle! Artistic. Mr. Humberton, in case you should not recognize me, I am a gentleman who has just been released from jail. Quite by accident, you understand!” He stood with feet far apart, looking down at the manacles which Humberton wore. “If I take a key from the bunch my uncle carries—if I unlock your handcuffs—it is the same kind of accident. You expect maybe I lead the police to this house? That was your idea?”

Humberton hesitated, then said: “It was.”

“A good idea! The execution of it—unfortunately for you—not so good. Our official friends are crude, as usual. They hunt for me now in another part

of town—the part of town where I gave them the slip!”

Humberton looked into the triumphant, black eyes. Though the lips were smiling, those eyes were not. They were hard and cold as ebony. “Where is Doctor Cranston?” he demanded, abruptly.

Joe Bertini's smile faded. His mouth set. “Your watch, Uncle,” he said. “What time by your watch?”

Then his glance fell on his uncle's wrist watch, and he answered his own question. “Twenty-three minutes to twelve! You will be shocked to learn this, Mr. Humberton. Your friend — Doctor Cranston — he has exactly twenty-three minutes to live. Uncle, there is something our guest should listen to. It will help to pass the time for him.”

“He has heard the ticking,” the old man put in, quietly.

“That is well. That is very well. You are a philosopher, Mr. Humberton. You notice that ticking. You weigh it in your mind. No doubt you understand then that my imprisonment is unimportant. Clyde can arrest me. He can take from me the pleasure of witnessing my revenge. But all the while the clock is ticking away. When it ticks midnight, your Doctor Cranston dies.”

“I think not,” Humberton retorted.

He said the words on a chance. They might bring out the true situation sooner than a direct appeal. He needed to know the truth, to know it at once, if by any possibility he was to save Cranston. As he had hoped, Joe Bertini took up the challenge.

“You ‘think not?’ You laugh at my plans?” The hard black eyes shone with resentment. “You sit here handcuffed and helpless, yet you say that? You are a fool, Humberton! In a moment I will show you how big a fool. But first let me tell you how my uncle—and he is an old man—made a fool out of your Doc-

tor Cranston. Fools! Fools! You are all fools!" He waved his hand toward the inscrutably smiling old actor on the bed. "There he sits—my uncle. You think he is an old man. This morning, when he totters to your Doctor Cranston's door—and his plans have cleared the way so that he could make that visit without being seen—he is an old woman. Poor old woman! Her little grand-daughter has swallowed a bone. She is choking to death. Unless the good Doctor Cranston comes instantly, she will die! And when he comes" — the speaker laughed, silently—"he is knocked on the head from behind."

"You should be very proud of that!" Humberton said, ironically; but the irony failed. If Joe Bertini recognized it at all, he gave no sign. He stepped over to the cabinet, and with his hand on a brass knob on its side, bowed, as if to acknowledge a compliment.

"I *am* proud!" he said. "My uncle and I, we are both proud! But I am prouder of this—my instrument of justice. One of my good men, who is skilled in such matters, makes it for me. Look!"

With the gesture of a showman, he turned the knob and tugged at it. The entire side of the cabinet swung away. Its interior came into view. There was the ticking clock—a little alarm clock hung near the hinges of the movable section. Strangely enough, it was the first thing Humberton saw. It caught his near-sighted eyes and held them for a moment. They dropped then, and he saw Cranston.

THE gaunt doctor sat in a chair. His coat was removed, his collar open at the neck. He was gagged. Above his head, and fitting tightly upon it, a convex metal plate reflected the light. His bare wrists were strapped to the arms of the chair. One trouser leg, slashed to

the knee, disclosed the white flesh, and revealed something bound to the leg—something which also flashed back the light with the gleam of polished metal.

"Notice the wiring?" Bertini asked, softly.

Humberton turned slowly. His muscles shivered, though the room was very warm. He looked into the mocking face, with its precise little mustache and hard eyes. "You can't do this!" he said.

"No?" Joe Bertini walked jauntily to the bed and glanced again at his uncle's watch. "Seventeen minutes! You have seen the official chair, no doubt. This one is quite like it. And just as deadly, I assure you."

"Bertini!" Humberton forced himself to speak calmly. He might have been discussing some late development of his art in the book-cluttered study at the parlors. "You are a civilized man. You are on the wrong side of the law—so are many others. Perhaps you don't stop at murder, when it is necessary. But this isn't necessary. You gain nothing by it. On the contrary, you are sure to lose everything. It is not merely murder—it is insanity."

Bertini shrugged his shoulders, smiled, glanced once more at the watch before he spoke. "That might be debated," he said. "My brother he awaits death five months. The end of this man—who brings my brother to death—it is merciful. He is not kept waiting even one day. Does it make any difference whether a paid executioner or a clock throws the switch?"

"Then take me. Kill me, instead. He's a man the world needs. I'm not. He—"

"Save your breath!" Bertini shouted, contemptuously. "I may decide to kill you, too."

Humberton had been thinking rapidly. The chain which held his handcuffs was long—long enough to permit him to stand, as he was now doing, where he could see

the gagged and silent yet living figure of his friend in the death chair. The window at the farthest side of the arm chair in which he himself had been sitting overlooked the yard.

He leaped suddenly to the other side of that chair. His manacled hands crashed through the glass.

"Ted!" he shouted.

That would be enough. The intelligent driver would hear, and at least partly understand. He fell back into the room. One hand was bleeding. He expected a bullet.

But Josef Bertini made no move toward the revolver which lay beside his uncle on the bed. Instead, he laughed and walked out of the doorway to the landing. He called something down the stairs.

"For a philosopher you are too impulsive, Mr. Humberton," he said, returning. "You should have told me what it is you have in mind. Then your hand would not be cut. Listen!"

SHUFFLING footsteps were coming up the stairs. They reached the landing. Two men walked heavily into the room, carrying between them the unconscious figure of Ted Spang.

"Lay him on the bed and go, men. At the far side. He won't trouble you, Uncle. You see, Mr. Humberton"—he grinned ironically, as the necrologist slowly struggled to his feet—"I make a little investigation before coming up. Your man is standing guard over some of my good fellows. So I tap him on the head from behind. It will not be fatal. And you needn't take my threat against you seriously. I intend to kill only one man—Cranston. Now, in how many minutes, Uncle?"

The old actor did not answer. His face was heavy with emotion. Slowly he forced himself to a sitting position beside the unconscious Spang, his gaze fixed tragically on his nephew.

"Josef!" he gasped.

"Eh? What is it, Uncle?" Bertini frowned at the interruption.

The old man's breath came in gasps. A spasm of pain twisted his round face. "I die tonight, Josef. I can stand no more. But I plead with you. It is my dying breath." He pointed at the rigid figure in the chair. "He has suffered enough. He cannot suffer beyond that, whatever you do to him. You have had your revenge. So there is no need—"

"You ask me to let him go?" The words were like a blow in the old man's face.

"It is the last"—Savoldi sank back, at first slowly, then with a thud—"the last I shall ever—" He was silent, but his features still worked.

Joe Bertini looked down at him. "You do not die, Uncle," he said. "You are only excited. Let me take your watch."

He coolly detached it from the quivering wrist, gazed searchingly a moment at Ted Spang, and walked back to the middle of the room. There he stood directly in front of the death chair. The doctor's dark eyes, which had been shut, opened. Bertini laughed.

"Know how long you have, Cranston? Three minutes! How does it feel to die in the chair? You shouldn't mind it. You make my brother die in it."

He held up the watch. "Two minutes! You hear that clock tick—the one in front of your face? It ticks away your life. It is correct to the second. I hold this watch on it. When they say midnight, you die. One minute!" He pointed at the clock. "Watch that? Watch the hands!"

He was silent. His gaze traveled slowly from his watch to the clock, thence to the face of the man in the chair. When he spoke again he was finding it hard to keep his voice under control.

"Ten seconds, Cranston!"

He whispered it, and his eyes gleamed.

"Five seconds, Cranston!"

"No!" Humberton shouted the syllable, and threw all his strength into a lunge against the power of the chain. It creaked, but held. Bertini laughed, hysterically.

"Three seconds!" he screamed. "You can't save him, Humberton! You can't save him! Now!"

The clock clicked, in the sudden stillness. A low, musical hum filled the room.

The body of the doctor stiffened, as if it were about to burst the straps. Then it fell back, limp. The head dropped sharply on the chest. Horatio Humberton hid his face.

Josef Bertini backed away from the chair, his eyes fixed on it in fascination. His finger, aimed to point at the sagging figure, wavered in a circle. He laughed, wildly. As if on a sudden afterthought, he staggered toward the death instrument, to turn the current off.

He never reached it. A deafening roar stopped him. His mad laughter changed to frantic coughing. He crumpled to the floor.

TED SPANG slid from the bed, a smoking revolver in his hand. For a moment he stood looking down at Bertini. He swayed, recovered himself, turned toward Humberton. The sight of his chief seemed to steady him. He tossed the gun to the bed.

"I guess it's curtains for Bertini," he remarked. "All because he was too good a salesman. He sold me on what he was doing in spite of all I know. So I plugged him. I hadn't been conscious more than a minute or so. Probably I was cuckoo." He chuckled. "Cuckoo or not, that was a well placed slug!"

Humberton could only stare. His first paroxysm had passed, but he was dazed.

The driver searched for the switch beside the chair and reversed it. The humming stopped. Then he placed his hand against Doctor Cranston's body. In a moment he nodded, with a satisfied sigh.

"He had me worried. His heart might have been weak, you know. But he's all right—only in a faint. I'll get the key to the handcuffs out of the old boy's pants, if it's there, then we can both work on the doctor."

Still Humberton said nothing. Ted Spang, becoming more his normal self each moment, grinned at him.

"Guess I'd better wise you up, sir," he said, while his fingers were busy with the old man's clothes. "Here's the keys. Let's find out whether one of them fits your bracelets. You see, one of the birds you put me to guard was the fellow who rigged up this electric chair for Joe Bertini. He got quite chummy, down there in the yard. Told me all about it. He wasn't a bad guy, at that. This key is the one, sir. Now I'll rub your wrists a little—those cuffs were tight. Well, this fellow didn't want to wire up a real electric chair for Bertini or anyone else. He wasn't that kind of a guy. So he fixed it to make the current hum without going through anything but the wires. It's a sort of short circuit, sir, the way I understand. That chair is as safe as my grandmother's. I knew that, but the tap on the head must have got me muddled. Anyhow, I forgot long enough to drill Joe Bertini when he got dramatic. Maybe it's just as well. Now there's two down."

"Two?" echoed Humberton. His voice sounded stiff and strange to his own ears.

"Joe Bertini and this one on the bed, sir. I guess the old boy passed out along about midnight. Only he ain't in a faint. His heart *was* weak."

Between the Lines

DID you ever read a detective story in which the mystery and horror were beautifully handled? In which murder followed murder with all the speed and excitement you could possibly wish for? In which the detective hero was a model of all that a detective hero should be—courageous, intelligent and all the rest?

And just as you were beginning to say to yourself, "Boy, oh boy, what a swell yarn this is going to be!" did you ever have the whole thing fall completely flat on you because the author didn't take you completely into his confidence? Because he let his detective

have access to information and clues which he concealed from the reader until the last minute, only to spring them then as a complete surprise?

It's happened to us. And made us awfully mad. That's one reason why you'll find nothing implied or concealed between the lines in the thrill specials we give you issue after issue in DIME DETECTIVE. That is—not if we can help it. For we are firm believers in the policy that a detective-story fan should have everything to work with just as soon as the detective himself has it. Half the fun, we believe, in reading detective and mystery yarns, is the chance it gives us to put ourselves

in the detective's place, reason the crime out along with him and see if we can't get to the solution as quickly or sooner than he does himself.

However, even with everything down in black and white as we like it to be we often find that we've missed something that was right there under our noses the

whole time. Has that ever happened to you? And does it rile you to find that such was the case as much as it does us?

Just how carefully do you read? Detective-story fans ought to be a pretty alert-minded bunch of readers. See if you qualify. In the center of this page are

a few questions you can take a whack at just for your own amusement. You ought to do well on them for the answers are all in this issue and if you've read the yarns— But of course you have!

So jot down your score when you've checked over the list and see where you really stand. Are you one of these people who miss details? Or are you quick to catch things the first time? If you're in the latter group you have one of the paramount qualities for making a good detective yourself.

How about it?

- 1. What character in what story got his nickname from what went on his feet? And why?**
- 2. What was Naomi Putnam wearing when she died?**
- 3. Who always pronounced "joke" as "zhoke"? What was his nationality?**
- 4. Who wore a cap for the first time in this issue? What did he usually wear?**
- 5. Name two night clubs in which action occurs in stories in this issue.**
- 6. What did Cardigan put in an envelope to use as clues?**
- 7. What did the sign on Big Jim Malloy's office door say?**
- 8. Who spent his boyhood in Cor-sica?**

MEET THE SPIDER!



The Underworld, organized into one compact army of crime, declares a new and ghastly sort of war on city and nation, in—

THE SERPENT OF DESTRUCTION

A Spider Novel That Will Keep You Up All Night!

No crime was too big or too little for the Sons of the Serpent to tackle. No man was safe in the city streets—and no woman could be left long alone in her own home! Honest police officials were killed or framed; honest business men found their businesses taken boldly from them; thousands died from the swift spread of a new and deadly traffic; and the insane asylums, becoming hot-beds of misery under the new order, were filled with those poor unfortunates cursed by the new madness! With Kirkpatrick falsely indicted for accepting a bribe, with Nita herself in the coils of the Serpent, the SPIDER is left to battle alone against the most vicious collection of criminals and degenerate killers that were ever assembled under one dark banner!

How does the SPIDER, grieving for Nita, meet this new peril?

How can one man, working alone, succeed where thousands have tried and failed?

What new weapon can he use that will once more inject the revolting criminal world with its old-time terror of the SPIDER?

Read how he does these things in the April Issue of—

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AMERICA'S UNDERCOVER ACE

Health! Strength! Muscles!

Complete Home Gym in One Outfit..

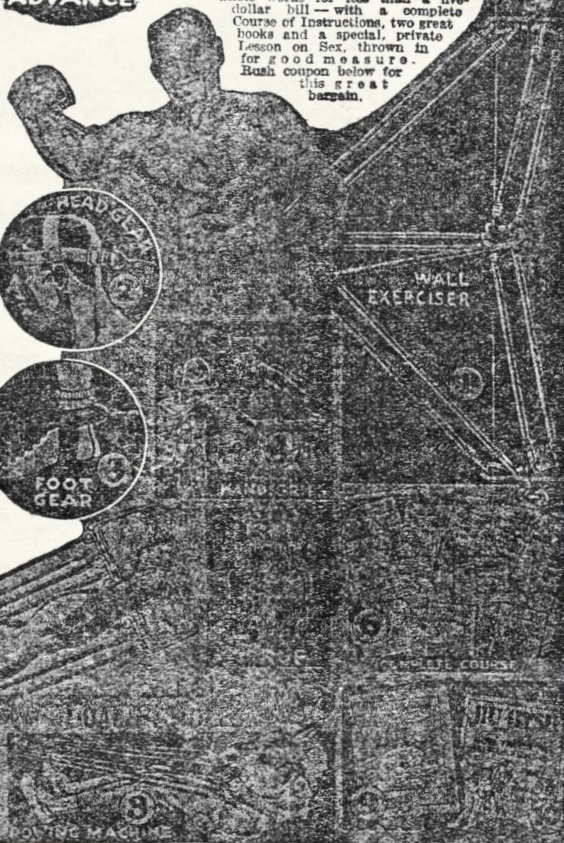
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SEND NO MONEY**

Send Name and Address. Big air-cooled movie, adjustable lamp socket, rewind and take up wheels. Uses big film, includes: 7-foot cord, show bills, tickets, metal slide and still pictures, U-Draw em slide novelty, film and instructions. **SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. We are reliable—Our 38th year. Be first. Write for dozen **SALVE** or **MAIL COUPON NOW**.

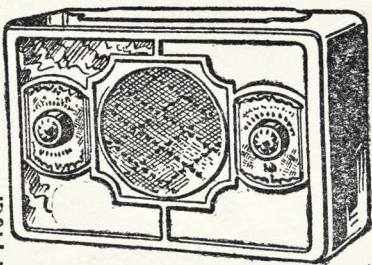


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Commissions**

SEND NO MONEY

Send Name and Address. Operates on either AC or DC, picks up police calls and regular broadcasts. Wonderful selectivity and sensitivity, fine tone, compact. Four tubes, high quality speaker included. Shielded chassis and 25 ft. antenna. It's unusual. **SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art picture, suitable for framing, with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. We are reliable—Our 38th year. Be first. Write for dozen **SALVE** or **MAIL COUPON NOW**. **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.**



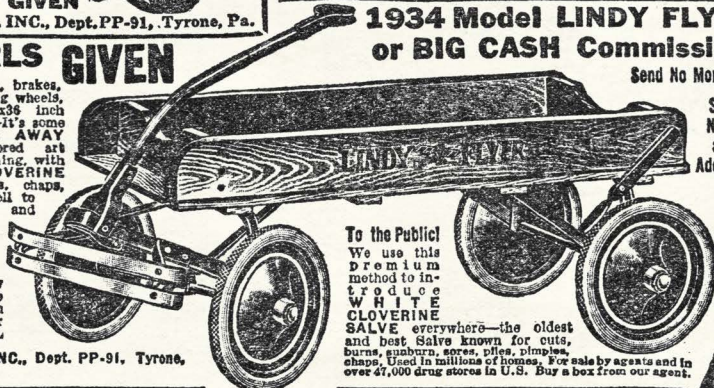
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Holds 12 22-cal. shells, good sights, walnut finish. It's great! **SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box, and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other choice Rifles, premiums or spending money. We are reliable—Our 38th year. Be first. Write for dozen **SALVE** or **MAIL COUPON NOW**. **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.**

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Just Look! Real bumpers, brakes, 10-inch disc roller bearing wheels, large balloon tires, 16x38 inch hardwood or metal body—it's some wagon! **SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other choice wagons, premiums or spending money. Old Cloverine agents please order. New agents wanted too. We are reliable—Our 38th year—Be first—Write for dozen **SALVE** or **MAIL COUPON NOW**. **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.**

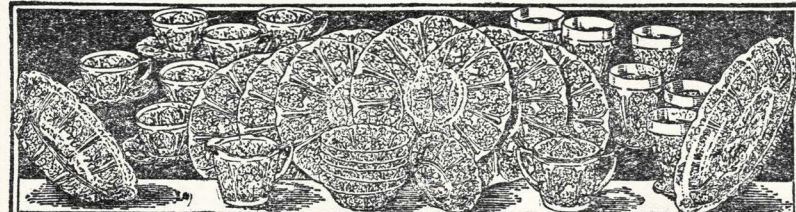


**1934 Model LINDY FLYER
or BIG CASH Commission**

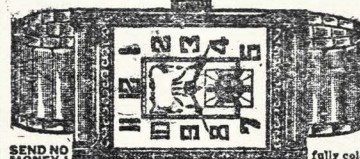
Send No Money

Send Name and Address

To the Public
We use this premium method to introduce **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** everywhere—the oldest and best Salve known for cuts, burns, sunburn, sores, piles, pimples, chaps. Used in millions of homes. For sale by agents and in over 47,000 drug stores in U.S. Buy a box from our agent.



Send Name and Address.—Latest Cherry Blossom design, first quality and modern—green or pink colors. Extremely beautiful **SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other choice sets, premiums or spending money. We are reliable—Our 38th year—Be first. Write for dozen **SALVE** or **MAIL COUPON NOW**. **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.**



**BOYS, LADIES, GIRLS
Wrist Watch
or BIG CASH Commission
GIVEN**

Send Name and Address. Latest white carved case, adjustable bracelet, jewel lever movement, radiant dial. It's gorgeous! **SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE** beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other watches, premiums or spending money. We are reliable—Our 38th year—Be first. Write for dozen **SALVE** or **MAIL COUPON NOW**. **WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.**

==== CUT OUT AND MAIL TODAY ====

Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. PP-91, Tyrone, Pa.

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures with 12 boxes **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** to sell at 25c a box (giving picture) **FREE**. I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per new premium plan book sent with order, postage paid.

Name _____
R.F.D. _____
St. or Box No. _____
TOWN _____ STATE _____
(Print last name in blocks below) Date _____

GIVEN

**LADIES!
34-Pc. GLASS Set or
BIG CASH Commission
GIVEN
SEND NO MONEY**

Try Wilson's Honey Horehound Menthol Cough Drops, 5c Everywhere

CALIFORNIA REDWOOD BURLS

This Burl is a growth of the famous CALIFORNIA GIANT REDWOOD TREE and when removed from the tree and placed in a bowl, in about one-half inch of water, it starts growing and sends forth the BEAUTIFUL REDWOOD TREE FOLIAGE and brings the FRAGRANCE OF THE WOODS into your home. Changing the water once a week and being careful they do not dry out is all the attention they need. You will enjoy watching them grow. As a house plant they have no equal. They are extremely hardy and will grow for years anywhere. They do not need any sun. The one illustrated is two years old.

The Burls are graded and sold according to size and thickness. The smallest size is about 2 inches long, weighs about 4 ounces and sells for 25c. The next size sells for 50c and is somewhat larger and thicker. The next size is still larger and sells for \$1.00. The Largest size at \$1.50 is quite thick and heavy, is 6 to 8 inches long by about 5 inches thick and averages about 2 pounds in weight. We cannot give exact measurements as no two are exactly alike in size or shape. Shipped prepaid. Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 744 Racine, Wis.

A Very Charming Horticultural Novelty



25c
50c
\$1.00
\$1.50

Will grow for years.
PLACE IT IN WATER—WATCH IT GROW

MAKE YOUR OWN RADIO



RADIO SETS* shows how to construct and operate inexpensive Radio Sets; the materials for which can be purchased for a mere trifle. Also tells how to construct a short-wave Receiver for bringing in foreign stations; police calls, ships at sea, etc. Only 15c postpaid.

GREAT CURIOSITY

Smallest Bible in the World. Size of a postage stamp. 200 Pages. Said to bring good luck to the owner. A genuine work of art. Must be seen to be appreciated. Make good money selling them to friends, church, acquaintances, etc. PRICE 15c each, 3 for 40c, 12 for \$2.50, 100 for \$7.50. Also leather-bound sets. Leather Bindings, with gold edges. Price 50c each, 3 for \$1.25, \$4.50 per doz. Magnifying glasses for use with Microscopia 15c.

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Box contains 12 sets. When lit with a match, each one gradually hatches itself into a snake several feet long, which curls and writhes about in a snake-like manner. Price per box, 10c postpaid, 3 for 25c.

STAGE MONEY

With a bunch of these bills, it is easy for each person of limited means to appear prosperous by flashing a roll of these bills at the proper time and peeling off a genuine bill or two from the outside of the roll, the effect created will be found to be all that can be desired. Prices, postpaid: 40 Bills 25c, 120 for 50c, or \$3.50 thousand postpaid.

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The Solo Solo Flute, or Harmonica, is a unique and novel musical instrument that is played with nose and mouth combined. There is just a little knack in playing this Solo Solo Flute, which can be acquired after a little practice, will enable you to produce very sweet music that somewhat resembles a flute. They are so fingering, and once you have mastered it you can play all kinds of music with facility and ease.

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More fun than fighting with your wife. Look like ordinary matches. As the victim tries to light one he gets quite a surprise. Price 10c per box, 3 boxes for 25c, 12 for 75 cents.

STAR TOY MAKER

Greatest boys' book written. Tells how to make a Pinhole Camera, a Cento model Railroad, a Teletype, a Phonograph, a Telephone, a Radio, a Kite, a Talking Machine, a Microscope, a Electric Motor, Electric Door Bell, Dog Sleigh, Racine House, Rabbit Yard, etc. 64 pages, 150 illustrations. PRICE 10c.

BOYS' OWN TOYMAKER

Tells how to make chemical toys, electrical toys, carnival toys, paper toys, cardboard toys, boats, traps, etc. 400 illustrations. Price 25c postpaid.

FUN WITH MAGNETISM—60 novel and unique experiments in MAGNETISM that you can perform with the aid of an ordinary magnet, magnet chain, fishing and spinning reels, ball and ball cluster, magnetic fish, etc. Also interesting information about lodestones, magnetism, electricity, etc. PRICE 10c postpaid.

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A new easy self-teaching method. Teaches how to play, how to use the tongue, tremolo, fully illustrated. Price 15c postpaid.

MONEY MAKING SECRETS. Golden opportunities for everyone. 64 pages copyrighted book chock full of money-making ideas, recipes, formulas, wrinkles, trade secrets, etc. Business can be started with little or no capital at home in spare time. 10c postpaid.

TRICKS & SOCIAL ENTERTAINMENT. Contains hundreds of interesting and amusing versions that anyone can do. Also explains secret of second sight. Price 25c postpaid.

WONDERFUL X-RAY TUBE

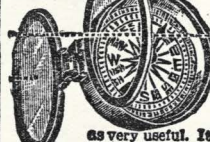
A wonderful little instrument producing optical illusions both surprising and startling. With it you can see what is apparently the bones of your fingers, the lead in a lead pencil, the ink in a pen, etc. and many other similar illusions. Price 10c, 3 for 25c.

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Used by police officers, detectives, sheriffs, night watchmen and others as a means of self-protection. Very effective. Easily fits the hand, the fingers being grasped in the four holes. Very useful in an emergency. Made of aluminum they are very light, weighing less than 2 ounces. Handy pocket size always ready for instant use. Price 25c ea., 2 for 45c postpaid. 710 page Catalog 10c.

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An Electric Motor for Only 10 cents. Sounds almost unbelievable, but it perfectly true. For Only 10 cents you need you all the parts necessary for assembling a full-plated and illustrated directions for assembling. No trouble at all putting it together in fact it is FUN. Just follow a few simple instructions and in a few minutes the motor is ready to run. Price postpaid, 10c.

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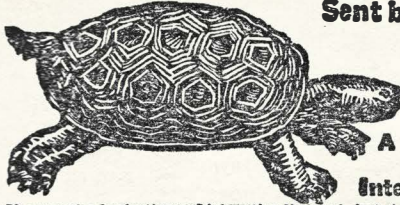
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Address orders for all goods on above and on following page to **JOHNSON SMITH & CO., Dept. 744, Racine, Wis.**

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A Fascinating and Interesting Pet

If you want a fascinating and interesting little pet, just risk a quarter and we will send you a real live PET TURTLE by mail postpaid to any part of the U.S.A. Now all the rage. Thousands upon thousands of these Turtles were sold at the World's Fair in Chicago. No trouble at all to keep. Just give it a little lettuce or cabbage or let it seek its own food. They are extremely gentle, easily kept and live for years and years. Needs less attention than any other pet. Get one or two. Study their habits. You will find them intensely interesting. ONLY 25c each sent by mail. Safe, live delivery guaranteed.

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A private Electric Telegraph Set of your own for 15c. Lots of fun sending messages to your friends. Better still get two sets, hook them up as shown in the directions, for TWO-WAY MESSAGES (sending and receiving). No trouble at all to operate with the simple instructions that accompany each set. Operates on any standard dry battery obtainable everywhere. With this outfit you can learn to transmit and receive messages by the Morse International Code, and in a very short time become an expert operator. Mounted on wooden base measuring 4 x 3 in., first class construction throughout. Complete with key, sounder, magnet, miniature Western Union blanks, packed in neat box with full illustrated instructions — ALL FOR 15c (without battery) postpaid (Canada and Foreign 20c.)

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Add 10c for 64 page book all about electricity written especially for boys. Tells how to make batteries, dynamos, motors, radios, telegraph apparatus, telephones, lights, electric bells, alarms, etc. Price 10c postpaid.

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NEW VAMPING CARD

NO TEACHER NEEDED—SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE SYSTEM Persons having neglected their Musical Education need not despair, for with the aid of our new VAMPING CARD (placing the card upright over the piano keys), you can Vamp away to thousands of Songs, Ballads, Waltzes, Rag Time, etc., etc. No knowledge of music is required. After using it a few times, you will be able to dispense with the aid of the Vamping Card entirely. The price of this very clever invention is only 15c postpaid.

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326 Jokes and Riddles, 26 Magic Tricks, 10 Parlor Games, 73 Poets, 13 Fairy Tales, 106 Money-making Secrets, 22 Monologues, 21 Puzzles and Problems, 5 Comic Recitations, 10 Funny Readings, 11 Parlor Pastimes, 13 Flirtations, 110 Girls and Boys Names and their Meanings, 10 Picture Puzzles, 69 Amusing Rhymes, 37 Amusing Experiments, Deaf and Dumb Alphabet, Shadowgraphy, Gypsy Fortune Teller, How to tell Fortunes with Cards, Dice, Dominoes, Crystal, Coffee Cup, etc., Hypnotism, Ventriloquism, Cut-outs for Checkers and Chess, Dominoes, Fox and Goose, 9 Men Morris, Spanish Prison Puzzle, Game of Anagrams, 26 Card Tricks, Crystal Gazing etc. ALL FOR 15 CENTS POSTPAID. Mammoth 770 page Catalog of novelties, jokes, tricks, puzzles, etc., 10 cents.



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REVOLVER STYLE
25c
50c
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MADE IN 3 SIZES

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Here is a very great novelty in Rings, that is selling in thousands. It is a nicely made ring, finished in imitation platinum, and set with a large imitation diamond. It looks just like an ordinary ring, but in the shank of the ring is a small microscopic picture almost invisible to the naked eye, yet is magnified to an almost incredible degree and with astonishing clearness. There is quite an assortment of pictures that should suit all tastes. Some are pictures of bathing girl beauties, pretty French Actresses, etc., others are views of places of interest in France, Panama Canal and elsewhere; others show the Lord's Prayer in type, every word of which can be read by persons with normal eyesight. They are interesting without being in any way objectionable. PRICE 25c, 3 for 55c, or \$2.25 per doz. postpaid. 770 page Catalog 10c.



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Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun fooling teacher, policeman or friends.

THE VENTRILO

a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it. Never fails. A 16-page course on Ventriloquism together with the Ventrilo. All for 10c postpaid.

PISTOL CIGARETTE CASE

It looks like a deadly weapon, but it is merely a novel Cigarette Case. This clever contrivance has proved itself better than the real thing in many an awkward encounter. Great fun "sticking up" your friends. They squirm and protest it might be loaded. Full the trigger and the slide flies open disclosing the cigarettes. Well made, light and compact. Weight only 2 ounces.

PRICE POSTPAID 25c

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An amusing and entertaining novelty. Hold it over a hand and it is supposed to describe a complete and continuous circle. Hold it over a man's hand and watch it move back and forth like a pendulum. We have made innumerable tests, and while we have never been able to figure out how it's done, we have never seen it fail. Many novel and interesting experiments may be performed with it. Try it for testing the sex of animals, cats, dogs, rabbits, butterflies, etc. Sold as a patent sex tester in Europe. PRICE 10c, 3 for 25c, 75c per doz. p.p.

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With 75 illustrations for Making Batteries, Dynamos, Motors, Telegraph apparatus, Alarms, Coils, "Wireless" Current Reverser, Electric Engine, Radio, etc. By electrical experts so that anyone can understand it. 64 pages. PRICE ONLY 10 CENTS POSTPAID.

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Pitch the Fade-a-way, Splitter, Knuckler, Smoke Ball, etc. Lessons by leading Big League Pitchers. Clearly illustrated and described with 56 pictures. 25c. JOHNSON SMITH & CO., DEPT. 744, RACINE, WISCONSIN

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 Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the job!
 Running down dangerous Counterfeit Gang. Tell-
 tale finger prints in murdered girl's room.
Free
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Quick Relief, or You Only Pay When Satisfied.
 If you suffer from High Blood Pressure, dizziness, ring-
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 paralytic stroke, to demonstrate Dr. Hayes' prescription
 we will send you postpaid, a regular \$1 treatment on absolutely
FREE TRIAL. While it is non-specific, many cases report remark-
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 within 3 days. Contains no salts, opiates or dope. Safe
 with any diet. **PAY NOTHING UNLESS GREATLY IMPROVED.**
 Then send \$1. If not your report cancels the charge. Write Dr.
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If you are denied the blessing of a baby all your own and yearn
 for a baby's arms and a baby's smile do not give up hope. Just
 write in confidence to Mrs. Mildred Owens, 1635 Coates House,
 Kansas City, Mo., and she will tell you about a simple home
 method that helped her after being denied 15 years. Many others
 say this has helped bless their lives. Write now and try for this
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