

SEPTEMBER

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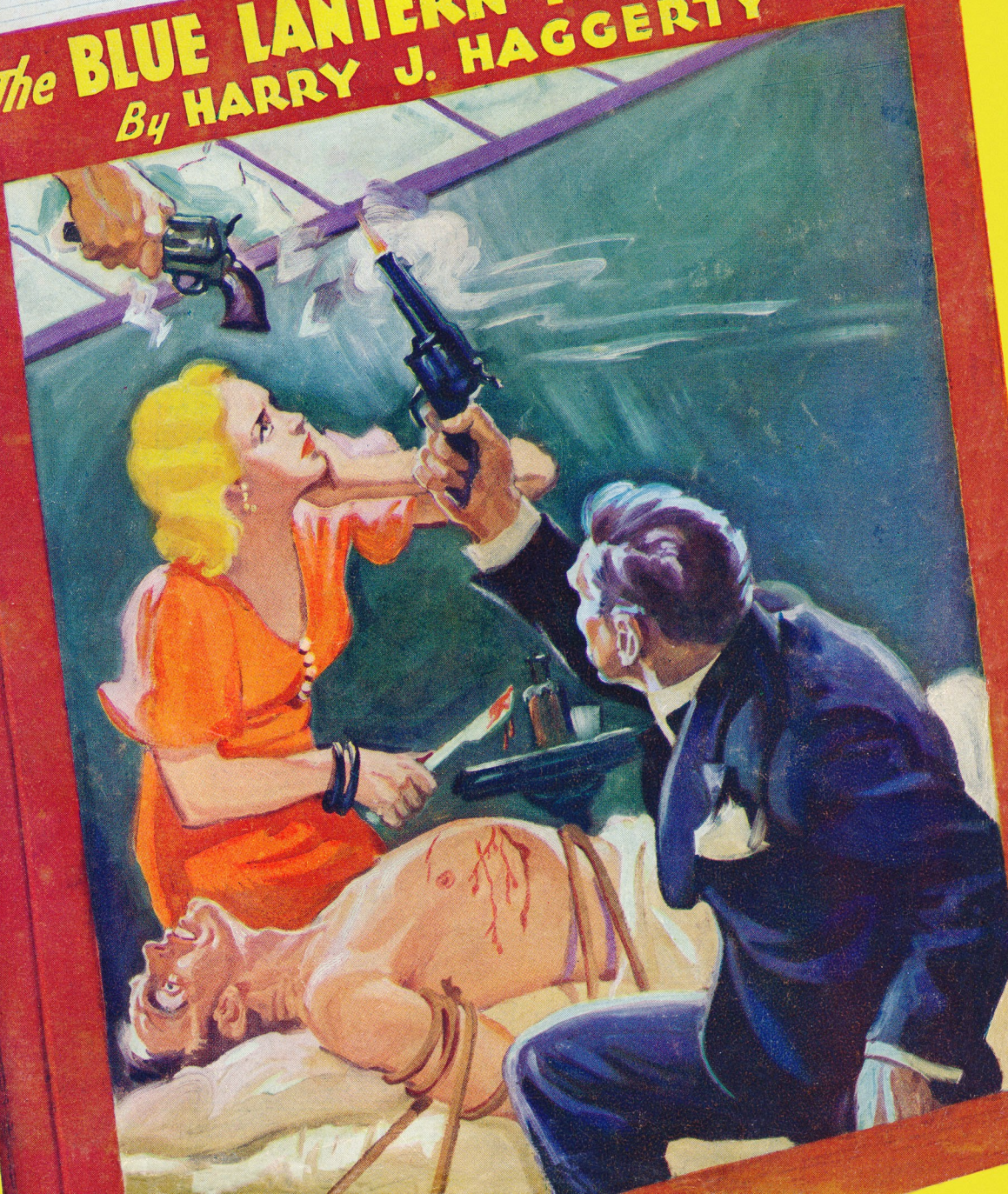
DIME

SEPTEMBER

MYSTERY

Magazine

The BLUE LANTERN MURDERER
By HARRY J. HAGGERTY



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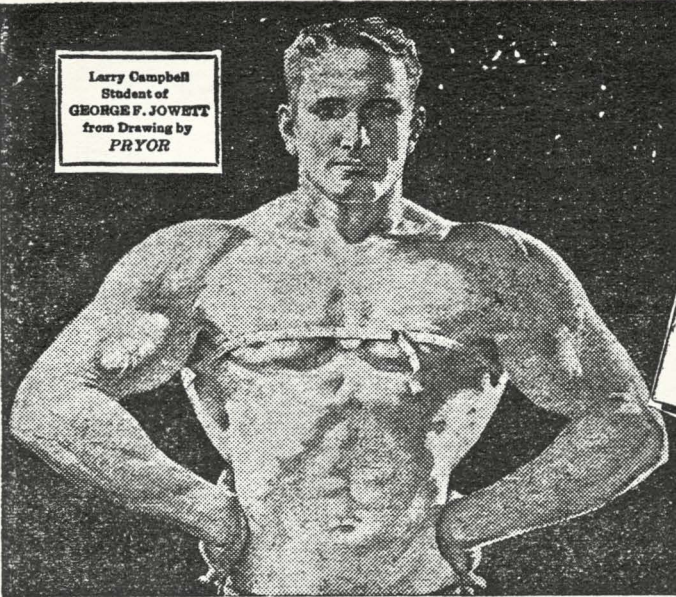
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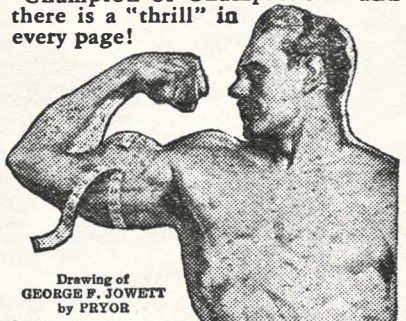
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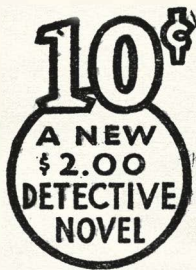
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DIME MYSTERY BOOK Magazine

Volume Three

September, 1933

Number Two

THE BLUE LANTERN MURDERER

By Harry J. Haggerty..... 8

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Only a paper strip, crumpled and torn, could point the murder answer.
- Murder By Magic (Short Story).....By Celia Keegan 112
Three men received the "death" puzzle and died—of natural causes!
- The Army-Post Mystery (Cash Prize Murder-Mystery).....By E. L. Seims 123
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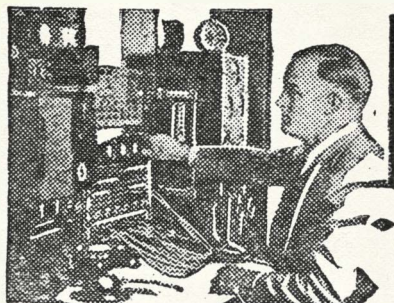
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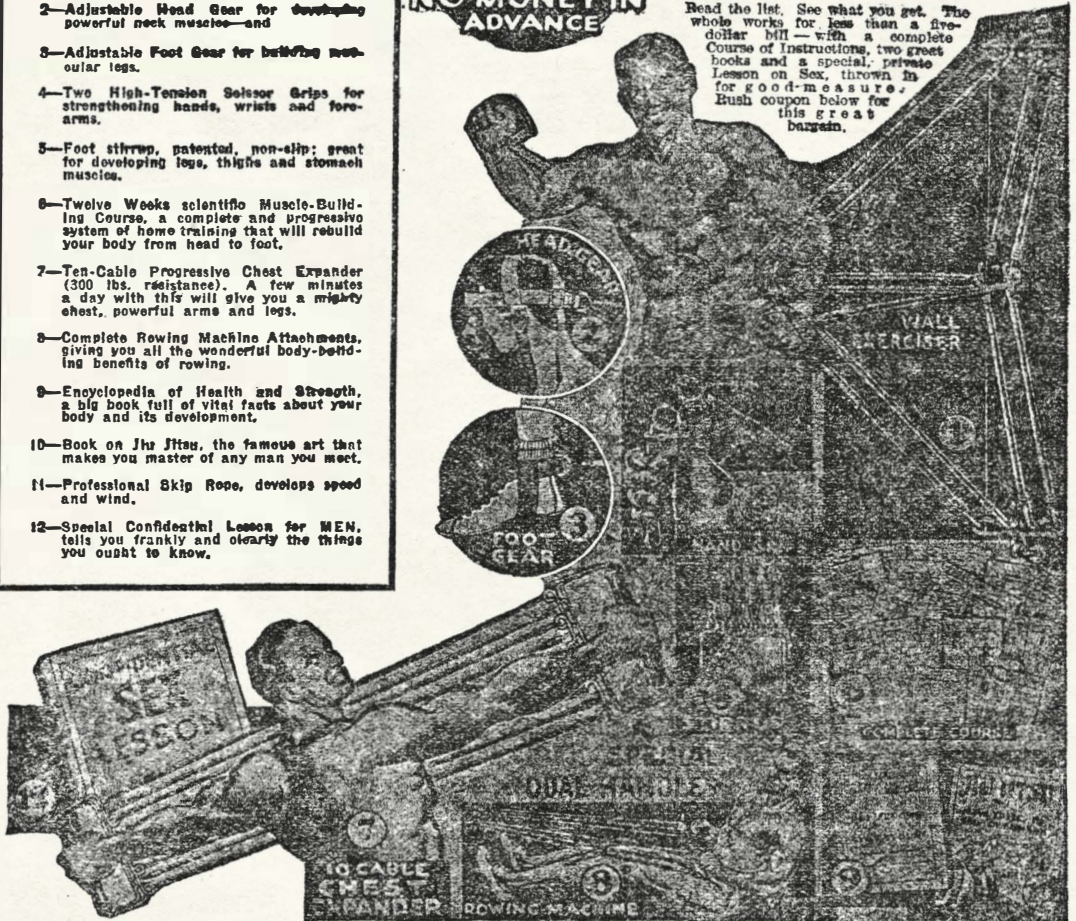
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The BLUE LANTERN MURDERER SPEAKS!

IT IS interesting, I find, to watch the effects of murder on those most closely connected with the victim. Sorrow, of course, is the predominating emotion. But there is also fear—a haunting nervousness which grows with each passing day; a sort of mounting apprehension which shows itself in half a hundred ugly little ways. And the terror of sudden death shows always in their eyes.

It was fascinating to study the Addison's and their friends as the death tally mounted and the murder net drew tight about them all!

The first two deaths, sheer masterpieces, would never have been called murder had it not been for a certain meddlesome fellow by the name of Daniel Hurley. The third death would never have occurred had it not been for the foolish stubbornness of a certain ambitious young man. The fourth, too, was directly attributable to Daniel Hurley—as was another which followed later.

So "the crime orgy," so-called by Hurley's paper, would never have been extended beyond those first two very necessary deaths had it not been for the editor of that paper himself!

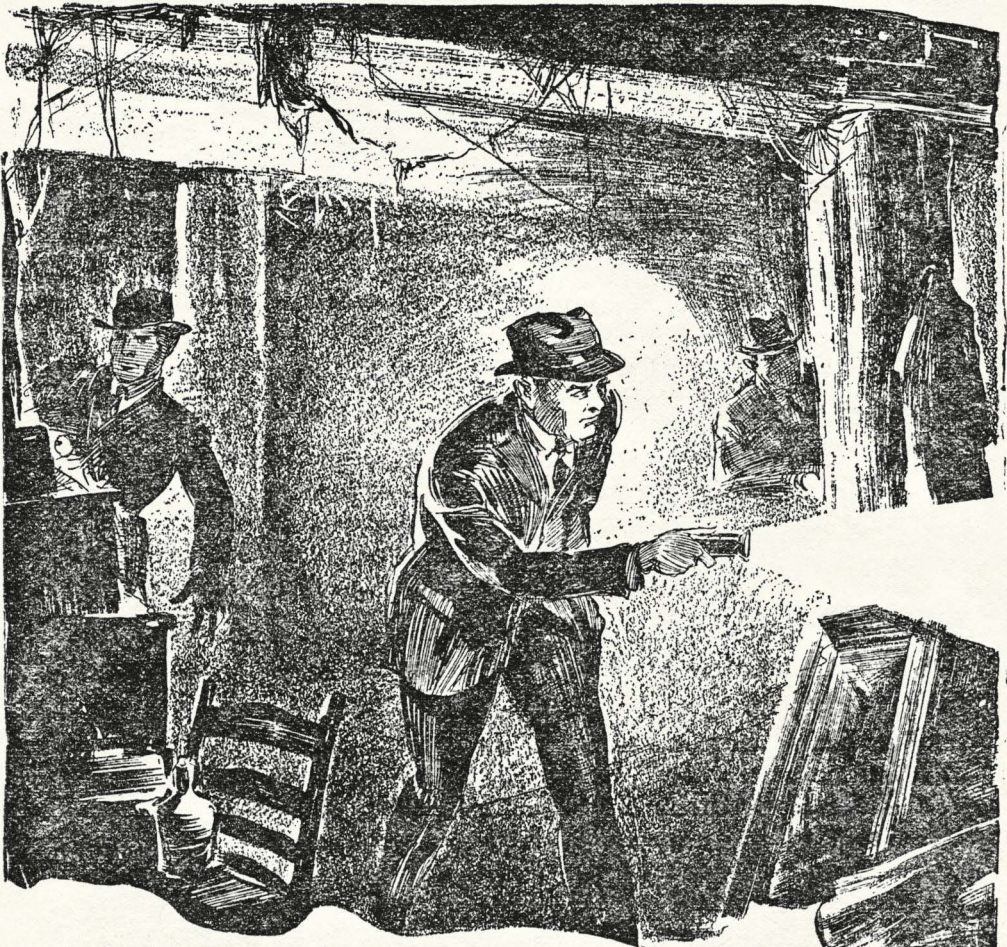
But that, I fancy, is a matter of no importance. My conscience, hardened as it has become through the years, has never once troubled me. I had long desired Sewell Addison's death, and his passing brought me pleasure rather than regret. The others didn't matter a great deal, one way or the other. What tickles my pride is the fact that though my first plans miscarried, I was clever enough to alter my campaign and still fool them all! Though the murders were uncovered—the murderer himself remained a mystery.

And now, after all the shooting and shouting, the chase is dying down. The police flatter themselves that the case is closed—that the guilty have paid the penalty of their sin. And I, ————, am still in the clear.

Tonight I shall kill Daniel Hurley. Then I shall go and visit with a certain charming woman. I shall marry the sweet girl of my choice. I shall find peace, content in the knowledge that all my enemies are dead!



The BLUE LANTERN



She bent above him, smiling prettily—while the knife in her small white hand slowly crisscrossed his stomach and chest with shallow grooves! Facing slow death in the torture-trap of a female blood-fiend the victim had still to learn the true identity of the murder master whose evil plotting brought wholesale death to a quiet New England village!

CHAPTER ONE

The Doctor's Telephone Rings

IT ISN'T pleasant to be awakened from sound slumber by the shrill, insistent ringing of the telephone, even though one happens to be a physician and is popu-

larly supposed to be accustomed to such nocturnal disturbances.

In his own rather limited experience, Doctor Malcom Babcock had already learned the truth of this observation. Such interruptions invariably found the young physician sleepily ill-tempered and a trifle

MURDERER

Book-Length
Mystery

By HARRY J. HAGGERTY



apprehensive. Doctor Babcock possessed an unusually vivid imagination. He had never stumbled sleepily toward his jangling telephone without wondering what dark and sinister message was about to come throbbing over the wire.

A woman in travail; an infant in the throes of a convulsion; a fatal automobile accident; a sudden heart attack; any of these things might be presaged by that rude shattering of his peaceful slumber. But Doctor Babcock always answered his

telephone and seldom refused to accept the call. A struggling young physician cannot afford to do otherwise.

The doctor's humble quarters consisted of three small rooms in an unpretentious apartment house in the downtown section of Elmhurst. He paid his modest rent to one Bridget Callahan, a kindly soul who occupied the remainder of the apartment on that floor of the ancient building. Doctor Babcock slept on a couch in the small room adjoining his office. This, in turn, connected with his waiting room. A door from the latter led to a dismal corridor and thence down a steep flight of stairs to the front vestibule.

It lacked exactly five minutes to the somber hour of midnight on a boisterous night in late October when the harsh ringing of his telephone awakened Doctor Babcock. He had retired at eleven, and his weary brain had just relinquished its grasp on things mundane and was off on a jaunt along the ethereal highways of Dreamland.

He sprang from his couch and stumbled toward the light switch on his office wall. He crashed against a chair and barked his shin. Growling an impatient oath, he found the switch and snapped on the light. The telephone kept on ringing.

Limping slightly, the doctor strode across the room to his desk and jerked the receiver off its hook.

"Hello," he growled into the mouthpiece.

"Is this Doctor Babcock?" an agitated voice inquired.

"Yes—speaking."

"This is the nurse at Addison Manor on Alpine Avenue speaking, Doctor Babcock. Can you make a call out here right away? Mr. Addison has had a sudden sinking spell, and Doctor Leonard doesn't answer his telephone. Doctor Simpson, who usually assists Doctor Leonard, is out of the city. We need someone at

once, and I thought perhaps you might be willing to come out."

The words jerked Doctor Babcock into instant wakefulness. An eager smile replaced the scowl on his face.

"I shall be very glad to be of whatever assistance I can," he responded, scarcely able to conceal his elation.

Forgetful of his barked shin, he dashed into his bedroom and hurried into his clothes.

A break at last! The chance he had been waiting for! Perhaps this would mark the turning point in his struggle for recognition! Sewell Addison, the multimillionaire! And Doctor Benjamin Leonard, the most famous physician and surgeon in Central Massachusetts! Would he be willing to help them out in this emergency? He grinned in boyish delight at the prospect. Does a fish like water? A child like candy?

He finished dressing, grabbed his bag and hot-footed it for the small garage behind the building. He sprang into the seat of his humble coupe, gave her the gun and went chugging off in a cloud of acrid smoke—headed, all unsuspecting, into headline fame in the most ghastly series of mysterious deaths the town of Elmhurst was ever to experience.

ELMHURST is not a large city, speaking strictly in terms of population, but it covers an immense amount of territory. Buckingham Heights is the aristocratic residential section, and Alpine Avenue, whither Doctor Babcock's wheezing flivver was now bearing him, is the ultra exclusive street in the section.

Driving his car at top speed, it took the doctor fully fifteen minutes to reach Alpine Avenue from his humble downtown abode, and another ten minutes of swift flight along its sweeping curves and gentle grades before his watchful eyes caught the blurred reflection of the street lights in the

storm-lashed waters of Crystal Lake.

He turned his gaze toward the sharply ascending terrain on his left and saw the lights of Addison Manor shimmering through the trees.

A vine-covered wall marked the lower boundary of the vast estate, and Doctor Babcock drove more slowly until he reached a huge granite arch that loomed gray and ghostly under the venerable elms that flanked the avenue on each side.

Through this he drove and followed the winding, ever-ascending drive until it debouched from among the trees and shrubbery into an open plaza in front of the great house itself.

A huge porte-cochère loomed ahead, its arched roof extending over the broad driveway and terminating in lofty granite pillars. The young physician steered his laboring machine into its gloomy shadow and brought it to a stop beside a granite platform at the foot of the broad steps leading upward to the front door of the stately mansion.

His approach had been observed, and two men were already descending the steps to meet him. Someone in the vestibule of the house switched on the porte-cochère light, revealing the men more clearly. One was dressed in the uniform of a chauffeur. The other was a stately, gray-haired man, attired in formal dinner clothes.

The chauffeur opened the door of the doctor's car.

"Doctor Babcock?" he inquired deferentially.

"Yes," the young physician replied, picking up his bag and stepping out.

The gray-haired man issued a curt command to the chauffeur.

"Park the doctor's car over at one side of the drive. Then wait here and keep a sharp lookout for Donald. If he returns, send him up to his father's room at once."

"Very good, sir." The chauffeur

touched his finger to the visor of his cap and stepped into the car, a disdainful smirk on his face as he settled himself at the wheel of the humble coupe.

The gray-haired man turned at once to the doctor. He extended a hand in cordial greeting as they started up the steps.

"Thank you for coming so quickly Doctor," he said. "My old friend is sinking rapidly. I'm his next-door neighbor Winthrop's the name—Horace Winthrop. Sewell means a great deal to me. Please do everything you can for him, Doctor."

"I'll do my best, sir," the young physician replied.

An aged butler opened the massive door at their approach and stood aside to let them pass. He was not the wooden-faced automaton of fiction and silver screen but a kindly old man whose troubled countenance betrayed a very human reaction to the pitiful drama that was being enacted in a room above.

They entered a spacious hall and ascended a broad stairway to the second floor. Down another long hall, where the thick carpet felt like springy turf beneath their feet, the gray-haired neighbor conducted the doctor until they came to a closed door of polished oak.

Winthrop knocked softly, then opened the door with the simple assurance of a privileged friend.

"Doctor Babcock," he announced in a subdued voice.

In the center of the luxuriously furnished chamber stood a huge four-poster bed, around which was gathered a small group of sorrowing relatives of the stricken millionaire. A shaded light at the head of the bed illuminated their anxious faces and revealed the emaciated features of the master of Addison Manor.

Heads turned at the doctor's entrance and one member of the group, attired in the stiffly starched uniform of a nurse,

left the bedside and stepped forward to meet him.

"I'm so glad you came, Doctor," she said in a low voice. "Mr. Addison has taken a very sudden turn for the worse."

Doctor Babcock inclined his head gravely. "I came as quickly as I could," he murmured.

The sorrowing group around the bed stepped back to make room for him. A glance at the waxen countenance of the sufferer told the young physician that the grim reaper was even then stretching forth a clammy hand to claim his victim.

Doctor Babcock raised startled eyes to the nurse's face.

"How long has he been like this?" he demanded softly.

"About an hour and a quarter, Doctor. He was resting comfortably at eleven, at which time I administered his usual sedative. At eleven-thirty I glanced in to see if he was sleeping—and I found him like this.

"I immediately called Doctor Leonard's office but no one answered his telephone. Doctor Simpson usually assists Doctor Leonard, but he is out of town for a few days. Then I recalled that a friend of mine had told me that you had recently opened an office in Elmhurst, and I thought you might not be too busy to help us out."

Doctor Babcock had been hastily delving into his kit while the nurse was thus gently explaining the reason he had been called to such an illustrious personage as Sewell Addison.

He found the vial he sought and handed it to the nurse.

"Have you a hypo sterilized?" he inquired.

"Yes, Doctor. I thought you might need it."

"Good! Administer one of these tablets at once."

DOCTOR BABCOCK reached for his stethoscope and adjusted it to his ears. He listened a moment to the patient's feebly beating heart, then felt for the fading pulse.

Raising his eyes, he met the sorrowful gaze of an elderly woman who was kneeling at the opposite side of the bed. She was gently stroking one of the patient's wasted hands.

"Is—is—my husband dying, Doctor?" she whispered.

The young physician gravely inclined his head.

"Yes, Mrs. Addison. It will only be a matter of minutes, I fear."

The aged woman continued to stroke the wasted hand.

"But—but—he isn't suffering, is he, Doctor?"

"No, Mrs. Addison, he isn't suffering."

A grateful smile flitted across the woman's pale face.

The young physician turned toward the table where the nurse was preparing the hypodermic.

"Please hurry," he admonished. "Every second counts."

"I am hurrying, Doctor," the nurse responded evenly. "This needle appears to be clogged. I'll have another ready in a moment."

Her tone was professionally impersonal. But the glance she shot at him from her black eyes conveyed the impression that she did not relish his gentle hint of criticism.

She stepped forward a moment later and plunged the sharp needle deep into the wasted tissues of the dying man's arm.

"Is there any possibility that my husband may regain consciousness before the end?" The sorrowing wife looked anxiously at the doctor.

Babcock inclined his head gravely.

"Yes, it is quite possible if his heart responds to the powerful stimulant we

have just administered. Caffein benzoate acts very quickly. We'll know in another minute or two."

He bent over his patient and again applied his stethoscope. He listened intently, the others watching with tense anxiety. Presently the heart action steadied a trifle, and a faint color crept into the pallid lips. Doctor Babcock stood up and smiled reassuringly.

"His heart is responding to the stimulant," he informed the anxious group. "But I must warn you it will not be for long. There should be a momentary return of consciousness, and he may possibly be able to speak."

The young physician stepped back and motioned the others to gather more closely around the bed. Then he moved around to the foot of the bed and stood beside the gray-haired man who had conducted him to the dying millionaire's room.

Winthrop smiled and placed a friendly hand on the doctor's shoulder.

"Good for you, Doctor!" he whispered softly.

The dying man's eyelids fluttered slowly open. For a moment he stared stupidly at the anxious faces bending over him. Then his eyes grew brighter and he smiled wanly.

"I—I—must have fallen asleep," he faltered. Strength seemed to be flowing back into his wasted body. His mind grew clearer, and a note of surprise crept into his weak voice. "But why are you all staring at me?"

His questioning eyes sought the face of his wife.

"Why are you crying, dear?" he whispered. Then a faint smile of comprehension flitted across his face. "Am I dying, Sarah?"

His wife raised his limp hand to her lips and kissed it gently. She met his questioning eyes bravely.

"Yes, Sewell," she whispered. "The

doctor says you are going to leave us. Are you suffering, dearest?"

The stricken man smiled wanly. "No, my dear. Just—just—a little weak—that's all."

He raised his eyes to the other members of the sorrowing group, and Doctor Babcock moved silently out of his line of vision. The nurse joined him in the deeper shadows farther back from the bed.

The dying man stared at the faces about him and singled out each one in turn with surprising clarity.

"Mother—Dot—Gladys—John—Gerald—Horace—all here but Don," he whispered. "Where is Don?"

"Donald is—is—coming, dear," his wife faltered. "He—he—was detained downtown."

Disappointment gleamed momentarily in the dull eyes.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "Tell Don—he—has—his—father's—blessing."

The dying man closed his eyes, and the color receded from his lips. The effect of the powerful stimulant was passing. A slight tremor shook his wasted body. He sighed gently and ceased breathing. . . .

AT THAT instant the door opened and an excited young man rushed into the room. He paused abruptly and stared questioningly at the silent figure on the bed. Then he ran and fell to his knees beside it.

"Dad! Dad!" he implored brokenly. "Speak to me! Don't you know me, Dad? It's me—Don."

With a shuddering gasp of comprehension the young fellow rose slowly to his feet. He turned abruptly to the others.

"What happened?" he demanded. "Dad was as well as usual when I left the house a couple of hours ago. Why didn't someone get word to me?"

"I tried to, Donald," the youth's mother replied softly. "I telephoned to your

club and—and—several other places where they told me you might be.”

John Addison, Donald's older brother, now spoke up sharply.

“Yes, mother phoned every night club and rotten speakeasy in town.”

Donald flushed angrily. Then the color drained as speedily from his face. He shrugged broad shoulders and turned away from his brother's accusing eyes.

“This is no time to quarrel,” he said quietly. “If you had called the Logan House, you would have found me. I was down there shooting a game of billiards.”

“And drinking as usual, I suppose,” John cut in caustically.

Gladys, John's wife, stepped between the two brothers.

“Donald is right,” she told her husband. “This is neither the time nor place to quarrel.”

Gerald Buckley, Sewell Addison's secretary, now spoke up, glancing inquiringly toward Doctor Babcock.

“Perhaps the doctor and Miss Newton have some further duties to perform and we should withdraw.”

The young physician bowed and turned instinctively to John Addison as the new head of the bereaved household.

“Yes, there are one or two tests I ought to make. Merely confirmatory signs of death which it is customary to check up on, you understand. And it might be well to get in touch with your undertaker at once.”

Sarah Addison glanced inquiringly toward her elder son.

“Whom shall we call, John? Silas Gray?”

“Yes,” her son responded. “I'll attend to it at once, Mother.”

The kindly old lady turned and held out her hand to Doctor Babcock.

“Goodnight, Doctor. I am exhausted and shall retire immediately. I am truly grateful for what you have done for us

this night. If I ever can be of service to you, do not hesitate to call upon me.”

Doctor Babcock bowed low over the proffered hand, his boyish face flushed with pleasure.

CHAPTER TWO

Exit Doctor Babcock

WHEN the door had closed behind the others, Doctor Babcock shot a quizzical glance at the nurse.

“I see it happens in the best of families,” he remarked.

Miss Newton's eyes glittered angrily. “I'll say it does, Doctor Babcock. Donald Addison is a disgrace to the name he bears. And he's breaking his mother's heart with his drinking and wild parties. He ought to be ashamed of himself.”

“Seems like a nice kid, at that,” the doctor observed thoughtfully. “Must have thought a lot of his father, too. That was genuine grief he displayed just now. And I suppose John is the virtuous elder brother?”

“Yes, I guess he fits that role pretty well, Doctor. Very stern and puritanical, but a fine man. And his wife is a wonderful woman.”

“And who is the diplomatic young gentleman who so tactfully suggested that they all leave the room?” the doctor inquired.

“That is Gerald Buckley. He is—or was, rather—Sewell Addison's private secretary. He's engaged to Dorothy Addison.”

“Wouldn't mind getting a break like that myself!” The doctor's face sobered. “But we are forgetting our patient. As a mere matter of form I had better make the usual tests.”

He turned to the silent figure on the bed and once more applied his stethoscope. Then he called for a hand mirror and held it in front of the sagging mouth. No tell-

tale vapor fogged its smooth surface. Satisfied, he was turning away when a sudden thought arrested him.

With deft finger he raised one of the drooping lids and touched the eyeball.

"Intra-ocular tension is gone," he observed in a matter-of-fact tone. Then he leaned forward with an ejaculation of surprise. "But what is this?"

The nurse peered over his shoulder, her face gone suddenly pale.

"Wh—what is it, Doctor?" she asked, vainly striving to control the tremor in her anxious voice. Doctor Babcock did not notice her perturbation.

"Look at that pupil, Miss Newton! It's still contracted! And the other one! Look! It's still contracted, too! That's mighty strange! The pupils usually dilate the instant death occurs. These are almost pin-point contractions! Opium or one of its alkaloids are the only things I know of that might keep the pupils contracted for a short time after death. What was in that medicine you administered at eleven?"

He glanced up sharply as he put the question.

BUT the nurse had now regained complete control of her emotions. She smiled a trifle tolerantly.

"Some sort of a mild hypnotic, I imagine," she replied. "Doctor Leonard dispensed it himself. My patient has had a dose of it every night since I've been on the case. And I believe Doctor Leonard will be able to explain about those pupils, Doctor. I recall that he mentioned something about a growing sluggishness of the muscles of accommodation. Possibly it was a partial paralysis due to the toxin of the disease. Doctor Leonard diagnosed the condition as Cardio-Renal Disease."

"I judged that was it," Doctor Babcock replied. "And it possibly accounts for the contracted pupils. Although I have

never observed a paralysis of the eye muscles during the course of Cardio-Renal Disease, I imagine Doctor Leonard can explain it satisfactorily."

The young physician picked up his bag, glanced once more toward the figure on the bed, and with a word of farewell to the nurse left the room. . . .

John Addison and Horace Winthrop met him in the hall. They were profuse in their thanks for what he had done, and the former promised to send him a check proportionate to the service he had rendered.

Speculating happily on the probable size of the check he was to receive, Doctor Babcock puffed contentedly on his pipe as he drove leisurely homeward.

It was well after two in the morning before he found himself once more in his own humble quarters. He glanced around his plainly furnished office and sighed profoundly as he thought of the palatial residence he had just left. And then his mind reverted to the dead master of that household. An uneasy frown gathered on his youthful face. Those contracted pupils still worried him. They resembled too closely the pin-point pupils of opium poisoning. Had some frightful blunder been made out at Addison Manor that night?

The more he considered the matter, the greater became his uneasiness. He glanced at his watch. Calling Doctor Leonard at this late hour would mean rousing the tired man out of his warm bed. But it couldn't be helped. He simply had to get the famous physician's opinion about those contracted pupils before he himself could rest.

He looked up the number and dialed it with impatient fingers. A busy test rewarded him. He tried again. Still busy! It was fully ten minutes before he finally got his connection.

"Doctor Leonard's office," an agitated

feminine voice announced in his ear. "Who is calling, please?"

"Doctor Babcock," the young physician replied. "Is Doctor Leonard in?"

A muffled sob came over the wire. "This is Doctor Leonard's office nurse. The doctor was killed in an automobile accident on the Hopevale road about two hours ago, Doctor Babcock."

"Doctor Leonard—*killed!*" The words came in a gasp of startled dismay.

THE agitated voice at the other end of the wire steadied a little. "The accident occurred at a spot about a mile beyond the city line. The doctor was returning from an emergency call in Hopevale. He was found dead in his car at the foot of a steep embankment. The highway is very slippery and his car must have skidded. The police believe the accident occurred shortly before midnight."

"How terrible!" Doctor Babcock exclaimed. "I can scarcely believe it's true."

Another sob greeted his words. "I know it, Doctor. It's a terrible shock to us all! But what was it you wanted? If I can be of any assistance—"

"No, I'm afraid not," Doctor Babcock cut in. "I just wanted to talk to the doctor about one of his patients. In his absence, I was called out to Addison Manor. Sewell Addison died while I was at his bedside."

An exclamation of surprise came over the wire.

"Sewell Addison dead! Why, Doctor Leonard told me just this afternoon that Mr. Addison was better than he had been in several weeks!"

"He took a sudden turn for the worse," the young physician replied.

"The nurse tried to get in touch with Doctor Leonard but no one answered his telephone."

"That's strange, Doctor Babcock! I have been here all night. I answered

every call that came in. I don't see how I could have missed hearing the phone ring."

"Perhaps it didn't ring," Doctor Babcock suggested. "I occasionally have that happen."

After asking for and obtaining permission to call and refer to Doctor Leonard's notes on Sewell Addison's case, the young physician mechanically replaced the receiver on its hook and sank back in his chair.

Doctor Leonard dead!

For fully ten minutes he stared at the instrument which had brought him this astounding news as though he expected it to speak again and tell him it was all a ghastly joke.

The harsh jangle of his front door bell jerked him out of his daze. He hurried into the waiting room and threw open the door.

A young man stepped inside and followed him into the office. He handed a printed form to Doctor Babcock.

"I'm from Silas Gray, the undertaker," he explained. "I saw a light in your office as I was driving past and I guessed you hadn't turned in yet. You doctors have as tough hours as we do."

"Mr. Gray is up at Addison Manor. I went along to help him, then discovered I'd forgotten the embalming fluid. I came back to get some and he told me to leave this death certificate for you to sign."

Doctor Babcock's face showed his surprise.

"For *me* to sign?" he exclaimed. And then he comprehended. Doctor Leonard was dead, and it would naturally become his duty to sign Sewell Addison's death certificate. He glanced sharply at the undertaker's assistant.

"Which means that Mr. Gray has already learned of Doctor Leonard's fatal accident?"

His caller nodded. "Yep—and ain't it

terrible! A mighty fine man he was! He'll sure be missed in this burg. Sent my boss plenty of work! Word of the accident came just after we got out to the manor. Hit them highbrows out there pretty hard—what with their own old man just passing out.

"While we were getting the body ready to inject the embalming fluid the nurse out there filled in the diagnosis and the other dope from her notes. All you've got to do is sign your John Hancock to the certificate—and then I'll breeze right along. We've got to handle Doctor Leonard's remains, too."

Doctor Babcock took the death certificate and glanced over the typewritten information the nurse had so kindly filled in for him.

He tossed the certificate on his desk.

"Very well," he told his caller. "I'll attend to it in the morning. No great rush about it, I guess. I'm just a bit tired—if you know what I mean."

"I get you, Doc. I'm in the same boat myself. But if you'll sign it now, it'll save me an extra trip over here tomorrow. With two important funerals coming almost together, we'll be up to our ears with work. Sign it now, Doc, and give a guy a break."

Doctor Babcock shook his head. "Sorry, but I can't do it, my friend. Before I sign that certificate I want to go over to Doctor Leonard's office and look over his notes on the case. I saw Mr. Addison for the first time tonight, and I know practically nothing about the case. I have only the nurse's word as to the diagnosis Doctor Leonard made."

The friendly grin left his caller's face. Sudden suspicion kindled an ugly gleam in his dark eyes.

"I don't quite make you," he stated sharply. "Think the nurse was giving you a bum steer?"

DOCTOR BABCOCK jerked forward in his chair in surprise.

"See here, my man," he said sternly. "It seems to me you're nosing into something that doesn't concern you. It's none of your business, but I don't mind telling you I observed a slight discrepancy between the symptoms that presented themselves tonight and the diagnosis given by Miss Newton. I positively **will not sign** that certificate until I check up on Doctor Leonard's notes. . . . And you can tell Mr. Silas Gray that if this isn't satisfactory to him, I'll request the medical examiner to run out there with me in the morning and view the remains. Do I make myself clear?"

His caller's hand flashed beneath his coat, and the next instant the doctor found himself staring into the muzzle of a heavy automatic pistol.

"You make yourself too damn clear!" the undertaker's assistant grated. "But guess again, wise guy. You're going to sign that certificate right now!"

"And if I don't sign it?" the doctor inquired, unable to believe that his caller would actually use the weapon if he refused.

"I'll blast you where you sit! See that little jigger on the end of my rod? That's a silencer. I guess you know what that means. Get busy, mister! I ain't got all night."

But Doctor Babcock was still unconvinced of his danger.

"What would shooting me get you?" he asked. "It's apparently my signature you want—not my death."

"You wouldn't care what it would get me—after you was dead. Quit stalling and sign that certificate. If you don't, I'll blast you and take a chance on the medical examiner discovering anything out at the manor."

The fellow advanced a pace and released the safety catch on his pistol.

"For the last time—do you sign it or don't you?"

Doctor Babcock at last awoke to his danger. The cold fury that now distorted the other's face was too real to be assumed. A chill ran up the doctor's spine.

"I'll sign it," he gulped. "I—I—thought you were only trying to scare me."

He affixed his signature and handed the certificate to the man.

The latter thrust it into his inside coat pocket, and a mocking grin replaced the murderous scowl on his face.

"You signed *two* death certificates that time, Doc!" he jeered. "Old man Addison's—and your own! Tough luck, fella, but you know too damn much."

The muffled reports which instantly followed were scarcely louder than the vicious thud of the bullets as they found their mark in the physician's body.

The killer made sure that his victim was dead, then started to steal silently from the room. A sudden thought assailed him. He withdrew the certificate from his pocket and retraced his steps. The doctor's body had slipped from the chair and was lying in a limp heap on the floor.

Bending over his victim, the killer placed the certificate in the inside breast pocket of the doctor's coat.

Now the police could question him all they pleased. In fact, he'd make it his business to see that they did question him. And he would stoutly maintain that the doctor had not signed the certificate while he was present, and, therefore, must have signed it *after* his caller had departed.

The undertaker's assistant was, apparently, quite skillful in thinking up a watertight alibi on the spur of the moment.

CHAPTER THREE

A Curse on the Addison Millions?

ELMHURST awoke that morning to find itself in the throes of a triple sensation. The venerable and wealthy master of Addison Manor lay dead in his stately mansion on the heights overlooking Crystal Lake. Doctor Benjamin Leonard, the city's most famous physician and surgeon, had been instantly killed in an automobile accident while returning from an emergency call in Hopevale. Doctor Malcom Babcock, a young and little known physician, had been found dead in his apartment, his body riddled with bullets from a .38 automatic pistol.

Running true to form, the general public skimmed lightly over the printed accounts of the passing of the two prominent men and avidly devoured every detail of the murder story. In death, the humble doctor had attained a degree of prominence his fellow citizens would never have accorded him in life.

The known facts relative to the murder were extremely meager, and no motive had thus far been established. The undisturbed contents of bureau and desk drawers and the discovery of a small roll of bills in a trouser pocket of the victim precluded the possibility of robbery as a motive.

The body had been discovered by the dead physician's landlady a few minutes past four that morning. She had been awakened by the insistent ringing of the doctor's telephone. Thinking that he had gone out on an early call, Mrs. Callahan had gone into the doctor's office to answer the telephone and had discovered the body.

She had immediately notified Police Headquarters, and Sergeant Timothy O'Rourke of the homicide squad, accompanied by two assistants, had hurried to the humble apartment on Vine Street.

They had found the doctor's body sprawled on the floor beside his desk. The sergeant had expressed the opinion that the murdered physician had been seated at his desk when the fatal shots were fired.

O'Rourke had summoned Inspector Franklin Osgood of the Detective Bureau. The latter, accompanied by Tommy Dale, the fingerprint expert, drew up at the curb in front of the apartment house just as the medical examiner came thundering up in his car. The three men entered the murdered doctor's office together.

The medical examiner had pronounced death due to multiple gunshot wounds of the chest. He had fixed the time of the murder at approximately three o'clock. Rigor mortis had set in but was not pronounced at the time of the expert's examination.

In the inner breast pocket of the victim's coat Inspector Osgood found the death certificate of Sewell Addison, signed by Doctor Babcock. A telephone call to Addison Manor had elicited the information that the murdered physician had been in attendance at the multi-millionaire's deathbed in the absence of the latter's regular physician, Doctor Benjamin Leonard.

A later edition of the morning paper stated that Silas Gray, the attending mortician at the Addison and Leonard obsequies, had expressed considerable surprise upon learning that Sewell Addison's death certificate had been signed such a short time after the aged man's death. He had testified that he had instructed his assistant, one Tony Lorello, to attend to having the certificate signed but was unaware that the young man had complied so promptly with his request.

Lorello immediately came forward with the explanation that he had seen a light in Doctor Babcock's office while on his way to Gray's funeral parlors for a supply of embalming fluid.

Recalling that he had Sewell Addison's death certificate in his pocket, and realizing that he would be kept unusually busy because of the death of Doctor Leonard, he had decided to stop and ask Doctor Babcock to sign the certificate then and there, thus saving himself another trip to the young physician's office later on in the day.

Lorello fixed the time of his call at approximately two-thirty. Doctor Babcock had received him in his waiting room. He had told Lorello that he was busy looking up something in one of his medical books and didn't want to stop just then to sign the certificate. He had promised, however, to sign it and leave it in at Silas Gray's office that morning on his way to the out-patient department of City Hospital, where he assisted at one of the clinics. They had discussed the sad accident to Doctor Leonard for a few minutes and then Lorello had taken his departure.

A straightforward story on the part of the undertaker's assistant—as the police believed—and valuable in that it helped in establishing the probable time of the murder.

UNDER another glaring headline appeared an account of the fatal accident which had overtaken Doctor Benjamin Leonard.

The doctor's office nurse, Miss Eleanor Bishop, had answered the ringing of the telephone at about ten-thirty. The call was for Doctor Leonard.

The party calling had sounded like an Armenian. The doctor was at home and Miss Bishop had called him to the telephone. He had talked a moment and then hung up, informing Miss Bishop that it was an emergency call in Hopevale. He had not given her the name or address of the person requiring his services.

Following the discovery of the doctor's body in his wrecked car, the police had traced the call to a pay-station in Ran-

dolph's Cafe in Hopevale. The cashier of that establishment had informed them that he had not noticed who had used the pay-station that evening.

A checkup of all known Armenian residents of the town had failed to disclose the one on whom the doctor had called. The police believed, however, that this person would immediately come forward when he learned of the doctor's fatal accident.

The accident had been reported by a young man by the name of Peter Sullivan. Mr. Sullivan and his girl friend had been returning from a party in Hopevale. They had been driving slowly on account of the slippery road and the wind-lashed rain that was dashing against their windshield.

A heavy coupe, driven at a terrific rate of speed and careening wildly, had rushed up from behind and had hurtled past with an utter disregard for the rights or safety of other travelers on the highway. Passing them, the coupe had continued its mad flight until it struck a sharp curve a few hundred yards ahead.

A heavy rail guarded the highway at this point, and into this barrier the lurching machine had crashed. It smashed through the rail and landed with a deafening crash at the bottom of a thirty-foot embankment.

Stopping his car near the yawning gap in the rail, Mr. Sullivan had scrambled down the embankment to the wrecked coupe. One horrified glance at that twisted mass of wreckage had been enough to convince him that whoever was buried beneath it was beyond all human aid. Mr. Sullivan had hurried back to his own car and had driven like mad for the nearest pay-station.

A police ambulance had immediately rushed to the scene of the accident; and the crushed body of the famous surgeon had been extricated with great difficulty from the wreckage.

Mingling with the odor of escaping

gasoline had been the unmistakable fumes of whiskey. A smashed pint bottle had been discovered in a side pocket of the car. The inside of the pocket was saturated with the contents of the flask. In view of these findings, the police had been forced to conclude that Doctor Leonard had been intoxicated when the accident occurred.

Mr. Sullivan's testimony as to the reckless manner in which the wrecked car had been driven substantiated this conclusion.

When informed of this theory, Miss Eleanor Bishop, the famous surgeon's nurse, had expressed the utmost astonishment, stoutly maintaining that the doctor had always been a savage opponent of liquor and had never touched a drop in his life. But, as the writer of the story pointed out, the evidence was too obvious to be ignored.

The account of the tragic accident made morbidly interesting reading. But it bowed and stepped aside in favor of the more sensational story of the murder of young Doctor Babcock.

Under still another glaring headline was an account of the death of Sewell Addison.

The aged financier had died suddenly. He had been suffering from a lingering malady which would have eventually proved fatal, but death had intervened at a time when the great man had apparently been enjoying a slight turn for the better. The writer of the story dwelt at some length upon the irony of fate which had brought about the death of the noted physician and his illustrious patient on the same night.

He also pointed out the almost uncanny coincidence of the death of the young physician who had rushed to the bedside of the dying financier at the very moment his more distinguished colleague lay dead beneath the wreckage of his car.

The astute scribe was reminded of the curse that was sometimes believed to attach itself to great wealth.

Was it possible, he asked his readers, that the two physicians had fallen under that curse?

CHAPTER FOUR

Lorello's Alibi

DANIEL HURLEY, City Editor of the *Elmhurst Morning Star*, quite frequently spent his lunch hour at Police Headquarters gossiping and playing checkers with Inspector Franklin Osgood of the Detective Bureau. They were pals of long standing.

Hurley was the thinker; Osgood the man of action. Together, they were a distinct menace to the plans and aspirations of evil doers.

In his moments of triumph, the doughty inspector was inclined to strut and accept the full credit for their joint achievements. And this suited Hurley because he found ample reward in seeing his theories vindicated and his logic substantiated.

The newspaperman wrote detective thrillers during his spare time, and while his more practical-minded friend often ridiculed the plots evolved by the other, he invariably came to him for advice and help when some particularly puzzling problem presented itself. In return, he gave Hurley many an inside tip that led to a smashing "scoop" for the latter's paper.

On the day the news of the murder broke they met as usual in the inspector's office at Police Headquarters. They omitted their customary game of checkers and turned their entire attention to the brutal killing of the youthful physician.

The excited gleam in Hurley's eyes warned Osgood that his friend's keen

brain was already hard at work on the problem.

"Got a theory, haven't you!" he exclaimed hopefully. "If you have, for the love of Mike spill it! I'm stumped. Why anybody would want to bump off a poor harmless kid like Doc Babcock is beyond me."

"You're damn' right I have!" Hurley retorted. "And it's a wow!"

He lowered his voice and continued earnestly: "Frank, I believe we are dealing with *three* murders instead of one!"

The detective jerked forward in his chair with a startled oath.

"Three!" he ejaculated. "What do you mean—three?"

"Sewell Addison, Doctor Leonard, and Doctor Babcock," Hurley replied. "I began to suspect something as soon as I learned young Babcock had been called out to Addison Manor last night. Why did they call an inexperienced kid when any number of older and far better known physicians were available?"

"I put a call through to Doctor Leonard's nurse and asked her about it. She didn't even know that Addison had taken a turn for the worse until Doctor Babcock called her up and told her the old man was dead. He told her the nurse out at Addison Manor claimed she tried to get Doctor Leonard but that nobody answered his telephone. Miss Bishop thought that was rather strange because she was at home all evening and answered the telephone every time it rang. I asked her not to mention this circumstance and she promised she wouldn't."

Hurley paused a moment, then went on, his eyes lighting dangerously.

"So much for that, Frank. Now let's consider the old man himself. He was better than he had been for several weeks. I met Doctor Leonard on the street the other day and he told me so. Said he wouldn't be surprised to see Addison

hang on all winter. But what happens? Out of a clear sky the old man takes a sudden turn for the worse and passes out."

Hurley leaned forward and pointed a lean finger at his friend.

"Now let's turn to his physician, Doctor Leonard. He is called out to Hopevale in a hurry, presumably by an Armenian. A checkup by the police fails to disclose the identity of the patient. Doctor Leonard gets tanked up out in Hopevale and drives over an embankment on the way home and gets killed. They find a busted flask in his car and enough evidence to show it contained booze.

"Young Peter Sullivan testified that the doctor was driving like a drunken man would. Natural conclusion—the doctor was drunk. But that, I happen to know, Frank, is utterly absurd. I knew Leonard too well to believe a rotten lie like that. He was a militant dry. Fought booze tooth and nail. Wouldn't even take out a permit to prescribe it for medicinal purposes. And yet they say he was drunk!"

Hurley's smile was tight-lipped, without much merriment.

"So much for that," he snapped. "Now let's get back to Doctor Babcock. He was shot at approximately three o'clock this morning. The undertaker's assistant, by his own admission, calls at the doctor's office at two-thirty to have him sign Addison's death certificate. The doctor is busy looking up something in one of his medical books and can't be bothered to stop and sign the certificate just then. He promises to sign it later and leave it at the undertaker's office. He and Lorello talk a few minutes and then the wop beats it. That's *his* story!"

Hurley swallowed hard, fighting a sort of growing excitement.

66 **A**ND then what happens, Frank?" he demanded. "In less than half

an hour after Lorello leaves, Doctor Babcock completes whatever he was doing, signs the certificate, places it carefully in his pocket, and is shot to death at the hands of an assassin! Fast work that!"

He leaned back, regarded his silent friend through half-closed eyes.

"But that isn't the only fast work that was pulled off last night, Frank. In less than two hours after Sewell Addison passed out, the nurse out at the manor had filled out the death certificate and Lorello had presented it to Doctor Babcock for his signature!

"Why the rush? Lorello says to save himself another trip to the doctor's office. Baloney!

"Here's the lowdown on the whole affair, Frank—as I dope it out. Sewell Addison was poisoned last night. Whoever pulled the trick was afraid Doctor Leonard would tumble. The doc was called out to Hopevale on a fake emergency. While he was there, somebody shot him full of coke and planted a bottle of booze in his car. They turned him loose—and the coke did the rest.

"But it wouldn't do to let old man Addison croak without an attending physician. In that case, the medical examiner would have to view the remains—and that was the one thing they didn't want to happen! So what do they do? They call in a young medico that is hardly dry behind the ears yet. Between his inexperience and his natural nervousness at being called to such a prominent personage, they count on him not observing anything to arouse his suspicions.

"But they come a cropper. Very possibly Doctor Babcock lets out something to the nurse, and she instructs Lorello to get the death certificate signed before Babcock has a chance to verify his suspicions. Lorello calls, and the doctor refuses to sign the certificate. The wop

forces him to do so at the point of a gun, then plugs him to close his mouth forever."

Inspector Osgood nodded slowly when his friend ceased speaking.

"It sounds plausible," he conceded, "but how are you going to prove it, Dan? Lorello claims the certificate wasn't signed when he left Babcock's office. Unless we can prove it was, the wop's got a fool-proof alibi."

A sudden thought brought an eager gleam to the newspaper man's eyes.

"Where is that certificate now?" he demanded.

"In the files in the City Clerk's office. I took it over there myself this morning."

"Was it torn or badly crumpled, Frank?"

"Nope—neat and clean as a new pin. Why?"

Ignoring his friend's question, Hurley continued: "Have you got the doctor's coat handy?"

The detective arose and strode across the room to a locked closet. He produced a key and opened the door. He reached an arm within the gloomy interior and brought to view the murdered physician's coat. Returning to his desk, he handed the coat to his friend.

Hurley took it and examined it with eager eyes. Then he turned with a smile of triumph to the detective.

"It's surely punctured good and plenty," he observed. "And two of the bullets plunked right square through the inside pocket! And the death certificate was in the pocket at the time! And it never got touched! Remarkable!"

Inspector Osgood snatched the coat from his friend's hand and thrust his own blunt fingers through the holes made by the bullets.

"Well I'll be damned!" he exploded. "I'm slipping, Dan. The certificate wasn't touched—which means, of course, that it wasn't in the doctor's pocket when the shots were fired!"

"Right!" applauded Hurley. "Otherwise, the certificate would have been riddled, too. It's merely another example of a bird spoiling things by trying to make his crime too perfect. Lorello wanted us to believe the doctor signed the certificate and placed it in his pocket *after* his caller had departed. But he forgot all about the bullet holes in that pocket. And that little oversight on his part knocks his alibi into a cocked hat, Frank. And now what?"

"Pinch that lousy skunk and put on the screws until he comes across," the detective growled belligerently.

Hurley nodded approval. "Yes—and the sooner, the better. Pinch him and give him the works, Frank. But don't let him know we suspect his motive or that we suspect anything concerning the deaths of Sewell Addison and Doctor Leonard. There's something mighty sinister afoot out at the manor, and our only hope of getting to the bottom of the thing lies in keeping our suspicions to ourselves. We're dealing with a foeman worthy of our steel, Frank. There's a clever and ruthless brain behind this business.

"Three good citizens already killed! That shows what we're up against. And two of them from innocent causes, apparently. A mighty clever plot! So subtle and clever that one is almost moved to doubt its existence!"

Osgood grinned admiringly. "You used that old brain of yours, Dan. It was a mile over my head. I'll bet we're the only ones who suspect anything at all."

"I hope that's true," Hurley replied earnestly.

CHAPTER FIVE

Attorney Martin Greenleaf

THE plainclothesman dispatched by Inspector Osgood to bring in Tony Lorello found the Italian standing in the alley at the rear of the undertaking rooms lazily enjoying a cigarette.

"You Tony Lorello?" the detective inquired.

"In person," the other replied with a smile. "Who wants to know?"

The other flipped back the lapel of his coat and displayed his badge.

"Inspector wants to see you down at headquarters. Let's go!"

"Wants to see *me*?" Lorello inquired in well-assumed surprise. Then he grinned. "Oh, I get you. It's about that shooting, eh? I'm sorry, officer, but I can't leave till the boss gets back. I'm all alone."

"Aw, quit stalling and come along," the other retorted mildly. "The dump'll keep till your boss gets here."

"Very well, officer, if you insist. Just wait a shake till I go in and scribble a note to the boss telling him where I've gone."

"I said to quit stalling," the detective retorted more sharply, placing a heavy hand on the Italian's shoulder. "Never mind the note."

"Okay, big boy, if that's the way you feel about it." Lorello shrugged his shoulders resignedly and moved off beside the detective.

They found Inspector Osgood seated at his desk enjoying a session with his pipe. He laid the latter aside and smiled genially through the miniature smoke screen.

"Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Lorello," he said pleasantly. "Have a chair. Sorry to trouble you, but there are one or two little points about your interview with Doctor Babcock that I want to run over with you."

Osgood turned to his subordinate.

"Okay, Tom. I'll ring if I want you. Guess Mr. Lorello can find his way out alone."

The plainclothesman saluted and withdrew, closing the door behind him and stomping noisily down the corridor. He waited a moment, then tiptoed back and took up a position beyond the door.

The phrase, "I'll ring if I want you," was the inspector's way of telling his subordinate to stay on guard and be ready in case he was needed.

Lorello, meanwhile, had taken a chair, his first slight feeling of apprehension gone. He even indulged in a silent chuckle. What an easy bunch these hick cops were! Sorry to trouble him! Inviting him to be seated! The old fool would be offering him a cigar next!

Inspector Osgood began his questions at once.

"What time did you say it was when you took that certificate up to Doctor Babcock's office, Mr. Lorello?"

"Approximately two-thirty, Inspector. I remember looking at the clock in City Hall tower just before I pulled into the curb in front of the doc's office."

"Uh huh. Did you notice what time it was when you left?"

"No, I didn't notice exactly, but I wasn't in there over five or six minutes. The doc was busy, and I was in a hurry."

"Did you notice what he did with the certificate?" Osgood asked.

"Glanced at it, then held it in his hand," Lorello replied.

The inspector treated his caller to a friendly smile.

"Lucky for you, young man, that you got out when you did. If you'd hung around a few minutes longer, you might have got the same thing that young doctor got." He settled deeper in his chair, squinted at the other appraisingly. "And now I want you to think hard, Mr. Lorello," he said quietly. "This may be mighty

important. You didn't notice anybody prowling around the front entrance when you left, did you?"

The Italian considered his alibi airtight, but if the inspector wanted him to strengthen it still more, he had no objections. The old fool was up against it and he was probably trying to find a new lead to follow. Well, he'd help him out a bit.

Lorello wrinkled his brow in deep thought. Then he raised excited eyes to his questioner's face.

"By gosh, I did at that!" he exclaimed. "I remember now I saw a guy standing in the driveway when I came out. I'd clean forgot about it!"

"You did?" ejaculated the inspector excitedly. "That's the stuff, my lad! Where was your gat?"

"In my pock— Hey! What the hell're you talking about?"

OSGOOD grinned mockingly. "Fine, Mr. Lorello! You had your gat in your pocket, eh?"

"Aw, you're cuckoo!" the fellow retorted. "I didn't have a gat. I didn't get your question."

"No? Now I'll tell one!" The detective leaned forward across his desk and shook a pudgy forefinger at his prisoner.

"You're one of these smart birds, ain't you! A wise guy! Too smart for us hick town cops! Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Tony Lorello. You're too damn smart for your own good. You and your fancy alibis! You crooks are all alike. You're so dumb you don't even know you're dumb. You thought you put one over on us last night, didn't you? Well, you didn't, big boy. You put one over on yourself.

"After you pumped the doctor full of hot lead you stuck that signed death certificate into his inside coat pocket, clean forgetting that two of your slugs had

plunked right through that pocket. If the doc put that certificate in his pocket *before* he was shot, how come it wasn't punctured, too? Laugh that one off—you cheap crook!"

If the inspector had hoped to anger the man, he succeeded far beyond his expectations.

Lorello's face twisted into a snarl of murderous fury. He sprang to his feet and backed toward the door, his right hand darting inside his coat to a concealed shoulder holster. He didn't hear the door open softly behind him. He had forgotten all about the man who had escorted him to headquarters. But he suddenly remembered him when he felt the latter's gun digging into his back.

"Steady there, fella!" a mocking voice warned. "Keep your flippers away from that coat. Stick 'em out in front of you! Quick!"

Lorello sullenly obeyed. An instant later he was securely handcuffed.

"Nice work, Tom!" Osgood applauded. "Now frisk him."

His subordinate ran expert hands over the tense figure of the killer and brought to view a snub-nosed automatic. He handed it to the inspector, who examined the weapon and raised mocking eyes to his prisoner's face.

"Ah, a .38! And those were .38 slugs the medical examiner dug out of Doctor Babcock's body!"

The inspector's eyes dropped to the weapon once more. "Oh ho! And what are these little marks near the muzzle? Naughty, naughty, Mr. Lorello! Don't you know it's against the rules to use a silencer? No wonder the doc's landlady didn't hear anything!"

Osgood waved a hand airily. "Take him away, Tom. Tell the desk sergeant to book him on a charge of carrying concealed firearms. That'll hold him till the D. A. gets busy. Better snap his mug

and take his prints. Looks like he had a good dinner. Probably won't care for any supper. Put him in solitary where he can meditate on his sins without being disturbed. We'll start working on him later. If he's ready to talk by breakfast time tomorrow, we'll give him something to eat."

He turned to his prisoner and continued: "No talkee—no eatee, Mr. Lorello! Savvy?"

His prisoner had now regained his composure. Only his smouldering eyes betrayed his murderous fury.

"Try any of your funny business on me and you'll be sorry," he threatened. "I know my rights. I won't say a word until I've talked with my mouthpiece. If you know what's good for you, you'll put a call through to Boston right off and tell Martin Greenleaf to hop the first rattler in the morning and come up here. Just tell him Tony Lorello wants him."

A STARTLED oath escaped the inspector's lips. "Martin Greenleaf!" he ejaculated. "The smoothest mouthpiece in Boston! I can see that damn shyster bothering with the likes of you!"

"No?" retorted Lorello sarcastically. "Guess again, big boy! Just put through that call and see who's right!"

"Okay," agreed Osgood. "But if you're kidding me, I'll make you forget you ever had a sense of humor before I'm through with you!"

"Take him away, Tom. He don't smell good!"

Leering maliciously, Lorello permitted himself to be led away.

Osgood put through the call to Boston. And to his surprise Greenleaf not only agreed to leave by the first train in the morning but cautioned the inspector to go easy on his client.

The comment this evoked went sizzling over the wire with such heat that it threat-

ened to blow out every fuse between Elmhurst and Boston. Greenleaf replied with something that sounded very similar to the well known "raspberry" and hung up.

There was no love lost between the famous "mouthpiece" of Boston gangdom and Inspector Osgood. The lawyer had visited Elmhurst on more than one occasion in the past, and each time had wrested his client out of the hands of the police. He had an extremely long and pointed nose, and the fiery inspector lived in the hope of some day getting his hungry fingers on that offending member and tearing it loose from its moorings.

After Greenleaf hung up, Osgood sought the solace of his pipe.

He was interrupted by two very illustrious visitors. One was John Addison and the other "Colonel" Horace Winthrop, the elderly neighbor who had ushered Doctor Babcock into the Addison home the previous night.

The older man acted as spokesman after greetings had been exchanged.

"My friend, John Addison, and the rest of the family," he explained to Osgood, "were very favorably impressed with Doctor Babcock. We were shocked beyond measure when we learned of his brutal murder this morning, and we all feel that something should be done to express our appreciation for what he did for us last night. In behalf of the Addison household and myself, we want the department to accept this check for one thousand dollars, to be used to defray his funeral expenses. And further, we wish to post a reward of ten thousand dollars for the apprehension and conviction of his murderer."

Inspector Osgood almost fell out of his chair in his excitement.

"We've pinched him already!" he exclaimed. "Tony Lorello, the undertaker's assistant."

His guests expressed their surprise and satisfaction.

"Good work, Inspector!" John Addison exclaimed warmly. "When you secure a conviction, the reward is yours."

Addison and Winthrop took their departure, and Osgood grabbed his hat and hotfooted it for Daniel Hurley's office.

The newspaper man was elated to learn that the famous Boston attorney had consented to defend Lorello.

"It proves my contention that something big's being pulled off," he told his friend. "Martin Greenleaf doesn't bother with small fry—unless there are big fish in the offing. And don't count too much on that reward, Frank. Unless you get a confession from Lorello, Greenleaf'll take the D. A. into camp. And for the love of Mike don't let on I'm interested in the case at all! I'm angling for the big fish, Frank, and I don't want him even to know that I've got a fishing license!"

CHAPTER SIX

Lorello Changes His Story

EARLY the next day Attorney Martin Greenleaf arrived from Boston and went immediately to the cell of Tony Lorello. He spent the better part of an hour with his client, then ascended to Inspector Osgood's office. They exchanged perfunctory greetings and the inspector invited his caller to take a chair.

The attorney shook his head.

"Thanks, but I haven't time," he replied. "I want to catch the first train back to Boston."

"What! Leaving us so soon, Mr. Greenleaf?"

"Yes—but you'll see more of me later, Inspector. And by the way, what will the indictment charge against my client?"

"Murder in the first, of course," Osgood replied. "And I suppose you have instructed him to plead not guilty?"

The attorney shook his head, a mocking light in his cold eyes.

"Oh, no, Inspector. My client shot the doctor, but he shot him in self defense. That's his plea—self defense."

Osgood jerked forward in his chair.

"Self defense!" he growled. "That's rich! But he can't get away with it."

Attorney Greenleaf shrugged his thin shoulders. "No? Perhaps not, Inspector. Time will tell. I'd advise you to listen to his story, though. You'll find it interesting."

"I don't care for bed-time stories," Osgood retorted. "If he shot the doctor in self defense why didn't he say so in the first place?"

Greenleaf smiled patronizingly. "Tut, tut, Inspector! Be your age! There were no witnesses. Why should the kid confess anything as long as he thought his part in the affair would never be discovered? You forced his hand, my dear fellow."

"Oh yeah? And I'll force the seat of his pants into the hot squat before I'm done with him!" said Osgood grimly.

Greenleaf smiled again and glanced at his watch.

"Perhaps I'd better have him measured for a pair of asbestos trousers, Inspector. And now I must be going. I'll be seeing you again soon. Good day, sir."

He bowed mockingly and departed.

OSGOOD swore long and fluently.

Then he cooled off sufficiently to call up Daniel Hurley, only to learn that his friend had left for New York City on business.

The newspaper man was gone two days, and when he finally breezed into the inspector's office, his friend responded to his boisterous greeting with scowling disapproval.

"Wonder you wouldn't tell a guy when you go away," he growled.

"I tried to get you on the phone, but your line was busy," Hurley explained. "I would have tried again but I only had a few minutes to catch my train."

"Called away suddenly, eh?"

"Yep—and in the interests of our little problem, Frank."

"Yeah? That sounds interesting. Tell me what you learned."

"After you tell me how things have been going at this end," Hurley grinned. "I see our friend intends to enter a plea of self defense."

"That," growled the inspector, "is Martin Greenleaf's way of trying to be funny. But he sure cooked up a pretty smooth yarn for the kid to spiel. Lorello claims he knew Babcock when the doc was an intern in the Boston City Hospital. Says Babcock was a poker fiend. Claims he caught the doc stealing dope from the hospital dispensary to sell so's to get money to play with. Didn't know where Babcock went after leaving Boston. Didn't know he was in Elmhurst till he breezed into his office the other night to have that death certificate signed. Claims the doc recognized him and accused him of following him here to expose him. Says Babcock drew a gat and took a shot at him. He closed in, and in the struggle that followed, the doc got shot. Says Babcock signed the certificate before he recognized him. Claims he put the certificate in Babcock's pocket after the doc was dead, forgetting all about the bullet holes through the pocket."

Osgood paused to mop perspiration from his forehead. He shook his head doubtfully.

"It's a pretty clever yarn, Dan, and one that's going to be hard to disprove unless we can scare up an eyewitness to the shooting or you scare up something that'll connect him with those other two killings. I'm commencing to believe there may be

some truth in your theory about Addison and Doctor Leonard."

"I'm banking on it to the tune of fifty bucks," Hurley retorted with a smile. "That's what my trip to the big town cost me. And here's how I came to make the trip, Frank. I met young Donald Addison on the street the other day, and he told me that his father carried a three-hundred-thousand-dollar policy with the Long Life Insurance Company of New York. Now it so happens that I am very well acquainted with a little girl who works for that company. Used to bounce her on my knee when she was a kid. Her father and I were pals. He and his wife were killed in a train wreck ten years ago. The girl's name is Hattie Oliver; and since the death of her parents she's been pretty much on her own. I've kept a sort of fatherly eye on her. She's what you might call an undercover investigator for the insurance company. Traces fraudulent claims and the like.

"Well, when I heard about Sewell Addison's policy I caught the first train and went to see Hattie's boss. He agreed to send her up here to inquire into the validity of Addison's claim. I told him what I suspected, but made him promise to keep it under his hat."

Hurley leaned forward, his shrewd eyes on the inspector's lined face.

"Now here's the dope, Frank. Hattie's coming up here in the role of a lady's maid. One of the maids out at Addison Manor quit her job—for a consideration—and Hattie is going to take her place.

"She's coming armed with credentials from the New York employment agency which supplies servants to the Addison household. She's to be one of these petite French maids—the kind you see in the movies—and she's due in tonight on the seven o'clock express. If you want to get an eyeful," he grinned, "you better chase down there."

Hurley's face sobered as he continued: "We need someone to check up on things out at the manor, Frank. That's the focal point of this whole affair. The guilty party may or may not be there. But we can be pretty sure that at least one of the accomplices is there. The nurse out there called Doctor Babcock that night, and that places her very definitely under suspicion. With Hattie at the manor and you and me at this end, we ought to learn something before long."

Osgood nodded. Grinning again, Hurley went on.

"And I've got still another little plan, Frank. I had some powders made up of Ipecac. I want you to see that one of them goes into Lorello's chow at each meal. They'll make him sick, but they won't hurt him. Then I want you to have him removed, under guard, to City Hospital, and we'll give out the information that he is critically ill.

"We'll follow this with a second bulletin stating that his condition is worse and that self-administered poison is suspected as the cause of his illness. We'll also intimate that Lorello has promised to come through with a full confession.

"That ought to get a rise out of the guilty party, and if he, or she, happens to live out at Addison Manor, Hattie will be there to check up on things. Of course it'll be necessary to have the cooperation of the doctors at City Hospital, but they mustn't know the real purpose underlying the hoax."

"I'll take care of that end of it," Osgood informed his friend. "The super's a good friend of mine. He'll fix things okay."

"Good! Then we'll leave it like that, Frank."

Hurley glanced at his watch and stood up. "Guess I'll have to be trotting along. Will I see you down at the depot?"

"It's barely possible," the inspector replied with a broad grin.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Best Laid Plans

THREE days after the advent of the new "French maid" at Addison Manor, the following item appeared in the *Elmhurst Morning Star*.

ALLEGED SLAYER OF PHYSICIAN CRITICALLY ILL—SOME SENSATIONAL DISCLOSURES ANTICIPATED

According to the latest bulletin issued by the physicians in attendance at the bedside of Tony Lorello in City Hospital, the alleged slayer of Doctor Malcom Babcock is very critically ill.

Since his removal from his cell at Police Headquarters early yesterday morning, his condition has grown rapidly worse. Though the exact cause of the prisoner's sudden illness has not been definitely ascertained, there is a persistent rumor to the effect that he took poison in an attempted suicide.

It is further rumored that Lorello has promised to make some startling disclosures in connection with the shooting of the youthful physician. A complete confession may be expected at any time.

Daniel Hurley grinned as he read this little masterpiece his own brain had concocted. Would the big fish nibble at this alluring bait? Daniel hoped so most fervently. The seed was planted. It remained to be seen whether it would spring up and bear fruit.

And bear fruit it did. Fruit so poisonous that the kindly editor wished he had never planted it.

On the afternoon of the day Hurley's carefully worded news item appeared, Hattie Oliver obtained permission to go downtown shopping. But instead of mingling with the late afternoon crowds, she met Hurley by previous appointment at the corner of Park Avenue and Salisbury Street and stepped quickly into his waiting car.

They headed back through the downtown traffic and finally gained the highway leading to Hopevale. A mile beyond

the city line Hurley pointed to the spot where Doctor Leonard's car had crashed through the heavy rail.

"That's where Doctor Leonard got his," he told Hattie. The girl shuddered and looked quickly away.

A few miles farther on, Hurley slowed down and entered a dirt road that wound its tortuous way upward toward a forest-clad elevation called Fox Mountain. There he halted his car under the spreading canopy of a large maple tree.

The autumn day was rapidly drawing to a close and the deepening shadows were tinting the gold and crimson foliage with more somber hues. Hurley relaxed and reached for his pipe.

"I brought you up here, Hattie," he smiled, "because only the birds and squirrels will hear us—and they never carry tales." The smile left his face as he continued: "How do you like your new job?"

"It's not half as bad as I was afraid it might be," said the girl. "My duties consist entirely of waiting upon the three ladies: Sarah Addison, Gladys, and Dorothy."

"And how did they digest my little news item regarding Tony Lorello?"

A look of uncertainty crossed the girl's face. "I hardly know what to say," she replied. "Warned as I was to be on the alert, I may have been over-suspicious. But I am positive of one thing, Dan. Something is very wrong out at Addison Manor. I sense a tension in the very atmosphere of the place. Hidden forces of some nature are at work out there. We mustn't, of course, overlook the fact that they have just gone through the sad ordeal of losing a loved one and are in the throes of a depressing reaction.

"But what I sense strikes much deeper than mere sorrow, Dan. I sense both sorrow and suffering—sorrow and suffering that somehow impress me as long ante-

ceding the death of Sewell Addison. And I sense something more sinister, too. I feel greed—and hate—and evil! I can't explain *how* I sense these things. I only know they are present."

Her companion nodded gravely. "I've felt a bit of the same sort of thing myself on occasion. I based my suspicions in the first place on the fact that Doctor Babcock was not the logical man to have been called to treat Sewell Addison the night he died. The uncanny coincidence of the three deaths, all occurring on the same night, doubtless impressed me also. But I firmly believe it was that undefinable sixth sense which enabled me to grasp the true significance of those apparently unimportant incidents. My good friend, Inspector Osgood, has no psychic sense whatsoever. He'd get a whale of a laugh out of our present conversation."

Hurley grinned at the thought.

"Action is his motto. Point out the trail, and he'll follow it till he finds his man. But no subtle psychic sense will ever lead him to the right trail, Hattie. Such things are over his head entirely."

The deepening shadows had merged into darkness while they were talking, completely shutting off their view of the wild, desolate region about them. Engrossed in their conversation, they failed to hear approaching footsteps from the rear—footsteps which halted abruptly, then advanced more cautiously, and finally paused in the deep shadow of a thicket near the car.

Hurley struck a match and held it to his pipe. The man crouching in the shadow of the thicket gasped in astonishment as the flickering flame momentarily revealed the faces of the girl and her companion.

HURLEY'S next words came with startling abruptness to the ears of the hidden eavesdropper.

"But you haven't told me how the folks up at Addison Manor reacted to my little yarn about Lorello, Hattie."

"The ladies all discussed it," his companion replied, "but the nurse seemed particularly interested. She thought the police were very lax in permitting Lorello to obtain the poison in the first place. And I heard her ask John's wife what she imagined those 'startling disclosures' could be. Yes, I should say if anyone's reaction to your story might be called suspicious, Miss Ethel Newton is nominated."

"The nurse is in on it all right," Hurley agreed. "But she's only a pawn. We're after bigger game, Hattie. How about the men folks? Hear any of them discussing it?"

The girl shook her head. "I didn't get the chance, Dan. My duties seldom bring me in close contact with them. I've learned considerable about them, though, both by personal observation and backstairs gossip. We servants are a terrible bunch of gossips, Dan! I could tell you a number of interesting things. But peddling 'dirt' isn't in my line."

"Perhaps it might be 'pay dirt' in the present instance," Hurley suggested. "In an investigation of this kind we can't afford to be too squeamish, Hattie. Apparently irrelevant facts sometimes prove extremely relevant. Trot out all the family skeletons you've discovered. I promise I won't call you a gossip."

Hattie Oliver shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"Okay, Dan. Here goes. I'll give you the richest shovelful first. Last night, long after all honest folks were supposed to be in bed and fast asleep, I slipped on a dressing gown and started on a little prow. In front of John Addison's bedroom door I saw his wife and that young whipsnapper of a secretary, Gerald Buckley, standing close together. They were

talking in low tones, but I couldn't hear what they were saying. Then, just before they parted, John's wife threw her arms about Gerald and kissed him! And the young man didn't appear to relish the caress! He extricated himself from her embrace and strode off in the direction of his own room. Gladys opened the door and disappeared into her husband's bedroom."

A low whistle of surprise came from Hurley.

"The dignified and haughty Mrs. John Addison making love to the secretary! And friend Gerald a bit reluctant! Don't know's I blame him! She must be nearly twice his age. And Gerald is engaged to Dorothy Addison! This is rich, Hattie!"

"Rich—and revolting!" sighed Hattie. "But that isn't all, Dan. Gerald and Dorothy may be engaged, but they are *not* in love. Anyone with half an eye can see that. But Gerald *is* in love with the nurse!"

"And how about the nurse?" Hurley asked. "Is she in love with Gerald?"

"I'm not certain on that point," the girl said thoughtfully. "She doesn't seem adverse to his attentions, although I imagine the open way in which he goes at it embarrasses her a little. He's an insolent little pup, Dan, I despise him! Miss Newton may just be playing him for a sucker."

"Yes, or she may have some more sinister object in view," said Hurley dubiously. "I wonder how long they're going to keep her, now that her patient is dead."

"Indefinitely, I believe. Sarah Addison isn't very well, and I think the children feel safer with Miss Newton there to look after her."

"I see. And how does Miss Dorothy feel about her fiance's affairs with the nurse?" Hurley inquired.

"Pretends she doesn't notice it, Dan. There's a little thoroughbred for you! She's one sweet little girl. Gerald Buck-

ley ought to be horse-whipped for treating her the way he does."

Hurley changed the subject by asking: "How do you like John Addison, Hattie?"

"Not too well, Dan. I admire him, but he's too hard and proud to suit me. And he spends a good part of his time jumping Donald, his younger brother! Donald seems to be the proverbial black-sheep of the family. Personally, I think he's just a happy-go-lucky kid having a fling at his wild oats. I don't condone his faults, but I think his brother is a bit too hard on him. And when you come right down to brass tacks, Dan, I'd trust Donald further than I would his puritanical brother. Hidden fires burn somewhere deep beneath John's coldness. I've glimpsed them in his eyes."

"Still waters run deep," Hurley quoted. "I'd pick Donald myself. What that kid needs is the steady influence of some good girl's love."

A slight flush crept over his companion's face; and she changed the subject rather abruptly.

"Please don't tell anyone about John's wife and Gerald Buckley, Dan."

"Of course I won't," Hurley promised. "I'm a newspaper man, but I'm no scandal-spreader, Hattie."

THE girl patted his hand affectionately.

"Forgive me, Dan! You're a dear, kind, affectionate, gallant, sweet, old—"

"Hold everything!" Hurley cut in with a laugh. "I'll get a dictionary and help you out."

They talked a few minutes longer, then started cityward. The eavesdropper watched them go, an angry gleam in his puzzled eyes.

Hurley made a date with Hattie for the following Monday, dropped her off at the entrance to the Addison grounds, then headed for Police Headquarters.

He found Osgood alone in his office,

his head resting dejectedly in his cupped hands, his elbows digging into the disorderly array on his desk top. At the sound of his friend's entrance the inspector looked up, then sprang to his feet with a belligerent growl.

"Where in hell've you been?" he barked. "It's about time you showed up! I've been turning the town inside out trying to find you!"

"Why — why — what's the matter, Frank?"

"Matter!" stormed Osgood. "Plenty! You and your damn' monkeyshines!" The irate detective shook a copy of the *Elmhurst Morning Star* in his friend's startled face. "Know what you've done by printing that crazy yarn about Lorello?" he demanded. "You got the wop murdered!"

"What!"

The color drained from Hurley's face, and he slumped weakly into a chair.

"Yep—murdered," repeated the inspector in a milder voice as he read the anguish in the other's eyes. "But don't take it so hard, Dan, old kid. You didn't mean to do it. Don't waste your pity on that damn' murderer. He had it coming. Only thing that makes me sore is that we've got another killing on our hands. If this business keeps up, I'll be getting the air."

"This is pretty awful, Frank," Hurley ejaculated weakly. "How did it happen?"

"About an hour ago," explained Osgood, "a guy dressed in the uniform of a hospital flunky stepped into Lorello's room and told the officer on duty at the bedside that the chief wanted him on the phone. There was only a shaded light in the room, and Lanahan, the bonehead on duty, didn't get a good look at the guy's face.

"The fellow offered to stand guard while Lanahan answered the call, and the flatfoot hurried down to the nurse's phone

at the end of the corridor. The receiver was off the hook, and when Lanahan spoke into the mouthpiece the switchboard operator downstairs asked him what was the big idea in not hanging up when he got through talking. Lanahan explained that there was a call for him from the chief, but the operator said there wasn't. Told him somebody had called up on the nurse's phone and asked the time, then left the receiver off."

Osgood drew a deep breath, his face wrinkling in a comical mixture of worry and anger. "By that time," he said bitterly, "the dumb cop began to smell a rat. He took it on the run back to Lorello's room. But he got there too late. The fake flunky was gone—and there was a nice little stiletto buried clean to the hilt in Lorello's breast! It had punctured his heart, and he was deader'n a door nail."

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Murdered Man's Son

THE following morning Hattie Oliver, alias Nanette LaFleur, came face to face with Donald Addison in the front hall. That amiable young fellow glanced cautiously around and raised a finger to his lips.

"I want a word with you alone," he whispered. "There's a little lake over the hill back of the house. I'll meet you down at the boat-house at one-thirty. Don't tell anyone where you're going."

The pseudo maid drew back in surprise.

"Non, non, M'sieur Addison, I cannot!" she protested in an embarrassed whisper.

"Oh, but you must!" the young man insisted. "Sh—! Someone is coming! Remember! The boat-house. I'll be expecting you."

Nanette courtesied and hastily withdrew, her cheeks aflame and an angry gleam in her blue eyes. What did Donald

Addison take her for? Then her anger died and she shrugged her shapely shoulders. He took her for exactly what she pretended to be—a vivacious French maid.

Should she keep the rendezvous? She decided at once that she most assuredly would. Her job at Addison Manor was to learn all she could about its occupants. And, as she had told Dan Hurley, her opportunities so far to study its men folks had been limited.

Ten minutes before the appointed hour she sauntered down past the garage and stables and followed the path that led upward through a tangled growth of underbrush and trees. She gained the crest of the hill and followed the winding path as it descended on the opposite side. Donald Addison was waiting for her in the shadow of the deserted boat-house.

He led her inside the shadowed interior.

"It's safer in here," he remarked by way of greeting. "Someone might see us outside."

Hattie glanced about apprehensively.

"I do not like it in here, m'sieur!" she exclaimed. "Ze madam would be angrie if she knew I came. Please tell me queeckly wot you desire."

"Oh, forget 'ze madam'!" Addison retorted with a tinge of mockery in his tone. He drew a jewel-studded cigarette case from his pocket, opened it, and silently proffered it to his companion.

The pseudo maid shook her head. "Non! Non! I have not ze time to smocke. Please tell me wot you want and zen I will go."

Addison lit a cigarette, inhaled leisurely, and coolly surveyed Hattie from head to foot.

She flushed beneath the insolent stare. Perhaps Donald Addison wasn't quite so likeable as she had first thought. This indolent young giant with mocking eyes was getting under her skin. What was

his game? Didn't he have any manners at all? Didn't he think that even a lady's maid might object to being as coolly appraised as though she were some prize animal at a county fair?

"Please, m'sieur!" she implored. "I cannot remain in zis place. I must hurry. Ze madam—"

"Cut it!" Addison interrupted coldly, flipping away his cigarette. "Very well! If you're in such an all-fired hurry, I'll come to the point at once. Would you mind telling me just who you really are?"

Hattie drew back in dismay.

"I—I—do not onderstand, m'sieur! I am Nanette LaFleur—ze French maid."

"Boloney! If you're French, I'm a Hindu! You didn't sound much like a Frenchy when you were talking to Daniel Hurley last night—out there on that road off the Hopevale turnpike! Seems to me I heard him call you 'Hattie'."

THE color drained from the girl's face. "Where—where—were you?" she faltered.

"Lurking in a near-by thicket," Addison replied. "If your boy-friend had driven a little farther up that road you would have seen my car. I parked it there while I went hunting. And I was heading back toward it when I bumped into your bus. Just as I was going to walk on, your friend very considerably struck a match and I recognized you both. To say that I was surprised to see our new maid enjoying a quiet tête-a-tête with that news paper man would be putting it rather mildly. The window was open and I couldn't help hearing what you said."

On Addison's face there was an angry snarl now, and he was leaning forward threateningly.

"You're a fast-worker, aren't you, Miss? Got our family down pat, haven't you! You saw my brother's wife kiss Gerald Buckley! Buckley and my sister

are engaged, but they don't love one another! But Gerald *does* love the nurse! My brother has 'hidden fires'! You saw them in his eyes! I'm sowing my wild oats! You'd trust me further than you would John! Is that enough—or shall I tell you some more?"

When Hattie did not reply, he continued coldly: "I am not particularly interested in who you may or may not be, but I *am* mighty curious to know your reason for spying on my people and then spilling what you learn to a newspaper man."

Hattie had slowly regained her composure during this tirade.

"Mr. Addison," she said with quiet dignity, "if an apology could atone for what must appear to you the act of an insufferable busybody, I would humbly offer it. Perhaps you will understand more clearly when I tell you that I am an investigator—a private detective—and that people in my profession are often forced to do things that are very distasteful to them personally."

Addison inclined his head in sober assent.

"I judged from your conversation with Hurley that you were something of that sort. But whom do you represent, Miss, er, er—?"

"Oliver, sir. Hattie Oliver. I represent the Long Life Insurance Company—and someone else."

Comprehension dawned in the young man's eyes.

"Ah, I am commencing to understand. You are here to investigate the validity of my father's claim against your company?"

"That is a part of my mission."

"I see. And the other part necessitates prying into our family affairs and revealing them to a newspaper man, Miss Oliver?"

"Yes, Mr. Addison—if you insist on putting it that way."

Addison laughed shortly. "I see no other way of putting it. And the name of this other party by whom you are employed?"

"If you care to give me your word that you will hold the information in strict confidence, I will answer your question."

Donald Addison's cold smile carried no slightest hint of humor. "I presume you realize I can make things decidedly unpleasant for you if I care to?"

"Yes, Mr. Addison, I realize that quite clearly. It is a risk I had to assume when I agreed to undertake my present mission. What you may choose to do to me personally is of no consequence."

Addison studied the resolute face of the girl who had entered his home in the guise of a lady's maid. What he read there pleased him. Quiet determination was mirrored in the clear blue eyes that met his so fearlessly and yet with no hint of bravado.

With the declaration of her true identity, Hattie Oliver had cast aside her assumed role. The girl who now faced Addison was his equal in every respect; a fact he instantly recognized.

THE expression of cool disdain faded from his face. His gray eyes grew more friendly.

"Miss Oliver," he said frankly, "I think I like you. I am beginning to get your viewpoint. You have a certain task to perform and it's up to you to perform it. It isn't your fault that it carries with it certain unpleasant features. If you can forgive me for spying on you last evening, can't we be friends?"

A radiant smile rewarded this gallant speech.

"I—I—would count it an honor to be numbered among your friends, Mr. Addison."

A boyish grin chased the last remaining

cloud from the young man's face. He thrust out a hand impulsively.

"Let's shake on it, Miss Oliver. I haven't so many real friends that I can overlook the opportunity of gaining a new one."

Their hands met, and in that warm clasp their antagonism melted like mist before the rising sun.

"Well, that's that!" Addison exclaimed heartily. "And now that we're pals and can speak right out in meeting, I'm going to confess to you that I'm burning up with curiosity. I've just got to find out why you spilled all that family dope to Daniel Hurley."

"And you have a right to know," said Hattie gravely. "The purpose of my investigation is of vital importance to every member of your household, Mr. Addison. And I'd like to tell you, too, because your secret cooperation might help a lot. But I'll have to have your promise of absolute secrecy before I can take you into my confidence."

The smile faded from Addison's face.

"You almost frighten me, Miss Oliver! It must be something mighty serious! Please spill it. You have my promise."

"First I must warn you that you are going to find it very hard to keep your promise. Do you still wish me to tell you?"

"More than ever!"

"Very well, sir. But let's sit down. That bench over there looks comfortable. It's rather a long story."

They sat down and Hattie launched into her recital. She told her companion everything; beginning with the death of Sewell Addison, and ending with the stabbing of Tony Lorello.

A somber light grew and deepened in the eyes of the young man as the tale unfolded. At its conclusion, he sat in stunned silence for several minutes, his great fists clenching and unclenching, and his

handsome face drawn and haggard.

Sudden fury took possession of him.

"The dirty, murdering fiend!" he growled. "Smoke him out—and turn him over to me!"

Then his face softened, and his anger died.

"Poor old Dad! Poisoned! This is going to kill my mother! Kill her just as surely as the poison killed my father!"

"But your mother isn't to be told—yet," Hattie gently remained the distraught youth. Remember your promise, Mr. Addison!"

A puzzled frown crossed the young man's face.

"But if Hurley is right about this business, how come others haven't tumbled, too?" he inquired.

"Unless one suspects the circumstances surrounding your father's death, there would be no reason or sense in connecting it with Doctor Leonard's fatal 'accident' and the shooting of Doctor Babcock. Even Inspector Osgood was inclined to be skeptical at first. But I imagine the stabbing of Tony Lorello has convinced him that Daniel Hurley is right."

THE angry gleam returned to Addison's eyes. "But the motive! What can it be?"

Hattie's hand closed impulsively above his.

"That, of course, is the all important thing—the motive behind the poisoning of your father. The other killings were merely to hide the fact that he did not die from natural causes."

She paused a moment to give him a chance to control his obviously mounting emotions. Then she went on, her voice now carefully matter-of-fact.

"Did your father have any known enemies? Who, outside of his immediate family, might possibly profit by his death? Had he recently threatened to disinherit

anyone or to make any important changes in his will? Daniel Hurley considers this last question of vital importance because he believes the time element was an all important factor in the commitment of the crime. Your father was suffering from an incurable malady, and death was bound to result within a few months, anyway. But the murderer couldn't wait. He had to hasten the death of a man already marked by the grim reaper!

"*Why?* When we learn the answer, Mr. Addison, we'll be hot on the trail of your father's murderer. We are reasonably sure that the nurse is implicated. But Mr. Hurley considers her merely an accomplice as far as the actual planning of the crime is concerned. She undoubtedly administered the poison, but she did it at the behest of the man higher up. By watching her, we may learn something that will eventually lead us to the true culprit. And to begin with, I'm going through her personal effects with a fine-tooth comb."

A smile stole across the girl's face. "I'm considered pretty good at that sort of thing, sir. If you happen to have anything you don't want folks to know about, I advise you to keep your door locked."

Addison grinned in turn. "I always keep it locked. But I imagine a lock or two wouldn't crimp your style!" Then his face sobered as he continued: "But all fooling aside, I think I can help you if you want to give her belongings the once over—by getting the nurse out of the way while you go through her things. I haven't felt the young lady out, but something tells me I might possibly be able to persuade her to take a little spin with me one of these fine moonlit nights."

"That's an idea!" Hattie declared. "And the sooner, the better. Do you think you could make it for tonight?"

"I can at least try," said young Addison promptly.

Hattie glanced at her wrist watch and stood up.

"And now I think I had better be getting back."

Addison remonstrated. "You've told me why you came up here in the guise of a maid and explained everything I wanted to know. Now it's my turn," he said grimly. "Those things I overheard you telling Daniel Hurley need a bit of explaining, too. It's only fair to us that you both should understand them fully—especially that kissing act you saw my esteemed sister-in-law and Gerald Buckley put on the other night. Won't you please sit down again, Miss Oliver?"

Hattie didn't require a second invitation.

ADDISON lit another cigarette and treated his companion to a friendly smile.

"One word will clear up that little episode of the kiss in the dark, Miss Oliver. Gerald Buckley is my sister-in-law's son by her former marriage. Husband number one was the black sheep of an old southern family. They lived together for a year and then Gladys left him, taking her infant son with her. She obtained a divorce on the grounds of cruel and abusive treatment. Her husband did not contest the divorce.

"Gladys felt the disgrace of her position keenly. Some women are like that. Her people were southerners, too, and very proud. She met my brother a dozen years ago when he was on a hunting trip down south, and they were married after a brief courtship.

"Gerald was a kid of twelve at the time. He was kept away at boarding school and college until a year ago, at which time he graduated. He came north and entered our home as my father's private secretary.

"Gladys insisted on this deception against the rest of the family's advice.

You see, Miss Oliver, when she married John and came up here she got off to a wrong start by keeping her first marriage a secret. She knew if she were to acknowledge Gerald as her son after all these years there would be a lot of talk and unpleasant gossip.

"Gerald seemed perfectly willing to keep his mother's secret and up until now the arrangement has worked out quite satisfactorily.

"Personally, I don't care for Gerald. He's not my style. Too cocky and self important. But he's smart—and smooth. Dad fell for him like a ton of brick. I think Dad had a lot to do with Gerald's engagement to my sister. He felt their marriage would be the only way the kid could assume his rightful place in the family.

"Dot doesn't care particularly for Gerald, but she thought a heap of Dad. Consented to the engagement just to please him. She'll probably go through with the thing to keep Gerald from exposing his true relationship to Gladys. He's got a case on the nurse, and I was hoping he'd fall for her hard enough to break off with Dot. Now, of course, such a thing would be out of the question. I imagine we'll have to warn the kid before he gets too intimate with that miserable creature."

"Perhaps—later," Hattie replied. "But I don't believe it will be necessary. I've watched the nurse, and I think she's just amusing herself with Mr. Buckley."

"All right, I'll leave it to your own judgment, Miss Oliver. Serve the kid right if he did get his fingers burnt a bit! I'd like to wring his neck for the way he's treating Dot!"

Donald Addison frowned at the thought and fell into a reverie. He shook his head.

"Now let's see. Oh, yes. John and I now come before the board of inquiry. I heard you tell Hurley that John and I don't get along very well together. That's

easily explained, too, Miss Oliver. It's simply a matter of incompatibility. I like a good time, and he doesn't.

"John's a very serious-minded chap, you know. He took over the job of carrying the world on his shoulders when old man Atlas quit. But he isn't a bad egg at that. Between his own superiority complex and his wife's social aspirations he doesn't get a chance to come down to earth—that's all. And he's got one beaut of a temper when he gets going—believe you me! That accounts for those 'hidden fires' you saw in his eyes!"

Donald spoke frankly, but Hattie noticed that a tinge of bitterness crept into the young man's voice as he talked of his older brother. She stood up. "I really must be going," she said. Then she smiled and lapsed into her role. "Ze madam will be angry if I do not return to ze chateau at once, m'sieur."

The next moment she was gone. As she disappeared up the wooded path, a whimsical smile crept over Addison's boyish face.

"She came—I saw—She conquered," he paraphrased the famous quotation.

Still smiling, he started leisurely up the path the girl had taken. Engrossed in his plans for the evening, he looked neither to the right nor to the left. He failed to see the evil face that peered at him from a thicket a short distance from the boat-house.

After the young millionaire had disappeared over the crest of the hill the watcher crept from his hiding place and stole cautiously down to the boat-house and paused at the open door. His keen eyes swept the shaded interior and came to rest on the bench. A lewd smile crossed his swarthy face. . . .

LATER that afternoon Donald Addison found the nurse seated on a lawn bench a short distance from the house.

He sat down beside her and after a moment or two of pleasant generalities approached the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"Ever take a ride through our New England countryside under a harvest moon, Miss Newton?"

"No, I never have, sir. Is it nice?"

"It is. I'm telling you!"

Casting a wary eye toward the house, Addison leaned closer and lowered his voice.

"I'm getting a bit fed up on hanging around the house every night. I feel just like a little spin tonight. Like to go along?"

A cautious look came into the young woman's dark eyes.

"I—I—would love to, Mr. Addison. But are you sure it would be, er, discreet?"

Her companion chuckled softly. "Who cares! Discretion comes with old age. And besides, nobody needs to know about it. I know a peach of a place up near Deerfield. They've got an orchestra that'll lift you right out of your chair and onto the floor. And they put on one humdinger of a cabaret show. The dump is called the Blue Lantern. Ever hear of it?"

Addison was reaching for his cigarette case when he put the question and failed to notice his companion's sudden confusion. Quickly recovering her composure, she smiled archly.

"No, I never have—but it sounds interesting."

"Better than that!" Addison retorted with a grin. "Well, what do you say? Are you game?"

The nurse smiled demurely.

"I'll try anything—once!" she replied softly.

"Atta girl! I'll be waiting for you down at the gate at eight-thirty. It's a good sixty miles up there, but my bus knows the road pretty well. We can make

it in a little over an hour. Like to travel fast?"

The nurse, now thoroughly at ease, treated her companion to a meaning smile.

"Speed is my middle name, big boy!" she said archly.

CHAPTER NINE

The Blue Lantern

FESTIVITIES were at their height at the Blue Lantern when Donald Addison drove his flashy roadster into the yard and parked in the space reserved for that purpose.

The rambling structure, once a respectable country tavern, was ablaze with electric lights. A cluster of blue bulbs, formed into the pattern of a lantern, gleamed from a lofty frame on top of the flat roof.

Donald Addison never approached this place of weird orchestral syncopations, raucous laughter, and wailing song without unconsciously comparing these present-day sounds with the long-silenced voices of those painted savages whose blood-curdling war-whoops had rent asunder the brooding silence of that bitter winter night when they swept into the little settlement of Deerfield, leaving death and devastation in their wake.

The Indians and the Blue Lantern had one thing in common; they were both killers. But the honors, he thought, went to the notorious roadhouse.

Addison led his partner toward the glaring lights which marked the front entrance. The husky guardian of the outer portals, attired in a uniform smacking of comic opera, greeted Addison by name, then stiffened in surprise at sight of the young man's companion. The nurse shot the fellow a warning glance and swept past him.

They were met at the inner door by a swarthy major-domo in correct evening attire. He greeted Addison effusively and

bowed formally to his companion, a questioning gleam in his black eyes.

He, too, caught a warning glance from Miss Newton. He turned immediately toward Addison.

"We have missed you, Mr. Addison," he exclaimed in a voice of fawning servility. "Your favorite table has been reserved every night in expectation of your return. We were sorry to hear of your father's death."

Addison acknowledged this bit of hypocrisy by a curt nod. The mention of his father in this place sent a dull flush to his cheeks.

The fellow led them between the crowded tables to a secluded nook in a far corner of a large room, his arrogant bearing and proud smirk clearly announcing the importance of the new arrivals. Money spoke in a loud voice here.

The fellow saw them comfortably seated and carried their wraps to the cloak room; a courtesy reserved for a favored few of his many patrons. Returning, he took their order and relayed it to an expectant waiter.

"And now what else?" he inquired with a knowing smile.

"How about a little Scotch?" Addison suggested to his companion.

"Right the first time, big boy!" she declared.

The major-domo bowed and departed on his errand. Addison leaned confidentially toward the girl and lowered his voice.

"They carry the best line of goods here I ever tasted," he told her. "Genuine pre-war stuff! And the funny part of it is, nobody seems to know where they get it or where they keep it hidden.

"The place has been raided a dozen times, and never a drop has been found except in the hip pocket flasks of the guests. They slip us the flasks, of course, but it would take a keen eye to catch them

doing it. And they make us keep them out of sight, too. Take a look around and you won't see anything but soft-drink bottles on the tables."

"Right you are!" declared the nurse, glancing around at the crowded tables. "Who runs the establishment, Mr. Addison?"

"Fellow by the name of Garbadian. A mighty smooth chap! Armenian, I believe. And he is making hay while the sun shines! He'll probably pay us a visit before the evening's over. Usually does. He may ask you to dance. Considers such a request the last word of hospitality. Might as well accept if he does."

Miss Newton's hand bag lying on the table prompted this last suggestion. It had suddenly occurred to Addison that it might contain something of interest.

"Perhaps I will—after I've had a couple with you," the nurse replied meaningly.

THE orchestra broke into a fast fox trot at this juncture and Addison accepted his companion's gentle hint. When they returned to their table they found their salads awaiting them. The waiter slipped the young millionaire a flask, and the latter concocted the high-balls.

The lights grew dim and an expectant hush fell upon the assembled merrymakers. A spotlight pierced the gloom and focused its beam on a curtain which concealed a miniature stage behind the orchestra. The curtain parted to a fanfare of trumpets and revealed a chorus of scantily attired girls.

Donald leaned indolently forward, elbows on the table and languid eyes upon the stage. He was not in the proper mood to enthuse over the crude spectacle. He was finding things exceedingly dull for some unknown reason. The place and its patrons seemed cheap and vulgar.

The music was wretched. The artificial palms were faded and shopworn. Even

the Scotch of ancient vintage tasted flat and insipid. A man, he decided suddenly, was a fool to spend his time and money in such a dump!

He stole a glance at his companion. She was oblivious to everything else as she watched the crude spectacle on the miniature stage, her own supple body swaying gently to the seductive rhythm of the music. The fingers of her right hand beat a gentle tattoo on the table. That hand fascinated Addison. Was it the one that had held the cup of poison to his father's lips?

A sudden gust of fury distorted his face. It was well for his companion's peace of mind that she did not observe it. Then his anger subsided as his thoughts reverted to his tête-à-tête down at the boat-house with Hattie Oliver. There was a real girl!

He tried to picture her sitting here beside him, sipping a highball. But the picture seemed out of focus, untrue.

The performance on the stage ended in a burst of applause from the spectators. The lights flashed on and the orchestra broke into the strains of a waltz.

A man approached their table, bowing and smiling as he made his way between the crowded tables. He paused beside Addison's chair and placed a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Ah, Meester Addison! It is good to once more see you. We have missed you. And how did you enjoy our new show?"

"Swell! A wonderful performance, Mr. Garbadian! But permit me to introduce my companion. Miss Newton, this is Mr. Garbadian."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Garbadian," the nurse said, extending her hand in friendly greeting.

"And I am charmed," the man replied gallantly.

Addison indicated an empty chair.

"Won't you sit down and join us in a little drink?" he invited.

The fellow bowed and sat down. "Thank you, Meester Addison, I will sit with you a few minutes, but I will not drink. To drink for me is not discreet."

The orchestra struck into a lively number. Garbadian glanced inquiringly toward Addison. "If you young people wish to dance don't permit me to keep you."

The young millionaire shook his head and grinned.

"That one's too fast for me. Perhaps Miss Newton would enjoy it though."

Garbadian stood up and bowed. "If I may have the so great pleasure, Mees Newton?"

"Certainly, Mr. Garbadian."

The man escorted her to the clear space in front of the orchestra and they were soon lost to view on the crowded floor.

"What is the beeg idea in accompanying our young friend to this place?" he demanded.

"He asked me, and I came," the girl replied. "What do you care? Is it any of your business where I go or who I step out with?"

"Not at all, my dear. But you must be very careful. It would not be wise that he should suspect we know you. And are you sure the other one would approve?"

A spasm of alarm crossed the girl's face.

"He mustn't know!" she whispered. "You won't tell *him*—will you, Ameer!"

Her companion smiled reassuringly. "Of course I will not tell him, my dear. But you must be very careful!"

The music ceased finally, and Garbadian escorted the girl back to her table.

A few minutes later the nurse pleaded a sudden headache and suggested they start for home. They had another drink and left the roadhouse.

CHAPTER TEN

The Cryptogram

LATE in the afternoon of the following day Hattie once more met Donald Addison at the boat-house. They at once entered the small building and found seats on the bench near the open door.

Donald banged an imaginary table with an equally imaginary gavel and grinned boyishly.

"The meeting will kindly come to order! With your permission we will dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting and proceed at once to new business. The chair now recognizes the chairman of the investigating committee. Miss Oliver, what report have you to make?"

They both laughed and then Hattie's face became sober. She silently handed Donald a folded slip of paper. He spread it out on his knee.

The following met his eye:

XII PBQ CLO QEB NQYHNS NDSOC.
CERA ZKLA YR YFYPYH. YWHH
XIWNIL YQ MBO WBGHFIQHWCBG.
ZC OQNA XKA DBQ EHKXEEH RM
PWGA YZVOC RTGIXUXRPIT RM
UTUVHVD YR WSJDAWKL HGK-
KATDW GIGYHN.

HKRA, G.

"Code, eh?" he ejaculated, glancing up from the paper. "Gosh, what a jumble!"

"Jumble is right!" agreed Hattie. "That's a copy of the original which I discovered last night in a cleverly concealed pocket in Miss Newton's traveling bag. I went back to my room afterward and puzzled on the thing until my brain was in a whirl. I've had considerable experience with cryptograms of one kind or another, but this is the most puzzling I've ever attempted to decipher. I can't seem to make head or tail of the thing. But I have an appointment to meet Daniel Hurley tomorrow night and I think I'll let

him have a try at it. He'll discover the hidden key if anyone can. He's—"

"Hold everything!" Addison interrupted excitedly. "I'll bet I've got the key to the thing right here in my pocket!"

He reached for his wallet and brought to view a folded paper napkin, which he carefully unfolded and spread out upon his knee.

Hattie bent closer to inspect it, and a stray lock of her hair touched her companion's cheek. A delicious thrill ran through him. This detective business, he decided, had its good points!

Written in lead pencil was the following:

MNOPQRSTUVWXYZ — ABCDEF-
GHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ.

Hattie raised shining eyes to her companion's face.

"I believe you're right!" she exclaimed. "This may be just the thing we're looking for! But where under the sun did you get it?"

Addison grinned shamelessly.

"I snatched it. While Miss Newton was dancing with another fellow I went through her hand-bag, which she had considerably left in her chair. In a little pocket her vanity case fits into I found a small card with those letters typewritten on it. I copied them on this paper napkin and replaced the card."

His grin became broader. "See what the force of bad example does to a fellow, Miss Oliver? I knew you were giving her things the once over back at the house, and I felt impelled to try the same thing on her hand-bag."

Hattie smiled innocently. "It's quite apparent you have a natural aptitude along those lines, Mr. Addison!" Then she became serious. "But let's tackle that cryptogram again." She pointed to the napkin. "See? The letters begin with M, continue in regular order to Z, then run through the entire alphabet. I

imagine the hyphen is merely used to indicate where the full alphabet begins and where the part beginning with M ends. I tried dividing the alphabet into various combinations, each containing thirteen letters—and I got nowhere. But here we have forty letters instead of twenty-six. Let's try dividing them into combinations of twenty letters each!"

EYES aglow with renewed hope, Hattie rearranged the letters on a small memo pad which Addison produced from one of his pockets. She arranged the letters thus:

MNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEF
GHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

They studied this combination a moment, and the girl's face fell.

"It's no use, Mr. Addison. We're still on the wrong track. In this combination the letters from M to Z have two sets of values. M in the upper row equals G in the lower; while M in the lower row equals S in the upper. And it'll be the same no matter what combinations we try, because in forty letters we are bound to use some of the same letters twice."

"I wonder if that hyphen means anything," Addison thoughtfully suggested. "Say, for instance, the letters to the right of it represent *plus* values, and the letters to the left *negative* values. Let's see. We have twenty-six letters to the right of the hyphen and fourteen to the left. Now let's say *minus* fourteen equals *plus* fourteen. *Plus* sixteen, for instance equals *minus* sixteen. But hold on! There isn't any MINUS sixteen. Nope—its got me. If there were an equal number of letters on both sides of the hyphen, we might—"

"Just a minute!" Hattie interrupted excitedly. "Numbers? Numbers? Let me think!"

The next instant she clapped her hands

gleefully. "I believe we've got it! Why didn't I think of that before!"

"Why didn't you think of what?" her companion demanded.

"Numbers! Look! This is what I mean. Take the first word of the message, for instance. It is XII. It looks like the figure twelve, but it may not be. It contains three letters, X—I—I.

"Using this key, let's count back three letters. That will give us: X minus 3 equals U. I minus 3 equals F. I minus 3 equals F. That spells UFF!"

Hattie's face fell. "But that doesn't make sense. Oh, dear! I thought sure we were on the right track."

Addison smiled sympathetically. "Let's forget the thing and talk of something pleasant. The moon ought to be perfect tonight. I wonder what Nanette would say if I asked her to take a little ride with me tonight?"

Hattie became suddenly starry-eyed, and the young man's heart skipped a beat. But her next words proved that she hadn't even been listening.

"I've got it after all!" she cried excitedly. The *writer* of the message, not the *reader*, was the one who did the subtracting! The reader should ADD! Let's try XII again.

"X plus 3 equals A. I plus 3 equals L. I plus 3 equals L. And that spells ALL! We've got it! We've got it!"

Hattie worked feverishly for several minutes, then handed the decoded message to her companion. He read it aloud:

ALL SET FOR THE TWENTY-SIXTH. GIVE DOPE AT ELEVEN. CALL DOCTOR AS PER INSTRUCTIONS. BE SURE AND GET LORELLO TO TAKE DEATH CERTIFICATE TO BABCOCK AT EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT.

LOVE, G.

"And that settles it as far as that damn little poisoner is concerned!" the

young man growled, forgetful of his companion. "I just can't—"

"Hands up!"

Hattie and Addison whirled at the growled command. A masked man was covering them with a huge automatic pistol!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hurley Interviews John Addison

THE new maid's failure to return to the manor was not noticed until the ladies were ready to retire. Donald Addison's absence at the Sunday evening meal excited no comment, as that young man came and went as the fancy struck him, often remaining away for days at a time.

Donald and the pseudo maid were still missing Monday morning, nor had they put in an appearance when darkness fell that night. It was not until John Addison was retiring that a vague suspicion began to take form in his brain. His wife was already in bed when he mentioned the matter to her.

"I wonder where the new maid has disappeared to," he remarked with a thoughtful frown.

"Probably lived up to her nationality," Gladys replied lightly.

"What do you mean?" her husband demanded.

"That she's taken French leave, you dear old numbskull. Skipped out without saying goodby. Probably found it too quiet up here. And I'm sorry, too, because I rather liked Nanette. Poor child! The homesick bug must have stung her all of a sudden. She left in such a hurry she didn't even stop to pack her luggage. Probably feared we'd make her stay her full month if she said anything about leaving."

The frown deepened on John Addison's brow.

"I hope you are right, Gladys. But I wonder if that is really why she left so abruptly. I—I—wonder whether Don had anything to do with her disappearance. He's been away since dinner yesterday, too."

Gladys raised surprised eyes to her husband's face.

"Just what do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"I mean they both disappeared at practically the same time," Addison replied. "And you know Don's weakness. He's notoriously fond of pretty girls."

"Don't be silly!" his wife retorted. "Give Don credit for having at least a little common-sense, John. He wouldn't run off with a servant any more than you would. He'll show up when he gets good and ready, and I'll bet he won't even know Nanette's gone. Forget Don and come to bed."

But John Addison's suspicions were strengthened the following morning. He was sitting in his study with his father's old friend and neighbor, Horace Winthrop, who had dropped over for a chat, when a timid rap sounded on the door.

The caller proved to be Albert, the chauffeur, cap in hand, and very apologetic for the intrusion. He hesitated on the threshold when he saw that his master was not alone.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, glancing toward Winthrop, "I did not know you had company."

"Never mind Colonel Winthrop," Addison retorted. "What is it you want?"

"But, sir, it's—it's a rather delicate matter and perhaps—"

He hesitated and again glanced uncertainly toward his master's guest. The latter stood up.

"I'll go, John," he said.

"Sit down," Addison replied. "I guess it isn't anything so very private that you can't share it, Horace."

"Just as you say, John." The gray-haired friend of the family resumed his seat. Addison turned once more to the chauffeur.

"Speak up, man! What is it?"

"I—I—just wanted to ask you, sir, why the new maid left so sudden-like?"

Addison eyed the fellow keenly. Was the chauffeur also beginning to suspect something? This was a matter that called for diplomacy.

HE ESSAYED a careless laugh and shrugged his shoulders.

"I wasn't aware that her departure was particularly abrupt," he replied. "Seems to me I heard my wife say something about the maid finding things a bit dull up here. Why do you ask?"

"Why—why, sir, I—I—was just wondering—"

"Wondering what?" Addison cut in impatiently.

"Why—er—you see, sir, I happen to know that Master Donald hasn't been home since Sunday afternoon. And I—I—saw—"

"Yes! You saw what? Out with it, man! What are you trying to tell me?"

Thus admonished, the chauffeur blurted out his story.

"I was dusting off one of the cars down at the garage, sir, shortly after dinner Sunday, and I saw the new maid walk over the hill in the direction of Gull Pond. A short while later I saw Master Donald take the same path.

"I didn't give the matter more than a passing thought, sir, and I had forgotten it entirely until this morning at the breakfast table. The servants were discussing the new maid, and, begging your pardon, sir, they were wondering why she left so sudden. And then I happened to remember that I hadn't seen Master Donald about since I saw him walk over the hill.

And—and—I couldn't help wondering, sir, if they—"

"If they went away together, eh?"

"Ye—yes, sir."

"Have you mentioned this to anyone else, Albert?"

"Oh, no, sir! I came directly to you, sir. I thought perhaps I ought to tell you what I saw."

Addison's manner became more friendly.

"That was the proper thing to do, Albert. But I am sure your suspicions are groundless. I'm quite certain the maid returned before she took her final departure. However, I'll ask Mrs. Addison about it. And in the meantime, kindly refrain from mentioning your suspicions to anyone else, Albert. Thank you for coming to me. Here, smoke these when you're not busy."

He thrust a handful of cigars into the chauffeur's hand.

Albert thanked his master and bowed himself out.

Addison turned angrily to his guest after the door had closed behind the chauffeur.

"I knew it!" he growled. "The damn young scoundrel! Dragging our name in the dust with his dirty scandals! Horace, that kid brother of mine will be the death of me yet! Chasing off with a servant! If he has no pride himself, he might at least consider our feelings a little."

His aged companion smiled indulgently.

"Youth is bound to have its fling, John. You're too hard on the lad. He'll steady down as he gets older."

A twinkle came into the eyes of the speaker as he continued: "If I were younger, I would envy the young rascal. That new maid is a—a—wow! I remember when I was a young fellow I—"

The jangle of the telephone cut short the old man's reminiscences. John Addi-

son picked up the receiver and growled: "Hello."

"Addison Manor?" a masculine voice inquired.

"Yes—John Addison speaking. Who is this?"

"Daniel Hurley of the *Elmhurst Morning Star*. Do you expect to be at your downtown office this morning?"

Addison scowled darkly. So the news was out already! Hurley was fishing for an exclusive interview about Don and the maid, eh? Well, he wouldn't get it!

"I have nothing to say," he stated coldly.

"Nothing to say about what?" the voice eagerly inquired.

A puzzled gleam crept into Addison's eyes. Perhaps the newspaper man hadn't heard about Don yet. He laughed and his voice took on a more friendly tone.

"About a certain deal I'm interested in, Mr. Hurley. Until it's completed I'll have nothing for you boys. I thought when you first spoke perhaps something had leaked out prematurely. However, if there is anything else I can do for you—"

"Plenty!" the voice cut in. "May I suggest that you get down to your office as fast as your car can bring you?"

"But I don't quite understand, Mr. Hurley. If you'll kindly—"

"I can't explain over the wire, Mr. Addison. Please hurry and get down here as soon as you possibly can."

"Very well, sir. I'll meet you at my office in half an hour."

Addison hung up and turned puzzled eyes to his companion.

"That was Hurley, the newspaper man," he told his neighbor.

"He's upset about something. Wants to see me at once. Care to ride down with me?"

The elderly man shook his head.

"Guess not, John. I'll visit awhile with

your mother. And I wouldn't let that newspaper man worry me too much. It probably isn't anything very important."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Addison, "but I guess I'll hustle along and see what he wants."

THIRTY minutes later Daniel Hurley was closeted with the new master of Addison Manor in the latter's palatial suite of offices in the Franklin Chambers.

The newspaper man wasted little time in greetings.

"Sorry to get you down here in such a hurry, Mr. Addison," he apologized, "but I had to see you and I didn't think it would be wise for me to run out to the manor. I want to ask you about a maid who entered your employ a few days ago. She calls herself Nanette."

John Addison rapped out an angry oath and his eyes blazed wrathfully.

"So you tricked me after all, eh? You knew it all the time! I'll break you for this, Hurley. I'll—"

"Just a moment!" Hurley cut in sharply. "Your wires are crossed somewhere, Mr. Addison. I don't know what you are talking about. I wanted to ask you about that girl because I'm worried about her. I had a date with her for last evening and she didn't show up. I want to know if she's all right."

Addison stared at Hurley in blank amazement. Then his lips curled scornfully.

"And you had the colossal nerve to bring me down here just to inquire about that sneaking little hussy, did you! And she walked out on you! Serves you right! A man of your age! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Hurley!"

In his wrath Addison threw discretion to the winds. He laughed harshly. "If you had a date with that young lady, she was playing you for a sucker! She disappeared shortly after dinner Sunday—

and I have reason to believe my kid brother went with her."

A startled oath broke from Hurley's lips.

"Gone since Sunday!" he cried in alarm. "And you haven't done anything about it? Man, you should have notified the police at once!"

"Notify the police? You're crazy, Hurley! Why should I notify the police just because my brother has taken it into his fool head to run off with one of the servants?"

"Listen, Mr. Addison!" Hurley commanded. "You don't understand!"

"That girl's no servant! Her name isn't Nanette LaFleur. Her right name is Hattie Oliver. She's a detective! And if anything's happened to her, I'll never forgive myself. She didn't run off with your brother. Hattie isn't that kind of a girl!"

"A detective!" Addison exclaimed. "A detective in our home! This is unbelievable! What was her purpose, sir?"

"It's about time you were wised up to a thing or two," Hurley ground out grimly. "I'll tell you what she was doing out there! She was trying to get a line on the man who poisoned your father! She was trying to find out who engineered Doctor Leonard's fatal 'accident'! She was endeavoring to learn the identity of the person who instructed Tony Lorello to shoot Doctor Babcock! To find out who stabbed Tony Lorello!"

"Man, what are you saying?" Addison demanded hoarsely. "My father poisoned! I don't understand, Hurley! Is this some ghastly joke?"

"I wish to God it were! Listen, Addison—and judge for yourself."

Hurley rapidly told the story, tersely outlining his theory concerning the chain of events which seemed to link the four deaths together as a part of some diabolic

cal plot, the purpose of which was not as yet even vaguely comprehended.

"And that's why our investigation is being made under cover," the newspaper man explained at the conclusion of his recital. "Our only hope seemed to lie in keeping our enemies ignorant of the fact that we suspected anything unnatural in the death of your father. But they're forcing our hand now, Mr. Addison! If they have spirited Hattie away, they know we're on their trail. And if anything's happened to Hattie Oliver, I'll never forgive myself. She's almost like a daughter to me."

The financier slumped into a chair and ran a hand wearily across his brow.

"This is terrible, Mr. Hurley! And I was accusing Don of running away with her!"

Sudden alarm brought him bolt upright in his chair. He shot a startled glance to his companion's face.

"And Don's been kidnapped, too!"

In an agitated voice he told Hurley what he had learned that morning from the lips of the chauffeur.

"That settles it!" the newspaper man exclaimed. "Hattie must have taken your brother into her confidence, and they've spirited them both away. Come! There isn't any time to lose! We've got to work fast if we ever want to see those young folks alive again!"

Addison sprang to his feet. "I'm yours to command, Hurley. What do you suggest?"

"I'll call up Inspector Osgood and tell him to send the wagon out for the nurse. It's high time that young lady was behind bars. Then we'll hop out there and try to pick up Hattie's trail from that point."

Hurley got the inspector on the wire, and the latter promised immediate action. Addison and the newspaper man hurried out to the financier's waiting car.

"Back to the manor!" Addison ordered.

"And never mind the traffic lights, Albert."

FRANKLIN CHAMBERS was the elite of the city's office buildings. As though disdainful to associate with its more humble brethren, it reared its nine stories of granite and gleaming marble in a comparatively quiet section of the downtown area, a mile beyond police headquarters.

This circumstance gave the inspector and the heavy police machine a start that Addison's car was unable to overcome. When the latter arrived at the manor, Osgood's car and the police "wagon" were already on the scene.

As the financier's car came to a stop before the front entrance of the mansion, Osgood came running down the steps, followed more slowly by Colonel Winthrop. Both men were visibly excited.

Addison and Hurley stepped out of the car just as the inspector reached the bottom of the steps. The latter shook his fist in Hurley's face.

"Why'd you wait so long to have that blasted nurse brought in?" he bellowed.

"Why, what's wrong?" the newspaper man demanded anxiously.

"Plenty, you big sap! She and her boy friend, the secretary, beat us to it—that's all!"

"That's right, Mr. Hurley," Horace Winthrop corroborated less excitedly. He turned to John Addison and continued: "Shortly after you left for the city I heard the nurse ask Gerald if he would mind driving her down to the post office. I saw them drive off in his car."

Hurley turned to Albert, who was still at the wheel of Addison's machine.

"Is Buckley's car fast?" he demanded.

"Fastest bus in the garage!" the chauffeur replied. "It's a Tempest Eight, sir!"

"Hear that, Frank?" Hurley cried excitedly. "A Tempest Eight! That bus'll

be in Canada before night! Better broadcast a description of it right away."

"Right!" growled the detective. He turned and dashed up the steps in search of a telephone.

Hurley turned to John Addison.

"Osgood will take care of that end of it. Now let's have Albert show us that path that Hattie and your brother took."

"It begins down behind the stables," the chauffeur spoke up. "If you gentlemen will hop aboard I'll have you there in no time."

Addison, Winthrop, and Hurley piled in, and Albert sent the huge car dashing down toward the stables. They sprang out and followed him to the spot where a winding path led upward through the tangled shrubbery toward the crest of the hill.

"The maid went first," he informed his listeners, "and Master Donald followed a few minutes later."

Sudden inspiration gleamed in John Addison's eyes. He turned excitedly to the chauffeur.

"Go over to the kennels and get Donald's favorite hound," he commanded. "Better bring him on a leash."

Hurley nodded approvingly as the chauffeur hurried away.

"Going to have him trail his master, eh? Not a bad idea, sir! It hasn't rained since Sunday, and I imagine he'll be able to pick up the scent all right."

"Leave it to Bonzo!" Addison replied. "He'll find Don if the boy's anywhere in the neighborhood. Raising foxhounds is a hobby of Don's, and Bonzo is his favorite dog."

"But, gentlemen," Horace Winthrop reminded the others, "I am still somewhat at a loss to know what this is all about! I gathered from what Inspector Osgood told me that Miss Newton is involved in something rather serious. But I'm still pretty much up in the air about it."

In terse sentences Hurley acquainted the old man with all he suspected and knew. At its conclusion, Colonel Winthrop turned sorrowfully to his dead friend's son.

"This is terrible, John! Sewell poisoned!" In spite of his seventy years, he was still a robust man. He threw back his broad shoulders and clenched his fists threateningly. "Count me in on this, gentlemen!" he growled. "I'm not exactly a young man any more, but I'd like to get my hands on the damn murderer!"

Inspector Osgood and one of the uniformed policemen from the headquarters machine joined them at this juncture.

Hurley acquainted Osgood with Addison's plan, and the detective's eyes gleamed eagerly.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "A regular old-fashioned man hunt, eh? Too bad your brother doesn't go in for bloodhounds, Mr. Addison!"

"Net all spread for Buckley and the nurse?" Hurley inquired.

"Yep—all set, Dan. We'll—"

Osgood paused abruptly at sight of the chauffeur rounding a corner of the stable, holding an eager hound in leash.

Hurley immediately assumed command of the little cavalcade.

"Let's go, gentlemen!" he said, pointing to the path ahead.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Bonzo Does His Stuff

THE noon whistles were blowing as the little party set out. The hound picked up his master's scent at once. Whining eagerly and tugging at his leash, the intelligent animal led them at a rapid pace over the crest of the hill and down to the boat-house. He paused occasionally to sniff at another scent which apparently mingled with his master's.

"That'll be Hattie's scent," Hurley told his companions.

Arriving at the boat-house, the dog's eager whine changed to a menacing growl, and the fur on his back bristled ominously.

"Ah! cried Hurley. "Here's where an alien scent joins the other two! Hold Bonzo outside, Albert, while we have a look inside this shack."

The eager men crowded in through the door and cast their eyes about the shaded interior. The snubbed butts of many cigarettes littered the floor near the bench where Hattie and Don had sat. Addison picked up one and examined it closely. He turned to Hurley.

"These are Don's all right!" he exclaimed. "See that monogram—'DLA'?"

"And they spent a considerable length of time in here," Hurley replied, "judging by the number of butts lying around." He turned to Osgood. "Find anything of interest, Frank?"

"Not a thing," the detective growled. "If those kids were forcibly abducted, seems like there ought to be some signs of a struggle. Wherever they went from here, they went peaceably."

Hurley smiled grimly. "Peaceably—at the point of a gun, most likely!"

They made their way outside, and the dog quickly picked up the scent of its master once more. Growling and whining alternately, the eager beast led them along the shore of the pond and struck into a path that eventually led to an old road. They advanced along this wider lane a short distance, then the dog lost the scent.

The reason was obvious. On a grassy plot at one side of the road a car had been parked. The print of the tires was unmistakable in the soft soil of the road.

"Well, gentlemen, this looks like the end of the trail," Hurley said disappointingly. "Our friends continued their jour-

ney from this point by automobile. Call off your hound, Albert."

"And now what?" Osgood demanded.

"Return to the manor and see if any word has come in concerning Buckley and the nurse," Hurley replied. "Then you'd better get back to headquarters, Frank, and broadcast a description of Hattie and Donald. I'll stick around up at the manor awhile and see if I can pick up any loose threads there. Did the wagon wait up at the house?"

"Nope—I sent it back to headquarters Dan. Brennan here can ride back in my car. But how'll you get back downtown?"

"I'll see that Mr. Hurley gets back to his office," Addison assured the inspector.

The little group of stern-faced men turned and retraced their steps in the direction of Addison Manor.

HURLEY and Osgood lagged a short distance behind the rest of the party. The newspaper man's face was drawn and haggard. The detective placed a friendly hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Buck up, old man," he said. "We'll locate those two kids before long. The trail is pretty cold by this time, but we'll find it."

"I hope so, Frank! I don't mind telling you I was pretty darn shaky until we discovered where they had been forced into that machine. I more than half expected we'd discover their dead bodies down here in the woods somewhere. The fact that they took them off in a machine indicates that they had no immediate intention of killing them. And the more I think the thing over, Frank, the more I believe there's a chance they won't kill them right away.

"The man behind this business has learned that we are on his trail. Doctor Babcock and Tony Lorello were murdered to keep them from talking at a time

when the devil believed his plot was not even suspected. The case is entirely different now. He knows we are wise, and realizing this fact, he may content himself with merely holding Hattie and Don until he has accomplished whatever purpose he has in view. Of course, he may find it necessary to kill them in the end. It's up to us to find them before that time arrives."

"I get you," growled his friend. "Our job is to get those kids away from that devil before things get too hot for him. But that isn't going to be the easiest job in the world, Dan."

"I know it," Hurley replied. "Our best bet is to get our hands on young Buckley and that nurse. She may not talk, but I imagine he will. He always impressed me as being something of a spineless fop—and your methods ought to loosen his tongue."

"Leave that kid to me!" Osgood growled. "He'll spill what he knows before I'm done with him!"

Arrived back at the manor, the inspector and Patrolman Brennan left immediately for headquarters in the former's car. Addison, Hurley, and Winthrop watched them go, then stood on the steps a few minutes talking about the recent developments in the situation. No word had as yet been received concerning the missing nurse and Gerald Buckley.

After a few moments Winthrop started across the spacious lawn in the direction of his own palatial abode, and Hurley followed Addison up the steps and through the portals of the manor.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Hidden Clue

HURLEY was Addison's guest at a late lunch, following which the two men repaired to the latter's study. The

financier offered his companion a cigar, but Hurley declined it. His pipe was seldom far from his hand.

In his conversation with Addison and Winthrop he had already stated his reasons for believing that Hattie and Donald were still alive. His logical surmises had done much to allay John Addison's fear for his brother's safety.

Hurley got his pipe going to his satisfaction, then trained his friendly eyes upon his companion's face.

"Developments from now on should be rapid," he told Addison. "But there is one very formidable obstacle still in our path."

"And that is—?"

"The motive, Mr. Addison. Until we discover a plausible motive for the poisoning of your father we are groping in the dark. With the hope of possibly bringing out something that has been overlooked, I am going to ask you a few questions. If some of them seem entirely too personal, I'm going to beg you to remember that I am asking them solely for the purpose of getting to the bottom of this thing."

"Ask what you will, Mr. Hurley. I'll answer to the best of my ability."

The newspaper man then proceeded to question his host about the things Hattie had discovered. Addison promptly explained them.

Hurley was vastly surprised to learn that the missing secretary was Addison's step-son, and the knowledge evoked a sympathetic expression of hope that the young man would clearly prove himself innocent of any complicity in the case.

Sewell Addison's will next claimed the newspaper man's attention. His host secured a copy of it, and Hurley perused the document thoughtfully. Then he shook his head.

"This looks innocent enough," he admitted cautiously, "but we can't afford to dismiss it too readily, Mr. Addison. A

fortune of this size always carries a potential menace. You men of vast wealth don't realize what your less fortunate fellow might do for a share of your riches. You don't know the terrifying possibilities that always lurk where gold is garnered.

"Greed! Revenge! These are the two passions that transcend all others for the taking of human life, Mr. Addison. And I am convinced that it must be greed in this particular case. Someone expects to profit financially by your father's death. And I'll go even a step further. The motive required that the crime be committed at this particular time! If this were not so, why would the murderer have hastened the demise of a man toward whom the finger of death was already pointing?"

"Think, man! Think hard! Were there any important deals pending at the time of your father's death? Deals that might have terminated differently if he had lived a little longer?"

Addison shook his head thoughtfully.

"None that I can think of, Mr. Hurley. My father's death at this, or any other, time could not have affected the Addison interests. The management of the estate has been in my hands for the past two or three years, aside from a few personal items that father still attended to. I, and not my father, would have been the one to murder in such a case, sir."

"Very well," replied Hurley. "Then let's turn to the revenge angle, bearing in mind that revenge and greed often go hand in hand. Did your father have any enemies, Mr. Addison?"

"None vindictive enough to murder him," the financier replied.

Hurley shrugged his shoulders.

"We're not going places very fast, are we?"

The newspaper man puffed at his pipe thoughtfully. In spite of the negative re-

sults his questions had thus far elicited, he was sure the motive for the crime was in some manner associated with the Addison millions. Any person or anything, directly or indirectly connected with such vast wealth, would bear watching.

Hurley's mind reverted to Gerald Buckley, the missing secretary. That dapper young gentleman definitely came within that classification of suspects.

He laid aside his pipe and again addressed his host. "Mr. Addison, I should like very much to run through Buckley's personal papers and correspondence. I suppose he has a study of his own?"

The financier stood up. "His study is directly across the hall, Mr. Hurley."

A moment later they were in the secretary's study, and Addison had closed and locked the door. He pointed to a desk. "Help yourself," he said gravely.

HURLEY nodded and sat down at the desk. The task before him was not to his liking, but that fact did not deter him. Nothing escaped his eye. Bills, documents, personal correspondence, were subjected to a rapid but expert scrutiny.

He came at length to a blank envelope, sealed, and evidently containing a folded sheet of paper. Sewell Addison's name and address were neatly engraved in the left hand upper corner.

Hurley silently handed the envelope to Addison.

"Strange how this happens to be here," the latter remarked with a thoughtful frown. "Do you suppose it may be a letter that my father dictated and that Gerald forgot to address and mail?"

"Best way to find out is to open it," Hurley suggested a trifle impatiently.

Addison tore open the envelope and withdrew a typewritten sheet of paper. It proved to be a carbon copy of a letter his father had dictated to the secretary. Addison perused it, then handed it to his companion. Hurley took it and read:

Addison Manor,
Elmhurst, Mass.
September 16, 1932.

Martin Greenleaf,
Attorney-at-Law,
1328 Rittenhouse Chambers,
Boston, Mass.

Dear Sir:

Replying to your communication under date of September Tenth, I am sorry to advise I consider it unwise to renew the lease on the Tucker property to your client, Mr. Ameer Garbadian. Complaints have reached me recently concerning the manner in which the tavern has been conducted, and I am highly displeased.

You will kindly inform your client that he will have to vacate the premises on or before November Twentieth, at which time his lease expires.

You may also inform Mr. Garbadian that the property is not for sale, and that if it were, I would not sell to him for any consideration whatsoever.

Very truly yours,
(Signed) SEWELL T. ADDISON.

Hurley raised shining eyes to his companion's face. "This looks rather promising, Mr. Addison." Then he added accusingly: "And you told me your father had no enemies!"

"I still see no reason to believe he had," Addison retorted. "This letter doesn't contain anything to alter my opinion."

"No? Guess again, sir!"

Hurley tapped the letter to emphasize his point. "If this Garbadian chap is the proprietor of some tavern that has recently become notorious, you may be very sure its unsavory reputation is due to the sale of booze. And you can be equally certain that your father's refusal to renew the lease hasn't engendered any feeling of affection on the part of Garbadian! Just where is this property located, Mr. Addison?"

"Up near Deerfield on a side road about a mile back from the main highway between Greenfield and Springfield."

Hurley's eyes widened in amazement.

"Do you by any possible chance refer

to the Blue Lantern?" he inquired excitedly.

His companion inclined his head soberly. "Yes—I believe that is what the tavern is now called. It was the old Valley Inn before the present tenant took it over. But why all the excitement, Hurley?"

The newspaper man ignored the question.

"The Blue Lantern!" he exclaimed. "The most notorious road-house in this part of the state! Why, man alive, that place is a veritable gold mine! And you say your father owned that property?"

"No—my mother," Addison corrected. "The property belongs to my mother. It was left to her by an aunt. The aunt's married name was Tucker. Her husband ran the tavern under the name of the Valley Inn. It was nothing but a peaceful country inn back in those days.

"Tucker died a number of years ago. His wife closed up the place and moved to Boston. When she died she left the property to my mother. The old place remained vacant until about three years ago, at which time Garbadian leased it and reopened it under its present name. I doubt whether Dot and Don know that it belongs to us at all."

A sudden recollection drained the color from John Addison's face. A startled light sprang into his eyes.

"Hurley, you're right!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Fool that I am not to have remembered! The papers for that new lease are on my desk this very minute, awaiting my signature. I had forgotten all about them! Buckley filled them out and handed them to me the other day. He asked me to be sure and sign them in time for him to get them in the mails before the twentieth!"

Addison paused and gulped painfully. "And Gerald was shoving that lease through against the express command of my father!" he exclaimed sorrowfully.

"And duping me into the bargain! This will just about kill my wife, Hurley!"

DANIEL HURLEY'S eyes had filled with sympathetic understanding as the other spoke.

"Perhaps it isn't as bad for the boy as it looks," he remarked quietly. "The lad is guilty of deception, but he may not know what it's all about. That nurse may have just been playing him for a sucker. She may have told him that Garbadian was a friend of hers and persuaded him to put the thing through just as a personal favor to her. He may prove to be just an unwitting accessory, Mr. Addison."

"I hope so, Hurley. And you're sure my father's refusal to renew that lease constitutes the motive for his murder?"

"It's a strong possibility, sir! I wonder if you realize what the loss of the Blue Lantern would mean to Garbadian? When I said the place was a gold mine, I wasn't exaggerating a bit. I'll bet that dump's bringing in close to a quarter of a million annually!"

"And that shyster, Martin Greenleaf, is acting for Garbadian!" Hurley continued savagely. "And when Lorello was arrested he came hightailing it up here to act as the wop's mouthpiece! Yep! The pieces of our little puzzle are all falling into place very nicely!"

Hurley glanced at his watch and abruptly arose. "It's later than I thought!" he exclaimed. "I'll hustle right down to headquarters and let Frank Osgood in on this. And kindly keep the matter of this lease under your hat, Mr. Addison. Our activities are suspected, but they don't know whom we suspect. There may still be a spy in this house. One of the servants, perhaps. Don't tell a single soul about it—not even your wife or your mother. It may be a day or two before Osgood is ready to move against Garbadian. Promise me, please!"

"I promise," Addison gravely replied.

"Good! And now I'll say goodbye, Mr. Addison."

The two men shook hands and Hurley left for the city in the financier's car. He arrived at Police Headquarters just in time to catch Inspector Osgood in the act of climbing into his own speedy machine.

"Wait up!" shouted Hurley, rushing toward him. "I've got something to tell you."

"Hop in and come along," Osgood commanded. "You can spill it on the way. They've just picked up Buckley a few miles this side of Petersham."

"Good!" cried Hurley, springing to a seat beside his friend. "He's just the young man I want to see! You'll get your chance to make that kid talk, after all."

Osgood shook his head and smiled grimly.

"Guess again, Dan! That boy won't talk—ever! They found him with a bullet hole smack between his two eyes!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Addison Versus Greenleaf

FORTY minutes of furious driving brought Inspector Osgood and Daniel Hurley to a point on the highway a few miles beyond the village of Barre. The roar of the powerful motor rendered speech difficult, and the newspaper man wisely refrained from attempting to acquaint the detective with the result of his conference with John Addison.

A number of passing cars had already stopped and their occupants were crowded around the body of the youthful secretary. A state trooper had taken charge pending the arrival of the Elmhurst Police. The shooting had occurred on a lonely stretch of road in the heart of the Harvard Forest Preserve, and the somber twilight beneath the lofty trees added

a final touch of gloom to the dismal picture.

Osgood parked his car and pushed his way unceremoniously through the gaping crowd. Hurley followed at his heels.

"Hello, Jackson," the inspector greeted the state trooper. "Anything been disturbed?"

The young trooper touched his cap in a brisk salute. "Howdy, Inspector. No, nothing's been touched. Body's just as Mitchell and I discovered it about an hour ago. Mitchell beat it back to the barracks to notify you. We knew from the description you broadcast that this kid was one of the pair you were after. I stayed right here with the body."

"Good work, Jackson! The medical examiner ought to be along pretty soon. A police ambulance is on the way, too. Strictly speaking, this is out of our jurisdiction, but this kid here belonged to us, and I guess the local authorities won't put up any holler."

The inspector turned to the onlookers. "On your way, folks," he ordered gruffly. "Jackson, you get out there on the road and keep traffic moving. Get them parked cars moving, too."

The trooper turned to his task. "Get going there!" he commanded sharply. "You heard what the inspector said. Come on! Come on! Get a move on!"

The crowd reluctantly dispersed, and the parked cars began to move away. Jackson stood in the middle of the highway, hastening them along and curtly ordering new arrivals to keep going. The second trooper returned at this juncture and took a position a short distance farther down the road.

Osgood and Hurley were left alone with the body. The newspaper man glanced pityingly down at the silent form sprawled on a bed of moss and dry leaves at one side of the road.

"Poor kid!" he exclaimed softly. "This

makes the fifth, Frank! How much longer is this business going to keep up?"

Osgood growled an oath and knelt beside the body. He pointed to a bluish hole in the center of the victim's forehead.

"The lad took it facing his killer," he said. "They were standing pretty close together. The kid got plugged before he knew what it was all about. And that hole ain't a very big hole, Dan. Probably made by a .22. Just about the caliber of a rod you'd expect a broad to tote around in her hand-bag—eh?"

Hurley nodded soberly. "Yes, I guess we can chalk this up against the nurse," he agreed. "It looks like she waited till they reached this lonely spot, then made some excuse for stopping. They got out, and she drew her gun and let him have it."

"But why?" demanded Osgood.

"Because his period of usefulness was over, Frank. This killing proves the kid was just a sucker for that woman. He was playing her game without really knowing what it was all about. The nurse must have become suspicious this morning when John Addison left in such a hurry for his downtown office. I imagine there are several telephone extensions at the manor. She may possibly have listened in to my conversation with Addison. Something put her wise at any rate. She waited until Addison left, then she got Buckley to help her make her getaway. She told Winthrop she was going to the post office. She probably kidded Buckley into taking her for what he thought was to be a nice quiet spin in the country."

"Yep—that's about the way she pulled it," Osgood agreed. "And then after she plugged him, she beat it away in his bus. And if I'm right, we've still got a chance of picking her up. The kid's car ought to be easy to spot."

"I imagine we'll locate his car before

very long," Hurley said quietly, "but it's dollars to doughnuts the lady won't be in it. She'll drive it just far enough to be out of the immediate vicinity of where the killing took place. Then she'll abandon it and make the rest of her getaway by some other means."

The words were barely out of Hurley's mouth when a third trooper came roaring up on his motorcycle to inform them that the missing car had been located on a side street in Orange.

Osgood cursed softly when the trooper went on to explain that the car had been abandoned.

"You ought to join the gypsies and get into the fortune telling racket," he told Hurley. "You were dead right about that dame, old man. She's nobody's fool. Slippery as an eel. But I've caught more than one eel in my day. And I'll hook this one, too, before I'm through!"

"And I think I know a promising hole to start fishing in," Hurley retorted. "I'll tell you about it later. Here comes the medical examiner."

THAT energetic official sprang lightly from his car, nodded to Osgood and Hurley, and turned at once to the body of the murdered secretary. He made a rapid examination, stood up, and faced the two men.

"Death was instantaneous, gentlemen," he stated crisply. "Bullet's probably lodged in the region of the fourth ventricle. Small caliber, but fired from a very short distance. Powder marks plainly visible on the skin. Probably a .22. Tell for sure when we get the bullet." He frowned distastefully. "Horrible business! Looks like a nice kid, too! Wagon ought to be along any minute. Passed it about five miles back. I was doing sixty-five. See you later, gentlemen."

The medical examiner retraced his

steps and sprang into his car. He turned the heavy machine and went roaring away in the direction of Elmhurst.

Osgood chuckled and turned to his friend.

"The doc's what you might call a fast worker, Dan. I'll bet he was here all of five minutes! Hate to have him operate on me when he was really in a hurry!"

The police ambulance came roaring up at this juncture. Osgood and Hurley waited until the body of the slain secretary was safely aboard, then made their way to their own car. The inspector drove at a moderate rate of speed on the return trip, and Hurley found time to tell his friend about the carbon copy of the letter Sewell Addison had dictated to his secretary. He was careful, however, to make no mention of Buckley's true status in the Addison household.

Osgood was grimly jubilant at the news.

"And so that letter was the hidden clue to the whole business!" he exclaimed. "Lucky for us the kid didn't destroy it! I wonder why he didn't, Dan."

"That question takes us into the realm of crook psychology," the newspaper man replied. "Why do crooks always leave a loose thread hanging somewhere along their trail? Buckley probably didn't attach a great deal of importance to that lease and simply neglected to destroy the carbon copy of the letter, never dreaming that anyone would go through his personal papers. Not that he was a crook in the real sense of the term, but he was at least crooked enough to hoodwink his employer. But enough of that, Frank. Let's see now. Theory proven; motive established. What next?"

"Get a warrant and slide up to the Blue Lantern and fetch in Garbadian," Osgood promptly replied.

A thoughtful frown crossed Hurley's face. He shook his head. A grave sus-

picion had been slowly taking form in his brain.

"No, Frank," he replied, "we mustn't arrest Garbadian until we're sure he's the man we're after—the man 'higher up.' Now, now! Hold your horses a minute and let me finish. Stop and think a minute. The man behind this clever plot is no fool. In fact, he's extremely intelligent. Does your conception of Garbadian place him in that class, Frank?"

"Why not?" Osgood demanded truculently. "We've never met the man. He may have more brains than you and me put together."

"Yes, he may have," Hurley replied, "but I doubt it. The man behind this business has kept himself pretty well hidden, hasn't he?"

"I'll say he has!" the detective retorted.

"Then let me ask you one question, Frank. Would a man as clever as our mythical super-crook run a shady joint like the Blue Lantern under his own name? Wouldn't he have an accomplice lease the place, and keep his own identity hidden?"

"Aw, you give me a pain!" Osgood retorted. "You and your damn' theories! We'll pinch Garbadian and sweat the truth out of him. And if there should be a guy still higher up, we'll learn his name and go after him!"

"And after you pinch Garbadian, I suppose the other fellow will obligingly wait around for you to go out and get him!" Hurley replied mockingly. Then the edge left his voice. "Listen, Frank, I've got a strong hunch that the nurse has holed-in up at the Blue Lantern; and I've got still another hunch that young Donald Addison and Hattie Oliver may be held prisoners in the same place. Hold off your pinch for a day or two and let me go up there as a guest and do a little quiet snooping."

"Yeah—and let Garbadian get wise and

beat it!" Osgood retorted mockingly. "Nothing doing, fella!"

"Then if you're bound to pinch Garbadian, let's do it in such a way that the man behind him won't become suspicious," Hurley pleaded.

"How?" the detective demanded.

"Get some of the state troopers to go along with us and stage a fake booze raid. I understand they're used to that sort of thing up there."

They argued the matter pro and con, but in the end Osgood capitulated. He shrugged helplessly and glanced at his watch.

"Okay. No use arguing with you, once you get a notion into that fat head of yours! We'll pull it off tonight. The sooner I get that Armenian under lock and key, the better I'll be satisfied. As soon as we get back to headquarters I'll dispatch a motorcycle cop up to the state barracks near Greenfield telling 'em what we want. Then he can chase on over to Deerfield and tell Constable Dressler to be ready in case we have to call on him. The Blue Lantern is in his district, you know."

"Fine!" applauded Hurley, his eyes lighting at the prospect of action.

THE remainder of the drive was spent in talking over their plans for the night. Osgood dropped Hurley at the latter's office and drove on alone to headquarters.

The newspaper man called up John Addison, only to learn that the sad news had already reached the sorrowing family in the somber mansion on the hill. But the financier had some interesting information for Hurley.

"I've just had a caller in the person of Martin Greenleaf," he told the newspaper man. "Said he happened to be in town and thought he'd call to offer his condolences on the death of my father. Meant

to have done so on his previous visit to Elmhurst, but didn't have time.

"He was with me when the news of Buckley's death came. Pretended to be greatly shocked. But I'm inclined to believe he already knew it. In fact, I'm quite sure this knowledge was responsible for his call. But the thing that puzzles me is how he happened to be in town at such an opportune moment.

"He only remained a short time—not more than fifteen or twenty minutes—and when he was leaving he just 'happened' to recall a certain lease you and I know about. Said if he wasn't mistaken the present lease expires in a few days. He rather 'presumed' Buckley had already made out the papers, and if I'd be kind enough to sign them he'd take them along with him and save me the trouble of mailing them."

"And what did you tell him?" Hurley eagerly inquired.

"I told him that Gerald had mentioned the matter of the lease to me, but that I wasn't sure whether the papers had been made out yet. I told him I was too badly upset by the news of the boy's death to think of attending to the matter today. I promised to mail the new lease before the present one expires."

A chuckle came over the wire.

"We parted then, each pretending that the matter was of no particular importance. I wonder just how deeply that fellow is involved in this business."

"Not too deep to cover his tracks," Hurley replied grimly. "He knows his onions! But you handled him just right, Mr. Addison. My congratulations! I don't want to say too much over the telephone, but if our plans don't miscarry, that lease will cease to be a matter of any importance after tonight. You may possibly find something of interest in tomorrow morning's paper."

Hurley hung up, a smile of grim satisfaction on his face.

"So Greenleaf just 'happened' to be in Elmhurst!" he exclaimed mockingly. "Someone called him up the minute they learned Buckley had been killed. When we learn the identity of that 'someone,' I'm betting it won't be Garbadian!

"Fast work on the part of Greenleaf—but he could make it in a plane from Boston, easy. Well, well! Is that lease important? I'll tell the world it is!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Prisoners

DONALD ADDISON awoke with a splitting headache and a feeling of nausea not unlike that experienced by a man awakening after a night of hectic celebration. The symptoms were not unfamiliar to him.

He yawned sleepily and reached blindly for the pitcher of ice water the butler always placed on the little table at the head of the bed in readiness for just such awakenings.

But his groping hand failed to locate either table or pitcher. He rubbed his eyes and sat up. He blinked at the bright sunlight streaming in through a partly opened skylight in the ceiling, and then as his bleary vision focused more clearly on his surroundings he uttered a startled oath and sprang from the bed.

Where was he? This wasn't his room! He'd never seen the place before! Then the memories of the previous day came flooding back.

He had been deciphering that code message with Hattie Oliver down at the boat-house. A masked man had held them up. A man whose guttural, "Hands up!" had been the only words he had spoken. A man whose further commands had been silent gestures. A man who somehow seemed vaguely familiar.

He had forced them to march through the forest until they reached an old road where a car was parked. They had been compelled to enter the car. Other hands had instantly seized them, and he had felt the sharp sting of a needle in his arm. This had been quickly followed by a lethargy which deepened into complete oblivion.

Sudden comprehension dawned in the young man's eyes. He had been drugged! And in all probability the same thing had befallen Hattie Oliver! But where was she now?

His anxious eyes swept the interior of the cozy room in which he found himself. There were no windows, but the place was flooded with morning sunlight from a skylight in the lofty ceiling. An open door afforded a view of a small bathroom, also without a window.

A closed door on the opposite side of the room claimed his attention. The key was missing and it was locked. He stooped down and peered through the empty keyhole. The bare walls of a dark corridor met his straining eye. He stood up and again surveyed his prison.

The locked door and the skylight were the only means of egress.

His tweed suit, neatly pressed, was draped over the back of a chair. His tan shoes, newly polished, stood on the floor in front of the chair. He caught a glimpse of his stalwart form in the oval mirror of the dresser. He was clad in gay-colored silk pajamas!

He pulled up the sleeve of his right arm and inspected the spot where the opiate had been injected. The tiny puncture was tender when he touched it. His brow darkened with anger. And they had dared to subject Hattie Oliver to the same indignity! That brave little girl whom he had known but a few short days, but who had already stormed the citadel of his heart!

Yes, he loved her! The knowledge of it had burst upon him with stunning force while they were marching through the forest at the point of their abductor's gun.

It made him ashamed of his manner of living. It made him determine to mend his ways. It created within him a fierce desire to be able to face those friendly blue eyes and read approval in their clear depths, instead of the gentle reproach he had thus far found lurking there.

It reawakened that sense of physical supremacy he had known in the days when his prowess on the gridiron had made his name famous in the realm of sport. It made him brave. It made him strong. It sent the lust of battle surging through his veins.

He clenched his great fists threateningly. If these devils had harmed so much as a single hair of Hattie's head they'd pay dearly for it!

He advanced upon the locked door and thumped it lustily with a clenched fist.

"Outside there!" he shouted. "Open up or I'll smash down this door!"

"Coming, sir," a startled voice replied from the corridor. "Just a moment, sir."

Footsteps came hurrying down the hall. A key turned in the lock and the door swung cautiously inward.

A LITTLE old man, clad in the drab attire of a waiter, stood timidly peering into the room, his wrinkled face denoting mingled caution and defiance. In one hand he held an automatic pistol.

"It isn't necessary to break down the door, sir," he said in a tone of mild reproof. "Is there something you wish, sir?"

Addison eyed the man angrily.

"Is there something I wish!" he mocked. "I'll say there is! What is the meaning of this outrage? Where am I? And where is Miss Oliv—er, er, Miss La Fleur?"

A glint of amusement shone in the man's eyes.

"I am not at liberty to answer your first question, sir. The young lady is in a room down the corridor. If you will call me when you are ready, sir, I will conduct you to the room where your meals are to be served. Breakfast will be ready whenever you are. The young lady informed me she will be ready in fifteen minutes. Just knock when you are ready, sir."

The man bowed and withdrew, locking the door after him.

Addison wasted no further time in speculating as to the whys and wherefores of his present predicament. That could wait. If the man had told him the truth, a breakfast date with the dearest little girl in the world loomed on the immediate horizon.

His anger forgotten for the moment, Addison shed his gaudy-hued pajamas and headed for the bathtub. After a quick plunge, he hurriedly shaved with a safety razor he found in the little medicine closet over the washstand, then jumped into his clothes. An examination of his pockets revealed them empty. But his roving eye discovered their contents neatly arranged on the bureau. Nothing was missing but a small pocket knife. He grinned mockingly.

"All dangerous weapons removed, eh? That knife wouldn't cut butter!"

A last hurried glance in the mirror, and he was ready to meet the lady of his dreams. He strode to the door and rapped sharply.

"Yes, sir. Coming at once, sir," the servant called, hurrying along the dark corridor.

The key turned and the door swung open. The man, still holding the automatic in readiness for instant action, stepped aside and invited his prisoner to precede him.

Addison nodded curtly and strode eagerly down the hall toward an open door at the far end. The servant followed at his heels.

The room they now entered was also devoid of windows and was illuminated by a skylight similar to the one in his bedroom. Silver gleamed on a table covered with spotless linen. An electric percolator bubbled cheerfully on a small serving table, and the appetizing aroma of coffee filled the air. A toaster, operated by the same magic power, stood beside the percolator.

But it was none of these things which caught and held Addison's gaze. He saw only the smiling face of Hattie Oliver.

Forgetful of all else, he sprang around the table and clasped the astonished girl in his hungry arms.

"Oh, my darling! My darling!" he cried. "Thank God you are safe!"

"Please! Please!" the girl gasped breathlessly, struggling from his embrace and turning a burning face in the direction of the smiling waiter.

Addison fell back abashed, his face as red as the girl's.

"Forgive me!" he cried contritely. "Please forgive me! I—I—didn't realize what I was doing!"

Hattie was as embarrassed as her companion.

"I—I'm afraid you have mussed my hair all up!" she stammered, still keeping her eyes averted. "Shall we sit down? I—I—believe I'm hungry!"

Silently they took their places at the table. Hattie attacked her grapefruit in nervous haste. Addison thoughtlessly salted his.

"Coffee, Miss?" the servant inquired.

"Yes, thank you."

"And you, sir?"

Addison nodded his head, still fearing to trust his voice.

The young people ate heartily in spite

of their embarrassment. And by the time a second cup of coffee was in order their confusion was a thing of the past.

Addison finally pushed back his chair and lit a cigarette. He raised questioning eyes to the face of the waiter.

"And now perhaps you will be kind enough to tell us where we are and to whom we are indebted for this hospitality," he suggested coldly.

THE servant coughed apologetically. "I am sorry, sir, but I am not permitted to answer questions. My master will doubtless enlighten you at the proper moment. I have been instructed to assure you that you will both be treated with every possible courtesy if you will kindly observe the few rules he has found it necessary to make.

"Your meals will be served in this room. The remainder of the time you will be confined in your respective rooms. You will find books and magazines at your disposal. I shall be within earshot at all times. You have only to call if you desire anything."

Donald Addison bowed mockingly. "Kindly convey our respects to your august master." Then the young man's face hardened and his eyes gleamed coldly. "And tell him for me that he's going to pay for this through the nose."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir." A malicious smile belied the polite reply. "Anything else, sir, before I conduct you back to your rooms?"

"You might leave us alone for a few minutes," Addison suggested.

"I'm sorry, sir, but that is against the master's orders."

Addison got to his feet and advanced slowly. The servant backed away and hurriedly reached for his gun.

The younger man laughed shortly. "Don't be alarmed, my man. I won't hurt you. I was merely about to suggest that

perhaps you and I could come to some sort of an agreement that would be mutually beneficial. I presume your wages are so high that a little extra change wouldn't interest you?"

A hungry gleam came into the old man's eyes.

"Why, sir, I—I—wouldn't exactly say—"

"Of course you wouldn't," Addison interrupted smilingly. "I'll give you a thousand dollars if you'll slip us out of here tonight."

The hungry gleam deepened, and the old man licked his lips. Then he shook his head regretfully.

"I—I—wouldn't dare, sir. The master—"

"Aw, forget that guy. I'll make it five thousand."

"Five Grand!" The awed exclamation came in a husky whisper. "Cash, sir?"

Addison laughed shortly. "Hardly, my man. I'm not in the habit of carrying that amount around loose in my pocket. But I'm sure my bank will honor my check for that much."

"Oh, it isn't a question of that, sir, I know you are a very wealthy man. But how could I be certain you wouldn't stop payment on the check as soon as you got out, sir?"

"Simply my word that I won't."

The servant shook his head. "Not doubting your word, sir, but you might change your mind after you are free. However the matter might be arranged for tomorrow night—if you were to give me your check today. That would give me time to cash it before you were released."

"Nix on that proposition," Addison growled. "I don't trust you any more than you trust me. The minute we are safely out of here I'll give you a check made payable to bearer. That's my offer. Take it or leave it."

The old man shrugged his shoulders regretfully.

"I can't agree to that, sir."

"Very well, then, I'll have to deal directly with your boss," Addison said in a tone of finality. He turned to the girl. "Will I see you at lunch, Miss Oliver?"

The girl inclined her head. "Yes, thank you. And I think you would be very foolish to trust this man. Honest men don't work for crooks—and I imagine his esteemed 'master' is very much of a crook."

The servant's eyes gleamed venomously.

"Thank you, Miss," he snarled. "My master will be pleased to hear you hold him in such high esteem."

He bowed coldly and continued: "And now, with your kind permission, I will conduct you back to your rooms."

THE remainder of the day passed uneventfully, and darkness found the prisoners locked in their rooms for the night. Throughout the long evening and well into the early hours of the morning the strains of a jazz orchestra filtered up from somewhere below.

Addison couldn't sleep, and the music grew wearisome. He thought it came from a radio.

The following day—Tuesday—also passed quietly. Their jailer served the evening meal, then locked them in their rooms for the night.

Addison was rapidly becoming unmanageable, and at supper the old servant had very wisely brought reinforcements in the person of a sleek-haired dapper young man, who talked through one corner of his mouth and whose cold eyes warned the young millionaire what to expect at the first hostile move on his part.

Growling dire threats and snarling like a trapped beast of the jungle, Donald Addison had retreated along the dark corridor to his room. Only the fear of what might befall Hattie Oliver if anything

happened to him had kept him from jumping his two jailers.

Locked once more in his room, he paced restlessly back and forth, consuming one cigarette after another in rapid succession. How, he wondered, would this business end? Why didn't the big boss show up and lay his cards on the table? What was the purpose behind the whole nasty business? Were they in the hands of his father's killer, or had they fallen into the clutches of a gang of kidnapers? If this latter surmise were correct, why hadn't something been said about ransom?

And there was that damnable music again! Wonder they wouldn't tune in on something besides jazz!

Wearied, finally, by his incessant pacing back and forth and his fevered speculations, Addison glanced at his watch and discovered that it was already eleven o'clock. Might as well turn in and try to get some sleep. Perhaps matters would come to a head tomorrow. If they didn't, he'd make them!

He undressed leisurely and had just donned his pajamas when the sound of stealthy footsteps came from the corridor beyond his locked door. A key was inserted, and the door opened to admit the old servant and another man. At sight of the latter, Addison sprang to his feet with an oath of surprise.

"Garbadian!" he cried. "What are *you* doing here? Man, but I'm glad to see you! You a prisoner here, too?"

The fawning smile with which the proprietor of the Blue Lantern had always greeted his distinguished guest was strangely lacking now. The fellow's black eyes gleamed mockingly, and a sneer of cold contempt intensified the cruel lines of his swarthy face.

"Ah, Meester Addison! We meet once more! I am pleased that you are glad to see me. It is always my desire that my guests should feel *that way!*"

Addison stared in blank amazement at his erstwhile humble host. Then the import of the man's words registered on his startled consciousness. His eyes widened in sudden comprehension, and an angry oath escaped his lips.

"So it's you we have to thank for this outrage!" he cried hotly. "And I suppose this is—"

"The Blue Lantern, Meester Addison." Garbadian bowed mockingly. "Did you not recognize the music of our orchestra?"

"I wondered where the cat yowling was coming from," said Addison grimly. "But I didn't tumble that I was locked up in your cheap dump!"

"No? Well, that is where you are, Meester Addison. And I am not so certain you will consider it such a 'cheap dump' before you get out."

"But you must be crazy!" Addison exclaimed. "Can't you guess what'll happen when we do get out? You ought to know you can't get away with a stunt like this."

"Ah, Meester Addison! That is the point precisely! *When* you get out!" An evil leer accompanied the words.

"You mean you'd dare to—to—"

"Exactly!" cut in Garbadian. "I see you begin to comprehend, my dear young friend. To become alarmed about what you will do *when* you get out would be so very foolish of me!"

Addison's face went suddenly white.

"But Miss Oliv—Miss LaFleur. Surely you—"

"Enough!" the other interrupted harshly. "I am not such a fool as you seem to believe me, Meester Addison. I know the young lady's name is not LaFleur. She is a detective. Your conversation down in that little boat-house was most enlightening!"

ANGER replaced Addison's fear. "Oh, so you were listening, eh? Then you

must have been the man with the mask! It covered your ugly mug pretty well, but I thought there was something familiar-looking about you—you dirty murderer! I'm not such a fool myself! So you're the man behind all these killings, eh? You had my father poisoned. You engineered Doctor Leonard's fatal 'accident.' You killed Lorello. You—"

"Tut, tut, Meester Addison!" the other cut in. "Not so fast! You are jumping to conclusions. I am not the man behind these things. I am—"

"A damn liar!" Addison cut in savagely. "You needn't bother to deny it."

Garbadian bowed mockingly. "Have it your own way, Meester Addison," he replied. "What you believe or do not believe is of no consequence. But you may be quite sure I would silence your wagging tongue forever if what you believe were true. It is true that 'dead men tell no tales,' but it is equally true that live men will sometimes serve a better purpose than dead ones. To kill the goose that lays the golden eggs would indeed be so foolish!"

The burly road-house keeper grinned at his own cleverness. "I have a little proposition to make, Meester Addison. I have a most uncomfortable feeling that the game up here is about played out. The situation is becoming a little, too dangerous for my peace of mind. I expect to retire from the scene very soon. If you will write me a check for two hundred thousand dollars, I will first cash it and then release you. If you do not agree to this willingly, we will try a little persuasion. If you still remain obstinate, it will become my painful duty to kill you."

"Is Miss Oliver included in your proposition?"

The Armenian shook his head. "No, Meester Addison, the most charming little detective is not included in the bargain. I have a still better proposition to offer

the young lady. Come! I know you have your check book in your pocket. Would it not be well to write the check at once and save so very much valuable time? It will require some little time to cash it, you know."

Addison faced the killer fearlessly.

"I'm not afraid of you, Garbadian," he stated coldly. "If I had only myself to consider, I'd tell you to go plumb to hell. But Miss Oliver complicates the situation. I will bargain with you for her sake. I've listened to your proposition; now I'll state mine. I'll boost the ante to three hundred thousand and I'll fix it so that neither of us can double cross the other.

"Tomorrow morning you drive Miss Oliver and me down to my bank in Elm-hurst. Take along two or three of your gorillas if you're afraid to trust us. When we get to the bank, you keep Miss Oliver in the car while I go in and get the money. Then, if you think I'm trying to pull off anything funny, you'll still have time to beat it with Miss Oliver."

Garbadian considered the proposition thoughtfully. Then he shook his head.

"It is much too risky, Meester Addison. I prefer two hundred thousand—and the young lady."

Addison tensed for a swing at the man's jaw. "Is that your final word?" he demanded.

Garbadian sensed the impending attack. He stepped back a pace and raised his automatic.

"Careful, Meester Addison! I am quite sure you do not desire to join those gentlemen who tell no tales. Yes—that is my final word."

Garbadian turned to his companion. "Very well, Casper, let us waste no more time. Bring in Miss Newton and her—er—little persuader!"

The aged servitor hurriedly left the room. He returned a moment later, followed by the girl Donald Addison had

last seen on the night he had accompanied her to the Blue Lantern. She smiled tauntingly at her former escort.

Garbadian turned his evil eyes upon his prisoner's face. "That little knife you see in Miss Newton's hand," he purred, "is called a scalpel. Physicians find it a handy tool when they decide to take out a man's appendix. Miss Newton has discovered a better use for it. But before she proceeds I will give you one last chance to accept my proposition. Will you write that check for two hundred thousand dollars?"

"I have stated my terms," Donald Addison gritted. "Believe me, if you go through with this, you'll pay for it through the nose!"

The Armenian bowed mockingly. "And you will pay through many bloody cuts, Meester Addison!"

At the point of his gun he forced Addison to lie down on the bed. The servant, after stripping their prisoner to the waist, lashed him face up to the iron frame.

Garbadian pocketed his weapon and gestured to the nurse. She stepped forward eagerly, the same taunting smile on her red lips. The knife in her hand shone no more brightly than the light of hungry anticipation in her heavy-lidded eyes.

She bent above Donald Addison's naked torso. A strand of her blonde hair touched his forehead, and he caught a whiff of some sharply sweet perfume. Her bright eyes looked impersonally into his. Then a shudder ran through Addison's taut body, and he strained involuntarily at his bonds. Moving deliberately, seeming to enjoy the slow progress of the knife through his tingling flesh, she had drawn the blade in a shallow path from breast-bone to abdomen!

He felt the hot rush of the released blood, the searing stab of pain as the knife started upward again, tracing a parallel course.

The Armenian, crouched beside the

bed, chuckled evilly. "That is but a sample," Meester Addison. Do I get that check?"

Donald Addison bit back a groan, shook his head stubbornly. Once more the knife bit into his flesh, traveling this time from one side of his abdomen to the other. Addison strained and writhed beneath the frightful torture. A moan of agony burst from his lips. Objects began to dance and grow dim.

And then there came the sound of splintering glass from overhead and a deep voice boomed: "Stick 'em up down there! Quick, or I'll blast you!"

This was instantly followed by a fusillade of shots. Then blackness and utter oblivion came to Donald Addison.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Raid on the Blue Lantern

INSPECTOR OSGOOD, Daniel Hurley, and a dozen state troopers left the barracks near Greenfield a few minutes before eleven and went zooming down the highway in the direction of Deerfield.

The troopers, thoroughly acquainted with every curve and twist of the road, led the way. Hurley and Osgood followed in the latter's powerful car. The doughty inspector smiled grimly at the pace set by the fleet motorcycle brigade. He pressed the accelerator down to the floor board and kept his keen eyes glued on the red tail lights ahead.

Hurley watched the speedometer. Fifty! Sixty! Seventy! Would it never stop climbing?

At seventy-five the needle paused. Hurley breathed a sigh of relief. The terrific pace made him a trifle nervous but it wouldn't do to let his friend know it. He leaned over and shouted in his companion's ear: "Is that the best your old tub can do? If you don't step on it, those boys'll be losing us."

"Oh yeah?" Osgood bellowed above the roar of the motor. "I got to hold back to keep from pushing 'em into the gutter."

The detective was in his glory. The moment of action was at hand. The scent was hot and the old bloodhound was whining with eagerness.

The little cavalcade reached Deerfield and shot through that slumbering village like a burst of meteors in a summer sky. A mile farther on they slowed down and turned onto a dirt road which led to the Blue Lantern.

From this point they drove slowly in order to muffle as much as possible the sound of their approach. While still some distance from the tavern they turned into a grove of pine trees and left their machines. The troopers gathered around the inspector for final instructions before advancing upon the notorious inn.

"Boys, this is liable to develop into a pretty hot party before it's over," Osgood informed them. "Garbadian is a killer, and if he tumbles to our real purpose he'll probably try to shoot his way out.

"Remember! This is supposed to be nothing but an ordinary booze raid. I understand they're used to that sort of thing. Keep them believing that's all it is, and everything'll be jake. We want to make this a surprise attack. My idea is to get the joint completely surrounded and every exit covered before we walk in on 'em.

"Corporal Jacobson, you detail three men besides yourself to crash the front door with Hurley and me. Station the rest of your boys at all the other exits. How big a place is it?"

"Fairly large," Jacobson replied. "It's an old three-story building. The top floor has been remodeled to make room for more guests. It used to be nothing but an old garret. No windows, but the flat roof is well supplied with skylights. This isn't the first time we've raided the dump,

and I'm fairly well acquainted with the interior layout. There's an outside fire escape leading from the roof to the ground. Don't know how safe it is, but I suppose it covers the law."

"Okay, Jacobson. That gives us a fairly clear picture. Assign your men to their positions, and we'll get going."

The corporal issued his orders, then turned back to the inspector.

"All set, sir."

The detective nodded, and the little cavalcade moved silently forward on foot. They clung to the deeper shadows along the side of the narrow road, darting behind friendly trees or clumps of bushes whenever a passing machine's glaring lights threatened to reveal them.

A THRILL of excitement ran through Hurley as he moved along beside his eager friend. He had helped Osgood solve many of his problems, but this was the first time he had ever actually assisted in making an arrest. He even had a rod in his pocket! The detective had slipped it to him before they left Elmhurst. He wondered if he would have occasion to use it.

The little party rounded a curve in the road and the lights of the Blue Lantern burst into view. The harsh music of a jazz orchestra came faintly to their ears across the brooding silence of the night.

They crept forward until they reached the cleared space around the ancient building. The men detailed to guard the side and rear exits stole silently toward their positions. Osgood gave them time to reach their stations before leading the assault on the front entrance.

"All right, boys," he finally commanded. "Let's go!"

The inspector and Hurley led the way, with Corporal Jacobson and the three remaining troopers close on their heels. With measured tread they crossed the

yard, entered the ornate vestibule and swept into the crowded cabaret.

At their sudden appearance the orchestra broke off in the middle of a bar, the dancing couples came to an abrupt halt, and a tense silence settled down upon the hilarious gathering.

Hurley and the troopers paused near the door, while Inspector Osgood advanced to a position in front of the orchestra and raised an authoritative hand.

"Everybody sit down," he commanded loudly. "You folks dancing get back to your tables and stay there."

The master of ceremonies stepped forward to meet the detective.

"What! The police again?" he inquired with a suave smile. "Another liquor raid?"

"You guessed it," Osgood retorted curtly. "You the boss of this dump?"

The fellow shook his head. "Nope, Mister Copper, I ain't. I'm just sort of running things here on the floor. Sorry, but the boss ain't in just at present."

"Oh yeah? Maybe he ain't and maybe he is. Now listen! I want you to round up everybody that works here and herd 'em right in here. Everybody—understand!"

"But—but—"

"No buts about it! Do as I tell you—and be quick about it!"

Osgood advanced threateningly and the fellow hastily backed away.

"Okay," he said sullenly.

A few minutes later a crowd of waiters, cooks, chamber-maids, and flunkies filled the cleared space in the middle of the floor.

"Frisk 'em!" Osgood commanded curtly.

The troopers sprang eagerly to the task.

The guests were beginning to move about uneasily in their chairs. One or two bolder spirits were audibly expressing

their displeasure. The doughty detective strode toward the crowded tables.

"You wise guys over there close your traps unless you're looking for trouble," he barked. "Another yap out of any of you and you'll draw a free ride to the lock-up."

The mutterings ceased instantly, and the detective returned to his position in front of the orchestra. The troopers had completed their task of searching the employees.

"Find anything, boys?" Osgood inquired.

"Three rods and one dirk," grinned one of them triumphantly.

"Good! Keep them bozos marked. Corporal Jacobson, you stay here and keep an eye on things in this room. Hurley, you take two of the boys with you and see what the cellar looks like."

The inspector beckoned to the remaining trooper. "You come along with me. We'll see what kind of a layout they've got upstairs."

He and the trooper pushed their way through the crowd of muttering employees and ascended to the second floor of the ancient tavern.

A hasty search revealed nothing but empty bedrooms and private dining rooms. They finally came to a locked door.

"That's the way to the top floor," the trooper informed Osgood. "It wasn't locked the last time we raided the dump. Shall we crash it?"

The detective was about to consent when a sudden idea assailed him.

"I've got a better plan," he told his companion. "You stay here and guard this door. If anybody unlocks it from the other side, you grab 'em. I'll climb the fire escape and take a squint through them skylights on the roof. Where can I reach it from here?"

"Down at the end of the corridor, In-

pector. But you better watch your step. That old fire-escape's probably been up there for the last thirty years. I expect it's pretty old and shaky."

Osgood nodded and hurried away. He gained the end of the dark corridor and raised the window. The next moment he was outside and cautiously mounting the iron ladder that led to the roof. And though it swayed and creaked under his weight he gained the flat roof without mishap.

HE GLANCED about and discovered a faint illumination coming from one of the skylights. He drew his gun and crept forward.

The opaque glass of the skylight permitted no view of what lay below, but one of the frames had been raised several inches for ventilation. Through this narrow aperture Osgood was able to peer down into the room.

His staring eyes saw the figure of a man lashed to a bed. Two other men stood at the foot of the bed. And above the bound man's half-naked body a blond girl was bending, a knife of some sort in her hand. A low moan came from the tortured man.

With a growl of fury the detective smashed the heavy glass with the butt of his pistol and thrust its ugly muzzle through the jagged hole.

"Stick 'em up down there! Quick, or I'll blast you!" he bellowed savagely.

The larger of the two men glanced upward in startled surprise. Instantly recovering, he drew his own weapon and fired point blank at the savage face staring down at him through the shattered skylight. The other man also drew a gun and began firing at the same target.

The sound of splintering glass mingled with the crashing reports of the guns. Osgood, heedless of the flying bullets,

sprayed lead into the room below from his own heavy gun.

He kept on firing until his gun was empty. The pistols of the others had also stopped barking, and the silence that followed the sudden fusillade seemed death-like and ghastly. And then as his ears recovered from the shock of the thunderous concussions the detective heard the sound of sobbing, gasping respirations coming from the room below.

Osgood jerked the broken skylight farther open and thrust his head into the opening. A growl of satisfaction came from his snarling lips.

The big man who had gone for his gun lay face downward on the floor, his arms outflung, and the pistol fallen from his nerveless grasp. It didn't require a second glance to see that the man was dead. The second man was lying on the floor near the bathroom door, his breath coming in long, sobbing gasps.

But the blond girl had vanished from the room.

The figure on the bed was silent and motionless, and the detective feared that he, too, had been struck by a flying bullet. He focused his straining eyes on the pallid face, and a gasp of alarm escaped his lips. The man on the bed was Donald Addison!

Osgood turned and rushed for the fire escape. He sprang down the steep ladder and leaped through the window into the corridor on the second floor. He rushed along the dark hallway until he reached the locked door leading to the floor above.

"Bust her down, buddy!" he shouted to the trooper on guard. "Donald Addison is locked in up there!"

The door gave before the fury of their combined attack and they went storming up the stairs. Down a narrow corridor they rushed until they came to an open door, through which light streamed.

Osgood flung through it and found himself in young Addison's prison.

A hasty examination revealed no injury save the cruel gashes inflicted by the girl with the knife. The young man was still unconscious from the torture.

THE inspector wasted no time on the silent form on the floor near the bed, but turned at once to the man near the bathroom door. He knelt beside him and shook him gently. The man moaned and slowly opened his eyes.

"Quick! Some water!" the detective snapped. The trooper sprang for the bathroom and filled a glass he found on a shelf. He knelt on the opposite side of the dying man and forced a few drops between the pallid lips. The man opened his eyes and focused them dully on Osgood's face.

"What's your name?" the detective demanded, once more gently shaking the dying man.

"Cas—Casper Dunlop!" the man gasped feebly.

"And your friend here?" the inspector urged.

"Gar—Gar—Garbadian. He's—the—the—"

The voice died away in a sighing gasp. A convulsive shudder shook his frail form. Then he lay still.

The detective stood up and shook his head sadly.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed softly. He strode across the room to the body of the other man and turned it on its back. He stared at the face curiously.

"And so you're Garbadian, are you?" he muttered. "The master plotter!"

"Well, Garbadian, your plotting days are over! You didn't deserve such an easy finish."

A sudden thought stopped his soliloquy. He turned excitedly to the trooper.

"The girl!" he cried. "Hattie Oliver! She's somewhere around here, too!"

Out into the hall they rushed, entirely forgetting about the unconscious man on the bed.

They entered the small dining-room and peered anxiously around. A closed door caught the detective's eye. He tried the knob, then rapped sharply.

"You in there, Miss Oliver?" he shouted.

Someone moved on the other side of the door and a frightened voice replied: "Yes—I'm locked in. Who—who—are you?"

"Inspector Osgood, Miss Oliver. Stand back while we break in this door."

"Hold on a minute," the trooper cut in. "Here's a bunch of keys I picked up in the other room. Perhaps one of them fits this door."

Osgood took them and quickly found the right one. The next instant Hattie Oliver was in his arms, sobbing like a frightened child.

"There, there, little girl!" the inspector exclaimed softly, awkwardly patting the girl's shoulder. "Everything's all right now."

Hattie presently regained her composure and drew back, a smile breaking through her tears.

"I—I—guess I'm a pretty poor detective, Inspector. I was locked in here all alone, and when I heard that shooting I—I—guess I got scared."

Then her face blanched in sudden alarm. "But where is Don—er, er, Mr. Addison?"

The detective grinned reassuringly and jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

"He's in his room, Miss Oliver." Then a look of dismay crossed his face. "And sink me for a lubber if I didn't go and leave him trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey! Hey there, Miss Oliver! Wait up! Let me go first!"

He made a frantic grab for the girl but she eluded him and was gone before he could stop her.

Osgood and the trooper followed more slowly, the old detective cursing softly at his own stupidity. They reached the threshold of Addison's prison and drew back in open-mouthed astonishment.

Addison had regained consciousness, and the girl was soothing his fevered brow with happy kisses!

Osgood nudged his companion in the ribs, and the pair stole silently away.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Sinister Secret of the Inn

WHEN Inspector Osgood went upstairs to search the rooms in that part of the building, Daniel Hurley and two of the troopers turned their steps in the direction of the cellar. They found the place in utter darkness, but the powerful beam of Hurley's flashlight soon picked out a switch on a post near the stairs.

He turned it, but the only result was a metallic click. Someone had tampered with the circuit.

He played his torch around the cavernous excavation and presently discovered one of the light sockets. A smashed bulb explained why it didn't light. Advancing slowly, Hurley and his two companions found several more bulbs treated in a like manner.

"Someone has anticipated our visit," the newspaper man remarked, "and that same 'someone' may still be down here. I wonder if there are any other exists."

One of the troopers trained his flashlight on a distant wall of the stone foundation.

"There's a door over there, sir. But I guess the boys outside are guarding it."

"Might as well make sure," Hurley replied, turning his steps in that direction.

"Gosh, it's big enough to admit a team

of horses!" he exclaimed a moment later. "I'll bet in the good old days many a hogshead of ale came through that door! This dump used to be a nice old respectable inn once upon a time. Ah, there's a key hanging on the wall! Rusty, too! I'll bet that door hasn't been opened in years. Might as well try it though."

It required all his strength to turn the key in the lock, but it finally yielded with a rusty screech.

Hurley grasped the ponderous knob and pulled with all his might. The heavy door swung inward on protesting hinges. The next instant a blinding glare of light flashed in his face, and a sharp command came from the darkness beyond.

"Hey! Back up there! This is a one way street!"

A short laugh followed the terse command as the outside guard recognized Hurley.

"Sorry, sir, but I thought it was someone trying to beat it."

"Glad to find you on the job," Hurley replied. "Anyone else try to come through here?"

"Somebody tried the knob a while back, sir. But they didn't try to unlock the door. I was hoping they would!"

"That's the spirit! We'll lock the door again and hide the key. But you'd better stay on guard just in case there's another key kicking around somewhere. See you later."

Hurley closed the door and locked it. He dropped the key behind an empty barrel and turned to his two companions. "You boys explore the bins and storerooms up at this end, and I'll take a look-see farther down the line. This place looks to be as big as Mammoth Cave!"

"We're principally interested in the inhabitants tonight, but I suppose we might as well keep our eyes peeled for booze, too. I don't imagine the neighbors would feel very badly if we found enough evi-

dence to put this dump under lock and key."

"You're darn-tootin' they wouldn't!" one of the troopers replied. "But I'm afraid we won't," he added. "We've helped the Prohibition Agents several times in the last year or so, but we've never found a single drop. It's here all right—and plenty of it. Trouble is, we haven't been able to locate it. Perhaps we'll have better luck this time."

"I should think you boys could spot the trucks bringing it in," Hurley remarked thoughtfully.

"That's the funny part of it," the trooper replied. "We've stopped all kinds of trucks heading in here, and we've drawn a blank every time."

"Perhaps they pipe it underground from Canada!" Hurley said with a laugh. Then his face sobered. "But we're wasting time, boys. Sing out if you find anything interesting up at this end."

Playing the beam of his torch ahead, the newspaper man started toward the far end of the cellar. He finally came to another door. It opened at his touch, and he passed through into another gloomy compartment.

The size of this second chamber surprised him. It extended a considerable distance beyond the rear of the building proper.

"Must be some outbuildings behind the inn," he muttered, "and the cellar connects them underground."

He played his torch on the ceiling, and discovered beams and heavy planking. Glancing about the gloomy cavern, he saw that it was littered with broken furniture, old boxes and barrels, and the accumulated debris of years. Dust and cobwebs met his eye on every hand. Close to the foundation on his left, however, the floor was clear. It suggested a passageway to Hurley's keen brain.

"We'll just see what's at the other

end," the newspaper man muttered grimly.

The sound of a stealthy footfall somewhere in the darkness ahead came to his ear. He turned the beam of his torch in that direction, and the next instant the lurking shadows were split asunder by a blinding flash of orange flame. The crashing report of a revolver reverberated through the dismal chamber.

A second shot followed on the heels of the first, and Hurley snapped the button on his flashlight and sprang to one side. Stygian blackness now enveloped him.

STILL blinded by those flaring streaks of orange flame, Hurley crouched and moved quietly out of the line of fire. He drew his pistol with his right hand and listened with held breath.

Again came a stealthy footfall. Hurley tensed and raised his weapon. He stepped softly to one side and his foot struck against an empty box. Instantly another shot split the silence. But this time Hurley was ready. He fired at the flash of the other's gun, the two explosions almost blending into one.

He was rewarded by the sound of a falling body and a sobbing moan of mortal agony. He crouched in the utter darkness, tense and ready to fire again. But no further shots came. Cautiously he flashed on his light, swept it about in a short arc. He could see nothing of his attacker.

But the moans continued, and now he caught the sound of a body dragging itself painfully along the stone floor. This was followed by a dull creaking as of a heavy door being opened. The dragging sound began again and ceased almost instantly. The moans died away in one last sobbing gasp.

Shouts and hurrying footsteps warned Hurley that the two troopers had heard the fring and were coming to his assist-

ance. Stabbing the gloom with their flashlights, they came hurrying in his direction. Their lights finally picked him up, gun in hand, and still tensed for another exchange of shots.

"Look out, fellows!" he warned. "I winged one of 'em, but there may be another down there."

The troopers extinguished their torches and crouched in the darkness, ready to fire at the slightest sound.

None came. Hurley waited a full minute, his heart pounding against his ribs. Then he laughed a bit shakily and straightened in the gloom.

"All right, boys. Guess there was only one." He flashed his light on again. "Train your lights down here and let's have a look."

Three beams of light cut the darkness and followed the direction of Hurley's pointing finger. The next moment the three men started forward in gaping amazement.

A portion of the foundation wall had swung outward, revealing another compartment beyond. And in the opening thus disclosed lay the body of a woman. The clothing had been disarranged and the dull sheen of silk stockings greeted the eyes of Hurley and his companions.

The three men strode forward and the troopers played their flashlights full upon the dead woman's face.

"It's the nurse!" Hurley gasped. "And—I—I—killed her!"

He turned away, trembling and sick at heart.

"Buck up, sir!" admonished one of his companions. "You didn't know it was a woman."

"No, I didn't know it was a woman," Hurley repeated in a dead voice. "She fired three times. I only shot once. I—I—wish I hadn't fired at all!"

He drew a long breath and squared his shoulders. "Well, I suppose we've got to

see this rotten business clear through to the end. You boys stay here while I go upstairs and find the inspector. We'll explore that compartment when I get back."

He was about to turn away when the dull gleam of gold caught his eye. He strode forward and picked up the object. It proved to be a small locket, evidently belonging to the slain woman. The delicate chain by which it had been fastened around her neck had broken during her dying attempt to drag herself to safety through the secret doorway to the next compartment.

Hurley picked it up and dropped it into his coat pocket.

"I'll turn this over to Inspector Osgood," he told his companions.

HURLEY hurried upstairs, still trembling from his harrowing experience, and encountered Osgood emerging from a telephone booth on the main floor. The inspector had just put in a call for the Deerfield Police.

Each acquainted the other with what had transpired, then the two friends hurried below into the gloomy cellar. Osgood nodded grimly to the two troopers on guard and flashed his torch on the silent form at his feet.

"Too bad! Too bad!" he ejaculated softly. "Always seems worse when it's a woman. We won't disturb the body, boys."

The detective's gaze swept to the cunningly concealed door that led to the secret compartment beyond.

"Pretty clever!" he declared. "When that section of masonry is back in place you couldn't tell it from the rest of the foundation."

"Probably operates by a hidden lever. Opening that door was the last thing the nurse did. But we're wasting time, boys. Let's see what that secret room has to say for itself."

The small party of grim-faced men stepped carefully over the body in the doorway and entered the next compartment. The flash of their torches revealed the reason for the cunningly concealed door. Shelves lined the walls on all sides; shelves piled high with bottled liquor of every description.

"Talk about your wine cellars!" exclaimed Osgood. "There's enough booze in here to float a battleship!"

"But how do they get it in here?" growled one of the troopers.

"That's for you lads to find out," the inspector retorted.

Hurley had trained his light on an object in a far corner of the gloomy compartment.

"Look, gentlemen!" he exclaimed.

"A safe!" cried the detective. "What in time is that thing doing down here?"

Followed by the others, he strode across the room and played the beam of his torch over the smooth face of the huge steel box.

"Wonder what they keep in it, Dan?" he asked his friend.

The newspaper man's eyes gleamed somberly. "I'm not dead certain, Frank, but I've got a strong suspicion. But how are we going to open it?"

"Perhaps that guy in charge of festivities upstairs knows the combination," one of the troopers suggested.

"Fetch him down here," the inspector brusquely commanded. "We'll soon find out!"

The trooper saluted and hurried away. He returned a few minutes later, herding his protesting prisoner ahead of him at the point of his gun. The insolent smirk was gone from the fellow's ashen face.

And the sight of the nurse's body completely unnerved him.

"Open that safe!" Osgood commanded. The fellow drew back in terror. "I—

I—don't know the combination," he stammered.

"Quit stalling and open that safe!" said the inspector grimly.

Trembling violently, the man knelt before the safe and twirled the combination lock. A moment later the ponderous door swung silently open. Osgood jerked the fellow backward into the arms of one of the troopers.

"Hang onto this punk," he commanded. Then he swung the door wider open and trained his light on the interior of the safe.

"Dope! cried Hurley. "My hunch was right, Frank!"

A hurried examination of the contents of the safe revealed large quantities of morphine, heroin, and cocaine.

"Motive enough for a dozen murders right here in this safe!" growled the inspector. "No wonder the renewing of that lease was so important! The booze was only a side line. The Federal agents will be glad to hear about this."

Osgood turned abruptly to his prisoner.

"Your boss is dead. You appear to be next in authority here. If you'll come clean, we can make things a lot easier for you. How about it?"

"I don't know nothing about this racket," the fellow sullenly replied.

"No? How come you knew the combination to this safe then?"

"I—I——"

"Aw shut up!"

Osgood turned to one of the troopers. "Take this man back upstairs. Tell Jacobson to slip a pair of bracelets on his pretty wrists. We'll attend to him later."

Convinced that there must be another exit to the secret chamber, the three remaining men explored every corner and crevice of the gloomy place. The other trooper returned just as Hurley's keen eyes detected a concealed lever on the

under side of one of the lower shelves at the far end of the compartment.

He reached down and pulled it toward him. A section of shelving and foundation swung inward, revealing a tunnel-like passage beyond.

Their flashlights piercing the darkness ahead, the four men entered the tunnel and strode rapidly along its heavy plank flooring.

THEY followed the narrow passage for fully five hundred yards before they encountered another barrier. This proved to be a heavy door, secured by an iron bar. Quickly removing this, they swung open the ponderous door and stepped forth into the silent night.

Playing their torches about, they discovered that the entrance to the tunnel was cunningly concealed in the heart of a dense thicket of brush. A well beaten path led them down to an old stone jetty on the shore of a lonely lake.

"Mirror Lake!" exclaimed one of the troopers. "The state highway runs along the other shore. It's about a mile across." His voice rose in sudden excitement. "And I'll bet I know how they get their booze and dope into the joint back there! It comes by seaplane!" He turned to his mate. "Remember that night we heard a plane go dead in the air, Sam? We thought the motor had stalled. I'll bet the fellow cut his switch to make a landing right down here!"

"Yep—and I've heard the same thing several other times, come to think of it," the other trooper replied.

"You boys have guessed it!" Osgood exclaimed. "That's the way they get their stuff! No wonder Garbadian wanted to hang onto this dump! With that ship bringing the dope and wet goods by air, and this little tunnel leading smack into his cellar, that baby was sure sitting pretty!"

The inspector turned to Hurley. "Now how about your man 'higher up,' Dan? It took brains to think up a scheme like this! I guess Garbadian fills the bill after all!"

Hurley, obscure in the semi-gloom, shook his head in emphatic denial. But Osgood failed to see that contradictory gesture, and the reporter held his peace.

The little party retraced their steps. They found the Deerfield Police had already arrived. While Osgood was conferring with them, Hurley went upstairs in search of Hattie Oliver and Donald Addison.

He found the young man sitting up in bed. His upper body was neatly bandaged, and the expression on his face was one of supreme happiness.

The dead had been removed, and only the broken skylight bore evidence of the grim battle that had been waged a short time ago in the little chamber.

Hattie greeted her old friend a bit bashfully. She blushed furiously under the smiling scrutiny of his friendly eyes. Donald told him of Garbadian's claim that another man was behind the recent killings and expressed the belief that the Armenian had been lying.

Hurley thought differently, but kept his opinion to himself. He asked Hattie and Donald not to mention the matter, as doing so would only serve to warn the real killer—if he should prove not to be Garbadian. Then Hurley took his departure, promising to call up John Addison at once. He did so, then went in search of the inspector.

"How'd you find the young folks?" Osgood inquired with a grin.

"Better'n that!" Hurley replied. His face sobered. "They'll make one swell couple, Frank!"

"You said it!" Osgood agreed heartily. "Two nice kids!"

"I just called up John Addison," Hurley told his friend. "I thought he might

be waiting to hear from me. He was mighty glad to hear that Hattie and Donald are safe. He hadn't even gone to bed. He and Colonel Winthrop were together in his study. I guess the colonel was as worried as the rest of them. I told John we had tied a can to the tail of this rotten joint and that Garbadian and the nurse are dead. He said he'd rout out the chauffeur and come right up here for Hattie and his kid brother. I expect they're on their way by now."

"Fine!" applauded the inspector. "Guess you and I might as well make tracks for home. The Deerfield boys can handle things up here now."

THE first faint sign of dawn was in the eastern sky when the inspector stopped his car in front of the Elmhurst Police Headquarters.

Hurley elected to walk the short distance to his own office, intending to stop at a lunchroom for a cup of strong coffee before tackling the story that Elmhurst would be reading at the breakfast table that morning.

He had his cup of coffee and hurried on toward his office. He reached the newspaper building and paused in front of the entrance to strike a match to his pipe. A muffled figure appeared at the mouth of an alley Hurley had just passed, and the next instant the sharp bark of a revolver reverberated up and down the deserted street.

Hurley's pipe fell from his hand, and his hat went spinning from his head, neatly drilled by the would-be assassin's bullet.

The newspaper man ducked instinctively and dove for the shelter of the building. He crouched in the entrance, eyes straining into the thinning shadows that enveloped the silent street. He waited several minutes, then crept out and retrieved his pipe and hat.

He ascended to his office and sank into his chair. He filled his pipe mechanically and explored his pocket for a match. His fingers encountered a small object. With a startled oath he brought to view the nurse's locket. He had forgotten to give it to Inspector Osgood. He pried it open with fingers that still trembled.

Beneath one of the glass faces of the inside of the locket he spied a circular piece of glazed paper. He extracted it and turned it over.

The faded snapshot of a man's face met his eye. He looked closer and almost dropped the locket.

It was a picture of Colonel Horace Winthrop!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Baying of the Hound

MIDNIGHT! A cold moon riding high in the heavens. Billowy masses of white clouds sailing majestically across the sky like ancient galleons homeward bound. . . . Gaunt-limbed trees standing like sentinels in the moonlight. Dead leaves, crisp with the chill of the autumn night, dancing away to glorious adventure at the call of the night wind.

Brooding silence engulfed Addison Manor in the folds of its somber mantle. The great mansion was in total darkness save for the subdued glow of a night lamp from a room on the second floor.

The shadows beneath the granite walls were deep and mysterious, as a muffled figure stole silently away from the protecting gloom of the huge house and disappeared among the trees and shrubbery of the mammoth grounds.

An hour passed. The clock in the tower of City Hall boomed faintly from the distance. The moon crossed the zenith and began its downward march toward the western horizon. The fitful breeze subsided, and the leaves, tiring of their mid-

night frolic, settled peacefully down upon the frosty greensward.

The muffled figure reappeared; this time stealing furtively toward the mysterious shadows that engulfed the silent mansion.

Suddenly the stillness of the night was rent by the mournful baying of a hound down in the kennels behind the house. The eerie sound began with a deep, throaty growl, rising in volume to a mournful howl, then dying away in a low, sobbing wail.

The muffled figure paused at the sound and trembled violently.

Silence again resumed its interrupted reign, and the figure darted across a moon-drenched space between the trees and disappeared into the shadow of the house.

Again that mournful wail arose, its weird cadences echoing and re-echoing over the slumbering hills. An owl hooted in angry derision, and in the far distance another hound raised its black muzzle to the moon and took up the cry. . . .

Dorothy Addison had been awakened by the first cry of the beast down in the kennels. She started up in sudden fright. When the dog bayed a second time she caught her breath sharply, then relaxed with a sign of relief.

It was only one of the dogs down in the kennels! But Don would have to move his pets farther away from the house if this sort of thing was going to keep up. It was enough to scare a person out of their wits! And she had heard that the baying of a hound in the middle of the night was a bad sign!

Hadn't they had enough of tragedy and sorrow already? Of course she didn't believe in signs. But just the same Don would have to move his kennels farther back on the hill.

Dorothy settled back on her pillow and drew the covers up around her neck. She

closed her eyes and tried to sleep, only to discover that the goddess of slumber must also have been frightened by the baying of the hound.

Dorothy started to count sheep. No use! She tossed and tumbled restlessly for a full hour. Then she decided to resort to a simple expedient that had never failed. She'd just slip across the hall and creep into bed with her mother.

Donning robe and slippers, she stole across the hall and entered her mother's room. The subdued glow of a boudoir lamp revealed Sarah Addison's eyes raised inquiringly at the intrusion.

"It's only me," the girl whispered. "I can't sleep. Mind if I snuggle in with you for a little while?"

Sarah Addison smiled wistfully and made room for her daughter.

"Of course I don't mind, my dear. Did that dog wake you, too?"

"Yes. Wasn't it terrible! It sounded like the wail of a lost soul. Why, what's the matter, Mommy? You're trembling! Don't you feel well?"

"I—I'm all right, Dorothy. I guess that dog frightened me a little. The sound came so suddenly. I—I—guess your old mother's nerves aren't as strong as they used to be."

Reassured, Dorothy snuggled closer.

"It's a wonder we have any nerves left, Mommy. It still seems like a horrible dream about poor father. When I think of that horrid Armenian ordering the nurse to poison daddy, I'm glad Inspector Osgood shot him!"

She shuddered.

"And just to think of that awful woman deliberately giving poison to father! And we thought she was so kind to him! And her shooting Gerald in cold blood! I'm glad she met the same fate! Such fiends deserve to die. It's been a terrible business, Mommy!"

"Yes, Dorothy—almost too horrible to

believe it actually happened. I feel so sorry for poor Gladys. In spite of her foolish pride, she loved Gerald as only a mother can love. And I am grieved for your sake, too. Gerald had his faults but he would have made you a good husband, my dear."

"No, Mommy," the girl replied, "I can't agree with you there. Even if he didn't realize what he was actually doing, he knew he was deliberately going against father's wishes when he tried to get John to renew that lease. And father trusted him so implicitly!"

Her voice softened, began to tremble ever so slightly. "He paid an awful price for his folly. But I never really loved Gerald, Mommy. I—I doubt if I ever could have gone through with the marriage—even for father's sake!"

Sarah Addison smiled wistfully. "I am glad Gerald's death doesn't grieve you, my dear. I want my little girl to be happy. I would go to great lengths to preserve my children's happiness."

DOROTHY snuggled closer. "Of course you would, Mommy. You've spent all your life trying to make others happy. And isn't it wonderful about Don! And what a sweet little wife he is getting! I thought she was a perfect dear, even when she was posing as a maid. They say every cloud has its silver lining. Perhaps the coming of Hattie Oliver into Don's life will prove to be the silver lining to this awful cloud, Mommy."

"I hope so, my dear," Sarah Addison replied softly. "The love of a good woman can work wonders with a man. Hattie is a very sweet, lovable girl. Don is very fortunate. Not that he doesn't deserve the best," she added loyally. "Don isn't a bad boy at heart. Just a little thoughtless—and with too much time and money on his hands. And he's brave, too. The way he withstood that awful creature's torture

proves what he's made of, Dorothy. I'm proud of him—just as I am of all my precious children. Don is getting a good wife—and Hattie is getting a good husband."

Dorothy laughed softly. "A regular fifty-fifty proposition!"

Her thoughts swung off on another tangent.

"And to think that terrible Blue Lantern actually belongs to you, Momsy! Oh, if poor old daddy had only confided more in us. If he had only told us about that old lease!"

"But he didn't expect any trouble, my child. He didn't know that his refusal to renew that lease meant the signing of his own death warrant."

Sarah Addison's eyes gleamed proudly. "And even if he had known, I'm quite sure he would still have refused to renew it. Your father was a very, very noble man, Dorothy. He placed honor above even life itself. He was proud of his own honor—and even prouder of ours. I have never known him to do a dishonorable thing in all his life. Your father never compromised with his conscience, my dear.

"He thought he was doing the right thing—the honorable thing—when he refused to renew that lease. And as much as I loved him; as much as I mourn him and deplore the terrible consequences of his act, I cannot—I dare not—say I am sorry he acted as he did."

"And he had a very, very, honorable wife!" Dorothy softly exclaimed.

Again that wistful smile crossed the elderly woman's gentle face.

"I—I—always try to do the honorable thing, Dorothy. But let's talk of something else."

"All right, Momsy. What shall we talk about? Oh, by the way, I met Uncle Horace coming out of John's study this afternoon. He hasn't been like himself

since father died. He seemed terribly upset today. I suppose learning that father had been poisoned came as a terrible shock to him. He loved daddy, and I know he's going to miss him terribly."

"Yes, the colonel and your father were inseparable," the older woman replied.

From the hall below came the measured tones of a stately old clock. They listened to its solemn tolling of the hour.

"Three o'clock!" Sarah Addison exclaimed softly. "Unless we stop talking we'll lose our beauty sleep entirely, my dear."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Sixth Murder

THE story of the raid upon the Blue Lantern and the series of crimes that had begun with the poisoning of Sewell Addison appeared in the early morning edition of the *Elmhurst Morning Star*. It was one of the greatest "scoops" in the history of the paper.

Hurley had written it, however, with a number of mental reservations and two important omissions. It branded Garbadian as the man behind the scenes and created the impression that the mystery of all the killings had been explained to the complete satisfaction of the police.

It mentioned the attempt upon Hurley's life and placed the blame on some unknown dope peddler, who had doubtless tried to kill the newspaper man because of the part he had played in exposing the Blue Lantern as the source of the narcotic supplies for that community.

This theory was advanced by Hurley to lull the suspicion the would-be assassin might have that the newspaper man had formed some other opinion.

The story made no mention of the nurse's locket and the picture it contained. Neither did it voice Hurley's suspicion that Garbadian had not been the

man "higher up" in the sinister drama. The newspaper man wanted the real culprit and the public at large to believe that both he and the police considered the case closed.

This would give him an opportunity to quietly check up on Colonel Winthrop in order to determine whether or not the presence of the latter's picture in the nurse's locket implicated him in the sinister activities of that young lady.

Hurley spent the entire day following the raid in quietly looking into the record of Colonel Winthrop. When night came he was fully convinced that the colonel was the directing genius behind the poisoning of Sewell Addison and the amazing series of crimes which followed.

Always methodical, the newspaper man jotted down his findings in his note book. They read as follows:

1. Colonel Winthrop is rated second only to Sewell Addison as the wealthiest man in Elmhurst.
2. The colonel's income from his brokerage business couldn't possibly account for his great wealth or his extravagant manner of living.
3. As the actual lessee of the Blue Lantern his income must have amounted to close to a quarter-million dollars.
4. Query. The Blue Lantern has only been in existence about three years. The colonel has lived the life of Riley for longer than I can remember. Where did he obtain his enormous income prior to taking over the Blue Lantern? Is it possible he may be the head of other similar enterprises throughout the country?
5. The nurse gave her residence as New York City when she registered with the local nurses' bureau. She only arrived in Elmhurst two weeks before securing employment at Addison Manor.
6. The colonel makes frequent visits to New York.
7. The colonel was with John Addison when I called up from the Blue Lantern. He had plenty of time to get downtown and shoot at me.

8. The cryptogram found in the nurse's traveling bag was signed with the initial "G." "G" decoded becomes "H." "H" stands for "Horace."

The second day after the raid Hurley dropped into the inspector's office at Police Headquarters shortly after nine-thirty in the morning.

Osgood congratulated him upon his lucky escape from the would-be assassin's bullet and expressed the opinion that they had both better watch their step if they didn't want to be "bumped off" by some crazy "hop-head" whose source of supplies had been temporarily cut off on account of the closing of the Blue Lantern.

Hurley was about to reveal his suspicions concerning Colonel Winthrop, when the telephone at Osgood's elbow rang noisily. The inspector lifted the receiver off the hook.

"Inspector Osgood speaking . . . Oh, hello, Chief! . . . *what!* . . . Colonel Winthrop? . . . Okay, Chief. I'll chase right out there. G'bye."

Osgood slammed up the receiver and turned excitedly to his friend.

"Another murder, Dan! It's Colonel Winthrop this time! His butler discovered the body in the study about ten minutes ago! Grab your lid and let's go!"

THE two men rushed down the stairs and sprang into the inspector's car. With siren bellowing its shrill warning, the car shot away in the direction of Alpine Avenue.

Colonel Winthrop's home was a palace of marble and granite. It bowed only to Addison Manor in magnificence and costly beauty. The two mammoth estates adjoined one another, an ornate stone wall marking their junction. A well-beaten path and a gate that always stood open bore mute testimony to the intimacy that had always existed between Colonel Win-

throp and the members of the Addison household.

The warm fellowship which had bound Sewell Addison and the colonel closer together than brothers had long been a proverb in Elmhurst. "As thick as Addison and Winthrop," was common expression.

The friendship between these two men of vast wealth dated back to that far distant day when they were both struggling, eager-eyed young business men, and it had apparently grown and waxed stronger and stronger through the long, success-laden years that had followed.

The "Colonel" prefix to Winthrop's name was entirely fictitious, having been bestowed upon him because of his military bearing and his penchant for frock-coats and black bow ties. Unlike Sewell Addison, whose great fortune had been amassed principally through real estate, the colonel's money was reputed to have been made through shrewd speculations. His palatial residence represented his only real estate holding.

He was the local representative for a famous New York brokerage firm. His offices were located in the Franklin Chambers, on the floor above the pretentious suite occupied by the Addison interests.

And now these two old friends were dead; and they had both met death at the hand of an assassin.

Hurley and Osgood discussed this strange coincidence as they hurried to the scene of the latest crime. The newspaper man's mind was in a whirl. The murder of the colonel had completely exploded his theory that Winthrop had been the man behind the other killings. He decided not to reveal his previous suspicions to Osgood. He advanced the theory, however, that some connection existed between the shooting of the colonel and the poisoning of Sewell Addison. Osgood

admitted such a possibility but didn't believe subsequent investigation would substantiate it.

When they reached their destination they were met at the front door by the officer on the beat.

"Good morning, Inspector. Howdy, Mr. Hurley," he greeted the two men, standing aside to let them pass. "I'm glad you've come. The study's the second room on the left down the hall. Body's on the floor just as the butler discovered it. Nothing's been disturbed."

Osgood nodded.

"Very good! Stay here on guard. I'll sing out if I want you. The medical examiner and fingerprint man are on the way. Send 'em along in when they arrive. All right, Dan. Let's have a look at that study."

The detective and Hurley strode swiftly down the carpeted hall in the direction of the slain man's study. An aged butler met them and pointed a trembling finger at the closed door.

"He's—it's—in that room, sir," he informed the inspector in a frightened whisper. "Will—will—you be needing me in there, sir?"

Osgood shook his head. "No—but stick around where I can find you. I'll have some questions to ask after we've examined the body."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir." The frightened old man courtesied respectfully and hastily withdrew.

The inspector laughed shortly.

"That old bird's scared half to death," he told his companion. "I'll bet he got the shock of his life when he discovered what's in that room."

"Can't say that I blame him," Hurley retorted dryly. "We're not all cops, you know!"

"Which is a break for the rest of us," Osgood growled.

He opened the door of the study and stepped inside. Hurley at his heels.

THE dead man lay sprawled, face up, in the center of the room. The body was fully clothed, slippers and robe replacing shoes and coat. Blood from three bullet wounds in the chest had seeped through the clothing and formed a black pool on the gaudy-hued oriental rug upon which the body lay.

The arms were outflung and the waxen features were frozen in a scowl of the most ferocious fury Hurley had ever seen depicted upon a human face.

The newspaper man shrank back and pointed a trembling finger toward that frightful countenance.

"Look, Frank!" he whispered huskily.

Even the hardened police official was taken aback. He rapped out a startled oath.

"Hell's bells!" he exclaimed in an awed voice. "What a face! Ain't it terrible, Dan! No wonder the butler was scared stiff!"

Then recovering from his momentary shock he laughed shortly. "The colonel must have been peeved about something when them bullets struck home. I'd hate to meet that face in the dark! I didn't know the old boy had such a fiery temper. Gosh, what a face!"

The inspector stepped forward and knelt beside the body. He touched one of the cold hands, then attempted to flex a forearm. The stiffened member resisted his effort. Osgood stood up and instinctively dusted his hands.

"He's been dead between ten and twelve hours," he told his ashen-faced companion. He glanced at his watch and continued: "It's eleven-thirty now. If he's been dead twelve hours, that would place the time of the shooting at approximately eleven-thirty last night. If he's been dead ten hours, the murder was committed about one-thirty this morning.

"Rigor mortis is fully established. I guess we are safe in saying the colonel got his not later than two this morning. We'll see how that checks up with the medical examiner's opinion."

The inspector raised his eyes and glanced about the room. Suddenly he pointed to a desk on the opposite side of the room. "Look at those drawers, Dan! That safe! The door is open!"

The detective sprang across the room and jerked the door of the safe wide open. A hurried search revealed nothing of value inside. The partly opened drawers and doors of the little compartments inside the safe clearly indicated that alien hands had been at work there, too.

Osgood turned with a grin of triumph to his friend and cried: "Frisked to a fare-thee-well, Dan! Was I right? Didn't I tell you there wasn't any connection between this killing and those other jobs! Robbery was the motive here. No question about it! It's as plain as the nose on your face! The killer probably forced Colonel Winthrop to open his safe at the point of a gun. Then the old boy got sore and thought he saw a chance to jump the thug when he started to make his getaway. He wasn't quick enough—and the bird plugged him."

Hurley had now regained his composure.

"I guess you're right about the motive," he agreed, "but when did he ransack the desk? It isn't likely he stayed to run through the contents of that desk after shooting the colonel. Those shots were almost sure to have been heard, Frank."

"But they evidently weren't," the inspector retorted. "The body wasn't discovered until ten this morning, kindly bear in mind. He may have had a silencer on his gat."

"Right!" agreed Hurley. "And he may have been ransacking the desk, and the

colonel came in and caught him. After that, it was probably the way you suggested."

Osgood shrugged his shoulders. "It's a minor point anyhow. The thing we're interested in is the motive—and that's plain enough. The colonel was a mighty wealthy man. The bird that cracked this crib probably made a sweet little haul."

The detective turned his gaze once more toward the silent figure on the floor.

"He was a good old sport, Dan," he said softly. "A good old sport. But suffering tom cats, what a face! Come on! Let's get out of here. That thing gives me the willies! Nothing more to be learned here. Let's go out and get some dope from the servants."

Osgood turned and strode from the room. Hurley followed more slowly, his keen eyes searching floor and walls. Something white lying on the floor under the fringe of a heavy portiere near the door attracted his attention. The detective did not see him stoop and pick it up. Afterward, Hurley could not have explained the sudden hunch that impelled him to thrust the object into his pocket without showing it to his friend.

THE medical examiner and the fingerprint man met them in the hall.

Osgood conducted them to the study, then summoned the aged butler and began barking questions at the frightened old servitor.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Marks, sir. Joseph Marks."

"How long have you worked here?"

"Sixteen years this coming December, sir."

"How many were in this house last night?"

"Only two, sir. The master and myself."

The inspector's face showed his surprise.

"Only two! How come? Where were the rest of the servants?"

"They haven't returned from their vacations, sir?"

"Vacations? How long have they been gone?"

"A week yesterday, sir." The butler coughed apologetically and continued: "You see it was this way, sir. The master has been having the interior of the house renovated. The painters and paper hangers have been at work for several days, sir. The upper floors are already finished. Perhaps you can smell the paint, sir."

Osgood sniffed the air questioningly.

"Yep, I smell it. Go on."

"Yes, sir. The master decided to send the servants away until the repairs are completed. I stayed on to cook his meals and look out for things. The house has been virtually closed, what with the other servants away and the master spending so much of his time evenings over at the manor, sir. But he has slept here every night."

The inspector nodded and put his next question.

"The colonel was a bachelor, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir. And I don't think he had any living relatives, sir."

"Is that so! All alone in the world, eh? Did he leave a will, Marks?"

The servant shook his head. "I don't know, sir. Mr. Irving Burke is his attorney. He can probably tell you."

Osgood dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand.

"When did you last see your master alive?" he asked.

"About eleven o'clock last night, sir. He was in his study, and I brought him some crackers and a glass of milk. Then he dismissed me for the night, and I went directly to my room."

"Were you fond of your master, Marks?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He—he—was a bit trying at times, sir, when he happened to be in his cups, but he was always quite considerate at other times."

"Ah! So he drank rather heavily at times, eh? How often did he get drunk?"

The old servant hesitated.

"Come, come! Answer my question, man," the inspector ordered sharply.

"Well, sir—quite often."

"Once a month?" persisted Osgood.

The butler lowered his voice apologetically.

"Oftener than that, sir. Nearly every Saturday night. But he was very discreet about it. He never left the house intoxicated, sir. He drank mostly at night when the servants were in bed. Very few people knew he drank heavily, sir. I trust you won't—"

"Don't worry!" Osgood cut in. "It won't do you any good. All you need to do is to answer my questions."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir."

"And you say your master wasn't quite so considerate when he was drunk?"

"N-no, sir. Not exactly, sir."

OSGOOD shot a quizzical glance at Hurley. The replies to his questions were taking a decidedly interesting turn.

"And did he ever strike you when he was drunk, Marks?"

"Why, er, er, yes, sir. But never very hard, sir. He—he—never really intended to hurt me."

A mocking gleam came into the inspector's eyes.

"And he was drunk last night, wasn't he?"

"Not what you might call intoxicated, sir."

The detective leaned forward suddenly and pointed to a bruise on the old servant's face.

"Is that where he cracked you last night?"

A startled look crossed the butler's face.

"Ye-yes, sir. But it wasn't a hard blow, sir. My—my—skin is rather tender. It bruises quite easily, sir."

Osgood laughed harshly.

"Oh yeah? I'll bet he knocked you breeches over teacup! I don't blame you for getting sore! And then you just drew your gat and let him have it!"

The butler drew back in startled dismay.

"Me shoot the master!" he gasped. "Oh, no, sir! I—I—couldn't do a thing like that, sir! I do not own a revolver. I—I—don't believe I would know how to explode one, sir."

Osgood smiled reassuringly.

"All right, Marks. I didn't really believe you shot him. Just wanted to make sure—that's all. How much money did the colonel have in his safe last night?"

"I—I—don't know, sir. It may have been quite a large sum. He was in the habit of paying most of his household expenses in cash."

"I see. And what time did you say it was when you last saw the colonel alive?"

"About eleven o'clock, sir."

"Was the safe open then?"

"I can't say for certain, sir. I didn't notice."

"All right. Now tell me just why he struck you."

"It was on account of the milk, sir. He said it was sour. I knew it wasn't, and I made so bold as to tell him that I thought he must be mistaken. He became angry and struck me. I left him then, sir, and retired to my own room."

The inspector waved a hand in dismissal.

"Very well, Marks, that'll be all for the present. But you'd best stick around. I wouldn't even leave the house if I were you. Someone might get the notion that you were trying to beat it."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir. If you need me again just ring, sir."

The old man bowed and withdrew.

Hurley laughed a bit grimly.

"Like to treat 'em rough—don't you!"

"Got to," the inspector retorted. "You can't go by appearances in this racket, Dan. That old boy looks like he wouldn't kill a fly. But you never can tell. Anyhow, I scared a couple of interesting facts out of him. And it's just possible that he may be the killer at that. He might have got sore at the colonel and plugged him, then robbed the safe to make it look like an outside job."

THE medical examiner and the fingerprint expert emerged from the murdered man's study at this juncture and approached the inspector and Hurley.

"Well, what did you find?" Osgood demanded.

"Three bullet wounds in the thorax," the medical examiner replied. "Small caliber revolver. Probably a .22. Death was instantaneous. The colonel's been dead between ten and eleven hours. He must have been in a towering rage when he was killed. Did you observe his face, gentlemen?"

"Did we observe it!" Osgood echoed. "I'll see it in my dreams for the next month!"

The inspector turned to the fingerprint man.

"Find anything, Tommy?"

A puzzled frown crossed the latter's face.

"Not a thing, Inspector! The safe and desk were wiped clean of prints. There were a few indistinct ones on the junk on top of the desk, but a comparison of them with the colonel's show they're his own beyond a doubt."

Osgood shrugged his shoulders.

"Crooks are getting too damn educated to suit me," he complained. "If they don't

leave even a fingerprint behind them, how in time can they expect us to catch 'em?"

He turned to Hurley. "Dan, you wait here while I round up that butler again. I'm going to have a looksee up in his room. If he pulled this trick, it's just possible he's cached the loot up there."

The inspector went in search of the butler. The medical examiner and the fingerprint expert departed for Police Headquarters. This left Hurley alone in the gloomy hall.

He surreptitiously withdrew from his pocket the small object he had discovered behind the portiere in the colonel's study.

It was a lady's handkerchief, devoid of initial or monogram. But it had a narrow border of black. It evidently belonged to someone who had recently lost a loved one. A delicate fragrance assailed Hurley's nostrils, and he raised the dainty bit of linen to his nose, endeavoring to classify the elusive scent.

It wasn't one of the more common perfumes, and yet it seemed strangely familiar. A vague memory clutched at Hurley's heart; a memory hauntingly sweet. And then he remembered.

Jasmine! That was it! The favorite perfume of his own dear mother back in the happy days of long ago!

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Jasmine Trail

DANIEL HURLEY, newspaper man and writer of detective thrillers, drove his humble coupe along the highway until he reached the winding road leading to Fox Mountain. He guided his laboring machine up this tortuous trail and came to a stop under the same tree where he and Hattie Oliver had parked the evening they had taken their first drive after her arrival at Addison Manor.

On that former visit to this isolated spot they had discussed the poisoning of

Sewell Addison and the problems the crime had created. Hurley's thoughts were still occupied with the same theme.

He had driven away from the city and into the peaceful solitude of the autumn countryside to be alone with his thoughts. He had visited this place many times. It was a favorite spot. Many of the plots of his stories had taken form while he sat here peacefully puffing his pipe and listening to the voices of the forest folk.

He glanced at the vacant seat beside him as though half expecting to see Hattie sitting there and to catch the sound of her voice. He wished that she might have been there in reality. He would have liked to discuss with her the new problem which the murder of Colonel Winthrop and the finding of a lady's handkerchief in the slain man's study had added to those others which the raiding of the Blue Lantern had seemed to solve, but which in reality it had not.

It would have relieved his troubled mind to have told her about an elusive and vastly disturbing phantom which was slowly taking form in his brain. Her womanly intuition might have been able to grasp more clearly what his duller masculine perception as yet but dimly glimpsed.

But Hattie Oliver was back in New York, gaily preparing her trousseau. It had been almost a case of love at first sight between Hattie and Donald Addison, and they were to be married during the coming Christmas holidays.

Hattie's work in Elmhurst was finished. The Long Life Insurance Company had accepted her report on the validity of Sewell Addison's claim and had already mailed a certified check to his widow.

Hattie, together with Inspector Osgood and the public at large, considered the mystery of all those killings mysteries no longer. She believed with Donald Addison that Garbadian's assertion that there was a hidden man "higher up" had been merely

made to divert suspicion from himself.

Hurley wondered what the girl would think when she learned of the latest murder. And then his mind wandered to Inspector Osgood, and a twisted smile stole across his sober face. His old friend was good enough when it came to direct action, but to attempt to discuss with him the thing that was now troubling Hurley would have been worse than useless. The inspector would laugh him to scorn.

Osgood had already formulated his theory regarding the shooting of Colonel Winthrop, and, as far as he was concerned, the case was closed. It was now entirely up to the authorities in the larger cities to comb their respective underworlds for possible suspects.

The inspector had at first been inclined to suspect Marks, the aged butler, who had admitted that his master frequently struck him when under the influence of liquor. He had promptly abandoned this theory, however, when no evidence was forthcoming to substantiate it.

A coroner's jury had returned a verdict of homicide at the hand of a person, or persons, unknown.

Such was the state of affairs when Hurley drove into the country to wrestle with the problem which the finding of the lady's handkerchief had injected into the situation.

DURING the three days that had elapsed since the murder of Colonel Winthrop, Hurley had been tempted on more than one occasion to turn the handkerchief over to Osgood and to tell him of his previous belief that Winthrop had been the man behind Garbadian. Something had stayed his hand and tied his tongue. Neither had he shown Osgood the locket containing Winthrop's picture. The heart-shaped emblem was safely hidden in Hurley's safety deposit box in the bank.

And now the newspaper man was out here in the peaceful wilderness to try to determine why his intuition had warned him to keep the knowledge of all these things from Osgood, and to figure out what connection, if any, existed between the presence of the black-bordered handkerchief in the dead man's study and the crime itself.

Hurley had already arrived at two logical conclusions regarding the handkerchief. It belonged to one of the ladies at Addison Manor, and it had been dropped a comparatively short time before Hurley found it. Its black border announced its owner to be in mourning; and the ladies at the manor were in mourning. When Hurley found the handkerchief, it had still exuded a faint odor of perfume; something it would not have done, if it had lain long in its place of concealment behind the portiere in the colonel's study.

Had it come there innocently? Neighbors, such as the colonel and the Addisons had been, were forever running in and out of one another's houses. Had one of the ladies dropped her handkerchief while chatting with the colonel in his study?

Hurley shook his head thoughtfully. Not within the last week or so, at any rate. The great house had been virtually closed while the painters and paperhangers had been at work.

Then how did the handkerchief get there? Had some female member of the Addison household murdered Colonel Winthrop and accidentally dropped her handkerchief at the time? And if this were true, what had been her motive for the killing?

A startled oath sprang from Hurley's lips. All his former suspicions concerning Winthrop returned at that moment with redoubled force. Winthrop was the man "higher up" after all! He had en-

gineered the poisoning of his old friend—and someone in the Addison household knew it!

And that same "someone" had taken vengeance into her own hands!

Hurley felt more sure of his position now. His mind relaxed for a moment. He stepped out of his car and filled his pipe. He struck a match to it and watched the smoke drift away in lazy spirals from its blackened bowl.

How quiet and peaceful it was out here in the country! This was the life! Away from man and his sordid struggle for gold! Some day, when the royalties from that "best seller" he was going to write came rolling in, he would build a little place in the country, where jails and thundering printing presses were unknown.

That woodchuck which had just peeped from behind a rock wouldn't kill one of its neighbors! Those squirrels up in that walnut tree were only concerned with garnering the necessary food for the barren days just around the corner. Even that predatory hawk, soaring on lazy pinions high in the autumn sky, was only seeking to kill for the food necessary to sustain life.

Lust! Greed! Revenge! The humble creatures of the wilderness did not even know what those things meant!

Hurley knocked the load from his pipe and turned again to his problem.

ASSUMING that Colonel Winthrop had engineered the poisoning of his old friend, and that one of the ladies of the Addison household had killed the colonel in retribution, which of the three had done it? Dorothy—the youngest member of the family? Gladys—the wife of John Addison? Or Sarah Addison—the widow of the slain man?

Not Gladys! She was merely a daughter-in-law.

Dorothy? Hurley shook his head. He

could not picture that gay and charming girl in the role of an avenger.

Sarah Addison? The kindly soul whose generous hand had caused the poor and needy of Elmhurst to rise up and call her "blessed"?

Preposterous! But wait! On second thought, *was* it preposterous?

The most timid of female creatures had been known to turn and fight tooth and nail in defense of her wounded mate or of her helpless offspring!

Yes—if Colonel Winthrop had met his death at the hand of any one of these three, Sarah Addison was the logical suspect!

Very well—what next? Put Osgood wise and let that old bull-in-a-china-closet haul the kindly old lady down to headquarters and subject her to his brutal "Third Degree"?

Hurley grinned mockingly.

And then have Sarah Addison calmly deny ownership of that handkerchief? No—that would never do!

The grin faded. A thoughtful frown gathered on Hurley's brow. If the truth were ever to be learned, tact and diplomacy of the highest order would have to be employed. Nor was Hurley quite sure he would care to see the widow of Sewell Addison dragged into court to answer the charge of slaying the man who was believed to have been her husband's best friend.

The newspaper man had no official connection with the police. He was not bound by the same rigid ethics in dealing with offenders of the written law. There was an "unwritten law" that sometimes superceded the written! If his suspicions were based on fact, his sympathies were all with the offender in the present instance.

But he must know the truth, even if he never revealed it to another living soul. He had a right to know! He had worked

too hard on the case to be denied this knowledge.

But how was he to learn the truth?

Hurley glanced at his watch, then at the gathering shadows. He hadn't realized how late it was! He'd have to be making tracks for home. Perhaps his mind would be clearer to wrestle with the problem after a good night's sleep.

He'd do one more thing tonight though. He'd call up the Alton Pharmacy as soon as he got back to the city. The elite of Elmhurst would never dream of trading elsewhere!

Back once more in his office, Hurley got the manager of the fashionable drug store on the wire. Pretending to be a friend desirous of giving an acceptable Christmas gift, he learned all he wished to know.

"Mrs. Sarah Addison always buys Piquet's Jasmine Bouquet," the manager informed him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A Lady's Handkerchief

IT WAS a few minutes after three o'clock the following afternoon when the butler sent a maid to Sarah Addison's room with a caller's card.

It bore the simple inscription:

DANIEL B. HURLEY

Sarah Addison took the card and glanced at the name.

"Daniel B. Hurley!" she exclaimed softly. "The newspaper man!" She raised her eyes to the waiting maid. "Very well, Josephine, you may tell the butler to invite him in. I'll be down immediately."

The maid courtesied and withdrew.

Sarah Addison glanced at her reflection in a mirror and tucked a stray lock of gray hair into place. A thoughtful frown

crossed her gentle face. A vague sense of uneasiness stirred within her as she repeated the name again.

"Daniel Hurley! The man who took such an active part in the recent investigations! I wonder what brings him to see me! I hope he doesn't— But no—it can't be *that!*"

She descended the stairs and entered the reception hall. Casting aside all formality, she advanced with a smile and extended her hand in friendly greeting.

"This is indeed a pleasure, Mr. Hurley!" she exclaimed politely. "Miss Oliver has said so many nice things about you I almost feel as though I know you already. And John tells me that a great part of the credit for solving these terrible crimes belongs to you. Won't you sit down?"

Hurley bowed, a friendly light in his gray eyes. "Thank you, Mrs. Addison. It is kind of you to see me. I fear the part I played has been over-emphasized. I—I—came to consult with you on a—er, er, rather delicate matter. If there is some place where we could perhaps have a little more privacy—?"

Sarah Addison's brows lifted inquiringly, but she inclined her head in polite assent.

"Certainly, Mr. Hurley. Let us go into my husband's study. I am sure we will not be disturbed there."

She conducted her caller down the broad hall and ushered him into her dead husband's study. She closed the door and indicated a chair.

"Sit there, Mr. Hurley. That was my husband's favorite chair. I am sure you will find it comfortable. I'll sit over here."

They sat down, and Hurley could not help making a mental note of the fact that the face of his hostess was in the shadow of an ornate screen in front of one of the windows. Was this a skillful maneuver on her part?

"We will not be disturbed here," Sarah

Addison told her caller. "I am at your service, Mr. Hurley."

Her voice was politely casual, but Hurley sensed a deeper emotion beneath the softly spoken words.

The newspaper man smiled disarmingly. "It is very gracious of you to humor a notion of mine, Mrs. Addison. I called to return something which I believe belongs to you, and I thought I should like to return it to you personally."

He leaned forward in his chair and gravely handed her the handkerchief he had found in Colonel Winthrop's study.

HIS hostess accepted it from his outstretched hand and glanced at it inquiringly.

"Yes—it is mine, Mr. Hurley," she admitted. "Thank you very much for returning it. But to tell you the truth, I hadn't missed it. How did you know it was mine?"

"I wasn't absolutely certain, Mrs. Addison. That is why I wished to return it to you privately. I—I—rather hoped I might be mistaken."

"O-oh!" the startled exclamation escaped Sarah Addison's lips involuntarily. Her face went suddenly white, and a frightened look crept into her eyes.

"I—I—don't believe I quite understand," she faltered. "Where—where did you find it, Mr. Hurley?"

"I found it in Colonel Winthrop's study, Mrs. Addison," Hurley replied gently.

The old lady recoiled as from a blow. She swayed in her chair, and Hurley feared she was going to faint. Recovering, she raised frightened eyes to his.

"Wh—when did you find it?" she whispered.

"The morning the body was discovered, Mrs. Addison."

Hurley's gentle tone reassured the startled old lady. Her frightened eyes—eyes that reminded Hurley of faded vio-

lets—searched his face questioningly. And then her face hardened with sudden resolve. A faint color crept into her pale cheeks and bloodless lips. Her drooping shoulders straightened.

“And you would like to know how my handkerchief came to be in Colonel Winthrop’s study?” she softly inquired.

Hurley inclined his head.

“Yes—if you care to tell me, Mrs. Addison. No one knows it but ourselves. I haven’t shown it to anyone. I thought perhaps you wouldn’t want me to. I found it quite by accident—*after* Inspector Osgood had completed his examination of the study.”

“Oh, how very considerate of you!” the troubled woman exclaimed softly. Then an expression of irresolution crossed her face and momentarily dulled the light of high resolve in her faded blue eyes.

“And if—if—I were to decide I had made a mistake as to the ownership of this handkerchief, Mr. Hurley—?”

“I should offer you my most humble apology for making a frightful blunder,” her companion said gently.

Tears glistened in the eyes of Sarah Addison.

“And they say chivalry is dead!” she murmured softly. Then the gentle face hardened once more with grim resolve.

“No! No!” she cried fiercely. “I do not wish to deny ownership of this handkerchief. I *must* tell you how it came to be in the colonel’s study. I *must* unburden my soul to someone. The burden is too great for my old shoulders to bear alone. Will you share it with me, Mr. Hurley? Will you listen to the story of a broken-hearted widow and mother, whose only defense is her great love for her children and for her departed husband? Whose one aim in life has been to make them happy and to preserve untarnished the honor of the name they so proudly bear?”

Daniel Hurley’s friendly eyes shone with deep pity.

“Yes, Mrs. Addison, I will gladly listen—if the telling will lighten the burden,” he answered gently.

CARELESS now of the friendly shadow cast by the ornate screen, Sarah Addison leaned forward in her chair until the light from the window shone full upon her face. When she spoke, her voice was under perfect control.

“Mr. Hurley, I must have dropped this handkerchief when I was leaving Horace Winthrop’s study after I killed him! Yes, you have guessed correctly, sir! I killed Colonel Winthrop! I killed him like you would kill some ugly reptile! But I am not a murderess, Mr. Hurley. I am an avenger!

“I could claim I shot him in self defense, because when he advanced upon me with that uplifted poker in his hand it became a matter of his life or mine. But I do not wish to hide behind such a subterfuge, sir. I entered his study that night fully resolved to kill him.”

Sarah Addison paused an instant and searched her caller’s face with wistfully pleading eyes.

Hurley smiled reassuringly. “Perhaps you had better tell me the story from the beginning,” he suggested gently.

“Oh, I intend to, sir! But the beginning goes back a great deal farther than you would ever guess. First, however, I must tell you some things that the recent investigations did not bring to light. Your story in the paper blamed everything on Ameer Garbadian. You were wrong, Mr. Hurley. Colonel Winthrop was the man behind Garbadian!

“Horace Winthrop was the head of the narcotic ring you and Inspector Osgood smashed when you raided the Blue Lantern. The colonel was the actual lessee of the property.”

For the first time her voice broke. But she forced herself to go on.

"It was Horace Winthrop—not Garbadian—who induced Miss Newton to poison my husband! It was Horace Winthrop who arranged the fatal 'accident' which overtook Doctor Leonard. It was Horace Winthrop who forced the undertaker's assistant to get my husband's death certificate signed at such a fearful cost. Poor Doctor Babcock! He died because he knew too much!

"It was Horace Winthrop who ordered Ameer Garbadian to enter the Italian's room at City Hospital and stab him. And all these terrible things resulted from my husband's refusal to renew the lease on that property or to sell it outright.

"When the colonel learned that my husband had refused to renew the lease to Garbadian he came to me and threatened to reveal a certain secret to my husband if I did not persuade him to renew that lease. But my hands were tied, Mr. Hurley. Sewell didn't know that I had any knowledge whatsoever concerning his management of the property. I finally insisted upon knowing what was being done with it. I had to affect great surprise when he informed me that the old Valley Inn had become a—a place of that sort.

"Realizing that my husband would never renew the lease to Garbadian, I pretended to be deeply shocked to learn that my property had been put to such vile purposes. I pleaded with Sewell to sell it outright and get it off our hands. He refused to do this, claiming that if he did, the infamous tavern would still continue to be a menace to the entire community. Instead, he would simply refuse to renew the lease, and thus close the doors of the place forever.

"And so I had to cease my pleadings for fear of arousing my husband's suspicions to a point where only the truth would have satisfied him. A truth, Mr.

Hurley, that would have killed him just as surely as the poison Horace Winthrop had prepared for him!"

SARAH ADDISON paused, her pale face drawn in with the pain of bitter memories. But she had courage of a rare sort. A moment's rest, and she forced herself to go on.

"I told the colonel that I was powerless to alter my husband's determination not to renew the lease. He upbraided me bitterly and promised to carry out his threat and reveal a secret that has made my life a miserable nightmare of apprehension and fear for many long, bitter years. From that moment I lived in constant dread. But for some reason the expected blow did not fall.

"I knew that it was not because of any pity the colonel felt for me. He had persecuted me too many long years for me to believe anything like that! He had blackmailed me continually since almost the first day of my marriage to Sewell Addison! That magnificent estate adjoining ours was paid for with my poor husband's money! Money he thought I used to found and maintain a school in Syria!

"And all through the years Horace Winthrop has posed as my husband's best friend! Posed—and laughed at me! Made me pretend I believed he was my husband's friend! Made me rear my children in this belief! Made me stand by and watch his foul lips pollute my growing daughter's pure ones with the kisses of a supposedly trusted and highly esteemed friend!

"And poor Sewell! He loved that man! He believed in him! He thought him the very soul of honor!"

The unhappy woman paused, overcome by emotion. Tearless sobs shook her frail body.

Hurley remained silent, deep pity softening the grim lines of his pale face.

Mastering her momentary weakness, Sarah Addison resumed her confession.

"And then a few years ago Horace Winthrop leased the property that had once been the peaceful home of my aunt and uncle; the place associated in my mind with so many happy childhood recollections. He leased it under Ameer Garbadian's name; a cunning and murderous fiend, over whom he wielded some powerful influence.

"I think the colonel's original reason for leasing my property and turning it into such a cesspool of vice was merely to add to my humiliation and to heap more indignities upon my head. And it appealed to his warped sense of humor to know that a man of my husband's recognized integrity and high moral standards was unwittingly aiding and abetting the nefarious undertaking by leasing the property to Ameer Garbadian.

"But for once in his life, Horace Winthrop overstepped himself, Mr. Hurley. The sinister activities of the Blue Lantern were brought to my husband's attention several times during the past few months, and he decided not to renew the lease.

"It was this decision that sealed his doom and brought about the deaths of so many innocent men. For you must understand, sir, that this tavern which the colonel had reopened more for the purpose of further humiliating me than with the expectation of reaping any great financial reward, quickly developed into a veritable gold mine."

SARAH ADDISON paused and drew a deep breath.

"Hadn't you better rest a few minutes," Hurley suggested gently.

The elderly woman shook her head. "No—I am not tired, sir," she replied steadily. "I am anxious to finish my story. My lips have been sealed too many long years to curb their impatience now. My

troubled soul will find no peace until I have told you everything.

"As I was saying, my husband refused to renew the lease. His death followed, and the colonel planned to have my son, John, sign the new lease.

"I did not suspect a thing when my husband died so suddenly. The 'accident' that overtook Doctor Leonard didn't arouse any suspicions, although I couldn't believe he had been intoxicated when it occurred. The shooting of poor Doctor Babcock shocked me inexpressibly, but I believed Lorello's statement that he had shot the doctor in self defense.

"I didn't suspect anything wrong about Miss Newton. I thought she was a very charming young lady. In fact, Mr. Hurley, I didn't suspect a thing about the whole horrible business until the Blue Lantern was raided and I read your story in the paper.

"And then everything became clear. Your only mistake was in placing the blame on Garbadian. I knew that Horace Winthrop was the guilty man. I knew then why the colonel hadn't carried out his threat to expose me. He had elected, instead, to kill my husband and thus retain possession of the Blue Lantern. When that place was raided and its sinister secret revealed, all the colonel's plans were frustrated. He had a frightful temper, and I trembled to think what his reaction would be.

"He was with my son that night when you called up from the Blue Lantern. I had retired, but John told me about it the first thing in the morning. The colonel, he said, had seemed overjoyed to learn that Donald and Miss Oliver were safe. He had left immediately after your call.

"He came over the next day, as usual. He congratulated Hattie and Donald upon their escape and appeared to be in the best of spirits. And then he got me alone in this very room and laid bare the depths

of his wicked soul. He raved and cursed as only one can who has sold himself, body and soul, to the evil one. And then he turned his curses upon me, hurling his bitter epithets until I had to hold my ears and bite my lips to keep from screaming."

SARAH ADDISON'S voice sank to a tragic whisper. "And then, Mr. Hurley, he finished by demanding the hand of my daughter, Dorothy, in payment for the loss of the Blue Lantern!"

Again the speaker paused.

"And then—?" Hurley prompted gently.

"And then he left, promising to return the next day for his answer, and threatening to disgrace forever the proud Addison name if I refused.

"There is a limit to human endurance, Mr. Hurley. I had reached mine. I would gladly have given him my entire fortune—my life. But when he demanded my innocent daughter in exchange for his continued silence, he left no alternative for me but to kill him.

"I could have borne the disgrace his revelations would have brought if I alone would have suffered. But it was my loved ones who would have suffered the most, Mr. Hurley. And so I decided that Horace Winthrop must die.

"I made my preparations very calmly. I knew that Horace would be alone except for his old butler, who slept in a distant part of the house. There was a small loaded revolver in the drawer of the little table at the head of my bed.

"I retired early that night and waited until the rest were asleep. Shortly before midnight I arose and dressed. I slipped a dark cloak over my dress and put the revolver in a concealed pocket in the lining.

"The clock in the tower of City Hall was tolling the hour of midnight as I crept from a side door of the house and stole across the lawn in the direction of Horace

Winthrop's home. A light was still burning in his study. I tapped on the window and he admitted me at once. He had been drinking and his breath reeked with the fumes of brandy. He closed the door and strode back to his chair behind his desk. I advanced slowly toward him, my right hand hidden in the folds of my cloak.

"He was still in a towering rage. His bloodshot eyes smouldered with the very fires of hell itself. I shuddered when he focused their baleful glare upon my face.

"'Couldn't wait till morning, eh!' he gibed mockingly. 'Well, what's it to be? Do the wedding bells ring—or do I spill the works?'

"'Horace Winthrop,' I replied steadily, 'your hour has come! I am going to kill you!'

"I drew the revolver from the folds of my cloak and pointed it directly at him. He sprang from his chair, and a spasm of murderous fury distorted his face. He hurled a vile epithet at me and leaped toward the fireplace. He snatched up a heavy poker and advanced upon me, unmindful of the revolver in my trembling hand. When he was almost upon me I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger. I think I heard three explosions before I stopped pulling against it. I opened my eyes. Horace Winthrop was lying dead at my feet!"

SARAH ADDISON smiled again, peacefully.

"An unnatural calm settled down upon me. I wasn't excited or horrified or anything. I remember I talked to him as he lay there with that frightful grimace of hate and fury still upon his face.

"I told him that he had only reaped what he had sown; that he should have known his sins would find him out. Then I gently removed the poker from his clinging grasp and returned it to its accustomed place.

"I was turning to leave that chamber of death when it suddenly occurred to me to divert suspicion against myself by directing it toward a mythical slayer. The door of Horace's safe was open. Securities and bank-notes to the value of thousands of dollars were in the safe. Shrinking from the very touch of his filthy money, I laid it on the smouldering embers in the fireplace and watched the crackling flames consume it.

"The same unnatural calm still possessed me. My mind was clear, and my entire attention was centered upon my task. I seemed to remember everything. I even thought of fingerprints. A small dust-cloth on the desk caught my eye. I took it and wiped the face of the safe clean. I even wiped the handle of the heavy poker. Using the cloth as a glove, I opened the drawers of the desk and removed some of their contents."

Sarah Addison paused and drew a deep breath.

"And that, Mr. Hurley," she continued, "is how Horace Winthrop, the man who made my life a long, hideous nightmare of terror, came to his end. To say I am sorry, sir, would be to state an untruth.

"I am glad! *glad!* GLAD!"

Fierce exultation flared momentarily in the aged woman's eyes, then died away as she sank back in her chair, exhausted by the violence of her emotion.

Daniel Hurley felt a sudden desire to take her withered hands in his own firm ones and comfort her.

Sarah Addison raised her eyes to his face and smiled wistfully, as though sensing his impulse. Then the smile faded and the grim lines of determination returned.

"And I have still more to tell you, sir," she resumed, struggling to control her voice.

"You are wondering *why* I permitted this fiend to persecute me all these years. You are wondering *why* I allowed him to

make a mockery of my husband's friendship."

A FLUSH crept over Sarah Addison's pale cheeks, but her eyes never wavered from her companion's face and her voice did not falter as she continued. "Perhaps you will understand more clearly, Mr. Hurley, when I tell you that John, my eldest son is *not* the son of Sewell Addison.

"Long, long ago—back in those happy days when I was little more than a child—Horace Winthrop and I were sweethearts. I was sixteen, and he was ten years my senior. I was very young—and oh, so very foolish! Horace Winthrop was my knight-errant—the hero of my girlish dreams. I trusted him. I believed his promises of eternal fidelity. And then—then—when trouble came, he—he—left me. Dazed and appalled by the awful disgrace and shame the future held in store for me, I did not know which way to turn."

A smile of wondrous tenderness stole across the aged woman's tragic face.

"And then, Mr. Hurley, Sewell Addison came into my life! It was a case of love at first sight—on his part. We were married exactly two weeks from the first day I met him. I know I shouldn't have permitted him to marry me, but I was a coward, Mr. Hurley—a moral coward. And Sewell loved me so tenderly!

"And then I made my first hideous blunder. I did not tell my husband my guilty secret. Time passed, and John was born. Sewell was so proud and happy in the belief that John was his son, I dared not tell him the truth.

"I made my second frightful mistake a few months later. Horace Winthrop returned to Elmhurst, and I foolishly admitted to him that my husband was still ignorant of the truth. From that day began the persecutions which have grown

worse and harder to bear with each passing year.

"Colonel Winthrop did not love me—I doubt if he ever really loved me—but he was insanely jealous of the success my husband was already attaining. He wormed his way into Sewell's esteem, and for many years their friendship has been a proverb here in Elmhurst.

"I could have borne that fiend's persecutions, Mr. Hurley; borne them in silence until death forever sealed my lips. I could have borne the shame and indignity of it all—not for my own sake, but for the sake of my loved ones. But when I learned that the monster had slain my husband and other innocent men; when he came to me demanding my little girl in exchange for his continued silence, I decided to kill him.

"I am not a very brave woman, Mr. Hurley. If you had not discovered my guilt, I fear I would have held my peace forever. But it was not to be. Our sins always find us out—just as I told Horace Winthrop as he lay dead there on the floor of his study.

"I am prepared to pay the penalty for my sin, Mr. Hurley. I'll give myself up to the law. I'll confess I killed Horace Winthrop. But oh, Mr. Hurley, won't you please keep my secret and let me give some other motive for my crime? To know that their mother is a murderess will be enough of shame to heap upon the heads of my innocent children without besmirching the proud name they bear by revealing that other thing."

Sarah Addison ceased speaking and her gray head dropped forlornly upon her shrunken breast.

Daniel Hurley glanced pityingly at the forlorn little old lady, whose tragic face revealed the suffering she had endured for so many long, bitter years.

"Mrs. Addison," he said softly, "I have it from no less an authority than Inspector Osgood himself that the shooting of Colonel Winthrop bears all the earmarks of a professional thug. He believes that the colonel caught the fellow in the act of pillaging his study and that the thug shot the colonel to make his getaway.

"Inspector Osgood believes the man is now safely hidden away in the underworld haunts of some large city and that it will be next to impossible to apprehend him. And I am inclined to agree with the inspector.

"I believe you must be mistaken regarding the ownership of that handkerchief, Mrs. Addison. I shall continue in this belief unless some innocent person is accused and convicted of murdering Colonel Winthrop."

A look of wondrous joy and hope transfigured the face of Sarah Addison. New life and strength seemed to be flowing into her drooping body. She arose from her chair and stepped close to her caller.

Hurley also stood up.

"Mr. Hurley," she inquired softly, "is your mother living?"

Her companion shook his head sadly.

"No, Mrs. Addison, she died many years ago. Why do you ask?"

"Because, Mr. Hurley, if she were living, I should like to meet her and tell her what a wonderful son she has. I am sure she would be very proud of her boy. In the name of my dead husband's memory, may I offer the prayer that every day of your life may be filled to overflowing with sunshine—with happiness—and joy?"

For answer, Daniel Hurley, hard-boiled editor, and writer of detective thrillers, bent low and touched his lips to the gray locks of Sarah Addison.

THE END

See opposite page for important announcement!

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DON'T MISS THIS ALL-STAR ISSUE!

FOR SALE ON ALL NEWSSTANDS SEPTEMBER TENTH



Ringer's Trap

By EDGAR WALLACE

Author of "The Man With the Red Beard," etc.

Michael Benner was sentenced to hang—with no possible chance of last-minute reprieve. Then his anguished wife received a brief unsigned note: "Don't lose hope!" The Ringer had taken a hand!

THERE were two schools of thought at Scotland Yard. There were those who believed that The Ringer worked single-handed, and those who were convinced that he controlled an organization and had the assistance of at least half a dozen people.

Inspector Bliss was of the first school.

"He's entirely on his own," he said.

"Though sometimes he employs an innocent man who has no idea he is being used to attract the attention of the police."

"By the way, is there any news of him?" asked the Assistant Commissioner.

Bliss shook his head.

"He's in London; I was confident of that—now, today, I have proof. If you had told me, sir, a few years ago, that any man could escape the police by disguise I should have laughed. But this man's disguises are perfect. He is the character he pretends to be."

Chief Inspector Bliss took out his pocketcase, searched through the papers it contained until he found a letter.

"This came in the morning mail," he said.

Colonel Walford stared up at him. "From the Ringer?"

Bliss nodded, and held out the type-written sheet.

Colonel Walford put on his glasses and read:

Michael Benner, now under sentence of death, is innocent. I think you knew this when you gave evidence against him at the Old Bailey, for you brought out every point in his favour. Lee Lavinski killed Estholl, but was disturbed by Benner before he could get the loot. Lee left for Canada two days after the murder. Be a good fellow and help save this man.

There was no signature.

"What's the idea?" The Assistant Commissioner looked up over his glasses.

"The Ringer is right," said Bliss quietly. "Benner did not kill old Estholl—and I have discovered that Lavinski was in England when the murder was committed."

The crime of which he spoke was one of those commonplace crimes which excite little interest, since the guilt of the man accused seemed beyond doubt and the issue of the trial a foregone conclusion. Estholl was a rich man of seventy, who lived in a small Bloomsbury hotel. He was in the habit of carrying around large sums of money—a peculiar failing of all men who have risen from poverty to riches by their own efforts.

At four o'clock one wintry morning a guest at the hotel, who had been playing cards in his sitting-room with a party of friends, came out into the corridor and saw Benner, the night porter, emerge from the old man's room, carrying in his hand a blood-stained hammer. The man's face was white, he seemed dazed, and when challenged was speechless.

Rushing into the room the guest saw old Estholl lying on the bed in a pool of blood, dead.

The porter's story after his arrest was that he had heard the old man's bell ring and had gone up to his room and knocked.

Having no answer he opened the door and went in. He saw the hammer lying on the bed and picked it up mechanically, being so horrified that he did not know what he was doing.

BENNER was a young married man and in financial difficulties. He was desperately in need of money and had tried that evening to borrow seven pounds from the manageress of the hotel. Moreover, he had said to the head porter, "Look at old Estholl! If I had half of the money that he has in his pocket I shouldn't be worrying my head off to-night!"

Protesting his innocence, Benner went to the Old Bailey, and, after a trial which lasted less than a day, was condemned.

"The hammer was the property of the hotel, and Benner had access to the work-room where it was usually kept," said Bliss. "But, as against that, the work-room, which is in the hotel basement, was the easiest to enter from the outside, and the window was, in fact, found open in the morning."

"Is there any hope for Benner?"

Bliss shook his head.

"No. The Court has dismissed his appeal—and Strathpenner is not the kind of man who would have mercy. Old Estholl was, unfortunately, a friend of his."

Colonel Walford looked at the letter again, and ran his fingers through his hair irritably.

"Why should The Ringer bother his head about Benner?" he asked.

The ghost of a smile appeared on the bearded face of the detective.

"The trouble with The Ringer is that he can't mind his own business," he said. "That little note means that he is in the case—he doesn't drop letters around unless he's vitally interested. And if The Ringer's vitally interested in Benner, then we're going to see something rather dramatic. By the way, the Home Secre-

tary has sent for me in connection with this affair."

"Is he likely to be influenced by you, inspector?" asked Colonel Walford drily.

"If I agree with him, yes; if I don't, no," said Bliss.

He went back to his room to learn that a visitor had called, and before his secretary told him her name he guessed her identity.

She was a pretty girl, despite the haggard lines which told of sleepless nights. She was dressed much better than when he had seen her at the Old Bailey.

"Well, Mrs. Benner," he said kindly, "what can I do?"

Her lips quivered.

"I don't know, sir. . . . I know Jim is innocent. He's incapable of doing such a horrible thing. I called at the Home Office, but the gentleman wouldn't see me."

Again Bliss looked at her clothes: they were obviously new. As though she read his thoughts: "I'm not in a bad way, sir—for money, I mean. A gentleman sent me twenty five-pound notes last week, and that paid off all poor Jim's debts and left me enough to live on for a bit."

"Who sent the money?" asked Bliss quickly.

But here Mrs. Benner could not give him information. It had arrived by post and was unaccompanied by any card or name.

"It might have been a woman who sent it?" suggested Bliss, though he knew better. "There was no letter at all?"

She shook her head.

"Only a piece of paper. I've got it here."

She fumbled in her bag and produced a strip of paper torn off the edge of a newspaper, on which was typed

"DON'T LOSE HOPE."

The "s" was out of alignment, the tail of the "p" was faint. Bliss got out the letter he had received that morning and

for a moment carefully compared the two. He smiled to himself as he replaced the one in his pocketcase and returned the other to its puzzled owner.

"You're under distinguished patronage," he said ironically, and then, in a more serious tone: "I'm afraid I can do very little for you. I am seeing—one of the officials at the Home Office this morning, but I'm afraid, Mrs. Benner, you'll have to resign yourself to—"

He did not finish his sentence, as he saw her eyes close and her face grow a shade paler.

Bliss pulled out a chair and bade her sit down; and somehow the sight of this woman in her agony brought a pang to a heart not easily touched.

"No hope?" she whispered, and shook her head in anticipation of his answer.

"A very faint one, I'm afraid," said the detective.

"But you don't think he's guilty, Mr. Bliss? When I saw Jim in Pentonville he told me that you didn't think so. It is horrible, horrible! He couldn't have done such an awful thing!"

Bliss was thinking rapidly. He had a dim idea of The Ringer's methods, and now he was searching here and there to find the avenue by which this ruthless man might approach the case.

"Have you any relations?"

She shook her head.

"No brothers?"

Again she gave him the negative.

"Good! Now, Mrs. Benner, I'll do the best I can for you, and in return I want you to do something for me. If the man who sent you that money approaches you, or if anybody who is unknown to you calls on you or asks you to meet them, I want you to telephone me here."

He scribbled down the number on a slip of paper and passed it across to her. "If anybody comes to you purporting to be from Scotland Yard, or to have any position of authority whatever, I want

you to telephone to me about that also. I'm going to do what I can for your husband, and, though I'm afraid it isn't much, it will be my best."

IT WAS half-past two when Bliss reached the Home Office, and, by some miracle, Mr. Strathpenner had arrived. He was the despair of his subordinates, a man without method or system. There were days when he would not come to the office at all; other and more frequent days when he would put in an appearance an hour before the staff left, with the result that they were kept working into the night.

The Right Honorable William Strathpenner, His Majesty's principal Secretary of State, was a singularly unpopular man, both in and outside his party. He was pompous, unimaginative, a little uncouth of speech, intolerable. He had worn his way into the Cabinet as other men had done before him; and, by a succession of lucky accidents, had finally obtained the highest of the subordinate Cabinet positions.

A thin man, short-necked, broad-shouldered, he had the expression of one who was constantly smelling something unpleasant. Political cartoonists had helped to make his face familiar, for his was an easy subject for caricature. The heavy, black, bristling eyebrows, the thick-lens spectacles, the bald head with the black wisps brushed across, his reddish nose—a libel on him, since he was a lifelong abstainer—made him unpleasant to look upon. He was almost as unpleasant to hear, for he had a harsh, grating voice and punctuated his sentences with an irritating little cough.

He kept Bliss waiting twenty minutes before he was admitted to the august presence. There seemed no reason for the delay, for Mr. Strathpenner was reading a newspaper when he came in. He looked

at the slip which announced the name of his visitor.

"Bliss, Bliss? Of course. Yes, yes, you're a police officer—ahem! This Benner case . . . yes, I remember now. I asked you to see me—ahem!"

He blinked across the table at Bliss, and his face had more than ever that unpleasant-smell expression.

"Now what do you know about this, hey? I haven't seen the judge, but there's no doubt in my mind that this blackguard should suffer the extreme penalty of the law. This report, of course, is bunkum." He tapped the newspaper with his finger. "The usual bunkum—ahem! I don't believe in confessions—you don't believe in confessions?"

"Confessions, sir?" The inspector gazed at him in astonishment.

"Haven't you seen it?" Strathpenner threw the paper across the table. "There it is. Use your eyes . . . third column. . . ."

IT WAS not in the third, but the fifth column, and the item of news was headed:

**"Hotel Murderer Confesses
Remarkable Statement by
Red-handed Murderer."**

Ottawa.

A man named Lavinski, who shot two policemen in cold blood in the streets of Montreal last night, when detected in the act of breaking into the Canadian Bank, and was shot by a third policeman, has made a remarkable statement before a magistrate who was called to his bedside at the hospital.

Lavinski is not expected to recover from his wounds, and in the course of his statement he said that he was responsible for the murder of Mr. Estholl, for which a man named Benner lies under sentence of death in London. Lavinski says that he made an entrance to the hotel knowing that Mr. Estholl carried large sums of money in his pocket, that he took a hammer intending to use the claw to open the door in case it was locked.

Estholl woke up as he entered the room,

and Lavinski says that he struck him with the hammer, though he was not aware that he had inflicted a fatal injury. He then discovered that the dead man had a hanging belt-push in his hand, and fearing that he had rung it, Lavinski made his escape without attempting to search his pockets. The statement has been attested before a magistrate.

Bliss looked up and met the Home Secretary's gaze.

"Well? Bunkum, eh? You've had no official notification at Scotland Yard?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not; I thought not—ahem! An old trick, eh, inspector? You've had that sort of thing played on you before. It won't save Benner, I assure you—ahem! I assure you!"

Bliss gaped at him.

"But you're not going to hang this man until you get this statement over from Canada?"

"Don't be absurd, inspector, don't be absurd! If a Secretary of State were to be influenced by newspaper reports where would he be, eh? Did you read the last paragraph?"

Bliss took up the paper again and saw, later:

The man Lavinski died before he could sign the statement he had made before Mr. Prideaux.

"Let me tell you, sir"—Mr. Strathpenner wagged an admonitory finger—"His Majesty's Secretary of State is not to be influenced by wild-cat stories of this kind . . . by newspaper reports, by—ahem!—hearsay evidence as it were. What are we to do? I ask you! On the unsigned deposition of a—er—convicted murderer caught in the act. Release this man Benner?"

"You could grant him a respite, sir," interrupted Bliss.

Mr. Strathpenner sat back in his chair and his tone became icy.

"I am not asking your advice, inspec-

tor. . . . If I lose my pocket-book or my watch I have no doubt your advice will be invaluable—ahem! to secure its recovery. Thank you, inspector." He waved Bliss from the room.

The detective went across to Scotland Yard, but Walford had gone. The only thing Bliss knew was that the death warrant had not been signed. It is part of the Home Secretary's duty to affix his name to a document that will send a fellow-creature from this life, and one of the bravest men who ever sat in a Cabinet refused the second offer of the office for this reason.

Mr. Strathpenner, at any rate, was not in any way distressed by his duty. He had summoned the judge who had tried the case to meet him the next day, and he went back to his house in Crowborough that night without a single qualm or misgiving.

MR. STRATHPENNER was a widower and lived alone except for a large staff of servants, which included a French *chef*. He dined alone, a solitary figure in the big mahogany-panelled dining room, a large German philosophical work propped up before him. He was an excellent linguist and had a weakness for shallow philosophies if they were propped with sufficient pretentiousness.

He was so reading at the end of his meal when the visitor was announced. Mr. Strathpenner looked at the card suspiciously. It read: "Mr. James Hagger, 14, High Street, Crouchstead."

Now, Crouchstead was the West of England constituency which had the honour of being represented in Parliament by the Home Secretary, and, since he held his seat by the narrowest of majorities, he resisted the temptation to send the message which rose too readily to his lips.

"All right, show him in here."

He looked at the card again. Who was Mr. Hagger? Probably somebody very important in Crouchstead; somebody with whom he had shaken hands. An important member of the Crouchstead Freedom Club, likely enough. Mr. Strathpenner loathed Crouchstead and all its social manifestations, yet he screwed a smile into his face when Mr. Hagger was ushered to his presence.

The visitor proved to be a very respectably dressed man, with a heavy black mustache which drooped beneath chin level.

"You remember me, sir?" His voice was deep and solemn. "I met you at the Freedom banquet. I'm the secretary of the Young Workers' League."

Oh, it was the Young Workers' League, was it? thought Mr. Strathpenner. He had almost forgotten its existence.

"Of course . . . naturally . . . sit down, Mr. Hagger. Will you have a glass of port?"

Mr. Hagger deposited his hat carefully on the floor.

"No, sir, thank you, I'm a lifelong abstainer. I neither touch, taste, nor handle. Of course, I realize that a gentleman like you has to have likker in the 'ouse. It's about this man Benner. . . ."

The Minister stiffened.

"We've been 'aving a talk, some of the leaders of the party in Crouchstead, and we've come to the conclusion it'd be a great mistake to hang that man—"

Mr. Strathpenner shook his head sadly.

"Ah, Mr. Hagger, you've no idea how deeply I have considered this subject, and with what reluctance I have been compelled, or shall be compelled, to allow the law to take its course. You realize that a man in my position . . ."

He continued his justification in terms which he had applied before to stray members of Parliament who had strolled into his room in the House of Commons,

and had expressed views similar to those which Mr. Hagger was on the point of enunciating.

"Now, let us leave this—er—unpleasant subject. Will you take some coffee with me? By the way, how did you come?"

"I was brought up from the station in a hack," said Mr. Hagger.

He was very apologetic.

"You quite understand, Mr. Strathpenner, that I had to do my duty. The committee paid my fare up, and I thought it'd be a good chance of seeing you. I've heard about your wonderful house, and I didn't want to miss the chance of seeing it."

Here he touched the Home Secretary on his soft side. The house had an historic as well as an artistic value. It was one of the innumerable John o' Gaunt hunting lodges that stud the county of Sussex. It was indubitably pre-Elizabethan. Mr. Strathpenner was prouder of his home than of any of his attainments. He led Mr. Hagger from room to room and was almost genial in his response to the visitor's interest.

". . . Haunted, of course—all these old places are haunted. There's a dungeon . . . the previous owner used it as a coal-cellar! A Philistine, sir—a boor—ahem!—or something objectionable. Come this way."

He opened a stout oak door, took a lantern from a hook and preceded his visitor down a flight of stone stairs. He showed him not only the dungeon, which had been carefully restored to its earlier grimness, but a lower prison chamber, six feet by six, approached through a stone trapdoor.

"Let me show you. . . ."

He went before the other down the ladder.

"We have ringbolts here, almost worn through with age, where the unfortunate

prisoners were chained. And yet the place is fairly well ventilated."

"It's a funny thing," said Mr. Hagger, as he carefully descended the ladder, "that the hackman who brought me up from the station told me to be sure to ask you to show me your dungeon."

"Extraordinary," said Mr. Strathpinner, not ill-pleased. "But the place has quite a local reputation."

HIS MAJESTY'S judges are not to be kept waiting. Sir Charles Jean, the senior Common Law Judge, looked at his watch and closed the case with a vicious snap.

"The Home Secretary said that he would be here at half-past four."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the official who was with him. "I've been on the phone to Mr. Strathpinner. He left the house an hour ago and should be here at any moment. It's rather foggy, and he is a very nervous traveler."

"I'm afraid I can wait no longer. I will see him in the morning. I hope you'll impress upon Mr. Strathpinner that there is, in my mind, a very grave doubt about Benner's guilt."

He might have added that he did not think that would have very much influence with the Minister, who had on a previous occasion ignored the recommendation of a judge.

Sir Charles had hardly gone before the official heard the rasping voice and nervous cough of his chief, and hurried into the secretary's office.

"Sir Charles Jean, eh? And gone? Ahem! Well, well, well! I can't be at the beck and call of judges, my dear man. Or Ringers either, my friend, eh?—ahem!—or Ringers either!"

"Ringers, sir?" said the astonished official.

There was a dry, rasping chuckle.

"Visited me last night, the scoundrel—

ahem! That will be something to tell Mr. What's-his-name—Bliss. By the way, call him up and tell him that when I return from Paris on Friday I should like to see him."

"Paris, sir?" asked the startled official. "There is a meeting of the Cabinet on Friday morning."

"I know, I know," testily.

He opened a portfolio, took out a sheet of paper and stared at it owlishly. The official saw the document and thought it a moment to pass along the message.

"Sir Charles asked me to tell you that he is very doubtful as to whether this man should be executed—"

But the other was scrawling his name.

"There will be a respite of fourteen days," he said. "The matter may come up for consideration next Wednesday after the arrival of the depositions from Canada."

He blotted the sheet and pushed it across to the Under-Secretary.

"The respite may be announced in the newspapers," he said.

"**I** OUGHT to have known," said Bliss ruefully, "that Strathpinner was the easiest man in the world to impersonate. The curious thing is, it did strike me when I was talking to him."

"How is he?" asked Walford.

"When they released him from his lower dungeon," said Bliss, with the ghost of a smile in his eyes, "he was slightly insane, but not, I think, quite so insane as Mr. Hagger of Crouchstead, who is no longer a life-long abstainer. Mr. Strathpinner used the lower dungeon as a wine cellar, and they had to live on something since the hackman who made them prisoners was not thoughtful enough to provide food. They might be living there still if The Ringer hadn't been obliging enough to send me a wire."

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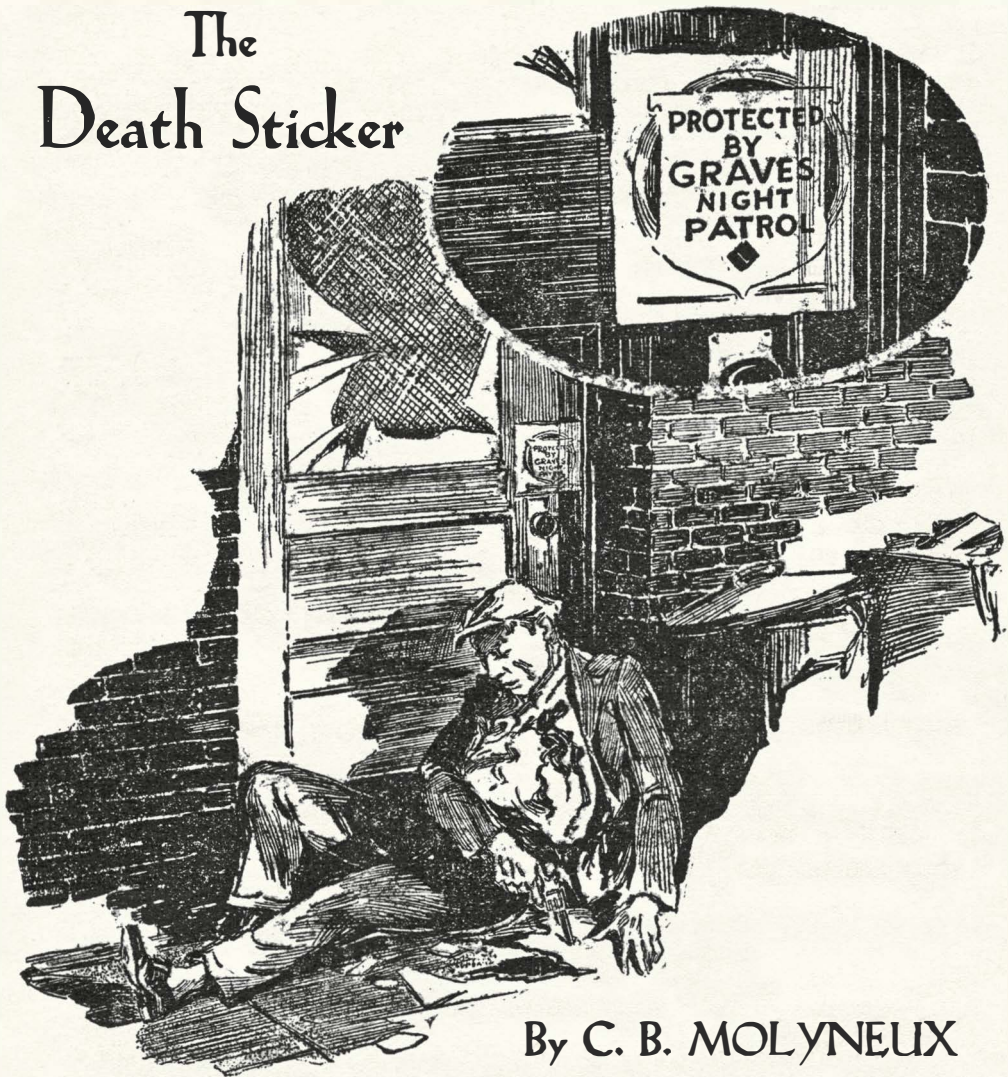
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**WATCH YOUR NEWSSTANDS FOR THE FIRST ISSUE OF
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FOR SALE IN SEPTEMBER!

The Death Sticker



By C. B. MOLYNEUX

Self-defense or murder? Heroic act or clueless crime? Conscientious Larry Storm was still weighing pros and cons—when the "death sticker" pointed the answer!

THE reverberating crashes of a heavy gun, twice fired, shattered the quiet of the still August night. The sounds came from Front Street, a block west. Without hesitation Larry Storm trod on the gas and whirled the small department car west at the next corner.

Jimmy Quint, guarding the scrawny, handcuffed prisoner in the rear of the car leaned forward in his seat.

"Something doing, Larry!" he ex-

claimed sharply. "That gun meant business!"

Larry swung the car south at Front Street and reached up to snap on the windshield spotlight.

"Watch the west side of the street," he warned Jimmy, and swiveled the spotlight to play on the east side of the dark thoroughfare.

Front Street at this point was given over to small wholesale businesses—poul-

try houses and commission merchants—and was poorly lighted. Few pedestrians were ever abroad here at nine o'clock at night.

The spotlight flashed briefly in an alley in the middle of the block, and Larry's alert eyes glimpsed something. He jammed on the brakes, stopped, and backed up two car lengths. Then he quickly scrambled out of the car.

"Stay with it, Jimmy!" he instructed shortly. "I'll look into this."

He raced into the alley mouth, long legs pumping. As he ran he drew his service gun, jerked out his pocket flashlight. Thirty feet down the alley from the sidewalk a tall figure straightened up from over a huddled form on the cobbles. The rays of a powerful flashlight fell blindingly into Larry's eyes. He ducked and pressed the switch of his own torch. Its beams outlined a man in trim green uniform trousers and a khaki shirt without a blouse. Shiny leather puttees glinted in the light.

A night patrolman from one of the patrol services. Larry's fingers slackened from the trigger of his gun and he slipped it back into the holster, striding forward.

"What's coming off there?" he challenged. "I'm Sergeant Storm, from headquarters."

"Oh, hello, Sergeant!" a cool voice replied. "I'm Harvey Cates, with the Graves Night Patrol. I just caught a bird crashing a store here and had to gun him."

He flashed his torch down on the sprawled, still figure. Larry recognized death with a practised eye.

"Cripes! Did you have to kill him?" he growled, stooping beside the body. "You patrol lads are too damn quick with your rods, if you ask me!"

"I had to shoot or get it," the watchman returned coolly. "He started to run first and then came at me with a gun in his hand. What would you have done?"

Larry saw a cheap, nicked revolver clutched in the burglar's hand. The other arm was doubled under the body. He took the gun by the barrel and gently drew it from the clutch of the limp fingers. He glanced at it briefly, saw that it hadn't been fired and dropped it into a coat pocket. Then he turned the body over.

Two crimson spots marked the front of the man's shirt, at the chest. At least one of the watchman's slugs had found the burglar's heart. Larry saw that he had been a young chap, possibly twenty-six or seven and that the now convulsed face would not have been bad looking normally. A stocky, medium-sized man, wearing a badly wrinkled light weight blue suit and shoes a bit scuffed.

"You got him, all right!" Larry said grimly, straightening up and flashing his torch on the watchman. "How'd you happen to run up on him?"

"I was making my rounds," the watchman explained, staring down at the body with an expressionless face. "I'd just stopped to try the doors of the seed store at the alley corner when I heard glass breaking in the alley. I ran around here and this fellow broke and legged it. I hollered at him to halt and he turned and came at me. I saw the gun in his hand and let him have it, twice."

Larry studied the chap a moment. A wide-shouldered, trim-waisted husky lad. Handsome in a rugged way. About twenty-five, Larry thought. Crisp chestnut hair showed under his cap and steady blue eyes, gleamingly cold, met the detective's stare.

Larry had shot men dead in the performance of his duty, but it had always left him a little sick afterward. This chap, with a hand resting on the holstered gun at his hip, was coolly unconcerned.

"Cripes!" Larry said, wonderingly. "You take it easy, young fellow! Ever kill a man before?"

"No," the watchman replied steadily, "but I never had one come at me with a gun before. I've knocked over a bear, and a cane brake wildcat once, but this is my first man."

Larry grunted, and cocked his ear suddenly. The distant wail of a squad car siren quavered in the air. Somebody hearing the shots had called headquarters and a squad car was speeding on the way. Glancing toward the alley mouth Larry saw that a number of cars had stopped in the street, but Jimmy Quint probably had warned the curious against entering the alley.

He flashed his torch along the building wall on the right. It was blank there, but behind him, the light centered on a small door. The glass of the upper part was smashed and slivers of the stuff gleamed on the cobbles. The attempt at the break had evidently been made there.

Two minutes later a squad car shrieked up, and a half dozen men scrambled out and ran into the alley. Captain Doyle of the night relief headed them, and commenced to rumble questions as soon as he came up.

BRIEFLY Larry explained his presence on the scene and told the watchman's story of the killing. The detectives ringed about, stared at the dead burglar, and listened while the Captain snapped questions at the watchman.

"H'mm," Doyle grunted, after listening to cool replies. "Guess it was a case of shoot or be shot, young fellow. Have you frisked the stiff yet, Larry?"

Larry hadn't, and knelt now to do it, with the assistance of one of the newcomers. The night patrolman looked on, without comment.

The dead burglar's pockets yielded the usual assortment of junk. Keys, a small knife, sixty cents in silver coin, and a pocketbook with no money in it and very

little else. An identification card and some receipts, made out to J. A. Evans. There was also a letter, postmarked that day, addressed to the same name at a number on Elm Street.

"Name seems to be J. A. Evans," Larry said, examining the envelope. "Lives out on Elm Street, in one of those cheap furnished apartments, maybe."

Captain Doyle had been flashing his torch about over the cobbles. "No tools," he commented brusquely. "New at this game, I guess. Out of a job and desperate. You got his gun, Larry?"

"Uh-huh. It's a cheap gun, bought at a hock shop, more'n likely. Hasn't been fired." Larry pocketed the letter.

The detectives crowded about the door then, examining the smashed glass. A heavy protective netting on the inside of the door caused comment.

"Huh!" one of the men grunted. "He couldn't have got far with that door, after breaking the glass! He must be a greenie."

"Was, you mean," Doyle corrected. "Figured he could pry the netting loose some way and get at the lock, maybe. What kind of a joint is this, anyhow?"

"It's a combination fruit stand and lunch joint," the watchman volunteered. "Run by a Wop and he does a pretty good daytime business."

"H'mmm. Poor place to hope to find any loose jack layin' around," Doyle grunted. "Well, I guess there's nothing much to do here. We'll have to take you down to headquarters, young fellow. Your boss can spring you pretty quick though, I guess."

"Say! I've got to make my rounds!" the watchman protested quickly. "I'm late now."

"Yeah. Well, you'll have to take a ride with us, first," Doyle growled brusquely. "There'll be a technical charge and you can tell your story. Somebody will have

to guarantee you sticking around until the coroner clears you."

The watchman shrugged. "O. K. Let's get along and get it over with, then," he said, resignedly.

Larry stared at him. For cold nerve and lack of feeling he had seldom met the chap's equal.

"Schwartz, you and Cullen stay here with the stiff," Doyle ordered. "I'll notify the coroner and the wagon to take the body to the morgue. The rest of you, come on."

He turned to stride to the alley mouth. The watchman moved up to the door.

"Wait a minute!" he said. "This Wop ain't a subscriber, but I want him to know we were on the job. A little advertising won't hurt."

He brought out a pad of gummed stickers, square, pasterish things, and licked one. He pasted it partly on the door and partly on the jamb, as a seal. He grinned a little as he did that. Larry bent to stare at the seal.

In bold red letters, running across the sticker, was the printed information:

PROTECTED BY
GRAVES NIGHT PATROL

Larry had seen such stickers often, pasted on doors of business places that were patrons of the service.

Then, leaving the two men designated to stay with the body, the group moved on to the alley mouth. There they found a ring of curious citizens and a dozen or more cars blocking the street. Gruffly Doyle dispersed the curious and sent them on their way. Larry had a thought.

"Jimmy Quint's in our car with a stick-up weasel we grabbed," he told the captain. "If you'll take Jimmy and the bird down with you, I'll take our car and run out to this Evans fellow's address and have a look around."

"Good idea," Doyle agreed. "Lemme know what you find out when you get back."

The night watchman had heard, and he made a quick request now.

"There's a stop house on the next corner with a public phone," he said. "Let me run up there and call the office, captain, so they can send a man right away to take my beat, and get somebody down to the station to spring me."

"All right," the captain granted, brusquely. "We'll pick you up at the corner. Just walk along with him, Gaffney."

The patrol strode briskly up the street toward the corner, the detective accompanying him. Larry went over to his car and explained matters to Jimmy Quint. Their prisoner was transferred to the big squad car and Larry drove away in the flivver.

THE Elm Street address proved to be a small, two-story cheap apartment building, in a smelly neighborhood. Larry found the name Evans under a mail box in the first hall he tried, and tramped upstairs without punching the button. He found the right door and rapped smartly.

After a moment, soft shod feet padded to the door.

"Who is it?" a sharp female voice inquired querulously.

"Open up," Larry returned, gruffly. "It's the police."

A sharp, startled exclamation sounded from inside. Then the door was unlocked and cautiously opened a crack. Larry shouldered in. A very blond, scantily attired young woman of twenty-two or three stumbled back from the door, staring at him. She was plainly aroused over his abrupt entrance.

"Say! Where's your license to come busting in here? What's wrong, anyhow?" the woman demanded angrily, frosty blue eyes flashing at him. She

clutched a sleazy silk garment about vivid, cheap pajamas.

Larry shut the door behind him and eyed her. The girl's face was boldly pretty, but marred just now with a swollen place on her cheek and an eye that was rapidly discoloring. Somebody had manhandled her not so long since.

"Are you J. A. Evans' wife or just his girl?" Larry demanded, not greatly impressed with this blond party.

"I'm his wife, thank you! What's the matter? Did the cops—catch him?"

"So you were expecting him to be snagged one of these nights, were you?" Larry stared shrewly. "What's he been up to?"

"I don't know. He keeps his business to himself a whole lot," was the cold reply. "But he ain't worked in a long time and he gets ahold of a little money once in a while. Suppose you spill what you come out here about, Mister Dick!"

Larry dropped into a chair and fished for a cigarette, studied the girl while he lighted it. She had retreated to the center of the room and was leaning against a table there, regarding him defiantly. She had released her clutch on the sleazy robe and it had fallen aside, revealing a plump, pajama clad figure. Scarlet bedroom slippers covered her feet, bare of stockings.

"Your husband," Larry said, "was shot and killed breaking into a store downtown."

Fingers flashing with cheap jewelry flew to her throat. The rouged face whitened until reddened lips resembled a cherry gash. Larry held himself ready for a spring in case she began toppling, but she fooled him.

She regained her composure with surprising abruptness.

"Well, I ain't so terribly surprised," she said tonelessly. "I knew he was up to something crooked. Who bumped him, Mister?"

"A watchman for one of the night patrol services," Larry said, a bit amazed at her coolness. "The watchman caught him red-handed, breaking into the store. He shot when your husband flashed a gun on him."

The girl stretched forth a ringed hand. "Gimme a cigarette!" she demanded, rather than asked. "This is a sort of a jolt to my nerves! What time did all this happen?"

Larry got up and gave her a cigarette and held a light for her. He saw that the hand that held the cigarette didn't even tremble. She sucked gratefully at the lighted pill.

"It happened around nine o'clock," Larry told her. "I just came from there. I found his address in his pocket and I wanted to see what I could find out about him out here."

THE girl undulated over to a sofa and stretched out there, propping herself comfortably in a nest of pillows. A cheap magazine lay on the floor beside the sofa and a reading light was trained on it. Evidently she'd been reading when he knocked on the door.

Larry's eyes darted about the room in a quick survey. Cheap furniture, badly used. A telephone on a stand in a corner. Ash trays everywhere, messily full of butts. Dust on the center table. A most untidy room.

"There ain't a lot to tell about John Evans," the girl said, exhaling smoke. "I married him about a year ago, after chasing with him a week. He was an automobile mechanic then and makin' fair jack. He lost out six months ago and hasn't had a steady job since. We've been making it, somehow, but the rent's two months past due and they ordered us out. We've been fightin' some lately, about his running out at nights."

Larry looked at her discolored eye.

"Husband give you that shiner?" he asked.

Her hand went to the eye, and then to the lump on her cheek. She nodded.

"Tonight, before he left about six," she confirmed. "We had a scrap."

"About what?" Larry shot the question.

"Huh? Oh, nothing much. I just told him I was sick of starving with him and was going to beat it. And we had words."

That was said carelessly, but somehow it didn't ring right to Larry's ears. He passed it up, though.

"Well sister, I guess you're rid of him now, if that's what you wanted," he said. "This your furniture here?"

"No. We didn't own a stick. Rented the place furnished. I can put all our stuff in one trunk and have a lot of room. And I'm doing that, the first thing in the morning."

Larry got up and moved toward the door. He turned there for another question.

"Going to do anything about the body?" he asked, curiously. "It'll be at the morgue, I suppose."

"Who, me? What would I use for money, burying him? His insurance ran out four months ago."

"How about his folks, if he had any?"

"They can have him. They live out in the country about twenty miles. They raised enough hell about me taking him on, when he was worth something."

Couldn't blame them for that, Larry thought, a bit disgustedly. A cheap, cold-blooded little fleusy, that's about all she was. Probably had nagged the Evans lad into desperate ways when he couldn't find work and buy her cheap finery.

"You'll notify his people, won't you?" he asked, opening the door.

"I will not! It'll be in the papers and they take the papers," was the cold reply. "I'm forgetting I ever knew John Evans after tonight. Much obliged for coming

out and telling me about it, Mister Cop."

Larry banged the door a little behind him, and swore under his breath when he tramped down the stairs. He'd sure run into two cold-blooded specimens tonight. That Graves watchman and this blond frail with the discolored eye.

He still was a little warm about it when he reached headquarters and reported his findings to Captain Doyle. The captain received the information phlegmatically and wasn't surprised over Larry's rather pointedly expressed opinion of the late John Evans' wife.

The Graves patrolman, Larry learned, had been released through the efforts of the company manager and probably had gone back on his beat.

Larry was off duty now. As a matter of fact, the business of the stick-up man he and Jimmy Quint had nabbed had worked him overtime. He departed immediately for home, and didn't remember until he was undressing for bed, that he had forgotten to turn in John Evans' cheap little revolver. And the flat automatic he'd taken off the stick-up was still in his pocket.

CHANGING things from his pockets to another suit next morning, Larry ran across the letter he had taken from John Evans' body. He sat down on the side of his bed and after a moment's study of the envelope, drew out the single sheet of cheap note paper enclosed. His eyes puckered thoughtfully when he'd read the note.

Dear John:

I don't like meddling but you ought to know this. Rose was out again yesterday with YOU KNOW WHO. I saw her leaving a beer joint in the country with him, in his car.

You can do what you want to about it but I'll face her and swear to it if she denies it.

Your good friend,

Ed.

"U'mmm!" Larry grunted, thoughtfully. "That explains the walloping he gave her. Cheating, the little blond devil! I think I'll have a little more chinning with her this morning. This thing don't look so good."

He dressed hurriedly, got breakfast and phoned in to tell the chief that he was going to make a little investigation before reporting that morning. He didn't offer details, and Inspector Higgins didn't ask for them. He knew that Larry Storm had sound reasons for most things undertaken.

Larry first visited the office of the Graves Night Patrol. The manager there was a little wrought up about the shooting. Harvey Cates, Larry was informed, was supposed to be home, sleeping.

Cates' record with the company, where he had been employed a year, had been satisfactory. About the only fault the manager complained of was that the man was independent and cocky. There was only one bit of information that checked as important to Larry.

Cates had gotten a phone call in the office the evening before, just before leaving to start on his rounds. A woman had called for him and he talked briefly. He had appeared a trifle worried after the call, the manager thought.

Larry went to the nearest public telephone after leaving the Night Patrol office. He called headquarters and was lucky enough to find Detective Gaffney there. He asked hurried questions when he had Gaffney on the wire.

"Tim, when you took that night patrol bird to the flop house to phone last night, who did he call up?" Larry wanted to know.

"I couldn't say, Larry," Gaffney replied. "The phone was in a booth and he went in and shut the door. He called his office, I guess, because a man came right down from there and got him off."

"Was he in the booth long enough to make two calls, maybe?"

"Well, maybe he was. He was there two or three minutes, anyhow."

"Thanks, Tim. And tell the inspector for me that I may not report for an hour or so."

Larry sought his little coupe again and drove to the address on Elm Street. The door to the Evans' apartment was unlocked. Larry walked in without knocking.

John Evans' blond widow was in the bedroom and came bouncing out at the sound of the closing door. Her eyes flashed angrily.

"Well, flatfoot! Of all the nerve, coming in here without rattling at the door. I thought maybe it was the expressman, coming after my trunk."

She was dressed for the street. A skillful use of cosmetics hid the bad eye, although the swelling still showed on her cheek. She looked about as Larry imagined she would dress, pert and inviting.

"I knocked, but maybe you didn't hear," he lied. "There was something I forgot, last night." He pulled a gun from his pocket. "Did you ever see this before?" he demanded.

The girl drew back slightly and made no move to take the gun for examination. "Yeah, that was his, all right!" she said, without hesitation. "He's been carrying it for weeks."

Larry looked at her hard. Her eyes returned his stare unblinkingly. He pocketed the gun again, slowly.

"So you're moving," he said, curiously. "Rushing it, aren't you?"

"I'm shaking the dust of this joint off my feet forever," the blond returned tartly. "And it's not too soon for me. I'm moving back to where I used to live, and I guess I'll get me a job, maybe."

A door bell shrilled in the rear. She started to the door. "Guess that's the expressman for my trunk," she said.

It was. At her summons, called down the stairs, a burly man in overalls lumbered in. Larry looked on while a trunk was dragged from the bedroom. The girl gave an address, which he made a mental note of as the expressman jotted it down.

"That'll be a buck, lady," the man said. "You can just pay me now."

The girl opened a purse and passed over a dollar bill. The expressman examined it doubtfully. Larry couldn't see the bill from where he stood, but evidently the expressman didn't fancy it.

"Oh, it's all right!" the girl exclaimed, impatiently. "It's been torn in two and mended but anybody will take it. The banks will put out a new one for it. Anyhow, it's all I've got in small change."

The expressman pocketed the bill, shouldered the trunk and went lumbering off with it. The girl turned to Larry.

"If that's all you want," she said, "excuse it, please. I got a few things to do before I beat it from this dump."

Larry hesitated, meeting the bold stare. Then he nodded.

"O. K. If we need you again, I reckon we can find you," he said, and swung out of the place.

THE expressman's truck was pulling out as Larry reached the sidewalk. He let the truck get a block lead and then overhauled it, waving the driver to the curb.

"That bill the lady gave you," he said to the astonished driver. "I'll take it off your hands and give you a sound one."

Vastly pleased, the man fished out the bill and exchanged with Larry. He drove away, grinning, and Larry gave the mended bill a close scrutiny. His face was rather grim when he turned about in the block and drove back to the apartment.

The Evans woman was just coming out of the entrance, carrying a suitcase. She

came down to the curb, looking for a cab. Larry swooped up, stopped and got out of his coupe. The girl stared and pulled back when he took her arm.

"Hop in, sister!" he said curtly. "I've just decided I want you at headquarters for a fittle."

"Say! What is this?" The girl jerked at the clamped fingers and her face whitened a little. "What do you want with me?"

"Wait and see," Larry returned shortly, and urged her into the car, tossing the suitcase behind her. He got in and drove straight to headquarters.

He didn't offer any explanation and the girl didn't ask one. He could see that she was scared, and thinking hard. Larry was doing some thinking himself.

He parked the girl with the matron at headquarters and then sought Inspector Higgins. He talked earnestly with his chief for ten minutes in the inspector's office. A trifle amazed, Higgins finally nodded agreement to what Larry was asking.

Larry picked up Jimmy Quint and they hurried to the headquarter's garage and got a speedy cruiser. In five minutes they pulled up before an address that Larry had gotten at the Night Patrol office.

The place proved to be a boarding house. A woman sweeping the porch informed them that Harvey Cates lived there, and probably was asleep in his room—the second floor front—at the moment. Larry merely said that his business was important and he'd go right up and risk waking him.

"Stick around here in the hall, Jimmy," he instructed his partner quietly. "If he get's cagey and slips me, you can nab him."

Larry knocked at the door of the second floor front and in a moment it was opened by the night patrolman. His eyes widened a bit at sight of Larry, and grew wary.

There was lather on his face and he was in his undershirt.

"Oh, it's you, Sergeant!" he said. "Come in."

Larry entered the room as Cates walked back toward the washstand where he'd been shaving.

"Yeah," he said, shortly. "I came out especially to take you down."

Cates laid down the razor and turned about abruptly. His brows went up queerly. His eyes, after a glance at Larry's grim face, whipped to the dresser between them. Larry saw his holstered gun lay on top of the dresser.

"What do you mean?" Cates demanded. "Coming to take me down! Why?"

"For murder!" Larry said.

"Murder? You're crazy, man! They can't charge me with murder for shooting that rat of a burglar in self defense!"

"No? But how about shooting down an unarmed man who came to beat you up because he'd discovered you'd been sneaking around with his wife?"

Cates laughed. "Are you nuts?" he sneered. "I don't know the man's wife. Didn't know he had one, even. I didn't know him."

"Yeah? She's down at headquarters and tells a different story." Larry said, coldly. "She put up a good act last night, Cates, after I got out there. Because you called her from that flop house and put her wise. But I tripped her twice when I went back there this morning."

Cates' eyes twitched. But they didn't leave Larry's face.

"She called you last night, Cates, before you left the patrol office and warned you that her husband was wise, and coming for you," Larry went on, steadily. "You were ready for him when he finally found you. You shot him down, Cates, and planted that cheap gun in his hand. Then you smashed the door glass."

"You almost scare me!" Cates jeered.

Larry's muscles gathered. He didn't like the look in the fellow's eyes.

"You forgot to tell her the kind of a gun you planted," he said. "I showed her a gun awhile ago and she popped out and said it was her husband's. But it was an automatic I took off a stick-up last night and had in my pocket. Not the cheap revolver."

Cates licked his dry lips with a nervous tongue. "I don't know anything about that," he said. "You can't tie me up with the woman. I don't know her."

"She was moving, Cates. The expressman came for her trunk while I was there." Larry disclosed something he held in his hand. "She paid him with this—and it clinched everything. She got the bill from you, Cates and you can't deny it!"

He spread the bill before the night patrolman's eyes. It had been torn in two lengthwise strips at some time and mended with a ribbon of gummed paper. A narrow ribbon, and across it, in bold red letters was a line of print.

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With a sharp, ugly word, Harvey Cates grabbed for his big gun in the holster. But Larry had been watching for that. His hard fist slammed out. The gun roared and the powder from the flash scorched Larry's coat. Then he managed to get a hand on the man's gun wrist. They went to the floor in a thrashing, grunting heap. Larry's steel fingers bit into the wrist, twisting cruelly. He drove a fist into the soapy chin.

Jimmy Quint, tearing madly up the stairs after the shot, arrived in time to see Larry Storm calmly astride of a limp murderer, snapping the cuffs on his wrists.

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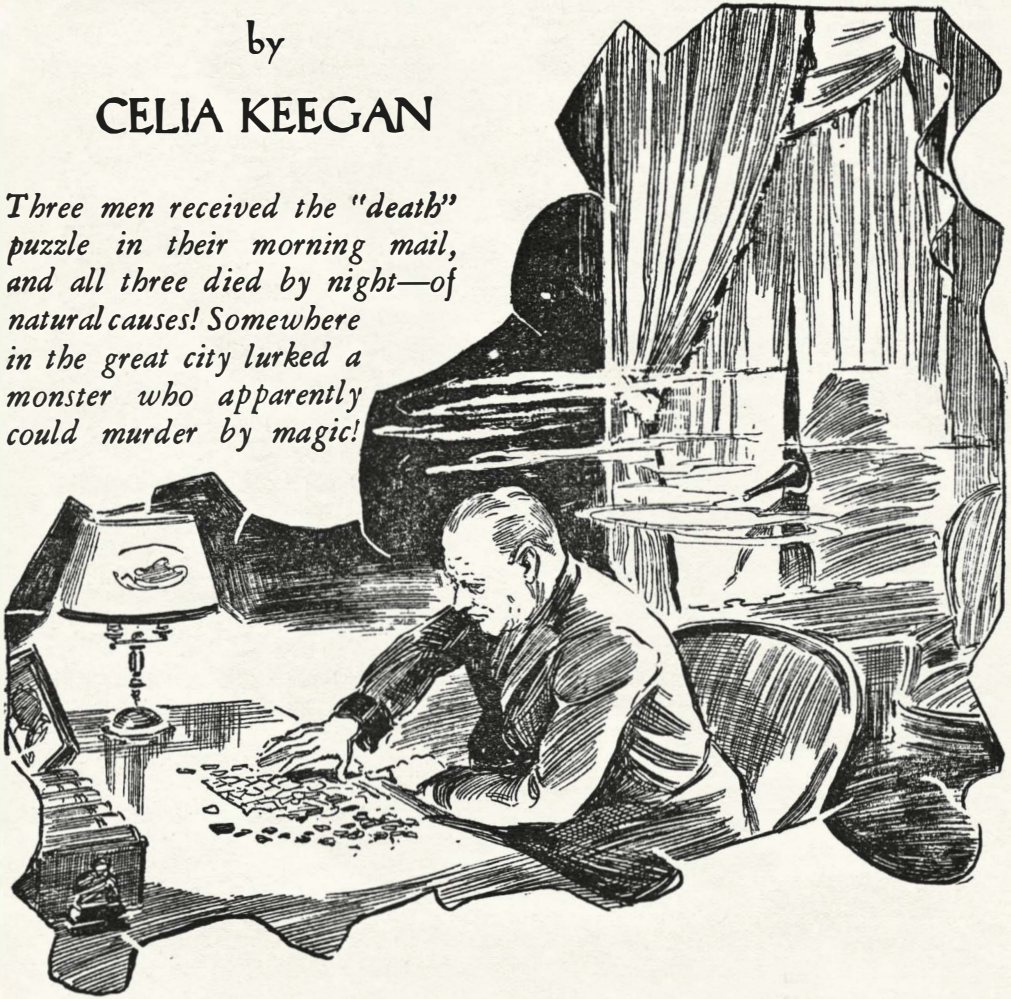
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Murder By Magic

by
CELIA KEEGAN

Three men received the "death" puzzle in their morning mail, and all three died by night—of natural causes! Somewhere in the great city lurked a monster who apparently could murder by magic!



THE newspapers were inclined to make quite a bit of it. Naturally, there was nothing unusual or humorous about death itself, but the fact that Elmer Cutting, a well-known judge, had been found dead while working a jig-saw puzzle had aroused a great deal of comment.

Ministers saw the item and made it the subject of their sermons, blaming the jig-saw craze for half-empty churches; a leading motion picture theatre magnate took this opportunity to revile the latest fad without being as frank as the preach-

ers and mentioning *his* half-empty houses. A minor women's magazine pointed out that housewives were not only neglecting their homes and children for the scroll-cut pictures but that the excitement must be bad for everyone, for had not Elmer Cutting died of a heart attack?

That would have been all, had not a rather startling coincidence occurred.

Two days after Cutting's death, Richard Carter, prominent lawyer, was found dead in the same circumstances. His valet, entering the bedroom to wake his master, found Carter dead, seated before a small

table, his gray head sprawled pitifully among the fantastic pieces. Again the newspapers made much of it, stressing the fact that the two men had been friends and marveling at the similar manner of their passing. Carter's doctor issued the statement that death had been due to apoplexy and matters took their conventional course.

Heming Byrd had just returned to his desk after attending Carter's impressive funeral. He had gone partly out of curiosity and partly because some question, teasing at the back of his brain, would not let him rest. He was slumped down before his typewriter, scowling at the innocent keys, when his city editor yelled for him.

"Hey, Byrd!"

With one of the characteristically quick movements that had caused his name to be distorted into "The Humming Bird," the young reporter answered the call.

"This looks as if it were right up your alley," said Grice. "I'm darned if I can figure it out. One was O. K. and two might have still been all right, but this third one looks phoney to me."

"What'd'y mean?" Byrd leaned forward with interest.

"A guy named Philip Scantling has just been found dead in his room uptown, and he had been—"

"Working a jig-saw puzzle?" finished Byrd excitedly, his voice rising.

Grice nodded, squinting curiously at his favorite reporter. "You guessed it. What's this, some more of those hunches of yours? Come on, what are you stewing over now? Out with it."

Byrd frowned, trying to get his thoughts sufficiently clear to be put into words, as he hitched himself into a comfortable position on the corner of Grice's desk.

"I'm not sure that I know myself," he began slowly. "I've been thinking about

this business all afternoon, while I watched them bury Carter. It seemed funny to me that they should both have died while they were working on a puzzle. As you say, just one death wouldn't have meant a thing. But if there's even been a third, when two was one too many—" his eyes narrowed thoughtfully as his voice trailed off into silence.

"Ugh," his editor groaned in mock despair. "I can see you're off again. I suppose I may as well let you alone, if you want to make work for yourself. Hop to it."

"The well-known free hand, including the expense account?" grinned Byrd as he slipped from the desk.

"Get out of here, and don't use taxis," growled Grice.

ALL the way uptown in the subway, Byrd wondered if his imagination were running away with him again, as it so frequently did. Still, Grice had been the first to say it was queer. Of course everyone was working jig-saws—he admitted the vice himself—and just possibly, three different men might have died while engaged at this pastime. Just the same, he was going to be sure.

Arriving at the house where Scantling had lived, Byrd hesitated. He dreaded breaking into a home of mourning with what would sound like foolish questions. But curiosity overcame dread, and he mounted the stone steps and rang the door bell. However, he was relieved to find that the place was a boarding house and that Scantling had been a bachelor. The maid who admitted him told him that much and then left him in the cozy, old-fashioned parlor while she brought Mrs. Pelzer, the landlady.

"Good day, Mrs. Pelzer," said Byrd, rising as the elderly lady entered. "I'm Heming Byrd, of The Record. If you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few

questions about your late roomer, Philip Scantling."

"I'm sure its all right." The woman smiled pleasantly and sat down, motioning the reporter back to his chair. "Poor Mr. Scantling. This has been a great shock to all of us. He was such a fine man, so quiet, never gave any trouble. We'll miss him."

"I can understand that," answered Byrd sympathetically. "I believe he was working on a jig-saw puzzle when he died?"

"Yes." Mrs. Pelzer nodded and sighed. "He was very fond of them, poor man."

"What did he do?" asked Byrd.

"Do? You mean his business? He worked in a clothing store right near here; he had been the manager for the last few years."

"How long has he lived with you, Mrs. Pelzer?"

"Over eight years," replied the woman with another sigh. "That's quite unusual nowadays, you know, Mr. Byrd."

"I'll say it is," he agreed. "No wonder you hated to lose him. I gather he was a bachelor?"

"Yes. I often used to tell him he should find some nice girl and get married, because he'd make such a wonderful husband, so home loving, and all, but he always said he was satisfied with things the way they were."

"How old a man was he?"

"Between thirty-five and forty, I should say."

"I see." Byrd felt a slight disappointment. Vague as his idea was, he was trying to discover some connection between Scantling and Judge Cutting and Richard Carter, but the last two had both been men over sixty. While the thought was still in his mind, he questioned idly. "Did you ever hear him mention a man named Elmer Cutting?"

"Elmer Cutting, the Judge?" The

familiarity with which the landlady repeated the name stirred Byrd with new hope. "Why, yes. Not that Mr. Scantling exactly knew him, but he was the judge on that case. I remember Mr. Scantling speaking of him, while the trial was on, with the greatest admiration."

"What trial was that?" queried Byrd, masking his growing excitement.

"You must have heard about it—it was in all the papers. A murder trial. Johnny something was the man's name. He was sent to prison for life. I know Mr. Scantling often worried about his share of the responsibility."

"I'm afraid I still don't quite understand what Mr. Scantling had to do with it," reminded Byrd gently.

"Oh. I thought you knew. He had been picked for jury duty and then made the foreman."

"I see." Byrd was inwardly triumphant. "That's very interesting. Perhaps Mr. Scantling knew a Richard Carter, too?"

The landlady frowned in an effort to recall the name. "I couldn't swear to it," she said doubtfully, "but I seem to remember he was connected with the case in some way, too."

"You've certainly been very helpful, Mrs. Pelzer," said Byrd sincerely. "I wonder if I could just see Mr. Scantling's room now?"

"Certainly," agreed the woman. "It's been all cleaned up and straightened, ready for someone else. That seems sort of sad, doesn't it?"

Byrd nodded. This information was another disappointment, but he had already succeeded in more than proving part of his hunch and wouldn't force his luck. "I guess its just life," he said. "Never mind, then. I only wanted to see the puzzle he was working on."

"Oh, I can show you that," offered Mrs. Pelzer. "I picked up the pieces and put

them back in the box. I happen to have the paper and the card, too, if you want to see them."

"Paper and card?" repeated Byrd questioningly.

"The card that came with the puzzle, and the paper it was wrapped in," explained the woman. "A friend sent it to Mr. Scantling."

"Oh, yes." Byrd's "seventh sense" was buzzing. "I would like to see them, very much."

IN a few moments, the woman was back with the objects in her hand and gave them to Byrd. He looked first at the ordinary oblong pasteboard box that held the puzzle, then stared at the title with a mounting wonder. The puzzle was named "The Prisoner."

Deciding that he had plenty of time to ponder over that, Byrd turned his attention to the neatly folded piece of wrapping paper and the card. The wrapping paper simply bore the name of Philip Scantling and the address. On the small white card were a few scrawled words—

Here's a hard one for you—see if you can do it in an hour as I did.

Charlie.

"A friend sent it to him, eh?" asked Byrd slowly, still feeling that the long arm of coincidence was being stretched too far.

"That was the queer part of it. I was with Mr. Scantling when he opened the package and for the life of him, he said, he couldn't place who this Charlie was."

IT WAS some three hours later that Byrd threw a motley collection of paper, cards and boxes on his editor's desk.

"Is this food for thought or is this food for thought? Don't let it give you mental indigestion," he quoted pompously.

Grice examined the three identical boxes, picked up the two cards and frowned as he saw they both bore the same words, written in the same scrawled hand.

"I see I'm supposed to play Watson," he grunted. "O. K., Sherlock. Go ahead and astound me. But it better be good." He tried to hide the pleased light in his eyes as he regarded the eager young man on his desk.

"It's like this, boss," began Byrd. "I went up to Scantling's first and found from his landlady that this puzzle had been sent to him by his friend Charlie—but he couldn't remember who Charlie was! Like the good tidy soul she is, the landlady had saved the wrapping paper the puzzle came in and also the card. You have 'em there. Now get a load of this—Next, I went to Carter's. His man remembered that the puzzle had come through the mail and after a short search, found the card that had been inclosed with it. You have that, too. I numbered them on the back so we could tell 'em apart. One is Scantling, two is Carter.

Grice looked at the two duplicate cards again, each with its faint challenge from the unknown Charlie.

"I get it," he nodded. "What else?"

"So I went on to Cutting's," resumed Byrd. "I wasn't as lucky there— Oh, I got the puzzle all right, but the card had been thrown away. However, there was a card from some friend of the judge's named Charlie! Yep, I'm not making this up!" Byrd grinned, clasped one knee and rocked back and forth precariously.

"And see, they're all copies of the same puzzle, this 'Prisoner.' But you ain't heard nothing yet. This particular puzzle is on sale at every five and ten cent store in the city—the whole country, I guess. And not only that, it's *not* a hard one. In fact, it's so darned easy that anyone who's a half-

way expert at the things could probably put it together in half an hour! And—don't stop me, and don't fall over—Philip Scantling was the foreman of a jury on the case tried by Richard Carter before Judge Cutting in which Johnny Hall was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment!"

Even that lucid announcement would hardly have accounted for the start Grice gave and the way he gripped his reporter's shin.

"Johnny Hall?" he barked raspily.

"Yes." Byrd beamed proudly. "And I did it all myself, teacher. Do I go to the head of the class? Now all I need to do is find some pal of Johnny's who may or may not be named Charlie—"

"Nertz," interrupted Grice rudely. "You said I ain't heard nothing? Don't you ever read the papers, you tramp? Johnny Hall escaped from prison nearly two weeks ago!"

"Well, I'll be a monkey's so and so," whistled Byrd.

"And then some," nodded Grice, obviously complacent at having been able to shock the shocker. "Now, change it to all you need to do is find Johnny Hall and put the bracelets on him and see that he doesn't beat the chair this time. What's detaining you? Or haven't you discovered yet how he scared these people into dying? Perhaps you're going to tell me the puzzles were all poisoned!"

"Wish I could, after the way you've been handling them," grinned Byrd. "But Cutting and Carter and Scantling were!"

"Poisoned? You're not clowning?" Grice rapped out.

"Not me," reproved Byrd, trying to look injured. "I called up my old friend Doc Granger. He had a look at Scantling and just slipped me the information by phone. Scantling was killed with poison gas that leaves its victim looking like he'd had a heart attack. No trace at all. Sweet

thing, isn't it? Of course, I can't be sure about Cutting and Carter, but the police will be, in a few hours. What price Johnny Hall as a murderer now?"

"The police are on it then?" asked Grice slowly.

"Sure. Granger was the only one I could trust and he had to tell them. The doctor Scantling's landlady had called in agreed with Granny as soon as they got together, too. But he can't be blamed for his heart failure verdict. Who would have suspected murder, anyway, but a smart reporter like me? But gosh, I'll be afraid to go home and finish my jig-saw now!"

"Any fool that messes with those dratted things deserves to be gassed," snorted Grice scornfully. "Why don't you get out of here and find Johnny? It ought to be easy for you, seeing as how no one but the entire police force is looking for him."

"Leave it to me," promised Byrd largely.

He stretched and was slowly easing himself from the desk when the phone rang. Grice's face told him that it was an interesting call and he waited, listening shamelessly. He was looking with bland innocence at his editor when Grice banged up the phone and turned to glare at him.

"Too late, as usual," he barked. "That was Sergeant Reilly, of the Bronx. He thought I might be interested in knowing that they had taken Johnny Hall, escaped murderer, into custody!"

"Then at least I know where to go and look for him," was Byrd's parting shot as he grabbed his hat, and dashed out of the door.

BYRD didn't have much difficulty in getting into the cell where Johnny Hall was waiting his indefinite fate. The reporter was liked by almost everybody on the force and was generous with his information whenever it would help.

Therefore, in a short time, he was granted the privilege of a private interview with the escaped murderer.

Byrd was surprised at his first glimpse of the man. Hall was hardly thirty, and while his face showed the lines of fear and strain, he was far from the type associated with the hardened criminal. But this didn't fool Heming Byrd. He'd already lit on too many baby-faced killers and high school gunmen. But he grinned amiably at Johnny and offered him a cigarette.

"Why did you do it, Johnny?" he asked casually.

The man sighed heavily, running a hand over the heavy growth of beard on his cheeks and jaw.

"I don't know. I just went screwy all of a sudden, I guess. Being locked up does that sometimes to a man, you know. Maybe I had some wild idea that if I got out I could prove my innocence—I don't know. What difference does it make?"

"You haven't gone about it very well," said Byrd gravely. "You'll sure get the chair this time, Johnny."

"The chair?" The man opposite him shuddered. "Don't talk about it. What for? I didn't hurt anyone when I broke loose— It was so easy—one of those Heaven-sent opportunities, it seemed like—that's why I fell for it."

"Uh-huh, and when you did get out, you started bumping off the men who put you in, eh?" asked Byrd gruffly, trying to imitate Grice's barking with indifferent success.

"Bumping off the men—" paling, Johnny repeated the words with a fine imitation of bewilderment. "I don't get you. What are you driving at?"

"I suppose you don't know anything about the murders of Judge Cutting, and Carter the lawyer, and Philip Scantling?" asked Byrd cuttingly.

Johnny leaned forward tensely, one

thin hand grasping the reporter's knee spasmodically.

"The Judge and Carter—they've been murdered?" he whispered. "Good God—no one thinks *I* did it?"

"Who else would?" questioned Byrd slowly, his eyes narrowing. "And Scantling, too. Don't forget him. You'll burn for this, Johnny."

Again the man shivered as he shook his head despairingly from side to side.

"I suppose I'm due to be framed again," he gulped hoarsely. "Cutting and Carter—but who's this Scantling? I never even heard of him."

"You—what?" That proud possession that Byrd frequently referred to as his "seventh sense" stirred again.

"I don't even know who he was," replied Johnny dully, burying his face in his hands.

"He was the foreman of the jury that returned the verdict against you," said Byrd, watching the man keenly.

The hands dropped and the prisoner's eyes stared fearfully into his own.

"Then I guess I'm done," groaned Hall. "I might better have killed myself and had it all over, instead of giving myself up."

"You did that?" asked Byrd quickly.

"Yes." Johnny nodded hopelessly. "I guess I began regretting my break an hour after I was out. Freedom wasn't as precious as I thought it would be. Freedom—" he laughed sardonically. "I ask you, skulking in the dark, hiding in a room, afraid to show my face out our doors—there wasn't much difference between that and jail! If I'd had any money, and could have gotten out of the country, it might have been different. But as it was— Well, last night I decided I might as well give up and walked into the nearest police station and told them who I was. No guts, I guess. But I would have

had enough to do something if I'd known about this!"

"Listen, Johnny," Byrd spoke earnestly, "I know something about your case, of course, but I'd like to hear your version of just what happened. Make it snappy, but don't leave out anything important. I've got a hunch I may be able to help you, but not unless you tell me the truth."

Johnny Hall looked up at Byrd. There was a gleam of hope in his deep-circled eyes.

"You mean it?" And as Byrd nodded earnestly. "All right, here's how it was. God knows, I've thought about it enough myself. I guess you know I was head cashier with Thomas and Parto. They were one of the biggest of the importers and exporters—chemicals, essential oils and that sort of thing. We'd just filled an order for a South American company and the representative had paid for half of it—fifteen thousand dollars that was—and paid cash. I worked late on my books that night and when I went home, I walked, as I often did. That's why I couldn't prove any alibi when, the next morning, the safe was found open and all the money gone. And what was worse, Mr. Thomas had been murdered. They picked on me the first thing."

"Just a minute," interrupted Byrd. "Tell me again how Thomas was killed."

"He'd been gassed to death," said Johnny. "They found the glass cylinder broken up on the floor of the room he'd been working in. It had been thrown in, they imagined, through the ventilator over the door. If it hadn't been for that, the doctor would have given heart failure as the cause of death. Everyone said at the time how lucky it was they noticed the broken glass. And it was one of the gas products we handled, you see."

"Yes, I see," assented Byrd, curbing his inner tumult. "Go on."

"I was arrested right away, and they wired to Spain for Parto, who came back at once. Then they found a lot of crooked items in my books, but I can only give you my word that I didn't know how they got there—things that had gone on for four or five years. Parto hired James Daniels to defend me but all the good I got out of that was life imprisonment instead of the chair. That's about all I know. Does it help any?"

"It may," said Byrd as he rose. "Now, Johnny, keep your chin up and don't do any talking. You're in a bad spot but you don't need me to tell you that. I'll probably drop in again tomorrow and let you know how I'm getting along. Just remember that I believe you, kid, and that I'm trying to do everything I can to help."

NO REAL humming bird had ever darted around much more quickly than Heming Byrd did for the next few hours. He pulled every string he had ever heard of and many that he hadn't known existed. Grice gave him carte blanche and helped him enormously, using his influence with government officials, telephone companies and the cable offices. Both men were highly excited—they knew that Johnny would be charged with the three murders at any moment and they were determined to beat the police at their own game.

"Even while we're using them," grinned Byrd at one time during the hectic night.

Grice remained in his office, waiting in a fever of impatience while Byrd was in and out and everywhere. This was almost like the old days, when newspapers fought strenuously to scoop each other, the city editor told himself.

Morning was well advanced when Byrd returned for the last time, marshalling his queer collection of people and distributing them to places of his own selec-

tion. Four doctors made statements which they signed before witnesses. Daniels, the lawyer who had defended Johnny Hall, engaged in a long conference with Grice and Byrd. And Spears, of the Homicide Squad, who, as Byrd said, "was a friend when he forgot to be a copper," listened with amazed scepticism to the story the reporter poured forth. Yet all of them disappeared at last and Byrd and Grice sat alone, staring at each other with hope and fear alternating in their gaze.

It was a few minutes after ten o'clock when Grice's phone announced that he had a visitor.

"Show him right in," rapped the editor and pretended to busy himself with papers on his desk, while Byrd walked away to a window, striving for a nonchalant whistle.

He turned casually as the door opened. A tall, dark man of middle age, lithe and slender, stood looking politely from one to another.

"Mr. Grice?" he asked with the barest trace of an accent.

"Yes. Sit down, please," said the city editor with an unaccustomed smoothness in his voice. "It was kind of you to come."

"Not at all," smiled the other, with a flash of gleaming teeth under the slight mustache. "I am very glad to do all in my power for the poor young man, even though I fear it will be useless again. Poor Señor Hall! What a fool he has been! Yet, as he once worked for me, I cannot help but feel the responsibility."

"Big of you, Mr. Parto," said Grice with what Byrd afterward told him was a smirk. "Especially as you say, when it seems hopeless. I guess you know he'll have to stand trial again, for three murders this time, and they'll be sure to give him the chair."

"It is all very sad," sighed Parto, "but what can one do? Perhaps the plea of

insanity? Surely it must have been a distorted mind that has made him kill these men who were instrumental in his punishment?"

"I'm afraid you're right," murmured Grice pleasantly. "There's one thing I wish you would tell me, though. Call it curiosity, if you like, but I want to know. Why was it you've never told anyone that you had arrived in New York the day before your pardner was murdered and that you pretended to arrive here from Spain on a later boat, in answer to the cable that was sent you?"

The dark face did not change, and once more the white teeth flashed out in a smile.

"Must I confess?" he shrugged. "It is not the gentlemanly thing to do, but since you must know—it was a lady."

"A lady?" asked Byrd, joining in the conversation for the first time.

"Yes. A most charming lady." Parto spread his hands wide in an appealing gesture. "I was, at that time, married to a most estimable woman who, alas, has since died. Yet I must admit to—what shall I say—a straying fancy, once in a great while? Surely, you will not publish the fact that my trip was made in company with a delightful young actress, and that it was for her sake, as well as my own, that I kept my earlier presence here a secret?"

"You can prove that, I suppose?" asked Grice, beginning to lose his manners.

"Prove?" The dark brows lifted haughtily. "I was not aware that this was a question of proof. You hardly expect me to ask a lady to confess her own indiscretion?"

"It would be a good thing for you if she would," said Grice grimly. "Parto, maybe you don't realize that you're not sitting so pretty right now."

"I do not understand," said Parto dis-

dainfully. "I think, perhaps, I had better leave."

"Oh, yeah?" Byrd burst in again. "Try it, and I'll phone the nearest police station and have you picked up and thrown into jail!"

"For what?" cried Parto angrily, glaring down on Byrd as though he were some obnoxious insect.

With an inward chuckle, Grice tipped back his chair and resolved to let Heming Byrd finish this in his own way.

"For murder!" snapped Byrd, as angrily. "Murders—plenty of them. First your pardner, Alfred Thomas, then Cutting and Carter and Scantling, and I'd better include your poor wife, too!"

"My wife!" The swarthy face turned a sickly purple. "My wife died a natural death! I can prove it. As for these other accusations, they are absurd. Too ridiculous to deny! It is this Johnny Hall who killed them all—were they not judge and lawyer and jurymen? Who else had a motive? And did he not give himself away with the first puzzle he sent?"

"All murderers give themselves away, when they're too smart," said Byrd with infinite disgust. "You've done it, Parto—not only just this minute, but since you first came into the office. In the first place, you should have acted surprised when Mr. Grice told you that Hall was to be accused of three murders. You slipped up there, Parto. You see, the general public still thinks those jig-saw puzzle deaths were heart failure!"

"Convenient, to have a gas that produces such symptoms, isn't it? Then those 'Charlie' notes—you were almost clever, there. Almost any man knows someone named Charlie. And also, almost any man would fall for the challenge to try to do the picture in an hour. But you made another mistake there. I suppose you couldn't resist the temptation to pick that particular puzzle, trying to make evidence

against Johnny, but you should have taken one that was really hard! A child could work 'The Prisoner' in ten minutes!" he exaggerated boldly.

PARTO'S eyes were moving restlessly back and forth, though he still maintained his air of outraged calm.

"Then you spoke about the puzzles Hall sent," Byrd went on summing up his points. "No one else knew about that, either. Oh, we've got you, Parto. It will take more than a clever lawyer to get you off, and you don't hear of many miracles nowadays. And you'll deserve all you get, *thief and murderer!* Rob and doublecross your own pardner, kill him and frame an innocent kid. It's a pleasure to send you to the chair! Come on, boys."

At the appearance of the detective, the policemen, and Daniels, who had been hidden in the next room, Parto's calmness disappeared. His startled exclamations and disjointed babblings practically reached the confession stage as he was led out.

Spears stopped to assure Grice and Byrd that there would be very little trouble in obtaining Johnny Hall's complete vindication, coinciding with Parto's certain conviction.

"It's a cinch," he said. "How'd you first get on to it, Hummer?"

Byrd grinned with mock modesty. "I wasn't sure who the real murderer was at first," he admitted, "but whoever he was, he'd made one big mistake. Scantling was killed some time around midnight last night, and at eight-thirty, Johnny Hall had walked into a police station and given himself up! Of course the guy who was planning to have all this look like his work couldn't know about that! That was just plain, damfool luck.

"My own guess is that Parto got scared when Johnny escaped and figured he might be after him, might have figured out just what had happened—a few years

in the pen is sometimes a wonderful eye opener. So the cold-blooded scoundrel started killing off the people Johnny might be expected to hate most!

"I think the only reason he used the jig-saw puzzle was to throw added suspicion on Johnny, sending them 'The Prisoner.' Perhaps he even planned on their being interested enough in the things not to hear him when he squirted the gas in. Yeah, they've improved it since Thomas was murdered—you can shoot it out of a sort of gun, now. We found out it was easy to get to any of the three rooms where they were killed. Parto wasn't so terribly dumb, at that."

"How about yourself?" laughed Spears as they walked out. "The department

owes you something for this, Hummer."

The reporter basked complacently in Spear's approval as he accompanied his friend to the door of the building, then slowly strolled back to hear the caustic comments on his inefficiency that Grice would be sure to produce. Yet he was hardly prepared for the outburst that greeted him.

"Get the blasted blazes out of here," roared his gentle editor lovingly. "Haven't you brains enough in your thick head to leave a man alone when he's busy?"

With burlesqued caution, Byrd withdrew noiselessly from the room and closed the door. Once outside, he doubled over in a spasm of silent laughter.

Grice was working a jig-saw puzzle!

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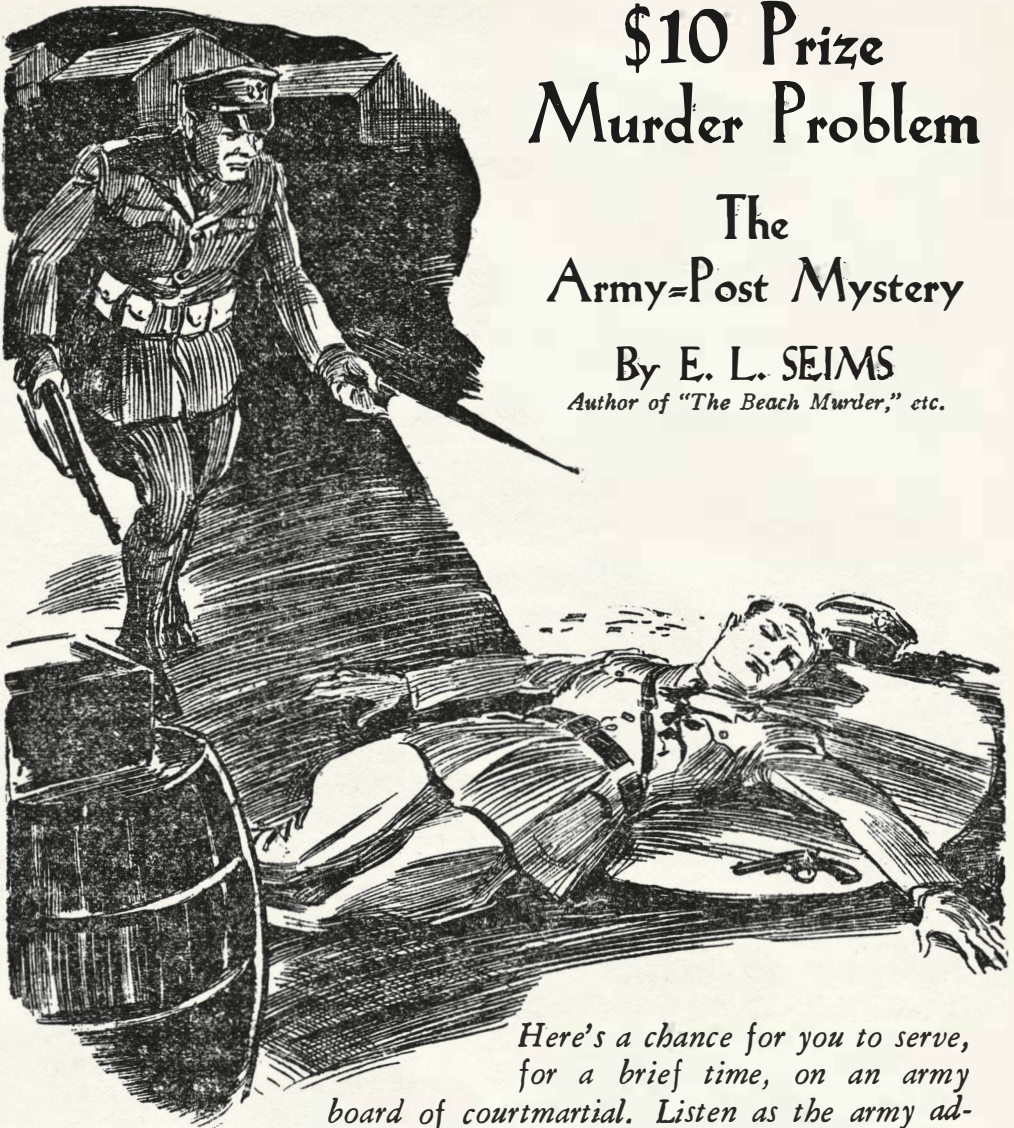
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“AND in conclusion, gentlemen of the courtmartial, let me point out again that the defendant, Lieutenant Philip Davis, not only had motives for killing his superior officer, but that the evidence points to his guilt.”

The trial judge advocate paused dramatically to pass a sweeping glance over

the faces of the nine army officers who composed the military court. Stern-lipped, grim-eyed, the officers looked back—but no more fearlessly than did the prisoner, who sat at a smaller table nearby. He was a tall, well-built fellow with candid gray eyes and a firm young mouth. The pallor of his usually wind-browned

face deepened as the trial judge advocate continued. But he did not flinch.

"The murder pistol was owned by the defendant," the advocate went on. "A button from his uniform jacket was clutched in the dead man's right hand. Gentlemen, there is no doubt in my mind but that Lieutenant Philip Davis killed Captain Cornell on the night of April 17th—murdered him in cold blood—and that he should suffer the full punishment of his crime."

A few minutes later the prisoner was led from the room, the witnesses were dismissed and the nine officers were left to decide one of the most dramatic crime cases that ever came before a United States military court.

Captain Cornell had been shot to death April 17th, 1918, at the army post at which he was stationed. The crime had occurred just a short distance from the Officer's Club, but the music—a dance was in progress—had evidently drowned the shots as no one had heard them. When a sentry discovered the body a few seconds past midnight, the captain had already been dead between ten and twenty-five minutes.

Lieutenant Davis' gun was found in the bushes nearby, and it was later proved that the bullet—which had pierced the body and ricocheted against a cement wall ten feet away—had been fired from it at very close range. There were some scratches on the dead man's left cheek as if a sharp-nailed hand had clawed it. A small white powder puff was half trampled into the ground. Davis maintained that he had not carried his gun that evening but had left it either in his quarters or his office. He admitted having been on bad terms with the murdered man and having quarrelled with him in the billiard room shortly after eleven o'clock about a girl—Mary Casaldy. Later on, he said that he came upon Captain Cornell and

Mary in the grounds outside. They were quarreling—he was speaking roughly and she was crying—so Davis had interfered. He guessed that this was about eleven-twenty-five. He had knocked Cornell down and gone back to the club. It was during this short fight, he thought, that the other man had pulled the button from his coat.

The cross-examination on the point was interesting.

QUES. What were Captain Cornell and Miss Casaldy arguing about?

ANS. I don't know.

QUES. Did you overhear Miss Casaldy begging Captain Cornell to marry her before he was transferred overseas, and didn't you hear him say he would not?

ANS. I don't remember.

QUES. When you spoke to Captain Cornell, what happened?

ANS. He got ugly. I told Mary—Miss Casaldy—to leave us. He refused to let her go, so I knocked him down.

QUES. Don't you know that striking your superior officer is a serious offense?

ANS. Yes.

QUES. You knew that Captain Cornell could prefer charges against you that might stand you up before a court-martial?

ANS. Yes. But I didn't stop to think about it. He jumped right up, and we fought for a few minutes. Then I landed an uppercut on his jaw and he flopped over. When I saw he was out, I left. That's all I know. I did not see Miss Casaldy around after the fight was over, and I assumed that she had taken my advice and gone when the fighting started.

THE defendant went on to say that he returned to the club about a quarter of twelve and did not leave until the alarm was given.

His story was partly born out by Mary Casaldy who had been living on the post in the house of her married brother, Captain Miles Casaldy. Her affair with Captain Cornell had amazed all her friends, who thought she was safely engaged to Lieutenant Davis.

Mary said that when Davis interfered, she had run straight back to the club and cried for a few minutes in the ladies' dressing room. When Davis returned to the dance floor about twenty minutes to twelve, she was waiting and asked him what had happened. He assured her everything was all right.

She admitted that the powder puff at the scene of the crime probably belonged to her, but denied that she had gone back to look for it.

QUES. Yet you were seen to leave the club again about a quarter of twelve.

What did you do?

ANS. I wanted to talk to my brother.

They told me he had gone to his office, so I went over there. But the place was empty.

Her brother, Miles Casaldy, had left the dance around eleven-fifteen, intending to finish some work at his office. He said that when he got there he found that some papers he needed were home. So, leaving the lights on he had gone out to get them. It must have been at this time that Mary reached his office and found it empty. She didn't wait.

Miles said that in returning he took a short cut that led past the scene of the

murder. Thinking the man on the ground was wounded, he knelt and half lifted him before realizing he was dead. He had laid him back and as he did so one of the papers must have slipped from his belt—where he had hastily thrust them—for it was later found, badly creased and dirt-stained, beneath the body. Also, his blood-smearred thumb print was impressed on the dead officer's smooth leather belt. Fearing that he might be implicated, Miles had left the scene hurriedly. He was held for a while on suspicion, but later released.

"And I have no definite suspicions," he had declared firmly. "Cornell was fairly popular, but his luck at cards—and love had won him many enemies."

The dead man's gun was beside his body. His fingerprints were on it, and one shot had been fired. The bullet had smashed against a tin can which stood a few yards away and had ploughed into the turf. Scuffed grass nearby gave evidence of a struggle . . .

If you were on the court martial would you vote Lieutenant Davis guilty—or innocent? If he did not commit the crime, who did? Pick the clues that point to the murderer, then reconstruct the story of the crime in no less than fifty and no more than four hundred words. A ten dollar check goes to the reader who identifies the killer and writes the most logical reconstruction of the murder. Answers must be in the mail by midnight of September the tenth.

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(July Dime Mystery Book Magazine)

Ten Dollar prize winner: Alma Brincifield, R. D. No. 3, Wapakonita, Ohio

Solution: The cryptogram hidden in the crossword puzzle was: "Secret stair led down to cave from camp." The first murder was committed by Guy Milton and the second by Red Horse.

Honorable mention: B. McManus, Pittsburgh; Richard A. Mallory, New York City; Mrs. George Hows, Jr., Verona, N. J. and Fred L. Barker, Houston, Texas.

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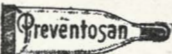
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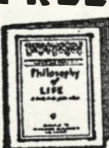
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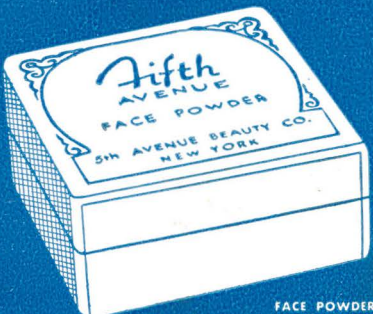
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Give me your measure and I'll PROVE You Can Have a Body like Mine!

I'LL give you PROOF in 7 DAYS that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Let me prove that I can put layers of smooth, supple, powerful muscles all over your body.

If you are underweight I'll add the pounds where they are needed and, if you are fat in any spots, I'll show you how to pare down to fighting trim.

And with the big muscles and powerful, evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one other conditions that rob you of the good times and the good things of life.

Here's All You Do!

Just jot down your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to me—and I'll send you, absolutely free, a copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound, flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an "Atlas Champion" the same easy way.

I haven't any use for apparatus that may strain your heart or other vital organs. I don't dose you or doctor you. **Dynamic-Tension** is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

NOTE: No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED make such an offer!

Charles Atlas

The 97-pound weakling who became the holder of the title: "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—won in international contest against ALL strong men willing to compete with him.



Charles Atlas As He Is Today.



CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 93-9,
133 East 23rd Street, New York City.
I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic-Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)
Address.....
City.....State.....
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Gamble a Stamp—To Prove I Can Make YOU a New Man!

Gamble a stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you all about my special **Dynamic-Tension** method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret methods. What my system did for me, and these hundreds of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only 25 or 50 percent of the man you can be! Find out what I can do for you.
Where shall I send your copy of "Everlasting Health and Strength?" Jot your name and address down on the coupon, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 93-9, 133 East 23rd Street, New York City.