

A NEW MYSTERY By GEORGE A. McDONALD

THRILLING DETECTIVE

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APR.

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FEATURING

THE MURDER PENNY

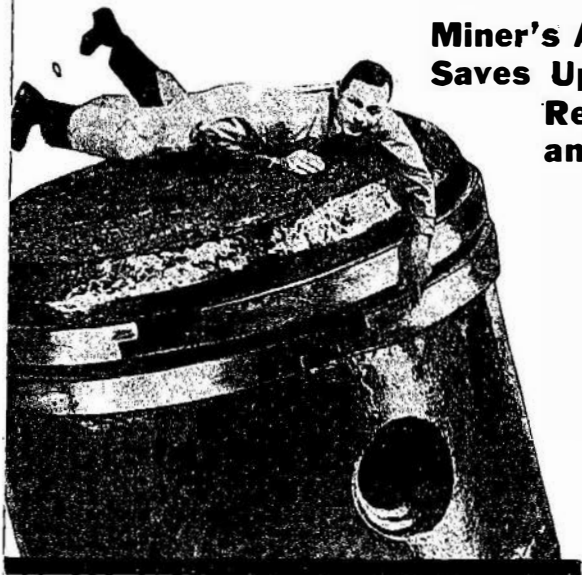
A Complete Novel of
Hell's Arcade

By THEODORE
TINSLEY

HOUSE OF HOMICIDE

A Nightclub
Mystery Novel
By PAUL ERNST

DON'T BUY RINGS or REBORE YOUR CAR WASTES OIL and GAS



Miner's Amazing Mineral Discovery Saves Up to 95% of New Ring and Rebore Costs. If Worn Rings and Cylinders Are Wasting Oil and Gas Send Coupon Below for FREE SAMPLE!

SAVES OIL SAVES GAS

Nearly a half-million motorists have used this revolutionary method of cutting oil and gas waste caused by worn rings and cylinders. Savings up to 50% reported. Give your car new power, pep, speed and quiet with this amazing mineral discovered in the Rocky Mountains. Awarded A.T.L. Seal of Approval

TAKES PLACE OF NEW RINGS AND REBORE!

Quickly placed through spark plug openings and at a fraction of the cost of new rings and rebore, this amazing mineral fills in and plates worn rings and cylinder walls. Ovrhaul gives your motor increased compression. Cuts oil consumption, increases gas mileage, adds new power and speed, with other substantial benefits of new rings and rebore. Ovrhaul has been thoroughly tested and proved by impartial laboratories and great Universities in the United States and abroad. Proved harmless to finest motors

INSTALLED IN 30 MINUTES!

Ovrhaul works on the mineral plating principle—No special tools needed. No car tie-up. No danger of ruining motor by grinding cylinder walls—works in while you drive, save you time and money. Gives you months of extra car use. A single application lasts up to 10,000 miles.

SAMPLE FREE!

If your car is wasting oil and gas, before you spend up to \$150.00 for new rings and rebore—send your name and address on the coupon below for a free sample of this amazing mineral which expands up to 30 times when heated and full details of a real money-making opportunity. Air mail reaches us overnight from the East.

**Pay Up to \$151.37 for
Rings and Reboring?**

Worn rings and cylinders cause your car to be an oil and gas eater. Before you spend a lot of money, Ovrhaul. Give it an opportunity to do for you what it has done for thousands of others. Here are prices of new rings and rebore on a 1935 models: Chevrolet \$50.00; Ford, \$62.50; Dodge, \$59.20; Packard, \$50.00 to \$55.00; Cadillac, \$75.00; Packard, \$112.50.

ENDORSED

By Member of
Society Automotive Engineers
National Aeronautical Assn.,
Detroit Soc. of Engineering,
Pontiac Engineers Club.

Let us send you L. H. Smith's complete report which shows that the compression of a badly worn 6-cylinder motor was increased 32.4% and brought back to within .09 points of its original new car efficiency. Such tests conclusively prove the sensational merits of Ovrhaul.

NEW MONEY-MAKING TERRITORIES OPEN

Salesmen and Distributors Who Act Quick!

Successes of Ovrhaul have been phenomenal. Hundreds of Salesmen and Distributors in the United States and abroad. The biggest money-maker in National magazine, newspaper and radio advertisers carry the message. Ovrhaul to over 18,000,000 car owners. The market has barely been scratched. To wide-awake men we offer opportunity—an opportunity which never come your way again. A fast selling, repeating article, fully endorsed by U. S. and foreign patents. Saves motorists millions of dollars. Many territories still open—but you must act quick if you want to get this.

Free SAMPLE COUPON

L. Mellinger, Pres. (Paste on Postcard and mail)
Ovrhaul Co., C-912, Los Angeles, Calif.

Without cost or obligation, rush me FREE SAMPLE. Also show me your big money-making plan.

Name

Address

PHONE, WRITE OR WIRE TODAY!

Let us send you free sample which every salesman is furnished for demonstration. Let us show you, with their permission, ACTUAL earnings of our distributors. Let us show you how you can start in this business NOW—before all territories are assigned. The market is there—we have the product—are you the man? Let's find out. Write, phone or wire today.—B. L. Mellinger, Pres., OVRHAUL CO.



"You don't have to
TELL IT TO THE MARINES
they KNOW!"



"On active duty with the Fifth Marines in the Nicaraguan jungles, I went to our field hospital with fever. One day a badly injured Marine was flown in...it was my buddy!

...WRITES HARRY E. REECE, FROM THE U. S. VETERANS HOSPITAL AT MEMPHIS, TENN.



"His head had been bashed in by a machete. To save him, surgeons must remove fragments of skull pressing on the brain...a delicate operation anywhere, it was extra tough in a field hospital. I guess they didn't have much hope. Just when they started operating...



OUT WENT THE LIGHTS!



"Our small portable generator had failed! Hospital corps men rushed through the dark ward, gathered up flashlights some of the men had there, and with the light from *fresh DATED 'Eveready'* batteries, the surgeon finished his work.

"My buddy returned to duty, is still living and he thanks one *swell* Marine Corps surgeon and *dependable*, dated 'Eveready' batteries. They were the only kind our canteen sold, the only kind that could have taken what we gave 'em.

(Signed) Harry E. Reece"



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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. XXVII, No. 2 HARVEY BURNS, Editor

April, 1938

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in Your Spare Time For A

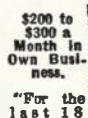
GOOD RADIO JOB

HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS



Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"When I completed 20 lessons I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined station WMPC, where I am now Chief Operator."
— HOLLIS F. HAYES, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.



\$200 to \$300 a Month in Own Business.

"For the last 18 months I have been in business for myself, making between \$200 and \$300 a month. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field."
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Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$200 to \$300 a year—full time servicing jobs pay as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.



J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute
Established 1914

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money for hundreds. I send Special Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I GIVE YOU A COMPLETE, MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL WAVE, ALL PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP SERVICE SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

The man who has directed the home study training of more men for the Radio industry than any other man in America.

Find Out What Radio Offers You
Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a post card—NOW.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8D09
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.



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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY.....STATE.....

HEADQUARTERS

Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet



PAUL ORR, twenty-eight-year-old dilettante, has a splendid personality—good looks—a suave, sophisticated manner—but he is penniless! And he is to be married to Helen Bower, sensational star of Hollywood! The night before the wedding, Orr opens the door of his apartment to admit an unwelcome guest—a smoothly-groomed young Mexican.

"The money, Doctor!" demands the Mexican.

"I am not a doctor," Paul Orr replies.

White teeth gleam in a slow smile. "I know."

Suddenly the Mexican draws a gun, points it menacingly at Orr. It is a black, snub-nosed automatic. Orr tries to avoid looking at it.

"You are arresting me?" he asks.

The smile remains. "No, senor, I am killing you!"

Death in Mexico

That's the exciting start of **MURDER IN MEXICO**, a thrill-a-minute novel by Steve Fisher scheduled for next month's issue. A mystery of the land of warmth and sunshine, gay resort of millionaire playboys, vacationland for the darlings of the screen!

Join the merry throng in the Gold Room of the Foreign Club, gay rendezvous where showgirls and debutantes mix, where gamblers and bankers vie for high stakes, where crook meets crook!

Learn the "inside" of a daring robbery that leads—to death!

Follow the career of Helen Bower, Hollywood's latest find, as she is rocketed into a dynamic setup which shakes the foundations of filmland!

Death's spotlight reveals a murder that will shock you with its grim implications!

MURDER IN MEXICO has suspense, action, surprises—everything you want in a detective novel, and more!

Other Headliners

Another stellar attraction in next month's issue is **MURDER SCOURGE**, a complete novelet by Philip L. Ketchum.

Jeff Draper, hard-boiled Chicago detective, starts out on an easy job—only to find that it isn't as easy as it looks! He accepts an assignment to go to a border town and set up a tombstone over the grave of one Wayne Cartwright. Not much of a task for a celebrated sleuth, but—

When he arrives at his destination, Draper finds that mere mention of the dead man's name is enough to cause Trouble with a capital T! And—he's taken for a ride! Hell busts wide open!

Draper is drawn into a case that will amaze and astound you.

What happened to Wayne Cartwright? Where does Verna LaRue, night-club entertainer, fit into the grim mystery? It's a baffling enigma that Draper is called upon to solve—and we challenge you to guess the solution before the very last line!

A Mr. Finis Novelet

One of your favorite characters is featured in **THE MARK OF MR. FINIS**, a novelet by Benton Braden bringing you the further exploits of Mr. Finis, crime's Nemesis!

Also—many other stories of crime and mystery next month.

Meanwhile, please write and tell me what you think of this issue. Your letters, containing so many worth-while comments, criticisms and suggestions, are invaluable in helping us to shape the policy of this magazine. Keep them coming! And thanks to you all.

—THE EDITOR.

Why Trained Accountants Command

[—and how ambitious men are qualifying
by the LaSalle Problem Method]

High Salaries

GET this straight

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures where-with he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.

Some Examples

Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of

LaSalle accountancy students.* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. He became auditor for a large bank with an income 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at \$30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income many times as large.

A woman bookkeeper—buried in details of a small job—is now auditor of an apartment hotel, and her salary mounted in proportion to her work.

A credit manager—earning \$200 a month—moved up quickly to \$3000, to \$5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which netted better than \$10,000 a year.

And What It Means to You

Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you may equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable profession?

Are you really *determined* to get ahead? If so, you can start at once to acquire—by the LaSalle Problem Method—a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of those principles—this without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is unnecessary. You will be given whatever training, instruction or review on the subject of bookkeeping you may personally need—and without any extra expense to you.

If you are dissatisfied with your present equipment—if you recognize the opportunities that lie ahead of you through home study training—you will do well to send at once for full particulars. The coupon will bring them to you without any obligation, also details of LaSalle's convenient payment plan.

Check, sign and mail the coupon NOW.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credit and Collection Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Accounting |

Name

Present Position

Address

*Names available on request.

WE COPPED THIS ONE FROM COLLEGE HUMOR



"This is the maid's day off, but won't you come in?"

...America's Smartest Magazine...

College Humor

NOW ON SALE **15c** AT ALL STANDS

\$30⁰⁰ TRADE-IN ALLOWANCE

...DURING THIS
**MIDWEST
 FACTORY-TO-YOU
 SALE**

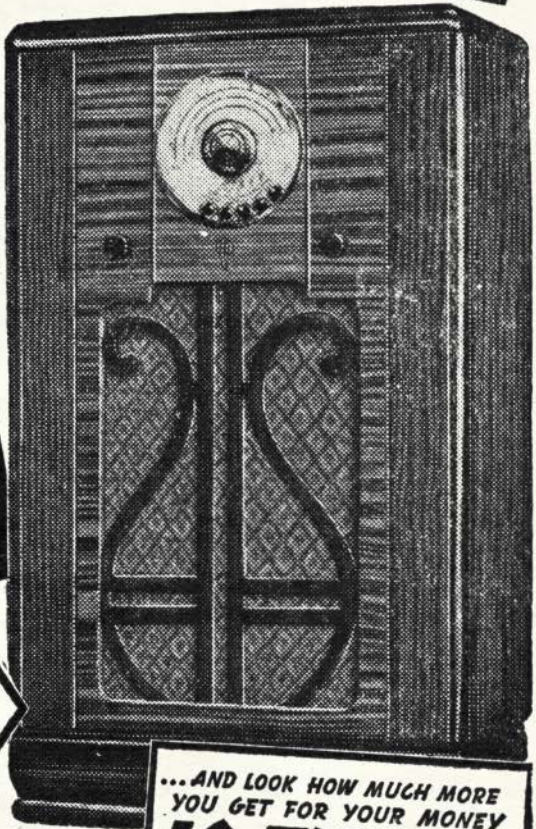
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 YOUR STATION FLASHES IN!



... AND LOOK HOW MUCH MORE
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- ★ 16 tubes for price of 8—
- ★ Not a cut-price set, but a bigger, more powerful, super performing COMPLETE radio in a big exquisitely designed console of matched Walnut—
- ★ Faster Dial-A-Matic Tuning—

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Just imagine a radio so big, so powerful, so luxurious—in a big, beautiful,

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MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
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Send me your new FREE catalog, complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer, and factory-to-you wholesale prices. (Special offer and prices prevail only when dealing direct with factory by mail.)

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THE TIME OF HER LIFE Cornell Woolrich
TAMED BY THE ONE MAN
 This \$10,000 prize-winning author has written the amazing story of a very young, very alluring, very ruthless adventuress. Her mother had been the gay and reckless "Grass Widow" whose mad love of pleasure she had inherited. Her life became a veil of deceit concealing wild escapades with rich and pleasure-sated men-about-town until, in the final pages, she is tamed by the man. Even at \$2 this was a "Best Seller."

PLAYTHINGS OF DESIRE Wesley Weston
A STORY OF PASSION
 The flaming fire of a great and overpowering love in a smashing story that swings the glittering lights of Broadway to the sanctity of the North Woods. A strong emotional heart-stirring novel of a rich man and his wife and the rugged Big Woods guide who proves more sophisticated than was expected. The frank answer to the question "What does a faithful wife owe an unfaithful husband?" Many \$2 editions of this "best seller" were sold out.



A VIRTUOUS GIRL Maxwell Bodenheim
STARK DRAMA OF ENDURING LOVE
 The passionate story of a wiseful, pink-and-white Emmy-Lou, 17 respectable years old in the congested era of 1900. Alluring, born to love under the spell of a summer night and a boy whom her parents forbade. They called her "fast" in Chicago but Emmy-Lou believed in Romance and was ready to pay for it: A pulse-quickenning drama of a girl's courage against the strangling conventions of respectability! Formerly \$2.

THE MARRIAGE GUEST Konrad Bercovici
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 The tale of a vicious love's of a fine, sensitive woman who has succumbed to the necessities of existence and conventionalality, but whose fine spirit to the end, lives with, is loved by and bears children for the man she really loves. Stark drama of the crucifixion of three lives, through which runs the golden thread of a woman's passionate, enduring love, defying the world. \$2 worth of intense drama!

BROADWAY RACKETEERS John G. Sweeney
THELUSTS OF THE RACKET MOBS
 A masterpiece of the Main Street by the Bernard Shaw of the Broadway. You get both sides of the racket, plus the laughs and lusts of the racket mob, told in the jargon of Racketland. Never before has Broadway artifice, in all its phases, blazing with illicit loves, honeycombed with intrigue, teeming with swift-paced lives, been exposed to the light as in this volume. Real life characters with authentic data exactly as originally sold in its \$2 edition.

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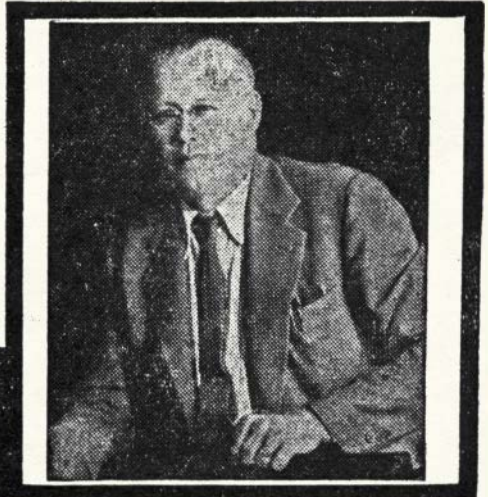
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**Unhindered by Ordinary
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The product is a distinctive, entirely different device for replacing a more cumbersome, expensive, comparatively very inefficient operation. The present volume done by the industry in question runs into a great many millions annually. Simply replacing a small part of this industry's product will net our men a small fortune.

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of present common cost of method it replaces, as a standard guaranteed saving. In many cases, the cost has run as low as TWO PER CENT of what the cost often reached formerly. There is a size suitable for small concerns, as well as large. Costs less than 2½ cents daily per unit used annually. Purchases depend on size of business. Initial purchases have run as high as 27 units in one delivery. Every satisfied customer means foundation laid for regular resale. Large firms which trials made in home or branch offices, then install as Standard thru-out. For example, leading automotive concern reported \$12,000 return on \$187.50 investment.

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Men coming in with us now have the opportunity to share in the typical success of a young business with far-flung possibilities. All inquiries held in complete confidence. Address coupon or letter to

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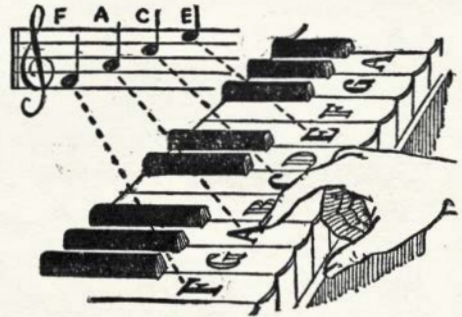
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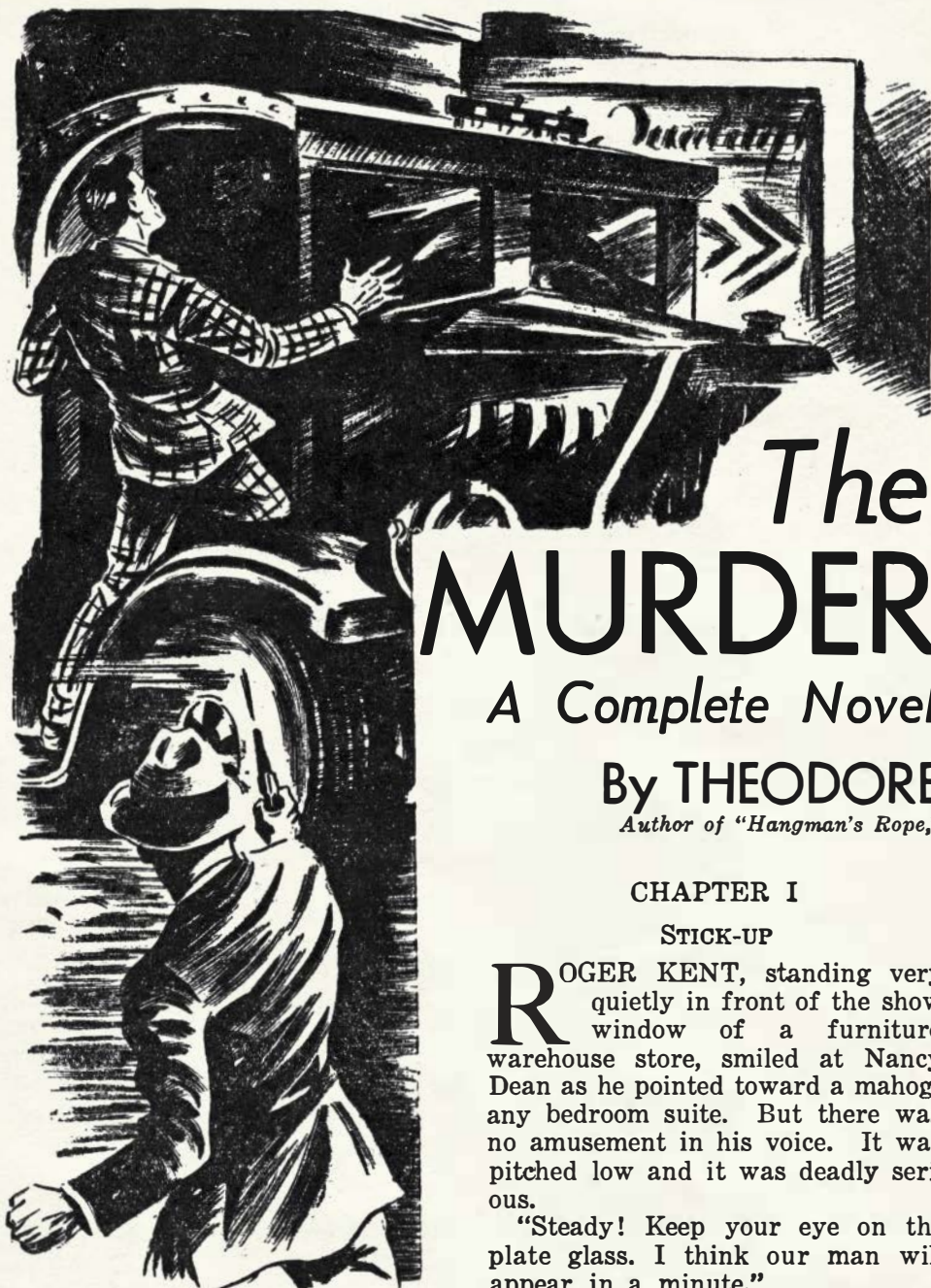
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CHAPTER I

STICK-UP

ROGER KENT, standing very quietly in front of the show window of a furniture warehouse store, smiled at Nancy Dean as he pointed toward a mahogany bedroom suite. But there was no amusement in his voice. It was pitched low and it was deadly serious.

"Steady! Keep your eye on the plate glass. I think our man will appear in a minute."

A bullet from Roger Kent's gun sent the thug reeling

With a Fortune in Gold at Stake, a Daring

Death in the Midst of a Hi-Jack Feud!



PENNY

of Hell's Arcade

TINSLEY

"Give and Take," etc.

"Right!" Nancy said. "How shall we work it?"

"Same as before. I'll cross over and tail him. If he stops, I'll pass him, and you pick him up for a block or two. I don't think he's wise to either of us."

They continued to stare into the show window. To the casual passers-by they seemed like good-looking newly-weds, very much in love, trying to decide between twin beds or a double bed for their apartment. Kent helped the illusion by sliding his arm around Nancy



The driver of the silk truck tumbled to the pavement, dead

Detective Combats Villainous Trickery!

Dean's slim figure. She leaned close, a flush on her lovely face.

But her flush was one of grim excitement. Like Kent, she was watching in the plate glass window the reflection of a doorway across the street. Her innocent-appearing blue eyes gave no hint of the smart brain that ticked steadily behind her lovely forehead. She was the cleverest woman assistant with whom Roger Kent had ever worked. And Kent himself was rated tops in New York as a private detective.

SUDDENLY his arm slid from the girl. He walked quietly away. Nancy, her eyes on the plate-glass window, saw that the vestibule door across the narrow street was slyly opening.

A man emerged. His quick eyes stabbed left and right. Then he began to drift slowly west. He was short, thickset, with long arms and powerful shoulders. His head was pointed and lean, like a wolf's. He had a spade chin, black eyes under heavy brows, and a tight, cruel mouth.

Roger Kent crossed over at the busy corner and followed the man. He had been on his trail for ten days now—without learning a thing. but today was different. Kent had a hunch he was on the verge of an adventure that would bring him to grips with the most ruthless and efficient criminal gang in the history of New York.

The man he was trailing was a gunman named Peter Wissel. But it wasn't Wissel's identity that made Kent's heart pump with excitement. Wissel was a paid gun-slinger for someone far more important. The Blue Penny! A sinister big shot whose hidden identity had never been discovered. He had directed crime after crime with impunity. His take had already run up into the millions. And the only clue to

his personality and power was that name—the Blue Penny!

The nickname had come from a strange fact that served only to deepen the mystery that shrouded this unknown big shot of crime. Several times, when one of his hired underlings had been killed in battle with the police, a queer talisman had been found in the dead thug's pocket. An ordinary copper penny, dyed a bright blue. Nothing else. No clothing labels, no marks of identification. According to underworld rumors, the blue penny was in some way a clue to the identity and the headquarters of New York's unknown public enemy.

By patient investigation, Roger Kent had discovered that Peter Wissel was high in the councils of the gang. Confidential whispers had linked Wissel to the hold-up of the Merchants Bank and the assassination of a police inspector in broad daylight. The killing of the inspector had been swiftly followed by the most ruthless criminal coup in thirty years—the sticking up of an armored Government truck and the theft of a huge consignment of gold bullion destined for the new U. S. Treasury stronghold in Kentucky.

The gold ingots had never been recovered. Federal men and police had found no clue to the vanished treasure. All they had found was a blue penny on the bullet-riddled body of one of the thugs who had been left behind by his fleeing pals; sprawled dead in the gutter.

Roger Kent continued his quiet tailing of Peter Wissel. He wondered what the sleek gunman was doing in this neighborhood of narrow streets, warehouses, garages and cheap rooming houses. Ordinarily Wissel's haunts were the flashy restaurants and night spots along Broadway. He liked hot music, good food, and near-unclad girl shows.

Suddenly Wissel glanced back. Then he stopped and pretended to examine a magazine display outside a small stationery store. Kent passed him without a sideward glance. The tall, good-looking private sleuth continued onward to the corner and turned down the avenue.

Wissel was satisfied. He kept walking west. He paid no attention to the pretty girl on the opposite side of the street. He had emerged from his vestibule doorway too late to have seen that Kent and this slim blonde had been talking together in front of the furniture warehouse window.

Nancy Dean missed nothing of the gunman's actions. She saw him take a book of cigarette papers from his pocket and attempt to roll a butt. The attempt was a failure. Wissel threw both paper and tobacco into the gutter. He did the same on a second attempt. But Nancy saw the crook palm the third paper in his hand.

A TAXI chauffeur was lounging at the curb near a parked taxicab. Wissel stumbled as he passed close to the man. Their hands grazed. The paper passed to the taxi man.

A block onward the same thing happened again. Wissel deliberately spoiled two cigarette papers and passed the third to another taxi driver. Crossing the street, he repeated the operation with the chauffeur of a parked moving van.

Nancy Dean dropped back, afraid she might tip her surveillance to the crook. But evidently the third cigarette paper message was Wissel's last. Quickening his steps, he rolled a butt without any trouble and left a cloud of blue smoke eddying in his wake. Nancy's guess was that every third paper in that cigarette book of his contained a written message. But what? And why?

The trail ended unexpectedly. Wissel vanished into the basement of a rooming house. Nancy glanced backward and saw Roger Kent nod briefly on the other side of the street. She crossed and joined him in the dark angle of a brick doorway.

Kent frowned at her eager report.

"Remember how the Blue Penny gang tangled up traffic before they knocked over the gold shipment?" he said evenly. "This looks a hell of a lot like the same efficient brand of— Watch yourself! Here comes Wissel—and damn it, that's a neat disguise!"

A man in the rumpled white uniform of a street cleaner had emerged from the spot where Wissel had vanished. But Kent's first surmise was wrong. The man was not Wissel. He was a man whom neither Kent nor Nancy had ever seen before. He carried a stubby metal wrench in his hand as he walked quickly to a water hydrant near the corner.

A moment later, Nancy, who had peered cautiously from their covert, was pointing down the narrow street in the opposite direction. Two familiar-looking taxicabs had swung into view. They parked at the curb. Behind them an empty moving van appeared. Nancy recognized that van. It backed up as if about to take on a sidewalk shipment. Its length blocked off nearly the whole width of the street.

"A stick-up!" Nancy cried. "They are going to ambush a truck. But where's the truck? And what kind of—"

"Watch that man at the hydrant!" Kent whispered warningly. "He's the key to the whole job. If anything blasts, stay here and be set to shoot. I'll cut across the street. We'll give these rats a neat dose of crossfire!"

CHAPTER II

THE ESCAPE



KENT had barely left the girl's side when a huge truck lumbered around the corner from the avenue. Kent's eyes gleamed. He recognized on the truck the name of a Paterson silk manufacturer.

Things happened instantly. The crook in the street cleaner's uniform turned on the hydrant with a quick twist of his short-handled wrench. A solid jet of water gushed across the cobbles, forming a spouting barrier behind the silk truck.

At the same moment the two taxicabs down the street started simultaneously to turn. They collided with a banging crash of fenders. The chauffeurs sprang to the pavement, cursing each other, leaving their cabs jammed together. Behind them the empty moving van remained broadside to traffic.

The silk truck halted. It was pocketed between the broad jet of water gushing from the open hydrant and the traffic jam ahead. The two unsuspecting men on the front seat chuckled at the excitement.

But a moment later there was a grim, snarling echo. A pistol shot! A bullet ripped through the skull of the silk truck's grinning driver. His helper gave a yell of fear as the driver's body tumbled to the pavement. Then the helper recovered his nerve. A gun gleamed in his hand as he leaped down from the truck.

Bullets whined at him from both ends of the street. The taxi drivers and the chauffeur from the moving van were racing forward, pumping bullets. Behind the trapped truckman came more vengeful slugs—the quick flashes of scarlet from a .45 in the hand of the fake street cleaner at the hydrant.

The truckman pitched forward. He was dead before he struck the ground.

A thug leaped upward to slide behind the wheel of the unguarded silk truck. But the thug never reached his goal. A bullet from Roger Kent's gun dropped him backward in a squirming huddle.

Nancy, too, was firing from the shelter of her brick doorway. The mobsmen halted with yells of surprise. Whirling, they tried to mow down these two unexpected enemies on both sides of the street. But Nancy was well hidden and Kent was a shadowy, twisting target in a drumfire of blasting lead.

The street was in a wild uproar. Women were screaming, men shouting. Somewhere in the distance a grim, spine-chilling shriek rose over the roar of the confusion. The siren wail of a speeding police prowl-car!

Instantly that wail was repeated closer at hand. The hoot of one of the taxicab horns was desperately signaling for the mobsmen to retreat. They turned to flee, leaving their dead pal lying where he had fallen.

It was Wissel who had tooted that taxi horn. He came zigzagging back to where the dead body of the thug lay. Behind him, the moving van was swerving around with a harsh screeching of its gears. So were the taxicabs. But Wissel delayed his own escape to take a desperate chance. With eyes gleaming, he sent a slug flaming at Roger Kent. Then he bent swiftly over the body of the fallen gangster.

His hands ripped through the dead crook's pockets. He seized something, whirled—then Kent was diving at him headlong.

It was a slugging battle at close range. Neither man was able to fire. A gun-butt glanced off Kent's bobbing head, but he was fighting like a fiend himself. He saw blood

trickle down Wissel's cheek from a gashed temple.

He had his strong fingers hooked into Wissel's throat. Then, abruptly, he hurled the crook away from him. Through the clamor he had heard a thin, piercing cry. The scream of a woman. Nancy Dean!

She was rolling over and over in the desperate embrace of the fake street cleaner. The fellow had emptied his gun, but he was using something equally deadly. An uplifted knife glittered above the helpless Nancy's throat.

It whizzed downward.

Roger Kent was already racing across the narrow street. He covered the last six feet with a flying dive through the air. He struck the killer's shoulder, bouncing off with a crash against the hard pavement.

BUT HIS collision deflected the death blow. The knife missed its target of flesh and struck point-downward against the asphalt. The impact of steel on stone snapped the point from the blade. Screaming an oath, the murderer rolled to his knees and tried to jab the broken blade into Kent's dirt-streaked face.

Kent rolled his head like an experienced boxer and allowed the jagged blade to slide harmlessly over his left shoulder. He swung a hard, trained fist with every atom of his strength. The blow bent the killer's head backward like a hinge. He flew backward and his skull cracked against the sidewalk.

Kent grabbed for the fallen girl. Her thrashing legs had twisted the fabric of her skirt under the sprawled body of the dead crook. Kent knew that the fellow was dead from the limp droop of his head. In his fall, he had broken his neck against the sharp edge of the curb.

Kent scooped Nancy upright, then he was running with her toward the shelter of a basement doorway. Be-

hind them he could hear the drum-fire of police guns. The prowler-car was racing through the splashing jet of water from the opened street hydrant.

Voices screamed:

"There they go! Down in the cellar! Two of 'em got away—a man and a girl!"

Kent slammed the oaken cellar door.

He fumbled fiercely to find a key but there was none. It was Nancy, dirty, dishevelled, but still grimly alert, who found the chain and the bolt.

She shot the bolt and tightened the stout chain.

By the time police shoulders hit the locked barrier Kent and the girl were racing through the dark cellar.



Bullets through the door panels speeded them on their way. Those cops meant business!

The door groaned and splintered under their assault.

Kent, however, was already in the back yard behind that musty cellar. He had yanked Nancy up a small flight of stone steps with a violence that almost pulled her arm from her socket. But the girl uttered no complaint. Her blue eyes were like shining stars. Physically she was all in.

Mentally, she was as alert as Roger Kent.

She could hear the feet of cops racing through the cellar as Kent tossed her upward to the top of the

board fence. Her dress was split raggedly down one side—but that only made it easier for her to scramble over the fence and hurl downward to the opposite yard. Kent was beside her almost before she hit the ground.

They fled down more steps into another cellar.

A quick race through darkness and they reached the foot of black stairs. Halfway up, Kent stiffened suddenly. A faint rhythmic sound was audible from the hallway above. The sound of a man's quick breathing.

Kent's lips brushed Nancy's ear. She nodded and squeezed in front of him. She was the first to emerge at the head of the cellar stairs. A bulky figure in blue sprang at her. a cop!

His eyes opened wide with surprise at sight of a woman.

Nancy took advantage of the cop's surprise. Her arms smothered his gun hand. She threw him sideways, knocking him off balance. Kent slid like an eel behind the struggling pair. His fist crashed behind the cop's ear. It was a clean knockout. An instant later, Kent was bending above the unconscious policeman.

He ripped the shining shield from the blue tunic.

"Quick!" he cried to Nancy.

THEY dashed through the hallway to the sidewalk. Kent grabbed Nancy tightly by the arm and spun her toward the curb. She pretended to fight with him. She had noticed him snatch the shield from the unconscious cop in the hallway and divined his getaway plan.

Kent paid no attention to the startled pedestrians. His loud bellow halted a passing taxicab. He flung open the door and threw Nancy headlong inside. His cupped palm showed the shield to the taxi driver.

"Police Headquarters!" he said.

The shield and Kent's blazing eyes did the trick. The cab shot away. The driver glanced back only once. Kent's savage bellow ended his curiosity.

"Watch the traffic, stupid! And get this hack to Headquarters in a hurry!"

Nancy worked quietly, repairing the damage to her clothing. A couple of pins attended to the worst rips. Kent's handkerchief and her compact helped a lot. By the time the cab halted outside the grey stone building in Centre Street, she looked fairly presentable.

"I hated to slug that cop," Kent said under his breath, "but it was that—or death for both of us. Let's go!"

His hand remained twisted in Nancy's shoulder until they passed through the grim portals of the stone building. Then he let go and smiled pleasantly. So did Nancy. She had done a nice job with lipstick and powder. The two sauntered arm in arm through the lobby like a couple on a sightseeing tour. They walked calmly through to the rear entrance and then out to the street.

Five minutes later they were rolling uptown in another taxi. And about two hours later than that Roger Kent sat in his private office talking to Nancy Dean.

A hot bath and a complete change of clothing had improved her morale tremendously. A visit to her favorite beauty parlor had completed the cure. She looked as if she had just stepped from a Hollywood casting office.

But there was a frown on her smooth forehead as she stared at the flat circular object in Kent's palm. It was a blue penny. The same one that Peter Wissel had tried to snatch from the body of his dead pal.

"How do they stain it?" Nancy asked. "Copper sulphate?"

Kent chuckled and shook his head.

"No. I've made inquiries of a chemist friend of mine. I watched him stain a sample penny in his laboratory. It's quite a formula. Eight ounces of hyposulphite of soda. Four ounces of lead acetate. A gallon of water. The whole mixture boiled."

"That's a heck of a job," Nancy said.

Kent grinned. He was in high good humor.

"My chemist suggested an easier substitute."

He took a blue pencil from his desk. Nancy shook her head.

"No use. I tried that myself. It won't work."

"Not with an ordinary blue pencil," Kent said. "This one is a bit different. It's what is known to photographers and retouchers as a China marking pencil. Watch!"

He coated the penny carefully and Nancy's eyes widened. The blue was not as glossy as the color on the original penny, but it was smooth enough to pass muster. Nancy promptly took the China marking pencil and shoved it in her handbag.

SMILINGLY, Kent started to protest. But his words were cut short by the arrival of his secretary from the outer office.

"A Miss Gordon to see you," she said.

"I'm not taking any new cases," Kent replied. "Tell the lady I'm sorry. I'm busy."

His secretary didn't budge. She was a shrewd woman, worth the high salary that Kent paid her to handle clients in the outer room.

"I think you ought to see this Miss Gordon, sir," she said. "She's worried about her father. It's some-



Roger Kent

thing about a man named Wissel."

"What!" Roger Kent's eyes narrowed. "Show Miss Gordon in at once!"

She proved to be a tall, spinsterish woman of about thirty. She looked worried and frightened. Nancy's smile put her more at ease. Kent let Nancy do the questioning.

Miss Gordon's story was startling.

Her father, she said, had formerly been a Government chemist. For years he had led a humdrum existence. Then he had met a man named Aymer. That had made an instant change in Gordon. He began to lose interest in his job, to spend nights away from home, to gamble and drink.

He had finally been fired from his job. But he didn't seem to mind. He always had plenty of money. Everything had gone well until a grim little man named Peter Wissel called at the Gordon home. He had come with a threat about a blue penny.

Gordon's daughter had overheard the threat. There had been stark

terror in her father's eyes when she asked him what was wrong. He had refused to explain. Nor would Aymer talk. The two merely glanced covertly at each other and tried to laugh it off.

Then Gordon had bought steamship tickets for himself and Aymer. They were going to take a sudden and mysterious trip to Europe, they'd said. Gordon had told his daughter it was in connection with a business opportunity in London. But she knew he was lying. He was fleeing from a death threat that had something to do with a blue penny and a man named Peter Wissel!

She had come secretly to Kent for help. A friend had told her he was the best private detective in New York.

"When do your father and Aymer sail?" Kent asked gently.

"Tonight."

She named the pier and the ship. It was a midnight sailing from one of the big West Side piers.

"I'll be very glad to help you," Kent said softly.

When the pale Miss Gordon was gone, he faced Nancy Dean with a grim glint in his eyes.

"What does it mean?" Nancy whispered. "Do you think that Gordon or Aymer are honest men in a jam of some sort?"

Kent shook his head.

"The opposite!" he said gravely. "I know that Aymer is a crook. His description tallies with certain information in my homicide files. Gordon, I'm sorry to say, has probably taken the crooked road to wealth. If not, why should Wissel show up with a threat about a blue penny?" He sighed. "I feel sorry about Gordon's daughter. She's obviously on the level. But unless my slant is all wrong, Gordon and Aymer are both mixed up with the unknown big shot who planned that silk truck holdup this morning. We know that Wissel

is a go-between for the big shot. My guess is that he'll be at that pier tonight."

Roger Kent rose and stared out the window. The cold afternoon sunlight was fading to a dismal dusk. Thick clouds were rolling in from the harbor. They were bringing with them wisps of grey fog.

Nancy didn't seem to mind the threat of rain.

"Let's have a cocktail and a swell dinner," she said. "After that a good show." She laughed to hide her excitement at the prospect of danger. "I always shoot better on a full stomach, Roger. We can be out of the theater and over to the pier long before midnight."

Kent patted the slim hand of his pretty assistant. "You're the damndest girl for action I ever met," he grumbled. But there was approval in his level eyes.

He reached for the phone on his desk and in a calm voice made dinner and theater reservations.

CHAPTER III

NO SAILING



PETER WISSEL boarded the big transatlantic liner with quick strides up the visitor's gangplank. He crossed the promenade deck, hurried through a brilliantly lighted lounge, descended to a lower deck. He was guided by a slip of paper which he drew from his pocket. Two names were on that paper and two cabin numbers.

Halting midway down a long corridor, Wissel grinned as he verified the number on a locked door. But there was no mirth in his grin. It was merely a mechanical contraction of facial muscles. He rapped on the door.

"Telegram for Mr. Gordon!"

There was a long silence. Then

the door opened slowly, unwillingly. A man peered out. He was a fleshy man, with meaty shoulders and a ruddy, full-blooded face. The crimson faded from his fat cheeks as he stared at something that lay in Wissel's palm. He tried to slam the cabin door but his visitor's foot prevented that.

"Doc sent me. I got a little present for you."

He held out his hand and Gordon glared at the token he displayed. It was an ordinary copper penny except for its peculiar color. The penny was dyed a bright blue.

Gordon took it as if he dared not refuse. The coin trembled in his fat hand.

"Doc has me wrong," he gasped. "I—I wasn't running away."

"Sure. I know. You were just taking a little walk around the corner to Europe."

"Aymer talked me into it. He bought the tickets, arranged for it all. He threatened to kill me if I didn't obey." His whisper rose to a thin pleading cry.

"I'll leave the ship right now. I'll go straight to Doc. I—I can explain."

"You're damn right you'll leave the ship! So will your wise pal Aymer. Wait for me on the pier. I got another penny to deliver."

Wissel turned on his heel and padded swiftly down the dim corridor. The blue penny still lay in Gordon's fat palm. He stood petrified until the footsteps of an approaching steward roused him. The steward caught a glimpse of his pale face.

"Is anything wrong, sir? Are you ill?"

"I'm all right," Gordon stammered. "Just a touch of indigestion."

He slammed his door, locked it. Hastily he rummaged through a small leather bag and jerked out a pistol which he shoved tremblingly

into his hip pocket. Then he took his coat from a hook and began searching frantically for his hat. It was on a dark shelf of the wardrobe closet but he couldn't see it. All he could see was the pointed, wolfish head of Wissel and a blue penny.

A dull brazen clamor was becoming louder all over the ship. Stewards were beating their shore warning gongs with padded hammers.

"All-l-l ashore that's going ashore!"

Gordon whimpered as he clawed through the wardrobe to find his hat. He was sick with terror, hardly conscious of what he was doing.

Wissel heard those warning gongs. He had crossed swiftly to a corridor on the port side of the ship. He rapped on a door and grinned.

"Open up, Mr. Aymer! I got a present for you."

Unlike Gordon, this second man showed no hesitation. Framed on the lighted threshold, he gave Wissel a quick, penetrating glance. Then his eyes dropped to the blue penny in the thin little man's palm.

He laughed deliberately.

"YOU think it's funny?" Wissel snarled.

"So you're Doc's little handy man, eh?"

Aymer stood there, grimly contemptuous. He was thin like Wissel, but taller and more muscular. He had tapering shoulders, with long arms and big hands.

"Suppose I say to hell with Doc and stay on this ship?"

"In that case, I'll use the ticket Doc brought me and take an ocean trip myself. Figure it out."

"How about you and I talking things over?"

"There's nothing to talk about. Either you take this penny and get off the ship, or—"

"Okay," Aymer said softly. "I

know when I'm licked. Gimme the coin."

He reached out for Wissel's extended hand but he didn't take the penny. Instead, his muscular fingers closed on the wrist of the gunman and yanked viciously. The sudden heave pulled Wissel forward off balance and tumbled him through the open cabin door.

Aymer skipped nimbly aside as the body of his foe plunged past him. He slammed the door and shot the bolt home with almost a single tigerish gesture. Then he whirled.

Wissel had hit the floor full length on his face. He rolled over with the quickness of a cat, rising to one knee. His hand whipped to his pocket. The motion was so swift that the glint of the gun made a formless blur. But he had no chance to fire.

The point of Aymer's shoe sunk into Wissel's belly with a force that drove the breath from his agonized lungs. Wissel dropped the gun. He tried to whirl on his knees to regain the weapon, but pain closed his eyes and made his clawing fingers scrape blindly on the floor.

THAT was all the time Aymer needed. A knife jerked from a leather scabbard inside his coat. It had a flat palm handle and a double-edged blade.

Wissel screamed—a thin, gurgling cry as the knife sank hilt-deep into his back. It came out with a warm gush of blood. Again and again Aymer struck, long after Wissel lay inert like a bundle of rags. The rags were crisscrossed with bubbly scarlet slits. The blade of the knife dripped. Aymer wiped it carefully clean on his victim's coat-tail.

He listened, posed rigid as a statue. In the corridor outside he could hear the monotonous beat of a steward's gong.

"All-l-l ashore that's going ashore!"

Aymer glanced at his watch. In less than five minutes the gangplank would be pulled to the pier. Precious minutes to hide the traces of murder and to make good his own escape!

He was confident he could do both. He had been prepared for Wissel's visit. That was why he had selected a cabin on the port side of the liner.

Switching off his ceiling light, he climbed upon the leather settee under the porthole. The fastenings of the porthole cover were already unhinged. The glassed cover swung inward and Aymer peered out into foggy darkness.

He was on the side of the liner opposite the lighted length of the pier. A few feet below his eyes was the murky surface of the Hudson. Fog and darkness made the water almost invisible.

Aymer sprang across the dark carpet to Wissel's body. He picked him up carefully, holding him belly downward, with his head lolling, so that little of the blood from his stabbed back would drop to the floor. Wissel's slight build made him an easy bundle to slip through the round hole of the opened port.

Aymer began to push him through—then halted with a quick gasp of alarm. He heard something from the darkness of the river that brought cold sweat to his brow. *Choof! Choof! Choof!* A tug! Maneuvering close to the liner's black flank to take a hawser ready to be flung from above. Aymer hadn't counted on that. He twisted about, his grisly burden soaking his coat with crimson as he peered cautiously toward the passing tug.

He could see her squat yellow funnel and the flare of ruddy light from her engine room. But there were no deckhands visible astern as she slid slowly past, curving inward to bring her shaggy bow around.

Nancy was securely trussed



Aymer uttered a low, pleased chuckle. Behind the tug was a creamy whirlpool from the race of powerful propeller blades. The tug's engine was reversed. She was coasting slowly forward, braked by madly whirling blades.

Swiftly Aymer took advantage of the tug he hadn't counted on. Wisel's body slid through the port. He hung for an instant, black against the liner's plates, then Aymer released his grip and the dead man went headfirst overboard.

The churning thunder of the tug's propeller drowned out the splash the body made. Aymer's haggard eyes peered just in time to see a dark blur vanish into the soapy whirlpool under the tug's stern. He fancied he could see the tug quiver from the churn of human flesh in the blades. But no head peered from the engine room. None of the men clustered as the bow ran astern. The whizz of a light rope from above kept their attention riveted on the bridge of the liner. They began to draw in a dripping line to which a larger hawser was attached.

Aymer waited to see no more. He snapped on his cabin light. There were a few drops of blood on the carpet but he didn't care about that. When they dried, the dark carpet would hide them.

The penny was still lying on the floor where it had fallen.

Aymer picked it up with steady fingers and slipped it into his trousers pocket. A glance at a mirror showed that his face was flecked with blood and his hair touseled. His coat was a sodden mess where the dead man had squeezed against him on his passage through the porthole. He whipped off the coat, swiftly emptying the pockets and tearing out the tailored labels, weighted it and threw it overboard.

He washed his hands and face carefully. A coat from the wardrobe closet replaced the one he had

tossed overboard. There was a tiny crimson stain on Aymer's white collar, but he didn't have time to change it. He was keeping careful check on the time. Barely a minute to find Gordon, tell him that Doc's messenger was dead, and scam together from the ship.

Before he left his cabin, Aymer made a quick phone call over the temporary shore connection used by passengers to make city calls before the ship sailed. He called a certain taxicab office and talked briefly with a man he called Mike.

There was a tight grin on his lips as he approached Gordon's cabin. Gordon would be easy after he got him ashore. Gordon was a yellow louse. He'd be so scared when he heard what Aymer had done that he'd skip the ship like a cur.

It was this last thought that made the hurrying murderer break into a run. What if Gordon had lost his nerve and was already on his way to obey Doc's summons—to tell Doc that it was Aymer who had engineered the doublecross? That made Aymer sweat in earnest.

His hand whirled the knob of Gordon's door. It was unlocked. A ceiling light showed that the cabin was empty. Gordon's hat and coat were gone.

CURSING, Aymer raced through a corridor to the stairs leading to the upper deck. High above his head he could hear the full-throated bellow of the liner's whistle. A long, sustained blast. He knew what that meant!

His flying body sent passengers bounding out of his path. "'Urry it up, sir!" A steward yelled shrilly. "They're castin' off!"

An open deck—Wet, foggy smell—An electric winch was swinging the gangplank free—It began to recede across empty air toward the crowded edge of the pier—

CHAPTER IV
DEATH ON THE PIER

ROGER KENT was among the crowd of spectators who impatiently awaited the casting off of the gangplank. Like those nearest him, he waved his handkerchief in pretended farewell to someone on the ship. But there was a queer, baffled look in his eyes. He was certain that Peter Wissel had boarded the liner. He was just as certain that Wissel and two others should have left it long before this.

Yet only Gordon had appeared. He had recognized Gordon from the description given him by the man's daughter. Gordon's appearance five minutes earlier was why Roger Kent was standing alone in this hurly-burly of farewell shouts and waving handkerchiefs. A nod from Roger had sent Nancy Dean gliding through the crowd on Gordon's heels.

Nancy was midway across the pier now, leaning against an empty baggage truck. Her position turned her sideward, so that she was able to keep an eye on Gordon and still manage to send an occasional glance toward Kent.

Gordon was obviously waiting for someone. He stood in shadow formed by the angle of an upright steel post. Behind him only a low picket fence closed off the black sweep of the river. Fog blew over his shoulder in smoky swirls, so that part of the time he was almost invisible. To Nancy's relief, he had lighted a cigarette and was puffing jerkily at it. The intermittent glow showed the frightened pallor of his fat face.

As the liner's whistle roared and the gangplank lifted, Gordon seemed to lose his nervousness. He took the cigarette from his lip and ground it under his heel. Turning, he began to slip quietly along the pier, keep-

ing close to the picket fence over which the tendrils of grey fog swirled.

Nancy glanced toward Kent for instructions. But he had turned his back toward her. He was staring toward the opening in the liner's rail left by the moving gangplank.

Nancy started to follow the disappearing Gordon. But before she had taken a half dozen steps, Gordon himself was again motionless. He had stopped short for the same reason that had made Roger Kent suddenly turn his back to the pier.

A man was racing into view on the open deck of the liner. He was waving his arms, shouting shrilly. Other people began to shout. The officer on duty at the gangplank blew a quick blast on his whistle. The moving gangplank ceased its slow ascent.

It was made fast again between ship and pier. The belated visitor hurried swiftly down. He paid no attention to the turmoil his unexpected appearance had caused. He seemed the calmest person in the crowd. The angry profanity of the pier foreman merely deepened the smile on his thin lips.

Roger Kent gave him a quick scrutiny as the man went past. He knew from a memorized description that this man was Aymer. His glance took in the man's sleek, well-groomed appearance, his thin, hatchet face, the smile that made his eyes gleam like bits of bright mica.

But it was Aymer's collar that interested Kent. There was a tiny fleck of crimson on its starched white surface. The stain could not have come from Aymer himself. His smooth-shaven cheeks and chin were unmarred by any cut or scratch. To Kent's intuitive mind there was a definite link between that spot of fresh blood and the fact that Peter Wissel had failed to leave the liner.

The crowd on the pier was scattering. Some were milling toward the pier head to watch the giant liner being warped out into the black river by laboring tugs. The rest straggled toward the street exit. Aymer drifted with the latter group, his bright eyes stabbing left and right.

Kent had joined Nancy Dean alongside the empty baggage truck. They saw Aymer halt suddenly, then turn and glance about him. Satisfied that he was no longer an object of attention, Aymer moved across the pier toward the fog-shrouded picket fence where Gordon was waiting.

The two men began to talk quickly. Gordon seemed to be doing most of the talking. His fat shoulders bobbed, his fleshy arm gestured. Finally, he seized Aymer by the wrist and drew him closer to the picket fence. Their bodies merged in the fog from the open river. It was hard to make them out clearly.

SUDDENLY Kent uttered a quick exclamation.

His eyes had been watching the two almost invisible men. He had seen a sudden queer movement draw them staggering together for an instant. They were struggling—fighting! One of them reeled, fell in a crumpled huddle.

Roger Kent's long legs carried him forward at top speed.

But before he could reach the two men a fleeing figure was leaping upward with the agility of a monkey. He clawed himself to the top of the picket fence and went over it into a haze of fog that blotted out the narrow horizontal timber of the stringpiece. Along this dripping beam he ran like a wavering ghost figure. Then, abruptly, he whirled and leaped outward and down. He vanished into the blackness of the river.

Kent reached the prone body on

the pier a dozen feet in advance of Nancy Dean. He bent and rolled the victim over on his back. It was Gordon and he was stone dead. Blood spurted from a deep knife wound in his back. There was no sign of the weapon. Aymer had jerked it loose and taken it with him as he fled.

Kent had scarcely noticed these grisly details when a piercing scream warned him that his own safety was menaced. A woman had seen him crouching over the body.

"Help! Police! Murder!"

Her scream roused everyone on the pier. Men yelled and raced forward. Nancy Dean screamed, too. She had reached Kent's side and was pretending to wrestle with him. But her ear was close to the calm lips that whispered racing words of instruction to her.

"I'm going after Aymer! Stay here and watch Gordon's body. Look for an attempt by someone to steal a blue penny from the corpse. If it happens, follow whoever steals it—and phone my penthouse as soon as you get the chance. I'll phone you, too, as soon as I can."

He was gone in an instant. He vaulted over the blur of the picket fence, ducking low as his feet struck the narrow timber of the stringpiece. The roar of a pier policeman's gun made hollow echoes under the pier roof. A bullet whistled over the spot where Kent's head had been eerily visible in the fog.

Nancy Dean saw Kent melt swiftly along the narrow stringpiece. Like Aymer, he turned and leaped overboard. Nancy listened for the splash—but there was none! Kent had vanished as soundlessly as if he had converted himself into the gray vapor that hid the river and shore.

The cop with the gun was already hurdling Gordon's body and rushing toward the fence. Nancy screamed

at the top of her lungs and went into an excellent imitation of hysterics. She clutched at the uniformed pier officer.

"Let go, Lady!" he yelled at her. "The guy's getting away!"

He was afraid to be too rough with this lovely blonde who had blundered into the path of an escaping killer. By the time he managed to free himself, Kent had gained a precious minute of time.

THE cop ran along the narrow stringpiece to the spot where he had seen the killer leap. He expected to see a head bobbing around in the murky water, but saw neither head nor water. The squat bow of a barge was dimly visible a dozen feet below the pier's edge. The barge was heavily laden with coal, laying almost awash, so that her wet grey decks looked like part of the river itself.

The pier cop made the leap downward with a lot more noise than Kent had. He pitched awkwardly forward and almost fell over the combing into the cargo of coal. Regaining his feet, he raced astern.

He was rounding the dim shape of the barge's cabin when he heard a faint groan. It came from a spot nearby. Bending, he felt swiftly in the darkness. His questing hands touched only the smooth wetness of the deck planks. Then the groan was repeated and he saw where the man was lying. He was flat on his face behind the dark metal shape of a capstan. The cop dragged at him roughly and he staggered to his feet.

One swift look, and the pointing gun in the cop's hand lowered its muzzle. The slugged man wasn't the killer. The fleeing fugitive had been neatly dressed. This fellow was in black-smudged overalls and a filthy undershirt. He proved to be the captain of the barge.

His gasping voice stammered out

dazed words. As he talked his hand feebly rubbed his swollen jaw.

He had been lying quietly in his cabin, smoking a pipe, when he had heard the roar of a pistol shot from the pier. Rushing on deck, he had been just in time to see a dark figure leap soundlessly down and rush toward the stern.

"Could you see his face?" snapped the cop. "What did he look like?"

"I don't know. All I can tell you is that he runs like a damned rabbit and his fist is as hard as a pile driver. I tried to grab at him, but he let me have one in the jaw that almost tore my head loose. I went down with a bang and cracked my skull against the capstan. The next thing I know, along you come with a damn big gun and—and—"

The cop was no longer listening. He had rounded the stern of the barge and was staring across the greasy water. His jaw dropped as he saw the extended plank. There was another coal barge moored a few feet astern. The rickety plank spanned the water gap between the two crafts.

The cop crawled gingerly across, only to run promptly into another man in dirt-smearing overalls. This fellow was not only unharmed—he was surly and abusive.

"What the hell's going on here?" he roared. "What do you guys think my barge is, a race track? Pounding over my head like damn fools when I'm trying to sleep! Get off here or I'll—"

He saw the gun and the grey uniform. His blustering words choked off.

"Quick! Where did he go?" the cop cried.

"Which one? There were two of them."

"Two?"

"Yeah. The first guy was the one who woke me up. His feet made an awful racket over my head. The second guy went chasing after

the first before I could tumble up from my bunk. He sounded like he had rubber-soled shoes on."

"Where did they go?"

"I dunno. Before I could take a deep breath and spit, you come sliding across a plank with a big gun in your fist, and—"

Again the cop whirled away from time-wasting talk. In another instant he found out exactly where both fugitives had gone. A short wooden ladder had been moved from its rack at the rear of the second barge. It had been propped upright, so that its top rested against the bulkhead edge that closed off the cobbled surface of West Street.

The cop went up the rungs and squirmed over the huge squared timber that topped the street bulkhead. He found himself in a wilderness of piled crates and boxes. Freight had been stacked here to await the arrival of early morning delivery trucks and it made an almost impassable maze. Black aisles radiated between tarpaulin-covered bales and huge packing cases.

The cop searched every nook and cranny thoroughly before he emerged on the pavement of West Street. He found no signs of a fugitive. The fog made wet, shiny halos around the street lamps. It dripped like a ghostly curtain on the steamy windows of a Coffee Pot restaurant on the corner across the street. The cop hurried over and peered inside. The counterman was asleep, with his head propped on his elbows. All the stools were empty.

Had the cop turned the corner and peered down the shrouded side street, though, he would have seen the faint glimmer of an automobile's tail-light melting like a crimson will-o'-the-wisp into the gloom. It was gone in an instant. The car was a sweet little coupé job with a custom built engine under its shiny hood. Roger Kent was behind the wheel, driving with a sure, ex-

pert touch. Only his parking lights glowed. He didn't want to tip his presence to the taxicab he was trailing eastward across Manhattan.

The taxi for which Aymer had called from the ship had arrived and had been waiting for the fugitive, parked behind a dark produce truck near the edge of the waterfront. A quick leap inside, a discreet slam of the door, and the taxicab made a circling turn through the darkness.

Roger Kent followed the dim cab ahead of him. It had been a simple matter to race unseen through the fog to his own swift coupé which earlier he had parked in the cobbled darkness.

Kent thought grimly about his fearless little blond assistant whom he had left on the pier with the dead Gordon. He had warned Nancy to be on the alert for trouble. But there was no way he could look after her now. She was on her own.

CHAPTER V

PENNY ARCADE



NANCY DEAN had hardly reeled out of the embrace of the pier cop she had successfully delayed when she was shoved and buffeted by an excited crowd.

People on the pier had heard the commotion. They ran pell-mell to where Gordon's body lay, packing around the corpse in excited layers. They kept shouting foolish questions, impeding any sensible investigation.

It was, however, a break for Nancy. She lost herself in the shifting crowd. But she remained close enough to keep her eyes on the little open spot in the confusion where Gordon's corpse lay.

Suddenly she saw the crowd eddy as a tall grey-haired man pushed his way through. Men growled angrily as he shoved them aside

with quick, deft elbow work. He silenced them with a crisp, authoritative snap of his voice.

"Move back, please! Get back and give this wounded man a chance to breathe, if he's still alive—as he may be."

"How about moving back yourself?" a voice argued.

The tall grey-haired man smiled.

"I happen to be a physician, my friend. Dr. Charles Ridley, if you must know. I'd like to examine this poor devil—if you'll be good enough to give me an opportunity to attend to him."

The circle around Gordon opened wider. The man who called himself Ridley dropped to one knee and peered at the bloody slit in the victim's back. He turned Gordon's body over with a quick gesture and pried up both eyelids, giving a brief stare into the distended eyeballs. Then he lifted the clenched left hand of the victim and pretended to feel the silent pulse of a dead man.

Nancy Dean knew that Gordon was dead. She had seen enough knife wounds in her grim career as Roger Kent's assistant to know that the blade that had stabbed Gordon had penetrated his heart. Why, then, was this crisply professional Dr. Ridley putting on so deliberate a fraud? She saw that Ridley's eyes, for all his pretended interest in the pulse count he was making, were not watching his patient, but the faces of the crowd that ringed him at a respectful distance.

He was trying to keep their attention diverted from his hands. His right was clamped lightly over the dead man's wrist. The left was cupped beneath Gordon's clenched hand. So cleverly did this hidden left hand work that no one but Nancy realized what the doctor was doing. He was gently prying the dead fingers apart.

Suddenly he bent and listened in-

tently at Gordon's chest. The movement screened both his hands. But Nancy, crouched low and watching, saw a tiny object slide from the corpse's clutch into the palm of Ridley. Instantly he transferred it to his pocket. But the glint of the object was unmistakable. It was a blue penny.

Dr. Ridley's clever palming of the penny and his brisk rise to his feet were simultaneous.

"I regret to say that I can be of no help to this man," he said in a sorrowful tone. "He has just breathed his last."

Nancy didn't wait to observe any more of the grim farce. She had a hunch that Ridley was about to leave the pier.

She slipped deftly through the crowd and made her way down the dimly-lit pier to the street entrance. Two or three taxis were lined up outside, but she crossed the street and entered one that was parked at the opposite curb.

SHE shoved the driver a crisp ten-dollar bill. Swiftly she explained what she wanted. The driver nodded.

Ridley was already climbing into a taxi across the street. Nancy's hackman waited until the rival cab drove southward for a block and vanished around a corner. Then he stepped hard on his gas pedal.

The chase led eastward through Fourteenth Street. The cab ahead was traveling at a fast clip but that didn't worry Nancy's driver. It was a help, he explained, not a hindrance. The chauffeur up front would have to keep his eyes and ears alert to avoid a collision in the fog that swirled ahead of his racing lights. The mist was like dirty yellow rain. It was not thick enough to blot out vision entirely, but it turned Fourteenth Street into a dim, steamy tunnel.

Nancy hunched anxiously forward

on her seat, her eyes straining to make sure that the tiny red glint of the tail light ahead didn't veer suddenly and vanish north or south. But the chase continued in a straight line across the rocky spine of Manhattan. Lexington. Third. Second.

Evidently Ridley didn't suspect anything wrong. With the blue penny he had taken from Gordon safe in his pocket, he was heading straight for some goal on the east side of town.

"Why doesn't he turn? He can't go much further, can he?"

"Not unless he flies over the East River. Maybe—"

THE driver's voice broke off in a grunt. He shifted his foot and shoved hard on the brake pedal. The cab skidded forward on locked wheels, jamming the chauffeur's belly against the steering gear and spilling Nancy Dean on hands and knees.

She was up instantly.

"What happened?"

"The guy pulled a quick stop a half block up front."

"Do you think he's wise?"

"Not a chance. I switched off my lights a block back. Look—he's out on the sidewalk, paying off. He's going into a dizzy-looking dump. What in hell is it—a dime museum?"

Nancy stared. The place was open to the street under a festoon of colored electric bulbs strung over the entrance. Fog frosted the lights and made them hazy with moisture. The blare of radio music made a hideous sound. People were drifting in and out, mostly men.

Ridley disappeared inside the garish entrance.

Nancy Dean paid off her hackman and walked quickly along in the wake of the fugitive.

The spot where Dr. Ridley had disappeared revealed itself to

Nancy's eager eyes as she hurried forward. The nature of the place made her heart thud with excitement. It was a penny arcade! Evidently Ridley planned to make use of his stolen blue coin in a hurry. But what was he going to do with it? Drop it into one of the machines that lined the walls? That seemed ridiculous.

There were not many women in the place, but Nancy sauntered boldly in. There was no sign of Ridley. A crowd of loiterers was watching a sailor drumming his big red fists against a slot machine punching bag. To the left was a change booth where a girl with jet-black hair and a bold, sullen mouth sat waiting on a high stool to exchange nickels and dimes for pennies.

The arcade was a long one, extending inward a hundred feet or so from the sidewalk. Movie machines with lurid titles lined the rear wall. Nancy dropped a penny in one. She turned the crank slowly, pretending to be interested.

But Nancy's real interest was in another direction.

There was a curtained doorway to the left. Dirty velvet drapes hid what looked like a narrow corridor. A sign on the wall outside said:

MANAGER'S OFFICE.
KEEP OUT!

There was no other place where the missing "Dr." Ridley could have gone. There was no sign of him in the arcade, and Nancy's sharp eyes had given him no opportunity to retreat to the street. She began to move slowly toward the velvet drape, intending to lift it casually and take a quick peep down the hidden corridor. But a sudden queer chill along her spine changed her plan. She had a feeling that someone was staring at her.

There was no one near her when she turned. But lifting her eyes,

she became aware of the unpleasant scrutiny of the black-haired woman in the change booth. The cashier hadn't altered her position on the high stool by an inch. She had merely lifted her gaze to a tilted mirror that hung above her head. Perhaps it was just a coincidence, but the mirror framed exactly in its center the draped curtain which had interested Nancy.

Nancy sauntered toward a row of phone booths. She decided to telephone Roger Kent's penthouse and leave a report with Kent's valet. It was a device the two investigators used whenever circumstances separated them on a case. Kent's valet, Hendrix, was a shrewd and capable servant. When Kent was away, Hendrix had orders never to leave the penthouse under any circumstances. He acted as contact man for the receipt and transmission of messages.

BUT Nancy delayed making her call for a sudden and startling reason. A man had entered the penny arcade from the street. He was dressed in a suit of work dungarees. A peaked cap was drawn low on his forehead and under one arm he carried a bulky paper parcel.

His face was streaked and dirty, but Nancy instantly recognized the glare of those pale, narrow eyes. The man was Aymer!

He walked with a quick, nervous step toward the cashier's wicket, shoved an object across the wooden sill. It was done openly, almost with bravado. Nancy Dean caught the glint of dull blue.

"You gave me a bum coin, Sister," Aymer said in a throaty growl. "I want a good one, see?"

The cashier didn't seem surprised at the strange token which she had certainly *not* given to Aymer. She said something to him in a voice that was pitched so low Nancy Dean couldn't hear it. Then she shoved

the blue penny back to Aymer—and something else which she tried to keep covered with her palm as it exchanged hands. But Aymer lifted it so eagerly that he was clumsy and Nancy caught a swift glimpse of it.

The second object was a key.

Aymer went slouching back toward the penny movie machines in the rear. Nancy watched him through the glassed door of her phone booth.

He disappeared at once behind the velvet drape.

She knew now what the blue penny was for! It earned for its possessor a key to some mysterious door back of a dingy velvet curtain.

Ridley had gone in first. Was he the criminal overlord who had sent Peter Wissel with a death warning to Gordon and Aymer? If so, why was Aymer so boldly bearding the lion in his den? Why had he changed his neat clothing for the dungarees of a truckman?

And where in the name of mud was Roger Kent?

It was this last question that alarmed Nancy. She knew Kent was a resolute man, not easily diverted from a trail, particularly when he knew the crook he was trailing was a murderer. The fact that Aymer had shown up alone in this garish Fourteenth Street penny arcade was proof positive that Kent had either been trapped, or that Aymer had succeeded in giving him the slip somewhere in the fog that blanketed Manhattan's streets.

With her red lips grimly compressed, Nancy dropped a nickel in the phone slot and whispered the unlisted number of Kent's penthouse apartment.

To her relief Hendrix answered almost immediately.

"Nancy Dean. Emergency. Take a message."

"Yes. I'm ready."

His voice was, as usual, completely calm. Hendrix had long since accepted the unusual as commonplace. He had to in the service of a pair like Roger and Nancy.

"Has Mr. Kent called you yet, Hendrix?"

"No."

"All right. If he does—I mean *when* he does—tell him I'm in a penny arcade on East Fourteenth Street. Left hand side of the street, a block or two from the East River. Tell him that Aymer showed up and used a blue penny to get to some place in the rear of the joint. A man named Dr. Ridley is also here. Ridley got hold of Gordon's penny on the pier."

"Yes," Hendrix said softly. "I've got that. Anything else?" His voice remained unruffled, although he had not the faintest idea what Nancy was talking about.

"Get this last very carefully. Tell Mr. Kent that if he takes a blue penny, and pretends to the girl in the change booth that she gave him a bad coin, she'll slip him a key. That's what I'm going to do right now."

Her voice wavered for an instant. "Wish me luck, Hendrix."

"Miss Dean! Wait!" Hendrix's voice at last lost its composure. "Don't you think you had better wait for Mr. Kent to arrive? It sounds like a reckless thing to do, single-handed! Those two men may be—"

"I've got to be reckless," Nancy snapped. "If there's another exit to that rathole where Ridley and Aymer disappeared, it means the blowup of this case. I've got a hunch from the way Aymer was dressed that a truckload of merchandise is going to be moved tonight. I'm going to find out or bust! And Hendrix! Thanks for being worried about me. I was beginning to think you weren't really human."

CHAPTER VI CELLAR HIDEOUT



SMILING wanly, Nancy pressed the phone hook down and broke the connection. Her elbow kept the hook depressed, but she didn't replace the receiver. Her slim shoulder held it propped against her ear. She continued to talk smiling nonsense into a dead transmitter in case the woman in the cashier's booth might be watching.

While she talked she extracted a small object from her beaded bag. It was the China marking pencil she had thoughtfully stowed away in Kent's office. Holding the penny lightly by its edges, she used the China marking pencil to color the coin. The blue transferred evenly to the copper. It was not a bright glossy color but it was blue enough to pass a rapid scrutiny. And she knew that Aymer's transaction with the cashier had been swift. The whole exchange hadn't taken more than ten seconds.

She slid her blue penny flat across the wicket, holding a finger tip over most of its surface. She repeated Aymer's surly demand.

"You gave me a bum coin. I want a good one."

The cashier hesitated. Then she reached under the desk.

"I'm sorry," she said in a sullen whisper. "We ain't allowed to refund coins. You'll have to show it to the manager. In the rear."

Her hand shoved out a flat key.

Nancy walked quickly to the velvet curtain, lifted it, slipped into the corridor beyond. It was a short hallway, windowless and doorless except for a single locked door at the end. Nancy rapped gently to test the material of the barrier. It was solid steel. No one answered the faint tap of her knuckles.

She turned the key and a tumbler

clicked—but nothing happened. The door refused to budge. Again she turned the key and again a tumbler clicked. On the third turn she felt the bolt slide free and was able to open the door.

The room into which she stepped was empty. Worse than empty. It looked as if it had been untenanted for years. Walls unbroken by windows; not a stick of furniture; no carpet on the dust-covered boards. But the floor itself proved that people had been in here recently. Footprints in the thick dust led straight to the door of a closet.

The closet was as empty as the room, its floor grimy with dust, the few hooks in the wall bare of clothing. Rising on tiptoes, Nancy peered at the shelf that lined the rear, but that, too, was empty. However she saw something on the edge of the shelf that made her scrutinize it more intently. There were dirt marks where fingers had fumbled.

Then she saw the button.

It was cleverly concealed. Painted the same color as the shelf, it was sunk flush with the wood. The finger marks alone had betrayed it. She hesitated for ten slow seconds. Then, with eyes shining like blue, reckless stars, Nancy Dean pressed the button.

SHE was utterly unprepared for what happened. Without a sound, the closet began to descend! It moved slowly downward in a hidden vertical shaft. The whole closet was a cleverly camouflaged private elevator!

It stopped as noiselessly as it had started. The rear wall slid silently open. Nancy was facing another closed barrier; this time of white canvas. She stood rigid, listening. She could hear queer sounds coming from the other side of that tightly stretched canvas. The faint snarl of an angry man's voice was accompanied by a more sinister sound—

the gasping gurgle of someone choking to death!

Nancy's intuitive brain supplied her with a swift answer to the meaning of the canvas. She decided that she was staring at the reverse side of an oil painting. It must be on the wall of an apartment. The apartment must occupy the whole cellar space under the penny arcade upstairs. She had noticed on the sidewalk outside that there was no arrangement for a cellar entrance from the street.

Swiftly she opened her handbag and extracted two objects. One was a shining little automatic pistol. The other was a nail file. With the sharp point of the file, she punched a tiny opening in the canvas and applied her eye close to the hole. It was as small as the peephole of a snapshot camera; like a camera, it gave a wide conelike range of vision into the room beyond.

She gasped at what she saw.

The room was a gorgeously furnished living chamber. Deep rugs, lamps, expensive furniture, weapons and curios on the wall. But it wasn't the sight of such unexpected splendor in the cellar of a penny arcade that made Nancy gasp. It was the vision of two men twisted in a death grapple.

Ridley had both hands sunk deeply in the throat of Aymer. He was squeezing the life out of the man. Aymer was purple in the face, waving his arms, trying to scream something. It was his gurgles that Nancy had heard through the canvas of the painting that hid the motionless elevator.

Suddenly Ridley seemed to conquer his lust to kill. He relaxed his grasp on Aymer's throat and threw him reeling to the floor. A gun glinted in Ridley's lean fist. He pointed it ominously as the fallen man rolled weakly to his knees and staggered to his feet.

"You dirty, doublecrossing rat!

What have you done with those ten barrels of vinegar? Talk fast—or by hell, I'll—"

Aymer screeched in his eagerness to talk.

"Doc, for God's sake! Listen! You got me wrong! I came here, didn't I? Would I do that if I was crossing you?"

"Where's the vinegar?"

"I came here to show you. That's why I'm wearing these dungarees. There's a suit for you in the parcel I brought."

"What do you mean?"

AYMER'S gasping voice blurred as he leaned closer. Nancy Dean was unable to make out the sense of his words. But it drew a barking laugh of triumph from the man with the gun.

"The cross was Gordon's idea," Aymer muttered. "I was willing to give you the two-thirds split you demanded when you supplied us with the gunmen for the hijack job. But when the guards killed them both and Gordon and I got away with the stuff—well, he said the hell with you and your cut. He threatened to kill me if I squawked."

"Where did you hide it?"

"Uptown, Harlem. If you'll only trust me—"

"Trust you, you rat? What happened to Pete Wissel when I sent him to the pier tonight?"

"Gordon croaked him," Aymer lied. "He let him have a knife in the back and shoved his body out a porthole. I—I wanted to obey your warning and come straight here, but Gordon caught me on the pier and—and—"

"Well?"

"I killed him," Aymer whispered. "I was more afraid of you, Doc, than him."

"Maybe you're telling the truth, at that," Ridley purred. "You see, I was on that pier tonight."

A smile twisted his lips.

"I'll give you a chance to come clean. And God help you if that vinegar uptown isn't Grade A."

He had drawn dungarees over his clothing and was adjusting a peaked cap when Aymer gave a sudden shrill cry. He was pointing straight at the painting behind whose canvas back Nancy Dean was watching and listening.

"Look! The painting! The electric bulb over it is lit!"

"Down!" Ridley snarled. "The elevator's at the bottom!"

He came charging forward, gun in hand.

Nancy fumbled desperately to push the shelf button. But before she could touch it, the concealing painting slid swiftly aside. Ridley's murderous face was peering at her over the barrel of a leveled gun.

The only thing that saved her life from the crashing rip of a slug was the fact that Ridley hadn't expected to see a woman. He gulped with amazement. For the millionth part of a second his gun wavered, then Nancy, with a squirming leap, ducked under his clutching arm and fled across the chamber beyond.

She had taken only three steps when Aymer's fist struck her. Reeling, she fell to the floor. Ridley shoved past Aymer and dragged her to her feet.

"Who the hell are you?" he roared. "How did you get down here?"

Nancy didn't reply. She couldn't. Her head was filled with flaming pinwheels from the hurt of Aymer's fist and the thump of her forehead against the floor.

In a moment stout cords appeared from somewhere behind her and she was trussed securely, wrists and ankles. Ridley lugged her to a sofa against the wall and propped her upright.

"What's your name, you wise little hell-cat?"

There was a stain of blood on

Nancy's lower lip where her teeth had been driven into the flesh. The blood ran in a trickle down her chin and the sight of it seemed to kindle a spark in Aymer's pale eyes. He sprang toward the wall behind the couch and ripped loose a hunting knife that was attached to the wall by thin decorative cords.

"She must have a blue coin," he growled. "How else could she get in?"

"There were only two coins," Ridley said coolly. "You had one. I myself recovered the other from Gordon's body. All right, Blondie! Are you going to talk, or shall I do things to that shapely little body of yours that will hurt pretty bad?"

"Lemme handle her," Aymer cried huskily.

He shoved the knife forward so that the point pricked the creamy whiteness of Nancy's throat. Her stubborn silence enraged him and he started to stab deeper. But Ridley suddenly uttered a commanding growl and seized the knife. He hung it back on the wall with a hasty gesture.

"We got no time to waste on her now. I'm interested in *vinegar*. I've got to know whether you're playing square with me or whether you're lying. We can take care of this blond cutie when we get back."

AYMER nodded. His eyes were like coals. Ridley struck Nancy a blow that tumbled her flat on the sofa. A gag was forced between her clenched teeth.

"Come on!" Ridley snapped.

The two crooks vanished through the opening in the wall. The oil painting slid back into place. After awhile the tiny white electric bulb above the painting ceased to glow.

Nancy began to struggle desperately. But her ankles and wrists were so tightly trussed that it was impossible to free herself. Suddenly she changed her efforts. Her up-

raised eyes saw the hunting knife with which Aymer had threatened her.

It was hanging loosely in its ornamental cords where Ridley had shoved it back. But he had done it angrily, hurriedly, and Nancy saw that it might require only a small amount of vibration to cause it to fall.

She began to butt the wall with her head. Her heels, too, struck again and again with a desperate tattoo. The vibrations were tiny but the cumulative effect was to slide the suspended knife looser and looser from its insecure hanging. It fell suddenly, bounced on the sofa and dropped to the floor.

Nancy rolled headlong after it. She was too desperate to mind the crashing thump. She had to free herself before the two killers returned. She shivered at the memory of Aymer's hot eyes. The man was a sadist! He would revel in torture.

She was able to touch the knife with the fingers of the hands bound tightly behind her, but it was hard to manipulate it. The edge of the blade was razor-keen. As her fingers fumbled, trying to draw the blade across the cords, she felt the hot-cold agony of steel slicing her flesh.

It was useless torture. She was unable to cut the cords. Her fingers were too stiff to manipulate the knife.

It fell to the floor.

She was bending dazedly to try to regain it when her lifting eyes saw the electric bulb above the painting suddenly glow. The secret elevator! It was descending! Ridley and Aymer were returning to finish her.

She had used up the last atom of her strength. She pitched sideward with a moan, staring helplessly at the painting opposite her as it slid aside.

CHAPTER VII

TEN BARRELS OF VINEGAR



MAN sprang into the room. The sight of his blazing eyes and the big gun in his fist made Nancy utter a feeble cry of delight. Roger Kent! Square-shouldered, competent, grim. Peering swiftly about the ornate underground chamber, ready to spit flame from his steady gun muzzle.

Then he was leaping forward with a lithe stride to the aid of his helpless blond assistant.

That was all Nancy remembered for awhile. When her fogged eyes cleared, there was a tang of excellent Scotch in her throat and Kent's sinewy arm was supporting her. Weakness fled from her. She was able to stand alone.

Swiftly she poured out to Kent what she had seen and heard. He seemed puzzled by Doc's reference to ten barrels of vinegar.

"How did you get past the cashier?" Nancy asked. "How did you manage about the blue penny?"

"I used the coin I got hold of at the silk truck robbery," he said.

Nancy's smile was fainter, but there was no longer a trace of weakness in it. She was regaining her nerve.

"I used the China marking pencil," she gasped. "I knew all along it would come in handy."

"We've got to get out of here—fast!" Kent said tightly. "Can you make it?"

"Yes."

They ascended silently in the elevator. Together they passed through the dusty "manager's office" and through the velvet curtains to the penny arcade. It was still well filled with an assortment of frowsy customers. Kent kept Nancy close to him as he elbowed a quick passage to the street. Nancy's blood-smear-

wrists were hidden from prying eyes by her long sleeves.

Kent's swift little car was waiting at the curb. There was still plenty of fog but it was thinning a little. A rainy mist was falling from the grey sky. Before morning the city would be drenched under a downpour. But the clinging wet mist that now prevailed made an excellent curtain for the movements of the car that sped along under the capable driving of Roger Kent.

"Where are we going?" Nancy asked.

"Think you're up to a little more excitement?"

"If you try to get rid of me now," she retorted, "I'll yell blue murder to the first cop we pass. I'll tell him you're trying to do wrong by an innocent blonde from the country!"

"How about your wrists?"

"They've stopped bleeding. It was just an act to get your sympathy. Where are we going now?"

Kent chuckled. "To a garage on the lower west side that specializes in renting out motor trucks."

"Why a garage?"

He explained grimly. As the car sped along through wet darkness, he told what had happened since he had leaped from the steamship pier to pursue Aymer. The trail had led downtown to the clothing shops in the neighborhood of Chatham Square. Aymer had gone into one of these shops while his taxicab waited. Kent had slouched past, protected by the fog, and had seen what Aymer was buying. He had bought two suits of dungarees, two cheap work shirts, two peaked caps. He had one set wrapped in a paper parcel, the other he carried loose back to the taxicab.

Again Kent had followed Aymer through the darkness. This time the crook's taxi had halted outside of the Eureka Truck Rental Garage. When Aymer entered he was dressed

in his truckman's clothes. He conferred in the garage office for awhile and emerged with a satisfied grin.

"I suspected then," Kent said, "that Aymer had hired a delivery truck and had agreed to come back for it later. I wondered why the delay. Now I know he was planning to get hold of Doc Ridley."

FROM the garage Aymer had driven to a nearby cheap hotel. He had paid off the taxi driver at this point. Kent had followed him cautiously into the lobby and seen Aymer enter the slow old-fashioned elevator. Kent himself had hurried up the stairs. By pausing at the dark angle formed by the staircase at each floor, he had been able to keep pace with the slow-rising elevator and find out at what floor Aymer alighted.

He had got off at the fifth. Kent spotted the room he entered and waited to see what he would do next. But ten minutes had passed and there had been no sign of Aymer. Finally, Kent had become worried and had tiptoed softly to the suspect's door. A faint knock had brought no answer, but skeleton keys had the door open in a jiffy.

The room had been empty. There had been an open window with a curtain fluttering in the rain, and a fire-escape outside leading downward to a rear courtyard. The foxy Aymer had pulled a neat sneak.

"I went downstairs and phoned my penthouse, figuring you might have turned up something at your end," Kent said. "What I heard from Hendrix brought me tearing over to the penny arcade on East Fourteenth Street."

As he spoke he steered his coupé smoothly into a side street that was lined with garages on both sides. He slowed his speed to a crawl.

"What's all this queer talk about vinegar?" Nancy whispered. "Why should Aymer and Doc Ridley be murdering people for ten barrels of vinegar?"

"I don't know," Kent admitted. "I've been racking my brains, trying to figure out that angle. It certainly doesn't make sense, does it?"

"Aymer said there had been a hijack. Doc loaned Aymer and Gordon two gunmen for the job. The gunmen were killed but Aymer and Gordon got away with the loot. Then they tried to cheat Doc out of his share of the swag. Would they

[Turn Page]

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take chances like that for a load of vinegar?"

Kent's eyes were suddenly blazing with a queer inner light.

"Wait!" he cried under his breath. "A hi-jack! Gordon was a chemist—*Vinegar!* By the lord, that might be the answer! That is the answer!"

"What do you mean, Roger?"

"I mean that the silk truck holdup this morning was a cheap job compared to some of the others the Blue Penny gang has pulled. Forget about silk, darling! We're on the trail of something a damned sight more valuable!"

Kent's foot suddenly jammed hard on the brake pedal of his coupé.

"There's the garage I trailed Aymer to," he whispered. "That big brick one up near the corner. Slide low on your spine."

"Do you think they're here already?"

"They must be. They had a big start on us."

Presently the huge light over the dark entrance of the garage bloomed into bright incandescence. There was a snorting rumble and then a truck rolled through the archway to the street. As it turned, the figures of the two men on the front seat were clearly visible under the rays of the overhead light. Aymer was driving. Doc Ridley was hunched alongside him.

LUCK was with the investigators who sat with averted faces in the motionless coupé at the curb. The truck turned in the opposite direction. It rumbled to the corner and then headed north.

"Harlem!" Nancy breathed. "That is where Aymer said the vinegar was hidden. He told Ridley it was in a warehouse in Harlem."

"Okay. On to Harlem!" Kent replied.

His voice was gay, almost bantering. He had been filled with sup-

pressed eagerness ever since he had coupled mentally a month-old hi-jack of gold, a Government chemist and ten barrels of vinegar. But the bulge at the angle of his taut jaw showed that his gayety was only the surface covering for a grim determination. Nancy prodded him with no more questions. She had an odd chilly feeling along her spine that Kent was going to astonish her before this exciting evening was over. If there was one thing Nancy Dean loved, it was a big dish of excitement, with a dash of amazement as dessert!

Before she knew it, Kent's car was halting at the corner of a narrow cobbled street on the west section of Harlem.

The corner hid Kent's car from the view of the men in the truck. The truck had parked directly in front of what looked like a two-story abandoned loft building. There was an empty store on the ground level and black iron shuttered windows on the loft above.

Ridley and Aymer melted down an alley that ran along the far side of the structure. Three minutes after they had vanished, by Kent's accurate watch, he and Nancy Dean hurried quietly forward.

Moving noiselessly to the rear of the shop they found a locked door. But Kent took care of the simple spring lock with a few deft movements of an expensive little tool that looked like a steel fountain pen in its chamois case.

The two investigators found themselves in a square, boxlike entry in the rear of the vacant store. Kent had a small flashlight in his pocket with the end taped to permit only a tiny beam of light. But he was afraid to use it for fear of alarming the two crooks who had climbed a flight of wooden stairs to the loft floor above. The stairs showed like a pale ghostly slant in the darkness.

A faint squeaking and scurrying seemed to be going on all over the place.

"I hope they're not rats," Nancy whispered at Kent's ear. "If there's one thing that makes me sick all over, it's—"

She surged suddenly against Kent as a grey shape in the gloom darted across her shoe and scuttled into a hole in the wall. Kent lifted a swift hand to press it over the startled girl's mouth, but the precaution wasn't necessary. In spite of her fright and disgust, Nancy was keeping her wits. Her own palm choked off the involuntary gasp she had given.

Her voice was a shaky whisper.

"I—I can't stand the feel of the damned furry things! Let's hurry this up. I'd rather have gunplay!"

Kent took her hand. It was as cold as ice.

The fact that rodents were scurrying at will in the darkness made it easier to ascend the creaky wooden staircase. Kent proved it by moving slowly upward with the girl. In spite of the unavoidable noise they made, not a sound came from the blackness of the floor above. Step by step the two advanced. *Creak-creak*— They were almost at the top of the stairs when from the darkness of the loft came a quick, suspicious oath.

"What's that? Did you hear anything? It sounded like somebody on the stairs!"

The voice was Ridley's. The thump of his approaching feet became louder. Kent crouched against the wall. Nancy leaned sideward over the banister rail. Both their guns were ready to spit flame.

But the jeering voice of Aymer averted the peril of a gun-fight in a spot that would have been a death trap.

"Don't be silly, Doc," Aymer growled. "You heard a rat. The place is lousy with them! Where's

your flash? I'm trying to locate these damn vinegar casks."

There was a sullen grunt, then Ridley's footsteps receded. Nancy took a long, shuddering breath. She followed the tiptoeing shape of Kent to the loft entrance.

Both crouched to the floor as they saw the yellow flash of an electric torch. But the light was pointed toward an inner corner of the loft. Ridley was holding the torch, Aymer was pointing toward a group of metal casks with a whisper of triumph.

"There you are! Ten of 'em. Didn't I tell you they were here? Unscrew one of the caps and take a look for yourself." He cackled with nervous laughter. "You can dip your finger in it if you like."

CHAPTER VIII

GOLD!



WITH Nancy following him, Kent crept forward along one side of the gloomy chamber. The littered confusion of the loft covered their advance perfectly. Empty boxes and crates, upended barrels and cartons shielded them from the two men in the far corner. The scurry of rats hid any sound they made.

Aymer had taken the electric torch from Ridley and was holding it focused on one of the metal casks. Ridley bent and began to unscrew a circular cap in the top.

"Hold that light steady, you dope!" he snarled.

But Aymer continued to move furtively to one side. His free hand darted suddenly toward what looked like a looped string. Too late, Ridley sensed treachery. His whirling body was halted by the flaming roar of a shot. A bullet spat from the wall directly above the cask to which he had been lured. It tore slantingly through Ridley's forehead

and tunneled out the back of his skull. He went down with a thump, his blood puddling the dusty boards.

Aymer gave a screeching little cry of delight. The beam from his torch centered full for an instant on the dead face. Then with vicious deliberateness, he drew back his foot and kicked the dead Ridley, so that the inert body quivered.

"Wise old Doc, huh? You and your two-thirds split! There ain't even going to be a fifty-fifty split, sucker! I'm taking every last dime—and you can tell that to Gordon when you meet him in hell!"

Kent was rising quietly, inch by inch, behind the dusty pile of barrels where he and Nancy were crouched. Nancy, too, was on her feet, moving a little to the left so that she could circle to the rear to back up Kent's surprise attack. Instinctively she knew what he was planning to do. A quick plunging leap through darkness, an impact of bodies that would send Aymer's torch flying end over end. Then a bone-crushing embrace by a master in the art of jiu-jitsu—

BUT Fate changed the perfect plan in the twinkling of an eye. Kent was startled by a shrill, unexpected scream of terror from his blond assistant. Bent double, her face chalk-white, Nancy Dean was clutching with both hands at something that squirmed beneath her dress halfway up her leg.

Aymer's gun muzzle swerved. Bullets pumped in a spray of hot lead. They missed Nancy's body as Kent struck her in a diving football tackle. He swept her off her feet and threw her crashing to the floor.

She was still screaming, her hands desperately taut on the squirming thing under her clothing. Kent hurled an empty barrel rolling across toward the advancing Aymer. It struck the killer's shins and knocked him off balance. Before he

could recover and fire again, Kent's hand had scooped swiftly toward the hidden thing Nancy was holding. His fingers closed on the warm, convulsive body of a clawing rat. He threw it like a squealing missile at Aymer.

Two seconds later Kent's hundred and eighty pounds of gymnasium-trained muscle struck his man like a battering ram.

Kent had lost his gun. In his wrestling plunge at Nancy and his swift clutch at the rat he had dropped his weapon somewhere in the darkness. A bullet furrowed his neck like the sharp rip of a red-hot wire across his flesh. But he was conscious neither of pain nor of the warm dribble of blood. He had one hand on Aymer's jerking weapon, the other on the killer's throat.

His whole mind was concentrated on the throat of his enemy. He used his left hand only to keep the muzzle of Aymer's gun from pointing at his arched stomach. Aymer fought like a fiend to send a slug ripping from pointblank range into Kent's entrails. But the tight pressure on his throat soon ended that.

The gun fell from his opening fingers. The light from the dropped torch lit up the ghastly purplish hue of his face.

He stopped struggling suddenly and tried to cry out gurgling words. Kent's hands loosened.

"Don't—choke—I—give—up—"

"Pick up his gun, Nancy!" Kent rapped.

She had her own tiny automatic trained on Aymer's back. It was steady as a rock, although her face was still greenish with the remembered sick horror of the rat. She leaned toward the gun on the floor.

Aymer suddenly tore himself loose and flung himself at Nancy. Kent's fist smashed at the killer's jaw and he kicked the big gun on the floor skidding into a corner. But he mistook Aymer's desperate

intent. Aymer went for the tiny automatic in Nancy's dangling hand.

And he got it!

He grinned as he toppled backward from Kent's punishing fist. It was a grin of ghastly and bitter triumph. He had only a scant second to use the automatic—and no chance at all to whirl and kill Kent or the girl. He was trapped—finished—done! Three men had died tonight from his murderous fury. Now he killed a fourth.

Himself!

The gun made a brief, explosive report. For an instant the tiny muzzle remained glued to Aymer's temple. Then the dead fingers relaxed and a lazy trickle of crimson began to creep slowly down the cheekbone of the motionless face.

"I'm sorry for that," Kent said in a toneless rasp. "I hate to see the electric chair cheated."

He was still poised on the balls of his feet, tense as steel wire.

"I figured on everything but suicide," he said slowly. "I should have remembered that. He knew he'd lost his wealth—"

"Wealth?" Nancy whispered.

KENT didn't seem to hear her. He had turned from Aymer and was staring at the dead Doc Ridley.

"Doc, they call him in the underworld. He's been Dr. Ridley, Dr. Hannen, Dr. Callahan; has had a score of other aliases. He started as a brilliant physician, then went wrong. He became the shrewdest and most feared man in the underworld because no crook knew exactly who he was or the location of his headquarters—until they incurred his displeasure and got the blue penny of death."

"But—" Nancy gasped.

"He was a criminal broker. He formulated and arranged crimes, always taking two-thirds of the profits. If we can locate his private papers in that amazing cellar apart-

ment of his, we'll probably discover he's close to being a millionaire— You're puzzled because I spoke of Aymer's wealth. I mean the wealth he missed. Let's have a look!"

The beam of his torch lit up the ten metal casks. On each of them was neatly stenciled:

CIDER VINEGAR. GRADE A.

Nancy stepped eagerly to the cask on which the dead Ridley had loosened the metal cap. She reached to lift off the cap, then stiffened with a frightened cry and a glance at the dark corner behind the cask.

"You needn't worry about that gun Aymer rigged," Kent said grimly. "It was arranged for only a single shot. When he pulled the lanyard string, the recoil sent the weapon crashing to the floor. It's quite safe now."

She peered inside the cask, aided by the torch that Kent held close to her elbow. "Why, it's liquid! Just plain vinegar!"

She poked her finger through the opening. But Kent caught her wrist in an iron grip and yanked it away.

"A rather specialized type of vinegar," he said. "A type that I'm afraid would cook the flesh on your bones if you were silly enough to touch it. Haven't you noticed the peculiar metal this cask is made of? Or the fact that the inside is lined with a special covering? I'd rather test my theory with something a bit more durable than your lovely finger."

He dipped the barrel of the automatic pistol into the fluid. Lifting it carefully, he allowed a few drops of the stuff to fall on the bare boards of the floor. It ate greedily into the wood with the vicious bite of acid. A peculiar odor became noticeable.

"For gosh sake, what is that stuff?" Nancy said faintly.

"It's a mixture of one part nitric acid with three parts of hydro-

chloric acid. Chemists call it *aqua regia*."

"I still don't understand. Are chemicals so valuable that people commit murder to get hold of ten barrels of the stuff?"

"Not the chemicals, darling," Kent said. "The material imprisoned in the chemicals! Some substances are extremely hard to dissolve. One of them in particular. But with *aqua regia* the trick is possible. It not only dissolves the material, but readily yields it up again whenever the chemist desires."

"And that material is?"

"Gold," Kent said very softly.

He explained. Nancy herself had provided him with the clue. Her eavesdropping in the apartment below the penny arcade had enabled Roger Kent to couple three facts for deduction—a hi-jack important enough to interest Doc Ridley, a crooked chemist named Gordon, and ten barrels of so-called vinegar. The fact that two of Ridley's gunmen had been killed in the successful holdup identified the job. The Government truck that had been robbed on its way between the Federal Bank and a special train that was to take the bullion bars to the new treasury stronghold built underground in Kentucky. The gold had never been traced or recovered.

It was this gold theft that had first put Kent on the trail of the Blue Penny mob.

"I think a telephone call to the Federal Building will make certain Government men very happy," Kent said with a quiet smile. Then his smile faded.

"I'm terribly sorry about Gordon's unfortunate daughter," he added. "I rather think that when I phone in the news, I shall make a little harmless deal. It won't matter to the Government if Gordon's decent daughter is told that her father was killed in a brave effort to help the authorities track down a gang of criminals."

Nancy Dean's face became suddenly pink with embarrassment. She began to fidget. Then she asked a question that was completely irrelevant. "I wonder if you could loan me a pin, Roger?"

"A pin? What in the world for?"

"I'm very grateful for the way in which you grabbed that horrible rat. But you were just a bit ruthless in your method of grabbing. My skirt—I—I really could use a pin!"

Gravely Roger Kent fished along his lapel. He found a bright new pin and handed it to his blond assistant. Then he turned his back like a gentleman, while Nancy Dean made certain minor adjustments.

Next Month: MURDER IN MEXICO, a Novel by STEVE FISHER

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Hacker's Luck



The man held a large, black automatic

Joe Vodich Finds a Use for Five Cent Pieces When He Pays Off a Gang of Kidnapers!

By ROSS RUSSELL

Author of "Seeker of Tomorrow," "The Great Radio Peril," etc.

JOE VODICH was the kind of hacker that got nickel tips. The rest of the independent cab drivers at the Consolidated stand laughed at him and called him the "Nickel Nurser."

He got so many nickel tips he carried cardboard tubes in which he packed the nickels, forty at a time. These he took home for the kid. Vodich was always good for a laugh

—Nickel Nurser! But what the hell could he expect with the cheese-box on wheels he operated?

The other hackers would have laughed uproariously could they have seen Joe Vodich's rattletrap careening down the storm-lashed Post Road at 10:50 the night of October the fifth. But they were much too busy pulling flags for that.

It was the first rain of the season.

Hacker's red letter day! Dampened citizens were fighting for every available cab. And the Nickel Nurser was cruising the lonely Post Road searching for a number that didn't exist! Another good laugh for the gang!

The call had been bona fide, no doubt, but the excited client, possibly an irresponsible drunk, had garbled the address. Joe Vodich's twenty mile ride into the sticks had been nothing better than a wild goose chase.

Now he was pushing his ancient cheese-box back to town as fast as it would travel—trying to get in before the theaters broke.

The speedometer needle jittered at 55 miles per hour. It seemed like at least 95 in the old independent—and was about as dangerous. Braces, fenders, and warped parts rattled hellishly, vying for noise with the thunderstorm.

Joe Vodich's wide, honest, Polack face squinted through the blurry windshield at the tortuous ribbon of asphalt, muddy yellow-black under the glare of his feeble headlamps.

TIRES made weird sucking noises as they squeejeed water off the flooded pavement. The rain whipped in the unprotected driver's compartment, ran down Joe Vodich's neck, dribbled off his big, flat nose.

Vodich flicked a glance at the rear-view mirror. A twin yellow blaze danced insanely there, told him another car was bearing down on him at a still greater speed than his own reckless pace.

Squawling through the storm Joe's cheap built-in radio told him the latest developments in the boldest kidnaping job since the Weyerhauser snatch:

"Police Commissioner Tim O'Hara announced early tonight that all law enforcement officers, including G-men, had been withdrawn from the case to facilitate ransom arrangements. He

intimated that he would personally make a third attempt to contact the gang who kidnaped his eight-year-old son, Tim, Jr., almost two weeks ago. Observers expressed fears that the youthful, red-haired snatch victim might have been already slain by the kidnap gang."

Muscles knotted in Joe's throat. He knew Commissioner O'Hara by sight. Vodich had met him when he was a second grade police chauffeur—before the depression and a payroll slash had ended his career and put him back in the independent hacking racket.

Joe Vodich sensed how Commissioner O'Hara must feel. His own kid was about as old as Tim O'Hara, Jr., only with unruly tow-colored locks instead of red hair.

Now maybe Commissioner O'Hara would never see his son alive again. Maybe they would find him stuffed in a lonely grave like the Lindbergh kid—

Vodich frowned at the headlights in the rear-view mirror. He took one big-boned hand from the wheel to pump the mechanical windshield wiper. After he did this he dropped his hand into the pocket of his raincoat and felt the weight of the roll of nickels he had just completed for the kid.

The car behind was bearing down on him rapidly now. He pulled his cab to the edge of the asphalt to let it pass.

It came in a hurricane of wind and splashing water heedless of the curve ahead. Water, driven like buckshot, pelted Joe Vodich's rubberized raincoat.

Huddling to avoid the deluge, honest Joe Vodich, the Nickel Nurser, caught a glimpse of the other car. Orange body and checkered top! One of the independents from the Consolidated stand! Pete Swingle's hack!

What the devil was Swingle doing out here?

Had Pop Gessner, the dispatcher, sent Swingle to the sticks to pick up the mysterious fare that Vodich had failed to locate? Pop usually gave Swingle all the gravy, like the easy pulls up Millionaires' Hill.

Then it occurred to Vodich that Swingle had been unable to find the garbled number and was trying to beat him back to town.

Vodich stepped on the gas and bawled, "Hey, Swingle! Wait a minute!"

Light spilled on the face of the rubber-coated driver of the other car as it drew alongside. To his surprise Vodich saw a hollow, raptorial face with cavernous eye sockets and a nose that drooped like a hook. That wasn't Swingle!

As if in answer to Vodich's cry the chauffeur of the checker swerved deliberately towards him. Joe swung wildly to avoid the crash. Metal ribbed and crunched in a hellish cacophony. Vodich froze onto the wheel, but with a violent wrench it jerked from his grasp.

The last picture he had, before the close-up of the oak tree, was one of the checker slewing drunkenly down the road. Then, with a dull impact, the tree shunted Vodich into the dripping underbrush.

THE wheel went soggy and the hack crashed. The windshield burst into a thousand fragments and Vodich went out cold.

It was a good thirty minutes before the cab driver regained consciousness. Limping back towards town in the battered hack he speculated on the destination of the speeding checker and the fate that had overtaken Pete Swingle.

He also speculated on the dubious possibility of credit for repairs at the Acme Garage. Maybe he'd have to plaster the hack with an auto loan shark to swing the bill.

A bright pillar of light stabbing

skyward broke his chain of thoughts. There had been an accident on the old wooden bridge leading away from the Post Road at Shady Corners intersection.

As Vodich braked to a stop and got out, his radio crackled forth with another news bulletin:

"Police Commissioner Tim O'Hara left the city late this evening for an unannounced destination. It was believed that a final attempt to contact the kidnap gang might be made under the cover of tonight's savage thunder-storm. For the return of the official's eight-year-old son the kidnapers are asking a sum of—"

Vodich cut the switch, dousing lights and radio. He could see now that an automobile had fallen part way through the undermined bridge. The creek was already swollen to flood proportions and it was only a question of minutes before the structure would be swept downstream.

Closer examination disclosed that the smashed wreck was what remained of Pete Swingle's new checkered cab. Only the circumstance that the crushed tonneau had jammed in the substructure had saved the car from plunging into the flood waters. A single headlight ray sent a piercing shaft of light into the rain-swept blackness overhead.

Vodich swung over the rail so that he could hang by one knee and extricated the mysterious chauffeur who had run him off the road. The man regained consciousness momentarily and gestured feebly at a plump leather carry-all bag inside.

Vodich retrieved, opened the bag. His eyes blinked. It was literally stuffed with sheaves of used five, ten and twenty-dollar bills. There seemed to be thousands and thousands of dollars in there, enough at least to make Joe's roll of nickels seem very paltry indeed.

It was miles either way to a telephone or hamlet and Vodich realized

that the injured man required immediate attention. Through the driving rain across the creek he could make out a square of yellow light. There was farming country over there and apparently the inhabitants of the nearest house were still awake.

Shouldering his double burden Vodich began picking his way across the creaking bridge. It was hard going through the flooded dirt road, now a quagmire, and farther to the house than Vodich had anticipated. He sweated profusely but his broad, squat frame was the product of peasant stock and seemed built for heavy burdens.

Finally he reached the porch of the farmhouse where the yellow light looked out at the storm. He stood there, anxiously ringing the mechanical bell, a dripping, hard-breathing man, ankle deep in a pool of muddy water.

As soon as the bell echoed inside the house the lights blinked out instantly. There were suggestions of movements within but they were muffled by the rain bombarding the roof incessantly. Vodich waited, his legs planted in the pool of water, holding the dead weight on his shoulder.

The injured man had not moved for some time now. Joe Vodich could no longer make out his breathing.

A voice said: "Open up inside, Blackie!"

The voice came from behind Joe Vodich. It was a sharp, tense voice.

Vodich swiveled slowly under his burden.

The speaker stood motionless in the gravel path that bisected the front yard. A snap brim felt let rain water gush over the storm lapels of a trench coat.

The man held a very large black automatic and it was pointed at Joe Vodich's belly. He examined Vodich distrustfully in the uncertain light. The hood of Vodich's one-piece, rub-

berized raincoat made recognition difficult.

The black rectangle in front of Vodich became blacker. The man in the trench coat put the gun away, walked up the rickety stairs, took the carry-all from Joe's grasp, and pushed him through the black rectangle.

Lights flashed on in the interior. Vodich's first concern was to lower his burden to a moth-eaten mohair sofa. Turning, he lifted the hood of his raincoat, said:

"Folks, this bird is hurt pretty bad. He's gotta see a doc—"

JOE VODICH left off speaking abruptly. He got very still all over. Muscles in his throat tightened.

The tableau of the farmhouse interior, the pieces of furniture and the people among them, seemed to leap out of the night, to smack Joe Vodich squarely between the eyes.

The uncarpeted floor was speckled with hundreds and hundreds of cigarette butts. The wide, hairy man who sat across an uncleared table cradled an automatic shotgun.

A very tall man with patent leather hair, pencil mustache, and green eyes leaned against the opposite wall toying with a submachine gun. The kid with orange hair and the pale, frightened face, was gagged and trussed in an arm chair.

Then there was the man who had ushered Vodich into the house.

The only sound in the room was the *drip-drip* of rain water as it fell off Joe's raincoat.

The men in the room watched him wordlessly. The man in the trench coat walked slowly towards Vodich. He had his black automatic out again now. His eyes bored icily into Vodich. He twisted the lapels of Joe's uniform coat and spat out:

"Where's Lalo?"

The automatic struck out and the barrel of it slashed Vodich across the face. Blood trickled into his eyes.

"Lalo! Lalo! The contact man. The guy with the hooked schnozzle!"

Vodich talked mechanically, with a dry, burning throat, hardly knowing why he told the man what had happened. "And so," he wound up, "I found the hack like that and this bird in it. He was worried about the bag so I brought it along."

The man in the trench coat jerked the crash victim over roughly.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "That's Lalo!" He examined the victim briefly, swore again, and said, "He's settled!"

"Good," replied the tall gang leader, his green eyes sliding from the bag of currency to Vodich. "Better check the punk, Cece. He might be Law!"

Cece frisked Vodich professionally, examining the empty wallet and taxi driver's credentials. The roll of nickels got a sneering laugh out of him. He threw the package back at Vodich. Vodich gulped and put the nickels back in the pocket of his raincoat.

"Nuthin' on him," reported Cece. "Just a lousy mouse trap driver. Anyway he looks too dumb to be a copper."

THE squat man with the shotgun spoke for the first time. He spoke in a bestial, growling tone, opining, "All coppers is dumb."

Cece crossed the room in quick, nervous strides. He seized the eight-year-old captive by the hair and, jerking his chin up, demanded, "Does this punk work for your old man, kid?"

The red-head's intelligent grey eyes searched Joe Vodich's face. The kid was trying to decide which answer would help the one man he had seen in two weeks who might be his friend. Finally he shook his head in a slow negative.

Reynaldo finished counting the bundles of currency, closed the bag.

"Looks like the red neck *liked* his

kid well enough not to cross us on the sugar. Twenty grand apiece, boys. Cece, you'll handle the car. Blackie, you know what your job is. Remember, they can't trace shotgun slugs. Give it to 'em in the back of the bean."

Blackie made a low, growling sound in his throat.

"But you're—you're not going to bump the kid, Mister—!" gasped Joe Vodich.

"Naw, you dumb Polack, we're going to leave him around so he can put the finger on us!"

"But—but I seen you guys too—"

Reynaldo's razor thin lips stretched into a wan smile and his green eyes glittered. He nodded slowly at the Nickel Nurser.

Blackie shuffled, jacked a shell into the chamber of the pump gun.

The eyes of the boy lashed stiffly to the chair were brimming pools of terror. He struggled futilely, shook his freckled head pitifully in an effort to plead with Reynaldo.

Reynaldo's thin smile was still frozen on his face. There was no mercy in his green eyes.

Joe Vodich got very still inside. He could hear his lungs squeak each time he breathed. His eyes crawled sideward in their sockets, trying to place the position of the three men in the room.

He commenced to talk in his slow, faintly Polack accent. He was never a talkative man but he had heard it said that when in a spot the thing to do was to talk fast and keep on talking.

As he talked, without knowing what he was saying, he walked towards Reynaldo and Cece. Reynaldo's smile went out and he reached instinctively for the machine gun. Cece brandished the automatic.

"Get back, punk!" Cece rasped out. He realized that he could not fire now. The dumb, terror-stricken hacker was directly between him and

Reynaldo. Cece reversed the automatic and leaped, chopping wildly with its thick, blue-metal butt.

The Nickel Nurser saw the arc of the swishing automatic. He did not try to dodge the blow. One hand was up to ward off the worst of the impact, the other jammed in the pocket of his rain coat. He couldn't go down when the gun struck him. If he did, he was all through. He knew that.

The gun fell. It seemed to slam Joe's brain loose inside his skull. Nausea rushed through his body but he fought it off, planting his thick, stout, peasant's legs in the floor. Inside his pocket his leathery palm tightened around the roll of nickels.

His fist, bulging now with the tube of coins, flew from his pocket, arced upwards. It made a flat, hollow *clink* against Cece's jaw. Cece staggered and stared out with glassy eyes. He lost hold of the automatic. Vodich heard it drop.

Joe Vodich was moving faster than he had ever moved in his life before. With his left hand he shunted the staggered gunman towards Reynaldo, flailed successfully at the light switch. As blackness washed over the room he threw the tube of coins furiously at Blackie.

Vodich went down on top of Cece's sinking body, splayed hands groping desperately for the .45. His fingers clawed at the floor, closed finally around the rough grip of the automatic.

AS HE pulled the gun towards him a terrific blast stuffed the darkness with sound. A dull red flame glowed where Blackie had been.

Cece's body rose up from an invisible impact. Something hot chewed into Joe Vodich's stout leg. Vodich released the safety on the .45, jacked the slide.

Reynaldo's voice, strident and thoroughly unnerved, yelled out,

"Hold it, you damn fool!" From Reynaldo's side of the room a round cone of light winked on, stabbing the floor.

Before the light reached him Joe Vodich pointed the automatic at a spot in the darkness twelve inches to the left of the flashlight's probing eye. He pulled the trigger. The gun bucked. He heard a groan and Reynaldo's flashlight clattered to the table.

Another blast ripped the floor as the pump gun spoke again. Joe Vodich fired at the dull red flash, but the shotgun belched on. This time its molten hail rattled perilously close.

Vodich catapulted himself towards the spot where the kid had been lashed to the rocking chair. The pain in his leg was a brake to speed and agility. He stumbled, crashed, felt the kid under him.

The shotgun went wild with a frenzy of terrific cannonades.

Joe Vodich picked up the kid and the chair, went hurtling headlong for the closed door in the rear wall. It splintered as they went through.

Buckshot sieved the dilapidated wall twice, then the firing pin of the pump gun clicked on an empty chamber. Vodich weaved back to the main room in time to see Blackie run out the front door. He fired twice but missed.

Then from the storm-lashed night came a stern "Halt!"

There was a yell. Two shots crackled from the torrential darkness and the yell twisted into a scream.

In the gravel path that bisected the front yard Joe Vodich made out a thin, spare man in an ulster-style overcoat. He was kneeling over Blackie's twitching body, a blue police positive gleaming dully in his hand.

The man arose and came slowly towards the house, without fear. He seemed preoccupied. His face was

seemy with tension. Joe Vodich recognized with difficulty the Police Commissioner, Tim O'Hara.

O'Hara stared unseeing at the two men on the floor. "My son—?" he asked.

The Nickel Nurser pointed towards the back room. "In there, Mister O'Hara. Safe and waiting for you!"

After father and son had been alone for an interval Vodich took the leather bag in to O'Hara.

"And here's the ransom money!" he announced.

COMMISSIONER O'HARA opened the bag and nodded at the bundles of currency—\$60,000 worth of it.

"It's all there, Commissioner," said Vodich brightly. "They didn't get away with a cent!"

"Damn the money, man! I've got my son back! But maybe you don't know what that means!"

Joe Vodich grinned. "Sure I do! I got one too, Commissioner! An' just about his size!" The Nickel Nurser seemed to be smiling all over.

"Yeah?" The commissioner began to smile too—a tight, Irish smile that dissolved the lines of worry creasing his lean face. "See here, are you from the same stand as that fellow—Swingle, I think—I found up the Post Road?"

"Yes, sir. Joe Vodich, No. 44. But Swingle, is he hurt?"

"Just slugged. The contact man abandoned his car and called a cab. The second taxi picked him up. I lost the trail, didn't get a lead until I saw the wreck on the bridge. Tell me, Vodich, you recognized me the first thing. How' Pictures in the papers?"

"No, sir," replied the cabbie. "You see I used to drive for the department. That was before they cut the payroll and sent me back to hacking."

"Pretty tough racket, isn't it?"

"You said it! Plenty! Too many nickel tips, Commissioner."

"Vodich, you can forget about the nickels," said the Police Commissioner, arising. "There's a twelve-cylinder front-drive job the department furnishes me for transportation standing the other side of that wrecked bridge. How would you like to give up hacking and chauffeur it around? It pays a first-rate salary."

"Oh, boy! Would I!" Joe Vodich's grin widened. Then it got sheepish and his face turned scarlet as he blushed with embarrassment. He glanced self-consciously at the coin-strewn shambles, said, "So help me, Commissioner. I forgot. Them nickels! Gotta save 'em for the kid."

*Next Month: THE MARK OF MR. FINIS, a Novelet of
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Murphy grabbed for the

HOUSE

CHAPTER I

TWO GO DOWN

IT WASN'T quite midnight yet, so the main crowd hadn't come to Kelso's 22 Club. Things were going smoothly. There was a murmur from the roulette tables, slightly louder talk around the dice tables. Chemin de fer was about deserted.

Pete the Parson left the Number

Kim Kelso, Two-Fisted Gambler, Risks

the Swanky Corridors of the 22 Club!

A Complete
Novelet



remaining gun as Kelso looked on, outwardly calm

OF HOMICIDE

One roulette table and headed toward Kim Kelso. Pete's nose, as thin and pointed as a draughtman's triangle, preceded him like the prow of a ship. Above it, his black little eyes were beads of wariness. He got to Kelso, near the doorway.

"Everything okay so far, Boss?"

Kim Kelso, tall, slender as a rapier is slender, nodded his dark head with the white splash down its center. His dark eyes were as

watchful as the black ones of Pete the Parson, his nimble trouble-shooter.

"Keep your neck in, Pete. I never thought I'd reach the limit of my drag in Chicago, but that fool killing in here last month strained it plenty."

Pete nodded. "Spain won't be here tonight, will she?"

"She will," said Kelso grimly.

"What the hell, Boss!"

His Life to Back a Desperate Hunch!

"I phoned her," said Kelso, flicking at the lapel of his immaculate Tuxedo. "I told her not to come. She knows Ted Ortley gets out today as well as I do. And she knows Ortley said he'd kill her—and she knows Ortley knows the Twenty-two Club is one of her choice hangouts. But she's coming tonight, anyway."

"Why?" gaped Pete. "Just to be ornery?"

"I don't know," said Kelso slowly. "She acted damned funny. I asked her not to come. She said she had to. I told her I'd keep the door locked on her if she came. She said she'd scream in the street. I told her I'd cram her into a taxi and ride off with her. She said she'd have the place raided if I did—and she could do it, too, after the Guido murder here last month. So—she'll be here if she wants to be such a fool."

"**M**AYBE she won't show after all," said Pete hopefully.

"Maybe she won't. And maybe Ortley won't. But you'd better stay on the door, Pete. Let Spain in. But if Ortley comes around—"

"I'll keep him out if I have to call the Marines to do it," nodded Pete the Parson. Kelso turned, satisfied.

Pete followed his draughtsman's triangle nose out the door of the huge second-floor room, down the dim, quiet hall to the stairs, and down the stairs to where six-foot-four Jack Murphy stood by the street door. Pete's memory was one reason why Kelso had hired him, a year ago. Murphy, who had seen Ortley several times, might forget him; Pete, who had only seen him once, would not.

The 22 Club, with a small layout, was the most exclusive in Chicago, with the highest limit and the biggest political drag. It was run honestly save for racketeer promoters and business pirates whose profits

were crooked, though legal. From these Kelso mercilessly milked thousands; the rest found the games on the square.

A young fellow with hair as light and slick as taffy, and with glazed blue eyes set too close together over a classic nose, came in. He nodded profusely to Kelso, and Kelso did not bother to nod back.

"Has Spain changed her mind about coming here?" Kelso asked bleakly.

"I wouldn't know," said the man.

"If you don't, who does? You're her gigolo, aren't you?"

The man's fair skin reddened, then paled. "Some day you'll go too far, Kelso."

"And some day," said Kelso stonily, "one of the boys that Spain shakes down will get wise to the fact that you're the man behind her—like Ted Ortley did—and you'll go to the morgue."

The man only sneered, and strolled on to a table. Kim Kelso stared after him with cold eyes. He loathed Tony Harper, who took from Spain the badger and blackmail money she raked in. Kelso would have barred the 22 Club to both Spain and Tony if it hadn't been for that confounded drag of Spain's. She could put him out of business if she wanted to—and she insisted on coming to the club because it was rich hunting ground. However, maybe she'd get a rush of brains to the head at the last minute and not come tonight—

Kelso turned, and swallowed an oath. "Hello, Spain," he said steadily to the girl who had just come in from the deserted hallway. She was petite, with eyes like ripe olives, skin like cream and hair like jet. She had a figure that had made a quick fortune for the burlesque man in whose theater she had introduced herself to Chicago. She laughed at Kelso, showing white, even teeth that were perfectly formed and yet were somehow not attractive.

"Hello, Kim," she said, defiantly.

"Made your will?" Kelso inquired. Highlights glinted on her glossy black hair as she tilted her head pertly.

"You'll keep Ortley out if he's crazy enough to come."

She too went to a table. But not to the table over which Tony Harper's slick yellow head was bent. Only a few knew of their connection. In the same room together, they always pretended to be unacquainted.

Kelso's dark eyes followed the girl. "Spain" Juarda. Probably no more Spanish than Kelso, but she palmed herself off as such. No longer a dancer—she had found it more profitable to bleed rich suckers. Such a one had been Ted Ortley, Kelso knew.

TWENTY-FIVE, with a millionaire background, Ortley's father had killed himself in '29, after losing practically all the Ortley fortune in the stock market crash. Ortley had come out with about a hundred thousand, and with a mind sobered and sharpened by the break. He'd had a swell idea—a new soft drink that could be financed for his hundred thousand. He stood a chance of boosting the Ortley remnant back into a fortune again. But then he had met Spain.

She got him, as she got most men. When she was through with him he hadn't a dime—and had signed several checks he had no business to sign. He found out how Spain had treated him—and had turned over his money to a man she was two-timing him with—just before he went to jail. He'd been completely off his head about the girl. He raved that he'd kill her the minute he got out. Then he'd had sense enough to shut his mouth. Now, today, he was out. Paroled.

"Hello, Kelso."

Kelso looked down several inches

into the eyes of a plump man of forty, with greying hair and a ruddy face. He looked like a bank executive, tanned from Florida golf and Bermuda fishing. Which was precisely what he was.

"Hello, Mr. Meller," Kelso replied quietly to the vice-president in charge of real estate bonds for the Southern Trust and Savings Bank.

Several more people, men and girls walked past. Kelso didn't pay much attention to them. Jack Murphy, at the street door, knew who should come in and who should be kept out.

"Is Spain here?" Meller asked with poorly repressed eagerness. Kelso knew inner, sardonic amusement. Bad for a banker to come to such as the 22 Club. Worse for him, a married man, to meet Spain. The Southern's second vice-president would regret the combination of circumstances some day. But it was none of Kelso's business.

"Oh, I see her, over there," Meller answered his own question. He left Kelso and walked toward Spain, at the end table. Kelso shrugged. Well, Spain gave the boys a merry chase before the bite came—

Kelso suddenly stared harder in the direction Meller was taking. The object of the club owner's gaze was a girl who had apparently passed him while Meller was with him at the door. She stood next to Spain, as blond and blue-eyed as Spain was dark. She was in a white satin evening dress that was not expensive and yet looked regal on her slim, perfect body.

Kelso shook his head a little, puzzled. The girl had never been in the 22 Club, as far as he knew, and yet he felt that he'd met her before. The small, straight nose, the delicate, level eyebrows, the firm, rounded chin—

It was the chin that rang the bell. He'd known a chin like that, eyebrows and nose like that, on a man.

And the same combination had peered at him several times from the countenance of a young girl.

Kelso walked toward the table, frowning faintly. Spain and Meller were talking animatedly together. At least Meller was animated; Spain seemed silent and a bit unresponsive. Kelso slipped his hand under the elbow of the gorgeous blond in white satin.

"You're Sophie Stratford."

SHE sighed and shook her head. "Gosh, Kim, I was hoping you wouldn't recognize me. You haven't seen me since I was fifteen—and that was ten years ago."

"What's a gambler's daughter doing in a gambling room?" said Kelso steadily. "I'm glad to see you—but not here. As Manny Stratford's daughter, you ought to know better."

"Dad won plenty in other people's places before he died," Sophie said defiantly.

"Sure. Fighting fire with fire. Playing crooked against the crooks. But *you* can't do that. Why the devil are you here?"

"Because I know your place is on the square," said the girl, looking down at the table. The wheel was spinning. She watched number twenty-two. Kelso grimaced. If he had a dollar for every sap who came in here and took twenty-two on the roulette table, just because the name of the place was the 22 Club—

"I want to get a little money," said Sophie, eyes and voice trying to be light, amused, but only succeeding in sounding vaguely terrified.

"Ever gambled before?"

"Good heavens! I've played everything there is to play, thousands of times, with Dad."

"In his home and for nothing," Kelso said. "Have you gambled in public, for real money, before?"

"N-no." Sophie's blond head came

up. There was some of Manny Stratford's granite in her deep blue eyes. "You're treating me like a child, Kim. If I want to put some pin money on a wheel, it's my own business. Just an evening's fun—"

The wheel stopped. The little ivory ball stopped in a slot. The slot was not numbered twenty-two. The girl's eyes followed the three chips being raked in from that number on the board.

"Don't try to kid me," said Kelso. "You haven't any pin money to lose. When Manny died he left you a swell memory, and that's all. Working in a Michigan Avenue dress shop, aren't you?"

"See here, Kim Kelso—"

"I just heard that the other day," he said calmly. "I meant to drop in for a visit with you—see if there was anything I could do for Manny's girl."

Sophie wordlessly put two chips on twenty-two. "You need money," Kelso hazarded, shrewd dark eyes on her blue ones. "So you come here with your fifty cents in savings. Don't you know you never win when you really need it?"

Sophie said nothing. But her red lips were set in a hard, straight line and her cheeks were dark.

"Your father was my oldest friend," Kelso said quietly. "He taught me all I know, and he set me up in business. He was better than an uncle to me. How much do you want, Sophie?"

Sophie melted a little at that. "You're sweet, Kim. Nicer even than I remembered you as a kid. But go away now, and let me travel the road of sin."

She laughed, and something about it hurt Kelso badly, though he didn't show it. He seldom showed any emotion.

"How much do you need to win?" He put it another way.

"Oh, about five thousand dollars," she said.

"There's five thousand at the cashier's cage for you if you want it," he said. Then he stopped. Pete was signaling him from the door.

"Excuse me," said Kelso. He went to the door quickly, but not appearing to be in a hurry.

"What's up, Pete?"

"Jack and I just turned a guy away from the door," said Pete, mouth sliding the words out cornerwise under his thin triangle of a nose. "Tall guy, young, red hair with a kind of curl in it almost like a dame's hair. But he was all man, and he looked white and mad."

"Ted Ortley!"

Pete shrugged. "I only saw Ortley once. The other times he was in the papers. But he ain't hard to spot, is he?"

"No. His size, and his hair— What did he do, Pete?"

"He went down the walk to the corner, and that's all I know, Boss."

"Think he means to hang around outside till Spain leaves?"

"I couldn't say," Pete shrugged. "But he packs a rod. His hand moved an inch toward his shoulder a couple times, like he was thinkin' of turning it on me and just comin' in."

"At his shoulder! The boy's come down. He was society. Only dicks and mugs have shoulder holsters."

"Guess a year in the can made a mug out of him, Boss."

Kelso chewed his lip. "Stroll down the walk, Pete. Try to locate him. There'll be murder if he gets half a chance."

Pete left. Kelso turned and Spain was at his elbow. She stepped to the threshold.

"Better stay in the room, Spain," Kelso said tonelessly.

"Ordering people around again, Kim?" she cracked back.

"Ortley's outside." Even Spain, hard as she was lovely, could pale at that.

"No!"

"The Parson just saw him at the door. Turned him away."

Spain bit her red lip. "I'll stay on the floor, Kim. I'll just go down the hall a minute."

He watched her go past him and turn to the left, toward the lounge. Then he went back to the end table where Sophie was, and saw Tony Harper walk toward the door. Harper went out, within two minutes of Spain's exit. Kelso's lips twisted. The lounge intimation was a stall, then. Spain had wanted a word in private with Harper.

"How you coming, Sophie?" he asked the blond. She turned her face toward his, and it was strained.

"Not too well," she admitted.

"There's still money in the cashier's cage."

KELSO felt a hand on his arm. He turned. Meller was there. The club owner stepped off a bit with the older man.

"Kelso, Spain's told me some things about young Ortley. And I knew him slightly. A hot-headed young fool. Dangerous, I think."

"Well?" said Kelso, after a pause.

"Well," said Meller, eyes steady on Kelso's, "I saw you talking with your man a minute ago, and you were frowning. Was it about Ortley? Did he have the foolhardiness to show up here tonight?"

"Pete's always talking over something with me," Kelso evaded. "There are continual details to keep straightened out in a place like this."

Meller looked hard at him, then started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" said Kelso quickly.

"Out to see where Spain went and be sure she's all right," Meller said.

"She's okay—" Kelso stopped, and shrugged as Meller went on. Let the banker find the two together in the hall. It was all right with him.

Though Spain and Tony would probably be alert enough to turn their backs to each other with the opening of the door.

He turned back to Sophie, saw her put two chips on twenty-two. Her last chips. Her eyes were blue holes in her face. She must want money very badly—

The door to the hall opened abruptly. Kelso caught the unwonted swiftness of the move from the corners of his eyes. He looked more squarely. Meller was in the hall, face as white as a sheet. He beckoned the gambler, and Kelso walked swiftly toward him. The truth was banging intuitively at Kelso's brain as he walked. And then Meller let him have it.

"My God—Spain and some young man!" he whispered through blue lips. "Out here in the hall."

Kelso stepped out, closing the door of the big room behind him, and turned right, toward the stairs. Meller grabbed his arm.

"No. That's the way I faced when I first came out. I didn't see them for a minute or two— The other way."

Kelso had wheeled long before the finish of the words. Four long steps took him to them—two bodies on the dim hall floor. One was Spain, and the other was Tony Harper. They were stone dead, shot through the back of the head.

CHAPTER II

OUT THE WINDOW



FOR the second time in a month, the police were swarming in the 22 Club. They herded the frightened, apprehensive patrons together in the big gambling room—stripped of apparatus before the squad cars got there. They watched the front and rear doors.

They went over the hall in the vi-

cinity of the bodies almost with a microscope.

Detective Fahey, Homicide, was in charge. That was Kelso's tough luck; Fahey hated Kelso, and made no bones about it. Fahey—big, fast-moving, with a jaw that was pugnacious to the point of vindictiveness—stared in cool triumph at the gambler.

"I guess you can wash up and go into an honest business after this, Kelso. The second murder in this joint inside of thirty days! First Guido, that rat of a blackmailer, killed by 'persons unknown' in your washroom. Now Tony Harper and Spain Juarda, a couple more blackmailers. I can just about hold you right now as an accomplice to murder!"

"Try and do it," said Kelso steadily. But he wasn't feeling so steady.

Fahey turned to his work, summing up what had been learned so far. Spain and Harper lay on their faces with their feet toward the lounge at the left end of the second-floor hall, and their heads toward the door of the main gambling room. As they were shot in the back of the head, this meant that the shots had come from the direction of the lounge. Fahey went back there. Agnes, Kelso's colored maid in charge of the lounge, cowered before the big detective.

"You better change your mind and talk!" Fahey grated. "There's a window in this lounge. It faces on the street. A guy climbed in that window, waited at the door of the room, and plugged these two with silenced guns when they showed in the hall, didn't he?"

"No, suh! I tol' you, no man was in this room. Not ever. An' I been in heah solid from ten, when the place opens, to now."

"You're lying," cracked Fahey. "Was the guy that came in the window a big fella with red hair that

had a kind of wave to it? Or was it somebody else? Talk!"

"Nobody came in," insisted Agnes shivering but firm.

"Look," said Kelso. "There's no mystery about this, Fahey. There's no sense in keeping my customers here and giving everybody the rubber hose. You know who did it as well as I do. It was Ortley."

"Yeah?" sneered Fahey.

"Yeah. Spain bled the kid of his last dime. Spain got him to write checks on a nonexistent bank account and was responsible for his going to jail. On top of that, she was careless enough to let Ortley know that she'd had a real sweetie on the side all the time. Ortley swore he'd kill her, and today he got out of the pen, paroled after a year."

"I got to be thorough," said Fahey, grinning bleakly.

Kelso looked at him coldly. "Pete," he called down the hall. Pete the Parson came from where he'd been standing at the head of the stairs.

"Tell Fahey who you saw at the door just before Spain and Tony were killed."

"I saw young Ortley," said Pete. "Wavy red hair and all. He tried to crash in, and Jack Murphy and I kept him out."

"Mr. Meller, will you please come here a minute?" Kelso said, at the door of the big room.

The banker stepped past the two uniformed men at the door.

"Tell Detective Fahey what Spain told you about Ortley."

Meller faced Fahey. "I—I was fairly well acquainted with Miss Juarda. I hope that will be kept quiet, Officer. I hope this whole thing can be kept reasonably quiet! If it comes out that I was here tonight—my position with the Southern Bank—it's such an absurdly conservative and conventional institution—"

Meller moistened his lips. "Miss Juarda told me about young Ortley's parole from the penitentiary today. And she said she was afraid of him. She said that through a series of misunderstandings, young Ortley had conceived the idea that she was responsible for all his troubles. Even for his jail sentence. And she said she was afraid he'd try to track her down and kill her."

"So now you got it, copper," Pete the Parson said. "Ted Ortley came here tonight. A few minutes after he was turned from the door, Spain and Tony get shot. Puzzle: Guess who shot 'em."

FAHEY grunted, and turned to Meller. "You're the one that found 'em out here dead, aren't you?"

Meller nodded.

"All right. Tell us about it."

"I saw Miss Juarda go to the door of the ga— of the big room there. A minute after, I saw the young man go, too. But I didn't pay any attention to him. I didn't even know she knew him. I started after her—"

"Why?" Fahey demanded.

"Because I knew of Ortley's threat. I was afraid she might be indiscreet enough to leave the building for a short time. I wanted to advise her not to. When I got to the hall, I started toward the stairs. Then, as I neared the stairs, I saw the two in the other direction. On the floor, like this, dead."

Kelso stared at Fahey. "Well?"

"Well—" shrugged Fahey. "I got a call out for young Ortley, haven't I? He'll be picked up at sight. But until he is, and until he's confessed, I got to be thorough, don't I?"

Kelso knew what that meant. Deliberately, with stony glee, the detective would harry and hold and bully the guests of the 22 Club. He was going to fix it so no one would ever visit a Kelso house again—even assuming Kelso could ride this

second murder storm and emerge with a shred of his "pull" left to guard him against raids.

But Kelso's impotent anger did not show on his face. He only shrugged, and went with Meller to the door of the big room. There, as he was about to turn back to the hall again, Sophie Stratford's almost imperceptible signal caught his eye. He went to her. Manny Stratford's daughter was as pale as her white satin dress. Even her throat and breast seemed bloodless.

"Kim!" she whispered. "What are they saying out there? That Ted Ortley did it?"

"There isn't much doubt of it," Kelso replied. They were standing a little apart from the fifty or sixty others in the room. "But how is it you know about Ortley? Did you ever meet him?"

Sophie stared up at his face out of eyes that seemed to have lost all their color.

"I'm engaged to him," she said simply.

KELSO was silent for a dozen seconds. "You said—" he murmured incredulously.

"I'm engaged to him. I met him two years ago. We were going to be married. Then he went to—*to jail.*"

"But Sophie—" Kelso moistened his lips and started again. "You knew about Spain?"

"I knew all about her. Ted himself told me, at first. Later, lots of others saw to it that I knew what was happening. There are plenty of cats in the world, Kim."

"You knew—and it made no difference to you?"

"Of course it made a difference!" Sophie whispered fiercely. "I could have killed her. I could have killed myself. But all the time I knew Ted loved me, and hated himself. Spain was something outside of love. She was a sickness with him.

He got over it, but a little too late. He went behind bars—"

"He went swearing he'd murder Spain."

Sophie nodded. "Ted's temper is—rather terrible, Kim. But I know he didn't kill her tonight. I met him at the station today, when he came from the penitentiary. I spent the afternoon and evening with him, up till nearly ten o'clock. I got him to promise he wouldn't touch her—at least tonight."

"What were you going to do about tomorrow and the next day?" Kelso said. "Hold him back by the coat-tails?"

"Tomorrow I was going to get him out of Chicago. To Lexington, Kentucky, to make a new start. A friend of Dad's has a small automobile agency there. He said he'd sell out to Ted, with five thousand dollars as first payment."

"So that's why you wanted five grand tonight!"

"That's why," she said. "To give the two of us another start, in another city. And, oh—how much more I need the money now! To take to him so he can get away! If he's caught, he'll go to the chair as surely as day will come tomorrow. And he didn't murder Spain and her man!"

"But Sophie," Kelso said gently, "he was seen here tonight. Seen at the door by Pete. And Pete has a memory like a roll of fine film."

"He couldn't have been here! He promised me he'd wait for me at—where he's staying!" Sophie's voice was wild, though she managed to keep it inaudible from the rest. "Kim, I tell you he didn't do murder! And he's got to get away. Will you let me have money, now, so I can take it to him?"

"You couldn't get out of here," said Kelso absently. His thoughts were running in squirrel cages. "Nobody can. Fahey'll see to that."

"I've got to. Kim, as God sees

me, Ted didn't kill Spain tonight. I *know!* But he'll die in the chair for it just the same, if he's caught."

"And it means—quite a bit to you, Sophie?"

"I'll die, too, when the switch is thrown," she said simply. "I'll keep on breathing and walking around, but it won't mean anything."

Kelso looked covertly around, saw that they were still out of earshot of everyone if they kept their voices down.

"Where can he be reached?" he said suddenly.

"What?" in a startled gasp.

"Where's he staying? Where were you going to take the five grand to him—if you got it?"

"Kim—why do you want to know that? You wouldn't—"

"Tell the police? No, my dear. I want to see him, that's all," Kelso said patiently. She stared at him, eyes enormous.

"I know quite a little about people," Kelso said. "I want a look at Ortley, and a word with him. I'll hand over the five thousand to him if I'm even half convinced he kept his promise to you tonight. Though Lord knows who else could conceivably have killed Spain and Tony. Now, what's the address?"

SOPHIE whispered it to him. Duke Hotel, North Rush Street, registered under the name of Anderson.

"But Kim, you said no one could possibly leave here!"

"I wasn't thinking of myself," Kelso shrugged. "I think I could manage it, all right."

He walked away from her toward the cash cage, disregarding her smothered protests, seeing only her face. There was a kind of glory in her face—

With five thousand dollars in century notes in his Tuxedo coat pocket, Kelso walked down the hall toward a small room in the rear—a room kept carefully locked.

"Where're *you* going?" Fahey snapped, coming to him instantly.

"Down to my safe," Kelso said smoothly. "I've got a little dough in my pocket I want to put in the safe."

"I'll have a look at that 'dough'," said Fahey, "and at the room you're going to!"

"What's that matter? Afraid I'm hiding the murder gun?"

"I wouldn't know. But I'll take no chances."

"You wouldn't. Come along," said Kelso indifferently.

He opened the door of the rear room. The chamber had only three pieces of furniture in it. Desk, chair, and a safe. Kelso strode toward the safe, with Fahey right beside him. Kelso seemed to see Manny Stratford's shrewd, raggy, whimsical face floating over the safe. Thoughts assumed unspoken word-form in Kelso's mind. Exit smiling, Manny—

He turned without a flicker of warning, and swung his right fist from his waist. It crashed on Fahey's jaw with a sound that could have been heard clear out in the hall, and Kelso leaped for the window. He threw it up and slithered onto the platform of the fire-escape outside.

Fahey went down; but he was tough, and he hadn't been entirely unprepared for some such move. He got to his knees, swaying, and dragged out his gun. Its roaring cough jarred the room. Kelso got down the escape untouched. He looked up, saw Fahey's head outlined in the window, heard another shot.

The slug ricocheted off the iron of the fire-escape with an almost human whine. Then Kelso was gone, black suit merging with the blackness of the alley—away from Fahey, all right, but from now on the object of solicitous hunting by all of Chicago's police force.

CHAPTER III

RED—TWO KINDS



HE Duke Hotel, on Rush Street, was a pretty shady hangout. Kelso hated to think of Sophie visiting anyone in such a joint. But he knew she'd have visited Ortley in a far worse dump than the Duke Hotel. She advertised her feeling for the kid on her face, in her voice, in her eyes.

Kelso sighed. This was going to be tough on the girl. Any way you played it, she was crazy about—a murderer. Kelso didn't see how Ortley could possibly be innocent. Pete the Parson's memory was phenomenal, and Pete had seen Ortley at the 22 Club door. There was only the faint possibility that Ortley had gone to the club to get Spain, and had been forestalled by someone else equally anxious to rub out the temptress and her partner. But—who?

Kelso shook his head. Nobody. Ortley was *It*; no getting away from that. The club owner went into the lobby of the Duke, bareheaded, in Tuxedo without an overcoat, though it was a cold March night. He prepared to play drunk in front of the desk clerk. But there wasn't any clerk. The small, dingy key-desk was unattended. Kelso suspected you only got the clerk by ringing for him. Otherwise the shabby little lobby of the place was deserted, so tenants could feel they could come and go as they pleased, without observation. It was that kind of hotel.

Kelso leaned across the desk and looked at a fly-specked register. The name Anderson had room 402 after it. He went up to the fourth floor in a little automatic elevator that wheezed and screeched.

Outside 402, he listened at the door for a moment, and heard

guarded movement within. Was Ortley packing for a getaway? If so, the man must feel pretty hopeless about it, for he couldn't have much cash with him. Kelso patted his pocket. Minutes ago he had decided to give Ortley the five thousand without strings or questions. Spain and Harper had been rotten. And Ted Ortley had had plenty of provocation for murder.

Kelso tapped at the door. The movement in the room halted instantly.

"Who's there?" from a low voice.

"Kim Kelso," Kelso whispered through the panel. "You've been at my place. You know me. I'm from Sophie—"

The door was opened just then. The light had been turned out in the room, and Kelso couldn't see very well. He saw a big man, face white in the dimness; saw dark red hair with a slight wave in it.

"Ortley—" he began. Then the ceiling seemed to fall on him, and he went down to his hands and knees across the threshold, with darkness around him that was filled with nausea.

The blackness seemed only a little lightened at first by a flood of light following the click of a switch. The sound of the door being shut seemed to come from a long way off. Then Kelso's head began to clear a little.

"Ortley, you fool—" he mumbled hoarsely, getting to his knees. Then he stopped.

The big red-haired fellow facing him with a gun in his hand—the barrel of which had just cracked down on his skull—was not Ted Ortley. He was Ortley's size and build. He had red hair with a slight wave to it, almost as though it had been marcelled. But his face was no more like Ortley's than Kelso's was.

The club owner's hand touched the top of his head. Blood was

streaking the white plume in his thick black hair.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded. Red-Hair had his hand on his gun trigger as though he didn't know whether to squeeze it or not—with odds on the affirmative.

"You're not Ortley," Kelso began.

"No, I'm not Ortley," said the man.

"But you were at the Twenty-two Club a while ago," said Kelso, blinking to clear his vision. "Yes, it must have been you—"

"Shut up," said Red. "I gotta think."

HE stared at Kelso, face wrinkling a little. And Kelso stared back, less and less perplexed. It simply could not be coincidence that a man who looked so much like Ted Ortley could have tried to get in the 22 Club at about the time Ortley might have been expected to arrive. This must have been arranged, with the man made up enough like Ortley to fool whoever was at the club door.

Had Ortley, held by his promise to Sophie Stratford "not to touch Spain," hired someone else to do the job? But that didn't make sense. Why would Ortley have someone else impersonate him in murder? Why not get the most different-looking man he could find—

"Who hired you to play Ted Ortley and frame him for murder?" he rapped out suddenly. Red stared at him, forehead wrinkling more sharply.

"Will you shut up?" he snarled. Then he shook his head. "Why couldn't you have come a little later, after I'd gone?"

Kelso ignored that. "How did you get into the Twenty-two Club? The back door's always locked at night. The room off the escape is kept locked. I don't think you came in the lounge window—"

"I didn't go into your joint," Red barked. "I just walked to the door and walked away again. I got five bills for just walkin' to the door—and for something else I gotta do in a minute."

"Who gave you the five Cs?"

Red didn't pay any attention to that.

"I can't ride you outta here and give it to you in the country," he complained, "because I didn't come here in a car. I hate to just open you up here and leave you lay, because it may spoil the picture later. But I guess I'll hafta do that last, anyway."

So the man had been hired for five hundred dollars to palm himself off as Ortley, and for "something else!"

"Where's Ortley?" Kelso snapped. "What did you do with the kid?" He spoke as though *he* had the upper hand.

"What's it to you?" snarled Red. "You won't be talkin' to him! Yeah, I got to fix you and lam. I wasn't paid enough dough for anything any more risky."

Thoughts were percolating swiftly in Kelso's brain. But chief among them was the ironical one that now, with a gun leveled at his chest and a finger twitching at the trigger, he knew who had killed Spain and Harper! He couldn't even guess at the motive, but he knew who had done it.

"Look," he said slowly, getting to his feet, stalling for time, trying to live a little longer. "You don't have to kill me. I'll keep my mouth shut."

Red thought that over for a few seconds. Kelso's feet moved a little, with his weight on his left foot and his right shifting a bit in its patent-leather pump.

"You wouldn't keep your mouth shut," Red decided, with a shrewdness unlooked for in a heavy-faced, professional gunman. "You came

here to help Ortley. You wouldn't stay quiet later on a murder frame against him."

"You got five hundred for tonight's work," said Kelso. "I'll give you ten grand to turn around while I walk out the door."

Red shook his head with an air of decisiveness.

"No dice. I'm a murder accomplice. Ten grand ain't enough to keep me out of the chair—"

With no warning at all, while the man was talking, his finger tightened on the trigger. No warning? Well, it wouldn't have been to most men, but Kim Kelso was a gambler. He had seen many times, in men's eyes, the slight pupil-dilation that accompanies a fast and important decision.

His right foot shot forward and up just a half second before Red's gun barked. His loosened right shoe flashed across the wary ten feet of distance Red had kept. The shoe probably wouldn't have hit Red, and certainly it wouldn't have hurt him if it had. But it seemed to be flying right for his face, and no man on earth can avoid ducking a little in such a circumstance. Red's slug spat into the wall two feet to Kelso's right. And then the club owner was on him.

KELSO'S was a sedentary life, and he was forty pounds lighter than the man with the red hair. But for years he had spent his afternoons in gymnasiums, and now he was fighting for his life.

He got Red's gun wrist with his left hand, sent his right smashing into the man's face. Red rocked backward and in the momentary slackness of his grip, Kelso twisted the gun out of his hand. It cracked to the floor. Then Red's malletlike fist caught Kelso above the ear in a wild swing.

Kelso fell to hands and knees, but he fell in the direction of the gun

Red had dropped. Red bellowed with a broken knuckle and kicked savagely at Kelso's head. Kelso caught his ankle, pulled, and Red came down with a jar that shook the floor.

In the hall someone was shouting now, and the sound of running feet came plainly to Kelso's ears. They did to Red's, too, and he went wild in his anxiety to get out of the place while there was yet time. He lashed out at Kelso with fists and feet. Kelso managed to duck some of the blows, parried most of the rest, and finally got the opening he wanted: a clear shot at Red's jaw. His right crashed solidly home. Red reeled backward, and Kelso got the gun.

"Stay where you are," Kelso grated.

Red gathered big shoulders for a lunge forward.

"I don't want to kill you," Kelso said. "Stop—"

But the red-haired man had gone crazy. The chair was staring him in the face as an accomplice to murder. He charged blindly. Sighing, Kelso shot twice. And when the sound had died away, he turned from the red-haired man without another look. Kelso was a marksman; he didn't have to check on those two shots.

He went to a door in the right wall, opened it, and saw a bathroom. More, he saw a huddled body on the floor of the bathroom, with a little blood coming from hair almost as red, trickling brightly on the white-tiled floor. It was Ortley; and he was knocked out, deeply unconscious.

Far away, the scream of a police siren sounded. Kelso shrugged. That was all right. He knew where he was going now, what he was going to do. He splashed water in young Ortley's face.

The kid didn't move. He'd been slugged hard. His face was relaxed,

almost like the face of a child. There was hard experience written there, lines of suffering engraved from tough breaks endured since he'd lost his millionaire-playboy background. There was good, solid strength there, too.

Kelso splashed the water again, from the cold-water faucet, and in a moment or so, Ortley stirred. Then, with Kelso helping him, he sat up. His eyes rested foggily on the gambler, then narrowed a little.

"I know you. At least I think I do. You're—"

"Kim Kelso, owner of the Twenty-two Club."

"Yes— Twenty-two Club. Yes— Spain hung out there—" He tried to get to his feet and couldn't.

"Why are you here?" Kelso asked him.

"I came from Sophie Stratford."

ORTLEY clutched his arm. "From Sophie! Why didn't she come herself? Why are you here instead? What's happened?"

"Murder's happened," said Kelso. "Spain and Tony Harper were shot through the head at my club a little while ago."

"Good!" said Ortley. Then: "But who did it?"

"You didn't?" Kelso murmured.

"Me? I don't remember anything since about eleven o'clock! I was slugged by a chap with red hair when I opened my door to his knock." He looked at his wrist-watch. "Why—I've been out for two hours! My God, my head's sore— Don't they know who killed Spain and Harper?"

"A man of about your height and build, with your kind of red hair, tried to get in at the front door just before they were shot," said Kelso.

Ortley struggled with that for a few seconds in his cloudy brain. Then he exclaimed aloud.

"A frame-up! I said I'd kill

Spain, and everybody knows it! Are they hunting for me?"

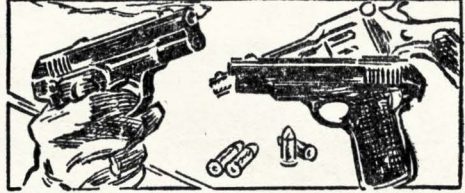
Kelso nodded.

"Then I've got to get out of here, damn quick!"

There was a banging at the hall door then. "Open up, here!"

"It's the police," whispered Ortley. "I've got to—"

There was a window in the bathroom. He got to it in a sudden



move over the bathtub, and threw it open. Kelso grabbed his legs and grabbed him back.

"Let me go, you fool!"

"Stick around," said Kelso. "It's a dumb stunt to run."

"Let me go, I say!" Ortley struggled desperately. "Kelso, let me go or I'll kill you."

"Ortley," Kelso said evenly, "sit down and relax, or I'll knock you down. You're going back to the Twenty-two Club."

"Back there? Where the police are with the dead bodies of two people I swore I'd kill?" Ortley's voice rose in frenzy above the banging on the hall door. "Damn you, you're in with the police!"

He swung heavily for Kelso's face. Kelso ducked, regretfully knocked the kid off his still wobbly pins, and then the door splintered open.

"In the bathroom, there! Come out with your hands up!"

Kelso walked out, Tuxedo not too mussed up, looking absurdly debonaire. He saw three plainclothes men. One of them he knew—Detective Vaughan.

"Well, I'll be!" Vaughan exclaimed. "Kelso! There's a warrant out for your arrest."

"There should be one for the guy

you'll find in there, too," Kelso said, jerking his head toward the bathroom.

Then— "Yours?" Vaughan said, jerking his squarish head toward the dead man with the red hair on the floor.

"Mine," said Kelso. "Self-defense."

The other two men came out half dragging and half carrying Ortley.

"I'll say there's a call out for him!" Vaughan snapped. "Ortley! Wanted for killing two people at the Twenty-two Club! This is my lucky night."

He started toward the door. Ortley stared with hate and contempt beyond words at Kelso.

"Okay, we'll ride 'em to Headquarters," Vaughan said.

"Not to Headquarters," Kelso contradicted. "Back to my club."

"Orders are to take you to Headquarters—"

"Look," Kelso said. "Fahey, in charge of this investigation, is at the club. I want to see him, and I want Ortley to go with me. I want to tell Fahey who really killed Spain and Harper."

"Orders say Headquarters," repeated Vaughan woodenly.

"You damn fool," Kelso said. "The killer's at the club right now! Take us back there before he gets away."

Vaughan rubbed at his jaw. Kelso's manner was as convincing as it was urgent. Finally he nodded.

"The club it is. Come on down to the squad car. Harry, stay with this red-haired stiff."

Ortley stared at Kelso with bleak eyes.

"I might have got away back there, Kelso," he said. "You stopped me. And now you're having me taken to the bodies of two people that everybody in Chicago is sure I murdered. You'd better know who the killer is! It's *my* life you're gambling with now!"

CHAPTER IV

JUST A HUNCH



EVERYBODY was still at the 22 Club. Fahey, with grim relish, had refused to let a soul leave. He faced Kelso and Ortley with stony exultation in his eyes.

"So you two *were* in this together!" he said. "I thought so all along. And you, Kelso, tried to lam and got picked up! Where'd you catch him, Vaughan?"

"Duke Hotel. Ortley took a room there under the name of Anderson. There's a dead man back in that room. Kelso's. He admits it. A guy with red hair."

"Red hair?" said Fahey, glancing at Ortley's dark red top-knot.

"Yeah. The guy looks a lot like Shooey Louis, one of Malone's old guns. Only if it is, Shooey must have used henna on his hair and put a wave in it."

"No matter. You caught these two before they could get away?"

"I didn't exactly catch 'em," admitted Vaughan. "Kelso was waiting for us when we got there, after shots had been heard. He kept Ortley there, too."

"Nuts," said Fahey. "He'd have taken a powder, all right, if he thought he could—"

"I asked Vaughan to drive us back here to the club," said Kelso, "because I wanted to give you the lowdown on the business. In exchange for that, I want you to let my guests go home without booking them or even mentioning them, and I want you to lay off me as much as possible in the whole affair."

Fahey shook his head. "You've got a nerve! Talking like that, with a murder rap on you." But there was alertness in the detective's eyes. "Well," hesitantly, "I suppose I might as well listen to your hot air. What have you got to spill?"

"This," said Kelso. "You've got the killer here—now—in this building. He's been in this building all evening, since long before Spain and Harper got theirs. And he stayed on afterward. Ortley never figured in it at all."

"Ortley showed up at the club door—"

"No. That was Shooley Louis. The man that killed Spain and her gigolo hired Shooley to show up at the door for a minute, so Ortley would get the ticket for murder. Then that man shot Spain and Harper, with silenced guns; melted in with the crowd here again, and rested safe—because Ortley was going to take the rap."

"How do you know somebody didn't come in off the street? Ortley—or maybe Shooley, even?"

"I don't make it easy for folks to come in here without my knowledge," said Kelso. "The back door is kept locked solidly after eight at night. The room off the fire-escape is also locked—so you can't open the door either from outside or inside. There's only the front door, and tonight Jack Murphy and Pete the Parson were on that."

"The lounge—" Fahey began.

Kelso shook his head. "That sounded kind of thin from the start. Maybe a man could have climbed up and entered through that window. But how could he be sure the maid wouldn't scream before he could get to her and silence her? And how could he know there wouldn't be a couple of women guests in there at the time? And how could he know Spain and Harper would happen to be in the hall then?"

"The angle of the shots shows they were killed from the lounge end of the hall," said Fahey stubbornly. "The way Spain and Harper were lying proves that."

"Their bodies could have been moved to give just that impression," Kelso said. "In fact, they

must have been. For they must have been shot from the other end of the hall, toward the rear, beyond the head of the stairs."

"Hmph!" snorted Fahey. Then: "Well, spill it, if you know so much. Who killed 'em?"

KELSO sighed unevenly. His face looked tired and a little old.

"I hate to do this," he said. Fahey and Vaughan watched him closely. "Come upstairs, where the rest of the folks are."

The two detectives went with him to the second-floor hall. The two bodies were still there. The coroner had come, and they'd be taken away soon; but now they lay there under white sheets. Pete the Parson was near the head of the stairs, about where he'd been when Kelso made his getaway. His eyes were anxious as he saw Kelso coming back. Down the hall Meller was arguing with the officer on watch there.

"Think of my position," Kelso heard him say. "You don't have to hold *me* here any longer. This will ruin me! Let me go home, and I'll report at Headquarters—"

He stopped as he saw Kelso come from the head of the stairs. The club owner paid no attention to him. He went to the rear of the hall. On one side was the door to the room off the fire-escape. On the other was another door. He opened it, revealing back stairs.

"The murderer came up these stairs," Kelso said. "He must have stood about here with his silenced guns." Kelso stood in the hall near the backstairs door. "He got Spain and Tony Harper while they were looking the other way; never gave them a chance."

He stared at Fahey with somber eyes. "Pete the Parson did it, Fahey. Put the cuffs on him."

From the head of the stairs, Pete's gasped curse came to them.

"Hell, Boss!" Pete protested. "Have you gone nuts?"

"I wish I had," said Kelso. "I hate to do this. But I'd feel worse about it if you hadn't pulled such a rotten trick, Pete: hiring Shooley Louis to frame a kid that's already had too many tough breaks:

"I never heard of a Shooley Louis," said Pete, backing a little toward the stairs. But there was a subtle difference in his voice.

Probably not till that moment had Fahey really taken much stock in Kelso's words. But he caught that slight tonal difference.

"Yeah?" Fahey said. "We'll see what Shooley has to say about *that!* He's back in young Ortley's room," he bluffed. "I guess he'll rat to save his own hide. Put out the mitts—"

HE stopped. Beside him Vaughan stopped too. Twin revolvers had appeared in Pete's hand—and the guns were silenced.

"Damn you, Kim!" Pete said thickly. "If I don't get out of this, I'll drill you first."

He started backing down the stairs, a step at a time, beady black eyes alert.

"All right—take him, Jack," Kelso said matter-of-factly.

"Old stuff," Pete jeered. "Think I'm going to look behind me, huh? Well, you can go to—"

He screamed, then, and turned with weasel swiftness as big arms caught him from behind. Jack Murphy, six feet four, had him helpless in a bearlike embrace. Murphy hadn't been behind him when Kelso spoke. He'd been at the foot of the stairs, watching the familiar figure of Pete coming down backward. But he was unable to see the guns and didn't know anything was wrong, till Kelso had given his even command.

Pete kept on yelling. And two shots spat from his silenced guns into floor and wall, before Murphy got the second gun from his right

hand. The left-hand gun had jerked out of twitching fingers and fallen to the floor. Then Pete broke, and let Fahey handcuff him.

"Pete," Kelso said. "Why on earth did you do it?"

Pete the Parson only glared at him. Then Kelso's eyes glinted.

"Guido! Killed last month here, also with a silenced gun! So you're his murderer too, Pete? And Spain and Tony Harper knew it—so you had to shut them up. Is that it?"

Pete shrugged.

"But why did you kill Guido, Pete? What did he have on you?"

The beady black eyes glittered. "I dragged down a few bucks from the cage a couple times. Guido saw me and started tagging me for dough. Said he'd tell you if I didn't pay. He asked too much, so I—" He shrugged again.

"And then Spain and Tony put the bite on you for the killing?"

"Yeah," said Pete tonelessly. "I'd thought I was in bad with Guido. I was in *real* trouble with those two! I was to strip the cage tonight and turn the take over to them, or I'd go to the chair. I told 'em I'd see 'em in the hall at twelve o'clock and give 'em the answer. I saw 'em, with their backs turned, and gave 'em what Guido got! I'd put a silencer on my other gun—just in case."

"Well," nodded Fahey, "I guess that's all. Glad you told, Pete. Might have had trouble in court if you hadn't."

"If I hadn't talked, Shooley would," said Pete dully.

Fahey grinned. "It may interest you to know that Shooley will only talk in hell. He's dead, Pete, back in Ortley's room, henna hair and all! Take him out, Vaughan."

Pete started screaming then. And, screaming, he was dragged to the squad car—

"How'd you tumble, Kelso?" said Fahey. "What told you?"

Kelso's shoulders moved. "Nothing very spectacular, Fahey. First Pete's memory. He's known all over town for it. Yet he could mistake Shooey Louis for Ted Ortley, in spite of plenty of difference in their faces. That didn't go down. Second, the fact that it really is pretty impossible for anybody to get in here except through the front door.

"But Pete, the head man around here under me, had a key to the back door, of course.

"Cinch for him to duck around the alley, when I told him to go out and see if he could find where Ortley'd gone from the front door. Cinch for him to let himself in the back, go up the back stairs to the hall where Spain and Tony were to meet him at midnight. Cinch for him to shoot them—and have Ortley tagged for it, so he'd be forever safe."

"In other words," snapped Fahey, "you played a hunch. That's no court evidence, man, and you know it!"

"I'm a gambler," said Kelso, palms spread. "I've been playing good hunches all my life—and winning on them. I won here. Remember your bargain, Fahey. I turned your killer over to you. Now lay off the Twenty-two Club."

Fahey bit his lip. "Oh, all right.

You'll have to report on the Shooey Louis business. But I guess we'll drop it at that."

He went out, scowling, and Kelso went into the gambling room. They were streaming out, now, getting their wraps, thankful for the anonymity that Kelso had managed to preserve for his patrons. But two didn't move for a minute. Sophie Stratford and Ted Ortley. They were standing close, just looking at each other. Kelso took out his five thousand as he got to them, and extended it to Ortley.

"Here. For that auto agency in Lexington, Kentucky. Can you manage with the parole board to leave this state?"

Ortley nodded. He was extraordinarily speechless at the moment. But his eyes said things to Kelso. And so did Sophie's.

"You crazy kids," said Kelso gruffly. "Get out of here. And don't come back. You've brought me nothing but trouble."

But Sophie kissed him on the lips before she went; and Ortley wrung his hand till Kelso thought his knuckles would splinter. And then the gambler was left alone, seeming small in the big empty room, gazing absently around at the bleak and comfortless apparatus of his trade.

SAY
"LUDEN'S"



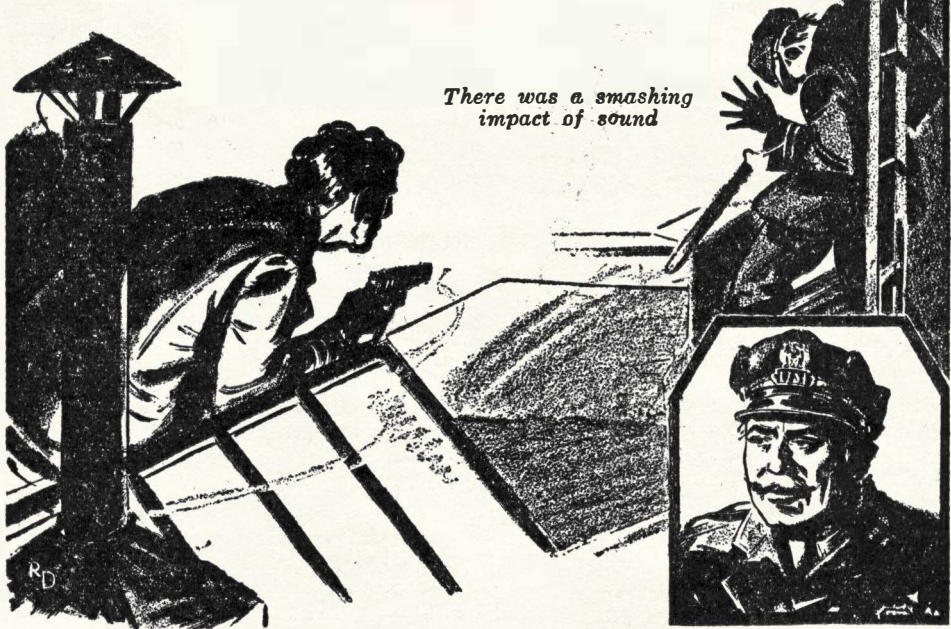
Because

BUILDING UP YOUR
ALKALINE
RESERVE

HELPS YOU TO
RESIST COLDS

From a MEDICAL JOURNAL: "The researches (of these doctors) led them to believe that colds result from an acid condition. To overcome this, they prescribe various alkalis."

POLICEMAN PETERSEN



*There was a smashing
impact of sound*

*He Was Just An Old Neighborhood Flatfoot with No
Big Arrests to His Credit, Yet He Dared to Take
the Trail of Cop Killer Stumpy Moffett!*

By JACK KOFOED

Author of "Bluebeard of France," "The Affair of the Necklace," etc.

STUMPY MOFFETT crouched by a chimney on the roof, and looked over the edge into the street. There were police down there, and everyone of them would give a month's pay to get him. But they weren't going to get him—not as long as he had a gun.

Suddenly every sinew in his body

tightened like wire. His sensitive ears had caught a low, rasping sound. Someone was cautiously lifting the trapdoor that opened onto the roof. Stumpy looked around the chimney. He could see clearly enough, because the yellow summer moon lit the place like a stage under a spotlight.

He had an automatic in his hand, and the butt was pleasingly cool against his palm. His eyes were fixed on the trap that inched up slowly and revealed a broad, red face and a wide pair of shoulders backing up a pistol that was thrust out in front. Stumpy was not conscious of any particular nervousness. He never was when there was danger in the air.

The policeman thrust back the trapdoor suddenly, leaped out and sought shelter in a clump of shadows. He was not sure whether his quarry was there at all, but he was not taking unnecessary chances. There was a pulse-pounding wait for a moment or two. Then the cop moved out of the shadows, and was outlined by the yellowness of the moon.

Stumpy moved his gun muzzle to the right, and squeezed the trigger. There was a smashing impact of sound. The wide-shouldered figure went down as though it had been bludgeoned, and lay still.

"That'll do for you," said the boy under his breath, and ducked back suddenly as a shot blasted from the trapdoor. Another bluecoat had taken up the attack.

"Come out of there, Moffett," called a harsh voice. "Come out with your hands up. The whole block's surrounded. You can't get away."

Couldn't get away, eh? That was a laugh. There were five thousand dollars in his pockets, and he had planned this thing carefully. He'd get away all right. No cops were going to get him while he had all that dough!

A burble of shouts welled up from the street. Whistles were blown. All those fellows would be up here in a minute. It was time to go. He fired at the trapdoor again. The unseen man answered with a blast from his own gun. Then Stumpy slipped off down the line

of the roof to another trapdoor, and disappeared through it. In the cellar of this house was an entrance to a sewer. He could come out of it blocks away. The coppers would never get a glimpse of him. Stumpy Moffett was too smart for them.

THE morning paper was propped against the sugar bowl. Black headlines tramped over page one, shouting the story of Stumpy Moffett. Policeman Petersen read the paper, and drank his coffee, which left little drops like brown dew on his ragged mustache. He liked coffee and sitting in the kitchen with his shoes off.

When you have walked a beat for thirty years your feet get bunions and tired, and wool sox feel much better than hard leather. Everyone in the neighborhood called him Policeman Petersen, as though he had no Christian name. Stumpy Moffett had called him that when the boy lived a few doors down the street.

Mrs. Petersen squinted from the stove, where she was frying eggs and bacon and potatoes. She had caught a glimpse of the Moffett name, but could not quite make out the rest of the headline.

"Stumpy in trouble again?" she asked.

Policeman Petersen nodded. His face was round and red and fringed with grey hair. His mustache was ragged, because it was long, and he chewed on it when he was bothered about things.

"Yep," he said. "He robbed a place over on the West Side last night. Got away with five thousand dollars. The boys trapped him on the roof, but he shot O'Connor and got away. I guess they'll give Stumpy the chair for it. It's hard to believe. He wasn't a bad boy when he lived around here. He was awful nice to his mother, and tended that little baby sister of his as good as if he was grown up—"

Mrs. Petersen put the eggs and bacon and potatoes on the table and filled up the coffee cup again.

"I declare to gracious, Henry, I don't understand you," she said. "You're a policeman. You're supposed to uphold the law. Yet, you are always feelin' sorry for thugs like Stumpy Moffett."

"I know," he said, fumbling for words. It was hard to explain. Maybe it was because, even after thirty years on the force, he wasn't a good policeman. He had never wanted to be one. He wanted to be a wood carver—but not being able to make a living that way, had gone on the Force. So, he never made an arrest without feeling sorry for the person he had taken. Maybe they had gotten off on the wrong foot the way he had. And once started wrong there didn't seem to be anything they could do about it. "Now, this Moffett boy—"

ANNA sat down at the table. Her tired blue eyes were suddenly bright.

"I don't want to talk about Stumpy," she said. "I want to talk about you—about me and you. We are getting old, Henry, and we ain't got anything saved up, hardly. Thirty years ago you were a patrolman—and you are still a patrolman. I'm not fightin' about that, because you're not the kind to be gettin' ahead. But I was talkin' to Lieutenant Ryan's wife. She says there's talk about cutting down the force. If that's done you'll be one of the first to be dropped. Why shouldn't you be? You've never done nothin' but walk your beat and try doors and help kids across the street."

Anna was right. She was so right there was no answer he could make. But there should be an answer. Why couldn't he put his tongue to it? His gun and club lay on the dresser. They were the emblems and badges of his calling. He

didn't want them to be. Small boys, playing forbidden ball in the streets, kept a weather eye out for policemen, and jeered from safe distances when they were chased.

Labor agitators called them Cos-sacks. Newspapers hammered them for beating men in illegal third degree methods. But no one jeered or taunted Policeman Petersen about these things, for he was a safe old watchdog, who had never bitten anyone. Like Stumpy Moffett he had gotten off on the wrong foot. He could not help being the way he was—nor explain why.

He finished breakfast, and wiped off his mustache, thinking how hot it was going to be out on the street that summer day. Anna was watching him sharply. Policeman Petersen wished he had been born with her ambition and determination. If she had been on the force she would have risen high. There was something inflexibly determined about her.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked. "It's pretty late to ask me to change now."

"Late or not, you'll have to do something, Henry," she told him. "What's goin' to happen to us if they drop you? It's hard enough livin' on your pay without tryin' to make ends meet on a patrolman's pension. Now, if you could get to be a sergeant—"

He laughed hollowly. They wanted lean, hard, ruthless men for sergeants—not Policemen Petersens.

"Maybe they'll make me commissioner if I ask them," he said.

Anna came close, and put her arms around his neck. She had been very pretty when she was a girl. The years had rubbed out that prettiness, but there was still beauty in her eyes.

"I'm serious, Henry," she said, "awful serious. We've always been independent. We've always paid our bills. I lay awake nights shiverin'—"

afraid that maybe some day we won't be able to. I love you. I've had to love you to go through the things we've faced together. But now—I'm so afraid—deep down inside of me—that you'll fail me at last!"

Policeman Petersen chewed his mustache. He felt like a small boy who is scolded for not getting his lessons right; a boy who never would get those lessons right, no matter how hard he tried. What could he do except the things he had done for thirty years? Anna read the hopelessness in his face.

"I've got an idea," she said. "Maybe there is a way. You know Stumpy Moffett. You know everybody he ever traveled with. It says in the paper they're offerin' a five-thousand-dollar reward for his arrest. Besides, if you get him they're bound to keep you on the force. Maybe you can find somebody who'll tell you where he's hidin'."

Funny he hadn't thought of that before. Maybe he hadn't because he was a bad policeman. Sure. There was Louis Wagner. Louis seemed to know everything that was going on, and he hated Stumpy. Besides, Petersen had helped him more than once. Maybe he didn't know where Moffett was—but he might. Still—

"I'd hate like anything to arrest Stumpy," he said. "I liked him better than almost any other kid I knew in the old days."

"If you find him you've got to arrest him," said Anna. "It's our lives or his—and somebody else'll do it if you don't."

Policeman Petersen sighed heavily.

"All right. I'll do the best I can."

She kissed him again—ferverently; almost the way she had kissed him when they were sweethearts.

"I'll be praying, Henry," she whispered.

It was hot outside. Petersen began to sweat at the first touch of

the August sun. He had shivered and sweated and walked his feet raw for thirty years. In all that time he had never made an important arrest. It would be savagely funny if the first one should be a boy he had held in his arms as a baby.

He had always been fond of Stumpy. It bothered him when he heard that the youngster was getting into trouble. But policemen are not guardians or preceptors. Maybe they should be—but they are not. The bright metallic heat of the summer morning made him remember a little naked boy under a hose in the street, a blue-eyed little boy who ran out and seized him around a leg with wet arms, and insisted on kissing the scrubby mustache that was not so grey then.

IT GAVE Policeman Petersen a headache trying to figure out why people did the things they did—and why life was so cruel to everyone. But a man who gets six dollars a day to walk a beat is not expected to philosophize about the world's sorrows. He is supposed to do as he is told, and not ask questions.

It was not a long walk to the station house, but before he reached his destination the old man was dripping with sweat. If it wasn't for Anna he would let the whole thing go. He could put no heart into looking for Stumpy Moffett. But he had to look for him.

Lieutenant Ryan was sitting at the desk, making notations in the blotter. He was a lean, bumpy-chinned man, who looked the way a policeman is supposed to look—merciless of manner and clipped of voice. Petersen coughed in an embarrassed manner, and said: "Lieutenant, I'd like you to give me a relief on the beat to-day, while I take a look around for Stumpy Moffett."

Ryan grinned.

"Gettin' pretty late in the day for you to be a Sherlock Holmes, ain't it, pop?" he asked.

Policeman Petersen did not take offense. He was used to the condescending air of his superior.

"I guess it is," he admitted. "But this is a little different. You see Stumpy was brought up in my neighborhood. I know all about him. Maybe I can find out something nobody else could."

Ryan grunted.

"All right," he said. "What have I got to lose? You putter around and see what you can dig up. I'll assign Wilkins to your beat. But, listen, Petersen—don't go tryin' to take that guy yourself. Moffett is a tough hombre. He's too quick on the draw for you. If you locate him call me, and I'll send a couple o' real cops over to take him. I don't want to carry you back to your old lady in a wagon."

Petersen should have resented that. Somehow he didn't. Ryan was right. He was no fighting man. He never had been.

"There—there's one thing I wanted to ask you, Lieutenant," he said. "I hear there's a reward offered by the papers for whoever gets Stumpy—"

"Five grand," said Ryan.

"But it wasn't that so much I was thinking about. I've been on the force a long time—and I've never gotten anywhere. It's my own fault, I guess—but if I *do* find Moffett—"

THE lieutenant looked down into the anxious red face that peered up at him. He felt a little sorry for the old fellow.

"Say, the Commissioner is so anxious to get Stumpy that if you turn him up you'll be a sergeant to-morrow, pop. I'll give you my word on that." He laughed dryly. "Now all you've got to do is find him."

Petersen saluted.

"I'll see what I can do about it," he said.

He went out into the sun again. The first thing was to find Louis Wagner. Louis knew a lot of things, and had the gift of hatred. He liked Policeman Petersen as much as he hated Moffett—and he might talk.

It took the old man several hours to find Wagner in a gloomy saloon on Monckton Street. Wagner was a greasy little man, with pockmarks all over his face, a muddy-yellow skin and bloodshot eyes. He smelt of hair oil and onions and garlic. At first he wouldn't talk.

"I'm no stool-pigeon," he kept repeating, but as he became drunker there was less emphasis in his voice. "I know one thing about that mug. He's fell for a dame named Judy Allen. She's just a kid, but they're nuts about each other. A friend o' his is captain of a tramp steamer that's headin' for Cuba tonight. Never mind how I know it. I know it."

The policeman bought him another drink.

"That's all right as far as it goes, Louis, but it don't go far enough. This means my job. I got to get Stumpy or they'll kick me off the force. I'm an old man. That would finish me. I've done a lot of favors for you. I've kept you out of jail a dozen times. You don't like that Moffett guy—"

"I hate his guts," snarled the drunkard.

"Then come clean. Nobody'll ever find out who told me."

Wagner hunkered deep into his chair, scowling at the little pools of whiskey on the table top. He kept stirring something around in his muddled mind.

"All right," he said suddenly. "I'll blab. Why not? Why shouldn't I even things up with that punk?"

"All right—go on."

"He an' Judy are at 50 West Fifth Street—second-floor back.

They'll stay there till to-night and then board that tramp. But get this into your head, Petersen, I'm tellin' you this because you've done me a lotta good turns. There ain't another cop in the world I'd squeal to—even to get Stumpy Moffett."

"Okay, Louis," said Policeman Petersen, getting heavily to his feet, and wiping a trickle of sweat out of his eyes. "I'll pay you back for this."

"You've paid me in advance," said Louis Wagner.

Petersen went down to Fifth Street. Number 50 was a drab, four story brick, latticed behind with an old-fashioned fire-escape. He walked into the alley and looked around. A board fence, with the paint nearly peeled off. Garbage strewn around. A fetid, rotten smell. He looked up at the rusty fire-escape, and the curtain pulled halfway down the window of the second floor rear.

"Stumpy's there," he thought to himself, and wondered why they called the lean, good-looking boy Stumpy. Some foolish nickname of youth. Now, what would be the best way to go about this job? Ryan would know if he were here. Ryan knew everything about man hunting. Petersen knew nothing.

No use walking upstairs and knocking on the door. Ryan had told him to call for help. The old man had no intention of doing anything of the sort. This was his job, and he would do it himself.

The fire-escape. That was the only way up. Of course, Moffett might look out—and then it would be just too bad, for there was no way of ducking a bullet on that iron skeleton. But Stumpy had always liked him. He wouldn't shoot off hand and without warning—unless the happenings of the past had made him so jittery as to lose control.

Petersen took off his shoes so he could make the ascent more quietly,

and dropped his revolver into the side pocket of his coat. Then he began the slow climb. He took his time because it was hot—and his heart was beating like a triphammer—and because he wanted to postpone the arrest as long as he could.

When he reached the landing opposite the window he paused, and flattened himself against the brick wall. Having regained his breath, he peeped cautiously into the room. The contrast between the garish sunlight and the dimness inside made him blink. After a moment his vision adjusted itself to the difference, and he could make out details of the ugly little room and the people in it.

Stumpy was walking about restlessly. He was tall and slim; not more than twenty-five years old. He was in his shirt sleeves. The butt of an automatic protruded from his hip pocket.

His girl sat on the bed, kicking her slipper heels nervously on the rug. She was younger than Stumpy—a blond youngster, who looked as though she should still be in high school.

"I KNOW how you feel about it, honey," he was saying. "I've been a bad egg. Nobody knows that better than I do—but it's different now. That was my last job. There won't be any others."

"But you killed a man last night, Stumpy—you killed him!"

His eyes peered out of the dark pools of shadow about them.

"I know I did. It's funny. I didn't want to kill him. I didn't want any trouble. I did the job to get enough money so we could go away together—forget everything here—start over again. The cop was after me. He had his gun out. I could see it shine in the yellow light from the moon.

"I didn't think of anything right then except you, Judy. I thought

that if he caught me we'd never be together again—everything would be over. I don't remember pulling the trigger, but I did. The explosion nearly cracked my ears. It made me sick. I ran away as fast as I could."

THE girl did not seem to understand. She loved him. You could see that. She loved him with her eyes—and with her hands that touched him when he strode nervously past the bed. She wanted him and nobody else in the world.

"Try to understand about me," Stumpy Moffett said. "When I was a kid I wanted to be an engineer. I wanted to be somebody—you know, like Marconi and Edison and fellows like that. But my people didn't have any dough. They couldn't send me to school after I was fourteen. I went to work in a butcher shop.

"It made me disgusted—and I got only nine dollars a week. I keep going back trying to figure out how I got started wrong. That was it. I wanted to be an engineer—and I couldn't be one without money. It was more important to me than anything else.

"But I didn't do anything about it. Louis Wagner told me I was crazy. He had been stealing all his life. We were talking in his room when the cops came in. The place was full of stolen goods. Louis didn't go to bat for me—not much anyway—and they gave me five years—five years for doing nothing."

Something of steel came into Stumpy's voice. It had been soft and sad before.

"Prison! It kills you bit by bit. It starves you in every way a man can be starved. It puts something into you that shouldn't be there.

"When I got out they wouldn't let me alone. I got a job, and pretty soon a detective showed up and told

the boss I was a convict. I was fired. That happened a dozen times. What did they expect would happen? How did they think I could live? I didn't want to be a crook—but they wouldn't let me be anything else. Only one man ever said a decent, friendly word to me. That was Policeman Petersen. But, what could he do in the long run?"

The old man on the fire-escape felt a lump choking in his throat. Poor kid! He had suffered enough. Oh, so Petersen had been the only one decent to him—and here was Petersen, with his gun in his hand, ready to take him again! It was rotten—that's what it was—rotten!

The policeman knew how the boy felt. The inscrutable forces of life had driven him into being what he was—just as conditions had nudged Henry Petersen into being a cop instead of an artist in wood. Talk all you want to about strength of character, and the game fish swims upstream, and all that kind of rubbish. Some men were strong enough. They had that strength born in them. Stumpy hadn't and Policeman Petersen had not, either.

Well, what was the use of waiting? There was a dirty job to be done. He might as well get it over with as soon as possible. Gosh, if it were only possible to slip down the fire-escape—just walk away, and forget those two in there! He wanted to forget them. He wanted them to be safe this minute—with all the black trouble of theirs behind.

Petersen edged himself around on the fire-escape so he could get a better look into the room. The boy and girl were sitting on the bed. His arm was around her, and he was kissing the tears off her cheeks.

"I've got everything set," Stumpy said. "We can't miss. In five days we'll be in Cuba—there's a guy I know who's got a sugar plantation there. He'll give me a job—and we can forget all the things I've done

—and be happy the rest of our lives.”

Happy? Maybe they could be. Maybe Stumpy could atone for his past. Other men had. What did the Commissioner or Lieutenant Ryan or anybody else—except Policeman Petersen—know of cause and effect and the drama of young lives?

What would it matter to the world if Stumpy Moffett was strapped in an electric chair or lived out the years in a Cuban hideaway? It mattered enough that a reward of five thousand dollars had been offered for Moffett—and a bright yellow set of sergeant's stripes would go to the man who took him.

The old man thought of breakfast that morning—of his wife's worn and patient hands and the fear in her eyes. He could not go back to her, and say he had failed—that he had reward and promotion in his hands only to throw them away because he was a sentimental old fool. She would never forgive him. That was one thing Anna would never forgive. After all, why should she? Stumpy had killed a cop—and according to any known law had trouble coming to him.

Petersen's service gun was in his hand, but he wanted to throw it into the street. Those two in there were so young—so much in love—so sure that what they did in the future would atone for the past. The procession of events had found Stumpy too weak to oppose them. But, the policeman thought, I haven't been any different myself. At heart Moffett and I are pretty much alike. What would he do if he were in my place? He'd say the hell with it, and go away. Why shouldn't I? Duty? Duty is a fine, brave thing—but how does it shape up with the ruin of two lives?

Then Anna came into his mind.

Stumpy Moffett had killed for his Judy—for money that would let him take her away with him. Policeman Petersen loved his Anna just as much as Stumpy loved Judy. There were five thousand dollars and a sergeant's stripes and security for taking the young man. Henry had worked for thirty years without getting those things. He could do it now in a minute.

His heart did not harden, but his determination did. He'd have to do it for Anna and the grey years ahead.

THE gun-butt felt cold and hard in his hands. He pushed the muzzle past the line of the wall.

“All right, Stumpy,” he said, “Stick 'em up!”

Moffett had been so straight and tall as he stood there talking to his girl. When he saw the gun muzzle his shoulders sagged as though bowed under a burden too great for his strength. The corners of his mouth curved down. His skin, which had been flushed and warm, became a pale ivory.

“Is that you, Petersen?” he asked.

“Yep.”

“You—I suppose you heard—everything I was talking about.”

“Yes, I heard. And I'm sorry, Stumpy. Real sorry. There ain't anything I can do, though.”

“There is, too,” said the girl suddenly. Her voice was thin and high. “He'll never do anything wrong again. All we want is the chance to get away—and be happy and honest. You can let us do that, mister. What's it mean to you? Just another guy to arrest. Just another name in your book.”

That's what she thought. What did she know of thirty years of being married and living in a little house and scrimping along on a patrolman's pay? What did she know of the fear old age brought? Life to her—if Stumpy could get

away—seemed a romantic idyll in a white house among the palms, with a blue Cuban sky overhead. Petersen wished they could have that idyll. They could have it if he walked back to the station house, and told Lieutenant Ryan he had not been able to find Moffett. But Anna wouldn't let him do that. Anna was at his elbow. He could hear her anxious voice in his ears.

A sergeant's stripes—five thousand dollars reward—a secure old age. Don't get soft about that young thug, Henry. It's only justice that he should be punished. Don't let him talk you out of anything. You hear me, now? Yes, he heard her, but—she didn't understand about getting started wrong and being unable to fight against the tide that was sweeping you down river. He understood because he and Stumpy, in their widely different ways, were so much alike.

"I'M sorry," he said again, "but you can see there is nothing I can do."

"But there is," the boy cried desperately. "You've got to help us. You're not just a cop—you're a man. You understand. You feel things. Look at this kid here. It's as much her life as mine. Give us the little chance we want. Don't do it, Petersen—don't take me."

There was a choke in the old man's throat, when he answered.

"There ain't no use arguin'," he said. "I'd sooner cut off my right arm, Stumpy—but I'm going to take you back with me."

"No! No!" Judy screamed.

"Lieutenant Ryan told me to call a couple of real cops to make this arrest," said Policeman Petersen. "But I didn't do it. I'm goin' to do it by myself."

Moffett still had his hands in the air, but a sudden look of relief crossed his face.

"You're alone, are you?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm alone," said Policeman Petersen, "but let me tell you something, Stumpy. I'm not takin' you because it's my duty to do it—or to have one citation in thirty years. But you killed a man last night. You killed him for Judy's sake—even though you didn't want to do it. Well, I can kill a man for my Anna; if I have to."

"You mean—me?"

"I mean you, Stumpy."

"Don't try it, Policeman Petersen," said Moffett in a voice as tight as wire. "I like you better than almost anybody I ever knew, but that won't stop me. You haven't fired that gun of yours a dozen times in thirty years. I can shoot—and I *will* shoot—because it's my life and Judy's—or yours—"

The old man chewed the ends of his frayed mustache.

"All along I knew we were a lot alike, Stumpy," he said, "and here we come to the finish with exactly the same idea. You and Judy—me and Anna—the problem's the same with each of us—and we have to settle it with a gun. I'd give my right arm not to do it."

There was silence in the room.

"I've got the drop on you, kid," said Policeman Petersen, "and I'm coming in to get you. Don't reach for that cannon of yours. It won't do any good."

He stepped through the window. Judy had thrown herself on the bed, her tear-streaked face lifted toward him.

Stumpy, his arms still partly raised, stood in the middle of the worn carpet, so white that he looked like a dead man. Petersen wondered if Anna could see these two now she would change her mind about the reward and the sergeant's stripes. But he knew she wouldn't. Women were much less yielding about that sort of thing. Maybe they were right. He didn't know—but he was still so sorry he had to buy her

security with the happiness of these two children.

Moffett's right came down, and went for his hip pocket with the striking quickness of a cobra.

"I'm sorry, Stumpy," said Policeman Petersen, pulling the trigger.

The dark little room echoed with the crashing dissonance of a shot. There was an acrid smell of powder in his nostrils. He heard Judy weeping on the bed.

JUDY ALLEN was having a drink with a friend of hers. The tragedy of Stumpy Moffett was in the past. There was no longer a trace of sorrow in her pretty face. Her emotions were like a typhoon. They blew themselves out quickly.

"I was thinking about Stumpy just today," she said. "He was the quickest-thinking guy I ever saw. You know, one time we were sitting in a barroom, and one of the Skinny Davis mob that was gunning for him came in, with a gun in his hand. Stumpy ducked under the table, and shot him—like that." She snapped her fingers.

"But the smartest stunt of all was one that didn't work. We were hiding out in Fifth Street after he leveled off that cop. A flatfoot shoved through the window, gun in hand. 'I know that bozo,' Stumpy said, 'he's a flatfoot named Petersen—a great pal of mine when I was a kid. Sentimental as an old woman, too. I think I can talk him out of this rap.'

"Well, I give you my word we put on an act like two broken-hearted kids that had me cryin' myself. The only trouble was Stumpy got too interested in his act. Petersen almost fell for it. I saw it in his eyes—but he didn't, quite, and when the hardware went off my boy friend got a ticket right smack in the heart. It was too bad, because he had a job cased that would have made him a hundred grand."

Judy powdered her pert nose.

"Quick thinkin' is all right, I guess," she said, "but Stumpy didn't seem to be quick enough on the trigger when it came to meeting even an old copper face to face. I guess that taught me a lesson."

IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

MURDER SCOURGE

A Novelet of Baffling Mystery

By PHILIP L. KETCHUM



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THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF JAMES LE BOEUF, A POWER PLANT MANAGER, JULY 1ST, 1927, PUZZLED THE PEACEFUL INHABITANTS OF MORGAN CITY, LOUISIANA.

EARLY IN THE EVENING OF THE DAY HE VANISHED, NEIGHBORS OVERHEARD A QUARREL BETWEEN LEBOEUF AND HIS BEAUTIFUL 38-YEAR-OLD WIFE, ADA.

SHE ADMITTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN AN ARGUMENT, BUT DENIED THAT SHE KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT WHY OR WHERE HER HUSBAND HAD GONE. SHE INTIMATED THAT HE MAY HAVE DESERTED HER.

SEVERAL NIGHTS LATER, TWO MEN HUNTING ALLIGATORS ON LAKE PALOURDE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN, TURNED THEIR FLASHLIGHTS ON A TREE GROWING OUT OF THE BED OF THE BAYOU. AS THE LIGHT PENETRATED THE WATER, THEY NOTICED A BULKY OBJECT CAUGHT IN THE BRANCHES JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE WATER. INVESTIGATING, THE HUNTERS WERE HORRIFIED TO DISCOVER THAT IT WAS THE CORPSE OF A MAN — THE BODY OF THE MISSING JOHN LE BOEUFF.



MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CORPSE, WHICH HAD BEEN WEIGHED WITH SEVERAL PIECES OF IRON, PROVED THAT LEBOEUF HAD BEEN DEAD SINCE THE TIME OF HIS DISAPPEARANCE. A SHOTGUN CHARGE HAD TORN THROUGH THE BACK OF HIS HEAD AND THE WOUND INDICATED THAT LEBOEUF HAD BEEN MURDERED.

THE CORONER, MAKING A THOROUGH EXAMINATION, FOUND KNIFE SLITS ACROSS THE CHEST AND THE STOMACH. AS HE STUDIED THESE PECULIAR WOUNDS HE NOTICED HOW SKILFULLY THEY HAD BEEN MADE.

HE REASONED, "THESE CUTS MUST HAVE BEEN MADE BY A DOCTOR OR SOMEONE WHO KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT SURGERY."



MRS. LE BOEUF

DETECTIVES MADE A METHODICAL CHECK-UP OF THE ACQUAINTANCES OF MRS. LE BOEUF. SHE HAD BEEN SEEN VISITING THE OFFICES OF A LOCAL PHYSICIAN, DR. THOMAS E. DREHER, ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, ALTHOUGH SHE APPEARED TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH.

UNDER SEARCHING SCRUTINY MANY THINGS CAME TO LIGHT, AND IMMEDIATELY THE DEATH PLOT STARTED TO UNFOLD, WHICH SHORTLY REVEALED THE SORDID STORY OF A SMALL TOWN LOVE AFFAIR AND ITS GHASTLY CLIMAX.

IT WAS LEARNED THAT DOCTOR DREHER HAD BEEN ROWING ON LAKE PALOURDE THE EVENING THAT LE BOEUF HAD DISAPPEARED. ALSO, NEIGHBORS REMEMBERED TWO LARGE IRON WEIGHTS SIMILAR TO THE ONES ATTACHED TO THE CORPSE, THAT WERE MISSING FROM THE FRONT YARD OF THE DOCTOR'S HOME.



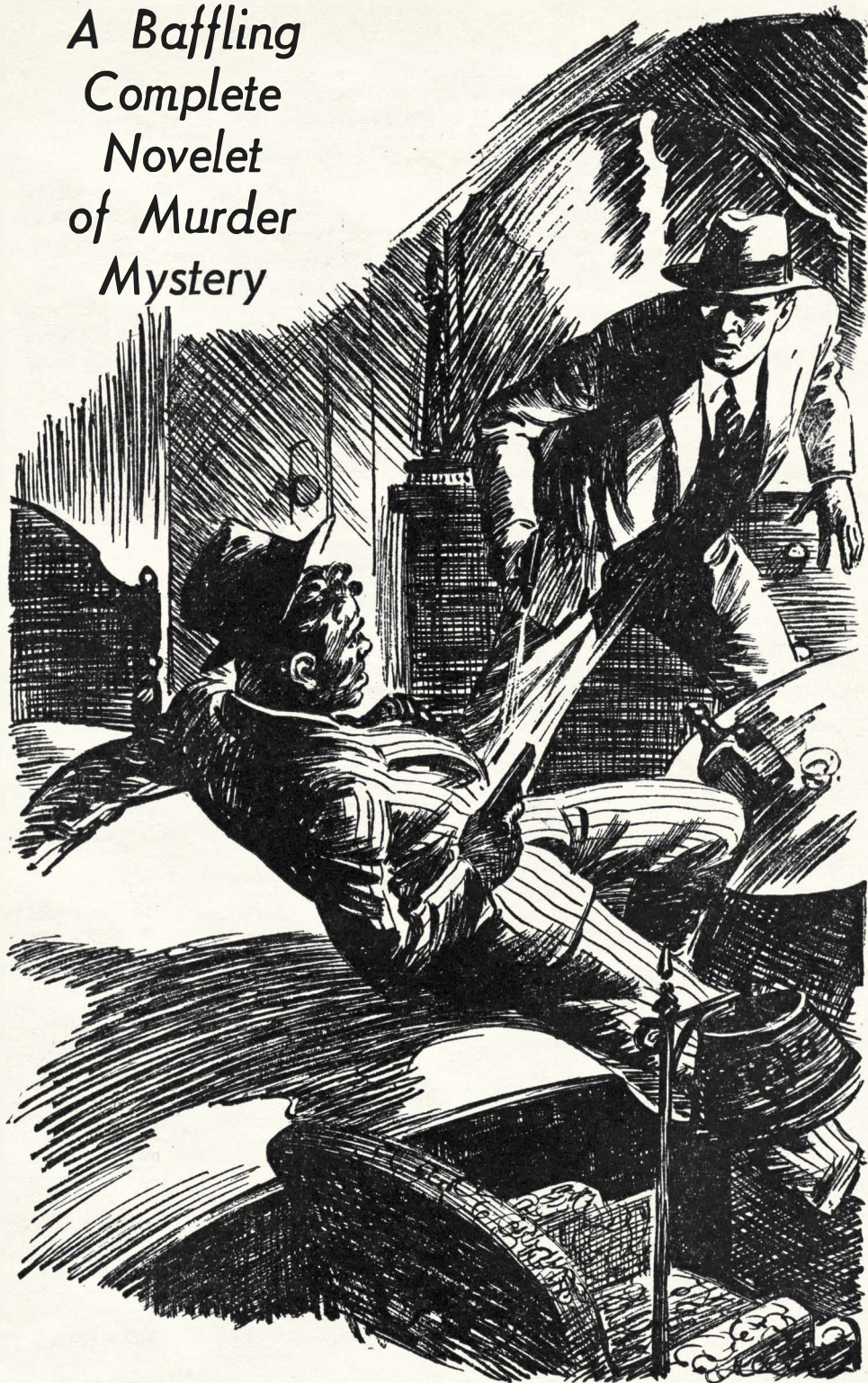
DR. THOMAS DREHER



TAKING DREHER INTO CUSTODY THE POLICE SUBJECTED HIM TO RIGID QUESTIONING. FACED WITH THE EVIDENCE, HE CONFESSED THAT HE AND MRS. LE BOEUF WERE CARRYING ON A CLANDESTINE LOVE AFFAIR AND THAT THEY HAD HIRED A LABORER NAMED JAMES BEADLE TO DO THE ACTUAL KILLING SO AS TO RID THEMSELVES OF THE QUARRELsome HUSBAND. THE DOCTOR HAD MADE THE SLASHES SO AS TO PREVENT THE RETENTION OF GASES IN THE STOMACH THAT WOULD BRING THE BODY TO THE SURFACE OF THE WATER IF IT WORKED LOOSE FROM THE HEAVY WEIGHTS.

MRS. LE BOEUF HAD ASKED HER HUSBAND TO TAKE HER FOR A BOAT RIDE ON THE LAKE THE EVE OF THE MURDER. THE DOCTOR AND BEADLE HAD WAITED IN AMBUSH. THE "PERFECT CRIME" HAD BEEN FOILED WHEN THE BODY CAUGHT IN THE BRANCHES OF THE UNDER WATER TREE. BEADLE WAS SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT. MRS. LE BOEUF AND DOCTOR DREHER WERE HANGED.

*A Baffling
Complete
Novelet
of Murder
Mystery*



Bob Iron's finger tightened on the trigger



The Woman in Green

*Bob Iron, G-Man, Loses a Prisoner in a Storm of
Lead . . . Then the Federal Law-Hounds
Bay on a Fresh Trail*

By **GEORGE A. McDONALD**

Author of "Whispering Death," "Killers Are Dumb," etc.

CHAPTER I

DEATH IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

BOB IRON'S brows met in a scowl. His grey eyes were somber as they studied the blond woman beside him in the rear seat of the F.B.I. Buick sedan. Marcia Sheeren was still an enigma to the lean, bronzed G-man. He did not know yet what motive had driven her to telephone the tip that

had resulted in the break-up of the Killrain mob and the death of their flaming-haired leader.

Not even the three weeks of bitter, acrimonious court battle she had put up fighting against deportation had broken the wall of mystery surrounding the "Woman in Green," as the tabloids called her. Her hazel eyes were still, inscrutable pools; sometimes sullen and sometimes blazing with ferocity—but usually

brooding and opaque. Her vivid red lips were still tightly locked.

Iron judged her to be about thirty. She was attractive in a hard, brazen way. The figure beneath the green silk ensemble was perfectly molded. Tall, and sleek as a golden panther she was the type that would appeal to a ruthless, cold-blooded devil like Red Killrain.

Sob-sisters and feature writers had attributed the "fingering" of Red Killrain to jealousy. But Bob Iron had watched her while Ned Mead, gangdom's highest priced mouthpiece, had futilely battled for her liberty. He was convinced that some more primitive emotion than jealousy had motivated the betrayal.

The blond woman caught his intent scrutiny. Long, golden lashes half veiled her eyes. Red lips curved sardonically as she asked: "What's wrong, copper? Is my war paint on crooked?"

IRON shrugged his shoulders. He flicked a glance at his partner, Barney Lee, who was tooling the Buick over the White Horse Turnpike at an even fifty-five m. p. h. His grey eyes whipped back suddenly to the woman's impassive face.

"Why did you turn Killrain in, Mrs. Sheeren?" he asked abruptly. "Was it an order from the Big Shot?"

For a split second her eyes went wide. Then she laughed softly: "Still nursing the idea that Red was not the Number One man, eh? I thought you were smart, Iron. But you're either damned dumb or damned stubborn. You're the only cop in the country that don't give Red Killrain credit for heading his own mob."

"I'm the only guy in the country that trailed Killrain constantly for six months after the kidnaping of little Teddy Winship. I learned a lot about Red between the time the baby was snatched from the Winship mansion—and the hour that tiny skeleton was found in the Pocono Mountains. Killrain never planned the details of that job. He

was a shrewd, cold-blooded, ruthless killer—but he was short on brains."

The woman beside him winced. Her face was haggard and strained. She asked bitterly: "Do we have to talk about that? You collected from Red—a life for a life. You closed your case—in gunsmoke."

Bob Iron's lean, tanned face was savage. His curly brown hair all but bristled as he rasped: "That case will never be closed until I know I've gotten the fiend that was responsible for that atrocity."

She recoiled before the repressed fury in the young G-man's eyes. She laughed jerkily: "I said you were stubborn. I'll bet you still believe you and your pal, Lee, are going to deliver me to Ellis Island for shipment back to Latvia."

"Your boast that you'd never be deported sounded good in the papers," the G-man said scornfully. "But even a smart shyster like Ned Mead couldn't stave off that rap. You're lucky you weren't tried as an accomplice in the Winship kidnaping."

For the first time since he had known her, Bob Iron saw Marcia Sheeren soften. Her hand grabbed at his arm, something like tears clouded her eyes.

"Don't say that, Iron," she snarled. "I—I—" Then her face hardened. "Oh, what the hell," she shrugged. "We aren't at Ellis Island yet." The old, mocking smile pulled down the corners of her mouth.

Bob Iron felt a recurrence of the cold chill that had coursed down his spine at intervals since he and Barney Lee left Washington on the secret trip with the Woman in Green. He couldn't shake off a premonition of danger. He leaned back against the cushions, his eyes narrowed on the ribbon of road winding beneath their speeding car.

It was a lonely stretch but another hour should see them in New York. He mentally cursed the jittery feeling. Marcia Sheeren had no friends in the U. S. as far as the G-men had been able to find.

Only a couple members of the Killrain mob were at large, and they

wouldn't attempt to rescue the moll who had put their leader on the spot—unless they wanted to exact revenge. There had been no fatalism in the blond woman's repeated boast that she would never be deported. Certainly she didn't expect to pay the underworld price for double-crossers.

A sardonic voice at his elbow interrupted Iron's thoughts. "How about a smoke, Copper? Got a cigarette to spare?" The G-man nodded curtly, reached for his pocket.

A clipped curse from Barney Lee jerked Iron's eyes ahead. He saw a big furniture van roll out of a side road and start across the Turnpike. Barney's dark head bent over the wheel, his slim shoulders arched as he jammed on the brakes and swung the Buick to the left. Then Iron yelled. A blue sedan was darting out of the cross road on the opposite side from the van. They were headed for a three car smash-up. Lee gripped the wheel, swung his hundred and fifty pounds on it as he sawed back to the right. The blue sedan curved away from them.

THEN kaleidoscopic pictures flashed before Bob Iron's eyes. He caught the glint of sunlight on the blue-steel barrel of a submachine gun in the sedan window. From the corner of his eyes he saw Marcia Sheeren lift her knees, wrap her arms around them and bury her face as she cringed low on the cushion. He was grabbing for his gun as he heard the staccato clatter of the tommy gun and the crash of glass in the front window.

Barney Lee slumped over the wheel. The car rocked and swayed, headed for a steel telegraph pole at the side of the road. Iron tried to grab for the ignition key and the brake. The machine-gun chattered again and pain seared the side of the G-man's scalp.

He saw the steel post loom up in front of the windshield. The car crashed and Bob Iron's skull cracked against the framework of the door. His last conscious thought was one of bitter self-castigation. The Woman

in Green had made good her boast! She wasn't going to be deported!

Passing motorists dragged his body from the crumpled wreck ten minutes later. By some miracle the gas tank hadn't exploded. The G-man batted dazed eyes, lurched to his feet, and staggered toward the wreck. He insisted on helping his partner. A solemn faced man told him Lee was beyond all help. Machine-gun bullets had riddled his body. Bob Iron wondered how he had escaped execution. Warm blood was trickling over his face from a scalp wound. He must have been covered with blood. The killers—and Marcia Sheeren—had figured him dead.

Smoldering eyes, that burned like live coals out of his pallid, blood-streaked face, fixed on the crumpled figure that had been hurled halfway through the windshield. Tears stung Bob Iron's eyes. Barney Lee had been a swell partner. A couple years younger than Bob Iron's twenty-eight, the big fellow had regarded the reckless young Southerner as a kid brother. A bitter curse jerked from deep in Iron's throat. That curse was both a prayer and a promise.

Other cars lined up behind the wreck. State troopers on motor cycles appeared on the scene. Iron hazily sketched the details of the carefully-planned, daringly executed coup. He asked one of the troopers to rush to a phone and broadcast a description of the murder car and the decoy van. Both had disappeared from sight before Iron's rescuers appeared.

The G-man grumbled impatiently while a crude bandage was fastened over his scalp wound. He was weak and dizzy and there was a huge lump on his forehead. But every minute was valuable if the killers were to be run down.

He crossed the highway, scanned the tire tracks in the dirt road. The second trooper who accompanied him heard the G-man mutter: "A 319 on three—A 818 on the fourth—scar on left rear. Three General tires and one Goodrich with the Goodrich scarred from a cut."

"You mean you can tell the kind of tires from those prints?" the trooper asked blankly.

"We have classifications of all makes," Iron said wearily. "Crooks blot out engine numbers, use fake licenses and do fast repaint jobs. But they seldom change the tires on a 'hot' car. Gives us a good means of identification. The car we want is a Chrysler, equipped with three fairly new General tires and a worn Goodrich. Broadcast that from your headquarters, will you, buddy?"

One of the motorists gave the G-man a lift into New York. Iron figured the crooks would either head from the metropolis or double back toward Washington. New York had been the headquarters of the Killrain mob. He believed the Woman in Green would hunt cover in the big city.

Disjointed thoughts shuttled on through his aching brain on the ride. Who could be behind the spectacular rescue? What had prompted it? Not revenge, he was sure, or Marcia Sheeren's bullet-ridden body would have been in the wrecked sedan. His skin began to crawl and blood hammered faster in his veins. His theory must be right.

Red Killrain hadn't been the brains of the mob. Some sinister spirit of evil had lurked behind the scenes, plotting and directing the clever coups that had made the Killrain mob the most dangerous gang in criminal history. The Winship kidnaping had aroused the whole nation. The four-year-old son of the famous war ace had been publicized almost as much as his heroic father. The heat had been turned on—and the criminal genius of the mob had thrown Killrain to the bloodhounds of the law—in order to check the relentless hunt that would have eventually unmasked the real leader of the mob. Marcia Sheeren had been the tool employed to destroy Red Killrain, and the mysterious Big Shot had kept his promise to liberate her.

Bob Iron's jaw hardened. Anger and futility smoldered in his pain-ridden eyes. The brain that had in-

spired Killrain's killers still menaced the country. A new mob could be organized, another Public Enemy would gain notoriety through the insidious machinations of the devilish fiend who had sent Red Killrain on a career of crime that had ended with a bullet from Bob Iron's gun.

That fiend had to be unearthed before he could launch another appalling crime wave. Bob Iron still had a job to do—he had sworn to track down the beast responsible for the kidnaping of young Teddy Winship. His task had just begun.

CHAPTER II

SIREN'S TRAP



THE G-man's lean face wore a grim, harried expression as Bob Iron sat in the New York district F.B.I. office the next afternoon. There had been little progress made in trailing the abductors of the Woman in Green. The blue Chrysler had been traced as far as the Holland Tunnel and there the trail was lost.

Agents from the F.B.I. and local detectives were casing every public garage in the city. But Iron knew there was not much chance of picking up the murder car. The crooks probably had it under cover doing a quick repaint job unless it had been abandoned.

A dragnet was out for Marcia Sheeren but it might take days or weeks to ferret out the blond Latvian.

Bob Iron was still ridden by the fear that the unknown criminal genius was organizing a new mob in preparation for another campaign of robbery, kidnaping and murder. Police had reported whisperings of some sinister forces at work in the underworld but could not put their fingers on any definite activity.

Don Gilmore, Special Agent in charge of the New York district, was going over reports with Iron. He swore viciously as he tossed a sheet of paper across the desk to the Special Agent.

"Another crank letter that the

Winships received this morning," he grated. "I'd like to get my hands on one of the crack-brained sadists that delight in torturing that stricken couple. This makes about the tenth letter they have received since—since that kid's body was found. I suppose we've got to try and run it down, same as we did the others."

A light of suppressed eagerness showed in Bob Iron's grey eyes as he carefully smoothed the coarse sheet and scanned the single hand-printed lines: "Do not lose hope."

"This note has been treated for latent prints, of course," Iron said thoughtfully. Gilmore nodded: "Yes. Silver nitrate solution failed to bring out any prints. Whoever printed it used gloves."

Iron's voice got a little sharper as he said: "That might indicate a criminal or some one versed in the ways of crooks. Better have the graphologists and the handwriting experts go over it. From the shading of the letters I'd say a foreigner wrote it—possibly a woman."

Gilmore eyed the lean-jawed young investigator closely. He hesitated for a minute, then said: "You're quite steamed up about this crank note, Bob. Any special reason for your interest?"

Iron was silent. Then his fingers pushed through his close-cropped curly brown hair, lingering on the strip of adhesive tape that marked his narrow escape from death. Color stained his tanned cheeks and his voice was half-sheepish as he confessed: "I guess I'm screwy, Don—but I've never been convinced that Teddy Winship is dead."

Gilmore snapped erect in his chair, his eyes wide and startled. He said abruptly: "You were there when they found his body."

"When they found a body," Iron corrected slowly. "It was only a skeleton. Doctors classified it as the skeleton of a four-year-old boy. The skull was crushed so they couldn't tell much about the contour of the head. And it was found a few hundred yards from a cabin where we knew Red Killrain's mob had holed

up. There never was any positive identification, to my way of thinking."

"But even the parents accepted it as the body of their child."

"I know it," Iron said glumly. "That's why I've never voiced my pet theory before. I'd feel like a torturer raising any false hopes in the heart of any heroic little woman who's been through the agony Mrs. Winship suffered over the loss of that lovely little blond-haired kid."

"Here's my crazy idea. Killrain was being hounded, especially after he'd collected one hundred thousand dollars ransom without delivering the child. The logical thing would be to kill the youngster. Supposing the fiendish devil behind Killrain conceived the idea of planting a duplicate skeleton. The hunt for Killrain would be as intense as ever—but the Big Boss knew that the law of averages indicated that sooner or later Red would be cornered and knew that he would never give up alive."

"With the skeleton as evidence of the baby's death and with Killrain dead, the case would be officially closed. Then, when the heat was entirely off, secret negotiations could be opened with the parents and another ransom mulcted from the Winships."

"**G**REAT guns," Gilmore exploded. "Have you anything at all on which to base such theory? Or is it just a hunch?"

"It was mostly a hunch, until yesterday. That skeleton was found in a dry, protected spot. I didn't feel sure that the flesh would have entirely decomposed in six months, though doctors said lye or acids might have been used in an effort to destroy all evidence of the crime."

"At the time, I accepted their verdict like everyone else. The hunch still persisted. If Red Killrain was the real leader of the mob, it was bound to be a fallacy, for Killrain could never hope to have the heat off while he was alive. The abduction of Mrs. Sheeren yesterday has convinced me that Kill-

rain was only a front man in the mob. There must have been a master criminal behind the gang—and consequently my theory is strengthened.”

“It sounds logical,” Kilmore said breathlessly. “What can we do about proving it?”

“Nothing,” Iron said bitterly. “If the faintest rumor got out that we believed the child was still alive, it would mean his death warrant. So forget what I said, Don. Don’t even mention it to your boys here. It’s the one thing that’s kept me grinding on this case—and I’ll keep on plugging, until I’ve satisfied myself that I’m crazy.”

“Just handle this note in the routine manner, trace it at the post office, let the experts work on the handwriting and file the reports for me. And put everything we can into the hunt for The Woman in Green. She’s our only lead now.”

Bob Iron eased his six-foot length out of the chair, pulled his shabby felt hat gingerly down on his curly head and grinned morosely. “I’m going up to see ‘Foghorn’ Mead,” he said. “He was in court this morning, so I couldn’t question him about the escape of the Woman in Green.”

“I don’t think Ned had anything to do with it. He’s too smart to deliberately participate in murder, even to save a client. Marcia Sheeren may have tried to get in touch with him. If she hasn’t any more money, Mead may put the finger on her.”

EDWIN MEAD was a white-haired, ruddy-faced man with the twinkling blue eyes and smooth cheeks of a boy. He had an enormous chest from which boomed the educated voice that had been lifted so successfully in defense of criminal clients.

There was a slightly worried look about the lawyer’s innocent blue eyes as he greeted Bob Iron. He shoved out a fat, slightly perspiring hand and said: “Sorry to hear about the tough break you got yesterday. One of your buddies killed, too. Damned tough, feller.”

The G-man nodded darkly. “Heard

anything from your former client?” he asked curtly. Mead’s leonine head shook emphatically. He said: “I don’t want to hear from her. I’m sorry I ever took on her case.”

“You can’t win them all, Mead,” Iron commented.

“It wasn’t that. I lose plenty of cases. I took her as a client because I thought she was getting a raw deal from Uncle Whiskers. She’d done you boys a good turn and enabled you to wipe out the most dangerous desperado in the country. Then for thanks, she was branded as a criminal and slated for deportation as an undesirable alien. That’s why I went to bat for her.”

“That and the \$25,000 she paid you,” remarked Iron cynically. Ned Mead’s face crimsoned, then he shrugged his bulky shoulders. He said: “I guess you boys were right. She was as dangerous as any member in the mob. More so—if she planned her own rescue. The papers said it was perfectly planned and executed.”

Bob Iron rubbed the adhesive tape along his scalp. His eyes were dark and bitter. He asked tonelessly: “Got any idea who might be in back of that rescue?”

Mead plucked at his round, dimpled chin. Then he walked back to his desk for a humidor of expensive perfectos. Iron refused the proffered smoke. Mead bit the end of a cigar, lighted it and studied the end for a second or two with his brow corrugated in a frown. Then he met Iron’s probing stare and said levelly:

“I’ve got a couple of ideas, Iron. They aren’t based on any confidences of a client, so I’m free to air them. You know, of course, that Red Killrain salted away nearly a half million, as his share of the robberies and kidnappings he pulled.

“As far as I know that loot was never uncovered by the law—or by the remainder of his gang. I’m sure Marcia Sheeren knew where it was cached. I think she paid my fee out of Red’s stake, though naturally I didn’t ask her.”

Iron smiled cynically. “Do you

think Killrain's men would let her get away with it? They must have had some loyalty for their leader."

"For a half million you can buy all the loyalty there is in the underworld," the lawyer said contemptuously. "Jerry Heller, the blond, Dutch kid who was Killrain's best man wasn't wiped out in that raid. He was largely responsible for Killrain's success.

"Heller was a new gangster type, a college boy who had been tossed out of school for racketeering. He had brains—and was coming along fast, when Red got knocked off. What's to prevent the Sheeren dame from making a hook-up with him by offering a big share of that half million to be used in hiring and outfitting another mob?"

IRON'S eyes glinted, then went I opaque. He'd been checking on Heller as a possible master mind behind the organization, but Heller's youth and inexperience in crime had eliminated the blond killer as a suspect. Mead was in a position to know Heller's real standing in the underworld. He masked his interest as he asked flatly:

"What's your other theory, Mead?"

The lawyer inhaled deeply, let smoke trickle from the corner of his mouth and clipped:

"Call me nuts if you want to, Iron. Have you figured that the Sheeren dame might have been the real brains behind the Killrain mob? She had everything it takes—nerve, brains and all of the cold-blooded lack of emotion of a dangerous killer."

Iron sucked in his breath sharply. There was plenty of truth in what the lawyer said. Marcia Sheeren had been so confident that she would never reach Ellis Island all during the time she had been held *incommunicado* during her court hearing.

She had talked with no one but her lawyer, so she couldn't have planned her escape after she was picked up. She must have foreseen the result of her tip-off about Killrain, and had planned for every

emergency, in case the court decided against her. There was a motive for her betrayal of Red Killrain—the sunset haired killer had gotten out of hand and refused to take orders, so she had put him on the spot.

Mead emphatically and earnestly denied that the Woman in Green had sent any message to gangsters through him. The lawyer was jittery. He seemed afraid of being accused of complicity in the escape of the alien gun-moll. He eagerly agreed to notify the F.B.I. office at once, if his former client tried to get in touch with him.

Back at the Bureau Headquarters, Bob Iron discussed the lawyer's theories with Don Gilmore.

"What do you make of it?" Gilmore asked.

"It's got me thinking," Iron admitted somberly. "Especially the idea of the Woman in Green being the Master Mind of that outfit. If she and Jerry Heller team up—it's going to mean grief for the law. Any late reports on the blond killer?"

"Never a trace of him since he faded out just before Killrain was burned down," Gilmore grated. "Heller's on the wanted list in every Police Headquarters in the country. I figured that perhaps Killrain bopped him off for insubordination and dropped his body into a river or a lime bath."

"Not Killrain's style," Iron growled. "Red would want the glory of knocking off a flashy gun like Heller. We'd know it if Jerry was executed by Killrain. Send out new flashes. Have the search for Heller tightened. He may be the rat that machine-gunned Barney Lee. A tommy gun was Jerry's favorite weapon. Too bad I didn't get a gander at the killer in that car—but things happened too fast." Gilmore promised to speed up the search for the blond German gunman.

By the next evening, Bob Iron was worn and harried. No trace of the Woman in Green had been picked up. A search of public garages had failed to turn up the blue

Chrysler. The trail had bogged down completely at the Holland Tunnel. And Marcia Sheeren was free and footloose to help in the hatching of more devilish crimes like the kidnaping of little Teddy Winship.

The G-man's hair was badly rumpled from nervous thrusts of his lean fingers. His lean tanned face was a picture of fatigue and dejection. He had been busy all day, running down false leads, offered by would-be amateur detectives who believed they had seen the notorious ex-sweetheart of Red Killrain in a dozen different places.

HE swore morosely as the phone rang. "Another brainstorm," he growled to Don Gilmore as he picked up the instrument. Then as he listened the weariness faded from his face, his eyes got hard and alert. His voice was crisp as he said:

"Yes—a blue Chrysler, 1936 sedan—not the Airflow—I understand—blue body and dark blue fenders, yes. You say they came night before last—two men, eh? You read the car description in the paper? Okay, madam. I'll be right over."

"Sounds like it might be a hot lead, Don," the young G-man cried.

"This woman, evidently German or Slavish from her accent, has a string of private garages on the West Side. Two men rented a stall for a blue Chrysler, night before last, paid her a month in advance, then took their car out today, saying they had to make a business trip. Didn't want any refund on their money, which excited her suspicion. I'll go over and take a look-see."

He found the address in a district of three story frame houses on the West Side. A big-boned, square-faced woman answered his ring at the bell. She took him back to the line of corrugated metal garages in back of the house and showed him the stall the Chrysler occupied. Bob Iron all but crawled on his knees examining the faint tire tracks on the floor.

A recent rain had dampened a big

spot of oil on the asphalt court. Tread marks of two or more of the tires were visible. His pulse hammered fast and his grey eyes glistened as he found the markings of General Tires and then a Goodrich with a flaw near the outer edge of the track. There could be no mistake. The killers had parked there.

He fired rapid questions at the landlady and she answered in slow, broken sentences. One man was skinny, with dark hair and close-set eyes, like a bird's, she called them. The other man was square-faced, young and had big shoulders. He, too, was dark. She thought he was Magyar but he said he was Irish. Tingles of excitement ran up and down the G-man's spine. Was that the reason behind Jerry Heller's disappearance? Could the blond killer still be roaming the streets, safe behind a disguise of dyed skin and hair? He swallowed a curse of disappointment—he was just a few hours too late.

Iron asked wearily if the woman had any idea where the garage tenants lived. She shook her head dully, then her cowlike eyes brightened.

"Wait," she said gutturally. "Mine boy—he said something about a hotel—he carried the bag for them."

She disappeared through a back door, to appear a minute later with a tow-headed, flat-nosed boy of ten or eleven, her son Johann. Iron's heart skipped a couple of beats as the boy said he'd carried a suitcase for the smallest man over to the Hotel Maxon, a block east. He slipped the boy a half-dollar for the information.

Iron found the Hotel Maxon a second-rate establishment, catering both to transient and residential trade. The sallow-faced clerk at the desk was chary about giving information until the G-man flashed his leather case with the F.B.I. identification card. Then he remembered that two men answering to the description of the garage renters had taken a room two nights before. They hadn't checked out yet.

He didn't know whether they

were in their room or not but offered to call them on the house phone. Iron said he'd go up himself. His warning against notifying the occupants of Room 806 that a visitor was coming up seemed to impress the sallow-faced clerk. He moved away from the house phone hastily, assuring Iron in an aggrieved voice that the Hotel Maxon was run on the level, it wasn't a crook's hangout. He wasn't looking for any trouble with the law.

Room 806 was at the end of the corridor to the left as Iron got out of the elevator. His brain had been busy as he rode up, figuring out an excuse for calling on the men. He decided to use the old one about a girl friend who used to occupy that room. Once he glimpsed the occupants of the room, he'd know whether Jerry Heller had suddenly turned brunette.

HIS gun was in his right hand coat pocket as he rapped on the door. There was a grim, set line to his lean jaw and his eyes were hard and cold. At the thought that the blond killer was one of the roomers. Heller had been a big shot in the Killrain mob—he would know the real story about that tiny skeleton.

Once he was a prisoner, the young thug could be made to talk. G-men didn't use the third degree—they went a step farther, using the fourth degree and hammered at suspects with psychologically planned questions, hundreds and hundreds of them, until a story was fully pieced together.

Of course, he had to get Heller first. But Iron wasn't worrying too much about that. The blond Dutchman was hell on wheels with a rod—but Bob Iron had been brought up in the Northwest and had used a six-gun as soon as he was big enough to lift one.

There was no response to his knock. He pounded more vigorously, but not the slightest sound filtered through the door. Room 806 seemed vacant.

Iron studied the brass lock on the

door thoughtfully. Then he reached for his skeleton keys. The third one he selected clicked the tumbler and the door inched open. He slithered in cautiously, his fingers wrapped around the butt of the automatic in his pocket.

Wary eyes raked every corner of the room, picked out the open suitcase beyond the bed, the scattered newspapers and magazines. His eyes brightened and a pleased smile bent the corners of his mouth. He'd have a chance to case the room while the occupants were out. There might be something that would reveal the real identity of the Mr. Lewis and Mr. Harris who had registered for Room 806.

He closed the door softly behind him, making sure that the spring lock clicked. He slid across the room, jerked open the door of the clothes closet, saw a checked suit hanging there that made his pulse hammer. Jerry Heller went in for flashy clothes. The suit coat looked as if it would fit the ex-collegian's husky shoulders. He checked the bathroom, making sure that no one was lurking there. There was a third door that plainly led to the adjoining room. He tried the door and found it locked. Then with a little grunt of satisfaction he started to work on the open suitcase, scanning the pockets and lining for papers or letters. His fingers had just found an envelope tucked under a couple of freshly laundered shirts when a faint noise spun him about on his knees, his gun lifting to cover the door of the room. He thought the sound was the click of a key.

For a long minute he crouched there, nerves taut, eyes slitted on the door knob, waiting for it to turn. Then he swore softly, his nerves must be frazzled, he was hearing things. He bent over the suitcase again, was just lifting the letter when door hinges squeaked and a harsh voice clipped: "Just hold that pose, G-man! Don't move anything but that head of yours! And turn it slowly—this way please—"

Blood congealed in Bob Iron's veins at the precise, clipped words,

voiced in the tones of an educated man. Jerry Heller would probably talk like that. His head pivoted slowly. Bitterness welled up in Iron's eyes as he stared at the square-faced, wide-shouldered figure in the door to the adjoining room. The black hair and the dark olive skin tint were deceiving at first glance. But the features were those of the blond killer.

"Heller," the G-man muttered. "Jerry Heller!"

"That's right, copper," the gunman grinned. His automatic jerked upward a trifle. "You can get up—if you keep your hands over your head. That should be easy for a graduate of the F.B.I. training school. I don't need to tell you not to get smart."

Iron came up off his knees, hands held shoulder high, his unwavering eyes on the bulldog face of the killer. He saw Heller move into the room and a narrow-chested, thin-lipped man came after him, with an automatic swinging loosely in his hand. Heller motioned Iron back against the wall, told the little man: "Get his rod, Tony. Make sure he isn't double-heeled. He's a smart egg, this Iron guy, and hard as his name."

Tony grinned maliciously but he was cautious about lifting the gun from Iron's coat pocket. He patted the G-man, armpits, hips and belt for an additional gun, then grunted: "That's all, Jerry."

"You fell for that play like a sucker," Heller said sardonically as he dropped onto the bed. "Blondie figured you would. She's a smart gal. Gave you just enough information through that Latvian amazon to bring you up here on the run. Too much would have made you suspicious."

Iron choked back a bitter curse. He should have suspected that the woman at the garage was a Latvian, a countrywoman of Marcia Sheeren. He had been led subtly into a death trap. Frantic thoughts flashed through his brain, wild plans for escape whirled madly. His arms started to ache, but when he tried

to lower them, Heller's gun snapped up again. The killer's next words sent a chill down the G-man's spine.

"You were getting too wise, Iron," he lipped tightly. "You guessed that Red Killrain wasn't the real head of the mob. Pretty soon you would have nosed out the Big Shot. Now you won't have a chance to do any more nosing."

"You can't get away with it, Heller," bluffed the G-man. "You don't think I'd come here alone, do you?"

"Nuts to you, copper," the square-faced gunman snarled viciously. "You're a lone wolf. You ran down Red Killrain almost single-handed. I know you haven't any pals with you on this junket. And by the time they find your body strewn all over the floor, Tony and I will be miles away."

He snapped an order to the thin-faced lad and Tony hastily scooped up the articles from the dressing stand and tossed them into the suitcase. The checked suit went on top and the cheap bag was snapped shut.

"Now open the windows, Tony," Heller grated. He gave Iron a mocking smile. "The Ninth Avenue El goes right past this corner. When the next train comes along—Mrs. Iron's little boy can kiss himself—good-by!"

CHAPTER III

TAPPER TAPPED



BOB IRON'S face was a grey, tense mask as the slender little gunman, whistling tunelessly through his teeth, threw up the two windows. Jerry Heller slouched carelessly on the edge of the bed, but his .45 calibre automatic was never very far off the line to Iron's heart. Heller chuckled a little as Tony came back. He said:

"You're a game guy, Iron. I hate a mug that goes saffron, when he's due for the heat. Too bad you're on the other side of the fence. You'd be a good buddy to tie in with."

Cold sweat was forming on Bob

Iron's brow. His blood felt like a stream of ice water in his veins. But his voice was steady as he asked: "Any objections to my lowering my arms—before the final payoff? It's damned uncomfortable posing like this."

Heller clucked approvingly. "Nice goin', feller," he said. "Sure—drop 'em, if you want to. Why not cross them on your chest—it will look pretty when they—"

His sardonic rejoinder was interrupted by a soft knock on the door, a hesitant, almost timid knock. Heller's eyes slid to Tony's face, in a mute question—then jerked toward the door. And as those pale blue eyes moved, Bob Iron's right hand, which had been descending slowly, flashed down with incredible speed. The G-man's voice cracked like the snap of a whip:

"Drop that gun, Heller!"

Jerry Heller whirled, his wide eyes stared at the little derringer that Iron had snapped from concealment beneath his coat sleeve. It was a tiny, double-shot, little weapon—but deadly at such close range, especially in the hands of a man like Bob Iron. A sougning noise like a sigh escaped from Jerry Heller's chest. The gun dangled limply in his lap. His blue eyes went opaque, his square teeth showed in a vicious snarl.

"Drop it!" commanded Iron again. A tiny muscle throbbed along the G-man's jaw, his eyes were blazing slits of fury. "Drop it—or try to use it. I don't care which you do." As the G-man spoke, the faint knock sounded on the door again—a little louder this time. It seemed to stir Jerry Heller into suicidal activity. He stared at Iron a second, then he threw his body sideways on the bed.

"Scram, Tony!" he yelled. "It's the payoff—"

Tony darted for the window. The gun in Heller's hand was lifting fast. Bob Iron swayed at the hips, his finger tightened on the trigger of the derringer just as Heller made his desperate play. The heavy roar of the killer's gun drowned out the sharp crack of the derringer.

The tiny gun had blazed a split second ahead of the automatic. Heller's shot plowed into the wall a foot from Iron's head. He never fired another. The tiny pellet from the sleeve gun had driven squarely through the killer's left eye.

Iron whirled, snapped the remaining shot from the little gun at the figure that was scrambling for the fire-escape. Wood and paint chipped from the window sill as Tony dived through. The G-man plunged for the bed, grabbed the automatic from Heller's limp hand and rushed back to the window. The little gunman was three floors below, racing recklessly down the grilled steps, his figure almost lost in the darkness. Iron winged a shot at the moving blob. He heard the bullet whine as it ricocheted off the steel grillework. He scrambled through the window, but Tony had dropped to the court before he could draw a bead on him.

He heard someone crashing against the door from the corridor. He had just gotten back into the room when the lock splintered and a bulky, white-haired figure plunged in and straightened stiffly under the menace of the gun in Iron's first. The G-man swore.

"WHAT in hell are you doing here, Mead?"

For a minute the lawyer was breathless, panting from his effort in smashing in the door. His blue eyes went wide in a startled stare as they riveted on the big figure sprawled across the bed.

"Who's that, Iron?" he gasped. "It looks like—it is Jerry Heller, isn't it?"

"It *was* Jerry Heller," the G-man corrected harshly. His gun dropped as he repeated: "What are you doing here, Mead?"

The lawyer mopped his brow. His blue eyes were bright, glittering with suppressed emotion as he said: "The same thing you were, I guess. I nearly walked into a trap—set by that she-devil, Marcia Sheeren. She called me about an hour ago and asked me to meet her here. I agreed then I called your office, but you

were out. I didn't tell the chap that answered the phone what I wanted, because I figured that you might want to be the one to pick her up—since she—slipped through your fingers once. I came along, thinking I could play along with her, until you could grab her. But she was putting me on the spot." He mopped his brow again, then asked: "Did she feed you the same line?"

Iron started to admit that he had been played for a sucker also. He changed his mind and said tersely:

"No. I did some smart detecting, so I thought. I just blundered in on my own accord. Heller and his pal must have heard me using a skeleton key on the door, so they ducked into the next room and let me put myself on the spot. Jerry was all set to burn me down when you knocked. That gave me just the break I needed to play the ace I had up my sleeve. I got Heller, but the other rat got away."

Mead cursed vehemently. He said:

"She's getting desperate, when she makes plays like that, Iron. You must have been spotted going up to my office. This hell-cat figured that I knew a lot about the mob, and that I'd have to throw in with you boys or be branded as an accomplice or a member of the mob.

"She knew which decision I'd make. So I was too dangerous to let live. I guess there's no doubt now about who was the brains of the Killrain mob. She made me grab her line; hook, sinker and all. And I don't rate myself as any yokel. I've fooled around with crooks enough to be wise to their rackets."

Iron thought grimly of the neatly planned plot that had lead him to Room 806, and he mentally agreed. The Woman in Green had plenty of grey matter underneath that mop of blond hair. It looked as if she had been trying to get rid of two enemies at one time. That was ruthlessness to the highest degree.

Bob Iron's face was bleak as he started for the phone to summon the morgue wagon for Jerry Heller's body. He heard a racket in

the hall, looked around and saw the sallow-faced clerk. A uniformed cop and a man who identified himself as the manager were with him. Iron told the police officer what had happened, asked him to cover the routine of reporting Heller's death and disposing of the body.

The G-man took the suitcase Tony had packed, saying he wanted the criminology experts at the F.B.I. laboratories to go over the things. Then he turned to the lawyer and said:

"I'd like to have you come down to the bureau office, Mead. I want you to make a deposition about this woman trying to trap you here. I'm going to get her—and I want every scrap of evidence I can get to help send her to the chair."

Mead agreed willingly. He was still mopping his brow, apparently still sweating over his narrow escape, when they rode down the elevator.

DON GILMORE saw a deep frown making a washboard pattern on Bob Iron's forehead after Ned Mead had finished his deposition and left. The lean-jawed young G-man was running his fingers savagely through his curly brown hair, a sure sign that his brain was wrestling with some troublesome problem. Gilmore asked:

"What's worrying the old think-box now, Bob? Anything I can help on?"

Iron's fingers wrapped into a heavy fist, and slammed down on the desk.

"Mead's holding out on us, Don." He said explosively. "If Marcia Sheeren tried to put him on the spot, and I think she did, it wasn't just because he had talked with me. Foghorn has got something on that mob. Maybe he's got the key to the hiding place of Red Killrain's loot. I want you to arrange to have his office wire tapped. Detail a couple men to record every conversation he takes part in."

Gilmore nodded, saying: "I was a bit suspicious when he called up tonight and wouldn't talk with anyone but you. His alibi about want-

ing to help you square the ignominy of losing the Woman in Green was a little thin."

Bob Iron was weary and disheartened when he trudged back to his hotel room. He found little satisfaction in the thought that another desperate killer had been wiped off the list of Public Enemies with the death of Jerry Heller. Marcia Sheeren, who loomed more and more positively as the Siren Genius of the criminal world, had outwitted him again. Fatigue and discouragement had his morale at its lowest ebb. He wondered bitterly if he hadn't more than met his match in the Woman in Green.

His despondency increased as two days of plodding, relentless search in every possible nook and corner of the underworld failed to turn up the slightest trace of Marcia Sheeren or the swarthy-skinned Tony, now definitely tabbed as a member of the former Killrain mob.

THE suitcase had failed to produce any worthwhile evidence. There had been a couple letters from a girl in Wilkes-Barre who had evidently fallen for Jerry Heller. Investigation proved that she knew nothing of the blond killer's criminal activities. She had met Heller at a dancehall a few months before and believed him to be a semi-professional ball player on one of the industrial teams.

Then when the trail seemed hopelessly lost there came an unexpected break. A gas station employee in a little village just west of Wilkes-Barre had spotted the blue Chrysler. Twice, in three days time, the car had stopped for gas. The first time, the attendant hadn't noticed it particularly, except to admire the good-looking red-haired woman who was with the dark-skinned driver. But the second time the woman hadn't looked so pretty.

She was mad, the attendant said, and was bawling the dark man out for falling down on some job she'd given him. He'd overheard enough of their conversation while filling the tank to arouse his suspicions

and make him believe that the Chrysler was the bandits' car he had read about in the papers. The car had gotten away before he had a chance to telephone the police.

Iron's flagging spirits rose. It all tied in together. Heller must have been living in the vicinity of Wilkes-Barre when he met the flapper who had written him. Killrain had been shot and the tiny skeleton had been found in the mountains in that vicinity.

The fact that the blue Chrysler had showed up at the gas station twice in three days would indicate that the new headquarters of the mob was somewhere in that region. Which meant there was something there that vitally interested the Woman in Green. Red Killrain might have cached his loot near the spot where he had been killed.

Feverish activity stirred the F.B.I. offices. Details working out of Harrisburg and New York started a systematic hunt for the new hide-out. In the guise of aluminum peddlers, book agents and vacuum salesmen, agents called at houses and farms; cities and settlements were covered.

In the role of state surveyors equipped with transits and markers, Bob Iron and Don Gilmore drove up to the gas station where the car had been spotted, asked countless questions of the sharp-eyed attendant about the appearance of the car and finally jogged his memory to the point where he recalled the tires being caked with black gumbo that must have come from the farm region about twenty miles distant.

Mile after mile along dirt and macadam roads the two G-men traveled, setting instruments and markers, but in reality scanning roads for tracks, questioning farmers about traffic and transportation of their crops, always managing to insinuate in their conversation some casual reference to the blue Chrysler the police were searching for.

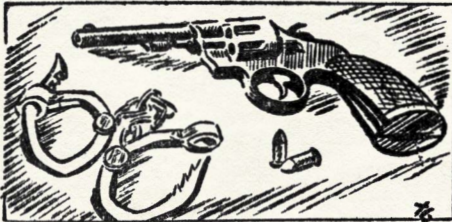
It was a disheartening task. The population was largely foreign; Dutch, Italian, Polish and Slavic settlers made up the farming sector.

Inhabitants were taciturn and suspicious of strangers. Twice they were set upon by ferocious dogs. Once when Iron thought he saw tire tracks that resembled the Chrysler's leading into a farm yard and started to trail them in, a burly Polack armed with a shot-gun nearly blew his head off.

IT TOOK plenty of diplomacy to persuade the farmer they weren't revenue men searching for illicit stills. At another place, where the G-men's hopes were fanned into quick expectancy by the print of the pattern of tire treads that were now indelibly burned in Bob Iron's brain, a black-haired, brown-eyed, five-year-old youngster sighted them coming into the farmyard and ran screaming into the house. A minute later a deep-bosomed, barefooted *Hausfrau* ran out with a bucket of steaming water, ready to scald the intruders who had frightened the child.

Don Gilmore tried his most persuasive German on the woman but she continued to menace them sullenly, ordering them away from her place. The New York agent's temper flared, he turned to Bob Iron who was grinning wickedly and said:

"I'm getting fed up with this stuff, Iron. I'm going to round up



a detail and turn every one of these hovels upside down."

Bob's eyes had been raking the ramshackle barn and the grounds about the none-too-clean farmhouse. He grabbed Gilmore's arm, said abruptly:

"Let's go, Don! We've got it!"

Gilmore's jaw dropped, then he swung on his heel and followed Iron down the dusty pathway. Out of

hearing of the house he demanded: "What have we got, feller?"

"The place where that Chrysler had stopped. Not once but several times. I spotted three or four different sets of tracks, while you were battling with the female Tarzan." Exultation rang in Bob Iron's tones. His lean face was tense, his eyes glittered with excitement, as they got into their battered roadster and raced down the road.

Swiftly and methodically, Bob Iron outlined his plans. Men would be detailed to surround the farm at dusk. Iron had spotted a telephone wire leading to the farm. The wire would be cut, then agents garbed as telephone linesmen would call, hunting for the break in the circuit.

While making repairs they could tap the line, leading the plugged-in circuit to the wooded hill in back of the barn. At the same time a radio beam photo cell outfit could be set up across the barn door so that no one could drive in without sounding an alarm up on the hillside where Iron and Gilmore would be watching the farmhouse.

Field headquarters had been set up in one of the villages on the outskirts of Wilkes-Barre. Men were located and started on the telephone-tapping job. Another agent was detailed to round up as many men as possible by nightfall, and to post them in strategic positions on the hills on either side of the valley farm. An hour later Bob Iron and Don Gilmore were located in a favorable spot on the hill beyond the barn, equipped with a portable telephone receiving set that would be connected to the plug-in as soon as it was dark enough for the agents to lead up the wire without being seen.

Minutes dragged into an hour, then two. Finally a wriggling figure slipped through the underbrush, unrolling a coil of telephone cord and a roll of thin wire. Connections were made and the radio electric eye was set, as well as the phone connection. Don Gilmore clamped on a set of earphones, Bob, equipped with a pair of night glasses, kept

the farmhouse under constant observation.

Another dreary hour dragged past. Bob Iron was getting jittery, wondering whether he had gone off half-cocked at the sight of the wrong tracks. But the intuition that served him almost like a sixth sense, told him that he was on a hot trail.

Dusk had deepened into darkness, and Iron's wrist-watch registered seven o'clock, when Don Gilmore snapped up to a sitting position and clamped the earphones tighter to his head. Iron watched him anxiously, saw the older man's weather-beaten face register excitement. Then Gilmore said softly:

"The old dame is calling Wilkes-Barre—she's got someone on the phone—talking a mixture of German and some Slavic lingo that I can't get— God, Bob—she's talking to the Woman in Green—she called her by name—reporting our visit this afternoon—then about the telephone going dead and the men coming to fix it— Well, I'll be a such and such—" He jerked off the earphones, stared at Iron and cursed in a dazed, bewildered voice.

"What's wrong, Don?" Iron asked sharply. Gilmore ran his hand over his brow, said blankly: "That woman isn't human. When the dame down at the farm told her about the telephone linemen, Marcia Sheeren laughed and said in German, 'Think nothing of it'. Then she spoke in English, sharp and fast. She said: 'Okay, G-men. The pay-off's at ten tonight'. Just as though she was talking directly to us."

Bob Iron was quiet for a minute. Then he cursed bitterly. He said: "She was talking to us, Don. She was smart enough to figure out that the phone trouble meant a tapped line. She knew we'd be listening in—and she's fired a challenge at us."

"What can we do about it?" Gilmore asked morosely. "No use in sticking here if she's got us spotted."

Bob Iron's face was like a granite block. He said savagely: "I'm going to accept that challenge, Don. I'm going to be down at that farmhouse at ten o'clock tonight."

CHAPTER IV

SLAYER'S SHOWDOWN



ON GILMORE started to voice a protest, then he locked his lips. He knew the stubborn streak in Bob Iron's make-up. It was useless to argue with the big fellow. The same stubbornness had kept Iron doggedly on the trail of Red Killrain in a chase that had swept up and down the Atlantic seaboard and had wound up in a mountain inn not many miles distant.

He knew the lean-jawed, wide-shouldered, ace-sleuth of the F.B.I. was grimly determined to see the last of the Winship kidnapers brought to justice; to see the nefarious gang that had terrorized the country for nearly two years, entirely wiped out. This was Bob's case.

If he wanted to waste three hours there on a lonely hillside, while the Woman in Green was laughing at them, it was okay with Don Gilmore.

The young agent seemed to sense his partner's resignation, for he said apologetically:

"I've been doing a lot of thinking in the last two hours, Don, and I've gotten this whole thing pretty well settled in my own mind. It's a crazy explanation and one that I'd be afraid to bring into the Chief at Washington—without some evidence to substantiate it. I've got a hunch that I'm right though—and ten o'clock tonight will tell the story. Either I'm the best guesser in the country—or I'm the biggest sap."

For the next twenty minutes he talked, outlining point after point in his startling theory. When he had finished, Don Gilmore was jubilant.

"You've got it, Bob!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I know you've got it. And boy—what a wind-up to the toughest case we ever tackled!"

To the impatient G-men it seemed

that the hands of Iron's illuminated wrist-watch would never get around to ten P.M. But after nine-thirty, events moved rapidly. Iron picked up headlights of a car on the country road, saw them turn in at the drive leading to the farm. A minute later the radio cell began to buzz, the circuit had been broken by a car driving into the barn.

"I'm not sure—but it looks like the Chrysler," Iron grated. "Two people getting out, a man and a woman. That would be Tony and the Woman in Green."

He put down the night-glasses, slipped his automatic from its holster and tried the mechanism. Satisfied that it was working smoothly he shoved it back into its spring clip. Don Gilmore's voice was troubled as he said:

"Wish you'd let me go down there with you, Bob. I'm afraid you're pressing your luck too much, trying it single-handed."

Iron clipped him on the shoulder with a hearty thump.

"Two might be a crowd," he said. "We don't want to scare the Big Shot off. You can lead the reserves."

"If I'm not too late," Gilmore muttered, as the big fellow started swiftly down the hill toward the farm.

Headlights of a second car showed in the drive as Bob Iron's long legs carried him over the uneven ground. Despite the darkness, he kept to the shelter of the clumps of shrubbery, racing across the stubble of corn in back of the barn at a crouch. The second car was in the drive, a dark coupé with a long, sleek-looking hood. Iron's pulse hammered fast as he saw it, his theory was working out perfectly so far.

Disconnected, jumbled thoughts flashed through his mind as he rounded the corner of the barn, eyes alert for any sign of an outpost or guard. His blood was pounding at his temples, cold sweat was dampening his palms.

Elation sang in his brain—for he felt that he was at the end of a long, bitter chase. The supreme

achievement of his career as a G-man would be accomplished in the next few minutes—or he would be added to the honor roll of those who had lost their lives in the line of duty.

His eyes scanned the rear door of the farmhouse, as he moved silently along the wall of the barn. He thought he would have no difficulty in getting in. He glanced at his watch, it was exactly nine-fifty-eight. He still had a couple of minutes until the time set in the mysterious message from the Woman in Green.

A sudden scream stopped Iron dead in his tracks for a second. It was like the cry of an infuriated beast, like the vicious scream of a mountain lion that he had heard in the Rockies years before. He leaped forward, had taken only two strides, when the stillness of the night was shattered again. This time it was the rattle of gunfire that crashed in the ears of the G-man a single shot, then two more in quick succession—a slight delay and then two more.

IRON was swearing under his breath. His gun swung in his fist as he crashed into the back entry, hit the door with his shoulder and pitched into the big, old-fashioned kitchen. Light showed in a narrow entry ahead. From that direction he heard moans of pain, mingled with clipped oaths in a strangled voice. He was diving for the entry when he heard a door slam at the front of the house.

The entry lead into a shabby living room, with a fireplace along one wall. Crouched by a corner of the fireplace was Marcia Sheeren with a gun wavering in her hand. Blood was streaming down the front of her green silk frock. Her left hand was braced against the fireplace bricks.

Iron thought she was trying to keep herself erect. Then he saw that her body was sheltering a tiny figure—the little boy who had run from them in fear that afternoon. His dark head peered out from under her extended arm, his eyes were

wide with fright and he was crying hysterically.

Iron's gun dropped, his swift glance swept the room, took in the slowly expiring figure of Tony stretched near the door, and the quaking shivering hulk of the big farm-woman cringing in the corner. Then his eyes came back to Marcia Sheeren.

Her face, strained and white beneath the make-up, looked ghastly. Pain clouded her hazel eyes, but her lips forced a stiff smile. Her voice rasped and bubbled in her throat. She said:

"Hello, Copper. I—thought you were going—to be late. I wasn't sure my message got through. It was my only chance to get the Big Shot—and save the kid!"

Deep pity wrenched Bob Iron's heart. She was like a courageous animal fighting off death. He nodded slowly, said: "It's the Winship youngster— isn't it?"

"Yes. I couldn't let them bump him off. I had a kid his age once—killed by a hit-and-run driver. I knew how this kid's mother felt—so I turned against the mob. Killrain wanted to bump him off—even after I figured out the plan of substituting a skeleton we got at a crooked baby farm. The Big Shot fell for the plan—but Killrain knew you'd get him—he wanted to bop the little feller—for revenge. So we never told Red—where the kid was hidden."

Bob Iron had moved the wounded woman to a comfortable chair. The big Latvian woman got bandages, but the sight of the two wounds over her heart told Iron that the Woman in Green was done. He tried to take the gun she gripped, but she smiled crookedly and asked if she couldn't keep it. She might need it—if they brought the Big Shot back.

Bob Iron slowly shrugged his consent; she had definitely proved she was on the side of the law. He told her to save her strength for answering questions, verifying the theory he'd outlined to Gilmore.

When the chase got hot, the

Woman in Green had suggested dyeing the youngster's hair and planting him with the big Latvian, a distant relative of Marcia Sheeren. The woman believed the boy was Marcia's child and that she was hiding him from a drunken father. The little fellow had aroused the latent mother instinct in the hardened blond woman.

With desperate cunning she plotted to restore little Teddy Winship to his parents. Her first move had been to get rid of Killrain, who was a menace to the child's safety. That also gave her a hold on the Big Shot. She knew where Killrain had cached his half million loot but the Big Shot didn't. A split in that loot had been the Big Shot's price for engineering her escape.

The death of Barney Lee was not planned, it was Jerry Heller's lust to kill that added murder to her rescue.

SHE played her cards well in the desperate gamble to save Teddy Winship's life. She dared not tip off the G-men and have them rescue the boy. One of the Big Shot's men was usually around the farm. Orders were to kill the boy at the first sign of a raid. She had to get rid of the Higher Up, before either she or Teddy Winship would be safe.

Here again her hands were shackled. She could have put the finger on the Big Shot by phone as she did Killrain. But there would be no proof except her word, and the Big Shot was too clever to be convicted just on her say so. So she tried twice to have the G-men get him red-handed, while he was in contact with the members of his gang.

She wanted him on the spot that night when the G-men raided. But her plans had miscarried. The Big Shot sensed that he was in a trap and shot his way to freedom.

Suddenly a volley of shots crashed. The sound came from some distance down the road. Bob Iron's jaw hardened, his eyes smoldered as he said:

"Your Big Shot didn't make his getaway. Some of our lads stopped him out there."

The woman's strength was waning. She called the little fellow to her side. He sobbed as she rumbled the dark hair that had begun to show blond at the roots. She said brokenly:

"Your mommy and daddy have come home now, Teddy. This nice man—will take you home. Tell mommy—you were a good boy—for Aunt Marcia—"

He saw the dark stain on her breast, his face twisted in a mask of sorrow.

"The man hurt you, Aunty," he said tearfully. He patted her cheek and tears glistened in the woman's tortured eyes. "He thinks I'm his aunt, copper," she choked. "Ain't that somep'n?"

A car roared up to the door and three G-men came in, herding a big figure in a dark coat and hat. Iron's eyes slitted venomously as he then snapped:

"The Woman in Green was even more dangerous than you figured, wasn't she, Mister Mead?"

BAFFLED rage showed in the lawyer's face. His features were masked in savage fury. "It's a frame-up!" he shouted. "This woman hates me because I couldn't beat the deportation rap for her. She lured me out here, tried to kill me, and now she's trying to frame me with all the crimes her mob pulled. She can't make it stick. You're screwy if you think she can, Iron. She's a criminal. Her evidence is not worth the powder to blow it to hell. I'll sue the Government—these thugs of yours wounded me, absolutely without excuse."

Don Gilmore burst into the room, just as the lawyer finished his tirade. He cried:

"It's okay, Bob. I just got a report of the conversation over Mead's tapped wire from New York. He told Marcia Sheeren he was going to kill the kid tonight, and a lot more. We've got enough to hang him a hundred times."

"I was sure we could," Iron said grimly. "I was slow getting wise to the fact that it had to be Mead. He was the only one who knew we were bringing her to New York by auto that morning. She didn't know herself how she was going to be transported, until we started.

"Mead was there at the D. of J. building when we pulled away. He had to be the one who telephoned Heller and arranged the rescue. After that it was a case of getting evidence to clinch it. We almost got it at the Hotel Maxon—but I was ahead of schedule, wasn't I, Mrs. Sheeren?"

She nodded weakly, said: "I knew you could locate Jerry. I told Mead—I was putting you on the spot—I knew he hated you so much—he'd come to be in on the finish. But I didn't think you were screwy enough to tackle them alone. I wanted you to get him red-hot—I thought you would get help and round him up with Heller and Tony."

Mead's face went pale at the news that his phone had been tapped. Sweat beaded his forehead as he realized his fate. He turned to the pallid woman in the easy chair. Berserk fury suddenly inflamed his brain. His fat, hairy hands lifted and hooked like talons. A savage growl rasped in his throat as he sprang at her, yelling:

"You doublecrossing rat. I'll get you—"

The limp, weak hand lifted. Marcia Sheeren's finger tightened on the trigger of the gun she was holding. "Nuts to you," she cried.

The gun roared, Mead clutched his breast, then went down like a deflated balloon. He quivered, kicked, then lay still. Marcia Sheeren's eyes were still humid as they fixed on the inert heap of flesh. She looked at Bob Iron. A hollow rattle came from the throat—she forced her livid lips into a smile and whispered:

"I said—I wouldn't go back—to Latvia—copper." The blond head, now a flaming henna, dropped to her chest.

The Woman in Green was dead.

The Music Goes In —and Out

Pepper Corbin, T-Man, Lets a Dope Ring Whistle Itself to the Chair!

By
**LAWRENCE
TREAT**

*Author of "Three Magic Bullets,"
"Elephants is Dainty," etc.*

WHEN "Pepper" Corbin answered the abruptly rung bell of his apartment, the big tough man at the door kept his hands in the pockets of his trench coat and stared insolently, the way a man can when he has a gun in his hands and you haven't. Corbin grinned at the hard, humorless features; at the hard black eyes; at the broad, heavy forehead with the brittle sandy hair. He always grinned and kept up an aimless chatter when he was in a jam. It keyed up his mind and tensed his strong, lithe muscles, somehow.

So he grinned now. The big man must have found out, in some way, that Corbin was a narcotic agent attached to the Internal Revenue



Thomas was leaning back in his chair, dead

Bureau of the Treasury Department, and that his radio announcing was a blind, a means of getting into places which the ordinary agent could enter only as part of a raiding squad.

"Come on in," Corbin chirped. "I don't know who you are or what you want, but if you got a gun, better bring it out. I don't like guessing. What do you want, anyhow—tea?"

The big man walked in. "It's a gun," he remarked laconically. "I just brought it along."

Corbin decided if he could make the man sit in the big chair in the corner, there was a chance of ducking into the next room and reaching the telephone. His revolver was hanging in its holster in the closet. No chance of reaching that, obviously. "So you just brought it along to play with," he said. "Okay—sit down and play."

"Can the comedy," was the harsh rejoinder. "I come here to say something—and I don't want to kid around. The boss says you should lay off Thomas. If you don't, you'll get hurt."

Corbin was a lot more surprised than he looked. "Who's the boss, and why in hell shouldn't I see Thomas?"

"You know why," declared the big man sullenly. And when Corbin didn't say anything, but just stood there like a bantam rooster, full of muscle and energy but with nothing to do, the big man repeated it. "You know why."

"Maybe you got the wrong party," Corbin suggested. "No reason in the world why I shouldn't see Thomas. Maybe you ought to be telling this to someone else."

The gunman looked perplexed. "Your name's Corbin, isn't it? Well, the boss says to tell this guy Corbin to lay off, so I'm tellin' you. If you don't, it's your funeral."

The "boss" must be someone higher up in the dope ring of which Newton Thomas was one of the outlets. It would be nice to get the boss's name, but the sandy-haired gunman was a poor bet for learning it. Corbin thought of all this while he spoke.

"You go back and tell the boss I don't know what this is all about. I'll be home tomorrow morning—if he wants to tell me."

The big man eyed him harshly. "It's plain enough, Corbin. You see Thomas and you'll get hurt bad. And I hope they let me do it."

THE narcotic agent said "Thanks," and opened the door. The big man scowled, turned on his heel and stamped out. As soon as he was alone, Corbin called up the radio studio and asked for Thomas.

"Hello, Newt—Pepper talking. I want to see you tonight. I have to stop in at the studio first, and then I'll go right over to your joint. Yeah, it's about that business. I'll be there." He cradled the receiver, started to dress.

The big man's visit had been a surprise. It looked as if the "boss" thought Corbin was trying to chisel in, or else was just being curious about things that didn't concern him. But nobody sends a gunman to tell a recognized narcotic agent to lay off, so that part of it was all right. Corbin's identity was safe, anyway.

He'd gone to a lot of trouble to conceal his identity and to establish a reputation as a dope addict. He'd practiced a nasal twitch in front of a mirror, developed the trick of raising goose-flesh at will, learned how to press his tear glands in order to induce a wateriness of the eyes. He made certain that people saw him with these symptoms of an addict in need of drugs. And to complete the buildup, every week

he bought twenty dollars' worth of white powder from little Jesse Critz. Corbin took the stuff home in a small brown package and promptly threw it down the incinerator.

His purpose was to locate the chief dispensing agencies for the dope rings, but Newton Thomas, radio singer, cabaret owner and dope seller, had changed the picture. Thomas was anxious to get out of a racket into which he'd drifted before he was making big money on the air. But he knew too much for his own health, and was afraid to quit.

Pepper Corbin thereupon popped out with a scheme. Thomas was to play sick, take a trip for his health and leave Corbin in charge of the dope selling. When the big shots got used to him, Thomas could slip out permanently. For Corbin, it was a break; Thomas would hand him a who's who of illicit drug dealing, and the Treasury agent, working on the inside, could slowly gather the evidence for the biggest crack-down in the history of the narcotic squad. The gunman's visit, however, spoiled all of that, and Corbin formed a new plan—a plan to learn everything he could from Thomas, and to learn it as soon as possible.

Corbin had completed his half hour of announcing on a small-time program and was on his way out of the radio building when he heard someone humming lustily in one of the small side rooms. He poked his head inside, saw a dark swarthy man with a black military mustache. It was Otto Herrn, composer and orchestra leader.

The T-man grinned. "Hello, maestro. I almost recognized that tune of yours this time. In another week I'll know it's you whenever I hear it."

"In another week everybody in

town will be singing it. That's my new 'Mountain Song'—starts my new program tomorrow. You're announcing for me. How about having a beer and talking it over?"

"Sorry, I can't—I'm due up at Thomas'. But I'll give it a good plug, all about the Swiss yodel that inspired it. If I had a memory for music I'd be humming it myself."

Herrn hooked one arm in Corbin's. "You remember more than you realize. The subconscious memory. Music goes 'round and 'round, Pepper."

"Not in *my* head. It just goes in and out."

HERRN smiled. "I'll go up to Thomas' with you and bet you a stein of beer that before the evening's over, you'll whistle the 'Mountain Song' without knowing it."

"Sorry, old man, but I have some private stuff to discuss with Thomas. But we'll have the beers tomorrow, after your new hour. So long, maestro."

It was past eleven when Pepper Corbin entered the noisy, smoke-filled room of the Peacock Supper Club. The floor was crowded. Bare shoulders were pressed against gleaming white shirt fronts. A dim yellow light lit garishly grinning faces, and cast shadows into the corners of the room. The orchestra worked like mechanical marionettes, wound up full and jerking with quick spasmodic movements.

Corbin picked his way stiffly between crowded tables and wondered at which one of them a gunman sat, fingering a revolver and ready to use it. Well, he wasn't clairvoyant and he didn't see his sandy-haired friend, and all he could do was march ahead, his eyes peeled and his hands ready to grab.

He stepped through a rough curtain, jerked into a crouch and then

straightened up slowly. There was no ripping blaze of a shot; merely a tall blond youth, slender, with baby blue eyes and curly hair. Somebody's gigolo, decided Corbin. Then the gigolo swayed slightly and an empty smile parted his lips. He seemed very drunk, even before his words gave him away.

"I'm losht, 'n' I can't get by th' three of you in sush a narrow plashe. No room. Hic—pardon me, shir."

Corbin stared, then broke into a sharp crackling laugh. He didn't realize the tension he'd been under until it broke at the hiccough of a drunken kid.

"Just walk through the end man," he grinned. "You'll find plenty of triplets tonight. Know which is Thomas' office?"

THE blond man wobbled and held out his hand. "You're real pal I'll take you alla way into Mis' Thomas' offish. He'sh frien' of mine, too."

"Never mind—I'll find it," Corbin assured him.

"Real pal—couldn't thinka leavin' you. Might get losht too, like me! My name'sh Whitey Shmith—whash yours?"

Corbin smiled and gripped Smith's cold hand. "Corbin. Listen—you take me to Thomas' door, and then I'll take you to your table. That fair enough?"

"Pleasha meet alla you. I came in with a boo'ful blond girl, and now she'sh triplets and they're all losht. Thomas' offish—right here." He weaved to the last door and peered at it.

"One of theesh—dunno which!" He started to snicker, swayed and grasped at the door knob. Corbin caught him under one shoulder and tried to steer him away. The gigolo muttered "No," turned the knob and leaned forward. The door swung

open, revealing a room that was half office and half living room. There was nobody in it. Smith staggered forward.

"Hello! Washa matter, Thomas? Why don' you shay hello to an old frien'?"

Corbin was getting annoyed. "He's not in—go on back," he said curtly.

The gigolo struggled awkwardly. "Maybe all the tripletsh are hidin' here. You look—I look. They're blonde, shee, 'n' they got blue dreshes on. You look inna closet and I'll look unner the rugsh."

Corbin grabbed him by the jacket lapels and shook him, hard. As he did so, Smith's face came close to his own and the T-man was struck by the lack of an alcoholic breath.

"You're not drunk!" he rapped out suddenly. "What's the idea, anyhow?"

"Not drunk—courshe not!"

Corbin said "Okay, Whitey," and shoved. The blond man's legs didn't move right. They buckled, hooked around each other, and he stumbled backward to fall across a chair, balance a moment and then flop heavily to the floor. He lay there motionless.

"Passed out! Corbin muttered. "Must be stewed after all." And he swung on his heel and marched off. He tried the two other doors, found both of them locked. Puzzled, he decided to go back to the dance floor and dawdle over a drink. Funny that Thomas hadn't been in, and funnier still about the blond gigolo who didn't smell of liquor—

Pepper Corbin was beginning to wonder whether he'd pulled a boner. With his drink half empty, he rose and stamped back to the corridor. At the first door, in small black letters, he saw Newton Thomas' name. So the blond man had taken him into the wrong room!

He knocked, received no answer and turned the knob. Then he knew he'd pulled something much worse than a boner. He'd exploded his whole narcotic case like a balloon, and he didn't even have the torn strips of rubber in his hands. Just the cold menace of a corpse—that was all.

Newton Thomas was leaning back in his swivel-chair. His arms hung down loosely; his eyes had a glassy sheen and the color and consistency of fish scales. Blood from a bullet hole was dripping down his cheek. As Corbin gazed, a drop hit the floor, spread. The T-man looked a little sick, and disgusted.

He turned slowly, in a circle. The door was closed, but the keyhole was empty. A couch, a radio, a liquor cabinet, a bookcase, another cabinet met his eyes. Then he was back at the desk, with a window behind it and the dark shades drawn down. The dance orchestra must have drowned out the noise of the shot.

Corbin looked at the desk. It was mahogany. A brand new scratch mark, about six inches long, disfigured the side of the desk; the same side as the bullet wound in Thomas' temple, he noted. Near the scratch lay a gun. A Colt .38 automatic. The T-man took out his handkerchief and stepped forward. There was no doubt that Thomas was stone dead and that he'd been killed within the last ten or fifteen minutes. But there was a lot of doubt about some other things.

Corbin started to whistle a funeral march. He glanced up at the mirror, hit a false note and kept on whistling. He scratched his chest and slid his fingers toward his gun holster. Then the man in the mirror spoke.

"Stop! Stick your hands up and turn around, slow!"

Pepper Corbin raised his hands and spoke at the mirror. "Hello, Whitey." He swung around, his hard muscles bunched and trembling with the deliberate slowness of their movement. The blond youth smiled. His baby blue eyes looked guileless, innocent.

"So I wasn't drunk, wise guy!" he sneered. Corbin didn't answer. Smith must have shot Thomas and had just stepped out of the murder room when the T-man had appeared in the corridor. It had required nerve and fast thinking to play drunk that way. The setup was perfect for a frame. Corbin coming to see Thomas at almost the moment he was shot. Five minutes during which Corbin couldn't account for his presence. Apple pie a la mode for the police.

Why had Whitey Smith risked coming back?

THE gunman stepped forward with a quiet, deadly wariness, his gun leveled, his blue eyes still childish, innocent. When he was a foot from the Treasury agent he stuck his revolver muzzle into Corbin's stomach and frisked him. The T-man didn't move while the blond youth took his revolver. He wondered whether Smith knew he was from the Revenue Bureau. It made a lot of difference—that probably he'd been found out.

Smith backed stealthily across the room. "Nobody heard it when Thomas got bumped, and nobody'll hear it if you get bumped—so you're gonna do what I say. Got it?"

Corbin's grin was tight. "No reason to bump me. I stopped in to see Thomas and I find him—well, you know all about that. All I want is to get out of here—out of this room and this night club and this city and this state, too. Somewhere in Jersey would suit me fine, with

a couple of beehives to take care of. You like bees, Whitey?"

"Smith to you. Finished shooting off your mouth?" the gunman clipped.

"If you feel that way about it, Whitey. But listen—"

"Smith. And shut up," the gigolo snarled.

"Sure. He must have been shot about ten—"

"*Shut—up!*"

Pepper Corbin shrugged. Time, delay was important; somebody else might come along. But the T-man, who was usually one jump ahead of himself, realized he could overdo it. So he shut up.

"All right, then. Now pick up that gun on the desk."

CORBIN'S eyes narrowed. He stooped, lifted the automatic. The muzzle was facing Thomas' dead body. He turned with a puzzled look.

"What's the idea?" the Treasury agent demanded. As the arc of the automatic described a half circle, he jerked it up and squeezed the trigger. A flat clicking sound told him the clip was empty.

"Enjoying yourself, sonny boy?" Smith asked without smiling. Then, with suppressed fury, "Think I'm a goof? Put that thing down and sit in this chair, with your hands on the arms."

Fingerprints! Whitey Smith's game was to smear the room with Corbin's prints, so that the police could reconstruct the crime and pin it on him. Well, at least they'd be smeared in the places Smith had touched. This was one murder Pepper Corbin would know everything about—for all the good it would do, he swore softly.

"All right, Corbin," Smith clipped. "Now put your arm on the desk and grab hold of the inkwell."

Corbin's sleeve covered the

scratch mark. He couldn't reach the inkwell. He shoved his arm forward until his fingers clasped it. His mind kept racing. There'd been no struggle, he knew. Smith had sat down for a friendly chat, reached for the inkwell with one hand and shot Thomas with the other. Just like that. Smith had had his reasons before he'd arrived. He'd probably been told to rub out Thomas before he could talk to Corbin.

"Now get up and come along with me. We're going out to the dance floor, and we're going to sit down and have a drink. Just pals, you and me. Only remember, I'm the guy with the gun—and I don't mind using it."

Corbin shrugged. "Okay, Whitey—you got the breaks tonight. But try making a monkey out of me again, and the keeper'll be in the cage and the monkey'll be on the outside. I should have socked you, back there. Next time you play drunk, roll a little liquor on your tongue and you'll smell like you act. Now that we're friends again, what'd I do wrong?" he said conversationally.

"You parked your brains with the hat-check girl."

"Score yourself, Whitey! But I don't get your game yet. Where do I come in?"

"You're the sap."

"You have a nice way of saying things. Makes me almost fond of you. Going to ask me to dance, or what? Let's talk about Thomas. We'll have highballs and call it an old-fashioned wake. Was Thomas a friend of yours?" They entered the cabaret proper, selected a table.

"You guess." The gunman's innocent eyes surveyed Pepper Corbin. Smith's one hand was below the level of the table. His expression hadn't changed once since the moment he'd appeared in Thomas'

office. He began to whistle. The whistling annoyed the T-man.

"Listen—you invited me to have a drink, and here we are, and you haven't even ordered up. If we're going to be pals like you said, you ought to tell me something about yourself. I'm Pepper Corbin, radio announcer, and pretty soon all the girls'll be over here trying to get me to sign 'em up for a radio hour. That what you want, too—a radio contract?"

Smith leaned forward, and for the first time expression lit his light blue eyes. It was a hard, ruthless expression, a pinpoint of light that gleamed balefully, darkly from the depths of his sockets.

"I bumped him—and you know it! What the hell you tryin' to do—get yourself bumped, too?"

Pepper Corbin decided he'd said enough. Whitey Smith hadn't so much as left a fingerprint on a spoon, and his name wasn't Smith, and there were no initials on his belt buckle. The gunman straightened up suddenly. Corbin realized somebody had signaled.

"Listen, Corbin—I'm scamming now. You know what's good for you. So you'll stay right here at this table till you get a message from me. So long, pal!" And he vanished through a pair of curtains nearby. Pepper Corbin didn't follow. He had no gun—and Smith had friends. Best to wait a couple of minutes. The trick was to pick up the gunman's trail.

A waiter brought the T-man a drink he hadn't ordered, and hovered around. When there was a commotion at the front door, the waiter put a plate with a check on the table. Corbin took hold of it. There was a key lying underneath. A sharp, commanding voice barked brusquely from the entrance of the supper room then. "Keep your seats, folks. Go right ahead with

whatever you're doing. Only thing is, you can't leave for a few minutes."

Corbin turned. A thin, chesty, hatchet-faced man in a blue suit was speaking from the door. Two or three police uniforms backed him up. The T-man watched the plainclothes man and his squad march across the floor and head for Thomas' office.

He had it now. Somebody had tipped off the police about Thomas' death. Whitey Smith had waited until they were outside the building. Then he'd beat it, through a side entrance the police didn't know about. The key must be to the door of Thomas' office. One more piece of evidence against Corbin, of course. The Treasury agent grabbed the key and dropped it in his pocket. Then he rose and crossed the dance floor. A patrolman stopped him outside Thomas' room. The door was not quite closed, because one of the hinges had been bent in forcing it open.

"Who's in charge?" Corbin asked.

THE patrolman snorted. "What you wanta know for?"

"Treasury man. Who's in charge?" he barked.

The officer looked dubious. "Inspector Foley—but he's busy."

"He'll see me." Pepper Corbin pushed and the policeman stuck out an arm. "Will you send in word—or do you want to make a ruckus over it?" the T-man demanded.

The officer scratched his head vigorously. "Hey, Mike!" he yelled, and whispered when the other approached. A few seconds later Corbin was ushered into the cabaret office. Three or four men were busy with a steel tape measure and a camera. He stalked up to the man who had barked orders at the supper room door. "Inspector Foley?

I'm Corbin, narcotic squad." He took out his identification card. "Thomas was one of my angles."

Foley examined the card, glanced from the photograph to Corbin and then back to the photo. "Know anything about this?"

"No, but I want to look up somebody that may. I thought I'd give you what I have, first. Who tipped you off?"

FOLEY shrugged. "Just a guy. Call came from a pay station near here."

"Check your waiters." A waiter had handed Corbin the key, and a waiter must have given Whitey Smith his signal. Foley could question the staff immediately.

"And listen—ever hear of a smart gunman that looks like a gigolo? Curly hair and blue eyes like a 'gimme' chorus girl?" Corbin demanded.

"You got me. Try the criminal files down at Headquarters. This is Thomas all right, isn't it? What'd you have on him?"

"Not much. Call up the narcotic office and they'll read off whatever there is. You can locate me there any time. How do I get out?"

"Mike'll take you. So it's dope, huh? You fellows ought to have the answer tucked away somewhere. Call me if you get anything."

Pepper Corbin wasted no time on the street. Thomas' name was *not* in the Federal files; and as soon as Foley learned that pleasant little fact, he would be after Corbin. He'd check fingerprints and discover that the T-man had handled the gun and sat in the chair facing Thomas, and that Corbin had five unaccounted minutes and a perfect motive.

The motive, of course, would be graft. Corbin had been friendly with Thomas, and it was easier to guess that he'd been taking graft

than that he'd been getting his evidence. And if Foley were a little slow about piecing it all together, Whitey Smith would be sure to put in an anonymous call and state the case against Corbin in no uncertain words. But Corbin, the narcotic agent—or Corbin, the radio announcer? That left something in life to find out.

The T-man could reconstruct the events leading up to Newton Thomas' murder. The cabaret owner had revealed his arrangements with Corbin, and one of the higher-ups in the narcotic business had hired Smith to prevent it. The frame was largely Whitey Smith's own bright idea. A gunman who looked like a gigolo and thought for himself, this blond icicle. It was an extraordinary combination.

Pepper Corbin dreamed about scratch marks, and woke up in a strange room. He'd explained to his office that he had to lay low for a few days, because otherwise the police would misinterpret his actions. He'd given a detailed description of Smith and sent out a general alarm.

He was not surprised the next morning when he received a peremptory order to report to his chief. That meant Foley had a warrant for his arrest and there was no trace of Smith. But the T-man had no intention of obeying—yet. He breakfasted in a cafeteria and groped for ideas. If he didn't find Smith fast, he'd be in the worst jam of his career. If he wasn't in it already, he cursed softly.

It took two cups of black coffee for Corbin to get his inspiration. As long as he was free, he was a threat to Whitey Smith. Smith had just as much interest in finding him as the police did. His logic was simple enough. If he couldn't find Smith, Smith couldn't find him, either—

Pepper Corbin was whistling as

he walked up the brownstone steps of the shabby house where little Jesse Critz, dope peddler, dispensed his small stock. A known "addict" like Corbin couldn't get along one day without his ration, particularly when he's in a tough spot. Maybe Whitey Smith would figure it that way and make contact at Critz'. Corbin strode up the dingy corridor and mounted to the second floor. He wished he had a gun on him, but he hadn't thought of it last night, and this morning was too late. At the second floor rear he knocked at the door—three quick raps, a slow one and three more quick ones.

JESSE CRITZ was a puny little man with pasty, unhealthy skin and scared, shifty little beads for eyes. When the door opened for Pepper Corbin, the T-man was completely different from the springy, muscular man who had ascended the steps. His hands shook, his watery eyes had a droop at the lids and his lips twisted thinly as he spoke.

"Hello, Jesse. I come for some fixups. I only got a couple of bucks, but listen—I'll make it okay later. I want enough for a few days, see?"

Critz began to whine. "I got nothin' here. Somebody's after me—headache man—and I got to be careful."

Corbin's mind flashed while he answered. As far as he knew, the narcotic squad was much more interested in staying away from Critz than in locking him up. He was Corbin's connection, and Corbin was important. So Critz must be lying, and the only reason he could be lying was at Whitey Smith's order.

"You can't let me down, Jesse," the Treasury agent said in a thin nasal voice. "I need it bad."

"I can get it for you. You stay here, see, and I'll go out and chase

up some geezers for you. You just wait in this room."

Critz obviously wanted to get out to a phone. Either he'd tip off the police, or, more likely, he'd notify Whitey Smith. Corbin decided then and there to drop his mask. He stepped forward, threw back his shoulders. His whole frame seemed to grow bigger; he was alert, strong, with his muscles bunched and his face hard.

"Trying to put me behind the gun, aren't you? You want to go out and make a call—who is it?" he snapped. Critz' reaction was almost funny. Fearful eyes regarded the suddenly bunched fists.

"No—you got me wrong—I wouldn't do nothin' like that!"

Pepper Corbin reached out, grabbed Critz by the lapels and shook him like a rag doll. "Whitey's behind this! You don't have to tell me, punk—I know! Now, where can I get hold of him?"

"Honest—I don't know—I—oh—ouch!"

"Spill it!"

"Nothin'—to spill!" Critz whined. Corbin shoved the man across the room. He sprawled heavily and went down, moaning. Corbin leaped forward, prodded him with his toe and followed with a jab at his stomach.

"Don't lie to me!" he snapped. "Smith put you up to this. You'll tell me where he is if I have to beat the life out of you. Now—talk!"

Jesse Critz put his shaking hands in front of his goggling eyes. "Whitey Fremont—he'll kill me!"

"I'll do worse than that—I'll maul you up so bad, you'll spend the rest of your life wishing you were dead! Only get this—there won't be any Whitey by tomorrow. He'll either be stretched out like a dead chicken, or in stir for the rest of his life. Now—going to talk?"

"Stop it! Don't hurt me—please—I'll talk! Whitey—wanted to know when you came here, wanted me to let him know and to keep you till he had time to get here!"

Corbin stared contemptuously at the frightened little addict. "All right, Critz—we'll do just that. You telephone him, tell him I'm here and that you're holding me. That lets you out, doesn't it? Only, I'm going to listen in on that call."

A half hour later there was a series of knocks: three, then one, and then three. Pepper Corbin flattened himself behind the door. His mouth was tight, his eyes fiery and somber with determination. He had a straight wooden chair in his hands, poised to swing.

"Come in!" Critz squeaked. Corbin was watching him closely. He saw the little addict sway, saw the terror written across his pasty face. Whitey Fremont, alias Smith, must have seen it, too; because he didn't walk in.

"What's the matter?" he said in a clipped, wary voice. Critz tried to answer and only managed a whisper.

"Nothin'!"

CORBIN'S knuckles were white with the force of his grip on the chair. He lifted the piece quietly, carefully, high over his head.

"What the hell—" Fremont snarled, and stopped as he heard chair leg scrape against the wall. Corbin didn't hesitate. He swung with every ounce of his strength, whirling the chair in a wide circle that swept it around the edge of the door and squarely at the place where Fremont ought to be standing.

The T-man heard a gunshot, saw a spout of fire blaze at the door, but the momentum of his attack spun him around and out of range of the blistering death that pumped

through the narrow panels of wood. The chair seemed to catapult out of his hands. Whitey Fremont caught it in the chest and brought up his revolver as he went staggering back. Corbin's hands shot out, grabbed and clutched on the barrel of the gun. He twisted sharply and put all his weight behind it. The gun sloped away from him.

The two men went reeling backward as if they'd been flung out of the wreck of a speeding car. A length of banister ripped and toppled over with a splintering crash. Head first, like some strange animal with eight waving legs, they crashed down the length of the stairway.

Corbin felt as though the side of his head had been split open. The gun had disappeared somewhere in the wild scramble of his assault. He was pumping his fists as fast as they would go. Someone was screaming, and from the street he heard the shrill of a police whistle. He arched his body and smacked a short, vicious fist into Whitey Fremont's stomach. Abruptly resistance ended.

It took a lot of explaining to Inspector Foley. "Your fingerprints, Corbin," he kept repeating, "and you put one over on me when you said Thomas was in your files. Why should I believe your story now about a frame?"

Whitey Fremont began whistling in sarcastic unconcern. Corbin turned sharply on him. "Guys like you only whistle when they're scared, but—" Corbin broke off suddenly. "Holy Mike!" he muttered. Then he turned back to Foley.

"Listen, Inspector—I'm announcing on a national radio hookup at twelve noon. I got to be there. You and a couple of men can take me up and wait outside the studio. It's all glass enclosed, so you'll be see-

ing me every minute. I haven't time to explain the whole case now, but I'll give you this much of it.

"That scratch mark on Thomas' desk—new, wasn't it? Take that busted button from Whitey's sleeve and send it to your laboratory. He made that scratch when he slid his hand along the desk to take hold of the inkwell. Some of the mahogany fibers will still be on the button. The rest is easy. Find out what Whitey was doing with Thomas last night, and why he sneaked out a side door just when you arrived. Now take me to the studio!"

IT was exactly one P. M. when Pepper Corbin marched out of the broadcasting room. Otto Herrn was with him.

"Good, wasn't it?" Herrn asked. "And thanks a lot for the way you announced it, Pepper. You gave the piece a real start. Everybody'll be humming it in a couple of days, like I said."

Corbin stopped next to Inspector Foley and his two men. "Yeah," he remarked. "Only it's too bad, maestro, that you didn't get it on the air a day or two sooner."

"Why?" Herrn wanted to know.

"Because if you had, it wouldn't have meant anything that Whitey Fremont was whistling it."

"Whitey Fremont?" blankly.

"Yeah. You were the only person who knew I had a private appointment with Thomas last night, and you told Whitey to bump him off before I got there. But Whitey's been around you too much, and he picked up that tune of yours. You may be a hummer, but he's a whistler. And he's whistled the pair of you into a death march. If I had any head for music, I'd have recognized that tune of yours last night. But music goes in my head—and out."

Inspector Foley stepped forward then, his voice harsh. From his manner, Corbin knew he'd proved his point to the hilt.

"Otto Herrn, I arrest you for the murder of Newton Thomas. You and the damn' gigolo gunman of yours!"

The blankness had disappeared from the orchestra leader's bland face. He was no musician now; no composer. Savage hate drew up the corners of his twisted mouth in a sneering leer.

"Stand back, all of you!" he snarled, and jerked an automatic from a shoulder holster. "You, Mr. Pepper Corbin—I'm going to salt you down right now! The richest dope traffic in the state! That music front of mine was perfect—until you came along. Well—*take it!*"

But even as he spoke Pepper Corbin had tensed himself in a human catapult of angry bone and muscle. He fairly hurled himself at Herrn's feet. The narcotic racketeer fired wildly, but he was off position as Corbin struck his legs. Quick as light Inspector Foley lunged forward and smashed the man behind the ear with a big, bony fist. The composer-criminal went down as though pole-axed.

Corbin, slumping to the floor with a bullet in his shoulder, grinned weakly. "So my logic finally convinced you, Inspector!" The police official hurried over to ease him to the carpet.

"Yeah," Foley grunted. "Someone go get a doctor—quick!" he yelled. Gently he began to remove the T-man's coat. "Yeah—that brilliant mind of yours. You see, Whitey confessed while you were broadcasting."

Pepper Corbin's grin grew broader. "Sure," he chuckled, and winced at the same time as the coat was pulled against his wounded shoulder. "Didn't I tell him to?"

A Complete Crime Novelet



The flames were leaping high; a fireboat played

Under Cover

CHAPTER I AT THE CLUB PARISIEN

THE pretty blond girl, in the daring evening dress, quirked her full, red lips. She smiled sweetly, but her blue eyes were as chill as arctic ice.

Farrel, who sat across the little table, watched her.

"Don't turn your head," she said, "but two very unmistakable detectives have just come in. It's written all over them."

Farrel smiled as if the girl had

just said something vastly amusing, and nodded.

"I know," he replied. "Saw them in the mirror in back of you. Now, what do you suppose they want in the Club Parisien? Two guesses, Gorgeous."

The smile still lingered on the girl's lips. For four weeks she had been one of the singers of the Broadway bright spot. All kinds of people came to the Club Parisien every night, to dance and to watch the floor show. Her fingers toyed with the stem of her glass. She leaned

When Artelli Sets a Doublecross Snare

By
S. GORDON
GURWIT

Author of "Vengeance,"
"Holster Law," etc.



streams of water on the fire-trap

Death

forward. The dance music drowned her comments:

"One guess is—Artelli. He's sitting over there. Maybe the law's caught up with him."

"Not a chance," said Farrel. "That's one wrong guess."

"Artelli gives me the creeps," said the girl. "He's been making me propositions every time he's been in here. He's busy with his dessert, seemingly, but he's really watching you."

"Not me, Sheila—you!" Bruce Farrel, known the length and breadth of Broadway as "Flash" Farrel—be-



He Isn't Particular Who Falls into It!

cause of his almost uncanny speed with his big fists—shook his auburn head. Some people would have called him a red-head.

He wasn't quite that. But, almost. His deep, grey eyes sometimes turned black at night, when flooded with excitement, as they were now. His perfectly fitting evening clothes covered an athlete's powerful body, tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with the deceptively thin waist that told of terrific hitting power.

The girl's flesh showed a faint ripple of distaste as she glanced covertly at Artelli. Her eyes went back to Farrel's.

"The other guess," Farrel asked, "is—what?"

She shrugged. "Perhaps you'd better tell me," she said, still smiling.

"Looks like I'm going to Centre Street again. A pinch!"

"You mean—" She stopped. The smile almost faded.

Flash nodded, his lips firm. "Those dicks won't be happy till they do their stuff," he grinned. "Something's up, Sheila! Keep your ears and eyes open. Looks like I'm going to jail again—in a few minutes!"

"Good Heavens!" she said; and still the smile didn't leave her face.

Flash nodded, unperturbed. "Looks that way. It's part of the game, Sheila. I won't be in jail more than an hour, so what? It puzzles the dicks. They can't do much with a guy who has a drag in the right places, eh? I see the dicks are going out now. Maybe Artelli tipped them off that I usually come here. I think they'll wait for me outside, so as not to create a fuss in here."

She nodded, and the big blue eyes studied the dancers. "Bruce," she said, "did you—kill Dutch Schaeffer?"

"Who—me?" he wanted to know. "Who says so?" His eyes raked the cafe suddenly, keen as the dart of a rapier. He knew that the word had gone out over the Broadway grapevine a month ago, that he had shot and killed Dutch Schaeffer, reputed to be the fastest shot on the Main Stem.

The underworld got its information somehow, through queer, intuitive guesses. Certainly no one had seen it done. Maybe, reflected Flash, he'd tell her some day; tell her that he *had* killed Schaeffer. He liked Sheila, but he wasn't telling even her about the Dutch Schaeffer affair.

A grim smile played on his thin, reckless lips; the handsome, dangerous face was taut with a wary vigilance. Something was up! He sensed it in the very air. It prickled the thin hair on the back of his neck!

THE girl looked at him. "Artelli says you would know something about it," she answered, quietly. "And that's the general opinion of the smart guys who come here—that you shot Dutch down without giving him a chance, and left him to die in the gutter."

"Think of that!" marveled Flash. "Is that why Artelli is hanging around here? He knows I come here, and he's seen me talking to you, Sheila. He and Dutch were good friends, I hear. Know anything about it?"

"I've heard so," said the girl. "Artelli's hinted it. Also, that it might not be too healthy to have you as a friend." Her face was calm, but there was a cloud of anxiety in her blue eyes. "Bruce," she continued, "even if you have a drag in the right places, it won't help you any if Artelli—or any of Dutch's friends—you know what I mean?"

"Oh, the eminent counselor won't burn me down! He's too cagey. He'd dig up Dutch's mythical younger brother, in Chicago, for a job like that—or, he'd frame me." His eyes sobered for a moment. It was true that he had shot and killed Dutch Schaeffer, but it had been a question of life and death.

Dutch, reputed to be lightning with a gun, had been just a shade of a second too late. Flash felt no qualms over exterminating Dutch, dangerous gunman, known killer; and Dutch had fired first, trying to kill him. The police had no evidence on which to hold him for the shoot-

ing, but they had been after him, suspicious, harassing him, ever since Dutch had been found dead.

The word had filtered through that some of Dutch's friends were determined to wipe out Flash Farrel. Flash shrugged. It was all part of the game. He was used to taking big chances. Tonight, some sixth sense whispered to him that the stage was set for something.

Artelli, over there in the corner, finishing his solitary dinner, wasn't in the Club Parisien because he liked the music, or the way the chef cooked soup! Not Artelli! He was a notorious girl chaser, and he had cast covetous glances at Sheila Dunn.

Artelli had seen Flash and the girl dining together. His shoe-button eyes had glinted stormily at this. He didn't like competition. Flash had caught the look. He grinned, It was what he wanted. He wanted Artelli to hate him—to make a move.

"Beat it," said Flash, to the girl. "Keep your ears and eyes open, Sheila, and look out for yourself!"

Again the girl smiled brightly. "Artelli," she said, "is looking over this way. He's through, and he's coming over here—I can sense it. The swarthy octopus looks evil tonight, Bruce. For God's sake, be careful—"

"Scram!" smiled Flash. "You be careful! I'll call you later—at the hotel or here—and tell you where I can meet you."

She got up, nodding her golden head brightly—she was a wonderful actress, Flash thought admiringly—and then she went back-stage. Flash watched her go, then he turned to his own dessert.

All around him people wined, dined and danced, unconscious of the deadly drama that was brewing beneath the surface of the gaiety; unaware of the grim undercurrents that flowed, swift and dangerous, fanned by the cold breath of death. A reckless, devil-may-care grin tugged at Flash's thin lips as Artelli paused at the table. Without appearing to do so, Flash watched her like a hawk.

"Hello, Art!" smiled Flash, thinly. "Howzit?"

"Not bad," smiled the dark man, his black eyes opaque. "I see you're still playing the blondes. Quite a ladies' man, Flash, aren't you?"

"Can I help it," shrugged Flash, "if the dames like red hair? I've got what it takes! How's the jurisprudence racket, Counselor? Still springing 'em?"

"Now and then," said the lawyer. "Good music, isn't it? Nice place. I asked the waiter to serve my coffee at your table, Flash. Got something to say to you."

"Okay by me," nodded Flash, instantly alert. His face, however, was placid. He stabbed a brief glance at Artelli. A powerful, thick-set man, Artelli. He was the mouthpiece for several of the big-money big shots. He was considered a sharp lawyer, but his practice was somewhat shady.

Flash saw him, now and then, at the Madison Square Garden fights, at Jack Dempsey's bar and other bright spots; and Artelli was reputed to be a rich man. Flash knew that he was a shrewd and dangerous man. He noticed the bulge of a gun under Artelli's immaculate Tuxedo. He probably had a permit to carry it. Trust Artelli to be within the law!

"GO AHEAD, Art," he invited. "What's on your mind?"

Artelli lit a cigarette and carefully put down the burned match. "A client of mine," he said, in his suave voice, "would like to make a deal with you, Flash. He's seen you around now and then, and he'd feel better if you were playing on his team. He's got an interesting proposition to make to you."

"I see," mused Flash. "That would be safe cracker number one, 'Bo' Boswell, wouldn't it?"

"You seem to know! Smart fella!"

"He and Dutch got those Russian emeralds out of a Customs' Office safe, didn't they, Art?"

"I wouldn't know anything about that!" protested Artelli.

"No. Not much, you wouldn't!

Well, I know it, Art! I know that the police and the Customs are hot after that green ice. I know the guy who tried to smuggle it in and got caught. I know that Bo is in hiding. And I know I can find him when I want to, and where I can lay my hands on that ice, too. Maybe, one of these days, I'll need it for my own refrigerator. Who knows?"

Artelli's eyes narrowed. "You know all that, eh? Even where the emeralds are?"

"Well, I've got a good hunch, Art!" "Where?"

"Now — naughty-naughty! You don't expect that I'm going to spill that, do you? One of these days, I'll just go get 'em—when I need a little spending money."

Artelli smiled thinly, his eyes as cold as a dead fish. "Quite an order, I'd say," he commented, calmly. "It would take a lot of doing. Sounds like suicide to me. I've heard that you were after the emeralds. I imagine Dutch heard the same thing, eh? Why not see my client tonight? No harm in it. He might want to declare you in on a certain deal, so you could help him out of a certain situation he can't handle all alone. If I make myself clear?"

"Transparent," said Flash. "You want me to meet Bo Boswell and throw in with him on this emerald deal. It might be worth while, at that! I understand the emeralds are worth two hundred grand. For a twenty percent split, I might talk turtle; but for a better break, I'll talk turkey. I know where to peddle 'em. Lay it on the table, Art. No puzzles!"

Artelli shrugged. His smile was still pleasant and fixed; but a deep flame burned behind the opaque black eyes. He said:

"The job might be a bit outside the law, but I'd be there to see you through if anything happened. But, nothing will happen. Anyway, you've got a drag and you move around pretty freely, I see. My client needs the services of such a man. I don't know what he's willing to pay you, but he'll pay well."

"I'm listening," encouraged Flash, his inscrutable eyes on the other.

"There's a certain warehouse, near the river, where he'll expect you at exactly twelve tonight. The old Matson Company place. Just go right in and pay no attention to the butler. You'll find my client waiting."

"I see," nodded Flash. "And suppose I'm not interested? Suppose I just take it into my foolish head to get that green ice for my own use? I don't like this—maybe you're steering me to a payoff. Maybe you heard something said around town—"

Artelli grinned like an evil gargoyle, his smoldering eyes masked.

"Scared?" he taunted. "Take a gat with you! You mean, about Dutch?" Artelli shrugged. "It was up to him to take care of himself. I'm not his wet nurse."

"He was a pal of yours—also Bo's partner, wasn't he?"

"A pal of mine? No! A client perhaps, nothing more; and I'm not interested in paying off any client's personal grudges. Dutch had a brother, I hear, in Chicago. That would be his affair, not mine. I didn't mention Bo's name, did I?"

"No, you didn't. Excuse the guess! Well, Art, suppose I still say that I'm not interested in your client?"

ARTELLI'S face was impassive, a cruel. "Oh, I think you will be," he said. "There's been some awful things in the papers lately—like finding nice little blondes in the river, all mussed up. It would be awful if anything like that should happen to Sheila."

"Oh!" said Flash, softly. "It's like that, huh?" Glinting sparks illuminated his hard grey eyes for a second; his mouth straightened, but he said offhand: "Sure would, but what's that in my young life? Think how many dizzy dames fall into the river these days. Anyway, tell your client to be there. I will."

Artelli arose. The music was playing again and his words reached only the ears of Flash Farrel. He said, "There's a couple of dicks hanging around. If they're waiting for

you, don't make any fuss; phone me. I'll be at my office and I'll spring you." He walked away, and Flash watched him disappear toward the checkroom, his mouth suddenly bitter and grim.

CHAPTER II

MURDER DATE WITH BO BOSWELL



IF he didn't miss his guess, Artelli's clients were his partners in crime. The crooks risked their lives and freedom, and Artelli supplied the sinews of war, erecting barricades that stopped the law.

Farrel paid his check, got his hat, his coat, his cane, and walked out onto the street. The two detectives closed in on him instantly.

"Hello!" grinned Flash. "Conners and Doyle, as I live. Fancy seeing you here!"

"Yeah!" growled Conners, the bigger of the two detectives. "Fawncy! How'd you like to take a little trip to Headquarters?"

"What for?" asked Flash. "I have no business down that way."

"Oh, maybe the chief wants to ask you what the well-dressed hood will wear this Easter, huh? Or maybe it's about that Dutch Schaeffer rub-out. You wouldn't know anything about that, now, would you?"

"Me? Not a thing!" grinned Flash. "How could I?"

"I wonder!" said the detective, with heavy sarcasm. His hands went over Flash rapidly. "Huh!" he snorted. "Packin' a rod, huh? Well, this'll get you a nice long stretch—"

"Oh, go float a stove!" said Flash testily. "My permit's in my vest pocket, Conners. Here it is! If that's what you want me to go see the chief about, please don't waste my time and yours. Hand back that heater!"

Conners looked at the permit. He grunted and handed it back; also the pistol. "One of these fine days, you flashy crook," he growled, "I'll find out how and why you rate all the drag you've got. And I'll spill it all

over the town—come hell or high water—even if I get canned for it!"

Flash drew on his tan pigskin gloves and raised his eyebrows.

"Scram!" he said, blandly. "If you subject me to any further embarrassment, I'll sue you!"

"You'll—*what?*?" gasped Conners, purple with anger. "One of these days, Flash Farrel, when I get the right dope—"

"I thought *he* was the right one," interrupted Flash, nodding toward the silent Doyle, the other detective. He turned away, got into a taxi that came up from the hackstand, and said, so the two flabbergasted detectives could hear, "Waldorf, driver—and don't spare the 'orses!"

He didn't go to the Waldorf. A mile away, he dismissed the cab and took another. Then, he went to Riverdale, where Artelli maintained an elaborate house as his bachelor quarters. Flash drove around, looking the house over from every angle; then he went back to Times Square and went to a movie.

At five minutes of twelve that night, he stepped behind a box on the wharf that held the old deserted Matson warehouse. It had been abandoned for years, he knew. So this was where Bo Boswell was to meet him, and where he had, undoubtedly, been in hiding. A brother to the slithering rats that scurried before the soft footsteps of the light-footed Flash.

A cold drizzle was stinging the skin of his face. It was dark here, and unspeakably dismal. A drifting mist made soft blurs of the river lights, and a steamer hooted somewhere on the black waters. Flash grimaced when he thought that Times Square was only a few minutes away; while here, the river front, deserted by its daytime workers, sprawled black and empty like a world of the dead.

No lights showed in the warehouse. Flash didn't expect to see any. Bo, if he was here at all, was in some secret hideout within. Flash slipped the safety from the silenced gun he carried. He needed calm

nerves, a quick brain, to meet the man who awaited him. Bo Boswell was a shrewd crook, a merciless killer, the cleverest jewel thief in New York.

When Flash remembered what Artelli had threatened if he didn't come to terms and throw in with Bo, his hair crinkled. Sheila would bear the brunt of the punishment. He set his teeth grimly. This was a showdown. He couldn't allow it to go any further. Artelli wouldn't let him!

The suspicion flashed across his mind that this might be a trap to pay him off for tumbling Dutch Schaeffer into the gutter with three steel slugs in his massive chest. Dutch had been Bo's partner in the theft of the valuable emeralds from the Customs' safe. Dutch had suspected Flash—suspected the source of his influence; and Flash had been forced to defend his life and forever silence the crafty Dutch.

He squared his shoulders and allowed his eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. When he began to see comparatively well, he made his way toward the sagging door. Without hesitation, he opened it and entered, closing it behind him. Inside it was as black as the nethermost pits of hell. He paused again to give his eyes a chance. From his left pocket, a tiny flashlight came and he stabbed the sharp beam around.

A huge, raftered barn, it seemed to be empty, smelling of bilge and brine and decay, acrid with accumulated filth. Huge rats, as large as rabbits, scurried before the light. A slight shudder of distaste traversed the immaculate figure of Flash.

HE went forward, using the flashlight. Five minutes spent on the ground floor convinced him that there was no one there. Broken windows gaped, showing faint, irregular blotches of light. There wasn't a sound beside the lapping of the river below, and the occasional squeal of a huge rat, disturbed in its nocturnal quests.

Below the floor was the river. There was a staircase at one end

that led to a second floor. He went silently up the stairs. He was beginning to wonder why Artelli had sent him here, when, reaching the top, he made out a faint glow that came from one side. A door was partly open. He tiptoed over to it. Inside, he made out a desk with a kerosene lamp on it. The windows were masked with boards. Silence, heavy with foreboding, lay in the eerie gloom.

Cautiously, he nosed the door open with his gun—and stopped short. Bo Boswell sat asprawl in a chair. His back was to the door, and he was either asleep or deep in thought, planning some new viciousness.

Flash's finger laced around the trigger and a tigerish scowl crossed his face. It would be so easy, from here, to line up the sights on that massive, unmistakable head and pull the trigger! It would be doing society at large a favor! He wet his lips and slowly closed the door behind him. Bo might have other gunmen around the warehouse, and Flash wanted to hear what Bo had to say. He came forward noiselessly.

His alert eyes shifted around the room, thick with the dust of years. His automatic held ready, he listened. Not a sound came to tell him of a human presence.

Suddenly Flash spoke. His voice was low and tense, cold with the ice of a deathless hatred. "Lift 'em, Bo!" he said, quietly.

Bo Boswell didn't stir. He didn't lift his hands. He seemed oblivious of any presence. Flash's eyes narrowed. He wasn't foolish enough to advance and get within reaching range of those powerful hands. Slowly, he circled, to get in front of Bo, his pistol poised.

"Okay, Bo," he said. "You wanted to see me, Artelli said. Here I am, but we'll talk on my terms, mister! And don't try to talk yourself out of anything; you can't! If you figured to trap me here and have your hoods finish me off, forget it. If any move is made, you go *first!*"

A cry of surprise came to Flash's lips. He was facing Bo now, and

he saw why Bo didn't answer. He was dead. A bullet hole, like a black spot, showed between his eyes; and the blood had run gruesomely down his face, staining his white shirt. It was plain to Flash that the man had been dead for some time; and he had, evidently, been shot as he sat in the chair. Probably, by some one he trusted. In his lap lay his big .45 automatic, where he had dropped it.

All at once Flash stiffened. Far off, he heard the wail of a police siren. It occurred to him that if he was found here, he would be suspected of this murder, for murder it was.

He did some fast thinking. There was something behind all this. Had Artelli known that Bo was dead when he asked Flash to come here? It didn't make sense. Who had killed Bo? Someone who knew that Bo had the Russian emeralds?

Sounds came to him, faint and indeterminate; whispers. He listened. There was nothing now but the faint, far-off banshee cry of the police siren. He would have to get out of here in a hurry. But first, he'd have a look around. He went through the dusty desk. Nothing there. The dead man sagged in his chair, his wide-eyed stare grotesque and filled with a fixed astonishment. The lamp burned steadily. It had a large glass reservoir, and Flash noted, with a frown, that the oil filled about half the receptacle. It had been burning a long time if it had been filled before it was lighted. His frown deepened. The siren was howling nearer.

A steady, annoying sound caught his ears—a slight crackling, faint, muffled. He went to the door and threw it open.

"Damn!" he swore, suddenly. This was a trap! Flame leaped from the stairs! Someone had set the stairs afire with some chemical, for the blaze leaped, green and purple and yellow, already beyond control! And the police siren sounded nearer.

It flashed over him then. Artelli had sent him here to kill him—had

(Continued on page 120)

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(Continued from page 119)

probably tipped off the police that there had been a murder committed in the old warehouse! He had sent the police so they could find Flash Farrel here with the dead Bo Boswell. Flash wondered at the motive.

Did Artelli suspect him of being someone other than Flash Farrel, gaudy crook and badman with a gun? Did Artelli want Flash to die in the fire, or did he feel that Flash was dangerous and might attempt to get the Russian emeralds away from Bo Boswell? What was Artelli's stake in this game of life and death?

This was no time for any speculation, however, Flash thought, and he'd have to move fast to save his skin. He raced up the creaky hallway, but there were no other stairs. Back again he went and tried several of the windows, breaking them out with his gun. Below glistened the oily black waters of the river. It was either a plunge into the river or death in the spreading fire!

The old warehouse was as dry as tinder and would be an inferno in a few minutes. A crafty plan! If the fire didn't get him, the police would find him here. He would be blamed for killing Bo!

The siren suddenly howled near the warehouse. Flash entered one of the dark rooms and peered out of a window. A crowd was already collecting, and he could see that the warehouse was doomed. The fire was spreading with incredible rapidity. From the river came the hoarse blasts of a fireboat. Through the half-drizzle, half-mist, he made out the loom of a firetug, steaming fast, sparks pouring from her funnel. In another minute the river and the shores would be so full of people that his getaway would be seen—highlighted by the leaping flames! He grimaced and put his gun back in its holster.

He took one more look at the hallway and the stairs. Billowing green and yellow flames leaped and roared before him. Not a chance in the world of living through that. The stairs had fallen. He went back into

the room and poised himself on the window sill. One swift look around, then he dived for the black waters below.

CHAPTER III

BROTHER OF A DEAD MAN



OLD, slimy waters bit into his body like a steel knife. He shook off the shock and swam under water for several yards before he came up.

The fireboat was playing streams of water on the warehouse now, a searchlight illuminating the burning building. The tug lay, tossing gently, nearby, puffing softly with her efforts. The flames were leaping higher now, from one end of the fire trap; on shore, fire engines clanged and the crowd was growing.

His teeth chattering, handicapped by his clothes, gagging with the foul water, he swam powerfully under the next pier and made his way to land. He looked back at the flaming holocaust. It was Bo Boswell's funeral pyre!

Thirty minutes later, Flash was in his own hotel room, in the Forties. He took a hot shower, changed into a dressing gown and sat down to think it over. Even here, he could faintly hear the wailing sirens on the river front. Artelli, he determined, grimly, was going to do a lot of explaining before the night was over!

He picked up his phone and tried to get Sheila Dunn. Her hotel informed him that she didn't answer. He looked at his watch. After one. Well, perhaps she hadn't reached home as yet, from the Club Parisien. She sometimes worked later.

He lit a cigarette and was on his way to his closet for another suit when the phone rang. He picked it up and said, "Hello?"

"Hello?" said the night clerk. "Oh, hello, Mr. Farrel! I didn't know you were in. I didn't see you come in—"

"I came in the back way," snapped

Farrel. "What's on your mind?"

"There's a young fellow been trying to get in touch with you—"

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, sir. He's here now. A Mr. Hunt? He says he came from the Club Parisien with a message from Miss Sheila Dunn."

"Send him up!" snapped Flash, and hung up. What did this mean? Who was Hunt, and why would Sheila send him with a message? His brows knit suddenly, and he worried his nether lips with his strong teeth.

When the knock came at his door, he called, "Come in!"

A young man came in and stared at Farrel. He was short and slim and wore horn-rimmed glasses. His face was white and smooth as a baby's.

"Are you Mr. Farrel?" he asked.

"Right!" said Farrel, eyeing this strange visitor; because the other closed the door behind him, pulled the glasses from his face and whipped out an automatic with a silencer on its nose.

Flash Farrel's eyes narrowed. He was in a dressing gown, and, for once, he had allowed his vigilance to relax. His gun had been emptied, wiped and laid on the radiator, to dry out. There was another in a desk drawer, on the other side of the room, but that was too far away to do any good now.

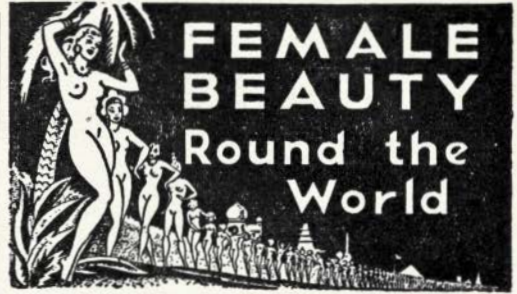
The young man smiled, and then he didn't look youthful any longer. His face seemed old with an incredible evil. His eyes were blue and cold, and he stared at Flash with an impersonal appraisal—the scrutiny of the professional torpedo. Flash's voice was level and toneless when he spoke:

"What the hell's the idea, fella? Who are you?"

The white-faced man smiled, or seemed to. It was a wolfish lifting of the upper lip, more of a canine snarl than a smile. He said: "I don't like you, mister, so I'm going to blast you."

Flash's mind was racing desper-

(Continued on page 122)



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(Continued from page 121)

ately. He placed the pallor of the young thug now—a hophead! Filled with the false courage and the utter recklessness that the dope inspired. He had been given a job, and he was going to do it. But, who had sent him? Flash said:

"Why blast me? I don't even know you!"

"You're getting in the boss' hair, mug, that's why." The killer wet his lips with a flick of his tongue. His bright eyes were picking a spot to drive home his slug. The eyes were merciless, without compunction. Flash played desperately for time.

"If I'm to be put on the spot, I'd kinda like to know why? Who wants me rubbed out?" He wondered if he could close the distance between them in one jump. Professional hoods are quick on the trigger and accurate. They have to be, to stay in business.

The killer's eyes flamed. "I said I came from that skirt, didn't I? Let it go at that. I did. She's where she won't stool pigeon any more!"

An icy shudder raced down Flash's spine. Sheila was—where?

"What d'ye mean?" he asked, calmly. "What skirt?"

"The dame—the dame you're soft on—in the Club Parisien! We took her for a little ride—so the boss could ask her some questions." His gun moved threateningly as Flash shifted his hands. "Hold it!" the thug hissed.

Flash held it. An arctic rage was creeping up within him. He had never seen this particular thug before. "Artelli got you from out-of-town, didn't he?" he asked, shrugging. "I suppose he had you cover me in case I didn't go to that warehouse. In that case, you were supposed to turn on the heat here, is that it? You might as well tell me, if you're going to do it."

The hophead's eyes stared as unwinkingly as a cat's. "I'm Chuck Schaeffer, mug," he said. "Artelli told me it was you rubbed out Dutch. I'm goin' to even it up, tough guy, see? This is where you go out!"

Flash stared. So, that was it! Dutch *did* have a younger brother, and Artelli had sent for him to come from Chicago and here he was! He tried another tack:

"Artelli's doublecrossing you, you fool!" he snapped. "He knocked off Bo Boswell tonight, in the Matson warehouse, so he could have all those emeralds for himself—"

"No, he didn't," grinned the other, viciously. "I gave Bo his this afternoon. He was a dirty rat—trying to hold out on me and Artelli. I got Dutch's share coming to me, mug, an' you're not hornin' in on it. You saw what happened to Bo, mister? Well, you're next!"

"But," snarled Flash, "don't you see why Artelli sent you here? If you rub me out, they're sure to get you here—in the hotel—you can't get away! Suppose you do—the clerk saw you—he'll be able to identify you. What happens? Artelli gets all that green ice for himself—"

"THEY won't get me," boasted the white-faced killer. His lips pursed and a fishy mirth gleamed in his dope-brightened eyes. Flash saw death in them and made up his mind to take a chance. "They told me you was tough," went on the other, "but you ain't so hot—"

Flash leaped forward and his foot lashed out with the speed of a bullet. The gun in the hood's hand popped, but Flash had hold of the gun arm by then. Both men went to the floor in a tangle. Flash forced the other's gun arm away. Then Flash reached up under the killer's chin and thrust with all the leonine strength in his big body.

There was a dull snap, and the thug suddenly went limp. His neck was broken.

Flash got up, took the gun from the dead hand and looked down at the sprawled figure. What would he do with him? The clerk had sent him up and knew that the thug was bound for Flash's room. Evidently, the silenced shot had not disturbed anyone. Still, it wasn't so good!

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 123)

Flash went to peer out into the hall. It was silent and dim.

He picked up the hophead's body and ran with it to the service stairs. Here, he threw the body down and was back in his room in a minute. He picked up the phone and got the night clerk.

"Hey, Jimmie!" he said, peevishly. "I thought you said that there was somebody coming up to see me? Where is he?"

"Why," said the clerk, puzzled, "he started up, Mr. Farrel! Some time ago. Maybe he changed his mind. Didn't he get there?"

"Aw, nuts!" said Farrel. "Are you kidding me? No one's shown up here. Well, maybe the guy changed his mind and left the hotel."

The clerk said he didn't know, and Farrel hung up. His mind was racing now. Artelli! The hood had spilled the beans. Artelli, the crooked lawyer, was back of the attempt to kill him. Ten to one, Artelli had watched him enter the warehouse and then had set fire to the place. Then, to make sure, just in case Flash escaped from the warehouse, Artelli had sent this professional hood to kill him in the hotel, lacking the guts to try it himself. Artelli took no chances of a slip!

It began to make sense. If Artelli had seen him enter the warehouse, he could have then set the fire and phoned the police, because Flash remembered hearing the police siren long before he heard the fire engines. And, just in case Flash was too wary to enter the warehouse, Chuck Schaeffer would be waiting for him. And Chuck Schaeffer had said that Artelli—

He raced into dry clothes, snatched up his second gun from a drawer and was on his way out in five minutes. It would be morning, perhaps, before anyone discovered the body of the thug on the service stairs—and the bullet hole in his own room. That would bring the police in again. He shrugged. That would have to be dealt with when

CANDID CAMERA CATCHES CO-EDS IN

the time came. Just now, Sheila was more important—and in devilish danger—if he knew Artelli!

He was playing a desperate hunch that Artelli had ordered Sheila taken to his own home in Riverdale. He hoped he was right, for he knew that minutes counted now. Artelli was ready for a desperate showdown.

CHAPTER IV

KILLER LAWYER'S FEE



FLASH hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to skin all the lights. He went back to Riverdale. It took nearly an hour before he left the cab, about a block away from the Artelli house. He told the

driver to wait, and slipped him a five-spot.

It was a neighborhood of aristocratic homes, perched on the edge of the city, close to the Hudson; and all the houses were dark, for it was well after three A. M.

The Artelli house showed no lights. Flash scouted around silently and effected an entrance in the basement, then made his way to the ground floor. Artelli, he reflected, would hardly bring Sheila here unless he was interested in something more than getting the girl out of the way. He wondered, suddenly, if the girl *was* here. Well, he would soon know. And if she wasn't, Artelli would soon talk if he got his hands on the swarthy lawyer.

As he moved silently toward a dimly seen stairs, he heard a faint voice above. Flash crept up the carpeted stairs with no more noise than a shadow. In an upper bedroom, the door of which was partly open, there was a light. Flash belied silently along the floor until he was able to look into the room.

Sheila Dunn sat in a chair, bound and gagged, her clothes disheveled, a red welt across one cheek; but her blue eyes blazed defiance across the room at some menace unseen by

(Continued on page 126)

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(Continued from page 125)
 Flash. Then, from a corner hidden from his sight, Flash heard Artelli's voice, exultant and merciless:

"Chuck should be coming in any minute now," he said. "Chuck won't fail! That rat, Farrel, took to the river. I saw him. But he won't get away from Chuck, m'love! Artelli thinks of everything! Got to be smart when you deal with slippery crooks like Farrel, eh?"

"So you came running," went on Artelli, amused, "when you thought Flash Farrel had sent for you, eh, Sheila? Well, forget that bum! What's he got that I haven't got? What can he do for you?"

"Chuck was burned up and wanted revenge. Flash killed his brother, you know, or—did you?"

The gagged girl couldn't answer, but her eyes snapped angrily.

"It's a sweet bit of business," went on Artelli. "Flash and Bo have been gunning for each other for a month. It'll look as if Flash knocked off Bo and then was bumped by Chuck. They'll get Chuck, of course, because he's a hophead and he don't use his head. I'll see to that!"

A soundless oath was on Flash's lips. He tensed and listened.

"Now, look," went on Artelli, "with those two out of the way, I get all the Russian emeralds, see? If you come to your senses, I'll give you some of them—mounted in new settings, so the cops will never be able to prove anything.

"Isn't that better than working hard for a living in a night club? Or batting around with a four-flusher like Flash? You and I can take a little trip to Europe."

The girl suddenly wriggled furiously with her bonds, but they held; and the blaze of fire in her eyes should have been sufficient answer for Artelli. He laughed.

"You'll get over that," he prophesied, "after a few days. You will stay right here until things blow over, and then you'll see sense, Sheila—or else! I've taken a big chance bringing you here, kid, and if you don't see things my way, you'll only leave here one way. Get it? I mean

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business! If you'll promise me, on your honor, not to scream and wake the neighborhood, I'll take that gag off."

Again the girl's eyes blazed hatred at him, and again he laughed. "Oh, well, have it your own way! I'm sorry Chuck had to paste you one to keep you quiet, but we'll deal with him for that later, when he gets back. Now, look, kid—you're bound to get tired of that attitude, sooner or later. Nobody puts me off too long. Other people have tried it. So what? They're just not heard of again, that's all! Think that over!"


The girl's frantic wriggling upset the chair and she went to the floor with it and lay there, unable to move. Artelli laughed low.

"You crazy kid!" he said, and walked over; and then Flash saw him. He had a glittering, green necklace in his hands, as if he had been examining it. He stooped and righted the chair with his right hand; and while he was doing it, Flash arose, stepped into the room and said, softly: "Good evening, Counselor!"

Artelli whirled, incredulous amazement widening his eyes and forcing his mouth agape. A moan came from the girl. Artelli's hand darted desperately to his coat. His gun was out with the speed of lightning, and the two reports came as one. It was too close to miss. Flash buckled as if struck a hard blow, staggered and sat down, hard. The bullet had struck him squarely in the chest.

Artelli gasped and wavered, his
(Continued on page 128)

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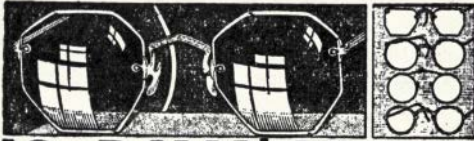
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(Continued from page 127)

face vacuous; his arm dropped to his side like a limp rag; then his knees buckled. He crashed down and slid forward on his face. He retched and coughed and the horrified girl saw a stream of bloody froth come from his mouth. Flash's bullet had pierced his lungs.

The girl had seen a tiny puff of dust where the bullet had struck Flash. Unbelievably now, he raised his head and looked around. His eyes rested on Artelli. Flash picked himself up and drew his pocket knife. While he freed the girl, he said: "Don't be frightened, Sheila! I always wear a bullet-proof vest. Well, I guess this worked out. I figured Artelli wouldn't be able to resist the temptation to own all that green ice. That's why I goaded him on, hinting that I was going to hi-jack it. So, the gentleman led me right to it!"

He freed the girl, pulled the gag from her mouth. She sat limp.

"We have to get out of here, fast!" snapped Flash. "Before anybody shows up. I have a lot to take care of. There's a dead man in my hotel, with his neck broken! A gentleman known as Chuck Schaeffer! The police are going to be curious and ask me questions."

ON a dresser, he saw a box that seemed to be filled with a lambent green fire. His lips tightened as he swept up the valuable emeralds and shoved them into his pocket.

"Come on!" he whispered. "Let's go fast."

They left silently through the back door. Nothing stirred around them. The night was quiet and serene.

"Come on!" He hailed a cab and spoke to the cabby. "Show some speed to Grand Central Station, Buddy! This is an elopement!"

The cab driver grinned suddenly in response. Thinking he understood what it was all about, he hurried.

Sheila sat back and straightened her clothes.

"Some day," she whispered, "they are going to find out about you, Bruce, and then your life won't be

worth a cent. Maybe this is no business for a young man like you!"

"And, how about you, lady?" he asked. "That goes double for a girl like you! Better go back to the Club Parisien and finish out the week, so they won't get suspicious and pass on the word to the wrong people! You can quit your job later, on any excuse you want to invent. And never ask me again about Dutch Schaeffer. You saw what happened tonight. It was that rat Artelli's life—or both of us! If that explains anything!"

An hour later, from a dial phone in Grand Central Station, Flash Farrel, star undercover agent for the United States Government, gave all the details to the city's chief of detectives, the only man who knew the real truth about Flash Farrel.

"And, how about Artelli?" asked the chief. "What'll I tell the newspapers about him? We gotta have some kind of a story, Farrel."

"He had no wife or family to worry over," said Farrel, into the phone. "He had all that stolen green ice in his room. I've got it. I'll send it over in the morning—by Sheila. Poor kid—I sent her to bed. She's all in. This was a tough case, for both of us. You can return the emeralds, Chief, and grab off the headlines. I can't use any in my work."

"You can charge Chuck Schaeffer off to an accident—he fell down the service stairs and broke his neck—maybe he was drunk—or doped, eh? And Artelli had some trouble with a client—gang war—anything you care to make it, old man—just so long you let me alone long enough to grab a week's sleep—"

"Wait a minute, wise guy—you and Sheila want to take a run-out powder, together? I kinda suspect both—"

"No," grinned Farrel, "but that's a swell idea—if Sheila can see it that way. I'll ask her! And say—keep those ambitious bright lights, Connors and Doyle, off my neck, will you? I can get along swell without those guys constantly hounding me!"

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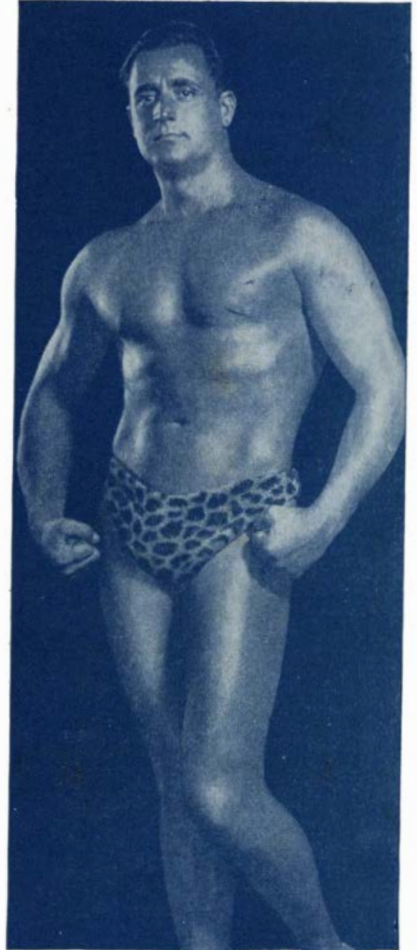
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- Oil Ranges
- Gas Ranges
- Furnaces

Name..... (Print name plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

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