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DEATH WALKS ALONE

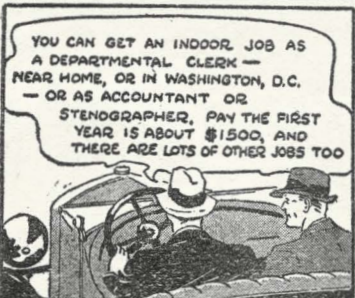
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Vol. III, No. 1

HARVEY BURNS, Editor

July, 1932

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DEATH WALKS



A Complete Book-Length Novel of

CHAPTER I

THE PERFECT ART OF MURDER

MURDER, I can assure you, is simply a matter of plain common sense. Nothing difficult about it; nothing mysterious."

George Northon spoke easily, with a mocking little smile playing at the corner of his lips. His thin, highly intelligent face was relaxed; his eyes darted nervously around the room.

"I tell you," he continued, "that only the stupid fear of law and the punishment the law metes out to those who commit murder makes it an intricate and baffling thing."

He was talking to his friend, Gordon Blair. This was not the first time Blair had listened to Northon's discourse on the art of murder. The theory of the perfect murder, as a matter of fact, was one of Northon's pet hobbies.

He had other hobbies, plenty of them; but the discussion of murder, the perfectly executed commission of that crime, had become almost a mania with him.

He was a strange man and there were times when Blair, his closest friend, could not fathom what lay behind those cold, gray eyes and those thin, classically formed lips.

Northon was somewhere around

ALONE

By GEORGE ALLAN MOFFATT

'Author of "The Cross of the Dundoves,"
"The Rap," etc.



Diabolical Murder and Mystery

fifty. His hair was lined with gray; he was tall and slim, with a nervously graceful body. He had the bearing and the build of a man who at one time had been a famous athlete.

Possessing a large private income, large enough so that he never had to worry about business or money, Northon spent his life traveling in the far and out of way corners of the world. He was a great student of the Orient and expended large sums of money on collecting rare vases and other bric-a-brac from the deepest and most hidden parts of China.

He lived on the first three floors of a fine old Colonial house on West

Ninth Street. His household consisted of a valet and a cook. He had never married. There was an adopted daughter, Jane Northon, but she did not live with him.

Blair only knew that the relations between Northon and his adopted daughter were pleasant and outwardly cordial. He attributed the fact that the daughter did not live at the West Ninth Street house, to Northon's rather nervous and eccentric habits of living. The daughter would come to visit her foster father once in a while, but not often.

There was a nephew, whom Blair knew and liked very much. He was a young man, who had worked

his way through Yale and now had a position in Wall Street at a very small salary, and living on that alone. Northon had given him a trip around the world when he had finished Yale, but there was no other financial help.

Then there was Retta Dolores, the bewitching and alluring dancer. She was the only person on earth that seemed to hold complete power over Northon.

Blair didn't like her. He didn't like her eyes, which were sensual and greedy; he didn't like her crooning voice, which was pure affectation.

There was nothing about her that he liked and he knew that she realized it and disliked him accordingly.

The friendship between Blair and Northon dated back a number of years.

Blair was a younger man than Northon; a different type in every way. He was the practical, matter-of-fact type American that usually keeps his feet on the ground. He was not a big man physically, but his body was wiry and well-built. His face was open and frank; his eyes looked out on the world as if there were nothing to hide.

He lived on the top floor of the Ninth Street house, and was a writer of some reputation and a great student of any subject that attracted his attention. It was as if these two opposite temperaments, these two diametrically opposite minds, found some common ground of mutual understanding and friendship.

IT had been several months past that Blair had noticed, with a certain uncomfortable feeling, Northon's reversal to his mania for discussing and studying the perfect murder.

And there had come a change over Northon. His nervous eyes had the habit of staring intently at Blair as he talked, staring in a way that

caused Blair to look away at something else.

Blair sensed something hypnotic in his friend's stare, a thing he had never noticed before.

ON this night Northon had changed abruptly, without any warning, from the subject of the political situation in Manchuria to the subject of the perfect murder.

He had done it so suddenly that Blair was taken aback and had no answer. They were seated in the large rear room on the first floor of Northon's apartment; the room where Northon surrounded himself with the numerous things he had collected, over a period of years, in every corner of the Orient.

The large room seemed utterly removed from New York; it seemed, with its endless vases and rugs and draperies and bric-a-brac, a spot somewhere in the deepest interior of China.

Northon got up from the fourteenth century Chinese chair he had been sitting in and paced the floor. His hands were deep in his trouser pockets, his head was bent over and he was staring at the floor.

Suddenly he stopped, swerved quickly on Blair, and said:

"What is there so fascinating about murder? After all, it is the primitive instinct in man, the desire to kill for gain or for lust. Is it because man has sought to stifle that primitive instinct, to punish man for following a natural and perfectly human impulse for gain?"

Northon stood looking at Blair. No smile played around his lips. His eyes bored into his friend, as if they were trying to work some strange power on him.

Blair didn't feel comfortable. But he didn't like the change that had come over his friend, the strange stare in those eyes, the nervous

twitching of the body when the subject of murder was brought up.

"My God, Northon, can't we discuss something besides murder," he said. "I almost believe, at times, that you are planning to kill someone and are having some trouble figuring how it can safely be done."

Northon laughed, shook his head slowly, and answered:

"Nothing like that, I can assure you. The subject intrigues me immensely. I think it intrigues me because behind the whole theory is the play of minds. On one side you have society, a little stupid and dull, but very well organized and efficient, and on the other side you have the murderer, fighting against society. It's a battle of brains and I think the murderer should have the best of it, the easiest job."

He walked back over to the Chinese chair and sat down as if he were tired and weary. His body slumped a little in the chair and he stretched his legs out in front of him.

"But the murderer doesn't have the best of it," Blair said. "Once in a while a murderer gets away with his crime, but the odds are all in favor of society."

NORTHON sat up straight. His eyes flashed and his thin lips smiled a little sardonically.

"That is because man has used the stupid, primitive way of man to commit murder," he said. "In other words, murder has not progressed with the mental development of man and society. A person wants to kill. He uses a gun, a knife, a club, or some such weapon. What happens? The world knows the victim has been murdered and the odds at once are against the person committing the crime."

Blair wasn't relishing the conversation, but he answered:

"Then your theory is to kill and

do it in a way that hides the fact murder has been committed."

Northon was on his feet with a spring. His eyes flashed.

"Exactly, exactly," he cried. "Does man have to murder in the crude, savage way of his caveman days? No, that is absurd. Murder, to me, is one of the easiest and simplest crimes of today."

"Don't overlook science," Blair tried to laugh when he said that, but his laugh was a sickly attempt. "There is no way to murder a man today that science can't tell that the man has been murdered."

NORTHON laughed. It was a dry, mocking laugh.

"Stupid, utterly stupid," he said. "There are many ways that one can murder and hide his crime. Yes, many ways."

He took several steps toward Blair. A change came over his face. It had a savage distortion that Blair had never seen before; his eyes held Blair's gaze as if Blair's head had suddenly been put in a vise and he could not move it.

"Listen to me, Blair," Northon spoke in slow, piercing words. "Let us take a specific case. Yes, we'll assume that you are going to murder me. Foolish, of course, but we'll take it as an example. You come down to my room. Naturally, you will come at night when I'm alone.

"You are bent on killing me and you have a fear that society will punish you by death if your act is discovered. You have thought about it for days, even weeks. You want my death to appear a natural death; you don't want murder suspected.

"What do you do? You don't use a gun or a knife. That is too crude. You want something that will make it look like I died of a natural cause. That will be fine. Nothing will be

said about murder; no one suspected."

Northon took several steps forward, hesitated a moment, and then continued in his slow, penetrating manner of speech.

"There are three ways, Blair, that a man dies suddenly. A bursted blood vessel in the brain brings on a stroke. It isn't hard to determine whether a man has died from a stroke or not. Now, if you wanted to murder me, how could you bring on a stroke?"

HE walked over to a table, picked up a long, thin piece of wire. He walked back to Blair, balancing that wire on his two forefingers.

"The Chinese are smarter than we are," he went on. "See this little piece of gold wire. At the end it is sharper than a razor. This wire pushed under the eyelid will cause a blood vessel to break in the brain and it leaves no mark, only the smallest hole under the eye, which no one will see.

"Not a bad way to do murder, Blair. My body will be found in the morning lying on the floor. The medical examiner will come and examine me, perhaps do a post mortem, and he will announce that death was due to a stroke. That's all there is to it. No investigation, no suspicion. Murder is simply a matter of plain common sense, I tell you. Just common sense."

Northon's words died away in a dry laugh. He shuddered a little, his face lost its savage distortion, and then he laughed, naturally, and walked back to his chair.

"An interesting subject, this subject of murder," he added.

Blair didn't answer him at first. He didn't know exactly how he felt, except that he was queer all over.

"Then there are other ways a man dies naturally," Northon continued.

"Take for instance, the different heart conditions. There are ways to bring on such attacks, certain gases invented by the Chinese and perfected by a certain sect of killers in India. Yes, there are many, many ways death can be made to look natural."

NORTHON seemed to slump further down in his chair. Blair saw something come into his eyes that looked like fear. It was a passing flash, but it was there.

Blair got up. He still felt the hypnotic effects of Northon's stare, even though that stare had ceased when Northon took his seat. Northon was smiling at him, smiling in his easy, tolerant manner as he always had done.

"I've listened to all the discussion of murder I want for one night," Blair said. "I hope you get enough of the subject before tomorrow night. We're having dinner together, remember, at Louie's."

Northon nodded. His body was still slumped in the chair and there was a weary look around his eyes.

Blair said: "All right, good-night. And forget about the perfect murder for a few days."

Northon shook his head slowly, said: "I am afraid I can never forget it, Blair." He then got up and paced the floor. Blair walked out of the room, but he took one more look at his friend.

Northon was still pacing the floor nervously, his hands deep in his pockets. Blair again saw that fleeting look of fear in his eyes, but this time it was more pronounced; it was more like terror than fear.

Upstairs, in his own bedroom, Blair undressed slowly. The hypnotic stare Northon had given him when he discussed the perfect murder, still seemed to hold him. It made him

uncomfortable, nervous and he got in bed without any delay.

It seemed to him that he rolled and tossed for hours and hours. He tried every trick he knew to force himself to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come.

He tried to assure himself that he was a fool to worry about Northon. He had known him many years; he had seen, before, the eccentric and erotic moods Northon was subject to. But that stare when he described how he, Blair, his best friend, could murder him, caused Blair to shudder even under the covers.

Then that look of fear that came to Northon's eyes! Was Northon afraid that someone was going to murder him? The thought flashed through Blair's mind and caused him to stop tossing in bed and to recall everything there was about Northon's strange actions and words about murder.

Finally, he closed his eyes. He was not conscious of falling asleep. Then came that subconscious realization, the realization that comes to a person in a vague and misty way, that he is dreaming. At first, the dream seemed unreal and only a series of unrelated incidents.

THEN suddenly he was down in Northon's apartment, in the room where he had talked to his friend. Northon was still there, staring at him, his face distorted with fear. He was shrinking away from Blair.

The scene changed. The dream became more real. Northon was standing in front of him, smiling, smiling in that mocking manner he always used.

He was saying: "A poison gas discovered in China and perfected by a sect of killers in India. Just one whiff of this gas and the victim dies. The valves of his heart stop working. In an hour the gas leaves, and when the

body is found, it is a sure case of a heart attack."

Northon stopped talking. The scene changed again. Blair was in some other room. He didn't know where it was. He was alone. He could hear Northon saying:

"This little gold wire; put it right under the eyelid. It will look like a stroke."

THEN he was back in the Chinese room again. Northon was lying on the floor, face down. Blair was standing over him and in his right hand was the little golden wire. Blair tiptoed over to a table, laid the wire on a book. Then he looked down at Northon's body again. The body didn't move.

The lights were on in the room. Blair walked over to the switch and turned them off. Then he walked out.

The first part of the dream had passed vaguely and with a sense of utter unreality. He was conscious, that consciousness that follows most dreams, that he was dreaming then.

But the last part of the dream, when he stood over the body of his friend was brutally real; it was as real as if he had stood there.

The realism of the dream caused him to wake. He was lying on his bed crossways, with the covers all under him. A cold sweat broke out over him. In the darkness of the room a sense of fear, of some indefinable terror, gripped him.

He sat up, shook his head a little; then realized that it had been a dream. But the horror of it would not leave him.

He slipped under the covers.

The next thing he knew it was morning. The sun was shining in the window of his bedroom. The horror of the dream was still on his mind, but the daylight made it seem less terrible.

He dressed slowly, fully intending

to go down at once and see Northon. He could not get the dream off his mind.

Someone pounded frantically on the door of his apartment. He went out to the door, snatching a dressing gown on the way out.

WHEN he opened the door Oscar Dugan, Northon's valet, was standing in the hallway. Fear and terror was painted over the boney face of the valet and he stood with his shoulders drooping over.

"It's Mr. Northon, sir," he gasped. "It's Mr. Northon."

"Mr. Northon—what about him?"

"He's dead, sir. Dead in his Chinese room. I just found him, sir."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir, dead and blue all over and stiff. He's been dead several hours. He's lying on the floor. I think it was a stroke."

Blair was half way down the stairs before Oscar finished talking. In another moment he was in the large room where he had left Northon the night before.

Lying on the floor, face down, was his friend. There was no question about his being dead. Rigor mortis had set in and the arms and the legs, even under the cover of clothing, had the marks of being stiff and set. The right side of the dead man's face could be seen. The cheek was blue.

Blair stood over the body of his friend in a stunned and helpless manner.

Two things stood out vividly in his mind, two things that chased every other thought from his mind. The first was the fact that Northon was lying exactly in the position that he had seen him in his dream of the night before; the second was that lying on the book, placed on

the long teakwood table, in exactly the position he remembered leaving it in his dream, was the long, thin gold-like wire—the sinister Chinese weapon of death.

He was staring at this strange weapon when Oscar came in the room, with his boney shoulders hunched over and his face white with terror.

"It's a stroke, sir. I'm sure that it's a stroke."

OSCAR repeated this a number of times. Blair did not answer him.

He kneeled down by the side of Northon, pushed the body over on it's back and looked at the right eye. The body moved stiffly; the left side of the face, the face lying against the floor, was flat and out of shape. The face was blue and distorted; it was ghastly in the distortion brought about by rigor mortis.

Blair pushed the eyelid of the right eye up. It was stiff and hard to move and it stayed up when he took his finger off the eye.

He pushed it down quickly and stood up. He felt weak and sick all over; he felt as if he was still dreaming.

Under the eyelid he saw a little hole, a hole so small that only a person looking definitely for it could see it.

Northon's words came to him. "This wire leaves no mark, only the smallest possible hole, and no one will see it."

Then he heard Northon's other terrifying words. "You come down to my room . . . you are bent on killing me . . . my body will be found in the morning . . . no investigation, no suspicions . . . you can do it easily."

Blair turned and walked out of the room.

Only one question surged through his dazed mind.

Had he, in his sleep, murdered his friend?

CHAPTER II

THE CHINESE LION

PHILIP WRIGHT, famous criminologist, sat at his desk in his penthouse on top of the forty-story business building in the 42nd Street neighborhood and drummed nervously with his forefinger on the top of the desk.

"An amazing story, Blair," he said. "I might say an astounding story. One that has great possibilities. Great possibilities."

Blair sat in front of the desk. His face was pale and his eyes watched Wright helplessly.

"I had to tell someone, Wright," he said wearily. "You were a friend of Northon and I know you are a friend of mine. I have told you the whole truth of what happened. I do not know whether I went down to that room, in my sleep, and murdered my friend. It is all vague and terrifying to me."

Philip Wright settled back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling. His full face, a little fat, was expressionless; his forefinger continued to drum nervously on the table.

"Ever been bothered with somnambulism?" he asked.

Blair stirred nervously in his chair.

"To be honest, Wright, I have all my life," he answered. "That's what worries me. I have been subject to walking in my sleep ever since I can remember. I have done some rather remarkable things in my sleep, damned remarkable."

Wright said nothing. He looked from the ceiling to Blair. He wet

his lips and stopped drumming his finger on the table.

"Let us go back to your conversation with George," he said. "That is important. Mental suggestion, powerful mental suggestion, works wonders at times. Why do you suppose he used your name in discussing the possibility of someone pulling the perfect murder on him?"

"I don't know just why he chose me. I do know that he was frightened. Northon was not a man to show his feelings, but I saw that look of fear flash in his eyes twice."

"Afraid someone was going to murder him," Wright suggested. "For some time he has been afraid of that. It preyed on his mind, caused him to study the matter of perfect murders and all that. But right now there are other things more important."

BLAIR shook his head slowly. "Nothing is important, Wright, but the fact whether I did or did not murder Northon," he said. "He was the best friend I had on earth. If I murdered him I want to know it; if I didn't I want to know who did."

"You are rather positive that George was murdered," Wright answered. "It is possible that he might have had a stroke, and you simply had the dream, and that's all there is to it."

"George Northon was murdered, I know that."

"There is nothing we know for sure when death comes."

"Anyway, we'll work on the basis that he was murdered."

Wright nodded his head and looked at Blair. The famous criminologist had a disarming look, just as his whole appearance was disarming for a criminologist. He looked far more like a successful business man than a person interested in crime.

He had the frank and well-fed

appearance of a banker or prosperous broker. His face was full and his eyes were friendly and open and frank. And under all stress, no matter what might happen, his eyes and his face and his actions remained the same.

"I also think he was murdered," he said quietly.

Blair waited for him to say more but he didn't. Blair felt a peculiar feeling come over him; he felt sick at the stomach and his brain whirled, he had trouble thinking rationally.

"And—and you think I murdered him," he replied in a low husky voice. "Be frank with me, Wright. We were both close friends of Northon. If I killed him, I am willing to face the charge, no matter what it will be. Be honest with me."

WRIGHT got up, walked around the desk, and took his hat from a chair.

He looked at Blair and said:

"I don't know anything now. Let's go over to the house and take a look at George. We might know more then. You can be assured that I will be perfectly honest with you. Have the police been notified?"

"Oscar, Northon's valet, attended to all that." Blair got up weakly and stood holding on to the chair. "I want to know now, Wright what you think. Did I murder Northon?"

Wright smiled. "How can I tell you now?" he replied. "In the first place, I don't know that he was murdered; and in the second place, I don't know the other facts surrounding his death."

"Other facts? What do you mean?"

"If you killed Northon, there will be no other facts; if you didn't, there will be."

Blair said nothing. Wright walked

out of the room and Blair followed him.

When they got back to the house on West Ninth Street, they found two policemen in the room. Northon was still lying on his face. There was a white sheet over him.

Oscar was sitting in a chair, the ancient Chinese chair Northon had sat in the night before while talking to Blair. The old valet's boney face was an ashen grey. He stared at the body under the sheet helplessly.

Wright did not go directly to the body. He stood at the door and surveyed the room. The two policemen eyed him suspiciously.

He said to Blair:

"I won't be able to look at the body until the medical examiner comes. The police are very particular about that, but I know Doctor Felton, the medical examiner, very well."

OSCAR got up and walked over to Blair and Wright.

"I have notified Miss Northon and Paul Conroy," he said. "Is there anything else I could do?"

"Nothing but keep still and don't get too excited," Wright told him. "Miss Northon, I take it is the adopted daughter. And Paul Conroy?"

"His nephew, sir," Oscar responded quickly.

Wright nodded and walked across the room. Blair followed him. The criminologist was half way across the room when he stopped suddenly, looked up at something on the wall, and then turned and looked at Blair.

Blair was right behind him! They were in the center of the room, some feet away from the body of Northon. The two policemen were standing near the body. Oscar had gone

back to the old ebony chair and sat down.

"Did you catch that?" Wright whispered to Blair.

Blair looked at him a little mystified and shook his head. Wright shrugged and remained where he was.

"It's here," he said. "I got it once."

"What's here?" Blair asked in a low whisper.

Wright gave him a quick, surprised look—but said nothing.

Blair glanced around the room. He had no idea what Wright was talking about. On the wall in front of them was a beautiful brocade piece of lace, whose threads were interlaced with pure gold. The drapery was a priceless gem of ancient Chinese art.

TO the right of it, over the Chinese fireplace, hung the famous yellow Mandarin, with its huge five-toed dragon. This had been Northon's most cherished possession.

Somehow, he had gotten this imperial garment from the Forbidden City. It was hundreds of years old and its value was almost priceless.

Beneath the Mandarin, on the mantle of the fireplace, were ancient Ming vases, unearthed by Northon after a thousand mile expedition into the interior of China. There was the Tsao Hung vase and the Fung Ting vase, each of them rare and almost impossible to get.

But as his eyes wandered from these to the black ebony furniture, some inlaid with marble, Blair could get no idea what Wright was talking about. And Wright didn't explain any further.

Wright suddenly gave a cry of surprise and walked quickly across the room, stopping within a foot of

where Northon lay on the floor, under the sheet. He was looking at a strange looking piece of statuary, which rested on a red lacquered Cinnabar cabinet.

His eyes feasted on the statue with amazement.

"The lucky old devil," he said. "Now where do you suppose he unearthed this? It is the most perfect Shik Tzu I have ever seen."

He examined it closely. "Priceless," he continued. "My God, it's priceless. It isn't of Ming Dynasty; it dates back to the Five Rulers. Look at it, Blair. The darned thing dates back two thousand years. Remarkable—amazing."

Blair looked at it. It was a statue of an ancient Chinese lion. It was about eighteen inches high. The lion was a crude looking piece of sculpture; its head was too large for the rest of its body. It looked something like a dragon with a lion's head.

ONE glance at the lion told Blair that its age was great. It looked as if it was made out of some peculiar kind of bronze and the bronze had little holes eaten in it. From its looks, it could easily have been several thousand years old.

Wright stood staring at it, totally oblivious that at his feet lay the body of George Northon or that Blair was standing near him.

"Amazing," he gasped. "I don't suppose there is another like this outside of China. Not one that old and that perfect. Remarkable. Northon always was lucky."

Blair said nothing. He remembered that Northon had shown him the statue three days before. He had been very excited that day. Northon had explained to Blair that this new addition to his vast collection of Chinese things was by far

the most valuable; but he had been strangely secretive about where he had procured it.

He had explained to Blair it was the lion that guarded the tombs of the dead in the Ming Dynasty, but that he was sure it dated back beyond the Ming, or even the Chou Dynasty. He had said nothing about the Dynasty of the Five Rulers.

Blair's thoughts were interrupted by a cheery, "Hello, everybody. What's the excitement," that came from the doorway.

He turned quickly. Retta Dolores was standing in the doorway. She was dressed in a close-fitting dark blue velvet dress and she wore a small, tight-fitting hat.

Despite his dislike for her, Blair had to admit, to himself, that she was an engaging and beautiful creature. She was about five foot seven, with a thin and graceful body.

Everything about her—her finely molded face, her sensual lips, her soft golden hair—everything was alluring and seductive.

AT times her eyes could be as innocent as a young girl's; at other times they were cold and cruel and greedy. There were times when everything about her was sweet and self-sacrificing, but Blair knew, as did all who knew her well, that this was only a pose and that she knew what she wanted and usually got it, without much regard for other people's feelings.

She stood in the doorway, looking first at the policemen and then at Blair and Wright. She did not look down at the floor.

"Well, what's the excitement?" She shrugged her shoulders in annoyance when she repeated the question. "Why the police and the famous Mr. Wright?"

Oscar got up and walked over to her.

"Why—why—Miss Dolores—"

But he never finished. She gave a little cry, brought her handkerchief up to her mouth, and clutched the back of a chair to steady herself.

Wright walked up to her quickly.

"Miss Dolores, perhaps we had better go in another room," he said quietly. "There has been an accident."

She pushed him away and stared down at the body under the white sheet. She was composed and even casual.

"Is George dead?" She asked the question as if she were asking the time of day. "I suppose it was a stroke. The doctor warned him about that."

"He was dead when I entered the room this morning," Oscar broke in excitedly. "I don't know how long he had been dead. He was blue and stiff. It was terrible."

Retta smiled pleasantly. "Death usually is that way, Oscar," she said. "It is rather strange that you found him in this room. Who was with him last night?"

She threw Blair a half-teasing and half-accusing look. Blair looked at Wright.

"It's not really important who was with him last night, Miss Dolores," Wright said. "The medical examiner will be here any minute now and we'll know the cause of his death."

RETTA DOLORES started to say something, but the bell rang for the front door. Oscar trotted out of the room and in a moment returned with the medical examiner.

He was an elderly man, gray-haired and with the face and actions of a college professor.

Wright said, "Hello, doctor," and then walked out of the room, motioning with his eyes for Blair to follow him.

Out in the hallway Wright turned to Blair.

"The odds are about three to one against you," he said curtly. "Northon was murdered all right, and as I say, it's a three to one bet right now that you did the job in your sleep. There's one chance, but you'll have to work fast, damned fast."

Wright took out an envelope from his pocket and wrote hurriedly on it.

Then he handed the envelope to Blair and continued:

"If you get down to that address before a certain other person does, providing, of course, that there is a certain other person, we may find out something that will clear you. You are to see old Chin Wah, a very close friend of mine. Give him this envelope. He will understand what the words on it mean. Now show some speed and be a little careful."

Blair took the envelope and started for the front door. It opened suddenly and a young man came in the hallway. Blair recognized him as Paul Conroy, Northon's nephew.

CONROY knew Blair very well, was a very close friend of his; so he directed his first question to him.

"What's happened?" he asked. "Oscar called me and said uncle was dead."

"Yes, he's dead, Conroy," Blair said. "Oscar found him this morning in the Chinese room."

"But—but what happened?"

"We don't know now. It looks like he died of a stroke or a heart attack."

Paul Conroy was still young, in

his twenties, and he had all the impulsiveness of youth.

"Why hide anything from me, Blair?" he said. "Something happened to uncle and I'm entitled to know."

Wright took up the conversation. "Mr. Blair has a hurried mission, Conroy," he said. "I can explain everything that has happened."

Conroy gave Blair a questioning look. He was a handsome young man, Paul Conroy. Tall and straight and powerfully built. His face was frank and boyish looking. The look he gave Blair had a great deal of his impulsiveness in it.

He hesitated a minute before saying, "Something serious has happened to uncle, something more serious than a stroke."

He stopped talking and glanced at Wright and then Blair.

Neither of them said anything.

Paul continued: "Something serious has happened, and if you don't mind, Blair, I'll go with you. I want to get the straight of this."

Blair waited for Wright to answer for him. Wright said: "I think it would be a good idea, Blair. You might need Conroy before you get home."

CHAPTER III

AT TWO IN THE MORNING

BLAIR and Paul caught a taxi on the corner of Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue. Blair gave the driver a number down on Pearl Street, in the heart of New York's Chinatown.

Besides this address and the name, Chin Wah, there was only a brief message on the envelope.

Blair couldn't make much sense out of it.

It read: "Shih Tzu, Five Rulers.

Sold in New York last week. Information very important. Wright."

The taxi went down Fifth Avenue and cut across Washington Square Park at a fast speed. Blair sat back in the seat and wished above all things, that Paul Conroy was about two thousand miles away from him right then.

He was still dazed and stunned by the death of his friend; every detail of that terrifying dream was as real to him in the taxi as it was that night. The feeling that, after all, he had murdered his friend and that all this running around was useless and foolish came over him.

But sitting beside him was the nephew of George Northon. Blair knew only too well the strong bond that existed between Northon and his young nephew. Northon had been proud of the young man, and justly so.

Paul had worked his way through Yale, had started on his own down in Wall Street, refusing all help from his uncle. He was young and ambitious and strongly attached to Northon.

How could Blair tell him the real truth? He would have to tell him something. He could not tell him why he was rushing so madly down to this address on Pearl Street. He wished Wright could have forseen his predicament and kept the young man back in the house.

BLAIR wanted to be alone. He wanted a few hours to reason things out himself. He couldn't quite understand how or why he went down into that room and murdered his friend, if he did such a thing; he only knew that Wright had said that the odds were three to one against him and he might as well have said they were ten thousand to one against him.

There were several things about George Northon's strange actions—the fear he saw in his eyes, the selection of Blair to make his suggestions of murders—these things Blair could not understand. But his mind was in no condition to understand anything.

For the first few minutes in the taxi, Paul Conroy sat silent. Blair waited for him to speak, a good deal like a condemned man waits for sentence to be pronounced on him.

Blair was prepared for almost anything from the nephew except what finally did come.

"Blair, I wanted to be alone with you," Paul said slowly and in a husky voice. "That's why I came along. I don't know where you are going, but I do know I have something very important to say to you. Uncle was murdered."

PAUL did not wait for an answer. He continued:

"Uncle George was murdered because I know that he has been in great fear of his life for some time. He has talked to me about it. He didn't say much; he just said that perhaps something might happen to him. I knew from the way he said it that he was afraid of his life."

Blair managed to stammer:

"Yes, yes, I know he was a little different, but I didn't know what was the trouble."

"The trouble was that he knew some one was planning to kill him," Paul replied. "And I'm sure that some one murdered him last night."

Blair made some foolish remark about the medical examiner and what he might find.

"Why is Wright on the case so early?" Paul asked.

"Well—well, you see, he was a great friend of your uncle," Blair answered weakly. He felt like he was going through ten third de-

grees at once. "He came over as soon as he heard about the death of your uncle."

The taxi turned over from Broadway to the Bowery. There was a traffic jam and the driver had to slow down.

Blair looked at Paul. Paul's face was ashen white and he was staring accusingly at Blair.

"You're holding a great deal back from me, Blair," he said. "You might as well be frank."

"But I've told you everything."

Paul shook his head slowly.

"No, there is one thing you have not explained to me." His voice was hard and hoarse. "You were in uncle's room last night when he was murdered. What were you doing there?"

BLAIR felt a queer feeling start from his throat and go down to his stomach. He started to answer, but his mouth was dry and the words wouldn't come.

Paul went on in his hard, hoarse voice:

"I've got to be frank with you, Blair. You were a friend of my uncle and a friend of mine. If you can explain why you were in that room, you are still a friend of mine; if you can't—well, murder is murder. That's all."

"You must be mad," Blair cried. "I was not down in your uncle's room after I went up to bed. I left him at around eleven. I admit that he wasn't feeling well and that he was afraid of something. I never saw him so wrought up. But I was not down in his room after eleven o'clock. You must be mad."

The taxi was cruising slowly down the Bowery, having trouble getting through the traffic jams.

Paul shook his head.

"You were down in Uncle George's room at two-thirty," he

said. "You were there because I saw you and you saw me."

"I saw you? Why that's absurd."

But it wasn't as absurd to Blair as he wanted it to be. He realized that, walking in his sleep, he could have passed Paul and not seen him.

Blair said nothing more. Neither did Paul for a few moments. Blair felt as if all hope were gone. There was no use bucking the impossible. Paul had seen him down in Northon's room. The little faith that Wright might extract him from the terrifying condemnation of having murdered his best friend passed.

I WENT to my uncle's house last night because he called me at around midnight," Paul explained. "He said he had to see me, that he had something very important to tell me. I don't know what it was. He told me to drop in around two o'clock. It was an unusual hour, but Uncle George was very much worked up when he talked to me on the phone. He was not himself. At two o'clock I went to the house.

"He was sitting in the Chinese room. I think he had aged twenty years. His body was trembling and his hair was snow-white. His face looked haggard and drawn. He talked to me in a jerky, high-pitched voice, which wasn't the way he usually talked.

"The purpose he had in calling me was startling, to say the least. It took him some time to get to it. I think it was the hardest thing he ever had to do in his life, telling me what he did. He called me there to tell me that he believed he was going to die, that nothing in the world could save him, and that he had made his will and left everything to Retta Dolores.

"For a while I was too shocked to say anything. Uncle George was a rich man. I didn't want his

money, but it hurt, hurt badly, to think that he cared so little for me. I thought a great deal of my uncle, and still do. I can't understand his actions.

"There is Jane, his adopted daughter. I know he loved her, loved her as dearly as he did his own daughter, but she was left out of the will completely. He stammered a great deal with his explanation but finally told me that he did what he did because he had to."

THE taxi turned off the Bowery into Pearl Street. It stopped at a number near Chinatown.

Paul said: "We'll get out and then I'll finish what I have to say."

He and Blair got out. Blair paid the driver and the taxi drove away.

They stood outside an old, tumbled-down building. Several Chinamen passed them, slinking along in their shuffle-like gait. Several white men, the derelicts of the Bowery, passed after the Chinamen. Then the street was deserted.

"What he meant when he said he had to leave all his money to Retta Dolores is something I don't understand," Paul continued with his story. "I know she has been close to him, very close. But I asked no questions. I took his explanation in as good grace as possible. After all, it was his money and he could do what he wished with it.

"After he told me all that, I got up and left. I went out on the street. I could not get him off my mind. I was worried. I knew something terrible had happened to him and that he was afraid something worse would happen.

"I went down on Eighth Street and got some doughnuts and coffee. After that I wandered around for about fifteen or twenty minutes and then decided to go back to the house and see if I couldn't persuade Uncle

George to go to a hotel; to do something to get him away from his fear.

"I found the front door to the house open, which was an unusual thing. I walked into the hallway and saw that the lights to the Chinese room were out. I figured Uncle George had gone to bed and I turned to leave; but just then I heard a slight noise and looked back at the door of the Chinese room.

"You were coming out of that room, dressed in your pajamas. You saw me but you said nothing. You went upstairs. I don't know now, and perhaps never will know, why I did not go into that Chinese room after I saw you. Perhaps, it was because I knew you had been such a close friend to Uncle George and I had faith and confidence in you.

"I thought you didn't want to speak to me because you were worried about his condition and didn't want me to worry. Anyway, I left the house. This morning Oscar called and told me Uncle was dead. I went over to the house at once. You were not there. I'm not a doctor, or an authority on the subject how long a person has been dead, but one look at Uncle George convinced me that he had been killed around two-thirty this morning."

PAUL CONROY stopped speaking abruptly. He looked at Blair. Blair was conscious of that look, but he didn't return it. He couldn't. He knew Paul was waiting for some explanation, but there was nothing he could say.

A woman, an old hag-like creature, passed them. She said something to them, but Blair only heard a mumble of words.

The old woman snarled and then moved on.

Paul said quietly:

"I can't, and I don't want to believe that you murdered my uncle,

but what were you doing in that room with the lights off?"

Blair wet his lips and looked directly in Paul Conroy's face.

"Paul, I don't know whether or not I am guilty!" he answered. "I can't explain now. If you saw me down in that room, I was there. But if I were there, I knew nothing about it. I know it sounds foolish but I can't say more now.

"When Oscar came up and told me George Northon was dead, I suffered a thousand hells. I went at once to Wright, told him the truth. He will either prove that I murdered your uncle or that I didn't. I am willing to pay the price if I did, but I do want a chance to prove, at least, to myself that I did kill him before I give myself up."

Paul Conroy said nothing. He stared at Blair helplessly.

Blair added: "If you will have faith in me for twenty-four hours, I promise at the end of that time to give myself up, if Wright or myself cannot prove that someone else did it."

Paul turned his face away. He started to talk, but choked.

Finally he answered: "I guess that's fair enough, twenty-four hours. Where are we going now?"

CHAPTER IV

CHIN WAH

BLAIR explained briefly Wright's instructions for him to come down to this address and hand the envelope to Chin Wah, his friend. Blair admitted he didn't know what it was all about; that it all seemed a forlorn hope to him.

Paul took the envelope and read what was written on it.

"The Shih Tzu!" he exclaimed. "That's funny. That's the lion dragon that uncle got several days ago. He was very proud of it."

"Yes, he showed it to me," Blair answered. "Said it was very valuable, but I know nothing about it. I'm only following Wright's advice."

Paul studied the envelope closely, turned it over, and then handed it back to Blair.

"This is the address," he said. "A foul looking place but maybe we can find Chin Wah, whoever he might be, here."

Blair walked into the little side hall door, which was alongside an antique shop. The hallway was dark and there was no way of telling where Wright's friend lived.

Paul started up the stairs and Blair followed him. There were no lights in the hallway. The stairs were old and rickety. The hallway had an unpleasant odor to it.

On the second floor they stopped. Blair knocked on a door. There was no answer. He knocked again. The door opened several inches and the yellow face of a Chinaman peered through the open crack.

"Chin Wah," Blair said. "We have come from Philip Wright, friend of Chin Wah, to see him."

The door closed abruptly, but without any noise. Several minutes passed and the door did not open again. Blair stood leaning against the stair rail. Paul Conroy stood erect. His face was still white and his jaw set. Blair knew too well what he was thinking about, and in the presence of Paul, the trip down to Chinatown seemed foolish and utterly useless to him.

He was debating whether or not it would be best to go back home, give himself up to the police, and take what punishment the law might mete out to him.

He was on the verge of suggesting this to Paul when the door opened again and a little Chinaman came wobbling out of the room.

He gave a low bow, holding his hands in front of him.

"You friends of Mr. Wright?" he asked.

"Yes, we are friends of Mr. Wright and we want to see Chin Wah," Blair said listlessly.

The Chinaman bowed again, made a wide sweep with his arm, and muttered:

"It is well, friends, Chin Wah will see you."

Blair took the sweeping motion of his arm to indicate they were to walk into the room. He walked in and Paul followed him.

The Chinaman led them to the rear of the floor, up a short flight of stairs, and suddenly they were in a room gorgeously furnished after the fashion of a wealthy Chinese.

Seated on a little stool, with his legs crossed under him, was an old Chinaman. He was dressed in a flaming red Mandarin.

He did not rise as they entered. He looked at them with the blank stare that only an Oriental can give to unknown visitors. The little Chinaman who escorted them into the room left through the door as noiselessly as he had appeared.

THE room was darkened. No light came in from the outside; candles placed here and there gave the interior a phantom-like appearance.

Blair walked up to Chin Wah. "Mr. Wright requested that I hand you this," he said, and then backed away and stood alongside of Paul.

Chin Wah looked at the envelope. He read what was on it in one quick glance and then he crumbled the envelope in his hand with a quick, nervous gesture, and held the hand close to his red garment.

"It is well, my brethren, that you

have come to me, for I can lead you through the mysteries of Chinatown as no other man can do."

Chin Wah talked in a loud, melodious voice. Blair looked at Paul, who shrugged and shook his head.

"I don't know what he's talking about," he said. "Are we down here for a little tour of Chinatown?"

Then suddenly Paul grasped Blair's arm. Blair looked at Chin Wah. He was motioning them to come close to him. He was doing it with his two long forefingers, which were down over his stomach and close to the red Mandarin he wore.

Blair and Paul took several steps forward. Chin Wah still motioned for them to come closer. They walked directly in front of him.

Then Chin Wah said in a low whisper:

"What your friend, Wright, has asked for is a thing that one cannot speak about in loud tones, for, verily, you are asking for information that is worth a princely sum. And Chinatown, even when among friends, has many ears."

HE STOPPED talking. His small, round eyes darted nervously around the room. The candles flickered and shadows played on the walls. The silence of the room was sinister.

"He who seeks the dragon with the lion's head is inviting death," he continued in the low musical voice. "I know only this for your friend Wright: three months ago, or perhaps longer, a Shih Tzu, dating far back to the days of the Five Rulers, was stolen from a sacred house in the Forbidden City.

"It would be difficult to appraise the money value of this piece. It is worth several fortunes. It was traced to New York. Far up on Allen Street, in a dirty and neglect-

ed part of that street was a little curio store, run by a man that no one knew from whence he came.

"It was rumored among those who know such things that the stolen lion's head was in that store. No one knows, for one morning, the owner of that little store was found dead and the Shih Tzu was missing from that store. There are many among my people who know that it has been stolen: there are many who would kill to know where it is."

He bowed low and then looked up at Blair and Paul and continued in a loud voice.

"For fifty dollars, friends, I shall show you all there is to see."

Paul taking a step closer to him, whispered: "That store in Allen Street. The number, please."

Chin Wah looked at him and shook his head.

"Youth is too impulsive," he said in a soft whisper. "Do not seek things in life that bring death, my boy. He, who would search openly for this stolen Shih Tzu, must realize that he is also seeking death. Let your friend Wright, wise in the ways of the world, seek for this thing. Do not go there yourself."

Paul whispered hoarsely:

"The number please. It is important. We must have it."

BLAIR stood beside Paul and said nothing. The words of Chin Wah did not impress him; nothing impressed him but the overwhelming fact that Northon was dead and that he had gone to the room of death at the hour Northon was murdered.

Chin Wah looked at Paul. There was something kindly, something parental in his look.

"If my friend Wright wishes that I give you this address, I will do so," he said slowly. "You are very

young, and youth does not handle danger with much intelligence."

"We must have the number," Paul said impatiently. "That is what we came for."

Chin Wah bowed low and then answered:

"314 Allen Street, near the corner of Bleecker Street."

The old Chinaman bowed again. Paul clutched Blair's arm and cried:

"We have only a half hour to get there."

"You will have to move faster than that!" Chin Wah grinned. "There are others, many others, seeking what you want and there are eyes that watch that place day and night."

Paul paid no attention to Chin Wah's warning. He had Blair by the arm and was pulling him out of the room.

When they were in the hallway, Blair said:

"We're chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. The thing that killed Northon was something much different than this lion-headed monstrosity that everyone seems so anxious to get."

A DARK form moved somewhere in the dim hallway. It moved, like a shadow.

Then another shadow moved somewhere close to them. There was the sound of slow, shuffling feet. It seemed to Blair that the old hallway was alive with moving shadows.

Paul didn't answer Blair. He started for the stairs.

There were no sounds in the hallway; only shadows moving, phantom-like in the half-darkness.

Blair followed Paul down the stairs. A man was crouching in the corner of the first floor hallway. Blair could see the darkened outlines of his shoulders. The crouching form

didn't move. It was as still and silent as a statue.

Paul kicked the door to the outside open with his foot and rushed out on the street. Blair was close behind him.

The daylight was a pleasant relief to the darkened, musty old hallway, with its strange smells and its moving shadows. People were walking up and down the street. A truck was unloading barrels several doors down below.

At the corner of Mott and Pearl Streets a policeman was walking back and forth lazily.

"Some place, that hallway and Chin Wah's quarters," Blair said. "Wright has peculiar friends."

Paul didn't answer him. He was frantically hailing a passing taxi. The cab drew up to the curb and Paul snapped the address on Allen Street to him as he jumped in the car.

The taxi pulled away from the curb with a violent lurch. It shot around Pearl Street and wound around the crooked little streets of Chinatown and then went out on the Bowery.

BLAIR looked behind. Another car was following them. It was a large black car, with curtains pulled down so that it was impossible to see the occupants, except the driver, who wore a cap and sat with his head bent far over the steering wheel. He was alone in the front seat.

The taxi wound through the traffic and went up the Bowery for several blocks; then turned and went cross-town until it came to Allen Street.

The black car followed close behind, keeping about twenty feet to the rear and making every turn the taxi made.

The presence of the black car and the influence of daylight revived Blair's spirits a little. The pros-

pect of excitement gave him a renewed interest in things, though he realized hopelessly that all this running around and all this mystery about the lion-headed dragon would hardly help him much.

Paul turned around and looked out the back of the taxi. He saw the black car following them. A smile came over his lips.

"I guess Chinatown has many ears," he said. "Old Chin Wah either spoke the truth or wanted Chinatown to hear about the Shih Tzu. Can't say that I like Wright's friend very much."

Blair watched the black car idly.

"A lot of trouble for nothing," he said. "What do you plan to do?"

"Get into that curio store some way and find out what we can about who owned it and how this person came to get this Shih Tzu," Paul answered quickly.

HIS young eyes flashed with excitement. His face was flushed and red.

"I don't know why Wright sent you down here to see Chin Wah," he continued. "And I don't know how that mysterious statue of a lion-headed dragon could have anything to do with the death of Uncle George. It's all dark to me, but I'm not letting this chance pass to see what it's all about. It looks like a golden chance for you, a real break."

He gave Blair a look that wasn't pleasant when he said that. Blair shrugged. There was nothing for him to say and he kept his silence.

The taxi pulled up to the curb at 314 Allen Street. The driver was watching the black car, which remained twenty feet behind him. He had a nervous look on his face.

Blair gave him a bill, jumped out of the taxi and waved the driver away. Paul was out alongside him.

The taxi lurched forward and was out of sight in the traffic in a few seconds. The black car cruised past Blair and Paul, turned down Bleeker and was out of sight.

"They may be back," Paul said. "They likely know what we're here for. The shop looks deserted."

THE curio shop at 314 did look deserted and very much neglected. The window was still filled with odds and ends, none especially attractive or valuable.

"I suppose the door is locked," Paul said, as he walked up to it and tried it. "But it isn't. It's open."

He pushed the door open and walked into the shop.

"Strange that the door should be open," Blair said, as he and Paul stood in front of the shop and surveyed the clutter of old furniture and odds and ends that stood on the tables and cabinets.

The place was much more like a second-hand furniture store than a curio shop. Old furniture predominated. It was piled chair on chair, and table on table, in two rows, reaching up to the ceiling.

Bric-a-brac were scattered here and there on shelves and such tables as were not loaded with furniture. The bric-a-brac was cheap, second-hand stuff of no value.

In fact, there was nothing about the store that seemed to have any value. The furniture was covered with dust; old papers and dirt littered the floor.

The front end of the place was fairly well-lighted from the street, but further back in the store, a darkness, almost as complete as night, settled over everything. They could not see the rear end.

"Doesn't look much like a store where they would carry a Chinese antique worth a fortune," Paul said.

"It's nothing but an old second-hand furniture dump."

He pulled a light-string that hung down from the ceiling. The lights were off.

Blair started to walk to the rear of the shop. The old place seemed to fascinate him. He had no idea why he walked to the rear, except that something suddenly caused him to realize that the dirty old store held some intriguing mystery. Just how this mystery might be tied up to the death of Northon was unknown. He suddenly remembered Wright's words.

"You've got a one to five shot of getting down there before some one else does," Wright had told him. "If you do, your chances of clearing yourself improve."

The darkness increased as he walked to the rear. He could see the outlines of furniture piled high up against the wall at the end of the store.

Something moved in front of him. He saw a form dart out from behind an old bureau.

The form was indefinite and vague. It disappeared, like a flash, to the rear of the store.

But in that flash Blair glimpsed the vision of a woman, a tall, slim woman, in a close-fitting dress.

He heard Paul cry out behind him—a cry of warning.

But it came too late.

Something struck Blair around the waist. Two powerful arms circled his body and he went down to the floor with a crash.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS ATTACK

THE force of the fall stunned Blair. He didn't lose consciousness. He felt the powerful arms around his waist, but his

body was numb and he was too helpless at the moment to struggle against the person who was bearing him down to the floor.

In his half-conscious state he heard furniture breaking somewhere in the front of the store. He heard Paul curse and a man groan.

Then the arms closed tighter around his body and a hand went to his throat; but in those few seconds, lying on the floor, his strength came back to him and with a terrific lunge Blair threw himself free of the hand around his throat. But the hand slipped down to his waist.

He gave another lunge; struggled fiercely. But he could not loosen that vise-like grip that held him.

Then he changed tactics. He was fast exhausting himself by his violent efforts to break the grip around his waist. He twisted around and tried to throw himself over on his back.

This move gave his unknown assailant the chance he had been looking for. Blair was permitted to twist his body around, and in doing this, his face came up a little.

Something crashed against his jaw. It felt to Blair as if the house had come down on him. Another crashing blow followed.

Blair's ears rang. Another smashing blow jarred his whole body.

There he lost complete consciousness.

HE came to slowly. It seemed to him that he was still floating somewhere in the air. He tried to open his eyes but he saw nothing. He closed his eyes again in hopes his head would clear.

For several minutes he lay with his head going around and around. He had no idea where he was or what had happened. His brain

seemed numbed. Then his head stopped floating through the air. He was conscious of a dull ache in his right jaw.

He put his fingers up against his jaw. Pain shot through his face when he touched it.

He opened his eyes slowly. He saw the light coming through the front window of the store. He saw the dark outlines of furniture to the right of him.

He sat up. His ears were still ringing, but slowly he remembered where he was and what had happened.

But where was Paul Conroy?

Blair got to his feet. He staggered a bit when he tried to walk. The old furniture store was eerie in its silence. The front door was closed. He thought that strange. He remembered distinctly that he and Paul had left it open.

A woman on the sidewalk outside walked hurriedly past the door. A man passed in the opposite direction. Blair shook his head violently. His brain was still muggy.

What had happened to him? Yes, he remembered. But where was Paul?

HE stumbled forward, in the direction of the door. He couldn't see the floor. He stumbled over something. It was soft.

A groan came from the floor. Blair had difficulty in remaining on his feet from the stumble, but he caught his balance and turned and looked down at the floor.

He saw the dark outline of someone lying, face down, at his feet. He reached down and turned the body over.

It was Paul Conroy.

Blair could see his face in the misty light. It looked as if it was covered with blood. The shirt was

torn almost completely from Paul's back.

He was down on his knees feeling Paul's face. It was wet and hot; Blair looked at his hand, holding it up close to his face.

It was covered with blood.

He took Paul by the shoulders and dragged him up close to the front door, where he could see him. Then he took his handkerchief and wiped the blood away from the other's face.

Paul stirred a little, groaned, and then opened his eyes. He stared at Blair for a moment and then closed his eyes again.

"Are you hurt badly, Paul?" Blair asked.

Paul again opened his eyes and looked at Blair and smiled weakly.

"Nothing serious," he said. "I think a couple trucks or something as heavy fell on me. That's all."

He sat up and shook his head; then he gazed slowly around the store.

"They didn't give us much warning," he continued. "I saw that woman dart out from behind that old piece of furniture and then I saw some chap making a dive for you. I yelled and when I did, two people hit me. And they weren't children. Not by any means."

He tried to get up, but he was still too weak. He grasped Blair's shoulder and pulled his body up and stood, leaning against Blair.

"We better get out of here," Blair suggested. "You need your face dressed."

PAUL let go Blair's shoulder and staggered over to a chair and sat down.

"We're leaving here when we find out what we came here for," he said. "The strange thing about this whole affair is that those chaps

didn't kill us. I hope they're gone now. Maybe, we can work in peace."

"I'm afraid we are too late to find anything now," Blair answered. "Whoever attacked us, beat us to what we wanted. That much is certain."

"Maybe they did, but I'm not leaving until I find out for sure."

Paul got up and staggered weakly to the rear of the store. Blair followed him.

The rear of the store was so dark that they could see nothing. Paul lit a match. A half burned candle was on an old table that obviously had served as the office desk for the former owner. Paul lit the candle and then slumped down in a chair.

The candle flickered a little, almost went out, and then flared up strongly and cast a sickly yellow light over the table.

"I guess we were too late," Paul said weakly. "They didn't need to kill. All they had to do was knock us cold for several minutes while they got away with what they wanted."

BLAIR looked at the desk. Papers were lying everywhere, on the desk, on the floor, and on the two old chairs near the table. Some one had ransacked the papers in a hurried and highly efficient manner.

"Whatever they were looking for, they likely got," Blair answered. "But the whole thing is a little mystifying to me. What were they after?"

Paul laughed. "Didn't it ever occur to you that Uncle George likely bought the dragon lion from this dealer," he said. "That, to Wright, has some importance in the case."

Blair sat down. His jaw still ached and his head hadn't cleared completely.

"It's stretching the imagination a

great deal to think that the lion-headed dragon murdered your uncle," Blair said wearily. "In fact, the cause of his death is quite obvious to me. He was killed by something altogether different."

"Something different? What do you mean?"

Paul's voice carried the hoarseness it had when he first accused Blair.

"I haven't told you my side of the story, Paul. It's a strange story, but perhaps we had better get out of here before I tell it."

PAUL shook his head slowly. "No, we can stay," he answered. "I don't think our friends will come back. I hope they do and if we stick around maybe they will."

Blair shrugged. Then he told Paul the whole story of his conversation with Northon, of Northon showing him the gold wire that the Chinese used to murder people, of his strange dream, and of his examining Northon's eye when he found him dead and finding the little hole under the eyelid.

Paul listened to his story carefully, his young face set and hard. When Blair finished, Paul said nothing for a moment.

He got up, walked over to the table, and shuffled some old papers between his fingers.

"If that's the case, it won't do us much good fooling around here," Paul finally said. "It is doubtful whether the attack on us here had any connection with uncle's murder. It is possible that we were attacked by people interested in getting possession of the dragon lion."

"Quite probable," Blair agreed.

"But Wright sent you down here. That's something."

"I don't know what Wright has in mind," Blair admitted. "I told

him the whole story about that wire, and when the medical examiner entered the room, he gave me this address and told me to get down to Chin Wah as fast as I could. That's all I know."

"It isn't much." Paul was busy going through the papers on the table. "But you never know what Wright has in mind."

He fumbled the papers nervously. Blair watched him silently. The light from the candle flickered a great deal; the papers looked yellow and old under the flickering light.

"Naturally, it is important to know whether uncle bought that cursed lion-headed dragon from this dealer," Paul continued, fumbling the papers. "If he did, and if his death was due to that antique, it is important to know who the dealer was and why he sold it to Uncle George. Perhaps, that's what Wright had in mind when he sent you down here."

Blair bit his lips. He ignored Paul's words.

"You saw the woman that jumped out from behind that bureau," he said in a low voice. "You said you saw her."

PAUL turned quickly and looked at Blair. "Yes, I saw her," he answered. "What about it?"

"I have seen that woman before."

"Perhaps, I didn't get a good look at her, only her shadow."

"I got a very good look at her."

Paul let some papers fall from his hand and turned about and faced Blair.

"Yes, that's interesting. Who was she?"

Blair shook his head.

"Too serious to make senseless accusations now. I can only say that I recognized that woman."

Paul didn't answer at once. He

stared a little bewildered at Blair and then said:

"I think I know who you mean. Perhaps, we have one idea in common and perhaps Wright was thinking of the same thing."

"I don't know," Blair answered wearily. "I only know that I recognized that woman and we both know her."

Paul gave a cold, cruel little laugh.

"Yes, I know her very well," he said. "I ought to. She's getting all of Uncle George's money. I ought to know her."

Blair said nothing. Paul turned and went through the papers on the table.

"We likely won't find anything here, but we might as well give the place the once-over and find out what we can," Paul continued.

It took them close to half an hour to go through all the papers on the table and on the floor. They were old bills, receipts, and invoices.

They were able to glean two facts from the papers. The dealers name had been Abe Cornisky and he had dealt only in second-hand furniture and cheap bric-a-brac.

No record of any sale to George Northon had been found; no record of the dealer ever having purchased or possessed the lion-headed dragon.

While Paul went through the papers, Blair kept a look-out for the return of their assailants.

None of them showed up. Blair thought it strange but said nothing.

AT the end of the half hour search, Paul said:

"No information here. We better get back to the house."

Blair nodded approval and they walked out of the front door of the store. Several people passing on the sidewalk, glanced at them suspi-

ciously. Paul's shirt was torn and his face was still covered with blood. Blair's jaw had swelled up and he didn't present a very pleasant appearance.

They hailed a taxi at the corner of Bleecker and Allen Streets and rode back to the Ninth Street house.

CHAPTER VI

YELLOW EYEBALLS

BACK at the house, Oscar met them at the door. The old servant, still badly shaken, was in a state of very jumpy nerves; and when he saw Paul, with his blood-streaked face and his torn shirt and Blair with his swollen jaw, the old man cried out in alarm.

Paul quieted him with: "It's nothing serious, Oscar. Just a little street fight. What's happened?"

"They have all gone, all gone," he stammered. "The police, I mean. The doctor said that Mr. Northon died of a stroke. The body is down at the undertakers."

Paul gave Blair a glance that conveyed a great deal of meaning, and its meaning wasn't overly pleasant.

Blair turned to Oscar. "And Mr. Wright, is he here?"

"No, no, he left with the police and the body. He left in a great hurry."

Paul walked into the front room of the first floor of the Northon apartment. Blair went upstairs, to change his clothes.

Fifteen minutes later he came downstairs. Paul was gone. He walked into the Chinese room. He had no special reason for going in that room, except a morbid curiosity that had come over him since getting back in the house.

The Chinese room, with its gold-braided draperies on the walls, its

yellow Mandarin staring mutely down at him, seemed strangely silent and deserted.

He walked over to the red lacquered cinnabar cabinet where the lion-headed dragon rested. He stopped abruptly, as if his body had stiffened from an electric shock.

The lion-headed dragon was gone.

FOR a moment he stared at the vacant shelf, unable at first to realize that it was gone.

A clear, melodious voice came from somewhere in the room.

"Mr. Wright took the funny looking statue. He seemed very much excited about it."

Blair turned quickly. Standing in the door was a girl.

"Why, Miss Northon, I didn't know you would be here," Blair said, a little embarrassed.

Jane Northon walked in the room. She was an attractive looking girl. Her face was sharp, but well formed; her body was youthful and graceful. She was dressed in blue, a color which brought out her clear complexion and her blue eyes.

"Why not? Isn't my foster father dead?" she asked.

She sat down in a chair and fumbled nervously at a string of pearls around her neck.

"Mr. Northon died of a stroke," she said. "Why were all the police here and why the mysterious actions of Paul? He passed me in the hall, going out, and he didn't speak to me. What has happened?"

Blair bit his lips. First it was Paul he had had to face and now it was the adopted daughter.

"Mr. Northon died very suddenly, Miss Northon," Blair explained. "Oscar found him dead this morning. The law requires that when a person dies suddenly, the medical examiner has to be called."

Blair noted that her eyes were red from crying. Her face was pale and her fingers fumbled nervously at the string of pearls around her neck.

"Yes, yes I understand all that," she answered. "But why was Mr. Wright so mysterious? I—I think something happened to Mr. Northon."

She cried softly, holding her handkerchief to her eyes. Her slim body trembled slightly.

Blair looked away from her. There was nothing more he could say. His eyes wandered over to the table where the little gold wire had lain on the book. It was gone; so was the book.

Just then some one came in through the front door and was walking down the hallway. Jane Northon looked up, dried her eyes, and said:

"I'm sorry. I guess I'm upset and nervous."

"Yes, I understand," Blair stammered.

He looked at the door. Wright was standing in the doorway, watching Blair and Miss Northon.

He laughed when he noticed Blair's jaw.

"Not bad, at that," he said. "You're lucky to get out of that old store with only a swollen jaw."

"Old store, what do you know about the store?" Blair asked, surprised that Wright should know anything about it.

JANE NORTHON got up quickly. Wright walked into the room.

Blair started to say something more about the store, but a sharp cry from Jane Northon stopped him. She had risen from her seat, her face went deathly white, and she cried:

"The store? What do you mean?"

Wright was standing close to her. "Why, nothing, Miss Northon. But you look ill," he answered.

She gave another suppressed cry, looked wildly at Blair and then at Wright and suddenly rushed out of the room.

Wright watched her leave with an expression on his face that Blair had never seen before. It was a puzzled, amazed expression.

"Strange girl, Jane Northon," Wright said, still staring at the door. "Hard to figure out."

He walked up to the door, closed it, and then turned a key in the lock. Then he walked back across the room and went over to a far end and took a chair.

"Come over here, Blair," he said. "Sit down near me. We'll have to talk in low tones. I don't want people listening through keyholes."

Blair went over to the far end of the room, a corner that was well removed from any door, and sat down near Wright.

Wright sat with his shoulders hunched over a little, the elbows of his arms resting on the sides of the chairs, and his hands folded in front of him.

"I have news for you," he said quietly. "And it is not pleasant news."

Blair was anxious to tell him about the attack in the furniture store, but Wright appeared to have no interest in that.

He continued: "George Northon was murdered. He was murdered as you dreamed he was. That gold wire was shoved up under his eyes, causing a hemorrhage in the brain."

BLAIR gulped awkwardly. He felt foolish doing that, but he couldn't help it.

He stammered: "And the police, have they discovered that?"

Wright eyed him closely. "Does that make any difference?" he asked curtly. "You must be ready to answer for whatever you did, if you did not dream it."

BLAIR nodded. "I understand," he answered. "But, damn it, Wright, I'm human. I'm ready to answer for what I did, but I want to be sure. It all looks so foolish, so impossible."

"Not impossible, nor a bit foolish," Wright said. "Mental suggestion, a form of hypnotism, has been responsible for a great many murders, many of them similiar to your case."

"But why did Northon want to be murdered? Why did he pick on me, his best friend?"

"I can't answer that just now. I'll answer about the police. The medical examiner did not catch the hole under the eyelid. He may, if the family insists upon a post mortem."

"And will they?"

"I don't know. Northon had a very funny family."

Blair got up and walked over to the wall and stood leaning against it.

"It won't be necessary," he said slowly. "If you are convinced that I killed Northon, I'm ready to give up now. I don't suppose sleep walking is much of a defense."

"It would be if you could make a jury believe it. It would correspond to any defense based on the fact that you were not responsible for your actions."

"But a jury won't believe much in sleep walking."

"It would look a little weak."

Blair shrugged. "It doesn't make much difference if they believe it or not. Shall I give myself up now?"

Wright looked up at him and smiled.

"Not so soon," he said. "I'm simply telling you that Northon was killed as you dreamed. That eliminates a certain theory I held and I haven't anything to put in its place."

"Meaning some theory about that lion-headed dragon."

Wright nodded his head.

"Young Conroy and I went down and met your friend, Chin Wah," Blair continued. "The old Chinaman took the lion-headed dragon pretty seriously. He talked about death and sent us to a deserted old second-hand store on Allen Street where we came very near death."

"Yes, I know all about that," Wright said. "Chin Wah told me about it."

"You have seen Chin Wah?"

"I saw him a little while ago. He thought you and Conroy very foolish men."

Blair laughed. It was a mirthless laugh.

"I guess he was right," he answered. "But let's get back to the murder of Northon. What shall I do?"

WRIGHT hesitated a moment before answering. "Keep your head and don't get excited. Just because one theory of mine failed is no reason why there are not others."

Blair said nothing. He stood against the wall and kept wetting his lips from time to time. He didn't look at Wright but stared across the room at a picture of a Chinese garden.

Wright continued:

"There are certain angles of this case that don't bear out the theory, that you killed Northon in your sleep. These angles are vague and hard to define. On the other hand your committing the murder is the

most logical and the most reasonable solution."

"Retta Dolores was in that store when we were attacked," Blair said in a hollow voice. "Do you know that she will inherit all Northon's money?"

Wright settled back in his chair and shoved his hands in his pockets.

"That's one of the angles that puzzles me," he answered. "But there is another one far more important."

"What is it?"

"The balls of Northon's eyes were yellow."

Blair looked at his friend as if he had suddenly gone crazy. He stared at him for several seconds.

"The eyeballs yellow. What in the world can that have to do with his murder?"

Wright got up.

"It can have everything in the world to do with it," he replied. "As it now stands, the fact that the eyeballs were yellow is about the only thing that stands between you and going to the police and confessing that you killed your friend."

"Yellow eyeballs," Blair repeated, a little foolishly.

Wright looked at him and smiled.

"Sounds funny to you, the idea of yellow eyeballs," he said. "Well, let me tell you, Blair, that it may sound like some very sweet music to you before we are through with this case."

BLAIR stared at him and said nothing.

Wright asked quickly: "Your dream, did you tell anyone?"

"Yes, Paul Conroy."

"I suppose you had to. He saw you coming out of the room."

"And he has told you about it?"

Wright nodded slowly and took a cigarette out and lit it.

"Yes, he told me about it," he an-

swered. "In fact, he told me before you came to see me. He told me then about his uncle's will and the fact that all the money was being left to Retta Dolores. I might also say that he hired me on this case before you did, and I might add that he hired me to save you. He doesn't believe that you killed his uncle."

"He doesn't believe I did it," Blair exclaimed.

"I should say that he doesn't want to believe it. The boy has a theory himself about the murder, a little fantastic, but possible."

Blair paid no attention to Wright's last words.

He said tensely:

"And you, do you believe I did it?"

Wright shook his head, inhaled deeply on the cigarette, and then answered:

"I believe that you were in the room when Northon was murdered, and I believe that you are the only person that could have murdered Northon with the Chinese gold wire."

"But he was murdered with that wire," Blair protested.

"Yes, he was murdered with that wire."

"Then I did it."

WRIGHT crushed the cigarette out in an ash tray close to him. He answered without looking up.

"I'm becoming ambiguous in my statements," he said. "I believe, in fact I know, you were in this room when he was murdered. I think you had a part in it. A peculiar part, I will grant you, but the murder of George Northon, if I am right, will prove a very strange murder."

Blair sat down wearily.

"I don't understand you," he said weakly. "If I killed him, I killed him. That's about all there is to it."

"All, Blair, except one thing," Wright replied quickly. "All except one thing, the yellow eyeballs."

CHAPTER VII

THE DIARY

IT was two hours later when Blair discovered George Northon's diary in a little side drawer of the black teakwood desk in the Chinese room.

He found it purely by accident. A diary was the furthest thing from his mind at that time. Wright had left abruptly after his rather mysterious remark about yellow eyeballs. It had sounded queer to Blair. He couldn't understand it, any more than he could understand Wright's theory of the murder.

He had said that only Blair could murder Northon with the thin wire of death; that Blair was in the room when the murder was committed; that he had had a part in the strange murder.

The whole thing was strange and ambiguous to Blair. He realized that Wright had not told him all he knew, that he had refrained from mentioning the important fact about taking the lion-headed dragon out of the house.

Blair had wandered aimlessly around the house after Wright left. He went up to his apartment but the place got on his nerves. He went down in the Chinese room and that got on his nerves. He went in the front room, a large reception room, on the first floor of Northon's apartment.

Jane Northon was there but she said nothing to him. She had been crying. He had wanted to talk to her, to find out what she knew about her foster-father, but her pale face and her red-rimmed

eyes prevented his asking any questions.

She had gotten up and left the room without a word. He felt a little uncomfortable at bursting in on her privacy, though he had some difficulty reconciling her apparent grief with her apparent neglect of her foster-father.

BLAIR knew that the relations between Jane Northon and her foster-father had been cordially cool. George Northon would never discuss Jane Northon with anyone. She had always remained something of a mystery to Blair.

Oscar hovered over the house like a shadow. He got on Blair's nerves. Everywhere he went, Oscar was somewhere near him. He went up to his apartment but didn't stay long. He went back down in the Chinese room and closed the door.

He sat down in the ancient black teakwood chair that Northon had sat in the night before, when he had expounded in his weird manner, his theory of the perfect murder. Blair smiled grimly. It had been a perfect murder all right. Too perfect for comfort.

Slowly and carefully he reviewed every detail of his conversation with Northon. As he reviewed it, he realized that some great fear had been preying on his friend's mind. He tried to hook that up with certain facts in the case but he could get nowhere.

Then he got up and examined every part of the room. He stood where the body of Northon had lain in death; he tried to figure where the murdered man had been standing just prior to his murder. But that, like the other things, got him nowhere, and he started idly to look through the drawers of the desks and cabinets.

It was then that he found the diary. It was a red leather-covered book, the commonplace form of diary to be purchased in any book or stationery store.

He turned the pages idly. He had never known that Northon went to the bother of keeping a diary. He went back to the teakwood chair, sat down, opened the diary and glanced through the entries.

He had opened the book at a date several months back. There were curt remarks about business transactions and engagements. Nothing of interest.

He thumbed through the pages, glancing, now and again, at some entry about a social engagement. Suddenly he caught the name, Jane Northon. It was a long entry, dated July 23rd.

It read:

"Jane came to see me tonight. I was alone. It was the same old story. I cannot fight her much longer. It will come and I must be prepared for it. Man cannot fight a she-devil. I will be prepared for what is to come.

"I suppose every man is visited with some form of curse in his lifetime, but I sometimes think mine is worse than any the human mind can conceive. Some curses you can fight; but a she-devil is too much. She will come again in two weeks. What can I do?"

BLAIR read the entry over twice; then he turned the pages quickly over to the date two weeks later.

Here he read:

"She came again tonight. I could do nothing with her. She will come again soon and then she will come again. Sometime she will not come. That will be when I am six feet under the ground. I wonder if the curse and that she-devil will follow

me to the grave. I suppose so; she has followed me thus far."

The writing of this entry was done with a hand that had trembled, a hand that had apparently trembled with fear.

There was no entry on the following date. The next night, Northon wrote briefly: "I feel better now. I must get a hold on my nerves. This is foolish."

The next entry was normal, concerning a business deal and the purchase of a Chinese vase.

Page after page Blair turned. There was no more reference to Jane Northon, his adopted daughter. Blair came down to two weeks prior to his death.

There was a brief entry:

"She came again. My God, I can't stand it any longer. Why does she torture me this way? Why doesn't she do what she wants? Perhaps, she thinks a lingering death is good torture."

There was no entry the next two days.

Then Blair read:

"A Shih Tzu dating back to the Five Rulers. Certainly, that far. Found it in a queer little store on Allen Street. The dealer wanted five dollars for it. Five dollars. It is worth many thousand times that. I gave him ten. It is marvelous. I have it sitting before me now."

BLAIR caught his breath. The lion-headed dragon had been purchased from the second-hand store. He looked at the next entry. It covered almost a page and dealt with the history of the lion-headed dragon. It intimated that the statue had been stolen from the Forbidden City and that there was danger in keeping it.

The entry the following date read:

"An interesting story about my

Shih Tzu. A thousand years back a eunuch in the household of the Emperor decided to murder the Emperor. Adopted an interesting way. Filled the head of the Shih Tzu with a poisonous herb and stood behind a panel, with a little hole in it, and then lighted the powder. Excellent idea, but the old Emperor smelled the musk and the poor eunuch lost his head. That gives me an idea. She will come tomorrow night."

According to the entry, she did come.

"She came, but I did not have the courage," the entry read. "Better to let her do what I had in mind. But there is suicide. Would that not be a better way out? It would end my suffering and my torture and she could come no more."

Three days later, the entry read:

"No, not suicide. I have a better way. I will end my misery, even though I have to use the best friend I have. Have been studying Munsterberg. It can be done. The golden prong of death will be the best way. But can I have the power over him? We will see. We will see. The power of mental suggestion. The perfect murder idea. What a thought, but it's better than suicide. I am a coward. I cannot do it and she will come again in a few days. I cannot face her again."

Blair felt a feeling of utter helplessness come over him. He trembled as he turned the page. He was afraid to read the next two entries. The last would be the night of Northon's death.

HE looked at the page. There was no entry on the day following the suggestion of suicide. The entry on the last day was long and scribbled so that Blair had difficulty in reading it.

"Blair came down tonight," it read. "The poor devil. I wonder if he suspected what was in my mind. I know it is cowardly but perhaps he will never know about it; certainly, the police will never suspect him. The perfect murder! No, it will be the perfect suicide. He has just gone upstairs. His eyes told my power over him. Will Munsterberg be right. Can mental suggestion go into sleep? Time will tell.

"I must call Paul and tell him about my will. Am I doing right? But I can't help it. I can't tell him about Jane. It is impossible. And if I leave him money, that she-devil will get some of it. I can't do it. Retta! A clever, scheming person. She knows about it. I owe her nothing, but she will take the money and spend it on herself. She is selfish. No one else will get it. It must be that way.

"Poor Paul. He'll never understand. He'll never know what pain this causes me. How can he know? I will have him come a little later. I will call him in a few minutes. He will be angry and hurt. He, of all people, deserves my help; yet to help him will be to help the creature I hate most in this world.

AND poor Blair! Does he know that in a few hours he will be a murderer? No, he will never know. No one will ever know. It will be the perfect crime, more perfect than man could dream of. Had I the courage to end it myself, I would do it. I can't. Poor Blair will have to do what I am afraid to do.

"I must call Paul now and then I shall burn this book. I had to write it down. It helps my nerves. This is one time I will beat that cursed woman. Beat her forever. L—"

The writing became so scrawled

and so shaky that Blair could not read it. He didn't try to read any more.

HE laid the book down. He was cold all over, yet perspiration was falling off his forehead.

Northon's half insane stare at him when he told him about the murder, the fear that flashed in his eyes—everything was clear to Blair now.

Out in the hallway, he heard Retta Dolores' shrill voice. She was talking to Oscar. Blair stood up. He felt that queer feeling going from his throat down to his stomach.

He looked at the red leather book; then stuffed it under his coat and rushed out of the room.

Fifteen minutes later he was sitting in front of Wright's desk and the criminologist was looking at him with a puzzled expression on his face.

"This diary is interesting—and important," he said to Blair. "It proves one thing to me, and that is, the theory that you were not alone in that room with Northon when he was murdered."

Blair shrugged hopelessly. "That doesn't help much," he answered. "There we have it in black and white, just what I did."

Wright smiled, closed the book, and handed it back to Blair.

"Interesting," he remarked curtly.

"But—but what does it mean?" Blair demanded. "Did Northon hypnotize me? Did he work the power of mental suggestion on me to do what he was afraid to do?"

Wright smiled again. He seemed to be in an affable mood.

"We know that's what he intended, but we don't know what really happened—not just now."

"When will we know?"

"Tonight or perhaps tomorrow."

Blair said nothing more. The diary lay in his lap. He stared at it mutely.

Wright continued:

"Now listen to me closely. Every detail is important. The lion-headed dragon, which I have, locked in my safe, will go back in that Chinese room tonight. I took it out of the house to have it examined by a friend of mine. His report of what it contained will be here any minute. The little gold wire will also go back in that room.

"You are not to leave the house until I come. The solution of this weird crime does not lie in Northon's house; we will find it in another part of the city. Many strange things will happen in that house. You are to watch them, but you are to do nothing.

"Be ready to leave with me when I come."

The phone rang. Wright took the receiver and said, "Yes, Wright speaking."

For nearly a minute he listened without saying a word. Then he said curtly into the phone, "Thanks," and hung up.

"My friend's report on the lion-headed dragon," he said to Blair. "Now get back to the house. Everything will be there by seven o'clock. Remember.

"Keep your eyes open but don't be surprised at anything, no matter what happens."

BLAIR got up and laid the diary on Wright's desk.

"Perhaps, you want this," he said.

Wright picked up the book and then put it in a drawer of his desk.

"It's not important any more," he replied.

"It has confirmed what I have suspected all along. I hope to prove it tonight."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DRAGON'S HEAD

BLAIR paced nervously in the front room of his apartment. It was seven-thirty. Downstairs in the Chinese room the lights were dimmed. The lion-headed dragon was back on the shelf of the Cinnabar cabinet. At ten minutes to seven Wright had brought it back.

He came with Paul and they left together, with only a few brief words to Blair. The long, thin gold wire also lay on the table where Blair had last seen it.

When Paul and Wright left, a deep silence fell over the house. Blair could hear Oscar walking around downstairs. That was all. There was no talking, no sounds save the heavy and regular thud of Oscar as he paced back and forth in the different rooms.

Blair remained upstairs. A feeling of some impending tragedy, a feeling of some overwhelming danger, seemed to pervade his spirit. He couldn't shake it off, try as he would.

He paced the floor nervously. What did Wright mean? What was the meaning of the whole strange network of mysterious happenings that surrounded the death of his friend?

The entries in the diary about Jane Northon! They were puzzling and impossible to understand. She was an attractive girl, still in her twenties. There was nothing sinister or brutal about her. What could Northon have meant when he wrote those entries? These and a hundred other thoughts passed through his mind but he could form no solution.

He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to eight.

He heard footsteps coming up the stairs to his apartment. He did not go to the door. He waited listlessly, wondering who it could be.

THERE was a light knock on the door of his apartment.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and Retta Dolores came in the room.

Blair had to look twice to recognize the once beautiful and alluring show girl. She fell into a chair and sat there staring dejectedly at Blair. Her face seemed to have aged ten years. It was haggard and drawn. There was no color to it. It looked pasty and lifeless.

"You—you will help me?" she gasped in a shrill, half hysterical voice.

Blair looked at her, too amazed to say anything. She pulled herself up a little in the chair and tried to smile, but the effort brought only a distorted grimace.

"I—I—know you won't understand," she went on, "but you must help me. It—it is terrible. I have to tell someone."

Blair bit his lips. He didn't know what to say.

"Why, Miss Dolores, you shouldn't object. You are getting a very good-sized fortune."

Blair was ashamed of himself when the words were out of his mouth. Regardless of what his former feelings toward Retta had been, she was helpless and terrified now, and it was no time to make sneering remarks.

She wet her lips and a pleading look came in her eyes.

"But I don't want the money. God, I don't want it," she cried. "You must understand. I don't want it."

Blair said: "There isn't much that can be done about that, Retta. A will is a will. Perhaps you can give it away."

He felt sorry for her, but he could not completely stifle the feeling of dislike he had always felt for her. And he hadn't forgotten that it was

her form that sprang out from behind the old bureau in the second-hand store when he was attacked.

She stood up. Her small and graceful shoulders drooped and her chest seemed sunken and pitifully small.

She looked at him and said:

"You don't like me, Blair. You never have and I know what you're thinking right now. I was down in that store, and I saw a great deal more than you did. Yes, I saw more than you did. Look, look, if you don't think I did."

WITH a wild flourish, a movement half insane, she tore her dress down her shoulder.

"Look at these," she cried. "I got these, and I'll get more. I got these because I saw what they did, and they were given me so that I wouldn't talk."

Blair looked at the shoulder. Great blue welts rose up on the delicate white skin of Retta Dolores—brutal, ghastly welts. On her neck were black and blue marks.

She gave a dry little laugh and pulled her dress back over her shoulder.

"Is a fortune worth that?" she asked. "Answer me, is a fortune worth that?"

Blair shook his head and looked at the white and drawn face of the girl that one time had been beautiful. The face was distorted with a grimace that might have been an attempt to smile.

"That's what the money brought me," she cried. "And it isn't worth it. I must talk—I must talk."

She fell in the chair, a sobbing, helpless mass.

She sobbed for nearly a minute and then got up again.

"I came up here to tell you everything, Blair, but I can't," she said slowly. "It isn't fear. It's some-

thing else, and some time you may understand."

SHE stopped talking and glanced nervously around the room.

Then she continued:

"I know the position you are in. I know all about it. It isn't pleasant, and there isn't much you can do to get out of it. But I want to help you.

"I can't tell you everything because my desire to help you is not as great as another emotion. I can only tell you this. Keep your eyes open. They have been closed. And don't overlook Oscar. You have been very stupid."

And with that she turned and ran out of the room. Blair heard her going down the stairs. He heard her suddenly scream in the hallway. A man's vile curse followed the scream. Then the front door slammed and the deep eerie silence settled back over the house again.

Blair went downstairs. The thought of the welts on Retta's shoulder and the sound of the man's curse roused him.

The hallway was empty when he got down to the first floor. He turned to go in the Chinese room. He got to the door but went no further.

DOWN on his knees, with arms stretched up toward the lion-headed dragon was old Oscar. He was going through a strange form of ritual. His head would bow down and his hands would go up at the same time.

For over a minute Blair stood in the doorway watching the strange proceedings.

Then Oscar started to mumble something. His words were unintelligible at first, low mumblings that sounded like an animal crooning. Then the words grew louder.

Oscar was talking in a language utterly foreign to Blair.

He kept staring at the lion-headed dragon as he talked.

Then suddenly Blair realized that Oscar was talking in Chinese.

Blair didn't know Chinese, except a few scattering expressions, but he knew instinctively, or thought he knew, that Oscar was talking in that language.

He waited no longer. With three strides he was in the room.

He took Oscar by the shoulders and pulled him to his feet. He wasn't gentle with the old man.

Oscar gave a pitiful scream and with a violent jerk pulled himself free from Blair's grasp. With the agility of a cat he was out of the room.

OUTSIDE the door he stopped and looked at Blair. He was in a crouching position, with his arms hanging, nearly touching the floor.

Blair's body stiffened when he saw the old man.

The boney old face was distorted. It was the face of a Chinaman.

Oscar uttered a weird laugh and disappeared.

Blair stood looking at him. He was dazed and stunned. Had he seen Oscar? But he realized that there could be no doubt as to that. The boney old face had been distorted and in the distortion Blair saw something that he had seen many times before but had not realized.

He remembered that Oscar's eyes were little and round, that his cheek bones were shaped like a Chinaman's; but with his face normal he carried little resemblance to a Chinaman. Distorted, it brought out the Chinese features.

Somewhere down in the basement of the house came the weird laugh of Oscar. It came a number of

times and then the oppressive silence settled over everything again.

Blair sat down in the black teak-wood chair and tried to collect his thoughts.

Wright had told him to expect many strange things. He was getting them, in big doses. First Retta and then Oscar. What would come next.

The lion-headed dragon was staring at him. The mouth of the dragon was open and its little eyes seemed to bore into Blair like two sharp steel drills.

He got up and went over to the statue. He picked it up and turned it over in his hands. The head fell off. It rattled on the floor. It had a peculiar ring to it. Blair stooped down to pick it up, but when he did, he was conscious of a sweet smell somewhere around him.

THE perfumed smell came in gushing waves. It was exquisite and delightful.

His head reeled a little. He forgot about the head of the dragon. He breathed in the sweetened odor as fast as he could.

He heard a woman laugh behind him; then the woman screamed.

The scream seemed to come from some faraway distance. Also, in that faraway distance, he heard a man talking. The woman answered.

Was the woman Retta Dolores or Jane Northon? He could not figure out. He was lying on the floor. His body was tingling and he felt happy and at ease with all the world.

The man's voice wandered further and further away. There was a weird little laugh in that faraway distance and then all sounds ceased, and he was in a beautiful garden.

The flowers were beautiful and tall and the perfume was exquisite. Then the flowers passed away. All was darkness.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT ON THE STAIRS

HOW long he lay in that dense darkness, Blair had no way of knowing. The darkness remained, but he was conscious of some one talking to him. He was conscious of moving rapidly as if he were being carried on a motor boat.

A voice near him said: "Breathe deeply. You will be all right in a few moments."

Something was against his nose. He breathed deeply. An offensive smell followed the breath. He opened his eyes.

Lights were passing by him, as if they were fire flies. He was conscious of moving very rapidly through space.

The voice said again: "Take another whiff of this."

He breathed deeply again. He had no idea why he did. There was nothing pleasant about what he was breathing.

The last breath brought him about. The strong smell of what he had breathed seemed to clear his mind of the darkness that had enveloped it. He opened his eyes and looked around.

He was in a taxi and Wright was sitting by his side.

Wright shoved something in his hand. It was cold.

"You'll be all right in a minute," Wright said. "You've had a very happy dream. You might run into a nightmare now, and you'll need that automatic."

Blair looked down at his hand. There was an automatic there. He looked at Wright and said:

"For God's sake, what happened? The head of that cursed lion-dragon fell off, and I reached down to pick it up, and something sweet filled

the air and then I had a very pleasant dream."

Wright put the cotton to his nose again and said:

"Take another whiff. This will clear your brain completely."

Blair inhaled deeply. He had no idea what he was breathing. It was something strong and powerful. It made him shudder a little.

Wright took it away from his nose. "That should fix you up," he said. "You're damned lucky that they only gave you something to make you dream. It might have been better for them if they had given you something to make you dream eternally."

The taxi was going down Broadway. They raced by a cross street, which Blair recognized as Canal Street.

"Where are we going and what's the idea of the gun?" he asked.

"We're going to get the Shih Tzu that has caused so much trouble," Wright replied. "You'll need the gun before we get it. We may need more than a gun."

Blair looked down at the automatic. His head was completely cleared. He had a dull, throbbing headache but no other after effects.

"I based everything on the murderer stealing the lion-headed dragon," Wright explained. "I realized that would be the only way we could catch the person we want. When you got to fooling with the statue the murderer got nervous and gave you a whiff of Chinese sleeping gas. It's not bad, this sleeping gas, but very effective."

"Yes, damned effective," Blair laughed. "And not bad either."

THE taxi turned suddenly off Broadway and cut across town to the east. Blair wondered where they were going.

"I got in the house just after the

Shih Tzu was stolen," Wright said. "I had planned to be there while it was being stolen, but I made a mistake of two minutes. But it doesn't matter. The murder of George Northon will be solved pretty soon, and you'll see the solution of one of the strangest murders in fiction or fact."

"But the diary and my being in that room, what about those things?" Blair demanded. "We can't overlook those."

Wright laughed. It was a happy, affable laugh.

"You were in that room all right, but you didn't murder George Northon," he said. "I thought you did up to three hours ago. Chin Wah did some good work for me and has rather upset a very fine structure of mystery that the real murderer built up to hide his crime. It was intended by the murderer that you would kill Northon, but the murderer got cold feet and did the job before you had time. You were lucky there."

THAT was all Blair could get out of Wright. The car turned a sharp corner, went up a crooked street and then stopped in front of an old building.

Blair saw that they were in front of Chin Wah's house in Chinatown.

Wright said: "We won't get out. Chin Wah will be here in a moment."

The door to the old building opened and Chin Wah shuffled out and came up to the taxi.

He said to Wright: "It is well. They have entered the building."

Then the old Chinaman jumped in the taxi with the agility of a young man. Wright gave an address to the taxi driver and the cab shot away from the curb and started uptown.

Neither Chin Wah or Wright said anything. The taxi was going up

the Bowery at a breakneck speed, disregarding traffic lights and signals.

A policeman whistled after them, but the driver stepped on the gas and the taxi roared away from the policeman's whistle.

Wright laughed: "My private taxi driver. Always use him in emergencies like this."

The taxi turned off on a side street, swerved around a corner and then came to a sudden stop near the curb.

Wright and Chin Wah piled out of the car and Blair followed them. During the mad race uptown he had not been able to follow the streets and he had no idea where they were. The street was a narrow, tenement house street of the lower East side. It was dark and deserted, even at that early hour.

WRIGHT gave the taxi driver some curt instructions and then turned to Chin Wah.

"Have you got the mask?" he demanded.

Chin Wah pulled something out from under his Chinese cloak. It was a large bundle. He unwrapped the bundle and handed three cloth-like things to Wright. Wright handed one to Blair.

"You may need this," he said. "This time it won't be sleeping gas; it will be a gas that will kill instantly."

Blair looked at the mask. It was a strange looking affair, nothing like the gas masks used in the war. It was of a very fine silk and almost as light as air.

Chin Wah said: "They fit right over your face. The silk is soaked with a fluid that will neutralize the gas for a long period of time."

"We'll have to make a straight frontal attack," Wright said. "There's no other way we can get

in the room. Once we get inside that building, shoot to kill. If you don't the other person will; so you'd better be ready to shoot first."

With those words he turned and walked down the street. They came out on a side street.

Blair said: "Why, this is Allen Street."

"Yes, Allen Street," Wright answered. "And we're going back to the building where you found the second-hand store. Only this time we go upstairs and it will be harder going upstairs than going in the old store."

Wright and Chin Wah were walking rapidly. Blair had no chance to ask any questions or answer Wright.

They were several blocks up from the corner of Bleecker and Allen Streets, where the store was located.

It took them only a minute or so to walk those two blocks. At the corner, directly across from where the store was located, Wright stopped.

"I rather suspect we are expected," he said. "We'll go in the hallway. The room is on the third floor. Once we get in the hallway, be ready for action and look out for the gas."

HE started across Bleecker Street after saying this. Chin Wah shuffled after him and Blair brought up the rear. He was carrying his automatic in his right hand and his left hand clutched the silk mask Chin Wah had given him.

The building, housing the furniture store, was a three-story tenement house. There was an old fire-escape on the front of it. The store took up the first floor and to the right of the entrance to the store was the door to the hallway.

Wright kicked that door open and disappeared inside. Chin Wah and Blair were right on his heels.

The hallway was jet black in its darkness. No lights in any part of the hall were burning. Wright closed the outside door behind them.

"It makes too good a target," he whispered.

The only sound in the dark hall was the soft breathing of the three men. Blair had no idea where the stairs were. He had little idea about anything that was happening. The memory of old Oscar's face, with the little eyes and the perfect Chinese cheek bones, played in his mind.

He couldn't get rid of it. He thought about Retta Dolores and Jane Northon, but he couldn't picture a girl hidden in an old building like this, waiting for them with guns.

Wright whispered: "Come on. The stairs are right in front of us."

Blair followed the whisper in the dark. He stumbled over the first step, fell down, and then got up and started walking slowly up the stairs he could not see.

THE silence was sinister and depressing. He could hear Wright and Chin Wah ahead of him.

He went up about ten steps when suddenly there was a blinding flash of fire ahead of him. A gun roared deafeningly in the narrow hallway. Something whizzed past his head and hit the wall to his right with a tearing thud.

Another flash followed and then another.

Wright yelled: "On your stomachs."

But he was too late. Chin Wah gave a guttural groan and fell back in Blair's arms.

Wright's gun barked twice. There was a weird laugh somewhere up on the second flight of stairs. Then came the answering fire!

Blair was flat against the wall, with Chin Wah in his arms. The old Chinaman's body was limp. The

bullets were missing Blair's body by inches. The person firing them was firing at an angle that sent the bullets within inches of Blair.

He heard Wright running up the stairs, with his gun barking viciously. Blair threw Chin Wah over his shoulder and made a rush for the second floor landing. He was helpless on the stairway.

A BULLET creased his shoulder and he dropped down on his knees. Bullets were hitting the wall in front of him. He couldn't go ahead and he couldn't go back. Bullets were hitting the wall behind him.

He wondered if anyone lived in the house and how long this barrage could go on without people outside hearing it.

Then suddenly the firing ceased. The air was heavy with acrid acid of the burned powder. An eerie, uncanny stillness fell over the hallway, a stillness fraught with a thousand dangers.

But Blair didn't think about dangers. With a lunge forward he went up the steps. He got to the second floor landing just as he heard Wright's voice somewhere shout, "Gas!"

Blair dropped the limp Chinaman on the floor and put his mask on. In the darkness he fumbled for Chin Wah's mask. He couldn't find it. He reached up under the Chinese cloak and pulled something out. He didn't know whether it was a mask or not. He slipped it over the old man's face, then stood up.

With the mask on, despite the fact that it had places for the eyes, covered with a very thin and flexible glass, the hall was complete Stygian darkness to him. He had no idea whether he was going forward or back to the stairs as he moved slowly along the wall.

He kept his hand on the wall, making his way slowly through the darkness. His hand came to a door. It was partly open. Blair started past it, but when he did, he felt two powerful arms go around his waist and the next instant his body was pulled in the room as if it had been a limp rag.

The arms closed around him in a death-like grip. Blair had felt those arms before. There was no mistaking them. They were the same arms that had gripped him in the store that morning.

He tried to struggle against that grip, but he was helpless. With a heavy thud he hit the floor. The wind was knocked out of him. He was helplessly stunned. There was something inhuman in the death-like grip around his waist. It seemed to be slowly squeezing all life out of him.

HE was lying on his face. The arms were pinning him to the floor just as if he were a mere child. He tried to twist out of the grip but he was helpless.

A hand was closing around his throat. He doubled his chin down against his breastbone, trying vainly to keep the hand from getting a grip on his throat.

The hand pushed his chin up slowly. All the strength in Blair's back and neck went down against that hand, but it wasn't enough. Slowly and surely he felt his chin going up.

In a second that grip would be around his throat.

That would be the end.

Blair wanted to cry out, but his mask stopped him. The mask was suffocating him.

He felt the fingers slowly go round his throat. He gave his body a supreme lunge forward. The

fingers left his throat, but in a second they came back again.

He gave another twisting lunge. The fingers left his throat again, but his efforts were useless. It seemed as if his body was riveted, through the waist, to the floor. He couldn't move; he gave up trying to keep the fingers away from his throat.

They closed around his neck in that same vise-like grip that he had felt around his waist. He opened his mouth frantically, trying to breathe. But the grip closed tighter around his throat. His body was convulsed in his efforts to get air.

Then suddenly a gun roared over him. Another gun seemed to answer the first roar. The echoes of the two explosions hurled themselves throughout the room.

A man gave a cry of pain. Another gun roared.

The fingers left Blair's throat. The weight on the small of his back left.

He heard a man running in the room. The man collided with something. There was a sprawling of bodies near Blair.

A man grunted and cursed and then Blair heard the weird laugh out in the hallway and after the laugh he heard some one running up the steps to the third floor.

A voice near him said:

"The third floor, the third floor, back room."

IT was Wright talking. Blair got to his feet weakly. He tore the mask from his face. He didn't know whether there was still gas or not. He had to breath. He stood, inhaling the air deeply.

The room was so dark that he could see nothing. He heard some one get to his feet near him and then he heard Wright's voice.

"Where are you, Blair?" Wright asked. "Are you hurt?"

"No, but Chin Wah is," Blair answered. "I'm all right."

"Chin Wah is all right," Wright answered. "Just a flesh wound across the head. I told him to take it easy. He's out in the hallway lying down."

The sound of a door closing upstairs broke in on their conversation.

Wright said: "It's up in the third floor back, the solution to all this mystery. Let's go up and get it over."

"How many are there?" Blair asked. "You were shooting at someone down here when I was riveted to the floor."

"Shooting blindly," Wright answered. "I wanted some light, and I got it and the gorilla on your back got scared and ran upstairs. You'll find out that it was a very queer looking gorilla when we get upstairs."

Wright walked over to the door. Blair could barely see the outlines of the doorway. That was all. He made his way slowly out to the hall, feeling ahead of him with his hands. He got out in the hallway and bumped into Wright.

"There may be some excitement when we get upstairs," Wright said. "Have your mask ready."

"What about Chin Wah?" Blair asked.

"He's all right. He'll be up when we have finished our work. It's a little too exciting for the old man."

WRIGHT started to walk away from Blair. Blair heard him going slowly up the stairs.

Blair followed close behind him, hugging the wall.

They came to the top of the stairs. No sounds greeted them.

The silence was even more sinister and intense than it was down below.

Blair could see the thin streak of light coming out from under a door to the right of them.

"The murderer of George Northon is in that room," Wright whispered. "I don't think we'll take the murderer alive. But don't shoot too quickly. You'll understand what I mean in a few minutes."

Blair said nothing. He stared at the door. Behind it lay the solution of the strange murder of George Northon.

CHAPTER X

THE SOLUTION

WRIGHT walked over to the door and knocked on it. There was no answer. He knocked again; then he jumped aside quickly.

A gun roared in the room and a bullet split the panel of the door and whined into the wall.

Wright called out:

"It's no use any more. The police will be here any minute now. We are coming in."

From somewhere in the room came a strange laugh.

Then a voice, almost inhuman, called out shrilly:

"Come in. I won't shoot any more."

Wright stood to the side of the door, reached across for the knob, and then turned it and threw the door open.

The light flooded the hall. Blair was standing away from the door, to the left; but he could see sideways into the room.

It was a large room elaborately garnished with Chinese furniture. He could see no one in the room.

He was only looking at one small angle of it.

The voice came again:

"Yes, it's all over. I can't fight the inevitable."

Wright walked into the room. Blair followed, his automatic gripped firmly in his right hand. Wright's automatic was also ready for use.

But it wasn't necessary.

BLAIR'S right arm fell listlessly at his side. He stopped in his tracks as if he had been slapped sharply in his face.

His eyes blinked at what he saw. He felt his throat go dry, and he wet his lips and looked helplessly at Wright.

Wright had walked up to a long black table in the center of the room. A man was sitting behind a table and he was smiling pleasantly at Wright.

Blair looked twice to see that his eyes weren't lying.

The man was Paul Northon.

"It's all over, Paul," Wright said in a dry, harsh voice. "I arrest you for the murder of your uncle."

Paul looked at him casually, shrugged, and said:

"No need for dramatics, Wright. Sit down and take it easy. I'd like to ask you several questions. Just curious, you understand. When a man thinks he's worked a perfect murder and it flops, he naturally wants to ask some questions."

Wright walked around the table and ran his hands over Paul's pockets.

"Just a sensible precaution, Paul," he said. "We've had enough bullets coming in our direction for one night!"

Paul laughed.

"No guns," he said. "No more bullets. It's all over."

Wright walked to the front of the table and took a chair. Blair

slid weakly into a chair near Wright. He was staring in amazement at Paul.

Paul Northon sat down and looked at both of them and smiled. His young face smiled, but Blair was surprised to see the brutality and the cunning and the cruelty in that face.

He had seen it before, when he had told Paul about his dreams; but then he had attributed it to the death of his uncle. Now it was natural, a part of his character and his mentality.

SORRY, Blair, to have been so rough on you downstairs," Paul said. "Holding you on the floor was a trick I learned in China. I used the same trick on you in the store until I had you out. I had to get to those papers and see that no trace of any sale of the Shih Tzu remained. Sorry, but it was all a part of the game."

Then he turned to Wright and shrugged.

"You were my Nemesis, Wright," he laughed. "I see now that my great mistake was getting you mixed up in this case. But I thought I had everything so perfectly planned that no one could discover my connection with the crime. Would you mind telling me where I fell down?"

Wright nodded.

"You planned the murder very well," he said. "You had it covered about as well as any murder could be covered. You stole the Shih Tzu out of the temple in Peking, while on the trip to China, given you by your uncle, and brought it back to this country and planted it in the store downstairs."

"You tipped your uncle off to the possibility of him buying such a valuable antique. You did all that very well. The murder of your

uncle was even better done. There was just one thing that gave you away."

Wright looked at Blair and smiled and then continued.

"Yellow eyeballs gave me my first lead in the case. The sleeping powder you had burned in the Shih Tzu produces a strange change in eyeballs. If death comes while under its influence, it makes the white of the eyeball yellow, and when I saw that, I knew that George Northon had been drugged to sleep by a powder that could only be obtained in China."

PAUL threw his cigarette away and nodded pleasantly.

"A slight oversight," he laughed. "I thought I had everything covered. But that wasn't my greatest mistake. I waited too long, hoping that Uncle George would get up enough courage to kill himself.

"The story of his strange fear of Jane is long and it isn't necessary to go into that.

"You and I know that Jane was Uncle George's real daughter. Her mother died at her birth. This gave my uncle a mental twist that he never got over. He hated and feared Jane; hated her because she caused the death of the woman he loved, and feared her because of the mania he had that she would some time kill him.

"She does not know the real story yet: that she is the blood daughter of George Northon. She always loved my uncle and tried to be friendly with him, and she visited him every two weeks. It was always the same. He was cold and distant to her and refused to talk. I knew that he contemplated suicide because of his fear of Jane Northon."

Wright interrupted:

THE diary tells that. You say that he didn't burn it. You planted it so that the police or I would find it. It was positive proof that Blair had murdered your uncle."

Paul smiled and looked at Blair.

"Sorry to have brought you in this mess," he said, "but after all, the diary would have cleared you and you wouldn't have had to suffer for the murder."

Blair looked at Paul in amazement. Paul was telling the story of his cold-blooded murder in the manner he would tell any commonplace story.

Paul continued:

"I knew everything that went through my uncle's mind. The idea of using mental suggestion to have this murder done struck me as novel and a sure way to clear myself of any suspicion. I think now that it would have worked out as I planned. I think Blair would have murdered Uncle George in his sleep. But I was too anxious, too nervous.

"I had to get my uncle out of the way. Wright knows and understands why I had to. That night I filled the head of the Shih Tzu with the Chinese sleeping powder. It was powerful. I knew that my uncle would light it, thinking it was incense. He did, and not taking any chances on Blair doing the job, I killed him, while he was under the effect of the drug, with the golden wire of death. It was easily done.

"Then I rushed out in the hallway. I saw you, Blair, coming down the stairs and go into Uncle's room. I realized then that I had been hasty, but it was done and I didn't worry much."

He lit another cigarette and smoked easily.

"Interesting subject, this mental suggestion," he went on. "It would have been interesting to see if you

would have murdered Uncle George. He intended for you to do it. I was able, by cleverly placed words, to put that idea in his head."

He stopped talking and looked first at Blair and then at Wright.

Wright said:

"And the money. Of course, Retta isn't going to keep it. I have talked to her."

"It doesn't matter much now," Paul answered. "I loved Retta and she loved me. With Uncle George living, we could never marry. That is why I murdered him. Did it for love. Rather foolish, wasn't it? Retta didn't know anything about the money. I managed to suggest this, through a rather round-about way, to Uncle George and he fell for it. Naturally, I wanted her to get the money.

"I wanted it for two reasons. If Retta got it, I would get it; and if she got it, there would be no suspicion directed against me as being an heir.

"Retta discovered my connection with the crime by coming down here this morning. That is how you happened to see her in the store, Blair. She found a paper that I had hoped to get before anyone got in the store. She knew from this paper that I was behind the sale of the Shih Tzu to Uncle George.

SHE rebelled against the idea of murder and wanted to talk. I had to beat her into silence. I'm sorry about that, terribly sorry, but I was desperate. She had a foolish idea that Oscar was helping. You know he is half Chinese, though you can't tell it by looking at him. The old fellow was at heart a real Chinaman and he worshiped the Shih Tzu as if it were a god."

Wright got up, walked to the table, and stood looking at Paul. Blair was still stunned by the story Paul

told and the ease with which he told it. He was having difficulty, even then, to convince himself that Paul was the murderer.

Wright said:

"Retta didn't talk because she loved you, Paul. But she is giving up her rights in the money. It will go to Jane."

"That's fine," Paul replied. "And old Chin Wah. Will he get the Shih Tzu?"

"The Shih Tzu will go back in the temple where it belongs," Wright answered. "Chin Wah had been searching for this. He was notified by his countrymen that it had been stolen from its resting place in Peking. That is why he risked his life coming up here."

Paul jumped to his feet and gave a weird laugh.

"The perfect murder, gentlemen," he cried. "We'll drink to my perfect murder."

Before Wright could reach him, or Blair get out of his chair, Paul had swallowed the contents of a glass.

He let the glass fall to the floor. It broke in many pieces.

He started to smile, but his face suddenly distorted in a painful grimace. He clutched his stomach, then his throat, and for a moment seemed to sway in the air.

Then he fell to the floor in an inert heap.

Wright walked around the table and turned him over.

"Dead," he said in a whisper. "The police believe that George Northon died of a stroke. We will let it go at that. I'll fix up Paul's death. It was suicide."

"I think I'll go home and get sleep," Blair said dully. "I think I'm still dreaming."

Wright laughed.

"Fine, but don't walk in your sleep again tonight."

The Murdered Wife



*Second in a Gripping Series of Stories of Doctor Coffin,
the Living Dead Man, the Eeriest Character
in All Detective Fiction*

By **PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN**

Author of "Dead Man Talk," "The Scarlet Ghost," etc.

I
THE handsome black limousine, driven by a Japanese chauffeur in dark green livery, came to a stop near the cemetery gate, and two women got down. Both of them were soberly dressed, but they were not in mourning. There was sufficient about them to indicate that one was mistress and one was maid.

The maid was an elderly woman, large and bony. The mistress her-

self was no longer so young—but a small and delicate woman, something of an invalid; and still beautiful, with the beauty of a fading flower.

"I'm afraid," the big woman whispered, with a slight shiver of her gaunt frame.

"Don't be silly, Georgette," her mistress chided softly.

But an observer would have said that neither were her nerves any too solid.

"What if this here is but another

trick of your husband, Mis' Lucy?"

The maid's form of address and a slight accent hinted of the South. As a matter of fact, there was a touch of Africa about her, as well—in her crinkly gray hair and her flashing dark eyes. But she was almost white. And she'd been caring for her "Mis' Lucy" since the latter's birth.

"Why should Mr. Mery waste his time?" the lady asked.

"Don't ask me!" Georgette droned. "But this here graveyard!—when it's almost dark! See, the gate's already shut! Nobody else around!"

"You're here, Georgette. And you said you'd bring—"

"The pistol? I got it here in my bag, Mis' Lucy. And if anyone—Mr. Mery or anyone else—"

"Sh! Koki will hear you."

The Japanese chauffeur, who hadn't left the car, sat at his place like a pale bronze image.

It wasn't for him to do a footman's work—opening and shutting doors—when another servant was on hand.

G EORGETTE, supporting her frail mistress, gave the bronze image a look of distrust. The Oriental remained—the bronze image. The two women moved away.

As Georgette had intimated, it was already getting dark. The neighborhood was a lonely one, even as a site for a cemetery.

The cemetery was a new one and, except for a recent event, little known. It lay far back in the hills. The general melancholy of the situation was enhanced by a grove of ancient eucalyptus trees. The trunks of these, with their scaly bark, were a leprous white.

At every sigh of the breeze the branches creaked, the leathery

leaves found voice in a chattering whisper.

"I'm glad the gate *is* closed," Georgette muttered. "Suppose we go back home, Mis' Lucy."

"Home!" Mrs. Mery echoed with a note of bitterness.

"I mean our home—your home, back down South—since Mr. Mery—"

"See," Mrs. Mery interrupted. "Someone is waiting for us."

"A hunchback!" breathed Georgette.

Both women were shivering a little as they continued their way. The tall eucalyptus trees seemed to shiver with them. Through the shadows of that park of silence that lay ahead of them there were ghostly gleams of white marble. And that curious gatekeeper who now awaited them was not a figure to lighten their mood.

He was not only a hunchback. He appeared dwarfish, especially now by way of contrast as he opened wider one of the monumental gates. He was almost ape-like, dressed in black. But the face he raised to them as they drew nearer was shrewd and friendly.

"Yes'm," he said. "You are the lady—the ladies—who've come to see the tomb of Del Manning?"

I T was Mrs. Mery who answered. She breathed an assent.

"I'll close the gate behind us because it's after hours," the hunchback said; "then show you the way. It's right near-by."

"Why couldn't madam have driven in?" Georgette began. More than usual she was assuming the air of an armed bodyguard.

But Mrs. Mery checked her. "You know, Georgette. He—"

The hunchback—"Shorty" to those who knew him—spoke up:

"That's right—he's—expecting you."

It was almost as if he'd meant that Del Manning—he whose tomb had been mentioned—was expecting them.

Del Manning's murder was still a subject of conjecture throughout the world. Del Manning's motion-pictures, in which that great actor—"the man with five hundred faces"—revealed his genius for striking characterizations, were still being run before crowded houses.

They followed a wide and winding avenue back into the cemetery for perhaps a hundred yards or so, no one speaking, while the silence seemed to deepen with the deepening dusk.

Then the hunchback, who'd been leading the way with his nimble ape-like tread and his long arms swinging, stopped and pointed up a slope to the left.

"You'll find — him — there," he murmured.

As they looked, he was gone. They were alone. They peered ahead of them.

All they could see at first was what looked like a small Greek temple up there set against the almost jet blackness of a cypress hedge. Then they were seeing something else.

FROM this supposed temple of death a human figure appeared, the figure of a man which, even then, Mrs. Mery felt was vaguely familiar.

"Georgette," Mrs. Mery whispered through tightened lips; "it's my turn to be afraid."

Georgette glared in the direction of the apparition.

"We can't quit now, Mis' Lucy," she droned. "And ghost or no ghost, I got this pistol ready."

II

FOR an interval the three of them were standing face to face.

The man from the Tomb was a somber figure. Yet not repulsive. There was even something poetic about him.

His bearing was strong and graceful. On approaching the women he had removed a broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, showing a wealth of long, dark hair rolled and slightly curling. This, and the long, black cape he wore, made him appear like some Southern gentleman of a bygone century—a fact that both Georgette and her mistress found somehow reassuring.

But it was the man's face that compelled Mrs. Mery's closest attention—a strong face, she found it, with steady, deep-set eyes; a face in which the bony structure was so predominant that she could easily imagine it—in this deceptive light—to be the face of a skull.

In spite of this, her earlier fear was leaving her. It had almost left her—it had left her completely. She was asking herself where she had seen this face before.

"Are you—Doctor Coffin?" she asked.

"I am he who telephoned you as Doctor Coffin," the strange man replied.

Mrs. Mery was telling herself that even his voice was familiar. It was a voice that her feminine intuition found reassuring—low-pitched, warm, vibrant. Else—so she was telling herself—she wouldn't be here now.

His voice had inspired an equal confidence over the telephone.

"Why did you insist that our meeting take place here?" she asked.

"For a number of reasons," the

man who called himself Doctor Coffin replied. "The principal reason was to test your courage."

"That wasn't such a test since you told me I might bring—Georgette."

"I knew Georgette—"

"Me?"

The gaunt maid, who'd kept her hand on the pistol in her sack, suddenly leaned forward.

"And she knows me!" Doctor Coffin declared in even tones.

His strong face gleaming whitely, he confronted the maid. His face was more like a skull than ever as he smiled.

"My God Almighty," gasped the woman. "Are you alive or dead?"

"Both!" He turned to Mrs. Mery. "Don't be frightened. But that's the simple truth. You see, Georgette does recognize me. Now, I am Doctor Coffin. But I am also he who was Del Manning, supposed to have been murdered, whose tomb is here. That brings me to another reason why I wished you to meet me here. I wished to show you that Del Manning's tomb is—unoccupied."

The famous actor, now playing the rôle of Doctor Coffin while all the world believed him, as Del Manning, to be dead, explained to the two women how he had made it appear that the body of a slain gangster was his own.

Doctor Coffin next produced a flashlight.

The small Greek temple—visited daily by hundreds of pilgrims, some of them merely morbid and some of them devout—as the last resting place of the great Del Manning was, as the late Del Manning himself now said, without a tenant.

AS the light snapped off, Mrs. Mery stood for a moment in silent thought. Her slight form was

tense. Her small hands were clenched. In the gathering dark her wide eyes searched the man in front of her.

"If I were in my tomb, Del Manning—"

"Doctor Coffin," he corrected her gently.

IF I were in my tomb, Doctor Coffin," she said with a catch in her voice that was almost a sob, "I shouldn't leave it."

"And that is the final reason why I wished to see you here," he told her. "You will understand, of course, the secrecy that was necessary for our meeting—on my own account, if not on yours. The late Del Manning lived for a world that wished to be amused. They paid him for it. He amassed a fortune. Now, in the person of Doctor Coffin, he's willing to pass this fortune back in the form of another sort of service."

"Meaning?"

"Justice! To protect the weak—make criminals confess and, perhaps, reform."

"And—you've included—me in your program?"

"Yes?"

"In what way?"

"Guess! Listen to your heart!"

Mrs. Mery's breast was beginning to rise and fall.

Gaunt Georgette, standing in the background like the shadow of a guardian angel, spoke up:

"You tell him, Mis' Lucy. Or, shall I?"

"You, Georgette. I can't. Although—I feel it—he already knows."

"I do know," said Doctor Coffin, in his gentlest voice. "And shall I tell you how I know? For the past three weeks I have been a servant in your house. You took me as a servant because I came so highly

recommended by the late Del Manning—”

YOU? You were — but you couldn't have been!—the Chinese second man, Charlie Soong?”

“Yes, Missie,” said Doctor Coffin, changing his voice to that of the Chinese servant. “Me Charlie—me allsame Happy Soong. Savvy, Happy? Only,” he added swiftly and smoothly in his ordinary voice, “I wasn't happy. I already knew—”

Again the gaunt Georgette broke in.

“It's the truth, Miss Lucy. Now I understand. He knows all about Mr. Mery wanting you to die. He was there—I saw him—the day Mr. Mery was telling you to go and kill yourself—”

“Enough!” gasped Mrs. Mery, with a shudder.

She found support against the stronger frame of her faithful nurse. For a moment the three of them were standing there in the silence. They were like three dark ghosts standing there near the vacant tomb, debating the mystery of life and death.

The deserted cemetery was filled with a whispering murmur as the breeze stirred the livid trees.

“Since that day Georgette mentions it has been getting worse,” said Mrs. Mery, controlling her emotions. She spoke with a forced calm. “Mr. Mery no longer hints that I ought to kill myself. I suppose he wouldn't trust me to make the deed final—or soon. He's been planning—to kill me himself!”

Doctor Coffin spoke:

“Of that also I have the proof. Your husband substituted poison tablets he brought back with him from Tahiti for your usual headache medicine.”

“I need no proof,” Mrs. Mery panted. “No woman lives with a

man as long as I have lived with him—loved him as I have—and needs ask for proof when her husband is meditating murder. I should have obliged him and got rid of myself. I would have—if it hadn't been for her—this other woman! Oh, I could kill her!—kill her!”

“There, there!” Georgette soothed. “If it comes to that, I'll kill the hussy myself.”

“There need be no killing,” Doctor Coffin put in softly. “There is a better way. You have seen this empty tomb. It shows you that death need not always be what it seems.”

He reflected a moment while that death's-head face of his shone whitely.

I AM Doctor Coffin,” he spoke again. “I own not only the largest funeral parlors in Hollywood, but I also own this cemetery. When you ride back from here you may talk as if you had been here to see me about the purchase of a mausoleum. I have a number of them available. One of which will be placed at your disposition.”

Georgette shuddered.

But little Mrs. Mery stood firm, her sober eyes wide and speculative with a certain horror.

“I merely tell you this,” Doctor Coffin went on, “because Koki, your chauffeur, is a spy for your husband, telling him everything, repeating what you say. Tomorrow, I, your Chinese servant, Charlie Soong—we hope he'll be ‘Happy’ Soong again, before very long—may have a chance to give you details of my plan before—he—asks you for a paper of dismissal.”

“Don't—don't leave me,” panted little Mrs. Mery with her first accent of forthright terror. “Del—Mr. Manning!—Doctor Coffin—I'm

almost afraid Mr. Mery will murder me—tonight—in my sleep!”

“He’ll not murder you in your sleep. He thinks you—may die—without that! No! Leave me! It is time that we all should be getting away from here. Do as I say. Be brave—as you’ve shown yourself to be brave by coming here.”

“Can’t you ride back with us?” Doctor Coffin smiled.

“You forget that Del Manning is dead. I’m going down to my private chapel now to change my make-up. In a little while not even Doctor Coffin will remain. But Charlie Soong will come to life. And—remember!—when you see Charlie Soong again he’ll be none other than—Charlie Soong!”

III

THE affair of Mr. Basil Dunwich Mery, eminent motion-picture director, and Fausta Favo, the latest sensational beauty of the screen imported from abroad, had thus far been kept from the general public, even in Hollywood; but it had already reached a point where it was becoming a source of keen anxiety to those who knew.

And those who knew included some of the leading figures in the industry. For Mr. Mery was not only famous as a director; he was one of the great producers as well, with a studio of his own, an investment representing millions.

Send him down in the wreckage of a first-class scandal and the whole motion-picture industry would suffer. It might even lead to something in the nature of an international boycott.

Furthermore, Mr. Mery had allowed it to be understood, when certain friends and business associates ventured to hint at the danger of a scandal, that he didn’t

care a damn if it did come to a wreck; and if it did come to a wreck, he’d damn well see that there’d be plenty of others to share the disaster with him.

The threat had teeth. Apart from his great reputation and financial power, Mr. Mery also happened to know a lot of Hollywood’s more intimate history—episodes in which several of these self-same friends and associates were themselves involved.

“Ma! Crazy!” they said of him. “The fellow’s simply lost his head over Fausta Favo!”

In this respect Mr. Mery wasn’t, as a matter of fact, so different from a number of others. Practically every man who saw her was ready to go crazy over Fausta Favo.

The girl was something of a mystery—brooding, slender, ivory-skinned, a Madonna in repose; but, when she moved—even so much as those strange eyes of hers—a sort of human serpent.

It was this particular quality of hers that had, in fact, given both the title and the theme to what was intended to be her first great starring feature. They were going to call the feature:

MADAME SERPENT

SHE looked the part more than ever as she lay there coiled—a few days later—in the special dressing-room that had been built for her at the Mery West Coast Studios. For two hours or more her personal squad of dressers and make-up specialists had been working over her with deft skill.

She now lay there—Madame Serpent—resting, biding her time.

Fixed and brilliant eyes that never seemed to close, a low forehead, a thin-lipped but wide and sensuous mouth; then that slender

but powerful body of hers that so inevitably suggested the grace and lazy terror of a python's.

THE effect had been heightened by the costume she wore—a spangled gauze of gold and black and nothing else.

The dressing-room itself was more like a human serpent's den than a lady's boudoir. It was dimly lit, heavy with strange perfumes, airless, cushioned like a divan.

There was a faint tap at the door.

Fausta Favo neither spoke nor moved. But her fixed eyes came to the door. She remained like that for seconds longer even when the door opened and Basil Dunwich Mery came in.

During the brief interval following his entrance he also stood silent, gazing. There was something about him to suggest the water-buffalo, a carabao, that has just happened on some giant python in a tropic jungle.

There was a good deal of the buffalo about Basil Dunwich Mery, anyway, not only in disposition, but in physique—a hulking man, massive about the shoulders, a big head on a short neck hung low and slightly thrust forward.

And dangerous as any buffalo, too, when it came to character—meditative, but ruthless, given to sudden rages, secretive, murderous when roused.

"I give in," he said, at last. "I came here to bawl you out, Fausta. But I can't. You're too beautiful, Fausta. Why do you keep us waiting?"

"Basil," she murmured. "Come here!"

He approached and remained standing. She uncoiled slightly and indicated her wish. He seated himself on the divan at her side.

"The stage has been set for an hour," he began to protest.

She coiled her arms about his massive head.

"Why do you keep us waiting?" he struggled on with breath that was beginning to labor.

"Why do you keep me waiting?" she parried.

"In what way?"

"Our marriage."

"When I'm divorced."

"T-s-s-s!"—it was like a hiss. "That woman you're married to will never grant you a divorce."

"Fausta, she may—die."

"Interesting, Basil!" she mocked caressingly. "What an impetuous lover you are!"

"More so than you think!" he stormed, softly, but with sudden fury. "What wouldn't I do for you! You know it! For you I'd go to hell. . . ."

THERE was a subdued tinkle from the small ornamental telephone that stood on a low table near the divan. The call was repeated—repeated again and again.

". . . One of your other lovers calling you up," said Mr. Mery, with a dash of savage amusement. "Go on, talk to him!"

"Very well," said Fausta Favo teasingly, and reached for the phone.

She was seated there with Basil Mery's arms about her as she listened. Mery was smiling—gloating. He could catch the murmur of a man's voice speaking, that was all. But he followed what Miss Favo said.

"Who?" she asked. "Doctor Coffin! What? What? Yes?"

Now she uncoiled herself—as suddenly, as swiftly, as an attacking snake. Like a snake she'd begun to vibrate—still clinging to the

telephone, listening, drinking in the words of the message.

Then Mr. Director Mery interfered.

He seized the actress and held her tight against his breast, while with his free hand he listened in turn.

"Dead!" he whispered. "Are you sure it is she?"

The response that came over the telephone sounded like a cackling laugh—chilling, mirthless.

Then: "Murder . . . letters . . . proof!"

"My wife—is dead!" said Mr. Mery.

He was white.

"Your work was swift," breathed Fausta Favo.

BY way of consolation, she again coiled her arms about his head.

"Wait!" he whispered, huskily; and he turned to the telephone again.

"Murder!—She left certain letters stating that you murdered her!—She left certain proof!"

The words buzzed through the brain of Mr. Basil Dunwich Mery.

What was this—a blackmailing scheme?

But he couldn't console himself that way. In the first place, his conscience wouldn't let him. In the next place, there was something about the way this Doctor Coffin talked.

No ordinary undertaker, Doctor Coffin—that was sure. An ordinary undertaker would have been more respectful. No ordinary undertaker would have dared to give him—the great Basil Dunwich Mery—orders.

Yet that was what Doctor Coffin had done.

Doctor Coffin had ordered the director to come to a certain obscure bungalow that night, where, it seemed the late Mrs. Mery had

gone to reside after their latest quarrel and where she now lay dead.

IV

IT was late that night when Mr. Mery and Doctor Coffin faced each other. It was at the entrance to a small wooded canyon not far from the center of Hollywood, but with an air of solitude and remoteness about it that suggested a country graveyard.

"You are—the undertaker?" Mr. Mery asked.

The other answered with that click of a dry laugh:

"We prefer to be called 'morticians,' Mr. Mery, especially when we rise to the top of our profession. Don't you remember me? I recall seeing you among the notables at the funeral of the late Del Manning, at which I had the honor to officiate. And now, to think that I should have such another client as the great director, Basil Dunwich Mery!"

"Who requested your services, Doctor Coffin?"

"The deceased herself! Her servant, Georgette, showed me a note your wife had written."

"Where is Georgette?"

"Disappeared, alas, Mr. Mery! She said she was afraid of you."

Mr. Mery stopped and looked about him. He had a buffalo's courage. Besides he was armed. He surveyed the man at his side.

Doctor Coffin appeared to be merely a middle-aged man, simple, not overly strong. With his old-fashioned black clothes and gray beard and mustache this Doctor Coffin might have been a backwoods preacher.

"Afraid of me!" the director echoed. "Now, listen, Doctor Coffin! Just what do you mean by these insinuations—now—and over the telephone?"

DOCTOR COFFIN turned and faced the director. They were in the canyon by this time. The wooded slopes of this cleft in the Hollywood hills rose steep to either side. There was little light.

There came to the director a qualm of fear, almost his first. It was as if he had suddenly found himself not in the presence of a living man, but of a ghost. It was a curious illusion, there in the blue darkness, that he'd seen this man before somewhere and yet that man was dead.

It was, moreover, a ghostly whisper that came from Doctor Coffin:

"Would you rather, Mr. Mery, that I make these insinuations to the police?"

"No! But—"

"Eh, eh!"—again that dry laugh. "First let us see if the lady really was your wife, Mr. Mery. We can talk things over afterward."

They came to an obscure bungalow. There was a blue light burning over the door. A stunted, long-armed hunchback opened the door.

"Shorty!"

The director had recognized that grotesque figure from having seen him long ago about the studios.

"Good evening, Mr. Mery," Shorty greeted him.

"You must come to see me at the studio," said Mr. Mery.

It was a speech that would have turned the head of any star in Hollywood, let alone an obscure nobody such as Shorty had always been.

But Shorty merely grinned up at the great director, and Mr. Mery felt—again with some ghostly qualm—that he was in the presence of something greater than himself.

"She's in there," Shorty confided.

And he thumbed a direction toward a dark room at the side of the hall.

Into this dark room Doctor Coffin had gone. A strong white light was switched on.

Mr. Mery steeled himself.

"She asked"—Doctor Coffin's pitiful laugh sounded through the heavy silence—"that you see her again in her wedding-dress—the one she wore—you remember—when you and she were married."

Mr. Mery remembered that dress—old-fashioned now. He remembered every detail about it—the ruching about the neck, the brooch that he had given her.

He was seeing them again in the long gray casket with its lid drawn back. He was seeing again the face of his wife—lifeless, composed, beautiful in a faded way. He stood there looking at it for a long, long time.

ON his own face there was no emotion visible—unless it was a trace of satisfaction.

"I'm willing to meet all ordinary expenses, of course," he said, at last. "I'm willing to meet even certain extraordinary expenses—such as keeping the funeral quiet—avoiding unpleasant publicity. My lawyer, Mr. Stone, will see to that."

Doctor Coffin watched him in silence without dissent.

"But, touching on those insinuations of yours—"

The director paused.

"Not mine!" said Dr. Coffin. "Hers! She left certain letters—"

"Yes? So has my lawyer certain letters of hers—threatening suicide! I turned them over to Mr. Stone this afternoon."

Doctor Coffin let out his cackling laugh, but there was no trace of joy in his face.

"Well!" he said. "I guess that settles that, Mr. Mery. But isn't there one thing you've overlooked?"

The voice of Doctor Coffin as he said this was that of a doddering

and disappointed old man. Was the old fossil—Mery wondered—again hinting at blackmail?

"What have I forgotten?" he blurted.

The scorn and threat in his voice was such as had often made those about him in his studio run to cover.

But Doctor Coffin eyed him now without confusion.

"You've forgotten," said Doctor Coffin in a voice suddenly gone rich and deep, "that the dead—the martyred dead—sometimes have strange ways of coming back!"

V

NOT long after this macabre and in some ways unsatisfactory interview of Doctor Coffin and Mr. Mery had ended, he who had been Del Manning—otherwise, "the man with five hundred faces," and now, by his own preference, "the living dead man"—came back alone to that obscure bungalow in the dark canyon where the blue light burned.

He'd acted the host. He'd accompanied the hard-hearted Mr. Basil D. Mery back to the director's limousine at the mouth of the canyon—had watched him drive away with the bronze-faced chauffeur, the Japanese, Koki, at the wheel.

A silent Great Dane and the ape-like Shorty were there to meet the master of the place.

"He offered me a job, boss," Shorty cackled. "I'd like the job of bustin' his snoot!"

Doctor Coffin smiled faintly.

"Take him up, Shorty," he recommended.

"Me! Go to that bird for a job?" "Yes!"

"Ah, gee! What's the idea? Are you throwin' me out?"

"Less than ever, you bum," said

Doctor Coffin, and he made a playful pass at Shorty just to reassure him. "But I happen to know what he has in mind for you. It's a job that you may not like, but it's your first big chance at some real detective work."

"Boss," said Shorty with a gust of awe, "lead me to it!"

"I'll send someone else to relieve you here," said Doctor Coffin. "When you're through, come over to Number One and talk with the real detectives."

Without further speech, the two of them entered the dark bungalow. There, Shorty lit a candle and passed it to his strange employer. Not even to Shorty himself was this employer of his ever free of mystery—the mystery which, perhaps, a dog feels when it looks at its master.

There was certainly that feeling of doglike and unshakable devotion in Shorty's heart as he remained in the dark hallway of the bungalow and looked at his master now.

Doctor Coffin, holding the candle aloft, had come again to the side of the casket. He stood there looking down at that serene face of the woman who'd loved and served the man who'd repaid her devotion at last with thoughts of murder.

"Poor girl!" said Doctor Coffin.

HIS expressive voice was freighted with grief. But the grief was gone—gone also from his deep-set eyes as well—a moment later when he added:

"So he thinks he'll replace you with Madame Serpent, does he! Ha! Ha! We'll see!"

He abruptly turned aside and, as if by magic, the fireplace of the little parlor had opened like a door.

Slowly, muttering to himself, Doctor Coffin descended through an open trap to the tunnel that would

bring him to the villa he had just referred to as "Number One."

VI

IT was in Number One—that large and luxurious villa in the neighboring canyon—where the late Del Manning, having ceased to be Doctor Coffin for the occasion, sat long at table that night with Captain Hughes, of the Federal Secret Service, now on special assignment, and Chief Costigan, of the local detective force.

Shorty also was there.

But the powerful little hunchback was keeping himself as inconspicuous as possible. Wasn't he learning to be a detective?

"Suppose," said Captain Hughes, "this lawyer whom Mery mentioned tries to mix in?"

"He won't," Chief Costigan came back with assurance. "He knows that Mery's record won't stand investigation."

Both detectives, Hughes and Costigan, had been hidden in the little bungalow while Doctor Coffin talked to Mery across the open casket.

"I've seen some hard-boiled gents in my time," said Captain Hughes, "but never one as hard-boiled as this one. He practically had a murder charge hanging over him, and he knew it. Yet, he never batted a lash. He saw his wife lying dead in her coffin, and himself as good as having murdered her—murdered her as surely as if he'd used a hatchet on her. Was he moved? No more than a man of granite."

"We'll move him," said the erstwhile Doctor Coffin.

"I think you feazed him a bit, at that," Chief Costigan commented, "when you pulled that line about—how'd you put it?—'the dead—the martyred dead—'"

The late Del Manning, his bony

face devoid of make-up, sat staring in thought.

"It's true," he said. "The dead do sometimes have strange ways of coming back. I wonder when Mr. Basil Mery will arrange his marriage to this woman-snake who's got him poisoned."

"Not long after the funeral," Chief Costigan ventured.

"I'll see to the funeral, Chief," said the volunteer undertaker; "and I'll see that it's the finest that Doctor Coffin's funeral parlors can provide. Tomorrow, there'll be the usual notice in the papers under 'Deaths': 'Mery, Lucille R—wife of Basil D. Mery—'"

"Was that Mrs. Mery's suggestion?"

YES. She has no family and few real friends, except back at her old home in the South. She's there now—with Georgette. If anyone there sees the notice it will be—well, just another mistake.

"And her acquaintances here?"

"They'll forget her within a week. They always do—in Hollywood—unless there's been a first-class scandal or something."

"Won't a lot of them want to come to the funeral—have a last look?"

"Sure! Let them come! That hard-boiled husband looked at her for half an hour and didn't see that what he saw was merely a mannikin and a wax mask."

"A wax mask?"

"One of the finest—made from a cast of Mrs. Mery's face before she left for the South—garnished with her own hair—tinted, made up, by Doctor Coffin himself. . . ."

It was Captain Hughes who was asking these questions. He'd been absent for a number of days on another case and was just now catch-

ing up on the swift developments in the Mery case.

" . . . And the clothes were real enough," said Doctor Coffin. "Her wedding dress—the gown and the ornaments she wore when she married Mery—when both of them were poor. Those are the details that not even a man like Mery is apt to forget. . . ."

The woman whom Doctor Coffin sometimes referred to as Madam Jane came in—masked, because of her face, which a clumsy beauty doctor had marred—but her fine and slender figure revealing the former beauty that had made her famous during one brief hour of glory on the screen.

"I've arranged—the wedding clothes to fit me," she announced.

Doctor Coffin expressed himself with that unholy laugh of his.

"This is still another angle," said Captain Hughes. "What's up next?"

"Help us to put on the last act," said Doctor Coffin. "And, trust me!—you'll be there for that final curtain."

VII

THERE was plenty of evidence in the following days that this last act in the affair of "The Murdered Wife," as Doctor Coffin and his friends came to refer to it, would not be long delayed.

It was evidence relayed to them mostly through the detective efforts of one entered on the payroll of the Mery West Coast Studios as R. Boggs, but better known to all concerned as "Shorty."

There was, it seemed, some added twist of infamy in the character of Fausta Favo that had made her long desire the services of a hunchback dwarf as a personal attendant.

It was a want that she'd often communicated to Basil D. Mery. Now, even in this respect, Basil D. Mery had been able to give her what she wanted.

Moreover, to Mery's amazed satisfaction, Shorty had shown himself capable of meeting the requirements of the job.

And these requirements were of the hardest.

THEY involved, for example, wearing the most outlandish of costumes—mostly early Arabic, in the style of the Arabian Nights.

They involved the performance of various degrading monkey shins for the amusement of Fausta Favo's guests.

Worst of all—but not so much worse than those other requirements, perhaps—was a willingness to accept, with doglike humility, the lady's temperamental outbursts.

For Fausta Favo had these outbursts. She could always be cruel. Shorty learned that. But she wasn't always the brooding serpent. There were times when she was more like a mad jungle-cat—spitting, clawing, slapping, gurgling incoherent hate while she inflicted pain. . . .

It was in a rage like this that Shorty heard her, one day, hiss at Basil Mery certain words that he repeated later to his friends in "Number One."

"*Yes-s-s! You pois-s-soned your Luc-e-e-e, you s-s-snake, but you won't pois-s-son me!*"

But Shorty felt that his troubles were over only when he was able to announce that Basil D. Mery and Fausta Favo had agreed at last to delay their secret wedding no longer.

Not only this, but Shorty was able to name the time and the appointed place.

VIII

THERE was nothing so very surprising in the sudden disappearance of Fausta Favò from the Mery West Coast Studios in Hollywood. Famous stars were in the habit of doing that—for shorter or longer periods—especially when they stood high in the favor of those in power.

Besides, it was generally understood that her marriage to Mr. Mery, now that the first Mrs. Mery was out of the way, would be but a question of days.

The publicity department of the studio soft-pedaled the news. As for the general public—that screen-fan public that extended around the world—they'd got hardened long ago to the way stars came and went, however famous these stars might be.

A Chaplin, yes! A Del Manning, sure!

Not even the easy-going patrons of the motion-picture trade would ever forget such singular geniuses as these. But, after all, a Fausta Favò! Merely another vamp! Tonight, the most brilliant star in the movie skies! Tomorrow, gone like a meteor!

Sometimes the meteors came back to be stars again. Sometimes they didn't. The astronomer-fans of the movie public could list a dozen cases like that. . . .

Fausta Favò had decided that the proper setting for her wedding to Mr. Mery should be a ruined mission she'd seen while "on location" across the Border in Mexico. If the wedding had to be secret it could at least be picturesque. Then, in order to carry out this picturesque effect, she spent considerable time and money trying to find a mission padre who'd perform the ceremony in the ruined mission.

Having found that this was absolutely impossible, she did the next best thing. She found a civilian who would perform the ceremony disguised as a mission padre.

You could never tell. Perhaps, at that, there'd be a few newsreel photographers on hand to grind the screen-report of the great event when Fausta Favò and Basil Dunwich Mery consummated their romance. For all her mystery and temperament, Fausta Favò—as the publicity men themselves expressed it—"knew her onions."

Having arranged these details to her satisfaction, Fausta Favò sent word to Mery that all was ready. He had merely to drive—or fly—down to a certain well-known Mexican resort where she'd be waiting for him.

THE resort, much frequented by Hollywood's rich and famous gentry, had a casino that made Monte Carlo look like a honkey-tonk. It had a race-course rivaling any. Its one hotel, catering almost wholly to Americans, was superb. And here, for one day at least, Fausta Favò had been fêted like a queen. They'd let her win at the casino. The horse she picked in the big event was an easy first. She had the royal suite at the big hotel.

It was in this royal suite, though, that she was visited that night by a couple of substantial but entirely unpicturesque Americans. They looked like ordinary small-town business men.

But one of them introduced himself as Captain Hughes, of the Federal Secret Service, now on special assignment. The other remained unintroduced except vaguely as Doctor Coffin and he also, it appeared, had a Federal commission of sorts.

Captain Hughes did the talking.

Such as there was. There wasn't very much.

The gist of it was this:

Fausta Favo would do certain things or she'd be arrested for murder.

"Murder!"

Captain Hughes repeated her little poison speech—the one Shorty had overheard—and added details; and, after that, Fausta Favo sat tight.

She would agree to anything, now that her own safety was involved. Anyway, she'd been assured, her passport had been taken up. If nothing worse happened to her, she'd be deported as an undesirable alien. Wouldn't it be better for her to go back quietly to where she came from and—no more said?

It would!

There were a number of Mexican ports from which she could sail. It might even be arranged that she leave for Europe by way of Panama.

IN any case, there were two things settled:

One was, she couldn't re-enter the United States.

Another was, that she'd sent her last message for the present to Mr. "Poisoner" Mery—unless, of course, she wanted to take a chance.

She didn't. . . .

Unaware of what happened to the lady he was going to take as his second wife, Mr. Mery drove South with the Japanese chauffeur, Koki, at the wheel.

The Border officials made a good deal of trouble on Koki's account. Considerable time was lost before they could be assured that Koki's papers were in order. As a result it was almost night before the expectant bridegroom arrived at the Mexican resort where he was to join his bride.

There, to his consternation—expressed in terms that no bridegroom should use—he learned that Fausta Favo had expressed the wish that the wedding be performed this same evening and that all was in readiness—and waiting—at the ruined mission, still some twenty miles further on.

To make matters worse, Koki was now reporting trouble with the car. Koki didn't know the road to the mission anyway. It was reported to be pretty bad—like all Mexican roads off the main highways—and easy to lose at that.

It was at this juncture that the situation was saved for Mr. Mery by the appearance of a gentleman who introduced himself as Señor Nitos—"Meester Nitos," as he preferred to be called, for he explained that he was more than half American.

He looked it. But he also showed a mixture of Indian or some other blood—a broad strong face, bony but pleasant; swarthy, but not too swarthy. He spoke English with only a slight accent and had the easy bearing of a man of culture.

Meester Nitos, it appeared, was driving past the mission in question. His hacienda lay in that direction. Would not *el caballero americano* do him the honor of sharing his limousine?

There was nothing else to do.

The telephone also, it seemed, had broken down.

IX

LONG, long afterward, Mr. Basil Dunwich Mery was to remember that night-ride of his with the mysterious Meester Nitos in the latter's limousine—Meester Nitos at his side, two giant Chinamen, who appeared to be

twins, acting as chauffeur and footman.

The car sped on through the dark. It seemed that all that Señor Nitos could talk about was murder—especially of men who murdered their wives.

Then, at last, their arrival at the crumbling ruins of the old mission, where, for a time, Mr. Mery had found himself deserted and alone.

Nitos—the man who had been so obliging with his limousine—had suddenly driven away with his Chinamen. There was no sign of anyone else. No sign of light, nor life, nor anything. Nothing but crumbling walls, a broken arch against the sky, a sense of death.

Then, Mery was recalling not only things that Señor Nitos had said—he was recalling Señor Nitos himself. It seemed to him now that he had seen that man somewhere. But where?

HIS mind groped back. There was something about Nitos that recalled—but that was absurd!—the undertaker who'd officiated at the burial of his wife. Could the two be one? Absurd, of course! But why, then, should Señor Nitos have insisted on talking so much of murder—the murder of a wife!

"All right, boss!"

Mery started as an ape-like figure appeared through the gloom.

"Shorty!"

"Yes, sir! She's waiting! Everybody's waiting!"

"Everybody?"

"Well, the bride—and the man who's doublin' for the padre—"

"All right! Lead the way!"

"—and, of course, there had to be a couple of cameramen," Shorty completed. "They're waitin', too, ready to grind the scene."

They followed a weed-grown trail

back through a ruined garden. For a while they were following the broken arches of an ancient cloister.

"They say this place is haunted," Shorty whispered.

Mery didn't reply. It was haunted for him, all right. He was wishing now that he'd brought Koki along. He was wishing he had a gun. He was wishing—a lot of things that he wouldn't express in the haunted dark of his own ruined heart and brain.

Then, as they crossed the cloister and came into a little patio, an abandoned chapel reared ahead of them, revealed by the first gleam of light they had thus far seen.

A MOMENT later, Mery had come stumbling to the chapel door.

He had then, at least, one moment of self-forgetfulness. What he saw, he was telling himself, would make a pretty effect on the screen. It was something he might use, even, in his current production—the one that his publicity department was already touting as Basil D. Mery's greatest masterpiece:

MADAME SERPENT

At this moment, he thought he saw her—Fausta Favo—standing there at the other end of the chapel, waiting for him. She was standing near the figure of the man who was to act the part of the padre in this romantic wedding—a man garbed in the surplice and cowl of one old Franciscan such as they who had built this mission centuries ago.

Then it may have been a phonograph—or it may have been a portable radio—that began to drub out a moan of music. By some satanic coincidence it was no wedding music, though. It was something sad, something wailing, something

with the click of coffin hammers in it and a rattle of bones.

Mery recognized it: That—
Danse Macabre!

It may have been only then that he knew that he'd been caught in some infernal mesh of misery and guilt. His heart failed him.

He was looking at that new bride of his who was coming toward him. Something was the matter with her. There had been some change. It was a change that was making him sick.

He recognized the wedding gown. It was the gown in which his wife had asked to be buried. He'd seen her in it when she lay dead—gray silk, ruching, brooch.

Paralyzed with a growing sickness of remorse and horror, he brought up his reluctant eyes to the bride's face.

"Lucille!" he gasped in a choking voice.

He saw the face of his murdered wife look back at him—recognizable still, but the face of one who had long been buried.

He heard the whisper:

"Come to me! Come to me!
Basil! I love you still!"

NOW the cowed figure of the padre was coming forward, and as the cowl slipped back Mery saw another ghostly face. Was it Del Manning's—he who also was back from the tomb? Or was it the face

of that weird undertaker, Doctor Coffin?

Mery never knew.

At that moment there was a blinding flash of light and several hidden cameras had recorded the scene.

IT was reported in Hollywood that Basil Dunwich Mery had suffered a slight paralytic stroke. Among his intimate friends—or those who had been such—it was also whispered that his mind was affected. He looked that way, when anyone happened to see again—in the sanatorium where he'd gone to live. He looked like a living dead man himself, they said.

As for Fausta Favo—pouf! Already there were a score of favorites to take her place.

Down at her old home in the South "the murdered wife" received a package containing a faded wedding dress. With it there came a letter from her friend, Doctor Coffin.

"If you wish," he wrote, "I'll get word to Mr. Mery that your part in 'the second wedding' was played by an old actress friend of mine. He's finished, forever, so far as Hollywood is concerned."

She wired back simply: ". . . blessed are the dead. . ."

It was just as well. Basil Dunwich Mery, in his sanatorium, had become interested in a pretty nurse.



SATAN SINGS



*A Fearsome Specter in Flaming Red Leaves
Death and Despair in its Wake*

A Complete Novelette

By **JOHN BOONE ROMISER**

Author of "The Scarlet Sin," "The Murder Specialist," "Wolf Eyes," etc.

HIS hands gripping the wide-spread arms of his deep leather chair, Harrison Van Cleve stared at the wood fire in his library intently, as though all that was of interest in the world was the endless war the flames were waging against the darkness of the unlighted room.

In another deep chair, a few feet

away, as silently watching the fire, her own thoughts tense in the silence, his gray-haired wife sat mutely, a deep, haunting fear in her young-old, blue eyes.

Wind, whistling eerily down the chimney, caused the fire to leap upward a moment, pushing the shadows to the farthest corners of the room. Then it died down and the shadows

rushed back, as if gloating over recovering their mastery of the room.

Van Cleve shivered as he darted a quick, fearful glance towards a darkened corner of the room and glanced at his wife as he heard her quick gasp. Her eyes, too, followed his fearfully.

"It's absurd," the man muttered, as his eyes resumed their staring at the flames. "Old women's tales. I won't believe it! I won't! It isn't possible."

"You've seen it—once," Mrs. Van Cleve said calmly, but the calmness was with an effort. Suddenly her voice changed to a low, passionate tone. "Oh, my dear! If anything *should* happen to you—if there is a force with which no human can hope to contend! You must—"

Van Cleve's eyes hardened. He brought his clenched fist down on the arm of his chair.

"When will you stop talking this nonsense, Elizabeth?" he demanded. "There's nothing supernatural about this devilish thing that's trying to frighten us out of house and home! I've told you that—even if I've had no luck finding out how it gets in the place, who's responsible. Tomorrow, I'm determined to bring in aid. There must be some way out of—"

Mrs. Van Cleve sighed hopelessly. "There is," she said. "I've told you that. If you'd only stop your unbelief, and—"

THE door opened softly as an impassive-faced, middle-aged housekeeper came forward, gently interrupting.

"Will I help you upstairs now, Mrs. Van Cleve?"

Mrs. Van Cleve rose slowly and reached out for the arm of the servant.

"Yes, Harriet," she said. "I'm tired." To her husband she said, as she walked to the door: "There are more things in heaven and earth

than you dream of, Harrison. Please try to think that a warning *might* be intended." Again she sighed. "Well, goodnight, dear."

The door closed gently behind her on her husband's murmured goodnight as, on the arm of her servant, she went towards the stairway. The two women took one step upward, glanced above them into the dimly lighted hallway above. Two screams came simultaneously as both stumbled backward. Two women crumpled in a heap at the foot of the stairs.

IN a bound Harrison Van Cleve was at his library door, had flung it open. But he did not see the two women lying there as his eyes first darted toward the head of the stairs.

"God!" he cried, as he flung up both hands as though to shut out the fearful thing he saw, the apparition in which he had refused to believe, appearing for the second time. "Not again! Go away! Go away!" His voice rose to a screaming wail as he backed towards the library door.

But the thing was coming towards him, seeming not to touch the stairs, but to float—a fearsome specter in flaming red, its eyes slits of fire, its mouth a mass of phosphorescent spew.

Out of one of the folds of the devil-red cloak it wore, clutched forth a distorted, shriveled hand of prodigious size with huge claws.

And from that mouth there came weird wailings, sobs that rose to screams as the thing floated on, on, down towards the man cowering back into the library, his eyes distended, in speechless fear as he retreated.

* * * * *

In the kitchen, reading his evening newspaper, in between times of chatting with the cook, Grayson, the but-

ler, lifted his head with a jerk, startled by a sudden sound. Again it came—whistling, pulsing, like the scream of a locomotive in the distance.

"Did you hear something?" he asked Mrs. O'Day, as she came toward his table with a fresh pot of steaming tea.

ONCE more the sound cut through the silence of the country house, louder, more ominous. With a clatter, the teapot dropped from the woman's hand, as she clutched at Grayson.

"It's the banshee!" she wailed. "It came before! I was hearin' it!"

Grayson loosened himself from her hands as he leaped to his feet at a repetition of the sound—wails now, plainly.

"Banshee! That's a human yell!" He leaped for the door. "Burglars! Mr. Van Cleve—"

The butler's tearing rush for the front of the house from which the sounds had come brought him to the foot of the front stairs, stumbling upon the unconscious body of his mistress before he saw her.

By her side, trying to sit up, looking at him dazedly with a great fear in her eyes, was Harriet Holmes, the housekeeper. The arms of the butler swooped down for the inert body of Mrs. Harrison Van Cleve.

"What is it? What's happened?" he jerked out to the housekeeper.

Harriet could only mouth something as her scared glance went past him, first to the head of the steps, then downward to the open door of the library. The butler laid his mistress down gently on a couch.

"Take care of her!" he commanded, as he sped on into the library.

The silence of the room was broken only by the crackle of the dying fire. Sitting before it, his face haggard

and white in the firelight that cast over his features a rosy glow, sat Harrison Van Cleve.

He made no move, did not look up as Grayson called to him. The butler's hand went out, touched his master, drew back. A frightened gasp escaped him. For he knew that hand of his that had touched Van Cleve had touched a dead man. With a choked exclamation, he turned and ran for the telephone.

An hour later Breakmoor Manor was alive with questioning police. But they were scoffing police, refusing to believe anything that was told them, least of all the story of the apparition that Harriet Holmes had to tell and to which Mrs. Van Cleve steadfastly clung.

"Dumb, they think we are, huh?" scoffed Inspector Brody, contemptuously, after arduous, long-drawn-out, but futile questioning. "Trying to say a spook pulled that murder, huh? Oh, yeah? No spooks I ever heard tell of ever made black and blue fingermarks on any man's throat."

FOR the hand that had crushed the life from the boy of Harrison Van Cleve had left such livid marks, awesome in their mute commentary on the fury of the assassin. The inspector turned once more to the wife of the murdered man.

"Now, Mrs. Van Cleve—," he began.

Elizabeth Van Cleve shook her head stubbornly.

"There's nothing else I can tell you, Inspector," she said with a resigned calm. "You don't believe me, but I *know* that it was no human hand that killed my dear husband. Haven't you said yourself that you've found nothing—nothing!—to indicate that there has been no other person save the servants and myself in this house tonight?"

That was true. The search of the

place that Brody had made with his aids had certainly been a most thorough one. No slightest sign of any living person was found, nor that there had been anyone but those present who were now in the house.

The hard-headed policeman was rapidly coming to one conclusion—that some one of those servants, or—something he hated to think (but there *had* been many such instances in his career)—that the man's wife had herself been the guilty person.

Who was there to say she had been unconscious as she said she was, during the time the housekeeper had been in a faint? Or had the housekeeper been knocked out? The devil with it! No, not the devil. That was what *they* were trying to say.

Brody took a deep breath and started all over with his questions. For what seemed an endless time, Elizabeth Van Cleve sat, white-faced, but steady-voiced, as she was questioned, her answers always the same, but in a dull, heavy voice as her mind and heart were with the still, white figure of her husband, whom she was so sure had been the victim of some supernatural vengeance.

BUT neither that night, nor in the days that followed, was Inspector Brody able to glean one slightest clue that would point to any murderer.

"I've told you," said Mrs. Van Cleve dully. "It was no living *man* who murdered my husband."

She repeated that to Harriet Holmes when at last the housekeeper received permission to put her mistress to bed, adding:

"We know, Harriet. *Why* will people be so stupid—to believe only the material?" She sighed. "Please send for Mr. Carsons in the morning, will you? He'll know what to do. And *I* know we'll never know the truth until Harrison comes back himself to tell us."

Which might possibly have been the opinion of the police, too, as days went by, and no single clue developed to point the way to the murderer of Harrison Van Cleve. Which they would not have admitted, however, any more than they were willing to admit that there was fast becoming a possibility that the mystery of the murder at Breakmoor Manor would remain among the department's unsolved crimes.

LAURENCE LAWTON, private investigator, shoved the last of a collection of typed reports into a pigeon hole, sighed relieved and remarked, sotto voice: "Let us all please rise while we join in thanks." He followed the action to the words. His secretary, Dave Nelson, glanced up with a lazy grin.

"You do it," he advised. "I'm quite comfortable. What's the big idea?"

"Plain enough, isn't it?" laughed Lawton, known to his nearer acquaintances by the less formal title of Larry. "Which means to say, the Clegg case is all washed up—done and finished." He grinned broadly. "Didn't you see me? Putting away the pa-a-pers? Know what that means?"

He didn't wait for an answer, as he moved over to the rack and took down stick and hat.

"Just that the best little detective the town knows is off for a well-earned rest. Golf's swell at Aiken, too, they tell me. Get those railroad tickets, Dave?"

The secretary nodded and his hand went towards his pocket. He stopped midway, as the door opened and the boy from the desk outside came in with a card. As Nelson took the card, he glanced keenly at his chief.

"Something tells me," he remarked casually, "that you haven't exactly teed off yet, Chief." He glanced at the card and a broad grin spread over

his face. "Umm," he said, "the Rev. J. Dexter Carsons. D'y'know he was coming? Was that the reason for the religious outburst? Why didn't you wait a minute—let him lead you in your prayer of thanksgiving?"

The cheerful grin on Lawton's face was wiped off far more quickly than it had appeared. Something seemed to tell him, too, that he had been premature in his cheerful mood. He held out his hand for the card, a muscle in the side of his face twitching nervously up and down like a shuttle.

He frowned down at it a moment as he fingered it in one lightly poised hand, glancing at what had been written on it in ink, in small, uncertain and dispersed style:

"Representing Mrs. Elizabeth Van Cleve, Breakmoor Manor, Madison, Long Island."

LAWTON wrinkled his nose. "A minister, eh? Now, what in time—"

"He looks like he's in some terrible trouble, Mr. Lawton," broke in the youngster who had brought the card, and who loved to see the mysteriousness in each visitor.

"Yeah?" Lawton hesitated a moment, frowned and tossed his hat back on the rack. "Oh, all right. Send him in, I guess."

The man answering to the name of the Rev. J. Dexter Carsons, who entered a moment later, was a small man, pale, a bit untidy and patently squeamish in the presence of the famous investigator.

His small black mustache was deftly clipped, and he wore a black mohair suit and a black stringy tie which dangled over his soft shirt front. His blue eyes perked to a gracious acknowledgment as he saw the man he had come to see.

"Sit down," invited Lawton, with a sweep of his hand, his mind still on

the train he must miss. "What can I do for you, sir?"

THE nervous little man seated himself. He cleared his throat.

"I—ah—well, sir, Mrs. Van Cleve sent me, and—"

"So I see," remarked Lawton dryly, as he shot a glance at the card still in his hand. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Van Cleve," repeated the clergyman, impressively, as though he believed the detective could not have heard. "Mr. Van Cleve was—ah—murdered, they say—ah—"

"I read the papers," said Lawton. "Well? What can I do about it?"

"Mrs. Van Cleve is in great distress, sir. She is in great distress—"

"Quite believable," remarked the detective, with that same dry inflection. "Especially since I believe the police have made no headway towards apprehending the murderers."

"Quite correct." The little clergyman's voice took on a tone of eagerness. "That is why we—ah—she, of course, I should say—" He hesitated just a second before he burst out: "Well, the fact is, Mr. Lawton, Mrs. Van Cleve is most dissatisfied with what the police have been doing. For a time she was willing to accept certain other ideas—ah—perhaps I'd best explain—"

"That might be best."

A slow flush spread over the clergyman's countenance, but he went on with the positiveness of a man who suspects he may not be believed, but who is earnest in his purpose.

"That was no ordinary murder, Mr. Lawton. None like any other. No human being committed that terrible deed. Both Mrs. Van Cleve and myself have come to the conclusion that—" He hesitated, confused.

"Yes?" The detective's interest encouraged.

"Well — ah — please don't think we're insane, sir, but Mrs. Van Cleve and I both have reason to believe that Mr. Van Cleve was the victim of a supernatural power—a demon who—"

Lawton did not laugh, but he smiled slowly.

"I see. But surely you're not expecting me to discover a demon for you, Mr.—" he consulted the card—"Carsons? A little out of the ordinary detective's ability, I'm afraid, my dear sir. And where would one look for a demon?"

"This one inhabits the Van Cleve home," said the minister gravely. "A terrible monster!"

"I think I understand," said Lawton slowly. "A maniac, probably—one who's somehow found his way into the Van Cleve home. I've heard of such cases, but, my dear sir, such things in this generation are, to say the least, a little *outré*, don't you think? I'm hardly a DuBoiscoby, or a Poe, and—"

"No! No!" The minister interrupted with upheld protesting hand. "Please don't misunderstand me. Any ordinary monster would have been discovered and overcome long ago. No—I mean a real demon—such as manifests from the — ah — invisible world—a devil-spirit."

LAWTON stared at his client in amazement. Was the man mad? Or sick? Or both? He looked as if he might be something like either. He certainly was fragile enough.

"A devil-spirit from the invisible world!" he repeated, and stopped a moment to think. Then he asked suddenly: "May I ask your religion, sir? And that of Mrs. Van Cleve?"

The little man's head lifted a little proudly.

"I'm a Spiritualist," she said. "So is Mrs. Van Cleve. She is ardent in her belief, though her husband was

greatly opposed to it. They had many arguments on the subject, so I understand. It was through my long interest in the subject that I met Mrs. Van Cleve about four years ago. But I had been concerned about spirit return for years—even while I had my parish in Hiddendale, Long Island.

"I met Mrs. Van Cleve at a seance—a spirit seance. You understand?" His eyebrows raised a small question, but he went on, reassured at the detective's nod. "We talk to the dead by means of mediums, you know—men and women who have the gift to talk to outer forces, to bring them before us—or rather, make us understand their presence."

"You believe in that? And does Mrs. Van Cleve?"

THERE was a slight hint of asperity in the small clergyman's demeanor.

"Assuredly. Why not? We have endless proof. Don't you believe it?"

Lawton shook his head, in his eyes a far-off expression of calculation.

"I don't know what to think," he said. "I'm frank to say that. I don't know whether to believe or disbelieve. It may be possible."

He looked at the man before him.

"But I still can't see what bearing this may have on your visit to me? Why pick on me to find your demon? From what I can gather, it's a long way away from the powers of any detective—professional or merely investigator. Why?"

The quick eye of Lawton saw how the Rev. Carsons seemed to be choosing his words for answer to that. He glanced up at the detective.

"Mrs. Lawton has been in communication with her husband," he said. "She had a trance medium in as soon as the police left."

"Yes? May I ask who?"

"You probably don't know her—"

if you're not interested in Spiritualism. A wonderful medium—with great power—the Princess Sutta.”

“Umm, Princess, eh? Real or synthetic?”

With the passing of the minutes, and the realization of missing his train, Lawton was getting a little exasperated with himself for the way he was letting himself be amused by this odd little man. Nothing to it, of course. Still—

“As far as I know she's a real princess,” Dr. Carsons was saying. “Says she has the title through some Hungarian lineage. A little too deep for me.”

Lawton nodded.

“How good is she? Did she produce anything?”

THE little minister smiled superiorly as his slight shoulders shrugged.

“In trance, she produced the small matter of Mrs. Van Cleve's husband, speaking through her guide, who announced he had been the victim of a strange fate—that a demon had appeared who claimed he was the avenging spirit for one wronged in this world—and had suddenly snatched him into space—that is, you understand, snatched his soul into space. He said there was someone in the material—you understand, we Spiritualists speak of material and spiritual as one, divisible only by understanding—I mean our material world, of course, who thought they were avenged by his passing.”

Lawton was silent a moment.

“You mean the spirit of Mr. Van Cleve said this?” he asked.

“Through a guide—yes. Mr. Van Cleve was weak, very weak—naturally. It would be a long time before he could demonstrate—if ever he understood how. What came from him, too, was sketchy, but—”

“Simply marvelous,” remarked

Lawton, after a second's long thought. “Simple, too—to come here to me and want me to discover who, in this, as you call it, material world, hired himself a ghost to murder Mr. Van Cleve. You're overrating me, aren't you, Mr. Carsons? I've never set up claims as a clairvoyant. Why pick on me?” He was getting a little exasperated.

The keen blue eyes of the clergyman never wavered as he watched the detective, and his hand went into his pocket.

“You and I are sensible men, Mr. Lawton,” he said. “I've known the time I would have scoffed at this preliminary explanation, too. I've thought it necessary to show you there *was* an enemy in the material who wished the death of Harrison Van Cleve. It could have been discovered in no other way. I'll now show you the proof of its rightness—why Mrs. Van Cleve has sent me to you—hoping you'll help us run to earth this unknown enemy, of whom we would never have known in any other way.”

He reached into his pocket as he spoke. “We have, I believe, something quite tangible upon which a materialistic detective may work.”

He handed to the detective a scrawled letter which he drew from an inside pocket. It read, unsigned:

“Mrs. Van Cleve:

“Do not believe all you see and hear. Your husband was not murdered by a spirit, but by one in flesh and blood.

“Unless you give us one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) by midnight of this coming June 26th, you will go the way of your husband. Do not think this a vacant threat. There *are* forces of evil. You have learned of them in your studies. They *may* overcome forces of good. They *may* aid those who have sold themselves to them. Perhaps! Why should we care, if—

“Place your remittance by the side of the road under the northeast corner of the bridge at the old site of Compton's Ferry, and we shall be pleased to forget you, in the greater good (?) of for-

warding a cause that must need money for fulfillment—in this world.

"Pleased to recall that the police nor the newspapers, so far, do not know of your fanatical beliefs—beliefs that would not escape investigation on the part of the administrators of your husband's estate."

Lawton smiled as he handed back the letter.

"So the police and the newspapers don't know of the Breakmoor ghost," he said. "What do you—and Mrs. Van Cleve suggest—for me?"

The little minister smiled.

"That ought to be obvious. Mrs. Van Cleve wants you to come to Breakmoor. She has faith in your ability. Does the matter interest you enough—to come?"

"Spirits, ghosts, hobgoblins. I'll say! Unless—" He gave one glance towards his hopefully upstanding golf clubs. "Listen! Is the fuss all over? Is there anything more out there?"

THE Rev. Carsons put his fingertips together in a prayerful attitude.

"The phenomena," he said primly, "if that is what you mean, still persists. There is always something weird and mysterious. A door slams, a strange voice comes from the air, there is a rustle of this or that curtain. It's incomprehensible. And there's no one in the house except Mrs. Van Cleve and the two servants who have consented to remain."

"None of Mrs. Van Cleve's relatives?" asked Lawton.

"There's nobody but Mrs. Van Cleve. She was her father's sole heir. Her sister, a more or less well-known opera singer, was disowned years ago. A none too reputable foreign singer as a husband was the reason, I understand.

"A strange man was Ethelbert Talbot. Mrs. Van Cleve's astoundingly rich father, father of the wife of one of New York's other richest men.

He was father, too, of Adelaide Cordova, the singer, who wanted nothing of him except to be allowed to go her own way."

Lawton was silent a split second. Was he interested enough to look into this odd tangle? He took from his pocket a small notebook as he spoke casually.

"There were no other heirs—umm, I remember now—the newspapers were explicit—umm—" The detective glanced up keenly at the little minister. "Quite an heiress, Mrs. Van Cleve? What's she planning to do with it? Aid the cause of Spiritualism—or leave her money for its adherents to fight over?"

Carsons bent eagerly toward the detective. "Mrs. Van Cleve wants you to come to Breakmoor, Mr. Lawton. Will you?"

"You'll be there?" Carsons nodded agreement to that. "Er—by the way, Mr. Carsons, I forgot to ask you. You're rector of what parish?"

Again a slight flush reddened the pale face of the self-confessed rector.

"None, now," he said reluctantly. "My congregation—the Church of the Universal Faith—has dwindled almost to nothingness."

"Too bad," said Lawton, as he stood up again, and reached for his neglected hat. "Let's go."

BREAKMOOR MANOR, two miles from Madison, a great place with sovereign towers and pacer-treading guardians, loomed severe and forbidding, but uninteresting enough to the cheerful residents of the small town. Except that it did bring sight-seers who were likely to spend a little money.

Mrs. Van Cleve was an accepted recluse. She had shunned society since the death, a few years before, of her only son. A reasonable hibernation, it was agreed, since she had loved him so, and had given over her

life to a quest to proving him not dead.

Mrs. Van Cleve could devote herself to such a cause, with little comment. Money excuses much. And she had it.

Motorists, dashing inconsequently by, wondered occasionally about the place. They asked questions, idly; went on. The world went on that way for Mrs. Van Cleve—inconsequently. With an interlude for thought.

Breakmoor Manor, once a high spot for society's gatherings, came to be shunned. Mrs. Van Cleve had been a hostess. She became a propagandist. Terrible. So Breakmoor, once the home of laughter, cynicism, what passed in the best circles for wit, knew a deliberate eclipse. Mrs. Van Cleve did not want society.

She wanted her home, though, her thoughts as she thought them. Having all the wealth she had, Mrs. Van Cleve's home had become a repository for the unusual that interested her. There were rooms that reminded—no, that were replicas—of Oriental lamaseries.

There were temples suggesting the ancient Gnostics. Tapestries of religious scenes hung from the vast walls, and mantels and tables, with their piled-up literature, spoke of interest in Christian and pagan faiths alike.

A PORTRAIT with a dim visionary figure reaching out hands for the dimmer Holy Grail was on one wall of a much-used room. Opposite was a picture of Guatama Siddhartha. Beneath the tree of wisdom, the apostle sat in tranquil meditation—exposé enough of the mental processes of the owner of the place. Even if other exotic adornment had not accentuated the display.

Lawton did not spend a great deal of time in idle questioning when he

first reached the place. It was his way first to look about him.

He seemed most interested to learn that neither Mrs. Van Cleve nor Dr. Carsons, on whom she seemed to depend greatly, had had any outside communications or interests, nor had either of them left Breakmoor since the tragic death of Harrison Van Cleve.

THE detective put the fact that the little minister seemed to be a fixture in the Van Cleve home into the back of his mind for further analysis.

There was no question that Mrs. Van Cleve was inconsolable, grieved. Dr. Carsons, unfrocked, grieved, too, was dolorous for another reason, besides. His flock, nobody seemed to want him any more. If Mrs. Van Cleve did—

Spiritually starved, desolated, and past sixty, Elizabeth Van Cleve's life had for a long time been in the mists, in the memories. Her attitude showed that; her home showed it. Her books—on black and white magic—her talismans, book and screed and grinning gargoyle in place of honor, showed her study. The woman wanted proof positive of *what* she wanted to believe.

When, in tow of her friend and counselor Dr. Carsons, the detective arrived, there was little to show in the woman's attitude that she had any slightest interest in a material investigator's having been brought into the case.

She greeted Lawton, suggested to her housekeeper: "We'd better give him the left wing, Harriet," and swept away to her own room.

Behind her locked door, Elizabeth Van Cleve dropped to her knees.

"Harry! Harry! You hear me, don't you, dear? *You* know now! *I* know! They can't tell us! But help me—help me!—to avenge you!"

LARRY LAWTON didn't care much for silent meditation. He needed somebody to talk to. Because Donovan from his office was a first-class "yes" man, the detective brought him along on the Van Cleve case as much of a matter of course as he brought his tooth brush. Donovan was good for asking questions sometimes, too, and he knew how to handle his forks.

The simplicity of that first dinner at Breakmoor, however, was a surprise to both men. Coolly aloof, but charming as a hostess, Mrs. Van Cleve did not mention the reason for the presence of her guests until coffee was being served. She came straight to the point then, as simply as a-b-c, as she looked Lawton straight in the eyes.

"It may seem strange to you, Mr. Lawton," she said, "that a woman who believes as I do, is so firmly convinced that my husband came to his death by supernatural means, should call in someone to discover the perpetrator of the crime. It's *because* I believe it was the work of evil spirits, that I have said nothing to the police. What would they know? What could they do? I have called on you, knowing of your keen mind because—"

Lawton gave back her look oddly. He suppressed the quirk in his lips.

"But, my dear Mrs. Van Cleve," he murmured, "I'm sure you overrate me. *I've* never searched out the spirits, and— "He was studying her face gravely. "I wish you'd be quite frank with me, Mrs. Van Cleve. Do you seriously mean to tell me that you believe that a thing like this threatening letter, demanding money, is the work of spirits?"

Mrs. Van Cleve's lips compressed a moment.

"I'm firmly convinced the spirits will have an explanation for it," she asserted. "We learned many things when the Princess Sutta sat with us

here last week. I'm trying to be a sensible woman, Mr. Lawton. I realize that this is probably a combination of the spiritual and the material. It is that you may make use of any knowledge that the spirits have to offer, that I am anxious that you, too, shall sit with us in a seance."

"And you think your husband will have something more to explain to you—through that medium?"

The woman shook her head, and sighed.

"Not necessarily. He might appear to me without a medium. He always promised he would."

The detective's face was filled with sympathy as he glanced at the broken woman across the table, but his mind was quite naturally rejecting any such possibilities. Two matters stood out plainly to him. The woman's husband had been murdered—choked to death. No ghost could have done that. Nor had any ghostly hand penned that note that now lay on his inside pocket.

His tone sought to rouse her to actualities.

YOU may be waiting for that, Mrs. Van Cleve," he said with firmness. "But as for me—well, if you ask me, I think we'd better forget the spirit of your husband, and stick to what facts we have—if any. Forgive me if what I'm going to say is—ar—a bit out of order, but—well, the fact is, have you given any thought to whether your sister, Adelaide Cordova, could have had any interest—or anyone connected with her—ah— There *is* such a thing as a spirit of revenge, you know, and—"

Mrs. Van Cleve's face had whitened to a deathly pallor, and her lips became a straight line.

"Quite right," she nodded. "But if Addie *did* have anything to do

with this, I *know* my husband's spirit will tell, and—"

Far more swiftly than any of them would have imagined of the woman who had so often to lean on the arm of a servant, Mrs. Van Cleve got to her feet and hurried across the room. From a drawer in a table, she took an object which scintillated in the light.

She brought it back to the table and laid it on the white cloth in front of the detective. It was an antique silver bracelet. Engraved inside was the name, "Adelaide Cordova," and the date, "1926."

"I had not meant to keep knowledge of this from you," she said. "I have simply been considering. But I suppose you may as well know what is in my mind. My sister's property, of course. I found it yesterday among some things of my father's in an old trunk, and—"

THE "ah" of understanding came from the three men simultaneously.

"Which means, as I get it," observed Lawton, "that your sister was *not* entirely estranged from your father, as you and everyone seemed to suppose. She must have been seeing him without your knowledge, and so—" The detective, glancing into the eyes of Mrs. Van Cleve, knew that much was going on in the mind back of those eyes. "And so," he finished bluntly, "you've decided that there may have been some agreement about your father's estate, unknown to you, as yet—"

"I'm afraid your conclusion is quite correct," said the white-haired woman, as she stood haughtily erect. "It *would* be a little plainer sailing for my sister with my husband out of the way—and myself! And with the aid of an evil spirit—"

Donovan was on his feet in a second, his arm crooked to aid his

hostess as she swayed a little on her feet. Lawton, too, leaped to aid her, as he murmured:

"And a hundred thousand dollars would certainly be a great help to a poor man or woman who wanted to fight for millions."

"You didn't say anything to me about that bracelet," twittered the little minister, hovering helplessly by. "When did you find it, you say?"

"Today," said Mrs. Van Cleve, tiredly, as she turned towards the door. "I found it beneath those old Pythagorean pamphlets of father's you wanted me to get for you in the attic. Will you excuse me, now, gentlemen? I—I'm a trifle exhausted—I shall need my strength for tomorrow's seance with the Princess Sutta."

But to Donovan, as the men moved away towards the library, Lawton muttered: "And tomorrow we shall be getting some 'this world' facts, old-timer—such as who this Princess Sutta is, and the life history of one Adelaide Cordova, and—" his voice lowered to a mere whisper—"do you know I'm mightily curious about the past life of our little friend, Dr. Carsons."

Breakmoor was darkened early, a little too early for Lawton and Donovan who strolled about for a time in the grounds, interested in the weird temples and high marble walls that stood starkly in the gray light.

All seemed placid, reposing, undisturbed, as the two men, shortly before midnight, started for their rooms. Breakmoor seemed peace itself. There was scarcely a rustle in the huge trees surrounding the house.

IT was a June night, fragrant and cool. Only an occasional sparrow in the vines twittered and fluttered in the leaves. There was no portent of unrest. All the ghosts must be

taking a night off, as Donovan said, for none were seen or heard. There was no moon. Only a black hush over everything.

Suddenly, as Lawton and Donovan reached the darkened hall, out of the night came the voice of a woman singing! Lawton stopped in the act of opening the door, as tense and immovable as Donovan, so sweetly alluring was the sudden song, which still held a menace of unexpected horror!

The tones were resplendent and golden—a voice of strange, sinister beauty, from somewhere in the house—rising, falling, sometimes with great volume, then attenuated, soft and gentle. A beautiful aria—a living, invisible song, filled the whole atmosphere!

One final measure, then—a gurgle of horror, as though the tissues of the golden throat were being crushed in a terrific struggle! A wild cry of distress!

As one man, the detective and his aid leaped for the stairway, bounded up two and three steps at a time, reached the upper hallway as the lights sprung up. The Rev. Mr. Carsons was just pushing the light button. He was strangely frightened and trembling as he stood there in his queer night clothes, his eyes searching wildly.

JUST outside her door stood Mrs. Van Cleve in her long white nightgown. Her face, even her lips, were as white as the garment she wore. Scream after scream was issuing from those pale lips. They could just make out the scared words of the little minister.

“Wha—what was it? Who was that singing? Did you hear—”

“It was the spirit-warning!” Mrs. Van Cleve was shrieking. “I knew it! I knew it! The spirit is trying to tell us—as the Princess said it

would! It’s the spirit’s way of telling us that—I will be next!”

With a final moan, she fell to the floor, mercifully unconscious.

IT was past one o’clock in the morning before Breakmoor once more resumed its calm, before Mrs. Van Cleve, relieved of her hysteria, but sobbing softly in her bed, with a white-faced Harriet sitting guard beside her, could be persuaded she was in no immediate danger.

As the sounds of her sobbing grew less, Donovan left his post on guard outside the door, and tiptoed downstairs. At the foot of the steps stood Lawton, so intent on the examination of a small object he held in his hand, that he did not at first see his aid.

“Well,” said Donovan, “you might let a fellow in on it if you’ve got anything there. What is it?”

“It’s not a pipe organ, or an orchestra, at any rate,” said Lawton with a smile, as he slipped the thing into his inside pocket, and would say no more.

Lawton planned a busy day for himself the next day. He went early to the city, although the events of the night had given him time but for little sleep. A call on Madame Cordova was, of course, indicated, but the detective’s instinct told him that there was another matter of even more pressing importance.

That little object he had picked up at the bottom of the steps, and which he had not shown to Donovan, was interesting him curiously. He had never seen anything like it before—wondered just what it could be.

He should not have a great deal of difficulty finding that out, however, for the thing was obviously something to do with music—perhaps a tuning-fork, or something of that sort.

It was made of two convex discs

of thin, flexible metal, the size of half-dollars, fastened together. When pressed with the fingers, a vacuum was produced. One edge was bent back an eighth of an inch, and there were two small holes in the metal on each side.

The thing looked more like a toy whistle than anything else, and on it were impressed the words: "Pan-Olean Music Co., Stratford-on-Avon." A music store on Forty-second Street would be one of the detective's stops.

Donovan, wanting to know if he should accompany his chief, was told: "Not today. You stay here and hold the ghosts down. I'm going to be calling on a famous lady. Maybe I'll bring her back with me, and she won't be the Princess Sutta. I'm getting a little fed up on mediums."

Madame Adelaide Cordova, the prima donna, past middle age, still popular, was in the midst of her morning routine with her coiffeur when Lawrence Lawton was announced. Madame Cordova had never been difficult of approach, and it was but a short time before the door opened and the woman, regal and austere, in a white velvet dressing gown, her fingers and arms covered with jewels, appeared before the detective.

SHE was obviously a bit surprised by such a visit, even after Lawton had said what he had come to say.

"But why should my sister want to see me?" she protested, and her lips grew thin and a little cruel.

"Madame Cordova," Lawton told her, "your sister is in great trouble and needs you. She is a sick woman, and in far more danger from those things of which I have told you than you can imagine. I am representing her and her interests, and—" his eyes spoke much to the woman of

the world—"I'm trusting greatly to your generosity of heart, Madame."

STILL the prima donna could not too quickly forget all resentment.

"My sister," she said, severely, "has always hated me. Ever since I chose my career, I've been a family out-cast. It's odd now, if on her death-bed, she sends for me. . . . It's all strange—her husband murdered—her queer religion. . . . And there was the way she swayed my poor father, but I forgive him, poor darling. He couldn't have been in his right mind, at the last, when he so entirely cut me off—"

Her mind seemed to be wandering far afield. She brought herself to with a jerk, as her shoulders shrugged, and she said to the detective: "Oh, very well. I'll go—if you think I should. Far be it from me to—" Her still beautiful eyes darted a glance at the man. "What does she want to see me about? Money, I suppose?"

"It may be," said Lawton, non-committantly, but to himself, he was justifying his own judgment. Madame Cordova was not acting like a guilty woman.

While Lawton was motoring down with Madame Cordova, Donovan was hearing some things he had never believed he would be called upon to listen to—that is, not while he was healthy and of sane mind. At last, the Rev. Carsons, sitting with the assistant's aid in the room in which Harrison Van Cleve had been murdered, was giving his own ideas of how the tragedy had transpired.

Carsons had reached the depths of esoteric converse at the end of a painfully long hour for Donovan.

"There is one phase of psychic phenomena which to me is particularly interesting," the pale little man was saying: "That is precipitation."

"Uh?" said Donovan. "Precipitation? Ain't that rain?"

Carsons smiled benignly.

"In some meanings. In psychic phenomena it means the appearance of some object in the air, apparently from nowhere—a spiritual substance made physical by the will of a spirit."

"Oh, yeah?" remarked Donovan. "How come?"

"Well, suppose we take that bracelet Mrs. Van Cleve found. It would be possible for a spirit to dematerialize that bracelet, bring it through space, and materialize it again in the trunk of Mrs. Van Cleve's father."

"Sure, Houdini," said Donovan. "I get you. Just the same as it's possible for a sewer pipe to sprout pineapples. You're telling me—I'm asking you. There wasn't any way for that bracelet to get where it was except for somebody to put it there, and that goes for me. For the boss, too, if I know him. We're detectives. We'd get a heck of a distance using 'spiritual' clues like that for evidence. And how about that singing last night, huh? Was that a ghost?"

DR. CARSONS shrugged, and sighed with a pained expression at such ignorance.

"Possibly," he said. "Or it might even have been Madame Cordova, as I'm inclined to believe. By this power of precipitation, it would be possible for a spirit to transport Madame Cordova here to sing for us, or in other words, a higher power at work to reveal that she was the guilty one. The spirit would transport her—her spirit substance, while, she, her physical body, was lying asleep in her own bedroom in New York."

"Oh, yeah?" Donovan laughed.

Carsons turned with a smile that was a little ill at ease as Lawton came into the room. There was a broad smile on the face of the de-

tective that pleased the small man still less. Lawton glanced around.

"All alone?" he asked. "Where's Mrs. Van Cleve?"

"Upstairs," said Donovan.

"Will you ask her if she'll be good enough to step down here a moment? There's something important to discuss—a conference—ah—some one I think she might like to see who will be here, and—"

THE clergyman rose slowly from his chair.

"You don't mean—surely you cannot mean that—that Cordova will be—" There was a dramatic appeal in the man's voice. "For God's sake, Mr. Lawton! Not that! The enmity between those two women—Mrs. Van Cleve's health—it would kill her! Don't—"

Then Mrs. Van Cleve was standing in the doorway, wan and motionless.

"You wanted to see me?"

"I did," said Lawton softly. "And so does someone else. She's waiting across the hall in the music room—some one who loves you, has always loved you—who's here to help you—"

He moved over and touched the arm of the gray-haired woman, whose eyes were widening with fright and surprise, with fear.

"Please don't get excited, Mrs. Van Cleve. It's all right—" He jerked around suddenly to Donovan. "Don't let that man get out of this room!"

There was something that sounded like a snarl that came from the so-called Dr. Carsons as Donovan landed on him. In two minutes more he would have slipped from the room, bent double as his small body slid behind the big chairs. Donovan's big hand grasped the man and held him tightly, struggling, as Lawton's aid looked at his chief in inquiry.

A vicious growl came from Car-

sons' throat at the sight of the regal feminine figure who appeared in the doorway. But it was drowned in the shriek that rose to the lips of Mrs. Van Cleve, as she, too, saw who stood there.

SHE shrank back, trembling, and would have fallen, except for the protecting arm of the detective.

There was a grin on Lawton's face.

"Madame Cordova," he said. "I don't think you know the Rev. Mr. Carsons. May I present him?"

The smile on the face of the prima donna as she glanced at the struggling little man was one of pure humor.

"So that's who you are now, is it?" she asked. "The Reverend? Oh, my word!" She glanced at the detective. "We were right," she said. "That's the man. He was a 'reporter' when he came to see me a few months ago. I never did see his wonderful interview with me, though—and I never saw my bracelet again after he left!"

"Is this your bracelet?" asked the detective, as he took the trinket from his pocket.

"I told you it was!" said the prima donna, as she turned, not deigning another glance at Carsons. Her arms went out to Mrs. Van Cleve. "Oh, Elizabeth!"

BUT Mrs. Van Cleve did not even see her. Her eyes were pitiful as she stared at the man she had trusted.

With all his strength the man was fighting to get away from his captor, screaming, mouthing. As though the man were quite silent, Lawton walked over to him, holding up the little object he had discovered the night of the ghostly singing.

"Don't you think it's about time to cash in your checks, old-timer?" he asked. "How about this? Discovered what it is this morning—a

mouthpiece for female impersonators to use. They told me all about it in the music store.

"And just one other thing, Carsons," he barked, "something you'd just as well know before you're dragged out of here. Really, you ought to have been a little more square in your financial dealings with that lady princess. Even a princess gets hungry sometimes, and peeved enough to squeal."

"The—the princess? Whe—where is she?"

"You *would* like to know, wouldn't you? Well, the Princess Sutta is in jail where she ought to be—since three o'clock this afternoon."

The fight was gone out of Carsons at last. He all but collapsed. The wail of Mrs. Van Cleve broke through the tenseness.

TAKE him away! Take him away!" she screamed. "He's a fiend! He'll kill me!" Clutching the bracelet of her sister, she lifted her clenched fists in the air and shook them fiercely. "So this is why you wanted me to go to the attic after those Pythagorean pamphlets!" she accused with all the fury in her. "So I would find this! Would suspect my sister!"

"Mrs. Van Cleve," said Lawton, gently, "please try to be calm. We have our man—and your ghost, though he may not look so familiar without his red cloak and his phosphorous.

"He *was* clever enough to know that with your faith and trust in him and in the Princess Sutta, that you would have been fair game for them with your husband gone, so—"

Mrs. Van Cleve stared at the detective a moment in agonized realization. Then she turned and threw herself, sobbing, into her sister's comforting arms.

Famous Crimes



MAURICE
SODY

THE FRENCH DETECTIVE
WHO SOLVED THE CRIME.

SHE IMMEDIATELY PHONED
FOR THE POLICE ALTHOUGH IT
APPEARED TO BE A CUT AND
DRIED CASE OF SUICIDE.

THERE WAS A SHOT IN HIS TEMPLE AND
NEAR HIS RIGHT HAND WAS A DISCHARGED GUN.

ONE DAY IN 1923, MARIA BOHANT,
A TYPIST FOR M. LEON BASILIONDIS, A
PARIS BUSINESS MAN, RETURNED FROM
A SHORT WALK AND HEARING A GROAN-
ING NOISE COMING FROM HER EM-
PLOYER'S PRIVATE OFFICE...
...SHE INVESTIGATED...
AND FOUND HER EMPLOY-
ER DEAD!



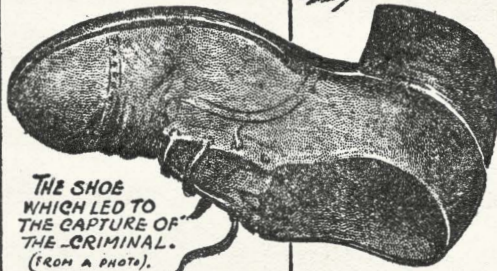
DETECTIVE SODY EXAMINES
THE BODY.

DETECTIVE
SODY WAS PUT ON THE
CASE AND DISCOVERED AT ONCE
SOME DISQUIETING FACTS ON EX-
AMING THE BODY. ON THE NECK WERE
A NUMBER OF CONTUSIONS AND
ON HIS HAND WAS A WOUND-LOOK-
ING AT THIS UNDER THE MICRO-
SCOPE SODY FOUND THAT
THE SAME BULLET THAT WAS
IN THE TEMPLE HAD CAUSED
ALSO THE WOUND IN THE
HAND, SHOWING THAT
MERCHANT HAD INSTINCTIVELY
PUT UP HIS HAND TO FEND OFF
THE BULLET.
TO SODY IT WAS MURDER!

AND IN ONE CORNER OF THE ROOM
HE FOUND THE IMPRINT OF A SHOE WITH A
HUGE HEEL SUCH AS A CRIPPLED MAN WEARS!
(HE HAD A CAST MADE OF THIS IMPRINT).

This is the Original Illustrated Crimes Feature—

NEXT-SOUDY BEGAN TO TRACE DOWN ALL OF THE MAN'S ACQUAINTANCES. HE DISCOVERED THAT 24 YEARS PREVIOUSLY THE MERCHANT HAD HAD A LOVE AFFAIR WITH A WOMAN NAMED, MLE. DU BOT DE TALHOUET.



THE SHOE WHICH LED TO THE CAPTURE OF THE CRIMINAL.
(FROM A PHOTO).

(NOTE THE UNUSUAL HEEL).

WHILE QUESTIONING THIS WOMAN IN THE READING ROOM OF HER HOME, SOUDY SUDDENLY SAW THE SHADOW OF A MAN PASSING BEHIND SOME GLASS DOORS THAT WERE COVERED WITH A CLOTH..... AND THE MAN WALKED WITH A LIMP!

HE ARRESTED THIS MAN AT ONCE. THE SHOE OF HIS FOOT FITTED THE CAST OF THE IMPRINT PERFECTLY... LATER A GUN DEALER IDENTIFIED THE WOMAN AS HAVING BOUGHT THE DEATH GUN. SHE THEN CONFESSED THAT HER SON (THE CRIPPLE) HAD KILLED BASILIONDAS. SHE RELATED THAT HE HAD LIVED WITH HER FOR YEARS BUT HAD REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THEIR SON OR FURNISH ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR HER AND THE BOY, AND THAT JUST BEFORE THE KILLING HE HAD CUT THEM OFF COMPLETELY. ... AT THE TRIAL THE WOMAN HELD SUCH SWAY OVER THE JURY WITH HER PITIFUL TALE THAT THEY WERE BOTH ACQUITTED.



MLE.
DU BOT DE TALHOUET.

the First to Appear in Any Detective Magazine

Conclude This Sensational Serial Novel

The Yellow Hand

A Three Part Serial

By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

Author of "The Cowled Cobra," "Dagger of Death," etc.

PART THREE



SYNOPSIS

Two investigators of a great crime wave, D'Strange and Lorimer, arrive in Seattle and make their way to a cheap hotel which is a good vantage point for their work. They come in contact with Toad, a girl whom they think a gang leader. They visit her and meet also a tall man wearing a black mask, of whom Toad seems to be afraid.

When he leaves the room, a thin overpowering smoke drifts into it. The three are almost suffocated. They hear sounds as of a running wooden-legged man. Suddenly they see a moving yellow hand, gesturing like that of a mute. Only the hand—no more. A scarab ring is on one of the huge fingers.

The hand makes for Lorimer's throat—and the next thing he knows, he is out on the Coleman Dock, far from the room of mystery. A hunchback on a four-wheeled vehicle sells him a newspaper. He notices that on the deformed man's finger is a ring similar to that of the yellow hand. On following the man, he discerns that he whistles with an uncanny beauty.

When Lorimer opens his paper, he is surprised to discover a note drop from it which is written in D'Strange's hand. D'Strange tells his friend he is with Toad; tells him that all people wearing buttons on the left lapel are friends and all wearing scarab rings enemies. Lorimer is also informed in this note of a robbery to take place in a large department store, and is told to hide

in the store and prepare a written report of happenings which he is to fasten to a wooden float and hurl into the Sound.

The instructions are followed out. In the dead of night, in the hiding place, Lorimer smells the same smoke which he has come to know. He hears the slithering sounds of wheels, the noise of a wooden-legged man running, and a shot.

He turns his flashlight on the safe. A man with a mask and the night watchman are both murdered. As he observes them, something strikes him between the eyes and he sees a nightmarish face and an effeminate yellow hand with a scarab ring. Then unconsciousness.

On awakening, Lorimer finds that someone has placed the dagger last seen in the throat of the dead burglar, in his own hand. He immediately goes to the window to make his escape. But there he feels strong arms bear him away into the darkness.

Blindfolded he is put in a boat. Once again he hears mysterious whistling, and later someone exclaims: "The Yellow Hand." He senses that all are terror-stricken.

The captors lead him through damp earth; he smells burning opium. He is in a circuitous tunnel.

When the covering is taken from his eyes, he finds himself in a bright garish room, and of all surprises, the girl Toad is there dressed in lavish Oriental gar-

of Thrills, Mystery and Grim Deeds



ments. She is sitting on a miniature throne surrounded by many subjects, most of whom are reclining. The brute called Happy is near her. And there, beyond her, is the Waxen face of D'Strange; he is signaling Lorimer to go.

Unseen, Lorimer darts out into the tunnel. He hears a burst of laughter which he believes to come from Happy—the Strangler. He swings through a door and finds himself in a huge room. All about him in boxes and antique stands he sees enormous wealth. He hears a rustling sound and soon cool, repulsive, hairy fingers pass over his face.

He flees. From the distance he hears a whining sound, and near-by, in the darkness the voice of D'Strange saying: "Back, and for God's sake." As he makes for the lighted room near the tunnel entrance he sees a dirty, ragged, old blind woman hurl a knife, then disappear in the blackness.

Here he is in a labyrinth. It is all such an unsolved mystery. He doesn't know what part his friend is playing, even when he again hears his voice. D'Strange manages to tell him that they shall meet at midnight and try to learn all about this hidden city.

As soon as D'Strange leaves, there comes again this strange laughter from the direction in which the poor misshapen woman with the knife has run.

Now go on with the story.

CHAPTER VI

THE TORTURE CHAMBER

LORIMER met D'Strange that night as he had been instructed—and D'Strange had much to tell. Just how he had ingratiated himself with Toad, Lorimer never learned, but that she held him in some sort of regard Lorimer knew well enough.

Or perhaps, because she was Toad, brutal and fearless, she held the great investigator in contempt, not at all fearful of what he might be able to do—always provided that she suspected his intentions with regard to her and the organization of which she was a cog.

It seemed incredible that she did not know D'Strange by reputation.

At the same time it was apparent, that she did not know all the facts in the case, or what the investigators were seeking—else their lives would not have been worth a thin dime.

But how about the Yellow Hand?

What did the invisible, unapproachable beings back and beyond Toad know of D'Strange and his intentions—and of Lorimer?

All these, and countless other questions Lorimer asked himself during the hours he was compelled to wait in the treasure house.

What sort of creatures, which he had never seen as yet, still haunted the ruins and tunnels of these catcombs? What had coughed in that odd way just before he had dashed into the side tunnel and all but given his life to the knife of the old woman?

He knew it had not been this woman whom he had encountered; for he had crashed into a gross body, there in the darkness, so solidly that he had been all but upset by the rebound. It could not have been the emaciated old woman. Too large and too solid of construction.

He asked D'Strange about it when the latter came at midnight.

"A man of some kind, Lorimer; but of what kind I do not know! Some moronic throwback, perhaps. He may be a companion of the dagger woman; he may be—most anything you care to guess! No one, not even Toad, knows all the evil that may be found down here. It is our duty to find out about these things! It is part of the mission assigned us before we left Washington!"

Nice prospect!

BUT the partners started out as soon as D'Strange felt it to be safe—straight into the tunnel where Lorimer had encountered the hairy man, where the cold hand had caressed his face, and whence the woman had come crawling into the light of the treasure house.

It was an eerie journey upon which they embarked. Most of the time Lorimer walked with his hands

at his throat, expecting any moment that *something* would come to him out of the darkness, something with murder in its heart.

THEY had gone far along the tunnel, much further than Lorimer had gone that first time, when his ears just sensed that rustling sound. He stopped with a gasp and seized the arm of D'Strange.

D'Strange's fingers went to Lorimer's lips, touching them lightly. Lorimer told him what he had heard. He had already told D'Strange of his previous experience. He felt D'Strange slip from his hand when he had finished, and knew that the deaf detective had hurled himself straight ahead in the darkness.

Lorimer heard a thud as he collided with something, the thumping of heavy bodies upon the floor. His heart in his throat, Lorimer leaped to D'Strange's assistance, hands extended blindly, ready to fasten upon whatsoever they encountered.

They encountered nothing, but Lorimer heard a groan from D'Strange, a strangling gurgle—moving away in the tunnel. Lorimer ran ahead toward the sound. He heard the sound of blows—and a weird coughing; the voice of D'Strange, muffled and indistinct.

"Lend a hand, Lorimer! He's got me!"

He? Who was he?

Lorimer increased his stride, for the sound was moving away swiftly. If only D'Strange could hear! Lorimer could have shouted to him to delay the retreat until Lorimer could come up with whatever it was that held D'Strange. But D'Strange probably guessed at Lorimer's difficulty.

Lorimer heard him swear, and could tell that the oath came from between tight-closed lips. The unseen one coughed again. D'Strange had

hindered the unknown for a moment or two.

"For the love of God, Lorimer! He is crushing me to death!"

Then Lorimer was with D'Strange, and both of them were fighting with all their power against the malignant entity of the tunnels. Lorimer struck out savagely and had the satisfaction of landing a blow, squarely delivered, with all the weight of his body—and the creature did not even seem to feel that it had been struck.

But it loosened its grip on D'Strange, who was beside Lorimer on the instant.

"Stand clear, Lorimer," he panted, "I am going to use the knife!"

Lorimer heard the knife thud home, and knew that D'Strange would not have struck blindly. He had scored a hit; but when he cursed soulfully a moment later Lorimer knew that the knife had been snatched from him.

"We have a chance against this brute, Lorimer," D'Strange panted, "because it lacks intelligence. But remember that there are other guardians of the tunnels."

The dagger woman!

Yes, Lorimer remembered her well enough—and it did not need the sound of her weird laughter for him to know that she was close to them in the darkness! In his mind's eye Lorimer could see her, moving forward with her shiny dagger in her hand—creeping forward on hands and knees, her wispy hair hanging about her face.

D'STRANGE and Lorimer crouched down against one wall of the tunnel. Lorimer could hear the measured movement of bodies in the darkness—the tunnel had become a place of horror, a dwelling of blind things and beasts with terrible power—with rending fangs.

Lorimer felt something warm upon his hand!

It was blood.

"D'Strange, are you hurt?"

D'Strange's fingers were at Lorimer's lips because of the tenseness of the situation.

"Yes," D'Strange replied, "but I hope not badly. The fellow bit a piece out of my shoulder! I am fortunate it was not my jugular vein. That is where he intended to bite me!"

Lorimer shivered.

THE coughing sound came again, so close before Lorimer he believed he could have reached forth his hand and touched the hairy creature. He held his breath. So must have D'Strange, for Lorimer could not hear his breathing. The rustling sound, slow and methodical, approached.

Then the two unseen killers were together—and the commingling of sounds told Lorimer that they were comforting each other.

A whimpering, as though a child whined for sympathy—unearthly crooning that was fearful in the dark. D'Strange seized Lorimer's hand. Without a word he plunged away. Both ran with all their strength. The coughing sound came to Lorimer's ears as they fled—and he knew that the two weird ones were not in pursuit.

After a time they showed. At a word from D'Strange they stopped, while Ewart bade Lorimer use his ears. Lorimer strained them to listen—but all about was the silence of the tomb.

"We have about three hours, Lorimer," said D'Strange, when Lorimer had told him they seemed to be alone and unwatched, "and we must study this place as thoroughly as time permits. Listen at intervals and tell me if you hear anything. If not

we can talk in low tones, and try to get together on this affair. At the same time we will be covering every inch of the place, mapping it in our minds. But at the end of three hours you must be back in the treasure house! I can find it!"

Lorimer shivered again. That meant they would have to pass those two creatures again.

"I have plenty of questions to ask, D'Strange!" Lorimer blurted out; "and I haven't been able to answer any of them myself. Why, for instance, is there a locked door to the treasure house when there are a half dozen other ways to reach and leave the place?"

"Who knows? Perhaps the treasure house is a connecting link between one set of tunnels and another, and there is no way to reach the room where you last saw Toad except through the treasure house. Suppose anything you like—who knows what will be encountered when one deals with wily Orientals?"

"What is the yellow hand?"

"That is something we have yet to learn!" replied D'Strange shortly; "so far I have only guesses to offer. It is certain that the yellow hand itself is a bit of Oriental mummery—just as it is certain that we are dealing with Orientals. And the head of this city's portion of the vast criminal organization we are out to destroy is an Oriental! One of the cleverest I have ever encountered—since we have neither seen him, nor know anything of him save through his manifestation, the yellow hand!"

WHAT was the message spelled out by the yellow hand through the smoke in the beginning of this mess? What did you mean by 'men with red buttons in the left lapels of their coats'? What was that spidery creature I saw in the department store the night of the robbery? Whose

was that nightmarish face I saw above me just after I discovered the body of the watchman in the store? Why was I brought here at all? Who is Toad? What is her place in the organization?"

WHAT a list of questions. It might have been done by mirrors. Actually there was hashish in that smoke at Toad's and we saw things that were really there and didn't see things that were."

"But the message of the fingers!"

"Meant nothing to me! I caught a Chinese word here and there, but the message must have been dialectic, since I did not get it all."

"And your automatic. How did it disappear from your hand and then come back again just before you shot at the invisible, to me, person who tried to garrot you?"

"I had no pistol. It was taken from me in the struggle at the head of the stairs."

"But I saw you shoot at the hand, and saw the wound made by your bullet! The fingers went on with the message, even though red blood was dripping from the wound."

"I did not fire at the hand, Lorimer," replied D'Strange patiently, "nor was the owner of the yellow hand wounded in any way."

"But I saw it all, D'Strange!"

"I am sure you *think* you saw it; but did you! It is a shrewd, twisted mind with which we are dealing and—did you ever hear of some of the weird things that eastern mystics are able to do?"

Lorimer nodded.

"This is just a guess, mind you, Lorimer; but I believe that, in some way, you were made to see the things you tell me you saw. The 'Yellow Hand' wished to separate us for some obscure reason—or for any reason you care to guess, since no white man can know an Oriental's

reasons for many things he does—and—and—so you saw the things you tell me you saw.”

“But that doesn’t explain it at all.”

“Has anybody ever explained the ‘rope trick?’ No, yet there are many responsible persons who claim to have seen it performed. It has been photographed at the very moment the crowd fancied they saw a boy climb up a rope apparently suspended in mid-air; but all the picture showed when developed was an old man squatting on the ground with a funny look on his face, and the boy sitting beside him. What made the crowd see what it thought it saw?”

“There are stories of how Orientals have, at a distance of many miles, compelled certain enemies to commit suicide. There are stories of how responsible men have seen eastern fakirs pass through solid walls, a plain impossibility. Not a lucid explanation, but all I have at the moment.”

“And it doesn’t explain anything. For all I know everything I have witnessed here in these catacombs has been part of some nightmare induced by the Yellow Hand. I may not be in these catacombs at all, but up in the sunlight on Third Avenue.”

“Right enough, except that the sun isn’t shining on Third Avenue at this hour—and I have seen the same things that you have. It is only after seeing the yellow hand that you should doubt the evidence of your senses.”

ALL of which muddled Lorimer more than before! It sounded like an opium smoker’s dream.

Might it not be an opium smoker’s dream?

“D’Strange,” Lorimer said, “you have been smoking opium since you joined Toad.”

D’Strange laughed softly.

“I expected that. The answer is no. I pretended to smoke it, and since I know its effect on the human carcass I was able to fool even the Chinese servitors of Toad. No, I have given you the only explanation of what you saw that seems to come even near the mark at the moment!”

All this time they had been walking through the catacombs. Ever and anon they would see splashes of light through the gloom—evidence of rooms, dens of vice, that were occupied. They avoided these as though they had been plague spots, though Lorimer knew that D’Strange catalogued them in his mind.

LORIMER tried to do so, but he might as well have been inside a whirling ball for all he knew of his location. At intervals they would stop so that Lorimer could listen.

The rustling sound did not come again—nor the sound of coughing; but once, faint and far away, Lorimer heard eerie whistling. Several times he heard bursts of nervous laughter, feminine laughter—and the hoarse voices of men. He would tell D’Strange.

Invariably, when he made such reports as these, D’Strange would leave Lorimer alone in the darkness and creep away to investigate. He would return after a time; but he never told Lorimer what he had seen.

Lorimer did not enjoy those waits in the dark tunnels.

Many times he felt great spaces about him—and knew that they were in some great tavern below the city, rock-vaulted perhaps; but he did not care to investigate these places.

It seemed to Lorimer that on all sides there might be frightful abysses—that they by instinct, or by the sure knowledge of D’Strange, were crossing these abysses on the narrowest of causeways. This feeling

was uncomfortable and nerve-harrowing in the extreme.

Just before D'Strange told Lorimer that their three hours were almost up they entered a lighted room—far distant, Lorimer knew, from the room where he had last seen Toad.

What a room!

It had all sorts of weird paraphernalia such as Lorimer had never seen before, nor had dreamed existed. There were strange racks, queer, unlovely contrivances of metal—and in one corner a metal cabinet of some sort which filled Lorimer with dread, as though it had emanated an aura of menace. Lorimer's one desire, after he had been in this room for a moment, was to turn and flee into the darkness, even though he knew that the hairy one and the dagger woman were out there, lying in wait for him.

"What is it, D'Strange?"

Lorimer looked at D'Strange as he spoke. His face was bedewed with perspiration—and for the first time since Lorimer had known him, D'Strange's waxen face held an expression which might have passed for horror. He lifted his hand to his face, and Lorimer saw that it trembled.

As Lorimer watched D'Strange, he noted the blood-stained shoulder where the creature in the dark had sunk rending fangs into the flesh.

FINALLY D'Strange answered—and Lorimer wished that he had never asked!

"It is a torture chamber, Lorimer!" It was almost a whisper. "If we are ever caught before we have closed our net on the Yellow Hand and his organization we will learn how it is operated. Let's get away from here. There is a reason why there is a light in this room, and there may be eyes, now, watching us from the darkness."

Lorimer needed no second bidding!

They darted away. D'Strange was breathing heavily. If this had frightened D'Strange, Lorimer knew that there was good reason for fear. He could not guess what sort of tortures were inflicted here, nor for what reasons; but D'Strange knew something of the East, and Lorimer was more than willing to believe what he had more intimated than told.

Lorimer looked back before they had made a turn which shut off the light in the torture chamber.

He uttered a cry of terror!

CHAPTER VII

LITTLE RED BUTTONS

IN the light of the torture chamber's door a woman struggled with might and main against a giant—a giant bigger than any man Lorimer had ever seen! When her agonized face turned toward the partners in the struggle, Lorimer thought for a moment that the woman was Toad. But the next instant he knew it was not.

D'Strange started back. But, afraid for his safety, Lorimer put forth his foot and tripped D'Strange neatly. When he had regained his feet the light in the room had gone out. . . .

By various methods D'Strange got word to Lorimer when it would be safe to roam the tunnels—safe, that is, as far as the regular denizens of the place were concerned. Lorimer would have to take his chances always with the hairy one and the dagger woman.

Though Lorimer walked constantly in the shadow of death, he learned a great deal about this den into which they had stumbled. He wondered how many of the people who frequented the place knew what it really was.

Imagine entering some secretive

place where opium or other forbidden pleasures are to be had for the asking, and being ushered into a basement below the roar of the street, a basement lighted eerily by lanterns, shaded lamps, or candles—which add to rather than detract from the lure of such a place, and you have about all the visitors to the place, knew about.

THEY knew nothing of hidden doors leading into the catacombs—or of the eyes which looked in at them from the darkness, eyes that searched out and marked certain prey for their own. Even the police did not know these things, Lorimer later learned, so well were the secrets guarded.

But Lorimer began to learn them, acting under explicit instructions from D'Strange.

There were certain hours only when Lorimer could make his explorations, hours when the followers of Toad would be about their business in the city streets. Always, however, he searched the tunnels while in perpetual dread of the hairy giant, Happy the strangler, and the dagger woman.

But he kept his fear in abeyance and did the best he could, with the result that ere a week had passed he was thoroughly conversant with the tunnels and runs from far back under the city to the very shoreline of the Sound.

Just as he was getting ready to set forth one night, D'Strange came to him quietly.

"Here is a note," he said, "I'll show you a way out that is known to but three other people—the Yellow Hand, Toad, and myself. When you get out, give this note to the first man you see who wears a little red button on the left lapel of his coat."

Instantly Lorimer was tense with

excitement. He sensed that the time was fast approaching when drastic action was to be taken, when many things would be made clear to him at which he had merely guessed before. He took the slip of paper which D'Strange tendered him and nodded briefly.

They left the treasure house.

Fifteen minutes later, without having encountered either the giant or the dagger woman, they were deep in one of the little used tunnels of the catacombs. Lorimer knew this tunnel, but up to now there had been something about it which he had not discovered.

He had entered it before and penetrated to its very end, which he had bumped against in the darkness. He did not know, until D'Strange told him, that it made an abrupt turn into a low, narrow tunnel, barely large enough for an average man to enter, then a second turn—and came out at last in the basement of a deserted firetrap of a house in that section of the city south of the station, the turns shutting off any chance ray of light that might otherwise have entered.

D'STRANGE showed it to Lorimer and vanished at once, leaving Lorimer to find his way out as best he could, and with orders to get back with all speed lest he be missed.

Even as D'Strange told Lorimer this, the latter wondered how D'Strange had managed to keep him from being slain long ere this, or how he had turned Toad's attention away from Lorimer—since he could think of no other explanation for his freedom from molestation while in the treasure house.

The game was far deeper than Lorimer had even dreamed, apparently.

It was a suffocating crawl to reach the basement. But Lorimer

made it at last and entered the firetrap of a house. He stood erect with a sigh of relief and brushed the dirt from his clothing as best he could.

He was not a prepossessing person, for he hadn't had a shave or bath since he had arrived in the underworld—but it was good to get out, if only for a breathing space. He looked back into the hole whence he had come and shuddered. He had almost become a creature of the dark himself.

Then he left the house.

As Lorimer walked along he thought it would be well to know something of the message he was carrying. D'Strange had merely tendered him a folded paper, which seemed to indicate that he might read it if he chose.

He unfolded it and this is what he saw!

ACHMED
GRZGDI JJPGMS VUADTK P

Lorimer stared at the paper in amazement! Of course he could make nothing of it. He was deeply chagrined that D'Strange had seen fit to treat him in this way—until he realized that he would have been a fool to do otherwise, when he knew of the hazards that might be Lorimer's, and of the off chance that Lorimer might lose the paper or be compelled to deliver it into hands for which it had not been intended.

OBVIOUSLY it was a code of some sort. The word ACHMED might be the key-word or it might be the name of the person to whom it was intended that the paper be ultimately delivered.

But Lorimer had no time to spend on ciphers, even had he possessed the knowledge to work the thing out. The obvious thing to do was to de-

liver it to the first man he met who wore a little red button on the left lapel of his coat, and get back to his hole in the ground with the utmost possible speed.

So, walking warily and looking about him to see if he were spied upon, he entered the first cheap clothing store he encountered and haggled with the man who ran it until he traded him out of the raggedest suit of clothing he possessed.

This wasn't much of a disguise, but it was the best he could do at the time and he was forced to be content with the makeshift.

He sallied forth and hurried toward the main part of the city. Casually, without seeming to do so, he studied the faces of the men whom he met, with a second glance at the left lapels of their coats.

It was almost an hour before he found a man who wore one of these.

HE turned in the crowd, which was fairly large for the lateness of the hour, and followed the man. He was about the last man Lorimer would have thought to be a friend of D'Strange.

He was a great, bull-like fellow, and his face looked more like some of the faces Lorimer had seen in the domain of Toad than the face of any honest man. Yet he wore the button, and it was not Lorimer's place to question the orders of D'Strange.

Lorimer hurried past the man, pressed the paper into his hand, and kept on going.

Well ahead Lorimer turned and looked. The stranger had stopped and started back in the opposite direction, and he was walking with great strides. He never turned his head.

Lorimer knew he had caught the paper. He had felt the stranger's hand close over it convulsively. For

many moments Lorimer watched him. Then with a shrug of his shoulders he started on the return journey.

Some one whistled in the crowd near-by, just an ordinary whistle. A bit surprised, Lorimer glanced in the direction of the sound.

Almost abreast of him, walking in the same direction, walked a man as different from the man to whom he had given the paper as it is possible for two men to be. A little, wiry chap with a rat-like face, well-dressed, with a touch of raciness, red hair and freckles.

He wore a little red button in the left lapel of his coat. Had he signaled Lorimer? He did not know. But the second stranger kept his place, though he paid Lorimer no heed whatever.

LORIMER quickened his pace. So did the other. His eyes roved over the crowd, noting everyone in it save Lorimer. Then they rested on Lorimer for a fleeting instant, with no recognition in them.

Yet Lorimer sensed that he was known and that the stranger had seen Lorimer deliver the message of D'Strange. Then why did the stranger follow, knowing Lorimer to be a friend? Was it because he was not sure that Lorimer *was* a friend? Was it because he felt that Lorimer needed protection?

Resolutely Lorimer kept his eyes away from the freckle-faced shadower. But before he had arrived within blocks of the house which covered the hidden entrance to the catacombs, Lorimer looked around.

The stranger was nowhere in sight. But well behind Lorimer was a well-groomed business man, twirling a shiny cane, very much out of place in the section of city into which Lorimer was rapidly penetrating.

But he wore a little red button in the left lapel of his coat.

In a swift glance Lorimer photographed his features well enough to be able to describe him to D'Strange. Then he looked back no more. . . .

Until he passed into a dark alley and two men with masks on their faces hurled themselves upon him from nowhere!

They made no sound whatever, and Lorimer saw a murderous blackjack poised in the hand of one of them. He fought with the fury of despair. But they were too strong for him. He knew them to be members of the underworld crowd headed by Toad, and knew that he had failed in his mission, possibly spoiled all the work of preparation so painstakingly managed by D'Strange.

Had he possessed a pistol he must, of necessity, have slain them both—so that no word could have gone back to Toad, information that he had been seen, free, in the city streets.

COULD he have killed them the only report she would have received would have been word of their death—and by that time Lorimer should have been back in his prison in the catacombs, apparently innocent of the whole thing.

But he had no pistol!

He managed to grasp the hand of the man with the blackjack. But the second man had clasped his hands about Lorimer's throat and had thrust a damaging knee into his groin.

His eyes were darting from his head and Lorimer knew that he was fast losing consciousness when, through the red haze before his eyes, he saw the well-groomed business man, with the little red button in the left lapel of his coat, standing

nonchalantly against the side of a house bordering the alley.

He was watching the fight, with a wary eye swerving at intervals in every direction as though he looked for others to arrive on the scene.

Somehow the presence of the stranger gave Lorimer fresh courage. With all the strength of his body he hurled himself erect and managed to fling the two men free.

Instantly there came two sharp reports—the smacking of an automatic, and the two men fell, almost together, even as their hands were outstretched to reach Lorimer again!

They never moved after they struck the ground. The well-groomed stranger had killed them instantly. Quietly, unexcitedly, he pocketed his weapon. Leisurely he removed the red button from his lapel.

AS Lorimer's ear caught the swift rush of pounding, heavy feet, the stranger jerked his coat open with a single motion, ripping off a couple of buttons, tore his collar savagely, ripping his immaculate waistcoat and shirt, dropped his hat to the ground and stepped on it—snapped his cane across his knee.

"Get out of sight!" he ordered Lorimer.

Lorimer wasted not a moment, darting into the shadows in the alley. There he waited for a moment and looked back, wondering what the stranger would tell the swiftly approaching police.

Three men in uniform dashed into the alley, coming up short as they all but stumbled over the two dead men just inside.

"What's all this?" demanded the leader gruffly.

Then he must have noted the face of the "business man," for he instantly became apologetic, retrieved Lorimer's unknown benefactor's hat

from the ground, issued orders for the removal of the two bodies.

"I was just doing a bit of slumming, Evans," said the stranger, "when these two fellows jumped me and tried to blackjack me. I had to shoot both of them to save my life."

Whoever or whatever the stranger was, the officer accepted this statement of the case without hesitation. He evidently knew this man, and from his attitude the stranger must have been of some consequence. He turned away from him and bent over the two dead men. He uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction when he saw the faces of the dead.

"Wanted, both of them!" he said. "And the rewards say dead or alive!"

"Take the reward yourself, Evans," said the stranger quietly, "I'll fix it up for you!"

Evans answered.

"You'll step down to the station for a few minutes, sir? Just a mere formality!"

Lorimer's benefactor nodded briefly.

LORIMER waited for no more. He had little time left. He hurried on into the depths of the alley.

Just before he quitted it to approach his objective, he looked back. The dead men were being borne from the alley, and his unknown friend was following the death-cavalcade. He could not have seen Lorimer, of course, but his hand lifted in an imperious gesture which said plainly.

"Keep going!"

A few minutes later Lorimer had reached the house, entered the basement, dropped to his knees to follow the tunnel back to the domain of Toad.

D'Strange was awaiting him as he entered the treasure house—and Lorimer noticed that the treasure in

the place had been materially increased.

He looked a question at D'Strange.

"A half dozen robberies," D'Strange said shortly, "in different parts of the city! If only we could see the papers tomorrow! I'll wager that the police will get the panning of their lives—to say nothing of the fact that our own superiors will be wondering just what we are doing and have already accomplished. But we'll soon make an end now—if you get that note through."

"I got through all right, and gave it to the first man I met who wore a red button in the left lapel of his coat."

"Describe him to me!"

Lorimer did so briefly.

"Describe the two men who trailed you after you had delivered the message!"

Lorimer must have looked his surprise, for D'Strange spoke again before he could answer.

"It is part of the system by which they acknowledge receipt of messages."

LORIMER described the two other men, told D'Strange of the fight at the mouth of the alley, of the death of the two would-be killers. D'Strange expressed satisfaction.

"You say it was the bull-like man, then the little freckle-faced fellow—after him the well-groomed business man?"

"Yes."

"That means, 'depend on us,' Lorimer! It is a code that the smartest crook in the city wouldn't pick up! If, for instance, the two shadows had followed you in a different order, it would have meant, 'something wrong, beware.'"

"It's beyond me, D'Strange. I tried to read the code, too."

"It's really simple, Lorimer. Perhaps, if it fell into the hands of someone not intended to receive it, it would be decoded correctly, though I doubt it. ACHMED is the key-word. Letters of the alphabet are numbered. Letters of the message are so placed that they will fall in groups of six as far as possible. Then the word ACHMED is placed above the message repeatedly, so that, one letter after another, a letter in the key-word falls above a letter of the message.

"Then the first letter, A, falls above the first letter of the message. Take the number representing the place of A in the alphabet, which is 1, and add the number of the first letter of the message, in this case F, and you have a total of 7. G is the seventh letter in the alphabet, and is the first letter of your code-message. Do this for the whole message and you have your code.

"To decode, take the first letter of your key-word and subtract it from the first letter of your code. One from 7 is six. Six represents the first letter of your decoded message. F is the sixth letter of the alphabet. Continue until you have the message decoded. The message you took was: *forty-eight hours to go!* It meant that our friends should be ready to get really busy in forty-eight hours—which, if we are lucky, will mean the end of the Yellow Hand!"

"Very clever, my friend! But the Yellow Hand is not to be caught so easily! You must think he has the mind of the child!"

D'STRANGE did not hear it, of course, but Lorimer did—and whirled to face the black mouth of the tunnel from which the dagger woman had first come out in an attempt to take his life. Nothing but darkness there, though Lorimer fancied he could see greenish eyes.

It was a peculiarly sing-song voice, and it sent the cold chills racing along Lorimer's spine.

"My God, D'Strange. Our plans have been overheard."

Lorimer had seized D'Strange's arm as he spoke. Dramatically, though he was not thinking of drama at the time, he pointed toward the black maw of the tunnel.

From another tunnel behind, there came suddenly that eerie whistle, which was like the singing of a canary, yet not like it, either! With this sound there came the sound of coughing, the scream of the dagger woman.

Then, out of the darkness it came, flickering, wavering, like the hand of a ghost. The greenish sheen, outlining the scarab ring. The light increased, a ball—like an uncanny will-o'-the-wisp — whirling, rolling, eddying.

It seemed to coalesce, to draw together in a wild configuration, to become stationary at last—and in the darkness of the tunnel, twenty yards or so from the treasure house, they could see plainly the terrible yellow hand, with its facile, swiftly moving fingers.

Then words in the same sing-song voice.

"Take them to the chamber of punishment!"

CHAPTER VIII

DESPERATE FIGHTING

THEN hell broke loose. The tunnels running into the treasure house seemed to vomit men. From all sides they came, closing in. With the fury of despair, knowing as they did the horrors which awaited them at the torture chamber, the partners fought the killers.

No knives appeared in the hands of the followers of the Yellow Hand

—they were to be taken alive, so that the brutal Yellow Hand would be able to gloat over them as they suffered the agonies of the damned—the hellish contrivances in the torture chamber; contrivances intended to rend and maim, to kill in the end.

Crouching, his feet wide apart, Lorimer lashed out with his hands. In them was all the relentless strength of the maniac—for Lorimer had visited the torture chamber before, had inspected it carefully since that first time when they had seen the hairy giant bear away the fighting woman, and knew what fate would be theirs if they lived to enter its portals.

OUT of the corner of his eye Lorimer saw D'Strange beside him. D'Strange seemed actually enjoying himself, though already his waxen face was streaked with blood where fingernails had scored his flesh.

Lorimer saw his great right fist smash into the face of a yellow man—and that man's face became a bloody smear, unrecognizable as a face. That blow had killed the man as surely as though it had been a blow from a sledge.

The man dropped and lay still. Bending, D'Strange lifted him with lightning speed, hurling him into the faces of the onrushing men. The men ducked instinctively, and the body hurtled on to vanish in the darkness of the tunnel in which they had just seen another manifestation of the yellow hand.

A burst of hellish laughter from the tunnel.

Words in that sing-song voice.

"Tell your wax-face friend, Lorimer, that this only adds a bit more to the account I have to settle with him! His torture will be prolonged for this killing!"

Lorimer did not tell D'Strange. It

were better that he did not know. But his knees grew weak as he caught and understood the words—and the killers closed in.

A hand came up bearing a black-jack. Lorimer darted in, drove his arm under the enemy's elbow, to grasp the hand which held the weapon. A powerful heave and the arm snapped.

The yellow man gave a scream of pain and ran into the tunnel—only to come hurtling back, high in the air as though shot from a catapult, his head hanging grotesquely, proof that some unseen agency out there in the darkness had witnessed his desertion, and thrown him back into the fight.

LORIMER saw him come hurtling back. He dodged the body and laughed—a laugh that sounded strangely in his own ears, though he knew it came from his own lips. He knew that he laughed, that he was crazy with bloodlust—and didn't care.

A man came in, crouched low—and Lorimer straightened him with a savage kick which struck him squarely beneath the chin.

D'Strange felled a man as large as himself. The fellow fell with his feet at the feet of D'Strange. D'Strange, his mask of a face devoid of all expression, bent and seized the man by the ankles. High he lifted him, swinging him about his head as though he had weighed nothing at all.

This human weapon he used with terrible effect—on the weapon. But for a time the attack was halted as the enemy drew back for a breathing space.

"Cowards!"

One word, freighted with anger! The savage voice of Toad! The barking of a weapon, a streak of flame from a tunnel mouth—and one

of the hesitating men plumped down, a hole between his eyes!

Again they closed in, circling this time to approach from all sides at once.

"Get your back against a wall, Lorimer!" shouted D'Strange.

The nearest solid vantage point was the door of the treasure house. They darted to this, lashing out savagely at those who opposed them. With their backs to this they stood side by side, fighting for their lives.

D'STRANGE now was almost unrecognizable. His face was a gory mess. Lorimer knew his own must have been as bad or worse, for often he had to slap his hand to his face to wipe his eyes—and the hand came away covered with red blood, his own. But he fought on.

There could be but one end to such a battle. Without the moral support of the Yellow Hand and Toad they might have beaten the enemy back long enough to have made a break for a tunnel—but with these two outside the attackers would give their lives in battle rather than admit themselves beaten.

Then the light in the treasure house went out!

Lorimer knew what that meant, for it never went out save when the door swung open! But it was too late. Darkness, the solid door swinging away from their backs, heavy bodies leaping upon them from ahead—a satanic laugh at their backs where the door had been.

Lorimer felt about his neck the noose of the strangler and knew that Happy held him helpless. He could feel Happy's great arms about him, pinioning his own to his sides—could hear Happy's guttural laugh in his ears.

Happy loosened the noose so that Lorimer could breathe. Then he lifted Lorimer and slung him across

his back. Lorimer could feel the weight of numbers all about him, and what the killers said, their ejaculations, told him that D'Strange had been taken.

Back through the treasure house the killers bore them. Into the tunnel which he knew led to the torture chamber.

Happy carried Lorimer so that the latter faced the way they were going. His eyes strove to pierce the darkness ahead, as he hoped against hope that some miracle would yet save them from those heartless contrivances which he was convinced the Yellow Hand would utilize upon their quivering bodies.

FAR ahead, moving on before them, the weird yellow hand, with the facile fingers ceaselessly opening and closing, led the way, high up against the roof of the tunnel in its nimbus of light. Lorimer could see the sheen of the scarab on the ring.

In the weird light he could make out the faces of those who bore them, horrible in their indistinctness—and every eye was fastened on that moving yellow hand in awful fascination—with the fixed stare of men who walk abroad in nightmares with their eyes open.

At last, Lorimer thought, they should have a glimpse of the man who was the Yellow Hand. He would lead his followers to the torture chamber and they would be able to see him against the light which came out. For, like the treasure house, the light always glowed in this chamber of horror—a yellowish warning to anyone who gazed upon the light.

Lorimer's eyes were wide open and staring, though he strove to retain control of himself so that this creature, whatever it was, would not again trick his senses as it had in

that first room of Toad, he watched the moving hand in utter fascination.

STRAIGHT ahead it moved toward the torture chamber—straight ahead until, faint and far away, he could see the light which peered into the network of tunnels from the chamber itself.

Now, Lorimer thought, he would see the body below the yellow hand.

But the hand kept in the shadow, though it beckoned their captors on. It kept out of the light as they approached in a way that was uncanny in the extreme. It finally stopped against the side of the room, still in the shadow, while the index finger pointed to the open door.

The greenish sheen of the scarab ring seemed more greenish and baleful than ever before.

The motley horde, increased now in numbers until they filled the torture chamber and overflowed still into the network of tunnels, pressed forward at the behest of the beckoning finger.

They were inside. D'Strange and Lorimer were hurled to the floor like bags of sand, to lie panting and bleeding, their eyes scouring the room for way out which they knew did not exist. Their clothes had all but been ripped from their bodies. They were more dead than alive.

But horror kept them conscious. Their eyes fixed upon the contrivances in the chamber as they wondered what would happen to them first.

They waited for word from the Yellow Hand. Their captors, as though obeying an unseen signal, squatted on the floor of the chamber. Their eyes went to the metal cabinet across the chamber—went to the cabinet as though it had been a lodestone, and held. Silently, scarcely breathing, the killers waited.

FROM outside came the burst of hellish laughter.

"Note well," came the sing-song voice, "the great cabinet across the room. You will observe that there are two cabinets, one above the other—and that the bottom one will just hold the body of a man standing upright. The upper cabinet is filled with water, and is exactly the size of the cabinet below. There is a hole between them, in the roof of the lower cabinet.

"It is a small hole, and with your hand you can hold back the water—but not forever. Sometime you must eat, and to eat you must take your hand away, and the water will pour through. It will take a long time, but even though your friends, the men who wear the little red buttons, enter the tunnels and capture or kill us all, they would never find you. For you will be gagged and locked in the cabinet—and the light in the chamber will be extinguished.

"If they find you it will be a miracle—and a still greater miracle if they can revive you after you are found! For, besides water, green and slimy, the upper cabinet is awrithed with blood-sucking leeches. A pleasant prospect, eh, Lorimer? Eh, D'Strange? Though your friends send me to hell, I will laugh in the face of Satan as I think of how I left you both. D'Strange, the great investigator, whose name has become a by-word among criminals!"

Again that hellish laughter. It died away and silence reigned for a time, as though the unseen creature were thinking of elaborations to his frightful scheme. Even their captors cowered as they waited, their frightened eyes searching the darkness fearfully.

"Ask your friend Lorimer, if he is enjoying pleasant thoughts!"

That sing-song voice.

"Just think of it, and tell your

deaf friend your thoughts. We will wait until your forty-eight hours are almost up, and cast you both into the cabinet. Remember, there are leeches in that water, blind leeches—and their activity causes untold agony."

As though in answer to these fiendish words there came to their ears the weird scream of the dagger woman.

"Dan!" screamed Toad. "Keep her away!"

A man rose from among their jailers. Lorimer saw that he had no liking for his job; yet he feared to disobey Toad.

He weaved his way among the squatting men and went out the door into the tunnels.

He never came back.

Instead, crouching there in the doorway, was the dagger woman.

CHAPTER IX

BATTLE TO THE DEATH

THROUGH all of the horror D'Strange had appeared almost unmoved.

Lorimer even imagined that he could read a faint hint of amusement in D'Strange's eyes as he noted the fear on the faces of Toad's followers, Lorimer's hopelessness, and when Lorimer had repeated for him the words of the Yellow Hand.

Lorimer soon understood why.

D'Strange's face twisted into a sardonic grin when the dagger woman crouched in the door of the torture chamber, her wild eyes gazing back into the darkness whence she had come—but only one who had known D'Strange as Lorimer had known him would have known it to be a grin.

Why was the dagger woman's knife so redly dripping?

What had she slain out there in the darkness of the tunnels? What was it that she feared?

From out of the darkness came the smashing roar of a pistol. Lorimer leaped to his feet, his lips telling D'Strange what he had heard.

"Open the cabinet. Hurl the spies inside."

It was the voice of Happy! Lorimer knew it was Happy's voice for he saw the moving of Happy's lips. Yet there was a peculiar quality in that voice which caused a cold wave to course through him.

The strangler had taken command of the situation—and that it was serious Lorimer knew at once. For, following that first pistol shot there came a veritable fusillade of shots.

FROM all directions came the sound of savage firing—the smacking of automatics, the crashing of eerie echoes through the tunnels.

No one paid any heed to this order of Happy's. Lorimer saw relief on many faces at this evidence of the approach of events that would take their minds off the horrors they had witnessed as they waited other horrors in prospect.

Every man in the chamber leaped to his feet. Toad towered majestically in the midst of her subjects, her eyes turned toward the entrance of the torture chamber.

The firing came nearer. Happy leaped to the door and into the tunnel. Toad at his side, a pistol in her right hand. The others crowded out of the chamber, milling about their two leaders.

D'Strange and Lorimer were in the midst of their captors still, though Lorimer noted that they were now paying their prisoners little heed.

Happy turned his masked face to D'Strange.

"So you tricked us after all, Wax Face!" he said savagely. "Then you shall stand among us and be shot down by your own friends.

They will not recognize you in the poor light and a bullet has no eyes. I could strangle you, but I prefer to watch your face as you stand here and wait for your friends to capture the place—only to find that they have killed their leader! Oh, you tricked us, all right, and I give you credit. So your code message, *forty-eight hours to go*, was a code within a code which, translated, meant to attack with all possible speed."

D'Strange nodded quietly. There was no anger in his eyes, nor pity, though Lorimer guessed that he felt a bit sorry for Toad, with all her faults and the sins he knew she would take with her from the world.

Happy, with Toad advising and directing, stationed his men. Their number was being constantly augmented by other men who came in from the mouths of all tunnels, fear in their faces until their eyes fell upon Toad. Then their fear would vanish.

These people of the grottos would die bravely, there was no doubt of that—and would ask for no quarter.

Far down the various tunnels they could see pin-points of light. Against these squares, rectangles and circles of light they could see men running toward them. Could see them turn and fire back into the light, at some approaching Juggernaut which D'Strange and Lorimer could not see.

THE partners could see them fall as they fired, to lie still in the everlasting sleep which they had so manfully earned. But there were some who did not fall, and these came on to swell the numbers of those who stood beside Happy and Toad.

Slowly, relentlessly, the attackers surged toward the chamber, bearing great flashlights that made the tunnels as bright as day—great fingers of light that came from the mouths

of all the tunnels, proof that, somehow, D'Strange had been able to get the plan of these grottos out to his friends, so that they had been able to close in from all sides at once, shutting off all escape.

THE gang recognized this too, and looked to their weapons, holding their fire. They planned to make every bullet count.

On, relentlessly, came the attackers—represented as yet only by those great fingers of light, and the streaks of flame vomited forth by their spitting weapons.

There were screams from those who had been caught in the tunnels and sorely wounded—screams as the wounded fought against capture. Screams that were cut short when quarter was refused or a man took the easiest way out by his own hand.

Then Happy jumped to the wall of the torture chamber and pressed against it.

Instantly great beams of light shot down each of the tunnels which converged on the torture chamber. Someone had long ago foreseen such an emergency as this and had made plans accordingly.

The lights were far more powerful than those of the attackers, and in their bright glare they could make out those who bore down upon them. The tunnels were alive with men. Men with harsh, unyielding faces, weapons gripped tightly in their hands, their eyes glued to the knot of criminals that surrounded D'Strange and Lorimer.

They were very close now, and as yet Happy's men had not fired a shot. Lorimer studied these men who charged—and saw that on the left lapel of each there rested a little red button. Long ago D'Strange had told him he had operatives whom Lorimer had not yet seen—and here before his eyes was proof.

D'Strange had not told Lorimer everything about the case, which proved that he had not entirely taken him into his confidence. Some of these men had followed D'Strange from Washington, and had been in touch with him since the moment he had left the train. Some of them might have preceded him—some of them might have been among the opium smokers who frequented the catacombs—watching, always watching, preparing the ground for the masterly occupation by D'Strange.

THESE detail men had built up an organization efficiently, apparently independent of D'Strange—and while D'Strange had been, to all appearance, in the power of Toad and the Yellow Hand.

Yet he had been behind it all, and had made his plans carefully, guarding against every possible chance of failure.

D'Strange came to Lorimer's side and spoke.

"Do you see now, Lorimer? Though I denied it before, merely because I knew my words might have been overheard, *I did* read the first message of the Yellow Hand! It contained instructions to Toad to ask us to join the organization, solely for the purpose of keeping us under the eyes of the great organization of which the Yellow Hand is the head and, deliberately, though the move should not have fooled a child, I did as Toad asked me; but we were recognized for what we are the very instant we left the train.

"We didn't make a move that was not born in the fertile brain of the Yellow Hand. The hurling of the dead Chinese down the stairs just as we passed the hotel door was deliberately intentional—and I knew it when I examined the corpse, which was cold! It had been dead for many hours!"

By now, however, the pistols of their captors had begun to speak.

"Watch me, Wax Face!" cried Toad. "Watch me shoot away some of those little red buttons!"

Her pistol spoke as she finished her boast, and the foremost of the attackers dropped like a log. Even as he dropped Lorimer saw that the red button on his coat had vanished—and that a red stain had come to take its place.

STILL the attackers came on—in silence, save for the regular spitting of their weapons. The gangsters fell like flies. Though D'Strange and Lorimer stood in the midst of the criminals no bullets found them, proof that they had been recognized.

But Happy had not yet noted this. He was too busy marshaling his forces, too active keeping his little army properly placed. He seemed to be everywhere at once, commanding, exhorting, mouthing threats.

Toad's weapon spoke again—and another button vanished. Toad laughed shrilly, calling to D'Strange to take note of the accuracy of her firing. Toad was enjoying herself. She had lived by violence and had no fear of dying by violence.

The attackers were close now—and the tunnels had become a bedlam. A veritable hail of bullets filled the air, which was acrid with the odor of burned gunpowder. The dead on both sides lay thickly. It was to be a finish fight, no quarter asked on either side.

Most of the flashlights had been shot from the hands of the attackers. The fight was now being waged by the lights cast from the lights which Happy had clicked on.

Happy paused in his fighting. He still wore a mask. No bullet had yet touched him. Had D'Strange warned the attackers to take him alive if possible? He rushed past

Lorimer toward the wall of the torture chamber.

Lorimer put forth his hand, on a sudden impulse, to tear away the mask. His fist caught Lorimer in the face, hurling him all of ten feet.

HAPPY reached the wall and pressed his hand against it.

Instantly the lights went out.

At the same moment, near the top of the larger tunnel, in which the main part of the fight was taking place, there glowed a great spot of weird light. In this light there instantly shot a yellow hand—an effeminate hand wearing a scarab ring. At the same time there came that sing-song voice which Lorimer had not heard since the dagger woman had so dramatically come out of the darkness to crouch in the door of the torture chamber.

"You think to take the Yellow Hand so easily! Ha! ha! ha! You fight against greater powers than you know! Ha! ha! ha!"

For a moment the firing of the attackers ceased. It was as though this weird manifestation had stunned them. Not so the criminals.

Lorimer could feel the very atmosphere grow tenser, as though every man there crouched in readiness for the last grand effort, which was destined to lead them all forth to freedom—those who yet remained alive.

It was the voice of D'Strange that broke the spell. He broke away from their captors, seizing Lorimer's hand and dragging him along, and hurled himself toward the attackers.

"Keep firing. Redouble your efforts. It is a trick. Do not watch the Yellow Hand. Keep your eyes away from it with every effort of your will. Fight as you never thought to fight."

With a whispered word D'Strange

slipped away, dropping to his knees to be below the line of fire of their attacking friends. Lorimer knew that he was deliberately going back among the followers of Toad. Why?

THEIR friends had heard his words—and the personality of D'Strange had caused them to do his bidding. The Yellow Hand still flickered at the roof of the tunnel—and now the fingers began to spell out a message, moving faster than it seemed possible for fingers to move.

The battle was now hand to hand. There were savage screams, terrible oaths.

Then the tunnels again became as light as day—and Lorimer saw Happy struggling fiercely in the hands of D'Strange. D'Strange had found the button and they no longer fought in darkness. D'Strange hurled Happy from him and darted back. A great cry from Toad.

"Happy. Happy. Don't let them take me."

Instantly the great brute was at her side. Out of his clothes he produced the strangler's noose, flipping it over her head. But the noose never tightened.

The "businessman" who had saved Lorimer's life when Lorimer had taken D'Strange's message to ACHMED, had leaped forward and hurled himself upon the strangler.

They fought there, friends and enemies of both watching them, while Toad's weapon took up the fire. Lorimer hurried forward, his arms extended to take Toad prisoner—for he had now noted that, though she pressed the trigger of her weapon frantically, no streak of flame resulted. She had no more ammunition.

But just as Lorimer's hands would have touched her, while her green eyes flashed into his, open and un-

afraid, a gory figure arose from among the dead.

It was the dagger woman! Her upraised arm, wielding the dagger, was directed at Lorimer's throat. But in the infinitesimal instant required for the savage thrust Toad hurled herself in the path of the down-plunging blade, herself taking the point of the weapon.

"Sorry it didn't get you, Lorimer!" and Toad smiled. "But it was my only chance to evade capture."

These were the last words ever spoken by Toad. She died as she had lived—by violence.

The fight was practically over.

The men with red buttons in the left lapels of their coats had captured or killed most of the enemy. D'Strange had again come to grips with Happy the strangler, while the others now formed a great circle about the combatants.

What was D'Strange trying to do? He had a weapon in his hand now, and could have used it at will; but he made no effort to do so, devoting his efforts to disarming Happy. Several times he strove to tear the man's mask from his face; but each time Happy evaded him.

His hand went to the mask another time, swift as the darting of a serpent's tongue—and Happy's hand flew to his own face.

Instantly D'Strange's hand swerved, and before Happy knew that it had been a ruse to throw him off guard, D'Strange had disarmed him.

HAPPY straightened where he stood. His eyes, glowing redly through his mask, roved over the faces of his enemies. Then they went to the roof of the tunnel. Every eye followed his glance.

There, where they had seen it last, was the yellow hand, in its nimbus of light, visible only because the tunnel roof was beyond the

reach of the great lights in the wall of the torture chamber.

The fingers were swiftly moving, spelling out some message. Lorimer heard a gasp of astonishment from the lips of D'Strange.

Their friends watched the hand as though spellbound. What caused the appearance of the hand, too high above for anyone to reach?

BY an effort of will Lorimer forced his eyes away from the weird, sinister hand, and back to fasten upon Happy.

A ghastly change was coming over him.

He seemed to be shrinking into himself, though his eyes were still roving over those who hemmed him in—fiercely roving, as though by sheer force of will he would find a way out of his predicament. He bent at the waist, and his shoulders seemed to arch in a repulsive fashion. His legs seemed suddenly to twist grotesquely.

Lorimer could not see his face, but he knew that he was looking upon the hunchback, as he would have appeared without the four-wheeled vehicle upon which he sat as he sold papers in the city streets!

Without his vehicle he looked like the great spidery creature Lorimer had seen the night of the robbery, when a streak of silver had darted into the beam of the flash to snuff out the life of a safe-blower. Playing it had been, all of it. Even to the clump-clumping of the wooden leg.

Of them all, only D'Strange and Lorimer were watching Happy. The

rest were watching that sinister yellow hand at the roof of the tunnel. Happy's eyes roved over them.

THEN when he felt that no eyes, save D'Strange and Lorimer, were upon him, he made a break. Lowering his head he charged, like a bull, at the circle of men. Instantly D'Strange was upon him.

A crashing blow to the butt of the ear and Happy fell in a heap. D'Strange snatched the mask from his face—and Lorimer saw that it was the same repulsive nightmarish face he had seen above him the night of the robbery! The hunchback!

The very instant that D'Strange's hand felled Happy to the ground, the yellow hand vanished.

They stood about the beaten man.

"D'Strange," Lorimer asked, "what did those fingers say?"

"They said: 'You win this time, D'Strange!'"

Happy was handcuffed between two of the attackers and the march through the darkened tunnels was begun.

D'Strange explained to Lorimer the mystery of the bodiless hand.

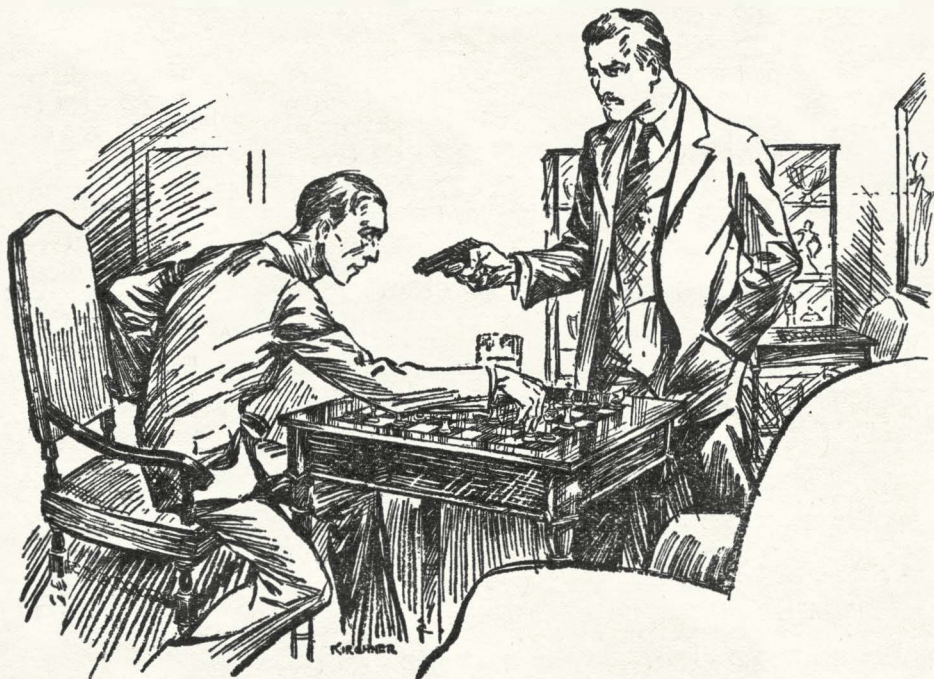
"The scarab ring on the finger is a clue," he said. "In a ring on Happy's finger a tiny hand was etched on the inner face of what seemed to be a diamond. By turning on a little light behind the figure, with mere pressure on the ring, he caused the hand, many times magnified, to appear when and where he desired.

"And so ends our mission in Seattle."

THE END

Next Month: Begin "The Big Shot," A New Sensational and Gripping Serial Novel of Organized Crime, by the Famous Detective Writer, John G. Brandon. Don't Miss It!

CHESS PROBLEMS



A Detective Who Has His Hobbies Meets A Crook Who Has Them, Too!

By **ALEXANDER SAMALMAN**

Author of "New York at Night," "The Price," etc.

NOISE was prevalent, always, at the Laskeronian Chess Club. Noise was king. A game generally played in quietude was played here amid the babbling of tongues and the clatter of chessmen.

The clubroom was remarkably furnished. Twenty-four mahogany chess tables lined the walls. Seldom was a table without a duo of players and at least a trio of onlookers. In glass cases, several silver chess sets and every sort of expensive, attractive chess paraphernalia was displayed.

At a table in a far corner of the

room sat a red-haired, red-mustached, middle-aged man who in business hours was a detective, and in all other hours was a chess devotee. He bent over the board, on which were arranged two white rooks, a white king, and a black king and queen. The problem was to checkmate with the queen in four moves.

Anthony Quick bent every faculty upon solving it, oblivious of the noise of his fellow club members. Quick was as greatly interested in chess problems as in playing the game itself.

At another table, a laugh arose; a

poor player had made another stupid mistake. It issued from a dozen or more mouths, and was loud enough to be heard through the window by a passer-by.

But Quick kept on gazing at the board and pieces before him; he did not look up for an instant.

It is needless to recount the various disturbances that disturbed Quick not at all. As time passed—and time always passes quickly at a chess club—the contenders left in pairs.

AT twelve a man stepped to Quick's side.

"Time to leave, Tony."

"Sorry, but I've got to finish this. I'll lock the place up when I go."

"S'long."

The only man left now was Quick, still striving to attain his end, and muttering softly to himself over the vicissitudes of the problem.

"If I move here—no! It wouldn't be good. This might do. No, the rook is on the way. What a problem! Let's see, if—no, that wouldn't work."

At one, he decided to quit trying. As he rose, he was greatly surprised to see a man in the act of stealing something from a case.

In a moment he had his revolver leveled at the intruder.

"Come here," he ordered.

The burglar, a thin, sickly fellow, much in need of a shave, slowly ambled to a safe distance.

"What were you doing?" asked Quick.

"You know as well as I."

The captor displayed his badge.

"Never knew the detectives fooled with chess till one in the morning," said the burglar with an assumed air of indifference.

Catching sight of the problem, he bent over it, drew his hands near the table, moved a piece, then an-

other—in a moment, he had solved it.

"Huh!" gasped Quick, more astonished than when he had first caught sight of the man. He added admiringly, warmly: "Say, I worked at that since ten!"

"Nothin' at all, nothin' at all," assured the burglar. "Sam Wilton—that's me—can solve any little old problem in the chess dictionary."

"Wow!" exclaimed the captor. "You're a clever crook. Now that I know who you are, I'll introduce myself—Tony Quick."

Wilton recoiled. Quick was a detective who had been mentioned to him by gangster friends many times.

"Mr. Quick," asked Wilton, "before you pull me in, will you be so kind as to play me a game?"

"Well—"

Quick hesitated. He should immediately lead out the thief—but, oh, wouldn't it be sport to play with someone who could solve problems that quickly!

WILTON seated himself. The pieces were placed in position.

"But say," questioned Quick, the doubt showing in his expression, "I can't keep you covered with a gun and play at the same time, can I?"

"Oh, bother! I haven't got a weapon, and if I had I wouldn't use it."

A search having been instituted by the detective, the game started. From the very beginning, Wilton played well. Quick, also, was capable of keeping his side of the game going pleasingly. Twice he had won championships of the Laskeronian Chess Club.

During the game Quick suddenly recognized Wilton's features.

"Say," he burst out, "I think you were up for a year in '27."

"Sure thing. I guess I'll soon be up again."

"It's too bad I have to pull you in . . . but it's my job. You understand?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"Well, continue the game."

"Let's go."

The battle lasted nearly an hour. Wilton was the victor.

"Oh, gee!" moaned Quick. "Think of being beaten by a crook! I'll say that you can play!"

"Learnt how in prison."

"Got something out of your jail stretch, eh?"

"In games I'm nothin' at all. It's the problems I like."

"Me too. Well, I guess we'd better be—"

"Hold on! Let's stay a while. I just thought of a peachy problem. Sit down. Look!"

Wilton spread six or seven pieces in different positions on the board.

"White mates in three moves. See if you can do it."

Quick bent over the problem.

"It is hard. But a player like you ought to be able to—"

The compliment to his ability led Quick to try to solve the problem.

"It's two now," said the burglar. "See how long it takes you."

QUICK concentrated on the problem.

"Let's see," he muttered, "if I

move here, the black bishop is in the way. Here, the pawn is. Don't think I can move this castle anywhere. Oh, here—no! What's the use? I'll get it sometime though, I guess."

But, try as he might, Quick could not solve the problem. The former one, compared to it, was mere child's play.

He grew more and more immersed in his problem. Patiently he sat, not moving a muscle, regarding the pieces on the board, his mind active.

Suddenly he looked up and said loudly: "I'll be blowed if I can—"

HE paused in the middle of his sentence. No one was in the room! The hour hand of the clock pointed to four. "Well, of all—"

A great fear entered Quick's head. He rushed to the nearest glass case. It was open. The silver chess set, the little gold statuettes of famous exponents of the game—all, all were gone.

Pallid, Quick rushed to another case. Conditions were the same.

On a table he found a neatly written note:

"S'long. As a detective, you make a good chess player. Needn't go on with the problem; it has never been solved and never will be. Also, my name is not Sam Wilton."



DEATH'S RACE



The Sixth of a Sensational Series of Stories of a Self-Appointed Avenger Making a Single-Handed Fight Against a Powerful Criminal Group

An Alias Mr. Death Story

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "Dead Man's Drop," "The Long Arm of Vengeance," etc.

NINE chairs stood about the long mahogany table of the room. Yet only four of them were occupied. A single but powerful electric bulb threw white searching light down from the ceiling, accentuating the emptiness of the vacant chairs.

At the head of the table sat a masked man. His two gleaming eyes shone through a pair of slits in the

blackness of the hood which covered his entire face. For a moment his nervous gaze rested on the black countenances of three others in the room who were masked like himself, then for a moment it scanned the empty seats. His forefinger drummed a nervous tattoo on the table.

An air of apprehension enveloped the chamber, as the three others sat silent, evidently waiting for him at

the head of the table to speak. But their leader said no word. Instead he sat there, grim and silent, and despite the covering on his face it was apparent that some powerful emotion held him in its grip.

It was obvious that Number One of the Murder Club was afraid; and his fear had subtly communicated itself to the remaining three members of this nefarious organization.

Finally, a tense hoarse voice broke the sinister ominous silence of the council room.

"For God's sake, Number One, say something. I can't stand this any longer. Why did you call this meeting? What's wrong?"

Some one sighed with relief at the sound of a human voice; and the man at the head of the table seemed to cast off the silent spell which had held him in thall.

Slowly he rose to his feet and spoke in a slow somber tone, the voice of a man who is weary of life, who is burdened down with terrible responsibilities.

"Comrades," he said solemnly. "I am about to make an admission that I never thought I would be compelled to make. We are defeated. We have been outwitted at every turn. The power of the Murder Club has been successfully challenged. We are impotent to deal with our deadly enemy. He has slain more than half our membership; and all our plans to deal with him have gone awry."

HE paused for a moment, and the man who had spoken first rose from his seat.

"You mean Alias Mr. Death, of course," he said. "I admit you're right. I admit that he's licked us at every turn. But what are we to do? What?"

His voice was high and contained a hint of hysteria as he spoke the last words. The other two figures

looked eagerly at their leader as the question was propounded.

The man at the head of the table shrugged his shoulders and spread his palms upward.

WHAT, indeed?" he replied bitterly. "There seems little we can do against him. That is the reason that I have called this meeting. There are four of us left. Four out of our original membership of nine. We have lost more than half of our men and almost all of our power. I realize that since Mr. Death began his frustrating of our plans none of us are as wealthy as we had been. Yet we must keep our heads. We must not permit our rage at our enemy to sway us. He has beaten us, and there is but one answer."

"And that is?" asked someone.

"To get out. To quit. But before we do it, we shall pull one last job. One last job that will give us back all the wealth Mr. Death has cost us. Then we shall dissolve the Murder Club. Take our profits and get out. That is the only way we can save our lives. Are you gentlemen agreed?"

For a moment the terrible silence which had pervaded the room swept back upon it, and the four men sat there grim and quiet as their distorted minds considered if dissolution of their organization which for so long had controlled the destinies of Newkirk City was the only method by which their lives could be put out of reach of the long murderous arm of Mr. Death.

Then, suddenly, one of the hooded men nodded his head decisively.

"I agree, Number One," he said. "The strain of carrying on is too much. Not one of us knows when Mr. Death will strike us down; not one of us knows when we shall go to join our comrades. I agree with you. Only show us how to regain

the fortunes that we have lost through the machinations of Mr. Death, then we will dissolve."

A MURMUR of assent went through the room as the leader rose once again.

"I already have made the plans," he said. "I have already taken the first steps. We should split about five million dollars. I believe it is Number Nine's turn for duty."

Number Nine stood up and bowed.

"Then, gentlemen," continued Number One, "I suggest you leave us. We shall discuss the plan in detail. If you are needed you shall be informed. If not, you shall be sent your share of the spoils. But no one must know more than is absolutely necessary. Hence I ask you to leave us alone while I give Number Nine the details of the scheme I have arranged."

Two of the masked men rose, and bowed toward their leader and the comrade whose turn it was to devote himself to the business of the Murder Club.

Soon the two men were left alone. Smoke from innumerable cigars thickened the air of the room as they talked far into the night. Plotting, planning, for the final job that was to outwit Mr. Death and restore the Murder Club's members to its former financial prestige. Daylight showed over the hills to the east of Newkirk before the pair of masked men stopped talking.

Following the custom Number Nine bowed and left the room, leaving the leader to himself. Number One seated himself when he was alone, and hummed a merry little melody. He was more at ease than he had been in weeks. After all, he still had his life, and when his plan had been put into operation he would be a cool million dollars richer.

Mayor Richman of Newkirk City sat at the huge desk in his office and puffed mechanically at a panatella. City Hall was deserted. It was long since the other employees had gone home. The building was in darkness save for the dim bulbs which lit the halls to show the watchman his way, and the blaze of light which shone from the chandeliers in the mayor's office.

The mayor suddenly jerked open a drawer of the desk and withdrawing a brown bottle and a tumbler poured himself a stiff shot of excellent French brandy. Yet even the warm glow of the alcohol coursing through his veins failed to banish the apprehension that was upon him.

For the fiftieth time in as many minutes he glanced down at a slip of paper on his desk and read the typewritten words thereon.

MR. MAYOR:

On Monday night you will remain after hours in your office until our representative calls upon you. Death shall be the penalty if you refuse to obey or set a trap.

(signed)

THE MURDER CLUB.

He puffed the cigar nervously, then suddenly froze to immobility in his chair, his eyes glued to the door of the office which was slowly moving inward. His hands clenched themselves into fists and his eyes stared at the moving portal until they ached.

SLOWLY the door swung open. Gradually a black-garbed figure appeared. Two eyes gleamed from slits in the ebon hood which fell to the visitor's shoulders. Then the door slammed, and a metallic voice spoke.

"Good evening, Mr. Mayor. I see you received our note."

Richman nodded. His throat was too dry for words.

"Good," continued the other, as he

drew up a chair. "Now let's get down to business."

THE mayor fidgeted as his unwelcome visitor sat down, and hoped that this call did not presage anything too serious. It was not the first time that the mayor had been honored by a visit from the notorious Murder Club. Far from it, the organization controlled the political destinies of the city, and thus far no public servant had ever dared to disobey, save one, and his only reward was the elegant words engraved on the tombstone which marked his grave.

"I have called," said the hooded man, "to discuss with you the new park which the city contemplates erecting. I know that the Board of Alderman have not yet selected the site. Further, I know that you control the board.

"I have come to tell you where the park shall be made. On the corner of Vine and Race Streets there are sixty acres of swampy land. Those sixty acres are owned by the Devine Corporation. You will purchase that land for the park. You will assay it at the sum of five million dollars which will be paid to the corporation. Do you understand?"

Richman gasped. Then suddenly found his voice.

"But good God, man! That swamp land isn't worth a nickel. The only place up that way that's worth anything are the two blocks which run on that hill through the center of the swamp. The rest is valueless."

"I am not here to argue," said the masked man with a sinister ring in his voice. "In fact I quite agree with you. The land isn't worth a damn, save for the three blocks of which you speak and which the Devine Corporation does not own. However, you will go through with the condemnation proceedings.

"You will give the owner of the three good blocks as little as possible. Certainly not more than ten thousand. The Devine people must be awarded the rest of the money. Is that thoroughly understood?"

For a moment, Richman's eyes lit with a gleam of hope. He nodded his head affirmatively. The expression in his eyes, however, was not lost on his masked visitor.

"I can guess what you're thinking," he said. "You imagine that all you have to do is to find out who the officers of the Devine Corporation are, then you know the identity of some of the Murder Club members.

"Don't bank too much on that. First, the corporation is in the hands of trustworthy dummies, and second, any overt act on your part will be dealt with as all the enemies of the Murder Club are dealt with. You understand your orders. Are there any questions?"

The hooded man rose, indicating that the interview was at an end. Mayor Richman turned an appealing face toward him.

"Do you realize you're ruining me?" he asked in agonized tones. "Do you realize that if I do this I am ruined in Newkirk City? My career is over?"

"I'm not interested in that," said the other. "You'll obey instructions. That's all I have to say. Good evening."

The door opened, then slammed, leaving the mayor of Newkirk City alone with his none too pleasant thoughts.

NOT for a moment, did the mayor entertain the slightest idea of disobeying the Murder Club. No, the organization was too powerful for that; and he did not have the least conception of how their power had

been curtailed of late by the depredations of Alias Mr. Death.

TRUE, he had heard of the phantom marauder who left his card at the scenes of his killings, but Richman had no way of knowing that Mr. Death's victims were members of the club, or that the phantom avenger was anything more than an ordinary, though unusually colorful crook.

Richman realized that if he pulled the raw deal that he had been ordered to do, he was ruined. Yet after all, it was better to have a career aborted and remain alive, than to be slaughtered in one's bed as had those others who had dared defy the organization which had just given him its orders.

With a heavy heart the mayor of Newkirk extinguished the lights in his office and walked slowly from the building to his home.

James Quincy Gilmore, Junior, pressed the doorbell once more. As he heard the bolts shot he smiled, already anticipating the fresh young feminine face that would appear. The door opened and his smile vanished. Replaced by an expression of grave concern.

"Why Sally," he said as he entered the room and put his arm around the girl with the tear-stained face. "Why, what's the matter? What's wrong?"

Sally Fortune wiped her eyes on an absurdly small piece of Irish lace and fought for control of her voice, while Jimmy eyed her apprehensively.

IN all the years of their acquaintance he had never seen this girl give way to tears.

At last she spoke.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy," she said. "I'm sorry I called you. I suppose I'm silly to go on like this. But as you

know my sole income, since daddy died, has come from those three blocks of buildings up at Race and Vine."

"Sure," said Jimmy. "What of it?"

"I'm going to lose it."

"Lose it? How?"

"It's been condemned by the city for the new park."

"Well," reassured Jimmy. "That won't do any harm. That land's worth real money. They'll pay you plenty for it. Then you can invest in something else. That's nothing to worry about."

SHE dried her eyes again. "But it is something to worry about," she said with tearful emphasis. "They're only giving me ten thousand for it."

"What!" Jimmy almost leaped from his chair.

Sally nodded. "Ten thousand," she said again. "That's all."

"Ten thousand! That's an outrage. That property's worth ten times as much."

"I know it is. But they sent me a letter today telling me it had been condemned and that they would pay ten thousand for it."

Jimmy Gilmore's face became suddenly grim. "Let me see their letter."

Sally Fortune crossed the room and took a letter from the desk in the corner. She handed it to him.

A frown crossed his brow as he read it. Then abruptly he rose to his feet.

"Listen," he said. "Let me handle this for you. And promise me not to worry. Of course, legally, we can't do anything, but I have a hunch and if it works out, things might be all right. Now promise me to stop crying, and let me attend to it."

She looked into his eyes. "Jimmy," she said earnestly. "I'll promise. If you'll handle it for me, I'll promise not to worry."

"Good. Don't mention it to anyone and don't do a thing about it until you hear from me. I'll call you later."

He strode from the room, a grim and bitter expression on his young bronzed face.

FOR more than two hours Jimmy Gilmore walked round and round the City Hall building. Through its long corridors he marched, his keen eyes searching through the crowds. He paid particular attention to the private office of the mayor.

There was an outer reception room before the sanctum of Newkirk's chief executive. The door was open and a secretary was busily bending over a desk. Evidently this sight interested Jimmy as time and time again he marched past the open door and shot a swift glance at the man working in the reception room.

Then on one of his many journeys through the building, the break for which he had been waiting came. The secretary rose from his desk and leaving the room for a moment marched down the long corridor to the water fountain at the extreme end of the hall.

Jimmy Gilmore lost no time. Casting a speedy look around to make sure that he was unobserved, he slipped through the reception room door, pulling it closed behind him. Then he did a peculiar thing.

He whipped a small black cloth object from his pocket and with a deft motion pulled it over his head. It was a mask which reached to his shoulders; a hood similiar to that used by the members of the Murder Club, save that it bore a white skull painted over his right temple.

Then with a determined purposeful walk he strode toward the private office of the mayor and flung open the door.

Mayon Richman looked up from his desk and gasped as he gazed into the unwavering barrel of an automatic in the steady hand of a hooded man. In his excitement he failed to notice the painted white skull on the other's mask, and immediately took the intruder for the same man who had visited him a few nights ago.

"Good God!" he said hoarsely. "Has the Murder Club no better sense than to send a man here in broad daylight?"

Jimmy Gilmore smiled grimly. He had suspected that the club he had sworn to exterminate had had a hand in this business and the Mayor's words corroborated that theory. He closed the door behind him and turned the key in the lock.

"I'm not from the Murder Club," he said quietly.

The mayor stared at him, wonder and puzzlement on his face.

"Not from the Murder Club," he repeated. "Then what—"

Jimmy answered the question for him before he had completely phrased it.

"I'm Mr. Death. And if you make any outcry you shall see that I am well named."

But Richman was beyond calling for help. His jaw dropped. His face turned ashen. His fingers lay still and nerveless upon the desk.

MR. DEATH!" he said and the tremor in his voice indicated that he would have found the Murder Club's emissary more welcome than this stranger who held his threatening weapon firmly in his hand.

"Yes," he said. "Now we're going to have a little talk, Mr. Mayor, and—" He glanced significantly down at the gun in his hand. "I'd advise you to speak the truth. That remark you made as I came in the door when you mistook me for a

member of the Murder Club was enlightening. In fact, it confirmed the hunch I had when I came here. You know what I'm here about, of course."

THE mayor shook his head. The stark terror that shone in his eyes reflected the state of his emotions. If he feared the Murder Club, he at least knew how he stood with them; but now facing the phantom Mr. Death at whose door half a dozen killings had been laid, he was in an abject paralysis of fear.

"I'm here," went on Jimmy, "About the condemnation proceedings for the new park."

Richman started.

"You too!" he ejaculated.

Jimmy eyed him shrewdly. "I, too," he said quietly. "I take it the Murder Club has a hand in this also."

Richman nodded miserably. The weapon in Jimmy's hand moved toward him threateningly.

"Then tell me, Mr. Mayor," he said in a soft voice that was belied by the look in his eyes. "Tell me all about it."

Richman's heart pounded wildly as he considered the unenviable situation in which he found himself. If he talked, the threat of the Murder Club hung over his head. On the other hand, if he refused to talk—he stared at the automatic in front of him, and decided to throw himself on his captor's mercy.

"Listen," he said hoarsely. "What can I do? I'm between the devil and the deep sea. On one hand, you threaten my life. On the other, I face the Murder Club. What can I do?"

Jimmy Gilmore considered this for a silent moment.

"I'll tell you something," he said suddenly. "Something no one else in the world save the Club and myself know. I'm not the ruthless killer

that most people in this town think. I'm masquerading as I am for one single purpose—and that is to wipe the Murder Club from the face of the earth. Every man that I have killed has been a member of that organization.

"I mean to go on until I have slain them all. They are powerless to work against me. I'm giving you your choice. Deal with me and I'll guarantee you my protection against them. Or if you think they can save you from me throw me in with them. All right, I'm waiting for your answer."

RICHMAN, never a particularly strong character, stared blankly at the unwavering gun muzzle before him and decided to throw his lot in with the man who sat before him. After all, it was Mr. Death who sat before him now. He could deal with the Murder Club afterwards. In a thin quavering voice he related the entire story of the condemnation proceedings.

When he finished his story he looked anxiously at Jimmy.

"Well?" he asked nervously. "What about it?"

"Simply this," said Jimmy Gilmore. "The scheme must not go through. I know as well as anyone else in this town that you control the aldermanic board. You will call a meeting tomorrow. You will notify the press of this meeting. There you will rescind the resolution and offer the fair amount to the owner of the three valuable blocks. To this Devine Corporation you will offer ten thousand dollars which is about what their property is actually worth."

"All right," said Richman readily—too readily.

But his sudden acquiescence did not escape the masked man.

"Don't think you can pull any tricks," he advised dryly. "I shall

sit with the audience in the aldermanic chamber. I shall have my gun ready. And if you say or do anything other than I have told you, I shall shoot you down where you stand."

Richman squirmed in his chair.

"But think of me," he whined. "What about the Murder Club? They'll kill me if you don't."

"They won't kill you at the meeting," said Jimmy brusquely. "For they won't know what it's all about until after it's happened."

"But then what?"

"I've given you my word, I'll protect you. You'll have to be content with that."

The mayor stared at the compelling eyes which returned his gaze through the holes in the mask and nodded his head. He had but little choice in the matter.

But somehow it seemed the man before him exuded an air of assurance, of confidence, that made him feel a little at ease. If ever there was a man who could save him from the vengeance of the predatory club, he felt it was the man before him now.

"All right," he said at last. "I agree. But for God's sake see me tomorrow after the meeting. The club will be after me sure by then!"

"You control the police," said Jimmy. "Surround yourself with a bodyguard. The club won't be able to get near you then. Anyway, I'll keep an eye on you."

He rose and walked to the door. "Pick up that phone on your desk," he said, "And send your secretary outside for a walk while I get out of here."

RICHMAN did as he was bid, and Jimmy hearing the footsteps outside, unlocked the door. He slipped the key into his hand. Then swiftly stepped into the reception

room, locking the door of the private office behind him and leaving the key in the lock. Then he removed his mask and walked boldly down the long corridor whistling softly to himself.

Jimmy Gilmore returned to the huge house which had become so lonely since the death of his father, and seating himself at his desk in the study gave himself over to the study of the situation before him.

Ever since that bitter night on which his father had been slain by the Murder Club because he had been about to expose them, Jimmy had devoted himself to wiping out that notorious organization. He had already accounted for five of a total membership of nine, and now, he had stumbled upon another of their plans.

HE was glad now that he had used the character of Mr. Death which he had created, to protect Sally's fortune. It was the first time that he had assumed the role without being sure that he was on the trail of the Murder Club. His principal idea had been to frighten the mayor into explaining the park deal which obviously was crooked. And in so doing he had discovered that once again his trail had crossed that of the Murder Club.

And now once again he was hot on the scent of the quarry he had vowed to exterminate. Not that this fact filled him with any sense of elation. For Jimmy Gilmore, in order to keep his terrible oath had given up all the worth-while things in life. Though he loved Sally Fortune, he could no longer ask her to be his wife—the wife of a murderer.

No, everything had been surrendered, everything given up to the avenging of his father's death. He sighed as he lighted a cigarette. Well, five of them were already gone.

There were but four left, and if his plans worked out, and he could come face to face with the member who was handling this land condemnation business, his work would be nearer its end.

FINALLY he went on up to bed. For a long time he lay there, awake and sleepless with a terrible bitterness in his heart at the man who had killed his father and made of him an outlaw, a man who could no longer take his rightful place in decent society. Eventually, when dawn thrust her gray fingers over the horizon, he slept fitfully.

Mayor Richman's night was even more sleepless than that of Jimmy Gilmore. He lay in a luxurious bed in an even more luxurious bedroom and pondered the position in which his own weakness and cowardice had placed him.

For years, now, the Murder Club had dictated the policies of the city unmolested, and thus far the mayor had not suffered by it. He had been well taken care of as long as he did what he was told. Now the club had demanded something of him which would wreck his professional career, and on top of that he had been visited by the phantom killer, Mr. Death.

For a long time he did not sleep, and when he did it was only to wake a short half hour later bathed in sweat, his mind a whirling vortex of fear from the nightmare which had seeped through his apprehensive brain.

Yet when he rose in the morning his mind had been made up. He had decided that the best gamble was to keep faith with Mr. Death. True, he did not underestimate the power of the club. But if he obeyed their dictates this time he was ruined anyway. Whereas, by cancelling the unjust condemnation proceedings, he

would save himself from political suicide.

Then again, it seemed that Mr. Death's protection was worth something. For the mysterious midnight marauder had thus far been clever enough to leave no clue behind him, to outwit his enemies at every turn, so perhaps, he could save the mayor from the long arm of the club.

However, before attending the aldermanic meeting which he had called for that afternoon he took the precaution of calling on his chief of police for a bodyguard of six of the force's best men. They stood about the rostrum of the aldermanic chamber when he addressed that body.

The room was crowded when the mayor made his speech. Jimmy Gilmore sitting in the midst of the gallery crowd listened to the mayor with a grim ironic smile playing across his face.

RICHMAN backed water gracefully, explaining that a mistake had been made in their previous meeting, and rearranging the condemnation awards. The aldermen, like the well trained toadies they were, solemnly agreed and voted to sustain the mayor's about face.

After the new resolution had been passed the mayor bowed nervously to the crowd who cheered what they considered his open avowal of an honest error and passed from the chamber as his blue-coated bodyguard closed in about him.

That night the mayor's bodyguard was augmented by a score more policemen who surrounded his house. Yet even this display of protection did not render Richman free from fear.

He knew full well that the Murder Club had its spies posted in nearly every city department, and he sat

apprehensively in his big living room wondering if one of the men who had been sent to guard him would actually be the man that the Murder Club might select for his execution.

THE aldermanic meeting had been concluded nearly eight hours ago. And inasmuch as he had not heard from the club yet, Richman began to regain a little of his courage. Still he dared not face the darkness, the loneliness of his bedroom. He remained seated in a Morris chair before the fire, sipping the whisky which fought the fear in his heart.

Hearing a footstep behind him, he started suddenly. He breathed with relief as his gaze saw the familiar blue serge trousers of a regulation police uniform, but then as his eyes traveled upwards to the newcomer's face, his heart stood still in utter horror.

For the man at whom he was looking, though wearing a complete policeman's outfit had a black-hooded mask which covered his face and hung loosely on the shoulders of his uniform!

"My God—"

"Silence!" Came a voice from behind the mask. "Silence, you fool. Don't you know who I am."

Then for the first time, Richman noticed the little white painted skull at the top of the mask.

"You!" he ejaculated. "You—Mr. Death!"

Jimmy Gilmore nodded behind his mask. His hand moved toward his coat pocket and a second later his automatic was in his hand.

"How—how did you get in?" asked Richman in a tremulous tone.

With a gesture, Jimmy indicated his uniform coat.

"I figured the house would be so well guarded that I'd be able to easily slip in with a uniform. I kept

under cover and put the mask on when I was inside the house."

Before Richman could reply, a discreet knock came at the door. Jimmy hastily moved to the side of the room.

"Answer that," he said in a whisper. "And remember I've got you covered. Handle it as though nothing were wrong."

Richman nodded and leaving his chair walked to the door. Jimmy heard a voice say: "Sorry to trouble you, sir. But a messenger boy just left this note. Said it was important."

The door closed and Jimmy looking across the room saw the mayor staring with glazed eyes at a piece of paper in his hand.

"What is it?"

For answer Richman handed him the paper. Then white-lipped and trembling, he fell back into the chair. Jimmy's eyes raced along the penciled scrawl.

MR. MAYOR:

You have played the traitor. And for that you die—tonight.

(signed)

THE MURDER CLUB.

A low whining moan came from the Morris chair.

"Oh, God, what can I do. I'm a dead man. I'm—"

"Rot," snapped Jimmy Gilmore. "How can the Murder Club get in past all those cops?"

"How did you get in?" groaned Richman.

FOR a moment Jimmy stood there in silence, then he nodded his head.

"You're probably right," he said softly. "That's just what they would think of. Now brace up, Richman, and listen to me. If you don't go to pieces, I think I can get you out of this."

The mayor looked up eagerly. "How?"

"Is there a closet in this room?"

"Over there." Richman indicated a door to the left of the entrance from the hall.

"All right. Get in there. Stay in there. Turn off all the lights save that small floor lamp. I'll take your place in the Morris chair. In that single dim light a man won't recognize me at once. And in that second, I can get the drop on him. Hurry now. They may be here any minute."

HASTILY Richman did as he was bid, then disappeared in the closet. Jimmy took his place in the chair. He sat there, his eyes glued to the door, his automatic held alertly in his hand.

The minutes ticked past. Yet Jimmy did not relax his vigil. Then suddenly he sat bolt upright as he heard a soft footfall in the hall outside. He leaned forward in his chair. He saw the brass door knob turn slowly. The door swung silently ajar.

The moving door jerked suddenly, then swung closed once more. A masked figure, wearing a hood similar to that of Jimmy's, faced the Morris chair from the threshold. In the dim light of the room the stranger could make out a form in the chair, but the light was too tricky for his eyes to make out any detail.

"So, Richman," he said in a hard steely voice. "You crossed us, eh? Well, you've got a hell of a lot of nerve even if you haven't much judgment. Maybe you'd like to tell me why you did it before I bump you off."

Jimmy rose easily to his feet. The automatic in his hand was on a level with the weapon which the other man held pointed at him.

"I'm the answer," he said quietly. "I'm the reason Richman crossed you, I'm also the reason that you're

not going to bump him off. Look more closely and you may recognize me."

The Murder Club member peered into the gloominess of the room. Then suddenly he saw the white skull on the other's hood. He fell back a pace.

"God!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Death."

"Yes," said Jimmy grimly. "Mr. Death—and we meet once again. Mr. Murderer."

Number Nine of the Murder Club suddenly recovered from his amazement of meeting his deadly enemy here.

"Yes," he retorted and his voice was edged with venom. "We meet again Mr. Death—and may the best man live."

Two revolver shots rang out as one. Jimmy felt a pricking sensation in his shoulder. His arm jerked. The muzzle of his gun flew up, and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the wall behind the man who had fired at him.

In an instant he had recovered and his weapon came in a direct line on the other's heart. He heard a single click as his adversary pressed the trigger and the striker hit a defective round. Jimmy's own finger constricted on the trigger. But before he could fire, the Murder Club man, realizing the impotence of his own revolver, hurtled through the air.

TOO late Jimmy saw him. He tried to sidestep and fire at the same time. But the lunging black figure was upon him. He felt a sudden weight upon his bleeding shoulder and for the second time the whining steel from his automatic ate its way into the plaster wall.

The pair of hooded figures grappled desperately. Jimmy, feeling a hand at his throat, swung his right

THEY DARED

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BANISH FEAR
AND IGNORANCE!



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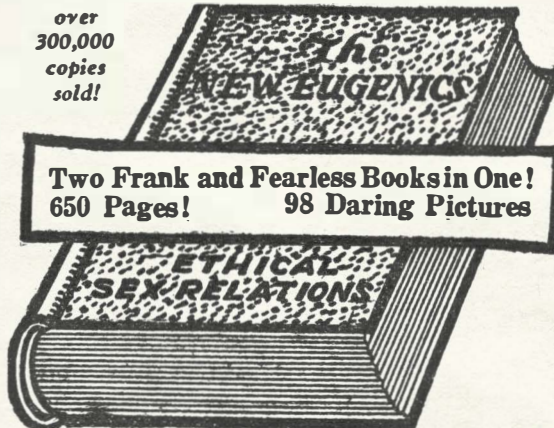
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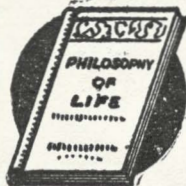
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hard into the other's face. For a moment the clutch on his jugular relaxed and he tore himself free. But before he could bring his gun into play again, his adversary had followed up.

Jimmy could hear the other's breath coming fast as they stood toe to toe in the center of the room. Each straining desperately for an advantage that would turn the tide of the battle. Blood streamed down from the jagged wound in Jimmy's shoulder, drenching the clothing of both men. Still, despite the terrible wrenching pain of his wound he did not give way.

A leg crashed against his and Jimmy went down. For a moment the pair of them rolled over and over on the floor. Jimmy's revolver clattered to the floor. Again he swung his fist into the other's face and muttered a curse as he missed the point of the jaw by less than an inch.

Then even in the midst of the struggle, Jimmy heard the sound of an opening door behind him. He heard a swift footstep in the room. Then Richman's voice called out.

"Boys. Quick. Help. Police. Come here!"

THE mayor ran across the room and disappeared through the hall door. Jimmy felt his enemy's grip relaxed for a moment as the Murder Club's emissary's mind grappled with this new problem. Swiftly Jimmy came to his feet. He confronted the other, and spoke rapidly.

"Listen," he said. "That was Richman. He's gone to get the cops. We are both finished if they find us. Let's get out. My car's below. We'll finish our little argument later."

Number Nine of the Murder Club nodded his agreement and the pair of them made for the big French windows on the other side of the room.

Like two cats, they dropped lightly to the lawn beneath, just as the lights in the room they had left flared full on. They heard excited voices above them and half a dozen blue caps thrust themselves from the window. A voice cried out.

"There they go!"

Jimmy lightly vaulted the fence which surrounded the mayor's estate and sprang into the roadster which he had parked beneath the shadows of the trees that lined the roadway. The hooded member of the Murder Club jumped in beside him.

THE engine roared to sudden throbbing life as Jimmy stepped on the starter and threw the car in gear. Up the road before them they heard the voices of the police. And as the roadster started up, the noise of other cars came to them from the rear.

Jimmy thanked the gods that he had retrieved his revolver from the floor before they had leaped from the window. He turned to his companion.

"Got your gun?"

The other nodded.

"They're coming after us. Get ready to use it."

Number Nine examined the weapon in his hand and apparently satisfied that it was now in working order, he glanced back over his shoulder. Two shafts of light shot down the road behind them from the headlights of the first police car.

Number Nine carefully sighted his pistol and pressed the trigger twice. Jimmy keeping his eyes on the road ahead jammed the accelerator all the way down.

He listened eagerly for the sound of a puncture after he had heard his companion's shot. But the only reply was a devastating fusillade from the police car. Half a dozen angry

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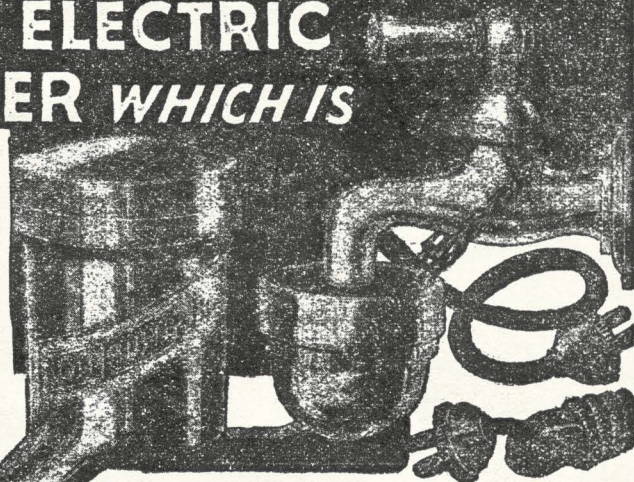
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slugs ate their way through the chassis of the roadster.

The speedometer indicated sixty-five miles an hour, as Number Nine hastily reloaded his weapon and promptly emptied it at the headlights behind, which were coming closer and closer.

There was suddenly a loud explosion, followed by the sound of shrieking brakes. Jimmy heard an elated voice in his ear.

"Got him that time. The front tire. We've stopped them."

"There's another one behind," said Jimmy laconically. "Maybe we can outdistance it."

Less than three minutes later another pair of headlights replaced those which Number Nine had put out of commission. Once more there was an interchange of shots. Jimmy heard something buzz past his head, as he vainly attempted to coax a few more miles per hour out of his already overtaxed engine.

HE glanced up at the roadside for a moment, and noticed that he was already on the outskirts of the city. Behind, the powerful police car was gaining momentarily. He turned once more to his strange ally.

"We'll drive right across the common," he said. "We've got more chance in a running fight through the trees than out here on the open road."

"Shoot!" said Number Nine.

Without decreasing his speed, Jimmy twisted the wheel to the right and the car left the road. It rumbled crazily over the rough ground of the field and charged like a live mad thing in the direction of the fringe of trees some hundred yards in the distance. The police car, taken completely by surprise, raced past, straight down the road, then came to a creaking halt.

By the time the cops had stopped

their car and started up again, Jimmy's roadster was almost at the edge of the sparse clumps of trees for which he had aimed. He slowed down slightly and zig-zagged crazily between two gnarled trunks.

THEN applying his brakes gradually, he weaved a dangerous circuitous course through the foliage of the common. Of a sudden he came to a stop and listened intently.

"We're pretty well under cover here," he whispered. "They'll have to stop their car out there. It's too big. They'll have less chance of nabbing us here than out in the open."

The other man nodded and stepped from the car, his hot weapon in his hand. A moment later Jimmy followed suit, withdrawing his automatic as he stepped out upon the ground.

The pair of them, who such a short time ago had been bent on each other's destruction, stood shoulder to shoulder, waiting tensely for any footfall, any sound that would indicate the approach of their common enemy; the enemy that had, for the moment, rendered this strange hooded pair allies.

Number Nine suddenly seized Jimmy's arm as a crackling of underbrush came to their ears. Both of them stood steady and firm, their weapons ready for defense. Then they heard a man's voice say in disgruntled tones:

"What the hell! We'll never find 'em in here. They've probably gone through and come out on the other side. Let's get back to the house. They might double back there to get Richman."

Another voice assented and the footfalls steadily receded through the trees. Jimmy waited until he could hear no further sound, then his eyes glinting hard through the slits in his hood, he turned to the other.

(Concluded on page 122)

This Little Gland Robbed Me of Sleep and Health



HEADACHES



SCIATICA



NIGHT RISING



EXHAUSTION

Until I Discovered a New Hygiene for Men Past 40

IT HAD been coming on for years—this devilish thing called "Prostate Trouble!" I gave it little thought at first, because I figured that all men experience a certain change about my time in life. That was my big mistake. I thought it was just the breakdown of oncoming age and that I would have to put up with it. I did for a while, but a year later, my condition went from bad to worse at an alarming rate.

These Common Symptoms

My sleep was broken a dozen times every night. In fact, one hour's fitful sleep was a luxury. Pains had developed in my back and legs, and I was chronically constipated. I was run down in body and almost broken in mind—practically an invalid at 53. I talked to scores of men. In fact, I talked to practically every man I met or could get to listen. As I look back now I think I was practically insane on the subject.

Faces Surgery

It has been my experience that a majority of men past 60—and a surprising number even at 40—had one of these distressing symptoms, but few men had it as bad as I did. I had seen my doctor, of course. But he could offer me but little relief. I spent hundreds of dollars

in an effort to avoid an operation, for I had learned that gland surgery was usually dangerous. This insidious little gland that robbed me of sleep and health now threatened my very life.

The Turning Point

Then I read one of your advertisements. I admit I mailed the coupon without the slightest hope. There probably never was a more skeptical mind than mine. But this simple little act turned out to be the biggest thing in my life.

I can never thank you enough. I am now sixty. I can go to bed at ten o'clock and sleep straight through. My doctor has pronounced me in normal health. My entire body is toned up, and I feel almost like a youngster. I have had no return of the trouble, and now use your pleasant treatment just fifteen minutes a day, over one or two months, just to make sure that I keep my perfect health.

Millions Make This Mistake

When I was at my lowest ebb, I encountered so many prostate sufferers that I know there must be millions of men doctoring for sciatica, pains in the back and legs, bladder and kidney weakness, chronic constipation, loss of physical and mental capacity and a host of supposed old age symptoms, *who should probably be treating the prostate gland!* In fact, I learned not long ago that certain medical authorities claim that 65% of men at or past middle age suffer from disorders of this vital gland.

My advice to these men is not to make the mistake that I made. Send the coupon for that little book, "The Destroyer of Male

Health." Find out the facts about this little gland, which the book contains. It explains a prominent scientist's discovery of a new home hygiene—explains how, without drugs or surgery, without massage, diet, or exercise, this method acts to reduce the congestion and combat the dangerous symptoms.

Scientist's Book Sent Free

See if these facts apply to you. Learn the true meaning of these common complaints and see why these ailments in men past 40 are so often directly traceable to a swollen prostate. The book, "The Destroyer of Male Health" is sent without cost and without obligation.

Simply mail the coupon to W. J. Kirk, President, 4253, Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 303 Van Nuys Building, Dept. 71-G, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 71-G, 53 Yonge Street, Toronto, Can.

W. J. Kirk, President
1184 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio

Please mail me at once your Free booklet, "The Destroyer of Male Health," and full details about the new home treatment. I am not obligated in any way.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

Number Nine was not taken un-awares. He, too, turned to face the notorious Alias Mr. Death, the man who had slain his five comrades. Their guns were aimed unwaveringly at each other. A grim, tense silence enveloped them.

"Well?" said Number Nine. "Does the truce end or continue?"

"The truce ends," said Jimmy Gilmore in a cold, hard voice. "It was of mutual benefit for us to join forces for a while. But now that that necessity is over, we can resume where we left off."

Number Nine's eye gleamed for a moment. His finger pressed the trigger. A dull click sounded.

"My God!" he said in horrified accents. "My revolver is empty. I fired every round at the police car."

Jimmy Gilmore's trigger-finger relaxed on his weapon.

THEN," he said, "we shall wait a moment. Don't think I'm being merciful. I'm not. No member of your murderous organization deserves mercy. But after all, you emptied your weapon in my cause as well as yours. Hence I'm giving you a chance. Have you any more ammunition?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall walk off six paces. I shall count ten slowly. By that time you should have reloaded. At the count of ten I shall fire. You are privileged to do the same, and to repeat your own words of earlier this evening, 'May the best man live!'"

"Thanks," said Number Nine simply. "You're a strange man, Mr. Death. I'd like to meet you under other circumstances."

"You may," said Jimmy grimly, "—in hell."

He turned abruptly and walked off six paces to the rear. Then he stood

perfectly still and commenced counting in a low monotone. Number Nine of the Murder Club swiftly produced ammunition from his pocket and reloaded his gun. Then he, too, faced his enemy.

"Eight — Nine — Ten," concluded Jimmy.

And at that precise moment his finger squeezed the trigger softly. A staccato report ripped the silent night, followed a fraction of a second later by a similar sound. But the bullet from Jimmy's automatic had reached its mark, just as the other fired.

JIMMY heard the impotent steel from the other's weapon whiz by over his head. While before him Number Nine of the Murder Club fell to his knees, a dull red spreading stain over his heart.

Jimmy walked forward slowly. The dying man looked up at him and the fragment of a smile crawled over his pain-glazed countenance.

"You—win—Mr. Death," he said slowly. "Good-by."

He fell forward on his face and was still.

For a silent moment Jimmy regarded the prone figure at his feet, then putting a hand in his pocket he produced a small oblong card. But three words were written on it. The moonlight from overhead revealed them: "Alias Mr. Death!"

Jimmy stooped over and placed the card on the dead man's back. Then turning silently, he walked back to his car. And despite the fact that he had once more exterminated one of the club he had sworn to slay, he felt no exultation. Rather, he felt a pang of regret that a victor feels when he vanquishes a gallant enemy, a man who has been worthy of his steel.

HEADQUARTERS

WHERE READERS, WRITERS, AND THE EDITOR MEET



The old man at Headquarters has finally emerged from under the huge stack of mail that came in as a response to the April "Readers' Choice Contest."

Thanks for the enthusiastic comments on your coupons in the space reserved for "Remarks." Thanks, also, to those who had criticisms to offer. A knock is as good as a boost—and we're always looking for op-

portunities to make THRILLING DETECTIVE even better than it is.

The many hundreds of coupons received have been classified and averaged, and we're pleased to give you the results. Here's the line-up on the stories in the order in which they appealed to the average reader of April THRILLING DETECTIVE:

- 1st—*Phantom Murders*, by Robert Wallace.
- 2nd—*Midnight Marauders*, by G. Wayman Jones.
- 3rd—*Murder From the Grave*, by Jack D'Arcy.
- 4th—*The Death Camera*, by Will Levinrew.
- 5th—*The Murder Monster*, by Douglas Allen.
- 6th—*By Wire*, by John L. Benton.
- 7th—*Mr. Monk's Human Freight*, by Harold de Polo.
- 8th—*The Coupling Pin*, by John H. Compton.

First prize was won by Albert
(Continued on page 124)



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81x4	2.95	1.15	28x4.75	2.45	1.20
82x4	2.95	1.15	28x4.75	2.45	1.20
83x4	2.95	1.15	30x4.95	2.90	1.05
84x4	3.50	1.15	29x5.00	2.95	1.05
84x4 1/2	3.20	1.45	30x5.00	2.95	1.05
84x4 1/2	3.20	1.45	28x5.25	2.95	1.05
84x4 1/2	3.45	1.45	30x5.25	2.95	1.05
80x5	3.40	1.75	31x5.25	3.10	1.05
88x5	3.60	1.75	30x5.77	3.20	1.40
86x5	4.45	1.75	30x6.00	3.20	1.40
All Other Sizes	31x5.00		31x5.00	3.40	1.40
	32x6.00		32x6.00	3.20	1.45
	32x6.00		32x6.00	3.50	1.45

DEALERS WANTED
Send only \$1.00 deposit with each tire ordered. We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 percent if cash in full accompanies order.

TUBES BRAND NEW - GUARANTEED
Tires failing to give 12 months' service replaced at half price.

YORK TIRE & RUBBER CO., Dept. 325-A
3835-59 Cottage Grove Ave. Chicago, Ill.

This FREE BOOKLET has amazed THOUSANDS

AN AMAZING SECRET!

Learn secret power of getting riches! Win money, friends, health, magic charm! Know this great discovery, a dynamic force to remake your life. Thousands testify to marvelous results. Amaze friends with your new power and personality. Send for sensational FREE booklet! **SUCCESS INSTITUTE, 618 South Western; Rm. 180, Los Angeles**

(Continued from page 123)

Kurtz, 123 Brown Avenue, Holyoke, Mass., whose coupon reflected most accurately the average opinion of THRILLING DETECTIVE readers. Many congratulations, Al—you know how to pick 'em.

Second money goes to George Cokas, 706 New Jersey Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C.

There are two third awards, as there was a tie between Leo Delapa, 61 Sunnyside Avenue, Readville, Mass., and Amos L. Crawford, 55 Alabama Street, Carrollton, Ga. Of course, each of these two contestants will receive the full amount of the prize.

(Continued on page 126)



WANTED - for murder!

\$1,000 Reward!

In a dirty, forlorn shack by the river's edge they found the mutilated body of Genevieve Martin. Her pretty face was swollen and distorted. Marks on the slender throat showed that she had been brutally choked to death. Who had committed this ghastly crime?

Crimes like this are being solved every day by Finger Print Experts. We read in the papers of their exploits, hear of the mysteries they solve, the rewards they win. Finger Print Experts are the heroes of the hour.

More Trained Men Needed

The demand for trained men by governments, states, cities, detective agencies, corporations, and private bureaus is becoming greater every day. Here is a real opportunity for YOU. Can you imagine a more fascinating line of work than this? Often life and death depend on finger print evidence—and big rewards go to the expert. Many experts earn regularly from \$3,000 and more per year.

Learn At Home in Spare Time

Now, through this amazing new, simple course, you can learn the secrets of this science easily and quickly at home in your spare time. Any man with common school education and average ability can become a Finger Print Detective in surprisingly short time.

FREE - The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief!

IF YOU ACT QUICK—We will send you free and with no obligation whatsoever, a copy of the gripping, fascinating, confidential report Secret Service Operator No. 38 made to His Chief and free book on Finger Prints which explains this wonderful training in detail. Mail Coupon NOW!

Don't wait. You may never see this announcement again! You assume no obligation. Mail coupon NOW—while this offer lasts!

Institute of Applied Science

Dept. B-725 1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Chicago

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, Dept. B-725 1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Without any obligation whatever, send me your new, fully illustrated, FREE book on Finger Prints and the free copy of the Confidential Reports of Operator No. 38 made to His Chief.

Literature will not be sent to boys under 17 years of age.

Name _____

Address _____

Age _____



SOLES 4 1/2 CENTS

Heels ^{for the} 1 cent

New Improved SAVASOLE Pays You \$4.20 a DAY

Up To

No more costly shoe repairs. No more wearing worn-out shoes with leaky soles that are harmful to health. This amazing invention—now perfected—saves your money. It's called Savasole, a scientific, plastic, repair set that puts new soles on worn-out shoes. Makes them like new for as low as 4 1/2 cents a sole. Rebuilds run-down heels for as low as 1 cent. New way of applying. Just take a spoonful out of the can and roll it out. Trim it to size. See picture below. Then it cements on to the old sole and

hardens overnight. You have a solid, non-skid, waterproof surface that covers all cuts, holes, cracks.

Cash In Now on This HARD TIMES NECESSITY

Now! SO EASY! A Child Can Apply

No fuss. Just roll out the plastic Savasole to a thickness of about 1/4 inch. Trim it to the size of your sole. (See picture above.) Then apply cement to Savasole and shoe. Press together firmly and let harden overnight. Wears better than ordinary soles—and can't come off.

This sensational specialty has captured the country and is filling distributors' pockets with gold. Even in hard times it has proved a gold mine for agents! We give you quick, one-minute demonstration that amazes prospects and compels them to order. Sure repeat business. Good territory still open. Rush coupon for Free Sample on leather and new exclusive territory plan.

AGENT Makes \$135 in a Week
Hundreds of Other Letters Like This

G. C. Miller writes:
 "I gave up my former connection where I ranged in earnings from \$315 to \$386 per month. I started out with three gross of Savasole. Since that time, my earnings have netted me over \$135 a week and I am sure that I will soon hit \$200 per week. Savasole has solved my financial problems, and you are the whitest bunch of people to work with I ever saw."

R. R. BOLLMAN, Pres.
 Daylight Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

It's GUARANTEED!

Do not confuse Savasole with cheap imitations that spread on with a knife, sometimes drying rough and uneven. Savasole alone is applied in one solid piece and dries thick, smooth and even. And Savasole is the only one that has the Bollman Double-Action Cement process that means Savasole cannot come off. It actually outwears the uppers. My money back guarantee protects you and your customers.

Mail for FREE SAMPLE

R. R. Bollman, Pres.
 PERFECT MFG. CO., D-127, Daylight Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

Dear Mr. Bollman: Please send me a Free Sample of Savasole applied to miniature leather sole and tell me how I can make up to \$43 a day. I am not obligated.

Name

Address

Town State

Territory preferred.....

THE PERFECT MFG. CO.. D-127

He Stopped Whiskey!

Wonderful Treatment Helped Faithful Wife to Save Husband When All Else Failed.



The Happy Reunion

Try it Free

Wives, mothers, sisters, it is you that the man who drinks Whiskey, Wine or Beer to excess must depend upon to help save him from a ruined life and a drunkard's grave. Take heed from the thousands of men going to ruin daily through vile bootlegger's Whiskey, and the horrible stuff called home brew from private

still. Once he gets it in his system he finds it difficult to stop—but you can help him. What it has done for others is an example of what it should do for you. All you have to do is to send your name and address and we will send absolutely FREE in plain wrapper, a trial package of GOLDEN TREATMENT. You will be thankful as long as you live that you did it. Address

DR. J. W. HAINES CO.

638 Glenn Building Cincinnati, Ohio

PROTECT YOUR LIFE with TEAR GAS FOUNTAIN PEN!

Brand New Instant Protection without injury to anyone. Agents can make up to \$400.00 monthly. One agent sold 1 dozen in 5 hours. One minute demonstration gets the order everytime. Sells on sight. Protection for everybody against robbers, criminals, morons, vicious dogs, etc. Every autoist, store, bank, theatre and every home prospect.



AGENTS! Grab This Money Maker

Step into this new, unlimited, money-making field. You take orders. Collect your big pay daily. Devote part or full time. Exclusive territory still open. Write quick for starting offer.

ATLAS CO., Chesterfield Station, Dept. 1607, Chicago

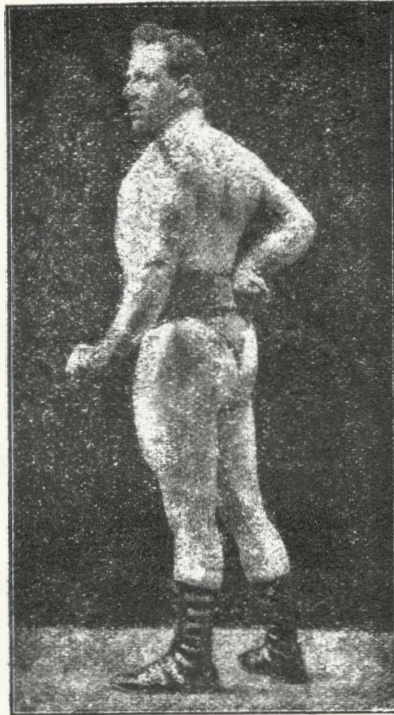
(Continued from page 124)

Five fourth prizes are awarded, and these go to the following five lucky contestants:

Thomas Harvey, 407 Railroad Street, Forest City, Pa.; Mrs. Olive Horton, Box 226, Blue Hill, Maine; B. Vomacka, 1296 First Avenue, N. Y. City; Kenneth Schrolder, Hortington, Neb., and Wm. De Bnam, Afton, Va.

Next month you'll be given the results of the May "Reader's Choice Contest"—so if you've been clipping your coupons and haven't seen your name above, don't give up hope. Anyway, our best to you—and thanks for your co-operation in this unusually successful contest.

(Continued on page 128)



GEORGE F. JOWETT, Champion of Champions

"Rough? You bet your life I'm rough!"

Don't read another word if you think I've got any time to waste on MAMMA'S BOYS. And don't read another word if you think my system of body building is any pink-tea affair for drug store sheiks or lounge lizarda with a YELLOW STREAK a yard wide. I'll treat you ROUGH when you take my course and I'll tell you where you get off, doggedn quick, if you don't do what I tell you.

I'll Make You Strong

But when I get through with you, you'll say that George F. Jowett is the BEST FRIEND you ever had. You will have muscles of iron and nerves of steel and every fiber of your being will be athrob with HEALTH and ENERGY and VITAL FORCE. The virile red blood of a conqueror will flow through your veins. Inside and out—mentally and physically—I will give you the POWER that is the foundation of SUCCESS in any undertaking.

Patented Dumbbells Free

To every person who takes my course I will give a pair of my patented Jowett Progressive Disk Dumbbells. They cannot be equalled for workmanship and muscle building. Here's another important point—my course is laid out personally for each PUPIL. Every week you receive a new set of exercises in order of progression. You get Twelve Courses covering the Twelve Principles of Life and on conclusion of your course receive an emblem showing you are a graduate of the Jowett Institute of Physical Culture.

Get My Free Book

All I ask is this: Send for my free book, "The Thrill of Being Strong." You'll get a real kick out of it because of the photographs and because it shows how easily you, too, can have nerves of steel and muscles of iron. If you would like to lay your case before me in a personal letter, I will give you a personal reply without any cost.



JOWETT INSTITUTE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE, Dept. 65-Gb, 422 Postlar Street, Scranton, Pa.
Dear Mr. Jowett: Please send me FREE a copy of your illustrated booklet, "The Thrill of Being Strong."

Name

Address

29 X 4.40
\$2.30 **NEW TIRE**
 SEE FREE on GOOD YEAR - Goodrich
 Firestone - U.S. - OTHER MAKES
 Year after year car owners all over U.S.A. who insist upon reliable tire satisfaction buy from this oldest established company. You can get the biggest tire values in history—SAVE UP TO 75% on our Standard Brands reconditioned tires. Every tire is sold with our 12 Months' Written Guarantee Bond insuring hardest road service.
 FREE Hot-Patch emergency vulcanizing outfit—worth \$1.00 value—FREE with every order for 2 tires. Send your order TODAY.

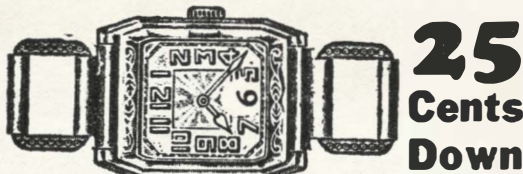
12 MONTHS' WRITTEN GUARANTEE BOND

BALLOON TIRES			CORD TIRES		
Size	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
29x4.40	\$2.30	\$.85	30x3	\$2.20	\$.75
29x4.50	2.40	.90	30x3 1/2	2.25	.75
30x4.50	2.45	.90	32x4	2.95	.90
29x4.75	2.45	.90	32x4 1/2	2.95	.90
30x4.75	2.45	.90	34x4 1/2	3.25	1.15
30x4.95	2.90	.90	34x5	3.25	1.15
29x5.00	2.85	1.10	34x5 1/2	3.45	1.25
30x5.00	2.85	1.10	36x5	3.55	1.25
28x6.25	2.85	1.15	36x5 1/2	3.65	1.25
30x6.25	2.95	1.15			
31x6.25	3.10	1.15			
29x5.50	3.20	1.20			
30x6.00	3.00	1.20			
31x6.00	3.10	1.20			
32x6.00	3.20	1.25			
33x6.00	3.25	1.30			
32x6.50	3.40	1.40			

DEALERS WANTED

Send only \$1.00 deposit with each order, balance C. O. D. If you send cash in full deduct 5%. You are guaranteed a year's service or replacement at half price. References: DUN and BRADSTREET.

VICTORY TIRE & RUBBER COMPANY
 33rd and S. Morgan Streets, Dept. 209, CHICAGO, ILL.



25 Cents Down

Sport Model Man's Watch-Link Bracelet

Sport Model Man's Wrist Watch. Beautifully engraved and finished. Latest style chromium finished link bracelet to match. Radium dial and radium hands. 15 Ruby and Sapphire jeweled movement, perfect timekeeper. Will give 20 years satisfactory service. A Man's Wrist Watch for sport, work, business and all other social functions.

Latest Popular Rectangular Wrist Watch



Beautifully engraved and oxidized. Latest style, handsomely engraved link bracelet to adorn your wrist. 15 Ruby and Sapphire jeweled movement, perfect timekeeper. Will give 20 years satisfactory service. Send only 25 cents down. No red tape, no delay. Your watch comes for 30 days free trial to decide and convince. If absolutely pleased, send balance \$2.00 a month; full price of either watch only \$17.95. If not absolutely pleased, return watch and your deposit will be promptly refunded. Stock is limited. Don't delay. Rush order at once. Mention watch wanted.

Guaranty Watch Co., 154 Nassau Street, Dept. 168, New York.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of Thrilling Detective, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1932.

State of New York }
 County of New York } ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared N. L. Pines, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the managing editor of THRILLING DETECTIVE and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Metropolitan Magazines, Inc., 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Editor, Harvey Burns, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, N. L. Pines; Business Manager, none.

2. That the owner is: Metropolitan Magazines, Inc., 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; M. A. Goldsmith, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none.

4. That the two paragraphs next above giving the names of owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustees or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statement embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders, who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him.

N. L. PINES.

Sworn by and subscribed before me this 24th day of March, 1932. Harry Kavesh, Commissioner of Deeds. Commission expires March 24, 1933.

A Baby in Your Home

Scientists now state that "Complete unity in life depends on sex harmony" and that the lack of it is the one greatest cause for unhappy marriages. Also that every woman "has the capacity for sex expression" but too often she is undeveloped or suffering with general female disorders, which rob her of her normal desires. During an experience of more than 35 years specializing in the treatment of diseases peculiar to women, I developed a simple home treatment which has brought new hope, health and happiness to many thousands. Many who had been childless for years became proud and happy Mothers. Husbands have written me the most glowing letters of gratitude and now I want every woman who is run-down or suffering from female disorders to learn about this splendid treatment, and how she may use it in the privacy of her own home.



Get This Knowledge FREE
 In my two books "Full Development" and "A Baby in Your Home," I intimately discuss many important subjects relating to the female sex that are vitally interesting to every woman. They tell how you too may combat your troubles as thousands of others have and often again enjoy the desires and activities of Nature's most wonderful creation—a normal, fully developed vigorous woman. I will gladly send both books postpaid free. Write today. DR. H. WILL ELDERS, Suite 437-D, 7th and Felix Streets, St. Joseph, Mo.

the female sex that are vitally interesting to every woman. They tell how you too may combat your troubles as thousands of others have and often again enjoy the desires and activities of Nature's most wonderful creation—a normal, fully developed vigorous woman. I will gladly send both books postpaid free. Write today. DR. H. WILL ELDERS, Suite 437-D, 7th and Felix Streets, St. Joseph, Mo.

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Many people that believe in LUCK are carrying a pair of GENUINE BRAHMS MAGNETIC LODESTONES. We have received a large number of wonderful testimonials from people who believe in LUCK, become LUCKY in Money, Games, Love, Business, etc., and claimed much benefit and profit from carrying a pair of these GENUINE BRAHMS RED LIVE HIGHLY MAGNETIC LODESTONES. They have much faith in these marvelous Lodestones and consider them to be POWERFUL LUCK CHARM for the deemed prevention of Bad Luck, Evil, etc., and believed attraction of GOOD LUCK in Games, Money, Business, Love, Happiness, Success, etc. We make no unnatural representations. Believe in LUCK? Special only \$1.97 for the two, complete with FREE full information. Pay Postman \$1.97 and 15c postage on delivery. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or MONEY RETURNED. You Can't Lose! Order Yours NOW! (Copyrighted P. S. S.) Dept. T368, P. S. BUREAU, General P.O. Box 72, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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the IMPROVED
**ALLADIN
AUTOMATIC
WATER
HEATER**

Agents' Price \$1.95. You make \$1.00 clear profit.

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ALLADIN leads the way with this sensational new guaranteed AUTOMATIC water heater. Plug into your wall socket and turn on the water. Out it comes—sizzling hot. Just turn off the water and AUTOMATICALLY the current is disconnected. Do not be fooled by other heaters that are not automatic and burn out. FITS ANY FAUCET. What a convenience for washing dishes, shaving, washing a few pieces of lingerie and countless other uses. Safe and dependable at all times. Now for the first time offered at this low price—Only \$2.95.

FULL YEAR'S GUARANTEE

Get this amazing time-saver and enjoy its remarkable convenience. The Amazing ALLADIN is guaranteed for one full year against all defects in manufacture and materials. ALL APPROVED EQUIPMENT. No wiring or installation necessary. The ALLADIN slips over the faucet in a jiffy and can be carried from one room to another without trouble.

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Make a complete and convincing demonstration in less than sixty seconds. Slip the ALLADIN over a faucet, plug into a light socket, turn on the water, and PRESTO!—your customer won't let you take it away. Every time you do this it puts a dollar in your pocket—clear profit. Ten, fifteen, twenty times a day—depending only on how quick you travel. House after house, office after office, store after store—everywhere orders are waiting. Get your sample NOW for \$1.95, and get our big money making plan. Start AT ONCE!

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315 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

- Enclosed find money order for \$1.95. Please send me one ALLADIN Automatic Water Heater for 110 volt, A. C. current, order blanks and selling information.
- Please Note: Check here if you have D. C. current. (D. C. model not automatic.)

I understand that upon receipt of this sample outfit I can take orders and collect \$1 cash deposit on every ALLADIN Heater I sell. I will send orders to you and you will ship direct to customers, C. O. D. for the balance, plus postage.

- I would like to have additional information before acting as one of your agents. Please send this by return mail, without obligation on my part.

Name

Street.....

City State.....

Canadians please remit cash with order. Other foreign countries 75c extra for each unit, cash with order.

(Continued from page 126)

Thrills! Thrills! Thrills! You'll find plenty of them in the August THRILLING DETECTIVE, which starts off with THE SANDY HOOK MURDERS, a complete book-length novel.

It's by Lieutenant John Hopper—'nuf said. You know the punch he can put into a story! And this one is about the life that Hopper knows best—the life of an army post with all its possibilities for exciting thrills.

A murder is committed—several murders—under the most eerie circumstances—and you'll never solve the mystery until the very last page.

Besides this exceptional novel, we begin a new serial by John G. Brandon, who is known wherever detective stories are read and whose books have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. This serial novel—his newest and best—is called THE BIG SHOT and deals with organized crime on a gigantic scale.

Besides these big features, you'll read more about ALIAS MR. DEATH and the eerie DOCTOR COFFIN, as well as the usual best short stories in any detective magazine.

—THE EDITOR.

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We are looking for more ambitious young fellows with factory, building construction, or other mechanical experience to prepare for well-paid positions in Drafting. Such men, we find, are unusually successful as Draftsmen, because they know how things are done, and that's a priceless asset to the man who makes the blue-print plans. Get in touch with us and we'll tell you how you can cash in on your entire past experience.

We have trained machinists, carpenters, masons, plumbers, clerks, farmers, and even laborers for well-paid Drafting positions. Mail coupon for details of our remarkable offer.

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The way to a fine Drafting job for you — is easier than you think. It takes no "artistic talent" or advanced education. Thousands of men no smarter than you, with no more education or ability, have learned it quickly and you can, too. With the co-operation of some of the biggest employers and engineers in the U. S., we have worked out a plan to prepare you for Drafting work in your spare time at home. Mail coupon for complete information.

Drafting Is Logically Your Next Move!

Of course you realize the biggest handicap to mechanical work is that you're limited in earning capacity to the output of your two hands, as long as you live. Even the skilled mechanic earning \$30 to \$50 a week has reached his limit. He can never earn more and when he gets old he will earn less. So we don't blame any man for wanting to get away from this futureless outlook. For wanting to get into something where he can use his head as well as his hands—where he will be paid for what he knows, instead of only for what he does. . . .

You know enough about blueprints to understand that PLANS govern every move in factory and construction jobs. The Draftsman who makes them is several jumps ahead of the workman who follows them. And so we want you to know that DRAFTING is a logical, natural PROMOTION from mechanical and building work—better-paid, more interesting—just the kind of work you'd enjoy doing.



"I have landed a job with the Pacific Tel. and Tel. Co. in Seattle, and I must say that I am greatly indebted to the American School for my success. You have done all that you promised in helping me obtain employment."
T. C. White, Seattle, Wash.

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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 - Contracting and Building
 - Electrical Engineering
 - Business Management
 - Accounting
 - Civil Service Positions
 - Law
 - Civil Engineering
 - Auto Engineering
 - Highway Engineering
 - Mechanical Engineering
 - High School (in 2 years)

Name

St. No.

City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

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The Greatest
SIN!



Everything A Married Woman Should Know

- How to hold a husband
- How to have perfect children
- Warding off other women
- Keeping yourself attractive
- Why husbands tire of wives
- Dreadful disease due to ignorance
- Babies and birth control
- Twilight sleep — easy childbirth
- Family health guide
- Change of life—hygiene
- Inherited traits and diseases
- The mystery of twins
- Hundreds of valuable remedies



What to tell a growing child!

Guide them safely through
aid of this book.



Girls! Don't Marry Before You Know All This

- The dangers of petting
- How to be a vamp
- How to attract desirable men
- How to know if he loves you
- How to acquire bodily grace and beauty
- How to acquire charm
- Intimate personal hygiene
- How to pick a husband

Secrets for Men

- Mistakes of early marriages
- Secrets of fascination
- Joy of perfect mating
- How to make women love you
- Accidents and emergencies
- Limitation of offspring
- Warning to young men
- Secrets of sex attraction
- Hygienic precaution
- The reproductive organs
- What every woman wants
- Sex health and prevention

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