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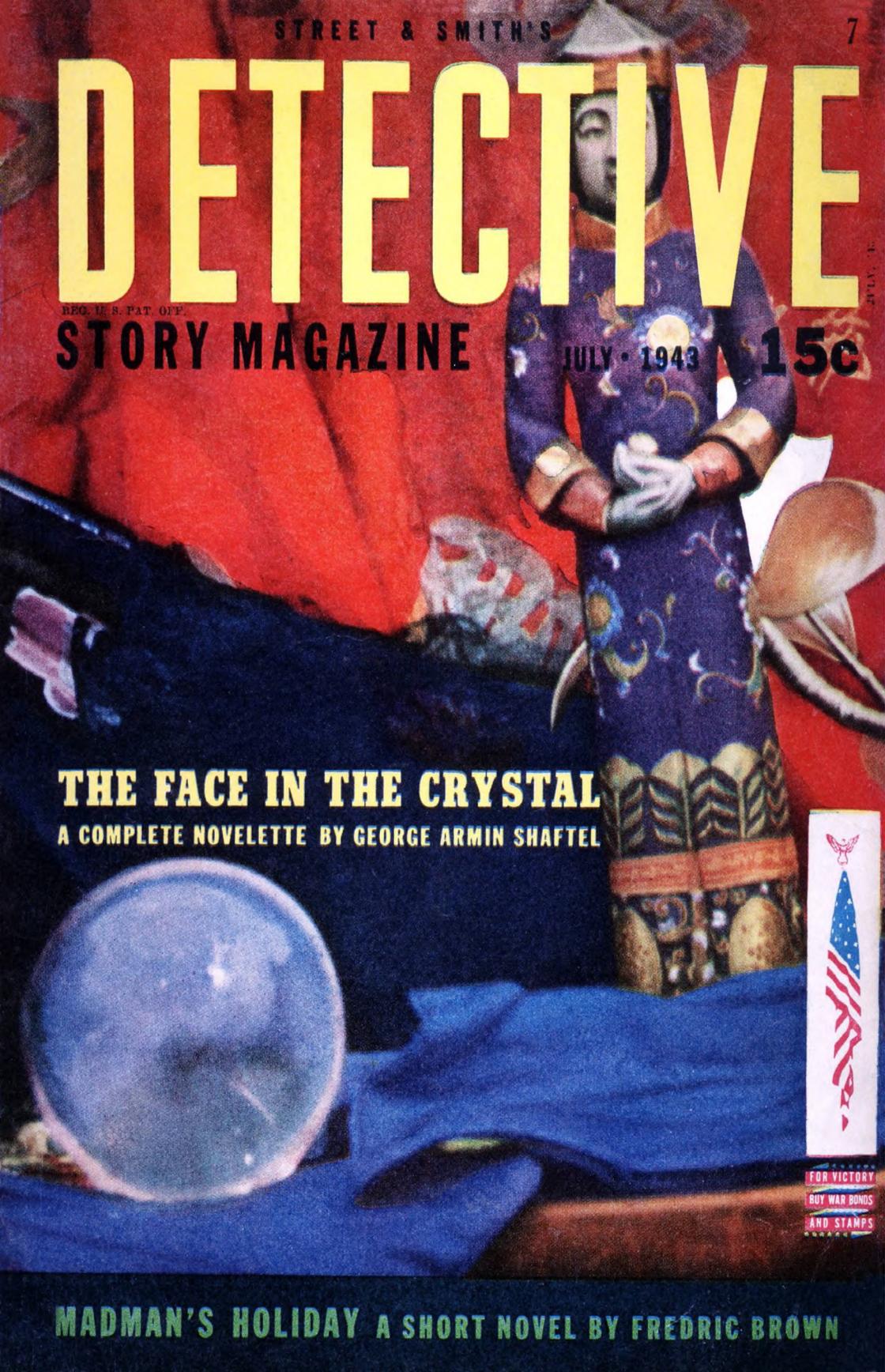
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STORY MAGAZINE

JULY • 1943

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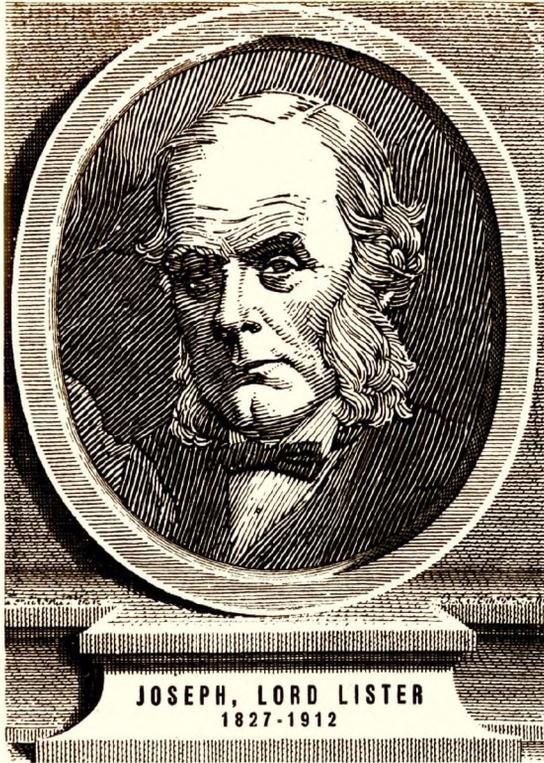
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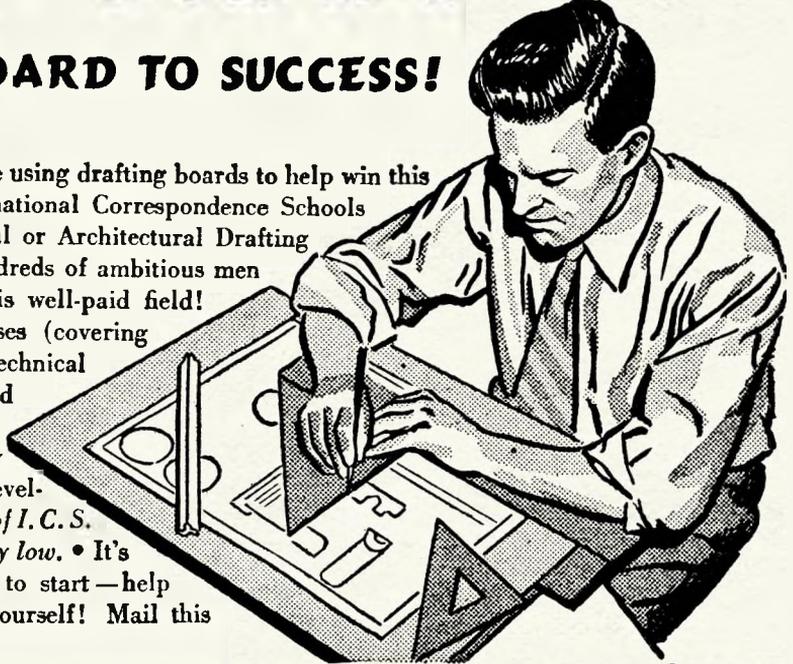


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② "We found it," continued Rourke. "A big delayed action bomb sitting on a severed pipe in the middle of a three-foot crater. We set to work. Letts held the flashlight, taking care to shield it so the Nazis couldn't see it, while I blocked the broken pipe with clay.



③ "In about 12 minutes the job was done. They were the longest minutes we've ever lived. We couldn't have done it without our flashlight—and the steady light from fresh batteries you can depend on."

NOTE: Bomb Squad later dealt with time bomb. The George Medal for "extreme courage and devotion to duty" was awarded to Rourke and Letts.



OCD approved flashlight regulations stipulate careful shielding of the light from a flashlight during a blackout, as Arthur Letts did. Likewise wartime economy demands strict conservation of both flashlights and batteries.

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DETECTIVE
STORY MAGAZINE
REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

EDITOR • DAISY BACON

JULY, 1943 • VOL. CLXVI NO. 3

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DETECTIVE STORY NOTES

After a day filled with hard work, when one is sorely in need of relaxation and a change, we can recommend nothing that does the trick better and quicker than a good detective story.

Our August issue—on sale at all newsstands July 9th—is brimming over with “relaxation.” Even the title of our complete novel, “The Hearse Was Late,” by Philip Ketchum, is enough, we think, to make one forget the heat and one’s own weariness. And the story itself—a murder rehearsed until it was letter perfect. The man who had watched for several nights this rehearsing of a murder, put on by his neighbor across the court, did not know whether he was crazy or not. When he finally found the courage to tell his story to the police, they, too, wondered about his sanity. But when a murder was reported exactly as he had told them he had seen it, they began to wonder about their own sanity. It’s a swell story. And one that any doctor would prescribe as a good home remedy.

Next we have “The Mystery at Corsair’s Cove,” by Peirson Ricks. Our cover was made from this story and it is hard to conceive of murder

and intrigue going hand in hand with the peacefulness and tranquility that the photographer was quick enough to catch as he focused his camera. But, as is so often the case, where everything is seemingly peaceful and quiet, an inferno of hatred and lust is boiling “behind the scenes.” It is the story of three men who grew up together, whose family were friends, such good friends in fact, that they all summered at the same resort year after year. But greed is no respecter of persons and a man’s best friend turns out to be his most deadly enemy.

One of the best stories, we think, that Author Henry Norton ever wrote is “Corpse About Town.” If you like a dash of humor in your detective yarns, you will appreciate this one. Sara Tallant, glamorous and dee-lovely, had had men do curious things to gain her attention, had had them call at all hours to declare their love and devotion, but when Charlie Mears, who had just about everything that is necessary to make life worth living from a material point of view, arrives in a wardrobe trunk, even Sara, who loved a good gag, failed to see the point of it. To tell you more will spoil the story and tip you off to the solution. So, until next month, happy reading and we hope you’ll follow our prescription for “relaxing and forgetting.”



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THE FACE IN THE CRYSTAL

A NOVELETTE

by GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

Having promised his client a happy "ever after," the Hindu had to make good his promise—and thereby turned prophet into profit.

I.

Like a miniature moon resting on a dark cloud, the shining globe reposed on its stand of black satin. The room was draped in heavy velvet and seemed crowded with shadows, and incense wafted, pungent and giddy.

The man and woman were seated, the crystal ball on the stand between them. Both leaned forward, gazing into it.

The woman was young and beautiful. She wore a smart suit of expensive gray tweed. In her red-brown hair sparkled a diamond clip. She sat on the edge of her chair and

her hands, clasped together in her lap, were white-knuckled with tension. Her blue eyes were haggard and frightened.

"It's been a year and a half since you first came to consult me," the man said.

His voice was soothing and hypnotic. He sat in a great carved chair. He was clad in robes of dark velvet agleam with gems, and he wore a silver turban slashed with an arrow of gold, tipped with a burning ruby as opulent as the fabled eye of an ancient Hindu idol. His face was dark as cinnamon bark. His brown eyes were luminous in the gloom.

"Yes," Anne Drury answered.

"But it was just a joke, my coming to you before. I had no faith in you. I thought it was the usual bunk when you told me that I'd meet a dark man, and that money and fame were coming to me—"

"Have they?" Krishnu asked.

"Oh, yes! A lot of both," she said.

"And you did meet a dark man. You married him."

"Yes, I did, I did! But now—"

"Now the man you married and the man you love are both suspects in a murder case," he said slowly.

She recoiled, amazed and shaken by his blunt statement.

"B-but how could you know? I mean—"

"It'll all be in the evening papers," he said.

She leaned forward, imploringly. "Krishnu, I've worried and brooded till I've nearly gone crazy! How will it all end?"

"Miss Drury," he said, his low voice comforting, "at the time you came to me before, you were out of work and almost penniless. You were afraid. Harl Pembroke, the movie star, was interested in you. You were not seriously interested in him, because he was twenty-two years older than you. But when he asked you to marry him, you were desperate enough and ambitious enough to accept him."

"Th-that's so," she admitted tremulously.

"Pembroke got his studio to give you roles in his pictures. He trained you. He made a big success of you. You did not love him. But you were fairly happy, until your husband's son, by a former marriage, came home from college. Young Bob Pembroke is your own age. You love him."

She reddened. Tragically she admitted, "I can't help it."

"You can't help it," Krishnu agreed, nodding his turbaned head.

"For young Bob Pembroke is Harl Pembroke, some twenty years younger. He has his father's charm, his father's talent and he is of your own age. Young and attractive. He is all that you wish your husband might be."

"But now— Oh, it's so awful, it's driving me mad!"

Solemnly Krishnu said, "You are married to the father, but madly in love with the son. And both love you. You told your husband the truth, finally. And you left his house."

"Oh, I had to! I'd spoiled something that was so fine!" Anguish made her voice harsh. "Can't you see? Bob has adored his father since he was an infant. And Harl has always been so proud of Bob! Why, Harl trained Bob and pushed him along, so that now Bob is going to be a star in Harl's own studio! And now I've . . . I've ruined everything, made them hate each other, and— Krishnu, tell me! How is it all going to end?"

For a taut, dramatic moment, Krishnu said nothing. Then he spoke and his low words were vibrant, eloquent with reassurance. "It will end, Miss Drury, as you wish it to end."

"Thank God!"

"But before the end," Krishnu warned, "there will be much trouble. There will be heartache and suspense and conflict."

"What sort of . . . of trouble?" she asked unsteadily.

On a running belt concealed under the satin drapes of the stand holding the shining globe, Krishnu's concealed hand penciled irritably:

For Pete's sake, Mary, quit telling me to ease this dame out! What's the latest dope on the murder? Hasn't Eddie phoned in yet?

Into the earphones concealed in Krishnu's turban came back the in-

stant answer: "You be careful, Alan! Yes, Eddie just phoned. He says that the police know now that Mike Sarsotti was murdered either by Harl or Bobby Pembroke. They say that nobody else could have done the job! So ease that dame out before you talk yourself into a jam!"

With a world of aplomb, Krishnu told his client: "Bob Pembroke is accused of murder. But he will be fully exonerated of guilt. Miss Drury, young Bob is on the threshold of a great career. He will be given the role of Captain Burke in the film his studio is making, 'Federal Man'—"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Miss Drury.

But into the earphones in Krishnu's turban hissed a warning. "Heavens, Alan, you're taking awful chances. Don't—"

But Krishnu was sailing ahead: "Young Bob will make a great hit. The movie public will idolize him even more than it has idolized his father. In fact, Bob will supplant Harl, both in the studio, and in public favor. And, a year from now, you and young Pembroke will marry!"

In another room, Krishnu rapidly changed clothes. And with them, his identity.

With turban, robes and grease paint he played the role of Krishnu, fashionable Hindu clairvoyant and crystal-gazer of Hollywood. In a neat gray suit, his red hair sleeked back, his freshly scrubbed face shining, he was Alan Randolph, a bookish chap who lived on inherited money and wrote crime articles for highbrow magazines. Thirty-two, he was; tall and athletic of build. His eyes, without make-up, were ordinary brown eyes full of humor and intelligence. And his skin was not of a tawny hue, but ruddy with good health. His jaw was lean and

strong, his nose aquiline, his lips sensitive and up-curving with optimism.

The door to his room opened. He smiled at the sweet-faced girl who entered.

"What got your dander up, Mary?"

Her gray eyes stern with anxiety, she said, "Alan, you've put Krishnu into an awful hole!"

"What a prophet *you'd* make!" he groaned in mock despair. "Don't you know that the secret of fortune-telling is to promise your client success, love and a happy ever after?"

"Don't joke, Alan! You've pulled an awful boner!"

"Not me."

"Alan, you've predicted that young Bob Pembroke won't be convicted for murdering Mike Sarsotti, that he'd play the lead in that new picture, and that he and Anne Drury will marry—"

"That's what I said, Mary. And that's how I got a swell fee out of the dame. Two hundred bucks!"

"But, Alan, Krishnu has promised the same success, love and a happy ever after to another man—to Bob's father, Harl!"

"B-but that's not possible, Mary!" he gasped.

"Yes! I did it for you. In Krishnu's daily column in the *Star*. I wrote an article on Harl Pembroke, two weeks ago."

"Good Lord! What did you say, Mary?"

"Just the routine stuff, Alan, like you've had me doing for months. In the article I have Krishnu predicting that Harl Pembroke will make a big hit in the role of Captain Burke in the picture, 'Federal Man.'"

"And I've just told Anne Drury that Harl's son will play that role!" Alan realized.

"Also, I predicted that Harl Pembroke and Anne Drury would give



"But before the end," Krishnu warned, "there will be much trouble. There will be heartache and suspense and conflict."

up divorce proceedings, that she'd come back to him."

"And I've just told her that she'll marry young Bob!"

"But what caps the climax," Mary wailed, "is that, in the article, Krishnu says that Harl Pembroke faces serious trouble, but will come out O. K. The old gag! And now the police say that either Harl or his son Bob killed Mike Sarsotti!"

"Holy smoke!" Alan groaned in consternation. "I promised that young Bob would be proved innocent!"

He took a turn about the room. Mary gazed after him.

"Alan, how are you going to unscramble this mess?"

He smacked a fist into his palm in grim determination.

"Krishnu can't afford failure. What he predicts, comes true!"

"But, man alive, Harl and his son can't both be Anne Drury's husband! They can't both be cleared of murdering Mike Sarsotti! They can't both play the lead in that picture!"

Alan's lean jaw set. "Mary, Krishnu's predictions come true. Because he *makes* them come true."

"But you can't—"

"No? Mary," he said, "you watch my smoke!"

The telephone shrilled an imperative command.

Mary answered. She told Alan, "It's Eddie. He says that Harl and Bob Pembroke are being given preliminary examinations now. He says hurry over!"

"Here I go"—Alan grabbed his hat—"to turn prophet into profit!"

Twenty minutes later, Alan was at police headquarters. His friend, Lieutenant Bolling, took him into the examining room.

"Pete," Alan asked Bolling, "what was the autopsy report?"

"Nothin' much. Sarsotti died from a bullet in the heart."

"No signs of choking or beating?"

"Hm-m-m. Some needle punctures. Sarsotti was a hophead. He had a skinful of heroin in him. But he died of a slug in the pump. It was murder, all right."

Harl Pembroke was called. He was brought forward to make his statement.

Forty-five, but surprisingly youthful, Harl Pembroke carried himself with an air that at once proclaimed but managed to make light of the adulation which had been his. His strikingly handsome face, though not so lean as formerly, was unlined; and his hair and mustache held no telltale tinge of gray to mar their sleek black.

He sat down. He looked at the men before him and turned to the examiners with the suave, ingratiating manner of one winning an audience.

"What I know, I can tell briefly," he said. Listening, Alan Randolph felt a tingle along his spine. Every word uttered by that deep, dramatic voice, was done so feelingly. For years, from stage, radio and the screen, that voice had charmed and entranced a great public. In it were overtones that plucked at Alan's nerves like cunning fingers upon harp strings—overtones of "Macbeth," or "He Who Gets Slapped," and of "Emperor Jones."

"Last Monday, at four o'clock," Harl Pembroke stated, "my servant announced a visitor, Mike Sarsotti. I didn't know the man. Realizing he must have come to see my son, I directed Hsing, my man, to take Sarsotti to the beach fronting the house. Hsing did so, and came back. I sent Hsing to the store at Malibu then, for supplies. I locked the gate after him. We have a high fence about the estate which is topped with barbed wire and rigged with a burglar alarm. Movie folk have been victims of a lot of thievery, you

know. Only my son, and my . . . er . . . wife and I have keys to the gates.

"Well, to continue— At five o'clock, Hsing returned. He found the body of Mike Sarsotti on the beach in front of the house."

Harl was asked, "Who was on the grounds, during that hour?"

"Only my son, myself, and Mike Sarsotti."

"Couldn't somebody have gotten in without you knowing?"

"No," Pembroke answered. "Not even from the seaward side. My burglar-alarm system has an electric eye that would set off the alarm if anyone even stepped onto the beach. If somebody had tried to climb the fence, the alarm would have advised me, and notified the patrol officers at Malibu."

Alan whispered to Bolling, prompting him.

Bolling said, "Pembroke, do you realize that what you say means that either you or your son *must* have killed Mike Sarsotti?"

"I do. That was mentioned before."

"Did you shoot Sarsotti?"

"I did not." Pembroke's calm was theatric, in face of the excitement which fired his listeners.

"You mean that your son *did* shoot Sarsotti?"

"I did not see him do it."

Alan prompted the detective: "Ask him, if Bob has an alibi, why you shouldn't jail Harl on charge of murder!"

To this Harl Pembroke answered, "I did not shoot Sarsotti. I could not have shot him."

"What d'you mean *could not*?"

"Because," said Pembroke, "Sarsotti was killed by rifle bullets fired from my porch, when he was two hundred feet away, on the beach. You detectives have established these facts. I could not have done that shooting."

"Why not?"

"Because, that afternoon, I had had my eyes examined for glasses. Dr. Meade had treated my eyes with a drug to enlarge the pupils. At the time of the murder, I couldn't read; I couldn't recognize a person across the street. I couldn't have shot a man through the heart at a distance of two hundred feet. At that distance, Sarsotti would have been nothing but a blur to me. Dr. Meade will confirm this."

At the rear of the room, a tall, scholarly man stood up.

"I do confirm Mr. Pembroke's statement," he said. "He could not have shot Sarsotti through the heart even if the man had been standing only a dozen yards from him."

For a minute the room was silent. The head of the homicide bureau conferred with the medical examiner.

"That's all, then," he told Harl Pembroke. "You are free to go, sir."

Young Bob Pembroke was brought in. Alan was struck by the youngster's resemblance to his father. Bob was Harl Pembroke, but twenty-odd years younger. The same tall build and handsome, arrogant features; the same wavy, black hair and dramatic dark eyes. The father was portly and well-preserved; while young Bob was lean and his dark eyes burned deep in his hollow-cheeked face.

Young Bob made quite an entrance. He carried himself as resolutely as though a third-degree would prove as ineffectual with him as a bean shooter against knightly armor.

He sat down. Questions were fired at him.

"No use going any further with this!" he burst out. "I killed Mike Sarsotti!"

Excitement sparked its high-vol-

tage through the room.

"Why?" demanded the D. A.'s assistant.

"Blackmail. Last week, I signed a long-term contract with Monarch Films. I . . . I thought I was starting a big career. Then Sarsotti came and said he'd break a scandal that would finish me in pictures, unless I paid what he asked."

"What was the scandal?"

Wearily, young Bob passed a hand over his haggard eyes. He answered, "Sarsotti's sister took poison when I refused to marry her. Sarsotti swore he'd smear the story over the headlines in a way that would make the women's clubs boycott me."

"Why didn't you pay him off?"

"I hadn't the money. Besides, I knew he'd keep bleeding me."

"How'd you kill Sarsotti?"

"Your detectives figured it out," Bob answered. "I told him to wait on the beach while I went indoors for the money. I got my rifle, put a silencer on it that I'd gotten from the studio prop room, and came down to the back porch. I shot through the porch screen at Sarsotti. Your men found the bullet holes in the screen. I shot twice. Sarsotti collapsed. That's all."

"Sign this statement."

Young Bob leaned forward. The stenographer laid a sheet of paper before him. He picked up a pen. Hesitated.

His flushed face turned deathly white. He looked around jerkily; in his dark eyes, for an instant, flamed an overwhelming fear. Then he stiffened. Pride steeled him. Rapidly, but with a dignity befitting the signing of a death warrant, he affixed his name to the confession.

"That's that," said Bolling to Alan. "We can go back to our pinochle."

Alan's brown eyes narrowed. "No. Our work is just starting."

"You're nuts! Young Pembroke has confessed."

"To a crime he never committed," said Alan.

Bolling stared. "Nobody but him could've killed Sarsotti!"

"Bob Pembroke is innocent."

"Rats! He'll hang."

"I know a fortuneteller who says he won't," said Alan.

II.

Alan rushed home.

The lower floors of his big house were given over to the clipping bureau and genealogical library over which Mary Landiss presided. Five girls worked under her, to cut clippings and file documents, to index and cross-index. Eddie Nolan, Alan's assistant—former reporter, private detective, tout, jockey, news-reel cameraman—did Alan's leg work. By virtue of connections which ramified amazingly, from newspaper morgues and records of private investigation bureaus, he picked up the occasional missing link needed to supplement information which Mary supplied Alan from her huge library—a library of details about anybody and everybody who might, some day, consult the great and infallible Krishnu.

The clipping bureau was a good front. The public did not know that Krishnu used its wealth of facts. The public thought Krishnu was an Oriental of unearthly origin who climbed into the stars on a rope of hashish and spied on the three Weird Sisters as they spun and measured and snipped the threads of mortal destinies—

"Mary," Alan commanded, "give me material on everybody connected with this Sarsotti murder!"

Alan got to work. For hours he pored over every recorded fact about each person involved in the case. Mary helped.

Until late afternoon they toiled.

Finally, his lean face solemn, Alan laid three clippings together on the desk before him. One was a sob-sister article on the evils of dope. The second was a Braille advertisement of books for the blind. The third was a newspaper account of a car being stripped of accessories, in broad daylight, on the Malibu Beach road.

"Alan," Mary asked, "of what earthly use are these trifles?"

"Kid," he said, putting a long arm about her shoulders, "losing the doodads off his car will maybe save a certain man's life! This sob-sister article calls dope a terrible evil, but proves it a blessing. And this Braille ad makes me realize that a certain blind man saw deep as a microscope, while sharp-eyed detectives have been stone-blind!"

Eddie Nolan, Alan's assistant, came into the office as unobtrusively as a shadow.

Alan asked, "Eddie, you found out where Mike Sarsotti bought his dope?"

"Yeah. He bought his happy dust from Shaky Tim Tosci."

"O. K.! Let's go find Shaky Tim!"

They drove down Sunset Boulevard like radio cops on an ambulance follow-up. They twisted past the plaza crowded with Mexicans, and angled down the hill of old Los Angeles into the dingy red brick of Chinatown. Eddie slowed to the curb beside a house fronting on a gloomy alley. From the building opposite came the wail and dissonance of Chinese music and a clatter of dishes. Several dark-clad figures melted furtively into doorways as Alan and Eddie stepped from the roadster.

They got a sharp stare from a hunched little man coming up the sidewalk. He pulled his hat low, and turned into the alley.

"Hey, Tim!" Eddie called.

Shaky Tim started as if jabbed with a knife and started to run down the alley. Alan lunged after him, made a flying tackle and brought him crashing to the pavement.

"What th' hell is this?" Tim yelped. "A snatch?"

"I want some information," Alan said. "You'll spill what I want to know or I'll tell the coppers that Shaky Tim is a lifer named Sam Ponzi who escaped from Folsom Penitentiary three years ago. Do you talk? Or do I?"

"I'll talk," said Shaky Tim. "Come on."

He led them into the dingy house fronting on the alley, down into a basement that was a jungle of boxes and debris inhabited by tigerish rats. To a back corner he led them and into a small room. Shaky Tim snapped on a dusty electric fixture. Looking around quickly, Alan saw that there were no windows, that the room was crudely partitioned off by boards, like a shack under a railroad trestle.

"Tim," Alan asked, "you maybe know that Mike Sarsotti was murdered a couple days ago?"

"Yeah."

"What all d'you know about Mike?"

"Not much," Shaky Tim said uneasily, rubbing his unshaven chin. "I been sellin' morphine to Sarsotti regular for two years—"

A gun spoke with a battering roar of concussion in the room. Once, then twice and a third time. "Down!" Alan yelled, dragging Eddie to the floor with him, whipping an automatic from his pocket as they sprawled on the concrete. Alan jerked his head toward the plank door. It was open a couple of inches and through the gap the pistol spoke a fourth time. Then the muzzle was jerked away, and the door slammed shut.

Alan triggered his automatic. He

sent three slugs tearing through the planks of the door.

Then Alan jumped up, hit the door with his shoulder, sending it slamming wide open. Again he triggered his gun, into the darkness of the basement. He saw no one; no gun roared answer; no swift movement in the piles of boxes that reached to the ceiling. The basement seemed empty.

"Hey, chief," Eddie called. And from the sick tone of Eddie's voice, Alan knew there was no use in searching the basement. The killer had done his job, and fled.

Alan turned back into Shaky Tim's room. Eddie was bent over Tim's prone figure. He got up, saying, "Poor devil."

Alan looked at Shaky Tim. He had caught three of the slugs in the chest.

"Well, they shut his mouth," Eddie said. "Why?"

"Whatever he was going to tell is lost to us," Alan said. "Come on. Let's get to headquarters."

Cautiously, they hurried through the cellar to the outside door and up the alley to their car.

Up the hill they drove, turned a corner, and sped up San Pedro. A freight train was on the tracks in the middle of the broad street, chugging toward the yards. They drew alongside the freight engine's mountainous bulk, heat and flames from the blowers blasting at them like demons.

Another car drew up beside their roadster, on the opposite side. Eddie was driving, and Alan was reaching back to the shelf for cigarettes, his body turned sidewise, when a single pistol shot spat from the other car, the sound muffled in a roar from the freight engine's stack.

Alan's roadster swerved in a turn that rammed it squarely into the chugging locomotive. The pavement seemed to tilt like a seesaw.

Shouts, a clank of metal and hiss of steam mingled in chaos in Alan's brain as he struck the pavement and rolled over and over—

Men helped him to his feet. Dazedly, he looked at the wreckage of his car and lunged forward, a gasping yell in his throat, to bend over the limp, still figure of Eddie Nolan.

"Easy, partner," somebody said. "Your buddy is wounded, but he'll be all right."

Riding in the ambulance to the hospital with Eddie, Alan did some hard thinking. Looming vivid in his brain was the realization that he and Eddie were marked for death. Why? That killer wanted to shut their mouths as he had shut Shaky Tim's mouth. Why? Because Shaky Tim *had* revealed something to them that might be fatal to the murderer?

"But all Shaky Tim told us," Alan reflected, "was, 'I been sellin' morphine to Mike Sarsotti regular, for two years.'"

Those words didn't seem very important. And yet, in them must be the key to this whole set-up of murder, Alan realized. A chill spider-legged up his spine. It seemed that an impalpable menace loomed over them, gathering to strike.

"First Sarsotti was killed. Then Shaky Tim. Who . . . who'll be next?"

Alan had a confab with Lieutenant Bolling.

"Harl Pembroke is in this case deeper than you cops realize," Alan insisted. "Whether he's the brain guy behind all the killing, or just a hired hand, I don't know. But he's in it!"

"Maybe he's just an innocent bystander?"

"Let's find out!" Alan urged. "Let's use a lie detector on him! I'll rig one up."

"Lie detector?" snorted Bolling. "Hokum!"

"Says you! Don't overlook any bets, Pete."

Bolling telephoned Harl Pembroke. Then he and Alan drove out to the actor's beach estate.

A Chinese servant opened the gates for them, and ushered them into Pembroke's study.

Pembroke came striding in grandly, as if a whole first act had prepared for his entrance. He looked freshly tubbed, shaved, massaged. He wore a Chinese dressing gown that set off his stalwart frame to fine advantage. His black hair was plastered and parted in youthful fashion, and his mustache was trim as a chorus man's. He had virile charm, Alan realized. And an ego as monumental as Grant's Tomb. He looked ten years younger than his forty-five. Only his eyes betrayed him—they were wary dark eyes, crafty with disillusion.

"What's this nonsense about a lie detector?" he snapped.

Diplomatically Alan said, "You're not guilty, so you've got nothing to be afraid of, Mr. Pembroke. It's for your own sake, as a matter of fact, that we wish to use it. You see, some of the papers are hinting that the police let you go too easy—"

Br-r-r! The telephone shrilled interruption.

Harl Pembroke snatched up the desk phone. "Hello!"

The voice in the receiver rasped loudly. "Harl, this is Gus Sterne, out at Monarch Studios."

"Yes?" Harl said, and now his voice was suave as honey.

"Harl, we got a quarter-million dollars tied up in the 'Federal Man.' Your son can't finish the lead role in it, now, and—well, we need you to finish the picture for us."

"You want me back for just *one* picture?"

Pembroke's voice was calm, indif-

ferent. But Alan noticed that a pulse leaped in the actor's throat, that his hand was white-knuckled. Quickly, Alan realized what heady triumph this moment held for Harl Pembroke. He had been fired from his studio—now they were *begging* him to come back!

"Harl," said the voice in the receiver, "we'll give you a five-year contract, at fifteen hundred a week."

"Well, I'll see you in the morning," the actor said coolly. And calmly he set down the phone. Not until then did he permit himself a shout that brought his Chinese servant rushing in, quivering with fright.

"Now that you're back in pictures," Alan said, his lean face thoughtful with friendly concern, "you don't want any rumors going around that might queer you with the public."

"That . . . that's right," Pembroke said.

"Of course, if you refused to submit to the tests, that would sort of indicate you were afraid—"

"Oh, go ahead, go ahead!" Pembroke snapped.

He sat down in an armchair. Alan unpacked his apparatus.

He rolled up Pembroke's sleeves. Around Pembroke's arm he fastened the hollow rubber band of a blood-pressure indicator. To the actor's other wrist, Alan affixed another instrument: "To record variations in your pulse beat," he explained. About Pembroke's chest he fastened a broad band, snugly. "To record variations in your rate of breathing," he said. He put a sort of cap, lined with a network of wires, on Pembroke's head. "Tension of the scalp shows emotional disturbance. You've felt your hair raise, when you're scared, of course."

"Have I?" the actor snapped.

"So I'm going to ask you certain questions. You'll answer. Whether

your answers are lies, or truth, we'll be able to decide by studying your emotional reactions as these instruments will record them."

"Damn you, you're not insinuating that I lied?"

"Oh, no-o!" said Alan. "Bolling, you have the stop-watch. You'll keep track of the time interval between each of my questions, and Mr.



"Pembroke, the police say that there were just two persons who could have killed Sarsotti. But isn't it true that a third person killed him and that you know who this third person is?"

Pembroke's answers. All set, Mr. Pembroke?"

"Yes, get on with it!"

Alan drew himself to his full height, stood towering over Pembroke. His keen brown eyes bored

into the actor's dark ones. And as Alan spoke, his deep voice was the voice of Krishnu, stern and resonant as if with muted thunder.

Alan asked: "Pembroke, is it true that the sharpshooter who killed

Mike Sarsotti was a blind man?"

Pembroke started, visibly. The dial of the pulse counter showed a sudden leap of heartbeat. The rate-of-breathing indicator revealed a sudden stab of breath. Seconds passed, and Pembroke did not answer; moments lengthened rapidly.

"Pembroke," Alan said, "a prompt answer indicates a true answer; if you delay, it looks as if you're figuring out a lie."

"The answer is no—I mean I don't know a damn thing about it," the actor blurted out.

"O. K. We'll go on. Pembroke, is it true that Mike Sarsotti was dead before he was shot?"

Not a flicker of reaction did the actor show this time.

His answer was prompt: "I wouldn't know."

Only the dial to the instrument upon his head revealed an impulse. The needle waggged, as if Pembroke's black hair had risen in a stab of terror—

"O. K.," said Alan. "Pembroke, that man who mowed your lawns today was a private detective. He searched your incinerator and your rubbish cans and found a strip of felt with a hole in it, and a battered hypodermic needle. Is it true, Pembroke, that those articles can prove that your son did not kill a man, but saved a man's life?"

The actor did show a flicker of emotion this time. He yawned and said wearily, though promptly: "I wouldn't know."

The dials of the lie detector did not even jiggle.

An oppressive sense of failure began to weigh leaden upon Alan's nerves. Carefully, he phrased his next question.

"Pembroke, the police say that there were just two persons who could have killed Sarsotti. But isn't it true that a third person

killed Sarsotti? Isn't it true that you know of this third person and that you could save your son by revealing the identity of that third person?"

Pembroke stiffened. His dark eyes widened. The needles of the lie detector dials leaped and vibrated.

But the actor did not answer. Past Alan he stared, toward the doorway.

"Harl!" someone gasped. "Good heavens! You look as if you were clamped into the electric chair."

Alan and the detective whirled around.

In the doorway stood a young woman, a supple, shapely woman—Anne Drury, Pembroke's estranged wife. Her lovely face was pale. Her blue eyes stared in astonishment.

For an instant Harl Pembroke sat as if turned to stone, as if thunder-struck by her presence here. Then he leaped to his feet. He tore Alan's lie detector apparatus off.

"Harl," Anne said, her low voice imploring, "I've got to talk to you."

Discreetly, Alan drew Bolling aside. But just as soon as Pembroke took his wife into the next room and shut the door, Alan sprang to that door and opened it an inch.

He saw the actor standing before Anne, gazing down at her. His dark eyes were avid, his body was tense, as if he kept from taking her in his arms only by a supreme effort of self-control.

"Harl," she was saying earnestly, "I've come back to stay, if you'll do just one thing—"

He stood taut, his expressive face reflecting the backlash of tumultuous emotions. She gazed up at him, her fine eyes steady and direct, a shadow of suffering on her lovely face. The soft light laid upon her hair a sheen of red-brown gold; in

her posture, in her every move and gesture, was grace and appeal.

Watching, Alan felt for Pembroke. He guessed what anguish had burned in Pembroke's heart; how it had smoldered to a dull ache under the melodrama of events, and now blazed anew as he stood tense, gazing at his young wife, absorbing her with his eyes, with his every sense, as if he could breathe in the beauty of her, as if her loveliness were a fragrance he could inhale deeply, as if her charm were a ringing carillon that filled his mind with lingering, suffusing music.

He smiled. If he had shouted aloud, if he had whooped and smashed things, the sudden triumph that fired his veins could not have been more eloquent.

"You've come back to me," he said. He drew a deep, tremulous breath, moistened his hot lips. "You've come back."

He reached for her, starved yearning making him savage.

But she held back. Huskily, he demanded, "What . . . what is it that you want me to do?"

"I want you to help Bob! To help your son get free!"

He jerked, perceptibly, and on his cheekbones burned sudden spots of angry red.

He said flatly, "I can't help Bob."

"But, Harl, he says you can!"

"No." He turned away deliberately from her.

She seized his arm. Tears in her eyes, she begged, "Harl, Bob is your own son! He didn't kill Sarsotti. Can't you understand? He'll die for a murder he never committed, unless you help him! I thought that, for me, you'd . . . you'd do anything, you'd give anything—"

Violently, he wrenched away from her. And without another word, he started out of the room.

"Wait!" she cried. He turned, as

she snatched a small automatic from her purse.

She pointed the gun at him, but he sprang forward and knocked the weapon clattering to the floor. She gasped, and leaned back against the table, limp, crimsoning with shame.

He grasped her elbows and shook her violently.

"No hysterics, Anne! You're going back to town."

He called his servant, then released her, as Hsing entered.

"Harl!"—for a moment she looked at him, her eyes misted, full of pain—"I won't ever be back!"

Blindly she stumbled to the door Hsing held open.

For an instant Pembroke hesitated; his handsome face twitched in a paroxysm of indecision. Alan, watching, realized that in the actor's mind seethed a hell of anguish. He loved his young wife with all his heart—yet, he did not call her back.

He turned toward the door of his study. He smoothed the strain from his face. He put on poise like a mask. As if an afterthought, he picked up the gun which he had knocked from his wife's hand, and stuck the weapon into his pocket.

Alan dodged back from the door. Pembroke pushed it open, and came back into the study.

"Sit down, Pembroke," Alan requested. "We'll finish—"

"No! To hell with that lie-detector hokum!"

"Hokum?" Alan's brown eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "I'd call it the real McCoy, considering how much it has revealed."

Pembroke's jaw dropped. Livid, he stared at Alan.

"Damn you, you're faking!"

"No! Look, Pembroke. The police say that nobody but you, or your son Bob, could have killed Sarsotti. And Bob has confessed to the murder. But this lie detector has made

me realize that *neither* of you actually did kill Sarsotti."

Harl Pembroke was staggered. An abrupt, ghastly change came over him. He cringed and his rampant ego wilted like tinfoil in a blaze of heat. He looked panicked, terrified.

Abruptly, Harl let out a hoarse yell. "Hsing!"

His hand streaked up from his pocket. Blue steel shone in the light. Alan yelled, "Look out!" Alan flung his six feet of sinewy length in a headlong dive at Pembroke. The room rocked to the concussion of the pistol's report. A bullet lashed at Alan's throat like the swipe of a saw. Then he struck Pembroke, and they crashed to the floor, Pembroke beneath. Alan knocked the automatic from his hand. Pembroke smashed at Alan's face with his fists. Alan got up. He grabbed the actor by the collar and yanked him to his feet, shaking him like a sack of meal.

Flinging Pembroke into a chair, Alan snapped, "We'll have you down to headquarters, wise guy, and you'll name that killer! Come on, Bolling."

Gathering up his apparatus, Alan stalked out of the house. Lieutenant Bolling followed. They got into the car and started toward town.

"What I can't savvy," Bolling remarked, "is why Pembroke jumped you, Alan, when you said that neither he nor his son killed Sarsotti? Hell, if you proved that, you'd be doing Harl Pembroke a favor! So why'd he turn on you?"

"Pete, we've got to make him tell why. We'll— Hell, what's wrong now?"

The engine of the car had died. They were coasting.

Bolling pulled off the concrete, and braked to a stop.

"Damn funny," he remarked, getting out and looking at the tank.

"We're out of gas. I thought I had a full tank."

"Here comes a car. I'll hail it," Alan said.

He stepped out onto the road, full into the glare of the oncoming headlights, and held out his hand.

The machine slowed up as it neared and stopped, nearby.

"We're out of gas!" Alan called. "Will you—"

Swift jets of flame spurted from the car. Dazedly, Alan felt himself stagger and spin back, vaguely he heard Bolling yell— Then the concrete tilted under his feet, and the brushy hills across the road tilted at the sky, and he fell down, down, in a whirling darkness that shriveled his sense in a black pall of screaming oblivion—

III.

He came to his senses in an ambulance.

A white-coated intern sat beside him.

"Where's my partner?" Alan demanded.

"Easy, now. You got a bullet in your shoulder and—"

"Damn you, where's Pete Bolling? Tell me!"

"He got it bad. In fact—"

"Pete's dead!" Alan cried. A sort of stunned horror gripped his brain. Who was the killer? "Tomorrow, I've got to make Pembroke name that murderer!"

He stayed at the hospital overnight. In the morning, he phoned Detective Ramsey of the homicide bureau. And though he felt feverish and groggy, Alan left the hospital and joined Ramsey.

They drove out to Harl Pembroke's studio. The gateman directed them to sound stage No. 10, where "Federal Man" was being filmed.

Entering, they saw that a scene had just been shot.

Everybody in the huge, barnlike structure was gathered around the director. Director Riisen sat in a canvas chair, flanked by his assistant, a script girl, cameramen, and a couple of authors. He was talking to the players, particularly to Harl Pembroke.

Pembroke wore a gray suit that was dusty and torn and stained with dye to look like blood. A jagged slash over one eye looked realistic, and "blood" drained in a line from his lips. He looked haggard, sweaty and battle-shattered.

"Harl," the director was saying, "there's something wrong. You aren't putting conviction into your work!"

"Any suggestions?"

"Of course not, Harl," the fat director said, grinning affectionately. "Just . . . just get in there and pitch!"

"And do your job right," Alan put in, "because you're going to police headquarters, as soon as you're through."

Seeing him, Pembroke started violently. He looked at Alan's bandaged shoulder, at Detective Ramsey, and a strange look of grim calculation came into his eyes.

But he said only, "Riisen, I'll put on fresh make-up."

"Yes, Harl. You can take twenty minutes, while I have the camera crane readjusted for that fall down the stairs."

Pembroke strode away. Alan sat down to watch.

A warning bell rang. Kleig lights focused in dazzling brilliance upon the set, a three-walled interior of a tenement.

"Sink 'em!" Riisen signaled to the sound booth, to the cameramen. On the stage, the story action began! Alan looked at the rough script he had been given.

Six men were gathered around a hand press, examining a counterfeit hundred-dollar bill.

"It's a better job than Uncle Sam does himself!"

"Passin' this stuff will be easy. Me'n' Lefty will—"

A buzzer shrilled warning. Sudden panic on their faces, the counterfeiters whipped automatics from their pockets as a door crashed open and in charged Captain Burke (Harl Pembroke) and three men in police uniform.

Through an opposite door the counterfeiters fled. One guarded their retreat with a submachine gun. It's cannonade was answered by the police fire.

Pembroke pitched headlong to the floor. Two of his men crumpled, and the third lurched and staggered as if badly hit, and reeled back out of the room.

From the floor, Harl shot at the machine-gunner.

The Tommy-gun clattered to the floor, and the counterfeiter slumped where he stood. Harl lunged to his feet. Harl grabbed the machine gun and plunged through the doorway after the escaping mob, into a hall.

The counterfeiters were waiting at the top of a stairway for their partner. Their automatics blazed at Harl and he fell; but even as he fell, he triggered the Tommy-gun and two of his assailants doubled up and hit the floor in a heap. The rest fled down the stairs.

Harl attempted to rise. Failed. Again he tried to get onto his hands and knees. Somehow, he did it. Every line of his face screamed anguish. Every twist and jerk of his muscles shouted in mortal agony.

"God A'mighty—that's *acting!*" the director whispered to Alan. "That's the old Harl Pembroke, at his marvelous best!"

Somehow, dragging the Tommy-gun, Harl reached the top of the stairs. A pistol roared from below. Down the stairway Harl dove, hurtling and careening in a terrific bone-smashing plunge.

One mobster waited at the foot of the stairs, gun uplifted. Harl struck the bottom. At point-blank range the mobster squeezed the trigger. Harl fired a burst from the Tommy-gun. Screaming, the mobster spun around, lurched through a door.

Harl lay limp and inert for a moment. Then slowly he lifted his head and faced the camera. Blood ran from his mouth.

A glaze as of dimming consciousness filmed his dark eyes. Agonizingly he tried to lift himself onto hands and knees; and into the effort he put a heart-stopping eloquence. First the taut, clawed fingers of his hand moved, as if straining out of the cold lassitude of death; then his elbow straightened, his arm moved, his other arm reached out; he lifted up onto his arms as if tearing his shoulders out of the clutch of a quicksand. Masterfully he portrayed the effort of an iron will to control a body that was broken and shattered.

Over the floor he pulled himself an inch at a time, paralyzed legs dragging pitifully. Toward that door through which his foes had gone he stomached along, not forgetting, in his anguish, to reach back and drag the Tommy-gun up. Time and again he slumped flat; but time and again he shook off the coma and pulled himself on.

Into the doorway he pulled himself. There, at the far side of the room, two counterfeiterers were hastily cramming the contents of their lockers into a suitcase.

Harl pulled the Tommy-gun forward. With an agony of effort, he raised his head and lifted the gun.

"Mike!" he choked out. "Sam It's . . . the payoff!"

They whirled, their automatics blazing out. The submachine gun roared. The two mobsters crumpled to the floor—The Tommy-gun slid from Harl's clutch. He slumped face down onto the floor. One effort he made to rise up; then his head rolled flat against his shoulder. A shudder racked his body. The fingers of one hand slowly stiffened.

"Cut!" the director yelled. "Lord, that was splendid, Harl! Best damn acting you ever did in your life! It'll make the picture. You've given us a smash hit!"

Impulsively, the crowd started forward to congratulate Pembroke. Alan went with the others; he felt a new respect for the actor.

The "dead" mobsters nonchalantly picked themselves off the floor. The last two "shot" by Harl bent down to give him a lift up.

They touched him and recoiled, unbelieving horror on their faces. And instantly, with a swirling sickness in his brain, Alan knew what they were going to yell.

"Chief, he's *dead!* God A'mighty, Pembroke's shot to pieces!"

IV.

A lofty room, furnished in luxury, shadowed with the dusk of velvet hangings. Incense.

A great, shining globe like a moon, pausing in a sky of black satin.

Behind the globe, sat Krishnu, in a great carved chair. He was clad in robes of rich dark velvet agleam with gems, and wore a silver turban slashed with an arrow of gold, tipped with a burning ruby. His contemplative face was dark as cinnamon bark. His brown eyes were luminous and earnest.

"You rotten, lying faker!" Anne Drury was crying at him. "I'm going to make a complaint to the district attorney—"

"Miss Drury," said Krishnu, his resonant voice very calm, "I sent for you because I want to tell you how to free young Bob Pembroke from jail. He did not commit that murder to which he confessed. I want you to place the guilt where it really belongs."

Anger fled from her face. She sank into a chair.

"Krishnu, if you can only do that! I'd give *anything*—"

"The police," Krishnu went on, "said that either Harl Pembroke, or his son Bob, must have killed Sarsotti. Neither did. Mike Sarsotti killed himself."

"Suicide!" she gasped.

"No. It was not suicide. It was murder. I will reconstruct the whole affair for you, in due order. First, I will tell you what you must do— When you leave here, go to the office of the *Star-Courier*. From their files get a newspaper story of a car being stripped of accessories in broad daylight, on the Malibu Beach Road. You will note that



Blue steel shone in Pembroke's hand. Alan yelled, "Look out!" and flung his six feet of sinewy length in a headlong dive at Pembroke.

the date and time of that robbery, will be four thirty, May 1st."

"Why, that's the day—"

"And the hour," said Krishnu, "that Mike Sarsotti was killed at Harl Pembroke's beach place. Miss Drury, the car that was robbed, was Bob's. He left it parked beside the road when the distributor went wrong and the engine died. He was in a hurry. He got a lift on into Santa Monica. Miss Drury, I have here a list of people who saw Bob Pembroke in Santa Monica during the interval from four twenty, until a quarter to five. Their testimony will prove that young Bob could not have killed Mike Sarsotti, because he was miles away at the time of the murder. Miles away, on an errand of life and death."

Anne Drury's eyes were shining with joy.

"Please, explain more—"

"Young Bob," said Krishnu solemnly, "knew of his father's relations with Mike Sarsotti's sister. When Sarsotti came that afternoon and demanded blackmail from Harl, young Bob overheard. Bob knew his father could not raise the money Sarsotti wanted. So, immediately, Bob started to Santa Monica in hope of raising the money from friends. But car trouble delayed him, and when he got back—though it wasn't a half-hour later—Sarsotti was dead. Young Bob, I believe, then went to his room without letting his father know that he was aware of all that had occurred."

"But why . . . why did Bob confess to the crime?"

Krishnu's voice became very kindly. "I wonder, Miss Drury, if you know with what hero-worship Bob regarded his father? The boy's mother died when he was an infant. He never knew her. Harl Pembroke was both father and mother, comrade and hero, to him. Harl had devoted himself to the boy.

"You can imagine how proud the lonely, imaginative youngster must have been of his famous father. When Bob looked at his dad, he saw all the high-hearted heroes that Pembroke played. To Bob, his father was D'Artagnan, King Richard, and Cyrano, and all the other glamorous heroes of the stage—When Bob finished school, it was his father who got him into pictures. Yes, Pembroke was good to Bob, until—"

"Until I spoiled it all!" Anne Drury exclaimed.

"—until this trouble with Sarsotti, which began a year before Harl married you, came to its climax," said Krishnu. "Consider, now: On account of Bob, Harl lost you. On account of Bob, Harl was dropped by his studio; his roles were given to Bob—Bob was young, and so like his father.

"Bob knew that Harl was crushed by these losses, and he felt himself to blame—"

"Literally, Harl was no longer the same man; his heart was shattered and his brain twisted. People joke about an actor's ego, but it is only a great ego that will drive a man to eminence in such a profession. Losing his career, losing you—well, it was hell on earth for Harl.

"He had loved his son. But the man who had made a has-been of him, he hated with fear and jealousy. And the rival who had stolen his adored wife, he could kill.

"Young Bob realized all this. He's young and idealistic. When he saw a chance to right the wrongs he had done his father, why, he grabbed the chance. Bob sacrificed himself. He confessed to killing Sarsotti, to throw suspicion away from his father."

Anne Drury nodded, understanding.

"I see— No, I don't see it all. Who *did* kill Sarsotti? Harl couldn't

have. He had just had his eyes treated. He couldn't see well enough to have shot at Sarsotti, a couple of hundred feet away. Remember, Dr. Meade established that!"

"That's so," Krishnu admitted. "But it's not of first importance. You see, those bullets didn't kill Sarsotti. He was already dead when they hit him."

"Wh-what do you mean?" she stammered, in amazement.

"I'll reveal the whole story in detail," Krishnu said. "Now, please, imagine yourself at your husband's home that afternoon when Mike Sarsotti is ushered into the study. Hsing has gone to Malibu. Young Bob is upstairs, taking a nap. Your husband has asked Sarsotti to sit down, and offers him a cigarette. Sarsotti looks at him, and says:

"'Well, Pembroke, you raised that money for me? Damn you, you better have! Two weeks you been stallin' me!"

"'Sarsotti, it takes time—' "

"'To hell with the sob story! You got the money, or haven't you?"

"'I've arranged to settle with you,'" Pembroke said.

"'O. K., hand over the coin!"

"Harl Pembroke looks at him with cool dignity. 'You're nervous.'

"Under that calm reproof, Sarsotti flushes and says, 'I'm jittery as all hell! You've stalled me off for two weeks and I've had no dough to buy the stuff. Damn you, I've been sufferin' tortures!"

"Harl Pembroke turns to his desk, opens a drawer and brings out a hypodermic syringe. Casually, he says, 'I told my doctor about you, and had him leave a little . . . er . . . medicine for you. Go ahead and use it. Then we can settle our business less like thugs and more like gentlemen.'

"Sarsotti snatches the hypodermic. Abject, almost crawling in his grati-

tude, he says, 'You're a sport, Pembroke!'

"He lifts his sleeve, and thrusts the needle into his arm.

"'Isn't that a pretty big shot you're taking?"

"'I need it!' Sarsotti snaps, pushing the plunger in. Then he gives the syringe back to Pembroke.

"Pembroke's dark eyes flame with triumph.

"'Sarsotti, for two long years you've blackmailed me!"

"'Yeah. But pay me, now, and I'll call it quits.'

"'Until your nerves start screaming for dope again—then you'll come back for more cash!"

"'Damn right. You're a sucker, and I'm takin' you.'

"Harl Pembroke pushes a chair forward. 'Sit down before you fall down,' he says.

"'Boy, I'm floatin' high,' Sarsotti mumbles foggily.

"Pembroke opens the door of the study, looks up the stairway, listens until he is satisfied no one is near, then shuts the door.

"'Sarsotti, I'm through handing over blackmail.'

"Sarsotti stares and blurts querulously, 'You crazy? The scandal I got up my sleeve would ruin you like *that!*' He tries to snap his fingers, but can't. His hand falls woodenly onto his lap. He stares at it, bewildered.

"'Sleepy?' asks Pembroke.

"It takes a moment for the question to reach Sarsotti. Blearily he stares at Pembroke. With an effort, he arouses himself. Bewilderment comes over his sallow face. Suddenly his fat, gross body twitches. And a spasm twists his coarse features into a mask of horror. 'For God's sake,' he mumbles. 'I'm . . . I'm paralyzed. Why . . . I ain't got no strength.' And in a gasp of agony that rasps from his

bloodless lips, he mutters, 'Oh, my God . . . I'm sick—'

"'You're feeling helpless,' says Pembroke, 'like you've made me feel for two years.'

"Realization crashes upon Sarsotti's numbing brain.

"'Blast you to hell!' he tries to shout, the words burring in his throat. 'You've poisoned me!'

"With an effort so intense that it pops grisly beads of sweat upon his forehead, he lunges out of his chair. He tries to grab Pembroke by the throat. Pembroke easily forces him into a chair.

"'Sarsotti, you're dying.'

"'You'll burn for this, damn you!'

"'No, Sarsotti. I've planned this all out. You'll be found dead. From a bullet wound. Nobody will ever suspect that something else caused your death. An autopsy will reveal that you were a drug addict, and will reveal heroin in your system. A big dose, but not enough to kill a habitual user. The needle scars on your arm will show you were a habitual user.'

"'The police won't know that it's not heroin you've made a habit of, but morphine. They won't know that this big shot of heroin was enough to kill you. You see, Sarsotti, though heroin and morphine are both derivatives of opium, of the two, heroin is much stronger. Heroin is maybe six times stronger than morphine. So, just now, you've injected into your veins enough heroin to kill you. You can feel it numbing your body, your brain, your heart! It's an easy way to die. Easy for you and fine for me— My tracks will be hidden.'

"'It's murder!' gasps the doomed man. 'You'll burn—'

"'Somebody will burn. But not I!' Pembroke says hoarsely. 'You're not the only enemy I've got to take care of!'

"He bends and lifts Sarsotti, who

is so limp that his head rolls as if his neck were broken. He drags him out a side door into a garden plot which is screened by tall shrubs. He leaves Sarsotti lying there.

"Pembroke goes back into the house. After a time he comes out again, with a rifle fitted with a silencer.

"He bends over Sarsotti. Sarsotti never stirs. He lies there in the stony, unnatural quiet of death. Pembroke places a felt pad over Sarsotti's heart. Then he puts the muzzle of the rifle against the pad, and squeezes the trigger.

"The silencer muffles the report.

"Pembroke steals back to the house. In the hallway, he listens for sounds of movement upstairs. He hears none.

"'The kid's sleeping well!' he mutters.

"Going out, he picks up Sarsotti's body and carries him a few hundred feet out onto the strip of beach inclosed by the high fence of the estate. He leaves Sarsotti lying on the sand.

"Then Pembroke goes to the porch which fronts on the beach.

"He places a chair by the front screen. Steadying the rifle on the chair back, he fires through the screen in the direction of Sarsotti's body. Twice he fires.

"With his finger, then, he feels the two bullet holes in the copper screen, peering blurrily at the powder stains about them. Next, he kicks the two empty cartridges, which the rifle ejected, into a corner. He feels with sensitive fingers for scratches on top of the chair back, where he has steadied the gun barrel. Finally he wipes fingerprints from the weapon.

"That silencer and the hypodermic syringe," Krishnu finished, "have been found. A private detective named Halloran has them. He can also produce testimony establishing

that Sarsotti was a morphine addict, not a heroin user. You will find Halloran at this address."

He paused. Anne Drury sat absorbed, thinking.

"Krishnu, you've helped me so much! Just one thing more. Who . . . murdered Harl?"

"Harl Pembroke," said Krishnu, "killed himself."

She stared, incredulous.

"Listen," Krishnu said. "Harl realized that if the police discovered that Sarsotti was a morphine addict, they'd realize he was killed by the heroin. So Harl worried about that peddler from whom Sarsotti bought his morphine—Shaky Tim Tosci. Harl watched Tosci. And when detectives went to Tosci's quarters and Shaky Tim started to reveal what he knew, Harl shot him. However, Shaky Tim had already told enough for the investigators to figure out how Sarsotti really was killed.

"The investigators—Lieutenant Bolling and a criminologist, named Alan Randolph—questioned Harl. He realized that his guilt was discovered. In a desperate effort to save himself, he had Hsing tamper with their car. He followed them when they drove away from his place. And when he found them stalled on the lonely highway, he shot them down.

"However, he did not kill them both. He discovered this next day

when Randolph came to the studio after him.

"During a wait between scenes, he put real bullets into the guns—supposedly loaded with blanks—which the other actors used against him in a fight sequence.

"Harl Pembroke died heroically, performing the greatest bit of acting of his whole career. Though another actor will be dubbed into 'Federal Man' to finish the film, credit for a smash hit will be Harl Pembroke's!"

Anne Drury's lovely eyes misted. A moment she was silent.

Tremulously, then, she said, "Krishnu, you've h-helped me so much!"

"For a fee," he said honestly.

"I can't ever thank you enough!"

"And now," Krishnu said, smiling, "I think it quite safe to predict that young Bob Pembroke will be cleared of any guilt in this case; that he will finish the picture, 'Federal Man,' and will be given a starring contract by his studio. And that you and he will be married a year from now!"

Alan Randolph laid a check on the table before his assistants, Mary Landiss and Eddie Nolan.

"One thousand bucks!" said Eddie, whistling. Mary smiled.

"That," said Alan, hugging Mary, "is what I call turning prophet into profit!"

THE END.



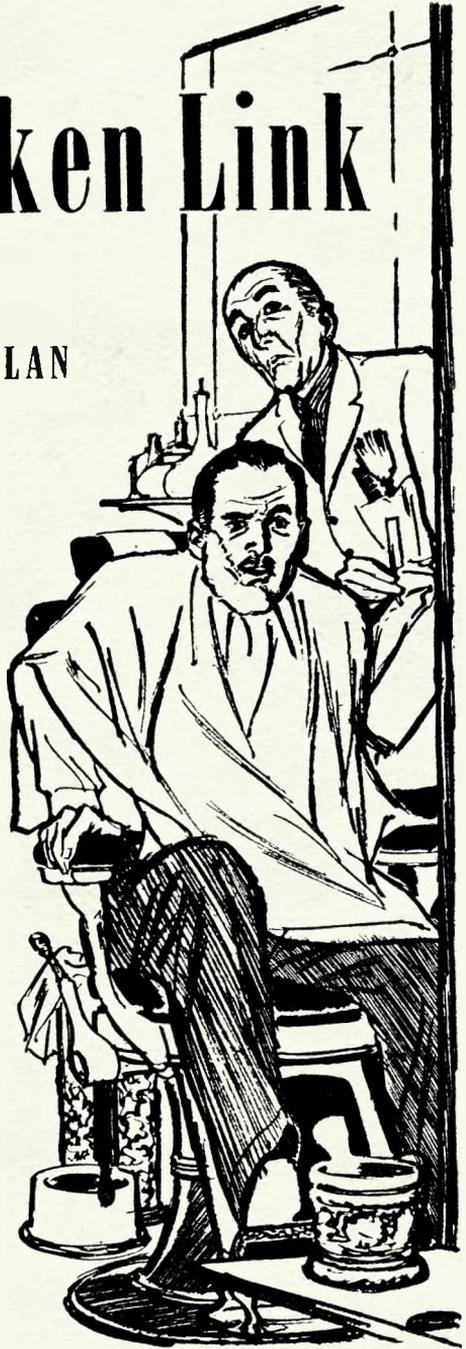
The Broken Link

by TED COUGHLAN

A detective goes to get himself a shave and instead gets a nice, juicy murder to solve.

Detective Wade Barnett rubbed his not-too-smooth chin, deploring the scarcity of razor blades. He wondered if he had time to rush to the barber shop before catching the bus to Miami police headquarters. When the overcrowded vehicle stopped at the corner to take on more passengers, he shook his head, went across the street to the barber shop, took off his blue sports coat, loosened his tie, and got in a chair.

"Shave?" The tall, emaciated cracker barber started honing his razor without waiting for an answer. Putting a steaming towel over his customer's face, effectively gagging him, he went on: "Shore windy, ain't it? Things must be kinda slow with you fellows since they clamped down on gasoline. Crooks can't pull many jobs on three gallons a week." He chuckled at his own humor. "Now take me—"





"I don't want you. A shave will do," Barnett muttered, as the towel was removed.

Lying back in the chair, he watched idly a man on top of a two-story house across the empty lots. The late-morning sun was just coming up, and shone through the tall coconut palms onto the roof, slickened by the heavy Florida dew. While Barnett was still watching, the man started from one end of the steep-hipped roof to the other. He kept shaking his head and gesticulating wildly. He slipped once or twice and had to grab at the peak to keep from falling. After a while, he sat down, his legs straddling the sloping roof. His hat blew off and sailed away.

Barnett pointed him out to the barber: "Look at that guy, Seymour! He seems to be too scared to either stay up there or come down."

The barber walked to the open door and stared across the lots. Slowly stropping his razor, he remarked: "It looks like that lazy, good-for-nothing Resse Hull. He's been up there ever since I opened an hour ago and ain't done a stroke of work yet. I hope Thomas is paying him by the job and not by the hour."

"What's he doing? Putting on a new roof?"

"Supposed to. But he ain't even started the fire under the tar barrel yet today. He was up there all day yesterday, but I can't see what he done. Maybe he's still drunk."

Once more the man stood up on the steep roof. He braced himself against the wind, looked around uncertainly, then started toward the edge of the roof. He seemed to lean against the slope as he warily put one foot in front of the other. In the crystal-clear air of the Florida morning, he was seen about halfway down toward the overhanging eaves. Suddenly he slipped, made a futile grab to save himself, and with a

barely audible scream, fell to the wet tar paper. Steadied for a split second, he began sliding again. The detective and the barber gasped as the man's body disappeared.

"Cripes, there's a cement walk all around that house!" Seymour ejaculated.

Barnett jumped out of the chair. He jerked the apron from around his neck, wiped the lather from his cheeks, and ran across the street, followed by the barber.

When they reached the distant house, which was surrounded by a tall coconut grove, they saw the workman's battered body lying on the walk.

"Run and call an ambulance, Seymour!"

The barber went reluctantly. Barnett saw the back door of the house open, and a heavy-set giant of a man rush out. He looked at the detective with red-rimmed eyes. When he spoke, Barnett was almost knocked over by the fumes of liquor on the man's breath. His booming voice could be heard a block away.

"What fell? The crash woke me. What are you doing in my yard?" He added the last question as an afterthought.

Barnett pointed to the corpse: "Hull fell off the roof. He's dead."

"What?" The man stared unbelievably at the mangled body. "When? He wasn't supposed to be working up there today. Yesterday, he said he'd get through before dark."

"Obviously he didn't." Barnett walked around the building. There was neither a ladder nor a scaffolding against any of the walls. He looked the second time to make certain, then demanded: "How did he get up there this morning? There isn't any ladder near the place."

The big man gulped. His thick lips parted, and his furred tongue fell out like a panting dog's. It was

several moments before he could answer the question.

"There ain't no other way to get up there, except with the ladder. It's gotta be there!" He ran around the building to see for himself.

When he stopped searching, Barnett ordered: "Telephone the police! Tell them I want the photographer and the medical examiner out here right away."

The owner of the house left, muttering drunkenly.

Barnett reflected pityingly: "Hull might have been on the roof all night. With this stiff breeze lashing the palm fronds, he could have yelled himself hoarse without being heard. Still, it looks suspicious—"

When the barber came back from phoning, Barnett asked: "Where did Hull live?"

"Down the next street."

"Hurry over there and get his wife. Bring her right away."

"All right, but I don't want to be the one to tell her."

"Don't be so squeamish. Bring her here."

Before either Thomas, the house owner, or Seymour got back, the photographer arrived. While he was taking pictures, Barnett went around the house again, bending near the dew-dampened ground, shaking his bulletlike head dubiously.

"What do you make of it?" the photographer asked.

The detective ruffled his short, graying mustache.

"There's something screwy about it all. Judging by the grass, Hull must have flown up there. There isn't a mark where the ladder stood, and no footprints except mine and the house owner's. Where's that damn barber?"

He looked toward the road. Seymour was just coming into the yard, solicitously guiding a frail, middle-aged woman by the elbow. Barnett

motioned to the photographer to cover the corpse.

The woman looked at the covered body, then lifted her head and asked: "What happened to him? Is . . . is he—"

Barnett nodded. He said: "I'm sorry. He lost his footing and fell off the roof."

The woman received the news in stunned silence.

Barnett led her inside the house. When she was seated in the living room, the detective asked her: "Was your husband home last night?"

"No, he didn't show up. I came over here looking for him after dark, but when I seen the ladders was down, I figured he'd gone to the dog races. He went there most every night."

"Are you certain he was away from home all night?"

She nodded.

"It ain't nothing unusual for him. Many a time when he managed to win a few dollars on the dogs, he'd get drunk and stay away for two or three days at a stretch. I never thought— When can I take him home?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Hull, nobody can touch the body yet. The medical examiner will have to take it downtown for an autopsy. You see, someone must have taken that ladder away while your husband was on the roof. He apparently spent the night up there, afraid to move in the dark. Do you know anyone who had a grudge against him?"

Mrs. Hull was sobbing jerkily. Her eyes were dry, but her shoulders heaved. She stood up and grabbed at the back of the chair for support, before answering: "I don't know, but lately there's been so many arguments. I heard him fighting with some of the neighbors about money."

Barnett allowed the widow to go home. He sent the barber back to his shop, then asked Thomas:

"Where do you keep your ladders?"

"Out in the garage."

"Bring your key and come along."

"It ain't locked. I haven't a car any more. I left it open, so Hull could keep his materials in there while he was fixing the roof."

He led the detective to the front of the building. The heavy double doors to the garage were closed. Thomas tried to swing them open, then backed away.

"Someone snapped the padlock. I'll have to go back in and get the key."

Barnett examined the lock. The dampened surface glistened in the sun. Obviously it had not been touched that day. When Thomas came back with the key and gave it to him, Barnett unlocked the garage and swung open the squeaky doors.

Two sections of an extension ladder were lying against the wall. Thomas started to drag them out, but the detective ordered: "Leave them alone!"

After examining them, he turned to Thomas: "Dry. They've been in here all night. At what time did you talk with Hull yesterday afternoon?"

"I hadda go downtown around four. Before I left, he said he'd get through by night. He said he'd put the ladders away and come by sometime today, to get paid for the job. When I got home last night and seen the garage doors closed, I figured he'd finished, so I went to bed without giving it another thought."

"At what time did you get home?"

"'Round two in the morning. After I got through downtown I met a couple of guys and we went jookin'."

Seeing the medical officer drive up, Barnett told Thomas: "That's all for now, but hang around."

Thomas went into the house. Barnett asked the medical examiner:

"Can you possibly tell me how long he was up on that roof, Dr. Adams? I think he must have spent the night up there."

Adams lifted the cover off the corpse and stared down at it. Without even bothering to open his bag, he bent down and his hands expertly felt the dead man's clothing. When he straightened up, he announced: "His clothes are soaked through by the dew, so it looks as if you're right. The autopsy will tell if he's had anything to eat since yesterday. If he hasn't, then you can just about swear to it that he was up there all night."

"That's all I want to know then. It's obvious what killed him, even if I hadn't seen it happen— But I'd like you to confirm my deduction as soon as you can."

While saying this, Barnett gingerly searched the dead man's tar-and-blood-stained overalls. He took out a plug of tobacco, a wallet, some loose change, and a handful of mutual tickets. On the ground, underneath the body, where it had obviously fallen from his torn hip pocket, Barnett picked up a letter in a cheap envelope, read the single, ruled sheet. He frowned and puckered his expressive lips.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Dr. Adams picked up his bag and asked: "Did you find something important?"

Barnett waved the letter at the doctor.

"This is a new one. I've heard of dime chain letters, but this is the first one I've seen where you're supposed to send someone a gas-ration ticket. It repeats the same old story about getting sixty-four tickets if you keep the chain unbroken."

"Let's see!" Adams reached for the letter, read it, and handed it back. "That's a new wrinkle. I imagine the postal authorities would like to know about it."

"They will, don't worry!" Barnett tucked the letter into his wallet, started to put it into his pocket, then withdrew it again. An "A" ticket fell out. He retrieved it and then scanned the five names at the top of the letter. They were the people to whom the addressee was supposed to send a letter to keep the chain unbroken. After sending a ticket to the top name, the addressee was supposed to put his own at the bottom of the list, and mail five new copies out.

Barnett recognized every one of the five names. They were all people who lived in the neighborhood.

After the medical examiner left and the body had been removed, Barnett went back into the house. Thomas was in the kitchen frying bacon and grits for his breakfast. He invited the detective to have a cup of coffee, but Barnett refused. He sat at the littered table while Thomas ate the greasy mess from the frying pan, and asked him: "Did you get one of those chain letters lately?"

"What letters? I don't hardly ever get no mail."

"Quit stalling, Thomas. Your name is on the one which Hull had in his pocket. It's the third on the list, so you must have received one and answered it."

"I don't get you, mister. I ain't received no mail for weeks—not since the first of the month, and then I only got me bill from the light company. I got no folks nowhere. All I ever gets is a circular from some lumber company."

Barnett took the letter out of his pocket and showed it to Thomas. He pointed to the man's name near the head of it. After reading it, his lips moving as he mentally pronounced each word, Thomas handed it back. He took a loud gulp of black coffee from the saucer, then

wiped his full lips with the back of his hairy hand.

"First I seen of it, mister. Even ifn I got one, I wouldn't have answered it. I ain't got no gas ration tickets. I sold me car about the time they started this monkey business."

"How do you get around to your different jobs?"

"I quit odd jobbing. Them two houses I own brings in enough rent for me to get along on. I grows me own food, mostly."

Barnett left then and went back to the barber shop. Seymour was standing outside, with a crowd of loafers, retelling the story of the accident. As the detective listened, the story seemed to grow more lurid with each repetition.

When he started all over again, for the benefit of a newcomer, Barnett interrupted him: "Any chance of getting that shave now, Seymour? That is if you have wind enough left, after shooting off all that hot air."

Reluctantly, the barber left his audience. When he had the detective's face lathered, and drew the first strokes along his cheek, he started gabbing again.

"Durndest thing I ever hearn about? What do you think he was doing up there all night? Musta been drunk, or somethin'— Reminds me of a time up in Georgia. I was out a-huntin'—"

"Sure, I know— That time you killed a grizzly bear with a twenty-two. Has the mailman been around yet this morning?"

"Nope, too early. Since they cut out the second delivery—"

"He's late every day." Barnett finished for him, then added: "Getting much mail lately, Seymour?"

"Tolerable amount." He jumped the subject. "No. 3 was sure hot out at West Flagler last night. I

won three races and the daily double."

Barnett was used to the barber's boasts about his winnings. Next to his prowess as a hunter, it was his favorite subject of conversation. The detective grinned and rolled his eyes up to see the barber's face.

"I suppose you came away a ten-dollar loser, in spite of your good luck."

"Good luck, nothing! I knows how to pick them. I won me two hundred and eighty-seven bucks."

"You haven't seen that much money outside of a bank since the flood, Seymour. Why not keep your tall stories for the crackers? Or have they stopped believing you, too?"

Seymour grunted, and dabbed at Barnett's chin with his shaving brush. He gave his razor a few more licks on the strop, and started scraping the tough grayish stubble. "You're only kiddin'. You know I can pick them. Now take that dog in the eighth tonight—"

"You take him. What time is the mailman due around?"

"In an hour or so. Expecting something?"

"No. Hurry up, will you? I can't stay here all day!"

Seymour finished the job, and Barnett paid him.

"Don't lose it all on one race."

He walked out and went as far as the corner. He stood there shading his eyes with his hand, and stared up the block. In the distance, he saw the familiar figure of the postman riding his bicycle. He walked up to meet him. After a brief greeting, he asked: "Anything for me, Johnny?"

"Not today, Mr. Barnett. I'll try to dig you out a good one tomorrow."

"Thanks, Johnny. What is the name of the postal inspector in your office?"

"James MacIntyre. Boy, is he tough!" Johnny whistled loudly. "You got anything to mail today?"

Barnett shook his head. He eyed the strapped bundles of mail in the basket on the bicycle.

"Lots of it this morning, eh?"

Johnny waved his hand deprecatingly: "Junk. Most of it for one guy." He picked up the largest package, and waved it in front of Barnett's face. "All this!"

Barnett wanted to ask who was getting it, but he knew Johnny too well. Despite his careless air, the young postman was a conscientious worker. He wouldn't let anybody know about mail he carried for another person. Giving his machine a quick shove, he jumped on the saddle, and pedaled off, whistling.

Later, down at headquarters, Barnett went to the medical examiner's office. Dr. Adams was changing from his white coat into street clothes. He said to the detective: "Judging by his stomach, the dead man hadn't had anything to eat or drink for at least twelve hours, probably longer."

"Thanks, doc. So he was unable to leave the roof. That's about the only thing that would have kept him hungry for that long. I know how those crackers love to eat. Well, I might as well see the chief and have it over with."

Chief Donaldson was in a better humor than Barnett expected. His shrewd blue eyes twinkled when the detective walked in. He lit his pipe, waved Barnett to a chair, and asked: "How are you making out? Anything definite yet?"

"A few things, chief. You've had the medical examiner's report. It confirms my suspicion that Hull was murdered—even though his killer might not have been within a mile of him when the planned accident happened. Whoever removed

that ladder last night, hoped that Hull would fall off the roof during the night. I suppose he meant to get back there early this morning and put the ladder back up against the house."

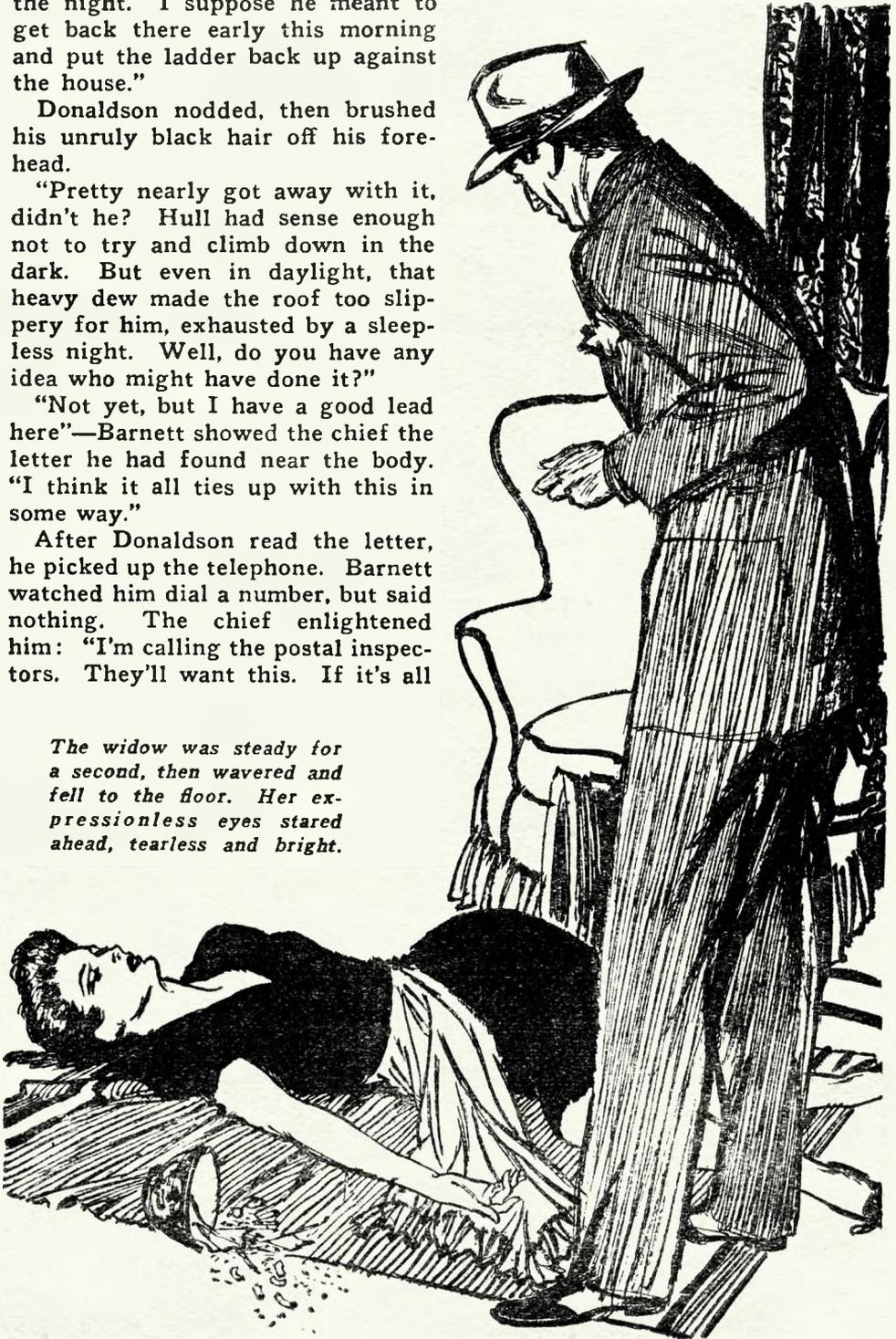
Donaldson nodded, then brushed his unruly black hair off his forehead.

"Pretty nearly got away with it, didn't he? Hull had sense enough not to try and climb down in the dark. But even in daylight, that heavy dew made the roof too slippery for him, exhausted by a sleepless night. Well, do you have any idea who might have done it?"

"Not yet, but I have a good lead here"—Barnett showed the chief the letter he had found near the body. "I think it all ties up with this in some way."

After Donaldson read the letter, he picked up the telephone. Barnett watched him dial a number, but said nothing. The chief enlightened him: "I'm calling the postal inspectors. They'll want this. If it's all

The widow was steady for a second, then wavered and fell to the floor. Her expressionless eyes stared ahead, tearless and bright.



tied up with the murder as you suspect, then—”

When Donaldson finished the call, he leaned back.

“What did you find out about Hull? What kind of a fellow was he?”

“Not too much. His wife says he gambled. Some of the boys around the neighborhood were sore at him about money. From all the gossip I could pick up, he took bets to the track, and didn't always come across with the winnings. I guess he was booking them himself.”

“Find out someone he chiseled out of a good-size bet. Whoever killed him might have just meant to scare him into paying up by removing that ladder.”

Barnett went back to Thomas' house. There was nobody at home. He spent several hours checking on the other people whose names were on the chain letter. With the exception of the barber, they all claimed not to have received any.

Seymour showed him the one he had. “But I never answered it,” he assured Barnett righteously.

He opened the drawer of his towel cabinet and showed the letter to Barnett. The detective tried to peep inside to see if there were any more hidden inside, but Seymour closed it too quickly.

Barnett tried to question him indirectly. “Been out hunting lately?”

“Every chance I get. I generally go most every morning for an hour or so before I open up. Sundays we go all day.”

“Were you out this morning?”

“No. Smelled like rain, so I slept a bit longer.”

Barnett hadn't been hunting for years. He liked tramping through the woods, but not killing birds. Slumping lower in the chair, he asked: “How about going with you next Sunday?”

Seymour hesitated before answer-

ing. He straightened out the shelf which held his scissors and razors. His back was still turned to the detective as he agreed: “All right. We can use my dog. You got a gun?”

“Sure. I'll save on driving this week so that we'll have enough gas to use my car.”

Seymour walked to the entrance of his shop and looked up and down the street.

“You don't need to skimp on gas. I have a few coupons left. We ain't supposed to use a car for hunting nor fishing. They claim its non-essential driving, but with your official tag nobody will bother us.”

“You don't have a car of your own. Where do you manage to get ration tickets, big shot?”

“Wouldn't you like to know?” Seymour rubbed the blade of a razor across the back of his hand, slicing off a few hairs to test the blade. “Well, there's a few floating around.”

The detective stopped pumping the barber any further and went down to see Mrs. Hull. He found her in the back yard washing clothes in a tub over an open fire. She wiped the sweat off her face on her torn apron, and sat down on a fallen log.

“You found out anything yet, Mr. Barnett? When can I bury him?”

“Tomorrow, if you wish, Mrs. Hull. Do you— Can you—” he stammered, embarrassed, but went on. “Are you able to take care of it?”

She nodded.

“He had a small policy. I kept up the payments every week. It ain't much, but it'll give him a decent burial.”

“I'm glad of that, Mrs. Hull. I wonder if you can help me? Do you know which of the neighbors he was squabbling with about money? I'm afraid he was taking bets to the track for some of them and didn't

always turn back what he should have."

"I reckon so. He done it last season a couple of times. Some of the men let him get away with it, but he come home several nights with a black eye."

"Which one of them did he fight with?"

"I don't know for sure. Several, I guess. I know Seymour wouldn't even cut his hair no more. He was sore at him. Then he had a fight with a guy that used to hang around here. I disremember his name, but he ain't here no more. Drafted."

"Why was Seymour sore at him?"

"Same reason as the others, I reckon. They're all gamblers." Her toothless mouth screwed scornfully.

On his way back, the detective met Seymour again. The barber was dropping letters into the corner box. When he saw Barnett, he hurriedly stuffed them all into the package slot. Without a word, he turned and went back to his shop. Barnett was right behind him. Inside, he demanded: "Since when did you start carrying on a mail-order business?"

"Oh, you know I grows aloes and ships them. I got a bunch of letters asking me about plants, and just answered them. Nothing wrong about that, is there?"

"I guess not. Mrs. Hull just told me that you were so sore at Hull you wouldn't even cut his hair. What was the trouble?"

Seymour sat in the barber chair and leaned back.

"Nothin' you'd be interested in. Me and him just had a run in, that's all."

"About mutuel tickets? What did he do, clip you, too?"

"Oh, no. He tried it once, but when I told him I'd slit his throat if he didn't pay off, he came across right away."

Barnett went home and called the

postal inspector at the branch which delivered the mail to his home. When he got in touch with MacIntyre, he asked him: "I'm Detective Barnett. Are you making any progress, inspector?"

MacIntyre sounded sour: "If you want any information, come over here, where we can talk in private."

"I'll be right over. I think I have something for you." Barnett hung up and left the house.

In MacIntyre's office, he told the postal inspector what he had found out, and suggested: "When the truck picks up the mail from that box on the corner by the barber shop, you might see what Seymour is writing so many people about. It looks fishy to me. He has a small patch of aloes—all right—but not enough to take care of more than a half-dozen customers."

"We'll find out quick enough." MacIntyre rang a buzzer on his desk. When a postal clerk answered it, he ordered: "Send the truck over and clear box No. 876. Bring everything in it to me."

When the mail truck returned and the carrier brought the mail into the inspector's office, Barnett could hardly curb his excitement. MacIntyre sorted the letters expertly, laying the ones Seymour had mailed in a separate pile.

When he had them all together, he told Barnett: "I'd rather you didn't see how we inspect suspicious letters. Wait in the next room. I'll call you in a minute."

Reluctantly, Barnett left the office. Before he had time to finish a second cigarette, MacIntyre called him back to his office. He was scowling.

"A bum steer, Barnett. Every bit of it was legitimate, personal mail. I'll watch his incoming letters. If anything turns up, I'll get in touch with you."

Barnett thoughtfully snuffed his

cigarette out. He started to leave, then turned back, asking: "Do you still have that letter Donaldson sent you?"

MacIntyre pointed to the envelope lying open on his desk.

"There. Why?"

"Do you mind if I take another look at it?"

"No, go ahead."

Barnett picked the letter up and read it again. His face broke into a grin as he handed it back to the postal inspector.

"Of all the dumb clucks, I sure take the cake. I should have realized it right away when I found that first chain letter."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's obvious who killed him. I've wasted the whole damn day on something as simple as handing out a traffic ticket."

MacIntyre scowled so heavily that his bushy red eyebrows met over his bright black eyes. He demanded: "Well, aren't you going to let me in on it? It'll solve this case of mine, too, won't it?"

Barnett shook his head: "No, it won't help you, inspector. The only thing I can promise you is that there won't be any more of those chain letters. When Hull died it broke the chain."

"You promise! We can trace those letters easily enough—" The postal inspector was still scowling.

"Read tomorrow's paper before you put in too much time on tracing them," Barnett advised him, and left the office.

Outside, he jumped into his car and hurried back to Hull's house. Mrs. Hull was still washing when he walked into the yard. Without any preamble, he insisted:

"I'll have to search Hull's room, I'm sorry. I should have done it earlier."

"Go right ahead." The woman

sounded resigned. "I ain't even touched it today."

"You'd better come in with me, Mrs. Hull, and show me which one it is."

The woman dropped a towel back into the hot water, wiped her hands and face on her apron and led the way into the small bungalow. The inside was as neat and clean as any house Barnett had ever been in. He was surprised to see how much more expensive-looking the furniture was than he had expected to find in the old, weather-beaten house, but he said nothing until Mrs. Hull opened the door to a bedroom.

She said: "This is his room. Can I go back to me washing?"

"Not yet. You'd better wait here with me." He looked around the room, then started searching it. In the only closet he found a leather suitcase and brought it out into the light. When he opened it, and several hundred gasoline ration tickets and letters fell out, he didn't even bother to pick them up, but asked Mrs. Hull quietly: "He was sending all those chain letters out with his own name at the top of the list, wasn't he? That's how he got all those ration tickets. You were tired of his gambling and bootlegging gas tickets. Is that why you killed him?"

The widow looked right through him. Her expressionless eyes stared ahead, tearless and bright. She stood steady for a second, then wavered and fell to the floor.

Barnett picked her up and put her on the bed. He went into the kitchen and brought back a glass of water. After he bathed her forehead with a wet towel, the woman's eyes fluttered open. She lay still for a moment longer, then sat up. Without betraying any emotion, she started to talk: "He weren't never no good. Between his gambling and drinking, he spent most of the

money he made. I could have stood for that, but when I found out he was bootlegging gas tickets and anything else he could steal, I told him to quit or else I'd turn him in. My folks was all decent, law-abiding people."

"What did he say to your threat?"

"He jist laughed at me and slapped me down. Yesterday, when I went over to call him to his supper and seen him on that steep roof, the idea came to me right suddenlike. I jist took the ladder away and—" She broke off, the armor of her unnatural calm cracked. She started screeching hysterically.

Barnett tried to stop her. He threw a glass of water in her face, but it had no effect. He slapped her cheek sharply with his open palm, but she kept on screaming.

He took her by both arms and shook her. With a convulsive motion, she broke away from him and ran from the room. Barnett heard another door slam. He looked toward the front screen door. It was still hooked from the inside. So she was still indoors, and there was no immediate need to chase her. It would only increase her hysteria.

Still wondering how to quiet the stricken woman, he followed the sound of her now diminishing screams. Her voice was coming from the living room. He walked toward the door and put his hand on the knob just as the sound of a shot roared out and the screaming stopped.

Barnett quickly opened the door. He was just in time to see her lifeless body crumple to the floor.

THE END.



PAGAN SONG

Oh, happy dead, whose graves are dug
 In Pierian earth;
 Happy ears to rot beneath
 Cloven-hooved mirth.

Oh, holy hills, where gods have walked
 And deathless ruins stand;
 Oh, unkind sea, to bar from me
 My holy land!

Sara Owen.

MADMAN'S HOLIDAY

A NOVEL

by FREDRIC BROWN

*"Here's mud in your eye,"
said the reporter. "And
tetranitronaphthalene in
yours," said the madman,
who wasn't so mad after all.*

I.

I felt swell. Somebody said, "He's coming around," and I wondered vaguely who was coming around what, but it didn't matter. It was perfect, just to be lying here asleep, or almost asleep. Let people talk all they darn pleased, just so I could sleep. For weeks now, since I'd started those TNA reaction tests, I'd been going on three or four hours' sleep a night.

And now it was all over with, and I was on the way to turn in my report, and although I was sorry the report was negative—well, that was that, and I was going to take a few days off before I bit off another round with old man HE.

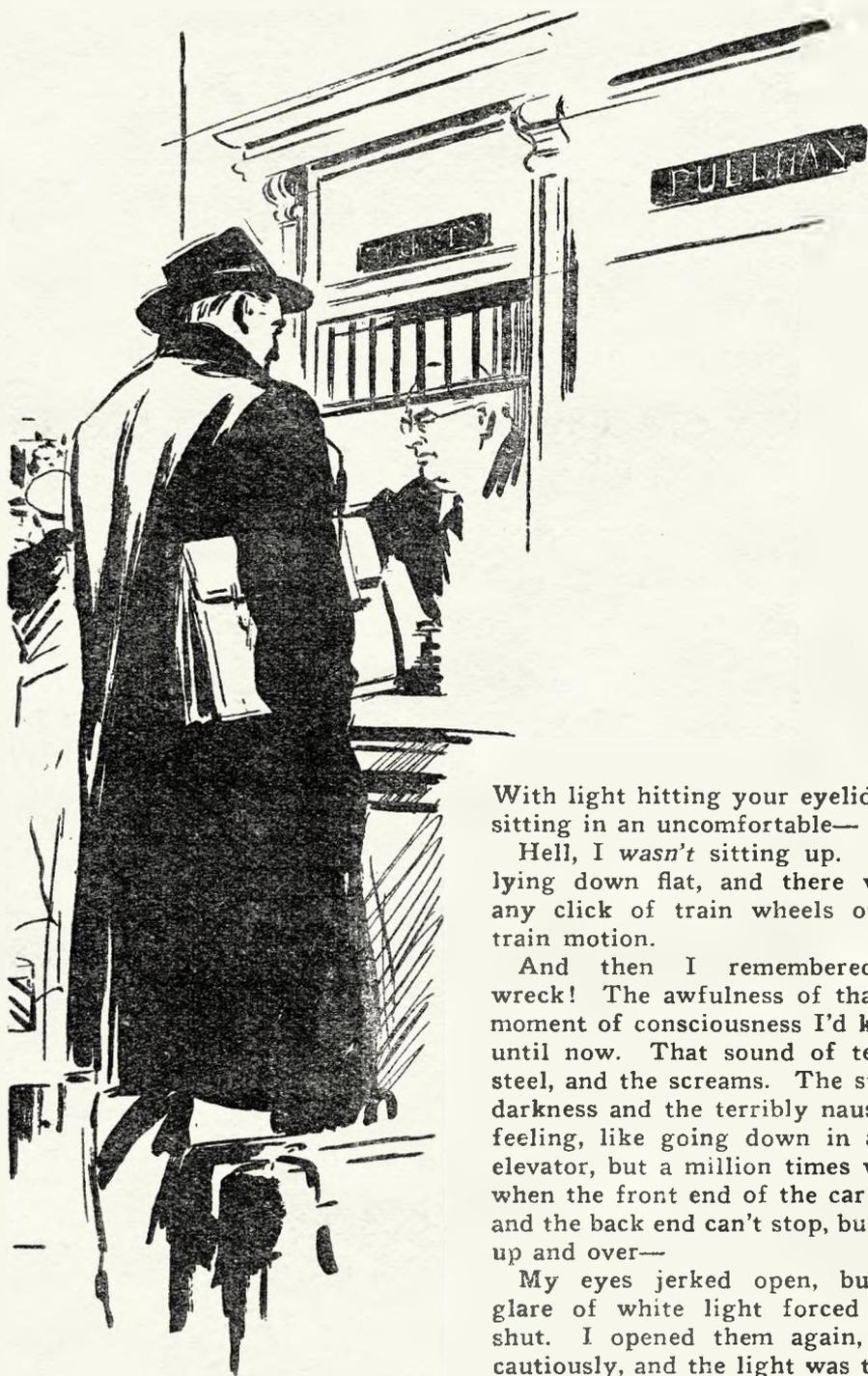
There was a gruff voice. It said, "Look, doc, this is important. He had papers on him that— Well,

never mind. Can't you bring him out of it?"

"It's a very mild concussion. But it's better if he—"

I wished they'd shut up. It's hard enough to sleep on a train, without your neighbors jabbering all night.





With light hitting your eyelids and sitting in an uncomfortable—

Hell, I *wasn't* sitting up. I was lying down flat, and there wasn't any click of train wheels or any train motion.

And then I remembered—the wreck! The awfulness of that last moment of consciousness I'd known until now. That sound of tearing steel, and the screams. The sudden darkness and the terribly nauseated feeling, like going down in a fast elevator, but a million times worse, when the front end of the car stops and the back end can't stop, but goes up and over—

My eyes jerked open, but the glare of white light forced them shut. I opened them again, more cautiously, and the light was tolerable. I seemed to be in a private room in a hospital. Near the bed stood a man in white and a man in gray tweeds with a dead cigar in

his mouth. A nurse was just leaving and left the door ajar behind her.

The man in white said, "You're all right, Mr. Remmers. Just a mild concussion." It seemed almost impossible to believe him; it was incredible that I'd been through that wreck without broken bones. The *Washington Flyer* had been doing at least eighty.

The man in gray tweeds growled something under his breath that I didn't quite catch, but the doctor nodded again. He stepped closer with the business end of a stethoscope in his hand. He said, "Lie down, please," and listened to me tick for a minute and peered closely at the pupils of my eyes.

He said, "Normal," to nobody in particular. Then to me, "This gentleman is from the FBI. Wants to talk to you. Talk all you want, but stay in bed."

He left, closing the door behind him, and the man in tweeds looked at me for a full minute without speaking at all. His face was as expressionless as a cue ball. He took the dead cigar out of his mouth, walked over and threw it out the window, and then came back.

Then he asked, "What happened to the papers?"

They hadn't found them, then.

"They were in my brief case," I told him. "The case was on the seat with me, wedged in between me and the arm of the seat, next to the window. I had my hand on the handle of the brief case when we hit."

He grunted noncommittally.

"Don't worry about them," I said. "It was all negative. There wasn't a fact or formula in that brief case that couldn't have been mailed in duplicate to Berlin and Tokyo. What I had in mind to do with the TNA was a flat washout. But Major Lorne wanted me to bring in a report, so I was on my way."

"Just what were you trying to do with it?"

I studied his face a minute while I was trying to make up my mind about answering, and he must have figured what I was thinking. He took a wallet from his pocket, and an identification card from the wallet and handed it to me.

I'd seen them before, and it was the McCoy. It had his photo and his prints, and his name was Frank Garland.

I handed back the card. "What do you know about HE?"

"Not much except that it stands for high explosive. TNT."

"TNT," I told him, "is just one form of high explosive. There are others that pack more wallop, but they aren't stable. Cast, it can be stored indefinitely. You can drop it, kick it around, and hammer nails with it. You got to use a fulminate of mercury fuse to make it say 'uncle.'"

"In a loud voice," said Garland.

"In a loud voice," I agreed. "But not as loud as TNA. That's tetranitroaniline, and it's got better than forty percent more kick than TNT. It's about the most powerful of the solid explosives. But it's got temperament. Goes off, maybe, when you don't want it to."

"And you were trying to stabilize it?"

"Exactly. But we didn't, so don't worry about the papers. If they were lost, I've got other copies and they're of no military value. But those were only the first tests—the first series, I mean. After I rest up, I'm going to try—well, some other angles."

And not even to an FBI man was I going to talk about what those other angles might be.

Apparently, he wasn't interested. He said, "You talked to Major Lorne, long distance, at four o'clock this afternoon. I imagine that

neither of you talked very freely over the phone. But he suggested that you go to Washington to see him. Right?"

"Right," I said, wondering where this line of questioning was going to lead.

"Starting then, at four o'clock, please tell me your movements. Everything you did."

"Went right home and—"

"You took the test reports with you?"

"No. I gathered them up and put them in the brief case and put the brief case in the safe. Then I went down—"

"Lock the safe?"

I shook my head. "I told Peter Carr—he's my assistant—to lock it when he left. Then I went home, had a bath and a shave and supper and left in time to catch the *Washington Flyer*, going to the station by way of the lab and picking up the brief case. Carr had left by then, and I let myself in with my own key. Bought a round-trip ticket at the station and—"

"What'd you do with the other half?"

"Huh?" It was such a screwy question that I stared at him blankly until he repeated it.

"Why, in my wallet. Why?"

"Skip it. And then? After you bought the ticket, I mean."

"Got on the train and—" I broke off, staring at him. "Say, what is this? Am I suspected of having stolen those papers from myself, or of engineering the train wreck, or what?"

He shook his head slowly. I couldn't tell from his face whether he meant a negative answer, or merely that he wasn't going to tell me.

He said, "Maybe you shouldn't talk too much, at first. I'm going to give you a rest. And— Listen, you still say there was nothing im-

portant in that brief case?"

"Sure. I told Major Lorne over the phone that results were ixnay. If they hadn't been, I'd have told him to send around a battalion of you boy scouts to escort me there with it. Stabilizing TNA, if it can be done, is big stuff. I wouldn't risk carrying something like that, without protection. I'm not crazy."

He said, "No?" and I didn't like the way he said it. But he turned and headed for the door. As he went out, I caught a glimpse of blue uniforms in the corridor outside.

After a moment, the door opened again. It was the nurse who'd been in the room when I'd first awakened. She handed me a newspaper and said, "Mr. Garland thought you might like to see the morning paper."

She left, and I unfolded the paper. It was a Philadelphia *Post-Gazette*, the late-city edition. The war news was good. I read it slowly.

And then, quite suddenly, it struck me that there was something wrong with that front page. It failed to mention the train wreck.

A local story, sure, but a big one. That train had been only an hour out of Philadelphia. And it must have been a bad wreck—

No, the date was right. And this edition wouldn't have gone to press before four in the morning and it was broad daylight now. With a cold chill growing along my spine, I tried page two, and then leafed through the paper from stem to stern. No train-wreck story.

I threw back the covers and got out of bed. My legs felt rubbery but I got to the door and opened it a crack. There were two policemen, and they both turned around as I opened the door.

One of them nodded when I asked if he'd send Garland in to talk to me again. I got back into bed.

Garland came in. This time he pulled up a chair and sat down.

He said, "I thought you'd want to see me when you'd read that paper. Now what's this gag about a train wreck?"

I spoke slowly and carefully. "I boarded the *Washington Flyer* yesterday evening. To the best of my knowledge, an hour out of town, it was wrecked. *Wasn't* it? I mean, didn't *anything* happen to it?"

"Not a thing. Nobody even pulled the bell cord. It went through on schedule."

"If you'd told me that without showing me this paper— Say, how did I get here, and when? And, for that matter, damn it, where am I?"

"You're in St. Vincent's Hospital, in Philadelphia. You were found by a squad car at two o'clock this morning, and brought here. They found you lying in Burgoyne Street, with your head against a lamp-post. You'd been drinking, and you were out cold."

"They brought me here?"

"They took you to police emergency as a drunk. Then, going through your pockets, they found out who you were, and found some correspondence with Major Lorne. They got in touch with him, and he got in touch with us and told us to find out what happened."

"I hadn't been robbed?"

"There was a hundred and twenty dollars in your wallet. But no train ticket, incidentally. And you had a suitcase with you. Not a brief case."

I closed my eyes and found that the headache and the thumping in my skull was coming back. "What kind of suitcase?" I asked.

"Black Gladstone. Pebbled leather. Had clothes in it that seemed to be yours."

I said, "I kept a bag like that, already packed, at the laboratory, in case I had to make a rush trip. But

I didn't take it last night, because I was coming back the next day and figured I wouldn't need it. And the brief case— It was gone?"

"You didn't have it with you, if that's what you mean. But it's still on your desk at the laboratory. With papers in it—and your assistant, Carr, says they're the ones you were going to take to Washington."

"Then I didn't— I mean, you think I didn't take the brief case at all, but—"

"We haven't traced yet what you did between the time you left your house—that was at half-past six—and the time you were found in Burgoyne Street at two in the morning. You must have gone to the laboratory, but taken the Gladstone instead of the brief case. After that, we don't know. How much money did you have when you left home?"

"A hundred and thirty-five, and some change."

"And there was one-twenty in your wallet. You spent fifteen dollars, somehow. We're going to find out what you did, if we have to take this town apart. And Major Lorne's coming down tomorrow."

He looked at me speculatively, coldly. "That's all you've got to say?"

I nodded, and he turned to go.

II.

It got lighter outside, but inside my head it didn't. My ideas, if you could call them that, went around and around and came out nowhere. If I were sane, then *somebody* was crazy. Because if I'd been the victim of a frame-up engineered by someone or something other than my own disordered imagination, nothing had been accomplished.

The brief case hadn't even been stolen. It would have been of no value, other than as a good ten-dollar brief case, if it had.

But, damn it, there *had* been a wreck. I'd *been* there. I'd heard the screams and the ripping sound of metal, and I'd felt the train seat rise up under me and—

Breakfast came, but I wasn't hungry. I drank all the coffee there was, but didn't touch the rest of it.

Major Lorne came in at about nine o'clock. He sat down in the chair beside the bed and looked very austere and military. He asked first what hours I'd been working.

I told him, and he shook his head. "Too much, Remmers. A breakdown was bound to happen."

"You think, then, that I went haywire—that I'm crazy?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, at all. I think you worked too hard and had a mental breakdown. I talked to Garland before I came up here, and it doesn't make sense any other way. Does it?"

"Unless somebody *thought* I'd accomplished something with TNA, major. They might have—" I broke off, because it didn't make sense that they'd have done it that way. They'd have killed me and taken the papers, and there was no reason for all the razzle-dazzle. And how would it have been done, anyway? Hypnotism? I didn't believe that any hypnotist could have impressed on my mind the recollection of something that didn't happen.

Lorne asked, "Did you give anyone cause to think that you might have discovered something important?"

I shook my head slowly. "I haven't talked about what Carr and I have been doing to many people. And to none of them have I intimated that I had even an important lead. Matter of fact, I haven't had."

"You did all right on classifying that ammonium picric.

"That's a dead duck. I gave you what you wanted on that a month ago, and haven't worked on it since.

And last week I gave out the story to Andrews, as you told me to. Read his write-up on it?"

Lorne nodded. "Good job. He's here now, by the way, to see you. I told him no publicity on this . . . er . . . misadventure. You've got another guest, too. Peter Carr." He cleared his throat. "Remmers, you've got to take a rest cure. There's a sanitarium near town run by Doc Wheeler. Ever heard of him?"

"No, but I'm not going to any—"

"You'll be in good company. Several important officials are staying there right now. Worked too hard, like you. Doc Wheeler is sort of semiofficial psychiatrist to the—"

"Nuts," I said. "I'm not crazy and I'm not going to a private loony bin. I'll rest up a few days at home, but the work's got to go on."

Lorne stood up. He said, "Sorry, but you're wrong. We can't force you to go to Wheeler's place, but you can choose between that and staying here. And Wheeler's will help you the most, of the two."

"But I don't need a sanitarium, damn it." But even as I said it, I wondered if I were wrong, and just being stubborn. So I said, "Well, all right, but just for a few days. What about work at the lab? Want Peter Carr to carry on?"

"I've talked it over with him," said Lorne. "He wants to talk to you about it. Seems there are some loose odds and ends he can clean up. Take him about three days, and then he'll rest up, too."

When Lorne left, the doctor came in again. He checked me with the stethoscope as before, and asked how my head felt.

"There are two people still waiting to see you," he said. "But you may see them for only a few minutes each. After that, you'd better rest up for your trip."

Carr came in first. Good old Peter. But likable as Carr always was, there

was a quiet dignity about him that forbade intimacy. He'd worked for me for three years, and yet I knew little about him other than that he was an efficient laboratory technician. I'd had him investigated, of course, when I first hired him, and the report on him was probably filed away somewhere, but it was amazing how few of the details of his life I remembered from that report, or had learned since. It was as though he hid from life behind a pair of thick shell-rimmed glasses.

He smiled at me a bit uncertainly now and ran spatulate fingers through his thick shock of blond hair. He said, "I can't tell you, Mr. Remmers, how sorry I am that you—" He paused as though embarrassed, not knowing how to continue the sentence.

"I'll be all right, Peter," I told him. "Couple weeks and I'll be back. There isn't much for you to do meanwhile, and I want you to rest up, too. Finish the check on that 14-series and get the decks cleared for action on something new."

"Yes, Mr. Remmers. That's only about two days' work. Even if I rest, I'll have time for more. Remember I told you I wanted to try ammonium nitrate and powdered aluminum in the tetranitroaniline 13-series? Mind if I go ahead and try that while I'm free?"

"How long will it take you?"

"Not over three days for rough tests. If anything likely develops and I go into detail on it, it'll take longer."

"Hm-m-m," I said. "That's what I'm afraid of. You might get interested and keep on working night and day, as we have been. Look, this is an order. You're to take at least a week off out of the next two weeks. And to work only normal hours the rest of the time. Within that limitation, try anything you want. O. K.?"

"Fine, Mr. Remmers. Is there . . . uh. . . anything I can do? For you, I mean?"

"Not a thing, Peter. Thanks."

He went out quickly, as though glad to escape.

Armin Andrews came in breezily. He pulled up the chair with its back toward the bed, and sat down astraddle of it, leaning his chin on his arms.

"What happened, Hank?" he demanded.

"What do you mean, what happened?" I countered. "Didn't you ever hear of a guy working too hard and having a—"

"Nuts," he said. "This is off the record. I want a story, sure. But you know I wouldn't turn it in without your O. K. And the war department's, too, for that matter. But don't give me that breakdown routine. What really happened?"

I stared at him curiously, wondering whether he'd be able to make anything—except hallucination—out of my remembrance of what had happened. Armin Andrews was a brilliant reporter, all right. His name had been on one of the biggest scoops of the years just past—the running down of the spy ring headed by Dr. Gerhard Wendell. He'd been ahead of the FBI on several angles of that case, according to what I'd heard from Major Lorne. He'd provided the lead that took them to Wendell himself, and he'd been in on the kill. He had a bullet hole in his thigh to show for it, too.

Andrews stood ace-high with Major Lorne. That was why, when a write up of my lab, with pix, was wanted for the army ordnance journal, he'd assigned Andrews to the job. He'd done an excellent piece of work on it, and we'd become well acquainted during the process.

"How'd you get in on this, Armin? Did the major call you?"

He shook his head. "This is on my own. I was at the police station when they brought you into emergency, downstairs. The looie on duty down there knew I was talking to Cap Krasno. He decided from the papers and the money on you, you might be somebody, so he came up to ask me if I knew of a Henry Remmers. It was a lucky break."

"Lucky for which of us?" I asked.

"For me. I smelled a story, and I still smell it. But it was a break for you, too, maybe. I told 'em to phone Major Lorne right away. That's how the FBI got on it so quick. He notified them."

I shrugged. "Well, the FBI's off it now, I guess. They put it in the pink-elephant file, and I go to a sanitarium to rest up."

"Was it pink elephants?"

I considered a moment before I answered. Lorne and Garland had both known that Andrews was waiting to see me, and certainly they knew he'd want to know the details of my experience. Neither had even suggested that I refrain from talking about it, so there was no reason why I shouldn't tell him.

So I did. I gave him the whole story, starting with my phone call to Washington. And in the telling of it, I learned something.

I learned that I was a long way from being convinced that what had happened was a figment of my imagination. Damn it, I remembered taking the brief case from the laboratory. I remembered buying a ticket. I even remembered buying cigarettes while I was waiting for the train.

I remembered riding on that train.

The wreck! It was one of the most vivid memories of my life.

After I'd finished, I lay back, worn out merely from telling about it. I shuddered and closed my eyes. In half a minute, I opened them.

Andrews was staring at me, his

eyes narrowed in deep thought.

He said, "Damned if I know, Hank. Sounds impossible, but—Mind answering a few questions? Feel well enough, I mean?"

"Shoot," I said.

"When did the train leave?"

"Seven forty, or a minute or two after that."

"Did you know there was a train leaving then? Before you went to the station, I mean? Does it prove anything, if there was?"

I thought it over, and shook my head. "No, I knew beforehand that was when the *Washington Flyer* left."

"No reservation?"

"No. I went by coach. Ticket was eight eighty, round-trip."

"Know that before you bought your ticket?"

"I . . . I might have remembered it. I've made the trip before."

"Remember the number of your car, or anything about it?"

"Just that it was a coach and the seats were blue plush." I saw clearly what Armin was driving at now, and tried to co-operate. I said, "Let me think," and tried to remember details that could be checked on. But after a minute I shook my head.

"The conductor?"

"He was short and heavy-set. Maybe about fifty, with thin gray hair. I think I'd know him if I saw him again. In his uniform, anyway."

"Would he remember you, do you think?"

"N-no. Hardly looked at me. I noticed him while he was trying to get a ticket from a drunk in the seat ahead."

Andrews snapped his fingers. He said, "Now we're getting somewhere, maybe. What was his argument with the drunk?"

"No argument, really. The drunk was asleep and the conductor shook him, but couldn't wake him. The

guy mumbled, but stayed asleep. He had two friends with him; they were possibly sober. One of them shook him several times and he finally woke up enough to hand over his ticket."

Andrews looked disappointed. "What did they look like?"

"I didn't see the drunk, except for a glimpse of his profile when he woke up for a minute. He was youngish and dark and—yes, he wore shell-rimmed dark glasses and a black felt hat. The men with him—guess I'd recognize them if I saw them again—they were both about forty, fairly well-dressed. One of them was short and chunky, but you can't judge a man's height when he's sitting— Wait, he was stocky; I remember now he got up and went to the back of the car where the lavatory was."

"Remember any other incident that might be checked on?"

"Hm-m-m. I'm afraid not. There were only about a dozen passengers in the car, and it was third or fourth car from the end of the train."

Andrews nodded slowly. "Not much, but— Hell, if you check on *all* those points, it would be past coincidence to think you imagined being on the train. I mean, *if* there were a coach with blue plush seats

third or fourth from last, with only a dozen passengers, with the conductor you described, and a drunk who wouldn't wake up—"

"But all you'll do," I pointed out, "is shove ahead the borderline between what happened and what didn't. I remember all that, but, damn it, I remember the train being wrecked. And it wasn't. I must have—"

The door opened, and the nurse came in with a thermometer. She said to Andrews, "Sorry, sir, but—"

"I'll see you tomorrow, Hank," Armin said. "At the sanitarium."

III.

An intern from St. Vincent's sat on one side of me, and Frank Garland on the other, in the back seat. The driver was a policeman in uniform. I wondered about that. I didn't like it.

None of us talked much until we were almost out of town. Then Garland cleared his throat.

He said, "Aren't those experiments with HE dangerous, Mr. Remmers?"

"Yes and no," I told him. "We make them up in very small quantities, using every precaution possible in handling them. Of course, if something should go off *while* we were mixing it, it would be dangerous for the person handling it. But it wouldn't wreck the lab, or anything like that."

"Just how severe would be the explosion of the average quantity you work with?"

"About as . . . as severe as the explosion of a rifle cartridge. And about as loud, and as dangerous. Which means it could kill you or not harm you in the least, depending on the direction of the force of the explosion, what it was in at the time and—oh, a lot of details."

"Like dropping a cartridge into a



"They found you lying in Burgoyne Street, with your head against a lamp post. You were out cold."

fire and standing around until the heat explodes it, huh? I mean, the shell will kick off one way and the bullet the other, and one of them might hit you, or might not."

"Something like that, except the charge isn't confined, until we put it in the testing chamber. From then on, there's no danger because we work from behind a shield in the testing."

"Can't you work from behind a shield in mixing it?"

I shook my head. "Too much trouble, and too little chance of an explosion, anyway. When I say an explosive is unstable, I mean relatively unstable. After all, we know what we're doing and we don't just toss things together blindly. We start with a basic known formula and then work gradual variations in it, and in general we test each one for possibilities before we try the next. Say we're working with trinitroresol, for instance. We add a minute percentage of sodium nitrate, and when we test it we find it's a fraction less stable than the original. So we don't add more sodium nitrate and try again. We know that won't get us anywhere. We try other variations and don't increase the dosage, as it were, unless it shows promise."

Garland took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and handed me one. He said, "I'd like to see your lab some time. Personally, I mean. When you're back at work in it."

"Any time," I told him. "The lab itself is no military secret; it's been written up in the ordnance journal, and other places. I'll show you around, everything except the records. Not that it would matter if you saw them, too."

"Why not?"

I grinned wryly. "They're strictly in the no-dice class. We've got a big backlog of negative information thus far. I know four thousand-odd



The ticklish part was going hand over hand along that staff from one tree to the other. There was a twenty-foot drop if anything went wrong.

ways of varying the formula for TNA which do *not* help stabilize it. We did do a few minor things with propellants for special types of guns, but the records on them have been turned over. We don't keep copies. It'd make me jittery to have anything valuable around."

"Because it might be stolen?"

"There's always that possibility. Of course, we take plenty of precautions just the same, but—"

"Why, if there's nothing valuable there?"

I laughed. "Somebody interested might not know that. And I have equipment there that set me back over fifty thousand. Precision stuff—it's got to be precision to get accurate checks on such small quantities. You don't measure out picrates in a beaker, not for the kind of work we do."

"How does your head feel?"

"Tender, that's all. The ache's gone. But I'd just as soon not hit any bad bumps."

"We're almost there. Another mile."

The last mile, I thought, and tried to laugh at myself for feeling uneasy at the comparison. A two-weeks' rest, that's all this trip was taking me to. And maybe I could cut down the time if I got plenty of sleep and kept my mind off—

"How do you test the stuff?" Garland asked.

"Any number of ways," I said. "Deterioration—we can speed that up artificially in a Mersing chamber; rate of detonation—we can check that up to twenty thousand meters a second. Heat reaction test, which is nothing more than a heating chamber. But the main thing, for our purpose, is the stability test. We use a fulminate of mercury fuse for that."

"And vary the quantity of . . . er . . . fulminate of mercury to see how big a charge is needed to set off whatever you're trying out?"

"It's easier than that. We use a standard fuse and vary the distance between the fuse and the charge we're testing. If we find that the fuse, at X distance, does *not* detonate the charge, but at Y distance does detonate it, then we know it's satisfactory for stability, and we go ahead with the other tests."

"If you keep trying that all day, the lab must be a pretty noisy place, isn't it?"

"No noisier than a shooting gallery. And you can't hear the explosions outside the building, unless you're listening for them, and there's no traffic going by."

"The neighbors ever— Skip it; here we are."

The sedan was turning into a driveway, and it came to a stop before a big iron gate in a high brick wall. A watchman looked out

through the gate, but didn't open it until Garland got out of the car and showed him a paper.

Then, while Garland got back into the car, the watchman went back into a sentry booth beside the gate and stayed inside for a minute or two. Then he came out and swung open the gate.

As we drove through, I asked Garland why the man had gone back in the booth before letting us in.

"He phoned the building and had them throw the switch to open the gate."

"Why don't they just give him a key?" I wanted to know.

Garland shrugged. "Playing safe, that's all. If somebody wanted to escape, they might overcome him and take away the key. It'd be tougher, wouldn't it, if they had to phone the main building and give a password?"

I whistled softly. "You mean they have dangerous . . . er . . . patients here? I thought Major Lorne told me—"

But the car was stopping now in front of a brightly lighted doorway. Garland got out hastily, as though trying to avoid my question. He said, "Come on."

I hesitated, on the verge of protesting and saying that I'd changed my mind about agreeing to Lorne's suggestion for a place to rest up. But— Oh, hell, I might as well go through with it now. If Dr. Wheeler was half the psychiatrist Major Lorne said he was, it wouldn't take him long to decide I was perfectly sane.

Besides, I was coming here voluntarily. I wasn't being committed.

Or was I? What was that paper Garland had shown the guard at the gate?

But I was outside the car now, and almost to the door. Garland was on one side of me and the intern on the other, the policeman who'd

driven the car bringing up the rear. Resistance, either physical or verbal, would prejudice my case. I had an uneasy hunch I'd be taken in there just the same, and with a black mark on my dossier that might take longer than two weeks to eradicate. Considerably longer.

I went in.

An attendant in a white uniform led us to an office. The policeman and the intern waited in the hallway, and Garland took me in to meet Dr. Wheeler.

Wheeler stood up behind his desk as we went in. He was a small man, bald as an egg, and he wore thick-lensed pince-nez glasses on a wide black ribbon. The lenses made his eyes look enormous.

They turned on me, and studied me, and I felt transparent.

"Mr. Henry Remmers, doctor," Garland said. "The man Major Lorne talked to you about. Here are the papers—the reports from St. Vincent's and so on." He tossed an envelope down on the desk.

I cleared my throat. It seemed suddenly important that I make my voice sound natural and say the natural thing. The words came out all right, but it sounded to me as though somebody else were talking.

I said, "Good evening, doctor. Major Lorne suggested this as the ideal place for a rest cure for a week or two. I'm coming here voluntarily, of course. I mean that I'm not . . . er—" I bogged down, realizing that it would have been better if I'd said nothing at all.

"Of course, of course," Dr. Wheeler smiled and nodded. "We want you to feel that you are a guest here, Mr. Remmers. You're tired, of course, after your trip?"

"Not particularly. I—"

"But rest will be the best thing for you, right now. It will be much better if I . . . ah . . . talk with you

in the morning, will it not? I'll have you shown to your room."

He pressed a button on his desk.

I realized the futility of protest, and I was a bit tired, after all. A good night's sleep, and everything might look different in the sunlight of tomorrow.

Maybe it was all to the good that, feeling as I did right now, I didn't have to undergo a lengthy examination and more cross-questioning.

I nodded, and said, "I guess you're right, doctor. Er . . . good-by, Mr.—"

I turned, but Garland wasn't there. I hadn't heard him leave the office, but he was gone.

The door opened, and an attendant came in. Not the one who'd shown us to the office, but another—a husky man with a nose twisted a little to one side. He looked like a fugitive from the fight rings.

"This is Mr. Remmers, Wilbur," Dr. Wheeler said. "You will take him to Room 212. It's been prepared for him."

He turned back to me. "Tomorrow, Mr. Remmers, we'll show you around the place. The grounds here are beautiful at this time of year. But tonight, sleep well."

Again his eyes seemed to look right through me. Possibly it was the effect of the thick lenses, or it may have been a trick of focusing. I wondered if Dr. Wheeler used mesmerism on his patients. With eyes like his, very little verbal suggestion would be needed.

Then he sat down abruptly and turned to papers on his desk, and I followed Wilbur out of the office.

I followed him up a flight of stairs and along a corridor. He opened the third door from the end, reached inside and flicked a light switch.

He said, "There's a button in the door frame here. Rush it if you need anything."

I said, "Thanks," and stepped in-

side, and the door closed behind me.

It was a small, but comfortable room. There was a window, open a few inches at the top, and I was glad to see that there were no bars across it. There was a desk and a chair, and a shelf with a few books on it.

There was a single bed with a pair of pajamas lying across it. The pajamas looked familiar. I picked them up to make sure, and they were mine, all right.

Then I saw that my black Gladstone bag had been pushed back under the bed, and I remembered that these pajamas had been the ones I kept in the bag. Probably Major Lorne had brought the bag out during the afternoon when he'd talked to Wheeler about me. I was certain that it hadn't been in the car in which I'd been brought here.

I pulled it out and opened it, to refresh my memory on what its contents had been. There were shirts, socks and underwear enough to last me for several days. And there was a toothbrush and comb. But my razor was gone.

Someone in a nearby room started singing in a high, cracked voice. No tune, just a continuous high monotone. I couldn't make out the words.

Well, I thought to myself, you're here to relax. Damn it, relax.

I bent over to scan the titles of the books on the shelf. There were half a dozen of them. I read the titles: "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," "Pride and Prejudice," "Ivanhoe," "Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come," "Heidi" and "Ben Hur."

All the latest best sellers! Leisurely literature for lulling lunatics. Well, there'd be an evening paper somewhere around the joint. I'd stick my head out into the hall and ask the attendant on duty to bring me one.

I turned and reached for the door-knob.

There wasn't any. The door didn't open, from my side.

I stood for quite a while looking at that door, and especially at the place where the knob should have been and wasn't.

I got myself calmed down before I pressed the button for the attendant. No use raising hell with him. I'd have to put up with being locked in until I had a chance to talk to Dr. Wheeler.

On principle, I didn't like it. But it wouldn't hurt me, for one night.

The door opened, and it was Wilbur. He said, "Yeah?"

"Is there a copy of the evening paper around?" I asked him. "Any evening paper."

"Sorry, mister. Against the rules."

"Huh? Why?"

He shrugged. "Patients aren't supposed to worry about what goes on outside."

"But, look," I said, "I'm not— Oh, skip it."

He closed the door.

I sat down on the bed and glowered at nothing in particular. Darn Major Lorne for getting me into a place like this. Next time I saw him, I'd tell him he was badly mistaken about the character of Dr. Wheeler's private little rest haven.

No newspapers! In times like these, the surest way to work up a good worry is not to *know* what's going on. What's happening tonight in Tunisia? If I knew, I could forget it.

After a while, I got up and went to the window. It was so dark out that I couldn't see anything in the glass but my own reflection. I tried to raise the sash and it wouldn't lift. The top part went down six inches and that was all. No more.

No, there weren't any bars, but the panes were set in metal frames and I had a pretty good idea that

the glass was bulletproof, once I got the significance of the frames and the fact that the window wouldn't open wide enough for anyone to escape.

Well, there wasn't anything I could do about it tonight.

I took another look at that shelf of books, and picked out "Ivanhoe." It wasn't bad, after the first couple of chapters. By the time events got to Sherwood, I was deeply interested.

Then, suddenly, and without warning, the lights went out.

I put the book down in annoyance and groped for the doorway. By the time I got there, I could see well enough to find the button and push it. There was, once my eyes were used to the comparative darkness, a faint blue illumination in the room.

It came from a dim bulb set in the ceiling, behind blue glass.

Wilbur opened the door and said, "Yeah?"

"The light went off," I said. "Was it an accident or—"

"All room lights go off at ten sharp." He slammed the door, and since there was nothing else to do, I undressed and went to bed.

IV.

I couldn't sleep. And I didn't want to think, but there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't want to think until things had simmered down, and I'd had my talk with Dr. Wheeler and—

Then I began to hear the voice. It was a strangely hoarse, whispering voice, and it didn't come from any ascertainable direction. It filled the room, as the blue radiance filled it, dimly.

"You're new here?" it demanded. "You're new here? You're new here?"

I sat up in bed and looked around. Was I really going crazy?

"The register," said the voice.

"I'm talking from the next room."

I looked around until I spotted it. A small metal grille in the wall near the desk. I went over to it and bent down. "Yes. I'm new—"

"Sh-sh, just whisper. I can hear you, if you whisper." His own voice was lower now. "If they hear, they'll shut off the registers. They murdered the man in that room before you, like they'll murder you."

He was crazy, of course. I said, "Thanks; I'll watch out. My name's Remmers. What's yours?"

"George Zehnder. They'll kill me, too. I was in censorship, and I found out too much. Look, when did you see a paper last?"

"This morning," I told him. "We're doing well in the Solomons and the Russians are pushing the Nazis back steadily. Things are deadlocked in Tunisia. The Germans have lost—"

"You believe all that?"

"Believe it? Why, sure. Even the Axis radio—"

"There isn't any Axis radio. There isn't any Axis. Those stations are our own. The Russians control Europe. That's what I found out. That's why I'm here. You got to tell people, if you can escape. And I know how you can. I can't."

It sounds funny, here and now, but it wasn't, then. Not in that luminous-blue room, locked in, with my wardens apparently thinking I was as crazy as the man I was listening to. It put shivers down my spine and for reasons I couldn't explain.

Maybe because it settled once and for all the character of the place I was in and the fact that I was in a jam. That was a logical reason for those shivers.

There was a lesser one, and I didn't like to think about it. People today had been listening to my story with just about the same feeling with which I'd been listening to that of

George Zehnder in the next room—the next cell.

"It's a plot, Remmers," the voice whispered. "The whole administration, Washington, and the Russians. They control Europe. There isn't any war, but they're sending all the men out of this country and landing them on islands out of the way, so they can take over and make this part of the Comintern. That's why you're here, too. You found out *something*. What was it?"

I couldn't very well refuse to tell him why I was here; I put it into as few words as I could.

"See?" he whispered. "Things like that are going on all over. Train wrecks that they keep secret. Factories blown up. Everybody else on that train was killed, but you survived, and they had to tell you there wasn't any wreck and put you here. Now they'll kill you, so you can't tell."

I said, "That's— Maybe you're right. But I'd better get some sleep, so I can be on my guard tomorrow."

"Good," came the whisper through the register. "You've got to be on your guard tomorrow all right. Sleep."

I went back to the bed, a little shakily. Someone across the corridor started laughing hysterically and couldn't stop, until a door opened and closed. Then silence. Finally, I slept.

Then I was dreaming, for things were confused and unreal, in the manner of dreams. A train conductor was telling me that Dr. Wheeler had told him that the war was all a plot, and shouldn't I ask Major Lorne about it before I went on working with explosives, and I laughed out loud and told him that Wheeler was a paranoiac because his eyes were as big as grapefruit. And then things went *swish* and I was in the laboratory.

Good old Peter Carr was stuffing

reports into my brief case and saying, "These are all you need, Hank. In case you get cold, I mean, up in Iceland. You can start a fire with them, and they won't explode because the stability factor of paper is ninety-nine and a half."

I grabbed the brief case and then Armin Andrews was there asking me for an interview about my trip to Iceland and I took him back to the testing rack and said, "See, it doesn't make any more noise than a rifle shot. You can stand right there behind the shield and I'll go throw the switch from over there and it goes *bang*."

And it went *bang*, and I joined him again and moved the shield and said, "Stable, see? But no power. Now take the hexanitrodiphenylamine—" And he said, "Not me, I'll take vanilla." And then I took him back to the office and I sat down, only I was sitting on a train again, and my attorney, John Weatherby, was with me instead of Armin.

Then there was a rap on the window of the train, and I opened it and a stranger stuck his head in the window and said, "Here it comes!"

He disappeared, and there it was again! Sudden darkness. The long, drawn-out sound of ripping steel and wood, shrieks and screams of terror from all about me. And the seat going up and over into darkness. And then nausea and pain. Shrieks and screams and tearing steel in darkness.

Then a locomotive headlight—

Somebody was shaking me, and the light wasn't a locomotive. It was a flashlight playing in my face, blinding me, and I was back in bed at the sanitarium. Wilbur, the attendant, was shaking me.

"Wake up, cut it out," his voice growled.

The wreck terror was still with me, and my forehead was clammy.

Wilbur said, "Lay off the scream-

ing. We won't let it get you."

"I'm all right," I said. "I . . . I just had a nightmare."

He grunted and went out. But I knew one thing now. That wreck really had happened. It hadn't been a dream, the first time. Last night—

The voice from the register whispered, "Remmers, are you all right? Did they kill you?"

I didn't dare answer, because if I listened to that mug, pretty soon I'd be believing him. I'd be crazy, too. Or was I already?

I faked a snore, to avoid answering Zehnder. And then I must have slept again. For I woke up to the sound of my own screams.

There were two of them this time, Wilbur and another. Wilbur was slapping my face. "Wake up, buddy, cut it out. Come on; what you need is a nice long soak in hot water."

And then the two of them were leading, half carrying me out of the blue room into the yellow-lighted hallway. They handled me firmly, but not roughly.

The other attendant was as big as Wilbur, but dumber-looking. He had a swarthy, brutal face and a curiously gentle voice.

He asked, not of me, "Hadn't we better call the boss?"

"Naw," said Wilbur. "Not unless he has another, anyway. If he does, we'll put him in a special."

Then the white tile room, and they stripped my pajamas off me and the warm water in the sunken tub felt good. It was hot at first to my cold-sweated skin. Then pleasantly, languorously warm, and I relaxed. I didn't think. I was past thinking, just then.

The rest of the night was quieter, though I didn't sleep again. I felt, somehow, that I'd never again trust myself to sleep.

After they took me back to my room, I watched dawn come up. Watched it out of the bulletproof-

glass window that wouldn't open wide enough for a man to squeeze through.

It was a beautiful fried-egg sunrise along the tops of the trees beyond the distant high wall. A riot of red and yellow above the green.

Breakfast was brought to me and I ate, a little.

Then I watched the sun climb higher, and thought of it shining into the windows of my home out in Glen Olden. I wondered if I'd ever live there again.

The sun was almost overhead when they took me downstairs to Dr. Wheeler's office. The day attendant who took me there remained in the office, standing with his back against the door.

Dr. Wheeler motioned me to a seat facing him. He studied a file of papers for a while, looking up at me occasionally as he read.

I sat quietly, waiting.

He cleared his throat, finally. "I understand you had an . . . ah . . . unquiet night last night, Mr. Remmers."

I nodded. "Nightmares. Or rather, the same one twice."

"The attendants should have called me. Upon first awakening from . . . ah . . . delirium, your answers to certain questions might have been quite revealing. I understand from this dossier that you have never suffered before from mental disorder. How has your general physical condition been?"

"In the pink," I told him. "But I guess I pushed myself too far, recently, on working hours."

"I understand you are doing research for the government. In explosives. Do you ever feel fear, uneasiness, in the handling of such dangerous substances?"

"Hm-m-m," I said, "a little, occasionally. It wouldn't be normal, not to. But it hasn't worried me."

"You work directly under Major Lorne's orders?"

"Yes, and no, doctor. I do what he tells me to do, and report to him. But I'm not on the government pay roll at all. The laboratory is my own and—"

"You have independent means?"

"Yes. After college, an inheritance let me set up a small laboratory of my own, purely as a gamble. I had the luck to make an important discovery in plastics and sold the process for a sizable sum plus royalties for fifteen years. So I'm financially independent. I'd worked with explosives a bit, and when the war started, I thought my services in that line would be most valuable. The war department put me in touch with Major Lorne, and I've been working at whatever he's suggested ever since."

"Paying for your own materials and equipment?"

"Of course. I can afford it, and Major Lorne agreed that since I didn't need a government salary, it would cut a lot of red tape if I remained technically independent. He takes care of priorities on everything I need, and, of course, anything I discover is automatically the property of the government."

"An excellent arrangement." He smiled. "We'll do our best to send you back to your laboratory as soon as possible, Mr. Remmers. For the moment, the most important prophylaxis for you is complete rest and freedom from worry. Don't think about the war, about your laboratory, about . . . ah . . . your experience of night before last. And about those nightmares—"

"Yes, doctor?"

"Possibly they will not recur. If they do, we'll try to get at the cause of them. You'll have the freedom of the grounds, of course, and I suggest some brisk walking this after-

noon to induce normal fatigue. And I'll have a mild sedative sent to you just before you retire."

He nodded toward the man at the door, as though the interview were over.

I stood up, but I said, "Just a minute, doctor. There are one or two questions I want to ask."

"Yes?" There was an edge of impatience in his voice.

"About newspapers. I'm sure knowing what's going on outside won't, in my case, cause any—"

"Sorry, Remmers, no. You'll have to let me be judge of what will be best in your case. And no visitors, either, for a while. Visiting day is Sunday, but this first Sunday—no, not in your case. Insulation from outside contacts is the best—"

I interrupted, "But that's preposterous. I'm here voluntarily, for a rest cure. I—"

His voice was crisp and final. "Mr. Remmers, if you are interested in an ultimate cure, you won't question my rulings. And as for your

Then the night exploded. I found myself flying through space, landing on my back in the road. The debris from the explosion was still falling.



V.



"The reason I don't remember much after that was that on his way back he slugged me with a blackjack. That's when the lights went out—for me."

being here voluntarily, temporary commitment papers have been signed, by Drs. Rurick and Ulhausen of St. Vincent's, with the concurrence of your lawyer and Major Lorne. This institution has your best interests at heart, however, and you'll do well to co-operate with us. That is all."

All the resistance went out of me, suddenly. Meekly, I allowed myself to be led back to my room. Lunch was brought to me there.

I roused myself enough to ask a few questions of the attendant. Yes, patients could send and receive mail, provided the subject matter was approved by the staff. Letters were distributed every morning after breakfast. Patients had freedom of the grounds from one o'clock in the afternoon until five. Yes, there was a general dining hall, but patients were served meals in their rooms for the first few days, until they became adjusted to sanitarium routine.

At one o'clock the attendant returned and opened my door.

The grounds were extensive, and probably quite beautiful, if I'd been in a mood to appreciate them.

But walking was welcome relief after confinement in that tiny room. It hadn't seemed so small when I'd first entered it, but every hour there had diminished its size. A room into which you're locked can shrink to the size of a coffin.

Most of the other patients had remained on the stretch of lawn in front of the building. There were chairs and tables on the lawn, and card games starting at some of the tables. There was a shuffleboard court marked out on the cement driveway, and a row of stakes for pitching rubber horseshoes.

But I didn't want companionship. Not that kind of companionship, anyway.

I walked, alone.

There were a few others who, like myself, went farther afield. Occasionally, I passed one of them, but they, too, wanted solitude, for none of them spoke to me.

Not directly, at any rate. There was the man who stood on the stump, speaking to no one in a voice that rolled like thunder. A mighty voice, deep and impressive. "—and the birds of Armageddon shall fly the shrieking skies and their droppings upon the quaking face of earth shall be fire and destruction and holocaust—"

He was a tall, dignified looking man with silver hair. He looked familiar; I thought I'd seen his picture somewhere, at some time. I walked faster until I was beyond range of that vibrant voice.

At two or three points I went close to the wall. It was twelve feet high, and there was a wire along the top of it. Not a barbed wire. Undoubtedly, it contained electric current, possibly not in lethal quan-

tity, but enough to stun. Or possibly, it merely set off an alarm if shorted by the touch of an escaping patient. There were no trees within a dozen feet of the wall.

And then it was evening, and my cell again. I finished "Ivanhoe" and bribed Wilbur with a five-dollar bill to find me another assortment of books to take the place of the ones I had. The ones he brought weren't bad: they included "Huckleberry Finn," "Pickwick Papers," and others I'd read long ago, but which were worth rereading.

I was halfway through "Pickwick" when the lights went out.

I undressed slowly, uneasily, wondering if I were in for another bad night. I wished there were some way I could break or put out that blue night light. Blue is supposed to be a quieting, soothing color.

Supposed to be!

It isn't; not in a room like that, under circumstances like those. Not at night in a madhouse. A weird, blue radiance.

Physically, I was so tired that I must have gone to sleep the moment I lay down.

Then I was sitting up in bed, yelling my head off, and my pajamas were soaked with cold perspiration.

Yes, I'd lived through that wreck again. Or, maybe died in it. That horrible wreck that never had happened. Or *had* it?

Wilbur was there, and Dr. Wheeler, and I kept my eyes closed while Wheeler asked me a million questions so that, while I answered, I wouldn't have to look into those eyes of his. I don't remember what the questions were, but he didn't seem to be satisfied with the answers. Some of the same questions were repeated over and over. It was almost like going through another nightmare.

And there was warm water again and I must have gone to sleep in the

sunken tub and not awakened while they took me back to my room. At any rate, I woke up in bed and my last recollection was the water.

I lay there quietly for a while, getting enough courage to get up and dress. Then the attendant came with breakfast, and a letter from Armin Andrews.

There were two sheets of paper in it, but the sheets weren't the same size. Scissor marks showed that the bottom of the first page and the top of the second had been sheared off. The paper seemed to have been ordinary size, and, therefore, almost half the message was gone. It read:

Dear Hank:

Dropped out to see you this evening, but find I can't, so I'm dashing this off in Wheeler's office. Talked my boss into giving me a few days off work and started my vacation last night by riding to Wilmington.

That was all there was up to the scissor cut across the first sheet. Below the cut on the second:

Keep the old chin up, and don't worry. If there's anything I can send you in way of reading matter or smokes or what-not, let me know. Be seeing ya.
Armin.

For a minute after I got the significance of those scissor cuts, I was so mad I couldn't see straight. Wheeler had scissored out of that letter the very thing I wanted to know. *Had* to know.

Those missing words would have told me whether I'd really been on the *Flyer*. Whether I was *mad* or *sane*.

Just then, I was mad all right, in one sense of the word. I forgot the bell and hammered on the door until an attendant opened it.

Before he could ask what I wanted, I started a tirade that would have blistered the hide of an alligator. But it petered out as I saw he was merely bored and resigned. As

though he'd heard worse, from crazier people.

He said, "You mean you got a complaint because the office cut something out of a letter? Look, mister, they did it for your own good, if they did. And it won't do no good to squawk."

"Maybe," I said grimly. "But just the same I demand to see Dr. Wheeler at once and—"

"Dr. Wheeler ain't here. Left on a vacation early this morning. Dr. Gottlieb's in charge. You can complain to him if you want, but it won't do no good, mister."

"Take me to him, anyway."

"Not now. Evenings between six and seven. That's the only time you can—"

I slammed the door, and stood there, trembling with anger. If I'd left the door open a minute longer, I'd have struck the attendant. And it wasn't *his* fault. Besides, it would be another proof to them of how crazy I was.

Maybe I was crazy. Maybe that's what had been in the missing part of that note from Andrews—the fact that there hadn't been any such conductor on the train I remember taking. That there hadn't been a coach third or fourth from last, and that all the cars were crowded. In other words, that the whole thing was haywire. That I was haywire.

Or had he told me that the conductor had verified my story; that all details, except the wreck, checked.

Was I crazy? Damn it, I was going to go crazy wondering.

Then something struck me so damn funny that I laughed out loud, bitterly. *This* was to be a place of quiet and rest to overcome a breakdown. *This* place, where I was locked in a tiny room under a blue light all night, where I had nightmares that would drive me crazy, if I weren't already.

And they kept from me the *one*

thing, the only thing, that could help my mind to adjust itself—the truth. If I only knew beyond all doubt what had happened night before last, if I only knew that my mind had slipped a cog, then maybe I could adjust myself, and work toward recovery.

But uncertainty was intolerable. I had to know.

Not knowing, this place was hell.

I had to get out of here—to escape. Right away.

And once I realized that, I became calmer. I had something constructive to think about now—how to get out of here.

It would have to be during the afternoon, of course, when I had the freedom of the grounds. But how to surmount a twelve-foot wall with a wire running along the top of it which I mustn't touch. Not knowing this country, I'd need a good long start before they missed me.

Then I remembered something the patient in the next room had said, during our whispered conference. If only it weren't of a piece with the rest of what he'd said—

I put my mouth down to the register and whispered, "Mr. Zehnder."

The answering "Yes?" came almost immediately.

I whispered, "Night before last you said you knew a way I could escape. Why haven't you used it?"

"I can't. They're waiting outside to get me if I do. I'm safe only as long as I stay here and pretend I'm mad. But maybe they don't know you, and you could get through them. If you do, you'll tell everybody what I told you about—"

"Of course. How can I get over the fence? And what's the wire on top of it?"

"An alarm. I heard it set off once. Listen, you walk due west from the west side of the building until you come to the wall. Then turn north and follow it about a hundred yards and you'll see a birch tree—"

He went on with it, and it made sense. If the tree were there as he described it, and the other tree at the outside of the wall, the idea would work.

I reached the tree within ten minutes of the time I was let out of the building, at one o'clock. Even from the ground, I could see that it would work. It took me a while to find a sapling small enough so that I could break it, yet strong enough for its purpose.

The hardest part was shinning up the bole of the birch, carrying with me the six-foot staff I'd made out of the sapling. The ticklish part was going hand-over-hand along that staff from one tree to the other, after I'd set it as a bridge across the five-foot gap between the fork in a heavy branch of the birch and the fork in the bole of the maple beyond the fence.

It was ticklish, and there was a twenty-foot drop if anything went wrong. But nothing did. Climbing down the maple was easy, and I cut across a fallow field to a dirt road beyond.

Two miles of walking brought me to a highway.

Luck was with me. An interurban bus came along, and stopped to pick me up when I hailed it. It was headed for Marcus Hook, and Marcus Hook is only a matter of minutes from Philadelphia by fast train.

I was free. Until they caught up with me, I was free.

In Marcus Hook, I learned that the next train for Philadelphia was due in twenty-five minutes. I sat down on a bench to wait, and realized for the first time how utterly weary I was.

My head ached, too. I closed my eyes and tried to relax, not to think about anything until I'd talked to Andrews. Time enough to think things through after I knew what he'd learned.

I must have fallen asleep as soon as my eyes closed.

I opened them to look at the clock to see how long I still had to wait, and the clock said half past six. I'd slept for three hours, sitting there.

The lights were on in the station, and it was twilight through the windows.

And an hour and a half ago, back at the sanitarium, I'd have been missed. By now the alarm was out for me, and the search would be on. They'd be watching my home, probably, and the laboratory. Maybe even Andrews' flat.

But— Well, there was nothing to do now but to go on, and to avoid capture as long as I could—at least until I'd talked to Andrews.

A train for Philadelphia pulled into the station and I boarded it, cursing my stupidity in losing the brief time that would have been mine to utilize as a free man and not as a fugitive.

VI.

There was no cause for hurry now, and plenty of reason for caution. In Philadelphia, I made myself as inconspicuous as possible in leaving the station, and I phoned Andrews' flat from a nearby drugstore. There was no answer.

I tried his paper next, on the off-chance that he'd be working late. I was told that Andrews was taking a vacation of a few days and wouldn't be back until Monday.

I ate something and then took a room in an inexpensive and inconspicuous hotel in Bremen Street. I used an assumed name, of course.

It felt great to be free, but I couldn't see that it was getting me anywhere as yet. There were two people I wanted to see—Armin and Peter Carr. I thought I could trust both of them, but there was an excellent chance that Peter's house and the laboratory would be watched.

And I knew no way of getting Armin—except by calling occasionally, on the chance that he would return early.

Yes, the authorities would be watching for me closely. Looking at it from their point of view, I was a lunatic at large—and an expert on explosives. An explosive maker with a mental quirk that concerned train wrecks. Looking at it that way, they'd think it a matter of considerable urgency to catch me again.

Then I remembered Gene Larkin, and started toward his cab stand. I'd gone to high school with Gene. I had a hunch that I could trust him, and, anyway, it was unlikely that he'd have heard this soon that I was a fugitive.

His cab was there, all right, and Gene in it.

He said, "Hi, there, Hank," when I walked up and from the casualness of his tone I knew he hadn't heard anything. I got in.

"Gene," I said, "you free all evening?"

He grinned, "I wouldn't call it free with the meter ticking. But I got the night ahead of me." Then, as he looked at me closer, he stopped smiling. "Something wrong, Hank? You in a jam?"

I said, "A hell of a jam. Drive around a while—with the meter going, of course—and I'll tell you."

I told him the whole works, and he didn't say anything for a full minute after I finished. Then he pulled up to the curb. He said, "Better get out here."

I didn't believe it. I said, "Damn it, Gene, you mean that even *you* think that I—"

He turned and looked at me and I knew I'd been wrong. He said, "Hell, no. But we're near your house. I'm just going by to see if it's being watched and you'd better not be along. Wait in the shadow

of those trees and I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

He was back in ten. "It's bad. There are two carloads of cops, maybe more in back. I made the mistake of slowing down to see if they were coppers, and they stopped me and looked in back. Good thing I left you here. Listen, I'll drive by the laboratory next. If Peter Carr's working late, there'll be a light on. You keep on waiting here."

I nodded. "You're a godsend, Gene." I looked at his snub-nosed, freckled face and damn near broke down. "Lord, in over three days you're the first person I've talked to who hasn't thought I was nuts."

Gene snorted. "You're not crazy. You been framed."

There was assurance in his voice. But, better than that, there was sudden assurance inside me. Now, away from the atmosphere of the sanitarium, I knew damned well that I was sane.

The *how*, and for that matter, even the *why*, of what had happened to me were still obscure. But I'd been in a hell of uncertainty and now I was out of it again, in the light.

I *wasn't* crazy, and they weren't going to take me back there *alive*. Sure, it would be foolhardy to resist arrest and hide out, but that was my personal brand of craziness and I wasn't afraid of that. Right now, I wasn't even afraid of the nightmares; I knew I wasn't going to have them any more. Somehow, I was going to wreck that train wreck before it wrecked me.

Gene said, "It's nine thirty. I'll be back in half an hour."

Back in the shadow of the trees, I watched the cab drive off, and I waited.

Half an hour passed. Then another, and another. I waited two hours and then I walked to the corner of the boulevard and saw a cab coming. It wasn't Gene's, but I

hailed it. I gave an address about six blocks from the laboratory.

This, I thought, as I got out of the cab and paid off the driver, was the route Gene would have taken. I'd gone as close as I dared, in the cab. Maybe Gene would have parked nearby for some reason, and I could walk close enough to see his cab.

And this was the route Peter Carr would take going home, if he'd been working late. These six blocks, and then one block west to the car line.

I looked around the corner and down Hale Street, and there was a man halfway down the block walking toward the car-line street. A man about Peter's size and build.

Well, there was no hurry in my walking toward the lab, and that might be Peter. I started after him, walking briskly. I'd caught halfway up to him—a quarter of a block away, perhaps—when he reached the corner.

Then I heard the rumble of an approaching streetcar, and realized that he'd board it before I got there. I broke into a run and—yes, it was Pete Carr. I recognized that long, brown topcoat of his and the disreputable felt hat pulled down over his eyes.

I yelled, "Hey, Peter!"

He heard me and turned. Then he whirled back and ran toward the tracks. The streetcar stopped and he boarded it while I was still fifty paces away.

He *must* have recognized me—my voice, at any rate. Lord, if even Peter Carr thought me a dangerous lunatic, to be run away from, I'd get little help from other people, I knew.

I was out of breath and panting. I'd passed a tavern while I was running toward Peter, and I returned and went into it. I'd rest a minute and have a drink, and then walk toward the laboratory to see if I could spot Gene's cab.

I ordered a beer, and while the

bartender was drawing it, I called Andrews' number again. No, he hadn't been or phoned home and they didn't know where he was.

Drinking the beer, I wondered about Peter. Could he have missed recognizing me? True, he was a timid cuss, in some ways. Seeing a man running toward him, yelling something he didn't understand, he might have reacted that way. But—

"Nice night," said the bartender.

"Yeah," I lied. It was a hell of a night, now. Everything was going wrong. Probably Gene—on sober second thought—had decided it was too dangerous to help me, and had gone back downtown. Not that I blamed him.

The beer was good, and I had another. Damn Peter, I thought.

Well, there wasn't any hurry, now. It was twelve fifteen by the clock behind the bar. I might as well catch the streetcar into town and turn in. Tomorrow—

I'd kept an eye out the window and no squad cars had gone by outside, so I felt fairly certain Peter hadn't phoned the police. Anyway, the tavern keeper was getting ready to close up.

I strolled up to the car stop on the corner, and only when I got there did I remember that there wouldn't be another car along until two. I'd missed the one at twelve—the one Peter had taken, and the only owl cars on the line after midnight were at two and at three thirty.

I leaned against the building a moment, and then decided I'd rather walk than stand there. True, on the car-line street here, there was a chance of flagging an inbound cab, but I thought I'd rather kill time until two o'clock by taking another look at the laboratory.

Even if they were watching it all night, I could surely get within a block of it without being seen. Maybe— Oh, I don't know *why* I

wanted to go that way, but I did. Maybe it was just a hunch.

I walked back the way I had come, to the corner a block back where I'd gotten out of the cab. Down the six straight blocks that led to the lab, I could see two or three cars parked without lights. But in this outlying district, all-night parking was permissible. It was unlikely that any of them harbored detectives, for none of them was closer than a block to the lab.

Anyway, I could get closer—

The first car, a block up, was an old jellopy I'd seen parked there often before. The next— Was it a taxi?

Yes, it was. A cab parked without lights. There was a driver in the front seat, but no one in back. Looked like Gene's cab, but why would he still be parked here? For that matter, why would he have parked here at all? It was too far away from the lab, and on the same side of the street. He couldn't even see it from here.

I was closer now, and I could see that the driver was slumped forward across the wheel. Was it Gene, asleep?

It was Gene, all right. I opened the door of the cab, called his name, and put a hand on his shoulder to awaken him. The tips of my fingers touched the flesh of his neck, and the flesh was cold.

VII.

Something inside me turned cold, too, at that moment. It wasn't fear, thank God, it was anger.

Up to now, I'd been worried stiff, and I'd been acting defensively, trying to clear myself of the implied charge against me of insanity. Now it was different.

Gene had been the first person really to be on my side, the first to accept my version of what had hap-

pened. And now Gene was dead. Murdered. Even before I turned on the dome light of the taxi to see how he had been killed, it didn't occur to me to doubt that his death had been by violence.

And it had. The lower part of the back of his head was crushed in. A cowardly blow from behind; it could have been dealt with the butt of a heavy revolver.

Yes, now everything was different!

Now, as though Gene's being killed weren't enough, this was proof. Proof that whatever machinations of evil had taken place four nights ago had not been figments of a disordered imagination. Now I could go to the authorities and demand—

No, I couldn't, of course. From their point of view, I was an escaped maniac. I'd been with Gene; unless the time of his death could be set with unlikely exactitude and should coincide with my ride in the other cab. I had no alibi.

And it wouldn't coincide, of course. Gene had been killed before then, or he would have been back to pick me up. He'd been killed while I waited for him back there in the shadows.

But by whom—and why?

I flicked off the light switch and sat down in the back seat to think things through as far as I could.

Whoever had killed Gene had been in the cab with him, sitting here where I was sitting now. And the cab had been parked here; with Gene slumped forward over the wheel that way, it couldn't have been brought in to the curb here after his death.

Let's see— He left me to drive past the laboratory to see if there was a light on there. He wouldn't have picked up a casual fare, with me waiting for him back there. There were only two possibilities then. A policeman or detective

might have stopped his cab in front of the laboratory, ordered him to drive a few blocks on and— No, that was unlikely. If the place were being watched, there'd be a pair of detectives. So the other would know—

But Gene knew Peter Carr, by sight. He knew that I wanted to talk to Peter. If Peter had left the laboratory while Gene was driving past, or if Gene had passed him on the street, while Peter was walking to the car line—right here, maybe—Gene would have pulled in to the curb, told Peter I'd sent him, and asked him to get in.

And then— Had Peter Carr murdered Gene?

But why? Impossible as it was to think of Peter Carr as a murderer, it was even more fantastic to name any motive for his killing Gene. He could have refused to get into the cab, if he were afraid of me. Or, if already in the cab, he could have refused to accompany Gene and got out again. The cab hadn't started.

The more I tried to think it out, the dizzier became the circles in which my thoughts revolved. Somehow, this apparently motiveless murder was madder than anything that had happened yet.

Was I, framed somehow into appearing insane, the victim of a madman's plotting? Gene had nothing to do with whatever was going on; who but a madman would want to kill *him*?

Well, my first step was obvious. Regardless of risk, regardless of his attitude toward me, I was going to look up Peter Carr. Tonight. Now. When I'd heard his story, even if I had to sit on him to keep him from running away from me while we talked, then maybe things would begin to make sense.

I got out of the cab. There was nothing I could do for Gene now,

except get his murderer. Then I remembered that Peter Carr had moved recently and I didn't have his new address. He was living alone—I recalled him telling me—in a sort of bungalow along the river.

But there was only one way I could get that address tonight, and that was from the records at the lab. But if the lab were watched—

Well, there was one way in that they might not have covered. I started walking toward the lab, four blocks away. Slowly, so I could think out what my best chances were of getting in unobserved.

A block and a half away, I cut into an alley, and from there on, I avoided the street on which the lab faced. I cut through yards to the back door of a four-story apartment building half a block away, and went in and up to the fourth floor.

The hallway window there would give me a bird's-eye view of things, for the few other buildings in the next block were low ones. My laboratory was a one story concrete garage building I'd had remodeled for my purpose.

Yes, there were two parked cars, one in the alley behind and a little beyond the lab. The other, across the street from the front of it. If there were no watchers other than those I presumed were in the cars there, I could make it unseen to a side window.

I went downstairs again, crossed the side street, and cut across lots and yards and over fences.

The window was locked, of course, but I got it open. I'd purchased a razor and blades when I'd left the hotel, and one of the thin steel blades now stood me in good stead. I pushed it up through the space between the sashes and pushed the catch. I'd often thought of putting better safeguards on those windows, but I'd never had anything really

worth stealing in the place.

Inside, I tiptoed over to the file cabinet. It made a noise when I opened it, and I stopped and listened intently. It was quite possible that they had a man planted somewhere inside the building. But there was no sound save the ticking of a clock.

I had to risk a match to find Peter's address, but if the only watchers were in the two parked cars, they wouldn't be able to see a faint flicker of light here in the office.

Then I crossed over to the safe and struck another match while I worked the combination. There was about three hundred dollars cash in the safe, kept for making various cash purchases. I didn't know how much longer I'd be a fugitive nor what unexpected expenses I might have, so I'd take advantage of the opportunity by taking that three hundred with me.

I swung open the safe, and struck another match. The tin box that held money was there, but the safe was strangely empty otherwise. The two bigger compartments, which held the condensed records of all our experiments and tests, were empty.

Strange. Had Major Lorne taken them? Peter had the combination of the safe, and he'd have turned those papers over if Lorne had demanded them. But why would Lorne have wanted them? He had the originals of most of them; these were merely our copies. And in general, they were valuable only in a negative way, in that they might save time for other research men.

And Peter? He'd have had no cause for taking them. For a moment I pondered the idea that Peter might have discovered something about which I knew nothing. But that wasn't likely, for it was I who did all the testing. And if he *had* discovered something important on the side and wanted to take personal

advantage of it, he would never have incorporated it in those records, and, therefore, had no reason to steal them.

I took out the tin box and opened it. The money—the paper money—was gone, too. There were a few dollars' worth of silver, but whoever had rifled the safe hadn't bothered with it.

I didn't bother with it, either. I left the safe ajar and started back for the window. After all, I had Peter's address, and that was what I'd come for.

At the window, I paused to listen for sounds outside. A locomotive whistled mournfully far away. But that was all, except for the nearby ticking of that clock.

I had a leg over the window sill, before a thought came to me that stopped me from going the rest of the way.

I *didn't* have a clock that *ticked*, here in the laboratory. There was an electric clock out in the shop, and



It must have taken me half an hour to move that chair the six feet to the desk. But I made it, finally, and luck was with me, for the phone stood near the edge.

a small chronometer back in the testing room, but—

I pulled my foot back into the room, and headed for the direction from which that ticking seemed to come. I found myself standing in front of my own desk and the ticking sound came from under it. I lighted a match and bent down.

It was a clock, all right, but the clock was fastened to a simple mechanism that would detonate a fuse. And the fuse was embedded in a box of what looked like granulated TNT.

Thirty or forty pounds of it. Enough to make a shambles of the whole laboratory, if not actually to blow it apart.

Quickly, I reached out and pushed the button that would shut off the alarm. Then I tiptoed out into the laboratory and groped through a drawer until I found a stub of candle. By its light, back in the office, I carefully dismantled the detonating mechanism.

I found that my forehead was dripping wet when I finished. I have a good, healthy respect for explosives. That's why I'd been able to work with them so long and still retain the requisite number of arms, legs and fingers. But I'd never before messed with it in forty-pound quantities.

There was sufficient toluene and nitrates right here in the lab to have made that much TNT. Twice that much, in fact.

Again I went out to the laboratory and from there into the stock room. The toluene was all gone. If it had all been used for making TNT, then there was another forty pounds or so of it kicking around somewhere.

But that worried me less at the moment than the problem of who had trinitrated that toluene. Because there was only one answer, and that was one that didn't make sense. Only Peter Carr had suffi-

cient access to the laboratory to have made that quantity of TNT. With all our equipment designed for handling minute quantities, it would have taken a lot of time to make eighty pounds of HE. It couldn't have been done in a stolen hour or two late at night.

But was Peter Carr a homicidal maniac? That fitted the murder of Gene Larkin, and insanity might account for the time bomb I'd just dismantled. But it couldn't account for whatever frame-up had been pulled on me four nights ago. Peter Carr *couldn't* have done that.

At any rate, I had his address. That was what I'd come here for, and my coming had incidentally saved quite a few thousand dollars' worth of equipment from being scattered about the landscape.

Now to talk to Peter Carr.

I left as I had come, without attracting the attention of the detectives in the two automobiles.

Safely away, three blocks from the lab, I glanced at my watch. It was ten minutes to two o'clock. I could still make that two a. m. owl car. And it would take me within walking distance of Peter Carr's place.

I was the only passenger on that car, and the ride seemed interminable. My mind was so confused that I actually tried to avoid thinking, until after I had talked to Peter.

It was two thirty when I walked down Grove Street to the river.

There are cottages, many of them mere one-room shacks, all along the river at this point. Some of them are fixed for year-round occupancy, the others are uninsulated frame buildings habitable only during the clement months of the year.

Peter's would be the third or fourth south of Grove Street. Yes, there was his name on a mailbox at the edge of the road. A path led down the slope into darkness.

A cool breeze blew in off the river. In it, a smell of coming rain.

I glanced up at the sky, and the rain clouds were still quite distant in the west. Overhead were white, fleecy cumulus clouds, a round area of them made radiantly golden by the moon behind them. Those clouds were moving east, out of the path of the coming storm, and I saw that within a few minutes the moon would be out in the open, and that I'd have much better light for picking my way down that path.

So I leaned against the mailbox, and waited. The breeze was pleasant in my face, and I took off my hat to let it ruffle my hair.

About me was utter silence and peace as I looked up again at the sky to see if the moon were nearing the open stretch of sky.

Then the night exploded.

I was lying on my back in the road. My ears were numbed by a sound so loud that I cannot really say I heard it. The flash had been so bright that it was seconds before I could see.

But I didn't seem to be injured, otherwise, nor could I have lost consciousness for a measurable interval, for debris from the explosion was still falling.

A bit shakily, I got up and walked to the edge of the road to look down. Peter Carr's shack just wasn't there any more. Some of the scattered fragments that had been the shack were still burning, and there was enough light to see by—only there wasn't anything there to see except the place where the shack had been.

There wasn't any use in my going down the path. If anyone had been in that shack—well, he wasn't there now.

Somewhere in the distance I heard the wail of a siren and then another. Squad cars and fire engines would be converging on this spot, and they'd be here within minutes. I

had to get away from here, and quickly.

I turned and sprinted back across the road toward the railroad tracks on the other side. Far in the distance I could see the headlight of a freight locomotive coming slowly as it cut speed to enter the yards a mile away.

It seemed to take hours to get there, but it beat the squad cars and the fire engines, at that. I ran alongside the first box car back of the tender, caught the rungs and swung aboard. I made myself as inconspicuous as possible between two of the cars until the train, now down to a crawl, reached the Covina Street crossing, just south of the yards. I dropped off there.

Somewhere a clock struck three. I'd escaped from the sanitarium about fourteen hours ago; it didn't seem possible that so many things had happened in so short a time, unless, in some way I couldn't understand, my escape had precipitated those events.

And now, damn it, I was worse off than before, because I didn't even know whether Peter Carr were alive or dead. Well, I couldn't go back and ask, under the circumstances. I'd have to wait until tomorrow morning's newspapers to find out whether or not the firemen had found a body—or parts of a body—in the wreckage. And whether positive identification had been made.

Under the first street light, I brushed myself off as well as I could, and smoothed down my hair. My hat was gone, but it was too late to do anything about that.

Then I walked, almost staggering from weariness and reaction, down Covina Street toward town. About ten blocks—it seemed like ten miles—farther on, I found an all-night drugstore and phoned for a taxi.

At four o'clock I fell into bed in

my room at the hotel. I slept as though I had been drugged.

VIII.

I slept for twelve hours and a half, and felt more groggy than refreshed when I finally awakened.

But after a bath and a shave, I felt nearly human enough to phone down to the desk for an afternoon paper, and I read it while I dressed.

Read it, that is, after I got over the shock of seeing my own picture staring at me from the first page. I'll skip the wording of the caption and the headlines; I don't like to think about them. And they were more or less what I'd expected and feared.

What interested me was the details in the minion type. It seemed that Henry Remmers, an escaped lunatic who was an expert in explosives, had had a busy night. He'd taken a taxi to the neighborhood of his own laboratory, and had murdered the taxi driver. Then, with explosives obtained from the laboratory which he had entered through a window—the report, I noticed, did not mention that the laboratory had been under observation of detectives—he had partly constructed a time bomb.

Apparently something had frightened him away before he completed the detonating mechanism, but he must have taken a quantity of high explosives with him. With this, he went to the bungalow of his former assistant, Peter Carr, and there had overpowered Carr—it was presumed—and tied him up. Then he had made another bomb, this time finishing the job. Yes, I'd expected all that.

The detail that interested me most was that the body of Peter Carr, despite its condition, had been definitely and conclusively identified. Carr's dentist had identified his own

handiwork, and one arm that had been found almost intact had a prominent scar which was listed as an identifying mark in Carr's selective service registration. Marks on the wrist indicated he'd been tied up with rope.

My hat had been found, with my initials, near Carr's mailbox.

They'd tied me in with Gene Larkin's murder, too. A newsboy near Gene's cab stand had seen me get into the cab.

A nice case. Everything but motive, and why does a madman need motive? Luck was with me in one little detail; the photograph they had of me was an old one. It showed me with a self-satisfied smirk I hadn't been wearing of late.

I studied it and my face in the mirror. Lot of difference, now. Just the same, I'd have to be extra careful from now on.

I went out through the lobby of the hotel cautiously, but the clerk didn't even look up from the paper he was reading.

But he was looking at my picture, even then. It would be only a matter of time, if he were normally intelligent, before it occurred to him that it vaguely resembled one of his guests—

There was a hat store only three doors from the hotel. I went in and bought a black felt with a wide flexible brim. With the brim down over my eyes, it gave me a sinister look. I wished I could feel as sinister as it made me seem.

Two blocks further on, I bought a cheap ready-made suit, as different in cut and color as possible from the suit I was wearing. I wore it out of the store and left my old suit to be called for later.

There seemed to be only one angle still open for me to investigate. Even that was risky and I'd have to be careful.

The Washington Flyer. I could

go to the station tonight on the chance that the same conductor might be on the train. I couldn't inquire in advance about that, of course. But I could buy a ticket and board the train. I could pretend to be a newspaper reporter.

Armin Andrews would already have broken the ice by questioning him; if he didn't recognize me as his passenger of that night, I could learn as much as Armin had learned.

After that—well, unless I got a lead, I was probably stymied. I might as well give myself up, but not to the police. I'd go right to Major Lorne and try, however vainly, to get him to listen seriously to my side of the thing. Maybe I couldn't talk myself out of going back to an asylum, but I just might succeed in planting some doubt in his mind, so he'd go ahead and investigate.

It was five forty now, two hours before train time.

I had an hour and a half to kill before I could start for the station, and I couldn't sit here in the restaurant that long without attracting attention.

The darkness of a movie would probably be the safest place. I remembered now having passed one just a few doors before the restaurant.

The picture was a Western. I sat through it and never did find out what it was all about or why the actors shot at one another at frequent intervals. My eyes were on the luminous dial of my wrist watch fully as much as they were on the screen.

At seven twenty I left the theater and walked to the railroad station.

No use looking around for detectives. If they were here and spotted me, that was that. It would be worse than useless to resist arrest. If they'd anticipated my coming here, then there wasn't a single angle of

the case I could investigate independently, anyway. If there were detectives, and I got away from them, I'd have Hobson's choice between hanging around Philadelphia until they caught me, or running away and becoming a fugitive for the rest of my life.

So I strode confidently across the lobby and up to the ticket window. I pushed a bill under the bars and said, "Wilmington, round trip."

A familiar voice, over my shoulder, said, "Make it two."

I whirled around, and it was Armin Andrews. He looked friendly. He said under his breath, "Careful, Hank. Keep it casuallike."

I nodded, picked up my ticket and change, and waited until he'd bought his. Then as we walked away from the window, I asked, "What did you mean about the 'careful'? Are they watching for me here?"

"No, but there's a regular on duty here all the time. If you'd run, or done anything to call his attention to you, he might have recognized you from that photo."

"And you're not going to turn me in?"

He shook his head slowly. "Not till I hear your side of it, anyway. I'm still not convinced that you're . . . uh—"

"Crazy," I said. "I'm not afraid of the word, but I'm not crazy. And plenty happened last night. I'll tell you all right, but first, what did you find out from the conductor on—"

"We've plenty of time to talk on the train. Meanwhile, you look like hell, Hank. A drink'll do you good. We got time for a quick one in the bar over there."

"You mean we're really going to ride to Wilmington and back? Why, if you've seen the conductor?"

"Why not? We've got tickets, and can you think of a better or safer place to talk?"

We had the drink, and it put a

pleasant warm spot in me and made me forget just a fraction of the trouble I was in. And I had plenty to ask him, and he had lots to ask me, but we waited until we'd found a seat on the *Flyer* and it was pulling out of the station.

Then Armin said, "All right, I got less to tell so I'll talk first. I saw your conductor. He didn't remember you, but he remembered the drunk he had trouble getting the ticket from."

"Any details? Did he remember how the guy looked, or anything?"

"Not much. Said he wore a gray suit and a black felt hat with a wide brim—like the one you've got on now. And dark glasses. But he didn't notice his features much, and isn't sure he'd know him if he saw him again. But he remembered he had two fellows with him who were sober, or comparatively sober."

Here, then, was confirmation of the fact that I had boarded the *Flyer* that night. A sleepy drunk could have been a coincidence, but not the two companions, the black hat, the glasses. I'd seen the rims of the glasses from the side, although I hadn't fully caught his face.

It should have excited me, but it didn't. It was nice to find confirmation of at least the start of my story, but damn it I'd known ever since last night that it had really happened.

A conductor was coming down the aisle now. It wasn't the same one. Armin said, "He might be on a different car. We'll look later; there's no hurry. Now what happened last night?"

I told him, and he listened but I couldn't tell from his face whether he believed me or not.

He whistled softly when I finished. He said, "Boy, you sure put your foot into it. Two murders, and you were on the spot for both of them. Two bombs, and you were

just too soon for one and too late for the other."

"Do you think there's a chance, any chance that the police will believe the truth?"

"I doubt it, Hank. Even if you can prove it, you might have trouble getting them to listen to your proof. You see, they *know* what happened, or they think they know and that's just as bad. To them, you're an escaped maniac. They won't even want to ask you questions, because they've got that preconception."

I nodded gloomily, knowing that he was right. It wasn't going to do me any good merely to find out what was what. I was going to have to be able to prove it, and in words of one syllable.

I asked him, "Armin, have you got any ideas? I mean, assume for the sake of argument at least, that I'm sane and that I've told you the truth. Then somebody's up to something. What have they got to gain by it?"

"I've wondered about that. Are you sure—completely sure—that you didn't make any discovery in the lab that would be of . . . of military value? Even of commercial value?"

"Positive. I've thought about that very angle, but the more I think the surer I get, Armin. I ran the tests myself on every variation we tried. I checked every sample for stability, rate of expansion, the works. Look, if Peter had found anything that had better-than-average properties along any of those lines, he wouldn't have known it. He didn't run the tests himself."

"Not ever?"

"Not alone. He knew how, of course, and when I talked to him last, while I was in St. Vincent's, I told him he could go ahead and finish the tests on one line he was working on."

"Could he have found something

important in the last few days?"

"He *could*," I said, "but he couldn't have known about it in advance. It couldn't account for—"

"For what?"

"For the runaround I got five nights ago. The night of the train wreck."

Armin grimaced. "That damn train wreck. If we could only dope out what really happened on that train— Are you subject to hypnosis?"

I shook my head. "It couldn't have been that, I'm sure. But however it was done, I'm beginning to see why."

Andrews looked interested. "Give, pal."

"It's tied in with the laboratory, of course. Somebody needed me out of the way for a while, to get at something in the lab. Something that would take a bit of time and couldn't be done—or obtained—in an ordinary burglary. They couldn't murder me, but they did manage to frame me into talking myself into a nuthouse, about a train wreck that wasn't."

"Why couldn't they have murdered you?"

"Major Lorne—and the FBI. If there'd been any murdering done, the FBI would have been on that lab like a swarm of locusts. They'd have turned that lab inside out, and guarded it with their lives. Even

Peter probably couldn't have got in, alone."

"Makes sense," Andrews said judiciously. "Carry on."

He nodded toward the window. "We're going through Chester. Do you remember Chester? I mean whether your wreck was before or after here?"

"After," I said. "Yes, I remember seeing the station. And after the outskirts of Chester, the conductor came through. Then there was Marcus Hook. I don't remember going through any station after Marcus Hook. I'd say it was about five minutes out of there that the . . . the wreck—"

"Would have happened, if it did happen. Look, maybe I ought to leave you alone to concentrate for the next ten minutes or so. I'll take a stroll up toward the front of the train and see if our favorite conductor is on duty in one of the other cars."

He left, and I turned to stare out the window.

I tried not to think, but to remember. To recapture every little detail, however slight, that had preceded whatever had happened.

Yes, just like this—I'd been sitting here when the conductor came through. I'd handed him my ticket without looking up.

Then, at the seat ahead, he'd said, "Ticket please," and there hadn't



been any answer. He'd said it again, more sharply, and then was when I'd looked and seen the back of the head of the man who was asleep there.

He was sitting on the outside and another man was sitting next to him. I got a view of his profile as he turned to look at the conductor and said, "I'll wake him up." And then he shook the drunk and said, "Wake up, Bob."

And the third man, who was sitting on the seat facing the others, riding backward, took an interest, and helped try to wake up the drunk.

One of them asked, "What pocket'd he put it in, Walter?" And the other said, "I dunno . . . I don't like to— Shake him again."

And the head wearing the black felt hat had waggled back and forth under the shaking and the drunken one murmured something inarticulate and must have reached into his pocket, for I saw his hand, holding a ticket, go up toward the conductor.

The conductor had punched the ticket and put it under the clip with the other two, over by the window. They'd been yellow slips of cardboard; mine, a through ticket to Washington, had been red.

Then the conductor had gone on. "I turned back to the window. Marcus Hook had gone by outside, as it was going by now. I remembered glancing at the drunk, and his head had lolled forward again.

The man who had been riding backward, facing the others, had got up. I remember now that he'd said, "Back in a minute, Walter." He'd gone down the aisle toward the back of the car.

I'd turned toward the window again, and a little time, maybe five minutes, must have elapsed.

And then— The wreck. Damn it, I remembered—

"Wait a minute, Hank," I said to myself, "just what do you remem-

ber? Let's analyze it, let's take it apart to see what makes it tick."

And I closed my eyes and thought hard, and a little light began to enter the darkness. A possibility.

I tried to remember what seat I'd sat in that night. It had been third—no, second from last. There hadn't been anybody sitting behind me, I was almost sure.

Darkness and pain and the screams of people being killed or injured, and the sound of rending steel and the—

I opened my eyes and looked up, and Armin was coming back from the front of the train. He slid into the seat beside me and said, "He isn't on duty tonight, Hank. I asked one of the other conductors."

"It doesn't matter," I told him.

"Well, no, I questioned him pretty thoroughly but—"

"I didn't mean that. I mean—I *know now* what happened last Wednesday night."

IX.

Armin said, "The hell!" and his eyes widened. "I thought— Well, never mind that. What happened?"

"Three men," I told him, "boarded this train with a carefully worked-out plan for getting me. A plan so . . . so preposterous that it worked perfectly. So smooth that I didn't know I'd been shanghaied, and neither did the conductor or the other passengers. They—"

"But what about the wreck, Hank? Are you forgetting that?"

"There wasn't any wreck. And when I got right down to it, Armin, I don't remember a *wreck*. I remember certain things, mostly sounds, that added up in my mind to the impression of a wreck. I see now how it could have been done, I think. But let's take the kidnaping first.

"Those three men had a plan, and

one of them playing drunk was part of it. They wanted to stamp on the conductor's mind that he was practically unconscious. And they never let the conductor get a good look at his face, really. He had that wide-brimmed hat and he didn't look up when he finally did hand over the ticket."

"You mean so the conductor couldn't identify him later?"

"More than that. Listen how simple it was. One of the last things I remember was one of the other men getting up and walking to the back of the car. The reason I don't remember much after that was that on his way back he slugged me with a blackjack. That's when the lights went out—for me.

"Then look how simple it was. He sat down beside me, and his companion moved back, too. The one who'd played drunk took the seat behind. They switched tickets in the clips by the windows, and the drunken one traded hats with me and put on me the dark glasses he'd been wearing. We were at the back of the car, practically, and all of that could have been done without attracting much attention."

Armin said, "I think I get it. When the conductor went through again, there were still the same number of people, sitting in the same relative positions, and their tickets checked. One of them had been unconscious before, and he was unconscious then."

I nodded. "And at Wilmington, the two men who were sober helped their drunken companion off the train—practically carrying him between them. Only it was me instead, and the one who'd changed places with me probably rode on to Washington on my ticket. It all checks out, see? Three off at Wilmington, and one through to Washington. And it had already been planted in the conductor's mind that

the one in the black hat was too drunk to walk alone, so—"

"I get it," said Armin. "But why Wilmington? How do you know they . . . you . . . got off there?"

"Wilmington and Baltimore are the only stops the *Flyer* makes after Philadelphia. The conductors use red cardboard seat checks for through to Washington, yellow for Wilmington, and probably some other color for Baltimore. They had yellow checks, I remember, like ours are tonight."

Armin whistled softly. He said, "It would have worked. It would have worked. So they got you off the train that way, unconscious. And they took you somewhere, you think, and staged a phony wreck while you were coming out of it and then dropped you where you were found?"

"There wasn't any need for a phony wreck. Just sound effects, damn it. Look, my impression of that wreck is the sum of four things—sudden darkness and pain, *sounds*, and the seat rising under me. Look how easy that is.

"Maybe they took me somewhere in Wilmington for the runaround, or maybe they drove back to Philadelphia first. Come to think of it, Philadelphia's more likely.

"So when I'm coming out of it a little, in a dark room, or maybe only blindfolded, they give me those sound effects. Recorded, and probably through a set of headphones. I remember now something that I didn't think of before—a sense of pressure on my ears while this . . . er . . . wreck was going on."

Armin nodded. "It could be, Hank, it could be. You had the sudden darkness and the pain already, and you slowly come out of it to those sound effects, and maybe they've got you sitting on a sofa and lifting it a bit—or maybe that sense of motion was just nausea.

And I think that would account for something else—your nightmares back in the sanitarium.”

“How?”

“If you were unconscious, you'd have had no sense of time. That's why all those things came together in your mind; the darkness, the pain, the sounds. But they wouldn't have taken a chance on your hearing those sound effects only once. Maybe you wouldn't have remembered them. You may have had those earphones on for half an hour or longer, hearing those sounds over and over. You'd have had no impression of lapse of time, but the repetition would have made that impression so vivid it would have haunted your dreams.”

And it had haunted them, all right. I shuddered a bit at the memory of those nightmares in a madhouse.

We were silent a moment, and then Armin said, “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“What's your next step? I think you're right on Wednesday night. It adds up. And your suggestion for a reason is sound; somebody wanted you out of the way without attracting attention to the lab by murdering you. And the thing was so elaborately done, I think we can say it wasn't any casual robbery. Those three men must have been German agents. Do you suppose they got what they wanted?”

I said, “I still can't imagine what it was. Maybe they heard a false rumor about my lab, or got their wires crossed somehow. But they got what they wanted, if it was there, because they took my papers before they set that time bomb. I doubt if they'll be able to translate 'em, though. I make notes in a sort of chemical shorthand of my own.”

“Want me to go to Major Lorne for you, Hank? I imagine if I tell him all this, it will certainly open his mind and he'll start the investi-

gation in the right direction. If you like, you can stay under cover until you're cleared.”

“Would you talk to him? We can go right on through to Washington on this train and—”

“He's in Philadelphia,” Armin interrupted. “We'll have to switch back at Wilmington, but I'll see him tonight, when we get back. We're almost to Wilmington now.”

At Wilmington, we had to wait forty-five minutes for a train back. We got back to Philadelphia at half past nine.

In the station, I suggested, “Let's have a drink to celebrate this. Where's Lorne staying?”

Armin named the hotel, and I said, “You can phone to see if he's in, while I order for us. Come on.”

In the bar, I ordered two ryes and by the time the bartender had brought them, Armin was back from the phone booth.

“Out,” he said. “Left word at the desk he wouldn't be back until around eleven.” He picked up his drink. “Mud in your eye.”

“And tetranitronaphthalene in yours,” I told him. “But what do we do until twelve? I'd feel safer under cover, in a movie or somewhere. In a place like this, there's always the chance someone who knows me will walk in.”

He nodded. “It would weaken your case to be picked up now, before I get in licks with the major. I'd talk to Garland instead, but I think he's back in Washington—or maybe, by this time, somewhere else on another case. They consider this one closed, except for finding you.”

“Shall we try a movie then? Or, if it would bore you, I can go alone and meet you afterward.”

Armin said, “Maybe we can do something constructive. I've been thinking about that sound-effects angle. Maybe we can get a lead on

it, since we've got two hours to kill."

"Swell. What's the angle?"

"Canned sound effects—unusual ones like train wreck noises and multiple screams—aren't any too common. Every big radio station's got a library of them, of course. But if recordings like those have been borrowed or stolen from any Philadelphia station recently—well, it might give us a lead. And there must be a pretty limited number of people who'd have free access to them."

"But that would take a canvas of the studios," I said. "We wouldn't have time in two hours."

"We won't go to the studios. Not first, anyway. I know a fellow who's salesman for the Metropolitan Specialty Co. They sell stuff like that, to the studios. We can find out from him who might have ordered recordings of that kind recently. If it's a studio, we can figure the ones in their library were stolen, and if we can tell Major Lorne that recordings like that were stolen, it'll be a big boost to your story. If some private party bought them direct—hell, it's not only a boost for your story; it's a straight lead to the gang we're after."

"That idea," I said, "calls for another drink. Champagne, if you want it!"

He grinned. "I'll stick to rye. You can order while I find out if we can see him tonight."

The ryes were waiting on the bar when he came back, and I could tell from his face that he'd been successful. He nodded, and said, "I phoned for a cab, too. The less walking you do, the better."

He raised his glass. "Here's—what was it you said, in my eye?"

"Tetranitronaphthalene. But that was in your right eye. How's about hexanitrodiphenalymene in your left?"

We drank, and it tasted like nec-

tar. I felt swell, better than I'd felt since last Wednesday night. I felt almost free, already.

But it wouldn't be over until I'd helped get the men who'd killed Gene Larkin and Peter Carr.

The cab came, and Armin gave an address on Oakland Avenue. It was only a short ride. We went up the steps of the house, and Armin pressed the bell button and stepped back.

The door opened at once, as though someone had been waiting behind it. I looked at the man who was standing there, and he was one of the three men who had been on the train Wednesday evening, the one who had walked back to the lavatory, just before my private blackout.

But there was something else about him almost as startling. It was his resemblance to Peter Carr. I hadn't noticed it that night, but now it was glaringly obvious. Maybe because he had on a hat then and didn't have one now, and he had the same thick shock of blond hair Peter had, cut exactly the same. With the addition of a little filling out of his cheeks and a pair of shell-rimmed glasses like Peter wore, he'd have been a dead ringer.

Involuntarily, I took a step backward. Then I stopped dead, because I'd run into something that felt like a gun, in the middle of my spine.

Behind me, Armin Andrews' voice said, "Go on in, Hank. The party's for you!"

X.

Armin Andrews—if that were his right name—was being very polite and considerate, damn him. His tone of voice didn't differ from the one he'd always used, and he didn't look a bit more sinister than usual.

He said, "Awfully sorry we had to tie you up, Hank, but I know that

temper of yours, and I don't want you to do anything foolish. It has turned out we need you, I'm sorry to say. Otherwise, I'd simply have turned you over to the police when I first met you tonight instead of bringing you here for the party."

I said something I won't put in writing and Armin said, "Now, now. We can gag you if necessary, but I'd rather talk with you than merely to you. But let me remind you that Walter is standing behind you with a blackjack. You may yell once, if you wish, but not twice. And one yell won't bring any help. You must have noticed that the nearest house is twenty yards away, and your ears will tell you we have a rather loud program on the radio downstairs."

"Why did you kill Peter Carr?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you all that," he said. "I want your co-operation and I'm going to offer you terms. I'm going to have to tell you part of it so you'll know what we want, so you might as well hear it all. Have a cigarette? I'll have to hold it to your lips, of course."

I started to tell him where he could put the cigarette, but let it go and merely shook my head. I did want to hear what this was all about. *If* I ever got out of this, it would be important for me to know. It *could* be important to my country, to winning the war, for me to know.

"Very well," he said, and lighted a cigarette for himself. "First, it must be obvious to you that I am what you would call an enemy agent. And that look on your face reminds me to tell you that I'm proud of it."

His eyes darkened. "Damn you, you'd be proud if your government had planted you in *my* country long before the war, and you'd called yourself Herman Schwartz, or something, and pretended to be a German. And if you'd had brains enough to work yourself up to a top

spot in the reporting game and got yourself trusted by important officials and been on the inside of stuff other reporters couldn't touch."

"By exposing your fellow spies, wasn't it?"

"Wendell? I acted under orders. He was washed up. But you remember how Lorne let me write up your lab for that ordnance journal?"

I nodded, and he went on: "What I fell into there was blind luck. Listen, you think of HE in terms of what it does to steel and brick and stone. There's something more important. Remember that experiment they made last year, with the goats?"

Yes, I remembered. It was a widely publicized fiasco. They'd tethered goats at varying distances around a bomb to test an inventor's claim about its concussion. The bomb had gone off, but not a goat fainted.

I said, "That was liquid air and carbon black. All right in theory except for the evaporation rate of liquid air. By the time they exploded it, it was as powerful as a firecracker. It was screwy."

"The idea was screwy, but what they hoped to glean from it wasn't—the disruptive effect on living tissue. You know how an ordinary bomb acts. The blast from it kills for only a short distance, unless men are struck by fragments or flying debris."

I nodded, beginning to get what he was driving at. And it began to scare me, too, because it could be so important.

Flesh is resilient; construction materials are not. An explosive which has a high disruptive effect upon living tissue would be a discovery of the first magnitude, although it could be used only for special purposes. But think of a bomb which when dropped on a warship would kill or stun the entire crew;

the ship could be taken over almost intact.

I asked, "But what makes you think that I had a lead toward anything like that?"

His face was grimly serious. "Because I felt it, that's why. Remember when you were showing me how the tests were run? You were back at the detonating switch, and I was standing up by the panel to watch the needles jump on the dials. You were ten feet from that explosion, but I was only four."

"You mean it . . . it jarred you?"

"Just a little. But for that *quantity* of HE—half a thimbleful! What series were you testing that day?"

I said, "I don't remember."

He shrugged. "You can think back and figure out. If you'd only dated those damn records of yours—Well, let's skip that.

"You see now why we wanted you away from the lab, without doing anything that would put the FBI wise to the fact that we were doing it. A nice little hallucination on your part—

"And I guess you've got the answer about Peter Carr by now. Walter here, with a bit of make-up, passed as Carr—close enough that the neighborhood out there and the copper on the beat didn't notice the difference. He couldn't have fooled you, of course; you knew Carr too intimately."

I said, "That was Peter who came to see me at St. Vincent's. You must have kidnaped him just after that, and held him while your . . . your confederate used Peter's keys and his identity to get into the lab every day while I was in the sanitarium. And then I escaped—"

He nodded. "We'd found by then that we couldn't get it by ourselves—from the screwy way you kept records. So we got rid of Carr, and we were going to get rid of the lab,

too, and let you take the blame for both of them. It would keep you from going to the police. And we couldn't let Carr go anyway, after we'd held him. As for the taxi driver, he put his oar in last night when Walter was leaving the lab, dressed as Carr. Got Walter into the cab and said he was going to take him to see you. So Walter had to kill him."

Well, I had all the answers now and a fat lot of good it would do me, probably—or them, either. I'd let them kill me before I'd talk and tell them what they wanted to know.

Not that I was feeling heroic, at all. I was sweating plenty. But just the same I knew this thing was so much bigger and more important than I was, that I knew I wouldn't break, no matter what they did.

Armin said, "So here's our proposition. Help us willingly, and your worries are over. You'll have a position of honor in—"

I let go, then. The cool insolence of that offer got me, and got my temper. All the pent-up anger that I'd held in check long enough to find out what had happened, burst into invective.

Armin looked up over my head and nodded, and Walter, standing behind me, thrust a gag into my mouth and tied a cloth around tightly to hold it in.

Armin said, "I was afraid you'd feel that way. But maybe a little pain will make you feel different. Or a lot of pain will. We've got a man who's an expert at that—I don't like it myself. You think it over while I go get him."

He bent down and looked at the knots in the ropes that tied me to the chair. He said, "Nice job, Walter. He won't get out of that. I'll be back in less than an hour."

Walter said, "O. K. I'll take Otto for a game of rummy."

They went downstairs and a few

minutes later I heard a garage door open and a car drive away.

The ropes were cutting into my wrists and ankles and my arms had been tied around back of the chair and crossed there so my fingers couldn't even touch a rope anywhere, much less a knot. But I struggled until I felt my wrists getting numb, and from lack of circulation, my fingers would barely move.

Armin was right; I wasn't going to get out of those ropes. Not in days, let alone in an hour or less. The man who'd put them on knew his stuff.

Deliberately, I made myself relax and think. Hank, I thought, quit trying to tear your wrists off and use your brains instead.

I looked around, and there was the telephone. It was on the desk six feet away. Could I possibly move my chair toward it without making enough sound to attract the attention of Walter and Otto playing cards downstairs?

My ankles were tied, one to each of the front legs of the chair. The knots were probably as tight as the others, but there was a trifle leeway in the ropes. I worked and twisted until I had about an inch of play with each foot. And then, taking as much of my weight as possible off the chair and putting it on to my toes, I began to work the chair across the carpet toward the desk.

It seemed to take hours, for I had to fight for every inch.

But it didn't make much noise, and my real battle was against time. Pretty soon Armin would be back.

It must, actually, have taken me over half an hour to move that chair the six feet to the desk. But I made it, finally, and luck was with me in that the phone was standing near the edge.

First, I used the mouthpiece of the transmitter as an edge against

which to work down the cloth that had been tied over my mouth. Very gently, so I wouldn't push the phone back or knock it over. Then, I was able to push out the gag with my tongue.

The hardest part was getting hold of the cord of the receiver with my teeth and lifting it off the hook. I bent forward as far as I possibly could and let it fall onto the desk blotter on which the phone stood. A bit of noise, but not much. And maybe, even if they'd heard it downstairs, I'd get my call through in time.

With the receiver lying there on the desk, I could hear the operator's voice, if not her words. I gave the number of the hotel Armin had mentioned when he'd phoned Lorne from the station.

Then I kept my ears strained until I heard another voice coming from the receiver. That would be the hotel switchboard. I said, "Major Lorne, please. Quickly. It's important."

There was the buzzing sound that denotes a number being rung, and then there was a masculine voice from the receiver. I said, "Major Lorne, this is Hank Remmers. I want to give myself up. I'm at 50-16 Oakland. Hurry."

Just that, because I didn't want to complicate things and waste time explaining. I heard his voice sputtering questions, but I cut in and repeated what I'd said before, word for word.

There was a click in the receiver, and after a while a crisp feminine voice again. Probably the operator asking why I hadn't hung up. I told her to trace the call and send the police. I didn't want to count entirely on Major Lorne, and besides I wasn't positive I had the address on Oakland right.

That was all I could do, then, and

worn to a frazzle by the awful muscular effort of moving that chair to the desk, I leaned back to take the strain off my wrists.

The telephone started clicking at me after a while, in futile signal to have the receiver replaced. And after a while, I heard the clock outside strike eleven. Another ten minutes or so, and a car stopped in front of the house. A car door slammed.

I could hear two men coming up the walk, and I could hear Armin's voice, as the steps changed from cement to the wood of the porch.

Then there was the sound of other cars, two of them I thought, swinging in to the curb. Again the slam of doors, and I heard Major Lorne's voice call out, "Armin, wait."

I must have passed out for a while, then. When I came to, my wrists had been untied. Frank Garland, the FBI man, was untying the knots at my ankles. The room seemed crowded. Beside Lorne and Armin, Walter and Otto were there, and two strangers who might have been either police detectives or FBI men. And another man with a brutal,

coarse face who must have been the one Armin had brought for the torture job.

Armin was talking glibly. "It's all my fault, major. Don't blame my friends here. I caught Hank tonight and I just couldn't resist trying to get an exclusive story out of him before I turned him over."

Lorne said, "Damn it, you can't—"

"I know, major. I was wrong. But after all, I had caught him and thought I deserved a scoop on it. I wanted to know *why* he killed Carr and the cab driver. Sure, he's crazy, but there must have been some method in his madness, and I wanted the whole story." His voice was a nice blend of apology and defiance. It was beautiful acting.

Lorne was glaring at Armin, but there was annoyance and not suspicion in his look. I knew that anything I said would be discounted in advance, because I was crazy. Whatever I said, it had to be good and it had to be quick. And then I knew there was only one subject on which I could get Lorne's serious attention.

"Major," I said, "have my records

*YOU'RE SMOOTH
ENOUGH
IN A BLACKOUT!*

*YES, IN DAYLIGHT
TOO. I USE
STAR BLADES!*



4 for 10¢



from the laboratory been found?"

He turned to look at me then. I knew that would get him. He'd want those papers, whether he thought I was sane or crazy.

"Where are they, Remmers?"

"Here," I said, and watched both his face and Armin's, because I was guessing. "Here in this house." And when I saw Armin's quickly concealed reaction to that, I went further. "Here, in this room."

Armin cut in smoothly. "That's absurd, major. He couldn't have hidden them here, because I just brought him here an hour or so ago. He didn't have them with him and he's never been in this house before. It belongs to my friend, Walter Landlahr—"

"Who's been impersonating Peter Carr," I interrupted. "Take a look at him, major."

Lorne stared at Walter, and frowned. He couldn't help noticing the resemblance. Armin spoke up quickly. "I'll vouch for Walter, major. I've known him for years. I'm afraid Hank's—"

But Lorne said, "Pipe down, Armin." He was still staring at Walter. He asked, "Are you a relative of Peter Carr's, Landlahr?"

I said, "Never mind that, major. If you want those records, they're in this room."

I had his attention again. He said, "Where?"

"Look for them," I told him. Lorne stared at me uncertainly, and I didn't crowd my luck by saying anything more. Even a touch of uncertainty was a gain for me.

Lorne said to Garland, "Damn it, I do want those papers. Maybe you'd better take a look, just on the chance—"

Garland nodded and turned toward the desk.

Armin sighed. "Well, major, sorry I tried to pull one on you and I hope there's no hard feeling.

Guess I'd better run down to the paper and write this up—without Remmers' story."

Very casually he picked up a brief case and sauntered toward the door. But I saw Walter Landlahr tense a trifle and try not to look at Armin.

"Major," I said quickly, "the papers are in that brief case!"

Garland turned from the desk and looked at Armin, who kept on moving. Maybe he'd have got away with it, if Walter Landlahr hadn't been too jumpy. He stepped in between Armin and the rest of us, and a gun materialized in his hand; I didn't even see what pocket he got it from. His eyes were blazing, and his voice hoarse.

"Stay back, you—"

And then Garland dived at him and the gun went off. The other man, Otto, threw himself against the door as it slammed shut behind Armin. He had a gun, too.

There was a fusillade of shots, for the two plain-clothesmen were firing, too. The man who'd just come in with Armin was down. Garland had taken a bullet, but he'd knocked down Walter, and Lorne's foot caught Walter's gun and kicked it out of his hand across the room.

Armin's footsteps could be heard as he ran down the stairs. Otto was down, but his body blocked the closed door, which opened inward and one of the two detectives was trying to drag him out of the way. By the time he reached the stairs, Armin would be out of the house.

There was only one way of stopping him, and the others hadn't seen it, nor was there time to tell them.

I'd stood up the minute the trouble started, and now I ran to the front window. Armin would go out the front way, of course, regardless of the risk of being shot at from up here, for his car was parked in front and he'd need it for a getaway.

There wasn't any time to raise the

sash. I doubled my arms over my head and butted right through the glass, stepping out onto the porch roof just as the front door downstairs opened.

I didn't even try to gain my balance on the sloping roof. I just kept going because the sound of the door and the footsteps on the porch told me my timing would be about right.

And it was. I landed on top of him, and—fortunately for me—the momentum of my fall carried us off the cement walk onto the lawn. Even so, it knocked the wind out of me.

Lorne, with a gun in his hand, was leaning out the window. He yelled, "Hank, are you all right?"

I thought I was, but couldn't make any more answer than a grunt.

By the time the cavalcade came downstairs, I'd managed to get to my feet and found out that my legs

still worked. I seemed to be bruised, but nothing worse.

Lorne grabbed the brief case and bent over Armin. He cried, "You've killed the guy! His neck's busted."

"That's great," I said, and I meant it.

Lorne stood up slowly, hanging onto the brief case as though it were part of his arm. He stared at me. "Hank, what the hell's this all about?"

"Let's go some place where I can sit down," I said. "It'll take a while, and I can't stand up that long right now."

He nodded. "Guess you've been through plenty. We'll take you to a hospital for a nice quiet rest and then—"

"The hell you will," I told him. "Tomorrow morning I start work at the lab. Four days ago you scheduled me for a nice quiet rest, and I couldn't live through another one for all the coffee in Brazil!"

THE END.



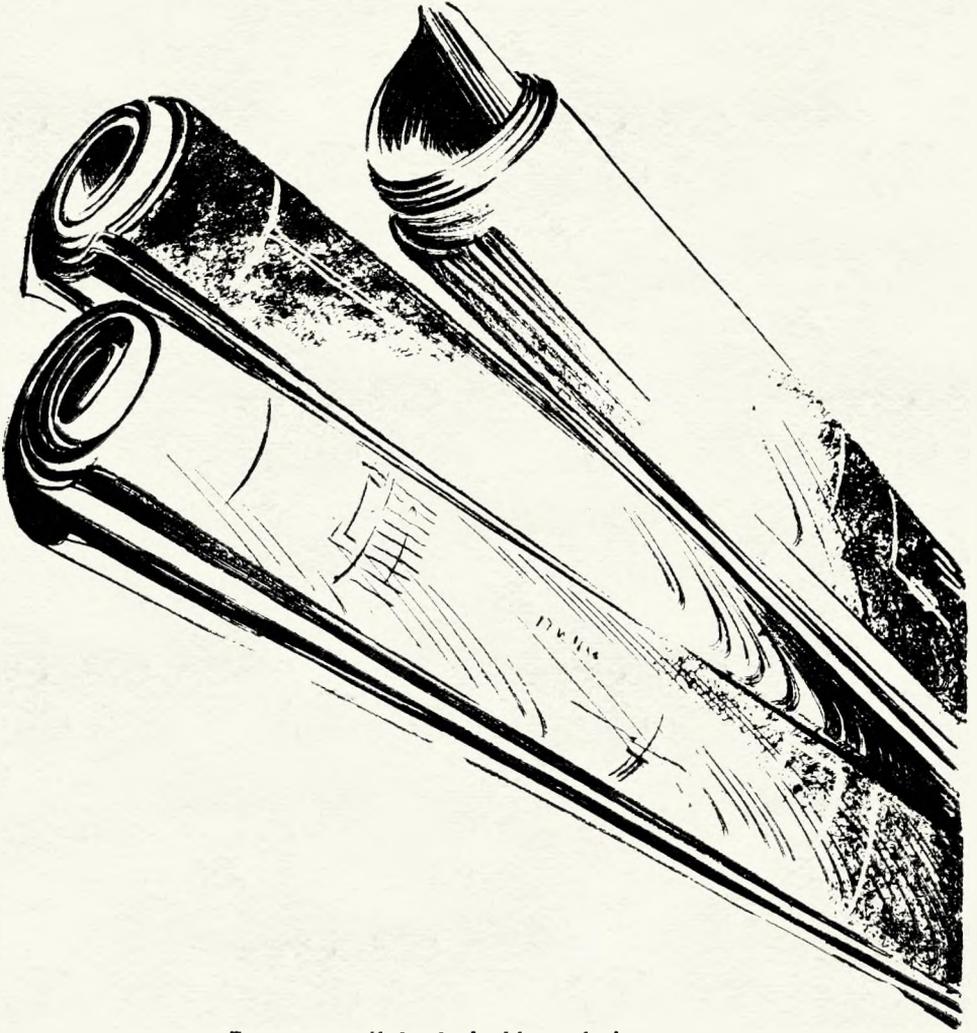
RECIPE

Soak the bread of anguish
 In the wine of bliss;
 You will find no eating
 Tastier than this.

He who boldly takes the
 Acrid with the sweet,
 Knows the burning touch of
 Wings upon his feet.

Sara Owen.

SON OF



*Fear so distorted his mind
that he eventually saw murder
as the only way to security.*

FEAR

by CLIFFORD D. CLEVENGER

"Danny," Thea's voice said softly, breathlessly, over the phone. "Meet me at the corner at eight."

"Listen," I cried, "if that old—"

"Please, Danny, meet me at the corner at eight."

She hung up before I could answer, but I told the empty office what I thought of J. Herrington Coots. Thea was taking his dictation afternoons, and he always kept her till six-thirty or seven. And tonight it was eight. He was confined to his residence in North State Street by a heart attack, and it made him more grouchy than usual. Coots was publisher of the city's most ag-

gressive newspaper, the *Star*, and was always in a knockdown, drag-out fight with someone.

Right now it was with the Pembroke Engineering Co., the place where I worked. That's why Thea had to be so careful when calling me. It would never do to let Coots know of the connection. Pembroke Engineering had done some bridge-construction work for the city, and Coots claimed we'd grafted a lot of money. The fight had been going on for several months now, there were lawsuits over it already, and more expected any moment.

I shoved the blueprints and speci-



fications into my desk. I was too mad to work any longer. I'd been working overtime for a couple of months now, making every cent I could, for I needed it badly. And it simply burned me up that Thea had to work, too.

I slammed out of the office, cursing Coots, Pembroke, Bradley, the office manager, and all others who weren't desperately in need of money the way I was. The night elevator man grinned and jeered at me. "Well, if it ain't Danny Walsh in one of his lovelier moods."

I snorted. "The way I feel tonight, Bill, I'd shoot anyone for ten bucks in cash. And you can tell that Simon Legree, Hastings Bradley, that I left at seven-forty. I know he has you check up on me; afraid he'll pay me a cent more than is due. God, if I had his money I wouldn't be a miser."

"That's the way he got it," the elevator man chuckled.

I left the Pembroke Building by the rear door which led to the parking lot. Hastings Bradley was getting a big armload of blueprints from the back of the company car he always drove because he was too much of a tightwad to buy one himself. He came toward me, and I thought, "Here's where I'm stuck. I'll have to carry those damned prints up to the office."

"Hello, Walsh," Bradley called, quite cheerfully for him.

"Can't I help you with those blueprints?" I asked, trying to sound eager.

"Thanks, but I'll have the elevator man take them up." Bradley took out his cigarette case, offered me one, held a light. "Thought I'd never get away from the club tonight," he went on after taking a puff. "Met a couple of politicians, and you know what they are." He looked at his watch. "It's almost

eight now. Well, good night, Walsh," and he entered the building.

I sauntered across the parking lot, puffing contentedly on Bradley's imported cigarette. "Maybe he's not such a bad guy after all," I told myself. I put my hand on the front of his car as I went around it to where my old jellopy was parked. But I jerked my hand away quickly for the car radiator was hot. "Why, the old skinflint," I said aloud. "Can you imagine that? Driving four short blocks to the club just to save his shoe leather."

On the way to the near north side I bought an *Evening Star*, just to see what the latest was on the Pembroke Engineering scandal. Coots was whooping it up; Pembroke already had filed a damage suit, and some of the help around the office were getting scared for Coots had already ruined several firms by the violent attacks he'd made on them in the *Star*.

I parked around the corner from Coots' house, where I always waited for Thea, and opened the paper. Right on the front page were more photographs of sheets of figures showing payments on certain phases of the bridge building we had done for the city. I'd worked on those specifications myself and could see that the person who'd prepared these figures really had inside information. And the payments had been twisted around to make it look mighty bad for Pembroke Engineering, although I knew we'd actually lost money on the contracts.

William Pembroke had been boiling in the office this afternoon, and this would increase his rage. Bradley had third-degreed everyone to see if there were a leak of information from our office. Bradley was trying to convince Pembroke that someone in the city engineering office had slipped this information to

the *Star*, but was having tough going.

I finished reading the article and looked at my watch. It was twenty after eight. I jumped out of the car and hurried around the corner. I'd tear that place to pieces if I had to, to get Thea out. I ran up the stairs. The front door was open, so I went in without ringing.

I'd taken just three steps when a heavy hand fell on my shoulder, and I turned to face a big cop. "Where you goin', bud?" he asked.

"What's it to you?" I snapped.

"A tough guy, eh," he growled and stepped toward me.

I shoved his hand off my shoulder, but didn't move. I was too mad.

A door opened from a room adjoining the hall and a man appeared in the doorway. "Clancy, is that the med—"

"Just a young punk, Captain Herett," the copper beside me interrupted.

"Bring him in," Herett said pleasantly.

"Do you go peacefully, or do I have to drag you?" Clancy asked in a hoarse whisper that said he hoped I'd chose the latter.

I walked into the room, taking a good look at the man in the doorway. He was about thirty-five, square-jawed but pleasant enough appearing. He was tall, athletic. You'd take him for an engineer or maybe a lawyer.

"You came to see Mr. Coots?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I came to get Thea. She was supposed to be through at eight."

"His secretary?" he asked.

I nodded.

"You're her boy friend?" he wanted to know.

I nodded again, but suddenly I became alarmed. Something wasn't right here. "Say!" I demanded.

"If anything's happened to her I'll break someone's neck." I looked around quickly. There was Coots, sitting at his desk with his head resting on his arms on the desk top. I took a step toward him before I saw the knife hilt sticking out of his back. I gasped and turned. "He . . . he's—"

"Murdered," Captain Herett finished for me.

I leaped toward Herett, grabbed his coat. "Where's Thea?" I demanded. "I got to see her. If—"

"Calm yourself," Herett said. "She's all right. She's lying down upstairs. She fainted when she found the body."

I took a step toward the door, but Herett stopped me with a firm grip on my arm. "Take it easy. She'll be a lot better off if she doesn't see you."

I protested, but he only asked, "What's your name?"

"Walsh."

"You come here every night to get your girl?"

"This is the first time I was ever in the house, but I waited around the corner till twenty after eight. Thea was supposed to meet me at eight. I was gettin' sick of it. Coots kept her later and later every night."

The hall door opened, and a guy with a headquarters' mug peered in. "This bird"—pointing at me—"was parked around the corner for almost half an hour, captain. When I seen him barge in here, I searched his car. Found he'd been readin' this article in the *Star* about the Pembroke Engineering Co., and he had some of their blueprints hid in his car."

"I don't have any of their blueprints in my car," I retorted, "and what if I did. I work for them."

"So you work for Pembroke Engineering?" Herett asked.

"Sure."

"And your girl worked for Coots?"

"There's no connection!" I cried. "Thea was just working here till—"

The door burst wide open and William Pembroke strode in. "So you're the one who's been selling me out!" Pembroke roared, advancing on me. "Working nights in the office on the plea you needed the money. And all you wanted was a chance to steal data from the files so you could sell it to Coots. You'll pay for this, Walsh. There are laws in this country to punish cheating employees.

Hastings Bradley was right behind Pembroke and a couple of more plain-clothes men followed them in. "But, Mr. Pembroke," Bradley protested mildly, "maybe Walsh is perfectly innocent."

"You heard this detective just say he found blueprints hidden in Walsh's car." Pembroke pivoted. "What did you find, man. Let's see them." Pembroke grabbed the proffered prints, glanced at them, looked up. "These are from the city bridge job, the very prints from which the data in tonight's *Star* was taken."

"It does look bad," Hastings Bradley said.

"Bad!" Pembroke roared. "It's as plain as hell."

"But, Mr. Pembroke!" I cried. "I don't know anything about it. I never took prints from the office."

"It's the old story," Pembroke roared on. "Walsh sold some information to Coots and when Coots refused to pay what Walsh wanted, Walsh killed him."

"That's a logical explanation," Captain Herett put in, "which is why we had you brought up here, Mr. Pembroke. Added to the fact that Walsh's girl friend worked here as Coots' secretary, it makes a good case. She, no doubt, acted as intermediary."

"It's a lie!" I cried. "Thea is innocent and so am—"

"He even defends her," Pembroke cut in. "Well, that's what happens when a fellow gets mixed up with a girl of her type."

Something burst inside my head, and suddenly I was flying through the air at Pembroke. My fist crashed against his chin, knocking him back against the wall. I knew it was a crazy thing to do, and I also knew I had to get out of there. I doubled over and charged through the detectives like a fullback on a line plunge.

I was down the hall, out onto the porch in a split second. I leaped into the yard of the adjoining house. It was dark now. I vaulted walls, hedges, raced through alleys. Finally, I flipped a truck, rode eight blocks before I jumped off. I felt safe for a few minutes, anyway. I walked along a dark, residential street.

Gradually, I got my breath back, and my heart stopped pounding. The thrill of the chase was over now and I knew I didn't dare go home. I couldn't see Thea either. If it hadn't been for her, I would have left town, but I couldn't go off, leaving her behind. Not like this anyway. I wasn't sorry I'd hit Pembroke for what he'd said about Thea. I'd do it again under the same circumstances.

I walked on and on, trying to think of something clever to do, but my mind seemed a blank. I felt tired, beaten, and very old. And I'd failed Thea again. This was one time I couldn't run out. I had to stay and face the music. I had to prove my innocence some way. But I'd gotten away to a mighty poor start and lost my job besides.

I don't know how long it was before I thought of Hastings Bradley. He hadn't wanted to accept

Pembrook's hasty judgment of me. Maybe he still believed me innocent. At least, he'd know a good lawyer to help me, and I surely needed help.

I checked the street signs at the next corner and found I was only a few blocks from Bradley's home. He lived alone in an old house in one of the poorer sections of the city. Rents were a lot cheaper there, which suited his miserliness.

When you're a hunted man you go cautiously toward any place where you might be known. Shadows ahead assume the proportions of hidden officers of the law, waiting to ambush you. Noises in the still night cause you to start, and send your pulse pounding. Your instincts are keyed to a high pitch, and you are ready for anything. You clearly see things that you would normally never notice.

All these things I observed as I approached Bradley's home. I found that I was not frightened, but rather felt a glow of self-confidence I had never experienced before. Maybe it was simply that any definite action after my momentary hopelessness gave me this feeling, but I like to think it more than that. I prefer to believe that in this trying moment I really had found myself.

I passed the house on the opposite side of the street first, but could see no signs of a police guard. Then I went around to the alley, climbed the fence, and approached the house across the ill-kept lawn. I didn't dare go to the door and knock, for fear the police might be waiting for me.

Instead I prowled along the side of the house until I found an open window. It was dark inside, so there was no danger of my being silhouetted against a square of light for any of the neighbors to see. With my hands on the sill, I pulled myself up and scrambled inside.

I felt my way across the room, careful not to make any noise. In the hall I saw a dim glow coming from a lighted room toward the rear of the house. I tiptoed toward it until through the open door I saw Hastings Bradley standing near the stove.

At once I felt relieved and called eagerly, "Mr. Bradley." I stepped into the kitchen.

He turned toward me quickly, but did not seem surprised. He'd been fixing himself a little snack. The coffeepot was simmering on the gas stove and ingredients for sandwiches were on the cabinet. He held one hand behind him as he watched me.

"I came to you for help, Mr. Bradley," I explained. "You seemed to be the only one who believed in me. I thought you might know a good lawyer I could get."

He stared at me a long minute before asking, "Are you alone?"

I nodded and, as I watched him, I suddenly knew that he was afraid. Not necessarily afraid of me, but afraid of many things, even life itself. Fear was the thing that drove him, was the cause of his miserliness. And as the realization struck me, I wondered why I hadn't noticed it before and why I, myself, had ever been afraid of this man. I laughed, a nervous cackling laugh, as one of the fears which had hung over me for so long a time dissolved like a morning mist before the rising sun.

At my laugh, he jerked his hand from behind him, and it held a gun. "I'm going to kill you, Walsh, for breaking in here and threatening me. I asked the police for a bodyguard, and they laughed at me."

"You're crazy!" I cried. "I'm not threatening you. I just want some help. I never stole any blueprints from the office or killed Coots." I backed toward the stove, keeping my

hands away from my body, so he wouldn't think I was reaching for a gun. He seemed scared enough to kill me. And he'd be perfectly justified in the eyes of the law, for I was a fugitive from a murder charge. I glanced around the kitchen, trying to see some way of escape. The windows were heavily curtained. No one from outside could see us. He could shoot me down and then tell the police he had done it in self-defense.

"Why don't you call the police?" I suggested. Anything to gain time.

"I'll shoot you first and then call them, Walsh." He moved a step nearer, as though afraid he'd miss me at a longer distance.

I moved back a step, and my fingers touched something hot, which set a thought rushing into my mind. I knew this was the coffeepot my fingers were against and I also knew I had to act fast if I were to get out of here alive. I started at Bradley, hoping he couldn't read my thoughts, for if he did he would kill me instantly.

My only hope was to play upon his fears, and I talked fast as my fingers edged around the coffeepot, hunting for the handle. "I know Pembrook's back of this whole thing," I shot out in a low tone. "That's why he accused me at once. Pembrook's like that. He'd kill a man who crossed him in a deal. That's why he killed Coots. I'm going to see him tonight, tell him everything I know, Bradley." And then at the top of my voice, I shouted, "Get him, Buck!"

Bradley jumped a foot at my shout, and I hurled the coffeepot at him. He tried to dodge the hot coffee and shoot at the same time. But the bullet went through the back window at about the same moment I dashed through the doorway into the hall. I headed straight for

the front door, being sure Bradley would be afraid to follow me out into the dark.

Outside, I ran two blocks and hitched onto a truck. I had to get away from here quickly for I knew Bradley would call the cops. I heard a siren after we'd gone hardly a mile, so I dropped off the truck and hid in a dark doorway till the squad car roared by.

Then I started walking again, using dark side streets and alleys. It would take me about an hour to reach my destination, but my actions were purposeful now, and I swung along with a supreme confidence which hardly seems justified now in the light of hindsight. But I was sure of myself, sure that I could accomplish my mission.

With my hat pulled low, I walked right up the front steps of the Coots house on North State and went in. I figured a different cop would be on duty by this time, and I was right. "I want to see Captain Herett at once," I told the officer at the door. "It's an urgent message from Mr. Pembrook."

"He's in the back room questioning Coots' secretary," the copper said.

"This concerns her, so I'll go right back," I said, and hurried down the hall before he could protest. I opened the door, stepped inside quickly, and closed it behind me.

Thea was sitting in a big chair. She was pale and her eyes were red from crying, but she looked like an angel to me. When she saw me, she was frightened and her lips formed my name, but she did not speak.

Captain Herett was surprised when he turned and saw me, but he tried to hide it. "So you're back," he said.

"Danny," Thea said in breathless alarm. "You . . . you're different. What's happened to you?"

"I'm all right now," I said. I stepped over to her, bent down and kissed her. Then I straightened up and spoke to Herett. "All I want is a chance to tell my story."

"I can't remember ever denying it to you," he answered.

But before I could say more, there were heavy footsteps in the hall and the door burst open. William Pembroke barged in with Bradley right behind him, and a couple of plainclothes men following.

Bradley saw me almost instantly. "There he is! He'll kill us all!" he shouted and reached in his pocket. I knew it was the gun he'd tried to kill me with an hour ago, and I knew he'd finish the job this time unless I moved fast.

I leaped forward, caught his wrist, as he started to pull the trigger. I twisted the gun from his hand, held him before me as I backed toward the wall.

"This is the second time he's tried it tonight," I told Captain Herett. "It's getting to be a bad habit."

"Shoot him quick!" Bradley cried in terror. "He broke into my house tonight and tried to kill me."

"I didn't break into his house," I declared, lowering the gun. "I climbed in through a window that was open. And he tried to kill me—I was unarmed. I simply went there for help. I didn't get any help from him, but I found out he was the one who murdered Coots."

"That's impossible!" Pembroke cried. "Bradley was at the club when the murder occurred."

"How did you find out by going to Bradley's house that he was the murderer?" Captain Herett asked.

"When I was backing away from him my hand touched the hot coffee-pot on the stove," I explained. "That was the second time tonight I'd touched something hot. The first time was in the parking lot back of our building. The radiator of the

company car which Bradley always drove was hot. I thought he'd driven it from the club merely to save shoe leather, but, of course, it wouldn't have heated up in those four short blocks."

"But he said he walked from the club to the office and stopped to make a phone call," Captain Herett said. "That's how he accounted for about twenty minutes of his time."

"He had the car parked near the club," I declared. "He drove up here fast, killed Coots, and hurried back. He could do it easily in twenty minutes. And that's why the radiator was hot."

"He had access to all the office records," I hurried on, "and he was a shark at figures. He fixed up that data for Coots so it would look bad for us."

"But it's incredible," Pembroke said. "I . . . I can't believe it. Why should Bradley do a thing like that?"

I looked at Pembroke closely, and for the first time realized that he was a man who could never be afraid of anything, and so would have a hard time in believing that anyone else could be as much in fear of everything as Bradley was. I would have to explain it and then prove it practically before Pembroke's eyes to convince him.

"Bradley did it because he was afraid," I said. "When Coots first started attacking us in the *Star*, Bradley remembered Coots had wrecked other firms by his attacks. Bradley was afraid Pembroke Engineering might be ruined, so he began playing both sides of the fence. But Coots didn't want part-time loyalty. He must have demanded more than Bradley was willing to give. Afraid again that he'd lose what he already had, Bradley killed Coots as the only way out.

"Bradley found out some way that . . . that Thea worked here," I rushed

on. "Then he figured he could hang the thing on me. He knew Pembrook would jump to the conclusion that I was guilty. When I flared up, socked Pembrook and ran, I played right into Bradley's hands. He asked for a police guard, left a window open, and kept his gun handy. He thought there was a good chance I'd come to him for help. All through this he'd insisted on the innocence of anyone from our office, and had tried to lay the blame onto city-hall engineers."

I advanced menacingly on Bradley to prove my point that he was afraid. "Isn't that the truth?" I cried, raising my hands as though to throttle him. "I'll choke the truth out of you!"

Bradley backed to the wall. "Stop him! Stop him! He'll kill me!"

"Admit you gave Coots the data from your office and I will," Captain Herett demanded.

I advanced a step nearer Bradley. His eyes popped, his tongue hung out. You could see that he already felt my fingers on his throat.

"Say you stole it," Herett growled, right behind me now. But I didn't turn. I moved ever so slowly, but nearer and nearer to Bradley. After what he'd done to Thea I could have choked him gladly.

"You stole the data from your office! You did it because you were afraid. You lied about walking from the club. You drove up here, met Coots, stuck the knife into his back!" Herett was lashing out the words.

My fingers were nearing Bradley's throat when he suddenly screamed. "I did it! He double-crossed me! Save me from Walsh. He'll kill me—" Then Bradley collapsed into a writhing, screaming figure on the floor.

The burly detectives carried him into the hall at Herett's orders.

I turned quickly to Thea and saw that she had fainted. I bathed her temples with my handkerchief, moistened from a glass of water on the table. I rubbed her wrists.

Pembrook watched us, eying me curiously, but I ignored him. Finally, he spoke. "Why she's a lovely little thing, Walsh. I admire your taste."

Thea opened her eyes, and Herett said, "Everything's all right, Mrs. Walsh."

"Mrs.?"—from Pembrook.

"They were secretly married several months ago, just after the Coots-Pembrook fight started," Herett explained to Pembrook. "They couldn't very well do otherwise with Thea working for Coots and Dan for you on the low salary he was getting. But they soon found there was to be a baby. Thea was determined to work as long as she could and Dan worked late every night, so there would be enough money to properly take care of the finest baby in the world."

"I . . . I told Captain Herett all about it, Danny," Thea said. "Is . . . is it all right?"

"Everything's all right," I replied with confidence. "I'll get another job, a good one, and you won't have to work any more." I knew now how to handle Pembrook. Show him you weren't afraid and he'd admire you.

"No, you won't," Pembrook snapped.

I grinned and shrugged. "Who'll stop me?"

"I will," Pembrook declared. Suddenly he grinned back, shoved out his hand. "I'd be an idiot, Walsh, to let go of a man who can think when he's on the kind of a spot you were on tonight. I've got just the job for you, a good one, too." And he kept his word as I knew he would.

Well, the baby was a boy, so we named it William Pembrook Walsh.

THE END.

SMART GUY

—a guy who thought to himself, "What's in a name?"

by WILLIAM G. BOGART

Dan Haley, of homicide, his coat collar turned up against the cold rain, crossed Broadway and moved up the Seventh Avenue side of Times Square. His quiet gray eyes took in the assorted signs on the brilliantly lighted theater fronts; he nodded to various people who knew him along the main stem.

"Hi, lieutenant." It was a newsboy at the corner. "How goes it?"

"Hello, Tommy." Haley flipped the kid a dime and smiled. He said, "Get yourself a hamburger."

The kid grinned.

A theater doorman waved a greeting; a driver called from behind the wheel of a parked cab, "What do you know, Haley?" and Dan Haley answered, "Not much, Joe. How's it goin'?"

Dan kept moving through the rain. He was tall and keen-looking,

and he wore a somber-colored trench coat and a turned-down snap-brim hat. There was an alertness about him that you sensed particularly when you noticed his eyes. He was Lieutenant Haley, and he had a reputation up and down Broadway as a copper who didn't fool around. He was tough. Crooks shivered in their shoes when Dan Haley was on the prowl.

But he was just walking tonight. You could tell that from his attitude. He was off duty. But you couldn't keep a guy like Dan Haley away from Broadway, even on a rainy night—

It was getting late when he turned into the side street near Columbus Circle. There was the darkened marquee of a newsreel theater ahead. Lucius Hamilton, the theater manager, had probably

just closed up. But Haley guessed he was in time to join his friend for a cup of coffee at the White Coffee Pot, back on Seventh Avenue. Haley often stopped by to have a cup of coffee with Lou—

He tried the glass doors just behind the change booth, found them locked, and knocked on the glass. He waited, but there was no answer. Lou generally checked up on the day's receipts in his tiny office upstairs. But Haley apparently was too late. His friend had already gone.

The detective shrugged, turned away, and started back up the street. Just then, his sharp ears caught the faint, hurried padding of feet in the alleyway that adjoined the theater. Haley drew up short, peered down the black passageway. He listened.

Instantly the hurrying steps jerked to a halt. Someone down there in the darkness was watching Haley. The person must have been in the alley, recognized the well-known detective, and tried to duck out of sight. Why?

Dan Haley turned into the alleyway, and instantly the footsteps started moving again. Someone was running back into the alley, away from Haley!

Haley cried, "Hey!" and followed.

He pulled out a flashlight as he ran, shot the white beam ahead into the wet night. A figure in dark clothes scurried along a building wall, deep in the alley. The next instant the racing form appeared to be swallowed up by the wall itself.

His jaw setting grimly, Haley leaped ahead. There was a high wooden fence behind the theater building, and a swinging doorway that led through the fence. Haley spun through into the courtyard that was beyond.

Someone was moving stealthily—

The prowler spun. The light was smashed from Haley's hand. It

crashed at his feet and went out. Darkness swooped down again. But not before Dan Haley had glimpsed a shadowy form, had seized a thin, slippery pair of shoulders that had almost ducked past him. He hurled the unknown marauder back.

But a knee, driven with furious speed, caught Haley in the stomach. His hands were knocked loose from the fugitive's coat collar. Panting madly, Haley's captive tried again to slip through the protective darkness in a desperate attempt to reach the alleyway. The fellow was like a trapped fox—agile, dodging, moving with frantic speed. He was also tough as barbed wire.

A fist cracked the detective's jaw. At the same time a heel ground into his instep.

Dan Haley grimaced and swung into blurred speed. He drove his assailant up against the board fence and it rattled as though there had been an explosion nearby. There was a gasp of pain. The man fell—

Dan Haley swooped down, ready to seize the man. There was something funny here. Why was the fellow so desperate to escape—

Something sliced the air close to Haley's grim face. A knife!

Haley managed to twist, avoid the deathly drive of the knife blade by a scant half inch. In the darkness he kept in a weaving crouch, then dived for his attacker's legs. His hands smacked the board wall. The man was gone!

And then there was only the banging of the board gate through which the man had escaped. Picking himself up swiftly, Dan Haley followed. In the alleyway he drew up short, because already the sounds of padding feet had faded beneath the dismal patter of the rain.

Haley reached the side street, squinted his sharp eyes against the evasive shadows cast by occasional street lamps. In the areas between



Abruptly the prisoner paused in his writing. Terror and guilt were mirrored in his dark eyes as he stared at Haley.

patches of pale, saffron glow there was only vague darkness. But Haley watched down the block to see if any moving figure appeared for an instant in front of one of the street lamps.

He saw no one. He turned back toward Seventh Avenue. His quarry must have headed that way. Haley had just reached the corner when he heard the mournful whine of a police siren, saw the red glow of a police car headlight. The car swung into the side street he had just left. Haley swung back. He returned to find out what was going on.

And he returned to find his friend, Lou Hamilton, the theater manager, dead!

It was a half-hour later. One of the squad men was saying, "And so that's the way we found him, Haley. Dead, with a knife wound in his back. But before he died, Mr. Hamilton must have managed to reach the phone and call headquarters. He must have died while making the call, because they heard the phone crash and then he didn't say any more." The headquarters man indicated the blood-smeared, still figure on the floor of the tiny office.

Dan Haley's grim gray eyes flickered as he looked down at his friend. Lou Hamilton had been a pretty swell sort of guy. He had made fifty dollars a week here at the theater and he had a wife and two small kids—

Haley's eyes roved the office. The safe was open. There was a metal cash box on the desk, also open. But all that it contained now was some loose change. Easy to see what had happened. Lou had been stabbed while going over the day's receipts, prior to locking the money in the safe until morning. Someone must have hidden in the theater at closing time, waited until the projection-booth operator and any other employees had gone home, then slipped upstairs and caught the manager unawares.

Haley looked at one of the headquarters men and asked, "What time did that phone call come through?"

He was told the exact time, and suddenly he realized that his friend must have been dying even as Haley had tried the front doors of the theater. Haley must have come down the dark side street an instant after the killer had escaped through those very doors—a simple matter, since fire laws required that all doors carry a bar arrangement that could be worked at all times from the inside.

Haley thought of the prowler in the alley, and knew that he must have been the killer. The man had ducked in there when he had spotted Haley coming down the street toward the theater!

Haley said, "Check for prints." He looked at a lab man who had been sent up from headquarters. "You won't find the knife, because the killer still has it with him. He tried to use it on me."

Everyone looked at Dan Haley curiously. But he did not explain. Instead, he swung on his heel and

hurried out. He headed back toward Seventh Avenue, and his eyes were bleak and hard beneath the turned-down brim of his hat. The rain kept coming down. As Dan Haley saw each passer-by, he eyed him closely, taking in his stature and appearance. On the avenue, he glanced in cigar-store windows and in drugstores and bars. He stopped at cab stands and questioned drivers. All up and down the avenue, he questioned storekeepers and people he knew. He moved slowly down the street, feeling somehow that the killer was still in the neighborhood.

Because that fellow in the alley had recognized him. Otherwise, why had he ducked? And if Dan Haley knew the way of criminals, the fellow would stick around the neighborhood to see *what* Dan Haley knew. He would want to know what moves the police planned.

Haley swung back up the avenue, was just passing a lunchroom near the corner of the theater side street, when he slowed, peering through the rain-smearred window. Inside the white-tiled hamburger joint two men sat at the counter. One man was hunched over a cup of coffee, his collar still up, his hat dripping raindrops—

Dan Haley stepped inside, quietly.

The man who was sipping coffee glanced up. His sharp eyes slid swiftly over Dan Haley's tall, lean figure. Then he returned to his coffee-drinking. Haley's sharp eyes ran over the fellow's figure. There was a trace of mud on the man's coat, on his wet, sloppy-looking hat. His shoes were wet and there was mud ground into the heels.

Haley's gaze dropped to his own shoes. The brownish mud on his own brogans matched that of the stranger's shoes. The detective stepped forward.

"You!" he said firmly.

The man looked up. He had nar-

row dark eyes and a red welt across one side of his thin face.

"You speak to me?" the man asked flatly.

"Yeah," Haley said.

"Well?"

Haley moved his head. "Come along."

"What the hell is this?"

Haley moved imperceptibly. His hand dragged the man off the counter stool. The wiry fellow practically swung in the air before he was slapped down on his feet. Then Haley had him by the upper part of one arm. The fellow winced with pain as steel-hard fingers cut into the muscles of his arm.

"Don't give me that stuff," Haley said, and led him out.

Outside, he got a tricky hold on the dark-faced man's right arm and led him down the street.

"What's the gag, Haley?" the man whimpered.

"So you *do* know me!" Haley snapped.

"Sure. Who doesn't?" The man's voice was a whine. "But listen, copper, you ain't got a thing on me—"

"We'll see," said Haley, and he prodded the man along toward the theater. He said nothing further.

There was a uniformed cop at the door of the theater when they got back. He let them in. Dan Haley took his captive directly to the upstairs office, shoved him into the room ahead of him. A fingerprint man and a photographer were working hurriedly. The dead man still lay on the floor.

"I think this guy is the one," Haley said quietly.

Everyone looked up sharply. Haley frisked his captive. He found some small change, some keys—but no large sum of money, no knife.

His captive stared in shocked amazement at the still figure on the floor.

"Gosh!" he said. "And I was only talking to him a little while ago!"

Dan Haley's cold eyes flickered. "Then you *admit* you knew him?"

"Sure, I knew him. I was up here visiting with him for a few minutes after the show closed."

"You know him very long?" Haley asked.

"Quite some time."

Haley said, "And he was alive when you left here tonight?"

"Naturally!" The man's dark eyes flashed. "What the hell you trying to pull, Haley?"

Haley said flatly, "Of course you've ditched the money and the knife. You did that right away, because you were afraid you might be caught with them. You figured you could pick them up later, and you hung around, waiting to see what the police were going to do."

"That's a lie!"

Haley moved forward, clutched the man by the collar, practically flung him into the chair by the office desk. The detective picked up a sheet of paper and a pen, pushed them in front of the suspect and ordered, "All right. I want a statement as to just what time you talked to him, what you said, what time you left." There was something expectant about Dan Haley's manner, and everyone watched tensely.

The captive shrugged, picked up the pen. "Sure," he said easily. "I'm not afraid to tell what I did. Because I didn't kill him."

Haley nodded toward the sheet of paper. The man started writing. There was only taut, strained silence and the slight scratching of the pen as everyone waited.

Abruptly, Dan's prisoner paused in his writing, and frowned a little, and sat staring at the piece of paper.

Instantly Dan Haley was bending over him. "Go on! Put it down!" His eyes blazed with a strange light.

"You can't, can you? Because you don't know it!"

Terror and guilt were swiftly mirrored in the man's dark eyes. He stared at Dan Haley.

Haley whipped the sheet of paper from the desk, showed it to the others. His eyes were ice-gray now. "There's one detail this man has avoided in everything he's said here. Something that proves he's lying like hell!" He pointed to the captive. "He said he knew this dead man for some time, that he was in the habit of frequently dropping up here to the office. But tonight was the *first* time. He planned the whole crime in a hurry. But he forgot one important thing!"

"You mean—" someone started.

Haley rapped, "He forgot to learn *Lou Hamilton's name!*"

Haley indicated the paper again. "That's why he was stuck just now when—"

Someone yelled, "Look out, Haley!"

But Dan Haley saw the sudden movement as the dark-eyed man started to dive toward the doorway and the adjoining balcony. Haley's fist lashed out, caught the man on the jaw. It was a blow that carried the detective's hard, full weight behind it.

The man's head snapped as though it were jerked by a wire. He swayed, pitched sidewise, landed in a crumpled heap on the office floor. He did not move again.

A cop whistled. "Whew!" he said. "It's a damned good thing the medical examiner's due here any minute. Otherwise, maybe we'll have another corpse!"

Dan Haley rubbed the knuckles of his right hand. His fingers touched a ring on that hand. His gaze went to the red welt across the left side of the killer's still face. He said, "The first time I hit him, out back in the dark, I must have slipped in the mud."

THE END.

Sara was glamorous and young and gay, and she loved a good gag; she liked men who were endowed with "worldly goods"; she liked the good things in life, and she saw no reason not to take what came her way, no questions asked. But when her latest admirer arrived in a wardrobe trunk, in full dress, Sara found that her sense of humor had deserted her.

If you like a dash of humor in your detective stories, you're going to enjoy this latest story by Henry Norton, "Corpse About Town." In August Issue of Detective Story Magazine.

STICK-UP

by JULIUS LONG

*The story of a man who
just couldn't lose his luck!*

Beckel watched the little man carry his double handful of chips to the cashier's window. The man deposited the chips and began to go through his pockets. He produced more chips, mostly blue in color. The cashier counted the chips as they kept coming, and when the last one had been laid down he said, "That's fifty-four hundred dollars. Of course, you want a check."

The man shook his head. "No. I'll take the cash."

Beckel had to admit the man was not so dumb as he looked. At least he knew about Jake Fallon's checks.

Jake Fallon stood across the room watching the little man, and when the cashier looked his way he nodded. The cashier asked, "How

do you want it?" as if paying out fifty-four hundred were not at all unusual at the Lucky Dollar Club.

"Hundred-dollar bills will be all right."

That was perfectly satisfactory to Beckel, too. He watched the cashier count out fifty-four hundred-dollar bills. The little man accepted them without checking the count and with difficulty stuffed them into his right-hand trousers pocket. He jumped slightly when he discovered Jake Fallon at his side.

Fallon chuckled as if he were the happiest man in the world.

"Well, doc, I see you took the house tonight. You may think I'm kidding when I say it, but I'm glad to see you have some luck. You've

been a good customer here, and you deserve it. Just spread it around where you got it, that's all I ask!"

The short man mumbled something and moved toward the door. Beckel watched Jake Fallon and enjoyed heartily a silent laugh. Inwardly, Fallon must be enduring racking pains. For a month he had watched this man lose an average of almost two hundred dollars a night and tonight, in less than thirty minutes, he had got it all back.

It just went to show. Even with house dice as crooked as Fallon's, the sucker had a long, long chance. Of course, it was out of the question to suspect the man of palming his own dice. He was Dr. Evans, one of the city's most respectable dentists. Just to play safe, however, Ernie Berman, the stickman, had changed the dice three times in the thirty minutes of play.

Beckel waited two full minutes before following Evans from the room. As he did so, a heavily built man with a deep scar running across the left side of his face sidled up and said through lips that did not move, "Watch your step, Beckel."

Beckel pretended that he did not hear and went on. Outside, he trembled a little. The man with the scar was Ernie Berman, the stickman who had failed to stop Evans' winning streak. Translated, Berman's warning said, "Lay off Evans if you want to keep your teeth!"

Ordinarily, Beckel would never have considered running counter to Ernie Berman. Berman was tough. But he couldn't follow Beckel into the army, and at five thirty in the morning, a matter of three hours, that was where Beckel would be. He was no chump, and he was not going into the army broke. With Evans' fifty-four hundred and his own dice, he would make more dough in the service than a general.

He drove his car from the parking

lot, which was generously supplied free of charge to customers of the Lucky Dollar Club. His car was an expensive one, but the tires were smooth and a man from the finance company had been on the lookout for it for several days. Well, after five thirty the finance company could have it. In the meantime, Beckel needed it.

He sped across town, confident that he would reach Vernon Heights before Evans. Evans' home was one of the finest in Vernon Heights and on one of its most spacious lots. Beckel had cased it thoroughly, for he had naturally been interested in a man who could drop an average of almost two hundred dollars a night for a solid month. He had never expected a break like this, but he had had a hunch that Evans would bring him good luck.

The left-hand door of Evans' two-car garage was still open as Beckel drove by. Beckel parked beyond a bend in the boulevard and walked back. The right-hand half was occupied by a green sedan which belonged to Mrs. Evans. Beckel took a position behind it.

It was going to be ridiculously easy. A little man like Evans would give him no trouble at all. Evans would not have a gun, for the State law restricting the ownership of firearms was very strict. Of course, if you were in the stick-up racket like Beckel, you didn't worry any more about the firearms law than you did about missing church on Sunday. But law-abiding citizens like Evans, who paid their taxes, were afraid to own guns. It was all pretty soft.

Headlights turned into the garage drive, and Evans' car filled the left side. Beckel waited until Evans had snapped off his lights, then he got out his cheap Spanish .32 and went around back of Evans' car. There was little space between the

Orange flame blinded him and something struck him, knocking him flat on his back on the drive. He could only lie there with increasing indignation. Evans had carried a gun!



car and the garage wall, and when Evans climbed out, he was in a cramped position with his back to Beckel.

"This is a stick-up," said Beckel. "Get your hands up and stand still."

Evans lifted his hands and did not try to turn around. Beckel moved forward, training the automatic on the small of Evans' back. When he was close enough, he transferred the .32 to his left hand and thrust his right hand into Evans' pocket. The fifty-four hundred-dollar bills made such a huge roll that he tore the pocket getting them out.

"O. K., doc, just take it easy and don't try nothin'."

He stepped backward out of the garage. He was so certain that Evans would make no trouble that he became a little careless. He looked over his shoulder as he neared the doorway, considering the danger of intervention by a chance passer-by far greater than any possible danger from Evans. When he turned back to Evans, it was too late.

Orange flame blinded him, and something sharp as an ax struck him in the chest, knocking him backward out of the garage and flat on his back on the concrete drive. All the wind was knocked out of him, and he could not breathe any air into his lungs. He could only lie there with rapidly increasing indignation. Evans had carried a gun! Why, Evans had no respect for the law! Why, it was—

Evans, as a dentist, had had sufficient training to enable him to ascertain that the man was dead. He stood over him, his automatic pistol still in his hand. The pistol felt very strange, though Evans had been carrying it for a month, ever since he had started patronizing the Lucky Dollar Club.

It had occurred to him that something like this might happen, in which event a gun would come in

handy. Now that it had actually happened and his gun *had* come in handy, he wished that he had never taken it out of the house. He stared at the dead man at his feet and told himself that he would have been better off if the man were still alive and getting away with his fifty-four hundred dollars.

Evans appreciated the seriousness of the offense of owning a gun. Carrying it concealed on his person was even worse. He had acquired the gun several summers ago while vacationing. When his vacation had ended and he had returned home he had kept the gun.

Now he had used the gun in a homicide that was justifiable. The police would certainly not hold him for the stick-up man's death. In the State in which he had purchased the gun he probably would be considered a hero, even publicized as a protector of the American home. But in this, his home State, his act involved awkward complications.

Here, he might even be arrested for possessing the gun which he had used in self-defense. In fact, such an event was probable. Evans recalled the story told him by the cabinetmaker who had built the bookshelves in his den. The cabinetmaker had purchased some old furniture at an auction, hoping to salvage the lumber. In a table drawer he had found an old rusty pistol incapable of function.

The cabinetmaker had promptly taken the pistol to the police station. He had been arrested at once and subsequently fined. Evans realized that his position in society was more enviable than that of the cabinetmaker. In the light of the circumstances, the police could not very well crucify him for encroaching on their prerogative of possessing firearms.

There was one thing in his favor, however. The police would be em-

barrassed by the discovery that the dead man had attempted to rob him of his winnings at the Lucky Dollar Club. Of course, a place like the Lucky Dollar Club could not operate without police protection. The situation would present such an awkward problem to the department that the detail of the unlawfully possessed firearm would no doubt be forgotten.

Yet Evans did not walk into the house and summon the police. In the house and asleep, unless the shot had awakened her, was Norma, his wife. She would never understand about the fifty-four hundred dollars. It would be hard to explain to her why he had spent every night for the last month at the Lucky Dollar.

Until a month ago he had always confided in Norma about even the most infinitesimal problems of his life. They had been married ten years, and he had felt that their minds and hearts were as one. Then Norma's mother had died and left her four thousand dollars.

"I've had my eye on a farm," Evans had told her. "Let's take your four thousand, and the six we've saved and buy it. The price is twenty thousand, but it will be easy to pay a loan company out of the profits."

Norma had been cold to the suggestion.

"Please don't ask me for the money, Larry. Something might happen to you. I'd like to keep mother's money just in case."

Evans had suffered a horrible disillusionment. For ten years he had struggled to pay for his professional equipment, this home, and had even been able to put by something besides. That money, as well as his property, he had always considered Norma's as well as his own.

But now it was apparent that Norma looked at things differently. She regarded her own welfare apart from their mutual security. She

was looking ahead. Something might happen to him. She would be left alone. Disillusioned, Evans, too, felt alone. He had derived perverse pleasure in squandering the savings which he now regarded as his own, exactly as Norma considered her mother's money her own. He had plunged tonight, determined to throw away the last dollar. But a miracle had happened, and he had got even.

And he didn't want Norma to know what had happened to him in the last month. Of course, he could keep his mouth shut about the fifty-four hundred dollars. But if he told the police that he had killed a man to protect small change, he would not appear in the same light as if he had protected the larger sum. Besides, the police would find out anyway.

Evans walked back to the door of his car, reached into the glove compartment and procured a flashlight. He dared not use the garage lights. He played the flashlight upon the dead man. The front of the man's shirt was bloody, and there was some blood on his coat, but none had got to the garage floor or the drive.

Evans carefully dragged the man to the rear door of his car, opened it and lifted the body inside to the floor. He closed the door, went back and picked up the pistol which the man had dropped. At first glance he thought it was identical to his own, but then he saw the safety was in a different place and recognized it as a Spanish imitation. He dropped the gun into his left pocket.

He played the light upon the garage floor and quickly found the glistening brass cartridge case that had been ejected from his own automatic. He dropped the case also into his left pocket. Then he got into his car and backed quietly from the drive.

Lolling low in the seat of Beckel's car, Ernie Berman waited for Beckel and fifty-four hundred dollars. After Beckel had left the Lucky Dollar Club, Berman had gone into a huddle with Jake Fallon.

"Beckel tailed Evans."

Fallon was incredulous. "Are you sure? I thought he knew better than to bother my customers."

"I'm sure. Things are different with Beckel now. In the morning he goes into the army."

"The devil! He's certainly clammed up about it."

"It's a cinch he was figuring on pulling something. Evans will be a soft touch. I figure he'll beat Evans home and take him there."

Fallon reflected. "Well, if Beckel's going to take him anyway—"

That was all Ernie needed to know. He had already told one of the boys to stand by. After a fast ride to Vernon Heights he spotted Beckel's car, dismissed his own driver. For minutes he had waited, hidden in the back seat. He sat up straight when he heard the shot.

He swore. It would be just like Beckel to muff a soft touch like this. So he had to shoot Evans! Well, Ernie wanted no part of a murder. Fifty-four hundred was a lot of jack, but not enough, especially when he had to split it with Fallon. He quickly got out of the sedan. He crouched behind a hedge, sure that Beckel would come running. If Beckel saw him in the neighborhood he might get ideas about framing him for the job.

But Beckel did not come running. After a few breathless minutes, Ernie got the shock of his life. Evans' car was backing out of his drive, and Evans himself was at the wheel!

Ernie ducked low as the car headed out through Vernon Heights and toward the city limits. When it was a block away, Ernie straight-

ened. It was staggering to realize that it was Beckel who had been shot. Beckel's body was in the car, of course. Evans was scared, trying to dispose of the body. Ernie wanted no part of murder for fifty-four hundred dollars, but now he saw even greater possibilities. He got into Beckel's car and started following, keeping well behind so that Evans would not notice his lights.

Evans drove slowly and made several turns. At first Ernie thought he was aware that he was being tailed, but at last he realized that Evans was headed for Willow Run. That suited him fine. Willow Run was an isolated place at this time of night. Ernie would have no trouble at all.

He parked a hundred yards behind the place selected by Evans and approached stealthily. By the time he arrived Evans already had Beckel's body out of his car and halfway to the bank of Willow Run. Ernie went in cautiously through the weeds, revolver drawn.

"Well, well, doc, fancy meeting you here!"

Ernie laughed at the way Evans let go of Beckel and straightened up. He moved forward.

"Keep your hands up, doc. You can't be as tricky with me as you were with Beckel, so don't try it."

He ordered Evans to turn around, and Evans complied. He extracted two guns from Evans' pockets. From another pocket he took some small bills.

"Well, where's your fifty-four hundred?"

"Find it yourself!"

Ernie slapped the back of Evans' neck with the butt of his revolver. Evans pitched forward onto his hands and knees. Ernie turned away, sure that the fifty-four hundred hadn't been left on Beckel. But he went through the corpse's pock-

ets anyway. He whistled when he found the roll of bills.

"You crazy jerk! So you were going to toss the stiff into the run with the roll still on him!" Ernie said, laughing aloud.

Evans said nothing. From his position on all fours he flung himself at Ernie's legs. Ernie went over backward, but sprang up quickly and brought his revolver down on Evans' head. Evans dropped onto his face and Ernie stepped back with a grunt of satisfaction. Then he screamed. Something or someone had sprung from the weeds and was tearing his flesh into shreds.

Norma Evans had not slept. This was no new experience for her; it was practically the thirtieth night of wretched writhing in her bed, of agonized waiting for the sound of Larry's car in the drive. Every night it had been the same; where he had been, why he had stayed out so late were points he had never bothered to explain.

In the morning he would bolt his breakfast, seeming not to notice her, flee in preoccupied haste to his office. Of course, there was something radically wrong. It was not like Larry Evans to be so coldly inconsiderate. It hurt that he should fail to take her into his confidence.

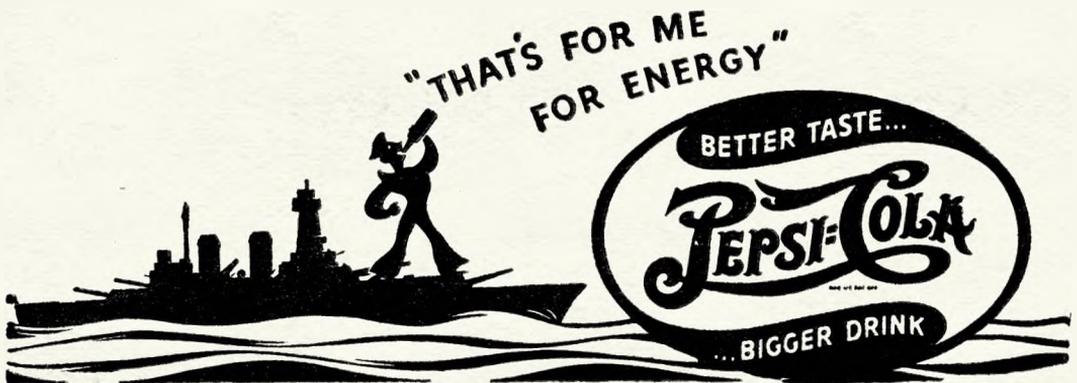
Her own guilty conscience forbade

her to openly accuse him. She herself had guarded a secret. Fortunately, Larry never had been inquisitive about her family; there had never been any occasion to tell him about her father. He knew simply that her father had died during her childhood, that her mother had operated a small business and sent her through college. What he had never known was that her father had been thrice a bankrupt, finally a suicide.

A thousand times she had resolved to tell Larry about the kindly, dreamy-eyed man who had brought home those fabulously expensive dolls that he so pitifully could not afford to buy. After all, he had not been a father to be ashamed of, no matter how foolish his business ventures had been. Her heart always glowed with pride at the very thought of him, even though he had left her mother to carry on alone.

Her mother's struggle had been a tremendous one. It had left an indelible mark on her viewpoint. Only a little more than a month ago, her mother had said: "The few thousand dollars that I'll leave you are to be yours—yours alone. Perhaps they'll give you a measure of the security that I never had. Promise me you'll never permit them to pass from your own hands!"

Norma Evans had promised. That was why she had denied the inherit-



ance to Larry, even though she had wanted him to have it. She wished she could have been able to explain to him and realized that her refusal had hurt him deeply. For a while she had thought that it was this refusal which had caused the change in him. But, with the passage of days, she had dismissed the idea.

It was something deeper, something infinitely more serious that was troubling Larry. The way he stayed out till three o'clock every night, his worn, harried look indicated that something very serious was wrong. If only he would confide in her and tell her what the trouble was!

She lay back with comparative relief when she heard the sound of the car coming into the drive. The quiet pur of the motor ceased and she knew that presently the overhead door would rumble down. Then Larry would come noiselessly into the house and—

The shot brought her upright in bed. Cold fear gripped her body. She slipped from bed and ran to the window from which the garage and drive were visible. The moonlight was faint, but at once she saw the outline of the man sprawled out on the drive. Larry!

No, it wasn't Larry! It was Larry who came and stood over the fallen man. As Larry stooped over she saw the automatic pistol in his hand. In cold terror she watched as Larry straightened, stood there as if thinking. Who was this man whom Larry had shot?

Instantly, she felt that this was the crisis of the thing that had troubled Larry for the past month. Whoever the man was, he was the cause of Larry's anxiety, and now Larry had in desperation shot him. Of course, this had been a mistake, but the murder was done, and it must not be discovered. Eager to

help in its concealment, she flung a negligee about her and kicked on some mules. When next she looked out the window Larry was dragging the dead man into the garage.

She raced down the stairs. Larry was backing out of the garage as she reached the side door. In desperation she watched him reach the street, drive away. Then she grabbed up the keys to her own car and ran out to the garage. The heavy door had always given her trouble, but it was amazing how easily she lifted it. In a matter of seconds she was backing her car into the street. She had thought Larry would have a long head start, but the lights moving ahead were only half a block away.

She drove without lights. She felt only that Larry must not know of her presence. He had chosen to keep his troubles a secret; she would not let him know that she had discovered his dread secret of the dead man in the garage. Unless she could help— If only she could help!

The car ahead turned many times, finally into a road that wound beside Willow Run. The car stopped. Norma Evans brought her own car to a halt, pulling deep into the weeds at the side of the road, causing the willow branches to brush the top of her car. From her concealment she saw the man leave the car ahead. Her spine chilled. The man was not Larry.

The man began to move stealthfully away. Her teeth chattering with terror, Norma Evans left her car and followed. She could not understand what had happened. She could understand only the fact that Larry was in trouble, that he needed her.

Larry was not in the car ahead; it was not Larry's car. Blindly in the darkness, Norma Evans moved on. Twice she lost a slipper, retrieved it. Then she suppressed a

cry as she spied the familiar outline of Larry's own car at the side of the road. She hastened toward it.

There was a sound of scuffling in the weeds between the road and the bank of Willow Run. Her eyes were more accustomed to the darkness beneath the willow trees now, and she could see the two men fighting. Plainly one man was having the better of it. The man was not Larry. He was using a pistol as a club on the fallen man's head. Larry!

Norma Evans flung herself on the man with the pistol and tore at a face which was already deeply scarred.

Evans opened his eyes. His head was splitting. That woman's scream was deafening. He got to his knees. His eyes widened at the spectacle he beheld. Norma was fighting a losing battle with Ernie Berman. Berman tore himself loose from her clawing fingernails. He swung hard

with his pistol and sent Norma reeling backward. Berman stared stupidly at her fallen figure, breathed heavily.

Something glistened at Evans' knees. One of the automatics had fallen from Berman's pockets. Evans seized the automatic, lifted it and fired point-blank at Berman's middle.

The two cars were close together as they moved away. Behind them remained a third car. Nearby lay two corpses, one as it had fallen. Its pocket had been picked of fifty-four hundred dollars, and the fingers of one hand were affixed to an automatic pistol, the serial number of which had never been registered. In the hand of the other corpse lay a cheap imitation of that excellent pistol. The investigating officers could find empty cartridge cases from each weapon if they troubled to investigate so obvious a crime.

THE END.

"The Hearse Was Late," by Philip Ketchum! The complete novel in our next issue. And it's a mighty good one, too. A murder rehearsed until it was letter perfect. Only when the police were tipped off, they shook their heads. People just didn't rehearse murders. But when the murder occurred, exactly as had been previously reported to them, they weren't so sure.

The yarn is chock-full of excitement and suspense, as any good detective yarn should be, and we promise you that the solution is one that you will never guess.

MURDER COMES TO TEA

by RALPH BERARD

Three men and a woman were seated at the table when Death stalked in and invited one guest to drink his poison brew!

So it was murder. A man wasn't supposed to understand women and I should let Muriel Logan take the rap for a killing she hadn't done and that I knew she hadn't done because—well, just because I knew she hadn't.

I got up from the breakfast table resolutely, laid down the paper and did not tell Julia what I was thinking. Instead, I said calmly, "I'm going down to headquarters, dear."

Julia shrugged as she started clearing the table. Our two boys, Robert, eight, and Ted, six, had already started for school. "You'll just get yourself into a mess," Julia said.

I started downtown, nevertheless. I was going there because I believed





I knew Muriel Logan better than anyone else did. Muriel and I had been brought up in the same town; even gone to the same kindergarten. And for two years before I met Julia, Muriel and I had gone together quite regularly. I was positive she was not a girl who would poison her husband, as the morning paper had just told us, and I felt it my duty to prove it wasn't so.

Captain of Detectives Joe French seemed amused when I told him my reason for coming and it made me sore. I had never met the captain before. My limited knowledge of crime came from a deep study of applied psychology and practical physiology, and I suppose the way I talked didn't make much sense to him at first.

"So, you know all about women?" he said, smiling, in answer to my introduction.

I hadn't meant it to sound the way it did, but I said, "I know more about Muriel Logan than anybody else, more about her than her own husband ever could, more than I know even about my own wife—"

"Oh?" The captain broke in, and I detected plenty of insinuation in the way he said that word.

I made things worse by attempting to be serious and impressive. "There was something between Muriel and myself, captain, which I'm sure you wouldn't understand. I suppose you laugh at the idea of a brother-and-sister relationship being possible between a man and woman. Well, so do I. But there can exist a relationship of— It isn't possible to put it into words. It's a sort of understanding, a mental condition that can't exist between two men, or between two women."

French kept nodding his head patiently, letting me run my full length. He was about fifty, a heavy-set man who was substantially built from hips to shoulders. His legs

were a little short and you noticed it even when he sat, as he did now, in the big swivel chair behind his flat desk. There was a rose in a tiny vase on the desk and this was October. Its presence there should have tipped me off, but in my impatience to help Muriel, I'm afraid I didn't use my full knowledge of psychology and calm reasoning. I might have seen, for example, that the smile in his eyes was part of his natural expression. Of course, he'd been skeptical about the way I blew off. But within minutes I was eager to admit my mistake and seek his co-operation.

I went on now, determined to make my point, "This understanding that sometimes exists between a man and a woman is in some respects stronger than love and more loyal than friendship. It takes neither marriage nor abuse of social custom to satisfy it and there isn't any possible means on earth of breaking it."

French leaned toward me, his eyes twinkling with keen intelligence. "Say that again," he requested.

I tried to repeat my words.

The captain leaned back and looked at me seriously. "You're a deep thinker," he said slowly. "We can get along. Now listen and I'll tell you about this murder."

I sat very still and listened. It wasn't necessary to ask for any explanations. Captain French gave me the damning evidence against Muriel Logan in a few brief sentences. There didn't seem to be the least loophole.

At six o'clock the evening before, Muriel Logan had served dinner to her husband, Arthur Logan, and two of his friends, Frederick Munroe, Arthur Logan's lawyer, and Mark Stevensen. The latter was the American representative of Australian Mail Lines, from which Muriel's husband had chartered two ships which in turn he had rechar-

tered to the British government for the duration.

The four, including Muriel herself, had sat down at the table at the same time. During dinner, Muriel had served tea. She had poured the tea. Everyone at the table could see everyone else and, according to French, all present had agreed that nothing could have been placed in any cup without all the others seeing it done—except Muriel.

Within a few minutes after drinking his tea, Arthur Logan lay stretched on the floor of the adjoining room, dead from strychnine. Both the other men had finished their tea. Neither had been affected. Chemical analysis plainly detected strychnine in the few drops of tea remaining in Logan's cup. The tea in the other two cups was uncontaminated. What remained in the pot had not been poisoned.

"And, of course," I added, as French finished, "Muriel did not drink the tea; she never touched it."

French seemed to be taking new interest in me. "You do know her, don't you? What's her not drinking tea got to do with the case?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. It's just a fact."

"What else do you know about Mrs. Logan?"

"She's been married only two years. She was thirty-four when she married Logan and had turned down several good proposals because she was her mother's only support and with her daughter married, Mrs. Patterson would have no other companionship. I'm sure Muriel considered that very seriously. She was thoughtful of others, especially of her mother. Logan came along with plenty of money. Maybe Muriel loved him—I don't know—but I've always suspected it was something of a deal."

"I'm interested," French interrupted, holding up his hand to stop me as he arranged a telephone connection. "Tell Calahan," he said into the instrument, "to keep someone at the Logan place and be sure nothing is touched." He cradled the phone. "Now, go on," he said to me.

I was suddenly conscious of an inner excitement. I'd never been a detective and the prospect of discovering something important thrilled me. "Could I go with you, captain, and study the scene of the crime?"

Captain French rose with a friendly smile. "That's what I was thinking of," he said, reaching for his hat. "We can talk on the way. Your method of attacking this case from the angle of your personal acquaintance and understanding rather intrigues me. It gives you certain advantages we cold-blooded law dogs don't have."

"Like my knowing that Muriel Logan simply would never drink tea?" I suggested.

"So small a thing as that can have a bearing sometimes," French admitted and, as we went out together, I had the distinct feeling that something warm and pleasant had come to exist between this forceful, energetic man and myself. We had become friends.

The Logan home was practically new. Situated in the very center of exclusive Greenmore, it was a formal-appearing colonial of white brick. As we went up the walk of scattered flagstones, I remarked to Captain French, "This place is typical of Muriel, of the Muriel the world and her friends know. But it is all a sham, captain—not the real woman herself. The real Muriel lives within herself, a frightened creature, very much afraid of the world. If she had her way it would

be to live by some tiny mountain stream in a cabin of logs with a stone fireplace. She would like to be surrounded by birds, and to be so far from cities and crowds that she could have her own private moon to hang just as she would like it, high among the trees of the forest."

French looked at me questioningly as we stood on the doorstep waiting for Calahan's guard to admit us.

I smiled and added, "This house, captain, represents what Muriel Logan absorbed from a social-climbing and selfish world and an even more selfish mother. I should like very much to see the spot Muriel Logan would prefer to call home if she had the courage of her convictions."

French shrugged. The door opened, and we stood in the presence of murder. The body had been removed, but nothing else had been touched.

The fourteen-foot-square dining room was all that interested me. There was the table, still set, the food still upon it. "Enough tea remains were siphoned from each cup for the chemical test," Captain French said. "Everything else is just as it was."

I walked slowly around the table, looking at the perfectly white cloth, the napkins, the cups and saucers. Muriel Patterson's personality was very close to me—I could think of her only as Muriel Patterson, the girl I had known so well, because I had not so much as seen her since she had changed her name to Logan. Spread before me was the thick shell of Muriel's immaculate outer self, the civilized social being. How I longed to crack that hard shell and solve murder! I realized, with something of a shock, that if Muriel had not poisoned her husband, she might, nevertheless, know who did.

I suddenly believed that if Muriel did know she would go to the chair

herself before she would tell. I believed that. I knew Muriel.

"Muriel sat here." I pointed. "Her husband here. I don't know how the other two sat."

I found the captain's eyes questioning me curiously. "Muriel did not drink tea," he agreed. "There is no cup. Since she had no maid and waited upon her own table, she naturally sat nearest the kitchen. But Arthur Logan would most normally sit at the head of the table. How do you know he didn't last night?"

I pointed to Logan's cup. "See how brown it looks, captain. Arthur Logan must have been a steady tea drinker. He drank his tea strong and Muriel must have made it for him regularly. Tea gradually stains a cup a dark greenish-brown and you cannot wash off the stain."

The way my words held the detective's interest encouraged me. "Muriel Logan, any woman, in fact, would be very careful not to give that cup to a guest. It isn't dirty, but it looks dirty. You could bet your right hand, captain, that a woman like Muriel Logan would not give a guest a cup that looked dirty if there were any way to avoid it. On the other hand, she would not give her husband any cup except his own. Do you agree?"

Captain French laughed lightly. "You're rather a remarkable fellow, Marshal. I do agree perfectly. Every word you just said would apply to my own wife; I'm sure of that."

"Let's remember this womanly trait," I suggested, "and the fact that Muriel never drank tea." I turned toward him. "May I be permitted to talk with Muriel?"

"You think you have a theory that will save an innocent person, don't you?"

I nodded. I wasn't ready to tell French that I already knew who had

poisoned Arthur Logan. There wasn't enough proof available. Maybe I couldn't prove it at all. But I knew. I was sure.

"You may see Mrs. Logan," Captain French agreed.

I entered Muriel's cell, the door clicked behind me and she took my hand eagerly in both of hers, holding it almost as a child might do. "Hello, Richard; I'm awfully glad you came to see me." She smiled quite naturally.

I sat down on the edge of the cot. She settled into the one chair and kept smiling lightly, wearing the smile as a mask to keep hiding herself from the world. She was very pretty. She did not look perceptibly older than when I had last seen her three or four years before. Her figure was still slender and willowy, as if it should be standing on a remote cliff somewhere, bending before a wild wind sweeping in from the sea. Her eyes had in them, as always, what only men with vivid imaginations—poets and adventurers—could read. I knew better than to speak to her immediately of what had happened. "How are you?" I said.

"Oh, I'm fine, Richard; I'm always fine."

"Always, Muriel?" I questioned. "Pollyanna."

"You know better than that, Richard." Her eyes upbraided me. She still held my hand, and her fingers gave mine a little squeeze of spontaneous pleasure at seeing me. No mention yet of the murder. But she knew I knew and understood. "How's your mother?" I asked her.

"Oh, she's fine, getting older, of course. But she's still a dear. I had guests last night and she was over all afternoon, to help me clean house. She insisted on washing and drying the dishes all by herself, and I'm afraid she overdid. Her heart isn't

very good; she's pretty old."

"And she takes strychnine for it?" I asked casually.

Muriel nodded, still smiling, without any attempt at evasion.

"You know about strychnine from her case, don't you. Muriel? You know how much it would take to kill a man?"

"I have an idea, all right." She still smiled. She always smiled when she talked, even as a little girl—even when she cried. Once or twice I had torn aside that mask that hid her from the world. I believed I could do it again. But now she slid away behind a quick change of subject. "I've been married and widowed since I last saw you."

"Yes. I read about it in the paper—and you sent us an announcement. Remember?"

She nodded. She was more tight-lipped, still smiling, but her eyelids flickered and I knew she was breaking. "You're in trouble," I said. "Serious trouble."

"It'll clear itself up," she claimed lightly.

I stood up and, going toward her, took both her hands in mine. She looked up at me questioningly. I pulled her to her feet, made her stand close to me, so she had to look directly into my face. "You're in jail, Muriel; do you realize that? When you leave here, there'll be a chair, first in a courtroom, then another chair in a death chamber. You'll never be able to take down your hair and feel the wind blow through it. You won't be able to run barefooted on a sandy beach at dawn, or ever rush to your porch in a sudden storm to marvel at the lightning streaking across the blackened skies. You won't have me to talk to and no one will understand."

With the last words I softened my tone. Her head had fallen upon my shoulder and gentle sobs shook her, like the whimpering of a very small

child. "Richard! Richard! What can I do? What can I do?" She was beating her hands against my chest like a terrified bird fluttering against a windowpane in a frantic effort to regain its natural elements of air and sunshine. I had succeeded in breaking that mask.

I lifted her chin, made her look up. "How did the strychnine get in your husband's tea, Muriel?"

She conquered the tears and looked at me. No smile now. Just dumb horror. "I don't know, Richard. I must have put it there. No, no, not purposely, Richard. I mean accidentally. Mother may have been careless; she might have left some about some place and—"

I shook her, almost viciously. "You're lying, Muriel."

She shrank back as if I had struck her. "No, Richard. No. Not to you, I wouldn't."

"Then you're lying to yourself." I gave her a light kiss on the forehead and patted her shoulder reassuringly. "Anyway, it isn't murder. If you did it accidentally, that isn't murder."

Her eyes were wide; her fingers clutched. "How can we prove it was accidental, Richard?"

"I will," I promised. I helped her as best I could to readjust her mask before I went. It wasn't difficult, and she was smiling again when I left.

At the end of the corridor there was a small room where visitors waited to see prisoners. I had to go through it on my way out. Mrs. Patterson rose as I entered and came toward me, her gloved hand extended. "Why, Richard, my boy. You came to see Muriel?"

Muriel's mother was modishly dressed, too youthfully for her age. Her hair was tinted with something that failed to hide how much she had grayed, and her face had shrunk un-

til her features were all edges and creases. But her smile, as ever, was glued on with a social veneer which always held it in place no matter what the circumstance. "Muriel's in serious trouble," I said. "I'd like to talk to you about it after you've seen her."

She nodded and thanked me. "I'm sure Muriel'll come out all right," she said quite positively. "They can't prove she did it." Mrs. Patterson moved away, following the guard toward Muriel's cell.

Although I had promised to report back to Captain French after talking with Muriel, I now decided to wait for Mrs. Patterson and then see him. I had a little game to play with Muriel's mother, not a pleasant game either.

The captain, however, happened to go past and see me sitting there and in a few minutes he came back with some pictures from the rogues' gallery. There was no one else in the visitors' room, so the detective sat down beside me and handed me several pictures. "Ever see this fellow?"

I instantly recognized the man. "Muriel's brother," I said matter-of-factly. "A bad egg if there ever was one. He started when he was just a kid, stole a car, I think. He served three or four years in the reformatory at Perdeau, then got out and started a string of bigger and better holdups. His mother won't acknowledge him as a son. You can't even make her answer a direct question concerning him. Muriel won't, either."

"He's dead," Captain French said.

"Yes, I know. He was shot by a cop during a bank holdup several years ago. Muriel told me about it one time in an off moment, when I had her hair down."

Captain French smiled quizzically. "When you what?"

"When I had her hair down," I repeated. "When I was able to strip off her mask and make her cry. You never can get a completely frank and honest answer from her unless you can tear away the mask."

The captain shrugged. "There're places I can't follow you," he admitted. "But these"—tapping the photos—"prove that a tendency toward crime is in the family."

"One child may favor one parent," I suggested, "another, the other side of the family."

We were interrupted by Mrs. Patterson returning. Captain French moved to leave, but I detained him and made the introduction. The detective acknowledged it courteously, then made an excuse to leave us. I motioned to Mrs. Patterson to sit down. She hesitated, showing plainly that she resented being given a command by someone she considered her social inferior. "Muriel isn't going to get out of this easily," I said seriously.

Mrs. Patterson kept her chin up in the air. Quite haughtily, she insisted, "They can't prove anything against Muriel. Either of the two men could have put the poison in Arthur's tea."

"You forget that each could see the other at all times; neither man left the table and there was nothing wrong with Mr. Logan's eyesight, either."

There was such a sudden change in Mrs. Patterson's expression that I knew immediately she had failed to consider this simple fact. She recovered promptly, however. "Mr. Munroe and Mr. Stevensen had mutual financial interests; they unquestionably were acting together."

"On the contrary," I insisted, "they hardly knew each other. They have nothing whatever in common financially, and even if they had, neither could have poisoned that cup of tea without great danger of either

Muriel or Mr. Logan seeing it. Besides, it was Muriel who had access to the strychnine you always have on hand for your heart attacks. She was the one who knew just how much strychnine to give."

Mrs. Patterson had turned whiter than the powder on her face. "You, Richard—you think she's guilty," she faltered.

"I think what I've just told you is what the jury will believe. A smart prosecuting attorney can prove these things beyond the reasonable doubt that might save Muriel's life." I looked very solemn and stood up and sighed. "I haven't much hope, Mrs. Patterson."

She got to her feet a bit unsteadily, looking ten years older than she had a few minutes before, and went out mumbling mournfully to herself something about her "poor, innocent, darling baby."

Captain French had returned to his office and he admitted me immediately. I sat down at his desk with deliberate slowness. I was no longer impatient or excited. I said bluntly, "Muriel's mother poisoned Muriel's husband."

French laid down his pencil on the glass desk top with a metallic click. He frowned. The frown changed to a slow smile, and the smile faded into a thoughtful look. My respect for the captain was increasing. Here was a man whose mind could not be stampeded. He could not be hurried in a physical sense either. He had time to listen to all arguments, to listen to all theories. This was murder. If an innocent person were executed, it would not be Captain French's fault. Neither was it likely to be his fault if a guilty one went free. "It's hardly possible," he decided.

"You police are always interested in motives," I began. "You must try to picture this Mrs. Patterson as an extremely self-centered and grasping

woman. I do not pretend to understand her. There's no mysterious understanding between us"—I smiled to emphasize my meaning—"but I can give you certain facts; what you might call a family picture."

Captain French waved his palm for me to proceed.

"Mrs. Patterson had been a shop girl, nineteen years old, when she married a very wealthy lawyer, unquestionably desiring his money and the social prominence the marriage would bring. Muriel was the first child of that unhappy union, the boy, the second. Mr. Patterson was thirty years older, but I got to know him rather well—a wonderful and brainy man whom the ignorant shop-girl wife could never hope to understand. He died a few years back, broken in spirit as well as financially. In fact, Mrs. Patterson never enjoyed any of the expected financial reward because Patterson's first wife created a scandal, and there were lawsuits which practically ruined Patterson's prospects. Mrs. Patterson was compelled to hang to the fringes of a very doubtful society in which she never was able to progress above the most mediocre shallows.

"Muriel grew up. Her simple charm and unbelievable thoughtfulness earned for them both the position her mother had always craved but never achieved. Mrs. Patterson's triumph, however, was limited by Muriel's salary as an unusually successful private secretary to the president of the Farwestern Railroad."

Captain French listened carefully to my every word, sometimes halting me to interpose a question. Finally, he opened a cigar box, clipped a cigar and shoved the box toward me. I unconsciously stuck one in my vest pocket and went on.

"Mrs. Patterson realized Muriel's

personality was the key to her own social success. Without Muriel she would become a forgotten old lady. She frowned on all Muriel's suggestions of marriage. She hated Muriel's suitors. Muriel's marriage meant the certain loss of all Mrs. Patterson lived for and, as I've told you, Mrs. Patterson is a most selfish woman, the exact opposite of Muriel, who would sacrifice everything for her mother, even her life.

A smile suddenly broke through the smoke of Captain French's cigar. "All right," he conceded. "Mama Patterson had a motive. She had lost both her daughter and her short-lived social prestige. By Arthur Logan's death she would regain both. Muriel would inherit Logan's money; mama would come back to live with daughter, and daughter would become charming hostess for future social progress. Mama Patterson also had the strychnine. You still leave two impossible situations: How did mama put poison in the tea when she was not even in the house that evening? And how could she live with daughter, after daughter had been executed for the murder committed by mama?"

I knew Captain French was not being facetious in putting the case as he did. It was a very effective way of clarifying it.

I answered his two questions: "Mrs. Patterson left the proper amount of strychnine in Arthur Logan's cup when she had finished washing dishes that afternoon. If it should be noticed it would be taken for a trifle of sugar, salt or flour and tossed into the sink. If she failed, the plan could be tried again later. There was no danger of Muriel drinking from that cup because she never drank tea. Muriel would give the stained cup to no one except her husband for the reasons we agreed upon this morning.

"Mrs. Patterson likely foresaw

that Muriel might be accused. But up until I talked with her a few minutes ago, she was supremely confident that she could not be convicted. Having had no business experience herself, she looked upon men like Frederick Munroe and Mark Stevensen as monstrous tycoons who would quickly be subject to all sorts of malicious and scandalous suspicion. She figured that, at the very worst, Muriel would be tried and acquitted, and she was so entirely selfish that she cared little how much mental distress Muriel might have to suffer meantime, so long as her scheme eventually proved successful." I paused, then added, "Right now, though, Mrs. Patterson is damned worried. I just as good as told her Muriel was going to burn, and whether the old lady likes me or not, she's always had a certain confidence in my judgment."

Captain French rose abruptly and ground out his cigar. "What do we do to cinch it?" he demanded vigorously.

I was on my feet, eager to prove my theory. "We go to Mrs. Patterson's at once, while she is still scared. I talk and you listen. She'll either confess or get so mixed up in her story that there'll be no doubt left!"

We soon reached the apartment where Mrs. Patterson lived alone. It was a bright fall afternoon, with the children just coming home from school. We heard the eager laughter of youngsters as we entered the apartment hall and Captain French knocked gently on Mrs. Patterson's door.

We waited, but no answer came. I tried the knob, not expecting it to turn. But it did. We went in.

Mrs. Patterson's body lay stretched full length on the floor. She was dead.

Captain French looked at the body, then at me. He moved about the room and found a note pinned to the bedspread:

I have just had a heart attack and have taken strychnine. Now I feel better, but I am still afraid for Muriel. I shall take more strychnine, enough so I shall never be afraid any more. I put the strychnine in Arthur's cup the afternoon I washed dishes at Muriel's. She did not kill him.

I read the note over the captain's shoulder. For a moment I felt a trifle guilty. Maybe I had caused this. Then a deep repulsion filled me. "Mrs. Patterson wasn't afraid for Muriel," I said. "She was afraid for herself. She got to thinking where she would stand with Muriel electrocuted or in prison and Arthur Logan's money either put in trust or going to his brother in Chicago."

Captain French was holding the note, looking at it meditatively. "I can hush this up with the reporters. Heart failure. She did have a bad heart. There isn't any need for the daughter to know her mother committed the murder, or killed herself. I can explain to her simply that our evidence is not sufficient for a prosecution. We'll make it as easy for her as we can."

"You're mighty thoughtful, captain," I said. "I didn't know there were any guys like you. You won't fool Muriel, though. She'll smile and appear happy, but she won't be fooled."

Captain French stared at me wonderingly.

"Muriel knows her mother did it. She figured it out for herself; I read it in her eyes— But, captain, please believe me, it will help Muriel a lot if she never knows about the note. She mustn't know that people like you and I guessed that she knew. It'll help her keep her chin up to think we all believe her husband's death was an accident."

"I see what you mean," Captain French said.

I got a cab and went straight home. The boys were just getting back from school. It hardly seemed possible so much could have happened since breakfast.

Julia gave me an "I-told-you-so" look. "Well, did you get yourself in a mess?"

"Muriel Logan's being released," I said.

"You're responsible for it, I suppose." She didn't say it in a mean way or sarcastically. It was just a statement.

I laughed. "What difference does it make?" I put my arm around her and kissed her.

Possibly I'll never see Muriel again. If I do it'll just be because we happen to meet accidentally on the street or some place. She'll say, "I'm awfully glad to see you, Richard," and she'll be smiling. We'll talk a minute about the weather, maybe about the wind in the trees, and that will be all.

THE END.



CLUES TO CHARACTER

As Shown in Handwriting

BY NAIJA ANDREYEFF

A page of handwriting has a great deal to tell us about our own characters and the characters of others. It provides a comprehensible index to a person's mental processes and inner emotions. In short, it is a veritable yardstick by which the writer's personality, moods and talents can be measured. But have you ever stopped to think that it is possible for others to judge you from your signature alone?

This matter of signatures, with or without underscores, is very important. It is one of the first things to which those who are interested in character analysis from handwriting should give their attention.

Most of us write our names far more often than we write long letters or compositions in longhand.

Many of us typewrite our personal correspondence. Therefore, this pen gesture of signing our names naturally makes a deeper impression upon our consciousness and, consequently, our signatures become even more a part of ourselves than does the rest of our handwriting.

Some handwritings may look alike, but the signatures will always be different in letter structure or some quirk of the pen. A page of handwriting may be likened to the clothes a person wears or the manners he assumes. The value of the signature in handwriting analysis is that it is more likely to reveal the true self of the writer than does straight handwriting alone.

Some people find it easy to change their handwriting at will. But they

can't successfully change their signatures at a minute's notice. And when another style of handwriting is adopted, if the name is signed without particular effort to make it different, it will be the old, unchanged signature.

It is never advisable to pass judgment and offer an opinion about the signature alone. For an accurate and dependable analysis, at least ten lines of writing (in ink) or more are required, plus the customary signature. Many characteristics can be deduced from a sample written in pencil. But because the pen pressure has much to tell us, a sample in pencil is less dependable. And the best sample of handwriting is one that has been written with ease and without the writer's knowledge that his writing would be subjected to an examination. Otherwise, the writing often becomes stiffly formal and even the signature may change to some extent.

One of the interesting things about signatures is that some people can sign their names in two or more different ways. Of course, one of the signatures will be the real one. And to find out which is the cultivated or assumed signature and which the real, it is necessary to study the body of the handwriting. Take time to do this.

Often the signature does not seem to match the rest of the writing. For instance, the handwriting in a letter may lean forward, and the

signature will be upright, or even backhand, and may be composed of letters that are much narrower than the letter formations in the rest of the handwriting. This indicates that the writer does not show his true nature readily. A forward slant of the writing indicates a responsive nature. But an upright signature will make the writer appear outwardly reserved and cool.

On the other hand, with a backhand script we may find a flowing, forward-leaning signature. A combination like this is often used by people who appear sociable and easy to get along with, but who do not always show their true feelings, and really are not as charming and friendly as they seem.

The best indication that a person is as he appears to be, is when the handwriting and the signature match. This is, insofar as the slant of the writing, the pen pressure, and size of small letters and capitals both in the body of the writing and in the signature are concerned.

A good example of this may be seen in sample A, which illustrates the handwriting and signature of India's famous Mahatma Gandhi. And paradoxical as it seems, although he was educated in London, his handwriting is more typically American in style than the customary English "hand." In this sample, the body of the handwriting and the signature are, indeed, of one tone.

In reply to your letter I may say that I expect to reach

Yours sincerely,
M.K. Gandhi

A

When you want to determine if a person likes himself, and to what extent, observe the size of the capitals and small letters and compare them with the signature. Often we meet people who are quiet and unassuming, and we are tempted to think there is no push to them at all; no ambition, no aspirations. A look at their handwriting, however, may reveal a good deal more self-satis-

he wants, or completely realized whatever ambition is driving him. It also means a vital kind of optimism. A hopefulness that is not downed by struggle or discouragement. These are the people for whom life never loses interest, no matter what disappointments they are called upon to overcome.

It is when either the handwriting or the signature, and sometimes

Quite new scrap books
B Millard

faction and ambition than we suspect. In a case like that, the handwriting itself may be small and perhaps not at all distinguished. But the capital letters will be large in comparison with the rest of the handwriting, and will command more attention than the formation of the small letters. In the signature, the capitals will very likely be smaller.

When you come across a sample in which the body of the writing is on an even keel, but the signature runs "uphill," it is an indication that the writer has aspirations of one kind or another, and is striving to make his dreams come true. From this we can deduce that he has not as yet reached the position in life

both, run "downhill," that we should watch for a pessimistic attitude and despondency. Skeptics may take this lightly. They may say, "It's too simple. It's like saying the day's nice because the air is balmy and the sun is shining. There's nothing to it." But this tendency to write "down hill," so to speak, should not be lightly dismissed.

When someone we know goes around shrouded in gloom, or is so irritable no one can come within four feet of him without having his head snapped off, a look at his handwriting and signature may prove very valuable, particular when a person's attitude shows no sign of regaining his equilibrium. After all, no one can be on an even keel all the

pending, but none of them are sufficiently definite to be mentioned just now.

C Sincerely yours,
Dermot Darby

time. But if the handwriting runs "downhill," and persists in doing so, we know that whatever the trouble, it is serious, and that the writer needs more than a cheery word or a

People who lead quiet, well-ordered lives, rarely underscore their writing. They may be average people, or people of high culture and attainments who feel that their posi-

would help a lot.
Franklin D. Roosevelt

Best Wishes for Chr
 J. Edgar Hoover

I have ever
 confidence in the sure
 General Whittier.

D

friendly pat on the shoulder to help him over the hurdle.

There is still another important and interesting indication in handwriting—the underscore. But don't be worried if you never underscore your signature. It's nothing to be ashamed of. From the viewpoint of graphology, using an underscore means only that you have a very strong desire to make your personality stand out in some particular manner. People who never underscore their signatures do not become as easily unhappy, depressed,

tion and success in life do not require them to force themselves in any way upon the notice of others. They expect to be recognized for their true worth without ballyhoo.

This does not mean that people who do use underscores are in favor of an all-out campaign for advertising themselves and their accomplishments. Far from it. But the more the personality of the writer asserts itself socially, in business, politics, art, music, the stage, in literature and other fields, the more likely he is to use an underscore.

Betty Davis

Sincerely
Irving Berlin

E

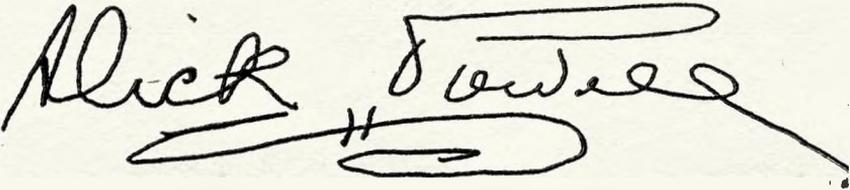
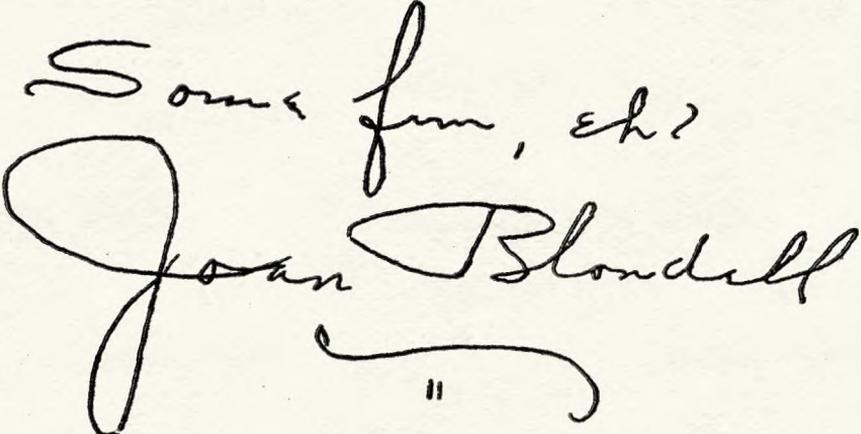
or dissatisfied as do those who use an underscore. If they do not always get to first base, they don't consider that all is lost.

At any rate, people who have found their niche in the world, and who have attained success, no matter what the degree of that success,

usually have distinctive signatures. Their "success" need not be professional. They may never have had professions. But their success as fine people and worth-while human beings will not be denied. Sample D illustrates several very interesting signatures without underscores.

The signatures of President Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover, General Mac-

of the straight line, such as the one beneath the signature of actress Bette Davis. Miss Davis' signature, with its high capitals and the unusual formation of the capital letter *D*, doesn't really need an underscore to make it distinctive. That short, straight, light underscore, however, indicates very good judgment in practical matters, quick, ready mind and plenty of self-confidence.

my characteristics
 "  " 

Arthur and Governor Thomas E. Dewey have been reduced in size somewhat. But in each case, strength of character, self-reliance, self-confidence, determination of purpose and capacity for leadership, as well as outstanding personality, are clearly evident.

Underscores, like handwriting itself, differ greatly. Few underscores are exactly alike, with the exception

Mr. Irving Berlin's signature (the reproduction here is slightly reduced in size) runs "uphill," showing almost perpetual optimism. The underscore indicates confidence in his ideas and undertakings, and the kind of strength of purpose that successfully carries opposition.

Signatures like those of screen and radio stars Dick Powell, and his

Greer Garson

G

Bing Crosby

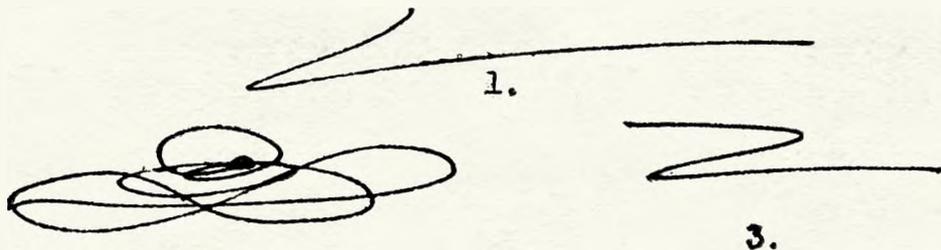
wife, Joan Blondell, are by no means ordinary. The large, flowing, graceful capitals and curved underscores with the two small perpendicular strokes, show much personal charm, versatility, a gracious manner and good business judgment. Since the handwritings match the signatures, you may be sure that both Mr. and Mrs. Powell are as they seem. In other words, they do not pretend, but are themselves at all times. I want to add here that these two young people are making a great success of their marital partnership, and that this is clearly reflected by their handwriting. They have practically everything in common, and their temperaments are much alike.

No need for me to go into a detailed description of the vivacious and very likable Greer Garson. Her signature shows a very intriguing

personality, somewhat changeable as to mood, through which, nevertheless, runs a steady stream of constancy. She is charming, original, sometimes a little critical, but generous and fair, and a young woman who knows her own mind.

Another interesting signature without an underscore is that of Bing Crosby. Those graceful, unassuming capitals indicate poise, confidence, high ideals, and generosity.

Angular underscores indicate forcefulness, temper and ambition. See underscore marked 1, in sample H. People who make these underscores, more or less like the one illustrated, are not always as good-natured as those who use curved underscores. On the other hand, underscores that are all flourish and meaningless scrolls show vanity, love of display and a desire for the



H.

Jeanette MacDonald
 Clare Boothe
 Tallulah Bankhead

I

limelight. See underscore marked 2.

Zig-zag underscores indicate a very quick mind and a persistent liking for physical activity. See underscore marked 3. When an underscore assumes an eccentric form and is used persistently, and if the handwriting shows good mental powers, it indicates unusual individuality, often genius or extraordinary ability of some kind.

Very often people never use underscores until they are obliged to get out in the world and stand on their own feet. In interpreting underscores and signatures, it must be remembered that the findings in the body of the handwriting either accentuate, balance or minify the meaning of the signatures themselves.

Last but not least, in some instances, the signature contains an upper stroke that can easily be interpreted as an underscore. But being placed over the signature, it may be termed as an overscore. Jeanette MacDonald's signature contains this overscore, and you can find it in many signatures of handwritings you examine. The high and long *t* crossing in the signature of Tallulah Bankhead is also an overscore. The same meaning can be applied to the signature of Congresswoman Clare Boothe. These overscores indicate the ability not only to express the writer's own personality, but also to express himself or herself in a clear, concise manner that anyone can understand. So, watch your underscoring!

THE END.



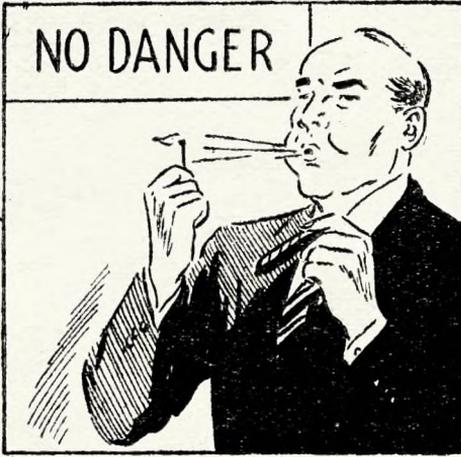
"PUZZLERS FOR A BRAINY DAY"

An amusing and entertaining collection of brain ticklers for keen minds.

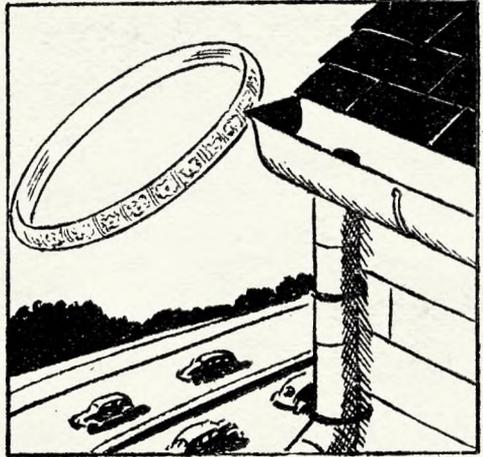
By Millard Hopper, World's Unrestricted Checker Champion

TRAINING YOUR POWERS OF DEDUCTION

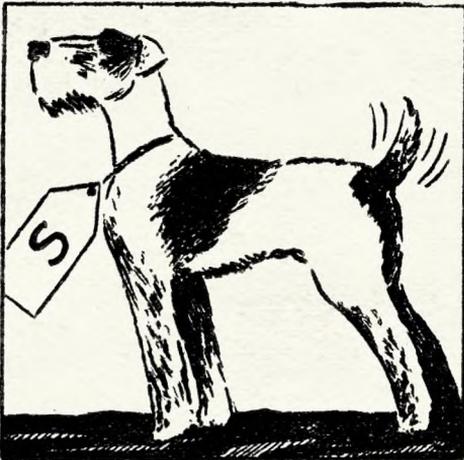
Each of the following pictures represents the name of a thing connected with crime. How many can you solve?



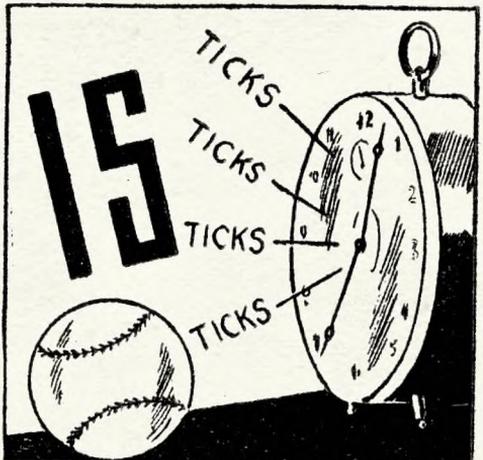
1



2



3



4

Answers on page 146

BLACKOUTS...

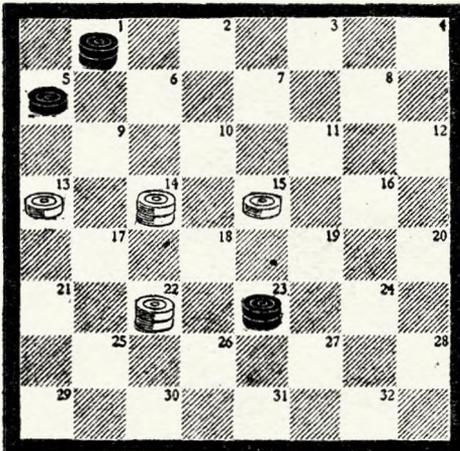
To Sharpen Your Mind



Take your pencil and black out two squares in each row from left to right. If you black out the correct ones, the remaining letters will spell out the criminal's name, his alias, the crime for which arrested, and the city where apprehended.

CHECKER BRAIN TEASER . . .

Test your skill at this age-old game.



Black checkers moving down the board are to move and win in two moves.

CRYPTOGRAMS . . .

The science of cipher writing or cryptograms, although demanding a great amount of patience, can give untold hours of amusement.

There are various forms of cryptograms. Some are based on the substitution of other letters of the alphabet, others on transposition; in fact, almost any intricate method of concealment can be used.

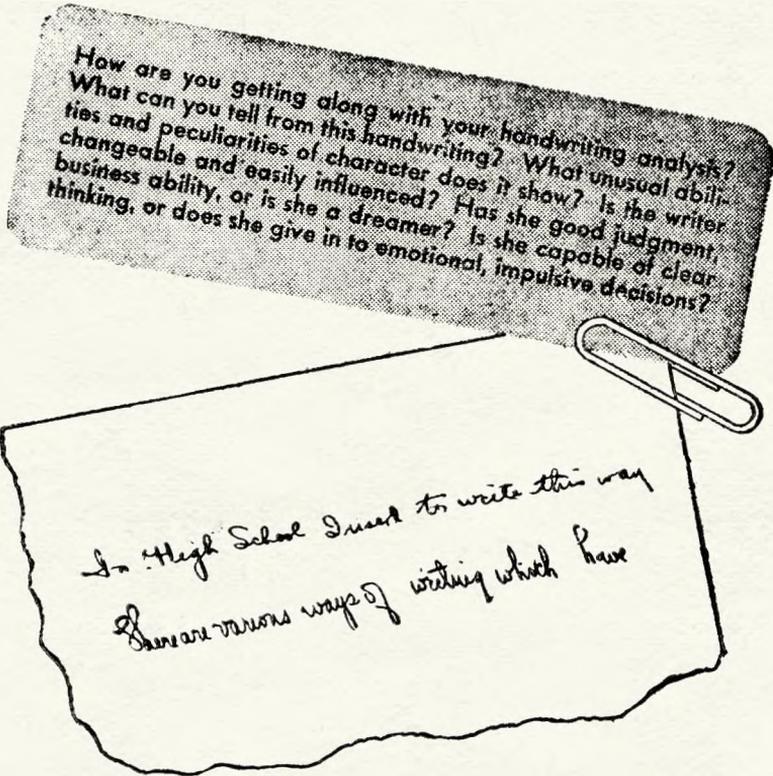
One of the simplest forms is when the first or last letter in each line of a letter are read up or down and form a message. Others require a knowledge of the frequency of the letters of the alphabet, the letters which occur most often being E T A O N I R S H with the most often used two-letter words, i. e., as, of, in, it, to, is, be, he, by; the three-letter words most often used are the, and, are, but, was.

Some cryptograms can be decoded in a few minutes, others have been known to defy experts for months, or even years. The one given below should not prove too difficult to the practiced solver of this form of secret message.

AB CDE FGBEEBF AI D JDIKDE LDJMBN,
 DIF D ODHG PQ KBGR ENHQQ NGPSEBGE
 NADN CPSTF ADKB ENPPF USHNB DE CBTT
 DTPIB CHNAPSN DIR TBVE HI NABW.

CLUES: D should lead to DIF, also DIR and DE, followed by CDE and AI. These will reveal FGBEEBF; also KBGR, ODHG and JDIKDE.

CHARACTER QUIZ



There is no doubt that a change in the emotional or mental make-up of a person definitely shows in the handwriting. This sample was written by a young woman whose handwriting changed remarkably within the space of four years. She was not conscious of deliberately changing the style of her handwriting. But there it was.

The first line in this sample illustrates how she wrote at one time. Here the clear, carefully made letters, the almost upright slant show a nature that is not extremely intense. But the roundness of the letter formations and fair spacing

between letters in words indicate a goodly amount of warmth and impulsiveness, and a friendly, good-natured disposition.

The dashlike *i* dots show an active sense of humor. Some of the letters are upright and others lean about one degree forward. This shows a nature that is not quite settled, emotions that are variable. But the affections are expressed with ease, and there is unstinted friendliness in her contacts with others.

The *t* bars here are firm and have a little hook on the end. In the process of reproducing handwriting in print, these little hooks are some-

times hard to see. In this sample, however, a hook is quite clear in the word "to." Hooks often are found not only on *t* bars but other ending strokes, indicating that the writer is tenacious. People who make these hooks like to hold onto what is already in their possession. They like to finish what they begin, and this characteristic helps them to stick to whatever course of action they plan for themselves, regardless of circumstances.

Strange as it seems, this tenacity of purpose is found more often in small handwriting than in large, due, perhaps, to the fact that carrying out plans of any kind requires concentration as well as determination. These same hooks can be found in the beginning of some *t* bars. But when they are, the tenacity of the writer is not of the same intensity.

The second line of this sample shows a marked change in many ways. The handwriting leans to the left, indicating that the writer has become much more reticent than she was before. She is just as ardent and affectionate, but somewhat less demonstrative. The handwriting is also more compact and angular, indicating that although she is still kind and generous, she deliberates before acting and is less impulsive.

She has also acquired more poise and is more sure of herself. But contradictory as it sounds, she is also more self-conscious. This is due to the fact that backhand writers are introverts and live a great deal within themselves. It is harder for them to forget themselves and their emotional pattern than for those whose handwriting slants even one degree to the right.

If you will notice the *i* dots, you will find they have changed, too. They are no longer as dashlike as they were in the first line of this sample. This shows a change in the

writer's sense of humor. It is still there, of course, but she has become more serious-minded and, with the changed slant, more retrospective.

The loops of letters like *h*, *t*, *l*, have grown higher. This, combined with the medium-heavy pen pressure, indicates that she has a healthy interest in making a success of herself, and she is well on her way as a research worker in chemistry. Regardless of change in herself, she is perfectly suited to this type of work, except that if she had not changed so greatly she might have been somewhat restless at times. Whereas now, close attention to details and to experiments that must be made over and over do not particularly distress her.

When letters are crowded close together, it shows that a person is inclined to think twice before acting. And since in the second line of this sample there is less space between letters in words than in the first line, it indicates that the writer has become more cautious and conservative. Basically, her personality has not changed. She may seem a little cool and distant at times, but once acquainted, she is just as friendly and sociable as she always was. She is not particularly demonstrative with her affections, but neither is she cold and unresponsive. Another noticeable change is the complete absence of beginning and ending strokes. This is a sure sign that the young woman has made commendable mental progress and has good reason to be proud of her advancement.

The matter-of-fact *t* bar in the second line shows that she is sensible, practical, and has fairly good will power and determination. The hook is missing from this *t* bar, but the compactness of the other letters reflects strong convictions.

Naiia Andreyeff.

DEEDS OF THE WICKED

by DOROTHY DUNN

The prophet had said, and rightly, "The murdered is not unaccountable for his own murder, and the robbed is not blameless in being robbed. The righteous is not innocent of the deeds of the wicked—"

I.

Bruce Andrews didn't look like a man waiting for death. He looked like any other bachelor physician enjoying an after-dinner pipe in the solitude of his tenth-floor apartment.

The picture was one of comfort—lounge chair, lamp over the left shoulder, a look of rugged goodness on his rather stern face. He held a small leather-bound book in his hand and anyone stepping around the entrance hall into the living room toward Bruce Andrews would have

marked him for a contented man. Except for his eyes.

Bruce didn't know how much of the turmoil showed there. But it didn't matter much, for his caller wouldn't care about the look in his eyes. A murderer was going to ring the buzzer soon and Bruce had decided to open the door and let murder be done.

Meanwhile, he divided his attention between the book in his hand and the black-faced alarm clock that ticked with maddening, raucous clicks in the silent room.

Since nine o'clock he had thought of a thousand things, but the mocking white hands now showed only ten after.

He turned back to his book about the prophet. Here is a man who knows, he told himself, probably the one man in the world who might understand me. The prophet would know, for instance, why I am waiting for death tonight, why I am going to let my murderer strike, even though I could be easily victorious in a struggle.

The lines from the little volume burned their power into his mind, giving him strength while he waited:

"And this also, though the words lie heavy upon your hearts: The murdered is not unaccountable for his own murder, and the robbed is not blameless in being robbed.

The righteous is not innocent of the deeds of the wicked—"

The radium dial showed nine thirty. The lattice door of the elevator clanged shut. For a minute Bruce thought— But it was only Miss Shay in 1023 coming home from the Bijou. The next time the elevator comes up—

Bruce felt that he had never fully appreciated the prophet before. A man has to live through a situation before he can apply a philosophy. The middle-aged doctor skimmed the pages again hastily, drinking in the truth while there was still time.

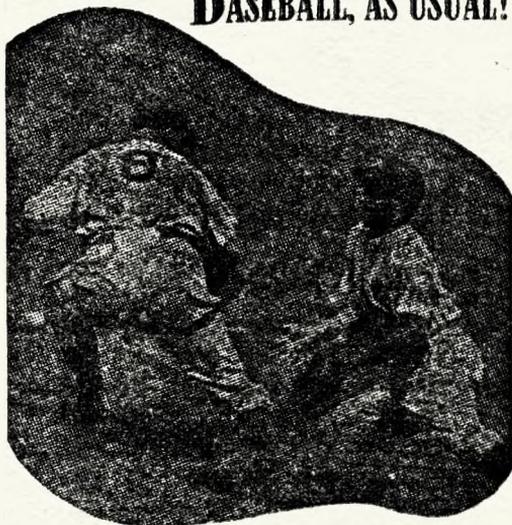
"You cannot separate the just from the unjust and the good from the wicked:

For they stand together before the face of the sun even as the black thread and the white are woven together."

The black thread and the white. Bruce looked at the black-faced clock with the white hands and numbers, knowing they would be woven together as his eyes got dull. He knew he would not be able to see or distinguish the black from the

DS—9W

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white, any more than the police would be able to separate the just from the unjust.

He would be the injured one, and yet he would not be innocent of the deed that was to be accomplished tonight. Bruce knew that the killer would bear a burden of guilt afterward that would not be entirely her own.

For he had injured Maxine ten years ago. He had left her the breath of life without the spirit of life. Although he had divorced her at once as any man would, he had tried for ten years to make up for his one act of violence.

He had kept her corpse-like person stimulated, but the one thing she required of him was dragging him down to an unendurable depth. A hell of conscience for the living, Bruce thought, is worse than a hell of fire for the dead.

He wondered what method of murder her demoniacal mind would invent.

At ten o'clock, a small woman heavily draped in black, pushed the button of the self-operating elevator. She looked as closely veiled as a nun, save that her dress was street-length and displayed nice legs and trim ankles. Most of her face was covered with a heavy black veil that fell from the brim of her small hat tight against her cheeks; the ends of the veiling were fastened across her chest.

She had pressed the downstairs buzzer marked "Bruce Andrews," and now her gloved finger was sending the car to the tenth floor.

The hall was deserted and Bruce was waiting with the door open.

"Will you come in?" he asked, standing aside to permit her entry to the small reception space.

She didn't answer, but went past him like a somnambulist and seated

herself stiffly in an uncomfortable Chippendale.

"I must have it, Bruce! You would have been wiser to have given it to Morris this afternoon."

Bruce sat down, mechanically replacing the book in his case.

"I have refused, Maxine. I told you that this afternoon over the phone. After all these years, I know I can't go on. The money would be all right—you deserve that, perhaps—but I can't contribute to your vice any longer."

Her voice was a mechanical thing. "You were the cause of that vice. What else can a woman like me do?"

Bruce brushed his forehead with a weary hand. Why didn't she get the thing over with? Beads of perspiration glistened on his upper lip.

"Don't keep reminding me of what I did to you! For ten years you've sent those bitter notes by Morris—"

"For ten years I've been half alive! I was a beautiful woman once. Look at me now." She stretched a hand up to the veiling.

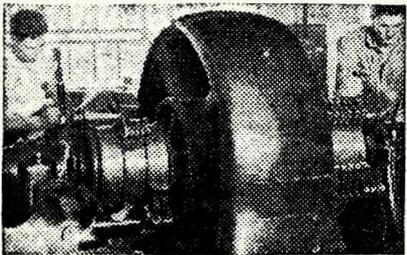
"My God, Maxine— Don't take off that hat! Ever since that night I found you and realized what kind of woman I married, I've seen my handiwork in nightmares. What can I do now?"

"Keep supplying me with the means of forgetfulness. I'm a woman with an acid-eaten face! What else can I live for except the vice that enables me to live?"

"I've said I can't do it any longer and I mean it. After all, my temper that night was just the outgrowth of broken ideals. I had loved you so blindly, it made me insane to find out—"

"It would have been kinder to kill me," said Maxine in that same flat, measured voice. "Instead, you buried me alive in the tombs of broken women."

MEN! Whether You are **16** or up to **50**
Serve Your Country Best... in a
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Bruce forced his eyes up to the part of her face that showed.

"If I don't supply your growing demands, then what, Maxine?"

"I've come for the regular supply that you wouldn't give to Morris. If you refuse, I'll kill you, Bruce."

She pulled a revolver from her purse to punctuate her threat, and there was a cold fury in her eyes.

"Money?" asked Bruce. "Will that do?"

"You haven't enough. You've been slipping as a doctor, you know."

"It's no wonder," said Bruce in a weary voice. "I've had to fight suspicion from the first. A doctor's supply isn't unlimited and has to be accounted for."

"You won't give it to me?"

Bruce's low laugh was almost triumphant.

"No. What's more, I've been sitting here waiting for you to kill me. You killed everything else I held sacred. Go ahead; finish the job!"

Maxine raised the gun, taking careful aim. Bruce put his hand up to his face—that's where the bullet would strike. She would have her little ironic moment. He couldn't bear to look at her murderous eyes.

Then the explosion came. Bruce heard the report and his nerves seemed to crack along his spine with the sound. For a second, two seconds, he held his upright posture; then dimly, he was aware of other sounds—a thud, a jarring of the floor, footsteps, a door closing. She was getting away in a hurry.

"Is this death, hearing my own body fall? God in heaven, do I have to rise up out of myself and look down at my own bloody corpse?"

Bloody! His surgeon's fingers were accustomed to the sticky feeling. His hand slid along the bridge of his nose as in a dream, and he opened his eyes when the nervous reaction passed. Speedily, his brain

clicked his eyes into focus. The bullet had not struck him!

But Maxine was lying on her back and blood was oozing from her chest. Already a glaze had come over her eyes, and her hat and veil had been knocked off in the fall. Her face—her entire face was exposed!

Bruce took one look at her, scarcely believing what he saw. Then he sprang into action.

First the door. The powder smell was heaviest in the hall. Maxine had not fired her gun. Then he remembered about the latch; he had reversed the buttons so the door would be open after Maxine killed him. Someone had followed her, had found an easy entrance, and had killed her before she could commit her murder. At least, that's the only way he could account for his miraculous escape from death. One look at Maxine's face had convinced him of his right to live, to rise again in his work. But the police mustn't know—not yet.

He went into the hall and met Miss Shay pulling on a robe as she came toward his door.

"Oh, Dr. Andrews, are you all right?"

"Of course. I thought you might be alarmed and I was just coming to reassure you. My gun went off accidentally."

Miss Shay, a good-natured soul with no family of her own, had a sincere concern for her neighbor's welfare.

"I'm so glad. I mean . . . well, doctor, you've seemed so—"

"I know what you mean. I've seemed depressed perhaps. But it's just overwork."

"But you've paced the floor nights; I've heard you. Do take a rest!"

Bruce turned her rotund middle-aged figure toward her own apartment.

"Now you march back home and

get some rest yourself! I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"Not at all. Good night, doctor."

This time, Bruce set the buttons back to their locking position on the door. Then he stripped to his underwear and set to work.

Maxine was dead, but he felt no sorrow, no guilt.

For ten years he had been haunted by the vision of the ugliness of her face where the acid from the test tube in his hand had struck her. For ten years she had bled him of money and morphine to pay for her mutilated face. A shifty rat named Morris had come once a month with a note from Maxine, demanding payment and reminding him of her ravaged cheek.

Now, even dead as she was, he could have slapped Maxine's face. The cheek was smooth—almost as beautiful as ever. There was no trace of the horrible injury he had inflicted!

Bruce knew that only Duker of Vienna could have done such a marvelous job of restoration, and Maxine had gone abroad the first year. For nine years, then, he had paid for an ugliness that no longer existed.

As he cut away her clothes and rolled them into a little bundle, he noticed something else.

He examined her arms and legs carefully and peered into her mouth. His disgust grew until he could scarcely bring himself to touch the body of the woman he once had desired so madly.

Maxine's skin had not been broken by a single hypodermic needle! A close examination showed that she was *not* an addict, and yet she had haunted him into supplying her with enough morphine to keep her in a constant state of elation for nine years!

Bruce began to realize what his

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weak method of dealing with this woman of his past had meant. Maxine must have built up a private little morphine cult to keep her rich. Now the victims would go wild with the supply cut off so suddenly. If many people were involved, suicide and frenzy might break loose in the city. Bruce cursed his own folly, but he knew his innate sense of responsibility and goodness would make him find those people and make reparation.

But the murder of Maxine must be kept a secret; the body must be disposed of.

Bruce gave little time to wondering who had killed Maxine. He carried her body to the bathtub, thinking only of a way to secrete it temporarily.

It was morning when Bruce finished his work. He had operated slowly, skillfully, and immaculately. His instruments were clean now and ready for the sterilizer at his office. The bathroom was scrubbed, and he was shaved and dressed for the long day ahead.

Sally Arthur, his receptionist, looked up with surprise as he entered.

"Going away, doctor?" she asked, noticing the large suitcase.

"Not far. Just through those two doors into my lab for some research that mustn't be interrupted. I'm going to bunk in there for a week or so. What's on the book?"

Sally had been with Dr. Bruce Andrews a long time and it hurt to watch his patient list dwindle.

"Nothing important, doctor. I can transfer these to Dr. Kane if you wish to be free. I always thought you ought to be a research man," she added loyally.

Bruce picked up his suitcase.

"Wipe up the appointments and take the rest of the day off, Sally. I'll call you when I'm ready to start

again. I need a fresh cadaver, but I'll call for it myself."

Not until the dismembered body of Maxine was sealed to pickle in large glass jars, did Bruce sit down. He was careful to leave the identifying marks on the body, and he explained this in the letter he wrote.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Inclosed in this envelope is the pellet I removed from the body of Maxine la Barge. She was killed in my apartment Thursday night, May 20th. Because the motive was indirectly caused by my own foolishness and directly by a grave crime probably committed by the deceased, it is necessary for me to conceal her body. Other people may be strongly affected by her death and I must find them before too many tragedies result. I have not destroyed the corpus delicti. I am preserving it for the police, but I must have a few days of freedom. Case 16 in my laboratory holds the evidence.

Bruce signed this letter and placed it in his coat pocket. He would carry it until his job was done, so that if anything should happen to him—

II.

Ned Ritzer, city detective, owed his life to the courage and skill of Dr. Bruce Andrews. Ned would never forget that day during prohibition— The gunman's car was still at the scene of the shooting when Dr. Andrews stumbled beside him in the gutter, pretending to have been hit by a stray bullet. His words had been like water in the desert to Ned. "I'm a doctor. Lie still and they'll leave." After it was all over, Ned's gratitude had been sincere. "You took a hell of a chance, doc. If there's ever anything I can do—"

Now prohibition was a forgotten nightmare and Ned was getting ready to turn in his badge for a G. I. haircut when Bruce came in.

"Remember me?" asked Bruce.



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"With my life!" cried Ned, advancing with outstretched hand. "I'm just clearing up here for the army. Hope there's something I can do for you before I go."

"There is, Ned. Something in confidence."

Ned swung the door shut with his foot.

"Let's have it, doc."

"Do you know a shifty little eel named Morris? Big nose, slit eyes, thin, and about five feet four?"

Ned laughed.

"Morris Greening! Sure! The whole department knows him. He's just a petty stoolie."

"Is he a dope fiend?"

"I think not. Just a dope, period."

Bruce's one theory took a nose dive, but Morris was the only link he had in the mysterious chain of Maxine's evil years.

"Know where I can find him?"

Ned drew little figures on his scratch pad.

"The last time I saw him he had a room at the Woodbine Hotel and there was a beautiful dame with him."

"Who was she?" asked Bruce, dreading the answer.

"Didn't know her from Eve. I just saw them pass in the lobby, if you can call that hole a lobby. I was there to get Pamela Wentworth, the missing socialite. She was hiding out there, down to her last thirty-five-dollar hat. After we got the gal home, her parents gave the department the slip on details. It must have cost papa a slice to hush the papers, but a paragraph got in anyway. You may have seen it."

Bruce remembered. Headlines over the disappearance of Pamela Wentworth, and later the anti-climax of an obscure filler giving amnesia as the excuse.

"Was Morris involved in Pamela's case?"

"No. He's lived at the Woodbine

pretty innocently. If you have something I can help you with, say the word. I'll turn out the whole force!"

"Sorry, Ned. That's just what I don't want. But can you describe the woman who lived with Morris?"

The next words of the detective gave such an accurate picture of Maxine that Bruce felt his stomach turn over.

"You say Morris is a stool pigeon. Would he kill?"

Ned sat up, his back stiff. But he didn't pry the doctor with questions and Bruce was grateful for that.

"I doubt it, but one can't always tell what people will kill."

"I know," said Bruce wearily. "It was a stupid question." He rose and held out his hand. "You've been a great help, Ned. Your information won't be misused. Good luck in the army."

"Thanks, doc. I'm checking out of here today, but I have a week free. Can't I help?"

"Save it for the Japs. I think I can take care of this yellow business on the home front. Drop me a card."

As Bruce walked down Twelfth Street through the noonday crowd, he wished he felt *sure* he could take care of the business at hand. He wished he knew more about Ned's methods or had a badge to back him up. He had nothing but two good fists, an angry heart, and a suspicion that Pamela Wentworth had not suffered from amnesia to back up his visit to Morris Greening.

He knocked gently on the door of the room the surly desk clerk had indicated.

A voice close to the panel answered.

"Maxine?"

"The doctor," said Bruce. "She sent me."

The door opened wide enough to admit him.

Morris stretched out a greedy hand and leered unpleasantly.

"Hand it over, doc. I don't know what Maxine has on you, but it must be something good to turn you into a delivery boy."

"I haven't anything to deliver, Morris."

The slit eyes became even narrower as Morris slipped his hands into his trouser pockets. Alarm seemed to grow in him.

"What have you done to Maxine? She went to you last night. Where is she?" he asked threateningly.

"In my laboratory—pickled."

"You're lying! She never drinks."

"You can have her back after you give me some information, Morris. Did you make an addict out of anyone else besides Pamela Wentworth?"

The hand of the small man moved out of his pocket so quickly that Bruce didn't even see the blackjack coming. The round lead filling crashed against his skull and a red-hot flame shot through his head.

His last conscious thought regretted the letter he had written. He had expected the police to get him—not Morris.

He had bungled the whole thing. Just when his life was beginning to mean something to him and to the unfortunate victims of Maxine and Morris, he felt everything slipping away from his grasp and he sank to oblivion with the letter in his inside pocket.

III.

Ned Ritzer was glad to get out of the office. The boys had given him a handsome watch in a little ceremony and it had been an ordeal. A hard-boiled dick can't break down and cry over a "thank-you" speech, but his throat had felt damn funny when he accepted the gift and tried

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to say "good-by" without sounding slushy. Yes, sir, he was glad that was over.

He headed straight for the Woodbine Hotel and took the back way up when he got there.

Morris Greening's door was ajar and Ned entered stealthily. But it was too late for action.

A straight chair was overturned and the cords of a tie-up job were still dangling from the legs and back of it. An envelope was propped up on the shabby bureau.

The printed stationery bore the return address of Bruce Andrews. Ned's eyes widened as he saw his own name scrawled across the face of the envelope.

The doc must have known a detective can't keep his nose out of things, especially where a friend's safety is concerned.

But his brow wrinkled as he read the black puzzle. There was nothing in the envelope except a strange confession addressed to: "To Whom It May Concern" and signed by Bruce Andrews.

Maxine! The doc had asked him to describe Morris Greening's woman. That must be why Bruce had asked whether or not Morris would kill!

Ned left the Woodbine with the letter in his wallet. He knew that Bruce expected him to turn the letter over to the police department, but the doc wanted some free time, too. Ned decided to do nothing until he heard from his friend. He went home to wait for a possible telephone call from the man who seemed to prefer to do his own mopping up.

While Ned was cooling his heels at home and chafing under the inactivity, Bruce was on his way to the Wentworth residence. The cab deposited him shortly after two o'clock. His arms and wrists were

sore from straining the bindings loose on Morris's chair and each step up to the front door reminded him of his aching head.

The butler was adamant and Bruce was in no mood for it.

"But I must see the Wentworths. It's very urgent."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"So am I," said Bruce, giving the man a shove and stepping inside.

Mrs. Wentworth appeared.

"Shall I call the police, madame?"

"No, Griggs. It's . . . it's Dr. Andrews, is it not?" asked Mrs. Wentworth, recognizing Bruce.

"I must talk with you and your daughter, Mrs. Wentworth."

The dignified woman turned pale.

"You may come in here, doctor. My daughter, however, is indisposed. What is it?"

Faced with the blunt question, Bruce didn't know how to begin. He felt sure even a detective wouldn't dare voice a mere suspicion to people like the Wentworths. But Pamela was his only hope of finding out who the addicts were. Morris Greening had probably turned his laboratory inside out by this time. If he discovered the pickling body of Maxine, he would be well on his way, God knows where. Maybe out of town, maybe to the police, being a stoolie. Bruce didn't know whether Morris had left the letter with him on purpose, or whether he hadn't seen it.

"Mrs. Wentworth, I must have your confidence. I'm very sure that your daughter can give me some information vital to the welfare of others like herself."

"I'm sorry, doctor. Pamela is ill. She's been suffering from amnesia."

Bruce made a scoffing noise. "Really, Mrs. Wentworth—amnesia! I'm a doctor, you know. Ethics don't permit gossip. You'll have to trust me a little, for Pamela's sake. I can help her."

Under the aristocratic reserve, Bruce could sense indecision, confusion, and deep suffering. He leaned forward and spoke gently.

"It happened against her will, could happen to anybody, you must understand that. It won't help Pamela to hush it up. She needs expert treatment—and *not* for amnesia!"

Mrs. Wentworth broke then, and it seemed to relieve her to stop pretending.

"How do you know about Pamela?"

"That's not important. May I see her now?"

"Impossible. Tomorrow perhaps."

Bruce made one last effort to gain admittance to Pamela's room.

"The other sufferers can't wait until tomorrow. Please!"

Mrs. Wentworth opened her mouth to speak, but the words never came.

The explosion of a gun from upstairs silenced whatever she would have said.

Bruce took the circular staircase in bounding leaps. Griggs was in the upper hall.

"Pamela's room?" panted Bruce.

"Here." The butler tried the door, but it didn't yield.

Bruce crashed his shoulder twice against the panel and splintered the wood. His one chance of getting information was beyond that door. If he should be to late!

Pamela sat on the edge of the bed. The revolver was still in her hand and blood spurted from a shoulder wound. She gave Bruce a disdainful look and tried to point the gun at him.

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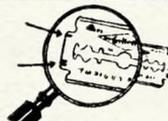
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you must stand there gaping—"

She lifted the gun to her temple just as Bruce sprang forward. He thrust back the gun hand, sending the bullet into the ceiling.

Pamela fainted before her mother came into the room.

"She's dead, isn't she, doctor?" asked Mrs. Wentworth in the strange calm voice that indicates a postponement of hysterics.

"No," said Bruce gruffly. "Get me hot water and bandages and call your family physician. This isn't even a hospital case."

"Please, Dr. Andrews, couldn't you be her physician? We must have sensible help."

"You mean you trust me?"

"I'd be very grateful," said Mrs. Wentworth humbly.

Bruce leaned over Pamela. Her wound was not half as serious as the hypo pricks on her arm. But with time, he could hope to cure that.

"Where did she get the gun? Surely you suspected her state."

"She slipped out last night. She may have got it then."

Bruce gazed sadly at the petulant young face on the pillow. A beautiful young face except that the marks of strain made it look weirdly old.

Griggs came in with a kettle of boiling water and Bruce sterilized his hands. Then he ordered the butler and Mrs. Wentworth out of the room as he bent over Pamela.

She was conscious and moaning now. Poor kid! She must have killed Maxine last night, saving his life, and this afternoon he had come just in time to save hers. Like ships that pass in the night on Maxine's sea of evil.

"Who are you?" muttered Pamela, staring up at him.

"Your friend. You've seen me before."

"No, I haven't. Your voice is familiar, though. It's like something I heard in a dream."

"It was a dream, Pamela. Just a

nightmare. Think of it that way. I'm going to help you get well and no one will ever know. I'm Dr. Andrews."

"Oh, my God!" said Pamela, shuddering violently. "It was your name on the mailbox!"

"Don't think of that. Maxine would have killed me if you had come a second later. A policeman would have done the same thing in your place."

The trembling was becoming acute. Bruce's only chance lay in getting a coherent answer.

"Who else, Pamela? Where can I find them?"

"At a place called the Bower. But it's too late for them—they get all the morphine they want, but Maxine wouldn't take me there until I got more money. She fed me on the dope, then starved me for it, threatening. I killed her for that."

Bruce wasn't interested in details, only in one thing, and the girl was in a state of mental torture and physical pain.

"The Bower, Pamela. Where is it? Tell me quickly."

"I think it's near Maplewood, but I'm not sure. Maxine said no one could find it."

Pamela's eyes grew heavy—the loss of blood was making her sleepy. Bruce let her drowse off. He picked up the revolver that Pamela had used and slipped it into his pocket.

Maplewood was a very small community set in hilly country. The land wasn't good for farming and most of the inhabitants used their acreage for sheep raising. The one brick building was a nursing home and Bruce could see the advantage of that. If the local sheriff stumbled into the Bower, he might think the girls were escaped patients.

Bruce stopped at the general store to speak to the proprietor who was bent over an account book. Any

man with a white shirt and stiff collar would arouse hostility here, and Bruce got a cold reception.

"I'm looking for a vacant house. Can you give me any information?"

"Aimin' to live in it?"

"Maybe."

"None fittin'."

"But some vacant?"

The lanky owner of the store adjusted the steel-rimmed glasses and looked at Bruce with amusement.

"Maybe the house five miles down the next cross road would suit you. Been vacant for years."

The fellow looked like a practical joker, the kind to delight in sending a stranger off to look at the end of the road. But Bruce had to take a chance.

The cab driver grumbled.

"This road's a helluva note for my tires!"

After four miles of the rutted road, Bruce stopped the driver with instructions to wait. Then, he took the remaining distance at a brisk walk.

He couldn't picture a house being in this forsaken spot. Weeds and scrub trees choked the ditches and only the jagged rock bed kept them from overrunning the road.

At the next hill, he ought to be able to see more of the surrounding country. If luck would only be with him, there might be a house.

But as he panted to the top of the incline, he forgot all about finding the Bower for the moment.

A girl wrapped in something like a white beachrobe sat on a rock, cradling her ankle and moaning.

She didn't look up as Bruce approached.

"Let me see," said the doctor, kneeling down and reaching for the ankle.

She sank back fearfully and in pain. Her yellow hair hung in braids and Bruce brushed it away from her face. The dirt on her face

and arms aroused his pity. He knew that the constant use of dope can give any human being a cat's aversion to water.

The girl shoved him away with desperate hands and tried to hobble up on the injured ankle. He caught her as her knees buckled with unbearable pain.

"Why did you leave the Bower?"

She seemed relieved.

"You know about the Bower?"

"Yes, Maxine sent me. Why did you leave?"

"I had to. The dead man frightened me."

Bruce carried her along the road. The dead man might be an illusion and it might be—well, the way things had been happening, it was probably a reality.

"You passed the trail," said the girl. "Take me back to the Bower, please. My ankle hurts. Will you take the dead man away?"

Bruce cut back and took the side trail, pressing his way through the low-hanging vines on the trees. The going was rough, with the girl a dead weight in his arms, but he felt near the end of his job.

The house was well-concealed and in good repair. But when they neared the door, a chorus of wails started that made his blood run cold. The sound was like a pack of hounds baying at the moon and then a clank of chains could be heard distinctly.

"Go on in," said the girl. "They think you're from Maplewood. We play ghost if anyone comes around. People think the house is haunted."

So that's what the practical joker had had in mind for him! For once Bruce was grateful for a man's strange sense of humor.

He had found the Bower! Now to confirm his theory of how Maxine had disposed of her dope, then the police. He wondered whether Ned had turned over the letter to the department.

He carried his pitiful burden to a couch and started to lower the girl when she screamed. Her body had partly obstructed his vision, but now he looked down and saw that the couch was already occupied by the dead body of Morris Greening.

The girl wriggled out of his arms to a standing position and hopped across the room to a chair, calling to her companions.

Bruce leaned close to Morris and the smell of bitter almonds was strong.

"Who poisoned him?" he asked, turning on the girl.

"How should I know?"

The other victims, all women, came in.

Bruce didn't want to talk to them. He just wanted to get them the hell out of there as fast as he could. He would gladly give his life and his reputation to see them tucked into a neat row of clean sanitarium beds.

He pushed his way out of the living room to inspect the house further. Maxine had taken every precaution. In the back he found a room that could be securely locked. Once in there, these sick women would be safe until some means could be found of moving them to a hospital for treatment and care.

Bruce used the phone booth of the Maplewood drugstore to call the police.

"I don't want to give my name," said Bruce, after he had given the location of the Bower, "but you'd better come. Incidentally, a Morris Greening is there—dead from a big dose of prussic acid."

Bruce hung up, not waiting for cross-questioning. He imagined that he would find a supply of prussic acid missing from his laboratory. Morris must have been scared into a blue funk at the sight of Maxine in assorted glass jars.

An hour later, Bruce was at home,

waiting for his arrest. Impatient to get it over with, he called Ned.

"I'm waiting for your official visit. Did you get the letter?"

"Yes. Don't leave your apartment; I'll be right over."

Bruce mixed a highball and drank thirstily.

In ten minutes, Ned arrived.

"Get everything wound up, doc?"

"All in good hands. The narcotic squad is about to rescue seven more socialites like Pamela who had to pay out plenty of cash for selling their souls to a demon."

"And Morris?"

"Suicide."

"And you?"

"Jail for murder. I killed Maxine with this gun." He turned over Pamela's revolver.

Ned didn't take the gun. "Hell!" he said. "I've killed six people."

"With authority to do so."

"In my language," said Ned, "a louse is a louse, no matter who pulls the trigger. And speaking of authority, I turned in my badge at noon today. When I got your letter, I'd been off the force for over an hour, so it's none of my official business."

The ex-detective took the letter out of his wallet, held a match to it, and dropped it into an ash tray.

A flicker of hope burned in Bruce's eyes. Those girls—Pamela—

"You really believe my wrong doesn't deserve jail?"

"Who the hell can always be sure of right and wrong? Take a chance! Good civilian doctors are scarce these days. So long."

At the door, Bruce slipped a small leather-bound book into Ned's pocket.

"Read this in camp if you have time. I think you'd like the prophet's chapter on crime and punishment, Ned."

THE END.

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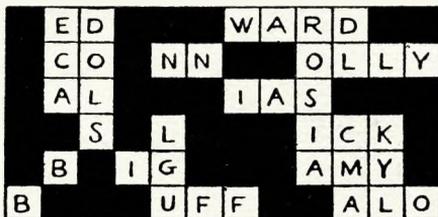
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ANSWERS

TRAINING YOUR POWERS OF DEDUCTION

1. Safe Blower
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BLACKOUTS



CRYPTOGRAM

He was dressed in a canvas jacket, and a pair of very stiff trousers that would have stood quite as well alone without any legs in them.

CHECKER BRAIN TEASER

Black moves his King from 23 to 18. The White King jumps from 14 to 23, and Black's next move is from 5 to 9, White jumping from 13 to 6, and the Black King on square 1 then jumping the four White checkers.

She SAID: I'm sorry I can't go with you tonight..



But She really THOUGHT: I'm ashamed to be seen out with such a SKINNY WEAKLING!



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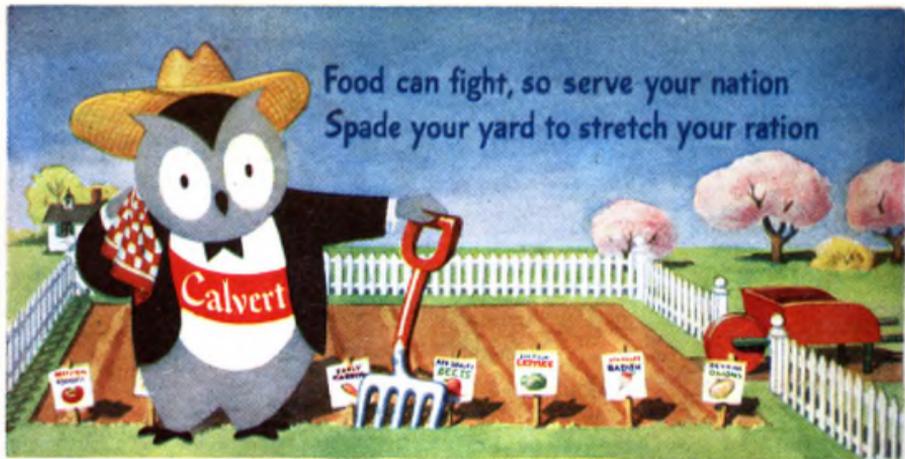
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