

**NOW**  
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**COMPLETE CRIME MYSTERY STORIES**

**POPULAR**

**AUG.**

# **DETECTIVE**

**A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION**



**TWO  
PARIS  
KNIGHTS**

**A Novelet of  
Mad Mystery  
By FREDERICK  
C. PAINTON**

**THE GOLDEN  
APPLE MURDERS**

**A Novelet of  
Espionage and Crime  
By WILLIAM L. HOPSON**

**DEATH  
FOR JEWELS**

**A Willie Klump Novelet  
By JOE ARCHIBALD**



# MAKE YOUR OWN RECORDS AT HOME

THINK OF IT! I JUST MADE THIS RECORD WITH THE NEW HOME RECORDO!

IT'S WONDERFUL - AND SO SIMPLE - PLEASE LET ME MAKE A RECORD.

YES, BOB, AND IT SURE SOUNDS LIKE YOUR VOICE!



With HOME RECORDO you can make a record of your singing, talking, reciting or instrument playing right in your own home, too! No longer need the high prices of recording machines or studio facilities prevent you or your family or friends from hearing their own voices or playing. No experience necessary. No "mike" fright to worry about. No complicated gadgets. In a jiffy you can set up HOME RECORDO, play or sing or talk, and immediately you have a record which you and your friends can hear as often as you wish.

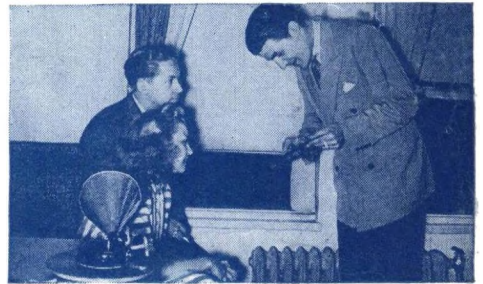
## CHARLIE BARNET

and other famous orchestra leaders use

HOME RECORDO

## YOU TOO CAN MAKE RECORDS RIGHT IN YOUR OWN HOME

Everything is included. Nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay. You get complete HOME RECORDING UNIT, which includes special recording needle, playing needles, 6 two-sided unbreakable records. Also spiral feeding attachment and combination recording and playback unit suitable for recording a skit, voice, instrument or radio broadcast. ADDITIONAL, 2-SIDED BLANK RECORDS COST ONLY 75c per dozen.



Charlie Barnet in his private hotel suite checking a duet by Judy Ellington and Larry Taylor, Vocalists in his band.



Judy Ellington heard in Charlie Barnet's Band making a Home Recordo record for her personal album.

## HAVE RECORDING PARTIES

You'll get a real thrill out of HOME RECORDING. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice or playing right from a record. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and become the life of the party. Great to help train your voice and to cultivate speech. Nothing to practice... you start recording at once... everything necessary included. Nothing else to buy. Just sing, speak or play and HOME RECORDO unit, which operates on your electric or hand-winding type phonograph, will do the recording on special blank records we furnish. You can immediately play the records back as often as you wish. Make your HOME MOVIE a talking picture with Home Recordo. Simply make the record while filming and play back while showing.

**SEND NO MONEY! HURRY COUPON! START RECORDING AT ONCE!**

HOME RECORDING CO.  
STUDIO KL, 11 WEST 17TH ST.  
New York, N. Y.

Send entire HOME RECORDING OUTFIT (including 6 two-sided records) described above, by return mail. I will pay postman \$2.98, plus postage, on arrival. (Send cash or money order now for \$3.00 and save postage.)

Send ..... doz. additional blank records at \$1.75 per dozen.

Name .....

Address .....

City and State.....

Note: Canadian and Foreign \$3.50 cash with order.

Operates on Your A.C. or D.C. Electric Phonographs, Record Players, Radio-Phono Combinations, or Hand Winding Phonographs and Portables

**COMPLETE OUTFIT \$2.98**

INCLUDING SIX TWO-SIDED  
BLANK RECORDS — ONLY  
**HOME RECORDING CO.**

Studio KL

11 West 17th STREET.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

# Accountancy Home-Study

## made interesting and practical thru problem method

**Y**OU know as well as we do that Accountancy fits many men for positions that pay three and five and ten thousand dollars a year—gives many other men unusual opportunity to start a profitable growing business of their own.

You probably realize also that—because of the new state and federal legislation—the accounting profession faces now and for the next few years the greatest opportunity it has ever had.

The only question is—just how practical is it for you to train yourself adequately in Accountancy through home study?

And the answer lies in the LaSalle Problem Method.

For this modern plan of training not only makes Accountancy study at home thoroughly practical but makes it interesting as well.

And here's how:

### You Learn by Doing

Suppose it were your privilege every day to sit in conference with the auditor of your company or the head of a successful accounting firm. Suppose every day he were to lay before you in systematic order the various problems he is compelled to solve, and were to explain to you the principles by which he solves them. Suppose that one by one you were to work those problems out—returning to him every day for counsel and assistance—

Granted that privilege, surely your advancement would be faster by far than that of the man who is compelled to pick up his knowledge by study of theory alone.

Under the LaSalle Problem Method you pursue, to all intents and purposes, that identical plan. You advance by solving problems.

Only—instead of having at your command the counsel of a single individual—one accountant—you have back of you the organized experience of a great busi-

ness training institution, the authoritative findings of scores of able accounting specialists, the actual procedure of the most successful accountants.

Thus—instead of fumbling and blundering—you are coached in the solving of the very problems you must face in the higher accounting positions or in an accounting practice of your own. Step by step, you work them out for yourself—until, at the end of your training, you have the kind of ability and experience for which business is willing and glad to pay real money—just as it was glad to pay these men.

### Five Men Who Tested and Proved It for You

For instance, there was the man who started Accountancy training with us in 1916. After a short period of study, he took a position as book-keeper for a year, and then became accountant for a leading automobile manufacturer—with two bookkeepers under him. He became auditor of one of the foremost banks in his state with a salary 325 percent larger than when he started training.

He wrote, "My training is the best investment I've ever made, showing a cash value running into five figures."

And the young clerk, earning \$75 a month eleven years ago and later getting many times that as general auditor for an outstanding, nation-wide organization. Within six months after he began our training, he was earning \$125 a

month and within four years, he was earning \$250.

Do you wonder that he wrote, "While LaSalle ads once seemed like fairy tales to me, now I know from personal experience that they are true."

Or let us tell you about two men—one a stenographer and the other a retail clerk—neither of whom knew more than the simplest elements of bookkeeping. One became the comptroller and the other the assistant comptroller of a large company.

"LaSalle training in Higher Accountancy," wrote both, "was the important factor in our rapid climb."

And if you are thinking about the C. P. A. degree and a public accounting business of your own, read about the pharmacist who was earning \$30 a week some years ago when a LaSalle registrar secured his enrollment for Accountancy training. Eight months later he left the drug store to take a bookkeeping job at \$20 a week—less money but larger opportunity. Three years later he passed the C.P.A. examination and a year later yet he was earning \$5,000 a year. Now he has his own highly successful public accounting firm for which he says, "My LaSalle training has been largely responsible."

### One-Tenth of All C. P. A.'s Are LaSalle Trained

If you want still more proof, remember that over 1800 C.P.A.'s—approximately one-tenth of all those in the United States who have ever passed the difficult examination for this coveted degree—are LaSalle alumni.

And knowing these facts, ask yourself if there can be any further question about the practicability of this training for you—ask rather if the real question is not about the size of your own ambition and the quality of your determination.

For Accountancy is no magic wand for the lazy or the fearful or the quitter—it offers success only to the alert adult who has the courage to face the facts and the will to carry on till the job is done.

If you are that individual, the coupon below, filled out and mailed, will bring you free the information that may open up to you the future of which you have dreamed—ability and income and success.

Is it not worth getting that information?



Send for This Book

\*Names and addresses given on request.

## LaSalle Extension University

### A Correspondence Institution

4101 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 8329-HR, Chicago, Ill.  
Please send me, free of all cost or obligation, your 48-page, illustrated book "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays," telling about the profession of accountancy and your training for success in that field.

Name.....  
Address..... City.....  
Position..... Age.....



# POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XIX, No. 2

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August, 1940



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By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

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*Where Readers and the Editor Meet*

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published bi-monthly by BETTER PUBLICATIONS, INC., at 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscriptions yearly, \$6.00; single copies, \$1.00. Foreign and Canadian, postage extra. Re-entered as second class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1940, by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.





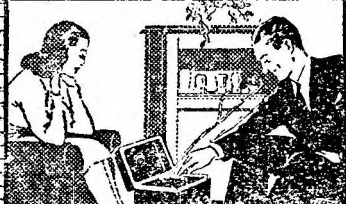
# I Jumped My Pay from \$18 to \$50 a Week!

*Here's how I did it*

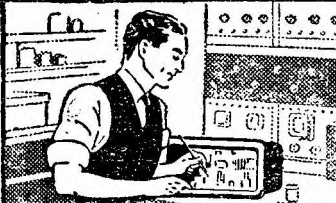
by S. J. E.  
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)



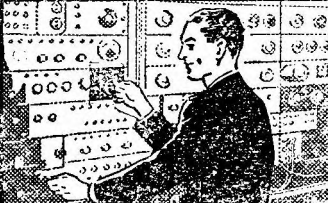
"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio, and started training at home for them."



"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make \$4 to \$10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N. R. I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWO as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSTU. I am also connected with Television Station WJNK."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."



## Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

J. E. SMITH,  
President  
National Radio  
Institute Estab-  
lished 25 years

NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities

for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open many good jobs soon.

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

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-00 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALI-WAVE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to

help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read any money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President,  
Dept. OH09, National Radio Institute,  
Washington, D. C.

### MAIL NOW - Get 64 page book FREE



J. E. Smith, President, Dept. OH09,  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....  
Address .....  
City ..... State.....

# A Money-Making Opportunity for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR  
AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE  
A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly  
"Sent Out" by Business Men  
Now Done by Themselves  
at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle exclusive agency for one of the most unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—  
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings  
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays out \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays out representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing, money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of  
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has  
Nothing to Do With  
House to House Convassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

## EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office, counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$3 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out, you can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a novelty but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wait if you wish. But do it now. *Admiral*

F. E. ARMSTRONG, President  
Dept. 4047H, Mobile, Ala.

**RUSH FOR EXCLUSIVE  
TERRITORY PROPOSITION**

F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4047H, Mobile, Ala.  
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_



**\$6.85**  
to  
**\$35.00**

*Choose*  
**FOR YOURSELF  
FALSE TEETH**

AT  
*Amazingly Low Prices*  
—BY MAIL—  
**SEND NO MONEY**

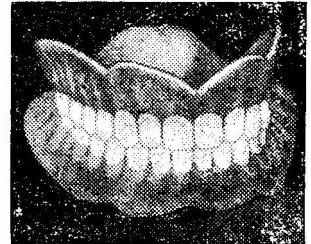


Posed by a Professional Model

THE TESTIMONIAL LETTERS WE PUBLISH are communications that customers have sent to us without solicitation and without pay. We have large numbers of such missives. We never print anyone's letter without previous consent. We believe that each of our customers who has written to us enthusiastically endorsing our dental plates is sincere. We do not, however, imitate or represent that you will receive the same results in any instance that those customers describe. What is important to you is that when you pay for our teeth, WE GUARANTEE IF YOU ARE NOT 100% SATISFIED IN EVERY RESPECT WITH THE TEETH WE WILL MAKE FOR YOU. AFTER YOU HAVE WORN THEM AS LONG AS 60 DAYS, WE WILL GLADLY REFUND TO YOU EVERY CENT YOU HAVE PAID US FOR THEM.

**MADE - TO - MEASURE  
DENTAL PLATES DIRECT  
FROM OUR LABORATORY TO YOU!**

We make to measure for you **individually**—BY MAIL—Dental Plates for men and women— from an impression of your own mouth taken by you at your home. We have thousands of customers all over the country wearing teeth we made by mail at sensible prices.



**HAND-CARVED SET**

**BEFORE**

**AFTER**

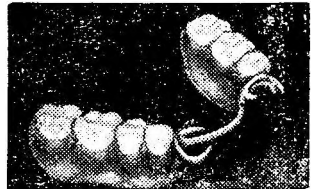


**Mrs. Elsie Boland of Norton, Kansas, writes:**

"Enclosed find two pictures. One shows how I looked before I got my teeth; the other one afterwards. Your teeth are certainly beautiful. I have not had mine out since the day I got them, except to clean them."

**AT ROCK-BOTTOM  
PRICES**

If you find out what others have paid for theirs, you will be astounded when you see how little ours will cost you! By reading our catalog, you will learn how to save half or more on dental plates for yourself. Monthly payments possible.



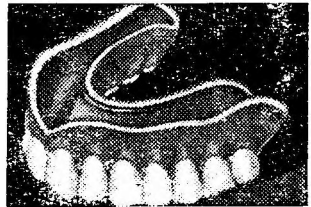
**PARTIAL**

**ON 60 DAYS' TRIAL**

Make us prove every word we say. Wear our teeth on trial for as long as 60 days. Then, if you are not perfectly satisfied with them, they will not cost you a cent.

**WITH MONEY-BACK  
GUARANTEE OF  
SATISFACTION**

We take this risk. We guarantee that if you are not completely satisfied with the teeth we make for you, then any time within 60 days we will immediately refund every cent you have paid us for them. We take your word. You are the judge.



**ROOFLESS**

**HIGH-GRADE MATERIAL AND EXPERT  
WORKMANSHIP**

TRY our practically unbreakable ROOFLESS, PARTIAL and TRANSLUCENT plates. Our dentures are set with pearly-white, genuine, porcelain teeth; constructed from high-grade materials, with expert workmanship, to give long service. We make all styles of plates. A dentist who has had many years' experience in making dental plates supervises the making of each plate. . . .



**Harry Willoughby, Adairville, Kentucky, writes:**

"I have received my teeth and am PROUD OF THEM."



**Mrs. Geo. G. Conklin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes:**

"I received my set of teeth. I wear them day and night. I have good reason to be well pleased with them. Thank you very much."

**FREE**

IMPRESSION MATERIAL, Catalog with our new low prices and information. Don't put this off. Do it TODAY! CLIP COUPON OR WRITE. A one cent postcard with name and address plainly written is all that is necessary.

→ We also Repair or Reproduce Old Plates—48-hour Service

**UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY**

Dr. Ernest French, Supervisor of Laboratory  
1555 Milwaukee Ave., Dept. 8-82, Chicago, Ill.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW

**FREE** UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY

Dept. 8-82, 1555 Milwaukee Ave., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

Send, without obligation, your FREE impression material, catalog, and information.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

(Print Clearly)



**ACT NOW!**  
ON THIS BARGAIN OFFER.

**THIS BEAUTIFUL DESK FOR ONLY \$1.00**

**THE COMBINATION FOR AS LITTLE AS 10c A DAY**  
How easy it is to pay for this combination. Just imagine! A small good will deposit and terms as low as 10c a day to get this combination at once. You will never miss 10c a day. Become immediately the possessor of this combination. You assume no obligation by sending the coupon.

WITH ANY

**REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER**

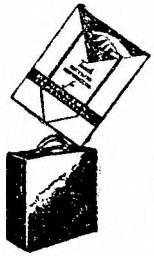
A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green—trimmed in black and silver—made of sturdy fibre board—now available for only one dollar (\$1.00) to purchasers of a Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble. It will hold six hundred (600) pounds. This combination gives you a miniature office at home. Mail the coupon today.

**THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU LEARN TYPING FREE**

To help you even further, you get Free with this special offer a 24-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent Free while this offer holds.

**SPECIAL CARRYING CASE**

The Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a beautiful carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood bound with a special Dupont Fabric.



**SPECIFICATIONS**

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Deluxe Portable—standard 4-row keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key; two color ribbon and automatic reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 8.2" wide, black key cards and white letters, rubber cushioned feet.

**MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

The Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable Typewriter is sold on a trial basis with a money-back guarantee. If, after ten days trial, you are not entirely satisfied, we will take it back, paying all shipping charges and refunding your good will deposit at once. You take no risk.

**SEND COUPON NOW!**

Remington Rand Inc. Dept. 169-8  
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable, including Carrying Case and Free Typing Booklet, for as little as 10c a day. Send Catalogue.

Name.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....



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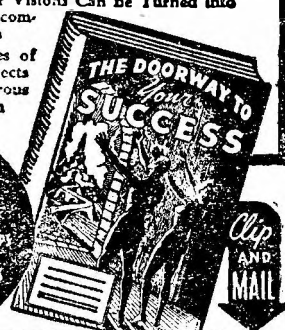
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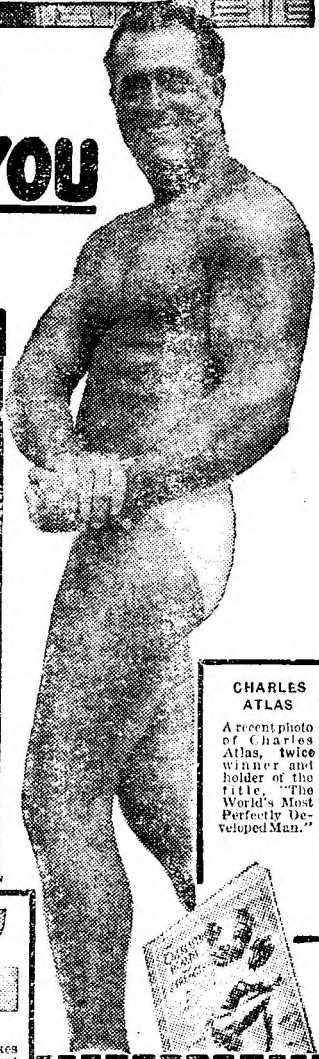




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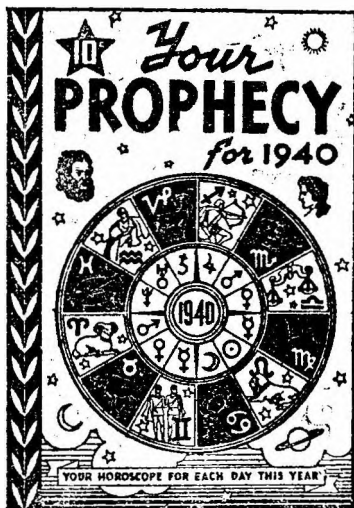
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Pete swung on the jaw of the first waiter who presented himself



# TWO PARIS KNIGHTS

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

*Author of "Murder Advertises," "Pawns of Murder," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### BROKE—AS USUAL

**A**T MIDNIGHT of a pleasant spring evening two tanned young men walked furtively along the Rue Pigalle and stopped near the entrance of *Le Perroquet*, one of the gayer night clubs of Paris. From within came the rhythmic

pound of tangos and the cheerful happy sounds of dancers. Along the curb the taxi drivers loafed contentedly, and up and down this famous Parisian street with its green and red, yellow and blue Neon lights, strolled gay revellers. In short, here was Gay Paree, made for fun and frolic.

But neither of these furtive young

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**A COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVELET**

---



men was in a gay, festive mood, nor out for a frolic.

The tall, broad-shouldered youth with the blue eyes took a hasty glance inside *Le Perroquet*, and then gazed apprehensively at the blue-caped *agent de police* twirling his baton on the street corner. This good-looking young man wore a wrinkled broad-cloth tuxedo and a wrinkled white cummerbund, but his shirt was spotless.

His companion was much shorter, broader and stockier, possessed of a wide billiken face ornamented by a broken nose and an amazing number of freckles. He had a shock of brick-red hair that stuck straight up *en brosse*, like the stubbles of a toothbrush.

This one turned his snub nose toward the night club entrance and sniffed agonizingly. From within, above the pleasant *pop* of champagne corks, sounded the definite clink of knives and forks cutting on plates. To his distended nostrils wafted the succulent odors of broiled lamb chops, the exciting smell of thick, rich steaks, and the tantalizing aroma of fragrant coffee. He licked his lips, swallowed convulsively, and with a sad sigh turned away.

"Boy," he moaned, "I could eat my way through a restaurant, door to door."

**I**N TURNING his nose away, however, he sniffed the appetizing aroma of fresh-baked bread, piled high with *salami* and garlic, which the taxicab drivers were eating in their off hour, washing down the food with long gulps at leathern bottles of *pinard*, red wine.

The freckle-faced youth's expression grew desperate.

"Pete," he cried to his blond companion. "I ain't et since day before yesterday. I've got to eat. People expect me to. It's a swell custom."

"It's a nice habit, Clicker," admitted Peter F. Vallon good-naturedly, "and if you'll just hush your plaintive cries for a half hour, I'll stuff you full of sirloin steak to your tonsils."

"With mashed potatoes and gravy?" cried Ernest "Clicker" Dunn

eagerly. Then he sighed heavily. "That's what you said in England, and we got ten days in the London can."

"Well," said Pete Vallon, "you ate there, didn't you?"

"Not enough to keep my belt tight."

"Hush and smile," grinned Pete Vallon cheerfully. "This stunt will feed us both—a real meal."

Clicker Dunn hushed, but he did not smile nor look cheerful. He had never missed a meal in his life until Peter F. Vallon had inveigled him into this cockeyed trip around the world. At the time it had seemed a swell idea. Peter F. Vallon, star reporter of the *New York Sphere*, of which Clicker was tops photographer, was a restless, ambitious young man. One day he came to Clicker burning with a great idea.

"You and I," he cried excitedly, "we start at City Hall, bid farewell by Mayor LaGuardia. We start pen-niless, recorded by witnesses. All we carry is the clothes we wear, one suitcase, your camera and my notebooks and pencils. We swear to go around the world and return to that spot within one year, and in that time we can't beg, borrow or steal a penny. We can't send home for money. We can't bum a ride. We have to work and earn every penny of the cost of the trip."

Clicker Dunn had got enough shiners from people who didn't want their pictures in the paper, and had had enough cameras broken over his skull to be slightly gloomy in disposition.

"Why?" he said dourly.

"We write a book of our adventures," cried Pete enthusiastically. "You take the pictures to illustrate the story, and I write the copy. Why it'll be a world-beater, it'll make us famous. We'll call it, 'Around the World Busted, or You Can't Keep a Couple of Good Guys Down'."

Clicker surveyed the idea.

"But listen, Pete, we might get in some awful jams," he said.

"So what?" grinned Pete. "They only make the book better. The bigger the adventures, the less we'll have to lie."

"Well," said Clicker, "I'll go and I hope it's a lesson to me."

They had come to England playing chambermaid to a lot of cows on a cattleboat. They had walked practically all the way from Liverpool to London. They had lived on fish and chips so long that Clicker felt he was sprouting gills. But they had eaten, they had worked. Compared to France, England had been easy. Here in Paris, not knowing the language and unable to get a work permit from the French Government, they had got no work. They had pawned clothes, camera, pencils.

From three meals a day they cut to two, then one. Occasionally Pete sold a feature to the Paris edition of the New York *Herald-Tribune*. But it was not enough.

Worse, and more dangerous, they had not enough money to leave Paris for Rome, Italy, the next stop. Their book contract depended on completing the round-the-world trip in one year. If they were to stay on schedule, then they should have been in Italy a fortnight back. They were dangerously late now. And they were broke, hungry, desperate.

ONCE Clicker had timidly suggested wiring for money or borrowing five bucks.

Pete's blond hair had bristled.

"Not a thin dime," he had shouted.

"Do you want people to think we're quitters? I'll walk to Rome on an empty stomach first."

"Well," groaned Clicker, "walk on mine. You'll never find an emptier stomach."

So now, driven into a corner, Pete had come up with some harebrained scheme to get the price of a meal and a pair of third-class tickets to Rome.

Clicker emerged from his sad contemplation. "How you gonna get a feed out of this night club?" he asked plaintively.

"I'm going to dance," said Pete, nodding for emphasis.

Used as he was to Pete Vallon's mad ideas, this made even Clicker gasp.

"Dance? Moses on the Mount, Pete, you can't dance."

Pete nodded grimly. "But I'm going to—somehow."

"But why?" cried Clicker.

"Listen," said Pete. "In France there is one law that is strictly enforced. If a gigolo dances with your dame you have to pay him—or go to jail."

"You gonna play being a gigolo?"

"Yes!"

"But how can you collect when you can't dance?"

"Easy," grinned Pete. "I'll pick out a couple of Americans and put on my best busted accent. If she trips over me I'll say it's a new step—the Yankee Toddle or something—and blame it on her that we don't dance good."

"What if you're so lousy they won't pay?"

"That's the point," said Pete. "No matter how lousy I am, the guy has to pay. That's the law. The only catch is that the guy might find out I'm not a regular gigolo in the place. But he won't. Americans in Paris want to avoid trouble."

"Well," Clicker said, "if we do wind up in the can, they have to feed you."

"Hush," said Pete, peering inside. "There's a couple—the big tall guy and the luscious blonde. You slide in and wait until I give you the sign, then come over and help me in the get-away."

Clicker sighed. "It's cockeyed, but what have I to lose but my life?"

He followed Pete Vallon into the night club. . . .

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE BEGINS AT MIDNIGHT



THE table to which Pete Vallon had directed Clicker Dunn's gaze, the big, broad man, Harry Craig, lit a cigarette and very thoughtfully blew out the match with a lungful of smoke.

"You're gorgeous tonight, Sally," he

said. "I believe I still love you."

She had red-gold hair, deep violet eyes, and she had a soft crimson

mouth and that breathless, exciting appeal called allure. If you talked to her, danced with her, looked at her, an electric shock went from her to you and dazzled you. Even the hard, bitter disillusionment in her big eyes, even the fact that she was now half drunk, didn't detract from her loveliness.

She shook her head, her red lips twisted satirically.

"That's what all men say," she said. "You have a slogan, 'Love 'em and leave 'em'."

She laughed softly. "Not me. No man will ever hurt me again the way Ronald did. Me, I'm out for the money. Give me my hundred thousand and you can keep your love."

Harry Craig was a good-looking man, attractive, save for the thin quality of his hard gray eyes.

"You'll get your money after Ronald is committed," he said. "And, by the way, the lunacy commission will arrive tomorrow for the final examination. You'll testify, of course."

She looked at him broodingly, her stare withdrawn.

"I hate to do it," she said, shaking her head.

"He's mad, getting dangerously so."

"I know," she nodded. "And I don't love him now—I couldn't, knowing what I do. But still I hate to say outright that he's insane."

"But you will," Craig said thinly.

She shrugged. "Yes, as long as you'll settle my suit out of court and . . ." She broke off sharply at a warning look from Craig.

A tall, tanned young man loomed over Sally and bowed gracefully from the hips.

"Eef Madame would 'onor me wit' these dance, pliz?" He smiled, showing a mouthful of even white teeth.

Sally surveyed his clean-cut appearance and noted the shabby dinner jacket. She felt sorry for him.

"He looks something like Ronald, doesn't he?" she said.

Craig frowned.

"Send him away."

She shook her head, her lovely eyes brightening.

"I've never danced with a gigolo—

they say they're wonderful—and it might be fun."

With things going well, Craig was not so impatient, irritable and ruthless tonight. He shrugged.

"You won't find it worth a hundred francs," he grinned.

Sally stood up, raised slim, alabaster arms, and slid warmly into Peter F. Vallon's waiting arms. She placed her cheek against Pete's, her red-gold hair nestled against his neck. Her red lips parted in an entrancing slow smile.

"All right, Good-looking," she murmured softly, "show me something."

For the first time since he had thought up this plan of raising a hundred francs, Pete Vallon's heart sank. Usually these night clubs, with their tiny postage stamps of parquet floors, are so crowded that dancing is a pretense in which a couple merely stand and take mincing steps. Pete had depended on that to cover his terpsichorean inadequacies.

But this floor, for some reason, was practically empty. He could, he told himself ruefully, have gone skiing and not hit a thing.

THE orchestra, being European, had spent most of the night playing La Congas, rumbas and tangos, these being the slower, more graceful dances to which Europeans are addicted. In such slow rhythmic steps Pete could make a pretense of dancing, and if he didn't catch the time he could say that he was trying a new step.

But now, to his utter horror, the orchestra, as if knowing they were American, began to give off hot licks and give a tune known as The Watchmaker's Daughter Was on Watch. Within Pete's arms this fragrant lovely girl began to twist and throb to the rhythm.

"Come on, Ronny," she said dreamily, "get hot and give."

Somehow the combination of the maddening pulsation of the drums and this gorgeous girl made Pete's heart hammer wildly, and he began to shake and move. And a miracle happened. For the first ten steps he whisked her across the floor in mag-



nificent style. He could not know it, of course, but she was a marvelous dancer, and as he turned and stepped and hopped, her slim body moved with his, so that they were as one. Pete became ecstatic. This was easy, all you did was keep time to that drum.

Even Sally murmured against his cheek:

"Say, Handsome, you're a real hopping alligator."

"Madame ees won'nerful," said Pete.

He was flushed, grinning, and on one semi-high jump of a hop he looked past Sally's golden head and smiled triumphantly at an astounded Clicker Dunn.

Clicker gulped.

"It can't be," he muttered. "The guy *can't* dance."

His confidence fully restored, Pete clutched the lovely girl closer and essayed a couple of mad whirls. The first two went off swell because she was instinctively sensing his every change of pace and meeting it.

But the third turn Pete ended with an unexpected hop. She had expected a hip—and there was disaster.

Pete suddenly found himself walking right up her slim legs like a line-man up a telephone pole. He climbed her ankles with one shoe, and he walked up her dress with the other.

Sally cried out in agony.

And at the same moment her lovely chartreuse dress, jerked from below, gave away in two places. It was one of the new dresses held up by magic and bridge-engineering without any straps. But it had never been constructed for such an emergency, so it yielded at the bosom and it gave way at the waist line in the rear.

Sally Hunter, there in the center of the dance floor, felt a cold draft above and in the rear. She clutched at her bosom.

"Get behind me, for heaven's sake," she gasped, "and hold it up."

Pete, in horror, perceived that so wild had been his gyrations that all others had deserted the floor to witness a solo by these two mad Americans. He seized the torn chartreuse gown and tried not to see the contorted faces, nor hear the laughter.

The dress slid from his grasp. In a trice he whipped off his coat and held it around Sally's thighs.

In prison lockstep they left the floor. Sally's face was crimson, furious, and she was shaking.

Pete was so red his neck was swollen against his collar.

In the rear of the night club Clicker groaned.

"Well, I know cockeyed well that he couldn't dance," he muttered.

Harry Craig had risen and was watching Sally's disheveled arrival with cool detachment. She sank down, trembling.

"Put on your coat, you idiot!" she said to Pete.

Pete put on his coat. The orchestra, with true Gallic sympathy and gallantry, had struck up a fast fox trot to cover the situation. The manager was arriving with Sally's mink wrap.

Harry Craig looked at Pete.

"Whoever told you that you knew how to dance?" he growled.

PETE thought frantically. To admit blame was to lose the hundred francs they so desperately needed. And if he bluffed it out there was still a chance of getting away with it. He drew himself up haughtily.

"I was dancing zee new American dance, Yankee Toddle," he said coldly. "I am sorree if Madame she do not know cet."

Sally, subsiding inside the mink coat, flamed anew.

"My Lord, are you trying to tell me I can't dance?"

Pete shrugged and gave Clicker the emergency signal.

"I would not say anyzing to Madame about her dancing," he rejoined. "I merely ask for my 'ondred francs, and I go and I am verree sorree."

"A hundred francs," repeated Harry Craig. "You just ruined a gown that cost one hundred and fifty dollars."

"To me zat is nossing," said Pete. "I dance weeth Madame. Eet ces one 'ondred francs. If she ees out of practice dancing, can I be blamed?"

"Ooh!" gasped Sally and then suddenly the whole thing struck her risibilities and she laughed. "Once Hoi-

lywood paid me fifteen hundred a week, thinking I could."

Pete's eyes widened and he smothered a groan. My God, he would have to pick a professional danseuse for this jam. But he mustered his courage.

"Madame, I do not care who you are. I am owed one 'ondred francs. Please to 'ave your 'usband pay."

"He's not my husband."

"Not a penny," said Craig angrily.

"If you do not pay," frowned Pete, "you weel go to the—the jailhouse."

The moment he spoke, he knew he had made a mistake. Harry Craig's thin, narrow eyes widened. Sally's violet orbs flashed. Clicker groaned. Then Sally snatched at Pete's coat, pulled it open. On the edge of the inside pocket was the maker's label, "Brooks Brothers, New York."

"Why!" cried Sally, "you're no gigolo. You're an American!"

"Say," said Harry Craig, "what is this?"

He turned to the manager. "Does this man work for you as a professional dancer?"

The manager was pale with fury that anything like this should have happened.

"*M'sieur*," he cried thickly, "these one I 'ave nevair seen before in all my life, *non*. But contain yourself, *M'sieur* and *Madame*, *soyez tranquille*. I weel feex all as all was nevair feexed before."

With that, he whistled shrilly, one long blast.

A flying wedge of waiters came out of nowhere and plunged at Peter F. Vallon. The manager whistled again, twice, and the *agent de police* stopped twirling his baton and ran furiously to *Le Perroquet*.

As the battalion of waiters bore down on him, Pete yelled, "Clicker," and braced himself. Clicker hurdled two tables to stand beside him, fists clenched. But Pete didn't want to fight.

A fight meant police, police meant jail, and jail meant weeks, perhaps, of incarceration and utter failure to get around the world in one year as had been pledged. No, Pete wished only to escape. In the split-second

before the waiters hit him he saw the flapping kitchen door. There, might be escape.

"The kitchen door," he panted. "Let's go."

Pete swung from the hip on the jaw of the first waiter who presented himself.

Clicker might be dour but as a rough-and-tumble fighter he had few equals. He hit one waiter on the jaw and the said waiter lit on the back of his neck.

They were going good, fighting back to back, and were nearly to the kitchen door when the chef with a meat cleaver came out roaring and brandishing his horrible weapon. And the *agent de police* lifted his baton and swung at Clicker's head. Clicker dodged but not quite enough. He went down. Pete straddled his prostrate body to keep him from further harm. His face was white and grim.

"All right," he said, "we give up."

The *gendarme* collared him. "*La boite* for you, and you will stay there one long time."

### CHAPTER III PROPOSITIONED



SALLY HUNTER had watched this unequal struggle with shifting emotions. And now when the *agent de police* prepared to take his prisoners out she cried impulsively:

"Oh, Harry, they are Americans. We can't let them go to

a French jail."

"I can," said Craig dryly. "Come on, let's get out of here."

"No, please, Harry," she said. "There must have been a reason for their actions."

She turned to Pete. "Why did you pretend you could dance and try to get money out of us?"

Long ago Pete and Clicker had made their decision as to what kind of a story they would tell if they ever fell afoul of the law. They wanted no publicity in New York headed:

"Reporter and Photographer Imprisoned Abroad."

So Pete explained. "We're two college boys working our way around the world on a bet." He enlarged on this, explaining how they must neither beg, borrow or steal. If we aren't in Rome by Tuesday," he concluded, "we'll lose all the way around and that hundred francs would have taken us a long way third-class."

Sally listened interestedly.

"There, Harry," she said when Pete had finished, "you see?"

Harry Craig did not reply to her. Instead he addressed Pete.

"If you went to Yale then you knew Ronald Baird."

"Ronald Baird?" repeated Pete. "You mean the Hermit of Park Avenue?"

"The newspapers nicknamed him that," nodded Craig, his eyes narrowing keenly.

"Sure, I know him," replied Pete. "I once got an interview from him for the er—Yale *Daily Record*. On his twenty-first birthday. The whackiest lad I ever met. For a guy worth eighty million dollars he's crazy."

This was a little but not all of the truth. Pete had, by dint of brilliant scheming, managed to give to the world the only interview Ronald Baird ever gave. The story had created a sensation.

Ronald Baird, the adopted and only son of Jason Baird, multi-millionaire lumber and coal baron, was a queer youth and victim of a queer upbringing. Old Jason Baird had been afraid of germs, a phobia that caused him to wipe down doorknobs before grasping them.

Young Ronald was brought up by nurses in sterilized surroundings and was nicknamed "the sanitary baby." The boy had, therefore, no playmates. Even after his adopted father died and left him eighty millions, he lived alone.

He had queer ideas such as thinking all women were useless parasites, wanting to establish an endowment corporation to bring about a revival of the Golden Age of ancient Greek Civilization. He wanted to buy an island from the British Empire to

house his new civilization and populate it with the brainy refugees from totalitarian governments.

In short, he shunned people, claiming they were decadent. But of all this, Pete said nothing. He was already smelling a big story for the cable.

"If you saw him, say, tomorrow," Craig was saying, "could you identify him and tell something of his queer reputation?"

"Sure," said Clicker eagerly.

Craig's jaw tightened as if he had made a decision.

He turned to the *agent de police* who had listened bewilderedly to this interchange. He spoke to him in perfect French.

"*Monsieur de la Police*, these two young men are making a practical joke—in America it is very popular. I am not offended, and I will pay what damage there is—and take this for your trouble."

He slid the policeman a hundred-franc note. The man's expression changed instantly.

"A joke," he laughed loudly and waved his hands. "Back to your places, *Messieurs*, it is only the mad American humor—the Yankee joke—and we all laugh."

ALL began to smile hopefully. A few more hundred-franc notes ended the episode.

Craig looked keenly at Pete.

"You know, I suppose," he said, "that you can always be arrested on this charge?"

Pete nodded. "What about Ronald Baird?"

"I am the nephew of old Jason Baird," Craig said, "so Ronald Baird is my er—step-cousin."

He paused. "Ronald is being committed tomorrow to a private psychopathic institution. I'd like you two to appear before the commission and tell what you know, and in exchange for this testimony I'll give you a place to sleep tonight, your meals, and supply you with two second-class tickets to Rome, Italy."

"Hot dog!" beamed Clicker. "You hired two hands. We'll start the meals right now. Hey, *garcong!*"



He waved to a waiter.

Pete also nodded agreement.

"Has he become—er—violent?" he asked.

"Well, yes," nodded Craig. "He thinks he's traveling around the world. He tries to speak Hindu, for example, or Japanese, or Malayan, according to where he thinks he is. He won't leave the house, and sometimes he insists he is a fly crawling on the ceiling. And, like any other *dementia praecox*, he thinks he is not insane but being persecuted and would attack us if not—er—restrained."

"The poor devil!" Pete said. "Well, he was always odd — but I should think an American psychopathic ward would be better than the French."

"Oh, no," said Craig. "It is the most expensive in the world, has the best physicians, and they have new treatments aside from malaria to cure insanity."

Pete let his eyes shift to the lovely Sally Hunter. Craig saw the glance.

"She was engaged to be married to him," he said gently, "and suddenly Ronald attacked her, physically, at a big reception. Slapped her face, and knocked her down. She started to sue for a hundred thousand dollars—the letters he wrote, you know—but I have managed to arrange that out of court."

After Pete and Clicker had had a hasty snack, Craig summoned his car, a big Rolls Royce, and they all got in. The car purred smoothly for several miles through the Fontainebleau section and came to a halt before a huge Louis Sixteenth mansion sitting in a hundred acres of magnificently landscaped grounds.

THE car waited while a gate-tender came out, unlocked the massive wrought-iron gates and admitted the car. Pete, who had a quickly observant eye, saw in the headlights that the gateman wore a shoulder holster and the butt of a pistol, at least a .38, partly protruded from the slack coat.

Clicker also saw the gun butt and raised his brows.

The car rolled up a long drive and stopped under the *porte-cochère*.

"Gosh!" said Clicker, "this looks like Grand Central Station."

"It has fifty-two rooms," said Sally.

A man in butler's livery let them in. Pete saw that this man's plum-colored coat also bulged over a gun and holster. Pete suppressed a puzzled frown.

Inside now, Harry Craig eyed them sourly.

"Just to make certain you're not lying, I want you two to look at Ronald Baird right now to identify him. And God help you if you've lied."

Craig led Pete and Clicker to the third story. Here was a long corridor, brightly lighted, and in front of a door sat a thick burly man, reading a detective story magazine. He jumped up as he saw Craig.

"Quiet as a mouse," he said.

Craig nodded curtly and the man went to the door and turned the big, heavy French key. He thrust open the door and peered in alertly.

"*Tres bien*," he said.

"I hope he's not violent," Sally said.

Pete, sensing deeply a big story, looked around eagerly.

The room was large and airy but devoid of furniture, except for a big bed bolted to the floor and a chair likewise immovable. There was a youth in the middle of the room, squatting Turk fashion on the linoleum and picking nervously at a drapery he had apparently jerked from the window. The bare window disclosed steel bars newly placed there.

Pete's eyes fastened to the young man's face. He saw a youth of twenty-three or so, with jet black, long, uncombed hair, a gaunt, pale face, and big staring eyes that held a deep glitter in them.

His mouth was full-formed and generous, but twitching now. The body was thin but wiry. In short, Ronald Baird might have been, with rest and diet, a powerful, good-looking young man. Now he looked frenzied and abnormal.

"Can you swear on the stand that this is Ronald Baird?" Craig said coldly to Pete.

"Yes," said Pete, a deep pity suddenly welling up in him.

"Yeah, that's him," said Clicker, subdued.

The boy looked from one to the other of them.

"Why do you claim to recognize me? I don't know you."

His voice was deep, nervous.

Craig stared at his step-cousin and then twisted to face Pete.

"That's funny," he said. "If you interviewed him he doesn't seem to remember, and he remembers almost everything about his college days."

Pete bit his lips. "Why," he said hastily, "*dementia praecox* cases have strange lapses. He doesn't remember the interview, but he should remember me."

"Ronald," Craig said, "did you ever meet this young man before?"

Ronald Baird came off the floor. He was shaking terribly, a wild glitter in his eyes.

"I'm not insane," he shouted thickly. "I haven't *dementia praecox*, and you brought these men here to lie me into an asylum. I know your plan, Craig. You've always hated me. You thought my father should have left his money to you because you were of the blood and I was only adopted. You've schemed this all the way to get control of the money."

He flung back his head and laughed hysterically.

"But you won't. No French commission will swear me into an asylum. Not when they can see in a moment that I'm *sane*."

He suddenly glared with fury at Sally Hunter.

"And they won't put me away on the false testimony of this jezebel, either." His voice rose to a scream. "She tricked me—she's a cheat, a wanton, and she wanted my money, too, but she won't get it — not a penny."

Pete looked from the boy's face to Sally Hunter's. Sally was deathly pale, too.

"Don't talk like that, Ronald," she said quietly. "You . . ."

"Quiet, you wanton," he howled. "I saw you with my own eyes kissing that man. And you supposed to be engaged to me! And when I slapped you for what you are, you sued me

in court. And when I said I'd see you dead . . ." He broke off. "You wormed inside of my life, and some day I'll kill you for it."

She was stung. "You only prove yourself mad," she cried. "I was kissing that man—sure, I was. We were rehearsing for the roles in 'Beyond the Law.' It was business, and if you had been sensible then you'd have thought nothing of it."

She retreated, leaned against the wall.

"I've been sorry for you, Ronald," she went on, lowering her voice. "I haven't wanted to see you—er—put in an institution. But now I guess it's for the best."

"Sure," sneered Ronald, "and after you've got me there and Craig has got my money, he'll pay you a hundred thousand dollars for lying."

"He'll pay me a hundred thousand dollars for the humiliation and embarrassment you caused me by slapping my face and publicly ruining my picture career by having people laugh at me as the girl who had her face slapped at the reception of the Duke of Hansor."

"Stop it, the both of you," cried Craig. "Sally, you ought to know better than to bicker with a maniac. Ronald, it will do you no good to get violent, because they'll put you in a strait-jacket."

"They will?" Ronald Baird laughed a high-pitched hysterical laugh. "That's what you think. I'll never go to an asylum."

## CHAPTER IV

### ESCAPE!



PETE had listened intently to all this amazing interchange but he had also been busy. His roving eyes had seen, tucked into a hole in the linoleum, something that glittered. He could just see the edge of it.

No one saw him stoop and pick it up.

His eyes went round with wonder-

ment. What he held in his hand was a home-made but nonetheless efficient *oustiti*. Now, an *oustiti* is a narrow-headed, sharp-jawed pair of pliers made for the sole purpose of reaching into a keyhole to seize the key and turn it. With this *oustiti* Ronald Baird could have released himself at any moment from this room.

Pete just had time to slip the *oustiti* into his pocket when Craig seized Sally's arm.

"Enough of this," he said.

"You've failed," screamed Baird. "You've taken me around the world, but you didn't dare put me in a Chinese asylum, or Japanese or Hindu one, either. And I'm not fooled by your other schemes. I hang to the chandelier but I know I'm not crawling on the ceiling."

Craig did not reply. He thrust Sally out of the room, gestured curtly to Pete and Clicker. The guard locked the door behind them. In silence, Craig led the way down to the next floor. He told Sally to wait for him downstairs, then walked along the corridor and finally threw open a door. He pressed a button, flooding a huge room with light, and gestured to two huge, red-canopied beds.

"You'll be comfortable enough here," he said.

Pete noticed that the windows here, too, were barred. He muttered something.

"You can understand now why he must go to an institution?" Craig said.

"Sure," said Clicker, "he cuts paper dolls."

Craig went out. In the silence, Pete and Clicker both heard the key turn in the lock. They exchanged quick looks.

"Gosh!" said Clicker. "It's nights like this that makes guys' hair go white."

Pete said nothing. He walked around the huge room, fished for a cigarette and smoked abstractedly.

"Big joint, ain't it?" Clicker said. "I could bed down in Grand Central Terminal and feel more cozy."

"Did you smell anything familiar while you were near Baird?" Pete said.

Clicker thought. "No, I didn't smell . . . yes, I did, too! Kind of like—well, I can't just remember."

"Neither can I," said Pete, "but I will." He paused near Clicker. "What do you think?"

"Think? What of?"

"The set-up. Baird, Sally Hunter, Craig—"

"Oh!" said Clicker. "Well, I dunno. Baird's a screwball all right—crazier than a monkey in a prickly pear orchard. The gal—she loved him, but he slapped her down publicly and that ain't no way to do. As for Craig, he's greasy and I don't like him."

"Neither do I," said Pete. "And why did he lock us in here?"

"Maybe he thought we'd steal the family crest."

Pete didn't laugh. "It's the story of the year," he muttered. "Heir to eighty millions clapped into the slap-happy coop. Girl friend swears him away and takes a hundred thousand for a slap on the jaw."

He paused. "And Craig, as only relative, gets to administer a nutty man's estate of eighty millions. And, Clicker, administering eighty millions is just like owning it yourself."

Pete took out the *oustiti* and juggled it in his hand.

"I crave to look around this place and clear up the details. This story is worth a hundred dollars in New York."

"Well—" began Clicker doubtfully.

"That kid didn't sound too crazy to me."

"Aw, now, Pete," protested Clicker, "don't go gettin' Sir Galahad on me. Damn it all, that kid was nutsy-fagen five years ago and you know it."

"He might have been eccentric but he didn't have to be crazy."

**H**E STRODE to the door and put the *oustiti* in the lock.

"Oh, all right," said Clicker, "only now I wish I hadn't let you hock my camera. Pix would sell, too, and then I'd buy me a thick steak."

"That kid was clever enough to make this *oustiti*," said Pete as the door opened.

Clicker sighed. "Sometimes I think you ought to have your head exam-



ined. They'd find some funny-looking air pockets in the skull part."

The two tiptoed out into the hall.

Followed by Clicker, Pete moved along the hallway, with the intention of climbing to the next floor and getting another talk with Ronald Baird. Pete was far from satisfied.

The boy didn't talk like a *dementia praecox*. There was that familiar smell which, if Pete could ever identify it, would be a clue to indicate what was the matter with Baird. And finally, there was Pete's utter mistrust of Harry Craig. This might all be his own imaginings but another talk with Baird, alone, would prove conclusive.

But he didn't get that talk.

As he reached the shadow of the staircase leading upward, he suddenly shrank back and thrust hard up against Clicker.

Clicker gulped.

Going down the stair, silent as a ghost, was Ronald Baird.

In his hand he held an ugly, short-snubbed revolver, and his face was twisted with such a look of fanatic purpose as Pete had never seen before. Even while Pete and Clicker crouched in the shadows, the boy stole down the flight of stairs to the main floor where Craig and Sally Hunter had their suites. He glided silently out of sight.

Clicker's eyes were wide.

"Gosh," he whispered, "that guy is going to use that rod! Did you see his face?"

Pete nodded. How, he wondered, had Baird got out? Where had he got the gun? Well, that didn't matter. What did count was that the boy must be prevented from committing murder. He hastily slipped off his own shoes, gesturing to Clicker to do the same. Then he hurried down the staircase.

"Be careful," said Clicker, "I seen guys before with that look — and somebody always died."

Pete hurried as fast as he could but he was not in time to prevent what ensued. As he came to the entrance of the drawing room he saw Harry Craig, his hands raised, and Sally Hunter, a cigarette in her hand,

and her hands raised. They stood by the fire. Facing them, gun leveled, was Ronald Baird, a most terrible expression of joy and triumph on his face. It was thirty feet across a brightly lit room to the boy and Pete knew he couldn't make it and live unless Baird's attention was distracted. He must bide his time for the moment.

Meanwhile, the boy spoke in a low fierce tone.

"I've got to have it. I've got to smoke. Where is it?"

"Go back to your room, you fool," said Craig harshly. "You go outside with that gun and somebody will kill you."

"You daren't let me die," the boy smiled weirdly. "You know I've made a will. The will leaves everything where I want it left and *not to you*."

"Ronny, listen to me!" Sally said nervously.

"Hush," the boy said. "You've had your say long enough. It's my turn now. What I want to know is, what country am I in—Japan or China?"

Clicker nudged Pete. Pete didn't move.

"I know it's eighteen days across the Pacific," the boy said, "but I couldn't tell, you keeping me blindfolded and my eyes so bad. I don't know where we landed."

CRAIG remained silent.

Sally looked at him. "You're in Paris, Ronny. You've . . ."

"Don't lie to me," cried the boy harshly. "How can I be in Paris after eighteen days on the Pacific and the damned endless hoot of the foghorn? No, no. Answer me, I say, or I'll . . ."

"You're in Shanghai," said Craig. He glanced at Sally as if indicating the lad should be humored.

"Good," said Baird. "Now, give me the smoke, Craig, and then I'm going out and tell the police how you're trying to destroy my brain."

Craig made an involuntary move. The boy's arm became rigid.

"Don't do it, Craig, or by God, I'll shoot. I want to shoot. I don't see why I don't."

"Please, Ronny," said Sally, "listen to me, boy. I know . . ."

"You cheap gold-digger," he snarled. "Keep out of this."

Pete saw Craig start to dive toward Baird. He thought it was only a bluff.

"Get back, Craig," Baird screamed. "Get back, or I'll . . ."

It was reckless, mad, but Craig kept on coming, one long savage charge. Pete started to jump forward to interfere, but it happened too quickly.

"Ronny!" screamed Sally.

The boy pulled the trigger. There was a sharp explosion. Pete Vallon saw cloth flick from Craig's coat sleeve on a line with the heart. But Craig kept on coming and before the boy could fire again he had knocked up the revolver barrel with his left hand and swung savagely with his right. The fist came over with pile-driver force and struck the boy squarely on the jaw.

Ronny Baird shot backward, a low, agonizing moan driven from his pale lips. He struck the floor with a crash and lay in a crumpled heap.

For an instant, nothing moved in the room and there was no sound except the heavy breathing of Craig. Then Sally sobbed.

"Oh, dear Lord, Harry, you've killed him."

She ran to Ronald Baird and knelt beside him. Blood seeped from the boy's bluish lips.

"I had to do it," Craig spoke queerly. "You saw he was going to shoot me. It was his life or mine."

"Was it?" she turned, gave him an odd look. "Why didn't you let him go out? He would have harmed no one. He would have been brought back by the police."

"Hush, you fool," said Craig. He bent over, picked up the boy in his arms. "I'll fire Teverdeaux for this. How did the boy get out?"

From the boy's pocket fell an *oustiti*, the mate to the one Pete now had. So! The boy had made two. Pete looked troubled and suddenly shrank back.

Craig crossed the room.

"Jules!" he shouted.

Pete looked at Clicker and, with a swift movement, retreated to the stairs. He ran up them silently, pur-

sued by Clicker. Pete did not pause at the second floor but continued on to the third.

"For cripes sake, what now?" Clicker panted.

Pete did not answer. He paused before the door to Baird's room and looked down at the senseless body of the guard. The man had evidently been surprised and Baird hammered his skull with a small marble bust. It was the guard's gun that Baird had seized and used.

The door stood open. Pete gestured to Clicker to enter.

"Hurry," he whispered.

"What goes on?" Clicker pleaded.

Pete shut the door and switched on the light. There was no place to hide except under the bed. He switched off the light.

"All right, Click, you first."

He pushed Clicker to the bed.

Clicker protestingly got down and crawled under the big French bed.

"But why?" he demanded.

"Click," whispered Pete, "that lad isn't crazy."

"He's nuttier than a fruitcake," Clicker said.

"Hush!" whispered Pete and they lay flat, even holding their breath, for suddenly the door opened and Craig entered. He walked straight to the bed and flung the boy on it. Baird was already muttering incoherently and his body tossed and the bed creaked.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PLAN FAILS



"H, HARRY," said Sally, "he's hurt. Maybe he—he's dying."

"It's better if he does," said Craig in a cold biting voice. "If he has to exist in an asylum, with no hope of recovery—"

"But you said," cut in Sally, "his will . . ."

"His will doesn't matter now," said Craig.

There was silence.

"Harry," Sally said, "I don't like it. I—"

"Hush!" said Craig. "You're tired and upset, and I don't blame you. But everything is going to be all right. The guards will be more careful after this."

Pete, watching his legs, saw them stand close to Sally. There was silence in which he presumed that Craig kissed her. She said no more and their legs walked to the door. The light was turned off, the door closed, and a key whined in the lock. Then silence.

Pete crept out from under the bed. He switched on a wall light. Ronald Baird lay there, twisting and writhing, his face hotly flushed, his eyes open but unseeing, his lips mumbling. Pete scowled. This didn't look so good.

Then he bent and smelled. He gestured to Clicker.

"Smell," he said.

Clicker sniffed. "Say," he began, "I've smelled that before. On the East Side." He paused, thinking. "Say, it was a dump we raided with the cops!"

"The Hindu *bhang* joint," muttered Pete. "That's it! This boy's been forced to smoke *hashish* until his wits are as addled as a ten-minute egg."

"On the level?" wondered Clicker. "The health commish once said *hashish* would drive you cuckoo, but . . ."

"Wait," said Pete.

He was bending down over the twitching, throbbing young man. He was studying the feverish skull and the veins in it. He frowned again. This looked like brain fever.

"It's hellish," he growled. "I think . . ."

Sudden, Baird came up off the bed with a jerking leap that nearly knocked Pete over.

"I'm falling, falling," the boy cried. "I've got to get to the chandelier."

He crossed the room in three leaps, tore open the door of a room and vanished inside.

"For cripes sake," muttered Clicker, "and you say that guy ain't goofy?"

"Good God!" cried Pete. "He was on the verge of cracking up and that

blow has given him brain fever. That kid is liable to die on us."

He ran into the dark room after Baird. Clicker followed and in his excitement slammed the door. It locked behind him.

Pete started to say, "Open the door," but didn't when, somewhere in the darkness, Ronald Baird began a half-scream in panting terror. So rather than have this outburst bring the guard, Pete endured the darkness and fished for a match. The room was utterly black and breathless.

The match flared wildly and settled into a steady pear-shaped flame. Pete was looking down at the floor at the spot from whence came the sobbing sound.

Clicker startled him by saying:

"My God, Pete! Look!"

He was pointing upward.

But Pete did not look. In that instant he wondered if he were going nuts, too. Because, staring at the spot where the sobbing came from, he saw Ronald Baird clutching tightly to a cut glass chandelier such as ornamented the ceiling of the room which had been assigned to him and Clicker. He was so startled that he dropped the match. It flickered, went out.

CLICKER was grabbing his arm.

"Gosh, we're walking on the ceiling!"

"You're crazy," said Pete uneasily.

He reached for another match, lit it. Ronald Baird shifted, straightened, but did not release his grip on the cut glass chandelier. His sobbing stopped.

"Look out," he whispered, "you'll fall up and break your neck. You can't walk on the ceiling. You are not flies."

Despite himself, Pete made a grab for Clicker. Holding up the match, he lifted his eyes.

"My God!" he gasped and staggered.

Over his head he saw a sofa, a big easy chair, a lounge, a taboret with boxes of cigarettes and a pipe on it, a carpet, rugs in front of the hearth, a small end table piled high with magazines, a bookcase — all upside down. He shifted his gaze and saw

draperies arching outward from windows that were upside down, too.

The match burned his fingers and he dropped it. As it went out, he reeled dizzily. When you are seeing upside down those things you've been seeing normally all your life, your senses reel.

"Baird, are there lights?" he whispered.

"No, no lights in here except when they make them come on. But I like the dark. Then I don't see myself walking on the ceiling like a fly."

"Oo-oo!" moaned Clicker. "Pete, for gossake get me out of here."

Pete lit another match and stared into the dimness. Once again, the horrible dizziness assailed him and he wanted to bend and twist his head and look up from his ankles. When he did so, however, he felt about eighteen feet tall. When he straightened, he had a sudden giddy sensation that made him lurch. It was a horrible feeling.

"It ain't right," Clicker was muttering, "it just looks that way."

"Oh, no," panted Baird from his clinging perch. "I thought so at first. No, if I let loose I'll fall and dash my brains out."

Pete was staggered. Was this the same boy who had talked downstairs? This raving madman?

In a swift motion, Pete knelt beside the youth.

He felt the hot, flushed face, the twitching. Then he knew.

"Dear God!" he muttered.

"What is it?" cried Clicker.

"The boy was worked up to the point of a breakdown. Now, as a result of that blow, he's got brain fever. We must get him out of here or he'll be insane or perhaps die."

"Get him out? Are you goofy, too? How can you get him past Craig and his men? You'll have to wait and spill the scheme to the lunacy commission."

Pete again felt of the boy's brow. He had intended to wait, but he knew now he dare not. He had had a reporter room-mate once who had brain fever.

"We've got to go now, or get a doctor in," he said.

"Then, Pete, you really think this boy is sane?"

A cold fury grew in Pete's heart. Forgotten now, for the second, was his wish for a big exclusive story. Forgotten was everything, except this gibbering boy whose reason had been unhinged by the most deadly scheme Pete had ever encountered.

"Of course, he's sane," he growled. "How would you feel if you were kept in an *upside down* room and fed *hashish* cigarettes? And I'll bet that isn't all. Craig has got him all mixed up on his location. He probably dropped belladonna in the boy's eyes and then kept them bandaged when the belladonna enlarged the pupils to admit too much light—and made the boy ill."

"An upside down room," said Clicker. "It had me pretty groggy at that."

"It's not so original," said Pete. "There was a rich man in New York who had a room built upside down and used to put his drunk guests in there to come out with a hangover and figure pink snakes were chasing them." He paused.

"Hold a match, Click, while I see where that door goes."

**I**T GAVE you a horrible sensation to reach *up* from a frescoed ceiling to open an upside down door. But on the other side was something nearly as bad.

"For cripes sake!" said Clicker. "It's a ship's cabin."

Pete looked around the replica of a first class cabin on an ocean liner—complete, berth and all.

"Yes," he said sternly. "That's how he fooled the blindfolded boy. He'd tell Baird he was in Tokio when he was in Paris and people to whom Baird talked would think he was crazy."

"Gosh, the poor kid!" said Clicker. He picked up a queer-shaped object. "Looks like a small foghorn to give sound effects."

"Give me that," said Pete, lighting still another match. "It'll come in handy."

There was no egress in this direction and Pete turned to retrace his



steps. As he did so Ronald Baird emitted a terrible shout.

Pete raced to him over the frescoed ceiling.

"Put out the light," cried Ronald. "Put it out or I'll be blind for life."

He leaped up at Pete, hung in mid-air for a divided second and then he crashed flat and did not move. Pete hastily knelt.

"Out cold," he muttered. "We've got to get him out of here, Click, or he's going to die."

As he spoke there was a slamming sound from the adjacent room.

"Duck!" Pete whispered.

He was just in time. The guard flung open the connecting door and threw a flashlight beam across the frescoed ceiling. It picked out the unconscious body of Ronald Baird. The guard cursed, hesitated and then came in.

"Damned nut ought to be in bed," he muttered.

This was too heaven-sent an opportunity to miss. As the guard entered Pete swung noiselessly behind him. He had only the foghorn but it was heavy. He swung with all his strength. The guard hiccoughed and fell flat on his face.

"Nice going," said Clicker. "He's hearing the birdies."

"Grab Baird's feet," Pete said. "Now's the time to move fast."

"It can't be too fast for me." Clicker lifted Baird's feet.

As they backed out Pete tried to make a plan of sorts. Once out of the house they could rush Ronald Baird to the American Hospital at Neuilly where, if it was at all pos-

sible, American physicians could save his life. Meanwhile, the job was to get safely out of this house.

And this, in the next moment, seemed utterly impossible.

As they carried Ronny down the hallway to the staircase there were footsteps behind them. A man's voice called loudly, "Teverdeaux!"

Pete groaned. "That guy will find Teverdeaux out cold and rouse the house."

It was too late to go back.

To make matters worse Ronald Baird took this occasion to twist and writhe and utter peculiar strangling sounds. Pete tried in vain to muffle the noise. The brain fever gave Baird super-strength.

They were on the first floor now, but on the staircase overhead sounded racing feet.

"We can't make it outside in time," Pete said.

The man above shouted the alarm and his voice bellowed through the house. Almost in Pete's face, a door opened and flung out a rectangle of light. He prepared to fight. But instead of Harry Craig, it was Sally Hunter. Pete was seized with a sudden inspiration.

"Bring him in here, Click," he ordered.

**R**OUGHLY he thrust Sally, soft, warm and rumped from sleep, back into the room. Her eyes widened and she turned pale but she did not cry out.

"Steady," said Pete, "and put something on. You're going to need it."

[Turn Page]



She silently got into a dressing robe practically as diaphanous as her nightgown.

"Well?" she said.

Pete walked to her, placed his hands on her slim warm shoulders and looked into her eyes. She returned the look unflinching.

"You look too decent to be in on a hellish scheme like this."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know that Harry Craig is deliberately trying to unhinge this boy's brain and drive him insane—and may have succeeded?"

She shrank back. "That's a lie! The boy is psychopathic and he belongs in a sanitarium. It's the best."

Pete shook her. "Are you just a cheap little gold digger as Ronny said?" he growled. "Come—look."

He dragged her to the bed where Ronald Baird tossed and twisted inside Clicker's firm grip.

"Listen to him," he said, "just listen."

The boy was babbling wildly but through it all, like a refrain, ran the words—"Sally, darling, I didn't mean to strike you. Oh, darling, I love you. Please, sweetheart, it was jealousy—I—" His voice died down to incoherent mumbles.

She looked at the fevered face, the twisting lips and hands. Her own face was tense.

"What is the matter with him?"

"Brain fever," said Pete. "Without a doctor he goes insane—maybe dies—as Craig wants him to." He paused. "We've got to get him to a hospital right away—and Craig's guards are looking for us."

She didn't seem to hear. "I didn't think he loved me. I thought it was the run-around. I didn't realize—he's just a boy."

"Just a queer shy, retiring boy," assented Pete, "and when—we'll have to find out how—when Craig got him on *hashish* it reacted peculiarly. In the singular, narcotized, condition that the boy developed Craig probably poisoned his mind against you. Maybe Craig fixed it so that the jealous kid saw you kiss that guy in rehearsal."

The youth's hands groped. "Sally, where are you? I'm in the dark."

She took his hand in her cool one, and pressed it.

"I'm here, darling," she whispered. She turned to Pete, her face resolute.

"What can I do until you get him to a hospital?"

"Get cold compresses for his head now. And if you've got a gun you'd be practically a godsend."

"No gun," she said and went for the compresses.

## CHAPTER VI

### PRESENTS FOR TWO



WATCHING her a moment, Pete turned and strode rapidly to the window. It was at least thirty feet to the ground. The windows were not locked and one, indeed, was open.

"Get those sheets, Clicker," he said, "and start tearing them up." He got no reply from Clicker and turned to raise his voice. Clicker was bent over the girl's vanity table, examining something. He was grinning delightedly.

"You might know them Germans would think up a gadget like that," he chuckled.

"What is it?" demanded Pete impatiently.

"Looky." Clicker held up what seemed to be a gardenia attached to a length of slender rubber tubing.

Pete swore fretfully. "All right, playboy," he growled, "fill it with water and squirt it in somebody's face."

"Squirt hell," said Clicker injuredly. "That's a candid camera. Takes pictures on film the size of your fingernail."

"So what, little boy?" Pete pointed to the bed. "Tear up some sheets."

Clicker swore. "I never seen such a guy," but he put the gardenia camera in his pocket and set to work tearing up sheets.

Sally Hunter returned with some

cold compresses and began to administer to Baird. The moment her soothing voice touched the lad's ear he ceased to squirm and talk incoherently and rested quietly. But this did not go on for long.

Ten minutes later, there was a thumping at the door and Harry Craig's impatient voice could be heard shouting in the hall.

"Sally, Sally! Open up."

Pete swore softly. Clicker froze over his sheets. Sally didn't take her hands from Baird's head but her eyes flew to Pete. Pete shrugged and started looking for a weapon.

"Stall him," he whispered. "Don't let him in now."

She glanced down at Ronald. Clicker hastened to be ready to clamp a hand over the boy's mouth. She got up, encountered Pete's level gaze.

"You can trust me," she whispered coolly.

She walked to the door.

"For Heaven's sake, Harry, what's the idea of waking me up?" she said.

"Let me in," Craig repeated. "Ronny's escaped and those two damned crooks have him."

Pete searched desperately for a weapon. He found one of sorts on the *escritoire*, a thin-pointed silver blade, used to slit letters in the morning mail. It wasn't much but it would have to do.

"Damn it," Craig was saying, "stop talking and unlock the door."

Pete gestured to Clicker to hide Ronny and himself in the clothes closet. He ran to the door, froze along the wall so that the opening of the door would hide him from observation. He gave Sally a reassuring smile.

"Nice going," he muttered. "Now tell him to come in."

She was scared but she fought down her fear.

"Oh, all right," she said carelessly, and unlocked the door.

The door opened wide under the thrust of Craig's impatient hands. Sally had sense enough to shrink back on a line with the closet so that Clicker, crouching, holding Baird, would be covered.

As Craig followed her, saying,

"What's the big idea?" Pete came out from behind the door and pressed the point of the paper cutter against the back of Craig's neck.

"Stand still and raise your hands," he said in the coldest voice he could muster, "or I'll push—hard."

Harry Craig stood rigid.

"Sally," Pete said, "lock the door." She obeyed silently.

"Craig, try to yell and it will be your last," Pete said grimly.

CRAIG was shaking, but not with fear.

"You she-devil, you're protecting *them*," he choked.

"Save your dirty names, Craig," said Pete. "You were all washed up in any case. I'm a reporter and Dunn is a cameraman and we'll cable a story tomorrow that will queer your pitch. The police, after that, will take charge."

Craig seemed not to hear. He was looking at Sally Hunter with a very strained, fierce gaze.

"Why?" he urged in a low tone. "Why did you let them in here?"

She returned his stare, her nostrils flaring.

"You lied to me," she said. "You lied to Ronny about me. You framed that rehearsal to break us up. Because once Ronny was married to me, he was safe from you and your horrible scheme."

"And as it is," he sneered, "Ronny dies and you get nothing—because you'll not get a hundred thousand from me."

"You're not the heir," she cried. "The will . . ."

"I destroyed the will," smiled Craig triumphantly. "As the sole relative I get it all."

"No," said Pete quietly. "At a hospital Ronny can recover. So you stay here for the police. Tie him, Click."

"You fool," Craig said to Sally, "if I go to jail, don't you see you must go, too, as an accessory?"

She did not flinch. "If that's the way to save Ronny, then that's the way it's got to be."

"How noble!" he sneered. "For a gold digger who started out to get Ronny's money . . ."

"Yes," she cut in quietly, "I started out to get his money. I've been hurt plenty by men in my time and I said I'd never be hurt again. But"—she looked down at Ronny—"I love him and that's all there is to it."

"He'll not want you—ever—you fool," rasped Craig.

"Probably not, poor lost child," she said. "That doesn't count now."

She looked at Pete. "Hadn't we better get him to a hospital?"

Pete nodded, his eyes shining.

"Right!" He motioned to Clicker Dunn. "Put Ronny on the bed and fix that rope of sheets."

"Okay," Clicker said, and left Ronny.

This was a mistake. The moment Clicker's hands left him, Ronald Baird bounded from the bed and started for the window.

"Look out," cried Pete, but he knew Clicker would be too late.

Baird was racing for the window as one who is about to dive. It was Sally who stopped him.

"Ronny!" she called, and jumped for him.

At the sound of her voice, he stopped, hesitated. And in that second she reached him, flung her arms around his neck and pressed his face to hers.

"Sally," he said in a queer voice and collapsed onto her.

His weight forced them back to the floor.

Then Craig struck.

Pete's attention was momentarily withdrawn and Craig took advantage of it. He lunged forward to his knees, jumped up like a cat and in turning he had his gun out and leveled.

"All right," his voice was arctic cold, "I'll play the rest of the hand."

He backed carefully to the door, opened it.

"Jules! George!" he called out loudly.

He was grinning savagely.

"That's no go, Craig," Pete said. "We've seen your torture rooms. We've even"—he had an inspiration—"we've even got pictures of them—the upside down room."

He turned to Clicker. "Show him the camera, Clicker."

Clicker looked puzzled for a space and then said:

"The camera? Oh, the camera," and pulled out the German buttonhole candid.

Pete had been trying to startle Craig but he failed.

"So what?" grinned the man. "With eighty millions at stake and all its power, do you think I'm not prepared?"

Pete's heart sank.

"Prepared?" he repeated.

"Certainly, prepared. Tonight, this house accidentally burns to the ground. It is too bad that a reporter, a photographer and a cheap chiseling gold digger will burn, too."

**P**ETE knew the man was mad enough to carry out such a holocaust. But Pete was not through yet. He made one more attempt. He signaled Clicker to be ready.

"Did you use up a whole roll of film on those crazy gadgets Craig was using to drive Baird nuts?" he asked.

Clicker looked at him, caught Pete's expression and slight nod.

"Oh, sure," he said, "I got them all."

"Then throw the roll out the window—now," yelled Pete and crouched to spring.

It was life or death in that instant and he knew it. If Clicker failed to jump toward the window and draw Craig's attention, then Pete would get a bullet as he lunged to the attack. But he trusted Clicker implicitly, and as he yelled he dove across the room at Craig. And Clicker, putting all his faith in Pete, jumped for the window, his hand upraised.

With two figures in motion, one toward him, Craig hesitated for the slightest fraction of a second. Not long, but long enough. As he aimed at Clicker and pulled the trigger, Pete hit his legs. He smashed the man sideways, clung tightly and Craig toppled and fell.

As he went down he raised the gun to kill Pete. Clicker, coming like an express train, hit him in time to knock the gun muzzle aside. Pete slugged Craig in the jaw. The man slumped back, senseless.



There were running footsteps in the hall. Pete bounded across the room, shut and locked the door practically in the face of two men with pistols. He jumped aside to avoid a shot through the panels. He gestured to Clicker who gave him Craig's gun.

"You out there, listen," Pete said loudly. "I've got a gun in here with five shots. You can't get in here alive. Craig's dead. We've sent for the police. Scram!"

He turned to Clicker. "Set that foghorn moaning out the window, boy, we've won."

The horn produced a long sad, dreary moan that grew more mournful by the minute. But it was heard a long way, and somebody would come.

"Hey!" cried Clicker. "He promised us chow, too. Don't forget the eats." "You wouldn't let me, you and your stomach," sighed Pete, but he took another hundred-franc note.

His eyes lifted to where Sally sat holding Ronald Baird's hand.

"I'm not stealing," he said.

"Of course not," she protested, "and if you'd wait Ronny would give you any sum you wanted. You've saved his life and his reason."

"Hot dog!" said Clicker hopefully. "That ought to be worth a hundred bucks."

Pete Vallon shook his head.

"We couldn't use the money, honest," he said. "If we had all the money to make this trip there'd be no fun."

"That's what you think," muttered



FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## MURDER STALKS THE PARK

*A Baffling Mystery Novelet of a Gruesome  
Crime Conspiracy*

**By JOHNSTON McCULLLEY**

"Sounds like a cow that's lost its sheep," grinned Clicker.

Fifteen minutes later, when Pete opened the hallway door, Craig's guards were gone. Pete grinned.

"Good! So now, before the cops arrive, I'll just settle a pressing little business matter."

He bent over the still unconscious Craig and abstracted a wallet stuffed with French banknotes of incredible size. Clicker saw the thousand-franc notes and gasped.

"Gosh, there's enough there to take us around the world in a Rolls-Royce."

Pete shook his head and carefully abstracted five one-hundred franc notes.

"He promised us a second class passage to Rome for identifying Ronald Baird. Well, we identified him—and earned our money, so I'll take it."

He started to put away the wallet.

Clicker, but he subsided at Pete's throaty growl to hush up.

When the police arrived Pete let Sally, as Ronny Baird's fiancée, take charge, while he and Clicker became two visiting friends from America. They made statements, swore to them, promised to return if needed, and, forty-eight hours later, were permitted to leave France.

Sally Hunter went to the *Gare de Lyon* to see them off. She was pale, worn, but her violet eyes shone with a spiritual glow, an inward happiness that made Pete catch his breath.

"Ronny's getting well," she said. "He'll be as he was—soon."

She said no more but Pete understood.

"That's swell," he said heartily.

"I've brought you two presents—from me and Ronny," she said. She handed Clicker the German button-hole candid camera.

"Criminy!" gasped Clicker, overwhelmed.

"You earned it," Sally said earnestly. "It helped save Ronny's life."

The train conductor stalked along the platform crying, "*En voiture, Mesdames et Messieurs. En voiture.*"

Sally came to Pete and gave him her hand.

"I couldn't think of anything for you but this," she said, and reaching up swiftly she kissed him softly on the lips.

In that instant, as his lips touched her fragrant ones, Pete saw into her eyes and perceived that the hard, bitter look was gone forever. He saw

the soul of her and it was shining.

"Good-by," he said. "You'll make him happy—make it all up to him."

She stood waving on the platform until the train vanished from sight.

Clicker leaned back, face alive with joy as he examined the beautiful little camera. He talked happily until he discovered Pete was not replying. He looked over.

"What's eating you?" he demanded.

Pete was looking at a crimson tint of lipstick on his handkerchief.

"Nothing," he said, "only I think I'll learn to dance on this dizzy world tour."

COMING NEXT ISSUE

## DEATH PAYS THE RANSOM

*A Gripping Snatch Case Novelet*

By **ROY MARR**

Get in the swim with well-groomed men—  
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# OIL FOR DOOM

By  
**THOMAS LAMAR**

Author of "Poor Little Wise Guy,"  
"Government Man," etc.

*When Murder's Trail Leads Aboard a Tanker, Detective Stone Learns a Racket Smells as Fishy on the Briny as on Dry Land!*

**A**DAM STONE stopped briefly when he saw the body at the foot of the pier, about where the tide would have thrown it up. It was a man with gray brows, unusually blunt fingers, and he wore only a blue cotton shirt. A long knife had spoiled the shirt and whatever was left of the chest beneath it.

The corpse meant nothing to Stone. Stiffs were not uncommon in harbors along this coast. Besides, the guy was too dead to be helped, and Adam Stone wasn't sure when the *Puncheon* would sail. He went on.

There was no gangplank at the side of the *Puncheon*, only a Jacob's ladder. Adam Stone, handling his one hundred eighty pounds as though he had climbed ship ladders all his life, mounted this to the oil-smearred deck.

The tanker was larger than she looked from the dock, at least 7,000 tons and she was dirty on deck and her hold stank. Wrinkling his nose, Adam Stone paused near the head of the Jacob's ladder.

Right beyond him along the deck, a short man with tarnished gold braid on his sleeves and wind-roughened hands was having words with a good-



Rocky Stone charged—straight into the gun muzzle

looking girl. He held one of the girl's elbows firmly, restraining her partly by force, partly by argument. Neither noticed Adam Stone.

"But, Captain Hatch, I must go ashore," Stone heard the girl protest angrily. "It's important!"

Her dark wavy hair was lively, glistening with health. She wore low-heeled shoes and a tropical sweater, and Adam Stone couldn't help seeing that her small-boned, strong-looking figure wore sports clothes well, and often. Straight brows above a pert nose would, he thought, give her lovely face a mischievous cast normally, but the little frown creasing her forehead now seemed half fright, half uncertainty.

"Important or not, you can't go," Captain Hatch said harshly.

"Oh."

The girl's low reply held a note stronger than simple disappointment, almost strong enough to sound like dread.

"I've told you Barranquilla's unsafe for you alone, Miss White," Captain Hatch apologized in quieter, smoother tones. "And I can't spare an escort. So I'm forced to order you to remain on board."

**H**E TRIED on a smile but it didn't fit well. There were huge pouches under his slanted, frosty-blue eyes, and Adam Stone could see small ugly veins in both the eyes and the pouches. His teeth were tobacco stained.

"After all, as captain, I have to accept responsibility for my passengers," he added.

The captain released the girl's arm to pat her shoulder, but she twisted away from his hand. Then, seizing her opportunity for escape, the girl darted desperately around the stocky captain and dashed blindly along the steel deck, heading toward the Jacob's ladder.

Unwillingly Adam Stone blocked her path. Too surprised by her sudden act to move quickly, he stood solidly in the girl's way. She hurtled against his hard-muscled body and bounced to a stop, as if she had struck a brick wall.

She was gasping when Adam Stone caught her shoulders and gently steadied her upright. In an instant she found her balance, shrugged free impatiently. The look she gave Adam Stone was deeply contemptuous.

"Sorry," he said.

She didn't reply, and her disdain increased, if anything.

Captain Hatch clutched at the girl's elbow hastily, and he didn't intend to give her another chance. Placing himself between the girl and the ladder, he swung her around roughly so that she faced the bridge.

"Miss White, I order you to remain in your cabin while we're in port!" His sea-weathered features were flushed.

Then Adam Stone took a hand.

"Turn her loose, Captain," he said quietly.

Captain Hatch jerked his head to gape up at Stone. The girl stared alternately from one to the other, bewildered.

"I'll—I'll do nothing of the sort," the captain spluttered. "Who are you to give orders aboard my ship?"

"I said turn her loose," Adam Stone repeated, gazing levelly at the angry captain.

At that moment, it was easy to see why his friends—and enemies too, for that matter—had nicknamed Adam Stone "Rocky." His lips were a thin-drawn line above his rock-hard chin. There were pinched clefts at the base of his strong, slightly battered nose. The skin over his high cheekbones was smooth and tight. Altogether, except for a dangerous light flickering deep in his sable-black eyes, it might have been a face carved on a granite bluff.

Captain Hatch reluctantly let his fingers fall away one by one from the girl's trembling arm.

"Now," said Rocky Stone, "she can go ashore if she likes."

"No! Barranquilla's unsafe for a girl alone."

"It's safe enough for about seventy-five thousand other people," Rocky Stone told him dryly.

"Who're you?"

"Adam Stone. I have a cablegram from New York instructing you to



give me passage on the *Puncheon*."

Adam Stone brought out the slip of paper ordering Captain Hatch, of Tanker *Puncheon*, to take one passenger, Adam Stone.

But he didn't show the frosty-eyed captain another cablegram, the one that had jerked him loose from a pleasant vacation on a cruise liner, that ordered him to board this greasy barge and see what he could see. That one had been memorized and destroyed.

**N**OT that it had given him much to memorize. Bare instructions to drop his vacation and board the tanker had made up most of the message, then it closed cryptically:

Watch for irregularities. Vague tip something wrong. Use tact. Undercover.

Rocky Stone spat mentally.

"So," he thought wryly, "I jump from a claim investigator to a sea-going dick who uses tact, and the first mug I meet mauls women."

"Passengers!" Captain Hatch expressed his bitter contempt for the whole breed in the single word. He crumpled the cablegram.

"This is an oil tanker," he complained. "I'm supposed to carry a cargo of crude, not play steward to passengers!"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I'm tired—plenty tired of trying two jobs at once. You can't come aboard. She can't leave." Captain Hatch glared balefully at the girl. "I'm not taking another passenger, and the one I already have isn't going gallivanting around a foreign port alone!"

"You're wrong," Rocky Stone said. "Your agent has booked my passage and been paid for it, so you'll give me accommodations. And the lady can leave now if she likes."

"Thank you. I will." The girl smiled gratefully.

But she took only one step before Captain Hatch seized her. And Adam Stone seized him. He jerked the captain around, forced him backward against a stanchion.

"I told you once to turn her loose," he muttered coldly.

Then the man's hard fist landed in Stone's left eye. Rocky grinned and moved to smother his arms, but it turned out that he was a very solid little guy and subduing him was not an easy trick.

Rocky Stone, in fact, never did get the best of him, for reserves appeared. Stone heard careful footfalls behind and whirled to face a red-headed giant who walked like something you'd see in a primeval forest.

Knobs of muscle stuck out, here and there, over the guy's beefy pan, and his mouth was extraordinarily small. He seemed to weigh all of three hundred mighty pounds. An undersized cap, set precariously on the back of his huge head, marked his rank as mate. Two seamen followed closely on his heels.

The giant walked steadily, unflinching, into Rocky Stone's powerful lefts and rights until Stone was cornered with his back against the ship's rail. Any one of the blows should have felled an ox, probably would have splintered an ordinary man's jaw. But even Rocky's Sunday punch was no good here. His knuckles were numb, his arms tingling to the elbows, when the barrier forced him to make a desperate stand at close quarters.

But it wasn't much of a stand. The big mate simply couldn't be hurt with bare fists.

With absurd ease, without apparent malice, he gripped Stone in enormous paws, lifted him clear of the deck and shook him loosely, until his legs flapped as though he were a rag doll.

Meanwhile, the seamen, obeying barked orders from Captain Hatch, had taken hold of the girl. This precaution was unnecessary, however. For, from the moment the battle seemed to be going against Stone, she had not attempted to flee but had stood her ground, as though determined to accept full share in any reverse.

The mate stopped jiggling Adam Stone long enough to ask for instructions.

"What I do with him, Cap'n?" His speech was guttural, heavily accented. "T'row him back on dock?"

He took up his shaking where it had been left off.

"No, he wants to be a passenger," Captain Hatch answered. "There was a sly undertone in the statement that promised future unpleasantness. "Trot him to a cabin, Mr. Mueller."

Mr. Mueller obligingly frog-walked Rocky Stone ahead of him to the forward deck.

Tankers are queerly built. They look as if somebody had sawed a ship in half and inserted a center section of tanks, like leaves in a dining room table. Thus a tanker's superstructure is crowded compactly in two odd divisions, fore and aft, and such vessels are not noted for their roomy quarters.

ADAM STONE learned this when the big red-headed mate dumped him into a two-by-four cubbyhole which boasted neither porthole nor air vent, then slammed and secured the steel door.

"Pleasant voyage, Mr. Stone," called Captain Hatch, slyness still edging his humor. "I trust you'll be snug and comfortable."

"Thanks," said Rocky, derisively.

Then he inspected the meager cabin. But you can't break metal with your bare hands, and steel surrounded Rocky on all sides. So he tumbled onto the narrow bunk and sought sleep.

What, he was asking himself when he dozed off, could be wrong with the *Puncheon*? What was he expected to look for—with tact? Why had he, Rocky Stone, a detective and claim investigator for the Blue Line, been ordered aboard the ship?

Crooks and rackets were his meat, sure—but on land, in the claim department of a steamship line big enough to accept every kind of consignment for any part of the world. Fraudulent claims by shippers on land were one thing, sea-going crooks another.

How would you go about nabbing a crook at sea, anyhow? And where did the girl, Miss White, fit in? Ordinarily, passengers were not accepted on a tanker voyage. You had to have a drag somewhere to get passage. Yet

the captain called her a passenger. . . .

The tanker was at sea, Barranquilla far behind, when Stone woke. Someone had opened the cabin door, and latched it wide. He was no longer a prisoner. A cool breeze fanned through the open door in short puffs as the ship slogged heavily along, the way tankers do when they carry full cargo.

Rocky Stone, stretching, stepped out on deck. For all of her cumbersome, the vessel was making knots. A white-frothed wake boiled away from her stern and the thrust of her screw was noticeable even this far forward.

The girl leaned over the rail, her eyes on a distant roll of smoke just over the horizon. Rocky Stone joined her, blinking in the early morning sun.

"You woke up," she said, without turning.

"Look," Rocky asked mildly, "why don't you tell me what it's all about?"

"Suppose you tell me?"

Stone chuckled. "This won't get us anywhere."

"It won't," she agreed.

"Okay. What do you expect me to say?"

"They plan to kill us."

"That's *their* plan, not mine."

Rocky Stone said cheerfully. "Why?"

"I don't know."

"There must be a reason."

"There is, but I don't know what."

"Why did Captain Hatch refuse you permission to go ashore?"

She shook her head. The ship under the roll of smoke came up over the horizon, off to port, quartering the tanker's course. To Adam Stone it looked like a destroyer, a U.S. destroyer. He judged it to be part of the "safety patrol" provoked in American waters by Europe's war.

"Let's begin all over again," he told the girl. "My name's Adam Stone. I'm on vacation from New York. I haven't the slightest notion what may be wrong on this hulk—if anything."

She turned to face Stone then, but there was little pleasure in her pretty face. A half-smile quivered a second on her full lips, faded quickly.

"I'm Nancy White. Also on vacation. Also from New York. And something's dreadfully wrong with the *Puncheon*. I know!"

There was a breathless intensity in the girl's fear that made Stone feel uncomfortable.

"I thought you told me you didn't know?" he said, bantering.

"I didn't mean this way." Nancy White twisted her hands. "I have a feeling—"

"I understand. Where did you join the ship?"

"New York. My father used to captain a tanker. He thought I'd enjoy a voyage on one. He got my passage. And I did enjoy it—until two days ago."

"What happened?"

"A fat man who wore a derby and carried a briefcase came and talked with Captain Hatch in his cabin for a couple of hours. When he left, everything changed. Several of the crew went away and didn't return. Captain Hatch became surly with me, and he ordered me not to go ashore."

"Who, besides yourself, saw this man?"

"Why, Mr. Mueller, I guess. And Mr. Thompson, the second mate. And Captain Hatch, of course. That was all, I think."

"What about the crew?"

NANCY WHITE shook her head gravely.

"Mr. Mueller sent everybody aft, to do something in the engine room, just before the man came. And he tried to get me to watch the work. But I didn't." She added an explanation, "It's hot down there."

"It's hot anywhere in this latitude, if you ask me," Rocky Stone said. "What was next?"

The girl shrugged. "Then, after the fat man left, Captain Hatch changed. He'd always been so nice to me before. And some of the crew went ashore and didn't return. And Mr. Thompson disappeared."

"What?"

"I said Mr. Thompson disappeared and I didn't see him again."

"Was this Thompson short-fingered, with gray eyebrows?"

"Yes. Certainly." She looked up.

Rocky Stone sighed. She had told him she didn't know anything, and it had been like pulling teeth, but here was a lead, finally. He wasn't exactly in a position to do anything with it, though, he reminded himself sardonically. Still, now the corpse beside the pier meant something to him—a murderer on the *Puncheon*.

"What time is it?" Rocky Stone yawned. "When'd we leave Barranquilla?"

"Last night, about eight o'clock," Nancy White answered his last question first. Then she glanced at a tiny watch on her wrist. "It's six-forty, A.M."

Her "A.M." sounded very pointed to Rocky Stone. He grinned.

"I must have slept the clock around."

"You did." Her voice was accusing. "How could you, and let them bring us way out here, where we haven't got a single chance to get away?"

The girl waved her hand, palm up, at the expanse of water surrounding them. No land was in sight in any direction. They could see only the smooth waves of the "blue" Caribbean, which is really a bright grass-green on sunny days. Seabirds swooped and skimmed and squawked about the tanker, and the destroyer furrowed along beneath her plume of smoke. But everything else was just plain water.

Rocky Stone pretended to shade his eyes.

"Pretty," he said.

The girl stamped her foot, and the expression of disdain that she had worn when she first saw Adam Stone came back.

"You fool!" she blazed. "You grinning fool! We're going to be killed, and I'm scared."

Stone sobered instantly. His dark eyes pitied her as he touched her shoulder. The girl was trembling.

"I'm scared, too," he told her seriously. "But maybe it's not as bad as you think. Maybe something will turn up."

"What are you going to do?"

She had him there. Rocky Stone,

thinking of the three-hundred-pound mate, of Captain Hatch and his sly sadism, of the miles of water isolating them on this ill-natured ship, didn't know what he could do at the moment.

"Wait," he lied. "I've got an idea."

But Nancy White refused to be comforted by so vague an answer. She was pouting, prettily, Rocky thought, when the big red-headed mate, Mueller, padded up.

"Breakfast," he said.

Adam Stone followed the girl to the mess. Captain Hatch was seated at the head of the table, prepared to enjoy himself. There was a rapt look in his glittering, slanted eyes, as if he were about to feed a condemned man his last meal and thrill with every bite.

"I hope you had a comfortable night, Mr. Stone," he said, with mock courtesy.

"Yes, thank you, Captain," Rocky said meekly. "Very comfortable."

Adam Stone's casual, unworried air didn't please Captain Hatch. He didn't like it at all.

So Stone needled him. "I slept extremely well, in fact."

He cocked a glance at the girl and she shuddered. She'd probably be off him for life—if she had a life, hereafter. But Rocky Stone didn't plan to give this wet-lipped little runt the satisfaction of gloating over his discomfort, if he could help it.

**B**ACON, biscuits, honey and coffee were on the table. Already the big knobby-faced mate was stuffing food into his small mouth and its littleness apparently placed no limitation on quantity. Mueller was not only a huge man, but a huge and noisy eater as well.

"It's plain fare," Captain Hatch said smoothly. "But if you have a particular preference, I'll try to get it for you, since . . ."

He left the sentence hanging, his gaze roving from Rocky to the girl and back again. Although he sought to keep his expression perfectly blank, there was evil in the set of his very bones.

Stone thought of a mongoose he

had once seen in a zoo. The animal, its sleek head weaving, its beady eyes alight, had crept toward a fear-paralyzed live meal, tossed into the cage by a keeper. Even Rocky Stone, tough, hard, realistic, had turned away from that sight.

But he couldn't turn away now.

"I'll eat what's here," he said flatly.

"And you, Miss White. Would you care for a favorite dish?"

The captain's false solicitude was vast. A sneer curled around its edges.

"Coffee," the girl faltered. Her face was pale, drawn, her eyes were wide with misery. "I'll just have coffee."

"Nonsense!" Captain Hatch found the girl a better target for his game than Rocky Stone. "That's no breakfast. Haven't you heard sea air gives you an appetite?"

With a grand gesture, he loaded bacon on her plate, then placed the honey pot beside it. Nancy White did not eat. She viewed the food as if her stomach were queasy.

"Why, Miss White, you look ill." Captain Hatch's sympathy jeered, a chuckle whispered under his breath. "Surely you aren't going to tell me you're seasick in this mild weather? It's not seemly that . . ."

"Shut up!" Rocky Stone interrupted.

His tone was bleak, granite hardness showed again on his countenance, his fingers were white on the tabletop. Captain Hatch, swallowing, bridled.

"Perhaps," he finally said, cold as ice, "you've forgotten your position, Mr. Stone."

That did it. Rocky Stone came out of his chair, scooped the captain's bosom up in his hand, jerked him to his feet.

"Listen," he said through his teeth. "Pick on me all you want to, but leave the girl alone!"

Captain Hatch snarled in his throat. So Rocky Stone joggled the captain as the big mate had shaken him. And he learned quickly that he had made another mistake.

Mueller, wiping his tiny mouth on the back of one great paw, rose slowly, came slowly around the table. His

outflung arms reached for Stone. It was on again.

This time, though, Rocky didn't even think of using his fists. He released the stocky captain and danced, like a clever boxer, backwards across the messroom. But the place was cramped, its furniture securely bolted to the deck. He suddenly found he didn't have space for back-pedaling—and Mueller kept coming.

So Adam Stone changed his tactics on the crest of an instant. He snatched a fork from the table and sprang to meet Mueller, a blur of speed. He jabbed the ludicrous weapon sharply against the man's protruding belly, then glided away, like an expert fencer handling the finest rapier.

Mueller howled as a hurt animal howls, clutched his stomach, bent over slightly. Adam Stone shifted his attack to the rear, stabbed his makeshift spear deep into the mate's oversize thigh, then slid out of range before he could turn around.

The spot must have been exceedingly tender, for Mueller whimpered and rubbed himself gingerly. He stood helplessly agape until Captain Hatch bawled at him.

"Mr. Mueller! The man has nothing except a small fork. Are you going to let him stop you with that?"

The captain kicked Mueller's leg, as some skimmers urge a balky mule into motion.

Either the sneering words or the kick drove the big redhead to advance. He waddled after Adam Stone.

Then the small messroom became a backdrop for one of the ugliest dramas ever played by human beings. Panting, mumbling, moaning with pain, Mueller followed Rocky Stone around and around the restricted space, meeting the sharp-tined fork everywhere. Relentless, because he had no choice, Stone plunged his weapon again and again into the man's suffering flesh, his graceful footwork keeping him always just beyond reach.

Captain Hatch, at ease in his chair, a nasty gleam in his frosty eyes, watched the torture of his own man with hideous pleasure. His lips got

wetter, hung loosely, inhumanly slack.

Spots of color flamed in his cheeks, grew until they spread over his ears. His chapped hands jerked and quivered with unholy ecstasy. And all the while he goaded, with gibes and orders and kicks, Mueller into taking more punishment.

Nancy White first watched the fight worriedly, then turned her head away, then hid her fear-widened eyes on folded arms and wept quietly on the tabletop.

Rocky Stone jabbed and continued to jab. Mueller, like a bear tormented by an active dog, stumbled after him. The big mate probably felt as full of holes as a pin cushion but he had determination. He kept coming. Blood flowed sluggishly from wounds on various portions of the man's body, staining his thin clothing, trickling over his tanned skin. And Stone's stomach limped every time the fork sank again into Mueller. Yet he had no choice except to fight desperately with his only weapon. He jabbed and the mate bled.

**F**INALLY Captain Hatch ended the struggle—simply. Almost with an air of casualness, he thrust a foot between Stone's legs from behind and tripped him.

Adam Stone went down. The three-hundred-pound mate leaped, pinning him to the deck. His fork and his agility became suddenly useless against Mueller's unlimited strength. The mate knocked the fork from Stone's hand, his blow numbing Rocky's wrist. Then he swept Adam Stone from the deck, lifted him high between large hands, and began slamming him against a steel wall.

Rocky Stone's teeth clattered, his head rolled on his neck at the force of the impacts. He fought and clawed and kicked and squirmed. But he might as well have saved himself the trouble. Nothing he could do affected Mueller in the least. Steadily, as if he timed himself to a certain pattern of rhythm, the big mate pounded the wall with Rocky Stone until Stone was breathless and limp, though not quite unconscious.



Nancy White, screaming, flinched whenever Stone thudded against the wall. Captain Hatch, the pouches under his misshapen eyes shaking, laughed without sound.

When Stone was subdued completely, Mueller, still holding him aloft, stalked out on deck. Nancy White and the captain followed. There was a wondering, fear-ridden look on the girl's pretty face, but Captain Hatch's pale eyes were glowing with anticipation. The girl no longer screamed.

The patrolling destroyer's diagonal course had brought her much closer to the tanker. Now miles instead of leagues separated the two ships. Mueller hesitated when he saw the destroyer.

"Maybe glasses," he said to the captain, in his guttural voice.

But Captain Hatch had an answer to that. He moved his head significantly toward the starboard side of the tanker. Mueller shifted his burden, and the little procession trooped to a point beside the rail where the tanker's forward superstructure concealed them from the view of the destroyer.

Then, with deliberate slowness, as if he were tossing a pail of garbage overboard, the big mate lifted Rocky Stone high and flung him into the sea.

The water shocked him from his semi-stupor. He sank deep, rose to the surface spluttering, and a life-preserver struck the water beside his head. He grabbed for the circle of canvas and cork, missed, grabbed again. When his fingers finally clutched the object, he felt himself being tugged along with the tanker.

The life-preserver was attached to a line, and the girl was at the other end. She had thrown it and timed the throw. *That* was quick thinking, if you asked Rocky Stone.

Hand over hand, he made for the ship. And, after a couple of false starts when the waterline swash bruised him against the tanker's plates and almost tore his grip from the line, he went up the side, like a monkey on a stick. Nancy White helped him over the rail.

No one attempted to interfere with

the rescue. The huge red-headed mate, his heavy features stolid, stood beside Captain Hatch, who seemed rather pleased at the unexpected turn of events.

Cat-and-mouse play was right down his alley, his smirk said. The crew, or what few members of it were in sight, watched silently while Adam Stone tried to shake the water from his clothes.

Open hostilities were ended—for the present.

"Are you hurt bad?" the girl asked, hoarsely.

"No, I don't think so." Adam Stone dug brine out of his ear and grimaced. "But I've learned I'm not an old salt. I don't like the taste of the ocean."

Nancy White's concern vanished. She stabbed Rocky Stone with a look, her lip curling.

"Funny man!" she said, bitterly. Then she walked toward the bow.

She was standing there, wistfully gazing after the destroyer as it cut the tanker's course beyond hail, when Adam Stone turned into his small cabin to wring his clothing and lick his wounds.

**H**IS body was painfully bruised from one end to the other. He ached all over and suffered a twinge of agony if he so much as flexed a muscle. Yet, as far as he could tell, none of his injuries was likely to be permanent. He let himself prudently down on the bunk, sighed as he persuaded his taut, abused muscles to relax.

He was very weary, very sore. He slept.

The tanker had no way on her when Rocky Stone finished his nap late in the afternoon. She was stopped dead still somewhere at sea, barely rising and falling on a gentle swell.

Raucous yells, the creak of gear, the dull thump of collision mats against the tanker's steel sides brought Stone to full wakefulness. Groaning through clenched teeth, cursing mildly, he dragged himself from the bed and staggered into his clothes.

The deck bustled with activity

when Adam Stone reached it, walking stiffly. Mueller, the big mate, was posted beside a main tank valve. Members of the crew heaved and hauled and chanted. Directed by Captain Hatch, they wrestled a bulky hose toward a coupling.

This hose wormed down to a small wooden ship snubbed at the tanker's side, pitching moderately in unison with the larger craft. Two others stood off nearby. The three looked like fishing vessels, but Rocky Stone knew they were not a part of any fishing fleet. And they explained a lot.

Now he understood what was wrong with the *Puncheon*, why the second mate had been murdered and a portion of the crew somehow stranded in Barranquilla. He understood, too, why he and the girl were slated for death.

Rocky Stone's whole frame seemed one raw, throbbing nerve. The bright sun stung his eyes, pierced his brain. He felt rotten, and activity and noise didn't lessen his discomfort. He would much rather have returned to his bunk, where at least he would not have to stand, but he remained on deck.

Grimly, stubbornly, he stayed there, and the busy people of both vessels disregarded his presence. That was their error.

Adam Stone watched the transshipment begin. The *Puncheon* was a sloppy ship and an untidy, careless crew were making her more sloppy. Her deck-plates were already covered by a neglected scurf of old grease and they added to the filth. Oil dribbled from loose connections here and there, poured viscidly over everything, as the massive hose stiffened and the tanker's cargo started growling up from her belly and down into the ship below.

It was Colombian crude, perhaps the finest in the world. You could, in a pinch, use it in your auto just as it came from the ground—clear and amber, rich, clean, fine. Rocky Stone was not surprised that somebody thought a tanker-load worth a few murders.

Nancy White came timidly up be-

side Adam Stone then. For several minutes she observed operations in silence. Finally she faced him.

"What . . ." she began.

"Oil," Rocky Stone told her tersely. "There's a war, and it's precious to certain individuals."

The girl drew her straight brows together.

"You mean the fat man at Barranquilla arranged this with Captain Hatch? That it's the reason he's going to—"

"Exactly."

"But I don't see why they go to all this trouble. Why they should have to kill anyone." Nancy White caught her breath. "Couldn't the oil be bought and . . ."

"It was bought — from Captain Hatch."

"I mean, honestly."

"Listen." Stone explained, "just now, for some purposes, oil is almost as valuable as gold, when it's delivered at the right spot. There's no legitimate way of making such a delivery, so Captain Hatch was bribed."

"I still don't understand."

Adam Stone touched the girl's arm, then his fingers closed comfortingly on it. His black eyes were suddenly very serious.

"This is not the time for details," he said. "It's time for that idea I mentioned."

NANCY WHITE was startled. She had given Rocky Stone up as a bad job long ago. Unbelieving, she eyed him during the space of seconds. Then she decided she liked what she saw. Confidence in Rocky Stone grew on her lovely features.

"Can I help?" she asked.

That made Rocky Stone grin.

"You *are* game," he said, approvingly.

Nancy White smiled. Both of them nearly forgot the business at hand then. But Stone brought his mind back to his job.

"No," he said, "you can't help. It's a one-man chance. You go to your cabin and get into a life-preserver—just in case. I'll do the rest."

"I'd rather stay."

"No," Stone said firmly, "you

might cause everything to fail simply by being on deck. You can help most by going to your cabin."

"All right, if you say so."

Obediently Nancy White turned to leave but Rocky Stone didn't release her arm.

"Thanks," he said, "for pulling me out of the briny deep."

Rocky Stone caught a glimpse of the mischievous expression he had always expected in her eyes.

"I'm sorry I called you a fool," she said. And as she headed for her cabin, Nancy White added, "I'll have a life-belt ready for you, too—just in case. Good luck!"

Adam Stone's grin lasted until the girl was beyond sight, but no longer. Once she was comparatively safe, his lips jerked into a solemn, grim line. He dug a waterproof match-case from his pocket, opened it, selected three matches with care.

He strolled casually down beside the pulsing hose, beside the leaks and oil puddles, the matches concealed in his palm.

His plan was ridiculously simple, in principle and in execution. He merely lighted his matches, one by one, and flicked them onto different sections of the oil-flooded deck.

The ship caught fire instantly. Little squads of flame leaped over and around tank fittings, marched along the grease-encrusted deck, recruiting as they went. A column of black smoke climbed into the sky, visible for miles, like burning tar-paper that goes unchecked.

Then Adam Stone had only to stand off Captain Hatch and the giant Mueller, and any others who might want to show their displeasure, until help could come. But that wasn't so simple.

The *Punchoon* was suddenly a swirl of screaming confusion. Some of the crew jumped overboard. Others stampeded for lifeboats, clawing and scrambling, their feet drumming on steel plates. Still others swarmed down into the wooden ship and hacked at lines which fastened her to the burning tanker. All chattered and howled and scurried, panic-stricken.

Rocky Stone congratulated himself. He wasn't going to have to battle the whole crew, anyway.

Captain Hatch and the big mate, however, didn't join the rush to escape. They stood their ground. Captain Hatch bellowed unheeded orders at his scattering men. Mueller, flames licking his pants legs, first closed the main tank valve, then retreated to the foredeck, where Captain Hatch stood, where Adam Stone had dashed after he set the blaze.

It, like the superstructure aft, was raised a few feet above the level of the tank well. So the three men were together on an island of temporary safety beside a lake of fire. Someone was on the other side, too, for the tanker's whistle hoarsely bawled distress signals over the sea.

Mueller waited for no prodding from Captain Hatch. He rushed Rocky Stone. And this tactic gave Stone the only break he had against this unbeatable giant of a man.

Adam Stone moved smoothly backward until he was about three feet from the ship's rail, then he met the big mate's spring. As Mueller plunged upon him, Rocky Stone bent quickly, caught the man's weight on his shoulders, grasped his ankles and heaved. Mueller, driven by his rush and Rocky's springy muscles, pitched headlong into the sea.

Not even waiting to see how the big mate fared, Adam Stone whirled, expecting to find Captain Hatch ready to attack. But the captain had disappeared. Rocky, realizing what that meant, galloped toward the bridge.

A YOUNG fuzzy-faced officer that Stone had not seen before was whining commands worriedly into the engine-room speaking tube. He didn't look up at Stone. Captain Hatch, in a tiny chartroom just abaft the bridge, pawed frantically at a drawer. There was a black Navy revolver in his fist when he straightened, his flaccid lips lifted off his yellow teeth.

"It's too late for that, Hatch," Rocky said. "Your game's played out. The destroyer will be here in a minute."

Captain Hatch, for a breath,

seemed undecided. His gun wavered slightly. Then his chin firmed with resolution, his baggy eyes squeezed half shut, and he steadied the revolver.

Rocky Stone charged—straight into the gun muzzle. He felt powder bite his cheek, heard a deafening roar and the *splat* of lead striking metal overhead. Then he was on the deck, grappling with the wiry captain.

As they rolled and slugged, the revolver barked once again and Captain Hatch groaned but fought on. Stone tried desperately to wrest the weapon from the man's elusive hand, but his previous conflicts had worn his strength away. It was below par, much below. The best he could do, for the present, was hold his own.

They battled fiercely, bitterly, no holds barred, no possible advantage overlooked, tooth and claw and brute energy.

During some period of the brawl the young officer and the helmsman joined in, kicking viciously but not too accurately at Rocky Stone as he rolled to and fro with their captain. Then Nancy White was a part of the fracas, courageously wielding a life-belt as an improvised bludgeon.

Finally Rocky Stone got the gun—and it was all over.

He rose, took command of the bridge and the ship. The captain's two men, under the threat of his revolver, meekly raised their hands, backed into a corner. Captain Hatch lay still, for the shot which had caused him to groan had entered his leg. He hated Stone with his eyes, but he was through and knew it.

Fatigued, bloody, yet grinning, Rocky Stone led the girl to the bridge, closed and latched the chartroom door on his prisoners. The tanker still burned, shooting black smoke high, but the blaze had lost some of its first fierceness, and it seemed to be confining itself to the tank well.

"Shouldn't we get off?" Nancy White asked calmly. "Won't she explode?"

"I don't think so."

"What are we going to do now?"

The girl was not frightened, Rocky noted, merely curious.

"Wait for the Navy," he told her. "Oh, you mean the destroyer we saw this morning."

"Yes. She's probably seen the smoke already."

"That was your idea from the beginning?"

"Well," Rocky hedged, "maybe not exactly from the beginning."

They were silent, their shoulders touching. The howling confusion of a few minutes ago had died down. Those of the crew who had launched lifeboats were picking up the ones who had dived overboard. Rocky Stone saw the big mate, dripping largely, being hauled over a tilted gunwale by four straining men.

The sham fishing boat, now free from the tanker and overmanned, sailed to join her fellows. The three put their noses together, like dogs meeting for the first time. Stone saw talk and necks craning toward the tanker. But nobody ventured to board her.

"Look." The girl pointed.

Adam Stone turned from his sentinel duty to follow her finger. The destroyer, bobbing like a hobby-horse, under forced draft, making all of her twenty-five knots, was speeding toward the *Puncheon*. She slid to a quick halt beside the tanker, her propellers churning full speed astern, and her high-pressure hoses, already broken out in preparation, literally swept the fire off the *Puncheon's* deck.

It was done with such efficiency and speed that it seemed absurdly easy, almost too easy for belief.

**B**UT the flames were gone. Only the crust of neglected oil fouling the tanker's deck had burned. The ship and her valuable cargo were undamaged by the fire—and her tank-well was much cleaner for it.

The three small ships had begun scampering away as fast as their slow engines would permit. Now, the blaze completely conquered, this attracted the destroyer's attention. She leaped off to round them up.

"Good!" Rocky Stone said.

Nancy White moved three steps from Rocky Stone. Mischief was in

her voice when she asked her question.

"Why is it good?"

"Because they'll find men on those boats willing to talk. Come back over here."

She shook her head, smiling. "I still don't understand."

"Those fishing vessels are disguised submarine tenders, fuel carriers," Stone explained. "Nazi, I suspect, since they're hard up for oil. Hatch accepted a bribe to deliver his cargo out here. He probably intended to tell his owners that an unidentifiable sub had forced him to turn it over to an entirely different kind of ship. That's the reason he stranded some of his crew, the reason he was set on murdering us."

"He didn't want witnesses, you mean?"

"Yes. Come here." Stone peered at her out of curious eyes.

"More?"

"There isn't any more except that Hatch and Mueller killed the second mate, Thompson, because he knew something about the deal and they couldn't or wouldn't trust him. If they don't hang for attempted piracy they'll hang for that."

The lifeboats were returning to the *Puncheon*, but the destroyer, also, was returning, with three captive sub tenders in tow. Rocky Stone had uncovered "irregularities" and taken steps. Now he wanted to think of something else.

"I'm master of this vessel at present," he told the girl with mock gruffness. "Young lady, you'll do as I say. Come here!"

She came.

NEXT ISSUE

## EXIT DOCTOR DEATH

A Novelet of Crime's Avenger by FRANK PIAZZI

**When a girl needs help**

**UPSET STOMACH - ONIONS**

**DENTAL DECAY - LIQUOR**

**TOBACCO**

**SEN-SEN**  
FOR THE BREATH

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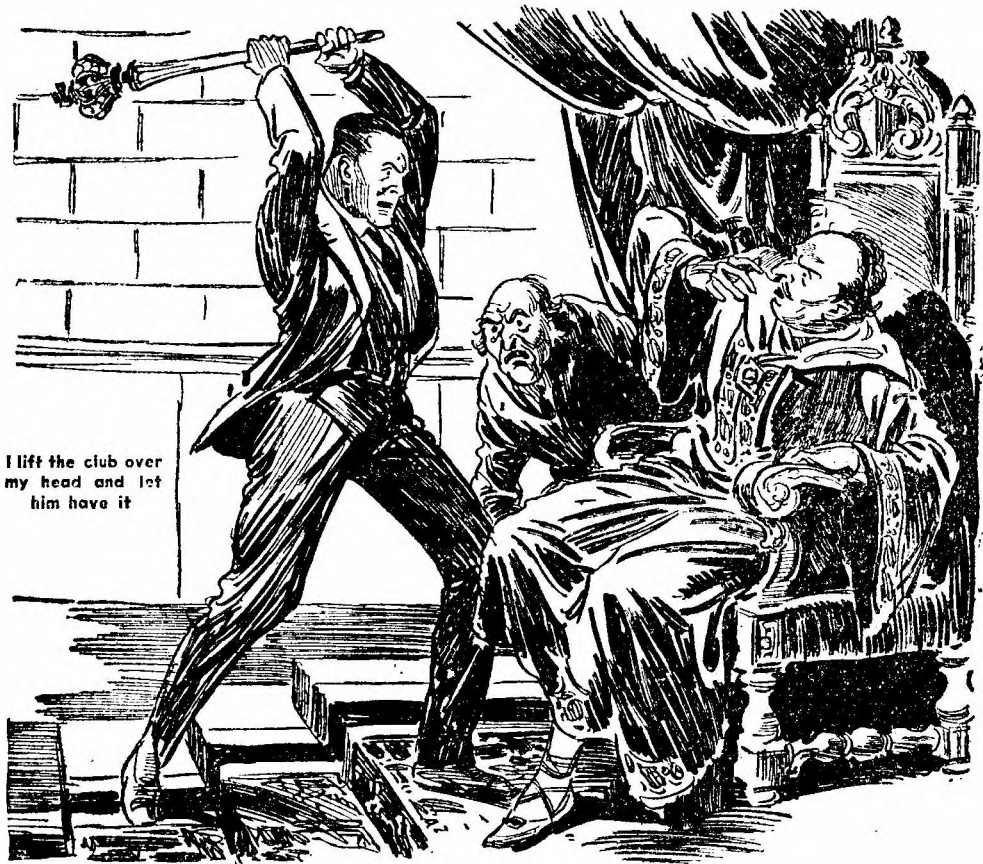
**DON'T OFFEND... USE SEN-SEN**  
BREATH SWEETENER... DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION



# MUGS KELLY INTERVENES

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

*Author of "Mug in a Frame," "Cub for a Corpse," etc.*



I lift the club over  
my head and let  
him have it

*When Sinister Forces Surround the Court of King Icarus II, the Gargoyle Detective Picks a Clever Blackmail Scheme for a Royal Knockout!*

**A**LL right, so I have the face that frightened Gargantua. Maybe he is big and dangerous, and kills people if he can get hold of them, but I know guys that act the same way and they ain't monkeys.

You take this King Icarus. There was a so-and-such if I ever saw one—and I got plenty of views of that lug.

Before we go any further maybe I better trip down to the front of the stage and introduce myself. "Mugs"

Kelly is the name, of the Ninth Avenue Kellys. I'm big and tough, and a private detective. And as I mentioned before I have the face that frightened the pride of the circus. Personally I think Gargantua is jealous of me. Not that I wear a mask of horror—it's just that handsome is as handsome does and it done me wrong.

Anyway, I'm down at Atlantic City taking me a vacation when it all starts happening. I'm staying at one of the beach front hotels and getting along all right when one evening there comes a knock on the door of my room.

I open the door and there's a bald-headed guy standing there looking at me. He shudders and so do I. Maybe he didn't like my looks but he's got a face like something one of the school kids drew on the blackboard while teacher was out of the room.

"Mr. Kelly?" he says as though he doesn't really want to believe it. "Mr.—ah—"Pitcher' Kelly?"

"Mugs Kelly," I says, giving him a hard look. "What became of the coffin?"

"What coffin?" he asks, puzzled.

"Beg pardon—thought you were a werewolf looking for your parking space," I says. "What do you want, who are you and why?"

"I am Guff, the Mystic," says bald and dismal "Royal Soothsayer to His Majesty Icarus, the Second."

"I remember his old man," I says. "I read about him in a mythology book. Kind of a high flyer, wasn't he. Died from too much sunlight as I remember."

"He's not in the phone book," says Guff, like something had just started to worry him. He has one of those faces that looks worried all the time anyway. "If he was he would be the first."

"Who isn't in the phone book?" I ask, wondering if I wasn't suddenly being featured in a little act thought up by fourteen and a half Hollywood gag writers for the Marx Brothers. "Come on, dish me the guff, Guff!"

"This Icarus the first you are talking about—" he says.

"Thrilling Wonder's little green

men!" I interrupts. "Will you please tell me why you are here? Please"—my tone changes—"before I get sore and kick you out of my room!"

"His Majesty—" he begins.

Guff breaks off, looking like a fish opening its mouth for the hook as my phone rings. He makes a dive for the phone, but I grab him before he reaches it.

"Wait a minute," I tell him. "I'll answer that."

"But I'm sure it is for me," says Guff.

I DON'T pay any attention to him as I pick up the hand set and place the receiver to my ear. Guff sees I am not going to let him get the phone first so he sits in a chair and watches me.

"Hello?" I says. "Kelly speaking."

"Listen, Kelly," says a voice over the wire that sounds like a couple of sheets of number eight sandpaper being rubbed together. "Lay off the Icarus case or you'll be wearing a wooden kimono."

"Oh, Mr. Karloff, you say the nicest things," I mutter, and then I get tough. "Listen, yuh lug, you aren't scaring me any. If I want to take a case, I'll take it. And on second thought I apologize to Boris Karloff, he plays real villians — not cheap heels."

"To disobey is death," says the guy on the phone, and then the line goes dead as he hangs up.

"Who was it?" asks Guff with unbecoming eagerness.

"Wrong number," I says. "Now tell me what's wrong with the King?"

"He is going to be murdered Tuesday at four o'clock," says Guff quietly.

"With tea and crumpets served, I hope."

Just then I hear a sound like the snapping of a bull whip outside the window of my room. I've learned that there are times you live longest by moving fast. So I drop to the floor like somebody socked me over the head. And just as I do the bullet smashes through the lower window pane, flies across the room right where I had been standing. I saw the guy with a rifle at the window

of a building opposite the hotel and that was why I ducked down quick.

Guff has more brains than I thought. He jumps up and jabs a finger at the switch and puts out the lights in a hurry. By that time I have my automatic out of my shoulder holster and am standing at the window. The window where the guy with the rifle had been is dark now. That was one crazy angle about the whole thing. I had seen a masked man at the open window with a rifle in his hands and the lights in the room had been on at the time.

"He's gone," I says. "Maybe he meant what he said over the phone, if it was the same guy."

"His Majesty didn't tell me I was to be murdered, too," says Guff.

"A soothsayer should be able to figure that one out all by himself," I tells him, drawing down the shade at the window. "Turn on the lights; he won't shoot again."

Guff turns on the lights. I'm tired playing around so I make him talk, and talk fast and straight. It seems that Icarus, the Second, is really an eccentric millionaire named Jefferson Bronce. He is a bit balmy and really believes that he is the only living descendant of Icarus and is the ruler of Crete. All of which is swell except for the fact that Icarus didn't have any descendants, and if he had they wouldn't have been kings anyway.

"And you think you really are a soothsayer," I asks, after I have managed to dig this much information out of Guff. "Is that right?"

"Of course not," says Guff haughtily. "I'm just Mr. Bronce's private secretary. He insists that I keep up the King and his court atmosphere at all times." The secretary smiles. "After all he is a very rich man, and I like my job, so naturally I humor him." Then his tone changes. "But I was serious about someone threatening His Majesty — I mean Mr. Bronce's life."

"Tell me about it," I urge him.

**G**UFF became serious. "We are staying here at this hotel. King Icarus has a suite on the tenth floor that he has furnished like

a palace. His young nephew is with him—"

"Don't tell me it's going to be one of those cases where nephew plans his uncle's murder to inherit the family fortune," I interrupt angrily. "What's the nephew's name?"

"Collin Harvey. He is a big game hunter, at least he used to be before the war started. He has quite a lot of money of his own that his father left him. He's Mr. Bronce's sister's son."

"And Bronce told you to get me to work on this case?" I asks.

"Well, not exactly," says Guff. "He didn't want me to go to the police when we discovered that his life was threatened. And when I suggested getting a private detective he said all right, to do so. I was talking to the room clerk about private detectives and he told me what good work you did in the Case of the Wistful Bath-tub."

"Yeah, one of my cleanest cases," I says, knowing that the room clerk had been giving Guff a ribbing. The guy at the hotel desk didn't know a thing about any of the cases I've ever handled. "Let's go see the King," I suggest then.

I open the door of the room, and then remember that I'd left my cigarettes lying on the bureau. I step back to get them and Guff stands watching me. Suddenly, the door blows shut and we hear a heavy thud out in the hall.

"What was that?" I snap, drawing open the door and looking out. "Oh, I see."

Lying on the hall carpet is a heavy long-handled fire ax. Obviously, it has been placed up over my door and was supposed to drop down on my head when I came out of the room, but the door slammed shut and knocked the ax down without creating any homicide.

"Somebody doesn't like you," says Guff in the same tone that you'd say, "Naughty, naughty" to a child. "Maybe it's your face, Mr. Kelly."

Before I can answer that one a guy dressed up like an undertaker's assistant comes marching along the hall. I know him by sight and name. It's

Dawson, the assistant manager of the hotel. He looks at the fire ax and then at me and Guff.

"Really, gentlemen," he says ruefully. "The management will not tolerate such pranks. Guests are not allowed to play with the fire-fighting equipment. That ax is for emergency use only."

**H**IS attitude gets me sore. Telling me that I had been playing with the hotel fire-fighting equipment without giving either Guff or me a chance to say anything. I saw red, and lashed out with a right that caught Dawson on the chin. He bounced back against the wall, and then dropped like a wet rag to the floor.

He's sprawled there with his eyes closed when a stocky blond man about thirty gets out of the elevator and comes hurrying toward us.

"I've been looking all over for you, Guff," he says excitedly. "The room clerk said you had gone up to Room Ten-sixteen so I came up here. Uncle is very excited. He has just received another note threatening his life."

"We were on our way to the King's suite," says Guff. "This is Mr. Kelly, a private detective." The secretary knelt down beside the assistant hotel manager who is still lying there motionless. "We've had a little trouble with this man."

"What's wrong?" asks the guy I realize must be the nephew Collin Harvey. "That's Dawson, the assistant manager, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," says Guff. "But there's something wrong. Mr. Kelly just knocked him down with a blow of his fist, but now—" The secretary broke off with a frown.

Guff moves over, examines Dawson, then gets to his feet. I can see from his expression that there is something seriously wrong. He looks at me and then shakes his head solemnly.

"This man is dead," he says. "Too bad, Kelly, I'm afraid your blow must have killed him."

I guess that is where I started surprising the boys. I'm the kind of a guy who doesn't believe all I see and

less of what I hear. I walk over and give the "corpse" a good swift kick in the posterior. Dawson lets out a yell and leaps to his feet. He glares around wildly and then goes running down the hall with his coat tails flying out behind him. He disappears down the exit stairs.

"What is this anyway?" I asks, glaring at Guff and Harvey. "A little game of 'Charades' or 'Pin the tail on the donkey' with me supposed to be the donkey? I knew that guy wasn't dead. What did you think I killed him with, a mysterious Oriental poison that I had on my brass knuckles?"

"It was all a joke." Collin Harvey smiles, but it reminds me of a sick cat yawning. "The King is really very anxious to see you at once. His life is in danger."

"All right, let's go then," I grunt.

While we're riding up to King Icarus' suite I'm thinking hard. First Guff comes looking for me to work on this case, then some lug phones me and tells me to lay off or else. After that a guy wearing a mask takes a shot at me from a window across from the hotel. I realize now that guy could have been the nephew, and it also could have been John Smith from Podunk, for all I know.

Then this business with the fire ax. Dawson comes along and I don't like his attitude and sock him. Guff and Harvey try to make me think I've killed Dawson, and I might have fallen for it except for one thing. I was watching the hotel manager pretty carefully when he was lying there, and dead guys usually stop breathing. Dawson hadn't, so I knew I wasn't kicking a corpse. But why try to frame me with a murder? I decided to keep quiet and see if I couldn't get the tie-up later.

We reach the suite then. Guff and Harvey take me into a room that has been fixed up fit for a king all right. At one end of it there is a throne, and there is a guy dressed in a red velvet king's robe. He reminds me of a white-faced buzzard with a mustache. He has a hooked nose and such a high forehead that it doesn't reach his hair until it gets pretty near to the back of his head.

"Good evening, Mr. Bronce," I says, as I'm getting a little tired of the King stuff. "I'm Mugs Kelly."

"And I am King Icarus, the Second," says Bronce, majestically. "Supreme Ruler of the Isle of Crete, commander of the army and navy and keeper of the Royal Exchequer." He glared at me. "And don't call me Mr. Bronce!"

"Sorry Your Majesty," I says, bowing before him.

There was something about this suite of rooms I didn't like—a sort of sinister atmosphere that I couldn't explain. Collin Harvey had quietly disappeared and Guff was standing beside the throne. I kept thinking that if a clam had a face it would look just like that of the secretary.

Bronce seemed harmless enough, even though he was obviously a little crazy. I felt sorry for the guy. A millionaire playing that he was a king was like a kid playing he was an Indian or something. I see that he's holding a fancy looking scepter in one hand. It's sort of a silver stick with a crown on the top of it, and I think what a swell shillelah it would make. A guy could go to work beautifully in a fight with a club like that in his hand.

"My life has been threatened," says Bronce. "I'll pay five thousand dollars to you, Mr. Kelly, if you will find and arrest the man who plans to kill me. But the police must not know anything about this until you are positive that you have captured the fiend."

"I'll show Mr. Kelly the notes, Your Majesty," says Guff, as Harvey comes back into the throne room. "If you will be good enough to come with me, please, Mr. Kelly."

"Well, I've finally made up my mind, Uncle," says Harvey, going over to Bronce. "After we have talked it over I'm sure that you will agree that my plan is the wise one."

"No, Collin, no!" yells Bronce. "I won't do it—ever!"

**G**UFF leads me into a room and closes the door. He shows me a collection of neatly typewritten threat notes. All are done on the same sort

of typewriting paper. All of the notes read:

YOU WILL DIE THURSDAY AT FOUR O'CLOCK.

"Not very bright upon the part of the sender," I says. "The police could trace the typewriter on which these were written in no time."

There is a phone in the room. I pick it up and it starts ringing.

"This is the hotel management," says a voice on the wire. "Please inform Mr. Bronce that we expect the bill to be paid in full by noon tomorrow or we must request him to give up the suite."

I handed the phone to Guff without saying anything. He asks them to repeat the message, says he will tell Bronce and then hangs up. Just as he does we hear a shout and the sound of a struggle coming from the throne room.

"Come on!" I yelp.

I dash into the throne room and find that it's dark.

"He tried to get us," shouts Bronce in the darkness. "He struck Harvey on the chin and knocked him down."

Guff turns on the lights. Collin Harvey is lying on the floor, out cold from a nasty blow that left his chin all cut and bloody. The King is pretty well messed up; his scepter is lying on the floor and he is sitting on his throne breathing heavily. There is another door to the room leading out into the hall and it is wide open.

"He—he went that way," says Bronce, pointing toward the door. "He tried to kill us both!"

"Yeah," I says, going to the door and drawing it closed after seeing there is nobody out in the hall. "First, he was supposed to murder Harvey and then you." I pick up the scepter. "At least that was what I was supposed to think."

"What do you mean?" says the King suspiciously. Guff has moved over beside the throne, listening. "I don't understand, Kelly."

"That's just it," I tells him. "That's where you and Guff made your big mistake—you don't understand Kelly. You figured that I was dumb, but I'm



not. Don't you think I know that Guff's coming to my room and hiring me to protect you was part of the plan? The phone call warning me to keep away from the case, the masked guy standing in a lighted room while he took a shot at me was all just a build-up to convince me that Bronce was in real danger."

"But why should we go to all that trouble?" asks Guff.

"Because you wanted me to believe there was a killer after Bronce and Harvey," I says. "Harvey is the guy around here that has money. Bronce evidently has spent all of his fortune carrying out this goofy King business. If he had plenty of money now, the hotel management wouldn't be calling about the hotel bill. You guys were going to give me a good build-up and then kill Harvey so that his uncle would get his money. I was supposed to believe it was the killer who wrote the threatening notes and keep on trying to protect Bronce—"

"Damn you!" shouts Bronce, fumbling inside of his robe for what I figure must be a gun. "You did find out too much."

"Take your hand away from that gun!" I roar, raising the scepter over my head with both hands like a club. "If you don't I'll smash your skull with this!"

**B**RONCE pulls his hand away quick. Guff leaps at me and I sock him over the head with the scepter and knock him out. Bronce draws his gun and I expertly knock it out of his hand with my scepter club.

"I heard everything, Kelly," says

Harvey as he gets to his feet. "That's why I pretended to be still unconscious. You were right. Uncle hasn't any money left; I just found that out. He has been trying to bluff me about it. You see, he has been a little off mentally and I wanted to put him under the care of specialists but he refused to let me. I was trying to convince him it was the best thing to do tonight when the lights suddenly went out."

"And somebody attacked you in the dark and hit you across the chin with this," I says, showing him the crown end of the scepter that had a little dried blood on it. "There must be a special switch somewhere on the throne that King Icarus could press with his foot and turn out the lights."

"But why did Guff want to pretend that Dawson was dead there in the hall when you hit the assistant manager?" asks Harvey.

"Maybe so that he and Bronce could hold a murder over me—at least a manslaughter angle." I grin as I say that one. "It was a pretty weak idea on their part. I had begun to get suspicious long before that."

"I might have been murdered if you hadn't intervened," says Collin Harvey. Then he shudders.

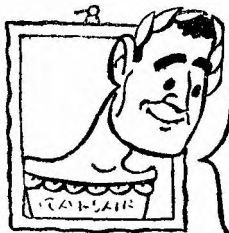
"But I did and you're still alive." I sighs.

"What's the matter?" he asks.

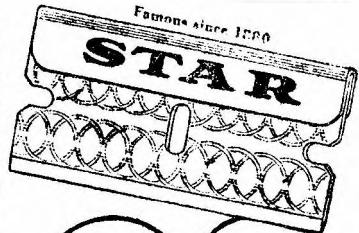
"I'm thinking of the five thousand bucks I ain't gonna collect!"

"I'll make it ten thousand," says Harvey, without batting an eye.

Everything goes black as I faints. I'll bet Gargantua would have laughed at that.



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# Murder in with Music

By HAROLD F.  
SORENSEN

*Author of "Nervous Energy," etc.*

*A Rat-Hating Music-Lover Makes  
a Wily Killer Change His Tune!*

**J**IG HAXALL braked near the curb and got out of the car. Holding the loose front of his light tan overcoat with his left arm, he lifted the heavy black case. His body listing slightly, he carried the case into the ice-cream parlor.

Jig entered by the side door, just opposite the telephone booths. Here, the fountain ended, and the rear space, full of breakfastlike nooks began. At the very rear was the automatic phonograph he had come to adjust. Instead, he set the case down and glanced behind the marble counter.

It was just after nine A. M. Evelyn was working alone. Some fellow was having toast and coffee up near the front, and another man was drinking a coke and complaining that Evelyn had not put enough vichy in it.

Jig caught Evelyn's eye, and when she grinned at him his heart beat faster. She sure looked good in her white uniform, and the little white high-fronted circlet on her red hair.



Niser grabbed a gun out of the desk

But as nice as she tried to make the grin appear he saw that she wasn't in a grinning mood.

Jig couldn't expect her to be chipper. This was a tough job. Take it

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Introducing Jig Haxall, Song Sleuth

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all in all, she was running an ice-cream parlor, a candy store, a lunch counter; dispensing mixtures for guys with headaches and hangovers, and selling cigars and cigarettes on the side. Besides, the company that owned this chain of stores didn't give her enough to—well, he was making twenty-five a week, and she was making less. They didn't dare marry on it, not without some money in the bank.

A woman came in, demanded orange juice. Jig picked up the black case and as he went to the rear of the store, he wondered if Niser had been in pestering Evelyn again. Jig's gray eyes flashed at the thought.

He was something above medium height, compactly built, with a clean-cut face and blond hair. He was steaming inside, thinking of Bart Niser. His eyes were blazing, but he got to work.

He took the coins, mostly nickels and a few dimes, out of the machine, and tallied the amount in his book. He did that hurriedly, glancing at the indicator that recorded how many times each of the twenty discs on the machine had been played. The favorites of the last couple of weeks were still in the lead. His own favorite, *Love Is What It Makes Us*, had gone from last to third place.

It was some encouragement, at least, but not all he had hoped for. Jig considered that the finest love song ever pressed. He wanted the platter to go over because he could get a better paying job if he could acquire the knack of spotting the discs that would attract the coins.

**A** LOT of money was lost by buying up the wrong records, by putting the right records in the wrong spots. It was funny that here, in Evelyn's ice-cream parlor, the loudest and most popular records got the play. There was no initiative about trying out new tunes. Recordings by Negro swing bands were the vogue.

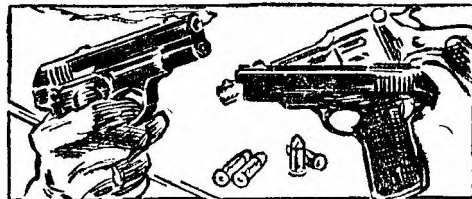
Jig looked up, turned around. The store was empty now and Evelyn was on her way back to him. As she passed the side entrance, Niser came in, and stood squarely in her path.

"Hello, Red." Niser shifted, kept her from passing. "Make up your mind about that date for tonight?"

Evelyn went white as Jig started forward.

Niser whirled. He was much older than Jig and Evelyn, who were in their twenties. Bart Niser was over thirty-five, shorter than Jig, but he carried more weight, and his round dark face looked as tough as his round, stocky body.

Neither spoke. Niser threw up his fists and Jig sailed in, fists moving. He made his mistake in thinking that Niser intended to depend on fists. In-



stead, Niser crouched back, bracing against the end of the fountain, and kicked out. Jig caught the kick at the knees, and almost fell. Niser hit him a solid, smashing blow in the face. Jig went down, skidded back along the tile floor.

Bart Niser went after him. Jig scrambled desperately away, and Niser's stamping foot came down on the floor. Jig sprang up, throwing his left hand out to catch something for support, while his right fist leveled for his antagonist's face.

"What's going on here?" a harsh voice called out.

Niser spun. Jig let his eyes rest on the man in the brown overcoat and the battered gray felt hat. He was taller than Jig, and much huskier and heavier than Niser. He looked as if he could take both of them and knock their heads together. He was Detective-sergeant Vinson.

Vinson got no answer to his question. He glanced at all three of them and shook his head knowingly.

"Come on, Niser, I want to talk with you," he ground out.

"How'd you know I was here?" Niser demanded.

"Tony Peregoff said so," Vinson snapped. "Why, what about it?"

"His damn mouth is too big. I've told him before." Niser gave Jig a black look, and slammed out of the store with Vinson.

In a mirror Jig saw that his cheek was cut and bleeding. Evelyn washed it, and put a band-aid on it.

"Jig," Evelyn called him that, too, just as they all did, instead of George Haxall, "don't go to his place today. Pass it by."

Jig smiled. Customers came in then and Evelyn got behind the fountain, and he went back to the phonograph. He took out some discs that had never earned much, and put in three with songs from the movie opening on the corner. With a little wave to Evelyn, he went out.

It took him only five minutes to get the money out of the big automatic phonograph in the drugstore across the street, and to put the coins in the canvas bag attached to his belt. He made a few changes in records and got back into his car.

Niser's barroom was at the next corner, down a long block past coal yards screened behind high wire fences. Jig was halfway down when Detective-sergeant Vinson stormed out of Niser's. He waited until Vinson walked out of sight, then pulled up outside the saloon.

**W**HEN Jig strode into the barroom, he heard the echo of angry voices dying out, drowned by the music of a swing band. It was the atmosphere that told him there'd been a vicious quarrel. Niser turned away from the bar and glared at the phonograph.

"I told you not to play that damned song again!" he yelled at his bartender, Tony Peregoff. Turning, Niser glared at Jig, and ordered, "Get that damned record out of my place!" Niser shook a finger at Peregoff. "And you, change your apron!" Niser stalked into his office, slamming the enameled blue door behind him.

Tony Peregoff stood looking after his boss, sullen. His apron and jacket were as dirty as his fingernails. The glare in his eyes was bitter. Jig figured that Peregoff had been bawled

out for telling Vinson where to find Niser.

The record referred to was the *Sawmill Stomp*, and Jig hated it as much as Niser did, but he let it play to the end. It was raucous, discordant, noisy. There weren't many of them in all this district, only this one and one in Evelyn's. It was a platter that earned almost nothing directly. But there were fellows who would play it, and then get razzed so thoroughly that they spent a dozen nickels, or someone else would, to drown its memory. The *Sawmill Stomp* was a record that made people want to hear music.

Peregoff didn't speak to him, and Jig was just as glad. Peregoff had the blub-blub-blub voice of the slow-witted, and it got on his nerves.

Jig took the money out of the machine, and checked the listing to see which platters were getting the play. He changed the *Sawmill Stomp* for a sweet number, and put in a few risqué platters, too hot for the radio, and grooved especially for this kind of trade and the barber shops. After closing the machine, he went over and pounded on the blue enamel door.

Niser opened it just a crack. Jig threw his weight and that of the black case against the door. Niser was thrown back. Recovering, he hurried to his desk. Jig shut the door, heard the spring-lock catch, and figured that would keep Peregoff out.

"I'm ready to take up where we left off, Niser," he snarled.

The fat lips curled contemptuously on Niser's swart face. "Why, you dirty little punk—" He grabbed a gun out of the desk. "Get out!"

Jig sneered at him and his big revolver. Picking up the black case, he pulled the bolt on the side door and stepped out into the street. The door banged behind him, and the bolt snapped into place.

Jig's next two stops were a beauty parlor and a barber shop. He felt gratified; the selections he'd chosen were slowly climbing into favor. He'd been a pinball machine repairman and he'd made twice what he was earning now. When the pinball licenses were revoked, he got this

phonograph job because he knew the route—the phonos were in practically every spot where the pinballs had been—and because he was honest. His only chance of earning again what he had been getting, was to master the vagaries of music merchandising and command more money as a disc spotter.

Back in his car for a short drive, Jig thought of Vinson. He knew all the cops from his endless rounds, and they knew him. Detective-sergeant Vinson was one of the best, strictly business. It was surprising that Vinson had wanted to talk to Niser. Vinson was not looking for any sort of pay-off or free drinks. Not Vinson.

JIG went into a honky-tonk night club. It was quiet, deserted-seeming, lifeless now. It always was, in the morning, the only time Jig ever entered. The only one he had ever seen here was the lady that owned it.

One morning he had seen Niser come out. Mamie, the proprietor, had blabbed to him that Niser owned half the joint. She'd been tight that morning and sore at Niser. That was what Jig hated most about Niser. It was what set his blood boiling, and almost drove him off his nut when he saw Niser talking to Evelyn. Jig hated to go into this low-brow place.

But he went in, said hello to Mamie, gave her a cigarette, and his interest in the phonograph made him forget everything else. It was one of the biggest machines the company put out, and it took in plenty of money. Nearly a hundred dollars most weeks.

There were four sorts of records that went over big, here. The newest, most popular records, of course. Then there always had to be a lot of ballads, sung by husky-voiced tenors. And this was one of the places where the real oldies, the real tear-jerkers earned money. Lastly, there were the novelties of the risqué type which were practically a gold mine.

Jig counted out the coins, mostly quarters, under the gimlet eye of Mamie, and gave over a seventy percent split. She demanded it, cash in hand, and he had instructions to give

it to her. It was nearly eighty dollars this week. She nodded, and carried the money into another room, pulling her wrap tight about her.

Jig was at the front door and out, when he remembered he'd left his cigarettes on the machine. He caught the door just before it shut, and barged into the barroom again.

The phone bell shrilled and Mamie yelled into it. She became very excited and hung up with a bang. Someone called her, and Mamie shouted back:

"They just found Bart Niser beaten to death with his own gun. They said if that kid Jig Haxall is still here, to hold him."

Jig stood in the hallway, trembling. His first impulse was to run to the back of the house and tell them it was a damned lie. But he clenched his teeth and wiped his tan sleeve over his face. People were running about at the back of the house, coming to the front. He stood rooted. Then, he felt as if he had yelled at the top of his voice, though he knew he hadn't made a sound. He dove for the door and ran out.

He was in the car and had it going before his brain began to function. He wrenched the steering-wheel over. Like a homing pigeon, he headed straight back for the ice-cream parlor to tell Evelyn. It was a little after eleven by his wrist-watch.

Hiking past the soda fountain, Jig ordered coffee, and went right on down to the back. The auto-phono was blasting out noisily with the *Sawmill Stomp*. Quivering to the very roots of his hair, Jig opened the front and shut down the volume. Impatiently then, he shut the machine off.

Evelyn brought him the coffee, the cup rattling on the saucer the way her hands were shaking.

"Jig!" she cried, staring at his face.

People began to run like wraiths past the windows, and Jig and Evelyn could hear the horrible sounds of someone screaming down the block.

"Evelyn, go out," Jig gasped. "See what it is!"



White-faced she ran out, and came stumbling in with her eyes so staring blue that he could see nothing else. "Jig, it's Peregoff, down on the corner, screaming for police. A man told me Niser has been murdered."

Jig nodded. "Evelyn, listen! They just found Niser, beaten to death with his gun. I didn't do it, Evelyn. Peregoff did, because of an argument he had with Niser. I'm going to give myself up to the police and tell them that. But I wanted to tell you first not to worry. I didn't do it. I know Peregoff did. But if the cops should hold me—"

Evelyn glanced at the wall clock. It was nine minutes after eleven.

"Jig!" she cried. Peregoff walked out of here as you came in. He wanted change for a ten-dollar bill and stood at the end of the fountain talking to me. He was hurt because Niser was hollering at him. From what Peregoff says, Vinson is looking for a bank robber named— You know, it was in the papers about him the other night, he killed a man—"

"Charles Falconer?" Jig snapped.

"Yes, Jig. He was a pal of Niser's, and Vinson thinks Falconer will come to Niser for help. Vinson said if Falconer did, Niser better open his mouth quick, and not try to hide Falconer. So Peregoff thought he was doing right, and shot off his mouth and said he thought he saw Falconer on the street last night.

"Vinson didn't pay any attention to him. You know Peregoff is—well, he hasn't all his buttons. But what I mean, Jig, is that Peregoff was in here for twenty minutes. He—he didn't look as if he killed Niser. He had a clean fresh white jacket and apron, on, no—you know—on it."

No blood, she meant. And it would be difficult to beat a man to death with a gun butt and not get spattered with blood.

"I'm getting out of here." Jig jumped up. He was far too worried to walk into the hands of the police now. "Maybe if the cops can't find me, they'll keep working into the case, Evelyn. They might find out who really did it. But once they get me—they won't do a hand's turn.

Good-by, Evelyn, and don't worry. I'll be all right."

Evelyn stopped him and gave him the key to her room. "Be careful you get in without the landlady seeing you." Then she made him take off his conspicuous light tan coat, and put on an old red and black mackinaw that was kept about the ice-cream parlor for going into the cellar, or out in bad weather.

Customers up at the fountain were clamoring for Evelyn's attention. Jig squeezed her hand, then darted out the door.

It was a good thing she'd made him change his coat. As he got outside, face concealed by the upturned collar of the mackinaw, he looked in the window, and saw the reflection of Vinson getting out of a big black auto. Vinson was certain to have spotted him if he'd been wearing that light tan coat.

Jig didn't go to Evelyn's room. He was afraid that once he got locked up in that room, he'd go crazy. He could feel the jitters coming on at thought of it. He needed air and freedom of action.

HE HEADED for the northwest section of town, the Negro district. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have been getting out here about this time. It was just short of one o'clock when he got to the Pennsylvania Avenue bar, and the place was crowded with lunchers. Jig kept moving. He realized now that it was not so good to be known by so many cops. In the next half hour he ducked Clancy, Burns and O'Connor, anyone of whom would have known him instantly.

Next time he passed Jeff's place, everyone was back at work, and Jig went in. If he could get help anywhere, he'd get it from Jeff. A crazed marijuana smoker had been about to slash Jeff from behind with a razor, about a year ago, and Jig had knocked the addict out.

Jig said hello to Jeff, and went to the phono, opened it, and made a pretense of coming on business. He saw that *Love Is What It Makes Us* was catching on. Funny thing about the

colored people, they usually took up a ture months before the whites were aware the song was on the market.

Jig looked cautiously over his shoulder. There was no one in the bar but him and Jeff. Jig started to tell Jeff some of the odd story. Then he told him all of it. The big, sparely built Negro, with his wide lean shoulders, looked like a black cowboy. He listened intently with his eyes big as saucers and rolling excitedly. Then he rushed Jig into a private little room that was his office.

Jeff must have been nervous, because the moment he went out he started the phono. Jig sat listening to it. It was one of the novelties he had put in here, just to try it out. Novelty records, like the *Beer Barrel Polka*, *Flat Foot Flookey*, were the greatest gamble in the business.

Very few people seemed to realize that for every one that went over, there were a hundred that became "klinkers," hopelessly lost money. A man who could cut down on the number of klinkers his company invested in, would command a salary Jig could get married on. Most of all, Jig wanted to acquire the knack of spotting a good novelty platter.

**H**E STOOD beside the table in the dark little room, and started to jig. He was not very familiar with the novelty that was playing in Jeff's machine. He hadn't had a chance to make up his mind about it. He was jiggling when Jeff opened the door and came in with a sandwich and a glass of beer.

"Uh-uh, so that's why they's calling you, Jig, huh?" Jeff flashed a wide grin.

Jig nodded. That was why. He couldn't dance in public, not even with Evelyn. But dancing alone, that was his way of getting the feel of music. His first opinion of a piece came from dancing to it, even of the sort of music that a man will cry into his beer over.

Jig ate the sandwich and drank the beer gratefully. "Jeff," he asked, his throat tight, "will you lend me a gun?"

Jeff almost sprang into the air at

that. "What yuh figurin' t'do with a gun?"

Jig sat with his arms stretched almost across the table, his head hunched low between his shoulders. "I been thinking." He told Jeff about Charlie Falconer. "Jeff, that man came to Niser."

**J**EFF cocked his head to one side, furrowed his brow, and scratched in his woolly hair. "Ain't sensible-like, is it, Jig? Ef'n Niser was going to hide him, don't make no kind of sense for Falconer to kill him."

"They probably fought about how much Falconer was to pay for being hidden," Jig insisted. "Jeff, is it clear outside? I'm going to phone Evelyn."

Jeff reported that the barroom was clear. Jig slid out and dialed the phone. It was stuffy and fetid in the booth, and he sweated with apprehension. He was all set to hang up instantly if anyone but Evelyn answered. At this time of afternoon, there would be one or even two girls working at the soda fountain with her. But it was Evelyn that answered.

"Jig, I was frightened!" she said. "Vinson came. I guess you saw him. He asked me a lot of questions. He made me tell him where I live, because he said they might have to get in touch with me at any time. But I think he had a hunch you would be hiding there. Gosh, Jig, I was sure they caught you!"

Jig's knees buckled and he leaned against the booth wall for support. "What else did Vinson say?"

"I tried to make him believe you didn't do it, Jig. But Vinson wouldn't pay any attention. Peregoff says you were the only one in the office with Niser, and Peregoff never saw you come out and he said when he got back to the bar he tried to get into the office and Niser wouldn't answer. So Peregoff went round to the street side, and the door to the office was unbolted. He went in and found Niser."

"Don't worry, honey," Jig soothed. "I can hide out. I have friends. And—I love you, Evelyn."

Jig hung up and came out of the

booth panting and sweating. He and Jeff hurried back into the dark little office.

"Look, Jeff," Jig insisted, banging his finger on the table with every word. "Someone phoned that bar where I was, at eleven this morning. Niser was dead then! But, right then, Peregoff was with Evelyn, talking to her. So who phoned Mamie then, and told her to hang onto me?"

Jeff admitted he didn't know.

Jig snarled. "The only man who knew Niser was dead, was the man who phoned. He gave himself away by that call. But he figured the chance was worth taking, for the sake of getting me framed for the murder."

"It could be," Jeff sighed. "But then you got to remember—"

"Jeff!" Jig cried impatiently, interrupting. "Figure it. The barroom was empty. Going out to change the ten-spot, Peregoff would have set the switch. When the front door opened, the buzzer would sound in Niser's office, and Niser would come out to serve bar. Well, someone came in, and Niser came out. Who would Niser have taken into his office? Charlie Falconer, of course!

"Niser promises to hide him out, but they fight because Niser wants too much money. Falconer is a tough egg. He knows where Niser was going to hide him out by that time, so he just kills Niser and goes there. But first he makes that phone call—" Jig threw his hands up. "Oh, nuts! How would he know about me, about where I was going?"

"Yeah, I was figurin' it do sound like a voodoo-man for him to know all that," Jeff agreed.

**S**UDDENLY Jig snapped his fingers. "Wait! Falconer was in the office all the time and Niser was no coward, I'll say that for him. At least, he wasn't afraid of a fight with me. But he pulled a gun. Why? Because he had Falconer hiding in a closet. Niser couldn't be bothered fighting with me right then. He had to get rid of me and the gun was the quickest way.

"And when I was gone, Niser said

to Falconer: 'Good thing Jig didn't see you, because in a few minutes he'll be at Mamie's, and if he saw you there . . .' Jeff, Mamie's is where Niser would have sent Falconer. That's how the whole thing was done. Falconer phoned Mamie after killing Niser. Then he went out the side door, leaving it unbolted."

Jeff rubbed the back of his neck and grimaced. "Could be."

"Jeff, you got to give me a gun," Jig implored him.

Jeff sweated with apprehension, but he loaned Jig a Colt's Woodsman .22 with a six-inch barrel. Jig stuck it in his waistband and thanked him.

"Jig, why don't you tell the cops?" Jeff begged.

"I'm trying to save my life by hanging someone else," Jig said seriously. "And that's the first and last thing the cops would think of. Jeff, I can't *prove* any of this."

He hung around Jeff's barroom till it was dark, then slipped out the back door. Jeff wished him luck.

Jig rode downtown in a trackless trolley. When he got off it was dark and he wasn't so afraid of being recognized. He hurried crosstown to the out-of-town newspaper stand at the post office.

Jig had to go through quite a few papers, and he was shaking all the time. It was a busy spot, out in the open, with a lot of cops coming and going from Headquarters, which was only a couple of blocks farther east. Jig couldn't stem the feeling that someone was pushing a heavy three-by-eight wooden plank through his body, slowly but without ever stopping. That was how he felt about getting arrested and going to the hangman. They used the rope in this state.

Finally, he found an Akron paper with a picture of Charlie Falconer. Jig bought the paper, and hurried away. He took a good look at Falconer's picture, then threw the paper in a trash can. Well, he'd know Falconer, if he saw him.

Determined to see this through, Jig headed for Mamie's.

The night club was different now. It was after eight o'clock. The music

was going, the lights were on, and he could hear laughing and playful screaming. Jig stood across the street, rubbing his hands. The red and black mackinaw was warm, but he was used to a longer coat, and his thighs felt naked. The gun in his waistband felt as big as a cannon.

Tucking his hands under his arms, he went round and came down the alley to the back of the nightery. There was a small wooden extension at the rear of the house, but the door was locked.

A small truck whizzed up the alley, braked to a stop, and a man jumped out. He came straight for the house, carrying a box. Jig crouched into the shadows.

The man banged on the door and was let in. Jig peeked through a crack between the shade and the casing.

**T**HE man was setting the box on the kitchen table and talking to a big Negress in a white apron. There was a dark pantry between the kitchen and the backyard. Jig dove into a black corner of the pantry just as the man and the Negress came through. The man left the house, and the woman locked the door behind him.

Jig held the gun and wondered if he could scare the cook into telling him if Falconer was in the house. He was trying to decide when Mamie walked into the large kitchen.

Mamie looked younger than in the morning, though her face looked like hell, so thick with white powder. Her darkish blond hair was all frizzed and standing out from her head. Her figure looked pretty good in the black satin dress. She seemed quietly angry and thoughtful, though her hips moved to the rhythm of the rhumba that the band was playing.

Mamie said something to the cook, and they lifted the kitchen table aside. The cook raised a trap-door, took a pint bottle Mamie gave her, and went down the stairs into the cellar. Mamie probably felt pretty safe. Jig was almost certain there wasn't a cop in town knew about the connection between her and Niser,

and so, she would never be associated with Falconer in the cops' search.

Jig stepped out, whirled Mamie around by the shoulder and stuck the gun in her face. His expression told her to keep quiet. She tried to shrink away, but his fingers clawed into her.

"Who made that call this morning, saying Niser was dead?" he demanded.

Her tongue was pinkish-white on her heavily rouged lips. "I dunno."

The cook was coming up now. Jig dragged Mamie over to the pantry doorway. He stood out in the dark, clutching the back of Mamie's dress, the gun against her spine.

"Get rid of her," he hissed.

Puffing and muttering, the cook came up out of the cellar, carrying a trayful of dirty dishes.

"Go upstairs to my room and wash me out some stockings," Mamie ordered. The cook started to close the trap-door, and Jig jammed the gun into Mamie's back. "Go right now."

The cook shuffled out of the kitchen toward the bedlam of music and laughter in the cheap night club. Jig pushed Mamie down the cellar stairs. He didn't have to ask her to guide him. He saw the light beaming through chinks of a door up front. When they got there, Jig shook her, and pushed her to the door. Mamie gave a series of double knocks, bolt and chain clanked, and the door swung outward.

Jig pushed Mamie into the man who had opened the door, stuck the gun past her body. It was Charlie Falconer, all right. He was tall, with a dark lean face, and a nose that made him look like a vulture. He glared at Jig, and cursed Mamie.

"Shut up!" Jig ordered. "You killed Bart Niser, then phoned Mamie, and tried to get me arrested."

Falconer sneered, his body tense.

Mamie clutched Jig's arm, threw her weight on it, and tried to force his gun down. In a flash Falconer had a gun in his fist, a great big one, with a bore so large Jig thought he could have shoved his .22 right down it. Mamie screamed and tried to duck so Falconer could get Jig.

Jig clutched her back of the head,

gave her a knee at the same time, and sent her hurtling into Falconer. Jig went in fast, intending to smash Falconer with his gun.

FALCONER'S tremendous automatic blasted deafeningly. Jig staggered back. He realized how futile it would be to hit a tough man like Falconer over the head with his light pistol, even if he could. Falconer shoved Mamie out of the way, brought his gun up. Jig dropped to his knees, stuck the long-barreled .22 forward, and triggered at Falconer's hand. Falconer screamed in pain.

Jig dashed forward, scooped up the automatic and retreated, holding both guns. He stood listening. He could hear the thumping of feet, but in dance rhythm. The floor must be pretty thick. He could not hear the band at all, and apparently they had not heard the shots up there.

Jig gestured fiercely. "Tie up his hand," he snapped.

Falconer sat on the edge of his cot, moaning while Mamie tore up his shirt and did a neat job of bandaging his hand.

"How much did you give Niser for hiding you here, Falconer, and how much did he want?" Jig demanded. "That was what you fought over, wasn't it?"

"We didn't have any fight," Falconer growled, "and I gave him the five grand he asked for."

Mamie stood up. "You got this all wrong. Why? Falconer was already down here in the cellar when you came this morning. He just barely got here when you came."

Jig fell back a step and things swam before him, but he kept the two guns up and pointing. This was a set-back.

"Then who did phone?" he grated. "Tell me you don't know—" Jig took a menacing step forward, but stopped as Mamie cringed. "How much of that five grand did you get?"

"None," she pouted. "Niser made me take him. Now I can't get rid of him."

"You tell me who phoned," Jig offered, "and maybe I can help you with the police. I'll tell them that

since Niser owned half of this dive, maybe he *did* make you take Falconer in."

She shrugged.

Jig glanced at a large coil of electrical wire on a shelf over Falconer's head. "Get down flat on your stomachs, both of you." They cursed him bitterly, but they got down obediently. Jig stepped over to Falconer, and slammed him hard behind the ear with the automatic. Then he bound both of them with the wire. "All right, Mamie, if you don't start to talk—"

"I been thinking," she snarled, when he rolled her over and sat her up. "Listen, I dunno who phoned. Falconer *was* here. All I can tell you is I heard music over the phone. But it wasn't any tune I know."

Jig backed away, did a little dance and hummed.

"That it?" he asked.

She regarded his dancing distastefully and shook her head.

Jig kept up the dancing and the humming till his feet were leaden and his throat sore. She kept shaking her head. Finally, he went into a dance that was something between the trot of a horse and the slogging of a weary-footed soldier. His throat was husky.

"Was it that?" Jig croaked.

She nodded.

JIG gagged both her and Falconer with their handkerchiefs, and left them. He came up into the kitchen, closed the trap, and rushed out of the night club by the rear. The first store he came to, he used the phone and told the police what they'd find in Mamie's cellar. Then he started for Niser's tap room.

The whole place was dark and the doors were locked. There was only one light, upstairs, where Tony Peregoff had his room. Jig stood panting, gazing up the block toward the ice-cream parlor where Evelyn worked.

It was a poorly lighted street and an unpleasant, tawdry block from here to the ice-cream parlor. The coal yard with its protective wire fence stretched the whole block, on

one side. On the other, almost up to the parlor, was a now deserted oil burner factory. Jig went over everything Evelyn had told him. And he thought the hardest about the clean white jacket and apron Peregoff had worn.

Snapping his fingers, Jig looked at the street corners. There was no sewer on Niser's corner. Nor one diagonally opposite. The other two corners had sewers, and on the way up to Evelyn's, you would have to pass one. Jig ran up the street.

There was a manhole on the sidewalk, over the sewer. He waited until a trolley car went past. It raced along, and several autos dashed through at a fast clip. Jig got down quickly and raised the manhole cover. On hands and knees, he peered into the sewer.

The stench was terrible. It was pitch black inside. He broke out into a sweat. Slowly, he started to get up. Automobiles shot by going in both directions, and the bright glare of their headlights pierced the sewer darkness for a moment. Jig caught his breath.

He had been looking down. But now he knew there was something whitish on a ledge. Whoever had thrown it in the sewer had thrown it in hard, through the big aperture in the curbing. The object had gone under the manhole cover, to the back, and stuck on the shelflike ledge. Jig got down, pulled it up. Then he shook it out. It was an apron, all right, and it was filthy, but there was more than dirt on it. Jig replaced the manhole cover, and went across to the door alongside Niser's.

The door was open, apparently never locked. Jig tried to get up quietly, but the steps creaked when he trod on them. He threw caution to the winds then, charged up the stairs, rushed to the door of the room. Twisting the knob, he put his shoulder to the panel, and flung the door open with a bang.

The room was empty!

Before he could turn, something jabbed him in the back, and the thick voice of Tony Peregoff warned:

"This is a gat." He took the big

automatic out of Jig's trembling hand.

Jig looked around, saw the light burning down the hall and the open door. He realized that Peregoff had been in the bathroom. Peregoff had heard him come up and wasn't taking any chances.

Pushed, Jig went into the room and stood at the end of the bed, studying the sullen, dark face of Peregoff, who clutched a gun in each hand.

"What'cha poking around here for?" he demanded.

"Don't pull that," Jig sneered. "You're not so dumb as you look, Peregoff. You know why I'm here. You killed Niser and tried to frame it on me."

SOME of the fat folds vanished, and Peregoff's bright eyes came to the surface, dark, glittering, dangerous. "Yeah?"

"You were sore at Niser for bawling you out," Jig went on. "Maybe he was even going to fire you. You waited until I was gone, till Falconer was gone. Then you went in and killed Niser for the five grand Falconer had given him. You went up to the ice-cream parlor, and when Evelyn wasn't looking you ducked into a booth and phoned Mamie. Hell, you could phone in ten seconds, and Evelyn wouldn't notice, waiting on a customer."

"Listen," Peregoff glowered, "I been over all this with the cops, and they couldn't prove anything, so how can you? How could I be in a nice clean apron and coat if I beat Niser to death with his gun?"

Jig grinned. "You put an old dirty apron over Niser's head, and then beat him to death, that's how." Jig let the apron fall from under his coat to the floor, then picked it up. "See?"

"How'd you get that?" Peregoff screeched.

"Want it?" Jig asked, and flung it in his gaping face.

Jig dropped to the floor, lay flat, rolled aside as Peregoff let go with both guns. The bed shook and trembled as the post was hit. The floor erupted splinters and the glass



in the window pane was shattered. Jig lifted the .22 out of his waistband, and fired.

Peregoff fell to the floor with a thump that shook the house. He screamed with pain, holding his leg. Jig stood taken aback, not quite understanding exactly what had happened. Recollecting himself, he darted forward to get Peregoff's guns.

But the door behind Peregoff was hurled open, and Vinson and another cop stood there, pointing their guns. Jig threw his on the bed.

Vinson nodded approval. "What's this about?"

JIG told him about the apron. Vinson knew all about Falconer and Mamie, said they were in jail already. "After we got them, we cruised this neighborhood. I thought you'd be round this way," Vinson told him. "But what made you pick on Peregoff?"

Jig cleared his throat. "When I dashed back to Evelyn to tell her that someone had phoned Mamie about Niser, the phono was blasting like hell with the *Sawmill Stomp*. I finally got it out of Mamie that she heard music over the phone, and

finally she recognized the *Stomp* as the tune.

"Well, there isn't another phono with that record within a mile of here. I figured Peregoff as the murderer then. But I had to figure out how he kept from getting bloody. The idea of putting a cloth over Niser's head seemed good. And when I looked to see how Peregoff could have gotten rid of the cloth, I looked down the sewer, and found that old apron."

Vinson nodded. "Look, you should have surrendered to the police, though. Still and all. . . ." Vinson heaved Peregoff to his feet, grimacing at the screams Peregoff was giving out with, and motioned the other cop to take Peregoff out. "Still and all, you accomplished something. You captured Falconer. Your split on that will come to a thousand dollars. Anything you'll be able to do with it?"

Jig came to life like the opening chords of the *Ehapsody in Blue*. He thought of Evelyn, and visualized her wearing a wedding band as conspicuous as a symphony would be in Mamie's night club.

"Is there?" Jig yelped. "Oh, boy!"

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# The Golden Apple Murders

By WILLIAM L. HOPSON

*Author of "Death Writes the Answer," "Acc as the Joker," etc.*

*When the Nazis and America's Underworld Tie Up, Duke Anson Finds the Fruit of the Family Plot Is Death!*

## CHAPTER I

### THE BEAUTY

**I**T WAS about one o'clock when I got back to the office from lunch, and my new rug was a mess—ruined. Nothing else had been disturbed. All the new red leather furniture with the chrome steel frames was in place. The private dick license, dated only yesterday, hung conspicuously where I'd fixed it over a corner of my desk for the benefit of any doubting client. Except for the

ruined carpet and a secretary who had disappeared, the office was a rhapsody of neatness.

Of course, the fat character sprawled in my chair at the desk struck a most inharmonious note. He had been shot right between the eyes. His bloated face hung to one side, and red dripped sluggishly into a viscous puddle on the rug. That rug had cost me two hundred bucks.

For a moment, I stood surveying the layout before I closed the door and approached the cadaver. Quickly I searched the body, emptied the pockets, explored every seam.

The door opened and Miss Thatcher came in. Miss Thatcher was the cute little dish on probation to me as secretary-receptionist. Her big eyes got bigger at sight of the comfortably seated visitor.

"Oh," she said, startled.

"I thought you'd been abducted," I said. "Who is he, Yellowtop?"

"I don't know. He came in shortly after you went to lunch. He was in the reception room when I stepped out to mail some letters."

"How long were you gone?"

"Not over five minutes."

"Must have been a silencer," I said.

There was nothing to identify the gentleman. A pocket knife, keys, a wallet containing two yards, and a .32 roscow made up the pile on my desk. I had replaced the other junk and was stuffing a crumpled handkerchief back



District Attorney Kirk

A  
Complete  
Novelet



The bullet ricocheted upward  
into his lungs

into a hip pocket when I felt something hard tied in a corner of it. I shook out the linen and untied the knot. And there in my hand lay a tiny golden apple. Of imitation gold and crude workmanship, it appeared worthless. I started to put it back, changed my mind, slipped the roscoe from its stall under my arm, and then dropped the apple in.

"Well, put in a call for the law," I said. "We can't have the office cluttered up with cold meat—not in this kind of weather."

She stood for a moment looking at the inert form back of the desk. Then she shook her head sadly.

"And he was our first client too," she said.

"Client?" I prompted.

"Yes, he said he needed your help. He was terribly nervous."

She reached for the phone on my desk. Then she changed her mind and put it down.

"Oh," she said.

HE HAD opened the door quietly, a red-headed, beefy-looking individual who might have passed for a movie dick. As tall as I, but heavier. The other difference at the moment was that he had a snub-nosed roscoe in his right mitt and mine was in its usual place. The roscoe was pointed at the second button on the vest of my new sixty-five bucks suit, counting from the bottom.

You can always tell a lot about a hood by the roscoe he packs, and my estimation of that lad went up a few hundred degrees at sight of the heater. It was as neat a man-killer as you've ever seen. Handmade. Patterned after the Fitzgerald Special Colt. A .45 with a two-inch barrel, cut-away trigger guard and hammer spur for quick drawing double action. It was a lulu! Only a specialist would have one like it. Under different circumstances, my hands would have itched for a chance to try it out.

I was so absorbed in the roscoe and Redhead's pale blue eyes that I didn't notice the rodent behind him until he scurried past.

"Get your hands up!" commanded Ferret-Face, as though I'd waited to

be told. "Even a world's champion pistol expert wouldn't be foolish enough to try anything now."

"You're telling *me!*" I said.

I'd bent my arms at the elbows. My hands, palms out, came up to my shoulders. Ferret-Face squeezed past the bulk of the gunman. Careful to keep out of the line of fire, he darted past Yellowtop. He went to the cadaver and did some deft finger work, and the rodent was *good*.

He turned out every pocket, dumping the contents onto the ruined carpet. Presently he straightened with a baffled curse.

Redhead said, in vast satisfaction:

"I told you, Boss, that Blinky didn't have it on him. I searched him after . . ."

"Shut up!" snarled the rodent.

"That carpet cost me two hundred bucks," I said to Redhead. "Where'll I mail you the bill?"

"Shut up!" said Ferret-Face again.

"Frisk him," he ordered Redhead.

Redhead stepped closer, the gun lining my vest.

"About face, mug," he ordered crisply. "And just to keep you from getting foolish ideas, I'll just borrow your roscoe."

I looked into the eyes above the blue-veined big nose, weighed my chances—and turned around. I know a bad hood when I see one, and that lad was *bad*. Redhead slipped my Colt .45 Police job out of its stall and then did a neat job of frisking me. That little ceremony over with, he backed away toward the door.

"Shall I blast 'em, Boss?" he asked calmly.

"Sure," I sneered, my lips curling.

"And have a few dozen office workers dash out when that heater goes off. They'll make swell witnesses, sucker."

The bluff worked, and I felt better. Ferret-Face was backing with him.

"Nobody can prove a thing in court about Blinky, Red.

"But for your own good, Mister Anson, you better forget what we look like."

They closed the door behind them. I went to the desk, got the drawer unlocked, and grabbed up the mate to the .45 Redhead **had** borrowed. I

went out into the hall, found nothing anywhere. The two had disappeared. Not that I was worried greatly. They couldn't get away from Pittstown once a dragnet had been thrown out. And I was certain they wouldn't try. Not while I still had that apple.

"Shall I call the law now, Mr. Anson?" Yellowtop said.

"Yes," I told her. "Only now it isn't only murder. It's murder and robbery."

**T**HE next four hours were busy ones. Photographs were made of the office. Fingerprints of the stiff were taken, and hundreds of questions asked. I said nothing about the golden apple. It was stretching a point maybe, but Blinky had been a client of mine—of sorts.

I left my office with William Kirk, the district attorney. Kirk was a good friend of mine. We spent the next three hours leafing through the rogues' gallery trying to spot Ferret-Face. No luck. But we did come across portraits of Redhead and Blinky, both members of Slash Dell's mob.

Dell's outfit was one of the best organized gang of jewel thieves in the country. The cop in charge of the gallery extracted Blinky's long record and marked it:

"Closed."

A fine rain sprayed the streets as I left Pittstown's City-County Building and went over to the Double-Header in a cab to alleviate that tired feeling. Things, I told myself disgustedly, were certainly moving along quite ducky for a reformed soldier-of-fortune who had wanted to settle down to the tranquil life of a private investigator. You were supposed to rescue beautiful heiresses and then marry them. Or something. All I had so far was a ruined rug that cost me two hundred bucks, a golden apple that somebody wanted badly, and a headache from hours of answering questions.

The Double-Header is a high class dive, patronized alike by the elite of Pittstown's underworld and its top layer citizens. The beer was good—the music good for nothing. After

spending a sawbuck and two hours, I had purchased three tidbits of information. Slash Dell and his mob had vanished. Ferret-Face was Gem Clark, an American who had avoided a heat wave by going to Germany and collided with German justice. He had spent two years in Dachau concentration camp. Clark was now lined up with the vanished Dell's mob.

As I got up to leave, a couple entering the door caught my attention. The man was built along the lines of a good heavyweight gone to seed. Obviously a German, with too much belly, too much red in the face, gray hair clipped close to a noggin shaped like a wedge.

The feminine half of the team was a dream and could have passed for my heiress in distress. Only I wasn't dreaming and she wasn't an heiress. It was the "Beauty," Jenn Hepner, a baby I'd run into on a couple of other occasions. The bright lights made the deep violet of her eyes shine like glistening black diamonds. Her red lips were parted in a smile that did justice to a toothpaste ad. I sat down again.

The head waiter escorted the Beauty and her German john to a table near mine. As she sat down, she saw me. I grinned broadly. For an instant, she froze. Then she turned to the stiff-necked lad with her, still smiling. She leaned toward him. He got up, sat down again as the Beauty glided to the rest room, passing my table on her way.

"Wait, Duke," drifted down to me in the music of the Beauty's lady-in-distress voice.

I signaled a waiter. When he stood at my side I smoothed out, then folded, a five spot.

"Is there an outside exit from the rest rooms?" I asked.

"No, sir."

I shoved the bill at him. He palmed it like an expert.

"Kill a little time near that door where she went in," I said.

He bowed and moved away.

My fingers drummed on the table while I waited. I should call the law and turn in the Beauty. Kirk would have loved having her answer a few

questions. She wasn't exactly wanted—that million dollar baby was too damn clever—but she could tie up a lot of loose underworld ends that needed straightening out. But I don't shoot sitting game, and she knew it. When I downed that twist, I wanted to down her according to my own rules of the game.

Presently she came back, brushing the waiter on the way. She rejoined her pal, avoiding my table on the return trip. The waiter came over to take my order.

The note the waiter put near my hand was brief. I read:

Apples are very valuable, sometimes. Better call me at 3482 about two A. M. And that's *all* the calling you'd better do.

So the Beauty was mixed up with the apple? This was getting good. I tucked the note into my pocket and rose. Without so much as a glance at the Beauty, I paid up and, with the sour notes of the band beating in my ears, stepped out to the curb. It was raining a temporary downpour. The water spattered against the sidewalks and ran into the gutter. I threw up my collar as the taxi slid up to the curb and ducked inside.

## CHAPTER II

### APPLES TO BEAUTY



THE roscoe was a long-barreled 9mm Luger and it was pointed right at me. The little guy with the Chaplin mustache doing the pointing gave his advice as the car shot away.

"I'm aware of your reputation, Mr. Anson, but I wouldn't try anything rash at the moment. I, too, know something about firearms."

His voice was deep and guttural with a vague hint of an accent.

"Yeah," I thought. "I'll bet you learned it during the War, too."

"I know," I said to him, "you're in the produce business too."

"I don't believe I quite understand."

"You're interested in apples," I

said. "The market seems to be good recently."

He unbent enough to smile stiffly, but made no reply. Neither did the driver. But that boy knew where he was going. He finally turned the cab off the main drag onto Beech, a narrow, poorly lighted and deserted side street. Halfway to the next corner the cab stopped at the curb and the motor died.

The driver turned around, slid back the panel.

"Ready, Herr Bouton?" he asked in German.

I speak German. He handled his Luger as though he wasn't used to it.

"Keep him covered," ordered Herr Bouton.

He slid his gun into his belt and began an awkward job of frisking me.

"Damn!" I thought, remembering I'd dropped the apple in a vest pocket after examining it in the cab while on the way to the Double-Header.

I cursed myself for a fool. I shouldn't have waited. The driver's gun was too far for me to reach, and Bouton was smart. He kept his distance while he went through me.

"Ah!" he guttured. The tiny golden apple glittered dully in the palm of his hand for an instant before it disappeared into his pocket.

Bouton drew his Luger again, trained it on my heart and barked in German:

"Start the motor. Make it back-fire."

The driver turned away. The starter whirred, caught. The motor roared alive.

Bouton shifted slightly, shoved the gun a fraction nearer my ticker. Not knowing I spoke Heimie as well as he spoke English, he probably thought I figured we were going to take another ride. So, maybe he didn't expect me to move. But it was my move now—or never. I moved.

My left arm flashed out, knocking the barrel aside and up. My right hand flashed under my arm, whipped out my .45 Colt, officer's model. The Luger cracked a high-pitched, vicious report. Burning powder stung my forehead, glass tinkling on the floor of the cab.



My roscoe came out as fast as the newspaper reports of my exhibitions said, lashed out and whacked Bouton on the head. I wheeled toward the driver. That lad had turned, gun in hand. I hated to play with such an amateur, but I'm ticklish about certain things. Our roscoes sang a short duet. He missed. I didn't. Damn! I thought. When this is over I'm going to a rest home for neurotics.

I turned to Bouton. It had been risky playing to knock him out instead of burning him down. But he could answer the riddle of the golden apple, I felt certain. And he'd talk when I questioned him in my inimitable strong-arm manner.

"Time to wake up, sonny," I cracked.

My hand slapped him across the cheek. He didn't move. My hand felt wet, sticky. Blood! I pulled him straight in the seat. A hole punched in his temple showed where the driver's wild shot had gone.

There was no use swearing, though I felt like turning the air blue while I retrieved the golden apple.

I got away from that cab fast. I should report and assist Kirk. I knew he'd raise hell with me when he found out. We'd always quarreled, even back in the days when we'd done a short stretch together as state troopers. But there was time enough to call in the law when I broke the case or it proved too tough for me. Right now, red tape would add nothing to the solution.

**T**HE early morning editions were brought up to my room at midnight and carried two-inch headlines. I'd lugged out a bottle of rye. Soap and water will take the smeary smog—a combination of Pittstown's smoke and fog—off your hide, but it takes liquid rye to take it out of your bones. I poured a third, then set the glass down to read the news.

And it *was* news!

SECRETARY OF GERMAN CONSUL  
SLAIN: IMPORTER DIES WITH  
HIM: BODIES IN STOLEN CAB

Then followed the story—wordy but sparse of fact. Bouton was at-

tached to the German Consulate in Pittstown. He was killed by a gun found in the cab. The other stiff was identified as Karl Kruss, a partner in a German importing firm and the leader of a local Bund. The police suspected the killers to be anti-Nazi agents. Well, they were partly right. I'm anti-Nazi.

I finished my drink, lit a butt and set staring at the golden apple I now held in my hand. I twisted the tiny stem, pulled and turned the apple in every possible manner. It wouldn't come apart. Well, maybe the Beauty could enlighten me on the subject.

I pulled my Colt from its stall, dropped the apple in, cleaned and reloaded the gun. At two A.M. I picked up the phone. The Beauty answered. I'd never mistake that purr she could use so—so thrillingly.

"I'm so glad you called, Duke."

"I know you are, my loved one. Kirk would like to call on you too, some evening when you can find time," I laughed.

The velvet went out of her voice. "Be at Tenth and Wilson in fifteen minutes," she snapped. "I'll be waiting."

With a slammed receiver the Beauty broke the connection. I grinned and got under way.

It was not a trap, and fifteen minutes later in an all night beancery I wolfed a hamburger while the Beauty's lovely teeth wrestled with a ketchup-dripping hot dog. The fat Greek who ran the place had gone back to his seat by the cash register and was nodding again. In our booth, we were very much alone.

"Let's have the yarn, baby," I said. "With as few lies as possible."

Those big eyes of hers, wide and deep, looked into mine. She could wreck a guy with those lovely lamps.

"Duke, there's very little to tell," she began. "You know what I've been up against. No home at seventeen and on my own. Fighting tooth and nail against the world with the only weapons a woman can have—passable good looks and a fair sprinkling of brains. Maybe I did get into the wrong company. What could you expect when every so-called 'decent' guy

I ever met had but one thought in mind—making passes.”

“I’m crying in my coffee,” I sneered. “A couple of more minutes and I’ll be wanting to marry you to reform you. But I’m a good listener. Let’s have the rest of it.”

She ignored my sarcasm and went on as though nothing had happened.

“I learned to take care of myself pretty fast—and I didn’t have to pay anything for the lessons. I’ve hung right on that precarious strip that divides the underworld from the so-called upperworld. I’ve never directly pulled a job of any kind. . . .”

“Not that you got caught at,” I interrupted. “You were too clever, baby. You let the mugs do it and then took it from them. But what’s all this leading up to, my lovely one?”

She said nothing for a moment. The heavy coffee cup slid back and forth under her hand, making wet circles on the slick table top.

“Duke,” she said quietly. “I’ve teamed up with Gem Clark. He’s got a big deal on now—in appls. It involves a fortune in uncut flash and some more stuff besides that. It’s my one chance—the chance I’ve been looking for for five years—to clean up and get clear of all this. When it’s over, we’re going to France. Call the law if you like. But I won’t talk.”

**I** THOUGHT of a rodent like Ferret-Face and the Beauty together. It didn’t fit. Not a bit. That million dollar baby wasn’t giving herself to any mug like Gem Clark. If Ferret-Face thought so, he was going for a beautiful fall.

“Just two little love birds,” I sneered at her again.

She shrugged those shapely shoulders, dropped her cigarette into the half-filled coffee cup. I kept hammering at her. She wanted me to come in on the deal—with the apple.

“You’re the one guy in the world that I could really be nice to, Duke,” she said softly. “Why don’t you . . .”

“Listen, you—turn off the heat!” I snapped. “There’s nothing doing. That’s flat!”

She shrugged again, reached for her bag. But I snatched it out of

her hand. I’d already noticed the outlines of a little heater in it.

“Then give me one of those awful things that you smoke, my pet,” she said calmly.

I reached for the fags and she moved—like a cat. The tobacco spiced coffee sluiced across my eyes and it burned like hell. The heavy cup came down on my temple like a sledgehammer. I went out for a few moments. But it was enough for her to sift my raiment. I couldn’t see when I came to, but above the excited jabbering of the Greek I heard the front door slam. In spite of the pain shooting through my eyes and temple I grinned. The Beauty is in a class by herself.

Back in my room in the Carson Hotel, I luxuriated in an eye-wash before getting at the golden apple again. I knew now, beyond any doubt, that the thing must contain some kind of a message. I hunted around until I found the magnifying glass I’d forgotten to take from my other suit. One look and I used my knife for a can-opener. It sheared through the soft metal.

A pellet of onionskin paper was inside. It was a strip about three inches long by a half-inch wide. I read the inked numbers aloud:

“1-5-3-3-10-12-3-2-10-3-9-  
6-4-6-14-1-1-7.”

Code, of course. I gave it up for the time being, tucked the paper into a cigarette butt, tossed the butt into an ash tray, undressed and rolled into bed. I was asleep before the bed-springs squeaked. I’d committed the unforgivable sin of a gunner—slept with an uncleaned gun—for the first time in my life. But it had been a day of some little action.

It was a little after noon the next day when I entered my office. Yellow-top sat stiffly at her desk. Facing her, also very stiffly, was the character with the close-clipped, wedge-shaped noggin, who had been the Beauty’s escort the evening before. A couple of newspapers, giving more about the two guys found in the cab, were scattered about.

CHAPTER III  
THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT



HE SHOVED his card toward me — Herr August Schmidt, attached to the German Consulate in Pittstown. He bowed stiffly from the waist and clicked his heels when he presented it. A nod from me, another bow and heel click from Schmidt,

and he followed me into my private office.

I closed the door, waved him to a chair, sat down and lit a cigarette. Schmidt declined a fag with a stiff "Thank you." He was about forty-five, and I'd a hunch he was one of those young Prussian officers during the War.

"Mr. Anson," he began crisply, "I'll come straight to the point. I am here in a strictly unofficial capacity—for a friend—and without the knowledge of my superior. You have in your possession, I believe, a golden apple. It can be of no particular value to you. I am empowered to offer you two thousand dollars for it."

I drew deeply on my cigarette, leaned back and watched him. A determined individual and a dangerous one, I judged him. He had little of the middle-aged night life johnny about him as he sat waiting my answer.

The smoke left my lips with a hiss.

"You speak English very well, Herr Schmidt," I said.

"Thank you," he said stiffly. "I've been in this country a long time. But I've made you a proposition. You haven't answered it."

"I've refused it," I grinned at him and stood up.

"Why? More money?" he barked, bristling.

"I haven't got it," I told him quietly.

"What!" He rose to his feet. "You haven't got it? Why?"

I let him stew for a minute, and stew he did—beautifully.

"I opened it," I rapped out.

"You opened it?" he almost croaked. "You opened it and . . ."

". . . found the message. Quite a simple thing to decode. Now suppose you tell me what I want to know. First, how did you know that I had it?"

He looked at me closely.

"Perhaps a man named Slash Dell knew and told my friend."

"Yeah," I said, "and maybe a guy named Gem Clark knew and is a friend of yours. No matter. Give me the rest of the yarn."

"Briefly, it is this: This friend of mine wished to send out of Germany some personal property, private papers. He intrusted them to smugglers. Distrusting them, he wrote in code and put the message in that golden apple which you had. He gave it to a friend. It was stolen, and the message came into your possession. That is all."

He had sat down again. Now he leaned back, quite satisfied with himself. I looked at him and sneered at his remarks.

"Funny, you being in the diplomatic service."

Herr Schmidt looked puzzled.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You're such a rotten liar," I clarified.

I'd expected an explosion. I got it. Prussian style. Schmidt was big and strong, for all his fat. I'm bigger and stronger, and I'm not fat. He wasn't badly hurt, but there must have been murder in his heart as I marched him out by the collar and seat of his pants. His neck under my fingers was as red as Yellowtop's lips.

She looked up at me as I slammed the outer door behind the departing member of the Consulate.

"Know anything about codes?" I asked, producing the notes from the golden apple.

Yellowtop nodded her blond head.

"A lot more than you think," she smiled.

For two minutes, she studied the paper. Then we talked codes for half an hour. We were agreed as to the type of code it was, and were one that it wouldn't hurry the solution to call on the police experts for help. With-

out the *key*, this was one type of code that couldn't be broken down.

The phone rang. Yellowtop answered.

"Will you take it in here or in your office?" she asked.

I put the receiver to my ear.

"Duke Anson," I said.

"Come to 421 Cypress, Duke," whispered the voice of the Beauty, and it was not its usual husky self. "On the spot. No trap, I swear. Help me, please, Duke, please!"

THE connection was broken. I hooked up the phone, got my hat, and slipped another Colt into my pocket. I hid the message.

"If I'm not back in an hour send the law and plenty of 'em to 421 Cypress Street," I ordered Yellowtop.

"Right. Trouble?" She nodded toward my sagging pocket.

"Maybe," I said.

Was this a trap? Possibly. Yet I had a hunch that it was not. Last night, when I'd gone to meet the Beauty, would have been the logical time. That gal had nerves of ice, and whatever it was, something unusual was about to take place.

Playing hunches has done me a lot of good now and then. I'd play this one, too. And trap or not, this move should bring me into contact with Slash Dell. Once I contacted a member of Dell's pack and could keep him breathing long enough for a pow-wow, I should get some light on this enigma of the golden apple, why members of a German Consulate secretly were mixed up with it, and possibly with a big-time jewel pack.

I flagged a cab and was on my way. Damn! I thought. I was supposed to rescue *hairresses*!

Cypress Street is out in the Steelton district, a tough, poverty-stricken neighborhood near the steel mills that make this one of the dirtiest and richest towns in the country. I left the cab at Pine Street, two blocks north of 421 Cypress.

For a dollar, I bought the sack of a newsboy on the corner. The kid pocketed the coin, tucked the papers under his arm and breezed. They ask no questions in Steelton. There was

a small store across the street. From the drowsy old hag behind the counter, I bought a pair of colored glasses, blue ones like they wear in the steel mills. It took nearly all the soap on the dusty shelves back of the counter to give my bag the *right* appearance, but I bought it. I slung the bag over my shoulder, put on the glasses, and moved into action.

Starting at the house on the corner, I mounted the rickety steps. The work-wrecked woman who answered my knock took the "sample" I gave her and hardly had time to say, "no" before I thanked her for not buying six bars and moved on to the next. As quickly as possible, I worked my way to 421. An unpainted, weather-beaten house that had been built in the eighties.

I climbed the rickety steps. I was carrying the bag in my left hand now. Somehow I was beginning to regret my part in the affair. I should have called Kirk anyhow, though it was too late to think about *that* now. The door shook and rattled when I beat on it.

A curtain moved aside at a window to my right. I didn't pay any attention. I beat on the door again.

"Scram!" roared a voice at the window — Redhead's! I thanked my lucky stars then that I'd changed to a brown suit that morning and a different hat.

I hammered on the door again, and flicked away the glasses. The door yanked open. Redhead said:

"We don't want no damu . . ." before he recognized me and realized his mistake.

"I brought the bill for the rug," I rasped, sliding in.

This time *I* was the guy on the proper end of the roscoe.

"Where's Violet Eyes?" I said, kicking the door shut behind me and looking everywhere in the hall at once, waiting for a door to open.

I was going to start blasting when one did open.

Redhead snarled beautifully.

"Sing," I said, "or I'll bend this leveler over your conk. Last chance."

"In there," he sung, jerking his head toward the door on my left.

"Alone?"

"Yeah."

"About face, mug," I ordered crisply. "And just to keep you from getting foolish ideas, I'll just borrow your roscoe," I imitated.

"I knew we oughta blasted you," he said.

FROM the clip holster under his arm I took the gun I'd seen in my office—pointing at me. It was a lulu all right. Balanced beautifully, and all I figured it to be. I hefted it like a kid with a new toy. I could hardly wait to get down to the police target range to practice with it.

My absorption with that artistic rubber-outer almost finished me. Redhead fell forward on his hands, kicking back and up with his heels. One didn't miss. His oversized hoof caught me in the solar plexis. The whole damn room reeled around and my pins gave way. I went down. Somebody shouted. A woman screamed. Then Redhead was wheeling around, and I know my eyes bugged out at sight of my own heater in his hand. A hideout! The man was a genius!

I guess we all have our weakness. Guns are mine. I should have played safe. Maybe it was just an accident that I used the Fitzgerald. I'd already intended adding it to my collection if it turned out as good as I hoped.

It did. His top shirt button disappeared and became a hole, and I put another through the same spot just to be on the safe side. I couldn't have done better with my right hand. He folded like a blown-out tire and I decided to keep the Fitz.

My head cleared and I struggled to my feet. The door on my right had opened. I faced a man who'd jumped through. Ferret-Face! Gem Clark and I met again.

It was an accident that Clark got his then. The guy who had done time in a German concentration camp was too valuable to me to go out, and I didn't mean to shoot him. I was so afraid I would that I used my own heater. The shot I snapped at the rod in his hand didn't miss. I never miss. The gun he held in front of

him as he came through the door went spinning, but the heavy bullet ricocheted from the cylinder—upward through his belly into his lungs.

Ferret-Face gave a kind of queer grunt and clapped both hands to his midriff. He shot me a strange look, then bent over almost double, turned around, and walked back into the room like a very tired old man. A few more steps and he went down. Red squeezed out between his interlaced fingers as though he'd spilled crimson ink all over them. His breathing became harsh and irregular. I bent over him, saw the red on his lips.

"Copper," he grunted, and spat bloody froth into my face. "We oughta stopped you in the office like Red got that rat Blinky for stealing the apple."

"You're gonna take a trip to hell," I said. "Talk!"

He did. Just four words. They were his exit line.

"*Schwarzes Geld*—Black Gold," he whispered.

I went over to the cheap iron bedstead in the corner and untied the Beauty first. While she sat up and rubbed the circulation back into her shapely arms and legs I loosed the other.

I've a strong stomach, but it turned over and cringed when I got a good look at that poor devil. He had been horribly scarred. One eye was missing, and where his nose should have been there was a mass of shapeless scar tissue. Broken teeth were exposed by the twisted, formless lips.

But those scars were old, months old. It was the new ones, mostly burns, that Gem Clark had inflicted. He moaned a little as I rubbed his swollen arms, but no words came from the battered mouth. I felt a genuine thrill of admiration for the guy. His body was wrecked, but the spirit of him burned strong and showed itself in the fierce light that gleamed from his one good eye.

"Spin it, baby," I snapped at the Beauty. "And it better be good."

She had taken a pack of cigarettes from the dresser and was sitting on the edge of the bed, smoking calmly.

She shrugged.

"I heard Slash and Gem talking. I was to get mine because they figured I was crossing them. I was to be brought here from Slash's apartment for the medicine—since I wasn't talking there. I managed to get to the phone and call you before I heard them coming and hung up."

I TURNED and grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. I wasn't gentle about it.

"Listen, you," I gritted between my teeth. She got under my hide. "In one moment I'll leave here. This guy goes with me. You'll stay here—tied up on that bed — unless you come clean. Talk!"

But I guess she knew I wouldn't do it for she turned those violet eyes on me.

"You saved my life, so I'll marry you," she simpered. "Kiss me, my hero."

I'm not proud of doing it, but I'm making no apologies either. I grabbed that million dollars worth of armful, drew her to me, bent her across my knee, and gave her an open-handed whacking that she'll never forget. It was the first time in my life that I'd done just that, but when I released her and she stood up with both hands rubbing the back side of her firm hips, big tears were welling in her eyes. She was that mad.

"You—you— Oh, damn you, Duke!" she raved. "Some day I'll—"

"Why do you Americans play like that?" cut in a cool voice from the bed. It was a voice of authority, strong, clear, with a strong German accent. "Let us go."

I wrapped a blanket about his blistered feet.

"You are of the police?" the scarred man asked.

I introduced myself. His name, he said, was Harry Stahl, and he had done time in Dachau concentration camp in Germany with Gem Clark.

I picked him up and started to leave the room when I saw a book lying open on the cheap dresser. Why would a rat like Gem Clark have that book? An open Bible seemed out of place here. The Beauty shoved the book into my pocket, and twenty min-

utes later we were in my office. Stahl wouldn't permit me to call a doctor. So Yellowtop and the Beauty, under my supervision, dressed and bandaged his many painful but superficial wounds the best they could.

When Stahl was as comfortable as we could make him I said:

"I'm promising nothing. I may turn you over to the police. But I'm listening. Shoot."

Stahl looked puzzled at this last.

"He means go ahead and talk," the Beauty said.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CODE MESSAGE



AS YOU must know," he began, "the present German Government has passed laws making it a criminal offense to send out of that country any money or jewelry. This injustice has forced many otherwise respected people to break those laws.

A group of men have organized to aid those oppressed people, and quite a traffic has been built up in this smuggling of 'Black Money', as it is called.

"My brother and I, already ruined, turned our talents to this field. The inevitable happened. We were arrested by S.S. Troopers and thrown into Dachau without trial. *Gott!*"

Stahl's hand caressed his disfigured face as he leaned back in the chair. I understood. Dachau is the most infamous concentration camp in Germany.

"In Dachau we met Doctor Liebman, an automotive engineer. Before he died Liebman told us he had converted his fortune into gold and had shipped it, with another fortune in uncut diamonds, out of Germany. But he himself had been arrested before he could leave the country.

"He knew he was doomed, so he desired that that fortune in gold and jewels should be used for one purpose, if possible. To aid homeless, destitute refugees who had fled Germany. He committed the fortune to my



brother and myself. That was when we met Gem Clark, the American.

"It was shortly after this that I was pronounced 'reformed' and released. I took with me a golden apple in which Doctor Liebman had secreted a code. To prevent any miscarriage he had put the key to the code—a series of numbers—in another apple, which my brother would bring when released.

"A month later, however, he was beaten to death for the infraction of some minor prison rule. He entrusted the other apple to Gem Clark, who was with him when he died. The American, Clark, came to me immediately upon his release. Of course, he had opened the apple and gotten the key to the message, and now tried to trick me for the other apple.

"Naturally, I refused to conspire with him, so he informed the *Gestapo*—secret state police—to get the informer's share of recovered Black Money. I evaded both the *Gestapo* and the *Gremzer*—frontier customs police—and escaped to Holland. From there, I came to America to find Doctor Liebman's brother, to whom all the dead man's personal effects had been shipped. I . . ."

The glass in Stahl's hand slid to the floor. His head slumped forward on his chest. I sprang to his side. He hadn't fainted. He was asleep—exhausted physically and mentally from the suffering he'd undergone at Slash Dell and Gem Clark's hands. I picked him up and carried him to the divan.

"Take it from there, baby," I snapped at the Beauty.

"The beasts!" she said. "Oh, Duke, and they call me a criminal."

Yellowtop had taken down every word of Stahl's in shorthand. She did the same as the Beauty unloaded.

"Gem made a deal with the *Gestapo* after Stahl escaped. He was to get a big cut of the money. So Gem and a Nazi agent followed Stahl to America and trailed him to Pittstown, certain he'd uncover the cache. But once he was safe over here, in God's country again, Gem Clark wasn't splitting any loot with anybody. That is, not any Nazis. What he did was to get in touch with his old pal Slash Dell

to help him handle the deal. Then they snatched Stahl to beat the Nazi agent to the punch and to make Stahl talk."

"They've been working on him ever since, but after what he went through over there their stuff was child's play. He wouldn't tell a word. That's all."

So that was the secret of the golden apple? Whoever decoded that message would uncover a fortune in gold and in uncut jewels. I had the message. All I had to get was the key. That brought up another question.

"How about Blinky?" I asked the Beauty. "Where did he get the apple?"

"Oh, Blinky, he was one of the snatchers. In searching Stahl's room, he came across it. He said nothing about finding it. But he learned plenty about its value and of the Nazis' part in the picture while Slash and Gem were working on Stahl.

"He took a powder and tried to peddle the apple to the German consul. Of course, the consul was horrified, officially, at the thought. He couldn't dare get mixed up in anything of the sort. But his secretary and another attaché, Schmidt, were ordered to pay Blinky five thousand cash for it. But when he went to collect, he was trailed by Red and ran into stormy weather."

"But why did he come in here?" asked Yellowtop.

"That's one against you, Goldilocks," I cracked. "You forgot that the German consulate is in this building, next flight above. Brother Blinky was spotted and tailed by Red. He saw the name on the door and ducked in here for safety. Red followed him right on into the inner office and then blasted him, maybe with a silencer. But he couldn't find the apple, so he beat it back and got Gem Clark for another try."

I TURNED to the Beauty. "And just what were you doing with Schmidt in the Double-Header, my love?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," she said, and almost blushed.

"I probably wouldn't," I said. "But you can spill it anyhow."

"I went to tell him about the location of Stahl's prison. I've done a lot of things in my life that I'm not proud of, but that torture stuff was too much even for a gal who's had to be hard or be taken. I was going to tell him . . ."

". . . for a price," I cut in.

". . . for a price," she admitted coolly. "I changed my mind when I saw you in the Double-Header. . ."

"Figuring you could maybe wham me over the conk—which you did—with a coffee mug—and get all that uncut flash and maybe the gold all for yourself," I finished for her. "But Dell and Clark found out about it, and you were slated to get the same thing that Blinky got. You certainly travel in nice company, baby."

I ordered Yellowtop to see that Stahl was taken to a private hospital. Then I picked up the telephone, unscrewed the receiver, and removed the onionskin I'd hidden there. The Beauty's beautiful eyes widened just a little, then narrowed. I tossed her a twenty-dollar bill.

"That'll take you a long ways, darling," I grinned. "For two hours I'll forget about you. But the next time we meet you're headed for Kirk and the can."

"So that's the tip-off note you have there, eh?" she said. "The key to a fortune in Black Money that you might take for yourself? How about a split if I don't write a letter to Kirk?"

She's all business, that twist!

"Scram!" I barked at her.

"Okay, my pct, and thanks for the rescue," she grinned back, going toward the door. "I might do as much for you sometime."

In my private office, the door locked, I sat at the desk. Before me was the Bible that I'd brought from Slash Dell and Gem Clark's hideout. In one hand, I held the message. I was on the right trail—of that I felt certain. But there was a job ahead of me, for I'd been unable to find anything on Clark's body.

It was half an hour of brain-busting struggle before the light cut

through the black fog that hung over my brain. I had leaned back and lit a cigarette when I got an inspiration. I said to myself that Clark, having the key to the message, must have tried to work out the message. In sheer desperation.

That saved me a lot of work, that little hunch!

The Book was brand new, right out of a bookstore. But one section, The Songs of Solomon, showed signs of much use. That part was dog-eared from wet thumbing and left no doubt in my mind that Clark had given it plenty of attention. From then on it was a pushover. I worked it out fast.

I unlocked the bolted door, returned to the chair and awaited developments I'd a hunch were just around the corner. Or rather, one flight up. I allowed myself the luxury of a big yawn and stretched my arms overhead. I kept them there when I heard two things and saw a third. Yellowtop yelled. My buzzer buzzed. The door to my office banged open to admit a crisp blond young lad with "Nazi" rubber-stamped all over him, even to the heel click. The *Gestapo* agent that Clark had doublecrossed.

He didn't salute. It would have been awkward with that 763 Mauser in his right paw.

"Heil Hitler, sonny," I greeted him pleasantly. "But don't play heil with this rug too. The code and the Bible are right here on my desk. And don't slam that door quite so hard when you go out."

But the louse did anyhow. Just for spite, I think. He didn't speak a single word. I suppose it's all a part of Hitler's "Waste-Nothing" program.

**YELLOWTOP** came rushing in, breathless. "That—that woman—was with him. She said to give you her love—while she held a gun on me! Did they get it?"

"Both it and the Bible," I said. "We don't need it now. The code was in The Songs of Solomon. First number the chapter, second the verse, third the word. The message was, 'Black Gold in chariot to Solomon.'"

"Chariot?"

"That's Hindu for automobile," I cracked. "Doctor Liebman shipped an automobile to his brother Solomon, I think. Get me the telephone directory."

I had all the pieces of the golden apple puzzle, or enough of them to work on. The thing was already shaped in my mind. Now to gather up the pieces. The directory open, I ran my finger down the list of names. Yes, there it was. Solomon Liebman, 736 Lake Street. It was a garage. Good!

I lit a cigarette and leaning back, grinned at Yellowtop as I propped my feet on the desk.

"Well," she welled, "aren't you going to do something?"

"I am," I said. "Those playmates of ours know their stuff. That lad grabbed the Bible off my desk. He has the message, too. It won't take them long to break the thing down—maybe an hour, maybe sooner. You take a spot in the lobby. When you see our recent visitor or Schmidt leave the building, call me. And move fast."

She looked at me, a puzzled frown marring the smooth whiteness of her forehead.

"Elementary, my dear Miss Watson," I explained. "I want to put the hooks into those two Heinies, along with the others. We give them enough rope and when they've tangled themselves up in it, the Law will tow them in. You can bet that the evanescent Mr. Slash Dell has a shadow around. There's a fast show-down coming and maybe he'll be in on it."

"Then you knew that girl—I won't call her the Beauty—would go upstairs to Schmidt and spill everything to him about you working the code when you let her go?"

"I knew you were a bright young woman when I put you on probation, Yellowtop," I cracked. "Consider yourself permanently hired. Now, on your way."

I said those Heinies waste nothing, including time. Twenty-two minutes later Yellowtop called excitedly on the phone.

"Schmidt and the other," she said.

"They just went out. That woman is with them."

I slammed down the phone and sprang to the front window. Schmidt, the blond young *Gestapo* agent, and the Beauty were piling into a cab. Across the street, a black sedan pulled out from the curb and followed the cab. It was working! Now came the ticklish part for me. If my timing was bad by so much as a minute I was sunk.

## CHAPTER V

### HOW DAMES ARE



SOLOMAN LIEBMAN'S garage was only two blocks away. But because of one-way streets and traffic routing, a car leaving my office building must travel six blocks to get there. Six blocks through late afternoon traffic. I was earnestly banking on that.

I spurned the elevators and raced down three flights. In the lobby I grabbed Yellowtop by the arm. Hustling her along beside me I spewed instructions.

"Call Kirk," I snapped. "Send him to 736 Lake with Toms. Tommy guns Thatcher! Hurry!"

I released her with a shove toward the phone booth. Through the revolving doors I hit the sidewalk running. The city's pedestrian traffic was treated to a perfect example of line-bucking and cross-country running. I ran those two blocks in just a trifle over nothing flat, upsetting a stout gentleman as I rounded the corner into Lake Street.

A frail little man sat at the desk in the glassed-in office of the garage as I puffed in under full steam.

"Liebman?" I barked.

He nodded, peering at me through lenses as thick as a silver dollar. The place was like a huge deserted barn, more for storage and daily parking than anything else. And Liebman didn't look like a man waiting for the key to a fortune in a car his

brother had shipped him. Or maybe he didn't even know about it. Right then I didn't have time to speculate.

"Sometime ago your brother's car was shipped to you from Germany. Where is it?"

"And who are you, my friend?" he inquired.

I glanced over my shoulder. A cab was drawing into the curb. No time to chat. I grabbed Liebman and hustled him through the door.

"Duck!" I hissed into his ear. "Get out of sight, quick! Hell's gonna break loose!"

I shoved him and ran. A concrete ramp curved up by a wall to the floor above. I hit for it, and for a guy who'd already done two blocks under full steam I didn't do so badly going uphill. A backward glance showed the Prussian-like figure of Schmidt and the blond young *Gestapo* agent coming in. The Beauty was with them. I entered the storage room.

Lined up on the street side of the room were about thirty cars of various ages and makes. Hurriedly I looked them over. They were all of American manufacture, but I spotted the one I wanted down at the end. The German license plates were the tip-off.

I pulled out my roscoe and crouched out of sight behind it. All right, let them come now—what was left of them.

Then it happened. From below came the sound of a voice. I knew instinctively that it was Dell's. His roar of command to his men—a roar of execution—was followed by the roar of .45's, a Tommy, and the sharper bark of a Luger. Dell did indeed have no intention of splitting any loot with *Herr* Hitler, now that Gem Clark was eradicated. The staccato chatter of the Tommy drowned out everything else. I slipped over and peered down.

Schmidt and the *Gestapo* agent were ready for a trip back to Germany in wooden overcoats. One of Dell's mob was down, too. Slash Dell, holding a Tommy, was running toward the ramp, his thin face twisted into a grimace of blood lust and greed. Behind him crowded three

others. I ducked in a hurry, went back to the car.

"It's a car we want," said Dell. "The Heinies were talking about a car. There, that must be the one down there. See the Kraut plates!"

I had the second roscoe out now, waiting. Dell was going to get both of them first.

"Get that hack rolling!" he ordered.

Screaming above the voice came the unmistakable squall of police sirens.

"Coppers, Slash!" yelled one of the hoods. "What are we gonna do now?"

"We'll shoot it out. We're hooked for the hot seat with those two Dutch stiffs lying down there. Come on!"

Time for me to come in. I could keep these lice busy and maybe save the life of an officer. I sprang up. But the handle of the car hooked into my breast pocket, jerking me off balance. I stumbled back, tripped, fell hard.

**BY THE** time I got up it was all over. It happened that fast. Those lawmen knew how to handle the heat. A burst or two of Tommy fire and it was history.

"Search the place!" roared Kirk's voice.

It had been my intention to turn over my prisoners and tell my tale when the cops arrived, take a bow, and exit to the sound of loud cheers. But now I changed my mind. If the car *did* carry a fortune in gold and uncut flash there was no use in risking tying it up in legal red tape. The funds were needed badly, now.

There were some boards on the rafters overhead, forming a small platform. I jumped, got a hold, swung up. Twenty minutes later all the cops were gone and the place was as quiet as a morgue. They'd taken Liebman with them. Cautiously I swung down and stole down the ramp to the front door. As I'd feared, two uniformed coppers were on guard outside the door, shooing the crowd on about its business.

I got the motor going upstairs. It purred as quietly as a contented kitten. Liebman had taken exceptional

care of it. I switched off the ignition, pushed the machine to the curved incline, jumped in as it started to roll down, and glided it to a stop with the shiny bumper right against the electric sliding doors. I couldn't reach the button from where I sat in the car, but I thought I could with a broom handle. I got out and scoured the joint until I found a broom. Then I got back into the driver's seat.

I punched the starter button with my foot and the motor broke into quiet life. I punched the electric button on the sliding doors with the broom and they slid back. Then I jammed the juice to the engine and shot out into the street past the too surprised flatties. The car lurched as I spun into traffic.

Things happened fast then. Two voices commanded, "Stop," a couple of roscoes opened up behind, and a slug zinged past my left ear and shattered the edge of the windshield. About four more drilled through the back.

"Damn!" said the Beauty's voice muffled, from the floor of the back seat.

"Come up here, you," I ordered over my shoulder.

She managed to comply while I herded the Heinie hack around a corner with squalling tires. It ran good on two wheels, though the taxi driver whose cab we almost climbed didn't seem to notice *that*. I heard him bawl something after us. It sounded like "*Hayseed!*"

The Beauty was sopping wet. Dripping. But the way that wet dress clung to her luscious curves gave me the idea that all girls like her should wear only the wettest of dresses at all times.

"If you laugh I'll claw your eyes out," she hissed, looking straight ahead. "When Dell's pack muscled in, I hid behind a barrel of water. When the Law came I got into the barrel. I made it into the car when you went after the broom. So this is the car with the ice in it?"

"Yeah," I said.

"You've got to show me. I'll lay a yard even that you don't find it in here."

I told her it was a bet, and fifteen minutes later we were in a private garage of mine. I gave the car the works while the Beauty sat handcuffed—on an orange crate. I literally tooth-combed it looking for a secret hiding place. But it was no go.

"You owe me a yard," said the Beauty, sweetly.

I straightened up and ran my fingers through my hair. It was then I noticed a slight nick in the windshield frame, where the slug had gone through, chipping off the paint. I knew then I'd hit the jackpot.

Quickly I went gouging along the metal framework of the car, uncovering more gold. A car of gold. Doctor Liebman had been an automotive engineer, and he'd replaced all the lighter removable parts, even the shiny bumpers, with replicas of solid gold. The price of the chariot at current prices was staggering, and I almost shuddered at thought of that taxi we'd nearly climbed.

"Well, that's the score, baby," I grinned at the Beauty.

"But you still owe me a yard," she reminded. "You didn't find the ice you said. . . ."

"I got some valuable experience," I laughed. "And a prisoner. But not a dime do I take for this case. This gold, all of it, goes for the purpose Doctor Liebman intended. It will help make life livable for a lot of refugees from Naziland."

**T**HE Beauty let those melting eyes of hers meet mine.

"Sometimes I'm almost convinced you're a right guy, Duke," she said softly.

"You ought to try leveling sometime, my love," I said. "Well, come on. We're going to see Kirk. I told you what would happen next time we met."

"Get 'em up!" commanded a voice behind me.

The Beauty, looking past my shoulder, raised her cuffed hands. Slowly my own hooks went up. I glanced over my shoulder.

Slash Dell, a roscoe in each hand, was opening the door wider to get through, then kicking it shut behind

him. A bloody rag was bound around his forehead. He stopped three feet from me.

"What a break!" he gloated. "I give the Law a lesson in escape when they come through the door. A half hour later, while I'm musclin' a yokel's car, I happen to see you two drive past and tail you here. I waited outside the window until you got things ready, sucker."

I didn't answer. And I didn't answer when he said:

"A slug apiece for you two clowns. . . ."

I FELL to the floor, my leveler out and spouting as his shot parted my hair on the wrong side. I shot him right between his narrow eyes. He was dead before he fell.

As I got up I glimpsed, from the tail of my eye, a blurred motion on my left. I had a quick gander of the Beauty beside me. A crescent wrench in her cuffed hands was descending upon my noggin. I ducked. I didn't duck fast enough. Stars fell on Duke Anson.

I don't now how long I was out. But I finally wobbled to my feet. There was a big knot on my conk. The knot was splitting wide open. Dell lay where he had fallen and the Beauty had disappeared. Then I found the note pinned to my *necktie*, and in spite of the pain I chuckled when I read it. She'd written:

All right, my hero. For once I'll level. In your coat pocket is a bag of flash—all uncut. I found it in a trick compartment in the back of the front seat while those flatties

were having some much needed target practice. I'm tossing it into the pot. But in the morning I'll feel like kicking myself.

Yours.

P. S. I took your wallet. Only an extra yard besides the one you owed me. You heel!

As I said, the Beauty is in a class by herself.

I arrived late at the office the next morning. Yellowtop looked up with a grin as I entered. I'd managed to straighten things out with Kirk—after listening to a beautiful cussing out. But he had no love for such an outfit as the *Gestapo*, so he'd agreed to hear nothing, officially, about the Black Money chariot, after all.

Two of Dell's pack were alive and anxious to spill anything to save their carcasses from a trip to the frying pan.

Kirk was to help Stahl and Doctor Liebman's brother head a commission to work for the rehabilitation of the refugees, thus carrying out the dead man's will.

Yellowtop grinned that funny grin at me.

"How shall I enter this first case, Mr. Anson?" she asked.

"On the debit side," I grinned back. "We can get the rug washed and cleaned for about twenty bucks, my lost wallet cost five dollars, and I lost one hundred dollars to the Beauty. But that's only a loan. Some day I'll meet that baby again and when I do I'll collect with interest."

But Yellowtop only sniffed disparagingly and turned up her nose.

Oh, well, you know how dames are.

# College Humor

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THE BEST COMEDY IN AMERICA

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# THE CAT JUMPS

By ROY MARR

Author of "The Subway Murder," "Killing at Buffalo," etc.



Hermann Vanderkopf tottered backward a pace, tumbled over a chair—shot through the heart

**T**HE diamonds trickled from the chamois pouch to the black velvet that enhanced their radiance. Herman Vanderkopf spilled them out slowly, relishing their every gleam as they emerged from the pouch one by one under the shaded light.

"Oh!" The girl reached involuntarily. "How gorgeous! Aren't they, Fred? Gorgeous!"

Fred Channing nodded, while his more practical mind reflected on the hazard of keeping such a fortune in an isolated country house. More than a hundred stones, ranging from two to ten carats. He guessed their

*George Sloan's Perfect Murder Plans Go Awry When He Forgets That Felines May Be the Enemies of Man!*

worth at well over a hundred thousand dollars.

Vanderkopf ran his fingers through them, setting them ablaze. His eyes twinkled from the girl to Channing.

"You think they are good enough for your young lady?"

Channing grinned. "There's only one answer I could make to that while she's around, so I won't commit myself. They certainly are dazzling."

Alice Lane sighed longingly.

"They're so lovely. May I touch them, Mr. Vanderkopf?"

"Of course."

The old man beamed on her, pleased by her appreciation.

She bent over them, moving them slowly with slender fingertips to stir their deep-seated fire.

"They're perfect," said Vanderkopf, "and I know of nothing more beautiful than a perfect diamond. They're my hobby now, you know, my only love."

Until his retirement, a couple of years before, he had been the most exclusive diamond merchant in New York, with world-wide recognition as an expert. The ordinary run of diamonds, he regarded as so much trash and would not handle. Only jewels of the first water and most exquisite craftsmanship ever came from his hands.

"Old customers still come to me," he added with pride, "and send others who want only the finest diamonds—as you were sent to me. Cutting fine stones as they should be cut is my pleasure and"—he bowed to Alice—"it gives me further pleasure when they go to someone who loves them and does not wear them simply for show."

"They're marvelous," she murmured. "I never saw . . ."

She broke off with a little scream and jumped back as a big white Persian cat leaped to the table beside her. The cat blinked at her, then turned to roll the gleaming gems daintily with a paw.

"There's a picture," laughed Channing. "A cat playing with a million dollars worth of diamonds!"

**V**ANDERKOPF stroked the cat's long silky coat.

"Tippy loves them too," he said. "No matter where he is, he knows when I take them out and comes in here."

The telephone rang and he crossed the room to answer it. There was

welcome in his voice but his expression was regretful when he hung up.

"My nephew," he said, "and my greatest disappointment. I wanted him to carry on my business but I couldn't teach him the right feeling for diamonds. He doesn't seem able to understand their beauty, can't see anything but their commercial value."

He could have added that the nephew, George Sloan, who lived with him, was more interested in spending money than in making it. Sloan had just landed from a Caribbean cruise and, as Channing and Alice gathered from the telephone talk, was staying overnight in New York.

The cat perched on Vanderkopf's shoulder while Alice selected a diamond for her engagement ring. That took time and presently it jumped to Channing's shoulder.

"There's a saying," said Vanderkopf, "that you never can tell which way a cat will jump. You can with Tippy—if there's a shoulder within reach."

He put the cat on the table and left it patting the diamonds around while he accompanied Alice and Channing to their car.

There was weariness in his step as he reentered the house and his thoughts dwelt on his nephew. Sloan's absences from home had become increasingly frequent and prolonged. He spent a lot of time in New York and was vague about how he occupied himself.

Having inherited a substantial fortune from his parents, Sloan showed no inclination to engage in business. To Hermann Vanderkopf, that was all wrong. He didn't know the state of Sloan's finances but suspected that they were seriously depleted. It was a point he intended to take up some day.

As he knelt to place the diamonds in the wall safe behind a panel just above the baseboard, the cat climbed on his back to watch as it always did. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Upon landing from the cruise ship late in the afternoon, George Sloan

telephoned the Commodore Hotel and asked for Hugh Morton. Morton had registered the previous day in accordance with plans made before Sloan sailed.

"I'll check in about eleven," Sloan told him. "What floor are you on?"

"The eighth. Eight-eighty-seven on the Forty-second Street side."

"All right," said Sloan. "Stand by and I'll give you a ring when I get in. I want to get started by midnight."

With some fellow passengers, he had dinner and saw an early floor show at a night club. At eleven o'clock, he taxied to the Commodore and got a room on the eighth floor. Before going up, he phoned Morton from a booth and gave him the room number.

Morton called on him immediately. He was a Broadway sharpshooter, willing to participate in anything less than murder. He brought along a small safe-cracker's jack in a briefcase.

"You've got it straight, haven't you?" said Sloan. "You hold the fort and let the management know it's being held. Every so often have a drink sent up. I gave the clerk the idea I'm half-crocked, so it will get over all right."

"I'll handle it," said Morton. "How long will you be gone?"

"About four hours. And look, don't let the waiters see too much of you. Turn on only one light, that one on the table, and keep as far from it as possible. Go to bed or be in the bathroom when they come in. Don't let them get a good look at you. Remember that."

"Okay," said Morton, "okay. I'm worrying more about you on that angle. You've got to watch your step going out and coming in. Hotel clerks remember faces."

"I'll keep clear of the desk. Where's your car?"

**I**T WAS in a garage two blocks away at Forty-second Street and Third Avenue. Morton gave him the claim check, the owner's card and the keys.

Sloan considered the rough tweed suit he had on. It was dark enough to

be inconspicuous. He put on crepe-soled shoes and was ready to go.

Morton pointed to the jack. "You remember how to work this gadget? Set the claw under the combination knob and—"

"I know." Sloan took up the briefcase, anxious to get under way. "You take care of this end and I'll do the rest."

"Here's hoping," said Morton, "if the haul is as good as you say."

"It will be," promised Sloan.

Without going near the desk, he left the hotel by the exit into Grand Central Station, walked to the garage for Morton's car and headed for his uncle's house in Westchester County.

Preparation of an alibi was for police consumption. His uncle would not suspect him. But the police would check him up—and find he had been in his hotel room in New York, fifty miles away, all night. The waiters who served drinks to his room would testify to that. . . .

The house was on a little-traveled side road, half a mile from the nearest neighbor. Besides his uncle, the only occupants were the housekeeper and cook.

Sloan parked the car at the end of the short driveway, confident that no one would come along to see it during the few minutes he was in the house. From the dash compartment he took cotton gloves, a flashlight and a screw-driver. This, with the jack, completed his equipment.

Silent on his rubber soles, he crossed the porch, unlocked the front door, closed it behind him. He flashed his light briefly and went on to the library, on the left side of the hall. His uncle's bedroom was on the other side of the house, over the living room. The servants were on the third floor.

Curled in the depths of a library chair, the big white cat watched him as he closed the library door and went to one of the square mullioned windows set high on each side of the fireplace. He did not notice the cat in the dark.

Opening the window, he gashed the sash with the screw-driver and gouged a piece from the casing to

make it appear that it had been forced from the outside.

His nerves tightened sharply as he knelt at the safe. He fumbled in opening the concealing panel, spun the safe combination too far on the second turn.

The cat got up, stretched, leaped on his back.

Sloan reared to his feet, startled, swearing. The equally startled cat scrambled to his shoulder. Damning it, he reached up and tore it loose. His right sleeve pushed back and the cat's claws ripped his forearm as he dropped it to the floor.

Unaccustomed to such rough treatment, the cat retreated and sat down to smooth its ruffled fur.

Sloan opened the safe and was stowing the pouch of diamonds in his pocket when light flooded the room. He swung around to see his uncle, fully dressed, covering him with an automatic from the doorway.

Hermann Vanderkopf stared blankly, incredulous.

Sloan stood up slowly, hopelessly. He doubted that anything could be gained by an appeal for mercy. His uncle was so scrupulously honest he had no tolerance for a thief.

"George!" said the old man. "You!" Sloan hung his head.

"I don't suppose there's an excuse," he mumbled, "but I had to get money and—well, there wasn't anywhere I could get it."

**T**HE old man advanced into the room. The gun drooped to his side. The hurt look left his face and it became stern.

"Sit down, George," he said.

Maintaining an abject pose, Sloan dropped heavily into a chair. He had to stall his uncle until he could see a way out.

His uncle put the gun on the table and stood looking down at him.

"Why were you in such need of money, George? You got two hundred thousand dollars when your father died three years ago."

Sloan didn't face him but covertly eyed the gun.

"The usual story," he replied. "I've been playing the market, play-

ing the horses, gambling. My money is all gone. I owe a lot."

"So," said the old man bleakly, "you came to rob me. If you had told me you were in trouble I would have helped you. I wouldn't bother to help a thief."

Anger surged in Sloan. Never having known his uncle to be up at this hour of the night, he regarded himself as the victim of a bad break, of the rotten luck that had pursued his gambling activities.

"You're wondering, I suppose," said Vanderkopf, "how I happened to catch you. You have yourself to blame for that. I've been worrying about you, and when you telephoned last night, I decided it was time we had a heart-to-heart talk. Thinking of that kept me awake. I was sitting at my bedroom window when you arrived."

Sloan raised his head. "You recognized me?"

"No. I recognized—a thief. I let him enter the house to catch him in the act."

Sloan glanced again at the gun. He gave thought to a still more disastrous result of his unsuccessful foray—his elimination from Hermann Vanderkopf's will under which, as it stood, he was to receive probably a quarter of a million dollars.

The silence lengthened. He could not see any way out.

The cat, its dignity restored, sprang to the back of his chair and stepped to his shoulder.

He flung it off in suddenly ungovernable rage, swooped over and snatched the gun.

"Okay," he said harshly, "I'm a thief and you're throwing me out. But I'm not going empty-handed. I'm taking what I came after."

The old man faced the gun without flinching.

"If you do that," he said, "I'll send the police after you."

Keeping him covered, Sloan backed away and shut the door.

"You think you will," he snarled—and stepping quickly forward, rammed the gun against his uncle's chest and fired.

Vanderkopf tottered backward a

pace, tumbled over a chair—shot through the heart.

Sloan stood frozen in momentary panic. It passed quickly, and to his astonishment, he was able to view the killing almost with detachment. Never having had any real affection for his uncle, he felt no remorse. Vanderkopf, he reminded himself, would have cast him out penniless or jailed him for refusing to give up the loot.

Switching off the lights, he opened the door and listened. The house remained quiet. The short, sharp bark of the gun had not awakened the two women on the third floor.

Sloan laid the gun on the floor and hurriedly completed the evidence, intended to stamp the robbery as the work of a professional. The base of the jack fitted around the safe combination dial with a strong steel claw under the knob. Elevation of the jack wrenched out the knob.

He grimaced ghoulishly as he passed the body on his way out. Actually, he had gained more than he counted on. He not only had the diamonds but would share in his uncle's estate long in advance of expectation.

The cat crouched, unwinking eyes on its master, sensing death. . . .

**A**T FOUR O'CLOCK, Sloan left Morton's car in a parking lot on West Forty-second Street and taxied to the hotel. Entering it from the terminal, he walked to the eighth floor to avoid coming under the observation of an elevator operator.

Morton eyed him doubtfully.

"Something go wrong?"

Sloan took up a half-finished highball and gulped it.

"Everything's all right," he said. "Haven't you anything better than that to drink?"

"There's half a dozen straight shots lined up in the bathroom. I've been saving them, figuring you could use a couple."

Sloan went in, took two drinks fast and returned with one in his hand.

"You look like something went wrong," persisted Morton. "What did you run into?"

"Nothing," said Sloan shortly. "I'm all right. You kept things moving here?"

"Steadily. The hotel will swear you were here all night. You got the rocks?"

Sloan produced the pouch. His hand shook as the picture of the man he had killed rose before him. Unconsciously, he muttered to himself.

"The old fool should have been asleep."

Morton heard only the end of that.

"Who would have been asleep?"

"Huh?" Sloan took another drink. "I said I'd like to get some sleep. I'm checking out at eight."

Morton didn't press the question, but it was obvious to him that there had been a slip up. He put on his coat, aiming to get off the deck rapidly.

"You're jittery," he said, "but getting stewed won't do you any good if you have to use your head. Let's see what you got."

Sloan poured the diamonds out on the bed.

"My God!" ejaculated Morton. "You got something! That's real ice. What's it worth?"

"Around a hundred and twenty-five thousand."

Sloan sorted the diamonds in sizes, then divided them, three to a pile, one to another.

"That's about right," he said.

"Fair enough," agreed Morton. His cut was one-fourth. He scooped them up and pocketed them. "How strong is the heat going to be?"

"Plenty," returned Sloan. "How good a look at you did the waiters get?"

"They didn't. I got into bed when they came up. Why so much heat? Who saw you?"

Sloan shook his head impatiently. He handed over the parking lot check with Morton's license and keys.

"Everything's all right," he repeated. "Is there anything else I ought to know—any conversation with the waiters?"

"Uh-uh. I only grunted at them." He picked up the briefcase contain-

ing the jack and a violently striped pajama coat. "I got this," he said, "to make the bed act look good."

"Um," said Sloan absently. "I'll telephone you when things quiet down and we'll go see that diamond man you know."

"Oke," said Morton. "I'll be seein' you. Good luck."

Back in his room, Morton applauded his foresight in having left a call for five o'clock. That was just in case. And now it looked like good judgment. He packed his bag and sat down to await the call.

MEANWHILE, Sloan paced restlessly, assuring himself he had nothing to fear. He speculated on when the storm would break, nerved himself to weather it.

The housekeeper and cook would go downstairs at six-thirty, but it was unlikely that they would go into the library for several hours. His uncle generally got up at eight o'clock but sometimes slept later. They would think nothing of it if he did not appear at the usual hour.

His car was in a midtown garage. At seven-thirty he telephoned for it to be sent to the hotel.

When he checked out, the diamonds were in one of his two bags. He drove over to Forty-first Street, parked, and walked back to leave the bag with the diamonds in the parcel room at Grand Central. He mailed the check to himself at his uncle's home.

This time he drove fast, hoping to arrive very soon after discovery of the body, to see in what direction the police were heading. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Because of the cat, the murder was quickly revealed.

Tippy was always in the kitchen, awaiting his breakfast at six-thirty. When he didn't show up this morning, the housekeeper went looking for him.

By seven-thirty the State troopers were there.

The housekeeper, who had admitted Fred Channing and Alice Lane, remembered his name but did

not know where he lived. The cook recalled that his car had a Connecticut license. Through a message broadcast over the interstate police teletype he was located within an hour at his home in Greenwich, thirty miles away. He picked up Alice at once and drove over.

Sergeant Haley of the State Police, in charge of the investigation, took them into the living room.

Horror-stricken, Alice sat stonily staring out a window.

"We were here about an hour," Channing related, "and left about ten o'clock. We came to select a diamond for Miss Lane's ring. Mr. Vanderkopf put it in his vest pocket. Perhaps you found it there."

The sergeant nodded.

"Did he lock the diamonds in the safe before you left?"

"No," said Channing. "They were on the table. What time was he killed?"

"Between one and three. If he left the diamonds out he may have expected another caller. He didn't say anything about that?"

"He didn't."

"How about the phone, anyone call while you were here?"

"His nephew called to say he was staying overnight in New York. I don't know where."

Haley phoned his barracks to have the New York police canvass the hotels for Sloan.

"Nothing else you can think of?" he asked Channing.

"Nothing."

Alice spoke. "There's a car coming in."

Haley went out. From behind the wheel Sloan looked at him inquiringly.

"What's happened? I'm George Sloan."

Haley sized him up, saw that he was tired and evidently had not slept, smelled of liquor.

"There's been a robbery."

"I'm not surprised." Sloan got out of the car. "I've said often enough it was foolish keeping a young fortune in the house. Where's my uncle?"



The sergeant motioned toward the house, said abruptly:

"He's dead!"

"Dead!" echoed Sloan. "How? What—"

"Shot dead by the burglar."

"Have you caught him?"

"Not yet."

"But, good Lord, the servants must have heard the shots and given the alarm!"

"There was only one shot," said Haley. "They didn't hear anything."

"We will," said Haley. "Can you help us trace the diamonds? Do you know them well enough to describe them?"

SLOAN shook his head. "No, I'm not familiar with them. How did the burglar get in?"

"Through a window in the library—apparently."

Sloan's pulse quickened.

"You say that as if you doubt it."

"We're not so sure," said Haley.

THREE COMPLETE NOVELETS NEXT ISSUE

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Sloan looked sad.

"What a home-coming," he said. "I've been away for a month, you know. I can't believe it—Uncle Herman dead. Aren't there any clues?"

"Not yet. He was shot with his own gun. There aren't any fingerprints but his on the safe. All we've found so far are the marks of a car that stood out there on the side of the road. That doesn't mean much."

Sloan gestured angrily. "But there must be something. We've got to find something—to get the murderer."

"We're waiting for a wood expert to tell us."

"Tell you what?"

"Whether the breaking was done from the inside."

Sloan seemed puzzled. "I don't get you."

"It might be phony," said Haley. "I'm told your uncle went to bed regularly around ten-thirty."

"That's right."

"Then what was he doing up and dressed after one o'clock in the morning? That would indicate someone he knew was here. If that some-

body killed and robbed him, the forcing of the window would be phony."

"Somebody he knew." Sloan frowned thoughtfully. "You mean he opened the safe to show the diamonds and. . ."

"The safe was cracked but that also might be window-dressing to cover an inside job."

"But," objected Sloan, "if it was somebody he knew, why did he have his gun? You said, didn't you, he was shot with his own gun."

The sergeant shrugged. "We'll get that figured out. Let's go inside."

They went into the living room, where he introduced Channing and Alice and explained their presence. There was a strained silence as they looked over one another.

The cat stalked soberly in. It jumped to a chair behind Sloan and fixed its eyes on him.

"I wish we could help," said Channing to break the silence. "As I told the sergeant, Mr. Sloan, the only thing that happened while we were here was your tele. . ."

A startled exclamation from Alice Lane interrupted him.

"The cat!" she cried. "The cat, Fred!"

Uncomprehending, they looked at the cat. It was gathering itself to spring to Sloan's shoulder.

"Grab it!" cried Alice excitedly. "Quick!"

As the cat took off, Sloan lunged forward and caught it in midair.

Sloan backed away a step, wary. He didn't get the point but sensed danger in it.

"Nice work," said Sergeant Haley, "but why?"

**C**HANNING held the cat, looked at Alice for the answer.

"You remember," she said to him, "Mr. Vanderkopf said one always could tell which way this cat will jump?"

Channing nodded. "He said that when it got on my shoulder."

Alice turned to the sergeant. "I think you told us the cat was shut in the library with—Mr. Vanderkopf."

"That's right," said Haley.

He let her go on without attempting to hurry her.

She faced Sloan a little breathlessly.

"When were you last in the house?"

"Not for a month. Why?"

Alice stepped over and stroked the cat, looked at her hand.

"I noticed," she said slowly, turning again to Haley, "there was hair on Fred's shoulder after we left here last night." She took the cat from him and pointed to white hairs on the front of his coat. "See how it sheds."

The sergeant moved closer to Sloan.

"Yeah," he said, giving her an appreciative glance, "I see."

Sloan turned his head slowly to look at his own shoulder. White hairs adhered to the rough tweed. He stood rooted, fighting off panic, as the sergeant stepped up behind him.

"That ties you in, Sloan," said Haley. "There's cat hair all over your back."

Sweat oozed on Sloan's forehead.

"I was in New York all night," he said thickly, "and can prove it. Ask the hotel—"

"We will," said Haley. Reaching over Sloan's shoulders, he took hold of the lapels of his coat and pulled it open. "Let's have this for Exhibit A. You won't be needing it."

Sloan braced to resist, realized the folly in that, and surrendered his coat. They couldn't convict him, he told himself, because of a few cat hairs. Not when he had an ironclad alibi.

Ironclad? Was it? Suppose they discovered a hole in it, a tiny hole in which to get leverage to tear it apart! He shook his head, convincing himself that it was puncture-proof.

"You're crazy," he said, keeping his voice even and trying to grin. "I was in New York. I hadn't any reason for killing my uncle."

"Only that you were robbing him," said Haley.

"I was in New York," insisted Sloan. "You'll find that out when you check up."

An ironclad alibi—sure. They couldn't hook him up with Morton. They couldn't hook him up with Morton's car. His own car had been in

the garage since he sailed a month ago. The waiters who served drinks in his room would make the alibi airtight. He said so.

"Several waiters can tell you I didn't leave the hotel. I was out with some people last night and did some drinking. I got to the hotel about eleven o'clock but couldn't sleep. I felt like having a couple more drinks and had them sent up."

"How many?" asked Haley.

"I didn't count them—quite a few. I got the last one just before I fell asleep around four."

Haley smiled. "Drinks nicely spaced for an alibi. That doesn't prove you were in the room. Somebody could have sat in for you."

"I was there."

"In bed?"

"In bed."

"And you think the waiters will identify you?"

"They should."

"How many waiters?"

Sloan hesitated. "Several."

"You're sure the same waiter didn't serve you all the time?"

Sloan hesitated again. Here was a point he had overlooked. A possible hole in his alibi.

"I don't know," he answered. "I didn't notice particularly. Waiters look pretty much alike."

"All right," said Haley. "Now tell us, so we can get things straight when we question them, what color pajamas were you wearing? Or didn't you wear any? You ought to remember that."

Sloan went cold. The pajama coat Morton had worn was a monstrosity, unforgettable, with wide red, yellow

and blue stripes—totally unlike any that Sloan owned.

"What's the matter?" gibed Haley. "What are you waiting for? What color pajamas?"

The cat slipped from Alice Lane's arms and walked in front of Sloan. He swore and kicked it. His alibi was already in shreds—destroyed by a cat and a suit of pajamas he didn't possess.

Handcuffs clicked on his left wrist. He drew his right hand away as Haley reached for it. His shirt sleeve pulled up, baring the scratches inflicted by the cat.

"Swell," said Haley, "swell. We'll photograph your arm for Exhibit B."

Dazed by the swift collapse of his supposedly impregnable defenses, Sloan wilted in dread of the final crushing blow that even then was descending upon him, unescapable. Now that he was enmeshed the police would open his mail, and find the parcel-room check for the bag with the diamonds.

Sergeant Haley gave Alice an approving nod.

"Smart girl," he said. "But for you he'd probably have got away with it."

She dropped limply into a chair, overwhelmed by realization that she was sending a man to the electric chair. Channing sat on the arm of the chair and put a comforting arm around her.

In helpless rage Sloan cursed the cat and Morton. His fury focused on Morton. But for the pajamas—

"Look," he said, and named his accomplice—squealing like the cornered rat he was.

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## **THRILLING DETECTIVE**

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# Alias Mr. Bones

By OWEN  
FOX JEROME

Author of "The Eyes Have It,"  
"All at Sea," etc.

*A Hallowe'en Trick That  
Backfires Blazes a Straight  
Trail to a Wily Killer!*

**I**T BEGAN when Sam Lewis, chief mortician of the Siegfried Funeral Home called up the police to report the disappearance of Mr. Bones. Though no one could have guessed that it was the preliminary to a tragedy that would grip the town of Pinetop with horror.

"Nuts!" said Sergeant Mace into the telephone. "Who would want to steal that old relic, Lewis? Somebody just hid him in a closet. That's the place for a skeleton, anyhow."

"Such is not the case," came back Lewis' precise and annoyed voice. "Mr. Bones is definitely missing, and Mr. Siegfred will be highly displeased when he learns of it."

"All right, all right, I'll see what we can do about it," Mace promised gruffly. He pronged the receiver and glanced over at Dick Wortham of the Pinetop Recorder. "Of all the crazy things to worry the police about! Mr. Bones has been misplaced."

"Sort of out of joint, or dislocated, eh?" Wortham wisecracked, grinning. "Well, if Bones is gone, he'll show up tomorrow. Tonight's Hallowe'en, you know."

"Sure." The sergeant grinned and dismissed the subject temporarily, for a matter of more vital and live interest. "Say, what's new on the municipal airport, Dick? Anything?"



There was a desperate struggle

Wortham shook his head. "No, nothing, Tom. Cox still opposes the project, and the Archer crowd of playboys are still agitating for a special election to vote on the bond issue. . . . Say, I might be missing a bet on poor old Mr. Bones. Guess I'll go over and let Lewis tell me his troubles."

He got up lazily and sauntered out of the police station, but it was about the airport he was reflecting instead of the disappearance of a skeleton that was as familiar to Pinetop citizens as the town itself. Particularly was he thinking of J. Ludy Cox who was so bitterly opposed to a municipal airport in Pinetop. For not only was Cox one of the bustling little city's big-shots, but he was also the uncle and guardian of Myra Cox—which meant considerable to Dick Wortham, secretly.

Too bad Pinetop couldn't have the airport, he thought, especially since Myra wanted it, and it was on her land near this Missouri town nestling in the Ozarks that there was a level spot large enough and close enough to town for a landing field. Some of her rich young friends had established a private landing field on that plateau, but to fix the field up properly so that the Federal government would recognize it in the national defense hook-up and come to its support with more funds meant an outlay of more than the aviation club wanted to invest privately.

**T**O MAKE it worse, Cox positively refused to permit his niece to sell the property cheaply for this purpose, and was as firmly opposed to a bond issue. Nobody around Pinetop, he declared, flew planes save a scant dozen wealthy playboys. Why should the entire town be saddled with a debt to fix up an air field for them?

And there it stood. If Cox could be made to change his mind, everything would be jake for Myra and the rest of the air-minded contingent. And that meant her stepfather, Oscar Siegfred, of Siegfred's Funeral Home, too, for that public-spirited man was a licensed pilot, as well as president of the Business Men's Club. Myra and

her stepfather were at least agreed on that, though since her mother's death she no longer lived in the undertaker's home, but with her paternal uncle and guardian, J. Ludy Cox.

Dick Wortham chuckled as he headed for the Funeral Home. Well, Siegfred had something besides an airport to worry about. His cherished old skeleton relic was missing. And more than one Pinetop resident, probably, would feel a personal loss if that beautifully articulated skeleton really was gone, and had not been spirited away for a Hollowe'en trick.

Because, for twenty-five years, Mr. Bones had occupied various honored niches in the establishment of Oscar Siegfred. Every kid in town had grown up with an intimate acquaintanceship with Mr. Bones. Dick Wortham himself and his friend Tom Mace had studied Mr. Bones under the friendly tutelage of Mr. Siegfred and as youngsters had learned to recognize and name the two hundred and some-odd bones which constitute the human frame.

At the funeral home Dick Wortham found Sam Lewis fuming and fretting. For Mr. Bones was certainly missing from his platform in the alcove most recently allotted to him.

Wortham grinned at Lewis. "Just dropped over to learn if Mr. Bones wore his afternoon frock coat when he left," he announced soberly.

Lewis, a dignified mortician who took his calling and his job seriously, glared.

"It isn't at all funny, Wortham. Mr. Siegfred is going to be plenty mad. Mr. Bones has become a sort of talisman to him."

"Where is Mr. Siegfred?"

"He flew to Memphis yesterday morning to attend a conference. He'll be back tomorrow, and I want that skeleton back in that alcove before Mr. Siegfred comes home. He's going to be furious."

"I've an idea Mr. Bones will show up," said Wortham. "Perhaps he is going to be the life of a party somewhere tonight. It's Hollowe'en, remember."

"I don't care if it's Christmas," said Lewis sourly. "I want that skeleton

back. And you can tell that red-faced policeman friend of yours, Sergeant Tom Mace, that Siegfred Funeral Home is highly annoyed."

"I'll tell him," Wortham promised gravely. "I'll even give you a box in the paper on Mr. Bones. Where do you think he ought to be mentioned? Necrology, or society?"

Lewis growled an unintelligible reply, and Wortham went out, laughing. He was crossing the square on his way to the *Recorder* office when, with a sharp blast of a car horn a sleek blue convertible coupé slid up alongside him and stopped. A lovely girl, with hair delightfully wind-blown, was smiling at him.

"Jay walker!" she jeered. "Where do you think you are? In the backwoods?"

"Myra!" His heart missed a couple of beats. "Don't you know they pinch speeders in this thriving city?"

"Hop in," she invited, opening the door. "I'm on my way to the depot to meet Uncle Ludy. He's coming in from Springfield. Want to ride down to the station with me?"

"I'll go along for the ride, thanks. I— Hello! What's this?" Wortham held up an envelope on the seat as he got in beside Myra.

**I**T WAS a plain envelope addressed to Mr. J. Ludy Cox in a bold, large hand. In the corner where a two-cent stamp should have been was an inked drawing of a skull and cross-bones. Myra Cox laughed.

"Oh, that! Hallowe'en prank, I guess. I found it in the mail box as I left the house."

Wortham grinned wryly, toying with the envelope. "Funny I should be running into so many skeletal references. First Mr. Bones disappears from Siegfred's, and now this. I'm beginning to feel like Tommy Tradles."

"What? Uncle Oscar's heirloom missing?" Myra had never called Siegfred father.

Wortham explained as they sat in the coupé and waited for the train. But when it pulled in, J. Ludy Cox was not aboard.

"Uncle Ludy must have stayed

over," Myra said. "Probably he'll call me long distance tonight."

"How about this ominous missive?" asked Wortham.

"One Hallowe'en joke that missed fire. Let's open it."

Wortham ripped open the envelope and withdrew a single sheet of folded paper. It, also, was embellished with a skull and cross-bones. The message read:

If you would learn something of great importance, drive out to the old farmhouse at the aviation field at eight o'clock tonight.  
Yours for progress,

Mr. Bones.

"Well!" said Myra. "How do you like that for a Hallowe'en stunt?"

"Sounds like missionary work for the airport to me," Wortham said, with a shrug. "Sure you haven't a hand in this?"

"Of course not. Shall we drive out there?"

"This note says eight o'clock. There wouldn't be anybody there now."

"But I can't go at eight o'clock!" exclaimed Myra. "I'm going to the Hallowe'en dance at the country club with Frank Archer."

"Uummm," said Wortham.

Frank Archer was a banker's son, ringleader of the aviation circle, and of course in love with Myra.

"Listen, Myra," he said quickly. "I'll go out to the field as your uncle's proxy tonight."

"All right. Here—take the note. But you must promise to tell me all about everything."

The reporter promised, and she drove him back to the *Recorder* office. . . .

It was growing chilly by dark and there was the hint of frost in the air. Wortham stopped his coupé in front of Sergeant Tom Mace's house and honked. Mace came scurrying out, bundling his topcoat around him against the wind.

"Swell night for goblins," he offered as he got into the car. "The kids will be driving folks crazy. . . . Now—what's all this spook stuff of yours?"

Wortham explained as he drove rapidly along the winding road to the



old farm of Myra Cox's Grandfather Wilson.

"And I imagine we'll find the missing Mr. Bones at the same time," he concluded.

They reached the landing field and drove up to the group of buildings at one end. One large hangar with sheet-iron roof and sides housed the half dozen privately owned planes, an open-front shed served as a field workshop, and the cabin of hand-hewn logs which had been the Wilson farmhouse now served as a home for the caretaker.

The place was somehow eerie and had a deserted air tonight, although one window of the farmhouse glowed yellow with lamplight. The two men piled out and knocked at the front door.

"Lonely sort of place after dark," observed Mace.

"It won't be if the Archer crowd puts over the municipal airport idea," commented Wortham. "Maybe you and I will be flying yet, Tom."

"On my salary?" snorted Mace. He knocked again, raising his voice. "Hey, Beeler! You got company!"

**T**HERE was no answer, and he tried the door. It opened easily. The wind whistled mournfully under the eaves, but it was warm in the house. In the gloom Mace removed his topcoat and hat and tossed them carelessly across the old-fashioned hat rack by the door. Wortham found himself straining his eyes through the gloom and straining his ears through the silence as he slipped out of his topcoat. For some reason he couldn't understand he drew out his .38 and held it in his hand.

"Beeler!" he called. "Where are you?"

"The light's in the sitting room," said Mace. "Maybe he's fallen asleep there."

They moved along the short hall, flung open the sitting room door—and stopped short, on the threshold. The caretaker was not there, but in the middle of the floor, seated at a small round-top table which held a lamp, was a human skeleton in a blue sack suit. The left arm lay extended on

the table, the bony fingers holding an envelope. A bowie knife had been thrust through the breast of the coat just over the spot where a heart once had beat.

"Mr. Bones!" cried Mace. "By golly, you were right, Dick."

Wortham stared at the skeleton. He was so familiar with Mr. Bones that he thought of the skeleton as an old acquaintance, but for some strange reason the short hairs were stirring at the nape of his neck. He sensed something alien here that he couldn't explain.

"The letter!" said Mace, starting forward to grab it. "Look, it's addressed to Cox."

"Wait!" said Wortham sharply. "Don't touch it."

Mace twisted his head in surprise. "What's eating you, Dick? Say—what's the idea of the gun?"

"I don't know," admitted Wortham frankly. "Something just strikes me wrong, and I don't know what it is."

"Aw, this is just a Hallowe'en prank," said Mace. "And we were looking for Mr. Bones, weren't we?"

Dick Wortham stared again at the bleached white skull of the skeleton. Experimentally, he hefted the dangling right arm. It was heavier than he thought it should be, aside from the weight of the coat sleeve. And he was vaguely conscious that there was a distinct aura of horror hovering over this room like a miasmatic mist.

"Tom," he grated. "Look at the left tibia. See if my initials are scratched there. Remember when I put them there?"

Mace knelt and quickly pulled up the left pant leg. He exposed white bones bare of any mark or blemish.

"Not here, Dick," he whispered.

"Tom," Wortham said grimly, "this is not the skeleton of Mr. Bones!"

"Then, hell, what skeleton is it?" demanded Mace. "Look, Dick—the bones are quite heavy! They're new!"

Wortham bent close to examine the skeleton. To the superficial eye this was a bleached and weathered assembly of bones, clean and dry and white and polished. And not too white. But Mace was right. This skeleton was

new. It had been worked over and polished to make it appear old.

"Come on," Wortham said crisply. "We're getting out of here."

"Where to?" Mace asked.

"To question Frank Archer. That bowie knife is from his dad's collection! He was mixed up in this business."

"Wait. Let's look at this letter."

**M**ACE gingerly took the envelope from the skeleton's hand and ripped it open. Within was a single sheet of paper with the skull and cross-bones inked at the top. In the same handwriting as that as on the envelope Myra had given Wortham were the words:

All who stand in the way of progress, Mr. Cox, are reduced at last to my extremis. Take warning before it is too late. Heed the call of modern times. Aviation has come to stay. On this somber night of witches' carnival I come from the grave to counsel you. Vote for the airport bond issue before it is too late.

Mr. Bones.

Wortham and Mace went immediately to the country club, found young Frank Archer and took him to an auto-room. With a grin, Archer faced the two.

"What is this?" he asked lightly. "A police raid?"

Wordlessly Mace extended the letter found at the aviation field. Frank Archer raised quizzical eyebrows.

"A Hallowe'en joke?" he asked.

"We hope," said Wortham. "Where did you get that skeleton, Archer?"

"What skeleton?" protested the banker's son. "I haven't—"

"Don't waste time, Frank," Dick Wortham cut him off. "You did it. You even stuck one of your dad's bowie knives into the coat. And we can prove that was one of your own old suits."

"So what?" said Archer, shrugging. "That the first Hallowe'en joke you ever heard of?"

"Murder," informed Mace grimly, "is no joke. Where'd you get that skeleton?"

"Murder?" gasped Archer, paling. "What are you talking about?"

"Tom's carrying us a little fast,"

said Wortham. "Perhaps it isn't murder, but where did you get that skeleton?"

"From Siegfred's Funeral Home. Where else would I get Mr. Bones?"

"That skeleton is not Mr. Bones," Wortham said gravely.

"But it has to be! A couple of the boys and I grabbed it last night! You're crazy—or trying to scare me. Of course, that was Mr. Bones."

Wortham and Mace looked significantly at each other.

"Better get the names of the other boys, Tom," advised Wortham, "and check his story. I'm going to locate Sam Lewis and ask him some questions. There isn't another skeleton in this part of the country that we know about—above ground."

"I'm going with you, Wortham," said Archer. "This smells bad."

"And I'm going, too," announced Myra Cox, advancing into the room. "What's going on here?"

Wortham told her, briefly and soberly.

"I don't think you'd better go, Myra," said Archer. "Another of my jokes seems to have backfired."

"Try and keep me out," she said, with determination, and slipped her hand through Wortham's arm persuasively.

"All right," the reporter conceded grudgingly. "But nobody else. This isn't a parade."

Sam Lewis knew no more than he had already told Wortham, but insisted on going right out to the aviation field to see the skeleton. In Frank Archer's car the four of them drove to the old Wilson farm. Things there were precisely as Wortham and Mace had left them.

Lewis took one look at the skeleton.

"This is certainly not Mr. Bones," he said decisively.

"We already have proof of that," said Wortham. "Can you tell anything else about it offhand?"

**L**EWIS took out his pocketknife and began fussing with the neatly articulated bones. Myra snuggled up close to Wortham and shivered. The reporter promptly put his arm about her protectively. Archer, with wor-

ries of his own, didn't seem to mind.

"As near as I can judge," stated the mortician, straightening up, "this is a new skeleton which has been worked on to give the appearance of age. It is the bony structure of a man whose age, I should judge, was between fifty and sixty. More I couldn't say without making laboratory tests, but I think the bones were boiled in lye or acid to strip them clean."

"How horrible!" moaned Myra, shuddering.

"But I swear I took this skeleton from the Funeral Home last night!" declared Archer. "It *must* be Mr. Bones."

"So you say," grunted Lewis sourly.

"Come on," ordered Wortham. "We're going to the police station."

At Headquarters Tom Mace and a couple of night men were waiting. The police were beginning to get interested.

"Frank Archer's story holds water," reported Mace. "All three fellows who were with him told the same thing. They stole that skeleton from the Funeral Home."

"Is any middle-aged man of about five-ten in height missing from Pinetop?" asked the reporter.

Wortham answered quickly. "I don't know of any."

"No," said Mace. "Only Oscar Siegfred and J. Ludy Cox."

There was a sudden, scared silence as suddenly they all stared at each other. Wortham broke it.

"Get long distance on the phone," he snapped at the night desk sergeant. "Call Springfield for Cox and Memphis for Siegfred."

In less than thirty minutes they had the first report. Siegfred was in Memphis. The airport authorities advised that he would be flying his biplane back to Pinetop in the morning.

The report from Springfield, however, was mystifying and shocking. Not only was J. Ludy Cox not to be found, but there was no indication that he had ever arrived there.

Myra nearly collapsed. Wortham tried to soothe her.

"Take her home," he said to young Archer. "And keep your mouth shut.

I'll let you know the minute we learn anything, Myra, honey."

After the young couple departed Wortham turned to Mace.

"Go over to the Funeral Home with Lewis, Tom, and stay there until I come."

He turned to the phone and called long distance again. Getting Memphis, he talked for a few minutes to Police Headquarters. Then he fumed and fretted while he waited for a call back. In an hour he had it. A grim expression came to his rugged face as he listened. The desk sergeant stared at him with wide eyes and slack jaw.

"You keep your mouth shut, too," advised Wortham as he left the office. "Tom Mace will handle this, if there's anything to handle."

Hastening to the mortuary, he held conference with Mace. Then they turned to Lewis.

"We want to go through Siegfred's effects, Lewis—now!" informed Dick Wortham. "Do you cooperate like a good boy, or does Tom Mace have to get a search warrant?"

"I—I don't understand," faltered Lewis, looking from one to the other, "but go ahead. I—I guess it'll be all right."

It was for the searchers, but not for Siegfred. Locked away in the undertaker's private safe they found the watch, wallet and personal effects of J. Ludy Cox. In the basement they found other gruesome shreds of evidence in and about the furnace. They also learned that Oscar Siegfred had been alone in the mortuary the night before last.

THE sun was rising when they left. "But why?" puzzled Mace while they were eating breakfast together. "Why would Siegfred kill a man who was almost kinfolks to him?"

"We'll learn that when we arrest him this morning," Wortham said.

The two men were waiting at the aviation field when Siegfred flew his biplane in from Memphis. They met the undertaker as he climbed out of his plane. Siegfred was bare-headed, having removed his flying helmet and goggles. He was a thick-set, vigorous

(Continued on page 109)

# Death for Jewels

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Author of "Prison Break," "No Place Likes Homicide," etc.

*The Unpolished Manners of the World's Most Gullible Sleuth Rob Him of His Girl and Entangle Him in a Web of Gangdom's Most Impolite Crooks and Murderers!*

## CHAPTER I

### KLUMP BECOMES A FENCE



WILLIE KLUMP, president and sole owner of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, sat in his office one morning. He was interestedly running his bovine peepers over the account of a pretty daring jewel robbery that had taken

place on Madison Avenue the night before.

It seemed that three peculiarly daring characters had broken into a heavy-sugared trinket establishment. What was more, they had unlawfully removed a sizable collection of Amsterdam sparkling crockery from the safe. The cops downtown said that nobody could have purchased the lot for less than forty or fifty grand. They had had such a sneaky feeling that they knew the dishonest characters who had pulled the job, that they had arrested the trio on suspicion.

However, the gendarmes from downtown did not even find an eighth of a carat on the suspects or in the place where they hung their hats. So they had put them back into circulation.

"H-m-m-m," Willie said. "The crooks were picked up practically right after they had filched the dazlers—if they did. And so if they were guilty, they must have stashed

the loot somewhere between the Madison Avenue bazaar and where the policemen apprehended them. I have no doubt that the D. A. has put a tail on every one of the unlawful taxpayers. Yep. Smart of the D. A. to let the criminals go. You cannot trail a character very far in a two-by-four guest room of the city. But I certainly would like to catch them myself—"

Willie's office door swung open and two classily dressed gentlemen stepped in.

"Good mornin', Mr. Klump. How are you this mornin'?" one asked him avidly.

He had a highly attractive smile and carried a strange looking set of baggage. The citizen with him smiled, too, and put in his own remarks.

"I see you are reading all about that robbery last night, Mr. Klump. I guess you detectives have to keep brushed up on current events."

"That is right," Willie said. "What can I do for you?"

"It is what we can do for you," the bigger of the two visitors said. "We have something here that you need. I bet there isn't another private detective in the country who owns one. It is a lie detector."

"Huh?" Willie gulped. "I've heard of them, all right. Are they for sale now?"

He waited eagerly for one of the dapper men to reply.

"Not to everybody, Mr. Klump! Just think of ownin' one an' gettin' crooks to confess right here in this

# A Complete Willie Klump Novelet



"Help! Police! Murder!" Willie heard the blond cashier shriek

here office. You can even charge the Police Department for lettin' them use it."

"Boy, oh, boy," Willie enthused. "Is this my lucky day! How much are they?"

"One thousan' berries to you, Mr. Klump," the man with the smile on his pan said. "Me an' my partner will give you a demonstration if you ain't so sure of the investment."

"Well—er—you cannot blame a person from bein' skeptical when he is thinkin' of spendin' a whole grand," Willie said apologetically.

"Set the thing up, Ed. Plug it into that socket on the wall. I'll strap the electrodes to Mr. Klump's hands while you're doing it."

"No—now wait—"

"It will not hurt you one jot or

tittle, Mr. Klump. We will prove you are lyin'."

"I am not! I—"

"But you are goin' to, Mr. Klump. Now Ed here will ask you to think of a number from one to five. You gotta keep it in your head, see? He'll ask you every number from one to five an' you'll tell him it ain't to everyone. Remember now. Ready?"

Willie heard a switch go on and then he heard a sound like a swindle-jalopy meter clicking over. He took the number four. When the man working the chart asked him if it was that number he said it was not.

"Was it five, Mr. Klump?"

"No."

"It was four, huh?"

"Why—er—yeah. How did you know?"

"When you lied, the needle of the chart jumped like it was powered with ethyl gas. Well, I guess this test proves that machine is some-thing to own. Congratulations, Mr. Klump!"

"Yeah—er—I suppose I will buy it." Willie grinned. "Just think, I will be the only detective in New York with one. I will walk to the bank with you and draw out the money."

"We are practically givin' that one away, Mr. Klump. But we want to get them started fast."

Willie donned his old, battered hat and One-Flight-Up-and-Save-Ten-Dollars topcoat. Chattering amiably, he accompanied the two gentlemen to the bank where he drew out ten one-hundred-dollar bills. He paid it over. Then he shook hands with the salesmen and hurried back to his office to feed his lamps on the lie detector.

"Boy," Willie said as he settled into his favorite and only chair. "If I can steer one of the diamond robbin' suspects in here, I'll make him confess. No crooks can lie to me now. Wait'll Satchelfoot Kelly see this."

**W**ILLIE KLUMP had a room on Forty-ninth between Lexington and Park. He was smugly asleep in his bed there at twelve o'clock that same night when his landlady banged a fist against his door. He just missed hitting the ceiling when her well modulated voice blasted out for him to get up.

Willie pried his eyelids up and staggered to the door. He opened it. Behind his landlady towered three big cops and Satchelfoot Kelly.

"What is the idea?" Willie mumbled sleepily. "I ain't done nothin'."

"Did you buy a lie detector this afternoon, stupe?" Kelly grinned ominously at Willie.

"I did. I—er—oh, you want to use it, huh? Well, it'll cost the city fifty—"

"Willie," Satchelfoot said. "If you was a hen, you would lay eggs already cracked. We have got them two ginzos who stole that lie detector. They are now locked up at the Forty-seventh Street Precinct Station. They

lifted it from the D. A.'s office in Westchester. How they did it we don't know. But it kinda looks like you was an unwitting fence."

"Aw, cut it out," Willie wailed. "You're kidding, ain't you?"

"Come on, Klump," a big flatfoot growled. "Get your pants on an' take us over to your office. We got to get that thing. What did you pay for the thing there?"

"A th-thousand bucks. I— Where are them dirty crooks? I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"No wonder they was boiled when we caught 'em," Satchelfoot said with delicate irony to the cops with him. "Willie, that was Gentleman Jack Jaffy and Sid the Salesman who robbed you. Did they have a time on your sugar! There was four of the eye-openest dolls with them."

Willie Klump put on his pants inside out, stuffed a pajama coat into them, and pulled a coat over all. He had his carpet slippers on when he rode down to his office with the big town's crook chasers.

He opened the door of his office and choked on his heart as he watched them take the lie detector away. Then he demanded to be taken over to Forty-seventh Street to salvage all the legal tender he could. He wasn't a fortune-teller, but he had a predicting feeling that it wouldn't be much. . . .

## CHAPTER II

### HOW A DETECTIVE WORKS



**C**ONFRONTING Gentleman Jack and Sid the Salesman, Willie was quietly indignant. He spoke with his usual polite restraint.

"You dirty crooks, you give me back my dough! Say, why in hell do we have cops an' detectives around this town, anyhow? Ain't an honest citizen like me safe no more? You hand over that dough or I'll ram down your hats so far you'll need armholes in them!"

Gentleman Jack turned with bleary irony to Sid the Salesman.

"Exactly how much we got left, my dear fellow?"

"Precisely one buck an' eleven cents, old chap," Sid replied. "Boy, was that one whoppin' big night or wasn't it!"

Gentleman Jack nudged Willie in the ribs. Willie stopped with his back to the wall.

"Pal, that night was worth two years in the ice-box up the river. We're still young. We'll find more guys like you when we get out. Or maybe it'll be you again."

Satchelfoot Kelly laughed louder than Gentleman Jack and Sid the Salesman. Finally he dried his eyes and wanted to know if he could arrest Willie for receiving stolen stuff.

"Have a heart, Kelly," a cop grinned. "Ain't he been taken over the jumps enough? Willie, I knew you was dumb. But I didn't know how really dumb you was. . . ."

Feeling silly as a baboon wearing a women's new fall hat, Willie shuffled out of the station house. He had never been so miserable. His pride had been dynamited, and his dough had taken the Fifty-second Street hotspots out of the red.

Willie ambled dejectedly toward the East River and was picked up by a policeman on Second Avenue.

"You screwball," the cop yelled. "Come along with me till I call up Bellevue."

Again Willie's dignity was assassinated. He writhed in the cop's clutch while his captor phoned the Bellevue Napoleon ward. Then the cop pushed Willie away from him.

"Get back home fast. If I catch you tryin' to be a squirrel on this beat again, you'll get yanked up to Poughkeepsie, where they feed you pecans and popcorn."

"I was just—walkin' along," said Willie, and he knew how phony it sounded. "Somebody pulled me out of bed in a hurry. You know how it is."

"I do not," the cop retorted virtuously.

Next night Willie met his steady, Gertie Mudgett, as he had a date with

her. Gertie proved as soothing to Willie as a heaping teaspoon of salt to a recent knife gash. She wasted no time in telling him what a high-grade cluck he was.

"Imagine a detective buyin' a lie detective. If anybody knew they was against the law, a detective should."

"Yeah?" Willie asked puzzledly. "But the law owns one."

Gertie did not conceal her disgust with Willie. She picked him apart, even complaining about how he was eating in public.

"There you go, stupid—tryin' to eat gravy with a fork. What you think bread is for. Satchelfoot Kelly wouldn't be so ignorant."

"Oh, that lug is refined, is he? So is axle-grease, then."

"And stop chewin' that ice you got in your mouth. You sound like a concrete mixer."

"I like to chew ice," Willie snapped. "If Kelly's such a hot shot, why'n'cha go out with him, huh?"

"That is just what I will do, William Klump. Anyways, he ain't so thick that he goes around buyin' a lot of lie detectives. Good night!"

"Go on. Who cares? I know a taxi-dance place with plenty of swell dames."

In high dudgeon, Willie snatched a newspaper off an adjoining table and looked to see if the cops had rounded up the sparklers lifted from Madison Avenue. The follow-up of the story was brief, simply referring again to the suspects who were being closely watched.

**W**ILLIE threw down the paper and got up and paid the damages. Going outside, he climbed into his fifth-hand car and drove up to Fiftieth and Broadway. There he invested in a string of gallop tickets and strode belligerently into the vast dance hall.

"I will show Gertie that she is not the only pebble in the sea," he vowed.

Willie got to dancing with a classy blond trick. She told him it was her night off and she was just filling in for a sick friend.

"I work over in Paloppa's Lunch, big boy. How's about droppin'



around and seein' me tomorrer? Say, don't you like this dance floor?"

"It is quite a elegant one," Willie replied eagerly.

"How do ya know? You ain't stepped on it yet. I bet my dogs look like truffles by now. Where do ya get your shoes, at a Navy Yard?"

"Ha, ha— You are a card," Willie said.

The very next night Willie Klump sauntered over to Paloppa's Lunch as Willie had to eat somewhere. The blonde ogled him from the cashier's desk and Willie's ears shook a little.

"She has got more oomph than Gertie," he said to himself.

He went over to gab with the cashier. She told Willie to scram as the boss did not allow her to talk with customers.

"After," the blonde said. "I'll be off at ten."

"Oke," Willie said. Hieing to the counter, he took a gander at the bill of fare. He ordered lamb stew, then glanced idly around. He spotted a big mechanical Victrola over in a corner and went over to drop a nickel into it. The tune he wanted was "Bang Bang Blues," as it was a very recent air from Tin-Pan Alley.

Willie fumbled the nickel and it dropped down behind the contraption. He tugged at the music box and moved it away from the corner a little. Willie was stooping down behind the thing when he heard a very unpleasant voice. He knew it emerged from no Salvation Army lassie.

The blonde at the desk let out a shrill yell.

"Everybody stay where they are or we'll plug ya! We're lookin' for a guy. Oh, hello, Bugs. You are comin' with us. Surprise? Come on or we'll—"

"Oh, yeah?" Bugs replied pleasantly, grabbing out a cannon. *Bang, bang! Bang, bang-bang!* "Surprise! Surprise!"

"Ow! B-beat it, pal. He got me. I didn't t'ink he had a g-g-gun."

"Help, police, murder!" Willie heard the blond cookie screech.

Then he crawled out of the corner and looked at the citizen reclining on

the floor. When he looked up, he saw a big bluecoat standing in the door, blowing a whistle.

"What happened?" Willie gulped.

"Huh," a counterman said negligently. "Why, nothin'. Just a punk come in to hold up the joint. It's like this every night, ain't it, Mamie?"

"Y-yeah," the doll said. "N-never a dull moment here. It is why I am just crazy about workin' in this dive."

"I heard the mug talkin' to somebody an' it was not you," Willie said to the counterman. "Where is the character who was sitting here in the corner with the blue pin-striped suit on?"

"Huh? Why—er—Mamie, did you see a guy here wit' that kind of a suit on?"

"Somebody is nuts," the blonde said.

SHE turned toward two big cops and told them that the counterman was too quick with a Betsy. That was why the defunct taxpayer was spread all over the floor of Paloppa's lunch. One of the policemen turned the loser over on his back and yelped:

"That's Pinky Puzzola. Can yuh imagine Pinky gettin' so low he would hold up a ptomaine parlor like this? Why, Pinky has pulled some page-one jobs in his time. Well, there's the dead wagon."

Willie sat down in a corner and scratched his dome. He watched the cops shake hands with the highly unrefined counterman. Then he watched the boys from the corpse-filing house put the liquidated rough boy in a bassinnet. Willie got his lamb stew, but he had no more appetite than a gorged boa-constrictor. Soon everything was quiet in Paloppa's Lunch.

"I—er—did see that guy I s-said I saw," Willie finally called out.

"You keep on thinkin' that, brother," the counterman said nastily. "Look out yuh don't bust your brains thinkin', punk!"

Willie lingered. He wanted to talk to the blonde about this thing. A character wrapped in a Camel's-hair coat strode in. He got up to the counter and talked confidentially with the citi-

zen who served the viands. He leaned forward on his stool, so Willie could not catch a word.

The character settled back after awhile and ordered his chow. He ate it in a big hurry, then gulped down his water. He went out of the restaurant with a bulge in his cheek. His teeth made cracking sounds against the ice. Willie grinned and picked the lump of ice out of his own glass.

"Huh, I guess I am not the only one who likes to chew ice. I am ignorant because I chew ice, am I? Well, wait'H Gertie sees that blonde with me."

Willie told the blonde he would have to see her some other time. Right after leaving the restaurant, he went over to his office. He pulled paper and pencil out of a drawer and started writing. The notes he made ran thusly:

No. 1.—There was a character wearing a pin-stripe suit in Paloppa's. There is no such thing as an invisible man, only in the movies. The holdup citizen spoke to him, I bet. Where did he go after the fireworks?

No 2.—The counterman bumped the burglar. Why? Why did the guy wearing the pin-stripe scam? Why was rough criminals after him? It was not a holdup, I know that. No crook like Pinky Puzzola would hold up Paloppa's. Pinky was out to snatch the pin-striped citizen because he had something Pinky wanted. What was it? This is quite mysterious, to say the least. Would like to connect it up with diamond robbery. Who wouldn't? Pinky called the character in the pine-stripe, "Bugs." Now, where have I heard of a gentleman named Bugs before?

No. 3.—I shall keep an eye on Paloppa's.

**W**ILLIE strode into the beanery around nine o'clock the next night. There was the same citizen with the camel's-hair coat, and he was pushing the last of an eclair into his kisser.

Willie got on the stool beside the character. The counterman scowled blackly at him.

"Been seein' things lately, pal?"

"Er—nope, I had my eyes examined," Willie said. "The specks specialist said I saw double. Ha, ha!"

The counterman got a laugh out of Willie. He was still chuckling when he passed out a setup for the presi-

dent of the Hawkeye Detective Agency. He pushed a glass of water toward Willie and another toward the character in the camel's-hair wrapper. Then Willie wondered why the counterman began scratching his scalp. Willie put his head down to his hamburger.

"Hey, pal," the counterman said. "Mamie wants to talk to you."

"Huh?"

Willie slipped off his stool and went over to the cashier's desk. He did not see the character behind the counter switch glasses on him.

"Hi, big boy," Mamie chirped. "Why so snooty? Am I gettin' so tough to look at?"

"Why—er—"

"Here's a customer," Mamie said. "See ya later."

"Aw, aw right," Willie Klump muttered. "This is the nuttiest joint."

He climbed back on his stool and finished the hamburger. He drained his water-glass and walked out of Paloppa's, chewing on the lump of ice that had been in the glass.

When Willie was out of sight, the counterman and the character in the yellow Benny got their heads together.

"I'll make sure, Mike," the latter said. "Mamie can steer me after the ginzo if anythin' went screwy."

"That's a flatfoot called Satchelfoot Kelly comin' in now," the counterman said. "It's a laugh, ain't it?"

"Yeah. One tailed me to the hotel last night and frisked me. He was burnin' when he let me go. So near an' yet so far. I wonder do the bulls think they was born wit' all the brains, huh?"

William Klump wended his way homeward, his molars crunching the ice cube. All of a sudden, Willie jumped a foot off the sidewalk and let out a yell like a timber wolf. A nerve in his noggin had voted independent. Willie held his head in his hands and staggered against the corner of a building.

"I hit that big fillin' in that b-back tooth," Willie moaned. "Must of been l-l-loose. Oh-h! An ache like I g-g-got shouldn't belong in a horse's noggin'. I m-must git to a d-d-dentist. Ow-w!"

CHAPTER III  
PAINFUL PROFIT



MR. KLUMP got to his room and sat down on the bed. He probed at the filling with his index finger. The nerve in his noggin danced and bucked and sun-fished. He swallowed a mouthful of cold water and almost jumped out of

the window. The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency decided right then and there that he needed no more homeopathic remedies. He went out into the hall and looked up a tusk torturer. He called five of them and found out that they were closed.

"Th-this is a h-heck of a country," Willie groaned. "A citizen could die for all anybody cares."

He finally contacted one nerve nudger who held open house, but he was told his appointment would have to be at ten-thirty.

"I maybe will shoot myself before then," Willie snapped. "If I am not there on the dot, go down to the morgue an' change the fillin'! Huh? Ha, ha, yourself."

Willie went back into his room and sat down. He finally got tired of stamping his feet and he went outdoors and took a walk. The cold air bombarded the aggravated ivory. Willie stopped once and knocked his noggin against an iron post.

He staggered along the street, a bit abstracted, so he did not see the taxi sneak toward the curb. Two men leaped out of it and one pinned Willie's arms. The other prodded his breastbone with a big Roscoe. He said to get aboard the cab quietly or Willie would get himself knocked off.

"This is kidnapin'!" Willie informed them as he was hustled into the jalopy. "I got an appointment with a dent— You stop pushin' or—"

The taxi roared into high and then headed north. Willie did not want to go that way because the dentist's office was south. Willie patiently explained to the rough boys. They told

him to keep his kisser shut or they would knock out all his teeth and he would not need an oral blacksmith.

"I have not done anythin' to anybody," Willie said. "You apparently have mistook me for somebody else. Ow, my tooth!"

"The boss wants t' talk to yuh, pal. Me an' Whitey here ain't mad at yuh. Just don't give us no trouble an' we won't make a mess outa you."

"I got to see a dentist. I can't tolerate this here agony."

"Ha, ha! Put a hand over his mush, Ziggy."

Now Willie Klump was not as pulchritudinous as a movie hero, but he was much better upholstered with brawn. Ordinarily he was a mild, easy-going citizen who lived and let other people live. But at the moment the nerve running from his jaw to the top of his pate was acting up in terrible fashion.

By the time the cab had traveled three blocks, Willie Klump did not even feel as pleasant as a saber-toothed tiger with hives. Willie ran amuck.

"I have got to see a dentist, I told you fellers!" Willie said, and went to work.

He banged the gent named Ziggy, clipped him in the chin with his elbow. Ziggy almost bit his tongue in twain. Ziggy's pal tried to soak Willie with the Betsy. Willie seemed to have sprouted four new arms that were all supplied with big freckled fists.

The rough boy was smacked ga-ga. His head was pushed right through the non-shatterable glass in the side of the cab.

Willie did not stop to think. He pasted the driver of the jalopy behind the ear. That proved to be quite a reckless act, as then there was nobody left at the wheel.

The taxi hopped the curb, side-swiped a mail-box and nosed into the window of a lingerie shop. When the policemen got Willie out, they took a blue silk nightie from around his neck. Then they wanted to know why he was trying to beat up a girdle dummy.

"Uh—I was kidnaped," Willie said.

"I got awful mad. An'—Ow! I still got that toothache. I got to get to a dentist or I will go nuts."

"Who are these guys?" a policeman wanted to know.

"I have no idea. I am walkin' along Lexington when they pull up and abscond with me. I am William Klump, president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency."

"The sap that bought the lie detector? Ha, ha! I bet these two punks was goin' to take you over to buy the Tri-borough Bridge from them. Say, wouldn't that be an investment? Listen, Willie. Please go home or somewhere and don't come out. You ain't safe nowhere."

"Arrest them two snatchers," Willie demanded. "I will prefer charges against them—reckless driving. I will sue that cab driver. I know my rights. Ow! What time is it?"

"Five to ten, Klump. You show up at Headquarters in the morning, see?"

Willie hurried south. The tooth was beginning to spin the top of his head around as if it had been a gun turret. He swore that he would never chew ice again.

He walked up three flights to the dentist's office. Sitting down in the waiting room, he picked up a magazine. It was opened to an ad where a spiffy looking doll was baring her milk-white fangs. The caption read:

**YOUR TEETH ARE YOUR BEST FRIENDS**

Willie swore and hurled the magazine away from him. It smacked the dentist, who was coming out of his torture chamber, right in the stomach. Willie groaned all over and then made a dive for the chair in the next room.

"Bothers you, does it?" the dentist said.

"N-no," Willie snapped. "I love it. Don't just stand there. Do somethin' or I will chew up that set of uppers you got there. Oh! Ow!"

The D.D.S. told Willie to stop yowling and to sit back, relax and open his mouth wide. Willie did so.

The masticator mechanic shoved a little long-handled mirror in the resultant yawning pit in Willie's face.

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Then he followed up with probe that had a point. It hit the filling in the private detective's tooth.

Willie raised right off the chair and his hair stood up straight.

"That," the dentist chirped, "is some filling!"

"Ahyah! Wa' ig un 'en I ha' it pu' in. Ge' it 'oose—'uick!"

Willie squirmed and yelled while the dentist loosened the jammed filling.

Suddenly Willie slipped back in the chair and pawed brine off his pan in big drops.

"Ah!" Willie breathed. "I guess I know there's a heaven even if every-

(Continued on page 104)

(Continued from page 103)

body else is just guessin'. This is it, right now!"

"Yeah, that's some fillin'! Who are you—Morgan van Dukerbilt, Junior? I've heard of citizens doin' this, but I never hoped to get his business. A diamond for a filling, at least three-quarters of a carat!"

"It is, huh?" Willie said wearily. Then he gulped and leaped up. "Diamond—er—er— What did you say?"

"Didn't you know?"

Willie Klump hopped out of the torture divan and grabbed the sparkler from the dentist's hand.

"You took that out of my— Why, I never—"

Willie's wits gathered and got into a huddle.

"I g-get it!" he mumbled weakly. "I know why the rough counterman sent me over to talk to Mamie. He w-wanted me-me out of the way so's he could shift glasses. Look, I had a loose fillin' in that tooth but it was only cement. When I was chewin' the lump of ice, it fell out an' that diamond went into the cavity instead. It got jammed into it and against the nerve. N-no wonder them mugs grabbed me an' tossed me in-into the cab. I-I got to get somewhere an' figger this out."

Willie Klump pocketed the diamond, grabbed his hat and coat and headed for the hall outside.

"You come back here an' pay me, you gyp!"

"Oh, shut up," Willie fired back. "I will come back and pay you. When I do, you will be able to buy drills big enough to strike oil!"

Thoughtfully Willie returned to his office. He sat there scribbling for twenty minutes and his scalp was crawling all over his noggin. Finally he called up Headquarters. He spoke authoritatively to a flatfoot there in unimportant tones.

"This Pinky Puzzola who was rubbed out. Was he a pal of some characters named Bugs Logan an' Beaut Montana?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Er—I am the chief of police in Punxatawney, Pa.," Willie said. "I got two characters here—"

"Why, no, Chief. Pinky was poison to them punks and they was always battlin' each other. We think Bugs and Beaut robbed a jewelry store here in N'York an'— Say, this ain't no long distance call! What is the idea?"

Willie grinned and hung up.

Downtown, an irate gendarme stamped up and down.

"Somebody is kiddin' me or— That voice sounded familiar. Where have I heard it before?"

Willie looked at his notes. They said:

A character who was not in on the sparkler snitch knows who was and is trying to cut in on the booty. Pinky Puzzola was him or was hired by a higher-up. No wonder the cops cannot nail the guilty boys with the pilfered ice. I know why. Pinky was going to snatch the citizen with the pin-stripe suit to maybe torture him into telling where the rocks were planted. The counterman bopped Puzzola as he was hep to the whole works.

It is a lucky thing for me that Gertie gave me the air as I would not have met Mamie Schirtzsinger. I would not have gone down to Paloppa's cramp parlor to see Mamie. Thus I would not have chewed the lump of ice that gave my molar the hot-foot. I would not have got dragged into a Jesse James' jalopy.

It is quite smart some dishonest criminals are. But crime does not pay. The dazzle dornicks were ditched somewhere between the Madison Avenue place and where the policemen picked up the suspects. Which was over on Second Avenue. I must go down and see the D.A.

Willie went downtown very early the next morning. He had to wait two hours before anyone would see him. A fourth assistant D.A. finally gave Willie a hearing. Willie told him he knew where forty grand worth of ice was, he was relatively sure.

"You are the patsy who purchased a lie detector, aren't you?" the public servant flung sourly at William Klump. "Could you also tell me just where they hid Judge Crater?"

"This is no time for bandagin'," Willie said in a huff. "Where do you think I got this sparkler?"

Willie produced the three-quarter carat solitaire and poked it right under the skeptic's schnozzola. "Maybe you think I got this in a box of crack-erjacks, don't you?"

"Why—er— Where *did* you get it?"

"Oh, yeah? I will let you, and Satchelfoot Kelly and other smart strong-arms of the law take all the credit if I tell you! But here's what you can do. I want four husky slewfeet to come into Paloppa's Lunch on Forty-fifth near Third Avenue at nine o'clock this evening. Have them act like they was only customers. I will be there at the counter. Tell them to act like they do not know me."

"I must talk to the boss about this. The police commissioner an'—"

"Also see the mayor," Willie said impatiently, "and the governor. But have them big flatfeet where I said. Good morning to you. Of all the red tape!"

#### CHAPTER IV WILLIE'S TRIUMPH



LUMP walked into Paloppa's Lunch at eight-forty-five that evening. The counterman gave him a gander that made Willie feel as if he had returned from the dead, which he probably had. The suspicious looking character who was

wearing a blue pin-stripe suit also looked at Willie in a rather startled way.

"Now, wasn't you present in this here joint the night there was a hold-up?" Willie asked the citizen. "I contended you was. Everybody else assured me I was in error."

"Naa!" the customer snarled politely. He took a quick gander at the counterman. "Who is this funny looking ginzo?"

"Well, then, I guess I don't know what I was talkin' about," Willie said innocently. "But some current events has been pretty puzzlin' to me. Can you imagine? I was picked up in a snatch last night. Right in broad moonlight they grabbed me. But I got mad and escaped. I guess maybe some dumb kidnapers mistaked me for a Park Avenue playboy. Let me have a plate of sliced raw onions."

(Continued on page 106)

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(Continued from page 105)

The counterman grinned. A heavy load seemed to have slipped visibly from his shoulders. He started to slice a gigantic Bermuda tear-jerker. Willie could see that he had never encountered such a strange person as the potentially great detective.

The ptomaine artist looked up briefly when two customers slouched in and took a table in the far corner. A third ambled in and mounted a stool next to Willie. He was a gentleman with such ample girth that he almost shoved Willie off his perch.

"Stools ain't made for guys like you," Mr. Klump said testily. "You need a table."

"You got your choice," the big customer replied gently. "Either you shut your trap or I insert this bowl of sugar in it."

A fourth customer barged in and creaked a chair at a table. Willie Klump waited until the character in the blue pin-stripe finished his snack and washed it down with a glass of water. The suspicious ginzo headed for the door.

"Bend over here," Willie whispered to the counterman. "I wish to whisper somethin' quite important."

The hash poisoner leaned over the counter. Willie grabbed his head and bore down powerfully until the rough boy's nose, ears, eyes, and throat were mashed into the plate of onions.

"Grab that guy goin' out!" Willie screeched.

Old Ned moved in with everything he had, which was plenty.

"Get that ice he is suckin' on!" Klump howled. "Two of you go and block that kitchen door!"

The counterman's oily bean slipped out of Willie's grasp. The tough taxpayer reached for a Betsy and fired it from memory, as his optics were still gushing brine.

A gendarme bounced a slug off the big boy's noggin. Willie followed up with a full ketchup bottle.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Mamie the cashier got into the brawl. She tried to make an omelet out of the brains of the cop who had the dishonest criminal in the pin-stripes down on the floor.

Willie came to the rescue. He caught Mamie by the coiffure and pulled quite viciously. But the doll did not come away with the blond locks.

"She is black-haired," Willie Klump yipped.

Then he got hold of Mamie's bona fide tresses and gave a tug. Mamie screeched a higher note than was ever heard at the Met. She dropped the big glass change-tray.

The cop thanked Willie between breathless short pants. Then he slapped the crook under him loose from his marbles.

"Well, now what do we do, Mr. Klump?" a flatfoot standing in the kitchen door respectfully wanted to know.

"You stay right there," Willie replied firmly. "Cover the door, as I am going into the kitchen. Did you get the ice cube the criminal was teething on?" he asked another gendarme.

"Yeah. What of it? I got it in my hand and it's freezin' me numb. But it still don't make no sense."

"Just put it in that cup of hot mud on the counter," said the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency. "Then wait. Keep an eye on it."

**H**E WENT into the kitchen. A moment later he came out with six trays of ice and dumped them on the floor. He went back, and returned with two more trays.

"Now," he said with modest amusement, "we will have some fun meltin' these here cubes. Grab a whole potful of java."

"I don't get it," a cop protested. "Why should we have to obey this screwball?"

A brief twenty minutes later, Willie Klump stuck his hands in the huge pot of warm bilge and fished around thoughtfully. He came up with both mits filled with diamonds. Two human bloodhounds staggered back, close to swooning.

"You will find a rock in that cup of ink on the counter, too," Willie informed a gendarme.

The counterman stirred. He got up and put out a hand to brace him-



self. Being rather blind for the moment, he happened to put it in a messy rice pudding.

He shook his head and looked at the gloomy pan of the shackled customer. That criminal in the blue pin-striped suit was swearing at everything and everybody from the beginning of history to that historical date.

"The dumb cluck was a flatfoot all the time, Bugs," he finally managed to say coherently. "Mamie, you oughta swallow lead for this!"

"Aw, how did I know?" she howled. "Shut your kisser and hold that gab for a mouthpiece."

A squad car pulled up in front of Paloppa's. One of the gents who emerged from it was a friend of Willie's named Satchelfoot. Satchelfoot goggled at the dazzlers on the counter and then at William Klump.

"Where'd yuh— How'd yuh—"

Willie took a chair and wiped his clammy brow.

"Why, it was quite simple once I got the hang of it. It is no wonder that the sparkler snitchers were transferring the rocks from the stash-in' place right under the eyes of policemen. You see, the night they was chased away from the Madison Avenue shop, they stopped in Paloppa's here. They hung around just long enough to get rid of the hot ice. The counterman there is one of Bugs Logan's gang. What did you think he did with the stuff? He put them in the water he put in the ice trays and froze them up. He put a little milk in the water first, I think, as the water here has been sort of funny looking lately."

"What!" Satchelfoot gulped.

"Yes. Bugs and his pals all took turns coming in here to eat. The cops knew that. But it is not a crime to eat, so they could not arrest them tough boys for that. The counterman there put an ice cube or two in the water he served the dishonest taxpayers. They walked out of here with sparklers in their mouths. I guess that was ingenious, wasn't it?"

"B-but h-how did a half-wit like you catch on?" Satchelfoot asked pitifully.

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

Willie smiled.

"It seems the counterman got mixed up the other night. He gave me one of the ice cubes by mistake. Ask Gertie how I like to chew ice. Well, it got into a cavity in one of my teeth an' that is how I knew. That same night I am almost kidnaped by the pals of these crooks. But I got away. You see, the character in the camel-hair coat is a friend of this tough baby's here. He found out he did not have the cube with the rock in it. So he figured I must have it and I would tell the cops. Well, I made out tonight I did not know anything about anything."

Satchelfoot Kelly went over to the counter and leaned against it. Weakly he cradled his noggin in his arms.

"I don't know," he moaned. "M-maybe I should just give up tryin'."

"So you just take these crooks downtown. Make them tell you who their pals are and where they hid the other stones. This Puzzola who was rubbed out here. He was pretty sure Bugs' gang had the rocks. He wanted to cut himself in. I was here, came to see Mamie, as I had met her at a taxi-trot place the night Gertie told me to go fish. I think that is all. I guess you will all have to admit that the mystery has been solved."

"I tol' yuh we shoulda had him bumped off," the unlawful character in the pin-stripe suit snarled at the big victual vender wearing the Center Street jewelry. "I knowed nobody could ever be as stupid as he looked. Aw, gnats!"

"That is why I get along as a rule," Willie said. "I look like anything but a detective, don't I? You would not have much success sittin' outside a rat-hole with a tiger skin on, would you? *Ow!*"

"What's the matter, Klump?" a cop yelped. "Who stabbed yuh? Watch all the doors, men!"

"It's my tooth," Willie griped. "I forgot to have it filled. *Oh!*"

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency bolted out of Paloppa's. He hopped into a squad car and rushed away.

"Hey, you come back here, Klump!"

Satchelfoot shouted. "Come back with that prowler car!"

"Odd mug, ain't he?" a flatfoot said. "The insurance company said today that there was twenty-five-hundred-bucks reward for findin' them sparklers."

A dull thump interrupted him.

"Hey, Kelly has fainted! Come here get some water. Er—never mind the water, as I am sure he needs an inhalator. Hurry up, for heaven's sake!"

## ALIAS MR. BONES

(Continued from page 95)

man who looked young for his forty-five years. He glanced at the two approaching men in surprise. "Why hello, boys," he said, smiling.

If there was any man-hunting thrill to this arrest. Wortham couldn't find it. Instead, there was a dull ache in his throat as Mace spoke.

"Mr. Siegfred," said the police sergeant solemnly, "why did you kill J. Ludy Cox?"

Oscar Siegfred stopped dead, like a man who had been pole-axed, his heavy face going blank.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded.

"I wish we were," said Wortham. "But we found Cox's personal effects in your safe and evidence in your basement workshop that you dissected his body and cremated the flesh. You synthetically aged his skeleton and put it in the alcove of Mr. Bones. If Frank Archer hadn't played a Halloween prank with the skeleton, what you did might never have been found out."

"You are mad!" whispered the undertaker. "What became of Mr. Bones?"

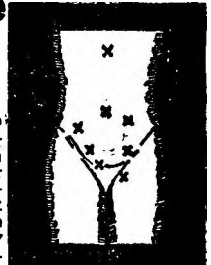
"You took him to Memphis and sold him yesterday to a medical clinic. You had no way of thoroughly destroying bones quickly, and you didn't dare try to sell a green skeleton, so you thought—"

With a sharp cry Siegfred whipped out a revolver and slashed Sergeant Mace over the head with it without warning. Mace groaned and crumpled in his tracks.

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

Pulling his own gun, Dick Wortham leaped forward to grapple with the man who suddenly had become a maniac. And as they locked in a mad struggle, the reporter knew that his life hung in the balance.

Snarling and all but frothing at the mouth, Siegfred grasped the younger man's gun wrist, shoving it upward. Twisting his own right hand free he jabbed his automatic forward to blow off the top of Wortham's head. At that instant a gun roared from close to the ground, and Siegfred gasped out a strangled cry as he went rigid and then collapsed in the reporter's arms.

With blood running down the side of his face, Sergeant Mace was weakly propped up on one elbow, his smoking police special in his hand.

"I had to do it, Dick," he grunted painfully. "He was going to blow your top off."

Siegfred, shot through from side to side, was dying. Wortham laid him gently on the ground, and the two friends bent over him as other men came running from the group of buildings.

"Why did you kill Cox?" demanded Wortham. "You're dying, Mr. Siegfred. Just as well talk."

The undertaker opened glazing eyes. "Because—" he murmured, "because—Ludy found out—I'd killed Myra's—mother—for her money. I had to—silence him. I—"

A rush of blood poured from his mouth, and Oscar Siegfred strangled to death before the bullet wound could kill him. . . .

Only minutes later Myra Cox was sobbing in Dick Wortham's arms.

"I didn't even dream of any of this!" she sobbed. "And—and poor Uncle Ludy's skeleton sitting there, holding that letter to himself. It—it's ghastly. And Uncle Oscar murdered my mother, and now they're all dead! Oh, Dick, I'll never be able to look at another skeleton as long as I live."

"You won't have to," Wortham promised. "I'm going to have plenty to say about your welfare from now on. Make no bones about that!"

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(Continued on page 112)

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(Continued from page 111)  
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**An Ex-G-Man in Action**

Three: EXIT DOCTOR DEATH, by Frank Piazzzi, a G-man novelet that is really different! Because the hero, Bob Marty, is really an ex-G-man!

Bob Marty became so well known because of his crime-fighting activities that he was asked to resign! His face was too easily recognizable—and that isn't an advantage for a G-man! Particularly when a mysterious murderer called Doctor Death is free to continue his devilry.

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- Electric Refrigeration
- Electrical Ventilating, Plumbing
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- High School
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**Table of amount of insurance purchased by a monthly payment of one dollar.**

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41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
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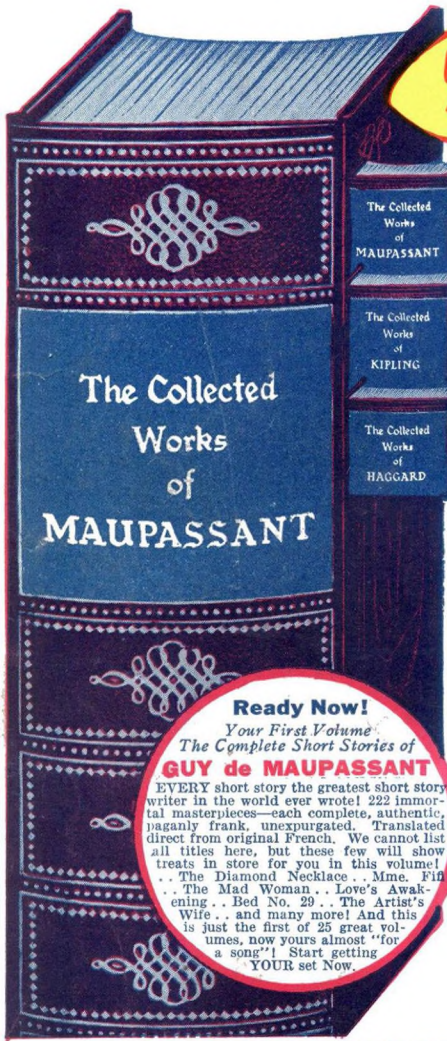
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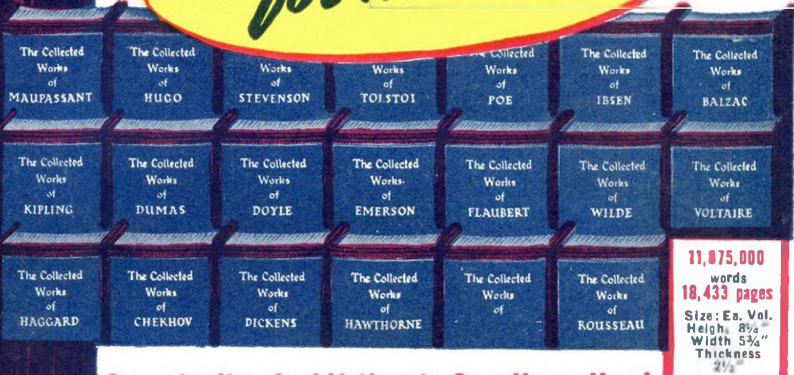


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