

A MAGAZINE OF RACKETEERS AND GUN-MOLLS

GANGSTER STORIES

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Twice Around
the
Clock

by

George J. Brenn...

Rough on "Rats"

Missing Page

Inside front cover

Muscles 5¢ apiece!

WOULDN'T it be great if we could buy muscles by the bag—take them home and paste them on our shoulders? Then our rich friends with money to buy them, sure would be socking us all over the lots. But they don't come that easy, fellows. If you want muscle you have to work for it. That's the reason why the lazy fellow never can hope to be strong. So if you're lazy and don't want to work—you had better quit right here. This talk was never meant for you.

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Follow me closely now and I'll tell you a few things I'm going to do for you.

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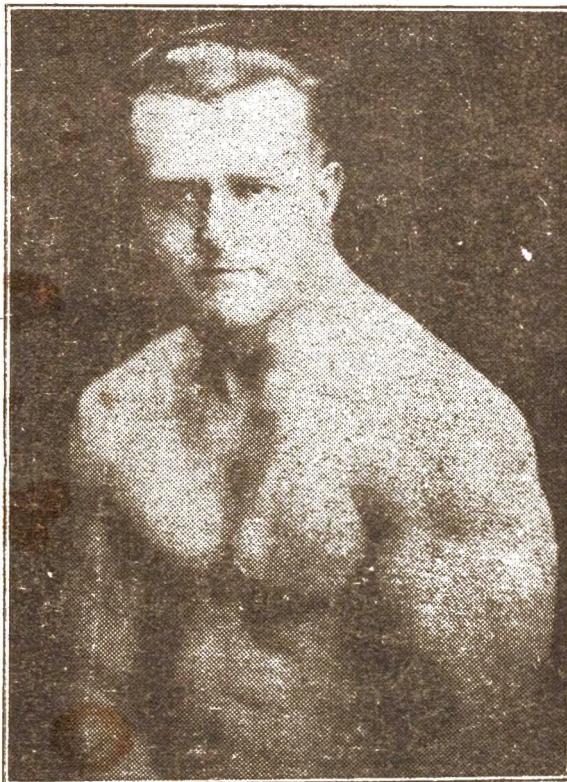
In just 30 days I'm going to ~~increase~~ your arm one full inch. Yes, and add ~~two~~ inches to your chest in the same length of time. But that's nothing. I've only started; get this—I'm going to put knobs of muscles on your shoulders like baseballs. I'm going to deepen your chest so that you will double your lung capacity. Each breath you take will flood every crevice of ~~your~~ pulmonary cavity with oxygen. This will ~~send~~ your blood with red corpuscles, ~~shooting~~ life and vitality throughout your entire ~~system~~. I'm going to give you arms and legs like pillars. I'm going to work on every inner muscle as well, toning up your liver, ~~your~~ heart, etc. You'll have a snap to your ~~stop~~ and a flash to your eye. You'll feel the real pep shooting up and down your old backbone. You'll stretch out your big brawny arms and crave for a chance to crush everything before you. You'll just bubble over with vim and animation.

Sounds pretty good, what? You can bet your old ukulele it's good. It's wonderful. And don't forget fellow—I'm not just promising all this—I guarantee it. Well, let's get busy, I want action—So do you.

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A MAGAZINE OF RACKETEERS AND GUN-MOLLS

Gangster Stories

PUBLISHED BY HAROLD HERSEY

VOL. 1

DECEMBER, 1929

NO. 2

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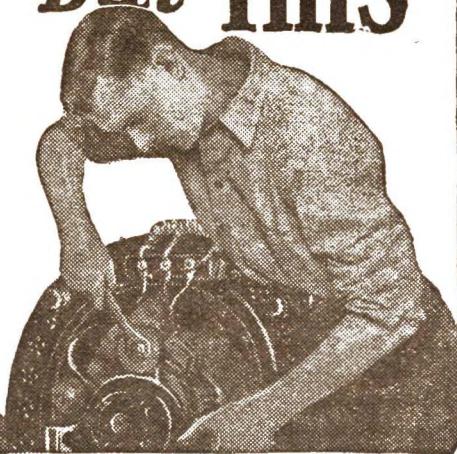
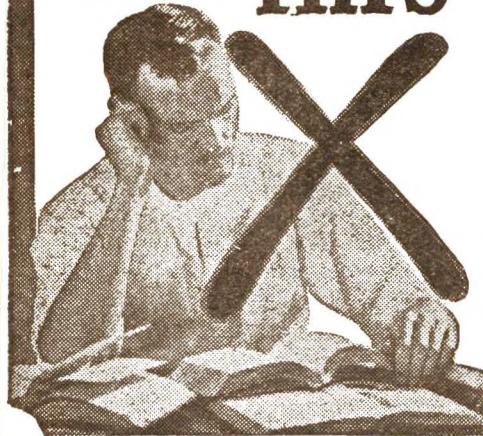
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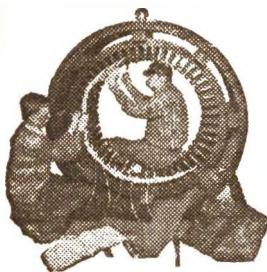
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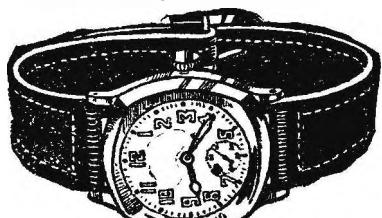
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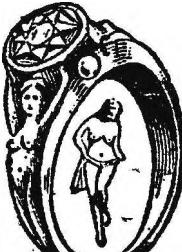


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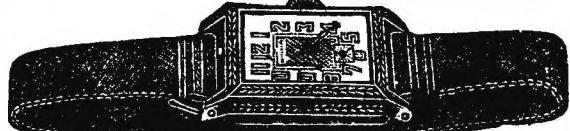


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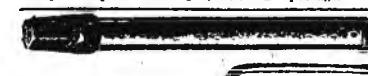
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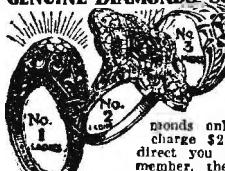


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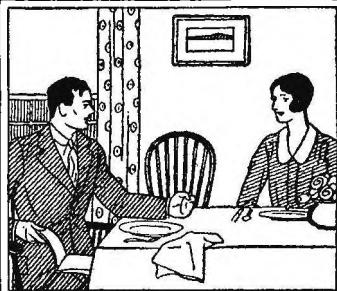
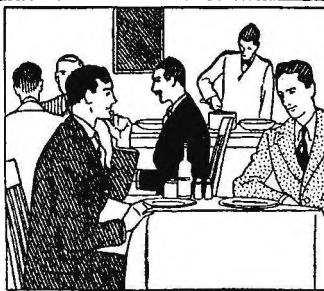
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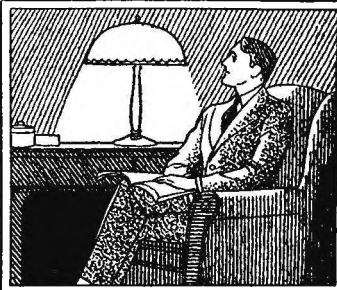
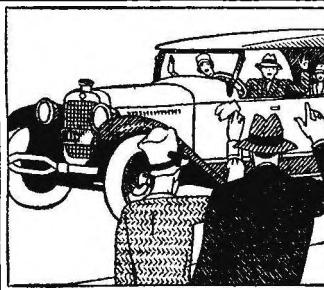
"I hadn't received a decent raise in years and my small salary scarcely lasted from week to week. Margaret did all her own housework, but the bills kept piling up and I was always afraid I'd lose my job."

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"One day I had luncheon with Tom Wilson, who used to work right beside me before he took up an I. C. S. course. He told me how he was making \$5000 a year and had just bought a new home in the suburbs."

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"That certainly was a lucky day for me. In four months I received a raise in salary and before the end of the year I was next in line for manager of my department. I'm now making more than Tom Wilson."

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Rough on "Rats"

A Complete Gangster Novelette

By ANATOLE FELDMAN

It wasn't the boodle that figured, and it wasn't the lead, and it wasn't fear—just the heartbreaking business of a filthy double-crossing trap that put too much lead into guts where it didn't belong. A Chink, a Jew, and an Irishman—plenty brains—but nobody spotted the rat anyway. Read this hair-raising novel of Underworld intrigue and the gun-moll who knew everybody's onions!

THE HANDS OF the open, bold faced clock in the tower of the Jefferson Market Court, pointed to three. Three in the morning of a raw, blustery day in early March. The streets were deserted of all save an occasional drunk sleeping off the effects of a bottle of potent "smoke," and a few stray felines, commonly referred to in the neighborhood as "Garbage Inspectors."

Then life and movement began to animate the scene. The heavy-timbered oak door of one of the many private houses silently opened into the night. A thin crack of light pierced the gloom in the street, then was snuffed out as a gusty gale of wind zoomed around the corner.

A squat, dark visaged man, with cap pulled low over his eyes, sidled down the short flight of stairs from the door onto the sidewalk. His movements were furtive, sly; as swift as any predatory creature of the night.

A brass-buttoned, blue-coated Flatfoot pounded his heavy feet down the end of the street and the man in the cap flattened himself in the dark shadows against the house. He waited a moment, tense, until the copper had passed, then with an agile leap sped

across the sidewalk to a waiting machine.

With one movement he was behind the wheel with his foot on the starter. A low rumble of power suddenly echoed in the quiet street as he jammed his foot on the gas pedal. Then he slipped into gear and took the next corner on high.

A scene, very similar to this, was transpiring at precisely the same time, at a point in the City some three miles north. And still a third individual, with slinking, furtive movements, surprisingly like those of the first gunman, started out in a speedy machine from a point five miles South.

A half hour later, within thirty seconds of each other, the three denizens of the night entered a shabby waterfront cafe on West Christopher Street. The honky-tonk was foul with the stale odor of flat beer and the acrid fumes of bitter black tobacco.

This was Silent Joe's Dump. Joe, its proprietor, was deaf and dumb. Anything and everything, murder, arson and rape, had been planned across the beery tables of Silent Joe's Place and there were only five notches carved on the bar.

Notches, you ask? Yes; that was

Silent Joe's idiosyncrasy. Every man, or woman for that matter, who was sent up to the hot seat from his dump, had his epitaph carved into Joe's bar with a notch.

The three late arrivals drifted to a dilapidated table in the far corner. Joe approached them; Joe of the sharp, unnaturally bright and ferret-like eyes. That was nature's compensation; hear and speak he could not, but he could read a letter out of the corner of his eye across the room.

One of the men at the table went into a graphic description of a bottle. Joe understood; he had received that order many times before. He turned to his bar and returned to the table a moment later with a bottle of whiskey. The drinks were poured.

"Salud!"

A grunt.

"Faugh!"

And thus the formalities were attended to. The formalities to the planning of—

NOW NEW YORK is a town of a million rackets, gunmen, gangs and suckers. And over the flaming, vicious underworld of the City ruled three men. Three men as cold, relentless, brutal and yet as sentimental as ever killers were. One ruled the mob of two-gun gorillas that used the streets and alleys north of Tenth Street as their stamping ground. Another found a fortune in the crooked sinister alleys of Chinatown and the flaming east-side. And the third, like a blood-thirsty pirate of old, sucked wealth from the River on the West and the teeming warehouses that crowded its banks.

Shanty Hogan, quick thinking, witty, brilliant ruled the North Siders, and such was his guile at playing crooked politics with even crookeder politicians of the City, that his activities in crime extended as far north as Columbus Circle.

Smooth, oily, affable China Cholly

ruled his renegade tong with a honeyed tongue and the most subtle, treacherous poison known to the East. But be it said for China Cholly that he reserved this refinement in diabolical death only for a squealer—a rat! The entire underworld approved!

To make this curious triumvirate complete, there was in the West, Hymie Zeiss. Now when a Jew is tough and a bad egg—he's just that. Wicked. Hymie Zeiss, "Little Hymie," as he was affectionately referred to by his henchmen, was not a lovely thing to look at, as a man. He was short, flat-faced and wizened, but his eyes were the soft, mellow brown of the Semite. On more than one occasion, Hymie had plugged a man, plugged him dead, and a half hour later endowed the widow with an annuity for life.

Among these three mobs there was not open warfare. In fact, some sort of truce had been agreed on between them. But there was friction, jealousy, unrest. The seething dynamite of hell brewed beneath the surface, needing only the spark of one overt act to blow off the lid.

Among the three of them they had fairly well divided up lower Manhattan for criminal exploitation, but down the center of the Island, between the domain ruled by China Cholly on the East Side and the haunts of Little Hymie on the west, was a narrow band of territory that all exploited equally. It was this neutral section of the City that was the chief bone of contention among the three gang chiefs. Each one suspected the other of reaching out greedy fingers for it; each one feared the aggression of the other.

And for the past six months now, the seething tempers and bitter hatreds so long kept below the surface, were gradually emerging toward an open break; towards open warfare. It started with minor violations of the truce among the three mobs and

developed with one reprisal after another to a situation so desperate that Police Commissioner Mallen, down at Headquarters, neglected his duties as official welcomer of the City, and went into executive session with his lieutenants.

THREE WAS a certain three-story red brick house on West 10th Street, just off Seventh Avenue, that was used by Shanty Hogan as headquarters. The three upper stories were occupied by a crew of hungry, flea-bitten hack writers, but the low English basement, the pet graft of Shanty's, was the most notorious and thriving dispensary of booze in the district.

At eleven A. M. of the morning following the surreptitious meeting of the three mugs in Silent Joe's, Shanty stepped briskly into the private bar in the little room behind his public speakeasy.

From the outside, the place looked innocent and harmless enough but one glance around the inside revealed a veritable fortress and arsenal. Nothing short of a battery of six inch guns backed up by a Company of Marines could have broken into Shanty's hideout—once the bars were down.

Two men were there before him, awaiting their Chief's arrival. One was Smiling Jimmie Hart, the other, Groucho Griffo. They were Shanty's lieutenants, tried through a hundred gang fights and not found wanting.

Smiling Jim and Groucho were a living demonstration of that theory that opposites attract. Their names alone told the story, but either one, at an instant's call and without an instant's hesitation, would have laid down his life for the other.

Shanty tossed his soft grey felt onto a convenient hook and slouched into the chair at the head of the table. His two henchmen eyed him quizzically as he withdrew a hammered silver

cigarette case, extracted a butt and lit it thoughtfully. Smiling Jimmie's freckled face broke into a broad grin. Groucho's dark one scowled still more.

"Boys," began Shanty at last, "I got a red hot tip-off."

"On what?" growled Groucho the practical.

"On a load of booze under bond coming in tonight."

Smiling Jimmie tilted back his chair, threw back his blond head and a thin piping whistle escaped his pursed lips.

"Can that! Can that!" snarled Groucho.

"Yeah. What's the idea, Jimmie?" asked Shanty jokingly. "Your Irish pan is ugly enough without screwing it up like that. Anyway when you whistle you're thinking—and I don't like you to think. What's on your mind? Out with it."

Smiling Jimmie's chair came to the floor with a bang.

"You bet, Shanty, I'm thinking. And you, dumb guy," he added, turning to Groucho, "don't get sore at me if you ain't got no brains. It's this, Shanty. Don't it seem God damn queer to you there's been so many tip-offs lately? Funny, eh?"

"Jeez, Jimmie," replied Shanty consideringly, "now that you mention it, you're right."

"And all the tip-offs haven't been to us. China Cholly has had a lot of dirt spilled to him and the same goes for Little Hymie. Now tell me, who is so interested in our welfare that they're handing us fifty grand on a silver platter? And another thing that strikes me queer about these tip-offs is the way they have a habit of not coming off the way we expect; or if they do come off we get the double cross and the bulls is waiting for us."

"What you're trying to say," growled Groucho, "is that there's a Rat some place. Is that it?"

"That's it, Groucho!"

"But why?" insisted Shanty. "Give

me the gimmick.. How does it work out? We get a tip-off, the office. China Cholly and Hymie Zeiss the same. What's the dirt, the low down? Who's playing us for a sucker and why? Where's his percentage?"

"Don't know yet," replied Smiling Jimmie. "But we got to find out. And the best way is to go through with this hi-jacking expedition of ours tonight. Unless I miss my guess, hell will pop loose along the road and out of the hell we might get the galoot back of this double, double cross and figure his game."

"Figure his game, hell!" snarled Groucho. "Let me get a squint at the double crossing rat and I'll pump him full of lead."

"You would, Dumb-bell!" smiled Smiling Jimmie. "You drill him before I get a chance to make him talk and you'll be giving birth to a load of lead yourself."

"Can that talk, Boys," urged Shanty. "Let's work this thing out, first."

The three hitched up their chairs closer to the table and bowed their shaggy heads together in conference.

TO LOOK at his round, placid, moon-like face, one would never have suspected China Cholly of being a bad man,— killer. Especially so on this same morning as he ambled serenely up the Bowery and turned into Pell Street. Cholly greeted all his countrymen with an expansive chatter of high-key Cantonese and balanced the rakish checkered hat over one ear.

China Cholly was in a very genial mood that morning and with good reason too. For there had come to him, via the complicated underworld grapevine, word, that a load of genuine booze under bond, was coming into the City that night.

Three doors down on Pell Street, he stopped before a low, dilapidated wooden structure. On the window

was painted in shaky English letters the legend—Hop Sing, Laundry. As if to make the statement good, a few fly-bespeckled collars and one solitary antiquated dress shirt huddled together in one corner of the window.

Cholly looked once up and down the Street; snapped his cigarette butt out into the gutter with a deft flick of his wrist and then gently rapped on the door. It opened on silent, well-oiled hinges for him and closed on his retreating back as swiftly and secretly. Hop Sing's place, at one time in the distant past might have served as a laundry, but that far off day had been forgotten even by China Cholly.

He passed swiftly through the main store, now heavy with flaky dust and tangled with spider webs. This outer sanctum was presided over by a sallow, pig-tailed Chinaman, who drowsed in a Buddhistic attitude at the door.

Cholly gently pulled aside the heavy curtains hanging at the rear of the room and slipped down a short damp hallway. He pulled up abruptly before a blank wall, while his agile fingers traced an intricate pattern across an inlaid panel. Under his manipulation a concealed door swung inward through which he swiftly disappeared.

No matter how tough a gang of Chinamen may be, they never look it. China Cholly's outfit of killers was as murderous as any that haunted the Underworld of New York, but to look at their bland, smiling faces as their Chief entered, one would have suspected them of nothing more vicious than an occasional puff at the pipe.

"Monling, Boys," sing-songed Cholly. "How's everything? Hokay?"

"Hokay," they answered in chorus.

China Cholly pulled up a chair, exhaled a bag of Bull Durham and proceeded to roll a rice paper cigarette with yellow stained fingers. He inhaled deeply for a minute. No one spoke, but six pairs of slant eyes fol-

lowed his every movement. Cholly didn't encourage questions from his men. He ordered, and they obeyed.

"Have all boys here nine o'clock tonight," he jerked out in his sing-song voice. "I have tip-off."

"All light. Boys he be here," answered Soy Low, Cholly's deputy.

"We take booze come in under Government bond," continued Cholly. "You have all boys ready, Soy Low. By God, we make fifty grand tonight, maybe. Nine o'clock I be here. Have boys ready with guns."

"Hokay," replid the stolid Soy Low.

With the assurance that his brief orders would be carried out implicitly, Cholly reverted to his native tongue and gave vent to a long string of Chinese incantation. His followers beamed on him. China Cholly was a "funny fella," and fifty grand would buy many hours of bliss via the poppy route.

IT SEEMS THAT the tip off that both Shanty Hogan and China Cholly thought their own private property, had been broadcast, for still another underworld Chief made plans that morning for the capture of the load of good booze coming into the City under bond. "Little Hymie" Zeiss, in his strong-hold back of an abandoned water front warehouse, also went into executive session with his mob of rods.

"Boys," said Little Hymie, "there's money to be picked up tonight. A big piece of change. I got the tip-off straight."

"Yeah?" growled Butch, his right hand man. "I remember the last time you got the office straight. We ran into a load of bulls and federals and damn near got shot all to hell!"

"I remember that too," answered Zeiss, "but this time we'll be ready for 'em if they come. Have the boys loaded down with artillery. If somebody gets funny along the way, blow 'em to hell and don't stop to argue or

ask any questions. Read about it in the papers."

"The lay is queer, I tell you," insisted Butch.

"I got a hunch that way myself," agreed Little Hymie.

"Then why step into hell?"

"Because," answered Hymie, "it's time for a show-down. This might be a frame. Maybe this is Shanty Hogan's dirt or maybe the Chink's. Then again it might be somebody else trying to give the works to us. If my info is good and on the up and up—we get the booze. If somebody's put the screws to us, this is the way to find out."

"It's the screws, Hymie, it's the screws," complained Butch.

"Then what's eating you?" barked Little Hymie. "Don't we know what to do with stool pigeon punks? We'll give 'em the works and collect a bounty from Hogan and Cholly."

The bleak March day passed uneventfully. So stilled were the rumblings of the Underworld that many knew it for the calm before the storm. The three gangs were busy with preparations for the night. Guns, revolvers, knives and automatics were brought out and oiled and polished; trigger fingers were limbered. A man's life depended that night on how fast and straight he could shoot.

But the Underworld was not alone in making preparations. There was a great show of activity in an altogether different quarter of the City that day. Police Headquarters buzzed with more than the usual excitement. Something big was on foot.

The same held true for the Federal Building, a few blocks south on lower Broadway. Closeted in his office with five of his most dependable officers, sat Silas Yelton, the fanatical head of the Prohibition forces for New York. Yelton was mentally gloating over the massacre he was planning for that night. He expected to make a big name for himself, in a big, spectacu-

lar way. What matter if half a dozen men or so were lost? Hadn't he been appointed to uphold the sanctity of the Law?

"Men," he began, "I have again received information from that mysterious source that has tipped me off so well in the past."

"Then it's on the level," chortled Yancey, one of his deputies. "That guy who's squealing, who ever it is, is the inside. He's got the right dope. God help him if ever Little Hymie or Shanty Hogan or China Cholly spot him."

"That's not our worry," snapped Yelton. "He's informed me that all three, Hogan, Zeiss and the Chink, are going to make a try at hi-jacking that load of whiskey coming into New York tonight. That's our opportunity. This is the time to make a real clean up. Those outfits have caused us too much trouble all ready. They're a menace to the law.

"We'll let the three gangs converge on the booze truck, kill each other off and then we'll charge down and clean up the rest."

"But good Lord, Yelton, what about the driver of the truck. He'll be killed," complained Yancey.

"That's not our concern."

"But unless you warn him, it's murder."

"We are only doing our duty; our duty as we see it. And it means promotion for us all."

At the word promotion, Yancey dissented no longer. Not that the promotion in itself meant anything, but the bigger the job, the bigger the graft.

EIIGHT O'CLOCK that night found Shanty Hogan at the bar of his speak-easy on Tenth Street. He was tense, on edge, and because of it he drank. Whiskey straight was Shanty's order.

He always felt that way an hour before setting out on one of his numer-

ous ventures into crime. He wasn't yellow, he didn't have a case of nerves; Shanty was just pleasantly stimulated by the coming danger. It was all a game to him. A live and die existence.

Nothing sweeter than the acrid smell of burnt powder and the growl of gats.

After his third he entered his private back room strong-hold as cool and placid as a lily on a mill pond. His mob was awaiting his arrival, a gay, carefree buckaneering crew headed by Smiling Jimmie and Groucho.

"Howdy, Boys," greeted Shanty with an inclusive wave of his hand. "All rarin' to go?"

"All set, Shanty," replied Smiling Jimmie. "Just waiting for the word from you."

"Artillery?" questioned the gang chief.

"Plenty," growled Groucho. "And I got a weird hunch we're going to eat smoke before we're tucked into bed again."

"Just so they don't tuck you into a wooden kimono," laughed Smiling Jimmie. "If they send you over the river tonight, Buddy, I'll guarantee you plenty of company."

"Well, we've gabbed enough," grinned Shanty. "Let's go! The side door, Boys. The cars are parked on Waverly Place. Groucho, you take the second car. Jimmie, you drive the first. I'll step with you."

At his words, Groucho opened a concealed door in the back wall and led the exit into a dark alley that ran the length of the house. The mob, pulling their caps still lower over glinting eyes and taking one last reassuring feel of their hips, followed him out into the night. Smiling Jimmie and Shanty brought up the rear.

Swiftly they piled into the cars and a moment later with roaring exhausts, careened away from the curb. The staccato bellow of their pounding

engines echoed thunderously through the canyoned streets, only to be carried away on the tearing blasts of wind that screamed around the corners of the tall buildings.

Little was said. There was no need for words. What lay before them was action; an argument to be settled with the whine of hot, searing lead and the ominous growl of revolvers.

The two black cars, with lights dimmed and license plates bespattered with mud, headed North and East, making a bee line for the tangled maze of streets that rotated from the hub of the bridge to Long Island at Fifty-ninth Street. The blobs of light from the street lamps flamed by with an ever increasing rhythmic regularity.

As they approached the shabby east-side section where they had decided to way-lay the truck-load of booze, an electric tension gripped the men.

Guns were smoothly pulled from hip holsters and carefully examined for the last time. Safeties were snapped back, and gnarled and grimy fingers crooked around a score of triggers.

If all went well as they had planned it, this was to be a quick raid, with or without blood-shed. They were to drill the driver of the truck if necessary, roll his limp body into the gutter and then make their get-away.

The expedition was dangerous in the extreme, right in the heart of the City, but fifty grand was worth plenty of risk.

There was no question but that Shanty Hogan and his mob expected trouble but little were they aware of the direction from which it would come. Two blocks away from the approach to the bridge, Shanty pulled the cars up to a halt in a dark, blind alley. It was a strategic point—for the booze truck, passing off the bridge, would have to pass within ten feet of his men. They waited; five,

ten minutes. Time that seemed ages long to their expectant nerves. Cigarettes were consumed at a furious rate and men, on the ragged edge passed slurring remarks concerning the parentage of their companions. Remarks, which if passed under normal conditions would have been answered by a flash of six inch steel or a hurtling hunk of lead.

Far down the deserted high-way a faint light twinkled. A moment later the hum and throb of a heavily loaded truck was carried on the chill night breeze to the waiting gangsters in the alley. Shanty made a last inspection of his men.

"Here she comes, Boys," he said. "When the truck is abreast of us, let's go, and let the driver have it. Groucho, Jimmie and I are going to make for the wheel. You guys cover us in case he has a guard trailing him. Watch your fire. Don't shoot unless you have to. But when you do burn smoke, make it count!"

The men replied with grunts and low spoken profanity. It wasn't the first time they had hi-jacked a truck load of booze. Bring on that truck! Let 'em have it over with!

THE GOVERNMENT man behind the wheel of the heavy, six-ton Mack, was congratulating himself upon an uneventful trip into the City, as he swung off the bridge onto the streets of Manhattan. If he was to have had trouble, it would have been on the dark, unfrequented roads of Long Island.

Here in the City, he had nothing to fear. His thoughts were of his home. His old woman and the kids would be waiting up for him.

In an excess of good spirits, he pursed his lips and piped out the chorus of the latest popular song.

Suddenly a whine past his ear; then a pang and the tinkle of glass. Simultaneously with the last, the man behind the wheel heard the growl of a

revolver. Instinctively his foot jammed down on the gas and even as the heavily loaded Mack lurched forward with a roaring exhaust, a fusillade of shots broke out in the night. Spattering lead splintered his wind-shield. Vindictive bullets flattened themselves savagely against his instrument board. The broken tinkle of glass and the gurgle of flowing liquid told where an acid wasp had eaten into his precious cargo.

He crouched low behind his wheel, gave the bus all the sauce she had and drove straight ahead.

Shanty, at the head of his men, led the drive on the truck. He was three yards ahead of his mob, his gat flaming fire as fast as he could pull the trigger. But suddenly he staggered in his reckless charge, lurched forward and only by a tremendous effort of will saved himself from going down. A slug of burning lead ate its way into his shoulder and his automatic clattered to the asphalt from his nerveless fingers.

The shot that had drilled Shanty was evidently a signal, for a split second after it, a fusillade of shots rang out from the opposite side of the alley. The black night was pierced with stabbing flame.

The surprise attack took Hogan's mob completely unawares and at the first burst of raking fire two of his men fell prone into the foul gutter.

Shanty was quick to realize that he had fallen into a trap. The booze truck was speeding by; was even now out of danger. To hell with it now! His men came first! His right arm was paralyzed, dead. A growing pain lived in his breast. Shanty fell back a few feet and rallied his men.

On the other side of the street, Hymie Zeiss was taking full advantage of his surprise maneuver. With guttural profanity he urged his mob on, leading the charge with two barking, sinister guns in his hands. He well knew that it was Shanty Hogan's

mob he ran into and now that the warfare had broken out between them—let it be finished. Gun Law would rule and Little Hymie had the most potent gang of killers in the City.

By his sheer guts under fire, Shanty saved his men from utter route under that first withering burst of lead. He wrenched an automatic from the limp and bloody hand of one of his fallen henchmen and held his first line, insecurely fortified behind a galvanized garbage can.

The night awoke to a vivid, hectic life with the ominous rattle and growl of guns. The black alley was punctured with livid stabs of flame from the automatics, and the weird bursts of light etched in a scene of carnage.

But Shanty Hogan and Hymie were not to have it out alone that night. Two minutes after the two rival gangs had taken up positions of vantage on either side of the street, China Cholly's horde of yellow gorillas swept down on the fray. The yellow men went into action with a reckless daring and spattered their foes, both Hogan's men and Zeiss' mob, with a deadly fire that took ghastly toll.

FROM THEN ON it was every man for himself! It was hard to distinguish between friend and foe. The evil, dirty street was made heroic with the crash and thunder of glorious combat; the growl and bark of guns; the terrible blasphemous oaths of the fighters and the despairing death cries of the mortally wounded.

For a full ten minutes they carried on a miniature war. Neither side gave way, yielded; neither side gained despite the slaughter. The street became a shambles. Blood ran like water through the fetid gutters. The living stumbled over the dead, cursed them and kicked them out of the way. The three gangs would have fought it out there to the last man but—

Yelton, at the head of a squad of Federals, decided that the carnage

had lasted long enough. In three high-powered cars they careened down the street, straight into the heart of the fray. Machine guns thrust their blunt, ominous nozzles from the windows of the cars and splattered a murderous rain of hail into the middle ranks of the gangsters. Friend and foe alike, Chink, Jew and Irish, fell like toy soldiers before that first, treacherous burst of lead. Confusion! Devastation! Pandemonium filled the street. The curses and death rattles of the dying rose on the howling wind above the roar of the guns.

In another few minutes Yelton would have carried out his intention of wiping out the three gangs. At this new, unexpected threat, the three mobs were utterly routed. All of the men were attacked from three sides at once and no one knew which fire to return first.

Half of the men had been mowed down in the first minute of bitter warfare before an answering round of singing death was spewed forth from their guns at the new foe. A foe more to be hated than any rival gang or gangster.

With a sick heart Shanty saw his men wither before the barrage of lead from the Federals. All the acid bitterness in his heart that a few moments before had been directed at Little Hymie and China Cholly, concentrated into one burning lust; a lust to kill Silas Yelton! But what was he to do? Retreat? The longer he held the few remnants of his mob there, the target for three fires, the less chance he would have of fulfilling his vengeance. For the first time in his long career as a gangster, panic seized his heart. Not that he was afraid to die,—die with a hunk of lead in his guts. He had long realized that that was the way he would eventually go out. No! Shanty was filled with panic on realizing the terrific carnage amongst his men.

Common sense dictated retreat but

never yet had he stooped to such an ignominious course. Then it was, when all seemed lost save honor, that inspiration came to Shanty Hogan. There came a momentary lull in the firing and in the brief silence he raised his voice and bellowed into the night.

"Hymie! Cholly!" he roared with all the power of his leather lungs. "It's Yelton and the Bulls. Let's forget our battle and clean them out!"

Two answering incoherent bellows assured Shanty that his words had been understood and agreed upon. He breathed a half muttered prayer of relief. Quickly he rallied his men, encouraging them with bitter promises of vengeance. Revolvers and automatics were loaded again for the last time. Bleeding, stricken dying men rose to the last emergency like heroes.

"Now!" rang out Shanty's voice above the chaos and din of battle.

As one man the few remaining survivors of his once indomitable mob swept into the street and headed for Yelton's mob, still firing from the security of their machines. Hymie Zeiss at the head of his gang of gunmen joined them from the opposite side of the street. And on their flank, China Cholly, grinning devilishly, swept forward with his villainous crew of Chinks.

Involuntarily a blood curdling yell of triumph swelled from their lips, as with a united front they swept irresistably forward. Nothing could stop them. They knew it. And Yelton and his men knew it too. At the sound of that savage, atavistic death cry from the mob of killers, panic and yellow crawling fear filled the heart of the Federals.

They returned an irresolute fire, but the Underworld, united for once that night, was invincible.

The front of their ranks presented one continuous flame of fire as they advanced savagely up the street, guns and automatics belching death. When one man fell in the van, there was

another from the rear, ready and eager to push up. Chink, Jew and Irishman battled shoulder to shoulder!

Slowly, at first, Yelton began to retreat. Then more swiftly. But ever that raking, deadly, unrelenting fire from the united mobs of the Underworld, pressed on. The retreat became a route, a ghastly massacre. Men died, hurling terrible blasphemy on Yelton's head.

Of the forty deputies that he had marshalled to what he believed a killing, less than half returned. Twenty men out of forty and of course Yelton himself. He saw to that!

THE COMPLETE panicky route of the Federal men brought a temporary lull among the foes of the three gangs. They needed the next few minutes for the bitter task of collecting their dead. With sorrow laden hearts they went about the gruesome work. They picked up the riddled bodies of their followers and placed them in machines.

In the course of the heart-breaking task, Shanty, Cholly and Little Hymie came together, elbow to elbow.

"Got to thank you, Shanty," growled Little Hymie, "for comin' through against Yelton."

"Same goes here," chimed in China Cholly.

"Forget it, you mugs," snapped Shanty, slightly embarrassed. "This bloke yours?" And with the words he gently rolled over a stiffening corpse in the street.

Little Hymie claimed the dead man. There was a sob in his voice as he spoke.

"Louis, they got you too, did they? Don't worry, old pal, I'll get 'em."

"We better lay off each other to-night," continued Shanty. "Enough hell."

"Yeah," agreed Little Hymie. "We got plenty dead to bury."

"How in hell all this hell start?" queried China Cholly.

"You guys trying to shoulder in on my racket!" growled Shanty.

"Your racket?" snarled Little Hymie. "How ya get that way? Since when you got a monopoly on the booze peddling in this town?"

"Sure, no your racket, Shanty. Me got to live too," put in China Cholly. "No your racket Shanty any more Little Hymie's or mine."

"All right, all right! Forget it!" snapped Shanty. "All the stiffs taken care of?"

They looked around the street which at last had been cleared of its ghastly cargo. With a curt nod and a grunt to each other, the three gang chiefs turned on their heels and returned to their mobs. A minute later the blustery March wind had cleared away the acrid smoke of gun fire.

IT WAS A WEARY, disillusioned remnant of his gang that Shanty Hogan led back to his retreat on Tenth Street. And it was with a stricken heart that Shanty counted the cost of the ill-fated expedition. And that was not alone in sorrowing his heart. The booze truck, the thing that had cost so much bloodshed, had escaped entirely.

Groucho had been right that morning when he had forewarned him of trouble. He too had suspected it, but the venture had turned out otherwise than he had planned. For the greater part of the time it had been out of his control. Only when the new menace of Yelton's men had crashed down on them had he risen to the situation.

Just what was the low-down on the ill-fated expedition? Was it just a quirk of fate that had brought Little Hymie and China Cholly there on the scene at the same time as himself?

Who had tipped off the Federals that the attack was to be made? There were many questions, bitter and brutal, that Shanty mulled over in his mind that night.

The heavy, rumbling voice of Groucho thrust itself in on his meditations.

"Well, Shanty," he began, "what did I tell you?"

"Don't rub it in," growled Shanty. "Hell! I feel lousy enough now."

"The whole damn lay is queer," put in Smiling Jimmie. "Something damned crooked some place. Jeez, with the three of us fighting it out and Yelton piling down with the machine guns, I thought it was curtains for all of us. If you hadn't come through then, Shanty, Yelton would be collecting a bonus from the State on all our hides right now."

"Hell!" complained Shanty. "You're trying to let me down easy. I didn't do anything but get you all into a lot of lead and lose half our men."

There was a deep silence between the men for a few minutes. They sucked greedily at their cigarettes, each one preoccupied with the problem of the double-crossing rat in their midst.

"Say, listen Shanty," said Groucho at last. "I hate like hell to mention it but I have to."

"What?"

"Well," began Groucho slowly, feeling for the right words, "there's a leak somewhere. You know that. Has been for some time. This isn't the first little party of ours that's gone wrong. And always there's been the Jew and the Chink to screw up our plans. Now, I put it to you, what do you make of that?"

Shanty had a sneaking idea to what he was referring but for the sake of discipline he wasn't going to let him get away with it.

"What the hell you driving at?" he demanded. "Don't give me none of your riddles. Ain't in the humor for 'em. Speak out! If you have something to say, spill it."

"Now don't get sore, don't get sore," persisted Groucho. "It's this. You've been running around a lot with

Sadie. Now I ain't saying that Sadie ain't on the level, but after all she's Little Hymie's sister. You couldn't blame her much if she—"

But Groucho never had a chance to finish his accusation. With a bellow like that of an infuriated bull, Shanty threw himself across the table and entwined his sinewy fingers around the throat of his lieutenant. The weight of his hurtling body crashed Groucho clear out of his chair onto the floor and as he fell, Shanty plunged down upon him. His hands tightened about the throat of his henchman until Groucho's eyes bulged.

Smiling Jimmie dove across the room and flung himself on his chief's back. It took all the strength of his hands to pry his fingers from Groucho's throat.

"Easy, Shanty, easy," he begged. "Now what do you want to do a thing like that, for?"

Shamefacedly the Irishman released his lieutenant and then helped him to his feet.

"Sorry Groucho," he apologized. "My nerves are ragged. Forget it."

"Sure," growled Groucho, rubbing his swollen throat. "Sure. No hard feelings. I know how you feel."

"But Groucho is right," put in Smiling Jimmie. "Shanty you got to look the facts in the face. You been running around with Sadie. Nice skirt and all that. That's okay. But maybe she is squealing to Little Hymie."

The first seeds of suspicion and doubt had been planted in Shanty Hogan's brain. His hands constricted into hard knots. His eyes narrowed and shot fire. His rugged jaw shot dangerously forward.

"By God!" he exclaimed, "if she is, she'll never squeal again."

"Now don't do nothing hasty," counselled Smiling Jimmie. "Maybe she's on the level. Figuring her crooked don't explain China Cholly. We have to go at this thing slow. We can't make any mistakes."

"We can't make any mistakes, all right," agreed Shanty, "but we can't go slow."

SHANTY HOGAN was not the only one who spent an anxious questioning time that night. Hymie Zeiss too, put many unanswered questions to himself as he stamped the length of his headquarters after the disastrous fiasco with the booze truck.

He did not know whom to curse first for the misadventure that had cut down so many of his best men.

Of course, there was Shanty Hogan, but then Shanty, by rallying the three gangs, had saved them all from destruction. And China Cholly had been there too! There was no getting to the bottom of the thing. There had been a leak; a double cross—that alone was clear. Little Hymie concentrated all his mental powers on finding the rat.

For a half hour his yellow crooked teeth masticated the mangled end of a cigar. Then a cruel streak of suspicion entered his brain. His hairy nostrils dilated and his brown eyes narrowed down to dangerous pin points.

"Matz!" he bellowed to the outer room of his hangout.

The imperious summons was answered by a hatchet-faced, blue-bearded individual.

"Go out and get Sadie," snapped Little Hymie. "I want to see her at once. Here!"

Matz grunted his understanding and shuffled out of the room. Little Hymie continued his impatient pacing of the room. It was the bitterest blow of all to be compelled to doubt his sister, but he could see no other possible leak.

Ten minutes later Sadie entered. Little Hymie eyed her shrewdly in silence. Sadie was none abashed by his scowling glare and answered him eye for eye. She flippantly swished her abbreviated skirt aside and perch-

ed jauntily on the corner of the table, revealing a tantalizing length of silk clad calf. Her body was lithe and slender but plump enough to the touch.

"Sadie," began Little Hymie, "I got to speak to you."

"Shoot kid," replied Sadie. "I'm here. What's eating you?"

"Plenty, kid. I got a good idea to croak you!"

Sadie's slender leg was suddenly stilled. Her pretty, full mouth sagged open a moment in utter surprise.

"You're going to do what, Hymie?" she asked.

"Nothing!" he replied curtly. "Listen, you little tart. There's been a leak out of my place. Info is getting to Shanty Hogan. Somebody is squealing!"

"Why you dirty, low down crumb!" flared out Sadie. "Are you insinuating that I'm spilling any dirt to Shanty?"

"How does he get the dirt on every move I make?" insisted Shanty.

Sadie jumped off the table and like a flaming Amazon charged across the room at her brother. Her small, sleek head jutted out until it was within a foot of the gangster's distorted features.

"How the hell do I know how it leaked? But I'm not that kind of a rat—see? And anyway if I was, do you think Shanty would listen to me?"

Little Hymie by now was pretty convinced that Sadie was on the level but he could not back out of his accusation just then. He shifted his attack.

"You think that dumb Irishman is a pretty wise guy, don't you?" he scorned. "You know I've told you a hundred times to quit running around with him. Now I got enough. You got to make a choice. Either you quit Shanty Hogan or you quit me. Which is it?"

Sadie backed away a few feet from Little Hymie and surveyed him contemptuously with searing eyes.

"Well, if you want me to choose, I will. I'll take Shanty. You can go to hell!"

That was only the beginning of Sadies "say" to her brother but he cut her taunting hot words short by slapping her viciously across the mouth with his open palm. This parting love token presented the gang chief turned on his heels and stamped out of the room.

AT ONE OF the beer tables in the dark shadows of Silent Joe's Place on Christopher Street a little celebration was on foot that night. A celebration of three; a Jew, a Chink and an Irish Harp. Hogan, Zeiss and China Cholly would have been mighty interested to have heard the words that passed between the men. Lots of things and incidents that were puzzling and mysterious would have been readily cleared up. And there would have been three more stark figures on the cold marble slabs in the morgue.

The three men were jubilant. They toasted each other's health many times in raw, stimulating whiskey and toasted the ultimate success of some secret venture among them. Tonight they had struck, craftily, wearily and it would not be many weeks more, they assured each other, until they would have in their hands alone the disposition of all the Underworld rackets.

Things had gone even better than they had anticipated. As a result of their cunning and craft, the three rival gangs were on the point of entering a war of extermination. That was just what they wanted. Let Jew wipe out Chinaman and Chink clean up Irish and the Harps pulverize the Semites. Then these unholy double-crossing treacherous rats would step in and take command.

Sadies' loyal heart was filled with an all consuming rage after her scene with Little Hymie. That she of all

people should be accused of being a rat! A double crossing rat, squealing on her brother!

In the heat of the moment, as she stormed out of Little Hymie's headquarters, she planned and vowed a thousand fantastic vengeances. She would show Hymie, if he insisted on thinking her crooked, just how crooked she could be. The thing that hurt most of all was the implied reflection on her lover. Little Hymie had said what he had just because she was running around with Shanty. And she knew that Shanty Hogan would be the last person in the world to take double-crossing info from her.

But Hymie was right. Information was leaking somewhere. The thought sobered Sadie's flaming anger against her brother. She spent a bitter half hour in trying to locate the leak. Who was the rat? That he existed she felt sure. The only way she had of vindicating herself in Little Hymie's eyes, was to show him the real punk in the outfit. The more she mulled over the proposition, the more surely she came to the one conclusion. She would put the matter up to Shanty himself.

Late into the night, Shanty, Groucho and Smiling Jimmie brooded over a bottle. The room was heavy and bitter with the acrid smoke of many cigarettes. Their words were few and monosyllabic.

Then came a discreet rap at the door. At first they ignored it. The knock was repeated, this time more insistent. Shanty raised his blood-shot eyes from the table and turned his shaggy head toward the door.

"Well, what is it?" he snarled.

At his voice, the oaken panel slid open and the head of one of his henchmen thrust into the room.

"Sadie's outside," he said. "Want's to see you bad. Right away."

The men stiffened in their chairs. Smiling Jimmie and Groucho silently eyed their leader, wondering how he would meet the situation. A thousand

doubts assailed Shanty. A thousand fears, loves, hates and lusts. Could it be that the girl he loved was playing him dirt; was playing him for a sucker?

His love and desire struggled with his hate. Should he see her? He was about to send out word for her to go to hell when a sudden thought stayed him. Just what was so important that Sadie had to see him at that hour of the night? Had little Hymie sent her to him to get his new plans of campaign?

"Send her in, Scraggy," he said at last. And his voice was cold, ominous, deadly.

Sadie swept confidently into the room, the swish of her skirts revealing her insinuating hips. Straight up to Shanty she marched. Her hands reaching out for him.

Then she staggered back, for even before she could touch him, he sent her reeling across the room with a powerful right arm.

She recovered herself swiftly and was immediately on the defensive. She was not quite sure how to take this new attitude on the part of her lover.

"Say, you Bum," she began, "is that your idea of a love tap. It don't fit in with mine."

"Love tap, hell!" answered Shanty. "It ain't. That mushy stuff is over between us, girl. What do you want here?"

Sadie was taken completely aback at this line of talk.

"Shanty—" she began pleadingly.

"Can it! Can it!" he growled. "That boloney don't go any more, see. You made a sucker out o' me long enough. What kind of a sap do you think I am. Dumb? By God, if I was only positive you're the one that's been double crossing me, I'd choke that neck of yours till your tongue dropped out."

At this new attack on her honor, Sadie was indeed stricken.

"You too, eh, Shanty?" she said sadly. "A hell of a lot you guys know about women. Hell. All men are lice, anyway." Then her pride and anger got the better of her.

"You're just as dumb as that dope brother of mine. First he kicks me out with a clout on the jaw for squealing to you and now you give me the works for squealing to him. It's a laugh, eh? A great big laugh! You're a lot of wise guys! Wise, hell! You're all hams, palookas. If I wanted to rat on you don't you think I could have done it long ago. Put you on the spot dead? And the same goes for that flat-nosed Jew brother of mine. Men are all lice."

"Easy what you say," began Shanty threateningly, but Sadie's flow of angry words could not be stopped.

"To hell with you dumb mugs," she flung out and her lashing tongue stung the three men to silence. "Of course there's a leak somewhere—a blind man could see that. But I'm not the stool—see? Not for you, Shanty Hogan or for Little Hymie Zeiss. But I guess the only way I can make you believe that is to get the dirty rat myself. You guys are too dumb. All you do is sit on your cans and talk, talk, talk. Lice! All of you."

"Listen here, Sadie"

"Aw, go to hell!" she flung back.

And with this defiance on her lips she stamped out of the room, complete master of the situation.

"Now I wonder," muttered Shanty, when the door had closed behind her. "I wonder. Sadie was a pretty swell kid."

SAIDIE didn't get to bed until five o'clock that morning. Tired as she was, aching in every limb, she did not sleep. Restlessly she tossed from side to side, thinking, thinking. There was some tiny germ of inspiration fermenting in the back of her

mind. In vain she tried to bring it to light.

She began by marshalling all the facts of the three gangs before her. Then something very startling struck her.

Her brother, Little Hymie, thought that somebody was squealing to Shanty Hogan and the latter thought the same thing in reverse. And to make the situation still more complicated, China Cholly also got inside information on both the rival gangs.

What did that mean in the final analysis? Simply, there must be more than one squealer! Then inspiration!

The most obvious thing was that there were three rats, one in each gang. That would easily account for the double, double-cross. What their object could be she had not the slightest idea, but the more she considered the matter the more surely she felt that she was right.

She knew that she would get no consideration from Little Hymie and pride forbade her from going to Shanty with her theory. Only one resource remained open for her. She would see China Cholly and put the matter up to the shrewd and wily Chink.

With this resolution in her mind and a faint smile of triumph on her lips, she at last found a deep and untroubled sleep.

With all the oily, subtle grace of his race, China Cholly extended the hospitality of his house to Sadie when she called on him the following afternoon. At a clap of his hands, tea and rice cakes were served to them by a mute Oriental who bowed deferentially to the white woman.

When they were alone China Cholly smiled enigmatically but said nothing. He waited for his visitor to begin. Sadie swallowed the last of her tea at a gulp and dove into the heart of the matter.

"Cholly," she began, "there's queer things going on."

"Velly queer, Sadie," agreed Cholly with a smile.

"Queerer things than you know, Cholly," continued Sadie. "Something's got to be done about it."

In a few brief words she told him of her break with her brother and Shanty, and of their suspicions. Cholly listened attentively to all she had to say, but offered no word in reply. Mentally he was analyzing her words; silently he was analyzing the girl before him. China Cholly put his keen subtle perceptions to work on the problem of whether Sadie's visit was on the level or merely one angle of some cunning plot to trap him.

Sadie went on, unaware of Cholly's thoughts and suspicions. But the more she talked the more she convinced the Chinaman of her sincerity.

"And what you want from me, Sadie?" he asked at last.

"Listen, Cholly," she replied. "Listen well. This is what I've figured out and I want you to help me. For your life and all your mob is at stake as well as Little Hymie's and Shanty Hogan's life."

"Go on. I listen. I am all ears," Cholly assured her.

"I figure it out that there are three rats," said Sadie. "One in each mob. Get me? One in your mob, one in Hymie's and one in Shanty's. They're playing a crooked game together. Why, I don't know. But their game is to make trouble, see? Trouble between the three outfits. One spills the dirt on the other. Maybe what they're trying to do is to have you and Shanty and Little Hymie kill each other off and then take over the works. I don't know. Maybe. But it's clear as hell they're working against the gangs."

A slow spreading smile of comprehension spread across Cholly's face. He nodded approval.

"Now, I can't get Hymie or Shanty

to play with me," continued Sadie, "so I've come to you. Just give me the tip-off, a name, that's all I ask. You say nothing, Cholly. You know nothing and I know nothing. Okay?"

"Hokay," smiled China Cholly. "You velly smart girl, Sadie. Maybe you better watch Solly Gold. He velly funny man."

Sadie had gotten the office! So Solly Gold would be worth watching, eh? She was so impatient to be on the job that she utterly ignored all of Cholly's courtesies and rose abruptly. With a light hand on her arm the Chinaman escorted her to the door.

"You let me know what you find out, eh, Sadie?" he said. "I work with you on this."

"Okay, Cholly, thanks."

"Hokay," he sing-songed back to her.

SADIE wasn't slow to follow the tip given her by China Cholly. For two days she literally lived on the trail of Solly Gold. He led her a merry chase from bar to speak-easy to gambling dump but not one suspicious thing did she see. She even pondered the revolting project of playing up to Solly Gold. A girl of Sadie's calibre had lots of ways of making a sucker out of a guy. She vetoed the proposition, temporarily, however, deciding to save that line of attack for a last desperate endeavor.

By the end of the third day she was at her wits' end. She even began to doubt China Cholly's word. The situation, as far as she was concerned, demanded immediate action.

It was then she thought of Silent Joe's place. Mentally she cursed herself fluently for not having thought of it before. She killed the early evening until eleven o'clock over a greasy pack of cards, dealing out endless games of solitaire. When at last she "beat the Chink" she took it as a good omen, slipped into a silk-lined leather

jacket, jammed a white beret over one saucy ear and sallied forth.

She hailed a passing cab and gave the driver the Christopher Street address. Twenty minutes later she called him to a halt a block away from Silent Joe's Dump. She jammed her slim form close against the dark shadows that masked the dreary buildings that lined the shabby street and slowly began her approach on the dive.

Suddenly she flattened herself in a dark doorway as a car raced down the street and pulled up with screaming brakes before Joe's place. Sadie was all alert. Her nerves tensed and her sharp eyes pierced the gloom ahead.

A man jumped out of the machine and sped speedily across the sidewalk to the basement entrance of Silent Joe's. As the door opened for him she caught a fleeting glimpse of his silhouette in the doorway. She was not positive, but the man greatly resembled the squat, ugly Solly Gold.

Sadie was about to venture forth again when a second car pulled up to the curb ahead of her. She lost herself in the shadows again. This time she was sure the new arrival was a Chink.

Well, that accounted for two of the members of the conspiracy she had mentally pictured. She decided to wait to see if a third rat arrived, and she was not disappointed. Five minutes later a third car pulled up to Silent Joe's dump and a third man stealthily entered the place.

Sadie considered her position. What was she to do? Follow the traitors in or pass on the word to Little Hymie and Shanty?

"To hell with those mugs," she muttered to herself. "I'll run this thing to the ground myself. Anyway I don't know anything definite yet."

With her hands in her pockets she boldly swaggered on down the street past the hangout. A few feet beyond was a dark, narrow alley. On a

hunch, Sadie dodged down it and carefully felt her way along by the wall of the house. A thin beam of light at the rear, shining out into the murky night, caught her attention. Swiftly she approached it and with a beating heart saw that it came from a window that gave onto Silent Joe's dump.

Dropping on one knee she pressed her eye to one corner of the dirty glass and peered in. Directly opposite her at a corner table, sat three men. Her spirits soared and she could have sung for joy for her judgment had been vindicated. One of the three men was Solly Gold, another a Chink whom she recognized as a member of China Cholly's mob. And the third was Lefty Dugan, a tin-horn rod belonging to Shanty's outfit.

Sadie's elation suddenly changed to bitter fury. These were the three gorillas responsible for all the trouble and bad blood among the three gangs!

These were the three mugs responsible for her break with Little Hymie and Shanty. Her fingers itched and constricted around the butt of the .32 automatic in her pocket.

FIRST she had to hear what they were saying. She waited a moment until a boisterous gust of wind rattled the window, then she gently pried it up an inch. To the opening she pressed her ear. Voices came to her, faint and indistinct but she caught a word here and there and her inflamed imagination filled in the gaps. She had been right. Shanty had to listen in on that conversation!

She slipped out of the dark alley again and sped down the street. On the corner was a dingy, greasy all-night Coffee Pot. Sadie darted inside and locked herself in the telephone booth. Not having a nickel in her purse, she dropped a quarter into the slot and breathed a number into the mouth piece. A breathless pause and then a brusque voice answered at the other end.

"Hello. What you want?"

"Listen, guy," said Sadie. "This is Sadie Zeiss. Put Shanty on."

"He ain't here!" came back the voice.

"Listen Bozo," snarled Sadie. "Don't hand me that line of manure. I know he's there. Tell him it's Sadie and I got to speak to him."

"All right. Wait a minute. I'll see if I can get him."

A moment later Shanty's irritated voice growled over the wire. Sadie cut his sarcastic profanity short with her hurried words.

"Listen, Shanty, I'm in the Coffee Pot on Christopher Street a block away from Silent Joe's. There's a little session going on down there that you got to listen in on. One of your men is there, one of Little Hymie's and one of the Chink's. If you want the low down on the double crossing business, now's the time to get it."

"Say," began Shanty with deep irony. "You think I'm dumb? What's this—a frame? You little Bitch, you trying to put me on the spot?"

"Aw, for Gawd's sake, Shanty, don't be like that," pleaded Sadie. "What kind of a Bum do you think I am, anyway? I wouldn't pull any dirt like that on you, and you know it. I'm giving this to you straight because you wouldn't believe me if I told you. You got to hear yourself."

"Where'd you say? Silent Joe's?" questioned Shanty.

"Yeah. Make it snappy. There's an alley running South of the dump. Go down there and you'll find me by a window looking in."

"Okay, kid, I'll be there, but if you—"

"Hell, no! Please Shanty, don't be like that!"

After he had agreed to keep the rendezvous with Sadie, Shanty was half sorry for his decision. The thing looked suspiciously like a trap, but still, deep down in his heart, he felt

sure that Sadie would not put him on the spot. In view of the suspicions of Groucho and Smiling Jimmie, he did not tell them where he was to meet the girl.

"Where to?" asked Smiling Jimmie, as he retrieved his hat and slouched toward the door.

"Going to see Sadie," answered Shanty defiantly, "any objections?"

"None here," answered Smiling Jimmie. "But just as a precaution, better see that the gat is loaded."

"Don't worry about me," answered Shanty. "I can take care of myself with that moll without a gun."

"Where you meeting her, just in case you don't?" shot out Groucho.

"None of your damn business," growled Shanty and with the words he slammed the door behind him.

AFTER putting in her phone call to Shanty, Sadie beat it back to the black alley and her spy-hole by the window. Again she pressed her ear to the inch opening and listened. The three traitors were still speaking of their plans for disrupting of their respective gangs. Their words came to her too indistinctly for her eager ears. She gambled on opening the window another inch and swiftly following the attempt came disaster.

The noise of the sash raising in the frame attracted Solly Gold's attention. His head shot up and he glanced swiftly across the room. Sadie had been quick but not quick enough. The eyes of the other men at the table followed the direction of Gold's gaze, just in time to see a disappearing head. Instantly the men were on their feet, guns drawn. Gold took swift charge of the situation.

"You stay Lefty," he barked. "If he shows himself again, plug him. The same if he tries to get in the window. Come on Chink. We'll head him off down the alley."

Without waiting for more the two men barged out of the room onto the

street. They charged down the sidewalk and at top speed turned the corner into the alley. There was a sickening collision as they hurtled pell-mell into Sadie facing down from the opposite direction. The shock of their contact threw them apart for a moment, stunned, and Sadie's automatic was wrenched from her hand to go sailing off into the night in a wide parabola.

In an instant Gold had recovered and was on her. He threw one rough arm around her head in a hammer lock, at the same time clapping his foul hand over her mouth. Sadie struggled violently, viciously, with tooth, nail and hoof, but to no avail.

The Chink came to Gold's aid and between the two of them they managed to drag the twisting, squirming, struggling girl out of the alley onto the sidewalk.

Sadie knew their intention with her. If they once got her away from that place in a car—it was curtains. She fought like a mad woman with all the desperate abandon of an Amazon. But their combined weight was too much against her. Struggle as she might in their grip they slowly bore her to the curb and a waiting machine. Lefty came out to join them. He cursed bitterly at the sounds of struggle. Doubling up his fist, he pulled back and crashed a stiff-armed right flush to Sadie's jaw. She went limp with a little panting sigh, and then was still.

Like a heavy sack of wet wash they threw her into the machine.

At the height of the struggle before Joe's place, Shanty in his roadster turned into Christopher Street. He saw the swaying forms on the sidewalk and his first impulse was to charge down and investigate. Then his old gang sense asserted itself. That was an old gag—the street corner fight. The chances were that if he barged in on it, he would receive

a load of lead poisoning for his trouble.

He slowed down and approached cautiously. Dimly he made out the swaying figures of three men and a girl—and that girl was Sadie. His heart constricted. Trap or no trap, he was going to investigate. With one movement he jammed his foot on the gas and whipped out his blue steel Smith and Wesson .38 special. But even as his car gained momentum he saw that he was too late. He saw with an agonized heart the slugging blow that felled Sadie; saw her tossed like a limp rag into the waiting machine; saw the three men pile in after her and roar away.

SHANTY'S gun growled once and he took up the chase. A fusillade of shots answered him from the speeding car ahead. Then the two drivers, Shanty and Solly Gold, got down to the fine points of piloting careening machines at sixty miles per hour through the narrow back alleys of New York.

They saved their lead for more sure shots, or until it was a question of fighting it out with death. Now that the other car was trying to escape, Shanty was convinced that the fight on the street was on the up-and-up and that Sadie had been on the level with him concerning the tip off.

A great sigh of relief welled to his lips. Sadie, what a damn swell kid she was! He had known all along that she wouldn't play him dirt. And now she was being taken for a ride, for his sake; because he had tried to thrust onto her shoulders the responsibility for all his dumb mistakes. Well, he would make it up to her!

He nursed his throttle and spark and coaxed a few more revolutions out of his already straining engine. But ever the car ahead crept away from him. Corners were taken on two wheels with a skidding rush and

a tear. Early morning milk-wagons were somehow miraculously missed. L pillars were skimmed by inches.

Shanty cursed bitterly, futilely. The car ahead was out-distancing him; was now a full block away. His bus was traveling with all the sauce she had. The needle on the speedometer trembled around the seventy mark but no matter how he nursed the gas, he could not get it above that mark.

Suddenly the car ahead took the next corner on two wheels and disappeared. Ten seconds later Shanty made the same turn. A burst of lead greeted his skidding advent and spattered with a spray of flying glass through his wind shield. The escaping machine had tricked him and instead of continuing the flight had pulled up to the curb to finish him off as he passed.

A stabbing, searing pain ate into Shanty's breast. The car swerved crazily and it was only by a tremendous effort of will that he straightened it out and saved it from tangling disastrously around a lamp-post. His eyes became blood filmed. Shanty knew he was going out. Instinctively, before utter blackness fell over him, he shut off his gas and threw his gear shift into neutral.

A HALF hour later Shanty slowly climbed back to consciousness out of a deep well of blackness. His head throbbed abominably and a searing pain shot through his breast. He tried to sit up and found it impossible. He closed his eyes again and slowly his strength ebbed back into his racked body. A moment later he stirred again to discover that he was bound, hand and foot. His mind was blank and empty. His brow wrinkled as he concentrated his hazy brain on the events of the evening. Then slowly it came back to him. The phone call from Sadie; the fight on the street; the chase and the trap.

Then a low, strange, unfamiliar

sound attracted his attention. Shanty recognized it at last as the sound of weeping. A girl was crying softly by his side. He stirred.

"Shanty! Shanty! Tell me they didn't get you. Tell me you'll pull through," pleaded Sadie's tearful voice.

With a great effort Shanty slowly moved his lips and spoke.

"Sure, kid, I'll pull through," he muttered weakly.

The crying ceased. Sadie snuggled her young warm body up to the stricken one of the gang chief.

"I'm sorry, Shanty, sorry I got you into this," she whispered. "But anyway, it'll show you I didn't rat on you."

"I never really thought you did," answered Shanty. "It's okay, Kid, we'll pull out of this."

Their whispered conversation was abruptly cut short by the opening of a door. Solly Gold entered, holding a lamp before him, followed by Lefty and the Chink. The three traitors stood above the prostrate figures and gloated. To show his contempt, Lefty savagely kicked Shanty in the ribs with a heavy boot.

"So you've come to, have you?" he growled.

"Yes, I'm okay, you rat," answered Shanty. "What the hell's the big idea?"

"You'll find out soon enough," answered Gold. "Your days as a tough guy are over, Hogan."

"Let me up out of here, and I'll damn soon show you different."

"The only way you'll go out of this room is in a wooden box," laughed Gold. "Now just keep your mouth shut and nobody'll step in it. We got you where we want you. The next guy we're after is Little Hymie."

"Hymie is too slick a guy for you to get the way you got me," scorned Shanty.

"Well, if he's slick, we got a slick trick he'll fall for."

Without more ado, he bent down, grabbed the hem of Sadie's skirt and yanked. The flimsy material was rent in two, revealing a dainty array of silken underthings. The three mugs guffawed uproariously at Sadie's futile efforts to conceal her shapely limbs.

"Never mind that stuff, Sadie," laughed Lefty. "It all won't matter in a little while."

"What are you going to do with that skirt?" she demanded.

"Send it to Little Hymie. Even if he is on the outs with you, that Jew brother of yours will come looking for you hot foot if he thinks you're in trouble."

"So you're the three punks who've been playing the double-crossing act?" snarled Shanty.

"Punks, hell!" laughed Gold. "We got brains. After tonight we'll have the three gangs and all the gravy."

"Don't bank too much on that," warned Shanty. "The night ain't over and I ain't croaked yet. You might get a nice quiet funeral instead."

TEN o'clock next night found Little Hymie snoozing beer with his henchmen in his headquarters, back of the water front warehouse. A game of poker was suggested and in a few minutes the men were busily engaged in cheating each other out of huge sums of money which they in turn had fleeced from some one else.

A half hour after the game had been in progress, there came an interruption. The guard at the door ushered into the inner sanctum a little gutter-snipe with sniveling nose.

"There he is, kid," said the guard pointing out Little Hymie.

The street brat approached Zeiss with awe in his eye.

"Say, Mister, are you the guy they call Little Hymie?"

"Yep, that's me, son. What are you doin' here?"

"A broad give me this to give you," said the urchin and with the words he reached inside his greasy blouse and extracted the tattered remnant of Sadie's skirt.

Little Hymie took it from him and turned it slowly over in his hand a moment before he recognized it. Then he flushed and if his swarthy complexion would have permitted it, he would have paled a moment later. His arm shot out and grabbed the urchin with a vise-like grip.

"Where'd you get this, kid?" he demanded.

"Don't hurt me, Mister. I'll tell you."

"Well?"

"A lady give it to me. Shoved it out of a crack in a window. Told me to give it to you and to take you there. Said you'd give me a saw-buck, mister!"

"Anything you want, kid, if you can take me there."

"Sure. Come on. But do I get the ten spot?"

Little Hymie crushed a crisp bill into his hand, considerably larger than the requested saw-buck. Then, literally picking the boy from the floor, he strode towards the door.

"Need any help?" flung out Butch after him.

"No. I'll handle this alone," answered Little Hymie.

The brat led Little Hymie down many dark alleys and around many twisting corners. So sure was the gang chief that Sadie was in trouble, that he never once thought that he was being put on the spot. At last the urchin stopped before a dreary, three story red brick building on Mulberry Street. The place had every appearance of desertion and decay.

"That's the place, Mister," said the boy, pointing with his finger.

"All right, kid. Thanks. Now beat it!" growled Little Hymie.

The youngster took him at his word, turned and scampered down

the street, clutching the fifty dollar bill tightly in his fist.

Hymie eased the gun in his hip pocket and stealthily mounted the steps to the front door of the house. Slowly his hand went out to the knob. He tried it and to his surprise it turned. Gently he eased the door open a foot and then squeezed his massive bulk through the opening. Then as carefully, he closed the door behind him.

A faint rustling came from the dark shadows in his rear. Little Hymie spun around with lightning precision, but just too late. He felt the breeze fan his face before the blow struck. Then something murderously heavy sloughed down on his skull. He threw his hands up instinctively but the blow crushed home. He was conscious of a blazing flash of heliotrope made jagged with vivid streaks of red. The smoky taste of sulphur was in his mouth. Then utter blackness.

Little Hymie's knees sagged. Unconscious, out on his feet, he staggered forward for two steps, then crashed headlong to the floor. Where he lay, a thick pool of blood collected around his head.

THE three traitors to the gangs found China Cholly not so easy to deal with. One ruse after another failed to entrap him and as a last resort the rats had to carry out a daring piece of kidnapping right off the crowded pavements of the Bowery. True, they got China Cholly in an off moment and before he had a chance to make a draw, two blunt nosed automatics were grinding away at his guts.

It would have been asking for death then and there, to have refused the invitation to go for a ride. Silently China Cholly obeyed. He stepped into the car and crushed himself on the seat beside Lefty, closely followed by Solly Gold. The Chink took the

wheel of the machine and frisked them away to the sinister house on Mulberry Street.

When the thick skull of Little Hymie finally threw off the stunning effects of the blow he had received, he came to, to find himself amongst friends, as it were. At least, he had a very intimate knowledge of all those present in the room. Propped up against the wall on either side of him were his two underworld rivals, Shanty Hogan and China Cholly, and a little further on he saw with relief his sister, Sadie.

Facing them, leering, triumphant, sneering, were the three rats, automatics held suggestively in their hands. Little Hymie took in the motley gathering with a wry smile. Then he bravely essayed a grin.

"Jeez," he said, "I've been trying to get together with you mugs for a long time. And I'll be damned if I didn't have to be shanghaied to do it."

"And before the night's over you'll be dead!" croaked Solly Gold.

"Well," answered Little Hymie, "worse things than that have happened. But I ain't dead yet, see. I ain't dead till you plug me in the heart with a load of lead. And you, you crawling scum, you ain't got the guts."

"I ain't, ain't I?" flared out Gold. "Well, God damn you, I'll show you."

He raised his automatic, drew bead and would have fired point blank if Lefty hadn't knocked his gun down.

"Cut it out, you Sap!" he growled. "We don't want to croak 'em yet. They all got nice little bank balance we can collect in the morning. No use lettin' it go to the State."

"So," continued Little Hymie tauntingly, "you're the yellow, crawling vermin that's been doing all the double crossing around these parts. Faugh!" With the words he spat viciously at the three men standing over him.

Solly Gold suddenly flicked his wrist

and brought the barrel of his gun in a tearing slash across Little Hymie's face. The gangster took it without moving, without a mutter. His silence above the tap-tap of his blood dropping to the floor, was more deadly than a thousand words.

A long pause. Then:

"I'm telling you now, Solly Gold, you better plug me! If you don't, I'll tear out your heart!"

"Horse collar!" snarled Gold.

Then Little Hymie turned to the other captives.

"Fellas, I'm sorry for gettin' you wrong. I apologize."

Lefty had heard enough. He swaggered across the floor to the prostrate Jew and spat into his face.

"Well, Hymie," he began after this insult, "now that you've made your little speech, I'm going to give you the low down. Seeing what we intend to do with all of you, it's only fair. We're going out and start your three gangs off on the war path. When they've about cleaned each other out, then we'll step in, take over the works and consolidate. See? The Chink, Solly and me are going to be the big works. Get me? We're going to run the Underworld. We're going to run the rackets. We're going to get the gravy."

"And what about us, you double crossing, yellow livered pimps," sneered Little Hymie. "You think we'll lay down and take it?"

"You'll have to, Hymie. You'll lay down and take it in a coffin. You'll be dead, see? Come on boys, let's go!"

With evil, triumphant smiles on their lips, the three rats inspected once again on the bonds on their prisoners and then left the room. A moment later the outer door was heard to close behind them.

No sooner were they alone in the house than there was a concerted move on the part of the four prison-

ers to free themselves from their bonds. But they were well and cunningly tied. They squirmed and twisted and turned but their bonds held. In vain one tried to free another. The air was livid with profanity as they struggled with the ropes that bound them but what they needed then, rather than sharp tongues, were sharp knives.

But at all costs they must succeed in freeing themselves. If not, it was very possible that the three Rats would succeed in carrying out their threat of annihilation. They feared, not alone for themselves, but for their men, who even at that moment were being led into useless slaughter.

WHEN the three rats left the house and their prisoners on Mulberry Street, they immediately separated, each going off in a different direction. Lefty made tracks for Shanty's headquarters on Tenth Street, Solly Gold made for Little Hymie's warehouse on the west side and the Chink soon lost himself in the tangled streets of Chinatown.

A half hour later the three traitors had the three mobs worked up to the murder point. Men saw red and at the same time their chance of vengeance; a vengeance they had been seeking for months now. Brisk sharp orders were given and executed even before the words died out.

To the usual assortment of sawed off shot guns, revolvers and automatics, blunt, savage sub-machine guns were added and China Cholly's tong pulled off the racks their heaviest hatchets. This was to be a war of extermination. Within minutes of each other the three mobs left their respective headquarters and piled eagerly into their waiting cars. The advance was begun. All speed laws were broken that night, as the machines loaded with death and destruction, hurtled through the night streets of the city toward one another.

A HALF hour later, the prisoners on Mulberry Street were desperate. Despite their most strenuous efforts to free themselves, they were in exactly the same position as when their captors left them.

It was then, when all else had failed them, that Shanty Hogan had inspiration; inspiration of a very desperate sort, it is true.

"Listen you guys," he said, "I got an idea if you want to gamble on it."

"Shoot," said Little Hymie, "we can't be any worse off than we are now."

"Those wise guys left the lamp here," continued Shanty. "There's oil in it. We can set the damn joint on fire and let the fire department yank us out—if they get here in time."

For a moment they considered the proposition. Sadie was the first to break the silence.

"My vote goes in yes," she said.

"Me too," assented China Cholly.

"We'll gamble the roll," put in Little Hymie.

"Good!" grunted Shanty. "Now you guys and Sadie back into the other room. That'll give us a few minutes leeway, anyway."

They rolled, hobbled and lurched across the uneven floor and passed into the next room. Shanty was left alone. The oil lamp, burning brightly, was perched on a box in the center of the room. He scanned the dark corners of the place for a last time, judged the distance back of him to the door and then fell heavily into the box.

The lamp went down with a crash and a trail of flaming oil darted across the dusty floor. The old and mouldy wood took fire at once. In a moment the spongy walls took flame. Shanty waited to see no more. He rolled himself across the floor, away from the fire, towards the door, squeezed through and slammed it shut behind him.

Breathlessly the captives waited behind the slender barrier. Had they made a mistake? Had they been foolhardy? Was their end to be the fearful one of dread by fire? A thin wisp of smoke curled under the door jamb; then a flickering light lapped through.

A moment later they heard the ominous roar and crackle of flames in the next room. The air became uncomfortably warm, then stifling hot as the acrid smoke still continued to seep in to them. Sweat poured off them in streams. They gasped for air. They choked and their lungs were a living hell.

The roar of the consuming flames sounded like an orchestra of hell. The heat became terrific and the door that sheltered them from the raging inferno inside warped and bent. Well, anyway, they were going out in a blaze of glory.

Then above the seething hiss of the flames a shout sounded in the street outside. The alarm was given!

The four prisoners suffered all the agonies of hell for what seemed an eternity before the air was pierced by the screaming wail of a siren and the clang of engines. They willed to live through that bath of flame.

The clang and roar of heavy trucks and the swelling throaty cry of the gathering crowd in the street filled the room. A moment later dark forms appeared at the window. The panes of glass were shattered and three helmeted firemen clambered over the sill. At first they thought the prisoners there quite dead but a string of hurried orders and instructions from Shanty convinced them otherwise. In a thrice their bonds were cut and they were carried to the waiting ladders.

The fresh clean air revived them. Greedily they sucked it in in hungry mouthfuls and by the time they had reached the ground they were ready to carry on.

Four streams of water were now

playing on the blazing structure. The street was a bedlam of noise, cries and pounding engines. Under cover of the confusion, Shanty herded his three companions together and streaked them outside the police ring.

The red painted body of a police car caught his eye.

"This way, this way!" he urged and elbowed his way to the curb. "Jump in you guys. This is our best bet!"

Hymie, Cholly and Sadie were quick to obey and before the sweating policemen knew what had happened, the commandeered car was careening down the street in high. Shanty gripped the wheel in two strong hands while Little Hymie ground the siren to a high moaning wail.

Traffic officers cleared the streets for them for blocks ahead. Like a red juggernaut of doom the gangsters sped through the streets, their course of destruction speeded on by the hand of the Law. Sadie alone appreciated the humor of the situation and could not resist the temptation to thumb her nose at each flatfoot they passed.

THE three Rats, each one with the particular mob he had betrayed, did their work well. So well, in fact, that when the gangs converged from three points of the compass, in the neutral strip of territory between the East and West sides, flaming hell broke out with a cataclysmic roar. The heavy artillery went into immediate action and the sinister growl and rattle of sub-machine guns sounded like a skeleton's dance.

The gangs tore right up to each other and went into a desperate hand to hand conflict. No time this for seeking refuge down dark alleys; no time this for spotting off a bloke from the security of a roof top. There was bitter hatred between the men; hatred that could only be purged by personal contact.

A savage horde of madmen, a ragging mob of insane demons, the gangs

milled about the street, bleeding, sweating, cursing. Sawed off shot guns were jammed into enemy guts and emptied of their leaden poison; the asphalt became slimy with the tangled bowels of fallen men.

Ever and anon a pineapple would be dropped in the midst of half a dozen struggling gorillas, with the result that friend and foe alike were rent asunder by the flying shell.

The struggle was elemental, colossal! Here were bitter foes, struggling with brute force, face to face. There was no subtlety of brain in play here. There was no master mind strategy or ingenuity. Lust was given full play. Kill, kill, kill or be killed! That was the Law!

The massacre could not have lasted for long. There was only one inevitable outcome to it. Another half hour more and all there would have found a blessed annihilation in gory death.

Suddenly, however, there darted straight into the swirling haze of gun smoke, a streaking red car. With a scream of breaks it pulled up directly in the center of the fire. The advent of the hurtling machine was so sudden and unexpected that for a moment there was a lull in the bitter warfare.

The three gang chiefs were quick to take advantage of the brief respite. As one man they stood up in the captured police car, waved their arms violently and shouted hurried words. A terrible silence filled the air. The gang chiefs rejoined the torn and battered remnants of their once powerful organizations. Sobs of sorrow and hate struggled for dominance in their throats, as they surveyed the shambles.

And for this massacre three double crossing rats were responsible. God help them!

So great was their grief that they were momentarily stunned into inactivity. It was quick thinking Sadie alone who saved them from another

disastrous blunder. Her eye caught a furtive movement among the mob of restless gangsters, where the three rats edged their way to one of the parked cars.

Swiftly she wrenched a heavy colt .45 from a limp wrist and confronted the three traitors. A savage feline ferocity marked her face with terrible doom. Her lips curled evilly into a cruel smile revealing two rows of sharp white teeth. Teeth she would have been glad to sink into the traitor's throats.

The Rats fell back before her, more in fear of her passion-distorted face than of the threatening gun in her hand with which she covered them with a slow fan-like movement.

"Shanty!" she called. "The rats! Watch them or they'll make a get-away."

At her words the three Chiefs started towards her.

The traitors saw their plot go sky-high on Sadie's words. Death was all about them. They made a break and on the instant Sadie's gun barked three times. The three explosions came so close together that they sounded like one and the three Rats t u m b l e d simultaneously to the gutter.

Little Hymie rushed to his sister.

"What'd you do, kid," he asked hurriedly. "Kill 'em dead?"

"Hell no," replied Sadie. "Just drilled 'em to keep 'em quiet. I'm saving them for the boys to finish off proper. They deserve it."

A HALF hour later a weird and terrible scene was being enacted in a dirty, musty room of Little Hymie's warehouse. The three rats had been strung up by their wrists to a raftered beam in the ceiling and their ankles manacled together. Then the terrible revenge of the underworld began!

Each of the survivors of the now united mobs, all armed with evil,

glinting knives, marched by the dangling figures and slashed. It was a slow death! A torturous, horrible death. The blows were struck cunningly with hateful lust, just deep enough to torture, not deep enough to kill at once. For a half hour the gruesome retribution lasted, then silently the three Chiefs and Sadie, followed by their henchmen, left the scene of horror.

The three, dangling, disfigured, corpses bore mute testimony to the terrible revenge the Underworld wreaks on a traitor—a Rat!

"DRINKS, men, the best in the house for all of us," said Little Hymie when the mob had left the death chamber. "From now on the three gangs are one."

"And Sadie here," said Shanty, putting one arm affectionately around her, "has agreed to become Mrs. Shanty Hogan. It's this kid here, boys, that saved us all from being sent to hell by those stiff's inside."

Bottles of good Rye! Lifted glasses! A toast!

"Death to all traitors. Long life and prosperity to the new mob. A mob of Chink, Jew and Irish! Skoal!"

CHICAGO RUM DEATH ROLL SAYS "BACK TO ITALY" FOR JIM GENNA

Jim Genna's happy homecoming from Italy was interrupted rudely by his first experience in a Chicago police cell.

Once chief of a flourishing gang of alcohol cookers, Genna fled to his homeland four years ago after the murder of three of his brothers in gang battles. But Italy too was inhospitable. He spent two of his three years there in prison awaiting trial on a stock-fraud charge of which, he emphasized, he was eventually acquitted. Police in Chicago had never molested him, so he decided to come back to the "olive oil and cheese" business here.

Genna sat forlornly in his cell and listened to a recital of the list of his friends killed since he departed. John Stege, Deputy Police Commissioner, reminded him of the death of his brothers—Angelo, Mike and Tony—and then drew out one by one the photographs of the liquor racketeers that followed them.

"Tony Lombardo," Stege pointed a finger. "Shot to death."

"Smoots Amatuma," he pointed again. "Torpedo, John Scalise, Albert Anselmi, Tony Spano the cavallero, Henry Spingola—shot to death."

"Jim, you'd better get out of town or the newspapers will be carrying pictures of your funeral. You're sitting in the same seat in which five others sat when they were warned to get out of town. They have since been killed."

The Sicilian, who at times pretended he understood no English, jumped from the chair and walked nervously to a window, beating a tattoo on the radiator.

Genna was locked up to await a show-up before the Detective Bureau squads.—(From N. Y. World)

Pearls of Death

A Complete Racketeer Novelette

By WALT S. DINGHALL

To far off Ceylon reached the hatred born in New York's Under-world, and pearls obscured the Girl until the Girl vanquished the pearls!

CHAPTER I

PEARLS AND A GIRL

IT DOES not matter how Saunders happened to drift into Kuala Town. It is enough that he was there. At the height of the pearl fishing season Kuala is a home and haven for thousands of strange wanderers on the face of the earth.

The crystal waters of Pearl Bay, washing onto the reddish-brown coast with its background of impenetrable Ceylon jungle, bring with them fifty thousand human beings to mob the pole and mat shelters of Kuala Town.

A few weeks before, and weeks and weeks after the fishing is done, Kuala Town is nothing more than white sands and empty streets, forgotten under the paralyzing heat of the tropic sun.

But during the season, (and the government permits but six or seven weeks of pearl oyster gathering), the place is a raging metropolis. Everyone is there, every race: native Tamil, Chinese, Spaniard, Hindu, English, Arab, Burmese, American, Russian, German and Scandanavian.

And there came Saunders, the lean, tanned American.

He had the look on his face of a man who has tried his hand at almost

everything, with little luck and little less of hope.

He arrived in Kuala Town with not much of anything. He had his knowledge of the world and men and of out-of-the-way places where few white men had dared venture.

He did not even possess a change of clothes; but taut against his skin was buckled a money belt that held three hundred rupees. A modest fortune, it was his sole fortune. With it, he meant to try his luck at pearls. Pearls are a gamble like roulette or dice. A turn of the wheel and a man can become fabulously wealthy, a twist of the wrist and a rich man can become beggarly poor. Saunders knew that. But after all, it was the game he had been playing for the past ten years. It was the only game he knew.

At the sight of Kuala Town, his blood quickened its course. The pulsating life and vigor of the place enlivened him. The babel of tongues of a dozen or more races jarred in his ears, but not unpleasantly. And he liked to be jostled along the street by the surging crowds of natives.

He remembered having seen just such a crowd of anxious, impulsive human beings at the roulette tables of Monte Carlo, at the race tracks, at the gold fields of Alaska and the diamond mines of Africa. Back of them all, was the same motivating force.

In the very center of the town, Saunders paused on his way. Across the crowded street from him, was the only hotel the town afforded. It was uninviting enough, squalid and dirty. But it wasn't the hotel Saunders was interested in. It was a young woman on the porch, dressed in a yachting costume of white.

His eyes were afire as he watched her. She was not too tall, but slender and graceful. From the top of her hair of shingled gold to her white, canvas shoes, class was expressed in every line. A queen, Saunders confided to himself.

A white woman in Kuala Town was enough of a strange sight, but so handsome a creature, serene amidst the dirty milling mob, was nothing short of a mirage. He rubbed his eyes to look again, afraid that the vision would disappear. It didn't.

Saunders was not the only one whose gaze was arrested by the beautiful woman. A group of Arabs, crowded about the steps to the porch, were laughing hoarsely and one or two pointed a dirty finger at her. Saunders understood Arabic, even if the girl did not. He moved closer.

He knew what she did not know, that the Arabs were commenting on her bodily charms. He stirred in anger and before he could get to them, one of the group, bolder than the rest, strode up the steps to the girl. His companions' remarks egged him on. The girl smiled but backed away as he approached.

This time, Saunders did not hesitate. He shoved and writhed his way through the crowd, jostled the astonished Arabs from his path and in a bound was on the porch. The girl smiled to him as he came nearer, a confident, winning smile.

It was all he needed. With one hand, he wheeled the offending Arab about and with the other, hit him flush on the jaw. The Arab dropped without a sound.

INSTANTLY, there was a torrent of angry voices. The Arabs leaped up on the porch to retrieve their fallen comrade. Several drew knives and advanced threateningly on Saunders. He was crouched and ready. His lean body thrilled at the approaching battle.

The Arabs came forward warily, step by step. The hub-bub in the street increased.

Suddenly, the girl stepped in front of Saunders, facing the Arabs. They hesitated.

"Move off, pronto!" she ordered in a commanding voice. "Get out, before there's trouble."

The Arabs shifted uneasily. They did not know what to do. These Americans were far too bold to be attacked. In that instant, Saunders stepped beside the girl and let fall a whole string of invective in Arabic. He must have expressed himself succinctly, for a few seconds later the porch was clear.

A man emerged from the hotel door. He too was attired in a white yachting suit. Trailing behind him was the hotel proprietor, a swarthy Portuguese.

"What's wrong, Megs?" the man asked. "Someone told me you were in trouble out here."

"I was," she answered brightly. "But it's all right now, Nebby. Some fool Arab tried to get fresh and this man just showed him his place. Knocked him out with one punch."

She looked at Saunders with a dazzling smile. He could do nothing but grin sheepishly. The man in the yachting suit scowled.

"Enough of this foolish business," he growled. "We'll be getting back to the boat." He turned on his heel without another word or glance at Saunders, and walked off.

Megs seemed undecided a moment, then she too started away. "We're aboard the Miramar," she called back

to Saunders, "anchored in the bay. Come visit us some time."

She descended into that sea of swirling humanity that flowed along the street. Saunders watched the pair, angered by the cold-blooded rebuff of the man, fascinated by the girl.

So her name was Mews. His name was Nebby. A hand waved to him from the crowd. It was her hand. He waved back. Then he saw the girl's companion angrily shake her. She did not wave again. A moment later, the pair were out of sight.

Saunders heard a chuckle. He looked. Near the porch stood a white man, regarding him intently. Saunders looked at him sharply. The face disappeared.

"Not a very pleasant fellow, eh?" observed the hotel-keeper at Saunders' elbow.

"Who? What do you mean?" Saunders asked angrily.

The hotel-keeper shrugged his shoulders, implying it was no business of his. Nevertheless, he could not restrain offering his opinion.

"You befriend his wife," he said, "and he does not even thank you. Instead, he give you what is called the cold shoulder."

"She is his wife?" The question popped out of his mouth before he actually realized it.

"I not know for certain." The hotel-keeper smiled knowingly at the other's chagrin. "They here in Kuala Town maybe a week. Lady, she want to buy pearls for necklace. They have yacht in bay. She tell you, the Miramar. They must be plenty rich. I think she his wife, but I not know for certain."

"H'm," was all the comment Saunders could muster.

"Better look sharp for Arab fellers," the hotel keeper went on. "They treacherous. They try get you for hitting Arab feller."

Saunders muttered again; "H'm." And went inside.

CHAPTER II

"KILLER" REILLY'S PROPOSITION

BUT the Portuguese's warning was correct. Saunders himself knew enough of Arabs to have been wary. But he wasn't.

The pearl fleet had been towed into shore for the day and the shells had been dumped into the government clearing house where one third was returned to the divers and two-thirds retained by the government. Saunders felt out of sorts as night came on. It never occurred to him to seek the cause in the fact that a certain golden-haired girl was almost indisputably the wife of a certain boorish individual.

At any rate, tired of the crowds, he walked to the outskirts of the town where the poorly-thatched houses were thinner and the night infinitely clearer and more peaceful. There he stopped to light his pipe. Then he walked slowly down the line of trees toward the beach. Once he stopped to glance at the jungle on his right that loomed a dark threat in the night. He took off his sun helmet and carried it in his hand.

The glow of his pipe marked him clearly in the darkness.

There was no warning. Saunders neither heard nor saw the dark shadow that slipped up behind him. It was the Arab he had knocked down on the hotel porch. Saunders felt only that sky and earth had suddenly met on top of his head as a sandbag crushed him down.

But since the Arab remains an Arab, Saunders escaped death. This particular Arab had come for revenge. He had meant to kill, but finding his adversary prone at his feet, his swift fingers first searched his inert form for booty. There was

a grunt of satisfaction when the money belt was found. A wicked looking kris cut the clothes over it, and the money belt changed hands. Then the knife was lifted to slit Saunders' throat, but a soft sound warned the murderer that someone was approaching on the sands. Quickly, he searched the rest of Saunders' pockets, removing a pouch of tobacco, some matches, a little roll of rupees and some silver money. Then the Arab stealthily flitted away into the night.

When "Killer" Reilly passed the spot where Saunders' body lay, a blot against the light sand, he stopped, scratched his head, then whipped out a box of matches. It was his footsteps that frightened away the Arab and unwittingly saved Saunders' life.

Reilly struck a match and held it low, moving it the length of Saunders' inert figure. His keen, pig's eyes took in at a glance the details of Saunders' attire, the cracks in the leather of the shoes, the worn cloth of the white drill suit and the lines engraved-on the tanned countenance.

They told him clearly what Saunders was—a gentleman down on his luck. Reilly chuckled. When the match burned down almost to his finger-tips, he tossed it into the sands and struck another. This time, he allowed its feeble light to rest entirely on Saunders' face. Reilly chuckled again, even more delightedly.

The second match burned down. Reilly threw it to join the first, thrust his hand beneath Saunders' shirt and grunted approvingly. The heart was beating regularly. Then he drew forth a cigarette, squatted down on the sands, felt reassuringly for the gun in his pocket and settled himself to wait.

WAITING, he smoked cigarette after cigarette. In the dim light of their glowing ends, his face leered into the darkness. It was not

a pleasant face. A woman encountering it alone along a lonely way would stifle a scream and walk away as swiftly as possible.

It was the face of a killer. Low slanting forehead, shifting, stupid eyes set above a flat nose and a wide dissolute mouth. But Reilly was proud of his face. Back in civilization, it had been his passport to gangland. And together with his exploits earned him his proud nickname of "Killer."

The sandbag had done its work effectively. Saunders was out for almost a full hour. He came to by degrees. First, there was a hazy period of consciousness when his body writhed and fought to banish the blackness from his brain, then a gradual lifting of the fog about him; and finally, a realization of what had happened, of a splitting ache that throbbed his head, and of the fact that someone was sitting on the sands beside him. His first impulse was to seize this figure and throttle it, for he believed it to be his assailant.

"Easy, bo!" Saunders startled at the man's voice, at the slang.

"How," Saunders asked, "the hell do you come to be here?"

Reilly shrugged his shoulders. "Simple enough," he stated. "Found you stretched out here like you was a stiff. Sat down and waited till you'd come to. That's all."

"Do you know what hit me?"

"Must've been a ton of bricks from the way you panned out on your face," Reilly laughed. In spite of the pain in his head, Saunders could not help laughing with him.

"Stupid of me. Forgot to keep a lookout for those Arab swine," Saunders declared. "And I was warned against them, too."

"So an Arab got you, eh?"

"I reason it must have been," Saunders agreed dourly.

"Had a tiff with 'em, didn't you,

this afternoon, over a lady?" Reilly smiled almost benignly.

"Yes," Saunders answered hurriedly, "How did you know?"

"Oh," the other answered carelessly, "I watched your boxin' exhibition from a gallery seat."

Saunders tried to make out his features in the dark. "I think I remember you," he said. "Weren't you standing on the street near the porch when the lady walked off?"

"I guess I was," Reilly admitted. "Pretty lady, wasn't she? Swell dame!"

There was something in the other's voice that brought Saunders up sharp.

"Do you know her?" he asked suddenly.

"Sure," the other answered with a bitter laugh, "but we're not on speaking terms. I used to know her back in Nev York. What's it to you?"

"Nothing," Saunders rejoined lightly and fell to ruminating.

"What did the hold-up guy get from you, by the way?" Reilly asked.

Saunders had already missed his money belt and found his pockets empty.

"Everything," he answered briefly.

"Cleaned out, eh? Got any other dough cached away?"

"Not a cent!"

"Then I suppose you'll borrow."

"I haven't a relative or connection in this world. But that's all right. I'll come through. This is not exactly the first time I've started from scratch."

The other nodded, then shook his head. "There isn't much to do around a dump town like this, is there? Unless you can dive."

"I can't dive." Saunders struggled to his feet, but the effort sent waves of pain shooting through his head. He closed his eyes, and put a hand to his forehead. In spite of himself, he swayed slightly. The other was on his feet at once, offering a support-

ing arm. Saunders could not help but feel the amazing strength of the man. His arm was like a steel cord as it braced Saunders' shoulders.

"Where are you going?" Reilly asked.

"Back to town," was the curt answer.

"With empty pockets?" Reilly's voice was coolly insinuating.

Saunders shrugged.

"Something will turn up."

"You mean you'll work? You just said there's nothing to do here."

"A man does anything to eat," Saunders stated simply.

Reilly showed his uneven teeth in a bitter grin.

"This is from the shoulder, bo. Wanta work for me?"

SAUNDERS eyed his companion with keen eyes. He took in the low slanting forehead, the cruel lips.

"What can I do for you?" he finally demanded.

"Plenty," was the laconic answer. "I have business that needs attending to. You're the man for me, if you want the job. There'll be plenty of money."

"This is nothing you're just er, fixing for—charity?" Saunders was taking a shot in the dark.

Reilly guffawed. "Charity? Me, charity? Listen, mister, I don't mind telling you right now, I'm known back in the States as 'Killer' Reilly. But that's none of your biz, see? Me, charity?"

And again, Mr. Reilly permitted himself the luxury of a wolfish yowl. He would have described it as laughing from the belly.

"But get this, mister," Reilly suddenly continued. "My business may sound easy. Maybe, it is. But it can turn out to be dangerous, see? I don't know. Are you afraid of being bumped off?"

The lean, tanned face of Saunders did not change in expression as Reil-

ly talked. But when the other had finished, he asked briefly: "Is there anything crooked in it?"

Reilly's face snapped shut, a dangerous gleam in his shifty eyes. This time he did not laugh. "That will not be part of your job or any of your business, bo," he said. "Crooked? Not to me, maybe to you. I don't know and don't give a damn. Your end could be called spy-work. I'm not sure. But what I'm going to do you can keep out of altogether. There'll be plenty of money for your work, and from what I saw this afternoon, you're the man for the job. Furthermore, you'll keep your mouth shut about anything you do happen to learn. Crooked? Maybe yes, maybe no. It's a little matter of revenge if you really want to know."

"Then you will not tell me?"

"Christ, no!" Reilly was vividly emphatic. "D'you think I was born a fool? No mister, I'm not telling you my business, not yet."

Saunders peered into the other man's face. He realized that this business the man was alluding to, was not just the sort he would readily engage in, but he thrust his scruples aside.

After all, he had knocked about the world for ten years. In that time, he had acquired a little hardness, some bitterness. And here he was in Kuala Town, dead broke, robbed of his last stake.

"All right," he said without emphasis, "I'm with you for anything short of murder."

"Reilly is the name," the other chortled, "Reilly. Put it there. I knew you had the guts to join up with me." He thrust forth his hand.

Saunders had little scruples about shaking it. "I'm Saunders," he introduced himself. "I guess you're American, too."

"Right you are," Reilly responded. Saunders was now able to walk un-

supported. They were reaching the bright lights of Kuala Town.

"What do you want me to do?" Saunders asked.

"Right on the job, eh? Well, you'd better wait for the morning. I'll tell you just what I want first thing in the morning. Meanwhile, here's a part of your salary. This job pays at once. This'll pay for your hotel room and breakfast. Ta, ta, for the present. See you in the morning." And Reilly departed, leaving Saunders at the steps of the hotel.

CHAPTER III

KISS AND BETRAY

SAUNDERS was on the hotel porch shortly after sunrise. Kuala Town had not completely quieted down for a moment all through the night, and now at dawn, it fairly seethed with activity.

Over the waters of Pearl Bay, the great, round sun-ball shot the clouds full of brilliant colors and the bay itself was like a glitter of diamonds shooting back the light.

The pearl fleet had already been towed out to the rocky inlets that are like little fingers of the bay and in which lie the oysters in depths of four to ten fathoms. The high peaked little boats, much like sampans, had cast off from the steam trawlers and were now jockeying for their positions for the day. Their sails slatted in the breeze and their crowded decks were wild with confusion as divers prepared for this work. The day in Kuala Town had begun.

Shortly after Saunders had finished his breakfast and was smoking his first pipe on the porch, Reilly appeared. In the daylight, Saunders' respect for his employer vanished. He had not imagined he was working for such a man, and he would gladly have escaped his duties. But having already accepted money from him,

there was nothing for it but to see Reilly through. Reilly was amiable.

"Good morning," he boomed. "How's the head?"

"Well enough," Saunders responded, as the other leered at him, he asked; "What am I to do today?"

"Ready for business, already?" the other asked. "Good, come down to the landing with me. I've chartered a little launch there. You're going to make use of it."

Together they walked down to the beach and onto the low narrow, pile-supported landing. At the end, a trim little launch was secured. It rode the swell easily and the off-shore wind had pushed it out to the length of its rope. It looked like a secure sea boat and would hold three or four comfortably. Reilly was now all business.

"Can you manage it?" he asked. Saunders nodded. He knew machinery, and there would be no trouble on that score.

"Well, bo," continued Reilly, eyeing him narrowly. "A lady invited you yesterday to visit her aboard the Miramar."

"Yes," responded Saunders. "What of it?"

"Just this. Now get it straight. You're going to visit her all right, today. A social call, y'understand? That other guy on board, you know who I mean, the tough bird who wouldn't give you a tumble yesterday, isn't going to like it. The hell with him. Play your game with Megs." Saunders looked astonished. "It's all right," continued Reilly, "I know the girl. She'll be glad to see you."

"Is that all I'm to do?"

"No there's more. You get on board and I don't care how you do it, but you're going to get a plan of the cabins, see? Where each of them sleep. The girl and that guy. That's all. When that's done, your work's done."

Saunders calmly relit his pipe.

Carelessly his eye watched the pearl-fleet. Then he turned squarely around to his companion.

"Look here, Reilly," he said quietly. "If you think I'm going to help you rob anybody, you're just mistaken. You've got the wrong man for the job."

Reilly's eyes narrowed dangerously. Saunders noticed his hand feel inside his coat pocket. A revolver was plainly outlined there. Then Reilly laughed his wolfish yowl, and withdrew his hand.

"Just to assure you, I'll tell you this much. There'll be no robbery," he stated. "But if you're going to back out now, why it just won't be healthy for you. You know too much already, see?" And he thrust his jaw out menacingly. Saunders was sorely tempted to let fly at that craggy jaw, but he held his peace. What was the man's game? What had the girl to do with it? If he followed orders, he would find out.

"Forget it, boss," he said lightly. "I forgot myself. I guess I got no right in my position to stop at anything short of murder."

"Now you're talking," Reilly agreed, "you get that plan, give it to me, I pay you and you beat the country. At once, y'understand and no questions asked. Now get into the launch and make for the Miramar. Take all the time you want cruising about, enjoying yourself." And Reilly walked off.

THE beach, the landing place quickly dropped astern. The stout little launch headed out to the open sea, the Miramar and the pearl-fleet. Saunders was in a brown study as he handled the little tiller. He had accepted working for Reilly. What it would bring he did not know. But at any rate he would have an opportunity of meeting the girl again.

It was too early in the morning to proceed to the Miramar, so Saunders

instead headed for the pearl fleet. He had dug for diamonds in Africa, prospected for gold in Alaska, now he would see how men wrested pearls from the bosom of the sea.

Oyster gathering was in full swing as the launch neared the fleet of high-peaked boats. Saunders steered casually for the nearest boat, painted a bright yellow, bizarrely hung over its spars and rigging with turbans, colored burnoses and other bright colored articles of clothing.

Some twenty men crowded the deck and as the launch drew in, gay voices hailed him. Saunders waved, shut off the motor and drifted in closer where he could plainly see the divers. They were all busy and paid no attention to him.

It was an Arab boat. Saunders heard the soft inflections of that tongue as he moved close. He watched the diving curiously.

Each diver's manduck or helper on deck had two ropes in his hands which ran down into the water. At the end of one rope was attached a stone as a sinker and at the end of the other, a net basket.

The diver would fasten a clip on his nose, slip his foot through a loop in the rope with the sinker and descend swiftly to the bottom with the basket in his hand. He would gather shells for a minute or so and then jerk on the rope for his manduck to haul him up. The shells would be taken out of the net and packed on the deck of the boat.

In spite of the confusion that seemed to reign aboard, the divers went up and down with monotonous regularity.

Saunders suddenly stiffened and took the pipe from his mouth. A tall Arab, naked save for a loin cloth, had stalked from the middle of the boat to the side. He stood talking to his manduck a moment.

There could be no mistake. It was the Arab whom Saunders had knock-

ed down in Kuala Town, undoubtedly the same Arab who had attacked Saunders on the beach only the night previous. The man's nose was big, his lips thick and cruel looking. He gazed idly over the side, saw the launch and a moment later, its navigator. He gave a snort of anger and retired quickly amidships.

Saunders noted the number painted on the boat and then started for the Miramar. He had mentally resolved to settle his score with that particular Arab. Meanwhile, he would visit the yacht that lay half a league westward.

As he pulled abreast the yacht, a white, graceful, two-masted boat, Saunders throttled the motor and hailed. The head of a Malay seaman appeared over the side.

"Ahoy," called the sailor. "What is the Tuan's pleasure?"

"Is the white master and lady aboard? Tell them, I have come to visit them." The head disappeared and a moment later, Saunders heard a musical laugh, followed by the appearance of the golden head of the girl.

"Oh, it's you," she called down. "I knew you'd come."

"Couldn't resist your invitation," Saunders called back gaily. "May I come aboard?"

She smiled in answer. The Malay sailor caught the line Saunders threw, and the launch was made fast. A Jacob's ladder was dropped over the side and a moment later, Saunders was facing the girl.

"Come here, there's an awning and the sun isn't so strong," the girl said. He followed her to the stern and took a seat beside her on a canvas deck chair.

"My name is Saunders," he said, "Howard is the first name."

"Mine's Marie Carnahan. Mugs to my friends. Thanks for helping me out yesterday."

"It was nothing. The Arab de-

served all he got. He's going to get more."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

In a few words he told her of the assault on him, leaving out of course his encounter with Reilly. He told her also of locating the Arab as a diver.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Get him," was the grim reply. For a moment both were silent. Megs looked out over the water that was crystal blue. Saunders covertly watched the fine line of her profile. She was a beauty. Like the passion flowers he had seen in the depths of the jungle. She caught him staring at her and there was not even a faint symptom of a blush. Evidently, she was accustomed to being admired.

Saunders almost stammered. He felt embarrassed but the question must be put. "Where is your, er, your husband?" he finally blurted out.

"My what?" she asked in bewilderment.

"That man with you yesterday. I thought he was your husband."

The air tingled with peals of her laughter. "Nebby, my husband? That's too funny!" and again she laughed heartily.

SAUNDERS laughed with her. Much as he would have liked to bite his tongue for having asked such a question, he nevertheless felt relieved. So that boor wasn't her husband after all! The sun shone brighter.

He liked too, the easy camaraderie of her attitude towards him. It was plain to see she was accustomed to the society of men, being neither shy nor overbold. Nevertheless, each glance she gave him made it more sure that he was to be her captive. On the surface, it seemed she was more than palpably interested in him.

"Nebby has gone off to Kuala Town," she said significantly.

"On business?" asked Saunders.

"Yes. He and I are partners in this pearl racket."

"You are in the pearl business?"

"Just started. First we get a necklace for me and then we buy some to sell in America. Maybe we'll escape paying the customs tax that way."

Something in her tone, a note of amused tolerance in handing out this information convinced Saunders she was lying, hiding the truth from him. There was some game being played here that Reilly wanted a hand in. This Nebby and the girl were slick, he had to admit that.

Their game whatever it might be was well covered by the presence of a yacht and their pose as millionaires, anxious to buy pearls for madam. But this puzzled him. How in the world did a creature like Reilly ever get to know Megs so intimately, and why in the world should Megs live aboard a yacht with such a man as this Nebby?

He remembered his mission. He rose, "Is there any ice water aboard? I'm thirsty."

"Call the steward," Megs answered, "There's a pitcher of lime-juice and water below."

This was the chance Saunders had been waiting for. "Don't bother," he said. "I'll get it myself."

"All right. I'll show you where."

Together they went down the companionway and entered the little saloon. They passed two cabin doors. "Yours?" Saunders asked. "Nice little place."

"The one to the right is mine," Megs declared. "The other over there is Nebby's."

Saunders nodded and made mental note of the arrangements below. He could go back and give Reilly a complete report. But would he? The girl was pouring a drink in a tall glass.

"Shall I add some gin and make a ricky?" she asked.

"I wouldn't mind," Saunders laugh-

ed. "If only for the fact that it will give me a chance to drink a toast to you."

Megs came closer. Saunders lifted his glass. "To the most beautiful girl I have ever seen." And he gazed deeply into her eyes, then stared at the rich carving of her breasts under the low-cut neck line.

Saunders drained the glass. With outstretched hands he took hers and held them. "I meant what I said a moment ago," he whispered.

As if a sudden flash had blinded him, he had her in his arms, hardly realizing what he was doing. He was kissing her, wildly, madly. Her face, her lips, her throat, her arms. She pushed him back but there was no anger in her voice.

"You're not so slow, Mr. Saunders."

"I'm sorry, I'm—"

"Oh, don't apologize. It was rather sudden, but I can't say I minded it much. You sort of took me off my guard."

"Then you forgive me?"

"Forgive you? Foolish boy." And she threw her arms about him and crushed his lips to hers. The next instant she was on the other side of the room, her eyes bright as if kindled with a strange fire, her lips parted. "Now that's all," she said significantly, "for today."

Saunders' brain was in a whirl. So this was the girl he meant to betray to Reilly. He didn't care who she was. She was going to be his. She was going to be his woman! Abruptly, he faced her.

"Megs," he said clearly, "do you know a man by the name of Killer Reilly?"

CHAPTER IV

THE WIND CHANGES

FOR a moment her face blanched, a shudder ran through her. Then she shrugged her shoulders lightly.

"The name's familiar. Maybe I do."

Saunders ignored her play. "Reilly," he stated, "is in Kuala Town."

This time there was no mistake. Megs' face disclosed a hunted dread. "How did he ever get here? He must have followed us!"

"I can't say. He aims to come aboard this yacht. That's all I know."

"Aboard here? Reilly? My God, he mustn't!" She braced herself and looked bravely at Saunders. "Let him come. I'm not afraid of him, he's got nothing on me, the rat. He's out of prison two years. It's a shame he wasn't there for life."

"So he was in prison?" asked Saunders.

"Him?" Megs laughed scornfully, "The cops had everything on him from arson to murder. But all they did prove was a robbery. He got four years."

"Let me help you," Saunders pleaded. He was close to Megs and his arms went about her. Her warm breath made his blood pound.

She searched his face keenly. "Saunders, Howard I mean, keep out of it. Reilly is a killer. But he won't get me. I can handle him."

"He won't have a chance to get you!"

Just then from above decks came the noise of a tender pulling alongside the yacht, then footsteps across the deck and down the companion-way. "It's Nebby come back," Megs whispered. "Don't say a word of Reilly." His hands clung to her shoulders, caressed her breasts, but she released herself slowly.

She went out leaving Saunders alone. The door of the saloon was left slightly ajar.

Saunders heard her say in a cheerful voice. "Hello, Nebby, back so soon!"

And then the man's voice, gruff but exultant.

"Back, Megs. And I got it. The old fool. I got him into the hotel

room. Told him we wanted to buy a dozen pearls. He brought a bagful with him to show me. It was easy. A knife, no noise, and here they are!"

"Nebby, quiet!"

"What's the matter? We're aboard our yacht, ain't we?" Then quickly "Think of it Megs, we're rich! This swag'll hold us for life!"

"Quiet, Nebs! There's someone else aboard."

The door to the saloon was pushed open. In the doorway loomed the figure of Nebby, his face disfigured by a scowl, etched deep into his features.

"Oh, it's li'l Lord Fauntleroy, is it?" he sneered. "Well, how much have you heard?"

Saunders shook his head. "Nothing that I would care to repeat to anyone," he stated.

"Well, you'd better not." Nebby's hand rested inside his white jacket. "Who asked you aboard? Get out!"

Saunders' eyes flashed from Nebby's livid face to Megs behind him. She nodded her head and pointed above decks.

"Alright," Saunders was nonchalant, "I'll go."

The two followed him up, Nebby glowering. As Saunders was stepping over the side, Nebby grasped him by the shoulder. "I've a good mind to put you where I put that pearl merchant," he gritted.

Saunders grinned. "What for? I've already told you that whatever I heard is for no one else's ears. In fact, I've forgotten it altogether."

As he started the motor up, Saunders glanced back once more. Megs was leaning over the rail. She waved her hand. She smiled and an unspoken word crossed her lips. It was a secret understanding between them that needed no speech.

When Saunders reached the landing, he expected to find Reilly waiting for him, but he was nowhere to be seen. Saunders was not disappointed. He wanted some time any-

way to think over what had happened between him and Megs. It seemed incredible that he had actually held her in his arms. He thrilled as he remembered the one passionate kiss she had imprinted on his lips.

As he neared the town, coming off the beach, he noticed an unusual commotion above the usual frenzy of the crowded streets. Business in Kuala Town was at a standstill. Arab, Burmese, Hindu, Chinese, Spaniard, Russian, German and Tamil were gathered in hundreds of little knots exchanging excited gossip. What had happened? Saunders asked the nearest man to him, an aged Hindu.

"Ah, Sahib," was the answer, "Abd-el-adab, the Arab pearl merchant, the richest man in Kuala Town, whose wealth in pearls was worth that of two sultan's kingdoms, was found murdered in a room of the hotel, his pearls gone!"

SAUNDERS' mouth closed tightly. The theft had already been discovered. Should he tell what he knew? He thanked the Hindu and went on. At the hotel, he encountered Reilly.

"You haven't been gone long," Reilly said in greeting, as his little eyes searched Saunders' face keenly.

"No, his Nebs came back quickly and ordered me off."

"What did you find?"

"I have the plan in my head. I can draw one for you."

"Good. Did Nebby ask any questions? Did he try any rough stuff?"

"No, he was jealous, but that's all."

"Nebby was in town," Reilly said slowly. "I saw him here."

"Did he see you?" Saunders asked.

"No, that wouldn't do, that's why I hired you. But Nebby was in town, left for his ship and then this pearl merchant is found dead, robbed." Saunders tried to look disinterested. Suddenly, Reilly turned to him. "You're not a fool, Saunders," he said flatteringly. "I think I can lead you to

a good thing. He lowered his voice, "Nebby killed that old man. I know he did because I know Nebby and know why he's here. Come with me."

He took Saunders' arm and led him away. Saunders suddenly wheeled about. He had sensed rather than felt a pair of eyes boring into his back. As he looked, a figure was lost in the crowd. It was dressed in a burnoose.

"There was a man listening to what you said," Saunders remarked to Reilly. "I don't know how much he heard, but I feel sure it was the same man who robbed me last night."

"Never mind him now," Reilly laughed, "there's bigger things ahead." And he led the way to a bar where they could sit at a table a little apart from the rest, in comparative security.

"Now," said Reilly over his Scotch and soda, "here's a proposition for you. I was going to swing it alone but Nebby's little job changed my plans. There's more in it now. You're in with me. You know how the land lays on that yacht." He leaned forward and continued in a whisper. "Nebby stole a fortune in pearls from that guy he croaked. I'll give you a little lesson in hi-jacking and the pearls are ours. Your job will be to get the pearls, mine to get Nebby, for private reasons."

"I see," Saunders commented. He looked interested. Reilly's game was plain. On the spur of the moment, Saunders decided to act as if he were ready to join forces with the Killer. The girl....

"Glad you do, Saunders," Reilly agreed, "Tonight we start and tonight we'll be rich." The deal seemed closed.

"Just out of curiosity, Reilly, I'd like to know what you have against Nebby. Besides the pearls, you see. What's the game in tracking him down?"

Reilly's face blackened, his clenched

fist smote the table. "That rat," he almost yelled. "Well, I don't mind telling you, Saunders. We're partners, now. Nebby and that girl!" He paused to sip from his glass. "It goes a long way back, almost eight years. D'you wanna listen?"

Saunders nodded.

"**I**T WAS in New York," Reilly began. "Megs was a kid then, about sixteen, but smart as a whip. We was in a gang, did all kinds of jobs, and Nebby was leader. He was smart, too, I got to hand it to him. We had plenty of jack and Megs was my girl. Understand she wasn't just a gun moll. I told you the kid was smart. She fixed up plenty of jobs we'd never thought of and she was pretty. Christ, she was pretty! Had to fight the whole gang to keep her!"

"Not that it did me much good. She didn't like me enough to spit on me. A little hell-cat! But I held her! I could lick any man in that gang and my gun could talk pretty quick.

"Nebby fixed our jobs. He was the brains and Megs helped him. I'm not so much on brains. My strong stuff is with the gun. Well, Nebby got too high falutin' to please any of the boys. He'd rig out in a tux and go carousing about town with swell people, actors and guys that write books and plays.

"We didn't say nothing, at least I didn't until Nebby looks Megs over and decides she'll do to trot along with him. They went around pretty often until it came to a show-down. I had my gun ready to shoot but Nebby told me not to be a fool. He would lay off Megs if I wanted him to. That was O. K. with me, so I didn't kill him. Just about then, he comes to me with a little proposition. A job in a home of a certain rich guy. He gives me the plans of the house and tells me to hop to it. I didn't suspect nothing. He told me he wasn't sending any of the boys

with me. He could trust me alone. It was a one-man job.

"I went and of course found the place planted with bulls. They winged me before I could shoot and the judge gave me four years, an easy come-off, considering. They couldn't prove much on me. I was in the stir less than a month before I got wind from my pals that Nebby and Megs skipped the country together. Then I hear that that Long Island job was fixed, just as I thought. Megs planned it to get rid of me. They had hoped I'd kill a bull and get the chair but their luck wasn't so good.

"Me, I stayed in that stir, waiting and praying for the day I'd get out. Most guys would let it go. But not me. And I was still crazy about Megs then.

"Well, Megs and Nebby never came back to the gang. They never came back to America. I did a couple good jobs when I got out, and with that money, started looking for them. It wasn't hard to trace 'em. They'd been in Europe, wanted in almost every tin-pot country for swindle schemes. I could see Nebby was using his brains some. No gun play for him, no killings. This last job he pulled here in Kuala Town is a bit out of his usual style.

"Anyway, I was just a bit too slow every time I thought I'd caught up with 'em. Once in Monte Carlo I almost had them. I had one shot at Nebby in a dark street. I missed. He saw my face and ran. Megs and he had pulled a swell racket with some rich blokes. It was mostly Megs' idea. So the next morning, they pulled out with a load of cash and that yacht they have now in Pearl Bay.

"Since then, they've been in the East, everywhere. This is the first time in two years, I've caught up with 'em by Christ, I'm going to get them. They don't know I'm here. I've kept under cover pretty well.

"I wasn't going to drag you in. But

those pearls make a difference. We get that, too. Split fifty-fifty. Only leave Megs and Nebby to me."

Saunders nodded and affected a careless wave of the hand.

"I don't care much what you do to them," he said, "as long as we get the pearls."

"That's where you're talking sense," Reilly commented. "I want Nebby alone when he lamps me face to face in the same room. And Megs, I've got something pleasant fixed for her, too."

Saunders involuntarily shuddered, but his face displayed none of his emotion.

"**A**LL FIXED," he said, "tonight? About two in the morning when this town's a little more quiet. The Miramar is too far from shore to disturb our little social call. I'll pick you up at the hotel."

Saunders nodded again and left Reilly alone over his drink.

The streets of Kuala Town still seethed with buzz of angry voices, Arabs mostly, discussing the murder and robbery of their comrade. Kuala Town, for all its apparent lawlessness, was not accustomed to such high-handed robberies.

Nothing like it had happened in years. Saunders seemed to be walking without a disturbing thought in his head, but in reality, his eyes keenly scanned each of the groups he passed. He was looking for a certain Arab, but that individual was nowhere to be seen.

On the verandah of the hotel, Saunders encountered the good-natured Portuguese proprietor, who at the moment was occupied in shooting off the curious come to have a look at the body of the slain merchant.

"Bad business, Mr. Saunders," the Portuguese greeted him with a groan. "Devilish bad business, and in my establishment."

"Is there no one you suspect?" Saunders asked casually.

"Ah, senor, I have my suspicions, but what is one to do?" He lowered his voice cautiously, "The Arab riffraff suspect, too. You know whom?"

"I can't say that I do," Saunders remarked.

"Well, I will tell you. You are a gentleman of honor. You will not divulge a secret, no? Well, all signs point to the gentleman in the yacht. You know whom I mean?"

Saunders feigned surprise. "Not him!"

"I do not speak for certain, senhor," the Portuguese hastened to add. "But you see, he was the last to be seen with the pearl merchant. Understand?"

Nebby had blundered badly. He had not even taken the trouble to cover his tracks.

Saunders spoke aloud: "I cannot believe it! But what do the Arabs think?"

"They place the blame on him, too. In fact, I've heard talk, quiet talk, you understand not meant for my ears, of a raid."

"A raid? on whom?"

"On the yacht, on the man and woman. Perhaps tonight."

"You have heard this?" Saunders asked.

"I do not speak for certain, senhor. Only what I have overheard. I may be mistaken, but I do not believe so."

"Then this raid comes tonight?"

"So I have heard. It may be talk, but Moslems, if the senhor knows the East, are quick to revenge one of their fallen brethren!"

CHAPTER V

BLADE MEET BULLET

THE FULL MOON that hangs over Pearl Bay like a lantern, had not yet risen; the night was fathomless darkness. Megs stood in

the faint spot of light that came up from the open companionway, and peered uncertainly around. Nebby, in the bow, hailed her softly.

As she made her way cautiously forward, her eyes became accustomed to the darkness; she distinguished the tiny red end of Nebby's cigarette. She put one between her lips and lit up.

"How long will you be out here?" she asked wearily.

"All night," Nebby replied briefly.

"What's the idea?" she asked. "If you're afraid of their coming for you, why don't we set sail and skip?"

"Can't," Nebby answered sharply. "Tide's out. No wind. That's just our luck. Have to wait for dawn. Now get below and fetch some sleep."

"No, I'd rather stay on deck awhile. If anything's going to happen, I want to see it. But I guess nothing will."

"Can't say. That's just the trouble."

"Oh, Nebby, we have to get out. Is there no way of moving from here? Absolutely, no way?" She was pleading.

"Say, you're pretty scared. What's the matter, lost your nerve?"

"No, I'm just sick of the game, that's all."

"Wanta quit?" he challenged.

"Yes," she breathed defiantly. "I'm just sick of it. It's, well it's exciting, of course, but . . . What's the use? You wouldn't understand, anyway."

"Maybe I do."

"Oh, you do?" She was scornful.

"Sure I do. That guy Saunders, lil' Lord Fauntleroy. That's where your trouble lies. For two cents, Megs, I'd swear you're in love with that guy."

"Save your money," she advised scathingly. But there was an odd light in her eye as she answered.

"Better get that stuff out of your head, Megs," Nebby stated calmly. "You're too clever to be in love."

"You never were in love with me, were you Nebby?"

"No, you and me are partners, that's all. We've done pretty well together without bothering about love. Get that?"

"I got it. Now you get this. I'm not worrying about Saunders. That's my own affair. But here's something for you to worry about. 'Killer' Reilly is in Kuala Town!"

"The hell you say! He can't be!"

"He is. Saunders told me this morning when you chased him off the ship. That's why we ought to sail away tonight while we can."

"We can't sail. I told you that. But I'm not going to pull the white feather for Reilly. He shot at me in Monte Carlo and I ran. I'd like to meet him again. He's been hounding us long enough. This," he pulled out a knife, "or this," his other hand disclosed a thirty-two automatic. He said no more.

Little more passed between the two after that. Megs settled herself in a deck chair. She was going to remain on watch with Nebby. Nebby posted one of the Malay sailors in the bow, another in the stern and one amidships, ordering them to report any suspicious noises, no matter how slight. The wind was off-shore and the Miramar lay bow-on to the land.

Out over the water, they could see the lights of Kuala Town, atwinkle in the dark. Some forty or fifty thousand human beings were there, a little more than half a mile away. But the Miramar, dark save for her three riding lights, might as well have been thousands of miles away. Silently, she rode on her anchor—waiting.

IT WAS PAST midnight. Nebby was growing sleepy. Megs was awake and alert. Suddenly, startled, she shook her head as if to clear it and peered out over the water. She strained her hearing. The rhythmic

putt-putt of a motor launch, quiet but insistent in the night, came to her ears.

For a moment, the sound was lost, but then unmistakably, it carried to her on the off-shore wind, nearer and nearer. Five minutes later, it seemed alongside the bow and only a few feet out. Then the noise stopped and the night was quiet again. Quickly, she roused Nebby.

At the news, he tensed, brought forth his revolver from his pocket and cocking his head on one side, listened. He heard nothing.

"False alarm, Megs," he said evenly.

"No, no. I heard a boat, I tell you."

She was right. Less than five feet from the Miramar, its motor shut off, was Reilly's launch. His plan now was to drift up to the Miramar and board her from the stern, making fast the launch to any stray rope that might hang there. Saunders, at the tiller, was silent but expectant.

He had decided on his course. He would slip aboard with Reilly and guide him to Nebby's cabin. Then, he would get Megs into the launch and make for Kuala Town, leaving Reilly and Nebby to settle their own dispute.

But just as the launch was soundlessly made fast, another sound came clearly across the water. Saunders and Reilly in the launch and Megs and Nebby on the yacht, listened intently. A muffled thump and splashing such as might be made by one not very familiar with the use of oars. Then another thump and another splash. It was clear. Two rowboats were coming from Kuala Town in the direction of the Miramar.

"The Arabs," Saunders breathed into Reilly's ear.

"Damn 'em," was his comment. "We'll have to work fast now and vamoose with the pearls before they find us here."

On the deck of the Miramar, Nebby had already unsheathed his knife and laid it beside him on the rail. In his hand, gleamed his automatic.

"That's what you heard, Mags," he told her. "Rowboats. Go below now. Call the Malays here."

The Malays came forward and the five of them listened to the stealthy approach of the unknown boats. Mags went down the companionway to her cabin, but on the steps, she paused, undecided whether to descend or stand it out with Nebby whatever might come. Then she thought of Saunders with something like a pang at her heart.

He had come into her life unexpectedly, and at a time when the roving partnership with Nebby was beginning to lose its charm. She was tired of running away. And Saunders was after all, the only man she had ever known who truly admired and respected her. She had seen that in his eyes, and it was a refreshing experience. Perhaps, he even loved her. She sighed and laughed at herself for sighing. Perhaps Nebby was right. She was in love! She ran her small hand over the voluptuous curves of her hips and thighs and thought yearningly of his strong sunburned back.

Upon deck, Nebby strained every nerve to catch the sound of the oars, coming closer. He had no doubt the rowboats were making for the Miramar. No one, he knew, would be abroad so late at night on legitimate business.

He was not afraid. His life had been spent fleeing the law, fleeing revenge, fleeing retribution.

As he leaned over the rail, staring into the inky blackness, one of the Malays touched his arm.

"You hear!" the man hissed in his ear. "You hear!"

"The rowboats? Yes."

"No, Tuan," the Malay whispered.

"The footsteps of men in the stern. You hear, Tuan?"

Nebby turned his head. There could be no mistake. In the still night, soft footsteps creaked over the boards of the deck.

"It is Mags," Nebby muttered.

"No," the Malay insisted under his breath. "Tuana has gone below. It is others."

"Watch here," Nebby ordered. "I'll go and see."

He crept forward cautiously, without a sound. Without warning, the Malays heard a string of curses break from his lips. Then a red stream of fire burst the darkness as his pistol went off. There was a cry from another throat, Mags', then silence!

One of the Malays started forward, then hesitated. The others made no move. They had no personal interest in the affair. Their nerves had been frayed enough by the muffled approach of the unknown boats. The shot completely undid them. Like streaks, they darted to the forecastle and battened down the hatch from the inside.

Off-side the steady splash-splash of oars continued. On deck of the Miramar, the quiet was intense.

THEN CAME the grating voice of Reilly. "Here Saunders give me a hand. We'll carry him below."

"Is he dead?" Saunders asked.

"Not yet," Reilly chuckled. "Just out. He's mighty careless with a gun. I used mine for a blackjack. It worked."

Nebby was lifted up and dragged down the companionway. The door of a cabin was open. Reilly led the way there and the limp body was unceremoniously dumped on a bunk.

"This his cabin? Looks like it all right," said Reilly as he switched on the light. "Don't act so glum, Saunders. We'll search for the pearls and beat it. There's no time to be

lost now with those Arabs probably coming aboard any minute."

Saunders grunted. He was worried over the absence of Megs. Where was she? Reilly was making an unbelievably rapid scouring of the contents of the room. Drawer after drawer was opened, its contents sacked, but the pearls were not to be found.

"Damn you, Saunders," he rasped. "Give a hand here."

But Saunders' eyes were glued on the doorway. Reilly followed his gaze and stood transfixed. It was Megs standing there, a small bore automatic in her hand.

"All right, you skunks," she remarked calmly. "Up with your hands."

Reilly took a step nearer. "Stay where you are, Reilly," she ordered. "Don't move or I'll shoot." Then she gave Saunders a withering glance. "So you teamed up with this rat to get me?"

"But Megs, you don't understand. I."

"Shut up before I forget myself and shoot!"

She advanced menacingly on Saunders. In that brief instant, Reilly ducked and made a running dive for her legs. The automatic spoke sharply, but the bullet passed harmlessly over his head and drilled a neat hole in the opposite wall.

Megs crashed down as Reilly's arms grasped her legs, and the back of her head struck a bulkhead. The impact dazed her, and for a moment she seemed ready to rise to her feet. The next instant, she fell back limp with closed eyes.

"Number two," Reilly panted. "We got 'em both out now."

Saunders regarded him with fascinated eyes, just as one watches a repulsive snake. He scarcely believed what had just taken place before his eyes. In an instant, he recovered. He grabbed up Megs' little

automatic. He was about to level it at Reilly's breast. Then he stopped.

From above decks came the sound of commotion, of footsteps running to and fro. "The damned Arabs," Reilly muttered. "We're too slow. Now we've got another fight before we're through. Come on, Saunders." And he rushed up to the deck.

Saunders, undecided for a moment, glanced down at Megs. She lay motionless. There was a lump in his throat and he swallowed hard. He knelt down beside her, putting his hand over her firm breast. He felt the regular beat of her heart.

Reassured, he lifted her in his arms and carried her into her own cabin. Carefully, he laid her on the berth and then closed the door. This done, he plunged up the companionway.

As he neared the top, the sound of shots split the night. One, two, three. Then silence broken by the pat-patter of running feet.

A dark form filled the companionway. Saunders shot. The figure toppled down like a log, almost carrying him with it. Without pausing, he reached the deck. Voices spoke.

SAUNDERS CROUCHED low in the shadow. The night worked in his favor. The men he was fighting could not tell him apart in the darkness from any of their number. He stooped low and rushed. Bodies met him. There was on the instant a mad scramble.

Three times, the little automatic he held barked angrily, and twice Saunders had the pleasure of hearing the sound of bodies crashing down to the deck. Hit, if not killed! Then he stumbled and almost fell over a pair of outstretched legs.

But the shots marked him. Someone among the Arabs struck a match. In the momentary light it showed, Saunders took stock of his position.

He was a few feet from the companionway.

The legs he had stumbled over were those of Reilly's. He had probably been hit as he came up from the companionway.

The instant the match burned out, Saunders fell flat on his stomach and lunged to the left. A sudden, hot pain seared into his right shoulder. But that move probably saved his life. The stab had been aimed to enter his back between the shoulder blades.

Hoarse curses in Arabic. Feet rushed to where he had been.

Saunders instantly realized he could not hold out against this crew. He did not know how many Arabs had come aboard but there were enough certainly to get him in the end. He could not hope to fight them. He must get down the companionway again and lock it. In that case, he might be safe and the Arabs, thwarted, might depart. It was his only chance.

He leaped free of the melee and ran a few light steps to the stern. Loudly, he stamped on the deck and then dodged in the shadow of the port rail back to the companionway. The ruse worked. The Arabs were drawn to the stern by the noise. Three quick steps took him to the open companionway.

There he hesitated. He thought of Reilly. He might not be dead, but if he were left on deck, the Arabs would surely finish him.

In that split second, Saunders did not question Reilly's right to live. He knew only that Reilly was a human being.

He stopped. Dragged Reilly up almost upright and then shoved him through the companionway. The body tumbled down the steps and stopped at the bottom with a dull thud.

The bare second's delay almost finished Saunders. Another match flared behind him. The holder per-

ceived his form and yelled, then leaped. Saunders had no time to shoot. He met the man with his fist and hurled him to the deck. Scrambling on hands and knees, he plunged into the yawning companionway. He fell clear to the bottom over the steep steps, avoiding a broken limb only by falling plop on the body of Reilly. His hand groped for the door, found it, slammed it shut and shot the catch.

Then he breathed easier. For the time being, he was safe!

CHAPTER VI

FEVER BEYOND PEARLS

SAUNDERS found himself in the fore cabin where on the berth lay the still unconscious form of Nebby. He dragged Reilly still further into the room. A rapid investigation showed him the gangster was still alive.

Panting, he was on his feet again and into the narrow passage-way to Megs' cabin. At the door of the saloon, he halted. Overhead, the commotion increased. He heard a few sharp orders delivered in Arabic. Then came a crash. Another. The door had given way. He fingered the little automatic, waiting.

The door flung open. He fired. No one stood there. A mocking laugh greeted him, then ended abruptly.

"We want the pearls," a voice called down in intelligible English. "Give us the pearls and we will forego vengeance for our slain comrade."

Saunders did not answer.

"The pearls," the voice repeated. "The pearls and no one will be harmed."

"I do not know where they are," Saunders called up.

"By Allah, you lie. Dog!"

A form in a burnoose shot down the companionway. Another followed and behind him still another.

Saunders fired, but his shot went wild. The next instant he was overpowered. Three Arabs clung to him.

His arms were tied behind his back, but his feet were free. He was thrust into Nebby's cabin and forced down on the port seat. He blinked and peered around.

Two Arabs were in the room with him. One was tall with cruel looking lips and a scowling visage, the other much smaller in stature. The tall one was familiar. It was the same one Saunders had knocked down in Kuala Town.

"Well," said the Arab in fair English with a glance at the prostrate forms of Nebby and Reilly, "Allah has crossed our path once more."

Saunders contrived a smile. "This is the second time you've got the upper hand," he said.

The other disregarded him. Instead he turned on him fiercely. "Where are the pearls?" he hissed.

"I do not know," Saunders answered with a shake of his head.

"You were in league with the murderer. You must know. Where are the pearls?"

"I tell you I don't know. I came aboard this ship only a few minutes before you did."

It was plain from the Arab's face that he took no stock in that statement. In his hand he held Megs' automatic, wrenched from Saunders. He placed it on a table near the cabin door.

Then he spoke a few words in Arabic to the smaller man who grinned appreciatively and departed for the galley. Saunders understood that order. His blood froze within him.

"Ask that man for the pearls," he said, pointing to Nebby. "He knows."

"We will deal with him later," the Arab rejoined, "and with this crea-

ture as well." And he gave Reilly a vicious kick.

"That man has the pearls," Saunders insisted.

"We will get the truth from you," the Arab stated. "It will be some pleasure to see you suffer. Then the girl in the other cabin. We will see what manner of woman she is." He licked his lips in anticipation. Saunders went sick at the thought.

The other Arab returned. "They are being heated," he announced.

"God." The tall man turned to Saunders. "For the last time, where are the pearls?"

Saunders shook his head.

The Arab clenched his fist. "Fetch the irons," he grated.

The other grinned widely and went off. A few minutes later, he returned with a poker in his hand, the end of which was glowing red.

The cruel lips of the tall Arab tightened. He held the poker above Saunders' head.

"Where are the pearls?" he demanded.

Saunders regarded him with solemn eyes.

The hot end of the poker came closer to Saunders' head.

"The pearls!"

There was no answer.

With a deliberate movement, the poker was brought down, down. The Arab ripped at Saunders' shirt, laying bare his shoulder. The poker hissed at contact with the skin. Saunders writhed. The hot pain almost left him unconscious.

"The pearls!"

Numbly, Saunders managed to shake his head.

A second time, the poker descended. It literally ate into the flesh of the shoulder. Saunders could not restrain a groan. His eyes glued themselves on the knob of the cabin door. He had to concentrate on something or go mad with the pain.

"The pearls!"

This time, Saunders did not even bother to shake his head. He stared at the knob like a madman. For a third time, the poker bit into the living flesh. He clenched his jaw and kept his gaze centered on the door knob.

It was turning!

SAUNDERS wanted to laugh, scream. His eyes were already playing him tricks. He was losing his grip on his mind. But wait! He looked again. It was true. The door was open half an inch. An eye was peering through. Below the eye, he caught just a glimpse of a white dress.

It was uncanny. His brain almost refused to wrestle with his new problem. He almost forgot his pain in thinking of it. Megs was lying in her berth, unconscious. He had put her there himself. Now she was peering through the crack in the doorway!

Quickly, Saunders took his eyes away, lest he betray her presence. Both Arabs were intent on watching him. Their backs were to the door. His eyes scoured the room. They lit on the automatic, lying on the table near the door. He had shot six, seven times with it. It might not be loaded. Then— But as if in craven fear, he raised his eyes to the tall Arab.

"Torture me no more," he pleaded. "End it all. End it. There's a gun on the table near the door. Shoot me with it! Shoot me. Is it loaded?"

The Arabs were amused by this show of fear. They had been waiting for it.

"The gun is loaded," the torturer admitted, "but what of that? It will not be for you. The pearls, now pig. The pearls—or the branding iron."

"Use the gun. Get the gun. It is loaded. It is on the table near the door." Saunders seemed beside himself. The Arabs laughed.

Saunders dared not look at the

door. But out of the corner of his eye, he saw it open wider. "Get the gun," he yelled. "The gun!"

This last outburst covered any noise the opening of the door might have made. Megs rushed to the table and took up the gun. Her angry voice pierced the room.

"Is it pearls for swine?" she challenged. "Come and get them."

At the sound of her voice, both Arabs whirled, flashing knives in their hands. The smaller one sprang forward, but Saunders thrust out his unbound legs and tripped him. The man crashed to the floor.

The big Arab rushed for Megs. The little automatic barked deafeningly. Carried by his momentum, the Arab crumpled at her feet. The second man scrambled to his feet. Another shot and he fell face forward.

Tearing the knife from the Arab's grasp, Megs cut the cords from Saunders' wrists. Just then a form on the floor stirred. It was Reilly coming to. Without a glance at him, Megs made for the door.

"Take the knife with you," she cried to Saunders. "Come on deck. We'll settle the rest."

There were only two more on deck, one at the wheel who cowered at sight of the pistol and another in the stern.

"Get the sailors," Megs ordered. And even in the excitement, Saunders wondered at her. A woman in a thousand, he thought. He yelled. From the forecastle came a faint reply. "Here, Tuan!"

The sailors came out. Saunders ordered them to take charge of the prisoners. Into the hatchway of the forecastle they were led and the opening was battened down securely.

"That's all," Megs announced business-like. Saunders nodded. He took one step toward the companion and tumbled to the deck.

Megs was at his side in an instant. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing," Saunders murmured. "Nothing at all." But her hand felt the wetness of his right shoulder.

"There's blood. You're hurt."

"A scratch. No more."

But her exploring hand touched his other shoulder and its seared flesh. He winced.

"Come below," she ordered grimly.

"Forget it," he bantered lightly.

"Come below!"

Saunders yielded. Supported by her arm, he made his way down to her cabin. The shoulder was bleeding profusely. Megs blanched at sight of it.

"**L**OOK at those terrible blisters," she cried. "I'll fix it." She ran to the galley and was back in a moment with a pan of water and clean towels.

"Off with your shirt."

"I'm all right," he protested.

"Take off your shirt!"

Meekly, he complied. Her fingers worked deftly. She washed the wound and sterilized it with anti-septic. Then she neatly wound a bandage about it. On the other shoulder, she spread an unguent and lightly spread a towel over it.

"There," she said as she finished. "That's better."

"Much better," Saunders agreed.

They were both silent. Their eyes met. Saunders' heart began to race alarmingly. He reached out and took her hand in his.

"Do you still think I came aboard with Reilly to get you?" he asked gently.

She lowered her eyes, an unheard of thing with Megs. "No," she said quietly. "I don't."

"Well, now I'll explain it." And briefly, he told her what his plans had been. He had wanted to come aboard and get her ashore while Reilly attended to Nebby. But the coming of the Arabs put his plan in the bad.

"But how did you ever come into the cabin when those two Arabs were, branding me?" he asked.

"I came to in my berth," Megs declared. "My head was hurting and it was dark. I heard voices in Nebby's cabin. I opened the door a little. You saw me and let me know where the gun was. The rest you know."

Saunders nodded silently.

There was a short interval when neither of them spoke. Saunders toyed with her hand. He began boldly: "I don't believe in love at first sight or all that sort of thing, but . . ." And he stopped, confused.

He took a deep breath. "What I mean is I'm afraid I'm in love with you."

"Afraid?" She laughed. "I wouldn't be afraid."

Saunders gathered her to him.

"And Nebby?" he asked.

"Nebby has never meant anything to me. He, he never so much as kissed me. So there!"

"I don't care," Saunders whispered happily. "You're my woman now. That's all."

Their lips met in a long, lingering kiss.

Suddenly, they broke apart. There were the sounds of scuffling, a muttered oath and then a horrid scream.

"Nebby, Reilly. . ." Saunders cried.

They raced to Nebby's cabin, flinging the door open just in time to see Nebby throw himself at "Killer" Reilly. The two were snarling and biting at each other like two dogs.

Saunders was for rushing in and separating the pair but Megs placed a restraining hand on him. It was then as they rolled over and over each other in death grips that Saunders perceived the flash of a knife.

"They're best alone," Megs declared. "They'd both join to kill anyone who tried to separate them now. I know. I've seen enough gangster fights."

SHE tried to force Saunders from the door but he seemed rooted to the spot, fascinated by the struggle. Reilly was the stronger of the two, Nebby the craftier. Reilly had grasped him by the throat. He was slowly choking him, his ham-like hands closed tight about Nebby's neck.

But Nebby his strength fast ebbing, raised his arm as if by instinct, his hand clasping the lean, sharp knife. The arm came down. The knife plunged deep into Reilly's back.

The gangster released his hold a moment. His face expressed bovine astonishment. He rose to his feet slowly, just in time to ward off another of Nebby's murderous stabs.

"You've got me, you rat!" he screamed.

He fell, knocking Nebby under him. The latter struggled to rise. It was impossible. Reilly's hands sought and found Nebby's throat. They held tight, in a last death grip.

Before Megs could stop him, Saunders bounded to where they lay. Desperately, he tried to separate them. Reilly's hands were like steel bands. Reilly's eyes were already glazed, but his grip did not lessen. He was dying and carrying Nebby with him. The veins in Nebby's face stood out like cords, his tongue hung out, his eyes seemed popping out of his head.

To Saunders, it seemed he toiled for hours trying to break Reilly's grip. Actually, it was but several minutes. Megs touched him on the shoulder.

"It's all over," she said quietly, "we're safe."

"Yes," Saunders answered dazedly. "The 'Killer' has taken vengeance."

Megs' eyes filled with tears. Her lips quivered. Suddenly, she flung herself violently into Saunders' arms.

"I don't want to cry!" she sobbed. "I don't want to cry!"

Saunders held her tenderly, stroking her golden hair. "There, there," he said. "In the morning, we'll call in the authorities and clear the boat. We'll tell them they died at the hands of the Arab robbers. Everything will be all right!"

Her sobs quieted. With a last backward glance at the two gangsters, locked in death, Saunders led her out. In her cabin, he prevailed on her to lie down in her berth.

"In the morning," Megs stated, "we'll return the pearls, too."

"As you wish," Saunders agreed.

The quiet of the night stole in upon them. From the deck, they could hear the Malay sailor softly singing a native melody. Their minds seemed purged of the events of the night.

Megs relaxed on the clean, white covers. Her arms stole up about his bronzed neck. Irresistibly, he was drawn down until his face rested close to hers. She pressed her warm, scented lips to his, shuddering in delight at contact with his body. Then she closed her eyes to shut out the night, the marauding Arabs, the gangsters dead in the other cabin. She knew only the fever of his kisses. . . .

KILLS HIS AUNT

A point of oriental family honor was on trial at the State Courts at Stamboul, where a young lad is being tried for the murder of his young aunt for riding horseback astride.

The young murderer, Buran Eddin Bey, a sixteen-year-old Turkish schoolboy, slew his aunt, 18, apparently because of the moral shock suffered by the boy at seeing his relative riding the horse in a manner which in Turkey is regarded as unconventional.

The incident took place at a picnic. A sister of the victim testified that one of the guests at the picnic placed the girl, Muyet Hanum, astride the saddle to give her her first lesson in horseback riding.

A priest testified that the boy visited him on the evening of the incident and complained bitterly of his aunt's conduct. The priest, seeing the lad suffering from the moral shock, tried to calm him, but Buran left hurriedly, went into his aunt's bedroom and slew her in the presence of her mother.

Guns of Gangland

By FREDERICK BORDEN

They say the big racket can't last. "Spend-a-Thousand" Eddie, glamorous Underworld king, who followed the smoke of his own six-gun from the gutter to the peak of gangland power, knew of other ways to beat the racket; and when he sent that fatal bullet into the heart of Big Trip Kennedy, he was taking it for granted that the blonde dancer would be happy after all.

SPEND - A - THOUSAND" Eddie Fogarty, big time racketeer who had come by his nickname more honestly than he had acquired most of his worldly goods, leaned forward across the small, secluded table which he nightly occupied in the Seven Roses Club.

With him were two companions—swarthy Joe Martelli, owner of the club, and a slim, pale-faced youth, one of Martelli's hoofers. The admiring eyes of the youngster as he watched the big racketeer would have told volumes to anyone interested in watching him.

But as usual Spend-A-Thousand Eddie drew the eyes of all those seated at the nearby tables. To the habitues of the night-club world, the racketeer was almost as well known as he was to the police.

There were many of the "wise ones" who believed that Eddie Fogarty had reached the limit of his power. The life span of a gang chief is never very long and Spend-A-Thousand Eddie had already ruled his mob for eight hard and bloody years.

And yet anyone, to look at the big racketeer's face as he pushed his chair back with an easy grin on his lips, would have found it hard to be-

lieve that here was a man who still carried the marks of a score of shootings on his powerful body.

But the grin faded from his lips and his heavy lidded eyes took on a new interest as he stared at the slim, blonde haired girl that had come forward to the center of the dance floor.

"Who t'hell is the new one, Joe?" he asked.

Joe Martelli eyed the girl as she went through the song number. The wop nodded his round head in approval. The girl would prove to be a big drawing card.

"Clever kid, ain't she?" he growled hoarsely.

The gang chief watched her in silence for a few minutes. He had an eye for women, and this kid appealed to him as different from the ordinary run of "skirts" that frequent the night clubs.

Spend - A - Thousand Eddie, who could take his pick of most of the girls that made the Seven Roses their nightly hang-out, found pleasure in watching the lithe, youthful movements of the girl as she went through her song, finishing up with a tap dance that brought down the house.

"Great kid, eh?" growled Joe Martelli again. "Wait a second an' I'll

send her over to yuh. Maybe you'd like to meet her?"

The Italian got to his feet. At the same moment the young hoofer who had been seated between the wop and Spend-A-Thousand Fogarty leaned across the table and spoke rapidly:

"She's a straight kid, Mister Fogarty," he cried in a slightly husky voice, "I've—I've only known her since she's been workin' here but she's a straight kid I tell yuh!"

"What t'hell is that to you?" asked the Italian night club owner coldly, his little black eyes snapping dangerously. "What t'hell is it to you, kid? Go tell her I wanna talk to her."

The young hoofer got quickly to his feet. His momentary courage had left him. But Spend-A-Thousand Eddie stopped him with a single gesture of his hand. The racketeer laughed.

"Never mind the moll just now, Joe," he said. "The first thing I want you to do is to telephone to Trip Kennedy to run that truck load of booze through tonight. Give him the 'come-on' right."

"I'll see that there'll be two or three of the boys waitin' for him where he least expects to find 'em—the dirty rat. After that they'll take care of Kennedy himself."

The racketeer laughed again grimly. Then he turned to the young hoofer.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Jimmy Halloran."

"All right, Jimmy," grinned the racketeer. "Beat it over to the girl friend an tell her that Eddie Fogarty wants her over here at his table in one hour. I'll show you just how straight she—or any other moll is. Who is she anyway?"

"Name's Mamie Driscoll," grunted Joe Martelli.

"Okay with me," laughed Fogarty. "Tell Mamie that Eddie Fogarty wants her over here in one hour. That's all."

WHILE JOE MARTELLI went over to the telephone to put the wires to use that would bring Trip Kennedy into the trap that Spend-A-Thousand Fogarty had prepared for him, the racketeer remained seated at the table. Three of his mob were ready to hi-jack the rival gang chief's threatened run of booze. A telephone message would put them into action.

Meanwhile the young hoofer, Jimmy Halloran, had sought out Mamie Driscoll in the large room in the back of the building that was used as a dressing room by Martelli's girls. The hard, young eyes that stared back into his own grew softer as she listened to the hoofer's pleading. But her painted lips only laughed.

"Aw, lay off the sob stuff, Jimmy," she interrupted, "I c'n take care of myself."

"You're just like all the rest of the skirts," cried Jimmy angrily, "Yuh been workin' here in this joint for less than a week an' the very foist time a big time guy like Fogarty looks at yuh you go an' fall all over him. He's been here every night an' this is the first time he's even noticed yuh. An' yuh fall for him right away—"

The girl tightened her lips and drew her slim body erect.

"That ain't none of your business," she snapped.

"An' I thought you an' me was gonna be pals," said Jimmy gloomily. "Why the foist day yuh came to work here I figures to myself that here's a little broad that's different from the rest. An' then yuh go an' turn out just like the rest of 'em—nothin' but a damn little gold-digger."

"Aw, Jimmy, be a regular for once in your life," sighed Mamie. "You an' me ain't nothin' to each other. I like you—but—"

"You like me — hell!" sneered Jimmy. "All you're thinkin' of is the money a guy like Eddie Fogarty can spend on yuh. Think I ain't wise?"

What d'yuh think they call him Spend-A-thousand Eddie for?"

"Well," snapped the girl, "Why don't you go an' get some of it? You'll never be anything but a small time hoofer if you live to be a thousand. I'm only a girl, an' I want some fun while I'm living. I ain't gonna spend the rest of my life jumping from one tank town to another. If Mister Fogarty wants me to—"

Jimmy Halloran turned his back on her with a curse. His heroic stride carried him as far as the door. There he turned and shook a finger at Mamie Driscoll, whose small, painted lips had broken into a smile again.

"All right!" he roared, "I'll show yuh I don't give a damn for guys like Eddie Fogarty. I'll get the dough—watch me. Small time hoofer, am I? Don't worry—I'll show yuh a wad of dough yet that'll open your eyes."

Then his voice cracked slightly as he added, "An' here I was gonna ask yuh to come with me some Sunday to meet my married sister over in Jersey."

Mamie Driscoll's laughter died away again.

"Don't be like that, Jimmy," she said softly, "I like you, Jim—"

"Then yuh ain't goin' over an' get into Fogarty's party after all?" cried Jimmy eagerly. "Yuh been kidding me—yuh ain't goin' over?"

"I certainly am!"

Mamie's careless, happy laugh rang in his ears as he slammed the door behind him.

JOE MARTELLI'S small black eyes were almost lost in folds of fat as he came back to join Fogarty at the table. With a brief nod he let the racketeer know that the telephone call had been a success.

Trip Kennedy and two of his men had started off on the booze run that would mean their death and the hijacking of their truck load of liquor.

Three seconds later Fogarty got to

his feet and wandered off in the direction of the telephone booths. Five minutes passed. Then Fogarty returned, smiling grimly.

Now, satisfied that his plans were working out successfully, he looked around for new amusement. Two other girls and a sleek haired young Sicilian had joined Joe Martelli at the table.

Fogarty smiled as he saw Mamie Driscoll approaching. The crashing jazz of the orchestra was beating out the dance that marked Jimmy Halloran's big moment as an entertainer in the Seven Roses Club.

The hoofer scowled as he saw Mamie join the racketeer. There was no doubt in his mind that Jimmy Halloran's act was going to be a flop that night.

As the night wore on others joined the group that surrounded Spend-A-Thousand Fogarty and his party. Several tables had been pulled together. Hard faced, painted women, and men whose expressions seldom changed talked and drank.

The rest of the customers nodded their heads knowingly. Spend-A-Thousand Fogarty was at it again—some new racket had been pulled off.

In the midst of it all Joe Martelli, who had been called to the telephone, hurried back to whisper a message into Fogarty's ear. The racketeer got to his feet with a curse, his eyes ablaze. Instantly all conversation at the tables stopped. With a brief nod of his head Eddie Fogarty called one of the men to his side.

"Tell him," he snarled to Martelli, "Tell him what you just told me."

Martelli turned to the Sicilian youth who had left the table at Fogarty's command. Then, lowering his voice so that none of the others could hear, the wop whispered hoarsely:

"Trip Kennedy got away—Burned down two of our boys an' made a clean getaway. The bulls hustled Lombardi and Moran to Bellevue. Lombardi died

ten minutes ago an' Moran is goin'—An' Trip got his load of booze through safe—"

The grim lipped gang chief stood for a moment lost in thought. Then he turned sharply to the sleek haired Sicilian.

"Get the hell down to the Glass Slipper, that's Trip Kennedy's hangout. Find out where he is. He'll probably lay low for a while, but he's part owner of that joint an' somebody around there'll know where he is. Find out all you can. I'm gonna get that baby myself—"

The Sicilian hurried out and Eddie Fogarty returned again to the table. Mamie Driscoll's hard, little face reflected the tenseness that had fallen over the group. Everyone knew that something had gone wrong.

Then suddenly the racketeer turned to Mamie. His voice was even again; his eyes expressionless.

"Come on, kid, I'm gonna take you home," he said.

No one at the tables appeared to be surprised. One woman laughed drunkenly. Only as the girl and the gang chief left the table Jimmy Holloran's sullen eyes watched them from across the room.

THE NEWSPAPERS played up the story of the gang killings. True to the code of the gangsters, both Lombardi and Moran had passed out with their lips sealed. For a time Trip Kennedy's name was mentioned as being wanted for questioning by the police.

The police commissioner announced on three different occasions that he would be picked up within twenty-four hours following. But Trip Kennedy had disappeared.

Through it all Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty went about his usual haunts. Of course his name had been mentioned in connection with the killings. Even Red Flynn, the detective, kidded him about his part in the gun-

play that had followed the attempted hi-jacking. But Fogarty's angry snarl brought a choleric flush to the flatty's beefy face.

"Keep the hell away from me, Red," advised the racketeer, "When I find Trip Kennedy I'll give you something to kid about."

"Why don't yuh try the Glass Slipper?" the detective taunted him. "Yuh ain't afraid to go there lookin' for him just 'cause he's part owner of the joint, are yuh? Besides there'd be an easy chance for yuh to stick up the joint the way it's laid out—plenty of cash an' Trip Kennedy—Cripes! But maybe you ain't takin' any chances now that you've got a new dame to take care of."

"You go to hell!"

Red Flynn's face was all seriousness again.

"On the level, though—that's where Trip is hanging out. But yuh better not go bustin' in there with him an' his mob just waitin' for yuh to come."

The detective laughed. Ever since the attempted hi-jacking the "wise ones," had renewed the stories of Spend-A-Thousand Fogarty having reached the limit of his power in the Underworld.

Was he slipping? Would the same fate that had overtaken so many of the other big time racketeers of both Chicago and New York overtake him? Maybe the very next slug from some killer's automatic would have his name written on it—

Here was a cheap little flatty that he could crush into the mud kidding him. And yet night after night, unaccompanied by a body-guard, he came and went. Night after night the same small table in the Seven Roses Club served as the gathering place where he met his lieutenants. The sullen eyes of Jimmy Holloran the hoofer still followed him.

"Wise guy!" Jimmy would growl, as he slammed the door behind him and retreated into the dressing room.

But one night he strode in there and found Mamie Driscoll admiring a platinum bracelet that circled her slim wrist. Jimmy stopped short at the sight. Then he sneered.

"Ten cent stuff," he snarled, "Your boy friend must be tryin' to make yuh look like one of Woolworth's windows."

Mamie Driscoll's hard little mouth twisted in anger.

"He isn't a cheap little hoofer like you anyway," she cried. Then more softly she added, "Aw, Jimmy, can't you see me be happy once in a while?"

"Did he give you that?"

"Certainly he did," the girl answered, as she held her arm out at full length under the light. "An' that isn't all. Jimmy, I'm quittin' this joint at the end of the week."

Jimmy glared at her.

"I s'pose he's gonna put yuh up in a swell hotel. That's the kind of a broad yuh are, is it? Give your old friends the air just 'cause yuh got a piece of tin around y'er wrist?"

Suddenly Mamie Driscoll's painted mouth curved into a smile.

"Don't you wish that you could've given me a present like this?"

When Mamie had left the dressing room Jimmie Halloran sat down and buried his face in his arms.

When he got to his feet he removed an ugly looking automatic from his pocket and gazed at it almost tenderly. A second later he replaced the gun in his coat and swaggered to the door. Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty might have carried himself just like that before he shot his way to the top of the heap.

MAMIE DRISCOLL had been gone from the Seven Roses Night Club for almost two full weeks. And Mamie Driscoll, looking back over those two short weeks, could scarcely believe that all of these things had come to pass since the night that she had left the Seven Roses. She had

returned there twice during those two weeks with Eddie Fogarty.

Jimmy Halloran had refused to speak to her at first.

"Why in t'hell should I speak to yuh?" he had snorted when she went in back to look him up in the old familiar dressing room, "Look at yuh — You look more like the five an' ten cent store every day wit' them rings an' bracelets all over yuh." Then he stopped short, but finally added; "Gawd, Mamie, you sure do look bee-yootiful!"

That was her first visit to the Seven Roses as a guest of the notorious Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty. Her man! The thought had somehow never clicked. In spite of herself she found herself thinking and laughing about the little tenth rate hoofer, Jimmy Halloran, his crude and boyish outbursts of anger and hatred against the big racketeer. And then the night of her second visit—

"That damn lousy little punk," Joe Martelli had cursed as he came over and pulled a chair up to Eddie Fogarty's favorite table.

"Can yuh imagine that rat, Halloran, runnin' out an' leavin' me flat? Not that his act is any good—the kid is a worse flop each night, but it's somethin' anyway for the suckers to look at. An' here he goes runnin' out on me."

Somehow a feeling of fear had come over Mamie at the wop's words. This wasn't like Jimmy to run off that way. And almost at the same minute the sleek haired Sicilian had entered. Quickly he came up to the table. Fogarty looked up, his face expressionless. The Sicilian pulled up a chair.

"Gawd! This is rich," he laughed. Then turning to Martelli he went on, "I just met that hoofer of yours, Halloran, loaded up with booze an' carryin' a rod an' headed for a big stick-up — Got to get plenty of cash at once—tonight—that's what he tells me."

At mention of the automatic Mamie Driscoll grew pale.

"Stick-up?" Martelli cursed.

But the Sicilian's hard laugh interrupted him.

"That ain't all, Joe. D'yuh know where he's gonna stage this stick-up? D'yuh know where he was headed for? The Glass Slipper, so help me Gawd—says that some flatty tipped him off that they always keep a lotta loose cash in that front office." He roared with laughter, "'Course it was only the booze talkin', but—"

Mamie Driscoll leaned forward, her small right hand drawn up into a hard fist with which she pounded the white clothed table before her.

"He'll do it, you fool," she whispered, her small face tense, "He'll do it—for me—Why don't you stop him somebody—Eddie—He'll try it, I tell you. An' with Trip Kennedy an' his mob of killers there. Can't you do something to stop him?"

For a full ten seconds no one answered her. Then Eddie Fogarty reached across the table and caught her fingers. His words came evenly, almost monotonously.

"Don't worry, kid. It was probably only the booze in him that was talkin'. He'll wake up in some speakeasy after he sleeps it off. But if it'll make yuh feel any better I'll send the Sicilian here around to a few of the joints to see if he can pick him up, an—I'll take a ride down to the Glass Slipper myself." He got to his feet. "Don't worry, kid, that's all. You stay here with Joe, an'—"

"I will like hell. I'm goin' with you."

Mamie Driscoll was on her feet, facing him, as she spoke.

THE TWO taxicabs rattled down one of the streets in the forties. In the gray light of the early dawn the street was deserted. The first cab was headed east, then swung sharply down Sixth Avenue, and pulled up to the curb.

Within the cab the Sicilian waited for the second car to pass, then, with a hurried command to the driver of the cab he stepped out and walked quickly down the silent street. At the next corner he turned west. There, a few doors ahead of him, was the unlighted entrance to the Glass Slipper.

The Sicilian shivered slightly in the early morning chill. The job he had undertaken was a dangerous one. While he waited he mentally timed the progress of the second cab.

Inwardly he cursed the little hoofer, Halloran, who had forced Fogarty into action. The big racketeer's plans for a raid on the stronghold of Trip Kennedy and his mob were well made, but with this forced action the rival gang chief had every chance in the world of making his getaway again.

"The damn little idiot," the Sicilian grunted, and then he started forward with a curse.

There was no mistaking that sound—the muffled crash of an automatic from behind the Glass Slipper's closed door. Again a gun barked—twice—three times. Someone swung the door partly open and the roar of hoarse curses, mingled with women's screams, broke the silence of the deserted street. The Sicilian hesitated, uncertain of what to do. Fear gripped him.

At the same moment the partly open door ahead of him was swung wide open. Full in the stream of light a man staggered out into the street. It was Jimmy Halloran, the automatic still gripped in his twitching fingers. The little hoofer was badly wounded. Swaying drunkenly he swung around and again his gun went into action. Full into the stabbing flame sprawled Trip Kennedy's bartender. Behind him appeared four men—and last of all the ugly, drawn face of Trip Kennedy himself.

The little hoofer was running wildly down the street now, scared stiff

and cold sober. A whining slug nipped him in the shoulder, spinning him around. But before Trip Kennedy and the four gangsters could reach him he was up again and running on. And at the same moment a heavy closed car swung into the street from Broadway.

And at sight of that car the Sicilian's nerve partly returned to him.

"Gawd! If that's Fogarty," he whined, "We might have a chance yet."

WHEN THE Sicilian's cab pulled up to the curb on Sixth Avenue the second taxi, carrying Fogarty and Mamie Driscoll and Martelli, had swung to the right on the next block and continued far over to the west side.

The racketeer's one chance was in speedy action. Leaving the Sicilian outside of the Glass Slipper to head off Jimmy Halloran's drunken attempt Fogarty sent a hurry call to a garage far over on the west side. When he returned to the taxi his grim smile reassured Mamie.

"We'll head him off, kid don't worry," he said evenly; "I've sent two or three guys around to the joints where he might be found. They'll bring him back—to you—"

"Gee, Eddie," the girl sobbed. "It's all my fault. I kidded him about not having any money. I knew he wanted me. He threatened to do something like this, but I didn't believe him. I didn't think he had the nerve."

The hard face of the gang leader was close to her own. For a brief moment he seemed about to say something. Then the cold laugh that she knew so well by now broke from his lips.

The taxi pulled up in front of the west side garage. Fogarty leaped to the ground as a heavy black curtain-ed car rolled out to the street. The driver of the car turned to speak to two men who were dimly outlined be-

hind his bulky shoulders. A second later Mamie Driscoll was standing beside Fogarty on the sidewalk.

The racketeer made only one more effort to stop the girl in her stubborn determination. His eyes were filled with admiration as he watched her hard, little painted lips curve into a disdainful smile at the thought of the risk she was running.

The death car with motor racing was all ready to pull away from the curb. There wasn't a second to be lost. With a grim laugh Eddie Fogarty watched the girl climb into the car.

JIMMY HALLORAN stumbled and fell face forward. The sidewalk seemed to jump up and hit him full between the eyes. All the effects of the cheap booze he had been drinking, and that had sent him out with the wild idea of gathering in a quick bank-roll, had left him.

Dimly he was aware that this was his finish—those running feet behind belonged to Trip Kennedy and his four gangsters. A half sob broke from his lips. Right then and there he knew that he wasn't cut out to be a crook. Easy money? He didn't want it for himself. It was for Mamie—always for Mamie.

Suddenly, with a grinding of brakes, a car pulled up at his side, a heavy black hulk of a car—Someone jumped to the side walk, almost stepping on him. He was dragged, thrown into the gutter in the rear of the automobile. Down the street somewhere a man's voice cursed. A bullet sang past Jimmy's head. And then followed the deadly, rattling sound of a machine gun going into action.

Wiping the mud and blood from his face he staggered to his feet. From a narrow slit between the curtains of the car the stabbing flame told him where the machine gun was. Two of Trip Kennedy's men were sprawled out on the ground.

Trip himself, with his back to the wall and an automatic in his hand, sent slug after slug into the car. The driver toppled over, blood trickling from the side of his face.

Suddenly Trip Kennedy turned and ran. Half way down the block, just outside of the Hotel Ingleton, he stopped again, finding shelter behind the stone figure of a lion. Jimmy Halloran, looking for the automatic that had fallen from his hand when he stumbled to the ground, heard a woman's scream. Mamie Driscoll! Quickly he turned to find the girl at his side.

She screamed again, "Eddie, come back!"

The racketeer had jumped from the car and was running down the street. Trip Kennedy's gun went into action again. Another of Kennedy's men went down and the fourth one turned and ran.

The machine gun inside of the closed car was silenced. The driver was dead. The men sprawled on the street lay where they had fallen. And Mamie Driscoll, clinging to Jimmy Halloran's arm, watched wide eyed the pistol duel that was taking place between Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty and big Trip Kennedy.

The gun fight ended as quickly as it had started. Jimmy had been called to help the sleek haired Sicilian drag the body of the driver from behind the wheel.

By the time the Sicilian had taken his place and brought the motor to life with a roar, Mamie Driscoll was running forward to where Eddie Fogarty stood in the middle of the street, the smoking automatic still in his hand. Before she could reach him Trip Kennedy had crawled forward. Slowly—wearily—he raised his gun hand—

Both automatics cracked out a flame of death at the same instant. Kennedy pitched forward—dead. But Eddie Fogarty too had gone down. He tried to raise himself as he heard

Mamie's voice calling to him. With a curse he set his lips and tried to answer. But the effort was too much. When the car pulled up to his side he willingly let Jimmy Halloran and the girl help him in.

Not a second too soon did the big car pull away. The shrilling of police whistles and the pounding of night sticks on the pavements followed as the Sicilian swung the wheel and the car roared off toward Sixth Avenue. Just around the corner the Sicilian pulled the car up short beside the taxi that had carried him from the Seven Roses Club earlier in the morning.

"Joe," he yelled to the driver of the cab, "Give me a hand here quick—they 'got' Eddie—"

Three minutes later the heavy closed car was weaving its way between the L pillars on its way uptown while the Yellow Taxi, with the wounded racketeer and the hoofer and Mamie Driscoll inside, picked its course through the early morning traffic. When the cab had reached 72nd Street Eddie Fogarty's head fell forward wearily. And Mamie Driscoll drew him to her and cradled his head against her breast.

THE NIGGER elevator boy in Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty's uptown hotel opened his sleepy eyes in alarm as the gang leader was all but carried into his car. With him were the little hoofer and Mamie Driscoll.

Quickly they got him up to his room and made him as comfortable as possible. Twenty minutes later Joe Martelli arrived with the information that the police had already found the death car, ditched, up in the Bronx.

"Red Flynn'll be up here any minute now—the lousy flatty," the wop grunted.

"Let 'im come!"

The snarling words were almost more than the racketeer had strength

for. And yet he stubbornly refused any medical attention. Mamie Driscoll's tear stained face bore but little resemblance to the smart little dancer of the Seven Roses Club. Jimmy Halloran had nothing to say. It was the big racketeer who did all of the talking—gasping out each word painfully—

"Listen to me, kid," he said, his hard eyes searching out Jimmy Halloran's face, "I told this little girl here that I'd bring yuh back—to her. Well I did. You ain't got the makin's of a racketeer, kid. Lay off that stuff."

Mamie Driscoll placed a hand on Fogarty's forehead but the racketeer shook it off. His lips twitched faintly in a smile.

"I came damn near—marryin' you, kid. If you woulda had me. That's how hard I fell!"

The girl's sobs broke the silence that followed.

"For God's sake get a doctor—somebody," she cried.

Joe Martelli shook his head. The fat little wop knew death when he saw it coming, and he had seen it many, many times in his racket.

"Yeah," Fogarty gasped, "I was all set for marryin' you, kid. Hell! I've even got an apartment further up-town." He laughed, a harsh, choking rattle. "Well I guess the two of you kids can have it now. You like her, don't you, Jimmy?"

Halloran nodded his head.

"I've got an apartment further up town, I tell yuh—a real swell joint. Go up there an' get a new start, you kids. Joe Martelli will keep an eye on yuh for me. There'll be the apartment an' a coupla gran' right now, an' more if yuh make good."

A faint trickle of blood came from his lips. Then, motioning for Mamie and the hoofer to step aside, Eddie Fogarty called Joe Martelli over to the bed. To him he repeated a great part of what he had said to Jimmy

and the girl. The fat little wop nodded his head.

"I'll keep my eye on 'em, Ed—"

The slow, easy rap of heavy knuckles on the door drew the eyes of everyone in the room. Eddie Fogarty's hard lips tightened. At a sign from the racketeer Mamie Driscoll walked over and opened the door.

The beefy red face of Red Flynn, the detective, looked into the room. With a half smile crossing his lips he entered, deliberately stopping to kick the door shut. Then he walked slowly over to the bed.

"Got yuh, Eddie, eh?" he drawled. "I warned yuh to keep away from the Glass Slipper, an' Trip Kennedy."

With an amused smile the detective watched the grim tightening of Mamie Driscoll's crimson lips. From her his gaze wandered to Jimmy Halloran, then to Joe Martelli.

"All of your friends here, eh?" he grinned.

Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty grinned back at him—an ugly fighting grin. But suddenly the detective bent forward over the bed. The racketeer's eyes were glazed with the death that was creeping on him. This wasn't what Flynn had come for. He had come to make a pinch—the biggest pinch of his career—Spend-A-Thousand Eddie Fogarty was caught at last, and in a killing too. And now he saw the honor of making that pinch slipping from him.

"What d'yuh say, Eddie? I've got the goods on yuh at last, an' if yuh'll only say so in so many words on paper I'll get the credit for it yet. What d'yuh say?"

"What do I say?" whispered Eddie Fogarty, but the grin still clung to his lips, hard even in death, "You can—go to—hell!"

And Mamie Driscoll, who had drawn nearer and nearer to the bed until she touched the racketeer's hand, felt the icy fingers tighten around her own.

On the Spot

By JOHN GERARD

An eye for an eye—a life for a life—this is the deadly implacable law of the Underworld. Blackie Rosario knew one side of the law, but a blue-eyed devil taught him the other.

“**I**’VE BEEN against this business from the start, see, Blackie? I think it’s a damned dirty trick to bump off a guy who’s always treated you right!”

The speaker’s sinewy hand pounded the arm of his well-upholstered chair.

The stocky figure of Blackie Rosario jerked upright in the carved throne behind the heavy walnut desk. In his hand was an automatic, its muzzle bulging with the grim snout of a Maxim silencer.

“You’ve given me just about enough in the way of backtalk, Hansen.”

The other had barely time to grasp what was happening when he slumped over, a bullet in his heart.

“Any of you fellows want to tell me my business?” inquired the gang-leader grimly, waving his smoking gun around the room.

Awed by the fate of their companion, the three men of Rosario’s gang who had been picked to accompany him that night, looked at the stiffening corpse and back again to their leader.

“Hell, no, Blackie,” replied Nick Sapiro, his lieutenant in a conciliatory tone. “We’re back of you in anything you do. If you want to put Grady on the spot, we’re with you.” He looked enviously around him. “You’ve done damned well for yourself and by us, too. Hasn’t he, boys?”

“You bet he has,” Attilio Costa and

Gennaro Fabbri, the other two men, chimed in enthusiastically.

“I never did like that lousy Swede,” mumbled Fabbri, giving the dead man a look of hatred from under his bushy brows.

Replacing his gun in his pocket, the gang-leader surveyed the luxuriously furnished room with complacent pleasure.

A year ago he had come from bossing a small gang in a mid-western city, arrived in New York practically unknown.

The walnut-panelled room, the marble fire place, all the appurtenances of wealth that this great house flatninted in the teeth of the world, were his, won by his own efforts. His sway was practically unchallenged in the section of the town he had made his own. But here was this damned Irishman, Mike Grady, trading on past favors he had done him, contesting his influence. Grady had helped him once when the coppers were hot on his trail.

Well, that was all over; it was the present that counted.

The telephone bell rang.

“Hello,” said Rosario curtly, “yes, we’ll be right down.” Replacing the receiver, he addressed the expectant trio. “Just had word from the guy I planted in Grady’s usual hang-out that he’s in there now. Let’s go.”

On the threshold Rosario paused for a last look at the still shape of

Hansen collapsed in the chair. His heavy black brows contracted in a frown. "Take care of the stiff, Costa," he ordered, and walked out without a glance.

Through the wrought-iron door and into the street went the four gangsters on their mission of death. At the curb a long black limousine was drawn up.

Rosario gave his orders to the chauffeur, then leaned back in his seat puffing at a long cigar whose bright band flashed in the glow of the swiftly passing street lights that lit up the leader's swarthy features.

Down Broadway the heavy car roared, through the region of garish lights that spread their advertisement of movies, nightclubs and theatres across the black sky—the show-window of the racketeer! Through a side street in the forties, across Eighth Avenue, to pull up at a quiet, brown-stone front house.

"Tell Grady a friend of his wants to see him."

Rosario had descended from the car and made his way across to where a dim light glowed in a converted basement above an iron door where he pressed a button.

Suspicious eyes took in the gangster's face for a moment. Grady's hangout was well guarded. "Who'll I say?" asked a voice.

"Tell him it's Blackie Rosario."

"All right, chief," replied the man respectfully.

His heavy features contorted into an amiable grin, the gang-leader followed the man into a small room where Grady sat at a table drinking with two of his henchmen.

"JUST TO show you I'm on the level, Mike." Blackie tossed down two pistols on the glass top. "I wanted to have a chat with you."

Grady looked up, an angry flush on his face. "We'll talk when you clear

outa my territory, Blackie," he said icily, "An' only then."

"That's exactly what I came to see you about, Mike," returned Rosario with forced friendliness. "I wanted to see if we couldn't fix up something between us."

For a few minutes he talked earnestly, reminding Grady of his gratitude to him for having helped him out of a tight place, promising concessions. He was talking against time, waiting for the man he had planted in the speakeasy to play his part.

All at once a man rose unsteadily from a table in the far corner of the room. "Ya low, yella—" he muttered, whipping out a pistol and firing two shots that reverberated like thunder in the confined space.

Grady leaped from his chair and was across the room in two strides.

"You damn fool," he burst out angrily, "don't you know any better than to pull a stunt like that in here?" The drunkard, sat down again. Both shots had missed their target. He made no protest when Grady wrenches his gun from him, but sat regarding the Irishman through glazed eyes. "Get to hell outa here now, and make it snappy!" Grady added, grasping the man's shoulders firmly and throwing him down the room.

Returning to his own table, he addressed Rosario who had remained a silent spectator of the scene. "The cops'll be here in a second, Blackie, an' I don't want 'em to see us together. Suppose we finish our chat where there's no chance of buttin' in."

The plant had been a good one. Plainly Grady was not suspicious. Besides, had not Rosario thrown his two guns down on the Irishman's table in token of good faith?

"Just as you please, Mike." The Italian gang-leader's swarthy face was impassive.

"Take your rods along, Blackie. Ya

never know when they'll be useful." Good-naturedly the Irishman gestured to the table, keeping his hands well in evidence as did his two subordinates.

"Thanks, Mike." Carelessly Rosario swept the pair of guns into his capacious pocket and, taking Grady's hint, followed him down the room with his hands ostentatiously in front of him.

They stepped into the street.

"I'll say it's cold!" Grady turned unconcernedly to utter the last words he was ever to speak. What cause was there for alarm when Rosario was walking between him and his two lieutenants?

But in the same instant the gang-leader hurled himself to the ground. From the black limousine at the curb, three lurid flashes tore the night. Grady fell.

With a dash Rosario leaped for the limousine, jumped through the door held open for him. Instantly the chauffeur engaged his clutch. The car of death roared down the street, missing a police Ford by inches.

By a circuitous route the limousine drove back to Rosario's palatial mansion. It had been a neatly executed job, and the leader was particularly pleased with his men. So were they when he stripped off a trio of thousand dollar bills from a bulky roll and handed them to each of his men.

"Good work, boys!" He complimented them laconically. "Go and celebrate all you want. This ain't no ordinary bumping off!"

THAT it was not, the morning papers with their four column streamer heads bore ample testimony the following day.

Rosario, puffed up with vanity, scanned the lengthy accounts that paid tribute to his boldness, while at the same time they invoked the police to put an end to this series of out-

rages that disgraced the greatest city in the world.

One large beringed hand took the cigar from his mouth while he turned to smile on his lieutenant.

"Now Grady's gone, we've got the whole damned town the way we want it, Nick!" Rosario exclaimed in a satisfied tone. "Anything in your bunch of papers?"

"Usual song-and-dance, Blackie," replied Saporì, glancing up from his pile of papers. "Each reporter has a different story."

So carefully had Rosario planned the death of his enemy, indeed, that only one journal mentioned the presence of a fourth man in the party that had left the speakeasy.

What with the shooting that had taken place a few minutes before and the police interrogation a few minutes after the triple murder, witnesses had been too dazed to give more than a garbled account of the proceedings.

"These lousy cops'll find they have to get up damn' early to get ahead of Blackie Rosario," remarked the gang-leader with pardonable conceit.

"So long as you don't get tangled up with a skirt," Saporì reminded him. He was the only one in his gang to whom its leader allowed complete freedom of speech.

During the next two months the swarthy Sicilian's star was constantly in the ascendant. Those in the know shuddered and turned away when they saw that black limousine, with curtains down, careen down Broadway at full speed.

It might be inconvenient to see too much, to be anywhere near when that car would draw up for a second or two to belch a volley of lead from the submachine guns held in the hands of Rosario's capable assistants into the brightly lit entrance of a night-club that had held out against the racketeer.

One raw night in March the car

was returning from a very successful conference, as Rosario with grim humor termed his raids, when its driver swerved sharply, pitching the gang-leader forward in his seat.

"What in hell's biting you, Larry?" Rosario called out to his man. "Don't you know my house yet?"

"Sure, boss." The car was a short half block away from the wrought-iron gates. "I nearly ran over a girl back there," he went on, drawing up to the curb.

Jumping out of the car, Blackie looked back along the street to see a huddled form lying in the street just where the car had turned out. Always suspicious, even though, with the killing of Grady, his sway was undisputed, he glanced about him before retracing his steps. The street was utterly deserted. Beckoning to Saporì to follow him, he walked to where the girl had fallen.

Stooping over, Rosario examined the bundle of rags his car had so nearly run down. "God! The kid's light as a feather," he muttered, lifting her so that her pale, drawn face was illuminated by a street-lamp. "An' not such a bad-looker, either!" he went on, as his gleaming eyes took in the small, delicately moulded features, the white skin under the close-cropped fair hair. He caressed the slender curves of the girl's body, visible under the thin, tattered dress. "Young, but a neat bit o' goods!"

"Lay off the women, chief," grumbled Saporì who stood by, watching the leader's interest in the unconscious girl with a grin of contemptuous amusement.

"Woman, my right foot!" countered Rosario. "Can't you see this is just a kid, Nick? I'm taking her into the house."

A STIFF shot of brandy, and a pair of blue eyes opened wonderingly to look up into the grim visage of Rosario.

"How are you feeling, baby?" he asked as gently as Blackie Rosario ever could ask anything.

"Hungry," she whispered weakly, "and—and cold."

Those two wants attended to, she gave Rosario a more detailed answer to his questions.

After a bitter quarrel with her family on account of a young man, she had been kicked out of her home in an up-state town. The twenty dollars she had taken along had brought her to New York, where, like so many people from the country, she drifted in the hope of finding work.

"I kidded the landlady in my rooming-house into letting me stay on a week without paying," she concluded her recital, "but she threw me out this morning. I guess I was kind of faint when I walked right into the headlights of your car, mister. You see, I'd been tramping the streets all day—" Her voice trailed off weakly again.

Rosario nodded understandingly. "Sure. You hadn't had a thing to eat. I know. I've been there myself." He bent lower, gazing searchingly into the blue eyes. "How'd you like to stay here a while, kid?"

She hesitated for a moment, then looked at the gang-leader appealingly, with the trusting look of a child toward an adult. Sprawled in their large chairs, Saporì, Costa and the small, monkey-like Fabbri, exchanged glances. The boss was at it again!

Hadn't it been a skirt who had gotten him in trouble in Chicago, and again at Toledo that last time when his blind infatuation had placed nearly all of them in the shadow of the chair?

"I'll feed you up until we see a couple of roses in them pale cheeks," Rosario pressed her, noting her reluctance. Clumsily he reached out and stroked her pale face. "What do you say, baby?"

"Why, why, thank you, sir, ever so much." The girl stammered her embarrassed gratitude.

"Don't call me sir. My name's Blackie Rosario. And I'm Blackie to my pals. What's your name, anyway?"

"Peggy Ransome."

"All right, Peggy, this is your home from now on," returned the gang-leader with hearty joviality.

But his enthusiasm was far from being shared by the other members of Rosario's gang. Even the privileged Saporì, however, did not dare to remonstrate with his chief, except by an occasional hint and a constant attitude of veiled hostility toward the girl.

IN A remarkably short time Peggy Ransome had become the queen of the huge mansion that was the outward symbol of the racketeer's immense power. Good food and expensive clothes had done their share in transforming the emaciated waif into an extremely attractive young woman. At first good-humoredly tolerant, then eager in his desire to show his henchmen that here was a skirt who was really worth-while, Rosario had admitted her to his councils.

From being grudgingly given a hearing, Peggy's opinion was soon sought on the various schemes the gang had afoot. Even the surly Saporì was obliged to admit that the kid had a shrewd head on her pretty shoulders.

As for Rosario, his enthusiasm knew no limits. "I tell you, Nick," he would say to his lieutenant, "that girl's got a head for details that's positively uncanny. Remember how she helped us with that little affair between Fabbri and Kemp?"

Fabbri, the wizened gangster, had been able to make his getaway after an unpleasant shooting affray with a dry agent, thanks entirely to Peggy's

forethought. In several other cases, too, the girl's keen brain had been of valuable assistance.

But there was one flaw in Rosario's contentment, a big one. From the outset his interest in the girl he had picked up starving off the street had scarcely been platonic. Now that she was healthy, well-dressed and secure, his desire more than kept pace with her daily growing beauty. Yet, do what he might, he could never persuade Peggy to regard him in any other light than that of a benevolent and protective uncle.

If Peggy Ransome divined the smouldering fire she had kindled in the gang-leader, she gave no sign, but went about the house gaily and cheerily, humming little snatches of song, joking with Saporì or Costa whose silent enmity she ignored, and behaving generally as if the human race had been completely left out when the animal world was divided into two sexes.

Often she would clap a jaunty, close-fitting toque on her golden head and saunter down Fifth Avenue in the warm spring sunshine. Where she went, no one troubled himself to find out, for Rosario was busy night and day with a new and highly profitable racket he was introducing to the city.

"That damned blonde's got the boss by the ears," complained Saporì one day to Costa. "She's smart as a steel trap, I'll hand her that, but she's got him goin' an' comin'."

Costa scratched his head reflectively. "Why in hell don't you wise him up, Nick?" he said at last. "No good never came of tyin' yourself up too tight with a broad."

"Me say anything to Blackie? Sure, an' get myself bumped off for my trouble, seein' the state he's in. Not on your life! Why, Blackie's nuts about her. Besides, she's got a head on her. She's helped us out with good ideas more than once."

"You're right, Nick. No use makin' him sore."

Sapori took a turn or two about the room, then came back to Costa again. "Attilio," he said slowly, "You can count on me to use the first chance that girl gives me. One of these days she'll slip us an idea that's not so hot. Then I'll clamp down on the boss hot an' heavy!"

But the trouble, from Sapori's point of view, with Peggy's suggestions was that they were always excellent. Whether it was from the leader's growing impatience because he could not have his way with her, and his consequent inattention to business, whether because of some other reason, the next three jobs pulled off by the gang ended in dismal failure.

ONE late afternoon, Rosario returned, morose and gloomy, from a visit to a lawyer which had cost him exactly \$100,000 in cold cash, to find his lieutenant confronting him.

"Blackie," said Sapori gravely, "I don't want you to get mad at me till you hear what I've got to say."

The gang-leader looked up at him wearily. "Shoot, Nick."

"It's about Peggy," went on the man. "We all know you're crazy about her, an' mind," he added hastily, noting the angry glitter in his chief's black eyes, "we all like her an' we think she's a swell kid—"

"Cut the soft stuff, Nick. I'm listening."

"All right, boss. Well, all we fellows have been figurin' that maybe you haven't been on the job for the last month, just because of that. She's doin' you no good, boss. No skirt you ever got mixed up with has, Blackie." He paused nervously to see what effect his advice was having. To his astonishment Rosario appeared to be influenced by his words.

"You're partly right, Nick," ac-

knowledged the gang-leader after a long silence. "That Jane's made me soft, but, by God! I'm going to stick to her once I've broken her in. She's got the makings of a swell moll, Peggy has! But you're right," he went on vehemently, "I've let the kid stall me along. I've been soft. And when the hell could anyone tell Blackie Rosario he was soft?"

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," answered Sapori. "But I wish you'd lay off, all the same, Blackie. The last six weeks have been pretty lousy for us. Job after job has gone wrong on us, damned if I can make out why."

"They won't from now on, that's a cinch," retorted Rosario confidently. "Have you been working on the layout of that bank in Washington Square?"

"Sure. Peggy was with us when you first told us about that all-night dough deposit."

The gang-leader rose from his chair. "I remember. The kid went down to make a sketch of the place for us. It looks like a pipe to me." At the door he paused. "Don't worry about me any more, Nick. And have everything set for tomorrow night."

His lieutenant had given him the right steer, Rosario knew, as he walked resolutely up the stairs to Peggy's room. He had been soft, weak, letting her stall him along as she had. Taking the key out of her door, he called out cheerily: "It's Blackie, kid. Can I come in?" No sense in scaring her. She'd probably come through like a lamb if he put it to her the right way.

"Walk right in, Blackie." A cheery welcome sounded from the other side of the panel.

"Hello, Peggy." He contorted his heavy features into what was intended for a disarming smile, then turned to lock the door behind him. "Just so we won't be disturbed—" The words died on his lips. He took

an uncertain step backward. The small muzzle of an automatic in the girl's hand was pointed unwaveringly at his heart. "Why, what the hell's the idea?" he stammered.

"The idea is just this, Blackie Rosario," snapped the girl, her blue eyes contracted to pin-points of menacing light, "that you're going to listen while I put you wise to yourself. Keep 'em up if you know what's good for you." The gang-leader's hand had been descending stealthily to his armpit; obediently it stretched swiftly above his head again.

"But I don't get this at all," grumbled the fellow plaintively. "Haven't I always treated you right, Peggy? Haven't I done—"

"Hold your trap, Blackie." Gone was Peggy with her childish ways, the soft look in the wide eyes that, even when their owner's brain was helping Rosario with some of his most murderous schemes, never quite seemed to leave them. Before him was a cold, grimly efficient young woman—the gangster's moll into which Rosario had flattered himself his course of treatment would change her. "Did you ever hear of Mary Flanagan?" She rapped out her question.

The gang-leader shook his head. "Can't say that I've had the pleasure," he sneered. "Is she a sister of yours or something that you think I've ruined."

"No, Blackie," responded the girl urbanely, "Mary Flanagan was Mike Grady's sweetheart and she's talking to you right now. I guess you never heard of Grady, either, eh?"

"My God!" groaned Rosario. He had not been a gangster all his life not to realize exactly what the girl's last statement signified. Here was the law of gangland, stark, grim, inexorable, demanding a life in payment for a life.

"I'm not going to kill you now," went on the girl as if reading his

thoughts. "I'm going to let you think things over for a while. You dirty, low-down skunk," she was lashing herself into a white heat of passion, "you killed Mike Grady, the best pal you ever had. And you didn't bump him off on the level, you yellow, lousy skunk. You didn't have the guts, damn your black heart! You had to go and make believe you were friends with him. I got the whole story from that dope you planted in his hangout. Why don't you pick your men better, Blackie Rosario, you great gang-leader?" she taunted him.

His swarthy face flushed a dark red, the veins in his bull-like neck bulging, Rosario stood, eyeing the girl like a hawk, watching his chance. But the black circle of steel pointed steadily at his heart, the blue eyes in the taut face behind the gun matched his own alertness.

"Then you picked me up on the street," she continued with icy scorn, "and you feed me and keep me because I've got a pretty face and a nice smooth body. I've been watching you, Blackie Rosario, and I've been ready for you to spring this on me for the last week. I know damned well what you came in here for, you louse." She rose from her chair and came towards him.

"Would you like to know why all your plans have gone wrong for the last six weeks?" she inquired sarcastically. "I've been tipping the bulls off to you, you hound, and I've got enough evidence to make you burn. It'll make such a stink all your protection won't be able to save you."

"Is that so?" broke in Rosario belligerently. Terrified though he was, he had no intention of letting this moll see it. He resorted to the brow-beating tactics that he usually found successful. "And where have you got all this wonderful evidence?"

She tapped her forehead. "In here—and other places. Now, Blackie, I'm going to leave you. But, first of

all, lie full length on the floor and stick your arms under that chest as far as they'll go. I'm not taking any chances this trip."

SCOWLING and infuriated, the gangster did as he was told. With expert hands the girl removed the two guns he invariably carried as well as the key of her room which she tossed out of the window.

"Stay where you are if you value your health," she called out to him, uncoiling a length of rope she had laid by a table-drawer and tying one end around a pillar of the balcony that overhung a quiet side street. "I've got a pal in the street below with his eyes on this house. He's a straight shooter, too." She stopped with one hand on the balustrade to bid the gangster a grim farewell.

"Remember, you dirty, double-crossing hound," she called to the prostrate man in a voice that cut like steel, "Mike Grady's girl tells you you're going to burn. Shooting's a damned sight too good for rats like you."

In a moment she had slid down the rope and was running toward a man whose eyes were glued on the balcony above. "Come on, Pete. All hell's going to bust loose in a minute."

The man motioned her into a waiting taxi and leaped into the driver's seat. Down the street sped the car, turning into the Avenue on two wheels. With a royal disregard of traffic lights the driver sent the automobile skidding in and out between other vehicles until he had reached his destination.

"Thanks, Pete." A quick look about her assured Mary Flanagan that no one she need fear was in the street. "You'd better kill that cab some place, and do it quick," she warned him.

The man was slow in heeding her advice. That same night he was found dead, pinned under the wreck-

age of his taxi. But try as they might, Rosario's men could not pierce the secret of the former Peggy Ransome's hideaway.

Rosario had lost no time in creeping to the balcony. Between the pillars of the balustrade his hate-filled, black eyes watched the speedy departure of the taxi. Then he slid down the rope to the street; no time to waste in smashing the door of her room! Storming, he ran around to the front of the house, pushed aside his amazed butler and leaped up the stairs three at a time.

In the high-ceilinged study Nick Saporì's friendly greeting died on his lips. The boss's panic-stricken, yet furious expression told him that things had scarcely gone according to schedule.

Panting, Rosario flung himself into the carved throne-chair behind his desk. In a few hurried words he informed his lieutenant of what had occurred.

Saporì knew better than to reproach his chief. His groan of consternation was a far more eloquent testimony to his feelings than any words could have been.

"We got to pull out, Blackie," he said at last. "That damned skirt'll blow the lid off if we don't take it on the lam right away!"

"The tough part of it is that I haven't got any ready cash," replied Rosario. "The hundred grand to that lawyer today took all I had left."

"Can't be helped," said Saporì laconically, getting up and picking a telephone receiver off its hook. "I'll call the boys, tell 'em to come over right away."

While his lieutenant was telephoning, the gang-leader was ransacking the drawer where he kept his money. There were only a few bills there, not more than \$5,000 in all. He looked helplessly around the room. If only he could convert what his enormous house had cost him into ready cash.

"Nick," he was speaking resolutely, something of his old defiant manner had come back to him, "We're going to pull off that job tomorrow night!"

His lieutenant stared at him as if he were crazy. "God, Blackie, of all things! Why, that skirt knows all about it. It's a cinch she'll have tipped off—"

"Hell, Nick, I'm not such a fool as all that," Rosario interrupted him impatiently. "But we've got to have money, that bank's an easy proposition and, what's more," his voice rose to a bellow of anger, "if you think I'm going to be scared off by a lousy, four-flushing broad, you've got another think coming."

The door opened to admit Costa and six more men of Rosario's gang. Briefly their leader told them of the girl's identity, told them, too, that they were going through with their raid on the bank the following night.

"Nick's against the idea," he concluded. "Only he hasn't heard the end of it. We'll pull off the job as I said—"

"But, Blackie," expostulated Saporì, "can't you see she'll have wised up the cops? She'll tell 'em they can round up the whole lot of us by waitin' till tomorrow night."

"For the love of God will you let me finish?" thundered Rosario. "The job was arranged for three a. m., wasn't it? Well, we'll be there three hours ahead of time, clean up an' beat it out to Jersey. What in hell's to stop us? The Holland Tunnel's only a few minutes off from Washington Square." He leaned back in his chair triumphantly. "And Grady's moll will find out she isn't so damn smart, after all."

A chorus of approval greeted their leader's suggestion.

"For a starter, Nick," went on Rosario, his confidence in himself restored by the enthusiastic support of

his gang, "suppose you get on the trail of the Irish wench." He gave the license number of the taxi that had borne her away.

NICK SAPORI and two men detached themselves from the group. And so it came about that Pete, one of the men who had remained faithful to the memory of the murdered Mike Grady, on his way to dispose of the taxi as the girl had advised him, was effectually put out of the picture by Rosario's men. But, search as they might, of Mary Flanagan herself they could discover not a trace.

Shortly before midnight Blackie Rosario swaggered out of his house and into the waiting limousine that was to take him to the scene of the hold-up. Behind him three other cars were drawn up at the curb. He intended to do this thing in style. Elaborate precautions had been taken; lookouts posted all around Washington Square had called up to say that there wasn't a sign of an extra cop in the neighborhood.

Besides him in the back seat were Saporì and Costa, tense and nervous. In spite of the assurances of safety they fingered their guns apprehensively.

"Put those rods away!" barked Rosario. "They get on my nerves. You'll be using them soon enough."

Silently the occupants of the car watched the swift procession of street-lamps flashing by the windows.

Through the canyon of lower Fifth Avenue, between towering apartment-houses swept the four automobiles with their murderous load, to pull up in front of the bank whose windows shed long, golden shafts of light on the pavement.

"Fooled 'em this time," grunted Rosario complacently, striding into the huge, marble-panelled vault and up to the gleaming metal cage through whose bars he thrust a per-

suasive revolver. "Stick 'em up," he growled to the teller.

All around him his men were working with machine-like regularity. The few customers in the bank at that late hour had been lined up against the wall under the guard of Joe Macchia. Tony, the soup expert, had gone down to the vault with his nitro-glycerine and two assistants. The surprise was perfect. Not a shot had been fired.

Keeping his man covered, Rosario walked back to the entrance of the cage. What was in the teller's drawers was only chicken-feed, but he might as well have all the cash he could lay hands on. He looked over to where Saporì was entering the president's office; through the ground-glass partition he could see vague shapes moving in there. Throwing open the steel-barred door which gave access to the teller's cage, the leader walked in.

"Don't you try any funny stuff, bo," he threatened the two men who cowered before him, "or—"

He stiffened at the menacing pressure of a revolver in the small of his back.

"That goes for you, too, Blackie Rosario," snarled a voice behind him. "We've got you at last an' we've got you good. Drop that rod an' reach for the ceiling."

The leader gave a wild, hopeless look around. What in the name of everything that was insane had happened? From under the breast-high marble coping of the cage where they had lain concealed, men in blue were springing up, aiming forty-fives at the backs of his gang through the bars. All his lookouts were watching the entrance.

Behind him that bitter voice spoke again. "Tell your men it's useless to fight, Blackie. They haven't got a chance!"

Crestfallen, Rosario preceded the grim reminder of death out of the

cage. A wild hope flared up in his heart. Perhaps Tony and his two men would come up from the vault and turn the tables on this army of cops. A few men had done the trick before!

The hope was instantly extinguished. Three men in handcuffs were being marched up the stairs that led to the vault, between half a dozen policemen. From the president's office Nick Saporì emerged, similarly hand-cuffed.

Why in the name of God hadn't he thought to investigate those shadowy figures he had seen through the glass, Rosario asked himself.

"I'll break you for this, sergeant," hissed Rosario as the policeman who had been covering him stepped round in front to snap a pair of bracelets on his wrists. "As soon as I get to the station-house I'll call Jake Eisenstein for my bail. Then you'll be getting yours—plenty!"

"Yeah," drawled the sergeant insolently. "An' who says so?"

"Blackie Rosario says so. See?" For all his fear, the gang-leader had recovered his old defiant swagger. Many a cop had wisely looked the other way in the old days under such a threat.

"There won't be any bail, and if the sergeant gets anything, it'll be a promotion." A hard, cold voice made the leader turn suddenly.

The gang-leader's jaw sagged. Confronting him was his implacable enemy, the girl of the man he had betrayed to his death.

For a moment she stood looking at him in cool triumph. Mary Flanagan spat full into the gangster's face.

"You yellow cur, I told you I'd get you!" she cried. "Think of Mike Grady when you burn, Blackie Rosario, think of the pal you framed, you dirty louse! An' when your black heart rots in hell's fire, give a thought to Mike Grady's moll who put you on the spot!"

Twice Around the Clock

A Complete Gangster Novelette

By GEORGE J. BRENN

Joe Banney was innocent! And when they sent him to the chair, his moll swore to clear his name. The mob thought she couldn't do it, and crooked millions blocked her path—but Joe's moll had given her word to wreak vengeance within 24 HOURS!

CHAPTER I

ROSE BANNEY'S VOW

THREE was an eloquent silence in the dingy little flat—in the stillness the measured clock-ticks echoed sickeningly.

Gil Mason, tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, sat at the table, deathly pale. This king of counterfeitors, usually suave and capable of dominating any situation, was nervously attempting to bite the abbreviated moustache that gave him the air of a movie actor.

At the window, peering into the street from behind the draperies, stood Nate Levi, famous criminal lawyer, short, stocky, immaculately dressed, and infinitely more nervous than Mason.

The third occupant of the room was a strikingly handsome girl of the gypsy type, olive complexioned, and with crisp black hair that curled in wanton profusion. She sat hunched on a hard wooden chair, elbows on her knees, chin cupped in her hands, and stared into space. No emotion was evident in her expression, and yet Rose Banney was tragedy personified. Tragedy and drama were stalking and playing

their old, old game in this dingy little room.

Gil Mason suddenly banged on the table and Nate Levi fairly jumped. The girl continued unmoved and without expression.

"What a rotten, lousy break!" cried Mason, his voice hysterical and unnatural. "Civilization—bah! Who would think, in this so-called enlightened day and age, that organized protectors of society, the courts, the judges, the juries, would permit an innocent man to be framed—to be burned? Is it any wonder that we rebel against the conventions and step outside the pale? My friend—my pal—good old Joe Banney, burning in the chair for a murder he never committed!"

He slumped over on the table and for a moment he buried his head in his arms, sobbing convulsively.

"By God!" he murmured brokenly. "I could make a better world with a handful of sticks and a basin of mud!"

"Go ahead, Joe; work off steam. It's good for you," observed Levi, producing a silk handkerchief and effacing the evidence of very genuine tears. "I wish Rose could do the same. Don't think that I don't sympathize. Hell, it makes me crazy

when I think that the only murder case I ever lost was one in which I was defending an innocent man! It couldn't be helped, folks; it was Fate. Every cent you raised has been spent where it would do the most good. I haven't taken a penny for myself, I assure you."

"I know it, Nate. You were always white and decent with this mob and every other one. Don't think that I'm not wise to the fact that you spent a few grand out of your own jack for Joe."

Levi spread his hands deprecatingly.

"'s nothing. I liked Joe—and Rose—and you, Gil. It was a pleasure to do business with a mob headed by a Rhodes scholar. And my pride was piqued. I didn't want to be licked by money and influence. I used both, myself, but we were up against a powerful combination. We've all had time to realize it, and to be reconciled to what was coming. Joe did. He's a man, if there ever was one. Let's be strong, for his sake."

Mason shook his head, wearily.

"I can't ever be reconciled, Nate. Look at the straight, true story we had, and yet they wouldn't listen to the truth. It was too simple—too obvious. Joe learned that Kid Ruffo's gang were going to pull a payroll hold-up at the Wright Ice Cream plant. He knew they were slick, clever, and would get away with it. So he planned to hi-jack the money. He and Dopy Tucker, without telling us, 'cause he knew that I wouldn't have stood for it. It wasn't our game. And Joe never figured that Ruffo's mob would do any gun work. Well, they drilled the old paymaster and the armed guard. Joe's plan called for clock-work action, and he had to go through with it. He hi-jacked the coin. What happened? He got

caught with it; therefore he must have been the murderer! It was so damned—"

"I know; I know," interrupted Levi. "My head swims with the details. It was Joe's big mistake. Ordinarily all the mobs in town would have chipped in to a defense fund, but hi-jacking is something else again. They despise it almost as much as they hate a stool-pigeon. There were five in the Kid Ruffo gang who would have stood a chance at getting the 'hot squat.' Joe and Dopy were only two, and the law of the pack seems to favor as few victims as possible. Sun's coming up. Nearly five-thirty."

The girl stirred ever so slightly, but there was an ominous air about the movement. Levi tip-toed from the window to the table, kicking aside the innumerable newspapers that cluttered the floor. He whispered to Mason.

"Listen, Gil. I'm afraid for Rose. She was strong and staunch and brave last night, when she said good-bye to Joe at the Pen. She seems to be, now, but she's just storing up repressed emotion. The phone is apt to ring any minute. While there is life there is hope, but once hope must be definitely abandoned there'll be hell to pay! She'll break down. There should be another woman here, to take care of her."

Perhaps the girl heard the whispered conversation, but if she did she gave no sign of it. Gil Mason, in turn, whispered his disagreement.

"She'll cut loose, Nate, but she won't break down."

As if to settle the matter, the telephone rang. The girl stared at it, wild-eyed, lips compressed. For a moment Levi and Mason were petrified, and exchanged frightened glances. The lawyer breathed hard

and fast. Resolutely, Mason squared his shoulders and marched to the shiny black instrument.

"Hullo," he whispered. "It—it—is? Yes. God! Yes, I will. I'll start for Brenton at once, with Levi, in his car. Yes, we'll claim it. Right!"

He replaced the receiver noiselessly.

The woman turned toward him.

"Is—is it—all over?" she asked.

Mason nodded, refusing to meet her gaze.

She arose, and hollow-voiced, addressed them.

"Go. You and Nate, Gil. Claim the body. Arrange everything. Don't worry about me. I'll be at the—the funeral, Wednesday. I've some—some clothes to get, some things to do. I'll be all right."

Mason hesitated, uncertainly.

"Have you money, Rose?"

"Enough. You take care of the insurance. Spend it all—all for Joe—his funeral."

"What are you going to do?"

She didn't answer.

"Where are you going? Will you come back here to the flat?"

Still no answer. Gil walked over to her and put his arm on her shoulder.

"Rose," he said, softly, "let me in on it. You have something in mind. Perhaps I can help. At any rate, I've a right to know. What are your plans?"

"Plans?" She shook her head, wearily. "I haven't any definite ones. I haven't started to plan yet. But I've work to do. No harm to tell you, Gil. I've a lying, perjured druggist to pay off. And a District Attorney, and a Judge who wants to be the next Governor. And the Ruffo gang. I've a promise to keep, a promise I made to Joe last night that I'd clear his name within

twenty-four hours. Why didn't I clear it before? Well, I was afraid to try. It seemed like a man's job, and you and Nate are usually so capable. I was afraid I might gum up your plans. You tried, did the best you knew how, and failed. Now it's my turn!"

"But, Rose—" began Mason, only to be silenced by Levi.

"Leave her alone, Gil," cautioned the lawyer. "She's right, and she's entitled to her chance. What possible harm can she do? Anything that happens now is anti-climax. Rose has a good head, and I've a hunch she knows what she's doing. And we'll see you sure, Rose, on Wednesday?"

She nodded, as she donned her coat and her hat.

"Wednesday, or sooner, boys. Don't worry. I've something new to live for. An idea, and an ideal. But first I'm going to stir up hell and hasten the ruin of a lot of worthless lives. I'm going to make a lot of maggots eat crow and like it. I'm going to vindicate Joe and make the public realize that he's a martyr, and I'm going to do all of those things before the hands have traveled twice around the clock!"

Once more she was the Rose Banney of old, the scarlet tam perched jauntily on her head, the crisp black curls escaping from beneath it, her eyes burning and dark, and strong determination evident in the tilt of her dimpled chin.

Nate Levi stared at the door she closed behind her.

"I believe her, Gil," he observed. "Skull-work always was her long-suit. Rose thinks like a man, and she's a natural-born psychologist. If I was J. Victor Fisher, or Judge Van Loan or Grossman, the druggist, I think I'd skip town, at least for twenty-four hours! Come along. We've got to claim the body."

CHAPTER II

AUTO-SUGGESTION?

THE BRANFORD PHARMACY was located on the corner of Branford Avenue and Bleeker Street, diagonally across from the Wright Ice-Cream Plant. Here Henry Grossman dispensed allegedly medicinal liquor, with or without prescriptions.

Here, too, woe-begone creatures skulked at the side-door in the alley, passed in a handful of small coin, and received in exchange a folded square of paper containing a minute quantity of apparently innocuous white powder.

The store itself, like the neighborhood, was tawdry, run-down, outdated. Henry Grossman would have liked to renovate it, to replace its stale stock, to freshen its appearance with a well-lighted, flashy front. He was tempted to do this with his new-found fortune, but lacked the nerve to face public conjecture regarding the source of his funds.

It had been a lucky day for him, the day of the Wright Ice-Cream hold-up. He had seen it all, had even been detained as a material witness. They took his deposition, word for word. He had told them how four men had intercepted the paymaster and the armed guard. At the first show of resistance the bandits had shot them, picked up the wire-lined payroll bag, thrown their automatics in the gutter, and hurried half-way up the street to where a touring-car waited.

Grossman had not observed, in a brief interval, that two men had boarded the touring car, one in the front seat beside the driver, the other in the rear seat. Nor had he known that a prod from a blue-nosed automatic had served as sufficient urge for the driver to relin-

quish his post behind the wheel of the throbbing motor car, and to vanish at high speed around the corner. But he did observe that as soon as the four bandits had thrown the bag into the rear of the car with the evident intention of following it in, the car had suddenly pulled away, leaving them stranded, gasping and nonplussed on the curb-stone.

Henry Grossman was something of a man-about-town. He had an extensive knowledge of those who actively infested the underworld. This was due principally to his illicit traffic in rum and drugs. And he had a nodding acquaintance with some of the big shots. He had no trouble, therefore, in recognizing Kid Ruffo, Terega Joe, Pete Tiller and Little Ben as the four frustrated gun-men who stood on the curb, and who suddenly commandeered a parked sedan and made their escape. He knew, too, without a shadow of a doubt, that Kid Ruffo and Little Ben had been the actual slayers of the old paymaster and the guard.

Largely on the strength of Grossman's testimony the newspapers congratulated the police on the speed with which the Kid Ruffo gang had been taken into custody, a clear case against them having been established.

Then things began to happen. Joe Banney and Dopy Tucker were arrested, caught with the loot. Men with long foreign names, friends of Kid Ruffo, sleek, oily and polite, called on Grossman. These men could forget their sleek, oily politeness and show glittering white teeth as they snarled and threatened. They could cajole, too, and mention huge sums of money, payable in return for a repudiated deposition.

But Grossman was afraid of the law and knew something of the penalty for perjury. An offer of ten

thousand dollars from a group of Ruffo's countrymen left him unmoved. Then the politicians began to arrive. First the little ones, then the big fellows. They talked about "fifteen grand." He continued to refuse, but not so vehemently.

Henry Grossman finally achieved importance, for three worthy gentlemen called on him. The Chief of Police was one, District Attorney Fisher was another, and the third was Judge Van Loan. The Judge did the talking.

Van Loan was tall, sallow, slim and forty. He had short, jerky movements and looked away from the person he was addressing. His speech was sharp, incisive, staccato.

"We can run you out of business, Grossman," he announced. "Dope—hooch—we know all about you. I'm going to run for Governor. I need funds and votes. Banney and Tucker are crooks with police records. The world doesn't need them. Ruffo and his friends are powerful. I need their help. You don't want to get in trouble, do you?"

"No," agreed Grossman.

"Very well. Identify Banney as the man who did the shooting and Tucker as the chap who drove for him. Here's twenty grand. No perjury charge will be made. Your original testimony will disappear. The cops won't harm your trade, they'll let you get away with anything. O. K.?"

The Big Shot had spoken. No need for further vacillation. Grossman consented to repudiate his previous testimony, to furnish a new story and a new identification. He did not know that some of Kid Ruffo's relatives were bankers and millionaires. He gasped when he heard humors of Fisher and Van Loan splitting a hundred and fifty thousand.

HENRY GROSSMAN glanced at his watch as he walked from his home on Branford Avenue to his pharmacy on the corner. It was 6:15 A. M. Banney had been executed an hour earlier. What of it? He was a self-avowed crook. Forget it!

He unlocked the door and entered the pharmacy. In fifteen minutes his prescription clerk would show up for work, and Henry would go back home for a second and more leisurely cup of coffee.

As soon as he entered the store a girl with a red tam slipped out of the adjoining alley and glanced hurriedly up and down the street. She entered the pharmacy. Grossman had not yet raised the half-lowered blinds. It was a bit dark within, especially where she stationed herself at the prescription counter. He hastened to serve her.

"Poison," she murmured, huskily. "Strong, quick poison—a dollar's worth for a cur that's going to die!"

"Can't give it to you, lady, without a prescription."

She whipped off her tam and brought her face closer to his, across the counter.

"Rose Banney!" he exclaimed, shaken with fright.

"Yes. Do I get it?" Her hand stole out from within her coat. It clutched a business-like weapon, and she held it at a level with the top of the counter. Crazed, he decided, by suspense, the execution. Over-wrought nerves. He was obviously afraid.

"You can't—" he began, but a challenging movement of the gun threatened him.

"O. K." he muttered hoarsely, and went behind the prescription-counter screen.

Rose scribbled industriously with a stub of lead pencil on a bit of wrapping paper. She smiled faintly when he returned with a

tiny phial, for he had armed himself with an antiquated revolver. Then she spread the scrap of paper before him on the counter, and beside it she placed the phial, conspicuously labeled: "Poison—Cyanide Potassium."

"I see you've a gun, Grossman," she observed. "Well, use it on yourself, if you like, but it's an ugly, messy way. You'd do better to drain that little bottle, but before you do either, I want you to sign that paper!"

She placed a dollar bill on the counter.

"And I'm paying for it," she announced. "The more you think about it, the more you will realize that it's your only way out. It will prey on your mind—this killing of an innocent man for money. Every bill and coin you handle from now on will be smudged red with Joe Banney's blood. The police may be able to offer you physical protection, but they can't ease and quiet your troubled mind and your accusing conscience. Joe's funeral is Wednesday. Want to come? Want to see the body of the man you killed—the burns of the electrodes?"

He answered her with a barely perceptible shake of the head, his face ashen, his lips blue.

"Well—think it over. You won't be able to think of anything else between now and Wednesday."

He stared at her, bewildered and fear-crazed, as she silently left the store. Then he inspected the sheet of paper. It read:—

"To Whom It May Concern:—

I lied. Kid Ruffo and Little Ben killed Parsons and Edwards. Joe Banney and Dopy Tucker were innocent.

(Signed) _____"

Angrily he crumpled the scrap of

paper into a ball and tossed it into a waste basket. For a moment he stood irresolute, a tortured expression on his face. Then he went to the basket, retrieved the crumpled wad, smoothed it out, folded it neatly and placed it in his vest pocket.

Grossman then picked up the phial of poison and went to the prescription counter with it. He was just about to empty the phial when he heard Irving, his registered pharmacist, enter the store.

He hurriedly concealed the tiny bottle in his vest-pocket, next to the scrap of paper, and came out in the store to greet his employee.

"Hullo, Boss," grinned Irving. He held out a morning edition of the *Ledger*. "Extra," he announced. "All about the execution of Joe Banney!"

CHAPTER III

THE BEST OF REFERENCES

PERHAPS Rose Banney told the truth when she informed Gil Mason that she had no definite plan. There was the germ of a plan, however, in her pocketbook, in the form of a newspaper clipping—a "Help Wanted" advertisement. She had clipped it the night before, some sub-conscious motive impelling her to the action, since she had not the slightest idea at the time of how she would make use of it.

On the trip from her flat to Grossman's drug store the name of "Mrs. Purcell" flashed through her mind repeatedly, each time in association with the clipping. Vaguely, nebulously, a logical series of acts suggested themselves, and by the time she walked out of the store she had evolved a program which, though incomplete, appeared to hold forth attractive possibilities.

From Grossman's Rose went

directly to the business office of the River City Star. At the desk provided for the convenience of those who would advertise in the newspaper she opened her pocket-book and removed the clipping. It read:

"Lady's Maid:—White, preferably French. Must be accomplished at hair-dressing, manicuring, and make herself generally useful. Chatterboxes need not apply. Generous concessions in the matter of time off. I will pay \$100 per month for a maid who meets these requirements and can present first-class references. Apply to Mrs. Purcell, 12 Belgrave Drive, Forest Hill."

Rose Banney studied the advertisement carefully for a few moments. Then she took a sheet of paper from the rack and proceeded to pen another advertisement. This one read:—

"Lady's Maid—Salary \$150 per month. Week-ends free. The best of references absolutely essential. Apply for interview to Mrs. A. K. Twombly, Cosmopolitan Hotel."

She handed the advertisement to the counter clerk.

"Can you get this in your first edition?" she inquired.

He glanced at the clock.

"Just about make it, madam," he advised. "One insertion? All caps?"

She nodded, paid the fee he mentioned, and departed hurriedly for The Powder Puff, a rather unpretentious beauty shop about two blocks away.

The slick young foreign proprietor mumbled an expression of sympathy.

"Thanks, Nick," she answered.

"I'd like to get that blonde dress-wig that I hired from you a couple of times. Is it fit to go out?"

"Perfect," he assured her, and produced it from a glass-enclosed closet.

"Put it in a box, please, and I'll take it with me. I may keep it for several days. I really should buy the thing. Maybe I will, some day, when I'm flush."

"Madam is always flush after hiring that wig," smiled Nick, who had more than a passing knowledge of his fair client and her activities.

"Not this racket, Nick," she advised. "This time I'll have to take my pay in satisfaction instead of cash."

He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"What can be sweeter than revenge?" he asked.

"Nothing," she retorted crisply, and departed, Nick's cry of "Good luck" following her down the rickety stairs.

At a large department store she made some purchases and returned to the flat with them. Gil Mason and Nate Levi were gone. Rose got busy with a make-up box of genuinely professional appearance, donned the wig, packed a bag, telephoned for a taxi, and was soon on her way to the Cosmopolitan, River City's newest and most pretentious hotel. Here she registered as Mrs. A. K. Twombley, and presently found herself installed in a cheerful outside room on one of the upper floors. A bell-boy accustomed to rating women in terms of dimes was astonished and delighted with her dollar tip.

"Bring me a Star as soon as the Home Edition is on the stand," she told him, "and tell the clerk to 'phone me before sending anyone up."

She was physically exhausted from strain and lack of sleep, and

threw herself across the bed. Two hours later she was awakened by a knock on the door. The bell-hop was delivering the newspaper she had requested, and announced that a woman was waiting to see her.

"Send her up," she announced, and hurriedly opened the Star to the "Want" ads. Mrs. Purcell's lengthy advertisement still appeared, but was somewhat over-shadowed by her own, which was set in upper-case type.

Three or four applicants appeared, but for various reasons Rose did not look upon them with favor, and tactfully dismissed them. She had luncheon served in her room, and had barely finished eating when the clerk telephoned to announce another applicant.

The girl was apparently in her early twenties, somewhat sad-faced, with large, expressive eyes, extremely pale complexion and an alluringly petite figure.

Rose inspected her references. Palm Beach, Newport, Bar Harbor. She nodded approvingly at the evident sincerity with which former employers extolled the merits of this jewel among ladies' maids. Names that one frequently encountered on the society page in New York newspapers, too.

"Why did you leave Connie Van Bibber?" she asked.

"My health was very poor, and I had to go away for a long rest. Oh," she added hastily, "I am well and strong again, and I need a situation so bad. My funds are exhausted."

There was the faintest hint of tears in those expressive eyes.

"I think you are just what the doctor ordered, Celeste Marchand," smiled Rose. "Where are you staying?"

"At the Y. W. C. A."

Rose hesitated a moment, and then produced a key-tainer from the drawer of the dressing table.

"Get your things together," she advised, "and go to 97 Midland Boulevard, West Crescent. Better take a cab. Open up the house, see that it is aired and that everything is in order. This afternoon I shall engage a cook and housemaid, and I'll be home this evening. Here," and from her purse she withdrew a twenty-dollar bill, "you may find some immediate use for this. I shall retain these references until I have investigated them. I think we shall like each other, Celeste."

"Madam is very kind. Everything will be in perfect order when Madam arrives."

The girl left, jingling the keys and joyously happy. Rose chuckled at the thought of Ripley Roosevelt's astonishment when the girl appeared at that young financier's West Crescent home. The keys were authentic enough; they were the very ones that she and Joe and Gil had used in their abortive attempt to raid the Roosevelt bank account by some fancy forgery.

She dressed for the street, donning a very plain but demurely fetching black frock with abbreviated skirt. Hastily stowing her few personal articles in her bag, she again perused the references her last applicant had left.

"Well," she mused, as she prepared to check out of the hotel, "we'll see how Mrs. Purcell likes Celeste Marchand's references!"

CHAPTER IV

A TRIPLE ALLIANCE

MRS. PURCELL, it developed, was charmed with Celeste Marchand's references and with the personable dark-eyed blonde who presented them. Rose found herself engaged with the scantest of preliminary ceremonies.

Mrs. Purcell was a tall, willowy

creature, henna-haired, and with a somewhat flamboyant beauty that defied the usual ravages of time. She was possessed of a breezy and engaging frankness.

"You'll do, my dear," she announced, after a review of the references and a personal inspection. "You're a lot better looking than my last girl. She was so thin she looked like a lizard skinned and dressed. And I think you may prove entertaining. What detective agency do you work for?"

"None, madam," answered Rose, somewhat disconcerted.

"Then what's the big idea of the Loreli wig? Ditch it, and let me see your own hair!"

Rose grinned as expansively as her small mouth would permit, and removed the offending coiffure, shaking her disarrayed black curls into their accustomed places.

"That's better," observed Mrs. Purcell. "So His Honor is hiring detectives! I see no reason why he should stoop to that."

"I am no detective," protested Rose. "I am just a maid."

Madam shrugged her shoulders. "Well, have it your way. Gosh, I've seen you before. Where? Tell me, kid?"

"Perhaps Madam visited at homes where I was in service," suggested Rose.

"Can it, kid. No Connie Van Bibbe in my set. I'm *declassé*. Well, I should worry. It won't be long, now, before I'll begin enjoying myself. And as for you, sweetheart, I don't know what your game is, but I reckon I can handle you. Let me show you your quarters, and then we'll see what you know about the art of rejuvenation. Think you can take ten years off my appearance?"

"Madam would have to return to grammar school," observed Rose.

"Cute!" decided Mrs. Purcell. "Guess you'll do."

Rose found her duties light and pleasant, her mistress capricious but considerate, her surroundings luxurious and well-appointed. The pain that welled in her heart was tempered somewhat by the adventure in which she found herself engaged, and she was genuinely interested in the somewhat eccentric creature who had hired her, and who seemed to know no fear.

"You *can* dress hair," conceded Mrs. Purcell, after a critical inspection. "Now shed that uniform and get into a pretty dress. I like bright colors."

"I'd rather not," objected Rose.

"I'm not saying the dress isn't pretty," continued Mrs. Purcell, without looking at her. "It shows your figure and legs to splendid advantage. But you must get rid of the cap and apron. No badge of servitude in my establishment. And we dine together."

They did, cap and apron being definitely abandoned. The dinner was served by a particularly ebony-hued cook who answered to the name of Dinah and who displayed a loud and aggressive friendliness.

"Do you know my boy friend?" inquired Mrs. Purcell, between courses.

"No, madam."

"Call me Ruth," urged Mrs. Purcell.

"But I am the maid, and—"

"Ruth," interrupted Mrs. Purcell. "You're promoted. You are now my companion. Well, to get back a bit, do you know Judge Van Loan?"

"I have heard of him," admitted Rose.

"Well, he's the boy that puts up for all this. Good enough daddy in his way, but since he's decided he'd like to be the next Governor he's had a few sudden twinges of virtue, and he thinks we must reach the parting of the ways. Sad, isn't it?"

She simulated an exaggerated air

of sorrowful pensiveness that was belied by a lurking gleam of humor in her expressive eyes.

"I am sorry, Ruth."

"Save your sympathy. There's just one important piece of business before us right now, and that is to see that Hizzoner pays—and pays—and pays! After that we begin to live—you and I."

"You do not like the Judge any more?" queried Rose.

"Never did, sweetheart, but ladies must live. His heart's desire right now is to get rid of little Ruthie as cheaply as possible, but he's due for a real wallop in the wallet. Half of River City knows about me, but a bit of house-cleaning, he figures, will fit him to go before the rest of the state for votes. Funny, ain't it?"

Rose nodded, knowingly.

"What more can one expect from a man-made world?" she observed.

"You've felt it, too, have you? Lose your meal ticket?"

Tears welled up in Rose Banney's eyes as she thought of Joe. Ruth Purcell sensed that it was no old memory she had awakened.

"SORRY, kid," she murmured softly. "Didn't mean to hurt you. Say, I'm beginning to place you. I've seen your picture somewhere!"

"I think not, madam."

"Yes, I have. In the newspaper, I think. And call me Ruth."

"If you insist. But who am I to be pictured in the newspapers?"

Mrs. Purcell smiled.

"Damned if I know, just yet, but I'll place you before long," she promised. "I'll bet a big red apple the Judge sent you here."

"If he did he does not know it," announced Rose, deciding that some measure of frankness might best suit her plans.

"A rather cryptic remark," observed the other, thoughtfully. "My

dear, be cryptic if you like. I don't mind. It stimulates my mental processes. But it would be like the Judge to frame me. He's the most ambitious, selfish, self-centred, cruel person I've ever met. No conscience, no mercy, no sympathy in him. I've passively hated him for years, and now I'm going to make him squirm. If you are his friend I give you leave to take that statement back to him."

"I am not his friend," protested Rose, her eyes flashing fire. "I hate him—hate him far more intensely than you. He is all the things you've called him and more! A man who will not stop at human life to further his ambitions should—should not—" but Rose broke down, and was unable to finish the scathing denunciation she had started.

Mrs. Purcell seemed to awaken to a realization of some significant fact. She stared at the girl in wonder, her lips parted, and then regarded her with compassion. In the somewhat tense silence the clanging of the brass knocker on the street door was almost unnerving. Dinah answered it, and presently entered the room.

"A lady to see you-all, Mis' Purcell. Name o' Marshane, or some sich. Sez as how it's moughty 'portant."

Rose was instantly alert. She felt like fleeing the room, but curiosity and the absence of the blonde wig were responsible for a resolution to see the situation out.

"Show the lady in, Dinah," commanded Mrs. Purcell, and presently Celeste Marchand followed the negress into the dining room.

"I beg madame's pardon," began the little French girl, "but is there here a lady named Mrs. A. K. Twombley?"

"No, there is not. Why?"

Celeste directed a penetrating glance at Rose, hesitated a second,

and decided that her memory was playing pranks.

"It is like this. I answer an advertisement for a maid, put in the paper by Mrs. A. K. Twombley, Cosmopolitan Hotel. She hired me, takes my references, gives me keys, and sends me to open her house at West Crescent. I go to the house, but the whole thing seems strange to me. It is a man's house, or so I should judge from the furnishings, the appointments, the clothing, and even the letters one finds on the desk. So I talk to the maid next door, and she has never heard of this Mrs. Twombley. It is a Mr. Ripley Roosevelt who is live there."

Mrs. Purcell laughed aloud.

"Oh, this is too good!" she exclaimed, endeavoring unsuccessfully to control her laughter. "Your name is Celeste Marchand, is it not? And you were last employed by Connie Van Bibber?"

Vigorous affirmative nods answered her.

"But how does madame know?" inquired the girl.

"'Tis me fatal gift of divination. But why do you come to me with this strange story?"

"I was afraid to stay at this house in West Crescent. Me—I do not care to get mixed up with the police. So I go back to the Cosmopolitan Hotel and make inquiries. No one can help me, but at last I question the men at the taxi stand in front of the hotel. One of the chauffeurs tells me he has driven the lady I describe to this address, so I am here to find her and to get my references."

"What did this Mrs. Twombley look like?" inquired Mrs. Purcell.

Celeste hesitated.

"She was," she began, "of about the same build as that lady who sits with you at the table. Her eyes were very dark, like—like—well,

like that lady's eyes. And she, too, had such a mouth and nose."

"But her hair, Celeste," baited Mrs. Purcell. "Do tell us about her hair."

The girl seemed patently disgusted.

"The hair," she announced, "was as golden as that lady's hair is black!"

Again the mirthful laugh from Mrs. Purcell. She arose from the table, left the room, and returned in a few moments with a packet of papers.

"Here are your references, Celeste," she said.

The girl stared, wide-eyed.

"But this Mrs. Twombley?"

"She has disappeared for good."

Baffled, bewildered, disgusted, the little French girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I might have known," she murmured. "I liked her, that Mrs. A. K. Twombley. We could have done much together. She had few scruples I think."

"You do not like people with scruples?"

"Not too many, madame." She waved the packet of papers. "Take these references, for instance. A boy in New York—his business is forgery—made these for me. I find that they get me good jobs with the respectable middle-class, or the *nouveaux riches*. Then it is up to me."

Mrs. Purcell grinned.

"I need a maid, Celeste."

"I know. I have seen your advertisement, but Mrs. A. K. Twombley promised better pay, so I called on her first."

"Would you like to work for me?—without scruples?"

The girl nodded, emphatically.

"Then meet my companion, Rose Banney. And open up that bag you are toting, and let me take a look."

Celeste grinned back at her.

"How do you do, Rose Banney,"

she murmured, as she fumbled with the catch on the bag. "When I get this open, you can see for yourself I was very conservative. From this Mr. Ripley Roosevelt I have taken only the watch and chain, a diamond scarf-pin, and some cuff-links of the platinum!"

And this time Rose Banney joined in the laughter.

"Well," announced Mrs. Purcell, "this looks like a real organization, to me.

"Were you surprised, Rose, when I called you by your right name? . . . I thought not, and now that I know how you feel about Van Loan, I've a hunch that Heaven sent you."

CHAPTER V

THE JUDGE PAYS A VISIT

IT was a decidedly perfunctory kiss with which Judge Van Loan greeted his lady at ten o'clock that night. Ruth Purcell received it mockingly.

"I'm not pestilential," she observed. "You don't have to, you know. As a matter of fact I'd just as soon you didn't."

He regarded her from the corners of his shifty eyes as he procured a drink from the cellarette. Stretched out on the chaise-longue, her hands clasped back of her head, she waited for him to meet her eyes. He didn't.

"You promised that we could clean this matter up tonight," he observed, hesitantly. "I've the bonds with me, and they've already been transferred to your name. Here."

He withdrew a heavy envelope from an inner pocket and jerked it toward her. She examined the contents, including the assignment on the reverse.

"They weren't yours," she observed.

"No." He smiled complacently. "I bought them on the open market."

"They've gone down a point," she complained, serio-comically.

"Yes; don't it beat hell? You're two hundred and fifty out, but a bargain's a bargain. You're paid in full."

"For services rendered," she murmured.

"Exactly," he concurred, eagerly. "No need for a receipt or—or agreement, or anything of that sort. Just a word of honor agreement that this marks the parting of the ways. I know you'll be sensible, Ruth."

"Of course. Sure of the nomination, are you?"

"All sewed up. They'll probably enter a Fusion candidate against me. You know—Lord's Day Alliance, Anti-Saloon League, W. C. T. U. and all the psalm-singers. But I'll trim them."

"And the Election?"

"A cinch. I've all sorts of support promised, and the biggest war-chest with which a Gubernatorial candidate ever entered a campaign."

She assumed a pleading expression.

"I'm almost sorry to hear it," she observed. "Listen, Fred. The unexpected frequently happens in politics. Suppose, just suppose, that you are not elected. Will you come back to me?"

Nervously he avoided her gaze, and hesitated.

"Will you, Fred?" she persisted.

"Well," he drawled, thoughtfully, "there's so remote a chance of my losing that I suppose I might promise you with perfect impunity. But really, I feel that we, that it's time, we've sort of—"

"Never mind, Judge," she smiled. "You've answered me. It's a case of getting rid of little Ruthie for twenty-five grand, win, lose or

draw. Fair enough. I'll keep my bargain. I'll do more. I'll help protect you."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, glancing about, furtively.

"Do you know," she asked him, very deliberately, "that Grossman, the druggist, contemplates suicide? And that he means to leave a written confession that Joe Banney and Dopy Tucker were framed?"

He stared at her, wild-eyed.

"Who told you?" he exclaimed. "How do you know? You're—you're crazy!"

She turned away from him, indolently.

"Dinah will show you out," she observed.

He started for the door, hesitated, and retraced his steps.

"How on earth did you get hold of that wild yarn?" he demanded.

She sat up, her eyes flashing.

"Don't be a fool, Fred. I've told you something I thought you ought to know. You assail me with questions. Who, how, and all the rest. Here!" She flung out an arm, removed the telephone from beneath the bouffant skirts of a bisque doll and offered it to him. "Call Grossman, and find out for yourself."

He accepted the instrument reluctantly, and after a moment's indecision he lifted the receiver.

"River 3100," he advised the operator.

"That's not Grossman's number," protested Ruth Purcell, but Judge Van Loan silenced her with a gesture.

"Police Headquarters?" he barked. "This is Van Loan. Give me Chief McVey. Well, where is he? To Grossman's? What for? God! Tell him to report at my home as soon as possible!"

He banged the receiver on the hook.

"Grossman's dead," he muttered. "Suicide—poison. But McVey's on

the job. He'll get the confession if there was one, so I've nothing to worry about."

"Of course you haven't," she assured him, arising to pull the bell-rope. She met Rose at the door. "The Judge's top-coat, hat and stick, Celeste," she ordered, artfully concealing the girl for the brief moment she appeared.

Rose returned with the articles mentioned. She held the coat and the Judge thrust his arms into the sleeves without giving her even casual attention. She stepped in front of him, hat and stick extended. He reached out for them, and his quick, furtive glance developed into a stare.

"Why—this—this is—"

"Rose Banney, Your Honor. Joe's to be buried Wednesday. Will you come to the funeral?"

The slim, sallow-faced jurist turned a sickly green, as he grabbed his hat and stick and fairly rushed from the room.

Mrs. Purcell wore a satisfied grin, while Rose stood pale-faced but resolute gazing toward the door through which he had fled. Before either of them could speak the door of a spacious clothes closet popped open and three alert, keenly excited young men tumbled out.

"Just a minute, gentlemen of the press," cautioned Mrs. Purcell. "Remember your pledge. Until I give the word, no mention is to be made of what has occurred here this evening."

"Cross my heart, lady," grinned the tousle-haired blonde from the News.

"I've writer's cramp, Mrs. Purcell," assured the carelessly-attired, handsome youth from the Star.

"Even a reporter is not without honor," drawled the Argus man, "but I assume that any facts we uncover by our own efforts may be fed to the public."

"Of course."

"Thanks, awfully, Mrs. Purcell," said Morley, the News representative. "We'd like to stay for a chat, but this Grossman thing—well, you know how it is," and he fairly ran from the room, talking as he went. The reporter from the Star followed at his heels, but Mrs. Purcell detained Jordan, the employee of Argus by the simple expedient of grasping him firmly by the arm and wrist, despite his squirms.

"Listen, boy," she advised him. "When you get to Grossman's, the most important thing you can locate for your newspaper is a confession, in lead-pencil, on a scrap of paper about so big. It was written by someone else, but was signed by Grossman."

He tore himself from her grasp.

"Thanks, lady," he shouted. "I'll find it!"

CHAPTER VI

NEWSPAPER STUFF

AN amazing number of reporters were on the scene of the tragedy without loss of time, but it was Jordan of the Argus who proved himself the most enterprising and ingenious. With the others he listened to the details grudgingly recited by the police officials in charge, and learned that an undertaker had called at the pharmacy at six o'clock, in answer to a telephoned summons from a woman that he call for the body of Henry Grossman.

Grossman, in the flesh, had met him, anxiously assured him that a mistake had been made, and sent him away. His assistant, Irving, reported that the druggist had been completely unnerved by the incident, and had muttered something about "Rose Banney." Here was a new angle and perfect grist for the news-mills.

Irving stated that his distract employer had sent him out to supper, but that he had hurried back, some inexplicable prescience convincing him that all was not well. He found Grossman dead, the empty phial beside him, and had immediately sent for the police.

Police Chief McVey was about to leave when the newspaper men arrived, but changed his mind.

"Did he leave any note or communication?" inquired Jordan.

A hesitant, reluctant negative shake of McVey's head answered him.

"Has the clothing been searched?" persisted the Argus representative.

"Yes," announced McVey, with exaggerated frankness. "Nothing but the usual things you might find in any man's pockets. No explanation for the suicide."

"What's your theory, Chief?" queried Morley.

The gray-haired official assumed an impressive attitude.

"Revenge," he announced, "and no doubt about it. Joe Banney's not buried yet, and his gang are following the under-world code of 'a life for a life.' They probably worked on the poor boy's imagination, and the power of suggestion got the best of him. That stunt of sending the funeral director while he was still alive was a diabolical scheme. We'll round the Banney gang up and make 'em account for their movements."

During this oration Jordan slipped behind the counter and made a hurried but rather searching examination of the counter, shelves, prescription desk and the spot at which the body had been discovered.

"What are you looking for?" demanded McVey, sharply.

The reporter ignored the question and asked another.

"Mind letting me see the articles found in the clothing?"

McVey indicated a card-board box, into which the reporter peered. Wallet, cigarettes, small change, cigar-lighter, watch, pen-knife, *et cetera, et cetera*. Nothing extraordinary, nothing to excite comment.

"Wasn't there," asked Jordan, deliberately, "a piece of paper about so big?" and he indicated its approximate size with his hands.

"Paper? Paper?" repeated McVey, as if puzzled. "No, there was not. Why do you ask?"

"A piece of paper about so big," repeated Jordan, "with writing on it. Lead pencil writing."

"Written by Grossman?" sparred the Chief.

"No, written by someone else, and signed by Grossman!"

The Chief endeavored to simulate ignorance of the existence of such a document, but the troubled glances exchanged by the two uniformed policemen present convinced the newspaper chap that he was on the right trail.

"I saw no such paper," emphasized McVey, with an air of finality.

"Strange!" commented Jordan. "Nevertheless I have a strange hunch that remorse caused Grossman's suicide. Remorse because his perjured testimony had sent an innocent man to the chair. That, I think, is the theory I will telephone in to my paper. Still sure there wasn't a scrap of paper, Chief?"

"There was no paper signed by Grossman," reiterated the Chief. "Why don't you write the story yourself and send your photographer here for a couple of shots?" he suggested, ingratiatingly.

"Nix, Chief," retorted Jordan, good-naturedly. "The camera man will be here any minute. I'll let a copy-desk hack write the yarn. Me, I'm after that paper."

McVey seemed angered at the persistence of the journalist.

"Let me know if you find it," he observed, stiffly. "I'm leaving."

As the Chief started for the door, Jordan pulled his hat down firmly on his head, walked up to him, and said in an undertone:

"I'll go to the Judge's, too, Chief."

The Chief gave a visible start and wore a worried look. This man, in addition to being a pest, knew too much. He temporized a bit.

"There's no sense in doing that," he announced, "for I wasn't going to see him. As for the scrap of paper, I meant to keep it quiet until our hand-writing expert had a shot at it, but there's no denying you fellows. Here."

He produced a folded slip from his pocket and handed it to Jordan. The reporter unfolded it. It was the note written by Rose Banney, but it was unsigned!

"I'll leave it," volunteered McVey, "with Patrolman O'Dowd. He'll let your cameraman take it for the front page."

"Thanks, Chief," acknowledged the reporter in the same careful undertone. "If I were you I would advise His Honor not to leave town. The newspapers might make a story out of it."

"I tell you, I don't expect to see him. I'm not going to his home!"

"Well, I am," advised Jordan, "immediately. And if he won't see me I'm going to sit on his door-step just to see who enters and leaves."

McVey's face purpled.

"Go to hell!" he growled, as the reporter handed the note back, and walked past him to the curb, where his taxi-cab was waiting.

Two of the reporters, unable to overhear the subdued conversation, but alert to the possible significance of the bit of paper, rushed to McVey's side to inspect it, whilst the

others, confident that Jordan had obtained a hot tip, rushed after him to grab their own waiting taxis or to commandeer others.

Their purpose was interrupted, however, by the appearance in the entrance of the drug-store of a tall, broad-shouldered handsome man with a miniature mustache—an immaculate individual with a quizzical smile and a nonchalant manner. There was a momentary diversion.

“GIL MASON!” exclaimed McVey. “Well, of all the nerve! I’m damned if—”

“I’m afraid you are, Chief,” kidded Mason. “It begins to look as if the whole political ring is damned with you, too.”

“Don’t presume, you—you damned rat!” exclaimed McVey.

“Tut, tut, old man!” cautioned Mason. “A bit harsh, that language. I heard about this dreadful *faux pas* of the perjuring chemist’s, and figured that you might want me. And just to make sure that you won’t hold me too long on a trumped-up charge, I’ve got my mouth-piece, Levi, outside in a car.”

“I want you all right,” glowered the Chief, “but not to take you in. Just want to give you a word or two of advice. Your mob is planning to bury Joe Banney Wednesday. It’s just past midnight, so this is Tuesday. Well, Mr. Gil Mason, your mouth-piece will tell you that there’s a law in this State requiring that the body of an executed person be interred within twenty-four hours. It has seldom been invoked, but it will be in this case. You’ll bury him today!”

“Yeh?” observed Mason.

“Yeh! What’s more, there’ll be no ten-grand bronze casket, no trick floral pieces, no tuxedo on the stiff, no nothin’. You’ll plant him without fuss or frills, so quietly that no one will suspect it. There’ll be

no list in the newspapers of the well-known armed gunmen and racketeers who attended. Get me?”

Mason nodded.

“Yeh. I get you. Guess you’re right. Joe was a white man and he’d rather have it that way. We’re not going to plant him. Joe’s gonna stay above ground, in a mausoleum. At Fairview. We bought a crypt for him today. Tried to buy one for myself, just to feel easy in my mind, when the time comes. I wanted the vault next to Joe’s, but I couldn’t get it. It’s owned by some feller named Van Loan. Got a match?”

A reporter offered him a light for the cigarette that dangled from his lips. He smiled upon the assembled representatives of the Fourth Estate.

“Well, gentlemen,” he observed, “I’m here to be interviewed. Make it snappy, please. Yes, the funeral will be Tuesday, not Wednesday. Yes, Banney was guilty of high-jacking, but innocent of murder. He was framed, I’ll swear to that. Some of our best known officials are about to resign. The political situation, did you say? Well, you may quote me as saying that Judge Van Loan will not run for Governor, and District Attorney Fisher will not be reappointed. Both gentlemen have accumulated, by their sound and ethical business judgment, slight but sufficient nest eggs on which to retire. The Lord only knows what they’ll hatch next. That unsigned confession? Let me see it. Yes, I recognize the writing. No, I’d prefer not to comment on it. The Ruffo gang? Why bother about them? They are quarreling with ‘Blue Murder’ Peterson—odd name, that—about the ownership of a beer-dump. That’s flirting with disaster, as you know. I think that’s about all. No, it isn’t; I’ve just another word. When the evidence is all in

and you are convinced that Banney and Tucker were framed, give Tucker a break. He should have his sentence commuted, be cured of the drug habit, and restored to society. Myself? I have plans, gentlemen, but cannot divulge them. You wouldn't believe me if I said I was going to—oh, what's the use!"

A telephone in a coin-box booth rang violently. One of the policemen answered it. A moment later he emerged from the booth.

"Gil Mason's wanted," he growled.

Mason entered the booth, but returned almost immediately. His face wore the same inscrutable, enigmatical smile.

"I fear I'm about to break into print," he observed. "If I do, I shan't have a ghost writer. They want me over at the Argus office. So long."

CHAPTER VII

BOB DAVIDS—IDEALIST

BOB DAVIDS, managing editor and part owner of the Argus, looked up from his desk with a pleasant smile as Gil Mason invaded his sanctum at one o'clock in the morning. Davids was middle-aged, short, stout and homely. He had small eyes that were alert and sparkling, sparse hair parted in the middle, and oodles of personality and human kindness.

"How are ye, Gil?" he queried. "Have a smoke? Feller sent me these from Havana. Got my message; did ye? Well, I'm gonna talk plain. Rhodes scholar, I understand. What's the idea of living by your wits? Shucks, don't bother to answer. Half of our eminently respectable citizens are doing it. Some of us inside the law, some of us outside, and the line between is only a horse-hair, so to speak. We

couldn't even get out a newspaper if we were to observe all the conventions."

"Especially a tabloid," grinned Mason.

"Yeh—especially a tabloid," agreed Davids. "But the Argus is a darned good tabloid, you'll admit."

"It's the fairest, squarest paper in town," observed Gil, slowly and seriously.

Davids beamed on him.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," he said, obviously pleased. "That's what I've tried to make it. It's my particular method of obtaining a kick out of life. I've got enough money to cherish and nourish and hold fast to an ideal. That gives me an edge on the other papers. Mebbe I'm making money because I don't have to. Funny, ain't it?"

"Logical," pronounced Mason. "I've always had a hunch that the newspaper racket, if properly played, had plenty of thrills in it. In fact, if I've such a thing as a suppressed desire, I guess that's it. To be a newspaper man. I'd made up my mind that I was coming to see you in a week or so—for a job."

"No!" exclaimed Davids. "Well, that's damned decent of you, Mason. Giving us first call on your services, I mean."

"You mean you'd give me a chance?" gasped Gil.

"I'd call it an honor," the editor assured him. "And I wouldn't insult you by imposing conditions on you. The fact that you are interested in embarking on a career with us is evidence, to me, that you've decided to forsake your old game."

"It means just that, Mr. Davids. From now on. But you sent for me. Why?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know. My man Jordan asked me to get you here. Claims he's got a red-hot development in the Gross-

man case, and can use you. I sent a couple of the boys out with instructions to find you."

"They found me, all right. I was at Grossman's pharmacy when a telephone call came in for me. Levi was with me, so he drove me here and then went on alone to arrange for Banney's funeral. He'll be buried before daybreak. Better that way, I think, even though Rose doesn't see him again."

While he was speaking Davids had pressed a buzzer-button, and a shirt-sleeved, tired looking man with a straggly moustache appeared.

"They're holding Banney's funeral. He'll be buried before daybreak today, instead of tomorrow, Brooks," he announced. "Get some one on it right away."

The tired-looking man nodded listlessly and retired without a word. Davids again faced Mason.

"Pardon the interruption," he murmured. "Tell me, Mason, is it true that you fellows usually have safe-deposit vaults at the different banks?"

Gil Mason grinned a bit ruefully. "Yeh," he admitted. "Not much in 'em, sometimes, though."

"Jordan asked me to find out if you've got one in the National Lumber Trust. If you have, he'd like you to stay until he gets here. If you haven't he'd like you to stay, anyway. Kinda garbled, that statement, but the boy was bubbling over with excitement. Now you know as much about it as I do."

"Well, I haven't a vault there, but Rose Banney has. Wonder what the idea is?"

"Blessed if I know. At any rate, we can sit and talk things over until he gets here. I've an idea or two about your entrance into the newspaper game. Had you thought of the particular angle you'd like to tackle?"

"Naturally. I can write grammatical English and I've a fair vocabulary, but I can't say that the throes of composition are particularly alluring. I'd thought that the big kick came in running down stories, in getting the low-down, the inside facts on them."

Davids nodded understandingly. He leaned half-way across the desk, earnestly.

"TELL me, Mason," he urged, "is it true that the racketeers, gangsters and gun-men are as frequently 'framed' as is claimed by them? Is it a fact that police-hounding of the first-offense man is responsible for a substantial increase in the number of criminals? Do the police frame men to cloak their own inefficiency and to protect others?"

Mason's answer was instantly forthcoming.

"By God! yes! Especially in this town. One out of four convictions, I'd say."

"Then, why stay in this town?" Gil hesitated.

"Funny," he admitted. "I never thought of that before. I fancy it must be because it adds zest to the game."

"No doubt that's it. Are the real, true facts obtainable in such cases?"

"Frequently."

"That being the case, here's my idea. This paper needs a Crime Specialist. It should be his duty to determine such facts, supported by convincing evidence, in order that the paper may champion the under-dog and the innocent, and expose the inefficient and dishonest public servant. How does that sound? Too idealistic?"

"Not by a jug-full, Mr. Davids. I had something like that in mind."

Gil's enthusiasm was contagious.

"It seems to me," continued Davids, "that this purpose might

best be served if your connection with the Argus, for a time at least, did not become public. Gil Mason, frequenting his old haunts, and with no visible means of support, would be in an infinitely better position to obtain information than Gil Mason, Crime Specialist and star reporter on the Argus. Am I right?"

"Absolutely," concurred Gil.

The door flung open and Jordan strode into the room.

"Lo, Chief. Lo, Mason. Glad you're here. I have a tale to unfold. Briefly, it purports to show that Van Loan will fade out of the picture tomorrow. He's booked passage to Italy with his wife, and may definitely withdraw from the Gubernatorial campaign. And Grossman left a written confession, exonerating Joe Banney and Dopy Tucker."

Mason registered disgust.

"No good, Jordan," he observed, tersely. "That confession was written by Rose Banney, but Grossman didn't sign it."

"Rose Banney, eh? That's news! Well, that isn't the confession I meant. I had a tip to look for a signed confession, and I had a hel-luva time getting Chief McVey to show it to me. Imagine my disappointment when it turned out to be unsigned! However, when I looked at the body I noticed a smear of ink on the thumb and fore-finger of his right hand. Grossman, I learned, typed the labels for his prescriptions—he didn't write them in pen and ink. That gave me a hunch that he might have written a confession of his own. As it turned out, he had."

"Where is it?" queried Davids.

"McVey has it," answered Jordan.

Gil Mason regarded the young reporter admiringly, and then turned to Davids.

"You don't need a Crime Specialist on the Argus, Mr. Davids," he ad-

vised. "You've got one, and he's a beaut!"

CHAPTER VIII

TABLOID TACTICS

JORDAN lit one cigarette from another and blew the smoke about with utter abandon as he related his story with an air of tense excitement.

"To begin with," he said, "Van Loan's beautiful and clever mistress sent for three newspaper men and secreted them in a closet in her boudoir. She expected a visit from the Judge."

"But why should Mrs. Purcell do that?" queried Davids, bland innocence personified.

"Well, their relations have been the talk of the town, and his Gubernatorial ambitions necessitated a parting of the ways. I gathered that the parting would cause the blonde lady no unusual pangs, provided it was accompanied by a proper settlement. The big kick in the situation, however, from my viewpoint, was the fact that Rose Banney was established on the premises as a maid or companion, or what have you."

"Mrs. Purcell handled Hizzoner with an artistry born of long experience, but the well-staged little episode developed an entirely unexpected *denouement* when, quite by accident, we overheard a telephone conversation clearly indicating that Grossman had committed suicide. Imagine the feelings of three leg-men cooped up in a clothes-closet, and pledged by their respective words of honor not to stir until the eminent Judge had departed! Boy!"

The mere recollection of the situation caused Jordan to wipe beads of perspiration from his forehead before he continued.

"Finally Van Loan left, after

leaving a message for Chief McVey to call at the Judge's home as soon as possible. Mrs. Purcell and the Banney girl are apparently working together, since the big titian blonde tipped me off on the confession before I left Grossman's.

"But that," objected Mason, "was the unsigned confession, the one written by Rose Banney. How did you learn of the one written by Grossman himself? You've told us how your suspicions were aroused by the ink-smear on the corpse, and that McVey has the document in question, but I don't see how you established that fact."

"I was coming to that," advised Jordan. "I was a bit hasty in letting McVey know that I knew of his appointment at Van Loan's. In fact, I threatened to accompany him, and to discourage or bribe me, I don't know which, he produced the unsigned confession. You will recall, Gil, that I was leaving in my taxi when you appeared on the scene at Grossman's. I went directly to Van Loan's home with no definite plan of procedure. When I arrived, the front of the house was in darkness, save for one room on the upper floor. However, there was a light in the rear of the house, and I headed in that direction. My knock was answered by Kigo, the Judge's Jap servant. Kigo was apparently under instructions to admit the Chief when he called, and perhaps to hold himself in readiness to serve such liquid stimulant as Hizzoner and the Chief might require.

"Luck was with me. The Jap didn't say a great deal, but I could tell that in some fashion he had learned that a crisis was imminent in the affairs of his employer, and the fact seemed to please rather than displease him. I went to work on him, and in less than no time I discovered that Kigo's sense of

loyalty had been displaced by a malignant hatred, far from passive in its nature. Kigo, it appeared, had resented Van Loan calling him a 'damned yellow Chink', and had shown his temper. Van Loan gave him a month's notice, and the Jap was silently turning over in his mind a plan for revenge. That was right in my alley. If I could gratify this desire and at the same time make it worth something to Kigo I was assured of a capable assistant.

"We had a whispered confab in the kitchen, and the up-shot of it was that Kigo silently installed me in a room adjoining Van Loan's den. Fifteen minutes later he admitted McVey. I overheard their entire conference. I won't recite the details now, but they very nearly came to blows. Van Loan wanted the signed confession, so that he might destroy it. McVey insisted on holding onto it to protect himself. They finally calmed down, and it was agreed that McVey should file the confession in his safe-deposit vault at the National Lumber Trust Company just as soon as the bank opens this morning. Mr. and Mrs. Van Loan will sail for Italy. Upon their return, if things have blown over or settled down, the Judge will reach a definite decision about running for Governor, and McVey will permit him to destroy the signed confession. I tell you, Mr. Davids, this City, County and State is in the hands of the most despicable, cold-blooded gang of crooked politicians it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. They are so crooked that they don't trust each other. Think of it—Van Loan made McVey, politically, and the Chief is hanging on to the Grossman confession in order to have some measure of power over his benefactor!"

"That is almost a general situation in this town," observed Mason, somewhat amused. "Where did

McVey go when he left Van Loan's?"

"Home. Van Loan's chauffeur is to call for him at nine-fifteen this morning to drive him to the bank and thence to Police Headquarters."

There was a profound silence. Finally Jordan said, half-hesitantly:

"Not much sense, I guess, in burglarizing the Chief's home for the confession."

Gil Mason vetoed the proposal.

"No sense at all," he observed. "That's a pretty big house of McVey's on Warren Street, and we haven't the slightest idea of where the paper will be. Moreover, the house is well wired, and the cop on that beat, by virtue of his particular assignment, is constantly alert. No, that's out."

Bob Davids breathed a sigh of relief.

"I don't disapprove of unconventional methods," he smiled, "but they do get me a bit nervous at times. You apparently had another plan, Jordan. What is it?"

"I THINK I know," announced Mason. "Suppose you leave it to Jordan and me. Then there'll be no need for upsetting your nerves."

"But," objected Davids, "I get a kick out of being nervous! Why do you suppose I'm in the tabloid game?"

The three men laughed aloud, and proceeded with their plans. At three-thirty, when they were virtually completed, they were interrupted by the intrusion of Brooks, the shirt-sleeved individual from the copy desk.

"Hell's broke loose, Chief!" he advised, excitedly. "Just got a tip from Donnelly, the telephone operator at Headquarters, that there's been a wholesale gang war out at Vaux Hall. 'Blue Murder' Peter-

son's gang hemmed in the entire Ruffo outfit in a garage and machine-gunned 'em. Not one of 'em left!"

Jordan grabbed his hat.

"I'm off," he shouted. "Get fifty bucks to Kigo, will you, Mr. Davids?"

"Hold on," protested Davids. "You need sleep. We'll send—"

"Sleep hell!" grinned Jordan. "I want to see that bunch of gangsters with their hands folded. Got a camera man, Brooks?"

"He left when the call came in."

"Oh. Well, so long!"

Davids and Mason exchanged glances.

"You don't seem surprised," commented the editor.

"No. I've been expecting it. In fact, I told the newspaper boys up at Grossman's a few hours ago that something like this impended. Well, 'Blue Murder' will hold undisputed sway over the Vaux Hall beer-dump —until—"

"I guess 'until'—is right," agreed Davids, looking at his watch. "Gosh, it's three-forty."

Mason arose and stretched himself.

"Nearly twice around the clock," he observed. "I'm afraid she won't quite make it."

This was uttered half-aloud, and though it appeared cryptic and irrelevant to Davids, the newspaper man offered no comment.

Mason picked up the telephone receiver and called a number.

"Mrs. Purcell?" he inquired. "Pardon my calling at this unholy hour, but I simply must get in touch with Rose Banney. This is Gil Mason speaking, if that means anything to you. It does? She's not? How long ago did she leave? After telephoning Peters, you say? Sure it wasn't Peterson? Yes, I imagine so. Well, I'll have to locate her. Thank you very much, and accept

my apologies for disturbing you. Good-night."

He snapped the receiver back on the hook, his habitually languid manner fell from him like a cloak, and he was a picture of galvanic action as he grabbed his hat.

"Good night, Mr. Davids," he exclaimed. "I've got to find Rose Banney at once, or our plans will go completely to smash!"

CHAPTER IX

BLUE MURDER PETERSON

ORATON STREET, in the neighborhood of the quietly pretentious and eminently respectable Oraton Apartments appeared to be deserted at four a. m. when Gil Mason stepped out of a cab. And yet, as he prepared to enter the apartment house a nattily dressed young man of prepossessing appearance seemed to spring from nowhere and to peer inquiringly into his face.

"Mason, eh?" he murmured. "What's the idea?"

"I must see Peterson at once," answered Gil.

"Step into the lobby," commanded the youth, disengaging one hand from his coat-pocket. "We can talk better in there."

He followed Gil into the lobby, and nodded assuringly to the instantly alert elevator operator, a burly specimen of manhood.

"'Sall right, Barnie. Boss knows him."

Then he turned to Gil inquiringly. "I don't know if B. M. is in," he advised, using the initials of the nickname by which Peterson was commonly known, "and I don't know if he'll see you, if he is in."

Mason grinned.

"He's in," he advised, "for his capable body-guard wouldn't be on the job if he wasn't. And he'll see

me if you tell him I'm looking for Rose Banney."

The youth hesitated no longer.

"You've got a rep for square-shooting, Mason," he observed. "I guess I can take a chance. Wait here."

He disappeared around a bend in the lobby, presumably to telephone, and shortly re-appeared and indicated the elevator.

"Barney will run you up," he announced.

Even Mason was unprepared for the lavish and luxurious appointments of the illiterate Beer Baron's apartment. The room in which he was received had been equipped by an artist among interior decorators, and was faultless. It was the living room of the lord of the manor, with a broad open fire-place, rare tapestries, old paintings, and a rough tile floor partially covered by appropriate rugs and animal skins. Mason noted with semi-humorous reaction the collection of weapons, both ancient and modern, which had been blended into the decorative motif, but which, at a pinch, might convert this room with studded oak doors into a veritable fortress.

Blue Murder Peterson and his wife were fully dressed, and were listening to a distant radio station. Four o'clock in the morning was the middle of the afternoon to these gentrified.

Peterson, a huge blonde Swede with rough-hewn features and an air of reckless good-nature was seated beside the plump, youthful dark-haired German girl who shared his fortunes and his name. They greeted Mason in friendly fashion as he entered, and Gil ingratiated himself into the lady's good graces by his debonair manner and punctilious observance of the social conventions. Mrs. Peterson departed, a giant negro brought

in high-balls, and the men were alone.

Blue Murder raised his glass and offered a toast.

"To Rose Banney," he declaimed. "The best man in Gil Mason's mob!"

"I'll drink that toast," agreed Mason draining his glass.

"And no mistake," continued Peterson. "What a moll! I'll put your mind at rest right away, Mason, by letting you know she's here."

"Damn it to hell, B. M.," barked Mason, angrily, "you should know better than that! Why get her mixed up in this thing?"

Peterson retained his pleasant manner.

"It's all right, Gil," he assured the other. "The coast is clear now, and she can leave. Let me tell you about it. She telephoned me about Grossman as soon as she got news of him pullin' the dutch act. That was a hot tip, because I knew it would worry the Ruffo gang. Funny thing about them fellers—every time they are puzzled they hold a meetin'. You know, reg'lar big business stuff, conferences. And where do they hold 'em? In that garage out in Vaux Hall that I used to have for a beer dump. Ruffo leased it right from under me, 'cause I didn't have a renewal option, but he's been afraid to dump beer there. A little bit leary, you know, of my mob. I knew that they'd have one of their meetings as soon as they heard about Grossman, so I gets the boys together and we went out to the garage. None o' the Ruffo gang around, so we bumps the watchman, hides in the big covered beer-truck and waits. You'll probably read about 'em bein' ambushed and shot down in cold blood, but I want to tell you it was *some* battle. Why, we had three of our guys wounded and one guy sent West. Dragged 'em away with us.

"Well, Gil, one of the best men on our side was a little slim feller in overalls and a gray cap who could fight like Yiminy Yee! Boy, how he did sail in, yust like a wild-cat. When it came time for a getaway he was right by my side and I took him along in my car."

The door opened. A youth in overalls, twirling a gray cap, stood framed in the doorway.

"ROSE!" exclaimed Mason, hurrying to her side. "What ever made you—"

"'Ssh! You know. I've helped pay off another score, Gil. Peterson didn't know. I just attached myself to his gang in the dark, in that alley in Vaux Hall. He didn't really know until we were well on the way here, in his car. Then he was worried. Afraid the flat-feet would find me. He's had one of his body-guard outside waiting for a break."

"Sure," echoed Peterson. "Libby. Everything O. K. now, he tells me. Do you know, Gil, that I can get to my garage, a full block from here, without going out of doors? Well, I can. I've only done it once or twice, and tonight I'm going to let Libby show you and Rose how to do it. Cellars are good for somethin' else besides storing coal."

"Fair enough," conceded Gil. "How are you fixed on this affair, Peterson?"

"Covered. Covered all around. Perfect alibi, with a Police Captain to help me prove it."

He winked knowingly.

"Then let's get going."

Rose pulled the red tam from the pocket of her overalls, shook it out and adjusted it jauntily on her crisp black curls. Then she slipped out of the overalls, which had been sufficiently roomy to accommodate her trim, brief skirt.

Libby made good Peterson's

boast. From the extensive basement of the apartment house they entered the cellar of an untenanted adjoining loft building. From this cellar they entered another apartment house cellar. The connecting entrances were artfully concealed. And presently they found themselves in a large public garage, which they entered from a back-yard door. The sudden appearance of Libby and his two companions seemed to occasion no surprise on the part of the garage night man, and it was in Libby's car with the owner as chauffeur that they returned to Rose Banney's flat.

Rose had displayed an unnatural vivacity on the way home, but as soon as Libby disappeared and they were alone in the flat she appeared to grow glum, morose and despondent.

"What's the trouble, Rose?" queried Gil, tenderly.

She stirred, restively.

"Oh, I've failed, Gil; failed in the thing I wanted most to do. I banked on getting a confession from Grossman, and I didn't get it."

"But he left one, Rose."

She stared, wild-eyed, unbelieving. He hurriedly recited Jordan's story.

"So you see, there is still a chance, but it's a slim one. It's really a man's job, but conditions are such that only you can handle it. Is it worth while? Can you do it?"

"Of course it's worth while," she retorted, scornfully, "and I can do anything, after what happened tonight! Gil, I don't know what came over me, but I went absolutely berserker out there at Vaux Hall."

He nodded understandingly.

"I know. You've just got to have this emotional experience, and then there'll be a let-down and you'll be your own old self again. Well, Rose, go to your room and snatch some sleep. As I said before, there's a

man's job ahead of you—an almost impossible job."

But before she would retire she insisted on hearing the details of the job.

CHAPTER X

ROSE BANNEY AT WORK

THE NATIONAL LUMBER Trust Company opens its doors for the transaction of banking business at ten a. m., but the Safe Deposit Department begins activities at nine o'clock.

At nine-fifteen Rose Banney, carrying a small leather brief-case, entered the impressive doorway of the massive gray stone building. She stopped for a word or two with the white-haired special officer and sauntered down the corridor to the head of a stairway. Another word or two with the younger special policeman at this vantage point, and she descended the stairs.

"Good morning, Miss Banney," murmured the immaculately uniformed doorkeeper from behind the ponderous steel-barred door, as he swung it open for Rose to enter. As it closed behind her Rose stopped at the desk just inside, where a youngish old man, stout and blonde-gray, sat engaged in clerical work. He looked up, recognized his visitor, and gave her a sympathetic smile. He knew all about Joe Banney, and felt sure that legal technicalities necessitated consultation of certain papers in her safe deposit vault.

"Let's see, your number is—"

"376—19," advised Rose, producing a key from her bag.

"Section 19, vault 376," repeated the man, filling out the card and turning it over to Rose with the pen, for her signature. She noted that he had entered, in the space provided for that purpose, the time of arrival in the vault as 9:20 A. M.

She signed the card and proceeded through the huge circular hardened-steel door which stood ajar, the visible inner side revealing a complicated glass-enclosed mechanism of bronze, brass and more steel. Now she was in the vault proper, a high-domed, marble-floored room, its two side-walls and centre-stack a mass of individual vaults of assorted sizes.

Here the millionaire, in a compartment the dimensions of which might be expressed in feet, deposited the evidences of wealth, of acumen, of tragedy and of shame, and here the shop girl, in a vault three inches high, three inches wide and two feet long, might deposit her modest jewels and keep-sakes, her building and loan certificate, her Liberty Bond.

Rose Banney handed her key to one of the two attendants in the inner vault. The man made an entry in a huge book on a shelf beside the entrance, walked to Section 19, located vault 376, and inserted her key in the lock. He gave the key a twist, removed it, and substituted a master key of his own. The vaults were so constructed that the two keys were necessary to open or lock them. The heavy processed-steel door fell open, and the man withdrew the metal box within.

"Out here," he asked, "or would you like to take it to a room?"

"A room," answered Rose. "I've some papers to go over."

The attendant led the way to a marble-lined room directly behind, and an integral part of the vault. The rooms were little more than booths, one next to the other, constructed of massive oak, but open on the top. Inside of each one was a chair and a heavy plate-glass shelf which served as a desk. On the desk was pen and ink, a pair of scissors, a steel T-square to facilitate coupon cutting for those who did not care

to use the shears, a stack of the bank's deposit-slips and some small envelopes for coupons, printed on the outside to indicate the number of coupons of each denomination and the total value. There was also a desk-light, and pegs on the wall for hat and coat.

Rose pulled the door partly shut after her and placed the brief-case on the glass shelf. Then she peered through the crack in the partly-closed door and maintained this position for all of ten minutes. She nodded with satisfaction as she observed the attendant headed in the direction of her own booth, followed by Chief McVey. They walked past her booth, and finally she heard the attendant say, from some distance away:—"Is this satisfactory, Mr. McVey?"

"Fine, fine," grunted the Chief, and then Rose heard the desk-light snapped on and the attendant re-tracing his steps.

A short, safe interval and Rose hopped up on her chair and looked over the top of her own and the adjoining booth. The light was in the fourth booth from hers. The entire section of booths was removed from the line of vision of those in the vault-room proper. As cautious as a cat, she dropped lightly from the chair, opened the brief-case, and withdrew a leather "life-preserved" with a spring handle. Noiselessly she slipped out of the room, closing the door after her, and slipped down to the fourth booth.

The doors of the booths are equipped with catches which are infrequently used. Quite as careless as the average person, Chief McVey had not fastened the door of his booth. It was a matter of seconds for Rose to bring down the leather-black-jack with scientific precision on the appropriate spot on the Chief's cranium, to paw over the

papers on the shelf, and to find what she sought in a plain white envelope. She slipped the black-jack in her pocket and hurried noiselessly back to her own little room.

Rose felt keenly elated as she restored the black-jack to the briefcase and picked up the metal container. There is practically no opportunity to pilfer from a safe-deposit vault, but she had demonstrated by a combination of skill, sheer nerve, brains and luck, that it is possible to rob a person within the confines of such a vault.

She turned off the light, returned to the vault proper, and handed over her receptacle and key to the attendant, at the same time noting with satisfaction that other clients were entering. If the Chief did not recover for fifteen minutes or more it would be possible to point out that the act of violence might have been accomplished by any of a number of people who had visited booths.

The attendant slipped the receptacle back into the vault, repeated the performance with Rose's key and his own, and again made an entry in the big book, Rose inspecting it as she walked past the huge circular door. She was cool and smiling as she reached the doorman.

"Good morning, Madam," he observed, as he opened the door, not only to permit Rose to depart, but to allow Sheriff Lowden to enter. The Sheriff didn't notice her and Rose chuckled silently. Lowden and McVey were of opposing political camps and deadly enemies. If Lady Luck continued to smile upon her, Lowden might remain in the vault long enough to be suspected of an onslaught on McVey.

"McVey entered the vault at 9:31, according to the record," she mused, "and I left at 9:33. Pretty quick work! Well, now to keep my date with Gil and Mr. Bob Davids."

CHAPTER XI

THE MOB DISBANDS

AGAIN the dingy flat—headquarters of the Gil Mason mob. Mason was packing a bag for Rose, performing the work neatly and with a precision that was almost essentially feminine. Rose sat by the window reading, the floor about her feet littered with the papers she had discarded. They were all there—The Ledger, The Star, The Argus and The News. Extras—all of them with screaming obtrusive head-lines that clamored for attention:—

**GROSSMAN CONFESSION IN
DETAIL
IMPLICATES VAN LOAN,
FISHER AND MCVEY
THREE OFFICIALS UNDER
ARREST**

**BANNEY AND TUCKER
INNOCENT!
GOVERNOR ORDERS
INVESTIGATION**

**ARGUS OBTAINS
CONFESSON
OFFICIALS OFFER RESIG-
NATIONS**

**INNOCENT MAN EXECUTED
RUFFO GANG, GUILTY,
EXTERMINATED
BY RIVAL RUM RING**

The girl's pulse beat madly as she absorbed their story, and the events so briefly, so meagrely limned, rushed in kaleidescopic fashion through her brain.

Finally she finished reading, nodded with satisfaction as she relinquished the last of the newspapers, and she turned to face Mason with a proud, philosophic half-smile.

"It doesn't bring Joe back, does it?" she observed in her throaty contralto, "but that's the chance we always took."

"That's it," he agreed. "We've always taken chances, but neither you nor I approved of the one that Joe took, did we? So we lost our pal, and I've had enough. How about you, Rose? Are you through?"

She nodded as she stared into space.

"Yes, I'm through. The law is too powerful. It's a tough thing to buck when it's honest, but when it's administered by knaves, no one has a chance. I'm through all right, but I don't know what I'm going to do. I could go back on the stage, I suppose, unless they pinch me for all I've done in the last twenty-four hours.

"Hell, kid, you've cleared Joe, and you've exposed and ruined a number of crooked politicians. An army could do no more. Rose, I'm proud of you!"

She smiled wanly.

"I could never go through with such a program again, Gil," she confessed. "I guess hatred, legitimate righteous hatred, if there is such a thing, gives one strength and ingenuity. But what are you going to do, Gil?"

He arose and towered over her proudly, almost boyishly.

"I've taken a job with the Argus, Rose. It's quite all right, too. I'm to be a sort of crime specialist, to get the low-down on every case where a man or woman is framed. I doubt if a public official in River City will venture to abuse his trust for some years to come, but if it is attempted you may be sure that he'll be exposed."

Her eyes sparkled.

"Why, Gil," she exclaimed, "that's just fine! Just think, Joe might have been with us today if we'd had a newspaper brave enough to fight his battle!"

"True enough. Well, Rose, the old mob's dissolved. I'm going to the vaults tomorrow to determine our assets, and what we have belongs to you and Dopy Tucker."

She shook her head.

"Not a penny to me, Gil. I'm not particularly keen about it, but if I like I can stay with Mrs. Purcell. When Dopy's released we'll give it all to him."

She arose, put both hands on his shoulders and spoke earnestly.

"There never was a pal like you, Gil. If you're going straight, Hell, so am I, and so is Dopy, if we have to work our fingers to the bone."

BUS DRIVER SHOT TO DEATH

A pretty blonde in her early twenties, said to be hostess in a Long Island road-house, is sought for the murder of Michael Robert Kelly, twenty-nine, driver of a bus between Freeport and Jamaica, and understood to be a member of a wealthy Baltimore family.

According to the Nassau County police, Kelly and the girl, known only as "Marjorie," had been friendly. She was waiting for him when he checked out after his last run at 2 A. M. and seemed to be pleading with him at the terminal in Banks Avenue, Rockville Centre.

He took her away so other drivers could not overhear, and they were walking along Nassau Avenue when two shots were heard. Kelly was found dead from two bullets in the heart and back. The girl was driving away in a roadster and has not been seen since.

Kelly lived at No. 32 East Avenue, Valley Stream. The girl is believed to be hiding somewhere in Jamaica.—(From N. Y. World)

One Hour Before Dawn

By WILLIAM MCNEIL

The moll belonged to Big Jim Regan, and the mob thought she belonged to Italian Joe, and maybe Eddie the Dope knew where she DID belong, but—

FLOSS O'CONNOR was Big Red Regan's moll. The fact that Red was doing a stretch up in the Big House that would take five long years out of his life, and hers, hadn't seemed to change her a bit at the start. Even the tabloids had spoken of her as a loyal, courageous girl.

That is why the river mob were struck dumb when she took up with Italian Joe Mercurio. The wise ones shook their heads knowingly. One or two felt sorry for Red, but then, that was something for Italian Joe and Big Red to settle between themselves—someday.

There were those who hinted that Italian Joe had framed Big Red Regan. The olive-skinned, oily haired wop and Big Regan had clashed on several occasions. But the big, good natured Irishman, secure in his control of the river mob had laughed it off. Only once had he given a display of the killer that he was. He had openly slapped the Italian across the face.

"Some day, Joe," he snarled, "I'm gonna burn you down."

Italian Joe's face on that occasion had displayed no greater emotion than it had on that later day when he stood staring at the door through which they had taken Big Red. He was one of the last to leave the crowded courtroom when the session was over.

At first Floss O'Connor had fought tooth and nail to aid her man. She knew that the jury wouldn't give Red half a chance. His reputation had been against him from the start. In her futile rage she threatened to 'get' Phil Moran, the detective who brought Red in. She had argued it out with Moran later on the street.

"You cheap flatty!" She twisted her full lips into a snarl as she spoke, "Red Regan was planted an' you know it!"

Moran laughed. He admired this cheaply gaudy, painted girl of Regan's for her nerve and the fight that was in her. He could have told her much that she didn't know about the crooked deal they had handed Big Red. Maybe he would—someday.

"Listen, Floss," he grinned, "I'm admittin' we couldn't prove all the stuff we checked up against Red right now. If we could only get you to talk—the way he did—"

"What do you mean?"

The detective's face became serious.

"Double-crossin' you like he did. Why the very night we picked him up in the Princess Hotel, do yuh know who he was with? That dame from Torreli's place."

Floss O'Connor's small white face was within an inch of his own. Gone now was the happy, careless girl that had been Big Red Regan's moll. In her powdered face her eyes were dark as the night. Her nervous, highly

polished fingers twitched. But her voice was low and well under control.

"Phil Moran," she said, "you're a liar! There never was a squarer shooter in this world than Big Red, an' you know it. He'd have gone to hell for any one of his friends. You know that too. An' I'm tellin' you right now that I'm out to get the man that double-crossed him. I know more than you think I do. I'm out to get the man who—"

"Who is he?" grinned Moran. "Do I know him?"

Floss O'Connor's painted young mouth twisted into a bitter laugh.

"You know him, Mister Moran—an' so do I."

BUT BEFORE the first year of Big Red's sentence had passed Floss seemed to have forgotten her promise. She never spoke of Red any more.

She didn't even seem to avoid Italian Joe Mercurio, although it was common knowledge now that the wop had used Red as bait for the law. She seemed gay and happy although something hard had come into her face.

But it wasn't until after the Jersey payroll robbery that she actually seemed to yield to Italian Joe.

The wop had drawn on Eddie the Dope for a remark passed about Big Red being double-crossed by her. Everyone knew that the success of that bold daylight holdup had hinged upon the expert timing worked out by Big Red Regan months before.

The Italian had simply made use of Big Red's carefully worked out plans. Since Regan couldn't possibly be imagined disclosing these plans to anyone, with the exception of Floss O'Connor, the wise ones again nodded their heads knowingly.

No one else said anything. Eddie the Dope was fool enough to talk, that's all.

From that time on the entire river mob knew that Floss was Italian Joe Mercurio's girl. Some of them felt sorry for Big Red. Eddie the Dope, slinking down side streets to avoid the Italian, kept his mouth shut now, but his scheming brain was ever on the alert.

Alone, or in dark corners, he would heap vile curses on the head of the man who had not only made himself head of the river mob, but had stolen Big Red Regan's moll as well.

"Wise guy!" he spat venomously, "I'm a dope, am I? Well, snake, before I'm t'roo wit' you, I'll show yuh which one of us is the dope, you or me!"

The curious thing was that Floss O'Connor, the cause of the bad blood between Eddie the Dope and Italian Joe, had taken sides with the cokey.

"Leave 'im alone, Joe," she screamed, fighting mad at sight of the Italian's automatic, "You're not going to burn him down while I'm here. Get behind me, Ed!"

Then, more softly she added, "What do you want to let your wop blood run away with you for? I don't want to lose you, yet!"

The smooth, oily haired Italian eyed her with the look of a hungry animal. Then a satisfied grin crossed his heavy lips.

"Don't you worry about losin' me, kid," he smirked.

Floss O'Connor shivered a little, but her painted lips curved in a smile. Eddie the Dope's lifeless eyes wandered from the girl's face to Italian Joe.

Then with a vile curse he turned his back on them. But anyone who by chance had met the cokey later that night, slinking along back streets, would have noticed first of all the shrill little laugh almost of triumph that broke from his lips from time to time.

Eddie the Dope had planned his revenge well.

UP IN that grim hell, the Big House, the fading daylight filtered in upon Big Red Regan. Clutched in his fingers was the dirty scrap of paper that the guard had just passed to him. Scarcely moving his lips the big Irishman crumpled the paper in his powerful fist and shot a question at the slouchy uniformed man who stood watching him.

"You got this note from Eddie the Dope himself, or did he send someone?"

"From Ed—he's been down in the village since last night," the guard whispered hoarsely.

"Has he got any of the mob with him?"

"Listen here, Red," countered the guard, "when do I get them five grand for fixin' this getaway for you?"

"Just as soon as I'm on the outside, Doyle," replied Big Red. "You know me an' you know that I never went back on my word in my life. All that I want to do is to get out for twenty-four hours."

"If I c'n get you out at all yuh might as well stay for the rest of your life, or until they pick you up again," growled Doyle, "I'm takin' a hell of a chance, Red. I wouldn't do it for any guy but you—"

"An' what about Ed?"

"He's alone. Got a stolen car with stolen license plates. He's fixed it so there'll be a second car, about eight miles. From there on a milk truck'll carry yuh through. You'll be in N'Yawk about an hour before dawn."

"An hour before dawn," breathed Big Red Regan, his lips setting grimly, "Thanks, Doyle. Don't be surprised if you find the hot seat waitin' for me by the time I come back."

"Gawd, the chair!" gasped the guard, "Listen Red, there ain't no dame in the world worth goin' to the chair for."

Then he shivered with the fear that gnawed at his soul. "What'll happen

to me if they find out how you made your getaway?"

Big Red Regan laughed grimly.

"No one will ever find that out, Doyle. No one knows that Eddie the Dope is your brother so even if we're stopped there'll be nothing to connect you with the break. When I'm once clear of the gates I'll go to hell before I'll let any guy stop me until my job is done. After that I don't give a damn. There'll be an investigation with the usual hokum—a gun smuggled in to me somehow—You'll say that you were beaten unconscious an' your keys stolen."

The guard interrupted him nervously.

"I—I guess that for five grand, Red, you c'n make a real job outa that beaten *unconscious*. I got it all fixed for Smolsky an' the gate to let yuh through. But yuh need clothes, an—"

Big Red Regan's grim smile widened at the guard's words. Turning his back to Doyle, Big Red bent forward. A second later he swung around to face him again and the guard's face paled with fear. Over Red Regan's arm hung a folded suit of clothes while his right hand gripped the ugly, cold steel of a Smith and Wesson Special.

"Gawd!" gasped the guard. "Where an' when in hell did yuh get them?"

Red Regan's only answer was a hoarse chuckle at the fear that lined the guard's face. Then his eyes clouded with the determination of the killer who felt his lean fingers closing upon his victim's throat.

"I've still got some—friends, Doyle," he whispered.

But the guard only shook his head. It was more than he could understand, why a man should be willing to go to the chair on account of a woman. His brother, Eddie the Dope, had told him all about Floss and Italian Joe, but even Eddie hadn't known about the clothing and the

gun that had been smuggled in to Big Red. If such a thing had been done right under his nose and the noses of the other guards, then—

"Gawd!" he muttered again. "An' a big time guy like that is willin' to risk his neck on account of a moll. Ain't life one hell of a riddle?"

IN A large rear room, directly over Torreli's place on Eleventh Avenue, Floss O'Connor and Italian Joe Mercurio sat face to face over a table on which, exposed to the feeble light from above, lay over two hundred thousand dollars in money and stolen jewelry.

The look of anxiety that filled Joe's eyes faded as he admired the richly loaded table. All of this represented the work of only a few months. The sight of it all filled him with pride. But again the film of anxiety flooded his eyes.

"I was a sucker to show you where I had all this stuff hidden," he whined, the beads of moisture dripping from his swarthy face. "Supposin' the cops should come bustin' in? Where t'hell would I be then?"

"Aw, Joe," Floss O'Connor cried, "ain't part of that stuff mine? Ain't I been in on every deal with you? An' ain't I your girl? I just wanted to look it over again, that's all."

"But yuh didn't know where I had it hidden, an' now—"

Floss O'Connor's painted lips broke into a smile.

"You wasn't going to double-cross me, Joe, was you?"

"I don't trust any skirt," Joe growled.

The sound of footsteps passing in the hall outside brought a little cry to Joe's lips. Bending forward he tried to cover the gems and money while his strained eyes watched the door, and the beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. The footsteps passed his door and continued on

down the hallway. Italian Joe breathed a sigh of relief.

Floss O'Connor watched the Italian's face closely. Then her eyes returned again to the shimmering silver and platinum; the pearls and other precious stones, and the crisp bills, counted out into neat little piles of various denominations.

Italian Joe wet his lips. Ever since he had hung around with the river mob he had envied Big Red Regan's split on the various rackets put over by the gang.

Now that big split was his. He was sitting pretty and with almost four long years to go before Big Red could ever bother him again.

He had certainly made a clever move the day that he had planted the big Irishman for that cheap little Long Island job and then fixed it so that Phil Moran, the flatty, would pick him up.

Big Red had been the most surprised man in the world when they had fished the three rings and the platinum bar pin out of his pockets. Italian Joe laughed as the scene flashed before his eyes again.

Suddenly Floss O'Connor bent forward, listening. A clock was striking somewhere. Three times it struck. Italian Joe reached forward to gather in the jewels that lay before him on the table. Floss O'Connor smiled and touched Joe's hand.

"Joe," she whispered, "Let's go away tonight, just you an' me!"

The Italian eyed Floss with the look of a man who is about to realize the one thing that life had cheated him out of. He had stepped into Big Red's shoes as far as power and money were concerned.

His had been a rule of blood clouded by the smoke of his automatic. But as yet he had failed to gain control over this active, fighting moll of Regan's. True the river mob recognized her as his property—his girl.

She herself at times, as tonight, admitted the claim.

And yet, at other times, she ignored him and almost jeered openly at him. And now, at sight of the riches that lay scattered about the table, she had come to a final surrender.

Italian Joe Mercurio smiled complacently.

"Joe," Floss breathed again, "let's pack this stuff in a bag an' head for Canada. You've got your car outside. None of the mob will get wise to where we're going. And tomorrow we'll be in Canada, just you an' me. What d'yuh say, Joe?"

Italian Joe put his fleshy fingers over her own. This was his moment of final triumph over Big Red Regan. And yet his avaricious mind clung to the power and wealth that might be his if he stuck on here with almost four long years ahead of him. He could even have Big Red taken for a ride when the Irishman finally was released from stir. And yet—

There was a new light in Floss O'Connor's velvet eyes as the hardness died out of them. Again she reached forward and touched his hand.

Her touch was magnetic. The hot Italian blood stirred in his veins as he eyed her bare throat and rounded breasts. He leaned forward, his lips seeking hers. For a brief second a flare of hatred flashed into the girl's eyes. Her slim body trembled and her small hands gripped the table's edge. Then her red lips curved into a smile of triumph. She knew that she had won.

CARRYING THE heavy black bag that contained the money and gems, Italian Joe Mercurio led the way down the narrow stairs that brought him to the street. Close at his heels came Floss O'Connor. Eleventh Avenue was deserted, although the lights in Torreli's place were still going strong. Quickly Joe

crossed the sidewalk to where his trim little roadster was parked. Without a word he threw the bag into the car and climbed in behind the wheel. Floss followed him, throwing an outer garment over the bag that rested on the floor between her feet.

At the same moment the huge bulk of a man slipped out of the shadows of the doorway that adjoined Torreli's. The light fell full on his face as he approached the car. It was Phil Moran, the flatty.

Italian Joe eyed the detective suspiciously as he rested one huge hand on the car, leaning forward with a grin on his heavy lips.

"Off on a little trip, just the two of you, eh?" chuckled the detective. "What t'hell's the rush? Checkin' out at three o'clock in the mornin'?"

"What is it to you?" asked Floss bluntly.

Italian Joe squirmed uneasily in his seat. But the flatty retained his good-natured grin. He acted like a man who had valuable information to give—if he cared to. Joe's uneasy fingers played with the wheel.

"Got a little news that might interest you, Floss," Moran added with a throaty laugh. "Your old sweetie, Big Red, was all set for a break tonight. My idea is that he was comin' down here to 'talk' things over with you. Well, at any rate, Eddie the Dope was to pick him up outside an' rush him in a stolen car down to where nothin' could keep him from droppin' in on you. Big Red, as you probably know, is all hell let loose when his temper's up. But—" again he laughed, "somebody filled Eddie the Dope full of snow again an' he got to shootin' his mouth off. Told the whole works—"

Floss O'Connor's face was white and drawn. A sob burst from her painted lips. The next second she had leaned forward and struck the detective full in the face, her tiny fist

drawing a trickle of blood from his lower lip.

Phil Moran caught the girl's two hands and forced her back into her seat. He admired this fighting moll. With the back of one huge hand he wiped the trickle of blood from his lip. Again he grinned.

"I've got a damn good mind to keep you here in N'Yawk where yuh belong, Floss—with me," he said.

"I told yuh once before that there are many things I could tell yuh—about Red goin' up to the Big House f'r instance—that yuh might wanna know. Yuh told me once that yuh was gonna 'get' the guy that double-crossed Big Red, an'—"

Italian Joe Mercurio's face was gray-white in the light reflected from Torreli's windows.

"Come on, Floss," he cried sharply, "let's get goin'!"

"You'll get goin' when I'm damn good an' ready," snarled the detective suddenly, "an' that'll be when I get a look at what yuhve got in that black bag, Joe!"

As if ashamed of his weakness of a moment before, the detective suddenly pushed Floss O'Connor aside roughly and reached for the bag. Italian Joe Mercurio's nerve failed him. With a sullen whine he gave up.

"How much?" he asked weakly.

He was satisfied to get away without exposing the contents of the bag to Phil Moran's greedy eyes. Floss O'Connor eyed the Italian's trembling fingers with a sneer. And this yellow rat was the man who thought he had won her.

The detective slipped the money into his pocket—two grand wasn't bad for a night's work. His hoarse words reached Floss O'Connor's ears as the trim little roadster pulled away from the curb.

"I coulda told you a lot if I'd wanted to, Floss. You coulda been my girl if you'd played on the level with me. I could even ha' tipped you off

about Eddie the Dope shootin' off his damn mouth an' the law stepping in just at the minute that Big Red Regan was makin' his break for liberty!"

THROUGH THE silent towns that bordered the Hudson River, Italian Joe's trim roadster tore on. Off in the distance a sleepy clock chimed the hour. Four o'clock! She had timed the distance from Yonkers well.

Italian Joe, bent over the wheel, kept his eyes on the winding road, leaving Floss to her own thoughts. And with the passing of each mile her heart grew lighter. The happy, careless girl of old seemed to come to life again within her.

Town after silent town was left behind them. As they neared the village of Ossining Joe's nervousness seemed to increase. Big Red's threatened break put the fear of God in him. It was lucky for him that he had been tipped off about Eddie the Dope in time. His fingers clutched the wheel grimly as he tore through the town. Then he breathed a sigh of relief. The Big House—and Red Regan—lay behind him. Ahead was Canada and safety.

His nerve returned to him again by degrees. Why should he let the spectre of Big Red Regan haunt him? He had played a desperate game and won. The old arrogant, complacent smile returned to his lips.

And then, suddenly, he saw the black hulk of the car that blocked the road ahead of him.

There was no room for him to pass it. To think of turning around was both foolish and futile. Besides—the Big House lay back there—and Red Regan—. With a grinding of brakes he stopped short, and then he laughed, nervously. The black hulk had turned out to be nothing more threatening than a milk truck.

But a shiver of fear went through

him as he watched the truck's driver, apparently attempting to turn on the narrow road.

But God in Heaven, what was this? The man who had been seated beside the driver had jumped out and was slowly approaching the roadster. And then Italian Joe Mercurio cried out in fear as he caught sight of the man's face in the faint light of approaching dawn. It was Big Red Regan!

The driver was Eddie the Dope, the cokey that Phil Moran had said had talked too much and consequently spoiled Big Red's break for liberty. Italian Joe's face was the color of putty as he turned to Floss O'Connor.

"We're trapped, Floss!" he screamed. "Gawd! Big Red's got us!"

To his great amazement the girl only leaned back in her seat and laughed.

"Here he is, Red! Just as I swore to you I would, I have delivered him right into your hands!"

Then turning to Italian Joe she went on, "I swore to God I'd get the man who double-crossed Big Red. Well, here you are, you rat! Get out an' take what's comin' to you!"

Big Red Regan, wearing the clothes that his moll had smuggled in to him under the very eyes of the guards, reached one powerful hand forward. A second later Italian Joe Mercurio was standing out in the road facing him and almost slavering with fear. His rat eyes wandered about hopelessly in search of a means of escape. Eddie the Dope jumped forward, insane rage firing his muddled brain.

With a quick jerk of his right wrist he swung an ugly looking automatic into view. Before Big Red or Floss could make a move to stop him the automatic went into action. The crashing slug tore straight into the Italian's head. The wop went down. Eddie the Dope did a dance of rage,

pumping slug after slug into the body at his feet.

And they left him there, beside the road, his body riddled with bullets. They stopped only long enough to give Eddie time to ditch the truck, then, with Big Red Regan at the wheel of the wop's roadster, the two gunmen and Big Red's moll tore on into the night.

IN THE Grand Hotel in Montreal, Big Red Regan opened the black bag and spread money and jewels out on the bed. At sight of the fortune before him Eddie the Dope gave vent to a shrill whistle and hurried to the door to assure himself again that they were locked in safely. The big good natured Irishman counted out the money.

"You better take yours in cash, Eddie," he laughed. "I don't want you to get all snowed up an' go peddling any of these things around up here. There's no sense in inviting the bulls to jump on our trail."

Eddie the Dope looked hurt, but his eyes brightened at sight of the pile of dollars that came his way. As far as he was concerned, the hell with Canada! He would be off for New York again before the night was over. When he had left them alone together, Big Red Regan grinned.

"We'll disappear for a while, Floss," he said, "after all, as Doyle said, I might as well stay away for the rest of my life, or until they pick me up again anyway." He laughed, "Five grand of this goes to him, Floss. Then it'll be me an' you for England an' the continent for a while. I've got a hunch that we'd both like to live on easy street for a few years. What d'yuuh say?"

Floss O'Connor's eyes were soft as the night again, and her round white breasts quivered under his hand.

"I'll go any where you say, Red. Ain't I your girl?"

Night Clubs of the Air

A Complete Underworld Novelette

By STEPHEN BARR RICHARDSON

A startling novelty for New York's sensation seekers—flying night clubs! And behind the rich spectacular display two grim Underworld kings wage a deadly war. Read this skin-ripping tale of gangdom in the clouds!

CHAPTER I WRECKED RACKETS

AN ATMOSPHERE of tense expectancy brooded over the three occupants of the small room that gave on the dance-floor of New York's most exclusive night-club, "The Golden Eagle."

Beyond the closed door wailing saxophones, clashing cymbals and the sweet moaning of violins united in festive music. For the patrons the evening was at its height, gay, brilliant and carefree.

For the trio waiting, anxious and silent, in the manager's office the gayety outside was an accompaniment in ironic contrast to the grim calamity that threatened.

Of the three, Lloyd Marsden, proprietor of the string of "Eagle" night-clubs, alone preserved an outward calm. His bronzed face stared impassively out into the night, heedless of the garish panorama of Broadway that flowed by endlessly beneath the windows.

It was the woman who first broke the silence.

"God! Lloyd," she exclaimed, "it's way past the hour." Before her on the table lay the shreds of a handkerchief she had torn to tiny pieces. Picking them up she threw them ir-

ritably into a corner. "Call up. Do something, can't you?"

"Easy, Peggy, there's a good girl." Marsden laid his hand on her arm. "You know we've done all there is to be done. If Ed Moberly doesn't show up with those men I told him to get, we might as well kiss 'The Red Eagle' good-bye. Sit down, Terry, there's no use borrowing trouble."

The other man had ground out the butt of his cigarette savagely and was pacing up and down the narrow room.

"I know it, Lloyd," he admitted with a shamefaced grin. "You're the boss, you stand to lose the most, and you can sit there as cool as the proverbial cucumber. Damned if I see how you can—"

The dry ringing of the telephone interrupted him. Deliberately Marsden picked up the receiver. Intently the man and woman kept their eyes on their leader. The bronzed face turned a shade paler, the sinewy hand on the girl's white arm tightened its grip in answer to the desperate, hurried words pouring over the wire.

"We have kissed 'The Red Eagle' good-bye," said Marsden slowly, replacing the receiver. "Moberly called up to say that he got there just ten seconds too late."

"What—what happened?" asked Peggy Allen in a whisper.

"Joe Penza's usual tactics," replied the leader with a weary smile. "That lad from Chicago has his raids well organized."

"The dirty, stinking hound!" burst out Terry Hale, pounding the table with his fist. "How many of our bunch did he bump off?"

"An even dozen," Marsden told him. "He's clever, that guy, damned clever. Swept the entry-way with machine-guns, went upstairs, shot the three men we have on the floor, ordered everyone out into the street, then blew the place to hell."

"Did he steal anything?" asked the girl.

Marsden shook his head. "He's playing a bigger game than that. Of course, he grabbed the receipts. But he wants to put me out of business, so he can corner the night-club racket in this town. Why should he make prospective customers sore?"

Hale nodded. "You're right there, Lloyd. Is Moberly coming here with his gang?"

"I told him it wasn't necessary. Penza will think twice before he tackles the 'Golden Eagle.' He knows we're here. Besides, I've taken care that he's heard we have the place well fortified. As long as he doesn't know exactly where our men are, he'll leave us alone." His voice became a hammer of determination. "And I'm going to fight that low wop gangster to the last ditch!"

Since the Chicago racketeer's invasion of his territory, Marsden had caused small hiding-places, in which one man could stand erect, to be built in the thickness of the walls on the stairs leading up to the dance-floor and around the dance-floor itself. Through loopholes concealed in the heavy decoration with which the walls were encrusted the place could be commanded; hostile gangsters

could be picked off by the unseen guards.

But Marsden had only had time to install his system in his finest night-club before the others were gutted by his relentless enemy.

EVERY precaution had been taken. In the manager's office in which the trio was sitting a small board with twenty miniature electric light bulbs had been hung on the wall. Wires led to each of the sentry-boxes in which a light would flash at a touch on the master-switch.

In answer to the light every man would respond and his particular light on the board would gleam. It was Marsden's device for making sure that his guards were alert.

"Those people out there," Hale jerked a thumb in the direction of the dance-floor, "don't know the protection they're getting. And they have the nerve to yap about the fancy prices we charge." He rose and went over to the board. "Might as well see if those fellows are on the job. How long is it since you flashed them, Lloyd?"

His head cupped in his hands, Marsden was thinking furiously. This made the fifth of his night-clubs that Penza had smashed in as many nights. So far he had been too busy trying to protect himself to take the offensive. But he'd be damned if he'd take his defeat lying down. There must be some way out. Hale repeated his question. Abstractedly Marsden roused himself.

"What's that, Terry? Oh, I guess it's all of an hour. Flash 'em again will you?"

Hale threw the master-switch over. The leader and Peggy slewed around in their chairs, their eyes on the board. But no answering lights appeared in the little bulbs. Dull and lifeless, they gave back only the faint reflection from the overhead fixture

in the office. Frantically Hale jugged with the switch. In vain!

With an oath Marsden sprang to his feet. "We're sunk if those men aren't at their posts. God Almighty—"

At that moment the shrill blare of a trumpet in the orchestra stopped in the middle of a phrase. The confused babble of sound on the other side of the door was cut short as if by magic.

Ripping out his gun, Marsden made for the door, flung it open. Close on his heels followed Hale and the girl.

"Stick 'em up if ya know what's good fer ya!" A snarling voice, reinforced by the hard muzzle of a gun pressing against his ribs, was a convincing argument to Lloyd Marsden. There had not been a soul in his line of fire except the terrified patrons of the club, huddled together in panic-stricken groups, motionless.

He glanced to his left. There, with hands held high, Peggy Allen and Terry Hale were being relieved of their artillery by a short, villainous-looking man while two others covered them.

A hideous, pock-marked face leered up at Marsden. "C'mon, fella, hand over yer rod an' make it snappy!" An increasing pressure of steel in his ribs caused him to surrender his gun. Expert hands patted his clothing, relieved him of the second automatic under his left arm.

Then the four men, who had been lurking just outside the door to surprise Marsden and his two allies, backed away a few steps though they still held their automatics ostentatiously in front of them.

From behind the piano emerged a squat, burly figure. On his swarthy face was a grin of malicious pleasure. His fat hands, sparkling with diamond rings, rubbed against each other in oily satisfaction.

"Well, Mr. Lloyd Marsden," he sneered, "I guess this is the last of

your famous bunch of night clubs." He turned to another short, beetle-browed Italian who was surveying Marsden with contemptuous amusement. "Do your stuff, Tony," he rapped out to the man.

Obediently the fellow herded the scared patrons of the "Golden Eagle" out of the room. Men and women in evening dress lost no time in leaving the dance-floor for the stairs which led to the street. The orchestra, gathering up their instruments, followed. In a few minutes the room was cleared of all except those directly concerned in the issue of the fight.

"That's not a bad idea, Joe Penza," remarked Marsden sarcastically, "to have your gang do your dirty work for you and come out in the open when it's all over."

"Can't make me sore," returned the Chicago gang leader with a grin, "however hard you try." He pulled out a chair from a table and straddled it. "I got what I came after, didn't I?"

"**T**'LL have to hand it to you," asserted Marsden with a laugh; "you did just that." He might as well accept defeat as gracefully as possible, however bitterly it rankled.

Out of the corner of his eye he glanced warily at Hale and Peggy Allen who stood glowering furiously at the leering gangsters. It was touch and go whether the three of them would be bumped off. "What are your terms, Penza?" he asked curtly.

The Sicilian surveyed him with leisurely insolence. "This makes the sixth and last of your elegant string of 'Eagle' night clubs that I have wrecked for you, doesn't it?" He mocked his helpless victim. "It takes a fellow from the Windy City to show you wise New York guys what speed is." Under his heavy black brows his eyes glinted in sudden menace; his voice took on a chill, threatening

tone. "You're out of business, Marsden, see? You and that frail of yours," he jerked a contemptuous thumb in the direction of the girl, "and the rest of your gang, I'm giving the whole bunch of you twelve hours to leave town."

"And suppose we don't?" asked Marsden indifferently, "Then what?"

"Just try it on," replied the other warningly, "and see what you get."

"Why don't you bump 'em off, boss?" put in Tony with a laugh. "Stiffs don't split, an' then you won't have no more trouble from 'em."

"Who's running this racket, Tony Minitello, you or me?" demanded Penza curtly. "I've got enough trouble on my hands organizing this racket to suit myself without taking these people for a ride. All the same, I guess I won't give you twelve hours. You three are leaving New York right now under my personal charge. The rest of your gang I'll attend to myself."

Minitello had slouched round to the cashier's desk. Pulling open the drawer, he stuffed his pockets with the money it contained.

"Keep it, Tony," his chief nodded approvingly. A glance at the big clock told him it was well after two.

"And now let's get going." He arose, sending the chair spinning out from under him.

Prodded by the menacing muzzles of pistols grinding into the small of their backs, the trio descended the stairs to the street where Penza's cars were parked at the curb.

Unceremoniously they were hustled into a large limousine. Minitello and another man climbed into the tonneau and sat on the two small seats in front of them. Another of Penza's men got in beside the driver.

"You'll see it in the papers, Marsden," he said, his features expanding in a grin of oily satisfaction, "but I'll give you a little advance dope on my plans in case you'd like to have it.

Your other night clubs were lousy joints, so I wrecked 'em. But this one's dandy, real elegant, and I'm going to use it as my head quarters. Tomorrow night the 'Golden Eagle,' it's good business to keep the name," he went on with a mocking flourish, "will be open for trade at the same old stand. Tony," he turned to his lieutenant, "drop 'em off somewhere in Jersey."

Lloyd Marsden, with a restraining hand on each of his companion's arms, had all he could do to control them and himself from an angry outburst. The suave insolence of the Chicago gang leader rasped his nerves, already strained to the breaking point by the collapse of the successful racket it had taken him years to build up.

But it was never Marsden's way to indulge in empty threats. And at present he saw no possible means of getting even with the man who had tricked him so effectively.

"Bye-bye, Marsden," Penza was speaking again, "and here's hoping you get to be one of the leading lights in Hohokus, New Jersey, or some other important city. But if you value your health, stay away from New York!"

"Good-bye, Penza," replied Marsden evenly. He had no intention of letting the Chicagoan see how his victory and his taunts had gotten under his skin.

With a parting wave of his bejeweled hand Penza turned back into "The Golden Eagle." The car started off, rounded the corner into Seventh Avenue and roared down town, exhaust wide open.

SOON they were speeding over the rough road through the evil smelling Jersey flats. To their left the varied lights of Newark air port blazed in the darkness. Marsden looked out longingly at the air-drome.

He had served with distinction in

the aviation during the war, had been on the point of buying a ship when the scrap with Penza had started. That was all over now.

He glanced sideways at his companion. Peggy's mouth was set in a grim, hard line, her blue eyes looked stonily straight ahead of her. Terry Hale sat motionless as a rock, his face averted. The two gangsters in front of them, their hands bulging menacingly in their coat pockets, sat regarding them with scornful indifference.

On through Elizabeth sped the car to turn abruptly into a rutted road. Soon the dark shapes of houses became more and more infrequent. At length the limousine stopped, and they were hustled out into the road.

Minitello climbed down from the front seat. With rough hands he stripped Peggy of her rings and the diamond necklace she was wearing.

"Take your hands off her, you dirty scum," shouted Marsden angrily. A blow on the back of his head stretched him senseless in the road. Deft hands relieved him and Hale of their money.

"If it wasn't for Joe's orders," said Penza's lieutenant, "I'd bump off the three of you. Any more cracks like that last one and I will, see?"

He kicked the huddled form of Marsden, looked at the girl and Hale in triumph, and strode back to the car, followed by the other members of the gang. "You can hock those clothes for a few bucks," he called derisively over his shoulder. "An' just remember the Hudson river's the dead line for you."

CHAPTER II

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER

PEGGY ALLEN and Hale watched the dwindling red tail light of the limousine disappear around the curve. Then they stooped to the unconscious figure on the ground.

After a few moments Marsden stirred slightly and groaned. Hale returned with his hat full of water from a nearby brook. Taking it from him, the girl sprinkled some of it over Marsden's face.

Revived by the icy water, Marsden sat up. "I ought to have had more sense than to give that wop any back talk," he said slowly. "God! what a fine bunch of suckers this fellow Penza's made of us!" Taking hold of Hale's outstretched hand, he struggled to his feet. "Let's see if we can make it to a hotel," he went on. "Tomorrow we'll see what can be done about giving Penza some of his own medicine."

"It's a fine idea, Lloyd," agreed Peggy drily, "but those bright boys relieved us of all our spare cash."

"Not quite all, I think," replied Marsden with a wry smile. "I am literally well heeled."

"What do you mean?" asked Hale.

"Just that I took the precaution of sticking a hundred dollar bill under the in-sole of every shoe I've got," answered Marsden.

"And these two centuries will just about save our lives," added Peggy. "Let's be on our way."

Dawn was breaking when the trio, footsore and weary, reached a hotel in a small New Jersey town. Though his head was splitting from the blow he had received, Marsden knew he could not afford to lose any time.

The gray light of dawn, filtering through the windows of the room they had engaged, threw the drawn, haggard faces of the three people in their bedraggled evening clothes into sharp relief.

Marsden, telephone on the table in front of him, was waiting for a call he put through to New York.

"We've got to work and work fast to get back at Penza," he told the other two. "Driving by Newark airport last night gave me an idea. I'm going into business again with a

racket that'll put that yellow Chicago hound's nose right out of joint." The telephone bell rang. "Hello, Moberly, is that you?" he said curtly in answer to a sleepy voice at the other end of the wire. "I want you to come out here right away and bring as much dough with you as you can lay your hands on." He gave the name of the hotel of the town before he hung up. "With old Ed on the job," he remarked, turning to the others, "we ought to get some action."

"NOT the kind we want, though," countered Peggy drily. "Hasn't it occurred to you Lloyd, that Moberly's alibis have been a little too frequent lately?"

"You're right, Peggy," answered Marsden, frowning. "But I can't believe Ed would double cross me!"

Peggy laid a hand on his arm. "Will you never learn, Lloyd, that some people hate you for doing them a good turn? I was against taking him on from the very start. I never liked him."

"After the way he fell down on us last night, I'd be damned if I'd trust him," put in Hale.

"Perhaps you're right," admitted the leader reluctantly. Disloyalty, in Marsden's code, was one of the unpardonable sins. "To get back to my plan, how does a night club in the air appeal to you?"

The two stared at him incredulously.

"The idea's great," replied the girl sardonically. "But where are we going to get the dough to finance it?"

"As soon as Moberly arrives," Marsden told her, "we'll attend to that little matter. Meanwhile, Terry, suppose you go out and buy us a couple of store suits." He drew off a shoe and extracted a bill which he handed Hale. "I'm going to arrange one or two things with Peggy."

The door had scarcely closed be-

hind Marsden's lieutenant when the girl turned angrily to him.

"You trust people too damn far, Lloyd," she said. "Let me handle Moberly when he comes. You do a fade out, and I'll plant something on that yellow hound that ought to convince even you."

"When once I trust a man," acknowledged Marsden, "I'm from Missouri when it comes to suspecting him. I've got to be shown. And when you remember I saved that fellow's neck—"

"You won't lose anything, Lloyd," the girl promised him. "I won't tell you what I'm going to do, but it'll prove whether Moberly is on the level or not."

There was a knock on the door, and Hale burst in with a large package and the first editions of the New York evening papers.

"Now I know why Penza didn't have us bumped off, Lloyd," he exclaimed furiously, flinging down his bundles. "He certainly has made a laughing-stock out of us!"

Marsden reached for the papers. His eye ran down the column of type under the head title announcing Penza's successful raids. The satirical tone in which the story was written, the jibes of the reporter, made Marsden and his outfit utterly ridiculous.

For all his slugging tactics, the Chicago gang leader had been subtle enough to put his enemy out of the way more effectively than if he had killed him. His entire gang, Marsden knew, would enlist under Penza's banner, unless he could act—and quickly.

Until this disgrace was wiped out, until scores were even with Penza, he couldn't show his face in New York.

The telephone rang, announcing Moberly's presence downstairs in the lobby.

"Send him up," said the girl brief-

ly, then, "You two go in the other room. I'll handle him."

The door opened to admit a small, inconspicuous-looking man, whose face was an expressionless mask.

PEGGY greeted him good humorously, put all her cards on the table with the utmost frankness. When Moberly protested that his gratitude to Marsden would prevent him going over to Penza, the girl heaved a long sigh of relief and told him that Marsden was going to stage a quick comeback. That very night at ten o'clock, she told him, they were returning to New York where they would plan an attack on Penza.

"We'll meet in our loft building at West 14th street," she concluded, "at midnight. I knew you'd stick by us, Ed. Lloyd and Terry have gone out. They'll be sorry to have missed you."

"I'll be there on the dot," Moberly rose. Taking a small wad of bills from his pocket, he handed them to her. "This is all the kale I could manage. I'll have some more for you tonight."

Peggy leaned back in her chair, fingering the roll of bills absently, as the man's footsteps died away down the corridor. Calling the two men from the other room, she quickly outlined her plan to them.

"And then, Peggy," Marsden's fist pounded the table excitedly, "We'll start 'Night Clubs of the Air'."

Toward evening a rickety Ford sedan, decorated in the facetious manner dear to the small town wit, wheezed through the Holland Tunnel and turned north. In front of a low brick house in Barrow Street one of its occupants, after a stealthy glance around him, jumped out and dived into the area-way.

By the time the car had creaked its way around the block, the man had emerged again.

"Quick work, Terry," Marsden con-

gratulated him from the driver's seat, accepting the pair of automatics Hale proffered. "Did Molloy have anything to say?"

"Most of our gang are waiting to see which way the cat jumps before they join up with Penza," rejoined Hale shortly. "But they'll stick by you, Lloyd, if there's a fighting chance."

Marsden nodded grimly and swung the car westward into 14th Street. It was well before midnight when they drew up at the loft building which was their destination. A single flickering gas jet cast eerie shadows on the dusty stairs.

Marsden led the way up to the second floor and darted to the window to look down into the street they had just left. Below the house a long black limousine had drawn up. The street lamp shone on the steel of gun-barrels protruding from its windows. Two floors above a door opened and shut again. But Marsden's quick ear caught the low murmur of voices. They were trapped! Caught between two fires. He tiptoed back to where the girl and Hale were waiting in an angle of the stairs.

"You were right, Peggy," he whispered. "Ed Moberly is double crossing us. Quick, this way."

Marsden had not rented the loft building without being sure that it had handy exits. Up the stairs to the third floor sped the trio, where a window in the rear gave on a fire escape.

Leaving Peggy on guard in the shadow of the iron balcony, Marsden and Hale climbed the ladder that led to the fourth floor. Catching hold of the gutter above his head, Marsden swung himself onto the roof, avoiding the window.

The next moment Hale had joined him. Stealthily the two men crawled over the roof to where the glass-framed rectangle of the skylight projected above the black tar.

HUDDLING close together, Marsden and Hale peered through the gap left open between the dust-grimed panes in order to admit air to the room below.

"Looks as if Moberly was O. K., Terry," whispered Marsden to his lieutenant. "There are six of our men with him."

"What about that limousine waiting?" Hale reminded him. "The way I figure it, we three were expected to go up and get a lot of hot air from Moberly. Then we'd be chopped as soon as we got to the street. And if we tried to beat it back up the stairs—"

"Ed and those six men of ours would be waiting for us with their rods," Marsden supplied. "For all that, Ed may be on the level," he added, still reluctant to suspect a man whom he had once trusted.

Underneath them the seven men were lounging around the floor, silent for the most part save when one of them would mutter impatiently and rise to his feet to take an abrupt turn or two up and down the room. From their vantage-point on the roof the two watchers could see the dusty whitewashed room, lit only by a naked, flaring gas jet, could hear every word as it was borne upward on the still night air.

"Listen, fellows," Moberly was saying, "suppose you all give me the dough you had from Penza for this job. You'll have it back when those three are bumped off. But I don't want 'em to suspect nothing, see?" He extracted a roll of bills from his pocket, placed them on a wooden stool in front of him. "Five grand apiece from each of you guys an' the twenty I've got here will look like real dough to that sucker Marsden." He glanced at his watch. "An' a lot of good it'll do him! He an' his moll an' that guy Hale ought to be here any minute now."

Marsden's eyes had narrowed to

mere slits, his mouth was a tight line. Moberly's death-warrant was as good as signed.

"I'm going after that guy," whispered Marsden to Hale. "You stay here and do your stuff."

All at once the door into the room below opened to admit Minitello.

"Change of plans," he announced curtly. "We'll croak these three with knives on the second landing. There's a whole bunch o' cops watchin' across the street. Won't make any noise this way." He disappeared the way he had come.

With a nod of satisfaction Marsden crept away from his lieutenant's side, descended the fire escape to where Peggy Allen was crouching, gun in hand, and instructed her to join Terry on the roof.

"I probably won't be able to get back to you," he concluded. "So don't wait for me. I'll meet you at Molloy's."

CHAPTER III

FLYING RACKETEERS

MARSDEN watched the girl's lithe figure disappear in the darkness above him; then he crept through the window into the dimly lit stairway.

"Well, Ed," he said, throwing open the door, "here I am, punctual to the minute!" Indeed, a neighboring church clock was tolling the hour of midnight as he entered.

"I managed to rake up some dough for you, Lloyd," Moberly told him with a gesture toward the heap of bills lying on the stool. "There's fifty grand. Where'd you leave Peggy and Hale?"

"That'll do as a starter," rejoined Marsden coolly, sweeping up the money and cramming it into his pocket. The sidelong glance at Moberly's face told him that his deliberate ignoring of his question had aroused the other's suspicions.

Stepping back a pace, Marsden whipped out his two guns with lightning-like speed. "Reach for the ceiling, all of you, you dirty, double-crossing lice!"

Taken utterly off their guard by the swiftness of the command, the six men obeyed. But Moberly must have known what was in store for him, for his hand darted to his armpit.

The report was deafening in the narrow room. With a ghastly grin on his face the traitor crumpled, his fingers tearing convulsively at his chest.

Footsteps were pounding up the stairs outside. To get away through the window would be fatal, Marsden knew.

"If you guys think Lloyd Marsden's going to let himself be licked by that oily Chicago wop," he backed to the door, both guns held in front of him, "you've got another think coming!"

Another second and he was outside; the door slammed behind him. A knife struck quivering in the wood work, missing his head by the fraction of an inch. In the dim light he could see the figures of men huddled on the landing below.

Crouching on the top step, he fired twice as another knife whizzed past, ripping his shoulder.

In the room he had just left he could hear the sound of shots. Terry and the girl were guarding his rear, firing through the skylight into the room below!

Gathering himself together, Marsden charged into the packed mass of men on the landing; his unexpected attack sent them headlong on the floor. For a few moments he hit out right and left, clearing a path to the window.

The front door that Minitello had locked, suddenly gave way before the assault of the police who had been waiting across the street. It was only a matter of seconds since he had shot Moberly, thought Marsden, lashing

out vigorously with gun-butt and foot at his assailants. Thank God they didn't dare use their weapons in the dim space for fear of hurting one another.

The police were clattering up the stairs, rounding the turn just below him when Marsden shook himself free and dashed through the window on to the fire escape. He hugged the wall as a last vicious fusillade tore at him from the window, before Minitello and his men dashed up the stairs to escape the oncoming police.

To try to join Hale and Peggy on the roof was madness. Marsden sped down the fire escape, swung himself from the last rung of the ladder into the court yard below. Running across the yard, he reached the fence that separated it from the back yard of the opposite house. Swinging himself over it, he dropped on the other side.

In the loft building on 14th Street, a bitter fight was raging. The crunching of night sticks on human heads, the shattering report of the heavy police .45's, yells of pain and anger, told Marsden that he had put a very neat crimp in Penza's scheme.

Hoping that Terry and the girl had been able to escape over the roofs, he lifted the grating above the cellar and jumped in. From his knowledge of the construction of old houses in New York, he knew that there would be a similar grating that gave on the street in front of the house. The inhabitants of the tenement had long since gone to bed and he would not be disturbed.

A few minutes later a taxi dropped him in front of the hide-out on Barrow Street. Inside he found his lieutenant and Peggy who had just arrived by an equally circuitous route.

"IT'S thanks to you, Peggy," he said, "that we're alive tonight. Moberly won't ever double cross us—or any one else, again," he added grimly. Taking the roll of bills from

his pocket, he counted them deliberately. "Fifty grand's not a bad stake to start with," he continued. "We're going to move over to Newark so as to be near the Airport. 'Night Clubs of the Air' will be a going concern inside of a week."

Lloyd Marsden's prophesy proved to be correct. Full page ads, placed in all the New York papers, promised the jaded palates of rich sensation-seekers a new and undreamt of thrill.

Penza was busy effacing the consequences of his defeat at Marsden's hands. It had taken several high-priced lawyers and a great deal of money to prevent his becoming involved. So Marsden was left to prepare his new venture in peace.

He went at once to see his banker, a man whose affiliations stretched as high into the rarefied atmosphere of Park Avenue as they struck deep into the roots of the underworld. To him he propounded his scheme.

Huntington Wright leaned eagerly over his desk as the details of the plan were unfolded to him.

"It's great, Lloyd," he declared. "But why don't you raise money by one of your usual rackets?"

"It takes time to pull off a big stunt," rejoined Marsden. "And, besides, I want this thing to go through right away. How about it?"

"You've been spending money fighting Penza and protecting those late lamented 'Eagle' Night Clubs of yours," the banker reminded him with a smile. "But I'll back you to the limit, Lloyd. How much do you need?"

"Let me have a hundred thousand in cash, and arrange for the purchase of four tri-motor all-metal cabin monoplanes. The cover charge is going to be plenty. If the scheme makes the hit I think it will, we might get hold of a Zeppelin later on."

The banker whistled in amazement. "That's a pretty tall order, Lloyd," he observed. "Still, I think it can be

managed. How soon do you want them?"

"Today if possible," rejoined Marsden with a grin. "You can bring pressure to bear on some factory to switch an undelivered order to yours truly."

The compliment to his power obviously flattered the banker. He pressed a button on his desk. "I'll see what can be done," he assured the gang leader.

In answer to his ring a secretary appeared.

"Please let Mr. Marsden have all the cash he wants. Take it out of my personal account," he told the girl, "and get his receipt for it." He rose, taking Marsden by the arm. "Miss Caroll will fix you up, old man," he assured him, "and I intend to be one of your very first patrons. Let me know as soon as you are ready."

"You bet I will, Huntington," said Marsden gratefully, "and thanks a lot!"

If money talks, the cash that Marsden spread abroad with lavish hands in the next few days fairly screamed. Through the capitalist's power and the gang-leader's suave pressure, a large trans-continental concern found that delivery on four large passenger ships it had ordered was mysteriously delayed.

To Peggy Allen the leader entrusted the decoration of the four huge planes. Under her able direction an army of painters and upholsterers invaded the hangars where the ships were housed.

And every day the papers carried more and more alluring advertisements of "Night-clubs of the Air." At the end of the week reservations, even at the staggering prices Marsden was charging, had been made for months ahead.

K NOWING the effect that his trimming at the hands of Joe Penza would have on the public mind, Mars-

den remained strictly anonymous. When he had made good, and only then, would he reveal the identity of the man behind this novel departure in entertainment.

If Penza once got wind of his plans, there was bound to be fighting. And he knew, from certain meaning hints that Huntington Wright had let drop after the enthusiasm of their first interview had time to cool off, that the banker would not finance him again if he failed this time.

But Penza, in spite of his apparent inactivity, had not been idle where Marsden was concerned. He had discovered who was behind "Night-clubs of the Air."

"Thinks he'll put it over on me, does he?" he demanded of Minitello who was nursing a bandaged forehead and broken arm, the results of his affray in the loft building on 14th street. "Well, I warned that fool Marsden where he got off if he started anything that cut into my racket."

"You made a sucker out of him in this burg, Joe," replied Penza's lieutenant. "That writer you hired sure can sling words."

Penza grinned with satisfaction. "Yeah, that's why he's keeping his name out of this new stunt of his. I tell you what, Tony, we'll lay off him until he has things under way. Then," his massive hands tore the air, "we'll bust him wide open. An' there won't be no competition again from that bird. He's going to be croaked—and stay croaked!"

"Is that why you sent for Hungarian, Joe?" inquired Minitello.

"You got me—the first time!" his chief nodded approvingly. "This guy Stepan Janos was one of the best airmen in the Austrian army during the late unpleasantness. He's down and out now, but it's going to be worth a whole lot of dough to him to smash up Mr. Lloyd Marsden's flying night-clubs. I'm taking him down to Curtis Field tomorrow so he can get his

hands on a stick again." He went to the door of his office which gave on a large ante-room, filled at any hour of the day or night with members of his gang. Thrusting his head out, he called: "Hey, Janos, come in here a minute. I want to see you."

A tall, emaciated figure of a man, in whose grey eyes burned a spark of madness, entered the room and slumped into the chair to which Penza waved him.

"You know why I've sent for you, Janos?" the gang-leader shot the question at him.

The man looked up wearily, shaking his head as if indifferent to everything in the world.

"I want you to lay off the booze from this minute on," Penza rapped out, "until I tell you to hit it again. I guess you've seen these ads of 'Night-clubs of the Air'?"

Janos nodded. Speech seemed to be not worth the effort.

"The racket's run by a man I don't like, see?" Penza continued. "As soon as it's going strong I'm going to smash his planes to hell for him!" His fist pounded the table emphatically. "And then I'm going to make a clean sweep of his whole gang!"

The Hungarian regarded the other from under the thatch of unkempt hair that hung low over his forehead. "You mean I'm going to smash them?" he said quietly.

Penza flushed. He never liked his courage to be called in question by anyone.

"You take me with you tomorrow to Curtis Field and give me some lessons in fighting a ship, and I'll show you whether you're to tackle this job alone."

"Alright," said the Hungarian laconically. "Let me buy a pair of small planes and I'll have them equipped with camera-guns. Then, as soon as you're all set for the real thing—" He completed his words with an eloquent gesture.

CHAPTER IV

LOOPS AND LIQUOR

MEANWHILE the first adventurous clients of "Night-clubs of the Air" were arriving at the Newark flying-field in the fleet of cars Marsden had ordered, as a special feature, to take each patron from his home.

At the gate which gave on the separate enclosure where the four trimotored ships were already on the line with motors idling, four men stood, closely scanning the entrants. While all around the field other henchmen of Marsden's kept unobtrusive watch. Of their leader not a sign was visible.

Lloyd Marsden, with Peggy Allen and his lieutenant by his side, was looking on at the brightly lit scene from the window of his office at the side of the hangar.

"They seem to like it," he remarked as the enthusiastic buzz of praise from their prospective patrons was carried to them over the warm night air. "Peggy darling," he turned to the girl with one of his rare displays of emotion, "this racket will owe most of its success to you." He kissed her, then put on his flying-jacket, helmet and goggles. He had no intention of being recognized.

Hale followed suit; together the two men walked out to the waiting planes in which most of the passengers, still murmuring ecstatic praises, had already taken their places.

And, indeed, Peggy had decorated the huge ships with brilliant originality. Each of them bore the device of its own particular sport.

Dice, in grotesque human forms battled with each other all over the wings and fuselage of one plane; while the next carried the outlines of a neat assortment of cocktail shakers from among which brilliantly painted cards stood out with absurd

figures that suggested the three forms of poker—stud, strip and draw. Another machine was decorated with intertwined roulette wheels, and on the fourth a number of stags, with horns interlocked, pranced up and down between the two rows of colored lights set into the leading and trailing edges of each ship.

Marsden had determined not to take any chances on his enemy planting any pilots on him; he and Terry Hale were flying two of the huge ships while the other two had been entrusted to the care of men the leader had known during his service in the war.

A portly figure in a dinner-coat accosted him as he walked across the field. He wheeled sharply, then beckoned the man into the shadow under one of the great wings of the plane he was to pilot.

"Hello, Huntington," he greeted the capitalist who was backing him. "What's on your mind?"

"Everything Okay?" asked Wright. "I just wanted to wish you luck on your opening night."

"Thanks," replied Marsden. "Yes, I've taken every precaution I could think of." He gestured to the fleet of cars drawn up outside the flying-field. "Individual service to and from the home of each party with two of my men in each car; sentries posted all around the field. I've examined each plane myself to make sure that Penza hasn't been monkeying with it."

"Done about all you could do," observed the banker, rolling a large Havana cigar from side to side of his mouth. "I don't mind telling you, Lloyd, I'm a bit worried. Penza's been making me propositions in the last few days, very much on the quiet. What about your liquor?"

Marsden frowned. "That Chicago yegg's cornered that racket in New York, taken it clean away from me. I've had to get it from the South, but

it's all been analyzed. So he's been after you, has he?" His lips tightened into a thin line. "You wait till I'm on my feet again, Huntington. I'll send him back to his home town in little pieces!"

The banker laughed; nevertheless he was plainly uneasy. "It'll take you some time to build up your gang and your prestige again, Lloyd. But I'm counting on you to do it." He started to walk over to the plane with the stag emblem. "Good luck to you, old man!"

Marsden nodded his thanks and gave a swift look round. His pilots were all in their cockpits, awaiting the signal to start. Putting a whistle to his lips, he blew a shrill blast. Then he ran up the ladder to the glass-enclosed cockpit of the ship he was going to fly.

THE POWERFUL Pratt and Whitney engines shattered the night with their roaring thunder. Down the field sped the four ships, Marsden in the lead, to take off in a graceful climbing turn to the northwest.

Peggy Allen, waiting in the office, watched them winging their way over the Hudson. Like four huge, luminous birds they seemed from the ground, flaunting their gay lights.

Lloyd Marsden, his hands hovering over the controls, looked back through the glass window of the door at his back into the interior of the plane. His patrons appeared to be as pleased with what they found there as they had been at the novel decorations on wings and fuselage.

Behind a miniature bar a white-robed bartender was busy mixing drinks while men and women eagerly watched the signals of the croupier at the roulette-wheel or looked out of the glass portholes at the panorama that unfolded itself ceaselessly below them. The smart gowns of the women and the well-cut clothes of

their escorts were ample evidence that this newest form of entertainment had attracted New York's ultra-fashionable set.

He would need no hired writer, Marsden knew, to give him the proper send-off. He grinned acidly at the memory of the verbal trouncing he had received at Penza's hands. If any of his clients should guess that he, New York City's most discredited racketeer, was behind "Night-clubs of the Air," his patronage would show an instant and alarming decrease.

The banker's warning came back to him. So Penza knew all about it! But then the Chicago gang-leader, Marsden's spies informed him, had his hands full consolidating his newly won territory. He flew on over the far-flung lights of the great city; to his right the three other ships, radiant citadels of light in the blue-black night, were speeding along parallel with his own course.

After his experiences in the war straight flying was tame to Marsden. He decided to give his passengers some thrills. Pulling his stick back into his stomach, he stood the ship on its tail and rocketed up a couple of hundred feet into the air, then whipped out on an even keel and continued a long, steady upward climb until his altimeter needle stood at 6,000 feet.

Cutting his throttle, Marsden glided silently downward in long spirals. The twinkling lights of Central Park grew larger with the approach of the plane. When he was a scant fifty feet above the tree-tops, Marsden gave his motor the gun again and drove his ship straight for the arrowy shaft of a sky-scraper. Its undercarriage just missed the top pinnacle of the tower. Then, without giving his passengers time to draw breath, he was diving down over the East River to shoot up again and head out over Brooklyn to the dark surface of

the bay, dotted with the lights of passing vessels.

A glance to his rear told him that his patrons were delighted with his stunts. Flushed faces and sparkling eyes were eloquent tokens of their excited enjoyment. It was plain that he had discovered the secret of all good entertainment: novel sensation.

Out over the dark waters of the ocean darted the four planes, while their human cargo turned again to the excellent liquor Marsden had provided and the diversions of gambling.

A wide circling sweep brought them gaily decorated planes out far down the Jersey coast. Marsden glanced at the clock on his dashboard. It was time to return.

One after the other the glittering fireflies swept down to the landing-field. Soon their passengers were being taken back to their homes in the limousines awaiting them outside the enclosure.

NEXT MORNING the press was unanimous in its enthusiasm. In the sitting-room of the little house he had rented in Newark, Marsden scanned the papers anxiously for any mention of his name. There was none. Apparently not the least fascination of "Night-clubs of the Air" was that the identity of their operator was a mystery.

"It looks bad to me," he commented to Peggy. "Penza's no fool; he must know I'm back of this racket. Why isn't he letting the cat out of the bag?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "Search me," she replied. "Maybe he thinks it's bad business to let the world know you're staging a comeback so soon after he trimmed you."

"There's a lot in that," answered Marsden thoughtfully. "I guess I'll give the story to the papers myself if—" He paused as a sharp rap sounded on the panel of the door.

"It's Terry," a voice came from the corridor.

"Come in," said Marsden.

"I hung around the hangars all night after you left, Lloyd," Hale announced grimly, "and found a fellow doctoring the liquor. Penza's man, obviously. He'd gotten by the guard somehow."

"You bumped him off, I suppose?"

"Of course," Hale told him, "and I locked up the two men who were on duty outside the hangar."

Marsden swore viciously. "Put 'em on a ship bound for South America and see that they don't duck out before she clears. And let the rest of the gang know that anyone caught asleep at the switch again will be taken for a ride."

"Alright, Lloyd. Same route tonight?"

"Sure. Give 'em a few stunts and then take 'em out over the ocean where they can drink and gamble. What our customers want is excitement and plenty of it. I was just saying to Peggy that if I get the breaks I'll give the papers the story that Marsden is staging a comeback. That'll give 'Night-clubs of the Air' another boost."

"If it needs any," countered Hale with a grin, going to the door. "So long, you two!"

CHAPTER V

DEATH RATTLES

FOR THE FOLLOWING two weeks the town talked of little else but the flying night-clubs. People clamored for reservations on one of the planes; the waiting-list increased by staggering numbers.

Every night Marsden auctioned off a few seats he had reserved for enormous sums. Men thought nothing of paying down ten thousand dollars for an evening's entertainment, provided they didn't have to wait their turn.

Games for high stakes were played in the comfortable cabins of the monoplanes; there was always a sporting chance of paying for your ticket that way!

Although the protection Marsden had to pay was stiff, although his overhead was enormous, he succeeded in turning over a considerable amount of money to his backer.

"You've made good, Lloyd," Wright congratulated him. "I knew you would."

"All the world loves a winner," Marsden pointed out to him. "Look at the razz I got only two weeks ago. And even you were a bit uncertain. Now, I think this is exactly the right time to spring two big surprises on the public."

"Go as far as you like, Lloyd," the banker told him. "But, first of all, have you any news of Penza?"

"He's lying pretty low, as far as I can make out. But I've got my place so well guarded he can't pull any of his dirty tricks there."

"That's fine," assented Wright. "What's your latest idea?"

"I want you to back me to the extent of a dirigible," said Marsden. "There's going to be a real week end club on her. And at the same time I intend to let people know who is behind this whole project."

It was a marvel of luxury that loomed, silvery and immense, in the hangar that Marsden acquired along with the dirigible itself. In the spacious cars slung underneath its belly hidden lights played softly on low velvet-covered divans heaped with downy cushions. A narrow, glass-enclosed companionway connected the three cars. The center one held a bar, opposite which curtains were drawn in front of a miniature stage. In the other two cars each divan was completely enclosed by heavy curtains.

The dirigible, with passengers and crew as well as complete provisions

for the week-end was to leave its hangar the following Saturday at three in the afternoon and not to return until Monday morning. Marsden had engaged Tana Devi, the famous Oriental dancer, and a half dozen hand-picked beauties from Broadway as an added attraction.

The announcement of this latest recruit to the flying fleet of Night Clubs, coupled with the news that Lloyd Marsden, the discredited racketeer of a few short weeks ago, had staged a spectacular comeback, caused a sensation that had never before been equaled in New York's smart set. The telephone rang constantly in Marsden's office at the Newark flying field.

To all the eager applicants for tickets on the dirigible's maiden trip the same courteous negative answer was given. No reservations were available.

Through his banker Marsden had disposed of all the accommodations to a fabulously wealthy man who had paid him an enormous sum for them.

No longer in the disguise that helmet and goggles afforded him, he welcomed his clients and escorted them through the luxurious mazes of the dirigible's cars.

"You're coming with us, Marsden?" asked Cranston, his multi-millionaire client.

"I'm flying one of my own ships as usual," replied the other with a smile of regret. "Maybe the next trip I'll come along as a passenger. But you'll be well looked after, Mr. Cranston. You'll be seeing my four ships tonight over the Ocean." With a nod of farewell he left him in order to give the dirigible's commander some final instructions.

A FEW minutes later Marsden was watching the dirigible rise majestically from the ground and head inland. After making a wide circle over Jersey and eastern Penn-

sylvania, it would pass over New York at dusk and head out to the ocean. He followed it out of sight, pride in his heart that his enterprise had met with such success.

Joe Penza must be boiling, he thought with a pleased grin. He had taken such precautions that it was impossible for the Chicago gangster or any of his men to approach his field. And he knew that it was not Penza's policy to scare off possible clients. Consequently, he felt that his passengers were safe from any attack in the air.

It was with a feeling of elation that Marsden strode across the field that night to take his place in the cockpit of his plane. In the cabin behind him men and women were eagerly discussing the prospect of a trip on the dirigible. Glasses were raised in an enthusiastic toast to Marsden, who smiled his acknowledgment through the glass pane.

Against the fleecy wrack of clouds that scudded across the face of the young moon, the four planes stood out in moving patterns of light that glittered across the sky. Never before had Marsden felt such exhilaration.

Under his expert hand the great ship hurtled downward in a sudden dive, leapfrogging over the top of the Woolworth building to hurtle down into City Hall park and zoom up again abruptly over the Brooklyn Bridge.

Behind him the other three pilots were playing the game of follow the leader, winging after him in close formation.

Soon they were out to sea. Passengers on the four ships were laying bets as to the minute when the dirigible would first be sighted. Behind each bar a man was kept constantly busy shaking up round after round of cocktails.

In the large central car of the dirigible Cranston and his friends

were lounging comfortably on the low couches while Tana Devi's lithe body wound through the slow, graceful poses of an Oriental dance to the sensuous accompaniment of a flute playing a soft melody in a minor key. From stem to stern the long silvery cigar was ablaze with lights.

In the office next to the hangar Peggy Allen was keeping in constant touch with the pilots of the flying Night Clubs. In the next room a radio operator, head-phones clapped to his ears, was guiding the pilots of the four ships toward the dirigible.

But high above the gay, unsuspecting fleet of ships lurked deadly menace. Penza had decided to strike at Marsden in the hour of his greatest triumph. His story had been well prepared in advance and awaited only his final orders before being given to the press. In swift, single-seater combat planes, armed with machine guns, he and the former Hungarian ace, Stepan Janos, bided their opportunity to pounce down on their defenseless victims. The Chicago gangster had proved an apt pupil and had no reason to doubt the outcome of his plan.

All at once glasses clinked against each other. Above the roar of the powerful engines men and women exchanged delighted shouts. A twinkling blaze of lights on the horizon, the dirigible had at last appeared in sight. The winner of the sweep stake, who had been able to guess closest to the time when the dirigible would be sighted, swept up his winnings and laughingly yelled for a round of drinks.

The four ships drew close together at a signal from their leader. Wing-tip almost touching wing-tip, they swept on toward the dirigible, a solid bank of glittering light.

Marsden had worked out his schedule to perfection. The dirigible's passengers had scarcely finished applauding the sensuous Oriental

dancer, when a steward entered to announce that the four planes were in sight. Eager faces were pressed against the port-holes to watch the two planes at either end of the formation speed toward them with throttle opened to the last notch.

Her slim waist encircled by Cranton's arm, the beautiful dancer looked on, enthralled by the spectacle of the great machines hurtling toward them out of the darkness.

A few hundred yards away Marsden and Hale were gliding on with idling motors, awaiting their turn to divert the dirigible's passengers and their own with a similiar exhibition.

When a collision seemed inevitable, the experienced hands at the controls of the first planes pulled back on their sticks. Over the long torpedo of the dirigible they flew, to wheel right and left above it.

THEN PENZA struck! Swooping down like falcons on their prey, the guns of the two pursuit planes vomited their steel-jacketed hail of death into the close-packed trio of machines below them. Those brightly lighted ships offered a target impossible to miss.

The incendiary bullets ripped through the fragile envelope of the dirigible. His head pierced by a bullet, the pilot of one of the planes above it slumped forward against the stick. The plane, obedient to the pressure on its controls, nosed sharply down to bury itself in the huge gas bag underneath.

Again Penza and Janos deluged the other machine with vicious bursts of lead. It fell off on one wing, righted itself for a brief second, then weaved downward faster and faster in the ghastly motions of a spin to plunge out of sight in the ocean.

It had all happened in an instant. Lloyd Marsden stared incredulously at the frightful wreckage of the

three machines a short distance off. Lambent, searing flame spouted from the bullet-riddled dirigible, eclipsing the gay lights that mocked him now with such irony. In and out above the ruins he caught sight of two darting, wasplike planes.

Instantly Penza's diabolically clever scheme was apparent to Marsden. By crashing his entire fleet where they would sink and leave no trace, the Chicago gangster would rid himself very neatly of his rival. Another sad chapter would be added to the long list of fatalities in the air.

Instinctively switching off his lights, Marsden climbed desperately for the scant refuge of the fleecy clouds high above him. He could be of no help if he stayed on the sea. To his left he could see that Terry Hale had plunged his ship into complete darkness and was losing no time in making for safety.

But Hale, for all that he gave his engine everything he could, could not hope to outdistance the venomous attacks of his relentless enemies.

His black, beady eyes glued to his sights, Penza was hurling his ship toward the huge tri-motored plane whose pilot was striving so frantically to allude him. Above him the Hungarian, his gray eyes alight with the mad joy of destruction, was already letting loose a few bursts at long range.

Like a hunted animal, Hale looked about him hopelessly for means of escape. There was none. But he might be able to give his leader a chance if he could hold up the deadly attacks of his two foes long enough. Another few seconds would give Marsden time to gain the precarious shelter of the cloud. Being the nearest, his plane had been the first to be attacked.

Hurling his stick forward, Terry Hale drove his ship down to the surface of the water tossing restlessly a thousand feet below. He was about

to die, he knew, with that terror stricken crowd huddled in the cabin behind him. His finger reached for the light switch in one last gallant gesture of defiance. For the last time the flying Night Club sparked from prop to tail-skid with glittering light. A panic stricken hand shattered the pane in the glass door that led to the cabin, reached through and clawed in terror at the pilot's shoulder.

"The damned idiot!" muttered Hale sardonically, shaking himself free. "As if there was a chance of getting out of this mess alive!"

Taken by surprise at first by Hale's bravado and sudden dive, Penza and Janos lost no time in following suit. Rapidly they converged from opposite sides on the downward plunging monoplane, their guns trained on the pilot's cockpit.

Two long streaks of flame belched from the muzzles of the machine guns. Red-hot, stinging agony tortured Hale's whole body. A twisted smile on his lips, he pressed forward against the stick. With a long, sputtering roar the gayly painted plane disappeared in the water.

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT VENGEANCE

HIS LIEUTENANT'S sacrifice had given Marsden the breathing space he needed so desperately. A quick glance downward showed him the swift extinction of Hale's plane, showed him, too, the vengeful forms of his two adversaries soaring upward to crash him.

But the cloud was only fifty yards away. Another second, and he had reached it. Penza would expect him to make for land, he guessed; he swerved sharp around and headed farther out to sea. Moisture blurred his wind-viser but the cloud was too thin to hide him completely from

his enemies. He flew on at full throttle, hoping to put enough of the thin mist between him and his enemies to shroud him from their sight.

Cutting his throttle, so that his engine was barely turning over, Marsden opened a section of the wind-viser and peered out into the darkness behind him. All around the silent plane tattered streamers of mist filled the dark vault of the sky.

Near at hand his straining ears made out the thunder of his enemies' planes.

Apparently they were quartering the sky all about him. The roar of their engines would die away only to grow stronger again. Marsden returned to his seat, gave his motor full gun and sped still farther out to sea. For the second time he cut his throttle, peered out of the plane and listened. No sound.

With a heartfelt sigh of relief Lloyd Marsden pointed the nose of his ship upward and climbed until his altimeter needle hovered around fifteen thousand feet. Then he headed Northward in a wide, sweeping arc.

IN the office at the side of the hangar Peggy Allen sat, staring fixedly out into the night, her ears strained for the drone of airplane engines that would tell her of the return of the flying night-clubs. The radio had ceased suddenly; silence had been the sole answer to the operator's frantic calls.

At last the girl could bear the suspense no longer. Throwing open the door of the office, she made her way out onto the field. Some of her own anxiety had been communicated to the guards posted all around the enclosure.

Automatics in hand, they were striding up and down, gathering in little knots to talk uneasily, scanning the dark vault of the sky above as if

they expected an invisible enemy to swoop down and attack them.

Peggy passed from one group to another, encouraging them as best she could. Marsden had probably decided to make a night of it, she said; the big ships carried plenty of fuel. Any minute now they would be returning, she told them.

But her brave front deceived no one. An atmosphere of black dread brooded over the field, mounting with every second as the familiar glow of lights failed to make its appearance on the horizon.

After an eternity of weary tramping up and down the field, the girl returned to the office. On the table before her a pile of half-smoked cigarettes bore witness to her frayed nerves.

When the first faint streaks of dawn came in from the ocean, throwing the squalid Jersey flats into relief and paling the brilliant arc-lights around the field, a faint drone far to the south beat upon the ears of the anxious watchers. With a bound Peggy Allen leapt from her chair and ran out in the field.

High overhead a single plane was approaching. Thank God! At any rate Lloyd was safe, thought the girl, recognizing the device with which the ship was painted.

Cutting his throttle, Marsden side-slipped down to the field. His face was grey and taut with the strain of his all-night flight from the two swift planes of his enemies. In a few hurried words he told the girl the entire story.

"We're licked, Peggy," he concluded. "This night's work will give me a black eye from which I'll never recover." He gestured hopelessly toward the panic-stricken passengers who were being escorted to the waiting cars. "I'm through! But at least I'll croak that yellow hound Penza before I'm much older."

Her arm around him, the girl led

the nerve-racked man away to the office, striving to console him for his crushing defeat.

There was to be no sleep for either of them that day. Penza, to complete the annihilation of his rival, had broken his story in the papers. And each edition brought more and more bitter denunciations of Marsden. "Culpable Negligence"; "Untrained Pilots"; "Unlicensed planes"; "The criminal racketeer who gambles with the lives of clients in rotten machines"; these were a few of the milder phrases hurled at Lloyd Marsden's head. In vain the passengers on his one surviving plane pointed out in exclusive stories that the three machines and the dirigible had been crashed. It was useless: the accounts of eye-witnesses always contradict each other, and Penza had a section of the press too well subsidized. Their stories were met with unbelieving editorial sneers.

Marsden kept silence. What was the use of saying anything? Many names prominent in the fashionable world were on the casualty list.

With one accord all but a score of his gang deserted him. Barricading himself in his office, Marsden conferred with the loyal handful of men that remained to him.

THE following day a short announcement appeared in all the morning papers to the effect that the single surviving night-club of the air would be doing business as usual that same evening, and inviting patronage.

If the telephone in the office had burned with indignant threats and abuse since the ghastly accident of the day before, it fairly blazed all that day. But Marsden was busy in the hangar, superintending certain alterations on his plane. Peggy Allen, left in charge of the office, curtly informed all callers that the man they wanted was not there. Even Huntington

Wright, their backer, who had been laid up by illness on the night of the smash, was turning them down cold.

"Give me the phone," said Marsden who had come into the office at that moment. "So you're going back on me, too, Huntington, eh?" he said with frigid politeness in answer to a torrent of abuse from the banker. "I've stood by you when you were in a tight hole many a time. I know your pocket's hit, and hit badly," he went on, ignoring the other's interruption, "but what do you think this affair's cost me?"

Wright's voice showed that he was thoroughly ashamed of himself. He tried to crawl, but Marsden cut him short. "This has shown me who my friends are," he told him curtly and hung up. "Get Sergeant Lahey and Inspector Galpen for me, Peggy, over at the Essex street police station," he requested her.

"There are two guys who don't forget you," he observed after a short and plainly satisfactory conversation, for a broad grin was on his haggard face, the first time he had looked cheerful since the terrible catastrophe. Taking hold of the girl's shoulders, he looked steadily into her blue eyes. "Peggy darling," he said, "we'll either make it tonight, or else—" he spread out his hands in an eloquent gesture, "it's curtains for the whole lot of us!"

Returning to the hangar, Marsden picked out the six smallest men he had left and ordered them to report to Peggy Allen. An hour later half a dozen more left the flying-field to go to New York by a circuitous route.

At nine that night Lloyd Marsden was going over the huge tri-motored plane for the last time. His painstaking inspection showed him that all his plans had been carried out to the last detail. He left the hangar and walked over to the gate of the enclosure where the two men, who be-

side himself alone remained on the field, were mounting guard.

A horde of curious spectators was pressing against the gate, asking questions and sneering at the pair of watchmen. Among them, Marsden knew, would be one or more of Pennza's spies.

"**W**ELL, look who's here? If it ain't the boss himself!" A tall, villainous fellow with a sneering, pock-marked face had thrust his way through the crowd and was leaning on the palings. "All sold out for tonight, I expect?"

Marsden paid no attention but beckoned to one of the guards to whom he gave whispered orders.

"Think you'll get any more suckers to take rides in your lousy ship?" the man went on.

"Some people still stick to me," rejoined Marsden mildly, turning to address the speaker as if he saw him for the first time. He pointed down the road. "I think the first car is coming now." A loud, incredulous guffaw greeted his words. But the crowd parted with murmurs of surprise as the car drew up in front of the gate. From it descended a man and two women in evening dress who were quickly admitted through the gate. The mouth of the man who had been jeering fell open in astonishment, while an inconspicuous individual detached himself from the outskirts of the crowd and hurried away.

"Come on, Harry," said Marsden, nodding to one of the guards. "Let's get her out on the line." With a welcoming wave of the hand to his patrons, Marsden walked over to the hangar.

Five more cars drew up in front of the gate and their occupants were quickly ushered onto the field.

A few moments later the guests had taken their places in the big cabin. Last of all, Marsden and the white

robed bartender mounted the steps to the plane.

But if the crowd of sight-seers on the ground below had gasped in amazement at sight of the venturesome men and women who were taking their lives in their hands by patronizing "Night Clubs of the Air," they would have rubbed their eyes in even greater astonishment if they could have looked inside the plane once it left the ground.

With the exception of Peggy Allen all the other women in the cabin had thrown off their smart evening wraps, ripped off their dresses and high heeled slippers. In shorts and undershirts they stood revealed for the six small gangsters their leader had mysteriously despatched that very afternoon. The men, too, were discarding coats and collars to join the others in their preparations.

From under the seats and inside the bar six sub-machine guns were extracted. Mounted on tripods, they were trained in pairs out of each side of the ship and through trap doors that Marsden had had cut in the roof and floor of the cabin.

In his cockpit Lloyd Marsden was fondly fingering the trigger of another Thompson gun. High up over the Hudson he cut his throttle and turned in his seat, pulling down the window of the door that gave on to the cabin.

"It's damn sporting of you, Lahey and Galpin," he was addressing two burly men in evening dress who had taken no part in the proceedings. "But God knows I need official witnesses to this scrap. I've got to clear myself and do it right!"

"New York for New Yorkers," yelled back one of the policemen with a grin. "Lahey and I would do a lot for you, Lloyd, but aside from that we like to see this Lousy Chicago wop get his!"

CHAPTER VII

THE FINAL DRAW

THE great ship swept on over lower Manhattan. In order not to arouse suspicion on the part of his enemies, Marsden was pursuing the usual route.

Penza's tortuous mind had, indeed, made him fear a trap on Marsden's part. The announcement in the papers that morning had made him summon Janos to him hastily.

"I was going to blow that dump of his to hell," he told the Hungarian ace. "Now I'm going to wait a while. If Marsden is crazy enough to challenge me again, I'll bump him off much more easily this way."

"*Ja, spurlos versenkt,*" assented the other with a sneer, "as we used to say in 1916. Sunk without a trace!"

"You get me perfectly, Janos," replied the Chicagoan. "But even Marsden isn't damned fool enough—" He broke off with a dubious shake of the head. "Still, there's one chance in a million. I'm planting some fellows out there in Newark who'll give me the low down."

"You want me to stand by?" queried Janos.

Penza nodded. "Yeah, you do just that and keep sober. If I don't get the right dope tonight, I'll wipe that guy clean off the map tomorrow!"

With wild elation that evening Penza had heard the news coming over the wire that another party of society suckers was taking a ride in the machine he intended to crash. He and Janos lost no time. They were already at the field where their two swift pursuit ships were waiting on the line.

Up into the dark heavens spiralled the two machines. If they made for New York City at once, their pilots knew they could not fail to pick up the monoplane which was their objective. In a few minutes they had

sighted Marsden's brilliantly lit machine. Keeping it just within their vision they hovered far above it.

Marsden continued to dive and pull up just over Central Park. Soon he would head out of New York harbor. His lips curled into an ironic smile at the thought of his enemy's blank look of surprise when he would discover the flying Night Club to be a flying arsenal.

Skimming low over a great liner that was steaming majestically down the Bay, Marsden turned sharply southward. The big ship hugged the shore-line for some miles, then edged gradually out to sea. Penza might suspect a trap if it took the same course it had two nights before.

Again Marsden cut his throttle and shouted to his men in the cabin behind him. "They'll be on us any minute now. Get set and hang on, because I'll have to stunt!" In spite of the surprise he had prepared for his enemies, Marsden knew that he had a pair of skilled fighters to deal with. He was neglecting no stratagem which might insure the success of his plan. A glance at his altimeter told him he was 7,000 feet above the ocean. He decided to gain altitude and force Penza to attack at the same time.

Pulling back on his stick, Marsden sent the monoplane corkscrewing steeply up into the night. At 10,000 feet he let his motor idle and began a slow glide downward.

Suddenly the staccato roar of two airplane engines came in through the open panes of the wind-visor. Looking up, Marsden caught sight of two pursuit planes hurtling toward him in a full power dive. Instantly he switched off the gay lights that made the ship so conspicuous a target. One small blue bulb below remained lighted in the cabin. The extinction of that would be the signal for action.

For a second the pilot's hands hesitated over the controls as if in doubt.

The two ships were only a few hundred yards away now, but Marsden was determined to hold his fire until the last possible second. There might be a chance of bringing them both down with one volley.

All at once one of the planes overhead flattened out, swerved in a wide arc and dived down at him again head on. Penza, he guessed, wanted to have the personal satisfaction of killing the pilot. The other machine was plunging down to attack him broadside.

For a tense fraction of a second Lloyd Marsden waited, motionless. Then he sprang into action.

OUT went the blue light. Instantly, red flashes from the starboard battery ripped through the blackness. A hail of bullets riddled the pursuit plane with their merciless impact. Its pilot, taken completely by surprise, had not had time to fire a single shot before he slumped over the side of his cockpit, hands clawing wildly at the fuselage in his death agony.

A bullet plowed its way through the doomed plane's gasoline tank. Sheets of lurid flame sprang from the engine, licked hungrily at the wings.

Another instant, and Marsden would have had his other adversary within range. But the man had seen his companion's fate just in the nick of time and altered his course. Marsden longed for the prop-synchronized guns of a combat plane. He had not had time to install them, and had to content himself with his one submachine gun that fired upwards a few inches above his propeller.

His adversary was circling warily overhead, keeping out of range. Marsden kicked the tail of his ship around to see the pyre of flame that was all that remained of his other opponent. The figure dangling over the side of the cockpit was certainly

not Penza's. The Chicago gang-leader must be in the other ship.

Giving his motor full gun, Marsden zoomed up under the combat plane. A short burst of bullets from his gun missed its cockpit by inches as it side-slipped quickly to whip out below and soar up under the monoplane's belly. A stinging hail of bullets poured at it through the trap-door in the floor of the cabin, but its pilot managed to get in a round that killed three men before maneuvering out of range.

With the skill his war service had given him, Lloyd Marsden swung his far heavier machine around and dived on his opponent. But the Chicagoan clearly meant to do his fighting at long range until he could decide where the monoplane's blind spots were located.

Time after time Penza sent short bursts hammering into his victim. Marsden eluded them with ease, striving to lure the other into a fight at close quarters.

Yet Penza was resolved to crash his antagonist at any cost. Tiring at last of the futile game of exchanging bullets at a distance, he darted in under the engine.

Anticipating his maneuver by the fraction of second, Marsden stood the monoplane on its nose and dived on his assailant. Then, ramming his stick hard over, he put the ship into a vertical bank so that her port side passed straight above Penza's plane.

From the port-holes the grim muzzles of machine guns and automatics belched a fusillade of lead into the small pursuit plane. Intent on his purpose, Penza had seen the danger too late to avert it. But his thumbs, pressed savagely against his stick trigger, sent a last defiant stream of bullets into the metal ship above him.

Marsden felt a stinging pain in his thigh. In the cabin behind him Peggy Allen was staunching the blood that flowed over her white shoulder, while two men writhed on the floor,

doubled up with stomach-wounds.

Whipping out on an even level keel, Marsden hoisted himself painfully to look over the side where Penza's plane was weaving oceanward in the ghastly motions of a spin. Throwing his stick forward, he followed his victim down, switching on all his lights in triumph. Nearer and nearer the doomed plane he drew.

In the cabin Inspector Galpin stood up, drawing a powerful flashlight from his pocket. Peering through a porthole, he let its beam play full on the face of the man in the crippled ship beneath.

A wave of elation swept over Marsden as the white ray lit up the bull-like head and grim vindictive features of the dead gangster, sitting erect and lifeless in his cockpit.

Another second, and the flash illuminated only the troubled surface of the Atlantic. Joe Penza, the overlord of a vast and powerful gang, has disappeared forever!

Lloyd Marsden headed upward in a graceful climbing turn and made straight for his flying field. The two policemen, he knew, would acquit him of all blame in the public eye. Penza's gang, leaderless now, could be dispersed with ease. His old, undisputed supremacy awaited him.

"I suppose you and Peggy will take a few weeks off after all this excitement?" asked Inspector Galpin good humoredly, helping the wounded pilot down the steps to the ground.

"Like hell we will!" declared Marsden. He drew a card out of his pocket and scribbled on it. "And, by the way, Inspector, 'Night Clubs of the Air' is going to be a permanent institution in New York night life. This pass," he handed him the card, "is good any time. I hope you'll come often. And," he added softly to himself, "I know damned well the public will!"

“Crooked Charity”

By HENRY LEVERAGE

When Santa Claus started handing out the little Christmas presents, Big-scar Guffman, Convict No. 27, stood in line for a queer one. What's this got to do with a museum? Read and find out!

WHEN BIG-SCAR GUFFMAN left a dummy in his cell and squeezed into the line of silent men who were making their way to the chapel for the Christmas entertainment, he figured upon an escape from a penitentiary that was pronounced unbeatable.

The dummy had been so lifelike that he chuckled to himself as the convicts twisted and squirmed their way through the cell block and upstairs to the chapel. Big-scar closed his eyes and tried to imagine just what a guard would see who would peer through the bars of cell 27.

Apparently a convict lay there, with legs crossed and a newspaper over his face, as if he had fallen asleep in the act of reading. The yegg had practised the part for over two months. The guards had grown tired of tapping the bars and waking him up. They were reasonably sure to count him “in” that night.

Big-scar had made further plans. Getting out of the cell was the first step in a ladder to freedom. The other steps of this ladder were a matter of luck and nerve. He had sworn to be out of the prison by Christmas.

The yegg sat through the prison movietone entertainment like a man in a trance. He failed to applaud when the warden announced, before the final reel, that turkey would be served for the Christmas dinner.

The movietone drew to a close. Big-scar began planning a second step in the escape. He waited as the long line of men started to file through a doorway. He paused at a platform upon which the warden and guests were standing. He edged to one side where there was a space behind the movie screen.

No one noticed him. He squeezed along a wall and then vanished behind the platform. The space there was sufficient for him to lie down with his head in his arms. He breathed slowly, as the feet of his fellow prisoners shuffled away in the distance.

Their number seemed endless. The warden and his guests stepped down. The lights were turned out, one by one. A door clanged at the foot of the steps. A gong sounded.

“I win round one,” Big-scar grinned to himself.

The stroke of the gong was followed by another. Then, after a grim wait, Big-scar heard the jingle of the “count” signal. The guards had counted the dummy in 27. The principal keeper had phoned for the sentries to come off the wall. The prison was in darkness.

The yegg crawled out, listened with head cocked sidewise, then rose and tiptoed to a barred window. Through this he saw the white sheen of the ice in a river. Beyond this ice was a far-off shore.

He reached down, pulled a hack-saw blade from his shoe, wrapped its end in a handkerchief and went to work on the central bar.

The tempered steel bit into the soft iron, like a knife cutting cheese. In ten minutes he felt the blade pass through. He waited then. No sound came to him of discovery.

The yegg climbed on the sill. He braced his feet against the window's edge, and pulled the sawed bar until it left an opening through which he could crawl. He stood upon the coping, breathed into his palms and gained a narrow ledge that ran around the building below the chapel windows. Along the ledge he worked, holding his hands close to the wall. He came to a drain pipe and lowered himself till he stood shivering within the shadow of the building.

The prison yard was deserted save for a lantern that bobbed up and down at the end furthest from Big-scar. He crouched as he crossed the open expanse. He shinned an iron fence, and crawled upon his stomach till he reached the ice. There he waited, glancing back. There was no sign or sound of discovery.

Big-scar frowned. Danger would come at midnight when the hallkeeper would flash a light into his cell. The newspaper and the dressed dummy would probably be discovered. The siren would blow. The constables would be notified. He resolved to place as many miles between himself and the prison as running would permit.

He hurried over the ice of the river till he had passed below the southern wall. Then he edged inshore, scrambled up the bank, and ran down a railroad track.

A crossing led him where he found himself between snow-covered hedges of estates that stretched back from the road in long vistas of contentment and rest.

Big-scar went on. It was Christ-

mas Eve and all the world was at peace, except himself and the Law.

THE STARS that spangled the heavens were like powdered diamonds in a black velvet band. Snow and ice crunched and crinkled under foot.

Once he gained a cheerful thought. He was on his way to a city whose arms would reach and close him in their grip. He could hide with gangsters until the pursuit was over. Then he could come out and mooch to other cities.

The yegg liked the thought of being lost among a million people. He had little fear of being captured, providing he would stay away from his old haunts.

He plodded on through the snow with one thought in his mind: he must reach a racketeer's dive before the police were notified.

Costella and the whole Central-Office force could search until they grew tired. Costella and O'Morpha had made the pinch from which the yegg was escaping.

Both dicks were hard-boiled eggs. It was just like them to spoil a Christmas day.

He made progress through the silent estates of the rich. He held before him the glow in the sky that marked the city. It was like some aurora of wealth and security. It lured him on to greater effort.

Big-scar glared over his shoulder now and then. No sound or echo of the escape disturbed the attenuated air. He concluded the hall captain had flashed a light into cell 27 and then gone on satisfied.

The yegg's prison clothes were dark gray. They might be mistaken for a workman's garb. His cap worried him. It was round, with a small vizor that would give him away to anyone who had visited the prison.

Big-scar searched to right and left for a house in course of construction.

There would be another cap or hat in such a place. Painters or plasterers always left them. Also, he could pick up a paint-pot or a tool and walk into the city like a laborer. The police would hardly suspect or question him in such a guise.

The road he followed widened into a square whereon was a gasoline station. The yegg paused before it and studied the windows. There was nothing inside the station except oil in cans.

He had taken a step away when there rose the low rumble of a far-off siren. It swelled, then died to an echo. It rose again. It filled the air with its menace. It spoke of gunguards, white faces in the cells, a country-wide pursuit wherein it would be unsafe to move. It indicated a Christmas eve air of broadcasting his description.

Big-scar ran as he had never run before. He charged along a road as if all the furies in the world were after him. He covered a mile in fast time when he brought up standing and blowing before the arbor gate of a snug estate.

He held his burning sides as he crouched under a hedge.

"Somethin's comin'," he said through gritty teeth.

There sounded footsteps in the lane that led down from the country home. The steps came closer. Big-scar braced himself and waited for almost certain discovery. He felt that he would have to bean somebody.

Out through the snow-draped boxwood came the figure of Santa Claus. It was such a Santa Claus as the yegg had read about in prison tracts. White whiskers draped over great horn buttons. Merry eyes and a scarlet nose peered through these whiskers. The cap on Santa's head was cocked and debonair. In the pack on the back of the apparition was a pile of toys, hobby-horses, dolls, whips, with bells upon their ends.

The yegg clicked his frozen lashes as Santa Claus swung at the arbor, whistled a tipsy tune, and went up the road without glancing back. Big-scar scratched his head. His face grew dark as he heard the sound of the prison siren to the north and toward the river. Its notes were insistent. It seemed to say:

"Prisoner has escaped! Prisoner has escaped! Fifty dollars reward!"

Swinging, the yegg watched the burly form of the man who had come out of the estate. He was evidently going somewhere with presents to hang upon a Christmas tree. Big-scar remembered the days when he had believed in Santa Claus. That was when he was about three years old.

He dashed after the figure in the road.

The footprints of the Santa Claus had not run in a straight line. They zig-zagged across the road in the manner of one who had imbibed too much.

The approaching yegg noted that the Santa Claus was about his size and general weight. He determined to possess himself of the Kris Kringle outfit, pack and all. It would be a disguise in a million. In it he could go anywhere and grin at the police.

BIG-SCAR slowed his steps as he tailed the staggering figure ahead. He glanced back now and then and listened. The siren was sending its warning blares out over the country. They bore no resemblance to holiday cheer.

The escaping yegg's chance came when the tipsy Santa Claus stopped by the side of the road, rested his pack upon a snow-covered stone, and sat down heavily. Big-scar drew the hack-saw blade from his pocket and advanced with all the noise he could make.

"Put up y'ur mitts!" he commanded.

The Kris Kringle whiskers quiver-

ed as two pudgy hands shot into the frosty air.

"Look out, or I'll shoot," menaced Big-scar, standing at a safe distance and brandishing the saw. "I'll shoot at th' first move. Y'u greaseball!"

"Spare me! Spare me!" came from Santa Claus.

"Take off that outfit y'u!"

One hand came down, then jerked upward again as Big-scar stepped forward.

"Get 'em off! Take off 'em whiskers an' things! All off or I'll plug y'u!"

The man rose, swaying from side to side, and began to unpeel his coat. The trousers followed. The whiskers and cap and nose dropped to the snow.

"Beat it!" growled Big-scar. "Beat it while th' goin's good. I'm goin' tu fire in three seconds. One, t'u—"

The yegg had a glimpse of a thoroughly frightened householder leaping over hedges, bushes, and fences in the manner of a jackrabbit.

He pocketed the saw as he heard a crash of glass where the man had stepped through a low greenhouse. He held his sides as he roared with glee. It was the first time he had laughed in years.

The figure that hurried down the snow-covered road five minutes later, was a different one from the convict who had climbed out of the great prison and escaped. Big-scar carried the Santa Claus pack. The wig he wore, allowed free vent for his mouth and eyes. It concealed the tell-tale scar on his right cheek.

A nose which was of papier-mache and colored like a ripe strawberry was almost the original hue of the yegg's nasal appendage before it had been whitened by prison life and lack of booze. He felt no cold, although the temperature was almost zero and falling. He reasoned that it was between twelve and one on Christmas morning.

Lights shone ahead. Big-scar trudged along until a suburban town opened up before him with its close-nested homes mantled in security like hens at roost. He found the pavement hard and clear under foot. He passed citizens who waved at him and answered his cheery "Merry Christmas."

A motor-bus stood waiting, as if for him, at the junction of two streets. He entered it, fished deep within his inner prison-suit pocket, and brought forth a silver dime. He had other money secreted from prison guards. The yegg caught a glimpse of himself in a window. No one of the gun-guards who were combing the county would have suspected in him the object of their search. The paper nose, the white whiskers, the pack crammed with toys, were his passport to the gates of the city he was now entering. He seemed the personification of the day and the season.

The bus stopped under the shelter of a structure which would lead to the subway. Big-scar climbed out, followed by the sleepy passengers. He had not long to wait for an early morning train that would take him into the heart of the city.

He parted with a nickel at the turnstile and entered the rear car. His heart jumped. He recognized two Central-Office detectives who were sitting at the front end of the car. They eyed him, then fell to talking.

Big-scar breathed a sigh of relief. They had not recognized him in his guise. It was as if he possessed a mantle of invisibility. He leered at them.

The click of the car wheels on the rails became music to Big-scar. He longed to take off the gigantic red nose and breath more freely. He looked around to see if he could possibly roll a drunk for a bottle.

The yegg saw moving pictures of stations crowded with well garbed merry-makers, white walls that blaz-

ed with familiar advertisements, and displays of food posters that made his mouth water.

HE CROUCHED closer into his seat and glanced about the car. It was empty except for the two Central-Office men who were in the further end. One of these men had a turkey under his arm. Big-scar tightened his belt.

He lifted his Kris Kringle pack and examined its contents. There were toys enough in it to stock a nursery or to grace a large Christmas tree. At its bottom the yegg felt boxes of dates and candy and twisted paper things that would explode when they were drawn apart. He crammed them deeper within the pack, swung it upon his shoulder, and waited.

The Central-Office dicks rose at a station. They braced themselves as the train came to a grinding halt, then hurried out on the platform. They had not suspected him. He stood erect as the train gained speed. The next station would be the one he wanted to get off at. He stood in the vestibule with cool nerve. The train drew up, he stepped to the platform, and hurried up a stairway to the familiar street.

Down this he walked briskly, his eyes glinting. He was free! He was disguised to perfection. He felt like one of the wise men of the East bringing gifts to the Magi.

The yegg recognized the landmarks as he passed into another and meaner street. There was O'Connor's speak-easy. Its front door was closed. He could see the long shining bar with the frosted mirror behind, and underneath this a row of black bottles.

A bartender came from the rear. A light shone there. A crowd sat at the tables drinking beer and whiskey.

A pal or two might be celebrating there.

He hesitated as he passed the saloon. He was of a mind to try the

side entrance, stalk in on the gang and surprise them. Possibly they were talking of his escape at that very moment. He mooched on. He feared a stool pigeon.

Suddenly near a hiding place where he wanted to secrete himself, he saw two lurking forms. He felt the grip of a nameless something at his heart. He steeled himself as he had often done in days gone by. The two forms were fly-mugs. He felt sure that they were waiting for him. He went boldly by them and recognized Costella and his side-partner O'Morpha. They had made the pinch at the bank. They knew of his escape.

"Can't be him," Costella said cautiously.

"I ain't so sure; he's about due."

"In that outfit? Why that's some mission stiff with a pack of toys. Take another gap at him, O'Morpha."

AN ALLEY behind the Huber Museum, was a familiar get-away for the yegg. He had once or twice taken that route when dodging the coppers. He remembered a barred window, high up, through which an agile man might break into the Museum. Once before he had considered doing so. He had given up that plan, realizing that wax and plaster and paste jewels, worn by some of the effigies, were not negotiable with fences.

He reached the spot beneath the window. No one was in the alley. It was too early for anyone, save festive souls, to be stirring. The sun had not yet struck across the roofs or broken through the nipping mist.

The yegg sprang for the window's sill, secured a grip, drew himself on the ledge, braced a knee and yanked at the center bar of the window. It was of rusty iron; it gave where lead had been poured into the stone. Again he braced his knees, adjusted the Santa Claus pack, and bent the bar out of the way. Then he jerked at the sash,

which came up, with a shower of dust and cobwebs. Big-scar peered inside the Museum. He saw a storeroom's walls, canvas frames, crates of excelsior and barrels of plaster-of-Paris.

A door lead from the storeroom to the Museum proper. This door was slightly ajar.

"A nifty hiding place!" the yegg said as he dropped to the floor and drew down the sash, after straightening the iron bar. "Here's where I smash those fly-mugs if they are still trailing me."

He realized that there was a watchman or two within the Museum; there also might be a charwoman at work, scrubbing floors. Big-scar's mind was made up; he wanted one more try at freedom.

He opened the door that led from the storeroom and crouched like an ape, ready to spring on someone. His shaggy brows worked up and down as he squinted uncertainly in his efforts to pierce the gloom of the Chamber of Horrors. His papier-mache nose came loose.

A uniformed guard stood, leaning against a display case almost in the center of the Museum. The sight of the gold-braided uniform roused the yegg's anger like a sudden slap in the face. He ground his teeth and made ready for a leaping spring. Prison screws and coppers were the yegg's particular meat.

He covered the distance like a tiger. The blow he struck, the watchman would have slain a giant. Big-scar's fist went through a wire frame and plaster. The watchman was an image, designed to confuse visitors. This image crumpled to the floor and lay prone.

The yegg stared around and saw a hundred wax faces making mock of him. Marie Antoinette, Danton, Napoleon, Josephine, Jesse James, Jack the Ripper and Chapman were enjoying the occasion. Between two booths, filled with effigies, the yegg

discerned himself—a Santa Claus with a pack of toys.

He set about his task of destroying the effigy. He crushed the figure's head, stamping at the powder beneath his prison-made shoes. The noise he made was slight. He pressed the exhibit into an unrecognizable mass. He examined the suit on the figure. The proprietor of the Museum, always a stickler for detail, had clothed the effigy in a woolen suit, big buttons, gaudy tie and flashing shirt. This outfit was a ringer for the one Big-scar wore. He sat down and listened for sounds while he donned a pair of real leather shoes.

There came a sudden sound at the front of the Museum that indicated guards were unlocking doors. A whistle shrilled through the building. Another sound came from the rear, near the store-room.

"CAUGHT!" thought Big-scar. "I'm surrounded. Maybe they heard me. Maybe them coppers tipped me off to th' guards."

He got up and looked about him. He realized that it would be well to conceal the evidence of destruction. There was an imitation showcase alongside Santa Claus' form. Small toys filled the case, to lend realism to the exhibit.

The yegg began shoving the broken plaster beneath the showcase. His foot moved while he watched a giant door swing inward.

They were opening the Museum for the day, though it was still quite early. The proprietor of the place was known for his long hours and industrious habits.

The drowsy guards had not yet detected the fugitive's presence. Big-scar glared at them through his false whiskers.

A group of patrons, led by an old man with a guide book, entered the building. A girl screamed when she

collided with a horror in the shape of a plaster-of-Paris pickpocket.

"I gotta pose fer Santa Claus," concluded the yegg. "I can't make a get-away without stirrin' up a lot of gum-shoe guards."

He climbed a pedestal and sat down when the group, headed by the old man, strolled by. He heard the guide explain:

"This 'ere old Kris Kringle, or Santa Claus. He was brought here especially for the Holidays. He's almost alive."

"'E is, is'e?" thought the yegg with inward glee when the group strolled toward Jack the Ripper's booth.

Workmen came out of the store-room. They started hammering at a new exhibit, at the back of the Museum.

Attendants approached at the head of more visitors.

"I wonder if I have to sit like this all day?" the yegg queried to himself. "It's an outrage—me dyin' fer somethin' to eat an' drink."

At ten o'clock a commotion started at the entrance. The yegg straightened himself and stared over the top of the showcase. The aisles were dotted with patrons. Among them he discerned the uniforms of a brace of cops. Behind the cops loomed familiar forms—those of Costella and O'Morpha.

The menaces from Headquarters were darting glances to left and right. Near them walked the Museum's proprietor.

"Somebody tipped 'em off," sighed the yegg. "They're goin' tu make a search of th' Museum."

The detectives paused at the crushed figure of the sham guard which Big-scar had smashed with his fists. The proprietor bent over the figure while the two dicks looked around knowingly. Both had heavy over-coats on. O'Morpha's pocket bulged with a quart bottle.

Big-scar smacked his lips. His nose itched.

"I hope they don't connect me with beanning th' guard," he grinned.

His hopes were set at rest; the two detectives shook their heads. It wasn't likely that the yegg would leave such evidence of his presence in the Museum.

By roundabout aisles Costella and O'Morpha approached the yegg. The bloodhounds from Headquarters were making a thorough search of the Museum. They sized up everybody, questioned guards and workmen, looked behind gruesomely painted curtains. They neared Santa's booth, followed by the Museum's proprietor.

"This," explained the manager, "is for the kids. See, he's loaded with toys. We'll give them away tomorrow, or maybe this afternoon if the crowd is thick enough."

A cold feeling went up and down Big-scar's spine. He held himself in position with a mighty effort. He felt Costella's sharp eyes on his back. O'Morpha remarked dryly:

"It's a rotten imitation of Santa Claus. Eh, Costella? It don't look life-like."

Costella replied: "No resemblance. When they do these things, why don't they do them proper? Why don't they make the effigies true to nature?"

The dicks moved on.

COLD sweat stood out on Big-scar's brow. It had been a close touch-and-go between him and liberty. He was afraid to turn his head and watch the two detectives.

A diversion came at noon when a group of children, led by a teacher, filed into the Museum. The children all carried boxes or baskets. One boy perched himself near the Santa Claus booth and opened his box. He devoured most of the contents, finally taking out a piece of pie. The yegg, who had eaten nothing since escaping,

glared at the pie. He leaned toward it—then hesitated.

The boy laid half the pie on top of the lunch box and went for a glass of water. Big-scar selected a present from his pack and rose from his chair.

Temptation and hunger steeled the yegg's nerve. The sight of his favorite pie made the risk seem small.

He got the portion and thrust it into his mouth. He rubbed his soiled whiskers and resumed his position in the chair.

A cry went through the aisles of the Museum when the boy returned and missed the pie. The present did not appease him. He ran toward the teacher and explained what had happened. Scholars were accused. They denied the theft in loud terms.

"That's a bad rumble tu make over a piece ov pie," thought Big-scar. "What would they do if I copped a whole one? Maybe they'd hang me fer it."

He cast an anxious eye about for escape. The workmen at the back of the Museum had ceased their labors at noon. Perhaps a getaway could be made in that direction. There was the bent bar in the storeroom through which he could squeeze. The yegg started out of the booth. He tiptoed a few cautious steps when voices caused him to halt stiff in his tracks.

Other children were approaching. He was caught. He advanced to them and unloaded his pack, giving each a present.

"Merry Christmas," he said through his beard. "Wish I had more presents, kids. "Now beat it away. I'm goin' tu be a wax image again. Beat it, kids."

He resumed his rigid position on the dais until nightfall.

When the doors were closing, he heard Costella's voice saying: "We'll plant in here tonight. Every clue leads to this Museum."

"Aw, Big-scar couldn't be here!" O'Morpha protested.

"Someone got in here. There's a twisted bar."

The yegg sat like a steel spring, ready to pounce on the two sleuths as they sauntered around, flashing spotlights into every booth. They stopped finally and sat down at a little gold-painted table drawn from the Marie Antoinette Exhibition.

"It'll be a tough night watchin' this dump," declared Costella. "But it's chief's orders. Guffman, alias Big-scar used to live near this Museum. Give me a drink, O'Morpha."

Costella's side-kick produced a bottle of Holiday booze. He upended the bottle before offering it to Costella. Big-scar whose nose was almost white from keeping temperate, sniffed the alcohol. It brought tears to his eyes.

The papier-mache mask and beard fell around his gigantic neck. He waited, leaning forward toward the sleuths. They drowsed, each groggy from drinking.

Over the intervening distance the yegg reached his arm and gained the bottle. He clutched it in his cotton-covered fingers. The remaining half portion almost vanished down his throat. He set the bottle nearer Costella than O'Morpha, and staggered to his chair. He waited.

STATEGY might succeed where force would fail. O'Morpha awoke and reached blindly for the bottle. His hand strayed over the table. He blinked his eyes, then, as he grabbed the remaining drop, he cursed his partner drunkenly. Costella awoke. The yegg heard an argument, hot and heavy between the dicks.

"You're a hell of a guy, takin' it all!" Costella accused.

They drowsed, after almost drawing guns on each other.

A second inspiration came to the yegg. He shifted the pack from his shoulders, got down and tiptoed toward the sleeping sleuths. His hand

touched the little gold-painted table. He gripped the bottle, swung it overhead, and brought it crashing through O'Morpha's slouch hat. Big-scar ducked around a booth and started crawling like a grizzly toward the rear of the Museum.

The diversion of O'Morpha recovering from the staggering blow and lunging at Costella was time enough, to throw both detectives off guard. Over went the little table. Blows were exchanged. Arms swung. The brace of fly-mugs crashed together into the Marie Antoinette booth, O'Morpha cursing:

"Take that an' that, yu hit me with th' bottle!"

"You copped th' booze!"

"Nifty," remarked Big-scar shedding the whiskers and mask from his neck. He threw a knee over the window-sill where the twisted bar was.

Behind him he heard sounds of struggling; ahead in the nipping air was freedom.

"It ain't been such a bad Christmas after all," he grinned. "An' them poor kids got toys they wuldn't ov got, if I hadn't played Santa Claus."

FRENCH CRIMINAL BURIED ALIVE BY SECRET SOCIETY

A story of a crime, hardly surpassed in horror by the most gruesome tales of Chinese torture, was revealed when the Magistrate of St. Germain, near Paris, un-earthed the body of a man known as the "Marquis de Champaubert," who had been buried alive in the nearby woods.

An inhabitant of Maison Alfort recently received and turned over to the Magistrate an anonymous letter relating how the "Marquis," who a few years ago was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for a series of swindles, had been murdered by persons whom he had ruined. The letter ended:

"You will find the 'Marquis' in the woods at Vernoillet. He was buried alive. But he must be dead now."

A map was enclosed in the letter to aid in the search for the body.

The story seemed so fantastic that the Police Magistrates, when the letter was first placed in their hands, thought it must be a hoax. They knew that since his release from prison the "Marquis" had been living quietly with his family just outside Paris. Finally, they decided to make sure by visiting the spot shown on the map.

It was easily located. The earth had been dug up recently. A small brick pipe was visible on a level with the top soil. A few feet down the police found a rough wooden coffin connected by a rubber tube with the brick pipe.

The coffin was opened. In it lay the body of the "Marquis," clothed only in a shirt, the face twisted in agony.

The victim had succumbed not to suffocation, but had died a lingering death from starvation.

It is supposed the murderers drugged the man, placed him in the coffin and carried him by night to the burial place. The brick pipe and rubber tube allowed him to breathe.

The real name of the "Marquis" was Pascal Clement. In 1924 he organized an elaborate ambush in a mansion in Brittany for a Paris jeweler who was to have been shut in a room into which chloroform was to have been pumped. A number of other robberies and swindles were subsequently traced to him.

According to the anonymous letter, Clement's assassins belong to an association known as the "Knights of Themus," sworn to correct legal sentences which appear to them as lax. The letter indicated that the executioners had placed a quantity of chocolate in the "Marquis's" coffin in order to prolong his agony and had also inflicted five other forms of torture on the victim before finally burying him alive.—(From N. Y. World)

The Disastrous Duplicate

By JAY G. DUNN

They were so much alike that an expert could scarcely tell them apart. Then, of course, seven years in the coop had done a lot towards making Shifty Banter step into the muddle with his dangerous plan.

FROM the opposite side of the street, Shifty Banter looked the big house over. He was a lean man, with stooped shoulders and a sharp face. His eyes were hard and his mouth grim. A cigaret burned forgotten between his long, nervous fingers, as he slouched against a telephone pole and gazed sullenly across the street.

Mike Sharner lived in that house. A suite on the second floor at the back, Shifty had learned. Mike Sharner, the clever one, the smooth-voiced one, the one who would double-cross a pal for a few hundred dollars.

Seven years! Shifty shivered although the night was warm. His hand, touched the gun in his coat pocket, his lean jaw tensed under the prison pallor of his face, his breath came sharply.

A surge of hatred swept over him and left his knees weak. He inhaled deeply from his cigaret to sooth his nerves. A scene of seven years ago flashed across his mind. Many nights since, it had kept him tossing on his prison bunk.

With the vividness of yesterday's memory he recalled that little room. Two men sat at a square table, upon which was a pile of sparkling pieces of jewelry and a smaller pile of soft, rag-like bills with yellow backs.

One of the men was tall and

aristocratic looking. The other was short, with a square head set on a thick neck which seemed almost a part of the broad, powerful shoulders. Both men looked up in surprise as Shifty closed the door and faced them with leveled automatic.

"Whatsa idea?" Stumpy Gruber growled threateningly.

"Just keep yer mitts on the table and don't move if yuh wanna stay healthy."

It was a white-faced Shifty Banter who advanced with narrowed eyelids and set lips, to stand beside the table.

"Whatsa idea, huh?" Shifty snapped. "That's what I wanna know. Whatsa idea you guys pullin' that Rawlson job and leavin' me out? Wasn't that my job? Didn't I get all the dope on it? Didn't I, huh?"

"It was as much our job as yours, Shifty." That smooth, purring voice of Mike Sharner's always irritated Shifty.

"Like hell it was," Shifty barked. "But I didn't come to argue, see. You guys crooked my job. Yuh gotta come clean with my divvy. Gimme my third an' I'll blow."

Silence greeted this proposal. The air in the room tensed. Shifty clutched his gun, and his finger pressed dangerously tight against the trigger. The two men at the table exchanged a quick glance.

"All right," Sharner purred. "That

sounds fair. Maybe you did have a stronger claim on this job than we thought. And to show you that we're on the level we'll give you the cash, and we'll take our chance on the jewelry."

"Nix on dat stuff," Stumpy growled. "Bills is easy to get rid of. Dis junk can be traced. Why give him the easy pickin'?"

"If there is any doubt about our not treating Shifty right in this matter, we're going to set it straight." Sharner's gentle voice had an air of decision which silenced the other.

Shartner shoved the bills to the side of the table nearest Shifty, who after a moment's suspicious hesitation, stepped up to the table and stuffed the bills in to his pockets.

FOR a single instant Shifty was off guard. Something struck him on the side of the head. He staggered back. His gun roared. A movement from behind—a thousand darting points of light. Then—blackness.

When he came to, he was lying on the floor of a police emergency. On either side of him was a pair of blue-covered legs.

"This one was certainly dumb," one of the cops was saying. "Old Rawlson had one of the finest collections of counterfeit bills in the country, an' this bird had the whole collection stuffed in his pockets."

Seven years they had given Shifty. But he did not squeal on the other two. In the first place, Shifty was no squealer. And then, too, he was not sure that they knew about the bills.

But he found out later. Not only did they know all about the bills, they had called the cops that night, so there would be no chance of his getting away.

When Muggs Cullihan arrived at the prison six months after Shifty got there, he told Shifty about it. He had heard Sharner and Stumpy

Gruber laughing about it when they thought they were alone.

During the years that followed, Shifty's boiling rage at his two double-crossers had gradually cooled. In its place came a cold, deadly hatred. Now that he was free, he grimly sought the objects of this hatred.

He did not want to kill them. Shifty was no killer. Besides, he wanted to go straight. In seven years he had seen many men, more clever and brainy than he, enter those prison walls. He was convinced it was a losing game. He was going straight, and somewhere in the city Lolla was waiting for him, that they might start the new life together.

But the cold rage of seven years was not to be denied. That account with Sharner and Gruber had to be squared. He did not want to kill, but one way or another he must have revenge.

He suddenly realized that it was getting late; time for him to act. He tossed away his cigaret butt and dodged through the traffic of the home-going theater crowd, across to the gate of the house next to the one where Sharner lived. He opened the gate and walked boldly toward this house. Sharner probably had some of his mob guarding his own place, and Shifty was taking no unnecessary chances. He wanted to go to Sharner, but under his own power and in his own way.

He came to the porch of the house, but turned and followed the walk around the side. Once in the shadow at the side of the house, he darted across to the back yard of the house he had been watching.

Lights glowing through two upstairs windows told him that Sharner was probably in. In front of these two windows was a tree, the branches of which scraped the roof of the back porch. From the porch it would

be an easy matter to slip into one of the two windows.

Shifty slowly climbed the tree, moving his arms and legs carefully so as not to cause any sharp snapping of the dry bark. There were men in the room above; he could hear their voices as he climbed.

One of the windows was open and the blind was not fully drawn. Shifty came level with it. He sucked his breath in sharply at what he saw. There were but two men in the room. His lips curled in a muttered snarl at the sight of them.

Mike Sharner and Stumpy Gruber!

His gun was out and he was aiming before he realized what he was doing. Then he lowered it. Something was wrong in there. Sharner, tall, white-haired, aristocratic-looking, was sitting in the depth of a huge chair, and in front of him stood the short, powerful figure of Stumpy Gruber. In Stumpy's thick-fingered hand was a black, ugly-looking gun.

“YEAH, an' you double-crossed me," Stumpy was growling fiercely. "An' now the cops are after me hot an' I gotta get outa the country an' get out quick. I'll need ten grand. You gotta put up that ten grand, Sharner, fer the dirty trick yuh pulled on me."

"You know very well I have no such amount, Stumpy." Sharner's soft, musically modulated voice floated out to Shifty in sharp contrast to Stumpy's gutterals.

"Yuh gotta get it then."

"Suppose I don't?" There was a menacing note in the soft voice now.

"Then the cops are goin' to know damn quick who croaked Mose Rossbaum."

Sharner's black eyes narrowed, and Shifty thought he was going to leap at the other, in spite of the gun.

"Take it easy, Sharner." Stumpy raised the gun a few inches higher. "It's a bad time to try any funny

stuff. Do I get the ten grand, or don't I?"

"But I haven't got it, I tell you."

"Awright. Yuh heard my speel, see?" Stumpy backed toward the door. "We'll both do time, then. Only yuh'll probably burn fer that Rossbaum job."

"Wait a minute, there. I guess you've got me. I'll get you the money tomorrow."

"Wadda yuh mean, tomorrow? How do I know yuh ain't stallin'?"

"I'll prove it to you. In the drawer of this table—"

"No yuh don't," snapped Stumpy. "Keep yer mitts on that chair."

Sharner's half-extended arm dropped back to the arm of the chair.

"You shouldn't be so suspicious, Stumpy. I'm really on the level. In that drawer there is nothing more dangerous than a plush box with very interesting contents."

"Awright. Just the same, another move like that outa yuh might be unhealthy. "I'll get the box."

He edged around the table, never failing for an instant to keep Sharner covered. He opened the drawer, felt for the box with his free hand, found it, and then only did his eyes leave the other's face.

The lid snapped back when he pressed the catch. He placed the box on the table, and picked up the pendant inside. Three large stones set in platinum, glittered and sparkled at the end of the fine platinum chain which dangled from Stumpy's thick fingers.

"That," said Sharner smoothly, "is a perfect imitation of a diamond pendant owned by Mr. Gordon Gilbreath, the millionaire sportsman. I have seen the original several times, and I swear I couldn't tell the two apart but for a tiny swastika cut in the back of this center stone. That chain and setting are genuine, Stumpy. It set me back an even thousand."

"Yeah, but I don't get the connection. Gonna pull a job on Gilbreath?"

"You guessed it, Stumpy. Gilbreath's pendant is rated at fifteen thousand. I can raise ten on it inside of two hours. Tomorrow he's sending it to Cleveland for his wife to wear at the Kokoon Klub Ball Dynamique.

"Old Gilbreath hates publicity, and fifteen thousand is nothing for him to worry over, anyhow. Therefore, the messenger will probably go unguarded. The rest is easy. I've had it planned for a long time. Even if there is a guard, it won't need to worry us much. And this is a mighty good imitation. It may be several days before the real one is missed."

"Yeah, but why not just go out to Gilbreath's place an' crack the crib? He'll have the sparklers there tonight if he's shippin' 'em first thing in the morning."

Sharner shook his head. "You don't know the Gilbreath safe. There's only one man I ever knew who was clever enough to open that safe, and that was Shifty Banter. Besides, my plan is much safer. There's no chance for a slip-up."

"Awright," Stumpy grunted. "Work it how yuh want to. But I'm in a hurry, see? The bulls are closin' in on me. I got to get out. Don't gype me again, Sharner. I give yuh till tomorrow night at midnight to produce the ten grand. I can't wait no longer. If yuh don't come through with the jack, I spill everything, see?"

THEY spoke further, but Shifty in his tree, did not hear them. A plan was darting through his brain; he breathed quickly with the excitement of it. He could go straight as he wanted to, and still square his account with these two with crushing finality. And it was so simple. Crack Gilbreath's crib—he could do it! Take the pendant.

Shartner couldn't produce the ten

grand; without the money, Gruber would get nabbed; Gruber would squeal on Sharner; both would go up the river for a good long stretch. It would be a good revenge; both of them would get more than seven years.

Shifty's attention returned to the room. He gave a startled gasp at what he saw. The two men were still talking, but behind Stumpy, and almost upon him, a small cat-like man was creeping with a thin, wicked-looking knife raised to strike.

Shifty suppressed a yell of warning. His plan for revenge was in danger. If that knife fell, Gruber would be out, Sharner would be free from the threat of exposure, and the securing of the Gilbreath pendant would no longer be of vital importance to Sharner's safety. Shifty's revenge would be shattered, if that knife fell.

But Stumpy sensed the danger! He turned his head suddenly, and side-stepped swiftly just as the cat-like man lunged at him. The man with the knife was off balance. He stumbled past. Stumpy's gun hand shot out and down. The gun butt struck the fellow's head with crunching force. With a trembling moan, he slumped to the floor.

It happened in an instant, but in that instant, Sharner was upon him. Sharner was a powerful man. He grasped the wrist of Stumpy's gun hand, and put all his strength into one mighty twist. Stumpy gave a yell of pain. The gun thudded to the carpet.

Like an animal he was at Stumpy's throat. His long, sinewy thumbs buried themselves in the soft flesh. The stocky man fought frantically, but was gradually being pushed backward and down.

Shifty, outside in his tree, scarcely breathed. If Sharner won—he clutched his gun and waited breathlessly.

But suddenly, with an enormous effort, Stumpy straightened. He clasped his hands in front of him, and shot them up between Sharner's arms. It was a good trick. It broke Sharner's strangle hold. Before the tall man could recover, Stumpy lunged at him, giving his powerful shoulders a sharp swing as he came. Stumpy's elbow crashed to the side of the other's head. Sharner staggered back and dropped.

Stumpy picked up his gun and staggered over to where the other lay. He stood over him, his back bent, his head sunk, his arms dangling loosely from his shoulders. Sharner stirred.

"Yuh dirty double-crossin' snake —oughta plug yuh right now. Only reason I don't—gotta get me ten grand. If yuh don't—too damn bad for yuh!"

Stumpy swayed uncertainly a moment, then reeled toward the door and was gone.

Shifty slid down the tree, darted across to the other house, and walked swiftly down the front walk to the street. He turned and went rapidly up the street half a block, turned and started slowly back.

Before he had taken more than a dozen steps back toward the house, Stumpy came out, walking unsteadily, hailed a taxi and got in. Shifty waited several minutes, but saw no signs of Stumpy being followed.

He breathed a sigh of relief. Stumpy Gruber was safely away. Mike Sharner's freedom, perhaps his escape from death in the chair, now depended upon his getting Gilbreath's pendant, and silencing Gruber with the money he got from its sale.

Shifty glanced at his watch as he hurried away. Twelve-thirty! By the time he could get his necessary tools and get out to the Gilbreath place, it would be close to two, just the right time to start working. If

Gilbreath was sending the diamond pendant to Cleveland early in the morning, it would surely be in the safe at the millionaire's house tonight.

IT WAS ten minutes to two when Shifty stepped noiselessly from behind a bush near a pair of French windows at the side of the Gilbreath house. He darted across the short stretch of lawn, and up onto the porch. A few minutes under his skilled fingers, and the windows swung open silently.

Shifty knew the layout of the house; he had cracked this same safe once before. He stepped into the dark room and closed the windows but did not fasten them. The narrowed focus of his flashlight traveled slowly around the room. He stole quietly across the thickly carpeted floor and into the library.

Then he worked fast. He remembered that the safe was in the wall behind a hanging mirror. He quickly removed the mirror, and it took him but a few minutes to open the outer door of the safe.

Suddenly he paused. An uneasy feeling of danger came over him. Had he heard a sound, or was it imagination? He thought it had been a slight shuffling sound, nothing loud or distinguishable, more like a soft-soled house slipper brushing the rug.

He stood rigidly, breathing silently through his mouth, listening intently. For several long minutes he listened, then slowly swung the beam of his flashlight around the room. Nothing! No slightest sound broke the heavy silence of the big room.

He shrugged slightly. "Nerves," he muttered under his breath, and set to work again. From his pocket he took a black, disc-like instrument, such as deaf people wear, and adjusted it to his ear.

With his ear to the safe door, he manipulated the knob. The magnified

noises of the tumblers came to his ear distinctly. In less than half an hour, the knob clicked and the door swung open easily under his hand.

His light quickly found the plush box. He opened it, saw the pendant, and slipped box and pendant into his pocket. He hesitated a moment as his light played over the other loose articles of jewelry and the stack of bills. But he remembered that he was going straight, and resolutely closed the door and twirled the knob.

He quickly closed the outer door and hung the mirror again. Then he suddenly stiffened. This time he was not mistaken. Before he turned, he knew there was someone behind him.

"Stick 'em up—high!" The voice was low, penetrating, a woman's voice.

As he turned, Shifty was suddenly blinded by the full glare of a flashlight. In the fringe of semi-light beside the glare, he saw the menacing muzzle of a heavy automatic.

"Not a sound out of you. Go back to the window where you came in. No funny stuff! I'm right behind you."

Shifty was troubled by that voice. It was vaguely familiar. But he obeyed without hesitation, noiselessly crossed the two rooms, and stood in front of the window.

"Keep going. Don't try to run. I'm coming, too."

The hard object pressed against his back told Shifty that he was still covered. But he had no desire to run. Like a flash across the span of seven years came recognition of that voice. He trembled slightly.

Out of the window they went, across the broad lawn, to a sheltered spot among the bushing shrubs of the garden.

Shifty turned and faced the girl.

"L OLLA!"

L"Yes, I knew it was you, Shifty." In that voice was none of the tender recognition for which Shifty

yearned. "What's the idea? You wrote me you was going straight." The hard note in Lolla's voice caused Shifty's shoulders to droop.

"Listen, Lolla, I am goin' straight. You an' me always played square with each other, didn't we? Well, I'm still square with you, kid. I cracked that safe and got the pendant to get square with Sharner an' Gruber.

In a few words, he told her of the meeting he had witnessed between his two enemies, and of the plan he had formed.

"And," he ended, "if Sharner don't cop this pendant tomorrow, they're both sunk, see? Sharner can't raise the jack, an' Stumpy'll sure squeal when he's nabbed. They'll both get the works."

Shifty gritted his teeth. "Damn 'em. Maybe they won't frame a pal again so easy."

Lolla dropped the gun to her side, and sank back to the bench.

"But you can't do it, Shifty. I've been working with Sharner. I'm a maid here, and I got all the dope for him to plan this job. But somehow, Gilbreath got wise to me. He's had me watched. He knows something is going to be pulled here. If that pendant is gone tomorrow morning, he'll have me nabbed inside of an hour. That's why I was watching it tonight. I was afraid Sharner might try something funny."

"Yuh mean, unless this pendant gets to Cleveland, yuh'll get run in for the job?"

"Yes. Sharner has framed the job so it'll point to me at every turn. I see that now."

"But," Shifty objected, "if I take it back, Sharner'll get it tomorrow, won't he?"

"Not if you're as clever as you used to be, Shifty. If you want me to go along with you and start out straight as we planned, you've got to keep him from getting that pendant. They'll stick me for ten years for this."

Shifty slumped to the bench and stared down at the blurred objects which were his shoes. If he kept the pendant now, Lolla would get nabbed for it next day. If he put it back in the safe, Sharner would get it tomorrow, and Lolla would get pinched when the substitution was discovered.

True, they could squeal on Sharner, but Shifty knew Sharner. For every one thing that Lolla could tell about Sharner, he could tell ten about her. No, Lolla had been working with Sharner, and by now he would have enough facts about her to put her away for the rest of her life.

It looked hopeless, whatever they did. Shifty thought back over Sharner's plan as he had heard it outlined to Stumby Gruber. The two pendants would probably be switched by some clever ruse on the train. The loss of the real pendant might not be discovered for days.

Hadn't Sharner said that the imitation was so perfect that he, himself, could hardly tell the two apart. And Sharner was a good judge of jewelry. As things stood, Shifty would lose not only his revenge, but Lolla also.

A sudden thought came to Shifty. He turned to Lolla, trembling with the excitement of it.

"Listen, kid, it's gonna be all jake. We'll get you outa this, an' put those birds away for a stretch, too."

"Listen to this." In a rapid whisper, Shifty told her his plan.

"Great stuff, Shifty. You always was the cleverest guy I knew. But you got to be careful. If he catches you, it's all up with you."

They talked earnestly for several minutes. Then Shifty rose.

"I'll be back from Sharner's in an hour. Wait here. If this works, tomorrow we face the world straight with all accounts squared. He walked swiftly away into the night.

He was back in less than an hour. Lolla had been so busy with thoughts

of a troubled past, and dreams of a future with the law no longer hanging over her like a depressing shadow, that she did not hear his approach. She started slightly when his low, guarded voice came over her shoulder.

"O. K. so far, kid. Now let's get this thing back into the safe."

Together they crept, noiseless as shadows, back toward the house.

TWO DAYS later, at nine o'clock at night, Stumpy Gruber was arrested. For two days Shifty had haunted the vicinity of the Central Station. Now he saw them bring Stumpy in.

Shifty lost no time in getting out to Sharner's. In twenty minutes from the time Stumpy and his uniformed escort disappeared into the station, Shifty was once more in the tree outside Sharner's window.

He knew that Sharner would not be long in learning of Gruber's arrest; Lolla had given him some idea of the masterly way in which Sharner got information he wanted.

But even Shifty marveled at the speed of the man's system. He had no more than reached the level of the window, than he heard the sound of a flung door open. The blind was down this time, but the window was open; voices came out to him distinctly.

"Dey got 'im, Chief, an' he's squealed. Anson just tipped me off. Looks like hell's to pay."

"All right," came Sharner's even, though strained voice. "You three know the plan. Beat it quick, scatter, and we'll meet at the old place in Cleveland."

Shifty heard the door slam. He swung out onto the branch, slid to the porch roof, and in another minute was inside the dark room next to Sharner's. Not if he could help it, Sharner wouldn't meet them in Cleveland!

The cops would be on their way by now. He'd only have to hold Sharner ten or fifteen minutes. But he knew this would be one of the most dangerous jobs he had ever tackled.

Shifty had the door partly open and was about to step out into the hall when he heard footsteps coming rapidly down the hall toward him. He closed the door silently, clutched his gun, and flattened himself against the wall back of the door. He scarcely breathed as the steps came nearer the door.

If the man came in, he was caught. And in their present frame of mind, these men of Sharner's would make short work of anyone who endangered their plans.

Shifty's heart thumped against his ribs as the steps paused at the door. Then he breathed again; the steps hurried on.

He again opened the door, and this time he went out. Three quick steps brought him to Sharner's door. He opened it softly, stepped silently in, and turned the key as he shut the door.

Sharner snapped erect from a suitcase he had been fastening.

"Up with 'em, Sharner. An' no funny stuff, see?"

"Well, Banter, what do you want? Speak quick. I'm in a hurry."

"No hurry," said Shifty deliberately, "you ain't goin' no place."

"What do you mean? Talk fast. I've got to get a train in fifteen minutes." The tall man's voice had a level cold note in it.

"Why, I just wanna talk to yuh," said Shifty easily, throwing one leg over the arm of a chair. "We're old pals, ain't we? I come twice before to see yuh, but yuh was busy both times. The first time, I had to listen in on a little talk you was havin' with Stumpy Gruber."

A look of quick understanding flashed into Sharner's dark eyes.

"So it was you, damn you," Shar-

ner snarled, taking a quick step forward.

"Steady, Sharner, steady. I'll plug yuh. An' yuh know damn well I got a right to. I'm just hopin' yuh'll make a false move."

For a tense moment the two faced each other like statues. Then Shifty went on evenly:

"**S**URE, I switched 'em. That was the second time I was here that night. I cracked Gilbreath's crib, got the real sparklers, an' brought 'em here an' put 'em in yer box."

The sound of footsteps came from the stairs; heavy footsteps they were, confident footsteps, footsteps made by men with square-toed shoes. The cops!

"Back, damn yuh," Shifty commanded fiercely, leaning suddenly toward Sharner, "an' if yuh move toward one of these windows, yer gonna get yours, see?"

Sharner looked into the glittering eyes of the man he had double-crossed. He stopped.

Shifty backed swiftly toward the open window. The footsteps were now almost to the door. Shifty paused on the sill, his gun still covering the enraged Sharner.

"That was funny, Sharner, you havin' the real goods an' risking yer neck to switch 'em on the train fer yer own phoney ones the messenger was carryin'. Yuh see, I put yer phoney sparklers back in Gilbreath's safe, so the kid would be carryin' 'em next morning when he started for Cleveland."

Heavy shoulders butted the door. It creaked.

"Think of me when yer doin' time, Sharner. An' if yuh ever get out again, don't frame no more of yer pals."

Shifty slid down. The sound of a wild curse from Sharner mingled with the noise of the crashing door, as he hit the ground.

A Case of Identity

By B. W. GARDNER

Jimmie's moll was clever. Matching wits with dicks meant nothing in her young life until—

THERE CAME a sudden soft tapping on the door. The woman in the chair started violently and an expression that was almost terror came into her black eyes. But it faded instantly, leaving her calm but tense.

A woman about thirty, with an almost pantherish grace to her tall and slender body. Her face was startlingly pale, the paleness accentuated by the raven black hair. And her eyes were black, with a hint of violence lurking behind a peaceful exterior. The beauty of her too-red lips was marred by a touch of hardness that amounted almost to cruelty.

The soft, persistent tapping on the door sounded again. Unhurriedly the woman rose to her feet, went to the door, and inserted a key in the lock. When she opened the door, a funny looking little old man stood there, a black satchel in his hand.

He was short and paunchy, with huge spectacles covering his eyes of pale-blue. His dingy suit, baggy and unpressed, hung untidily about his body, and his comical derby was dented by long wear. At sight of the woman his pale eyes lighted joyfully.

The woman laughed—a strained, hysterical laugh—and her body relaxed. She seized the paunchy little man by his arms, dragged him into the room, and locked the door.

"Ikey Dinglebaum!" she cried. "You old buzzard! I was never so glad to see anyone, Ikey!"

Ikey gazed at her critically from behind his spectacles. "Ach—but its good to see you again, Molly! You've not changed a bit—just as beautiful as ever, and it's been more than a year. But I—I thought—I didn't know you were back in town, Molly, till this morning."

"Of course you didn't. None of the gang knows. And I don't want them to know. So you got my message?"

"Sure!" he cackled. "And old Ikey came on the run! But—where's Jimmy?"

The woman's face flushed painfully, and she averted his eyes. "Jimmy? Why, I don't know where he is. I saw him last in London."

"You mean—you've split?"

"Yes, if you call it that!" Again that slightly hysterical laugh, filled with pain. "But, let's not talk of it, now. I'll tell you by and by. I have so much to tell you, and there's so little time to tell it in. But, first, Ikey, we'll drink."

THE FAT little man watched with a puzzled frown as Molly fluttered to a large cabinet and took out a bottle and two glasses.

The glasses she placed on a small table in the center of the room, and poured a small amount of the sparkling liquid into each. Then she took the black satchel from his hand, cast it aside, and placed a chair near the table for him and one on the opposite side for herself.

"To days that are gone!" she said and lifted her glass.

She seated herself in the chair across from Ikey and cupped her chin in her palms.

"I've so much to tell you, Ikey, I don't know where to start. I needed help—and I said, 'If anyone can help me, it'll be Ikey!' So I sent word, for I don't dare to be seen in that part of town."

"Sure—sure!" the little man smiled. "But Jimmy—tell me about Jimmy!"

"I see I'll have to!" Her voice was soft, and that expression of pain came to her eyes again. "It's all over between us, that's all! I—I'm sorry—I guess it was my fault! I couldn't hold him!"

"It wasn't that!" Ikey declared, "Jimmy was as square as they come! What went wrong? You loved him, didn't you?"

"Of course!" she said passionately. "I still do! But it's all over. Jimmy was in Paris the last I heard."

"Word came back that you two pulled a big job in London an' got out with the whole hides. That's the last I heard."

"And that was the end! Listen, Ike, I sent you word that I needed help—and I do! You say you heard about the job we pulled. Then you heard we stole the famous Claxton diamonds!"

"I heard that—yes!" Ikey said quietly. He fumbled with a huge black cigar, but his pale eyes gleamed avidly. "Worth half a million, eh?"

"So they say!" She smiled mirthlessly. "But I'd give them all and more, if I had Jimmy back! We got the sparklers—yes! And quarreled over them! I know it was my fault. It always was.

"I'd done the same before—accuse him of holding out on me, when I knew he always gave me my share, and more. I'd gotten into the habit; he'd always stood for it, so I thought he would again. But he didn't!"

"It was in my hotel room, that same night, even before old Claxton had missed the diamonds. I—I'll never forget it! I accused Jimmy of holding out on me. When I done that, he looked at me for a long, long time, not saying anything. Then he pushed the whole pile of sparklers to my side of the table and got to his feet.

"'Molly,' he said, 'this is the end! You'll never accuse me of that again!' And he turned and left the room. That was almost a year ago; I've not seen him since, though I heard he was in Paris."

She dropped her head on her arms, and a soft sob shook her slender body. Ikey patted the dark head clumsily.

"Too bad!" he soothed. "And Jimmy such a white guy, too! But," he brightened perceptibly, "you have the diamonds?"

She lifted her head. "Yes, but it don't help me much! You know the Claxton diamonds, Ikey. And everybody else knows them. Old Claxton, of London, is a millionaire. He has but one hobby. Collecting diamonds. He has one of the finést collections of uncut stones in the world—or did have!"

"Jimmy and me got the best of them. But little good the whole pile's done me. Every jeweler of any size in America has heard of the Claxton diamonds, and knows they've been stolen. I haven't dared try to sell them. They'd be recognized instantly."

"So!" The paunchy little man rubbed his bald head thoughtfully. "So you send for Ikey, eh?"

"Yes!" she said impulsively. "Because I knew you'd help me—and play square."

SHE ROSE suddenly to her feet and went again to the cabinet. Ikey watched narrowly—Ikey, who was probably the cleverest "fence" in all New York—a receiver and dispenser of stolen goods. Ikey was partial to

diamonds, and knew them as very few men in the City knew them. Molly and Jimy Bondi had been among his late and valued customers, before they'd left for London a year before.

The tall woman opened a cabinet drawer, rummaged deep under wearing apparel and took forth a peculiar looking something. She held it aloft. It was a little golden idol. A repulsive thing, with it's stubby arms folded across its paunchy stomach and a leering grin on its face. She brought it to the table.

"This is the package they came in," she smiled. "All bundled nicely, sitting in the safe, supposed to fool anyone looking for the famous Claxton diamonds. But, Jimmy—we knew!"

She turned the idol slowly in her hands, pressing firmly on various parts of it's anatomy with her fingers. There was a sudden sharp, metallic click. A small square panel slid upward from the center of the idol's back. There was a stony patterning as a number of small objects came from the anatomy of the idol and scattered over the table.

Ikey caught his breath sharply. The woman watched with a half-derisive smile as he stretched his claw-like hand toward the pebbles. Pebbles that winked with an ominous lustre and gave out colors that looked like the sun setting in a blood-red sea.

"The Claxton diamonds!" Ikey breathed.

"Yes—the Claxton diamonds!" Molly snapped. "But it ain't so simple as that! I tell you, every jeweler in America knows these stones, and knows they've been stolen. And I need money, Ikey. I need it bad! That's why I sent for you. I know you can fence them, Ike, you've done harder things. That's what I want you to do!"

"I may!" Ikey said cautiously, "but,

it'll take time. How much do you want for them?"

"I'm not particular!" she said almost harshly. "I wish I'd never seen the damn things! They caused it all. They caused me to lose Jimmy!" her voice rose shrilly.

"There—there!" Ikey said soothingly. "Maybe it'll be fixed between you and him!"

"It won't be. He said he was through, and he meant it. I—I'd give all of them just to see him. I'd—"

"I'll see what I can do!" the fat little man said hurriedly. "But it won't be easy. Old Ikey has ways—yes, that is admitted!" He ran his unclean fingers lovingly through the small pile of gleaming stones, grinning at the sounds they made.

"But, as you say, everybody knows the famous Claxton diamonds. They must be recut. And there is the danger!"

"I know!" she said. "I've been afraid to stir from this hole. I don't think I'm suspected, but I've seen men hanging around the house—and I think I know a dick when I see one—I ought to! I want to get away from here, Ikey—to go to South America. That's why I want to get rid of these things. I'm afraid, without Jimmy. I want to go away! I—"

There came a sudden rapping on the locked door. Molly whirled like a trapped animal, that expression of fear again in her black eyes. The paunchy little man rose hurriedly to his feet.

"The diamonds—quick!"

With a single motion the woman scooped the handful of glittering stones from the table, and poured them into the grinning idol. She pressed a spot directly in the center of the idol's stomach, and the panel closed. Running silently to the big cabinet, she raised the apparel in the drawer, and placed the idol deeply underneath.

"You better get out!" she whisper-

ed. And in the whisper there was ill-concealed terror. "It may be the dicks!"

Swiftly she propelled the little man to a second door and opened it. It opened into a clothes-filled closet, with a window opening onto the fire-escape. She thrust him inside, closed the door and locked it. Ikey thought of his little black satchel, lying in a chair; he hesitated, then knelt and placed his pale-blue eye to the key-hole.

THE KNOCKING was resumed, louder, imperative. Molly hesitated a moment, collecting her wits. Then she went calmly, gracefully, the terror gone from her eyes, to the door and unlocked it.

Two men stood there. A young man and an older one with gray mustache; darkly clad, business-like men. They pushed their way courteously but firmly into the room.

"Sorry to disturb you, madam," the older man was saying, "but it is unavoidable! I'm Steele, from headquarters, and this," with a jerk of his thumb, "is Paxton. And may I ask if I am speaking to Molly Wilson?"

Molly's voice was soft, but with just the proper amount of resentment. "No, I'm sorry! You must have got the wrong number. My name is Mrs. Jane Winton."

"Queer!" Steele seemed nonplussed, but was regarding her closely. "But you will pardon me if I insist, and ask a few questions? I don't see how I could have made a mistake—eh, Paxton?"

The young man shrugged and smiled. "Every one makes mistakes!" he said.

"Even diamond thieves!" Steele turned back to the woman who was regarding them with well-feigned bewilderment. He drew a piece of cardboard from a pocket.

"And may I ask if you recognize the woman in this picture?"

Molly took the photograph. It was

a photograph of herself. She merely glanced at it.

"I do not!" she said firmly.

"Too bad! That is a photograph of one who is known in the underworld as Molly Wilson, Moll of Jimmy the Dip. But a year ago they both disappeared. At almost the same time Farnsworth Claxton, a London millionaire, was robbed of half a million in diamonds. We have reliable information that these two pulled the job. Are you sure madam, you don't recognize this photograph?"

"Absolutely sure," the woman said impatiently, "and I've never been to Europe."

"Possibly," young Paxton cut in, "she will explain these two glasses on the table. Also," he walked to the closet door and tried the knob, "this locked door!"

Molly paled slightly, but replied instantly. "A friend was here. He left a few minutes before you arrived, and I neglected to remove the glasses."

"And this door?" Paxton requested politely.

"The bath is out of order, and the landlady has the key!"

Her heart suddenly froze. Paxton had picked the black satchel from the chair and was trying to open it. She had not realized that Ikey left it behind in his flight. But when the young man opened it, it was entirely empty!

"All that will keep!" Steele said. "But, since the lady seems so sure she is not the party named, I will endeavor to refresh her memory. Not only do we know, madam, who stole those diamonds, we are very well aware of the movements of the principals in the case since that night. We also know that Molly was deeply in love with this yegg called Jimmy—for he was only a yegg, you know!"

BUT IF THE observant detective expected the woman to show resentment at this, he was disappointed.

"Why tell me all this?" she demanded flatly.

"Because it might interest you! And there are other things, which you do not know and which I shall tell you, that will possibly interest you.

"As I said, Molly Wilson was deeply in love with Jimmy—but, for some reason, probably a quarrel over the loot, these two parted company the very night of the diamond robbery. They have not seen each other since.

"All this you possibly know. But do you know, madam, just what Jimmy has been doing since that night?"

But the woman had turned away with a half-scornful shrug and was gazing from a window.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" she said distinctly. "Why should I know anything about the actions of every common crook in the City?"

"My error—possibly you should not! It is agreed, then, that you know nothing concerning one Jimmy during the last year. But, I shall tell you. Did you know that, one month after the diamond robbery, Jimmy was murdered in an Apache den in Paris?"

The pale faced woman half turned; a startled exclamation rose to her lips, and was never uttered. Her face blanched. By a violent effort she regained control of her slipping senses.

Something that made her want to scream, to cry out that it was not—could not be true! Jimmy dead! But outwardly there was no sign of the conflict within. She was calm and as cold as ice.

"Does that mean nothing to you, madam?" Steele asked harshly.

She turned in well-feigned surprise.

"Very little. Why should it? Am I supposed to register grief over the death of an unknown crook?"

"No—but I was under the impression that you would be vitally interested in the death of Jimmy Bondi. You are clever. I admit that you are

registered here as Mrs. Jane Winton. It is also true that we were not certain of the identity of the woman who rented this room—though you were suspected of being Molly Wilson.

"That surprising lady managed in some way to escape from the keen eyes of the agents of Scotland Yard; how, I do not know. Later, it was discovered that she had sailed for America on the Olympic. She is doubtless now in New York. Do I bore you?"

The woman shrugged and was silent.

"It became known that the entire collection of diamonds was in the hands of this lady crook—whether as result of a quarrel, or as a blind, is not known. The whereabouts of Jimmy Bondi was discovered almost immediately. But he did not have the stones. He was placed secretly under arrest and admitted that the entire collection was in the possession of the woman.

"And, he was allowed to escape—so realistically that he did not suspect it was a ruse—that Scotland Yard might observe his movements. But, it all came to naught, for, as I said, one month later his throat was slit by a knife in an Apache den in Paris.

"Headquarters received word that Molly Wilson was in New York. And, eventually, suspicion came to rest on you. But, after all, it seems that we were mistaken!" He bowed courteously, as if preparing to leave.

"Mistakes are natural!" The woman's voice was indistinct.

"Quite so!"

THREE

THERE WAS a slight commotion in the hallway. A sudden scraping of feet, and muffled oaths. A protesting voice was raised shrilly.

Then the unlocked door was flung violently open. Three men stood in the opening. Two darkly clad men—and between them, his wrists manacled before him, was a tall, disheveled

young man, his curly hair about eyes that avoided the woman.

A sudden shrill scream from the woman shattered the silence.

"Jimmy!"

She started forward; and paused, realizing that that one word had sealed her fate. With the realization, she dropped with a heart-broken sob into a chair and buried her head on her arms. But she was on her feet almost instantly, the hard, cynical lines stamped deeper about her mouth.

"Madam," Steele said not unkindly, "I will ask you again. Are you Molly Wilson?"

"Yes!" she said defiantly. "Why deny it? But," her eyes were bitter, accusing, "you—you said he was dead!"

"For which I sincerely ask your forgiveness," Steele said earnestly.

The woman had turned to Jimmy Bondi. But he stood with bowed head, silent, his manacled arms before him.

"It was the only way," Steele spoke. "I'm sorry we had to resort to this. When I told you he was dead, you made a brave effort to control your emotions—and almost succeeded. But when you discovered he was alive and well, it was too much."

"It was the only way," he repeated. "We were not certain of your identity. And Bondi, here, had refused to

identify you. Furthermore, he had sworn he was alone in the diamond robbery, and that you were somewhere in Paris.

"But, come!" His tone became crisp and business-like. "You have the stones?"

Her laugh was harsh. "Yes! And I want you to take the damn things off my hands. They've brought me nothing but misery!"

She walked slowly and gracefully to the big cabinet and took therefrom the repulsive little idol. She placed it in Steele's hands.

After they had gone the fat little man in the closet took his pale-blue eye from the key-hole and adjusted his spectacles. He shook his bald head sadly. Jimmy and Molly had been very good friends! He tried the door, and found it locked; then he opened the window, gazed fearfully downward for a moment, and ejected his paunchy body onto the fire-escape.

Half way from the fire-escape he paused and glanced upward, with another regretful shake of his head.

"And him such a white guy, too!" He moaned, and then, "Oi—mine satchel, I left it in the room!" But then, he reflected with a crafty grin, the satchel was entirely empty, so it did not matter so much! Satchels were cheap!

ITALY WINS FIGHT FOR BANDIT

Chained and handcuffed and surrounded by a whole squadron of police, Sante Pollastro, Italy's most notorious bandit of post-war years, arrived in Italy after a two years' fight against extradition from France.

Pollastro will be tried and will have to answer for a score of crimes, including the killing of five policemen. Two of the policemen were marshals and another a sergeant. Pollastro maintains he killed only two of the policemen.

The Italian robber, who has a keen mind and an unusual range of education, was the leader of a band which first became prominent in 1922.

Pollastro himself confessed to the Italian police numerous felonies he had committed, but defended his killings.

"I wished only to preserve my liberty. I would have killed ten persons rather than lost that," he said.

Among his accusers is an anarchist named De Rosa, a former member of his band. Pollastro says that De Rosa came from America to begin a reign of terrorism and betrayed him for a reward of \$500.

Pollastro's arrival at the Milan Prison caused a near riot when the other prisoners rushed to get a glimpse of the celebrated bandit and were beaten back by prison guards.

Bars of Hades

By TOM CHAMPION

PART II

READ THE OPENING PARAGRAPHS AND CONTINUE THE STORY:

MARSDEN and Darcy! Two lions burning for blood! Marsden, warden of the State Prison, pitiless brutal mankiller. Darcy, lord of the biggest underworld mob, in the coop awaiting the chair. And these two implacable wills pitted against each other, while the mob on the outside sends no word to its leader.

"I'll break you, Darcy! I'll make you crawl and lick the dust off my shoes. I'll show you who's master!"

"Like hell you will, Marsden! I'll beat this rap. The prison isn't built that could hold Darcy, see?"

Then began the systematic attempt to destroy this iron will. Marsden starved Darcy, put him in solitary, tortured him with salted drinking water, beat him, resorted to the most diabolical schemes to break the pride of the underworld lord. His cleverest card was putting Darcy in a comfortable cell lined with pictures of beautiful women. Fascinating love stories on the table. Soft bed—Darcy spent a night in agony of desire.

With the contrivance of Spike, a trusty, he leads a prison break, but the reserves are called and the prisoners are mowed down mercilessly. Darcy is called down to face the revolting brutality of Marsden's anger. The warden smashes his fettered victim to a pulp. But no physical pain, no threats, no fears can shake Darcy's pride. His last words of consciousness are words of cold defiance:

"I'll beat this rap, warden. The prison isn't built that could hold Darcy, see?"

LIKE A GRIM Gibraltar set in the center of Fairyland, the State Prison stood a massive, forbidding monster of stone and steel partially obscured by the vernal trees of the late Spring. The golden dancing rays of sunshine softly played along the jagged topped walls, and were reflected as though through a prism as they lapped up against the tin cupolas of the small guard houses mounted upon each strategic corner.

It was on such a gay day, that Ray Conners came to the end of his term. He stood silently before Marsden's desk. An unhealed purple scar on his face bore mute testimony to the warden's brutality. But despite the somber expression upon his countenance, his heart murmured a gay song. Freedom!

Marsden cleared his throat noisily.

"Well, Conners," he began. "You're one of the few guys that get out of

here in almost as good shape as you came in."

Conners met his eye squarely.

"Yes, Warden," he said evenly. Despite the hatred that flamed inside him, he would not gamble another run-in with the man tamer with liberty in the offing.

Marsden nodded sardonically.

"Yeah," he said. "You're getting a break. Well, you been a pretty good guy. I'm not squawking. But there's one thing I want to tell you before you leave. I happen to know that you belong to that rat, Darcy's mob. Now, if you value your liberty, you'll make no attempt to do any snitching on the outside about what goes on on the inside."

He thrust a warning finger over the desk almost into Conners' face.

"I'm making no promises, Marsden."

Marsden's lips compressed.

"I'm not asking you for any. I'm telling you something. Don't talk. All right, boys, take him out."

Connors turned on his heel and followed the guards from the warden's office. He walked slowly up the main corridor, his heart pounding wildly. In another moment he would be a free man.

Already a key was fighting with the lock of the inner gate. It squeaked protestingly as it swung open on its heavy hinges. Connors passed through.

In another second the outer door had been flung open, and a clean vision of green and sunshine flooded the gunman's eyes. He sighed deeply, and turned to the keeper.

"Goodby," he said in a thin, choked voice.

The gate clanged shut behind him, and he strode down the dusty road with the imperious swing of a blooded duke, rather than the apologetic shuffle of an ex-convict.

A train bore Ray Connors to New York, a subway hurtled him uptown; and a cross-town car clattered him over to the waterfront warehouse, in which the rods of Jack Darcy had lain low since the apprehension of their leader.

He cast a surreptitious glance over his shoulder as he left the car to make sure that his unobtrusive movements were not observed by any flat-footed minion of the law, and, leaping up the three steps that led to the door, gave a peculiar staccato knock.

In a second a board was pushed cautiously away from a peep-hole and a glinting yellow eye met his. He heard a smothered exclamation as the owner of the eye swore a frightful relieved oath, and swung the door open.

Connors' hand was crushed in a heavy ham hand and a booming voice smote his ears.

"Well, if it ain't Ray home from the

big house. Jesus, but the boys will be glad to see you. What's all the stink going on up in stir?"

Connors managed to release his hand and regarded it ruefully.

"That's my gun hand, Mike," he grinned. "Don't ruin it. I'll spill all the dirt later. Where's the boys?"

Mike made a heavy gesture toward the stairs.

"Up there. Go ahead up. They need the dirt."

CONNERS slowly picked his way through the dim warehouse and mounted the rickety stairs. On the first landing he saw an oblong of light emanating from an open door. He breathed deeply. For the first time in years he was with those whom he called his friends. He gained the doorway and stood for a silent moment, the yellow light falling upon him.

The conversation in the room was suddenly stilled. Hard eyes looked at him, and for a moment became strangely soft. A wistful smile crawled over the face of Ray Connors, and impulsively he stretched forth his hands. In a moment the spell was broken and bedlam reigned.

An inarticulate medley of voices dinmed in his ear. His hand was pumped up and down till it seemed that the aching muscles must actually crack under the strain. A thousand questions were hurled at him.

Finally retrieving his right hand Connors held it up over his head.

"Just a minute, boys, and I'll give you the whole story. But there's someone here who deserves first crack at the information. I guess you'll all agree to that."

The mob before him followed the gesture of his arm towards the slim, well-rounded figure of a girl who sat alone at a corner table. A muttered assent gave acquiescence to his words. The girl rose to meet him as he crossed the room.

"Hello, Hedda," he greeted. "How is it?"

She stared at him, her eyes two apprehensive orbs in a strained white face. She ignored his friendly question.

"How—how is he?" she asked, and her voice held a vibrant tremble.

Connors leaned over and patted her hand.

"Easy now, kid. He's all right."

He felt her hand tremble in his.

"But—but we heard—"

"I suppose you did," agreed Connors. "But he's all right. See? Of course he got in a bit of a jam with Marsden but every mob in the underworld expected that. Marsden's out to break him, that's one sure thing."

"Isn't there some way of getting him out?"

Connors' teeth set for a second as he thought of the things he had endured at the hands of the man-killing warden.

"Don't worry, Babe, we'll get him out all right. That's why I'm here. You can trust me."

The girl's eyes melted into his.

"I know I can, Ray," she said softly. "We've felt so helpless here. We knew we couldn't do anything without some information from someone who's been on the inside."

Connors rose to his feet.

"Don't worry, kid," he counselled again. "I'm going to talk to the Flash now and before the night's gone, there'll be a pretty little scheme hatched out."

Hedda followed him with her eyes as he disappeared in the small office to the left of the big barroom.

Some few moments later a half dozen stern faced men sat around the massive oaken conference table in the counsel room. The ornate furnishings that the room contained belied the fact that the chamber once had been used as a storeroom for grain. The walls were hung with heavy drapes which served the double pur-

pose of enhancing their appearance and rendering them practically sound proof.

At the head of the table was an empty chair, while at the right and left sides respectively sat Darcy's first lieutenant, and Connors. It was part of the mob tradition that the head chair could be occupied by none but their leader. However, in his absence the Flash was the master of ceremonies.

He rose to his feet, and a hard look replaced his usual flippant gaze.

"BOYS," he said. "You've heard what Ray has said. Jack's getting one hell of a deal up there. It's a cinch that Marsden won't break him, but he'll probably kill him first. We've got to get him out."

A low murmur of assent ran around the room.

"From the layout that Ray's given us," went on the Flash, "it's almost impossible to plan any escape through trickery. Marsden's too smart for that. The only thing to do is to beat him at his own racket."

Connors nodded in agreement.

"Absolutely, Flash," he said. "Brute force is the only way to get the chief out of there. The question is, can we get enough force?"

The Flash shot an inquiring look around the table.

"You hear that?" he demanded. "What's the answer?"

A heavy jowled gunman at the foot of the table replied.

"Why not, Flash? In a pinch we can raise a mob half a thousand strong. That ought to be enough to keep Marsden's mob busy till we get Jack out."

The Flash nodded thoughtfully.

"I've got something of an idea myself, boys. But it'll take some working out. I'll let you know about it later. In the meantime, I want it arranged for Hedda to get a pass next visiting day and go up to see him."

That's all for now. You stay behind a minute, Conners."

The others filed silently from the room, while the Flash poured the latest creation of his fertile brain into the admiring ears of Ray Conners. The Flash talked easily in his low tones as Conners nodded his head to indicate his understanding of the finer points of the plan.

Suddenly there came to their ears the sounds of a scuffle in the other room. The Flash rose angrily to his feet.

"Damn them," he snapped. "I've told the mob to keep their differences to themselves while we're lying low. Let's see what the hell's going on now."

Swiftly they strode from the room together. As they reached the doorway a dramatic tableau held their eyes. Standing up against the bar with upraised hands was a small wizened figure of a man, facing some half dozen of the mob who threatened him with drawn guns.

The Flash screwed up his face as he tried to recall the helpless man's identity. His face was vaguely familiar, but somehow the suave gangster could not call him to mind.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

Big Mike stepped forward and took it upon himself to answer.

"A rat, Flash," he said quietly. "I've been watching him all night. He must have sneaked in somewhere. I knew he was a wrong 'un but I didn't get wise till Rosetti tipped me he's a stool."

The Flash tapped his hand dangerously on his hip pocket.

"Rosetti," he called.

A tall sallow Italian youth detached himself from the crowd.

"Mike's right," he said. "I know him. He's been stooling around headquarters for years."

"Yeah?" said the Flash, and his voice held an ominous threat.

He gestured a dismissal to Rosetti and stepped up to the bar.

"Put the rods away," he commanded. "I'll handle this rat."

He reached out toward the trembling man and seized him by the shoulder.

"Anything to say?" he questioned.

The man looked hopelessly around the antagonistic faces which glowered at him. His face had turned an ashen grey, his eyes were wide dilated balls, his lips trembled as he made reply.

"No," he said and his voice was almost inaudible.

"Well," went on the Flash. "You know the answer to that."

The other nodded dumbly.

The Flash's hand sought his pocket and was withdrawn firmly grasping a 38 special.

"Any messages?" he demanded tersely.

The other started to shake his head, when a sudden wild gleam of hope lit his eye.

"Yes, yes," he said in a slightly steadier tone. "I've got a letter here if you'd—"

"Hand it over," said the Flash. "It'll be delivered."

The stool pigeon's hand went to his coat pocket. Suddenly it flashed upward and the light played for a dazzling moment on a piece of shining metal in his hand.

Before the Flash could entirely take in the situation, he had lifted the silver police whistle to his lips and a shrilling blast rent the room. Its echo was drowned in the roar of the Flash's 38. The rat crumpled and fell, a thin streak of blood oozed from his mouth, and the whistle that had sent its warning dropped, a red stained rolling piece of silver. The Flash leaped to action.

"Move!" he yelled. "Probably bulls outside. Man those three Thompsons in the store room. Get one at the head of the stairs and the others at

the end of the room in case they try the windows. Drag out the gats!"

The mob sprang to obey his shouted commands. Conners dragged out a machine gun and mounted its tripod at the stair head. The other pair were stuck in strategic corners of the room. Already the trample of feet was heard outside, and in a moment came a pounding at the heavy door.

THE FLASH held up his hand for silence. "Who's there?" he roared.

"Open in the name of the law!" came a stentorian voice couched in the gentle accents of Tenth Avenue.

"We have only one answer for the law," cried the Flash as he levelled his 38. A whining slug crashed through the wooden portal and a yelp of pain and a dull thud testified to the accuracy of the gang-leader's aim.

Then hell broke loose. A volley of shots crashed up against the outer side of the door, and Conners winced as a bullet bit into his shoulder. However, he disdained relief and held onto the eager trigger of the Thompson.

In another moment the heavy door had crashed inward and with a splintering crack fell upon the stairway. A horde of plain-clothesmen poured through the opening. Conners, blood streaming down his arm, squeezed the trigger, and the gun answered.

Lead and steel fell upon the minions of the law, as they sang their awful threnody into ears of the invaders. The steady rattle of revolver fire took up the obligato and rattled death and devastation into the advancing policemen. But still the foemen's guns were not stilled. The heavy bark of the police 45's presaged the chorus of death that the streaking lead roared up the stairway.

The Flash's voice was heard above the din of battle.

"Watch the windows!"

A second machine gun turned its ugly head toward the south, where

the tinkle of shattered glass preceded a second platoon of the enemy. Standing firmly between his two lines of men, the Flash directed the fire of one down the stairway and the other toward the shattered windows. His own 38 drilled a steady line of steel into the mark that his eyes had set.

Suddenly his keen grey eyes caught a swift flank movement of the enemy toward the farthest machine gun. Two sharp reports had sounded, then the gangster manipulating the Thompson slumped crazily and fell inert over his smoking weapon. With a shout of triumph, half the window section charged upon the temporarily disabled gun.

With the speed and litheness of a tiger, the Flash charged also. If that gun were lost and turned on the defenders, all was lost! However he did it, he must prevent the capture of that important weapon.

Single-handed he bore down upon the onrushing policemen, his gun spat a venomous stream of hate and death and his sharp eyes gleamed brightly as two uniformed figures went crashing down upon the floor. But swiftly as he had moved, he was not swift enough. He was about ten yards from the contested gun, when three of the foes were but a yard away.

Then something happened. A lithe, graceful figure swept through the bullet scarred door that led to the counsel room. Like a young Fury, her tight dress clinging exquisitely to her delightful slender body, she darted towards the machine gun.

For a fleeting moment the surprised cops hesitated.

"Good God," swore one. "It's a moll."

That was the last thing he ever said. With a bark of hate the Thompson spewed forth its messengers of death into the very midst of the enemy. Men went down like flies. A sudden scream of awful agony rent the air, punctuated by the relentless

monotone of the guns' harsh voices.

Hedda, her face a tense, white mask, her eyes two blazing marbles of hate, clenched a small tight fist behind the trigger guard. Her lips had frozen themselves into a bitter smile, and she muttered something softly to herself.

The Flash drew a deep sigh of relief. He gently took the gun from Hedda's hands, and thrusting it toward one of his henchmen, gave brief orders.

He put a comradely arm over Hedda's shoulder.

"Take it easy, Babe," he counselled. "It's all over now. They'll only last a few minutes more."

She stared at him with blank eyes as though only half understanding.

The sound of the firing died down. A clangor ambulance bell shattered the sudden stillness of the waterfront.

The Flash led the girl into the counsel room and helped her to a chair.

"It's over, Hedda," he said soothingly. "And thanks one hell of a lot. You saved the day. I always knew you had nerve, but I've never seen such a little hell-cat as you were tonight."

Her shapely breasts strained under the close-fitting bodice.

"I was thinking of Jack," she said.

MARSDEN listened to the voice that drifted to him over the telephone with an incredulous expression on his countenance.

"Who?" he said for the second time.

Again the voice came over the wire.

Marsden hung up. He thrust the phone back on the desk, with an expression of vast satisfaction. He rubbed his fat greasy hands together. He shot a swift glance at the taciturn Spike, who nervously shuffled papers in a corner.

"Well, here's a break," he announced. "Stand by, convict, and get a peep at Darcy's moll."

Almost before he had finished the sentence, a soft rap came at the heavy door.

"Come in," growled the warden.

The door opened, revealing a blue uniformed keeper with a slim, imperious blonde. Marsden gazed at the girl appraisingly. It seemed as though he would strip her with his eyes.

He gestured a dismissal to the keeper.

"Sit down, Miss," he said striving to control the lust in his voice.

Hedda strolled casually across the room, and took the proffered chair. She crossed her legs, revealing the pink-white of appealing thighs above the black silk stockings.

"Thanks," she said, and smiled. It seemed to Marsden that her voice was a silky invitation.

Carelessly she tossed a card on to his desk. Marsden picked it up and cast a cursory eye over the visitor's pass.

"Sure, I know," he said. "You want to see Darcy."

"Right."

Marsden regarded her with an admiring eye.

"O Kay," he said at last. "But he can wait. I want to talk to you first."

She met his hot glance with a cool, untroubled gaze.

"Yes," she said, and her voice was frozen honey. "Go ahead." Slowly she uncrossed her legs, and the short skirt covered her rounded knees.

Marsden twisted uncomfortably.

"Well," he began. "I figure that you'd like to feel that your crooked boy friend was getting treated nicely around here."

He paused and watched her closely with narrowed lids.

"Go on," she said in an even tone. "You've got more to say than that!"

"You're damned right I have," he replied. "The whole point is that if I treat him right, I'll expect you to—er—"

He floundered under her cruel, compelling eyes.

"You'll expect me to treat you right," she finished for him, making no effort to conceal the contempt in her voice.

Marsden flushed.

"Sure," he answered with an essay at affability. "That's the idea."

She came to her feet and looked down at him, her eyes flashing a cold, wrathful fire.

"Marsden," she said, and her voice was a singing whip. "You're a louse! A God-damned dirty louse! If you owned the only Davenport in the world I wouldn't sleep with you. Furthermore, you'd never have the guts to make a crack like that in front of Jack Darcy."

Marsden rose to his feet sputtering with anger.

"The hell I wouldr't," he roared. "You're nothing but a lousy gun moll, and you can't get away with that stuff around here. Come on! I'll show your boy friend up for you."

He pulled a bunch of jangling keys from his pocket, and grasping her slim arm headed for the door.

JACK DARCY sat idly upon his cot, wondering whether the advent of another visiting day would bring him word from the gang.

A faint click sounded in his ear, and he listened closely. A tap-tapping on the flagstones. Funny he could have sworn it was the sound of a woman's spike heels. He rose and went to the door bars. There was a swish of knee length skirts as Marsden and Hedda appeared around the corner of the cell block.

"Hedda!"

His voice was hoarse and choked with repressed emotion.

She smiled back at him and her soul was in her eyes. Marsden merely growled.

"Here's your girl friend, Darcy. She dared me to make a certain crack to her in front of you."

"Lay off her, Marsden. Your quarrel's with me."

Marsden laughed mockingly.

"I don't intend to quarrel with a broad as pretty as that, Darcy. I'm going to make her."

An inarticulate rattle of rage issued from Darcy's throat and his hands gripped the bars violently.

"You lousy rat, Marsden. Get to hell out of here. I'm entitled to visitors. Am I not?"

Marsden grinned.

"Sure you are. I'm not keeping her away, am I?"

He crossed to the girl and placed a heavy arm across her shoulders.

"Come to Daddy!"

Hedda angrily flung his arm away and crossed to the bars. In a moment she was in her lover's embrace. Marsden seized her roughly by the shoulder, careful to keep out of Darcy's reach.

"Come here, you! There's only one guy in this can that collects kisses from you, and it ain't him either!"

With a swift motion, and even before she was aware of his intent, he flung both arms around her and drew her into his embrace. She fought viciously with nails and elbows. Darcy mouthed a frightful blasphemy and struggled futilely with the steel that pent him in. He saw Marsden's lips thirsting for Hedda's; saw the coarse hands clutch at her slender round thighs and breasts.

Never had he known such a terrific fury. Beside this awful bitter hate that consumed him, all other emotions were reduced to a minus quantity. A hot dry flame licked his burning throat, and tears of rage ran crazily down his flaming cheeks.

Hedda struggled violently in the powerful arms of Marsden. Suddenly Darcy noticed her hand come from some part of her clothing and sweep

toward the cell. There was a sound of something soft hitting the cell floor. Darcy looked down to see a small cloth package at his feet. Marsden, busy in his attempt upon Hedda, failed to notice the swift movement.

Quickly Darcy stooped and hid the small bundle under his blankets. As he returned to the door, he saw passionate relief that Marsden had given up the battle. Two searing scratches down his cheeks testified to the ability with which Hedda defended her body. She stood facing him, a veritable Boadicea, her face flaming, and such a bitter diatribe issuing from her red lips that even Marsden seemed momentarily at a loss.

Finally Marsden regained his dazed senses. He ran his hand ruefully over his cheek and wiped the blood away with a handkerchief.

"Henderson," he shouted down the corridor.

A blue uniformed keeper came dashing up at the double.

"Take this lady," his accent on the last word was a really remarkable piece of irony. "Take this lady away!"

He turned to Darcy.

"No more visitors for you, Darcy. You're being disciplined."

DARCY remained silent as his gaze met Hedda's. For a fleeting moment they stood thus, a world of understanding passing between them. Then slowly, before she joined the keeper up the corridor, she permitted her left eyelid to fall in a delicious wink.

Darcy nodded his head. He didn't quite understand what was going on, but he knew that something was in the wind.

"Come on!" yelled Marsden. "We've been here long enough!"

Darcy watched them until they disappeared up the corridor and even after they had passed from

sight, he listened to those small clicking heels, a strange wistful sensation in his heart.

Jack Darcy, convict Number 6678, waited anxiously for the day to pass. He realized that whatever the bundle contained, it must be of the greatest importance.

When gong clanged for bed time, he flung himself on the bed to open the package. As the guard's footsteps echoed up the corridor he cautiously unfolded it. In the dim light he could scarcely distinguish what it was. He ran his hands over it. It was cold like metal in some places, and some coarse khaki material in others. He waited a moment until his straining eyes became more accustomed to the absence of light.

Slowly the thing that he held in his hand evolved into an article which he recognized. At first he held it up, hardly crediting his senses. But yes, he was right. It was a gas mask!

With a perplexed expression playing about his features he returned the mask to its former hiding place. Then selecting a cigaret from his meagre store, he lighted it, and flinging himself back on the cot gave his mind over to meditation.

Now what on earth had the mob sent him a gas mask for? Had they heard something? Something to do with Marsden? Perhaps Marsden was planning to hurl gas bombs into his cell in a final effort to crush his spirit. He dismissed that as absurd. There were too many holes in that line of reasoning.

He stared at the roof of the cell, his eyes abstractedly following a playful moonbeam as it glittered on the harsh stone above. The puzzled expression remained on his face. However, finally, with a sigh he rolled over and was soon lost in the depths of a tired, fretful slumber.

THE FOLLOWING morning I found Jack Darcy still puzzling over the mysterious gift that his sweetheart had made him the day before. He ate his breakfast mechanically, and on the way back to the cell block managed to whisper a word into Spike's ear.

"Something's going on," he told him hoarsely. "I don't know what the hell it is myself. But stand by expect anything. I still think we'll beat this rap, boy."

Spike grinned back at him, but a passing guard rendered further conversation impossible.

Jack Darcy had indeed spoken truer than he knew. Something certainly was going on!

Ten miles away from the prison gate, a score of high powered motor cars proceeded slowly up the dusty country road. Following them was a heavy rumbling truck. Inside the limousines sat grim faced men. They rode silently along, no word passing among them. The driver of the truck sat with a sawed-off shot gun beside him, and behind him in the lumbering vehicle were a half dozen men with as many machine guns. Two more sat smoking on a heavy metal box. Smewhere in the distance there came the faint roar of an airplane. Occasionally one of the men in the cavalcade would thrust his head from the car and cast an anxious glance at the sky.

Darcy returned to his cell after breakfast, and after performing his diurnal routine duties, composed himself for a cigaret. Before he was aware of the passage of time the keeper's key jangled outside, and the door was swung open.

"Exercise hour, bub."

Darcy grinned up at him, and prepared for the morning stroll in the rock enclosed yard.

A steady plodding of heavy booted feet sounded throughout the prison yard, as little groups of grey

clad men walked to and fro indulging in what the State considered enough exercise to keep them healthy. Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Darcy walked slowly and in silence, not noticing the whispered remarks of the others that comprised his group. The brilliant sunshine threw an ironic flood of light into the bleak rock-ribbed wall. A tall birch tree thrust its head up from the south, and fluttered slightly in the soft breeze as if commiserating with these men who were denied their freedom. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Up and down. Down and up. Time clicking off. Lives rushing past. Outside a motley variation of life. Inside a grim dull prison routine. Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Overhead like some graceful grey bird an airplane zoomed. For a fleeting moment it seemed hung in space over the prison yard. Darcy regarded it idly. The swift rushing ship seemed in itself a challenge to the confinement of a cell. He drew a deep breath and prepared to exhale in a long heartfelt sigh.

CRACK—crack—crack!

Three rifle shots rent the still air. The trample of feet stopped abruptly and a terrible silence like death fell like a pall over the yard. Darcy stood tense and still. His expert ear knew that no guard's rifle had fired those shots.

Suddenly a mighty shout shattered the stillness. Heads appeared over the South wall in three places simultaneously. An amazed guard who stood upon the East wall half raised his rifle, but before he could complete the gesture a stabbing flash cut the air and he fell a crumpled, bloody mass in the doorway of his sentry box.

Still Darcy had not moved. His keen eyes swiftly swept the wall. Was this friend or foe? Of a sud-

den his heart raced. The blood pounded through his veins. For with a swift glinting motion the squat nozzle of a machine gun had appeared on the South wall, and behind the cumbersome barrel casing was the familiar face of the Flash.

He strangled the words that rose to his lips and they died unuttered. He must still be careful. The battle was not yet won. The dazed guards had now come to their senses, and sent a rattling volley at the invaders.

The Flash shouted a staccato order, and a score of guns replied with a devastating volley. A window clattered open above the yard. Marsden's surprised red face appeared. He roared a swift command. Too late, the Flash swung the nose of the Lewis and directed a stream of lead at the hated face.

There was a shuffle of feet in the main building. A score of armed guards rushed into the field. A shrieking barrage hurtled toward them from the walls. They stood firm, their rifles blazing a crescendo song of death.

Again a window clattered up. Marsden appeared behind the shining barrel of a Browning. He swept the walls with a hail of death. Men dropped. Blood dripped down the cold stone.

Darcy leaped to action. With a shout he ran toward the cell blocks that housed the men who had not yet been released for exercise. At the entrance to the corridor, the keeper lay already cold in death. Darcy fumbled for his keys. It was a matter of a moment to fling those doors wide open.

He rushed back to the court yard. The battle remained even. The gangsters had already swarmed over the wall. They took what cover they could find, and blazed away in open warfare. Marsden

still manipulated the gun at the window.

There came a great clamoring at the outer gate. Marsden had phoned the town for reserves! Darcy sighted the Flash as he sprang from the wall and set the gun up in the yard. A sudden burst from the Lewis tore through the ranks of the guards. The outer gates swung slowly open and some fifty more police swarmed through the gates. The Flash eyed them deliberately. He pressed the trigger. The lead hammered its brutal way through them.

The commander of the reserves rallied them quickly. The rifles came to the port, and a terrific volley of death greeted the Darcy mob. Darcy's heart was in his mouth. It seemed as if they could not cope with this new attack.

He heard a sudden roaring. He looked up to see the very airplane he had so much envied before. The Flash gesticulated wildly to him.

Darcy regarded him with bewilderment. He failed to understand the other's frantic signal. Lead and steel death smashed madly up against the rock walls. Blood and shrieks of mortal agony polluted the gay spring day.

Darcy suddenly became aware that the plane was directly overhead. The mob he saw dimly through the smoky haze which enveloped the battle field. They seemed to have some huge dark misshapen things on their faces. He stared in puzzled wonderment. Then he understood.

Hesitating no longer, he ran madly across the yard, running the gauntlet of fire from friend and foe alike. Something whined and ate into his left arm as he gained the cell block, but disregarding the stinging pain he continued on his way to the cell. Swiftly he reached under his cot and withdrew the

package that Hedda had brought him two days ago. Mechanically he donned the gas mask, then headed again for the yard.

As he rounded the corner once more the spring sunshine had vanished. The gay dancing daylight was gone. In its place was a yellowish-grey misty haze. He could hear the horrible gurgles of men as they gasped for breath. There was a dull explosion as the roaring plane discharged another bomb loaded with gaseous death.

He panted wildly and vainly tried to draw more air into his bursting lungs. With his fingers he essayed to wipe the eye pieces clear. He could hardly see. There was still intermittent firing in the yard. A bullet pinged up against the wall behind him. Blindly he stumbled through the semi-darkness. He must find the Flash.

He stumbled over something. At his feet was a body—a gun at its side. Hastily he picked up the weapon. A dark form bore down on him. Darcy brought his newly acquired gun up to his waist.

"Hold it!" a voice shouted, muffled in the folds of a gas mask. But Darcy recognized it.

"Flash," he breathed.

The other nodded.

Seizing Darcy's arm he hurried him with sure footsteps through that awful yellow mist. Almost at the wall they stopped. The Flash

guided his foot to a ladder, and pushed. Arduously Darcy clambered the wall. Willing hands greeted him on the other side and hurried him some hundred yards down the road. Obeying a shouted command in his ear, he cautiously removed the gas mask.

The spring day was suddenly resurrected. Light and freedom poured into his starved soul.

"Quick," said the Flash.

He turned and beheld the svelte grey lines of an airplane behind him. Obeying the Flash he ran toward it. Strong arms pulled him into the cockpit. Someone spun the prop. The big ship taxied crazily across the grass. Her pilot leaned gently back on the stick. The roaring prop flashed in the centre of the sun. Darcy was thrown almost over as she zoomed. Suddenly her pilot flashed deft hands to the controls and levelled off. He banked swiftly and headed to the East. He shouted an unintelligible remark which was devoured by the motor and wind. Darcy grinned up at him and inhaled deeply.

He was free. Free in the clouds with the very birdman he had envied so, a scant hour before!

A fugitive from the chair, in deadly feud with Marsden, and hurling wild defiance into the teeth of the law, does Darcy make good his threat? Read the next installment of this thriller in the January issue of Gangster Stories.

CLERK'S MARKED BILL LANDS BANDITS IN JAIL

A sentimental clerk of the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steam-boat Line some weeks ago marked a \$5 bill tendered him by a young woman of his acquaintance. As a result, two men charged with the \$10,000 Labor Day safe robbery at the Oak Bluffs office of the steamboat line are under arrest.

The men are Edward Tracy, thirty-one, being held for extradition in Woonsocket, R. I., and Joseph Fisher, twenty-six, of No. 104 Radcliffe Avenue, Providence.

The clerk, H. W. Rowe, now of Jacksonville, Fla., put the \$5 bill in the company's safe the night before the robbery.

Four days ago that marked bill came into the hands of an Island Line purser and gave the first clue to the perpetrators of the robbery.

The Lady from Castle-Bar

By E. PARKE LEVY

The gun and a girl in a whirlpool of gang action. The kind of a story that you could not find in any other magazine except this one . . . and a yarn that will hold you enthralled to the end.

SHE WAS ONLY thirteen when she stood before the bar of the police court for her first offense. Her red hair flowed in unkempt curls to her shoulder and her piquant, freckled face looked up defiantly into the ugly scowl that blackened the features of the police sargeant.

"So your name's Rosie Caldron?" he asked, recording some notes in a huge book. "Rosie—"

"It's Rosalie when you have time," she remarked saucily, and then stretching her thin, well-carved neck she placed her face in a position where she could look down over the gruff man's shoulders.

"R-o-s-a-l-i-e Caldron," she spelled it for him, while her bright, dark eyes followed every motion of his pen.

"Hey, kid, get down on your heels before you fall down," the heavy-set, blue-coated attendant commanded in a deep voice.

Rosie Caldron, devilish, vivacious offspring of the union of an Irish beggar of life and a Spanish siren, turned about quickly. Her eyes flashed glaringly and her head tossed with a certain authority.

"I'm not kid, fats," she spat at him, indignantly, her small arm akimbo. And then, when her anger had abated, she added, in no uncertain terms, "I'm a lady, see."

Something in the grace of her motions might have convinced anyone for the moment. But not Lafferty.

The big, husky attendant knew the fire-headed devil—yes, knew her too well. He placed a large, meaty hand heavily upon her small arm and looking at the six frightened brats who stood in back of her, broke out into a hearty laugh.

"So you're a lady, Rosie. Tell the court about it!"

She shook herself free, disgustedly, and a glance from the police sergeant informed Lafferty that order in the court was desired. The officer of the law retreated and stood erect beside the shiny railing while the sergeant resumed his questioning of the six brats and their leader moll.

"Where do you live, Rosie?" he asked.

She stared at him as if to say, "You big bloke! Didn't I just finish telling you my name was Rosalie and that I'm a lady, see?" Instead, she said sweetly, "My name is Rosalie and I live down there."

She pointed in the wrong direction but the court officer winked and the sergeant understood.

"Do you know," he began, sternly, "that you're not allowed to steal from fruit stands, young lady?"

Rosie Caldron smiled. It was a smile of pleasurable triumph. The sergeant had said, "Young lady." That had pleased her more than anything he might have said. At first she had determined to remain mute, to defy him, but now she spoke freely

as might behoove a young lady to a gentleman.

"I didn't steal the fruit, mister," she innocently protested, "I only showed the gang how to."

After the hearing was over and everything had been adjusted to the best possible means, the room emptied, and Tony Scartio, the Italian whose cart had been plundered, and who had chased the flaming-haired Caldrona devil down the street waving a banana stem menacingly after her, had been given fifty cents, the police sergeant spoke to Jim Connel, the new bull on the beat.

"Oh that's a bad one, that little red-head," he said meaningly, "just a ball of hell waiting to explode."

"I watched her pull the fruit stand haul," Connel said. "Slick? Like a tried moll!"

"I tell you," the sergeant cut in, "it's a hellish mixture. The devil itself. Spanish mother and Irish old man. Trump that."

"You don't mean it."

"Did you know them?"

Connel thought a moment. "The kid's mother—wasn't that the Marie Caldrona woman's kid?"

The house sergeant nodded.

"Yes, that's the mother. And the old man died in the coop. He was seldom out of it. Drink? Fight? God, there was a terror. And that's their gift to civilization." He looked out of the window in which direction Rosie Caldrona was disappearing from sight.

"Well," he philosophized, "she'll either grow up to be a fine woman or a holy terror. No in-between!"

"She's got a bad start," Connel admitted.

"It's the blood strain, Jim," the sergeant explained. "You can judge them while they're young. That devil's heartless. She'll raise more hell than all the gunmen in town if she stays bad. Mark my word."

JIM CONNEL didn't mark his sergeant's word. But that didn't change things any. Nothing could change things any. Rosie Caldrona grow up and stood bad—almost two pages bad in the court records.

Not just bad as bad people go, not a dip, not a shop-lifter but real bad. As the sergeant had said, "a holy terror." Devil of the union of two fiery bloods.

The Harlan mob that ruled the town ruled. That is, it was a complete monopoly. Until some wise slicks came in from New York or Saint Looey and started competition. Competition hurts a business.

Guy Harlan was a sweet believer in monopoly, so the slicks went back to Saint Looey or New York on the first special or graced the cold slabs in the morgue. Guy hadn't heard of any anti-trust laws for the business.

"Rosalie."

He always called her Rosalie. It worked like the magic salve the medicine men peddled on the north city lots. Anything else didn't go with her and Guy learned about women from other men's experiences.

Once some new killer had insisted on calling the moll "Rosalie." She had told him three times in her own funny way, "Listen, Rogan, call me Rosalie. I'm a lady, see?"

The fourth time that he had called her "Rosalie" she had tipped the bulls off to a job he was pulling that night and they smeared him red. No one knew it was Rosie Caldrona who had tipped the bulls off but everyone knew it "not so sure."

Guy Harlan took no chances. He rubbed the salve on thick and she loved it. He lived right up to her monomaniac wishes, and he'd always say, "Rosalie," or better, "Miss Caldrona, I'm counting on you tonight."

And the next day the papers would come out with glaring stories of the hold-up or bump-off and people would say, "Oh, horrors," while all Guy

would say was, "Nice work, Rosalie."

If the Irish in Rosie Caldron made her the best moll in town, then the Spanish that surged madly in her veins made her the best sweetheart of the bunch. That is, the best temporary sweetheart. All the passion of a thousand Castilian nights flowed in her veins, spasmodically.

Guy Harlan knew and respected it. In his own words, "She was the lovingest moll that ever lived, but that was all right as long as she kept it out of business hours."

Sometimes Rosie did. Sometimes she didn't. She played her men around in a veiled secrecy, like a mysterious trick box. Pretty much like she played the bulls. Fooled them, deceived them, betrayed them and lost them. They came and went. Nobody asked questions, nobody talked. Sometimes, however, it leaked out.

For instance, that time when the bulls spilled red all over sweet Sam Kennedy, when he was caught dead in a blind alley, and Rosie Caldron didn't show up for a job that night. Nobody talked, nobody asked questions. Guy Harlan walked about suddenly mumbling to himself. But everybody figured it out.

Rosie Caldron was mourning for Sweet Sam Kennedy.

She mourned a day as a rule. After that she'd throw her heroine to the side, dry her tired eyes, and, tucking her flaming hair under her small, tight-fitting hat, would promenade Hersher Avenue.

Then the mob was happy. Everyone knew Rosie Caldron was out for another man and that Guy Harlan could count on her services again.

SOMETIMES nobody came along that pleased Rosie. Nobody at all. And then she would kick about how slow things were getting in town and about going to New York or Saint Looey for a change.

Things were fast enough all right,

only the moll was tired of staring at the same men all the time, the same members of the mob.

Rosie would grow black and sullen and the mob would look with questioning eyes at the boss. Guy Harlan then knew it was time to take things in hand. Rosie was approaching a spell of "nasty." Black, sullen nastiness.

So pretty soon the wires to Saint Looey and New York were busy with orders for new immigrants. In a couple of days some of the old bunch took a vacation and new faces popped up.

Rosie Caldron had forgotten that she was ever tired of the town or had even thought about going away. Everything had become interesting and lively again. Old "half and half" had got what she wanted.

Generally Guy ordered the handsomest gunmen into town when Rosie was low in spirits. Big, bruising beer-runners and little, slick, black-haired killers. But the moll didn't like them all. There was no set formula for accounting for her tastes. Like everything else about her. Only sometimes she'd let Guy know about it.

"Say," she'd snicker, "where'd you ever find that Joe Cooney germ."

Then Guy would sigh, fix Joe Cooney on a stiff job, and if he wasn't caught by the bulls, tickets back to Saint Looey or New York were waiting for him down at the station. It was all a strange game—feeding the queen bee, that fire-blooded devil of a Rosie Caldron!

Once Rosie got the blues. Got them bad. Harlan and the mob suspected the trouble. So the wires to Saint Looey and New York were again ticking busily. But it didn't do any good. Rosie had the blues, the black blues.

"How about a rest, Miss Caldron?" Guy asked her, casually.

She was striding about in the back room of the Castle Bar with the grace

of a fawn or a tango dancer. Her white arm was akimbo, her body was lithe and slender, and her head was tossing wearily from side to side, in despair.

"How about a rest?" he repeated.

"I ain't going anywhere, Guy," she said, sullenly, "I'm staying."

Harlan shrugged. Later when things had grown quiet again he said, softly, "Can I count on you again tonight, Miss Caldron?"

She was moving about in the little room like a tiger, a sullen boredom in her expression. A cigarette burned lightly between her long, thin fingers.

"Oh, hell, I'm tired," she blurted, "besides—"

"Well, why don't you go away?"

She wheeled about and stared glaringly at him.

"So you're trying to shake me?" she sneered, approaching him, "after all I done for you and the mob."

A flaming rage had overcome her and a latin blackness darkened her features.

Harlan, leader of the mob and defiant challenger of the law, moved nervously toward the door. Rosie Caldron, that devil of a moll, had become nasty. Dark and nasty.

Some of the gang had said again and again, "When she gets nasty, watch the doors, pal. She'd kill her mother for two bits when her bloods up."

That was a pretty low way of putting it. Sure as the devil it was the truth.

And Guy Harlan knew it was!

"I ain't trying to shake you, Rosie," he blurted nervously, "honest I ain't."

"Rosie," she shouted, angrily, "so you're forgetting who I am. All right Guy Harlan, just you call me—"

"I ain't forgetting nothing," he explained, putting his hands up to quiet her, "I'm sorry, Miss Caldron, I beg your pardon," he finished softly.

That moll-devil of an Irish-Spanish union calmed like an oil-covered stormy sea. The black departed from

her face and she once more became tall and erect.

"It's all O.K., Guy," she said, moving slowly to the door, "you can count on me tomorrow."

The door closed behind her parting glance and Harlan locked it firmly.

THE MOB BOSS sat down, breathing quickly. Guy always breathed quickly under the slightest excitement. Also if he was worried. Now he was worried, more than ever, because Rosie was getting beyond bossing. What was the good of being boss if you couldn't boss? Sure, what was the good?

Once he thought he had things pretty much in hand and then he had to make that slip in the back den. Had to call her "Rosie" when it meant red to her crazy ladyship. Why did he get all nervous and forget to address her?

He could have kicked himself but what good would it do. He had to boss. If he didn't the mob might turn—yes, he'd boss as long as he was boss in his monopoly.

But it never happened. Pretty soon the monopoly became competitive. They shoved a new regime in an Eastern city and started cleaning things up. About sixty gun-men, dope-peddlers and dips left town for a spell on the first special out.

Some went to New York, others called Saint Looey at the ticket station, and some came to town and spat defiance at Guy Harlan right in his own camp.

Rosie Caldron knew it, the cops knew it, and the whole mob knew it. Pretty soon there was going to be lots doing—lots of action. Rosie Caldron wanted that. It was the inexplainable trick of satisfying the Irish when the Spanish went hungry.

Rosie was going to see action, action that would change the long, empty hours into quick pulsating minutes packed with excitement.

Long hours were endurable only when they satisfied the Spanish that flowed in her veins.

As Killer Luigi, one of the mob, had said, "If Rosie can't hear it with flowers, she's got to hear it with rods."

He had said Rosie because she was far out of hearing!

Right soon the war broke out. There was no notice, no terms. It was all taken for granted. Guy Harlan's monopoly had been broken. The war was on. Arsenals moved onto the den in back of the Castle Bar.

Machine guns, sawed off shot guns, and every type of rod that was ever made. Killers came and went. And Rosie stared emotionlessly.

When would it all break?

It wasn't long. Killer Luigi was the first of the mob to sprawl out on the sidewalk, gasp for breath, and shoot off into space, in front of the Dutchman's brewery.

Some strangers in a shiny red, high-powered sedan drove past the brick building as the Killer was coming out. He saw them and stared, bewildered, surprised. Pretty much like a kid looking at a trick box. But he didn't have a chance. Something went rap-a-tap-a-tap and Luigi fell breathing air and blood.

The first of the Harlan mob to die.

ROSIE CALDRONE was lounging about in the den back of Castle Bar when the obituary notice came. Guy Harlan heard it, murmured something under his breath and grew dangerously red.

Some of the mob merely mumbled to themselves while others rapped their fists damningly upon the card table that stood in the center of the room. And the moll smoked on emotionlessly.

Pretty soon the mob had seated themselves at the table and Guy Harlan motioned for silence. There was lots to be done, lots of planning and

war maneuvering, and the time was short. But nothing much was said for a while. Jim Connel, the bull on the beat, walked in, and the mob stared up quietly.

"Hello, Connel," Harlan said, unconcernedly.

"You sent for me, didn't you?" the bull questioned.

The mob boss nodded.

"You know what happened, don't you?"

"They got Luigi."

"Got him cold," Harlan clenched his fist.

"It's that new bunch from Philly," the bull explained, "so they say at headquarters."

"Philly?" Harlan was staring at the bull searchingly.

"Yeah," Connel informed them, "it's a bad bunch."

There was a momentary silence while the chief of the mob looked about him meditatively. Philly? Who could have crashed in from that town? A flashing thought occurred to him but he lost it immediately as something in the corner of the room stirred.

It walked to the corner of the room and twenty pairs of eyes followed her. It was the Caldron moll, menacingly audacious. Her arm was still akimbo and her eyes flashed like gems in the sockets of a huge idol.

A fickle silence that was almost painful existed, and the boss of the mob stood waiting in front of her. Waiting for what was coming—wanting it to come quickly.

"Well," she snarled, "you gonna talk sweet words all night with Luigi lying cold on a slab at the morgue?"

The mob boss didn't answer at once. His lips moved in weird contortions and his eyes flitted about the room, as if they were soliciting aid from the men of the mob. But they were requiting his stare; wondering what he had to say. It had to

be said right. Rosie had once loved Killer Luigi—wasn't that enough to make him cautious in his answer? Finally he spoke.

"We're cutting the chatter, Rosalie. We're doing things tomorrow night."

She smiled forcibly and threw a cigarette to the floor. Then she wheeled about and surveyed him with an evident disgust.

"Well, I'm tired of counting minutes shoveing by," she said, meaningly, "and if things don't liven up soon I'm going west."

The mob had been staring silently at the moll. In the dimly lighted room in back of the Castle Bar she offered a weird picture to witness and forever recollect. Every motion of her hand and head was in perfect harmony with the things she said and thought.

It added to their weight and left the mob singularly impressed. Rosie Caldron had meant what she said.

Lou Garson, the Swede who plugged two bulls in a hold-up on the north side, broke the tense silence.

"Listen, Rosie—" he caught himself—"Rosalie, we're planning this thing through. It's bad business."

The moll tossed her head in a sarcastic laugh. "Bad business. Where?"

Guy Harlan cut in quickly. This wasn't the time for any wrangling. Not if Rosie Caldron was on the other side of the fence. When he picked up his hat and made for the door it was a signal that the meeting was over and done for the night. And that went for everybody.

JIM CONNEL, the friendly bull, got a word from the mob chief. He nodded understandingly and left. What Guy had said to him Rosie didn't know. It puzzled her a moment and she was about to question him when the chief approached her, smiling softly.

"I'm counting on you tomorrow night at the brewery, Miss Caldron," he said, worriedly, "tomorrow night."

Her gaze fell upon him and she moved closer to him. Her hands reached nervously for his shoulders and then fingered his coat lapel. Guy Harlan stood there, waiting for something he was sure he didn't want to hear.

"What's up, Rosalie?" he said, softly.

She humped, despairingly. "Hell," the moll exclaimed, "I can't stand it any longer. I want to get this job over and I'm through."

"Through?"

Rosie Caldron nodded.

"I just can't go it any longer," she protested. "I'm choking to death. I got to get away."

Guy Harlan wanted to say something he had said before. "Take a rest, kid." But he remembered that unpleasantness very vividly.

So he said, "But things'll be lively soon, Rosalie. Lively as hell."

"I know," she admitted, "but that ain't all. I'm tired of the—the scenery."

The mob boss didn't crack a word. Rosie Caldron was telling him she was only half Irish. Something was missing—something he couldn't do anything about. When he had stared at her resignedly for a moment he put on his hat and closed the door of the den of the Castle Bar behind him.

And the Caldron moll sat down in her sea of blues, moping.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS the dangerous Lou Gannion mob that had cleared Philly and had come to Guy Harlan's domain to unseat the boss. The king is dead; long live the new king stuff.

Gannion was making his throne where he found it best, see? Right in the fertile racket of the Harlan field. Right near the old Dutchman's

b r e w e r y — hijacking the Harlan trucks and shaking down the regular trade, until the competition hurt badly. And Guy Harlan was a sweet believer in monopoly.

That's what he told the mob before they set out from the den in back of the Castle Bar after midnight. Outside in the dark side street things were being prepared for the first battle of the war. A high-powered car, with an arsenal in it, stood grotesquely beside the saloon. Three miles away was the brewery.

In between those three miles was the Harlan castle—the lion's den. Lou Gannion and his bunch had defied the lion in his den. And now the lion was roaring mad.

The clock hand was moving toward the hour of one. Pretty soon the quiet of the night would be shattered by the roar of motors and the crack of rifles. It was a nervous pulsating silence that existed in the den.

Guy Harlan was handling a sawed-off shot gun with the skill of a veteran. He tested it, found it true, and handed it to Lou Garson. The Swede walked it out to the waiting speed monster, tucked it under a robe, and returned in a moment. When he had closed the door behind him, Guy Harlan took out his watch and nodded quickly.

"All right, Miss Caldron," he said, servilely, "your car's waiting."

He was smiling courteously when the moll arose from the card table before her. With an agile movement she pulled a tight-fitting hat over her red coiffure, and placed a small rod in her bag. It shut tight with a click that sounded roar-like in the silence of the night.

Guy Harlan took out his salve box.

"Don't she look like some society broad from uptown?" he laughed, appraisingly.

Rosie Caldron had thrown a white fox about her shoulders and it had added considerably to a natural ra-

diance. That she was secretly aware of it he knew. However, it was better said. Much, much better.

"You're the prize-winner for looks, Miss," he ventured.

"Do you think so, Guy?" She said that painfully, as if a secret longing was somewhere within her.

"I ain't kidding you lady," he seriously admitted.

She smiled happily and dismissed the thought with a toss of her head. Rosie Caldron was always that way. Cutting the things dead that she most wanted because they interfered with the things about her. Denying herself the things that afterward pained her for mere want of them. Soul-torn, restless devil of a human pendulum!

"Where's the car?" she asked.

The mob boss pointed to a window. "There's a small car around the bend for you. A roadster—blue."

"Like me?"

"Bright and blue, Rosalie," he answered. His tone changed to one of caution.

"Now, we'll be waiting for you, see? You drive past the Dutchman's and keep your eyes open for any strangers. As soon as you get back with an O.K., on a clear road we leave to guard the trucks, understand?"

Rosie Caldron nodded and walked out to the dark corner of the street. A new, tingling sensation had overcome her and once again something within her was alive again.

She hadn't felt that way since Killer Luigi had been bumped off. Maybe before. And she didn't know what to blame it on—the anticipation of a fight or—was it the things Guy had said about her and the fox? She quickly dismissed the latter thought, and walked to the car. The Irish and Spanish at odds!

THE MOLL stepped upon the accelerator and the blue roadster whipped into a smooth drive. Through the south side and over toward the

Dutchman's brewery. Wide streets became narrow streets. It was dark—dark and after midnight. Few people at all walked the streets. Some turned to stare after the fleeting picture of blue and white.

One mile and two miles passed. Rosie Caldron, that devil of a gunman's moll, was riding the night on a joyous murder spin. Her eyes left nothing untouched. They took in everything that Guy Harlan might want to know. The road ahead was clear. Nothing suspicious thus far. Now the brewery was vaguely outlined in the distance.

The cold of the revolver at her side became vivid. Her hands ached with a tingling excitement. Less than a half mile to go and the motor purring pleasantly. Two officers hove into sight. One turned about, caught a signal and the two disappeared. It was Jim Connel.

Now the brewery lay straight ahead. Two blocks—barely visible in the dark. She pressed harder upon the accelerator and sped across a street. But one more remained to cross. Everything was dark and still, Ghostly still. Just as the mob would have it. And Lou Gannion and his gang were hanging out of sight. Probably away for the night. She peered nervously up the street and assured herself of that fact. There wasn't a thing in sight.

The little blue roadster was now a square from the brewery. And then a clear path to the Castle Bar den with the good news.

The moll stepped on it and whizzed by majestically. No one for the moment would have suspected a thing. As Guy Harlan had said, "just a society girl out for a spin." That remark, too, had pleased the devil in Rosie Caldron's veins.

Her eyes flashed greedily in the dark. Now she was right in back of the brewery. Men were working silently and industriously. Men of

the Harlan camp, loading Guy Harlan's trucks for the get away.

The road was clear. There was to be no hi-jacking that night. Lou Gannion had received a warning. Maybe he was wising up to what was best for him. He was probably staying away for the night.

The moll laughed defiantly and turned the car into a side street and stepped on it for the Castle Bar.

A square on the other side of the Dutchman's brewery something black shot out of a side street, and rammed her squarely. The last thing Rosie Caldron could remember was someone saying:

"I beg your pardon, madame. It was unavoidable."

CHAPTER III

SOME FLOWERS came to the little white room in Mercy Hospital. Pretty bouquets of roses, orchids, and sweet peas. And for two days they stood about in the little room, attractive in their sombre vases, while Rosie Caldron was entirely unaware of their existence. Or of anything else.

On the fourth day the odor of medicants and stuffy bandages gave way to the relieving sensation of fresh oxygen. Things began to exist and take form. The Harlan moll had awakened in the little room of spotless white and a bower of flowers.

But she wasn't the least bit original, despite the Irish that flowed in her veins. Not the least bit humorously different.

When the tired eye-lids parted to reveal the some-what glassy stare beneath them, the first thing she said was, "Where Am I?" Anyone would have said that.

So, nobody answered her common query. All through the day Rosie said, "Where am I?" and "What happened?" And when she tried to remember there was nothing but black-

ness, shooting pains, and a vague recollection of someone saying, "I beg your pardon, madame. It was unavoidable." As if that helped any. Where was Guy? Where was the mob? What had happened at the Dutchman's?

Even Miss Donald, the tall, comely nurse who moved silently about the private ward could offer little that would enlighten things. At least she made no effort to, except to continually utter a trite remark, like, "Now rest yourself," and, "Now don't worry."

When later on she said that "Mr. Guy Harlan will call tomorrow," Miss Rosalie Caldrone, as listed on the nurse's chart, dozed off to a weary nap.

Guy Harlan did come the next day. Dressed in the garb of a prosperous merchant, with an equally suave mannerism, he walked into the spotless ward, handed a bouquet to the nurse, who quickly placed the flowers in a vase and left them to a much desired privacy.

He was at her bedside in a moment. "How you doing, Rosalie?" he gasped, excitedly, "Gee, I'm glad to see you. How you doing?"

She attempted to rise, vainly.

"Just lay still," the mob boss smiled down upon her.

"I'm so glad you came," she said, weakly, "I couldn't wait. What happened last night?"

"You sure got a lot of flowers from the boys," he avoided the question.

"Yes, it's white of them," the moll admitted, "but tell me what happened last night, Guy?"

Her face was pale and wan but a tremendous inherent vitality gave it a vivid appearance. Her lips were pale and dry, yet something in her voice was still mandatory. So much so that Guy Harlan was powerless to ignore it.

"Come on, Guy," she urged him on, "crack open."

The mob boss stared at her a moment. He didn't want to tell her anything. One thing certain, he wouldn't tell her she had been knocked out for three days and nights to listen to harp solos and singing birdies. She thought it was last night, poor kid. Well, he'd let it go at that. He'd tell her everything else.

"We got the works last night, Rosalie," he began.

"What do you mean," she gasped with a new interest, "what happened to me?"

"You?" he smiled, forcibly, "nothing much happened to you. Only that the Gannion mob rammed you when you was coming back to Castle Bar."

He felt her hand clasp within his own. He could almost feel the nails digging into the flesh. Rosie Caldrone was smouldering—on the rise to a flame.

"You don't mean it, Guy?" she asked, excitedly, "you don't mean it?" She searched his face for any trace of secrecy.

"Sure I mean it, Rosalie," he said slowly, "it was the boss himself what done it."

"Lou Gannion?" escaped her lips. The mob boss smiled ironically.

"That's what we learned we didn't know, Rosalie. Lou Gannion wasn't boss. It's some one else, we figure. Someone higher up?"

She stared at him questioningly. Something in her expression advised him to talk on.

"**W**ELL," HE BEGAN, "four nights ago"—he caught himself—"Last night, you see, after you got smashed we got kind of worried and came down to the trucks—over at the Dutchman's. The Gannion mob comes out of the side street you was sprawled in and the war begins."

The fingers about his wrist tightened and he was aware of her quick, short breathing. Her eyes were piercingly alive now and her face was vivid with a dull flame.

"Go on, Guy," she murmured.

"By the time things ended," he explained, damningly, "the casualties were heavy. Lou Gannion and five of his rats were full of slug on the gutter."

There was a momentary silence. She was eyeing him relentlessly, and when she noticed his pause, she said, "go on, Guy, that's half the story."

But the mob boss didn't answer. Rosie Caldron had asked him to answer something that was hard to tell her. There was, however, one way out. To stall. His eyes fell to the floor and then wandered in the direction of the open window that overlooked Hersher Avenue.

"What's the difference now," he murmured solemnly.

"Come on, Guy," he heard her say, more sternly, "crack open."

"You ain't much caring now, are you, Rosalie?"

Something in the moll's stare and her pressure upon his wrist spoke more than words. It left him helpless in a blind alley with but one way out. He'd have to tell her everything, as much as he hated to. Especially right now, with her sick and bumped up in the little white room of Mercy Hospital. But—

"They got five of us, Rosalie," he confessed, softly, "got 'em cold."

"Was it—did they get—Lou Garson?" she asked, nervously.

Something in the boss' reluctance to speak had hinted at that. And now when he nodded it left her crushingly convinced, a hard, unbelieving leer in her eyes. The dark red that had stolen over her face and the gritting of her teeth were evidences of the rage that was inwardly consuming her. Hurting her more than the

dozen bruises that hid beneath the medicated bandages.

Someone had killed Lou Garson! Once before the Swede had saved her from the bulls in a murder job.

A rage and a fury that shook her invalid self burst forth in a single oath.

"Who got him, Guy?" she demanded, "who got him?"

"Now keep cool, Rosalie," the mob boss advised, worriedly, "you're still on the bum."

"I said who got him?" she cried, "who got him?"

"What's the difference," he asked quietly, "there's only one rat to get for this. We'll spot him quick."

"You ain't spotting nobody," she insisted, defiantly, "this is my party. I say who got him?" She was raging with fury.

"Now keep cool, Rosalie," Harlan said, quietly, "you can have him. Maybe after all it's your game. He's the guy that rammed your car, see?"

"Rammed me?" She calmed a moment to give breath to her surprise. "You don't mean—" the eyes that were sparkling with a black anger had regained their normal hue and her face had changed from a fuliginous red to a pale white-olive. Her hair, hanging loosely in a fiery strand, was in contrast with her features now. It had been a sudden-sweet transformation.

"So," she exclaimed, understandingly, "it was that rat. I got to get better fast now, Guy."

"The mob wants you to get better soon."

"I got to," she repeated, "I got someone marked."

The mob boss kept still in thought. "Yes," she repeated again, "I got to get better real quick."

Pretty soon Guy Harlan had left the moll alone with her thoughts and the little white room was silent except for the soft rustling of her body,

moving uneasily in the whiteness of the bed. A surging madness of revenge was sweeping through her. It was tormenting her, seering her beyond measured.

Lou Garson had been bumped—bumped by the prince of the Gannion mob. This same prince had sent her to the little room in Mercy Hospital to curse away in at the pains and bruises in her aching body. This same prince, she raved, was probably laughing at her now.

She raged, she heaved in anger, and murmured again and again to herself, "I got to get better quick. I got someone marked."

Footsteps coming down the corridor broke the silence of the day. It was the nurse bringing flowers to Rosalie Caldron. More flowers from the mob to their moll. Someone else remembering the night at the Dutchman's.

"Who sent them?" she asked, wearily, when she had regained her composure, "Gee, they're pretty, ain't they?"

"Aren't they?" Miss Donald agreed. Her hands fumbled about for the small card that elusively moved about the bouquet.

Then she read it aloud. "I beg your pardon, Madame, but it was unavoidable." It was signed Charlie Moran.

"Who?" queried the moll.

"Charlie Moran," the woman in white repeated.

"Read it again."

"I beg your pardon, Madame—"

When the odor of newly applied medicants had grown stronger and new bandages had replaced the original Rosie Caldron went off into a fitful sleep. As if the doctor's advice, "Now rest yourself," had meant anything.

That was the fun of it. Little did the doctor know what was raising havoc in Rosie's veins, see? What with Irish and Spanish at odds!

CHAPTER IV

TWO WEEKS later that devil of a gunman's moll walked into the den in back of Castle Bar. Guy Harlan was there—the whole mob was there. It was all pretty much like the night before things happened down at the Dutchman's brewery. Pretty much the same.

"You did nicely," Jim Connel congratulated her, "you came out of it quick."

The moll smiled forcibly. The same, deep Rosie of the mob. As if nothing had happened. As if two and a half weeks in a little room in Mercy Hospital had only made a deeper mystery of the moll. Nothing else. Outwardly the same devil of the mob, the same graceful poise, the same arm akimbo, and the same careless toss of the head. Inwardly—there was no telling.

New faces were glaring at her. The mob was watching. But it didn't happen. These new faces had made no visible impression upon her. They had caused no outward visible emotions. Something, Guy Harlan knew, had changed Rosie Caldron. And he didn't know what nationality to blame it on.

"You think things has changed any, Rosalie?" he ventured, smiling ingratiatingly.

"Only faces."

Guy Harlan stopped suddenly. What the devil did she mean now? What was she hinting at? Was it revenge for Lou Garson. Was it herself. What did she mean? The boss saw clouds ahead and quickly changed the conversation.

"We got something to do, Rosalie," he added, but he didn't mean "we." She caught that at once.

"I'm ready, Guy," she announced.

"We got this Gannion prince marked. Trapped."

AS IF A SUDDEN transformation had occurred, she wheeled about suddenly and let the cigarette between her fingers fall to the floor.

Now her eyes were alive with a new eagerness and her lips were firm. A hard, challenging smile covered her countenance. She was standing dead still in front of him. Rosie Caldronne had forgotten half of herself.

"Where is he, Guy?"

"At the Little Savoy, Rosalie. Hiding in a room, see?"

She nodded understandingly. So, he was hiding. Hiding from the mob. No hiding from her. It was to be her trick. And he was afraid, hiding away from her. She laughed inwardly and waxed inhumanly cruel—in her sardonic harshness.

"He's got company," she laughed, coldly.

"Company, nothing, Miss Caldronne," Harlan announced. "You're to be his company." The mob boss laughed. "Some company."

The whole mob broke into a raucous laughter. Rosie Caldronne, lady of doubtful social standing, was to pay a visit to the prince of the Gannion mob. Now wasn't that funny.

"And," laughed the Harlan boss, "here's a little gift to his majesty from her ladyship." He handed her a little revolver. "Put this in your bag and surprise him," the mob boss ordered. "That's your job."

"We've got the drop on him. He's in that little front room at the Savoy with the blinds down on the windows. We got the house across the way. Machine guns pointed to the door of the Savoy, see? Once he leaves that door, he's plugged. He'll never break out alive."

That devil of an infuriated moll broke into a laugh. It was a heartless laugh, a cold serenade of death. A laugh of fatality to those who defied Rosie Caldronne and the Harlan mob. A challenge to all from the hellish moll of an Irish-Spanish fire.

When she had grabbed a bottle of unadulterated rye from the card table that stood in the center of the room and had waved it above her head like a madman Guy Harlan offered the toast.

"Your success, Rosalie," he laughed, "and I'll look you up in the society columns. I will see the obituary list for the name of your host" he coughed—"Charlie Moran."

Something broke the roar of the crowd. It was the crash of a glass laden with liquor fallen heavily to the floor. Someone was staring blankly at Guy Harlan and his mob. Almost as blankly and bewildered as the gang itself. It was Rosie Caldronne, stage struck.

"What's the matter," someone cracked, "you got cold feet, Rosalie?"

She hadn't heard him. It didn't make any difference, for she continued gazing at the mob, smiling confusedly.

"I—I thought I knew the name," she forced a laugh, "but I guess I don't though." She wandered off into a shortest reverie. In another moment she had once more tossed her head carelessly and become the vivacious leader of the mob.

"It's pretty bad," she admitted, "when a lady can't hold her drinks."

"Maybe you're out of the hospital too soon," someone ventured.

She had changed from a sombre red to a dull olive—a striking pale set off by the fire in her hair. Yet in perfect harmony with the sombreness in her voice—a deep conviction.

"Maybe you're right. Tony," she admitted, attempting futilely to appear hardened, "maybe I shouldn't have come out of the hospital at all. Maybe I ain't doing best."

She glanced about the room as if something was closing in on her, tossed her head painfully and walked out of the den, leaving Guy and the mob to stare questioningly after her.

"She's not the same moll," he said

in a semi-daze of thought, "something's come over Rosie."

"Maybe she got hurt bad," someone ventured.

"And maybe it's the Spanish in her" Tony laughed.

"Don't laugh, wop," Harlan said, meaningly, "that poor kid lives through hell all the time. She'll get this Gannion rat for adding to it." His voice changed to a livelier and more commanding tone. "Get the word down to the Savoy to watch the door. Rosie's going in and Moran's coming out. Tonight, see. Get the word down right away."

Soon the den back of the Castle Bar was empty.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS QUITE dark when a young lady in blue, with a white fox thrown about her shoulders stopped in front of the street door of the Little Savoy. She paused a moment while someone across the way caught a signal and then walked into the small hotel.

It was a small, dingy place, stuffy and suspicious in its first impressions. Hardly more than a hiding place—a rendezvous for the underworld.

The man at the desk was unkempt. She sized him up at a glance and then spoke to him.

"Is Charlie Moran in?" she asked in a firm voice.

"Well, now," he chewed his words, "I'm not sure, lady. He's in room 13. I'll ring him and see. Do you have a card?"

Rosie made a motion to reach into her bag, pretendedly, but then she closed it quickly as the flash of the gun metal within caught her sight.

"No," she said, gently, "I'm afraid I don't. Tell him it's—it's a dear friend."

She waited anxiously until the message got through. Yes, he was in his room. A lady? He'd see her right

away.

"The stairs to your left, madam," the aged clerk said tersely. He eyed her carefully and she smiled graciously.

She turned in that direction and mounted the stairs slowly. Pretty much as might behoove a lady. Rosie Caldronne was always that way. Gentle and lady-like when the occasion called for it. To the infinite degree. Warmly human in her coldest killing.

Room 13. She tip-toed quietly to the door. She'd knock. No, she'd walk in. Maybe Charlie Moran had a mob in there. She listened. There were no voices escaping the door. She instinctively felt for her gun. It was still in her bag. What good would it do? She'd better wait and get the lay of the land. She knocked.

The door opened a little way. Two dark eyes peered through, hesitantly, and she thought she saw a welcome smile replace a careful stare.

"Come in, Miss Caldronne," someone said.

Rosie Caldronne, murderer and gunman's moll walked into a man's room in a manner that might hardly behoove a lady, but with all the posture and appearance of a thoroughbred.

The man smiled pleasantly and surveyed her, as she glanced quickly about the room. His hands reached out for her wraps—white and firm hands that were in manly proportion to his fine stature and wellcut features. Charles Moran was playing host.

"May I have your coat and fox, Miss Caldronne," he said, gently.

There was nothing to do but take them off.

"And your bag?"

She stared quickly at him. He was still smiling courteously at her, while once again her eyes greedily took in all the doors of the room. Traps? Closets? Bulls?

The shades on the window were

drawn, shutting out the night and the mob across the street. If she could only get her hands on them she could raise them enough for the mob to see their target. Right now the gun couldn't do her much good.

Someone surely was in the closet in the remote corner. She'd have to use her wits to advantage . . . get the first break and make the most of it.

She handed him the bag and it fell heavily into his hands. He may have surmised its content; however he placed it upon a chair in plain view.

"Now tell me how you have been, Miss Caldron?" he began.

The moll was uneasily comfortable. He had seated himself opposite her and his every stare annoyed her. It left her impatiently uneasy, and she constantly glanced up at those window shades. If she could but get her hands on one.

"I'm all right, Mr. Moran," she ventured uneasily, stalling for time.

"Did you get my flowers everyday?"

"Yes, they were—"

"Did Guy Harlan know?" he asked casually.

She rose quickly.

"What's that your business," she said, "about Guy Harlan?" She made an attempt to edge in the direction of the shades but he caught her in his arms. She was struggling, weakly.

"Can't I send a lady flowers without a court permit?" he smiled kindly.

The moll in blue stared at him relentlessly a moment and then the flame smouldered gradually. Something in Charlie Moran's bland unconcern had softened her to a degree, unarming her. Yet it was tormenting, annoying. That shade! That bag! Why had she given it to him.

"You ain't made things too sweet for yourself by sending me flowers," she laughed, coldly, "if you don't know it."

"You're angry," he said, softly.

"It ain't only me."

"Oh, the mob," he laughed, "across the street?"

She stared at him surprisedly. "You ain't alone either."

Charlie Moran smiled. He had heard her ask that question, expectingly. Until she had been taken into his fullest confidence there could be no hope of escape whatever. And there was so much that remained to be learned before he could dare a get away from the Little Savoy. Now that she had asked it, everything depended on his answer.

"On my honor," he said, "I'm all alone—with you. I wouldn't have it any other way. Besides, I'm not worried. It's not the first time I faced the works for a lady."

FOR A LADY! He was staring fixedly at her smiling softly at her. She was still within his embrace, where he had caught her near the window shade, and yet he was unaware of the transformation that was occurring within her. The seething softness that had overcome her.

Rosie Caldron, that devil of a moll, had changed from the lady of the mob to a lady of his eyes. For precious moments she had forgotten all about the mob, all about her job, all about everything. It was the Spanish scoring a decisive knock-out.

She had even heard herself say, after a long silence, "Why did you come out here anyway?"

"That's a long story, Rosalie," Moran explained, "but I'm through. I never knew what the racket was like. I'm sorry."

She stared at him pensively.

"You mean," she gasped, "you ain't the boss of—"

He laughed lightly. "Boss? That's funny. Why, I'm just a new-comer. I take a crack at everything." He looked uneasily at the window shade that hid the killers across the way. Rosie saw him.

"Just doing it for fun?" she questioned, unbelievingly.

"I wanted money, Rosalie," he admitted, "that was it."

"You picked a black way to get it," she snickered, "but I guess you've found that out already."

"I'll say," Moran replied, "I—I found that out the first night."

"What do you mean?" she asked, aroused, "down at the brewery?"

Something in her voice suggested a terrible, despicable hate. As if she was struggling to conceal a murderous desire. But he was undesirous of either acknowledging or abating it.

There was something he wanted to tell her, something she had to know if he was to get out of the Little Savoy alive. A last straw—of truth.

He was still looking down at her, in that unconcerned, confident manner that had once riled her and that she was now growing tolerant of. It was a sweetness that was easily assimilated.

"Yes," he nodded, "that's why I rammed you. I couldn't help it. I was the lookout for the gang. My first night, see? I saw you come past in your car, and knew they were waiting for you down the block. I just couldn't let a lady ride to death. God, not like that."

She was staring up at him unbelievingly. He went on.

"They had you spotted from the start, Rosalie. They're a wise bunch. They had the guns ready a block past me. When you came riding down in blue and white—" he looked toward the window shade—"I guess I ain't got the heart for this racket."

If he said anything else she was unaware of it. Varying emotions surged through Rosie Caldron's body like little rivulets seeking a way to the surface. Seeking a way to express themselves. She tried to identify them. To know them by name. But no, they only rushed and tugged at

her until there was nothing but a concoction of wild thoughts.

The window shade. The Harlan mob. The flowers. He had saved her. He had sent her flowers. The bulls wanted her for the murder with Lou Garson. The bag? The gun? Charlie Moran. Guy Harlan. There was no method of rhythm to her madness. It was choking.

From out of all this she exclaimed, "You saved me, did you?" rather mockingly, "what for?"

He was looking silently at her in a quietness that was disturbed by nothing but her quick breathing. Something, however, was lingering about the room. Perhaps it was the unusual note in her voice, at once cruel and pleading.

After a pause he answered, "I—I had to."

BUT ROSIE CALDRONE was unaware of the sacrifice in these words. He had trusted that she would, but in vain. After all, Moran thought, she was only a moll—a devil of a heartless moll. What did it mean to her—heartless, cold-blooded gang girl of a murderer.

The dark green of the window shade grew vividly red to his eyes and a vestige of fear crept into his mind, only to be shattered by her next remark.

"You saved me?" she laughed, hysterically, "what for? The bulls? Gannion's rats? What for? You got yourself to save now!" She ended off in a merciless laugh.

Her hysteria drowned the words that were pouring from his lips. These weren't impassioned words. These were words of compassion, words to quiet her, to cut dead the agony that she was trying to forget in a sea of hysteria. Charlie Moran had awakened to it all. Something deeper than her words had betrayed her.

"Why don't you quit this racket?"

came to her beating eardrums in a muffled roar, "Rosalie, why don't you quit it while the quitting is good?"

"While it's good," she laughed, madly, "It's never good. For me—what's there for me?"

Her emotional strain had brought tears to her eyes, a misty film that had softened the harshness of her stare. A frenzy of uncontrollable emotions fighting themselves for but a moment's respite. Finding relief in only the hysteria of crying and laughing.

Her head was tossing with an artificial abandon, and her laughter, while less sincere was more mechanical.

"Me quitting?" she continued, "you don't know. You don't know me. A lady! I ain't a lady, Charlie. God, I'm black behind saving. Black as the night. I'm a killer, yes a killer. That's why I brought the bag." Her eyes fell upon it.

Charlie Moran trembled with an inward trepidation. Now it wasn't fear nor the menace of danger. It was something by far more pitiful—something never to be forgotten.

He crushed her to him and smoothed her laughing while she sobbed convulsively against his bosom in a tired silence. For a moment Rosie Caldron was finding happiness at a terrible price. Rosie Caldron, poor devil of a moll, was living! That surging within her had abated in an incredulous peace.

When she had loosened herself from his embrace she shuddered momentarily, wiped the tears from her eyes and reached for her bag.

"It's getting late, Charlie," she said, softly, "Guy Harlan wants you.

If you don't come now he'll come and get you."

He followed quickly and she stopped at the door of the room.

"Turn out that light, please."

"Yes, Rosalie."

She smiled in the darkness. Smiled dazedly.

"I'll go first," she laughed, "it ain't lady-like but I know the way. Here's a gun. Now give me your coat. It's dark and cold. I'm chilly."

At the foot of the stairs she stopped.

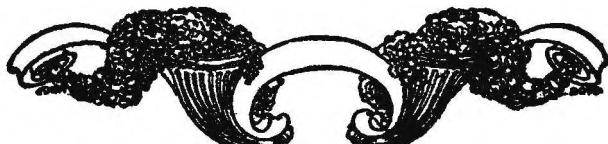
"I'll look out, Charlie," she said in a voice that fairly pained him. Its softness had become inhumanly warm in a new note. "You follow me in two minutes," she said. "I'll see you through. I'll save you all right," she laughed, softly.

Perhaps it was an injury to her head she had suffered down at the Dutchman's. Perhaps it was the strains within her, forever surging madly, driving her to a perpetual happiness. Perhaps it was the saving of a life worth more than her own. And perhaps after all, hidden under the black skin of that moll, that murderer of an outlaw mob, was the hidden soul of a lady.

Out of the night there never came an explanation. Only the merciless rap-a-tap-a-tap of a machine gun spraying death in its path.

In a moment he was beside her body while across the way the Harlan mob, unaware of it all, sped off into the night in that long, red speed monster.

Charlie Moran was bending close to her lips. That devil of a moll was smiling happily even in the shadow of death. And he thought he heard her lips murmur; "I'm a lady, see?"



The Eaves-Dropper

The letter department of Gangster Stories is designed to promote personal interest in your magazine. We want you to write your appreciations and your criticisms. Tell us what kind of stories you like best. Ask us about the authors. Let us feel that Gangster Stories has reached the mark we set for it.

FROM CALIFORNIA

Dear Editor:

I just can't remember how I happened to find out about your Gangster Stories Magazine, but I do say that it was one of the pleasantest events of my life, and that's putting it mild.

I'm seriously planning to break my family ties and settle down in a room full of those nerve-tickling sleep-killers that you manage to put out.

Let's have a little help in this new project.

Yours truly,
JOHN QUIGGLY,
San Francisco, California

A DISCOVERY

Dear Mr. Hersey:

After reading many magazines in search of a real underworld thriller, I read your Gangster Stories with so much pleasure, that I want to subscribe regularly. I wouldn't want to miss any story by that fellow Tom Champion. Tell Tom for me that he's the champion yarn-spinner, and if his story "Bars of Hades" isn't calculated to make any fellow sit up all night, then I'm a blank cartridge.

More power to your magazine, Mr. Hersey, and remember, I'm with you!

ALLAN WATTERMAN,
New Haven, Conn

In the rush of getting our issue to press we have not had time to write our correspondents for permission to print their names and addresses. We have therefore substituted names and addresses in place of theirs. In the future let us know in your letters whether you wish us to print your names with the communications.

RED BAND

Dear Harold:

Glad to see you back in the game! Your Red Band series is a knockout, particularly the Gangster Stories Magazine. It has more variety and excitement in it than any other magazine on the market. I liked the quality of romance and glamor that the stories have. It makes them stand out in contrast to the usual underworld stuff one reads.

The novel, "Black River" is a corker. Give us some more of Feldman's stuff.

Yours as ever,
HORACE EVANS.
Saranac, N. Y.

FROM ILLINOIS

Dear Editor:

Happened to collide with your first issue of Gangster Stories and sure got knocked out. Matter of fact, I was just thrown speechless. Can't cough up enough words to tell you your magazine is the snappiest, trickiest layout I ever tacked on to my eyeballs.

I must say you have me hanging on that "Ten Inch Blade". Great story! Good old Norwood. Write us some more.

Yours truly,
ROBERT BLAKELY,
Peoria, Ill.

A Page from the Publisher's Notebook

Tony Feldman is one of the few people, outside of Dicks, who really knows the underworld. He knows it from Hell's Kitchen to Chinatown, and he hasn't learned it from sightseeing busses, either!

This is how he happened to start taking lessons.

He was crossing from Hoboken on a ferry one night, pretty late (pretty good beer over there, eh, Tony) and as the ferry headed into the slip, he saw a man, who had been lurking in the dark out near the bow-chain suddenly look around and slide overboard.

Tony looked around, too, and saw two Dicks run forward and look over the edge, pulling out automaties. Tony can smell a Dick a mile off. He couldn't see the first man at first—gangster, crook, or whatever it was; but just then the ferry bumped home. The Dicks got out and beat it for a launch tied up at the end of the wooden piles.

Tony is a funny guy. He's as law-abiding as you and I are, but still he didn't like this two against one stuff. That's what he said. Maybe it was the Hoboken beer or a hot night—anyway, over goes Tony into the East River, shoes, pants and all, after the crook.

He caught up with him soon because he is some swimmer, and whispered to the surprised guy "Two of them after you."

Just then they heard the launch sputtering up to them, so they dove. When they came up, the Dicks had cut the motor and were drifting just in front of them. So what did Tony do but grab hold of the stern gunwale,

hanging on to the crook all the time. The Dicks drifted around for a long time looking over the water. Finally they decided the crook had given them the slip, so they cranked up their putt-put and went ashore.

As they tied up, Tony and the crook sank, swam under water, and crawled out on land. They were pretty wet, oddly enough, so the crook took Tony to his hide-out to dry off.

Well, the laugh was certainly on Tony. It seems the "crook" was a private Dick, out looking for a Chicago Bank Racketeer, who had abdicated with a couple thousand grand belonging to some John D. out there. He was hot on the scent when the two regulars butted in. He thought they would kill his game so he went over the side to get out of their way.

By this time Tony was interested, so he joined up with the "crook." Having nothing better to do and always ready for a fight, he thought it might be a good game.

He sure didn't waste much time. When they finished with that job Tony could speak the language, knew all the best hide-outs, and got two scars that would make a German officer look sick.

Tony is over in Lisbon right now. He is a great traveller and has been all around the world many times. He's gone all ways: by tankers, tramps, schooners, and big liners. He's found out a lot about the underworld in Paris—the sewers and the underground cafes, and the Limehouse District in London.

Write us some stories about those places, Tony.

"Don't spoil the party!"

.. someone called when I sat down at the piano



—a moment later they
got the surprise of
their lives!

I WAS just about to enter the room when I overheard Bill saying, "It'll seem like old times to have Dan with us again!"

"You'd better lock the piano!" came the laughing rejoinder.

"Nonsense! He won't have the nerve to play after what happened the last time!"

"That was a shabby trick. I almost wish we hadn't pulled it. . . ."

How well I knew what they were talking about!

At the last party I had attended I had sat down at the piano and in my usual "shop-stick" fashion started playing some popular numbers.

Before long, however, I had noticed an unusual stillness. I stopped playing, turned around, and—*the room was empty!*

Instead of entertaining the party, as I had fondly imagined, the halting, stumbling performance had been a nuisance.

Bursting with shame and indignation I had determined to turn the tables. At last tonight, the moment had come.

Everyone seemed overjoyed to see me again—obviously glad that I had evidently forgiven and forgotten last year's trick.

Suddenly I turned to Bill and said, "Hopo you've had the piano tuned, old boy. I feel just in the mood. . . ."

Instantly the friendly atmosphere changed. It was amusing to see the look that spread from face to face. For a moment no one spoke. Then, just as I was sitting down at the piano, someone called:

"For heaven's sake, get away from that piano! Don't spoil the party!"

That was my cue. Instead of replying I struck the first bars of "Sun-down." And how! Easily, smoothly with all the verve and expression I had always longed for!

I Fool My Friends

The guests gasped with amazement. Fascinated, scarcely believing their ears, they drew nearer. When I finished they loudly clamored for more. Time and again, when I would have stopped, they eagerly insisted on "Just one more, please!"

When they finally allowed me to leave the piano I turned around and said: "Just a moment, folks! I want to thank you for

what you did for me last year!"

The eager, laughing faces turned red with embarrassment. One or two of the boys murmured an apology. Seeing their confusion, I continued:

"I mean it! If you hadn't opened my eyes, I'd still be a dud at playing. I want home mighty angry that night, I'll admit. But it taught me a lesson. And believe me, folks, when I think of the real pleasure I get out of playing now, I'm only sorry I didn't pull that trick sooner!"

Before letting me go home that night Bill demanded, "How did you do it?"

I laughed. "Why, I just took advantage of a new way to learn music, that's all!"

"What! Didn't you take lessons from a teacher?"

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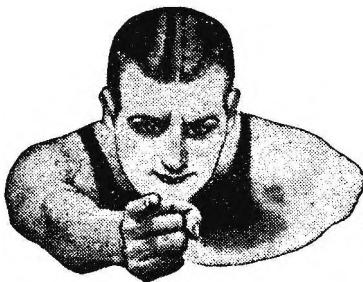
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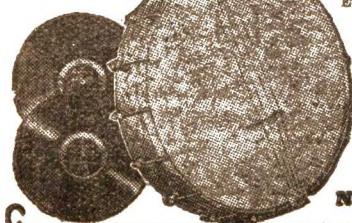
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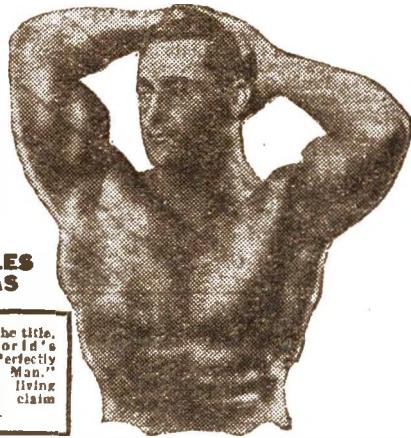
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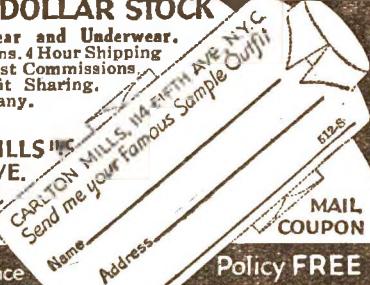
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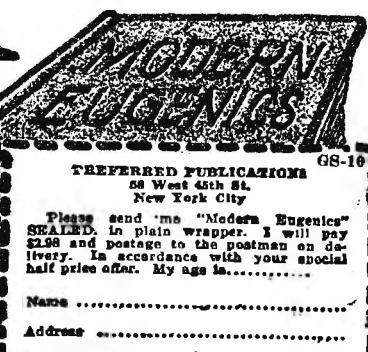
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