

10¢

MARCH

HEADQUARTERS DETECTIVE



MURDER TREADMILL

*Dynamic Detective
Novelette*

By STEVE FISHER

G-MAN JUGGERNAUT

Stirring Novelette

By G.T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

NOW LISTEN, LARRY -YOU CAN'T BACK OUT!

READ
HOW
LARRY'S
PIMPLY
FACE
ALMOST
MADE
HIM QUIT
THE SHOW



HEY CHARLIE -
TAKE A SQUINT AT MY FACE -
THAT FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST WORKED

REHEARSAL

ADDITIONAL

W.E. - I TOLD 'EM

IT WOULD GIVE

THOSE BLOSSOMS

DON'T I?

W.E. - I TOLD 'EM

IT WOULD GIVE

THOSE BLOSSOMS

DON'T I?

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THOSE BLOSSOMS

DON'T I?



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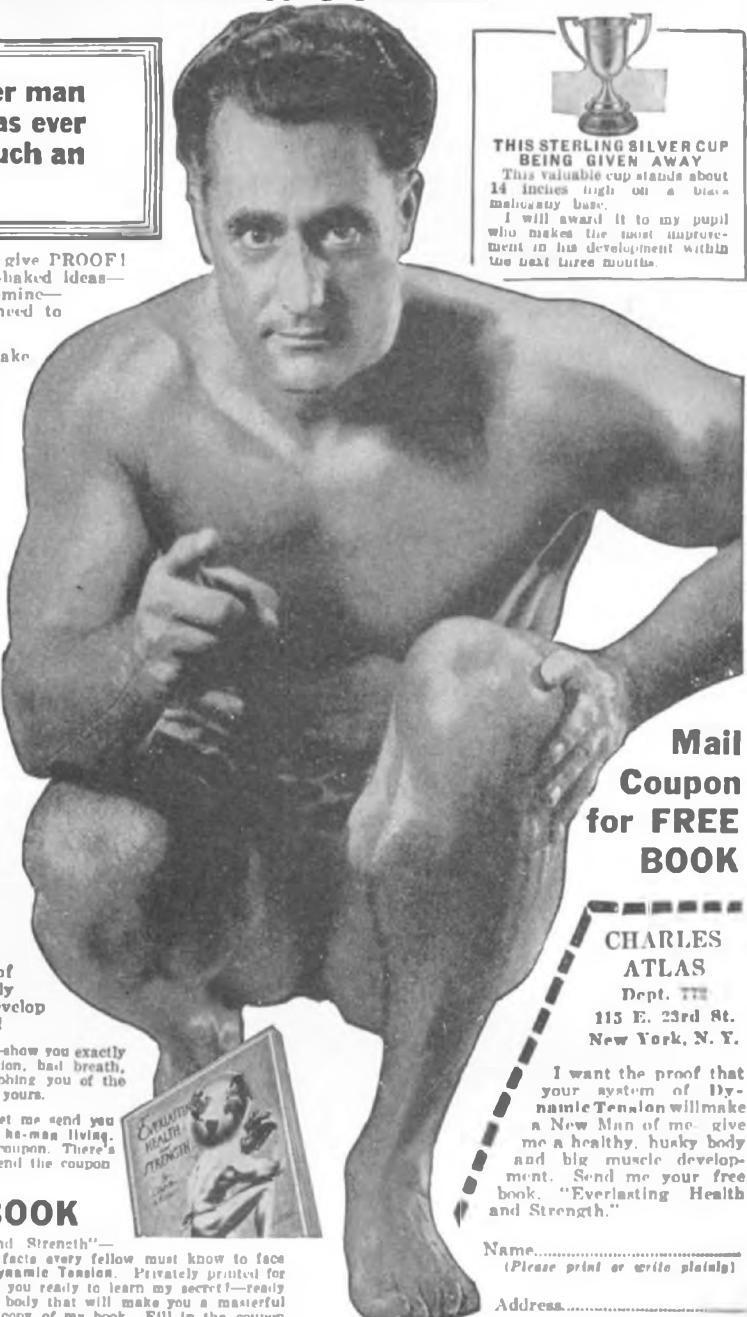
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City..... State.....

HEADQUARTERS DETECTIVE

Vol. XXI

March, 1937

No. 1

THREE TOP-RANK NOVELETTES

MURDER TREADMILL	STEVE FISHER	10
<i>Detective Tony Saxon tries to stop a murder treadmill—but gets Tommy-gum tangled when a girl joins the march to the morgue.</i>		
G-MAN JUGGERNAUT	G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS	42
<i>John Dirk tries to find the hub of the vice wheel—and a big spoke leads him to the father of a girl he'd helped.</i>		
HELL'S HANDYMEN	GEORGE A. McDONALD	100
<i>Lieutenant O'Dare gets a commission to arrest the only man who can give life back to his pal.</i>		

FIVE MOVING SHORT STORIES

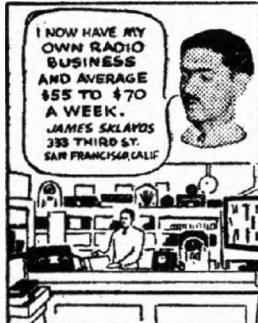
DEATH ON THE HOOK	JOHN K. BUTLER	31
<i>Sandy Taylor proves there's a new horror on the waterfront—when he's offered death on the hook.</i>		
HOMICIDE HELP WANTED	GRANT LANE	68
<i>From the grave comes an answer to a plea for homicide help</i>		
BLOOD ON THE TICKET	WILLIAM BRUNER	76
<i>Rocky King finds that a new way to stymie a cop is to put him in the cooler.</i>		
A COPPER CALLS HIS SHOTS!	CLEVE F. ADAMS	88
<i>Detective Fallon takes a cue from a killer.</i>		
SWITCHED DOOM	ORLANDO RIGONI	97
<i>"Toothy" Bergum learns death can be transplanted.</i>		

Cover by Norman Saunders

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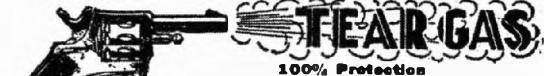
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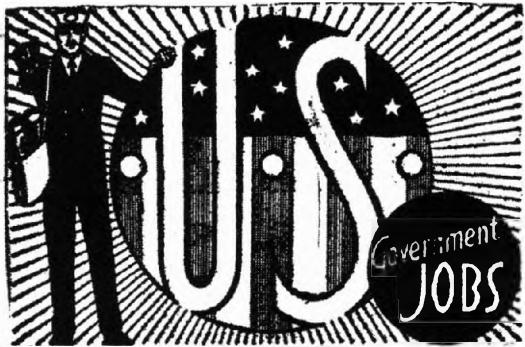
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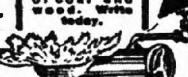
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"ACE" LINEUP

WHEN you've finished "Murder Treadmill" by Steve Fisher, "G-Man Juggernaut" by G. T. Fleming-Roberts and the six other great stories in this month's HEADQUARTERS DETECTIVE, we recommend that you try SURE-FIRE DETECTIVE. This splendid new magazine is another of the famous "Ace" Magazines line-up, and the February issue is now on the stands.

"The Cartoon Crimes" by Donald G. Cooley, "Died in Red" by Hal Murray Bonnett, and "Bullets for a Big Shot," by Alexis Rossoff, are only three of the all-ace, selected yarns in the February SURE-FIRE DETECTIVE. The day of the case-hardened detective is past. This new magazine features stories picked for emotional value as well as clever detection.

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Murder Treadmill

CHAPTER I TIME TO BLOW

HE worked furiously, feverishly; better and faster than he ever had before, but he could not keep his eyes from the clock. He stuffed packages of money on the lower shelves, canceled checks, took in petty cash from the merchants, but again and again his eyes drifted back to the clock on the wall.

Tick-tock . . . Tick-tock.

It was three now, the guard would be closing the doors; just a few more customers to bother with. Henry Masterson's pale face was covered with

sweat; his heart was pumping slowly, pumping hot, tingling blood into his veins. He glanced down at the battered suit case he had brought to work with him. A fishing pole was lashed to the outside.

"Going on a week-end fishing trip right from work," he had explained.

No one doubted him. When you had worked hard and faithfully for thirteen years in the same bank, no one would doubt you. That was his ace in the hole. No splits, no marked money. Hours in which to make his getaway—maybe a whole weekend. And sixty thousand in cash for himself alone to spend.

For almost thirteen years this had been Henry Masterson's dream;



Death ripped down the stairs toward the detective.

Dramatic Detective Novelette

By Steve Fisher

Author of "Receipt from Satan," etc.

Henry Masterson had a shrewd plan for fleeing his teller's cage with a fortune to buy a fuller life. But underworld leeches got wise to his plans, and decided to muscle in. And Detective Tony Saxon's ideas for stopping the murder treadmill were Tommy-gun tangled when Ethel Burks joined the march to the morgue.



Using an assumed name, he has even gone to the trouble of going into his disguise to Norman Saxon, one of the biggest criminal lawyers in the city, who, for a price, fixed him up a fake birth certificate. The lawyer had asked no questions; perhaps he hadn't known it was a disguise. Just last week, wearing the false new birth certificate in hand, Masterson had applied for and gotten a passport to leave the country.

Yet, even as he had collected these things, made his slow and methodical preparations; even as he contemplated with a surge of warm exhilaration the cafes of Paris, the streets of London, the cabarets of Shanghai, he had been too much aware that it was a dream. A dream that would not come true until he actually left the bank with the money.

And now—it scarcely seemed real for it was so easy, so simple—I worked, and watched the clock. I thought—and trembled with con-

and it had taken him that long to work out his comparatively simple little plan and to get enough courage to go through with it. He had lived alone, made no friends, confided with no one. The disguise he had worn when he purchased the steamer ticket was flawless, for it, too, had been chosen with care over a period of years. A wig, an old coat, a false nose, false eyebrows, and gold plating for some of his teeth—all bought separately on days months apart from each other.

temperate delight as he did so—of the things he would do. No longer would he be pale, a sickly man who at fifty looked sixty; he would become tanned and build up muscle. He would have an attractive figure for the girls on the boat. Slim, warm girls. All his life he had thought about women; and never had the courage or the affront it took to win one. But in his secret heart of hearts he made love to thousands; they followed him about, they fought over him. Now, all this would come to pass. Women, champagne. A life of ease and comfort.

He grinned as the last customer came up and deposited twenty dollars to his account. Twenty dollars! Men were fools to slave for such bits of change. The customer thought the smile was meant for him.

"Nice day," he said.

"Yes," Henry Masterson replied, "a very nice day."

"It should be good fishing on a day like this," said the man.

MASTERSON choked. Was this customer a detective? Did he know? Did he suspect anything? But in a moment he waved away his hysteria. It was pure rot. No one knew, for he had told no one. He had been at the bank long enough to be trusted and respected.

"Yes, good fishing, all right," Masterson said.

The customer left and the bank was cleared. Masterson glanced at the next cage and saw the teller leave. He was alone on the floor except for the offices in the rear where the manager and two of the directors worked. Alone to pretend to be finishing up his accounts for the day, while he—instead—stuffed the battered suitcase with bills.

No one bothered him, and since tomorrow was a bank holiday, his books would not be inspected until next week when he failed to arrive for work. In an hour he was ready to leave. The suitcase was filled with old

bills—sixty thousand dollars' worth. He lifted it, made his way out of the cage.

That cage had been a prison and now something pounding hard in his chest seemed to be saying: "You'll never see it again." He laughed, though not out loud; he wanted to sing and shout. Instead, he slowly made his way to the door, carrying the bag. The guard nodded.

"Have a good trip, Masterson."

"Thanks," Masterson said weakly, "I will."

Outside in the afternoon sunshine, he felt better. His legs seemed sturdier than before; he swung the suitcase at his side and sucked the fresh air into his lungs. Yet his eyes were sharply peeled and he was suspicious of everyone he saw. He could afford to take no chances now. An ice pack seemed to be lying on his stomach. It was fear.

He could not take a cab, even though the tonic of victory that was beginning to race through his blood demanded: "Hurry! Hurry up." If he took a cab it would attract attention. He walked to Market Street and took a street car. A man with sixty thousand dollars riding a trolley; it was ironic!

By the time he arrived at his flat he was more nervous than he had ever been before. Perhaps it was because he knew that if he managed to get away now, change to his disguise and get away from the flat, the chances were a hundred to one in favor of a successful getaway.

He climbed the steps, his limbs trembling, and put the key in the lock. Sweat rolled down his face as he opened the door, then closed it again and slammed home the bolt. He hurried into the bedroom where he put the suitcase down and opened it. Quickly, he got another bag from the closet and transferred the money into it.

The bills were soft in his hands. He gloated at them, his heart thumping fast. His, all his, now! He locked the

new case, started taking off his clothes. He changed in record time—he had practised that, too—and at last looked at himself in the mirror and adjusted the gold plates over his teeth.

He had been transformed into an old man with white hair, a bent back, who wore a long black coat. His nose was reddish—the wax nose—and fake wrinkles had been drawn into his cheeks. He was trembling so that he could scarcely lift the bag. He carried it through the front room, peered out the window. The street was empty.

HE went to the door again, came out and locked it behind him. He had just started down the steps when his heart stood still. George Johnson, manager of the bank, was coming around the corner. Masterson was for a moment too paralyzed to move. He did not know what to do. Run? Go back into the house?

No! Johnson saw him now and was coming toward him. But Masterson was dressed like an old man. The manager of the bank would not penetrate the disguise. Masterson told himself this. Made himself believe it. The large, red-faced banker reached him.

"Did you just come from Master-
son's flat? I saw you when you—"

"I—I am selling books," said Masterson in a high-pitched voice, "I don't know what you're talking about. . . ."

"Beg your pardon," George Johnson replied jovially, "I was speaking of a friend of mine. He was going fishing, and I guess that kind of had him excited, because he forgot to check out to me as he was leaving the bank. I wanted to talk to him—" He broke off. "You didn't get any answer to your ring, did you?"

Masterson's heart was in his mouth. So he had forgotten to check out! There was always something. But it would still be all right, because Johnson hadn't guessed who he

was. All he had to do was keep in character until he got out of his sight. He shook his head, rubbed his nose.

"No, I didn't. I reckon there ain't nobody home."

Masterson was suddenly conscious that the bank manager was staring at him as though his eyes would pop out. What did the fool see? Had something gone wrong? And then Masterson's blood turned to ice. He saw a piece of the wax on the sidewalk—it had fallen when he rubbed his nose.

"Masterson—"

"Shut up, you fool," Masterson rasped.

"Masterson," Johnson repeated, "then you've— Why I just wanted to ask you about the Jones deficit, you were supposed to—" His mouth closed. He looked around wildly. A girl was passing on the other side of the street.

"Listen," Masterson whispered, "keep your mouth shut, and we'll split. We'll—"

George Johnson backed up. "You dirty thief. You—Police!"

The girl turned, startled. Blood was pumping up into Masterson's temples. His brain seemed reeling around and around. Prison, disgrace. No money, no trip. He clutched at a gun in the pocket of the black coat. A small woman's revolver he had brought along in case of emergency. He felt the cold steel in his hand, felt his finger as it touched the trigger.

"Police!" the banker called again.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

George Johnson was jerked about; blood trickled from the corners of his mouth. He careened, head first, toward the gutter.

Eyes glazed, the bank teller pointed the gun down and fired another shot into the writhing body. He stared for another half second, then his legs started moving. He ran wildly down the street. He heard a girl's scream echoing in his ears. Heard sirens wailing behind him.

He kept running, reached an alley. His feet pounded down the tar; the bag was still in his hand.

The siren wailed louder. He could hear the shouts of men chasing behind him. Thus he started the murder treadmill.

CHAPTER II

WHERE IT IS HIDDEN

LIETEUTENANT ANTHONY SAXON, ace headquarters detective of the San Francisco Police Department, had the case put in his lap two hours ago; and it was already in such a muddled mess that he didn't know where to begin. A blond giant, with wide-set gray eyes, and a hard, high-cheek-boned face, he paced up and down in his hotel room, smoking one cigarette after another. He stopped now and then to use the telephone, then to jot down notes. Before a dick started running around on a case like this he had to know where he was going and why.

Newspapers headlining the bank robbery and murder lay strewn across his bed; the afternoon edition of every paper in San Francisco, and he had read all the details avidly. That Henry Masterson had managed to elude a chase; that he was still at large in the town, and that steamships, highways and airports were being watched while police combed the city for the murdering bank robber. But in the last few minutes Tony Saxon had penetrated beyond these surface reports.

Although a man who previously had no criminal record could not be traced through stool pigeon leaks in the underworld grapevine, yet there were ways. There were standard things a desperate fugitive, boxed within the confines of a big city, might do. One of them included going to a well known criminal lawyer for advice and protection. So at the present moment spy systems that had been established in the offices of the

most well known crook shysters were being tapped for information. It was this Tony Saxon was waiting for as the phone rang again.

Thus far he had received nothing of any particular value although he had a few hints as to what he might expect. A break by Masterson to get through a highway patrol; a charted speed boat smuggling him from one of the piers and running him up the Sacramento river. No matter what he did, though, Tony Saxon was now personally responsible for bringing him in.

The phone clattered again, and just then a knock sounded on the room door. Held up for a moment by indecision, he puffed at the cigarette that was in his mouth, then stepped over to the door and opened it.

His eyes widened. A small, blonde girl stood there. She was dressed in black with white collar and cuffs; her hair was like a halo of gold and her eyes were, Saxon thought, the deepest blue he had ever seen. As the phone shrilled a second, then a third time, she asked:

"Are you Mr. Anthony Saxon?"

He said: "That's me, miss. Step in and close the door behind you. I've got to answer that phone."

He picked up the receiver then, barked: "Hello."

A VOICE came slithering through the wire: "This is Mr. Green number eighteen speaking." That was the name for all of the city's secret operatives. Tony told him to proceed, noticing that the girl came in as he had bid.

"I have just checked on Norman Saxon's office," the voice on the wire went on.

Tony felt his muscles tighten and a momentary pang of fear shot through him. "Yes?"

"From what I have been able to learn," the police spy continued, "I think I can say with certainty that Henry Masterson visited this office late this afternoon without his dis-

guise. He and Norman Saxon left almost at once; the lawyer has just now come back and he looks as though he is nervous. That is all."

That is all. Stunned, complete comprehension still eluding him, Tony Saxon hung up the phone. In the past the fact that his brother was a big criminal lawyer had gotten them into scrapes where they were pitted against each other. Bitter arguments, some of them ending in fist fights, had ensued. Yet, Norman was his brother, and they had always managed to patch things up. Blood, they had said, is thicker than water; blood, in fact, is thicker than anything on earth.

And now, in a case like this, one of clear-cut robbery and murder where there could be no possible doubt as to the guilt of the murderer, Norman had taken a hand. It was ghastly. Incredible. For aiding the escape of a killer a man could draw the death penalty. A bead of sweat rolled down Saxon's bronze cheeks; his eyes seemed to be burning. Slowly, shaking his head a little, the news still buzzing in his mind. He looked up.

His voice was hoarse: "What do you want?"

Her eyes shone from under the brim of the pert black felt hat that she wore tilted to one side of her head. Tapping a cigarette on the edge of the table, she said: "My name is Ethel Burks. Newspaper reporters told me you were a lieutenant-detective in charge of the Masterson case; and that I would find you here."

His nerves were jangled so that he could not think straight. He reached a bottle of Schenley's from the drawer, poured the whiskey into a pony and gulped it down. "So what?"

She eyed him curiously. "I was an eye-witness to the murder."

Tony Saxon took his mind from his troubles for a moment to think. Then he suddenly ejaculated: "Oh, sure! You were the girl across the street!"

She smiled. "That's right."

Although his stomach was gone, he managed to grin. "Sorry I didn't treat you quite—" he broke, went on: "I just heard some bad news and it hit me pretty hard, too hard, I guess. As for you—you want to know what you should do. Well, this guy Masterson isn't really tough, see? All you have to do is sit tight until I bring him in. Then we'll call you when we make the indictment. After that you wait for the trial and appear as witness."

She said: "Oh, I didn't know there was only one. I thought—So you *will* get Masterson, all right?"

Something caught in Saxon's throat. Get not only Masterson, he thought, but his own brother, too. Of course in the case of his brother there would be evidence to procure, *absolute proof*. No matter what else he was, Norman was wily when it came to points of the law. "Yeah—I'll get the crook, all right," he said.

Ethel nodded and her face seemed to brighten. "When the cops ran down that alley after Masterson," she went on, "I followed them. Maybe you read in the *Star*. I was a witness to the killing, though of course they didn't know my name. I know where the suitcase full of money is now."

Tony was suddenly tense. "You—you know?"

"Yes."

"How many people have you told?"

"No one. Not a soul."

"Are you sure, Miss Burks?"

"Positive. And you can call me Ethel."

"Okay, Ethel; and you came up here to tell me where the dough is hidden—right?"

"That's right."

He beamed. "Now we're getting places. Shoot. Where is the dough?"

SHE dropped the cigarette and stepped on it. "Don't you think you'd better lock the door—just in case?"

He laughed. "Tony Saxon lock doors? Don't be silly." But on second thought he went over and locked it.

He was beginning to like Ethel Burks a lot. There was something cosmopolitan about her; swift and breezy in manner; decently sophisticated with no hick ideas about what she was up against. He began wondering what kind of a job she had, if any. Since he had to have all that information anyway, he pulled out his little black book, asked:

"Before we get down to the more grim things in life—where that money is hidden and so on, how about your address?"

"St. Francis Hotel," she said.

He raised his eyebrows. "Oh, you're rich?"

She laughed. "Not exactly. I'm bookkeeper there, and my room is included in the salary. Anything else?"

"Guess not. Now for the dough. Where is it?"

She had opened her glistening crimson lips to speak when a knock sounded on the door. She looked at it, looked at him.

Tony Saxon went over to open it, but he paused. Something—he did not know what it was—seemed to stay his hand, and a curious foreboding crept into him. He wanted to laugh at himself for what he considered childishness. The knock sounded again. Ethel Burks kept watching him.

At last Saxon went over, strapped his shoulder holster about his body. He put his suit coat on over it, then drew the police positive and held it gripped in his hand. He returned to the door.

"Who's there?"

"Telegram, sir," came the prompt reply.

"Push it underneath the door."

"Sorry, sir. I have to have a signature on it."

Anthony Saxon hesitated only a moment more, then he unlocked the door. There was such a thing, he told himself, as carrying caution to the point of being ridiculous; and he didn't want to make himself a monkey

in front of this blonde. There seemed to be a reason for that, too; as though she counted in things. He didn't know why, but it came to him all at once.

He motioned her back, opened the door.

Flame seemed to explode in his face, and in the next instant he felt a hot slug tear into his shoulder. Like an iron hand it spun him about. He stumbled across the room helplessly, went pitching to the floor. Ethel's scream sounded high and shrill. Saxon writhed his aching body about, lifted his gun.

Another slug came speeding at him, missed by an inch. Two huge men rushed into the room, and one of them lifted his foot and slammed it into Saxon's face. The blow threw him backward so that he was sprawled out flat. His nose was bleeding; his shoulder was bleeding, too; hot blood that seeped through his clothing.

He heard Ethel Burks scream again; then he heard the muffled sound as a gag was put over her mouth.

Desperately, he struggled to rise to a sitting position, to lift the police positive. A whir of screaming blackness was rushing through his mind. He tried to rub the mist from his burning eyes, grabbed the leg of the table and pulled himself upright.

But Ethel was gone. The room was empty.

CHAPTER III

MOUTHPIECE MONEY

HE managed somehow to get to his feet, the bullet wound in his shoulder burning like red-hot knives, and as he moved forward, a momentary blackness screened his mind, so that he stumbled and fell again.

When he opened his eyes again a moment later, the room was filled with people. Men who had come running down the hall; bell boys, show girls, guests. They were all talking at once and somebody was on the phone getting a doctor.

HD

Saxon was put in a chair and a woman poured warm water into the basin while men tore back his clothing to get to the wound. Chatter. Tony Saxon hated it, hated all these people intruding. He was thinking of Ethel.

"Tony Saxon lock his door?" He had said that, sap that he was. And what did she think now; or would she be able to think anything? The only living witness to the murder of George Johnson! Who was behind the kidnaping? Saxon shuddered. It was Norman, of course; Norman, his brother, grabbing a fat fee and taking care of a killer's dirty work; clearing a halfway safe legal path for him in the event he was captured.

A doctor came in, and the hotel manager. Again everyone was talking at once.

"Patch me up, Doc," Saxon said, "and make it snappy. I've got work to do."

The reporters came next. One of them said: "We sent Ethel Burks, the witness. She came over to Masterson's place, met us outside. What happened to her? Did you tell her to hide?"

"She's been kidnaped," Saxon said hoarsely.

The reporters pounced on him with questions. "Did she tell you where the money was hidden?" one of them asked.

Tony Saxon straightened up in the chair. "What money?"

"Masterson's loot."

Saxon's gray eyes were like hot flames. "How did you guys learn that she knew where it was?"

"Hell, she admitted that much. The cops have been all through that alley, though, and they didn't find anything."

"She forgot to mention that she told the press that," Saxon said.

The doctor finished and Tony Saxon pulled his shirt and coat back around him. He got to his feet, wobbled a little on his heels, and lit

a cigarette. He walked over to the table, reporters following him like a lot of little dogs, questions popping from their lips. Flashlight cameras exploded every moment or so.

He whirled suddenly. "I don't know what the hell you're following me for! All I've done is gum things up. I've practically washed the case out. Beat it!"

But they only grinned it off. "What are you going to do now?"

"Go to California for a vacation," Tony Saxon said sardonically. "Want to come along?" He poured another shot of Schenley's and drank it down, then put the bottle in his side pocket. He replaced the police positive in his holster, left the room.

The reporters trailed him as far as the elevator. When the lift arrived Saxon stepped into it, shoved back the newspapermen and slammed the door. The car went shooting for the ground floor.

HE checked with the house detective. The thugs must have escaped via the fire ladders on the side of the building because they hadn't come out through the lobby. At least that was the fat house dick's story and nothing would make him change it. He had a job to look out for.

Saxon passed through the revolving doors of the hotel and stepped out onto Market Street. An evening breeze was blowing in from the harbor; shadows were creeping about the buildings, people were packed into street cars, and surging down the sidewalk. Lights were blinking on everywhere—yellow eyes gleaming against the coming night.

Tony Saxon sucked breath into his lungs. Only one course lay open to him and he vowed that no matter what the circumstances were, he was going to take it. Even if it meant putting his own brother behind bars and eventually giving him a ticket for the noose. Norman had gone too far this time.

Yet, even as he vowed this and swung down the street at a good clip, Tony knew in his heart that he couldn't actually go that far. He remembered — wistfully now — what pals he and Norman had been all through school. The scrapes they had gotten into, the fights they had fought, the football games in which they had played on the same team. He recalled how they had dated girls in pairs; had made up foursomes for dances and proms. Norman laughing, happy; his decision to go to law school. Then, the first few years when, although he had almost starved, he had been straight and Tony had been proud of him.

He remembered the day Norman hung out his sign, and made the announcement that he was no longer trying for a job in the D. A.'s office. He would be "Attorney for the Defense."

"For the defense of every scurvy rat that walks into your office, eh?" Tony Saxon had said bitterly.

Norman Saxon had laughed. "Hell, no. There are good lawyers who protect innocent people. You know that."

"Sure. Is that the kind you intend to be?"

Norman had nodded. "You should know that it is, Tony."

Then Tony had asked: "Have you any clients yet?"

Norman Saxon grinned sheepishly. "Well, I've sort of promised Slip Ryan that I'd see what I—"

"He's a crook, a second offender; record a mile long!" Tony Saxon had broken in.

"Yes, but this time—"

"This time, hell!" Tony snapped. "If that's the kind of a shyster you're going to be I want nothing to do with you!"

He had stormed out of the office only to patch it up with Norman when, in spite of the fact that he took the defense, Slip Ryan was convicted. But that had been only the beginning. Out of the next seven court

cases his brother took, he won six; and one of his victories had been a difficult acquittal on the charge of murder. That had covered a period of eighteen months and Norman Saxon's reputation was then made. As time went on it had grown. At present he was regarded as the biggest criminal lawyer in San Francisco. He had a home in Palo Alto, half a million in the bank, and two swanky cars. What else he had wasn't revealed, but Tony Saxon suspected it included an army of thugs.

HE looked up as he reached a corner; he barged across the street, then headed for a taxi. A slim young man, nattily dressed, stepped up to him. He looked like a kid not over twenty. An unlit cigarette was in his mouth.

"Got a match, mister?"

"Sure." Saxon dug into his pocket, handed the kid a packet of matches.

The young man lit it, lighted the cigarette. His face was hard, without expression.

"If you know what's good for you, dick," he said, out of the side of his mouth, "keep your paws out of the Masterson case."

Saxon grabbed at him, but he suddenly felt something hard punch into his stomach. He looked down, saw a gun. A curious smile twitched about the young man's thin lips; he held the gun level, yet close enough to him so that it wasn't conspicuous on the street. He backed into a waiting cab. As the door of the taxi slammed, the motor growled and the car pulled away from the curb, darted into the thick of the Market Street traffic.

Saxon looked around for another cab to follow, but there was none in sight.

"So Norman's sending college boys around to threaten me?" he said in a low voice.

He dodged through the traffic across the street and finally found a cab. It was too late to follow the kid, but he hopped into it.

"One-thirty-one Post Street," he snapped.

"Yes, sir."

The vast offices for the Norman Saxon clientele were empty and light glowed only from the private sanctums of the criminal lawyer.

Tony Saxon swung down the aisle of desks, his hard gray eyes smoldering, the gun in his shoulder holster rising and falling with each step. He opened Norman's door, stepped inside and closed it. For a moment he stood there, spreading his legs and rocking on his heels.

Norman Saxon had grown a belly, and on his serene white face there were the first traces of flabby jowls. His eyes were brown—like two small marbles. When his brother had entered he had looked up from his desk, and now he was getting to his feet. His black hair lay flat and even on his head; his blue serge suit was faultless, and the fingernails of his chubby hands were well manicured.

"Hello, Tony," he said, "something I can do?"

Tony shoved back his felt hat, snapped a cigarette to his lips and lit it. It dangled in his mouth, smoke swirling up past his hard, tanned face.

"You've reached the end of your trail, Norman," he said evenly.

Norman Saxon laughed nervously. "What the hell are you talking about?"

TONY SAXON felt something going through him, pumping through him, like slow poison. The skin of his face seemed to be burning. He moved across the room to the desk, leaned forward.

"I'm talking about Masterson. You know damn well that's what I'm talking about, you punk little shyster. This is one time when you aren't going to get away with it."

"Get away with what?"

"What have you done with him? With the girl?"

"I know nothing about Masterson,"

Norman Saxon snapped, "and nothing about any girl."

"You lie!"

Norman bit his lip. "I—I didn't think it would come to you calling me names like that, Tony," he said. "Business is business. I might protect a crook—that's my right according to the law; and it is his right to have protection. But I haven't yet stooped to hiding killers."

Tony Saxon wanted to believe that; he wanted to more than anything else in the world. But things had gone too far and he had to let common sense, not sentiment, sway him. There was the girl—Ethel Burks—and she was important. Her life was at stake. Tony Saxon's gray eyes flickered. He reached out and caught his brother by the coat lapel.

"I said you lie!"

Norman Saxon backed, escaped his grasp. "Get out of my office!" he said. "If you have no search warrant, no warrant for my arrest, I demand, in accordance with the law you represent, that you get out!"

Tony Saxon laughed harshly. "Depend on a law you break to make a fat living to protect you, eh?" He came around the side of the desk. He was going to do something that he would rather shoot himself for first. He lashed out a smashing right squarely into the center of Norman's face.

He saw his brother's lips trickling blood; saw Norman stumbling back into a corner, sliding down to a sitting position on the floor. But what held him fascinated with the horrible fear that he might have made a mistake, was the incredulous light in Norman Saxon's eyes.

"You're going to be sorry for that," Norman said evenly.

Tony could not take his eyes from him. A breeze filtered through the window, rustled the papers on the desk. One slid off, fluttered past Tony and fell to the floor. Tony stooped and picked it up. He stared at it, and Norman scrambled to regain his feet.

He sucked in his breath, read:

"Masterson—Initial protection fee:
\$10,000."

It was evidently a record meant for Norman Saxon's famous secret file the police had been trying to get for over a year. Norman was on his feet.

Tony crumpled the paper in his hand. Sweat was covering his face; blood pounding into his head.

He reached out and hauled the portly lawyer to him. "Damn you," he breathed, "you're going to tell me something—tell me plenty! You're going to talk if I have to kill you to make you do it!"

CHAPTER IV

A DICK CAN GO DEAF

NORMAN SAXON writhed, struggled to free himself. "Keep your filthy hands off me, Tony!" he rasped, "I tell you I had nothing to do with Masterson. I tell you—"

Tony Saxon was breathing hard. He was a dick who had been through plenty of hell; a dick who had found it easy to beat a crook into submission, but this was something different. His own brother, and he was treating him as though he was a rat. But there was a duty, a killer at large, and a girl; for once blood didn't, couldn't count.

He lashed across a vicious left, tore skin from Norman's face. He bore down with a right, then grabbed him before he could fall. Tony's voice was husky.

"Ready to talk?"

Blood running down the corners of his mouth, Norman Saxon shook his head. "You can go to hell, you lousy—"

Tony's right landed on his mouth and Norman swallowed the words, spit out a tooth. He was shaking, trembling; no longer did he look like the town's biggest criminal lawyer.

"You've had this coming for a long time," Tony jerked out, "a helluva long time, Norman. And if you don't

talk now I'm going to have to get *really* rough—"

"Go to hell," Norman muttered again.

Tony lifted his brother to the desk, jerked off his shoes. Norman leaned up to a sitting position. Tony's curved right laid him low. Tony put trembling hands into his pocket and pulled out some matches. He lit one and ran the hot yellow tongue down the sole of Norman's foot.

The lawyer howled in pain. Tony lit another match; did the same thing. It was an old trick, and it didn't hurt so much; it was just the idea of it. The victim had it fixed in his mind that he was being burned to death.

"Going to talk?"

"No! No! Go to—"

Tony jerked him off the desk, held him up by the front of his coat and lit another match. "Your ears this time, Norm—"

Eyes glazed, Norman stared at the match. His face was a bloody mass. At last he shook his head, sighed.

"I—I'll tell you all I know, Tony, only you've got to stop—"

Tony threw him into the swivel chair, then he stepped back, wiped sweat from his face and sucked breath into his lungs. He pulled out the Schenley and gulped some down from the bottle. He corked it and put it back in his pocket.

Norman Saxon looked up, his eyes burning. "You know, Anthony, legally, you can't do this."

"To hell with legalities. You want some more?"

The attorney shook his head, looked at the desk. "Masterson is at the Empire Hotel, Ninth and Mission Streets. The clerk and bell boys are in the know."

"You're not lying? Because if you are—"

"I'm not lying!"

Tony Saxon's gray eyes flickered. Now he was beginning to get somewhere. "How about Ethel Burks?"

Norman Saxon looked up definitely. "I don't know a thing about her!"

"Listen, if you—"

"Damn it, Tony! I don't. Word of honor, I don't know *anything* about her!"

The headquarters dick laughed harshly. "You're the most honorless rat I've ever seen."

"*Tony, I don't know anything about her!*" Norman Saxon insisted.

"You mean it wasn't your boys who snatched her?"

"No. I wasn't even aware of her existence. At the time Masterson was here he didn't, either. It's his idea to not get caught. He knows it's up if he does—witness or no." Norman Saxon's hand was slipping underneath the desk.

"Get away from that!" the detective yelled, slamming him back.

"*Don't hit me again!*" his brother pleaded, his voice quavering.

TONY SAXON pulled him to his feet. "Don't worry. I'm not going to hit you. But what you're going to do is wipe that blood off your face and come with me while we get Masterson. You know, he's liable to do some talking when he finds out you squealed, and that won't go so hot with you."

"I've got a good case," the lawyer grumbled.

Tony Saxon went to the phone and picked it up. "I'm going to get cops posted around the hotel, then—"

The door of the inner office opened and closed. Tony Saxon looked up into the muzzle of a tommy-gun; it was held by the man who looked like a college kid. His face was still frozen, beyond expression. There was another man behind him now.

"Put that phone down, pal," he said.

Tony Saxon put the phone down, and, his eyes hot, looked over at his brother. "Some of your work, eh?"

Norman Saxon was choking, his face was deathly white. "No, these aren't—"

The youth with the Tommy-gun laughed harshly. "Get wise. We got

a line on where you kept the guy who waited to bodyguard you in a case of emergency—and well, he's still there. Kind of tied up now, though; and gagged." He glanced back at Tony. "As for you, dick; I gave you your chance. Now I'm going to give you a taste of lead—"

Sweat was rolling down Tony Saxon's face; his heart was thumping against his side like the pulse beat of a man with fever. "Wait a minute," he said, "you're the young lad who has Ethel Burks, aren't you? You couldn't find Masterson so you snatched her to try and make her give you a lead on that loot. That's the set-up, isn't it?"

The youth sneered. "That was the set-up," he replied, "only now we know where Masterson is; and when we leave this office, we'll still be the only ones still living who know."

The words dropped like lead from the detective's tongue. "I see," he said.

The kid's henchman, wearing a turtle neck sweater and a shabby brown suit, said: "So if you know any poems; anything heroic and noble to spout, dick—"

Tony Saxon's hard gray eyes were unflickering. Slowly, surely, muscles tense, he was moving forward. His brother stared at him for a moment. The kid brought the gun up, tightened his grip on it, ready to fire.

Tony Saxon dove, down deep. But not before his brother had moved. Norman Saxon, fat, soft—a coward. He flung himself over the barrels of the gun, pressed down with all that he had, pulled down hard. Tony saw him and amazement, pride flashed across his face. Yet even as his emotion registered, he was crawling across the floor, had his police positive out.

The man in the red sweater fired and missed Tony's moving body. Tony snapped back a roaring shot that caught the gunman in the shoulder and whirled him about, sent him careening across the room. As he fell

he grabbed the edge of the table, snapped two more shots at the dick. But they were wide.

THE kid threw off Norman Saxon at last, brought the gun up level with Norman's stomach. Tony saw this; saw it in the same instant that he saw the man in the red sweater drawing a bead on him for the next shot. The older gunman couldn't miss this time, and Tony Saxon had but to shoot him down.

But it would be a shot wasted. The brief second it would take to kill the man in the red sweater, Norman would be killed; chopped to pieces by the gun. Tony jerked the trigger of the police positive.

Wham! Wham!

The kid staggered back, his mouth opening, the gun clattering from his hand. The bullet from the other thug's gun came zooming at Tony, sliced through his side.

Tony Saxon felt the hot blood that oozed past his ribs. He was half blinded; only half conscious. But something pounded in him: you've got to go on. A cop has to go until he is dead. He staggered across the room, lifted the gun. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see Norman. Norman on the floor, laughing and crying because his life had been saved. The kid braced against the wall, his face numb, his eyes half glazed. He was in a stupor.

Tony fired. *Wham!*

The man in the red sweater, in the motion of returning fire, was bent double. His shot went into the floor. He dropped his gun from nerveless fingers as though it were red hot, and clutched his stomach. A high, shrill agonized scream broke from his lips.

Tony Saxon swayed over him, the smoking gun still in his hand; and Norman was just getting to his feet. Norman, sweating; shaking and trembling.

The kid shook his head, came suddenly to life. He turned, pawed at the door. Norman saw him and called out,

but when Tony lifted his heavy head it was to see the blurred vision of the kid catapulting like a wounded deer through the doorway. He heard the echo of his steps in the outer offices.

Tony Saxon plodded in the direction of the door, swung through it. He lifted his gun and fired as the kid slipped staggeringly out through the door that led into the hall. Behind him, the man in the red sweater no longer moved.

"Take care of him, Norman. Call the cops and that stuff. I've got to get to the hotel before the kid does."

Norman wiped his face. "I'll call the cops," he said, "but I won't be here when they arrive. Can't."

"That's all right," Tony Saxon answered, and he scarcely knew that he spoke. He moved through the doorway. Norman followed, stopped a few feet from him.

"Tony!"

"Yes?"

"So long, Tony."

"Where you going?" Tony demanded. Alarm crept into his tone now.

"Away," Norman whispered, "away from all this. I—I knew when Masterson came in I was going too far. I—I am going before it's too late."

Tony Saxon straightened up; the pain in his side was throbbing. He rubbed his eyes and looked at his brother. He knew that by rights, by the law for which he stood, he could arrest Norman; that he too would be a criminal to let Norman slip out of his fingers like this. He could handcuff him, wait for the cops.

But just then there seemed to be a screaming protest that pierced his brain cells. *You can't do it. Blood is thicker than anything. Blood is.* In that moment he thought of everything he and Norman had ever done together, from the time they were boys; he recalled the football games, the cheering; the girls they used to know, the proms they attended. And most of all he brought back to his

mind Norman's smiling face the day he announced he was going to be a criminal lawyer. "There are honest lawyers that fight honest cases," he had said; and Tony had replied:

"Is that the kind you are going to be?"

These things he remembered, and a lot more, too. The fights they had about cases Norman took; how they had gradually drifted apart. One working for the law, one against it. And through it all he could gradually discern a life pattern; and he could understand—perhaps as he never had before—what it meant when a man was your brother.

Norman Saxon had said just now: "I—I am going before it's too late."

Tony Saxon laughed. He said: "I didn't hear you, Norman. I didn't hear what you said."

Before Norman Saxon could speak, he went on. He didn't want him to see the mask that was his face, the tautness that had suddenly gripped his muscles; he didn't want to hear any more. He had told the truth, for he was deaf to what his brother had said. For a second in his long career he was inefficient; so that his brother's life could be spared.

CHAPTER V

TAXI TO A TOMB

WHEN Tony Saxon arrived at the Empire Hotel he saw a radio patrol car out front. When he entered he saw the two uniformed cops in the center of a small crowd in the lobby. Barging forward, Saxon shoved to the center of things. His eyes widened. One of the cops was taking the ropes off a man who had been bound and gagged.

"What's the set-up here?"

"Robbery, I guess," said one of the cops. "One of the guests said some men came in—about three of them—held a gun on this fellow and forced him upstairs. We found him up there —like this."

The manager was lifted to his feet. He was sputtering. "They forced me to the business office," he began. "they took—"

"That room I saw didn't look like any business office," said one of the radio officers.

"No. Later they took me there. It was my room. They thought I would have some more money there," recited the man.

Tony Saxon looked him up and down. "You mean they came here and snatched the baby you were getting plenty to keep hidden. That is what you mean, isn't it?"

The hotel man stared.

"Throw bracelets on him, boys," Tony Saxon instructed. "Accomplice in the escape of a killer. In case you want to know—until a few minutes ago this was Masterson's hideout."

"Masterson!"

"Yeah, Masterson!" Saxon stuck a cigarette between his lips and lit it. He puffed for a moment, looked around. He was disgusted. For all the work he had done tonight he had gotten practically nowhere. Ethel Burks was gone; and now Masterson was a captive with her. Queer, that the plot of an old man, a plot that must have brewed for years in his twisted brain, could blow a dynamite lid; that so many people could be swept innocently and intentionally into the web that revolved around what was meant to be a lone man's perfect crime.

He was suddenly aware that a vicious, red-haired girl standing across the lobby, was staring at him. Tony puffed on the cigarette, then flipped it out the door. What he needed was a drink; a good drink, then he would have to get back on the job—mess that it was now.

He started for the door, noticing that the girl's eyes were still on him. She was dressed in green—green skirt, shoes and hat. Her face was olive in complexion and amazingly clear. The crimson of her lips matched the luster of her fluffy red hair.

"Helluva time for a woman to be on the make," he said to himself, but somehow he felt that that wasn't the case. Her stare, even when his back was to her and he couldn't see her any more, penetrated into the inner channels of his subconscious and vaguely disturbed him.

ON the street he felt better. He lifted the Schenley from his pocket and took two large gulps. Wiping his mouth, he lit another cigarette, then set off down Ninth Street at a good pace, headed in the direction of Market.

He was almost to the corner of Market Street when a taxi cab stopped a few yards ahead of him. The girl in green alighted and paid the driver.

Saxon reached her a moment later. She called out. He spun about, shoved back his gray felt hat.

"Yes?" He noticed now that the taxi was waiting, motor idling.

"I would like to talk to you," she said, and her voice was tense.

He glanced at the taxi. "Got a couple of sweet boy friends that would like to talk to me also, I suppose."

She said: "No. The cab is empty. But we can get another if you don't believe me. What I have to say is important. It cannot be trusted to street corner conversation. It—it's a matter of life and death!"

"Okay, then, we ride the cab."

When they were settled and the taxi was weaving in and out through the thin traffic on Market Street, she leaned back and drew in breath.

"You are a detective?" she asked.

"You must have thought so," he offered dryly.

She nodded. "I have information. But I do not want to give it away. Since it is valuable—"

"The police department is not often in the market," he snapped, "what does it concern?"

"The whereabouts of Ethel Burks," she said softly.

He straightened, eyed her suspiciously for a moment. He smiled, though there was no humor in it. "What's your price?"

She was looking out the window and he thought he saw her eyes glistening. "A big price," was all she answered.

"Well—how much? A grand? Two grand?"

"Not money."

A queer feeling prodded through his chest. "I see. Then—?"

"I am Ruth Compton," she told him, looking at him for the first time in the last few minutes. "I work in burlesque."

He said: "Hell, I wouldn't have thought so."

"That isn't what's important," she went on. "I'm in love with a boy who until recently has been pretty straight. But he got in with a bad crowd. They took him through what they call a 'hardening' school. They taught him to shoot, to kill; although he has committed no murders yet. His name is Jim Brady. You've probably never heard of him. It probably means nothing to you. He meant to be honest—but, well—someone in the gang put him up to getting a job as reporter on one of the newspapers. You see—"

"Reporter?" Saxon gasped. And suddenly the tie-up of everything struck him like a sledge hammer. The kid with the Tommy-gun was a reporter, one of the many who had interviewed Ethel Burks as eye-witness. That was how he got word to the gang so quickly that there was sixty thousand dollars in loot not yet found by the police. Then, hearing the other reporters telling Ethel to come to Tony Saxon's room where he was working out the case, he had tipped the gang to her whereabouts. The kidnaping had been almost a push-over with an innocent faced kid maneuvering things!

"But he is in a terrible jam now," Ruth Compton went on, "and although he thinks it's going to bring

him a lot of money, I know that it will only lead to prison." She was looking out the window again. "Maybe—the noose."

The cab swung right on Embarcadero, speeded up past the docks. The bay was in plain sight; the new bridge, ferrys wending back and forth, gulls circling around. The breeze that slipped in through the windows became crisper and colder. The wheels hummed over the cobble stones on the street.

"Your bargain," Saxon said, "is that you'll tell me where Ethel Burks is being held, provided I see that your boy friend gets off free when the round up is made. *That* is your bargain."

"Yes, that is it. Take it, or reject it." Her tone was cold and final.

Saxon sat back, lit a cigarette. "I am not authorized to accept such bargains."

She flared angrily: "Are you authorized to let a girl like Miss Burks be tortured? Are you authorized to let a killer tear off her fingernails trying to make her talk? You cops and what you are authorized to do, and not do, make me sick. Wave the flag of duty and let innocent people die! The law has no soul, has it, no feeling, no emotion? It knows only one thing—duty!"

He laughed harshly. "I'm going to confess something, Miss Compton. I'm the world's lousiest cop at the present moment. Take me to the station. I'll pick up some boys—"

"No! The agreement must be that no one else is in on it. Jim might be killed if there are others. And they won't *all* agree to these provisions. At least if they do, they'll forget about it after the arrests are made. Cops are notorious for that!"

"Are they?" he asked hollowly. Then: "So you want me to go alone? I'm beginning to see things more clearly now. You're bait for a trap and I'm supposed to fall into it!"

"That's not true. So help me, it isn't!"

"How many men are there?"
"Five."

Saxon smiled thinly. "Five—against one. What the hell do you think I am?"

Ruth Compton shrugged. "There are ways of doing things. But if you're afraid—well, I guess the deal will have to be off."

His face burned. "The deal," he said tensely, "is *on*. Where do we go from here?"

The cab driver turned and smiled. "Straight into the jaws of hell to get a girl," he said.

Sweat broke out on his forehead. He stared, as though he could not believe his eyes. The driver of the taxi was Norman Saxon!

CHAPTER VI

GUN-GAUNTLET

IT was a moment before Tony Saxon could speak. The roof of his mouth was dry—parched, and his tongue was suddenly as clumsy as a piece of wood in his mouth. He swallowed, tried to laugh; but the laughter choked in his throat. At last:

"But Norman—what are you doing here?"

Norman Saxon was watching the road again. He spoke over his shoulder. "Briefly, Tony, it runs something like this. When you said what you did, and left, I knew exactly how you felt. I began thinking what a little heel I was to run out like that on you. The more I thought about it, the more I knew I couldn't go through with it. I realized—you had been right about everything, ever since college.

"There was one thing I could do that I knew would help you tremendously. Miss Compton and I once did business together. A suit over a contract—something I handled special. Once she came in with that kid who had the Tommy-gun tonight—Jim Brady. I recognized him. He must

have recognized me, too. Well, I got in touch with Ruth—”

She took it on from there. “He worked fast. Awfully fast. We had no idea where the girl was hidden. But I looked up all the likely places—places I had gone with Jim. Then we began telephoning. At one of the places I recognized the voice of one of the men in the outfit with which Jim is working. Norman insisted that I contact you alone. He bribed a cab driver to let him have the car, and his coat and hat. If you agreed he said we would all three—”

Tony Saxon nodded, and there was a wild pounding in his chest. “Sure. I get it. Perfect, airtight set-up! Step on it, Norman!”

“We’ve got to take a boat up the Sacramento River,” Ruth continued. “A short, fast ride. Norman phoned ahead for the man to have his own personal speed boat ready.”

Tony Saxon was reloading his police positive and made no answer.

The house was set back a half mile on a lonely stretch of land between two river-bank towns. Shrouded among the low-branched trees that hid the advancing trio, the white moon glinting off its roof, and the lights on the top floor gleaming dully, it presented a sinister picture. Saxon, his brother, and the girl were conversing in the concealment of the trees. The house lay a hundred yards across an open clearing.

“You’d better stay here, Ruth,” Tony Saxon whispered. He could hear the croaking of frogs; the song of crickets.

She said: “No. I’ll wager Lane is up there in the third floor window. I’ll go into the clearing and call to him. Pretend as though I came here to see Jim. When he leaves the window to come down and let me in—you two can race across the clearing to one of the windows.”

“That’s suicide for you.”

“No. I know them. They wouldn’t shoot me.”

Before he could stop her, she had stepped out into the clearing. Tony Saxon saw the man called Lane standing up, saw him level a gun down. She called:

“Lane!”

“Who is it?” His voice sounded hoarse and faint through the night.

“Ruth Compton! I’ve got to see Jim.”

“Brady. That damn fool kid!” Lane shouted. “Wait a minute. I’ll get some one to let you in.”

HE left the window. Tony and Norman raced across the clearing, reached the house, breathing hard, and hugged the shadows on the side of it. Breathlessly, gun in hand, Tony Saxon waited until Ruth was admitted to the house. He noticed that it was the kid reporter, Jim Brady, limping a little, and bandaged up, who opened the door.

“Sweetie,” he said, “how in the devil did you get here?”

She didn’t answer, and as the door closed, Tony Saxon heard Brady’s voice fade away.

Norman said: “She’s a swell kid.”

Tony Saxon nodded. Already he was prying open the window. Beyond its sheen of glass lay darkness. Carefully, slowly, sweat creasing his cheeks, he lifted it from the sill. He helped his brother up, boosted him through. He followed, leaped to the sill and crawled silently over.

The headquarters dick and his brother stood together in the darkness. A sliding door stood ahead of him, light slithering from beneath it. Norman Saxon had a gun in hand now, too. Tony Saxon moved forward first, pressed his ear to the door.

He could hear violent argument. Brady and the other men were arguing about Ruth’s untimely arrival.

“We’ve got to get to Ethel first,” Tony whispered, “get her and Ruth out of the house.”

He chanced opening the sliding door a quarter of an inch. A short hallway stood beyond; the argument

was coming from a room off it. A stairway stood at the end of the hall—past the door of the room in which the men were bickering.

Tony Saxon said: "We're into it, old man; we've got to fight like we've never fought in our lives. You stay here right here at this door. You'll be protected from their fire that way. But if any of them try to take the stairs—let them have it."

"Depend on me," came Norman's hushed answer, "I'll keep them down here."

Quickly then, and silently, Tony Saxon shoved the door back far enough to get through. Gun tight in his hand, he tip-toed down the hall. Hair seemed to rise on the back of his neck, and his heart was pounding so hard that he could almost hear it. In a moment he had to pass that room, and he had to pass it without being seen.

He waited, listened, then peered into the room. No one was watching the door for the moment. Tony Saxon stepped past it, raced for the stairway. Like a big cat he padded up the stairs, body lithe, gray eyes like granite.

On the second floor landing he looked around, and the silence oppressed him. Faintly from downstairs he could hear the drone of voices. He gazed at the rooms lining the corridor, moved slowly toward the closet one and opened it.

It was empty. Quietly, he closed the door, went to the next room. On the third and top floor just above him, Lane was sitting, on watch, a Tommy-gun in his lap.

SUDDENLY Saxon heard a thump; smoke came billowing out from under the last door in the hall.

He raced for it, flung it open. For a moment he pawed at the smoke that came rushing up into his face, then he peered through it. In a corner blonde Ethel Burks lay tied up, a gag stretched across her pretty mouth. But in the center of the floor, ropes

around his body, a gag also in his mouth, was a queer, pale-looking old man.

It was Henry Masterson!

Somehow, he had managed to roll from the bed, had managed to get matches from his pocket. He had lit off newspapers that were strewn across the floor. Already, the flame had reached an oil burner, and Masterson was trying to shove the burner over with his body.

Tony Saxon rushed forward, but it was too late for the oil burner came thudding to the floor, spilling fluid everywhere. The hungry little flames caught on, soared into a magnificent blaze and charged down the woodwork. Saxon leapt over the old man, drew a knife and slashed away Ethel Burks' bonds. He helped her to her feet.

"You've got to get out of here," he said. "Get out, and get out fast!"

She said: "I knew you would come, Tony. I knew you would!"

"I'm a helluva heel for not having arrived sooner," he gasped.

She was half laughing, half crying. "They were going to torture me. How, I don't know. They are downstairs right now. Some one came in, I think. But they're coming back—"

The flame was crackling now, and Henry Masterson was only an inch from it. Saxon stooped, picked him up. He cut away his ropes. But the old man only stood and laughed. There was madness in his eyes; his lips drooled. He had cracked under the strain of all that had happened. Cracked and gone wild.

Saxon's gray eyes flickered, he held the gun on him. "Get out into the hall!" he barked.

Masterson seemed not to hear. Still laughing, loud and shrilly; a laughter that echoed and reechoed above the roar of the fire, he left the room. Tony Saxon could hear guns popping from downstairs. He picked Ethel up in his arms, swept over the flames and arrived in the hall.

Lane, a huge, beefy man, garbed in a worn blue suit, was rushing down the flight of stairs that came from the third floor, the Tommy-gun in his arms.

The second floor hall on which Saxon stood holding Ethel in his arms, was about thirty feet in length. At one end was the stairway that led down to the first floor; at the opposite end, the stairway that led to the top floor. It was these top floor steps on which the beefy Lane was now kneeling.

Saxon put Ethel down and went for his gun. But it was too late, for Lane, crouched on the third floor steps, opened fire with the Tommy.

Brrrrrrrrrrrrrt!

CHAPTER VII TO THE LIVING

FATE and fortune kissed both of Tony Saxon's cheeks in that moment, for Lane had not yet sighted the gun far enough down and the bullets went high. By the time the second blast was lined on the machine gun's cartridge belt, Saxon had moved to the foot of the third floor ascending steps. His police positive cracked.

Wham!

Lane stumbled, came tumbling down those steps; but somehow, miraculously, as he rolled, he kept hold of the gun. Saxon lunged at the machine gun that Lane was fumbling with in his lap.

Even as he did this, he saw Ethel Burks backing in the oposite direction from him, in the direction of the steps that led downstairs. She was staring at the white-faced Henry Masterson who, shouting and screaming now, was racing about with lighted matches. Matches that he touched to every ignitable thing in sight.

Below, where Norman Saxon was trying to hold off the men who had been in the room on the first floor, came the heavy clatter of gun-fire.

Lane suddenly jerked, sent the

detective careening in the direction of the wall on the left of the stairway.

Saxon's back jarred against the wall, but almost at once he was on his feet, bringing the police positive up.

Suddenly he saw the kid reporter—Jim Brady—racing up the front stairs from the first floor now, a gun in his hand. A thin, ragged looking man was coming up after him.

Saxon, seeing these men had escaped Norman's barrage from below, could think of only one thing. They had gotten his brother! They had killed Norman! But even as this thought flashed through his mind he heard more shots downstairs; realized—for the first time—that besides the kid and his skinny companion, there were more of the gang on the first floor. Norman had been, was, even now, hopelessly outnumbered!

The beefy Lane, still sitting with the Tommy in his lap, was oblivious to everything except Saxon's weaving figure. He leveled the machine gun.

Brrrrrrrrrt.

Saxon had leapt a moment before the clattering started. He kicked his toe into the beefy face of the gunner. The machine gun charge went wild. Saxon saw that some of the Tommy's bullets had hit Jim Brady. The kid staggered in the middle of the hall and blood streamed from the place his eyes and his nose had been. He crumpled, dead before he touched the floor.

The skinny, ragged looking man who had been behind the kid reporter, stopped and stared down. But Lane, still on the floor, was jerking about; his face was a vicious mask. Saxon slugged down with the butt of the police positive, and Lane bent over the Tommy as though he had suddenly gone to sleep.

Flame was shooting from the room where Ethel had been kept a prisoner; Saxon could see nothing beyond it, though he heard Ethel scream; heard the rantings of the mad ex-bank teller; and he knew that the

skinny gunman who had come up with the kid was on the other side of that fountain of flame too.

AS he paused, prepared to move, the raging fire spanned the hall and leaped to the third floor stairs, at the foot of which Saxon was still standing.

Suddenly he realized he was trapped by the fire. Trapped alone with Lane, the dead machine gun killer.

Tony Saxon knew that to help Norman and save Ethel Burks he had to get past that wall of fire. He glanced about, wildly, desperately. It would be humanly impossible to run through it, he could see.

A way came to him presently. A chance, and he must take it. He leaped up the third-floor stairs. Only the bannister of these was burning. Almost at the top, he looked down at the scene beyond the wall of flame. Masterson was headed for the first floor. The skinny gunman was twisting Ethel's arm and trying to make her follow.

Saxon lined the police positive and fired. He caught the man in the arm. He spun about, raised his weapon.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

But Detective Tony Saxon was not there. He had leaped over the bannister and he crashed, his legs buckling beneath him, on the floor beyond the point where the fire had spanned the

hall outside the room where Masterson had started it. The fire was advancing no more than a foot behind him. Saxon shook his head, raised the police positive.

Wham!

His bullet crashed simultaneously with that of the skinny man, and Saxon felt a hot slug tear across his side. The gunman, however, crumpled to the floor. He did not move again. Shoulder bleeding, mind reeling, Saxon crawled forward on his hands and knees. He could hear no more shots downstairs.

"Go down, Ethel," he said hoarsely.

Instead, she came forward and helped him get up. Saxon did not know whether he was dead or alive. He seemed to be incapable of thought. Yet, he heard the crackling of the raging fire behind him. Holding the bannister, he and Ethel started downstairs.

What they saw halfway down almost paralyzed Tony Saxon. Never, in all of his life, had he seen such a sight; and never, so long as he lived, would he again. He knew that. Knew somehow this was the biggest, the most dramatic moment in his lifetime.

THREE men were lying about, two of them writhing on the floor. The third one was dead. Henry Masterson was in the room beyond,

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gibbering, and still setting things on fire. Ruth Compton was standing by the sliding door, sobbing.

But the thing that gripped and held Tony Saxon was the sight of the man who stood in the middle of all this. Norman Saxon, a gun limp in his hand; his coat drenched with blood; his hair hanging over his thick, pale face; his eyes like chunks of brown glass in his head. His brother was swaying.

The detective came down to where he was, and just then Norman Saxon, smiling as his brother had never seen him smile, slipped slowly to the floor. Tony, oblivious to his own pain, knelt. Ethel Burks knelt. Norman was whispering, and even as he tried to do this, blood bubbled across his lips.

"I—I did the—best—I could. I tried to—hold—them. Tried to—make up for—the kind—of life—"

His eyelids drooped as though lead weighed them down. Something rattled in his throat, and then he relaxed, and Tony could feel death in Norman Saxon's hand. Death. He was stunned. He did not know what to do, what to say. He looked up at Ethel.

"This—" he said hoarsely—"this is the death of a great lawyer."

Much later, Ethel Burks, Ruth Compton and Tony Saxon met. They went to Ruth's apartment and had supper.

"Yes," Ethel Burks said. "the police chased Henry Masterson, and I followed behind them. Curious. When the chase led away from the alley and the cops were gone I noticed something—the suitcase—and it looked as though it had been hurriedly thrown. It was under the building in the alley. I thought a gang had put it there and would be back.

"I thought I ought to save that money if I could, for a lot of people would be along soon, but I was terribly frightened. There was no one else around yet, so at last I pulled it out and looked inside. After that I was scared. I didn't know what to do. I was afraid whoever had put it

there—or one of the gang I thought had taken it—would return. The only thing I could think of was to get it to the closest place at hand where it would be safe. So I took it over to the Ferry Building and put it in one of those steel lockers. Then I went home to think what I should do. I began to wonder if the police would believe my story.

"I walked back then to where the papers said Masterson lived, expecting some police would be there, but as soon as the reporters found out I was the only one who had seen what happened they sort of took possession of me. They had already been told Tony Saxon was on the case, and knowing where you were, sent me to your room to tell you what I knew."

He said quietly: "Yes, I know. Jim Brady was one of the reporters. He tipped his gang that you knew where the loot was and that you would be with me. Naturally, with sixty grand in the offing, the crooks were willing to take any risks. It is unfortunate that you had to be mixed up in it. Unfortunate too, that my brother, although he knew nothing of these men, had dealings with Masterson. It was Norman's mistake."

"Yes, but he made up for it," Ruth Compton came in evenly, "and—and Jim Brady paid the price he knew he must pay. I have tried to look at it that way."

Tony Saxon lit a cigarette, poured some Schenley whiskey.

"As for Henry Masterson," he said softly, "the trip he wanted to take has lead a different course than he expected. The doctor say's he'll spend the rest of his life in the asylum at Napa."

Ruth Compton suddenly stood up and lifted her pony of whiskey. "Well, for tonight at least," she said, "let's forget the gloom. I suggest we drink a toast to the living!"

Tony got to his feet, and Ethel Burks also got up.

"To the living," Tony Saxon said. And they all drank.

Death on the Hook

By John K. Butler



Violence was no stranger to the waterfront—where hates and loves were often measured by bullets. But even the waterfront was rocked by the news that Sandy Taylor was taking death on a hook.

A GAIN in the silence of the waterfront, the scream sounded. It seemed to originate from the outer end of Fisherman's Wharf, but you couldn't tell for sure, because it came shrilly through the low-hung fog in countless little echoes, echoes that had sprung hollowly metallic from the corrugated iron roofs of warehouses, hauntingly forlorn from the damp walls of the Van Cise Cannery. Those echoes cried out like the voices of many forgotten ghosts; sudden and mysterious, they raced their eerie cries through dark sleeping alleys and empty truck-lanes.

A cobble-stone narrow street approaches Fisherman's Wharf. On one side are the crowded wooden buildings where the Japanese and Mexican laborers live. The men go out in the fishing tugs; their wives work in the canneries; in the daytime their numerous children, when not at school, howl

and yell through the filthy streets and alleys.

On the other side of the street approaching the wharf is a district where American men and families live. It's just like the right-hand district, except the people residing in it are smugly certain it is better.

At night the fishermen with their wives, and more often *without* their wives, gather in mutual territory—the cobblestone street. There are bright lights there, a ten-cent movie, beer parlors, a dance hall, and upstairs over those places, if they know you and you have a little money, you can get action on roulette, chuck-a-luck, black jack, craps. You can get women of all ages, nationality, and degrees of appeal, and they will be your companion for the evening to hit the high spots. They're very friendly, but you get only what you pay for, and if you take aboard too much hooch and pass out, they frisk your pockets, and you wake up in an alley with indistinct memories, a thick tongue, and no money.

One of the high spots is "Whaler Joe's."

"Whaler Joe's" is a beer parlor. Really, it's a saloon. But the word "saloon" is outlawed in California, so Whaler Joe calls it a beer parlor.

Upstairs over "Whaler Joe's" is a place you can go if you're a "friend" and have some jack. It's not called anything, because whatever you tried to call it, it's *still* outlawed in the State of California.

"Whaler Joe's" is situated at the very beginning of Fisherman's Wharf, so the scream and its many ghostly echoes sounded through the open doors and raced along the bar.

"Did you hear that?" Whaler Joe asked.

"What?"

"Like somebody yelling."

"I didn't hear anything," Sandy Taylor said.

Whaler Joe was a huge, deep-chested man, built like a heavyweight professional wrestler. His stomach

had taken aboard a bit too much food in recent years, and bulged a little, but Joe was still able to hold a Japanese in one hand, a Mexican in the other, and knock their heads together and pitch them violently through the front door.

Joe got his prefix name, "Whaler," from his early experiences off the coast of Alaska. His beer parlor had real whaling harpoons crossed like swords along an entire wall, and there were actual photographs of Whaler Joe "whale fishing" in the days before commercialization developed the idea of shooting harpoons at whales out of cannons.

"There it is again," Whaler Joe said.

"What?"

"That yelling. Like a woman, sort of a scream."

SANDY TAYLOR put his stein of beer on the bar, cocked his head and listened. He didn't hear anything but the drone of half-drunk voices along the bar and the tin-can music from an automatic player piano that drummed out any of six tunes for a nickel each, the most modern being "Sweet Sue."

"Shut that damn' thing off!" Whaler Joe barked.

He strode around the bar to the piano and punched a lever. The music suddenly ceased.

"What's the idea!" an American tuna fisherman demanded. "That's my nickel! What—"

"Pipe down!" Whaler Joe's voice boomed. "Everybody pipe down!"

They piped down. They all became rigid, formed a stiff scene as is made by a movie film stopped dead in the projector.

"Listen a minute," Whaler Joe said. He tipped his big round head to one side, listening.

The silence was strange. A fat rat scampered over the sawdust and vanished in a hole by the kitchen. They could all hear, faintly, the dance orchestra playing from Fisherman's Heaven, the deep-throated whistle of

HD

a trans-Pacific steamship crawling through dense fog around the breakwater.

"Listen," Whaler Joe repeated tensely.

They all listened.

Sandy Taylor, hunched at the bar, cocked an ear.

Not one man in the place knew who Sandy Taylor really was. They thought he was a "tuna man" between jobs; they guessed he might have been employed at one time as a foreman at the Van Cise Cannery. Whaler Joe figured him to be a conman, or a gambler.

None of them had the slightest suspicion that he was the ace undercover operator for the Harbor Police. Sandy Taylor couldn't let them suspect. That was part of the job. His value to the Harbor Police grew largely from his ability to meet the fishermen, hangers-on, and the people along that cobblestone street on even terms. His value was in being a policeman and not looking like a policeman. He wasn't a fictional detective who disguised himself with beard and dark glasses; he disguised himself by his easy mingling with the working men of the harbor, by mixing with everybody except police officers, by living in the district, by pretending to get drunk in the district, by gambling there, by "asking for touches" there, by, occasionally, asking for jobs.

"There it goes again," Whaler Joe said.

They all heard it this time.

Down the bar a man remarked loudly: "Sounds like a dame, and she don't like something." He guffawed as though he'd gotten over a top-form joke.

SANDY TAYLOR dropped his cigarette into a cuspidor. His eyes narrowed perceptibly. His work tonight wasn't, he thought, with a woman's scream. But as a law officer he had to respond.

In a way, it annoyed him.

He was supposed to be working on

another case. A case of a stolen necklace.

It happened last week.

The steam-yacht, *Mary II*, had been pulling up anchor in the waters of the Southern California Yacht Club for a cruise to Santa Catalina Island. Lots of distinguished guests aboard. Mrs. Edgar Farnsworth-Smith was aboard. There was a party. Somebody who didn't belong to the party managed to reach the yacht via rowboat, get aboard, and lift a twenty-thousand dollar pearl necklace from Mrs. Edgar Farnsworth-Smith's cabin. It was a dark night, foggy, like tonight. The yacht's captain took a shot at the thief. His shot went wild. The thief rowed away in the fog. The captain heard the dip-swish of the oars.

Sandy Taylor was commissioned to recover the stolen necklace. Somebody in the harbor had taken it. That person would have to "unload" it, "fence" it. Sandy Taylor told the Captain of the Harbor Police: "I'll drift around; pretty soon I'm bound to find out who lifted the string of pearls."

So tonight Sandy dropped in for some drinks at Whaler Joe's. He figured that any man who had fenced twenty-thousand dollars' worth of necklace, if he were a harbor man, would be spending the profits at Whaler Joe's.

Whaler Joe hadn't been back of the bar when Sandy Taylor first entered. That was at ten P. M. At eleven P. M. Whaler came down the stairs.

Sandy Taylor had a deep hunch that the man who swiped the string of pearls might be upstairs, gambling his profits. But Sandy didn't know Whaler Joe well enough to inquire about the "customers" upstairs.

At eleven-twenty, the first scream and its many eerie echoes drifted into the beer parlor. At eleven-twenty-five, Whaler Joe said to Sandy: "What'd I tell you! You hear it?"

"I heard it," Sandy clipped.

He made a run for the front door. Whaler Joe clumped over the sawdust after him.

Somebody shouted: "It was a dame, all right—yelling bloody murder!" and every customer of Whaler Joe's set down his drink and joined in the surge through the front door into the street.

Sandy Taylor was long, lean, and hard-muscled; he had the stride of a marathon runner as he headed out through the wet fog toward the outer end of Fisherman's Wharf. The customers of the parlor had been drinking heavily and they panted along far behind; only the powerfully built Whaler Joe could keep up with Sandy.

IT was thickly dark at the end of the wharf. The riding lights of boats were like timid candles blinking in the mist. A night light burned over the locked doors of the Van Cise Cannery; another light burned brightly in the fog from the top of a derrick-like apparatus used to hoist tons of tuna from the holds of the fishing tugs.

Sandy Taylor heard the scream again. His shoes slithered on the planks that were always slippery from fish and the melting ice used to preserve the catches.

Sandy Taylor stopped at the edge of the wharf and looked down.

A broad-beamed tug lay against the pier pilings, moored. It was dark and deserted except for the electric hand-lantern set on the deck by the pilot house, and the two dim figures showing in the glow.

One of the figures was sprawled face down, motionless. The other figure was Dorothy March.

Sandy Taylor swung around on the wooden pier ladder, greasy from fog and the boots of fishermen. He descended rapidly to the deck of the launch.

Dorothy March threw her arms about him, hid her face against him, sobbing tensely, sobbing in tight, throaty little gasps.

"It's Daddy—I think—I think he's dead!"

For a moment he just stood there, holding her. He was fond of Dorothy March. She had been born and raised in the harbor district, but she had grown up aloof to the harbor men. She had dark hair and dark eyes and a figure that the men stood and watched when she walked along the street.

She'd been taking care of Dad March for years. Old Dad needed plenty of taking care of. He had once been skipper on a tanker and since retiring on a small income he had little interest in anything but talk of ships and rye whiskey. The rye and the talk went together. Rye led to talk and talk led to rye.

Sandy Taylor said gently: "Let me look at him."

He knelt down beside the sprawled figure, moved the lantern closer. Up above on the pier many white faces stared down. Whaler Joe and two others dropped easily down the ladder.

Dad March's head had a queer twist from the neck. There was blood in the matted gray hair. His neck was broken. One of his arms was far stretched toward a shattered gin bottle.

A voice behind Sandy Taylor remarked: "The old boy fell off the pier."

Taylor looked around. It was Jeff Reynolds. Jeff was one of the harbor's loafers. He had a thin, bony frame from which his clothes hung loosely, a sharp discolored nose, and never a job. He lived by chiseling and selling lottery tickets. He liked to tell about the time he sailed a canoe to South America on a bet and the long period he put in as Second Mate on the S.S. Flower of the East.

"How do you know he fell off the pier?" Taylor asked directly.

Jeff Reynolds shuffled his feet awkwardly. "Huh?" But he didn't ask Taylor why he was so curious. His decisive way seemed to give him the right to be leader in this situation.

"I said how do you know? Did you see it?"

"No. Hell, I didn't see it. But it's easy to see how it happened. He fell

off the pier and banged his noggin on the deck. He was awful drunk."

Taylor looked over at Dorothy. "Were you with him?"

She shook her head slowly. Her lips moved and it was a second before she got the words out. "No. He said he'd be home by ten, and when he didn't come I got worried. I went out looking for him. You know how he gets when he's had too much to drink. I was afraid he might be lying in some alley. I came along with the lantern. I saw his hat back there, so I held the lantern over the edge of the pier. This—" She couldn't say any more.

TAYLOR spoke over his shoulder to Jeff Reynolds. "What makes you think he was drunk?"

"I seen him."

"When?"

"Tonight. He barged into Whaler's early. Didn't he, Whaler?"

"Yeah," said Whaler Joe. "He come in about seven."

"He got very drunk?"

"Yeah," Whaler Joe nodded. "He wanted to cut me high cards for ten bucks a cut. I kind-a hated to play when he was drunk, but he got nasty about it. So I took him in the back room and played him. Jeff was there. Old Dad had a run of bad luck. He kept calling for double or nothing on the cuts, and that made him lose worse. I hate to see a guy lose so much jack, but after all, cards is cards. It might be me losing next time. We all gotta take our turns."

"How much did he lose?"

"Well—" Whaler Joe stroked hard jaw. "It must've been five thousand. Say five thousand five hundred."

Sandy Taylor brought up with a jerk, his muscles tensing. "What?"

Dorothy March gasped. "Five thousand dollars? How could Dad-dy—"

"Where did he get that much money to lose?" Sandy Taylor asked quickly.

"How the hell do I know?" Whaler Joe snapped. "I don't ask guys where

they get their jack. Anyway, Old Dad had an income."

"But it's only a hundred a month!" Dorothy exclaimed. "We use that to live on."

Whaler Joe shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe he won it somewhere in a lottery or something. How do I know?"

Sandy Taylor did some thinking. Dorothy sat on a bench by the pilot house, sobbing in that throaty way, sobbing into her hands.

Sandy said to the men above: "Go call the cops. We'll have to tell them all about this."

"Everything?" Whaler Joe asked worriedly.

"Sure. Why?"

"Well, I sort of hate to admit about the gambling. They might hold me on it."

"Don't be a stoop," Sandy said. "You tell your story. Everybody gambles around here. They won't hold you."

Jeff Reynolds scratched his head thoughtfully. "You know," he began, "it is sort of funny when you stop think of it. Where would Old Dad get so much cash all of a sudden?"

Nobody answered that, but they all thought about it. Sandy Taylor began searching the dead man's pockets. He found no money. He found only a house key and a flat leather case. He held the case to the light. Gold lettering on the outside read:

SWANSON AND COMPANY

Jewelers

Sandy whistled softly and opened the case. It was lined with purple velvet formed in a shape to hold a necklace nestling there, but there was no necklace. The jewel case was empty.

"Holy smokes!" Jeff Reynolds grunted, peering over Sandy's shoulder. "Say, you remember reading about the necklace that was swiped from some rich old hen on the *Mary II* last week?"

Sandy studied the man carefully.
"What about it?"

"Well, I seen in the paper the pearls come from Swanson and Company. Honest I did."

"So did I," Sandy Taylor agreed pointedly.

"You know what I bet?"

"What do you bet?"

"I bet," Jeff Reynolds said in a voice that carried to the men looking down from the pier, "I bet Old Dad was the guy that swiped that string of oyster-drops. There's the case right there. He goes and fences the pearls and that's where he got all the money he lost to Whaler Joe tonight. So Dad gets tight and comes barging out here and falls off the pier—"

Dorothy March was clinging to Sandy's arm then. He saw the shine and shimmer of her eyes in the lantern's glow. "Sandy—you don't believe that, do you? You don't believe daddy stole the necklace? Not really?"

"It sure looks like it," Jeff Reynolds said.

"Sure," there was a note of irony in Sandy Taylor's tone, "it looks like it, all right. The trouble is, it looks *too much* like it!"

THE undercover man remained in the deep dark beside the Van Cise Cannery until the last curiosity seeker had gone. It took about an hour, altogether, including the removal of the body.

The police made a mild investigation and were very convinced that Dad March had met death by accidentally falling off the pier to the deck of the tug while intoxicated. The thing that took them away still interested was the jewel case; it looked like a definite clue to the missing Farnsworth-Smith pearls. Also, the tale of Dad March's gambling loss looked like a clue.

When the last footstep, the last huskily excited voice, died away in the foggy night, Sandy Taylor stepped out of the corner in which he'd been waiting and snapped on a pocket flash.

The beam was a weird white shaft in the damp gloom; it made a circle of brightness on the worn wharf planks. Sandy Taylor walked behind the circle, slowly, hunched in thought.

He stood for a while at the place from which Dad March must have pitched over.

Heels tapped faintly somewhere behind him, and he immediately switched the light off. He dropped his hand into his pocket, closing his fingers over the butt of his service Colt.

When the heels sounded closer, he aimed the flash in that direction and suddenly snapped the switch.

Dorothy March shuddered and stood in petrified fright as the beam of light played on her.

"Hello," Sandy said.

"Oh—is it you? I've been hunting for you. I couldn't find you back on the street."

He lowered the flash from her eyes, turned it straight down. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes." Her voice was breathlessly tense. "It's something—well, I didn't know whether to tell the police or not. Maybe it's silly, and anyway I'm his daughter and they'd think I was just talking."

"What?"

"You've been a good friend, Sandy. You don't believe daddy stole that necklace from the yacht, do you?"

"I'm pretty sure he didn't," the undercover man told her. "Is that what you wanted to ask?"

"Not all. It's something else. It's about that bottle, the one that was broken by his hand on the deck."

Sandy's hard smile wasn't noticeable in the drifting mist. Distantly, in the outer harbor, a vessel hooted mournfully. The fog siren screeched eerily from the breakwater.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "I thought of it, too. It was a gin bottle. Your dad never drank anything but rye. He'd rather be sober than drink gin."

"Yes—poor old dad. He couldn't help drinking. It was because he

missed being a skipper so much. Don't you think there's something queer about the gin bottle?"

HE put an arm across her shoulders, gently, and said slowly: "Look, Dorothy; he's gone. The thing that happened to him, happened quick. I don't think he felt much pain. It didn't make any difference to *him* which way he died, because it was all over in a second. But sooner or later you may have to realize *this*, Dorothy. I *don't think* Old Dad had any accident."

Her breath sucked in tightly. "You mean—"

"I mean his neck was broken, all right. But not from falling off the pier."

"You think somebody— Do you think—"

"Yes," he said firmly.

"But who would do that? Dad never had any enemies. Who would do a cruel thing like that to him?"

"That's just it. He never had an enemy. That's why this person who did it is extra devilish. I'm going to catch him, Dorothy. That's the only thing we can do for dad now."

She clutched his arm. "You know who?"

"I've got a guess. I'm going to check it."

"I'm going with you!"

"No. You go home. This is apt to be tough."

"I don't care. I'm going. Do you think I wouldn't be there when the devil that did that to daddy was trapped?" She laughed in a tight little way. "I'll be there. I'll help. If it's too dangerous we'll get the police. But we won't let him get away, will we, Sandy?"

"You better run home," he pursued.

"I'm not afraid. I'm not the kind of a weak sister that faints and things. I can take care of myself. Once a man grabbed me when I was coming home through the alleys from a show. I knocked him down. Really I did. I socked him right on the button."

Sandy Taylor couldn't help smiling. She was a grand kid. He could just picture her socking that masher on the button.

He patted her shoulder and said firmly: "Okay, Dot. Take a hitch in your belt, roll up your sleeves, and let's get going."

He led the way down the darkest side of the pier along the railroad branch that went out to the Cannery. Back at the approach to the pier the going got very slushy from melted ice, fish scales, sawdust, and mud. He held his flash all the way, moving slowly, studying the ground.

When he got into the deep slush he went even more cautiously over the surface, studying every inch.

Finally, he said: "Here. This is the place. This is where Old Dad died."

"Here?"

He nodded, bending over the muddy surface where truck marks and ruts and holes showed. "I noticed slush on dad's clothes. The police thought it got there because he was so drunk he fell down before he got to the end of the pier. I had a different hunch, and here's the proof."

"Proof?"

"Yeah. Those are two sets of footprints, fresh, made tonight after the trucking had stopped. Right here is a dragging rut where a man fell. After that there's only one set of prints leading back the way we've come."

"Oh!" the girl managed. "Oh!"

"Want to go home? Had enough?"

She drew herself up. "Certainly not. I won't have enough till we get to the end."

He patted her slim shoulder again and wondered why he'd never asked her to marry him. He was an awful dodo, he decided. Later on, when things got calm again, he'd have to see about changing his past neglect.

"This way, Dot," he said.

THE player piano was blasting out "Alexander's Ragtime Band" when they walked through the doors into Whaler Joe's. A big crowd of men

and some women lined the bar—Americans, Japanese, Mexicans. It was going on to two A. M., closing time. Everybody was talking about the death of Dad March.

Whaler Joe nodded to Sandy Taylor and locked the front doors. "I got to close," he said. "If I bust the ordinance, they'll take my license away." At the top of his lungs, he bellowed: "Polish off, folks. Bar's closed. No more sales."

He flipped half the light switches. The bartenders began to count their receipts. The sailors and fishermen went right on drinking, taking their time.

Sandy Taylor walked directly to the far end of the place. It was dimly lighted down there. Jeff Reynolds was sipping cognac. He looked at Dorothy from bloodshot eyes. "Say, that was too bad about your old man, wasn't it?"

Sandy strolled to the wall and examined the crossed harpoons. He saw a board that held a set of six belaying pins as curios from sailing vessels. Nobody paid attention to those curios. They were covered with dust. Except one. One had no dust. It looked slightly damp.

Sandy smiled in a hard way and went back and stood by the table where Jeff Reynolds was sitting.

"Jeff," he began mildly, "did you hear the latest?"

Jeff Reynolds hunched his thin shoulders. His hooked nose twitched slightly, like a rabbit's. "Huh?"

"The latest is that Dad March didn't die by accident. He was murdered."

Jeff Reynolds stared at him blearily for a long time. "You mean somebody killed him?"

Sandy leaned over the table, saying pointedly: "Yeah—that's exactly what I mean."

Whaler Joe strode up heavily. "I got to close up. It's the law. I got to—" he broke off, noticing the tense way Sandy Taylor stared at Jeff Reynolds and the shifty-eyed Jeff looked at the floor. "What's the matter?"

Reynolds shuffled his feet, slowly got up. "You hear the latest. They say Dad March was knocked off."

"Knocked off?" Whaler Joe looked from Dorothy to Sandy to Jeff. "Who'd knock Old Dad off?"

Jeff cleared his throat. "Know what I think? I think Dad stole that necklace, see? He cashed it with a fence. He got a lot of dough, see? Some of it, he lost gambling with Whaler Joe. Then some tramp tailed him when he left here and knocked him off for the rest and made it look like an accident."

Nobody at the table spoke. Down at the other end of the room the fishermen gabbed and drank, and the player piano hammered ceaselessly.

Finally, Sandy Taylor dropped a hand into his pocket, stood back and said to Jeff Reynolds: "Know what I think, Jeff? I think you're *too* full of ideas on this case. I'll tell you the real lowdown."

"Lowdown?" Jeff Reynolds coughed into his palm, shuffled his feet, batted his eyes.

"Yeah," Sandy Taylor said to him. "Somebody hoisted the Farnsworth-Smith string of pearls, but it wasn't Dad March. The police made a big search, because Mrs. Farnsworth-Smith has a lot of influence and the insurance company doesn't want to hold the sack. This guy that swiped the necklace from the *Mary II* at the Yacht Club got scared. He wanted to cool the heat down. So he decided to frame the theft on somebody else. Dad March was an easy-going fellow. So he picked on Dad to take the rap."

Jeff Reynolds coughed and glanced nervously around the room.

Sandy went on: "Whaler Joe had some curios on that wall—you can see some belaying pins over there. All but one have dust on them. The police will check that one and find it has mud and blood and hair and fingerprints. They'll be able to see that under a microscope. Dad March was a little tight, all right. The guy who stole the pearls tailed him out carrying a belaying pin and a bottle of gin."

"He broke Dad's neck in the slush back of the cannery with the belaying pin. Then he dragged Dad's body to the end of the pier and tossed him over to the deck of the launch so it would look like Dad fell over. He dropped the bottle of gin down on the deck. One of his mistakes was right there. Dad March hated gin. He drank rye. The killer threw the gin there because he figured it showed how drunk Dad had been. The killer also planted the jewel case on Dad."

Reynolds gasped. "Planted?"

"Obviously," Sandy Taylor clipped. "If a man steals pearls and fences them, what the devil would he keep the case for? It's nutty. That's the cheesy part of the frame-up. If I stole a string of pearls and hocked them, would I go carrying the empty case around with me so people would have a nice clue as to the thief? Nuts! The guy that figured that part of the frame was a moron."

Jeff Reynolds was sweating profusely at the forehead and on his upper lip.

Sandy continued: "You overplayed your part, Jeff. You wanted the police to think it was an accident, so you shot your mouth off as soon as we discovered the body. You had an explanation for the whole thing. It was too good an explanation. You explained it so every man there would get the bee in his bonnet and tell your ideas to the police."

Sandy backed up to the side door that led to Whaler Joe's upstairs gambling rooms and a downstairs exit. He turned the key in the lock. The front door had already been locked by Whaler Joe as he obeyed the ordinance for liquor dealers. Nobody could get out now.

The fishermen down the bar, the bartenders, none of them knew anything out of the way was taking place.

JEFF REYNOLDS sneered: "So you think I killed him, huh? You think I swiped the belaying pin,

planted the gin bottle. That's what you think, huh?"

"No," Sandy Taylor said definitely. Jeff Reynolds jaw dropped laxly. "No?"

"No. You're too weak. You couldn't plan *anything*. You didn't swipe the necklace. You haven't got enough muscle to break a man's neck, even with a belaying pin. And you haven't the guts. You were just the killer's stooge. The killer didn't want to risk exposure by giving an explanation to Dad March's death, so he had *you* do it."

Reynolds wiped the sweat away. "Anyway," he grunted "you're nuts, because if Dad didn't swipe and fence that necklace, where did he get the five grand he lost at cards to Whaler Joe?"

"There wasn't any five grand," Sandy Taylor said. "That was Whaler Joe's idea to make things look worse for Dad March. Whaler Joe didn't mind confessing to a little gambling if it further put the pearl theft on Dad. Whaler Joe has the muscle to break a man's neck with a belaying pin. And Whaler Joe knows how to use one; he used to be a whaler off Alaska. I don't think Joe fenced that necklace he stole yet."

Sandy glanced toward the corner and the safe which the bartender was opening to tuck away the night's profits. "Maybe the necklace is there. We can get the safe opened on a court order. Maybe Joe's fingerprints will be on that belaying pin. Maybe you were only the stooge, Jeff, but you can be arrested for criminal complicity. Maybe—"

Dorothy March screamed. "Look out, Sandy!"

The chair hurled in a swift arc. Sandy Taylor ducked it by inches. It crashed to pieces against the wall. Whaler Joe picked up another chair, whipping it at Sandy.

Sandy ducked again and yanked his gun out.

While he was drawing the gun, Whaler Joe snatched another chair in his strong meaty hands. Dorothy

March threw herself at him, spoiling his aim. The chair went wild.

Down the bar a dozen masculine throats yelled: "Fight! Hey, boys! Fight!"

Whaler Joe ran around the table and grabbed the knob of the side door. He wrestled frantically with it, but he couldn't get the door open; Sandy Taylor had already taken care of that angle.

"Look out, Sandy!" Dorothy screamed again.

Jeff Reynolds had pulled a long, sharp tuna-knife from under his coat. His left fist smashed against Dorothy's face, sending her hard and sprawling to the sawdust floor. Jeff rushed at Sandy with the tuna-knife held underhand in expert fashion. In that skillful way, it was worse than a gun; it might be faster than a gun. It was intended to go deep into Sandy's groin and rip slashingly upwards.

SANDY sidestepped just in time. His gun *whammed* three times and Jeff Reynolds dived slidingly across the floor and lay still. The blade of the knife had taken a slice from Sandy Taylor's side.

Whaler Joe snatched a harpoon from the wall. His tremendous muscles bulged and tensed under his shirt. His face was a hard, muscular mask, his eyes narrowed, his thick lips grinned smugly at Sandy.

The harpoon hissed through the air as Sandy ducked, shooting twice. Neither bullet struck; Sandy had lost his aim in ducking.

The harpoon buried itself many inches into the mahogany bar.

With amazing speed for a man so big, Whaler Joe had snatched another harpoon from the wall display. He held it poised. Sandy Taylor crouched with his Colt in readiness.

Nobody in the room spoke. The player piano finished off suddenly. Fishermen flattened themselves against the walls, out of the way, hid behind the bar, or lay flat on the floor. All watching. The Japanese stood like

a small army, their faces showing no emotion, no fear—just watching.

Whaler Joe said thickly to Sandy Taylor: "All right, cowboy! You got a bullet, and I got a harpoon. Let's go!"

Dorothy tried to scramble up off the floor. She was crying out continuously. "Somebody! Help! Stop it! They'll kill each other! Somebody do something!"

Nobody moved.

Then Whaler Joe's heavy right arm flashed.

Sandy Taylor had been watching for that. His eyes were as unblinking as a cat's watching a mouse. He tipped up the table before him as a shield. The harpoon pierced the wood, stabbed through for half its length, and Sandy winced in pain as the sharp steel head grazed his thigh.

His gun had fired its last shot as the harpoon flew at him. Whaler Joe's big body lurched. He grabbed at his side instinctively.

His eyes had a wildness now, the gleam that's a cross between insanity and a hysterical fight for life. In his nervous hysteria, the bullet in his side didn't hurt him.

"All right, cowboy," he laughed crazily, snatching down another harpoon. "Now I got this, and you ain't got *anything*! How you like it? How you like it?"

Sandy Taylor picked up the seat of the broken chair and held it before him. His face had a deadly whiteness, but the nervousness was controlled. His hands didn't shake as he watched the poised harpoon. Blood seeped down from his side, from his leg.

"Go ahead," he challenged, "I'm ready."

Dorothy March ran yelling toward the front doors. "Somebody call the police! Where's the phone! Please! Quick!"

The fishermen just stood rigid, or peered over the bar, or looked up from their positions prone on the floor. They had eyes for nothing but the fighters. They were watching a gladiatorial

contest. They knew only one man would live. Their eyes flashed with primitive gleam as they waited to see which man it would be. They saw the huge man who knew how to hurl harpoons and had one ready; they saw the lithe young man who had only the seat of a chair.

DOROTHY MARCH, trying to wrest the front doors open, looked around. She saw the two men waiting, grinning coldly at each other. Her body slumped suddenly in a faint and became an unnoticed fallen thing on the floor.

"Where do you want it?" Whaler Joe snarled. "In the belly or in the teeth?"

Sandy Taylor didn't flinch. He couldn't allow himself to flinch then. He was the only person who would be active in his own defense.

He said: "You're awful good at clubbing a drunken old skipper to death with a belaying pin, but maybe you're not so good now. Come on, Joe, toss it!"

The harpoon lanced out. With incredible swiftness, Sandy Taylor shot up the chair seat, tilted it suddenly, and the harpoon glanced wild from its surface, hit with a mighty crash a row of bottles behind the bar.

Sandy Taylor drove forward like a quarter-back bucking the scrimmage

line. He hit Whaler Joe low and the big man spilled back against the wall, shaking it with the violence of the contact, sending harpoons clattering to the floor.

Sandy had a chair now. It whipped over his head, smashed down, made a sickening thud on Whaler Joe's skull. The huge man slumped forward and didn't move. His mouth, half open, had sawdust in it, and seeping blood.

"I'm sorry I fainted," Dorothy said. "I didn't mean to get like that, Sandy. I just couldn't help it when he had the harpoon."

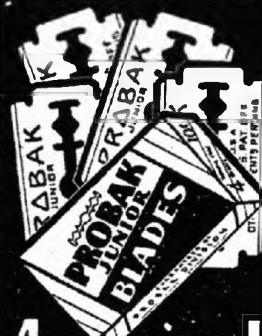
"You did fine," he told her. "You did better than I thought you would, and that's *something*. I told you it might be tough, didn't I?"

Three radio cops and two men from the Harbor Police strode into the parlor. Sandy Taylor, the undercover man, was pulling a string of pearls from Whaler Joe's safe.

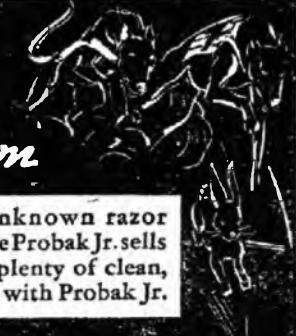
One of the cops walked over to the safe and stared at Sandy. He saw the blood on his leg, leaking sluggishly from his side, the sweat dripping from his chin.

"Hi, fella," he greeted. "What's been going on here? What's the reason for all this?"

Sandy held up the Farnsworth-Smith necklace. "Here's your reason," he said. "It's just a piece of string. Just a piece of string—only it has pearls on it."



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PROBAK JUNIOR

G-Man

It was Marjorie Hammond's tip that led G-man John Dirk near the hub of the vice wheel. But before he got there he had to pull a few spokes that were bound to the hub with hot-lead nails. And the man whose spoke led straight into hell was Marjorie Hammond's own father.

Marjorie Hammond pulled the trigger on the G-man.



CHAPTER I DEVIL'S COCKTAIL

THE man who entered the Lakeland taproom shortly after midnight had obviously just rolled from one of the three hundred

odd beds in Hotel Lakeland. His pants were none too well pulled over pajama-clad legs. The coat of his suit did not hide the corn-yellow broadcloth of his pajama jacket. He had thrust his feet into violin-size shoes without putting on his socks. His black hair was a sleepy tousle. He was a young man, but hollow-eyed. His face bore the dismal expression of a man who has just been forced to abandon some important project.

Sleep was the important and abandoned project. In the Lakeland taproom was a brawling, joking,

Juggernaut

Stirring Novelette

By G. T. Fleming-Roberts

Author of "Let 'Em Eat Lead!" etc.



laughing, glass-clinking, jazzing crowd of vacationers. They had come all the way to Wisconsin's north woods to get exactly the same kind of morning-after headache they could have obtained more cheaply in Chicago, Indianapolis, or Buck Creek, for that matter.

The grotesquely dressed man shook his head sadly. There were but two ways to sleep in Hotel Lakeland: you either had to be dead or practically ossified by alcohol. And in either condition a G-man is quite as useless as a cigarette lighter in a cyclone.

G-man John Dirk had been on the move for twenty hours. He had begun to realize what the papers fed the public about the ever-watchful, sleepless G-men wasn't all hooey. This G-man, anyway, never expected to sleep again.

It was a queer crowd in the tap-room. There were those who went in heavily for flannel shirts and poison ivy rashes. Among the dancers, there was now and then a flash of creamy feminine back rippled by the correct number of exposed vertebra. Then there were the dusty-mouthed tourists who had covered six hundred miles that day and wanted to talk about miles to the gallon.

They were not all drunk. Not as drunk, anyway, as the girl alone in the cozy walnut stall nearest the bar.

She was an almost-redhead. She looked like she would be rather tall if she ever got straightened out again. The heels of her slippers were spiking into the seat at the opposite side of the table. Her spine spelled a "C" backwards. She would laugh sometimes at nothing, then push her hair back out of dazed, worried eyes. In spite of over-emphasized makeup there was so much refinement about her features that John Dirk felt some one ought to spank her for making such a fool of herself.

The G-man went over to the bar, leaned across its yard width, and asked the head barman: "When do things generally quiet down here?"

The barman poured out a couple of cocktails. "First of October," he said. "The taproom right under your room?"

"Under my pillow," Dirk snorted. He speared an olive and pushed it into one side of his cheek. "Who's the girl?" He nodded toward the booth next to the bar without looking in that direction.

The barman shrugged. "No peach of my pickling. She came in like that. I gave orders not to sell her anything. Just toss a towel over your arm and walk past her if you want to get acquainted. Only thing that worries me is getting her out of here without making a scene."

Dirk reached over and picked up a towel. "I don't know what the catch is, but I'll try it." He pulled the towel over his arm and sauntered toward

the girl's table. She saw him coming, or at least saw the swinging towel. She reached out a hand to grab his coat. "'N ol' fashun', waiter," she said from force of habit.

DIRK sat down opposite her and stared at her bleakly. No, for all his pajamas, John Dirk was not the most incongruous figure in the tap-room. This girl was. She just wasn't the type to get all sogged up that way. She even flushed a little under the G-man's intense gaze.

She stretched both bare arms across the table toward him. Her right fist clutched a wad of bills. "Buy ush a drink. I'm dry—dry as the—the—"

"Yeah. As the Atlantic." He pushed her feet from the seat, took hold of both of her hands and started to pull her up. "Come on. You're going home."

"Not!"

Well, there wouldn't be any argument. Dirk got around the table and pulled her out of the stall. She wavered around, grabbed a stemmed glass from in front of a man who had just seated himself at one of the center tables, got it to her lips, and drank half the contents before Dirk knocked the glass from her hand. She laughed shrilly, folded forward. Dirk stooped, caught her on a wide shoulder, and lifted her without apparent effort. He strode toward the door, jaws set, deep eyes less tired than angry.

The barman waved at him. "Thanks, Galahad."

Dirk growled something uncomplimentary. If those dizzy dopes thought this was any knight-errant stuff they were crazy. This girl was just another of the sort who didn't have enough sense to take care of herself. Uncle Sam was on the lookout for girls like this because of the particularity noxious sort of two-legged insect they had been attracting lately. A wheel of vice rimmed the Great Lakes states. A trap of terror snared its victims in outlying towns and

transferred its catch to Minneapolis, Milwaukee and Chicago.

The F. B. I. was out to smash that machine; it was out to get that heart of stone, that brain of brass that belonged to the man behind the machine—the man nobody knew.

John Dirk kicked open the door that separated the taproom from the hotel lobby. He carried the girl across to the clerk, a man immune to all disturbance, who slept with his head across the desk. Dirk pounded the call-bell violently and brought the clerk out of his dreams. The man blinked for a moment at Dirk and his strange burden. The G-man asked: "Does this have a room here?"

"This does. Room 306. I carried it up last night. A Miss Marjorie Hammond from Milwaukee."

"Let's have the key," Dirk said. "I'll spare you the trouble tonight. Get one of the chambermaids to come up as soon as possible." Dirk carried the girl to the elevator and pressed the automatic control for the third floor. The girl wriggled slightly in his grasp, hiccupped, then went limp again as soon as the elevator had stopped.

He carried her to her room, unlocked the door, left it open, and turned on the light. He stooped so that she sat on the edge of the bed. She clung to his shoulder with one hand, then fell forward so that her glorious tousle of red-brown hair hid the G-man's face. He pushed her gently back by the shoulders. "You've got a lot to sleep off, kid."

Like a half-empty sack of meal, she flopped back on the bed, eyes closed. John Dirk straightened up, and the tired look went from his deep-set eyes. In the right hand of the girl on the bed was an automatic.

"What in hell," he whispered slowly. He bent over the girl, took hold of her shoulders and shook her. She remained rag-limp. Dirk's right hand went up to thoughtfully finger the cleft in his chin. He noticed a strange,

sweetish odor coming from his fingers. Some nearly colorless fluid covered his knuckles. Then he remembered that the cocktail Marjorie Hammond had stolen had spilled on his own hand when he had taken it away from her. But the odor—

He bent over the girl to sniff at her slightly parted lips. She wasn't breathing particularly easy. He clasped her wrist, felt a quivering pulse.

Somebody behind the G-man forced a cough. Dirk snatched the automatic from the girl's hand and slipped it into the inside pocket of his coat before he straightened and turned around. A chambermaid hid immense curiosity behind a yawn.

"Wake up!" Dirk snapped. "Get coffee and lots of it."

"Wh—what did you say, sir?" the maid gasped.

"Coffee!"

"But the urns are cold this time of night."

"Coffee and a doctor! This girl may die if we don't hurry. She's been poisoned!" And John Dirk pushed the chambermaid into the hall.

CHAPTER II

G-MAN'S GREETING

WHILE he was getting the chambermaid awake and started down the hall, John Dirk saw the figure of a man going through the door of Marjorie Hammond's room. Dirk turned, called: "Hey!"

The man in the doorway stopped. "I'm a doctor," he said.

Dirk looked the man over from head to foot. He was broad and appeared short. His long, capable-looking fingers wandered nervously over his vest. A heavy black beard made his collar and tie entirely unnecessary. Overhanging hair stopped where it met heavy, horn-rimmed spectacles that were centered with curiously anxious, faded blue eyes. It was the man from the taproom—

the man who had had his cocktail stolen by Marjorie Hammond.

"You're all but a corpse!" the G-man snorted. "Did you know that cocktail the girl grabbed from your table was a plenty per cent chloral hydrate?"

"No—no. Of course not." The doctor had removed his coat and was rolling up his sleeves. "Order coffee. That's the main thing." He bent over the girl and muttered something that sounded to John Dirk, a good deal like: "My darling."

The G-man snapped: "What was that?"

"I—nothing." The doctor shot a sidelong glance at John Dirk.

Dirk went over to the bed. "Do you know this girl?"

"Never saw her in my life. Will you please go down to my room on the second floor. It's number 208. Bring my medical kit from the closet. I have absolutely nothing here to work with."

Dirk hesitated. Then he snorted at his own suspicions. The poisoned cocktail had been intended for this bearded doctor. None could have foreseen that the girl would grab that glass from the man's table. It was chance that had all but killed Marjorie Hammond.

Dirk hurried down to the second floor where he found 208 unlocked. He secured the doctor's medical kit from the closet, noticed that a piece of the leather identification plate had been cut away and an ordinary red-bordered label had been gummed over the cut place. The label bore the name of Theo. Grant, M. D.

As Dirk left the room, the satchel in his hand, he nearly ran into a bell-hop who carried a tray and water pitcher. The bell-hop juggled the pitcher and stared pop-eyed at Dirk. "Matter?" snapped the G-man. "Waiting for a tip? That's not my ice water."

"N-no sir," the youth stammered. "Only, are you the gentleman from 211?"

Dirk nodded. "That's the number of my room."

"Jeefers!" exploded the boy. "I don't know how you do it. I thought you were in for a long headache!" And he gave an apologetic nod and hurried down the hall.

Dirk watched him go. Was everybody crazy? Then he remembered that he had left the door of his room open. There were certain papers in his suitcase that he would not have cared to have anybody see. He ran down the hall to his room, pushed the door open and turned on the light. Then he thought he understood. There was a man on his bed. Some drunk had wandered into 211 by mistake. The bell-hop had seen the man go in, had taken him for Dirk, and had naturally been surprised to see Dirk clear-eyed and steady a few minutes later.

The G-man swept up a military brush from the dresser and pegged it at the figure on the bed. The brush struck the man in the small of the back. The man neither moved nor grunted. Dirk went into the bathroom and drew a glass of water. He went back to the bed, the glass in his hand. What did it matter if he soaked the pillow? He wasn't going to use it again anyway. He took hold of the drunk's shoulder and pulled him over on his back, at the same time raising the glass of water.

Dirk drew a long breath and held it. He stood like a statue, staring down at the thing on the bed. For it wasn't a man. Not any more. It was a corpse—a cold, pop-eyed, black-tongued corpse with a stricturing band of thin wire deeply imbedded in the folds of flesh at his throat.

He had had a name once. Probably he had had several names. But the very latest of his aliases had been "Lips" Palos. He had been born a louse and had probably died one. He had occupied a spoke position in the wheel of vice the G-man had sworn to smash.

Things were happening too fast. The Lakeland needed a squad of G-men instead of one. But the dying deserved more attention than the dead—especially the dead of Palos' species. The G-man swung from the room, locked the door and ran up the stairs. The door of Marjorie Hammond's room was still open. The chambermaid was standing in it with a pot of coffee in one hand and a mug in the other.

"What do you want I should do with this?" the maid asked.

"Give it to the—" Dirk passed. On looking into the room, he saw Marjorie in the bed. She had been covered up. Her hair was pushed back from her smooth brow. She was breathing deeply and steadily. But there was no sign of the bearded Dr. Theo. Grant.

"Where's the doctor?" Dirk asked.

"What doctor?"

THEN the thought punched John Dirk squarely between the eyes and nearly floored him. If he had had his sleep, things would have been different. He would have thought through events as they had happened instead of getting himself all tangled up in a maze of baffling complications. No one had tried to feed chloral hydrate to Marjorie Hammond. That was clear. And no one had tried to feed chloral hydrate to Dr. Theo. Grant. Dr. Grant himself was the poisoner. That cocktail had been intended for somebody at the other side of Grant's table. Man or woman? Dirk didn't recall. He had paid scant attention to anybody in the taproom except Marjorie. It was only because of Dr. Grant's beard that he had been able to recognize the doctor again.

And that was why Grant had hurriedly followed Dirk and the girl. He had known that the girl had drunk a good portion of the poison cup intended for somebody else. A murderer is not necessarily a butcher. Grant had had no reason to kill the

girl and he had been anxious about her. The doctor was on the lam now, for certain. But the girl—The G-man went over and sat on the edge of the bed. He took hold of the girl's wrist. He thought the pulse was stronger.

"Here," he ordered the chambermaid, "help me get some coffee into this girl. I think she'll be all right in a few moments. Mustn't have taken as much of the stuff as I supposed."

"Po'r thing!" the chambermaid whispered. "It was a man, I know."

"Who was a man?" Dirk poured some of the coffee into the mug.

"Oh, it's always a man, beggin' your pardon, sir. It's a man that breaks our hearts and makes us want to leave this earth for a better land."

Dirk put his arm behind her back and raised Marjorie Hammond. "Listen, sister," he said to the chambermaid, "you get stories like that out of your head. I don't want you spreading the news that this kid tried to commit suicide. It was an accident, see?"

"I see," said the woman with a sad, knowing smile. "At least it won't go no farther than my lips."

They worked over the girl for thirty minutes or more. She came around rapidly once she started. She jerked herself up in bed, stared at Dirk with large, frightened eyes. She was gasping as though she had been plunged into cold water. Then she started patting herself, searching for something in the bosom of her dress.

Dirk watched her for a moment. Then he said: "It's under the pillow."

MARJORIE HAMMOND groped frantically under her pillow, found her small automatic and turned it on the G-man. And then she pulled the trigger. There was a startling, cold-sounding click from the empty gun as Dirk sprang to twist it from the girl's grasp. The chambermaid screamed. Dirk, his face inches from Marjorie's, asked: "Are you crazy?"

"You—you tried to drug me!" She was panting after the short struggle that had flushed her face and brought

her hair down again over her eyes. There wasn't the slightest trace of liquor on her breath.

"You're not drunk," Dirk told her. "You're just crazy. What's the idea of trying to shoot me? You would have if that gun had been loaded."

"You're one of them! You drugged me and you're one of them!" This very decidedly. Then she pushed the hair out of her eyes and took a good look at Dirk. "Or are you?" she said doubtfully.

"If you're out gunning for the members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the answer is yes."

A bewildered frown tightened her brows. "You're a G-man?" she whispered. And then she immediately scrambled from the bed and tried to stand up. She was too dizzy. She sat down on the edge of the bed and shook her head. "No go. I'm as flabby as a shucked oyster. But I'm not drunk. I've never been drunk."

Dirk addressed the chambermaid. "Will you kindly step out into the hall for a few moments? I'd like to talk to this young woman alone."

The maid complied none too graciously, and Dirk pulled up a chair and sat down facing Marjorie Hammond. "Now, Marjorie, why the masquerade?"

"You know my name?"

"Sure. You're known all over town, no doubt, because of your crazy goings on. But why, kid?"

Marjorie Hammond drew pictures on the pillow with her forefinger. "My dad's in the penitentiary at Michigan City," she said quietly. "He is a doctor. He helped a wounded gangster, they say. I think he was framed. I'm trying to find evidence that will get him out. A man by the name of Palos was associated with the gang. I followed Palos here. The gang that Palos is associated with runs gambling joints. And other things. They kidnap young girls, especially from small towns. I thought maybe if I acted sappy enough they'd pick me up. I was planning to lay low to see

if I could learn the identity of the big boss. I had a gun. When I remember to load it, I can hit anything. So I wasn't afraid.

"I—I want to help dad, see?" Marjorie's eyes were very steady and earnest as they met Dirk's. "Palos framed him. I was out to get Palos. I thought you were one of the gang and that you had drugged me some way. But I blew up. Got scared and tried to shoot you. I'm sorry."

John Dirk stood, turned, walked across the room and back. The girl's eyes followed him. The muscles of her face relaxed. There was something about the breadth of his shoulders and the lean length of him that inspired confidence and banished fear. He was scowling at her and smiling at the same time.

"You went looking for trouble, Marjorie, and you found it," he said. "You were out to get Palos. Don't tell that to anybody else, will you?"

"Naturally not. I've trusted you."

He nodded. "Well, you'll not regret it. But you've got to do exactly as I tell you. You're either half brass or just crazy, to think you could buck a gang like that. Palos isn't head man. Hell knows who is. Palos isn't anything but a flabby corpse occupying my bed at the moment."

The girl drew a quick, startled breath. "He's dead?"

"Murdered. That's why I wouldn't broadcast the fact that you were out to get him. You didn't do it. It took a person with very strong fingers to draw that noose of wire that tight. I don't think I could have done it and I'm not exactly a ninety-seven pound weakling."

"What do the police say?" Marjorie asked.

"They haven't said yet," Dirk replied. "And I'm not telling them at the moment. You've got to stick to your room while I look around a little. Lock the door from the inside and keep it that way until I get back. My name is Dirk, by the way. John Dirk. We ought to know each other better."

HD

"Dirk," she repeated. "John Dirk. I'll remember that."

He smiled as he went through the door. "Can I rely on that?"

CHAPTER III

DEAD MAN'S TALE

A SLUG of this," said the bartender, as he shoved a bottle invitingly toward John Dirk, "will cure that insomnia of yours."

"So will a sock with a lead pipe," Dirk told him. "Is there any place in this taproom where you and I can have a quiet talk?" He took his badge from his pocket and flashed it. The bartender's eyebrows went half way up his bald head. He nodded and led Dirk back through swinging doors into a bottle-lined room which he referred to as his pharmacy.

"G-man huh?"

Dirk nodded. "That girl I just trucked out of here was poisoned. Not fatally. She got the stuff in the cocktail she snatched from the bearded gentleman. Remember him?"

"Sure. Angostura Bitters."

"He goes under the name of Grant."

The barman shrugged. "I don't try to remember their names. I just know he likes his drinks with a couple of dashes of Angostura Bitters in them. Go on with what about him."

"Well, he tried to switch glasses, to the eternal damnation of the man sitting across the table from him," Dirk explained. "He'd just loaded that drink with chloral hydrate before the girl snatched the glass. Now do you remember who was sitting across from the bearded man at the time?"

"Nobody," the barman said. "But just as you went out with the girl, a man came in the front door, went to the bearded man's table, and said he was sorry he was late. Angostura said he was sorry, too, because he couldn't wait. Then Angostura followed you into the lobby."

"And this other guy who just missed his date with death—know him?"

The barman tickled the fringe of hair above his right ear. "It slips the gray matter just now. He's a big sportsman with plenty of something. Comes up here every year. He's a big shot in Chicago."

"A big shot, maybe, but on the liability side of any city census he happens to fall into. He wasn't T. J. Kyle, by any chance?"

The barman snapped his fingers. "Right! Occupies some big position in Chicago."

"Yeah," the G-man said dryly. "The same kind of a position that Lips Palos occupied in Milwaukee. 'Barber' Kyle, they call him. When the Morretti gang kidnapped Barber Kyle last year, do you think he paid his ransom in dollars?"

"At first glance, yeah. What with, then, G-man?"

"Souls, buddy!" Dirk snapped. He turned and strode into the taproom. Barber Kyle was that spoke in the vice wheel that had the most mud on it. Kyle was the man that John Dirk had shadowed as far as Wausau. There he had lost the trail and had rolled on to Rhinelander, hoping to run into his man again. If it hadn't been for a pretty, crazy girl, who was trying in her own hair-brained way to buck the same organization that the G-man had sworn to smash, he would have picked up that trail again tonight.

Palos and Kyle—two spokes in the wheel. And where spokes met was bound to be the hub. John Dirk looked around the taproom. Some one in that motley, noisy crowd might be the chief of the whole rotten crew. But try and pick him out!

As Dirk passed the front door to go into the hotel lobby, a voice called: "Say, young man, step out here a moment." It was a voice with the brassy ring of authority. It could have come from only one place—the

shiny black, hearse-like sedan parked in front of the taproom.

The G-man stepped out on the sidewalk and got something of a jolt when he saw the occupant of the car. The man was stretched flat on his back on a bedlike arrangement that occupied all of the big sedan except the driver's seat. The man wore a white linen suit as freshly pressed as though it had just been taken from a clothing store dummy. The present wearer of the suit wasn't apt to wrinkle it either. He evidently could move only his hands and arms. He looked at John Dirk by means of a mirror held in his left hand a little above his head. And by means of the same mirror, Dirk looked into the strangest face he has ever seen.

The face was white, like carved holly wood. The mouth was a colorless slot above an undershot jaw. The nose was thin and brittle-looking. Nothing but two flickering sparks of reflected light passed beneath the thick, heavy eyelids.

"Don't gape, yokel!" the brassy voice clanged. Fingers of the man's right hand reached out to clutch Dirk's fist where it rested on the window sill of the car. The fingers were like steel hooks, the strength behind them almost superhuman. John Dirk winced slightly. The voice of the man in the invalid car became softer, almost wheedling. "My chauffeur, the ruffian, is in that taproom. Would you be so kind as to tell him I have waited long enough? I have been kept waiting five minutes. And tell him to pay you a dollar from my wallet, my man."

The steel grip relaxed. Dirk stared at the half hidden, flickering eyes for a moment. They held a chill sort of fascination for him, like the eyes of a serpent. "Okay, mister," the G-man said quietly. He turned and entered the taproom.

A puttee-covered leg was thrust out from one of the stalls near the door. The G-man approached quietly, his ears tuned to the rumble of a

man's voice, outstanding above the bedlam in the taproom because it was sober rather than loud. Dirk looked over the walnut panel and stared down at the chauffeur for a second before the eyes of the uniformed man were lifted to meet his. The man's lips clamped shut, but not before Dirk had distinctly heard the names "Hammond" and "Palos."

THE chauffeur was built like an ape. He glowered a challenge from beneath beetling brows. Dirk couldn't see anything of his companion except the top of a well oiled head.

"Sorry to bother you," the G-man said meekly, "but the boss wants you out in the car. He says he's been waiting long enough."

The chauffeur didn't answer. He got up quickly. And on his heavy face was a strange look of animal fear as he hurried to the door.

Dirk sauntered over to the bar, eyes harnessed on the bartender's round face. He jerked his head toward the front of the taproom. "Who's the mummy?" he whispered.

"Murdock," replied the bartender as he methodically polished a glass. "Some say he's crazy. Wish I was that nuts. He sure accumulates the money! That ape of a chauffeur is only one of a dozen servants. Got a dozen such cars, too. Owns a big lodge on Blue Lake. Spends his summers here and his winters in Florida. Spends most of his time on the flat of his back, yet plays the organ and the violin. Makes his office anywhere there's a telephone, they say. Generally hated. Nobody gets inside his Stockade—that's his lodge, you know."

Dirk squinted through the Venetian blind that was lowered over the taproom window. He saw the big sedan and its strange, crippled occupant disappearing down the street. Then, out of the tail of his eye, he saw the man with whom Murdock's chauffeur had

been talking, get up and go into the hotel lobby. Instinctively, the G-man scented trouble. He had seen the man with the oily hair in a recent Minneapolis line-up. His name was Steve Collins. There was something about his eyes that reminded the G-man of a hungry rat.

John Dirk went into the hotel lobby. Collins was at the desk, asking about some one named Hammond. Dirk didn't wait for anything more. He slipped into the elevator without giving Collins a chance to see him. If that well oiled rat was out to pay a visit to Marjorie Hammond, he would get a little surprise.

He hurried down the third floor hall and knocked at Marjorie Hammond's door. There was no response. He tried the knob, found the door unlocked. "Little fool!" he muttered under his breath as he pushed into the room.

The light was on. He took a quick look around and went back into the hall. He fingered the cleft of his chin a moment and scowled at the floor. Then he slammed the door of Marjorie's room, turned toward the elevator, and stopped. The sliding door of the elevator had started to open. There was an eye watching him through the crack. No, two eyes. And one was steel!

There was a dull *plop*. John Dirk's long legs doubled under him. The sliding door of the elevator breathed a wisp of smoke before it slammed. Dirk scrambled to his feet. He had thought split seconds ahead of that silenced pistol shot. He didn't quite understand why his head had been the prospective bulls-eye, as he glanced at the neatly drilled hole on the door of Marjorie's room. His gaze bounced back toward the elevator shaft where he saw the shadow of the car against the frosted glass door as the elevator descended. He had made a grab for his gun as soon as he had seen that pistol muzzle staring at him and had immediately felt helpless and naked. He hadn't strapped

on his gun when he had pulled his clothes on over his pajamas.

Dirk sprang back into Marjorie's room and scooped up the service telephone. Eventually, the night clerk replied. "Murderer coming down in the elevator!" Dick whipped out. "Stop him, if you can!"

THEN he slammed up the receiver and ran from the room, into the hall, and down the steps. When his flying feet hit the second floor, he glanced toward his own room, saw Marjorie Hammond stooping over in front of the door, doing something to the lock. "Hey!" he stage-whispered.

The girl straightened up, looked frightened and guilty at the same time. Half a dozen quick strides brought him up to her. She hastily jabbed a bobby-pin into her hair. "I—I was looking for you," she stammered.

Dirk pulled out his key and quickly unlocked the door. "Hairpins won't do the trick. Go in, if you're so curious. But move. I've got to get my gun."

The clatter of the elevator door. Some one was pussy-footing just beyond the jog in the hall. Dirk seized Marjorie Hammond's wrist. "Go into my room. And keep quiet. Lips Palos on the bed isn't a pretty sight, but if you scream I'll haunt you the rest of your life. May do that anyway," he added with a grin. He thrust the girl into the room then sprang on tiptoe to the other side of the hall to do a little pussy-footing on his own, moving down toward the jog in the hall.

Back flat against the wall, eyes watching stairway and elevator, slick-haired Steve Collins prowled crab-fashion around the jog, almost into Dirk's arms before he sensed the G-man's presence.

The silenced gat was in Collins' right hand but it didn't have a chance to whisper before the G-man had him by the gun wrist. Dirk brought Collins' right elbow back against the

wall. The blow must have smashed Collins' funny-bone and his sense of humor along with it. His fingers sprang out stiffly from the butt of his gun. His mouth screwed out an oath which Dirk made him eat with a flat-handed blow to the lips.

Steve Collins' gun passed over into the G-man's hand. Some of his rat courage went along with it. He whimpered: "Aw, lay off, Hammond."

Hammond, was it now? John Dirk scowled as he pried Collins from the wall with the nose of the silenced gun and shoved him toward the door of his room. "Not a squeak, rat," he whispered.

Collins rolled terrified eyes. "What —what are you goin' to do with me?"

"You'll soon find out." Dirk pushed open the door and prodded Collins into the room. The slick-haired killer took one look at the pop-eyed corpse on the bed, uttered a faint shriek, turned, and dropped to his knees on the floor.

"You—you wouldn't do that to me, Doc," he mewed. "I never had nothing against you. I never been with the gang only just six weeks. I didn't have anything to do with framin' you."

Dirk looked across at Marjorie Hammond where she stood in the corner, picking her fingers. "Doc?" the girl muttered.

Dirk silenced her with a look. Then he took hold of Collins' collar and pulled him to his feet. "Sure," he said, "you just wish me lots of good things, don't you? What was that slug you handed me—a birthday present?"

"No—no. Honest, Hammond, I didn't know you were a game guy then. I like game guys. I wouldn't have done that then only it was Barber Kyle's orders."

Marjorie started to say: "Hammond?"

Dirk cut her off with: "I'd hate to stuff a nasty gag in that beautiful mouth, Marjorie." Then he gave

Collins a push that backed him to the bed and tumbled him across the cold corpse of Lips Palos. Collins was going into hysterics. Dirk got a knee on his chest and stuffed his handkerchief into Collins' mouth. "Toss me a towel, Marjorie," he told the girl. "If half the people in this hotel weren't soused we'd both be in the county jail in another minute."

The girl obeyed. She still had a large amount of her natural courage left, and she was all but bursting with curiosity. She started to ask half a dozen questions while Dirk was binding and gagging the terrified Collins.

Dirk straightened up. "Just one more question and it's going to be two living and one dead on that bed, Marjorie," he said sternly. "I got questions, too, but I don't display my ignorance."

As soon as Collins was as helpless as a mummy, the G-man gave the body of Lips Palos a cursory examination. There was a bullet wound in the shoulder of the corpse. It had been carefully dressed, by some one who knew about such things, previous to the actual murder. Then he found a long, coarse, black hair in the fist of the corpse. This he removed carefully and examined with a magnifying glass. He didn't know what kind of a hair it was. It certainly wasn't human hair.

MARJORIE came over and tried to see through the magnifying glass. Dirk let her look. The hair beneath the glass wouldn't tell her the story it had told him. And he wouldn't repeat that story because it would go through the girl like a knife. He'd rather not hurt the girl yet. But it was coming to that—coming fast.

"It's just a hair," said the girl.

"It's as thick as a rope under that glass," he replied cryptically. He put the hair into an envelope for safe keeping. Then he took hold of

Marjorie's arm and steered her into the hall. "What was the idea of trying to pick the lock on my door?" he asked as soon as the door was closed.

She shrugged, looked at him squarely. "It's the gypsy in me. I'm an old keyhole explorer."

Dirk snorted. "You think this is some kind of a party where you're M. C.? This is murder, get it? A man's dead. Or maybe I should say a louse is dead."

"I just wondered what you were doing," she said seriously. "I called up the desk and got the number of your room. I went down there and couldn't raise you. I forgot about what you said about Palos being on your bed. I looked through the key-hole and I was scared for a moment, when I saw the body on the bed. Thought it was you." She flushed slightly and covered quickly with: "Oh, don't feel too flattered. What have you been doing the last half hour—taking out adoption papers, or just having your name changed?"

He stared steadily into her eyes until she blinked and turned away. He could tell her now. If there was some way to let her down easy, maybe he could tell her. "Just where did you say your father was?" he asked.

"Michigan City. Why?"

"I wish he was," Dirk sighed. "He's in this hotel somewhere. That's why they're gunning for me. Collins doesn't know your dad. What he did was look on the hotel register for the name Hammond. You were the only one registered under that name. He came up to your room just as I was coming out. He thought I was Hammond. He'd been ordered to kill a man named Hammond. So he tried to get me."

Marjorie Hammond winced. "That's possible. I mean, he could have mistaken my name for dad's. I signed the book M. K. Hammond. Those are dad's initials, too. But

you're wrong about dad being out of—of you know where. I'd be the first person he would notify."

He took both her hands in a quick, earnest grasp. "I hope you are right. But when you stop to think of it, if your father broke prison, he wouldn't be apt to risk informing you through the mail or by means of telegraph. He may have followed you here without you knowing it. Or, if he really was framed, wouldn't his objective be the same as yours—to find the men who had framed him? Anyway, I'm going out to get the man who killed Lips Palos. You'd better get back to your room."

"John Dirk—"

He turned, found her eyes frightened and her breath coming in quick jerks. Woman's intuition, maybe, had told her what he had not been able to tell her.

"John, you don't think dad had anything to do with Palos' death? It couldn't be. Not if he was in prison. How could you think anything like that?"

Dirk took the girl by the arm and led her to the end of the hall where a red lamp glowed above a fire escape exit. "If your father was out of prison, he would try to get even with the men who framed him. And he is out of prison." He opened the fire escape door a little way. Its hinges squeaked. In the alley below, feet scuffed on the pavement. A nervously smoked cigarette glowed and faded in rapid succession. Dirk looked at the girl significantly.

"It's like that all around the hotel, Marjorie. They are men with guns and gun-sight eyes. They're out to get a man before that man can get them. The other killers won't make the same mistake Steve Collins did when he tried to plug me. Your father hasn't a chance of getting out of the hotel, for two reasons. You've just seen one of the reasons. I'm the other. I think he killed Palos."

She turned on him suddenly, furious, frightened, and appealing all at once. Her hands clutched at his coat like small white claws. She shook her head vigorously. Her eyes bored into his brain. She panted out staccato negatives. "No. It couldn't be. Not dad. Dad wouldn't kill. It was—it was the Sleeper."

Dirk's hands went to the girl's shoulders and moved downward, pressing her arms to her sides "Easy now," he whispered. "Who do you mean—the Sleeper? What are you getting at?"

Her head drooped until her red-brown curls tumbled over to hide her face. "Don't you know?" she said huskily. "I was grabbing at straws. Just before dad went to prison, he told me he was afraid. That wasn't like dad. He always had courage. But he said he was afraid of one man. The cruellest man in the world, dad called him. That man was the Sleeper. That's all I know. Just a man called the Sleeper."

Arm around the girl, he led her to her room in silence. In John Dirk's mind a picture was forming. It was a picture of a man with thick, heavy eyelids; a man who lay on his back in a car; a man with a brazen voice like a gong. Life hadn't been kind to that man. Was he the sort who would fight back, who would repay cruelty with cruelty? Would his hatred of his more fortunate brothers have led him to seek power through the channels of the world's worst crime?

CHAPTER IV

SUBSTITUTE DECOY

FROM behind the door of room 208 came the sound of a window opening. Then a snap like the breaking of a banjo string, and a man cursed softly.

John Dirk backed away from 208 until one heel touched the wall

opposite the door. He hunched his shoulders and charged at the panel. There was the squeal of straining metal and a splintering of wood. He backed again, gritted his teeth and struck the door like a human projectile that sent the panel wide open and crashed into a chair on the other side.

Dirk kept his balance. His gun leaped into prominence and turned unerringly toward the bearded man who was pasted against the wall at one side of the window. The window was partly open. There was a neatly drilled hole in the pane. Dr. Theo. Grant was blinking back blood that trickled into his right eye from a slight scalp wound. He was breathing heavily. His anxious eyes were measuring distances, weighing his chances of jumping the G-man's gun. And those chances were nil. John Dirk was a hard man to jump, and besides, Grant would have had to cross in front of the window. That meant daring death from the impatient smoker in the alley.

"Don't try anything you won't live to regret, Dr. Hammond," said Dirk softly. "I'm not a murderer, but a Federal Agent sometimes kills. And when he has to kill no one does a better job of it."

"You—you know me?" gasped the bearded man.

Dirk nodded. "The beard is false. It isn't even made from human hair. Lips Palos tried to get a handful of it before he died. Then, when you thought you had accidentally poisoned Marjorie Hammond, I distinctly heard you call her darling. Everything fits. Those g-men are out to get a man by the name of Hammond. And damned near did, by the looks of your head. Suppose you detour that window and sit down. You've got a lot to tell and not a whole lot of time to tell it in."

"And you're a Federal Agent?" the bearded man stepped cautiously toward a chair, swinging wide

around the window. He kept his eyes on Dirk and found the chair with his nervous fingers. "I should have gone to you men in the first place," the doctor said, "instead of trying to strike back at the men who hurt me."

"I don't care so much about you, Doc," Dirk said. "I'm thinking about that game daughter of yours. I thought that perhaps you had come to this hotel just to communicate with her."

"I didn't even know she was here," the doctor cut in.

"Well, anyway, it wasn't tough enough for her to think of you in the penitentiary. You had to fix up a death-house date for yourself. I'm not saying Palos didn't deserve all you gave him. I'm saying that Marjorie doesn't deserve all the hell you're fixing up for her. She came here looking for evidence that she hoped would prove you innocent of the charge that put you in the pen. You came here hunting Palos."

Dr. Hammond drew a long breath. "You won't believe this, but I'm going to tell it to you anyway: I did not kill Palos, though I tracked him here and tried to kill him."

Dirk snorted. "A doctor shouldn't have much trouble killing people. He gets plenty of chances."

Dr. Hammond's faded blue eyes looked squarely into John Dirk's eyes. "Think it over—that remark you just made. If I had killed Palos, would I have done it that way?"

DIRK looked down at Hammond's slender, nervous fingers. He had to admit they didn't look capable of strangling a man with a bit of silver wire. Hammond was arguing that a doctor would have chosen a more subtle murder method.

"Okay," said the G-man. "You've got a story and I'll listen to it. You're not my job, anyway. As a murderer, you'll just be handed over to the local authorities."

"First of all," began Hammond, "I was released from the penitentiary a week ago by the governor's pardon. I did not inform my daughter of my release simply because I expected to return to prison on the more serious charge of murder. I had lost the five best years of my life because of three men—Lips Palos, Barber Kyle, and a man whose identity I did not discover until I had mingled with certain of the convicts in prison. I haven't a nice disposition, and I had had a lot of time to brood. I wanted to kill those three men."

"The evidence that put me in prison was framed. One of Lips Palos' henchmen had been wounded in a gun brawl and he had been brought to me for treatment. When I discovered that my patient was a criminal, I tried to get in touch with the authorities. Palos and Kyle said I had tried to double-cross them, and as punishment for what I had tried to do, Palos, Kyle, and this mysterious third person planted evidence that framed me for a crime of their own doing."

"In prison, I learned the name of the third man who was my enemy. He was the Sleeper. He heads the vice syndicates in this section of the country. Kyle and Palos were his representatives. I followed Palos here, on my release, hoping to find Kyle and the Sleeper, too. And I fully intended to kill them."

The telephone rang. The G-man went over to the instrument. "Come and get it," he said. "And you'll say what I tell you."

Dr. Hammond picked up the receiver in unsteady hands. Dirk crowded close to the doctor so that he could hear the night clerk say: "Stockade Lodge calling Dr. Theo Grant. Mr. Murdock would like to speak to you, Doctor."

Hammond sent a quizzical glance at Dirk. The G-man nodded.

"But," Hammond objected, "it was like this when Palos was—"

"Tell the desk to switch Murdock on. I'll think up the answers."

In another moment, Dirk heard the brassy voice of the invalid millionaire: "Come out to the Stockade immediately, Dr. Grant. Another man has been seriously hurt. And by the way, how is your other patient, Mr. Palos, getting along?"

Hammond looked at Dirk and smothered the mouthpiece of the telephone against his broad chest. Dirk said: "Tell Murdock to come after you if he wants you. Say Palos is doing nicely."

HAMMOND repeated this message over the phone. The brassy voice agreed to call for the doctor in front of the hotel in half an hour. Hammond hung up and mopped his brow. "This Murdock—"

"I've met him," Dirk snapped. "Can you get that beard off in one piece?"

"I suppose so, but—"

"Then start getting it loose. And get out of your clothes. They won't fit, but they'll have to do. Talk while you're working. You haven't cleared up about who killed Palos."

"I thought I was safe behind this disguise," Hammond continued eagerly. "But they must have spotted me almost as soon as I got here. This morning I got a telephone call similar to the one that just came in. A man had been hurt at the Stockade."

"And I suppose that man was Palos?" Dirk was getting off his suit. "He'd got his neck entangled in a piece of wire, all by accident, eh? You'll have to do better than that, Hammond."

"No—no," Hammond rattled on. "Palos had been wounded through the shoulder. I was supposed to remove the shot. I welcomed the opportunity for I fully intended to dispose of Palos, my old enemy. I found the man in a room at the Stockade. He was delirious. He

babbled continually. Kept saying things like: 'We'll split it two ways, Barber and me. Two ways now. The Sleeper's whole damned treasure.'

"But when I got around to it, I lost my nerve. I'd spent many years learning to save lives. I couldn't kill Palos while he lay helpless under my knife. I had him resting easy after some time. I went out of the room for a while. When I came back, I made the discovery that Palos was dead.

"I made no examination at first. I was afraid I had failed in the operation. And I was afraid the whole gang would blame me for Palos' death. I told Murdock that Palos would have to be moved to a hospital and that I knew of one near by that would offer him perfect security from the law. Murdock seemed delighted. It was not until I got the body into the car that I noticed that strand of wire tight around Palos' throat. I knew then that he had been murdered. My one thought was to get rid of the body. I brought it here to the hotel under cover of darkness, happened to see the door of a room open—"

"My room," Dirk cut in. "So you passed the corpse off on a Federal Agent. Told the bell-hop the corpse was just a drunken friend. A nice piece of dirty work all the way around. Hurry off with that beard, Hammond. Your story, nutty as it sounds the way you tell it, has logic in it when you think it over. First—Murdock is the Sleeper, I suppose. Anyway, the Sleeper has most of the cash profits of the vice syndicate stowed away somewhere. Palos either knew where the money was or was determined to find out and split it with Kyle. Second—the Sleeper got wise and decided it would be better for his bank account with Palos and Kyle out of the way. I'll bet the Sleeper put that bullet in Palos' shoulder, just enough to wound him. Palos, of course, wouldn't know who shot

him. Then you were called in—the perfect fall guy.

"You were out to get square with Palos and Kyle. The Sleeper was determined to see that Palos never came out from under your operation alive. He had to frame you because he was afraid of what Palos' men might do if they found out that he, the Sleeper, had bumped Palos. The idea was to kill Palos and pin the blame on you. That, Doc, is why you're so popular with these gunmen around here. It's leaked around that Dr. Grant is really Dr. Hammond who had to have vengeance on Palos. And if their guns don't kill you, the law will."

Dirk picked up the false beard that Hammond had removed. The spirit gum had dried out but there was a bottle of the sticky stuff on Hammond's dresser. The G-man went over to the mirror. "I'm not going to look a hell of a lot like you, Doc, but as long as it's dark maybe I'll get by. But how come, if you couldn't murder Palos, you tried to kill Kyle tonight by putting chloral hydrate in a drink?"

Hammond shook his head vigorously. "You were all wrong. I could not have killed Kyle either. I had made an appointment with the man this morning before I went to the Stockade to work on Palos. True, I did intend slipping poison into a drink, but again I lost my nerve."

Dirk paused, in the arduous task of sticking the beard in place, to look sideways at Hammond. "I've thought about that poisoning from all angles. Unless you were trying to commit suicide, some one was trying to murder you or you were trying to murder some one. Now, which is it?"

HAMMOND shrugged helplessly. "Until you told me, I had no idea that cocktail had chloral hydrate in it. Had I wanted to kill a man, I would have used something else, I tell you. I was naturally anx-

ious about my daughter when I saw you carry her out—so anxious that I didn't care greatly whether I exposed my identity or not."

"Okay, Doc. Now if you'll expose your shirt, I'll put on your coat. I about half believe you."

Hammond eagerly began to remove his suit. "I don't know how I can thank you for even believing me, but—"

"Don't thank me," Dirk snorted. "Thank Marjorie. I'm working the law of inheritance backwards. I don't see how such a square girl as Marjorie could have a murderer for a dad."

"But what do you intend to do?" demanded Hammond. "I can't allow you to sacrifice yourself by acting as a decoy in front of those gunmen."

"Don't worry, I'm not going in for heroics. That mob won't turn their guns on the Sleeper's own car. And I'm returning to the Stockade with the Sleeper. What happens from there on is in the cards. Chances are, this is an attempt to rid the earth of one Dr. Hammond. Or maybe another frame. Maybe he wants to get rid of Kyle. Anyway, I'll be on the inside of the biggest vice organization in this section of the country. And that's my job."

"And do you expect me to sit back—"

"Right! Sit back and think of that daughter of yours. She's been thinking enough about you, trying to get you out of prison, sacrificing everything for you. And you couldn't think of anything after you got out but getting back in again as a candidate for the electric chair."

Dirk stepped over to the doctor and pulled off the man's horn-rimmed glasses, squinted through them, and could see scarcely a thing. He pushed out both lenses with his thumbs and mounted the frame on nose and ears.

Dr. Hammond's chin sank on his chest. "Maybe you're right," he

sighed. "But I hate to have you fighting my battles."

Dirk grunted. "That's what G-men are for. And the quicker the general public learns to bring us their troubles, the quicker crime marches on back to the hell it came from."

CHAPTER V

SUICIDE STOCKADE

AIR horns blared in front of the Lakeland Hotel. In the doorway, G-man John Dirk pulled Dr. Hammond's hat down far over his eyes and hunched his shoulders. In front of the hotel, Murdock's big car waited for him. Lying on his strange bed arrangement was Murdock himself, watching the door of the hotel by means of his mirror. The hotel and Rhinelander's streets were quiet. Even the taproom next door had fallen into a before-dawn hush.

Dirk drew a long breath and held it as though he fully expected it to be his last. He wondered if it was dark enough so that his crude disguise would not be penetrated by the heavy-lidded, lashing eyes of the strange man in the car. Only one way to find out, he knew. He threw open the door and strode out to the car, Dr. Hammond's satchel in his hand.

The foot of the invalid couch took up a portion of the front seat so that Dirk was crowded in close to the chauffeur, the same man Dirk had seen talking to Steve Collins in the taproom. He knew he was constantly under Murdock's closest scrutiny. Murdock's hand-mirror was a silvery, all-seeing eye, focused constantly upon the G-man. Not a word was spoken except Murdock's brassy order: "To the Stockade, James."

With a purr, like that from a contented Persian cat, the big car rolled from the curb and down the street.

Back in the hotel, Dr. Hammond

tiptoed up the stairs to the third floor. Without the beard that had disguised him, he felt cold and naked. Without his glasses, he felt that he was not seeing all he should see. He started at shadows, and he glanced distrustfully at the dim outlines of doorways. At last he found the door of his daughter's room. He knocked lightly. As he waited and there was no response, his heart lost some of its excited thumping. Why didn't she answer?

"Marjorie," he called softly. "It's dad." He took hold of the door knob. It chattered loosely in his grasp. He turned it, pushed open the door, and entered a room of darkness. The door closed quietly behind him. Hammond turned around. The light switch snapped. In the sudden glare, the doctor saw the blurred outline of a man who moved nearer and nearer, out of the mist of his dim sightedness. Here was a man who was big, sleek and pale-haired. His face was complacent pudginess, palely pink like a species of hog groomed for the fair and certain of his blue ribbons.

"Barber Kyle!" Hammond breathed. Then his eyes darted from the man to hurry about the blurred room. "Marjorie! Are you here, Marjorie?" Hammond lurched suddenly toward Barber Kyle. The muzzle of a gun brought him up short. "What have you done with my daughter, beast?" he demanded through clenched teeth.

Kyle uttered a soft, unpleasant laugh. "You worry so much. I should end all that, eh? Too bad for Marjorie that I thought this was your room. But don't worry so much. She'll live a long time. Too long, maybe. Like you're going down to my car, so she went down. Maybe not willingly. You want to go where she's going? You'll come willingly, eh? I will be very close to you and my gun will be closer still. Marjorie is tied up in my car. I will not have to tie you. Death can

do that. You killed my friend Palos, so you won't expect too much kindness from me, eh?"

"I did not kill Palos—"

"Shut up. We will walk and not talk of killings." Kyle crowded the doctor from the room, his hidden gun nudging Hammond constantly. Side by side in silence they went down the three flights of steps and across the hotel lobby. Barber Kyle's big car was standing in front of the hotel. Covering the doctor closely, Kyle ordered him to slide in under the wheel and then got in beside him. Hammond saw a struggling bundle, wrapped up in a robe and lying across the back seat of the car. Marjorie, he knew. He was so close to her, yet so utterly helpless to aid her. He wished she was dead. Better dead than in the soft, white hands of Barber Kyle.

KYLE was chuckling. The big car trembled with his merriment. He knew that Hammond was living through hellish torment. Kyle wanted it that way. Usually, he didn't care what a father thought when his daughter started down hill the way Marjorie Hammond was going, lashed by the same whip that would be used on Marjorie. But this time he spoke to a father and said: "Too bad you're not going to live longer and see more, Hammond."

"Damn you!" Hammond jerked around in the seat, his nervous fingers clenching. But Kyle's gun jabbed him again and Kyle's laughter stopped.

"You'll drive," Kyle said. "And just like I tell you. Get this crate started. I'll keep this gun on you."

Dr. Hammond's fingers trembled over the dark instrument board in quest of the ignition switch. He found the dashlight and turned it on. Suddenly, there was a pop like a drawn cork. The man beside him jerked convulsively, sobbed breath between clenched teeth, and slowly

folded forward until his head rolled against the windshield. Kyle lay very still. A dark, glistening stream trickled across the gleaming instrument panel.

Hammond blinked. A doctor should have known death, but this had come so unexpectedly and from no visible source. But while Hammond sat there, completely stunned, some one moved toward the left side of the car. A hand holding a silenced pistol came over the window sill and the gun muzzle jabbed into Hammond's back.

"Don't move. Don't turn around, or you'll get it now!" came a husky warning.

Hammond didn't move his head. But out of the corner of his eye, he saw a hand glide across the dashboard of the car and switch off the dashlight.

"Now," said the husky voice, "you shot Kyle in self defense, while you two were going along the street at about sixty miles an hour. Kyle was driving. Do you know what happens when you shoot the driver of a car through the head when he's going at that rate of speed? The car goes haywire. That's what this car is going to do. It's going all out of control. Going to ram into the bank or some other building. There'll be nothing to it except junk and a couple of corpses. That's the picture, but who cares about the picture so long as the frame is good, Mr. G-man?"

"G-man?" gasped Dr. Hammond.

There was a harsh oath. Powerful fingers clawed Hammond's ear and pulled the doctor's head to the left. A flashlight beam flicked across his face.

"Hammond!" cried the man with the gun. "And what the hell's this in the back? The girl? Damn you! Then the man with the beard—Hell! The G-man gone to the—" The man with the gun opened the door and crowded in close to Ham-

mond. In the dim, gray light of the early morning, the doctor thought there was something familiar about the hazy outline of the face that was coming closer and closer to him.

"No!" Hammond choked out. "You—you couldn't be. You—"

Fingers like steel hooks fastened suddenly upon Hammond's throat. The same fingers, he knew, that had twisted silvery wire about Lips Palos' throat. Fingers that squeezed—squeezed—

THE gates of the Stockade opened before the lights of Murdock's car. They were gates of steel to which heavy pine logs were fastened. The fence around the estate was similarly made so that picturesqueness and strength were combined. G-man John Dirk's eyes were busy with every detail of the huge log in front of him. They had driven about ten miles from the city, and most of the way along a trail of bark between seemingly impenetrable woods.

The place was ideally situated for the Sleeper's purposes. A woman's scream could have carried miles and yet attracted no one. The house was large enough to act as a depot and clearing house for the wretched human cargo in which the gang dealt. One wing of the house extended down to the edge of a little lake evidently included in the boundary of the estate.

The car pulled into a garage built into the house. The chauffeur got out hurriedly and closed and locked the doors behind him. Murdock was crying out in his brassy voice: "Get me out of here, damn you. I'm in a hell of a hurry! There's a huge merger to be carried out. Millions at stake. I should not have left the phone a moment." His strong hands clenched at the car door handles and rattled them furiously.

"To hell with him," the chauffeur muttered to Dirk. "The old stiff gives me the creeps. He oughtn't to

be alive, damn him." Then he raised his voice and called to some one in the house: "Oh Mike, the doc is here."

A big, dish-faced man with a particularly unpleasant smile on his wide mouth, came to the door that led from the garage to the house. He said: "Hi, Doc. Come on in." There was a decided spider-and-fly attitude about that invitation, but John Dirk could expect little more than that. He held on to the doctor's satchel and went up the three steps into the house proper. The man called Mike took him by the arm and steered him into a dark room.

"Where's the patient?" asked Dirk, in a rather poor imitation of Dr. Hammond's voice.

Mike simply laughed, kicked open the door with his foot, and thrust Dirk into a lighted room. Three men lounged in expensive chairs about the room. They were men who were good at lounging—well dressed lizards, clean shaven, well-fed, with all that had once been soul burned out of their eyes. They looked big-city. They were the kind of men small-town girls would look at and listen to and dream about, until reality turned dreams into hellish nightmares.

One of the three said: "Hi, Doc," and winked at one of his companions through a haze of cigar smoke.

Dirk put down the satchel on the table and fumbled with the catch. Another one of the men said: "You lost some weight in stir, didn't you, Doc? Don't seem like so thin a man could have killed Lips Palos." He laughed and slapped a solid thigh.

"I didn't kill Palos," Dirk said. He got the latch of the doctor's satchel open. "The Sleeper killed him."

"Hell, I guess we know that," said the man called Mike. "But you sure framed easy. You don't quite get it yet, do you? Guess you've got a right to some education before the

Sleeper fixes you up. Me and the boys here are the Sleeper's boys. Palos and Kyle have their own gangs, though we was all sort of incorporated under the Sleeper. Then Palos and Kyle got the idea that they weren't getting all they ought to out of the racket. Hell, they were getting filthy with money, but not so filthy as the Sleeper. They thought they'd just cut in on the Sleeper's haul and split it two ways.

"So the Sleeper decided Kyle and Palos were frozen assets. They had to go, but the Sleeper was too smart to have it look as though he did the killing. He didn't want Kyle's and Palos' torpedoes turning their rods on us, see? So you were the fall guy."

Dirk nodded. "I get it. And Kyle and Palos' torpedoes were to take it out on me. A sort of a triple play. But something went wrong. There was a G-man mixed up in the game. The Kyle-Palos killers didn't get me. So I'm brought here—but what for?"

"What for?" echoed Mike. "Say, can't you see the Sleeper can't have you running around loose? I don't know what the Sleeper wants to do with you, but it won't be decoratin' you for bravery or something. You're so yellow right now your voice has got the jaundice-shakes. It don't sound like Doc Hammond's voice, anyway."

"Any medal the doc gets is going to be made of lead, eh Mike?" laughed one of the others.

"What was the idea of the disguise, Doc?" asked one of the men. "The shrubbery and cheaters isn't enough to fool us. The same old Doc Hammond."

Dirk's hand slid down into the open satchel. It contained but a single instrument—his own accurate, deadly gun. His hand closed on the butt.

There was the faintest glimmer of suspicion in Mike's eyes. Instantly, he acted on that suspicion. With

an oath, he sprang at Dirk. The G-man raised his right hand and the satchel at once. He hurled the satchel straight into Mike's dish face, drawing the gun as he stepped back to avoid Mike's floundering body. The other three men drew guns simultaneously. There were two shots. White fire lanced through Dirk's right hand. He caught a glimpse of that hand as the three men came at him all at once; it was empty, and the knuckles were streaked with blood. At least one of these rats was sure death with an automatic.

A furious uppercut to the well-kept face of the foremost man all but broke the G-man's fist, but gave him the satisfaction of seeing the man fade out of the picture, choking on his teeth. Then another of the rats lunged with his shoulder low. He caught Dirk just above the belt and rammed him back against the wall with such force that all the breath in Dirk's lungs seemed to explode. Even then, it took the other two men to bring him to the floor. He fought with wild-cat fury and wild-cat ethics, but a below-the-belt kick from big Mike took the iron out of his soul.

They held him down, brought his bleeding hands together, and bound his wrists with adhesive tape. His ankles got the same treatment. Then big Mike pulled off the false whiskers and uttered a prolonged and elaborately embroidered damn.

"This ain't Doc Hammond!"

"Hell, no!"

The man who was spitting teeth came up with Dirk's gun in his hand. All the prettiness had been beaten out of his face by Dirk's powerhouse blow. Bitterly, he said: "And what in hell do you think he is?" He nudged Dirk in the face with the heel of his shoe. "Just look at the cute little stamp on this rod of his, will youse? This guy's a Fed!"

CHAPTER VI

THE SLEEPER STRIKES

AG-MAN wasn't to be disposed of with impunity, they decided. They hoisted their battered, bleeding captive on their shoulders and carried him into an unfurnished room at the back of the house. "He'll make hell for you, G-man," said the one who had suffered from Dirk's blow in the teeth, as he kicked Dirk in the small of the back. "The Sleeper's got more kinds of death up his sleeve than you've got hairs on your damned head." Then he went from the room, laughing.

Dirk lay on the pine floor, fully conscious of every pain that racked his body; fully conscious of his own helplessness. Anyway, he thought, it had been worth the try. He would have liked to prolong the fight, to mash those rats up a bit more. Rats? They were something lower than that.

He hated to pass out knowing that there was such a rotten blotch on God's clean landscape as the Sleeper's stockade. He hadn't passed out yet, of course. But they'd have to kill him. Then, when he thought of Marjorie Hammond, he felt that he just couldn't die. It was something like the immovable object and the irresistible force—he wouldn't die and they had to kill him. In the gray gloom of the morning, John Dirk laughed a bitter laugh that stopped short. Some one was just outside the door. It moved with a strange *thump-sluff* sound. Murdock!

The door opened and a shaft of yellow light pushed into the room. Murdock's stiff, paralyzed body was supported by two crutches that forked his powerful shoulders. His head was immobile. His body, from the waist down, was immobile. His leather-lidded eyes flickered catlike in the uncertain light. He braced

himself against the wall and let go of his crutches long enough to take a check-book and pen from the pocket of his immaculate white coat.

Murdock's brassy voice rang out: "How much shall I make this check out for, Doctor? Will a hundred thousand dollars be sufficient?"

The G-man uttered a crackling laugh. "I come pretty high."

"Say a hundred and fifty thousand then, Doctor." Murdock started to write in the check-book. "I shall be forced to sell my holdings in United Tin, but I am only too glad to make this little sacrifice in the cause of humanity. I'll phone my broker immediately." He eyed the G-man with strange, sleepy eyes. "Can't you sit down, either? Do you always have to either stand or lie down? That's my trouble. Some day, though, I'm going to have a real check-book. Then I'll be glad to repay you for your trouble, Doctor."

Dirk chuckled. "That's okay, Napoleon."

"Napoleon?" sang out Murdock. "I, Napoleon? Have you the slightest conception of my true identity? I am Murdock, The great Murdock. The greatest of all time, in fact. I am the wolf of Wall Street. I am the great bear who shall cause the next great financial crash. Men are made or ruined by me. I am Murdock, always sure-footed. I am the greatest financial wizard of all time!"

Dirk could have laughed outright had his own predicament worried him less. The man was crazy as a loon, but he was an ideal blind for the clever, insidious Sleeper. Probably the Stockade was deeded to the mad Murdock. The place seemed but the summer home of a wealthy eccentric. Eccentric, was he? Murdock was as badly cracked as a jigsaw puzzle. Yet to the natives, Murdock must have seemed a fearful and wonderful man. A man of ap-

parent wealth and power can do and say strange things without being thought insane.

TO the uninitiated, the Stockade must have appeared as forbidden ground because Murdock had made it so. Here, Murdock seemed to be king, because, in his own world of dreams, he fancied himself a man of unlimited wealth and power. None could have guessed that here at the Stockade the unfortunate victims of the vice ring began their journey along the road marked by the three "D's"—dope, degradation, and death. None would have supposed that here the unknown Sleeper directed his terrible traffic.

"Look here, Mr. Murdock," the G-man said. "You're a big man, no doubt of that. I'd like to work for you. I could help you a lot. I've got a real check-book in my pocket that I'd be glad to give you, but my hands are tied. If you could get the tape off my hands for me, maybe you and I could get into a business deal. We'd make a successful combine, you and I, what with your brains and my check-book."

Murdock screwed his body around. His strange eyes passed up and down the G-man's body. He shuffled nearer to Dirk. "With a check-book I could be a Rothschild," he whispered.

"Hell, yes," Dirk said. "And possibly a Ford." If he humored the madman, there was a chance that Murdock might enable him to get his arms and legs free. Then for another bold stroke at the rotten gang that held him prisoner.

"We'll do it!" cried Murdock. "We'll throw the financial world into a panic. Then we'll buy and buy and buy and create a monopoly in pepper and salt. We'll make them pay our price or go crazy for it."

"You'll have to pull the tape off my hands," Dirk said, "before we can do anything."

"Good! Of course. But it's a sad thing I can't reach down that far. My arms aren't that long. And I don't bend. I can't get down without help. But I'll get help. I'll call Mike. Mi—"

"Shut up!" Dirk groaned. "Can't you just fall down? We don't want Mike to know our secret."

"I can't fall down," Murdock said. "It hurts."

A figure loomed in the doorway, strode into the room, and knocked Murdock to the floor with a single blow of his powerful arm. The face of the newcomer was cruelly masked with a white triangle of handkerchief. His keen eyes darted at Dirk. He raised his voice and shouted: "Mike! Tucker! Get a move on, damn you!"

Dirk sighed. "Hello, Sleeper," he said softly. "You'll pardon me if I don't rise?"

The Sleeper ignored Dirk and turned to shout back at his men: "Tucker, that was sure a hell of a smart trick to bring a G-man here!"

The big chauffeur who had brought Murdock and Dirk to the Stockade came into the room, lug- ging the unconscious form of Dr. Hammond. "Your fault, Sleeper," grumbled the chauffeur. "I did just what you told me to. I got the nut to the telephone and had him call the hotel and get hold of Dr. Grant, the guy with whiskers that you said was the real Dr. Hammond. You said you were going to frame him for killing Kyle and then turn Kyle's and Palos' men loose on him. How in hell was I to know the G-man switched whiskers with the doc? And how the hell you goin' to frame anybody for bumping Kyle now?"

"Forget it, Tucker," said the Sleeper. "I made a mistake, too. It just complicates matters a little, that's all. The main thing is that Kyle and Palos got it in the neck. Now we got to clean up the doc and

the G-man. Mike got the boat ready?"

"All ready," Tucker said. "We got Kyle in it, all tied up with a lot of weights. We dump the stiff, the doc, and the G-man in the lake. The girl goes along to the other side of the lake for Wop Joe to pick up."

"What girl?" Dirk exploded. He hadn't meant to ask that question. He knew that his one chance was to lie low and wait for a break, though hell only knew where it was coming from.

THE SLEEPER chuckled. "Me, too, G-man. I'm surprised just like you when I look in the back of Kyle's car and find the doc's daughter. That's one reason why things didn't turn out just as I had planned. That girl was a prize package worth picking up, though. Soft on her, aren't you, G-man? A lot of guys will go soft on that heart-smasher. That's why she's going to stay alive, unlike you and her old man."

"Listen, Sleeper," said Dirk hoarsely, "haven't you done enough to her old man without taking it out on her? I got a little money—two thousand dollars in cash at the bank. I'll give you a check. You let the girl go. She's so clean and square, I don't mind dying if I can do it knowing she'll stay that way." He was bargaining, something the Feds didn't do. He was bargaining with a merchant of filth. He didn't care. Nothing mattered. The code of the F. B. I. seemed something in the dim past. Death didn't matter; death was something in the living present. He was going to die, but they couldn't have Marjorie; couldn't warp her to fit into their hideous pattern.

A slow, cold laugh came from the muffled lips of the Sleeper. "G-man," he said, "these ears of mine have heard every sob story in the world, from every kind of man and woman. And they haven't lis-

tened. I got money to make—a hell of a lot of dough to make before I check in. You go into tears if you want to, but don't waste words. I started in the bottom of my racket and worked up till the name of the Sleeper is the biggest in the traffic. Don't think I'll melt down now or be dope enough to take a check from you. If you had the cash, I'd take it. But I'd take the girl, too."

"You don't get the picture. A guy on the floor, all trussed up like a mummy and waiting for the gong, isn't in any position to bargain, even if he is one of Uncle Sam's bright boys. It's a damned shame you got to go into the drink. I ought to pack your corpse up and send it to Washington. Everything was moving my way until you Feds horned in. It might help if I could show you up as an example."

"That girl you talk about is just merchandise, as far as I'm concerned. A few weeks on a dope diet and she'll be like all the rest, only prettier, for a while, anyway. I'm really sorry you barged into this mess, because it puts me to a little trouble. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have framed the doc right and slept a little easier after they strapped him in the chair."

"Better think my proposition over," Dirk said. "Better do a lot of thinking, because a brain's not much good filled with slugs. You've got the idea you can make me vanish. Maybe you can. But a G-man can't vanish without about four hundred pairs of Federal eyes turning that direction."

"Threats, have we now?" said the Sleeper. "I've heard them, too. They usually follow the sob stuff. I got no worries."

Dirk ground his teeth, strained every muscle against his bonds. But the adhesive tape might just as well have been steel. The Sleeper stooped, hooked powerful fingers on Dirk's collar, dragged him across the room and through a door that

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opened on a boat house built out over the lake. There he rolled the G-man over the side of a good-sized launch. Dirk tumbled into two inches of cold water that slopped in the bottom of the boat. There was another man beside him, or rather a corpse — Barber Kyle, who had learned the futility of trying to double-cross the Sleeper.

A half minute later, Mike came out to dump the unconscious Dr. Hammond into the stern of the boat. The doctor groaned a little. Mike went back to join Tucker and the Sleeper.

"Doc!" whispered Dirk. "Come out of it!"

A groan answered him. Dr. Hammond did not move.

Dirk lay quietly in the bottom of the boat, waiting for the break that had to come. There had to be a way out—for Marjorie. He had forgotten about himself. He was thinking of the worse-than-death in store for Marjorie Hammond.

FIVE minutes passed. Then Mike and the Sleeper came into the boathouse. The former carried a limp, lovely form in his arms. It was Marjorie, still courageous as she struggled against the ropes that bound her and the arms that held her. She got a glimpse of her father and sobbed: "Dad!" Then her eyes found Dirk's and she husked: "John!" If she ever had any hopes, they went overboard then.

"Yes," Dirk groaned, "I'm washed out, too." He was thinking that water was pretty wonderful stuff if it didn't come up to your eyes. It was just possible that two inches of water would mean a world of difference in the future of Marjorie Hammond.

They put Marjorie in the stern near her father. The Sleeper squatted beside Dirk. Mike got in behind the wheel of the launch and started the motor. He still wore the handkerchief over his face.

"Why don't you bare your puss to the fresh morning breeze, Sleeper—or I guess it would sort of spoil the dawn," Dirk said as the boat popped out into the lake. "But you've got no secrets any more. I'm damned if I know your name, but I know you. How did you expect to try and poison Dr. Hammond without getting caught?"

The Sleeper laughed. "If the breaks hadn't gone the wrong way, I'd have got by with it, all right. The idea was to poison both Kyle and Hammond at once. I knew they were going to meet in the taproom. I was going to slip a half-empty bottle of choral hydrate crystals in the doctor's pocket. They'd have passed off for drunks until it was too late to give them an antidote. Then investigators would have found the poison on the doctor, his motive for revenge would have been dug up, and it would have looked like murder and suicide. Oh, at figuring things out, you can't beat the Sleeper. I like that name 'Sleeper' a lot better than Jones. Jones is my real monicker, though a lot of good that's going to do you."

They were about in the middle of the lake. Mike cut his throttle, fixed the wheel, and asked: "Will this spot do?"

"Sure," said the Sleeper. "Overboard with the stuff. Kyle was a good guy while he lasted. Too bad."

Dirk seemed to be intent upon the watery interment of the body of Barber Kyle. Close beside him, the Sleeper was fumbling with weights that were intended to carry the G-man to the bottom of the lake. But beneath him, Dirk's hands were busy. The water in the bottom of the boat had softened the adhesive tape considerably, just as he had anticipated. Was it soft enough to permit him to tear his hands loose?

Mike got the body of Kyle up on the thwarting and heaved body and weights into the water. The splash

echoed across the lake. Ripples rocked the boat.

The Sleeper said: "Mike, if you'll just loop this wire around the G-man's ankles, I'll put these weights—"

And that was as far as he got. John Dirk had other ideas about where the weights were to be put. The toes of his shoes were hooked under the seat in front of him, enabling him to sit up quickly. With the same movement, every muscle in his lean arms was brought into play against the water-softened adhesive tape. His left arm tore free from its mate. His left scooped through the water, caught one of the weights at the squatting Sleeper's feet, and brought it up with a swiftness that was dazzling.

The Sleeper made a try at drawing his gun. That was one time when he thought fast but in the wrong direction. Had he decided to spring backwards into the water, he might have escaped that flying weight. The oath on his lips never quite matured, as it was, for the weight caught him on the point of the chin. Bone slivered beneath that terrific blow. Instantaneously, the Sleeper slept. More than that, he sprawled on top of the G-man, and his unfeeling shoulders took a blow from a wrench which Mike probably intended for Dirk.

MIKE had a gun. He was drawing it when Dirk flopped to throw the Sleeper to one side. Dirk's doubled legs shot out to ram Mike in the shins. Mike's gun blasted, but it was just another hole in the water as the big man was brought, howling, to his knees. Dirk's left arm lashed around Mike's neck. His chin gouged up at Mike's Adam's apple. His right hand, bloody and waving long strands of adhesive tape, ward off Mike's gun and sent a second shot wild. He didn't know what was going to become of the third shot if Mike ever fired it. The G-man's

strength was going fast, and Mike was as fresh as the morning.

Dirk's fingers slid down and locked on Mike's gun wrist. That wasn't making a whole lot of difference to Mike. The gun was turning unalterably toward Dirk's head. It was a matter of seconds now. An ugly, triumphant grin twisted Mike's broad mouth. But it was just a little premature. Instead of continuing hopelessly to try and hold off that gun, Dirk suddenly exerted all his strength in bringing Mike's wrist down on the rail of the boat.

There was a howl of pain. Mike's fingers stiffened. The gun plopped to the bottom of the boat just inside the rail. There was a scramble of clawing fingers. Dirk got the gun by the butt and brought it up suddenly, the muzzle centering Mike's forehead. Mike didn't know Dirk's trigger finger was too numb to fire a shot. He only knew that he was looking into the wrong end of a gun, his own weapon, which he had every reason to fear. He shrank back, turned white, muttered hoarsely: "Don't shoot."

A rat would have fought back, knowing that the gray of prison walls was nearer than the gray of the morning sky. But Mike wasn't a rat. He was of a lower order of beings. He cowered in the stern, fascinated by the cold eye of the gun, while Dirk manipulated the ropes that bound Marjorie Hammond with his free hand. And when Dirk ordered him to come closer, Mike came closer, all the time whimpering: "You—you wouldn't kill me, would you? That would be murder."

"You're wrong there," Dirk said. "It would be extermination. Insecticide, maybe. But I'm not going to kill you. You loosen those ankles of mine."

"Sure," said Mike. "You bet I will."

Dirk grinned mirthlessly. "That's what you think!" And as Mike

stooped over, Dirk landed a gun-barrel blow on his temple. "That clears the decks for action," he said, as Mike dropped limply beside the Sleeper.

It was Marjorie Hammond who helped remove the bonds from Dirk's ankles. She was crying a little now, for some reason not quite clear to the G-man. "Gosh," Dirk said, "your dad will be all right, honey. He's doing some pretty lusty groaning."

"I—I know," she sobbed. "That's why I'm crying. It's joy, you blessed block-head."

Dirk shook his head. "I don't get it, but then go right on if it makes you feel any better." He reached over and pulled the handkerchief from the Sleeper's face. The man's jaw was a little out of shape, but he was still recognizable.

"The Lakeland bartender!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"None other," agreed Dirk.

"When I learned that your dad hadn't put the choral hydrate in the cocktail you accidentally got hold of, it was a cinch to figure out that the bartender must have been the prisoner. He saw a chance to get your dad and Kyle, both at the same time. He would have made your dad's death look like suicide and come out of it clean. As it is—well, we'll just steer this boat across the lake, take our two prisoners, and have the law round up the rest. It's the end of Sleeper's gang. The end of the Sleeper won't come until they turn on the juice of the electric chair."

Marjorie smiled as only Marjorie could smile. "See, I wasn't so dumb in carrying my detecting to the Lakeland bar."

Dirk put his arm around the girl and drew her nearer. "As a detective, you're just a confounded little meddler. But you can meddle in my life just as long as it lasts, honey."

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Homicide Help Wanted

By Grant Lane

JIM BREESE was bitter. For fifteen years he had worked hard and faithfully on the New York police force. At first he had sharpened pencils for the ace sleuths, and then he tracked down unimportant corpses and got the history of them. Very dull work, but it was when one of these had turned out to be an important link in the chain of crime the killer intended to be perfect, that he got his break. Casually going about getting the history of the corpse, he just as casually solved the whole case.

He was second grade, then, and some one else sharpened pencils. A few years later he followed a Chinaman's pigtail all the way from Manhattan to Manchuria and brought back an axe slayer. The papers published his picture and he was a first grade detective. Today he wasn't sharpening pencils, but he was third grade again. That was why he was bitter.

"Hell," said the chief, "after all those editorials—you the one dick I depended on for a solution to the murder of Mortimer Magee— You're lucky you aren't in uniform. You've disgraced us. Three weeks have passed

and the old millionaire's killer is still roaming around. The papers will never forget it!"

"I thought it was Hal Evans," Jim Breese answered softly. "You see, Evans being the madcap playboy. The nephew. Evans being the first name in the will—"

"You've been reading books. Madcap nephews don't murder their uncles for money. Besides, Hal Evans was in the Hi-Ho club at the time the murder occurred. Everybody in the place saw him."

Jim Breese arched his eye brow a fraction of an inch. "I think I recall having heard that before. Not often, though. Just about five hundred times."

"Well? Your clues? What about—"

"Couldn't find the gun. Nobody else had a motive to murder the old man."

The chief's face was livid. "You mean you haven't discovered anyone else with a motive?"

"Yes," Jim Breese said, "that's what I mean."

He felt pretty rotten. He thought, you could solve a couple of dozen cases; the papers could play you up, call you brilliant. But you couldn't

make a single mistake. At least not on a case that drew as much publicity as the simple little shooting of that rich old man in his Park Avenue place three weeks ago.

The years had hardened him. His face was like leather now. With deep-set gray eyes he glanced at the chief. "Any little odd jobs you want done? You've jerked me from the Mortimer Magee case and I'm still getting a salary. Maybe I could sweep up the card room?"

"It's no good—that attitude," the chief said. "If you can't do the work we have to put in men who can." He looked at a sheet of paper in front of him. "There's a report of a corpse up at 106th Street and Broadway. Some down-in-the-heel actor. You can run up there if you want."

"Thanks," said Jim Breese. "I suppose you'll want his history? It seems I have a vague recollection of being a detail man before."

"Yes. History. Any little odd facts." He handed him the address.

Jim Breese's gray eyes flickered. "Just one thing. I want to make it clear. I looked over the Magee case pretty carefully. I'm convinced there isn't a single lead now. If that case is ever solved I'll solve it—even if I have to do it in my time off!"

He turned on his heel and walked out.

THE actor lived in a brown-front rooming house. The place was run over with college kids going to Columbia. The actor's name was Harry Murry and he had kept to himself.

The room told the story. There were pictures of old-time stage stars autographed to Harry. There was a book of yellowed press clippings. Against one wall was an electric heater, which the landlady had not known he possessed since they run up the light bills. In a neat package beside it was a loaf of bread, a package of cheese and a bottle of milk. The cheese was pretty old. It was lying on

an old program from the Palace. Jim Breese looked at it. It said:

Act Three: Harry Murry—Song and Dance Man

Murry lay in the center of the floor where the medical inspector was examining him. Kids were peeking in through the door, and the landlady, a broom in her hand, and a cloth wrapped around her head, stood in the room over by the window.

The clothes on the corpse looked very neat, but when Jim examined them he found the cuffs of the coat frayed, and the gray checked trousers had been patched—"invisible" patching sold for twenty five cents anywhere—several times. The shoes were highly polished but they were full of creases that Jim saw when he bent them; and the soles were very thin.

Harry Murry's old face seemed very young. On the stage he would look like twenty-five, Jim thought, but dead, the skin he had kept tight and without wrinkles with packs of ice, loosened and became a flabby mass. He had green eyes which looked at the ceiling.

In view of all this, it struck Third Grade Detective Breese as peculiar to find a brand new tuxedo in the closet.

"Oh, he had a job," said the landlady, "he paid up a month's back rent on the strength of it. But then, after borrowing money to do that, and buy the tuxedo and all, he didn't get paid for the job. He was waiting for his pay when he died."

To say "died" was to put it mildly. The chest was crimson and sticky. It had been done with a knife. The knife was gone.

"Do you know where this job was?"

"No. He never told me. But I have my own ideas on the kind of a theatre that'll hold an actor's pay up for three weeks." She shrugged. "Poor soul."

The medical inspector got up. "He's dead—of knife wounds."

Jim Breese raised his eyebrow a fraction of an inch. "Oh, I see. That's quite a help. Thanks."

"It's quite all right," said the medical inspector. He left.

Jim looked around. There wasn't much more, but between the pages of a book he found a recent want-ad clipping; he read it carefully and pocketed it. And then he did something peculiar; he bent down and brushed his lean fingers through the threadbare rug beside the body. The landlady watched with wide eyes as Jim Breese picked up several small splinters. They were tan and looked the color of straw shavings. Jim carefully wrapped them in a handkerchief.

Casually, he turned, eyed the drawer of the correspondence desk. Here he found a letter only half written. It was dated yesterday and addressed to Max Baxter of the World Theatre.

He left the room with the landlady's words echoing in his ears that hereafter she would search rooms for electric burners. No wonder her bills had been so high!

MAX BAXTER was a short, thick-set man. He smoked a long cigar and looked at the detective with eyes of somber ebony. They were set close together and had a piggish gleam in them.

"Yes, I knew Murry. Owed him some money, too. He worked here a month ago. Begged for a chance and I put him on. We have a little vaude to make up for having only one picture. Most of the places run a double bill."

"You have a school for actresses?" Jim asked sharply.

"Why—ah," he coughed out cigar smoke, "yes—that is, I train them the best I can, and—"

"You offered Murry a partnership?"

"Yes."

"He didn't take it; yet was dead broke. Why?"

Max Baxter tugged at his collar and it was evident by the sweat that rolled down his face that he was not com-

fortable. "I don't know—wasn't interested, I guess. I'll tell you—"

"Let me tell you," Jim Breese said acidly, "I haven't checked up yet. All I have is half of a letter Murry started to write you. You may be interested in knowing, Mr. Baxter that he was so desperate he was going to *blackmail* you. Blackmail was a good deal more honorable than entering a partnership with you in that school! Isn't it the sort of an organization that puts ads in the papers for pretty young girls—experience *not necessary*?"

"Why, yes, we have run ads like that, you see—"

"Never mind. I know. You interview and it's all right because you've got this dump of a theatre as a blind. When you find a girl alone in New York—from some little town, maybe, and having no one to register a 'missing persons' complaint for her—you promptly hire her. She works a night in this show, then you tell her of a wonderful South American offer—and off she goes on a boat! But she never sees America again—nor a stage!"

Max Baxter threw down his cigar. "You can't prove that! You've nothing at all on me. That letter is nothing but lies!"

Jim Breese's face was white. "It's the old, old story, Baxter. I'll have the boys do a little checking tonight. I'd advise you to stick around. If that is the racket you're working you'll be taking a trip—up the river!"

"But I—"

"Shut up! I'm only sorry I haven't the evidence to haul you in now! You'd better put on a good show tonight. It'll probably be your last!"

Jim Breese sat in the back room of the precinct house because he thought he could be alone. He had twenty five back editions of every newspaper in town and he was laboriously poring through them. In his hand was the want-ad he had picked up in Murry's room:

Wanted: Actor. Must be young, personable. Have dark hair and either green or gray eyes. Smart dresser preferred. Experience necessary. Excellent pay—XX-4.

At midnight he clipped a duplicate ad. He sat back and yawned. Newspaper offices were closed until morning so there was nothing more he could do on that score. However there was more work. He took the light straw-like splinters that were wrapped in his handkerchief to the police laboratory.

"How's to go over them extra-carefully, Doc?"

"Sure thing, Jim. Clues?"

"I hope so. Funny thing, you know, I—" but he thought better of revealing the information, and nodding to the scientist, departed.

HE plodded into the apartment in which he lived at exactly one o'clock in the morning. It was a three story walk-up, but when he reached the rooms they made up for the extra exercise. They faced the East River, and Jim never tired of the sights that passed before his eyes. Tugs, and steamers, and barges, motor boats.

He unlocked the door and entered. He suspected nothing until he turned the light switch and the lights did not go on. Even then he might have blamed a burned out fuse; but a canny sixth sense warned him of danger. He stood by the door, trying to peer through the darkness. Through the French windows he could see the lights of the craft on the river; and he could hear the tooting of occasional whistles. In the apartment there was no sound.

Jim Breese was not a man to turn and go for help. For fifteen years he had fought all his battles alone; he intended to keep on that way for the next fifteen if he lived through them. He reached back to his hip holster and drew the police positive. It slid neatly into the palm of his hand.

When he moved forward his steps were stealthy, and he was aware

suddenly that his heart was tapping hard against his side. He went to the door of the bedroom and tried the lights there. The main switch would not go on, but whoever had put the electricity out of commission had forgotten the lamp that was plugged into the wall in the corner of the room.

Jim turned them on. He whirled about, waiting for gun fire. None came. Carefully, he moved to a closet and opened the door. Nothing. Yet he was sure there was some one in the apartment.

He went back to the door of the living room. It came then.

Three ear-splitting roars crashed away the silence. Red fire leapt like a trio of comets from the muzzle of a gun. Two bullets smashed through a picture on the wall; kept going on into the wood. The third took Jim through the side. It left a neat ribbon of blood.

It knocked him down. The fourth bullet was high over his head.

Jim Breese's side pained; pain that numbed his whole body. Get him, shoot the living hell out of him, hammered at his mind. But experience and common sense whispered something else. Let him think you're dead. Let him come over to examine you. Then open up.

He did that. Lay very still. After awhile he was rewarded. From the South corner he saw a blurred figure. It looked immense, bulky. It moved across the carpet in dragging *clumps* rather than footsteps.

When the light from the moon flickering through the window silhouetted the heavy figure, Jim raised his gun. One hand held the blood at his side; his fingers were hot with it. The other aimed the police positive.

It roared.

Jim was crouching now, like a wounded beast, and he sprang forward. He shot as he moved.

The figure clipped back two quick shots. One of them caught Jim in the shoulder, spun him around and

around. He pitched to his face in the center of the carpet. He clawed, wild rage seething through him, to gain his feet. He fumbled with his weapon.

Yet when he got up his legs were weak and for a moment he had to hold to the wall. At last he staggered across the room, still gripping the service weapon. He stared down at the figure of a man. He kicked his foot into it. It did not move.

Jim Breese kept his eyes on the dark figure as he went back to the bedroom. He called the house man out of his bed to fix the lights. Then he called the police station.

It was Max Baxter. One of Jim's bullets had taken him through the chest and he had pitched forward. There was a nasty gash on his head. He had fallen against the base of the big radio Jim kept. The squat theatre manager was dead.

Even the chief turned up. Jim Breese, who had always been too honest, admitted that he had thought Baxter innocent of murdering Harry Murry.

"It's beginning to look," said the chief, "like you have to have killers fall into your arms before you can catch them—to even solve a crime! You suspected Baxter of running a phony school and shipping gals to South America. We had the boys work on that and they were beginning to get places. With Murry blackmailing Baxter, threatening to reveal this phony school—you still figured Baxter innocent of murdering him!"

Jim, who was sitting in a straight chair while two internes from Bellevue treated his bullet scratches, only scowled. "Chief, I've always worked on theories. I had a theory in the Magee case and I had a theory in this Murry case. But something's gone wrong."

"Damn wrong," fumed the chief. "Take tomorrow off and rest with those wounds and everything. But show up the day after, if you can. I want to have a long talk with you."

Jim did not know how to answer that. He knew what the long talk would amount to. Brass buttons again, and a billy club. He was going around in a circle; going back to the point at which he started.

HE did not rest the next day. Bright and early he was at the newspaper office. The ad had been filed by Donald Walter, 310 East Tenth. The man had called for the answers. The name and address proved to be a fake. He phoned the police laboratory. Then he went over to Bellevue and into the morgue.

"This gash on the back of Baxter's head—how did he get it?"

"When he fell, I guess," said the doctor in charge.

"Yeah. But he fell forward—on his face. He cracked his forehead against the radio. There's a bruise there. But the gash on the back—"

The doctor shrugged. "You're the cop, not me. It's your own question."

Jim Breese grinned for the first time in two days. "And maybe you think I'm not going to answer it!" he said.

He left the hospital and drove like a whirlwind up to the rooming house on Broadway. The landlady said she had left everything just as it was. She didn't want to spoil the investigation. She followed him upstairs, but Jim entered the murder room alone, closed the door.

He went to the closet. The tuxedo was gone. That was what he wanted most.

His mind was working rapidly now, and he changed his plan slightly. He re-entered the hall, coming out so quickly that the landlady jumped.

"You've had a visitor. The killer came back for his dress suit. Remember any new faces showing up around here lately?"

"No. Except college boys coming to look at rooms."

"Would you know them if you saw them again? If you saw one of them alone?"

She crossed her arms over her buxom bosom. "Of course. I never forget a face."

"Thanks," Jim said, and left.

He was driving again, through the streets of the Bronx at breakneck speed, and he was conscious that a car was following him. It had kept his tail ever since he left the rooming house. Jim Breese grinned and throttled down harder.

Deliberately, he headed out of the residential districts and onto a highway. He watched the car that followed through the rear-vision mirror. No matter how fast he went, how many other cars he passed, that one stuck. He knew that the driver of it meant to kill him.

He drove for three miles, the other car doggedly at his tail; and then suddenly, without warning, he swerved right, swung down a narrow dirt road. He watched in the mirror as the sedan following also skidded and turned.

Jim Breese wheeled his machine onto a field, slammed on the brakes and leaped out. The black police positive was again in his hand. The sedan came rolling across the ground. And then he saw with sudden horror that it was not going to stop.

He fired at the tires, through the windshield. The car kept coming. Jim raced back to his own machine, behind it. The sedan tried to catch him, but it rammed Jim's coupe. A figure darted from the sedan.

Shots split through the clear afternoon air. Jim was crouching at the rear of his own machine. The lithe figure who was shooting at him was coming boldly forward. He recognized the man as Hal Evans, whom he had questioned many times. His hair was slicked down, and he was wearing a baggy gray suit he had worn last night.

"Better toss the gun away," Breese shouted, "you're a dead target, Evans!"

Hal Evans fell to his stomach. He lifted his gun and popped another shot

at Jim. It went high. Jim fired downward, and the bullets shattered Evans' hand. Jim came out then, ran to where the heir to millions lay. He jerked out handcuffs.

Somehow Hal Evans managed to jerk his body upright. Jim felt arms circling his neck, pulling him down. He crashed to the ground, and Evans was on him; kicking, gouging his fingers into his face, toward his eyes.

Jim Breese let out one mighty roar. He writhed his body one way, and then the other. At last he rose, like a bronc, and sent Evans sprawling. Jim was over and on him in less than a second. This time he managed to put on the cuffs.

As he jerked Hal Evans to his feet, Jim thought of only one thing—boy, was the chief going to have to swallow a lot!

ALL of the first-grade detectives in the precinct were present. Jim had requested it. The chief sat in a corner, his arms folded, entirely unconvinced. Hal Evans stood against the wall, handcuffed.

Jim Breese was all smiles. There was a cablegram in his hands. "I'll start at the beginning," he said with irony, "and make it easy for you boys. Hal Evans, supposed nephew of Magee, was the only natural heir for the millions. He was getting enough to spend while the old man lived. I found out when Magee was murdered that Magee really didn't mind the capers, but something had been disturbing him—he had written letters to China. And then suddenly, he was murdered."

"You'd better make this good," warned the chief, "or Evans' millions will libel you off the force so fast you won't know which end is up!"

"It's good," said Jim, "damn good. I cabled China right off. A long cable which I paid for myself because I knew that red tape would never get the city to pay for it." He glanced at the chief. "I'll collect on that later, because I've finally got an answer."

"Just what," said the chief, "has China got to do with this?"

"Plenty! Margie Magee Evans, sister of the old millionaire, ran away years ago with some hare-brained doctor. She ended up in China and had a child. That was all Mortimer Magee heard of her until last year, when she died. He immediately wrote that the child should be sent to New York and put in his care. Do you follow?"

Hal Evans straightened. White with rage he challenged: "Sure we follow! I'm Hal Evans. I came here when my mother died. So what?"

Jim Breese's face was solemn. "The what, mister, is in short that this cable states Margie Evans' son died at the age of five. You were a crackpot lawyer in China, in charge of Mrs. Evans' estate. Your name is Scott. As Hal Evans you are an imposter; I got the idea to send the cable inquiring about you because of the way Mortimer Magee was acting. Writing letters, and like that. He was suspicious of you—"

Jim turned and handed the chief the cable. The handcuffed man whitened. He spoke as though something were clogging his throat; as though speaking were a great effort.

"Well, if I am? What does that prove? Not murder!"

"I'm coming to that," Jim said, "I said that I always have a theory for murder—this case is no different. At the beginning Scott had an iron-clad alibi. Something I couldn't break. That is, not until Harry Murry, the actor, was murdered. Then the setup was clear enough."

"How?" asked the chief.

"Well, in the first place we found bits of straw like splinters on the rug when Magee was murdered. I had them examined and found that although they looked like a certain type of bamboo-straw slipper featured in the smarter New York shops, his shoes consisted of a taffeta weave—*specially made* for him. They can't be imported because of the high duty that would be on them. He could have gotten them only in China. The fact

that these little slivers from the shoes were in Magee's rug meant nothing, however, since Scott lived in the house, and was on the scene of crime—"

"Talk!" the accused man fumed, straining at the cuffs. "Go ahead and talk, copper. That's all you've got—a pretty story!"

"When I found specimens of the same type of shoes in Harry Murry's room," Jim went on as if he hadn't heard, "I had them examined at once. They corresponded with the first splinters. Scott lost them in the murder struggle. Apparently he used the slippers to muffle his steps getting in and out of the house.

"At the same time, I found a *want ad* in Murry's room—an old one. You boys saw me checking back on it. He gave a phony name but his description tallied with the man who inserted it. As I then suspected, the ad gave away Scott's alibi. He *hired* Murry to sit in the night club while the floor show was going on. He was sitting off by himself. Had Murry come in the side way; and when Scott returned from murdering Magee, he sent Murry out the side way again."

"Why you—" the man he had called Scott was tense, his face scarlet.

"That cinched the guilt on him so far as I was concerned," Jim said. "You see, I've figured it that Scott found he would have to murder Harry Murry because Murry was wise and intended to blackmail."

"Hell, man!" the chief of police ejaculated. "You mean to say that rat—" his eyes narrowed on Scott—"bumped off Magee and Murry both!"

"That's exactly what I mean to say," Jim stated.

The chief mopped sweat from his face. "But then, what about Max Baxter coming to your place?"

This was Jim's big moment. He straightened up, a slow smile reaching across his face. "Chief, you overlooked something when you came up. You failed to notice that Baxter had

a bash on the back of his head. He couldn't have gotten it by falling because he *fell on his face!*"

The chief was nodding. The other detectives were hunched forward, eyes wide.

"Baxter had come to see me—either to kill me, or to plead that I drop investigation of his school. He had broken into my apartment, and while he was waiting Scott came along. Scott must have heard about my tracing the want ad. He knew that would lead right to his door and that I'd see the set up. Well, he saw Baxter there and he saw a perfect setup for *my* murder. *He killed Baxter with a blow on the back of the head!*"

"It would look as though Baxter had killed Murry; had them come up to kill me and we had shot it out, both being dead by the time you boys arrived. That would close the case, leaving Scott in the clear. What Scott did when I came in was to hold up Baxter's body and bait my shots. I thought when I was fighting there in the dark that the figure looked pretty bulky!"

Jim Breese stopped, sponged sweat from his face. The room was as still as death. Scott, whose real name was Sterns, was struggling weakly; struggling with himself. His eyes were blazing, but his face was so white that it looked like a skull. He spoke, almost in a whisper.

"You've got your story, Breese. Pretty good for the prosecution. Those splinters from my tailor-made Chinese shoes. You've worked up quite a case." He straightened, his voice a little huskier. "But I'll beat it, damn you. I'm worth millions now and I *can* beat it!" He grew hysterical as the others kept silent. "Can beat it!" he screamed. "*I can!*"

At that moment the door opened and the scientist from the police laboratory looked in. He nodded to Jim.

Slowly, with deliberate procrastination, Jim Breese turned about. He eyed the grim line of detectives and some of them smiled; they knew. The chief sat very still. At last all eyes were centered on Scott. It was Jim who spoke.

"The bullet we found in Mortimer Magee's head was kept. Those things always are. We had ballistic experts examine it; and examine bullets from the gun that you tried to kill me with this afternoon. *Your* gun. It has been proven that the bullet that killed Magee came from it. And son, believe me, no jury yet has ever acquitted a murderer with evidence like that!"

Scott looked around, helplessly. He swallowed, and said slowly: "I guess—guess there's no use, is there?"

"No," Jim Breese said softly, "there isn't. There never is for murder. You see, a detective usually has a theory."



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Blood on the Ticket

By William Bruner

It looked like Rocky King would die, too.



By all the seven points of his highway patrolman star, Rocky King swore he'd drag the gold snatchers to the noose. But the crooks figured that one way to stymie a cop is to put him in a cooler—and use lead to scramble his brains.

OFFICER KING, of the California Highway Patrol, reclined in the tilt-back chair with waning patience, and listened to bald and garrulous Mr. Wilson, the barber of El Cajon. He had only himself to blame, "Rocky" King reflected, for sneaking a shave while he was supposed to be patrolling

U. S. Highway No. 80, which ended in San Diego and started back in Savannah.

But Rocky was responsible only for that part of the highway which cut through the back-country mountains of San Diego County; a broad slab of concrete which to-day seemed almost incandescent under

the baking desert heat that drifted over from Imperial Valley. In consequence, the road was practically deserted. Only tourists, who didn't know any better, and those who had no choice in the matter, such as truck drivers, were boring through the breathless afternoon. Mere heat, however, did not silence Mr. Wilson as he scraped away at the speed cop's tough, dark stubble.

"Great day for brush fires an' things," observed Mr. Wilson. "The whole world seems to go crazy, people included, when it gets so hot. Look—the lather's just like dust!"

"Just like emery," Rocky corrected, wishing he'd stuck to his business, even though there wasn't any.

"They're havin' some awful sand storms over in Imperial Valley, too," Mr. Wilson continued imperturbably. "I've noticed several cars go by with their windshields pitted somethin' fierce."

Rocky writhed. "Have you noticed that thing on the side of my head?" he asked plaintively. "It's an ear."

Mr. Wilson clucked with dismay and turned to search for a styptic pencil. It was only a small cut, he said. Rocky said nothing, but squinted sidewise through the door at his big white motorcycle, standing well out from the curb—a conspicuous warning to those who might try to fan up a breeze for themselves by roaring through the little town. In the shimmering heat, the motorcycle actually seemed to pant.

Nothing at all moved along the street, but suddenly the hot silence was broken by the sibilant hum of tires and a high-pitched drone of a speeding motor. Rocky straightened with professional interest.

In another moment a big streamlined refrigerator truck spurted into view. It was bright red, with the words, "Continental Cheese Company," painted in tall white letters on its side. Even as Rocky stared, the truck swerved wildly curbward, head-

ing straight for the standing motorcycle.

Rocky cried out in sharp warning. The truck swung on, clipping the motorcycle's front wheel and hurling it to the pavement with a resounding, enamel-chipping crash. Then, careening again to the center of the street, it roared away.

ROCKY charged through the barber-shop door, smearing off lather with one hand, grabbing black tie and sand-tan cap with the other. He had a waving acquaintance with the driver of that truck, a brick-topped youngster named "Red" Davis, who had hitherto seemed like a reasonable sort of fellow. Now, yanking the motorcycle upright, Rocky swore that he'd hand Davis a citation for everything on the books.

Mr. Wilson came outside. "Like I said," he observed, "folks just go bug-house. It ain't the heat; it's the dryness."

Rocky glared, kicking savagely at the starter-crank pedal. Nothing happened. Rage blazed in his usually mild brown eyes as he tried time and again, and sweat of exertion beaded his wind-bronzed and half-shaved face. The truck screamed around a distant curve and vanished in the direction of El Centro. Mr. Wilson did not make things any easier by continuing to talk.

"Real interestin', the way them reefer trucks keep cold," he said. "They carry dry ice, see? It's nothin' but solidified carbon dioxide gas, but it's got a temperature of a hundred an' ten below zero. Real efficient, too. A hundred pounds 'u'd keep the inside of that truck at fifty degrees for twenty hours or more."

Rocky glared. "Do you have to talk so much?" he barked.

Mr. Wilson was plainly hurt. "No," he admitted. "Although I was just goin' to point out that your spark plugs look kinda busted."

Mr. Wilson was right. The crash had somehow cracked the porcelain enamel

of both plugs, crippling the motor. With admirable restraint, Rocky climbed off the bike and shoved it toward a garage in the next block. Mr. Wilson went along to lend his moral support, although he was inclined to pessimism over the whole affair.

"Better let me finish your shave," he suggested. "You won't catch that bird this side of Yuma."

"I'll chase him across Arizona, if necessary," Rocky muttered grimly.

An hour later, with new spark plugs stepping up his speed, Rocky was beginning to wonder if he mightn't have to follow Red Davis at least to Texas. Now well up in the sweltering mountains, he had caught no second glimpse of the fugitive truck. His eyes smarted with the heat, and his forest-green shirt was plastered by sweat to his wide chest. His .38 special, along with its tooled black-leather holster and cartridge belt, dragged at his middle like a cannon.

But at last, topping a long grade, he saw a spot of streaking red as the reefer truck ripped wildly across a blind curve. Eyes glittering, Rocky opened the throttle wide and went streaking down that hill like a white projectile.

Spurting through the curve, he was surprised to see the truck only a short distance ahead. He gave it a shrieking siren blast, was further surprised when the truck promptly slowed and rolled to a halt in the middle of a bridge across a deep arroyo. He pulled up short, walked to the truck in stiff-legged rage.

It was only then, to his amazement, that he discovered that Red Davis had two passengers. The man in the middle was scrawny and black-haired, with a thin smile splitting his swarthy face, and black, glittering eyes like a lizard's. The other was a muscle-bound giant, with shoulders like a gorilla and a big, dumb-looking face.

WARY, they just sat there. Rocky glowered at the driver. Red's blue eyes were saucer wide; and his

lips were twitching nervously, as well they might. He'd been taking some awful chances with the laws of gravity, as well as with those of the State of California.

"What's the great big hurry?" Rocky snapped belligerently. "When I get through writing you tickets for this day's work—"

The big man broke in with a heavily sarcastic laugh. "The copper sounds sore, Blackie," he said.

"He sure does, Sam," the dark one agreed. "I guess there's no point in arguing with him, either."

"Naw," said Sam. "We ain't got time."

Red gulped but remained speechless. Suddenly it dawned on Rocky King that the truck driver was not so much nervous as just plain scared. His glance flashed back to the other two.

But his suspicions had been aroused too late. Blackie had him covered with a blunt, blue automatic; and in his slitted, serpentine eyes was a look of such venomous hatred that a sharp chill knifed down Rocky's spine. Blackie's thin lips drew back in a skull-like grin.

"Dead cops," he said with deadly softness, "write no tickets!"

Before Rocky could move, before he could snatch his gun for a single shot in self-defense, the blue automatic thundered. For one stunned instant it seemed to him that the top of his head had been blown off. Then everything blanked out. He plunged into a world as cold and lightless as the day was hot and bright.

Rocky sat up slowly, half an hour later, wondering how one body could hurt so much. He found and explored two bullet wounds, one along his scalp, the other nicking his left ribs. Both had stopped bleeding, but both still hurt like hell. A wide assortment of scratches and bruises evidently covered the rest of him.

He was in the arroyo bottom, he noticed, directly under the arched concrete bridge. His motorcycle was there, too, completely hidden from the

road; and he discovered with considerable relief that his gun had been left in its holster. They'd moved him down here, thinking him dead.

He was going to need that gun, he thought grimly—need it plenty. He knew now that Red Davis hadn't been driving like a maniac because he'd wanted to; he'd been driving that way because Blackie's automatic had been jabbed into his ribs. Just what crimes Blackie and Sam had committed, or had in mind, Rocky could not guess. But he had to find out, and soon. Red, having been witness to attempted murder—only Blackie's great haste had made the job incomplete—would sooner or later be getting a dose of the same thing.

Rocky wasted no time. Gritting his teeth over the first nauseous wave of dizziness, he swayed to his feet and tackled the staggering task of wrestling the big motorcycle back up those steep and crumbly banks. He sweated and choked, cursed and strained, certain he slipped back a yard for every foot he won.

But he made it at last, again roared eastward. He'd caught up with that fast truck once, knew he must do it again. Before Blackie and Sam had no further need for young Red Davis.

He did not slow until he reached the outskirts of Jacumba, where the highway crossed the tracks of the Southern California & Yuma—a railroad which started in San Diego, dipped briefly into Mexico, and then recrossed the border to plunge desertward through several tunnels and the spectacular Carrizo Gorge. To Rocky King, that always seemed a peculiar route for a railroad to follow. Not that it was any of his concern, he decided, as he popped into Jacumba and out again. Which was one good hunch Rocky might have had, and didn't.

A FEW more miles brought him to the desert rim, where the mountains dropped off in a mighty cascade of barren, chocolate-colored rock. He stopped. Imperial Valley spread vast

and golden before him, with here and there a great saffron cloud lifting to the brassy sky, where blistering winds swept dust and sand from the desert floor. In the middle distance lay a bright pattern of green, the irrigated lands around El Centro.

But Rocky did not stop for that dazzling view. He stopped because from that point he could see long stretches of the highway as it slanted down the mountainside on its man-made shelf. Heat swept over the rim in gusty puffs, like the panting of a mighty blast furnace, searing to the eyes and parching to the skin, making him acutely aware of the fact that he had been kicked by a couple of bullets.

And yet, with miles of visible highway coiling down and down to the desert floor, he could locate no speeding dot of red which might be the reefer truck. His brown eyes clouded as he glanced at his watch, decided that the truck couldn't possibly have dropped out of sight—if it had remained on the highway!

That hunch was too strong to ignore. Gunning the motor, Rocky whipped back toward Jacumba, pausing for one swift glance at the dusty bed of every side road that angled off through the sage.

And at last, not far from Jacumba, he spotted the wide treadmarks of a six-wheeled truck on a narrow road which ran to the head of Carrizo Gorge. The reefer had six wheels. True, there was a railroad maintenance camp near the gorge, but it seemed unlikely that the S. C. & Y. would be trucking anything there, when it had its own daily trains going through.

Rocky swerved into that ragged road. The highway was soon lost to sight as the road lurched into gullies and tilted over ridges. Rocky's performance on the leaping motorcycle would have done credit to a bronco buster or an acrobat. The crease on his head began to drip again; but Rocky, catching the distance-muffled blasts of a locomotive whistle, faint but some-

how frantic, scarcely noticed the new trickle of blood. His hunch had been right! Railroad engineers didn't waste steam that way just for the sake of making noise. There must be some connection between that frenzied tooting and the fugitive reefer truck!

Clamping his lean jaw, Rocky risked a few more notches of speed. It was a bad bet. Ripping between jagged granite outcroppings, he suddenly found himself on the point of running down a staggering, tattered man with brick-colored hair.

Red Davis!

The truck driver gave a croak of dismay and tried to lunge aside. Loose gravel rolled under his feet, spilling him across the road. With no time to stop, Rocky jerked the handlebars hard over. The motorcycle bucked madly through the sage, racking finally to a dust-spurting halt.

ROCKY ran back to the fallen man, helped him up. Red gaped, at first too astonished and too breathless to speak. He'd been running, and the flaming sun had sucked the sap right out of him. Panting heavily, he stared at Rocky's dusty, blood-crusted face.

"They—they didn't get you?" he managed finally.

Rocky shook his head impatiently. The locomotive was still shrieking, and his quick eye had caught a smudge of tarry smoke lifting above a cone-shaped hill straight ahead.

"Not yet," he grunted. "Quick, Red—what's their game?"

"Stick-up!" Red gasped. "There's a hundred grand in gold on that train. Shipped from Mexico. Those birds are after it, along with a couple of others. They're settin' fire to the tunnel an'—"

"Fire!" Rocky cried; and his eyes shot to that tarry smudge, reaching now like a great black fist into the sky. In the same instant the locomotive's tooting broke off with ominous finality. Rocky swore and plunged after his fallen bike.

Red gulped air and kept on talking as Rocky dragged the motorcycle through the pungent sage. Blackie and Sam, he said, had jumped on the truck as he was making a boulevard stop back in San Diego, jabbing a gun into his ribs. They had ducked low when they saw the white motorcycle in El Cajon, and Red had tried to warn Rocky that something was up by hitting his machine. They'd nearly killed Red then and there—the reason he'd given no warning when Rocky finally caught up.

"I was afraid they'd shoot you," he said bitterly, "but they did, anyhow."

After that, Red knew that his own chances were very slim indeed. He'd watched for opportunity to leap, but it hadn't come until they were snaking along a deep canyon a mile or so up the road. Red had jumped, and the truck had nearly gone over the edge with him. Blackie saved it. Banging painfully to the bottom, Red had fallen under a sheltering ledge. Already late because of a hitch in their plans—the truck they'd intended to use had broken down—the two men had driven on without climbing into the canyon to finish him off.

Rocky got his bike into the road. One sharp kick brought roaring response from the hot motor. Red grabbed his arm.

"I'm going with you!" the truck driver insisted.

Rocky stared at him. Red had made quick recovery, and now there was a glint in his eyes which would have matched Blackie's. And Red, after all, deserved to see the thing through.

"Can you ride 'em?" Rocky barked.

"I'll learn damn fast!"

"You're asking for it," Rocky grunted. "Sit on the seat and pray. I'll have to sit on you."

So mounted, they roared on down the road. Red wrapped his arms around Rocky's middle, but he had sense enough to stay limp, even when they crashed over unavoidable bumps.

HD

"This beats runnin' back to the highway," Red chattered. "Knew I couldn't do anything alone, an' without a gun."

Rocky grunted. There were two of them, now, with a gun between them. And four, at least—according to Red—in Blackie's outfit. But a man could always hope.

THEY came to a fork. One branch went to the maintenance camp. The other, snaking through sun-blistered mounds of rock, was narrower, rougher and steeper; and to it the truck driver pointed.

"That way," he directed. "There's two tunnels, see? One near the camp, an' the other farther down the gorge. Blackie's doin' his dirty work at the second."

Rocky veered into the right fork, which presently skirted a narrow, deep canyon. Red pointed proudly to the spot where he had jumped off.

"I guess we're just a couple of durable guys," he said.

Rattling gunfire broke out beyond the next curve, which seemed to hang dizzily over nothing. Rocky braked to a halt, and rushed with Red around the bend. They saw the railroad tracks and the reefer truck, already turned around and ready to roll. No one was with it. The unseen battle raged hotter. They leaped into the curving roadbed and pounded on. Rocky pulled his gun.

A few yards more brought them in sight of the train—five baggage cars and an engine—halted near the tunnel mouth, from which smoke was surging in great black billows. Blackie and Sam and a third man were crouched behind huge boulders on the hillside above the train, exchanging lead with a smudge-faced fireman and a cursing brakeman. The rest of the train crew, unarmed, were scattered at various sheltered points and watching helplessly. Two dead men, evidently guards, lay near the last car, rifles glinting beside sprawled bodies.

Nor were the unarmed trainmen the only helpless witnesses of that furious fight. Just within the mouth of the tunnel, crouched low to escape the choking, creosote-laden smoke, were another half dozen men, unable to advance because of the bandits' guns, unable to retreat because of the rolling flames which blazed at the tunnel's other end.

Rocky boiled with fury. Motioning for Red to stay back, he raced for the shelter of the last car—a position which would place Blackie and his men wide open to his shots.

It was hard going over those ties, with field boots which were never made for running and a head which seemed about to split wide open. Very hard going. But he almost made it before they spotted him. Almost—

He was less than a dozen yards from the end car when a bullet from Blackie's gun drilled the brakeman's heart. The man folded over like a diver doing the jackknife and plunged to the ground from the first baggage-car door.

Blackie whirled, triumphant, then spotted the racing cop. His cry of victory became a bellow of astonished rage. His automatic swung around, leaping viciously as he sprayed lead at Rocky King.

Rocky heard those bullets and their song of death. With a tremendous leap he gained the shelter of the coach. He grabbed at the coupling while new agony throbbed through his wound, but he downed returning dizziness with cold wrath. The killing of that brakeman was one cold-blooded crime too many. Rocky swore, by all seven points of his highway patrolman's star, that they weren't going to get away with it.

HE edged forward, discovered Blackie and Sam watching for him with malignant eyes while the third man continued to blaze away at the fireman. Blackie's automatic cracked. The first shot from Rocky's .38 was like a thundering echo. He saw

Blackie's right shoulder jerk violently, saw his automatic streak through the air in an electric-blue curve. Blackie cursed with pain, and Sam blasted the end of the coach.

The battle was even now—two against two, providing the fireman didn't get too reckless. And Rocky's experience with most crooks had taught him that they turned yellow when the odds were not in their favor.

But he was reckoning without Blackie, who always fixed the odds so they were on his side. As he leaned cautiously forward for a snap-shot at Sam, Red Davis's voice lifted in a shrill cry of warning.

Rocky whirled, discovered the fourth member of the gang; the fourth member, who was bearing down on him with a rifle from a point just above where Red stood. He must have been somewhere around the truck, Rocky thought bleakly, but it was too late to worry about that now. The man looked as if he meant business.

"Drop that gun!" he snarled:

The .38 clattered on the roadbed. At the same instant, Rocky heard a sharp cry of pain—the fireman, certainly—and the battle of the gorge was over.

The man with the rifle prodded Red down to the standing train. He was stocky and red-faced, with stiff yellow hair and pale, malignant blue eyes. His name, Rocky learned later, was Otto Heuning. He ordered Rocky and Red down to the engine, then started to uncouple the last baggage car.

Under the ready guns of Sam and the fourth man—who looked like Sam, and turned out to be a brother, Hank—there was nothing to do but obey. The bandits had the upper hand, and no mistake. The fireman, Rocky saw, had been shot through the right hand. He squeezed it under his left armpit and swore fluently. The other railroad men just looked on, wide-eyed and silent; and the sweat which dripped from their foreheads wasn't caused entirely by the heat which came roaring out of the tunnel.

Blackie's lizard eyes flicked over them all. His right arm was hanging limp, but the wound evidently did not bother him a great deal. His thin lips parted in a tight, sardonic smile.

"All right, you birds!" he snapped at the railroad men. "Just pile on that train—and run it through the tunnel!"

The engineer—a beefy man with thick white hair—shot an appalled glance into that fiery tube, then faced Blackie in swift protest. The protest died on his lips when he saw the baleful light in those dark little eyes. He shook his head drearily and climbed into the cab. The fireman followed, his wounded hand dangling.

"All the rest of you!" Blackie belowed. "We've got the tunnel dynamited on this end. If you expect to get through, you'd better be damn quick about it. We're blowing up the whole works in just about two minutes!"

They took his word for it, reluctantly scrambling into the coaches. Rocky was beginning to realize how thoroughly Blackie had planned. The fire in the tunnel, set by Otto and Hank, who'd come to the scene ahead of time, had served the double purpose of stopping the train and bringing all the men down from the maintenance camp.

NOW Blackie meant to balk immediate pursuit by sending the whole bunch of them through that tunnel and sealing them on the far side with a blast of dynamite. They'd be able to get out of the gorge, of course, either by racing the train on to the desert, or by climbing the mountain. In neither case, however, would they be able to spread the alarm until Blackie and his men had so great a start that catching them would take a lot of doing.

Red Davis eyed Blackie hopefully. "Want us to go with 'em?" he asked.

Blackie's eyes glittered. "You and the cop are going with us," he said flatly. "As hostages, just in case. And

we've got some unfinished business with you two."

Rocky shrugged. Like something in an insane and shocking nightmare he heard steel snarl against steel as the engineer pulled the throttle open, saw the train jerk into motion and swiftly gather speed for its mad dash through that fiery tunnel. The last car, which Otto had uncoupled and which evidently held the gold, remained where it was.

Rocky held his breath, silently cursing his own helplessness. He knew that there must be grave danger from heat-buckled rails, from poisonous fumes, from falling timbers. Even so, those railroad men did have a chance for their lives—which was more than Red Davis or Rocky King could claim.

And then, with a whoom, the train was gone, vanishing through the swirling smoke. Rocky tensed, half expecting to hear a thunderous crash, a chorus of agonized shrieks. Neither came.

"They made it!" Red whispered.

Sam ran down the tracks, bent low when he neared the tunnel mouth, struck a match. A feather of powder-blue smoke wisped up from an ignited fuse. Sam came charging back, raced with the rest of them to the shelter of the standing baggage car.

They waited through a jittery minute. Then came a flash of sheeting flame, a body-jarring concussion, a surge of searing wind. Rocky turned, saw heavy timbers snap like toothpicks, saw age-old granite split open and grind into the tunnel, while jagged rock and dust and smoke erupted skyward and thunderous echoes boomed along the gorge.

"That's making sure of a sure thing," he muttered.

Blackie leered. "You two birds taught us a lesson," he said, and turned to the others. "The gold's all ours, boys," he added. "I'll keep these babies covered while you load the truck."

Blackie had picked up his automatic, and now he held it steadily in his left hand. The others made quick work of transferring the gold bars from the baggage car to the truck, throwing out cartons of cheese to make room for the prisoners as well as for the loot. None of them paid any attention at all to the two dead men.

"I wouldn't mind ridin' inside that truck myself," said Sam when the last of the gold had been moved. "Sure is nice an' cool."

Blackie grinned. "A cop in the cooler!" he said, and motioned Red and Rocky into the truck. The door slammed behind them, leaving them groping in absolute blackness. The truck immediately jerked into motion. Rocky reeled against the side, finally sat down on a hundred grand in gold.

"Well," Red said dolefully, "here we are."

Rocky shivered. It was cool inside the truck and steadily growing colder as the dry ice chilled the recently admitted air. After the sweltering heat of the gorge, it was downright uncomfortable. His teeth chattered.

"If we don't die of lead poisoning," he muttered darkly, "we'll likely kick off with the flu."

Red sneezed. "Move over this way," he suggested. "You're sittin' right under a dry-ice bunker."

ROCKY moved, but his new position was just as chilly. He remembered the barber's statement that dry ice had a temperature of one hundred and ten below zero, but that now seemed like rank understatement. He rubbed the stubbled half of his face thoughtfully.

"Is this truck ventilated?" he asked.

"Naw," Red said. "It's built like a vault, but the bunkers have a pipe connection to the outside. Some reefers do an' some don't, but the cheese company figured—"

The truck crashed into a hole with spine-snapping violence. Red swore and lapsed into moody silence. Presently going became smoother as they

rolled onto the highway, but it was not long before they were swaying sharply from side to side. Rocky knew that they were ripping through the curves on the Mountain Springs Grade, which meant Blackie and his men were heading for the desert. And, knowing something of the desert's almost unbelievable tangle of canyons and washes and jagged mountains, he gave them a pretty good chance of making a complete getaway. It stood to reason that they had planned their escape as carefully as they'd planned the stick-up.

That was not a consoling thought but it had to be faced. Most crooks, Rocky believed, were dumb—but Blackie and his pals appeared to be the rule-proving exceptions.

They bowled on, again leaving the highway soon, whereupon the going became so extremely rough that Rocky wondered if the crooks hadn't abandoned even the desert trails. It seemed hours but it probably wasn't more than twenty or thirty minutes—that nightmare of a ride in an icy, lightless, wildly pitching traveling vault. The noise was deafening, what with the rumble and crash of the wheels, the snarl of the motor and the shrieking blast of the desert wind.

"Anyhow," Red shouted, "there's some satisfaction in not bein' out in that sandstorm."

"Yeah," Rocky agreed gloomily, knowing the storm would baffle pursuit by wiping out all tracks. "I hope they smother."

A new idea clicked in his mind. Perhaps—

THE truck stopped at last and the door banged open. Blackie and Sam stood waiting, automatics ready as usual, their faces yellow with grime. The wind still snarled, shutting out the sky with a writhing curtain of dust. Rocky blinked against the dazzling saffron light.

"Pile out," Blackie growled. "This is as far as you birds are going."

The prisoners dropped to the ground. Their bodies suffering shock

at the change in temperature. The truck had stopped in a sheer-sided natural bowl under a clump of cottonwoods; and since the only entrance was through a narrow, twisting canyon, it was effectively screened from all sides and above. Near by stood a powerful sedan, obviously left there for the final get-away dash; and just beyond it, Rocky noticed the dark mouth of a mine tunnel.

"Slick hideout," he muttered.

"He likes it!" Sam jeered. "Ain't that nice? Because he's goin' to be here a long, long time."

Blackie grinned, telling Otto and Hank to move the gold to the sedan. They objected, arguing that they wouldn't be driving on until after dark, anyhow, and that they'd like to breathe a few lungfuls of air which didn't contain a couple of cubic yards of dirt.

Blackie nodded, good-natured with success despite his wound, and they all turned into the tunnel. After a dozen yards they were halted by a stout oak door, as strong as the day it was placed there, held shut by a heavy iron bar. Sam lifted the bar from its slot and vanished into a lightless chamber. Presently a candle glimmered, revealing a room shaped like a tube set on end formed naturally from rock. There were age-blackened benches around the walls, and the wreck of an iron bed. Sam put the candle on a rickety table in the center of the room.

"The sucker who made this place," Blackie explained, "thought he had him a graphite mine. His idea was to keep out of the heat."

"He oughta dug it deeper," Sam growled. "It's still hot."

To Rocky and Red, just out of the uncomfortably chilly reefer truck, the heat was tormenting, and a surprising amount of fine dust danced through the open door. Sam kicked it shut, and they all sat down to await darkness, the prisoners taking a bench on one side of the dugout, the four crooks

lined up on the other. Blackie, who obviously knew his desert, was confident that they'd have no further difficulty in completing their get-away.

"This wind's all to the good," he said, stripping off his shirt to examine his shoulder. The wound was not bad, Rocky was sorry to note. "I doubt if it'll even occur to the law that we turned up this way. They'll do most their snooping around Yuma and along the border."

"Yeah," Sam said, but he didn't sound very happy. He was sweating like a horse. "Next time I throw in on a job like this, I'm goin' to pick a cool day."

Red exploded. "You give me a pain!" he said bitterly. "Squawk! Squawk! Squawk! Why don't you go out an' sit in the truck? It's cool there!"

Sam leaped across the dugout and slapped Red hard on the mouth. Red's head snapped back, and his eyes went wide in shocked surprise. Rocky clenched his big fists, but he did not move. His mind was wrestling with a dangerous plan. Crooks were dumb, he told himself; and a smart cop didn't wait for the breaks, he made 'em.

"Lay off, Sam," he protested with disarming mildness. "Red's just jittery, is all." He hesitated, then added in a voice more placating still, "We'd all feel better if we could cool off a little. Why not use the dry ice that's in the truck?"

They all stared at him, obviously wondering why they hadn't thought of that notion themselves. All but Red, whose mouth dropped open in protest. Rocky kicked through the table's shadow, and landed a sharp, unseen blow on the truck driver's shin. Red's mouth snapped shut.

"Now that's what I call bein' clubby," Sam grinned, and turned to Blackie. "How about it?"

Blackie's lizard eyes suspiciously searched Rocky's grimy, half-whiskered face, but finally he nodded. "Why not?" he asked.

SAM ordered Red and Rocky out to the truck, pulling his gun again. Red found two pairs of heavy cotton gloves behind the driver's seat, and gave one pair to Rocky. They climbed into the truck and opened the nearest dry-ice bunker—a metal box about two feet long and six inches deep close under the top—and each lifted out a chunk of dry ice. The heavy cotton gloves prevented the burning of their hands by the ice. White and dense like compressed snow, it gave off steamy fumes when the hot air hit it. Together they ran back to the dugout, with Sam lumbering close behind. They placed the stuff on the floor. Its cooling effects were immediately noticeable.

"This certainly is a great age," Blackie said sardonically. "Think of stick-up men having an air-conditioned hideout!"

"Yeah, just think of it," Red muttered, a wild and reckless light in his blue eyes. "There's another bunkerful of dry ice in the truck," he added, turning to Rocky. "Might as well do a good job while we're at it."

"Sure," Sam said. "Let's go."

The three of them returned to the truck. The second bunker, up forward, was a little harder to reach because of the load, but Sam did not offer to help. That was all right with Rocky King. He whispered swiftly in Red's ear:

"We're making a break this time," he said. "You'll know when. Get out of that tunnel as fast as you can."

Red forced a thin grin. "Okay, feller. Just as soon die one way as another—if I've gotta die."

"Get a hustle on," Sam growled. "I'm just dyin' to be cooled off."

Red giggled, a little nervous. Rocky didn't blame him. They lifted the dry ice from the second bunker and marched back to the dugout. Rocky hefted his piece. About twenty pounds, he judged, and icy hard.

The candle in the dugout had gone out. Otto was muttering, trying to light it, but his matches weren't work-

ing very well, either. They merely sputtered.

"That sure is potent stuff," he grunted, "if it'll freeze a flame."

Red snorted and set his block of dry ice down near the table. Pale yellow light filtered in from the tunnel mouth. Rocky halted just inside the door, holding his breath. When Sam came through, growling about the darkness, Rocky lifted his piece of dry ice and smacked him on the head with it. Sam got out one startled grunt before he crashed to the floor.

Red was ready. He shot into the tunnel like a scared rabbit. Rocky whirled to bolt after him as Blackie's voice lifted in an outraged curse, and the guns of Otto and Hank began to roar, loud as the crack of doom in that confined space.

ABULLET snipped at Rocky's sleeve. He yelled for Red to drop, knowing that they were both thrown into sharp relief against the tunnel mouth. Red obeyed, scuttling along on hands and knees, while Rocky grabbed the heavy door and started to swing it shut. Otto charged across the dugout, but his foot struck on a block of dry ice. It skidded from under him, hurling him violently down. He was lucky he didn't land on the ice, else his face or hands might have stuck there, if he'd stayed on it. Rocky slammed the door just as Blackie and Hank surged toward it. He snatched at the iron bar, tried desperately to shoot it home.

The two men were too fast for him. They hit the door with terrific impact, almost slamming Rocky back against the tunnel wall. He kept them inside somehow, digging his boots into the uneven floor and straining against their infuriated strength. A gun barked, and a giant splinter popped from the wood an inch from his nose.

Red came panting back, adding his weight to Rocky's. Together they forced the door shut, while a couple more bullets drilled through, missing miraculously. Red slipped the iron bar

home; and then the two of them raced breathlessly outside.

For a while neither of them spoke. They just dropped to the ground and listened to the shocking uproar inside the dugout. The men were trying to smash the door down with benches, but that door had been put there to endure.

"At that rate," Red observed, "they won't last at all."

He was right. The racket grew fainter, as if the men were becoming very, very tired, and at last it ceased altogether. Red sighed.

"Only a cop would think of a trick like that," he said with grudging admiration. "What're you goin' to do—leave 'em there until they bump off?"

"I'd like to," Rocky muttered, thinking of the two dead men in Carrizo Gorge, and his own grievances, including two bullet wounds and an interrupted shave. "I'd certainly like to, but the State of California mightn't think it was such a hot idea. We'd better get 'em out."

They went into the tunnel, listened for a moment at the securely barred door. There was not the faintest sound beyond it. Rocky opened the door, and saw what he expected to see—four unconscious men sprawled on the dugout floor, all wearing faintly surprised expressions on their still faces. It was very cool inside, but it was also very deadly with the confined space filled with the fumes of the dry ice. Holding their breath on each trip, Rocky and Red dragged Blackie and Sam and Hank and Otto out into the open as quickly as possible; and then, when they showed signs of recovering, heaved them, unarmed, into the cheese truck on top of the hundred grand in gold which they would never get to turn into a hell-roaring good time. Red slammed the truck door and made it fast with considerable pleasure.

"Air-conditioned hideout!" he snorted. "The damn fools should 'a' known better!"

Rocky grinned. "Give 'em credit, Red. I never thought much about dry

ice being nothing but solidified carbon dioxide until that gabby barber back in El Cajon started talking about it. But I did know that carbon dioxide, if he gets too much of it, can smother a man in no time at all. Being heavier than air, it pushes the air up where the lungs can't get it."

"Sure," said Red. "It's the same stuff that's given off when somethin' burns."

Rocky nodded, heading for cab. "Yeah," he said. "That's why I was worried when they first put us in the truck. I thought it was curtains for Rocky King and Red Davis. It sure was a relief to know those bunkers had an outside connection."

"The company doesn't like to take chances," Red said. "I suppose you started figurin' a way to gas 'em then an' there?"

"Believe it or not," Rocky admitted with fair modesty, "I did. I thought we might get 'em inside, somehow, an' plug the vents. But this worked better."

"I'll say it did!" Red muttered, climbing into the driver's seat and jamming on the starter. "I'm goin' to hurry up an' have grandchildren, so's I can tell 'em all about it."

Rocky chuckled. All things considered, he felt pretty good. The wind was

going down with the sun, and bright color flamed on the rim of the bowl as Red snaked through the narrow canyon and left it behind. The truck's windshield had been virtually frosted by the sandstorm, and the nice red paint job had lost much of its luster. That, however, was Red's concern; but if there was any gratitude in cheese companies at all, the driver had earned a raise. Rocky even thought that the higher-ups in the highway patrol might overlook the fact that he had done considerable damage to one perfectly good motorcycle.

"I'm going to take a nap," he said drowsily, "and if any one hollers 'Halt!'—for Pete's sake, *halt*. Every cop and deputy sheriff this side of hell is going to be looking for this reefer truck—and I'd sure hate to get shot again."

"Don't worry," Red promised. "I'll make these tires dig holes in the cement."

"Good," said Rocky. "Wake me, anyhow, when we go by that barber shop in El Cajon. I owe Mr. Wilson thirteen cents for half of a two-bit shave."

From the body of the truck came frenzied banging and muffled curses—sounds which were sweeter than any lullaby to the ears of Officer Rocky King. He dozed.

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Detective Fallon wanted to dunk his head like an ostrich when he lost his badge for speaking out of turn to the Comish. Then a newsie complained that his pooch had been kicked and a game girl laughed at gorillas' guns. For them Fallon was willing to take a cue from a killer and prove that—

A Copper Calls His Shots!



*"I'm not a copper.
If I was I couldn't do
what I'm going to do,"
Fallon said.*

**Memorable
Short Story**

By Cleve F. Adams

FALLON, first grade detective, still looked like a kid; a big overgrown mick of a kid who managed to get all the fun there was out of life. He was having a lot of fun now, entertaining the grimy-faced newsie, Jimmy Trigg. Sprawled carelessly on an empty desk in the squad room, his big, clumsy-looking fingers

performed deft miracles with a dime-store puzzle.

Jimmy was ecstatic, "Gee, Mr. Fallon, you know what? I won seventeen cents with that other trick you showed me."

"Did you now?" Fallon's jaw muscles moved rhythmically as his strong white teeth mangled a third stick of

gum. His dark eyes beamed approval.
"Did you now!"

No one else in the room paid him or his small audience of one the least bit of attention. It was as if the two were on a little island, all by themselves. Perhaps they were, spiritually. Fallon was essentially a street gamin. Tiring of the puzzle, he winked at the admiring urchin, picked up a rubber band. There was a fly on Detective Fogarty's bald head. Fallon made a bull's eye with the rubber band.

Simultaneously with the fly's demise and the startled oath of Fogarty an outraged bellow filled the office. Captain Tiernan stood in the hall door.

"Yah!" he snarled. "More of your kid tricks, hunh? Why don't you grow up, Fallon?"

Fallon's ears got red. Jimmy the newsie scuttled for the door. Detective Fogarty made apologetic noises in his throat as if he were the shooter instead of the shootee.

Fallon grinned engagingly. "Hell, Skipper, can't a guy have a little fun? 'Sides, you got no idea how these tricks o' mine improve the eye."

Tiernan harrumphed his exasperation, but his eyes avoided Fallon's as though he, too, were a little ashamed. He jerked a thumb toward his office. "Inside, you lug. I've got bad news for you."

Fallon's stomach did funny things inside him. The axe? Was the new commissioner still raising hell in the department? Fallon put a little swagger into his walk as he followed the skipper inside.

Captain Tiernan glared at him. "For crying out loud, stop chewing that gum! Or is it B.B.'s this time? I can't ever tell from the look on your ugly mug!"

"It's both," said Fallon, and to prove it, expelled a tiny leaden pellet at the inkwell. He sighed at the look on the skipper's red face. "Okay, you don't have to break it to me gentle. What have I done now?"

"What haven't you done? Look, Tim, I've put up with your horsing

around. I've even sympathized with your bringing prisoners in looking like they'd been through a sausage mill. But I warned you the commissioner wouldn't stand for it. The two muggs last night—well, their mouthpiece has been to the commish. He wants to see you."

FALLON looked down at his big, brightly polished shoes. Cop's shoes. The kind of shoes his old man had worn before him. "I guess it's the axe, hunh?" He lifted his eyes to the skipper's face. "Look, chief, you know damn' well I couldn't have brought them hoods in at all, if I hadn't half killed 'em first. Why don't the new commissioner get wise to himself? He was going to clean up the graft in the department. All he's done so far is try to turn us dicks into softies. 'Treat all prisoners firmly, but kindly,' he says. Why don't he go after Kranz and the vice squad? Why don't he find out where Kranz got that new sedan? Not that I'd mention it to anyone but you, skipper. You know that."

Tiernan nodded his shaggy gray head. "I know, Tim. You're one of my best men, but what can I do? Kranz is acting as confidential adviser to Commissioner Lowell. It may be my own neck soon. I—I did what I could for you, son."

Fallon shuffled his feet. "Yeah. Yeah, I know you did. Well, I'll be seein' you, Skipper." He turned, looking like a big, playful dog who has been kicked without reason. But his hat was cocked at its old jaunty angle, the aggressive swagger was back in his walk as he entered the squad room. The dicks tried not to look too curious.

Fallon grinned at them. "What the hell, is this a wake or somethin'? Mebbe I ain't canned. Mebbe it's only a suspension." He strode across to the hall door, paused. "Look me up when you go off duty, hunh, Fogarty? I'll be down at the Elite."

Fogarty said he would. Fallon thumbed his nose at the room, grinned crookedly and clattered down the

stairs to the commissioner's ante room.

Lieutenant Arthur Kranz winked openly at the civil clerk. "Well, well, if it isn't the trick dick, himself! What brings you here, Fallon?"

The civil clerk giggled, and Fallon lifted a huge fist, looked at it, put it away in a pocket. He scowled at Kranz.

"You know what brings me here. And I know it. All the men who might trip you up are getting the gate. Okay, announce me—or whatever it is you're supposed to do."

"Ah," said a cold voice from the doorway. "Belligerent as usual, eh, Fallon? Come in, please."

Fallon tramped in. He shut the door behind him, stood there very like a recalcitrant schoolboy. His dark eyes were hot.

"Fallon," said Commissioner Lowell, "I have issued orders regarding the treatment of criminals. You have repeatedly disobeyed those orders."

"Says who? Lieutenant Kranz?"

"I don't like your tone, Fallon. Lieutenant Kranz is merely doing his duty when he reports infractions of police regulations. There has been altogether too much rough stuff going on. After all, criminals are human beings."

"That's what you think," said Fallon. Painfully in earnest, he leaned forward, put his big hands on the desk. "Look, Chief, I never hurt a mugg in my life that wouldn't have killed me if they could. Crooks—some of 'em—take a lot o' persuadin' and after you been in this racket as long as me—" He broke off, abashed at his own temerity.

Lowell's face crimsoned. "You are impudent, Fallon. I'd intended merely to suspend you, but now you're through for good. Turn in your badge."

"Okay," said Fallon. Now that he knew the worst his nervousness left him. He was once more the swaggering, overgrown school kid. "I've been a cop a damn sight longer'n you'll be commissioner." His quick ear caught a

slight sound outside the door. He flung it open.

Lieutenant Arthur Kranz stumbled to his immaculate knees.

"Snoopin' again, hunh?" Fallon chuckled at Kranz' discomfiture, threw a quizzical glance at the startled commissioner. "Well, snoopers always get it in the neck." His chin lifted slightly, his teeth bared in a stiff-lipped grin. The B.B. caught Kranz just behind the ear. It was highly gratifying. "I'll be seein' you, Kranz," said Fallon. He closed the door.

IT was three o'clock when he turned his steps into the Elite Billiard Parlor. For hours he'd ranged the town, mile after mile, telling himself that he was no longer a cop, but that it didn't matter; trying to forget his wrath at Commissioner Lowell, at that rat, Lieutenant Arthur Kranz, at the whole setup. Kranz, ex-head of the vice squad, the guy that knew more about graft and corruption in the department than all the rest of them put together. Kranz, now acting as chief adviser to the new commissioner. That was a laugh. No wonder the raids weren't netting anything.

Six o'clock found Fallon still at the Elite. Shirt-sleeved torso bent far over a pool table, his vertically poised cue descended suddenly to execute a difficult *masse* shot. His opponent, a callow youth with obviously more money than was good for him, tossed a five dollar bill to the table.

He grinned crookedly. "You're good, Fallon."

Fallon acknowledged this self-evident fact with a certain complacency. He tucked the five—the third one that afternoon—away in his watch pocket, reached for his coat.

Detectives Fogarty and Kleagle caught him like that. Fogarty looked self-conscious. "You gotta come in with us, Tim. Commissioner wants to see you."

Fallon scowled. "Wants to apologize, hunh? Well, you can tell the commissioner to go dive in his hat. I

made fifteen bucks this afternoon, just playin'. I should slave my head off bein' a dick for a hundred and eighty a month. And nuts to you, too."

Understanding and something like commiseration showed in Fogarty's pale, washed-out eyes. "You'd be a dick for nothin' a month, Tim, and like it." He coughed. "Fact is, Kleagle and me was sent out to pick you up. And not so the commish could tell you he was sorry, either. His daughter was snatched this afternoon. He thinks you mebbe had a hand in it."

Fallon's jaw dropped. "Me?" he demanded incredulously. "Me snatch his daughter? Hell, I never even knew he had a daughter! And anyway, what do you think I am, a heel?"

Kleagle said patiently, "So what? We was ordered to bring you in. Do we hafta sap you?"

Muscles bunched along Fallon's jaw; little red flecks, like sparks, danced in his dark eyes. "You muggs just try to take me if I didn't wanna be took! Come on, let's get it over with." He clattered down the steps ahead of them. They got in the car.

COMMISSIONER LOWELL had aged twenty years in the last two hours. There were dark circles under his eyes and the lids were reddened, puffed. His hands fiddled aimlessly with the papers on his desk.

Fallon stood there scowling between Fogarty and Kleagle. He didn't say anything, just scowled.

Lowell said: "Fallon, revenge is a terrible thing. It makes people do things they wouldn't if they just thought about it a little. Where is my daughter?"

"How in hell should I know?" Fallon grunted. "Only thing I'm sorry for is that she ain't twins. You tie the can to me, and now you're trying to frame me for a snatch. Well, you can't do it, see? I got a alibi for from three to six this afternoon."

Lowell nodded dully. "I know that. The boys checked. But you could have engineered the job, Fallon. Tell me

where she is and I'll—I'll drop the charges against you."

Fallon said: "Go to hell. If I knew I wouldn't tell you!" He was ashamed the instant he'd said it. Red crept up around his neck and ears, but resentment still burned in him. "You gonna hold me?"

Lowell shook his head. "No," he said. "No, I've nothing to hold you on, Fallon. Get out." Fallon swiveled on a heel, banged the door behind him. But he wasn't fooled. Without turning his head he knew that the door had opened again and that either Kleagle or Fogarty was dogging his steps. Headquarters was in a turmoil. Uniformed men and plain-clothes dicks cluttered the halls. Out in the street squad cars were massed, radios blaring, waiting. The street lights were just coming on.

Fallon bought a paper, scanned the account of the kidnaping. Patricia Lowell had stopped at her milliner's on the way downtown to pick up her father. Madame Fournier had bowed her out of the shop at four-thirty. A man had accosted her as she was entering her coupé and madame believed there had been some kind of an argument, but she had been called back to the workroom at that moment and when madame had again entered the main salon, the girl and the man and the green coupé were gone. No, madame could not describe the man, other than that he was tall and very well turned out.

Fallon teetered uncertainly on the curb. What the hell, it was no skin off his nose, was it? Hooray for the kidnapers. He champed at his cud of gum. From the tail of his eye he caught a flash of the bald-headed Fogarty trying to look inconspicuous in the crowd.

Sudden mirth crinkled the corners of Fallon's eyes. His upper lip lifted in a grin. They thought they could tail him, did they. Thought he'd lead them to the girl? Well, he'd show 'em! He waited till a lumbering double-decker bus was just abreast, caromed off the curb in a flying leap and

caught the hand rail. Automatically he reached for his badge, cursed as he remembered, and paid his dime like any other private citizen. Behind him a siren wailed.

Fallon shouldered his way to the front end of the bus, got off at the next corner. He lost himself in the crush at the intersection, watched the chase go by. So now what? What did a guy do that didn't work for a living any more? He grunted irritably, decided to go on down and look over the scene of the snatch. Just to kill time.

MOST of the smart shops along Seventh were closed, but window lights still blazed. It was early for the before-theatre rush. Traffic was light. Extras were being called again. Fallon was trying to estimate the value of a lone hat in Madame Fournier's window when a piping voice assailed him.

"Wanna paper, Mr. Fallon?" Jimmy the newsie, one stocking wrinkled about an undernourished ankle, fumbled a bundle of *Clarions* under one arm. Under the other he juggled a wriggling, nondescript puppy.

Fallon gave the kid a half dollar. "Never mind the paper, fella. How's Marie?"

Anger flared in the kid's eyes, then something almost maternal as he twisted the pooch's limp ear. "Marie ain't so hot," he admitted. "A big palooka kicked her this afternoon and it kinda broke her spirit. You on this snatch case, Mr. Fallon?"

Fallon flushed. He couldn't even be a hero to this kid any more. "No," he said shortly. "No, I ain't even a cop, fella." And then, very casually, because he wasn't at all interested: "You around here this afternoon?"

"Sure," said Jimmy. "That's what I been tryin' to tell yuh. I think maybe this guy that kicked Marie had somethin' to do with the snatch."

Fallon pounced on him. "You mean—you mean you actually saw somethin'?" Hope died. No, it wasn't hope, either. What did he, Tim Fallon, care?

And anyway the kid was just sore because the pooch had been kicked. He'd like to believe the guy that booted Marie was guilty of all the crimes in the calendar.

Jimmy was saying: "—I seen the Lowell dame's car, all right. A big green coupe, just like the paper says. There was a black sedan parked a couple cars down, and a guy standin' beside it like he was waitin'. He wears spats and it's accounta Marie sniffin' at the spats that the mugg kicks her."

Fallon stared. "Spats, hunh? What kinda spats?"

"Yellow. But I don't see nothin' after that 'cause I hafta chase Marie." Jimmy looked hopeful. "You reckon he might have been the guy?"

"Sure," said Fallon disgustedly. "All we gotta do is find a guy with yellow spats, and there we are." Jimmy looked crestfallen, a little hurt. Fallon's heart smote him. He produced a dollar bill, did tricks with folding it, absentmindedly, because his heart wasn't really in it, tossed it to the kid. "Throw the papers in the gutter, Jimmy. Then take Marie home and put her to bed. She looks kinda—" he chuckled suddenly—"kinda pale."

He looked at his watch. Seven-thirty. Gosh, time certainly crawled when you weren't working. An idea struck him. Why not look up Lieutenant Arthur Kranz? It'd be fun, kind of, to really hang something on the louse. He caught a bus home.

There were lights in the living room. His sister was doing a little entertaining. Fallon eschewed dinner and a change of clothes, shunned the house and went around to the garage. A shadow moved among the lighter shadows of the hedge. Fallon chuckled. "That you, Fogarty?"

Detective Fogarty came out, looking sheepish. "Well," he said, "well—uh—it's like this, Tim."

"I know, I know. You're supposed to tail me to the hideout, only you're a lousy tail. You lost me so you figured I might turn up here. Well, make it

snappy. I'm going places." His big hands flashed out without the slightest warning. They gripped Fogarty's fat shoulders, hurled the man into the brambly hedge. Fogarty was still floundering, still cursing luridly and calling upon the saints to witness the perfidy of so-called friends, when Fallon's little car flitted down the drive.

HE got to Lieutenant Kranz's house just in time to see the lieutenant himself leaving. Fallon trailed the big sedan. An expensive job, that sedan. Likewise the new, modernistic house. Too damned expensive to be bought on a police lieutenant's pay. Fallon wondered why no one else could see these things? That stiff-necked commissioner, for instance. He stuck another stick of gum in his wide mouth, concentrated on the car ahead.

After a while the sedan's lights blinked out. Fallon stepped on the gas. Rounding a corner into a tree-lined street he saw the sedan flash into a private drive. A door opened, closed. Fallon remembered this house. It belonged to Quinn, the former police commissioner. Fallon rolled on by, parked in the shadows beneath a giant pepper, cut his lights. So Lieutenant Arthur Kranz was still reporting to the old commissioner, hunh? Why? To get the new one in Dutch and maybe reinstate the old one? This snatch, now. Suppose Commissioner Lowell couldn't even get his own daughter back? That'd make a swell set-up for the opposition to prove he was incompetent.

Fallon's jaw muscles bunched. Well, the guy *was* incompetent, wasn't he? To hell with it! Fallon had just reached this conclusion for the tenth time when his car door was yanked open. Violently Lieutenant Arthur Kranz glared at him.

"What's the big idea, flattie? You've been tailing me."

"Ain't it the truth," said Fallon. "The idea is to hang somethin' on you like I promised."

"Be careful," Kranz snarled, "be careful or you'll hang yourself. Or some one will do it for you." He wanted to smash his fist into Fallon's grinning face. You could see that. Fallon saw it, too, and not being hampered with the lieutenant's inhibitions, he flattened a big paw against the lieutenant's handsome face.

Kranz tumbled off the running board. With a careless: "Be seeing you, Arthur," Fallon trod on the throttle. He left the lieutenant standing there in the shadowed street, shaking a well-manicured fist, and mouthing dire threats. Fallon halted at the nearest drug store, called headquarters. His guarded inquiries netted him two bits of information. There had been no word from the kidnapers. No demand for ransom. Nothing. The second bit of information caused Fallon to look up Jimmy the newsie.

It was around nine-thirty when the man and the boy and the little dog Marie paused at the entrance to Eckert's place. Eckert's was a combination pool hall and bowling alley, the largest in the city, used as a club, a contact point for coppers, stoolies and out-and-out hoods. It was said of Eckert's that even honest men went there too, because the beer was good.

Marble stairs, neon-lighted, led down to the basement. On one side was a perpetually revolving barber pole, on the other a glass case with the latest thing in dentures. Fallon's teeth looked better than anything the dentist had to offer.

He patted Jimmy's shoulder. The little dog nuzzled his hand. Fallon gulped. "I don't think you're gonna get hurt, kid. Anyway, we gotta try it, hunh?"

Jimmy said belligerently, "Don't you worry about me, Mr. Fallon. Me and Marie can take care of ourselves." He trudged purposefully down the stairs. Marie's eyes, over the boy's shoulder, bothered Fallon. They were mildly reproachful.

After a little, Fallon went down the stairs too. Smoke fog enveloped him, the smell of beer and corned beef and human bodies. The bowling alleys rumbled like distant thunder, and men's faces looked tired, yellowish, under the lights. Jimmy and the little dog were nowhere in sight. The mob had swallowed them as if they had never been.

Fallon lounged the length of the great room, crossed over and came back on the other side. Men looked at him, looked away. The mark of the copper was on him, but he wasn't a copper any more. Maybe the men didn't know that yet. But they would. Fallon made noises deep down in his throat when he thought of that. His anger mounted again. At himself this time. What was he fooling with this job for? Why didn't he go some place and dunk his head like an ostrich?

A sudden yelp brought him up sharp. There was another yelp and Marie came hurtling through the air. Men guffawed. Fallon caught Marie, shouldered his way through the crowd that hemmed in Jimmy and a pool table and a guy with spats. The spats were yellow. The guy was a long drink of water with a cast in one eye, and a long sardonic face.

Jimmy was screaming. "Yuh big lug! Yuh big lug!" and the guy with spats cuffed him lightly. Somebody addressed him as Garvin. He grinned, showing gold teeth. And then he saw Fallon with the little dog. He lifted his cue at the look on Fallon's face.

"A copper, hunh? Sure I kicked the pooch. You want to make something out of it?"

Fallon put the whimpering mutt in Jimmy's arms. "No," he said, "I'm not a copper. If I was I couldn't do what I'm going to do. Like this, I mean." He took the cue from Garvin, snapped it as if it were a match. His left hand clamped on a padded shoulder, his right brought the pieces, almost gently it seemed, down on Garvin's lacquered head. Garvin went limp.

Fallon looked at the ring of faces. "Anybody else?" There wasn't anybody else. He dropped the man to the floor, lifted his lip in a sneer for the yellow spats. After that he climbed the marble stairs to the street. Nobody followed him up.

Jimmy the newsie dawdled by the curb. Marie, her cares apparently forgotten, was lapping water from the gutter.

Fallon said, "The pooch okay, fella?"

"Sure," said Jimmy stoutly. "Marie can take it."

Fallon dug for another dollar. Presently the little boy and the little dog went away. Fallon took up his stand in the recessed entrance to a haberdasher's shop. So intent was he on the pool room exit that he only half consciously noted the big black sedan as it crawled by. There were a lot of other cars. But when the sedan passed him for the fourth time in fifteen minutes he turned to stare after it with interest. Something about the back of the driver's head looked familiar. Fallon took off his ring and made scratching noises on the glass behind him.

Garvin and another man came up the stairs. They parted. Garvin's long legs stretched out in almost a run for the corner. He didn't see Fallon, apparently. Fallon counted to twenty before he ventured out of his niche. The yellow spats showed nearly a block ahead.

Fallon quickened his pace as Garvin's spats disappeared into the comparative blackness of a cross street. He rounded the corner cautiously. The man ahead had slowed a trifle, and Fallon, hugging the deeper shadows, was just congratulating himself when he was pinned to the wall by a pair of headlights.

IT was the black sedan again. As it straightened out from the turn, the light beam fell away from Fallon. The car flashed by. Fallon, cursing his luck, turned. Garvin was gone. The sedan swerved at the next corner, dis-

appeared. Fallon sprinted for the corner, skidded around it.

Strong arms embraced him, held him there in the dark; held him just long enough for the man behind him to smash something very heavy down on his head. He sagged. The arms still held, supported him. There was a second blow. Fallon didn't feel that one so much. But it did the business. He didn't know any more for a long, long time.

Some kind of a sound aroused him. It was vaguely irritating, like a dog snuffing, or maybe a woman crying. He opened his eyes, couldn't see anything. His hands and feet were tied, and from the stiffness of his forehead he knew that blood and hair were matted there. Funny, he thought, they must have laid me on my face for a while. The snuffing noises continued.

"Hey," he growled churlishly, "cut that out. It makes me nervous." The snuffing ceased. "You're the Lowell dame, hunh? Why all the tears?"

"Because I'm so darned uncomfortable, if you must know! I—I think they must have stuffed this mattress with potatoes!"

Fallon chuckled. "I ain't got no mattress at all. Hell of a note. Even a fifteen-cent flop house gives you a mattress."

There was silence for a moment. Then the girl's voice, not snuffing any more, but alive with curiosity: "I saw them bring you in. They said you were a—a dick."

"Don't let 'em kid you," said Fallon. "Your old man took care o' seein' that I'm not a dick. He canned me for bein' uncivil to muggs like the ones that copped you off. He says they're nice people." Fallon spat. "What do you think?"

"They're beasts! I'd like to tear their hearts out!"

Fallon cork-screwed himself into a sitting position. "Look, sister," he said earnestly. "If we ever get outa here, do me a favor, will you? Tell your old man how you like hoods, hunh?"

"I'll tell him!" she promised. "And how I'll tell him!"

"Swell," said Fallon. And then: "Look, baby, I'm gonna fall off the bed. Don't get scared."

"Scared! Who's scared? I'm—I'm so mad I could bite nails. And don't call me 'baby'!"

Fallon said: "Okay, baby," and fell off the bed. He waited, expecting some one to investigate the noise. No one did. Slowly, painfully, he inched under the bed, brought his corded wrists into contact with the angle-iron side rail. It was cast iron, rough on the edge. He began to saw. Back and forth, back and forth till his arms cried out for rest. He kept on, felt a strand give, then another.

The hall door banged open. Lights clicked on, blinding him for a moment. He peered from under the bed. Two pairs of legs. One pair ended in yellow spats. The others sidled up to the bed, like a crab. Suddenly one of the big feet lashed out, landed in Fallon's ribs. Hairy hands swooped, dragged him into the light.

The guy said: "Hi, copper!" and kicked him again.

Fallon just lay there, taking it, but not liking it. His strong teeth were bared in a sort of a grin. He grunted. "That's three. Three I owe you, punk."

Garvin grinned toothily. "You'll never pay him, copper. Morry's rubbing you out when we leave here."

"Cowards!" cried the girl. "You filthy scum!"

Garvin gave her a careless, back-handed slap that knocked her sprawling back on the bed. He turned to Morry. "Let the dick have it now if you wanna. We're blowing this joint."

MORRY kicked Fallon again. "Too bad, copper. Too bad I ain't got more time. I kinda like to play." He jerked his gun, squatted, toadlike, over Fallon. The vicious face crept down closer and Fallon could see the insatiable lust in the evil eyes. The lust to kill.

Fallon tested his wrists. They were almost free. Morry turned at something Garvin said. Fallon's hands moved from vest pocket to his mouth. The leering face came back, the gun trembled on Fallon's breast. The evil eyes were very close now, squinted a little as the trigger finger tightened. Fallon's lip lifted, ever so slightly. The B.B. smacked into a yellow eye. A yelp of pain, a heaving, twisting flurry of locked bodies, then Fallon had the gun in his two hands. The cords on his wrists snapped. The gun went off, muffled strangely, and Morry's body went limp.

Fallon rolled him off, looked for Garvin. The tall man was spinning crazily around the room, gun out, looking for an opening. He thought he saw it, fired. The slug hit Morry. Fallon fired twice, aiming very carefully because his hands were pretty numb and he wanted to be sure. Garvin got a funny look on his face, went to his knees. His gun dropped and both hands clasped his lean belly.

"And that," said Fallon, half to himself, "is where I like to get rats. That's where it hurts most." Fallon should have known. His ribs felt like they were all loose and chasing each other around inside him. He got out his knife, cut his ankles free. Then he looked at the girl. She'd passed out. Garvin rolled over suddenly, reached for his gun.

There was the sound of a million feet on the stairs. Fallon sat down on the girl's cot, pointed his gun at the door. Somebody on the other side of the door yelled: "This is the law!"

Fallon yelled back: "I wouldn't brag. Come on in!"

They came in. Bald-headed, pop-eyed Fogarty, and Captain Tiernan, and Commissioner Lowell and a couple more cops. They had Lieutenant Arthur Kranz with them.

The girl opened her eyes, sat up and held out her bound hands. "Hi, pop," she said to the commissioner. Fallon decided she was okay. He listened to the commissioner croon over her.

Fallon looked at Fogarty. "You ain't such a dumb mick. I had a hunch you'd pick up my trail sooner or later, account of you been around under my feet all night."

Fogarty blushed. "Well—uh—you see, Tim, I ran into the kid and the little dog. And then first thing I know, I'm reading a message and a license number scratched in a show window. Turned out to be Lieutenant Kranz's sedan. We—uh—just kinda followed the lieutenant around."

Kranz yelped: "I don't know a thing about it, I tell you!"

Fallon got up. Unhurriedly he clamped one of the lieutenant's wrists in a big paw, twisted it up and around between the well-tailored shoulders.

"When I see Kranz reportin' to the ex-commissioner," he said, "I thinks mebbe this snatch ain't for money. I called headquarters and sure enough there ain't any demand for dough. So I guess mebbe the reason is political, and I find out where Kranz used to make his contacts and there you are. 'Course, though, the lieutenant don't know a thing about it." He put on the pressure.

"I do too!" screamed Kranz. "I know all about it!"

Fallon scowled at the commissioner. "See what I mean?" he inquired. "First they don't, then they do."

Commissioner Lowell winced. "Yes," he said, "yes, I see what you mean. I—I guess we all have things to learn—er—Sergeant."

"Not him!" scoffed his daughter. "One look at his Irish mug and you can tell he knows everything." She grinned at Fallon. "What I'd like to know is what you did to that hyena that was going to shoot you?"

Fallon looked sheepishly at the skipper. His neck and ears got very red, and his big feet shuffled.

The skipper's face took on a purplish hue. "Don't tell me!" he snarled. "Let me guess. You shot him with one of your lousy B.B.'s!"

Fallon gulped. "Yes, sir," he said. "Kid stuff."

"Toothy" Bergum had no time for surprise when he discovered—

Switched Doom

By
Orlando
Rigoni



TOOTHY" BERGUM crouched back in the shadows, unmindful of the rain that beat in through the open window and made a puddle about his feet on the floor.

He was well hidden by the tall bookcase and the urn that contained a trailing fern. His lean, pale face smirked in a gesture of impatience. He ran his tongue along his big, crooked teeth, and cursed softly. Damn his lips, they were too dry! He wished the old man would hurry.

Mentally he checked over every detail of his plan. He had the wires run

to the back of the lounging chair, and the ottoman that stood in front of it. The copper plates were hidden in slits he had cut in the covering of the upholstery. The wires were concealed by the plush rug of the district attorney's den, and Toothy held the high frequency transformer in his claw-like hands. He had it plugged into the electric heater outlet, and the switch was within easy reach of his left hand.

For a week, he had been planning this electrocution. He had spied upon the district attorney's home every

night. About eleven-thirty, Wilson, the D. A., would go to his den for an hour of relaxation before going to bed. He always assumed the same slouching attitude in the big chair, with his legs crossed upon the ottoman. Toothy knew he had the copper plates in exactly the right spots.

He had made sure that the telephone was on the smoking stand beside the chair. While he waited, Toothy cursed the rain, but he dared not close the window as he had to use it to make a quick getaway.

Tonight, Wilson would either save Mike Bergum from the chair, or he would die with him—in just the same manner at the same time. Toothy had a flare for the theatrical. Not that Mike didn't deserve burning. He was guilty as hell. But Toothy needed Mike alive, in order to learn where he had hidden the money they had taken in the McClusky bank raid. Mike had slyly kept that information to himself, and Toothy meant to make his brother spill the straight dope, or else torture him to death himself.

The clock chimed eleven-thirty. Toothy tensed, and stared into the semi-darkness toward the door. At twenty-eight minutes to twelve o'clock, the door opened, and a light clicked on. It was the shaded bridge lamp over the big chair.

Toothy crouched like a great cat, and waited until Wilson was seated in the chair, head thrown back and feet crossed upon the ottoman. Then he said in a low, rasping voice:

"Don't move, Wilson. I got a little favor to ask ya. I got ya covered with a hot gat, an' I ain't got no scruples against jerkin' the finger prong. You sent my brother Mike to the death house, and he ain't goin' to die tonight, savvy?"

Wilson didn't move. He was a man of courage, and he lay there without even turning his head. He said, evenly. "If you're threatening me, save your breath. I know you. You're Mike's brother. I'm giving you a

chance to get out and close the window before I call the police."

Toothy grated a dry laugh. "Ya ain't talkin' to no jury now, mister. I know damned well Mike is guilty. But I don't want him to die—not yet. I got to have a hour alone with him before he burns. The governor won't budge a inch. Mike's got less than a half hour to live. They figger to run the scorch through him at midnight. That's exactly how long yer gonna live unless ya call the governor an' get a postponement."

"There's no reason—no evidence to show a postponement should be granted," Wilson said quietly. He didn't move his body, but his fat hand crept slowly toward the middle drawer of the smoking stand. Closer—closer.

TOOTHY smiled evilly to himself and licked his dry lips. He could see that hand, and he watched it with unblinking eyes.

"Ya can tell the governor that ya got some new evidence—tell him any damned thing ya wanna. If ya don't get him to hold up the works, yer due to beat Mike into hell, an' nobody'll know how ya got there, see?" Toothy snarled.

Wilson's hand was almost to the drawer pull. He was breathing hard—slow. He fumbled with the catch. "You haven't got the guts to shoot me, Toothy Bergum. You're yellow clean through, from front to back. You were in on that bank grab, and you let Mike take the rap. He wouldn't squeal on you."

Toothy had some pride, and now his anger flared. "I was yellow, was I? Why should I take the rap?" I didn't git none of the sugar! He wouldn't tell—"

Wilson was stalling for time. He had to get the drop on this madman, before Toothy could divine his purpose. "So you admit you were in on the job?" he said accusingly. "I was just feeding you rope, and you made your own noose."

Toothy cursed, and made a low, growling sound that might have been a laugh. "Nobody'll ever savvy I was in on the job but you, an' you won't live long enough to tell a damned soul unless ya do like I told ya."

Wilson's face was gray, and hard looking. The drawer was opening slowly.

"Ya got two more minutes, Wilson," Toothy snarled.

Wilson's hand closed about the automatic.

"One more minute!" Toothy was getting nervous.

Silently, Wilson drew the gun from the drawer, and it jabbed above the top of the table.

Toothy kept his eyes glued on that gun. He had known the gun was there, and he had expected something like this. It would add a touch of mystery to the picture when the police finally found Wilson's body. They would find him dead, with little burned spots on his body, a loaded gun in his hand, and nothing to show just how he had died.

Toothy stiffened. His lean fingers clutched the old transformer. His left hand darted for the switch. He had planned to jab that switch at exactly twelve o'clock so that Wilson and

Mike might meet in hell at the same time, but Wilson was forcing the play—

"Drop that gat, ya fool! Yer goin' to hell!"

Toothy jammed the switch home. There was the roar of the gun. A blinding flash of lightning flung across the room and the lights went out. There was an odor of burned leather upon the air. The room seemed to tremble with an awful stillness.

There was a faint stirring. Wilson, who'd half risen from the chair to fire the gun, groped for an electric torch. The flash had burned out the house circuit.

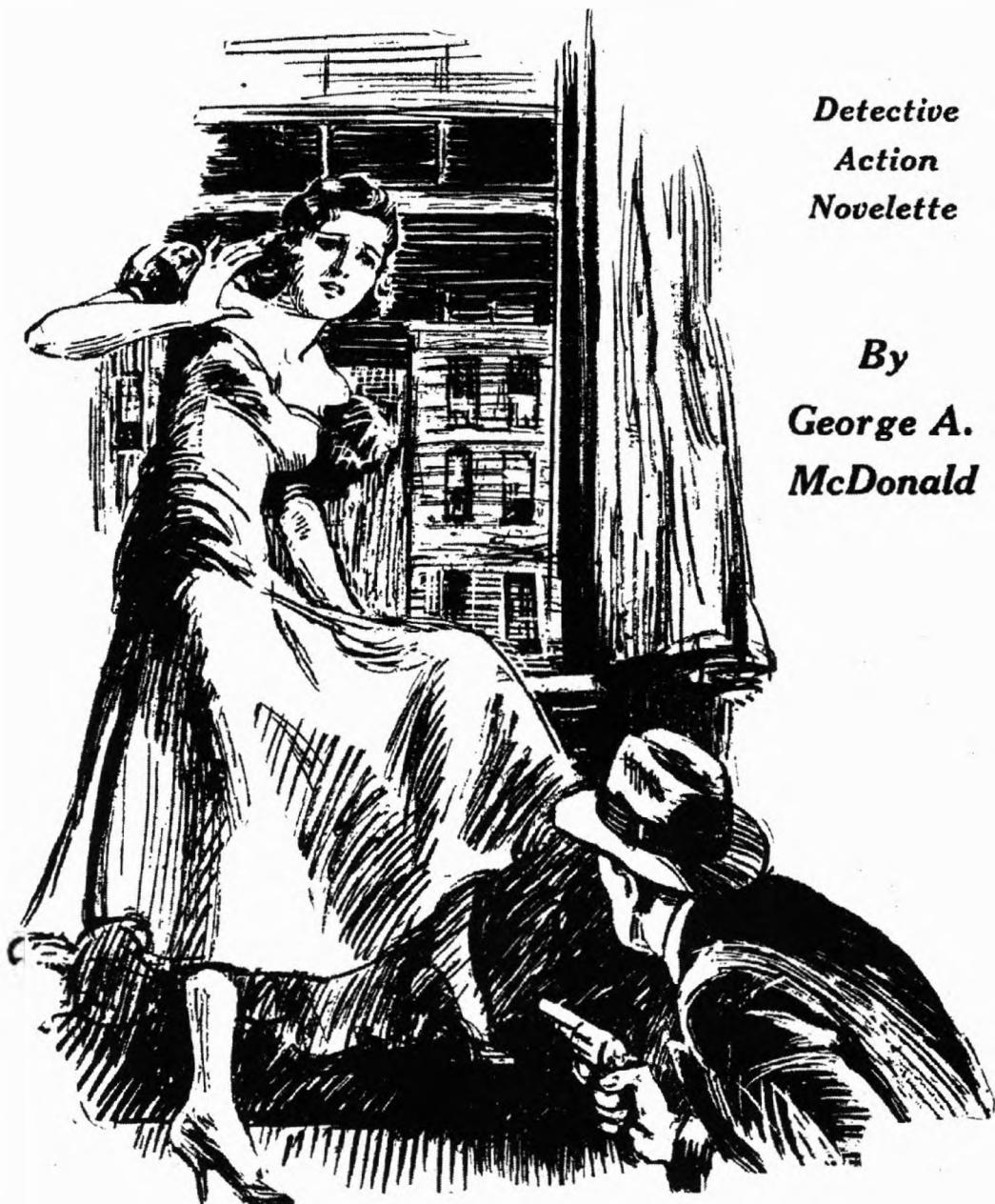
Grimly, he discovered the wiring, and followed it back to the window, expecting to find Toothy gone. As he looked behind the fern, he drew back as though struck. For Toothy hadn't gone. And he never would go. Not that he'd been hit with the bullet. It was just that he'd fallen into his own trap. There was a pool of water on the floor, and Toothy had been standing in the pool grounded, as it were. So when he shoved the switch home, the current had passed through his own body. It was Toothy who'd keep a rendezvous with Mike—and he was even a little early for it.



Hell's Handymen

*Detective
Action
Novelette*

*By
George A.
McDonald*



In his darkest hour Lieutenant O'Dare had to decide whether he could arrest the only man who could give life back to his pal. And it looked like the high card would call for noble dishonor—till he saw the deck had been stacked.

CHAPTER I

CALL FOR THE CORPSE

MUSCLES knotted along Detective Lieutenant O'Dare's craggy jaw. His big fingers wrapped into a menacing fist. Hot, sullen rage gleamed in his blue eyes.

The sleek, handsome man in the chair cowered, then whined:

"You can't stick me with a blackmail rap. The dame slipped me the money to cover our check at the night club. I don't know nothing about no blackmail ring. Lay your paws on me and I'll take a squawk right up to the commissioner."

"You lousy chiseler," rasped O'Dare. "Get a load of this. Three women committed suicide in this town last month, victims of the gang of ghouls I think you're hooked up with. Those women were murdered foully. Bullets would have been cleaner. You're going to put the finger on the rat that's heading up this filthy blackmail ring—if I have to beat you to a pulp."

Three weeks of fruitless work in trying to trail down the evil genius at the head of the vicious blackmail ring that was wrecking homes added harshness to O'Dare's tone.

The gigolo's olive face got green. He knew the big lieutenant's reputation for finishing any job he started. The stormy petrel of the force got results—by methods of his own.

"Hell, lieutenant! I ain't hooked up with them heels. So help me—"

Just then, Desk Sergeant Gilfoyle stuck his head in, growled:

"On the phone, Dan. It's Dr. Sheldon and he says it's important."

O'Dare shoved his fingers through his flaming red hair in an angry gesture. He cursed beneath his breath, told the plainclothes men who had picked up the suspect to slam the gigolo in the clink. A worried frown corrugated the big fellow's brow as he hard-heeled out to the desk.

It would just about kill his crippled pal Tim Ryan if Dr. Sheldon couldn't go through with the operation now. Sheldon was the only man in the East who could make Tim walk again.

Something caught at Dan O'Dare's throat. Tim had stood the gaff like a hero, ever since his engine had crashed a runaway freight two years before, making a helpless cripple out of the husky young engineer. Dan O'Dare,

the hardboiled, iron-fisted cop, was father, mother and brother to the crippled engineer. It had been that way since they were orphaned by a tenement fire as kids. The thought of active, athletic Tim Ryan never walking again sent a cold shiver down O'Dare's spine. His anxiety showed in his voice as he picked up the phone and said:

"Hello, Doctor. Sure—I'll be up right away. Larrabee's Employment Agency—on Madison. Yeah, in about ten minutes."

He shrugged wide shoulders into a belted trench coat, pulled a snap brim felt low on his sunset hair. Sergeant Gilfoyle looked funny as he said: "Hell, Dan. I sent Desmond up there about fifteen minutes ago. Got a report that a man died suddenly."

Apprehension stirred in O'Dare's brain. He had a hunch something was wrong, and the big redhead's hunches usually proved correct.

His brain was busy as he rode up-town. He recalled that Roscoe Larrabee operated a high hat agency, furnishing servants to the silk stocking trade. Larrabee was Dr. Mark Sheldon's father-in-law. It was whispered along the Rialto that the fast stepping young surgeon didn't hit it off so good with his wealthy, crabby father-in-law. O'Dare's presentiment of trouble deepened.

He pushed into a nicely furnished office on the seventh floor of the Rypler Building, halted with his wide shoulders against the door. For a second, the detective's startled eyes stared at the gaunt, white-haired figure sprawled face down on the mahogany desk. Then O'Dare looked at the black-haired man nervously fingering a tiny mustache.

"H' are yuh, Doc?" he asked flatly. "This why you called me?"

"Reason enough, don't you think, Lieutenant?" Mark Sheldon asked shakily.

O'Dare nodded, spoke to Jim Dempsey, a grizzled homicide squad man, "Medical Examiner coming, Jim?"

"Any minute now, Lieutenant," Dempsey answered.

O'Dare walked over to the desk, turned Larrabee's head. He sucked in his breath sharply as he saw the dilated pupils and the bluish tinge of the dead man's skin. Amazement sharpened his voice, as he turned to Mark Sheldon.

"He's been poisoned, Doc!" O'Dare pried open Larrabee's jaw, looked at the man's mouth. He saw that Larrabee had an upper plate that didn't fit too well. The detective sniffed, straightened slowly and stared at Dr. Sheldon. "No trace of the poison. What's the answer?"

Mark Sheldon's tailored shoulders rose and fell.

"I'm no toxicologist, Dan," he said slowly. "But it looks like nicotine poisoning to me. Nicotine doesn't come in tablets. Liquid or in powder—and there'd be some trace if Larrabee took it himself. Add it up yourself."

O'DARE felt a sinking sensation in his stomach. Sheldon was plainly fighting for composure.

"It adds up to murder!" the detective clipped. "Who wanted him dead?"

Despite an obvious effort to control it a tremor showed in the dark haired surgeon's voice.

"Larrabee and I fought like hell. He didn't approve of my playing around night clubs. My wife will inherit a sizable fortune. Looks like I had a pretty strong motive, Dan. I don't know of any other enemies the old man had—not virulent enough to poison him, anyway."

O'Dare's face looked as if there was a bitter taste in his mouth. Swift thoughts were shuttling through his brain. Sheldon had poisoned Larrabee and was afraid the cops would nail him for it.

Perhaps the plan had been in the back of his mind when Sheldon offered to pass up his usual high fee and do a charity operation for Tim Ryan. In return for that favor he could get O'Dare to frame evidence that would clear

him. If Sheldon was jailed, Tim Ryan's only chance of walking again was gone. Dan O'Dare's heart got cold. But he asked steadily:

"Did you murder him?"

Sheldon's eyes narrowed a little. He shook his dark head, said tersely: "No. I haven't seen Larrabee for a week."

The medical examiner came in, spoke a minute with O'Dare, then went to work on the body. O'Dare learned that Roger Fravel, the office manager, had discovered the body, about nine-thirty. Fravel had called Sheldon's wife, then the police. That accounted for Sheldon's presence so early in the morning.

O'Dare prowled around the office as he fired questions at the tall, round-shouldered, partly bald office manager. Fravel's pale blue eyes bulged and his prominent Adam's apple bobbed violently as he answered. He looked badly frightened. There had only been two visitors at the office, both applicants for jobs. He'd talked with Mr. Larrabee after the second man left. His employer seemed to be all right then.

The detective's square face was blank and emotionless but his hard blue eyes took in everything in the room. There was a screen in the corner, behind it was a washbowl and a first aid cabinet with a mirror. A brown can was on the floor, partly hidden by the shadow of the bowl. O'Dare picked it up, rapped a swift question at Fravel:

"Did Larrabee keep powder for sticking his false teeth here at the office?"

Fravel's throat constricted as he swallowed, a little color came into his long, pale face. He said:

"Yes. Sometimes his plate dropped while interviewing clients. It was most embarrassing."

O'Dare absently dropped the can in his pocket, completed his search of the office. He moved over to Larrabee's chair, started emptying the dead man's pockets, hoping there might be a lead of some sort there. He took out a well-filled billfold, a couple of letters. Nothing there. He rifled a couple of

legal documents that were folded in Larrabee's inside pocket, saw they were quit-claim deeds signed by Dr. Sheldon's wife. As he spread the first one, something blue dropped to the floor.

THE detective bent, retrieved the blue ticket stub, saw that it was for a front row seat at Linsky's burlesque. It bore the previous day's date and was for the afternoon show. O'Dare grinned crookedly:

"Did the old boy go for strip-teasers? Was he a burlesque fan?"

Roger Fravel's face was set in lines of grief as he said:

"He'd never waste money like that. He was too saving. He was a good man, though, and we all liked him in spite of his crustiness."

The medical examiner looked up with a frown. He said:

"All symptoms point to nicotine poisoning. Can't make out how it was administered, though. I want to do an autopsy."

Mark Sheldon was pale as he said: "Go ahead, doctor. I'll authorize it."

O'Dare told Dempsey to get finger print men to go over the office. Then he went out with Fravel to get the addresses of the only two applicants who had been in Larrabee's office so far that morning.

The big outer office and waiting room was almost deserted. A blonde girl was typing at a desk behind a railed enclosure. O'Dare stared at her. There was something familiar about her lovely oval face. Wide-spaced hazel eyes met his probing stare without a flicker of recognition.

Dempsey called Fravel into Larrabee's office for a minute. O'Dare walked over to the rail. Doubt had crystallized into certainty. The girl was Glenna Waverly, the hell-raising, spoiled daughter of Pete Waverly, millionaire contractor. What in hell was Pete's kid doing in an employment office? She'd been photographed at fights, races, balls and in night clubs, but never at a typewriter.

"Hello, beautiful," O'Dare grinned pleasantly. "You're new around here, aren't you?"

A dark veil slid over her hazel eyes for a second, then she nodded pertly: "I'm just substituting for Miss Jones, the regular steno, who's sick."

"How's Pete these days?" he asked abruptly, then felt like kicking himself as he saw the color race out of the girl's face. Her eyes got hard and her firm little chin, a miniature replica of old Pete's blunt jaw, rose belligerently.

"He's okay," she snapped, "if it's any of your business."

"Don't be like that, sister," O'Dare said easily. "Your toothpaste smile is better. How come you're going in for alphabet slapping?"

"Is it a crime for a girl to want to work?" she asked flatly. "It's about time I did something useful, don't you think?"

She didn't look at him when she said it. Her slim fingers moved nervously over the keyboard. O'Dare had a hunch she was stalling. He said:

"Fravel know who you are? He ought to be flattered, having a million dollar secretary."

Glenna Waverly came out of her chair fast. Her hand grabbed O'Dare's arm and her voice was shaky as she said:

"Don't tell him, Lieutenant! You're regular—I've heard dad say so. I've got a reason for being here—but I can't tell you what it is. You've got to believe me!"

Dan O'Dare's pulse began to hammer under the pressure of those slim fingers. He was friendly with half the beauties along Broadway. He knew a dozen girls who were more beautiful than the slim, blonde creature who had turned the battery of big, appealing hazel eyes on him. Yet he felt a little scared. He'd always considered himself woman-proof. Love 'em all, had been his motto. But Pete Waverly's kid was playing tunes on his heartstrings. His freckled face got red and he said gruffly:

"Hell, gorgeous. I believe you. Pete Waverly's daughter couldn't be hooked up in anything crooked." Then he remembered the body in the private office and his scalp tingled. There'd been a murder committed here. Did Glenna Waverly's reason for being there have anything to do with the kill? He clipped suddenly: "Do you know who murdered old Larrabee?"

A shiver went through the blonde girl's lissom figure.

"Was it—was it murder?" she asked throatily. "I heard Fravel phone headquarters. I—I thought it was heart failure or something like that."

"It was murder, baby. And your name is going to be MUD if the tabloid boys or some other copper spots you here. You're going to be in a bad jam."

"I'm in one now, O'Dare," she said bitterly. "One that you can help me out of—by forgetting who I am. Dad has spoken of you as a friend. Won't you do a favor for Pete Waverly's girl?"

O'Dare smiled wryly. He was off to a flying start on this case. Two people already enlisting his aid. O'Dare began to wonder what it was all about. He didn't like motiveless murders with outside complications. They took too long to unravel—and he had one mystery on his hands now in the blackmail ring investigation.

The girl's red lips trembled, and he thought she was going to cry. Weeping women scared O'Dare. He said quickly: "Hold it, sister. Don't turn on the water works. I'm a sucker for sob-stories. I'll keep my lips buttoned—as long as I can."

The dazzling smile he got made him feel guilty. He'd been a dope to promise anything like that. Now he had to stick to it, for his word rated high. Fravel came back and told the girl to dig out the cards of the two applicants. O'Dare jotted down their names and addresses, told Dempsey to turn in a report when the print and camera men where through.

"Going to push me in a cell, Dan?" asked Dr. Sheldon.

O'Dare shook his red head, said wryly: "Not today, Doc. You'd better get busy with your little knives. You may have to rent a high priced mouth-piece before this is over." His blue eyes probed at Sheldon's face as he said it.

The premonition of disaster clutched his heart again as Sheldon got pale and said: "Not until your pal Tim Ryan is walking again, I hope, Dan." O'Dare wondered whether it was alarm or a veiled threat that he detected in the handsome surgeon's voice.

CHAPTER II

PETERMAN TALK

THE address of the first applicant was in the upper Twenties on the west side. A frowsy looking woman answered his ring. O'Dare asked: "James Thornwood live here?"

The woman eyed him in cold suspicion, nodded and said: "Second floor, end of the hall on the right."

"Is he in?"

"You're asking me? Go on up and see. I ain't married to him, I just board him."

"That's his hard luck," O'Dare cracked.

He hard-heeled along the hall and his broad knuckles played a tune on the last door. There was no answer. O'Dare frowned a minute, then went to work with his skeleton keys. The tumblers clicked and he pushed the door cautiously. His eyes slithered about the vacant room, took in the cheap metal bed, the bureau and the scarred leather suitcase in the corner. O'Dare decided to learn what he could about James Thornwood. The fact that Thornwood might be a reputable citizen and could raise hell over an unwarranted search of his room bothered the big redhead but little. He had one of his hunches—and he started to put it into effect.

O'Dare was on one knee by the suitcase, when his sharp ears caught the faint whispering creak of a door. It

was instinct sent him diving for the shelter of the metal bed, almost before he caught the glimpse of the white bundle thrusting out through the crack made by the slowly opening closet door. O'Dare knew the wrapped towel was muffling a gun.

The big lieutenant wore a shoulder clip. He was thankful for the split seconds of extra speed it gave him as a bullet ripped through the shoulder of his trench coat. O'Dare rolled and twisted, then fired, slanting his bullet upward past the edge of the metal bed. He heard a hollow groan, then the door of the closet pushed out. The detective watched with slitted, blazing eyes as a stiff figure toppled forward, then pitched out, to slam face down on the floor.

O'Dare swore as he got to his feet, went over and turned the man with his foot. His marksmanship had been too damned good. The guy was dead as hell. If this was James Thornwood, O'Dare wasn't going to learn much about the Larrabee kill from him.

The redhead shamus' jaw hardened as he eyed the automatic wrapped in the wet towel. It made a good silencer. Then O'Dare's eyes narrowed. It had taken a minute or two for the mug to wet that towel, wrap it around the gun and duck into the closet. Not a half-minute had elapsed between his knock and his entry into the room. O'Dare swore morosely. Thornwood, or whatever the heel's name was, must have been expecting him. That girl now—could she have been the tipoff?

The landlady burst into the room, eyed the corpse on the floor. She started to scream, but choked it off when O'Dare snarled:

"Is this punk Thornwood?"

She nodded and started out the door.

"Come back here," snapped O'Dare. "Where in hell are you going?"

"I'm calling the law," she yelled. "This is a respectable house. You can't pull murders here and get away with it."

O'Dare gave her a smile, flashed his badge and said: "I'm the law, princess.

And your boarders have funny ideas about being respectable."

She started to protest of innocence but O'Dare silenced her, then told her to go down and get the cop on the beat to call the wagon. She halted at the door, glared venomously at O'Dare.

"He owed me a week's back rent. Who's going to pay that?" she asked.

"Better consult your ouija board," O'Dare replied.

HIS eyes were bitter as they studied the thin-lipped, pallid face of the dead man. Then he bent closer, scrutinized the tiny scars by the man's nostrils, pushed back his thin, yellow hair and saw freshly healed scars there. Thornwood had recently undergone a plastic surgery job. His nose had been straightened, and it looked as though a scar had been removed from his forehead.

O'Dare's brow furrowed. The skinny punk on the floor certainly was no gift to the movies. Even after the work-over, his face hadn't been improved much. He didn't look like a guy who had a bank-roll to spend on being made beautiful.

The redhead shamus squatted back on his heels, scrubbed his jaw reflectively. Thornwood had been tipped off. Only three people knew O'Dare was going to visit Thornwood. Those people were Dr. Sheldon, Glenna Waverly and Roger Fravel. The tip-off could have come from any one of the three. O'Dare's jaws got craggy.

Fravel could have telephoned Thornwood that O'Dare was on his way up there. It would have been a smart gag, giving the detective the address, then arranging to have him bumped off. The fact that he had apparently given Thornwood's address in good faith would absolve Fravel from any blame in the killing.

Then O'Dare shook his head. The horse-faced office manager didn't measure up as a master mind. Fravel was out.

O'Dare suddenly remembered that Dr. Mark Sheldon did plastic surgery.

A black frown of suspicion rode the redhead's forehead. He groaned aloud. If that suspicion proved to be fact—Tim Ryan would never walk again. Sheldon would be plying a coal shovel in hell instead of a surgeon's scalpel in Post Medical Hospital.

A chill premonition of danger tingled in O'Dare's veins. Some sinister master mind had put the finger on him. His investigation of the Larrabee kill was getting in some one's hair, badly enough to promote a second murder. O'Dare felt he was on a hot trail. He knew an implacable foe had marked him for death. Which was hotsy-totsy with the freckled-faced lad from Center Street.

O'Dare's square face was somber as he pounded down Broadway to Max Linsky's Burlesque. He'd layed an egg on his second call. Chris Olson, the other applicant, had scrammed, bag and baggage, before O'Dare got to his hotel room. The clerk said Olson looked scared when he'd checked out without notice. O'Dare figured the mysterious head man had given the Swede orders by phone to take it on the lam. The detective's lips tightened. It looked like Roscoe Larrabee had been fronting for a couple of hoods.

Billy Lewis, ticket man at Linsky's, grinned as O'Dare showed him the stub. His eyebrows cocked as he asked:

"You ain't flatfooting for divorce evidence are you, Lieutenant?"

O'Dare swore at him morosely.

"Don't be an umpchay," he growled. "This is a murder rap I'm on."

Lewis whistled.

"You're out of bounds on this one, Dan. That stub was used yesterday by Doc Sheldon. We reserve the choice seats for regulars. Sheldon always takes that same seat on Wednesday afternoons."

"Are you sure he was here yesterday?" barked O'Dare. "Couldn't somebody else have picked up his ticket?"

"I chewed the fat with him personally," Lewis stated. "I rode him about the roll he dropped on Slugger Malone

at the Garden on Monday night. Doc picked Slugger to knock over the Champ, to the tune of a grand."

O'Dare masked the bitterness in his heart behind a grin. He said:

"Lots of the smart money boys got fooled on the build-up they gave the Slugger." Anger and apprehension knifed his brain behind that smile.

Sheldon had lied to him. The dark haired surgeon must have visited Larrabee's office on Wednesday night or Thursday morning. Probably to deliver the signed papers his father-in-law had in his pocket. The ticket stub had caught between the sheets of the paper to remain unnoticed until O'Dare had smoothed them out.

THE big shamus stalked over to the curb, flagged a taxi and rode to Dr. Sheldon's Park Avenue address.

Sheldon was dictating into a dictaphone machine when O'Dare walked past the brown-haired nurse-secretary. The doctor's dark eyes got bright and hard. He asked quickly:

"Turn up anything yet, Dan?"

"Yeah. A couple things." O'Dare pushed back his hat, rumpled his red hair, then asked tonelessly:

"What was the idea of giving me the big run-around, Doc? You said you hadn't seen Larrabee for a week. But there was a stub of a theatre ticket you used yesterday among the papers in your father-in-law's pocket. Even a dumb flatfoot like me couldn't help adding up that one and getting the right score."

Sheldon's handsome face changed color. He got pale, then a dark flush stained his cheeks. He scrubbed the knuckle of his forefinger across his neat mustache a couple times. Fright showed in the dark eyes that stabbed at O'Dare's granite face.

"Yes, I lied, Dan," he said jerkily. "Not to you—but to the plainclothes man who was there. I was with Larrabee this morning at 8:30, before his office staff got there. He always got there early. I had to see him on a personal matter."

Sheldon found no encouragement in the detective's bleak face. He went on fiercely:

"I'll lay it on the line, Dan. I wanted the old buzzard to sign a note for me. I'd been helling around a lot and spent or lost more money than I could afford to put out. I had obligations to meet and I wanted to borrow on a note at my bank. I got my wife to sign those quitclaims thinking that would put the old hellion in a good mood. But it was no dice. All I got was a lot of abuse. He rode me so hard that I started once to clip him on the chin. Finally I told him what he could do with his money and his signature—and I scrammed. That's on the level, Dan. But I couldn't spill it in front of a police dick who didn't know me. I'd be jugged on suspicion. Even if I beat the rap—I'd be all washed up as a professional man. Can't you see the jam I was in? That's why I called you."

O'Dare had the feeling that Sheldon was laying it on too thick. He was counting on the big redhead's sympathy and friendship to alibi him.

"Didn't Fravel or the girl hear the argument?" O'Dare asked.

"I don't think so. The girl wasn't in when I left the office. And I don't think Fravel was in, either. He'd have mentioned it if he had heard the row. He doesn't think very much of me—he's like my dear departed father-in-law in that respect."

"Then you don't know anything about the murder? Larrabee was okay when you left him?"

"He was mad as hell, but otherwise he was his old miserly self."

The cynicism went out of Sheldon's face. He dropped a trembling hand on O'Dare's arm. His voice was shaky as he said:

"You've got to believe me, Dan. If not for my sake—believe me for the sake of your pal. You've got to—if you want him to walk again!"

O'Dare got up wearily. His eyes steadied on Sheldon's face. Bitterness

dragged down the corners of the detective's mouth.

"Yeah," he said tonelessly. "I've got to believe you—for Tim's sake. Funny world, ain't it?"

The detective's broad shoulders drooped a little as he went out.

ROGER FRAVEL'S Adam's apple did a violent rhumba when O'Dare told him about Thornwood. The office manager's stooped shoulders twitched in a shiver. His thin voice quavered as he groaned:

"Something sinister is behind all this, Lieutenant. I don't think Mr. Larrabee had any enemies. He was hard about money matters but he never cheated anyone. I can't see why anyone would want to murder him—but—"

A flickering expression that was almost craftiness showed in Fravel's pale blue eyes. O'Dare caught it. He asked sharply:

"But—what? If you've got anything on your mind, spill it."

"It's probably nothing," Fravel said apologetically. "Only I think Dr. Sheldon lied this morning. He was here early—before the office opened, arguing with Mr. Larrabee—about money. Sheldon was pretty mad when he came out. So mad that he didn't even see me, or he wouldn't have tried to get away with a story like that. I suppose the poor fellow was afraid he'd be suspected. That would ruin him, socially and professionally."

"That's what he was afraid of," O'Dare admitted. "He told me the straight story about twenty minutes ago. Why didn't you spring this before?"

Fravel flushed, made a nervous washing motion with his hands.

"Dr. Sheldon was here then. I didn't want to antagonize him—for he may be the one who will be in charge of this business, if Mrs. Sheldon wants to continue it. So I waited until I could tell you privately."

O'Dare admitted it was all haywire, any way you looked at it. He asked for

a check up on Thornwood's references, and learned that they were forged. Families he had given as references told Fravel on the phone that they had never employed Thornwood.

Additional investigation showed that Chris Olson, the other applicant, had also presented Larrabee with a nice set of hand-made credentials, none of which could be verified. O'Dare thought Fravel was going to take down his hair and have a good cry. The Larrabee agency had furnished the leading families in the city with servants for years. It was almost sacrilegious to associate fraud with their organization. O'Dare sardonically agreed.

Glenna Waverly wasn't at her desk when O'Dare went out. But his pulse began to jump when he spotted her in the lobby of the building. She was talking vehemently with a heavy-set man. Her glance slid over O'Dare's face as the shamus stepped out of the elevator. Then her blonde head turned away.

O'Dare knew she had seen him. His bewilderment grew as he glimpsed her companion. The big detective stiffened. His eyelids narrowed as he hurried out of the building. Suspicion and rage battled in his brain. He was plenty burned up because the blonde doll had cut him dead. Suspicion fed fuel to the blaze of anger in his brain, for he had tabbed her companion as "Slick Ed" Hawley, one of the cleverest safe men in the east.

O'Dare's eyes smoldered as he dropped into a doorway across the street. He waited ten minutes, then Hawley came out. A second look at the blunt-jawed, shifty eyed man verified the detective's swift identification. O'Dare rasped a sullen curse, jerked his hat low on his forehead and stepped into traffic behind the safe cracker. Hawley hadn't spotted him in the building. O'Dare meant to find out what business Pete Waverly's kid had with a notorious peterman.

O'Dare's brain raced as he trailed

Hawley across town. He tried to figure an excuse for picking up the barrel-chested crook to question him. There wasn't anything on the books against Hawley, no old charge that he could be held on. The big lieutenant's jaw hardened. To hell with charges. He'd grab the lug and beat his ears off if he wouldn't talk. O'Dare was getting fed up with mysteries.

He saw the safecracker duck into an alley. A tight grin creased the detective's square face. The back entrance to Silvio's pawnshop opened into that alley. Silvio's was listed on the books as a gun-drop, a joint where hot rods could be parked after a job, or where a gun or a complete set of burglar tools could be rented. It looked as if Ed Hawley was going to undertake a business venture.

O'Dare quickened his pace, rounded the alley corner almost at a run. He took the precaution of shifting his gun from its clip holster to his trenchcoat pocket. Hawley wasn't rated as a gunman. But the redhead wasn't taking any chances.

CHAPTER III

ONE-DAY REPRIEVE

HE saw the dumpy figure of the safe cracker hurrying through the gloom ahead. O'Dare's long legs churned swiftly. Savage exultation beat in his brain. He'd nail Hawley, and through him, smash the barrier of secrecy that was surrounding the murder of Roscoe Larrabee. If the barrel-chested lug had something on Glenna Waverly, O'Dare would find it out. He'd bust up any shakedown racket Hawley might be pulling on the gorgeous little blonde.

O'Dare's hand darted to his pocket as he saw Hawley halt and start to turn. The safecracker had picked up the beat of the detective's feet. Maybe he was going to make a fight of it. O'Dare viciously hoped so.

Then from the corner of his eye he saw a second figure lurching out at

him. He caught the moving shadow of a swinging arm, threw himself sideways out of the path of the crashing blackjack. Realization flashed through his brain. Hawley had led him into a trap.

His frantic lunge was timed too slow. He heard the swish of the sap, jerked his head but couldn't duck the lead-weighted weapon. Pain exploded along the side of his head, and O'Dare went down to his knees. He tried to push himself erect, vainly strove to get the gun from his pocket. But the blackness creeping up to his brain seemed to leave him powerless. His legs and arms folded and O'Dare went limp on the pavement.

The slap of running feet pierced the cacaphony of bells and whistles ringing in his brain. He heard a voice rasp: "Got him, Hawley. First crack." Hands were groping at his pockets.

O'Dare tried to twist away from those groping hands as Hawley ran up. The same voice snarled: "Hell, what a conk this flattie's got. He ain't out yet."

"Crack his skull," Hawley rasped viciously. "The big mug had me tabbed. We got to give him the works. I don't want the red-headed devil on my tail for this job."

"I didn't get no orders to croak him," protested the blackjack artist.

"To hell with orders. You want to keep on living, don't you?"

O'Dare's brain started to function. He heard the man who started to search him whine: "Okay—but I don't like cop-killing."

Cold sweat dotted the big detective's brow as the man pulled back. O'Dare knew his number was up. The final payoff was due.

DESPERATION whipped his flaccid muscles into action, made them obey the frantic urge of his will. He rolled, just as the vicious blackjack swept down again. Pain numbed his left shoulder—but his right hand tightened around the butt of his ser-

vice gun. His fingers hooked the trigger and squeezed.

He fired blindly, but he heard a yelp of pain, and the startled thugs scrambled to their feet. O'Dare rolled over on his stomach, tugging at his gun, trying to jerk it out of his pocket. He expected an answering shot, braced himself for the impact of a slug from Hawley.

"Scram, for hell's sake," he heard the safe cracker grate. "That shot'll bring all the bulls in the neighborhood."

Relief and the pain in his head left O'Dare weak and dizzy. He dimly made out the two blurred figures racing into the gloom. He tried to drop one of those fleeing shapes. But his hand wouldn't hold steady. His second bullet ricocheted off the pavement. Then his enemies were out of sight.

He got to his feet, weaving a little, and cursing venomously. A patrolman pounded into the alley and O'Dare explained tersely what had happened. There was no use chasing Hawley and his confederate. They were undercover by now. O'Dare told the patrolman to phone in from his call box and have a dragnet thrown out for Hawley.

A cold wind knifed through O'Dare's trench coat as he pounded crosstown to Madison. But the frosty bite of the air didn't chill the savage anger that burned in his brain. He figured it that Glenna Waverly had put him on the spot. She'd tabbed him in the lobby, figured that he'd heel after Hawley. So she had the big lug lead him into Silvio's alley, then telephoned the other lug to hole up and knock him off.

He remembered the prying fingers that had started through his pockets, wondered what in hell the thugs were after. He went through his pockets himself, found the can of sticking powder that he picked up in Larrabee's office. A dark frown rode his brow for a minute, then he whistled through his teeth.

The adhesive gum was tied up with Larrabee's death. That would explain Thornwood's sticking around to gun him out, instead of taking it on the lam. And it explained the attack of Hawley and his boy friend.

A cold tremor went down O'Dare's spine. If Glenna Waverly had sent Hawley and his pal on this job—it meant that the blonde girl was hooked up in the kill. She'd been playing him for a sucker, waiting for a chance to knock him off before he learned too much.

A bitter grin twisted O'Dare's lips as he shoved his chin deeper into the collar of his coat. First Sheldon—and now the nifty little blonde—had taken him over the jumps. He was being used like a dope by the very people he'd promised to help. The detective's jaw hardened. Okay. He'd be just dopey enough to backfire on them. Grim anger darkened his blue eyes as he turned in at the lobby of the Rypler Building.

FRAVEL, the office manager, looked surprised when O'Dare said he wanted to talk to the blonde secretary. There was a frightened look in Glenna Waverly's eyes when she came into Larrabee's private office. She flicked a quick glance about as if she half-expected to see the body still there. Then she stared at O'Dare, steadily and unflinchingly.

"Sit down, baby," O'Dare said politely. She flushed and her chin lifted a little but she sat down.

"What was the secret conference with Ed Hawley about this afternoon?" the detective asked evenly.

She puckered her fine brows, said; "Hawley—I don't know him. Who is he?"

"He's the heel you were talking with down by the elevator bank—a heavy-set guy with a penchant for getting into other peoples' safes."

Surprise and alarm spread across her lovely face. Anger showed in her hazel eyes. She said crisply:

"Your wires are crossed, Lieutenant O'Dare. That man's name is Goodman. He talked with Mr. Fravel about a position. Fravel sent me down to get some cigarettes and Goodman stepped off the elevator as I was getting on. He gave me a song and dance about wanting to talk to me—about helping him get a job. It took me a couple minutes to learn that he was just trying to date me up."

"And you figured it was part of your job to let him make passes at you?" O'Dare knew it was jealousy that prompted the dirty crack.

"I had reasons for talking with him," the girl rapped. "If the help you promised me includes chaperoning all my conversation with men—I'm not having any, Mister O'Dare."

O'Dare's chin tilted dangerously, his blue eyes got frosty. He said icily: "I trailed your boy friend, gorgeous, and nearly collected a nice shroud for myself. I figure that maybe you did the measuring for that graveyard suit. I'm calling for a showdown, sweetheart—before I find my shoulders pressing a nice cold slab in the morgue. Sing, baby, sing."

O'Dare expected her to show fright, but he was not prepared for the tumult of emotion that ravaged her lovely face. There was fear there, but some deeper feeling brought the tawny glints in Glenna's eyes. Her face was pallid but her little chin jutted fiercely.

Something caught at O'Dare's throat. Suspicion died in his brain as she cried:

"I didn't know that angle, O'Dare. I swear I didn't know they were going to try to kill you. I had nothing to do with it. Won't you trust me a little longer? I'm not asking it for myself—it's for some one else. Give me until tomorrow to get what I'm after. If I haven't succeeded then, I'll tell you the whole story."

"I may be dead by tomorrow," O'Dare objected. But most of the harshness was gone from his voice.

Common sense tried to tell him the blonde beauty was taking him for a sleighride. She was working with the clever murderer who had twice tried to put him on the spot.

He tried to tell himself he was following one of his infallible hunches in not dragging her down to headquarters as a material witness. But deep in his heart he knew that he wanted desperately to prove that Glenna Waverly was innocent of any complicity in the murder of Roscoe Larrabee and the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the killing.

"I'm an eighteen carat sap," he said gruffly. "But I'll play along another twenty-four hours. After that—there just ain't no Santa Claus."

Sudden relief brought a quick flush to her cheeks. She said simply: "Thanks, O'Dare. You won't regret it." Her cheeks were red as she went out.

Fravel's tall, stooped figure showed in the door a minute later. The office manager asked anxiously:

"You—you don't think Miss Weston had anything to do with the murder, do you, Lieutenant?"

It took O'Dare a second or two to figure that "Miss Weston" must be Glenna's office name. He shook his head, said shortly: "Hell, no. I saw her talking with a guy downstairs. The mug's picture is in our collection down at headquarters so I got suspicious. She tells me he's one of your applicants and that he was just making a tentative pass or two at a date. We list him as Ed Hawley, but you've got him on the books as Goodman. Hawley's one of the best crib-men in the country."

"Goodman a safe robber?" Roger Fravel wrung his hands. "Good heavens, another criminal? What kind of a business was Larrabee doing?"

"I'm beginning to wonder about that myself," O'Dare said softly. The question was still revolving in his mind when he rode back to headquarters.

CHAPTER IV

THREAT ON RECORD

THINGS were humming at Center Street when O'Dare got there. The medical examiner had turned in his report. Larrabee had been poisoned by nicotine. And from all indications, the poison had been administered through a canker spot on the roof of the man's mouth. Traces of the poison were much more marked there than in any part of his body.

"I guess I've got the answer to that one," O'Dare said grimly.

He dragged the can of powder from his pocket.

"Better have that analyzed right away," he told Desmond. "A couple guys tried to bump me off to get it. It adds up to two-and-two. This powder is probably loaded with nicotine. Some one knew about that sore spot in Larrabee's mouth. The killer knew he used this stuff at the office and the rest was simple. Larrabee smoked cigars and chewed the ends a lot. The nicotine taste wouldn't be noticed."

"Got any lead on the killer yet?" Dempsey asked. "I've been nosing around and I can't find anyone who had a hate on the old man—except your pal, Dr. Sheldon. And there's no motive for him killing the old boy except to inherit his dough. Sheldon has plenty of mazuma himself, so that's out."

O'Dare wished he was as sure about that as Dempsey was. He asked if any check-up had been made on the sources of supply of the poison. Dempsey was working on that angle. Three leading drug supply houses were furnishing him with lists of customers. Dempsey went back to the phone to prod them on the matter.

"What happened to the lounge lizard I had on the blackmail job?" the redhead asked Gilfoyle. The desk sergeant snorted:

"The usual. His mouthpiece grabbed off a writ and had the heel out a couple hours after you left this morning. They did everything but spit in

our faces when they left. I wanted to bust the gigolo's face, but it wouldn't be smart."

O'Dare cursed vindictively, spent the next half hour trying to piece together the fragments of information he had gathered that day. He got nowhere with the job. There was nothing to show any motive for the murder. Nor could he find any plausible explanation for Glenna Waverly working in Larrabee's office or for the interest that three known crooks could have in the employment agency. No big jewel robberies had been pulled lately. The crooks couldn't be using Larrabee's agency as a front for getting into wealthy homes.

He was still puzzling his brain when Dempsey came into his office. The grizzled plainclothes man looked startled and worried. He said:

"Hell, Dan. I got the lists of recent customers from those wholesalers. They claim they sold Dr. Sheldon a can of nicotine about two weeks ago. He said he wanted it to treat some plants his wife is growing."

O'Dare's face stiffened. He was smack up against the decision he dreaded. Evidence fairly screamed Dr. Sheldon's guilt. O'Dare knew he ought to put the handsome surgeon under arrest. He asked tonelessly:

"Did you ask for a description of the man who bought the nicotine? Are they sure it was Sheldon?"

"That's what puzzles me," Dempsey confessed. "One of the kids at the place sold the stuff, and he wasn't sure what the customer looked like. I'd better run up there and check closer on the description."

O'Dare's conscience troubled him as he said:

"Do that, Jim. We'll let Sheldon stay on the loose a little longer. If he's guilty, he'll hang himself if we give him enough rope. He won't dare to try to make a getaway. He's too well known."

Powerful forces were at war within the redhead law officer. His duty seemed plain. But the thought of Tim

Ryan's pain and suffering burned like caustic in O'Dare's brain. Dr. Sheldon's deft hands could end that agony for all time. The detective groaned. How could he condemn his pal to a life sentence of crippled helplessness? The problem was still unanswered when he left for the Chelsea Square apartment where Mom Grady kept house for him and crippled Tim Ryan.

HE tried to make his smile cheerful when he greeted the wide-shouldered, black-haired lad in the wheel chair. Tim was like a kid waiting for Santa Claus. He could talk of nothing but the forthcoming operation; what he would do when he could walk again; how he would repay Dan O'Dare for his kindness and what a swell friend Dr. Sheldon was to do the operation for nothing.

Salty moisture scalded the back of Dan O'Dare's eyelids. The lump in his throat kept him from eating. Both Mrs. Grady and Tim noticed the haggard lines etched in O'Dare's square face. The redhead said he was tired from the lot of legwork he'd done on the blackmail ring case. Then the conversation turned back to the new lease on life Tim Ryan expected on Saturday.

Dan O'Dare suffered through the darkest hour of his life with a smile creasing his square, freckled face. Behind that cheerful mask he went through his Gethsemane, torn between pride in his career and love for the dark haired lad in the wheel chair.

There were deep, pinched lines around his wide mouth when he made his decision. He'd cover Dr. Sheldon until the last possible minute. If the blow-off came, he would take the rap. He could make a living somehow, if he did get bounced off the force. But Tim Ryan could never find another miracle worker like Mark Sheldon. Whether he had murdered his father-in-law or not—Sheldon was going to perform that operation on Saturday.

Once the decision was made, Dan O'Dare found the black fog of despair

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lifted from his brain. Hell, he still had all day Friday and Saturday morning. He might be able to clear Sheldon completely in twenty-four hours.

He helped Mom Grady with the dishes, then said he was going down to headquarters for a couple of hours. There were a couple loose ends he wanted to pick up on another case. Tim wished him good luck.

O'Dare almost kicked the small package that was outside the apartment door. It was oblong in shape, plainly wrapped, without any address. O'Dare went back to the living room, tore off the wrapper and opened the box inside. A deep scowl grooved his brow as he stared at the black, cylindrical dictaphone record. Then he caught his breath sharply.

"What the devil's that?" asked Tim Ryan. "Don't tell me you made a record of them songs you murder in the shower of a morning. Bad enough to inflict them on Mom and me, without saving them for posterity."

"This is a different kind of a song, I'm thinking," O'Dare said bleakly. "I'll run upstairs and play it on the machine that Helen Larson has. She's a public stenographer and has one of these dictaphone machines at her place."

A premonition of danger was growing in O'Dare's brain as he pounded up the stairs. He had a feeling that the message on the black wax cylinder wasn't going to be good news.

HIS hunch was correct. The Larson girl fitted the cylinder on the roller, attached the earphones and showed O'Dare how to operate the machine with his foot. The redhead's jaw muscles knotted, flames of anger danced in his blue eyes as he heard a husky feminine voice saying:

"Lay off the Larrabee case, flatfoot, if you want to see your pal Ryan walk again. You're getting too smart for your own health. This is the only warning you will get. Lay off or else."

O'Dare's face went white beneath the freckles. The dirty, cowardly rats, cracking down on him through Tim Ryan. His lips formed a thin, straight line, his chin squared stubbornly.

The detective ran the cylinder again and again. The voice, distorted as it was in mechanical reproduction, seemed to strike a familiar note. He could almost see Glenna Waverly dictating that record.

O'Dare's blunt fingers worried his scalp. He hadn't seen any dictaphone machine in Larrabee's office. The lovely blonde had been working with a stenographer's notebook when he first saw her. She took personal dictation.

Then a cold tremor quivered the back of his neck. Dr. Mark Sheldon had a dictaphone in his office, had been using it that very day. O'Dare felt the bottom drop out of his stomach. His tortured brain lined up hard, insurmountable facts. Sheldon had doped the adhesive powder with nicotine, planning on retrieving the can after the murder. Unable to do so he had hired, first Thornwood and then Hawley, whom he probably had contacted at Larrabee's office, to get the powder back. Both efforts had failed. Sheldon knew the police would trace the purchase of the nicotine back to him and his neck would be in a sling. He was making one last desperate effort to force O'Dare to cover his trail.

Like a man reviewing a death sentence, O'Dare revolved the problem. Bitter resolution twisted his square, freckled face into a wicked mask. It was too raw. Sheldon couldn't get away with it. He wouldn't feel safe now, in letting the good-looking chiseler use a knife on Tim anyway. Dr. Mark Sheldon was due for a killer's cell in the Tombs.

He chased the bitterness from his face as he went downstairs told Tim: "It's just a gag one of my Broadway pals tried to pull. I'm going down and burn him up for it."

Dr. Sheldon wasn't at his Park Avenue office address. Nor could the

big shamus locate him in any of his customary haunts along Broadway. It was after midnight when O'Dare wearily returned to Chelsea Square. He felt like a heel for lacking the guts to spread a police dragnet for the handsome surgeon. But there was still a hundred to one chance that Mark Sheldon might be innocent; a ghost of a chance that Tim Ryan might walk again. He told himself that Glenna Waverly might have the key to the situation. And until he'd talked with her, he wasn't going to close in on Dr. Sheldon.

CHAPTER V

TO HELL GLADLY

ROGER FRAVEL was all in a dither when O'Dare visited the employment agency next morning and asked for "Miss Weston." The office manager's bulging eyes flashed venomously, his Adam's apple rose and fell like a cork on a heavy sea.

"She's gone," he sputtered. "The little sneak! I had to go out of the office on an errand. When I came back, I found her going through the drawers in Mr. Larrabee's desk. I grabbed her and threatened to call the police. The little vixen bit me, then ran out the door. She hasn't showed up this morning and the address she gave us was false. That girl is a criminal!"

O'Dare's brain began to race. He asked tonelessly:

"Have you notified headquarters? Are the police looking for her?"

"No, Lieutenant," stammered Fravel. "I—er—I hated to brand her as a criminal. After all—she didn't steal anything. No harm was done."

"Damned charitable of you, Fravel," growled O'Dare. His voice dripped with sarcasm. Doubt and suspicion were crawling in his brain. The blonde doll had pulled a fast one on him. She was hooked up with Ed Hawley in some crooked deal. Knowing O'Dare had spotted her talking with the safe cracker, she had framed the attempted

rub-out in Silvio's alley. Hawley was afraid to take a chance at robbing Larrabee's safe after that, so Glenna Waverly was trying to put over her deal herself. Smoldering anger flamed in O'Dare's blue eyes as he stalked out of the office.

Pete Waverly owned a big house on West End Avenue. O'Dare's jaw had an ugly set as he hard-heeled up the flagstone drive. A frozen-faced butler answered his ring. O'Dare identified himself and asked for Glenna.

A worried look crossed the butler's dead pan face. He said:

"Miss Glenna isn't home, Lieutenant. She didn't come home last evening—I hope there's nothing wrong. We're quite worried, because she hasn't called either the housekeeper or myself. She was to be home for dinner last night—it's not like Miss Glenna not to tell us if she changed her plans."

O'Dare got worried too. He fired a few questions at the butler, then gruffly tried to reassure the old man, who was really jittery. The redhead shamus was scowling as he strode down the path. A theory was forming in his brain and if his theory was right, Glenna Waverly was playing a damned dangerous game.

O'Dare called headquarters, learned that Dr. Sheldon had been picked up at his office and was being held for questioning. Gilfoyle also told him that a girl had called him twice, but refused to give her name. O'Dare said he'd be right down.

Sheldon's dark, handsome face was sallow when he greeted O'Dare. His eyes were like dark caves. He said bitterly:

"Got my cell ready, O'Dare? It looks like I'm going to be the goat."

O'Dare stared at him bleakly, picked the dictaphone record out of his desk drawer where he'd left it the night before. He asked levelly:

"Got anything to say about this message, Sheldon?"

The surgeon stared blankly, shook his head. He said:

"I use a dictaphone machine—but I can't see where that ties up with the charges against me."

O'Dare told him what was on the record, then rasped:

"It was a pretty scummy trick, wasn't it? Holding a threat like that over my head to bribe me into covering you up on this kill."

"You're screwy, Dan. I didn't dictate that record. I had nothing to do with it. If that's your evidence—I've got grounds for suit for false arrest. There's millions of those records in the city. You can't tie me up with that one."

SHELDON'S face was grim. There was dead certainty in his voice.

"Do you know Glenna Waverly?" O'Dare asked suddenly.

"I've met her a couple times at parties and social functions," said Sheldon. His face mirrored his surprise at the question. "What's the angle on that question?"

"I figure you and the Waverly doll are hooked up in a nice racket," O'Dare snarled. "She's done a fade-out. I want to know where she's holed up."

Sheldon s h r u g g e d despairingly, said:

"I suppose there's no use trying to convince you that you're all wet, Dan. I know the Waverly girl to speak to, and that's all."

The telephone rang on O'Dare's desk. He grabbed up the handset and his jaw hardened as he recognized Glenna Waverly's voice. He rasped:

"Go ahead, sister. It's your nickel."

"I'm in a jam, O'Dare," she cried. "I need your help."

"You're telling me you're in a jam," jeered the detective. "I knew that hours ago."

Something like a sob came into her voice.

"Please—please, don't be like that," she begged. "Listen, you big tramp. I know you figure I'm crooked as hell. Let me talk with you for five minutes. I'll change your mind."

"Swell, baby," snapped O'Dare. "Where are you?"

He blinked as she gave him the name of a second rate hotel in the west side. She said: "It's room 620. Come right up."

O'Dare told Sheldon: "I'm holding you here for a couple hours until I straighten out this angle."

Sheldon yelped a vehement protest, then lapsed into sullen silence as O'Dare growled a venomous threat. He was taken to the detention room as O'Dare pounded out of headquarters.

Glenna Waverly's blonde hair was a pale nimbus around her haggard face as she answered O'Dare's knock. A crooked smile twisted her lips, but haunting fear showed in her hazel eyes. She opened the door, motioned him in quickly.

O'Dare eyed her speculatively.

"What's the idea of hiding out in a joint like this?" he demanded.

Her firm little chin lifted at the hostility in his voice. She said:

"Because I want to keep on living."

She flushed as she caught the mocking incredulity in his face. Then she said fiercely:

"I know you figure I'm a two-timing heel, O'Dare. You're ready to slam me in the hoosegow for attempting to murder you. But you promised to help me—and Lieutenant O'Dare's promises are supposed to be worth something."

The detective's neck and ears got red. His jaw hardened.

"You forget there was a murder committed down at Larrabee's," he growled.

O'Dare was fighting the lure of her soft beauty, trying to tell himself that she was a wild, spoiled kid who had tried to get him bumped. But all the tough things he wanted to say seemed to stick in his throat. Hell, this sweet kid couldn't finger a man for murder. He was screwy even to suspect it.

"Larrabee deserved killing!" A note of intense savagery rang in the girl's strained voice. "He was a rotten beast

—a black ghoul who preyed on living persons, instead of dead corpses!"

O'Dare said: "Ah!" as he sucked in his breath sharply. Then he added: "Now we're getting places, sister. I had a hunch something like that was going to turn up. Go on from where you left off."

THE blazing hatred faded from her eyes, was replaced by deep fear.

"I—I can't, O'Dare," she said. "I'm afraid of what will happen."

The big fellow's temper flared. He wasn't going to let this scared, spoiled kid sidetrack him again. He dropped a hard hand on her shoulder, shoved her back into an easy chair. Sharp anger edged his voice, as he snarled:

"To hell with that stall, sister. You've got the lowdown on that screwy set-up at Larrabee's, and you're going to spill it. Maybe you think you're covering some one. Get an earful of this chatter. My best pal is a hopeless cripple. He's got just one chance to be made whole again—but the man who can save him from torture is a suspect in this case. I've got to clear Mark Sheldon—or start him toward the chair—in the next few hours.

"I like you, gorgeous—I think you're swell. But when it comes to sticking an innocent man in the clink—and letting Tim Ryan suffer the tortures of hell for the rest of his life—just to cover you up—I'm not that kind of a rat, baby! Come clear with me. If you're on the level—I'll go clear to hell for you. If you're a phony—I'll drag you down to headquarters, in spite of Pete Waverly's sugar, or your good looks, or what have you."

It was the longest speech O'Dare had ever made to a woman. Glenna Waverly's face was a pale ivory mask when he finished. He could see the rise and fall of her bosom beneath the clinging silk of the waist of her tailored suit. In the white oval of the face that lifted quickly, only her eyes seemed alive. They were probing deeply at O'Dare's hard, set face.

"I think you meant it, O'Dare," she said softly. "You'd go to hell for me—or for your crippled chum—if you thought we were right guys, as the boys say. I'm going to give you a chance to prove that."

"Shoot the works, beautiful," said O'Dare flatly.

Glenna Waverly studied her hands for a minute, her eyes clouded with turbulent emotion. Then her chin set doggedly.

"Larrabee was a blackmailer," she gritted. "He'd built up a perfect crime machine. Using his employment agency as a blind, he would send ex-convicts or criminals into homes as servants. These crooks prowled and pried, hoping to get something compromising on some member of the family that employed them. Larrabee made good use of the material they picked up. Every family has a skeleton of some sort in the closet. That ghoul made it his business to uncover such skeletons."

O'Dare rapped a savage oath, then asked:

"Did he get something on you, kid?"

"Not on me," the blonde head shook sadly. "Most of my escapades have been public news. But he trapped the dearest soul in the world—my mother. She made a fatal mistake when she was young, married a man who was a chiseler and a petty crook. He finally got into a bad jam and was sent up for life. Later she got newspaper reports that he'd been killed in a prison brawl. She was so ashamed that she never mentioned that wedding to dad when she married him. It wouldn't have made much difference when they were poor. After dad made money and got prominent, she was afraid to tell him."

"Then one day she got a phone call from her former husband. He'd escaped death and had broken out of jail. He wanted money to get out of the country. Mother should have called for a showdown then—but dad was being mentioned as a possible candidate for governor. Scandal would ruin him. So

she payed off. One of Larrabee's phony servants got a job at our house, probably tipped off by mother's first husband. He was the man you killed—he called himself Thornwood."

"So that accounts for the face lifting job," O'Dare muttered. "He was wanted for murder, so he used your mother's money to change his looks. Did Larrabee's gang get that letter?"

"Yes. The blackmail ring got ten thousand dollars from mother. They wanted more and threatened to expose her as a bigamist. She couldn't pay, and was nearly crazy when she told me about it. I sent her to Europe, and promised I'd get that confession and the marriage license the gang was holding. I'd done so much to hurt mother and dad—I figured it was time I did something to help them. I bribed Larrabee's secretary to take a sick leave. I'd taken a stenographic course once, thinking I might make something useful of myself. That's why I was working at Larrabee's—hoping to get the papers I wanted."

"Was that why you got interested in Hawley?" asked O'Dare.

She nodded tearfully.

"I was getting desperate after Larrabee's murder. I hadn't had a chance to get in the safe. When Hawley came in one day I recognized him. Dad had pointed him out at the fights one night, said he was the cleverest safe man in the country. I played up to him, and was going to try to get him to crack Larrabee's safe some night. But after his attempt to murder you—that deal was off. Hawley was hiding out, so I had to go on my own. Fravel caught me nosing through his desk, and I had to beat it. That's my story, O'Dare. What can you do about it?"

O'Dare's lips flattened against his teeth. He rasped:

"It checks with the theory I had. With that gang of crooks listed for jobs, it had to be a racket of some sort. No big jewel robberies had been pulled

lately. That left blackmail as the only field they could be working—and they worked that plenty. But I can't see Larrabee as the head man. We've checked him pretty close. He had plenty of money, and his record is straight as a string. Not a shady deal in his whole life. He built up that agency through supplying good, reliable servants to his clients. Why in hell would he toss it over, for more money? He didn't need it."

"Larrabee is a miser," she said viciously. "He saw a chance to get more dough and get it fast. He was the top man."

"Then who killed him, sugar?"

"I don't know—unless it was Dr. Sheldon." Her voice was tinged with pity. "I don't care who killed him. I want to get the papers that threaten my mother's reputation. And I'm going to get them, somehow."

O'Dare was lost in thought. He asked suddenly:

"Did Fravel find out who you are?"

"I don't think so. But he suspected what I was after. That's why I hid here. I knew the gang would be after my scalp. And—if Dr. Sheldon is hooked up with that mob—or if he got wise to the racket and tried to chisel in and murdered the old man because he couldn't cut in on it—he may identify me. I was afraid Sheldon would recognize me every time he came in—but he didn't. Guess he wasn't looking for the spoiled Waverly brat in a business office."

O'Dare had a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach. The girl was putting into words the self-same fear that was gripping his vitals. He asked:

"How did the mob contact your mother?"

"By telephone. They told her where to bring the money. She had to come alone—or it was no dice. They gave her ten days to raise the last ten thousand. The time is up at noon today. That's why I've got to do something fast. Those rats would tip off the papers—just to keep their other victims in line."

O'Dare rubbed his chin, said slowly:

"How's your nerve, kid? Willing to take a chance that may get you a red hot slug? It's the only possible chance we've got to trap this mob."

"Give me a chance," Glenna said fiercely. "I'd go to hell gladly, if it would save my mother."

"Okay," O'Dare nodded grimly.

He outlined his plan briefly. There was a stubborn tilt to the blonde girl's chin when she finished. She grabbed up her hat and coat, said huskily:

"What are we waiting for, Carrot Top? Let's go."

CHAPTER VI

A CROOK TO CRUCIFY

BACK at the Waverly mansion, the butler almost broke into tears when he saw Glenna. When she had reassured him, he said:

"Some man has been calling you all morning, Miss Glenna. He wanted your mother first, when I told him Mrs. Waverly was in Europe, he asked for you. He's called back several times, and said if you came in not to go out until he had talked with you."

O'Dare's eyes got frosty. He snarled: "Even fear of a murder rap doesn't check the black rats. We'll wait."

Less than an hour later the contact man called again. Following O'Dare's instructions, Glenna acted hysterical and upset, willing to pay anything to save her mother. She said she'd get the money from her own account at the bank, and asked where to deliver it. O'Dare swore under his breath as she repeated the name and room number in a hotel in the upper forties. Then he said:

"I want the boss to be there with those papers. This is the last blood money you'll get. I want to tell him so in person."

The whispering voice at the other end of the wire chuckled:

"Don't worry, sweetheart. He'll be there. That mug wouldn't trust his

own mother with ten grand. He'll do the collecting himself."

O'Dare's square face was like a black thunder cloud as she dropped the handset on the prongs. He snarled:

"What a dope I've been! I had the guy that you were talking with on the carpet yesterday morning. Probably that's why Sheldon called me off—to give the greasy haired punk a chance to get out on a writ. He's a gigolo named Luis Riaz, and he lives at the Hotel Grenadier, where you are to take that dough."

"What's the next step, Master Mind?" Glenna asked sharply. "This is no time for post-mortems."

"I could have Riaz picked up. I might hammer some information out of him. But this mob is vicious; he might be afraid to squawk. And your mother's name might get smeared all over the tabloid pages, while we were trying to break Riaz. We'll go through with the plan. You get the money and contact the gang. Probably you'll be shadowed from the minute you leave the bank. So I'll fade out the rear entrance, go downtown and do my stuff. Sure you aren't afraid to risk it?"

"No more afraid than a dog of a bone."

O'Dare's eyes scanned the lobby of the Hotel Grenadier before he went over to the desk. He saw no sign of Luis Riaz, the dark haired gigolo who must be contact man for the blackmail ring. The big lieutenant flashed his badge, asked if there was a vacant room on either side of the one Riaz occupied.

The clerk got jittery, told O'Dare he could have 308, which adjoined. The redhead shamus promised to tear out the clerk's tongue by the roots if Riaz was tipped off that he was under police scrutiny. Then he took the key to room 308, walked up two flights of stairs and slipped down the hall. He opened the door with a minimum of noise, slipped silently into the room.

His heart was pounding against his ribs as he listened at the door connecting with room 306. He could detect no

sound from the next room. The clerk had been right in his guess that Riaz was out.

The door was locked, and bolted. O'Dare's skeleton keys took care of the lock, but it took ten minutes of careful manipulation with a strip of cellophane to work the bolt back. Each minute was an hour long, fraught with fear that the blackmailer would return before the stage was set. At last the bolt clicked back, and the door opened at his touch.

Sweat poured down O'Dare's forehead as he hitched a chair near the connecting door. He was worried sick, afraid that he had put Glenna on the spot. Something might go wrong—the plucky kid might be shot down before he could spring his trap. Dan O'Dare lived a century in the half hour that elapsed before he heard the corridor door to the next room open and heard Riaz moving about in there.

TEN MINUTES later the room phone rang. O'Dare stiffened as he heard Riaz growl:

"Okay. Trail her up here. Send the number one guy along now."

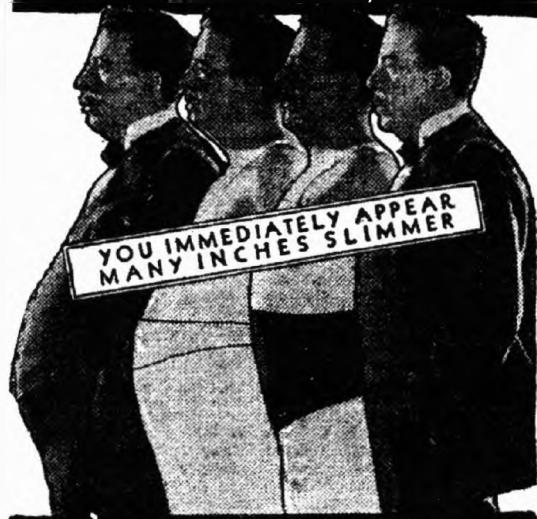
O'Dare took it that some one had trailed Glenna to the bank and reported that she was on her way with the money. Fear began to grip his stomach, bringing a feeling of nausea. Riaz—the number one man—and the tail who was shadowing Glenna. There would be three of them to face. He should have planted men downstairs, or in the vicinity of the room. His lone-hand tactics were going to get his neck in a sling this time, and it was too late to do anything about it. O'Dare didn't mind for himself so much, but he'd lead Glenna into a trap from which she couldn't escape.

He contemplated barging in and taking Riaz first. That would eliminate one enemy. But there might be some secret signal arranged, and Riaz might tip off the others before they got into the room.

He gritted his teeth. He had to play it the way he'd originally planned. But

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the palm that gripped the gun in his pocket was damp with sweat as he waited for the knock that would announce the arrival of Glenna Waverly.

Breath soughed in his lungs as he heard a knock, caught the subdued murmur of voices. One was a feminine voice, the contralto tones of the girl Dan O'Dare now knew he loved. He heard Riaz ask:

"Got the dough, precious?"

"I've got it. Where's the head man of this filthy mob?"

He was proud of the scornful insolence in the girl's voice. Her nerve was standing up under the dangerous test.

"He'll be right along," Riaz said smoothly. "Let's see the color of the dough. I can keep you amused then, until the Big Guy gets here."

O'Dare's hand was on the knob. He heard Glenna utter a little cry of dismay and anger. Rage flamed in the detective's brain. The dirty grease-ball was manhandling Glenna.

The door flew open. O'Dare thrust his big body over the sill. His voice was like chilled steel as he snapped:

"Get your hands off that girl, punk, or I'll blast your black heart right out of your carcass."

Riaz swore, then his voice lifted in a cry of warning. A slim, dark hand darted toward the lapel of his coat.

O'Dare rapped a curse. Fired with rage and jealousy, he had sprung the trap too soon. From the corner of his eye, O'Dare saw Glenna flatten her slim body against the wall. The briefcase she carried lifted and then shot forward, hurtling at Riaz' sleek head. The dapper Latin ducked, right into the bullet O'Dare was driving from his pocket.

O'Dare cursed again. He had fired low, intending to shoot Riaz in the leg to bring him down. But as the gigolo ducked, the bullet tore through his stomach.

Riaz screamed and went over on his face. O'Dare raced toward him, was about to bend over the wounded man when a shrill cry from Glenna Waverly

(Continued on page 122)

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(Continued from page 120)
ly spun him about, then sent him diving at the girl's knees. He'd glimpsed the door from room 304 at the opposite side of the room jerking open, caught the blurred glimpse of a face and the thrust of an automatic.

Insane rage churned in his brain as he dragged Glenna to the floor. Of all the blunder-headed, ivory-domed nitwits in the world, he was the worst. Confident that the other gang members would come straight to room 306, he'd forgotten the chance that the room on the other side might be vacant, or be used for a getaway. And now—his blindness was going to cost him his life as well as that of Glenna.

But he had reckoned without the blonde haired girl. For even as O'Dare was twisting free from the girl, she was clawing for the gun that Riaz had dropped. She and O'Dare both fired together—as the bulky figure of Ed Hawley charged through the door. Hawley teetered a second, as if rigid with surprise. Then he went forward and hit on top of his head on the floor. He was dead before he landed.

O'Dare jerked to his feet, swearing venomously as he heard the quick slam of a door. Glenna tried to scramble erect. She stumbled and fell against O'Dare, who was starting for the door. The big cop staggered, then halted for a second to grab the girl. She was falling directly over the body of Riaz.

IT took O'Dare a minute to set Glen-na on her feet. When he jerked open the hall door, the corridor was deserted. The third member of the gang had made a clean getaway. The brains of the rats was still on the loose.

Glenna's face was tragic as she questioned O'Dare with wide eyes. He shook his head, growled morosely:

"The rat made a clean getaway. Probably went down the back stairs. I didn't dare chase him—I wasn't sure how badly Riaz was hit."

The blonde girl swore bitterly. She felt that her clumsiness had blocked

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 122)

O'Dare from capturing the most important member of the mob. But O'Dare growled:

"It was just one of those breaks, Gorgeous. I'm to blame for going off half-cocked. I figure it isn't too late yet. I'm beginning to see things I should have seen twenty-four hours ago. We'll still crucify these rats."

He bent over Riaz, saw that the man would die before he could get to a hospital. Curses dripped from the Latin's foam flecked lips, when O'Dare tried to get him to finger his boss. O'Dare fought down the desire to plant another bullet in the vicious beast, started to search Riaz' pockets, but found nothing there. A search of Hawley's clothes failed to reveal any clues.

O'Dare picked up the brief case, handed it to the girl and said:

"Come on, darling. We'll make another call. If the luck of the Irish is any good—we'll wind this case up all of a sudden."

She glanced at the moaning figure on the floor, asked:

"Can't we do anything for him? I know he doesn't deserve it—but it doesn't seem human to leave him."

O'Dare picked up the phone, called headquarters, asked for an ambulance to be sent up immediately. While they were waiting, he made a crude compress to stop the flow of blood. Riaz was unconscious now. O'Dare knew he would be dead before the ambulance arrived. His prophecy was fulfilled. It was a lifeless body that went out.

Glenna Waverly's eyes were wide with wonder as O'Dare got out of their cab in front of the Rypler Building. O'Dare's lips framed a smile, but his eyes were hard and bleak as he said:

"I'm going to turn you over to Fravel. He wants you for attempted robbery."

Bewilderment still clouded her brow as they went into the employment office. Fravel was there, in his black alpaca coat. His pale eyes bulged as he saw the girl. Then he cried sharply:

"So you found her, Lieutenant!"

O'Dare nodded. His right hand dropped from Glenna's elbow, slid into his pocket. He said tonelessly:

"Yeah—I found her, Fravel. And I found you—which was almost more than I expected. I didn't know whether you had nerve enough to try to bluff it through or not. I was afraid you might have taken it on the lam."

Color drained from Roger Fravel's thin cheeks. His Adam's apple did a monkey-on-the-pole act and he looked as if he was going to cry. He blinked fast, but not fast enough to hide the feral glitter in his pale eyes. He croaked:

"What are you talking about, O'Dare? Why should I take it on the lam, as you call it?"

"To keep from burning for Roscoe Larrabee's murder! To keep from doing a hundred years for blackmail! To keep me from tearing you apart with my bare hands for trying to murder me a couple of times!"

The menace in O'Dare's voice was like the crackle of machine gun fire. Fravel quailed, tried to stiffen. His stooped shoulders slumped again, as O'Dare grated:

"The racket's up, Fravel. Riaz put the finger on you before he went out. Miss Waverly here, representing one of your victims, was a witness to the confession. You're going to fry, feller. But you're going to hand over the loot, before you go down to headquarters with me. Do you produce—or do I go to work on you?"

The bluff worked. Guilt was printed in every line of Fravel's face as he cowered before the murderous glare in O'Dare's eyes. He gasped weakly:

"I'll give you the stuff, O'Dare. But I wasn't responsible for the blackmail ring. I swear I wasn't. I'll prove it."

O'Dare watched him like a hawk as Fravel walked across the office to a steel filing cabinet. He pulled it out, revealing a wall safe behind the cabinet. Hair was lifting along O'Dare's neck, as Fravel swung the door open. It looked like the end of the chase—



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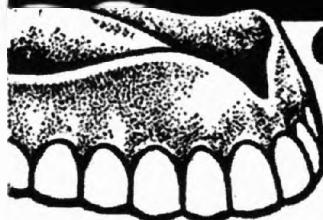
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but instinct warned the big fellow that Fravel was taking it too easily.

He saw the skinny hand of the office manager grope in the safe, then make a swift darting movement. O'Dare ripped out a curse, hit Glenna with his shoulder, staggering her halfway across the office.

The afternoon sun glinted on the barrel of the gun that Fravel jerked from the hidden safe. O'Dare's hand was whipping toward his pocket, almost as Fravel fired. The jump he'd taken to save Glenna, saved his life.

Fravel's bullet clipped the cloth in the shoulder of O'Dare's coat. Then the detective's gun cracked, muffled by the cloth of his pocket. A round black hole showed between Fravel's eyes. For a second the third eye was round and black. Then blood welled out. The skinny killer weaved and went down as though an axe had cleaved his skull.

O'Dare whirled, saw Glenna grabbing the rail to steady herself. He asked:

"Are you okay, sweetheart?"

"Swell," she retorted. "How are you—and all your family? Any one else in town you don't like? This seems to be clean-up day."

He saw that her chin was quivering. The blonde kid was fighting back hysteria that threatened to grip her. She asked weakly:

"Then it was Fravel who was leading the mob?"

"He was the master mind," O'Dare growled. "Poor old Larrabee was an innocent dupe. Fravel had built up the racket almost under his nose, using the employment gag to spot his snoops in wealthy homes. Larrabee must have gotten a hint of what was going on. Fravel had to get rid of him but lacked opportunity—until he overheard Doc Sheldon and Larrabee fighting. That gave him a swell chance—he could kill Larrabee and put the blame on Sheldon. He faked a dictaphone warning to implicate Sheldon.

"He bought the nicotine, using Sheldon's name, then kept it here until the Doc and his father-in-law had another

one of their battles. Yesterday morning was the ideal time. He figured that Sheldon would try to alibi himself out of danger. He probably planted the thought in Sheldon's brain before Dempsey got on the scene yesterday morning."

"He certainly had me fooled. I thought Larrabee was the king pin."

"I should have tumbled sooner," O'Dare said in disgust. "Fravel was the only one who could have contacted Hawley and Thornwood quick enough to put them on my trail. Larrabee's record was in the clear. Doc Sheldon loomed up so big, that I was in a lather about poor Tim Ryan's operation and was blind to facts that were right under my nose."

"Then Sheldon is in the clear—and he can save Tim?" she asked.

O'Dare nodded, then swore.

"Hell, I'd better get down to headquarters and explain things to Doc. The poor guy's probably so jittery now he'll never be able to perform that operation. We'll just clear out the contents of that safe and send the morgue wagon up to pick up Fravel's body. Then we'll turn the old sawbones loose."

There were tears in Glenna's eyes, as O'Dare handed her an envelope marked "Waverly." She thumbed the contents—said moistly:

"I know cops aren't supposed to take rewards, Redhead. But I feel that I ought to hand over this ten thousand to you. You can use it—to make sure Tim Ryan gets everything he needs in the line of care and service."

O'Dare looked at her and said:

"Tim will get that without charge. Doc Sheldon will make sure of that, after he's freed from this rap. As for that ten grand—you'll be needing that for a trousseau. I won't be able to buy you the kind you'll want."

Glenna caught her breath, her eyes widened and a slow smile spread over her lovely face. Then she whispered:

"So, Shamus. You *have* got brains. That's the smartest thing you've said since I met you."

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