

276 PAGES!

Mammoth DETECTIVE



Book-length Novel

WITH
THIS GUN

NOVEMBER

25c

JOHN WILEY and WILLIS MARCH



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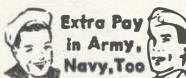
Lieutenant in Signal Corps



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BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time.

TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS

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Mammoth DETECTIVE

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

S T O R I E S

WITH THIS GUN (Complete Novel).....by John Wiley & Willis March 10
Death was best man at this wedding! And an old man named Time held the answer to the crime.

O'SHEEN'S SWEET TOOTH (Short-short).....by Leroy Yerxa..... 40
O'Sheen had two problems; a murder to solve, and a sweet tooth to satisfy. Oddly, they dovetailed!

ONCE IS ENOUGH (Short Novel).....by David Wright O'Brien.... 44
Once should be enough to kill a man, ordinarily. But what if he doesn't stay murdered?

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Undoubtedly there have been many perfect crimes; all with one fatal element—chance.

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Five years is a long time to wait to solve a crime—but glaciers just can't be hurried.

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There before him lay Mr. Murder, slain by his own hand! Then behind him came a familiar voice . . .

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At last Gussie had a husband, obtained after a careful scrutiny of a lonely hearts list . . .

THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA (Short).....by Helmar Lewis..... 132
It was a problem, and he had two separate choices. But both choices led to the chair!

IT'S YOUR OWN FUNERAL (Novelet).....by Robert Bloch..... 146
It was really a simple plan. He'd just die—not really—then come back and be his own heir.

TAVERN IN THE TOWN (Short).....by William Brengle..... 164
Muldoon was tricked; the tavern was opened legitimately. But did it take murder to close it?

KILLERI—OUT OF THIS WORLD (Short).....by Frank Patton..... 244
Perhaps the strangest thing of all is a killer's mind. If he imagines being a killer long enough—

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NOVEMBER 1943

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "With This Gun."

Back cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, depicting a "Picture Crime."

Illustrations by Julian, Malcolm Smith, Kohn, Rod Ruth, Robert Fuqua, Ronald Clyne, Robert Gibson Jones, A. K. Bilder.

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Volume 2
Number 5

OFF THE BLOTTER

YOUR editor feels quite pleased with himself this issue. In fact, he's got a case of swelled head big enough to make him look like a Martian right out of Orson Welles' radio broadcast. Why? Well, we'll tell you why!

FIRST, we've got a novel (a complete book-length) in this issue which we think is about the neatest yarn we've run in a long time. It's called "With This Gun" and it's authored by a pair of writers named John Wiley and Willis March. If you can put this novel down before you finish it, you've got more will-power than we had!

ON PAGE 262 you'll find an "auto-biography" of these two writers which has as its basis a little joke on your editor. It seems the lads want to remain a mystery, and when we wrote their agent for a sketch about them and photos, we got the photo you'll see reproduced on page 262 and a sketch which is interesting—because it's got us wondering now if we haven't got Shakespeare himself writing for us! Well, whoever these two lads are, they did one swell job,



"Just in case there's trouble over this—would you mind leaving your name and address?"

and if we can tease them into sending us more stories like this one, wow!

ALSO in our lineup this issue is the last detective story written by David Wright O'Brien who is now a member of Uncle Sam's Air Force. It's "Once Is Enough" and we believe that here is another story you'll find well worth reading to a finish in one sitting. We certainly hope Dave comes through okay, because a boy who can write this well is the lad for our contents page after the war!

ROBERT BLOCH is a strange fellow. It is rumored that he sleeps in a coffin and haunts graveyards. But it doesn't make any difference to us; he can do exactly as he pleases—just so he dreams up more ideas like the one expressed in "It's Your Own Funeral." Now here's a story with something unusual to it. We heartily recommend it if you are in an out-of-the-ordinary mood!

SO FAR, all the O'Sheen short-shorts have gotten praise. We expect the current "O'Sheen's Sweet Tooth" will be right in the same groove. Leroy Yerxa has a clever touch in these little yarns, and they pack plenty of punch.

GIVING Bloch a nudge for competition in the field of "unusual" plots, Leonard B. Rosborough gives us "Corpse in Ice" which deals with murder on a glacier—and the surprises in the story will knock you into a crevasse!

ONE of our stories goes into the realm of the fantastic this month. Tarleton Fiske does a weird little mystery—which turns out to be quite logical after all—about a guy named Murder. And he is murder, take it from us. Furthermore, he'll kill you! "Meet Mr. Murder," folks.

MOST of us have gotten a laugh out of those ads in the back of magazines commonly listed as "personal" which concern lonely hearts looking for other lonely hearts. Well, Lyle Thomas has read 'em too, and he's written a short around 'em. It's "Marry Rich: Free Particulars" and it's a neat little bit.

(Continued on page 8)



KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

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Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you A Sealed Book of explanation without obligation. This Sealed Book tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.



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(Continued from page 6)

BRUNO FISCHER gives us "The Gift" this issue, which is a study in satire that is about as rich in this quality as any detective story we've ever read. It ranks along with those famous "they'll do it every time" ideas.

HELMAR LEWIS takes a character and puts him on "The Horns of a Dilemma" and winds up with a horse-laugh. And the laugh's on the clever killer who was just *too* clever.

ONCE in awhile an author trots in with a character story which has a refreshing new angle. We've had lots of characters, but this one's a new one on us—and we wouldn't be surprised to see William Brengle's hero of "Tavern in the Town" come back in a heap of new adventures that will be as interesting and new as this one. Don't miss reading this one—and the sooner the better.

WE WON'T say much about the rest of our magazine, except to point out that we've got a contents page, one whole side of which is devoted to non-fiction, and to special departments. Each and every one of these bits are designed to give you plenty of interesting pastime. And they're just the thing to make those bus-rides to work a very pleasant experience.

ONE of the more clever methods of railroad looting was uncovered a few years ago on the New York Central line.

A piano box which everyone thought contained a piano was shipped quite regularly on the line. But whenever the car in which the box rode arrived at its destination the seal was found to be broken and valuable material in the car was missing.

For a time, the innocent-looking piano case was unsuspected. However, detectives finally noticed that there was sand along the right of way between stations. They got the idea that it might have come from the piano box.

Investigation showed that the box had false screws and was hooked from the inside. The box was half full of sand and a couple of eggs were inside.

Their method of procedure was to hook the lid on after them and be loaded on a car. When the train started, they looted the car, putting the goods in the piano case, dumping out the sand, and jumping from the train before it reached the yards.

It didn't go down in police archives as such,

but we still think the best name for the racket is the "Piano" Case.

THE first secret service organization promoted on a national scale in America was organized in June, 1778. Its directors were Aaron Burr and Major Benjamin Tallmadge, and it was established as a service organization for all the United Colonies. Known as the "Headquarters Secret Service," it developed into the first organized intelligence department of the "Army of the United Colonies."

A month after the founding of this secret service organization, General George Washington made Burr head of the "Department for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies"—official recognition of this forerunner of our F.B.I. today. Burr was ordered to proceed at once to Elizabeth Town to procure information of movements of the enemy's shipping about New York.

Then, as now, patriotic individuals, however, "snooped" much information to help the secret service. Burr soon found that the information he was to get about the activities of the British had already been gathered previously by these patriotic individuals and societies!

IN FOURTEENTH century London, apparently, it was dangerous for a business man to stand aloof from an organized racket in his trade. Nearly all the merchants, it was known, were selling too shrewdly and too crookedly and it was inevitable that some would be exposed and punished.

Nearly all the butchers in London were selling bad meat. The menace grew to such proportions that a number of them were hauled into court to "take the rap" for their illustrious associates. These men were dragged from their shops en masse, with little regard for their loud protests.

It is not surprising that among the few who were arrested was one butcher whose meat was found to be fresh and good. Soon he was strongly suspected of having "turned in" the others. So, when the day of reckoning came, the purveyors of bad meat were stood in the pillory, with the putrid stuff burning under their noses. The man who was "caught" selling good meat, however, was fined heavily and sent to prison!

That probably taught him something about double-crossing his pals. Throughout history, it seems, the welcome mat is never laid out for the squealer.

WAR Traffic Control is a new job for cops and is simply that control to be exercised when an emergency situation due to the war creates traffic problems and demands of an unusual character, different from those normally encountered. The War Traffic Control

(Continued on page 94)

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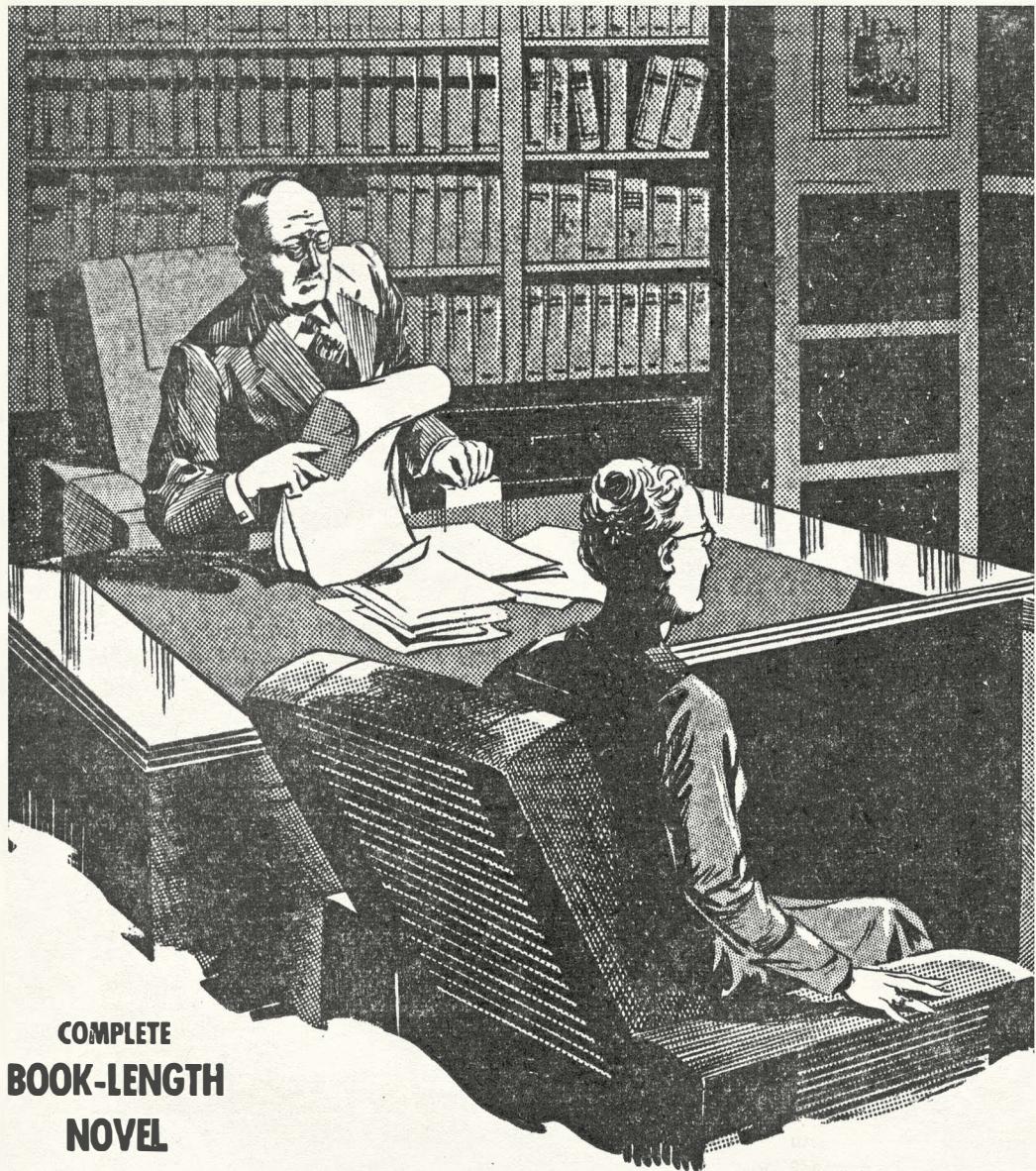
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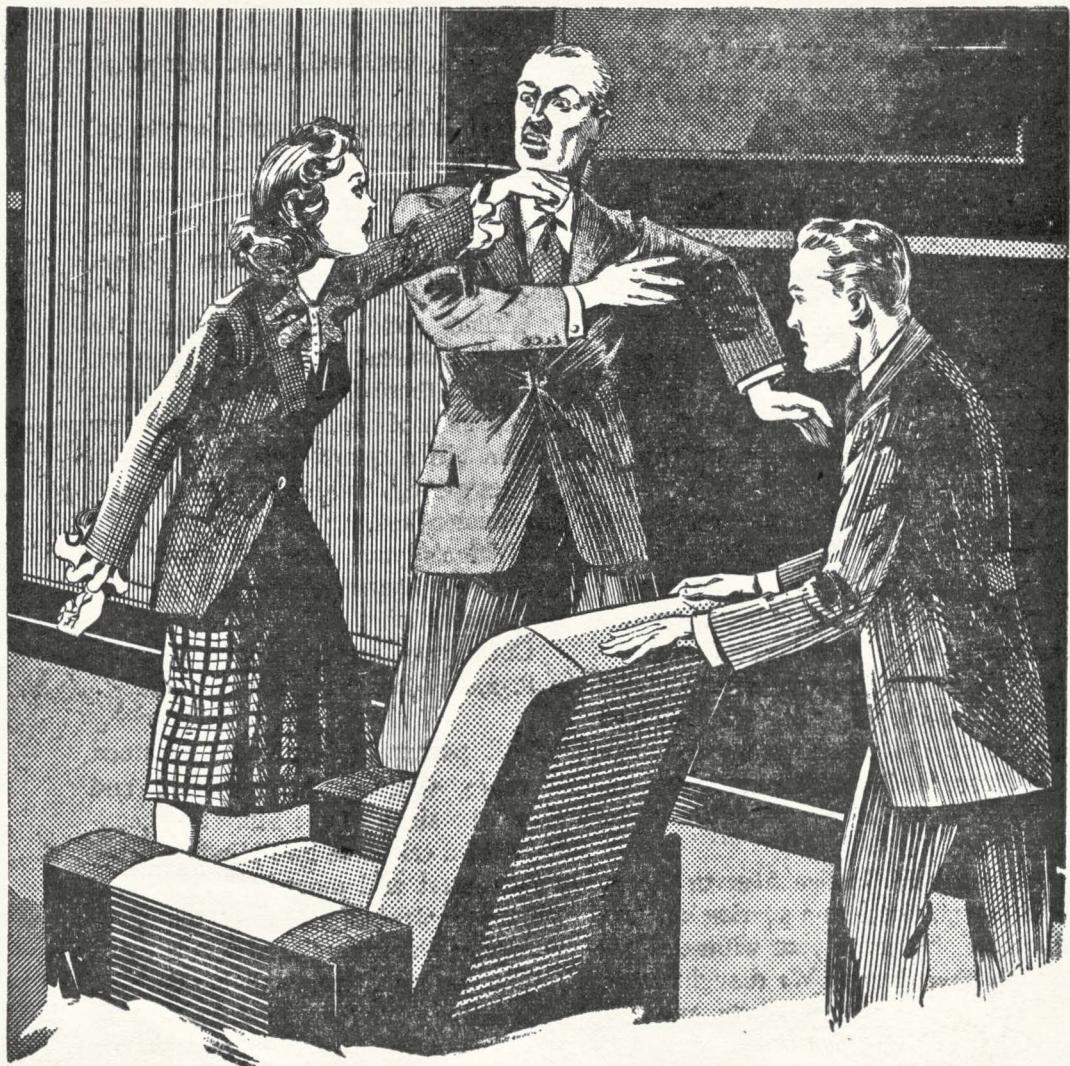
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COMPLETE
BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL

WITH THIS GUN

by JOHN WILEY and WILLIS MARCH



Paula's palm smacked sharply against Masterson's cheek

Natural death came to a mighty little man; but murder came to his daughter! Why? The answer lay in a grave twenty years old

DOUG WALLACE, you're trembling!" The girl's low, playfully mocking laugh sounded just a little hollow on the darkened porch of the frame dwelling. "I actually believe you're nervous. Is getting married such a disturbing thing?"

"Why doesn't he answer?" growled

the man, jabbing again at the doorbell with a white-gloved forefinger. "I thought justices of the peace were hard to wake up only in the movies. God knows, I've had enough of dramatics tonight!"

"Please, Doug, don't mention *her* again!" she said sharply.

Doug Wallace's shoulders stiffened, and it seemed to the girl that he shivered a little.

"It won't be over until I change your name from Helen Masterson to Mrs. Douglas Gaylord Wallace!" He put one hand into his coat pocket and withdrew it hastily, as though he had thrust it into a nest of hornets.

"You *are* nervous!" she said in amazed delight. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him passionately. "You romantic old dear!" she whispered.

The door opened and a column of light fell on them. A bald head gleamed atop a silhouetted figure facing them.

"Humph! Seems we'd better get this over with fast," the figure declared.

Wallace disengaged Helen's arms from his neck. His face was pale and he rubbed the contrastingly vivid lipstick from his lips with a quick gesture.

"You're Justice Marvin Gates?" he asked.

"Yup," said Justice Marvin Gates, standing on tiptoe and peering out into the night. "Where's your witnesses?"

"We haven't any. We thought you'd be able to pick somebody up—the housekeeper and the hired man, perhaps."

"Housekeeper? Hired man?" Gates grunted scornfully. "The marriage business ain't *that* good. And it's getting worse. I'm getting tired of you young folks barging in at two in the morning, and not even thinking to bring witnesses! The only other person around here is my wife, and she's going to kick like hell if she has to get out of bed. Young man,"—Gates peered speculatively at Wallace's expensively attired figure—"you'd better step out into the roadway and flag down a car. Anybody for a witness. I ain't going to call my wife; I'm married, and I want to *stay* that way."

Wallace hesitated, then turned to Helen.

"I guess that's what we'll have to do. You go in and I'll go watch for a car."

"Traffic's fairly heavy along here all night," offered Gates. "Shouldn't take you more than a few minutes. I'll get things ready. . . ."

Wallace nodded and went down the steps and walked back to the highway. He stood there in the dark, watching for the glow of headlights over the brow of the hill a quarter-mile away. His jaw set grimly, and his fingers clenched and unclenched.

"Where's your guts, Wallace?" he whispered hoarsely. "Don't let her down now!"

Once more his hand went into his coat pocket, his shoulders stiffened.

FOR perhaps ten minutes he stood there, waiting, then wheeled and faced the slope of the hill. The headlights of a car came into blinding being at the crest and moved down toward him. He stepped out into the glare holding both white-gloved hands aloft.

The car came to a halt beside him. The driver's window rolled down.

"What's the trouble, buddy?" a man's voice asked.

Wallace crossed the concrete to the car and peered in at the face of the driver. In the dim light coming from the dashboard he saw the palely gleaming face of a slender girl sitting beside the driver.

"I'd appreciate it a great deal," he said, "if you'd stop here a moment and do me a favor. You see, we're getting married, and Justice Gates needs a couple of witnesses before he can go ahead. It'll only take a few minutes. . . ."

"Married, huh!" the man's face broke into a wide grin. "Well, I guess" He turned to the girl beside him. "How about it, Anita? Mind if you

get home a few minutes later? Justice Gates is a good friend of mine."

"Anything you say, Joe," said the slim girl.

"Okay, honey. We'll call it our good deed for today. Wait'll I pull up into the justice's driveway. I know my way . . ."

"Meet you inside," said Wallace hurriedly. "There're papers to sign and the sooner we get finished the better."

"I guess I'd be in a hurry, too," laughed Joe. "Okay, buddy, be right with you. Better pretty up those lips and cheeks, honey, so's you'll look nice when . . ."

The rest of his words were lost to Wallace as he hurried up the stairs to the wooden porch and jabbed once more at the bell. It opened almost instantly and Helen appeared.

"Get somebody . . . ?" she began to ask, then saw the headlights of the car driving up alongside the porch. "Oh yes, I see you did. Why, Doug, you look positively ghastly! We'd better get this over, before you collapse. Imagine a big strong man like you afraid of a little wedding ceremony!"

Helen Masterson laughed, tucked her arm under his and led him into the parlor where Gates sat at a battered desk busily scribbling on two sheets of paper.

"I'm not afraid," said Wallace, a trifle annoyed. Then he subsided, stood silently, fists clenched.

A knock sounded at the door, and Gates clambered to his feet to answer. He walked past Wallace and Helen to the hallway. His voice came drifting into the parlor as he opened the door.

"Well, if it ain't Joe Grimes! What you doing off your beat and without your uniform?"

"This is my night off, Marvin. Me and Anita just came from the dance down at the corners. Didn't expect we'd be playing witness though."

Gates chuckled.

"You've done it often enough. Ought to be used to it. But this is the first time for you, isn't it, Anita?"

"Yes, Mr. Gates, and I'm positively thrilled to death. Joe, do you really stand up for a lot of couples?"

"Almost as much as he rides that State Police motorcycle of his," offered Gates. "Seems he's always being picked up by couples. But come on in. The youngsters are quite anxious to get hitched and away. Never have any time, these kids. Don't know yet that time drags out pretty long in married life, and that there's not much reason for rushing after you think about it awhile—but that's what I'm here for, so come on in and make yourselves comfortable . . ."

THE three of them came into the parlor, and Anita looked interestedly at Helen Masterson. Her eyes widened instantly as she saw the sable evening cloak and the low-cut crimson evening gown.

"Oh," she gasped. "You look stunning!"

Helen smiled condescendingly at her.

"Thank you," she said sweetly. "That's a very nice little gown you have on, too. It's so sweet of you two to act as witnesses for us."

"Oh, nothing at all," Joe Grimes said. "But maybe we'd better introduce ourselves . . ."

"Yes . . . certainly," Wallace began. "Mr. Grimes, this is my fiancee, Miss Masterson, and I'm Douglas Wallace. Helen, this is Joe Grimes, and Anita . . ."

"Anita Burditt," offered Grimes. "And she's my fiancee too. Wouldn't be surprised if we came here some night, looking for witnesses ourselves!"

"Oh, Joe," said Anita. "You know I want a church wedding . . ."

"I was only kidding, honey. Say, did you say Masterson? That wouldn't be Miss Helen Masterson, would it?"

"Yes," admitted Wallace.

"Seen your picture in the society column only the other day," said Grimes. "Mighty glad to be able to help you out. But it seems to me you'd have a swell, big wedding with all the trimmings . . ."

"Joe," said Anita, "mind your own business. Can't a couple elope if they want to?"

"Sure honey. I guess it's more romantic that way, at that . . ."

"Quit the gabbing," said Gates. "Here, Mr. Wallace, let's get these signatures down, then we'll get on with the ceremony."

Wallace sat down at the desk, signed both papers, then handed the pen to Helen, stood up, held the chair while she seated herself. There was silence in the room, broken only by the scratching of the pen as she signed. Wallace's fingers whitened with the intensity of his grip on the back of the chair as she wrote, and he loosed an explosive breath when she had finished. She glanced up at him.

"Heavens, Doug, you act as though I'd just signed my life away!" She laughed as he stiffened. "Or, to judge from your face, you've signed yours away! Well, honey, maybe you have. I'll be a pretty demanding wife . . ."

"**S**TAND here," said Gates bruskly, indicating a spot on the floor. "Joe, you and Anita stand beside me."

Helen stood up, and together she and Wallace stood before the bald-headed justice.

"Hey," Grimes interrupted. "Where's the ring? As best man, I gotta hold that, don't I?"

Wallace started, fumbled in his coat pocket, withdrew his hand hurriedly

and transferred searching fingers to his vest pocket. He drew out a tiny box, and opened it. In the light of the desk lamp, two rings were revealed, one a diamond-encrusted band, the other a huge solitaire gleaming like ice.

"Doug!" squealed Helen. "You didn't even tell me about that! But how did you know . . .?"

Anita gasped as Grimes took the diamond reverently and stared at it.

"Joe . . ." she said.

"Take a long look, honey," said Joe. "That's something you'll never get! You're engaged to a poor highway copper . . ."

Wallace stared a moment into Helen's eyes.

"If you'd said no, the diamond wouldn't have mattered," he said.

Further ohs and ahs were drowned out by the sonorous voice of Justice Gates as he launched into the phrases required by the law. In a moment he reached the question:

" . . . Do you, Douglas Wallace, take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold . . ."

Wallace stiffened. As the voice droned on, he winced at each phrase, and his face grew whiter. Suddenly he was aware that silence had fallen.

"Well, do you?" asked Gates impatiently.

"Uh . . . yes," said Wallace hoarsely, but loudly.

Helen smiled up at him and squeezed his arm possessively.

"Do you, Helen Masterson, take this man to be your lawful wedded husband . . ." Gates went on. When he reached the end of the question, she answered lowly, but clearly.

"I do."

Gates raised his right hand.

"Give him the rings, Joe," he said.

Grimes passed the rings to Wallace, who took them in cold fingers. He

lifted Helen's hand slowly, stared at it for an instant, then he put the wedding band on her finger. He felt hers squeeze down on his and his lips tightened. Then he slid the solitaire over her knuckles with deliberate slowness.

"Okay," said Gates with relief. "By the authority vested in me by the State, I hereby pronounce you man and wife!"

He closed his book with a snap.

GO AHEAD and kiss her," he said. "Then give me five dollars."

Wallace bent his lips to Helen's and kissed her savagely. When he released her, her eyes were wide.

"My!" she gasped. "You certainly are an ardent bridegroom. You've never kissed me like that before."

Outside, the roar of an auto motor came and died as brakes screamed. Grimes took a step toward the door, then hesitated.

"And I'll never kiss you again," Wallace was saying grimly.

"Helen, we're legally married now, and nothing you can do can change that. You've reached the end of your rope."

"Why, what do you mean?" she gasped.

"Nothing, except that now you're going to get what's coming to you!"

Wallace's hand dug into his coat pocket and came out with a snub-nosed automatic. He thrust it forward with one motion, and before the leaping Grimes could reach him, two shots blasted deafeningly through the tiny room.

Anita Burditt screamed piercingly and shrank back against the wall.

Helen Masterson, her face a mask of horror and terror, lifted a white hand to her breast, stared with rapidly glazing eyes at Wallace, then sagged to the floor.

Grimes' plunging body hurtled into

Wallace's, and he wrenched the gun from the white-gloved hand. With one motion he reversed it, trained it on the immaculate shirt front and snarled,

"Put 'em up, you lunatic!" he shouted. "Good God, man, what have you done?"

The front door slammed open and a man rushed in, alarm on his features. He stopped abruptly as he saw the crimson-clad body on the floor, and his face went pale. One shocked hand went to his tousled blond hair in a gesture of horror.

"Doug, you fool!" he gasped. "You poor, blind *fool!* What have you done?"

"Done?" asked Wallace calmly. "Nothing, Jim. Just straightened up a mess the only way it could be straightened up. Helen didn't know what Masterson planned tonight, and now she'll never be able to do anything about it." He turned to Grimes. "Shall we go, Mr. Grimes? I submit myself to your custody."

Jim leaped forward, grasped Wallace by the lapels.

"You sap!" he shouted. "Masterson died tonight at 8:15 of a heart attack. He never even got a chance to receive those papers, much less sign them!"

Douglas Wallace staggered and his face went grey.

"What! You mean he never . . . ?"

"Yes. Paula's ruined and so am I! And Helen's done everything she planned to do!"

For a long instant Wallace stood as though dazed by shock, then abruptly he pushed Jim's body toward that of Grimes. The two men went down in a heap, and Wallace hurdled them and vanished through the door. As the two inside scrambled to their feet, the roar of a motor came from the highway, and with a clash of gears, a car sped away.

Grimes came to his feet, grasped the

blond man's arm and yanked him savagely back from the door.

"No you don't" he roared. "Let him go. We'll get him. I wanna know first who you are?"

"I'm James Hartley, attorney for Masterson. And I'm not trying to escape. I want to catch him as badly as you do."

"Good," grunted Grimes. "We'll get him. I'll get on the phone and call out the highway patrols. He won't get away!"

He strode into the hall and snatched up the phone.

CHAPTER II

Funeral for Two

IT WASN'T like Paula Masterson to cry; but that's what she was doing. At least nobody ever thought that Paula was the weepy kind because she'd always seemed calm and composed and rather defiant toward the whole world insofar as her emotions were concerned. 'I can take care of myself!' had always been her stubborn exclamation. Right now she was far from stubborn, or calm, or even defiant. She was sitting straight upright on the big four-poster bed that had belonged to Carter Masterson, and tears were chasing each other unashamedly down her cheeks. The sound of her sobs, low and soft, was almost lost in the tremendous folds of the drapery that hung from every wall of the huge bedroom.

Masterson always had gone in for the tremendous. Even his drapes had to be massive; so heavy the maid groaned in disgust every time it was necessary to take them down for cleaning, or even to move them to open the windows when airing the room. The bed was tremendous, the pictures on the wall were tremendously framed, and

the fireplace on one side was tremendous.

That was hard to rationalize because Masterson himself had been rather tiny. He'd been dwarfed in the room. And when he had died, he had been almost lost in the center of the huge bed. It had always been a source of wonderment to his business rivals as to how he so invariably succeeded in overpowering and cowering all opposition. It was almost as though a bright light shone behind him, and cast his shadow huge before him, frightening those whom he faced.

Considering this, then, it was doubly strange that Paula was sitting here now, crying alone and sincerely.

James Hartley didn't understand it when he came in.

FOR a long moment he stood there staring at her, and she stared back. She made no attempt to wipe away the tears, or to conceal the fact that for once her emotions were unveiled to the curious.

"He was always good to me," she said, half-defiantly.

Hartley nodded slowly.

"To me, too."

There was a long moment of silence —awkward to Hartley, meaningless to her.

"What do you want?" she asked. "It's nearly three in the morning."

He crossed the tremendous carpet and sat down beside her.

"I've got some . . . bad news," he said.

She stiffened.

"Legal? If it's anything legal, I don't want to hear it now!"

"It isn't anything pertaining to business," he said slowly, definitely. Then he stopped a few seconds, wet his lips. "It's . . . rather shocking news. I didn't quite expect to find you like this

—it makes it kind of hard to say . . .”

She turned to face him wondering-
ly, her brows beginning to furrow in
apprehension.

“James Hartley, what are you trying
to tell me? What other bad news can
you possibly have?

“It’s about Helen . . .”

“Please,” she protested. “Let’s not
bring up that argument again.”

“There isn’t any argument, any
more.”

“Isn’t . . .” Her lips remained parted
in astonishment. You can’t mean . . .”

“No,” he said miserably. “Not that
way, much as I wish it could have
been.”

“Then . . . ?”

“Paula, she’s dead.”

Just the faintest tremor rippled over
her slim body, then she was motionless,
calm. The tears had stopped their
coursing down her cheeks, but their
track still gleamed wetly.

“How?” coldly.

“It . . . it happened . . . while—”
Hartley fumbled, then went on des-
perately. “Paula, she eloped with
Doug tonight, and . . .”

The composure was gone.

“Jim! What happened? An accident
. . . oh Jim, tell me! Is he hurt?”

“Not an accident,” he hastened to
say. “Doug’s . . . not hurt. Damn it,
Paula, I don’t know how to say this.”

“You’ve got to tell me. Whatever it
is, I can take it. I’ve not been crying
because I’m distraught. Tell me!”

Hartley’s voice took on a curiously
dead, bookishly descriptive tone.

“I found out about the elopement
about ten o’clock. I tried to catch
them, but I was just a few minutes too
late. They drove down the Lake road
to the justice of the peace at Hale’s
Corners. Doug married her there,
then . . .”

“Then?” she asked impatiently.

“He shot her,” Hartley concluded.

PAULA clutched at his arm, her face
went white.

“No!” she said piteously, “No! Jim,
you’re lying to me. You’re being fan-
tastic. You’re playing a silly practical
joke on me . . .”

“I wish I were that much of a heel,”
he said hoarsely. “But it’s true. He
shot her, Paula. Not sixty seconds
after he put the ring on her finger.”

“But why?” There was real anguish
in the girl’s voice now. And a tinge of
terror.

“I . . .” Hartley sensed her terror.
“. . . I don’t know!” he finished fran-
tically. “I don’t know!”

“Jim!” she was sobbing now, great
frightened gulps, “Jim, you *do* know.
He did it . . . for me! That’s what
he meant tonight . . . when he said—
Oh, God, Jim, tell me you’re fooling
me. Tell me it isn’t true!” She col-
lapsed on his shoulder, her whole body
shaking with her emotion.

“Honey, *please!*” Hartley was al-
most sobbing himself now. “Please
pull yourself together. I’m sure it
wasn’t that way—it couldn’t be. Doug
wouldn’t do such a thing . . . deliber-
ately. He was terribly worried—about
business. He loved her so much, too.
He must have . . . his mind must have
cracked—”

“He *hated* her!” Paula sobbed. “He
didn’t love her. He killed her for me.
He knew what Dad was going to
do . . .”

She sat up suddenly, clutched at his
shoulders.

“Where is he now? Have they . . .
arrested him? I’ve got to go to him,
Jim. . . .”

He shook his head.

“You can’t. They haven’t arrested
him . . . yet. He ran away, Paula,
when I told him . . .” Hartley halted,

realizing his near slip.

"When you told him what?"

"When I told him your Dad was dead."

Paula's shoulders slumped and she looked hopelessly tragic.

"It's happened, Jim. Just as I always feared it would. I should never have stayed. I don't belong here, Jim. Helen hated me for what I represented. Dad always shielded me, but I know it was an awful thing for him to face when he was alone . . . and Helen left him alone very often. I'm glad she's dead, Jim. Many times I wanted to kill her myself, for what she did to make him suffer. She was the only one who could ever make him suffer; and only because of me. If I had gone, as she wanted . . ."

Inside, Hartley breathed a sigh of relief. She hadn't detected the inconsistency in his story. He gripped her shoulders and shook her tenderly.

"Stop it, Paula! Don't blame yourself. It's all over now."

"But Doug . . . What about him?"

"I'm going out now, to try to find him. I'll bring him back, and we'll get the best lawyers in the country. Everything'll be all right. You just go to bed now and get some sleep."

"Sleep . . . !" Once more the tears started.

Hartley pulled the bell cord beside him and held his arm tightly around her shoulders while he waited. When the housekeeper appeared, still in her night-gown covered by her somber-hued bathrobe, he said,

"Put her to bed, Marta. And it might be a good idea to give her a sleeping powder . . ."

Marta nodded silently, took Paula by the elbow. The girl rose to her feet, dropped her red face against the old woman's shoulder and together they left the room. Hartley watched the old

woman's arm go tenderly around her slim shoulders.

"At least she's got one good friend," he whispered to himself.

Then he, too, rose to his feet and left the room.

* * *

"I REMEMBER the time Tinsley had him over a barrel," the speaker's eyes grew reminiscent as he peered through his glasses at the crowded church steps where milling hundreds of the morbidly curious waited the appearance of the coffins of Carter Masterson and his daughter. "It was a neat job. Tinsley figuratively could have broken every rail and tie in the railroad with his bare hands—and Masterson knew it. But Masterson stuck his face up at Tinsley and began sounding off, and by the time he finished, Tinsley looked like a whipped puppy. Sheer bluff, it was, and by God, it worked! I'll never forget it; a little whelp of a man facing a Wall Street wolf with ninety percent of the stock behind him, and he bluffed him to the tune of twenty millions!"

Another impeccably dressed-for-the-occasion business man spoke up ruefully.

"I guess I can testify to that," he admitted. "Masterson gave me the financial licking of my life in twenty minutes on the exchange floor, then turned around and set me up where I am today. Great little guy, he was. Could slap a man down as coldly as an iceberg, and with as much weight. And the next minute, he'd prove he had a heart."

"Speaking of his heart there were plenty of stories circulating around about that, too. That girl of his, Paula, I think, isn't his daughter. Never did understand what was back of it all, but he adopted her under circumstances that Wiley, of the *Blade*, wanted to

scream to the public in headlines three inches high."

"I never heard of it."

"Hell no! When Masterson got through with Wiley, he practically scrapped his presses for fear a word would leak out . . . But say, here comes the coffin! Look at that thing! It's big enough to hold five of him!"

A LANE was opening swiftly down the center of the church steps as spectators parted to form two neck-craning masses. The morning sun was shining down brilliantly, as though unaware of the tragedy lurking beneath the scene. But the tragedy was starkly evident in Paula's eyes as she came down the steps immediately behind the second of the two coffins. Her veil was lifted, remained so, and she stared about anxiously, searchingly. There was defiance in the lift of her head, pride in the tilt of her shoulders, disdain for the morbid eyes fixed on her, evident in the set of her lips.

As she reached the bottom step there was disappointment in her face. She dropped her head and walked slowly down the plush runner toward the limousine awaiting her. As she stepped inside, James Hartley pushed through the crowd and climbed in beside her. The footman shut the door.

"Jim!" exclaimed Paula. "Where have you been? Why haven't you called?"

Hartley looked at her haggardly as the car moved away from the curb.

"I've been going every minute. Haven't had any sleep in two days. And I must confess I'm licked; I can't find him."

"Where can he be?" wailed Paula. "Do you think something has . . ."

"I don't know," Harley said weariedly. "I've gone to every place he could possibly be, or have contacted. I've

asked everyone he knew where he might be. No one knows a single thing. He hasn't been heard from since he jumped in that car and beat it. Wherever he's gone, he's doing a good job of it. The police are as baffled as I am."

"Oh, Jim, have you seen the papers —what they're saying about him? It's too terrible for words. They're calling him a madman, claiming his mind is gone, and the police have orders to shoot to kill if he offers resistance. Jim, we've simply *got* to find him first . . ."

Hartley took her hand in his and held it tightly.

"I've hired detectives. They are doing all they can, which isn't much. He's vanished as though the earth has swallowed him up. But that isn't the worst of it. An unidentified woman was found dead in a culvert last night, and the papers are playing it up big—hinting very nastily that Doug is the killer, that he is roaming the countryside, a homicidal maniac. Until he's found, they're liable to blame everything that happens on to him."

Paula dropped her face into her palms and sobbed softly.

"Oh, Doug, poor Doug, why did you do it!"

HARTLEY drew her to him.

"Please don't," he begged. "It's bad, but we've got to face it. We've got to keep a stiff upper lip. Try to get hold of yourself. You'll need all your strength and control for this afternoon . . ."

Paula lifted a tearful face defiantly.

"Oh, that will! Why must I be there? I don't care what's in it . . ."

"It isn't a matter of what's in it," said Hartley. "By law, you are required to be there, to listen to the reading of it. All heirs will have to be there."

"That certainly won't be an awful

crowd," said Paula, attempting a laugh. "There's only one besides myself. Only one real remaining member of the great Masterson family, a third cousin or something. I can't count myself actually; there's no blood relationship in my case."

"Haven't you ever seen Arnold Masterson?" asked Hartley curiously.

She shook her head.

"No. There's always been bad blood between him and Dad. I don't know the details, but I think Dad was the one who got most of the Masterson fortune, and Arnold always felt he was entitled to it somehow."

"You know," said Hartley seriously, "in spite of being your father's second-best attorney, I know amazingly little about his affairs—concerning his recent dealings, that is. I know *nothing* about his past. I've heard of Arnold Masterson, of course, but never knew of any connection in a business way at all. Now that there'll be so much legal work to do, I'm afraid I'm going to be not much more than a flunky for the court."

"Why do we have to go to Webbley's office for the reading of the will?" asked Paula. "Why can't it be right at home?"

Hartley frowned.

"Arnold Masterson. He insisted on it. Wouldn't come to the home under any circumstances. Whatever happened between him and your Dad must have been pretty bitter, to make him act that way."

"I'm not going to like him," said Paula angrily.

THE limousine was turning into the cemetery now, and it came to a purring halt beside a huge mausoleum of unadorned, uncarved white marble. The only break in the severe lines was the name 'Masterson' carved over the door.

The two coffins were already inside, resting under the center of a small, al-

most flower-filled rotunda. Only a somber, gloomy light came from the small windows near the ceiling. The coffins were visible to Paula from the limousine as she stepped out of it, accepting Hartley's arm for assistance. She bit her lip.

"It'll be over soon," whispered Hartley.

They went inside. Several persons unknown to Paula stood silently by. A minister stood waiting, book in hand, at the head of the two coffins. In the shadows against one wall was an elderly man; tall, gaunt, strong-jawed. He had a strangely contemplative manner, as though he surveyed the scene with the direct intention of remembering every detail. His hair was black, but greying at the temples. He gave the impression of age, but physically he was obviously still powerful and fit. Paula stopped still as she saw him.

His eyes were upon her, burningly, intent. He came forward silently.

"I'm Arnold," he said in flat, curiously level tones. It was almost as though he was forced to curb any inflection in his voice to hide an emotion he desired not to reveal; as though his voice wore a mask.

"Dad's cousin?" Paula asked.

"Yes."

"It was nice of you to come," she said in strained tones. "I've wondered what you looked like."

She moved past him, stood directly behind Masterson's coffin, stared almost unseeing at the minister.

"If we are ready . . ." he said lowly. Hartley answered for her.

"We are ready."

The minister opened his book and began reading:

"Dearly beloved. . . ."

A dark shadow fell on the coffin before Paula. Her downcast eyes saw a blue-veined hand, strong and powerful,

fingers clenched tightly so that the knuckles were white. Arnold Masterson's hand; he had moved up beside her.

Unexplainable anger flooded through Paula. She lifted her head with a toss, to face him. For an instant she froze in that position, shocked by the burning intensity of the light in his eyes as his gaze met hers with the momentarily unveiled nakedness of an unexpected contact.

Coldness crept into Paula's brain. She fought to force her eyes down again and face the minister.

"Paula," a frightened voice said inside her. "You've never seen hate before. You've seen it now!"

Her heart hammered up into her throat until she thought it would choke her.

CHAPTER III

Death's Inheritance

"BEFORE I begin the reading of the will of Carter Masterson, there are a few strange facts I want to mention." Mark Webbley's voice was dry and professional. "They represent a point which may have some bearing on the probation of the will, in a moral sense. Actually, in a legal sense, the will I am about to read is the only existing will, and is drawn up in a perfectly airtight fashion, and I am sure, cannot be contested."

Webbley paused, cleared his throat uncomfortably, picked up a sheaf of papers and looked over his glasses at those seated before him. His gaze rested reflectively on Paula Masterson; passed on to James Hartley, standing against the wall behind her; skipped immediately to where Arnold Masterson sat in angular strength in a straight-backed chair beside the door. The only

other person in the room was Marta, who sat with a strangely disapproving look on her outwardly stern features. Webbley paid small attention to her.

"However, I've been a lawyer long enough to know that moral issues must be considered in the true interests of justice. Their application, of course, is entirely up to the court, and in all but exceptional instances, are decided on their actual legal aspect, if any can be applied. Thus, after I read the last will and testament of Carter Masterson, I want to read to you another document, unexecuted and therefore having no bearing on the actual status of the estate, which concerns all of you and myself in a more or less personal manner."

Hartley moved over behind Paula's chair and placed a hand on her shoulder. She patted it briefly, then replaced her hands in her lap.

"Go ahead, Mr. Webbley," said Arnold Masterson clearly. "I believe we are all in accordance with your statements and perfectly willing to allow you to conduct this reading as you see fit."

"Thank you," said Webbley a trifle coldly. "I shall proceed."

Once more he cleared his throat, then began.

"I, Carter George Masterson, being in sound mind, and in full possession of all my faculties, do hereby affirm this, my last will and testament.

"It is my wish that all inheritance taxes, State and Federal, be deducted from the general estate, prior to execution of all bequests, and that the full amount of such bequests shall be paid.

"To my adopted daughter, Paula, one dollar.

"To Arnold Masterson, one dollar.

"To Marta Mueller, ten thousand dollars.

"To my daughter, Helen, the entire balance of my estate.

"Executed this thirteenth day of September, 1937.

"Signed: Carter George Masterson."

FOR a long instant Webbley kept his eyes glued to the will he had been reading. The silence of that instant was broken only by someone's slowly expelled breath, evidence that the process had been temporarily halted. Webbley looked up to see that it was James Hartley who had first regained the normal use of his subconscious functions. Both Hartley's hands were now gripping the back of Paula's chair tightly. His face was serious, his eyes intent on Webbley's.

The attorney shifted his gaze to Paula. She sat very still, very white, very expressionless. Nothing in her eyes revealed the thoughts that might be in her mind. It was as if she had blankly refused to allow herself to think about what she had just heard.

Arnold Masterson's face was red. Momentarily he had lost his composure, but the evidences of it in his face were rapidly being replaced by something sardonic.

"Much as I hated him," he said softly, "I will admit I had to wait 'till he died to know him to do something rotten!"

Marta Mueller was staring uncomprehendingly at Webbley.

"I do not understand," she protested. "That was not Mr. Masterson speaking. . . ." Her bewildered gaze swept to Arnold Masterson, who was clambering to his feet.

"A very delicate evaluation of the difference between a daughter and a foster-daughter," Masterson said sarcastically.

Paula turned to face him. She was calm, but her eyes flashed fire.

"You will please refrain from being

insulting," she said clearly. "My foster-father was a fine man. He loved me, and I loved him. He never did an unjust thing in his life, and he still hasn't. As Mr. Webbley mentioned before, there are moral angles which must be considered. Morally, I had no right to any more than I have received."

Masterson stared at her fixedly, then he spoke stiffly.

"I have nothing but admiration for you, Paula; you are a noble girl. But I repeat, it was a rotten thing to do. No matter how loyal you are, I can't rationalize any justice into this, nor compensate it by comparison with what he has done in the past. . . . Excepting the regrettable fact that you are the victim, I feel a great sense of satisfaction in knowing that Carter George Masterson was a cad!"

Paula leaped to her feet.

"That will be enough, Mr. Masterson!" she flashed.

"I agree," said Webbley sharply from behind his desk. "Mr. Masterson, if you will be seated, I have something else to read. . . ."

Masterson sat down without another word, his face an imperturbable mask.

WEBBLEY coughed, picked up another paper.

"On the night Mr. Masterson died, I had an appointment with him. I was to bring this paper to him for his signature. It is, to be brief, a new will which he had me draw up. It is exactly the same as the will I have read, with two exceptions. I shall read only those exceptions."

Paula looked at Webbley with wonder in her face; Masterson's brows furrowed slightly with interest over gleaming eyes; Hartley swallowed hard.

"To James Hartley, the contents of safety deposit box 795, Commonwealth Bank.

"To my daughter, Helen, and to my foster-daughter, Paula, the balance of my estate, to be divided equally between them."

Paula's hand flew to her lips to stifle a startled "Oh!"

Hartley looked blankly at Webbley.

"What on earth . . . ?" he muttered.

Masterson leaned forward in his chair.

"By God," he exclaimed, "at the last minute his conscience got him!"

Like lightning Paula rose to her feet, took two steps toward Masterson, and the flat of her palm cracked sharply against his cheek.

Masterson sat still a moment, his face growing red, but his cheek remained white where Paula had slapped it. Then he rose to his feet to face her. He towered over her.

"In the name of decency, I probably deserve that," he said calmly, but with a cold note in his voice that suddenly brought back to Paula the feeling of terror that had swept over her in the mausoleum that morning. She shrank back imperceptibly, then maintained her position facing him by an effort of will.

"I . . . I'm sorry," she said stiffly. "It *wasn't* decent."

He went on:

"But getting down to facts, the will Mr. Webbley has just quoted from is not a will at all. It never received the signature that Carter undoubtedly intended to affix to it. The only will which matters, and the only one which the courts will accept, is the one which leaves almost the entire estate to Helen—and Helen is dead!"

"Since that is a fact, it is obvious that with the exception of ten thousand and two dollars, the estate is in the same condition that it would have been had Carter died intestate."

Masterson turned to Webbley.

"I believe I am perfectly right in assuming that since Helen Masterson died approximately four hours after Carter, the estate legally passed into her possession?"

Webbley nodded with a curious expression on his lips. They curved slightly as he answered.

"That is true," he said.

Masterson's face took on a look of triumph.

"Then, Paula, that rather puts your foster-father's will right where it belongs, with the bitter tea of General Yen! I am the only living blood-bond heir to the Masterson millions; you are the only other legal heir, through adoption. And I say, no matter what you do or feel about the matter, I'll fight in any way that is necessary for what is rightfully mine."

MARK WEBBLEY rose to his feet and faced Masterson, his palms flat on the desk before him.

"Except for one *other* fact," he said deliberately. "Helen Masterson did not, as you assume, die intestate. I have here, on my desk, still another will to read, the last will and testament of Helen Masterson, drawn up and duly executed only five days ago! I shall read that will now."

Arnold Masterson looked incredulous.

"A will!" he gasped. Then, instantly, he recovered. "But she couldn't execute a will! She wasn't twenty-one! Under the law, an infant cannot make a will and a minor is defined as an infant in this state."

"Wrong again," said Webbley. "Helen turned twenty-one just three weeks ago."

Masterson sank into his chair, baffled rage churning his features for a moment. Then he settled himself grimly back.

"Get it over with," he said. "I guess one more will won't mess up the situation any more than it is."

Webbley turned to Paula.

"Please sit down, Paula."

She returned to her chair and sat there, trying to quell the sudden trembling of her hands.

"What does it all mean?" she whispered to Hartley. "Jim, I'm so confused. . . ."

He patted her gently on the shoulder.

"I don't get it myself," he whispered back. "But we'll know in a minute. . . ."

Webbley resumed his seat, picked up a third sheaf of papers and rifled through them a moment.

"I'll skip all the legal terms," he said, "and get down to the will itself which is very short. It is as follows:

"To my foster-sister, Paula, one dollar.

"To my cousin, Arnold, one dollar.

"To Douglas Wallace, the balance of my estate, including all stocks and bonds in Masterson Amalgamated Railroads, Incorporated; United Steel Company; Whitney Transportation Company; Masterson, Incorporated."

Webbley looked up from the will, laid it down before him.

"That's all," he said. "Except that I might inform you that the amount of money in her own name alone involved in the stocks and bonds mentioned is in excess of six million dollars."

"**W**ALLACE!" gasped Hartley breathlessly. "Oh, my God!"

Arnold Masterson leaped to his feet, ignoring Hartley's outburst.

"Six million dollars! Impossible! How could a girl like that own so much? That's more than half of the Masterson fortune! All those stocks are Masterson companies."

"I don't know how she owned them,"

said Webbley flatly, "but she does. I checked that. Furthermore, they constitute, in each instance, in excess of fifty-one percent of the stock, and therefore, a controlling interest. And as matters now stand, not only that controlling interest, but the balance of the Masterson estate belongs to a criminal at large—to a murderer!"

Masterson stood for a long moment, thinking, a play of bewilderment crossing his features with rapid changes of expression.

"Obviously," he said in a strained voice, "many things none of us knew about, perhaps not even Carter himself, have been going on."

Paula rose to her feet.

"But why?" she asked. "Why? And how? Helen must have done this over a long period of time. . . ."

"Or had a hell of a lot of help!" snapped Masterson. He whirled on Webbley, studied him a moment, turned to Hartley, shook his head helplessly. A thought struck him. "What could that business about the safety deposit box be?" he asked curiously. "The contents of which you *almost* had willed to you!"

Hartley stared at him, did not answer.

"I'm afraid that will be a matter for the probate court examiners," said Webbley.

"Who has access to those deposit boxes?" Masterson asked.

"I do. I have the keys, but I am afraid that we will have to submit them to the court until the probating of the will comes up."

Masterson looked thoughtful. Finally he said:

"Then, if this matter has been settled for now, I assume that you will file the wills with the probate court immediately and notify us of developments?"

"Exactly."

"In that event I'll be going," Masterson said flatly. "Good day, Mr. Webbley, and my apologies to you, Paula. I am afraid I have acted rather hotly. I'm sorry."

Paula did not answer, and he turned on his heel and stalked from the office.

"I think I'll be going too," said Paula tremulously. "I feel rather ill. . . ."

"By all means, Miss Masterson," said Webbley. "Will you be taking her home, Jim?"

Hartley nodded, a peculiar thoughtful expression in his eyes.

"Yes, of course," he said absently.

He linked Paula's arm in his, turned to Marta.

"Coming, Marta?" he asked. "I think you'll have to take care of Paula again. Put her to bed the minute we get her home. . . ."

"Yes," said Marta, bewilderment still evident in her uncertain voice. "But I still say, that was not Mr. Masterson speaking in that will. He wouldn't do such a thing. I *know* he wouldn't!"

CHAPTER IV

Key to a Mystery

THE elevator operator lifted his eyebrows as James Hartley entered the cage.

"Work to do, so late?" he queried.

Hartley nodded.

"Yeah. Something I didn't get around to today."

"Oh . . . that Masterson case took up your time, eh? Awful mess, wasn't it? I see they haven't caught that madman yet. Sure is bad, having fellows like that on the loose. A woman ain't safe on the streets after dark . . ."

"I'm in a hurry, Ben," Hartley interrupted a little sharply. "And it's way after midnight now."

The operator closed the door, started the elevator upward.

"Going to take you long?"

"No, not long. Maybe a half-hour or so."

"Okay. I'll shoot right up to get you when you ring."

Hartley got off at the eleventh floor, where his office was located, walked down to the door and unlocked it. He turned on the light, glanced back, saw the top of the elevator disappearing downward.

Softly he closed the door again, leaving the light lit, and walked down the corridor toward the stair well. He went up two flights more, made his way through the semi-dark to another door. Black letters on the glass read "Mark Webbley, Attorney At Law." He produced his own key to Webbley's office, used it to open the door and slip inside. As a usual thing, he worked in his own two-by-four cubby on the eleventh floor, but sometimes he worked with Webbley in the large office, and Webbley had given him a key in case of emergency.

"This is an emergency," whispered Hartley to himself.

He fumbled around in the dark until he found Webbley's desk. It was locked. So was Webbley's personal file. Hartley grunted. The general files, along the wall of the inner room, held white cards with index letters on them. Hartley produced his tiny fountain-pen flashlight, scanned the file cards quickly, carefully shielding the light with his palm. He found M without any trouble and pulled the file open. Quick searching revealed that nowhere in its folders was anything that could contain a key.

Hartley made his way back to Webbley's desk. He crouched, ducked beneath it, fumbled with his hand for the back of the center drawer. He half-

smiled in the dark as he found his fingers reached easily a good six inches into the drawer past the open space between it and the back of the desk. But his gropings unearthed nothing but pencils, boxes of clips, and so on.

Frowning, he crawled out again, lifted the front of the desk and shook it. He heard loose articles flop back to the rear of the drawers. Once more he got under the desk. Almost instantly his fingers closed on the leather key case that he had known Webbley kept there. These would be the keys to his personal files.

Hurriedly Hartley scrambled out again, went to the locked files and tried several keys. At last he found one that fit. The drawer came open smoothly on its rollers. He lit his flash and searched through the folders. There was nothing concerning the Masterson estate.

Closing the top file, he opened the next. This time he found a metal box which rattled when he shook it. He found a tiny key that fit, opened the box. Inside were a dozen keys, all with tags attached. The third one he looked at was marked simply: "Box 795, Commonwealth—Masterson."

* * *

TEN minutes later, James Hartley jabbed a triumphant finger at the call bell on the eleventh floor.

When the elevator came up, his voice was cheery, casual.

"Finished for tonight, Ben. And am I glad. A little sleep . . ."

He stopped as he saw the figure in the cage.

"H—hello! Webbley!" he said in surprise. "What brings you to the office at this hour? Anything I can do?"

Webbley looked curiously at Hartley.

"I might ask what sort of work brings you to your office at this time of night,"

he said. "Didn't know you had any other active clients at the moment?"

Hartley shrugged, stepped inside.

"Nothing new, just some work I neglected during the past few days. I've been hunting around on the off chance I could find Wallace . . ."

"Better not monkey with stuff like that," Webbley warned seriously. "It isn't a legal matter—the police are better equipped for hunting killers. You aren't a criminal lawyer you know."

"I know—but I'd like to keep as much scandal away from Miss Masterson as possible."

Webbley smiled.

"Like the girl, don't you?" he asked. "Even if she hasn't a dime."

Hartley reddened, and Webbley slapped him on the back.

"All right, son, it's nothing to get flustered about. I wish you luck. Better go on home now and get that sleep you were muttering about when you got on. I just came down to get some keys I forgot . . ."

Hartley stiffened imperceptibly.

"I see," he said. Then: "In that case, I'll see you tomorrow. I am tired. No sleep in three days."

Webbley addressed the elevator operator.

"Take me to thirteen first, Ben, then come back up for me. I'll only be long enough for you to make the round trip."

"Right," said Ben, jabbing the starter with his stubby forefinger.

Webbley uttered a "goodnight" as he got off at the thirteenth floor. Hartley nodded mutely in response as the cage dipped down again. He swallowed with relief and when he reached the ground floor, walked swiftly from the building and hailed a cab.

His fingers closed on the key in his pocket.

"This is a hell of a mess," he mut-

tered to himself. "If I know Mark Webbley, he'll be at the bank when it opens in the morning. Damn the old fox anyway! Must he be so exactingly careful! Now what in the devil can I do to delay him . . ."

* * *

THE telephone was ringing when Hartley let himself into his apartment. His eyebrows lifted in surprise. He pushed the door shut behind him with his foot, crossed hastily to the telephone. He snatched the receiver from the cradle, lifted it to his ear.

"Yes?" he asked.

The voice on the other end of the wire was soft, almost a whisper.

"Is that you, Jim?"

Hartley almost dropped the phone.

"Doug Wallace! My God, man . . ."

"Keep quiet and listen!" came Wallace's urgent whisper. "I've only got a moment, and I've got to have some information from you. Tell me, just as concisely as possible, what were the terms of the will? I've discovered a few facts that make me think there are things in the wind I didn't suspect. . . ."

"Things in the wind!" exclaimed Hartley. "I'll say there are! But, Doug . . ."

"Don't mention any names!" Wallace's voice came sharp and clear to interrupt him, then its volume sank again. "Just tell me what you know. Quick!"

Hartley felt a sense of irritation sweep over him. There was something in the tone Wallace was using that he resented.

"Listen," he said slowly. "If it wasn't for one fact, I wouldn't tell you anything. I've been looking all over for you . . ."

"I know."

Hartley frowned and went on.

". . . and frankly, there's only one

thing for you to do, and that's to give yourself up. Do you know what you are being blamed for, and what the police have orders to do?"

Wallace's voice changed.

"Jim," he said pleadingly, "I know exactly what's being said, and what's in store for me. I read the papers. But I don't intend to give myself up, not just yet. There's something I've got to do, and I intend to do it. There are things about this matter that you don't even suspect; things you'll never know. But I swear that justice will be done before I am finished. I myself don't count. And I promise you, nothing will be done that isn't necessary. Please tell me anything you know that might help! It means *everything* to Paula—and that ought to mean *something* to you."

"I CAN tell you only one thing," said Hartley. "Paula and Arnold have been left exactly one dollar apiece, under the conditions of Helen's will, and *you* have been left the entire balance of the estate."

"What!"

Wallace's voice cracked out with such force that Hartley snatched the receiver hastily away from his ear, grimaced, and returned it cautiously.

"Jim, say that again . . ."

"You have been left the entire estate, in Helen's will."

"Oh, my God!"

"Does that change your plans?" asked Hartley curiously.

There was a moment's silence at the other end of the wire, then:

"Jim, I'm going to follow your advice. I'm going to give myself up."

"Now you're talking. We'll get the best lawyers in the country. I'm sure we can prove temporary mental derangement—you have been doctoring for your nerves, you know . . ."

"Jim, I wasn't insane; I'm not insane now. I don't intend to try to prove anything like that. I've committed a crime, and I'll take my punishment . . ."

"Do you know what that is?" asked Hartley ominously.

"Yes. The chair."

"That's the way you *want* it, isn't it?" asked Hartley with wonderment in his voice. "But *why*? There's no sense to being a martyr if you needn't be. After all, there's Paula to consider. She thinks a lot of you, and though I don't know why, it seems to me you ought to consider her feelings."

"I am. I'm considering her more than you realize. But that must remain a secret. There's only one other question I want you to answer before I hang up; before I give myself up."

"In Masterson's will, was there anything that sounded strange to you?"

"Strange? Why . . . no. It was very brief and concise . . ."

"I mean, was there any single *thing*, not money, which was willed to anybody?"

"No," Hartley hesitated. "Not in the original will. In the one he didn't live to sign, there was . . ."

"What was that?" Wallace's voice was urgent.

"The contents of a safety box would have been willed to me," admitted Hartley.

Another moment of silence came. Then Wallace resumed.

"Jim, you've got to get whatever's in that safety deposit box. You've got to get it right away!"

"Why?" Hartley asked warily.

"I can't tell you why, partly because I don't exactly know. But I do know that whatever it is will be a terrible thing for Paula if it gets into the wrong hands. It *mustn't* get into the wrong hands!"

HARTLEY made a sudden decision. "Doug!" he said swiftly. "I had a hunch the same way. So I went to Webbley's office tonight and stole the key to that box. I'm going to get there when the bank opens!"

"Good!" The relief in Wallace's voice was evident even over the wire. "But until you have it, I can't give myself up. Get it, and I'll be at your apartment tomorrow night at midnight. Then I'll explain a lot of things to you, and maybe the contents of the safe deposit box will explain a lot of other things. Once we are both sure that Paula is safe, I will give myself up."

"Just one hitch," said Hartley. "I met Webbley going up to his office tonight to get the key I stole. He'll know now that something is fishy, and if I know Webbley at all, he'll be there when the doors open. I've got to delay him somehow. Maybe a phone call . . ." Worry crept into Hartley's voice.

"Jim!" Wallace said. "Leave that to me! I'll see that Webbley doesn't get to the bank tomorrow morning. You be there promptly at nine, and *get the contents of that box*. If you love Paula, for God's sake, get it!"

"Okay," said Hartley dubiously. "But Doug, don't do anything . . ."

"Don't be a fool!" Wallace said half-angrily. "I won't murder him. But, Jim, I have been so shocked at this new development I've nearly forgotten what I really called to find out. Has there been any hint about Helen's . . . er . . . activities previous to her death? I mean activities concerning Masterson's own businesses?"

"How did you know that?" asked Hartley. "Even Webbley was flabbergasted. But however you know, Helen owned over six million dollars worth of Masterson securities, a controlling interest in each case."

Wallace's curse rang in Hartley's ears. Then shortly it was followed by a grim laugh.

"I've been an awful fool, but maybe nothing might have worked out if I hadn't been. Really, this is the joke of all jokes, and it's not on me! I wonder what *he* will say when he finds that I own everything his dirty dealings have finagled for Helen?"

"He?" questioned Hartley blankly. "Whom?"

"I'm afraid that's something it will be better not to mention," said Wallace. "I'm going to hang up now, Jim. Be sure you get the contents of that box."

There was a sharp click in Hartley's ear.

"Doug . . . !" began Hartley, then grimaced and slowly put the receiver back on its cradle. He sat down on the couch, and for long moments he thought. Then he undressed and went to bed.

AT NINE o'clock the next morning, Hartley strode hastily through the doors of the Commonwealth bank. He went to the safety deposit vault desk.

The clerk greeted him.

"Hello, Mr. Hartley. What can we do for you this morning?"

"I want to open box 795," he said. "Arnold Masterson estate."

He signed the necessary forms, produced the key.

"The guard will take you in and open up," said the clerk. "I guess he knows you . . ."

Hartley nodded, forced a grin to his face.

"Sure. Pete's an old friend of mine. He's been guarding that vault ever since I can remember."

He made his way down to the safety deposit vaults. The guard admitted him.

"Morning, Mr. Hartley."

"Good morning, Pete," said Hartley. "Get your key to 795. Here's your receipt . . ."

The guard led the way toward 795 after securing the bank key. He unlocked one lock, then used Hartley's stolen key to open the other. The box swung open. An inner tray was revealed. Pete began to walk idly away.

"Let me know when you're ready to lock up again . . ." he began.

"Wait a minute, Pete," said Hartley quickly. "If you don't mind, I'd like to have you take a peek inside with me. Masterson is dead, you know, and I'd like to have a witness. Never can tell who asks questions in probate court."

"Okay," said Pete. "Go ahead and open her up."

Hartley pulled the tray out, lifted the cover, peered inside.

"Unh!" he grunted.

Pete peered over his shoulder.

"It's empty," he remarked in surprised tones. "Guess I can't witness much, eh?"

There was a sinking feeling at the pit of Hartley's stomach.

"Maybe you *can*," he said. "Maybe it'll be mighty important for people to *know* this box was empty when we opened it!"

Pete shrugged.

"She's empty, all right. It won't be hard to remember that."

They locked the box again and Hartley strode out, a frown on his face.

CHAPTER V

Arnold Masterson Acts

"I'M GOING away for awhile," said Paula. "A vacation will do me good. I think I'll go up to 'The Pines' for a couple of weeks. It's quiet up

there, now that the regular season is over, and the outdoor life will do wonders for me."

Hartley pulled the car up beside a small roadside coffee house.

"I think that's a dandy idea," he said. "I'd like to go there for a few days myself! But say, let's stop and have some coffee, and chat awhile. I have some things I want to tell you, and something to talk over."

"Something to tell me?" she asked curiously. "Have you learned anything about Wallace?" There was a note of anxiety in her voice as she stepped out of the car and accompanied him up the short flight of stairs to the coffee house door.

"Keep thinking about him, don't you?" Hartley said seriously.

"Yes," she admitted. "I don't care what he's done, Jim. Somehow I've liked him ever since I first met him. And he's been almost like a big brother to me. Every nice thing I've had in the last few years, every good time, he's been in on, somehow. And I still feel that he did what he did, for me . . . although I can't understand how he could have contemplated such an insane thing? Why . . . why! . . . should he think killing Helen would help me? It's fantastically awful . . ."

Hartley opened the door for her, and followed her inside, to a tiny booth. She slid into the seat and he inserted himself opposite her.

"Paula, why do you keep on insisting that he did it for you? Aren't you the one who's being fantastic?"

Hartley watched her narrowly as she answered. The whispering voice of Doug Wallace was ringing in his ears: *There's something I've got to do . . . it means everything to Paula.* Wallace had killed Helen for Paula's sake. Hartley vividly remembered the bitter scene between Helen and Paula and Wallace

the night Helen had been killed. He'd been a rather helpless and uncomfortable witness to . . .

"No, Jim, I'm not being fantastic," Paula's voice interrupted his mental monologue. "Don't you remember the other night, when Helen started that scene . . . said she'd—"

"—see you dead before you got a dime of the Masterson millions?" supplied Hartley. "Yes, I remember."

Paula looked dazed.

"Jim! Even at that moment, standing there, Doug *knew* he was going to marry Helen that very night. He knew, and she knew, and neither of them breathed a word. Why? Even after Helen left, Doug didn't hint to me . . ."

"I've wondered what he told you," said Hartley.

"It's what he told me that makes me so sure he planned this horrible thing all because of me—because in some insane way he felt that it would solve all my problems. He always seemed to have an idea, because Helen hated me, that somehow I wasn't being treated right. After all, she probably had justification in feeling that I didn't deserve anything; she was Dad's own daughter, while I . . ."

"Let's get away from that subject," said Hartley a trifle harshly.

"No!" she said stubbornly. "I don't want to get away from it. I'm just a nobody. Actually, I haven't even a name . . ."

"One more word like that and I'll turn you over my knee and spank you right now!" Hartley flashed.

"All right," she said humbly, "I won't say any more."

HE PATTED her hand, began again.

"Except about what Doug said to you. I still want to hear about that."

"He said: 'Paula, I hate her!' And he said it with such a strange look in

his eyes that I knew he meant it. Jim, you might try to tell me he married Helen because he loved her, but I know differently. If he intended to marry her when he talked to me, which I'm sure he did, he also intended to kill her then."

A waitress approached with a pair of menus. Hartley waved them away.

"Just coffee, on two," he said.

While he waited for the waitress to get out of earshot his thoughts raced on. Paula was right about *that*. Wallace had left a note in his mailbox *before* he'd come to the Masterson home that night. Hartley'd found it when he went home. He remembered almost the exact wording of it; the wording that had sent him driving madly out the Lake road. *Masterson has agreed on the new will; he will sign it tonight. By the time you get this Helen and I will be man and . . .*

"What else did Wallace say?" asked Hartley.

"He said that before very long, things would be much different. I asked him what he meant, and he said he'd been talking to Dad. I wonder what it was that he could have talked over?"

Hartley remained silent. It had been the new will, drawn up between Webb-ley and Wallace and Masterson. Webb-ley had told him of it. But he hadn't inferred just what part Wallace could conceivably have played in it. Masterson had never been a man to either divulge his own personal business, or to allow anyone to dictate to him—yet it seemed that Wallace *had* been able to dictate. To what great extent was evident in the vast difference between the two wills. But why, in the first place, had the original will been so patently unfair to Paula? If Masterson had loved Paula as Paula claimed he had, then why treat her so shamefully?

Hartley sighed.

"I don't understand it," he muttered.

PAULA looked at him.

"Is that in answer to what I just said, or were you thinking of something else?" she accused. "You seemed miles away."

"Paula," Hartley said, taking one of her hands in his, "I've got something to tell you. It wouldn't be fair to keep it from you. Last night Doug phoned me at my apartment."

"Phoned you! Oh, Jim, where is he?"

"I don't know," Hartley shrugged. "I only know he's going to meet me there tonight at midnight. He was to have given himself up . . ."

She tensed.

"What do you mean, 'was'?"

Hartley grimaced.

"There was a stipulation. I was to have performed a certain mission, but I failed in it, or rather, it failed on me; so I feel sure that he will not give himself up."

"You are talking in riddles, Jim. Please don't torture me. Go directly to the point."

"You remember that mysterious safety deposit box intended for me in your Dad's unsigned will?"

"Yes."

"Doug says it concerns you; is extremely important. He insisted that I get it, and give it to him, or rather, open it in his presence and he would decide what must be done about the contents."

Paula looked blank.

"But how could you do that? Webb-ley has the keys. By now they are probably in the care of the probate court."

The coffee came, and Hartley poured cream for both of them. Then he swallowed a steaming half of his, cleared his throat a bit reluctantly.

"I don't know what you're going to

think about this, but I stole the key to that safe deposit box from Webbley's office last night."

"You *stole* it!" she gasped.

"Yes. I felt that there was something very strange about that will. Why would Master . . . your Dad, leave me anything at all? And if anything, why something so mysterious as the unidentified contents of a safe deposit box? Since the will had never been signed, it was a cinch I wouldn't get it, and obviously he wanted me to have it—wanted me to have it so much that he made a special effort to get it to me. So I felt that at least I ought to *know* what it was, even if I didn't take it. I intended to discover what it was, what it meant, and if it was simply some form of property, to return it and allow it to be disposed of with the rest of the estate in accordance with the will."

"And did you find out?"

Hartley shook his head.

"No. Paula, there was absolutely nothing in that safe deposit box! I got there this morning as the bank opened, was the first person in the vault—and the box was empty."

PAULA looked bewildered.

"How could that be?"

"I wish I knew!" said Hartley fervently. "Because Doug insists it was very important to you—how he could know that, I'm at a loss to explain—and now that it's gone, I'm worried."

Paula laughed dryly.

"What is there to worry about? I stand to lose nothing, certainly!"

"I don't know about that. But actually, what I'm worried about is Doug. When he finds I haven't got the contents of that box at my apartment tonight, he'll leave again, and not give himself up. Eventually, that course will lead to disaster. He'll get killed or

something, and if captured, the case against him will be almost hopeless. If he were to give up now, we could prove that he was temporarily mentally incompetent, and get him off with a light sentence at some mental institution."

"I don't think Doug could take that," said Paula tremulously. "He's a strange man, proud, and certainly not insane. In spite of what he did, I can't believe it was insanity. He did it for me . . ."

"He didn't!" exclaimed Hartley. "Will you please stop torturing yourself with that silly idea?"

"I'm going to be at your apartment tonight too," she said, ignoring his outburst. "I've got to see him first."

"No. I don't want you there."

"You don't want me there!" she gasped. "Jim Hartley, Doug Wallace is my friend. I intend to see him. I must talk to him. Especially if he will not give himself up . . ."

"You'll be able to see him all you wish," said Hartley, "because he isn't going to disappear again, even if he wants to."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that for his own good, I'm going to have the police on hand to take him into custody. I'll see that it is recorded as voluntary surrender. Later, when it's all over, he'll thank me for it."

Paula looked thoughtful.

"Yes," she said finally. "I agree with you there. But in that case, I see absolutely no reason why I shouldn't be present. I feel sure I can reason with him even better than you can . . . certainly you don't expect violence?"

Hartley looked at her a moment.

"All right," he sighed. "I guess it'll be okay. And maybe if he sees you there, he won't try anything foolish."

Paula rose to her feet.

"Let's go, Jim," she said. "I've got some things to do. If I'm going to take that vacation, I'll have to get the household matters in order. Oh, didn't you mention before that you'd like to come out to visit us for a weekend? Please do it, Jim. I'd be so happy to have you. And besides, I'm afraid that even with all that fresh air and big outdoors, I'm going to be just a little lonely . . ."

"Say," Hartley admitted. "It is going to be lonely, isn't it? Marta won't be exactly gay company; and she certainly can't clamber around those hills, and ride and row with you. Do you mind if I make a suggestion?"

"Why, no."

"How about letting me look up a companion for you—a girl who'll keep you company while you're there? I have just the girl in mind . . ."

Paula considered. Her eyebrows lifted approvingly.

"I think that would be very nice," she agreed. "It's all right with me, and I'd appreciate it. Really, I'd thought about inviting some of my friends, but with things the way they are . . ."

"Yeah, I know. And besides, most of them are cats," said Hartley. "I never could go for these young members of the four-hundred. Now this girl I have in mind is just a small-town girl and she'd welcome a vacation, I'm sure. Her name's Anita . . . Anita Burditt."

* * *

AMES HARTLEY lifted his eyebrows as he closed the door to Mark Webbley's office behind him.

"Hello, Masterson," he said in surprise. "What brings you here?"

Arnold Masterson wheeled his chair around slowly to face Hartley from where he sat opposite Webbley.

"Something that *might* interest you," he said significantly.

"In what respect?"

Webbley looked speculatively at

Masterson, then swung his gaze to Hartley.

"He thinks there might be still another will in that mysterious safety deposit box that was almost willed to you, Jim."

"Another will?" Hartley stiffened. "What makes you think that?"

Masterson shrugged.

"I just have a strong belief that one exists," he said casually. "So I've requested Mr. Webbley to take steps to open the box immediately in the presence of all persons concerned, to determine whether or not I am right. I believe that the very nature of this case demands that all possible steps be taken to expedite its settlement, and that all documents be produced and identified to prevent any complications that might arise from a belated introduction of still another will—" Masterson's voice took on a slight sneer—"considering the numerous wills that have already made their appearance."

"You don't *really* believe there's another will, do you?" asked Webbley with a curious inflection in his voice.

Masterson frowned, seemed about to mouth a puzzled retort, but Hartley spoke first.

"It might just be curiosity, eh, Mr. Masterson?"

Masterson flushed and got to his feet.

"Just what are you two getting at?" he snapped. "My motives in this matter are my own business. But I do stand on my rights to request that this step be taken. I'm sure that all other parties concerned will be agreeable . . . unless there's a nefarious reason to keep secret any such documents! I insist that there is another will in that vault, and I further insist that it be produced, or if it does not exist, that fact be proven!"

Webbley nodded agreement.

"I see no reason to get so excited

about it," he pointed out. "No one has raised any objections to this procedure, and as soon as I contact the other beneficiaries of the will and all persons concerned in the estate, the steps you desire will be taken."

"There are only two persons who need be consulted," Masterson fairly barked. "Miss Masterson and myself. I believe that inasmuch as I represent fifty per cent of the heirs, my request is sufficient to bear weight."

"Only one thing bothers me," remarked Webbley, unperturbed. "The key to that box has been stolen."

"*Stolen!*" Masterson fairly leaped at Webbley. "What do you mean?"

Unlike Masterson, Hartley remained silent, staring at Webbley. Webbley's glance met his and held for a long instant.

"**SOMEONE** entered this office last night and appropriated the key," Webbley explained calmly.

"That's preposterous!" exploded Masterson. "I refuse to believe it. There's something mighty screwy going on around here, and by God, I'm going to find out what it is."

Webbley shrugged.

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to get a court order, immediately, to open that box!" Masterson jammed his hat on his head and strode toward the door. "If the key has been stolen, why haven't you already acted to protect the contents of the box? Webbley, I am very much afraid that you are going to be in for a very serious time of it!"

"The *contents* of the box, Mr. Masterson?" queried Webbley significantly. "Are you sure there *is* a contents?"

Hartley started, then recovered himself. Webbley seemed not to have noticed his involuntary motion.

Masterson looked blank.

"I don't know what you mean," he snapped. "But we'll find out about the contents in a hurry. And if there *isn't* any, Mr. Webbley, you're going to explain why! According to that unsigned will you so graciously read before *all* of us, there *was* a contents, and by God, as its caretaker, you're going to produce it!"

"Is that a threat?" asked Webbley, a tinge of anger glowing in his eyes.

"It is!"

Arnold Masterson stormed from the office, slamming the door behind him.

Webbley faced Hartley.

"Impetuous chap, isn't he?"

Hartley nodded.

"Yes, but what's all the fuss?"

"About the box being empty you mean?" asked Webbley innocently.

"No," said Hartley with the slightest hesitation before he spoke. "What's Masterson got in his craw?"

"Six million dollars," Webbley smiled a little. "He's a fighting man, Jim, and he intends to get what's coming to him, if anything."

Hartley considered the older attorney a moment.

"Now that you've brought it up," he remarked pointedly, "what prompts you to suggest that the box might be empty? You aren't accusing . . ."

". . . anyone," finished Webbley promptly. "I simply stated the fact that last night I found my key to the box had been stolen."

"Then Masterson is perfectly right. It's your duty to see that the contents are safeguarded."

"I *did*," Webbley cut in.

"What!" said Hartley, startled.

"Yeah. I did. I went down immediately I discovered the loss of the key, got the bank president out of bed and explained to him. At the moment the box is safely in my possession. And as events turned out, it was a good thing

I went down there last night, because I was *unavoidably detained* this morning, preventing me from going to the bank when it opened. If I had waited . . . ”

“Unavoidably detained?” asked Hartley curiously. “Why the emphasis?”

“Did I emphasize?” Webbley’s voice was innocent. “Just a business matter came up; something that will require your presence at my home tonight at midnight . . . ”

Hartley’s jaw dropped.

“Tonight!” he gasped. “At midnight! But, Mark, I can’t do it. I’ve got a very important engagement . . . ”

“Isn’t meeting Douglas Wallace more important?” Webbley shot at him.

“Wallace!” Hartley jumped. “Meet Wallace! *Where?*”

“Be at my place at midnight, and you’ll find out,” Webbley shrugged. “And incidentally, don’t mention this to the police. I’m sure I can handle the matter myself.”

“Okay,” croaked Hartley. He walked to the door and went out, his head spinning.

“I DON’T get it!” he muttered silently to himself. What should he do now? Wallace had promised to be at his apartment at midnight. Now Webbley said he would be at another place. Obviously Wallace had contacted Webbley this morning, preventing him from getting to the bank, and to make it stick, had agreed to switch the meeting place and include Webbley. But if this was so, how did Webbley fit into the scene, especially his instructions to avoid notifying the police. What was Wallace’s purpose in the switch? And now how would Paula fit into the picture?

Outside, he thought deeply. How much did Webbley really know? Obviously he knew Hartley had taken the

key; also that he had gone to the bank this morning. A phone call would determine that. He’d signed the records. But that didn’t matter. Webbley knew there wasn’t anything in the box, and he must have gotten a laugh out of picturing Hartley’s discomfiture upon discovering that disconcerting fact.

Hartley almost turned back to hand the key to Webbley, then shook his head. If Webbley intended to remain silent, he could do the same. Let the matter drop. After all, Webbley undoubtedly knew that Hartley intended only to discover the nature of the box’s contents, and not to rifle it.

Hartley grinned to himself a little foolishly.

“You’re an old fox, Mark,” he said half-aloud. “But maybe you don’t know the real angles to this at all. And I’m going to see to it that Paula doesn’t agree to an immediate inspection of the contents of that box! *Somehow*, I’ve got to find out what’s in it first. Maybe Wallace can give me a hint . . . ”

A worried frown deepened on Hartley’s face as he walked toward the parking lot where he’d left his car. There was a little errand he had to do . . .

CHAPTER VI

Joe Grimes Gets An Assignment

STATE Patrolman Joe Grimes watched the car drive away with a puzzled frown.

“Hey,” he said to himself aloud, “I’d swear . . . ”

The door before which he stood opened, and a girl’s form appeared.

“Don’t you dare, Joe Grimes,” she said. “No swearing on my front porch.”

“Anita, who was that just drove away?” questioned Grimes, stepping inside and starting to remove his coat.

Anita assisted him, took the coat and hung it up.

"I'm *thrilled* to death," she said breathlessly. "I just took a job . . ."

He whirled on her.

"A job! What for, *honey*? My gosh, I don't want you taking any more jobs. After all, we're going to be . . ."

"Oh, it isn't really a job," she stopped him, "It's really a vacation with pay. I'm going to be a lady's companion for a couple of weeks up in the woods."

"A lady's companion?" Grimes motioned toward the door. That guy . . .?"

"Yes. That was James Hartley—you know, the man who rushed in that night Helen Masterson was murdered by that awful Wallace fellow . . ."

"Hey!" Grimes roared. "What goes on here? *Hartley!* Honey, you ain't taking no job like that!"

Anita took him firmly by the arm and steered him protestingly toward the parlor.

"Now, Joe, don't go *shooting* off without hearing the whole story first. Just sit down, and I'll explain."

"Explaining ain't going to do no good," insisted Grimes. "I won't have you mixing up with no murdering family. Besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

A puzzled look crept into Grimes' eyes.

"Never mind, right now," he said, suddenly vague. "Let's hear what you have to say first. Maybe there's more angles to this than I think."

It was Anita's turn to be puzzled.

"Joe, you're talking funny. Have you something to tell me?"

Grimes' jaw tightened.

"Later," he said firmly. "I do have something—but you get your story off your chest first. I'm getting sort of interested . . ."

She pouted.

"*Getting* sort of interested? Joe Grimes, you ought to *be* interested in what I do."

"*I am!*" said Grimes grimly. "Especially when *that* guy turns up." He pulled her down on the divan beside him. "What's this job business?"

"Well, it's very simple. Helen Masterson has a sister, a girl named Paula, who's pretty broken up by what happened—her sister murdered, and her father falling dead of a heart attack all in the same night—and she wants to get away from it all by going up to 'The Pines' for a few weeks. But she'll be all alone, except for an old house-keeper named Marta. Paula doesn't want any of her society friends there with her . . ."

"Yeah," said Grimes. "I can understand that—but what I can't understand is why Hartley comes to *you*? Heck, he hardly even knows you."

"He doesn't know *anybody*," she said. "Didn't I just say she didn't want anybody they knew? So isn't it logical that he should come to somebody he 'hardly even knows'? And he really was so concerned about it. He's in love with that girl, I just know he is! So I agreed to spend a couple of weeks with her just as a companion. It'll be fun, Joe . . ."

Anita looked a bit wistful, peered up at Grimes' eyes in a hopeful search for approval.

"But if you don't think . . ." she ventured.

GRIMES' face had taken on a speculative look.

"Sure, *honey*," he agreed. "It's a swell idea. You'll have fun, and make a little money for that trousseau of yours. It'll be sort of a vacation for both of us . . ."

"Both of us?" Anita's eyebrows lifted. "Now, Joe," she began, "don't

you start getting any silly ideas . . . ”

Grimes waved a hand cheerfully.

“ Hop right to it, honey. I’ll see you week-ends, and maybe a couple of days in between. Maybe I can even join the party at times and help cheer the lady up. I . . . ”

Anita lifted her trim body erect on the davenport and faced him with determined chin jutting out at him.

“ All right,” she said a trifle angrily. “ I won’t take the job. I’ll call him up and tell him I’ve changed my mind . . . ”

“ Now wait a minute,” Grimes interrupted her. “ Don’t get any notions I’m putting the squeeze on you. I really want you to go. And I’m not going to tag along, like you think; I’m not that much of a dope. But your being there is going to be a big help to me. Gives me an excuse to sort of hang around the neighborhood. Nobody’ll suspect what I’m doing, and . . . ”

“ Wait,” gasped Anita, “ you’re going too fast for me! Nobody’ll suspect what? What on earth are you talking about?”

“ I got a job, too, honey,” said Grimes triumphantly. “ And a darn nice one. If I make good, it may mean a detective berth with the State Police. And funniest thing about this whole business is that my job is tied right up with yours. I’m working, sort of, for the same family!”

“ Working for the family . . . ?” Anita was completely bewildered. “ Joe, you’re talking in riddles.”

Grimes laughed, leaned over and kissed her.

“ Settle back, honey,” he said. “ I’ll explain from the beginning. It’s kind of a cockeyed story. You see, Chief Hanson called me in this morning and told me to sit down, that he had a special job for me. I figured maybe he was going to hang a holiday job on me, and I wasn’t feeling good about it. . . .

“ He told me the whole department is looking for this Wallace guy for killing the Masterson dame, and also for a couple of other things that have been blamed on him since; that woman found in the culvert, a couple of robberies and so on. But they aren’t having much luck. The guy has disappeared like a ghost.

“ So somebody figures he has a lot of help, and has somebody hiding him out. But nobody can get a line on that either, and besides, nobody seems to know what the guy looks like. You know, honey, that fellow apparently never had a picture taken of himself in his whole life?

“ **W**ELL, the chief must have been put on the spot, because he seems awful anxious to get results. Somebody higher up is putting the bee on him, I figures. In a minute I get confirmation of this:

“ ‘ Joe,’ he says. ‘ You are the only man on the force who has any idea of what Wallace looks like. You saw him, got a good look at him, and can size him up pretty well, that right?’

“ ‘ Yeah,’ I says, ‘ I can. But what’s that got to do with me? Have you got some suspects you want me to look over?’

“ ‘ No. I am putting you on the case as a special detective. I want you to go out and do your damndest to find Wallace, dead or alive, preferably alive!’ ”

Anita clutched at Grimes’ arm, interrupting his story.

“ Oh, Joe! That’s dangerous!”

“ Sure it’s dangerous. But if I find him, we’re made! You can have diamonds and furs just like that Masterson dame. But don’t interrupt. I gotta tell you the rest of this.

“ ‘ But, chief,’ I says, ‘ I ain’t no detective. I’m a traffic man.’ ”

"The chief looks grim. 'When the governor says to put you on, you are a detective!'

"'Governor!' I yelps. 'Are you kidding?'

"'He didn't mention your name,' says the chief, 'but he did send out orders to get Wallace and to use every means at our disposal. Well, you at least know what he looks like, so out you go!'

"'But where'll I look?' I ask.

"'Damned if I know,' Hanson tells me. 'Just get out and look. Get some leads and track 'em down, one by one. And I hope to God you're lucky!'

"So here I am, Anita, honey, special detective, with detective's pay. And that's why, now that I think it over, this thing's working out swell. You got a job with the family, right on the inside. You can find out plenty for me. Just keep talking to the Masterson dame, and everything she spills, pass on to me, and I'll hunt down the clues.

"It's a perfect setup; and the way it looks, I'm getting the breaks at last. Why, maybe even this Paula girl might be the one who's hiding him out. Come to think of it, it could be significant that she's taking a vacation now with the season over and the resort all closed up. You said 'The Pines' didn't you?"

"Oh, Joe," Anita protested. "All this is rather too much for me to take all at once. But I can see you're going off on a wild chase of imagination. How do you have any basis for suspecting her? You're being just a little melodramatic, aren't you?"

Grimes scowled.

"Not me, honey. The chief gave me a lot of pointers. Told me all they'd learned already, and he told me this Paula dame was pretty thick with Wallace. They used to go night-clubbing together. Mighty friendly pair they made for a long time. And nobody can understand just how he was so on the

inside in Masterson's home. Masterson was always a cagy cuss, and outsiders never could squirm in very easy."

A NITA looked puzzled.

"I don't know how I can help," she said vaguely.

"Listen, honey. You just go up there with Miss Masterson, and get real friendly with her. Keep your eyes and ears open, and give me the lowdown on anything fishy. I'll call you up each evening just after dinner, and you can report. If anything turns up, I'll be right there. I'll be right there anyway, hanging around to see nothing happens to you, or to the Masterson girl. I figure like the chief does—these two were mighty friendly, and maybe they still are. Anyway, he's hiding somewhere, and a damn good hideaway, and maybe this is it. It looks like Fate to me . . ."

"Oh, Joe, don't start that fortune-telling business again. You are so gullible about things like that."

"Never mind that. How about it, honey? You game to be my assistant detective in this?"

Anita looked doubtful.

"I—I guess so. But it seems such a nasty trick to play on her. She's hiring me in good faith, to be a companion, and I'll feel awful funny spying on her . . ."

"You will be doing her a favor," said Grimes. "After all, it's her sister was murdered, and she must want that to be cleaned up . . ."

"You just said she and Wallace were pretty thick, and you're even thinking that it may be true that she's hiding him. That doesn't sound at all logical to me."

"Nothing sounds logical about this case," Grimes declared. "From the screwy things the chief told me, the whole family seems nuts to me. But this Paula girl seems to be okay, and

I ain't really got anything against her. In fact, I have a hunch the poor kid's going to need your company. She ain't really old Masterson's daughter. Adopted, I think. The dead girl hated her, the chief says."

Anita shifted closer to Grimes and nestled down.

"Let's forget that for awhile," she suggested. "If we talk about it too much, I'm going to get scared, and then I won't go up there with her."

"When you supposed to go?"

"I don't know yet. Mr. Hartley's going to call up and let me know. Maybe tomorrow . . ."

Grimes slipped an arm around her slim shoulder.

"Okay, honey. Let me know as soon as you find out. I'll be getting to work first thing in the morning, myself . . ."

CHAPTER VII

Rendezvous at Midnight

IT WAS twenty minutes before midnight when James Hartley neared the home of Mark Webbley. In the two years he'd been the junior assistant of the Masterson attorney, Hartley had never been out to the palatial estate on the city's outskirts. So it was with interest that he scanned the approaches to the big house.

There was a low field-stone fence surrounding the rather heavily wooded grounds. Three tremendous oak trees almost hid the house itself, nestling, in spite of its own huge size, in their inky shadows. Well-kept shrubbery made a maze of the grounds; and only at the front of the house was there any appreciable extent of open lawn. Here a gravel roadway led up to an arch that extended over the drive from a side door. From the front veranda a wide three-step staircase led directly down

on to the grass. There was no footpath.

Hartley saw a light in one of the front rooms. With that exception the house was dark. If there were any servants, it seemed they were all abed; or Webbley had given them the night off. Hartley suspected that the latter would be the case. One thing about Webbley: he always preferred to carry out things in as much privacy as possible.

As he turned in at the driveway, Hartley saw a car parked down the street. Perhaps a block away it was; and dark. He couldn't see if there was anyone in it or not, and after a careful scrutiny, decided it was empty. He could see the full oblong of the rear window admitting light from a street lamp a block farther down. No dark head obscured that oblong of light.

Hartley sensed the tenseness of his searching gaze and grinned a bit sheepishly at the realization of how anxiously he was watching for any sign at all of Douglas Wallace. Was he lurking about now, waiting for midnight? Somehow Hartley couldn't picture him as a skulking fugitive. Instead, he pictured the more likely possibility of Wallace driving calmly up to the entrance beneath the archway.

"How could that man be a cold-blooded murderer?" he asked himself beneath his breath. Now, here in the darkness of night on a wooded estate, the strangeness of that fact bore in on him more than it ever had. But intruding even more mysteriously was the reason for the apparently savage killing. Why?

Was Paula right? Could it be that a man would even murder, merely in the interests of a girl whom he had considered no more than a friend? Hartley knew, without doubting, that it had never been more than that. Paula liked Doug Wallace very much, and he'd been

(Continued on page 178)

O'SHEEN'S SWEET TOOTH

By LEROY YERXA

PADDY O'SHEEN'S night-stick gyrated with a little more gusto as he passed the fly-specked, dimly lighted windows of Armado's Pool Hall. It was close to eight in the evening and the town's hoodlum incubator was already doing a noisy business. Ike and Phil Armado, small town crooks, were both thorns in O'Sheen's side.

He made the turn into the lane that bordered the pool room and headed for the phone box visible in the street light at the far end of the alley. The Armado house was a dirty, two storied affair backed up to the rear door of the pool hall. The light on the porch sent out pale yellow from a dirt-crusted globe. Paddy O'Sheen hesitated. In the dark shadow of the porch steps he saw a dark bundle that looked like cast-off clothing. Paddy's eyes suddenly hardened. Evidently one of Armado's customers had absorbed too much rot-gut and passed out. Bending over, O'Sheen brought the stick down in a sharp blow across the soles of the man's shoes.

"On your feet, bum. Sure and you'll catch your death laying out here."

The man didn't move. Bending lower, with gradually awakening horror, O'Sheen rolled the man over on his back. Wide, unseeing eyes stared up at Paddy. It was Ike Armado, and he wasn't drunk. He had a deep, wide knife gash across his chest and the dark blood had dribbled out and soaked the front of Ike's white shirt.

"A devil of a way to celebrate my birthday," O'Sheen whispered. There was no one in sight near the alley entrance. Ike Armado wouldn't move again. O'Sheen's feet pounded swiftly on the concrete as he ran toward the phone box near the far end of the lane.

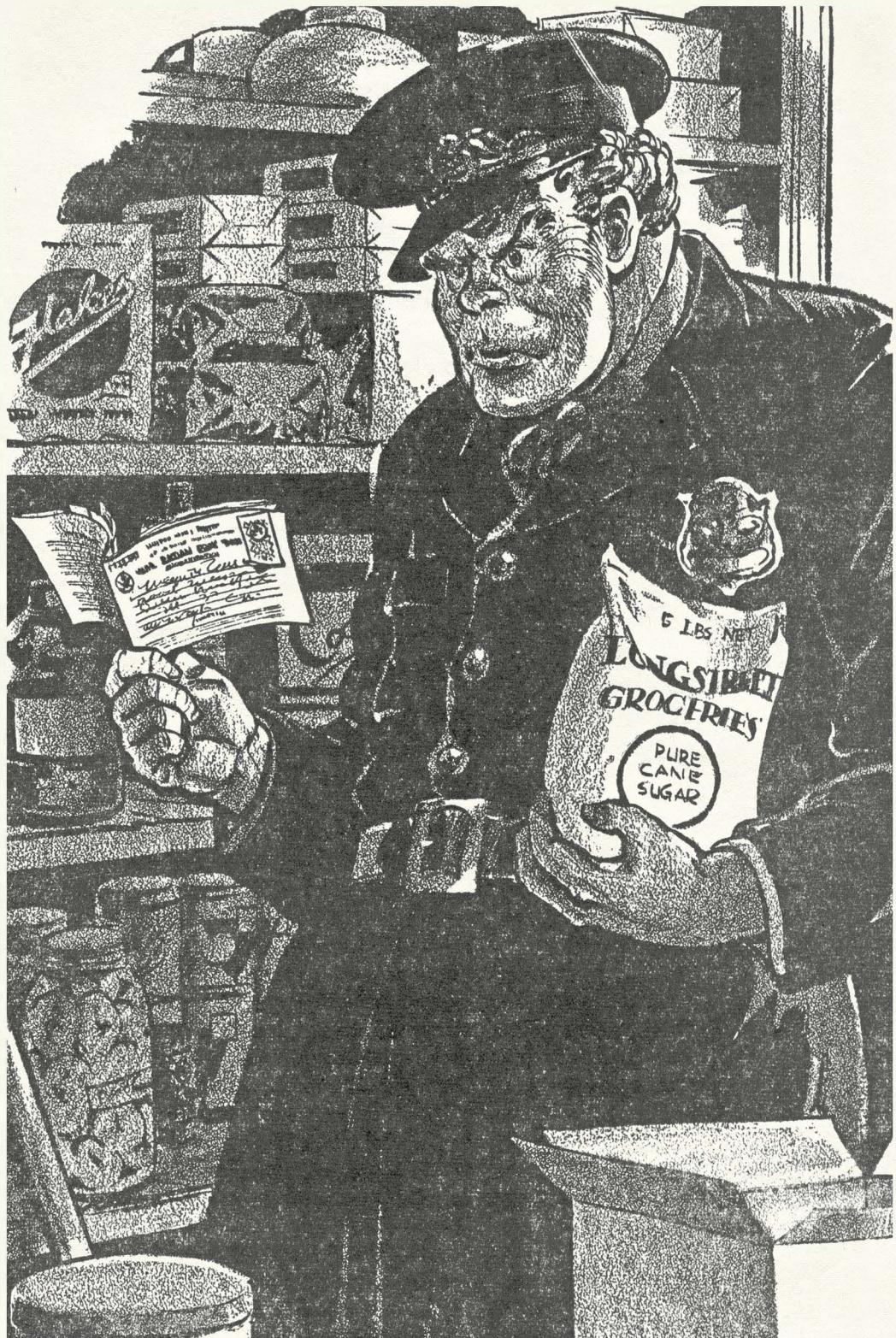
MARTA smiled happily when Paddy O'Sheen stomped into the warm kitchen.

"Happy birthday, Paddy." She was waiting eagerly for him to kiss her.

O'Sheen slumped down in the chair by the stove. He was scowling as he bent to loosen his shoes.

"Sure, and what's troublin' my big Irishman? You should be grinning your head off, this being your birthday."

This killer had a perfect alibi, but the alibi didn't include one of O'Sheen's weaknesses, his Irish liking for sweets!



O'Sheen opened the ration book and his brow wrinkled

She dropped at his feet and helped him remove the uncomfortable shoes.

"I've gone and stuck my fat neck out again," Paddy confessed. "Ike Armado was murdered. I told the Chief I was sure Phil Armado, Ike's brother, did it."

Marta's face grew concerned.

"You've been right before," she said. "The town will be better off without the pair of them."

"That's just it." Paddy stood up, crossed the room and dipped his finger into a pan of soft fudge on the table. "They tried to pick up Phil Armado. Found out he's been in Walkerville all day. A hundred miles from the scene of the crime, and a perfect alibi is what he turns up with. Say, you must have used a pile of sugar in this fudge."

Marta chuckled.

"You just sit down and eat the whole pan of it," she urged. "It might sweeten your disposition a little. The other will turn out all right."

O'Sheen complied humbly, his eyes never leaving the warm, delectable figure of Marta as she hovered over the kitchen range. She removed a vast, well-browned cake from the oven.

O'Sheen scowled.

"Say!" he protested. "Did you forget sugar rationing, what with cake and fudge all in the same day?"

Marta whirled around. Her eyes flashed.

"Sure and you're the world's prize grouch, this night. You just take the ration books and get some more sugar now that I think about it. Coupon twelve is good since yesterday and maybe the walk will cool you off a bit."

O'Sheen grumbled steadily as he once more laced his shoes and donned his coat.

At the door he hesitated, smiling uncertainly at Marta's back.

"I'll be right back," he said humbly, and went out.

TWO hours passed. Marta O'Sheen finished smoothing out the boiled frosting on the big birthday cake and put the remainder of the dinner back in the oven to keep it warm. With the ticking of the clock she grew more worried. Paddy had been angry and upset. He might get himself into trouble.

She heard his footsteps on the porch and sighed with relief. Paddy O'Sheen, when he opened the door, was a changed man. A broad grin encompassed his red face. Under one arm he carried a bag of sugar. The other held a huge bouquet of fresh roses.

"Good evening, Mrs. O'Sheen," he greeted her cheerfully. "Shall I toss my hat in first?"

A small bundle of charming womanhood dashed into his arms. He tried awkwardly to hold Marta, the sugar and the roses at the same time. Paddy could still blush at his wife's kisses.

CHIEF WALTER HENDERSON sat grumpily behind the bench at City Police Headquarters. Paddy O'Sheen, smiling and untroubled, waited for him to finish the tirade of abuse.

"And don't forget that Phillip Armado will sue the city for every cent he can collect," Henderson shouted. "I don't like him any better than you do, but he's got a perfect alibi. Six witnesses, including his own parents will swear he was a hundred miles from here, spending the day with his folks, when the murder occurred."

"But there wasn't another man in town who cared if Ike lived or died," O'Sheen insisted politely. "Phil wanted to get him out of the way and run the business himself."

"All right," Henderson leveled a finger at O'Sheen's ruddy face. "Phil Armado is coming in right now. If you can't make your accusation stick, I'm warning you. . . ."

"That I'll be without a uniform next week," O'Sheen interrupted him. "I'll take that chance."

Phillip Armado was fat, with a thick imported cigar pushed between the heavy lips of his swarthy face. He moved ponderously into the small room and seated himself beside the chief's desk. Removing the cigar from his mouth he spat across the floor into a half-filled cuspidor and stared at Paddy.

O'Sheen smiled.

"Hello Armado," he said. "I understand you don't know how Ike got that knife wound in his chest."

Phil Armado turned slightly pale.

"I'd rather not talk about . . ."

"Wait a minute," O'Sheen drew a small, flat booklet from his pocket and held it before Armado.

"Then let's talk about something else," he agreed. "This your sugar ration book, Phil?"

Armado nodded sulkily.

"It's got my name and description in it," he said.

"Yesterday was the twenty-eighth of the month," O'Sheen said softly.

"So what?" Phil Armado showed mild interest.

"Nothing much," O'Sheen admitted. "Except that this book proves you were in town about ten o'clock yesterday morning."

CHIEF HENDERSON flashed a glance of renewed interest at O'Sheen. A curse escaped Armado's lips.

"What the hell you trying—"

"Just this," Paddy O'Sheen went on. "I know you hated Ike. You wanted

him out of the way. Last night I remembered that coupon number twelve was good from yesterday morning until the end of next month. People who like to eat like you and I do, don't forget that sugar ration system. It was only a guess, but I spent a lot of time in your kitchen late last night. I found your book in a pantry drawer and a bag of sugar with 'Longstreet Groceries' stamped across the top of it. Stamp number twelve was used and you couldn't have used it before yesterday morning."

Armado chewed his unlighted cigar between rotating jaws. His lips were wet.

"That don't mean nothin'," he protested. "Anyone could have cashed in on that stamp."

"Not when two clerks at the Longstreet Grocery can swear that you came in at ten yesterday morning and bought your supply," O'Sheen said grimly. "You must have fought with Ike and cut him up after you returned home. Then you got out of town in a hurry. Ike managed to crawl out on the porch and fell off the steps. He wasn't noticed because the alley is deserted most of the time."

Armado leaped to his feet. The cigar rolled from his lips and hit the floor.

"You dirty punk!" Sweat stood out on his forehead. "I'll tear you . . ."

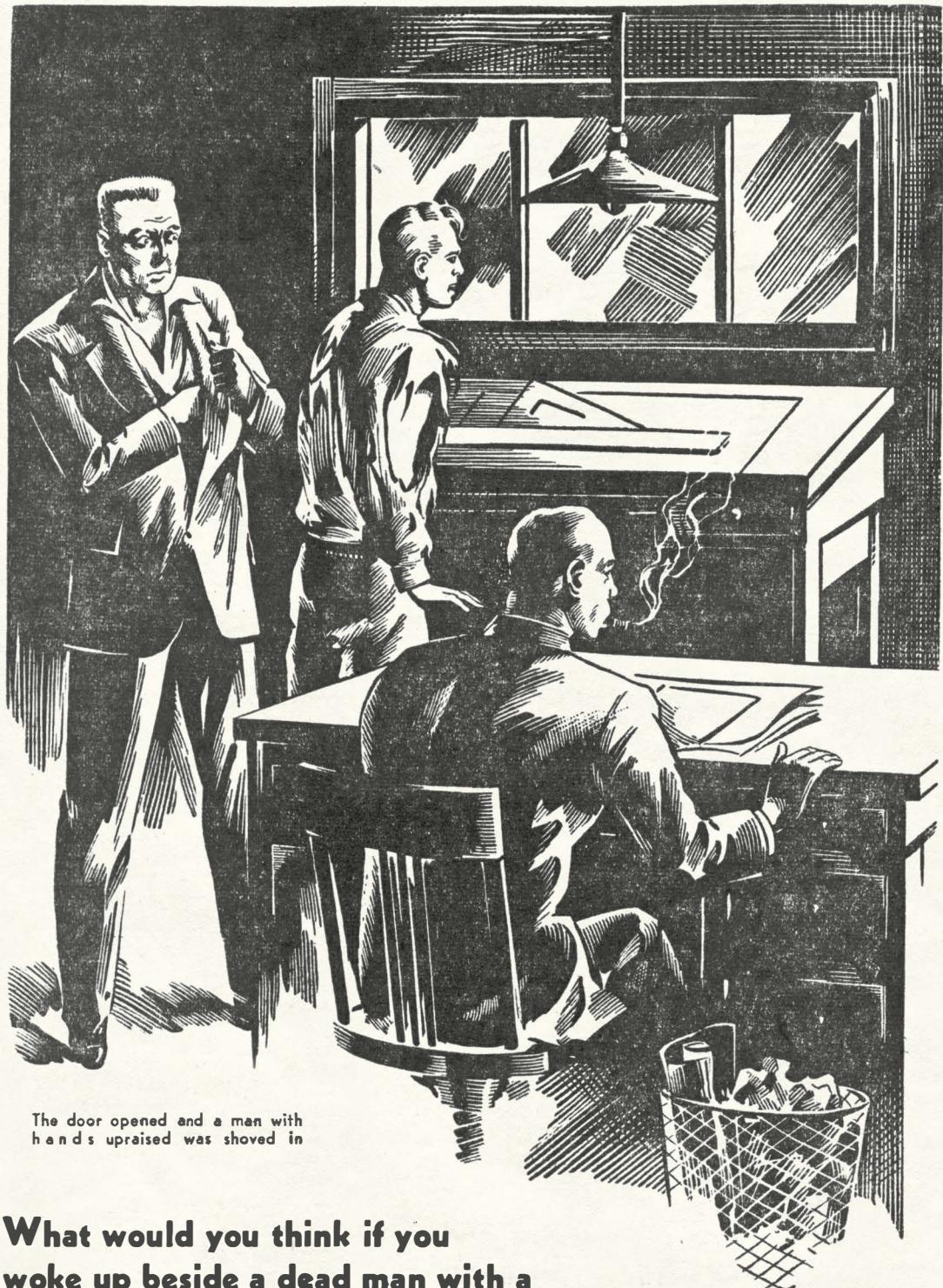
He stopped abruptly, and found himself staring down the big barrel of O'Sheen's pistol.

"I'm kinda fond of sweets myself, Phil," O'Sheen said quietly. "We got one thing in common. A man can be pretty smart sometimes but he's pretty sure to humor his sweet tooth."

BUY WAR BONDS

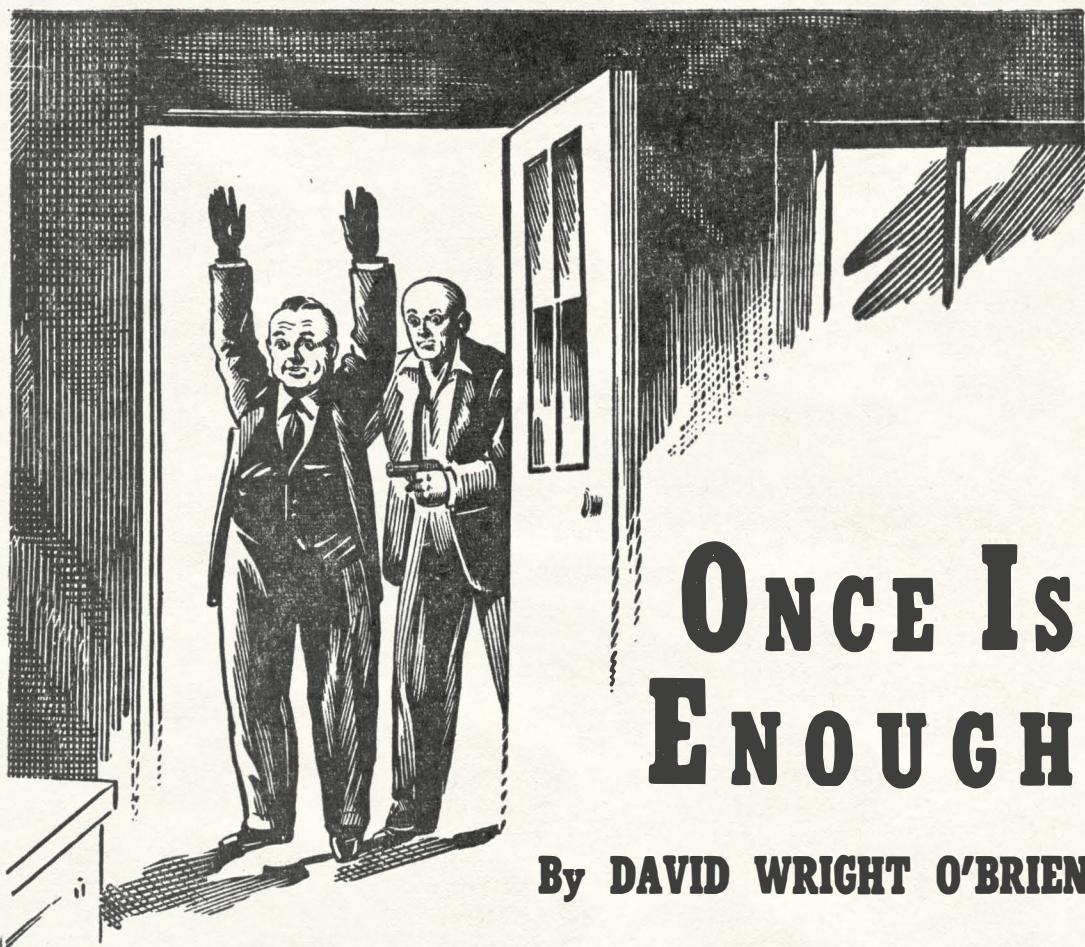
Don't let the cost of this war pile up a huge mountain of debt that will rob your children of a chance to be happy and to live the life that is rightfully theirs!

PAY YOUR OWN WAY TO VICTORY AND PEACE!



The door opened and a man with
hands upraised was shoved in

**What would you think if you
woke up beside a dead man with a
smoking gun in your hand? Just what
the police would think! It happened to Shane**



ONCE IS ENOUGH

By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

AS CONSCIOUSNESS returned to him, Thane fought to push aside the thick curtain of nausea and pain which blanketed his mind. Somewhere in the distance a telephone was ringing with evenly spaced insistence, and Thane tried to struggle to his feet to answer it.

The sickening vortex of blackness was resolving itself into thin wispy fragments of fog, and light stabbed blindingly into Thane's eyes as he opened them.

"A minute . . . jus' minute," Thane mumbled thickly.

He managed somehow to push himself upward on his elbows. The ringing was louder now, and more insistent. Thane shook his head from side to side,

trying to clear the last of the fog wisps from it. Pain lanced molten shafts of agony into his temples and he groaned, clutching tightly to the cool, hard object in his right hand.

The whirlpool of light and pain and sound no longer engulfed his senses, and for the first time he was able to bring things into focus.

The telephone still rang.

"A minute—" Thane began.

And then he saw the gun. It was the cool, hard object he clutched in his right hand. Instinctively his fingers released it, and it thudded softly to the thick brown carpet.

Thane managed to rise, now, even though the effort was measured in cold-sweated sickness. He caught the edge

of a davenport and held fast to it while some degree of balance and strength returned to him.

The ringing of the telephone jarred him again, its clamor not to be denied; and Thane released his grasp on the davenport, taking an unsteady step in the direction of the sound.

He almost stumbled over the body.

Thane's choked horror wheezed in his throat, his eyes dilating with shock and terror.

The body was that of a man. It lay face forward on the thick brown carpet, one arm thrust rigidly forward holding an ironwrought fireplace poker. The tip of the poker was stained, sticky with browning blood.

The telephone had stopped ringing.

Thane's eyes went to the gun he had dropped. It lay less than a yard from the dead man's hand. In the terrible silence that was louder than noise, Thane stared ashenly at the body.

Tearing himself from the hideous fascination for the corpse, Thane looked around the room.

Large, spaciously ceiled, expensively furnished, it was obviously the drawing room of a lavish apartment suite. A wood-burning fireplace in the far center of the room, displaying ashes and charred fragments of birch, snapped Thane's mind back to the blood stained poker in the dead man's hand.

To his right, before another davenport, Thane saw a low, stump-legged cocktail table on which two glasses stood beside a whisky decanter, a siphon bottle and a bowl of ice.

One of the glasses was clean, obviously unused.

THANE closed his eyes, his teeth biting hard into his underlip and his nails digging deep into his palms while he fought for control and some

semblance of reason.

His need for control was desperately urgent. Thane had never before in his life been in this room. He had never, at any time in the past, known this man who now lay dead upon the floor. Thane had utterly no idea of where he was, or how he had gotten there.

Thane opened his eyes and fought away the momentary dizziness that surged through his aching head. Steadying himself again on the arm of the davenport behind him, Thane gingerly touched the swollen wound on the right side of his skull above the ear.

His hand came away sticky with darkened blood and matted strands of his own dark hair. His eyes returned to the stained, sticky tip of the poker in the dead man's hand. With sickening certainty he knew that similar strands of his dark hair were clinging to the bloody end of that poker.

Thane fought back the panic that swelled in his chest. He tore his eyes from the poker and forced himself to stare at the body.

The dead man was dressed in a blue smoking jacket, gray, pin-striped trousers, and slippers. He was about Thane's size and build, perhaps an inch shorter, four pounds lighter — approximately five feet ten inches tall — weighing around a hundred and eighty.

His gray hair indicated that the dead man was from ten to fifteen years older than Thane, however. Somewhere between forty-five and fifty.

Thane forced himself to step up to the body, to bend forward while he gently, very gently, turned the dead man's head to the side.

It was difficult, almost impossible, to tell what he had looked like. Several bullets had shot away a considerable portion of his jaw, and blood smeared the rest of his features. Thane was able to see, however, that the man had a

gray mustache, a straight, aristocratic nose, bushy gray eyebrows. His forehead was surprisingly low and wide.

Thane moved the head back to the position in which it had been lying and straightened up.

Cold sickness came even more strongly to Thane, and his forehead shone with sweat. He turned and stumbled across the room to a window. He threw it open, the effort bringing the cold sweat out in torrents.

Thane leaned out the window and found himself staring down some fifteen stories into a darkened alley below. He began to vomit.

Several minutes later Thane pushed himself back from the window sill. His face was even more ashen than before. But some of the nausea had left him and the green circle around his mouth was gone. He went over to the stump-legged cocktail table, took the clean glass and the decanter, filling the glass with four fingers of whisky.

He gulped this down with a single back snap of his head. He shuddered deeply, then, putting the glass and the decanter back on the table.

The whisky warmed him, steadied him.

The telephone began to ring again.

THANE looked up in the direction of the sound, a hallway at the other end of the drawing room, a hallway several yards beyond the body of the dead man.

The telephone rang four times before Thane reached it. He picked it up from its cradle, put it to his ear. He made his voice a thin mumble.

"Hello," he said.

There was the definite sensation that someone was on the other end of the wire, and yet no voice answered him. After a moment a *click* told him that the other party had hung up.

Thane put the telephone back in the cradle, turned back toward the drawing room, and saw his hat and coat.

They were lying carelessly atop a hall table below a mirror. His pigskin gloves were atop his fedora, the fedora atop his brown polo coat.

Thane looked at them a moment, then went back into the drawing room. He passed the body of the unknown murdered man quickly, not looking down, crossing the strange room to a door at the far right end.

The door was ajar, and Thane pushed it back further, stepping into a small hallway bordered by three other doors, one of which was open.

The open door revealed a washroom. Thane entered it, stepped over to the washbowl, turned on both faucet handles, found some soap, and mechanically began to wash the blood from his hands.

Hands washed, Thane removed his suitcoat, searched it for bloodstains, found none, and removed his vest. His vest was also unstained.

Thane found a towel, opened his collar and inserted it, bib-fashion, to cover his neck and shoulders. Then, with another towel, he began the painful task of washing the wound on his skull.

The wound had stopped bleeding, and Thane cleaned around it, gritting his teeth against the pain. When he had finished he turned the hot water tap on full, rinsing the bowl of blood and dark hair. He rolled the soiled towels in another larger one which was clean. Carrying these, Thane went back into the drawing room.

Thane stopped by the cocktail table, picked up the glass he had used and the decanter, and started to smear what prints there might be on them. Then, in recollection, he turned to the window he had opened.

He cursed then, staring around the room desperately. He put the decanter and glass back on the table. It was no use. He didn't know where his prints might be found. They might be everywhere around the place, and there was no way of being certain.

He started toward the body on the floor, then stopped, cursing again. There was no sense in cleaning the poker, no sense in smearing prints on the gun, for the same reason.

Thane began to tremble. Panic surged again in his breast, and this time there was no denying its command. He was trapped. In a room with a dead man—a man he, Richard Thane, had to all evidence murdered brutally.

Trapped in a room he had never in all his life seen before. Trapped with the body of a man he had no recollection of knowing. His mind reeled and sickness began to flood him again in cold, sweat-washed waves.

Thane was still carrying the rolled towels as he made for the hallway in which he had seen his hat and coat. He left them beside the telephone as he struggled into his coat, picked up his hat and gloves.

They were still beside the telephone as Thane stepped out of the door and into a long, carpeted hallway. . . .

THE time in which Thane left the building had passed in a blur of panic to him. He remembered that there had been an elevator at the far end of the hallway—and he remembered deciding against its use while he stumbled to the other end of the corridor and found the stair exit which had been marked by a red safety bulb above the door.

He had stumbled dazedly down endless flights of stairs, his breath searing his lungs and the cold sweat of panic drenching his clothes. He had thought

at several times that he was about to collapse. And finally there was an exit light on the ground door. Cold air had engulfed him chillingly as he staggered out into an alley, and a thin mist of rain blew into his sweat-streaked face.

Thane had followed the alley, then, and the alley had led him into another until he at last found the courage to step out into a street.

The panic had left him now, to be replaced by a dull, numb horror. The street along which he walked was in a quiet residential section, and, save for an occasional car passing by, was utterly deserted.

Thane heard the streetcars rattling along the tracks, and the hum of a steady, fairly heavy traffic at the sudden termination where the little street joined a boulevard half a block ahead of him. It was only then that Thane began to realize where he was.

The familiar lines of the buildings on the corner ahead, the lamp-lighted precincts of the small park on the far south side of the street, the rattling surface cars half a block beyond that, told Thane—even before he recognized the Newberry Library—that he was approaching Bughouse Square.

He slowed his walk, stopping to peer at his wrist-watch. It was 1:10.

Thane thought suddenly of Lynn.

Lynn was Mrs. Richard Thane, his wife.

"Chow mein—and don't, please don't, forget the eggroll," she had told him. How long ago was that? Thane thought, while the hot lances seared his head. It was ten after one. He had called Lynn from the office at five o'clock that afternoon. Eight hours.

"You can expect me about six-thirty, then," Thane had told her. "I'll call Old Cathay and have them get the stuff ready. I won't forget the egg-roll."

"I'll stir up a nice tall shaker of Martinis," Lynn had promised.

Thane remembered leaving the office. It couldn't have been later than five-fifteen. His office was on LaSalle, directly across from the City Hall and County Building. He had looked for a cab and hadn't been able to get one immediately. He'd walked south to Washington and stood there on the corner trying to signal one. Then he had remembered that he'd forgotten to telephone Old Cathay for the food.

There'd been a small bar, one Thane patronized only infrequently, but a nice enough little place.

He had decided to have a before-Martini-before-dinner Scotch and make his call to Old Cathay from there. Thane tried to remember the place. He couldn't think of its name, although its location and appearance were easily remembered. Nothing pretentious. A bar, with booths and tables in the back and to the side.

Thane had gone into the bar, ordered his Scotch and asked for a slug with his change as he paid for the drink.

THE bartender was an amiable, moon-faced, bald little man, and had pointed out the telephone booth in the back. Thane had tasted his drink, put it down, and gone back to call Old Cathay. He tried, now, to remember what customers were at the bar.

Not more than four or five. Two women and a man at the front end. A couple in one of the rear booths. No one at the far end of the bar where he'd left his drink.

Thane tried desperately to remember the details accurately. There'd been another customer at the bar. He felt certain of that. And yet he couldn't recall it clearly. Suddenly he realized why. The other person hadn't been at the bar until Thane came back from

making his call to Old Cathay.

He took a seat several minutes after Thane had almost finished his Scotch. Took a seat to Thane's right, in front of a glass that Thane hadn't noticed until then.

Thane recalled, now, that he had scarcely noticed the man on his right. He was unable to recall anything of the other's appearance, and realized that he must have looked at him in the unseeing, abstracted fashion in which one commuter glances at another—gathering no impression whatsoever.

Now Thane stopped, standing on the corner. Several cars went by. An army truck passed, followed by a sports roadster. Half a block off, a north-bound Clark Street car rattled noisily-along.

Thane was frowning now, temporarily lost in his effort to recall what had happened in the bar after that.

His memory went no farther.

Thane wiped the rain and sweat from his white, strained face with a gloved hand. He was beginning to tremble again. What had happened after that? What in the name of God had happened?

Eight hours had passed since then. Eight hours—seven and a half, at least—which were an utter blank to him.

Thane dug his hands deep into his pockets, jamming his knuckles roughly down on a package of cigarettes. What had happened in those eight hours?

He had murdered a man.

"No!"

Thane clenched his fists even tighter in his pockets as the word rang desperately in his mind.

"No!"

He had murdered no one. He remembered the gun that had been in his hand when consciousness returned. He remembered the ugly mess the bullets from that gun had made of the mur-

dered man's face. He remembered the poker, with Thane's blood and Thane's hair on the end of it, gripped in the dead man's hand. He remembered all this and pushed it desperately from his mind. He was not a murderer. Richard Thane was not a murderer.

He had to believe that.

CHAPTER II

THANE found an all-night drug store on North Clark Street some five minutes later. He had decided by this time that he had to call Lynn.

The decision hadn't been easy to make. The thought of involving his wife in the terrifying chain of circumstances which had enmeshed him during the past eight hours had been almost more than he could bear to face.

He had realized, however, that the risks of such a call as balanced against the necessity were slight. It had been no more than fifteen or twenty minutes since he had left the apartment and the murdered stranger, Thane estimated, and the chances were strong that the police might not discover the body for some time.

Too, after the discovery of the body, it would be several more hours, perhaps considerably longer, before the evidence leading to Richard Thane—the evidence in the form of prints and other laboratory matter—would be sorted. The prints would be the most damaging evidence, Thane realized, inasmuch as he had been fingerprinted more than a year ago on a passport matter for a short South American trip he'd taken. Sent to Washington by the local police, the prints picked up in the murdered man's apartment would—in a matter of hours—be checked against those on file in the Bureau of Fingerprinting and Identification. By return telegraph the most damning of those prints would be

identified as belonging to Richard Thane.

But until that time, Thane would not be hunted. That gave him temporary freedom. A freedom measured in hours.

Thane asked a busy drug clerk for a slug, reached into his pocket, and realized he had no change. He brought forth his bill fold and was reaching into to find a dollar when he saw the thick, crisp sheaf of bills there.

At the time that he had left his office, over eight hours before, Thane had had something under twenty dollars in his wallet. It was used, crumpled currency, none of it fresh, and had been, he recalled, in denominations of five, ten, and some singles. The five and the ten and one single had not been touched. The other bills had been added to it during those blacked-out hours.

Thane saw the drug clerk staring at him impatiently, flushed, and pulled forth a single, hastily closing his wallet and dropping it into his polo coat pocket.

He took his slug and ninety-five cents change and went to a telephone booth in the rear of the store.

Inside the booth, facing the telephone, his back hiding his inspection, Thane took the wallet from his pocket and counted the crisp notes.

There were twenty-five of them. Each was a hundred dollar bill.

Two thousand five hundred dollars in crisp, fresh banknotes! Thane's hands trembled badly as he put the money back into the wallet and the wallet back into his pocket.

He had to sort through his change twice before he found the slug, and he made two mistakes in dialing the number of his apartment before the call was finally put through.

There was a momentary, far-away crackle in the connection, then the

buzzing began to indicate that the operator was ringing the call.

As the moments passed and the regularly spaced buzzing continued, cold perspiration came again to Thane's forehead. Lynn should have answered almost immediately. There was a telephone in their hallway, right off the living room, if she were sitting up, and another connection beside the bed, if she were sleeping.

The operator broke in after several minutes.

"They do not answer. Shall I keep on ringing?"

THANE put the receiver back on the hook and the slug clanked noisily down into the return slot. Thane opened the door of the telephone booth and stumbled out, almost bumping into a counter displaying alarm clocks and electrical accessories.

He moved through the drug store and stepped out into the street without being aware of the several customers who stared curiously at his ashen-faced, lurching figure. He didn't hear one of them remark:

"He's either hopped up or gin-happy."

Outside the drugstore, Thane turned south, toward the Loop, and started walking. It had stopped raining and the breeze was cold on his face. The noises of Clark Street at night were all around him. People who passed, and drunks who sometimes jostled him, were unnoticed.

Lynn was gone. Lynn wasn't at their apartment. Lynn, wild with anxiety, perhaps, or merely angry at what she might think to be a stand-up resulting from a thoughtlessly impulsive spree, had left the apartment.

But where had she gone? Where would she go under circumstances such as this?

Thane tried desperately to think.

If her anxiety, worry, had been the cause of her leaving the apartment, she would undoubtedly have intended to search for him, to call his friends, perhaps, in an effort, to learn if they had seen him. But she wouldn't, Thane realized, find it necessary to leave the apartment to make telephone checks at the places he might conceivably be.

Thane knew, too, that should the other alternative be the case, should she be angry and certain that he had sallied off to a round of bars with some friends accidentally met, it was more likely that she might leave the apartment. Perhaps, disgusted, she had gone to a friend's home to spend the night. Mentally, he checked a list of Lynn's closest women friends, then decided that it would be completely out of character for her to advertise any domestic strife to her friends by such a move. No. It wasn't likely that she'd spend the night at any one of their apartments.

Of course there were numerous other possibilities. Perhaps some friends of theirs had dropped in at the apartment during the evening. If Lynn had been angry, rather than worried, and the friends had planned to ask the Thanes to go out with them nightclubbing, it seemed reasonable to assume Lynn might—figuring to hell with him—have gone along with the other couple.

It was incredible how many other plausible explanations there were when you started thinking of them. Realizing this—though also realizing that he might be guilty of wishful thinking in regard to such explanations—Thane forced himself back into the somewhat numb composure he had had a few minutes before calling Lynn.

There would be nothing he could do about reaching Lynn now. Nothing whatsoever. He could call again short-

ly, and again after that if it were necessary. For the present, he didn't dare go to the apartment. And, too, for the present, he had to straighten himself out; had to get a grip on his sanity and his stamina. Quickly.

Liquor helped a little.

Three double-Scotches obtained at the next saloon he came to, did much to starch Thane's senses and courage. The whisky warmed him and dulled the ache in his head. He was able to think a little more clearly.

HE WAS steady when he left the place. Much more steady than he had been when he entered. Thane had heard of men being in the state where no amount of alcohol could make them drunk, and until now had always believed such stories to be beyond the realm of physical possibility.

As he stepped out of the saloon he was able to catch a cruising taxi immediately.

"La Salle and Washington," he told the driver.

Settling back, Thane found himself wanting a cigarette for the first time since his return to consciousness in the strange apartment. He pulled out the badly damaged pack and lighted a smoke with hands that trembled surprisingly little.

He had finished half of the cigarette, four minutes later, when the driver stopped at the intersection address Thane had given him.

Thane got out of the cab, paid his fare, and started up the block in the direction of the tavern which, over eight hours before, he had entered under such utterly different circumstances. . . .

THE place was named *The Idle Moment*, Thane observed from the window sign. He entered the tavern,

and noise, laughter, shrill voices in conversation and the music of a juke box playing *Black Magic* swelled around Thane as he stepped through the door.

For a moment Thane stood there impervious to the babble and confusion, his eyes searching the other side of the bar until he found the moon-faced, amiable little bald man who had been the only bartender on duty that afternoon.

The moon-faced little barkeep had his post at the far end, and Thane moved along the bar toward him, searching for an empty bar stool.

Several stools were vacant down there, and Thane moved onto one. A blonde to his left giggled and winked at him.

"Hello, big-boy," she smirked.

Thane ignored her; and then the moon-faced little barkeep was coming up to him, his face professionally bland.

"What'll you have, sir?" he asked.

Thane placed a five dollar bill on the bar, and forced a grin.

"Something a little easier on me than what I had early this afternoon," he said.

Sudden recognition came into the bartender's eyes.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "You're the fella who took sick so sudden this afternoon! How you feeling now? What was the matter?"

There was nothing in the bartender's voice, Thane decided, but genuine surprise and interest.

"I'm feeling much better," Thane said.

"Lucky thing your friend happened to be on hand," the barkeep said.

Thane's heart skipped a beat.

"My friend?" he asked casually.

The bartender looked puzzled.

"Sure. Didn't he take you home? He took you out of here."

Thane forced himself to grin ruefully.

"I wondered how I made it to a cab

and got home," he said. "You know, I haven't the faintest recollection of leaving here. In fact, I didn't know a friend of mine was here. Did he come in after I got woozy?"

The bartender grinned, scratching his bald head. "Come to think of it, now, he was sitting in the dark in a back booth when you came in. Then, when you went to make a call, he came out of the booth and brought his glass to the bar with him. Took the stool next to yours."

"Yes?" Thane said. "That's interesting. I wonder if it could have been—" He hesitated, then added, "But go on."

The barkeep rubbed his bald head again, reflectively. "I think he just put his glass on the bar. Anyway, when I saw him a minute later, he'd turned away and was starting toward the back. I thought he was gonna knock on the door of the phone booth to get your attention, but I guess he went to the washroom instead. You came out of the phone booth a minute later and sat down and started to finish off your drink. I remember I started polishing some glasses, and the next thing I know you're sick as a dog and almost out cold. This guy has come back and is standing beside you, helping you to get off the barstool."

Thane's heart was pounding rapidly in excitement. He fought to keep his features composed, to keep his voice from shaking as he asked:

"Did he say anything?"

The barkeep nodded. "Yeah," he rubbed his chin. "Yeah, he said—"

"Hey! You gonna gas all night, or are you gonna wait on customers?" a shrill voice on the left rasped.

Thane and the barkeep turned to see the blonde pounding her empty glass on the bar while she and her escort glared angrily.

"Okay, okay," the barkeep said wearily. "What'll you have—the same?"

He nodded apologetically to Thane. "Just a minute," he said.

THANE'S nails bit into his palms as

he clenched his fists in rage. But he kept his expression drained of any emotion, forced himself to light a cigarette from the glowing stub of the one he'd been smoking.

It was an effort to hold his mind in rein. His thoughts galloped in every direction, wildly stampeding at this first, tangible information that had come his way. He had been drugged. Drugged obviously by something placed in his drink when he was in the booth, telephoning.

The man who had drugged him had slipped the stuff into the drink while Thane was in the telephone booth, left his own glass near Thane's, and gone to the washroom until he heard Thane emerge from the booth. Then he'd waited long enough for Thane to drink enough from his glass to start the gogginess. He had returned to the bar just as Thane was near collapse, with the intention—which obviously had worked—to get him out of the place under the guise of a good samaritan.

Thane steadied his suddenly trembling hands against the bar. It was obvious, utterly obvious, that the man the barkeep was telling him about was the same one who had arranged the incredibly fantastic murder frame-up in that luxurious apartment.

The same hands that had helped Thane from the barstool and out into the street, were undoubtedly the same hands that had slain the mysterious man in the strange apartment. The same hands that went to work, then, in a cunning and incomprehensible motivation designed to start Thane on his

way to the electric chair for murder.

The moon-faced barkeep returned to Thane now.

"Those damned broads," he grumbled, "are enough to make a guy get outta this—"

Thane nodded impatiently.

"You were just about to tell me what my friend said as he started to help me out," Thane prompted.

"Oh. Yeah, that's right," the barkeep said. "Like I was telling you—you was almost out cold. This friend of yours says you musta been sopping it up all day, and I said that was funny, since you didn't show it none when you came in. He says you never show it until you get sick and start to pass out. Anyway, he's a friend of yours, like he tells me, and he oughtta know, I figure. He helped you out the door, his arm around your waist. You wasn't walking so wobbly, but your eyes was sure glassy. I guess, then, he put you inna cab, like you say."

"He didn't come back into the tavern?" Thane asked, though he knew what the answer would be.

The barkeep shook his head. "No. That's how I figured he took you all ways home."

Thane nodded. "That's certainly funny as hell. I don't remember anything until the cab pulled up in front of my house. I came around enough to get out and get upstairs. I wonder who my friend was? Maybe it was—say, what did he look like?"

The bartender rubbed his bald head, irritatingly deliberate. He frowned, pursing his lips and cocking his head. Then he glanced at Thane.

Thane went through a hideous eternity of suspense in those brief seconds. Supposing the description proved to be that of a friend of his, actually? Supposing, as he suspected it would, it would prove to be that of someone ut-

terly unknown to him? In either event, Thane felt grimly positive that it would be the description of the person who, through cunning, mysterious malevolence, had determined to frame him for the murder of an utter stranger.

"Well?" Thane demanded.

"S'funny," said the barkeep. "Best way I could describe your friend would be to say he was about your size, maybe an inch or so shorter. About your weight, too. Yeah, a build pretty much like your own. He had gray hair, though, and he had a gray moustache, and, oh, yeah, a nose real straight and, ah, dignified looking."

Thane stared speechlessly at the moon-faced little barkeep. He felt a fresh wave of sickness and bewilderment and fear sweeping over his brain and body. The man the barkeep had described was undoubtedly the murdered stranger in the swank apartment; the stranger who'd been slain by the gun Thane had found in his hand; the stranger who'd held in his death-frozen grasp, a poker sticky with Thane's own blood!

CHAPTER III

IT WAS fully a minute before Thane realized the barkeep was staring at him curiously.

"Whatsa matter?" the bartender asked, misinterpreting the expression on Thane's face. "Was the guy I just mentioned your boss, or something?"

Thane forced a smile.

"No," he said quickly. "No. Nothing like that. He was just a very old friend I haven't seen for a number of years, that's all."

"Well, can you beat that?" the barkeep observed with rare philosophy. "It's certainly a small world, ain't it?"

"It most certainly is," Thane agreed. "Supposing we have a drink on it."

The barkeep shook his head solemnly. "Gave the stuff up twenty years ago, thanks. Poison. Take a cigar, though."

"All right," Thane said automatically, "and bring me a double Scotch. You can skip the wash."

Four minutes later Thane left the tavern. On the sidewalk, he hesitated. The rain had started again, more heavily than before. He turned up his collar, found his cigarettes, lighted a smoke. Then he started east along Washington.

At State Street, Thane turned north, after crossing the street, and at Randolph went into the big Walgreen's on the corner there. He got a slug from the cashier at the cigar counter, rode the escalator down to the basement, and found a vacant telephone booth.

Inside, he hesitated for a moment, unconsciously holding his breath, before putting the slug in the slot. Supposing she still was not at home? He glanced at his watch. Five minutes after two.

He dialed his number rapidly.

The waiting was again an eternity of suspense. And again, when the established interval of buzzing had passed, the operator broke in to ask him if he wanted her to keep on ringing. Thane hung up wearily.

Where could she be? He was much more worried than before. Suppose something had happened to her. Suppose she had, somehow, been involved in this terrible thing by the same maliciously cunning forces that had involved him.

The thought had been with Thane all along, ever since Lynn came to his mind. This was the first time that he had permitted himself to consider it.

Supposing Lynn were, at this moment, involved in the terror and trouble he faced.

The supposition called for considerably more rational consideration than Thane had given it. But Lynn was involved, not he, in its hideous potentialities. He could no longer be rational.

In front of Walgreen's, Thane hailed a cab. He gave the driver his apartment address, nervously lighted a cigarette, and sat there on the edge of the leather upholstered seat, staring unseeing out the window during the journey.

The apartment in which Thane lived was a four room affair in a towering building on North State Parkway. He had the driver drop him off half a block from the address—on a sudden change of mind—and, on leaving the cab, started down an alley which would take him around to the rear of the building.

He was able to gain entrance through the back freight door which was left open until three-thirty every morning for the convenience of those residents of the building who parked their cars in garages along the alley.

He didn't have to pass the night clerk at the switchboard, this way, and the night porter was—as Thane had known he would be—conveniently asleep.

THANE used the freight elevator to reach the fifth floor where he and Lynn had their apartment.

There were a dozen apartments similar in size and floor plan on the fifth, and Thane's was at the end of the corridor, facing the street front and the lake considerably beyond.

Thane encountered no one going through the corridor. He was able to let himself into the apartment without being seen.

The place was in darkness, and Thane closed the door softly behind him and waited, holding his breath and

listening for full half a minute before he reached for the light-switch that illuminated the small front hallway of the apartment.

Thane blinked in the light and waited for another half minute with his hand on the switch. Then he went into the living room.

The light from the hallway streamed past Thane into the living-room, giving it a gray, ghostly visibility. His eyes moved slowly across it, from the windows to the bookcases to the right of them, the easy chair, phonograph-radio, davenport, tables, desk, other chairs, the lamp—until suddenly the sight of these familiar things blurred in the mist that came to his eyes. They were the first tangible evidences of the sane, normal, happy life that had been his but hours before. They were, each of them in its small way, integral pieces of a life that was suddenly shattered in an explosive horror of blood and terror and murder.

Thane stepped across the room and turned on the lamp behind the easy chair. Then he saw the book, lying face downward to keep the place in it, beside the chair.

A book Lynn had been reading.

He looked at the ashtray on the low table beside the chair. It was heaped with cigarette butts, the ends of which were stained with Lynn's lipstick.

Thane turned away, went into the dining room, past the buffet, past the small cocktail bar, pushed through a door into the kitchen. He snapped on the kitchen light.

On the sink stood a cocktail shaker with a silver bar spoon in it. Thane went over to it. It was only three quarters full, and the Martini in it was warm, stale. A single cocktail glass stood beside the shaker. It was sticky, and there was half a Martini still in it.

He remembered Lynn's voice on the

telephone that afternoon.

"I'll stir up a nice tall shaker of Martinis," she had said.

Thane turned off the kitchen light and went back into the living room. He stood there a moment, looking around uncertainly, until his eyes stopped at the desk in the corner, and he knew what he had subconsciously been seeking.

Perhaps Lynn had left a note.

Almost always, even when angry, Lynn would leave a note if she went out somewhere.

Thane could see from where he stood, however, that there was no note on the desk.

Mechanically, not aware that he was doing so, Thane found his cigarettes and lighted a smoke.

He stood there motionless a minute more, then turned and started for the bedroom off the hallway.

He didn't turn on the overhead light as he entered the bedroom; he reached for the cord of one of the lamps on Lynn's dressing table.

The scent of Lynn's perfumes made him swallow hard against the sudden lump in his throat. He looked around the bedroom.

The bed had not been slept in.

Lynn's red mules lay in a corner by her boudoir chair, a housecoat was thrown carelessly across the back of the same chair. Thane's eyes went to the night table beside the bed. There might be a message on the pad beside the telephone.

There wasn't.

He thought to look in the closet then—and found what he was dreading.

Lynn's overnight case was gone.

SO, HE realized an instant later on looking through her dresses, were five or six of her favorite gowns. Thane stepped over to her dresser and opened

the drawers methodically. Her lingerie, so carefully folded and neatly arranged as it generally was, was disordered and much of it gone. So were her stockings, handkerchiefs.

Thane closed the last drawer and stepped over to Lynn's boudoir table. He opened the jewelry case atop it, saw that some of her clips, rings, and necklaces were gone.

He took off his hat, then, tossing it wearily, carelessly, onto the bed. He walked over to the bed and sat down, head in hands. Minutes passed, and he noticed his cigarette long enough to straighten up and crush it out in an ash tray on the night-table.

Again, he put his head in his hands and closed his eyes wearily against the ache and the nausea and the horror that swirled fog-like around his mind.

He didn't know what he was going to do. He didn't know where he was going to go. He was too sick, too tired, really to care.

In the silence Thane was able to hear the ticking of the clock on the mantel above the living room fireplace. Against the raw, red abrasions of his mind the ticking was a cruelly malignant physical force—like water dropping rhythmically, ceaselessly on the forehead.

Thane put his hands against his ears and the sound of the ticking stopped, but the rhythm continued achingly in his head.

He rose, reaching for his hat behind him, and as he turned around he saw the glitter of the gun.

It was on the floor in a corner of the closet, shining dully, evilly, mockingly.

Slowly, as if hypnotized by the beckoning glitter of the weapon, Thane crossed to the closet and picked it up, holding it in his hand, staring at it in stunned horror.

It was the same gun he had left be-

hind him in the apartment of the murdered man; the same gun he had found in his hand when he'd regained consciousness a few hours before!

Thane placed the gun atop his own dresser, and turned back to the closet. He dropped to his hands and knees and began a swift, frantic search of the closet floor. Then he rose, and began to go through the pockets of his clothing on the closet hangers.

He stepped back from the closet, face drained of any emotion, eyes curiously hard. Then he turned, left the bedroom, crossing the hall to the bathroom.

Thane went through the linen hamper swiftly, and found what he was seeking at the bottom.

He brought it forth—a roll of towels—and removed the clean towel covering the roll. The towels beneath were stained with blood.

Thane frowned momentarily, and then recalled where he had left this roll of bloodstained towels. He had left it beside the telephone in the hallway of the apartment where the murdered man lay.

HE PUT the clean towel back around the bloodstained ones, rolled them all up again, and carried them with him back to the bedroom.

Thane put the roll on the dresser, beside the gun, and picked up the weapon.

He removed the magazine clip from the gun, breaking the remaining bullets out into his hand. Two shots had been fired from the weapon.

Undoubtedly the same shots that had slain the man he'd left back in the strange apartment. Thane put the magazine clip back in the automatic, then dropped the gun into his pocket.

He stepped through the door and went back into the living-room. He rummaged through the drawers of his

desk there, not finding what he sought. He frowned for an instant, then on impulse went back to the dresser in the bedroom.

In the handkerchief box atop his dresser he found the cartridges for the gun. A box of them, full save for the bullets in the gun and the two that had been fired from it.

Thane wondered what else had been planted in his apartment. He reached into his pocket for his cigarettes, brought out an empty pack and tossed it to the floor. He found an unbroken pack of Lynn's brand—Luckies—on the cocktail table. He opened this, tapped out a cigarette, lighted it, and sat down on the davenport.

The change hadn't come over Thane consciously. It hadn't been as sharply defined as stepping from darkness into light. But it had occurred, he realized, when his eyes had first encountered the gun on the floor of the closet.

Yes, the sight of that weapon had done it. With whip-like suddenness it had brought him around—much like a sudden, stinging slap will bring a person back from wild hysteria to sanity.

As Thane's eyes had encountered that gun he hadn't had to reason. It was all there before his mind with crystal clarity. And in that split-second the symbolism and grim significance of the weapon's presence had served as the stinging slap which drove away his terror, his sick bewilderment.

In less time than it would take to deliver an actual physical blow, that gun on the closet floor had brought to Thane the flaming fury of a man beaten, frightened, mercilessly mauled, and suddenly unable and unwilling to stand any more of it. The rage that had flooded him on seeing the symbol of what was being done to him had been swift, cold—an icy torrent of hatred

frozen by grim determination.

Fear and sickness had drained from him in that instant. And the sharp frigidity of unimpassioned rage had taken control. The presence of that gun had explained the absence of Lynn. They had taken Lynn—there was no doubt of it in Thane's mind as he saw that weapon on the closet floor.

And in touching Lynn they had snapped something in the soul of Richard Thane—had transformed him from a beaten, cringing quarry into an adversary whose veins held the chill savagery of crimson hatred.

Thane was aware of this newborn determination, and of the sudden clarity of purpose and reason which had come to him in the swift transition. He found himself realizing that he was utterly alien to the Richard Thane who had entered this apartment but minutes before.

He felt the torrent of hatred coursing through him, and understood that, somehow, it was a hatred beyond anything his emotions had ever experienced. A hatred that washed its crimson flood through his body yet cleaned and steeled his thinking. It was a drug, more than an emotion. It gave him strength and courage and washed away sickness and fear.

Thane looked at his hands. They were calm, strong—taut, perhaps, with the rage that steeled them—but utterly unshaken.

He rose from the davenport, crushed out the cigarette, put the package of Luckies into his pocket. Then he went into the bedroom. He picked up the cartridge box from the handkerchief box and dropped it into his pocket beside the gun there.

Picking up the roll of towels, Thane carried it back through the living room, the dining room, and into the kitchen. He dropped it down the incinerator.

The telephone began to ring as he was going back through the dining room.

His features registered no emotion. His stride neither faltered nor quickened as he went to the hall to answer.

CHAPTER IV

THANE picked up the receiver and stood there with it to his ear. He didn't say anything.

The silence was electric. Then a voice on the other end of the wire said: "Who is this?"

It was a man's voice, although it was tenor, bordering on the feminine. Thane wondered, for the flicker of an instant, if it was a crude imitation of a woman's voice. Then he decided not.

"Who is this?" the voice repeated again. There was no change in its intonations, confirming Thane's decision that it was not an attempt at impersonation.

"This is Richard Thane," he said after a moment. "Who in the hell am I talking to?"

"That is not important," the high tenor voice answered. "What is important is that I can help you. You are in serious trouble, Thane. You would be wise not to refuse assistance."

Thane said nothing to this, although the speaker had paused, as if expecting Thane to say something.

"Do you understand me, Thane?" asked the voice.

"I'm listening to you," Thane said. "You had better," declared the voice. "If you are willing to follow instructions, you might be saved from the electric chair. Look in your pocket for your card case, Thane."

The voice paused, and Thane reached into his inner suitcoat pocket. His card case, which he invariably carried there, was gone.

"The case is in the apartment of the man you murdered," the voice resumed.

Thane broke in. "Why didn't you bring it along to my apartment as long as you remembered the gun and the towels?"

"It seemed reasonable to leave the disposal of those items to you, Thane," said the voice. "As soon as you begin to attempt such a disposal you will undoubtedly realize how difficult they are to get rid of. And, of course, it seemed reasonable to give you some concrete evidence of the fact that arrangements could be made to save you from execution."

"I interpreted the gesture in that light," Thane said coldly. "All right. I understand the spot I'm in. Get on with it."

"It has been decided that only by your leaving town for a few days would it be possible to eliminate the circumstances which make your position so difficult at present."

"You mean, of course, go into hiding," Thane said.

"Not exactly," said the voice. "You wouldn't be hiding, unless the police were to connect you with the crime. If you were to leave town as I suggest, and under the circumstances I state, it might be possible to erase your connection with the murder completely."

"What do you mean by the circumstances you state?"

"Circumstances such as your time of departure, your destination, and so forth," the voice said.

"I'm to agree to those circumstances such as you suggest?"

"Really, Thane, it seems hardly likely that you are in a position to disagree with anything I might suggest. Incidentally, you must realize that you have been followed ever since you left the apartment of the man you murdered."

THANE'S silence was an exclamation.

"Don't let it make you jittery," the voice resumed. "It was not by the police, of course."

Thane's lips were taut as he said:

"We were discussing the trip planned for me."

"So we were," the voice agreed imperturbably. "You have undoubtedly noticed the excess of currency in your wallet. You are to use it for transportation expenses, some thirty-five dollars of it, that is. The rest is sort of a preliminary bonus. It was placed in your wallet to make you aware of another fact."

"And what was that?"

"Simply that, in addition to being willing to help you clear yourself of the murder, it can be arranged for you to find financial assistance in an almost unlimited measure."

"And what conditions go with additional cash donations?" Thane asked.

"A certain number of specific conditions. But they are of no importance now. They can be discussed later, in a more leisurely fashion. Let us get back to your train schedule."

"Train schedule?"

"You are to leave from the Northwestern depot, tonight—or, I should say, this morning—at five o'clock. That is less than three hours from now, so please get your instructions straight. You will go to the depot at twenty minutes to five. You will purchase a round trip ticket to Woodburn. From ten minutes to five until five o'clock, you will be seated on a waiting bench at the east end of the depot, near the soda fountain. At five, go to your coach on the train—it leaves at six minutes after the hour. Do you have that straight?"

In a tight, steady voice Thane repeated the instructions to that point.

"Good. Your train will arrive at

Woodburn—it's in Wisconsin, in case I forgot to tell you—at four o'clock in the afternoon. Take a room at the Woodburn Hotel—it's the only one in town—and stay in your room until further instructions are given you."

"How will they be given?"

"That is incidental," the voice declared. "You will follow those instructions when they arrive—that's all that matters now. Is everything quite clear?"

"Yes," said Thane. "What about my wife?"

"She is alive," the voice said casually.

"She had better be," Thane answered tonelessly.

The *click* on the other end of the wire told him the conversation was ended. Slowly, Thane put the telephone back in the cradle. He walked back into the living room, removed his overcoat, tossed it on the davenport.

He found the package of Luckies in the coat on the couch, took one, put the pack into his suitcoat pocket, and lighted his smoke with the silver Ronson on the cocktail table.

Thane glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes to three. He sat there smoking, his eyes half closed, his expression a stolid mask of rage.

After a moment he loosened his collar and removed his tie. He stood up, shrugging out of his suitcoat, then his best. He walked into the bathroom, still smoking, and began to remove his shirt. . . .

WHEN Thane stepped out of the icily stinging shower, he dried himself vigorously with a vast turkish towel, wrapped it around his waist, and opened the medicine cabinet.

He snapped on the tube lighting fixture above the mirror a moment later and went to work cauterizing the wound in his scalp with alcohol and iodine.

He found some tape and gauze bandaging and cut them to fit the wound. Then he combed his hair carefully.

When Thane finished shaving he went into the bedroom where he found a fresh change of linen and selected another suit. He lighted another cigarette as he finished dressing.

In the kitchen, a few minutes later, Thane broke the seal on a bottle of MacNiesh he'd taken from the small cocktail bar in the dining-room. He got ice from the refrigerator and a glass from the cupboard over the sink and turned on the cold water faucet.

Holding the glass up to the light, Thane dropped an ice cube in it and drowned the cube under half a glass of Scotch. He held the glass under the water spigot and let it fill to the top.

Then he went back to the living room and walked over to the window, glass in hand. He parted the curtains and peered down into the street five floors below.

A car was parked directly across the street from the apartment building and several more were parked on the west side of the street, but three or four buildings down. In one of those cars, Thane felt certain, was the person or persons who had followed him from the scene of the murder until he at last returned here.

Thane could see no one on the sidewalks, though it would be possible, he realized, for the building to be watched from the shadow of any doorway within range.

He let the curtain drop back in place and went over to the davenport and sat down.

His watch showed that it was a quarter after four, and abruptly Thane finished his drink and stood up. He crushed out his cigarette on the glass top of the cocktail table and picked up his polo coat from the couch.

When he had donned his hat and coat, Thane took the automatic from his pocket, removed the magazine clip, emptied the cartridges from it, and dropped them under the cushions of the davenport. Then he brought forth the cartridge box, reloaded the gun completely, snapped the clip back into the weapon, and put the box of cartridges and the gun back in his pocket.

Before he left the living room he paused a moment, looked around, then walked into the hallway. When Thane closed the door of his apartment behind him all the lights were burning as he had left them.

Thane took the regular self-operation passenger elevator down to the lobby.

As he passed the switchboard and desk, the bespectacled, pallid, thin-faced young divinity student who served as night clerk looked up from a theological text and nodded.

"Up early, Mr. Thane," he observed, eyes and expression curious.

"Or out late," Thane answered. He pushed through the double doors and stepped out into the street. The rain had stopped again, and the streets were fresh, black and damp under the lights.

Thane stopped at the sidewalk deliberately, fishing for a smoke as he stared at the car parked directly across the street. By the time he had lighted his cigarette he was certain that there was no one in the car.

HE TURNED right, then, and walked the block and a half down to Division without pausing to look back over his shoulder. As he had known there would be, several cabs were parked in front of an all night sandwich shop on the corner of Division and State.

Thane crossed the street and climbed into the first of these cabs. A moment

later the driver—who had been talking to the cabbie in the taxi behind his own—came around, hopped in behind the wheel, and said:

“Where to?”

Thane told him the Northwestern depot.

The driver was talkative at first, and somewhat insistent on giving Thane the inside track on allied military strategy as he saw it, but after a few blocks with only automatic grunts for reply, he lapsed into silence.

They went over to La Salle, then south across the bridge, and west again, following Wacker Drive to the turn that took them up to the east entrance of the depot.

Thane got out and gave the driver a dollar bill and a quarter. A tired red-cap slouched forward, saw Thane had no luggage, and went back to his argument with an equally tired baggage-man.

Thane pushed through the doors and into the depot.

Save for a group of some seventy soldiers in a far corner of the waiting room, the vast first floor of the depot was virtually deserted. Thane went over to the ticket wickets and purchased a round trip to Woodburn, Wisconsin.

“Train leaves at five-oh-six,” said the man behind the grille.

Thane nodded, put the envelope with his ticket inside his pocket, and walked over to the steps leading to the second floor past the train gate section.

The depot clock on the south wall of the second floor read eleven minutes to five. Thane turned left and walked down to the sector of waiting benches at the extreme east end of the room.

He passed a group of men in overalls, obviously farming people; several synthetic blondes overly dressed and overly painted who stared openly at

him, snapping their gum as they chewed it; a sailor stretched full length on a bench, head on his ditty bag, sleeping; and a fat Mexican woman who stared dully at a brown-skinned child wrapped in blankets on her lap.

He wondered vaguely which of them were waiting for the same train as he.

He took a seat on a deserted bench facing the corridor which joined the smoke-stained old depot with the ultra-modern Daily News Plaza building, picked up a copy of the *Herald American* which had been left there, and pretended to read the headlines.

Thane wondered if one of the four people sitting with their backs to him at the soda fountain just to the left of the corridor was the person assigned to check on his obedience to instructions.

Over the top of the paper he tried to decide this by staring intently at their backs.

He realized that, from their vantage points on the stool before the counter, any one of them, by means of the long mirror behind the counter, could watch him intently without revealing identity.

ONE of the persons on the stools—they were all men—rose, paid his check, and turned around, starting in Thane's direction. He was a short, stumpy man with a ponderous paunch. He wore a dark blue overcoat with a chesterfield collar, and a Homburg sat jauntily on one side of his fat head.

Thane lowered his paper and stared openly as the fat man approached him.

The fat man, seemingly unaware of Thane's appraisal, busily picked his teeth with his thumb nail, regarding the nail disappointedly each time he removed it from his mouth. He was still engaged in this absorbing occupation as he waddled past Thane.

Thane relaxed after, following him

with his eyes, he saw the fat man start down the steps in the center of the depot toward the first floor.

Thane put aside the paper and the pretense of reading it. He lighted a cigarette and continued to stare at the three men who remained on the stools at the soda counter.

Behind him the Mexican woman's baby woke and began to cry. Thane looked at his watch as the woman's voice began to soothe the child in her foreign tongue.

It was four minutes until five o'clock.

The Mexican baby had been silenced by some swift magic, and the drone of the conversation of the farmers came to Thane's ears.

One of the three remaining at the counter climbed off his stool and paid his check. The cash register rang, and the man turned around, stretching elaborately.

He was medium-sized, thin, and wearing a black overcoat which revealed brass buttons on his suitcoat as it fell open. The man held a uniform cap in his right hand, and Thane identified him as a brakeman or conductor.

He paid no attention to Thane as he sauntered by.

Thane looked again at his watch. One minute to five. He dropped his cigarette to the marble floor, crushing it out with his toe. He stood up, looking casually around.

Certain though he was that he was being watched, Thane found it impossible to tell from where or by whom. The fountain in front of him had, by its location and the explicit instructions that he sit in proximity to it, seemed like the most logical vantage point for his watcher.

Thane stared for a moment at the two men who remained at the counter. One of them was engaged in conversation with the night attendant who was

changing the coffee cisterns. The other was reading a paper. It was impossible to tell if either of them was the man assigned to watch him.

THANE turned away and started toward the staircase in the center of the room. Ten or twelve yards on, he stopped and turned.

The man who had been reading the newspaper had climbed off his stool and was opening his overcoat to get to his wallet. His back was still to Thane.

Thane was fully a hundred and fifty feet from the counter, but when the man turned to face him, there was something in the faintly distinguishable lines of his features and his general physical appearance that seemed vaguely familiar.

Thane sensed, rather than knew, that the fellow had seen him staring at him. At any rate, the man turned around—so casually as to be completely unsuspicious—and said a few words to the man who remained on the stool.

Frowning, Thane weighed the advisability of going back, of walking up to the counter and confronting the chap openly. Then he decided against it, turned away, and continued toward the staircase. The chances were a hundred to one in Thane's favor that the fellow would be on the train with him when it left the depot, he realized, and the tedious journey to Woodburn would give him plenty of opportunity to carry out whatever course of action he deemed best in regard to his watcher.

In the track gate section a gateman was calling out an endless string of small Wisconsin towns.

"On traaaaak sevvvun!" he concluded.

It was five o'clock.

Thane presented his ticket at the gate to Track Seven and was passed through. The Mexican woman with the

baby was up ahead of him, a cord-bound, splitting suitcase under one arm and the baby under the other. She waddled frantically, as if the hissing steam of the engine far ahead indicated immediate departure.

Thane frowned as he walked along the line of coaches—the Woodburn car was far up in front—and tried desperately to recall what had struck him as familiar about the appearance of the man with the newspaper at the soda fountain.

He had seen him but briefly—and from a considerable distance, of course. But there had been something—something—Thane tried to recall what it was, then temporarily abandoned the effort. He walked on toward his coach.

Thane was staring out the window and the train was starting to move when the explanation for the familiarity of the man with the newspaper clicked into place.

Thane's features went rigid, then white, and his hand clutched convulsively at the arm of his chair. It was incredible—utterly impossible!

Nevertheless Thane was numbly convinced of it. The chap's size, girth; his amiable bland moon face below his hat brim; his round button nose with the aggressively outthrust jaw below!

The man with the newspaper was the same man Thane had talked to several hours ago at the Idle Moment Tavern; the same pleasantly informative bartender who had so innocently related what he had seen occur between Thane and the murdered man. The train was clearing the station, now, and gaining speed.

It was seven minutes after five . . .

CHAPTER V

THE train to Woodburn moved as reluctantly toward that destination

as a child on the way to school. The stops along the route were innumerable; the delays at some of the stops, minor eternities.

Thane had traveled the length of the train twice within the first half hour of the journey. His inspection had failed to reveal any sign of the moon-faced, amiable, yet paradoxically mysterious little bartender.

Had his state of mind held anything other than the cold, unshakable hatred that it did, Thane might well have written the incident in the depot off as optical imagining prompted by hysteria.

But he had captured that fleeting glimpse of the man with the newspaper. Captured and held it in his mind while it was still fresh, until it was at last an indelible sketch in his memory. A sketch he could view and analyze and view again so that there was no longer any doubt of what he had actually seen.

It was almost impossible to link the blond little man to the hideous recollection of his discovery of the body in the strange apartment.

And yet such a link was now established by cold fact.

Thane had been utterly certain, in his conversation with the barkeep, that the amiable, though stupid, little man had been telling nothing but the truth.

The presence of the barkeep in the station, of course, washed away the belief Thane had had in the fellow's story. More sinister than that, it introduced the barkeep as the first identifiable figure in the hideous conspiracy against Thane.

It was impossible, of course, to imagine what role the barkeep was playing in the drama. Thane suspected even though realizing that he might be still guilty of underestimating the moon-faced fellow, that the barkeep was working as an underling for keener and more malicious superiors.

And yet the chap had seemed so open-faced, honest, genuinely unconcerned in his conversation with Thane.

There was no possibility of relating either fact, Thane knew. And to accept one would be to discard others. Nevertheless, each fact stood solidly by itself and only when linked did either seem utterly, maddeningly more tangled.

Thane had ended his second inspection of the train cars in the smoking room, and it was there, burning cigarettes one from the other, that he tried to bring reason to the madness.

Eventually he turned his mind to other and less impossible facets of the enigma, trying to establish conclusions from factors which—if considerably more cloudy—were at least in the realm of more tangible conjecture.

He tried once to paint an imaginary picture—by using the most reasonable processes of elimination—of the manner in which he had been shanghaied after having been drugged in the tavern on Washington.

He doubted if a cab had been used. The chance of getting one immediately was not always certain, and such a delay might have proved risky to his abductor.

It occurred to Thane, then, that his stopping in at the little tavern, as he had done, had been purely by accident, an impulse of the moment.

The person who had slipped the drug into his drink could have had no way of knowing that he would stop in there, or that he would stop anywhere—for that matter—before going home.

THANE paused in his reflections to wonder what the barkeep's part in the conspiracy had been. He wondered, too, if the murdered man had actually been in the bar under the circumstances the bartender had related. Perhaps the

barkeep had put the drug in his drink, perhaps not. But Thane was certain that the moon-faced fellow had been an accomplice, if not the perpetrator of the drugging.

But, at the moment, the question of who had drugged him was not as important as why he had been drugged and how his accidental entrance had fitted in so perfectly with the timing of the person who had accomplished the fact.

The pattern at that point of the enigma seemed to be based utterly on happenstance. Thane frowned, certain that this was not the case at all. The rest of the pattern was too coldly planned to be based on such a shaky beginning.

Some mind, or minds, had cunningly, maliciously planned a murder for a certain time on a certain night. The same mind or minds had also planned to find a stooge for the purpose of framing the murder on him within an hour or so of the actual time of the crime. He, Richard Thane, had been selected for the frame-up, and the scheme had gone through without a hitch.

But why he?

Because of a momentary impulse which turned his steps into a small, apparently respectable tavern he had visited less than six times before in the past year? Because he had just blundered into the path of the person seeking a fall guy for a frame-up?

The supposition did not fit the other details surrounding the enigma, particularly the details based on the high, tenor voice which had spoken to Thane over the telephone.

Everything about that conversation had indicated that the police did not yet know, and would probably never know, about the murder of the gray-moustached man in the strange apart-

ment. The threat held over Thane's head by the mysterious, almost effeminate voice on the phone, had been the disclosure to the police of the murder for which he had been so damningly framed.

Thane realized, from the import of the conversation, that the speaker had been almost certain it would not be necessary to use the threat of exposure to the police as anything more than just a threat. He had taken it for granted that Thane would comply to the demands made of him, rather than face a murder charge which had been made air-tight against him.

This, then, placed the emphasis more on the frame-up as a weapon, than as a cunning scheme to shove guilt into another's hands. Whoever had slain the man with the gray moustache had seemingly been brazenly certain of his ability to keep the crime from the eyes of the police. Thus, the only motivation for framing the crime on another would appear to be to secure a throttling grip of blackmail to be used with a purpose.

Thane frowned deeply again, some of the stolidity of his expression leaving briefly in the grim business of concentration.

For what purpose would anyone blackmail Richard Thane, a young, none too important, specialist in international legal contract matters?

Money was immediately eliminated. Thane had a comfortable income, but nothing that would appeal to a blackmailer. Too, the twenty-five hundred dollars that had been placed in his wallet led in the opposite direction from such a conclusion. Blackmailers seeking money don't stuff their victim's wallet with it.

That money in his wallet had been placed there to add to the forceful demands that would be pressed upon him. The safety of his wife had been the

crowning point in the pressure. The murder and the threat of his going to the chair for it; the money, and the broad hint that there could be more of it; Lynn, and the unspoken threat against her life.

Those were the three cudgels of blackmail selected by his adversaries.

But for what could he be possibly blackmailed? Of what use could he be to anyone to the extent where murder, much money, and the brink-edge of additional murder meant nothing when balanced against that person's wishes?

The question was utterly unanswerable.

THANE'S eyes were growing heavy-lidded, in spite of the restless, inquisitive clamor of his mind. Physically, the hours he had been through began to set his every nerve to a numb, aching weariness that would not be denied.

Thane rose from his seat in the smoker, flipped his cigarette accurately into a brass spittoon three feet away, and started back up the string of trains until he was again in his own coach.

The dim blue sidelights were on in the coach, and the blinds drawn. The other occupants of the chaircar were apparently sound asleep by now.

Thane slipped into his seat, grateful that it was occupied only by himself. He had removed his overcoat carelessly in his first hour on the train, and placed it in the iron holding elevation where, lumped, and blandly unsuspicious, it had passed without attention.

He took his coat down, now that he planned sleep of a sort, and spread it over his knees, blanket fashion, with his right hand inside the pocket, closed around the gun.

It was easier than Thane had thought it would be. His heavy eyelids closed

wearily, while the clicking rhythm of the train faded farther and farther from his ears, and at last there was oblivion and rest. . . .

THANE awoke four hours later, tumbling from a chasm of blackness and wind into a world of stinging light. He opened his eyes, squinting into the morning sunlight pouring through the window by his chair.

The rolling fields and fences margining the farmlands they were passing held Thane's attention hypnotically for fully half a minute, until he remembered.

He sat up, glancing sharply at his watch.

A quarter after nine.

At a quarter after nine yesterday, Richard Thane had said goodbye to his wife, Lynn, at the door of their apartment on North State Parkway.

At nine-thirty yesterday, Thane had opened his office, taken off his hat and coat, and seated himself behind his desk to open his morning mail.

An ordinary morning in the life of an ordinary, moderately successful young lawyer.

And now Richard Thane was moving toward a rendezvous in an obscure Wisconsin town. A rendezvous already prefaced by death and blood and violence. A rendezvous which Thane had determined to end in further blood and considerably more violence, should he get the chance for vengeance.

Thane had no precise plans. But he had a gun, and a cold, overwhelming hatred.

Something could be accomplished with those twin weapons, provided he kept them carefully reined.

Thane suddenly became aware that his hand was still closed around the gun in the pocket of his polo coat. He sat up and removed the blanket-like posi-

tion of the coat, being careful that the gun did not drop out as he put the garment casually over his arm.

He stood up and stretched his cramped muscles, yawning involuntarily. He picked up his hat, and with his coat over his right arm, started for the washroom at the front end of the car.

When Thane emerged from the washroom he was considerably freshened, having splashed icy water over his burning eyes, scrubbed his face thoroughly, and combed his hair.

He lighted a cigarette as he moved down the aisle, deciding to make another inspection of the cars on the train. Passing his chair he dropped his hat on the seat, but kept his coat casually draped over his arm.

Four cars from the smoker, Thane found the man he had been seeking.

The bartender was sitting in a car washroom, reading a newspaper and smoking a cigarette, when Thane walked in on him and knocked the paper from his hands to the floor.

"All right," Thane said quietly. "Start telling me the truth."

For a moment the moon-faced barkeep gaped stupidly, unbelievingly, at Thane. Then words tumbled hoarsely from his lips.

"I—I thought you was asleep . . . last time I looked . . . I thought that—"

"Skip all that," Thane ordered. He continued to keep his voice level, low, hard.

The barkeep looked wildly behind Thane toward the entrance to the washroom.

"You wouldn't want to start any commotion," Thane said. "It wouldn't be a healthful pastime. Even if someone happened to walk in here, you'd be smarter and considerably more alive, if you kept your mouth shut until they'd left."

"Okay," the barkeep gasped. "Okay. I won't do nothing foolish. I promise."

"You don't have to promise," Thane said. "All you have to do is begin explaining." Thane moved his coat from his arm as he spoke, put his right hand in the pocket where the gun was, then draped the garment over his arm again.

THE barkeep saw the outline of the weapon against the coat and went several shades paler.

"Sure," he said, and his voice was a strangled whisper. "Sure. I'll explain anything you wanna know. Anything. I'll admit I lied to you when you came into the place around two o'clock this morning."

"Who drugged my drink?" Thane demanded.

The barkeep cleared his throat, his blue eyes were watery. He gulped.

"I did," he said.

"Why?" Thane asked.

"A guy gave me ten bucks to—" he stopped at the look that came over Thane's face, gulped frantically, and bleated: "I'm telling it to you straight, honest-to-God, Thane!"

Thane looked at him impassively.

"It's your story," he said coldly. "And your hide that depends on it. How do you know my name?"

The last question seemed to catch the bartender off-balance. His eyes popped, he gulped, and finally found voice.

"F-f-from the dame," he said.

"Dame?" Thane's voice questioned coldly.

"Yeah, sure, the dame. The dame that came into the Idle Moment around ten o'clock last night. She said she was looking for you. She said you'd called her from the place, and I ast her when you'd called and what you looked like. She described you, and said you'd called earlier, a little before six o'clock."

Thane's face was hard.

"What did she look like?" he demanded.

The bartender relaxed a trifle at this indication that his story might be under consideration, but perspiration continued to wilt his collar and bead his bald head.

"She was a small, trim, blonde dame, with a kinda turned up nose, and a straight, pretty little mouth. She was worried. She was wearing a brown fur coat. She was a looker," the barkeep concluded.

"The dame you described is my wife," Thane said coldly. "Why do you pretend you don't know that?"

The bartender's eyes widened in surprise.

"How should I know that?" he demanded plaintively, bewilderedly. "How should I know that?"

Thane stared at him, then said:

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her what I told you when you came back. I told her you got sick all of a sudden, and that a guy who said he was a pal of yours helped you out. I said for all I knew you'd gone home to sleep it off. She ast me what time that was, and I told her. She left, then."

"What did you do after she left?" Thane asked.

THE barkeep looked worriedly puzzled again. "What did I do? What did I do? Why, I went back to serving drinks to customers, of course. But I was beginning to worry a little for fear maybe the mickey the guy gave me ten bucks to put in your drink had been too strong. I began to worry for fear maybe the thing was gonna backfire trouble on me."

"What do you mean, trouble?"

"My job, of course," said the barkeep. "My job and maybe thirty days in the Bridewell for getting mixed up in something that wasn't too ripe."

"Tell me about the stuff you put in my drink. Tell me exactly how it happened."

The bartender, face shining with sweat, cleared his throat again.

"Sure," he said hoarsely, "sure!" He gulped. "And this'll be the straight stuff, so help me God. I'll tell you just how it happened."

"That would be wise," said Thane.

"You hadn't come into the place yet, when this customer comes in and—"

"What customer?" Thane cut in.

"I don't know his name," the barkeep said. "He was a regular customer for the past couple months. A big guy, about six feet two and two hundred and twenty. Not fat. Not old. Maybe forty. Always dressed good in expensive clothes."

The barkeep had been looking at Thane as if he'd expected some sign of recognition in his listener's face.

"You don't know him?" the barkeep asked.

"No," said Thane.

"He generally came in with the guy I described to you as the one who took you out of the place," the barkeep offered.

Thane frowned. "You mean the man with the gray hair, gray moustache? The man you told me took me out of there?"

The barkeep nodded eagerly. "Yeah. That's right. You know him, so I figured you'd know this friend of his I was talking about—the big fella. They generally came into the place together, like I was saying."

"Go on with the story," Thane said.

"Well, this big guy, the friend of the guy with the gray moustache—like I said—came into the place before you did. He was alone and the guy with the gray moustache wasn't there waiting for him like he sometimes did. This big guy takes a seat at the far end of the

bar and beckons me over. I smile and say hello and ask him what he'll have, or would he rather wait until his friend—meaning the guy with the gray moustache—got there. You see, they always drank together, and I figured maybe he'd wanna wait for his—"

"Yes," said Thane impatiently. "I understand. Get on with it."

"Well, this big guy says he's gonna pull a stunt on his friend with the gray moustache and he wants me to help. I laughs and makes a joke like, 'sure, anything short of murder,' and the big guy laughs and says he'll see to it that his friend never knows I helped in the joke on him, so I needn't worry about that. Then he takes out his wallet, pulls out a ten spot and tosses it on the bar. My eyes pop, of course, since that ain't peanuts for a tip. The big fella pulls the package out of his wallet, then, and tosses that on the bar beside the ten bucks. It's a little paper package about an inch square. White. I ask him what is it, a mickey? He laughs and says it's like a mickey, except that it don't cause as much trouble as a mickey and don't send a guy running to the washroom all night. He says it's a harmless bromide, or something like that, and nothing to worry about."

THE barkeep paused for breath, then went on."

"Of course I know what the big guy means, all right, but I ask him does he want me to put that mickey in one of his friend's drinks? He asks me what in the hell do I think he means. I take a second squint at the ten bucks, and say I don't know if I oughta do anything like that. It might get me in trouble, I say. The guy picks up the ten bucks and reaches for his wallet to put it away. Am I ass enough to think that there was something wrong with it, he asks nasty-like. It's just an idea he had

for a joke, and if I don't wanna pitch in, okay, he says. I can't stand the sight of that ten bucks going out the window, so I tell him, okay, okay, I'll do it if he promises not to tell his friend I'm the one who gave him the mickey. I say, after all, I don't wanna get in trouble with no one."

"Then the big fellow left?" Thane asked.

The barkeep nodded. "Yeah. He gave me the ten bucks and the paper package with the powder in it. He told me his friend with the moustache would be in in a little while, and not to let on that he—the big guy—was there. I asked the big guy if he wasn't gonna come back, and he said sure he was. He said he'd be back about ten minutes after his friend came in. I ast him how he'd know when his friend came in, and he said he'd know, all right, since he told his friend he'd meet him in the tavern at twenty-five minutes after five. Then he told me not to forget, and laughed, and went out."

"What time was that?" Thane asked.

The bartender frowned. "That was maybe two or three minutes after five," he answered.

"All right," Thane said. "Go on with the story."

The barkeep wiped the sweat from his bald head with a handkerchief, and cleared his throat nervously again.

"Well, I pocketed the ten bucks, and put the powder paper in the pocket of my shirt. Some customers came in, then, and I mixed their drinks. Then a couple more customers come in and I waited on them. It was a little after five-fifteen, by that time, and you come walking in. I fixed your drink for you, gave you the slug and told you where the telephone was. You had just gone into the telephone booth when the guy with the gray moustache comes through the door. He goes down to the end of

the bar, a couple stools from where you've left your drink and sits down. I takes the powder paper from my shirt pocket, palms it, and walks over and asts him how he is and what'll he have to drink. He says he'll have Scotch and soda, and glances at his watch and looks around the bar. Then he wants to know if his friend—the big fella—has been in. I told him no, and went down to the other end of the bar to mix his drink. He can't see me, and I break open the paper and pour the powder in it, stirring hard, so's it'll mix good. Then I take the kicked-up drink down to him and put it under his snoot."

The bartender paused to collect his thoughts and his breath, then went on.

"I didn't wanna stand there gawking at him. It'd make him suspicious. So I turn away, nonchalant like, and start very slow toward the other end of the bar, making sure not to look back at him or do anything else that'd give it away. When I get down to the end of the bar, a customer starts gabbing, and it gives me a good excuse to kill time till he's done with his drink. About that time I'm beginning to worry more and more about maybe I wasn't so smart."

The barkeep stopped again to mop his bald head.

"Maybe two, three minutes passes while I chewed the fat with the customer," he resumed. "And then I turned around to look, more worried now, and seen that the guy with the moustache wasn't there, but that you were back from the telephone booth. It wasn't until you started to get glassy-eyed and teetering back and forth on the stool that I realize what's happened."

There was fright and supplication for belief in the bartender's eyes, now. He swallowed hard, and finished:

"You had come back and taken the wrong stool—they was just a few feet

apart—and finished off the Scotch and soda I'd fixed for the guy with the moustache!"

CHAPTER VI

AS THE frightened, sweat-streaked face of the bartender turned up whitely to meet Thane's stare, there was a look of pleading anxiety in his eyes.

"So help me God, that's the level truth! You believe me, doncha? You believe me—you gotta believe me!"

Thane's expression was impassive.

"I believed you the first time," he said flatly, "and it didn't get me anywhere."

"Doncha understand why I lied then?" the little man pleaded hoarsely. "My God! I couldn't do nothing but tell you what I did. I couldn't stand there and tell you, sure, I doped your drink. My God! It was alla accident, so help me. But I couldn't explain it. I hadda lie!"

"Perhaps," said Thane, "you'd better tell me the rest of it."

The barkeep put his arms on his knees and cradled his sweat-streaked face in his palms. He continued huskily, wearily, staring at the floor of the washroom as he spoke.

"The rest happened like I told you the first time. You was glassy-eyed and wobbly, and all of a sudden the guy with the gray moustache was standing beside your stool—he must'a been to the lavatory—and keeping you from falling off. I was scared to hell, and went down to that end of the bar. I couldn't think of anything to say. I was afraid to tip off the guy with the moustache as to what it was all 'bout. My God! I couldn't explain to the guy with the moustache that you'd been mickied by a drink I'd fixed for him! So I asked him what in the hell was wrong."

"What did he say?"

"This is the truth," the barkeep declared vehemently, "just like I told you first. It almost knocked me for a gool. The guy with the moustache says that you musta been sopping it up all day, and that every now and then it hit you like that. He said you'd be all right, though, and that he was a friend of yours and that he'd take care of you. That's when I said you didn't look like you'd had too much when you come in. And he said you never showed it much."

There was still no change in Thane's expression.

"And so the man with the gray moustache was the one who took me out of there?" he asked tonelessly.

The bartender lifted his head from his hands and nodded with desperate vigor.

"Honest to God—he was! I'm leveling with you, so help me. The guy said he was a friend of yours and took you out. My God! Imagine how I felt then. Imagine how I felt. He was a friend of yours, and I was the jerk who'd balled the whole thing up from every angle!"

"He didn't return, after taking me out?" Thane asked.

The barkeep shook his head vigorously. "No. He didn't come back at all. That's how I figured he'd taken you home."

"Did the big fellow, the one you described as the man who put you up to the gag, come back like he said he would?" Thane asked.

The bartender nodded. "Yeah. He came back, all right. About five-thirty. It couldn'ta been more'n five minutes after the guy with the moustache took you out of the place."

"You told him what happened?"

"My God! I had to!" the barkeep groaned. "I told him, all right, and got out the ten dollar bill he'd give me and

shoved it across the bar at him." "What did he say?" Thane asked.

THE bartender winced at the recollection, and sweat broke out anew on his bald head.

"I never seen a guy so mad. My God! He was white! He just stared at me like he was gonna cut my heart out, and his lips moved without saying words. But I could read his lips, and I never knew there was so many dirty names in the English langwidge. My God!"

"Then what did he do?" Thane demanded.

"Nothing," said the barkeep. "He stood there maybe a minute throwing the book at me with them dirty names and looking like he'd be glad to burn out my eyes with pokers. Then he turned around and left. He didn't even take the ten bucks I'd shoved back to him."

Thane said suddenly:

"What's your name?"

"Faber," said the bartender. "Pete Faber."

"All right, Faber," Thane said. "Your story holds together beautifully up until now. But it will have to fall apart when you try to tell me why you're on this train, and why you're going to Woodburn."

The bartender looked perplexed. "Didn't I tell you? I—say, what do you mean, going to Woodburn?"

"You didn't explain that part, Faber," Thane said. "And I have a hunch you know damned well what I mean by Woodburn." His voice was suddenly harder than before, and challenging.

Faber looked frightened again. "My God! That's right. I didn't tell you about that part. He came into the bar about twenty minutes after you was there. Must'a been about twelve o'clock."

"Who?" Thane demanded. "Who came into the bar?"

"This mugg," Faber said. "He was about five feet seven, with shoulders as wide as a house. He was a blond, real natty dresser. He hadda banged in nose, like an ex-pug. Tough looking hombre. But the funniest thing about him was his voice."

Thane's expression flickered surprise.

"His voice? How do you mean?"

"It was high, and thin, almost like a dame's voice," Faber said, shuddering. "It woulda been funny as hell, except for the fact that this guy didn't look like no comedian; he looked like a killer. My God! It was all over his face and staring outta his eyes, that killer look."

"Go on," said Thane.

"He came to the end of the bar and waves me over," Faber continued. "He didn't waste no words. His first question is have I got a wife and kids. I told him no. He says that's good, because then I won't have no trouble leaving quick. Then, before I can ask what he means by this, he says that it's been decided that a quick trip outa town for a couple of weeks would be healthy for me. He says that I'd be able to forget about mickies in a week or so, and that it would be okay to come back in ten days or more, as long as I come back without any memory."

"What did you say?" Thane demanded.

FABER blinked in surprise.

"What did I say? My God! What could I say? I said when did he want I should leave. He said starting then and there. Then he left. I waited maybe ten minutes, then took off my apron and told the boss I was sick and going home. My God! I was sick all right. I went right to my room and packed my duds. I called the depot

and found out there was a Wisconsin train leaving five-oh-six."

"Why Wisconsin?" Thane asked.

"I gotta cousin and his wife and kids living on a farm outside of Rhinelander," Faber said. "Only relatives I got within a hundred miles of Chicago. I figgered that'd be a nice quiet place to stay while my memory cooled off like it was told to."

"You certain your destination is Rhinelander, not Woodburn?" Thane demanded.

Faber nodded violently, fumbling inside his coat with trembling hands. He found his ticket envelope and handed it to Thane.

Thane opened the envelope and saw a round trip ticket between Chicago and Rhinelander. He put the ticket back in the envelope, handed it to Faber.

"You saw me when you turned away from the soda fountain in the depot?" Thane asked.

Faber nodded.

"My God! Sure I saw you. It almost knocked my hat off. But what in the hell could I do about it? Far as I knew, you mighta stopped in the depot for a candy bar. I waited until you were outta sight. Then I got on the train. It wasn't until we were fifteen minutes outta the depot when I spotted you coming down the aisle of my coach. I didn't have any idea you was on the train until then. My God! I didn't know what gave. I ducked into the washroom, locked myself in. I didn't come out for an hour. Then I took a chance, went through the cars, and saw you asleep in one of the front coaches. I came back here, figuring I could keep outta your way until I reached Rhinelander."

Thane stared at the moon-faced Faber. His expression had relaxed slightly around the mouth, and he took his

hand from the gun in the pocket of his polo coat, fished in the pocket of his suitcoat and found a cigarette.

Every part of the bartender's story dovetailed perfectly into the circumstances which explained his presence on the train. Thane found himself believing the tale exactly as Faber had told it. But he had one final test on which he decided to base his belief or disbelief of the moon-faced barkeep.

Thane put his cigarette in the corner of his mouth, found matches and lighted it. He took a deep, reflective draught, and when he exhaled he said casually:

"You might be interested in knowing that the man with the gray moustache was murdered last night."

Faber had been staring at Thane, pleading his innocence with his eyes and sweat-stained face. He had no time to plan a reaction to the casually spoken statement.

The horrified shock on the bartender's face told Thane what he had been seeking to confirm.

Faber had been telling the truth this time. He had known nothing of the murder . . .

THANE left the moon-faced bartender and returned to his chair car. It was twenty minutes after ten, and the train was slowing down preparatory to a small station milk-stop.

He put his coat back atop the luggage rack over his chair, removed his hat from the seat where he had left it, and sat down, closing his eyes tiredly and mentally assembling the pieces of information he had gained, preliminary to a fresh start on the incredible jigsaw.

For every new facet uncovered by Faber's story, a previously accepted one was lost. The arrangement of the pieces—as loosely as he had placed them—had been knocked asunder by

the information he now possessed. The sorting and reassembling that would be necessary in view of his new knowledge would undoubtedly be no less difficult than his first efforts had been. But the pattern which they would ultimately form would be somewhat more certain.

Thane took a deep draught from the last of his cigarette, dropped it to the floor, and crushed it out with his heel. He leaned back, steepling his fingers, and started to pattern the scant and bewildering facts at his command.

"Thane, I'd like to talk to you a minute."

He opened his eyes, saw Faber standing beside his chair. The moon-faced little bartender looked both worried and awkwardly uneasy.

"About what?" Thane asked. "Is there something you held out on me?"

"The washroom," Faber said, "ain't occupied right now. We could talk better there."

Thane grunted and rose. He followed the bartender to the head of the coach and stepped into the washroom behind him. As Faber had stated, they had privacy there.

"I haven't held out nothing on you, Thane," Faber said earnestly. "That ain't what I had on my mind."

"Then what is on your mind?"

"Look," Faber said awkwardly, his shining brow creased in a frown, "it's like this." He hesitated again, then blurted: "This thing has me down in more ways than one. I'm in a spot that ain't so comfortable, but you seem to be knee-deep in something worse than I gotta worry about. I'm the guy who shoved you into the soup. Maybe I made things worse by not giving you the straight dope from the start. Maybe I even gummed things up more by holding out on the facts from your old—your wife. I'm not a mental heavyweight, but I can catch on to things if

I get time and room enough."

Thane looked at him expressionlessly.

"All of which leads up to what?" he asked.

"If there's anything I can do to hel—" he began, then stopped, coloring at the expression that came suddenly to Thane's face.

"Well?" Thane asked.

"I know what you're thinking," Faber said miserably. "I'm a mugg wh'll take a ten spot to dope a drink. You figger I'd take half that amount to break an old lady's arm. Maybe I don't blame you. Anyway, I certainly took a runout in a hurry when that hood came into the bar and made faces and words at me. I pushed around plenty easy, and the more I've been thinking about it and wondering what color stripe I got on my hide, the sorer I been getting at myself. Maybe you won't believe it, Thane, but I was a tough nut twenty years ago. Nobody pushed me around anyplace, and that includes the prize ring. I—hell, I—ah—My God! Isn't there something I can do for you?"

THANE'S expression was impassive once more. But his eyes were speculative.

"I don't think you realize how far you're sticking your chin out, Faber," Thane said, watching him.

"You're going to Woodburn," Faber said doggedly. "The conductor'll change my ticket."

"The man with the gray moustache didn't look pretty, dead."

"Could I look prettier alive?" Faber retorted.

"For all you know I could be a murderer," Thane said.

Faber shook his head positively. "Unh-unh. Not you. Guys like you don't get nasty that way."

Thane rubbed his jaw reflectively. He stared at the barkeep another moment. Then he said:

"You could recognize the man who gave you the ten dollars?"

"At a hundrit yards," Faber answered emphatically.

"And the blond yegg with the voice like a woman?"

"Hell, I could *smell* him from that distance," said Faber.

"All right," Thane said briefly. "It's your hide, not mine."

Faber pulled the gun more swiftly than Thane could blink. It had been a lightning grab that had whipped the automatic from a shoulder holster.

Thane's face froze as Faber held the gun unswervingly trained on his heart. Then the bartender laughed, and lowered the weapon.

"I brought this along for the farm stay," Faber said. "I didn't know but what maybe I'd need it. That blond with the dame's voice wasn't funny."

The moon-faced little bartender put the automatic back in the shoulder holster beneath his suitcoat. He grinned apologetically at Thane.

"I guess I wasn't bring up right," he said. "I could never make up my mind to ditch the rod, even after I'd been outa the rackets fifteen years."

A faint smile touched the immobility of Thane's expression. He looked at the bartender with a new respect.

"You'll do," he said.

Faber rubbed his bald head sheepishly.

"I was packing the rod alla time you was grilling me," he admitted. "You should never be so dumb as to hold a rod so clumsy-like in a coat, the way you did."

"What in the hell made you sweat so?" Thane asked.

"My God!" Faber replied. "I was thinking maybe I'd have to plug you,

and what a hell of jam it would get me into." He sighed. "My God! I'm a yella so-and-so."

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS ten minutes after four when Thane's train arrived at the unpretentious little station at Woodburn. While the engine bell clanged and the steam hissed, the local postmaster supervised the unloading of the mail bags onto a small baggage cart.

Thane descended the steps from his car to the station platform almost simultaneously with the cry:

"Boooooaarrd!"

Thane looked around the station appraisingly. It was typical enough for a town of Woodburn's size. Baggage carts, waiting benches, a waiting room inside. He could see some of the town stretching a few blocks deep on the other side of the station. A small business district, boasting a theater and one floor department store, plus the usual number of other enterprises.

To the right of the station was a residential district. Narrow streets, trees that were leafy arches in summer and gaunt brown skeletons now.

The sign on the station as the train had pulled in had told Thane that the population of Woodburn was several hundred over five thousand.

The driving rods of the big locomotive up forward began to churn and the train picked up motion laboriously, cars banging in couplings, as Thane crossed the station platform and stepped into the small waiting room.

He had to wait some five minutes while the postmaster, baggage master, station master, and telegraph operator—in the person of a tall, spare, wiry old man with white, bushy eyebrows—discharged his chores in the order of their importance.

When the old man entered the waiting room at last, he surveyed Thane quizzically.

"What kin I do fer you, sir?"

"Can I send a telegram from here?" Thane asked.

"Don't see why not."

The old man unlocked the door leading into his ticket cage, reappeared a moment later behind the window, pencil in hand and pad before him.

"Well, sir, who to?" he asked.

"G. Winters," Thane said, "Blufftown, Wisconsin."

The old man jotted this down on the blank.

"From who?" he asked.

"J. Crandall," said Thane.

"How you spell that?"

Thane told him.

"Want it sent night letter, or now?"

"Now," said Thane.

The old man shoved a telegram sheet through the window.

"Write it," he said.

Thane picked up the pencil the old man had left atop the blank, thought a moment, then rapidly scribbled a message. He shoved the pad and pencil back through the window grille.

"Arrived on schedule. See you later as arranged. Crandall." The old man read aloud. He looked up at Thane. "Got two more words coming," he pointed out.

"That's all right," Thane said. "How much is the message?"

"You want it sent to the station at Blufftown, that right?"

Thane said that was right.

The old man told him the charges, and Thane pushed a dollar bill through the window opening. The old man found change, shoved it back at Thane. Thane started to turn away.

"Come to work at the plant?" the old man asked.

"The plant?" Thane frowned.

"New war plant just outside of town," explained the old man. "They're looking for help over there. Most everyone in town is working there now, seems like."

"No," Thane said. "No. That isn't why I'm here."

"I wondered," said the old man with easy candor. "Ain't usual to get passengers coming off the four-oh-six on Sunday during this time of year."

"I suppose not," Thane agreed. "Which way is the Woodburn Hotel?"

"Right on Main," said the old man. "Go out the same door you came in, turn right, go down to the end of the station, you'll see it. Sign over the sidewalk."

Thane nodded.

"Thanks," he said.

THANE found the Woodburn Hotel and saw a little bit more of the town enroute. There was, it seemed, a second business street comprised principally of taverns in surprising number, another movie theater—boarded up and not in operation, however—and a bank.

Registering at the desk in the lobby of the Woodburn, Thane was subjected to a moderate amount of curiosity on the part of a few guests and the employees.

Although he had no luggage, a nondescript bellboy-porter showed him up to the second floor where his room was located, gave him his key, and asked if there was anything he'd like. Thane gave him a five dollar bill and told him to bring back some glasses, ice, soda, and a bottle of Vat.

Thane closed the door behind the boy and began an inspection of his room. A big brass bed that looked as if it would be comfortable, an oak dresser with the inevitable Gideon atop it, two chairs, a moderately roomy

closet, good light and excellent ventilation due to its corner location and two windows, and a washbowl in a corner were what the room boasted. It lacked a bath and toilet, and Thane suspected he could find both down the hall.

He removed his coat, transferring the automatic to the under side of the pillow on the bed, tossed his hat on a shelf in the closet, and shrugged out of his suitcoat.

Then he sat down on the bed and lighted a cigarette.

He was smoking and staring at the worn floor covering when the combination bellhop-porter knocked on the door. Thane raised his voice and told him to come in:

"I thought there'd be a phone in this room," Thane said, as the boy arranged the bottles, glasses and ice on the dresser.

The boy looked surprised, then triumphant.

"You didn't see it," he said, opening a bottom drawer in the dresser. Then Thane saw the wires that must have been protruding, and the boy held the telephone up proudly.

"Leave it on the dresser," Thane said. "I wouldn't want to play hide-and-seek with it during the middle of the night."

The boy put the phone atop the dresser. Then he gave Thane a dollar bill and some change. Thane gave him a half dollar, and he left.

Thane fixed himself a drink, pulled one of the chairs over beside the bed and—using it as a table—placed the glass on its seat. He took his place on the bed again, tasted the drink, and leaned back against the bedstead.

He wondered how long he was going to have to wait.

IT HAD occurred to Thane more than once that this might be nothing but

a hoax cleverly designed to remove him from the city long enough for his adversaries to accomplish further designs against him. But he had discarded this idea for the dual reason that he was unable to do anything else than accept the situation as it stood, and that other factors argued against it.

It was reasonably clear to Thane now, that his being involved in the thing had started accidentally. It had been the mixup in drinks which had snowballed him into the murder and terror which followed. The moment he had raised the drugged glass to his lips, his part in the gruesome mystery was cast.

Lynn's visit to the tavern where he'd been drugged had puzzled him deeply for a while, until he remembered having mentioned where he was when he'd made that call to her.

Undoubtedly she had grown worried when he failed to show up at the apartment. She had recalled what he had said about stopping in at a place around the corner from his office on Washington, and gone in search of him.

What had happened to her after Faber told her his story and she'd left the place, Thane couldn't guess. Faber had told him Lynn had been in around ten o'clock. She might have gone back to the apartment, then.

There was the possibility that Lynn had been followed from the apartment to the Idle Moment. She might have been waylaid on leaving the tavern. But that discounted the fact that he had found her overnight bag and some of her clothes gone. It seemed reasonable to believe, then, that she had returned to their apartment.

What had happened there was additional speculation. Someone might have been waiting there when she returned. The only thing that was certain in that respect, was that Lynn

wasn't in the apartment shortly after one, when Thane had made his first call.

The fact that she had packed her bag, taken some of her gowns, indicated that violence had not been involved in her abduction. Or it indicated that someone else had thrown some of her things into the overnight bag before taking her along.

Thane crushed out his cigarette on the side of a wastebasket. He got up and took his empty glass over to the dresser, fixed himself another drink. He went back to the bed and resumed his position, lighting another cigarette as soon as he was comfortable.

Thane wondered if Faber had received his telegram in Blufftown all right. He took a deep swallow of his drink and speculated about the little barkeep.

Perhaps Faber would lose his stomach for the bargain he'd made. Perhaps he'd take another train back to Rhinelander and the place where he'd originally intended to hole up. Somehow, Thane didn't think so.

Thane got up from the bed, glass in hand, and walked over to the window. He stared down at the street for several minutes, unseeingly. Then he turned away, gulping down the rest of his drink and going towards the dresser to refill his glass, when he paused, frowned, and picked up the telephone.

The voice of the desk clerk came through a moment later.

"This is Mr. Thane. I want you to ring me before sending anyone up here, understand?"

"Yes, sir. You're expecting someone?"

"I am," said Thane. "But don't call me until they've started up."

Thane hung up and mixed himself another drink. He walked back to the bed, put the glass on the chair beside it, and stretched out again.

He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes after five. It was getting definitely dark outside by now. His short sleep on the train hadn't helped much, and his eyelids were heavy again. Thane crushed out his cigarette before dozing off. . . .

WHEN Thane woke the room was in darkness. A glance at the luminous dial on his watch showed him that it was seven-thirty. He rubbed his eyes and sat up, blinking.

And then he was aware that something had wakened him. Some sound.

In an instant he knew. The bulky figure in the darkness by the door said:

"Easy, Thane. Stay just as you are. You're covered."

Thane stared hard into the darkness, adjusting his sight to the deeper black of that figure by the door. Slowly, silently, he moved his hand behind him, fingers searching for the gun beneath his pillow.

"Get out of the bed," the voice commanded, "and put both paws in the air. Then stand there until I draw the shades and turn on the light."

Thane's hand found the gun, closed around it.

"You heard me, Thane," the voice said. The bulky figure in the darkness moved a little away from the door.

Thane knew that it would be a matter of no more than several seconds to whip the gun forth and fire. He knew that he could kill the figure in the darkness. But his hand released the gun, leaving it behind the pillow, and he stood up from the bed unarmed.

"Okay, put 'em in the air," the voice said.

Thane raised his hands above his head, and the bulky figure in the darkness stepped quickly over to first one window, then the other, drawing the shades on both.

The room was considerably darker now, but Thane could still follow the outline of the man in the darkness.

There was a *click*, and light flooded the room.

Thane blinked, and saw his intruder standing beneath the light cord which hung from the ceiling. The man was holding a gun, pointed at Thane, and smiling.

Thane's exclamation was involuntary.

His intruder was short, stumpy, with a tremendous paunch. He wore a dark blue overcoat with a chesterfield collar. A Homburg sat jauntily on one side of his fat head.

This was the first man Thane had seen leave the soda fountain in the depot—the same man who'd passed by him without even glancing up from his absorbed picking of his teeth!

"Hello, Thane," he said. "Remember me?" He made a gesture with his thumb, as though picking his teeth, then laughed. "Get your coat on. We're going places."

Wordlessly, Thane stepped over to the closet, taking his polo coat from the hanger. He tossed it on the bed, took his hat from the shelf, and did the same with that.

Then Thane crossed the room to the chair by the window on which he'd draped his suitcoat. He buttoned his collar and pulled up his tie as he did so.

AS THANE donned his suitcoat, the obese, stumpy intruder walked over to the bed and picked up the polo coat. He patted it several times around the pockets, looked at the bedcover, then dropped it back.

The fat man stepped over to the door, keeping his gun on Thane, and said impatiently:

"Speed it up."

Thane slipped into his suitcoat and

stepped over to the bed. It wasn't difficult, as he leaned forward to pick up his hat and coat, to slide the automatic out from under the pillow and conceal it beneath the coat.

He was carrying the coat on his arm as he joined the stumpy fat man at the door.

"Okay," Thane said. "Let's get going."

The fat man kept his gun in his pocket as they passed through the lobby. But he kept his hand on the weapon and, undoubtedly, his finger on the trigger.

The desk clerk called after Thane, and the fat man paused while Thane turned.

"What shall I say if that call comes through, Mr. Thane?" the clerk asked amiably.

Thane stared at him a moment.

"Say hello," he said. He turned, and walked out of the lobby, the fat man beside him, half a pace behind.

On the street Thane paused. He faced the fat man.

"What next?" he asked.

The black sedan rolled up to the curb beside them, at that moment, and the stumpy fat man jerked a thumb at it.

"We ride," he said.

Thane saw the driver of the sedan, then. He was blonde, hard faced, wide-shouldered. His nose had the pushed-in mark of an ex-pug. He was the hood Faber had described. The one who'd told Faber to leave town. The one with the voice like a woman—the voice Thane had talked to on the telephone.

"You get in the back, with me," said the fat man. "You first."

Thane opened the rear door of the sedan and got in. The fat man followed him, taking his gun from his pocket as he did so. He wheezed as he

sat down, turned slightly, gun held in his lap, and grinned at Thane.

"Get going, Harvard," the fat man told the driver.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY were through the little town and into the outskirts of it in less than eight minutes. There was little traffic save for an occasional truck and three or four passenger automobiles, even though they followed a state highway for another five minutes after leaving the town.

At a junction in the highway, they took a smaller, fairly well paved road, heavily bordered by thick woods. After five minutes on this road, the woods began to thin out, and three minutes later, in a vast, heavily rutted clearing, Thane saw the outlines of a large, recently constructed factory.

As the car sped on past it, Thane remembered what the old man at the station had said about the new war plant outside of town. The fat man, noticing Thane's interest in the countryside, laughed harshly.

"Get your eyes full, Thane," he said.

Thane's fingers closed tightly around the gun beneath the coat on his lap, then relaxed. Not yet. There was still Lynn to think of. He had to remember that.

They turned off onto a narrow, bumpy clay road several minutes later, and the blond hoodlum at the wheel slowed their speed perceptibly. Several hundred yards on, the car stopped.

"Okay," said the fat man. "We get out here."

The wide-shouldered, pug-nosed blond behind the wheel climbed out first, leaving the headlights on. He came around the front of the car and stood beside the front right fender, waiting. He had a gun in his hand.

"All right, Thane. Get out," the fat man said.

Thane's skin crawled. He swallowed hard. Supposing he had miscalculated? Supposing it was to be here, right now, the moment he stepped out of the car?

He thought of Lynn and his jaw hardened. His hand closed around the gun beneath his coat, and he leaned forward, opening the door. He stepped out into the sticky bank of the clay road, his eyes on the blond killer ahead of him, the coat still covering the gun in his hand.

Nothing happened.

"You gonna block the door all night?" the fat man snapped behind him.

Thane moved forward, and the fat man wheezed out of the car.

"All right, Thane," the fat man said somewhat breathlessly, "you walk along behind Harvard. I'll be right behind you."

The blond ahead turned and started up the road.

The fat man said: "No Olympic dashes, Thane. You wouldn't get a yard away before it'd be all over."

Thane walked on, passing the front of the car, his hand hard on the grip of his automatic. Behind him, he heard the fat man wheezing.

THE clearing was twenty yards ahead, off the road, and the blond called Harvard waited there at the edge of it while Thane and the fat man caught up with him.

There was a low, rambling shack of the sort used by construction companies in the center of the clearing. Lights burned in four of its windows.

The blond spoke as Thane and the fat man reached him.

"It will be best to let Thane walk in front now, Runt," he said. Thane recognized the thin, high, almost femi-

nine tenor and the careful enunciation. Harvard was undoubtedly the one he talked to over the telephone, and unmistakably the one who'd told Faber to leave town. The disparity between the man's speech and appearance was chilling.

"All right. In front of us, Thane," the fat man ordered.

Thane stepped out in front of the two, and in this order they crossed the clearing to the construction shack. The door of the central section of the shack opened when they were less than five yards from it, throwing a blocked patch of light against the darkness. A blocked patch against which was silhouetted the figure of a tall, solidly built man.

No one said a word, and the big man left the door and went back into the shack.

A moment later and Harvard's gun was in Thane's ribs, while the thin tenor command, "Up the steps slowly," was given.

Thane obeyed, climbed the steps slowly, and stepped into the shack with Harvard's gun still against his back. Blinking in the sudden glare of light, Thane surveyed the big man sitting behind the scarred desk in the corner.

He was roughly as Faber had described him. Heavy-set without being fat, shoulders powerful but sloping rather than square. His face gave Thane the impression of a bulldog.—It was ruddy, smooth shaven, wide mouthed and unpleasant. His hair was black, and thinning visibly above his forehead. He had combed it, unsuccessfully, to conceal the growing baldness. He wore a tweed suit that was darkish brown, adding to the impression of his massiveness.

He said, "Come in, Thane."

Thane moved to the center of the room, and the pressure of Harvard's gun against his back was gone. He

heard the door of the shack shut behind him. The fat man Harvard had called Runt, spoke.

"Here's the guy with the tough skull, boss."

Thane said quietly, "Where is my wife?"

The man behind the desk grinned. His teeth were very white against his ruddy face.

"You've come to take her home, I suppose?"

"Where is she?" Thane repeated.

"Take the gentleman's things, Harvard," said the man behind the desk.

The crashing blow Thane received on the side of his head caught him utterly unprepared. A sickening explosion of light and sound burst in his brain as he fell forward to the floor. A shot roared deafeningly through the room, and something made a metallic sound on the floor.

Thane realized foggily that his gun was no longer in his hand, and that his mouth was filled with blood and someone was cursing harshly.

HE TRIED to get to his knees, but his senses were swimming and his balance gone. He slipped forward and his face struck the floor. He didn't lose consciousness, though everything reeled in a chasm of blackness.

"Pick him up," somebody said.

Hands grabbed him by the collar of his coat and jerked him to his knees. Then his face was slapped stinging again and again, until he staggered to his feet.

The hands were on his arms now, as he teetered unsteadily and tried to spit the blood from his swollen mouth. He realized that his eyes were closed, and he opened them. The light stabbed painfully, and Thane realized that only one eye was open. He couldn't open the other.

The room was beginning to come back into focus. He could see the massive man in tweeds behind the desk, and the blond called Harvard at his side, glaring at a white-faced, terror stricken Runt. The hands were no longer on his arms.

The terrible flow of obscenity was coming from Harvard, directed at Runt. The blond hoodlum's thin voice was almost shrill in his rage. Finally he stopped.

"You ought to be plugged for being dumb enough to let him bring a rod along, Runt," the massive man behind the desk declared. His voice was calm, unhurried. "Another minute and he'd have been pouring lead at all of us. You can thank God I knew no one would hold a coat the way he was holding his. Get the hell out of the room before I give in to the impulse to have Harvard burn you."

Runt's ponderous paunch was heaving mountainously with the deep, gasping breaths he drew. His face was utterly white, his eyes glazed with fear. He staggered over to a side door and left the room.

The massive man behind the desk looked up at Thane now, grinning again.

"Do you always bring presents when you're invited to the country?" he asked.

Thane swayed sickly, his hand to his swollen mouth, and spit blood. His eyes glared wildly at his captors.

"Get him a chair, Harvard," said the massive leader.

The blond killer brought a chair around and placed it behind Thane. Thane slumped into it weakly.

"Give him a cigarette," the big man ordered.

Harvard extended a package of cigarettes to Thane. He took one, put it between swollen lips. Harvard struck

a match and lighted it for him.

"I don't think we've been properly introduced," the man behind the desk declared amiably. "My name is Colver, John H. Colver, of Colver and Thurston. You've met my partner, Thurston, remember? You spent last night in his apartment until your untimely departure around one o'clock."

"Go to hell!" Thane mumbled.

Harvard stepped forward and slapped Thane across the mouth. The blow caused no pain. Thane's face was already numb.

"All right, Harvard," Colver said sharply. "Save the sadism for later." His eyes went back to Thane. "Your skull was too tough for us last night, Thane. You weren't supposed to come out of the fog until three o'clock or better. The police would have been there by that time, and all this unpleasant additional labor would have been saved me."

"Where is my wife?" Thane said thickly.

"She's still alive, Thane," Colver said. "You'll see her very shortly. It's a shame to think you could have spared her this merely by remaining unconscious another two hours in Thurston's apartment."

"Why did you do it," Thane managed through swollen lips.

"Kill Thurston? Or frame it on you?" Colver asked. "Why, I don't see why an explanation isn't due you. After all, you haven't gotten anything at all for all your trouble. We've really had to push you around, Thane. I suppose it would be courteous to give you the satisfaction, at least, of knowing why." He paused.

"Well?" Thane asked.

"But that would be far too melodramatic, Thane," Colver grinned. "You can find out why in hell. You'll be there shortly, you know."

COLVER reached into the drawer of the desk before him, and brought out a .45 automatic. He put it on the desk and shut the drawer. He looked at Harvard.

"Tell Runt to go out to the garage and start the motor in the Ford going. Tell him not to connect the hose from the exhaust until we bring Thane and his wife out there."

Harvard stepped to the door through which Runt had made his trembling exit. Colver turned back to Thane.

"Carbon monoxide," he explained. "The Ford will be closed tightly while you and your wife are in it. As soon as you are dead, we air things out for several hours, then Harvard chauffeurs your bodies to the high turn on Willow Road."

Colver stared at Thane for a reaction to this. The big man's eyebrows raised.

"Don't you know the high turn on Willow Road? Ah, but of course you don't. You're a stranger here. I quite forgot. Willow Road is half a mile behind my plant—the war plant you passed on your way here. The road circles Lake Luna. It's a small lake, this Luna, but like so many Wisconsin lakes it is particularly deep in certain spots. Spots such as the one just below the high turn on Willow Road. The Ford, with you and your wife in the front seat, will make quite a splash dropping into Lake Luna. It's almost two hundred feet from the road edge down the cliff beside it."

Thane's voice was hoarse, pleading, thickened by his swollen lips.

"My God, keep her out of it! Let her go—for God's sake! She's done nothing! She's—"

Colver smiled, cutting Thane off.

"She'll die painlessly, beside you. I think that's rather touchingly romantic. I'd like to spare her, Thane. She's quite

lovely. However, you are both much better off dead. You and your wife and the bartender will be dead by morning. The bartender, of course, is the blundering ass who permitted you to take the wrong drink. Runt saw him purchase a ticket to Rhinelander in the depot. Harvard will drive up there, find him, and complete the job as soon as you are out of the way." Colver smiled again. "You three are the only persons who know anything even remotely connected with poor Thurston's death."

Harvard came back into the room, then.

"You told him?" Colver asked.

Harvard smiled, his cold eyes glittering.

"Quite explicitly," he said in his high, feminine voice.

Colver sighed resignedly. "I suppose you pushed him around for his error in not frisking Thane at the hotel."

Harvard was still smiling. He wet his lips.

"I'm not through with that fool yet," he said. Then he added, "I sent him out to the road to turn off the headlights on the sedan, first."

Colver nodded. "Good. Now I think we'd better get Thane's wife. He'll be happy to—"

THE crash of the door banging open was like a pistol shot. Thane, Colver, and the blond sadist turned to gape at the doorway simultaneously.

Runt stood there, his face a twisted pattern of hysterical terror, his arms limp at his sides, knees shaking. And then Thane saw the hand poked out from behind the stumpy fat man—the hand holding an automatic.

"Hold it just as it is, boys!" a voice commanded. It was Faber's voice.

"For God sakes don't shoot!" Runt

whimpered. Saliva drooled from the corners of his fat mouth.

"You move an inch, and I'll plug this guy. I gotta 'nother gun in his spine!" Faber's voice commanded.

Thane was out of his chair and on his feet. Harvard's hand was grabbing for the shoulder holster under his coat. Colver was the only one within quick reach of a weapon. He whipped up the .45 from his desk.

"You shoot," the voice of the bar-keep, Faber, yelled, "and this yegg of yours get it!"

Colver snarled, "That's fine!"

Thane hurled himself in a savage rolling block at Harvard's legs at the same instant Colver's .45 roared.

As Thane crashed to the floor with Harvard, Runt's shrill scream blended in the echo of the gun blast. The scream choked off in an obscene, strangled curse ending in Colver's name, and Thane heard Runt's fat body smash to the floor.

Then there were other shots roaring almost simultaneously; and Thane found his hands locked tightly around the automatic Harvard had managed to drag from his shoulder holster. The blond killer was writhing frantically in an effort to roll out from under Thane's weight, and Thane ground his teeth until his jaw ached, forcing the sadist gunman's arm back farther and farther until there was the *snap* of breaking bone.

Harvard's scream rang horribly in Thane's ear. In the split second in which the blond gunman went inert, Thane grabbed the gun from the floor where it had fallen.

As Thane tried to climb free of Harvard, the gunman's frantic grab with his good arm sent Thane sprawling atop him once more. This time Thane used the barrel of the gun as a club, smashing it murderously again and

again around the killer's head and face.

Thane's mind was a red blot of rage as he flailed brutally at the face of the man beneath him. And then he became aware that hands were pulling him by the shoulders and that a voice was shouting in his ears. The red madness blanked from Thane's mind.

"My God! That's plenty, Thane. That's plenty!"

The voice was Faber's.

THANE stared dully at the crimson pulp that was Harvard's face. He let the gun in his hand drop to the floor. He rose swayingly from the body of his adversary; the draining of his rage had left him weak, shaking.

Thane saw Colver, then. The massive killer was slumped in a corner to the right of the desk. His hands were clutched to his stomach, and blood seeped through the big-knuckled fingers.

"The little fat runt got him," Faber said. "Plugged him after the big guy had dropped him to the floor. My God! I thought that they wouldn't shoot if I walked in with the fat runt as a shield. My God!"

"Where did the fat one get the gun?" Thane asked.

"The big guy's second shot knocked the rod out of my right hand," Faber said. "The fat runt was already on the floor, he grabbed it up and gave his boss the works. My God! These guys got no loyalty to each other."

Thane saw Faber's right arm. It hung limply at his side, and blood dripped slowly from the sleeve to the floor. He turned and stared at Runt. The little fat man lay on one side. Crimson stained his coat above the heart where Colver's shot had entered. Runt still clutched the automatic that had been shot from Faber's hand. He was dead.

A groan from Harvard split the silence. The blond sadist's fingers were twitching but his body was motionless otherwise.

Thane walked over to the corner and looked down at Colver. The big man was still breathing, and his eyes were closed. His face was chalky, his mouth twisted in pain.

Thane picked up the telephone beside the desk. When the operator came in, he asked for the state police and an ambulance. He told the operator to check the number for the location from which he was calling.

They found Lynn in a room piled with shovels, picks, packing cases, and beam lifts. She was tied and gagged. Her eyes were wild with hysteria and relief when she saw Thane. She fainted before he was able to untie her bonds completely. . . .

CHAPTER IX

THE state police had arrived in less than twenty minutes, the ambulance five minutes after that. The troopers were swift and incredibly efficient. Colver and Harvard were both alive when they were removed from the shack.

An hour later, in the divisional state police headquarters, the tired young lieutenant put the telephone through which he had been speaking back on his desk. He looked at Thane and Lynn, who sat across from him.

"Colver is dead," he said. "They managed to get a fairly complete statement from him before he went. He confirmed everything you've both told me. Faber has had his hand dressed and will be here in a patrol car in a few minutes. I guess that ends it."

"What about the blond with the pug nose?" Thane ased.

The young lieutenant smiled faintly.

"Did he have a pug nose?" he asked. "I imagine it will be considerably more pugged when his face heals up."

"Then he'll live?" Thane asked.

"Unfortunately for him, yes," the young lieutenant said. "I imagine we'll turn him over to the Federal Bureau as soon as possible. The check we made on his prints revealed an astonishing background. He was German born, educated at Oxford and several of our best eastern universities. He returned to this country from Germany in 1934, under an alias, shed that identification and lived here posing as an American citizen from that time on. He was a bund leader in the east until '37, then dropped out of that picture after a nasty riot in New Jersey. His connection with Nazi espionage circles had never been certain, but I imagine Colver's confession will bring it out of him."

"Colver knew his background?" Thane said.

"Certainly. Colver and Thurston were operating the war plant outside of Woodburn for two years. They were each slicing off a nice side graft from the substitution of equipment inferior to that specified by their government contracts. The blond Nazi agent went to work in their plant—undoubtedly under sabotage orders from Germany—about eight months ago. In two months he discovered what Colver and Thurston were doing, saw the excellent chance for super sabotage, and approached Colver with his proposition. He offered him a tremendous amount of money—Nazi backed, of course—to perform out and out sabotage from his fool proof position as co-owner and president of the plant."

"Good God!" Thane exclaimed. "Sabotage right from the top!"

The young lieutenant nodded gravely.

"Colver went readily into the agreement, but he had Thurston to win over. He had no idea that his partner would refuse. After all, they had both been defrauding the government right along. This would be a hundred times as profitable and not greatly different. To his anger and amazement, Thurston refused." The lieutenant paused. "I imagine that Thurston's line of demarcation was reached when he realized that the money he would receive would be Nazi tainted. Peculiar reasoning, wasn't it? Some people's minds are incredible. He had defrauded his government by substituting inferior materials, and yet the unvarnished, bold-faced, naked picture of out and out sabotage appalled and frightened him. He made no bones about telling Colver how he felt."

"And that's when Colver decided to eliminate his partner?" Lynn asked.

"That's right," the lieutenant nodded. "He felt certain that Thurston was at the point where he would break down and go to the government with the entire story. He told this to the blond Nazi and they agreed to get him out of the way immediately. The night they decided to eliminate Thurston—last night—was premature, but necessary, since Thurston had called Colver in Woodburn that morning and told him he was going to the authorities with the entire story."

"Did he?" Thane asked.

"He didn't get the chance. Colver begged him to wait just a day, and made him promise to meet him in that tavern between five and six, to talk things over. Thurston agreed, figuring he could persuade his partner to abandon the plan and turn himself over to the F.B.I. with him."

The lieutenant took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, saw that Thane and his wife were both smoking, and

shook one onto his desk. He picked it up and lighted it.

"Colver went to the blond Nazi, nicknamed Harvard, and told him of Thurston's call. They had no time to make careful or foolproof plans. They decided to get rid of Thurston first, then cover up later. The plan of drugging Thurston in the tavern, then removing him to a convenient spot to kill him, seemed good enough. Having the bartender do it would make it foolproof, since Thurston wouldn't be suspicious of any hostile scheming until Colver arrived. Colver knew that, since he and his partner had been seen together in the tavern often, he could work the joke-on-a-friend gag and get Thurston out of there easily after he was drugged."

"All of which went very well until I blundered into the picture," Thane observed.

The lieutenant smiled faintly. "And got your drinks mixed. Yes. When that happened and Thurston came out of the washroom to see you sitting on the stool he'd left, in front of his drink, he was about to point out the mistake. Then he saw that you'd finished his drink, and were drugged to the eyeballs."

"Then he must have guessed," Lynn put in.

"Of course he did," said the lieutenant. "He knew that your husband, a stranger, had finished a drink intended for him and had been knocked out by it. He didn't have to put two and two together. He knew instantly that Colver and Harvard had their sights trained on him, and that the meeting had been a stall to give them time to get him out of the picture. He was scared. He didn't know what to do. He didn't know if Colver and the Nazi killer were outside, waiting for him, or what."

THE lieutenant paused. "This is, of course, conjecture, but it seems reasonable enough." He frowned. "Thurston knew he had to get out of there. He knew, too, that his risk would be greater leaving alone. He seized on the plan of taking you with him, Thane, since in your drugged state you wouldn't have a great deal to say about serving as a buffer between a marked man and his hunters."

"So then he took me directly to his apartment," Thane said.

The lieutenant said, "He probably intended to leave you there as soon as he was packed and ready to leave. Colver said, in his statement to our police stenographer, that he and Harvard arrived at the apartment just as Thurston was leaving. They shot him, of course, promptly."

"Then my husband became their problem," Lynn said.

"Correct," the lieutenant declared. "He was still drugged, lying on a couch oblivious to the fact that a man had just been murdered. Colver wanted to kill him, also, but Harvard pointed out that they had an excellent opportunity to rid themselves of additional police trouble by framing Mr. Thane. They went enthusiastically to work on the job, making the wound with the poker in your husband's scalp; then planting the poker in Thurston's hand, after disposing of his bloody overcoat, suitcoat, and scarf and dressing him in his smoking jacket. They arranged the two in a position that would look obviously like struggle and murder, forced some more drugs into your husband—enough to keep him unconscious at least, they thought, ten hours more—and planted some of Thurston's money on Mr. Thane. All this took quite a little time and detailed arrangement. It was almost midnight before everything was the way they

wanted it. Then they left, posting the hoodlum-foreman of Colver's, Runt, outside to watch."

Thane turned to Lynn.

"And at this time you were checking with the cab company to find out what drivers coming off work at midnight had picked up a load of a drunk and a man described as Thurston in front of the Idle Moment shortly before six. I can't get over that, Lynn. It's incredible—such detective work!" He grinned.

Lynn smiled, waving her hand airily. "It was really nothing. I found out at the bar how you had left and with what sort of a man you'd left, and at about what time. I knew drivers keep records of their loads, the addresses, I mean, and sometimes remember the description of passengers. I was positive you weren't drunk, and that it was something dreadful, since you never get to the staggeringly revolting stage when your drinking until four in the morning or so." She paused to smile maliciously at Thane. "Besides, I got the idea of checking the cab companies from a detective story I read last week. Someone did it in that. I think it was the murderer, or—no, it was—"

Thane grinned, cutting her off.

"Don't spoil the book for me, darling. I might want to read it."

The lieutenant coughed, smiled at them both, and said:

"At any rate, your wife finally had the cab people find a driver who remembered you and Thurston and came through with the address. It was almost one when she arrived at Thurston's apartment. That was when you were leaving. The two of you missed connections by minutes. You left Thurston's door unlocked and your wife went in. She saw the body, the gun, everything."

LYNN shuddered at the recollection. "I almost lost my mind," she admitted. "I was going to bolt, to get out of there, and then I saw your letter case. It was almost out of sight in a corner of the couch. I recognized it immediately, after all, I spent enough time picking it out last Christmas."

Thane shook his head marvelingly. "Then you went to work destroying evidence, eh darling?"

"How did I know that you hadn't killed him, Dick?" Lynn protested. "After all, if my husband was going to run around killing people in such a sloppy way, I felt the least I could do was clean up after him."

"When I saw the gun and the towels in the closet I was sure the killers had placed them there," Thane said.

"That horrible blond person with the girlish voice was in the apartment after I went home with what I thought to be the evidence you'd left." Lynn shuddered. "I was certain he was going to kill me. He made me leave the towels and the gun on the floor of the closet and pack my bag with enough stuff to make it seem like I was going somewhere. Then he took some of your things, Dick. He made a telephone call, then tied me up and gagged me. After a little while that repulsive fat man appeared, and the two of them carried me out of the apartment. They had a car parked behind the building. The little fat man put me in the back of the car, on the floor, and threw a blanket over me. He left, then, and the blond with the womanly voice drove away. I didn't know where he was taking me."

"That must have been the second time I called the apartment," Thane said. "But of course there was no answer. Runt must have stayed at the apartment until I got there. Harvard, you said, stopped the car several times. He must have been telephoning Colver.

On one of those calls Colver—who'd talked to Runt and realized I was in the apartment then—told Harvard to call me. Colver had the dope on the train schedules, of course, and told Harvard to use his judgment in the story he gave me to get me to go to Woodburn."

"Colver declared, in his statement," said the lieutenant, "that your untimely regaining of consciousness jinxed their frame-up. Harvard went to your apartment when they discovered your identity and finished the frame. He thought he might find something else to pick up as a plant. Lynn walked in with the gun and towels and Harvard knew she was your wife. Then he ordered her to pack, and called Colver. Colver agreed that it would be best to get Lynn out of town and told Harvard to take her to Woodburn. Colver told Harvard, too, that you'd fled the scene and might wind up at the apartment. He instructed Colver to wait until Runt arrived to take over the watch for you."

"But Faber said that Harvard came into the Idle Moment at sometime around twelve, to tell him to get out of town," Thane said.

"He probably stopped off there after leaving Thurston's apartment, on his way to your apartment," the lieutenant said. "At any rate, with your wife in their hands, they decided to eliminate you both by the car-over-the-cliff technique in Wisconsin. They figured they could frame it to look like an accident occurring on a vacation jaunt. They figured to have your clothes in the car as additional evidence. Colver bought the car in your name from a second hand place in Chicago. He drove to Woodburn in it. Thurston's body was in the trunk, and they buried him in the woods behind a summer house Colver owned off Lake Luna. My men are digging up the body now.

The rest—your trip to Woodburn, being called for by Runt, and all—fits in."

"IT DOES," Thane agreed. "But there'd have been no solution to the jigsaw if Faber hadn't come through so beautifully. He was the one element they hadn't planned on. If he hadn't arrived in Woodburn from Blufftown—where he'd gotten off the train so as not to be seen arriving with me at Woodburn—and hadn't stationed himself across the street from the hotel in a tavern to keep watch, we'd be at the bottom of Luna Lake right now."

"He told the police at the hospital that he saw Runt emerge from the hotel with you and get into the car Harvard drove up," the lieutenant said. "He followed you in the coupe he'd rented in Blufftown, driving without lights and keeping a safe distance. It's a wonder our highway patrol didn't pick him up. I'll have to give the boys hell about that—no lights." The lieutenant smiled faintly. "At any rate, he was looking over their parked sedan when Runt came out to put out the lights. He didn't seem to have much trouble with the hoodlum."

Thane grinned.

"It's easy to underestimate Faber," he said.

There was a sound in the station hallway, and Faber, followed by three state troopers, appeared at the door of the office a moment later. The moon-faced little bartender's wrist was bandaged, and supported by a sling.

"Well, well," the lieutenant grinned. "Your ears should be red, Faber."

Faber looked embarrassed. "Don't know about my ears," he said, "but my knees is, from knocking together so hard. My God! I was sure they

wouldn't shoot so long's I had their pal in front of me. My God!"

THANE, Lynn, and Faber were in the coupe the little bartender had rented, half an hour later. Thane drove, and the silence among them was that of wearily mutual agreement, each of them thankful for its soothing restfulness. Lynn, her head on Thane's shoulder, was falling into a drowsy half-slumber. Faber was smoking a cigarette and staring at the dark ribbon of the highway ahead.

Faber turned, glancing at Lynn. Then, in a conspiratorial whisper, he addressed Thane.

"Say, when we get to Blufftown you can see the little lady safely to bed in the hotel there. Then I think you an' me could use a couple of stiff snorts." He sighed. "I'm off the wagon tonight."

Lynn opened her eyes and blinked at Faber.

"If there's going to be any drinking I will not be sent up to bed like a child," she said indignantly.

Thane grinned.

"I don't know if either of us should accept his invitation to a drink, darling," he said. "After all, look at the trouble caused by the last one he gave me."

Lynn sat up, her hand over her mouth in mock alarm.

"Goodness, I almost forgot about that!"

Faber's moon face crimsoned to his collar. He looked acutely distressed.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "You don't think I'd do that ag—" He choked off in horror at the thought. "My God!" he concluded with righteous indignation. "Once is enough!"

THE END

★ ★ ★ BUY MORE BONDS! ★ ★ ★

The GIFT

by BRUNO FISCHER



Get the corpse buried—that was what he had to do. Then he'd be safe . . .

There is one element that makes the perfect crime impossible—sheer chance

THE silk-clad leg that lay along the ground was somehow no longer shapely. From the big toe a gaily-colored sandal hung at an askew angle.

Leonard Webb dropped his head back into his hands. Nightmare and reality had merged. Less than forty

minutes had passed since the ringing of the telephone bell, yet already it seemed to him as if that had been part of another existence.

It had been Fay Dram's husky voice on the wire, telling him that she was at the station, about to come here by taxi —to this house where he lived with



Marion, his wife. He had met her outside the high hedges which enclosed the estate and had got her quickly out of sight by leading her into the grape arbor. Fortunately it was close to midnight; Marion and the servants were asleep.

"Fay, you're mad," he said. "You've got to return to Provincetown at once."

She smiled with her lips only, and in the moonlight her gray eyes were hard black coals. "You're not kicking me around any more, Lenny. You haven't been to see me in three weeks."

"I'll be in Provincetown tomorrow night. I promise."

"That's no longer good enough, Lenny. You're going to leave that woman. You're going away with me, tonight."

In the uncertain light her face was cut into sharp planes. She was not nearly so attractive as Marion. She had not the grace or the charm, and certainly not the money. Why then had he started the affair?

In a way it was Marion's fault. He was crazy about swimming and boating and Marion loathed outdoor sports, so when hot days had come she had not accompanied him on weekends to Provincetown. And in Provincetown he had met Fay Dram.

"Haven't you anything to say?" Fay's voice rose to a pitch of sheer fury. "I'll *make* you go with me."

"Can't you lower your voice?"

"Let the whole world hear me!" she screamed. "I'll go straight to the house and tell her everything. We'll see how long she'll keep you then. You'll come crawling to me. You—"

He lunged at her. "Damn you, shut up!"

The silence of the night returned. She was thrashing against him, tearing at his hands around her throat, but she was no longer screaming. . . .

HE SAT with his head in his hands, trying to rouse his dazed brain into action. The important thing was to get the body away from here.

No, it wasn't as simple as that. As a lawyer, he knew how easily the police could identify a body. Even if he stripped every stitch of clothing from it, her identity might be learned through dental work or other physical markings or a photo sent throughout the country. Once they discovered who she was, no matter where the body was found, murder would inevitably point to him.

A number of people in Provincetown knew of their affair. The sphere of investigation would arrow down to him, as it always narrowed down to the lover. The taxi driver who had brought her here would identify her. The police would need no more.

The mere fact that her murdered body existed trapped him. It must cease to exist.

Fay had been in Provincetown only since spring, and not even he knew anything of her past. Who would think it strange if she suddenly left? Later, if there were inquiries by her family—if she had a family—it would only be found that she had last been seen in Provincetown and had not left a forwarding address. She had probably gone off with a man. And there it would rest.

Leonard Webb stepped out of the arbor. The house and the servants' cottage were both dark and silent. Near the arbor and at a distance from the other buildings stood the small wooden shack which he had converted into a workshop. His hobby was building fine woodwork, as others collected stamps. He had equipped the shack with workbench and tools, and there he spent what seemed to him the most pleasant hours of his life.

He plunged again into a nightmare. It was as if he were watching somebody else in his own image carry the body into the shack, lock the door and pull the shades, then rip up a section of the floor and set to work with pick and shovel.

After a while his muscles lost all sense of feeling, but he kept on with a kind of relentless fury. Two feet down, three feet, four feet—he had to reach the bowels of the earth, to put her out of sight forever.

When the top of the pit was above his head, he ceased. Careful not to look at the body, he shoved it over the edge. It fell with a sickening thud. He tossed her valise and handbag on top of the body and drove his agonized muscles to fill the grave.

The eastern sky was turning a baby-blue when he locked the door and stumbled toward the house.

AT noon he awoke. From his window he saw Marion strolling in the garden. In slacks and polo shirt, she looked as sweet and fresh as a sixteen-year-old. He stood watching her, wondering why her beauty had never before hit him the way it did now.

After breakfast he went to the shack. A chill swept over him as he stepped inside, but it passed almost at once. Even he could hardly tell that dirt had been shoveled here last night or that the floorboards had been disturbed.

On and off during the last couple of weeks he had been working on a record cabinet. It wasn't completely finished, but it would have to do as it was. He started with it toward the house. Highby, the gardener, and Gibson, the chauffeur, came running over to relieve him of it.

"I couldn't sleep last night, so I worked on this till dawn," Webb told them.

"So that was the knocking I heard last night?" Gibson said. "I was just telling Highby about it. We thought we'd have a look around."

Webb kept his smile from showing. It paid to prepare for any eventuality. Now, if for any reason the police ever did come here to inquire about Fay Dram, nobody would think of mentioning mysterious sounds on the night she had last been seen.

He called Marion to see the cabinet. "It's for your music records, sweetheart. I haven't stained it yet and the carving isn't quite finished. I haven't got all the tools I need."

"Why, darling, it's beautiful!" she exclaimed. And she kissed him.

Tenderly he held her to him, running his lips over her eyes and chin and throat.

"You've never kissed me like that before," she whispered. "You kiss me as if you love me."

"I've always loved you."

"You've been fond of me, darling, but that's not love. All along I've been hoping that some day you'd actually fall in love with me. Is this it, Len?"

"Yes," he said from the bottom of his heart.

IN THE days that followed he discovered that he had in fact fallen in love with his wife. The climax of his affair with Fay Dram had been an awakening. He was careful not to think of the thing buried deep under the shack. The whole horrible experience was becoming remote and shadowy, like something he had read long ago in a book.

Austin Pittman, his law partner, phoned from New York to bawl him out for neglecting his office.

"It's your fault, Marion," Webb told his wife. "I can't tear myself away from you. I'm afraid I'll have to

be in New York at least a week."

"A week," Marion said as if to herself, and she smiled.

"Say, you're not *glad* I'm going?"

"Of course not, silly. I'll miss you terribly." But her eyes continued to smile.

He was back in three days.

Marion was reading on the front terrace when he pulled up in his car. She raced down to him.

"Darling, you said you were going to be gone a week."

"I couldn't stay away from you." He looked narrowly at her. "Aren't you happy I'm back?"

"You know I am. Only now you've spoiled the surprise. I wanted it to be all ready when you returned."

"Surprise?" he said.

She nestled against him. "I want it to be a very special gift because you've been so sweet lately. You remember when you gave me the record cabinet and said you couldn't finish it because

your workshop hadn't enough tools?"

He pushed her away from him and walked stiff-legged along the terrace. When he reached the corner of the house, he could see the shack—or the place where the shack had been.

"Marion, what have you done?"

"I thought you'd be pleased," she said, staring into his face which she could hardly recognize. "I'm having a new workshop built for you, equipped with the best tools that can be bought. The house will be fieldstone and there will be a cellar where you can store—"

"Cellar!" he croaked.

The shack had been replaced by a crater. Above the crater he could see the flash of shovels spraying dirt.

"Darling, are you sick?" Marion asked.

He didn't hear her. The shout that rose from the crater filled his brain. Two men stumbled out and raced across the lawn to where he and Marion were standing.

OFF THE BLOTTER

(Continued from page 8)

Plan is the restraint and direction exercised over traffic and may be accomplished by design, traffic control devices, or by manual direction. Control by manual direction is invested in the police. Design and traffic control devices are the responsibilities of engineers.

The Plan briefs procedures to be followed when such aggravated factors as the following occur: 1. Air raid. 2. Blackouts. 3. Sudden, unanticipated and serious interference with, or interruption of planned traffic circulation. 4. Frequent and sudden changes in demands for road use. 5. The need for special restriction on road use and channels of operation. 6. Special problems attendant upon the accommodation of military traffic. 7. Restrictions in communication facilities.

DESPITE the impressions caused by publicity child brides in Kentucky and Tennessee, those two states must definitely take a back seat in the furthering of young love. Colorado, Mississippi and New Jersey all have legal marrying ages below the two.

The legal age in those three states is 14 for

the gentleman and 12 for the young lady. Tennessee, home of many a shotgun wedding, at least according to the popular conception, has a limit of 16 years for both sexes, while Kentucky is a bit easier on the female sex, having set a limit of fourteen.

All these ages, it should be understood, are only legal where parental consent is offered.

In all, there are at present twenty-six states which allow marriage, with consent of course, of a girl under sixteen years old.

A few of the age limitations, with consent, are Florida, Iowa, New York, Texas, and Utah, 16 and 14 respectively for the boy and girl; Alabama, Arkansas, and Georgia, 17 and 14; Missouri, 15 and 15; and Illinois, 18 and 16.

ONE of the most vicious of the rackets which have sprung up as a result of the war is the "love on first sight" game, which has given growth to the so-called "allotment wife."

The allotment wife is the modern version of the camp follower of olden days. She moves to a center near some large military camp or embarkation point. Then she marries a soldier or sailor on furlough or about to embark.

When her first husband has left the vicinity, or as is often the case—the country, the allotment wife changes her name and address and

marries another serviceman. She may do this two or three or even more times.

The racket angle is simple to work and difficult to stop. The "loving" bride collects not only the allotment pay of her husband—\$50 or more per month, depending on his rank—but she also may collect up to \$10,000 insurance on any or all of the husbands killed in action.

Many commercial prostitutes feel that the risk involved is well worth taking, as they may continue to work while collecting benefits.

One such bride was recently accosted in Canada. She had five husbands at the time, three of whom were soldiers. She was sentenced to four years in the penitentiary for her overabundance of loving spouses.

FORGERY must have been a problem to society long before our time. History tells us that numerous attempts had been made to check the check-passers.

In 1870, "check protectors" were manufactured. Although not claiming certain proof against forgeries, these were important instruments of protection. Check protectors consisted of punches which perforated figure holes in paper.

In June, 1899, a more efficient check protector was developed. Libanus McLouth Todd completed this model in a woodshed at 384 Gregory Street, Rochester, New York. He filed his application for a patent on August 8, 1899, and placed the machine on the market in the fall of that year. Its trade name was "Protectograph," and was built so that the machine forced ink into the paper under pressure making it part of the fiber of the document. On August 9, 1904, patent No. 766,853 was granted Todd, who illustrated that "Necessity is the mother of invention"—especially where clever crooks produce the necessity!

THREE have been countless stories of the intrigues, plots, and conspiracies of crafty noblemen. The French racketeering device, *lettres-de-cachet*, was one that gained great favor in "polite society."

Anyone with influence could have anyone with less influence secretly arrested and quietly banished for life, without leaving a trace of judicial procedure to show where the victim had gone.

Thus, the man who had a "drag" could borrow money without a thought of repayment. If his creditors became too insistent, they vanished. Many of these loans were, of course, only lightly disguised blackmail. The lender was afraid to refuse.

Personal grudges, too, were satisfied by this means. When not available through ordinary influence, this machinery could always be invoked through bribery of one kind or another. As a result, one well-known institution, marriage, became just a temporary vacation for flocks of

more ambitious young ladies in noble favor. Inconvenient or old-fashioned husbands disappeared with great frequency in this "sacrament of adultery."

It is said that a single Minister of the King issued more than fifty thousand of these orders of secret arrest. In those pre-Napoleon days, then, *lettres-de-cachet* seemed to be the vogue. When we planned our own Constitution, it may be interesting to recall, a special provision was inserted in the document, making such secret arrests illegal.

ARE you the sort of person, who, reclining in an easy chair, can solve the toughest murder ever to be committed in a magazine or book? Are you the type who drives all the people in your vicinity nuts at a theater, with a verbal accusing finger at the culprit, when the picture is but half-done?

If you are, then at some time or other you have probably wished you were a private detective, rolling in big dough and being pursued by (and pursuing) lovely young damsels in distress. Well, brother, awake and look at the facts.

Private detective work is no cinch and is certainly not an over-adventurous trade. A detective must have a good, general education, a quick mind, diligence, alertness, first rate character, the ability to do a lot of hard, sometimes menial work, a sense of logic—and a pair of good strong feet.

The latter are the prime requisites for what most veteran detectives term the hardest part of the job—shadowing. In these days of big stores, automobiles, fast traffic, and easy transportation, a man who can follow a suspect unfailingly deserves to be ranked alongside Ellery Queen and other famous detectives.

Despite the impression given off by the movies, most detectives are not wise-cracking, quick-fisted battlers. The majority are just fellows who can start a job and follow it through, mostly on their own two feet.

Like the infantry, the best man is the one with the tootsies, and deductive reasoning be damned.

THE British police force is a great and subtle body. They have had more experience than our own police force in crime detection and elimination. For this reason, perhaps, it is unequivocally understood that the governing body is Scotland Yard.

This body has many other sections of the police associated with it. It has charge of all fingerprint files and police records. It constitutes a national police force and although leaving simple local affairs to local offices, it cares for the greater and more offensive crimes. Although highly rated now, Scotland Yard was once only the headquarters of the London Metropolitan police. It derived its name from the fact

(Concluded on page 163)

CORPSE



Clearly visible in the ice wall was the body, perfectly preserved through the years

IN ICE

By LEONARD B. ROSBOROUGH

**As inexorable as Time itself the glacier
moved—bearing its grisly secret to solution**

CHAPTER I

I TRAMPED up the slope of the low ridge until I could see over the top, raised the binoculars to my eyes—and stopped dead. You've often read about this or that guy "gasping." That's plain malarkey; guys simply don't gasp. But if gasps had been in fashion that bright October morning, I'd have enjoyed a nice one.

The ridge I was climbing formed the rim of a grassy basin on the east slope of Cold Valley. In the center of the basin below me a small lake sparkled in the morning sunshine. It was fed by a rivulet from Little Glacier, a remnant of the last great Ice Age pocketed in a

gorge higher up the side of the valley.

I wasn't startled by the fact that big Dan Wells, the brains of Ace Investigators, was taking an early morning dip in an ice-cold lake, or that the big loon was wearing watersoaked shorts and undershirt, which practically qualified him for a nudist's degree. What got me was the burden cradled in the mighty arms of my cynical and hard-boiled partner. That burden was the voluptuous form of Hilda Stromberg, big and blonde like a Twentieth Century Viking, and there wasn't a stitch adorning her beautiful frame.

I was still doing a mental stagger when I got another jolt. As Dan walked out onto the sandy beach, a fat guy



oozed from a thicket with an automatic in his mitt. I recognized him from pictures in the papers five years earlier, at the time of the famous Alf Webb disappearance. His name was Paul Telgen.

TELGEN and the Stromberg Jane had been members of the party from which Alf had disappeared. Besides this pair and the unfortunate Webb himself, there'd been two others—a lean and cynical bird named Tony Faber, and lovely little Avis Lynn. Avis was young Webb's fiancee and Hilda's half-sister. Hilda went along as Avis's chaperone—and maybe because she had a crush on Paul Telgen at the time.

The object of their trip into the mountains was to bring back a cache of gold dust. In scouting around some time before that, Webb and Telgen and Faber had found an old sourdough prospector who had injured himself. They got him to civilization, but his injuries finished him. The guy had no kith nor kin. Before he passed on, he told them where his hoard was cached. It was theirs for the finding.

So the party of five went out and found it. Telgen and the other guy, Tony Faber, and the two girls, Hilda and Avis, came back. Alf Webb didn't. They told a story about Webb falling into a crevasse in Little Glacier. Telgen and Faber brought home their shares of the gold dust; Webb's was lost with him.

The case created a stir. There was some lifting of eyebrows, some questioning by the law, but by that time blizzards were raging in the mountains, and no real investigation could be made. The thing soon blew over. Everyone but the principals—and Dan Wells, my partner—forgot it. Dan was never fully convinced that Webb's

death was an accident.

Now, five years later, Dan and I were at the foot of Little Glacier, fifteen hundred miles from home, because he figured the glacier was due to spew out Webb's body at its lower end. Such things have happened, and when a guy's screwy enough to check the travel of one of these languid rivers of ice for five years, you might as well humor him. Besides, Dan had me half sold on the idea. If he'd lived in the old days, he could have convinced Job that boils were a blessing.

THE fat guy made some violent gestures. Dan walked a few paces and eased the unclad lady down. She seemed to be groggy, maybe unconscious. Her shirt and shorts were piled on the beach. Dan slipped them onto her, placed her face down and began pumping her arms to induce respiration.

I skulked along behind the ridge to get closer to them and catch some of their conversation. By the time I reached a spot opposite them, she was coming out of it. Dan helped her sit up.

The fat fellow was Paul Telgen, all right—flabby, loose-lipped, slovenly in dress, and wearing a three-days' growth of beard.

He was saying to Dan, "All right, tell me about it. And make it good."

Dan stood there like a Greek god in sodden underwear and gave the guy one of his faint sardonic smiles. He gestured toward a line of boulders which cut the beach in two and extended out into the water.

"Simple enough," he said. "I came to the beach on the other side of that chain of rocks to take a dip. I started to shed my duds and saw something in the water. It turned out to be the lady. I lugged her out."

Telgen's flabby lips curled. "Heroic

guy. Only I don't believe your yarn. I think you had a date with her."

Dan said, "Maybe she'll confirm my yarn."

The husky blonde didn't confirm anything. She just sat there with a dumb, dazed look.

Telgen gave a mean little laugh. "She's got nothing to say, it seems. Who are you and what're you doing here?"

Dan assumed his air of lofty disdain and asked, "Does it worry you, Telgen?"

Telgen looked startled at the mention of his name.

"Name's Wells," Dan went on. "I'm interested in glaciers. Maybe we're brother scientists."

The fat lad's face turned red. His trigger finger seemed to be getting nervous. I was just about to pop over the ridge with my own gun in hand, when the big blonde gal gave a little moan and collapsed on the sand.

Telgen turned to look at her, and Dan was on him. My big partner's very handy with his dukes. He slapped Telgen's gun hand down with his left and hooked a hard right to the jaw. Telgen dropped his gat and went head-over-heels backward. Dan picked up the pistol and tossed it into the water.

I tucked my gun away, stepped over the ridge and started down toward them. Telgen got up, mad as a wild bull, and rushed Dan. It was amazing how smooth and fast he moved, carrying all that beef. Dan clouted him another one, not quite so hard. The fat lad sat down with a grunt. Dan pulled him to his feet and said, "Goodbye now."

Telgen gave him a sullen, uncertain look. But two of Dan's haymakers are enough for anyone short of a champ pug, and finally Telgen turned and went away over the ridge. We watched him until he was well on his way toward

their camp. Then we saw a tall man come from the thicket and join him.

I looked at Dan; Dan looked at me. I said, "That tall guy's Tony Faber, or I'm crazy."

Dan clicked his tongue and answered, "Very likely, Gnome." He calls me Gnome because I'm short and broad, with a face like the leading man in a nightmare. "They're all here to welcome Webb home. Why d'you suppose Telgen and Faber came along this trip? They didn't lose their gold dust."

I said, "To help the girls, maybe."

"Maybe. Or to grab Webb's share. Or maybe there's some evidence they want to find and destroy."

The big blonde girl was showing signs of life. Dan said, "You entertain her, Gnome, while I dress," and disappeared 'behind the row of boulders.

CHAPTER II

HILDA STROMBERG sat up and stared at me. Her eyes were blue, but not the kind to inspire ballads. Chilly blue. She wore her thick blonde hair in a short bob. Her scanty togs revealed her sumptuous underpinning and husky frame to good advantage.

"I ought to be afraid of you," she said, "but with a pan like that, you've probably got a heart of gold."

"With a map as hard as yours," I retorted, "you'd be safe in a sultan's seraglio."

Hilda laughed throatily. "Let's call it a draw, Adonis. Here comes my big hero."

Dan was coming back, dressed, wringing the water out of his undies. He spread them on a rock to dry and came over. I told him I thought the dame was stalling—she didn't look very dazed now.

"That last passout *was* a bluff," she admitted. "Paul hasn't much sense.

I was afraid he'd lose his head and shoot. Then we'd all be in a jam. I faked the faint so your big chum could catch him off guard."

"Sweet of you," Dan commented. "Tell us more."

Hilda talked. "I came out for a dip. Didn't see anyone around—not that it would've made a hell of a lot of difference—so I slid out of the raiment and waded in."

She stopped and gave me and Dan an appraising look. "I walked out along that chain of rocks. Someone hidden there K.O.'d me. Next thing I knew you were pawing over me." She smiled slightly at Dan. "You wouldn't make a bad lady's maid—"

She stopped as though the sentence had been cut off with a cleaver. There was a startled flicker in her eyes. She got up and looked aimlessly around as though searching for something.

Dan's hand snaked out and passed over her short blonde hair. She jerked away and snapped at him, "What's the idea?"

"The slugging didn't raise a lump," Dan replied.

Hilda glared. "So I'm a liar, am I? He probably used a sandbag."

Dan yawned. "Maybe so, Hilda."

Hilda Stromberg looked at his sharply. "So you know me, too. You knew Paul Telgen—"

"I read the papers," Dan answered mildly. "Tony Faber's with you, isn't he? Which one of them slugged you, and why?"

HILDA looked us over carefully like an entomologist studying a couple of new bug specimens. Then she opened up: "Maybe I'm just a simple, trusting country lass to—"

I let out a wild guffaw.

Dan grinned briefly and said, "Tut, Gnome. That's impolite."

The big Jane smiled—actually smiled in her hard way. "It *is* a laugh, isn't it? But somehow you boys impress me. Yes, Tony Faber's here. Avis, too; she's back at our camp. We're all here except Alf Webb—"

Dan said, "And you're expecting *him*. We understand. So are we. Tell us what happened here five years ago."

"Poor Alf," she said musingly. "A likeable kid, who loved a joke. Nervy, too, but unlucky. First, while we were up here, he crushed a finger under a heavy rock. Borrowed Paul Telgen's hunting knife and amputated it himself. Put it in his bag of dust to take home as a keepsake."

"Grandstand play?" Dan asked.

"No. He wasn't a grandstander. I just happened to see him putting it away. He told me to keep mum—Avis was already upset by the accident; he was afraid it would shock her to know he was carrying the finger."

Hilda stopped. Dan said, "Might as well tell us the rest."

She thought it over. "Why not?" she said at last. "There's nothing to hide. The boys split the dust into three equal shares—about twenty-five pounds each. They put each share into a small canvas poke, with a strap to go around the neck. Each man carried his camp roll on his back, his bag of dust on his chest to balance him. Avis and I had our own little packs."

She glanced up at Little Glacier gleaming in its narrow valley bed, with the peaks rising high on either side of it. "We were up there beyond the glacier. We knew there was snow coming. Faber said the glacier pass was the easiest and quickest way out—"

"Faber suggested it?" Dan asked.

"You heard me," Hilda snapped at him. "Avis and I were in the lead. Alf Webb, Avis's fiance, came next with Tony Faber close behind him. Paul

was maybe fifty yards behind Faber. Paul's short and fat and was having trouble keeping up. The storm caught us about half way down—a hell of a blow, with snow so thick we couldn't see twenty feet. Luckily the wind was straight down the glacier, at our backs."

SHE hunched her shoulders, shivered and asked, "Why don't you offer me a smoke?"

"Sorry," I apologized. I stuck a cigarette in her face and lit it for her.

A few drags, and she said, "Thanks, Adonis. That helps a lot."

"Then what?" Dan asked.

"I heard a faint call from Alf Webb, 'Help . . . Tony,' and heard Tony answer him. Avis was ahead of me by this time, out of sight in the driving snow. I called to her and started stumbling back." She stopped and pulled furiously at her cigarette.

Dan asked, "What did you find?"

"Tony Faber down on his belly looking into the crevasse and calling Alf's name. Paul standing over him and yelling questions at Tony."

Dan said, "That's about how the papers had it. Tony Faber wasn't far away from Webb when he called out. The way Faber told it, the sound came from the direction of the crevasse, off to his right. Webb had wandered from the course, and Faber was abreast of him. Faber had to move carefully on account of the danger of falling in. But he got there first, Telgen soon after, then you and finally Avis Lynn. The ice at that spot was swept bare of snow by the high wind, except a strip at the lip of the crevasse. So there were no signs of struggle, no marks except a break in that strip showing where Webb went over."

Hilda nodded. "That was all."

"From then on," Dan continued, "everyone was on edge. It might have

been an accident or it might have been murder. It could have been any of you—"

Hilda shook her head. "It couldn't have been Avis. Those kids were really in love. Desperately. They didn't want to be separated for a day. That's why Avis came along. No, it was an accident."

Dan made one of his sudden direct attacks: "You and Paul Telgen were pretty sweet. Why didn't you ever marry him?"

"You know a hell of a lot, don't you?" Hilda snapped at him. She flipped the butt of her cigarette away and looked at me.

I slipped her another. She took a little time out to puff, then gave us that characteristic hunch of the shoulders and said, half regretfully, "Calf love, Paul and I. A passing fancy. I guess we're both too hardboiled to go in for the real thing."

"I imagine so," Dan agreed. "Hilda the Viking. A thousand years ago I can picture you out with the big blond boys ravaging the English coast town. . . . You called to Avis Lynn. Did she answer?"

"Yes, but she was downwind. She heard Webb's cry and she heard me call to her, but I couldn't hear her answer."

"Then you have only her word for it," Dan said stubbornly.

That irritated me. "Dan," I said, "don't be a dope. Avis Lynn's story sounds okay to me. They wouldn't hear her upwind in a howling gale."

"Maybe so, Gnome." Dan smiled indulgently and said to Hilda, "Gnome's easily impressed by a pretty face."

Hilda threw me a grateful look. "Thanks, Adonis. You're not as dumb as you look. I think I like you a little."

Strange to say, the "Adonis" gibe and the dumb-as-you-look gag didn't make me sore. I was beginning to have a sneaking liking for the big blonde hussy.

Hilda got up and said, "Alf Webb's death was an accident. We can get along here without your help. But thanks for the rescue." She left us and went down toward their camp.

I LEERED at Dan. "If I'd only had a camera," I jeered. "What a picture for the tabloids! Swell headlines: *Daring Dick Goes Nudist Lugs Luscious Lady From Lake.*"

Dan grinned tolerantly. "I'm just a natural savior of fair women. One of those mugs socked her with a sandbag." He looked thoughtful and added, "Or something like a sandbag."

"What do you mean—something like a sandbag?"

"A bag of gold dust. One of the bags went into the crevasse with Webb."

I started to say it was still there, but Dan held up his hand. "In 1840 three men fell into a crevasse in the Alps. Forty-one years later their heads came to light at the foot of the glacier. Bits of equipment showed up over the next four years. So this bag of dust may have come to light before the body."

"You think one of the gang found the bag and tried to hold out on the rest?" I asked.

"Could be that or something else. Hilda's case would have looked like plain drowning if I hadn't happened along. One of this gang may have thought the glacier would preserve a murder clue. Remember that scientists' banquet where they ate mammoth meat which had been frozen twenty thousand years?"

That threw a scare into me. If Hilda wasn't lying about being sapped,

whoever did it would try again. And there was little Avis Lynn— Funny. I'd never met the kid; knew her only from news pictures, but I was worrying about her. Dan filled his pipe and puffed in silence. It looked like a good time to make a getaway. I wanted to snoop around the enemy camp and assure myself the little wren was safe.

"When you get through dreaming," I told Dan, "come back to camp."

He nodded absently. "I will. This was murder, Gnome. If they could see almost twenty feet in that snow, Webb shouldn't have blundered into the crevasse. I think I know who killed him."

"Yeah?"

"Uh-huh. You remember Avis said she heard Hilda's call and answered it, but Hilda didn't hear the answer?"

"Don't be silly, Dan. Avis wouldn't kill a fly."

"Probably not," Dan answered in a soothing tone.

I PLUNGED into a thicket and walked toward their camp. Within a hundred yards of the place, I heard voices in argument. I eased down a gravelly slope, peered through the bushes and saw Telgen and Faber. Faber was lean and tall, trim in khaki. He had well groomed hair, tawny eyes, a tanned intelligent face.

Telgen was doing the loud talking. Faber spoke in a lower tone. They were re-hashing the five-year-old story of the trek across the glacier.

Telegen said in his wheezy voice, "I don't know who these guys are, but they know us. Dicks, maybe." He leered at Faber. "Does that idea startle you?"

Faber answered with cynical indifference, "Hi-jackers after the gold, probably. Why should it startle me?"

Telgen laughed huskily. "Just a

notion. You borrowed my hunting knife the morning we broke camp—claimed you lost it—”

“Or that you got it back without my knowledge.”

“Not a chance. Everybody knows you had the knife. You’ve always been sweet on Avis. You’re the one who figured how fast the glacier moved and told Avis the body was due to show up. If Hilda hadn’t tipped me off, there’d have been just the three of you here today.”

Faber’s tawny eyes half closed. “What are you driving at?” he asked.

“Maybe you knew the knife’d be found with the body—my knife. You could’ve either got rid of it—or maybe tried to hang something on me.”

Faber stepped forward, pushed his face close to Telgen’s. This smooth guy could be tough, it seemed. He spoke in a cold, even voice: “Telgen, one more crack like that—”

Telgen’s eyes popped open. He took a step backward, but tried to put on a bold front. “Is that a threat?”

“That’s a promise. And I keep my promises.”

Nice people! All eyes and ears, watching this little drama, I moved involuntarily and sent a little slide of gravel down the slope.

Faber’s glance flicked in my direction for an instant, then went back to Telgen’s face. “We’d better not start fighting among ourselves,” he said in a milder tone. “We’ve got these others to look after.”

He said more that I didn’t catch.

Telgen’s scowl finally changed to a feeble grin. “I guess that’s sense,” he agreed. He turned and started back toward their camp.

FABER stood stroking his sleek hair, watching Telgen as he walked away. I suspected the fat guy’s nagging had

him worried. Finally he pulled out a .38 automatic. I thought he was going to let Telgen have it, but at that moment the fat lad disappeared into the thicket. Faber stood watching the spot for two or three minutes, but the other guy didn’t show up again. Then Faber started walking directly toward the spot where I was hiding. I couldn’t get away without being heard or seen, and I didn’t want him to get the drop on me. I pulled my own rod, stepped out and said, “You’re covered, Faber. Drop it.”

He stopped, let the gun slide from his fingers and answered as cool as you please, “Well, hijacker, you’ve been eavesdropping.”

An instant later there was a noise behind me. As I started to turn, a club sailed through the air and knocked the gun from my fist.

I heard Telgen’s hoarse voice: “And now *you’re* covered, buddy. We heard you. I circled through the brush; and here we are.”

Faber said, “We’ll take him into camp until we see what goes on.”

When we got to their camp, a slender girl in a tan slack suit came out of her tent to meet us. I recognized her from the old news pictures. Avis Lynn’s eyes opened wide when she saw me. Close up, she was a knockout—little and slim and lithe, pink showing through the tan on her cheeks, eyes like the sky, fluffy brown hair. She looked at me like she might have stared at some wild animal.

“Who is it?” she asked Faber.

“Hijacker after the gold. His pal’s still at large.”

“What are you going to do with him?”

Faber considered the question, finally answered. “Tie him up. We’ll decide his fate later.”

Telgen didn’t say anything, but he looked at me and let out the meanest laugh I ever heard.

They trussed me up with my hands behind me, set me on a camp stool and tied my ankles together.

"Where's Hilda?" Faber inquired. "Snooping around the glacier again?"

"I don't know," Avis answered with a touch of defiance. "If she is, what of it?"

"We're all supposed to be working together on this," Faber answered. "I'll find her."

"I'll help," Telgen said. He tossed a long knife at the girl's feet. "The guy's tied up tight," he told her, "but if he tries to get rough, prod him with the shiv."

She gave me a sidelong look, picked up the knife and sat on another stool a little distance away. Faber was already on his way. Telgen hurried after him.

CHAPTER IV

A VIS'S devastating blue eyes regarded me warily. A little more color came into her cheeks. My nose caught the faintest whiff of a delicate perfume.

I smiled my sweetest and opened up: "Your friends seem to be worried. Are they afraid Hilda'll find something?"

Avis looked at me doubtfully. "What would they be afraid she'd find?"

"Evidence, maybe."

A shiver passed over her. She didn't answer.

I was uneasy about Dan. The big loon can usually take care of himself, but if these two caught him off guard, they could cause a lot of trouble. They might be desperate enough to go to any length.

I got very earnest. "Listen, sister," I pleaded, "Dan Wells and I are private detectives. We're not hijackers. If Alf Webb was murdered, we want to nail the killer. And so do you!"

She started, and color flooded her face. At last she answered, "Yes—of course. But it was—an accident."

"You don't believe that," I argued. "If it was murder, what then?"

She shivered again and dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. "Nobody would—murder Alf. Everyone liked him. He was so happy-go-lucky. He took life almost as a joke. He was generous—"

Talking seemed to relieve the tension of her mind. I tried to encourage her: "Yeah, I understand he'd give a friend the shirt off his back."

She nodded. "He'd cheat himself, but nobody else. When they divided the dust, just before we started home from that trip, Paul Telgen thought Alf's share was a little heavier than his. Alf said, 'Okay, Paul, we'll trade.' And they did."

"You see?" I said. "Telgen's greedy. He looks like the type that'd do anything for profit. I'm worried about my partner. Cut these cords."

She seemed half convinced. I leaned forward waiting her decision. I had a plan, in case she refused. It hurt me to think of getting rough with this frail little jane, but a guy can't always play the gentleman.

She hesitated, then shook her head. "No. Maybe I should trust you, but I can't be sure."

I played my highest card. "Somebody tried to murder Hilda this morning."

SHE straightened up with a sharp intake of breath. I told her the rest of the story. Her fingers curled into fists as she listened. The nails dug into her palms. I thought I had her sold. "What's the answer?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "How do I know it wasn't you or your friend who tried to drown Hilda?"

That left me only one course. I came up from my seat and lunged for her. She and the stool went over backward under me. She tried to wriggle free, but my weight held her down.

"I'll stab you," she panted.

The point of the knife was against my ribs. It sent a chill through me. I almost regretted my rash plunge.

"You're not the killing kind," I argued, trying to convince myself as well as her. "Cut the cords, or—"

I rolled to bring my chest onto her face and shut off her breath. She struggled harder, and she wasn't as frail as she looked—one of these outdoor athletic wrens. She put more pressure on the knife, until it pricked my skin. A swell way for a tough mug to pass out, I thought—stabbed to death by a frail little perfumed doll.

"Hilda's in danger," I argued in desperation. "Whoever tried to kill her will try again. Maybe they've got her now."

The pressure of the knife relaxed. I repeated my last statement. She hesitated for a few seconds, then her hand groped for my wrists. The knife sawed through the cords. I came up to my knees, snatched the knife and slashed the bonds on my ankles. I got up and pulled her to her feet.

"I couldn't do it," she moaned. "I couldn't—kill—anyone."

I said, "Sister, believe me I feel like a dog. But I was desperate. Here." I placed the shiv in her hand. "You may need this — against some of your friends."

Outside the tent, I hotfooted it for the lake where I'd left Dan. His underclothes were still drying on the rock, but he wasn't in sight; neither were my late captors. It gave me a scare. Had these two surprised Dan and taken him away? If he'd gone back to camp, why hadn't he taken his clothes? I won-

dered desperately where I should look next, finally decided on our camp.

We had a green pup tent pitched in a grove of fir and pine on a knoll, invisible until you were within a few yards of it. I made the quarter-mile in record time for a guy with short legs. When I got within sight of the place, I stopped and grabbed a sapling for support. Dan's big body was flat on its back with one knee drawn up. I'd seen guys lying like that after they'd been shot dead.

I tried to call out to him, but all that came from my throat was a croak. I started forward, and caution whispered in my ear. Telgen and Faber might be hidden somewhere, waiting for me. They'd got my gun back at their camp, and I was unarmed. It wouldn't help Dan for me to run into a trap. I went on, keeping under cover as much as possible. At every glimpse of Dan's sprawled hulk, I hoped for some sign of life, but there wasn't any. He might have been a part of the landscape.

The thing got me. I felt a sudden surge of rage, forgot caution and broke into a run.

CHAPTER V

AS I came up to him, Dan opened his eyes and said quietly, "Gnome, you look excited. Been in another mess?"

The relief was terrific, but the sudden turn of events enraged me still more. "You big loon!" I yelled. "You had me scared stiff. You left your underwear on that rock—"

"So I did," Dan answered, and sat up. "I made an important discovery; it drove everything else from my mind." He took up a dirty, watersoaked canvas bag. There was a strap with a buckle attached to it. The strap was

broken. "Webb's," he said. "The one with the amputated finger in it."

"Where'd you find it?"

"In the lake by the chain of rocks where Hilda was KO'd. It's the 'sandbag'—a twelve-thousand-dollar blackjack. The slugger left in there; no doubt intended to pick it up later—after he'd got rid of everybody else."

"Telgen!" I yelped. "He was right there when you pulled her out."

"Sounds plausible," Dan agreed. "I must have found Hilda soon after she was conked, otherwise she'd have drowned."

I told him what I'd been up to since we parted at the lake. Dan clucked knowingly as I talked. When I finished, he raised his brows and jeered: "You wrestled with the gentle Avis? Galahad, how could you?"

"Nuts, Dan, there wasn't any other way." I got to my feet.

Dan asked where I was going.

"To the glacier," I told him. "Those two mugs are looking for Hilda. She may need help."

I started away. He grinned and said, "Always the valiant knight. Watch your step, Gnome."

THE ground below the ice mass was strewn with boulders brought down as it crawled forward during the cold months and left when the foot of the glacier melted away under the hot summer sun. The high sloping face of the glacier was cut by many deep gullies extending far back into it. There was no one in sight, but Faber and Telgen could be somewhere in one of those icy canyons. I kept under cover until I was close enough to slip out and duck into one of them. Then I wished I'd thought to borrow Dan's gat.

The plane was as quiet as anybody's grave. Walls of ice like bottle-green

glass rose high on both sides of me. Webb's body could very well be somewhere in that mass, preserved by the cold and looking just as he did five years before.

The inner end of the chasm was split into two branches by a tongue of ice extending out from the main body of the glacier. The end of this tongue had broken off and lay in a pile of icy blocks. I climbed onto the pile—and immediately forgot all about Telgen and Faber.

Alf Webb was staring at me! His slight body was frozen upright in the ice like a fly in a block of amber. His eyes were half closed, mouth partly open, the face a rigid mask of terror. The last break-down of the ice had uncovered the face so it stood out from the surface like the figure of a grotesque and horrible cameo.

As soon as I could collect my wits, I scrambled down the pile of ice blocks and approached the body.

Another crack was developing in the ice. Soon it would break away and free the body. I worked my fingers into the crevice and heaved. The ice creaked and gave a little. Another pull, and the slab tore loose. It fell and slivered into a hundred fragments. The body now lay face down in the midst of them. The haft of a hunting knife stood out from Webb's back.

So it *was* murder.

I heard brisk footsteps coming along the canyon, beyond the pile of ice blocks. It wasn't Dan. I knew his tread. It was too brisk for Telgen. That left Faber. Probably he'd heard the ice crash down and had the same idea I did—that Webb's body would be uncovered by one of these miniature avalanches.

There wasn't any way out; there wasn't any place to hide. I didn't have a weapon.

I leaned against the wall of ice and thrust my right hand under my coat in a way I hoped would suggest a gun in a shoulder holster. I could hear the guy scrambling up the far side of the ice pile; then Faber's head showed over the top. He stopped, and a flicker of surprise went across his face. His eyes shifted to the corpse. He put my first thought into words: "So it *was* murder."

"Did anyone think different?"

HE EYED me steadily for a while, ignored the question and went on, "It's Telgen's knife, but I borrowed it from him. He'll swear he didn't get it back—and probably Hilda will support him. I didn't kill Webb, and I don't think a jury would convict me. But it could be embarrassing."

"So what's your proposition?" I asked.

"Webb's gold should go to Avis." His searching glance went back to the body. "If you've found it, hand it over and get out. I'll see that she gets it."

"Then you'll cover up the body," I jeered.

"Why not? I doubt very much that we could convict Telgen—"

"I know damn' well you couldn't!" It was Telgen's husky voice, coming from beyond the pile of ice. His head and shoulders came into view. He was holding a gun. "What have you got treed?" His roving eyes took in the situation. They turned on Faber. "So you're trying to get the gold you missed when you killed Webb! I thought so all along. Yeah, Mr. Faber, it *could* be very embarrassing for you."

"For both of us," Faber agreed coolly. "So the best thing is to give these hijackers the bum's rush and put the body back into the crevasse."

Telgen thought it over. "All right,"

he agreed at last. "Maybe we couldn't prove this on you—and you'd try to hang something on me. But we've got to bump this guy. He'd talk his head off."

Faber gave me a long, thoughtful look. "That could backfire on us. It's not necessary. We're two to one—let him talk." But there was still doubt in his eyes and voice, and it sent a chill through me. A little more urging from Telgen might change his mind. I was cold—and the glacier wasn't the cause of the chill. My hand was still under my coat. I bluffed: "I'm ready, Telgen. Start blasting—"

CHAPTER VI

THE hat jumped from Telgen's head. But it wasn't because his hair stood up with fright. The roar of a gunshot filled the canyon and Dan's voice followed the sound: "Drop it, Telgen."

Telgen's eyes popped open. Without turning, he dropped his gat.

"Okay, Gnome?" Dan sang out.

"Okay," I answered. I got Telgen's cannon.

Dan came over to the pile of ice. "You were so excited," he told me, "you forgot to re-arm yourself. I remembered after you left, and thought you might need help."

We herded them into a corner. I frisked them, but didn't find any more guns. Telgen was sullen; Faber his old cool self.

Dan inspected the body. There was some ice clinging to Webb's clothing and to the knife handle. Dan tore leaves from a notebook and twisted them into a spill. He lit the paper and held the flame under the knife handle. When the ice was melted, he blotted the moisture from it with his handkerchief, dusted the haft with powder from a pocket kit, studied it with a glass.

Faber smiled skeptically. "Looking for prints—after five years?"

"Ice is a great preservative," Dan answered, smug as a schoolmarm. "Fingerprints are oily; they'll stand a lot of moisture if there isn't too much friction. Any objection to my taking yours, Faber?"

The cynical guy had one of his rare moments of indecision. Finally he said, "Not at all. Several of us handled the knife, but we all wore gloves at the time of Webb's death. So, if you found prints, they wouldn't mean anything."

Dan took his prints on a sheet of notebook paper, and looked at Telgen. "What about yours?" he asked.

I answered for him: "Sure, Telgen'll be glad to." I pointed the fat guy's own gun at him.

Telgen scowled at me and said to Dan, "Okay, if it'll ease your mind. Prints won't prove anything, just as Tony says."

Dan got the prints, stored both sets in his pocket and tied a handkerchief around the knife handle. It looked silly, but the big loon had me almost convinced. I remembered his remark about the scientists' banquet where they served mammoth meat preserved twenty thousand years in the ice.

Dan's eyes were hard when he looked up. "Now," he said in a tone as cold as the glacier's breath, "we'll go up to where Alf Webb was murdered, and I'll show you what happened."

Telgen made a few surly objections, Faber some sarcastic cracks. I wagged the gun and said, "Get going."

WHEN we got out into the open, we saw the girls coming up the slope. Hilda was wearing slacks instead of shorts, a concession to the chill of the glacier. She acted a little tough when she saw the lads marching in front of my gun.

Dan was all business now. "Get into line, you two," he ordered them.

Avis Lynn's expression was a mixture of disappointment and anger. As she passed me, she said, "I should have stabbed you, after all."

The only answer I could think of was, "Girlie, I'm still sorry I had to get rough. Don't make me do it again." Then I asked Hilda, "Where've you been?"

"All around, hiding out and trying to keep an eye on everybody. Lucky for you, Adonis, I didn't get back to our tent while you were mussing up Avis."

"Get going," I told her.

It was a hard climb a mile and a half up the sloping ice. The sun was low when we reached the crevasse. Fat Mr. Telgen was blowing like a locomotive exhaust and the girls were pretty well winded.

I holstered my gun as Dan prepared to put on his show. He likes to dramatize things, and sometimes it gets results.

"This crevasse is very much the same as it was when Webb fell in," he began. "Some formation in the glacier's bed keeps it cracked open here, but it closes farther down as the ice moves forward. The scientific sharks claim that the pressure and friction cause alternate thawing and freezing—keep the deeper parts of the glacier in a semi-fluid condition."

Tony Faber folded his arms and looked bored. Telgen bent over to fuss with a shoe lace. When he straightened up, there was a gun in his fist. It was a midget .22 automatic, but it could kill at that range. My hand started for my holster, but Dan threw me a warning look and shook his head.

Telgen grinned and said wheezily, "A spare I carry in my sock. Go right on with your lecture, brother scientist."

I felt cheap at having overlooked this weapon, but if Dan was startled or annoyed, he didn't show it. He looked at Telgen with a faint smile and went on:

"Webb got off the trail after the blizzard started. He was about here when one of you birds"—Dan stabbed a finger at Telgen and Faber—"knifed him. You unbuckled the strap and took his gold pouch. He called for help. You pushed him into the crevasse—one of you. He grabbed the strap around his attacker's neck, to save himself. The strap broke, the bag went down with Webb. So it was an even swap—murder for nothing."

DAN pulled the heavy little bag with the broken strap from under his shirt. "This is it. The glacier gave it up; last night Hilda found it."

Hilda stared at the bag, then glanced sharply at Dan. Faber looked at her and pulled down the corners of his mouth. "So," he said, "you kept it to yourself."

Hilda flared at him, "Of course I kept it—for Avis. Alf Webb's share belongs to her—"

"Of course," Faber agreed. "We've all conceded that. Did you distrust me?" His faint sardonic smile showed for an instant. "Did you even distrust—Telgen? Or were you holding it for him?"

"I distrusted *you*." Hilda's chilly blue eyes glared at him. "And now I get the picture. You found the gold sack under my clothes on the beach; you slugged me and left me to drown."

Faber shook his head. His tawny eyes turned toward Dan. "Wells seems to know just what happened—and he has the gold. Where'd he get it? Might I suggest he stole it, slugged you, and played the heroic rescuer?"

Hilda didn't answer. A look of doubt

came into her eyes. She shifted them to Dan.

Faber went on: "The gold belongs to Avis. I'm going to take it. Telgen, keep 'em covered."

He sprang at Dan. I went for my gat, intending to blast Telgen if he tried to back up Faber. Hilda took it all in and made a quick shift to put herself between us. She still liked the fat guy, I thought—was willing to let us keep the gold rather than permit a gun battle in which Telgen might be killed. But Telgen didn't make a move.

Dan met Faber's lunge with his old reliable swing to the jaw. Faber's feet flew from under him. The fall brought a grunt from him. Avis Lynn screamed.

Dan snatched the gun from my hand. "Okay, Telgen," he called out. "I've got him covered. D'you want the pleasure of tying him up? Use his belt."

Telgen chuckled. "Sure," he said hoarsely. "I've thought all along he croaked Webb." He let his gun hand drop and started for Faber. Hilda moved along at his side.

FABER was propped up on the elbow, his mask of cool boredom gone. He glared at Dan. "Damn you, Wells—"

Dan said, "Wait a minute. You said prints wouldn't prove anything—that you were all wearing gloves?"

Faber started to get up. Telgen snapped an order: "Keep down; you can answer from there."

Faber scowled and answered Dan: "That's right. What of it?"

"The murderer wasn't wearing gloves when he stabbed Webb," Dan told him. "He took them off because they'd have slowed him up in unfastening the strap buckle of the bag Webb was carrying. He had to work fast, get the bag out of sight before anyone

else came up. You didn't think of that?"

"I didn't," Faber admitted.

"So the killer's prints were there—the newest and clearest—with the finger tips pointing toward the inner edge of the handle—the edge in line with the sharp edge of the blade. That's how a knife is held for stabbing."

Telgen looked startled. He was now out of line with Hilda. Dan pulled one of his quick changes; he shifted his gun and the muzzle spouted fire. The bullet knocked Telgen's automatic from his hand. The fat man shook his stinging fingers; his face turned livid. "What—what—" he began to stammer.

Tony Faber got to his feet. The cool smile was back on his lips.

Dan said to Telgen: "I was almost sure you were the murderer after I had that talk with Hilda."

Telgen whirled on her. "What did you tell him? Are you in on this frame-up?"

She didn't answer. Instead she whipped an automatic from the blouse of her slack suit. I winced as I realized I'd pulled another boner. It looked as though the whole crowd was heeled. It wouldn't have surprised me then if little Avis had pulled a rod.

CHAPTER VII

HILDA'S chilly blue eyes flashed at Dan. "I didn't say anything to smear Paul," she said tensely, "and there wouldn't be any prints after five years. You're lying all the way, and that proves your whole case is a bluff. You haven't got anything on Paul; that leaves Tony Faber. He was next in line after Webb—"

"Easy," Dan said. "You didn't know it, but you said something that put the finger on Telgen. He's the guy who stole the bag at the beach and hid

among the boulders; he slugged you with it and left you to drown."

"You're a liar!" Telgen shouted. "You're in with Faber to frame me. Hilda, give me that gat."

"Hold it, Hilda." Dan's cold voice stopped her. "If you do, I'll plug him. Now listen and I'll tell you what happened here five years ago.

"Coming down the glacier, Telgen lagged behind, pretending he couldn't keep up the pace. But when the snow blotted out everything, he came to life. He passed Faber, caught Webb near the crevasse—and you know the rest."

Telgen was getting back his poise. He grinned at the big blonde girl. "You called your shot, Hilda; the big dick's yarn's okay, except it was Tony killed Webb—not me. The dust Tony took home with him was Webb's, and this bag here was Tony's."

"I'm glad, Paul," Hilda answered.

"Sorry, Hilda," Dan said. "Telgen and Webb traded bags at the last minute—just before you started down the glacier." He glanced at Avis for confirmation.

The girl nodded, unable to speak.

Telgen saw the by-play, hesitated, then said, "Sure we traded, but all three bags were alike—"

"With one exception," Dan broke in. He snapped open the pouch in his hand, took out Webb's severed finger. "Webb put this little keepsake in the poke with his gold. Hilda was the only one who knew the finger was there. When you traded with Webb, he left it there—probably to startle you when you opened the bag. He loved a joke. It's a finger of death, pointing you to the chair!"

It was Avis Lynn's first knowledge that the gruesome trophy had been preserved. It must have brought back to her with shocking force a memory of her lover's injury and his later disap-

pearance. I saw her face whiten, her blue eyes open wide.

A strange look came into the eyes of the big blonde girl—a look of pain and loathing—of final resignation to the fact that Paul Telgen was the murderer of her sister's sweetheart. It said as plainly as words that she'd harbored some affection for this gross creature all these years, fighting a gnawing suspicion of his guilt, hoping he'd be proved innocent. Even the hearts of the Viking women had their tender spots.

Now she looked steadily at Telgen. "I've tried to believe in you, Paul, but I couldn't make up my mind until this was cleared up. I didn't know about the trade. Everything's clear now. You started out with this bag, but it went into the crevasse with Webb."

SHE went at him, gun raised to club him. Telgen took a step forward, hooked his left arm around her waist and wrenched the automatic from her hand. His movements were lithe and swift; Dan's theory that he'd overtaken Webb in the snowstorm wasn't so fantastic.

Hilda was husky and put up a battle, but the fat man, for all his flabby looks, was stronger. He squeezed her against him and poked the gun at us. The crevasse was less than ten feet beyond them. The struggle carried them closer to it.

Dan Wells tossed the gun back to me. "Watch Faber," he ordered, and went at them. Telgen's gun exploded, but the struggling girl spoiled his aim. Dan's body hit the pair, they went down in a heap and the gun flew from Telgen's hand. He made a wild effort to reach it. The squirming mass slid nearer the chasm. Dan battered at his face; Telgen stopped trying to reach the weapon and made an attempt to shield himself.

Hilda wriggled free as Telgen and Dan came to their feet, slamming away at each other almost on the edge of the crevasse. I yelled a warning at Dan. He jolted Telgen with a hard swing and stepped back. "The jig's up," he said. "The pit's right behind you."

The fat man threw one wild look over his shoulder and lunged again. Dan's right caught him on the jaw. He went back in short, staggering steps, swinging his arms to keep his balance. A projecting point of ice tripped him. He fell onto his back and slid toward the chasm. A second later he went over, screaming.

Tony Faber squeezed Hilda's arm. "Sorry, Hilda, old girl," he said and walked over to Dan. "Wells, it seems you've settled the question. Telgen died like Webb. Sort of poetic justice, eh?"

"Sorry I had to play rough with you," Dan replied. He can be polite as hell and very apologetic when he wants to. "But that rat had a gun, and Hilda got between us. Had to distract his attention and get her out of the way."

Faber gestured airily. "It's quite all right. Good work. Now let's be moving. It's near sundown and getting chilly."

BEFORE we broke camp next morning, Dan was examining the murder knife. He took off the handkerchief he'd wrapped around the handle.

"Don't be a dope, Dan," I cautioned him. "You'll smear the prints."

Dan grinned at me with that half-tolerant air of exaggerated patience he likes to assume at times. "What prints? The grinding of the ice wiped them all out. Even if we'd got the knife soon after the murder, chances are we couldn't have identified them—too many people had used the shiv. I didn't really expect to find any."

"Wise guy," I snapped at him. "And, of course, you didn't really suspect Avis Lynn, either."

"My dear Gnome," Dan answered in his best Sherlock tone, "I hardly gave Avis a second thought."

"Sure," I jeered. "You knew it was Telgen all the time."

"Practically. On the trek down the glacier, Avis was only a little way down-

wind from Hilda, but Hilda couldn't hear the girl's answer to her call. Webb was supposed to be more than fifty yards downwind from Telgen—yet Telgen heard Webb's cry, knew his exact words." Dan grinned in his tantalizing way. "Elementary, my dear Gnome; it proved Telgen was near Webb when he died."

THE END

"BLOOD" AND THUNDER DETECTING

By R. H. WANG

The modern detective uses the laboratory as a sort of blood-bank of clues—and to amazing advantage!

WHO done it?" That's the cry that rings in the ears of many a police chief and detective, and makes him squirm, because it's John Q. Public, who put him into office or hired him for protection, who is doing the screaming.

When blood stains the scene of a crime, modern science says "blood will tell" and goes about proving it in some very interesting ways. But perhaps they will be made clearer after a discussion of the principles and techniques of scientific blood-testing.

No matter from what race a sample of blood may have been taken, as long as the blood is human blood, it can be divided into definite groups. The grouping is based upon the discovery that the blood serum (liquid portion of the blood after it has clotted) of certain individuals has the power of clumping together the red blood cells of certain other individuals.

In grouping we are primarily interested in two factors. One of our concerns deals directly with the properties in the red blood cells—these properties we shall term agglutinogens. Our other concern deals directly with the properties contained in the serum. These properties we shall term agglutinins. Let me attempt to give an example which may make clear the significance of these preceding terms.

Try to imagine that each and every red blood cell floating about in the liquid portion of our blood has a lock built into its center. Let us next assume that each cell can only have its lock opened by the right type of key. We may further assume, for the purpose of simplification, that only those cells whose locks are opened attract one another. Therefore, a key capable of opening the locks of the blood cells would be able to cause the cells to attract one another and hence clump together. We may consider the agglutinogens of

the cells as the locks and the agglutinins of the liquid portion of the blood as the keys. Only a special agglutinin, or in other words, a special key, can open a special lock to cause the clotting of the blood cells.

There are four groups of blood. One group we shall designate by the letter—O. Another by the letter—A. Another by the letter—B. The last of the four, by the letters—AB. All human blood falls into one of the above forms. In the white race, group—O occurs in 45% of all the individuals, group—A in about 40%, group—B in about 10%, and group—AB in about 5%. Found in the four groups, are only two different types of locks and two different keys. Let us now list the lock and key set-up of each particular group.

Group—O has no form of lock in its cells. However, in the liquid portion of this type of blood is to be found two different keys. One of the keys—which we shall designate by a small a—can open any cell lock of the type we shall letter large A. The other key—which we shall designate by a small b—can open any cell lock of the type we shall letter large B. No other form of blood can clot a *group—O* blood, since there are no locks present.

Group—A has only one form of lock in its cells, an A type of lock. In its liquid portion it has only one form of key, a b type of key. By now it should be obvious that one could never mix the liquid portion of type O blood with the cells of type A blood and not expect a clotting to result. Why? Because the a key in blood O will open the A lock in blood A and hence clotting is sure to result.

Next we have a *group—B* type of blood. As its letter would tend to indicate, this group contains cells with a B form of lock. In the liquid portion we find only an a type of key. So we see that while blood—O can clot the blood of both

groups *A* and *B*, neither of these groups are effective in clotting group—*O*.

Lastly we come to group—*AB*. This type of blood is just the reverse of group—*O*, for it has two different locks—an *A* and a *B* lock—but no form of key. With no form of key, type *AB* is the most valuable blood when it comes to a transfusion, for it can open no lock and hence can clot none of the other types of blood.

I will attempt to put the preceding facts in a more compact form, so that the reader can have a quick reference before him.

TYPE AND LOCK	TYPE AND KEY			
	Oab	Ba	AB	Ab
O	—	—	—	—
A	X	X	—	—
B	X	—	—	X
AB	X	X	—	X

With the aid of the above chart the typing of blood becomes a simple matter. Suppose we were at the battle-field and needed to give a transfusion to one of our wounded buddies. Suppose we knew that he had type *AB* blood; we would now have to decide what type of blood could safely be administered him, without the danger of forming blood clots inside his body. By the use of the chart, we could easily find the right type of blood to use. First we would look for type *AB* under the heading *Type and Lock*. Next we would trace this column to the right till we came to a minus sign. The minus sign indicates no clotting; the positive sign signifies that clotting does occur. In this particular case, we find the minus sign under the column *AB*, so that blood type *AB* can only be used in the transfusion. It is obvious that blood of corresponding groups cannot clot each other, because if you will notice, no blood type has the key in its liquid portion that will fit its own lock. If this occurred, the blood in an individual's body would clot, causing death.

Now we come to an important problem frequently encountered in detective work.

Suppose we find a corpse covered with blood and are inclined to believe that some of the blood—perhaps covering a particular area on the corpse's leg—came from the murderer's body, which may have been wounded during the fight that preceded the murder. How would the police go about proving or disproving their suspicions? If the blood were fresh and the red blood cells still intact, we could very readily analyze the blood from the leg area to determine its group. If the blood of the corpse were of a different type than the blood on the leg, then it would prove beyond a doubt that the murderer had bled during the fight. Of course, the murderer may have the same type of blood as the corpse, and in this case, the police can prove nothing through blood testing.

Now that we have acquainted ourselves with

some of the basic concepts in blood typing, we can make use of the information already gathered, and with the aid of more information about to be given, work out a scheme for determining non-paternity by the blood-grouping tests.

There are three genes involved in the inheritance of blood groups in man. We may represent them by the symbols *A*, *B*, and *O*. Every individual has two of the three genes in his cells. Both *A* and *B* are dominant over *O*, but not dominant over one another. What does this all mean? Simply this. In the sex cell of the father only one of the above genes is present. Also in the sex cell of the mother we find one and only one of the above genes present. Now if the father contributes an *O* gene and the mother also an *O* gene, then the child of these two parents has two *O* genes present in every cell of his body. The presence of two *O* genes gives the child a group—*O* blood. If one parent contributes an *A* gene and the other parent an *A* or an *O* gene, then the child has group—*A* blood. Let us once more make a chart in order to simplify matters for the reader.

Blood Groups	Genes Present
A	A, A or A, O
B	B, B or B, O
O	O, O
AB	A, B

With the aid of the above chart, many disputes could be definitely settled. Let us take a few examples. Suppose a man is accused by a girl of being the father of her unborn child. He is given a blood classification test and his blood is found to be type—*O*. Suppose the girl's blood is also found to be of type—*O*. Now if the police waited for the baby to be born, and then testing the baby's blood, found that it belonged to group—*A*, what conclusion could we reach? From the above chart it is obvious that the girl is lying. Why? In the first place, a glance at the chart shows that a mother with type—*O* blood could only contribute an *O* gene. The man also having type—*O* blood could also only contribute an *O* gene. Therefore, any children by the man and this young girl must have two *O* genes in their body cells, and having an *O*, *O* setup would of necessity also have a blood belonging to group—*O*. This test would prove beyond a doubt the innocence of the man. However, even if the children had had group—*O* blood it would have been impossible to convict the man. For although this would prove that the man could possibly have been the father, what about all the other men in the world that have the same type of blood as the man? So we see that while a blood test can never really prove a guilt, it can definitely prove an innocence.

Advances being made in war test laboratories point the way to even greater advances in detection for the "blood" hound.

MEET MR. M U R D E R

By TARLETON FISKE



CHAPTER I

"Some Throats Are Meant to Be Cut"

I WAS going to kill Lester today. I knew it.

Did you ever have that feeling? You wake up in the morning with a song on your lips. The sky is just the proper shade of blue, and you feel right. And you know that this is the day you've been waiting for.

That's the feeling I had. "Today is the day," I said. "I'll kill Lester."

So I had a fine lunch downtown. I went out of the restaurant with a toothpick stuck like a miniature dagger in my teeth.

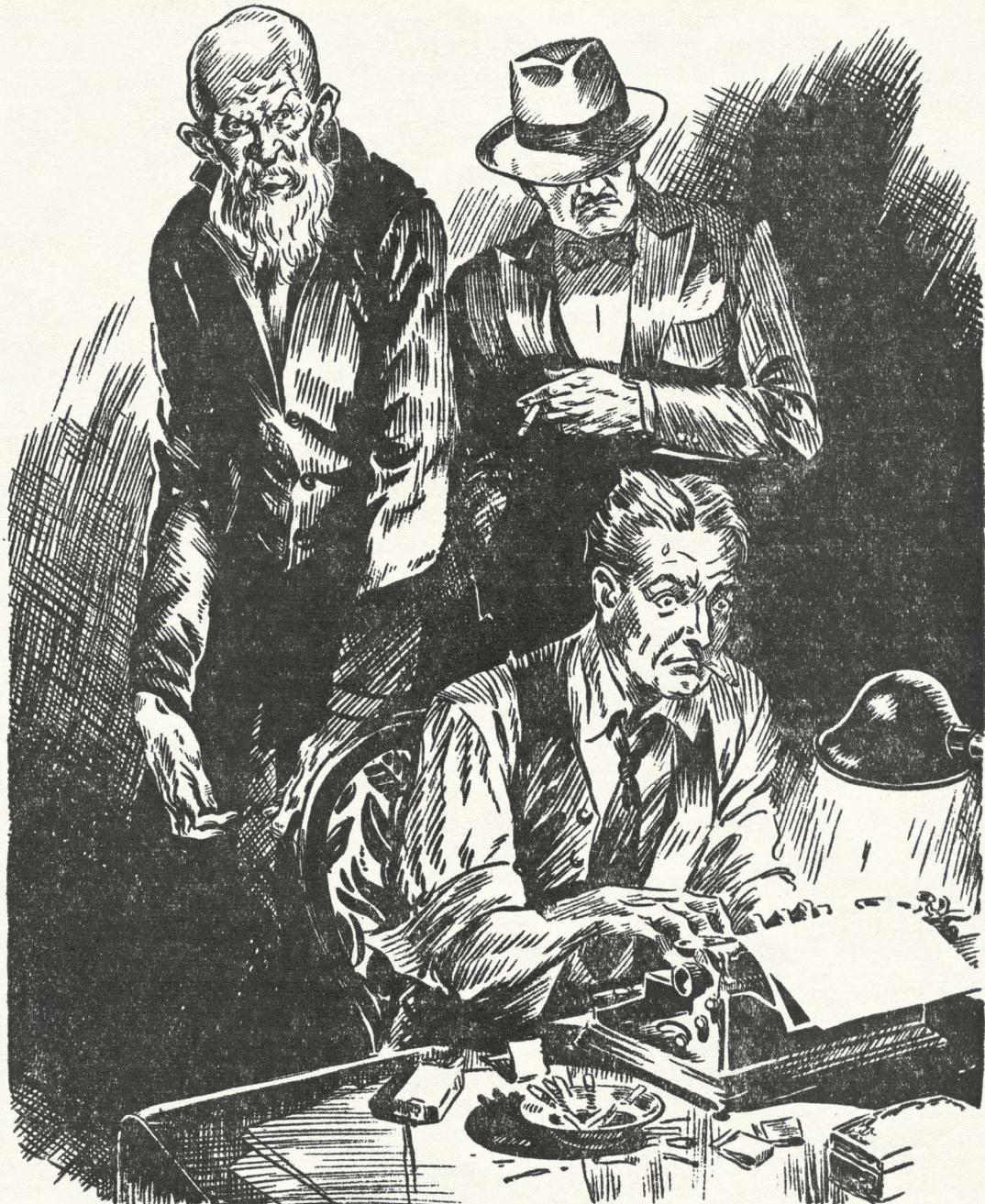
Like a dagger stuck in Lester's throat.

It was so nice I went for a walk. I kept whistling the first part of *Rhapsody in Blue*. Not the last part, but the early movement; the peppy one. It made me feel peppy, thinking about what I was going to do to Lester.

I couldn't stop thinking about it, planning it. Like a vacation you save up for all year long. That's what killing Lester would be. It would clear up all my troubles, take my mind off everything that bothered me. I gloated over it.

How do you kill a man and get away with it?

**The feeling of unseen presences
grew until it became brooding terror.
Then the living characters themselves
stepped out of his fiction's pages!**



Sweet rolled down his forehead—behind him . . . He could not turn to look

Come to think of it, that's a pretty dreadful question. If the answer were too easy, there'd be lots of slaughter going on. A terrific mortality rate among mothers-in-law, nagging wives, bosses, and the smart aleck announcers on the Quiz programs.

But very few people know the answer. I knew, today. I knew how to cut Lester's throat. Easy. Simple. A careful little plan of mine.

Why not? Laramie Lester didn't deserve to live. Shyster lawyer, home-wrecker, blackmailer. He deserved death.

Some throats are meant to be cut. And Lester's fat, pudgy neck cried out for the knife. He had a neck like a pig's—and like a pig, he must be stuck.

Laramie Lester . . . a human swine! I'd get rid of him, and my troubles too.

I walked for hours, just thinking about it. It was almost dark when I turned down the walk that led to home. I should have been tired from my long stroll, but I wasn't. I was fresh and eager. I was going to kill, and I had the strength of a murderer.

I slipped into the house very quietly. Mustn't disturb Laura, or Cobbs. My wife and secretary had nothing to do with this. It was going to be *my* party!

When I went down that hall to the room where Laramie Lester waited, I was almost trembling in anticipation.

I opened the door of the study, walked in. The lights were burning. I knew what I must do. From this point on, it was all part of the plan.

I sat down at the table. The paper was in the typewriter. My hands darted forward.

And I killed Lester.

YOU don't know what a satisfaction that gave me! To kill Laramie Lester, in just eight short sentences, a mere quarter-page!

Why, it took a load off my mind that I'd never realized before. For three weeks I'd been stuck in this mystery novel of mine, with Karger and the publishers screaming their heads off for the final draft. RKO or somebody was yapping for a look too—movie rights. And all the while the plot kept getting snarled up because of this Laramie Lester character. According to outline he was to live.

And now, after planning it all through, I saw that he must die here in order to work out the ending. So Laramie Lester lay sprawled in a pool of gore, right smack in the middle of page 213.

It was a picnic!

Only sometimes it wasn't a picnic. True, I was a success. Four books to the movies, two best-sellers; contracts for more. A fine house. A secretary, no less. And Laura—Laura was dreams-come-true in a blonde package to me.

But when I got stalled, as I had here with this Lester business, I paid for being a "successful author of mystery fiction" as the dust-jacket blurbs say.

Headaches? Brother, you don't know what headaches are until you run around with a brain full of characters that won't behave. And such characters!

Madmen. Evil geniuses. Human monsters. Nice company for one's thoughts. Twisted smiles and inhuman grins, and loathsome chuckles. Writhing bodies and crooked minds. Strange dreams and satanic schemes.

I lived with those characters; created them and thought for them.

No wonder I got headaches, no wonder I was anxious to get my stories done once they were fully started. I couldn't think about such creatures for more than a few months without going crazy.

Matter of fact, I had Doc Kelsey look me over regularly. Neuropathol-

ogy helped. I'd almost called him in again until I managed to kill my character.

Because I wanted to get this yarn done fast.

Lately I'd begun to outdo myself. Perhaps I was unconsciously slanting my stories for the horror movies. Certainly my villains were getting worse.

This last one was the peer of them all. Roll Fu Manchu, Professor Moriarity and Gilles de Retz into one, and add a dash of Hitler, and you have *Murder*.

I called him Murder. I couldn't help it. Yes, I know there was a character of that name in some movie once, but I couldn't help it.

He had to be named Murder.

A tall, gaunt man with a bald, bony head. Eyes that have looked on ordinary evil with scorn. A monster in body and a monster in mind. Red beard incongruous beneath the bald skull. Slim white hands more incongruous still on an ape's arms. A devil-worshipper in the story, and worse.

It was to stop thinking of him that I was so anxious to finish this story. Let the publishers have it. Let RKO buy it. Let Boris Karloff figure out a makeup for it. I didn't want any part of it. *Murder* was getting me down.

I used to talk in my sleep and wake up sweating. Or mumble to myself. Sometimes I was afraid I'd lose my grip and turn into a creature of my own thoughts. You can't scheme and plot death forever without having it *do* something to you.

WELL, killing Lester was a big help.

There he lay, right smack, as I said, on the middle of page 213.

And there I was, right smack on the middle of page 214, going back to my notes and showing Mr. Murder peering into the window.

When something went wrong.

Characters are always feeling a presence behind them. At least, in my yarns. I never had—but I did now.

I got the funniest feeling that someone, or something, was *staring* at me.

It was dark outside, and my table-light was flickering, and I was alone, and *something stared*.

So I turned around and looked out the window. That did it.

There was a man staring in my window. Peering. I saw him.

I saw a tall, gaunt man with a bald, bony head. He had a red beard, and his slim white hands were pressed to the pane. His eyes were grinning at me.

I looked away. I had to. My own eyes went to the typewriter. I had just typed, "I saw a tall, gaunt man with a bald, bony head. He had a red beard, and his slim white hands were pressed to the pane. His eyes were grinning at me. His name was Murder!"

His name was Murder.

But I was writing this, not living it. Who, or what—?

I looked again. The red eyes glared at me—just as though they stared at a body lying on the floor. And I saw a smile. A curious smile—filled with *recognition*.

That somehow made it worse. I rose to my feet and raced across the room, flung the windows open wide.

There was nothing there, of course.

I peered out. Then I held both ears.

Nothing was laughing in a shrill, hysterical cackle, laughing insanely as though at some horrible and evil jest.

That, I remembered with a shudder, was the way Murder always laughed.

CHAPTER II

The Man with the Red Beard

MY FINGERS shuddered as they pressed the buzzer sharply. But I

pulled myself together when Cobbs slipped in.

Cobbs was always slipping in. Sometimes I wished he'd do it with an open manhole. Oh, nothing wrong with Cobbs. A good secretary—thirtyish, gold-spectacle-ish, bookish. And very efficient. But usually he bothered me.

Now I was glad to see him. Very glad. I would have welcomed the sight of the Japanese army, for that matter. Human beings were what my eyes craved; something real.

"Prowler outside," I said. Didn't trust myself to get very voluble. "Take my revolver and tour the grounds, will you? I'm worried about Laura."

Well, I *was*. The fact that I was also worried about my own skin was just an added attraction. I would have gone myself, except for one thing.

If I went, it meant that I would be *admitting* there was something outside. That something had really looked in the window at me, instead of my imagining that it was so.

And I'd rather be crazy a hundred times than admit the actual existence of anything so foul as Mr. Murder.

So I sent Cobbs out, quickly; and poured a drink, still more quickly. The speed of this latter operation was exceeded only by the speed with which I drank the drink after pouring.

I refilled, and dropped the glass.

I didn't bother to pick it up, either. Didn't even see it. I was staring at the man in the doorway—the man whose appearance caused me to drop it.

Now, you know as well as I do who was in that doorway. But I didn't want to admit it.

I closed my eyes. I said, "No—no!" like a ham actor in a melodrama.

But Mr. Murder, long slim hands stroking his blood-red beard, stood in the doorway of my study and smiled his secret smile.

"How—how did you get here?"

It was a stupid question. But who thinks in the presence of Satan?

Murder's answer was even more stupid—to everyone else but *me*.

He just pointed at the typewriter!

"You mean—?"

"Come, come, now. You are not a stupid man."

That voice was deep. Like something choked up from Hell. I'd heard it before; when I'd *imagined* it.

"You are not a stupid man," Murder repeated. He walked forward into the room, closing the door behind him. "That is to say, you are not too stupid to *understand* what you have done, though you may not have used wisdom in doing it.

"Your creative energy has made your books. From what? Blank paper and typewriter ribbon ink? No—from your mind. Creative energy is an actual force. So is imagination. Imagination can be translated into reality. Somebody had to *imagine* a skyscraper before the first one was built, or a hamburger, for that matter.

"Grant the existence of creative energy, then. And consider this. You've lived with me for months. You sit at the table and ignore your wife and servants. You think of *me*. You sit at work and think of what *I'm* doing; not what your publishers or your secretary, or Laura is doing. In other words, for months now I have had a more actual existence for you than most real people. And now you've passed the mark. So much creative energy, like the ectoplasm of a psychic medium, has been expended by you, that I am now *embodied*."

"You mean—alive?" I whispered.

THE red beard nodded.

"I exist. You created me on paper. Your movies would create me

in an actor's mind and on film. But your own psychic force, your imaginative energy, has brought me into actual being. Now I am Murder!"

"But—but—"

The face stared into mine. And I read in it there what I had written. All the evil, all the cunning.

"Of course." Murder nodded. "I know what you are thinking. You have no one to blame but yourself. You made me evil. You gave me the dark desires—and the power to carry them out. Now you are wondering if I shall carry them out. Rest assured—I shall."

I didn't rest, and I wasn't assured. That face—that voice! A killer, and a genius! What had I created *with* it? Did this *thing* from my brain have weapons, too? Or money? Or a secret organization such as I had written about? What plans existed in this monster's bony skull?

I could ask. I could find out. Perhaps. But I only wanted to act.

My hand had been edging towards the paperweight for sometime now. I grasped it suddenly and let go.

Murder bent his bald head. The missile went wild, smashed into the lamp. The light went out, and as it faded, I sprang.

My fingers went straight for that bearded throat. I hoped—God how I hoped!—that there would be nothing for my hands to close around. Better madness than this reality!

But my fingers found a throat, and squeezed. And meanwhile, ape-arms lashed savagely into my chest, stabbing viciously into my lungs with maniac power.

I had made Murder strong and he was strong!

Again I squeezed, but a smashing blow jerked my head back, tore my fingers free. And then, the harsh, hot breath of Murder whistled in my ears.

I felt *his* hands on my own throat, felt the red haze swimming up—

"Bob!"

Laura's voice outside the door. Laura!

I broke free, gasping. "Keep out!" I yelled. "Laura—go back!"

There was a rustling in the darkness. I shot my fists out again as Laura entered the room. The overhead lights clicked on.

I stood there, redfaced and panting, in the center of the room. My clothing was disordered, and fragments of glass from the broken lamp clung to my trouser-cuffs. The window was open, and I saw how Murder had disappeared.

Or had he?

Had he ever existed?

Men can *feel* things as well as see them when they're—mad.

And the way Laura *looked* at me—

Her blue eyes were filled with a sort of incredulity and *pity* that I couldn't stand.

Then, when she didn't ask any questions, I knew what she thought. But I didn't care any more. I was thinking of *it*, loose somewhere and ready to kill.

So when Laura said, "Bob—don't you think I ought to call Doctor Kelsey?" I didn't object.

I just stood there with clenched fists. And when she wasn't looking. I opened one trembling hand and gazed again on the stiff, red bristles I had torn from Murder's beard.

CHAPTER III

"Cut Yourself a Piece of Throat"

"YOU'RE tired, Bob—you've been overworking."

Laura was a Petty drawing come to life. Nice to have one stroking your hair, isn't it?

Well I didn't think so. I gazed at her curls in their blonde upsweep and

saw—a bald skull. I looked at her dimpled chin and saw—a red beard. Her hands on my forehead were too slim. Murder's hands were slim.

And I looked out into the study and saw that every shadow held a secret. Things might be lurking there right now. Things that had somehow crawled out of my brain and taken a dreadful life of their own.

That's what I told Doctor Kelsey when he arrived.

The fat little neuropathologist smiled like an indulgent father-confessor; which indeed he was. I'd always taken my troubles to him before, and his smile had reassured me. This time it didn't.

"This Murder you said you saw—"

I jumped up. My hands went to my head.

"Don't start out like that, for the love of Heaven!" I murmured. "I didn't say I saw him. I actually saw him! You must believe that."

Doctor Kelsey's smile never wavered. But his eyes blinked just once, as though to cover up the same look I'd noticed in Laura's face. A look of pity. . . .

"All right, say it," I went on. "Say that I'm crazy, that I only imagined it all. Say that I opened the window myself, sat here talking to a hallucination, then turned out the light and knocked over the lamp and had a fight with an invisible figment of my own imagination. But let me tell you this—the figment of imagination weighed around two hundred pounds, and he had a red beard!"

I held out the coarse bristle I had tugged from Murder's chin.

This time Doctor Kelsey's eyes blinked more rapidly. And when he looked at me again he wasn't smiling.

"Tell your story again," he said. "Slowly."

I did. I went over it all, including murder's confession that my own brain had created him out of imaginative energy and given him a body and life of his own. I got up and showed Kelsey my story.

"Good Lord, man!" the little doctor exploded. "If what you say is true, then there's a monster abroad tonight. We must do something!"

Laura shivered, drew closer to me.

But she didn't get up and call the police. Neither did Kelsey.

And I caught on. They didn't believe me. They thought I'd gone crazy and were trying to humor me.

"But consider this," said Kelsey. "By your own account you wandered around all day in a sort of a daze. You saw no one and can give no accurate details of where you went and what you did. You came back here alone. Nobody but you saw this creature."

"Didn't you hear that laugh?" I asked Laura, despairingly.

"I—I had the radio on," she said, eyes averted.

"But what about the hair from the beard?" I turned to the doctor.

"It's hair all right. But whether it really came from a beard, and in the manner you imagined it did—"

He shrugged.

I trembled. Was I really going mad? Did these things happen? Then I remembered something.

"Cobbs," I said. "I sent Cobbs out to look for him. Has he come back yet?"

"Your secretary?"

"Yes. Come on—we'll see."

I MADE for the door, Laura at my side. The doctor followed. I could feel his eyes on my back. I could imagine what he was thinking. "Humor this maniac and wait for a chance to call help."

But I went right down the dark hall. It took nerve, because I was jumpy about the dark. Things might come out of it. Things that I had imagined in the book. Murder's devil-worshippers. Men in red robes that lurked to kill in honor of Satan.

But we stood before Cobb's room safely.

I knocked.

No answer. I turned. "There," I said. "He isn't back yet. Still chasing Murder. Maybe he's caught him—or called the police. At any rate, when he comes back he'll verify my story."

Doctor Kelsey quietly pushed me aside. He opened the door. His hand fumbled for the light.

We looked into Cobbs' room.

"There," I exclaimed. "Not a living soul in here."

"You're right," whispered Doctor Kelsey. He stared.

Then I saw.

Lying on the floor, eyes to the ceiling, was the body of Cobbs. Those eyes were open—and so was his throat.

The light glittered on a dagger, fixed in a throat that had been efficiently cut.

"It's murder," Doctor Kelsey whispered.

"Yes," I said. It's—Murder!"

CHAPTER IV

"The Moving Finger Writes—"

L AURA slumped silently in my arms. "Take her to her room," I urged. Doctor Kelsey lifted her with me and we carried her down the hall to her own bedroom.

"Let her rest," he said. "There'll be plenty of excitement to face from now on."

"You'll call the police, of course," I said, evenly.

"At once."

Neither of us spoke. I knew that he

knew. Knew I was now under suspicion of murder. A wild story is one thing—but a wild story plus a slaying is another. A nervous breakdown can be treated by a doctor, but homicidal mania calls for the police.

But the cops had to come. Suppose I was mad? And suppose I crept in to Laura and—?

I held my head in my hands. Not that!

Kelsey phoned.

Then we waited together until sirens screamed up the driveway.

Captain Shayne knocked on the door. I didn't like his face. He resembled a gorilla with a poor shave. I'd have written him in as a gangster instead of a police captain.

Shayne and three men went right down the hall to where poor Cobb lay. Doctor Kelsey accompanied them.

It was Detective Henderson who took charge of me. He was a tall, horse-faced man. He wore a battered felt hat, smoked a rancid pipe, and stared straight through me with gimlet grey eyes. But I trusted him.

We went into the study, Henderson and I.

"Well?" said Henderson, puffing on his pipe.

It was no picnic, telling him my story—but I got it out. It sounded weak, and I knew it. Henderson didn't say a word. His pipe went out when I got to the part about sending Cobbs out to chase Murder, with my revolver.

Captain Shayne chose this moment to thrust his gorilla mug through the doorway.

"Searched the body," he announced. "Coroner's arrived."

Henderson re-lit his pipe. "Did you find a gun in the pocket?"

"Naw. No gun at all."

Henderson stared at me. I tried to smile. All I could do was swallow,

hard. I hoped Henderson could swallow my story more easily.

"Wait here," said the detective. He went out with Shayne. He didn't need to tell me there'd be a man guarding the door outside while he was gone. I knew it.

AS HE went out, a second detective stepped from behind the door. I hadn't known he was in the room at all. His hat was pulled down over his eyes—but he looked up suddenly and I saw his face.

"Vladimar!" I exclaimed.

I couldn't help it. Standing before me was another character from the book!

Here was the long, pale face of the Russian devil-worshipper; the mustached, sneering upper lip of Murder's chief henchman!

But I must be seeing things—this man was a detective. He'd call for help if I got violent.

He didn't. He just looked at me and bowed!

Another character from my brain come to life. It was working and I wasn't mad.

"Silence," whispered Vladimar. He came towards me, hand extended. Icy fingers slipped a piece of crumpled paper into my right palm. Then he slipped out the door and disappeared.

I looked down, read.

"Keep your mouth shut about that piece of red beard, or we'll get Laura, too."

There was no signature. None was needed. But how did Murder know I hadn't mentioned the beard yet? Why didn't he want me to tell?

Could he, coming from my own mind, read my thoughts? When had I created Vladimar? Had I created more monsters?

Henderson came back. His pipe was

gone. He was all business, now.

"I've just sent Doctor Kelsey down to your wife's room," he announced. "You're coming along, too. We're going to get to the bottom of this crazy mystery right now. Characters out of books committing murders, and running with knives—it doesn't click."

"Damned right it doesn't," I answered. "And speaking of that—who was the detective who stood by the door when you were in here with me?"

"Detective? There was no one by the door."

"Long, pale face. Mustache. Grey eyes. Sneer."

"There's no such man in either squad here," Henderson snapped. "You seeing things again?"

"You bet." The hunch seized me, then. "Before we go down, I want to show you something I didn't speak of before."

I fumbled in my pocket for the hairs from Murder's beard, pulled them out.

Then we heard the scream. I knew that cry. Henderson knew where it came from—Laura's room.

"Laura!"

I was out of the door, down the hall with Henderson at my heels. Captain Shayne and his men thundered behind me. The screaming died, and all I could hear was the thud of fists as a detective pounded on the locked bedroom door.

Those devils! If they had harmed Laura—

"Break it down!" Shayne's voice barked.

Splintering of wood, smashing of lock. We burst into the bedroom.

It was empty. Laura and Kelsey were gone. An open window yawned on darkness.

"Sent Doc in here," the detective on the door panted. "One of the boys came in, too. He isn't here, either."

"One of the boys." Vladimar!

"After them—they can't go far!" Captain Shayne shouted. "Take a car!"

Then we heard it again, faintly. A siren's wail, and above it my wife's half-strangled scream.

"They've got one of the squad-cars," Henderson grated. "Get into the other one and tail them, quick!"

I stood staring into that outer darkness for just a moment. My wife in the hands of Murder! Were they going to—a Sabbath?

Wheeling quickly, I gathered my body for the leap and hurled myself through the open window into the darkness beyond.

CHAPTER V

"—And Having Writ, Moves On"

BULLETS blazed above my skull as I darted low across the lawn. I made it to the curb, spied what I was looking for. A police motorcycle.

The wailing of the stolen squad car had died in the distance. They had disappeared into the night.

Above, only a grinning moon leered down on my madness. I shot away from the curb, and as the wind shrieked in my ears, I sped into the blackness of the unknown.

Mad, was I? A madman's brain, creating a living creature named Murder—a creature that stalked abroad to kill. A Vladimar, steeped in Satanism, that sacrificed women's bodies to the Master of All Evil.

Perhaps I was mad. If so, my madness had created this, and my madness must destroy it.

I had a hunch.

The motorcycle throbbed beneath my thighs. I raced forward, grinning back at the moon. I couldn't be mis-

taken. I couldn't afford to be.

And I must get there in time!

Slashing around corners, veering wildly through clutching darkness, I let my mad memory guide me. Roaring down deserted side-streets through the slums, blazing through the night on Murder's trail, I steered a course for Hell.

And made it.

The black bulk of the missing squad car loomed up at the curbing. And beyond it, the dark house.

The house I had used in my story. That's where I got the idea. Walking one day, I'd stumbled across the old dwelling by chance. Condemned by the city, it mouldered in shadows, and from its black windows the gloating ghosts of dreadful memories seemed to peer.

This was the house I'd written into the book—the house I'd described as the home of Murder and his Satanists.

If Murder lived now, he'd take this house.

That was my hunch, and it *had* to be true!

Breathlessly I threw myself forward to brace the shock as the motorcycle ground to a halt.

I bounded up the weed-choked steps and stopped. No light shone from within, and the doorway gaped like a black mouth, yawning to engulf me. But if I were right, Laura was inside, and I didn't hesitate.

Weaponless? The door-knocker was a leering gargoyle, but it was brass. I wrenched rusty nails free and held the heavy metal in my hand. Its heft reassured me.

I kicked the door further ajar. The musty hallway sent odors of decay creeping towards my nostrils. Strangling tendrils of corruption welled about me as I moved slowly down the hall.

Silence. Silence deep as the dark-

ness. Where were they? It was like the Pit in here.

Pit. Cellar! I'd *written* about a cellar. There must be stairs . . .

There were. They creaked.

But no one heard the creaking. For Laura's sudden scream rose above all sound, and following it I heard a chuckle. It was Murder's chuckle. He was down there!

I made the rest of the steps in nothing flat.

THREE was a door at the bottom.

I kicked it open. The light streamed from beyond and I saw them.

A masked figure in a red cowl, binding Laura to a post. And standing before her, knife in hand—

Murder!

Creature of my dreams, creature of my mind's darkest depths, creature spawned in Hell—the baldheaded man with the red beard bristling! His long arm was raised, and the knife cut a silver sweep downwards toward Laura's bare neck.

Eyes wide with horror, Laura stared at the descending splinter of death. The cowled man held her fast, and Murder's knife plunged down.

I hurled the door-knocker forward with all my might. It veered in its flight, struck the cowled man on the temple. He went down with a gasp, his mustached lips curled in pain. It was Vladimar!

Murder wheeled, with a bellow of astonished rage.

"You!"

Nothing moves as suddenly as Death. He was Death when he came at me across that room. His long arms were extended, and the knife rose to slash at me as it had slashed Cobbs' throat.

My hands went up, grasping the iron wrist. His free arm locked about my

throat as we hurtled to the floor.

Murder's fingers ground into my neck. I knew it was all over then. Strange ways of death—to be killed by one's own character. Frankenstein and his monster—

I fought the monster. The rasping breath of doom I felt again. And my hands were slipping from that wrist, slipping from the arm, freeing the knife.

"So!" With a groan of madness, Murder yanked free and the knife plunged down. I threw my body aside, but not in time. A stab of pain seared my side.

Again the knife rose. This time I couldn't avoid it. It was the end.

With a final effort, I twisted my legs upward and thudded both feet into the thighs of the red-bearded maniac above me. He doubled backward with pain.

I rose to my knees and drove my fist into that bald temple. His hands sought my throat again, but this time I had the knife. I made it sing down once—twice—three times. The red of the beard became crimson.

I rose, raced to Laura's side. The knife cut the bonds that held her.

"Darling," I whispered. "Did they hurt you?"

She smiled up bravely. "I knew you'd get here, somehow."

"Let's get out of here," I panted. "Quickly."

"Not so fast!"

Turning, I gazed into the grim face of Doctor Kelsey.

And I gazed also into the grim muzzle of my revolver—the one I had given Cobbs before his death.

CHAPTER VI

Murder's Secret

I STARTED forward, but the revolver waved me back.

"Your plot against mine, eh, Doctor?" I murmured.

"Exactly." The little fat neuropathologist permitted himself a sardonic grin. "So sorry, but your part in this story ends here."

The gun went up. It was so close I could see the interior of the barrel, like a little black eye gazing at my heart. And *through* it—

"Wait!" I said. "As one—author—to another, don't you owe me an explanation?"

"Perhaps." Doctor Kelsey shrugged. "But it will be a quick one." His eyes were hard.

"It all started with Cobbs. He had the original notion. Saw what over-work was doing to you; knew it would be simple enough to drive you mad, with my help.

"We worked it out together—a scheme to make you see characters from your stories. Being your secretary, he had access to your notes and descriptions of characters. Murder was almost too easy."

He pointed at the redbearded giant on the floor.

"A patient of mine. Homicidal tendencies. He was under treatment at my private hospital, and I could handle him. He fitted the description of your character quite well, after I had his head shaved for the part. I promised him his freedom if he helped us in our scheme—of course, I meant to kill him when he had finished his work."

The doctor's voice was cold, unemotionless. I realized suddenly that here was a new type of Evil—scientific wickedness.

"Vladimar, as you called him, was a petty crook I also engaged. He fitted one of your characters, too. According to our original plan, Murder and Vladimar were to appear to you several times when you were alone, tell you that your

mind had given them life.

"Then I was to treat you, and declare your story insane. No one else would ever see these men but you. We rigged up this house, after choosing it to fit your story. Meant to bring you here, show you a fake murder, and let that drive your hysteria beyond the boundaries of reason. After that you'd be put away. And we'd start the same treatment on your wife. Show her characters from your stories and let nature take its course."

"But—why?" I faltered.

Doctor Kelsey smiled. "Money, naturally. You know the size of your income. What you don't know is that one of the movie companies has just bought the rights of two of your books. Cobbs never showed you the correspondence. We thought we could hold out on you, get you put away, and then—being a close friend of the family—I could get myself appointed legal guardian. With your wife following you, Cobbs and I could manipulate your funds to our own advantage. Simple scheme."

"It didn't work," I muttered, grimly.

"Yes it did," said Kelsey, even more grim. "You'll die in a moment. But here's the rest.

"I began thinking. Why cut Cobbs in on this at all? He'd done his part by creating characters and a setting from your notes. I didn't need him. And if he were found dead after Murder appeared to you, and you told your wild story to the police, you'd be locked up as a killer right away. Then I could carry on alone, frighten your wife into anything, and get possession of your funds and royalties.

"That plan backfired when you accidentally got hold of a part of Murder's beard. There was tangible proof you had been fighting something be-

sides your own imaginings. I had to work quickly. I had Murder kill Cobbs before discovering that.

"And when the police came, I knew they'd ask questions once they saw the hair. Vladimar's warning didn't shut you up, so I worked fast. We got your wife simply because they took me to her room, and if I'd escaped without her she'd be witness to it. So we brought her here. I meant to silence her and then kill the other two. You saved me that trouble. And by feigning unconsciousness, I am now going to complete the story with two little black periods from this weapon you so thoughtfully provided."

HE HAD decided on a period. But, staring into that pudgy little face I saw more actual madness, more cunningly concealed lunacy than Murder had ever possessed. And I decided on a—dash.

The gun went up as I launched myself forward.

"Bob!" Laura screamed.

It was too late. I heard the shot, felt agony flood me, and collapsed. Grinning, Kelsey pointed the weapon at Laura. His finger tightened, there was a report—

But the report came from *behind* Kelsey.

He crumpled to the floor as Detective Henderson raced into the room. Gun in hand, pipe in mouth, he surveyed the scene with a low whistle.

"Come on, boys," he commanded. The squad men filed in.

Laura moved to my side. "You're hurt," she gasped.

I sat up. "Nothing much. Knife grazed me in the side a while back, and when I jumped Kelsey, it got me. Bullet went wild."

"Start talking, brother," said Henderson.

I did. Told him the whole story. Waved the red hair under his nose.

When I finished he grinned. "Just a few questions," he suggested. "How did you happen to find this place?"

I told him about my hunch. He nodded. "Lucky we tailed you."

"One more thing," he added. "Why *didn't* you go nuts?" He looked embarrassed. "I mean, almost anyone would."

"I'm an author," I said. "When this Vladimar character appeared to warn me not to mention finding hair from a beard, I saw that someone was trying to hide evidence. Besides, I know my own characters, and Vladimar wouldn't act like that."

"Wouldn't he?"

"Of course not." I grinned. "Vladimar is a villain in my yarn, yes. But what Kelsey didn't know, and Cobbs didn't know, was the part of my story I haven't written yet. And in that part, Vladimar turns out to be working for the hero. So I knew this thing was some kind of fake."

"Authors!" Henderson muttered.

Going back in the squad car, Laura snuggled close. "Exciting," she whispered. "Maybe you can write a story about all this."

"Yeah?" I said. "From now on I'll probably write nothing but nice safe love stories."

But I doubt it!

A BRAND NEW NOVEL IN THE NEXT ISSUE

HALO IN HELL

By Reed Evans and John Wiley

SONG OF THE SWINDLER

By WILLIAM DECKER

I WONDER just how many readers of this article have at some time during their lives fallen victim to a swindler. It is really no reflection upon one's intelligence to be swindled, for the swindler is a crafty fellow—well versed in the psychology of human nature, and well trained in his particular brand of larceny. Probably the best defense against a swindler is a thorough knowledge and understanding of the swindler's technique; it is the only way to fight him and beat him at his own game.

Let us take a look at some of the classical swindle schemes and attempt to analyze their method of operation. Have you ever heard of the diamond switch? This is a very profitable and clever swindle system. The procedure runs as follows:

Two men stand along a busy street and seem to have difficulty understanding one another. One is a typical looking American—is well dressed and a very convincing speaker. The other is poorly dressed and appears to be a genuine foreigner; he speaks a foreign language fluently. Both of these men are notorious swindlers waiting to cast their net when the right type of "sucker" comes along.

Soon a foreign born woman approaches and the show is on.

"Pardon me, madam, but could you ask this foreigner what he wants of me?" asks the well-dressed gentleman. "I am having difficulty understanding the language he speaks." The swindlers pick the neighborhood so that it is suited to the immigrant's language. For example, if the language the foreigner speaks is Polish, then the swindlers will concentrate on a Polish neighborhood—where they can surely find a woman who understands the language. Many swindlers are well versed in many languages and can switch neighborhoods to confuse the police.

To get back to the story, the woman and greenhorn begin to converse. Soon the foreigner displays a solid gold piece and asks how much it is worth. The well-dressed gentleman offers to buy it and the transaction takes place—the woman acting in the capacity of an interpreter. Now the big kill takes place. The foreigner reaches into a secret pocket of his coat and in a hesitant manner withdraws a pouch. In the pouch he claims are valuable diamonds—Russian crown jewels. He produces the jewels and offers to sell them. The well dressed gentleman is already excited. He whispers to the lady that they are the finest stones he has ever seen, but that it would be wise to have the diamonds appraised before they begin to skin the immigrant, who obviously has no idea of the value of American money.

At this point the technique may vary, depending on the particular swindlers. Some swindlers may use valuable stones and let the woman suggest the appraiser, for what have the swindlers to fear when the stones are real? Some swindlers employ a third accomplice who makes his appearance at the opportune moment and claims he is an authority on rare stones. Whichever of the two methods is employed, the purpose in mind is still the same, namely, to convince the victim that the jewels are extremely valuable. Once the victim is convinced, the plot is obvious.

"Madam," says the well-dressed gentleman. "We are in a good position to make ourselves some easy money. This fellow is not acquainted with the value of American currency and why not profit by this? I have no money with me, and I couldn't possibly reach my bank before closing time. Therefore, I suggest that you put up the \$1,500 we would need to buy these valuable jewels. Tomorrow I will pay you \$750 and both of us can split the fat profit."

The lady in most cases falls for the fast talk and perfect acting of the well-dressed gentleman. There is strong desire in every one of us to acquire some *easy-money*; it is this very desire that gives life to gambling. The lady goes home and brings the money; she is given the diamonds by the immigrant.

"Don't sell them before tomorrow," says the well-dressed gentleman. "Give me a fair chance to pay you one-half your investment and therefore be entitled to one-half the profits."

The woman gives her promise and leaves with the diamonds. The gentleman never comes with the \$750, and upon trying to sell the diamonds the lady discovers the sad truth. Instead of being the valuable stones she was led to believe they were, the victim discovers that what she now possesses is only a cheap imitation. By this time the swindlers are many miles away and hard to trace, for the day which the lady had waited had given them adequate time to cover their trail.

Another sweet swindle is the *coin-matchers*. A case described by Soderman in his great book, *Modern Criminal Investigation*, ought to prove interesting. The story runs as follows:

Mr. Jones, an out-of-town man, is approached by a well-dressed young gentleman. "Pardon me sir," speaks the gentleman. "Could you inform me as to the location of the Museum of Natural History? I am a stranger in this city and seem to have lost my bearings."

"I am also from out-of-town," answers Mr. Jones. Soon both men are friends. The first

(Concluded on page 145)

MARRY RICH: *FREE PARTICULARS*

Gussie wanted a husband, so she answered the lonely hearts ad. Then she faced much more than loneliness!

**BY LYLE
THOMAS**

“**Y**ES, sir. A fellow meets up with strange characters. I don’t suppose I ever told you about Gussie Schultz?” Uncle Charlie pushed his chair back from the supper table and inserted a toothpick between his teeth.

Uncle Charlie was one of the extra hands on the farm. His real name was Charlie Jones, but everybody called him Uncle Charlie.

Ma streaked in from the kitchen, her hands full of dishes. “If this is going to be another one of them long-winded stories, you better move somewhere else so’s the women folks can clear up the dishes.”

Uncle Charlie chewed thoughtfully on his toothpick. “It must be going on six seven year that I hired out to Gussie. I don’t recall exactly anymore, but it don’t make no difference anyway. This is what happened.”

* * *

GUSSIE was one of them big, large-boned Dutch women, not much of a talker, but strong as an ox. Her Pa died and left her one hundred and sixty acres, and most of the time she run that farm all by herself. I never saw no man could hold a candle to her when it come to work.

For the first few weeks, she didn’t

say much, but one night she got real confidential. She was washing the supper dishes and I was fooling around the kitchen getting ready to do the chores.

“I been thinking some of getting me a husband,” she says. “A woman needs a man to look after her. It just ain’t right for a woman to be all alone.”

“A farm makes a lot of hard work,” I says.

“I ain’t complaining of the work, but it gets pesky lonesome without nobody to talk to month in and month out.”

That’s the first I heard about it, but it come out that Gussie had already wrote to one of them matrimonial places. Before you could turn around, she was getting mail from unmarried fellows all over the country, and everyone of them wanted to get hitched.

But Gussie wasn’t the one to rush into anything. You would have thought she was figuring on buying a horse, the way she went at it. She read those letters over and over, and weighed them pro and con. “I don’t care nothing about books and music and them things,” she would say. “All I want is a man who will be good company and take an interest in the farm.”

Then one night she showed me a letter from some fellow that went by the name of Jess Hendricks, and he seemed



He was looking speculatively down the well—speculating on what?

to fill the bill to a tee. He wrote as how he lived in Chicago, but always had a hankering for the country, had two thousand dollars' worth of bonds, and thought he and Gussie would get along fine.

Gussie thought so, too, I guess. Anyways, they wrote back and forth for a couple of weeks, and Gussie even had her picture took and sent it to him. On a Saturday, she got all dressed up, hitched the team, and drove into town. When she come back, she had a gold ring on her wedding finger, and she wasn't alone.

Well, Jess wasn't what I'd call a prize, but Gussie was grinning all over like a Chessey cat, and I figured if she was satisfied, it wasn't none of my business. He must of been around forty-five—I didn't hold that against him because Gussie wasn't exactly a spring chicken either—and his hair and skin was so dark he looked to be a fur-riner. Whenever you talked to him, his eyes moved around looking every place else except at you.

For a month them two acted like a couple of love birds. Jess didn't take much to the work around the farm, but he'd follow her around like a dying calf, and set and watch her while she done it. He was always asking her was she warm enough, and couldn't he get her a drink of water, and things like that. A couple of times he took her into town to see a picture show, and bought her ice cream afterwards. Gussie wasn't used to that stuff, and you know how women are.

ONE morning Gussie came down to the barn where I was working, and says "Jess and me are driving into town for a spell." It wasn't like her to go off in the middle of the day, and I guess I looked kind of funny, because she started explaining. "We're going to

sign some papers. There ain't no sense in having everything in two names, instead of one."

That was the first inkling I had of what was going on. "Look here, Gussie," I says, "I don't want to go around sticking my nose into other people's business, but, if I was you, I'd think this thing over before I done anything rash. After all, you don't know too much about that fellow."

I could have saved my breath for all the good it done. Gussie was set on going through with it, and nobody in the world could stop her.

From that day on, things wasn't the same. There was no more lovey-dovey or picture shows. Jess took to sleeping late in the mornings, and like as not he'd head for town in the afternoons and not get back 'til all hours. One afternoon I saw him standing by the house watching her work, and there was a look on his face I never saw on any fellow's face before. At first, Gussie'd try to put up a front like everything was fine, but she didn't fool me. After awhile she stopped trying.

Well, sir, there was an old well near the house that dried up long before my time. One night I was doing the milking, when Jess come out to the barn and says casual-like, "That well ought to be filled in. A person could fall into it easy."

I told him it was dried up.

"That don't make no difference," he says, "a person could still hurt hisself bad. I'm going to have it filled up."

I didn't say nothing, but he hung around for a while. Suddenly he says, "Uncle Charlie, I'd appreciate it if you didn't let on I said anything about that well."

I stopped milking and looked square at him. "I know what you are thinking," I says, "but there are laws about murder."

From the look on his face, you'd have thought I just caught him stealing the silverware.

After that I used to come across him at the well right often. Maybe he'd be leaning down trying to see into it. Maybe he'd just be standing still and thinking. But I knew that the time was drawing nigh.

I suppose you wonder why I stood around and let it happen. Well, there ain't much a fellow can do when one person is crazy in love with another, even though the other one is set on murder. All the same I tried.

I knew it wasn't no good to reason with Jess, and one night I tried to talk to Gussie about it. Jess was gone on one of his sprees.

"It would be a good thing for you if he never come back," I says.

"Maybe it would," she says, "but he'll come back. He'll never run out on me."

"All the same," I told her, "I'd watch my step mighty close if I was you."

Another time I begged her to run away somewhere so's she'd be safe, but that didn't work either. "What's the use?" she says, "I'd never be happy a second any place else."

Well, sir, I'd got to thinking a lot of Gussie in those months, and it was the hardest thing I ever did—waiting for it to happen. I got to wishing it was over, and I'd set around after supper thinking, "Maybe it'll happen to-night," and then get up in the morning wondering if it had happened. I was as jumpy as a cat. It got so I couldn't hardly do my work any more.

Gussie had been watching me, and one day she says, "Why don't you take a couple of days off, Uncle Charlie?"

"Twouldn't be right to go off and leave you alone," I told her.

She smiled pathetic-like. "Don't worry about me. I'm strong enough to take care of myself."

The upshot was I went to Omaha for a couple of days, and it was the worst mistake I ever made. Because, when I got back, the well was filled in, and I never seen Gussie again.

* * *

MA PICKED up a load of dishes. "Do you mean to set there and say that you never told the law a word about it?"

"Of course I told the law," Uncle Charlie said indignantly. "They hung Gussie the next April."

★ BLACK MARKET IN HAIRPINS ★

WAR or no war, milady seems determined to be beautiful and neat, even if it entails snooping in a black market. "After all," whines the little woman, "I'm essential to morale, and hairpins are essential to my morale, and, unpatriotic or not, I'm going to get hairpins!" Which of course closes the matter.

The interesting scarcity of those little black objects which always in the past seemed to be most plentiful was brought to light recently in Chicago. The blame was laid on the WPB which had reduced the allowance of steel for the manufacture of hairpins 75 per cent.

It was disclosed that white unidentified cards of ten hairpins each, apparently taken from standard manufacturers' cards of twenty-four, were being sold at 10 and sometimes 20 cents per card, a profit estimated to be 500 per cent.

One-third of a five cent card was found to be

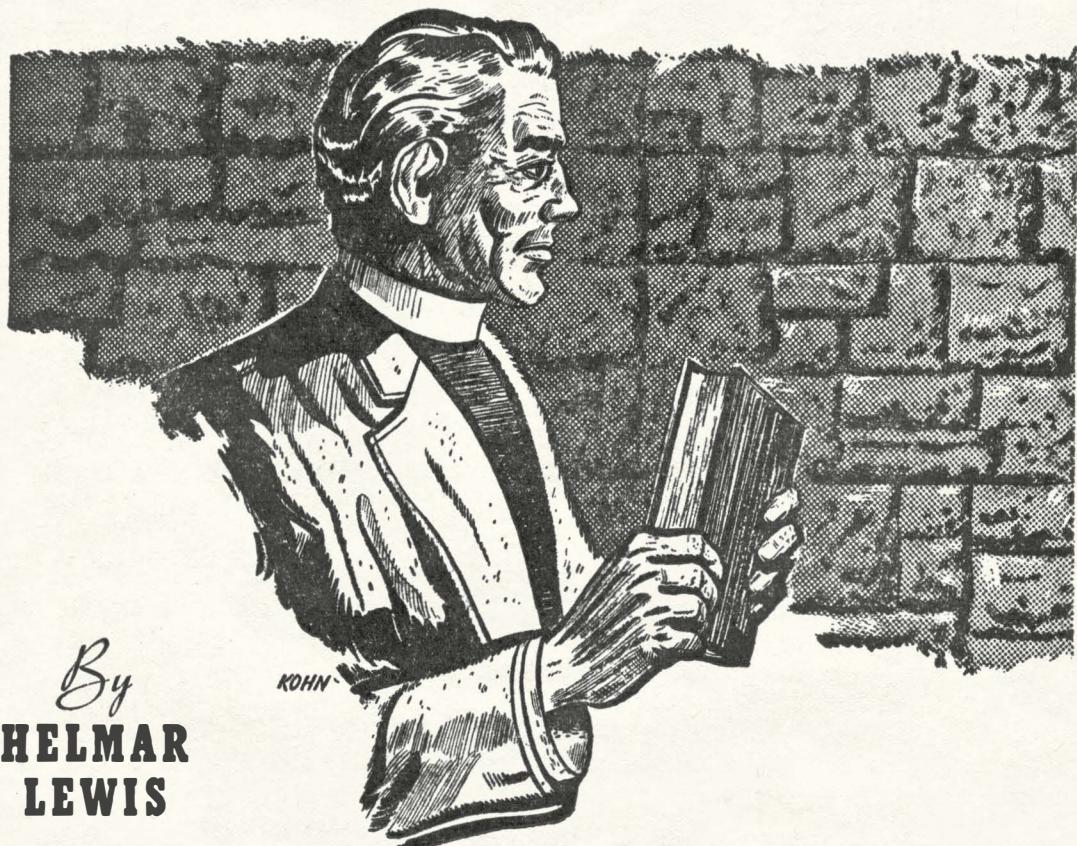
selling for 15 cents (or 45 cents for a 5 cent commodity). Cards containing 10 hairpins of various varieties, some of them used before or picked up from the streets, judging by their marred and dusty surfaces, were sold for 15 cents. These cards of second-hand hairpins are considered a menace to health.

Some other facts obtained were that inferior hairpins, manufactured in Mexico, were being peddled for fabulous prices; bobby pins brought as high as 5 cents for two; hairbows were bought at high prices because each contained six hairpins; and beauty shops were besieged with requests for any leftover pins they might have.

The average woman, it is estimated, needs about 300 pins per year to keep her hair neat. We haven't yet heard of the husband, who weary of complaints, suggested a crew cut, but it would be worth a try.

The Horns of

**He planned it carefully—another man
would die for his crime—and another did!**



By
**HELMAR
LEWIS**

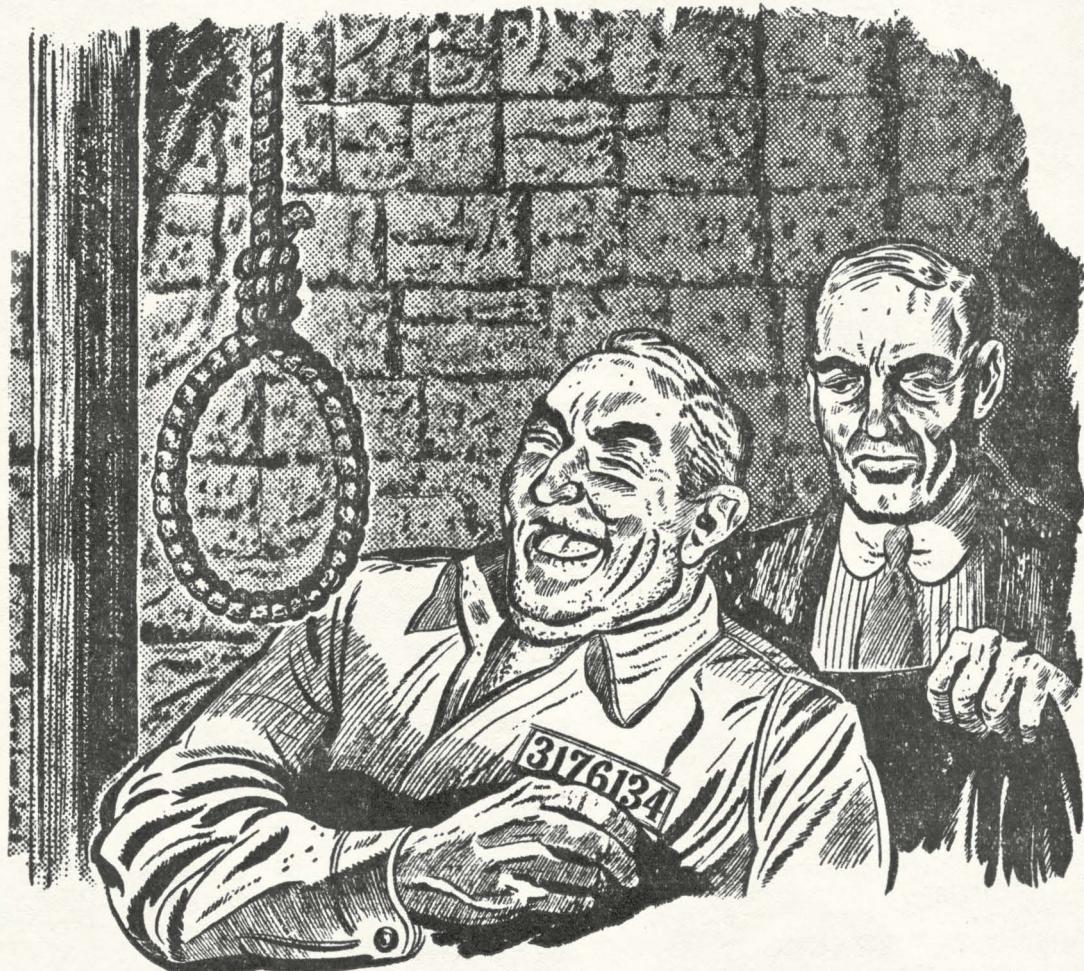
YOU haven't got the guts to kill me!" Guthrie said. "Besides, the cops'll know it was you who pulled the job—even if you get someone else to do it. They can get a dozen witnesses who heard you threaten to kill me. They know you've got it in for me. They'll get you and hang you higher than Haman!"

Charley Finch slumped deeper into the chair. He stared across the desk at

Guthrie through slotted eyes. A faint, derisive smile curled the corners of his mouth. He shifted the unlighted cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other before replying.

"Listen Guthrie," he said slowly, "you broke me. I took you into the firm as a young punk and gave you a chance to make something of yourself. You did. You worked behind my back and finagled around until you got com-

a Dilemma . . .



As he mounted the scaffold he laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks

plete control of everything. Then you dumped me."

"Old stuff!" Guthrie barked.

"I'm going to kill you," Finch said coldly. "And, what's more, I'm going to get the satisfaction of doing it without taking the rap for it. It's going to be as perfect a murder as was ever done."

He got up from the chair and made for the door of the office. He winced a bit when he saw the name MALCOLM

GUTHRIE, PRESIDENT, lettered on the glass panel. Before leaving he turned for a last word.

"So long, corpse!" he said.

WHEN he left the office building, Finch stood at the doorway for some time. When he was certain that he was not being followed, he stepped onto the sidewalk and hurried down the street. At the corner, he hopped onto a

street-car and began to lay out his plans carefully.

A few minutes later, he observed that the car was approaching Bughouse Square. He got off and ambled into the small park that made up the Square. Then he seated himself at one of the benches, near the fountain, and waited. He looked at his wristwatch. It was close to three. That meant the old bum would soon come stumbling down the pathway to his favorite bench close by.

At exactly three o'clock, Finch looked up and saw his man walking up the pathway. Soon, he had reached the bench opposite the one on which Finch was seated. He yawned widely, scratched himself under his tattered clothing and almost fell onto the park bench.

Finch observed him closely. He was amazed at the similarity between this man and himself. The hobo was almost the same height, to the inch. Like Finch, he sported a rounded pot-belly. There was, perhaps, a difference of a few pounds in weight. But the most amazing similarity of all was in the hobo's features. Like Finch's his hair was iron-gray, was bald at the top and had a few straggling hairs brushed across the bare dome. His eye-brows were of the beetling kind, like Finch's. His nose was thinly aquiline. His eyes were a watery blue and his lips, like Finch's, were thin lines. Yet there was an even greater similarity in the two men. Both of them used artificial plates instead of natural teeth. Finch had seen the hobo jut them out of his mouth, as though to relieve his sore gums from badly fitting plates. It was when Finch had seen this that he realized that, after his patient search of more than six months, he had finally found the man he was seeking.

He looked around and saw that the little park was practically deserted.

Now would be as good a time as any to get his plan started, he thought. It all depended on how the hobo would react to his proposition. He felt a trifle nervous as he got up and walked across the pathway to where the hobo was just beginning to doze off in the warm sunshine. He decided to seat himself on the right of the man so as to avoid getting a noseful of the stench that emanated from him.

After a few minutes of silence, Finch said to the hobo, "Kind of warm, huh?"

The other roused himself out of his nap, opened one eye and stared surprisedly at his well-dressed bench-mate. He ejaculated a hesitant, "Yeah!"

"How would you like to earn a couple of easy bucks?" Finch asked.

"Working?" the hobo asked fearfully.

"Not exactly."

"Legal?"

"Absolutely!"

"What's the catch?" the hobo demanded. "Why should a money man like you offer a guy like me a job? Especially when it's legal."

"I want to play a joke on a friend of mine," Finch explained affably.

"Oh yeah?"

FINCH continued. "You see, I made a bet with him that I could pick up a hobo off the street, dress him up to look like a gentleman and pass him off as one. You're just about my size. I'll dress you up in my clothing, give you a chance to take a bath and a shower. . . ."

"How about some of that smelly stuff you guys put on, huh?" the hobo interrupted.

"Cologne water and all," Finch said. He had a feeling that his plan was going to go through without a hitch after all. "What's more," he added, "I'll even throw in a bottle of Scotch." He waited to see what the effect of this last

promise would be. He was rewarded with an interested gleam in the hobo's eyes.

"What else?" the hobo demanded.

"A hundred bucks."

"You're sure it's all legal," the hobo demanded. "I ain't never been pulled in or booked yet and I ain't aiming to begin now. My record's clean, as far as the cops are concerned."

Finch nodded. His plan was turning out even better than he had hoped for. Without a police record, the man would suit his purposes ideally. "It's only a private little joke," he said reassuringly. "Just between my friend and myself."

"When do I begin?"

"Tonight."

Finch took a card from his pocket and handed it over to the bum. "Here's my address," he said. "Just to make sure that we can keep the joke a secret, you'd better come up through the side entrance. Make certain that there is nobody watching you."

The other took the card and fingered it hesitantly. "It's a long way out," he whined.

Finch took the hint. He withdrew a roll of bills from his pocket and handled it so that the other was able to ogle its size enviously. He stripped a five dollar bill from the roll.

"Here's a five-spot in advance," he said.

The other snatched the bill hungrily.

Finch arose from the bench. "I can expect you this evening at eight?" he said.

"Sure!" the hobo replied. "If there's more where this fin came from, I'll be there with bells on."

"Stay away from the booze until you get to my place," Finch warned him. "There'll be enough of that when you're through with your job."

"O.K., Chief!"

"Then it's a deal," Finch said before turning to leave the park, "you'll be at my place at eight."

"Dead sober."

SINCE six o'clock that evening, Finch had paced the floor of his apartment, nervously chewing at an unlit cigar wondering if the hobo was going to show up at eight. As the time for the man's appearance approached, Finch cursed himself for having given away the five dollars. Perhaps the hobo had gone out and got himself drunk. Maybe, at that moment, he was lying dead drunk in some foul alley with five dollar's worth of rot-gut white mule in his guts.

He started suddenly when he heard the doorbell ring. He looked down at his wrist-watch. Exactly eight o'clock. The man at least was punctual. He was also truthful, then, and his claim to having no record with the police might be the truth. He was immensely relieved when he saw that it was the hobo who had rung the bell and who was now standing in the doorway.

Finch let him in the apartment and closed the door behind him. He saw the hobo take in the fine furnishings and the other evidences of wealth in awed silence.

"Some layout!" the hobo finally managed to say.

"Were you careful about coming in?" Finch asked casually, as though it were not too important a detail.

"Oh yeah!" the hobo replied, "I waited until I seen the coast was clear, then I ducked in the side entrance and rung your bell."

Finch nodded appreciatively. "You'd better start changing now," he suggested. "I'm expecting my friend here in about an hour." He opened the door of the bathroom. "You'll find all the

toilet necessities you need in there. Take a close shave, a goot hot shower and put on the underwear I've left there for you."

The hobo looked into the bathroom. "Cheez!" he said, "silk underwear!"

"Here's the clothing I want you to wear," Finch said, pointing to a full dress suit he had laid out on the bed, "tails, stiff shirt, white tie, patent-leather shoes and all."

The hobo turned his rapt attention to the clothing on the bed. He scratched his head in amazement. "And I thought I'd never wear one of my own monkey-suits until I was laid out for my funeral," he said.

Finch grinned. "Better get started shaving," he said. "I'll wait out here until you're done and help you dress."

The hobo stopped at the bathroom door. "You won't have to do that," he said. "I can get into them myself. I once had a job as a sandwich man and I had to wear a monkey suit for a month. You can wait for me in the other room." He closed the bathroom door behind him.

Finch left the bedroom and went into the living-room. There, he continued to pace the floor impatiently chewing his unlit cigar to shreds. When he could bear the suspense no longer, and when he was about to go into the bedroom to see what had happened to the hobo, he heard the knob in the bedroom door turn. He stiffened and waited expectantly. His breath was almost taken away in surprize and amazement when a gentleman who had been a hobo, about an hour ago, stepped out of the bedroom.

FOR a moment, Finch could scarcely believe his own eyes. The transformation was almost miraculous. The suit, the shirt—everything—seemed to fit the man as though they had been

tailor-measured to size. Now that the stubble of beard had been shaved away, Finch saw that the man's face had taken on an air of gentility. It was only when the man spoke that he betrayed his true environment.

"Not bad, huh?" he leered.

What amazed Finch more than anything else was the fact that he felt, in looking at the reconditioned hobo, that he was staring into a mirror and that the dress-suited man in front of him was a reflection. The similarities in stature and facial delineaments were startling. Finch felt the palms of his hands grow damp with expectancy. The plan was going to work out perfectly.

"How about a slug of whiskey now?" the hobo demanded. "I ain't had one all day, like I promised you," he whined, "and my mouth is as dry as Kansas."

Finch hesitated. He could get the man drunk and perhaps, have an easy job. But would a chemical analysis prove something that might turn out to be detrimental to the fulfilment of the plan? He decided to give the man only one drink. His hand quivered when he poured a shot from the decanter on the sideboard into a glass that almost slipped out of his sweated palm.

"Here," he said to the hobo, extending the glass of whiskey, "you can have one now. Then, after you're done with this job, I'll give you the whole bottle."

The other took the proffered glass, sniffed the liquid like a connoisseur and downed it with one gulp. "How about another one?" he asked. "Just one more and we'll call it quits . . . for the time being."

Finch decided the time had come to act. Near the sideboard would be as good a place as any to do the job, he thought. "Go ahead," he said slowly, "help yourself this time."

The hobo grinned and walked over to the sideboard. He laved his lips with his tongue as he reached out to take hold of the whiskey decanter. So intense was his interest in the whiskey he was going to drink, he did not observe his host step quickly to a desk off to one side. Nor did he hear the sound of an opening drawer as Finch pulled out an automatic revolver and unhooked the safety-catch. Only when he heard a cautious footstep behind him did he turn to face Finch. His mouth fell open when he saw the automatic leveled at him. His eyes popped with fright.

"Wha . . . what's up?" he demanded.

Finch did not reply. Instead, he coolly examined the other's head and decided that the best place to shoot him would be in the right temple, between the eye and the ear.

"Cut the comedy!" the hobo insisted. There was a splinter of fear cracking his voice now. "Put that gun down. I ain't done nothing to you. I ain't bothered nobody, I tell you. Put that gun down! Put that gun down!"

FINCH pulled the trigger. The bullet went through the hobo's forehead, between the eye and the ear, where he had planned. The hobo sank to the floor with a groan, the blood pouring from the gaping wound in his head. And when Finch saw that he was dead, he stepped forward, pressed the automatic close to the dead man's face and emptied the automatic through the eyes, the mouth and the nose. That done, he bent over and extracted the man's battered plates from his mouth, took his own plates out and put them into place. Then he straightened up and observed the results of his work.

The hobo's face now was an unrecognizable, blood pulp. So far so good. Finch turned and hurried into

the bathroom where he gathered the hobo's filthy clothing together and prepared to don them. That accomplished, he returned to the living-room where the corpse lay and looked around the room carefully to make certain that he had done nothing or left nothing that might betray him. When he was convinced that everything was all right, he took a large bottle of cleaning fluid from the closet. Very methodically, he poured the contents over the hobo's face and body and over the drapes and other furnishings of the apartment. And, after taking another quick inventory glance around the room, he lit a match and set fire to the fluid-drenched hobo's clothing. They flared up instantly into flame. The flames leaped to other places in the room and licked their way up the drapes. Only when he was sure that the fire would not be quenched did Finch make ready to leave. Finally he did, through the side-entrance through which the hobo had come.

He turned up the ragged collar of the hobo's coat, as he stepped out onto the street. It was dark and he stumbled and almost tripped as he ran down the side-street to the alley. He ducked into it quickly. That's the end of Charley Finch, he thought to himself.

And as an afterthought he added: the beginning of the end of Malcolm Guthrie.

FINCH waited for a week before taking a chance of going out into the street. Meanwhile, he had registered at a decrepit hobo's hotel, on west Madison street. There, feigning illness, he had remained in his room where he had allowed his beard to grow sufficiently to label him as a hobo. The morning after he murdered the hobo, he sent out for a newspaper. Reclining in bed, he opened the paper and read

the front-page headline.

WEALTHY CLUBMAN FOUND MURDERED

The story went on to say that Charles Finch had been found dead in his apartment after firemen had responded to a fire-alarm. Because of the condition of the body—especially the face which had been almost burned off—identification had not been immediately possible. But a check with friends of the deceased proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the dead man had been Charles Finch. The dental plates of the dead man, found on the body, were identified by Finch's dentist as being those he had made some time ago for the deceased. No motive could be found for the murder but the police were checking up on a clue they had found at the apartment.

Finch smiled when he laid the paper down. By all rights, according to the account in the newspaper, he was dead. His murder would be written down on the police blotter as unsolved. Then, when the furor had died down, he would begin to work on the real object of his elaborate masquerade. Meanwhile, he would lay low and establish the new character he had taken on with the death of the hobo. In fact, he would become that hobo, name and all.

And, with that thought in mind, he fell asleep again and dreamed of taking hold of Malcolm Guthrie's throat and squeezing it into lifeless pulp.

HE HAD learned, from an old letter in one of the pockets of the hobo's coat, that the man he had murdered was named Henry Baker. So he had given that name to the man at the desk and, from that time on, became Hank. He went out every morning, ostensibly to look for odd jobs. Instead, he would go to the house on Astor Street, where Guthrie lived. He

realized that, in his condition, he would be unable to frequent the street itself because of the Pinkerton guards who had been hired by the wealthy house-owners to patrol their street day and night. But, with a sack over his shoulder, he would go through the alley collecting old bottles and rags. He even found himself a hole in a barn directly across from the garage behind Guthrie's house. There, he would lie hour after hour and note the times at which Guthrie arrived and left and sundry other habits of the man he was going to kill.

He discovered, for instance, that on Wednesday evening, Guthrie's chauffeur had his night off. Which meant that on these evenings Guthrie would be forced to drive the car himself. And, if he was alone, conditions would be perfect for cornering him, gloating over him and then murdering him. It would be perfect—that is, if he could time the minute of the murder to coincide with the exact time when the Pinkerton patrolman would be at the farthest end of the street.

One Wednesday evening, Finch thought the time had come for the murder. He had seen Guthrie drive up in his car, get out and make for the garage door. Also, he was alone. But just as Finch sprang up from where he was secreted, he saw that the patrolman was passing the house, about twenty-five yards away. He realized he could have killed Guthrie then and there. But the possibilities of escape, because of the nearness of the patrolman, would have taken away the pleasure of killing Guthrie and getting away with it, as he had threatened.

So Finch bided his time and waited for a more propitious occasion. It came a week later. When Finch heard a car pull down the alley, he looked at his watch and was overjoyed to note that,

at that particular moment, the patrolman should be punching in his time at the extreme end of the street. Now, if Guthrie was alone, he would be able to corner him in his garage and carry out his plans. With bated breath, he lay on the barn floor and waited for Guthrie's car to pull to a stop. It did. Finch peered through the darkness. He saw only one head silhouetted in the car. Guthrie was alone. The patrolman was away. The time had come for him to reap his revenge.

AS THE car-door opened, Finch withdrew his automatic from his pocket and unset the safety-catch. Then, when he saw Guthrie step out of the car and go to the garage door, he leaped up, started out and, when he saw the garage door swing open, ran forward and pushed his gun into Guthrie's back.

"Go in!" he rasped, "and if you make a sound I'll drill you right through the back!"

Guthrie gasped. But he went in. Finch kicked the door closed behind him. Then he waited for a while until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness.

"My wallet's in my—" Guthrie started to say.

"I don't want it!" Finch snapped back.

"I don't understand!"

"Turn around, then!" Finch commanded, "then maybe you will understand."

With his hands raised, Guthrie turned around slowly. By this time, his eyes had also been adjusted to the darkness. All he could see was a ragged bum waving an automatic in front of him.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded.

"Take a good look at me," Finch said, "then maybe it'll all become clear to you. If that doesn't help," he added,

"then listen to my voice."

There was a long silence. Then a gasp of horror. Then a single word from Guthrie's trembling lips.

"Finch!"

"That's right." Finch wished it were lighter so that he could see every detail of fear that was, no doubt, etched on his former partner's face.

"I . . . I thought you were dead!"

"That's what I wanted you to think," Finch explained. "I wanted to put you off your guard. I wanted to make you feel safe. I wanted you to think that I wouldn't be able to carry out my threat."

"Who . . . who was it who died, then?"

Finch laughed. "Just a harmless old bum I picked up in the park," he said. "I carefully chose one who looked something like me. I found one who even had plates, as I had. Then I dressed him up in my clothing, shot his head full of lead and set fire to the body and to my apartment. When the police came, they found the body, as you no doubt read in the paper, and were led to believe that I had been the one who had been murdered."

"You won't get away with it!"

"Oh! but I have so far. When I saw you last, at your office, you warned me that I wouldn't be able to get away with murdering you then because the police knew I was out gunning for you."

"They'll get you now, too!"

"How can they? Charley Finch is dead, remember? I'm not Charley Finch any more. I'm Hank Baker. And nobody would ever suspect that Hank Baker had designs on Malcolm Guthrie, would they? And they couldn't suspect Charley Finch because Charley Finch is dead."

"You've forgotten something that'll trip you up," Guthrie quavered. It was obvious that he was desperately

trying to stall for time. He realized that in front of him was a man with revenge in his heart—a man who would try to squeeze from the situation every ounce of pleasure he could. If he could stall him longer, then the Pinkerton man might return from his beat. But he was completely unnerved when he heard Finch break into his thoughts.

"You think you'll keep me talking here until that Pinkerton man returns," Finch said. "But I've timed him and he's not due back here for some time. So, I'll have a little more fun with you, watch you squirm as I promised myself I would do, and then. . . ."

"What'll you take?" Guthrie demanded.

"More than you've got."

"How much?"

"Your life."

GUTHRIE forced himself to tear his eyes away from the automatic that was wavering in Finch's hand. He turned his head slightly and looked out of the garage window. Only darkness greeted his eyes there. He looked at the door. It remained closed. He felt a tightening of the throat and, somehow, the saliva stopped flowing into his mouth and left it dry. He tried to wet his lips with his tongue but it, too, was dry.

"Give me a chance, Finch!" he pleaded. "For old times' sake. I'll make things up to you. I promise I will. I'll take you back into the firm. I'll do anything you say!"

Finch laughed. "That's just how I wanted you to be, Guthrie. I wanted you to crawl. And now that I've got you grovelling in the dust, I'm going to make things even between us."

"Don't . . . don't shoot!"

Finch squeezed the trigger. The roar of the revolver reverberated in the narrow confines of the garage. Guthrie

sank to the concrete floor with a bullet hole in his forehead, the blood gushing from it freely. He was quite dead.

Finch looked down for a long time and watched the body of his former partner twitching in its death throes. So engrossed was he that he did not hear the sound of approaching footsteps. Only when they were close up did he come out of the seeming trance into which he had fallen. When he did, he looked up startled from the body. The pad of footsteps came to him. It was the Pinkerton man, he thought. Evidently, he had spent too much time gloating over Guthrie. This would be no way to end it. He must not be robbed of the pleasure of getting away with the murder of Malcolm Guthrie.

Quickly, he leaped to the door and flung it open. The Pinkerton man was about two hundred feet away. He would have to chance ducking across the alley in the line of fire of the oncoming detective. From the doorway of the garage, he fired one shot. That would make the Pinkerton man think he was still in that direction, Finch thought. Then, bending low, he ran across the alley hoping that his shot had stopped the detective. He ducked into the hole in the barn and flung himself on the floor breathing heavily from fear and his exertions.

From the alley, Finch heard the sound of careful, cautious footsteps approaching. Then he heard them stop. After that came the sound of the garage door opening. Almost a full minute passed before Finch heard footsteps again. But this time they were running footsteps and they faded out into the stillness of the night.

He's gone to get the police, Finch thought. He waited a while to listen for more sounds. None came. So, getting up from the barn floor, he lurched

back into the alley again. He entertained the notion, at first, of returning to the garage to take a last look at the remains of Malcolm Guthrie. But his better sense prevailed, and, instead, he ran in the opposite direction to that the Pinkerton man had taken until he reached the end of the alley. When he got back onto the street again, he slowed up his run to a walk. Soon, he reached Clark street. There, he boarded a street-car to Madison where he transferred to another car to his hotel.

Only in the confines of his tiny hotel room did he finally decide that he was safe—that he had gotten his revenge. That he had killed Malcolm Guthrie, as he had threatened to do—and as he had boasted, had gotten away with murder.

THE next morning, feigning illness again, he sent down for breakfast and for a morning paper. He ate the coffee and rolls with relish. For spread out across the headlines of the front page were the words:

WEALTHY INDUSTRIALIST FOUND MURDERED

He read the story that followed avidly. No detail escaped him. And when he came to the words "the police are mystified at the reason for the killing," he grinned. He realized it would have been different had he not the foresight to do away with Charley Finch. They would have picked Finch up immediately, grilled him, brought in the witnesses who had heard him threaten Guthrie's life and, no doubt, convicted him of the murder. But now—now it was an entirely different story.

That evening, he went out of the hotel and strolled down Madison street. Bending over the river bridge, he secretly drew the automatic from his inner coat-pocket and allowed it to fall

over the railing. When he heard it splash in the waters below, he straightened and turned back to his Madison street stroll. He felt satisfied he had destroyed the last bit of evidence that could be used against him.

While walking, he began to think of his future plans. With the accomplishment of the murder of Malcolm Guthrie, he had worn out the usefulness of Henry Baker. Now, he could check out of the cheap hotel, get rid of the filthy clothing, buy himself a completely new outfit and assume the identity of an entirely new person. With the money he had managed to save, after having been pushed out of the firm by Guthrie, he could go to Mexico, to South America—anywhere. Now, he could really begin to enjoy himself.

With these pleasant thoughts in mind, he approached the entrance to his hotel. He hesitated momentarily when he saw a crowd of people grouped around a paddy wagon. But, realizing he had nothing to fear, he continued on to the hotel.

Just as he was about to enter, a policeman stopped him at the doorway.

"Where do you think you're going, stew-bum?"

Finch tried to squirm out of the policeman's grasp. "I've not done anything!" he protested. "Let go of me!"

"We're pulling in all you bums!" the policeman said. "There's been a couple of murders in town and they may have been done by one of you guys!"

He dragged Finch with him to the paddy wagon. In the course of the scuffle, one of Finch's plates fell out of his mouth. And, despite his protestations, he was not allowed to get out of the wagon to retrieve it. The wagon was soon filled with about twenty specimens of Madison street hobos and, in a short while, was on its way to the Desplaines street lockup.

This is only a routine dragnet, Finch thought to himself as he sat huddled against an old bearded drunk who was quietly weeping. I'm Henry Baker. They've got nothing against Henry Baker. They'll question me, maybe put me in the show-up, in front of the Pinkerton man, and then they'll let me go. He felt better from then on, consoling himself with the belief that soon it would all be over and he would be on his way to Mexico or South America.

HENRY BAKER, step down!"

Finch heard his name called. He walked up the stairs that lead to the show-up line. Behind him, he saw the lined, numbered rules that would indicate his height. A bank of flood-lights almost blinded him. For want of anything else to do, he looked down at his finger-tips that were mottled with the black ink the police had used in finger-printing him. A peculiar fear had surged through him at the time. Now, he examined the smudges closely to determine why he had suddenly gone weak. He was snapped back into the immediacy of his surroundings by the voice of the narrator, through a loud-speaker, who read off the list of crimes and the various aliases of the man in the show-up for the edification of the policemen, complainants, witnesses and the curious visitors who comprised the audience.

"Picked up on suspicion in the murder of Malcom Guthrie," the announcer droned. "No aliases, no previous record, no . . ."

His voice was suddenly interrupted. Automatically, the heads of all in the audience, their faces masked, turned in the direction of the narrator. Finch turned, too, to see what had happened. He saw another policeman talking excitedly with the narrator. Occasionally, he would hold up two sets of cards

and seemed to be comparing something on both. Finally, the newcomer went to the stairs leading up to the show-up platform.

"Get down off there, Henry Baker!" the narrator boomed through the loud-speaker.

Wondering what had happened and why the show-up had been interrupted, Finch shuffled off the platform to where the policeman was waiting for him.

"Come with me," the policeman said grabbing him by the arm. "There's a little matter of something else that we'd like to ask you about." He led Finch out of the show-up room, down a circular, steel stairway and into a bare office. With the exception of a single goose-neck lamp on a table, the room was dark. Finch saw six burly plain-clothesmen standing around ominously, their steely eyes boring right through him as though they were trying to search out the secret recesses of his soul. A police captain was seated next to an empty chair at the table.

"Sit down here," the captain said warmly.

Finch seated himself hesitantly.

"What did you say your name was?" the captain asked.

Finch swallowed hard. "Henry Baker," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure!"

The captain took the two cards from the policeman who had brought in Finch and laid one of them down on the table in front of Finch.

"These are your fingerprints," he said, still warmly, to Finch. "They're the ones we just made of you before the show-up."

Finch looked down at the maze of whorls. He wondered why he had been brought there. Had something happened to upset his carefully laid plans? Had he slipped up somewhere? He

tried to cast his mind back to the myriad of details of the two murders he had committed but he could think of nothing that might have been the reason for this untoward change. He could only blink his eyes in the glare of the light that had been so adjusted that its beam hit him in the face.

"If you say they're mine" he said hesitantly, "well, I guess they are."

The captain laid the other card next to the first card. It was another set of fingerprints. "Now, tell me," he said in an affable voice that was designed to win over the most recalcitrant of suspects, "what do you notice about these two sets of fingerprints?"

FINCH looked down at them both.

At first sight, neither of them made sense to him. But, gradually, he was able to distinguish a similarity in the manner in which the whorled lines were shaped. Soon, it became perfectly obvious to him that the two sets of fingerprints were alike, that they had both been made by the same man—by himself.

"Why, they're from the same man," he said.

"Yeah!" the captain said slowly, "that's what we thought. Now, if you'll answer my other questions as easily as you answered the first one, I'm sure you'll be able to save us and yourself a lot of time and trouble."

Finch stiffened. "Go ahead," he said.

The captain paused for a long time before speaking. The silence became almost unbearable to Finch. He felt the palms of his hands grow moist with sweat. Why doesn't he ask me? he whined to himself, why doesn't he ask me? Why doesn't he ask me?

The question was fired at him like a bullet.

"Where were you the night of June the 18th?"

For what seemed an hour, Finch's mind was a blank. Some hidden censor within him refused to allow him to think back, to dredge out any memory of his past life. Finally, he stammered out something unintelligible.

"What?" the captain roared.

"I . . . I don't remember!" Finch insisted.

"The night of June the 18th!" the captain hammered back relentlessly. "Think back! Where were you the night of June the 18th?"

Finch looked around frightenedly. He saw the bulky hulks of the plain-clothesmen inch toward him menacingly, as though they were going to close in on him like a crushing wall of stone.

"I don't know, I tell you!" he cried out. "I don't remember!"

Then, all of a sudden, he did remember.

He was in his apartment with Hank Baker, the bum.

It was the night of June the 18th that he had lured Baker up to his apartment and had murdered him!

Then . . . they knew!

They knew!

HE WAS trapped. There was nothing he could do about it. They had found a clue, they had told him, a single solitary clue. It was a finger-print on the whiskey-glass he had given to the hobo before he had shot him—his finger-print! There was no doubt about it. There was his own finger-print staring him in the face taken from the whiskey-glass. And there were the finger-prints they had made before the show-up. The thumb and forefinger of both were identical!

What could he do? Could he reject the character of Henry Baker and insist that he was really Charles Finch? Could he tell them that, in reality, the man whom they had thought to be the

murdered man, Charles Finch, was actually Henry Baker? Then that meant that they would hang him for the murder of Henry Baker. What was more, they could also pin the murder of Malcolm Guthrie on to him. So, if he convinced them that he was Charles Finch, he would be hanged just as he would be hanged, now, if he admitted that he was Henry Baker and that he had murdered Charles Finch.

Then an odd thought struck him. If he were convicted and eventually hanged for the murder of Charles Finch, then he would have been hanged for the murder of himself!

He started to laugh. By this time, he had lost the remaining lower plate in his mouth—it had fallen to the floor when one of the detectives had slapped him, and had broken in two—and his toothless mouth yawned grotesquely.

One by one, the detectives looked at each other as they heard him roar in laughter. One of them wound imaginary circles at his forehead with his forefinger. "Screwy," he whispered to a detective at his side.

"What's so funny about it?" the captain demanded.

But Finch only roared louder and louder.

He had already determined the course he would choose. He was going to remain Henry Baker. For then he

would not only be able to enjoy the immense humor of the preposterous situation in which he would be hanged for having murdered himself, but, in addition, he could still revel in the knowledge that he had committed the perfect crime—he had murdered Malcolm Guthrie and had not been found out.

FROM that time on, nothing could stop him from laughing. At the quick trial, when he had been placed on the witness stand, he replied to the questions of the State's-Attorney with loud bursts of raucous laughter. And after he had been found guilty of murder in the first degree and the judge had asked him if he had anything to say before judgment was passed on him, he laughed in the judge's face until his Honor had to resort to vigorous bangs with his gavel to restore a semblance of order to the courtroom.

Even as he stood on the trap-door of the gallows, with the noose drawn taut around his neck, even as the bolt under the trap slid away and the trap fell open and his body dropped through the death-hole to be caught up abruptly with a sickening jolt—the officials, the witnesses and the newspaper reporters heard the sound of his laughter, muffled by the black hood that had been thrown over his head, echoing and re-echoing in the death-chamber.

NEW SUCCESS OVER ATHLETE'S FOOT

NEW SCIENTIFIC 2-WAY TREATMENT WITH QUINSANA POWDER
-ON FEET AND IN SHOES - IS PRODUCING AMAZING RE-
SULTS. IN TESTS ON THOUSANDS OF PERSONS, PRACTICALLY
ALL CASES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT CLEARED UP IN A SHORT TIME.



SONG OF THE SWINDLER

(Concluded from page 127)

gentleman claims to come from the same state as Mr. Jones and both become palsy-walsy.

The gentleman offers to treat Mr. Jones to a show and the friendship gets thicker and thicker. Upon leaving the theatre, the two run into another man.

"Pardon me, but could you inform me as to the location of the Hippodrome? I just arrived here from the south and am thoroughly confused." So speaks the newcomer.

Mr. Jones and his friend from the same state admit that they are also strangers and soon have taken on another acquaintance. The man from the south tells them about a large sum of money he has recently acquired. He gives the impression of a rather wealthy person who would think nothing of throwing away a large sum with the flip of a coin.

All three men enter a cigar store and the southerner suggests that they match to see who pays. The southerner loses and of course pays. The southerner appears to resent his poor luck and suggests they all match for five dollars. The southerner again loses. The matching becomes more and more involved—the southerner losing more and more. Excusing himself the southerner leaves for a few minutes—possibly to the washroom. Every step is well planned and has a purpose. With the southerner's exit, the gentleman and Mr. Jones are left alone so that the trap may be adequately set.

"Let's get together and skin the southerner," suggests the gentleman to Mr. Jones. If Mr. Jones is very honest and it were against his ideals to gyp an innocent victim, then the gentleman would promise to give the southerner back his money. In any case, an agreement is reached and both decide to get together and win all of the southerner's money when he returns.

Soon the southerner appears and the matching continues. Both Mr. Jones and the southerner lose. When the loss grows quite large, the southerner gets indignant and accuses both Mr. Jones and his friend of teaming together against him. Mr. Jones gets scared and tells the gentleman to return the money, which may have risen to as large a sum as \$300. The gentleman tells Mr. Jones to return to his hotel, and that he will handle the southerner and then straighten out Mr. Jones' loss at the hotel.

Well, Mr. Jones goes to his hotel and the gentleman never comes. It soon dawns upon Mr. Jones that instead of him teaming up with his friend to gyp the southerner, the reverse had taken place. Mr. Jones then realizes that both of his acquaintances were swindlers and how cleverly they had pulled the "wool over his eyes." A simple matching game had cost him \$300. How ironical it

must all have seemed to Mr. Jones. To set a trap for a person and then find the trap has closed on yourself is not a pleasant experience.

Another case described by Soderman is even more interesting. Let us now focus our attentions to the *money-making machine*. This is a higher form of swindle in that the stakes are usually greater and the manipulations more delicate and cunning. The swindle is as the name would suggest. Who hasn't dreamt of an Aladdin's magic lamp that could turn out all the money one's little heart desires? This swindle works on the same psychological principle—buying a machine that can turn out twenty-dollar bills at will.

The *money-machine* itself is an interesting apparatus and is constructed as follows: Usually made in the form of a wood cabinet it stands approximately $3 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. A switch on the right side of the box operates an electric motor, which is present merely to complicate the machine and give out a seemingly important humming sound. Aside from an array of lights, glass tubes containing colored liquids, and quantities of blank white paper cut to the size of bills—which merely add to the authentic appearance of the machine and serve no purpose—the machine proper is of simple construction. There is a hidden button which causes a drop-slot drawer to fall to the bottom of the cabinet. A twenty-dollar bill is placed together with a blank piece of paper in the drop-drawer and the secret button pressed without the knowledge of the victim. This drops the box to the bottom and brings into view a similar drop-drawer in which two twenty dollar notes are found. The victim, usually not too bright and very subject to high-pressured salesmanship, believes that the machine has printed the second bill.

The net is a very intricate one—the process a slow steady wearing down of the victim's suspicions. The swindler may offer the victim a twenty-dollar bill for ten dollars, or may ask him to pass some bills at a commission. The result is that the victim becomes interested; his lust for easy money blinds his reasoning. The story that the secret of duplicating money was taught the swindler by a retired relative who formerly worked at the mint, is easily accepted because the victim wants to accept it and rationalizes till he makes it sound reasonable to himself. The swindler after he has hooked his fish may have the victim traile to see that he does not tip off the police. So well planned is this type of swindle.

As to the price paid, this is very variable. I have recently read a case where the victim was stung for an amount in the hundred-thousands. However, if the victim is not too wealthy the price asked for it may be much lower.

There are countless other methods of fleecing the unwary citizen of his money. The observance of one rule will confound the swindler: Something for nothing will cost you money!

IT'S YOUR OWN FUNERAL

By ROBERT BLOCH

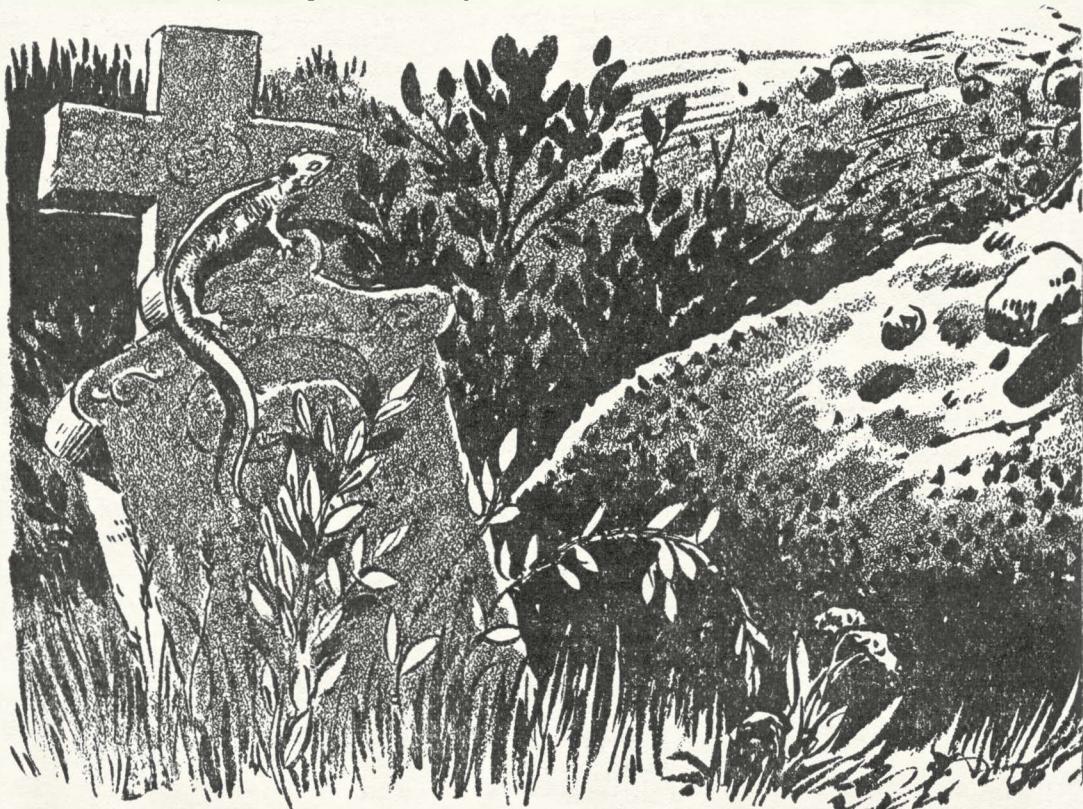
STANLEY COLFAX pounded desperately at the lid of his coffin. He exerted all his strength but the hinges scarcely budged. Panting, he lay back against the satin lining of the box and stared up into the darkness—the stifling darkness, the darkness of the grave. His lips shaped words that echoed hollowly against the coffin-lid pressing down above his face.

"This is swell," whispered Stanley

Colfax. "Couldn't be better, as I live and breathe!"

Once again he pushed at the lid. This time the coffin opened with a slightly perceptible squeak of the oiled hinges, and Stanley Colfax sat up in his casket and smiled.

The tall, thin man with a touch of gray about his temples looked the picture of radiant health as he stepped out of his coffin and jauntily dusted his



**With great care Stanley Colfax laid
his plans for his own funeral—except for
the nails in the coffin! It was murder!**



With a convulsive last effort Colfax burst free of his coffin

tweed suit with a pocket handkerchief.

Colfax hummed under his breath as he surveyed the room in which the coffin rested—one of his private apartments in the Colfax mansion.

Expensive furnishings and lavish wall-panelling barely hinted the extent of the fortune of Stanley Colfax, the oil magnate. Perhaps the best indication of Colfax's riches lay in the coffin he had selected for himself—a bronze and silver box with chased handles in solid platinum. Nothing was too good for Stanley Colfax; he was going to be buried in style.

"All the trimmings," Colfax chuckled to himself, as he bent over the table and desk in the corner.

"Yes, it's all here," he mused. He examined the papers pertaining to his burial plot and the documents made ready for cemetery officials. He fingered his burial permit absently, shuffling through his papers until he found what he was looking for.

"Ah, there it is!" he exclaimed. "My death certificate!" Admiringly he held the paper to the light. It was a beauty, to be sure—signed, sealed and delivered.

"In perfect order," he nodded. "Doctor Daroff's signature—yes—and here's the cause of my death. What did he put down? Coronary thrombosis? Good! I've always wanted to die in style, and coronary thrombosis is a good rich man's death."

Stanley Colfax wandered over to a mirror and regarded his lean image sardonically.

"Guess I'm ready to die," he told himself. "Never felt better in my life."

Abruptly, he turned to a dressing-table and rummaged around in the top drawer. His hands, emerging, clutched a number of articles. Hair-dye, a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, a blond false mustache, spirit-gum.

"All here," he concluded. "Guess I've practised the walk enough, and the mannerisms. Must remember not to smoke any more when I get this stuff on. Wardrobe is all set, too. With the new initials embroidered on my shirts and handkerchiefs."

Colfax secured an overnight bag and bundled the disguise into it. Then he stepped to a telephone and lifted the receiver.

"Henshaw? Still there, eh? Thought this was your afternoon off." A frown creased his brow. Then he smiled. "Oh, just leaving, eh? Well—will you bring the car around to the front driveway before you go? I'm off on an errand."

Colfax went down the hall carrying the bag. "Now to dump this stuff at the hideout," he determined. "When I return Henshaw will be gone for the day. The coast is clear. I'll get it over with in a hurry."

HENSHAW was waiting with the car. The bald-headed, bespectacled man-servant and major-domo of the Colfax mansion offered his master a furtive smile.

Colfax grinned back at him. "Little do you think," he inwardly chuckled, "that this is the last time you're going to see me alive. If you knew, then you'd break your jaw smiling, wouldn't you. Dirty sneak!"

Aloud he merely remarked, "Nice day, Henshaw. Have a good rest."

Colfax climbed into the car and wheeled down the drive. It was a nice day. Nice day for a murder. Nice day for a funeral. But tomorrow would be a damned sight nicer.

Tomorrow he would be lying in his coffin. And his relatives would come. His sister, her husband, the kids. And his stupid uncle, Professor Crowley. A fine crew of leeches and parasites.

They'd all be on hand for the funeral—and for the reading of the will afterward. They'd crowd around his attorney, Jeremy Fuller, waiting for the big moment.

How he longed to see their faces when the will was read! Two million dollars in perfectly liquid assets—the last will and testament of Stanley Colfax; unmarried, no direct descendants. Henshaw would be expecting his cut; Colfax knew his unfailing servility masked an avaricious nature. And his greedy sister and her covetous husband would expect a big bequest. Their oily friendship didn't fool him. The children, too, were little hypocrites. He was sure of it.

Yes, they'd hang on Jeremy Fuller's words. And when they saw Rufus Tate come in they'd stare at this intruder—this almost unknown nephew from California. They would smile secretly at one another, nudge knowingly. Here was an outsider who couldn't hope to be cut in on the gravy!

And then Fuller would come to the bequests. What a moment! "I hereby leave my entire estate to my dear nephew, Rufus Tate."

How he would love to see their foolish faces then!

But he *would* see them.

For he would be Rufus Tate!

It was a fool-proof scheme. Colfax gloated over it as he deposited his overnight bag at the apartment he'd rented. He hugged the thought as he drove back to his home.

For years now he'd been a prey to gnawing suspicions regarding his business associates, his friends, his relatives. Stanley Colfax had fought his way up to the top of his heap and found only a lonely eminence on which to stand. His relatives thirsted for his money. He was sure of it. They hung around like a group of friendly buzzards, waiting

for him to die. Still in his early forties, Colfax had the uncomfortable feeling of an octogenarian with cancer.

Well, he was sick of it. He couldn't take it. He found no pleasure in business any more; no sense to piling up a further fortune. If he could only get out from under, get away, start life anew and enjoy himself. But Stanley Colfax, the millionaire, would always be a prey for swindlers, wherever he might go. He would be a sucker, a soft touch, an easy mark.

There was only one solution. Stanley Colfax must die. That would rid him of his business obligations, his relatives, and his cursed reputation of wealth in one fell swoop. As Rufus Tate he would live.

THE simple details of the scheme were easy to arrange.

Colfax smiled cynically as he thought of how Doctor Daroff and his attorney, Jeremy Fuller, had consented to the plan. They were like all the rest—he bought their professional honor for a few paltry dollars. Fuller was bribed to carry through the scheme with the will. Doctor Daroff, his personal physician, was a weak-willed drug addict. Colfax knew it. He had agreed without any trouble. He'd forge the death certificate, give Colfax a simple cataleptic agent.

So now it was arranged. Colfax had only to walk into his empty house, drink the potion—as Juliet drank the potion given to her by Friar Lawrence—and wake up in a coffin in the cemetery.

The grave-earth would be loosely packed; he'd seen to that end of it with Jeremy Fuller. And his coffin-lid would not be nailed down. He'd awake, rise from the grave, retire to his previously-rented apartment, don his disguise, and appear at the reading of the will as Rufus Tate, a nephew.

Fuller had given him papers, credentials, identification galore. There was even a Social Security number and a draft card. Fuller was unscrupulous but thorough. And neither he nor the Doctor would dare to double-cross him.

Colfax smiled as he re-entered his driveway. He parked the car, entered his house, went upstairs to the bedroom, and produced the potion from a cabinet.

This powder, in a glass of water—

He felt excited, exhilarated. "Funny," he mused. "I've never felt so good in all my life—just the thought of dying makes life worthwhile."

Now for thirty-six hours of dreamless sleep. It was a pity he wouldn't be conscious during the funeral. He'd enjoy that. Some asinine preacher delivering the conventional rich man's eulogy over his body. And the company would send banks of flowers. Wreaths from cold-blooded business men who were glad he'd passed on. Another competitor gone—good riddance. Send the old vulture a "floral tribute" and let's see how we can cut in on his business now that he isn't around to bother us.

Colfax poured the potion into the water-glass with steady fingers. A white powder; it would dissolve readily, leave no traces. There wouldn't be a single clue, not a slip-up. The press would report death by coronary thrombosis and let it go.

Newspapers! He'd have to get the papers after he awoke. He wanted to read his obituaries, of course.

Colfax thought of P.T. Barnum and smiled. The old showman had been scuffing his feet on death's doorstep when a premature report of his demise was made. The papers had printed long articles lauding his illustrious name. Barnum read the publicity in bed, and the tributes kept him alive for several days longer.

Colfax shrugged, glanced at his watch. Five o'clock. Good—just right! That would bring him out of it at dawn, day after next. He'd be buried tomorrow—Doctor Daroff had promised to rush it through for him. Let's see, he'd drink it now. Daroff would come in to "discover" his body at six. Then he'd phone, arrange burial permits, and the funeral would take place tomorrow at sunset. Just the proper eccentric touch.

"I'd better make sure," Colfax murmured.

HE DIALED an outside number. Daroff's office. He answered the phone. Fine—his girl was gone. No eavesdroppers.

"Hello, Doc," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Colfax."

"All set."

"Good. I'll be right over."

"Step on it." Colfax grinned. "I'll be lying on the bed, by the way—not the floor. Don't want to spoil the crease in my trousers."

Stanley Colfax hung up the receiver. He stepped to a mirror, regarded his image in the glass. Then he raised the potion to his lips in an ironic toast.

"Here's looking at you," he said. "The king is dead—long live the king."

He drank the whitish liquid at a gulp. Tasteless, odorless, harmless—

A fog crept from the corners of the room, stretching forth its moist and clammy arms to embrace him. The fog slithered up to grasp his naked brain, caress its convolutions with damply pressing fingers that burned into his skull with white fire. And Stanley Colfax slid down into the fog, his brain burning as it mingled with the mist that swept over him. He kept trying to imagine what the fog might be, where it might come from. His last conscious thought brought recognition. Stanley

Colfax knew what the fog was now. It was the breath, the icy breath of death.

CHAPTER II

A Grave Mistake

SOMEBODY was breathing in Colfax's ear. Somebody was gasping, his inspiration a rasping rattle that tried to gulp precious air.

Somebody was pounding with bruised and lacerated fists; pounding against an immovable barrier above.

Somebody was sobbing hysterically in a high, gasping shriek.

Somebody was staring blindly into Stygian darkness, staring with horrified eyes that tried to tear away the eternal prison of night.

Somebody was—*he, Stanley Colfax!* Consciousness came on the wings of terror. Where was he? What was he doing?

The darkness answered mockingly. He was in his coffin. What was he doing? He was trying to get out.

But why couldn't he breathe? Why was he sobbing and struggling so?

Because . . . *he couldn't get out!*

The realization smote him. He'd been fighting madly to claw open the coffin. *And the coffin was sealed.*

He lay back on the satin, hearing the faint rustle of his shroud mingle with his shredded breathing in a counterpoint of pure horror.

Colfax tried to subdue his pantings. The air was foul, oxygen almost exhausted. How long had he lain here? How long must he lay here—*forever?*

The thought was hideous in its intensity of torment. His bleeding fingers rose to scrape the immovable lid of the coffin, pressing down on his body with the kiss of death.

Nails held. They had been pounded home, pounded with a heavy mallet that

sealed the coffin, sealed his doom.

"No!" The cry rose from his lips, shattered the silence of the sepulchre.

He had to be calm. He must relax, think. From now on it was a matter of time. Each moment was precious. A life-or-death matter. A death-struggle.

Somebody had been very clever. He must be cleverer. Who had done it? That didn't matter now. The problem was to undo the state of affairs—before it undid him.

A nailed coffin. His nails against the nails of steel. Steel. Steel against steel.

His belt!

Perspiring hands crawled down to his waist. Yes, he wore a belt, with a metal buckle. But to remove it in the cramped confines of the coffin was torture.

That torture was as nothing compared to the agony of prying up the nails with the steel belt-tongue. He worked slowly—despite his frantic efforts to be swift—loosening the wood around the nails, splinter by splinter. At last he had removed eight—the eight directly above his head. He could exert pressure now with arms, head and shoulders. He heaved. A lungful of mephitic air seared his body with pain.

The coffin-lid didn't budge.

Another lunge. No result—but his head swam, he felt a burning sensation in his chest, and fell back gasping. A rattle rose in his throat. Death-rattle?

With every fibre of his being, Stanley Colfax threw his body upward. Bloody fingers pressed, sprained wrists tautened, cramped shoulders surged. And the coffin-lid rose up—earth tumbled into the coffin.

COLFAX writhed like a worm beneath the deluge of debris. He choked, felt the horrible savor of grave-earth in his nostrils, pressing against his shredded lips.

His fingers clawed upward. Damp clods, loosely packed, gave way as he burrowed madly. Then began a nightmare ascent. Stanley Colfax was no longer a man. He was a graveyard maggot, a wriggling worm that twisted through the pits beneath the tombstones. The clammy, rotten stench of death clung to him, and the clammy, rotten earth shrouded his struggling body as he fought his way to the surface.

And then the outer crust gave way, he pulled himself over the lip of the grave's yawning mouth, he saw the crimson promise of dawn in the blessed sky above—and Stanley Colfax lay unconscious but alive on the edge of his grave.

Dawn was no longer a promise, but full reality when Colfax opened his eyes once more.

He blinked, shuddered, drew his bruised body erect and stared down at the handsome headstone.

Yes, there it was. "*Stanley Colfax—b. 1900, d. 1943.*"

"Yes," Colfax murmured. "I'm dead, all right. Or almost dead."

He wondered who had double-crossed him. Who had driven home the spikes?

For a wild moment he had an impulse to scratch a message across the tombstone at the head of the grave. "Opened by Mistake."

Then he frowned wryly. The sickish-sweet scent of the floral tributes rose to his nostrils. He stared down at the brown clods of grave-earth.

Grave-earth. An open grave!

He glanced around abruptly at the deserted cemetery in the dawn-light. Then he hastened down the path. A greens care-taker's toolshed stood beside a cluster of trees. He tried the door. It opened. He fumbled in the darkness of the little room.

Colfax emerged carrying a shovel.

With a sigh, he began to fill in his grave.

Whoever had planted him—they must never suspect that he'd managed a resurrection. The plan must proceed on schedule; the grave would be filled in.

Panting, Colfax concluded his labors, returned the shovel to its proper place in the shed, and tried to brush some of the mud from his grimy, caked clothing. He made a poor job. He looked like a tramp.

And like a tramp, he stole furtively from the cemetery. Like an outcast he slouched along. But then, he was an outcast. An outcast from life. A nameless entity, a dead man—a zombie, a walking ghost.

He would be a ghost now until he reached his hide-out and donned the disguise of Rufus Tate. Then he'd be an important figure once more. From ghost to million-heir in one easy lesson.

Yet his lesson had not been easy. It had almost cost him his life. Somebody had planned to plant him. Doctor Daroff? Lawyer Fuller?

Well, there'd be plenty of opportunity to find out, at the reading of the will.

Yes, this afternoon would be time enough. Now to go to the apartment, rest, dress, don his disguise, and show up at the Colfax residence at two.

WEARY feet carried him to his new hiding-place. Colfax found his key under the mat, opened the door, and staggered in. He fell on the couch and slept—deeply and dreamlessly.

The sun's slanting rays struck the bridge of his aquiline nose with noon-day violence when Colfax awoke.

His eyes blinked at the face of the clock.

"After one," he muttered. "Must

hurry. One time I must be prompt!"

Hurry he did. Bathing, shaving, the donning of new garments and adjustment of his disguise—all actions were completed shortly before two.

And then Rufus Tate, a blond, bespectacled young man with a wispy mustache, minced down the stairs and summoned a passing taxicab.

Drawling an address, Colfax leaned back and contemplated his new image in the rear-view mirror.

Not bad. He was unrecognizable. The spirit-gum tickled his upper lip, but the disguise tickled his fancy. He was on the way at last.

On his way to—what?

Just what was he stepping into when he decided to go through with the plan, continue with his masquerade just as though nothing had happened?

For the first time since his vivisepulture, Colfax pondered the situation.

He was taking a risk showing up at the reading of the will. Surely, whoever had nailed his coffin shut must have known of the plan. It didn't look accidental. And with the assurance that he was really dead, perhaps the situation had been altered. But there was nothing else to do but carry on and meet emergencies as they arose.

Stanley Colfax smiled grimly at his unfamiliar image in the cab mirror.

Somebody would be very surprised to see him show up.

But who? That scoundrel Fuller? Or that drug-doomed sneak, Doctor Daroff? Perhaps Henshaw—he'd had opportunities to eaves-drop during the weeks that the plan was being developed. For that matter, others could have overheard telephone discussions with either Doctor Daroff or attorney Fuller. His sister and her husband were around the house often. So was his uncle, the Professor.

Colfax clenched his fists at his sides.

He'd find out. His appearance would cause a betraying sign on the part of the guilty one.

"The guilty one," he murmured aloud, as the cab purred along. "My guess would be Fuller. He'd figure on killing me and then altering the will again. Or using the old will. But then—in either case, some relative would get the money."

"How would Fuller benefit? Unless, of course, there was collusion—a split afterward. Well, I'll find out soon enough."

The cab was wheeling up the driveway of his estate. Colfax glanced at the cheap wristwatch he had secured for "Rufus Tate" and then shook his head. Two-fifteen. A bit late.

"Better late than never," he mused, paying the driver and sauntering up the walk with a grin under the false mustache. "Yes—much better late than never!"

EXCITEMENT gripped him as he reached the door. Now he must control himself. His new disguise would be a test of all his ability. He must carry it off successfully, under the eyes of half-a-dozen people who knew him since childhood.

And there was a further test. One of those people was his attempted murderer. He'd be matching wits in a deadly game.

Colfax brought his hand up to press the buzzer, then noted the door was ajar.

Acting on sudden impulse, he kicked it open. It swung to reveal an empty hallway.

A faint trickle of conversation came from the library doorway to the left of the entrance. They must be gathered in there to hear the reading of the will.

Good. He'd make a dramatic entrance now, mince in with his "Rufus

Tate" walk and surprise them.

Or—

He hesitated, noticing that the library door was partly opened. Better take a look first and see if everything was clear.

Yes, they were all there. He recognized the faces, and the backs of heads. His sister, her husband, the children, gathered around the table. Doctor Daroff standing to one side. Henshaw solicitously hovering in the background. And presiding at the end of the table, Jeremy Fuller with his briefcase.

All present and accounted for.

Now to make the grand entrance—

A clatter of heels on the outer porch caused Colfax to wheel suddenly.

Someone else was coming to join the party! An unexpected guest.

Colfax noted the portieres next to the library doors and quickly moved behind the concealing drapes. He'd better take a look at this newcomer as he rang the bell. Best to know everything in advance.

But the newcomer did not ring. Seeing the open door, the stranger walked right in; taking short, mincing steps.

The stranger headed for the library without hesitation, brushing within a foot of Colfax's concealed presence.

Colfax stared, gasped, clutched at the portieres for support as his mind reeled under the staggering impact of what he saw.

For the mincing stranger had blond hair, spectacles, and the wisp of a mustache clinging to his upper lip. *The stranger was disguised as his identical double—Rufus Tate!*

CHAPTER III

Murder, He Says

THE rest was nightmare. Colfax gripped the wall and stared through

the curtains at the scene beyond in the library.

He saw the gathering turn heads as though actuated by the command of a single neck and regard the blond stranger.

He heard their exclamations of surprise, just as he had imagined hearing them when he made his appearance.

That was bad. But it was worse to hear the stranger—the double imposter, speaking in the drawling voice he had personally planned to use while posing as "Rufus Tate." It was all nightmare.

For "Rufus Tate" was speaking. He introduced himself. The California nephew. And now he was producing papers and handing them to Attorney Fuller. Credentials. Colfax could swear he saw a Selective Service card in the lot.

Sweating, Colfax saw this mysterious stranger carrying out, word for word, the entire dialogue he had planned to use.

Was he mad? Everything—the grisly struggle in the grave, the strange upset in his plans, and now the appearance of this masquerader—might be merely a hallucination of his diseased mind. Perhaps he was dreaming, and would awaken.

Awaken where? In that mouldering grave?

Colfax pressed trembling fingers to his dyed temples and tried to contain himself. He'd anticipated problems, but this was too much.

Now Jeremy Fuller was suggesting that they all sit down and listen to the reading of the will. The last will and testament of Stanley Colfax, deceased.

Stanley Colfax had looked forward to enjoying this moment when his will was read.

Now he ignored it. He was frantically scanning each face, each figure in the room. He must find a betraying

gesture, a sign.

His mind scurried like a frantic rat in the bony prison of his skull.

He was analyzing—searching for motives—clues.

His attention shifted from face to face.

THREE was his sister, Regina Bassett. A fat, perpetually smirking woman with peroxide curls. She sat there now with a mourning veil over her triple-chinned face. What black secret did that veil hide? The veil of hypocrisy . . .

Next to her, Andrew Bassett, her husband. A weak-chinned failure. Always the hearty "good fellow" type, but Colfax didn't trust his insincere flattery. Perhaps he'd ignored Andrew Bassett too blithely. The weak chin might hide a strong ambition. An ambition that stopped at nothing—even murder.

The children sat beside their parents. Three good reasons why the Bassets might kill.

Colfax thought of how they had treated him. His sister had suggested moving in, keeping house for him. Just an excuse, of course, to saddle him with the whole family. She was always pitying him for his "loneliness" and urging that he marry. It hadn't fooled him. She was after the fortune.

Suppose she or her husband had stumbled on this plot of his, decided to take advantage of it by hiring their own "stooge" to play the part of the nephew from California?

Still, the Doctor and Fuller wouldn't be likely to agree. And neither his sister nor her husband could force them.

But maybe one of the children might exert pressure.

Colfax's suspicious gaze fell on the younger members of the family.

The towheaded one was Bill. Twenty-two, an instructor in the Civil Air

Corps, but a snob. A chaser of society girls.

Bill had demanded a sports roadster from him two years ago. He knew where the money was, all right. Would he have the courage to go after it—in the worst way?

Maybe it was Tommy. He was older, twenty-five, with a wife. A young lawyer, already itching to get into politics. Ambitious, like his mother. Hard-headed. Hard-headed enough to plan a murder?

Cynthia. Just eighteen. A girl, but with all the mother's ruthless determination.

The whole family must hate him for his money. A lone bachelor—why was he entitled to so much when they had so little? Kill him—

Colfax scowled. He glanced at Henshaw; Henshaw the imperturbable. The secretary and man-of-all-work stood inconspicuously in shadow. Why? To hide the gloating, secret smile on his face?

Henshaw was always smiling. For ten years he'd served Colfax in this big house, and always he smiled. What in hell did he have to smile about? Unless he were hugging a secret in his breast—a cherished plan.

He'd had opportunities to listen in on the phone, to overhear conversations when plans were laid. Perhaps he'd stumbled on the plot and acted. Had his cold, bony hands driven home the coffin nails?

Colfax's glance fell on Professor Crowley. He started. Hadn't noticed his elderly uncle before—but then, nobody ever paid any attention to Professor Crowley.

Perhaps that was a mistake—not paying attention to Professor Crowley.

Come to think of it, he knew very little about his eccentric uncle. He was a poor chemistry professor in a local

university, and he was always at the point of asking Colfax for funds to set up a private research laboratory. But the bent little man had never come out pointblank with the request. He merely scurried in and out on hasty visits, said little, but sat there with a wry grin while he puffed on his pipe and regarded Stanley Colfax with myopic eyes.

An eccentric professor—serving the cause of Science—Science was a jealous master and demanded tribute. A tribute of blood for the great cause of research? Why not?

One of those things, perhaps.

COLFAX watched Jeremy Fuller as he read the will. He had a bland, purring voice; the voice of a sleek cat. And he resembled a sleek cat with his corpulent paunch, his slick grey hair, his slanted eyes and well-kept nails long as claws.

An unsavory character, Jeremy Fuller. A lawyer who wriggled his feline way through loopholes in legal fences. A cultured cat who would wallow in any garbage-pail if the pickings were rich, but who purred oh so gently when stroked the right way.

Fuller knew the plan. But would he have the guts to attempt such a thing?

Doctor Daroff, now, was a different proposition. The gaunt doctor with the mane of bushy black hair sat hunched forward in his chair. His unnaturally bright eyes gleamed beneath sabre brows. He pulled at his mustache with long white fingers. Fingers skilled at administering hypodermics—to others, and to himself.

A cokey. A hop-head. Brilliant, but thoroughly unprincipled. And perhaps not altogether sane. Those eyes of his had narrowed to black slits when Colfax promised him ten thousand dollars for the fake death certificate. Doctor Daroff loved money. It might be that

he loved it enough to kill for it. And he'd had every opportunity to take advantage of the situation. He was "in" on the plans. He and he alone was master of the situation.

Colfax watched him carefully now, through the curtains, as Doctor Daroff listened to the purring recital of Jeremy Fuller.

The climax had come. Every head leaned forward as Fuller began to read the portion of the will pertaining to bequests.

Here it was now.

"Entire estate to my dear nephew, Rufus Tate."

That *was* a shocker!

Colfax could swear that he read genuine astonishment on the faces of all those present. But anyone clever enough to plan this situation would have sense to restrain natural emotion.

And there was one unknown quantity. The false nephew. The stranger. "Rufus Tate" sat there calmly.

"This is all so sudden," he told the gathering. "So unexpected."

But he didn't look surprised. He didn't look flustered. Whoever he was, he knew what he was doing—stealing two million dollars from a supposed dead man!

"I don't know what to say," he drawled. "Why—Uncle Stanley—I hardly knew the man."

"Uncle Stanley" behind the curtains had a grim smile on his face. This last statement was certainly a true one!

As Jeremy Fuller concluded the reading of the will, Colfax pondered. This "Rufus Tate" imposter, now—suppose that he were really the instigator of the plot? Suppose he, whoever he was, had managed by some accident to get wind of the affair and had acted on his own. Then everyone else's surprise was genuine. Perhaps Doctor Daroff and Jeremy Fuller thought that this

man was really Colfax in disguise. They might be fooled, too.

If so—who was "Rufus Tate?"

COLFAX'S head was spinning. All this intrigue, this mystery—and he alone to play detective and find the man who had attempted to kill him. Or the woman. He must move quickly, take steps at once.

Should he step into the library, confront the imposter and blurt out the whole story? Tell them to their faces what he had done and why he did it?

That would be the best way. Except—

Except that nobody would believe him. Doctor Daroff had faked a death certificate. Jeremy Fuller had acted illegally in reading the will of a man he knew to be alive. They would have to deny his story. He couldn't choose the easy way out. So he had to proceed the hard way. But how?

Colfax stared again at the scene in the library.

"I'm so overwhelmed," the new heir was babbling. "Really, Aunt Regina, I don't know what to say."

Regina Basset and her husband didn't know what to say, either. They could scarcely conceal their active hatred. A glum look had settled over Professor Crowley's wrinkled face. The three Basset children were muttering between themselves.

Henshaw had turned away. What secret lay buried behind his bespectacled gaze?

Doctor Daroff was tapping a corner of the desk with nervous fingers as Jeremy Fuller fumbled with his briefcase.

Only "Rufus Tate" seemed to be at ease. He smiled now, clapped Andrew Basset on the back.

"Let's all have a drink," he suggested. "I think we need it."

There was no command in his voice, merely suggestion—but Henshaw seemed to sense the presence of a new master in the house. He scurried off.

Colfax waited, debating his next move. Henshaw returned with decanter and glasses on a tray. He poured. Fuller assisted him in passing the glasses around. Even teetotaller Professor Crowley took the whiskey.

"Rufus Tate" raised his glass and smiled. "To the memory of Uncle Stanley," he toasted.

The company drank.

Stanley Colfax tensed himself. This was the moment to act, to stop the farce. He would take off his mustache, go in there, and—

Empty glasses fell to the floor. Mouths gaped open in horror. Eyes goggled madly.

For Doctor Daroff had risen from his chair. He stood there, sabre brows raised, his eyes staring glassily at nothing. Long fingers stroked the side of his throat absently. Daroff's mouth opened. He took a step forward.

A voice—a choking strangled croak—welled from the red cavern of his throat.

"*You—fiends!*"

Regina Basset screamed as Doctor Daroff pitched forward on his face.

For a moment, nothing shattered the fear-etched tableau in the library. Then Jeremy Fuller sighed, heavily.

"This," he whispered, "is murder!"

CHAPTER IV

More Fun—More People Killed!

MURDER—police. Police—investigation.

It was a simple equation. Stanley Colfax solved it at once. He slipped out of the house without a backward

glance and raced down the driveway as fast as his feet would carry him.

He hailed a passing cab at the corner and gave his new address—the address of the hideout.

There was work to be done and he must think.

If Colfax had any doubts about the seriousness of a murder plot before, they were dispelled now. One of his suspects was a murderer. But now there was one suspect less. The Doctor couldn't be guilty of the plot, because he was dead. And why was he dead? Because he knew too much?

Better decide that when he arrived at the apartment. One thing he knew—he couldn't have stayed there at the house when the police arrived. The presence of two gentlemen named "Rufus Tate" would be difficult to explain. He couldn't explain it himself.

There was a lot he couldn't explain. Colfax thought about it later, pacing up and down the floor of the apartment.

He still didn't know who'd tried to kill him; his sister, her husband, one of the children, Jeremy Fuller, Professor Crowley, Henshaw, or the fake nephew."

He still didn't know who the fake "nephew" could be.

He still didn't know who killed Doctor Daroff, or why.

Three mysteries to solve!

Colfax decided to take the last one first. Doctor Daroff. He had been in on the plot. Apparently somebody desired to remove him—perhaps because he knew too much about one of the other mysteries, or held the key to the situation. A fair surmise.

But who did it?

Henshaw had brought in the drinks, including the poisoned whiskey. Therefore Henshaw was the most logical suspect.

Yet suppose this were true and Henshaw had intended the poison for someone else?

That was a subtle complication.

Still, Colfax could feel fairly certain that the police would reason as he did, and hold Henshaw for the murder of Doctor Daroff.

That would release the other suspects at once: Crowley, Fuller, Regina Basset, Andrew Basset, the children, and the fake "nephew." No need to even think about Stanley Colfax. They wouldn't have a clue to make them suspect the affair demanded further investigation.

So Colfax would have to discover his own attempted murderer himself. And, of course, he'd have to discover the identity of the second "Rufus Tate."

Two cigarettes later, Colfax began to think about that imposter. The man wearing his disguise, the man with his credentials, duplicated. The man who walked in and nonchalantly took a two million dollar bequest.

Who was he?

In the answer to that question lay the key of the mystery.

How was it that this man was wearing the identical disguise Colfax had selected for himself?

Somebody obviously had tipped him off to the plot.

Even so, where would this stranger procure such a disguise?

Colfax grinned.

"Why didn't I think of that sooner?" he muttered. "There's only one place he could get it, of course. At the same place I got mine! Racker's Costume Shop!"

IT WAS obvious, now. In order to make sure of duplicating the hair-dye and the false spectacles and the blond mustache, the man must have patronized the shop that Colfax had

gone to.

He'd stopped in about a week ago and purchased his supplies from Mr. Racker in his seedy shop in the slum district. It had seemed safe, harmless enough. But this stranger had been on his trail and duplicated his purchases.

Colfax's life was just one taxicab after another. He called one now, and hastily gave the address of Racker's Costume Shop.

"Now we're making progress," Colfax told himself. "Mr. Racker will be able to tip me off on who came in and asked for the same things I bought. I'm wearing the stuff now—I'll tell him I'm going to a costume party this evening."

The excuse would sound logical, Colfax reasoned. For as the cab drew up to a curb along one of the tangled streets, he realized that dusk had fallen. The red sunset crept off to die behind the looming walls of the squalid tenements that huddled along the street.

In the twilight, Colfax hurried along to the fly-specked window bearing the sign of Racker's Costume Shop. He descended the steps to the basement entrance and opened the door.

A pasty-faced blonde girl was leaning over the stained counter in the gloomy little shop. Colfax approached her.

"I'd like to speak to the gentleman who waited on me last week," he began. "Mr. Racker, that would be?"

"He's out," said the girl. "Can I help?"

"Perhaps." Colfax forced a smile. "Do you happen to know of any customer who has come in during the past seven days and bought a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles like these? And a false mustache like the one I'm wearing? And hair-dye—ash blond dye?"

The girl noted his disguise now and shrugged disdainfully. "Uh-uh," she

grunted. "I don't remember. Racker might know, but he's out. Whyn'cha come back tomorrow?"

"Guess I'd better." Colfax smiled and turned away. The girl's watery blue eyes followed his retreating shoulders.

"Screwball," she muttered.

Colfax emerged upon a darkening street. The cab had departed. Should have told the driver to wait. Now he'd have to walk. And the prospect of a walk through this deserted slum area was depressing.

Tomorrow he'd come back bright and early and talk to Racker. Too bad Racker was out. Wonder where he'd gone to.

And then—Colfax knew.

It hit him like that. All at once.

He remembered Lou Racker. A tall man. About his own height. A man in his early forties. His own age. A man who knew what disguise he was planning to assume.

A man who could assume that disguise himself!

The fake "Rufus Tate" might be Lou Racker!

Colfax was passing the alley behind the costume shop as the thought struck him.

It hit him with such a staggering force of realization that he didn't notice the figure creeping behind him; the figure slinking along the alley with blackjack poised to strike.

And so it happened.

The thought hit him—and then, out of the gathering twilight, the blackjack hit him.

Colfax spun around, saw the crouching figure raise a long arm to strike again. He tried to dodge, but too late. The blackjack came down in a vicious arc, and Colfax fell.

His last conscious vision was of the coffin in the cemetery—the waiting

coffin of Stanley Colfax which would be filled now, after all.

CHAPTER V

The Suspense Is Killing

WHEN "Rufus Tate" returned to the Colfax mansion, it was well after dark. He adjusted his mustache before ringing the bell, and patted the bulge at his hip pocket reassuringly. That blackjack sure came in handy!

He smiled.

There was no copper on the door. Good. The excitement was all over. There had been a brief questioning period, and then the cops had taken Henshaw off to a cell. Obviously, since he served the drinks, he planted the poison.

After that, everybody was free to depart. Just enough time to go back to the shop, wait for Colfax to show up—as he surely would, after seeing another "nephew" appear—and slip him the business.

Everything clicked. And now to show up again, just to nose around. Lull suspicion a little. And find out a few things—see how the rest of them felt, if they were still hanging around.

And they were. "Rufus Tate" found the entire gathering intact in the parlor. Of course, Henshaw wasn't there to serve any drinks. And Doctor Daroff was busy attending a post-mortem. His own.

"Rufus Tate" suppressed a grin and adjusted his spectacles as he entered the parlor.

He had to match the funereal air reflected by the others. And it *was* thick in there.

"Rufus, you're back!" Regina Basset swayed up to him. The fat woman had been crying, and her powder was streaked with mascara stains.

"Yes, Aunt Regina." He sighed, heavily.

"I know how you feel, dear boy. That horrible scene—coming right on top of Stanley's death! Poor Stanley!" The woman sighed. "I can't stop thinking about him."

She lowered her voice. "I'm afraid we weren't very good to him when he was alive. I was always nagging him about getting married, or coming in to keep house myself. I didn't realize the poor man wanted to be alone. He was an introvert. No wonder he left you his money—you were the only one who didn't pester him."

"Rufus Tate" stared at Regina Basset. There was no trace of envy in her voice. Apparently being cut out of a two-million dollar will didn't bother her in the least.

"How do you feel, Rufus?" Andrew Basset, her husband, joined them in the doorway. "Better get some rest. This must come as a shock." His weak chin wobbled. "Stanley was a wonderful character. Wouldn't think he'd have such a double-crossing sneak as Henshaw around."

Not a word about the will from him, either. "Rufus Tate" was surprised. You'd think they'd hate the old guy's guts—his guts, too. Well, that's life for you. And a good break. They weren't suspicious.

DELIBERATELY he walked toward the table where the three children sat. Towheaded Bill, curly-haired Tommy and the girl, Cynthia, flashed him a sad smile. Their grief seemed genuine, and therefore harmless.

Out of the shadows rustled Professor Crowley. "Mr. Fuller is expecting you," he said. "He's upstairs in the private study, going over the papers of the estate. I suppose he wants to

clear up the final details."

"Thanks," said "Rufus Tate." He eyed the elderly scientist closely. What did this old bird think about it all?

Unexpectedly the answer came. A birdlike claw was thrust into his palm.

"I know how you feel, my boy," whispered the oldster. "Your Uncle Stanley was a great man. We all miss him. But it's up to you to carry on now, as head of the family. Good luck."

"Tate" turned away, moving towards the stairs. A funny bunch. Apparently they had all admired Stanley Colfax—God knows why. He hadn't done anything for them, and he'd cut them all out of his will. Too bad he couldn't reconsider the matter. But it was too late now. Much too late.

"Rufus Tate" smiled as he went up the stairs.

So Jeremy Fuller was in the private study, eh? Going over papers, was he? Well—it was time for him to take a hand in this business of "settling the estate." He'd settle a few other matters with Fuller, too.

Brushing the slick gray hair from his forehead with his long-nailed fingers, Jeremy Fuller regarded his visitor with a detached amusement glinting in slanted eyes.

His purring voice was bland.

"I've been expecting you," he said. "Close the door and sit down. Everything—work out?"

"Perfect job," said "Rufus Tate."

"Thanks to me." Jeremy Fuller rose. "Lucky I saw that reflection in the hall mirror and realized old Colfax was hiding behind the curtains this afternoon when the will was read. God knows what he might have tried to pull off. I still don't know how he popped out of the grave, though."

"He's ready to be popped back into it," chuckled "Rufus Tate."

"Fine." Fuller rubbed his hands. "Are you sure?"

"Sure as I'm alive. I slugged him back of the costume shop, dragged him in, and tied him up—out like a light."

"You've been busy. Well, so have I," smiled the lawyer. "I managed to pin the poison job on Henshaw and cleared the law out in a hurry. Nobody suspects and the whole family is ready to forget all about it."

"YOU haven't told me yet how you got rid of Daroff," said "Rufus Tate," sitting down beside Fuller.

"Didn't you guess? It was simple," the lawyer grinned.

"To begin with, I've never told you my original plan, have I? That was before you came into the picture.

"Colfax had worked out this scheme to disguise himself as his own nephew after pulling off a fake death. Daroff and I planned it for him, of course. But I got to thinking. Why not let him really die, and then hire somebody to pose as the nephew and split the loot with him?

"Naturally, I thought of you, and sent Colfax to your shop to buy his disguise so you could size him up nad see if you could carry it off. I knew you used to be an actor and were the same build as Colfax. So—"

"Skip the ancient history," snapped "Rufus Tate." He rose. "What's this about the Doctor, now?"

"Well, you know how we figured it. Doctor Daroff would simply give Colfax real poison instead of the sleeping potion. To make doubly sure, I'd nail down his coffin-lid. Which I did.

"But Daroff must have had a plan of his own. He didn't administer the real poison after all. Of course, he didn't know I'd nailed down the coffin-lid, but apparently it worked out the same way. Colfax got out, somehow,

and showed up.

"At that time Daroff planned to go to him and tell him that I wanted to double-cross him and poison him. He thought Colfax would reward him for exposing the scheme.

"But I'd found the real poison here in the house that morning. I knew it hadn't been used. A pinch would do the trick. I kept the pinch in my pocket.

"When I saw the reflection of Colfax in the hall I knew he'd storm in pretty soon. Daroff would speak up and we'd be cooked. So you suggested a drink. Henshaw brought it in—but I helped him pass the glasses. And I made sure that the poison was in Doctor Daroff's glass. Simple?"

"Very. And clever."

"Thank you." Jeremy Fuller smiled his feline smile.

"After that it was all routine. Of course I knew Colfax would head for the costume shop sooner or later when he left here. So when the cops left I sent you to follow him. The rest is history.

"But now let's talk about more pleasant things." Again Jeremy Fuller rubbed his fat hands together. "With your acting ability and my brains we can go a long way. A very long way on two million dollars! We'll make a very jolly twosome."

"Rufus Tate" towered over the lawyer.

"Not so fast," he whispered. "There's one flaw in your plan."

"What's that?" Jeremy Fuller's purr had disappeared.

"Guess, master-mind!"

"I don't see—"

"Then I'll tell you." The voice of "Rufus Tate" was harsh. "I don't need you any more. I've got the money now, through the will, and you're through. If you want to tell

the police, go ahead. You'll go to jail for murder. And you can't implicate me for anything except impersonation."

"Yes? What about Colfax?" Fuller spoke through trembling lips.

"How can you prove I murdered him? Where's the body?"

JEREMY FULLER was no longer a cat. He was a tiger. He launched himself through the air, but "Rufus Tate" was ready. The blackjack whirled, and Fuller fell across the chair, holding his jaw.

"Now," said "Rufus Tate."

"What do you want me to do?" whispered Fuller.

"Just write it all out—everything you told me here. Sign a little confession."

Fuller's eyes darted helplessly. He gazed at the waving blackjack as though hypnotized. Slowly, he fumbled for a pen, drew blank paper before him. He wrote.

"Rufus Tate," waving the blackjack, stood over him.

And then, without warning, the door opened behind him. Fists flailing, young Bill Basset charged.

"I heard you," he grunted. His fist swung upward and "Rufus Tate" ducked just in time. The blackjack came up.

Jeremy Fuller scuttled around to grab him from the rear. But "Rufus Tate" turned and brought his weapon down on the lawyer's skull. There was a sickening thud, and the fat attorney dropped.

But Bill Basset and his brother **Tommy** closed in.

"Let him have it—the filthy swine!" Bill grunted.

"Rufus Tate" dropped the blackjack, held up both hands.

"No," he gasped. "Don't! Can't

you see—I'm your uncle, Stanley Colfax!"

CHAPTER VI

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

THE gathering in the parlor was considerably more cheerful half an hour later. Jeremy Fuller was not present. He had left, escorted by blue-clad figures summoned by phone. The blue-clad figures had also taken a neat document along—Fuller's confession, ornamented by a shaky signature. Henshaw would soon be released on the strength of it.

And now Stanley Colfax, minus mustache and glasses, and with a hint of natural darkness at the roots of his dyed hair, was finishing his story.

"You can see how it happened," he said. "Fuller's plot worked perfectly. His stooge, Racker, posing as 'Rufus Tate' actually did knock me out and tie me up in back of the costume shop. That is—he started to tie me up, when I recovered consciousness. As he bent over me I got the blackjack out of his pocket and turned the tables. When I left the shop, *he* was unconscious and tied. The police will find him there now, I'm sure.

"Then, naturally, I had to come here. I planned to pose as Racker posing as *me*—knowing that the instigator of the plot, whoever he was, would betray himself.

OFF THE BLOTTER (Concluded from page 95)

that the Kings of Scotland were reputed to have lived or eaten their meals in the vicinity of the present site.

The British police are under no political system. Their work is efficient and the crime levels for the population are quite low. The greatest advantage of Scotland Yard lies in the fact that their men, well-trained and renowned for their intelligence, constitute a system unrestricted

"It worked. I've told you how Fuller disclosed the whole story. I had him up to the point of writing this confession without revealing my identity. Then the boys came in, and that's that."

"Nice work, Uncle Stanley," grinned Bill.

Stanley Colfax shook his head.

"It wasn't so nice," he said. "I'm ashamed to tell you these things. As I look back on it now, my whole plan was the greedy concept of a small, suspicious mind.

"I thought to spite my own relatives, my own flesh and blood, with the help of a shady doctor and a crooked lawyer. That's pretty contemptible, when you come to think of it, isn't it?

"But I've learned my lesson—the hard way. When I came here tonight as 'Rufus Tate' not one of you had anything but honest sorrow in your hearts over my supposed death. I'd been fooling myself all along that you were after my fortune. What an imbecile I've been!"

Stanley Colfax smiled.

"From now on things will be different," he promised. "Tommy—"

"Yes, Uncle Stanley?"

"Tommy, you're a lawyer. I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"Draw me up a new will," said Stanley Colfax. "And leave plenty of room for bequests—because you'll all be in it!"

by local, metropolitan, or shire boundaries. Although their difficulties have increased since the outbreak of the War, it has been shown by their efforts and results that they are many times worth their salt. The British London Metropolitan police force now shares with the New York force the honor of being the world's largest police force.

AND with those revelations, we'll close up the little mirror we carry for reading these things off the blotter; and happy story-reading, you armchair detectives!

—Rep.



A man was running toward
the door of the little tavern

TAVERN IN THE TOWN

By WILLIAM BRENGLE



A tavern was embarrassing in this district—but murder was even more so!

BRRRRRRRRRRRRR!

Miss Richards, at her neatly-kept desk in the outer office of the Griswold Realty Company, flipped the switch of the inter-office communication set and unconsciously braced herself for the blast she knew was coming.

“Yes, Mr. Griswold?”

“Send Lafayette Muldoon in here!” The diaphragm of the set rattled in protest with each explosive word.

“I—I’m sorry, Mr. Griswold, but he just stepped out for mo—”

“Miss Richards!” The bellow cut her off in mid-sentence.

“Y—yes, sir?”

“What time is it?”

"Time?" She repeated the word mechanically while peering, with frantic myopia, through horn-rimmed glasses at the watch on her wrist. "It's 9:47, Mr. Griswold."

"Exactly." There was savage satisfaction behind that word. "The truth is, Mr. Muldoon is late again, isn't he, Miss Richards? Forty-seven minutes late, to be exact. And because he is young and handsome and a Personality Kid—" the acute loathing expressed in those last two words was indescribable—"you continue trying to cover up for him. . . . I want him the minute he gets in!"

"Yes, Mr. Griswold."

Miss Richards reset the switch with unsteady fingers, let go a shuddering breath and resumed her attack on the keys of her typewriter.

At 10:07 the street door opened and a tall, broad-shouldered young man in a light gray gabardine suit and an orange tie breezed into the reception office. With a deft twist of his wrist, he sent his imported Panama unerringly onto a peg of the hatrack in one corner and slid a neatly-pressed trouser leg across a corner of Miss Richards' desk.

"Morning, Gorgeous," said Lafayette Muldoon.

Miss Richards felt the color come into her sallow cheeks as it always did at moments like this. She masked her slight trepidation by saying severely:

"Mr. Griswold wants to see you, Mr. Muldoon. And he's quite angry because you're late again."

"Ho-hum!" Lafayette said, his smile undamaged by the news. "Trouble with you, you let the Old Man scare you, Gorgeous. Now, when he starts barking at me, I just—"

Brrrrrrrr!

"Oh, my goodness!" Miss Richards reached for the switch. "There he goes again!"

Lafayette's manicured fingers were ahead of hers. He pushed down the black knob, said, "'Morning, S. G.," airily.

There was a wrathful sputter at the other end that finally resolved into words. "Muldoon! Damn you, get in here! I'm trying to keep a business going in spite of the chuckle-headed help I'm surrounded with. Another thing: this office opens at nine—"

"Coming right in, S. G.," Lafayette interrupted pleasantly, and snapped up the switch. He patted one of Miss Richards' stubby-fingered hands affectionately, slid lithely from the desk top and strolled easily toward the closed door of the inner corridor leading to Stanton Griswold's sanctum.

THE man behind the broad, glass-topped mahogany desk had a red, round face topped with finely textured white hair that rose to an unruly top-knot like that baby's in the soap ad. He said, "Hello, Lafe," in a subdued and amiable voice. It was characteristic of Stanton Griswold that he did all his storming and fretting over the telephone or the communication set; face-to-face, he was revealed as a round-bodied, friendly little man of fifty-five, who seemed constantly bewildered by the multitudinous details of a real estate business that owned and managed several million dollars' worth of property located in the most exclusive section of the city.

Lafayette Muldoon pulled a leather chair into position beside Griswold's desk, sank into it and took out a cigarette case. He said, "Anything wrong, S. G.?" as he reached for the desk lighter. It was a familiar question—one that he put to the company president many times during the five days of each business week; and the answer was almost invariably in the affirma-

tive. For Lafayette Muldoon was the "trouble-shooter" for the Griswold Realty Company—a job that required the talents of a diplomat, detective, interior decorator, bill-collector, Mr. Dale Carnegie and a stationary engineer.

Stanton Griswold nodded sadly. "Yes, Lafe, something is wrong. I suppose you've noticed the tavern recently opened on the ground floor of our property at Winston and Sheridan?"

Lafayette expelled a cloud of smoke and grinned. "You bet I noticed it! Place looks like a waterfront dive. And right in the middle the ritziest section of town. You let your foot slip in renting that place, S. G."

Griswold looked grimly unhappy. "My foot, as you put it, has slipped before, Lafe. Otherwise, I wouldn't need to keep you hanging around here at a handsome salary!"

"Speaking of my salary, S. G." Lafayette began, flicking ashes in the general direction of the ashtray, "how about a—"

"Here's what I want you to do," Griswold continued, ignoring the interruption. "Take a run over there, see the owner and tell him he'll have to get out."

"Just like that?" The trouble-shooter's grin widened. "He's got a lease, hasn't he?"

"Certainly he has a lease," Griswold snapped. "Wouldn't let him in without one. Sent some woman around, very high-society, who claimed to be acting for a beauty shop chain. I'll admit she took me in; I didn't even have her references checked or have a clause put in the lease limiting her to open only a beauty shop. So a few days later a tavern opens up just around the corner from this town's most exclusive shopping district and across the street from the home of Robert Downing Raleigh—the leading Dry in the whole State."

"Don't tell me a woman's running that joint!"

"No, no. I understand the manager—he's also the bartender—is a squat, pot-bellied thug named Sam Black."

THE young man tamped out his cigarette, leaned back and yawned. "Frankly, Boss, I think he's got you. There's nothing in the city ordinance that says nobody can open a tavern in that neighborhood; and since you forgot to stick a clause against it in the lease, I suspect you're licked."

"Humph!" snorted Griswold. "And you're supposed to be a trouble-shooter! Lucky for us *I* manage to get a little information to work on once in a while, or the company'd go bankrupt."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning this: "There *is* an ordinance against operating a gambling house in this fair city. And both back rooms of that tavern are used for such a purpose; one where bets are made on race horses—"

"Bookie joint."

"—the other as a numbers racket station."

"Oh-oh! That's a steed of a different hue."

"Precisely," said Stanton Griswold. "Understand, Lafe, I'm no blue-nose; if a man wants to make a bet or have a drink it's all right with me. But we've been getting complaints here at the office. The business men along Sheridan have been hollering that money that should be coming over their counters is being bet on horses and numbers. Three different ones have threatened to break their leases unless I do something about it. And some of the residents in that block are promising to do the same thing—and I don't mean only Robert Downing Raleigh."

"Why, just yesterday afternoon Luke Crandall was in here storming about it.

Says it's an insult to the women who have to walk by the place. Not that I take much stock in what he says; in my opinion Crandall's on the road to being a pauper since he got pushed out as vice-president of the Collins Construction Company. That flighty blonde wife of his always did keep him spending money ahead of his income."

Lafayette Muldoon unfolded his long, slender length from the depths of his chair and brushed ashes from his trousers.

"I'll take a ride over to the tavern and see this Sam Black," he promised, crossing to the office door. "Incidentally, S. G., that's one thing about you I've always deplored."

The older man regarded his smiling, handsome countenance with clearly defined suspicion. "What do you mean?" he barked.

Muldoon opened the door and was half way out before he gave the answer:

"Your loathsome habit of repeating idle gossip!"

The closing door cut off Griswold's blistering comments.

LAFADETTE MULDOON turned the nose of his red, rakish-lined Buick convertible into the curb across from the front of the Idle Hour Tavern. At this mid-morning hour, the quiet street was deserted.

Certainly the bistro wasn't much to look at from the outside, he told himself as he opened the car door. It had no more than a fifteen foot front, if that, with a door at one end and a plate glass window sheltering a beer sign, a whiskey advertisement and, behind them, a black drape that left only the customers' heads visible from the sidewalk. Above the drape he could make out faces of the bartender and two men, the latter evidently truck drivers, or something of the kind.

It was that last phenomenon that kept Lafayette glued to the seat of his car. For this was distinctly not a neighborhood truck drivers would choose to do their beer-drinking in. As he studied the motionless heads, the truth of the matter was suddenly evident.

Behind the plate glass window, and above the black drape, a second sheet of glass had been placed—one in the cloudy surface of which had been worked the likenesses of a bartender and two customers! The artist responsible had proved himself a master craftsman; for the casual passer-by could have sworn he was seeing directly into the tavern's interior through an unwashed window.

Here was a camouflage that suddenly took on an ominous implication. Lafayette Muldoon stepped into the street, slammed the car door shut and approached the tavern entrance.

The tightly-woven screen door opened outward. Lafayette drew it ajar and strode briskly in. His eyes, accustomed to the bright sunlight outside, blinked uncertainly in the abrupt gloom of a small hall. At the rear were two doors, both closed; and to his right was an opening that led into the tavern proper.

He peered about uncertainly, a bit uneasy at the complete absence of sound. He took a few hesitant steps that brought him across the bar-room threshold.

Two small lighted bulbs above the mirror behind the bar did little to lessen the gloom. The dark-wood counter was bare, its expanse broken only by a pair of beer spigots midway along its length.

"Hello." Lafayette had intended the call to be loud and firm, but it failed singularly on both counts. "Anybody around here?"

The silence returned, deep, brooding. A prickling sensation seemed to stiffen

the hairs at the nape of his neck.

His eyes were slowly becoming accustomed to the murk by this time, and he was able to make out the outlines of three booths along one wall. And then he saw something that brought him, stiff-legged, to the entrance of the booth nearest the bar.

THE body of a man, squat, porcine, was huddled into a corner of the seat. It had neither coat nor vest, and a large dark stain covered the front of a white shirt.

Lafayette Muldoon's wide, confident grin that was so much a part of him, was gone now. He stood there, staring down at the dead man, his numbed mind automatically noting details.

A battered revolver, its once bright metal pitted with hard usage and age, lay on the floor a few feet outside the booth where the murderer had dropped it. Two glasses were standing on the booth's table—one a quarter-filled with stale beer; the other containing some pale red liquid.

Averting his gaze from the corpse, Lafayette gingerly dipped a finger into the glass containing the reddish liquid and transferred several drops to his tongue. "Slush!" he muttered, making a wry face.

He stepped back and took a deep breath. The thing to do was to get out of there and find a policeman. It wouldn't do to have some customer walk in and find Griswold's trouble-shooter standing over a freshly murdered man!

S. G. was going to be awfully upset about this, he told himself as he started for the door. It wasn't going to do the Griswold Realty Company any good as far as the neighbors were concerned, either. Lafayette Muldoon wished he could do something about it; but while there were a lot of things you could hush up, murder wasn't one of them!

He was pushing open the street door preparatory to stepping out, when the sounds of running feet along the sidewalk drew him up short. Risking a quick glance around the door's edge, he saw a heavy-set, thick-shouldered man in a light Palm Beach suit racing along the walk toward him, a strained expression on his round face.

The trouble-shooter stepped hastily back into the hall, and drew the screen door shut. The act was entirely instinctive, prompted by a subconscious aversion of being observed at the scene of a crime.

To his horror, the pounding feet stopped outside the tavern entrance and a deep voice called:

"Who's in there?"

From the standpoint of common sense, Lafayette should have opened the door, stepped out and said, "I've just found a dead man in there. We'd better go for the police."

But the badly rattled young man did nothing of the kind. Instead, he turned and tip-toed hastily back into the tavern, his heart pounding as though it would burst.

He heard the screen swing open, and a moment later a bulky figure filled the tavern doorway.

The newcomer caught sight of Lafayette, standing in the center of the small room, at once.

He said, "Excuse me. Thought there wasn't anyone around when I got no answer."

Lafayette opened his lips, but for the life of him he couldn't utter a sound. He saw the man's eyes blink several times as they sought to adjust themselves to the lack of light; heard him say, "Pretty hot, this morning. Thought I'd get a glass of beer to . . ." His voice trailed off, and Lafayette saw that he was staring wide-eyed at the booth containing the dead man.

THE trouble-shooter regained use of his voice. "I found him like that. I was just going to call the police when you came in." Without thinking, he started for the door and had taken two or three steps when a meaty hand clamped suddenly about his wrist and swung him around.

A scowling face thrust itself close to his own. "Hold it a minute, buddy! I think you got some explaining to do!"

Instant anger flamed through the young man. With a powerful jerk he tore free of the clutching fingers. He said, "Who the hell do you—"

The words ended as a bulky fist crashed against the point of his jaw. A burst of light swam before his eyes and he felt himself reel back. As he fought to maintain his balance, a violent shove caught him in the ribs and he crashed headlong into a booth. There followed the sounds of splintering wood as the table-top gave beneath his weight, the crackle of breaking glass, and he pitched limply into the lap of the seated corpse. A wave of blackness poured into his brain, and he knew no more.

"ALL right, Lafe," Stanton Griswold said, as the turnkey opened the cell door. "You can come out now."

Lafayette Muldoon took his face out of his hands and looked up from where he sat on the cot. There was a purplish bruise on one side of his jaw where the bulky-shouldered stranger had hit him. His usual broad smile and easy debonair manner were quite gone.

"You mean they've straightened everything out?" he asked hopefully. "That they've found who killed that guy?"

"No," Griswold said, shaking his head. "You're still the number one suspect. But I'm rich enough to have a lot of pull in this town, Lafe; I went up to see old Judge Sullivan and told

him everything you told me. He looked glum and muttered into his beard a few times, but finally held a quick hearing and set the bail at fifty thousand dollars."

Wordlessly, Lafayette Muldoon got to his feet and followed his employer out of the courthouse. It wasn't until they were in the real-estate man's car on the way to the office, that the younger man spoke again.

"There were a lot of things I couldn't ask you over the phone, S. G.," he began. "And they wouldn't tell me anything down at the station except that I was to be held as a material witness in the murder of some guy named Salvatore Blochetti, and that by the time they—the police—finished their investigation I might be charged with first degree murder!"

"What do you want to know, Lafe?" Griswold said, swerving to pass a lumbering milk truck.

"Who's this Salvatore Blochetti?"

"He's the one who called himself Sam Black. He has several aliases, I understand."

"Oh." Some sixty seconds of silence ensued. "You know, S. G., someone should have looked in those two back rooms at the tavern. The real murderer might have been hiding in there waiting until the police took me away before he made a break for it."

"The police looked in there," Griswold said wearily. "Both rooms were deserted."

"Hmm." The young man was slumped down in the seat, his Panama pushed back on his thick black hair. Lines of worry and deep thought were traced in his forehead and there was an angry, bewildered tightness about his mouth. He said:

"Who was the irate citizen who shoved me around at the Idle Hour, anyway?"

"That was Luke Crandall. I mentioned him to you at the office before you went down there. I talked to him shortly before I saw the judge. Luke said he stopped in for a glass of beer and found you. The minute he saw your face he claimed he knew something was wrong; that's how guilty you looked. Then he caught a glimpse of the dead man, and you made a break for the door. So he—er—clouted you one. That's his expression."

LAFADETTE touched his jaw with gentle fingers. "I'll say he did! I don't intend to forget it, either!"

Griswold shot an alarmed glance at him. "Now hold on, Lafe. There was nothing personal in his hitting you. He thought you were some killer who was trying to get away. You can't blame him for doing his duty."

"The hell I can't!" Lafayette was silent for another block or two. Then he said, "How about that gun on the floor? The police find out who it belongs to?"

"Not yet. Captain Logan says it's easily ten years old and probably came out of some hock shop window. Might even have been Black's own gun."

"Then that's no good." The trouble-shooter sounded more and more depressed. "Wait a minute!" He sat up suddenly. "How long had Black been dead? That's important; because I've got proof where I was up until I walked into that damned place."

The older man shook his head slowly. "Won't do you much good, Lafe. Coroner says he was killed less than an hour before Crandall found you there. How much less than an hour he can't say."

Lafayette sighed and slumped back. "Really a lovely mess of circumstantial evidence! . . . Where's my car, S. G.?"

"Where you left it, I suppose.

Why?"

Lafayette reached into a pocket to make sure he still had his keys. He brought them out, thought for a second, then said, "Drive me over to the tavern, if you don't mind. I want to pick up the Buick."

Fifteen minutes later, Griswold turned the sedan into Winston Avenue and rolled to a stop alongside the red convertible.

Lafayette Muldoon got out and slammed the sedan door. "Thanks, S. C.—for everything. I'll let you know when I've got this thing straightened out."

His employer was visibly worried. "Don't start something you can't finish, Lafe. It not only would put you in trouble still deeper, but it would hurt me. After all, I talked the judge into letting you out—not to mention the fifty thousand dollar bail I put up."

"Don't worry, Boss." Lafayette managed a feeble smile—no more than a ghost of his old grin. "I'm just going to ask a few questions around the neighborhood. I didn't kill Sam Black; but somebody did, and I'm going to find him. So long."

He watched the sedan until it disappeared around the next corner; then he took a deep breath, threw aside the cigarette he was smoking, walked past his car and entered the foyer of the handsome apartment building across from the tavern.

ROBERT DOWNING RALEIGH admitted him with a noticeable lack of warmth and led him into the subdued magnificence of a book-lined study. The State's leading foe of the demon Rum was a tall, loosely knit man close to sixty, with a fanatic's thin lips and hollow cheeks. He failed to ask Lafayette to sit down, and remained standing himself, evidence

enough that he meant the interview to be a brief one.

"I suppose," the trouble-shooter began uncomfortably, "that you know about the—the trouble across the street?"

"I certainly do!" Raleigh's voice, Lafayette decided, was like the sound of sandpaper against stucco. "And while I hold no brief for violence in any form, I must say that I can find no tears in my heart for this man Black. Alcohol is a servant of the Devil, young man, and—"

"Quite right, sir," Lafayette agreed hastily. "What I was wondering, Mr. Raleigh, is this: Did you happen to notice anybody entering or leaving the Idle Hour between, say 9:00 and 10:30 this morning?"

Solemnly, Robert Downing Raleigh shook his head from side to side. "I have been anticipating that question, Mr. Muldoon. As a matter of fact, the police put that same query to me not more than two hours ago. And I told them—as I tell you, sir—that the only man I saw walking on that side of the street during the time you mention was Mr. Lassiter, the insurance agent—and he did not enter that—that place. It so happens that I spent most of this morning standing in front of our living-room windows, which overlook the street, and the entrance to that saloon was under my observation practically all of that time. Not that I was engaged in spying on the place, you must understand; it was merely that I was rehearsing a speech for tonight and there is a cleared space there where I may pace to and fro."

But Lafayette Muldoon, his shoulders sagging wearily, was no longer listening. He said, "Thank you, sir," spiritlessly and turned to go. Robert Downing Raleigh accompanied him to the hall door, opened it, and said, "I

regret not being able to assist you, Mr. Muldoon. For, unlike so many young men of today, you appear to be temperate and clean-lived. Always remember that intoxicating liquor is as a sword; and he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword!"

And on the heels of this remarkable bit of hyperbole, Robert Downing Raleigh gently closed the door.

LAFAYETTE went slowly back to the convertible and climbed in behind the wheel. He kindled a cigarette, slumped back and tried to think.

Regardless of what the State's leading Scotch-and-soda hater said, somebody had entered the Idle Hour not very many minutes ahead of Lafayette Muldoon and put a bloody period to Salvatore Blochetti's life. For a moment he toyed with the thought that Raleigh himself might be the killer. But he dismissed the idea almost at once with the mental observation that Raleigh would have used a proverb instead of a gun—with probably the same result!

Finally he flipped away his cigarette, started the motor and turned east on Sheridan. Three blocks later, he pulled into the curbing in front of Wayman's drug store and closeted himself in a phone booth.

Miss Richards answered. "Griswold Realty Company. At your service."

Lafayette's "Hi, Gorgeous," was only a shadow of what it once had been.

"Oh, Mr. Muldoon!" Miss Richards had too few emotions to have learned to cloak them. "I think it's just terrible what they're saying about you. I know very well—"

"Good for you, Gorgeous. If this turns out okay, I'm going to marry you! Now, tell me—"

"Oh, Mr. Muldoon!"

"—is S. G. standing around where

he can hear you?"

"No, Mr. Muldoon. He's not even in the building. I think—"

"Then here's what I want you to do. Look in the files and get me the address of Luke Crandall."

"Why, of course, Mr. Muldoon. Just hold the— Oh! Isn't he the one who—"

"He certainly is!" Lafayette said grimly. "Make it snappy, Gorgeous; it's hotter'n blazes in this phone booth."

Very soon she was back on the wire. "It's 1614 Pershing Parkway, Mr. Muldoon. Second floor. . . . When will you be back at the office Mr. Muldoon?" she added wistfully.

"Soon as I serve my sentence! Thanks for the help."

He hung up ahead of her gasp and went back to the Buick. "1614 Pershing Parkway," he muttered. "Hell, that's just around the corner from the Idle Hour!"

Something in the back of Lafayette Muldoon's mind was trying to tell him something—something on which the entire puzzle hinged. The answer was there; he knew it, felt it, but it simply wouldn't come through.

As a precautionary measure, he parked around the corner from the Pershing Parkway address, and a few moments later was ringing the first floor bell at 1614.

THE door was opened by a thin-faced, red-haired woman in a pink house dress.

"Mrs. Andrews?" Lafayette asked, giving the name he had noticed on the bell plate.

"Yes," she said, smiling politely, obviously waiting for him to state his business.

"I'm from the Griswold Realty Company—your landlord," he said, smiling. "I'd like to ask you a few ques-

tions, if you don't mind."

"Why, of course I don't mind!" She led him into an overly furnished living-room and indicated a chair. "And while you're here, I wish you'd take a look at the kitchen sink. It—"

Lafayette said hastily, "Certainly, Mrs. Andrews. But first I'd like to get some information. Of course, I realize you may find it distasteful to discuss people who are your neighbors and friends. . . ."

An interested gleam came into her pale blue eyes. "Whom do you mean? Naturally, I wouldn't care to gossip. . . ."

But Lafayette had seen that gleam and he felt on firmer ground.

"It concerns the Crandalls," he said. "There seems to be some question as to whether the company should renew their lease this coming Fall. Any information you care to give will assist us in making a decision. You can be assured that anything you tell us will be held in strict confidence."

A righteous, I-am-about-to-do-my-duty firmness settled over her thin face; and Lafayette suddenly realized that he need only lean back and listen.

She said, "Far be it from me to say anything against anybody, Mr.—"

"Muldoon."

"—Muldoon. But they are an unhappy couple. My husband and I hear them quarreling at all hours—and mostly about money."

"Money?" repeated Lafayette, more to fan the flame than anything else.

She wasn't listening. "I don't think they're well off since Mr. Crandall lost out at the construction company. And I gather his wife is awfully extravagant. She's always getting new clothes from the best shops in town, and just lately she showed me a new wrist watch that must have cost him a pretty penny."

"Of course, I will say that it isn't

all her fault that they're hard up. If her husband would go out and get himself a good job—he's a capable man, I understand—instead of spending his mornings and afternoons over at the firehouse playing pinochle—”

The trouble-shooter straightened abruptly. “Just a minute, Mrs. Andrews. Do you know if he was at the firehouse this morning?”

“Why—why, I imagine so. He went out around nine, as usual, and that's where he almost always goes. Mrs. Crandall left a few minutes later; so I know they weren't together. He didn't stay at the firehouse very long, though—if that's where he went. He came back right after she did, around 10:15, and I heard them at it hot and heavy until he went storming out of the apartment a few minutes later. He really has an awful temper, and I'm sure—”

But Lafayette's thoughts were elsewhere. Without any actual supporting evidence, he had entertained the hope that Crandall was the murderer. But if the man had spent his time between 9:00 and 10:30 that morning at the firehouse and his own home, he couldn't have killed Sam Black.

Well, there was his next step all lined up: check up at the firehouse. If that was where Crandall had been during that important hour, then Lafayette Muldoon was licked—but good. If he hadn't been. . . . The young man's jaws tightened convulsively.

“—and once in a while they have the noisiest poker games! Why, I remember one night—”

Evidently he had missed a chapter or two in the lives of the Crandall family. But he was no longer interested. He picked up his hat.

“Thanks a lot, Mrs. Andrews,” he said, rising. “You've been a great help.

Now, if you'll excuse me. . . .”

She went with him to open the door, clearly disappointed that the nice young man had lost interest in a subject close to her heart. As he was stepping into the hall, she suddenly exclaimed, “Oh, Mr. Muldoon, wait! The kitchen sink—”

“Later, Mrs. Andrews,” he said, and fled for the street.”

THE blue-uniformed fireman, mellowed by Lafayette's gift of a fine cigar, put a foot on the Buick's hub cap and rubbed his nose reflectively.

“Sure, I remember,” he said. “He was here this morning. Showed up about nine; maybe five or ten minutes after. Reason I'm sure about it is because old Charlie Ewing took him for two bucks in a pinochle game. Seems Luke forgot to bring his money with him, so he left at ten minutes after ten to go home for his billfold.

Lafayette sighed. “How do you know it was 10:10 when he left?”

“'Cause he'd just stepped off the driveway when the call came in on that Harris fire. . . . Funny thing,” he added musingly, “he never did come back to pay off Charlie.”

The young man sighed again and stepped on the starter. “Guess that does it,” he said wearily. “Thanks for your trouble.”

He set the car in motion and drove slowly back to Wayman's drug store. Might as well call the office and ask S. G. if there were any new developments. Now that Luke Crandall had established a definite alibi, the last string was gone from his bow.

It was the simultaneous sight of two completely unrelated subjects that did it. He was in the act of stepping from the car when he saw a small dog scoot frantically around the corner, closely pursued by a slightly larger boy. And

almost in the same instant, he noticed that Myrna Russell was appearing at the Rosecrest Theater, next to Wayman's, in a picture called *The Bride Wore Pink*.

With almost an audible click the puzzle's scattered pieces came together in his mind. *He knew who had killed Sam Black!*

It had to be! No other hypothesis could so perfectly account for every scrap of evidence. But knowing the truth was one thing; proving it was another.

Lafayette sank back on the car seat, bowed his head in his hands and tried desperately to think of a way to get that proof.

Ten minutes later he was in one of Wayman's phone booths, pleading with the person at the other end of the line for complete and unquestioning co-operation. . . .

LOIS CRANDALL'S voice, soft, husky, seductive, came down the tube. "I'm sorry, Mr. Muldoon, but Mr. Crandall isn't home just now. Perhaps if you will come back a little later . . ."

"Do you mind if I come up and wait for him?" Lafayette asked. "It's really important."

"Wel-l-l." She sounded doubtful. "If you think it necessary."

The buzzer sounded, releasing the inner door, and he ascended to the second floor.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Lois Crandall was her hair. It was honey-colored, had a soft, natural curl, reached to her shoulders, and there was lots of it. A chartreuse robe of thin silk moulded the lovely contours of her body. Her face was round, inclined to plumpness, quite pretty and not especially intelligent.

She gave him a languid hand that

reminded Lafayette of a kitten's paw, and showed him into a living-room crowded with knick-knacks and spin-dly-legged furniture.

She waited until he was seated and had a cigarette going before she said, "I really don't know just when Luke will be home, Mr. Muldoon. Of course, you're perfectly welcome to wait, but —"

Very deliberately Lafayette Muldoon said: "Tell me, Mrs. Crandall, why did you kill Sam Black?"

In the shocked silence that followed, the color drained slowly from Lois Crandall's face. She put an unsteady hand to her lips, a glaze came over her light blue eyes, and she whispered:

"How did you find out! —"

"Yeah, Muldoon," said a harsh, masculine voice from behind him, "how did you find out?"

Luke Crandall was standing in the open door of a bedroom, his face twisted into a scowl, and his right hand was pointing a blue-steel revolver at the startled figure of Lafayette Muldoon.

For the first time in his life, the trouble-shooter knew the true meaning of fear. Matters had come to a head far more quickly than he had anticipated. And in Luke Crandall's eyes he saw his own death sentence.

"Put down your gun, Crandall," he said, with a calmness he was far from feeling. "That won't get you anywhere."

"In a minute or two," the stocky man said coldly, "I am going to put a bullet through your damned head. And the police will learn that you came up here to get even for that punch on the jaw I handed you; that I shot you in self-defense. First, though, I want to know how you found out that my wife killed Sam Black."

"Stall!" said a quiet voice in Lafay-

ette's mind. Stall him off. It's your only chance. Maybe something will happen that will let you get your hands on that gun.

He said, "The whole solution hung on a single point, Crandall. I would have gotten it right away if I'd had more sense."

"Meaning?"

"*You were running.*"

"Huh?"

"Just that. You were running to get to the tavern. And no matter how much a man wants a glass of beer, he won't run all the way from home to get it.

"A murderer would logically run away from the scene of his crime, Crandall. But only one thing would make him run back to it. *If he had left something there that would incriminate him.*"

LUKE CRANDALL said grudgingly, "You're a pretty smart lad, Muldoon."

"Thanks." Lafayette had hoped to find some indication that Crandall's vigilance was relaxing, but the gun muzzle remained unwaveringly directed at his midriff.

"What, then, had been left there that might betray the killer?" Lafayette continued. "The gun? Police Captain Logan admitted that tracing it to the latest owner would be practically impossible.

"There was something else there, though—at least, it was there when I entered and was still there when you entered after me. When you saw there was no chance to remove it without implicating yourself, you hit on a way to render it useless."

A grim smile touched Crandall's heavy mouth. "You're doing okay, fella. Let's hear the rest of it."

"I mean the liquor glass beside

Black's beer glass," Lafayette went on. "Unquestionably it bore the fingerprints of the murderer, and you had come after it, hoping to get there and leave before the killing was discovered.

"When you found me on the scene, you backed me over near the booth, clipped me one on the jaw, then shoved me onto the table in there. Naturally, my falling body smashed both glasses to bits, thus eradicating the fingerprints.

"But I had tasted the liquor in the killer's glass, Crandall. It was a cocktail known as a Pink Lady—a very mild drink, made with a sloe gin base and drunk almost without exception by women.

"The way I see it, your wife, unhappy over the fact that you could no longer furnish her with all the money she wanted, had taken to playing the horses in a frantic effort to swell her bankroll. She got in too deep with Black; he threatened to go to you for his money. She stalled him off as long as she could, then made a date to see him this morning for a showdown. When you left for the firehouse to play pinochle, she slipped a gun into her bag and went down to the Idle Hour. Black and she discussed things over a couple of drinks; he got tough, or something, and she shot him.

"She went directly home; and you came home for your billfold before she had a chance to recover from the shock of killing a man. She blurted out the whole story, and you set out at a mad dash for the tavern to cover things up.

"That's my story, Crandall."

THE stocky man blew out his breath. "And believe me, sonny," he said, "Professor Quiz couldn't have done any better!" He shot a malevolent glance at his wife, who was huddled, white-faced, in a corner of

the sofa. "I should let her go to the Chair for being such a damn dummy! But I'm not going to. . . . Stand up, Muldoon."

Lafayette felt little cold feet go up his spine. He knew what was coming.

"I'll be d a m n e d if I will!" he snapped.

Crandall grinned savagely. "And you'll be damned if you don't!" He came farther into the room, stopping a few feet away from the seated young man and directly in front of him. The gun in his hand was pointed squarely at Lafayette's head, and the finger was steady on the trigger. "Maybe you'd like to take it sitting, huh?"

"Don't be a fool, Crandall," Lafayette said weakly. "You'll never get away with it!"

"No?" Imperceptibly the finger began to tighten on the trigger. "Well, just watch—"

Behind him, the telephone exploded into sound.

In the tense, over-strained atmosphere of the room the loud ring was like a bombshell. Crandall stiffened convulsively and half-turned toward the phone; then recovered and whirled back—just in time to take the full impact of Muldoon's whistling fist.

The old, impudent, cocky grin was back on Lafayette Muldoon's lips as

he stooped to take the gun from Crandall's limp fingers. He shot a warning glance at the honey-haired woman on the couch and picked up the receiver of the telephone.

"Captain Logan?" he said. "You couldn't have called at a better time! . . . Yeah. . . . Sure I'm sure. They admitted she killed him! . . . Around the corner from *here*? Swell; send 'em right up. Don't worry; he's asleep and will stay that way for a while yet. . . . Okay."

He replaced the receiver, said, "Take it easy, darling; there's a squad car full of cops waiting around the corner and they'll be right up!" The remark was directed at Lois Crandall—the only conscious audience he had left.

Noticing a cabinet radio across the room, he sauntered over and switched on the mechanism. "No reason why we shouldn't have a little entertainment," he observed lightly, leaning easily against the wall, the blue-steel gun still in his hand.

A blare of music, and the words of a male quartet came through:

"There is a tavern in the town—"

Lafayette turned down the volume. "Not any more, boys; not any more there isn't!" he said lightly, as a siren wailed briefly in the street outside.

WHEN CHEATING WAS THE RAGE

IF you think you've been cheated especially harshly by a false-bottom jelly jar, you should have lived in old London.

Grain-dealers put thick, heavy bottoms in their measures. Innkeepers thickened the bottoms of bottles and drinking cups. One ale-house proprietor, a crafty woman, poured about an inch and a half of pitch into the bottom of each quart pot and then covered it with a layer of rosemary.

Officers who inspected these specimens could seldom be deceived, but they could always be bribed. If the sale was not up to "standard," there being no standard except that which the inspector invented, the whole supply could be

seized. The minor officers who were to regulate these and other out-of-the-way businesses, collected regularly on the threat of confiscation, or exposure of adulteration and the use of false measures.

The state of affairs became so ridiculous, in fact, that, at one time in London and for a long period afterward, there was no agreement as how much constituted a hundred-weight. So it was left to the city official, of course. This individual who handled the official scales decided how much was a hundred pounds, and he decided as he was bribed. Many times, it was noticed, he had to be paid to keep his arm off the beam!

WITH THIS GUN

By
John Wiley & Willis March
(Continued from page 39)

a remedy for her loneliness many times. Certainly he was nothing more.

And yet, if Paula were right, then why? Was there some connection between Paula and Wallace that Hartley, and perhaps even Paula, didn't understand? And why, too, had Masterson, who never tolerated intruders into the sanctity of his home, allowed Wallace to be the exception to that rule?

HARTLEY left the gravel roadway, walked across the grass to the stairs leading up to the veranda, walked across the red brick flooring to the door. Before he could ring, the door opened and Mark Webbley himself appeared.

"Come in, Jim," said Webbley. "I'm glad you're a bit early. I'd rather we were both here to wait for Wallace together. Somehow, I've a hunch this may be rather unpleasant."

"I see no reason for that," said Hartley. When I talked to . . ." he stopped dead.

"So you talked to Wallace," Webbley said, his face expressionless. "When?"

Hartley grinned, shrugged.

"Called me at my apartment last night. I persuaded him to give himself up, but he wanted to see me first. Was to have come to my place. So I was a bit startled when you informed me of the meeting-place here."

"Startled?" Webbley looked at him shrewdly. "Yet you accepted the change without corroboration . . .?"

"Why, yes."

"Then you knew Wallace intended to call me."

"Look, Mark," said Hartley. "Let's quit this fencing around. Yes, I knew, because he told me he was going to call

you. And the reason was to delay you in getting down to the bank to get that mysterious 'almost' legacy of mine, before I had a chance to get it with the key I stole from your office the night you met me in the elevator."

Webbley smiled.

"You beat me to it by a few minutes. I came down because I half expected you might do exactly what you did. I underestimated the speed of your reactions a trifle . . ."

Webbley led the way into the lighted living room and pointed to an easy chair.

"Take the load off your feet, Jim. We've got ten or fifteen minutes yet."

Webbley lit a cigar from the humidor on the mantelpiece, offered one to Hartley. Hartley shook his head.

"Jim," said Webbley, "do you think Wallace knew what was in that safe deposit box?"

Hartley considered a moment, looked dubious.

"Maybe; maybe not. Perhaps only a hunch. Do you know?"

Webbley expelled a cloud of tobacco smoke before he answered casually.

"No. I haven't opened the packet."

Hartley stared at the older attorney. For the first time the shock of realization went through him that sometimes Mark Webbley lied. It was almost a sixth sense that detected the too-casual note in the attorney's voice.

"What about Wallace?" put in Hartley abruptly. "What are your plans concerning him?"

"I think the same as you do—he should give himself up."

Hartley nodded.

"That's the only course," he agreed.

"I suggested that we could get the best defense attorneys in the country, and by pleading temporary mental derangement, perhaps get his sentence commuted to a term in an institution. He could be paroled from there later on, after a cure had been effected. You know, I suppose, that Wallace had been doctoring for his nerves for quite some time?"

"YOU'RE all for getting him off as lightly as possible, aren't you?" asked Webbley. "Aren't you being just a little too personal about his crime?"

"You don't really think he's a cold-blooded killer?" asked Hartley with lifted brows. "There's no reason for it. Why would he kill Helen just after marrying her? What could he stand to gain by it?"

"Gain?" Webbley peered at Hartley as though slightly amused. "What about six million dollars?"

"Wallace didn't know she had a dime!"

"How do you know he didn't?"

"He told me so, over the phone. In fact, he was against giving himself up until he learned that fact. Then he agreed immediately . . ."

"Ah!" Webbley's composure dropped from him with startling suddenness, then he forced himself back against the mantelpiece in a resumption of his former relaxed attitude. His eyes rapidly masked over. There was a queer determination in the set of his jaw. Hartley saw it form and a frown crossed his face. . . .

"Ah, what?" he asked.

"Just ah. You told him, of course, that Helen's will had left the whole thing to him."

"Certainly, but . . ."

"So how can you say he had nothing to gain? A few years in an insane asylum, an apparent cure—easy because

he isn't insane—and he comes out a millionaire six times over!"

"No. There's something else . . ." Hartley stopped, took another tack. "You sound personal now," he said. "Almost as though you were the prosecuting attorney, and not just the legal representative of the estate."

"I'm for justice, Jim," said Webbley stiffly. "A crime has been committed—an obviously premeditated one—and I think anything that I can do to bring Wallace to justice . . ."

A sound from the depths of the house silenced him.

"Just a minute, Jim," he said uneasily. "I'll be right back."

Webbley walked into the darkness of the rear of the house. Hartley heard him open a door somewhere at the back end of the house; probably the kitchen door. He heard a muffled exclamation, then silence. Then footsteps—of two persons—coming back to the living room.

Webbley and Douglas Wallace entered the room. Webbley's face wore an indefinite expression of disconcerted chagrin which vanished as he came more fully into the light.

"Doug!" exclaimed Hartley, leaping to his feet. "You're okay?"

WALLACE smiled, stuck out a hand. Hartley shook it.

"Sure, Jim. Do I look used up?"

Hartley's gaze traveled over his quiet business suit, his topcoat folded over one arm.

"No," he admitted. "For a man who's got the whole State looking for him, you certainly don't look the part."

"I didn't expect you to come to the rear door," said Webbley. "Might not have heard your knock."

"I didn't hear it," said Hartley with a laugh. "Mark's got sharp ears."

"That so?" Wallace looked at Web-

bley intently. Then he smiled. "I figured it would be better to make my entrance unobtrusive. After all, we have things to discuss without interruption for a time. Someone might have seen me if I came boldly up to the front door."

Webbley waved a hand to the divan.

"Make yourself comfortable, Wallace. Let's thrash this thing out quickly. As I see it . . ."

"I intend to give myself up," put in Wallace quickly. He seated himself, crossed his legs and folded his hands over one knee. "I had that intention last night, already. But first, I'd like to make a little deal."

"A deal?" Hartley looked curious.

Wallace looked at Hartley.

"You tell Webbley anything?"

"If you mean about calling me up, yes. He didn't fall for that phone ruse."

"Then we all understand each other."

"About what?" asked Webbley.

Wallace frowned.

"The contents of the safe deposit box. You've got it, Webbley. You told me you had it this morning."

Webbley shrugged.

"Yes. I have it. But what has that got to do with giving yourself up?"

"You don't know?" Wallace's voice was sharp.

"No. Haven't the slightest idea."

Wallace leaned forward. His voice was intense, earnest.

"Get that packet, Webbley, don't open it, and burn it right here and now! Then I'll give myself up."

"What on earth . . .!" exclaimed Hartley.

WEBBLEY sat down on the arm of an easy chair. His voice came flat and emotionless.

"I'm sorry, Wallace. I can't do that. I'm responsible for everything pertain-

ing to the estate. If it is not produced in court, Arnold Masterson can break the whole will—and you know what that would mean to Paula."

"What *would* it mean?" asked Wallace in his turn. "Perhaps much more than the dollar she's getting now!" He laughed ironically. "What on earth are *you* imagining it might mean? Why don't you say what *would* it mean to *me!*"

"Why do you want to burn the packet?" asked Webbley. "And how did you know it was a 'packet'?"

"Let's not enter into any conjectures on the contents," said Wallace. "All I want is to see the packet destroyed."

"What if the packet contains cash, or securities?"

"Stop quibbling. Even if it was cash, it would be insignificant."

Webbley rose to his feet.

"No, Wallace. I'm sorry. That packet remains in my custody until the time comes to deliver it to the proper court for action."

Wallace's hand held a snub-nosed automatic. A single motion beneath the topcoat, still held over his arm, had produced it.

"Get the packet, Webbley," said Wallace quietly. "We'll burn it, and then we'll call the police."

Webbley looked startled. But he stood his ground.

"No," he said.

"Take it easy, Doug," said Hartley in alarm. "After all, don't you think you are being a little unreasonable? What could there be in that packet that could possibly be of harm to Paula? And after all, you must remember that you now own a great portion of the estate. If it's a square deal for Paula you're considering . . ."

Wallace ignored him.

"Get the packet, Webbley," he repeated. "If you don't, I'll kill you."

Webbley paled, rose slowly to his feet.

"Kill me?" he asked. "For the sake of the contents of a packet you don't even intend to look into; intend to destroy? Wallace, you're insane!"

Wallace grinned mirthlessly.

"I'm as sane as you are," he said. "But if you prefer to believe I'm not, perhaps that will make it easier for you to believe I mean exactly what I say. *Get the packet!*"

Webbley made for the door, but Wallace lifted himself to his feet.

"I'll be right behind you," he said easily. "Come on, Jim. Let's all be a witness to this. Then we can relax."

Webbley led the way, and Hartley, deeply puzzled, but somehow reassured by the calm surety of Wallace's motions, followed. They went into a library, where Webbley snapped on a light. He walked without hesitation to a wall safe and opened it. He reached in, brought out a packet of papers wrapped in waterproof silk. He held them in his hand a moment, then turned and thrust them out at Wallace.

"Here they are," he said with a shrug. "But I'd advise you to think it over, Wallace, before you destroy them."

Wallace laughed.

"I'm not worried about consequences. I'll be the State's guest in the death house for something worse than this!"

HE TOOK the packet and they returned to the living room. Wallace, now that he had the packet in his fingers, walked eagerly over to the fireplace.

"Got a match, Jim?" he asked. "Let's get this over with."

Hartley nodded.

"Sure, Jim, but . . ."

The sound of the front door being flung open, and Webbley's shout, punctuated his unfinished objection.

"Come and get him, boys! He's inside!"

Wallace swore, whirled first toward the front door, and then, at the sound of heavy feet on the gravel outside, stuffed the packet into his pocket, dropped his topcoat, and ran toward the rear of the house.

"Back door!" yelled Webbley from his position at the front door. Poundng feet bore around the side of the house, echoed through the brick-paved arch at the side entrance.

Hartley, dazed by the suddenness of events, heard the kitchen door slam. For a moment there was silence, then a series of shots. More silence. Then more shots. And finally, only silence.

Webbley came into the living room, stared at Hartley, then spoke defensively.

"I knew he wouldn't give up, so I had police posted around, waiting for him. He fooled me by coming to the rear door . . . an obvious thing I just didn't think of. It is much better for him to be in custody . . ."

Hartley tightened his lips.

"Custody! Those policemen have had orders for days to shoot to kill. You knew that! Now they've pumped him full of lead. Custody . . .!"

"No such thing," protested Webbley. "I told them not to kill him . . . but he shouldn't have run off like that . . ."

A burly form appeared in the doorway, holding one arm. Blood was seeping from his coat sleeve.

"We'll get him!" the officer snarled. "The murdering bast . . . where's your phone. We'll get out the dragnet."

"He got away?" asked Hartley tensely. "You didn't hit him?"

"No, worse luck! Those damn big trees gave him perfect cover. He dived over the stone fence and into a car parked in front of a house down the street. We didn't suspect it because



it was there all afternoon. Made a clean getaway. But I got the license number. We'll be on his trail in no time."

Hartley looked at Webbley.

"Nice mess you made of things. Now maybe he won't give himself up at all!"

Webbley looked just a bit flustered. "Sure he will. He'll be phoning you as soon as he gets to a phone. He's got his mysterious papers, hasn't he? And now nobody can blame me for losing them."

"Sure," said Hartley savagely. "You're safe! Only I wish you wouldn't be so damn legal all the time!"

He stamped out of the house. As he went, he swallowed hard. It wasn't going to be an easy job to explain to Paula why he had ditched her! She'd be down at his apartment right now, waiting for him and for Wallace.

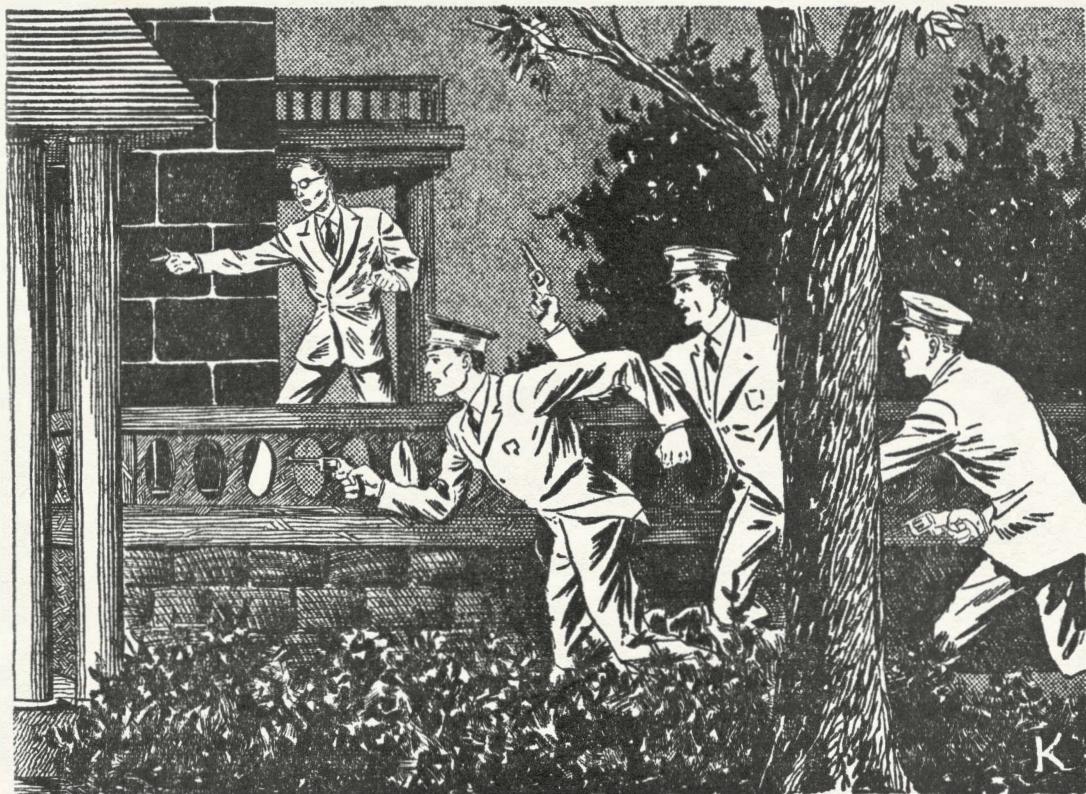
"And she'll be mad as hornets!" he

exclaimed ruefully. "But dammit, I couldn't bring her in on this 'packet' business. If there is anything in it to hurt her, it looks as though Doug didn't want her to know what it was. And somehow, no matter what he's done, I've got a hunch he's got something there!"

CHAPTER VIII

A Disturbing Discovery

DOUGLAS WALLACE stopped the car at the side of the highway beside a large sign on which were a dozen names of towns and villages together with the distance in miles to each. He turned on the dash light, pulled the waterproof packet from his pocket, tore the seals. Inside was a bundle of papers wrapped in legal paper, and bound with scotch tape. Wallace cut this with his



"There he goes!" shouted Webbley. "Around the back way"

thumbnail, and swiftly opened the paper. Inside was a packet held intact with a rubber band.

Wallace's face grew stony as he stared at the gilt-edged bonds release of that rubber band loosed in his hands. He rifled through them slowly, counted five thousand dollars in small denominations.

"Tricked me!" he muttered. "Said he didn't open it, eh? He opened it all right, and substituted these paltry bonds for the letters!"

For a moment Wallace sat with hands clutching the bonds until they crumpled. Then, with an angry motion he tossed them on the seat beside him.

"He knows! And he's playing some game. I've got a hunch what it is, too! And by the living Judas, I'm going to find out what it is—and when I do . . .!"

Wallace jammed a foot down on the

starter, whirled the car out on to the concrete again and drove ahead once more. He held his speed down, driving carefully. It was not yet two in the morning, and there was no sign of the coming dawn.

"About forty miles," he reflected calculatingly to himself. "I can make it before it begins to get light. I should be safe there for awhile. It's too early in the Fall for the phone service to be disconnected; so I can make a few calls . . ."

Something over an hour later his eyes caught the white flash that indicated a signpost up ahead, slowed down cautiously, leaned out the window.

"'The Pines' . . . six miles," he read aloud. He grunted in satisfaction.

He turned the car lights out, drove carefully into the narrow side road that led to his destination. He kept the

lights off, and made his way by the light of the crescent moon which was just visible over the trees to the east.

As he drove along, proceeding at not more than ten miles per hour, the trees grew more numerous until at last he was entirely surrounded by forest. Occasionally, through breaks in the pines, the glint of water was visible beneath the moon. Tiny lakes nestled here among these rolling hills and forest lands.

It was just before 4 a.m. when he reached the narrow trail which passed underneath a rustic arch on which was the legend "The Pines" formed of pieces of white birch. He maneuvered the car through the arch and went on.

FINALLY, reaching a low-roofed, two-storied building constructed of logs and possessing several gables, he drove the car around to a garage located behind the building. He shut off the motor, climbed out of the car, and stood for a moment listening intently. All was silence. In the slightly chill air of the morning, not even the croaking of frogs was to be heard. Down on the beach he could hear the tiny splashing of wavelets on the sandy shore of the little lake which stretched out beneath a blanket of low-hanging fog before the log-built resort.

Satisfied, Wallace went to the garage. He looked through a window. Inside all was gloom, but there was light enough to see that the garage was empty.

Examining the door, he found it secured by a padlock. None of the keys in his pocket fit the lock, so he went back to the car, rummaged under the seat. He found a heavy screwdriver, returned with it to the garage door. A moment later there was a loud snap as the hasp of the lock broke beneath his pressure on it.

A moment he stood silently, waiting

to see if the sound had roused anybody. There was no sign, so he swung the doors wide. Climbing into his car he started it, drove into the garage. A moment later he had the door closed, had placed the lock back in position, as though it were still intact, then made his way to the big log house.

Fifteen minutes later he had satisfied himself that the place had been closed up for the winter. He found a way inside through a window, smashing a small pane near the lock to accomplish his purpose. Once inside he felt his way around until he discovered the staircase that led up to the second floor. Here he found a bedroom, dragged several blankets from a linen closet, threw them on the mattress, removed his clothes and went to sleep.

* * *

WALLACE was up by nine o'clock, and began a search of the deserted summer resort. Down in the basement he located the storeroom and found, after breaking the lock, that it contained a large quantity of canned goods.

"At least I eat," he said with a relieved sigh.

He took several cans, went to the kitchen, opened them, warmed their contents in several saucepans over the oil stove. There was plenty of oil in the tank. In the kitchen pantry, too, he found a half-dozen packages of breakfast food.

When he had finished eating he restored everything to its place, looked reflectively at the tin cans, then walked through the many rooms of the resort to the veranda overlooking the lake. He tossed the cans into the water and watched them sink. Then he leaned over the rail and looked down at the doors below that revealed the entrance to a boathouse containing what he knew was a fast speedboat. Wood rails led down into the water, indicating the

boat was put up for the winter, out of the way of ice damage.

Then he returned to the cellar, removed a quantity of cans and carried them up to the second floor. Here he located the trapdoor that led to the loft, just beneath the low, sloping roof. This portion of the building was unfinished, and never entered.

By dint of several trips, and much pushing and shoving, he cached a quantity of eatables including the breakfast food and a large jar of drinking water; and a mattress from one of the beds and several blankets. When he had finished, he surveyed his hideway with satisfaction. Even if the caretaker paid a visit, he could remain here undetected for quite some time, at least until he had accomplished what was in his mind.

Thought of it brought a frown to his face, and he went down to the ground floor once more in search of the telephone he knew was installed.

"Lucky thing I spent last summer up here with Paula," he said aloud. "Thinking of this place was an inspiration."

The phone was still connected. When he lifted the receiver, he got the operator in the village, some ten miles away.

"Operator," he said, "will you look up the phone of Herbert Whitney, of the Whitney Transportation Company—yes, city directory—and ring this number when you have the party . . . ?" He stopped speaking as the operator's small voice in his ear asked a question.

"Has Miss Masterson arrived already?" she queried.

Wallace looked blankly at the phone a second, put at a loss by her unexpected question.

"Uh . . . er, no," he said in confusion. "Not yet . . . "

"When she arrives, will you have her

companion, Miss Anita Burditt, phone this office. We have a message for her."

Wallace frowned.

"Miss Burditt . . . ?" he questioned, hesitating to give the operator a chance to pick up from there.

"Yes. The party who called gave this office to understand Miss Masterson and Miss Burditt were coming up for a late vacation, and that this phone was to be held open until further notice. Is there anything else that would be required?"

"Uh . . . no," said Wallace. "But I've come up only to open the place up. It might be better if you just rang until Miss Burditt arrives, and give her the message . . . however, I'll leave a note if I go before they arrive."

"Thank you," came the operator's sing-song voice. "I'll put your call through now. Ring you back in a moment . . . "

WALLACE hung up, sat back with a frown of annoyance on his face.

"Of all the damned . . . "

He got up and went to a window where he could see the roadway leading down from the arch on the main road. There was nothing in sight.

"Judging from what the operator said, she'll arrive today," Wallace said reflectively. "I've got to be careful. If it was just Paula alone. . . . Who in the devil can that Miss Burditt be? Never heard of her before . . . my God!"

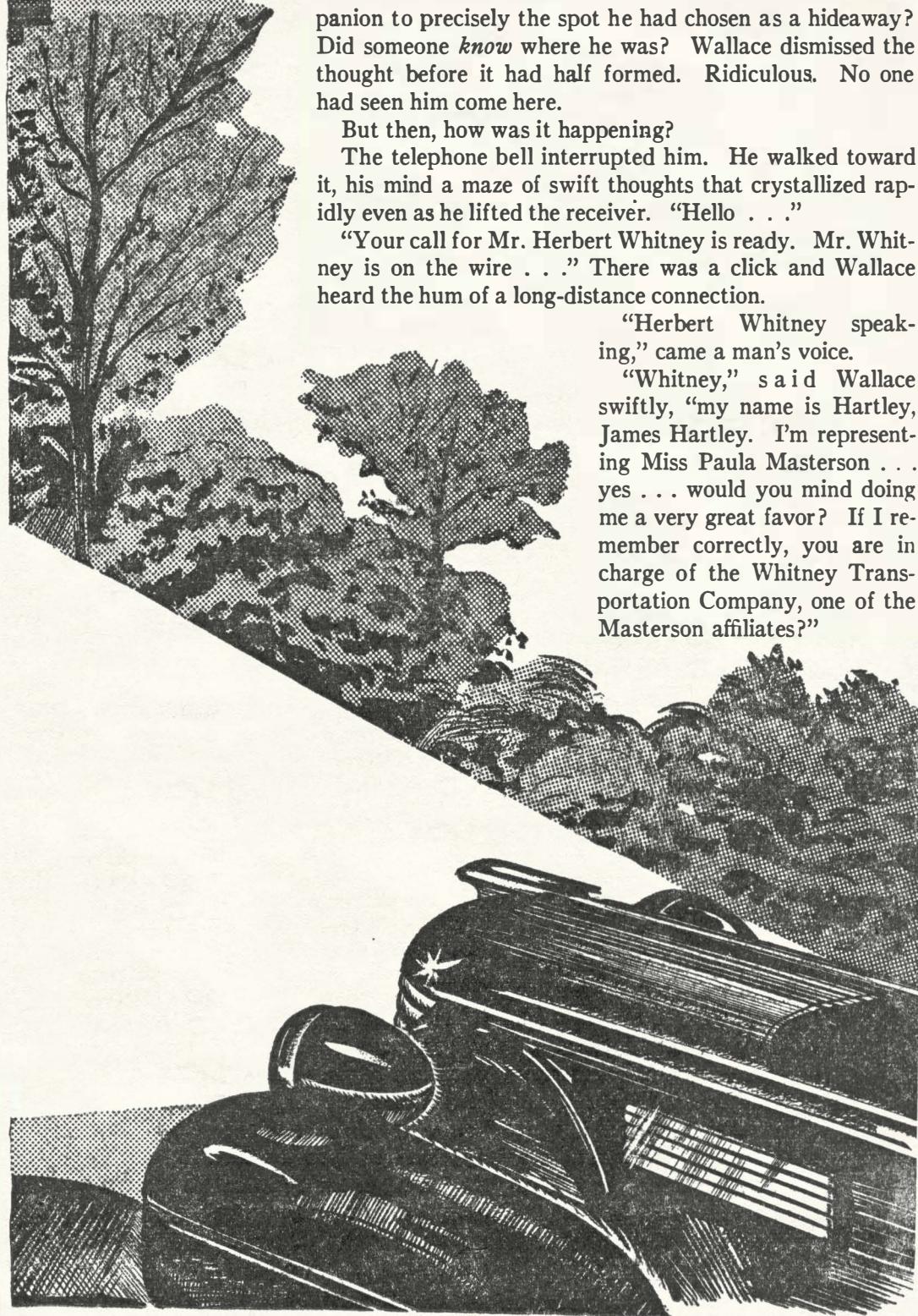
With crashing suddenness memory came back to him. He remembered her now. The girl who had been a witness at his wedding—and a witness of his shooting of Helen Masterson! And her boy-friend had been a State policeman!

"How on earth . . . !"

Wallace clenched his fists, stood tensely. What did *this* mean? How could Paula know this girl? Why come on a "late vacation" with her as a com-



Wallace jimmied the lock with a screwdriver



panion to precisely the spot he had chosen as a hideaway? Did someone *know* where he was? Wallace dismissed the thought before it had half formed. Ridiculous. No one had seen him come here.

But then, how was it happening?

The telephone bell interrupted him. He walked toward it, his mind a maze of swift thoughts that crystallized rapidly even as he lifted the receiver. "Hello . . ."

"Your call for Mr. Herbert Whitney is ready. Mr. Whitney is on the wire . . ." There was a click and Wallace heard the hum of a long-distance connection.

"Herbert Whitney speaking," came a man's voice.

"Whitney," said Wallace swiftly, "my name is Hartley, James Hartley. I'm representing Miss Paula Masterson . . . yes . . . would you mind doing me a very great favor? If I remember correctly, you are in charge of the Whitney Transportation Company, one of the Masterson affiliates?"

WITH THIS GUN

The voice on the other end of the wire broke in.

"Thanks to the late Mr. Masterson, yes. The old fellow did me a very great favor once. Glad to return it to his . . . er . . . any member of his family. What can I do for you?"

Wallace thought rapidly.

"Just this, Mr. Whitney. Would you mind checking on the stockholders of your company, and provide Miss Masterson with a list of them, together with information as to when and where these stockholders acquired their property? Since Mr. Masterson's death, followed so swiftly by that of his daughter, Helen, things have been in rather a turmoil. To tell you the truth, several things have come up which are just a bit irregular, and Miss Masterson would like to check. We thought of you as the most likely to do us a favor. You can be sure we'll both appreciate anything you can . . ."

"Certainly, certainly," came Whitney's voice over the wire. "In fact, I can say right now that the bulk of the stock is in the hands of three persons: the late Mr. Masterson and his daughter, Helen; and myself. Very few stocks are in outside hands. But I'll get you a list . . ."

"Miss Helen?" queried Wallace. "Very much of the stock?"

"Why, yes . . . I believe it might even be a controlling share . . . oh, I see what you are driving at—the Wallace affair! That was rather unfortunate, wasn't it? Yes, of course, I can understand why Miss Paula is concerned. That will was a gross miscarriage of justice. I can't imagine what Miss Helen must have had in mind . . . but then, love does funny things sometimes, doesn't it?"

Wallace's face was pale as the man rambled on, and he interrupted hoarsely.

"Get me what information you can,

and especially how Miss Helen acquired her interests. When you have the information phone . . ." Wallace glanced at the phone's base ". . . this suburban number—Pines, one-eight—and ask for Miss Masterson. You can talk to her, and she'll contact me. No use trying to get me in town. I'll be away."

"As you say, Mr. Hartley," came Whitney's voice. "I'll do it immediately. Should have the details for you by this afternoon, or at the latest, tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, Mr. Whitney," said Wallace. "Goodbye."

HE hung up the receiver and sat for a long moment in thought. Then he pulled open the drawer of the phone desk, found a pad and pencil, and wrote:

Miss Anita Burditt: Please call the operator. She has a message for you. The Caretaker.

Wallace thought for several more minutes, then he added a second note:

Miss Masterson: My car broke down, and I had to leave it in the garage. I had to break the lock to do it, but I will replace it in a few days. Also, there is a broken window in the north room. I will bring glass to repair it. Everything else is in order. The Caretaker.

He placed both notes under a paper-weight, rose to his feet. He looked again out of the window. Then, completing a careful inspection of the house, he returned to the second floor and climbed into the loft. Replacing the cover, he lay down on his mattress and lay staring thoughtfully up at the rafters, barely visible above him in the dim light that came from tiny, circular, dusty-paned windows at each end of the long loft.

CHAPTER IX

Two Girls and a Ghost

"OH, how lovely!" Anita Burditt's voice was ecstatic as she surveyed the lake, visible below the roadway now as Paula Masterson turned the car slowly in through the arch leading to the house. "It's much nicer than I ever dreamed it would be. Just look at the sunlight dancing on that water—I'd run right down now for a swim, if I could!"

Paula smiled.

"You can. In fact, as soon as we've got the things out of the car, let's put on our bathing suits and go down to the beach. We have a lovely sandy beach, diving platform, and even a float. I'm not sure about the float; it may be taken in already. But the platform always remains."

Anita looked dubious.

"I'm afraid I'm not much on diving . . ."

"Then I'll teach you," said Paula promptly. "I have several amateur trophies for diving. It's lots of fun."

Paula drove the car neatly around the house and up to the side door near the porch.

"We'll unload the bags first, right here on the porch. We'll have to do our own work, one of the disadvantages of leaving Marta home, but I guess we can stand a little dishwater and bed-making and house cleaning."

She climbed out of the driver's seat, fished in her purse for a key case, ran up the steps and unlocked the front door. She kicked it open with one slippers foot, then ran back to the car. Anita was lifting suitcases out of the rear seat.

In a moment, all the cases were inside, and Anita was staring about with delight at the furnishings.

"I'll be right back," said Paula. "Just as soon as I put the car away. Then I'll show you your room . . ."

"Oh, no," Anita interrupted her. "Our room! I don't want to sleep alone!"

Paula laughed.

"You don't have to. Just for your clothes. Hanger space is limited, and I've got so many things . . ."

She ran back to the car and drove it around to the rear and up to the garage door. Here she fumbled once more for her key ring, decided on a key, and advanced to the garage door. The key fit, but before she could turn it, the lock twisted in her hand, swung open. Paula's eyebrows lifted.

"That's funny," she murmured. "I'd swear . . ."

Then her eyes narrowed. She looked carefully at the sprung hasp of the lock, then removed it and opened the garage door. She stopped and stared a long moment at the car in the garage; then with a puzzled expression on her face, closed the door once more, stared back at the house thoughtfully. She moved her own car aside out of the way.

RUNNING back up the steps, she called out.

"Anita!"

"What is it, Paula?"

Anita appeared from the direction of the front veranda.

Paula hesitated a moment, then:

"Just wanted to know where you'd gone. How about getting this luggage upstairs, and then going for that swim?"

Paula led the way upstairs, alert at every door, until she reached the end of the hall. Then she turned back.

"Perhaps we'd better take the middle room," she said as though deciding. "It'll be more convenient to the

stairway."

They deposited the bags on the floor, and, while Anita sat with experimental glee on the mattress of the bed and jounced herself up and down, Paula moved back toward the doorway.

"You get out the swim suits, Anita; I'll be right back. I want to make a phone call."

Anita stopped her jouncing, but Paula didn't notice as she hurried down the stairway to the phone. Almost instantly she saw the notes lying on the phone stand. She picked them up, read them. A baffled look of perplexity crossed her face.

"Caretaker?" she whispered. "But . . ."

Abruptly she tucked the notes into her jacket pocket and picked up the receiver. The operator answered.

"Please put me through to Mr. James Hartley, in the city. The number is Willow 4573. Call me back when you have the party. I'll wait . . . what? . . . no, I'm not Miss Burditt. I'm Paula Masterson . . . Yes, I have the caretaker's note about the call . . . Yes, I'll tell her . . ."

The perplexity grew more evident on Paula's face as she waited for her connection.

"It's the oddest thing . . ." she murmured to herself.

A voice in her ear broke off her reverie. She returned her lips to the mouthpiece in glad relief.

"Oh, Jim. I'm so glad I found you in . . ."

"Why?" There was a note of alarm in Hartley's small voice over the wire. "Is anything wrong?"

"I . . . I don't know," confessed Paula. "But things aren't exactly the way they should be. For instance . . ." she hesitated while a sudden wideness of her eyes indicated a thought had flashed through her mind,

then she went on: "Oh, I guess I'm just being silly. Nothing really. Just the lock on the garage door was broken. But I found a note from the . . . caretaker, explaining something had gone wrong with his car and he had to leave it."

"Paula," came Hartley's puzzled voice. "You're talking . . . well, almost nonsense. Why worry about it if it was only the caretaker? Or is something else wrong?"

"No, really, Jim. I just wanted to let you know we got here all right. We're both going for a swim now. But I wanted, too, to remind you to come up Saturday for the week end."

"Paula," said Hartley. "Are you sure everything's all right?"

Paula laughed.

"Of course, Jim. I just . . . well, finding the broken lock gave me a start, until I found the note, and I just took a few minutes to get over it. Guess I'm not used to being alone in the great outdoors."

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said Hartley. "Besides, you aren't alone. Anita ought to keep you pretty busy showing her the sights and doing the countryside. But I'll be up there Saturday. In fact, I might just stretch a point and come up tomorrow . . ."

"Oh, really, Jim, that isn't necessary," Paula laughed. "I'm afraid my little case of nerves has created the wrong impression. Anita and I will have a perfectly lovely time, and we'll prepare a few little surprises for you when you come out. Just stick to your work, and don't play hookey on my account."

Hartley, at his end of the wire, chuckled too.

"Okay, honey. And thanks for calling. Better go for that swim. It'll make you feel better. And I'll see

you Saturday."

PAULA said goodbye and hung up.

Then she lifted the receiver again and called the operator.

"Please give me the local newspaper office," she said.

When she got the newspaper, she put in an order for the daily paper to be delivered and, as an after-thought, requested that the issues of the past few days be sent out with the day's paper.

Then, thrusting the notes in her pocket, she went upstairs.

"Anita, there's a call for you. You're to call the operator."

"For me?" Anita was wide-eyed. "Who'd know I was here? I didn't tell anybody."

"Best way to find out is to go down and call," smiled Paula. "My, but you look pretty in that bathing suit! I can imagine a lot of young men who'd call you, if they could just imagine what they were calling . . ."

Anita blushed, raced down the stairway. In a few moments, when Paula had changed into her bathing suit, she came back.

"It was Joe," she informed Paula. "Left me a phone number so that I can reach him."

"A phone number?" asked Paula curiously. "Isn't he at home?"

"No. He's been put out on a special job, and won't be at home for a week or so."

"Oh, I see. Well, I told you it was a man, didn't I? It looks like that Joe of yours is a smart fellow. But come on, let's take that swim. I'm ready now."

As they walked down to the beach, Anita looked at Paula eagerly.

"You know, Paula, there's something I've always wanted to do."

"What's that?"

"Swim in the moonlight."

Paula laughed deprecatingly.

"What's so unusual about that? I've done it dozens of times."

"I mean without a swim suit on," confessed Anita, her cheeks a trifle pink. "I've never been anywhere where there was enough privacy to do it . . ."

Paula laughed at her.

"Of all the . . . well, if you'll get such a kick out of it, maybe we will, one of these nights."

THEY had finished their swim, and eaten a lunch when the sound of a bicycle bell outside announced the arrival of the newsboy. He delivered a bundle of papers. Paula unwrapped them, took them out on the front porch, curled up in an easy chair and scanned them thoroughly.

In one of them she found the account of Wallace's encounter with the police at Webbley's mansion.

ALTAR KILLER ESCAPES TRAP

Douglas Wallace, maniac killer of the Masterson heiress, last night escaped from a police trap at the mansion of Mark Webbley, prominent attorney. The killer fled in a car apparently previously placed in readiness, police say. Patrolman Patrick Keenan was wounded in one arm by the killer in a gun battle. Wallace was believed unhit, but Keenan believes he put a bullet into the escape car.

"What are you reading so intently?" interrupted Anita, sitting on the arm of the chair. "Oh, I see . . ."

She took the paper away from Paula, folded it, and laid it aside.

"You came up here to get away from all that," she dictated firmly. "I intend to see that you do. Let's get those dishes washed, then take a little hike around the lake. I noticed an awfully nice trail leading right around the shore . . ."

Paula got up.

"I'll bet you won't want to hike all the way around," she laughed. "You've no idea how far it is. This lake looks small, but it really isn't. It's at least ten miles around, if you follow the shoreline. There're so many little bays and inlets."

"I didn't mean to walk all the way around," admitted Anita. "But a couple of miles won't hurt either of us."

"All right. You go put on some water to heat, and I'll take a run out to the car. I believe I left the keys in the trunk lock."

Anita returned to the kitchen, while Paula made her way around to the rear. She walked directly to the garage door, opened it, and went inside. A moment later she came out, looking very pale in the sunlight. There was a frightened expression in her eyes and she fought to erase it before she returned to the house.

"It's there!" she whispered to herself. "It's there! A bullet hole, in the back of the car . . ."

When she returned to the kitchen, Anita was standing poised in an attitude of listening.

"Did you knock something over out there?" she asked.

"Knock something over?" Paula was puzzled.

"Yes. I heard a noise, like boards falling. I thought for a minute you'd hurt yourself."

"Why no. I didn't knock anything over. And I didn't hear any boards falling. Are you sure . . .?"

Anita shrugged her shoulders.

"Guess I'm not used to this country life. Maybe sounds carry farther in this air. But I'd swear it sounded close. Maybe the place is haunted." She laughed. "Ghosts in the daytime . . ."

"Let's get the dishes finished," in-

terposed Paula hastily. "I think I like the idea of that hike more and more. That swim gave me a lot of ambition."

THE phone rang. Paula answered it.

"Miss Masterson?" came the voice. "Yes."

"This is Herbert Whitney. You remember me — one of your father's business associates . . .?"

Paula's brows knit, then her face cleared.

"Why, of course, Mr. Whitney. I think I saw you at the funeral, didn't I?"

"Yes. I was there. I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to express my sympathy then, Miss Paula. Mr. Masterson was a grand old man. I owed a lot to him. If it hadn't been for him . . . but that isn't what I called you for. I have the details on those questions Mr. Hartley asked me this morning . . ."

"What questions?" asked Paula. "And I don't quite understand. Mr. Hartley isn't here."

"Yes, of course. He told me he wouldn't be in town, and suggested that to save time, I call you directly—he gave me the number—and give you the information you both wanted. He gave me to understand you'd know what information it was."

"Why . . . oh, yes, Mr. Whitney. I recall now. And what is it you'd like to tell me?" Paula's eyes were wide with lack of comprehension.

"Well, the gist of it is about as I gave it to Mr. Hartley this morning. It is true that Miss Helen did own better than fifty per cent of the stock in the Whitney Transportation Company. I myself owned one-third of the stock, and the late Mr. Masterson owned the balance. Miss Helen, I

am sure, acquired her property through the help of Mr. Webbley. At least, he handled the deal, and apparently it was with the knowledge of Mr. Masterson. Otherwise, I hardly believe . . .”

Paula was wide-eyed with amazement.

“Helen! Owned so much stock in your company! And Mr. Webbley arranged . . . oh!”

Whitney’s voice sounded concerned over the wire.

“This news disturbs you, Miss Paula? You mean you didn’t know . . . ?”

“No,” said Paula frankly, “I didn’t. But I’m glad Mr. Hartley called you about it. There are several things which may bear investigation.

“Anything I can do to be of service, you may feel free to call upon me,” averred Whitney warmly. “Mr. Masterson did a lot for me . . .”

“When did you say Mr. Hartley called you?” asked Paula in a tone of curiosity, interrupting Whitney.

“This morning. He called from some place called The Pines—isn’t that where you are now? It was a toll call . . .”

“The Pines!” gasped Paula. “But he couldn’t . . . are you sure?”

“Fairly certain,” affirmed Whitney. “The call, as I said, was a toll call. The operator who got me on the wire informed me that was where the call was from. Is anything wrong with that?”

“Wh-why no,” stammered Paula. “I just didn’t know Mr. Hartley called from here. I arrived later, myself . . .”

“That explains why he asked me to call you,” said Whitney. “Obviously he didn’t expect to get back to town so that I could reach him today.”

“Yes . . . yes, that must be it,”

agreed Paula, dazed. “Well, thank you very much, Mr. Whitney. If there’s anything else, I’ll call upon you.”

“Please do,” said Whitney. “Good-by, Miss Paula.”

“Goodby,” said Paula, and hung up the receiver.

FOR an instant she sat thinking, then she faced Anita, who stood in the doorway.

“Anita, I’m afraid the hike is off. My part of it anyway. I’ll be busy for several hours. Why don’t you just go for a walk yourself?”

“Oh, I’d rather not . . .”

“Please do,” urged Paula. “I’m going to be a frightful bore until I get this business finished, and there’s no use you wasting this lovely afternoon. Besides, I’d rather you would . . .”

Anita looked doubtful a moment, then nodded.

“All right. If you want me to. But I’ll hurry back. I won’t be gone more than an hour or so.”

“We’ll go for a boat ride when you get back,” promised Paula.

Anita left the house, and Paula watched her trim figure striding down the lake trail.

“Lovely girl,” she murmured. Then her thoughts returned to the telephone call from Herbert Whitney.

“Why on earth didn’t Jim tell me he’d called Whitney?” she asked herself aloud. “And how could he possibly have called from here?” There was an incredulous tone in Paula’s voice. “There’s something awfully funny about all this . . .”

In sudden decision, Paula reached for the phone.

“Get me Mr. James Hartley,” she spoke swiftly to the operator. “You can reach him at his office in the city . . .”

"Paula!"

The voice behind her froze Paula in her seat, and her voice broke off as though she had been choked.

"Don't call anybody yet," said the voice.

Paula put the receiver back on its hook, turned slowly around to face the speaker.

"Doug!" she gasped. "Doug Wallace. You're *still* here?"

"Yes," he said, puzzled. "But how did you know I ever was here?"

"The car, in the garage, for one thing. I saw the bullet hole in it, and knew it must have been the car in which you escaped from that trap. But most of all, your notes . . . Doug, there *isn't* any caretaker for this place. We simply lock everything up and leave it."

Wallace nodded, grinned.

"So you knew all along those notes were phoney? Knew all along I was somewhere around?"

"Yes. But where?"

"Up under the roof, in the unfinished attic."

"So that was the falling boards Anita heard!"

"Yes," admitted Wallace. "I was taking a peek out the windows and tripped on a few loose ones."

A LOOK of alarm crossed Paula's face. She leaped to her feet.

"Doug! What are you going to do? You can't stay up there forever!"

"I'm not. It all depends on what Herbert Whitney told you."

"Whitney!" Paula was amazed. "Then it was *you* who called from here? But why did he think it was James Hartley?"

"Because I told him that's who it was. How else would I get him to tell me what I wanted to know? I'm a fugitive, Paula."

"What *did* you want to know, and why?"

"Who helped Helen get those stocks?"

"Mark Webbley," said Paula. "But what . . . ?"

Wallace smashed his fist into his palm, and his face grew red with rage.

"So he *does* know!" he spat out. "He's got 'em, all right! Well, Mr. Webbley . . ."

"What are you talking about?" Paula burst in. "Webbley does know what? And what has he got?"

In two swift steps Wallace was over to Paula; his hands clutched her shoulders. She shrank back, alarm on her features.

"No," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you, Paula! But please listen. I know what you're thinking, and you're right. I did kill Helen, and I intend to give myself up. But I can't, just yet. There is something very important I must do first. You've got to let me hide here a few more days."

"Why did you kill her?" Paula interrupted him with a piteous note in her voice.

Wallace stopped, taken aback, eyed her.

"You did it for me!" she accused. "You killed her so I'd get the fortune!"

Wallace stared for a moment, then he laughed savagely.

"Is *that* what you think?" he said. "No, Paula. I *hated* her for what she was doing to you, but I *killed* her for a personal reason. I thought your father's new will, which he never got to sign, would take care of the injustice she had done to you, so you see, there was no point in killing her, considering that. I couldn't have gained any more for you. As it turned out, of course, that might have been a motive. But it *wasn't*."

"Then why?" persisted Paula. "I

know you aren't insane. No matter what they say . . ."

"Perhaps Mark Webbly could tell you why," Wallace said drily. A flash of new anger crossed his face. "But I don't think he will!"

"Doug, you've got to give yourself up . . ."

"Not yet. Paula, will you do me one great favor? I promise that when I've investigated one matter I have in mind, I'll give up as you and Jim want me to. Just give me the keys to your car, and say nothing if it's missing for a time at night. You could tell Miss Burditt the . . . the caretaker asked to borrow it."

Paula looked doubtful, then she shook her head slowly.

"No, Doug. I can't let you go roaming around the countryside. They're out to kill you on sight! Don't you realize that?"

He nodded.

"Yes, Paula, I realize it. But please . . .!"

The spectacle of big, strong Douglas Wallace, who was an admitted murderer, begging for a favor, was so strange that Paula stared at him with wonder in her eyes.

"Doug," she whispered. "What's back of all this? What terribly important job must you finish, so important that you'll risk being riddled with bullets to finish it?"

"I can't tell you," Wallace's voice was thick with emotion. "Believe me, Paula, I can't tell you. But believe me, too, it's right and just. It means so much to . . ." he hesitated, and his eyes were intense on hers . . . to me," he finished.

Paula's eyes clouded with doubt.

"I . . ." she began.

THE sharp ring of the telephone bell startled them both. For an in-

stant Paula looked at it with terror in her attitude. Then, as though moving in a trance, she went to quell its insistent voice.

"H . . . hello," her voice faltered into the receiver.

"Hello, honey," came James Hartley's voice over the wire. "What's up? Something go wrong?"

"Oh, no, Jim, nothing wrong . . ." Paula tried to suppress the quaver in her voice, make it strong and calm and matter-of-fact. "I . . ."

"Tell him what Whitney told you!" Wallace's hasty whisper came to her rescue.

"Herbert Whitney called," she launched out. "He told me that Helen owned over fifty percent of the stock in his company, and that Mark Webbly acted for her in acquiring it. Jim, isn't that strange? Don't you think we had better ask Mr. Webbly about it?"

"Holy smoke!" Hartley's amazed voice burst out. "Honey, are you sure about this?"

"Mr. Whitney told me himself," said Paula. "It must be true."

"I'm glad you called me," said Hartley. "This is important, and very strange. I'm going to contact Webbly right away and find out what it all means. Why, if that's true, it means Webbly had a hand in *all* of Helen's deals. But then . . . Listen, honey, I'll call you back later to tell you what I find out. This sounds like something big. Just keep quiet about it. Behave yourself, meanwhile, and don't worry about things."

He rang off, and Paula hung up, turned to face Wallace again.

The room behind her was empty.

And to her call, there was no answer. Above, on the second floor, she thought she heard the sound of a loose board rattling as someone trod on it.

CHAPTER X

To Know Is to Die!

FOR the tenth time James Hartley hung up the receiver with a grunt of annoyance.

"Where on earth is that man?" he exclaimed. "He doesn't answer his home phone, and he hasn't been in the office all day! It's ridiculous that he wouldn't be at the office . . ."

A sudden thought flashed across Hartley's mind. He sat for a moment considering the inspiration.

"Maybe he's there all right, but just isn't answering the phone!"

Hartley frowned.

"And why wouldn't he answer his phone? Come to think of it, why did Herbert Whitney call Paula? Perhaps because something happened that brought it to his attention and made him think it not only important, but off-color. And maybe that same something happened so that Mark Webbley knew of it too, and realized the implications. So, was he *afraid* to answer his phone?"

Hartley shook his head angrily.

"No, dammit. Webbley's no coward, and least of all, a fool. That isn't the reason. But where, then, is he?"

"Covering up!"

The solution broke like lightning over Hartley and he leaped to his feet so abruptly that he almost upset the phone. Thus, he was uncertain for a moment whether the phone had actually rung, or the sound of the bell was just from his impetuous motion. A second later, however, it dinned into his startled ears and he snatched the receiver from the hook.

"Hello . . ."

"This is Arnold Masterson," came a cold, icy voice over the wire. "I've been trying all day to get Mark Web-

bley, but I can't reach him. Perhaps you know where he is . . .?"

"What do you want him for?" asked Hartley, then hastened to add: "Maybe I can help you." The supplementary remark failed to erase the bad effect of his blurted impertinence.

"None of your business!" Masterson snapped. Hartley's face reddened. The man was certainly arrogant. More than he had reason to be.

"Sorry!" snapped Hartley, in his turn a trifle irked. "I was only trying to be helpful. But since you can't be polite, I'd advise you to go back home and forget the whole thing. You're out of this picture completely. And if you want to know more about that packet there's been so much mystery about, find Douglas Wallace. He took it from Webbley last night at the point of a gun, then shot a policeman while making his escape with it. Don't you read the papers?"

MASTERSON'S laugh came over the phone, cool and controlled.

"The papers don't carry *all* the news," he said acidly. "As for that packet, let Wallace have it. I know what was in it, but I don't need it. I've got even better proof!"

"Better proof?" asked Hartley, amazed at this unexpected reply. "Proof of what?"

"Don't take me for an ass," came Masterson's acid voice. "You certainly know. And so does Webbley. If you two law-breaking sharks think you can cheat me out of what is rightfully mine, and has been for years, you've got another think coming. And if you think I believe that rot about those letters in that packet, you're more than mistaken. In fact, if Webbley—and *you*, Mr. Hartley—want to stay out of jail, I'd advise you to hand that packet over to me at once. And

you can tell Webbley that when you see him—unless I see him first! And by God, I'll see him tonight, if I have to sleep in his office. I'm *giving* you both a generous chance to clear out. If you know which side your bread is buttered on, you'd better take it!"

The crash of the receiver at the other end being slammed down on its cradle nearly cracked Hartley's eardrum. Dazed by Masterson's inexplicable tirade, he replaced his own receiver with a wry expression and sat down to think.

What he had heard went through his brain haphazardly, with no more coherence after several repetitions than it had originally from Masterson's lips. But finally one fact stood out above all the rest.

"That lousy son called me a crook!" exclaimed Hartley. "And I've got a hunch maybe he's got something there. Not on me, but I've got a feeling it *could* be pinned there! And I think Mark Webbley can tell me a few things about that!"

He rose to his feet, reached for his hat.

"Masterson," he exclaimed, "you aren't the only one who's going to camp on Mark Webbley's trail!"

* * *

IT WAS already dark when Hartley entered the building where his and Webbley's office was located and glanced at the elevator indicator. It was pointed at the top floor number, just beginning its downward trip.

Hartley grunted, walked up to the little desk where the register book listing all late arrivals and departures lay, scanned the list hastily. Mark Webbley's name wasn't there, either in or out. Which meant that if he was in, he had arrived during the normal day's business . . . Hartley's eyes stopped moving abruptly and his brows lifted.

"A. Masterson!" he exclaimed. "And he's been here a half-hour already!"

Hartley glanced hastily at the elevator indicator, saw that it was about half-way down. On sudden impulse, he raced for the stairway and made his way upward. Down the hallway, as he reached the third floor, he saw the lights of the elevator descend.

He reached the thirteenth floor, legs aching, made his way softly on rubber heels toward the door of Webbley's office. His key was in his hand; he inserted it softly. Beyond, in the adjoining anteroom, was the dim glow of a light. The glass pane of the next door, down the hallway, leading directly off the anteroom, was also lighted. They were in there. Perhaps he'd have a chance to hear . . .

The sharp crack of a pistol shot jolted Hartley's hand so that he shot the lock back with a loud click. Momentarily stunned to motionlessness, he stood there, then threw the door open with a crash and raced through the outer office, dodging furniture that seemed now to be in the damnedest places, toward the lighted glass door that separated the outer office from the anteroom to Webbley's own office.

As he reached the door, opened it, he was just in time to hear the corridor doorway of the anteroom slam shut—from the outside. But Hartley was transfixed for a moment at sight of a body stretched on the floor. Blood stained a white shirt front, welling from a bullet hole directly over the heart; a bullet hole which was brown with powder burns. On the floor lay an automatic.

Hartley leaped forward, knelt for a second, staring into the dead face.

"Arnold Masterson!" he gulped out. Then his startled eyes went to the door leading to the corridor. The murderer,

whoever he was, had just fled through that door!

Hartley snatched up the automatic from the floor and plunged in pursuit. He yanked the door open, stared up and down the corridor. It was empty. There was also no elevator on the floor, and no whine of the elevator motors to indicate a car either coming up or going down. There was only one exit—the stair well.

Hartley's pounding feet echoed down the corridor as he ran for it, gun in hand.

Behind him a shout rang out.

"Stop! Stop or I'll shoot!"

The voice was Mark Webbley's.

HARTLEY turned, saw Webbley standing just outside the door from which he had just come. There was a gun in his hand, and it was pointing straight at Hartley.

The muzzle wavered now, and Webbley's voice rang out again, a shocked realization in its tone.

"My God—Jim Hartley!"

In one insane instant Hartley realized the thought in his mind.

"Somebody's shot Arnold Masterson!" he exclaimed. "He ran down the stairway. Quick, for God's sake, don't stand there like a fool. I didn't do it. Hurry, or . . ."

"Don't move, Jim," came Webbley's strained voice, hoarse with shock and amazement and horror. "Don't move, please. I'd hate to shoot you!"

Hartley swore savagely, walked swiftly back toward Webbley, who moved backward an imperceptible inch, then stood his ground.

"Mark, don't be a complete idiot! Whoever killed Masterson is on his way down those stairs . . ."

"I don't hear anything," said Webbley heavily. "No footsteps. The shot came only ten or fifteen seconds

ago. It's thirteen floors down . . . and here comes the elevator."

Hartley stared helplessly at the older attorney, then looked down at the gun in his own hand, the gun which had obviously just killed Arnold Masterson.

"This . . . this is ridiculous," he gasped. "I . . . where did you come from, Mark . . . ?"

"I was in my inner office, getting some papers for Masterson," said Webbley. "He came up for a conference. Then I heard the door burst open, a shot, and someone running out this door. I grabbed my gun from my desk drawer and followed. But my God, boy, I never expected to find you! Why did you do it . . . ?"

Hartley stared at Webbley, his jaw hanging open, the shock of the previous sixty seconds of lightning happenings clouding his perceptive abilities. But one thing was becoming starkly clear—he, James Hartley, was in one hell of a jam!

The elevator whined to a stop now at the thirteenth floor, and a policeman, gun in hand, charged out, closely followed by a wide-eyed Ben, the elevator operator, who was careful to keep himself out of the line of fire.

"What's going on here?" asked the officer, coming to a halt before the two attorneys. "Ben says he heard a shot fired, and a lot of commotion . . ."

Webbley waved a horrified hand at Hartley.

"He . . . he just shot a man!" he uttered in shocked tones. "Just burst into my office like a madman and shot one of my clients—Arnold Masterson."

"Dead, you say?" asked the officer, his brows lifting. "Arnold Masterson—*another* one! Holy smoke! What kind of a family is this?"

The officer trained his gun on Hartley, sidled to the anteroom door, looked

inside. He made a wry face.

"I'll say he's dead!" he exclaimed. "Come on, young fellow, hand over that gun!" He advanced menacingly toward Hartley, whipped a clean handkerchief from his pocket, and Hartley dazedly dropped the weapon into it.

"Now, Ben, call the chief and tell him to send Homicide over," directed the officer. "Arnold Masterson, hey?" His eyes glittered. "This'll get me headlines three inches high!"

HARTLEY stepped forward protestingly.

"Officer, I didn't kill him! The real killer's escaping down that stairway! I was just coming in, heard the shot, and rushed in. I heard the killer running out this door, and followed. Then Mr. Webbley came out and stopped me."

"Just came in?" questioned Ben. "I didn't bring you up . . ."

"Where'd you get this gun?" asked the officer, hefting it as he wrapped it carefully and slid it into a side pocket.

"It was lying on the floor beside the dead man," explained Hartley wildly. "I picked it up to follow the killer . . ."

The officer laughed sneeringly.

"That's a sweet yarn!" he said caustically. "Who are you anyway?"

"His name's James Hartley," interposed Webbley who was still staring at Hartley as though he couldn't believe his eyes. "He's my junior assistant."

"A lawyer, hey? Well, you oughta know then what a pipe that yarn is," said the officer.

Hartley stared at the faces of his three accusers and his heart sank. Only too well he realized how silly his story sounded.

He turned to Mark Webbley.

"Mark," he said in intense tones, "I didn't do it! You've let the real killer

get away!"

Webbley shook his head.

"Please, Jim, don't make any more of a fool out of yourself. Realize that everything you say will be used against you. I'd move heaven and earth if I could believe you—but Jim, don't you see it's all too obvious?"

"Ben," repeated the officer. "Put in that call, like I told you. All this is getting us nowhere. Better save it to tell the jury, young fellow," he advised Hartley. "Meanwhile, don't make any moves. I'm the best shot in my division."

CHAPTER XI

Nudity and the Ghost

THE shaft of moonlight coming in the checkered square of the window was brilliant in the dark room. Anita Burditt lay looking at it. She thought of how brilliant it must be out on the lake—how the white sand of the beach must be glowing under its light.

She turned her head and stared at Paula's face, beside her in the moonlit room. Paula was sleeping.

Impulsively Anita put out her hand to shake her gently, then stopped before her fingers touched the sleeping girl's shoulder. An embarrassed expression stole into Anita's features, and she withdrew her hand. But she looked minutes longer at the shaft of moonlight. Then, shooting another careful scrutiny at her sleeping companion, she rose carefully to a sitting position, swung her bare feet out onto the carpet and rose to her feet.

Once out in the hall she breathed easier; a sensation of delighted adventure stole over her. Her pajama-clad figure stole silently down the stairs, found the front door, unlatched it, and went out. The air outside was warm,

lacking the chill that the season might ordinarily have dictated, and Anita uttered a silent little squeal of delight.

A minute later she stood on the sand of the beach, looking over the brightly sparkling moonlit water. She peered guiltily around for a few seconds, then realized that there was no need to suspect onlookers. Except for the sleeping Paula in her bedroom upstairs, the resort was deserted. There wasn't a residence in five miles.

Anita wriggled out of her pajamas, laid them on the pier, and descended the ladder, down into the water. The coolness of it was delicious to her bare skin, and she relaxed for a contented moment, floating blissfully. Then she swam with gleeful strokes out to the float and pulled herself up on it.

Back on shore the roof of the house reflected the moonlight brilliantly, casting the rest of the edifice into inky shadow by contrast. The moon, high above the forest just behind the house, rose in a sky swept clean of any vestige of cloud. The pines were silver and black under its rays.

Anita was delighted, and she basked in the scene for long moments until a vagrant breeze from out on the lake raised goose pimples on her uncovered back.

She slid back into the lake and swam aimlessly in sheer delight at the contact of the warm water on her soft skin. Once she felt a wriggling, finny body touch a leg and she squealed. For a moment she lashed the water into foam, then laughed at herself and swam on more quietly.

At length, tired out by her exertions, she clambered up the ladder to the pier-top. Although the whole pier was in brilliant moonlight, her pajamas were not in sight.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in startled dismay.

A SEARCH failed to reveal the missing garments. The cool breeze that had forced her back into the water on the float was once more raising goose pimples on her bare skin, and she shivered. That wind was strong enough to have blown her pajamas into the water . . .

She peered down into the depths, but the discovery of their white blur on the bottom was no relief.

"Oh," she gasped. "They're on the bottom. I just can't dive that deep . . ."

She looked up at the house, which was still silent under the canopy of moonlight, and suddenly she laughed.

"Nobody to see me, anyway," she assured herself.

In spite of the assurance, she ran like a frightened deer up the path, onto the porch, and halted as though frozen, now an even more apt image of the graceful forest animal, petrified in fear. Just inside the door, which was ajar, there had been a noise.

The noise of someone stumbling over a chair!

Paralyzed for the instant, Anita looked around wildly. Then she darted toward a porch wicker chair and crouched behind it, trembling with more than the night breeze.

Peering with startled eyes from her place of concealment, Anita saw the door open slowly and the dark figure of a man step cautiously out onto the porch. Terror struck her dumb. Her heart beat wildly as he stood there in the darkness, and utter panic threatened to send her in flight as she heard the *drip-drip* of droplets of water from her still-wet body striking the porch floor..

But apparently the noise was loud only to her startled senses, for the man seemed satisfied that all was silent and that he was unobserved. He walked

cautiously down the stairs, went around the side of the house, disappeared toward the rear.

With a rush Anita gained the door, leaped inside, and shut it behind her. For a moment she leaned against it, trembling, then the sound of a car motor broke on her ears. She went to the window, overlooking the driveway around the house. She saw Paula's convertible move smoothly and silently up toward the road and through the arch and away. Whoever was driving it nursed the throttle so as to make as little noise as possible.

Anita, baffled, stood for a moment staring up the empty road, then a thought struck her; new panic seared its way into her brain. She raced up the stairway, burst into the bedroom, then stopped still, hidden in the darkness.

"Anita, is that you?" came Paula's voice.

Anita snatched a bathrobe from a chair, threw it around her, then ran to the bed.

"Paula!" she gasped. "I . . . someone just stole your car. I saw him. Paula . . ."

"Oh!" said Paula in apologetic concern. "It's all right, Anita. I know it."

Anita stared.

"You . . . you *know* it?"

"**Y**ES. It was the caretaker. I forgot to tell you; he called this afternoon, and asked if he could borrow it. I said he could, and left the keys in the car for him."

"But he was coming *out* of the house!" protested Anita. "He was in the house . . ."

"Coming out of the house?" asked Paula sharply. "What do you mean? Where were you?"

Anita looked down uncomfortably.

"I . . . I was outside."

"Outside!" Paula was startled, sat up in bed.

"Yes. I . . . I went for a moonlight swim and . . . and I lost my pajamas!"

"Lost your pajamas!" gasped Paula. "What on earth . . . ?"

"I went swimming in the nude in the moonlight," confessed Anita, "and they fell off the pier. They went to the bottom while I was swimming, and I couldn't dive for them. So I had to come back the way I was . . ."

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Paula. "Did the . . . the caretaker see you?"

"No. I hid behind a chair on the porch when I heard him coming out. Then when he went around to the rear, I ran in and closed and locked the door. Then I heard the car start up and it drove away up the road."

A sigh of relief escaped Paula's lips. Abruptly she laughed gaily.

"So our little moonlight mermaid nearly got caught! Well, maybe that'll teach you. But you would have your little adventure . . . !"

Anita looked at her a moment, then she joined in the laughter.

"Anyway, it was simply wonderful," she defended. "I'm going to do it again, but the next time I won't lose my clothes."

Anita dried her hair, then found another pair of pajamas and got into them. Paula had lain down again and Anita clambered into the bed beside her. But as she lay looking at the shaft of moonlight on the wall, shortened now as the moon slid higher over the house, a thoughtful frown creased her features.

She turned her head and stared at Paula's face. Their eyes met in the darkness. Paula was thinking too.

"I don't think I like that caretaker," said Anita. "He had no busi-

ness coming into the house!"

CHAPTER XII

A Case of Too Much Reasoning

Editor EDWIN WILEY sat with his feet cocked up on his desk and his thumbs hooked blissfully into his vest. Perhaps no more self-satisfied expression had ever lain on the face of any man than lay right now on Wiley's ruddy one. It certainly wasn't the *outdoor* life that made Wiley's features ruddy, nor was it outdoor life that caused his bald head. Whiskey accounted for one, and worry the other. Like all editors, Wiley had his problems . . .

But this night those problems were finished.

"One million bucks!" he whispered to himself. "The old paper outa hock, old man Masterson six feet under, and the biggest scoop this paper ever had—all mine!"

A momentary scowl crossed his face at mention of Carter Masterson. Here, perhaps, was one of the very few men who had hated the mighty little millionaire. Partly, or perhaps mostly, because of a story he had once had to suppress, and the rest of it because Masterson had kept him where he was today—almost on the verge of, but never quite over, the precipice of bankruptcy.

It had always been a sore spot to Wiley to realize that he had actually been a *afraid* of Carter Masterson. Wiley might have had whiskey on his breath, but there was that peculiar might in his muscles that able drinkers sometimes have. Moral fear had always made those muscles back down.

"It was a long wait," said Wiley, "but every dog has his day, and now mine's come."

In his mind's eye he reviewed the scene with Arnold Masterson, just a few scant hours before.

"Makes a guy feel like Croesus, handing out twelve million bucks like that," observed Wiley. "Seems funny, me able to do it! Never forget the way that guy's eyes lit up when I told him the old story . . ." Wiley shuddered involuntarily at the recollection. "Now there's another one who hated the old man. *Really* hated, I mean! And I can understand it. He's been eating in that old injustice for twenty-three years. I suppose it is a shock to realize you've watched some other guy use a fortune that really belonged to you all along."

Arnold Masterson had been more than willing to cut Wiley in for ten percent. Wiley had the proof, and Wiley had convinced Arnold of that. But craftily, Wiley had held back the important details—the where and the when.

"A million bucks!" breathed Wiley again, leaning back even more luxuriously in his chair. He had a half hour before the proofs came up from the press room for the early morning edition. Then he could go home and dream of the wealth that would soon be his.

The door to his office burst open and the night reporter stationed at police headquarters burst in, his eyes wild, waving a sheaf of hastily scribbled notes in his hand.

"Stop the presses, Chief!" he yelled. "I got a story here that's worth the whole damn front page. Murder, m'boy, and big!"

"Murder?" gaped Wiley, plunking his feet down on the floor and leaning forward. "Who?"

"The Mastersons again!" yelped the reporter. "Just a few minutes ago, junior attorney James Hartley

barged into senior attorney Mark Webbley's office, where he was in conference with old man Masterson's only living male relative, Arnold Masterson, and shot him plunk through the heart!"

WILEY staggered, gripped his desk for support.

"Who?" he uttered hoarsely. "For Christ's sake, Getchell, shot *who?*"

"Arnold Masterson, of course!" howled Getchell. "Stop them presses, Chief. I'll get the story down on paper . . ."

As Getchell tore into the next room and hurled himself into a chair before a typewriter, Wiley sat down heavily in his chair and looked straight ahead. Finally his thick lips moved.

"One million bucks," he said tragically. "One million bucks . . . *gone!*"

His finger went to the communicator and he snapped a switch.

"Press room," he said wearily. "Joe? . . . Stop the works . . . Yeah, whole new front page coming down . . . Sure I know it's late . . . Who gives a damn!"

Angrily now, he snapped off the communicator and went in to peer over Getchell's shoulder as he typed madly. As he watched, his eyes narrowed, and finally he clapped Getchell on the shoulder.

"Get that set up, big, and tell Joe to be ready for a follow-up extra. Then put her to bed. I'm going out to get a story that will make yours look like a pimple on a hog!"

Then, as Getchell stared in amazement, he ran heavily toward his office, snatched his hat and coat, and lumbered down the stairs and into the street.

MARK WEBBLEY drove his car through the arch at the side of

his mansion and continued on to the garage at the rear. Here he put the car away and walked back toward the house. He passed one huge tree, then stopped dead in his tracks as a dark figure moved out from its shadow and stood before him. It wasn't too dark to see the glint of metal under the moonlight.

"Good evening, Mr. Webbley," said the intruder.

"Wallace!" gasped Webbley.

"Yes," said Wallace. "But let's not stand out here and talk. We can do business better inside."

Webbley looked woodenly at the gun in Wallace's hand a second, then he walked toward the house.

"Come on," he said.

Inside, Webbley led the way to the library, snapped on the light and turned to face Wallace.

"What do you want?"

Wallace frowned.

"The last time I was here you gave me the wrong packet . . ." He fished in his pocket and threw the packet of small-denomination bonds on the desk beneath the table lamp ". . . I just brought them back. Now, if you don't mind, I'll have the letters."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Webbley levelly. "I gave you the packet. If these . . ." indicating the bonds ". . . were what it contained, that's all there is."

"I know you're lying," Wallace remarked, "because I know what *really* was in the packet. And because there were bonds instead of letters, I know you know what was in the packet, and that you still have the original contents. And those letters must have some value to you to make you throw away five thousand dollars to keep them. Exactly what do you intend doing with the letters, Webbley? Why do you want them? Insofar as I

know, they are worthless to you, except perhaps in a dishonest way, and why should you resort to something like that? Actually, the only use *you* could put them to would be blackmail. I believe I'm right in saying that you are beneath that."

Webbley snorted.

"Blackmail! Wallace, isn't that why you want them?"

"Certainly not," said Wallace easily. "How could I use anything for blackmail which I intend to destroy—and you know I would have done that the last time we met. By the way, Webbley, that little trap you laid was quite legal, and upright citizenship, but it was, shall we say, unethical?"

"Is murdering ethical?" asked Webbley bitingly.

"No. And I expect to pay society's price for any murdering I do—and Webbley, a man can't die any deader for two murders than he can for one."

Webbley paled.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, since you know what's in those letters you are presently going to help me burn, I might be tempted to think it was necessary to shut you up, except that I hardly believe you'd ever be able to produce any other proof."

WEBBLEY looked at Wallace calculatingly.

"Just what do you propose to gain from destroying the letters you claim I have? Surely you aren't afraid a previous crime will catch up with you? That would be an anti-climax to your latest deeds."

"Let's just say my interests are . . . philanthropic."

Webbley sat down on the arm of a chair. He looked shrewdly at Wallace, who frowned.

"Say it," said Wallace. "I can see

it in your face."

"All right. Wallace, you're on the wrong track. I gave you the packet unopened. I didn't know what was in it. Since you are so certain that what I gave you was not the original contents, then I must conclude that what I anticipated, but must have been too late to circumvent, actually did occur—and that was that James Hartley got to the safe deposit vault before I did and got the original contents."

Wallace's face grew red with anger.

"Are you taking me for a fool?" he snapped. "No, Webbley, I know better than that. Besides, if Hartley had gotten the letters, he would have done exactly as I did: destroyed them. Webbley, get those letters. If you don't, I'll kill you right here and now, and burn this house to the ground!"

Webbley paled. But he continued his shrewd analysis.

"Then why did James Hartley come to my office tonight, where I was telling Arnold Masterson exactly what I have been trying to tell you—that I haven't any mysterious letters—and shoot him down in cold blood?"

Wallace staggered as though he had been struck.

"What . . . what did you say;" he croaked hoarsely.

"I said, Hartley shot Arnold Masterson dead in my office tonight and is now in custody."

Wallace sagged as though all the energy had been drained from him. The surprise on his features was absolute, and his dismay was patently evident. Webbley looked at him, launched his final clever sally.

"Does that spoil your plans, Wallace?" he murmured softly. "Can it be that with Arnold Masterson dead, your purpose is defeated?"

Wallace jerked erect, his dazed look left him and his hand tightened around

the butt of his gun. All at once a hard, harsh laugh broke from his lips.

"So you've got it all figured out, eh? The legal mind! Reasoning power over brute force! Now it's my turn to laugh!"

Webbley looked suddenly perturbed.

"What do you mean?"

"Just the way you reasoned things out. Shrewd, aren't you? But for one thing— You don't know *who* I am! And so, you made a mistake in analyzing my reasons for wanting the letters. Now I *know* you know what's in the letters, and I know you've got them!"

WEBBLEY, your first mistake in reasoning was in thinking I wouldn't return to this particular place to get the letters. You also reasoned that I'd reason you wouldn't keep them either here or in your office.

"Next, until tonight, you didn't see any special value, to you, in the letters; and from what I learned from—well, a friend of mine—it would be of much more importance to you to have them destroyed, in which case you wouldn't have objected. You see, I know how you helped Helen get all those securities, and perhaps I begin to see why.

"That's a laugh, Webbley, because the whole shooting match belongs to *me* now! All those nice securities Helen got through your work—at a neat percentage to you, no doubt—were to fight me in my own efforts, which you found out about in that same open market. But Helen unintentionally double-crossed you.

"Actually, when I married her, I didn't know *who* I was fighting, and I had the wrong man in mind. Poor Arnold—he got a raw deal all the way around!"

"When I die, at the hands of the State, the Masterson fortune will go to

the one person who really deserves it, Paula Masterson! Ironic, isn't it? You two worked so hard to make sure she wouldn't get a dime, in spite of any new will Masterson was planning—frankly because of my pressure. And then Helen got a brilliant idea to settle it in one stroke, and in the doing, set you down on the outside, too!

"Clever girl, Helen! And the rottenest female that I've ever seen! She made Paula's life miserable. She forced her will on her father. She persecuted them both. She was nothing but meanness and hate and rottenness. God, how I hated her!"

"I paid her off in coin, by Heaven. And for awhile I thought I'd messed all my plans up. Until you started reasoning, Webbley, just now. Reasoning from a wrong beginning! It's axiomatic, Webbley, that a conclusion drawn from an incorrect inference is bound to be a wrong conclusion."

"Now, Webbley, get those papers! Or I'll kill you where you stand!"

At last Mark Webbley's calm calculating assurance was gone. Now he was frankly frightened.

"I haven't got them," he babbled.

WALLACE drew his gun up deliberately, lined its sights directly between Webbley's eyes. His finger whitened on the trigger.

"Get the letters!"

His voice was so low that it was almost inaudible.

Webbley broke.

In panic, he turned to the bookcase, pulled out several books, two of which tumbled to the floor with nerve-shocking noise. Then he produced one from behind, opened it to reveal it as a dummy with a hollow interior. In this hollow was a packet of letters, yellow with age and held together with a rubber band. The rubber band was a new

one.

"Bring them here," directed Wallace.

Wallace put them down on the table and stood there, his body trembling.

Wallace snapped off the rubber band, thumbed through the letters. He prodded one out of the envelope with one hand, glanced through the contents. Then he nodded.

"Put them in the fireplace and touch a match to them," he directed.

Webbley complied; and in a moment both men watched the letters flare up and burn brightly. When they had been entirely consumed, Wallace prodded the ashes to powder with his toe, then turned to Webbley.

"You know what was in them," he said. "I should kill you, but now there would be no point in it. Arnold Masterson is dead. How and why, I can't understand. What could have made that foolish boy do such a thing . . .?"

Abruptly Wallace laughed loudly. Then he backed out of the room and made his way to the front door. Webbley didn't move from where he stood. Outside, Wallace ran swiftly down the roadway to the street, jumped into Paula's convertible, and drove away.

As the car vanished a dark figure leaped over the rail of the porch from where it had been stationed in a dark shadow near a library window and ran in the opposite direction. Had anyone been close enough to hear, they might have heard him mutter:

"One million bucks—maybe it isn't gone yet!"

CHAPTER XIII

Anita Catches Her Ghost

THE pitch darkness that comes just before dawn lay over the house by the lake. Anita Burditt, eyes wide in

the darkness, the memory of a dream still in them—a dream in which she fled nakedly through the night, hiding from menacing blackclad figures who always seemed somehow to be pursuing her in a long, low convertible—seemed to hear the purr of its powerful motor still in her ears. For a moment she lay there, at a loss to separate dream from reality. Then the purr of the motor came again. This time she knew it was no dream.

At her side, Paula's breathing was deep and regular, and Anita thrust a cautious foot from beneath the covers, put it to the floor. In a moment she was out of the bed, standing beside the window, peering down into the blackness at the rear of the house. There was nothing to be seen; only the jagged line that separated the brilliantly starlit, but moonless sky from the forest behind the house.

The car that had driven in was invisible. No motor purred now. For several moments Anita stood there, undecided. She wondered if she really had locked the door when she had come in so precipitately earlier that night. She decided that she had.

Then, downstairs, she heard a noise. A window being raised!

She might have been paralyzed with terror, so stiffly did the girl stand in the darkness, but somehow the square set of her slim shoulders and the alert, listening poise of her pert head gave the lie to that probability. It was true that her heart was beating as though it would burst in her breast, but there was a calculating attitude in her watchful waiting.

Her intent ears picked up the sound of the window being lowered again. She remembered which window now—the one at the end of the porch which had been broken.

Then came the sound of creaking

stairs.

The "caretaker" was coming up toward their bedroom!

Anita moved now, crossed silently to the door, shut it softly, and slid the bolt home. It made a slight click as it set into place, and Anita's fingers froze to it.

For several moments there was no noise, then came a grating of wood sliding against wood. Quite clearly Anita heard a grunt of effort beyond the door panel to which her tiny ear was tightly pressed. It had been the noise a man might make if lifting something—or himself! Abruptly Anita knew the truth. In her mind's eye was the vision of the trapdoor in the ceiling of the hallway. Through Anita's mind blazed the truth.

Paula Masterson was hiding the killer, Douglas Wallace, here in this house! Right at this moment he was concealing himself for another day in the unfinished attic! And as if in confirmation, once more Anita heard the clatter of a loose board above her, and this time she thought she also heard the muffled sound of a curse. Then all was quiet.

BACK in bed, Anita lay staring at the ceiling until the dawn began creeping into the room. Then she turned and stared long at the relaxed face of Paula Masterson. Puzzled concentration crept into her eyes; and once or twice she even shook her head vigorously, so intense were the thoughts that crowded through her head.

"Why?" she whispered soundlessly.

Anita Burditt, with the surety that a woman has, knew beyond all doubt that Paula Masterson was in love with James Hartley. This being so, then why did she conceal the killer of her own foster-sister from the law? It couldn't be because she loved him?

Outside, the noise of awakening birds grew with the brightening of the day, and finally Anita got up, stealthily put on her clothes, and went to the door. For a moment she listened before she opened the door, peered out. The hallway was deserted.

She made her way to the stairway, passed directly under the trapdoor in the ceiling. A tall man could just reach it, shove it aside, and lift himself over the lip.

Downstairs Anita fumbled in her pocket for the paper with a number on it, peered at it in the half-light of the lower floor, then picked up the phone. For a long moment there was no answer and Anita jiggled the hook. At last a sleepy operator answered. Anita gave the number in almost inaudible tones, her mouth pressed close to the receiver.

Another wait, then another sleepy voice, this time a man's. It was the desk clerk's at the hotel where Joe Grimes was staying. The hotel itself was in the village, perhaps eight miles from the lake.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Joseph Grimes," said Anita.

This time there was a longer wait. Then at last a familiar voice sounded in her ear.

"Grimes speaking," came his sleepy voice.

"Oh, Joe," breathed Anita. "I've got Douglas Wallace for you . . ."

"What!" The exclamation came like a shot over the phone. Joe Grimes' voice was no longer sleepy.

Anita went on swiftly.

"He's hiding out here at the lake, in the attic of the house—and Paula knows he's here! He just got back from somewhere, in Paula's car. She told me last night she left the keys in it so the caretaker could use it . . ."

"Honey," interrupted Grimes, "you

sit tight until I get there. I'll be out in a half-hour or less!"

The line went dead as Grimes hung up. Anita hung up too, and sat still a moment. Then, behind her, there was the slightest sound. Before she could whirl her startled body around, a man's soft voice came.

"Is he coming?"

ANITA faced Douglas Wallace with terror on her features. She clapped a hand to her mouth to suppress a scream.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Burditt?" Wallace hastened to say. "I'm certainly not going to hurt you. In fact, I heard you go down stairs, and I came down to talk things over with you."

Anita recovered her composure to some extent.

"Talk things over with me . . . ?" she said wonderingly.

"Yes. I'm going to give myself up, and I thought it would be a nice boost for your boy friend if he was the one to whom I surrendered. I rather like that young man."

Anita gasped in astonishment.

"You saw me come in?" Wallace went on.

She nodded mutely.

"I promised Paula I'd come back," said Wallace. "She's wanted me to give up, but there was something I had to do. Now it's done, and I'm ready."

"Then . . . then Paula wasn't deliberately hiding you?"

"Certainly not. She suspected I was in the neighborhood, but until I confronted her yesterday afternoon, she didn't know I was in the house. I didn't know you two planned to come out here, and I thought this would be an excellent hideaway for a time. Your coming changed my plans, but fortunately I got my work done. Borrowing Paula's car helped immeasurably. And now,

Miss Burditt, what do you say we wake Paula and have some breakfast before your boy friend arrives with the manacles?"

Wallace's wide grin held Anita spell-bound for a moment. Then she relaxed.

"One of us must be crazy!" she exclaimed.

"Then it must be me," laughed Wallace. "But perhaps there's a reason. It's been a very lonely life—except for Paula. I'm not sorry it's going to be over soon."

He walked to the stairway and shouted:

"Paula! Paula, wake up! Time for breakfast!"

The sound of startled bare feet on the floor above, the opening of a door, and Paula appeared on the landing, still in her pyjamas.

"Doug!" she cried. "What on earth . . . ?"

He laughed gaily.

"Get dressed and come down for breakfast," he said. "We'll have time to get a bite to eat before Mr. Grimes arrives to accept my surrender to the forces of law and order."

* * *

JOE GRIMES stuffed the newspaper into his pocket, his face grim, and fairly raced out of the hotel toward his car. For the next half-hour he drove almost recklessly down the narrow gravel roads toward the house on the lake. Several times he patted his side pocket where his gun reposed.

"This gets screwier every minute," he muttered to himself. "Killings without reasons!"

He drove into the archway toward the house as the sun was just making a sea of golden sparkles of the waters of the lake. It was a glorious golden autumn morning. Here and there amid the green of the giant pines the gold and red of an occasional oak added a burst

of color. But Grimes paid no heed. His attention was focused on the house just below him.

Driving to the side entrance, he leaped from his car, bounded to the porch and reached the doorway to find Anita waiting for him.

"Where is he, honey?" asked Grimes tensely. His gun was in his hand.

He kissed Anita hastily.

"Right in here, Mr. Grimes," said Doug Wallace heartily. "Come on in and have some bacon and eggs. That little girl of yours is a wonderful cook."

He appeared in the doorway, a plate and fork in his hands.

"Good morning, Mr. Grimes. Glad to see you. No one I'd rather ride back to town with than you. Sort of closes the books right where we began, although this time on a more cheerful note."

Grimes gaped, a study in stupefied astonishment.

"Wallace has decided to give himself up, and he wants you to get the credit," explained Anita.

Wallace nodded.

"Bringing me in will be a real feather in your cap," he said. "I imagine I happen to be the biggest case this State has ever had. Maybe you two will be able to get married on that promotion you're sure to get, Joe."

Grimes recovered his breath at last.

"Well I'll be damned!" he said. "Sure, I'll have some eggs!"

Wallace led the way into the house, to the kitchen, where Paula was setting dishes of fruit on the table.

"Good morning, Joe," she smiled. "Rather a surprising meeting, isn't it?" Her face sobered, and Grimes noted the expression in her eyes as she looked anxiously at Wallace.

"Yeah," he said uncertainly. "Yes, it sure is."

He removed his coat, hung it over a

chair. As he did so, the paper fell from his pocket and lay on the floor. For one stricken instant Paula stared at the huge black headline, then she reached tremblingly down to pick the paper up.

"No!" she breathed piteously. "Oh no, no . . ."

WALLACE caught her as she fell, and Anita leaped forward.

"She's fainted!" she cried. "Bring her in here, on the couch . . ."

She led the way toward the couch in the living room, and Wallace put her down. For an instant he stared down at her white face, then he went back to the kitchen. Anita followed him, snatched up a pitcher of water and a wash cloth, returned to the living room.

Without a word Wallace picked up the paper, sat down to read it. Grimes stood motionless, watching him with narrowed eyes. Wallace read on:

**ATTORNEY MURDERS
MASTERSON HEIR!**

**Arnold Masterson Shot Down
in Cold Blood**

James Hartley, Killer

Arnold Masterson, one of two living relatives of the late Carter Masterson, whose death of a heart attack occurred on the same night his daughter, Helen, was gruesomely shot to death by the insane altar killer, Douglas Wallace, last night met a similar mad end at the hands of James Hartley, junior member of the law duo of Webbley and Hartley, legal representatives of the late Carter Masterson.

The killing occurred in the office of Mark Webbley, senior attorney, during a business conference between Webbley and Arnold Masterson at 9:20 last night.

According to Webbley, the shooting occurred while he was procuring legal documents from the files in an inner office. He heard the sound of someone making violent entry from the outer door, then a shot, and the sound of flight through a door leading to the corridor of the building.

Seizing a gun, Webbley rushed in pursuit and captured Hartley in a thrilling battle.

Captured, Hartley offered a fan-

tastic story, claiming to have been on the verge of entry of the office intent on conferring with Webbley, when he heard a shot. Rushing in, he claims, he saw Arnold Masterson lying dead on the floor, the murder weapon beside him. Snatching it up, he pursued an alleged killer into the corridor, only to have him escape down the stairway. The murder gun, says Webbley, was his own gun. As a member of the firm, Hartley knew where it was kept.

According to Ben Carey, elevator operator on duty at the time, no one escaped via the stairway, nor was Hartley's name entered on the entry record on the ground floor as is required of all persons entering or leaving the building after regular business hours. Hartley did not come up via the elevator, but instead made his way up to the thirteenth floor by climbing twenty-six flights of stairs.

By his own admission, Hartley confesses to have known that Arnold Masterson was in Webbley's office at the time of the killing.

Hartley is being held without bail, pending a hearing of the coroner's jury. The district attorney has expressed the opinion that an indictment and speedy trial will be forthcoming. Said the district attorney:

"The reputation and good name of the whole state is at stake. We shall show the world that justice is swift and sure in this city!"

WALLACE finished reading, his face pale, and looked up at Grimes.

"They've got the wrong man," he said.

Grimes stared, noncommittal.

"I killed Arnold Masterson," Wallace went on. "That story of Hartley's is entirely true. I did escape down the stairway, and Hartley did pursue me. He might have caught me, too, if Webbley hadn't stopped him."

"So that was the job you had to finish?" asked Grimes.

"I didn't intend to let Paula know of it," said Wallace. "I'd intended to tell you after we were on our way. It was extremely unfortunate that you brought that paper along."

He rose to his feet.

"Come on, Joe," he said. "Let's go before Paula recovers. I hate scenes—

and I guess I've hurt her enough. Anita can tell her the truth. It's really Hartley she's worried about. They're in love, you know . . ."

Grimes nodded, put on his coat.

He kissed Anita, who had come back for a towel and heard this last exchange of words.

"Tell her," he said. "Wallace has confessed the Masterson killing, too. That's where he was last night. We're going now. The poor girl's had enough shock."

Wallace walked ahead of Grimes out to the car. There was a relieved look in his eyes as he sat waiting for Grimes to climb in at the wheel.

"Even if she notices the time discrepancy," he muttered to himself, "I don't think she'll mention it. Thank heaven for a woman's reasoning in love!"

"What's that?" asked Grimes.

"I said, it's too bad you brought that paper," said Wallace aloud. "Let's go. I'm anxious to get back to town and get Hartley out of jail."

CHAPTER XIV

Cars That Pass

EDWIN WILEY pulled the last sheet from his typewriter and handed it to the copy boy.

"Take it downstairs," he directed. Then he flipped the communicator switch. "Joe, copy's coming down. Set up the presses for an extra, and get them all ready to run. I want fast action on this. Then wait till I call you. Or if I don't call by midnight, run it in the regular edition."

Breaking connection, he got to his feet, left the office. An hour later he was on his way out of town, driving alone.

It was mid-morning when he turned into the little road that was indicated

by the sign as the entrance and access to "The Pines." Here he proceeded more cautiously until his speedometer indicated that his destination was but a half-mile distant. There he drove the car off the road, into a clump of bushes in the trees. Then, satisfied that the car was not visible from the road, he made his way on foot the balance of the way.

He reached the top of the bluff overlooking the lake at a point where the trees were thickest. For long moments he studied the situation.

"Don't seem to be anybody in sight," he said. "Maybe I got the wrong hunch on this thing, but the old girl at the Masterson mansion said the gal'd be out here. Mighty close-mouthed that old dame was. Mightn't have told me a thing if I hadn't said it was headquarters calling."

Wiley made his way down the slope, approaching the house from the side nearest the forest. Here the trees came all the way down to the shoreline. He found himself beside the boathouse. The water was low, and by dint of maneuvering over several half-submerged rocks, he was able to make his way under the bottom of the door, which was perhaps two feet above water level, and into the boathouse.

Here he surveyed the powerful launch, set on its rollers for the winter. The mere unfastening of several chains and the release of a pinion would send the boat sliding down into the water, he saw. For a few moments he sat on the wharf alongside the boat and listened.

Above his head he heard a door slam, then footsteps on the porch. The sound of female voices came to his ears, and he settled down to listen.

"THE man must be insane," came one voice. "Why would he kill peo-

ple in cold blood like that?"

"Please, Anita," came another voice. "Let's not talk about it. I thought at first he did it for me, but there was no reason to kill Arnold Masterson—he got only a dollar in the will. I thought he killed Helen so that I would get her share of the estate—but now I don't know . . . But let's forget it, Anita. And if you don't mind, I wish you'd begin packing. I want to go home. I just can't enjoy myself any further. What if Doug's confession doesn't convince the police and they still hold Jim?"

"Oh, but it will," Anita said quickly.

In the boathouse below, Edwin Wiley blinked in astonishment.

"What's all this?" he asked himself blankly. "The way they talk . . ."

The distant sound of a telephone bell came to his ears, and the sound of feet came from above.

"I'll get it," came Anita's voice hastily.

For a moment there was silence, then the sound of running feet as Anita returned, sobbing wildly.

"What on earth?" came Paula's distressed voice. "What's happened? Oh, Anita, please. Stop crying and tell me what it is?" There was panic in Paula's voice now.

"It's . . . it's Joe!" came Anita's tragic voice. "He's in the hospital. Wallace hit him, wrecked the car, and escaped again!"

The shocked silence above was broken only by Anita's sobs, which ceased slowly as Paula evidently comforted her. Down below, Wiley clenched his fists.

"What a story!" he breathed. "What a story this is getting to be! And I'm right on it!"

Anita's voice came.

"I've got to go, Paula. I've got to go to him!"

"Of course, Anita," Paula said. "You go get ready, then take the car. I'll pack our clothes and follow later in a cab. Run now, honey, and phone me the minute you get there and find out how he is."

The footsteps of both girls, one running, the other walking in slow hopelessness, came to Wiley's ears. He remained where he was, thinking.

"I'll wait till the girl's gone, then I'll have a talk with Miss Paula Masterson," he decided.

Some time later the sound of the car driving away came to his ears. Wiley waited a few more minutes, then rose to his feet. But he paused as the sound of a new car—the motor was deeper, more throaty—coming into the driveway stopped him. He frowned and listened.

FOOTSTEPS came on the porch. Voices came, one a man's, the other that of Paula Masterson. Then there was the sound of a scuffle.

"What the hell?" said Wiley, surprise in his voice. He listened intently, then a moment later made his way toward the door that led up into the house. Maybe it was open. . . .

It proved to be locked.

Disappointed, Wiley made his way back along the wharf, reached the side of the launch. Then behind him came a sound at the door he had just left. A bolt shot back.

Startled, Wiley stared around. There was no time to scramble out of the boathouse the way he had entered. Without further thought he dived into the launch, scrambled under a tarpaulin and down into the tiny cabin of the ship and lay there, silently listening.

* * *

MARK WEBBLEY swung his big Mercedes-Benz to the side of

the road with a curse when the oncoming convertible came at him without slackening speed. It swept past with a swish, and Webbley stared in indignation at the back of the driver's curly head.

"Woman drivers!" He snorted. He drove out onto the road again and continued on his way. In a moment he reached the archway with its legend "The Pines" and turned in.

Bringing the car to a halt in the driveway, he got out, climbed the stairs and knocked at the door. Paula Masterson opened to admit him.

She looked surprised.

"Mr. Webbley," she said, rather coldly. "What brings you here?"

"May I come in?" asked Webbley.

"Yes, I suppose so. But I'm packing, getting ready to go back to town . . ."

"Cutting your vacation short?"

"Naturally," said Paula with some resentment. "Certainly you must know why?"

"Yes, of course I do," said Webbley. "I'll never understand why he did it. It was an insane thing to do."

"He didn't . . ." began Paula hotly, then stopped as Webbley looked at her.

"I'm sorry, Paula," he said firmly. "But he did. I *saw* him do it."

Paula looked startled, her face blanched.

"You . . . you *saw* him do it?"

"Yes," said Webbley, a crafty look coming into his eyes. "But tell me, are you alone here?"

"Yes. A . . . a girl friend of mine was here with me, but she left just a while ago."

Webbley lifted his eyebrows.

"Was that your car she left in? The one that nearly smashed into me on the road?"

"Nearly smashed into you . . .

oh!" gasped Paula. "Yes, I guess it must have been. Maybe I shouldn't have let the poor girl drive. She was so upset."

"Upset? About what?"

"Her boy friend, a state policeman, was injured when Doug Wallace escaped from him on the way back to town this morning."

Webbley gasped.

"Wallace!" he exclaimed. "Captured . . . and escaped again!"

"Not exactly. He gave himself up, right here. But he must have changed his mind. Anyway, he slugged Mr. Grimes, wrecked their car, and escaped again . . ." Paula was on the verge of tears again. "Oh, why did he do it? It's . . . it's just insane!"

"Yes," said Webbley, "I believe that's correct. And now I'm sure the police will take no further chances. It'll be shoot to kill when they find him again. But, Paula, that isn't why I came up here."

"What then?" Paula wondered.

"I just . . . well, I have a sort of confession to make."

A CONFESSION?" Paula's eyes grew icy. "Perhaps something about some security deals you made with Helen? If you've heard about it from Jim, you don't need to come now with any 'confessions.' It won't change things. I think it was a scoundrelly thing to do, Mr. Webbley. And I don't think certain of your dealings are going to look too good in court."

Webbley's face clouded and anger seeped into his eyes.

"I'm certain they won't," he snapped, "and that's why they're never going to get to court."

Paula's eyes filled with animosity.

"And why won't they?"

Webbley regarded her strangely.

"First," he said, "allow me to pro-

ceed with my 'confession' if you don't object. It will clarify many things in your mind."

Paula sat down.

"Go ahead," she invited uncompromisingly.

"Well, to tell the truth, for the past ten years I have been stealing—yes, that's the word—stealing portions of your father's assets . . ."

Paula's face had assumed an incredulous cast, and she sat as though she could hardly believe her ears as Webbley went on:

"It amounts to a considerable sum," said Webbley smoothly, a dancing light far back in his eyes that seemed somehow horrible to Paula. "But Mr. Masterson, your *foster* father—" for some reason he emphasized the word *foster*—"never suspected me. He trusted me implicitly. He was a great man, Paula, but once he had beaten an opponent, he thought that the beating was final. You might say that he had a trifle too much egotism in his make-up which served to weaken an otherwise powerful and masterful character. He beat me, once, Paula, and then, as he did to others—Herbert Whitney for one—set me up again, in his own camp. Most of those fools prated of his magnanimous character; none of them seemed to realize, as I did, that what we really were amounted to being his slaves.

"Well, to get on, when Douglas Wallace came into the picture, I found that here was one man whose association was rather mysterious. To me he represented a danger, because he was one of those rare persons who was not afraid of Masterson. In fact, he began to engage in certain activities that came close to mine. I believe that he was doing it for you. Perhaps insanity explains his incomprehensible actions.

"Helen, too, learned of his actions,

and came to me. So, I saw another chance to gain a large portion of the Masterson fortune for myself. I induced her to allow me to 'gamble' in the market and thus 'win' for her certain stocks and securities which gave her control over quite a few of the Masterson interests. Of course, she couldn't know that I wasn't gambling; that it was actually theft. But she was, as most women are, simple-minded when it comes to business, and it did not seem strange to her that she could acquire six million dollars in securities with only a paltry outlay of cash in the beginning to start with. I think she gave me something in the neighborhood of eighty thousand dollars in cash.

"Well, Paula, she double-crossed me. She married Douglas Wallace, who in his turn, had *legally* fought the market and acquired a not inconsiderable portion of outstanding stocks. Perhaps she figured even to force me out of the picture. She didn't count on that unpredictable factor, the deeds of a madman. Wallace killed her at the altar in a fit of what must have been insanity.

"However, as it turned out, I was the sole gainer. I, and not Douglas Wallace, in spite of the will of Helen Masterson, am the sole owner of the six million dollars' worth of Masterson securities she *thought* were in her name. Naturally, all this is not in my own personal name, but in certain corporations of which I am the silent and invisible head.

"So, the way it stands now, I own the bulk of the Masterson estate. As its legal representative, in the muddle that will ensue, my fees will eat up a great share of the balance. Wallace will be either executed by the state, or committed to an insane asylum. Arnold Masterson is dead—for which crime James Hartley will pay with his life. In

short, the only other living heir to the Masterson millions, and the only other obstacle in my path to complete control, is, my dear Paula, your own little self!"

PAULA was as white as a corpse as she sat there before Webbley, crushed beneath his avalanche of incredible "confession."

"The . . . the only obstacle . . . ?" she managed to force from between paralyzed lips.

"Yes," said Webbley, a triumphant gleam in his eyes. "And an obstacle that will soon be eliminated."

"What do you mean?" asked Paula faintly, her fingers gripping the arm of the chair in which she sat.

"I mean," said Webbley in tones of ice, "I am going to kill you!"

Paula leaped to her feet, her eyes wild. A scream surged to her lips, but Webbley leaped forward, clapped a hand over her mouth. Then, as she struggled frantically in his arms, he lashed a fist at her jaw and she slumped to the floor with a moan.

Swiftly Webbley ripped several curtains from the windows, bound her feet and hands and gagged her. Then he picked up her unconscious body and made his way down the stairs to the basement and toward the door of the boathouse.

He slid the bolt aside and opened the door, kicking it wide with his foot. Then he carried the girl to the boat, dumped her into it, went back to unfasten the chains that held the craft fast. Only the pinion held it now.

A few catches on the boathouse door loosened under his fingers, then it slid up as he pushed it. The light of day came into the boathouse. Webbley climbed into the launch, knocked the pinion loose, and the launch slid swiftly out into the water, riding the wooden

rails smoothly.

A moment more and the canvas was off the motor housing, and Webbley slid into the driver's seat. He stepped on the starter, was rewarded by the whine from beneath the motor housing. It persisted for a moment, then the motor caught. Its spasmodic coughing steadied to a roar, and Webbley headed the boat out into the lake.

There was no one to see. Trespassers had never dared to encroach on the lake-encircling private property of Carter George Masterson, the man who never did anything except on a magnificent scale.

Webbley's eyes held exultance as he realized it.

* * *

JOE GRIMES and Douglas Wallace drove for a dozen miles in silence, then Wallace peered ahead through the windshield with sudden interest. He kept his eyes on a large car of foreign make coming toward them.

"One of them Mercedes-Benz swank jobs," offered Grimes.

Wallace nodded as though he had only half-heard, and he turned his head about swiftly as the car passed, apparently trying to gather in every detail of the car's features.

"Yes," he said vaguely at last. There was a frown in his eyes, and a thoughtful look on his face. Grimes looked at him peculiarly then returned his attention to his driving.

Wallace pulled out the paper and carefully re-read the story of the murder of Arnold Masterson. As he read, his frown grew more pronounced. At last a gasp escaped him, and he paled.

"So that's why the letters were valuable to him!" he exclaimed.

"What?" asked Grimes. "What letters?"

Wallace looked at him.

"Sorry," he said. "Merely thinking aloud."

But there was a sinking sensation of alarm in him that grew to all-consuming fear as the car sped on. He crushed the paper in his fists until his knuckles grew white. Then, as though gone suddenly mad, he smashed his fist into Grimes' jaw, gripped the wheel in a frenzy and held the rocking car momentarily on the road while he trod on the brake pedal. Brakes shrieked and the car slowed, but it skidded and tipped dangerously. Then with a crash of metal, it tumbled over into the ditch.

Grimes' inert body crashed against the windshield, then dropped back, eased down by Wallace's arms. Wallace himself shook his head dazedly a moment, then climbed out of the car.

A moment later a passing car pulled to a halt and its driver leaped out.

"Anybody badly hurt?" he yelled.

Wallace pointed back toward the overturned car, indicated the figure of Joe Grimes, lying half-out of the open door.

"He's been knocked out," he said. "Not hurt bad, though, I guess. Better help me carry him up and get him to a hospital."

The autoist, shaking his head as he surveyed the terrain, muttered a bit.

"What in hell caused it? Going too fast?"

He reached Grimes, placed his arms under the state policeman's shoulders.

"Take his feet . . ." he began, then stopped, dropped Grimes with a yell, and raced back toward his car. He was too late. Douglas Wallace was already in the driver's seat. With a roar the car sped away, hurtled down the road in the direction from which Grimes and Wallace had just come.

And as he hurled the car along, Wallace's face was grey.

"That was Webbley in that car," he said in agonized recapitulation, "I recognize the car from last night. *He's* the one who killed Arnold Masterson, not Hartley. And that means only one thing—he's on his way now to finish the job. He's on his way to kill Paula, and get the whole of all he and Helen filched from Carter Masterson! Lord, what a fool I've been not to realize it . . .!"

He drove on madly.

CHAPTER XV

Newshound on the Trail

ROY GETCHELL flashed his best smile at the nurse on duty on the emergency floor.

"How's about a date tonight, good-looking?" he asked.

The nurse snorted.

"With a reporter? Do you think I'm simple-minded?"

"Whatsamatter with reporters?" said Getchell indignantly, then added hastily: "No, don't tell me! But listen, honey, your job is nursing, patching up people with some of their anatomy mangled up. Now, my job is reporting. I got stories to fix up—and this particular story has a lot of its anatomy scrambled up. Seeing as how a date wouldn't be no reward to you, maybe a nice five-pound box of candy . . .?"

The nurse laughed at him.

"Candy? You'll have to do better than that. Nurses get candy all over the place. The patients usually can't eat it, so we do. Try again."

Getchell grinned suddenly.

"Okay, starchy. Then it's the date; there ain't nothing else sweeter than candy that I can think of. Take it or leave it." He flashed his press card. "I understand the patient ain't so bad hurt but what he can have visitors—

and I could go around you, easy-like."

"Why don't you?" she said sweetly. Getchell began to get exasperated.

"Because I'd rather have a straight story and I figure I can get it straighter from a nice gal like you than from the governor . . ."

"The governor?"

"Sure. He put Grimes on this job. In fact, he ordered the department to put everybody and anybody on the job who could get Wallace! Well, Grimes got him, but for some reason couldn't hold him. I wanna know why. And maybe even Grimes wouldn't tell me. I don't know what's behind this, and why the governor should take orders from anybody. Maybe it's that 'anybody' I'm looking for. Seems to me he's the key to this whole yarn."

The nurse looked pleased with herself.

"So you think I'm important?"

"And how, honey! Now, do you know anything?"

"Not a thing," she said promptly.

"Look, I know better than that," Getchell said. "Every accident case that comes in here talks his head off trying to tell the world it 'wasn't his fault'. And the only people they got to talk to is the nurse and the orderly who patches them up. They babble before they get over the bumps on their heads, and have time to think things over."

"This one didn't say anything."

"Why?"

"He was out cold."

"Whatsamatter with him?"

"Concussion."

"How's he now?"

"Ten minutes ago he yelled for the Chief of Police."

GETCHELL jumped. He turned toward the door.

"What about that date?" the nurse said quickly.

"Saturday night," said Getchell. "The whole works—you do the picking. One condition."

"And that?"

"You take me to Grimes now, via the back way, and then keep your mouth shut. I want this unofficial. And if somebody comes—the chief, for instance—before I get ten minutes with Grimes, stall him by saying the patient is being evacuated, or something. Get me?"

The nurse looked at him with a twinkle in her eye.

"If I peg you right, evacuated is the word!"

"If I hafta torture it outa him!" promised Getchell.

"This way," said the nurse, getting to her feet and leading the way toward a door. Getchell followed, his intent gaze fixed on her trim white-clad ankles.

"Where in hell's the chief?" Grimes exclaimed, before Getchell could say a word. "This . . ."

"On the way," said Getchell promptly. "What's the trouble?"

"Who're you?"

"Plainclothes," said Getchell promptly. "Spill it, I ain't got all day."

"Hartley didn't kill Masterson," Grimes said hastily. "The guy's as innocent as the day he was born!"

Getchell stiffened.

"You're nuts!" he said incredulously. "He's sewed up tighter'n a drum."

"Wallace did it. He confessed to me when he gave himself up to me today. His whole story checked. He came in, shot Arnold Masterson while Webbley was in his inner office, then heard somebody come in the outer door and beat it out the conference room door into the hallway. He says he dropped

the gun on the floor. Even knew where it was because he'd been in Webbley's office once with old man Masterson when Webbley had been cleaning it. He ran down the stairs, the way he came up, and then Webbley, dashing out of his office after the shot, caught Hartley apparently red-handed. Wallace got away."

"That's a hot one!" breathed Getchell. "Then Wallace gave up to you?"

"Yes?"

"How come you didn't bring him in?"

"On the way back to town he slugged me, wrecked the car, and beat it. According to the orderly who fixed me up, the man who brought me in, finally, picked up me and a motorist who stopped to help only to have Wallace grab his car and drive away."

"You don't know which way he went?"

"Back the way he was coming, according to the motorist," said Grimes.

"DAMNED funny he'd changed his mind," observed Getchell.

"I can't figure that out either," worried Grimes. "He was a friend of Hartley's, and when he heard Hartley'd been blamed for the Masterson killing, he confessed. Then, on the way back, he began reading the account in the paper, and suddenly he got to thinking. He muttered something about seeing why somebody wanted some letters, then all at once he bashed me. It was lucky that the traffic was light. I lost control of the car, and he grabbed the wheel. In fact, the only cars we had met along that whole stretch were a Mercedes-Benz and the guy who apparently picked me up."

"A what did you say?" breathed Getchell.

"The guy who picked me up?" asked Grimes, puzzledly.

"No, the car you saw."

"A Mercedes-Benz. I remember it, because Wallace stared at it like he never saw a foreign car before."

Getchell leaped to his feet.

"Jumping catfish!"

Grimes looked at Getchell dazedly.

"What's that got to do . . . ?" he began.

"Nothing," said Getchell promptly. "But I gotta go now. When the chief gets here, give him the dope about Hartley. And keep that Mercedes-Benz under your hat until I check up."

"Why?" asked Grimes flatly.

"The governor," said Getchell mysteriously.

Grimes stared, then:

"Oh . . ."

Getchell fairly ran out of the room, and as he passed the desk where the nurse was sitting, leaned over, kissed her on the lips and went on.

"Remember Saturday," he called over his shoulder. "And shoot the works on the trimmings. You deserve 'em."

"You'll regret that," she called after him. "I've got a wonderful imagination!"

Getchell's rapt expression faded a bit as he raced out toward his car.

"I hope I ain't got too much of the same," he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XVI

Marta Tells a Story

"THE lieutenant wants to see you," said the blue-shirted officer, unlocking the door to Hartley's cell.

Hartley got to his feet and followed the man out of the cell-block. He was admitted into the lieutenant's office, took the chair indicated to him.

"You're free, Hartley," said the lieutenant. "You can have all your things—over there—" he indicated Hartley's personal belongings arranged on a table—"and we're sorry we had to hold you."

"I don't get it," said Hartley, dazedly. "How come?"

"The fact is," admitted the lieutenant, "we've discovered your story concerning the killing and your part in it was true. Douglas Wallace has confessed to the deed, and his story checks in every way with your . . ."

Hartley leaped to his feet.

"Doug Wallace!" he exclaimed. "You mean you've got him?"

The lieutenant looked pained.

"We *had* him," he corrected. "He escaped again—after giving himself up. But not before he told the whole story to the officer who accepted his surrender."

"Escaped . . . ?" Hartley looked baffled. "Why on earth did he do a thing like that?"

"That's what we wish we knew," said the lieutenant drily. "But that's beside the point. We're letting you go because it's the only thing we can do. Considering the confession to a legal representative of the law, we can't hold you. If we did, you could sue the state—and frankly, the governor's pretty itchy about the Masterson killings. Any more complications and he'd blow up. If we don't get that guy for keeps, and soon, a lot of heads are going to be lopped off in the department."

As Hartley walked over and began pocketing his belongings, the lieutenant added:

"But just between you and me, don't wander off too far. You're a material witness to the killing and you'll be wanted in that connection."

"I'll be around," promised Hartley.

"I'm as anxious as anybody to get this thing cleared up—but that Wallace has got me going. I can't figure him at all. Why would he give himself up, then change his mind?"

"You don't know?" asked the lieutenant drily. "It's easy. The man's as batty as a belfry in a ghost town! A homicidal maniac."

* * *

AMES HARTLEY hurried to his apartment, bathed, and changed his clothes. Then he put in a call to Paula. The operator rang for some time, then rather uselessly informed him there was no answer. Hartley frowned, hung up and waited awhile.

Three times within the next hour he called, each time with the same result. Hartley consulted his watch and frowned. It didn't seem that either Paula or Anita would be out of the house at this time of the day.

Ten minutes later the phone rang and he leaped to answer it.

"Hello," he said eagerly.

A feminine voice came to his ears. "This is Anita Burditt. I've just gotten in town, to see Joe, but I can't get up to his room right now. So I thought I'd call you as soon as I saw the papers and saw that you had been released. I was so surprised. Wallace didn't tell us that he had killed Arnold Masterson and not you, when he surrendered to Joe at the lake . . ."

Hartley gulped.

"Wait a minute," he gasped. "Not so fast. What's all this about Wallace and the lake?"

"Haven't you seen the papers?" asked Anita.

"No! For Pete's sake, tell me!"

"Well . . ." Anita hesitated, then went on. "It seems Wallace was hiding out at the lake, as a likely spot to hide, not expecting us to come out there. He had a place fixed for him-

self in the attic.

"Then last night he took the car and went to town—to kill Arnold Masterson, he says, according to the papers . . ."

"What do you mean, 'he says'?" Hartley asked.

"Well, he told me, when I called Joe about him being at the lake, that he wanted to give himself up so Joe'd get the credit—and he never even hinted that he'd killed Arnold Masterson. He told Joe that on the way into town. Then for some reason he changed his mind about surrendering, and hit Joe, wrecking the car. When I heard about it, I came right in . . ."

"Where's Paula?" asked Hartley sharply.

"Oh, she ought to be home by now, or on her way. She told me to take the car, and that she'd stay and pack our things and call a cab to come in."

"I've tried to get her at the lake for more than an hour," said Hartley. "There's no answer."

"Then she's left," decided Anita. "Better try her at home. She might be there . . ."

"Anita, did Paula know Wallace was hiding in the house?" asked Hartley.

"I . . ." Anita's voice was hesitant.

"Did she?" insisted Hartley.

"Well, yes. She knew, because she left the keys in the car for him, so he could use it."

HARTLEY gasped, then his voice became serious and worried.

"Anita, I don't think you ought to tell anybody about that. Do you understand? It might mean a lot of trouble for her . . ."

"I understand," said Anita. "We had quite a talk, and I realize a lot more things than I did. She liked Wallace pretty much, and she begged him to give himself up. But he begged

her to let him have enough time to do one more thing. It was a shock to her when she found out what that one more thing was. If she had realized . . .”

“That wasn’t the one more thing he really meant,” said Hartley. “I know that. Why he killed Arnold is what’s bothering me. It’s just . . .” he had been about to say ‘insane’ but chopped the word off and substituted another “. . . inexplicable.”

“I’ve got to go now,” Anita said. “I’m terribly anxious to see Joe. The nurse said he wasn’t hurt bad, but sometimes . . .”

“Go right ahead,” said Hartley, “and thanks for calling me. It was very thoughtful of you.”

“Goodbye,” said Anita.

Hartley heard the click of the receiver in his ear and replaced his own, but picked it up instantly to dial Paula’s home number.

For a moment the phone rang, and then, just as Hartley was about to put the receiver down disappointedly, a voice sounded in his ear. He recognized it.

“Marta,” he said quickly. “This is Mr. Hartley. Is Paula there?”

“Why no, Mr. Hartley,” came Marta’s surprised voice. “Don’t you know—she’s on a vacation out at the lake.”

“No, Marta. She’s left there. She’s on her way home. She ought to be there now.”

“She’s not here yet,” said Marta. “I haven’t heard anything at all from her. It is funny that she would come home and not call me to get things ready. Paula always let me know when she did things . . .”

Hartley felt a twinge of worry, then thrust it aside.

“Have her call me the minute she gets home,” he urged. “I’ve got im-

portant things to say to her . . .”

“Where shall I have her call?” asked Marta, a cautious note in her voice.

“At my apartment.”

“Oh,” said Marta, the relief evident in her voice. “Then you aren’t in jail.”

“No, Marta,” reassured Hartley. “I’m not. They let me go. I didn’t kill Mr. Masterson, Marta. The police caught Douglas Wallace, and he confessed to the killing.”

“Mr. Wallace . . . ?” Marta sounded dazed. “Oh, this is awful!” The old nursemaid’s voice was troubled. “No, no, he shouldn’t have done that . . .”

“What’s that? asked Hartley in perplexity. “What do you mean? You sound as if it were . . . as if you . . .” he floundered.

“I just mean it is terrible that he goes around killing people. I am glad that he has been caught. I don’t think he realizes . . .”

“But that’s it, Marta,” said Hartley, worry in his voice. “He got away again. He was up to the lake, with Paula, and he surrendered there. Then, on the way to town with a policeman, he hit him over the head and escaped again. I’m afraid his mind has snapped . . .”

“Maybe that is so,” came Marta’s troubled voice. “They must catch him again, before he can do more harm . . .”

“Have Paula call me the minute she gets in,” repeated Hartley.

Marta promised, then Hartley hung up.

ANOTHER hour dragged past, and Hartley got an idea. He called the village and asked the operator what time Miss Masterson had put a call through to the cab company.

“I’m sorry,” the operator informed him. “There have been no outgoing

calls from the lake all day. Miss Masterson hasn't called for a cab. I've been on duty since . . .”

But Hartley didn't wait to hear the of it. He put a finger on the phone breaking the connection, then he dialed Paula's number again. When Marta answered, his voice was tense.

“Marta, hasn't she come home yet?”
“No, Mr. Hartley.”

“Well, I called the village, and they say she didn't call for a cab. So she must still be there. I'm afraid I'll have to go out there. If she calls in, Marta, tell her I'm on my way out to get her.”

“Mr. Hartley,” there was real alarm in Marta's voice now. “I think there is something you ought to know. I have been wanting to tell you for some time. It is hardly something to tell over the phone, but I am getting very worried. I think maybe if you understand several things, you will know better what to do.”

“What is it, Marta?” asked Hartley wonderingly.

“I will try to make it short. Mr. Hartley, I know Paula is in love with you, and I know you are in love with her. Even before now, I meant to tell you—and her—about . . .”

“Well, Mr. Hartley, Paula isn't Carter Masterson's foster daughter.”

“What!” gasped Hartley. “Isn't his . . . Marta, what do you mean? He adopted her, legally! I saw the papers myself . . .”

“Paula is not his foster daughter,” insisted Marta. “She is his *real* daughter—his own flesh and blood!”

Hartley almost dropped the phone from his nerveless fingers, and he fought to recover from his amazement at this incredible statement so that he could answer, but it wasn't necessary. Marta went on:

“A long time ago, twenty-three years ago, I was a nurse in a foundling

home. One day, a man brought a baby to me. It was Paula. He told me who she was—because the home would accept no babies in this way, without knowing who they really were. Of course, we kept our secrets . . .”

“To go back to the beginning, Carter Masterson, and his cousin, Arnold Masterson, were the sole heirs to the vast estate of an uncle to them both. But because the uncle hated the mother of Arnold Masterson, he left him nothing. The whole estate went to Carter. But there was one stipulation. Carter Masterson was not to marry until after he was twenty-five and the estate was turned over to him. In the event that he did, the whole estate was to go to Arnold.

“But Carter did marry. He fell in love with Paula's mother, and married her secretly. He felt that after he received his estate, he could again marry her, and no one would be the wiser. His love was too strong to wait . . .”

“BECAUSE of business, it was necessary for Carter to make long trips abroad. It was during one of these that Mrs. Masterson died—in giving birth to a daughter. That daughter was Paula.”

“Oh God!” interrupted Hartley.

“When Mr. Masterson came back to this country, he wasn't even shown the grave of his wife, buried under her maiden name. Her father was very bitter about it. He felt that his daughter had been the victim of a great injustice, but he respected her good name and kept the secret, even though he could have used it to provide the baby with the means of livelihood. He hated the child even more bitterly, because he saw in her the instrument of his daughter's death.

“Denied even the knowledge of his

wife's burial place, Mr. Masterson hired detectives to search for it, and finally found it. I know he did, because for many years the huge floral wreaths that came from nowhere were the talk of the countryside.

"But he didn't find his daughter—perhaps because he never suspected that he had one. Two years later he was married and had another daughter . . .

"Then one day he came to the orphanage, when Paula was six years old. He took her, adopted her as his foster daughter, and brought her to live with him. Because I was her nurse, and she refused to go without me, he brought me too. His second wife had also died.

"And there you have it, Mr. Hartley. Paula is really Paula Masterson, and the secret had to be kept, because if it became known, all that belonged to Carter Masterson and his two daughters would have gone to Arnold Masterson, who was the type of man who would have wrecked his vengeance to the utmost."

Hartley passed a hand over his forehead.

"Marta," he said hoarsely, "you've given me a terrible shock. I never suspected . . . But, Marta, how did Carter find out he had a daughter?"

"Douglas Wallace came to him one day, with some letters. They were letters written by Paula's mother to her husband during her pregnancy and just before her death. They had never been delivered by her embittered father. Nor did he destroy them because of his respect for his dead daughter. Wallace found them, somehow, and because of them became the one man Mr. Masterson feared."

"But," protested Hartley. "As I remember, Mr. Masterson didn't seem to dislike Wallace. And Paula thought

very much of him. He seemed always interested in Paula, and defended her against Helen. Why, it was he who worked to get Carter to change his will. In fact, the night he killed Helen, he had succeeded in getting Masterson to promise to sign a new will he and Mark Webbley and myself helped to draw up."

"I don't know," said Marta doubtfully. "I don't know why that was. I never did quite understand Mr. Wallace. Sometimes I thought that he was a very lonely man—and being with Paula seemed to be the one thing that always cheered him up."

"Those letters!" exclaimed Hartley. "So they were what were in the safe deposit box. He wanted me to know who Paula really was . . . and that's why Wallace was so anxious to get them and destroy them—because it would have meant the loss of everything for Paula."

Marta's voice resumed, and it was very anxious.

"I am worried about Paula," she said. "I have an awful feeling that someone means harm to her . . ."

"Wallace?" asked Hartley.

"No," said Marta. "I don't think he would hurt her."

"Then who . . . ?"

Hartley stopped dead, the implications of many other things crashing in on his brain.

"I'm going!" he said hoarsely to Marta. "I'm going—now!"

He hung up.

NOW he knew why Wallace would want to kill Arnold Masterson! There was but one answer . . . Mark Webbley *hadn't* given Wallace those letters that night. He *had* opened the packet. He *had* known what they contained. And somehow Wallace must have learned that Webbley had given,

or intended giving them to Arnold Masterson. So, in desperation, he had killed him as the only . . .

The phone rang again, and Hartley snatched it up.

"Hartley," came a strange voice. "This is Joe Grimes. I'm at the hospital. Anita's here, and she tells me something I don't know what to do about. But Anita seems to think you ought to know, and she also thinks you didn't kill Arnold Masterson . . ."

"What's that?" asked Hartley, puzzled. "You ought to know. Wallace confessed to *you*, didn't he? You sound as though you still think I did it . . ."

"If the police get the information Anita just gave me, they'll be sure," said Grimes drily. "But Anita sort of has me convinced there's more to this than meets the eye. I'm making a fool out of myself, but I guess it's a question of being a fool or being a bachelor. So, here it is—

"Douglas Wallace couldn't have killed Arnold Masterson, because he was forty miles away, at the lake, at the time it happened!"

Hartley's brain whirled.

"Say that again!" he gasped.

"Anita saw Wallace at the lake at ten in the evening. You know when Masterson was killed . . ."

"It's impossible," gasped Hartley.

"That's what the D. A. will say when he gets you before a jury," agreed Grimes. "And what the chief'll say to me . . . but it's your cookie, Hartley. Where's the raisin in it? If Wallace didn't kill Masterson, and you didn't, who did?"

"*Mark Webbley!*" yelled Hartley.

"Ouch," said Grimes. "Yeah, maybe you got something there. From what Anita tells me about certain stock deals . . ."

But James Hartley heard no more.

He had slammed the receiver back on the hook and was racing for his car. At last the whole horrible picture was clear in his mind—and a more horrible one was rising to take its place.

"Paula!" he exclaimed in horror and alarm. "My God, *she's next . . .!*"

Long before he reached the road that led to The Pines it was growing dark . . .

CHAPTER XVII

Death Goes for a Boat Ride

EDITOR EDWIN WILEY crouched down in the tiny cabin of the little motor cruiser, chagrin filling him. What a place to be caught on the sort of mission he was on. Wiley had something to sell, but this wasn't exactly the place to sell it.

For a time the noise of the motor and the splashing of waves against the prow of the boat as it drove out toward deeper water were the only sounds that came to Wiley's ears. But then the sound of voices, or more correctly, the sound of a voice, penetrated as the motor slowed down, obviously so someone else could hear that voice.

" . . . might interest you to know, Paula that . . . daughter."

Wiley strained his ears in an attempt to hear all the words, but he missed them. The voice was a man's and it seemed vaguely familiar to Wiley. It went on, still only half intelligible to Wiley.

"In a way this is double revenge for me . . . shame for you not to know before you . . . Paula . . ."

Wiley pricked up his ears. Obviously the man, whoever he was, was talking to Paula Masterson. But why didn't she answer? What was all this stuff about double revenge? And why this boat ride at all? Wiley puckered up

his face in a frown. Nutty things going on . . .

He inched forward on his stomach, lifted his head cautiously in an effort to see who was at the wheel. He could see only the top of a man's head. There was a hat on the head, and watching the crown of it, Wiley saw it turn astern a moment. Quickly he popped his head up and looked at the man at the wheel. Then he ducked it down again, gasping with surprise.

"Mark Webbley!"

This *was* embarrassing. His two customers in the same boat! It was going to be a little tough to explain, when they discovered him. Also a little tough to talk business with either of them! Even after he got them separated, it wouldn't be easy to make himself sound convincing . . .

Webbley's voice came to him again, penetrating his thoughts.

" . . . too bad you have to die. So young . . . "

Wiley swallowed hard.

What had Webbley said? Too bad who had to die? Paula . . . ? But why should she die? Thoughts of some malignant disease came to Wiley's mind, and he looked incredulous.

"Her?" he muttered. "Cancer, maybe . . . He shook his head.

He chanced another look, this time coming up enough to survey the whole boat. She must be sitting there somewhere . . . Wiley stopped breathing for a second, and even his heart seemed to stop beating, then as Webbley turned back from another of his scrutinies astern, Wiley plunged down just in the nick of time.

"Holy smoke!" he muttered. "Tied up! Like a mummy!"

The motor of the boat idled down. Webbley's voice came strongly now.

"This should be deep enough, Paula," he observed. "With that an-

chor tied to you, nobody'll find you for awhile, and when they do, it'll be another murder to Douglas Wallace's score!"

AS if lightning had struck Wiley, he could not have been more paralyzed. For a long instant that seemed eternity his muscles refused to function. His tongue suddenly seemed to dry up in his mouth. And when he did manage to move it, to utter several horrified words, it seemed coated with sandpaper and his voice rasped.

"My God!" he croaked. "He's going to murder her!"

The boat rocked a bit, and Wiley froze. The sound of Webbley's grunt as he lifted something, then a heavy thud as something solid and heavy thumped down on the planks of the launch's flooring.

Fascinated with horror, Wiley forced his head up so that he could see what was going on. Webbley was kneeling beside the girl, whose body was writhing desperately, her face white beneath its confining gag and her eyes dilated in terror. He was fumbling with a piece of rope tied to a heavy anchor made of an oil can filled with concrete and set with curved metal prongs. And even as Wiley's face rose above the combing of the little cabin, Webbley looked up and his startled eyes met the horror-filled ones of the stowaway.

In the same instant, Wiley leaped to his feet, hurled himself from the cabin and toward the would-be killer.

"You dirty murderer!" he choked. "You filthy fiend!"

And then the two men crashed together in a heap, Webbley going down beneath Wiley's desperate attack. As the fight progressed, Wiley's physique began to assert itself. In spite of his whiskey drinking habits, he began to prove that all of his bulk was not flabby

fat. He managed to rise to his feet, lifted a heavy foot to kick at Webbley's head.

The desperate attorney clutched at it, hung on with both arms for an instant. Wiley went down again, crashing against the tiller. The motor went full on as a wrist pushed the gas level far down. A tangle of rope from the anchor line Webbley had been attaching to the anchor whirled into the air and fell over the wheel, becoming increasingly more tangled as the untended wheel whipped around under the erratic progress of the boat, sent into a watery skid by the sudden application of power. Then, with a sharp "thuck" a knot caught in a stanchion, the rope drew tight, and the wheel yanked far over.

In an instant the launch was roaring around in a tight circle that sent the deck canting at a sharp angle.

Wiley and Webbley went into a heap against one side of the boat. For a moment neither of them had the advantage; and when both of them had regained their footing, it was at opposite ends of the little cockpit, with the body of the terrified girl between them.

"Webbley," gasped Wiley, "you're insane!"

"I know you now!" said Webbley. "What are you doing here, and how did you get here?" He didn't wait for an answer. His widening eyes told Wiley that he had it even before he could speak. Webbley went on: "I get it. You're the source of Masterson's information about Paula! So that's how he knew!"

"If you mean about her being the real daughter of Carter Masterson," said Wiley, pointing at Paula, "yes. I offered him positive proof. My share was to be ten percent. And nothing crooked about it, either," added Wiley

doggedly. "The money was legally Arnold's in the first place."

Webbley stared at him.

"So when Hartley killed Arnold Masterson, he killed the goose with your golden eggs," he said. "Well, that puts a different light on the matter."

"What do you mean?" asked Wiley cautiously.

"I mean that makes you a party to the secret. It means Paula here isn't the only person in the world who knows the secret. And it means I'll have to kill you too."

WILEY'S face became pasty white, and his red nose stood out ludicrously against its whiteness as he spoke.

"Hartley didn't kill Masterson," he said.

"Who did?"

"Wallace."

Webbley laughed.

"Wrong again," he said. "I did."

"You . . . ?"

"Yes. Hartley only barged in just after I'd shot him, so I dropped the gun on the floor, figuring he'd pick it up to chase me, ran out the door, then right back into my own inner office next door. So when Hartley chased out after me, he assumed whoever it was had gone down the stairs. I stopped him before he had a chance to discover his error."

Wiley was no fool. He saw where he stood. And now, as Webbley reached into his pocket for the gun Wiley knew must be there, he hurled himself forward over the body of Paula, huddled against the side of the boat where the tight circle of the plunging craft held it. Webbley cursed as the gun stuck in his pocket and was forced to desist as he defended himself against Wiley's desperate assault.

Webbley uttered a cry as a fist landed against his head



Once more the two men went down in a heap, and fists flailed out wildly. Webbley uttered a cry as a fist landed on the side of his head. He rolled aside. A moment later Wiley uttered a hoarse roar as Webbley's foot caught him in the groin.

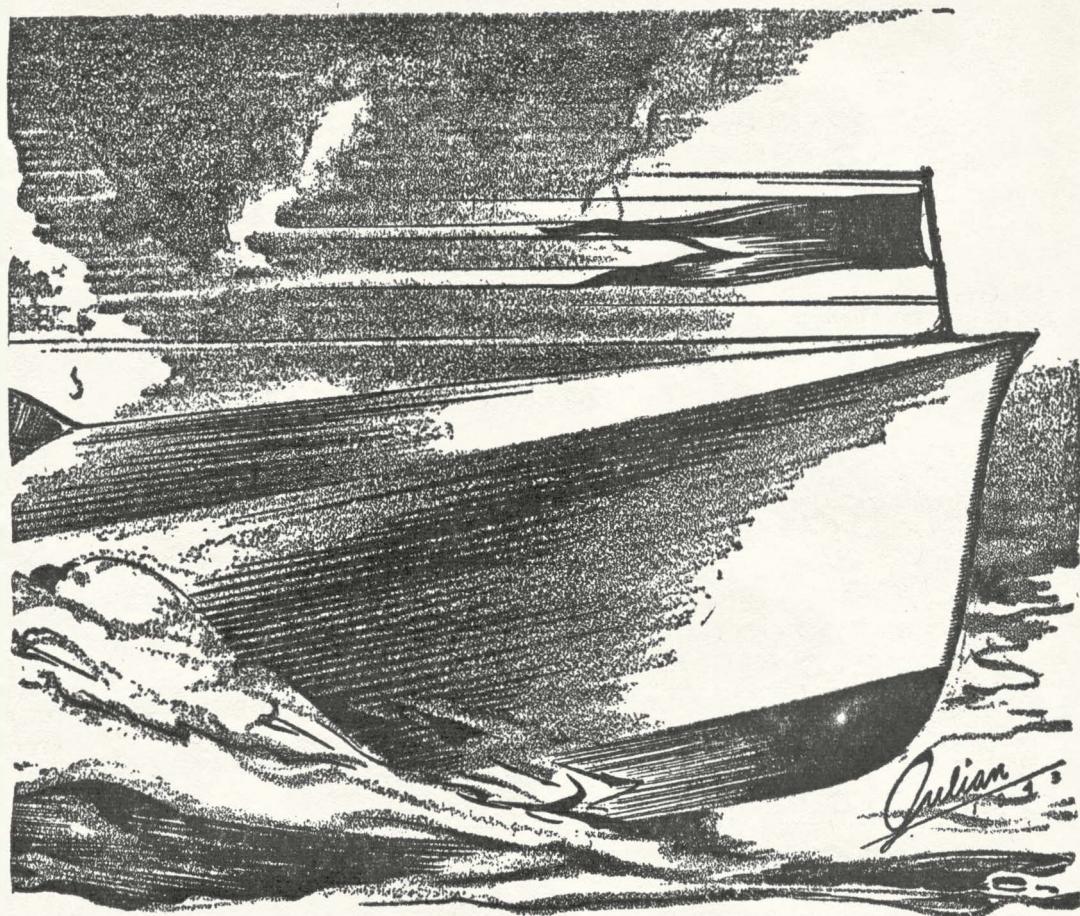
He staggered to his feet, plunged down hard on Webbley's body. He locked his arms around the man and squeezed. But Webbley, with the strength born of desperation, hurled both their bodies over in an arch on the floorboards. They crashed against the side of the boat with a terrific impact that broke Wiley's hold and brought his head against a stanchion with a terrific crack.

Wiley's eyes rolled. He wilted down

for an instant. Then he fought to regain his senses, and one hand clutched the side of the boat and sought to lift his heavy body. But the instant had been long enough for Webbley to regain his footing, and now he got his weapon free, trained it on Wiley. Wiley lurched aside. The bullet went through the side of the boat. Water spurted in through the hole.

Webbley cursed, reversed his weapon and rushed down on Wiley with arm upraised. Wiley saw him coming, scrambled hastily to his knees.

Webbley's first blow hit Wiley on the shoulder, sending one arm limp. Frantically Wiley fought his way to his feet, but Webbley's second blow was better aimed. It hit Wiley a glancing



blow on the temple and he reeled. Then, with startling suddenness, he fell against the side of the boat, more out than in, and there was a great splash as his body hit the water. For a fraction of a second his body dragged, one foot hooked over the rail, and like a live thing the launch lurched, veered, and nearly capsized.

With a desperate attempt to regain his balance that failed, Mark Webbley, still clutching his gun in his hand, went over the side with another mighty splash.

THE boat continued on in its rushing course, which wasn't an exactly perfect circle, because the wind constantly bore it toward the east. Web-

bley, still clutching his gun, came to the surface spitting and choking. He trod water, saw that there was no chance of getting back into the boat. Then he shoved the gun back into his pocket with great difficulty and once more trod water while his eyes searched.

All about him was no sign of Edwin Wiley. Webbley began swimming toward shore with strong strokes. Mark Webbley, like many members of civic men's clubs, was an excellent swimmer.

Reaching shore, he turned to watch the careening motorboat, and suddenly his eyes widened. The boat's mad circles, were bringing it constantly closer to a tiny reef of rocks that protruded above the surface. In a few more circles, it would crash those rocks. And

when it did . . .

Mark Webbley remained standing where he was, watching intently. He had to make sure . . .

And because of his intentness, he failed to see, for the moment, the tiny rowboat making its way toward the disaster-bound motor boat, one man at the oars, rowing madly.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Murderer Stalks a Murderer

DOUGLAS WALLACE, his arms aching as though they would drop out of their sockets, his fingers numb with the frantic pressure he was putting on them, pulled at the oars with sheer desperation. Twice he stopped his mighty strokes to look ahead of him at the launch, roaring around on its circle of doom toward the reef.

"Close!" moaned Wallace in despair. "Too close."

He dared not express the thought that was in his mind, had been there ever since he had sighted the launch far out on the lake and realized that a battle was going on in it between two figures. If Paula had been aboard that launch, was she still aboard it? Or had she, like those two battling figures, gone overboard into the deep water?

The small craft moved forward with maddening slowness, it seemed to Wallace, while the roar of the launch motor rose and died in a chilling crescendo of approaching disaster. Ever nearer to the rocks the wind was sweeping the careening craft.

The two glances Wallace had taken so hurriedly had revealed no sign of an occupant, but nonetheless, Wallace urged his craft desperately ahead. There was nothing else to do, no other course of action. If by any chance Paula was aboard that craft, and still

lived, certain death faced her by drowning in a matter of moments.

Wallace shuddered and his face became a mask of agony at the thought. Even in his exertion, the sense of utter loss and disaster that filled his mind was evident in the tragic set of his face. And perhaps, too, there was an insane light in his eyes.

"She's got to be alive!" he gasped. "She's got to be. . . !"

He had no more breath left now for words, but panted in great hoarse gulps with each stroke of the oars, which threatened to break, so much were they bending beneath his furious pressure and deep stroke.

Almost before he realized it the noise of the motor grew to a heavy roar that impressed itself all at once on his consciousness with its dangerous nearness. He dropped the oars, stood up in the boat, and as it swept by only a few feet away, its wake hurled his tiny craft about like a cork, forcing him to drop down and hang on with both hands to prevent toppling into the water.

But as the launch had sped by on its inexorable circular course, he had glimpsed what he wanted to see—the huddled, bound body of Paula Masterson.

"She's there!" he yelled.

Frantically he eyed the course of the launch, sought to think of a way to board the plunging juggernaut. He realized, helplessly that there was none. In fact, if he remained where he was, the next round of the launch would crush his little boat like an eggshell.

He sat down in abrupt haste and pulled mightily on the oars, sending the boat over the frothy wake of the launch's propeller into the inner portion of the circle delineated by the white foam. Here he stopped rowing once more, watched helplessly again

as the motorboat roared by. This time, because of the tilt of the craft, he could see more plainly, and he saw the gag that kept Paula still, and saw also that she was struggling desperately, but impotently, against her bonds.

Then, while he stood there, stunned, the launch crashed into the reef with a terrific smash. It leaped into the air, propeller shrieking madly, turned turtle with a mighty splash and broke in half on the reef. Wallace saw Paula's helpless form hurtle into the water and sink out of sight.

SOBING with horror, he sent the rowboat plunging toward the scene of the wreck with such force that water foamed at its bow. Reaching the scene, he found the place where Paula had gone down and saw her come once more to the surface, still struggling. He dove into the water and reached the spot, only to find that she had vanished again.

Frantically he took in a hoarse gulp of air, and although his lungs were already crying for more because of his frantic activities, he dove down, eyes wide and staring, lungs aching. Before him he saw the dim form, struggling. He made his way toward it, and as he reached it, realized with horror that movement had stopped.

Clutching Paula's hair in his fingers he clawed his way up toward the surface, and when he thought his lungs about to burst, and a wave of despair washing over him with an icyness that far outchilled even the deep water of the lake, he reached the surface, drew in one great gulp of life-giving oxygen before he went down again, muscular weariness almost so great as to paralyze his actions.

Once more he fought upward, again reached the surface, drew in more precious air, then sought out the rowboat.

It was on the other side of the fatal reef to which a portion of the motor boat still hung precariously.

Wallace swam toward the reef, crawled up on it. Then as he dragged Paula's limp form up beside him, his foot slipped on the weed-grown rock and doubled beneath him.

Agony washed a wave of pasty white into his face and he dropped down, moaning. But he fought off the pain, forced his body to obey once more, and on his knees, completed the job of dragging the senseless girl above the water mark. Laboriously he turned her over on her stomach, ripped the gag from her mouth, and the curtains from her arms and legs by sheer force, almost demoniac in his mounting terror at her limp immovability.

Methodically, sobbing in agony with each motion, he began artificial respiration, kept it up until a gush of water came from the girl's mouth. It ceased, then he turned her over, began slapping her cheeks, rubbing her wrists. A moan came from her tortured lips.

Then and then only did Douglas Wallace collapse across her limp body, his own pain-wracked form shaking with the sobs that racked him. For several long moments he lay there, unable to control himself, or to command his body. Then, shaking, but calmer, he struggled to his knees and looked down at her face. Her eyes were open.

"Doug . . ." she whispered.

"Don't . . . talk," he gasped in a voice that was almost a wheeze. "You're all . . . right, Paula . . . all right . . . now."

SHE struggled to sit up, moved her arms and legs with grimaces of pain as she sought to restore circulation. Then, a moment later she looked about her, realized exactly where she sat.

Darkness was creeping over the lake. Perhaps twenty yards away the rowboat drifted. The distance between it and the reef was increasing as the wind blew it.

Wallace grimaced, uttered a groan of pain as he sought to lift himself to his feet.

"Got to reach that boat," he said. "And I've hurt my ankle. Don't think I can swim . . ."

Paula gained her footing, looked critically at the rowboat, flexed her legs and arms experimentatively.

"I'll get it," she said. Then before Wallace could protest, she slipped into the water and swam slowly toward the boat. In a few minutes she reached it, pulled herself exhaustedly into it. In a moment she had reached the oars and brought the boat back to the reef.

She held it steady while Wallace clambered into it, biting his lips to keep back a groan as he bumped his strained ankle against the side.

"I guess I can row," he said. "Maybe even walk, when we get to shore. It hurts like the devil, but I don't think it's sprained."

Paula surrendered the oars to him, moved back to the rear seat.

"Now tell me," commanded Wallace. "What happened out here?"

Paula told him what had occurred between Webbley and herself, and as the story progressed, Wallace nodded several times and his face clouded and cleared by intervals. It clouded at reference to Webbley's thefts from Carter Masterson, and it cleared at the revelation that Webbley had discovered his own efforts.

"At least I had him worried," he said grimly. "But go on."

Paula continued. When she came to the revelation that the wily lawyer had also swindled Helen of the stocks he had originally stolen, then seemed to

turn over to her as "winnings" in stock market gambling, his face grew dark as a thundercloud. But it cleared.

"We can fix that," he said.

Paula looked at him.

"Doug, what did Webbley mean when he said I was a real daughter and not an adopted one?"

Wallace looked at her a long moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I might as well explain it all to you. It's bound to come out now, and besides, it won't make a great deal of difference.

"Yes, Paula, it's true. You are the rightful daughter of Carter George Masterson. You see, when your father was twenty-one, his uncle left him his entire estate, to become his on his twenty-fifth birthday, providing he did not marry before that time.

"But . . ." began Paula.

"Yes," said Wallace gently, "that's where all the trouble came in. The whole estate, in the event of such a marriage, was to revert to Carter's cousin, Arnold. And Carter Masterson did marry. He married in secret, because he was in love, and because he couldn't wait. His wife remained with her father—her mother was dead—until the day when he would be twenty-five and they could marry again and she could take her rightful place in his life.

CARTER was a working man at that time; through necessity, of course, not yet having obtained his legacy; and his business carried him abroad several times a year. It was during one of these trips that, unknown to him, a daughter—you, Paula—was born to him.

"Unfortunately, your mother had a hard time of it, and she only survived the ordeal by a few days. She died, and when Carter returned and came

to see her, he was refused even the location of her grave by your mother's father, your grandfather. Your grandfather was very bitter about it—and he hated Carter. He hated you too, because he blamed your life for her death.

"Carter Masterson wasn't told he had a daughter. Your grandfather even kept a bundle of letters secret from him which your mother had written; some during her pregnancy, and a last one just the day before she died. He hated Carter too much to deliver them, and he respected his daughter too much to destroy them. So he kept them.

"Well, your father finally found out where your mother was buried and kept a constant floral decoration on the grave thereafter. But he failed to learn of the existence of a daughter.

"Eventually he married again; and by this second marriage Helen was born to him. I read one day of the death of his second wife. I was just a youngster of twenty then, but I'd hated my father, and I'd been on my own from the tender age of twelve. Eight lonely years, Paula, in which I learned the meaning of family and friends—because I had none.

"Finally the loneliness got me, and I came back home. It was only then that I learned of Mary's death. It was a terrible shock to me. Mary was the only one who had ever been kind to me . . ."

"Doug," interrupted Paula. "Just a minute. You're not being very clear. When you say Mary, do you mean my mother?"

Wallace nodded.

"Yes. Her full name was Mary Ann Wallace."

Paula stared.

"Then . . . then . . ." she uttered strangely, ". . . you—"

"Yes, Paula, I'm your uncle. I'm Mary Wallace's wayward brother."

Wallace bowed his head and was silent a moment in bitter reverie.

"She was really all I'd ever had. Mother had died early in my youth—I was the second and only other child—and Mary had taken her place. But she couldn't cope with my father's bitterness and cruelty, and she couldn't persuade me from leaving.

"Then, to come back and find she had been dead six years . . ."

Wallace's voice broke for a moment, then he shook his shoulders, began speaking again.

"To make a long story short, I found Mary's letters and I forced my father to tell where he had taken you. Then I went to Carter Masterson, because even then, through common gossip, and through the newspapers, I knew what a spoiled child Helen was, and with how many of the best things of life she was being showered, while you, in an orphanage, were given only the small crumbs of a charitable existence.

"Even in that moment I think I hated Helen.

"Well, I forced Masterson to look for you—although when he saw the letters and realized the truth, I didn't have to force him. He cried like a baby, and we went together to arrange to get you. Then, when he had brought you and Marta—you refused to leave her—back to the Masterson estate, and you took your rightful place, I felt that I had achieved what I wanted and I kept my word to Masterson to stay away and never to let you know the shadow under which your true name was concealed."

Paula stared.

"But . . . you didn't stay away."

"**N**o!" exclaimed Wallace savagely. "I didn't. And it was purely by accident that I broke my word to Masterson. It was one day at a social

affair—I covered it for a newspaper—I saw Helen strike you across the face with a whip . . .”

Paula started.

“I remember that,” she said faintly, face pale with remembrance.

Wallace rushed on:

“I saw by the way you took it just what a life you were leading. I saw that Helen, resentful of your presence, and sheerly because of selfish jealousy, was making your life miserable. At least I thought it was that way; I didn’t know then that she had found the letters from your mother and was holding them over her father’s head to relegate you to what virtually amounted to her slave and plaything—someone to humiliate and vent her spleen upon.

“I broke my word, then; came to demand an accounting. And I succeeded to some extent too. Helen never knew who I really was, but because I had cowed her father—something no other person except herself had ever done—she had to accept me, both to save face and because she was afraid of me.

“In a short while you and I were such friends that I could not tear myself away. Twenty years of loneliness and bitterness were erased under the spell of your friendship. Paula, you are the picture of your mother. I can close my eyes now and open them again, and see her sitting there . . .

“Oh, Doug . . .” whispered Paula. “I . . . didn’t know . . .”

Wallace resumed his story

“I met James Hartley, discovered you two were in love. And right then and there, coincident with another discovery, I decided that I would fight to give you both what was as much yours as hers. That other discovery came because of my friendship with Hartley. Sheerly through accident, one day in his office, I found out that you

were excluded from your father’s will. And I also heard Helen, at home, constantly refer spitefully to the day when you would return to the gutter from which you came. I knew then that Helen was back of that will, holding her club of knowledge over her father’s head, threatening to ruin him, even herself, if you benefited in any way.

“Paula, I don’t think I ever met a more evil character than Helen Masterson. My hate of her grew more day by day, until it became an obsession.

“I faced Masterson, tried to force him to give you what was rightfully yours. But I failed. For two years I tried. But I did other things, too. I went into the market; began to accumulate Masterson stocks hoping some day to gain enough power to force my will upon him. I might have succeeded, too, if it hadn’t been for Mark Webbly.

“He found out what I was up to—and he had the advantage of being unknown to me. I didn’t suspect I had a rival in the very thing I was doing—until some of my deals unaccountably fell through.

“I considered my rival as Mr. X for a time. It wasn’t until I learned from James Hartley that Helen owned many of the stocks I had seen slip through my fingers that I realized who Mr. X was, and even then I only knew he was an unknown agent for Helen.

“When I found myself failing in this plan, I turned my attention to Helen. She was an easy victim, because it is a strange truth that we are drawn to those we fear. I suppose I did make Helen fall in love with me. And the ease with which I did it only made me hate her more—and besides, the closer association revealed even more to me the insensate cruelties she was heaping upon you.

“I married her, Paula, to frustrate

that mysterious Mr. X, and to gain for you, by her murder, the balance of the huge Masterson estate. I knew I would die at the hands of the State for it. But I didn't care. My life has been nothing but loneliness anyway. I wanted it to end. And by my will, everything I have, little as it now is, is yours. Naturally, Webbley has swindled her, and thus you, out of half of the estate, but I believe much of it can be recovered, now that he is dead.

"Which, I guess, is about all the story," Wallace finished.

PAULA sat silently in the rear of the boat, her pallid face gleaming whitely through the dusk, the horror and pity on it easy to read. Tears were running down her face.

"Doug . . ." she choked out. "Doug . . ."

Before she could say the words that she fought to express in some degree free of the tide of emotions that were flooding her being, the bow of the boat grated on the shore and the moment was gone.

Wallace unshipped the oars, stepped over the side with a groan, and dragged the boat up higher, limping with each step. Paula leaped out of the boat and stood beside him.

"It's going to be a long walk," said Wallace tonelessly. "Let's take it easy. This foot of mine is pretty sore."

Paula took his arm and they began a slow progress up the shore to the pathway that led entirely around the little lake. It was perhaps five miles to the house.

CHAPTER XIX

A Shot in the Dark

JAMES HARTLEY pulled the emergency brake up and killed the car

motor as the wheels skidded to a halt outside the dark bulk of the house on the lake. He leaped out of the car, looked up a moment at the darkened windows, then ran up the steps. He laid a hand on the knob and the door opened as he turned it. He stepped inside, fumbled around for the light switch.

"Paula!" he shouted. "Paula, are you here?"

Only empty echoes answered him.

He went from room to room, then arrived back in the living room. Then he noticed the overturned chair and another quick scrutiny told him what else was wrong with the room; several curtains were missing!

Face pale, Hartley resumed his search throughout the house, including the upper rooms, and even the unfinished loft where Wallace had established his hiding place. He saw the preparations Wallace had made and grunted. Then he came downstairs again, frowning in worry.

A man was standing in the doorway, his hand raised politely to knock.

"Who're you?" asked Hartley.

"May I come in?" asked the man. "My name's Getchell. Roy Getchell. I'm a reporter from the *Blade*."

"What are you doing here?"

Getchell looked around appraisingly, took in the flashlight in Hartley's hand, the dusty condition of his clothes.

"Maybe the same thing you're doing," he observed. "I'm hunting for someone. Miss Paula Masterson to be exact. Could it be that you're engaged in searching for the same person?"

"What do you know about her?" demanded Hartley sharply.

"Well, quite a bit," admitted Getchell. "But absolutely nothing about the present situation. I expected to find her here, and I'm a little disturbed to find her among those missing."

"What do you mean, among those missing?"

"Well, at least two other persons vitally connected with the mission I'm on are also missing. By name, Mr. Douglas Wallace, and Mr. Mark Webbley. Really there are three persons missing, if you want to include my drunken boss, Ed Wiley, who makes a better editor than a reporter, no matter what he thinks about it."

"Come in, Getchell," said Hartley, his face pale. "You seem to know a lot. I think we could stand comparing notes, and finding out what's going on. First what's your real business here?"

Getchell closed the door behind him.

"You want it straight? Yeah, I can see you do. First, what's your name, so I can place you in the proper position in this little chess game?"

"I'm James Hartley."

"Ah, the boy who is careless about picking up guns just dropped by murderers! That makes it nice. Well, Hartley, I'm principally interested in a killer by the name of Wallace, and, I *think*, a killer by the name of Mark Webbley, who, if I'm not guessing wrong, is around here somewhere right now, aiming to pot a few people, merely as a sort of self-appointed assistant to killer Wallace—because he seems to be hoping Wallace'll be the guy who takes the rap for the whole works."

Hartley gasped.

"How do you know all this?"

Getchell waved a hand airily.

"Read tomorrow morning's paper. It has the whole story, from A to Z, including . . . well including. But that's not the important thing now. Mainly I came out here to warn Miss Paula Masterson she had better hike back to town or leave her corpse lying around somewhere she don't want it. But, judging from your search, I'm a little late . . ."

"**L**OOK," said Hartley anxiously, "just what do you know? Miss Masterson was due home this afternoon, and never arrived. She hasn't answered her phone here all afternoon either. I came out here just a few minutes ago to get her. But she isn't in the house. We've got to find her!"

"Well," Getchell said thoughtfully. "I know that Mark Webbley isn't at home or in his office. I have reason to believe he is out here. I also know Wallace is at large, having escaped from one Joe Grimes, an officer to whom he gave himself up . . ."

"I know all that," interrupted Hartley. "Is that all you know?"

"Nope. I know Webbley's after Miss Masterson, and he intends to kill her tonight, if he hasn't already. I also know he's the cog in this whole machine, and he began it, years ago, by robbing old Carter Masterson blind behind his back. When Wallace exterminated that she—that she-dog, Helen, at the altar, his whole plan busted wide open. And it busted even wider when my boss, Ed Wiley, who isn't above accepting a few hundred thousand for a valuable piece of information, gave one Arnold Masterson a bit of information that threatened to bust it even wider. As you know, Arnold was bumped off, by parties named and unnamed, you and Wallace being two of the named parties, and if my hunch is correct, a smart operator by the name of Mark Webbley being the unnamed."

Hartley's face was blanched now with certainty.

"How do you know Webbley's out here?" he asked.

"Well, for one thing, his big Mercedes-Benz is parked in the woods up the road a ways. He hid it all right, but he forgot the damn thing leaves tracks easier to follow than an elephant, and about as distinctive."

"We've got to find Paula," said Hartley, galvanized into action. "Come on, Getchell . . ."

"Did you look all over the house?"
"Not downstairs yet."

Getchell followed as Hartley found the basement door, lit the light at the head of the stairs, and made his way down. The basement was empty. Even the fruit cellar, with its broken lock, was empty of everything save canned foods.

"What's that door?" Getchell pointed.

"Boathouse. Motor launch put up for the winter."

"Let's look."

GETCHELL suited the action to the word. He reached the door, found the bolt already slid back. He opened the door, peered through. A vaguely less dark square at the far end of the boathouse showed that the door to the lake was wide open.

"No boat parked here now," he said.

Hartley shouldered past him, flashed his light around the empty boathouse. Then, lips tight, he whirled around and ran for the stairs. Getchell raced after him, to find him standing with the phone in his hand.

Hartley jiggled the hook up and down several times, then set the phone down.

"Line's dead," he said. "We can't call for help. And it's ten miles back to a phone . . ."

"Maybe if we find the launch, we'll find out where she went," offered Getchell. "This lake isn't big, I understand. We could walk clear around it in an hour . . ."

"Take more than that," said Hartley. "It's bigger than you think. But at that, if we went opposite ways . . ."

"Let's do it . . ." Getchell snatched at the contents of a box on the floor of

the boathouse. "Say, here's some flares. Use 'em to mark the location of the boathouse when the boat's out at night, no doubt. How about each of us taking one of these, and when we find the launch, light a flare to call the other?"

He handed a flare to Hartley, pocketed one himself.

"Let's get going," he said. "The sooner the better . . ."

They left the boathouse, and outside, on the beach, having scanned the approaches to it carefully, they parted.

Hartley began running at a shambling half-trot along the rough, winding trail that led alongside the shore, winding around trees and rocks and occasionally across a strip of sand, his anxious eyes alert for some sign of the launch. He went on for nearly a half-hour, then slowed down, halted, stood a moment listening intently. Had that been a sound?

"Like something dropping on a wooden floor," he muttered to himself.

But the sound was not repeated, and he continued on his way. Another fifteen minutes passed, and Hartley estimated he had covered perhaps three miles of the shoreline.

THE moon was coming up now, and its light began filtering over the tops of the trees and gilding the lake with gold as its yellow beams were reflected and scattered by the rippling water.

Nowhere was there any sign of the motor launch. Now that the moon had come up sufficiently to reveal the surface of the lake, its whole expanse was revealed, and no black object broke its surface, except at one point. For a long moment Hartley peered anxiously, then suddenly he remembered what it was.

"The reef," he grunted disappointedly. "Water must be low. It's pretty

high out of the water."

He went on for perhaps five more minutes, watching the yellow path of moonlight move along with him until it fell squarely across the reef he had seen only dimly before. And the light was reflected brightly from a shining surface.

Hartley stopped, peered, then uttered a shout.

"The boat!" he exclaimed. "On the reef. And smashed in half!"

Before he could move a step, a shot rang out on the night air, coming from the shore not more than two hundred yards ahead of him. It was followed almost instantly by a woman's shrill scream.

"Paula!" gasped Hartley.

With frantic haste he tore the signal flare from his pocket, ripped off the cover, scratched it, and as it ignited, threw it down on the ground to stand on its spike. Even before its white sputtering flame caught fully and brightened to an eerie, bloody red color he was running madly up the moonlit path toward the sound of the shot and the scream.

CHAPTER XX

Murder's Red Glare

"**M**Y FOOT'S feeling better," said Wallace. "I can walk alone on it now."

For the past fifteen minutes they had been progressing slowly but surely along the path that wound in and out, up and down, across tiny patches of sand, and through clumps of pine trees and shrubbery around the meandering shoreline of the lake. It had been quite dark, but now the full moon was rising; and they walked through alternate areas of brilliance and blackness.

Wallace quickened his pace experimentatively and nodded in approval.

"Not a bad strain," he said. "Another mile and I'll be all right."

"What are we going to do when we get there?" asked Paula.

"I've got a car there. It's stolen, but that won't matter. We'll drive to the nearest police station and I'll surrender myself. Then you can take a cab home. You see, I'm worried about Jim. It's quite possible that he's still being held, considering that I escaped—although Grimes must have cleared him with my confession."

"Maybe they won't accept a verbal confession second-hand," said Paula.

"That's what I'm considering—but I did confess to a recognized representative of the law, and they have no further right to hold him until other charges are proved. The law can't hold two men for the same crime. The most they'd hold him for is as a material witness, and he could get out on bail in a moment on that."

Paula gripped Wallace's arm, stopped him in his tracks.

"What's the matter?" he asked, voice low because of her tense attitude of listening.

"I heard something, behind us," she whispered back. "Footsteps . . ."

Wallace peered back into the gloom that surrounded the trail immediately behind them.

"I don't see anything. You probably heard some small animal going through the brush. A rabbit, perhaps."

Paula nodded.

"I guess that must have been it," she admitted nervously. "Come on, Doug, let's get to the house. I'm getting a little scared. This moonlight is so eerie, somehow. It gives me the creeps."

They began walking again, and some five minutes later came to a long strip of white sandy beach. It extended for perhaps a hundred yards almost in a straight line.

"Let's take the water's edge. It'll be easier going," suggested Wallace.

"Anything to get away from these shadows for a moment," agreed Paula.

They made their way down the beach. Here the moonlight was brilliant, and they could have read a newspaper by its light. Wallace was walking faster now, but his progress was still slow. Paula matched his pace. Once she stopped, peered at the dark trees hiding the trail they had abandoned for the moment.

"There's something moving up there!" she declared.

Wallace stopped, looked intently.

"Lord, Paula," he laughed. "You're giving me the jitters too, now! Please don't do that any more. I'll be seeing a lurking menace in every bush!"

Paula bit her lip, went on. She was near the breaking point, and she wished mightily that she was safely at the house. But it would be a half-hour more at the very least before they reached it.

OUT on the lake now, the moonlight was bright, and for a while she watched its wide golden band pace her as she moved along. She saw, finally, the dark, low mass that was the reef on which the launch had reached disaster. She saw the forlorn smashed prow of it still sticking up, visible at this distance because of the gleam of the moon on its slickly varnished surface.

She shuddered. Out there two men had gone to their deaths, one of them an utter stranger. She wondered why a stranger had come so miraculously to her defense, and had fought to his death for her.

"Doug," she said. "That man who tried to save me from Mark Webbley. Do you know who he was? It just comes to me now that he *knew* who I really was, and that Webbley accused

him of telling Arnold Masterson."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Wallace, startled. "Paula, are you sure?" Then before she could answer, he went on, almost to himself: "It doesn't make any difference now. Arnold is dead . . ."

Paula stopped in her tracks.

"Doug!"

"What?"

"You didn't kill Arnold Masterson! I heard Mark Webbley tell this strange man that *he* did it! He even told him how he did it, and how he placed the blame on Jim. Neither of them seemed to know that you had confessed to the killing . . ."

"No," interrupted Wallace. "Webbley couldn't have. That's why I hit Joe Grimes and escaped. I saw his car coming out here, while we were driving in. Then, when I read the paper again, I realized the truth, that Webbley had killed Arnold, and was on his way to get you. I came back as quickly as I could, and I was almost too late!"

"Doug," said Paula wonderingly, "you confessed to killing Arnold just to save Jim!"

Wallace smiled.

"They can't hang me any more definitely for two killings than they can for one."

"But, it isn't necessary *now!*" she cried. "You said, just a moment ago, that you were going to give up at the nearest police station. But, Doug, not for *both* killings! And you won't hang. We'll get the best lawyers . . ."

Her voice was becoming frantic.

Wallace gripped her shoulders.

"Paula!" he said urgently. "Listen! Listen to me. The only grounds on which I could escape the death penalty would be insanity. Look at me, Paula; do you think I'm insane?"

"No," she admitted falteringly. "No! Certainly not!"

"Then the only way to save Jim is to

keep to my confession that I killed Arnold."

"But Webbley . . ." she protested. "He . . ."

". . . is dead," finished Wallace. "You are the only one who is alive who heard him say he killed Arnold. Nobody would believe you, Paula. Everyone knows you are prejudiced in my favor. And remember, you were a party to hiding me. That is almost certain to come out. It would nullify anything you said. Jim would hang too, Paula! Let me do this my way. Mark Webbley is dead, and . . ."

"*Mark Webbley is not dead!*" came a voice out of the darkness.

PAULA uttered a little cry of terror, and Wallace, his face gone pasty white, turned slowly on his heel to face the speaker, who had come up on them unnoticed from the direction in which they had been going. Mark Webbley stood there on the sand, facing them. In his hand was a gun, trained on Wallace's heart.

"You are taking just a little too much for granted," said Webbley in cool, deliberate tones. "I am very far from dead, Mr. Douglas Wallace. And *you* are taking a little too much for granted, Miss Paula Masterson, when you say Mr. Wallace is not insane. The law, and the people of this state will know otherwise, tomorrow morning. They will know that he was a raving maniac, lustng for blood."

Webbley waved a hand expressively. "I can see it all now. Headlines, telling how the mad killer struck again and again, and listing his victims: Helen Masterson; Edwin Wiley; Paula Masterson! And I can see the other headlines telling of my part in the affair. Glowing descriptions of how I rushed to the rescue of the beautiful heiress, but arrived too late to do more than

avenge! They will paint me as a hero who slew the most savage and insane killer this state has ever known!

"But there are things the papers *won't* tell! They won't tell of the Masterson financial empire, and who controls it now. They won't tell of the dummy corporation that I set up to hide my own ownership of all the stocks Helen thought *she* was acquiring! Perhaps some few people will wonder that the great Carter Masterson, the financial wizard, the master of destiny, finally met his masters and lost most of his fortune to cleverer men.

"Yes, indeed, you two, you are taking a great deal too much for granted!"

Paula stared at the man in horror.

"You . . . you fiend!" she uttered hoarsely. "Even the devil couldn't have dreamed such a monstrous plot . . ."

Webbley laughed.

"This moment is full of jokers," he said. "For days I had the governor putting every ace he had, and a lot who weren't aces, on your trail, Wallace. I had to eliminate you, and once I nearly succeeded. The police had orders to shoot to kill. But they missed. I threatened the governor with the very weapon Carter Masterson always used, his controlling interests in so many great civic companies. Yes, the governor knew I was an outraged citizen, a voter—and a very powerful one!—who was demanding action in apprehending the killer. But he didn't know that I wanted that killer myself, and couldn't find him; that I had a personal reason to put an end to his existence.

"And now, in spite of the governor, I find myself holding all the cards. Won't his face be red when he realizes that the indignant voter who called on him for action grew impatient and went out to show him how to do it!"

Wallace looked as though he would burst.

"You egotistic toad!" he shot out.
"Why you . . . !"

ABRUPTLY he hurled himself forward. Startled, Webbley fumbled his gun for a moment, then leveled it, aimed quickly but deliberately, and pulled the trigger.

A shot rang out deafeningly and Wallace halted in his tracks as the bullet plowed through his breast. Then, with horror spreading over his features, he sagged down in his tracks.

Paula screamed, long and wildly.

Webbley turned the gun on her, pressed the trigger. Only a snap resulted. He snarled, fumbled in his pocket.

Paula began to run, up the beach toward the house. She ran as though panic had lent wings to her feet. Webbley leaped in pursuit, but even as he took the first step, Wallace's fingers reached out, clasped about his ankle and tightened convulsively as the dying man's whole body shuddered, then went limp. Webbley fell, face forward. His gun muzzle plowed into the beach, and wet sand filled the barrel.

It took a moment to release the death-grip of Douglas Wallace's rigid fingers, and another minute to shake the sand from his gun.

But Paula, fleeing madly, saw none of this. Reaching the trail again, she rushed through the alternate areas of light and shadow, stumbling over roots and obstructions, picking herself up again to flee onward.

Eerily a red glare grew into being before her.

Then, suddenly, a shadowy form loomed up before her, and in the ghastly red light she saw James Hartley's startled face, heard him exclaim her name. She ran squarely into his arms.

CHAPTER XXI

Two Names for Paula

FOR several moments Paula could do nothing but fight for her breath. Then, when she was able to talk, she gasped out:

"Mark Webbley—he's behind me. He just shot Doug! He intended to kill me, Jim, we've got to run! He'll kill you too!"

Hartley grew grim and his eyes sought the trail behind Paula, but he saw nothing.

"How far behind was he?"

"I . . . I don't know. I thought he was on my heels. He fell, on the beach, or at least I think he did. I didn't turn to look. I had to get out of the moonlight before he could fix his gun and shoot at me. Something went wrong with it. He pulled the trigger, but it didn't go off. If it had, I'd be dead now."

Hartley nodded, took her arm.

"It's quite a way to the house. Think you can make it all right?"

"Yes, yes, of course. But hurry. He's sure to catch up to us soon."

Hartley followed directly behind her as they ran toward the red glare up ahead.

"What's that red light?" panted Paula.

"A flare I lit when I heard the shot and your scream," explained Hartley. "It's a signal to a reporter named Getchell who went the other way, searching for the launch. We found it was missing, and figured if we found it, we'd find you, or some trace of you. It'll bring him on the run, and maybe we'll need his help. I haven't got a gun. Don't know if he has, either. I have a hunch he hasn't."

"Did you phone for the police?"

"No. Couldn't. The line was dead."

"Webbley," reasoned Paula. "He must have cut it when he left the house. The line runs right through the . . . boathouse, you know."

"Never mind the explanations now," said Hartley. "Save your breath for running."

Paula was panting deeply now, and her steps were faltering.

"I . . . I guess I'll have to stop and . . . rest right now," she said hoarsely. She slowed down to a walk, but kept going. Hartley stepped forward quickly and picked her up. But he had made no more than a few steps forward with his burden before he stopped. Just ahead was the red flare he had placed in the ground. And now, as he stopped in his tracks, it arched through the air and fell with a hiss into the lake. Abruptly complete darkness descended, and even the moonlight failed to register on his retinae, accustomed to the previous glare of the flare.

He could no longer see the dim form that had thrown the flare into the lake!

PAULA uttered a low cry, struggled from his arms and stood on her feet.

"Webbley!" she wailed. "He's gotten ahead of us!"

Hartley swore. Hastily he peered around in the darkness.

"Down to the lake!" he whispered. "We'll wade into the water and swim. We'll be hard to spot that way. No use trying to go through the woods. We'd never make it at night. Those brambles are too tangled, and the thorns would tear us to pieces . . ."

As swiftly as they could they made their way down the slope which was about fifty yards long here, impeded every foot of the way by tangled creepers and low bushes beneath trees which grew crookedly in the slanting

hillside.

Several times Hartley halted Paula to listen, and once they heard a crashing in the brush just a few hundred feet to one side.

"Quick!" murmured Hartley. "He's heard us, and knows what we intend to do!"

They plunged on down the slope, reached the bottom. Then, here, they found a strip of marshy ground, and just beyond, the lake, rimmed by reeds.

"Oh!" exclaimed Paula, as she sank to her knees in mud.

Hartley stumbled forward, helped her out, then half-carried her through the swampy strip toward the water.

Above the noise of his own progress, he heard a crashing of underbrush, close now, and he tried to redouble his speed. But the muck clung to his legs, dragged Paula down. Both of them were panting with effort; Paula almost sobbing.

A shot rang out, startling close, and a bullet whistled past, ricocheted on the water, screamed away weirdly.

Hartley pulled Paula down. They crouched in the reeds and mud. All was silent, except for Paula's sobs, and Hartley clapped a hand over her mouth.

She stopped instantly, and he loosed his grasp.

"Be absolutely quiet," he whispered, "he's listening for us."

Deadly quiet settled down over the lake, and Hartley and Paula crouched motionlessly in the oozing muck for long moments. There was no sound to tell where Webbley was. But it was very obvious that he was listening too, for some sign of them. The moon went beneath a cloud. Hartley pulled Paula's arm, and they inched forward again.

Each step made a startlingly loud noise in the mud and reeds. They stopped nervously, several times, to

listen. Twice it seemed to Hartley that similar sounds, not so very distant, ceased almost with their own halts, oddly like an echo. But each time silence reigned, and he resumed his progress.

At last they felt firm ground, this time sand, beneath their feet; stood free of the swampy strip.

"Quick!" said Hartley in low tones. "Into the water before the moon comes out!"

They went into the water with a splash, only to find that it was but a few inches deep.

"Further!" gasped Hartley. "We've got to get into deep water before . . ."

And then, like the merciless beam of a searchlight, moonbeams swept over the lake toward them and abruptly they were in the full glare of the moonlight.

BEHIND them, on the shore, a sudden crashing of underbrush came, and the sound of running footsteps, slogging through the mud of the swampy strip, then pounding on hard sand. A shot rang out. The bullet skipped past them.

Hartley glanced hastily behind, saw Webbley's form standing on the shore in the moonlight, sighting carefully along the barrel of his weapon. Hartley lunged forward, dragged Paula down into the waist-deep water. They both fell with a splash. The shot came a fraction of a second later, and again the bullet howled away into the night.

Paula, caught unprepared by Hartley's action, came up choking and gasping, unable to get her breath. Hartley interposed his body between her and the shore and stared back, holding Paula down until only their heads were out of the water.

Obviously Webbley was having trouble seeing them, because he was

wading swiftly out toward them now. Hartley realized the peril of remaining where they were.

"Swim!" he said swiftly to Paula. "Swim, under the water if you can, out to deeper water!"

He followed his own advice, immediately behind her splashing lunge outward, and swam desperately. Then, when his lungs could retain his breath no longer, he came to the surface, found that the water was no deeper. Paula's head was visible right beside his, and another shot rang out, hit the water between them with startling effect. Water drops stung Hartley's face.

As the echoes stopped, Hartley heard a new sound on the shore, high up near the path. The sound of crashing underbrush. Then Webbley heard too, and he whirled, fired up the slope from his knee-deep position in the lake.

An answering shot came from still another plunging form, and Webbley screamed long and horribly. Then his body fell with a splash into the water.

"Got him!" yelled an exultant voice ashore. It was the voice of Roy Getchell.

"Getchell!" yelled Hartley, standing up. "Don't shoot any more. It's me, Hartley. We're out here in the lake."

"Come in out of the wet," Getchell called, reaching the beach. "It's all over but the shouting. Webbley's lying right here, dead as a mackerel!"

Hartley turned, lifted Paula into his arms and splashed toward shore. Paula was sobbing audibly now, with relief.

As he staggered out onto the shore, he confronted two figures in the moonlight. One of them wore the blue uniform of the State Police.

"Is she all right?" asked Joe Grimes.

Hartley nodded.

"Yeah. We're just worn out and wet. Was that you shot Webbley?"

Nice shooting—and the most welcome bit of fireworks I've seen tonight."

"And boy, has there been plenty!" averred Getchell. "I thought we'd never get here, when the firing began. I saw the red flare and came a-running. Ran into my friend, Grimes, at the house. He finally tumbled to what was happening and beat it out here. Tells me he nearly had to slug an orderly to get his clothes and leave the hospital."

Grimes grinned in the moonlight, took off his cap and exposed a bandage on his head.

"Takes more than a little concussion to keep a Grimes out of the fun," he said. "But come on, let's get to the house and get you both into some dry clothes before you freeze to death."

"Now you're t-talking!" chattered Paula.

* * *

LATER, sitting around the kitchen stove with all four burners lit, Hartley and Paula explained what had happened to them and Grimes nodded.

"Just about like I figured it from what Anita told me," he said. "When I had Anita phone Webbley's home and office and get no answer, I realized where he must be. I knew it would be useless to try to explain *that* mess to the chief in time to get help out of here, so I got dressed and left the hospital."

Roy Getchell was staring at Paula.

"Looks like, from what you say, I'm out of a job, he said. "And me with this wonderful story, too! But I guess you'll have all the publicity you want in the morning edition, which . . ." he looked at his watch ". . . is due to run off in an hour and a half."

"What's that?" asked Hartley.

Getchell shrugged.

"Just a story Wiley wrote before he left. I guess it was the story old Carter Masterson squelched on him years ago. The story of who you really are, Miss

Masterson. Wiley found it out years ago and proved it up with some hick town marriage records, and . . ."

Paula rose to her feet.

"Oh," she said. "It just mustn't come out!"

Grimes stared at her, then at Hartley.

"I think I get what you mean . . ." he began hesitantly.

Hartley got to his feet.

"Come on, Getchell, we've got to get back to town. You're going to kill that story."

"Me?" Getchell looked doubtful. "I'm only a reporter . . ."

Paula interposed.

"Mr. Getchell, I believe my father had some interest in the *Blade*, didn't he?"

Getchell nodded.

"I guess so. Enough to keep Wiley quiet for fifteen years."

"Well, Wiley's dead now," said Paula. "And I think it could be arranged to make the paper wholly a Masterson corporation, with you as its editor. And as such, I think you could kill any story?"

Getchell gaped, then he grinned.

"Say," he said. "It looks like the Masterson Empire is going to keep right on going after all! Sure, Miss Masterson, the story'll be killed!" His voice took on a tinge of awe. "Think of it," he added. "Me, a part of the Masterson financial empire!"

"No," said Hartley, stepping over to Paula and taking her hand. "I think you'll have to give it a new name. Let's call it the Hartley empire from now on. Because I'm going to give Paula another new name, just as soon as she'll let me."

Getchell turned to Grimes.

"Come on, copper. Let's get to town. It looks like these two want to be alone. And I've got a story to kill,

and some sleep to get, so's I can take a nice little nurse out for the swellest date she's ever had; and if I haven't got you tagged wrong, Joe, you haven't had a date in a while either with a certain girl . . .”

Grimes grinned.

“Yeah, that's right. I guess it *is* about time. Besides, I'm anxious to

tell the chief the state's biggest mystery is all cleared up. And maybe he's got some more I can go to work on . . .”

Getchell jerked his arm toward the door.

“You won't find it here,” he said knowingly. “As far as I can tell, there ain't any young lady here doing any yelling for help! Let's go, copper!”

WORKINGS OF THE POLICE COURT

IN case you are ever so unfortunate as to be arrested, justly or otherwise, it might make you feel a trifle better to know just what is going on. Therefore, here are some facts to add to your intelligence on the subject.

When a person is arrested while the police court is in session he is taken at once before the magistrate for a hearing. This is desirable from the viewpoint of expediency. However, some cities provide for such short sessions of police courts that they are forced to detain a considerable number of prisoners awaiting hearings, or in plainer language, they “toss you in the clink.”

In some cities the police courts are in session just a few hours each day. The calendars of the courts are prepared at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and contain the cases in which arrests were made during the preceding 24 hours. Thus a person arrested after 5 o'clock Monday does not get a hearing until the following Wednesday.

Obviously, this system is unfavorable to the arrestee and is expensive to the city. You may deem yourself fortunate if you are arrested in a city with an efficient and always-open-for-business police court.

If an arrest is made during hours that the police court is not in session the arrestee is either detained or admitted to bail. The amount of bail is usually double the largest fine to which the prisoner could be convicted. In order to safeguard the rights of persons arrested, the law states that any officer of the police must take bail if any person is arrested for a misdemeanor during the hours when the court is not in normal session.

However, these few facts about the procedure of a police court are valueless unless there is one deciding factor, to wit:

“Get yourself a good lawyer and make like you're honest!”

THEY'RE STILL BEING BORN

SUCKERS, the livelihood of many a citizen of these United States, still, it seems abound. Con men recently got a lift in their spirits when it was learned that some of their fellow practitioners had cleaned three noble citizens of Chicago out of \$3,540 plus \$400 worth of rings.

Number one victim was a widow, who on the promise of \$100 interest, plus prompt payment, was induced to part with \$2,400 in order to assure the culmination of a “big business deal.” Her acquaintance, needless to say, ended the deal as soon as he received the money. When last seen, he was strolling leisurely down the avenue.

Sucker number two was a woman, who, when approached by two strangers with the offer to help them distribute money to charity, thought it a fine idea. Of course, she was not surprised to find that a bond was required to keep the

business on the up and up. The charity plan, however, vanished along with the man, after the innocent one had turned over \$800 and \$400 worth of rings.

The old and by now well publicized penny matching racket still is workable, as was proven by victim number three. He had a nice conversation with two strangers and a nice time,—for a while at least. He discovered his pleasures had cost him \$340.

However, the most heartening fact to the con men was the thought of the many suckers who were caught and, as is likely, did not report the fact to the police.

Barnum was right, apparently, in his famous statement. A bit cautious in his estimate as to the creatures' growth, but nevertheless correct in the fact that “suckers are born every minute.” Maybe even faster in these days of streamlining.



With drawn gun, Chief Flannerman stared into the study

KILLER!— OUT OF THIS WORLD

By FRANK PATTON

Noel Kuttner sat planning murder. Then a weird thing happened. Bullets sped through the night, but they came from phantom guns. Could this be?

“I’LL kill him . . . I’ll kill him!” Noel Kuttner’s mutter escaped his savagely twisting lips audibly in spite of his brooding, trancelike state. “I swear I’ll kill him!”

His narrowed eyes stared straight ahead into the layered cloud of cigarette smoke that befouled the atmosphere of his study. His pupils were unseeing, unobservant. The paneled wall at which he stared was not mirrored in the depths of his mind. It was as though it didn’t exist. Instead, he saw a grim scene that had already unfolded itself countless times in his mind’s eye.

Noel Kuttner was once again building up in his imagination the vengeance that he would exact upon the man he hated; hated so terribly that the emotion welled over his being like a putrescent flood. Once more he was picturing himself in the role of a killer in the night.

How vivid it all was. Henry Gardner—coming unsuspectingly down the walk that led from the front door of his swank apartment toward the street light that would make of him a perfect target.

And crouching in the shadows just beyond . . .

Hate filled Kuttner’s glaring eyes as

he imagined it. Savage, fanatical, coldly reasoning hate. He would be standing there like the angel of death. A macabre chuckle broke from Kuttner’s writhing lips as his mind framed the simile. To Gardner he would look more like a *demon* of death. Kuttner would be standing there, gun in hand, facing the man he hated. And when Gardner saw him . . .

How he would recoil in fear! Terror would sweep over him, engulf him, bring to him the horrible surety of a death he could not escape.

“Don’t move, Henry Gardner, don’t move! Just stand there and grovel like the scummy rat you are. Stand there and shiver in your filthy boots. And listen!

“You’re going to die, Gardner. Die like a rat in a trap. You won’t have a chance. I don’t intend to give you a chance . . .

“You never gave anyone else a chance, Gardner. Not you! There isn’t a soul, or a heart, in you. That’s one reason I’m going to shoot you through the head, Gardner. I don’t want to risk the chance of not killing you by shooting you through a heart you haven’t got!

"Justice, Henry Gardner; that's what this is! Justice. You're going to die to make the score even—or as even as ordinary death can make it. If I were Genghis Khan, or Attila, or Tojo, you'd be subjected to the most awful tortures the mind of man has ever devised, before you died; and even then the score wouldn't be even. But it isn't in my power to do that, Gardner. See how lucky you really are? A clean, quick, painless death . . .

"Remember the reason for what's going to happen to you in a few seconds, Gardner? Remember what you did? Maybe you don't understand the *whole* reason for my vengeance, Gardner. I'll refresh your memory before you die; it's the only real torture I can put you through . . ."

OBVIOUS of what he was doing, so intense was his concentration on his hateful imaginings, Noel Kuttner took a cigarette from the receptacle on his desk, lit it and blew the smoke slowly from his lungs. Then, forgotten the cigarette smoked in his fingers, sending a long, curling streamer of blue-gray coiling up to flatten out and join the heavy blue cloud already hanging over Kuttner's head. His picturization of a scene of vengeance went on building in his mind . . .

"You had enough money, Henry Gardner. You could cover up, legally, the crimes that you committed. High-priced lawyers could get you out of anything. I didn't have a chance to fight you . . .

"Those bonds, Gardner. How cleverly you manipulated them! You went into the market and before I knew what was happening, I was a ruined man. You cleaned me out, Gardner.

"Oh, yes, it was perfectly legal in every respect. After all, the stock market is a gamble. I gambled—and I lost.

That was enough to make me hate you, Gardner, but no more than I'd hate any man who cheated me. If it had been cheating in a card game, I'd have punched your face. But that's as far as it would have gone.

"It was because of Marie that I really had a reason to hate you. Marie was my girl, Gardner. I loved her; I intended to marry her—just as soon as I got enough money. But I never got enough money; you took it away from me.

"You weren't satisfied with that, Gardner. Weren't satisfied with taking away my money. Maybe, you thought, she'd marry me anyway after I got a fresh start. So you took her away from me, too! And you didn't even *want* her!

"Marie always was a gullible little thing. She had her eyes full of stars. That was one of the sweetest things about her, her innocence. That and her hero worship. In the financial world, Gardner, hero worship boils down to money. The man with money must be a hero. It must take courage, Marie reasoned, to win through in business and wrest riches and fame from tough competition. You were a hero to her, Gardner. You knew how she believed that, and you played it up; made yourself a hero in her eyes.

"You had the weapons, Gardner, and you used them like a master tactician. Money, gifts, attentions, jewels and clothing—you filled her head with glamor. And when you had blinded her enough, you took her.

"How was she to know what even I didn't know, Gardner? How was she to know what you were in the underworld? Even the police have never been able to pin your activities on you. Perhaps they never even suspected how really big you were in the crime world and in the rackets . . .

"It's when she found out that terrible things happened. And when she had found out, you turned off the glamor; you became the predatory beast that you really are.

"I don't know exactly what you did to her, Gardner. Damn your soul, I don't know exactly . . . but you do, and you can think of it all now! Think of it, Gardner! What did you do to her?

THE morning they found her body in the river, Gardner, I nearly went insane. I came for you, but you had disappeared. You'd run away, Gardner; hid out somewhere upstate. On a vacation, they said.

"During the weeks I waited for you to come back, Gardner, I fought with myself. I knew only one thing—I wanted to kill you. But I wondered if I would. I'm a coward, Gardner. Everybody says I'm a coward. I remember how they said it that day you forced me to my knees in the market. They said it took guts to buck Henry Gardner, and that I wasn't having any more success at bucking than anyone else . . .

"I wondered at that for a while, Gardner. I wondered for a long time if I was a coward.

"But now you see I'm not a coward, don't you, Henry Gardner? Now it's you who are afraid. Afraid down to your heels that you're going to die. You don't want to die, do you? You keep thinking of Marie, and how she died. You don't want to die that way do you?

"I wish I could make you die that way, Gardner. But unfortunately I've got to do it this way. The police won't believe me. Nobody can track you down, You're too big in business and too big in the underworld. Everybody's afraid of you. They say you have a pull with the police commissioner; that you have a police guard around your apart-

ment all the time, so that nobody can kill you when you come and go.

"But you see I'm not afraid of that, Gardner. I planned this too well. And you're standing squarely in the light, Gardner, a perfect target. I can't miss! Then I'll be away in the dark before anybody sees me. They'll never see me. And they'll never know who killed you. You have too many enemies.

"You smashed me, Gardner. You took Marie away from me. And I couldn't do anything about it. People said I was a coward, too. They still think I'm a coward. That's why they'll never believe I could walk up like this, shoot you calmly through the head, then disappear in the dark. They'll never have the slightest suspicion.

"I figured that all out, Gardner. And now I'm going to have my revenge. Now, right now, you are going to die! Stand up, Henry Gardner! Pull your shaking body together and make believe you are a man! Look as callously upon your own death as you looked at Marie's dead face, shrugged, and then went on a vacation!

"I'm bringing the sights on this gun up deliberately, slowly, surely, Gardner. Now they're centered directly on your forehead . . .

"Ah, you realize at last that I mean it, eh? You've been thinking, too, that I could never do it! That I didn't have the guts to do it! Go ahead, Gardner, scream. Scream like the terrified animal that you are. Scream and die . . .!"

In Noel Kuttner's mental ear the sharp bark of the pistol shot was startlingly real. On his face was the savage satisfaction of a hate that was consummated. In his mind's eye, he watched the body of Henry Gardner slump down, blood gushing from a neat hole in his forehead—in the *exact* center of his forehead . . .

The silence of Noel Kuttner's study

was broken by a strangled gasp as Kuttner's hand went to his breast in a clutching motion. A gurgling sound came into his throat, and blood welled from his lips, and from between the clawing fingers that tore at his shirt. With gaping surprise in his rapidly glazing eyes, Noel Kuttner sagged forward over his desk, then complete blankness entered them and he lay still.

* * *

I MUSTA winged him, Chief," protested Patrolman Cressy. "I saw him clearly under the street lamp, just as he fired point-blank at Gardner's face. I'm sure I plugged him, at least in the arm. I'd a swore it was plumb center in his chest . . ."

"Now listen, Cressy," said Chief Flannerman in irritation. "Don't get me any more riled up than I am. You've been on the force long enough to know you're talking nonsense. In the first place, how in the hell did you let Gardner get plugged so easy? Not that it ain't a public improvement . . ."

Cressy looked bewildered.

"Chief, one second there wasn't anybody there, and the next, he stood under that light as plain as day. Just like he materialized outa nothing like one of them spirit projections mediums tell you people can send out if they concentrate . . ."

"Cut it out!" roared Chief Flannerman. "For the record, I'm going to put it down he sneaked up behind a row of bushes. This materializing business is crazy. Completely nuts! And coming from you, it's bughouse. Also, I'm going to put it down that you fired at the killer, but the light was bad and you missed . . ."

"But I *didn't* miss, Chief!"

"Cressy," moaned Flannerman, "you'll have me in tears in a minute. You know as well as I that there wasn't

a drop of blood anywhere around. And if you'd smacked him plumb center with a Police Special, he wouldn'ta *walked* ten feet from that lamppost, much less run fast enough to get down that whole street, which hasn't an outlet for two hundred feet, without even a single drop of blood leaking outa him! You didn't hit him, Cressy; that's as plain as the nose on your ugly face. If you'll take my advice, you'll go down-stairs and use up a couple hundred rounds on the pistol practice range.

"But, Chief . . ."

"Quit trying to make more of a mystery out of this than it is!" roared Flannerman. "I've got other mysteries to solve. In fact, I just came back from a place uptown. Some screwball committed suicide because he lost his shirt in the market, and his girl in the river . . ."

Flannerman paused, glared at Cressy.

"Maybe you can materialize a ghost in *that* case too!" he accused sarcastically. "This guy—Kuttner was his name—locked himself tight as a drum in his study, sat down in front of his desk and shot himself in the chest. The only thing that has me buffaloed is how he held the gun far enough away to avoid powder burns on his shirt . . ."

"That would point to murder, rather than suicide," said Cressy rather cautiously.

Flannerman looked sarcastically at Cressy.

"Listen, you lug. If you'd seen the way that guy had himself locked in . . . No guy could have got in to shoot him, nor got out after he did! I *know* that!"

CRESSY shrugged, then half-turned as the door opened.

"Hello, Purcell," Chief Flannerman said. "What's the dope on the bullets?"

Ballistics expert Purcell laid two bullets on the desk before Flannerman.

"This one," he explained, "came from Gardner's body. It also came from this gun . . ." he laid a pistol on the desk "and this one came from the guy in the uptown flat. It came from this other gun."

Flannerman stared stupidly a moment, then his face purpled in rage.

"You damned fool!" he roared. "You got the guns mixed! It's the other around!"

Purcell looked indignant.

"Listen, Chief, if these guns are mixed, they were mixed before I got 'em."

Flannerman went white with fury.

"You mean to say *I* mixed 'em?"

Purcell looked steadily at the chief, then he shrugged.

"Figure it out for yourself," he said, then turned and walked out.

Flannerman sat for a moment staring at the guns while comprehension struggled to erase the perplexity from his face. Then he grinned.

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "Now I got it! Two deaths solved at one sweep! Look, Cressy, I apologize for my crack about that guy not spilling any blood. It's perfectly clear now! Kuttner killed Gardner under the lamp, took your shot in his chest, managed to get home somehow, and locked himself in to die!"

"Also I apologize for calling you a bum shot. You're okay, Cressy. I'll see that you get a promotion for this. Here, take your gun and get the hell outa here."

Cressy took the gun with a relieved grin.

"Okay, Chief," he said. "I'm going. And believe me, I feel much better now. I *knew* I hit the guy . . .!"

After the patrolman had shut the



Henry Gardner slumped in death

door behind him, Chief Flannerman stared down at the gun and bullets.

"Now how in hell did I mix those guns?" he muttered. "First time I ever did a thing like that . . ."

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS DETECTIVES

By ALEXANDER BLADE

William H. Schoemaker

He became Chicago's most noted and feared chief of detectives. He is remembered by his nickname, "Shoes"

FOR 33 years William H. Schoemaker was the scourge of Chicago's underworld. Schoemaker hated panderers, crooks and thieves with a hatred almost fanatical in its intensity and he despised any policeman who would so much as bid a good morning to one of their kind.

The boy who was to become Chicago's most noted and most feared chief of detectives was born in Chicago in the year 1868. His first job was that of a Western Union messenger, a job which taught him the value of flailing fists. Later he became an office boy for the old Chicago *Daily News*.

"Shoes," as he was affectionately called by friend and not so kindly by enemy, would often chuckle reminiscently as he told how he ceased to be an office boy. One day he was leaning out the window, chewing away on a chaw of tobacco. Along came a baldheaded fellow, without a hat. The impulse was too great for "Shoes." In his own words, "I let fly and scored a bullseye, but some stool pigeon saw me and so I ceased to be an office boy."

For a while, "Shoes" held various positions in the circulation departments of the *News* and the *Chicago Tribune*. Then on Feb. 5, 1905, he joined the police department as a cub.

During the course of his career as a guardian of the law, Schoemaker was cited 23 times for bravery. He was known as a man of tremendous courage, a tall, honest fellow with a bark worse than his bite. He inspired both fear and admiration among gangsters. They liked him because he was honest and a square dealer.

Once when he was lying ill in a Chicago hospital he looked up to find two notorious hoodlums—both killers—standing at the foot of his bed.

"I thought my last had come," he told friends later. "But they said, 'We're sorry you're sick, Chief and thought we'd come in and say howdy.' Then they sat down and chatted for a while and the next day they sent flowers."

His superiors often called him the 100-per-cent policeman. His knowledge of human nature helped him achieve this title. This knowledge once aided him in solving a murder.

A sullen young suspect was taken to the detective bureau and brought before the Chief, who had him locked up for a few hours. Then "Shoes" sent for him.

"Hungry?" asked Schoemaker. "What do you like best?"

"Roast duck," was the reply.

"Fine," said the chief, "I'd like some, too. Let's go get some."

At a nearby cafe Schoemaker ordered roast duck with all the trimmings. They ate. Then Schoemaker said, "Well, son, what about it? Want to tell me all about it?"

The youth broke down and confessed to his part in the robbery and subsequent murder. The information gathered from that roast duck dinner eventually led to the round-up of the entire gang.

However, the road from rookie to chief of detectives was not an easy one. For seven years Patrolman Schoemaker made little impression on the department. Part of the time he did crossing duty in downtown Chicago and tooted a traffic whistle for the first horseless carriages in the loop. He was made a sergeant in 1910 and it was then that he began to build his reputation as an unbending disciplinarian.

"A policeman's got to be either hard or soft," he told the policemen under him. "If you're soft you're going to get into trouble."

At first roll call, Sgt. Schoemaker started after "drunks" and "shirkers." He sent several to the trial board and demanded their immediate dismissal.

One night a patrolman reported for duty drunk. "Shoes" refused to let him on duty. The man started to go down the street and Schoemaker knocked him down and took away his star and revolver.

The captain of the station preferred charges and Schoemaker went before the trial board with the result that the patrolman was discharged and Schoemaker was told that while the board did not altogether approve of such methods of enforcing discipline, under the circumstances his actions were commendable.

His was a relentless war on crime. He became known as "Knock-'em-Dead" Schoemaker due to his unending energy in the breaking of crime.

In 1913 the conditions along Clark st. were such that all Chicago was clamoring for reform. Mayor Harrison, eager to make a good impression, formed the following shock troops: Capt. Matthew Zimmer, Lt. Wesley Westbrook, Lt. Patrick Hogan, and Sgt. "Knock-'em-Dead" Schoemaker.

Every one of them had the reputation of being impervious to graft and able to use their hands if the situation required. They clapped on a 1 a.m. curfew and required an explanation of anyone caught out after that hour.

Night life along Clark st. was ruined. It got so that complaints from business men came pouring in by the dozens, but Mayor Harrison remained firm. The drive continued in the district until the ideals of the reform agencies and law-abiding citizens were satisfied.

So fearless did Schoemaker's reputation become that powers behind the vice rings used his name to keep troublesome dive proprietors in line. They often threatened to have him assigned to a particular neighborhood if the proprietor didn't mind his business and pay his dues. The formula is said to have worked every time.

In 1916 he was made a lieutenant. Promotion to a captaincy followed in 1925, but meanwhile, in 1924, he was made chief of detectives.

It was in 1924 that "Shoes" solved perhaps his most famous case, the Rondout train robbery, which amounted to \$2,000,000.

The mail train was held up by a group of war-trained robbers, who "got sick and tired of waiting for a bonus and decided to help ourselves to some dough."

"Shoes" arrested almost single-handedly four of the criminals and from them obtained confes-

sions which led to the arrest and conviction of the rest of the gang. The first four offered the policeman a bribe of \$20,000 dollars which he accepted. However, he turned the money over to the government along with the criminals after all the necessary information had been collected. As a result of a legal decision, however, Schoemaker was allowed to keep the money, plus a \$16,000 reward offered by the government. He split this money with three of his aides.

Schoemaker also distinguished himself by being instrumental in the solving of the Evergreen park mail robbery. He trapped "Limp" Cleaver and his hoodlums and wrung a confession from them.

He was chief of detectives from 1925 to 1927 and from 1931 to 1934, in which year he retired because of ill health. He was the only chief to serve two terms.

"Shoes" was held in high esteem by his fellow officers. They called him a "policeman's policeman." He wanted nothing greater in the way of praise. Upon his death in 1938, the *Daily News* ran an editorial for its former office boy.

In it "Shoes" was praised, not only for his deeds, but for his inspiration to the future cops of Chicago and other cities. As the Commissioner of Police said upon Schoemaker's retirement, "He was a 100-per-cent efficient policeman."

Heaven could hold no greater reward than those words for "Knock-'em-Down" Schoemaker.

★ IN DARKEST LONDON ★

THE "city slicker" it seems, has always shelled the poor country boy. Historical records tell us that such was certainly the case in old London. The term "foreign merchant" was applied to not only those who came from beyond the seas, but also to English farmers or tradesmen who lived and worked outside the city. These poor suckers were victims of a long list of extortions, legal and illegal.

Much of the problem started when London grocers complained that the spices imported from foreign merchants, such as pepper and cinnamon, contained a great deal of dust and similar refuse. The good people of London, it was argued, were thus being cheated. So it was decreed that all spices from foreign merchants must be "garbled"—carefully cleaned.

The foreign merchants protested vehemently. They argued that the same rule should be applied to spices consigned to and sold by English merchants. You guessed it—they got nowhere with their suggestion.

An inspector, who was an English grocer, was assigned to do the necessary cleaning. For his work he received eight cents a pound—plus all the extra racket money he could get from the foreigner

for not doing it. Obviously, if the foreigners sold clean spices by weight and their English rivals sold uncleansed, they could not compete.

On the agricultural front, too, the poor sucker had to be careful in his dealings with these captains of commerce. The usual maneuver was as follows: After a price for a load of grain had been agreed upon, but not yet paid, the merchant kept the farmer's attention engaged while some of his workmen or apprentice boys threw water on it. He then informed the unwary agriculturist that he could not be expected to pay the market price for wet grain. "Take a much smaller sum, or none at all," the buyer commanded loudly. Since the farmer could not cart wet grain home again to any advantage, there was nothing to do but sell it for whatever he could get.

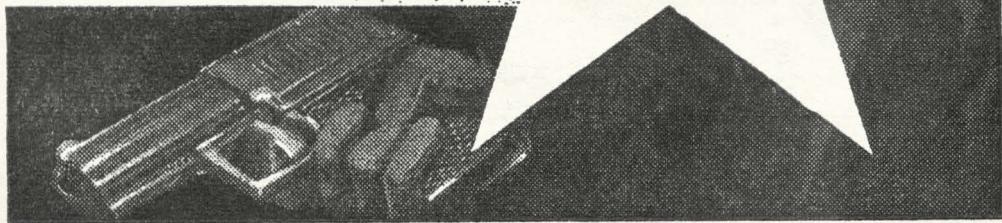
Similarly, a live calf or sheep would be quickly killed and the butcher would then refuse to pay the agreed price because the animal was "not what I expected, sorry." Again the farmer was helpless. He could not take the carcass home, nor could he sell it elsewhere in the city.

The law, of course, was an able Chamber of Commerce—for these unscrupulous London racketeers.

WANTED BY THE FBI



Acting in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mammoth Detective presents the following line-up of wanted criminals. If you have a clue that might result in their capture, notify your local FBI office or Mammoth Detective at once.





FEDERAL RESERVE ACT

WANTED

CLARENCE RAY BELL, with aliases: C. R. BELL, CLARENCE K. BELL, CLARENCE R. BELL.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 43 years (born August 8, 1890, near Cambridge, Ohio); Height, 5 feet, 8½ inches; Weight, 175 pounds; Eyes, grey; Hair, light brown; Complexion, light; Build, stocky; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, attended high school; Occupation, bank teller; Peculiarities, avid golfer and bowler, frequents dance halls, roadhouses, and bars, sports enthusiast, especially prefers basketball games.

CRIMINAL RECORD

(None Known)

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Cleveland, Ohio on February 2, 1938, charging subject as Clarence R. Bell with a violation of the Federal Reserve Act in that he did on or about March 28, 1930, at Canton, Ohio, knowingly, wilfully, unlawfully and feloniously embezzle and convert to his own use, certain funds of a National Bank.

UNLAWFUL FLIGHT TO AVOID PROSECUTION (MURDER)

WANTED

LAZARO AGUILAR RAMOS, with aliases: LARRY RAMOS, LAZARO R. MOS.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 29 years, born February 11, 1914, Philippine Islands (not verified); Height, 5 feet, 8 inches; Weight, 150 pounds; Eyes, brown; Hair, black; Complexion, light brown; Build, medium, muscular; Race, brown; Nationality, Filipino born, believed U. S. citizen; Occupation, houseboy, bus boy, prize fighter, vegetable worker, railroad worker, movie extra; Scars and marks, tattoo left arm; Peculiarities, gambler, dresses well.

CRIMINAL RECORD

(None Known)

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Los Angeles, California on October 7, 1942, charging subject as Lazaro Aguilar Ramos with a violation of the Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution Statute in that he did travel in interstate commerce from Beverly Hills, California, to Seattle, Washington, with intent to avoid prosecution for the crime of murder, which crime was committed at Beverly Hills, California, on February 2, 1938.



NATIONAL BANKRUPTCY ACT

WANTED

HARRY S. SCHWARTZBERG, with aliases: HARRY SCHWARTZBERG, SCHWARTZ, HARRY WALLACE, HARRY WERBER, HARRY WERBIE, H. VOSS.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 48 years (born December 15, 1894 at Kansas City, Missouri); Height, 5 feet 6 inches; Weight, 165 pounds; Build, stocky; Eyes, blue; Hair, dark brown, combed Pompadour (reported to be dyed red); Complexion, medium fair, slightly freckled; Race, Jew, but face bears none of Jewish features; Occupation, dealer in radios and automobile accessories, salesman; Marks and Scars: longitudinal scar, ½ inch on back of neck; vaccination scar, 1 inch, left arm upper; Peculiarities: talkative; reported to have reddish mustache.

CRIMINAL RECORD

(None Known)

On June 7, 1928, a Federal Grand Jury at Kansas City, Missouri, returned an indictment against Harry Schwartzberg, former President of the American Auto and Radio Manufacturing Company, Incorporated, Kansas City, Missouri, charging that on February 20, 1928, and continuously thereafter, he concealed from the trustee in bankruptcy \$88,943.10 belonging to the bankrupt estate of the American Auto and Radio Manufacturing Company, Incorporated. On February 19, 1929, Schwartzberg entered a plea of guilty to this indictment. Pending sentence, he was allowed to remain at liberty on \$5,000 bond. He failed to appear for sentence on May 24, 1929, and on May 25, 1929, his bond was declared forfeited.



NATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT ACT

WANTED

EDDIE B. POWERS, with aliases: E. B. POWERS, E. G. POWERS, EDDIE BERNARD POWERS, EDWARD POWERS, EDWARD B. POWERS, EDWARD BERNARD POWERS.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 48 years, born October 19, 1895, Dublin, Ireland (cannot be verified); Height, 5 feet, 10 inches; Weight, 152 pounds; Eyes, hazel; Hair, dark brown, gray at temples; Complexion, swarthy; Build, medium; Race, white; Nationality, Irish; Education, attended high school; Occupation, mechanic, truck driver, salesman for music lesson swindler; Scars and marks, bullet wound scar under chin, scar right shoulder blade, tattoo cow girl and initials "M.B." left forearm, star right forearm resulting from tattoo removal, tattoo, star between thumb and forefinger right hand; Peculiarities, erect carriage, walks with slight limp, gambles on horse races, impersonates government officers.

CRIMINAL RECORD

(None Known)

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Alexandria, Virginia, on December 7, 1936, charging subject as Eddie Powers with a violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act in that he did, on or about May 15, 1936, unlawfully transport a stolen automobile in interstate commerce from Boykins, Virginia, to Cumberland, Maryland, knowing same to have been stolen.





CRIMINAL RECORD

(None)

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Trenton, New Jersey, on June 13, 1939, charging subject, Captain Alfred Barnard, with a violation of Section 100, Title 18, for embezzlement of Government property in that he did on or about May 8, 1939, embezzle \$20,600 from the United States Government.

EMBEZZLEMENT OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

WANTED

ALFRED PAUL BARNARD, with aliases: CAPTAIN ALFRED PAUL BARNARD, ALFRED P. BARNARD, A. P. BARNARD.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 42 years (born April 23, 1901, at North Branby, Connecticut); Height, 5 feet, 10 inches; Weight, 170 pounds; Eyes, blue; Hair, black, or very dark brown, combed flat, parted in center, receding in front; Teeth, white, silver of gold shows; Complexion, olive, smooth, pallid; Build, medium; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, 2 years' high school; Occupation, Captain, Finance Corps Reserve, U. S. Army, formerly employed in banks and brokerage houses as an auditor; Scars, Appendectomy scar; Peculiarities, described as being very much a gentleman; immaculately dressed at all times; fond of women; drinks considerably; talks a lot—repeats himself; nervous laughter in speech; has tendency for double-breasted pinstriped suits; Marital status, married, separated; Glasses, wears silver-rimmed glasses part of time.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE VIOLATOR

WANTED

WILLIAM ALFRED WRIGHT, with aliases: WILLIAM RANDOLPH, WILLIAM A. RANDOLPH, WILLIAM ALFRED RANDOLPH, BILLIE WRIGHT, BILLY WRIGHT, W. A. WRIGHT, WILL WRIGHT, WILLIAM WRIGHT, WILLIAM A. WRIGHT, "WILLIE."



DESCRIPTION

Age, 45 years, born June 13, 1898, New York, New York (cannot be verified); Height, 5 feet, 4 1/2 inches; Weight, 135 pounds; Eyes, maroon; Hair, black, curly; Complexion, light brown; Build, medium, small; Race, Negro; Nationality, American; Education, unknown; Occupation, actor, singer, carnival worker, mechanic, electrician, car washer, cook; Scars and marks, burn scar outer forearm, 2 raised scars left side neck, scars left thumb and index finger; Peculiarities, transient, convincing talker, broad nose, wide mouth.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As William Wright, No. 9380, arrested Police Department, Denver, Colorado, May 31, 1924; charge, burglary of residence; disposition, 12 to 15 months.

As William Wright, No. 12574, received State Penitentiary, Canon City, Colorado, June 22, 1924; crime, grand larceny; sentence, 12 to 15 months, paroled April 22, 1925, released from parole June 27, 1925.

As William Alfred Randolph, No. 2975, arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Kansas, September 7, 1925; charge, fugitive from Denver, Colorado; disposition, released to Denver, Colorado, September 10, 1925.

* As William Wright, No. 9380, arrested Police Department, Denver, Colorado, February 18, 1926; charge, grand larceny; disposition, 5 to 10 years.

As Wm. Wright, No. 13393, received State Penitentiary, Canon City, Colorado, March 12, 1926; crime, grand larceny; sentence, 5 to 10 years.

As William Alfred Wright, No. 8328, arrested Police Department, Dallas, Texas, February 14, 1930; charge, burglary; disposition, 2 two-year sentences (concurrent).

As Will Wright, No. 63557, received State Penitentiary, Huntsville, Texas, April 26, 1930; crime, burglary; sentence, 2 two-year sentences (concurrent).

As William Wright, No. 34208, arrested Police Department, Evanston, Illinois, November 27, 1934; charge, attempted burglary; disposition, 6 months and \$1 fine on first count, 1 year and \$1 fine plus costs on second count.

* As William Wright, No. 9380, arrested Police Department, Denver, Colorado, October 6, 1936; charge, auto theft; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, Denver, Colorado, October 10, 1936.

As William Alfred Wright, No. 3293, arrested U. S. Marshal, Denver, Colorado, October 10, 1936; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, 5 years.

As William Alfred Wright, No. 1193-PCS, received U. S. Hospital for Defective Delinquents, Springfield, Missouri, August 30, 1938; crime, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; sentence, 5 years, conditionally released July 18, 1940.

William Alfred Wright was sentenced on January 30, 1937, to serve five years in the U. S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas, for violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act. He was transferred to the U. S. Hospital for Defective Delinquents, Springfield, Missouri, on August 30, 1938, and was conditionally released from this institution on July 18, 1940. A conditional release violator's warrant for his arrest was issued by the U. S. Board of Parole, Washington, D. C., on December 5, 1940, charging him as William Alfred Wright with violating the terms of his conditional release.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

IMPERSONATION

WANTED

JOSEPH CLIFFORD WEBSTER, with aliases: JOE CLIFFORD, JOSEPH CLIFFORD, C. B. DISNEY, CARL GARRITY, TIMOTHY GARRITY, TIMOTHY C. GARRITY, TIMOTHY GARRITY, ROBERT HAMILTON, CARL GARRITY, ROBERT HAMILTON, MOONEY, PATRICK O'FLAHERTY, R. C. ORTHWEIN, CLIFFORD WEBSTER, J. C. WEBSTER, JOHN CLIFFORD WEBSTER, JOSEPH C. WEBSTER, W. CLIFFORD WEBSTER, "TERRY."

DESCRIPTION

Age, 51 years (born 1892 at Kansas City, Missouri); Height, 5 feet, 11 inches; Weight, 150 pounds; Eyes, blue; Hair, gray; Complexion, sallow; Build, medium stout; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, attended high school; Occupation, clerk, stenographer, bookkeeper, expert typist, confidence man; Scars and marks, small cut scar upper right cheekbone; Peculiarities, extremely nervous, partly bald, wears horn rimmed glasses.



CRIMINAL RECORD

As Clifford Webster, No. 5214, arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, October 1, 1911; charge, passing worthless checks; disposition, 2 years, paroled October 20, 1911.

* As Clifford Webster, No., arrested City Marshal's Office, Pleasant Hill, Missouri, January 6, 1912; charge, forgery; disposition, released to Kansas City, Missouri.

* As Clifford Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, January 6, 1912; charge, forgery; disposition, 5 years.

As W. Clifford Webster, No. 18316, received State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, January 24, 1912; crime, forgery, 2nd degree; sentence, 5 years, paroled June 4, 1914.

* As Clifford Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, March 3, 1915; charge, forgery; disposition, released on \$1,000 bond, forfeited April 13, 1915.

* As J. C. Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, May 4, 1915; charge, forgery; disposition, 5 years.

As Joseph C. Webster, No. 17222, received State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, June 29, 1915; crime, forgery, 2nd degree; sentence, 5 years, discharged October 25, 1918.

* As Joseph C. Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, April 29, 1919; charge, forgery; disposition, 2 years.

As Joseph C. Webster, No. 23122, received State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, August 7, 1919; crime, forgery, 2nd degree; sentence, 2 years, discharged June 11, 1920.

* As J. C. Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, January 18, 1921; charge, forgery; disposition, 10 years.

As J. C. Webster, No. 23998, received State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, August 9, 1921; crime, forgery; 2nd degree; sentence, 10 years, discharged September 17, 1926.

As Joseph Clifford Webster, No. 5474, arrested Police Department, St. Joseph, Missouri, October 26, 1926; charge, bogus checks; disposition, released to Kansas City, Missouri.

* As Joseph Clifford Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, October 26, 1926; charge, forgery; disposition, 1 year County Jail, released January 4, 1927.

* As Joe Webster, No., arrested Police Department, Kansas City, Missouri, August 18, 1928; charge, worthless checks; disposition, 5 years.

As Joseph Clifford Webster, No. 34180, received State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, December 4, 1928; crime, forgery, 2nd degree; sentence, 5 years, discharged September 3, 1931.

As Timothy Garrity, No. E-7354, arrested Police Department, New York, New York, June 24, 1940; charge, petty larceny; disposition, 6 months.

As Timothy C. Garrity, No. 242023, received Workhouse, Rikers Island, New York, New York, July 3, 1940; crime, petty larceny; sentence, 6 months.

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at New York, New York, on April 30, 1942, charging subject as John Clifford Webster with a violation of the Federal Impersonation Statute in that he did, unlawfully and with intent to defraud, obtain certain money by falsely assuming and pretending to be an officer of the U. S. Government.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

DESERTER

WANTED

JOHN HENRY BALL, JR. with alias: JOHN H. BALL, JR.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 27 years (born July 3, 1916, Saint Louis, Missouri); Height, 5 feet 6 1/4 inches; Weight, 150 pounds; Eyes, hazel (blue); Hair, light brown; Complexion, ruddy; Build, small frame; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, high school graduate; Occupation, first class seaman, U. S. Coast Guard Service; Scars and marks, 1 inch line scar right cheek; Peculiarities, teeth unusually white and even; startling flashing smile; serious expression; quiet disposition.

CRIMINAL RECORD

(None Known)

John Henry Ball, Jr., former first class seaman, was declared a deserter from the U. S. Coast Guard Patrol Boat Theta on November 9, 1936, following his disappearance on October 30, 1939. His apprehension is desired for return to Military Authorities.



MAMMOTH DETECTIVE


**IMPERSONATION
WANTED**

ELBERT SMITH, with aliases: C. D. DAVIS, JAMES DOUGLAS, JAMES B. DOUGLAS, JAMES V. DOUGLAS, JAMES B. DOUGLASS, ELBERT B. MITH JONES, DAVIS MORGAN, DORIT MORGAN, DROIT MORGAN, HAMMONDS DAVIS MORGAN, SERGEANT DAVIS MORGAN, ALBERT SMITH, REV. E. F. SMITH, REV. E. L. SMITH, EBERT SMITH, REV. ELBERT SMITH, ELBERT B. SMITH, ELBERT ROBERTSON SMITH, ELBERT T. SMITH, "JONES."

DESCRIPTION

Age, 59 years, born September, 1884, Macon, Georgia (cannot be verified); Height, 5 feet, 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches; Weight, 132 pounds; Eyes, maroon; Hair, black—graying; Complexion, light brown;

Hair, black—graying; Complexion, light brown; Occupation, laborer, farmer, waiter, coal dealer;

two vaccination scars left upper arm, scar right forehead, curved scar back right hand, scar point of chin, scar outside left leg, scar left forearm, crooked little finger both hands, two missing upper front teeth possibly replaced with gold crowns;

Peculiarities, receding chin, protruding lips, deep set eyes, frequently wears horn rimmed glasses, high pitched voice, occasionally wears mustache.

CRIMINAL RECORD

* As James Douglas, No. 12386, arrested Police Department, Detroit, Michigan, April 13, 1922; charge, larceny; disposition, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 years.

As James Douglas, No. 14899, received State Penitentiary, Jackson, Michigan, May 27, 1922; crime, larceny; sentence, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 years, escaped from State Road Camp, Grand Blanc, Michigan, October 27, 1923.

As Elbert Smith, No. 12589, arrested Police Department, Omaha, Nebraska, September 4, 1928; charge, fugitive; disposition, released to Michigan State Police; returned to State Penitentiary, Jackson, Michigan, September 5, 1928; transferred to State Hospital, Ionia, Michigan September 10, 1928.

As Elbert B. Smith, No. 6218, arrested Police Department, Fort Wayne, Indiana, May 26, 1932; charge, fraudulent checks; disposition, 1 to 10 years.

As Elbert B. Smith, No. 15498, received State Penitentiary, Michigan City, Indiana, June 20, 1932; crime, issuing fraudulent checks; sentence, 1 to 10 years, paroled June 20, 1933, declared delinquent October 26, 1932.

As Elbert Smith, No. 884, arrested Police Department, Portsmouth, Virginia, June 1, 1934; charge, fugitive; disposition, released June 14, 1934.

As Elbert Smith, No. 2610, arrested Police Department, Rome, Georgia, sentenced December 18, 1934; charge, forgery; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, Rome, Georgia.

As Elbert Smith, No. 1494, arrested Sheriff's Office, Rome, Georgia, December 22, 1934; charge, forgery; disposition, six month County Jail, released June 12, 1935.

As Elbert Smith, No. 4891, arrested Sheriff's Office, Port Huron, Michigan, October 24, 1935; charge, worthless checks; disposition, dismissed, released December 6, 1935, to U. S. Marshal, Detroit, Michigan.

As Elbert Smith, No. 7950, arrested U. S. Marshal, Detroit, Michigan, December 6, 1935; charge, impersonation; disposition, ordered removed to Asheville, North Carolina; as No. 2498, received U. S. Detention Farm, Milan, Michigan, December 6, 1935; as No. 4286, arrested Sheriff's Office, Asheville, North Carolina, December 6, 1935; released to U. S. Marshal, Asheville, North Carolina.

As Elbert T. Smith, No., arrested U. S. Marshal, Asheville, North Carolina, March 14, 1936; charge, impersonating Federal officer; disposition, 6 months, suspended, April 11, 1936.

As Elbert Smith, No. 30177, arrested Police Department, Birmingham, Alabama, May 7, 1936; charge, issuing worthless checks; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, Birmingham, Alabama; released on bond, forfeited.

* As Elbert Smith, No., arrested Police Department, Lawrenceville, Georgia, June 2, 1936; charge, suspicion forgery; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, Cordele, Georgia, sentenced 4 to 6 years, November 2, 1936.

* As Elbert Smith, No., received Turner County Public Works Camp, Ashburn, Georgia, November 19, 1936; crime, forgery; sentence, 4 to 6 years, escaped July 21, 1938.

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Atlanta, Georgia, on October 9, 1941, charging subject as Elbert Smith with a violation of the Federal Impersonation Statute, in that he did on or about February 6, 1940, at Atlanta, Georgia, unlawfully and with intent to defraud, obtain certain money by falsely assuming and pretending to be an officer of the United States Government.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

**UNLAWFUL FLIGHT TO AVOID PROSECUTION
(MURDER)**
WANTED

ORLANDO GREEN, with aliases: THOMAS HOLTON, HOWARD JOHNSON, HENRY KELLY, HENRY LEE, "LITTLE BOY" TALSON, "LITTLE BOY" TALTON, "LITTLE BOY."

DESCRIPTION

Age, 43 years (born March 5, 1900, at Palmyra, Missouri); Height, 5 feet 7 inches; Weight, 133 pounds; Eyes, maroon; Hair, black; Complexion, medium dark; Build, slender; Race, negro; Nationality, American; Education, grammar school; Occupation, porter; Scars and Marks, cut scars on right side of neck; Peculiarities, has shiny skin.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As Thomas Holton, No. 425, arrested Sheriff's Office, Rock Island, Illinois, May 18, 1929; charge, robbery with gun; disposition, one year to life, Illinois State Penitentiary.

As Thomas Holton, No. 3388, received State Penitentiary, Joliet, Illinois, October 5, 1929; crime, robbery; sentence, one year to life; paroled December 15, 1934.

A complaint was filed before the United States Commissioner at Springfield, Illinois, on May 4, 1939, charging Orlando Green with a violation of the Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution Statute in that he did unlawfully flee from Moline, Illinois, to Des Moines, Iowa, for the purpose of avoiding prosecution by the State of Illinois for murder committed at Moline, Illinois, on or about September 20, 1936.



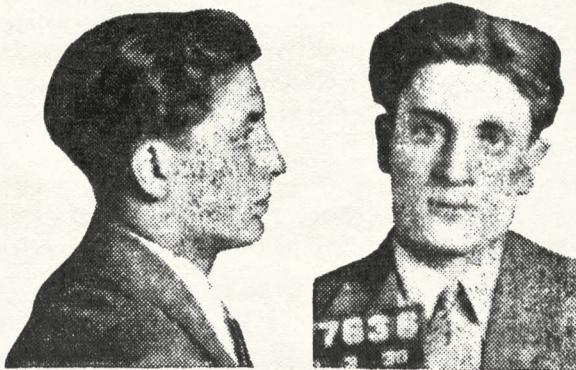
UNLAWFUL FLIGHT TO AVOID PROSECUTION (MURDER)

WANTED

PETER GALLO, alias PETE WALLACE.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 28 years in 1938 (exact date of birth not known); born at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); Height, 5 feet, 6 1/2 inches; Weight, 139 pounds; Eyes, dark chestnut; Hair, dark brown; Complexion, medium dark; Build, slender; Race, white; Nationality, American-Italian; Education, public schools; Occupation, buttonhole maker; Scars and marks: dark flesh mole in front lobe, right ear; scar cut, second joint index finger, rear left hand; scar right eyebrow; scar above left wrist outside; appendectomy scar.



CRIMINAL RECORD

- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 7, 1927; charge, larceny; prosecution dismissed, January 4, 1928.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 27, 1928; charge, larceny; adjudged not guilty and discharged February 19, 1929, Municipal Court, Philadelphia.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 6, 1929; charge, suspicion of forcible entry; discharged February 6, 1929.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 8, 1929; charge, larceny; discharged February 8, 1929.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 18, 1929; charge, larceny; sentence suspended; released on probation, March 20, 1929; discharged from probation, March 20, 1931.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, June 17, 1930; charge, suspicion of entering to steal; discharged June 17, 1930.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 7, 1930; charge, suspicion of entering to steal; discharged August 7, 1930.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 23, 1930; charge, suspicion of entering to steal; discharged August 23, 1930.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. 77636, arrested Police Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 3, 1930; charge, highway robbery; sentenced five to twenty years, September 10, 1930, Philadelphia County Prison, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- * As Peter Gallo, No. B-1756, received at Philadelphia County Prison, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 12, 1930; charge, robbery—being armed with an offensive weapon; sentenced to five to twenty years, September 10, 1930; paroled December 14, 1934.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE VIOLATOR

WANTED

HIRAM PALMER, JR., with aliases: ROBERT DAILEY, HUFFMAN, HARRY HOHMAN, HARRY HOHMAN, HUFFMAN, BOB RICHARDS, ROBERT RICHARDSON, HIRAM RITCHIEY, ROBERT RITCHIEY, ROBERT RICHARD RITCHIEY, ROBERT RITCHIEY, ROBERT DAVID RITCHIEY, ROBERT SEIBERT, ROBERT DAVID SEIBERT, BOB STOFFER, JACK STOFFER, JACK ROBERT STOFFER, JR., TAYLOR.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 29 years (born October 31, 1914, Rochester, Pennsylvania); Height, 5 feet, 7 inches; Weight, 130 pounds; Eyes, blue; Hair, brown; Complexion, medium; Build, slender; Race, white; Nationality, American; Occupation, salesman (sheet music, musical instruments, magazines); Peculiarities, left eyelid droops; thick lips; mouth habitually open.

CRIMINAL RECORD

- * As Robert Ritchey, No. 6185, arrested Police Department, Canton, Ohio, July 22, 1936; charge, automobile theft; disposition, released to Pittsburgh Police Department.
- * As Robert David Ritchey, No. 32258, arrested Police Department, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, July 22, 1936; charge, larceny of automobile; disposition, two years' probation.
- * As Robert David Ritchey, No. 26130, arrested U. S. Marshal, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 12, 1936; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, released August 12, 1936, on \$500 bond; on January 20, 1937, on a plea of guilty, sentenced one year and one day; sentence suspended and placed on five years' probation.
- * As Robert David Ritchey, No. 26130, arrested Sheriff's Office, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 12, 1936; charges, operating automobile while intoxicated—violation probation; disposition, six months.
- * As Robert Ritchey, No. 974, arrested Police Department, Mansfield, Ohio, February 27, 1939; charges, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act—violation probation; disposition, released to United States Marshal.
- * As Robert Ritchey, No. 26130, arrested U. S. Marshal, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 7, 1939; charges, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act—violation probation; disposition, one year and one day.
- * As Robert David Ritchey, No. 16779, received U. S. Industrial Reformatory, Chillicothe, Ohio, March 29, 1939; crime, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; sentence, one year and one day; disposition, conditionally released December 27, 1939.
- * On March 8, 1939, the subject, as Robert David Ritchey, was sentenced to serve one year and one day at the United States Industrial Reformatory, Chillicothe, Ohio, for violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act. He was conditionally released from that institution on December 27, 1939. A warrant for his arrest as a Conditional Release Violator was issued by the United States Board of Parole on March 7, 1940, for violation of the conditions of his release by failure to contact his designated probation officer.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.



Scars and marks: Index, middle and ring finger right hand amputated; Peculiarities, high cheek bones, sunken cheeks.

NATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT ACT

WANTED

HENRY ORAN PROPP, with aliases: JAMES E. BARTON, JAMES E. BAUER, JAMES E. BAUER, JAMES EDWARD BAUER, JAMES BAUERMAN, JAMES BOWERMAN, JAMES HENRY BOWERMAN, H. N. DAWSON, ALBERT HANNA, J. E. HANNA, JAMES E. HANNA, STANLEY MILES, LAWRENCE C. PRICE, BOWER BARTON PROPP, H. C. PROPP, H. O. PROPP, HENRY PROPP, HENRY L. PROPP, HENRY O. PROPP, HENRY ORIAN PROPP, HENRY ROBINSON, JAMES SANCLER, JAMES SANCLER, JAMES SANCLIR, JAMES SINCLAIR, ALBERT WOOD.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 43 years (born July 28, 1900, Warren Township, Bremer County, Iowa); Height, 5 feet, 7 inches; Weight, 150 pounds; Eyes, gray-brown; Hair, brown; Complexion, sallow; Build, slender; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, eighth grade; Occupation, typewriter repairman; little finger right hand tightly curled into palm;

CRIMINAL RECORD

As James Sanclir, No. 4652, arrested Police Department, Omaha, Nebraska, July 1, 1916; charge, grand larceny; disposition, 1 to 7 years.

As Jas. Sinclair, No. 6837, received State Penitentiary, Lincoln, Nebraska, August 11, 1916; crime, grand larceny; sentence, 1 to 7 years, paroled February 12, 1918.

* As Henry Propp, No., arrested Sheriff's Office, Waverly, Iowa, August 1, 1918; charge, breaking and entering; disposition, 10 years.

As Henry Propp, No. 8541, received State Reformatory, Anamosa, Iowa, September 25, 1918; crime, breaking and entering; sentence, 10 years, released, October 6, 1920.

* As Jas. Sinclair, No. 6837, received State Penitentiary, Lincoln, Nebraska, October 7, 1920; crime, parole violator; sentence, to serve balance of 1 to 7 year term, discharged February 2, 1924.

As H. O. Propp, No. 7926, arrested Police Department, Jacksonville, Florida, July 12, 1932; charge, suspicion, fraudulent use of mails; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, Topeka, Kansas.

* As H. O. Propp, No., arrested U. S. Marshal, Topeka, Kansas, July 23, 1933; charge, violation Postal Laws; disposition, 5 years.

As James E. Bauer, No. 42116, received U. S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas, August 5, 1932; crime, violation Postal Laws; sentence, 5 years, released April 8, 1936.

As Henry Oran Propp, No. 3344, arrested U. S. Marshal, Chicago, Illinois, June 27, 1941; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, remanded to Cook County Jail, Chicago, Illinois.

As Henry O. Propp, No. 27833, received Cook County Jail, Chicago, Illinois, June 27, 1941; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, released on bond July 1, 1941, forfeited.

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Atlanta, Georgia, on July 28, 1941, charging subject as James E. Bauer with a violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act in that he did, on or about March 16, 1940, wilfully, knowingly and unlawfully transport a stolen automobile in interstate commerce from Miami, Florida, to Atlanta, Georgia, knowing same to have been stolen.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

IMPERSONATION

WANTED

CHARLES WARFEL, with aliases: BUD WARFEL, LT. CHARLES WARFEL, CHARLES F. WARFEL, CHARLES FRANKLIN WARFEL, JOSEPH DOLLIN, JERRY MALONE, GIBARD PATRICK MALONE.



DESCRIPTION

Age, 32 years (born April 8, 1911), East Donegal Township, Pennsylvania; Height, 5 feet, 8 inches; Weight, 180 pounds; Eyes, gray; Hair, light brown; Complexion, dark; Build, good; Race, white; Nationality, American (Scotch-Irish extraction); Education, three years high school; Occupation, short-order cook; Scars and marks, 1 1/2 inch scar from outer corner of right eye downward and inward (very faint); small butterflies tattooed on back of each hand between thumbs and index fingers; tattoos on both arms from wrists to shoulders; Peculiarities, likes to read ancient history; smooth, fast talker, neat dresser; right eye tends to close when he looks directly at a person; prefers green clothing.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As Charles F. Warfel, No. 2159, arrested Police Department, Newport News, Virginia, October 11, 1932; charge, grand larceny (auto); disposition, 6 months.

* As Charles F. Warfel, No., arrested Sheriff's Office, Lordsburg, New Mexico, November 20, 1933; charge, larceny; disposition, 30 days.

As Charles F. Warfel, No. C-5691, arrested State Police, Reading, Pennsylvania, January 12, 1934; charge, violation Firearms Act; disposition, released to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Police Department.

As Charles Warfel, No. 2278, arrested Police Department, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, January 13, 1934; charge, violation Firearms Act; disposition, 3 months, \$25 fine and costs.

* As Charles Warfel, No., arrested Police Department, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, January 25, 1938; charge, forgery; disposition, fined \$50 and costs, and 1 1/2 to 3 years, paroled August 4, 1938.

As Charles F. Warfel, No. 49-674, arrested Police Department, Baltimore, Maryland, August 4, 1938; charge, bigamy; disposition, three months.

As Charles F. Warfel, No. 49-674, arrested Police Department, Baltimore, Maryland, March 5, 1940; charge, suspected larceny; disposition, released.

An indictment was returned on January 10, 1941, by a Federal Grand Jury at Toledo, Ohio, charging subject as Charles Warfel with violation of the Impersonation Statute, in that he did on or about September 15, 1940, knowingly, wilfully, unlawfully and feloniously pretend to be a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and in this pretended character obtain a sum of money.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE VIOLATOR

WANTED

JESSIE MAE MYERS (NEE JESSIE MAE JEFFERES), with aliases: GRACE ARMSTRONG, JESSIE BUZZARD, SUSAN CONNS, MARION HOLT, JESSIE JEFFERES, MRS. GUST JOHNSON, MARION JOHNSON, MARION G. JOHNSON, MARION JOHNSTON, JESSIE M. MEYERS, MARION MEYERS, MRS. RAYNE MURRAY, MRS. KARL MYERS, MRS. KARL H. MYERS, JESSIE SPRINGER, MRS. J. W. WHITE, SUSAN WHITE.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 55 years, born February 6, 1888, Knoxville, Iowa; Height, 5 feet, 1 inch; Weight, 120 pounds; Eyes, blue-gray; Hair, brown, graying, possibly dyed black; Complexion, olive, wrinkled; Build, medium, round shouldered; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, 9th grade; Occupation, cafe proprietress, cook; Scars and marks, 3 surgical scars on abdomen including appendectomy scar on right side, mole under chin, right little finger amputated at first joint; Peculiarities, wears bifocal horn-rimmed glasses, nervous, smokes cigarettes constantly, passes fraudulent checks.



CRIMINAL RECORD

As Jessie M. Myers, No. A-866, arrested Police Department, Pocatello, Idaho, May 28, 1938; charge, forgery; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, Cody, Wyoming.

As Jessie M. Myers, No., arrested Sheriff's Office, Cody, Wyoming, June 22, 1938; charge, forgery; disposition, 60 days.

As Mrs. J. W. White, No. 15759, arrested Sheriff's Office, Stockton, California, November 16, 1938; charge, investigation, fictitious checks; disposition, 6 months County Jail, 3 years' probation.

As Mrs. Karl H. Myers, No. 2479, arrested Police Department, Twin Falls, Idaho, August 10, 1939; charge, had checks; disposition, floated out of town.

As Grace Armstrong, No. 4920, arrested Sheriff's Office, Lewiston, Idaho, November 2, 1939; charge, fraudulent check; disposition, 15 days, \$30 fine and costs.

As Marion Johnson, No. 2394, arrested U. S. Marshal, Portland, Oregon, December 2, 1939; charge, impersonating Federal Officer; disposition, 2 years.

As Grace Armstrong, No. F-99-Cal, received Federal Correctional Institution, Terminal Island, California, January 11, 1940; crime, impersonation; sentence, 2 years, transferred to Federal Reformatory for Women, Seagoville, Texas, November 16, 1940.

As Grace Armstrong, No. 62-WS, received Federal Reformatory for Women, Seagoville, Texas, November 16, 1940; crime, impersonation; sentence, 2 years, conditionally released August 12, 1941.

Subject, as Grace Armstrong, was sentenced on January 5, 1940, in the U. S. District Court, Portland, Oregon, to serve two years' imprisonment in a Federal penal institution for a violation of the Federal Impersonation Statute. On August 12, 1941, subject was conditionally released from the Federal Reformatory for Women, Seagoville, Texas. A conditional release violator's warrant for her arrest was issued by the U. S. Board of Parole, Washington, D. C., on November 1, 1941, charging her with violating the conditions of her release.

PROBATION VIOLATOR

WANTED

IMER GLASSCOCK, with aliases: L. G. GLASSCOCK, IMA GLASSCOCK, IMER GLASSCOCK, IRMA GLASSCOCK, J. J. SMITH, "RUNT," "SHORTY."

DESCRIPTION

Age, 30 years, born June 20, 1913, Beauregard Parish, Louisiana (cannot be verified); Height, 5 feet, 3½ inches; Weight, 135 pounds; Eyes, blue; Hair, light brown; Complexion, fair; Build, medium; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, attended grade school; Occupations, laborer, lumber checker, truck driver, typewriter, dictaphone and radio repairman; Scars and marks, tattoo, woman seated on anchor right forearm; Peculiarities, partially bald.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As Ima Glasscock, No., arrested Sheriff's Office, De Ridder, Louisiana, March 14, 1929; charge, larceny; disposition, 5 years State Reform School, suspended May 2, 1929.

* As Ima Glasscock, No., arrested Sheriff's Office, De Ridder, Louisiana, February 11, 1935; charge, burglary and larceny; disposition, 2 to 6 years, February 15, 1935.

As Ima Glasscock, No. 25481, received State Penitentiary, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, February 16, 1935; crime, burglary and larceny; sentence, 2 to 6 years, released April 16, 1938.

* As Ima Glasscock, No., arrested U. S. Marshal, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 16, 1938; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, lodged Federal Jail, New Orleans, Louisiana.

As Ima Glasscock, No. 5930, received Federal Jail, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 17, 1938; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, Shreveport, Louisiana.

As Ima Glasscock, No. 199, arrested U. S. Marshal, Shreveport, Louisiana, May 12, 1938; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, case ordered passed May 20, 1938.

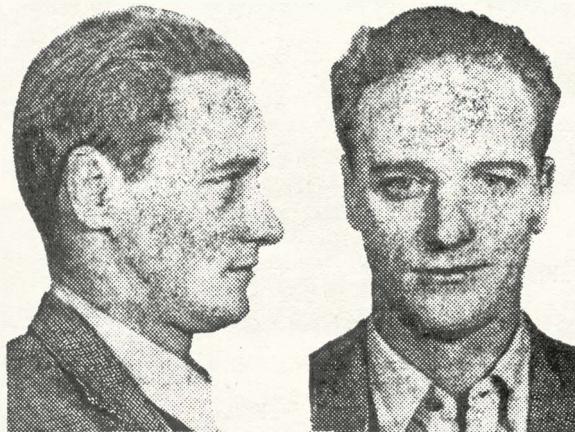
As Ima Glasscock, No. 5068, arrested Sheriff's Office, Monroe, Louisiana, September 3, 1938; charge, National Motor Vehicle Theft Act; disposition, 5 years' probation.

* As Ima Glasscock, No., arrested Sheriff's Office, Centerville, Texas, November 22, 1939; charge, cattle theft, 2 counts; disposition, escaped December 22, 1939, charges dismissed March 21, 1941, and March 16, 1942.

On September 3, 1938, on a plea of guilty, subject was placed on probation for a period of 6 years for violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act. For violation of the terms of his probation an order was entered in the United States District Court at Monroe, Louisiana, revoking subject's probation and a probation violator's warrant for his arrest was issued February 7, 1940.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.





marks, tattoos both arms, including red and blue heart with "USN" or "USD" over wreath, "Fry" "Shorty" and wreath, cross with "Honor"; cut scar left cheek, scar base of skull, scar behind left ear, scar left temple, small scar right ear lobe, vaccination upper left arm.

CRIMINAL RECORD

As George La Vaque, No. 16012, arrested Police Department, El Paso, Texas, November 18, 1928; charge, White Slave Traffic Act; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, El Paso, Texas, November 19, 1928.

* As George La Vaque, No. 1602, arrested U. S. Marshal, El Paso, Texas, November 19, 1928; charge, White Slave Traffic Act; disposition, 4 months El Paso County Jail, January 17, 1928.

As George Nelson La Vaque, No. 20937, arrested Police Department, Toledo, Ohio, January 12, 1930; charge, suspicion; disposition, released.

As King Nelson O'Brien, No. 9639, arrested Police Department, Dallas, Texas, November 2, 1931; charge, theft by conversion; disposition, released.

As George Nelson La Vaque, No. 11575, arrested Police Department, Portland, Oregon, February 1, 1932; charge, auto theft; disposition, released to U. S. Marshal, February 1, 1932.

* As George Nelson La Vaque, No. arrested U. S. Marshal, Portland, Oregon, February 1, 1932; charge, auto theft; disposition, released.

As George O'Brien, No. 21158, arrested Police Department, Decatur, Illinois, November 26, 1932; charge, investigation; disposition, released to Police Department, Providence, Rhode Island.

As George O'Brien, No. 10287, arrested Police Department, Providence, Rhode Island, December 12, 1932; charge, unlawfully driving off auto; disposition, delivered to Providence County Jail.

As George O'Brien, No. 21733, received Providence County Jail, Howard, Rhode Island, December 12, 1932; charge, unlawfully driving off auto; disposition, 2 years State Penitentiary, January 21, 1933.

As George O'Brien, No. 931, received State Bureau, Providence, Rhode Island, January 21, 1933; crime, unlawfully driving off auto; disposition, delivered to State Penitentiary, Howard, Rhode Island.

As George O'Brien, No. 5028, received State Penitentiary, Howard, Rhode Island, January 21, 1933; crime, unlawfully driving off auto; sentence, two years, transferred to State Reformatory for Men, October 23, 1933.

As George O'Brien, No. 8774, received State Reformatory for Men, Howard, Rhode Island, October 23, 1933; crime, unlawfully driving off auto; sentence, 2 years, paroled January 23, 1934.

As Texhart Wilson, No. 3032-D-8, arrested Police Department, Berkeley, California, October 7, 1934; charge, lodger; disposition, released October 8, 1934.

As Milo Armstrong, No. 10672, arrested Police Department, San Diego, California, April 28, 1935; charge, vagrancy; disposition, released April 29, 1935.

As George Nelson La Vaque, No. 30025, arrested Police Department, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 19, 1939; charge, vagrancy; disposition, released to Sheriff's Office, El Reno, Oklahoma, October 19, 1939.

* As George Nelson La Vaque, No. arrested Sheriff's Office, El Reno, Oklahoma, October 19, 1939; charge, theft; disposition, released.

An indictment was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 28, 1941, charging subject as George Nelson La Vaque with a violation of the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act in that he did, on or about October 28, 1939, unlawfully transport a stolen automobile in interstate commerce from Chicago, Illinois, to Tulsa, Oklahoma, knowing it to have been stolen.

* Represents notations unsupported by fingerprints.

NATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT ACT

WANTED

MILO HEATLY, with aliases: MILO ARMSTRONG, WILLIAM V. DEMPSEY, WILLIAM W. DEMPSEY, GEORGE LA VAGUE, GEORGE M. LA VAGUE, GEORGE N. LA VAGUE, GEORGE NELSON LA VAGUE, MICKEY LA VAGUE, GEORGE NELSON, GEORGE O'BRIEN, KING NELSON O'BRIEN, TEKHART WILSON, "WHITEY."

DESCRIPTION

Age, 34 years (born February 14, 1909, Grand Forks, North Dakota); Height, 5 feet, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches; Weight, 150 pounds; Eyes, blue; Hair, light brown; Complexion, medium; Build, medium; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years of high school; Occupation, carnival concession man, seaman, aviator, mechanic, taxi driver, chauffeur, used car salesman, laborer; Scars and

MAIL FRAUD



WANTED

JOHN EMMERSON DIMOND, with aliases: JOHN EMERSON DIAMOND, J. E. DIMOND, JOHN E. DIMOND.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 60 years, born March 17, 1883, Hartford, Connecticut; Height, 6 feet; Weight, 180 pounds; Eyes, light blue; Hair, dark brown, greying; Complexion, dark; Build, stocky; Race, white; Nationality, American; Education, high school; Occupation, securities salesman, stock broker, investment broker, bank teller, insurance company cashier; Peculiarities, wears horn rimmed glasses occasionally, collects books, perpetrates investment swindles.

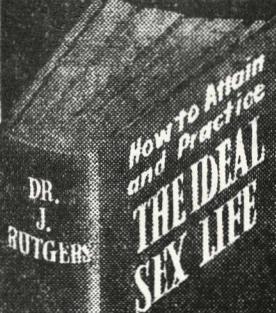
CRIMINAL RECORD (None known)

An indictment in 10 counts was returned by a Federal Grand Jury at Seattle, Washington, on February 21, 1930, charging subject as John E. Dimond, with a violation of the Mail Fraud Statute in that he did on or prior to January 1, 1928, unlawfully use the U. S. Mail, in furtherance of a scheme or artifice to defraud certain persons.

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- Advice for aged married people.
- Attaining the greatest satisfaction in sex life.
- 4 kinds of sexual satisfaction.
- Avoiding too little or too much sex life.
- Overcome physical hindrances for ideal sex practice.
- Avoiding dangerous sex relations.
- Degeneracy facts of sex.
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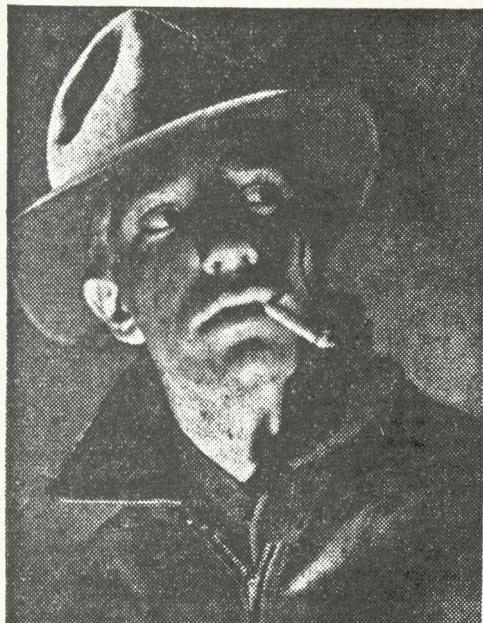
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Presenting The Author



WHEN we—we're talking about John Wiley and Willis March when we say we—wrote "With This Gun" we were aiming at book publishers, and not a magazine. It was only by pure chance that we discovered **MAMMOTH DETECTIVE** used complete novels of this type. So we took another chance and the editor bought it!

Then imagine our surprise when the editor rushed us a special request for photos and a short sketch of our lives. All this after we assumed pen names and retired blushingly into nonentity after having written a "detecatif" novel! Well, we still, for varied reasons, want to remain just John Wiley and Willis March. Maybe someday . . . depending on our success . . .

Well, one of our mottoes is never to say no to an editor. So here's a picture, and here's a (very!) sketchy composite of our lives. Let's take the picture first.

Both of us like to think that as an author we look a lot like this, venturing boldly, if foolishly, into the underworld in disguise, in search of black deeds and blacker men (that is, spiritually blacker). If we wanted blacker men, we'd

venture into a coal mine, which is also dangerous . . .

Actually, we suppose our minds do look somewhat like this picture. Sinister, full of plots (we wish they were!) and crammed with mystery. So you can look at it with some interest and belief that it is more or less a pictorial representation of our real (author) selves.

Now about us: We are just two men, not too young (one of us, that is) and we are engaged in a perfectly legitimate business. It is rather a stiff-collar business, and perhaps some of the people we come in contact with in the carrying on of that business would be shocked if they knew we even suspected the existence of dime thrillers and those horrible detectives! So, for that reason, we are blanketed with mystery even unto our names!

John Wiley (that's me, the writer of this little sketch) you might call a sort of assistant to an assistant in our business. I am rather active, and my comrade in enterprise finds me difficult to restrain from over-exuberance. I like sports, and whenever I can, indulge in games. Chiefly tennis and soft-ball. However, occasionally I camouflage myself in a football uniform and bowl 'em over with vim and vigor in practice sessions on the local campus. From this pastime I usually emerge with many bruises and the belief that maybe my old pal is right.

I am living in single blessedness, and right at the moment far lands call me persuasively—the persuasion of my dear uncle, Samuel. No doubt, as you read this, I will be surveying a battlefield with unholy joy, and as my comrade in crime points out, will have my "belly-ful" of fighting and exercise.

Willis March is a fine fellow, take it from me. He is especially popular with the children, and has them constantly around him. Secretly, I believe, he showed them our manuscript as it was being prepared, because on several occasions I have seen them whispering among themselves and looking very askance—at me! I suppose because he has accused me of misleading him on the path of blood and sudden death, as an alibi for his own bad example. In short, he is an egotistic ass, and although I concur, he is constantly remarking to me, his only possible audience, as to the excellence of his literary outpourings in murder.

Which is about all we can say about ourselves.

the READER'S VERDICT



WANTS TRUE DETECTIVE CASES

Sirs:

I like good detective fiction and read a lot of the magazines on that subject every month. But I believe most such magazines make a mistake by not including a true case, solved by some smart officer, in each issue. To me, such a chronicle helps to make the fiction in the magazine more believable. What do you think about it?

Most of the stories were excellent in this (August) issue. "Blackmail in Blue Ink," by Browne; "Murder by Memory", by Dennis; and "The Killer's Ear", by Ray—ran one, two, three. I didn't care a great deal for "Meet Mr. Terror", by Lewis; but that was really the only one.

Keep up the good work. And please give a little thought to my suggestion for true crime cases.

LAIRD SOCOLOW,
1818 Buena, Vista,
Sacramento, California.

In previous issues, true crime cases were presented and most readers asked that they be discontinued. Detective story readers fall into two sharply defined classes: those who want fiction and those who want facts. There are sufficient magazines in both fields to satisfy both classes of readers.—ED.

"WELCOME BACK, WILBUR!"

Sirs:

I got a terrific wallop out of seeing that Wilbur Peddie, the little skip-tracer, was back between MAMMOTH DETECTIVE covers where he belongs. And the story was a peach, too—showing that Wilbur doesn't have to have a corpse around to put his thinking powers into operation. Let's have one every issue!

"The Killer's Ear" was another bang-up yarn. It's such a relief to see someone besides private detectives and newspaper men as heroes.

The rest of the stories were right up there near the top two. "Red-heads Make Riots", had that air of "big city" about it that made the yarn very true to life.

I'd like to say a word of praise for the true articles that dot MAMMOTH's pages. They help to make the magazine the entertainment bargain it is!

LOIS E. MILLER,
1217 Farnum Street,
Omaha, Nebraska.

Your editors are still a bit dazed over Peddie's

popularity with the fans. Perhaps it is because the readers sense that Wilbur is taken from real life—at least in part. The author's former job as credit man for a department store, brought him into contact with skip-tracers and their problems. Be that as it may, however, this we do know: as long as the readers of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE want stories about Wilbur Peddie, they shall have them! . . . Gerald Vance, author of "Red-heads Make Riots" is now a member of the armed forces, so that we shall not be able to give you more by him for the duration.—ED.

LONG WALK COMING UP

Sirs:

I couldn't get over Frank Ray's "The Killer's Ear". It is the best, most amusing story I've read this year. Now, that's really something for me to say, because I read every detective, mystery, amazing and wonder story magazine obtainable in this town's stores.

I would like to ask you to have more of Frank Ray's stories in future issues. I hope also that "Father Burke" will be in them all. Both my husband and I like your magazines but have trouble in getting them here. How about seeing that we get a few more copies in this district?

More power to you in keeping your magazines up to a high standard in entertainment. Only one story bored me this time: Bellem's "Sisterhood of Fear." It was a long drawn-out story and I guessed who the killer was long before the finish.



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Keep on printing good issues like this one and I'd walk to California every month to get your magazine.

MRS. M. P. HANSEN,
319 Scenic Drive,
Ashland, Oregon.

Ray's story hit us, Mrs. Hanson, just the same as it did you. It is the type of story we always welcome and too seldom see. The fans who wrote letters about the August issue rated it second only to the Wilbur Peddie yarn.—ED.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT—PRO AND CON

I am one of the many people in this country who are opposed to capital punishment as a means of punishment, believing that it provides the real punishment to the innocent families and relatives of the guilty man. Also, statistics fail to show the efficacy of such punishment in deterring others from similar crimes.

It seems to me a discussion of this subject in either your Reader's Verdict column or as a published article would be instructive, interesting and important. I, for one, should like to read what others have to say about it.

M. W. SLATTERY,
817 Jensen Ave.
St. Paul, Minn.

MAMMOTH DETECTIVE welcomes letters on controversial matters and will be pleased to print opinions on any subject that belongs in the pages of a detective magazine.—ED.

AUGUST ANALYSIS

Sirs:

Your August issue of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE came very close to being the best you've put out so far. Only one story seemed ordinary, and that was Robert Leslie Bellem's "Sisterhood of Fear." I wish a lot of other detective magazines could come that close to perfection!

I list the stories in the order of their excellence:

1. "The Coward," by Russell Gray. The kind of story that would fit perfectly into the "slicks."
2. "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," by Alexander Blade. What a beautiful punch ending this one had!
3. "Blackmail in Blue Ink," by Howard Browne. For the deductive type of mystery this author is one of the best I've ever read.
4. "Murder by Memory," by Bruce Dennis. A trifle on the "hack" side, but darned exciting reading. I'd like to read more about Pete Weld.
5. "The Killer's Ear," by Frank Ray. The mounting suspense in this one gave me an overwhelming urge to skip ahead. Good writing!
6. "Frame-up at Casa Blanca," by Arthur Nelson. Smoothly written, fast-paced and exciting.
7. "Murder by Proxy," by William Delisle. Dragged a bit at times, but the ending was clever.

8. "No Risk Too Great", by Harold Channing Wire. More an adventure story than a detective. But it was a grand job of writing.

9. "O'Sheen's Photo Finish", by Leroy Yerxa. Good short-short.

10. "Red-heads Make Riots", by Gerald Vance. Couldn't be beat for solid action.

11. "Case of the Strangling Shadow", by Paul Devrait.

12. "Meet Mr. Terror", by Helmar Lewis.

13. "This Little Pig Goes to Market", by Stephan E. Chalet.

14. "Sisterhood of Fear", by Robert Leslie Bellem. Belonged in the ten cent detective magazines.

That sums it up. Hope your next issue is as good as this one.

MICHAEL MAHAFFEY,
Reading, Penn.

We appreciate the time and effort you've given in compiling this report. We try to publish at least one such letter in each issue. But those received and not printed are given a careful reading.—ED.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sirs:

In your "Off the Blotter" column, you tell us about the stories appearing in that issue, then finish it up with an assortment of crime oddities. While the latter are interesting, I, for one, would like to see that space contain little notes about the authors who write for you—what they are doing, what they are working on and what they are like. I personally enjoy a story more if I know something about the man who wrote it. And others I've mentioned this to seem to feel the same way. It's only a suggestion; take it for what it's worth.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK,
3490 Sewell,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Your suggestion is worth while, John, and we'll keep it in mind. Bits of information such as you request are often hard to obtain. Many of our writers have never been in our offices, and just what their reactions would be to such a request is something we don't profess to know.—ED.

PLEA FOR BOOK-LENGTH STORIES

Sirs:

Your last few issues have contained the usual selection of fine stories. But why have you completely dropped the book-length novel? Is it because you don't get any good enough to print; or are all the worth-while ones going to book publishers? Frankly, the only criticism I have to offer on MAMMOTH DETECTIVE is that you have never published a really high-grade book-length novel. Wyndham Martyn's stuff is simply too, too English and I do not care for it at all. The best long story you have yet run was C. S. Wallace's "Murder Enroute." Really, Mr. Editor, I think

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you should do something about this.

Browne's "Blackmail in Blue Ink", and Ray's "The Killer's Ear", ran off with top honors in the last issue, with Gray's "The Coward", close behind. Worst of the bunch was "Red-heads Make Riots", which was mostly corn.

CLINTON S. ALBRIGHT,
Hotel Rome,
Omaha, Nebraska.

We're way ahead of you, Clinton! Turn back to "With This Gun", by John Wiley and Willis March, and read one of the best detective novels you—or anyone else—ever read! Here is the type of mystery story that the editors of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE see too few of. If you haven't already read it, please do so; then send in your opinion. We have others of the same caliber coming up in future issues.—Ed.

BACK COVER DID THE TRICK!

Sirs:

I stopped at my favorite magazine stand a few days ago and, with no intention of buying anything, picked up a copy of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE—the first I had ever come across. The back cover mystery caught my attention; I read the clues, then stood there so long trying to figure it out without turning to the inside for the solution, that the clerk finally said politely, "I can recommend that magazine as one of the best of its field." What his expression said, however, was: "If you're going to stand there all day looking at the thing, why not put down twenty-five cents and own it!" So I did.

It turned out to be one of the most profitable quarters I ever spent. "Murder by Memory" and "Blackmail in Blue Ink", were worth the price alone. But what I wanted to point out was that I'm on to your method of selling magazines!

Incidentally, I had to turn to the solution inside to get the answer to the back cover puzzler. And it turned out to be so darned simple, too!

LESTER LINKUS,
2212 Houston,
Fort Worth, Texas

Personally, we've always been very fond of our back cover mysteries. But honestly, Lester, we had no idea they could be used as a means of high-pressure sales. Now that we know, there'll be one every month!—Ed.

BOO!

Sirs:

The one thing I miss in your detective magazine is the type of story that contains plenty of eerie atmosphere such as haunted houses and ghostly graveyards, etc. Nelson Bond came close to what I mean recently in his "Death Stalks by Night." Too few magazines carry such stories these days and I think they're making a mistake. What about it?"

MRS. MYRTLE DEVERS,
DeSoto Point, Florida.

Such stories have always seemed a bit "dated" to us, Mrs. Devers. Let's see what the readers say.—Ed.

PUNISHMENT

IN PRIMITIVE days, when man was supposed to be possessed by the devil, a criminal was punished in one of two ways: 1) the devil was cast out of his body for all time through some sort of magic; 2) he was exiled or executed. In part, this doctrine was based on the notion of protecting the community from further outrages, but far more important was the notion of the necessity of placating the gods.

The next stage in the evolution of a system of punishment occurred when more stress was placed on the element of social revenge. This attitude was developed as a result of considering a crime as a wilful act of the person involved and not the doing of the Devil, over which the person had no control.

Society was outraged at the thought of voluntary wrongdoing and retaliated by savage and barbaric methods. In this period, the notion of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" became popular. However, it was not the loose interpretation of today, but a literal translation.

This principle was gradually modified in the direction of a general scheme of corporal punishment. During the greater part of human history, corporal punishment, together with fines of various sorts, has been the typical method by which society avenged itself upon violators of its laws and social codes.

The varieties of corporal punishment were as numerous as they were savage, including such practices as whipping; cutting off the hands, ears or nose; branding on the forehead, in the hand, or on various other parts of the body; pulling out the tongue; gouging out the eyes; or the use of the stocks, pillory or ducking-stool for minor offenses.

The reaction against the brutality of corporal punishment is believed to have been due almost entirely to the Quakers and their followers. This group took its Christianity very literally. In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the savage laws of England and the Puritans concerning corporal punishment were abandoned and the imprisonment of criminals was substituted as a means of treating the wrongdoer.

However, due to the difficulties encountered from the mother country, it was not until after the War for Independence that the change went into operation. The various forms of corporal punishment were wiped out, other than hanging for capital crimes, and imprisonment was substituted. By 1825, this form of punishment had supplanted the more barbaric one of corporal discipline in most of the American states.

Paralleling this movement in America and somewhat influenced by it, similar changes gradually took place over Europe.

However, apparently the more humane method of dealing with one's fellow man never penetrated Germany, where "an eye for an eye and a mouthful of teeth" is still the standard.



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First, he assembled about 500 well-trained slave carpenters and masons. These he held in readiness. Then he made it his business to buy houses that were on fire and others that joined upon them. Of course, he got these at a low price, since the owners' fears and distresses hardly made them a match for shrewd Crassus. With his impressive force of builders, he was ready to cash in on the many catastrophes, and, in time, became master of a great part of Rome.

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CRIME AND ANTHROPOLOGY

CERTAIN theories have been expounded as to relations between the physical characteristics of criminals and the fact that they commit crimes. Many men believe that criminals differ in physical measurements as compared to men who are not criminals. The leader in this field who first worked on the problem is Lombroso. He definitely believed that criminals are inferior in anatomy and have many physical defects. For example, Lombroso made a study of the skulls of criminals and compared his figures obtained on skull defects with those of non-criminals. It was found that criminal skulls were inferior in size or else abnormally large; individual bones were oversized, and wisdom teeth development was not normal. Upon examination of the anatomy it was found that many criminals were smaller in stature and possessed extra long arms. Many were found to have foreheads which protruded abnormally and also exceptionally large jaw bones. These characteristics were not present in the majority of the non-criminals.

Opposed to the theory of Lombroso and his followers we find that many other men believe that these physical abnormalities and defects are characteristic of criminals because of their environment when yet children, that is the lack of proper nutrition lead to improper development. This, of course, would not explain the presence of wealthier men who became criminals.

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BACK COVER MYSTERY

By A. R. STEBER

Here is the story behind the mystery depicted in the scene on the back cover. Did your jury-verdict agree with this?

(See Back Cover)

OLD PETE glanced at his watch and grunted. "After midnight," he muttered. "Glad this is the last office to check . . ."

He unlocked the outer door to Dan Marx' office, opened it, and looked surprised. The light in the central office was lit. Marx had three offices in series; the outer being occupied by John Cain, bookkeeper and male receptionist for Marx; the office just beyond, where the light was now on, reserved for business discussions between Marx and clients; and the innermost office Marx' own private office.

"Musta forgot the light . . ." Old Pete was mumbling as he made his way around Cain's desk. Then he stopped in his tracks with a gasp. Lying flat on his face half through the doorway of the center office was the body of Dan Marx. There was blood staining the back of his coat, and a bullet hole was evident.

Old Pete turned pale, stumbled hastily back toward the corridor door, closed and locked it from the outside, and ran shamblingly toward a phone booth.

"Police . . . !" he gasped to the operator. "Send the police! There's been a murder . . ."

* * *

Inspector Stafford of homicide stopped beside Old Pete at the outer door to Dan Marx' office and watched him unlock the door with trembling hands.

"This where you say the corpse is?" he asked. "Yessir. Right inside the next door."

"This door locked when you came in before?"

"Yes, it was."

The Inspector followed Old Pete, observed the light in the center office.

"That light was lit just that way," Old Pete informed him. "I didn't touch nothing. Just came in, saw the body, and went right out again to call the police."

Stafford bent over the dead man.

"Shot through the heart from the back!"

He stood up, noted the position of the body, then an exclamation escaped him.

"Oho! A booby trap!"

His eyes fixed on the string attached to the door, which was opened out on the outer office. It led to a small table across the room where an automatic was fixed tightly. The string was still taut on the trigger, and the gun was aimed so that it would fire a bullet exactly at shoulder-blade height at anyone who left the room and pushed the door outward in so doing.

The door to the private office was also open,

hiding the table with the gun from view of anyone coming out of the private office.

Stafford inspected the room carefully, walking over at last to the table in the corner where the table lamp glowed brightly. He had to duck the string to reach it.

"Have to send up the lab boys to go over the place for prints and clues," he decided. "Come on, Pete. Let's go. And by the way, you be at the inquest tomorrow. This may be murder and it may not . . ."

* * *

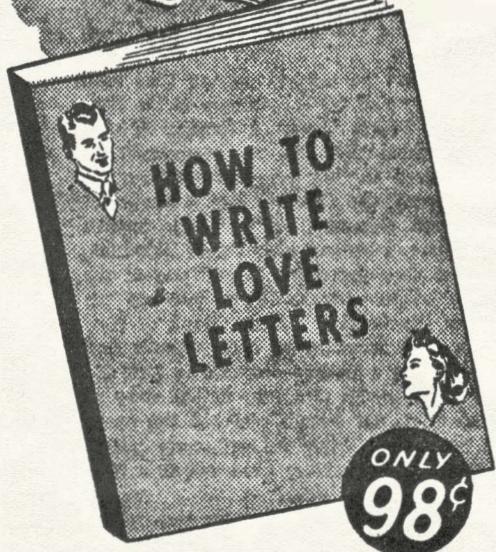
The coroner summed up:

"John Cain claims he left the office last night at 8 o'clock. Marx died at approximately 9:30. The door was locked. John Cain has a perfect alibi for 9:30. Death was caused by a bullet from a weapon affixed to a table and connected to a string tied to the door. It was a death trap for Marx, set so that when Marx, emerging from his private office, supposedly would not see the gun by reason of its being hidden behind the door to his office as he emerged. Nor would he notice the black thread leading to the other door. Thus, when he placed a hand on the knob, opened the next door, the string caused the gun to explode, killing him instantly by a bullet carefully aimed to strike him in the back just below the shoulder-blade. Examination of John Cain's records and books shows that he was short a sum amounting to twenty-thousand dollars, and his books doctored to conceal it. He denies this. It is also a fact that Marx Enterprises was in bad financial straits. A further fact in the case was an insurance policy, payable to Marx' wife, in the amount of \$40,000. It is not payable in the event of suicide. The murder weapon is Cain's gun, which he says was kept in a drawer in his desk in the outer office. It has only his prints on the butt. Prints on muzzle carefully wiped off. John Cain, the janitor, and the office of the building have the only keys to the outer office."

* * *

The coroner's jury returned as follows:

"Suicide. Dan Marx, to cover up loss of stockholders' money, and to make his policy payable to his wife, rigged the gun, doctored Cain's books to frame him for murder. He forgot this clue—namely the light which any man leaving his office would have turned off, which was impossible to do without running into the thread attached to the gun. Wiped his own prints off gun muzzle."



PARTIAL CONTENTS

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Scores of Model Love Letters By Famous People!

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How to make everyday events sound interesting.
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How to "break the ice."
How to assure him (or her) of your faithfulness.

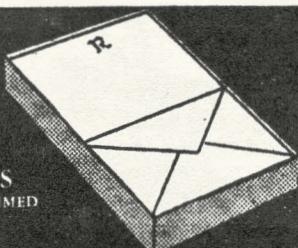
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CORNER

THIS feature will be discontinued for the duration in the interests of the safety of our armed forces and of national security.

PERSONALS

Will relatives of the late Gunther S. Adams, formerly of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, please communicate with Arthur M. Adams, care of this magazine? I have been appointed executor of the estate and wish to locate all heirs as soon as possible.

* * *

GEORGE PIERCE MUNROE, age about fifty-two, height five feet eight inches, graying black hair and brown eyes. Last heard of in Memphis, Tennessee in 1940, where he was employed as a claim adjuster by a life insurance company. He was a member of the A.E.F. during the first World War and bears a bad shrapnel wound on his left thigh. Please send any information to his brother, Mark Munroe, in care of this magazine.

* * *

EDGAR R. JACOBSON: I have had several letters from Marie. She has tried, unsuccessfully, to locate you at your last address in Los Angeles since last Spring. It is extremely important that either she or I get in touch with you without delay. We still believe you will make good. Write to me at the Springfield Avenue address.
—Paul.

* * *

ARTHUR SHELLMAN, age about forty-four, height six feet, blue eyes and brown hair. Last known address was New York City in 1919, where he was studying cartooning and illustrating. Was a member of the United States Navy during the first World War. Please send any information to Mrs. O. C. Maxwell, 1420 East 6 Street, Reno, Nev.

★ **OLD CHAUNCY** ★

C HAUNCY JOHNSON, better known in the trade as Old Chauncy, was reputed to be one of the cleverest bank and general thieves of the latter part of the nineteenth century. At the age of seventy in 1895, he was still a man to be feared by anyone having a sizable amount of cash on hand.

Old Chauncy started his career as a burglar, although previous to his first step on the wrong road he had worked as a bookkeeper, a job which befit his slight physical structure. The first of a long line of arrests occurred in 1852, when he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for the burglary of a silk warehouse in New York City.

No sooner had he finished serving that term than he was arrested for the robbery of the Hatter's Bank of Bethel, Conn. A total of \$36,000 of the take from that job was recovered and Johnson received another five year sentence.

Being liberated, Old Chauncy looked about for greener, if still dishonest, pastures. He teamed up with a Harry Newman, alias Dutch Heindrich, and the two then proceeded to pull one of the bigger jobs of the 1890's. They followed the president of the Central National Bank of New York from Wall Street to his office. When that gentleman placed a package containing \$125,000 worth of bonds on his desk and turned away to remove his coat, our friends snatched the package and were gone. They did not receive credit for the crime until the story came out in a later arrest.

In December, 1870, Old Chauncy was loitering in the Fifth Avenue Hotel when he saw the clerk place a package in the safe which was said to be very valuable by the owner. He then, naturally, proceeded to walk behind the counter, saunter easily up to the safe, in front of three clerks, and take the package and a number of others in his arms.

Quite casually he strolled for the door and had just about made it when he stumbled over a wastebasket and aroused the clerks out of their apparent lethargy. Our hero was as a result arrested and sentenced to ten years in State Prison. He was discharged from Sing Sing in December of 1878.

After the expiration of his term, he returned to New York to find most of his old buddies and fellow travelers in crime had departed for prisons unknown or were dead. He was without money and virtually friendless. So sad was his plight that in January, 1880, he stooped to snatching a lady's purse on the corner of Twenty-second street and Broadway. He was so weak from lack of food, however, that he found it impossible to outdistance his pursuers and thus again he was cast in the familiar role of prisoner. He was arrested, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to four years at Sing Sing, a home with which he was, by this time, well acquainted.

His last big-time crime occurred in 1883 when he stole a package containing \$230 from a barber

shop. The usual procedure followed with the usual result, this time with a little different background—the Cherry Hill Prison for three years.

After his release, he slipped still further in the lists of big-time criminals. He was arrested many times for vagrancy, purse-snatching and other similar crimes of small stature. By 1894, he had fallen to the stealing of an umbrella, for which he received one year in the Albany County Penitentiary.

At the end, he was a bum, a far cry from the proud sneak thief who could snatch a package with the best of them. All poor Old Chauncy got out of life was a smattering of notoriety, a nodding acquaintanceship with half the cops of New York and vicinity, and free board and lodging for the better part of his existence.

★ SINNING BISHOPS ★

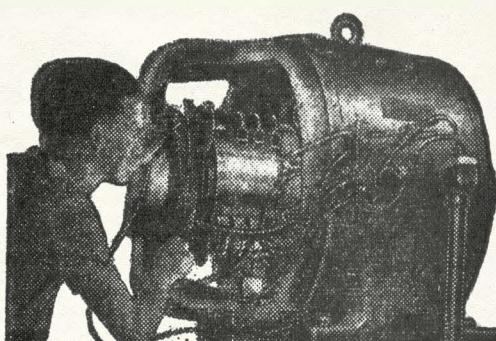
THE bishops of medieval days, it is well-known, hardly practiced what they preached. History books are full of accounts of the debaucheries and scandals of unscrupulous churchmen. And racketeering, too, had been adopted as a powerful tool on several occasions.

In the Europe of the Dark Ages, one racketeering device was commonly practiced. Although under the canonical laws all sorts of punishment and penances for sin were laid down, bishops and other dignitaries were allowed considerable latitude. And they helped themselves greedily to all the latitude they could summon through their positions.

Thus, in an age when men held their faith seriously, and looked daily for the second resurrection, a corrupt churchman adopted the famous device. It was a simple way of prying money out of the pockets of the penitent. He could give a wealthy sinner the choice of walking barefoot with a lighted candle to Loretto, or to Compostella, or to some other famous and necessarily distant shrine, or of paying a round sum of cash.

The sinner, of course, usually picked the second alternative. It was much cheaper for an active business man to pay the money than to start on a walking tour across Europe. This racket, it is reported, was later worked by most dishonest churchmen.

Some of these unscrupulous men had an interesting "sideline." They became professional "pardoners," traveling about the country like book-agents, selling written indulgences. These were usually forged documents, taking the place of the standard ones signed by the Pope or some high dignitary of the church. Once, when a cathedral fund needed replenishing, a regularly organized, official "selling drive" of these bits of paper was barnstormed about the country. In fact, as part of the repertoire of one especially adroit churchman, "future indulgences" were sold—"Next time you sin, Jacques, just tear up one of these documents. When you are all out of them, I will sell you more." Simple enough!



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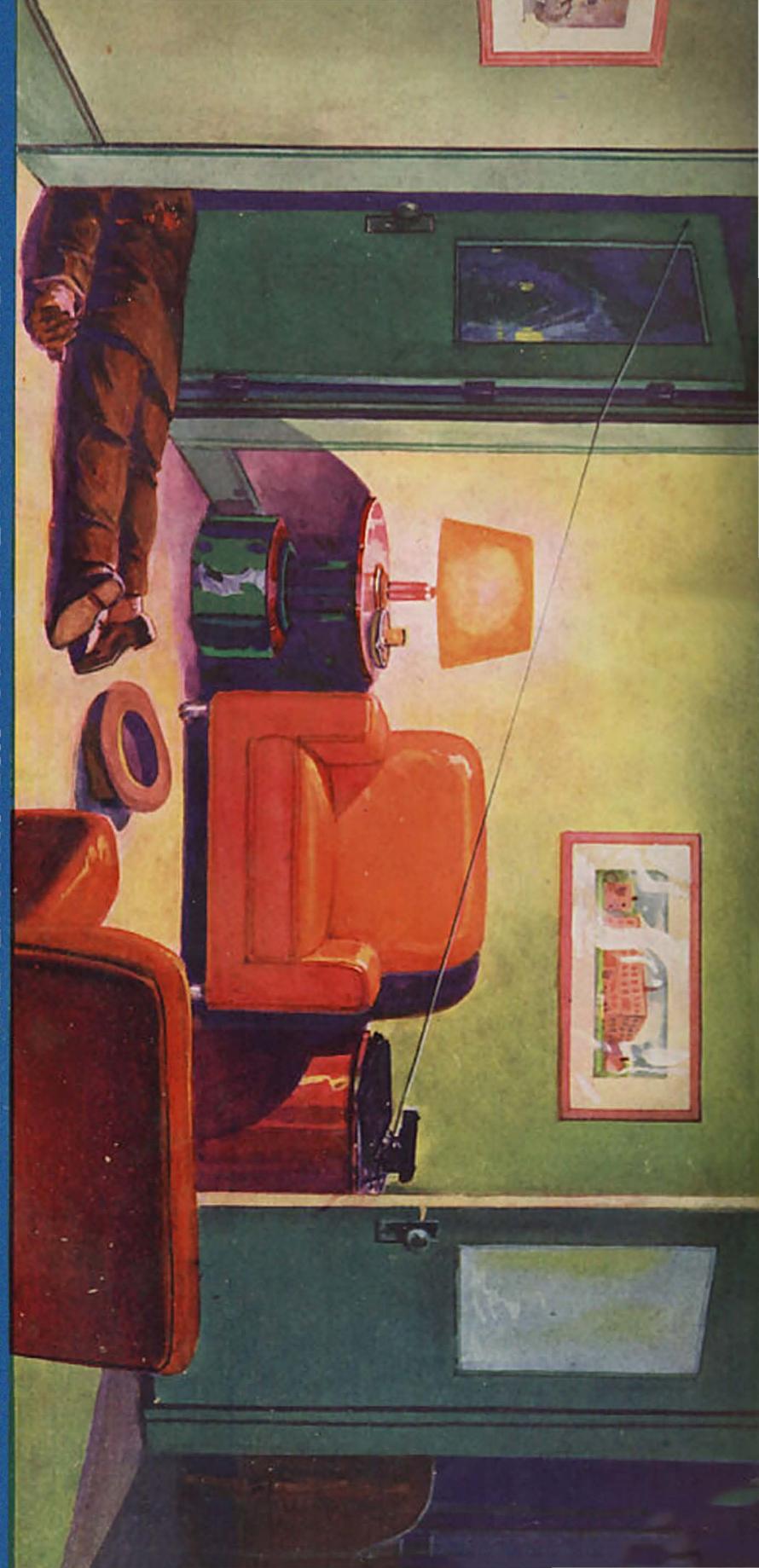
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JURY OF THE INQUEST, SHALL WE INDICT THIS MAN FOR MURDER?

Shall John Cain stand trial for murdering his employer, Dan Marx? Above is a reproduction of the death scene exactly as the police found it. Use it and following facts to decide.

Cain claims he left office at 8 P.M. last night. Autopsy shows Marx died at 9:30 P.M. Marx was shot in the back while opening door to Cain's outer office. Marx' own office is innermost of three.

Cain's gun, Cain's fingerprints on butt, no prints at all on barrel, is fastened to table behind inner office



door where Marx wouldn't see it. String attached to death room door fired gun when Marx opened it. Light, with pull-cord, still burned in death room when corpse was found. Outer door was locked. Investigation shows Cain had serious cash shortage in his books; also Marx' business was unstable. Marx' wife will receive \$40,000 insurance, barring suicide. Cain has only other key to outer office. Claims he locked door on leaving. Check your solution with story on page 270.