

Lock Summers Boys a Horse — JAMES B. HENDRICK

# Short Stories

June  
10<sup>th</sup>

25c

A Chinatown  
mystery  
novelette

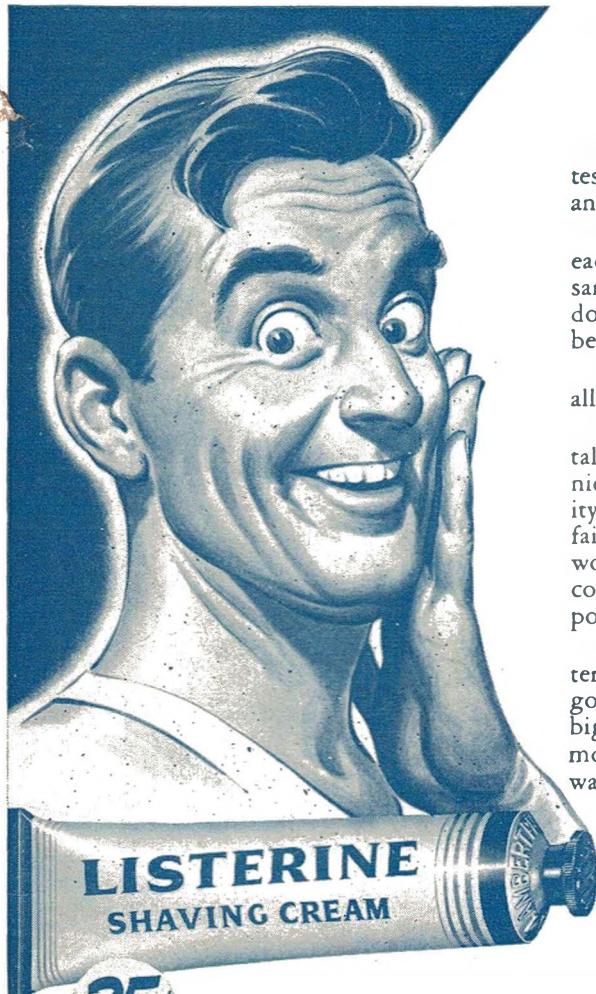
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"The Haunted Pigeons" — WALTER C. BR

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# Short

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**BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH**

# Stories

latest stories—no reprints



**JUNE 10th, 1944**

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## **COVER—Benton Clark**

*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use  
of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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# Overseas Mail

UNDER this heading in each issue of **SHORT STORIES** we plan to publish letters from men in our armed forces overseas. For each one we use its sender will receive a \$25.00 war bond. Won't you send us one? We cannot guarantee to return unused ones, but we want representative letters showing what is happening to our young men in their greatest adventure.

Address the Editor, **SHORT STORIES**, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Do not send original letters; have them copied.

*This letter has a fleet post office address, and comes to us from the friends to whom it was written.*

Dear Friends:

I will try and write a few lines and see if you won't let me know how everything goes back home. My letters are few and far between over here. Have been getting my mail much more regularly the past few months, though. Have gone as long as two months without hearing from home when I first came over.

I was in on the invasion of Sicily, and from there I went back to North Africa and spent a month doing nothing. Then I was in the invasion of Italy at Salerno. Now I am on a shore station and have life pretty easy.

There is nothing over here, but lots of land and no people. At least not very many. Mostly all Arabs and a few Frenchmen. The Arabs are okay in their way. They live in a little grass hut with a grass or brush and sometimes a cactus fence around it. All of them are farmers, but all I can see that they do any good at is raising kids. They have everybody beat when it comes to raising a large family.

They farm a little plot of ground with a wooden plow that looks like it might have been used by the Pilgrims at Plymouth. For horsepower they use either oxen, camel, or jackass. They usually keep their jack for riding though. It is really a sight to see a big old Arab on a little jack, wrapped up in a bed sheet. About all they really grow is a crop of barley, or some kind of grain that

they make their bread out of. But the thing that takes the cake is the way they thrash the darn stuff. They spread it out on the ground, in a hollowed-out place, and then the dogs, wives, oxen, camels and jacks are put on it. If one of the animals needs to answer the calls of nature, they make bread out of that, too. I know, I've seen it done.

Some of them have Arabian horses. Boy, they are beauties, but they use them for pulling the carts and ride the jacks. To them, water is something that keeps the jack going. They never use it for drinking or washing. They live on wine and no one has ever told them that they could wash their clothes or themselves.

The French are a little more civilized. You go to one's house, he will fill you up on wine, but of course he expects a little present. They will talk your head off. I can't make out what they are saying, but that doesn't bother them, for they keep right on talking. I have really been through some hot places since I came over here and I'm really thankful to have come through it.

I made second class after the invasion of Italy. That is the same as staff sergeant in the army. I am sure glad to get the increase.

Best wishes.

Bob.

*This letter was written by Corporal Ernest Parsley who is in New Caledonia.*

This finds me getting along fine and I'm  
(Continued on page 6)

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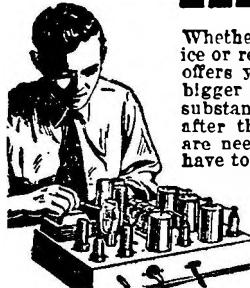
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## OVERSEAS MAIL

(Continued from page 4)

sending you a piece of French money. They are five franc notes worth about  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents in American money. The white population here is French and that is the main language spoken here. I am not learning it very fast as I have only learned eight or ten words in all the time we have been here. I can speak to the natives better than I can the French. I can carry on a conversation with them, as they speak a mixture of French, English and their own language, but English is still the most common language spoken, though, because we have the whole population outnumbered by far.

The only town that could be called a town is Noumea the capital. The majority of the French population live there. They have a French government, of course; the highest officer being the governor. He came here from Paris before the war.

There are Javanese, Tonkinese and several different tribes and they all speak different languages and have many peculiar ways and customs. The Tonkinese are small people, originally from Indo-China. They wear garments similar to pajamas with white waist and black pants, both women and men. They keep their teeth painted black all the time and the women keep their heads covered at all times. The Javanese are about the same, only that the men dress about like the French and the women wear skirts down to their ankles; the skirt being a big piece of cloth wrapped around their bodies. All have real long hair tied up back of their head. Most of them go barefooted. Several families live in one house, each family having ten or twelve children. About every woman you see is carrying a baby. They carry the baby in a sling, which is a big cloth tied over their shoulders and they set the baby down in it. A familiar sight is to see one of them with a baby in a sling and carrying a 100-pound load on her head.

The little brown fellow will be riding along peacefully sleeping. You can only see his feet and the top of his head. They say their average life is about 35 years.

The natives still have their peculiar ways but they are friendly. They like the Americans but don't care much for the French. Some of them say "Boom Boom finish pan tee merca," meaning that when the war is over they are going to America. They like to have their pictures taken. They still have their native dances, usually on Sundays and holidays. They have their faces painted up until it almost scares one to look at them. They build up a fire on the beach and dance around it making all kinds of weird noises. For their music they beat on old wooden boxes, tin cans or anything they can pick up. They barbecue goats, chickens and have plenty to eat. I have been to one of these festivals and it is very interesting if you can keep from being scared.

A lot of them wear clothes now, but haven't been very long. They like to wear American clothing and pick up every piece they can. Sometimes you'll see one with a whole uniform on, part of it is navy, part army, and part marine. Sometimes you see one barefooted and with shorts on and then a pair of old army leggings with his bare feet.

Their huts are made of straw and bark of a native tree. The principal crops are bananas, oranges, lemons, coffee, tangerines, peppers and I think some pineapples although I have not seen any. They also raise corn, which you can see most any time of the year. There are lots of deer, wild hogs, also mountain goats. There used to be wild dogs that roamed in packs, but I don't think there are any now. They also raise plenty of cattle and horses. There are plenty of mosquitoes, but none harmful, just very annoying. We sleep under mosquito nets.

Well, I guess I'll stop for this time as this is the longest letter I've written you in a long while.



# The Story Tellers' Circle

## *Shadows in Chinatown*

IF YOU think all the traditional mystery has gone from Chinatown listen to what Walter C. Brown has to say.

The author of "The Haunted Pigeons" tells us:

"A long time ago Mr. Kipling wrote a very famous ballad which begins: Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet—

"If you think Mr. Kipling was right, put on your hat some night and take a little walk through Chinatown. You'll see such a scrambling together of East and West that you'll come away with your head spinning.

"Is there an old-time joss house? There is—complete with gongs, shrines, incense and paper prayers. But there is also a Chinese night club—with an all-Chinese cast, including slant-eyed strip teasers.

"War news? Certainly. There are outdoor bulletin boards plastered all over with sheets of Chinese writing in long vertical columns. You watch a Chinaman reading the news, then you see him pull a pink-sheet tabloid from his pocket and study the racing form.

"Here's a shop—very modern. Fluorescent lights—cash register—typewriter. Here is another shop—the counting is done on an ancient abacus with wooden beads — the writing is done with brush and inkpot—the bookkeeping long strips of paper on spear files.

"There's an old man, reading one of the Five Classics. Thick, double pages and a wood binding. There's his black-eyed grandson, reading the comic magazines — Dick Tracy and Superman, and eating a hamburger.

"Is there gambling? Naturally. The Chinese are inveterate gamblers. Breaking it up is a police routine. Is it always fantan? No, it's just as likely to be gin rummy.

"You see a Chinaman going by with a tin helmet and an arm-band. He's an air raid warden. He's so proud of his insignia that he wears it all the time—probably sleeps in it.

"You hear radios giving out with the

latest and hottest jive—if you listen carefully you will also hear the squeak of a bamboo flute or the wailing scrape of a moon-fiddle.

"Then you look around at the slant-eyed passersby and a sudden thought occurs to you—there are no young men. Where are the young Chinese? They are all away in uniform—in Uncle Sam's uniform—and they make damn fine soldiers, too.

"So there's your quick tour of Chinatown. But don't get the idea that in this day and age all the immemorial mystery has departed from the Yellow Quarter. That one and original abiding puzzle of the Oriental still remains unanswered—just what is it that Chinese laundrymen write on those funny tickets they hand you? Just try to find out!"

Walter C. Brown.

## *Fight Fan Forever*

THE last time we saw William R. Cox he was up here on one of his infrequent trips from Florida. We had a grand time with him, reminiscing over some of the sports headliners of yesterday and today. Most of all, says Bill, he's a fight fan and this dates back to his newspaper days in Newark. He confesses that he wanders off whenever he can for a leather-pusher show to keep the smell of wintergreen and resin fresh in his nostrils.

Here are a few interesting sidelights on "beauties and boxers" with Bill Cox in the Tellers' Circle:

"A story like this, why it just grows out of little things. A young lieutenant is sweating over some supplies the G.I.s have playfully swiped or mislaid, a fight manager years ago pops into the mind, a lame pug who went far in the Jersey clubs recurs to the memory, strange items appear in the black markets and what more do you need except a glamazon? What more does anyone need after he gets a glamazon?"

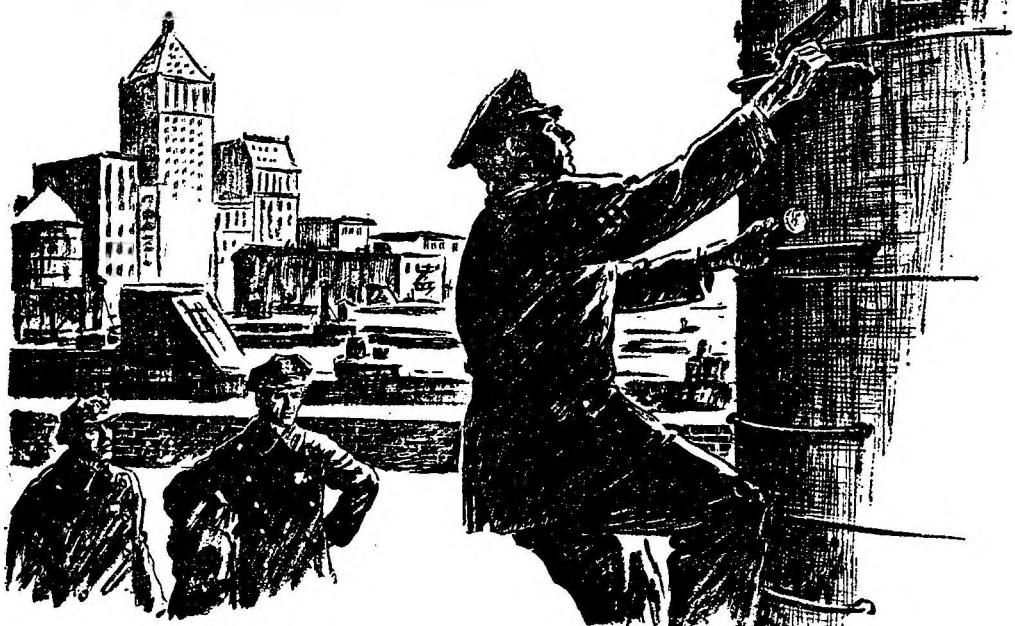
"Not many writers write about fights and fighters nowadays on account of most of them are writing about the war, but thou-

(Continued on page 124)

# THE HAUNTED PIGEONS

By WALTER C. BROWN

*Author of "The Silent Travelers of Pao-Shan,"  
"Seven Frightened Mandarins," etc.*



WITH grim brevity Sergeant Dennis O'Hara of the Chinatown Squad always refers to Yee Tok's sinister scheme of vengeance against the Blue Coat Men as "that Canton Street job." But the slant-eyed yellow men have bestowed a different title on that strangest of all Chinatown stories—they call it "The Tale of the Haunted Pigeons."

"Haunted pigeons?" Sergeant O'Hara asked curiously when he first heard the Chinatown version of the Yee Tok affair from his friend Sang Lee the scrivener. "Haunted by what?"

"Haunted by the ghost-spirit of Bow Chim," Sang replied.

O'Hara searched his memory for the faintly familiar name. "You mean Bow Chim the old-time cobbler who lived in Lantern Court? But he's been dead for some-

thing like thirty years. Where's the connection?"

"The pigeons, Sah-jin!" the slant-eyed writing-man explained. "Bow Chim the maker of shoes was also a Number One lover of pigeons. Always he feed them like honored guests and make lodgings for them upon his roof. Then one day Bow Chim is killed by hatchet-man of the Suey Sing Tong. *Hao!* The pigeons have never forgotten or forgiven that deed of blood."

"But what has all that to do with Yee Tok?" O'Hara countered, still puzzled. "He couldn't have had any share in Bow Chim's death. Yee Tok must have been only a small boy at the time."

"True!" Sang Lee agreed. "But when Yee Tok became a grown man did he not join the Suey Sings? And was it not the pigeons who lead Yee Tok to his downfall? *Hoya!* At long last the feather-friends of Bow



*Footprints That End the Middle of Nowhere,  
a Gun That Makes No Noise, Bullets That  
Flatten Out Without Hitting Anything*

Chim have taken vengeance for his death. Is it not as plain as black writing on rice paper?"

"Well," O'Hara admitted, keeping his face expressionless, "I hadn't thought of it before from that particular angle, but certainly Yee Tok was a Suey Sing man, and I hate to think of what would have happened to Officer Burke, if it hadn't been for the pigeons. Tell me more about this Bow Chim."

And Sergeant O'Hara listened attentively as Sang Lee detailed a brief sketch of the long-vanished cobbler of Lantern Court.

It was Bow Chim, according to Chinatown tradition, who first introduced pigeons to the narrow streets of the Yellow Quarter. Bow Chim was a Shanghai man, and often spoke longingly of the sweet sky-music made by the famous fluted pigeons of his native city.

And so one day the nostalgic cobbler had purchased a half dozen pedigreed pigeons and fitted their wings with tiny tubes of silver and tin, in the Shanghai fashion, so that they made a pleasant, whistling music in their flight.

Then came a tong war, and Bow Chim met his death at the hands of an unnamed Suey Sing. The secret of the fluted whistles died with him, and the Shanghai sky-music

was heard no more above the roofs of Chinatown. But his cherished pigeons continued to flourish, foraging now for their own food, and slowly growing in number from year to year.

It was whispered, however, that ever since the day of Bow Chim's death no Chinatown pigeon had accepted the smallest morsel of food from the hand of any Suey Sing man.

SERGEANT O'HARA nodded, listening gravely and politely to Sang Lee's recital. After his long years of service on the Chinatown Squad the tall, red-haired "Sah-jin" knew better than to smile derisively at this mystical, legendary tale of ghost-haunted pigeons who had waited thirty years to exact a tong vengeance.

After all, O'Hara was well aware that if it had not been for those same pigeons Officer James J. Burke would now be only another name on the big bronze memorial tablet at Headquarters, and Burke's unrecovered body a contorted heap of moldering bones in one of the most diabolical death-traps ever devised by a cunning, perverted brain.

Curiously enough, Sergeant O'Hara had been looking out at some of the strutting, puffy-chested descendants of old Bow Chim's beloved pigeons at the very moment

the curtain went up on the opening scene of Yee Tok's deadly plot.

O'Hara was standing at the window of his office in the Twelfth Precinct, watching the Chinatown pigeons waddling about in the inch-deep carpet of snow which covered the streets. The steady, rifiting fall had slowed almost to a stop, with only a few random flakes drifting down lazily, but the horizon sky was thick and sullen with an ash-yellow haze.

"This flurry was only a sample. We'll have a real fall of snow before morning," O'Hara predicted to himself, little realizing the grimly fantastic snow-problem that was to challenge him a few hours later in the frozen white silence of Canton Street—the incredible mystery of the footprints that literally vanished into thin air!

O'Hara turned from the window as his office door opened and Detective Faraday entered, suppressed excitement in his manner.

"Sarge! Guess who's waiting out here to see you? *Yee Tok!*"

O'Hara stiffened alertly at the name. "Has he heard the latest news about his brother?"

Faraday nodded. "He knows that Yee Doy is to be executed on Friday—as scheduled. The lawyer told him this morning that Yee Doy's final appeal has failed—no commutation of sentence to life imprisonment. I think Yee Tok blames your influence for the turn-down."

O'Hara shrugged. "My influence wasn't needed. The nature of the evidence against Yee Doy took care of that."

"You'll never get Yee Tok to believe it," Faraday declared. "He's always been a cop-hater."

"If I had my way, Faraday," O'Hara said, "Yee Tok would be sitting in the same cell with his brother. This isn't the first murder job they've pulled off. The hand that strikes is Yee Doy's, but Yee Tok lays the plans. He's the really dangerous one—the schemer. Yee Doy is tough and ruthless, but stupid. He's always relied on his brother's brains to beat the rap."

"Well, this is one rap he won't beat," Faraday said grimly. "If Yee Tok had all the brains in Chinatown, it wouldn't help Yee Doy now. When you've got a date in Death House Row—you keep it!"

Sergeant O'Hara nodded. "All right,

Faraday, bring in Yee Tok. I'll talk to him."

"Okay, Sarge," Faraday said, moving toward the door. "I've already given him a first-class fanning. I'll guarantee that he's not carrying any concealed hardware."

A few moments later the detective returned with a sturdy, wooden-faced Chinaman wearing a round mandarin hat, a quilted cotton overcoat, and thick-soled Canton slippers, for Yee Tok despised Rice Face clothing as well as Rice Face Law.

Hands tucked from sight inside his sleeves, Yee Tok made a stiffly formal bow. The cast of his features and the bronze tint of his skin revealed proud Manchu blood, but his narrowed, shifty eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot, and he reeked with some particularly pungent Oriental liquor.

"Well, what brings *you* here?" O'Hara demanded crisply, fixing his eyes on the tricky, treacherous Celestial, feared and hated by his own slant-eyed brethren.

"Sah-jin, I come to ask you for paper-writing so that police at prison *yamen* will open iron gates and permit me to exchange words of greeting with Yee Doy, my unlucky brother. Can do?"

O'Hara shook his head. "I have no authority to give you or anyone else a pass to Rockhill Prison. You'll have to abide by the regular rules of the prison. You'll be allowed a farewell visit to your brother for half an hour on Thursday."

"*Tsai!* Thursday no good," Yee Tok declared haughtily. "Must have words with Yee Doy today."

O'Hara shrugged. "I don't make the Rockhill rules. What's the matter with Thursday?"

"No good," the yellow man repeated. "Have other plan for Thursday."

"Then change your plans," O'Hara snapped. "It's Thursday—or nothing. The choice is yours."

Black-glinting hatred darted at O'Hara from between Yee Tok's slanted red lids. "*Wah!* Then I choose nothing!" he snarled, and suddenly shook his clenched fists. "The Triple Curse of Shon Ton, Lord of Ten Thousand Devils, upon all Rice Face justice!"

A rising tide of anger spread slowly across Sergeant O'Hara's face, but he held his voice to a controlled level. "If you have

some urgent message for your brother, give it to his lawyer. He'll see that it's delivered."

Yee Tok burst into a scornful laugh. "*Hoya!* Is not my brother's lawyer a Rice Face man? *Tsai kwei tzu!* All Rice Face men are false and lying as the Rice Face Law that steals my brother's life."

His patience snapped, O'Hara strode forward, his broad-shouldered six-feet-two dwarfing the yellow man. Gripping the front of Yee Tok's quilted coat, he jerked him forward with a force that nearly lifted the Oriental from the floor.

"That's enough of that kind of talk," O'Hara growled. "Your brother was given a fair and open trial by judge and jury. He was tried on the legal evidence and found guilty. No matter what the color of your skin, the penalty for murder is death. Yee Doy killed in cold blood, without mercy, and he will pay for his crime on the day and hour set by the court."

YEE TOK'S lips writhed into a crooked smile. "Maybe yes—maybe no! What man can foretell the color of tomorrow's sky? I think my brother Yee Doy *not* going to die on day and hour set by Rice Face Law!"

"Yeah?" O'Hara challenged. "And what do you think you can do to stop the law from carrying out its sentence?"

"Nothing, Sah-jin, nothing!" The crooked smile widened. "Is not my brother shut away in an iron room behind high stone walls guarded by a hundred Blue Coat Men with guns? This insignificant person can do nothing but burn paper prayers and wait."

"Well, you won't have much longer to wait," O'Hara declared. "It's only three more days to Friday."

"Many things can happen in three days, Sah-jin," Yee Tok said softly. "The Lords of Destiny have made a promise to Yee Doy my brother. Three times I have consulted the Tiles of Fortune, and each time the magic Tiles say Yee Doy shall have long years of life."

O'Hara stared grimly at the shifty-eyed yellow man. "Listen, Yee Tok, if you're cooking up some fancy scheme for a last-minute rescue of your brother—forget it! When you arrive at Rockhill Prison on

Thursday you'll be searched right down to the skin. You'll sit in a wire cage, and your brother will be in another wire cage—with six feet of space between them, and an armed guard watching to see that you don't slip him a knife or a file or perhaps a little bottle of poison."

For a moment Yee Tok stared at him with intent, bloodshot eyes, then the yellow man began to shake with silent, silky laughter. "Sah-jin, there is old China saying: Time holds the key for every lock. Time also holds the key to Yee Doy's iron door. You will see that the Lords of Destiny do not make idle promises. *Wah!* I go now."

Tucking his hands back into his sleeves, Yee Tok repeated his stiff bow and turned to depart, halting in the doorway for a final word.

"The Rice Face Law say my brother Yee Doy must die. The Lords of Destiny say Yee Doy shall live. *Hao!* We shall learn which is the stronger!"

Sergeant O'Hara remained motionless, listening to the whispering pad-pad of Yee Tok's thick-soled slippers fading away along the hall. On a sudden impulse he crossed to the window to observe the yellow man's departure from the station.

Outside, the plump pigeons still waddled about in the shallow snow, but as Yee Tok's taut figure came striding along the pavement they rose in quick, flapping flight.

Without a glance at the frightened birds, Yee Tok picked his way across the street to the opposite pavement, where he halted momentarily, looking back at the sturdy stone-and-brick structure of the police station. Then his hand moved in a swift, furtive gesture as he spat twice over his left shoulder.

"The finger curse," O'Hara murmured, watching until the Chinaman disappeared around the next corner. Frowning thoughtfully, he turned back to the papers on his desk.

DETECTIVE FARADAY loomed in the doorway, grinning. "What'd you say to Yee Tok, Sarge? He was cursing a blue streak under his breath as he went out."

"He demanded a visitor's pass to Rockhill for today, instead of Thursday. I told him nothing doing." O'Hara leaned back, rubbing his chin. "I have a hunch he's up to something, Faraday. He went away boast-

ing that Yee Doy will still beat the Friday rap."

"A jail-break?" Faraday laughed scornfully. "You don't break out of Rockhill, Sarge. The only way Yee Doy could beat the rap now is by suicide."

O'HARA shook his head. "That wasn't what Yee Tok meant. He boasted that his brother would enjoy long years of life."

"The Chink was just blowing off steam," Faraday asserted. "He's drunk—loaded to the scuppers. Phew! You can still smell the stuff in here."

"It's *yen-shee*," O'Hara said. "Made from opium ash. A vile liquor—stronger than *samsheu* or *lung-shao*. In the old days the hatchetmen used to soak up on *yen-shee* before they went out for a tong battle."

"Well, if Yee Tok had any tricks up his sleeve, I should think he'd stay sober," Faraday argued.

"I have an idea he *is* sober," O'Hara said quietly. "He put on a half-drunken act in here, but I watched him as he left the station and he marched off straight as an arrow."

Faraday shook his head. "Maybe he's still steady on his feet, Sarge, but he's got a skinful, all right. Those bloodshot eyes, and the smell on his breath—he just reeked with the stuff."

"That was my tip-off," O'Hara replied. "The smell of *yen-shee* was so strong it made me suspicious. While we were arguing, I happened to grab him by the coat, and there was a big damp patch on the front of it. My guess is that Yee Tok was carrying most of his liquor on the *outside*."

Faraday stared at him. "But why? Why the devil should he want us to think he was drunk?"

"I don't know, Faraday, unless—" O'Hara frowned into space for a moment. "Yee Tok is smart, and tricky as hell, but he has a weakness for bragging. If he really has some sort of scheme to rescue his brother from Rockhill, he might have wanted to do a little advance boasting without having us take the warning seriously—until it's too late."

"Too late!" Faraday echoed, astonishment in his voice. "Don't tell me you think he's got a chance of pulling off a crazy stunt like that? Crack Rockhill? Ha!"

"If Yee Tok thinks he has a chance, that's

enough for me," O'Hara said grimly. "I want him tailed, Faraday, from now until the hour of Yee Doy's execution. And make a good job of it. You know where his rooms are?"

"13 Peking Court," Faraday replied.

O'Hara nodded. "His usual hangouts are the Happy Door wine shop in Long Sword Alley and Mark Sin's fantan place in Paradise Court."

Faraday glanced out the window. "The snow's starting again. If it keeps up, it'll be a tough night for point duty."

"I'll have Driscoll take over at midnight," O'Hara said. "If anything breaks, get word back to me—fast."

"Okay, Sarge. If you think there's something cooking, hadn't you better tip 'em off at Rockhill?"

"Right away," O'Hara replied, and picked up the phone as Faraday departed on his assignment. "Get me Warden Gallagher," he said to the switchboard man, and waited for the connection.

"Hello—Gallagher? . . . This is Sergeant O'Hara, Chinatown Squad. . . . How are you making out with Yee Doy?"

The warden's deep voice rumbled along the wires. "Funny thing, O'Hara—I was just thinking of giving you a call about that Chink—"

"Anything happened?" O'Hara cut in quickly.

"No—nothing's happened. That's what's bothering me. When Yee Doy first arrived he carried on like a wild animal, pacing up and down his cell day and night, rattling at the bars like he'd twist 'em into pretzels. Then his brother came to see him. I don't know what words passed between them, because they jabbered away in Chinese, but after his brother left we had no more trouble with Yee Doy."

"He quieted down, eh?" O'Hara asked.

"I'll say he did! Now he sits by the hour without moving a muscle, with a funny kind of half-grin on his face. And every day he tells the guard: 'Yee Doy not going die. My brother fix.' This morning the lawyer came to tell him the final appeal had failed. It didn't shake him up a bit. He just grinned and said, 'Make no matter. My brother fix.' He's so damned confident about it, it's got me wondering."

"I'm wondering, too," O'Hara said. "Yee

Tok was here in my office just a few minutes ago, making the same kind of boast."

"Why didn't you lock him up?" Gallagher asked.

"On what charge?" O'Hara retorted. "Yee Tok's too smart to make any open threats. All he claimed is that the Tiles of Fortune showed long life for his brother. I think you'd better have Yee Doy searched thoroughly and transferred to a new cell."

Gallagher's hearty laugh vibrated in the receiver. "All right, Sergeant, but I think you're taking it too seriously. I've been Warden at Rockhill since it was built, and no one's ever cracked out of here."

"There's always a first time," O'Hara said drily. "They're a slick pair, Gallagher. I'm taking it seriously enough to have Yee Tok tailed night and day. I'll give you a call if anything develops."

O'Hara hung up and sat drumming a finger tattoo on the desk blotter. Premature twilight filled the office with a soft gray gloom. Outside, the white snowflakes sifted down at an increasing tempo, making a faint whispering as they whirled against the window panes. From the squad-room O'Hara listened to Captain Winters running crisply through the four o'clock rollcall.

A few minutes later the blue-uniformed men came filing out along the corridor, bound for their posts. "Burke! Come in here a minute," O'Hara called to a thick-chested, red-faced patrolman.

"Yes, sir!" Burke stood at attention before O'Hara's desk.

"Burke, I want to give you a word of caution," O'Hara said. "Keep your eyes open for Yee Tok. I'm afraid we're going to have trouble with him before we're through. You're the man who arrested Yee Doy, so he may have it in for you, particularly."

Burke smiled confidently. "Don't worry about me, Sarge—I can handle Yee Tok with one hand. He's not a fighter, like his brother. What a battle that Yee Doy put up before I got the cuffs on him! Most Chinks never learn how to throw a punch, but Doy socked me with a couple of wallops to the button that had me groggy."

"Well, brains can be dangerous, too," O'Hara remarked. "Yee Tok is full of tricks. Remember that, Burke."

The patrolman grinned, tapping his nightstick. "There's nothin' like a good rap over

the noggin' to take the steam out of a hopped-up Chink."

But if Officer James J. Burke, Shield No. 1369, could have had the least premonition of what awaited him out there in the cold, silent, snow-swirled streets of Chinatown he would not have swaggered so confidently down the steps of the Precinct, drawing on his thick woolen gloves—

**A**LONE in the office, O'Hara opened the filing cabinet and took out the well-filled crime dossier of the Yee brothers. Time passed unheeded as he browsed through the file, refreshing his memory with the details and methods of Yee Tok's genius for evil.

"Too bad that Yee Tok's not the one in Rockhill," O'Hara muttered. "If it was Yee Doy on the loose, he could be settled any time with a nightstick, as Burke says."

It was almost seven o'clock when O'Hara glanced at his watch. The snow was lashing and slashing at the windows now, whipped up by a howling wind, and piling on the sills in a creeping white tide.

"Time to eat," O'Hara said, and turning up his overcoat collar and pulling his hat down firmly, he plunged into the swirling white turmoil that waited beyond the Precinct doors. Head lowered against the wind, he made his way through the deepening snow to Mulberry Lane, and entered the Little Shanghai Restaurant.

"*Ala wah, Sah-jin!*" fat old Soon Yet the proprietor greeted him smilingly.

O'Hara glanced around at the array of deserted tables and vacant booths. "First time I've ever seen your place empty, Soon Yet," he remarked.

"White rain not good for business, Sah-jin. Tonight every one stay home and sit close to hot stove. *Ai-ye!* It is truly three-coat weather upon the streets."

"Yes, it has all the makings of a blizzard," O'Hara replied. "Well, what's on the menu tonight? I'm hungry."

"Maybe you like nice chow mein?" Soon Yet suggested. "Maybe eggs *foo yong*? Is also fine boiled duck, China style, of Number One tenderness."

"I'll have the duck," O'Hara said.

"*Wah!*" Soon Yet beamed approvingly. "I fix him special for you, Sah-jin, with plum wine sauce."

Sergeant O'Hara ate his dinner leisurely, listening to the wind swooping along Mulberry Lane, drawing a weird symphony of squeaks and groans from the rusty, swinging shop signs.

When he faced the storm again, O'Hara found that the wind had abated considerably, but the snow was still whirling down with a thick intensity. The smooth, unbroken blanket of white was deepening over streets so deserted that on his way back to the Precinct O'Hara encountered only one pedestrian—Meng Tai the apothecary, bundled to the ears, plodding along Orange Street to the bedside of some slant-eyed patient.

"Anything new, Charley?" O'Hara asked, halting beside the Precinct switchboard and shaking the snow from his coat and hat.

"Nothing, Sarge," the operator replied. "It's a tough night."

"Eskimo weather," O'Hara said. "I had to send Faraday out on point duty. I'll bet he's cussin' me good and plenty by this time."

The operator grinned. "When Burke made his pull from the box at Canton Street he said he'd give five bucks spot cash for a pair of ear-muffs."

O'Hara retired to his office. The Precinct station was filled with a hushed quiet that matched the brooding silence of the white-blanketed streets outside. Then the phone on the sergeant's desk rang sharply. The call was from the switchboard operator.

"Officer Burke's overdue on his eight o'clock pull, Sarge. It's 8:11 now, and everybody else has checked in. It's not like Burke to be late—he's always right there on the dot."

Before O'Hara could reply, the operator's voice resumed swiftly, "It's okay, Sarge. Here's the flash now from the Canton Street box."

O'Hara hung up, reflected a moment, then made his way down the hall to the switchboard, where a tiny yellow light glowed steadily on the panel as the operator impatiently worked the control key back and forth.

"Hey, Burke! Burke!" he shouted into the mouthpiece. "Can't you hear me?"

"Something wrong, Charley?" O'Hara asked quickly.

"Well, the line's open, Sarge, but I can't hear anything. It's like a dead wire."

"Maybe the wires are down," O'Hara suggested. "This storm—"

"But all our wires are underground," the operator declared. "We've never had a breakdown before. I'll try it again."

He took off his ear-phone, examined it, and clipped it back into place, but had no better success in establishing the connection. O'Hara stood staring at the unwinking panel light, glowing like a malignant little yellow eye, and a sudden premonition of disaster came to him.

"I think I'll go have a look-see, Charley. Order the emergency car."

Snatching up his hat and coat, O'Hara hurried to the Precinct's side entrance, where the emergency car was already waiting for him in the covered driveway, with Officer Doyle behind the wheel.

"The Canton Street call-box," O'Hara ordered as he climbed in. "And step on it, Doyle."

"Hell of a night for a pinch," Doyle remarked, starting the windshield wiper as he shifted gears.

"I don't know that it's a pinch," O'Hara replied. "Somethings gone wrong with Burke's call-box—or with Burke. We'll soon know which."

O'HARA'S eyes strained ahead against the shifting white curtain of falling snow as they swung into Canton Street. As they bore down on the Grove Street intersection their headlights picked out the green-painted call-box on the corner, wearing a slanted crown of snow.

"Looks like a false alarm, Sergeant," Doyle said, slowing the car. "There's no sign of Burke—or of anybody else."

"Pull in to the curb," O'Hara ordered sharply. "He's been here—his tracks are still fresh in the snow."

"Then maybe he's still within earshot," Doyle suggested, and stabbed out three peremptory blasts on his police siren as he pulled up beside the box. The corner property was an abandoned factory—a three-story building of weatherbeaten brick with boarded-up windows and doors, its broad stone steps piled high with drifted snow.

O'Hara, peering out at the measured line of Burke's footprints leading to the call-box, caught sight of a small, dark, crumpled object lying on the snow near the box.

"Look, Doyle—a glove! Burke must have dropped it—"

Then O'Hara, raising his eyes to the green police box itself, sprang out of the car with such a startled exclamation that Doyle came scrambling along at his heels.

"The box!" O'Hara gasped. "Look at it! The door wide open—the receiver hanging down off the hook!"

"And he left his keys in the lock!" Doyle added excitedly, pointing to a key-ring swinging from the little green door.

O'Hara stared around at the deserted intersection, its freshly gleaming snow unmarked save for their own wheel-tracks, the smooth white pavement untrdden save for the single line of Burke's footprints.

Nothing could have been more simply and clearly defined than that line of footprints. They approached the police box from the direction of Manchu Court—left a slightly jumbled circle of prints directly in front of the box itself—then veered around and doubled back toward Manchu Court.

"Guess the box is out of order," Doyle suggested. "Burke got tired of waiting for his connection, and beat it."

"Leaving the box like this?" O'Hara scoffed. Swiftly he caught up the dangling receiver and put it to his ear as he jiggled the hook. "Charley, can you hear me?" he called into the mouthpiece. "This is Sergeant O'Hara."

"Sure, Sergeant, I can hear you," Charley's voice responded promptly. "What goes on? Where's Burke?"

"I don't know," O'Hara replied. "He's been here at the box, and gone away again. I'm going to follow his tracks. Call you later."

O'Hara hung up, closed the box, and pocketed Burke's keys and the fallen glove. "There's something damned queer about this set-up, Doyle. Apparently Burke was just on the point of making his pull when he saw something—or heard something—that made him drop everything and rush off. We'd better get busy and find out what that something was! Get the big flash-lamp out of the car."

While Doyle secured the electric lantern, O'Hara pulled out his blunt-nosed automatic, checked the safety catch, and transferred it to his overcoat pocket. "Let's go!" he said briefly.

The line of Burke's return tracks led them straight on past the abandoned factory with its drifted steps. Then the tracks slanted off abruptly, disappearing into a narrow alley—

"Throw your flash, Doyle," O'Hara ordered, drawing his gun as they entered the three-feet wide passage. To their left towered the side wall of the factory—a three-story cliff of windowless, unbroken brick. To their right were the wooden backyard fences of the close-packed row of houses facing on Manchu Court.

Burke's tracks went on steadily past the snow-drifted wooden gates—past six, seven, eight of them. But at the ninth gate—

"Sarge!" Doyle's lantern moved jerkily, his voice an instinctive whisper. "He turned in here! The gate's still open—"

Gun in hand, O'Hara peered in through the open gate, which had cut a neat quarter-circle swath through the deepening snow. Burke's tracks went straight on across the backyard—three, four, five, six paces—and then abruptly, impossibly, *there were no more footprints!*

Doyle's breath hissed between his teeth as he stared at O'Hara, his face strained and white in the glow of the lantern. "Sarge!" he gasped in an awe-stricken whisper. "Are we seeing things? They *stop!* There aren't any more!"

O'Hara snatched the lantern from Doyle's unsteady hand and strode forward, taking care to leave Burke's footprints unmarred. In the center of the backyard, where the tracks ended so unnaturally, Burke's police cap lay upside down on the snow, together with his other brown woolen glove.

And right there, between the hat and the glove, a sunken scar in the smooth snow drew O'Hara's eye. Scraping into the snow, he held up Burke's .38 service revolver.

"Empty!" O'Hara announced, breaking open the cylinder. "Every shot fired!" A moment later his sharp glance ferreted out a series of tiny pockmarks in the snow a few feet beyond the last of Burke's footprints. And half-buried in the snow beneath these pockmarks they found the discharged bullets from Burke's gun—six .38 calibre slugs flattened out in a curiously lumpy fashion, as though they had crashed futilely against some shield of impenetrable metal.

The look of baffled amazement deepened

on Doyle's startled face. "Those bullets, Sarge! They didn't travel over six feet before they dropped! But what'd they hit? There's nothing here—nothing! Not even a cat's tracks!"

"Let's make sure of that," O'Hara answered in a grim voice. Holding the lantern high, he made a slow pivot. Behind them loomed the blank expanse of factory wall, crowned by the shadowy bulk of a water-tower. Before them the snow stretched smooth and unbroken between the last of Burke's footprints and the rear wall of the dark house.

O'HARA approached the house, and holding the lantern close to one of the back windows, peered inside. "Vacant!" he announced, and noticed how the drifting snow had piled thickly against the kitchen door.

Then he made a careful circuit of the backyard fence, marking that the vertical rim of snow along its top edge was unbroken anywhere. Nevertheless he flashed the lantern into the neighboring backyards on either side, but without finding any trace of footprints. An examination of the rest of the alley also revealed nothing but smooth, unbroken snow.

Completely baffled, O'Hara could only return and stare moodily at the mysterious spot from which Officer James J. Burke had stepped apparently from the world of sober fact into the realm of the supernatural.

"What do you make of it, Sarge?" Doyle demanded. "What in hell could have happened to Burke?"

"I don't know," O'Hara admitted slowly. "I don't understand any part of it. In the first place, what made Burke drop the call-box phone like it was a hot potato and head straight for this alley? If it was something or somebody he saw—then where are its tracks?"

"It might have been something he heard," Doyle said. "Maybe somebody yelling Help! or Murder!"

O'Hara gave him a sharp look. "Haven't you noticed how his footprints are spaced? Burke *walked* here at a normal pace—if he'd heard anything like that he'd have gone on the run, wouldn't he?"

Doyle glanced around uneasily into the cold white silence of the night, alive with the stealthy flutter and swirl of the falling

flakes. "And none of that explains what—what happened to Burke—afterward."

"Look, Doyle—keep a level head," O'Hara snapped. "There's no magic, white, black or yellow, that can make a 180-pound cop disappear into thin air."

"But he's—he's gone!" Doyle insisted. "And there are no other tracks—"

"Yes, Burke's gone," O'Hara growled. "It's up to us to find out how—and where. For a starter, let's have a look-see at the inside of this empty house."

Smashing one of the panes in a back window, O'Hara reached in and released the catch. Then he raised the sash and climbed in over the sill, with Doyle following.

Flashing the electric lantern, they moved from empty room to empty room, examining the dusty floors, the window sills, the inside of closets. "Nothing here," O'Hara declared finally as they ascended from the cellar. "Bare walls—bare floors. Nobody's set foot in this place for months."

O'Hara unlocked the front door and glanced out at the unbroken snow covering the front steps.

"All right, Doyle, let's see what the neighbors can tell us about those six shots Burke fired. This house is No. 17 Manchu Court. We'll try No. 19 first."

CROSSING the twin stone steps, O'Hara rapped on the door of No. 19. When there was no reply, he pounded again—and a third time. Then he leaned out and peered into the front window.

"No light showing. Guess there's nobody home. Let's try No. 15."

As they mounted the steps of No. 15, O'Hara pointed to a line of half-obliterated footprints leading to the door. "About an hour old."

The door was opened promptly by a round-faced, smiling Oriental—Sam Sing the barber, whose shop was on Orange Street.

"*Hola, Sah-jin,*" Sam Sing greeted affably. "This is Number One surprise. What can do for you?"

"You can answer a couple of questions, Sam," O'Hara replied. "Closed up your shop early tonight, didn't you?"

Sam Sing nodded, pointing to the still falling snow. "White rain makes streets empty. For two-three hour nobody enter

shop door. I turn key in lock—come home."

"How long have you been home?" O'Hara questioned.

"Iron bell in Rice Face church strike seven time as I leave Orange Street," the barber declared.

"Then you were home here when the shooting took place in the backyard next door?"

A blank look came over Sam Sing's face. "Shooting, Sah-jin? This is news of first telling to my ears. Somebody is make dead with bullet?"

A swift look passed between the two policemen, and O'Hara's voice sharpened. "Never mind about that part of it. There were six shots fired next door, not more than twenty minutes ago. Don't lie, Sam. We've got the gun—we've even found the bullets."

The slant-eyed barber shook his head. "I hear nothing, Sah-jin—nothing. All time it was silent as Ming tomb."

O'Hara looked at him steadily. "Tell the truth, Sam. We've been friends a long time—you know you can trust me. I want to know about those shots. I want to know if you looked out the back window when you heard them. I want to know what you saw, when you looked out—"

"Tsai! I have hear nothing, Sah-jin—I have see nothing!" Sam Sing declared earnestly. "I swear it, upon the sacred name of Milo Fo." He turned his head and called "An-wei!" along the dark hall.

The kitchen door opened, and a Chinese woman wearing a flowered robe appeared. She kept her dark eyes lowered and her hands modestly hidden from sight as she bowed formally to the visitors. Sam Sing spoke to her in Cantonese, and she replied briefly, shaking her head.

"An-wei, my wife, also say she hear no sound of shooting, Sah-jin," Sam Sing declared.

Doyle scowled and muttered under his breath, but O'Hara's face showed no change of expression as he abruptly turned the angle of conversation.

"How long has this house next door been vacant, Sam?" he asked.

"For long time, Sah-jin—more than twelve moons," the barber replied.

"Who lives in the house on the other side of it—No. 19?"

"Lee Kai lives there, Sah-jin. Not home

now. He is night-waiter at Long Jon's Tea House."

O'Hara nodded. "I know Lee Kai. All right, Sam, that'll be all for the time being. You still swear you didn't hear any shots?"

"If I speak falsely, may I never look upon the faces of my ancestors," Sam Sing affirmed.

"He's lying, Sarge," Doyle declared as they went down the front steps. "He must have heard the shots. All that jabbering to his wife in Chinese—probably telling her to keep her mouth shut."

"Well, Sam Sing has always had a clean record," O'Hara replied. "But we can check up. We'll see what some of the other neighbors have to say."

So the two policemen went from door to door until they had covered all the houses on that side of Manchu Court. At each stop O'Hara asked the same questions—and at each stop he received the same answers. Sometimes the answers were frank and open, sometimes sullen and suspicious, but they were unanimous in denying that any pistol shots had been heard.

"They're all lying to us," Doyle fumed when they had finished the canvass. "Chinks always play dumb—afraid they'll get involved in some Court business. Six shots from a .38—and nobody heard them! It doesn't make sense."

"On the contrary," O'Hara said slowly, "I think that's one of the few things in this whole crazy set-up that *does* make sense."

Doyle looked at him. "Sounds like double-talk, Sarge."

O'Hara was silent a moment. "Doyle, Captain Winters tells me you've got ambitions, that you're studying up for the Headquarters' exam."

"Yes, sir. Homicide," Doyle explained.

"Well, this is a nice little problem to sharpen your wisdom teeth on, Doyle. We came over here together—you've seen everything I have. What's your theory?"

Doyle shook his head. "It's beyond me, Sarge. Footprints that end in the middle of nowhere—a gun that makes no noise when it's fired—bullets that flatten out without hitting anything! How can you build a theory out of a screwy jumble of clues like that?"

"The real trouble, Doyle, is that you can

build *two* entirley different theories from this set-up. That queer business at the call-box—Burke's cap, his gloves, his gun, the bullets in the snow—they tell one story. But the fact that Burke *walked* from the call-box instead of running, the fact that nobody admits hearing the shots—that tells a different story."

Doyle looked bewildered. "You mean you've got it figured out, Sarge? You know what happened to Burke?"

O'Hara shook his head. "I don't know *how* Burke disappeared, but I think I know *why*. And there's a quick way to check up. Come on, Doyle—back to the car."

They left Manchu Court and hurried back along Canton Street toward their parked car. While Doyle brushed the white plastering of snow from the windshield, O'Hara opened the call-box and phoned the Precinct, giving a brief account of Burke's mysterious disappearance.

"Send out a general alarm, Captain," O'Hara instructed. "I'll be back there in a few minutes to make a detailed report. I want to check up on something first. Any message for me from Detective Faraday? . . . No? Okay."

O'Hara closed the call-box, threw a final glance at the line of Burke's footprints leading off toward that inexplicable rendezvous back of Manchu Court, and climbed into the car.

"Peking Court, Doyle," he ordered as he slammed the door.

Doyle pulled up outside the Mulberry Lane entrance to the Court, and they proceeded on foot through the tunnel-like opening to the silent, deserted rectangle of little houses. As they halted under the single lamp-post, Detective Faraday detached himself from a shadowed doorway.

"How's it going, Faraday?" O'Hara asked.

"Okay," the detective replied, and pointed across the Court to a lighted second story window. "That's Yee Tok's room."

"Have any trouble picking up his trail?" O'Hara queried.

"It was a cinch," Faraday declared. "After he left the Precinct the Chink blew himself to a very fancy dinner at Long Jon's Tea House. Spent almost an hour at the table. From there he went to the Plum Blossom Joss House. Fifteen minutes there. Then

he came back here, and it doesn't look as if he's coming out again."

"Do you think he spotted you tailing him around?"

Faraday shook his head. "He didn't act like he was suspicious, Sarge. I didn't see him glance back once."

"Well, Burke's disappeared under damned peculiar circumstances," O'Hara announced abruptly, "and it looks to me like one of Yee Tok's jobs." He went on to describe the baffling set-up that had confronted them in Manchu Court, a recital that left the detective staring incredulously.

"But look, Sarge, it couldn't have been Yee Tok," Faraday argued. "I've been here on the job every minute. A couple more Chinks have gone into No. 13 since I've been on the watch, but nobody's come out—nobody."

"Let's make sure," O'Hara said, and led the way across the snowy Court to No. 13. They found the lodging-house door unlocked, and went on up the staircase to the second floor, where O'Hara rapped on Yee Tok's door.

There was no answer, and O'Hara pounded again, harder. "Open up, Yee Tok!" he called, rattling the knob. "Police!"

AT THE summons, other doors opened stealthily, and various slant-eyed faces popped into view. The pot-bellied proprietor came hurrying up the stairs from his quarters below.

"Have you got a key to Yee Tok's door?" O'Hara demanded.

"No got, Sah-jin," the yellow man answered.

O'Hara measured the door with his eye, then drove his broad shoulders against the panels. The wood buckled under the assault, the lock snapped and the door flew open. A yellow-shaded lamp burned quietly on a table, but it needed only a quick glance to see that the room was empty.

"I'll be damned!" Faraday muttered.

O'Hara's glance went to the shrine-shelf on Yee Tok's wall, where the burned-down stubs of two scented joss-sticks still smoldered on either side of a bronze prayer-bowl, fire blackened inside and filled with brittle ash.

"Yee Tok's been burning paper prayers,"

O'Hara said, poking into the debris. "Yellow paper—red ink. Devil prayers!"

Faraday turned angrily on the slant-eyed proprietor. "Did you help Yee Tok sneak out of here? Speak up, chop-chop!"

The yellow man shook his head vigorously. "Know nothing—not see Yee Tok tonight," he declared.

"Well, he didn't leave by the front door," Faraday fumed. "That I'll swear to."

O'Hara nodded. "I guess he knew you were tailing him, Faraday. Yee Tok doesn't always use doors when he's in a hurry—a window serves the same purpose."

"But these windows face the Court," Faraday replied.

"There are other windows, facing the rear," O'Hara reminded. "There's one at the end of the hall, for instance. Let's have a look."

They went along the hall to the window that looked out on the kitchen roof. "The catch is off," O'Hara said, and raised the sash. Faraday snapped on his flashlight and directed the beam out over the snowy roof. A line of footprints slanted off from the window to the edge of the lower roof—the flat, undivided prints made by a padded Chinese slipper.

"That settles Yee Tok's alibi," O'Hara remarked. "All right, Faraday, stay right here on the job—but inside this time. If Yee Tok comes back, which I doubt very much—arrest him."

"Right!" Faraday said. "Are you going back to the Precinct now?"

"Not yet," O'Hara replied. "I'll follow Yee Tok's trail as far as I can. Come on, Doyle, let's get going."

**A**T FIRST Yee Tok's trail presented no difficulties. It was evident that he had jumped down from the kitchen roof into the backyard and thence made his way through the garden gate to an alley which made a right angle turn, opening into Half Moon Street.

But there had been a certain amount of pedestrian traffic on Half Moon Street, and Yee Tok's prints were blended into this general trail. And when they reached Mulberry Lane, Chinatown's principal thoroughfare, the confusion became an insoluble tangle.

"Well, that's that," O'Hara declared. "All

we can say is that Yee Tok was headed in the general direction of Manchu Court. The time element checks out, too—those tracks of his are pretty well snowed over."

So, turning back from the lost trail, they returned to the police car and drove swiftly to the Precinct, where the news of Burke's mysterious disappearance had created a sensation. O'Hara recounted the story of Manchu Court in full detail, and there was dead silence in the squad-room gathering as he placed the evidence on view, item by item—Burke's keys, cap and gloves, the empty gun, the flattened bullets.

Captain Winters rose abruptly. "O'Hara, I'm going right over to Manchu Court. I've got to look over this scene for myself. It's absolutely incredible!"

"Are you taking personal charge of this case, Captain?" O'Hara asked.

"No, I'm leaving it in your hands," Winters replied. "Burke's on your squad, Sergeant, and you're the Chinatown expert. Take whatever steps and give whatever orders are necessary."

While Captain Winters hurried off to examine the scene of the crime, O'Hara mustered the Precinct's reserve patrolmen in the squad-room, gave each man individual instructions, and sent them out to comb Chinatown for even the slightest clue to Officer Burke's fate and the whereabouts of the elusive Yee Tok.

Waiting for the earliest reports to come in, O'Hara sat down at his desk and made a carefully scaled drawing of the Manchu Court area, marking down a trail of little dashes to indicate Burke's course through the snow. He was still studying this chart when Captain Winters returned.

"O'Hara," the captain exploded, "I don't know what to say! This is the damndest piece of business I ever heard of. The whole thing's absolutely impossible—but it happened!"

O'Hara looked up from his chart. "Perhaps it *didn't* happen, Captain!" he suggested quietly.

Winters stared at him. "What do you mean?"

"Well, there are some mighty queer angles to this case," O'Hara said slowly. "For instance, Burke is noted for making his pulls on the dot. But tonight he was eleven minutes late reaching the call-box. Why? Then,

according to the evidence, something happened at the exact split second he was about to make his report—something that made him drop the phone and proceed to that backyard in Manchu Court. What was that something?"

O'HARA'S finger traced the line on his drawing. "Burke's footprints stop half a dozen paces inside the gate. We find his hat and glove and gun lying in the snow—but there are no other indications of a struggle. He emptied his gun at this mysterious enemy, but the bullets fall blunted only a few feet from the muzzle, and every one denies hearing any shots. Then, if we go by the evidence, we've got to believe that Burke was lifted right up out of his tracks—the whole 180 pounds of him—and whisked through the air without leaving a single trace. Add up all these impossibilities, Captain, and what's the answer? *It didn't happen!*"

"But it *did* happen!" Winters retorted. "You can't deny the evidence of your own eyes—"

"I mean it didn't happen to *Burke!*" O'Hara cut in. "I deny the evidence. I don't believe Burke came to the call-box. I don't believe Burke made those tracks in the snow. And I don't believe those six shots were ever fired in Manchu Court—"

"What in thunder *do* you believe?" Winters challenged.

"My guess is that Burke was waylaid by Yee Tok—but not in Manchu Court. Motive—revenge. Remember it was Burke who arrested his brother, Yee Doy. I think this whole set-up in Manchu Court is a clever plant, from the keys left hanging in the call-box to the battered bullets lying in the snow."

Captain Winters stared at him. "But Yee Tok wears Chinese slippers. These tracks were made by leather shoes—white man's shoes."

O'Hara shrugged. "If Yee Tok had possession of Burke's hat, gloves, gun and keys—why couldn't he have Burke's shoes?"

Winters was silent a moment, frowning at the chart. "But damn it, Sergeant, that wouldn't solve anything. You're only exchanging one mystery for another. Even if you're right about Yee Tok masquerading as Burke, how in hell could the Chink dis-

appear without leaving any tracks in the snow?"

"That I don't know," O'Hara admitted frankly. "But the whole purpose of the trick would be to pin down our attention to Manchu Court, to make us waste time and energy on a phoney set-up, instead of looking elsewhere for Burke. But I'm not falling for that bait—I'm concentrating on finding Yee Tok."

"I hope you know what you're doing," Winters said.

"I know Yee Tok," O'Hara answered grimly. "He's the slickest, trickiest yellow man we've ever been up against, and he'll stop at nothing to keep Yee Doy from being executed."

"Killing Burke won't help Yee Doy," Winters snapped.

"No—a killing won't," O'Hara agreed. "But suppose Yee Tok's idea is to hold Burke as a ransom prisoner? Suppose he warns us that if Yee Doy dies, it will be a life for a life? What answer do we give him?"

Winters banged his fist down on the desk. "Good God, Sergeant! You don't think he'd have the brass nerve to try that kind of a squeeze on us?"

"Why not?" O'Hara countered. "We're dealing with a reckless, half-mad criminal—a cop-hater, a law-hater. Since it was Burke who arrested Yee Doy originally, the blow falls on him. That would only be simple justice, according to Yee Tok's cockeyed way of thinking."

Captain Winters' jaw tightened. "I hope you're wrong, O'Hara. Anyway, you're building up a damned big theory on a mighty small foundation. So far, you have no direct evidence whatever to connect Yee Tok with Burke's—"

But the captain's sentence was never completed, for at that instant the window across the room exploded into a jangling shower of broken glass. Fragments of hard-packed snow mingled with the shattered glass strewed across the floor, and in the midst of the debris O'Hara's eye caught the glint of polished metal.

"A police shield!" O'Hara exclaimed, snatching up the silver-plated insignia. "Number one-three-six-nine! It's Burke's!"

A roughly torn scrap of brown paper was impaled upon the shield's pin—a penciled

message printed out in a crude and uncertain lettering:

IF YEE DOY DIE—  
BLUE COAT MAN DIE

"Is it signed?" Winters demanded.

"It doesn't need a signature!" O'Hara replied swiftly, and grabbing hat and overcoat, rushed out into the corridor, pausing only at the squad-room door to shout: "Everybody out! Follow me! Yee Tok just threw a message through my window!"

Racing down the stone steps to the pavement, O'Hara dashed around the corner into the street. Of course, Yee Tok had had plenty of time to make his get-away, but O'Hara counted on following his traces in the snow.

"Fan out boys!" he called to the patrolmen who had come dashing at his heels. "Search the snow all along here for fresh footprints."

But although they spent a good twenty minutes combing the side street and adjacent areas, they found no trace of Yee Tok's course.

"All right—give it up," O'Hara called out finally, and they trooped back into the Precinct.

"He got away," O'Hara informed Captain Winters. "Not even a footprint. He must have run along in the tracks left by automobiles. That damn Chink thinks of everything."

**W**INTERS had Burke's silver shield and the warning note in his hand. "Well, O'Hara, you certainly called the turn on this one. But it sure puts us on a hell of a spot. You don't think Yee Tok is bluffing?"

O'Hara shook his head. "No, that Chink means business, Captain. If we want Burke back alive, we've got to find him before eight o'clock Friday morning!"

"Three days," Winters said slowly, then exploded in sudden wrath. "By God, we'll rescue Burke if we have to rip Chinatown open from end to end! I'll have an emergency squad sent down from Headquarters! We'll rope off the streets and make a house-to-house search!"

"If you do, you're signing Burke's death-warrant," O'Hara warned earnestly. "I know Yee Tok. He's desperate—get him cornered that way and he'll fight it out. But

before he fights he'll make sure that Burke is the first to die."

"How the devil do we go about it, then?" Winters fumed. "We can't sit tight and do nothing."

"We've got to keep cool heads," O'Hara replied. "Yee Tok never strikes at random. He always plans every move in advance. No doubt he had a hideout prepared somewhere. It's up to us to find it. But quietly—carefully."

"Three days!" Winters repeated savagely. "There's no time for dawdling."

"I'm counting on Chinatown itself for help," O'Hara declared. "Ninety percent of the Chinese have always feared and hated the Yee Brothers. When they hear about Burke, they'll close ranks against Yee Tok as a common enemy. They'll search Chinatown in their own way—better than a regiment of police could do it, and when they have found Yee Tok's hiding place, they'll put the finger on him."

Winters stared thoughtfully at the silver shield. "You don't think Burke is—dead?"

O'Hara shook his head. "No, I feel pretty sure he's still alive—as hostage for Yee Doy's life. If simple murder had been Yee Tok's object, he wouldn't have bothered with all that hocus-pocus at Manchu Court."

For the balance of the evening Sergeant O'Hara hung impatiently over the Precinct switchboard, waiting in vain for some message or report that would throw a ray of light, however small, on the mysterious disappearance of Officer Burke.

At midnight the regular patrolmen checked in one by one from their beats, together with the reserves O'Hara had sent out on special assignment. But they had nothing new or helpful to report. Detective Faraday returned from his futile vigil at Yee Tok's lodgings, having been relieved by Detective Driscoll.

"Yee Tok won't be fool enough to come back there now," Faraday predicted. "He knows the heat is on full blast."

O'Hara went into Captain Winters' office to submit his discouraging report. "Nothing on Yee Tok, Captain, and nothing new on Burke. At seven sharp Burke made his regular pull from the Canton Street call-box, kidded a little with Charley about how cold it was, and hung up. From that moment on, we haven't a single trace of his movements."

"Well, between seven and eight it was snowing and blowing the hardest," Winters remarked. "The streets were practically deserted."

O'Hara nodded. "I know—I was out in it about that time. The way the snow was whirling around, you couldn't see ten feet ahead. Yee Tok could have ambushed Burke right in the middle of Mulberry Lane, and no one the wiser."

"Well, Sergeant, there's nothing more we can do about it tonight. Might as well check out and get some sleep. We'll tackle it again in the morning. Daylight may give us a new slant on things."

Reluctantly O'Hara put his papers in order and prepared to leave the Precinct. At the last moment, however, he turned back to slip the Manchu Court drawing into his pocket for further study.

Convinced as he was that the vanishing footprints were only a clever hoax, an Oriental red herring drawn across the real trail, it was still a baffling enigma that plagued and goaded his brain. He was still wrestling with the mystery when he fell asleep, and it was his first thought upon awakening in the morning.

O'Hara ate a hurried breakfast, so that he might be back at the Precinct in time for the eight o'clock roll-call. He cross-examined the men as they checked in from the night shifts, but each man told the same story—uneventful rounds of quiet, deserted streets, filled only with the cold white silence of newly fallen snow.

"Come on, Faraday," O'Hara said to his assistant, "let's have another look at that Manchu Court set-up. I can't get the confounded thing out of my mind."

When they arrived at Canton Street they found the alley behind the court roped off and one of the Precinct men stationed there on point duty, to make sure that the footprint evidence was preserved intact.

"Morning, Sergeant!" the policeman said, with a brisk salute. "If you'd got here about ten minutes sooner, you'd have had a surprise. Commissioner Harbison!"

"The commissioner was here, Brady?"

"Yes, sir. Came down from Headquarters. He said Captain Winters had phoned him the details about Burke's disappearance, and he wanted to check over the scene for himself."

"Did he make any comment?" O'Hara asked.

"Nothing much, sir. He asked me some questions—where Burke's things had been found, and so on—but when he'd finished looking around he just shook his head and sort of whistled under his breath."

Faraday gave a mirthless chuckle. "I'll bet Headquarters won't come rushing in to take *this* case off our hands."

"Well, I hope Harbison didn't trample over the main set of tracks," O'Hara said.

"No, the tracks are still okay, Sergeant," Brady assured him. "The commissioner stepped around them very carefully."

So once again Sergeant O'Hara followed the line of mysterious footprints along the alley and through the back gate of No. 17 Manchu Court. The tracks were no longer sharp and clear, but lay half-buried by the later snow.

"Lucky it stopped snowing when it did," Faraday remarked. "Another couple of hours and everything would have been snowed under."

Step by step O'Hara's memory retraced the previous night's bizarre adventure. There was no veil of darkness now, no curtain of swirling white flakes to add a touch of primal mystery to the setting. This was merely the snow-drifted back garden of a vacant Chinatown house, seen in the broad daylight of a crisp, cold morning, but O'Hara was stirred by the selfsame feeling of baffled amazement as he stared at the point where the footprints ended so abruptly, so inexplicably.

"No wonder the commissioner shook his head and whistled," Faraday said. "The whole thing's fantastic."

"There must be a normal, logical answer," O'Hara snapped. "These vanishing footprints can be nothing more than some fancy trick, and if Yee Tok was smart enough to work it out, we've got to be smart enough to figure how he did it."

As O'Hara surveyed the scene with frowning concentration, the air overhead was suddenly filled with the flapping and beating of feathered wings as twenty or thirty pigeons rose in abrupt flight from the roof of the abandoned factory whose high, blank wall adjoined the alley.

"There go those damn pigeons again," Brady remarked. "They've got a roost up

there on that old water-tower. I never saw such a restless flock of birds."

"Restless?" O'Hara echoed. With sudden interest his glance followed the birds as they winged in wide circles, with the water-tower as a central pivot. "You mean they've been doing an extra lot of flying around?"

"They sure have," Brady declared. "Every couple of minutes they take off like that, all of a sudden. Flap-flap-flap they go, around and around and around. Then they settle down again, but only for a minute or two."

O'Hara's glance was still intent on the circling pigeons. "And they always come back to the water-tower?"

Brady nodded. "They've been nesting up there on that tower for years, Sergeant. Here they come now, headin' back to the tower. You'll see if they don't take off again in a minute. If it was summertime, I'd say they were watchin' out for a hawk—"

THE pigeons had made a final sweep over Manchu Court, wheeled high and came sailing back to the water-tower on gliding wings. O'Hara could distinguish their mottled coloring — slate-gray, oyster-white, smoky blue, ash-yellow — and even hear their plaintive, throaty calls of *kuroo-kuroo* as they perched wherever there was a foothold.

But no sooner had they settled down than some undisclosed cause stirred them to renewed and precipitate flight. Off they went into the air again, with a heavy, creaking beat of wings.

"That's damned queer!" O'Hara muttered, watching them resume their tireless circles. Then his glance swung back speculatively to the old water-tower.

"Why the sudden interest in pigeons, Sarge?" Faraday queried. "They can do their flying upside-down, as far as I'm concerned. Pigeons won't help us find Burke, unless you've got a secret way to make 'em talk, and tell us what went on around here last night."

O'Hara turned with a swift gesture. "Maybe they *are* trying to tell us something — in their own peculiar fashion! Pigeons are lazy, Faraday—they don't fly around and around in circles just for the fun of it. They only take to the air when they're disturbed or frightened or nervous about something."

Faraday looked at him. "It's too deep

for me, Sarge. One mystery at a time is all I can handle."

"But it could be all one and the same mystery," O'Hara replied slowly. "Yes, it could be! I think I see how all the pieces can be fitted together! It begins with these footprints in the snow—it ends with the frightened pigeons!"

Faraday shook his head. "You can have the pigeons, Sarge. I'm still groping around for even a halfway reasonable explanation of these vanishing footprints."

"Well, the answer's right there before your eyes, Faraday. There *aren't* any missing footprints! The man who made these tracks coming in, left just as plain a track going out! The thing's so completely obvious, we couldn't see it for looking. Yee Tok simply walked out *backwards*, taking care to step in the same tracks!"

Faraday gave an excited whistle. "I think you've struck oil, Sergeant! But hold a moment!

"How could he backtrack all the way out to Burke's call-box, and then off along Canton Street, without making a single misstep in the snow? It strikes me that would be damned hard to manage—worse than walking a tightrope."

"I don't think he went all the way back," O'Hara replied. "Look, Faraday—eight or ten paces backward from this spot would bring him through the back gate and into the alley, right against the factory wall. A high, blank wall—not even a window in it. But suppose he had prepared a long rope beforehand, and left it hanging down into the alley from the factory roof. He grabs the end of the rope, climbs up to the roof, and pulls the rope up after him. Presto! There's nothing down below but a one-way trail ending in the middle of a backyard!"

"That cracks it, Sarge!" Faraday exclaimed. "And it'll be a cinch to check. We go up to the roof—if you're right, there'll be footprints up there in the snow."

Sergeant O'Hara gave a grim smile. "If I'm right, we may find something even better than footprints! The pigeons, Faraday — don't forget the pigeons! There's something up there that's making them jittery—something that keeps chasing them away from that water-tower. Could it be something *inside* the tower?"

"Holy Cats!" Faraday gasped. "You think

Yee Tok is hiding up there in that tower—now?"

"Why not?" O'Hara countered. "Could Yee Tok find a safer hiding-place anywhere in Chinatown? An empty water-tower, on the roof of an old, boarded-up factory. It'd be perfect for his purpose."

"And Burke! Do you think Burke is up there too?"

"If we find one, I think we'll find the other," O'Hara replied.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Faraday burst out eagerly. "Let's get going! If you're right, Sarge, we'll have Yee Tok cornered like a rat in a trap!"

"Brady, you'd better come along, too," O'Hara ordered. "There's no telling what we'll run into up there."

In single file, they went out through the alley into Canton Street, staring up at the front of the square, brick-walled building. The main entrance was boarded over, its stone steps covered by a smooth, unbroken mantle of snow.

"There's a side entrance around on Grove Street," O'Hara said. "We'll give that a look-see."



They passed Burke's call-box on the corner and turned into Grove Street. The brick walls gave place to a high wooden fence with a wide double gate.

"Footprints!" Faraday exclaimed, pointing to a series of faintly marked ridges and hollows in the snow. "Somebody went in that gate last night!"

O'Hara pushed against the gate, and with a little extra pressure it gave way, slowly and heavily. Inside was a narrow courtyard with a heavy-timbered shipping platform.

"More footprints, Sarge!" Faraday called out. "Now we're on our way!"

The snowed-over trail led them across the courtyard to the farther end of the shipping platform. O'Hara bent over and peered

into the shadowy space under the thick timbers. A short flight of steps led down to a basement door — a door with a shattered lock and fresh gouge marks in its wood.

"Jimmied!" O'Hara announced briefly, and drew his gun as he pushed the door inward.

The whole square expanse of the factory basement lay open to their gaze—empty and deserted. The line of small barred windows along the east wall was bright with morning sun, so that every nook and cranny stood revealed.

The three men advanced silently, guns drawn, glances alert. There were no piles of rubbish or debris lying about, nothing anywhere to obscure their view. A huge iron-plated furnace loomed up, thickly coated with dust and rust, flanked by a wooden coal-bin and a concrete ash-pit, both equally bare.

"Here are the stairs," O'Hara whispered. "Take it easy now! No talking!"

They found the first floor of the factory as bare and empty as the basement. Daylight trickling through the loosely-boarded windows created an eerie gloom. There was nothing to see but bare walls, bare floors, bare ceilings, marked with the scars of vanished machinery, torn-down partitions and wrenched-out fittings.

The second floor, and then the third, presented the same dismantled emptiness. Silently they crossed the top floor to the narrow flight of stairs that led upward to a trap-door in the roof.

A quick surge of expectant triumph swept O'Hara as he mounted those steps and found the trap-door unbolted. Slowly, cautiously, he thrust upward against the hinged panels.

The wide expanse of snowy roof glittered in the sun as O'Hara stepped out, shielding his eyes against the sudden glare. The trap-door opening was at the very base of the water-tower, bulking hugely overhead on its stilted scaffolding. Faraday and Brady crawled out beside him.

Grinning, O'Hara pointed silently to the snow all around him, pitted and scarred with the remains of footprints. Then, armed with gun and flashlight, he started climbing the narrow iron ladder that ran up the side of the tower.

Instantly, the pigeons clustering on the tower rose in alarmed flight, circling heav-

ily overhead as O'Hara continued his climb, rung by rung. The iron ladder ended at a sliding panel set into the wooden tower wall just under the edge of the conical roof.

O'Hara paused a moment outside the panel, considering the possibilities. Had Yee Tok heard his footsteps on the iron rungs? Was the yellow man crouched at bay inside that dark cavern, perhaps with a gun leveled at the opening where O'Hara must show his head?

"Speed's the safest thing," O'Hara counseled himself. "Plunge in quick and get it over with!"

Drawing a deep breath, he jerked the sliding panel aside and recklessly thrust head and shoulders into the black opening, his finger tight on the trigger of the snub-nosed automatic as his flashlight swept the interior in swift circles.

But no shots rang out to blast the dark silence of the lonely tower—only a bitter, explosive "Damn!" from Sergeant O'Hara as the probing beam of light disclosed nothing but emptiness. There was nothing inside the tower save brooding darkness, a few rusty water pipes, and the damp reek of slowly rotting wood.

Down on the roof, the two officers hovered anxiously at the foot of the iron ladder. "Hey, Sarge!" Faraday called up, "What goes on? Are you okay?"

O'Hara pulled his head and shoulders back through the panel. "It's a washout!" he growled. "There's nothing up here—nothing at all."

O'Hara came down the narrow ladder, and Faraday climbed up to see for himself.

"Tough luck, Sarge," he said, descending again. "Anyway, even if the pigeons threw us down, you had the right dope about everything else. Take a look at what Brady and I found in the snow."

Faraday reached down into the drifted snow behind one of the tower's supporting beams and held up a pair of shoes—sturdy black leather police shoes.

"Burke's!" Faraday proclaimed. "Yee Tok just threw them aside as soon as he finished making that phoney trail down there in the alley. The rope is here, too. You called the turn, Sarge, right on the button."

The detective lifted a heavy coil of rope from the same spot—a rope that was knotted every two or three foot along its length, to

make climbing easier. The purpose for which it had been used was quite clear, for one end of it was still anchored securely to the tower's scaffolding.

O'Hara dropped the rope over the edge of the roof, and they leaned out to watch its swift uncoiling, until the free end swayed to and fro about five feet above the snowy ground three stories below them.

"Check and doublecheck," Faraday said "And that cleans up the footprint mystery."

"So what?" O'Hara growled. "We haven't gained an inch. All we've got out of it is Burke's shoes. Are they going to help us find Burke?"

"We'll find him, Sarge!" Faraday declared confidently. "Yee Tok may be smart as hell, but Chinatown's only a small place, and he can't beat us for long at any game of hide-and-seek. We just keep hunting till we find his hideout."

O'Hara hauled up the rope and re-coiled it, while Brady unfastened the tied end. Faraday clapped Burke's shoes together to shake out the drifted snow.

"All right, let's go," O'Hara said.

As they climbed down through the trapdoor, the circling pigeons came winging back to the roof. Most of them settled directly on the water-tower, but others lined up along the scrolled cornice or perched themselves on the cluster of yellow brick chimneys. O'Hara, closing the trapdoor, had a curious feeling that every single one of the birds was craning its neck around to stare at him with beady-eyed expectancy.

**SERGEANT O'HARA'S** mood of angry disappointment was still with him as he exhibited the shoes and the knotted rope to Captain Winters at the Precinct.

"You shouldn't take it so hard, O'Hara," Winters told him. "You've turned in a first-class job on those footprints. It's not your fault that the water-tower turned out to be a false alarm. Your theory about the pigeons was a damned smart piece of deduction, even if it didn't pan out."

O'Hara paced to and fro, frowning. "Well, at least we know now that this whole footprint business was just a sideshow. Yee Tok must have set his trap for Burke somewhere else. Chances are a hundred to one it was somewhere along Burke's regular beat. We've got to check over that beat,

foot by foot, house by house, until we hit something."

"Go to it, Sergeant!" Winters said. "If you find you need more men, I'll get 'em from Headquarters. Let's show Chinatown what a real manhunt is like."

SO Sergeant O'Hara marshalled his forces, explained his plan of campaign to them, and set the manhunt into motion. Dividing Burke's territory into a number of sections, he assigned a man to each section, with orders to conduct a practically microscopic investigation.

"Turn in *any* piece of information you run down, no matter how trivial it may seem," O'Hara commanded. "Burke made his regular pull from the Canton Street box at 7 sharp—shortly after 8 Yee Tok's phoney call came through. We've got to fill in the details of that blank hour in between."

"What line do we take with the Chinks, Sergeant?" one of the men asked.

"Put your cards right on the table," Sergeant O'Hara replied promptly. "By this time every man, woman and child in Chinatown has heard all about Burke's disappearance. I think they'll give us full and complete cooperation in tracking Yee Tok down."

"Yeah? That'll certainly be a novelty," another remarked, with a skeptical laugh.

"This case is different," O'Hara declared. "Most of the Chinese regard Yee Tok and his brother as a disgrace to their race, color and creed. I think they'll welcome the chance to get rid of them, once and for all."

Sergeant O'Hara's forecast of Chinatown's reaction to Yee Tok's daring coup was soon proved correct. The news had spread like wildfire through the narrow streets, and ever since dawn the "Yellow Slippers"—official messengers of the tongs and other organizations—had been busily rapping at certain doors, delivering whispered messages.

The first tangible result of all this silent-footed activity was the arrival at the Precinct of a lean, gray-haired Chinaman—Moy Ghan, leader of the Suey Sing Tong, of which Yee Tok was a member.

"Sah-jin," Moy Ghan began, with a formal bow, "my spirit is weighed down by ten thousand sorrows over Yee Tok's evil deed."

"I know how you feel, *tu-chun*," O'Hara

replied. "We don't hold the Suey Sing Tong responsible for Yee Tok's actions. We know the Suey Sings are pledged to law and order."

"Yee Tok's wickedness has brought shame and stain to the honor of the Suey Sing name," Moy Ghan said sternly. "*Ai-je*, because of his reckless scheming against the Rice Face Law, every Son of Han suffers a Number One loss of face. But today I call a special meeting of the Suey Sing brothers. Yee Tok's name shall be cut with a sharp knife from the silken scroll of membership—it shall be cast upon the floor, spat upon, trampled underfoot, and cursed with the Curse of Yang-Yin."

"That's all right," O'Hara said, "but it doesn't help us lay hands on Yee Tok, and that's the main objective."

"Yee Tok shall be found," Moy Ghan intoned. "He shall be dragged from his hiding place and delivered into the hands of the Rice Face Law. Even now the plans are being laid. When they are complete, Sah-jin, word will be sent to you."

Moy Ghan was only the first of a series of visitors. Hugh Lee the merchant was the next arrival. Speaking as president of the Double Dragon Society—Chinatown's merchant guild—he informed O'Hara that his organization was offering a reward for the capture of Yee Tok.

"One thousand silver dollars, Sah-jin!" Hugh Lee declared. "The notice shall be posted in large letters on every street corner, within the hour."

Lee Shu, the venerable Chinese banker, was O'Hara's next visitor, come to denounce Yee Tok's desperate deed and to pledge full cooperation in tracking down the criminal. And when O'Hara mentioned the reward being offered by the Double Dragon Society, Lee Shu promptly declared he would match their offer with a thousand silver dollars of his own.

OTHERS came, too—Meng Tai the apothecary, Kim Yao the goldsmith, Sang Lee the scrivener—all long-time friends of O'Hara, each expressing his personal indignation at the attack on Officer Burke, and promising to do everything possible to help foil Yee Tok's ruthless scheme.

Finally, a "Yellow Slipper" brought a message from Lao Poh the *bonze*, inviting

O'Hara to attend a meeting of the Council of Han at the Plum Blossom Joss House.

O'Hara set out at once for the joss house, for the Council of Han was the most powerful and influential group in Chinatown, including in its membership the heads of the Five Tongs.

Lao Poh, wearing his priestly yellow silks, greeted O'Hara at the joss-house door, and conducted him to the meeting room known as the Hall of Justice, on the top floor. The Council was seated around a long table, and standing in a double row along the wall were fifteen silent, stern-eyed yellow men.

RESUMING his place at the head of the Council table, Lao Poh made a formal speech, denouncing Yee Tok in pitiless terms as one who had brought shame and disgrace upon all law-abiding Sons of Han. It was the Council's decree that Yee Tok must be hunted out and delivered over to justice. For that purpose a special search party was being formed to comb all Chinatown.

Lao Poh indicated the fifteen slant-eyed men standing along the wall. These were



the chosen searchers — three trusted men from each of the Five Tongs.

"That's fine," O'Hara said. "I welcome your help in this matter. But there's one thing I want clearly understood. If and when Yee Tok's hiding place is found, no attack shall be made, unless it is absolutely unavoidable. I want to handle Yee Tok's capture myself. My primary concern is the rescue of Officer Burke—alive and unhurt."

"Wah!" Lao Poh agreed. "It shall be done according to your orders. Have no fears, Sah-jin—Yee Tok shall be made a prisoner before the setting of today's sun."

Thus the Sons of Han made common cause with the Blue Coat Men for the tracking down of Yee Tok, but when sunset

came, Lao Poh's optimistic boast remained unfulfilled. Neither O'Hara's men nor the Council's slant-eyed posse had unearthed the slightest trace of the elusive Yee Tok, and the monetary rewards offered by the Double Dragon Society and by Lee Shu the banker remained unclaimed.

O'Hara, waiting impatiently at the Precinct for the summons that never came, stared moodily through the window at the darkening streets. With the coming of night, advantage lay once more with Yee Tok. Under cover of darkness he would be free to move about, possibly change to a better hiding place.

Unwilling to abandon his post for even a few minutes, O'Hara finally sent out for some sandwiches and a carton of coffee. He was eating at his desk when Faraday entered the office.

"Nothing new, Sarge," Faraday reported. "That Chink has the devil's own luck. I don't see where in blazes he could hide so that even the Chinks can't find him. That search-gang Lao Poh sent out has been doing a swell job—house to house. Somebody must be giving him shelter."

"I don't know," O'Hara mused. "Yee Tok and his brother always worked as lone wolves. There's a two thousand dollar reward for Yee Tok's capture—and a warning from the Council of Han that anyone guilty of aiding him in any way will receive fifty lashes of the split bamboo. Under those conditions, who would be foolish enough to give Yee Tok shelter?"

Faraday shook his head. "It's a mystery to me. He's not only got himself to hide—he has Burke on his hands. Every vacant house in Chinatown has been searched from cellar to roof. He must have figured out a damned clever hideaway."

"No doubt of that," O'Hara said. "Didn't he pass up the water-tower? There was a perfect spot—a natural."

Faraday grinned. "Still harping on that water-tower?"

"I can't get those confounded pigeons out of my mind," O'Hara replied. "When I saw them flying around like that, I'd have bet a year's pay it was a straight tip-off. When I climbed that iron ladder and found the tower empty, it gave me a funny kind of jolt, like I'd missed something, or overlooked something. I felt like I'd just added up two

and two and got five, when I knew the answer must be four."

"Well, I don't see what you could've overlooked," Faraday said. "Yee Tok *had* been there, sure enough, but there wasn't a footprint down below or up on the roof that hadn't been made long before it stopped snowing. And the factory itself is nothing but a hollow shell. Even a cat couldn't find a place to hide in there."

"I'd still like to know what made those pigeons so restless," O'Hara replied.

"Pigeons!" Faraday snorted. "Who can figure out anything about pigeons? I guess some of 'em like to fly around, and others don't. The only kind of pigeon that'll help us now is a stool-pigeon—"

Just then the phone rang on O'Hara's desk, and lifting the receiver, he heard Charley's voice saying from the switchboard: "Outside call for you, Sergeant. A Chink—"

Then the connection clicked, and an unmistakably Oriental voice asked "Sah-jin?"

"Yes, this is Sergeant O'Hara," he answered, leaning forward. "Who is it?"

"It is Yee Tok who speaks," the voice announced calmly.

"*Yee Tok!*" O'Hara shouted, grasping the phone as though it were the yellow man's throat. "Where are you?"

A mocking laugh was the answer. Recovering himself, O'Hara made a frantic gesture to the round-eyed Faraday, who sprang to his feet and made a sudden dash for the door.

Yee Tok's voice was steady, unhurried. "Sah-jin, what have you decide about my offer? The time grows short."

"Look here, Yee Tok!" O'Hara snapped. "You can't get away with this crazy stunt! You're a marked man! Your own people have put a price on your head! Where can you hide from *them*? If you're smart, Yee Tok, you'll give it up, and surrender to the police. If Lao Poh's men find you first, you're a dead duck!"

The mocking laugh was repeated. "Sah-jin, you have search Chinatown by night and by day, and what have you found? Nothing! Answer my question! You hold the life of my brother in your hands—I hold the life of your Blue Coat Man. Shall we make a trade—life for life? Is it Yes or No?"

O'Hara hunched over the phone, desper-

ately intent on gaining time—every minute, even every second, was precious now.

"But listen, Yee Tok—I have no authority to make a deal with you. Nobody in the Police Department could do that—not even the Commissioner himself. Only the Governor of the State can do anything to halt Yee Doy's execution."

"What answer, then, does the Governor make?" Yee Tok demanded.

O'Hara did some lightning thinking. "He says he's got to have more details, Yee Tok. He wants some sort of proof that Officer Burke is alive and unhurt. How are we to know you haven't already killed him?"

"The Blue Coat Man still lives, I swear it by Tao," Yee Tok replied, then gave a sinister chuckle. "But he is cold, Sah-jin, in his prison room, and the ropes that hold him are drawn tight. Also he suffers from hunger and thirst, for I give him no food, no drink! Remember that, Sah-jin! As the hours pass, he will grown more hungry—more thirsty—"

"You dirty yellow devil!" O'Hara shouted furiously. "You'll pay for this, Yee Tok! I'm warning you—if any harm comes to Burke, you'll settle for it to me—direct! And when I've finished with you—"

A DISTANT click told O'Hara that the yellow man had hung up. Slamming down the receiver, he sprang from his desk and dashed down the hall to the switchboard, where Faraday already hovered above the intently listening operator.

"Trace it, Charley?" O'Hara demanded.

"They're getting it, Sarge," Charley called over his shoulder, and a moment later started scribbling on a pad. "Yes—yes. The Happy Purchase Gift Shop—Half Moon Street. . . . Okay! Thanks."

"Come on, Faraday!" O'Hara called. "Split seconds count now!"

With Officer Doyle at the wheel of the emergency car, they swooped across Chinatown, charged headlong into Mulberry Lane and hurtled around the corner into Half Moon Street on two wheels.

Doyle pulled up outside the Happy Purchase Shop, and before he could set the brakes O'Hara and Faraday had hopped out and were rushing across the pavement. There were lights inside the Chinese gift shop, but the shades were drawn over the

doubled-paneled door, and the door was bolted.

O'Hara gave one wrench at the knob that made the glass panels rattle, then, wasting no more time, he shattered the glass with his gun butt, reached inside and slid back the bolt.

The front part of the shop was deserted, but a thumping, drumming noise drew them toward the back room, where a Chinaman sat bound hand and foot to a carved teak-wood chair, his head invisible under the windings of a long strip of crimson silk. The noises were occasioned by the prisoner's frantic efforts to writhe loose from his bonds.

Unwinding the silken strip, O'Hara uncovered the lean, wrinkled features of old Sam Tai, the shop proprietor.

"Sah-jin!" Sam Tai sputtered. "Yee Tok do this! He come into shop with gun—he lock door—he tie me with rope—"

"Has he gone?" O'Hara cut in swiftly.

"Aye! Only two-three minute ago! He run out back door—"

Leaving Faraday to untie the fuming shopkeeper, O'Hara took up the trail. Fresh footprints in the backyard snow led to the alley gate. O'Hara followed the tracks through the alley to Lantern Court, but there he lost them. There was nothing else to do but return to Sam Tai's shop and phone the alarm back to the Precinct.

"Yee Tok sure has a cool nerve," Faraday declared, "sticking up a shop just to make a phone call."

"A typical Yee Tok stunt," O'Hara growled. "It's a wonder he didn't leave a nickel on the counter to pay for the call."

Back at the Precinct, Captain Winters burst into angry profanity as he listened to O'Hara's report.

"Sergeant, it looks like that damned Chink means to go through with it," he said. "And frankly, I don't know which way to turn. Nothing like this has ever happened before. Commissioner Harbison has been in touch with the Governor about the situation. The Governor's willing to postpone Yee Doy's execution for a day or two, to give us extra time, but anything else is out of the question. You can see what a spot he's in—"

"How about the spot Burke's in?" O'Hara retorted.

"I know it's a terrible break for Burke," Winters said, "but what else can the Governor do? He's sworn to uphold the law, and the law says Yee Doy must die. He can't give in to blackmail, O'Hara. No public official would dare set such a precedent."

"Yes, I know," O'Hara replied wearily. "It's our job to find Yee Tok and rescue Burke. But the time's so damned short, and it's running out fast."

"Well, we can have an extra 24 or 48 hours," Winters pointed out.

"That'll be a big help to Burke," O'Hara said bitterly. "He'll have that many more hours without food—without water."

Spurred by this fresh knowledge of Officer Burke's grim and growing peril, Sergeant O'Hara drove his men relentlessly in the search for Yee Tok's secret hiding place, hour upon fruitless hour. At midnight there was a round table gathering in the Precinct—O'Hara, Faraday and Captain Winters, with Lao Poh of the Council of Han, Hugh Lee of the Double Dragon Society, and Moy Ghan, chief of the Suey Sing Tong.

That night O'Hara did not leave the Precinct at all, staying on duty until the small hours of the morning, then catching a few hours of fitful sleep, stretched out on a bench in the squad-room.

When Faraday reported for duty in the morning, he found the Sergeant seated at his desk, poring over a detailed map of Chinatown and jotting down a series of cryptic notes.

"Got something up your sleeve, Sarge?"

Farad:

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a phone. At dusk tonight all our men stop  
searching and start watching. I'm going to  
scatter them around at strategic points.  
I'll try to fix it so that Yee Tok can't go  
half a block in any direction without being  
spotted."

"We haven't enough men for the job," Faraday declared.

"We will have," O'Hara promised. "The

Council of Han are sending more men, enough to double the squad."

"I hope it works," Faraday said.

"It better work! It looks like our last chance."

AS TWILIGHT descended upon Chinatown, O'Hara felt the strain of waiting increasing to an intolerable pressure. But at the moment there was nothing more he could do. His men were at their posts, standing in dark doorways and the shadowy angles of walls, watching the street intersections, the entrances to the various Courts, even the narrow slits of alleys.

Seven o'clock passed, then eight o'clock—nine—ten—and Yee Tok held aloof from the carefully arranged web of watchers. O'Hara paced to and fro, a prey to doubt and anxiety. Perhaps Yee Tok would not risk phoning again. Or if he did, he might slip outside Chinatown to do it—

"If he gets a call through, what can I tell him?" O'Hara muttered. "How can I stall him off for more time—more time?"

Then at 10:18 a yellow light flashed on the Precinct switchboard, and a moment later the phone rang on O'Hara's desk. Snatching it up, he heard Faraday's voice—a Faraday so excited that his words were scarcely intelligible.

"We've got him, Sarge! We've got Yee Tok—over in Paradise Court!"

"A prisoner?" O'Hara cut in eagerly.

"Not yet, Sarge, but we've got him cor-

nered up on the roofs! He can't get away now!"

"Hold everything, Faraday!" O'Hara shouted. "I'll be there in two minutes!"

Jumping into the police car that had been held ready for just such a summons to action, O'Hara hopped out as it pulled up outside the tunnel-like opening to Paradise Court.

The Court was a bedlam of noise and confused movement, for the yellow men had come pouring out of the rows of squat little houses facing on the Court, eager to lend their help in the trapping of the fugitive Yee Tok.

Faraday came shouldering his way forward. "Follow me, Sarge!" he called, and guided O'Hara through the crowd to some stone steps where a young Chinaman sat stoically smoking a cigarette while Detective Driscoll bandaged a bullet wound high up on his right shoulder.

"This is Wong Tah, Sarge, one of Lao Poh's boys," Faraday explained. "He's the one spotted Yee Tok making a sneak across the Court. He grabbed him, and Yee Tok pulled out a gun and plugged him. But Wong held on to him, yelling for help, until it was too late for Yee Tok to make a get-away."

"Nice work, Wong," O'Hara complimented. "That shoulder's going to hurt for a while, but remember it's a two thousand dollar bullet you stopped."

"*Wah!*" the slant-eyed boy grinned. "You catch, Sah-jin. That Yee Tok is Number One devil."

Faraday pointed to the flat line of roofs along the north side of the Court. "He's up there, Sarge. They had him cornered here in the Court, but he managed to crawl up a rain spout. However, his goose is cooked now. We've got him boxed in on all sides—he can't get away!"

O'Hara nodded. "All right, Faraday, got your gun? Let's go up there and get him."

Choosing the end house of the row as their point of attack, they mounted the stairs to the top floor and made their way to the back windows. O'Hara stripped off his overcoat.

"We'll probably have to shoot it out with Yee Tok!" O'Hara said. "But remember this, Faraday—I want that Chinaman alive! Aim at his legs!"

"Think you can make him talk, eh?" Faraday grinned.

"He'll talk, all right," O'Hara replied. "Just give me ten minutes alone with him in No. 4 back at the Precinct—with the door locked!"

Noiselessly O'Hara raised the window and climbed out on the sill. Standing erect, he reached up, caught the edge of the flat

roof and drew himself upward until his head was above the roof level. Halfway down the row a dark figure crouched over the front cornice, peering down at the commotion in the Court below.

With a silent prayer that Yee Tok might not turn his head within the next several seconds, O'Hara swung one leg up and rolled himself onto the roof, keeping flat against the snow. But instantly Yee Tok whirled around, and with a snarling cry of rage and defiance leveled his gun and fired.

The first bullet went wide, but the second hit the brick chimney beside O'Hara and ricocheted past his face with a vicious *whitt!* O'Hara scurried across the roof at a crouching run and flattened himself in the shadow of the scrolled cornice.

Yee Tok was also lying flat now, invisible in the shadows. Faraday's head lifted slowly above the roof edge—

"Keep down!" O'Hara shouted. "He can see you!"

But the detective continued his climb, heedless of danger. Yee Tok fired at him, and missing, cursed wildly as he sprang to his feet to get a better aim. Then came the crack of O'Hara's gun, and with a yelp of pain the yellow man spun around and collapsed, clutching his thigh.

"Got him!" O'Hara yelled, jumping up. "Come on, Faraday."

But as they ran across the intervening roofs, Yee Tok lurched to his feet and started a shambling, staggering run to evade them.

"Stop him, Sarge!" Faraday shouted. "He's going to jump!"

Yee Tok paused momentarily on the very edge of the back roof, staring out at the bare branches of a tree which extended to within a few feet of the ledge where he stood. Then, casting one swift glance back over his shoulder, he made a frantic leap for the tree in a final suicidal bid for escape.

Crashing and snapping, the dead branches gave way under his weight, scarcely serving to slow his twisting, tumbling fall, his shrill screams cut off abruptly as his body thudded heavily against the brick pavement below—

By the time O'Hara and Faraday reached the spot, a thick crowd clustered around Yee Tok's sprawled body. Detective Driscoll was kneeling beside the fallen China-

man, examining him with the aid of a flashlight.

"Is he dead?" O'Hara asked.

"Still breathing, Sergeant," Driscoll reported, "but I don't know for how long. He's in a bad way. A broken back, among other things."

Amid the frenzied excitement an ambulance clanged its way across Chinatown to Paradise Court, and Yee Tok was lifted onto a stretcher.

"I'm going along to the hospital," O'Hara told Faraday. "You take charge of the search for Burke."

At the hospital O'Hara waited in a bare little room with painted walls until a white-clad surgeon came to report on their examination of the unconscious Oriental.

"We should operate immediately, Sergeant," the surgeon said, "but I can't hold out much hope. I'm afraid your Chinaman isn't going to pull through."

O'Hara scowled at the wall. "Damn the luck! Is there any chance of his regaining consciousness? We've got to make him talk, Doctor—a man's life depends on it."

The surgeon shook his head. "We'll do our best, Sergeant, but I can't promise anything. Do you want to wait?"

"Yes, I'll wait," O'Hara said.

He watched Yee Tok being wheeled into a room with swinging doors of frosted glass. An hour and a half later he followed the same wheeled stretcher to a small room at the end of a long corridor and settled down to an unrelenting vigil beside the still form in the white enameled bed.

Nurses came and went; at intervals doctors stopped in, examined the unconscious yellow man, studied the chart at the foot of the bed, and went away again. Time dragged heavily, and in spite of himself O'Hara felt his eyelids drooping.

"You look as if you could do with a little sleep, Sergeant," one of the nurses said. "If you want to doze off for a while, I'll be right here. I'll wake you if there's any change."

"Thanks," O'Hara replied. "I haven't had much chance to sleep in the last forty-eight hours."

O'Hara stretched out his legs and leaned his head against the wall, and in half a minute was sound asleep. When he awoke, there was daylight in the room, and a different nurse was on duty, but there was no change

in Yee Tok's condition, except that the grayish pallor of his immobile face was more pronounced.

"How is he?" O'Hara asked. "Any change?"

"He's slowly sinking, Sergeant," the nurse replied. "I'm afraid it won't be much longer now."

O'Hara looked at his watch. Ten minutes past eight. For a moment the fact lay isolated in his consciousness, then its full import burst upon him. *Yee Doy!* Eight o'clock was the hour set for Yee Doy's execution! At this very minute Yee Tok's brother must be lying dead in the mortuary room at Rockhill Prison! "I've got to make a call."

"Where's the phone?" O'Hara asked. "I've got to make a call."

The nurse directed him to the office, where he called up the Precinct and talked to Captain Winters, who had just come on duty. No, Winters told him, there was nothing new on Burke. Faraday was still out directing the frantic search for the vanished policeman.

"Any word from Rockhill?" O'Hara asked.

"The execution went through on schedule," Winters replied.

O'Hara returned to his vigil at Yee Tok's bedside. At 8:30 Faraday arrived, weary-eyed and exhausted by a night of ceaseless activity.

"Nothing, Sarge," Faraday announced angrily. "No word, no clue, no anything. We've looked everywhere—everywhere! I'm so damned tired I can't think straight anymore. How's it with Yee Tok?"

"Bad," O'Hara answered. "He's sinking fast. They don't think he'll last much longer."

Faraday stood at the foot of the metal bed, staring down at the still figure, swathed like a mummy, the gaunt, slant-eyed face as hard and unyielding as a sculptured death-mask.

"If he'd only snap out of it for five minutes," Faraday growled. "Just five minutes—"

But Yee Tok's slanted eyes remained closed, his thin lips locked tight in a shadowy, far-off sneer. Only the grayish pallor grew deeper—deeper—

At 9:17 the nurse gave a sudden exclamation and hurried from the room, returning

in a moment with the staff doctor. He bent over the yellow man in swift examination, turned back Yee Tok's eyelids as a final test, then straightened up.

"Sorry, Sergeant—he's gone," the doctor announced, and at his brisk gesture the nurse drew up the sheet over the rigid figure.

O'Hara drew a deep, slow breath, while Faraday's lips moved soundlessly over words that were not a prayer for Yee Tok's happy reunion with his slant-eyed ancestors. In silence they took their hats and found their way to the street.

"So that tricky yellow devil managed to beat us after all," Faraday muttered.

"We're not licked yet," O'Hara declared crisply. "We'll find Burke, if we have to take Chinatown apart brick by brick."

"Well, I don't know where you're going to look, Sarge. We've been over the ground twice already."

"Then we'll have to go over it twice again, and twice more on top of that!" O'Hara retorted. "But you look all in, Faraday. Why don't you check out and get some sleep."

Faraday squared his shoulders. "I can keep going, Sarge. After all, what's a little sleep, more or less. I keep thinking of Burke, poor devil, roped up in some dark hole somewhere, without food, without water—"

"Well, let's get back to the Precinct," O'Hara said. "We can pick up breakfast somewhere along the line."

So they started the half-mile walk from the hospital to Chinatown, discussing the best method of extending their search for the missing policeman.

"I think we ought to concentrate on the north side of Mulberry Lane," Faraday argued. "Didn't Yee Tok show himself in Half Moon Street, and then in Paradisc Court? Both on the north side."

"But Burke's beat is south of Mulberry," O'Hara replied. "I'm convinced that Burke was waylaid somewhere along his regular beat, and I can't imagine Yee Tok lugging Burke around on his shoulders for four or five blocks, even under cover of a blinding snowstorm. Too risky, Faraday, even if he had the strength for it."

"But how do you know Burke was waylaid on his beat, and nowhere else?" Faraday challenged. "That's just a deduction of

yours, Sarge. Maybe it's wrong—like your deduction about the pigeons."

O'Hara grinned. "You're never going to forget about those pigeons, are you?"

"Oh, I'm not trying to rub it in, Sarge," Faraday protested. "My point is that deductions don't always pan out."

"Well, perhaps we're both right," O'Hara declared. "It's possible, you know, that Yee Tok might keep Burke a prisoner in one place, and have his own hideout somewhere else. Sort of splits the risk, in case he has to move in a hurry. . . . Tell you what, Faraday, we'll divide the search. You take the north side of Mulberry Lane, and I'll stick to the south."

They were still discussing the matter when they reached Canton Street, Chinatown's border-line, and encountered Officer Brady, who had been assigned to cover Burke's beat. Brady approached them eagerly, asking if there were any news.

"Yee Tok's dead, Brady," O'Hara announced.

"Did he talk, Sergeant? Did you get anything out of him at the end?"

"He never regained consciousness," O'Hara informed him, and they stood talking about Yee Tok's death, and about the execution of Yee Doy at Rockhill that morning.

"It's good riddance to both of 'em," Brady said, "and there are damn few Chinks who won't say Amen to that. It's rotten bad luck Burke had to pay for their dirty schemin'. With Yee Tok gone like that, it leaves us in a tough spot—and leaves Jim Burke in a worse. It's too bad, Sergeant, we didn't find that yellow devil hidin' inside the water-tower. Things might've turned out different."

"Watch out, Brady," Faraday warned jokingly. "Don't mention pigeons while the Sergeant's around. He's still sore because they double-crossed him."

"He's pulling your leg, Brady," O'Hara said. "However, I still don't see why Yee Tok passed up that old factory as a hideout. There it is, right on Burke's route, empty, deserted, boarded-up, yet all he used it for was to put on that sideshow of the vanishing footprints. Where could he find a better hideout than that old water-tower? It was made to order."

"Too conspicuous," Faraday objected.

"Yee Tok was smart to pass it up. You spotted it quick enough, Sarge."

"Yes, but that was only on account of the pigeons," O'Hara replied. "If it hadn't been for the pigeons—"

"Speakin' of pigeons, Sergeant," Brady put in, "I been sort of keepin' an eye on that tower since I took over Burke's beat. Those pigeons are still flyin' around as lively as ever. I can't figure it out. There's another big flock of pigeons hangs out around the joss house on Orange Street. But you never see 'em flyin' around unless some Chink kid starts throwin' things at 'em."

"Pigeons again!" Faraday groaned, but O'Hara paid no attention. He was staring thoughtfully up at the roof of the abandoned factory in the block ahead, with its stilted water-tower thrusting against the sky. The pigeons clustered thickly on the old tower, preening themselves in the sun, while others were strung out along the cornice ledge, and half a dozen perched on the cluster of yellow brick chimneys.

"They're quiet now," Brady said, pointing with his hickory club, "but they've been flappin' around and around like mad all morning. See! There they go again!"

The pigeons rose in abrupt flight, wings beating heavily as they swung out over Manchu Court, then wheeled and circled around toward Grove Street.

"So what?" Faraday scoffed. "They've got wings, so why shouldn't they fly? What's all the mystery?"

O'Hara's hand motioned impatiently for silence. He was staring upward at the details of the roof as though he had never seen it before.

"The chimneys!" O'Hara murmured. "They took off first from the chimneys—then the others followed. Did you ever notice that before, Brady?"

Brady shook his head. "I wasn't watchin' 'em that close, Sergeant."

"What possible difference does it make?" Faraday cut in. "Hadn't we better drop the great pigeon mystery till after we've found Burke? That's our Number One job, if you ask me."

O'Hara swung around and faced the detective, his eyes glinting with suppressed excitement. "Faraday, hang on to your hat! I've got a crazy hunch that the great pigeon mystery, as you call it, is going to lead us

straight to Jim Burke! Come on—I want another look around in that old factory."

Without waiting for a reply, Sergeant O'Hara strode along Canton Street like a man hurrying to an overdue appointment.

"Look, Sarge," Faraday protested, "we've been through all this before. Those blasted pigeons were flying all over the place the other day, but it didn't mean anything—the tower was empty. What makes you think Burke might be hidden up there now?"

"I don't think so," O'Hara replied. "I'm not interested in the tower any longer—it's the cellar I want to see."

"The cellar! It's bare as a billiard table. What'd we overlook down there?"

"Burke, I think!" O'Hara said crisply as they turned the corner into Grove Street and pushed open the side-gate of the factory. Crossing the courtyard to the door under the shipping platform, O'Hara removed a wooden wedge that held the door fast, and they entered the gloomy, bare-floored basement.

As they advanced across the cemented floor, O'Hara stopped suddenly in his tracks. "Listen!" he whispered.

They stood stiffly, silently, ears straining to catch a faint, far-off sound—a muffled shrilling that seemed to come from a great distance.

"What is it?" Faraday demanded. "Where does it come from?"

But Sergeant O'Hara did not stop to answer the question. Instead, he sprang toward the great iron-plated furnace that loomed up in the dusk. Seizing the handle of the first of its three wide firing-doors, he tried to wrench it open. But it was sealed tight with the rust of years, and he passed on to the middle door.

This time the heavy iron plate yielded to his efforts and creaked open. Snatching Faraday's flashlight, O'Hara clicked on the beam and directed it into the dark cavern of the fire-box. The bright wedge of light revealed a bound figure lying huddled upon the furnace grate.

"Burke!" O'Hara shouted as the bound man stirred with a feeble cry and lifted dazed and blinking eyes into the cone of light.

"It's all right, Burke, old man," O'Hara said. "We'll have you out of there in half a shake."

Stripping off his overcoat, O'Hara climbed in through the opening and crouched down beside the bound prisoner. "Got a pocket knife, Brady?" he called back. "These knots are tough—"

BRADY handed his knife through the opening, and O'Hara made short work of Burke's fastenings.

"Can't move, Sergeant!" Burke gasped in a dry, croaking whisper. "My hands—my feet—"

"Numb from the ropes," O'Hara said. "All right, Burke, just take it easy. We'll manage it—"

So, between the three of them, they got Burke out safely through the fire-door. O'Hara followed, his hands scratched and bleeding, his face and clothing streaked with soot.

Burke slumped down on the cold floor, drawing great, gulping breaths as he leaned his back against the bulky furnace that had so nearly become an iron coffin. He tried to speak to them through lips that were parched and cracked.

"Save the talking for later, Jim," O'Hara said quickly. "Everything's okay now. Brady, hop out to that call-box on the corner and tell them to send a car over here—quick!"

A little later, and Officer James J. Burke was seated in the Precinct squad-room, wrapped in blankets, fortified by food and drink, and with his stiff, swollen hands and feet restored to partial use by brisk massage.

"Feeling better now, Jim?" O'Hara asked.

"A lot better," Burke said fervently, taking another sip of black coffee spiked with brandy. "And thanks, Sergeant. I sure thought my number was up. How long have I been in that black hell-hole?"

"Three days," O'Hara replied.

"Seemed like three months," Burke said. "Couldn't tell anything about time—never knew whether it was daylight or dark." Then his drawn, strained face hardened. "Yee Tok nailed me, Sergeant. I suppose you know that. If I ever get my hands on that murderin' yellow rat—"

"Yee Tok's out of our reach now," O'Hara said. "We cornered him in Paradise Court, but he jumped off a roof, trying to escape. He died before we could get any

information out of him. But tell us what happened, Jim, if you feel up to it."

**B**URKE took another sip of the coffee. "I'd just made my seven o'clock pull at the Canton Street box, Sergeant. I started down Grove Street, past the factory. It was snowin' and blowin' so hard you couldn't see six feet ahead. Yee Tok must've been waitin' for me behind that side gate. Anyway, I was only a few steps past the gate when somethin' clubbed me over the head. When I woke up, I was lyin' there on the cellar floor, tied up good and tight, and gagged on top of that."

"Did Yee Tok say anything to you?" O'Hara broke in.

"Not a word," Burke replied. "He just kept lookin' at me with a nasty grin on his face. Then the yellow devil started helpin' himself to my things—he took my gun, my shield, my gloves, my cap, and even my shoes. He took my gun and fired every shot in it up against the stone wall. I figure he must've been off his nut—"

"Yee Tok was crazy like a fox," O'Hara declared. "He had a purpose in all those things, even in firing the gun like that. But we'll tell you about that later. What happened next?"

"He opened up that furnace door and shoved me inside," Burke continued. "For the first couple of hours I tried to wriggle out of the ropes, but I couldn't budge 'em. I did manage to get the gag out of my mouth, though. I kept yellin' for help, but nothing happened, and pretty soon my voice gave out."

"Yee Tok never came back?" O'Hara asked.

Burke shook his head. "It was cold in there, and that lump on my head hurt like blazes. After a while I started to get hungry—and thirsty. Every once in a while I'd get kind of panicky and start yellin' again, but my voice wouldn't hold up. Then I thought about somethin' the Chink overlooked when he was pickin' my pockets—"

Burke held up a police whistle, fastened

around his neck on a looped cord. "He didn't notice the whistle because I keep it tucked away in my breast pocket. It took me a couple of hours hard work to get that damn whistle out of my pocket. I've been blowin' it ever since, hour after hour. I wasn't sure the sound of it would carry through those iron plates, but it was my only chance. I knew you'd have the boys out searching for me, and I was prayin' somebody would hear it when they were lookin' around in that old rat-trap."

"We searched through the factory twice," O'Hara said, "but nobody heard anything. The cellar was so bare, we didn't waste much time on it. It's lucky you kept blowing it, though. That whistle saved your life, Jim. We didn't hear it—but the pigeons heard it all right!"

"Pigeons?" Burke repeated, bewildered. "What have pigeons to do with it?"

"There's a flock of pigeons been roosting up on the factory roof," O'Hara explained. "Every time you blew that whistle, the sound of it came up the chimney and startled them into flying around. We couldn't figure out what made them so jittery, but it finally dawned on me that they were being frightened by a sound, and that the sound must be coming from the chimneys. From then on it was easy."

"But you don't know how lucky you are, Jim," Faraday broke in. "When you're up on your feet again you'd better buy the Sarge here a box of the best damn cigars that money can buy. He's the one figured out about the pigeons. The rest of us couldn't see anything in it—we even tried to kid him out of it, but the Sarge hung on to his hunch. If he hadn't—well, figure it out for yourself."

Sergeant O'Hara grinned. "When you've been in Chinatown as long as I have, Faraday, you'll learn to ride your hunches to the limit, because half the time that's about all you have to go on. Ride 'em hard, because you never know what some trifling detail will open up. As the Chinese say—a small candle can light a large room!"

# BUCK SUMMERS BUYS A HORSE

By JAMES B. HENDRYX



*There's Plenty of Ways  
to Even Up a Score  
Without Beating a Man  
to the Draw!*

GRAY dust rose in the thin clear air in the wake of the thundering hoofs of the Y Bar remuda. Sam Shonto, the half breed horse wrangler was getting plenty of help this day. The spring roundup was over. The last calf had been branded at noon, and the boys of the Y Bar were fogging it for the home ranch, thirty miles away.

For a week they had been crowding the

work in order to finish it in time for the big dance at Riverton on the night of the Fourth. They could still make it, but it would be cutting it close—what with a bath, and a shave, and a change of clothes. And because another ten miles lay between the ranch and Riverton, they wanted fresh horses under them for that ten mile dash—so the remuda was strung out on the high lope with twenty yipping, yelling cowboys at their heels.



With the horses milling and snorting in the pole corral, saddles and bridles were stripped off, and the men made a dash for the bunkhouse. Five minutes later twenty naked cowboys each with a bar of soap in hand, were wallowing in the shallow water of the creek that flowed past the bunkhouse door.

Scrubbed, shaven, and clad in a new silk shirt of robin's egg blue with a flaming red scarf knotted loosely about his neck, Buck Summers stepped from the bunkhouse and headed for the corral—the first of the cowboys to doll up for the dance. He was wondering whether Stella McCoy had received the letter he had posted a week before in Lodgepole asking her to go to the dance with him. The Lazy E boys were probably already in town, and the Circle Js, too. Both outfits had finished their roundups days ago.

Buck scowled. The Y Bar would have finished in plenty of time, too, if Joe Smart the wagon boss, hadn't decided to swing down for a look into the Little Bend country—three or four days lost for a few damn calves! And maybe Stella would go to the dance with some cowpoke from one of the other outfits.

At the corral fence he straightened up from his saddle, rope in hand, to see Joe Smart coming toward him from the house. Joe held a slip of paper in his hand, and with a sudden premonition of evil, Buck slipped into the corral, built a stingy loop, and tossed it over the head of his town horse, a snorty palomino with plenty of showoff.

When he led the horse out through the gate Joe was waiting for him. The wagon boss eyed him with a grin of approval. "All prettied up, eh? Gosh, wisht I was a girl—I'd shore be proud to step it off with you." He extended the slip of paper. "Swing around by the Lazy E an' give 'em this tally of their calves we branded. Pick up their tally of our calves. An' you better get theirs first. I wouldn't trust that new foreman no hell of a ways. We're payin' a dollar an' a half a head this year for brandin'—an' he might doctor the balance his way. 'Specially as I heard that him an' Shorty Watts was on a two-day drunk over to Stanton, couple weeks ago. This'll be the last time Shorty will ever rep for this outfit—or ride for it either. He's through around here."

BUCK scowled at the paper in the other's hand. "Aw, hell, Joe—let one of the other boys take it. I've got a date."

Joe Smart's grin widened. "So've nineteen other cow waddies—or they'll claim they have. It ain't so far out of your road. You'll make it all right. Have a good time."

"Good time—hell," Buck grumbled, as he thrust the paper into his pocket, "ridin' clean around by the Lazy E! If that's what you call a good time, why the hell don't you take it yourself?"

Two other cowboys detached their ropes from their saddles and grinned. "The early bird catches the worm," Bill Hambly grinned. "I'm shore as hell glad you beat me to that lookin' glass, Buck!"

Buck growled an inoffensive obscenity, threw the saddle on the palomino, swung

aboard, and headed down the trail in a cloud of dust.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Buck Summers dismounted and thumped on the door of the McCoy ranchhouse on a bend of the river three miles below town. Presently a dull light glowed through the darkened window and old man McCoy, lamp in hand, opened the door a few inches.

"Oh, that you, Buck? Thought you couldn't git in fer the dance. That's what Bill Hambly claimed. Stopped in 'long about eight an' told Stella you had some work to do fer the boss an' couldn't make it—claimed you sent word fer her to go to the dance with him. Stella didn't like it much—claimed it would be the last time you'd git the chanct to stand her up." The oldster's lips widened in a snaggle-toothed grin. "Better watch out fer Stella when she's got her Irish up. She rode off with her nose pretty high."

With a muttered curse, the cowboy swung into the saddle and dug the rowels into the palamino's flanks. Buck Summers rode with a grim set to his lips. This was the second time Bill Hambly had put one over on him, and by God, it would be the last! The other time he had taken it as a joke. But this time it was different—a damn sight different, when he dragged Stella McCoy into it.

The Fourth of July dance at Riverton had been advertised far and wide. And when Buck crossed the track at the edge of town he noted that the flat between the buildings and the shipping corrals was crowded with dim outlines of innumerable spring wagons, the horses unhitched and tied to the rear wheels, munching hay out of the boxes. These were the rigs of the family men—the small ranchers and nesters from up and down the valley. Through the open windows of the Valley Mercantile Company's wool warehouse the strains of Buffalo Girl blared forth into the hot, still night, and Buck caught glimpses of the dancers as he rode past and on into the main street where the saddled and bridled horses of half a dozen cow outfits dozed with lowered heads before the hitch-rails of the false-front buildings that flanked the wooden sidewalks.

Dismounting before the Last Chance Saloon, he passed on through, washed the dust and sweat from his face and hands at the pump, and returned to pause at the bar for a

drink. The bartender grinned as he set out a bottle and glass. "Hambly was in here a little while ago," he said, "tellin' the boys how he put one over on you."

Buck frowned, and glanced toward a group drinking near the end of the bar. He noticed Slim Jones, foreman of the Lazy E and two Lazy E cowpunchers. They must have just ridden in because he had seen Jones at the ranch only a couple of hours ago. Shorty Watts was with them. Buck wondered whether Shorty knew that he was through at the Y Bar. He tossed off his drink and refilled the glass.

"Hambly's made one brag too many," he said, and tossed off his second drink.

Slim Jones detached himself from the group and sidled along the bar. "Drink up, an' have one on me," he invited, motioning to the bartender. "I seen that Hambly when he was in here," he said. "Looks like he might be a tough guy to beat to the draw."

The words irritated Buck. "There's plenty of ways to even up a score without beating a man to the draw," he replied shortly, and turning on his heel stepped out onto the street.

When the bartender returned from serving a round of drinks at the end of the bar Jones jerked his head in the direction of the door through which Buck had disappeared. "Tough hombre," he said. "Claims he'll get this guy Hambly, an' I'mbettin' he will."

The man behind the bar laughed. "Buck's all right. Little sore, that's all. Bill Hambly beat his time an' took his girl to the dance. It ain't no shootin' matter. Buck's a quiet, steady goin' fella. He's Joe Smart's tophand over on the Y Bar. If it did come to shootin' though, I'd bet on Buck. They say he can jump a tin can up in the air with one shot out of that hog-leg of his, and put three bullets through it before it hits the ground."

The other poured his drink and watched the little beads rise and rim the glass. "Yeah, an' it's the quiet ones you've got to keep yer eye on. I never seen a loud-mouthed, braggin' guy yet that was worth a damn in a pinch. I seen the look in his eye when he went out. Tellin' you about me, I wouldn't want to be standin' in Hambly's boots."

There were half a dozen saloons in the two blocks between the Last Chance and the wool warehouse, and in each of them Buck stopped to inquire for Hambly, and in each

he took a drink or two with friends and acquaintances, who kidded him about Stella McCoy. Evidently Hambly was enjoying his joke hugely. Thus it was that when he arrived at the dance he was pretty well oiled, and fighting mad.

Frank Howe, the genial marshal of River-ton, who sat behind a table at the doorway selling tickets, shoved out the pasteboard with a grin. "Little late, ain't you, Buck? Looks like Bill Hambly's beat your time."

The music blared to a finish, and men were escorting their partners to the chairs ranged along the walls. "A lot of men have started something they couldn't finish," Buck retorted grimly, as his eyes swept the faces of the crowd. Bill Hambly waved his hand, and his partner, the pretty wife of a sheepman from over on Sage Creek, laughed as her eyes met his.

Buck scowled. Make a fool out of him, would he? Well, there would be plenty of time to hunt Hambly up later. He didn't want to start anything here among all these women. A Circle J rider was seating Stella McCoy directly across the hall.

**F**IDDLE in hand, Bull of the Woods Clark stepped to the edge of the raised platform that seated the orchestra. "Get your pardners for a square dance, gents! Whirl 'em fast, and swing 'em high!"

Buck crossed the floor to Stella McCoy. "Can I have this dance?" he asked.

The girl glanced up into his face, her blue eyes darkening. "Oh, it's Mister Summers," she said, with elaborate sarcasm. "I didn't expect to see you here tonight."

"If you got my letter you knew I'd be here," Buck replied shortly.

"And this extra special work you had to do for the boss," she continued evenly. "If it was emptying a jug, it looks like you've done a good job."

"Hambly lied about me not being able to get here," he snapped. "He heard the boss tell me to swing around by the Lazy E, and he thought he'd put one over on me. I'll tend to him, later. It'll be the last time he'll try to pull a fast one. Do I get this dance?"

"No, you don't." There was a flinty note in the girl's voice. "You're drunk, Buck Summers. I didn't know they had a saloon at the Lazy E."

Over by the doorway Frank Howe's brow

drew into a frown. An ex-cowpuncher whose injured leg prevented him from ever again riding the range, he well knew the potentialities of a hair trigger and a belt full of liquor. Catching Hambly's eye, he motioned to him with a jerk of the head. "Buck's on the prod," he said, in a low voice, as the other leaned over the table. "Better slip out for a while and give him a chance to cool off. We don't want to start nothin' in here. Never saw him tight before, and there's no telling what he'll do."

**A**CROSS the hall, Buck's eyes narrowed as they gazed down into the angry eyes of blue. "Okay. I'm drunk. There's plenty of other girls that ain't so particular. If you think I'm drunk now, wait till you see me a couple of hours from now—and wait till you see Hambly." He turned abruptly away, and a moment later led a giggling cowgirl onto the floor and took his place in a set that was just forming.

At the conclusion of the dance he seated his partner and his eyes swept the room in search of Hambly. Not finding him he headed for the door. As he passed the ticket table Frank Howe smiled up into the scowling face.

"What's your hurry, Buck? Better stick around and get your money's worth. Lot of pretty girls here tonight."

"I'll be back after I see that Hambly gets his money's worth," Buck retorted.

"Okay, Buck. Don't do nothin' you'll be sorry for—that's all."

Making the rounds of the saloons, in each of which he imbibed a few drinks, took time and it was long past midnight when he returned to the dance. He stood in the doorway, his eyes searching the faces of the dancers who whirled past to the tune of a lively waltz.

"Where the hell's Hambly?" he growled. "I can't find him anywhere."

Howe laughed. "Guess you're too late to find him, tonight, Buck. He left here half an hour ago—him and Stella McCoy. She said she was going home. Go on in and have yourself some fun. There'll be a lot of dancing between now and daylight. Boy, if it wasn't for this leg of mine, I'd be out there on the floor every minute, you bet! Give yourself a chance to cool off."

"I'll cool him off," the words ground

from between clenched teeth as Buck turned and disappeared into the night.

The palomino stood with a dozen other horses tied to the ground in front of the Last Chance Saloon. Mounting, Buck headed out of town on a high lope. So that was it, eh? So it wasn't just a prank? Hambly was making a play for the girl—stealing her right out from under his nose—or she'd never have left the dance to go home this early. They were probably sitting out there in the cottonwood grove on the river bank, right now—the grove where he and Stella had sat so many nights and watched the river ripple past in the moonlight. Or maybe they'd be in the kitchen, and Stella would be making coffee, and she'd get out the serviceberry jam and the spice cake. To hell with her! It was just like a woman to make a fool out of a man. If she wanted Hambly she could have him. But not till after he'd given him the damndest licking he ever got—and Stella would be right there to see it!

As he neared the McCoy spread, he reined down and circled the outfit to bring him to the grove below the horse corral. The house was dark. There was no light in the kitchen. Buck was glad of that. The rookus wouldn't wake up the old folks. He reached the grove, expecting to see the two horses standing there in the starlight. But there were no horses there. It was only a small grove, and dismounting Buck explored it. Swinging into the saddle he rode past the horse corral. The girl's stocking-footed bay was in the corral, and her saddle was hanging from its spike by the stirrup.

So Hambly had taken her home and gone on to the Y Bar. He hadn't returned to the dance or they would have met on the trail. "Okay," Buck muttered, digging the rowels into his horse. "Believe me, there's going to be one hell of a scrap in the bunkhouse."

As he swung into the trail a coyote crossed close in front of him and jerking the gun from its holster he took a shot at it.

There was no horse in the Y Bar corral when Buck rode up. Hambly must have returned to the dance. "Prob'ly figured I'd hit out after him and cut a wide circle. He sure gave me the run-around tonight—but he can't do it forever—not and stay in the country, he can't." Dawn was graying the east and Buck debated whether to hit out for town. His head was beginning to ache, and

he wasn't feeling so good. He wished he hadn't taken so many drinks. Too late to catch Hambly at the dance anyway. He swung to the ground, stripped off saddle and bridle, slipped his horse into the corral and went to bed. There'd be time enough to settle with Hambly.

## II

**A**N HOUR later half a dozen Y Bar boys rode in and unsaddled. One of them pointed to the palomino, its light buckskin sides stained with dried sweat. "Buck shore must of high-tailed it home," he grinned. "His Sunday horse is lathered up plenty."

"Yeah," chuckled another, "an' Buck was lathered up plenty when I seen him in the Long Horn 'long about midnight. He was lit up like a steamboat—an' huntin' for Hambly?"

"Where the hell is Hambly?" another asked. "His horse ain't here an' he left the dance early with Stella McCoy."

"Prob'ly stayed there fer breakfast," ventured the first speaker.

"He had a hell of a long stay, then," laughed another. "If Buck don't look out, Hambly'll be beatin' his time."

Other men drifted in by twos and threes and went to bed in the bunkhouse.

Along toward noon Buck was awakened by someone shaking his shoulder. "G'wan away," he muttered, burrowing his head deeper into the pillow. But the shaking persisted, and he rolled over to stare with bloodshot eyes into the face of Joe Smart. Beside him stood Tom Miwald, the sheriff. Others awoke and heads peered sleepily out above the blankets.

"Get up, Buck," the boss said, gravely. "Tom, here, wants to talk to you."

"Let him talk, then," Buck muttered, thickly. "I can hear him right where I am. Then get to hell out of here. I feel like the devil."

"Where's Hambly?" the sheriff asked abruptly.

"How the hell do I know where he is? I hunted for him all night and couldn't find him."

"But you did find him, Buck," the sheriff said, in a cold, hard voice. "You met him on the trail half a mile out from McCoy's ranch."

Something in the sheriff's tone caused Buck to sit up in his bunk. His eyes felt stiff and he blinked them rapidly as he strove to collect his befuddled wits. "What do you mean—I found him?" he asked. "I tell you I never did find him."

"Who shot him, then?"

"Shot him!" The words exploded from Buck's lips. Blankets heaved all down the bunkhouse as the cowboys sat up to stare at the trio. "You mean, someone shot Hambly?"

"That's right. Someone that knew he left the dance early with Stella McCoy, and followed him. You didn't overtake 'em before they got to McCoy's, Buck. But you met Hambly coming back. You met him there on the trail—and you let him have it. You shot him out of the saddle without giving him a chance to draw. His gun was in his holster when they found him."

"By God, I never shot him!" Buck was fully awake, now, and his brain was clear. "I followed him to McCoy's. But I tell you I never caught up with him! And if I had, I wouldn't have shot him."

"Plenty of people heard you threaten to get him. You must have shot off your mouth plenty. Damn near everyone that was in Riverton last night heard you threaten him—responsible folks, too—Frank Howe, and Stella McCoy, and Slim Jones, the Lazy E ramrod, besides all the bartenders, and half the cowboys in the country. I ain't saying you'd done it if you was sober—but you wasn't sober last night, by a damn sight. I had a talk with Stella, this morning. She was afraid you'd make a gun play, so she made Hambly take her home early."

"Sure, I threatened him. He pulled a fast one on me, and I would have knocked hell out of him if I'd caught up with him—but I didn't. You say his gun was in his holster when they found him—was he dead?"

"He died in the hospital about nine o'clock this morning. Jack Cleary found him. Him and his wife were driving home from the dance along on the edge of daylight, and when they got within a half a mile of McCoy's the horses shied, and Jack pulled 'em up—and then they saw Hambly laying in a patch of weeds close beside the trail. They loaded him into the back of the spring wagon and rushed him to the hospital—but Doc Peters saw it was no use—he

never even went in after the bullet. Hambly was in pain, the way he kept muttering. So Doc gave him a shot of morphine and after a while he passed on."

"And you're accusing me of murdering him, eh?" Buck said bitterly.

The sheriff shrugged, and reaching down drew Buck's revolver from the holster in his belt that lay beside his bunk. "I guess that's what they'll have to call it, Buck," the sheriff replied gravely. "With Hambly's gun still in his belt."

"I shot at a coyote," Buck replied, and even as the words passed his lips, he realized how lame the explanation must sound.

"Did you get him?" the sheriff asked. "They say you don't often miss."

"No. It was dark—only starlight, and he was running. I know it sounds like a lie—and a damn poor one. But that's the way it was."

"I'm afraid you'll have a hard time making a jury believe that, Buck. Andy McCoy says he woke up when he heard Stella's door close, and laid awake for a few minutes when he heard a horse gallop out of the yard and a few minutes later he heard a shot. He didn't think much about it, figuring that Hambly had fetched Stella home and was riding off feeling his oats and shooting up in the air. But it wasn't Hambly that fired that shot, Buck. It was you. And it wasn't a coyote you shot at. It was Hambly—and you didn't miss."

"You say Hambly muttered quite a bit before he died. Did he say I shot him?"

The sheriff shook his head. "No, Buck, he didn't. I tried to get him to talk before the morphine took hold—to tell me who shot him. But seems like he didn't understand. Prob'ly out of his head all the time. The only thing he'd say was 'Charlie Olds'—kept on repeating it over and over again, 'Charlie Olds, Charlie Olds.' There's no Charlie Olds around these parts. Someone he knew somewhere else, maybe—him being out of his head. Maybe when he was a little kid. Or it might be that's his own right name—no one knows where he came from. Anyhow, it didn't make any sense, so we didn't get any help there. But what with the evidence we've got, it don't look like we need any help."

Buck sat silent. There was a terrible taste in his mouth. His lips felt dry and his head

ached dully. All the boys were awake, now—sitting up in their bunks looking at him. His eyes swept their faces—impassive faces staring at him with eyes that were neither friendly nor unfriendly. These men had heard the evidence, and Buck knew that in their minds they had already convicted him—even as the jury would convict him later. The only difference was that the jury would pronounce the word that would put a loop about his neck. Slowly he shook his head. "No," he said, in a dull toneless voice, "it sure don't look like you'll need any help." He glanced up into the grave face of the sheriff. "I guess you'll be wanting me to go along with you."

The man nodded. "That's right. Get your clothes on, Buck. I'll wait here."

Joe Smart moved toward the door. With his hand on the latch he turned. "Some of you boys throw Hambly's stuff together. I'll catch up his horse and saddle it. We've got to give his belongin's into custody of the sheriff, so if anyone claims 'em, he can turn 'em over to 'em."

He stepped from the room, and Buck slipped from his bunk and drew on his clothing. As he stepped from the room a few minutes later, with the sheriff at his side, he turned. "So long, boys," he said.

"So long, Buck." The reply came almost simultaneously from twenty-odd throats, and Buck detected a note of blended sympathy and finality in their voices as though they knew they were seeing him for the last time. He noted, also, that few eyes met the glance with which he swept their faces.

At the corral Joe Smart was throwing Buck's saddle on Hambly's horse, a big rangy black. He turned to the sheriff. "This is Hambly's own horse, Tom. He rode a company horse to the dance. When you locate him, strip Hambly's saddle off and turn him into the livery barn corral. We'll pick him up."

"He's there already. I found him feeding a little ways from where they found Hambly when I went down to McCoy's early this morning."

"Okay. Buck ain't got a horse of his own, so he might as well ride Hambly's in." He tightened the cinch and started for the house. "Come on up an' get some breakfast before you hit out."

"I et at McCoy's," the sheriff said.

"I don't want anything to eat. I feel like hell," Buck said.

The sheriff shot him a sympathetic glance. "Better throw a couple of cups of coffee into you, Buck. Do you good. Come on—I wouldn't mind a cup or two, myself."

Fifteen minutes later, as they were about to mount, Buck glanced at the sheriff. "Want to put handcuffs on me?" he asked, stretching out his arms.

Miwald grinned. "No. I've got a gun here—two of 'em, counting yours. I'll take a chance on you, Buck. It would be a miserable job—ridin' in on a hot day with bracelets on."

They mounted and Joe Smart stepped close and offered his hand. "Well—so long, Buck," he said, awkwardly. "An—good luck."

Buck shook his hand. "I didn't kill Hambly," he said simply. "But they'll prove I did it. I haven't got a chance in the world—with the evidence they've got. The best luck I can have is that my neck will break so I don't choke to death."

### III

THE saloons of Riverton did a thriving business that morning. Many cowpunchers from various outfits had not returned to the ranches by the time the Clancys rushed the wounded man to the hospital. And when Hambly died the news spread like wildfire. Word passed that Tom Miwald had gone to the Y Bar to pick up Buck Summers, and no one pulled out of town. At the bars tongues wagged.

"Buck was huntin' him, last night."

"Yeah—he was stewed to the gills."

"I seen him in the Long Horn 'long about midnight, an' believe me, he had blood in his eye."

"Hambly copped off Buck's gal, an' throw'd his brag about it."

In the Last Chance Saloon Slim Jones turned to the bartender when news of Hambly's death came from the hospital. "What did I tell you, last night? I knew damn well Summers would get him. I seen it in his eye. Like I told you, it's them quiet ones you've got to watch out for."

Toward the middle of the afternoon men crowded the doorways of the saloons, and lined the wooden sidewalks to stare at the

sheriff and his prisoner as they rode down the street and on to the edge of town to pull up before the little brick jail where Frank Howe was waiting with the key to the huge iron padlock.

"You'd ort to listened to me, Buck, an' stayed to the dance till you cooled off," the marshal said, reproachfully.

"I didn't kill Hambly," Buck said.

Howe turned away and handed the key to the sheriff. "The jail's all ready. I fetched in a bucket of drinkin' water."

Miwald swung the iron door open and glanced inside. "Go on in, Buck," he said. "It ain't much of a place. But you won't be here long. I'm taking you down to the county seat tonight where you'll have better quarters. The local pulls in at twelve-forty. I'll come for you around twelve-fifteen. Anything I can do for you? You got tobacco?"

Buck nodded. "I'm all right," he said.

"How about some dinner?"

"I couldn't eat anything."

"Okay. I'll fetch you down some supper, though. You'll be feeling better by then." He stepped into the room, closed the door, and drew a flask from his pocket. "How about a little shot of licker? Might do you good, the way you feel."

As the sheriff removed the cap and extended the flask, Buck retched violently. "Get that damn stuff out of here!" he cried. "The sight of it turns me wrong side out!"

Miwald pocketed the flask with a grin. "Sorry," he said. "Most of 'em like a couple of snorts after they've been on a bender. They say you never was much of a hand to



drink. Too damn bad you had to go to it at the wrong time."

The sheriff stepped outside, the iron door clanked shut, and Buck heard the key turn in

the huge padlock. He glanced about him. The Riverton jail was a red brick building some twelve feet square that had originally been the powder house of a long-abandoned mine that had once flourished at the edge of town. It had a cement floor, and a single window high in the west wall. The window had been barred to prevent the theft of powder. The furniture consisted of a wooden chair, an iron cot, a water pail, and a slop pail. Never before had it held anyone charged with a serious crime. Frank Howe had rigged it up as a convenient place to temporarily house an occasional obstreperous cowboy whose liquor moved him to shoot up the town.

It was hot in the room—hot and dank and musty, with the sun beating down on the tin roof. Buck drank a dipperful of water and threw himself down on the cot. For a long time he lay there staring at the square of blue that showed between the iron bars. Several fat green flies, and a bumble bee flew in and out through the glassless window, buzzing monotonously. Idly, with a curious impersonality his thoughts drifted back over his past life. So this was the end of it all. A stinking jail—then a bigger jail—then a trial—and the judge speaking the words that would end his life—then the scaffold, and someone adjusting a noose about his neck. He wondered whether it hurt much—that sudden jerk on the end of the rope. He decided it wouldn't—but—it was a hell of a way to die.

As he looked a mouse appeared on the window-sill, ran back and forth several times, then disappeared as suddenly as it had come. Buck grinned. He wished he was as small as a mouse—he would slip between those bars and hit for the high hills. The mouse appeared again, and again it disappeared. Buck wondered where it had come from. It certainly hadn't run up the sheer wall—even if it could have got toe holds, there hadn't been time between its disappearance and reappearance for it to have reached the ground.

He got up, placed the chair under the window and stood on it. His eyes came just above the level of the sill and he stared out across the prairie to the distant hills. Then right under his nose a sharp gray muzzle appeared and a pair of beady black eyes stared for a split second into his own—and disap-

peared. With his fingers Buck explored the crack in the mortar at the base of the iron bar. It crumbled a little, and grasping the bar he twisted it and to his surprise found that it turned with a low, grating sound, as a tiny shower of mortar dust trickled down from above. He tried the next bar and found that it, too, was loose. Sudden hope welled up within him. To hell with Miwald and his rotten jail! Why should he stick around and be hanged for a crime he never committed? Once let him get out of here and onto a horse—and they could have their damned evidence! He'd keep on going—Canada wasn't so far away. He'd hit for Canada. They'd never look for him there. They'd figure he'd pull south—for Texas. Plenty of the boys knew he came from Texas. They'd think he'd make for the Rio Grande—and Mexico. What had Miwald said—he'd come for him at twelve-fifteen? At twelve-fifteen he'd be well on his way. But—he also said he'd bring him some supper. Buck curbed his impulse to pull and wrench at the bars. Instead, he pulled out his handkerchief and carefully wiped the mortar dust from the window-sill, returned the chair to its place, and then wiped up the tiny particles of mortar that had dropped to the floor. If he should loosen the bars now, he might leave a scar on the wall under the window-sill—a scar he might not be able to conceal by fitting the loosened mortar into place, and Miwald would be sure to see it when he brought his supper. Buck returned to the cot and was awokened later by the grating of the iron door.

The sheriff stepped in, closing the door behind him and set a well-filled dinner bucket on the chair as Buck swung his feet to the floor. "There you are, Buck," he said, as he placed a tin plate, knife, fork and spoon beside the bucket. "Better tackle that before it gets cold. I told the Chink to make it a big one, and to put in a double chunk of pie, seeing you ain't had nothing to eat today. Be seeing you at twelve-fifteen. Got to get back, now. Got mixed up in a poker game in the Last Chance to pass the time away, and they're into me for about thirty dollars. Slim Jones is getting all the gravy. He's sure riding a streak of luck. It's so good that I'm beginning to wonder if it is all luck. I notice some of the other boys are watching him pretty close, too."

Buck nodded. "Yeah, he might be handy with the cards, at that. Joe Smart don't like him much." A low rumble drowned the words and he glanced in surprise towards the window with the sunlight streaming in. "What's that—thunder?"

Miwald grinned. "You must have been asleep. It's been thundering off and on for an hour or more. It's pretty black in the south. Looks like it'll hit us directly. Well, so long—I'll be seeing you."

Buck's head had stopped aching and he realized that he was hungry. The sun was low in the west, and as he ate, he watched the square of sunlight climb higher and higher on the bare brick wall, as the rolling of thunder became louder and nearly incessant. Suddenly the sunlight blotted out, and drawing the chair beneath the window he stood on it and peered out at a black cloud shot by vivid flashes of lightning. Grasping the bar he jerked and wrenched at it with his two hands as one of the bricks of the sill loosened, and a shower of mortar dust rattled down from above settling in a gray powder on his hands and the sleeves of his silk shirt. Loose as the bar was, it took nearly half an hour of wrenching and twisting to free it from its crumbling moorings. Using it as a lever, the next bar came loose easily. It was raining now—a drenching downpour of big drops that splashed on the window-sill and pounded audibly against the sun-baked earth.

**B**UCK grinned to himself as he wriggled through the window and dropped to the ground. "I'm sure glad this window's on the side away from town," he muttered, as a vivid flash of lightning followed almost instantly by a deafening crash of thunder, lighted the scene. "And this rain will keep 'em inside."

Almost instantly he was drenched to the skin, and bending low, he ran for the shelter of the small barns and wooden pig fences that bordered a sort of alley in the rear of a row of dwelling houses. Dodging from shelter to shelter he skirted the main thoroughfare and came to the corral at the rear of the livery barn. Peering between the poles of the corral he saw what he had hoped to find—Hambly's horse, among half a dozen others. The big rangy black he knew to be a "long horse"—a horse that had speed, and heart,

and stamina—a horse that could carry a man far and fast. Working swiftly, he stepped into a shed, took his own saddle and bridle from the rack, loosened the rope, and hurried into the corral.

The rain was slackening, now—the lightning flashes were less vivid and spaced farther apart. He led the black from the corral and saddled him. As he was about to mount, a man stepped around the corner of the shed almost bumping into him. A flash of lightning revealed Con Sanford, a Circle J rider—revealed also by the look of startled surprise on the man's face, that he had recognized him.

Like a flash Buck's fist shot out and caught the cowboy squarely on the button. It was a terrific blow and a lucky one. The man dropped like a polled ox and lay sprawled in the mud. Reaching swiftly, Buck jerked his six-gun from its holster and thrusting it into his own, leaped onto the black, dug in his spurs, swung around the corral and out onto the flat.

#### IV

IT WAS half past eleven when Con Sanford, soaking wet, and plastered from head to foot with a mixture of mud and horse manure burst into the Last Chance Saloon and made for the table at which Tom Miwald was playing poker.

"Buck Summers is gone!" he yelled. "He pulled out on that big black you fetched him in on!"

The six players eyed the speaker incredulously, and a cowboy drinking with several others at the bar laughed. "Where the hell you be'n, Con? Thought you pulled out two hours ago."

"What's the matter with you?" Miwald demanded. "You drunk, or crazy, or what?"

"He was pretty well crocked when he left the Long Horn, 'long about nine o'clock," the cowboy at the bar said. "He claimed he was hittin' fer the ranch. We tried to make him wait till after the rain, but he wouldn't."

"I might of be'n crocked, then—but I ain't now," Sanford replied, prodding gingerly at his jaw with his fingers.

"Buck Summers is over in the jail, and Hambly's black is in the livery barn corral," Miwald said.

"They might of was there, but they ain't

there now, by a damn sight! I tell you Buck's gone, an' that big black's gone—an' my gun's gone along with 'em. Look at me! You think I've be'n wallerin' in horse manure for fun?"

The sheriff's chair scraped sharply on the floorboards as he rose to his feet, and eyed the speaker. "Listen, you—say what you've got to say—and say it quick. And if you're lying I'll throw you in the coop and tell Howe not to let you out for a week!"

Sanford pointed to the man at the bar. "Like Rawhide said, I got a pretty good shootful an' aimed to hit fer the Circle J. I'd left my horse in the livery barn corral, an' no more'n I'd stepped around the corner of the shed to get my kak, then I damn near run into that big black all saddled an' ready to go. Then I seen Buck Summers had him by the reins. He must of socked me one, 'cause the next thing I know'd, I was layin' there in the mud, wetter'n hell an' damn near froze. An' my jaw feels like I'd be'n kicked by a bronc."

Miwald walked to the bar and cashed his chips. As he left the saloon, he turned to the others. "You men wait here. If this fellow's told the truth I'm going to need a posse. Buck Summers shot Hambly without giving him a chance, and by God, I'll bring him in, dead or alive!" Fifteen minutes later he was back. "Get set, men. I'll be deputizing five or six of you that's got the best horses. We'll take Buck alive if we can—if not you're authorized to shoot him. Let's get going."

**S**LIM JONES pocketed a roll of bills and bit the corner from a plug of tobacco. "It's damn dark outside," he said. "Which way do you figure he'd hit?"

"He come from Texas," a cowboy ventured. "He'll prob'ly hit south."

Miwald nodded. "That's right. I recollect talking with him about Texas one time. He used to ride for the Hashknife outfit."

"Prob'ly try to get across into Mexico," opined another.

"That black of Hambly's is a long horse—an' it's a damn long ride to Texas," another hazarded.

Slim Jones spat accurately into a brass spittoon. "If it was me," he said, "an' I know'd there was plenty folks savvied I

come from Texas, I'd hit north instead of south."

Heads nodded, and several of the men agreed. Miwald's brows drew into a frown. "Buck's nobody's fool," he admitted, "even if he did pull off a dumb murder. He might figure that same way."

"Sure he would!" Jones exclaimed. "I don't claim to be so damn smart—an' I ain't the sheriff—so if I'm talkin' out of turn, jest shut me up. But it looks to me like the sensible thing to do is to wait for daylight before we pull out. Accordin' to this here Rawhide it was somewherees around nine o'clock when Sanford went for his horse. That give Buck a three-hour start, an' if that black is as good as you fellows think, he's put quite a few miles behind him. If we pull out now, we're liable to hit the wrong way, an' waste a lot of time. When Buck pulled out after knockin' Sanford cold, you can bet your last stack of blues he was goin' fast, an' a horse on the high lope is bound to leave a plain trail in the mud. If we wait till daylight we can find out which way he started, an' the way the ground is, we'd ort to be able to track him for a good many miles. If I was you, Sheriff, I'd start right now an' make the rounds of the saloons, an' tell everyone in 'em to stay off the trails leadin' out of town till daylight. If anyone's got to pull out tonight, tell 'em to ride off to one side—an' not to run their horses fer anyways a couple of miles. Then when we pick up the trail of a runnin' horse we'll know it's Buck's."

Miwald nodded, and eyed the other with respect. "Sounds reasonable," he agreed. "That's what I'll do. Start the game goin' again. We can play till daylight. I'll be back in a few minutes—and maybe I can get my money back."

At first hint of dawn the game broke up. The sheriff's eyes traveled over the faces of the men. "I want five or six of you boys to ride with me," he said. "I want only good men, and good horses—men that ain't afraid to shoot if they have to, and horses that can stand the gaff. We ain't going to come up with Buck Summers today—maybe not for a week. That horse of Hambly's is a long horse, and we all know Buck is a man who knows how to get all there is in him."

Slim Jones turned from the bar where he had been cashing his chips. "I'll go, Sher-

iff," he said. "The calf brandin's over, an' we won't be organizin' the beef roundup for a month. But seems like jest the two of us would be enough. I'm a pretty good hand at trailin', an' if it comes to a gun-play, it looks like two to one ort to be odds enough."

"I don't want it to come to a gun-play if I can help it," Miwald replied. "I never killed a man yet, that I didn't have to. I want to fetch Buck in alive. And the way I figure it, he might make a stand against one or two men, where he'd see it wasn't no use against half a dozen, an' give up without a fight. Of course, if he makes his stand we'll have to shoot him. He's never been a trouble maker, but he's a good man with a gun. He's killed once—and he'll kill again if he thinks he can get away, because he knows he ain't got a show in the world to beat the evidence. He's got nothing to lose by fighting it out—most anyone would rather get shot than hanged." He selected five others, and turned toward the door. "Get your horses and be at the Chink's in fifteen minutes," he ordered. "We'll throw a breakfast into us, and by that time it will be light enough to pick up Buck's trail."

Shortly before sunrise the men mounted, and followed the sheriff to the corral behind the livery barn.

Without dismounting, Slim Jones pointed to a series of deep hoof marks. "He puiled out on the jump," he said, "jest like I figured he would. An' the way he was throwin' mud, we can foller his trail on the high lope."

The posse swung into the trail which led



down a sort of alley to the flats that lay between the town and the loading chutes, then instead of crossing the tracks to the south, they swung to the north and hit the open bench.

For an hour the men rode at a fast lope, the imprints of the fleeing horse plainly visible in the wet buffalo grass. Then the trail rapidly dimmed and Jones who was riding ahead, side by side with the sheriff, pulled up. "It ain't goin' to be so easy from here on," he said, pointing to the ground. "Looks like we've come to the edge of that thunder-storm." He swung to the ground, dropped to his knees, and studied several hoof marks. "The ground's goin' to be dry from here, an' there ain't goin' to be no trail to speak of. But what there is, I can foller it. The big black is shod in front. The inside heel cork on the off shoe is wore damn near flat, an' the toe cork on the nigh shoe is wore down on a slant. He's slowed down to a runnin' walk, an' we'd ort to cover two miles to his one from now on without crowdin' our horses."

**A**S THE man mounted the sheriff's brow drew into a frown. "But hell-hard as the ground's goin' to be in a few minutes, he ain't goin' to leave no trail. He'll camp in the foothills tonight, an' tomorrow he'll hit for Eagle Pass. It's the only way he can get through the mountains—unless he swings a hundred miles or more to the east or west to go around 'em. My idea would be to forget his trail and hit straight for the pass. He'll have to swing into the regular trail to cross the mountains and there's some ranches in there. Someone will see him pass by. They can't help but notice that big black."

Jones shrugged. "You're the sheriff. That's what we do if you say so. But tellin' you about me, I don't need no road signs to foller a trail. S'pose he don't hit through Eagle Pass—where would we be, then?"

Miwald pondered the words and came to a decision. "Okay, I'll string along with you." He turned to the others. "You boys hit out for Eagle Pass. Inquire along the way for a rider on a rangy black. If you get wind of him, keep on after him. If you don't, go on through the mountains and wait for us at Sage City. You ought to make it by day after tomorrow night. Good luck—an' don't shoot unless you have to."

All that day Slim Jones and the sheriff pushed northward across the dry bench. A dozen times Jones dismounted and studied slight marks on the earth baked hard beneath the curly buffalo grass—marks that the sheriff could scarcely discern as Jones pointed them out to him. That night they camped on the bench, with the foothills half a day's ride away. The second day was a repetition of the first, with Jones confidently holding to the course, swinging to the ground, now and then, to examine a mark so dim that it meant nothing whatever to the eyes of the sheriff.

Toward mid-afternoon the officer put his growing skepticism into words. "By God, I don't believe you're following any trail! You get down and study marks so damn dim they might as well be made by a prairie dog as a horse." He pointed to the high-flung mountains ahead. "Why would Buck be heading for the mountains where he couldn't get through? He wouldn't. He'd be hitting either for the pass, or he'd be swinging wide to go around the end of 'em. If we done like I said, we'd be going through the pass, right now. We've lost a whole day."

Again Jones shrugged. "You're the doctor. If you say to hit for the pass, that's the way we'll go. But only a mile back I seen the mark of that slantin' toe cork in this coulee."

Miwald glanced ahead and his eyes lighted as he pointed to a gray blur on a hillside four or five miles away. "A band of sheep!" he exclaimed. "If Buck came this way the herder might have noticed him. We'll ask him, and if he hasn't seen Buck, we will hit for the pass. It's damn nonsense to hit the mountains where we can't get through."

They followed up the coulee and upon rounding a bend near where they had seen the sheep, the white cover of a camp wagon loomed up beside a waterhole. The sun had set and the sheep were working in onto the bed ground. The herder, dog at his side, stood beside the wagon watching the blatting sheep string in onto the bed ground to the tinkle of marker bells.

The two pulled up and Miwald asked, "See a rider pass here within the last day or so? He was wearing a blue silk shirt and white chaps and riding a big rangy black."

The man nodded. "Yump. Come by this

inornin', 'long about daylight. Et breakfast with me. An' begged a little salt. Claimed he was ridin' fer stray horses."

"Which way did he go?" Miwald asked, eyeing the apparently impassable barrier of mountains, a dozen miles away.

The man pointed. "He hit fer the mountains."

"But—there's no pass here."

"Mebbe—mebbe not. Some claims there is. There's talk about Flyin' H colts bein' slipped through some pass that only a few knows. The talk is that a Flyin' H wagon boss tuk out about three jumps ahead of the shuriff a year er so back when one of the cowboys ketched him slippin' Flyin' H stuff through there an' sellin' it on his own hook. Might be so—might not. I don't git around much. Jest hear the talk."

Miwald thanked the man and the two rode on. As they passed out of sight, he glanced at Jones. "Guess I'll have to take back all I said, Slim. I examined those marks mighty close, and I couldn't even tell they were made by a horse—let alone any particular horse. Cripes, when it comes to trailin' you've got an Injun backed off the map."

The other shrugged. "Takes practice, that's all," he said deprecatingly. Learnt it from the Blackfeet. Lived amongst 'em when I was a kid."

"What I can't figure," the sheriff said, "if there is a pass here how the hell did Buck Summers know about it? He came up from Texas and went to work for the Y Bar. He's been with them ever since—and their range is south of the railroad."

"I wouldn't know about that," Jones replied. "All I've be'n doin' is follerin' his trail. If there's a pass here, an' he used it we'll find it. Maybe someone told him about it. Maybe he run across that crooked ramrod the goat-loafer told us about."

## V

ONCE clear of the town Buck Summers swung northward. Plenty of people including Tom Miwald knew he came from Texas, and they'd expect him to head south. But there were cow outfits in Alberta and Saskatchewan—and the Canadian line couldn't be more than four or five hundred miles away. For half an hour he let the big

black run. Con Sanford might wake up any minute. There were plenty of cowboys in town, and Miwald would be out with a posse as soon as he learned of the escape. A tough break—to have Sanford show up just when he did. If it hadn't been for that he'd have had a good three-hours' start. Anyway, the encounter gave him a gun, and he had a beltful of cartridges. At least he could put up a fight. He hoped the posse wouldn't overtake him. He didn't want to shoot anyone—least of all Tom Miwald. Tom was a good fellow. He'd been mighty decent. But he was the sheriff, and he must do his duty. "He believes I shot Hambly," Buck muttered, "and with the evidence he's got, I wouldn't have a chance in the world. But I didn't shoot him—and I'll be damned if they'll ever hang me for something I didn't do. They might shoot me—but they'll never hang me."

The rain ceased, the lightning flashes paled, and the thunder became a mere rumbling in the west. Buck pulled the big black down to a running walk—a smooth gait—a pace that eats up the miles and leaves a lot of horse.

Dawn broke and he pushed on, his eyes searching the broad expanse of bench. Cattle grazed here and there in small groups, and at a spring hole in a coulee he flushed a stallion with his harem of mares and their colts. The roundup was over and the cowboys would be blowing their money in towns, or breaking horses on the ranches. A man might ride for days without encountering another rider this time of year.

He watered the horse and drank his fill at the spring. Toward noon he felt hungry and tightened his belt a couple of holes. Mountains showed—blue and dim in the distance ahead. He was impatient to reach them. Here on the bench a rider could be seen for miles. It would be easier to dodge pursuit in the mountains.

The sun hung low in the west when Buck encountered the first rolling foothills. He was hungry—good and hungry. A small bunch of cattle were feeding in a coulee. Taking down his rope, he tied onto a yearling, busted it down, and cut its throat. Working swiftly he cut out a juicy steak, and roasted it over a tiny sagebrush fire. The meat was good. Even without salt it was good, and he roasted another. Then,

trampling out his fire, he cut more steaks, nested them in his slicker behind the cantle and rode on.

When darkness fell he dismounted, cut a length from his rope, twisted a set of hobbles, and turned the black loose to graze. The night air was chill and he slept fitfully. The ground was warm, but even his saddle blanket and slicker failed to keep out the chill night air. With the first hint of dawn he caught up the horse and rode on.

The black seemed impatient to go and Buck held him in. "Sonic horse," he said, stroking the glossy neck, as the big animal strained eagerly against the bit, ears cocked forward.

ROUNDING a bend in the coulee he was following, Buck pulled up sharply and stared at the canvas covered camp wagon drawn up beside a waterhole. Sheep were blatting and beginning to get up off the bed ground. Smoke was rising from the stovepipe that protruded through the rounded canvas top. Buck was on the point of turning and slipping away unobserved when a dog leaped barking from beneath the wagon, and a man looked out through the doorway. As Buck rode up the herder swore at the dog which slunk back under the wagon.

"You et?" he asked. Buck replied in the negative. "Light an' eat, then. Grub's ready. Thought first you was my new camp tender."

"I'm hunting horses," Buck said, as he dismounted and climbed into the wagon.

The man filled two bowls with oatmeal, and when that was gone, he fried two thick slices of ham, produced some baking powder bread, and filled the cups with coffee. "Never seen a camp tender yet that was worth a damn," he grumbled. "I'd ait to be'n moved three days ago. Either they go off on a drunk an' fergit to fetch grub, er they don't move a camp till the grass is all et off fer five mile around an' the sheep's got to run all the mutton off 'em to git a bite to eat. Be a good thing if the damn coffee-coolers would have to herd their own sheep fer a while—mebbe they'd hire a decent camp tender."

Buck grinned. "Same squawk the herders make down in Texas," he said. Then added

hurriedly. "I was talking to a fellow from there just the other day. Could you spare a little salt? I might not run onto those horses for a couple of days, yet." He wanted to ask the man about a pass through the mountains, but decided against it. If Miwald should come this way there was no use putting him on his trail—let him guess which way he went.

The terrain became more and more rugged and the big black seemed more and more eager to push on. To Buck it looked as though the mountains formed an impassable barrier. He debated whether to turn back to the lower level and skirt them. Surely there must be a pass somewhere. But a pass would mean a traveled trail, and the chance of meeting someone. There might even be ranches along the trail. Maybe he could find a divide. The horse seemed more and more restless—more eager. It seemed almost as if he knew where he was going. "Maybe he does know," Buck muttered. "All right, old-timer—if you know your way around, you can take over." He gave the horse his head, and hour after hour the animal forged on, crossing ridges, following deep ravines, climbing higher and higher.

Late in the afternoon Buck realized that the horse was following a trail—a faint trail, dim and evidently long unused, but undoubtedly a trail.

At sunset, after a long climb, he passed through a deep notch, and realized that this was the divide. He dismounted and led the horse to a small grassy plateau, unsaddled and hobbled him. For a long time he stood taking in the grandeur of the mass of jumbled peaks and rolling hogbacks of the north slope of the range. Then he built a fire in the shelter of a grove of lodgepole pines and roasted a huge portion of steak. This time he had salt.

He grinned to himself as he rolled a cigarette, and drew the smoke into his lungs. If Miwald ever found this pass he'd sure know he'd been some place. For the first time since the morning Joe Smart woke him up in the bunkhouse he felt safe. That seemed a long long time ago.

It was cold on the ridge, colder even than his camp in the foothills, and Buck collected a pile of dry wood and lay close beside his fire. He slept better than he had

the night before. Waking only occasionally to toss on more wood.

All the next day the big black held unfalteringly to that dim trail. It was only at long intervals that Buck could tell it was a trail at all. Toward evening they were among the foothills, and as darkness gathered the horse topped a low ridge and halted abruptly before a wire gate.

Buck's eye followed the fence which barred the coulee, and disappeared over a low ridge in either direction. Dismounting, he let the horse through, and closed the gate behind him. As he mounted, the horse headed down a small creek. Buck pulled him around and, riding into a grove of cottonwoods a short distance away, dismounted and hobbled the animal. "If we're coming to a ranch I want to hit it in daylight," he muttered, "when I'd have a chance if things didn't go right." He built a little fire and roasted the last of his meat. As he had done the night before, he collected wood and kept his fire going.

When he awoke in the morning the big black was gone. He walked to the edge of the thicket but the horse was nowhere in sight, although the grass was lush and plentiful along the little stream. Other nights the big black had fed close to camp. Buck wondered whether the animal had slipped his hobbles. "Oh, well—this must be a field, or pasture of some kind. I'm sure glad he didn't pull out before. I'd have had a hell of a time getting through those mountains afoot."

Buck walked downstream. He had proceeded perhaps a mile when he rounded a bend and halted abruptly. There on the bank of the creek a hundred yards away stood a low log house, evidently of several rooms. Beyond was a log stable, and beside the stable was a haystack, and a pole horse corral. Standing beside the corral fence was the big black.

It was a small spread. He noted that the curtains in the windows gave it an air of neatness. Smoke curled lazily from the stovepipe, and as Buck started on the door opened and a man stepped out. He took a couple of steps toward the stable, halted abruptly, and stared at the big black that stood nickering and rubbing noses with a couple of horses in the corral.

When Buck came up the man was strok-

ing the black's neck and talking to him. He glanced at the hobbles and then at Buck.

"Your horse?" he asked.

Buck nodded, noting at a glance that the horses in the corral bore the same brand as the black, a Crazy BE on the left shoulder. "Yeah," he answered. "Got him from a fellow named Bill Hambly—a cow-poke down south of here."

"You've got a horse, there, brother. I raised him from a colt. Sold him to Hambly a year ago last fall. Didn't think Hambly would part with him."

"He thought a lot of the horse—ran into a bunch of hard luck and had to let him go."

"I hated to let him go, too," the man said. "Wouldn't of, except I figured Hambly needed him worse than I did. He worked for the Flyin' H horse outfit over east of here and he got onto some crooked work the ramrod was up to—easin' colts through the mountains on a secret trail an' sellin' 'em down along the railroad. Hambly tumbled to the racket and followed him through, one time. The boss must have found it out, because a few days later someone took a shot at Hambly that put a couple of holes through his hat when he was ridin' the foothills.

"He knew that some of the other Flyin' H riders was in on the deal, so he figured the odds wasn't right, an' he better get to hell out of the country before he got dry gulched. So he slipped over here an' bought Nig off'n me, an' pulled out. Then in the spring the Flyin' H got wise to the racket, an' the ramrod high-tailed about four jumps ahead of the sheriff. Some of the Flyin' H boys told me he figures Hambly turned him in—wrote a letter about it, or somethin'. Anyway he ain't be'n heard from since—an' good redrance. He run all the other nesters an' little ranchers off the north slope, except me. Figured the fewer folks there was in here, the less chance there was of someone gittin' onto his racket, an' reportin' it, I guess."

BOTH men turned at the sound of hoofs and the next instant a rider bore down on them, six-gun blazing. At the sound of the first shot the rancher dropped flat and rolled under the lower rail of the pole corral. The big black reared and whirled,

plunging clumsily away, his hobbled forefeet kicking up the gravel. Buck's gun was in his hand and he fired twice as the rider pulled up, sharply, flung himself to the ground, and using his horse as a shield, fired again. Buck felt a hot searing pain in his left side and he spun halfway around at the impact of the blow as a bullet tore through his cartridge belt.

The horse was rearing and plunging as the man fought to keep behind him. Again Buck fired, aiming at a leg that showed beneath the belly of the horse. The man went down, bridle reins in one hand, gun in the other, as the horse circled him vainly trying to break away. Buck fired twice more at the man on the ground before he could bring his gun to bear, and threw his own gun open to reload. But there was no need to reload. The man lay very still and his horse, bridle reins flying, was galloping off down the creek.

The rancher opened the gate and stepped from the corral, just as another rider dashed around the corner of the house, gun in hand.

"Drop that gun!" Miwald cried, pulling his horse to a stand, his own gun covering Buck.

Buck dropped the empty gun to the ground. "Okay, Tom," he said. "You've got me, I reckon. Glad it wasn't you I had to shoot. You used me all right. But at that, I'd shot it out with you if my gun wasn't empty."

The rancher eyed the horseman who had dismounted and picked Buck's gun up off the ground. "What the hell's comin' off here?" he asked. "Chargin' down on a man in his own dooryard?"

"It wasn't you we were after," Miwald replied. "It was this man. I'm the sheriff of River County, couple of hundred miles south of here. The dead man there was one of my possemen. We've been trailin' this

man for the last three days. Shot a fellow named Hambly, and then broke jail in Riverton."

THE rancher scowled at Buck. "So that's the kind of hard luck Bill had, eh?" he said, a note of contempt in his voice. "That's how you come to have his horse?"

The three walked over to where the dead man lay. Suddenly the rancher stooped, rolled the body onto its back and stared into the upturned face. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "Posseman or no posseman this damn scoundrel got what was comin' to him, at last!"

"What do you mean?" Miwald asked.

"I mean that there lays what's left of the crookedest, orneriest skunk that ever rode a range. His hair's black, now, instead of red. An' he's grow'd a mustache an' dyed that, too. But he can't fool me! Not with that scar runnin' back from the corner of his eye, he can't. I was there when his horse went down an' throw'd him ag'in a sharp corner of rock. It was only a mile or so down the crick an' we fetched him here an' my woman fixed him up right there in the house—sewed it as good as any doctor. She used to be a nurse."

"Are you sure?" Miwald asked. "This man was foreman of a big outfit down in our county."

"Foreman of one here, too—till they got onto him. Then he skipped out. You bet they don't come no crookeder than Charlie Olds."

"Charlie Olds!" cried the sheriff. "Charlie Olds! Why that's the name Hambly kept repeating just before he died. I was trying to get him to tell me who shot him—and he kept repeating the name 'Charlie Olds.' There wasn't no Charlie Olds that we knew anything about, so I thought he was out of his head."

The rancher's glance traveled from Buck's face to the face of the sheriff. "It might be," he said, "that you've be'n trailin' the wrong man. Olds tried to drygulch Hambly once before. That's why Hambly pulled out."

"But the evidence—it all points to Buck Summers, here. Motive and all."

"Olds had a motive, too," the rancher said. "Hambly had got onto his racket of runnin' off Flyin' H colts. That's why he tried to drygulch him. Then after Hambly



was gone, the outfit got onto his game, and some of the Flyin' H boys claim Olds blamed him for tippin' 'em off, an' he swore he'd get Hambly, if it was the last thing he ever done. If it was me that was sheriff, what with Hambly namin' Olds, an' all, I'd figure mebbe my evidence wasn't so good, after all."

Tom Miwald nodded, slowly. "By God, I believe you're right, at that. It was hard to believe that Buck, here, would gun a man down without giving him a chance to draw. But the evidence was all against him. I'll check up on this Olds, and if it's like you say I'll sure turn Buck loose." The rancher picked up the dead man's gun. "The bullet that killed Hambly—did it go on through him?" he asked.

"No. He was shot through the chest from in front, and the bullet stayed in. The doctor figured it was lodged against his spine. But the shape Hambly was in, he knew it was no use trying to take it out."

The man handed the sheriff the gun. "In that case, whilst you're checkin' up, you might dig out that bullet. Olds' gun is a forty-one caliber. The only one around these parts. I rec'lect he used to have to send east for his ammunition. That ort to let this young fella out—unless his gun was a forty-one, too."

Miwald smiled. "No, Buck's gun is a forty-five. I've got a hunch I'll be handin' it back to him when we get to Riverton." He glanced down at the dead man. "This fellow went by the name of Slim Jones, down our way. He got a job this spring as foreman of the Lazy E outfit. I rec'lect now, that he seemed mighty anxious to serve on this posse. Prob'lly figured that he wasn't safe as long as Buck was alive—that an innocent man has always got a chance to prove his innocence."

The rancher nodded. "Yeah, an' he shore wasn't takin' no chances on leavin' him alive, the way he began foggin' it up as soon as he got in range."

The sheriff frowned. "I told 'em to take Buck alive, if possible. We split up. I sent the rest of the boys through Eagle Pass, figuring that was the only way he could get through the mountains. But Jones, here—or Olds, or whatever his name is—insisted that he could track the big black down. He did,

too. Tracked him right to Buck's camp in the cottonwoods inside your fence. When we found his saddle we figured Buck was hunting his horse, and Jones suggested that I ride up the crick and he'd ride down, and one of us would be sure to find him. I hadn't gone far till I heard the shots, so I got here as fast as I could. Crook, or no crook, Jones was some trailer. Damned if I knew even an Injun could follow a trail like he did—across the dry bench, where I couldn't even see a mark, and through the mountains where there was nothing but rocks most of the way."

The rancher grinned. "He wasn't doin' no trailin'. Hell, he couldn't track a beef herd through the snow! He wasn't nothin' but a tinhorn gambler an' a horse thief. He figured the chances was Buck, here, would give the horse his head, an' he knew the horse would hit for here where he was born an' raised from a colt. Hambly rode him through the mountains on that trail when he pulled out. An' as for Charlie Olds—he'd ort to be able to foller it—he's be'n runnin' stolen colts over it fer years."

"Well, I'll be damned," muttered the sheriff, and pointed suddenly to Buck's belt. "Why in hell didn't you say you was hit? Look, there's blood on your shirt, and half the shells in your belt are smashed!"

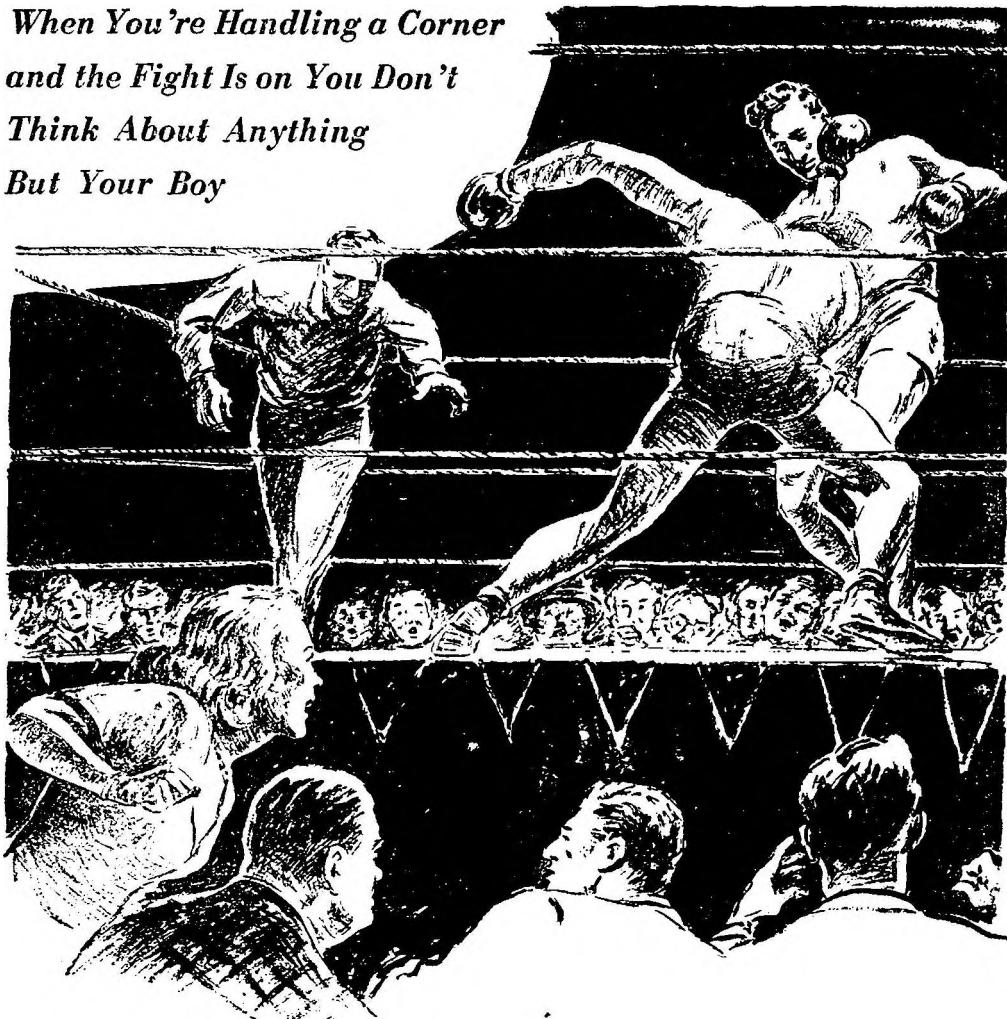
Buck grinned. "Just a scratch," he said. "I guess those shells saved me. It felt like someone hit me with a maul. It don't amount to anything."

"Come on in the house an' let the woman look at it," the rancher said. And as they turned toward the house, Buck glanced at Miwald.

"There's just one favor I'd like to ask," he said. "When you sell off Hambly's stuff, I want to buy the big black."

The rancher grinned. "He's yours, son," he said, "if you'll settle Hambly's I.O.U. I've got it here in the house. Hambly had to clear out before he got drygulched, an' he was about broke. He paid me what he had an' I took his I.O.U. for the balance. Hambly was square. He'd have paid it if he'd lived. Twenty dollars, it is—I've got the I.O.U. in the house. That's dirt cheap for a horse like Nig. But I sort of figure you've earnt him. I'll make out the bill of sale while the woman's fixin' you up."

*When You're Handling a Corner  
and the Fight Is on You Don't  
Think About Anything  
But Your Boy*



## THE BEAUTY AND THE BOXER

By WILLIAM R. COX  
*Author of "The Dude Turns Left," etc.*

WE SAT in the Nine Club and I said, "You have been away three years and now you have got a bum gam and still you want to go against Lefty Harker." I said, "Sometimes I wonder about you, Ad. Lefty is almost a middle and you are a light welter and besides Lefty will kill you on account of Lily."

Ad just sat there with that look on his face. When I was managing him, three years ago, he was the same, except he did not have those lines around his eyes. He was

a dark-skinned character, with black hair. His chin was hard and could take it.

I said, "Where have you been and how did you hurt your heel?"

"That," said Ad, "is neither here nor there, especially here. I want to fight Lefty and I will fight him for nothing at all. You to get your cut on the gate."

I said, "Have you got potty, Ad? Have you been mixing in this war and got that hysterical thing like Nobby Joe, who walks around thinking he is General MacArthur?"

Ad said, "Dibby, you are my manager.

I never had another. But if you do not wish to handle this, Dibby, I will go elsewhere. Get me Lefty Harker, any place, any time."

He got up and went out of the Nine Club, limping a little in the left leg. He was a medium-sized guy with a double-breasted suit and nobody looked twice at him, not even Nobby Joe.

I sat and thought about Ad Wilkins, the Jersey Skeeter. He had been a very good welter, at that, although not of the elite. He had beaten a lot of good boys and only Lefty Harker had really conked him, after Lily Carte had ditched Lefty for Ad—and had then left Ad for Rolly Ronder, the tobacco fellow with all the folding money. The funny thing about it was that Rolly had joined the Air Corps and had come in on a wing but failed with the prayer and it was then discovered that his money was all in trust and Lily was now singing nights at the Nine Club. . . .

Lefty Harker was around, like always. He was the Fighting Cop. He was a jerk if I ever saw one and I could not blame Ad for wanting to take one more crack at him—only Lefty could really fight. He had that hook which only a converted southpaw can dish out from a natural right-hand stance and he was beating on the door of the champ, and only the war kept him from taking over the throne room. It was not sensible for Ad to come back from whatever mysterious land he had been in and take on Lefty without a warm-up.

OF COURSE nothing has been sensible since the war began. Even characters like Nobby Joe went and got kicked punchy. It was the Japs who did it to Nobby. He came over to my table carrying a beer and he looked all right, a great big goon with one of those short haircuts and a red face. He had been a trial horse heavy. He said:

"I still think we gotta take 'em from East China. I gotta do my duty, ya know. But I still think . . ." His voice sounded as if it was coming from a paper bag. Sort of fuzzy and foggy.

I said, "Nobby, you are dead right!"

He blinked and looked at me with his big, round blue eyes, like a child. "Wasn't that ole Ad Wilkins talkin' to you? He never gave me no tumble. What's he want around here?"

I said, "He wants to fight Lefty Harker," not that Nobby would get it, but because I had to talk to someone, just to hear my own voice and see if it made sense. "He will fight Lefty for nothing—any place, any time."

Nobby screwed up his face and leered at me. "Haw! And they think I'm screwy. hey?"

"Exactly," said I. "Look, Nobby, when Lily comes in will you tell her Ad's in town?"

He said, "Lily? Oh, yeah, huh? I remember now. Lily and Ad and Lefty. Long ago!" He wrinkled his brow and I left him there, struggling with his memory. He worked for Charley James, who ran the Nine Club, which is a smallish trap in the Sixties, a profitable place because the fight crowd likes it. Charley was once a light heavy and a good one and he kept his beer pipes clean and sold California champagne in silver buckets just like it was the McCoy and did not charge eleven bucks a split. He charged nine, which made the Jacobs Beach mob think it was getting a bargain—and provided his joint with a name . . . the Nine Club.

I went downtown towards Mushky Mike's, remembering as I went that Charley James besides being a pug had also been one of the mains in the old rackets, and a very handy fellow with brass knucks, not to mention firearms. And now everyone knew that Charley was on the make for Lily Carte Ronder, who was singing at his club, and everyone therefore laid off Lily, which left her nothing to do but run around with Charley. Personally I would rather stay home and knit than be seen around with Charley James.

Mushky Mike was running the Acme Club, a brisk fight emporium over on the Avenue and he certainly thought I was crazy.

I said, "We will take five per cent. The commission needn't know and you can hand back the difference under the table to Lefty and the crook Porky, his manager."

Mushky said, "It'll pack the joint, all right. But Ad Wilkins has not showed here in a donkey's age. Can he make a fight?"

"He can and will," I said. "You know him. A gamer boy never walked."

"He don't walk—he limps," said Mushky.

"I seen him. Lefty will slay him, and you know it."

"That is our business," I said. In fifteen minutes we had it arranged for a week from Friday. I left Mushky wondering whether he had got a great bargain or a bad show which would give his club a black eye.

There was a lot to do. I had to get Ad a new license, see that the doctor passed him, arrange stuff with the Commission and get a place to train. I did not see Ad until two days later, in the Nine Club.

LILY was singing and the place was crowded. There was plenty of champagne going around and Charley was chewing a cigar in a corner, watching Lily and every once in awhile looking over at Ad with thunder clouds on his puss. I sat down with Ad and Lefty Harker came in with little Porky, his manager.

Lefty is no longer on the Force, having capitalized on his reputation to open a shamus office. He wears loud green suits and could not catch a cold in a refrigerating plant, but he gets some business and of course he makes plenty of scratch in the ring. He is thick-eared, a big-mouthed very tough potato with no manners and he also sits down and stares at Lily.

I said, "This place is becoming uncomfortable and besides you should be training. Let us go away from here and talk business."

Ad said, "You got him, didn't you?"

"I got everything but good sense," I admitted. "You train at Sealy's Gym."

"Don't worry about that," Ad said. "I got a little errand or two for you, Dibby. Here is a list of stuff I want to buy. Tomorrow you can go over on Sixth Avenue and shop for me. And whatever you buy, make a note of where you get it. Here is some money."

He gave me some bills and a list. I looked over the stuff and it was Greek to me. Mostly radio parts, and some blankets and razors and electric motors and things like that. There was even some items like "four dozen knives, forks and spoons, plain" and "dishes, heavy." I said, "This don't make sense and neither do you."

Ad said, "You can keep the change. And if you can't buy anything, you can keep all the dough."

Lily finished singing and went straight

back to the table where Charley James waited for her. The lights went on bright and Lefty spotted us. He got up and came right over, little Porky worrying along behind him. He said loudly, "Well, I signed to give you another shellacking next week, you simple jerk!"

Ad said, very quiet, "Thanks, Lefty."

"No hard feelings," said Lefty. He thumbed towards Lily and Charley. "We both got the gate. What's the use bein' sore? I'm just beating you for the records this time."

Ad said, "You're not beating me again, Lefty." He did not raise his voice, but that square chin was solid as a rock.

Lefty laughed and shrugged and turned away. I saw Nobby Joe's head sticking through the door from his position in the lobby where he made himself useful at greeting people, helping the check girl, the doorman, or even cleaning out drunks. I wondered how a punchy like Joe, discharged from the marines for brain trouble, could do even those simple chores, but he seemed all right. Lefty went past him and out into the street.

I said, "This is all getting too mysterious for me. I wish you would tell me what in the hell is going on!"

Ad said, "Just a return fight with Lefty."

I said, "That is a lot of hay. You are going out of your way to cause trouble. If you go over there . . ."

He was already limping across the room. I had seen it in his eye when Lefty went. He was going after Lily. I watched him draw up a chair and saw the expression on Charley James's ugly puss and my stomach turned over.

It is one thing to fight in the ring and be brave with characters like Lefty Harker. It is another thing entirely to mess with men like Charley. In the bottom of the River, their feet stuck in cement, are several gents who tangled with Charley James in the old days, and this is a fact known to one and all, that it CAN happen again. Yet Ad sat down and reached out his hand and touched Lily and I heard him say, "You're as beautiful as ever, Beautiful."

There is one thing about Ad, he does not ever make broad statements. Considering everything, the years on Broadway, the marriage with Rolly, who was not a quiet chap,

the nights singing in the Nine Club and the days running around with Charley James, Lily is still handsome. She is not a slim girl, but the flesh is well scattered on her.

She smiled at Ad. Charley did not shake hands nor change expression. Ad called a waiter and I saw the bucket wheeled out and the champagne cork popped. Charley naturally did not make any objection to Ad spending nine bucks for the native giggle water. It looked like a party to me, so I got up and exited.

That night I laid awake and puzzled about things and looked over the list Ad had given me and nothing made sense. I wished the war was over and the fight business back on its feet and that I had a heavyweight prospect with no geezer in him and a good, clean right hand. I fell asleep still dreaming. . . .

THE next night I was soaking my dogs in hot water when Ad came home. We were staying in an apartment on 135th, a little three-room trap and I was feeling pretty fairly comfortable.

I said, "Those were very queer errands you sent me on, Ad. I picked up a few things. But most of that stuff is strictly off the market."

Ad said, "Yeah. I know." He went out and looked at my collection of condensers, radio tubes and small motors. I had put tags on them with the prices and where I bought them. He examined it all carefully and said, "What is this note about Cantle's Warehouse?"

"A couple of people told me I could maybe get the stuff there, second hand," I said. "That was before I picked up the tail."

Ad said in a sharp voice, "Someone tailed you?"

"Uh-huh," I said. "A plainclothes dick. He never said anything. Just followed me around."

Ad said, "Did you shake him?"

"Nope," I said. "I just took a cab and came home and put the junk in there. I have got fifty bucks change."

"It's yours," said Ad. "Cantle's Warehouse is over on North River, ain't it?"

"Yeah. It is a small place, ramshackle and dirty. You wouldn't want anything out of there."

Ad said, "You did a good job, Dibby. But I don't want you to be tailed around

town. Maybe we had better train for this fight."

I looked straight at him. "That blond hair on your shoulder does not look like training to me. Charley James is a man who will do away with any necessity for training or anything else if he gets his mad up. Why don't you get hep and tell me what makes, Ad?"

He shook his head. "Just let us take care of this fight. I need to get Lefty into a ring. I may be a little off in my timing, so get me some good quick boys and we will go to work tomorrow at three sharp."

I said, "No road work?"

Ad said, "My heel is all right. It won't stop me."

But he could not run. He stripped well, better than I had ever seen him. He stepped around, using his right leg a lot, just balancing on his left. He kept an elastic bandage on the heel and no one saw the scar, not even me.

Everybody in Sealy's Gym was curious. We had Sailor Kid and a couple other good ones and Ad boxed them. He was not as fast as before, but he was socking pretty well, I saw at once. He had a new one-two, very swift. I told him to vary it and try the body and he did and that helped.

THERE was one thing—he trained hard. When he was with me before the war he had never been one to train, but now he took to it good and worked like a nailer. The time whirled by and I guess we did as good a job as was possible and his timing seemed to be fair enough when the day came for the fight.

He did not go to the gym, of course. We were sitting around our apartment, cutting up old touches when the door opened without even a knock. Charley James walked in.

I said, "Hello, Charley. What makes? I thought you were no longer interested in fights."

Charley perched on a chair heavy enough to accommodate his heft. He chewed off the end of a cigar and looked at Ad. He said, ignoring me, "What's your damned game?"

Ad slumped in my favorite red leather chair and cocked one of his heavy black eyebrows and said gently, "I'm a fighter. You ought to know that. A leather pusher. A

pug. A member of the busted beak profession."

Charley said, "You been snooping into my business. If you think you are muscling back in on Lily, you are more than a damned fool. I am advising you to stay out of my way, Wilkins. That is good advice. It could save you a lot of bad trouble."

Ad said, "You must be into something you do not want known around. You always were a man for being into things, Charley. And as far as Lily is concerned—you know that old story. Why don't you go home and count your bottles of champagne, Charley?" Ad was grinning at him.

CHARLEY got up off the chair. He touched his pocket and I could see something heavy hanging in there and was measuring the distance to the door of the next room. Charley said, "I gave you the warning."

He lumbered out of the apartment. I eased back in my chair and wiped the sweat off my forehead. I said, "Right now neither of us could get a quarter's worth of insurance from any smart company. What in hell is the idea?"

Ad said, "It is a long story. Later I will tell you about it. I do not want to get you in any more trouble, Dibby. You have always been a pretty square one. Just keep your nose clean and maybe you will see some fun before this is over."

"If I only knew what in hell it is that is going to be over," I mourned.

Ad stretched and said, "I have a short date. I will meet you at the Acme. Don't worry about me and don't bet on Lefty to win!" He grinned again and went out. How he knew that I had been tempted to risk maybe a hundred skins on Lefty I cannot imagine, but my conscience was clear. They were offering fives and Ad was not that bad against Joe Louis, even, and I took a couple of yards of that. It is always a fine, virtuous feeling to bet upon your own man although not always highly sensible.

The thing about Ad was that I was fond of him, I guess. When he had been fighting around the City and going with Lily Carte he was a fresh young kid, full of ginger and wise cracks and very pleasant to have about. He put life into every party and was a generous soul with a buck. We had made

a nice hunk of moola together and when he left town it was well-known that it was on account of Lily and Nobby Ronder and nobody blamed him a bit.

He was different now, of course, but I had some idea about where he had been, not the locality exactly, but I knew he did not get a crippled heel boxing in strange places. I figured he had been warring and did not want to talk about it. So I sympathized with him, even when it appeared that he was more screwy than Nobby Joe.

I sat there, and I got to thinking about Charley James and Lily Carte Ronder, and the more I thought the more I did not like Ad's parting statement, "I have a short date."

Now I was very frightened of Charley James, make no mistake. I had personally known two lads who went down in North River on cold, foggy nights, and although they had not been particularly nice chaps, neither had they been villains, but merely folks on the wrong side of a small war between racketeers around the Big Town. It was said further that Charley could out with his artillery and shoot the warts off a frog at seven hundred yards and no one had ever disproved that to me. I sat and shivered for a moment.

Then I got up and went into my bedroom and ruminated around until I found my old gat. It was in pretty good shape and I rubbed the excess oil from it and slipped a fresh clip into the magazine. I put it in my topcoat pocket and went downstairs. I rode the subway downtown and got off.

It was only about seven when I walked into the Nine Club. As Charley never did serve a decent meal, there was no one in the dining room except a couple from Oshkosh or somewhere who were scared to try the Stork or 21 and Nobby Joe, who was sitting in a corner tearing a herring. There is also no sign of Ad, which surprised me a lot, since his date must be with Lily, I had no doubt.

I went out to the bar and bought a beer and Nobby Joe padded out and stood beside me, sucking his teeth. After a moment he said, "Island hoppin' is definitely a waste of, now, manpower and the Chinks have already got the airfields and we should move in and sock 'em and rock 'em from East China."

"Fine! Fine!" I said. "Are you going to run for President, too?"

"I figger that if a gee minds his own business he will get along better in this woild," said Nobby Joe. "An' I bet you I can out-shoot you with that roscoe you are packin'. You are not the type guy to pack a rod, Dibby. Whyn't you go find Ad and take a snooze before the fight?"

"Has Ad been in here?" I said, shifting my coat so that the automatic did not show so plain.

Nobby Joe looked past me, at the back room, and his eyes glazed over. He said foolishly, "What I know, huh? I don't know nuttin'!"

I turned and saw Charley James and Lefty Harker and Porky coming towards the bar. I stepped quickly past Nobby Joe, hoping they would not spot me behind his bulk. I went past the bar, through a door into a kind of office. I doubled back and found myself in a hallway which led to the kitchen, a dim place, used only by the help.

**T**HREE was another door and I tried it gingerly, not being quite sure where it led. It stuck, then opened wide. There were stairs leading down and I heard Charley's heavy voice somewhere near, I took the stairs.

There was a lot of stuff in that cellar. There were cases of champagne and whiskey and there was a pile of boxes against the wall. It was more than Charley needed to run the Nine Club, I figured. I took a gander and the boxes were all stencilled "Cantle's Warehouse."

The main thing right then, of course, was to scram out of there. Ad was not around and I had made a mistake. I started looking for an outside exit.

I came around the corner of a small mountain of the boxes and saw a sliver of light. I started for it. There were stone steps and a cellar door with a strong padlock.

I started looking around for a crowbar or something. I was pretty anxious, because I had to meet Ad and get to the fight club. It was dark in the corners and I lit a match to see into the tool box.

The match went out and someone took hold of my arm. I tried to get the gat out of my pocket and jump away at the same time.

Lily Carte Ronder's voice said, "Don't be scared, Dib."

I stammered, "What in the world are you doing down here?"

She said, "Never mind that. Follow me."

She went over to the cellar door and got a key out of a red satchel-like pocketbook she was carrying. She wore a deep red dress and red shoes and was made up for the street. She opened that padlock and said, "I couldn't lift the doors very well. Let's go."

I lifted them. We were in an alley alongside the Nine Club. We went out on the street and there was a cab waiting. The driver gave me a queer look. Lily got in and looked at me and said, "Hurry!"

There was a shout behind me. I turned and saw Charley James and Lefty and Porky on the walk in front of the Club. It was Charley who yelled. He said, "Come back here, or I'll—"

I got the rod out about then. I pointed it at them and saw them dive for the shelter of the Club. So I climbed quick like a rabbit into the cab and said, "Downtown. To the Acme Club."

The driver did not answer, but he clamped down on that accelerator and we went away from there.

After about five blocks Lily said, "Ad looks good, don't you think?"

I grunted.

She said, "I took some of that fives. Did you get some of it?"

I said, "What were you doing in that cellar?"

"Lefty and Charley and some others have bet their last dollars on this fight, laying the odds," she said. "Wise money. . . . Don't you hate wise money?"

**T**HE lights were coming on and she looked as beautiful as a technicolored glamazon and almost as tall. I said, "I always thought you were a nice skirt, even when you ditched Ad for that Rolly Ronder. After all, Rolly had the scratch. But now you play around with Charley James and hide in cellars and I do not know what to think about you, but it is not complimentary."

"That is too bad, Dibby," she said softly. "I do not want you to think ill of me."

I said, "Always you give with the ten-dollar conversation. I know you are an edu-

cated dame, but that does not tell me why you are hanging around with stuff from Cantle's Warehouse."

Her voice changed. She said, "What do you know about Cantle's?"

"It is a crummy place," I said. "Everything about this deal is crummy. I do not like any part of it, even the fives I have got on Ad!" I said, "Although he is not that bad against Lefty, I will admit."

"That is right!" she said triumphantly. "That is what I said! Even if he loses, fives is too much!"

The cab driver stopped in front of the Acme Club. I paid him and he gave me the change in quarters and again he looked at me hard. He almost forgot to take his tip, too, which certainly pointed him up as a queer one. I took Lily in the front way and it was very early, but she said she would find her seat and look at the prelims, as she was a real fight fan and even liked the three-round boys.

I went back to the dressing rooms. Ad was not there. I fumed and fretted with Eightball, the jig who always handles the towel in my corner. An hour went by and I was sweating like a steer.

It was almost ten when Ad came in. He was limping pretty bad and out of breath. I screamed at him but he just said, "I had a little date. . . . Don't make the bandages so tight, Dib."

He was actually humming when we went down to the ring to meet Lefty Harker. I got him between the ropes and on the stool and Harker was already there, mad because we had made him wait. I looked down at the ringside, getting my bearings.

Charley James was sitting next to Lily. Nobby Joe was alongside Charley. Three or four other characters of the same stripe were scattered about, as though they watched over Charley and all his doings. That was the wise money crowd.

I said, "I rode down with Lily. She is betting her dough on you."

Ad gave me the old grin. He said, "I know . . . I know. . . ."

We got through the formalities fast. Lefty had that swagger. He also had a left hand like a maul. I scrouged down in the corner and looked up and said, "Dust him off, kid. Keep him away and give him that one-two."

Ad winked. He looked past me, at Lily

and Charley James and the mob. The bell rang. He went out, limping a little.

When you are handling a corner and the fight is on, you do not think about anything but your boy and how he is doing and what he had better do next. I squatted and watched, my ticker going like Whirlaway in the stretch.

Ad saw Lefty's plan right away. Lefty just walked forward, quicker than usual, trying to take advantage of Ad's limp, throwing those short hooks to the body. He had a straight right that was not bad. He looped a few to Ad's ribs and then stuck out the right.

Ad should have pivoted, but he didn't. He went inside, hung the hook on the peg and traded. It was no dice.

Five times Lefty hit him with the right. They were all clean punches. Ad began to bleed and Eightball moaned, reaching for the styptics. I yelled at Ad, but he kept going in, weaving, boring. The sixth time Lefty got to him with the right he went down. . . .

I caught his eyes as he lay there. I gave him the count at "five." He nodded, still grinning. He rolled over and was on one knee.

He was up. Lefty came rushing. Lefty was a bull with horns already blooded. He was carrying the fight every step, slamming Ad all over the premises. Any minute I expected to see him hang the water bucket upon Ad's skull.

The bell ended it. Ad came back and sat down. I patched him. He was not breathing hard and his heart action was all right. I said, "That is NOT the way to fight Harker. You have got to decision him to win. You KNOW that!"

Ad said, "It'll be all right."

I tried to put the mouthpiece in place but he shook his head. He said, "Never mind the damn thing. And don't worry too much, pal."

The bell rang again. Ad got up and limped out, brisk and happy as though he was winning. Lefty came roaring like the hinges of hell. Ad sidestepped the rush and pinned Lefty to the ropes with a quick push. Ad's left nailed Lefty on the mouth and his right came over in the one-two.

Lefty did not like it. He glared and swung and bulled to mid-ring.

Ad stopped moving. He leaned close and said something to Lefty. Then he sunk the right into the body, using all his strength.

Lefty's mouth opened and his knee came up. Ad just stood off, then, laughing. He poked the straight left into Lefty's face. He got Lefty off balance before he could recover from that terrible right to the belly and stabbed his eye closed.

I was howling like a madman on a drunken spree. I was kissing Eightball. I was doing dance steps out of Astaire's book.

The round ended. I said, "That is the ticket, chum! Box him! Make him eat leather!"

Ad looked up at me and said, "You think he's got geezer in him, Dibby?"

"I would not be surprised," I said. "I never saw it in him before, but tonight he may have a bit of geek. What did you say to him?"

THE whistle blew and I had to get down. Then Ad went out again. He deliberately boxed. He would sink that right to the body, using his new leverage that he had learned after his heel got hurt. Then he would step around easily and box and he would cut Lefty to little bits.

After the seventh I said, "He has been ready for two rounds. Why do you not stack him among the dirty dishes, Ad? One good right to the chops. . . ."

I got down. Ad went out and boxed. They wrestled and Lefty's mouth opened again. He was in pain. They were directly over me and Ad held him a moment and said, "It's yours and Charley's, ain't it? And the kid's in the clear? Will you talk, Lefty?"

Harker tried to answer but Ad filled his mouth with leather. Lefty floundered and went down. The referee counted to nine. Lefty got up, pale and dazed.

Ad slid in again. He held Lefty up with his right and belted him with his left. The referee hesitated as blood spurted from Lefty. My eyes bugged out. Never had I seen harder short punches, not since Dempsey. Ad's face was a livid mask and he just held Lefty there, tearing him apart with lefts.

I saw Lefty break, then. I saw him nod and blurt something through broken teeth. I saw Ad shove him away and drop the

merciful right at last, rounds after he could have slammed it home.

Lefty fell like a bag of oats and that was the end of the fight. Ad came boiling back to the corner and said, "We got to hurry!"

We went back to the dressing room and Ad yanked on his clothes as fast as a quick-change artist and we went outside and there was a cab right there, waiting, which was very strange indeed. I stared and it was the same guy brought Lily and me to the Acme.

I said, "We didn't even get paid off! I need that five per cent!"

Ad said, "Never mind that. Can you use that gat?"

I had almost forgotten the gun. I took it out and slipped the safety. I said, "Now?"

Ad said, "You were in the cellar of the Nine Club. You saw the stuff. Don't you know what it is?"

I said, "I guess I know, all right. I figured it out during the fight."

Ad said, "There may be a little trouble. We want to get them all. I'm worried about Lily. . . . Will you look after her while we are cleaning up?"

I said, "If you say so, but I found that twist down in the cellar with the stuff and I'm not sure about her."

He said, "Look after her. . . ."

We got out at the Nine Club and I started to pay the cabbie, but Ad yanked me indoors. I had the rod ready, expecting Nobby Joe to be on deck, but the big goof was not around. The band was playing and people were dancing.

Ad plunged through the door like one of those footballers and I went after him. We got into the hall, but the cellar door was locked.

Ad said, "Step aside and let Hod handle it."

I stepped aside and it was that taxi driver. He had his hat off and was carrying a short hatchet. He looked at the door and then tapped it in a certain way. It opened.

We went flying down. I saw Charley James come up from one of the cases marked "Cantle" and he had two guns, one in each hand. I tried him with a shot and he spun around. There were other characters, and they had Lily stacked up against the champagne cases, tied and gagged.

I had my orders, so I made a bee line for

Lily. I got in front of her and Charley James was still rooting and tooting with the two guns, or anyway one of them.

Nobby Joe came from nowheres. I started to shoot him through the head, but Ad banged into me and I staggered and missed. Nobby reached over the top of some boxes and grabbed.

He got each of Charley's wrists. He picked the heavy man up off the floor and swung him. The taxi driver and Ad were banging the other characters around something fierce.

I cut Lily loose with my pocketknife as Nobby let go of Charley, who flew through the air leaving his rods in Nobby's mitts. Charley landed among the nine-dollar champagne and the breakage was awful.

Lefty Harker seemed without fight, crouching in a corner with Porky. There was some noise upstairs and two cops came down and several other quiet, well-dressed young fellows who carried small machine guns. The taxi driver said, "You can take the whole crowd. I think Harker will confess. James owns the property and the Cantle Warehouse belongs to him and Harker and Porky. The ring seems pretty well busted."

THEY toted away the whole crowd. Charley James was nursing a sore arm where I nicked him. He yelled as he went, "I'll come back and get you, Dibby Dye! You and that stumble bum and that smart broad. . . ." Then they yanked him out.

I sat on a case of champagne and said, "What did they steal and when did you turn cop?"

The taxi driver laughed. Ad said, "He's the cop—F.B.I. When Nobby and me were in the Army, we knew his brother, who was a lieutenant. We are under fire together. I get this heel hurt and he lugs me in." Ad has got Lily in his arms and she seems somewhat pleased to be there in spite of the crowd.

I said, "You were in with Nobby?"

"In the Pacific," nodded Ad. "This Lieutenant Davis had been a supply officer, only he was short supplies. He thought he was disgraced. They simply could not find scads of stuff he had signed for and was responsible for. It was awful. Lieutenant Davis was a fine officer. . . ."

The taxi-driver-F.B.I. fellow said, "My brother got killed, but Ad and Nobby never forgot his worry about the missing supplies. When they were invalidated out, they found that all over the country the Army was missing supplies. So they began to inquire around. They come to us and offered to help."

Ad said, "That Lefty Harker and his fake detective agency. . . . But Lily put me onto that. She got it from listening to Charley James. They were all in it together. They stole Army supplies, sold them through various stores. We got the storekeepers earlier, when you thought I had a date with Lily, who was keeping an eye on things here."

"Cantle Warehouse is full of the stuff," said the taxi driver, very happy. "My brother is cleared!" He went out with the other characters from the cops and the F.B.I.

I said, "Whew! I am glad to see them go!"

Lily and Ad were clinching all over the place. Lily said, "Why, Dibby? They are on our side? Why are you glad to see them go?"

I stuck my old gat back into my top-coat. I said, "Because I have not got a license to carry this old rod which I brought home from the last war, that is why! And now will you come upstairs and let me buy some of this nine-dollar champagne, on account of I win a great deal of cabbage on this fight tonight? . . . And will you tell me why you must fight this fight, Ad?"

Ad said, "Oh, sure. . . . I was working under cover and fighting is my business. And I thought if I hammered Lefty and sprung what I knew on him and hammered him some more that the geezer would come out in him and we could be very sure about everything we guessed. . . . And besides, Dibby, don't you remember I like to fight!"

I got up and kicked over the case I was sitting on and it was not nine-dollar champagne at all, but Pomery 1925. I pick up a couple of bottles and we went upstairs.

Nobby Joe sat besides me and said while Lily and Ad necked right in public, "They thought I was nuts! Haw! Why, anybody knows island-hoppin' ain't as good as attackin' them from East China!"

I said, "This is where I came in. . . ."

*Well, the Sergeant Concluded Grimly,  
It Was Murder!*



## SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

By H. S. M. KEMP

*Author of "A Little Flutter in Fur," etc.*

**I**N ALL his five years at Keg River, Doc Allen had never had a better excuse for going on a binge than he had right now. Doc, by buying a dollar ticket, had won eleven thousand dollars in the Big Six Lottery run in Buenos Aires. Doc had only the haziest idea what the lottery was all about, but there was nothing wrong with the money itself. He had cashed the draft in town a few days before; and now, here he was back at Keg River, with a hang-over that told eloquently of the spree he'd been on.

But there was an aspect of the matter that worried Doc Allen. As he explained

it, he had bought two tickets out in Edmonton some months before, one for himself and one for Windy Young; and whereas he had cleaned up big, Windy wouldn't even get his dollar back. Doc figured the decent thing to do would be to split with Windy.

But those at Keg River laughed at him. To them, Windy was a pain in the neck. For not only was Windy pretty much all mouth, but he was ignorant, self-opinionated and a blowhard to boot. Oddly enough, any sympathy to spare went out to Doc Allen. Doc was fortyish, a big and powerful man, but with prematurely gray hair and pouches under his eyes. He looked what he was, a

down-and-out professional man, a busted medico whose curse was hooch. He seemed to have some sort of an income, for he played around with a fox-ranch a few miles up the Keg River. But eleven thousand dollars would only hurry him into his grave.

Then, as though to prove that luck ran in cycles, Windy Young struck it rich. He barged into Luke Day's trading store within a week of Doc Allen's return from town and rolled three hot-looking mineral specimens onto the counter.

Windy, shortish and built like a bull, hooked thumbs in his belt, rolled his quid and grinned, pig-eyed, at Luke Day. Luke was examining one of the samples.

"Yuh see?" crowed Windy. "That's the stuff y'get when an honest-Injun prospector goes out for it!"

Luke grunted. This was a dig at Fred Marsh. Marsh was a one-time bank-clerk who, according to popular legend, had been mixed up in a shady financial transaction in the city and had to come north quickly for his health. He was tall, dark, more than a little hawkish-looking.

"Sure!" jeered Windy. "Yuh can't learn prospectin' outa books. Y'gotta do it the hard way—like me!"

The sample had passed to Fred Marsh. The one-time bank-clerk seemed nettled, but he kept most of the rancor out of his tone. "That's rich-looking stuff, all right."

"Why not?" grinned Windy. "I wouldn't bother with nothin' else!"

He seemed so pleased about it that Doc Allen thought it time to get in his word.

"I'm glad you did strike it, Windy," he told him. "Picking up eleven thousand as I did on our sweepstakes tickets, I felt rather badly about you."

Windy stared, then grinned. "Yuh hit the jackpot? Good boy! I'd oughta make that chisellin' Joe Blake in the poolroom gimme m' dollar back. But anyways," he went on expansively, "what's eleven thousand? Chicken-feed! This stuff of mine'll net me a million!"

The trader, Luke Day, gave a thin smile. "Only a million?"

"Mebbe a couple of 'em," Windy boasted. "And I'll be good to you. This stuff come from Moosehorn Lake."

Fred Marsh frowned. Luke Day said, "You wouldn't be kidding us?"

"Not on yer life!" stated Windy. "Moosehorn Lake, I said. Only," he grinned, "Moosehorn is kinda big."

For some moments little more was spoken. The samples were scrutinized, and passed around again. Then Windy spat through the open doorway and wiped his stubbled jaws.

"Y'know what I'm gonna do? Now that I've struck 'er, I'm gonna promote me own company and work 'er myself. Lotsa guys wouldn't do that; they'd sell out and let some other feller skim the cream. But not Windy Young. He ain't that soft. No sir! And if you birds wanna get in on the ground floor, now's the time to say so."

Luke Day, lean, hard-looking, gave a grunt. "The genuwine wild-cat. Same old baby, but longer claws."

"Wild-cat?" Windy looked hurt. "Lemme tell yuh somep'n, Luke—there ain't no wild-cat about this. The vein is solid; she runs back half a mile—" He suddenly shut up then grinned again. "But why'm I wor-tyin'? You guys wouldn't find her in a hundred years!"

Fred Marsh cut in. "But if you've staked her—and run your lines—"

"But I never run no lines," grinned Windy craftily. "Somebody might come along in a plane, see the lines, and beat me to the recordin' office. Right now, there ain't much to show where I made the strike; and as fer the lines, I'll run 'em when I get back from town."

"Well, you needn't worry about me," observed Fred Marsh. "I've got all I can handle down the river."

"Them claims of yours?" Windy spat. "They're good enough, I guess; but they ain't in the same class as them of mine."

**L**UKE DAY, the trader, gave an eloquent sniff; but Doc Allen merely smiled. "Go ahead with them, then," he told Windy. "And if your assay report turns out as good as you think it'll be, I'll take a chunk of your stock myself."

"Why not?" Windy wanted to know. "When yer luck's in, crowd 'er. And yer luck seems to be in right now."

"Yeah," Luke Day nodded wisely. "You'll crowd her, Doc, if you sink her into a hole in the ground. Well?" he suddenly demanded of Windy Young. "That all you

came in for—to blow about this new strike of yours?"

"No." Windy growled the word. Back in his thick skull was the knowledge that Luke Day held considerable contempt for him and wasn't slow to show it. Luke was young, and also rawhide tough. "No," Windy growled again. "Gimme a packet of cigarettes—Wings. And," with a show of temper, "I'll be smokin' dollar-cigars less'n six months from now."

"Metbe," said Luke Day carelessly. He threw him the cigarettes. "In the meantime, see if you can dig up two-bits for them."

AS WINDY went out, two other men entered the store. One was a Mounted Policeman, Sergeant Dan Kennedy; the other a tow-headed gangling individual, Pete Schmidt.

Grinning at Luke Day, the sergeant remarked that the Big Wind was once more in town. "And what's it this time?" he suggested. "The strike he's going to make, or the one that got away?"

"Neither," supplied Doc Allen. "He's struck it rich."

Dan Kennedy, one of the Black Irish with Great War ribbons on his chest, seemed faintly amused. "Real rich?"

Doc shrugged. "To a layman, the samples look all right."

"If he didn't swipe 'em some place," put in Luke Day. "And as he says he's going to promote a company, it's likely he did."

The sergeant pulled himself up to a roost on the counter and began to roll himself a smoke.

"So," he mused, "Windy clicks at last. Did he say where he made it?"

"He said, all right," Luke Day assured him. "Claims he hit her on Moosehorn Lake."

"His samples looked good," offered Fred Marsh.

"Well?" asked the policeman. "What're you waiting for?"

Doc Allen shook his head. "Not for me. Not in my line."

"Forget it," growled Pete Schmidt. "Windy and me was all over Moosehorn last summer and ag'in this spring. Formation's ag'inst findin' anything much up there. Anyway, who'd bust a gut on the say-so of Windy Young?"

For a moment Sergeant Dan Kennedy watched the smoke of his cigarette curling upward; then he turned to Pete Schmidt.

"Seems like, Pete, you broke up your partnership too soon."

The tow-headed man shrugged heavy shoulders. "I never broke up no partnership. But when a guy lets you see you ain't wanted I pull out." Schmidt turned to Luke Day. "When did he make this strike?"

"I wouldn't know," said the trader. "He never let on."

Schmidt added heavily. "U-huh. I see."

Just then two Indian girls came into the store. With much blushing and giggling, each bought a gaudy silk handkerchief. As they went out with their purchases, Luke Day mentioned the wedding of the Chief's son that was coming off that evening.

"Heard about it," said the sergeant. "We must go down and take in the dance." He slid from the counter, bought a can of coffee and a tin of jam. "In the meantime, though, a feller must eat."

MID-SEPTEMBER now, the sun was beginning to drop; and by the time Dan's supper was cooked and eaten and the dishes put away, night had fallen. Then into the whitewashed detachment staggered Windy Young.

Windy was drunk. That is, in a slap-happy sort of way. He almost fell into a chair, hauled a crock from his pocket and squinted at its contents against the light of the lamp.

"Jus' inch er two lef', Sarge. Jus' li'l drink fer you. Here!" he invited. "Down 'er!"

Dan Kennedy took the bottle, removed the cork and sniffed at the contents. It was good stuff, bonded, and legal; but after Windy had slobbered at the mouth of the bottle for nine-tenths of its contents, Dan Kennedy wasn't fussy about the dregs.

"Nice of you and all that," he told Windy. "but you're too late. Just had supper; and I can't drink after meals."

"Yeah?" Windy seemed amazed at the confession; but after a moment spent in absorbing it, he drove home the cork, shoved the crock into his hip-pocket and became groggily confidential.

"Yunno, Sarge, ol' Windy's struck 'er at last. Yes, sir! Struck 'er high, wide and han'some! Lookit m' samples!" He hauled

chunks of rocks from several pockets and offered them for inspection.

While Dan Kennedy gave them the once-over, Windy elaborated on his future—the recording of the claims, the organizing of the company, the activities emanating therefrom. Then he somewhat startled the policemen by informing him that he had taken on a partner in the scheme.

"Partner?" echoed Dan Kennedy. "Who?"

"Well, I don't mean jus' a partner," hedged Windy. "But a sorta one. I'll pay him wages till the thing gets to runnin' right; then, if he sticks, he gets a cut like the rest of us. Fred Marsh."

Dan scowled. "Fred Marsh? What does he know about mining?"

"Nothin'." Windy giggled. "But he don't hafta. He's a banker, see; he knows figures. So there y'are; with me as the prac'le man and Fred as seccetary, we kin get organized right away."

The policeman gave a grunt. "You're nuts." After a while he added, "What other deal you make with this figure-wizard, this Fred Marsh?"

"At's all," stated Windy. "Mind yuh, it took a bit of coaxin' to get 'im. Yuh don't find a real edjicated seccetary in every rabbit-hole up here. But I sold him at last; and he's goin' out with me in the mornin'."

As the sketch of his plans unfolded, Windy's head seemed to clear. But he nipped this disaster by another pull at the bottle.

"Well, okay," Dan Kennedy told him. "I'm glad to hear of it. Between the two of you, you'll make a million. Now va-moose; I've some work to do."

WITH Windy gone, Dan sat down to his typewriter. A chance to get letters off to town didn't crop up every day at Keg River. Besides which, he had some monthly accounts for Divisional Headquarters that were somewhat overdue.

But there were others who thought along the same lines as Dan. Doc Allen dropped into the detachment as Dan was finishing, to borrow a postage stamp from him. Doc had an order he wished to send to town with Windy; and though he said nothing of it, the sergeant was prepared to wager that the order would be on the liquor-store.

"Wouldn't have bothered you," said Doc Allen, "if Luke Day had been around. But his place—store and house—is shut up tight."

Dan obliged with the stamp, and told Doc Allen that if he was heading for Windy's, he'd go along with him. He had mail himself for Windy.

"We'll take a look-see at the dance," he suggested. "On the way back."

There was no need to conjecture as to where Windy would be camped. When in the settlement—and it was fairly often—Windy pitched his tent in a spruce-grove a hundred yards or so beyond Luke Day's store.

Their road ran through the Indian village, and off towards the fringe of the bush was a house that was larger than the rest and brilliantly lighted. From it came the squeal of fiddles and the drumming of feet.

"Whooping it up," grinned Dan. "We'll sure look in on 'em."

But they didn't get as far as Windy's; for approaching Luke Day's store they found the office in the rear lit up and the front door of the place open. At a suggestion from the sergeant, the two walked through to the lighted office. Luke Day was working at his desk.

"Back, are you?" remarked Doc Allen. "And what's this—overtime?"

"Yeah; making up an order for Fred Marsh to take to town. It's just too bad," growled Luke Day, "that you wouldn't sell me that old typewriter of yours. I'm no good with a pen; and I've got to write everything out by hand."

"Guess you can have it," soothed Doc. "But what's all this about Fred Marsh going to town?"

Dan Kennedy informed him of the new partnership existing between Fred Marsh and Windy Young. "I told Windy he'd probably make a million," grinned the sergeant. "He may; but it'll be a million for somebody else."

"If Fred Marsh is going to town," he began—when the man himself burst in on them. He came running, face working with emotion.

"Quick you fellers!" the man panted. "Windy—up at his tent!"

Day sprang to his feet. Dan Kennedy scowled. "Whadya mean—Windy?"

"His head!" gulped Fred Marsh. 'It's all bashed in!"

Dan Kennedy shot a glance at Doc Allen. "Let's go!"

Luke Day grabbed a flashlight, and the four ran out. There was no need to ask useless questions, no time for them. The thing to do was to get there quick.

But in reality, there was no need for the haste. Tonight, tomorrow, a year from that time, it would be all the same to Windy Young.

For Windy was dead.

**H**E LAY sprawled on his face, and his head was so much pulp. But Doc Allen and the policeman rolled him onto his back, so that the doctor might feel for the heart. Fred Marsh stood by, dry-lipped, staring.

Dan grabbed Luke Day's flashlight and swung its beam around. The tent was pitched and in front of it were the ashes of a fire. In fact, Windy almost lay in the ashes. Dan asked Doc Allen, "How long ago was this?"

"You mean how long has he been dead?" Doc Allen flexed the arms, ran his hand beneath the man's shirt. "I'd say five minutes; ten at the outside."

"What?" Dan exploded the word. "While we were coming down from my place?"

"Perhaps while we were in the store."

Dan stood up, looked as though he wanted to say something, then thought better of it.

"Well," he observed at length; "if he's dead, there's nothing much we can do. Where'll we take him?"

Luke Day suggested the tent, the doctor one of Day's warehouses.

"How about the powder-magazine?" Dan Kennedy put in. "It's away from the rest and can't be hurt."

"All right," the trader agreed. "Shove him in there."

Fred Marsh was given the flashlight; Dan Kennedy, Luke Day and Doc Allen carried Windy Young. With the body placed on a bench in the powder-magazine, they came out again and the sergeant padlocked the door. They stood there for a moment, saying nothing. Stars, a faint breeze through the spruce, and from the village, that rhythmic, muffled pounding.

"No need to spoil their fun," Dan Ken-

nedy grunted. "The rest of us, we'll go up to Luke's house."

In strange silence the three other men took seats in Luke Day's front room while Dan Kennedy himself sank heavily into a chair at the table. The sergeant's face was grim, the line of his blue-shaved jaw hard and stubborn.

"Well," he said at last, "it's murder, all right. And what does anybody know?"

Doc Allen, pulling a folder of matches from his pocket, lit a cigarette. "You know all I know, I think."

Dan Kennedy nodded. "But what about you, Marsh?"

Fred Marsh was again normal. "I was talking to him before supper. Matter of fact, I had supper with him."

"Supper?" echoed Dan Kennedy. "Him? Soused to the gills?"

"I mean," explained Fred Marsh, "I had the supper—with him. It was this way: he came down to my tent and said he wanted to talk to me. I said I was thinking about getting supper, but he wanted me to go up and eat there. At his tent. Well, I did. I made tea and cooked some bacon but he didn't want to eat anything. He wanted to talk."

"And he made a deal with you—to be his secretary or something."

"That's right," admitted Fred Marsh. He added, "Who told you?"

"Nothing mysterious about it," grunted the policeman. "He did himself. And he also said he had to 'coax' you with the idea. Just what sort of a sales talk did he give you?"

"He had to convince me he had something worthwhile. Then he had to talk wages. I told him I'd half-promised to give Luke a hand in the store while the Indians were pitching-off, but he said Luke could rustle someone else. Finally, I decided to give his job a try."

"I see," said the sergeant. "But your story's only part of it. What did he tell you about the claim itself?"

"Nothing. Except that it was up on Moosehorn Lake."

**D**AN gave a grunt. "He just told you the stuff was up on Moosehorn, showed you some samples and offered you a fair wage. That was enough to make you quit

the prospecting, where you might have made a strike of your own?"

"Sure." Marsh added, "And if his strike didn't turn out to be any good, all I was out is my time."

Dan looked at the man levelly, then shot him a question. "When did you see him last?"

"About half-past eight. I left him at his tent and said I'd see him in the morning."

Dan glanced at his strap-watch. It was now ten-fifteen. "Well, where've you been since then?"

"Around," said Marsh. "When I left him I went back to my own tent. I read for a while, then I suddenly remembered that I didn't know what time Windy wanted to pull out in the morning. I went up to the dance, figuring he might be there, and when he wasn't, I went back to his camp again. And well—" Marsh concluded lamely, "you know what happened."

"I wish I did," grunted the policeman. "But I know what you're trying to put across."

He turned suddenly to Luke Day. "Well, Luke; what've you got to give us?"

The trader turned. "Me? Why, nothing. I've been around here all night."

"Yeah?" Dan Kennedy seemed interested. "Then how did you know that Marsh was going to town with Windy?"

"Oh, that." Luke Day seemed to brush the question aside. "Windy came down for a box of matches and told me about it."

"But Doc was down, too," Dan pointed out. "He wanted to get a stamp off you, but you weren't around."

"When?" demanded the trader.

"About half an hour ago. And you weren't here."

"Half an hour ago?" Day turned to Doc Allen. "That why you asked me if I'd got back—just now in the office? Yeah, I was away; but it was for just such a little while I'd forgot about it. I slipped down to Fred's tent to see if he'd take that dry-goods order out for me. Fred wasn't there; and I'd just got back when you guys walked in on me."

DAN pondered a moment. With what Luke Day had told, it seemed as though he'd collected about all the evidence he'd get at the moment. He had to admit that

it wasn't very helpful, but there was the chance he might do better further afield. So leaving the others, he borrowed Day's flashlight and retraced his steps to Windy Young's tent.

The tent had been pitched in a haphazard manner, but already there was an air of permanency about it. Windy had cut and strewn a few spruce-boughs inside the place, and on these he had piled his blankets and belongings. Items of clothing hung from the further tent-pole, and the grub-box, dishes and cooking utensils were stacked in a corner. As he eyed these, Dan Kennedy allowed that Fred Marsh's story of having supper at Windy's was probably true. Soused as Windy had been, he could have stacked nothing. Neither would he have bothered to straighten the place at all.

But if the sergeant was seeking a clue to the identity of Windy's assailant, he was sadly unsuccessful. The trouble was, he told himself, he didn't know what he was hunting. He had already observed that there was no more sign of a struggle outside the tent than there was in it; but the matter-of-factness of the place seemed to point to one of two conclusions: Windy was either clubbed from ambush, or he was struck down when he was least expecting it.

Stepping outside, he spent considerable time in going over the actual scene of the murder. The pine-needles and stubbly grass were flattened, and there was a small dark puddle of blood where Windy's head had lain; but that seemed all. There were no clear-cut footmarks, nor any sign of the murder-weapon. Dan reasoned that whoever the murderer had been, he would have had sense enough to take the weapon away with him; so to go to much trouble on that score seemed a sheer waste of time.

At length, feeling somewhat thwarted in this the first round of the case, the sergeant went back to Luke Day's. But at the last he decided not to go in. Instead, he struck off for the house where the dance was being held.

Arriving there, he stood for a moment in the doorway, looking on. So far as action, jubilation and perspiration was concerned, the dance was a howling success; and Dan Kennedy didn't feel like saying anything to spoil it. But just inside the doorway he saw Pete Schmidt sitting in a chair and

looking on. It happened there was another spare chair beside Schmidt, so the sergeant ducked through the doorway and took it.

Schmidt turned, raised his eyebrows when he saw who his neighbor was. "Couldn't keep away, eh?" he suggested.

The sergeant drew his feet under him to prevent them being mashed by a couple of whirling dancers. "That's right," he nodded.

The affair was colorful enough with the hanging lanterns, the bright dresses of the girls, the wide Stetsons and the gaudy neck-scarves of the men. But Dan was thinking of another scene, in the spruce-grove beyond Luke Day's store.

"Where's Windy?" he asked.

"Dunno," said Schmidt.

"Seen him?"

"Yeah; soon after sundown. He'd got a crock some place and was loaded for bear."

"Where was he then?"

"Visitin' around."

Dan nodded. "And where've you been all night?"

"Me?" Schmidt frowned at the personal switch in the conversation. "Why, here. At least, since it got dark." He looked steadily at the policeman. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Anything wrong?"

Dan Kennedy lowered his voice, although in the general uproar there was little need of it. "Only with Windy," he replied. "And somebody killed him."

"Good gosh!" exploded Schmidt. He stared even harder at the policeman. Then, more levelly. "You wouldn't be foolin'?" he suggested.

Dan shrugged. "The guy that got Windy wasn't fooling."

Schmidt shook his tow head. "I dunno a thing about it."

"Nobody does."

Schmidt asked for details of the affair. Dan gave him what he thought it fit for him to know. "So you see why I asked you where you were tonight."

"Yeah. And it's lucky for me that I was right here."

"And of course, you *were* right here? All the time?"

"Well, no," Schmidt admitted. "I moved about; went out once in a while for a breath of air. Yanno how it is."

"Yeah. I know." Dan Kennedy looked around him. "Must be fifty-sixty people in

here and the Lord knows how many more outside. But I wonder," he told Pete Schmidt, "how many of 'em could go alibi for you."

Schmidt's eyes narrowed. He chewed on the edge of his yellow mustache. "Feller wouldn't think of that."

"Think of what?"

"What you was sayin'—about how many of 'em could go alibi fer me." Schmidt seemed perturbed at the thought; but then he brightened. "Mebbe *all* of 'em didn't see me here all of the time, and mebbe *none* of 'em saw me here all the time; but I'm good 'n' sure nobody saw me no place else."

"Of course," agreed Dan. "Because you were no place else."

"Sure."

"Then you haven't a worry in the world."

FOR some moments thereafter the sergeant tried to give some thought as to what his next move would be; but in the rollicking din of the place, thought of any kind was impossible. So he told Schmidt that he would be seeing him in the morning, stood up and went outside.

There he found three men together, looking through the open doorway at what went on inside. They were Doc Allen, Fred Marsh and Luke Day. Day spoke first.

"Saw you talking to Pete Schmidt. Tell him about Windy?"

"Sure," answered Dan.

"What does he think about it?" asked the trader.

"Don't know what he thinks about it. I was asking him the same question that I asked you—where he was tonight."

"And where was he?" asked Fred Marsh.

"Right here. And he's got an alibi, of sorts."

"More than we have," observed Fred Marsh.

"I don't need one," Luke Day said stoutly. "Oh," with a touch of belligerency, "d'you figure I beefed the guy?"

"Keep your shirt on," grunted Fred Marsh. "If a man went out to do murder, an alibi would be the first thing he'd think of."

"Would he now?" Dan Kennedy gave Fred Marsh a peculiar look. "Dunno, but mebbe you've got something there."

"Even though," put in Doc Allen, "an alibi would be a handy thing to have."

Nothing much was said for a moment, then the sergeant spoke.

"There'll be an inquest tomorrow at ten. You fellers be around?"

It was an order, not a suggestion, and Luke Day recognized it as such. "I ain't apt to sell up and pull out over night. Sure I'll be around."

"How about you, Doc? Going home to your foxes?"

"I was; but not now. I'll camp some place, and go home after the inquest tomorrow."

"Come up and stay with me," offered Dan. "There's lots of room."

But after the other two had left, Dan Kennedy had an idea.

"Guess, Doc, you won't be staying with me, after all. You're welcome to the detachment, but I won't be there." He went on to explain that he wanted no tampering with Windy's effects, neither did he want the scene of the tragedy gone over till he could do so himself. So leaving Doc Allen at the detachment, he grabbed his sleeping-bag and headed back again for Windy's.

He figured he wouldn't sleep; there was too much on his mind. But after an hour of muddled puzzling, he decided to cross no bridges till he came to them; and finally dropped off.

But he was up early, closed and fastened the tent and went home. But before he left he gave the place another thorough going-over, but found nothing further than he had done the previous night.

Doc Allen was up and had breakfast cooked for both of them. Immediately thereafter, they set about getting the inquest lined up.

The affair came off at ten, with the resident missionary, the Reverend John Haynes—who was a Justice of the Peace—acting as coroner. Following their swearing-in, the jurymen paraded to the powder-magazine to view the mortal remains of Windy Young. After that, they returned to the police detachment.

The place itself was full, but none of those present could shed any light on the actual killing. Doc Allen gave a rather technical description of the injuries Windy had suffered, such injuries being caused by an instrument which Dan Kennedy knew too well would be described as "blunt." Luke

Day, Fred Marsh and Pete Schmidt told what they knew, and in less than an hour the proceedings came to an end.

The verdict was murder, committed by a person or persons unknown.

Haynes, the parson, seemed more upset about the happening than anyone else, and the fact that Windy had been eased out of the picture whilst under the influence of liquor seemed to be his special worry. Dan Kennedy, however, couldn't just see it.

"Windy was no angel, Padre," he objected. "I can't say he was ever in jail, but I can't say he shouldn't have been. And as for being pickled — well, Windy wasn't headed for the Happy Hunting Grounds anyway; so if he was scuppered at the time he got it, he never knew what hit him."

Haynes shook his head in admonition. "Dan," he smiled; "I'm afraid you're hopeless."

In a moment, he asked, "And what are you doing about the funeral? I suppose you'll be burying him here."

Dan figured they'd have to. "I don't know if he had any relatives; but we certainly can't keep him till we find out." He said he would see about having a coffin made, and he would notify the parson when his services would be required.

He left then, and picking up a couple of Indians, made his way once more to Windy's tent. The tent would have to be struck and the whole of the dead man's effects stored in the police warehouse until such time as a proper disposition could be made of them.

But nearing that end of the village, he saw, in the distance, Luke Day come from the direction of the spruce grove and go into his store. The sergeant frowned. Luke Day had lost no time in getting away from the inquest and up to the camp-site, and he wondered what it meant. He almost decided to drop into the store and ask the trader about his action, but then decided not to. Even if he got the truth, he doubted that he would accept it as such; and if it were the truth, he might have little means of proving it. No, he'd coast along for a while, and keep an enquiring eye on Luke Day.

So he superintended the transfer of Windy Young's belongings and then went in search of old Charlie Brent. Charlie was

a halfbreed who was handy with a hammer and a saw, and he made arrangements with the man to set about building a coffin.

But before he started, Charlie wanted to get an idea of Windy's requirements in the way of a casket.

"I got lumber," he pointed out; "but up in this country, lumber costs money. So I'll just make it to his fit."

That meant another journey to the powder-magazine, but as Dan wished to remove anything that Windy might have on him in the way of valuables, he went down; he and Charlie Brent.

BUT once again his path seemed to cross that of Luke Day. Beyond the store, he met the man carrying a case of shotgun shells on his shoulder.

"I ran out of twelve-gauge," Luke Day explained. "Had to bother Windy to get some."

"Yeah?" Dan cocked an eyebrow. "But I had the key of the magazine."

"One of 'em," Day corrected. "They come in pairs. Still, you'll find your man where you left him."

"It may have been because he was now generally suspicious, but when he entered the magazine, Dan's first glance was at the body of Windy.

It was on the low broad shelf as it had been before, but its position was altered. Dan had crossed the dead man's hands across his chest, with the left hand on top of the right. Dan remembered that too well; for Windy wore a cheap and heavy signet ring on the third finger of his left hand, and the ring had been showing when the jury-men filed out. Now the ring wasn't showing, for the right hand covered it.

"What the devil," Dan muttered, "goes on here?"

Old Charlie turned. "Eh? Goes on where?"

"Nothing," grunted Dan. "There he is. Get busy and measure him."

As the old halfbreed set about his chore, Dan looked around. On other shelves were cans of gunpowder and cases of various-sized ammunition, but Windy had his shelf to himself. Which meant, that in procuring the case of twelve-gauge, Luke Day had had no need to go near Windy at all. Yet he had done, must have done. Windy's body

had been tampered with, and Luke Day was the only man who could have entered the place since Dan and the jury had left.

Disgruntled with something he failed to understand, Dan waited till old Charlie got through. Then he told the halfbreed to beat it and began his own bit of work.

Windy was dressed in breeches and shirt and high boots. The pocket of his shirt held the half-empty packet of Wings and a small mineral sample. From the side-pockets of the breeches, Dan produced a few coppers, a knife, a handful of matches, and yet more samples. With this collection placed to one side, Dan seized the body by the shoulder and the belt and rolled it towards him. The hip-pocket was the next focus of attention; but as he went to dip into it, the policeman spotted a couple of matches lying on the shelf.

Now matches didn't belong on a shelf in a powder magazine, and lying where they did, they had evidently fallen out of Windy's hip-pocket. To determine the fact, Dan lowered Windy, looked, and found that pocket and matches touched.

"Yeah," muttered Dan. "I begin to see."

He realized now that he wasn't the first man to give Windy the frisk. Somebody had been through the pockets before him. And when from this hip-pocket he produced Windy's wallet, he understood.

Luke Day—and it could be no one else—had been interested in the wallet. Possibly in somewhat of a hurry, he had not bothered to roll the body too thoroughly, had pulled the wallet out, searched it and rammed it back again, not noticing that the matches that had fallen to the shelf.

Dan nodded. It was all very plain, as far as it went. Luke Day had suddenly injected himself into the picture, though Dan didn't know the reason for it; and perhaps, between Luke Day and Windy Young the wallet might prove the connecting link.

Gingerly now, Dan ran the zipper around the wallet's edge so that the thing opened. It was of a good quality of leather, and inside were several page-pockets of heavy cellulose. Dan merely noted this, then closed the zipper again and folded the wallet away in his handkerchief.

With his search completed, the sergeant took inventory of what he had turned up. Matches, knife, cigarettes, a few coppers,

and three small mineral samples. Windy had had more samples than these when he had rolled into the detachment, but where they were now, Dan couldn't hazard a guess. However, Dan scooped the lot into his pocket, went out and padlocked the door.

Walking away from the place, he told himself that his trip had not been altogether in vain.

But there was one point on which he was not clear; Luke Day had been into Windy's wallet, but was the trader interested in the wallet or something else? Dan would like to have known just what Windy had originally on his person, but there seemed little chance of ever knowing this. However, when he came to the store again, he walked in.

He found Luke Day alone, opening the case of shells.

"What was the idea of frisking Windy?" he asked him bluntly.

Day frowned, blinked a couple of times. "Frisking Windy?" he repeated. "What d'you mean?"

"Aw, quit the stalling," growled Dan. "I know you did, so you might as well out with it."

"Dunno what you're talking about." Day shook his head. "You got me."

Dan suddenly said, "Gimme a bottle of sauce. Yeah, Worcester."

L UKE DAY seemed puzzled. He turned, reached the bottle down, held it for a moment before he handed it across.

Dan took it, said, "Now see here, Luke, are you going to answer my question, or are you going to put me to a lot of work? And work I mean bringing out your fingerprints on Windy's wallet and on this bottle of sauce you've just given me?"

It was a jolt for Luke Day. He frowned, and in the next second or two Dan could almost read the working of his brain.

"Yeah, well—" he admitted. "I'm on the spot, though no harm's done. Y'see, Windy owed me ten dollars; so I figured I might's well lift it off him as bother going through a whole lot of red tape."

Dan stared at the man. And knew he was lying. "Then why didn't you say so before?"

The trader shrugged. "No need to ask that. Windy's been murdered; and if I said

I'd been frisking him, well, it might look like I was—like I was mixed up in it."

"I see," said Dan, though he didn't. "And next time don't be a fool."

He paid for his sauce and walked out, and then wondered if perhaps he himself hadn't been a fool. He had wanted to catch Day flat-footed to get his reactions, and while he had got them, he had also shown his own hand.

But it was too late to do anything about the matter now, and when a few moments later he met Doc Allen, he had already decided to dismiss the matter from his mind.

Doc was on his way to the store, and he wanted to know if there was anything more he could do to help the policemen. Otherwise he'd pull out.

"Go ahead, Doc," Dan told him. "I need a lot of help, but not the sort you can give me."

"They've got to be fed. But I'll be back in a few days time, or sooner if you want me."

But when he reached his detachment, the matter of Luke Day and his interest in Windy Young was still the uppermost in the policeman's mind. He had Day's own admission of tampering with Windy's body and the wallet, but what Luke Day admitted today and what he might say tomorrow could be two very different things. To preclude such an eventuality, Dan got busy with his fingerprinting outfit and raised several good prints on both wallet and sauce-bottle and photographed them. The developing and the rest of it could wait; but now that he had a permanent record, Trader Day might have a bit of difficulty of wriggling out of the hole he was in.

Now Dan could turn his attention to the wallet itself. But there was little satisfaction in this. Luke Day had been into it ahead of him, and he was merely taking what Day had chosen to leave.

And it wasn't much. There were two dollars in bills, a registration certificate, a new but very dirty postage-stamp, and odds and ends of papers. These were counter-slips from Luke Day's store, the pencilled address of an assay company, and a crumpled trapping-license that should have gone in for cancellation months before. As in the case of the contents of Windy's pockets, there was nothing of great value, and, what was

worse to the sergeant's reasoning, nothing of any informative value at all.

"I'm getting no place," Dan told himself. "And why should I? Except for Luke mixing into things, there isn't a clue of any sort. All I know is some guy sneaks up to Windy's tent, wallops him over the bean and beats it. And out of that I've got to build a case."

He cooked his dinner, and over it wandered idly where Windy had obtained his liquor. Had the man been sober, the murder might never have occurred. But within an hour of finishing dinner, this was explained to him. Fred Marsh said he had been keeping a bottle for Windy since Christmas.

"Windy and Pete were on a drunk, and when they sobered up, Windy slipped me the crock. Said to look after it, as they'd had enough. I thought he'd forgotten about it—but not Windy!"

Well, that was that; and Dan didn't know where to go from there. He said to Fred Marsh, "Did Windy leave any samples with you?"

"No. Why?"

Dan was down at Marsh's tent, overlooking the river. Marsh was washing his dinner dishes. Dan squinted to the far shore.

"Nothing. Only they might be nice to have. Now Windy can't stake stuff, somebody else should. That is, if he could locate it."

Marsh said, "I'd take a crack at it. Only, well, how would it look? Suppose I did go up to Moosehorn, did strike sign of Windy and staked it, it'd look as though—well, it wouldn't look too good."

Dan glanced down at the man. "You figure on going?"

"May do, next spring. No need to turn my back on a fortune. Pete Schmidt'll likely try it, too. So will a slew of others, when news of the murder gets out to town."

Dan gave a bit of a grin. "Sort of funny spot to be in, eh? Still, if a feller's hands are clean, why should he worry?"

Marsh threw a wave of dark hair from his eyes. "I'm giving Luke a hand in the store for a few days; but you nail Windy's murderer, and I'll pull right out."

Later in the day, Dan ran into Pete Schmidt. Schmidt seemed to have the same sort of worry as Fred Marsh—he'd like

to take a burl at Moosehorn Lake, but what would a cop think about it?

"Moosehorn Lake?" Dan gave a frown. "Weren't you the boy who said he wouldn't go tearing off to Moosehorn on the say-so of Windy Young?"

"Yeah." Schmidt admitted it. "But I got to thinkin'. I'll have to winter somewhere, and the trappin' around Moosehorn shouldn't be too bad. And if the guy *did* hit somethin' worthwhile up there, I might just run across it."

"It'll be all right with me," Dan assured him. "Only I wouldn't want you to leave right away. Till I get this mess cleaned up, I want all my friends around me."

"You do, eh?" Schmidt nodded. "Okay; but I hope it won't be for long."

But just as the man was turning to go, Dan stopped him.

"About that liquor that Windy was drinking—d'you know where he got it?"

"No; wish I did," said Schmidt. "I'd get some myself."

"Maybe," suggested Dan, "it was a leftover from Christmas and that toot you were on."

Schmidt grinned. "Don't worry about that. We had half a dozen crocks between us, but when we killed the last one, Windy was still lookin' for more. He fin'ly finished off with Painkiller."

SO, MUSED Dan, as he walked away, there were a couple of good liars still around—Luke Day and Fred Marsh. Day had admitted lying concerning the wallet and Dan was prepared to bet that the story of the ten-dollar debt was a lie also; and Pete Schmidt's statement regarding the Painkiller seemed to place Fred Marsh in the same category as Luke Day.

But what of it? Except for showing that both men knew more concerning Windy's affairs than they were prepared to say, it did not link them definitely with the killing. On the other hand, they might know all about it; but hanging it on them would take a lot of painstaking work. Well, Dan was prepared for the work; but before he could proceed with it, two happenings came along that temporarily threw him out of step.

The first was the arrival of a plane with a load of freight for Luke Day.

Dan was at his detachment when it

landed, and he realized that here was a chance to send out the mail that should have gone with Windy Young. He got it ready and added to it a subsequent report, but when he reached the store to give it to the pilot, he found the plane unloaded and Luke Day himself ready to take the trip to town. The trader said he had short-ordered on some lines and was going out on a brief buying-trip. He'd be back within forty-eight hours.



The news caught Dan a bit flat-footed. His first reaction was that Luke Day was doing a bolt. But then he scouted it. Luke Day was certainly not as free and cordial in his manner since the policeman had caught him in his lie, but for the little that had passed between them, there was no necessity for Day to take it on the run. Not enough, at least, for the man to turn his back on a trading business that represented an outlay of anything up to ten thousand dollars.

So the plane left with Luke Day aboard; and ten minutes later the second interruption occurred. An Indian arrived from Lynx Lake with the harrowing story of one of his people going violently insane. That meant Dan had to leave his investigations while he followed the man back to Lynx Lake.

And, as he found afterwards, there was so little need for it. His insane Indian turned out to be a man who had died of pneumonia, and the insanity was merely a fit of delirium before the end. The man had died the day before Dan arrived, so that all remained was to obtain statements from the witnesses and instruct them what to do in a similar case.

But though five days had elapsed before Dan got home, things seemed to be in order. Luke Day was back from his buying-trip and was working with Doc Allen's old typewriter in the office, Fred Marsh tended the store, and Pete Schmidt was still on

hand. The latter had taken a carpentering job at the Mission and would be there at least another two weeks.

So, home again, the matter of Windy's murder came once more to the front. The rest of the village seemed to have forgotten about it and Dan wished he could forget it, too. The trouble was that if he didn't turn up something soon, Headquarters would begin to nag.

So, for three days, he continued his plodding investigation. Then on the fourth morning—which made it eleven days since the murder—something happened which banished Windy momentarily from his mind.

Following breakfast, he paddled upstream and set out a fish-net; and when he returned he was met by Fred Marsh, Pete Schmidt and Parson Haynes. They seemed to be awkward, nervous, but it was Fred Marsh who broke the news.

"It's Luke," he said. "He's shot himself—up at the house."

Dan scowled, stared at the man. "Luke what? Shot himself?"

Marsh nodded. "When I couldn't get into the store, I went up there. He's in the front room, slumped across the table. Got a gun on the floor beside him."

Without another word, Dan struck off. The others silently followed.

L UKE DAY'S house was locked, front door and back. The sergeant found this odd. Locked houses in the north were a rarity. But when he rammed a heavy shoulder against it, the front door flew ajar.

As Marsh had said, Luke Day lay slumped across the table. There was a blackened hole in his right temple and his arms hung limply by his side. The gun was there, too, but it was the man's own .38 caliber revolver.

Dan stood still for a moment in silent survey. The parson, Pete Schmidt and Fred Marsh flanked him. Then he moved over and put the back of his hand against Luke Day's cheek.

Apparently Day had been dead some hours. Dan found the limbs were stiffened, and the blood on the table-top was clotted. Then Marsh drew his attention to a folded piece of paper propped on the table against a couple of books.

The sergeant picked the thing up, opened it, and frowned when he saw it began, "Dear Dan."

He read on:

"I thought I was hard-boiled, but I'm not. Sooner or later you'll find out that I killed Windy, so I might as well go this way as any other. But while you'll find out I killed Windy, you won't know why. So I'll tell you. Ten years ago, down in Ontario, he ran off with a girl I was struck on. He never married her, though he should have done, and she died when the baby was born. If I had caught up with him then, I'd have killed him, but I guess I got over it. That is, until the other night. When I heard of this new strike of his and the money he would probably make, it finished me. He good as killed the only girl I ever thought anything of, and now he stood to make a fortune. Well, he didn't. I squared things for the girl, and now I'm squaring them for myself."

The note was typewritten, but it was signed, "Luke."

Dan read it through twice, then he glanced up to see the parson, Haynes, watching him expectantly.

"That a note from Luke?" asked the parson.

"Yeah. Telling me why he bumped himself off." Dan read it aloud. "But it's news to me that he and Windy knew each other in Ontario."

"I knew it," put in Marsh. "Luke told me, couple of years ago."

"And Windy," put in Schmidt, "told me when he was drunk one night that he'd got in a jam with a dame down there some place and had to light out in a hurry."

"Who? Windy, or Luke?"

"Windy. But he never told me it was Luke's gal. Guess he wasn't drunk enough for that."

Dan took a turn of the room, then suggested they go outside. It was a cool, fresh morning, following a thunderstorm of the night before. He rolled himself a cigarette with care, lit it, and then spoke to Fred Marsh.

"You say you thought there was something wrong when you couldn't get into the

store just now. Why should there be anything wrong?"

"I didn't say that," Fred Marsh corrected sharply. "I said when I couldn't get into the store, I came up here. Luke generally opened up soon after seven, and when the store was still locked at eight, I wondered if he'd slept in."

"And—?" prompted the sergeant.

"Well, the house was locked, too. That seemed funny, so I took a squint through the windows to see what I could see. And that's when I found him — in his chair, flopped over the table."

Dan digested this. "How did he seem last night? Any different to usual?"

"Not a lot." Marsh said that for some days the trader had been complaining of headaches and was taking aspirin. "We'd been pretty busy yesterday, and after supper I had to come back and clean up some of the bookwork."

"Down at the office?"

"Yes."

"And Luke?"

"He took a canoe-load of trade-goods ten miles up the river to Rat Portage for old Pete Bear."

"And when did he get back?"

"Around midnight. A thunderstorm was on, but I heard his engine as he swung into shore."

"And you were—?"

"In bed, in the tent."

"And awake? You must have been."

"Sure. But I was just dozing off."

Dan pieced together what Marsh had told him and tried to make a picture of the whole.

"Luke went up to the Portage, you said. Were you working in the office when he left, or had you shut up already?"

"I was working. And I guess I was at it till an hour afterwards."

"Then," suggested Dan, "if you were the last one out of the store, why couldn't you get in there this morning? You must have had the key."

Marsh answered him quickly, "I didn't have the key and I didn't need it. Not to lock up. The door locks itself when you drop the night-latch. But I'd need the keys to get in again this morning."

"Yes, of course," murmured Dan. "That's it."

A moment later he re-entered the house and again the others followed.

A GLASS tobacco-jar stood on the table near Luke Day's head. Dan squinted at it, said to Marsh, "Get that off there;" and when Marsh had done so, added, "And you might as well open the store. But wait—I'll go down with you."

"But the keys?" pointed out Marsh. "I still haven't got them."

Dan went through Luke Day's pockets and pulled out a bunch on a ring.

"These?"

"Sure."

Dan was interested to see if it were possible to gain access to the store without the keys, but when he tried he found it was not. Marsh pointed out that both front and back doors were equipped with Yale night-latches, and the windows were solid and set in their frames.

Going into the office, Dan noticed the typewriter. It was a portable machine, so he slipped it into its cover and carried it back to the house with him.

Pete Schmidt and the parson were sitting on the veranda steps. Dan left the typewriter with them and went inside and picked up the tobacco-jar. This he wrapped carefully in a sheet of newspaper, came out and saw to it that the night-latch on the kitchen door dropped securely behind him. The front door with its broken lock he fastened with a chunk of wire he stripped from Luke Day's in-leading radio aerial.

Outside the police detachment again, Schmidt said he figured he'd best be getting on with the job, but Haynes remained. He followed Dan inside and looked mystified when the sergeant unwrapped the tobacco-jar. Dan noticed the look.

"Stick around, Padre," he suggested. "And get a lesson in fingerprinting."

Haynes didn't understand, and said so. Dan smiled, a bit grimly.

"You heard all I did," he told the parson. "What d'you figure happened last night? With Luke, I mean?"

Haynes frowned, polished his fingernails on the sleeve of his rather threadbare coat. "Well," he said; "it looks as though Luke went up to Rat Portage, came back and went into the store. You brought the typewriter from there, so I imagine that for some rea-

son he sat down and typed his suicide note. Then he came up here, placed the note on the table and shot himself."

"Yeah," said Dan. "It looks like it. He couldn't shoot himself at the store, because the gun was hanging where it always hung—in its holster on the wall of his front room. But what I'm getting at is this: if Luke did all you say he did, he'd be the last man to use the typewriter and his prints should show up pretty well on the machine. Well, I just want to make sure they do."

The job of dusting and photographing took some little time, for as well as the prints that showed on the typewriter, Dan also treated those that Marsh had left on the tobacco-jar. More time was spent again in the makeshift dark-room developing the negatives. For, as well, Dan took the trouble to develop those he had made of Luke Day's fingerprints on both Windy's wallet and the bottle of sauce. But he had the job finished at last and carried the results of his labors over to a small table that stood beneath one of the windows.

He laid them out in line—first the photographed prints from the wallet, then those from the sauce-bottle, and to the side of these, Marsh's fingerprints from the tobacco-jar and a series of other prints that had been left on the space-bar and keys of the typewriter. With a magnifying-glass he checked them all over for some minutes, then passed the glass to John Haynes.

"See for yourself," he invited.

The parson accepted; but after a careful scrutiny, he seemed at a loss. "These two," he observed, pointing to the prints from the wallet and sauce-bottle, "are the same; but these other two are rather vague to me."

"But not to me," was Dan's grim rejoinder. "I went in for that sort of thing. And you can take my word for it, you won't find the first pair of prints anything like the other two, though they're a pair as well. In other words, the prints on the tobacco-jar are identical with those on the typewriter."

Haynes' studious face looked grave. "Then that means—"

"Yeah," nodded Dan. "We both agree that the last thing written on the typewriter was that suicide note. And if that's so, Luke Day didn't do the typing. It was done by Fred Marsh."

For a long time the parson said nothing. He seemed to be pondering Dan's revelation in his mind. Then, "What made you do this fingerprinting at all?" he asked. "Were you suspicious?"

"I don't know," answered the sergeant. "But with Windy's murder on my hands and every other man in the place a liar, I'm getting to distrust everybody and everything. But I guess what started it was the fact that Luke committed suicide at all. He seemed well enough to me lately, and as for having a headache—well, guys don't shoot themselves because aspirin don't work."

Haynes picked up the significance of what Dan was saying.

"Then you're convinced it wasn't suicide?"

"Well, aren't you?" countered Dan.

**H**AYNES didn't know whether he was or not. "I'll admit that Luke couldn't have written you that letter, but it still looks like suicide."

"Does it?" Dan scooped his prints into a pile. "I'm going down again to Luke's to make sure."

Haynes suggested he would like to go along, and Dan assured the parson it was all right with him. So they reached the house together to find that Pete Schmidt had lost little time in noising the happening abroad. A mob of silent but interested Indians hung around the premises or gazed, awe-struck, at the house itself.

Dan went in with the parson, closed the door, and returned to his contemplation of the dead man and the setting of the tragedy.



First, there was the gun. Luke Day had fancied himself as a bit of a fancy revolver-shot, and gun and holster had hung on the wall of the front room since Dan could remember. Holding it in his handkerchief, Dan picked up the gun, broke it, and examined it. Only one shot had been fired.

From the gun, Dan turned to Luke Day himself. There was the powdered-blackened hole on one side of his head and a larger and more ragged hole on the other. Dan nodded, and his gaze traveled naturally to the nearby wall.

He had no trouble in locating the hole the spent bullet had made in the smooth, oiled logs. In fact, it had struck a pitchy part of one and was buried scarcely half an inch deep. With his jack-knife Dan worried at it and finally was able to pick the bullet out with his fingers.

It was flattened, considerably mushroomed, but as he stared at it, he began to frown. And the reason for his frown he explained to Parson Haynes.

"See that?" he asked. "Clean as a new pin!"

"Shouldn't it be?" suggested Haynes.

"If you'd ever dug a bullet out of a moose or a caribou, you'd know different. This bullet never went through blood or bone at all."

"Then that wasn't the bullet that killed him!"

"Couldn't have been." Looking at the wall again, Dan said, "And yet I can't see any other."

To prove his thoughts, Dan made a careful scrutiny of the entire wall; but he only found himself back to his original conclusion.

"Something screwy about all this," he grunted. "Just now it looked simple: Marsh wanted Luke out of the way, so when Luke went up to the Portage with that load of stuff, he wrote this 'suicide note.' Then he followed Luke here to the house, found him sitting at the table, and shot him. Sure; but now it don't add up."

The parson looked puzzled. "I can't see why Marsh should want him out of the way at all."

"There's a lot of things I can't see," confessed Dan. "Too many of 'em. Or put another way, there's too little I *can* see."

Frowning, he slipped the bullet in his

tunic pocket, stood spread-legged and then shoved the Stetson to the back of his head.

"Frankly," he growled, "it's the devil. For what have I got to go on? All I know is Windy blows in here with some mineral samples and a yarn about striking gold on Moosehorn. Somebody beefs the guy and nobody knows who done it. Then what? Do I get a lead of any sort? No! Comes instead a lot of jig-saw pieces: Windy's drunk when he gets killed and Marsh says he was tight on his own liquor he saved from Christmas. I find that's a lie. Then Luke Day goes down to where we're keeping Windy till we can plant him, frisks his wallet and has to lie about that, too." Herc Haynes seemed surprised, but the worried Dan Kennedy let it pass. "Then Fred Marsh and Pete Schmidt intimate they'd like to hightail for Moosehorn and locate Windy's strike; Luke's found shot and I get a phoney suicide note; and when I go to check Luke over, I'm not satisfied that he killed himself at all."

Haynes didn't understand a lot that Dan had said, but he seized on his last words. "Then if Luke didn't kill himself, it's murder."

"Not murder," corrected Dan. "Just another one." He straightened his Stetson. "They're coming in pairs these days."

They walked out, and the parson went home. Dan went down to the store. The place was busy with outfitting Indians, but Dan called Fred Marsh into the office.

Marsh tried to appear matter-of-fact and made a poor success of it. Dan closed the door and began to question him again.

"What time did Luke pull out of here for the Portage?"

"I guess," said Marsh, "about seven o'clock."

"U-huh. And you were working in the office when he left?"

"That's right."

"Doing what?"

Marsh thought carefully. "First, I had the counter-slips to make up. Then I posted them into the ledger. Then after that I typed out an itemized list of all the stuff Pete Bear had drawn on his trading account."

"U-huh," grunted Dan. "And then?"

"And then I went home, to the tent."

Dan filed this information away in the inner recesses of his brain.

"You say Luke came home at midnight, while a thunderstorm was on. But you heard his kicker?"

"Sure."

"Even though it was thundering."

Marsh frowned. "I mean, I heard his kicker between the thunderclaps."

"I never even heard the thunderclaps," admitted Dan. "But, then I sleep pretty good, I guess. But," he went on, "you never heard the shot in Luke's house?"

"No; but I needn't have done." Marsh pointed out the obvious. "My tent is at least two hundred yards away. And Luke could have shot himself on the stroke of a thunderclap."

"That's right, too," pondered Dan. "Well, you're busy, so I won't keep you any longer. Be seeing you at the inquest."

It meant another inquest; so Dan took his canoe and motor and ran the five miles up-river to Doc Allen's fox-ranch. Doc seemed almost floored by the news the policeman brought along. According to Doc Allen, Luke had wakened him at about eleven-thirty of the night before on his way home from Rat Portage. And now he was dead.

"And I don't get it," said Dan flatly. "Why should he be dead—as a suicide? He wasn't worried, or at least, didn't seem to be. And as for feeling sick or moody—well, you saw him since I did, how did he appear to you?"

"Not a great deal different to what he ever was," stated Doc. "He had a bit of a headache, but headaches were common enough with him. I told him it was his eyes."

"His eyes or his headaches won't worry him now. And as it'll mean one more inquest, I guess you'll be along. I'll set it," said Dan, "for three."

But on his way back to the settlement again, Dan remembered a job he had overlooked. That was going over Luke's .38 revolver for fingerprints. He promised that he would do it as soon as he arrived. And another thing that might pay dividends was to go through the dead man's effects and papers. There was no clue to the reason for the man's death anywhere else, so he might find it there.

But one thing he didn't find when he got around to it were any fingerprints on the .38. It puzzled him, and amazed him. If Marsh

were the man who had killed Luke Day, he had had intelligence enough to wear gloves in firing the gun but had lacked similar intelligence in handling the typewriter. Possibly he thought the letter would be taken for granted but that the gun would be scrutinized. If he did, he pulled a boner. No fingerprints at all could be as bad as too many.

But it was dinner-time and the sergeant cooked his solitary meal. He thought of the matter of going through Luke Day's effects, but due to the lateness of the hour, he decided to put it off until after the inquest.

The inquest was again held in the police detachment, with a jury composed of five of the more-intelligent halfbreed residents of the place and Doc Allen as foreman. They viewed the body, and the gun. The bullet Dan merely held by the base, showing only its mushroomed head. Had it passed from hand to hand, the quick-witted and gun-wise halfbreeds would have commented on its un-gory appearance. But it was while they were looking at the body itself that Dan Kennedy noticed a point he had overlooked before. Luke Day must have been shot at the table, for the puddle of blood was there and nowhere else in the room.

The rest of the proceedings took little time, but the verdict rendered differed to that given on Windy Young. This time it consisted of one word, plain and stark—Suicide.

SERGEANT DAN KENNEDY didn't always have luck, although of the Irish he was. In fact, he had had little luck at all for the past two weeks. But it just happened that after he had completed a search of Luke Day's belongings, a southbound plane landed at Keg River. Dan's fervent wish had been to catch a quick lift to town, and here it was for the taking.

It was a Consolidated ship, coming back from the Barrens with two prospectors aboard. Dan held it long enough to make arrangements with Parson Haynes for Luke Day's funeral and to tell him that he was going out to see his O. C., then he grabbed his club-bag and left the detachment on the run.

But it wasn't luck that provided him with transportation back to Keg River again the next day. The plane he rode was a charter-job, hired by the Royal Canadian Mounted

Police to take Dan north for a prisoner. And Dan was going to get him.

Four white men and a knot of natives met the plane as it landed. Dan went up to the store with the pilot, through, and into the office. The four white men he called in with him. They were Parson Haynes, Pete Schmidt, Doc Allen and Fred Marsh.

The room was a bit crowded. Doc and Fred Marsh sat on the flat-topped desk, and the pilot and Haynes took a couple of chairs. Dan and Pete Schmidt preferred to stand.

Dan Kennedy lost no time in getting down to facts.

"I wanted you boys in here so that we could clear up matters. They concern Windy Young, and also Luke Day. After I get through, all but one of you can go out with clean hands and free of suspicion. I haven't a thing against you, so you might as well know it now. But the other one, the one I want, well—we'll come to that later.

"Now about Windy—Windy was a blowhard, but he got a raw deal. You all know what happened to him. He was beefed without a chance to defend himself, and by a guy he had no reason to distrust. I tried to find out who this guy was, but I couldn't turn up a thing. Luke, however, did. Mebbe it's because his eyes were younger than mine or perhaps because I was looking for something out of the way. Anyhow, he found this thing that indicated who the killer might be; but he wanted a bit of proof. Well, perhaps not proof so much, as a motive for the killing. He got it; but instead of turning it over to me, he did a bit of high-jacking. And it cost him his life."

Dan pulled a fistful of papers from his tunic pocket and ran through them.

"Then I found something, when I searched Luke's effects." He frowned, pawed over his papers as though he couldn't locate what he was after. "Here's something, Doc," he said casually, "that'll interest you."

It was a sweepstake ticket, a receipt made out to Lucky Jim. F. D. Allen."

Dan held it, but so that Doc Allen could read it. And Dan read something himself, something in Doc Allen's face. It was a tightening of the muscles, a sweep of emotion that came, and went again.

Dan gave a short laugh. "Sure. Windy's

ticket. He told me he gave it to Luke for safe-keeping."

Dan shook his head. "A liar behind every bush! Windy didn't give it to him at all!" he said, challengingly. "Luke swiped it from Windy's pocket, that day in the powder-magazine."

For a moment Doc Allen said nothing; and before he could do so, Dan hurried on.

"And out in town, I saw another ticket—or, at least, the stub of one. Joe Blake had it, the guy in the poolroom. This was an 'F. D. Allen' ticket, too. Only instead of being made out to 'Lucky Jim' it was tagged 'Hippocrates.' Now, Doc, what have you to say to that?"

Doc didn't say anything, but Dan saw the quick swallow he gave.

"Yeah, there were two sweepstakes tickets," Dan continued. "When Joe Blake sold 'em, he put 'em down under your name and you let it go at that. You never thought either of 'em would win, and it was only because Windy asked you to buy one for him that decided you to buy another for yourself. But one did win—Lucky Jim; and when you were notified about it, you stuck to the eleven thousand."

Doc found his voice. "You're wrong. My ticket won."

Dan gave a smile. "You must have spoken without thinking," he suggested. "Don't tell me Windy was 'Hippocrates.' Hippocrates was a good name for a doctor; but I doubt if Windy had ever heard the name in his life."

**T**HREE was a momentary silence, and suspense was building up in the tiny office.

"So I'll hurry on," said Dan. "By what I hear, you went on a terrific bust and blew in half of the eleven thousand before you left Edmonton. Then when you got back here and found Windy was heading out himself, things looked suddenly bad. Windy might find out about that sweepstake ticket, and if he did, you'd face a penitentiary stretch. So something had to be done about it; and the only thing to do was to make certain that Windy never did go out.

"When you came up to the detachment that night, you had me fooled. The stuff of Windy taking out a liquor-order for you was so much eyewash. You'd killed Windy

already. But I couldn't pin anything on you. That was left to Luke Day."

Dan showed no hesitation now. He pulled another paper from his wallet. It was an envelope, from which he extracted two half-burned paper-matches. "This is what Luke found and I overlooked," said Dan. "After you clubbed Windy, you struck these two matches to make sure he was dead. You hadn't come in to spend the night in the village, so your flashlight was at home. And Luke suddenly realized that as you were the only man with any paper-matches in the place—you probably brought a folder or two back from Edmonton—you were the guy who killed him."

"Then Luke used his head. He knew you were no prospector and wouldn't kill Windy over a mineral claim, so it had to be something else. So he remembered about the sweepstake you'd won, and he just wondered if Windy was carrying his ticket around with him. He searched him, and he found it; and he went to town and learned the name of the winning ticket from Joe Blake. Then he came back and put it up to you."

"Well, there wasn't much you could say. You were in a spot; and there was something looming back of it all—murder. So you tried to buy him off, and you probably did. But you knew you could never be sure of Luke keeping the matter to himself. So you decided you had to kill him, too."

"You had a swell opportunity. You knew about Windy's mix-up with a girl in Ontario—though I believe the making of her into Luke's girl was just a bit of fiction. So if you could kill Luke by 'suicide' and make him confess to Windy's murder, you'd go into the clear."

"You took a chance on it—and you fell down bad."

Dan paused. He shot a glance to the strained, set faces of the other men around him; to the pouchy, bloodshot eyes of Doc Allen.

"Luke probably contacted you first while I was off to Lynx Lake, and later you got your idea. You'd type a letter purporting to come from Luke, keep it a while and sell the machine to him, then kill him when the break came along. The signature to the note would be the easiest part. You'd trace one of his genuine signatures against a lighted

window, and in a four-letter name like that, the forgery would never be detected. But when I say you fell down bad, I mean it. You killed him the night before last on his way back from Rat Portage, loaded him into your canoe, and towed your own canoe behind his. You packed him up to his house and laid him across the table and fired the shot into the wall. You'd probably have got away with it, anyway, but the thunderstorm helped you. With the row of that, a revolver-shot would never be heard. But here's where you fell down—

"Your fingerprints on the typewriter of some days ago were obliterated by those of Fred Marsh. And," pointed out the sergeant, "that could have made it mean for Fred. Especially after lying to me about Windy's liquor. Why didn't you," he asked Marsh, "come clean? Why didn't you tell me you got Windy loaded on a crock of your own so that he'd shoot the works about his strike on Moosehorn? You should have done so, for you almost hung yourself there. But to get back to you, Doc—

"With Fred's fingerprints on the typewriter but none on the revolver, things didn't add up. Then a clean bullet in the wall was another thing. The bullet being clean told me that this wasn't the one that killed Luke. But where was the other? Not in the room, sure. And that meant that Luke was killed some other place, in spite of the blood on the table.

"Where? I wanted to know. It didn't occur to me till afterwards, but the thunderstorm we had here the night of his death was pretty local. We had rain in the village, but you had none up at the fox-ranch. I noticed that when I was up there the following day. So before I went to town, I took a look at Luke's feet. He was wearing moc-

casins, and the moccasins were dry. That meant, of course, that he didn't walk from shore to house after he landed from the trip to Rat Portage. And if he didn't walk, he was carried."

The parson, Haynes, was fidgeting nervously. Pete Schmidt looked stolid, but expectant.

"And the rest of it?" suggested Dan. "Well, you're a big chap; so you lugged him into the house, came out again and slipped the night-latch behind you. And there he was—bullet-holes in his head, gun on the floor, blood on the table-top. But the blood—" Dan nodded grimly. "That blood fooled me; but analysts find things out. It was fox-blood—blood you probably brought along in a can."

He stopped suddenly. Doc Allen seemed to have shrank. The pouches under his eyes seemed more baggy than ever, his face had taken on twenty years; so that he looked an old, old man.

"No grudges, Dan," he said thickly. "I was rather expecting something like this. You took off to town so suddenly—and your case is so good. But that's where it will end—between you and me—just between man and man."

Then he whipped a hunting-knife from the belt beneath his sweater. It flashed twice. As Dan and Pete Schmidt drove at him, he was trying it again. But death came too quickly for him. The nerves of his fingers perished.

He almost fell forward into Pete Schmidt's outstretched arms.

They laid him on the floor, looked down at him; and the tension seemed to break. But Dan Kennedy got in the first word.

"The eternal obsession—something for nothing. And the Dealer takes the pot."



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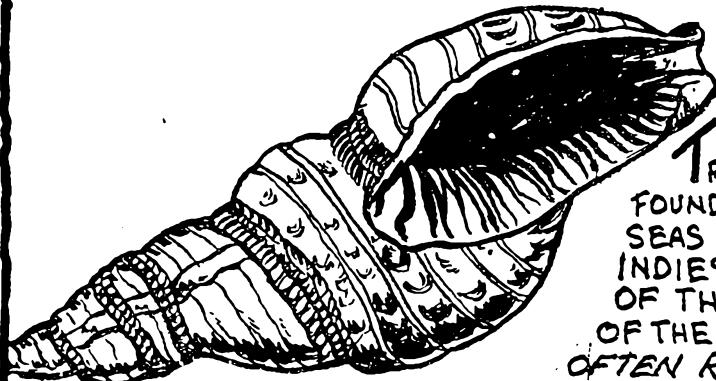
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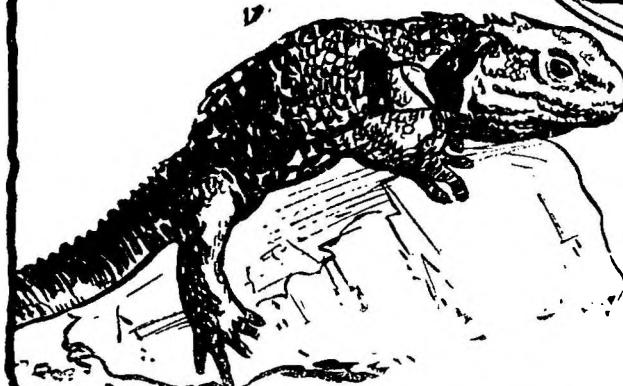
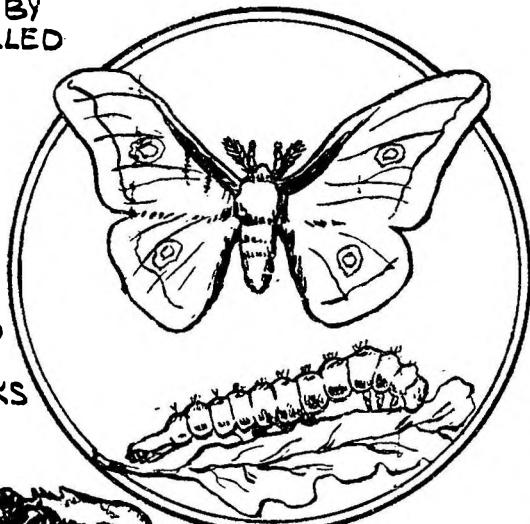
STAMP

# Curiosities by Weill



TRITON'S TRUMPET,  
FOUND IN THE SOUTH  
SEAS AND EAST  
INDIES, IS ONE  
OF THE LARGEST  
OF THE SEA SNAILS,  
OFTEN REACHING A  
LENGTH OF **SIXTEEN**  
**INCHES**

RAW SILK IS SAID TO  
HAVE FIRST BEEN MADE BY  
A PEOPLE OF CHINA CALLED  
CERES, 150 B.C. !  
IT WAS FIRST BROUGHT  
FROM INDIA IN 274  
AND A POUND OF IT  
AT THAT TIME WAS  
WORTH A POUND OF  
GOLD ! THE MAN-  
UFACTURE OF RAW  
SILK WAS INTRODUCED  
INTO EUROPE FROM  
INDIA BY SOME MONKS  
IN 550



THE TUATARA  
OF NEW ZEALAND  
HAS THE VESTIGE  
OF A **THIRD EYE**  
ON THE TOP OF  
ITS HEAD, WITH  
TINY LENS AND  
RETINA !

# DEATH HAS



# GREEN EYES

A Mystery Novel

## Part III

### THE STORY SO FAR

**M**AX MAGUIRE did not look like a private investigator. Perhaps that was one reason he was such a good one. He had been in partnership with a clever woman—Edna Tipton—which partnership he wanted to dissolve. He was in love with Margot Gage, but even a detective couldn't get away from the fact that she had a husband. He did meet her for lunch, however, at the Blue Lantern, where they were seen by an enemy of Maguire's on the police force and also by King Seeley, a reporter who couldn't stay sober. All this might not have mattered if Margot's husband hadn't been murdered, and she herself suspected.

Max was frantic at the thought of all that would come out at a trial, and resolved that he'd stop at nothing to help Margot. Then by a queer twist of fate he was retained by Gwen Dorrance to find the murderer of Jeffrey Gage, Margot's husband, and Gwen believed Margot guilty. Gwen's father also retained Max in the murder case, but Max could only dwell on one fact in the case—that Margot was in jail. So he deliberately tried to frame King Seeley for the murder, knowing what a terrible thing he was trying

to do, but excusing everything on the ground that to free Margot, any act would be fair. The police found him out, Margot and Seeley were both freed, but Max himself was grabbed by the police—who wanted to find out what he *did* know about the case.

## CHAPTER XII

### ADVICE FROM A SPINSTER

**I**T WAS nearly noon when a turnkey unlocked the barred door to Maguire's cell. "Outside," he grunted.

Maguire was lying in his shirt-sleeves on the dingy blanket that covered the metal bunk. He shook his bruised head.

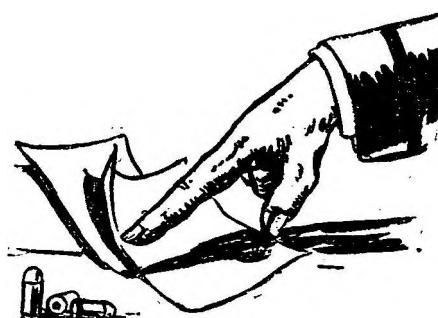
"Nothing doing," he replied, wearily but stubbornly. "If Kohler and Grott are matching me up for a return bout, they can come and hold it right here. I'm not saving them the walk to the ringside."

"Outside, guy," insisted the turnkey. "You've been sprung."

Surprised and suspicious, Maguire tightened his necktie and rose. He put on his jacket, topcoat and hat. The door swung open and he stepped warily out into the



By  
**MANLY  
WADE  
WELLMAN**



whitewashed corridor with its eternal reek of disinfectant. His hands were loosely clenched, his shoulders hunched, his whole body set for a surprise attack. The turnkey tramped ahead, and Maguire followed him along the passageway, through a metal door, and into the front room of the police station.

One side of the place was fenced off by a long desk, above which a caging of heavy wire ran up to the ceiling. Behind this desk, facing a little opening like a bank teller's window, sat a grizzled sergeant in blue. Kohler stood there, his elbow lodged in a corner of the window, arguing sourly with a dapper little old man with a trig white mustache.

The old man turned as Maguire came into view, and stepped forward with his hand out.

"How do you do, Mr. Maguire," he said, as cordially dignified as though they were meeting at a formal social gathering. "My name is Colonel James Calkins."

Maguire remembered the name. Colonel Calkins was an attorney-at-law of long and distinguished career, who had announced his retirement but who still practised law on behalf of a few close friends. Among these friends, Maguire knew, was Verna Hesseldine.

"I'm glad to meet you," said Maguire, taking the proffered hand. "Is it you who are getting me out?"

"Yeh, somebody's fronting for you," growled Kohler.

Maguire walked forward to the desk. His eyes glared from his bruised face.

"And you hate it, Kohler. I can see that."

"Eminently right, sir," chimed in Colonel Calkins. "I have just presented a writ of habeas corpus in your behalf, inasmuch as

you have been held without formal charge. And Sergeant Kohler has been hard put to stomach it, sir. Very hard put."

Kohler trod venomously on a scurrying bug. "I'll bet it was that old battle-axe, Verna Hesseldine, who sent you over," he grumbled.

Calkins made no answer. His bright old eyes studied Maguire's battered features. "Mr. Maguire," he said weightily, "I judge that you have been subjected to indignities."

"Yeh," volunteered Kohler. "Maxie ran into the edge of a door or something."

The desk sergeant had rummaged in some pigeonholes. Now he handed Maguire a bulky envelope which proved to contain the things which had been in his pockets before he was put into a cell. Maguire distributed them in their usual places, then spoke to Colonel Calkins again.

"I want to thank you for coming here," he began slowly, "and to ask if you would accept a little legal business."

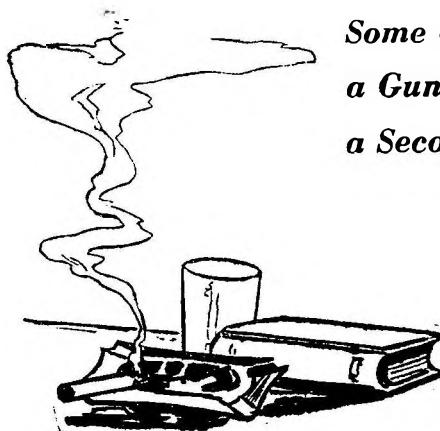
"Business?" said the little old lawyer politely.

"Business?" echoed Kohler, his pale eyes challenging Maguire.

MAGUIRE'S voice became bleak. "Will you please draw up an action for damages? Name the city government, the police department, the chief of police, and Sergeant Kohler and Detective Grott of the homicide detail, as defendants. The charge is false arrest, abuse of authority and felonious assault."

Calkins stole a look at Kohler, and his eyes twinkled. He nodded his smartly-barbered old head eagerly. "It would be a pleasure, sir, a privilege and a pleasure. And for what amount?"

### *Some Questions Entered the Case That Only a Gun Expert Could Answer, and There Was a Second Murder*



Maguire, too, studied Kohler's face, as if seeking an answer there. "Twenty thousand dollars," he said at last.

"Hey!" cried Kohler hoarsely, as though to protest.

Colonel Calkins' face wrinkled into a smile, bracketed with a network of fine lines. "A pleasure, sir," he repeated. "And I suggest an additional twenty-thousand dollars as punitive damages, Mr. Maguire. Forty thousand in all."

Maguire inclined his head gravely. "I leave it in your capable hands, Colonel. And now shall we go?"

Once outside, Colonel Calkins led the way around the corner and down the block. One or two noonday passers-by paused to stare curiously at Maguire's purple-red bruises and swellings. Further down the street the lawyer paused by a parked sedan.

"You're a sight, Max Maguire," scolded a woman's voice from inside the car. It was Verna Hesseldine, maintaining her sternest and most forbidding pose as she sat behind the wheel. "What do you propose to do about it?"

To grin was painful, but Maguire managed it.

Colonel Calkins here is suing the city for me," he told her. "By the way, Verna, Kohler was pretty shrewd. He guessed that you were back of this. And he called you a battle-axe."

"He did?" Verna crooned balefully. "Colonel, how much are you going to sue for?"

"Mr. Maguire and I thought that a total of forty thousand—"

"Not enough, Colonel. Make it for fifty thousand. And thank you so much for taking this trouble for me."

The little lawyer bowed and took his leave.

"Get in, Max," bade Verna. "Where shall we go to talk?"

"To my hotel," he suggested, sliding into the seat beside her.

She said nothing, but drove to his hotel. Once in his room he stripped off coat, vest and necktie and tenderly washed his face in cold water. Verna Hesseldine watched him with an expression that might have been concern, morbid interest, or amusement. "I daresay you'll want a drink," she said at last. "I know that I do."

"Of course." He took a bottle of Scotch from his bureau drawer.

"Shake that bottle," warned Verna Hesseldine. "All the fusel oil rises to the top, ready to poison the first drink you pour."

Obediently he agitated the bottle, the brown liquor inside whipping into a fine foam. "I thought that fusel oil was something that existed only in bootleg whiskey," he observed.

"It exists in all whiskies," she told him in her usual school-teacher fashion. "You've shaken it sufficiently now, it needn't be churned to butter. Pour it out."

He poured double portion into glasses on a tray, and filled them with ice water from a thermos carafe. Eagerly he drank, and the liquor seemed to inflate certain collapsed spaces within him. Draining the glass, he mixed more whiskey and water. Verna sipped more deliberately at hers.

"What do you want to know first?" she asked.

"About the *habeas corpus*. How did you think of it? Neither you nor I had the remotest notion of getting one for Margot."

"Because only Margot dreamed of the possibility," said Verna. "You were crazy with love and I was crazy with old-maid worry. Margot is sane, and from helping her husband in real estate affairs she's picked up considerable legal knowledge. She knew at once what to do."

"She suggested it?" cried Maguire eagerly, forgetting his aching body and battered face. "She isn't angry with me?"

"Oh, it isn't as simple as that. She wants you to be free and fairly treated, but she doesn't want to have anything to do with you. Not even a telephone call."

"But I'm going to look her up right away—"

"Not yet, Max." It was a command, not a plea. The lenses of Verna Hesseldine's pince-nez glittered like searchlights as they stared him into momentary silence. He made a gesture of defeat and sat down on the edge of the bed. Verna took the armchair opposite.

"Listen carefully," she urged him. "Margot feels hurt, very badly hurt, that you suspected her. She feels that it's a confession of poor faith in her that you would think she'd commit a sneaking murder. Beyond that she refuses to offer any explanation to

you about the mystery—which means that I must." She paused a moment, sipping. "I don't suppose that you'd care to hear about the famous conference at my house yesterday morning."

"But I do!" he protested earnestly.

"**V**ERY good. To begin with, I might admit in advance that Margot was rather ill-advised in her idea of what constitutes good and successful intrigue—but why should I admit it to you, when you made that half-cocked, scoundrelly effort to convict a man by false evidence?"

"Oh, all right," groaned Maguire. "I was foolish and I was wrong, and I got a masterly shellacking for my punishment. I deserved it, and I deserve what you're saying. Get on with the story."

Verna took off her spectacles and wiped them. As usual, her exposed eyes looked weary and wistful.

"It began several days ago when Margot learned that King Seeley was spying on Jeff Gage for Mr. Dorrance."

"What?" Maguire almost shouted. "Was it King Seeley who—"

"Yes," Verna told him impatiently. "He was out of a job, and had to make a living somehow, though I can't tell you why. I'm not sure whether Margot suspected Seeley and got him to admit what he was up to, or whether he volunteered the information himself. At any rate, she thought she saw what might be a way out of the difficulty for both of you."

Maguire kept silent, looking slightly sheepish through his facial injuries.

"She let Seeley think that she cared for him," Verna went on, and quickly held up a large, white hand. "Never mind, Max, never mind. She was doing it all for you, you triple-ply idiot. Seeley was full of eagerness to win her, and went to work to catch Gage in a situation scandalous enough for Margot to use for divorce evidence. She gave him that little jewelled pistol to pawn for expense money."

"She did? So that's how he got it. Did she give it to him this morning or before—"

"Quiet, Max. I'm not sure whether he had it before the meeting or not, but when she said something about it, he took it from his pocket and mentioned the name of a pawnshop where he would take it. You're

getting me ahead of my story. Early this morning Margot telephoned to ask if she could meet Seeley and talk to him at my home. I agreed, and—"

This time it was Maguire who interrupted. "Verna, you're being entirely too general. Right now you'd better make a good stab at remembering everything that happened, and telling it to me straight and in order."

The spinster scowled. "Do I have to make a sworn statement, and bring my birth certificate?"

"Oh, stop being my great-aunt," he pleaded desperately. "All I want is a clear, full story of what happened. You were there and saw and heard everything, didn't you?"

"Right. Seeley came first, very cheerful and mannerly, though he'd had a couple of drinks. Then Margot showed up, a little later, and she seemed rather agitated. Seeley wanted to kiss her—Max, your face is ugly enough without that glare. She wouldn't let him, anyway. The first thing Seeley said was that he had valuable information—Gage was really involved with that milk-faced Gwen Dorrance and would probably want a divorce himself so that he could remarry."

"Did he tell how he knew?" interjected Maguire.

"Not at once. Margot was more agitated, saying, 'Are you sure? Did he say so himself?' And Seeley replied that he did not hear a specific statement, but that he knew Gwen was going to meet Jeff at the Gage home."

**M**AGUIRE muttered profanely. Seizing a sheet of paper from the desk he began making swift notes. Verna sniffed sourly.

"Are you really jotting down deductions, or only trying to be impressive?"

"Go on," urged Maguire.

"Margot seemed relieved at what Seeley said, and replied, 'Good. If she's visiting him, perhaps she'll stay a long time.' I knew that Jeff Gage expected Margot to lunch with me—I'd already helped her with that lie so that she could join you later—and I offered the opinion that Jeff and Gwen would undoubtedly eat together. Seeley suggested that he go back and spy, perhaps overhear something."

"And then?" Maguire prompted.

"Margot suggested a little wait. 'Give

them time to settle themselves,' she said 'and rope to hang themselves.'"

"Rather an unfortunate phrasing," observed Maguire, especially in view of what happened."

"I thought so too, even at the time. Seeley agreed to what she suggested, and turned the talk to himself and Margot. He was quite fatuous. Said he hoped to make enough money from Mr. Dorrance to get married on. It was sickening, as you may imagine, and to quiet him I began giving him high-balls. I got him well started on the bender he betrayed when you and Margot ran into him just before lunch."

"Have a drink yourself, Verna," said Maguire, and replenished her glass. She adjusted her spectacles.

"Still scribbling, I see. Note down these things, Max Maguire: The little meeting I've described should explain three mysteries."

Maguire poised his pencil, as if to humor her. "What's Number One?" he asked.

"Number One is that Margot had good reason not to tell you about where she was all morning, and for swearing me and Seeley to secrecy. She knew that if you found out about it you'd be a jealous moron. Of course, she didn't know that she'd soon be in jail."

"Granted," said Maguire. "I was jealous—and a moron—and a heel. My only excuse is that I was, and still am, in love, which sabotages us all. Number Two?"

"Yes, Number Two," nodded Verna. "It makes logical the idle scrawling of Margot on that menu in the restaurant—she told me what it was a little while ago, and how curious and idiotic you were."

"I know what the menu says," Maguire informed her. "Gwen Dorrance picked it up and make it look pretty deadly."

"It was Seeley's assurance that made her feel that her marital obstacles were all but cleared away—probably would be completely cleared away before long." Verna leaned forward in her chair. "Number Three."

"Third and last," Maguire said, writing.

"You've already mentioned it. You know how Seeley got possession of her little gun. No question of either romance or murder there."

"I know something else, most comforting

of all," said Maguire thankfully. "Margot was definitely away from the scene of the murder."

Verna shook her head. "Oh, no, she wasn't. Not definitely. She stared straight into Maguire's eyes. "We three didn't get together until eleven o'clock yesterday morning. An hour or more after Jeff Gage was shot to death."

## CHAPTER XIII

### DISSECTION OF AN ALIBI

MAGUIRE'S eyes opened wide, then narrowed again. His swollen facial muscles shot through with twinges of pain, so he knew he was grimacing at Verna Hessel-dine.

"I'm afraid," he said, with a stunned softness that made his voice ridiculously mild, "that I don't understand."

Verna laughed a short, mirthless laugh, and her spectacles flashed fiercely. "Of course you don't," she replied. "And I pray heaven that your sadistic friends, Messrs. Kohler and Grott of the homicide detail, don't understand, either."

Maguire scowled again. "But, Verna," he reminded, still stunned with what she had told him, "you said that they were there with you at the time. So did Margot. So did—"

"Yes, and so did Seeley," she impatiently finished the sentence for him. "It was the one piece of good luck that's fallen into our laps from the very beginning of this whole filthy affair."

"Luck?" repeated Maguire. "I think I begin to see."

"At last!" cried Verna, in mocking applause. "At last the great master mind takes off his smoked glasses and begins to see, even as other men. How did you like seeing, Max?"

"Don't smear me, Verna. I can't stand many more physical and verbal attacks today."

Verna held up her huge right hand, with three fingers extended. Upon her right forefinger she laid her left forefinger.

"Again three points to consider," she said, as if coaching a dull child. "First of all, Seeley was arrested and questioned. In desperation, he told of the meeting at my

house, but he lied about the time. He changed that to give himself an alibi. And the great brains of the homicide detail—almost a match for your own, Max—went to check up on Margot—”

“Who’s been refusing to mention the meeting at all,” put in Maguire.

“Yes, for fear you’d find out and put one of your choicest wrong interpretations on it,” continued Verna sharply. “She was actually more worried about your ill-will than the danger of being convicted of murder.”

She touched her middle finger.

“But seeing that they knew, she admitted being with Seeley and me. She, too, made the most of it by saying that the time of the get-together was earlier. Thus she confirmed as true that lie of Seeley’s.”

“Then they called you,” Maguire supplemented. “I heard Kohler on the telephone.”

“By which time,” amplified Verna, “they were excited enough over the downfall of their charges to put leading questions to me, especially as regards the time. And I knew what to say to get Margot out.” She ticked off the remaining finger in conclusion.

Maguire nodded eagerly. “As I say, I heard it. Kohler asked you point blank if Margot was with you before the murder time.”

“And out walked Margot, and in stayed Max.” Verna cocked her head sidewise to study him. “Tell me, did only two detectives mark you up like that? You look as if a heavy-weapons brigade had held maneuvers on you.”

He brushed the question aside. “We’re back at the start,” he said, his voice thoughtfully quiet once more. “You told me to trust Margot, then you come out with the news that she can’t account for her whereabouts at the time that—”

“Oh!” she gasped in disgust, and raised her clenched fists shoulder high. “If you’re so utterly sure that Margot killed Jeff, why don’t you personally escort her to the electric chair and pull the switch with your own hand? Will you spend all your life demanding witnessed and documented evidence of where she was, and what she was doing, at every given moment? I declare, you don’t deserve as much as a kick from the toe of her oldest and least becoming shoe!”

Maguire’s temper rose.

“If you’re so convinced that she’s inno-

cent, why did you consider it necessary to tell a lie to get her out of jail? You aren’t much better off than I am, morally.”

Verna picked up her drink again and sipped at it. Her manner grew calmer, but no softer.

“Probably you aren’t sorry now that you tried to railroad that poor, liquor-soaked Seeley simpleton,” she said. “Since you know he wanted Margot, you wish you’d succeeded. The point is, Max, you failed to get her free, and I succeeded. But she’s free now. Isn’t that what is most important to both of us? Let the police do all the suspecting, and we’ll do the believing.”

“You believe in her?” Maguire challenged.

Verna nodded. “She told me that she didn’t kill Jeff,” she replied simply.

“You sentimental old faker!” cried Maguire warmly. He sprang up from the bed, caught Verna by her shoulders, pulled her roughly to her feet and planted a loud kiss upon her check.

“Pfaff!” she spluttered in protest, but then she smiled and turned pink. “You impudent Irish-Austrian guerrilla!” she giggled, like a confused girl. “Don’t think you’ll get past my guard with those commando tactics. I’m not young enough to be thrilled, and I’m not old enough to be softened—though I used to think I was old enough for anything.” She dabbed at his face with her handkerchief. “Get that smear of powder off your face before Margot sees it.”

“Margot?” echoed Maguire. “Is she coming here?”

“Do you think she’ll pursue you into your hotel room, you conceited ape?” demanded Verna in high disdain. “No, Max. You’ll go out to her place and see her.”

“Oh, I am?” Maguire sat down on the bed again. “Thanks for arranging my love life.”

“I’m capable of doing just that,” she assured him, unabashed. “The cold observer is always sounder of judgment than the flustered operator. Go out to her home, I say. She’s there by herself.”

Maguire reached a long arm toward the whiskey bottle, but Verna, still on her feet, quickly seized it and put it out of his reach.

“Please, Max!” she begged. “I know that another drink, and another and another, would help a lot. But you’d better do your celebrating after this whole mess is straightened out.”

"Hold on a moment," said Maguire. "You said that Margot wouldn't speak to me, not even on the telephone."

"I did say that," replied Verna, still holding the bottle in her hand. "But you were ready then to chase after her and try to change her mind, whatever she wished. I made you wait and listen. Now, when you find her alibi is false—"

"Oh, lay off, Verna!" he shouted, springing up again. "I've proved that I love Margot. I made a fool and a criminal of myself, wrecked my whole professional standing, for her sake. And when I said I'd go after her at first, I thought everything was over and that she was in the clear."

"I see," Verna's tone was an accusation. "What I told you about the false alibi makes a difference."

"Verna," said Maguire flatly, "I don't care a tinker's curse whether she killed her husband or not. What I do care is that she's still in danger. This shaky alibi that you and she and Seeley stuck together by chance co-operation may fall to pieces any moment. I haven't any time to waste soft-soaping Margot. I must go to work and figure out a new scheme to make sure—"

"Make sure!" echoed Verna in shrill sarcasm. "Make sure! Make sure! Do you think that anything would ever make you sure, Max? Haven't I been trying to get it through your thick Vienno-Celtic head that faith and trust go with love? Oh, I suppose that sounds like the last paragraph of a Victorian novel, but it's the solemn truth." Verna caught him by the elbows, her hands gripping like tongues. Her spectacles glared earnestly at him. "Go to her, Max. Comfort her. I know that she said she wouldn't speak to you—but give her an hour to be alone and quiet, and she won't mean it any more. She loves you."

"She does?"

"She told me how to get you out of jail. And she said that she'd be alone at home all afternoon. Doesn't that mean—"

Maguire whooped joyously. He kissed Verna again, and this time she laughed in genuine mirth and happiness, and kissed him back.

"I've never doubted Margot's innocence," he said. "Promise me that you won't either."

He lifted his hand and cast his gaze solemnly ceilingward. "I swear it, Verna.

Now get out of here and leave me alone. I need a bath, clean clothes—"

"I'm gone." In her bright smile of farewell was the hint of some vanished loveliness that must have been hers in past years. A moment later she had closed the outer door behind her.

LEFT alone, Maguire rapidly threw off his garments, then paused to gaze at himself in the mirror. His big body was marked with red and black bruises on abdomen, sides and chest. He winced as he remembered the blows and kicks he had received from Kohler and Grott.

"Some day," he breathed, half aloud, "those two gentlemen will wish they'd never heard of this case, or of me, or of murder in general."

He drew on a bathrobe of towelling, entered the bathroom, and turned on the shower. A vigorous scrubbing and soaping, a thorough rinsing and then a quick splash of ice-cold water, and he felt many times better.

Next he went to the mirror, lathered his chin, and flinching now and then from the pain of his beaten face, shaved closely and trimmed his mustache.

Reentering the bedroom, he examined the clothing he had discarded. There was an odor of disinfectant about it that reminded him of the jail. He thrust shirt, underwear and socks into a laundry bag, then called the desk on the telephone to ask for a valet to clean and press his suit. This done, he dressed from top to toe in clean, fresh garments. They added much to his sense of well-being.

As he knotted his necktie, he realized that there was much left of the hour that Verna Hesseldine had advised him to wait before going to Margot. His eyes wandered to a paper tossed upon the top of the bureau. Looking more closely, he saw his own handwriting. It was the series of scribbled notes he had taken while Verna described yesterday's meeting with Margot and Seeley.

It gave him a sudden new inspiration, and he crossed the room and sat down at the writing table. A sheaf of hotel stationery lay under his hands, and he uncapped his fountain pen.

At the top of the first sheet he printed, in large capitals:

## POSSIBLE SUSPECTS, CLUES AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES

Despite Verna's scorn, he felt that he could always summon his thoughts better by writing them down. He paused a moment, then counted aloud on his fingers:

"Simon Dorrance—Gwen Dorrance—Verna—King Seeley—" He paused. "Yes, and Margot. Five."

He counted out five sheets of paper. As he stacked them neatly and lifted his pen, the telephone rang. He picked it up.

"Yes?" he said.

"Mr. Max!" It was the trembling voice of Lizzie.

"Hello, Lizzie. What is it?"

"I've just seen the noon editions. How horrible! Are those stories true, Mr. Max?"

"If they say that I was held as a suspect, refused to talk, and was released on a writ of *habeas corpus*, they're true."

"I didn't mean that. There's something else, in the *Record*—"

"It would be nasty, then," guessed Maguire.

"The *Record* says that you were—were involved with Margot Coy Gage." She paused a moment, as if pronouncing the name had been difficult. When she spoke again, her voice tipped each word with vitriol. "That can't be true, Mr. Max. I won't believe it. Not with a murderer."

Maguire drew a deep breath. "Lizzie," he said, "I've told you again and again not to concern yourself with my private affairs. I'm sorry, but I can't have it any longer. You're through."

"Mr. M-Max!"

"I mean it."

"You can't fire me!" she shrieked, and the sharpness of her voice made his ear tingle.

"But I have fired you," he said, and hung up. Then he added another sheet to the pile on the writing table.

"Six," he said, aloud again. "Lizzie."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SECOND MURDER

MAGUIRE was slow with his writing, for he was both thoughtful and nervous. Several times he paused to underline certain

words or to scratch them out and write in new ones. Over the first sheet he lingered longest.

At the top, just under the general heading, he wrote the name of Simon Dorrance. Under that he set down the words "Possible Motives." Then he pondered for a moment, reviewing all he knew about the banker. Finally he set to work deliberately:

### SIMON DORRANCE

Possible Motives: Was angry at Jeff Gage because Gage had been paying attention to his daughter Gwen. Might have been jealous of Gage because of own interest in Margot.

Suspicious Circumstances: Dorrance was near the *Blue Lantern* at lunch time on day of murder. Asked numerous questions about Margot, as if to learn her whereabouts. Has gunsmithing equipment—may have devised firearm to commit murder without rousing suspicion. Is anxious to have case investigated, ostensibly to clear daughter, suggests Margot as culprit. . . .

Again Maguire studied his writings, and his thoughts recreated the picture of the banker's white, puffy face, like that of some shrewd larva, as he had seen it last. He continued writing, more swiftly:

. . . May he not be trying to learn if suspicion touches him, or hoping to catch someone else in web of evidence to remove suspicion from himself?

Maguire could think of no more to set down against the banker. He left a space for possible future additions, and finished with a brief paragraph at the bottom of the page:

Notes: Learn more about Dorrance's last meeting with Gage, also see if he had any reason to think Margot cared for him. Investigate note Gage gave him, Margot's apparent threat. Study for possible abnormal traits—daughter fixation, morbid tastes or distastes, etc. Get look at his private gun shop.

Finishing, Maguire blotted the sheet with great care and laid it aside. The next sheet

he headed with the name of Gwen Dorrance. He followed the form he had devised for the first sheet:

### GWEN DORRANCE

Possible Motives: Jealous rage because Jeff Gage may have thrown her over. Fear of exposure in illicit love affair. Double vengeance motive—kill Gage of whom she despised, doom of Margot, whom she hated as her lover's wife.

Maguire winced as he wrote "doom of Margot." The thought of her danger had been with him for more than twenty-four hours, yet he could not accustom or harden himself to it. He began to write more swiftly, as though fresh words on paper might banish the grim worry from his mind.

Suspicious Circumstances: She was at *Blue Lantern* shortly after Margot left. Was cautious or curious enough to search booth, gather up and hide torn pieces of menu card. Is an expert shot and likes to hunt—would logically use firearms to kill. Definitely wants to prove Margot guilty—may wish to cover up evidence that she did crime herself.

The dossier concerning Gwen Dorrance's possibilities as a suspect was almost as long as that he had drawn up for her father. He left a space as before, then the final paragraph of things he intended to do:

Notes: Get possession of scraps of menu and Margot's note, now in hands of Gwen Dorrance—*use force if necessary*.

He underlined the last four words heavily, as if to strengthen his own resolve. Then, continuing:

... Also learn about her last talk with Gage, check against her father's conference. Check closely for mental abnormalities, trace if possible entire course of her affair with Gage.

He read the sheet over. As before, an image rose in his mind, this time of the plaster-white face, the loose full mouth, the inscrutable dark eyes of the banker's daughter

who had loved Margot's husband. He twitched slightly in distaste at the thought of her. Both the Dorrances repelled him—they might have been ghouls or vampires, of the fabled race of "undead" which frightened the superstitious. At the same time he told himself sternly that he must not let this personal distaste color his valuation of the evidence for or against either of them.

He laid aside the second page, and with it the dominant thoughts about Gwen and Simon Dorrance. At that moment the telephone rang again. Once more he lifted the receiver. "Yes?" he said.

"Mr. Max!" It was Lizzie, her voice hysterical. "I tell you, you can't do this to me."

"You mean I can't fire you?"

"No, you can't. You can stop my pay and forbid me the office, but I'll go on working for you. Mr. Max, you don't understand me. I mean to help you, save you." She paused, seeming to sob.

"Save me from what?" he prompted.

"Not only from suspicion and arrest. There's another danger, Mr. Max. You're letting yourself in for a very foolish entanglement. You only think that you're in love with—"

His anger rose again. "Lizzie, that's why I have to fire you. Because you can't keep your nose out of my private business. I can't help but be sorry for you, but it goes. Now, if you really want to help me, stop telephoning."

She started to say something else, shrilly and protestingly, but he hung up. His heart ached over this awkward, floundering declaration of passion and loyalty—but Lizzie could not be allowed to complicate further his relations with Margot, already so sadly complicated. He turned back to his writing.

Lizzie—what was her last name? It took him a moment to remember. Lizzie Rausch, that was it. He wrote it at the top of the third sheet of paper.

### LIZZIE RAUSCH

Possible Motives: She is obsessed with passion or worship for her employer, intends to watch over and direct his affairs. May have killed Gage to entangle Margot in web of suspicion that would ruin her eyes of world, perhaps land her in prison or death house.

Suspicious Circumstances: Was by herself all morning—may have slipped away to commit murder. Has shown undue interest in affairs not her own, especially concerning murder case itself.

Maguire paused. He was having a hard time putting into written words his ideas of Lizzie as a potential murderer. But the impulse to distrust and analyze her remained, and he went on:

Notes: Find out definitely her activities on morning of murder. See if she has pistol or other firearm. See if she knows Gages or anything about their home.

He laid that sheet aside in turn, and pulled the fourth sheet toward him, writing a fresh name.

Verna Hesseldine! That acrid friend and champion and helper—could he set her down as a suspect and not hate himself? Yet he had suspected Margot; a moment ago he had refused to let personal feelings of a vastly different sort affect his estimate of the Dorrances; he had deliberately added the name of Lizzie to his list even though he found it hard to set down his reasons for suspicion. Resolutely he began to catalogue Verna's connections with the case, real and potential:

#### VERNA HESSELDINE

Possible Motives: Disliked Gage, might have tried to clear way for Margot's happiness.

He grinned a little as he added:

Is quite capable of murder, especially if it will help those dear to her.

Suspicious Circumstances: She knew material of metal cylinder found at murder scene. Seems to have much special chemical knowledge. Is wealthy and idle, time and money no object. Presided at meeting that proved alibis for Margot, Seeley and herself. When questioned by police, readily established alibi for Margot and Seeley—thereby establishing her own—but admits in confidence that they met well *after* time of Gage's death.

Maguire paused, tapping the butt of his pen on the edge of the table. What sort of

investigations could he press against her? He would rather face Kohler and Grott in their most violently suspicious mood than brave the flash of Verna's spectacles as she answered charges of murder. He pondered a full minute before adding:

Notes: Visit her home, search if possible for weapons. Try to establish her whereabouts at time of Gage's death.

Yet another finished sheet was added to the pile. The fourth was to be devoted to Seeley. Maguire shook his head slowly. He found some difficulty in mentally dividing the true and false evidence that affected the ex-reporter. At last he wrote, briefly but slowly:

#### KING SEELEY

Possible Motives: Love of Margot. Enmity for Gage because of slights and quarrels.

Suspicious Circumstances: Met Margot at *Blue Lantern*—chance or design? Had been drinking heavily—bolstering courage after trying experience? Was at police station when Margot was brought in. Seemed unstrung. Lied about time of meeting at Verna's.

Notes: If he is murderer, exposure will be doubly hard after failure of frameup. Catch him off guard.

Maguire had written a shorter page for Seeley than any of the others. Resolutely he marked the last sheet with a name:

#### MARGOT COY GAGE

Possible Motives: Love for Max Maguire.

That was short, but his hand trembled as he wrote it. He could think of no other motive to add, and so he proceeded to the next paragraph:

Suspicious circumstances: Owned .22 caliber pistol (same caliber as bullet). Wrote threatening note to Gage. Scribbled menu. Lied about meeting with Verna. Police sure of guilt for time. Kept important secrets to herself.

He paused again, then wrote, in big, underscored capitals:

TRUST HER AND SAVE HER

He reviewed all that he had written, folded the sheets carefully together and thrust them into his inside pocket.

His hat and topcoat still smelled of jail disinfectant as he donned them, and he registered yet another vow to settle accounts handsomely with Kohler and Grott. He looked at his watch—the hour of delay advised by Verna was nearly up. He left his room and rode down in the elevator. The operator gazed curiously at Maguire's bruised face, but said nothing. Maguire got his car from the garage and headed for College Grove.

HE FELT better than on his last trip along this same route. He had been ready to crumble then, with fear for Margot. Now that she was free, at least temporarily, from suspicion, he thought more clearly and dispassionately. The fact that he himself was the object of police investigations did not frighten him nearly so much. He had been in trouble with the police before—with Kohler, at least—and had come out of it without trouble.

The brick house came into sight. Maguire stopped the car at the curb and strode up the front walk. His feet made loud impacts on the concrete. Reaching the door, he rang the bell.

He caught, or fancied he caught, the faintest echo of movement inside, then silence. Nobody answered him.

He rang the bell again. No answer. He remembered that Verna had said that Margot was alone. Had she seen him arrive? Was she standing within, stubbornly silent, bent on refusing him entrance? He swore solemnly to himself that she must hear him.

Pulling open the screen door, he tried the latch. It gave, and the door swung silently inward.

"Margot!" he called softly.

His voice seemed to float around the parlor within, then to bounce back in a ringing echo. Still there was no answer. He crossed the door-sill and stepped inside.

Then he thought he heard a soft sob from the direction of the library. He turned his face that way.

Margot moved slowly into sight, pausing at the threshold of the library door.

She was pale and haggard, still without rouge on her face. Her gleaming hair was

slightly disarranged, as if her hand had groped over it. A belted robe of green silk hugged her body, and on her feet she wore mules and ankle-length hose. She stood in the library door, her head turned sidewise over her left shoulder so that her face, in profile, seemed to be gazing at something behind.

Maguire walked forward to her. "Margot," he began earnestly, "I couldn't stay away. I came here to tell you—"

Then he saw what she was walking away from in the library.

A body lay there, a long female body in crumpled clothing of extreme sports-fashion cut—yellow-green and blue-green. The woman was dead. She lay face down, her slouch hat fallen away from her tousled black hair, one arm doubled under her, the other curved up and around her head. About her was the limp abandon that marks the swiftly stricken corpse.

Maguire gazed. His mind groped for a word to describe that element of jumbled stillness that is recognizable at first glance as death. *Thrown away*. That was it. Like a jointed doll, a big doll with which a careless giant had played until tired. Now the giant had dropped the plaything on the floor. It had fallen to remain—

Through these half-idle musings came recognition.

It was Edna Tipton who lay there; Edna, his former partner, who had hated him and Margot, who now would never hate anybody again.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE HIDING PLACE OF DEATH

HE MOVED slowly toward Margot, and after a moment, she took an unsteady step to meet him. Her shoulder touched him, numbly, stiffly, like the prow of a boat knocking against a pier. Still she did not look up at him, and her arms hung straight down at her sides as if they had become too heavy to lift. Maguire caught her close, and suddenly she relaxed, relaxed utterly, as though about to wilt and fall to the floor.

"Steady, Margot," he exhorted her, his voice strained. "Steady, dear. It'll be all right."

"She—shot me—" stammered Margot. At last her eyes lifted to his. They were dark with horror, crowded with tears. "Shot me," she repeated. "Then she fell down—"

"Shot you?" echoed Maguire. "Where?"

Margot recovered herself, moved from him, half turning and thrusting her left leg backward by lifting its heel. Blood streaked the outer side of her bare calf, blood that oozed slowly from a small troughlike wound.

Maguire took one glance to assure himself that it was nothing serious. Then he stepped past Margot into the library and forced himself to look at the silent form of Edna Tipton.

She had fallen almost in the direct center of the room, facing toward the front windows. The table with the magazines had been knocked over and one of Edna's feet, wooden-looking now in its modish shoe, touched the chalked silhouette of Jeff Gage's body. Blood—fresh blood—spread in an uneven blotch around the head and shoulders.

Maguire knelt and touched a wrist. It was flaccid but warm.

"Edna," he muttered, then remembered that she could not hear anything that he would say. Taking her by the shoulder, he turned her over on her back. Her set face was blood-drenched, and a thin dribble still seeped from her torn mouth.

It was the same kind of wound that had gashed the lips of Jeff Gage—and, as with Jeff Gage, the wound was spattered with flecks of brown and white, paper and tobacco. Maguire's head swam with half-realized significances. Margot had faced around in the door, her whole horrified form trembling.

"We had better call the police," came her weary-sounding murmur.

"Not yet." Maguire got up and came toward her again. "We'll have to talk this thing over first."

"I didn't do it, Max."

"Come into the parlor," he said, and took her by the arm. She came with him like an obedient child. They sat down together on a divan, facing away from the library and the thing it held.

The unshed tears still stood in Margot's blue eyes, but her voice was steady and clear once more as she said, "Well, Max?"

She was being neither fearful nor defiant.

She was only waiting for what questions he had to ask her, and what course of behavior he might suggest.

"What was Edna doing here, Margot?" he inquired gently. "How did it all happen?"

"I heard her ring the doorbell, not fifteen minutes ago," was Margot's reply.

"And so she came in," supplied Maguire. "What did she want here?"

"That's what I found hard to understand," replied Margot slowly. "I expected her to blackguard or threaten me, and she didn't. Oh, she was grim enough. But what she said first of all was that she and I had an interest in common."

"Meaning me?"

"Yes," nodded Margot. "She spoke those exact words. She had, or at least affected, a very drawling, casual tone, and she suggested that we would do better by working together than against each other. I asked her what she meant. She began by saying that Jeff must have been killed either by you or by me, and perhaps by both of us."

MAGUIRE almost cursed, but did not. Edna was dead now, beyond rebuke or calling to account. "Go on, Margot."

"She pointed out that she could cause us some very grave trouble, by telling of our relationship in court. The police, she claimed, only half guessed at the full extent of it. However, she was willing to keep silent and even to help—for a consideration. Of course I asked what kind of a consideration."

"What kind was it?"

"She said that she wanted money."

Maguire stared, dumfounded and aghast. Margot looked down at the floor. "Surprised at her? So was I. I must have showed it, for she said, 'Oh, don't think that I'm poor. I'll get all of Max's money when he breaks our partnership agreement. But I want your money, too. If you two are so sure that you'll be happy in each other, you can find out—with each other and nothing else.'"

Maguire breathed deeply. "She meant that she'd blackmail us."

He could imagine Edna meaning that, and saying that. Now she was dead. Her knowledge and her plans meant nothing. He and Margot had only to forget her to be free of her.

"What did you say to all that?" he urged Margot.

"I said nothing. I walked into the library. She laughed, a very soft and superior laugh, and followed me in. She seemed to think that she was in full command of the situation. While we looked at each other, she picked up a cigarette from the box in there on Jeff's stand."

"I know which one," said Maguire, remembering.

She lighted it, and went on talking. She said something to the effect that I should be more adroit, both in love and in murder. I was afraid, and angry, and felt that I could not stand much more. I turned my back. Then there was a shot."

"At you?"

Margot shook her head slowly. "I suppose so. I felt a sort of slapping sensation at my leg. I whirled around, greatly frightened. She was bleeding at the mouth, her eyes were bulging out. Next moment she fell forward, knocking over the table. She lay there and did not move."

She trembled violently, as though stirred by strange, inward motor impulses. The tears overflowed at last. Maguire pulled her close in his arms and she dug her head helplessly into the angle of his neck and shoulder, her wet cheek touching his chin. He mused for the space of a moment on the situation.

Once he and Edna had been friends, confidants, business partners. They had even been attracted to each other. Now she was dead, violently killed, and he was shocked but not sorry. Edna lay dead in one room and he sat in the next, tenderly comforting Margot. What an awkward position they would be in if someone discovered them. If he were more of a philosopher, he felt, he might smile quietly. Being the sort of man he was, he frowned.

"Margot," he said, "you say you had your back to her when the shots were fired?"

"Not shots." Her face was still hidden, and her voice sounded indistinct and muffled. "Only one shot, Max. Yes, I had my back to her."

"One shot, you say? How could both of you have been hurt, then, if—"

She broke off abruptly, with his mouth half open. Margot had calmed her trembling. He released her and rose to his feet.

"Stay here," he said. "I want to have another look at the body."

He hurried back into the library and gazed again into Edna's bloody face. The wounded lips were a little relaxed and, bending, he could see the chipped teeth behind them. Like Gage, she must have been holding her teeth together when the bullet struck. Again, like Gage, she must have been shot with a small-caliber bullet. He remembered what the morgue attendant had said about tonsils torn to pieces. Maguire studied the flecks of paper and tobacco.

A little sparkle of white light drew his eye to the carpet. Quickly he stooped and caught up what lay there.

More puzzled wonder dawned in his face. It was a small hollow cylinder of pale metal, half an inch wide and less than a quarter of an inch in diameter, open at both ends—an exact duplicate of the one he had found in yesterday's visit to this same room. Duraluminum—Verna Hessel-dine had supplied him with that information, out of the strange junkshop of her knowledge. Straightening up, he gazed intently at nothing as he combed his wits for the explanation that seemed dancing on the very fringe of capture.

Edna had faced Margot with accusations and threats. Standing here—and he moved to the place where Edna must have posed in her fashion-drawing manner as she spoke her last ironic sentence in this life—she had gazed upon the protesting back of Margot. Where had that back been stationed, where was Margot's position? He quartered the floor with his eyes. Opposite him, on the rug, was an isolated spot of blood, undoubt-edly the first gush from that scratch on Margot's leg. There was something beyond it, too. A bit of light, duller than that of the duraluminum cylinder and even smaller, lodged there and blinked up at him.

From his trousers pocket he took a pen-knife, whipped it open and dug the point of the blade into the carpet. The heavy fabric ripped away, and he exposed the wood of the floor beneath. In it was lodged a round blob of lead.

Still holding the carpet away with one hand, he used the knife to chip splinters around the find. Then, prying carefully, he slipped the knife-point under the lead lump and lifted it free. Taking it between his

fingers and holding it up to the light, he quickly identified it as a twenty-two bullet. Upon it he thought he saw a fleck of blood. Margot's blood.

Again he studied the place where it had lodged. The nose of the bullet had barely penetrated the wood—the charge had been light, or must have lacked a solid firing base. He would have to study that aspect of the affair, too. Rising, he stepped back to where he had had estimated Edna's position to have been just before she fell. His eyes measured the distance to the blood-blot that marked where Margot had stood. It was a scant six feet.

SOMEWHERE along that six-foot space between the two women, a double shot had been fired—that is, if he were to believe Margot's story. And he had sworn himself to belief of her. Two bullets, then, had sped in opposite directions, discharged at the same instant so that their two reports had merged into a single clap of sound. Had Margot not insisted that she had heard but one shot? One of the bullets had gone forward, gashing Margot's leg and spending its force in the planking a few inches beyond and below. The other had stricken Edna in the mouth, had cut her down as Jeff Gage had been cut down.

It had knocked to pieces the cigarette she had so coolly appropriated—

"Cigarette!" he exclaimed aloud.

"What?" came the anxious voice of Margot from behind, and Maguire glanced in her direction. Sometime during his investigations she had left the divan and followed him, but lingered at the doorway, as if fearing to enter the room of death. Her face was full of apprehension. "What did you say, Max?"

"Margot, these cigarettes!" He held out his palm, with half a dozen tubes of white paper upon it—each longer and thicker than an ordinary cigarette, each lettered in gold with Chinese characters, each tipped with an elaborate cone-shaped roll of stiff card like an individual cigarette holder. "Where did they come from?"

Margot walked into the room at last, moving fearfully aside to give a wide berth to Edna Tipton's body. Coming close to Maguire, she gazed at the cigarettes. Her eyes full of mystification as she looked up.

"But I never saw them in my life," she protested.

He turned back to the box, peering at the cigarettes still remaining. "There are only this half dozen," he said. "The rest are standard brand, the kind you buy anywhere. But these—"

He spread them on his palm, studying them carefully and wonderingly. Then he pushed past Margot without apology, carrying his findings back to the parlor. Margot followed, her amazement eclipsing for the moment her horror.

On the center table Maguire spread out his handkerchief. Upon this he laid one of the cigarettes, then once more he produced and opened his penknife. As carefully and watchfully as a surgeon, he slit the paper down the length of one side and gently pushed it open, revealing the closely packed filling of shredded tobacco.

Margot came to his elbow, peering. Then she smothered a little cry. Maguire's knife-point, gingerly probing the dark-brown mass, exposed a flash of metal. He, too, hesitated, then poked the thing further into view.

"A cylinder," he muttered. "Like the two I—no, this is something different."

"Is it a cartridge?" breathed Margot.

"More than that," he said as he cleared away the last of the tobacco from around it.

"A cartridge," repeated Margot. "A double cartridge."

She was right. The little cylinder of duraluminum bore clamped into its ends two blunt-nosed bullets—twenty-two caliber bullets—pointing in opposite directions.

## CHAPTER XVI

### STARTING OVER

MAGUIRE turned over the strange object with his knife-point.

"Look out," cautioned Margot fearfully. "It'll go off."

"I don't think so," he said. "If a jar or a shake would have made it explode, I'd have jarred it off just now. Anyway, my guess is that the fire of the burning tobacco is what sets it off. There doesn't seem to be a cap or a fuse."

He counted the remaining cigarettes. There were five of them, all alike. The gold

lettering, the holder-like tips, gave them an air of luxury. And luxurious things always had pleased Jeff Gage.

He turned his attention once more to the double-bulleted cartridge. He picked it up somewhat hesitantly, despite his confident depreciation of danger possibilities. Margot, close at his elbow, also studied it. Finally she spoke:

"I don't see how a cigarette could be made to contain that thing without the extra weight making the smoker suspicious."

"It's not as heavy as you think," Maguire slid the double cartridge into a vest pocket. "It weighs no more than an ordinary coin. The cigarettes are big, a little extra bulk and weight wouldn't attract attention, the more so because of these holder-tips. They'd be grasped by the teeth, you see, and the lips wouldn't carry the whole load."

He squinted into the opening of one of the tips.

"Another thing," he continued. "The use of the tip would impel the smoker to keep the thing in his—or her—mouth. Then the bullet would be bound to strike back into the throat and make a mortal wound. An ordinary cigarette without a tip would be apt to be in the smoker's fingers as often as in the mouth."

"That's true," she nodded, and then she shivered. "The whole arrangement was so cold-blooded, so shrewd, wasn't it? Diabolical."

He nodded agreement. Then he folded up the handkerchief with the slashed remains of paper and tobacco and tucked it into the inner pocket of his coat.

"I'm beginning to understand something of what happened," he announced. "Edna stood looking at you, and the cigarette was drooping in her mouth, holder-tip and all. How many times I've seen her smoking, just like that!" He paused, remembering. "Then it went off. One bullet went into her mouth and finished her. The other ranged downward, grazed your leg and slammed on into the floor. The cigarette was blown to bits by the explosions that followed the two bullets out of the cylinder."

Margot made a little gesture to show that she understood. She was still pale, still tense, still fighting to keep control of herself.

"What now, Max?" she asked.

He looked into her eyes. "I hate to do it, Margot, but I'm going to have to leave."

"Leave?" She shrank back, as if the idea frightened her.

"Yes, and as soon as I'm gone you're to telephone the police and tell them what has happened here."

"Call the p-police? I?" The thought made her shudder once again.

"It's the best way," he insisted, as gently as he could. "Just now you stand absolutely cleared of your husband's murder. Seeley and Verna Hesseldine have established that alibi in establishing their own. Now, since this new murder has happened, they'll be inclined to suspect you again—"

"That's what I was thinking."

"—But not so much if you yourself call them," finished Maguire.

Margot bent her head a little, in assent. "What shall I tell them?" she pleaded.

"The truth. Nothing sounds so convincing as an account of what's actually happened."

"Shall I say that you were here?"

"Certainly. You couldn't leave me out. If you did, some neighbor would be bound to report seeing me drive up here to your door. Tell the police all about my coming, just as it happened. Forget only two points."

"What are the two points that I should forget?" Margot asked.

"The first is the loaded cigarettes. I'm taking them with me." He pocketed them. "You see, they could kill when the person who planted them was somewhere else—and if Kohler and Grott knew about them, your alibi for the murder of your husband would be squashed. The other point to forget is that I suggested calling the police. Let them think you did it on your own hook."

"But, Max, don't you understand?" Margot turned up her earnest face. "They'll suspect you if they know you were here, and especially if they don't realize it was you who suggested—"

"Nothing doing, Margot," he cut her off decisively. "They suspect me anyway. I'm only out of jail on a habeas corpus, and they'll do what they can to get me back in, whatever happens. Promise me you'll do it the way I say."

"If you want it that way, all right," she agreed hesitantly.

"Good girl. Now, give me one minute to clear out of this neighborhood. You can spend the time putting iodine and a band-aid on that little slash. Then telephone them, and after that get dressed at once. They may want you to go with them to police headquarters."

"Oh!" she gasped, in patent horror at the suggestion.

"Don't worry," he urged. "Go along cheerfully if they so much as hint at it. Verna and I will know enough to get a *habeas corpus* for you this time."

He turned toward the door. Margot took a little half-step with him, as though to prevent his going. He faced her again, managed a smile of encouragement, then bent and lightly kissed her on the mouth.

"Chin up," he said, and walked out. He felt that she watched him go, but did not trust himself to look back.

**H**E DROVE away. The houses he passed was cosy-looking and well kept. Some of them were enclosed by picket fences or smartly pruned hedges. Trees were tinted by autumn's first chill frosts. On one or two front porches children were playing. It was a nice, secure part of town, Maguire thought. He had never owned real estate in his life, but for a moment he envied the holders of such houses, with lawns and gardens and families, with no problems but the little uncertainties of household expense, the little quarrels with their wives, the little exertions of keeping up with the neighbors.

How would he and Margot fit into such a house, he wondered. She had confessed to being deadly bored with the neighborhood. If he, Maguire, had met her when they were younger, if they had wooed and wedded and set up housekeeping in a normal, unexcited manner, what then? Could the ecstasy have lasted? Would the hearth fire have turned dull and cold at the end?

He banished the idle thoughts, remembering that he and Margot were literally fighting for their lives and freedoms.

A neighborhood drugstore, modern and smart-looking, stood at the next corner. He stopped. Upon the door-jamb was the blue and white sign that advertised a pub-

lic telephone inside. Maguire walked in, stepped into a booth and dropped a nickel into the slot of the instrument. He called the bank that Simon Dorrance owned and learned, after some talk with a very close-mouthed secretary, that Dorrance was gone for the afternoon. He called Dorrance's home, and a moment later heard the voice of a woman, presumably a maid or house-keeper:

"This is Mr. Dorrance's residence."

"I want to speak to Mr. Dorrance," said Maguire.

"Who is calling, please?"

Maguire gave his name, and the woman told him to wait. After several moments the banker spoke:

"Hello, Maguire. What is it?"

"Will you be in for a while, Mr. Dorrance?" asked Maguire.

"Why, yes." Then, guardedly, "Why?"

"I'm coming over. I'll be there within ten or twenty minutes."

"What's this about, Maguire?" demanded the banker's voice, a little nervous and insistent.

"You said you wanted a report. I'll give it to you, but only in person. Not over a public telephone."

"Maguire! Is it about—"

"Not over a public telephone, please," repeated Maguire. He hung up and stepped out of the booth.

**T**HREE were no customers in the drugstore, and only one clerk was on duty. Maguire walked to where the clerk leaned against a shelf behind the cigar counter. He was a lean, bored-looking man with deep creases in his face and hair as white as his linen pharmacist's jacket.

"Do you know tobacco and cigarettes?" asked Maguire.

"I've been selling them for years," was the reply. "Why, what's on your mind?"

"Take a look at this." Maguire drew one of the long, gold-lettered cigarettes from his pocket. The clerk took it in his own hand. He lost the bored look, bending his snowy head to study.

"This isn't any brand I know," he said after a moment of silent scrutiny. "To judge by the gold writing it's Chinese or Japanese—Oriental, anyway—but I've handled gift and novelty Oriental smokes be-

fore, and I never saw anything like this."

"Was it made abroad, do you think?" asked Maguire.

The clerk sniffed expertly at the brown, close-packed tobacco at the untipped end. "It smells like home-grown tobacco to me," he said guardedly. "I'm not an expert or anything, but, like I say, I've handled and sold tobacco for years, here and in other places. My guess is that this pill was made up here in the States."

Maguire put out a hand to take the cigarette again.

"I had a notion that it was made here," he said. "You see, a friend of mine sent me some as a present. I thought I'd check up—just curiosity."

"Maybe they're loaded," grinned the clerk.

Maguire refrained with difficulty from starting. "Yes," he smiled back, "maybe they are. But it's a long time until April Fool's day."

The clerk chuckled professionally. "Could I interest you in some recognized brands?" he suggested hopefully.

"No, thanks. To tell the truth, I smoke pipes almost exclusively."

"How about a pipe, then?" The clerk pointed to a card behind the counter. Several cheap briars were fastened to it with loops of thread, and above them was the word BARGAIN, in large crimson letters.

"No, thanks," demurred Maguire again. "I have twenty-four pipes already." His eye traveled past a display of wines and whiskeys to a marble-topped soda bar, with shiny fixtures and a card that read SANDWICHES AND SOFT DRINKS. He remembered that he had had no lunch.

"I'm all equipped with smokables," he said, "but you might give me something to eat."

The clerk moved over behind the soda bar. Maguire ordered a toasted sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then sat down at a table behind a big show case full of fountain pens, writing tablets and fancy cosmetics. The man brought him his lunch, then moved back to the cigar counter. The show case shut him from Maguire's sight.

Carefully Maguire broke open the cigarette he still held in his hand. In its center, snugly sheathed in tobacco, was another of the double cartridges. Maguire

did not test the others—he was convinced that they would prove to hold similar secrets. He slipped the cartridge into his vest pocket with its mate, then quickly ate his sandwich and drank his coffee.

As he rose, the clerk lounged from the showcase and toward the table. His eyes were upon the torn paper and spilled tobacco that littered the table-top.

"I see you took what I said to heart," he volunteered. "I mean about the cigarettes being loaded."

"Yes, I did," agreed Maguire. "Sorry I messed up your table."

"Oh, that's all right." The clerk wet the tip of his forefinger, reached it out and picked up a fragment of the tobacco. He touched it to his tongue and savored it for a moment, standing with his eyes closed in concentration.

"Yeah, that's American, all right," he decided. "Virginia, I'd judge. Not the best, just fair. You tell your friend he ought to put out a better line of gift smokes."

"I'll tell him," promised Maguire. "Just as soon as I catch up with him."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE GUN SHOP

AS BEFORE, Simon Dorrance himself opened the door to Maguire. But he did not invite his visitor in, and stepped out on the porch.

"What is it?" he demanded, and Maguire fancied that the heavy face was bloodless, even beyond its normal dead pallor. "What did you come to tell me?"

"You said you wanted a report of some kind today," reminded Maguire. "Well, I have a clue to the murder weapon."

Dorrance shifted his soft weight from one foot to the other. A dead leaf crackled under his shoe. "Clue?" he echoed, rather stupidly. "What kind of clue?"

"Let's go inside," suggested Maguire. "I'll tell you about it there, and show it to you."

"Very well," said Dorrance hesitantly, stepping back to leave the doorway clear. "Step into my den. You know the way."

Maguire crossed the threshold, but paused. "No, not your den, Mr. Dorrance. That gun workshop of yours."

"Eh?" Dorrance sounded stupid again, and a trifle panic-stricken. "Why do you want to go there?"

"We'll have to examine the clue," Maguire explained, with an air of patience. "It's a bullet, and it needs an expert, with expert's tools, to look it over. That's where you come in."

Dorrance shut the door behind them, but still hesitated. "Why not take it to police headquarters?" he asked. His dark eyes, grown cunning, seemed to scan Maguire's bruises for the first time.

But Maguire made a gesture of dismissal of the idea. "No. We can't let the police in on this, Mr. Dorrance. We must keep all of our information to ourselves until we're sure of just where your daughter Gwen stands."

"Gwen's innocent!" blurted out Dorrance angrily. But his tone and expression had suddenly lost all suggestion of stupidity.

"Exactly," agreed Maguire smoothly. "That's why we don't want the police to learn anything that may possibly reflect wrong suspicions on her."

Dorrance drew a deep breath. "Very well," he said again. "Come along. My shop's down in the basement."

He led the way to the rear of the hall, opened a door there and motioned Maguire to go down a dim flight of stairs. At the bottom was a second door, and Maguire opened it as he reached it.

Beyond was a small chamber, perhaps ten by fourteen feet. Three of its walls were of massy, unfinished cement, apparently those of an ordinary cellar. In each of these was a small high window. Fringes of grass at the sills showed that they were flush with the lawn. The fourth wall was of plywood, apparently enclosing the shop from the remainder of the basement.

Against this plywood partition stood a solid, metal-topped bench, with a hooded light above it and a profusion of vises, gouges, dies and other tools upon it. Beside this bench was a beautifully made lathe, and against the concrete walls or on shelves hung upon them leaned and lay half-finished gun barrels, locks, an unvarnished wooden stock, and boxes of various gunnery materials.

Dorrance followed Maguire into the shop and turned on the light above the bench. It

flooded the floors, walls and shelves with strong white radiance. "All right," said Dorrance, "now let's see that bullet clue of yours."

Maguire fished from his pocket the bullet he had dug out of the library floor at Margaret's home, and dropped it into Dorrance's puffy hand. The banker turned it over, his eyes narrowed to study it under the light.

"A twenty-two," he announced almost at once. "Home-made."

"How do you know that it's home-made?" asked Maguire.

Dorrance held it out between thumb and finger, its base upward. "See that? It's quite flat. The base of a factory-moulded bullet is generally concave. Wait, I'll show you."

He lifted the lid from a small, neat wooden box on the bench. From the heap of lead pellets inside he selected a slug of thirty-eight caliber. This he held beside the twenty-two. It's base dipped inward like a little saucer.

"That shaping gives the explosion of the powder more of a grip and force behind the projectile," explained Dorrance. "Arms and cartridge factories have special equipment to do it, of course. To make bullets at home, you use a simple hand mould and pour your lead by hand."

"How do you mean?" asked Maguire, letting his face go helplessly blank. "Have you a mould here? Could you show me what you mean?"

"Certainly." Dorrance, now very much the hobbyist, turned again to the bench, and picked up a tool that lay upon it. The device had two shanklike handles, like a big pair of pliers.

"This," he said, "is a typical hand-mould. You hold the handles together, so, and it presses together the two parts of the mould proper—the little cup that shapes the bullet, and the upper lid that limits its length. And this hold in the lid is to admit the melted lead or alloy."

Maguire had seen and even used bullet moulds before, but he let Dorrance lecture on. His own eyes and attention went sliding here and there around the shop, making notes of every box, bin and other receptacle. There were no drawers or closed cabinets—anything that Dorrance might hide here would be in the boxes or the larger cases.

The banker had lighted a gas burner on

the bench, and was rigging up a sort of crane above it. This done, he hung a crucible upon the crane, so that the flame just licked its base.

"I've a low-melting alloy here," he explained over his shoulder. "It will become liquid very rapidly, and then I can demonstrate the mould."

Turning momentarily from the crucible, he took up once more the twenty-two bullet which Maguire had brought, from where it lay besides his open box of slugs. He had taken a small magnifying glass from his vest pocket and was peering through it.

"Hello," he said suddenly, "this bullet was never fired through a rifled barrel."

"No?" said Maguire, in a voice that he hoped would invite more.

"You can see for yourself." Dorrance handed over both glass and bullet. "You probably know something about ballistics—at least, you knew enough to bring that thing here for me to examine. Give it a close study under the glass. You'll find that there are no ringlike scars on its surface—no mark of the riflings of a modern gun barrel. The bullet was either fired through a smooth-bore weapon like a shotgun, or exploded directly from the cartridge."

He returned to the burner and crucible. Maguire continued his quick scrutiny of the shop. Suddenly his gaze came to a riveted halt.

The box from which Dorrance had taken the factory-made bullet to compare the home-moulded one remained carelessly open.

It contained an odd assortment of balls, cartridges, odds and ends—and some device of gleaming white metal, strange objects in the shop of an ordinary gunsmith but suddenly familiar to Maguire.

**H**E SHOT a quick glance at Dorrance. The banker's pudgy form stooped above the hand-mould. Dorrance was pouring a spoonful of the melted alloy in at the tiny hole. Maguire reached out quickly and snatched something from the box. Concealing it with curved fingers, he studied it hurriedly—a double cartridge, the duplicate of the two he had found in the gold-lettered cigarettes.

Dorrance turned back to him once more. Pulling the handles of the mould apart, he

flipped out upon the bench a shiny, fresh-cast bullet.

"There you are," he announced briskly. "Take a good look at it, Maguire. Do you see, at the base, a sort of rough-cast projection? That's from the opening through which the melted alloy is poured in. It has to be shaved off with a knife-blade. And that's why home-made bullets are flat-tailed instead of dish-tailed."

"I see," nodded Maguire casually. "By the way, Mr. Dorrance, what's this?"

He held out the double cartridge.

**D**ORRANCE stared, flung the mould down on the bench, and fairly wrenched the thing from Maguire's fingers.

"Where did you get it?" he almost snarled.

Maguire nodded sidewise at the bench. "I saw it in that open box. I was curious, and—"

"Sorry I'm so nervous." Dorrance was speaking smoothly again, but his eyes watched Maguire as a cat watches an approaching dog. "It's a secret invention of my own."

"What sort of invention?" asked Maguire. He, too, affected a smooth, idle manner, but his eyes were as alert as Dorrance's.

"At present," Dorrance made reply, "it's experimental, a sort of scientific toy."

"Toy?" echoed Maguire. He gazed at the little cylinder with its two bullets. He remembered the corpse of Jeff Gage at the morgue, then the corpse of Edna Tipton on the library floor.

"I may as well explain," said Dorrance. "I doubt if you'd steal the idea, Maguire, but some scientific men might turn pirate if they heard much about it. You understand, Maguire, that many things must pass through the toy stage before they become useful. Gunpowder was used for firecrackers before it became a device of war and engineering, it took the kite to develop the aero-dynamic principle of airplanes—but let that pass. I'm interested, not only in gunnery, but in the development and advance of rocket engineering."

Once more he was the hobbyist-lecturer, and his manner became patronizing. "I dare-say, Maguire, that you think of flights in space as nothing but fanciful imagination."

"To be absolutely truthful," replied

Maguire, "I've thought very little at all on the subject."

"The world at large thinks less still, but scientists are interested—vitally interested. Important brains and important money have been used in experiments that have now passed the blind stage. Maguire, you're a young man. Undoubtedly you'll live to see the day when a rocket-propelled ship will attempt to reach the moon—even Mars or some other planet."

"That'll be interesting, but how does it affect this little double bullet of yours?"

Dorrance dropped his eyes to the device, as if to gain inspiration from it. "I'm trying to perfect a system of figures and formulas to explain the force of explosions, propulsions and recoils," he answered. "I measure flight distances, force of impact, and so on. For some experiments I need, not an ordinary gun, but a device whereby a charge will speed its projectile without a barrel to guide it or a solid base to kick it off—a rocket ship in flight, of course, would lack both guiding barrel and solid base. And so I evolved the double cartridge. The two bullets, of equal weight, act each as a momentary base for the other to push away from." He smiled loosely. "A toy, as I said. Yet it may some day—"

"The cylinder's of duraluminum, isn't it?" put in Maguire.

"Dural, yes. Did you know that?" Dorrance shot him a sharp glance, then dropped the cartridge into its box and replaced the lid. "Dural is light and strong, and it can contain the explosion without bursting, as copper or brass might."

"And how is it set off?" was Maguire's next question. "By outside fire?"

"Exactly," answered Dorrance, with another glance of suspicious wonder at Maguire's grasp of the subject. "Of course, I use a low-temperature explosive—there are several—to mix with the ordinary powder. Powder alone is harder to explode by simple heat." He paused abruptly. "Well, this must be boring you."

"Not at all," Maguire assured him. "You make lots of those double cartridges, I suppose."

"Oh, quite a few." From being impatient, Dorrance was being rather stagily casual. "That box has a number in it. You see, I need them for a long series of experi-

ments. But shall we return to the clue you brought, Maguire?" He handed back the little piece of lead. "Where did you find it?"

Maguire had his lie ready. "I stole it in the morgue," he replied. "It was taken from the body of Jeff Gage."

"And I'm helping you?"

"A little." Maguire fastened Dorrance's gaze with his. "The murder weapon, according to your findings, was not an ordinary gun with a rifled barrel, and the bullet it fired was home-moulded. That sort of firearm ought to be easy to identify, in these days of modern guns and factory-made ammunition at low prices."

Dorrance stepped back against one of the shelves, placing his elbow upon it. Inches away lay a handsome pistol, large-bore and single-shot. His loose lips stirred, but did not quite smile. "You're thinking," he said, "that one of my double bullets, fired without a gun at all, would be just such a weapon."

"Something to that effect," said Maguire. "Does your daughter know anything about these double bullets?"

Dorrance slid his elbow back on the shelf and closed his hand on the butt of the pistol.

Before he could bring it up, Maguire threw himself forward to grapple.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ONE SUSPECT CLEARED

MAGUIRE'S right arm whipped around Dorrance's gross, struggling body, his left clutched for Dorrance's gun wrist and closed instead around the pistol itself. The banker was stronger than Maguire would have guessed—he could not be disarmed at once. "Get away," he choked out, then panted wordlessly as he tried to fight free.

Maguire heard the dry snick of the pistol hammer drawing back, and thrust his own thumb forward to hook over the breech. Next instant pain shot from nail-root to wrist as the hammer came down hard.

All this happened within the space of two fierce gulping breaths. Then Maguire shifted his right arm upward around Dorrance's neck. He turned the lower part of his body to the left, ramming his hip into Dorrance's soft belly, and bent quickly over. The movement tore Dorrance from his feet,

whirled him over and dropped him heavily on the concrete. Maguire threw himself astride the banker, still clutching the pistol while its hammer chewed at his thumb. His right fist lifted high.

"Let go of that gun," he commanded, deep in his throat, "or I'll smash your teeth out through the back of your neck."

The dull dark eyes glowed as green as an angry cat's, then closed. Dorrance showed his pointed teeth, and his right hand loosened its hold. Maguire tossed the pistol into a corner. Rising, he caught Dorrance's coat-front and dragged the pudgy form upright, then shunted it ahead of him into another corner, far from any of the firearms. Letting go, he sucked his lacerated thumb.

"I won't let you do it," said Dorrance.

"Do what?"

"Frame Gwen. You tried with King Seeley—I've seen the papers—but my daughter's a different person. I don't care how clever or plausible your plot is. If you try to frame her to save Margot Gage, I'll kill you."

Maguire studied him narrowly, "Or do you mean that you'll kill me if I find her really guilty and prove it?"

Dorrance shook his bald head. "We both know she's not guilty. But she's a logical suspect. If you—"

"Quiet, or I'll hit you!" Maguire broke in savagely. "If you believe she's innocent, you're hurting her case by acting like this. As for killing me, you've just found that I'm hard to kill. Another foolish move may be your own finish."

"We understand each other," said Dorrance. "So get out."

"I won't. You paid me to do a piece of investigation. Part of the investigation is now taking place here. You interrupted it with clumsy gunplay, when I asked if your daughter knew about the double bullets."

"She does not. She's interested in firing gun, not making them. You find it strange, Maguire, that I withhold so much from my daughter. We haven't been too affectionately close, she and I, but I'm willing to die for her. Yes, or kill for her."

"Maybe she won't like your methods," said Maguire.

"Maybe not. But I'm going to serve her, whether or no."

Dorrance pulled his rumpled clothing straight. His eyes, green again, wandered

to the corner where Maguire had thrown the pistol. Maguire quickly moved that way, picked up the weapon and broke it to eject the cartridge.

"Mr. Dorrance, you gave me a fifteen-hundred-dollar retainer, and promised me thirty-five hundred more if I found the murderer and cleared the name of your daughter from connection with the crime or alleged scandal about an affair with Jeff Gage. In spite of our little wrestling match, I'm going to hold you to that."

Dorrance produced a handkerchief and wiped his face. "What I said still goes. Carry out our agreement, in the terms you just stated, and the rest of the money is yours."

"No matter whom I expose?" prompted Maguire.

"No matter whom."

Maguire left the house quickly, and went to the curb for his car. He was baffled, and the sensation was both unfamiliar and displeasing.

WITH police backing, or even police neutrality, he would have moved to settle Dorrance's guilt or innocence right there in the gun shop. But Kohler would be hostile, would classify Maguire as a suspect. He, Maguire, must not present himself to the police without a proven culprit in his hand. He savagely kicked a swirl of leaves from the sidewalk as he opened the door of the car.

"Max! Max Maguire!"

He started, whirled and faced the man who hurried up.

"Hello, Max!" It was King Seeley. The blond young man seemed jaunty, happy. His pink face smiled, his hat rode slanted above his creaseless brow.

"Are you trailing me?" demanded Maguire.

Seeley's smile grew broader. "Oh, don't be that type. Look, you didn't do me any dirt. That little experience was the luckiest break I've had in weeks."

"How?" asked Maguire, still alert.

"I got my job back." Seeley clasped Maguire on the shoulder, almost affectionately. "As soon as I got out of jail I headed for the *Record* office. They offered me ten dollars for a quick column on my experiences."

"You gave it to them?"

"That and a lot more." He winked. "I've been close to the case ever since yesterday. I turned in my stuff, and the city editor said I had my job back again, with the Gage murder to cover from now on out."

Maguire smiled. "Congratulations," he said. "No hard feeling, then?"

"Why should there be, when you practically greased the way back to the *Record* for me?"

"Well, get in," Maguire said. "I'm heading back to town. Tell me all about it."

Seeley slid into the front seat, and Maguire went around the car and took the wheel. As they pulled away from the curb, he eyed Seeley sidelong. Finally he said, "Have a smoke?"

From his pocket he drew one of the gold-lettered, holder-tipped cigarettes he had taken from Jeff Gage's smoking stand and offered it.

Seeley did not take it at once. He stared frowningly.

"I've seen that thing somewhere," he said.

"Of course," Maguire nodded. "You tried to pinch a handful of these at Gage's yesterday."

Seeley glanced up inquiringly, then nodded.

"Sure. And you called me a shoplifter. Where did you get this one?"

"Margot Gage gave it to me. I was at her place a little while ago."

"Gave you just the one?"

"Right. I don't smoke cigarettes myself, so I thought I'd pass it along."

Seeley took it at last, turning it over and over. "It looks pretty luxurious," he observed, but Maguire, eyes on the pavement, could not tell whether he was hesitant or only savoringly deliberate.

"Got a match?" asked Seeley, and Maguire gave him one of the wooden matches he carried for his pipe. Eyes still on the pavement, he heard the scratch and the pop of flame, then glanced sidewise to see that Seeley had put the holder-tip between his lips and was cupping his hand around the blazing match to light the cigarette. Seeley blew smoke from his nostrils and sighed.

"Peculiar foreign stuff, but good," he announced.

Maguire thought of the drugstore clerk's

comment on the quality of the tobacco, but said nothing to temper Seeley's relish. He was well away from Dorrance's now, and stopped the car at a curb near a small shopping center. Producing his pipe, he filled it and lighted it with another wooden match. Through his own cloud of smoke, he watched Seeley.

The reporter had taken the cigarette from his mouth and held it carelessly between the fingers of his right hand. The glowing end pointed carelessly at Maguire's abdomen. The tip of the holder rested against Seeley's chest, in direct line with the heart.

"I was going to see Simon Dorrance," said Seeley. "He's been owing me a little money—thought I'd collect. But maybe you've got something better. A story."

"Story?" echoed Maguire. He watched Seeley carry the gold-lettered cigarette back to his mouth. It danced there as Seeley's lips formed words.

"You said you were at the Gage place. What does Margot think about it—about the death of Edna Tipton."

For a moment Maguire did not digest those words. He was watching the cigarette almost raptly. It now jutted sharply upward in Seeley's mouth. Bullets following its line in opposite directions would fly, one up through the roof of the car, one down into Seeley's mouth. Half an inch of drab ashes had formed. Maguire suddenly realized that Seeley watched him with almost equal intentness, waiting for him to answer. Seeley had asked him a question. Yes, about the death of Edna Tipton.

"You know about that?" Maguire tossed off in a level tone that might fit any mood.

"Of course. The police made a run out there. I fed it into my home edition story. You figure big in it. Margot said you were with her."

"And what did you write about me?" Maguire fidgeted in spite of himself, for the coal-end of the cigarette now pointed toward him.

"Here's a newsboy now." Seeley turned to look at the street. An urchin was trudging toward them with an armful of papers. He shouted a shrill message:

"*Record!* Last edition! All about the horrible murder!"

Maguire stared into the bowl of his pipe. No smoke curled from it.

"Out," he groaned, "and I haven't a match. Let me have that pill for a moment, will you?"

"I don't think it'll work," Seeley began to protest, but Maguire plucked the cigarette, now almost a third consumed, from his lips.

With a hand that he fought to keep steady, he plunged the burning end into his pipe, ground it heavily down, and smothered it.

**H**E LOOKED apologetically at Seeley. "Now neither of us has a light," he said, and tossed the stub into the street.

"Forget it," said Seeley, and put an arm out to beckon the newsboy nearer. The boy thrust a paper in, and Seeley seized it while Maguire tossed out a dime.

An eight-column banner of type occupied the entire top of the front page, at least two inches high:

#### NEW MURDER, MAGUIRE SOUGHT

"That means Edna Tipton," said Seeley. "Look, here's my yarn, with my by-line and everything." His pink forefinger dabbed at the lower half of the page. "Not bad."

A two-column feature headline said:

#### RECORD REPORTER TELLS HIS OWN TALE OF ARREST

Under that, in black capitals, the by-line:

By KING SEELEY

I was accused of killing Jeffrey Gage, the strangely murdered real estate broker—and for some moments they almost had me confessing to the crime that has shocked the entire community!

It began in a manner that swept me off my figurative feet, and off my figurative feet I stayed until luck set me free again after an hour of mental agony—free from jail and suspicion. Yesterday morning. . . .

"I haven't time to read this feature article now," said Maguire, and Seeley snickered, but not maliciously.

"Probably not, Max. Kohler and Grott are still after you. Read at the top of the page."

In the right-hand column, just below the big staring banner, Maguire read:

#### PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR IS ADMITTED SUSPECT IN DOUBLE SHOOTING

Edna Tipton, Maguire's Ex-Partner, Found Dead at Scene of Gage Murder

#### WARRANT IS ISSUED

Edna Tipton, glamorous woman investigator, for years a partner of Max Maguire, was found dead shortly after noon today at the College Grove home of Jeffrey Gage, who almost exactly twenty-four hours before was found murdered in the same room.

A warrant has been issued for Maguire, who is charged by police with both murders.

Brief reports, issued by Detective-Sergeant Kohler, head of the city homicide detail, are to the effect that Maguire was held at the city jail earlier in the day for questioning regarding the Gage slaying, that he had refused to talk, and that he was set free on a *habeas corpus* writ. The shooting of Miss Tipton followed almost immediately upon his release.

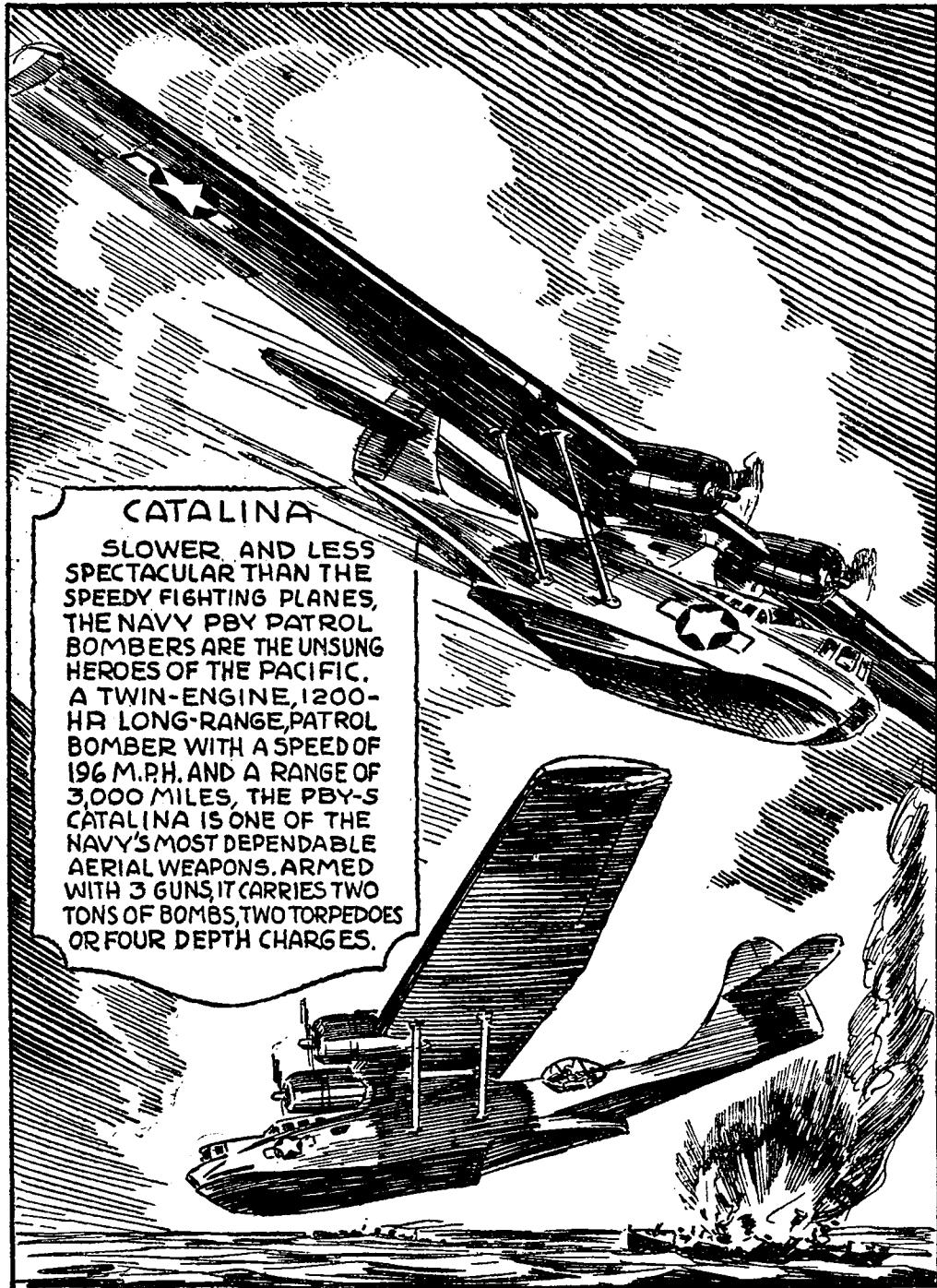
Unofficial reports are that Maguire and Miss Tipton had quarreled, and that their highly successful partnership of several years' duration had been dissolved yesterday.

Mrs. Margot Gage, attractive widow of the murdered man, and previously a suspect in the case, notified police. Although overwrought, she said that Miss Tipton fell dead after a shot was fired by an invisible person. She herself sustained a slight bullet wound in her left calf. She said that Maguire appeared at her door almost at the time of his partner's death, then left. Mrs. Gage's story has been accepted by police, and she was not held. Sergeant Kohler pointed out that she had definitely established an alibi when questioned concerning her husband's murder and that, inasmuch as all evidence seems to show that Miss Tipton was killed by the same hand and weapon, Mrs. Gage must be innocent in that affair also.

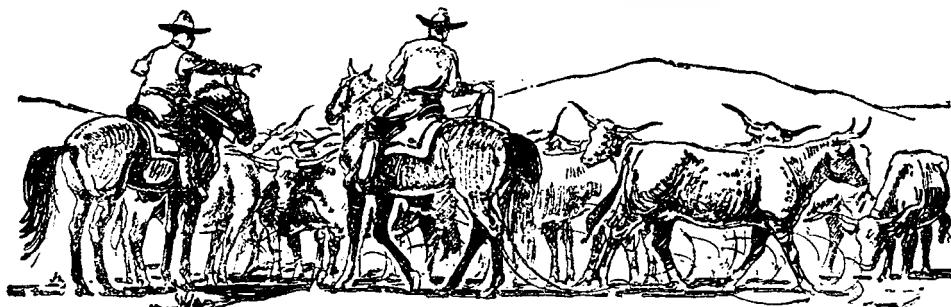
Police are combing the city for Maguire, and all highways, railroad stations and other avenues of escape are being watched.

# Wings for Victory

BY Jim Ray



# TENDERFOOT TOUGH HAND



## I

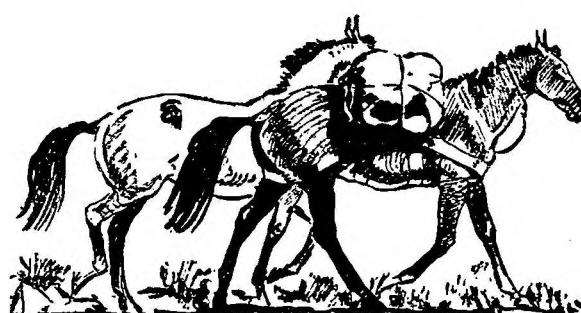
GEORGE BAXTER groaned and blinked his eyes open against the stabbing, throbbing pain and then he saw Slash L Jim Ledbetter standing there inside the round corral with the new Stock Inspector Harry Webb and the pair of them watching him while the Stock Inspector squatted on his spurred booteels and examined the brand on the hide of the partly butchered beef. George Baxter shut his eyes again. He was lying alongside the partly-skinned beef carcass. There was beef blood all over his hands and his clothes were splattered with it and the sweetish cloying odor of it in his nostrils made him a little sick at his stomach. That and the throbbing pain were nauseating him. A bloody curved bladed skinning knife lay on the ground alongside him. So did his six-shooter he remembered, grabbing it. So he shut his eyes because he knew he had to do some fast, sure thinking.

But big Slash L Jim Ledbetter had seen

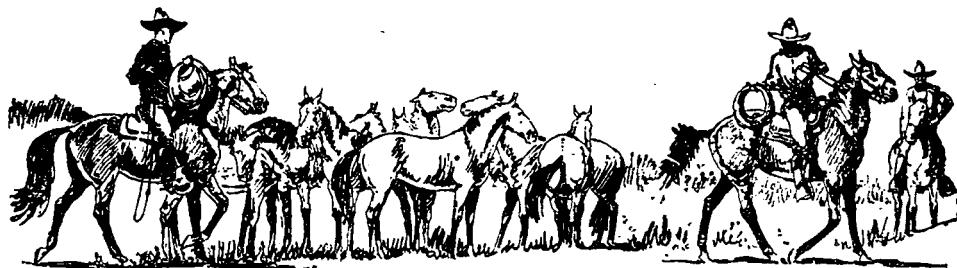
him open his eyes and now he took a couple of long-legged strides and Jim Baxter heard the jingle of the lanky cowman's spurs and then Ledbetter kicked him in the belly.

"The damn' pilgrim cow thief is playin' possum on us, Webb." Jim Ledbetter had a gruff, rasping voice.

The savage kick in the belly climaxed the mounting nausea and George Baxter rolled over on his side and was sick. The retching sent knife stabs of pain through his head and his skull felt as if it had been split wide open with a dull axe. Cold sweat bathed him and as in some horrible nightmare he could see Ledbetter's long, bony horse face with its yellow teeth bared in a grin. And the Stock Inspector's faint grin and his black mustache that was twisted to waxed points. Ledbetter's pale gray eyes, cold and merciless, set too close together on either side of a high-bridged nose. Stock Inspector Harry Webb's opaque black flint eyes, too sharp and bright. Webb was a range dude, but he was a good brand man and was out to build himself a quick rep. And he'd jail his poor old grand-daddy, if he had one, to do it.



## By WALT COBURN



"Judge Arnold will throw the book at 'im," Stock Inspector Harry Webb chuckled. "Butcherin' a Slash L beef. Makin' a gun-play when we rode up on 'im. And him a damn dude that ain't bin more'n three years in Montana."

"They bin a-ribbin' Baxter, like as not. Tellin' 'im that a real cowman never eats his own beef. Too bad that pardner of his got away."

George Baxter sat up slowly. He had to brace himself to sit up and his hand skidded a little in the corral dirt that was slick and wet with the blood from the partly skinned beef.

"That wasn't my pardner—" George Baxter's voice sounded weak and ineffective in his own ears. "You men have got me all wrong. It was that new cowboy I hired. I'd been to town for the mail. Found him butchering this beef—"

"So you helped him," grinned the Stock Inspector. "You was whittlin' the Slash L brand outa the hide when me'n Ledbetter rode up. For a dude pilgrim, Baxter, you ketch on shore fast."

"He comes from Chicago, Webb. Mebby-  
so learnt a few pointers hangin' aroun' the  
Union Stockyards. We ketched you dead  
to rights, Baxter."

"If you was so almighty innocent, what  
made you try a gun-play?" Webb's eyes  
looked like red coals in the sunset.

George Baxter's hat lay on the ground. He reached up and felt of his aching head.

Then looked at his hand. His hand was sticky with fresh blood. His thick brown hair was matted with sweat and blood and corral dirt. He fought back a wave of nausea.

"I'm hurt," he said weakly.

"Lucky you ain't dead," said the burly Stock Inspector. "You shot first. Couldn't take no fool chances on you missin' the second time. So I parted your hair with a forty-five. You kin tell it scarey to the other convicts at the Deer Lodge pen."

"I didn't shoot at anybody. You both had guns. Sam Waggoner was standing behind me. I heard him say, 'There's that glory hunter Webb and he ain't takin' me alive!'

*... Carrying Another Man's Cowhide Instead of the Old Pigskin!*



And I heard a gun go off like a cannon and that's the last I remember—"

"Who," asked the Stock Inspector, "is Sam Waggoner?"

"Waggoner's the new cowboy I hired."

"Never heard of 'im. You know any Sam Waggoner, Ledbetter?"

"New character on me, Webb. It looked fer all the world like Baxter's pardner Steve Sullivan."

"Yeah," agreed the Stock Inspector. "Looked like Steve Sullivan, all right. He shore quit the flats in a hurry. One feather in his geldin's tail and that pony woulda bin flyin' like a eagle. Either that bullet jolted this tenderfoot's brains or he's just a shore fast liar. There just ain't no Sam Waggoner. Baxter made 'im up. Givin' his pardner an out. For a tenderfoot pilgrim, you're doin' right good, Baxter. But Judge Arnold don't swaller fairy tales. Grab a tail holt on yourself, Baxter. Finish peelin' the hide off that Slash L beef."

"I'm injured. Sick. I can't—"

The lanky Ledbetter kicked him again in the belly as he sat there and Baxter grunted. Pain and nausea gave way to a blazing anger and Baxter rolled over and onto his hands and knees and onto his feet. He was groggy and his legs wobbled as he charged blindly at the big rawboned Slash L cowman. Ledbetter hauled off and his big open hand caught George Baxter alongside the mouth and sent him staggering off balance.

"Cut it out, Ledbetter," said the Stock Inspector flatly. "We don't want to mark him up."

Baxter spat blood and shook some of the pain from his head. The Stock Inspector picked up Baxter's six-shooter and shoved it into the waistband of his tight-fitting California pants.

"The shell under your gun hammer is the shot you took at me, pilgrim. I'm keepin' your gun. Exhibit A. Or B. We take the hide along to town and it'll be marked Exhibit A mebby. Peel it off. If you feel groggy, shove your head in the crick. Don't forget to pull it out, though. Git busy. We ain't got all evenin'."

GEORGE BAXTER, tenderfoot cowman, squatted on the creek bank and bathed his head and face in the cool water. Blood oozed from the rip in his scalp. Damn that

damn drunken Waggoner. Getting him into a mess like this. Killing a Slash L beef. What would Steve say when he found out about the nasty fix their little outfit was into? After all the warnings Steve had drilled into him. How Ledbetter was after their outfit because he wanted the land and the water rights to Antelope Creek. And Ledbetter didn't like the small outfits. He called them nesters and cattle rustlers. And Ledbetter and a few cowmen of the same big caliber had hired this swaggering spur jingler Harry Webb for Stock Inspector.

"We've got to watch our step, Bax," Steve Sullivan had repeated. "Ledbetter's after our scalps."

George Baxter rinsed the blood out of his mouth. He was bent over when Ledbetter kicked him viciously in the seat of his blood-spattered Levi overalls. Baxter's head and shoulders went into the water and when he choked and sputtered and came up, the big six-foot-six cowman was laughing and there was a thin smile on Webb's too-handsome face.

"Cut out the horseplay, Baxter," grinned the Stock Inspector. "I want that Slash L hide. You kin duck for minnows another time. If they got a crick at Deer Lodge. And if the warden lets the convicts play."

George Baxter was fighting mad. And when he got that way he was no easy chore for any man to handle. At college he had been middleweight champ. But this wasn't college. And those two gents were big and tough and their fighting rules ignored anything like fair play. They herded him back to the big corral. He picked up the skinning knife and went to work. Ledbetter had a bottle of whiskey and he took a big drink before he passed it to the Stock Inspector. Webb wiped off the neck of the bottle with a big white silk handkerchief before he drank. The big tobacco-chewing cowman scowled. But said nothing.

They made Baxter skin the beef and quarter it and hang the four quarters on meat hooks fastened to long ropes that worked by a windlass to hoist the meat high in the air from a scaffold.

It was getting dusk by the time he finished and when the Stock Inspector went to the barn to get his horse, Ledbetter, a six-shooter in his hand, made the tenderfoot cowman a proposition.

"There's a way outa this if you actually want to keep from doin' a twenty-five year stretch in the Deer Lodge pen, Baxter."

George Baxter was a little winded from his single handed job of wrestling the heavy beef quarters. His head throbbed with pain and the stench of beef blood hung in his nostrils. Blood smeared his lean, bluntnosed tanned face and his thick brown hair was sweaty and his brown-flecked dark gray eyes were bloodshot. His blood-caked fists unclenched under the threat of the big cowman's gun.

"Your proposition will stink, Ledbetter. It'll stink like your dirty unbathed hide."

"You talk too much for a pilgrim. Your play is to listen, Baxter. Webb is out to build hisself a rep. Might be I can't call him off. But I kin try. We got you foul, Mister. Fifteen years is the lightest you kin git off with. Judge Arnold bears down heavy on cattle rustlers. But it's my beef you butchered. My Slash L hide. If I don't prosecute, there ain't much that Stock Inspector Webb or Judge Arnold kin do about it. Sign over your Antelope Crick outfit to me, your Lazy Ladder brand, and I'll forget I rode here and ketched you butcherin' a Slash L beef."

"I have a pardner, Ledbetter: He owns a half interest in this spread—"

"It's your Chicago money. Steve Sullivan ain't nothin' but a forty a month cow-hand. You taken a likin' to him and dealt him in. It's your layout. And I'm offerin' you your first and last, and one and only out. You better take it, pilgrim. Or as shore as hell's hot, I'm a-sendin' you to the pen."

GEORGE BAXTER'S white teeth bared **G** in a flat-lipped grin. Prison. George Baxter III. Wearing prison stripes. Or did they wear stripes and walk the lock-step at the Montana prison? Boston papers please copy. George Baxter III wearing handcuffs. Scion of Back Bay Boston Baxters goes to prison for cattle rustling. A squib in the *Harvard Lampoon*. With cartoon. All American Throwback "Bax" Baxter. Carrying another man's cowhide instead of the old pig-skin. We want a touchdown! Goal for good old Bax! Then, Gaol for Baxter. The British still call their jail a gaol. Polo playing, five goal man Bax Baxter rides again. Good old

Bax who swapped his string of polo ponies for a string of cow horses. Sold his racing stable and bought himself a cattle ranch in Montana. Bax goes Western! Nice going, old man. It was a lark when you took a cop's helmet after a football victory and spent a few hours in the Boston jail with a crowd of teammates and you sang songs until they were glad to swing open the doors and chase you out. Fifteen years at Deer Lodge don't come under the head of sports. Think fast, George Baxter the Third. Make up your mind, Bax—

GEORGE BAXTER was still grinning when he slapped the gun out of big Ledbetter's clumsy hand. Then rocked him backwards and off balance with one-two swings that chopped and cut and hammered. And then he sank one deep into the big cowman's belly and twisted it up in under the man's ribs like a corkscrew and Ledbetter's long lantern jaw sagged down like an open hinge and he choked on a big soggy quid of tobacco and his pale eyes rolled back in their sockets until only the bloodshot whites showed and the big lanky rawboned frame doubled and folded up and Slash L Jim Ledbetter was out cold when he hit the corral dirt.

Ledbetter was still out and Baxter was washing the dirt and blood from his hands and face and head when Stock Inspector Harry Webb rode over from the big log barn.

"Your boss has a bellyache," Baxter grinned at the gun in the Stock Inspector's hand, "and a broken nose. He's sick. From his own medicine. I'm under arrest. You are privileged to handcuff a prisoner. But I'll tolerate no further abuse from Ledbetter. Or any from you, my fine feathered Beau Brummel of the wide open spaces. Keep it like that and we'll get along. Better lend a bit of first aid to your chum. He sounds like he's choked on his cud of plug."

Blood was spurting from Ledbetter's smashed nose and spilling from his mouth that had been torn against his big yellow buck teeth. Both his eyes were swelling to thin slits and turning a greenish black and purple. That solar plexus punch and the whiskey and the tobacco he had swallowed was making the cowman very sick.

"I'm blinded!" he gasped as he lay in the

thick corral dust, doubled up and holding his belly. "He blinded me!"

"Nothing that a hunk of that skinned steer won't cure," grinned Baxter. "He begged for it."

"I'd orter gut shoot you, Baxter."

"Mister Baxter to you. And they hang men for murder."

"When a law officer kills a cow thief in self-defense, pilgrim, the Montana law pays him a bounty."

"Circumstantial evidence would prove you a liar, Webb. The beef had been skinned, quartered and hung up. The hide with its Slash L brand is tied on your saddle. The prisoner has long ago been disarmed. Even law officers have been hanged for murder. Since you have had that cheap nickel-plated Stock Inspector badge pinned to that red fireman's shirt, Webb, you have killed two men. Your last victim was a mere boy. Not quite eighteen years old. You shot the boy in the back. Public sentiment ran high against you at the time. The bad odor of that murder still clings to your fancy range dude raiment. The skunk and the rattle-snake each have their peculiar odors. Stock Inspector Harry Webb gives off a similar aroma. On trial for your life before the stern-visaged Judge Arnold and a jury of your peers, the stink would be very pronounced. Murder will out. My pardner, Steve Sullivan, would spare no effort or expense. The murder of a Back Bay Boston Baxter might be quite easily accomplished under the circumstances. But perjuring yourself clear of the charge would be something that would make Houdini's most difficult feat seem like child's play. I'd advise you to go slowly, Webb. And speak softly. Better lend the helping hand to your chum. He acts like a horse with the blind staggers."

Ledbetter would have killed George Baxter. But Stock Inspector Harry Webb had been bluffed into something like a sullen but non-belligerent attitude. The killing of that young horse thief about six months ago had kicked up a bad stink and that stench, as Baxter had so bluntly reminded the Stock Inspector, still clung to him.

"Take 'er easy, Ledbetter. Wash up and let's git goin'. If Steve Sullivan should ride up, hell would bust loose. Cut out the cussin' and put away that gun. We got Baxter

over a barrel. Don't spoil the game. And you better hit that bottle easier. We gotta be cold sober when we fetch this pris'ner in. Old goat whiskered Arnold kin be hell on wheels. Tuck in your shirt tail, Led. Let's git away from here with the pris'ner and the hide. Steve Sullivan's a warthog when he's riled."

"My damned belly—my nose—my eyes—He tried to kill me and you say treat him easy. I'll tromp 'is guts out."

"Baxter," Webb reminded the cowman, "was ketched butcherin' a Slash L beef. We want him in good shape. Take him up before ol' goat whiskers Arnold all beat up and there goes your damned case ag'in' the tenderfoot. Arnold don't like me too good. He'd jump at the chance to pull off my law badge. Manhandlin' a prisoner is somethin' that a smart shyster kin build up into a big club. How come he whupped you, anyhow? You had a gun."

Ledbetter cursed him and the prisoner. They tied Baxter's feet to his stirrups and handcuffed him and took him to Circle City.

CIRCLE CITY was a wild and woolly little cow town. It boasted half a dozen saloons and a general mercantile store and a post office and the best building in town was the feed and livery barn. There was a small log jail. And a restaurant. Judge Arnold owned the store and was the Postmaster and Justice of the Peace and Judge of the District Court. Sheriff Pete West owned two of the half dozen saloons. The biggest and best. He called it the Mint and for sufficient reasons. His Bucket of Blood was likewise aptly named. It was Circle's toughest boozing place.

The Widder Black owned and ran the OK Cafe. She did the cooking and it was the best in the cow country. Her nineteen-year-old daughter waited on the table and swapped talk with the customers and every man in the cow country had, at one time or another, asked Wanda Black to become his wife.

Wanda was small and as one cow-puncher put it, built like a quarter horse. Her thick curly hair was a reddish chestnut sorrel. Her black fringed eyes were so dark a gray that usually they looked black. Her red lips smiled easily and she had beautiful white teeth and her voice was soft toned

and when she laughed it was never loudly but it sounded like the echo of something deep inside her heart.

She was laughing now at something Steve Sullivan was saying to her while he lingered over a third wedge of dried apple pie and his fifth cup of coffee.

Steve Sullivan was six feet tall and his muscles were long and tough as rawhide and he was a fast roper and a top bronc rider and as good an all around cowhand as you'd find in any man's cow country. His hair was as red and wiry as an Irish terrier's and there was a mass of blurred freckles across his face and they looked like a black smear on his weather tanned face. His nose was short and his mouth too wide and he was blunt jawed. There were shining sparks in his eyes now as he joshed Wanda Black. But when his temper bared the color of his eyes changed and they were as green and cold as winter ice. And the color would drain from his face and the freckles would stand out like a dark brown smudge across the upper part of his face.

It was early in the morning and Wanda was joshing him about his eating pie like that for breakfast and the Widder Black was standing in the kitchen doorway, apple cheeked and snowy haired and smiling. Then the door opened and Sheriff Pete West came in. He was a large man with a whiskey-veined face and a heavy paunch. Time had been when he was a top cowhand and later he ran a wagon and then he got badly crippled one stormy night when a stampede ran over him and killed his horse and he was laid up for a year and while he was still too crippled to fork a horse he won the Bucket of Blood playing poker. He still walked with a limp and his right leg bowed out a lot more than his left leg and he had the limping gait of a drunken sailor. His deputies did the hard riding. But Pete West had the savvy that it took to run the job from his saloon and he had plenty of guts and a quick draw to back his play. Sheriff Pete West was well liked. He always had a new story on tap and his stories were as clean as his spotless bar apron.

"Pie for breakfast," grinned Steve Sullivan. "Pete orders a T bone steak and a quart of rye and feeds the T bone to his houn'."

"Bourbon," chuckled Sheriff Pete West.

"And she's a bulldog. Part bull, anyways. With a family. Nine pups last night. I set up all night with her. Doggondest lookin' litter you ever seen. All colors. From one pure white to a brindle that's goin' to amount to somethin'. Fry six, Miz Black, and burn the taller outa the bacon. Plenty of fried spuds and a big bowl of applesauce on the side and a gallon of coffee and fix it to take out. Steve kin take it."

"For the proud mother and her nine li'l' fellers?" grinned Steve. "No T bone for the ol' gal?"

"Here's the jail keys, Steve. You let him loose and I'll have Arnold send you both up. He says he don't know when he'll be able to stand the smell of a steer, raw or cooked to a cinder. And where was you last evenin' about sundown, Steve?"

"Me?" Steve Sullivan cut a quick look at Wanda and her cheeks colored and Steve grinned and looked up at the Sheriff.

"None of your doggoned business where I was, Pete."

"Mebby not. Most mebby, yes. Judge Arnold will be askin' yuh." He tossed the jail keys on the oilcloth-covered table and told the Widder Black to wrap him up the two best T bone steaks she had on tap. For Queen, the mother of nine fancy pups.

"And mind you, Steve, no doggoned monkeyshines. You let 'im out and I'll shoot your big ears off."

"Let who outa where, Pete?"

"The hoosegow. Your dude pardner Baxter. Ledbetter and Fancy Britches Webb fetched him in. With a Slash L hide. Ketched him red handed butcherin' the steer that belongs to the hide. Ledbetter's face looks like he'd bin bucked off into a stone wall. There's a bullet hole in the Stock Inspector's hat. Doc's takin' some stitches in Baxter's scalp where Webb's bullet parted his hair in the middle. Beef butcherin' and assault ag'in' a law officer with intent to kill and resistin' arrest. Them's the charges ag'in' your tenderfoot pardner. Better take him some smokin'. And you kin pick up a quart of bonded stuff at the Mint. I'd take his grub over only I gotta tend to Queen."

Steve Sullivan's grin died slowly and the freckles smudged his face and his gray-green eyes were slivers of ice.

Sheriff Pete West shook his grizzled head and told Steve to keep his shirt on.

"You take 'er easy, son, or I'll have to lock you up. They claim you was with Baxter but you coyoted when you sighted 'em ride up. You simmer down, Steve. You play your cards close to your belly, savvy? Fancy Britches is rearin' fer a chance to hang it on you. And Ledbetter likes you like the Mint likes sheepherder trade. It looks like they ketched your pardner Bax in the bear trap. Don't do nothin' to hurt the case they got ag'in' him. Easy, son, like you was walkin' a beef herd to market. Don't git outa that slow walk. You won't do nobody no good by gittin' yourself jailed along with your pilgrim pardner."

The bright glints came back into Steve Sullivan's eyes and they puckered to slits with his wide-mouthed grin.

"You say Slash L Ledbetter got skinned up? And Bax shot a hole in Webb's hat? And the bullet with Baxter's name on it bounced off his Boston skull? Sounds like they was havin' fun. I kin swaller it all but my pardner spoilin' that stock inspector's hat. You ever see George Baxter handle a gun, Pete? It's the feller behind him or way off to one side of him that had better duck. Bax has never in his life hit what he shot at. He packs a gun so's to look like a cow-puncher. Like the ketch rope on his saddle. He's plumb harmless with both."

## II

GEORGE BAXTER, tenderfoot cowman, could never be quite sure when his pardner Steve Sullivan was joshing or meant it. Steve came into the jail with a bottle of whiskey and a caddy of Durham and the breakfast tray piled with enough grub to feed half a dozen prisoners.

"Nice little layout you got here, Bax. I'll git the Widder Black to hang some purty curtains to give the place a woman's touch."

"Where'd you come from, Stephen?"

"The Pool wagon wound up the calf round-up. I stopped in town on my way to the ranch. To pick up the mail."

"Female. Name of Wanda. How'd you get those jail keys?"

"Won 'em off Sheriff Pete West shootin' craps. Well, my thick-skulled *amigo*, tie into the grub while it's hot. I know it's ag'in' them Boston table rules to talk with grub in your mouth but if you feel like giv-

in' up the big secret I'm willin' to cock an ear. You musta bin full of shore enough panther juice." Steve pulled the cork and shoved the bottle at Baxter.

"Hair of the houn' dog, Bax."

Baxter shook his bandaged head. "I wasn't drunk, Steve. I'm still wearing the white ribbon. I haven't broken the promise I made you. No booze. You know, pardner, I have a hunch I was a sucker for the old shell game. Tricked."

"Pete said you got ketched in the bear trap."

Baxter nodded and felt of his stitched scalp and neatly bandaged head.

"Doc says it wasn't a bullet that ripped my scalp. That some of my hair is singed and scalp powder burnt. But that he'd seen the trick done before and patched the results. A man hits you on the head with the barrel of his six-shooter and pulls the trigger. It was the ejector dingus on the gun barrel that ripped my scalp. I remember now how Sam Waggoner was standing close behind me when we sighted Ledbetter and the Stock Inspector coming down the road where the road slants down the side of the hill. Waggoner shouted something about the glory hunter not taking him alive. I saw Webb shoot and pulled my gun. Then a cannon exploded inside my head and I was out like a light."

"Just who the hell," asked Steve Sullivan, "is Sam Waggoner?"

"Well," smiled Baxter lamely, "you were off on the round-up. I was halter breaking those two-year-old colts and the ranch chores were piling up and when this chap came grub line riding and tackled me for a job I put him to work. He said his name was Sam Waggoner and he was from Wyoming. He seemed all right. Willing and handy enough at whatever he went at and didn't have to be told. Not the chummy type but nothing of the old shifty eye about him. Chap about thirty and your build. Quite a capable sort of lad."

"So when I rode to town for the mail—"

"Female," grinned Steve. "Name of Wanda. Go on, Baxter."

"Name of Wanda. But she wasn't in town. So I rode back to the ranch. I found Waggoner butchering a beef. We were out of fresh meat and I'd said something about butchering when I got back from town. Sam

Waggoner said he was trying to save me the chore of butchering. He'd found a bottle of booze and was about half seas over. I didn't like it but I wasn't making an issue of the matter. So I put up my horse and got a skinning knife and began helping him. And then I saw the dead steer wasn't ours. It had a Slash L brand.

"I asked Waggoner what the hell. He acted shamefaced about it. Said it was the booze that had caused him to read the brand for our Lazy Ladder. So I told him we'd hang the hide on the fence and I'd inform Ledbetter of the mistake and rectify it by giving him a Lazy Ladder beef in return. Waggoner had started to cut the brand out of the hide and I'd just stopped him when we sighted Ledbetter and Webb coming off the hill. Then I got the little souvenir of the occasion. The Waggoner lad yelled and a mine exploded inside my skull and when I came out of it Ledbetter and the Stock Inspector were there in the corral with me and the partly skinned beef. The Sam Waggoner character was nowhere to be seen. He'd departed hastily for parts unknown. Must have had his saddled horse hidden in the brush. Ledbetter and Webb are claiming that you were the other butcher. I hope you've got an alibi, Stephen."

Steve rolled and lit a cigarette. "Pete West says Ledbetter's got a skinned nose."

"Ledbetter," retorted Baxter, "tried to scare me into buying him off. I'd sign over the outfit to him and he'd drop the beef butchering charge. I couldn't see eye to eye with him. He'd been somewhat abusive. So I used that as an excuse to mark him up a bit. Perhaps it hasn't helped my standing too much. Those lads seem to have something of a fool-proof case against one George Baxter the Third. You wouldn't have a nice sharp file or hacksaw blade concealed in this jailbird repast?" He looked under the slices of crisp bacon.

"What was it you was pretendin' to study at that college where you learnt them fancy drinkin' songs?"

"I have a vague recollection of studying law."

"Then we won't have to deal in a shyster lawyer. That saves us that much expense, anyhow. Judge Arnold will hold court as he always does when there's a case comin' up, at ten o'clock this mornin'. But you're

goin' to be too damn' sick to appear. Git a bellyache or commence throwin' fits or kill that quart of hooch and pass out drunker'n seven hundred dollars. Stall off your hearin' till tomorrow mornin'."

"Why?"

"You don't know why. Fact is, Mister George Baxter the Third, you're a tenderfoot dude pilgrim in the cow country and you're either drunk or plain dumb and you might be able to write out the Gettysburg speech in old Greek lettcrin' and read it aloud to the tune of Boola Boola but you're so damned green at the cow business you can't read your own Lazy Ladder brand or earmarks. And tomorrow mornin' when Fancy Britches Webb or Ledbetter or Judge Arnold asks you what brand was on the hide of that beef you butchered you don't know or you don't remember. You kin say without perjurin' yourself under oath that when you commenced skinnin' the hide off that beef you figgered it was one of ounr. When they try to make you say you knowed it was the Slash L brand you kin show Judge Arnold what they done to that skull of yourn. And if you ain't lawyer enough to convince Judge Arnold that you was blind from pain, then you deserve to spend the rest of your life makin' horsehair bridles in the Deer Lodge pen. You got that straight in your tenderfoot brain, pardner?"

George Baxter nodded. "Stall 'em off until tomorrow. Then I am vague brained. Not a difficult job, Steve. All I need to do is stay in character and act natural." Bitterness crept into his voice and his grin was twisted.

"Whoa, pardner. Cut it out. I ain't ridin' you. Just don't admit to even yourself that you read a Slash L brand on that hide."

"Sorry, Steve. But I'm not proud of myself, you know. Those chaps played me for a sucker."

"And back in Boston they're still sellin' gold bricks to ol' country boys like Ledbetter and Fancy Britches Webb and Steve Sullivan. How many times have the city slickers sold the Brooklyn Bridge to hayseeds like me?"

"I'm the black sheep who came West to make good. The town clown. The rumdum drunk who was getting his dude hide hung on the fence when a real lad with the kind of guts it takes, waded in and yanked him

out of the brawl and took him out on a ranch and tried to make a man out of George Baxter the Third. And what the hell happens? The first time I'm left alone and on my own I shoot the works. Lose the outfit you've sweated your guts out to build up. Listen, Steve. The best bet is for me to stand up before Judge Arnold, plead guilty and take my medicine. They can't lay a hand on you. I'm the Boston boy who went Western. And pulled up lame. You're a champ, Steve. You're all the aces in the deck. The salt of the old earth. A white man. Don't stick your neck out. Keep out of this mess. Hang onto the outfit. It's all yours now. Marry little Wanda. I'll knit you a fancy horsehair bridle for each of your many children. Hail and farewell, chum. Now get the hell out!"

"If you wasn't bunged up, Baxter, I'd bust the hell outa you. You're talkin' now like the dude souse that tried to whip all the tough hands in Circle City the first night you landed and the Slash L cowhands and Ledbetter was goin' to make you jig to six-shooter music or shoot the heels off your low-cut two-tone shoes. You quit me now and I'll have Judge Arnold throw the book at your dude head. Hell of a pardner! Quittin' a man in a tight. Just when I got the chance to shove a hunk of wolf bait down the throats of Ledbetter and Fancy Britches Webb."

"You're fooling yourself, Steve. They've got me across the old barrel. You know it and I know it. Stay out of it."

"You quit on me now, pardner, and Pete West will have to put an extra bunk in here. Do like I say and you'll be back finishin' halter breakin' them broncs about day after tomorrow."

"You don't mean that, Steve?"

"The hell I don't! Stall 'em till tomorrow. Then remember you never read no Slash L brand on that hide. Or if you did read it, it looked like a Lazy Ladder. Now git to work on that quart of forty rod. Pass out cold before Judge Arnold opens court. *Adios* and so-long, Bax."

STEVE SULLIVAN locked the cell door and went away whistling. When he had gone George Baxter pulled the cork on the bottle. He smelled it. Then carefully poured most of it on his clothes and he

gargled it and spat it out without so much as one small swallow. And he grinned at himself and at the waste of excellent ten-year-old bourbon whiskey. And when Sheriff Pete West came for him a little before ten o'clock that morning, to take him to Judge Arnold's court, he found the bottle empty and the prisoner George Baxter apparently maudlin, stinking drunk.

Steve Sullivan had taken Wanda Black with him and paid an early morning visit to Judge Arnold.

"Tell the judge, Wanda, where I was last evenin' about the time Ledbetter and Stock Inspector Harry Webb arrested George Baxter at the Antelope Creek ranch."

"Steve was whipping some manners into Chet Ledbetter with a doubled ketch rope. At the Slash L home ranch. I'd ridden there with Chet to get a buggy team my mother bought from Chet's father, Jim Ledbetter. Steve was on his way home from the Pool round-up, with his string of horses and bed horse. He stopped at the Slash L Ranch to see Jim and Chet Ledbetter about a brand argument he'd had with the Slash L rep who was working with the Pool wagon. Steve rode up about the time Chet was paying more attention to me than he was to the buggy team. After Steve whipped some manners into Chet's hide, we threw the buggy team in with Steve's string of horses and came on to town together. We'd just as soon you didn't mention it to anybody, Judge."

"You gave young Ledbetter a hiding, Steve? A good 'un?"

"You should have watched him crawl on his hands and knees and bawl and slobber," smiled Wanda. "That alibis Steve?"

"For the beef butchering. Chet Ledbetter will have you up for assault and battery."

"He says he's going to kill Steve the next time he sights him."

"Then Steve had better keep his eyes open," said Judge Arnold. "Jim Ledbetter and his big son Chet are hard cases. Now run along. Unless you want to see me about Baxter's case, Steve."

Steve Sullivan shook his head. "Some day, Judge, if I kin rope whup a few more Chet Ledbetters, I might git Wanda convinced that she'd better take me on for a lifetime job protectin' her. And we'll pay you another visit. Now I gotta git back to

the ranch. Git that beef hung up in the meat house."

"It looks bad for your partner, Steve."

"A judge shouldn't be prejudiced for an opinion," grinned Steve Sullivan, "till he's weighed all the evidence. So-long, sir."

They left Judge Arnold tugging his gray whiskers and chuckling and scowling from under shaggy brows.

Steve Sullivan left his string of horses in the pasture behind the feed and livery barn and rode on to the ranch. He spent the rest of the day doing what chores that needed to be taken care of. And when it was dark he changed into a pair of old canvas overalls and old boots and a battered old hat and shoved a whetted skinning knife into the saddle scabbard with his .30-30 carbine. And rode into the broken badlands. A little after moonrise Steve Sullivan shot a three-year-old Lazy Ladder steer. He worked fast. In less than half an hour he had the hide off the carcass. He had shot his beef near the edge of a big soaphole bog. The badlands had a lot of those black mud bog holes that crusted alkali white and in some cases were bottomless. Any animal trapped in one of those bogs would soon sink out of sight under its own weight. Steve rolled the beef carcass, minus its hide and the ears with their telltale earmarks cut off, into the bog. It sank out of sight and Steve covered the blood sign on the solid ground and at the edge of the bog and erased his boot tracks and the tracks of his shod horse. He rolled the beef hide with the hair side out and threw it across his saddle and rode behind it.

Back to the ranch. There he slid the flattened hide in between the soogans and blankets of a tarp-covered bed and loaded the bed on a pack horse and hit the trail for town. If he met anyone along the trail he'd tell them he was taking George Baxter's bed to him. That his dude pardner had some tenderfoot notion about wanting his own bedroll there in jail. But Steve Sullivan met nobody. And he rode unseen into the open doorway of the Widder Black's barn. And when he had shut the barn doors he jerked loose the squaw hitch in the rope and slid the tarp-covered bed with its hidden Lazy Ladder hide onto the dirt floor of the barn. He took the hide out and rolled it up again with the hair side out and rolled up George

Baxter's bed and roped it and left it in the harness room. And hid the hide in an empty manger.

The Widder Black's place was at the edge of town. A log house and a good log barn, a big truck garden and a lot of flowers and a horse pasture. A light showed in the kitchen behind drawn blinds. When Steve rapped cautiously Wanda opened the back door and let him in. Then she struck a match and lit the candle she had blown out before she opened the door for her after-midnight caller.

She let Steve give her a big hug and a clumsy kiss. He had burned his butchering clothes and bathed the blood off and was shaved and dressed in a new pair of California pants and blue flannel shirt and his town Stetson and best boots.

"You're duded up like Harry Webb. Buckskin seat in your new pants. My, oh my! Fancy Britches Sullivan."

"Have it your own way, lady. What did you find out?"

"It's soaking in a tub of water in Stock Inspector Webb's office next to the jail."

"Pickin's," grinned Steve.

"And Chet Ledbetter standing guard."

"Not so easy pickin's."

"Chet's a little drunk. A Slash L cow-puncher relieved him at midnight and he came to the restaurant for supper. I let him hold my hand while Ma cooked his steak. And promised I'd meet him for a few minutes later on. It's about that time now. He'll slip out for half an hour. He's tamed down. Eating out of my hand."

"Yeah. And he'll chaw off a few fingers if you ain't watchin'. Doggone, you're a white man. Ten minutes would be plenty. I won't forget what you're doing for me, Wanda."

"How do you know I'm not doing it for dear old Harvard? Well, let's ramble, cow-hand. Don't trip over your feet."

About fifteen minutes later Steve Sullivan slipped in the back door of Stock Inspector Harry Webb's cabin that was his living quarters and office. He carried the cumbersome rolled beef hide. He was breathing hard and wet with sweat and it was a minute or so before he located the wooden tub in the corner because the lamp light was turned on a low wick. Another five minutes and he had substituted the Lazy

Ladder hide for the Slash L hide. And he had to compare the two hides and cut a long angular rip in the Lazy Ladder hide to match the cut in the other hide where Waggoner had started to cut out the Slash L brand. The hides matched closely enough for color. Both steers had been red and brockle faced. And once wet the hair darkened and the hide would have to be closely examined on both sides to read the brand. Steve wore a long black slicker to cover and protect his clothes from both hides. He rolled the soggy hide that had been in the tub and carried it out the back door and he must have taken longer than he figured or Chet Ledbetter had got uneasy. He heard Chet coming in the darkness and flattened himself in the black shadows and Chet passed him so close that he could smell the tipsy young cowhand's whiskey breath. Chet's gait was long legged and stumbling from tanglefoot booze. There would be wet spots between the tub and the back door and Steve had to hope and trust that Chet was too drunk to notice.

Steve waited quite a while. He heard Chet stumble over something and curse thickly. Then the plop of a pulled cork and the clink of a bottle neck against the rim of a glass. Chet was having himself some beer. And singing now about Rye Whiskey I Crave.

Steve lugged the sodden hide through the night to the Widder Black's barn. He grinned as he spread it between Baxter's soogans and buckled the bed tarp and rolled up the bed and roped it. He had cut out the Slash L brand with the big whetted blade of his jackknife. And he rode away with the brand and when he got into the hills he whittled the brand into small pieces and as he rode along he scattered those bits of hide across a ten-mile ride. And it was daybreak when he swung back to the wagon road with his slicker tied behind his saddle cantle and all traces of his hide changing carefully wiped from his hands and boots. And the sun was in the sky when he rode boldly down the wide dusty main street of Circle City. Past the row of saloons. And he nodded, scowling blackly, at the little group of men standing on the wide plank sidewalk in front of the Mint. Sheriff Pete West minus his bar apron and wearing his street coat and a cartridge belt and holstered six-shooter buckled around his paunch. Stock

Inspector Harry Webb standing between the sheriff and big Jim Ledbetter and young Chet Ledbetter who was in his twenties and as big as his father. And both the Ledbetters with battered looking faces. Chet had his father's long jaw and high bridged nose and pale eyes but he wasn't as ugly looking as his tough tobacco chewing sire.

STEVE watched the Ledbetters warily, his hand on his gun. Chet had slobbered his threats about shooting him on sight. He would have ridden past but Sheriff Pete West hailed him. And for a few bad moments Steve Sullivan wondered if his hide swapping had been found out.

"Baxter comes up before Judge Arnold at ten o'clock sharp. You better be handy in case you're called for a witness."

"I'll be there," Steve Sullivan scowled heavily to hide the grin inside him. "I'd give a party to locate that Sam Waggoner."

"There ain't no Sam Waggoner," said Stock Inspector Webb.

"Baxter claims there is, Fancy Britches. His word is good enough for me any time. And against your word, Mister, it's worth a million."

Steve grinned at big Jim Ledbetter's battered face. Then at the rope welts that scarred young Chet's. And rode on whistling through his teeth.

### III

THE courthouse was a one-storied building with a sizeable courtroom with judge's stand and a railing in front of the stand and the chairs and two tables reserved for prosecuting and defense attorneys and the prisoners and the witness stand on the other side of the judge's platform with its flat-topped desk and heavy armchair. And the judge's one-roomed chambers at the back.

The courtroom was packed. The benches occupied and standing room taken up to the last foot of crowded space. Jim Ledbetter and Stock Inspector Webb luggered in the wooden tub with its soaking hide. Sheriff Pete West came in with the prisoner. George Baxter was dressed in a clean gray flannel shirt and Levi overalls and he was fresh shaved and his head wrapped in a snowy fresh bandage. His eyes were clear and

there was a faint grin on his mouth but something of the healthy outdoor color was gone from his face. And his jaws were clamped till the muscles at the corners bunched. He saw Steve sitting with some Pool ranchers on the front bench and they exchanged grins and Steve winked.

This was the preliminary hearing and no jury. Judge Arnold took his seat and rapped for order and the hearing got under way. George Baxter entered his plea of not guilty and told the judge he'd act as his own attorney.

There was something grim and desperate in Baxter's attitude. Like a man who was fighting a losing battle. Licked before he started.

Jim Ledbetter was called for the first witness. He was asked to identify the hide.

"I kin identify it, Judge, from both sides. It's a Slash L hide. Me'n Stock Inspector Harry Webb kin both identify that hide. We watched George Baxter skin it off that Slash L steer he killed an' butchered."

"Have 'em both identify the hide, Bax." Steve leaned across the rail to whisper to Baxter. "Right now."

Baxter looked puzzled. He got to his feet. "If it please your honor I would like to call upon Stock Inspector Harry Webb and have him sworn in and allow both men to examine and identify the hide."

**JUDGE ARNOLD** said it was contrary to the usual procedure but if both Ledbetter and Webb were willing he saw no objection to their making a point examination of the hide. It would save time. So Webb was sworn in. Ledbetter and the Stock Inspector examined the hide. The water had been drained off. The hide was heavy and sodden. It was almost impossible to read any kind of brand on the wet hairy side. And the hide would have to be fleshed before the brand welt on the under side could be accurately deciphered. But both men saw the knife rip in the hide where the brand was. They had been drinking all night and though neither man was drunk, their eyes were none too keen and their fingers clumsy as they felt of the hide. They looked at one another and nodded and dropped the sodden hide back in the tub.

"That's the hide," said Ledbetter. "I swear to it."

"That's our hide all right," agreed Stock Inspector Harry Webb.

They had not actually examined the hide. But since it had been skinned off that steer they had retained absolute possession of it. One of them or Chet or some trusted Slash L cowhand had guarded the hide. This was their Slash L hide. Get on with the hearing. That was their attitude.

"Make 'em swear to it, Bax."

The still puzzled Baxter had both witnesses repeat their declarations under oath.

The prosecutor had spent most of the night in the celebrating company of Ledbetter and Webb. His eyes were red rimmed and his voice too loud. He put Baxter on the stand and bullied at him. And made him identify the hide. And then Baxter sent the cow country courtroom into chuckles when he said he identified this hide as being the one he had skinned off the butchered beef.

"It's the same color. And there's that rip in it where Waggoner tried to cut the brand out. You'll have to remember I'd had a head injury. Pain blinded me. And at the best, I'm no brand reader. Harvard offered no course in the reading of brands. I naturally supposed the lad Waggoner had killed a Lazy Ladder steer. I presume this is the same hide I skinned from the beast."

"You presume!" shouted the prosecutor. "Is it or is it not the same hide you skinned from that butchered beef? Answer Yes or No."

"Ledbetter and Stock Inspector Webb have so identified the hide. They are both experts. I bow to their superior knowledge and training in such matters. I am forced to agree with them."

"That will be all." The prosecutor wiped the beads of sweat from his bald head and smiled placidly at Ledbetter and Webb.

That part of the hearing seemed to be over with. Judge Arnold had heard both Ledbetter and Stock Inspector Webb tell their coinciding stories of the arrest. The assault hearing would be separate from the beef butchering charge. The judge was about to formally charge the prisoner and bind him over for jury trial when Baxter said he had one witness to examine. He was acting upon Steve Sullivan's orders as relayed to Baxter by Wanda Black when she brought his jail breakfast to him.

"I'd like to have Stephen Sullivan take the witness stand."

WELL, the cow country courtroom decided, Baxter is hauling old Steve into it, after all. Why the hell can't the damned tenderfoot take his punishment like a man? Stand on his own dude feet?

"Will you take a look at that hide," Baxter's voice was dry in his throat and there was a stricken look in his eyes. "Examine it carefully. Identify the brand on the hide."

Steve Sullivan pulled the hide from the tub and spread it out, the fleshy side showing, on the platform. Then ran his fingers along the underside. Then opened the large blade of his jackknife and scraped the moisture from the under side of the hide. And again his fingers followed the brand welt and then he looked up at Judge Arnold. Still squatting on his booteheels he addressed the bench.

"Your honor, if it please your honor I would like to have you call three or four or a dozen disinterested cowmen from the audience. And Sheriff Pete West. I would like to have the sheriff and cowmen who don't owe Ledbetter anything or ain't scared of him and Harry Webb, to examine this brand." Then Steve Sullivan stood erect and snapped the blade of his jackknife shut.

"And if those men don't all agree with me that the brand on that hide is the Baxter and Sullivan Lazy Ladder, I'll eat the hide! Without salt!"

There was a dazed sort of silence and Sheriff Pete West proved right then and there that he was no slouch of a slow thinker and that he knew what to do in a tight and how to go at it and it was split-second brain work with that big bulk of hard fat and muscle coordinating. The Stock Inspector had started from his chair and the sheriff shoved out a big hand and pushed Webb in the face with it. A swift, hard shove that sent the Stock Inspector down into his chair and over backwards. And then the gun in the sheriff's hand seemed to be pointed at both the Ledbetters and the dozen Slash L cowpunchers who occupied a couple of the long benches.

"It's a damned coyote trick!" roared big Jim Ledbetter.

"It shore is," grinned Steve Sullivan, "but it didn't work."

Judge Arnold smiled faintly and tugged his chin whiskers and rapped for order in the court. Sheriff Pete West walked over to where the Stock Inspector had now regained his feet and was standing between the two Ledbetters.

"Why don't you three fellers set down?"

The prosecutor was on his feet now, mopping cold sweat from his bald head with a soiled handkerchief. His red-rimmed eyes looked a little glassy. He was protesting and objecting.

"Objection overruled!" barked Judge Arnold. "Sit down or I'll fine you and Ledbetter and Webb for contempt. Sheriff, select six cowmen whose opinions will be unbiased and examine that beef hide."

George Baxter was smiling uncertainly at his pardner Steve Sullivan. Steve was poker faced now. Judge Arnold was watching him with an eagle eye.

The two Ledbetters and Stock Inspector Harry Webb were glaring at one another, trying to shift the burden of blame for some slip-up they could not understand. That looked like their Slash L hide. But the sheriff and six Pool ranchers were scraping the under side of the hide with their jackknife blades and fingering the brand welt and nodding at one another.

Sheriff Pete West straightened up and hung his thumbs in the armholes of his unbuttoned vest. His voice fell on the hushed silence.

"Your honor," he said slowly, "we have examined the beef hide. The brand on it is a big Lazy Ladder. One of Baxter's steers wore it."

"Somebody switched hides on us!" Stock Inspector Webb's voice was shrill. His face was a mottled color.

"Sit down!" Judge Arnold's voice was an ominous rumble as he pounded for order. "This ain't the time ner the place fer loose talk. Take it outside. The prisoner will stand up!"

George Baxter stood on his feet. Stiff-backed and high-chinned and smiling very faintly. His heart was pounding against his ribs. He wanted to yell three cheers for Steve Sullivan. His pardner Steve.

"... and for lack of sufficient evidence, the charge of cattle stealing against you, George Baxter, is dismissed. Not guilty!"

"I'll git the squaws to tan that hide for

you, Fancy Britches," grinned Steve Sullivan. "Hang it on the wall at Ledbetter's house at the Slash L home ranch."

"You ain't won yourself nothin'," said Jim Ledbetter. "You slid your pilgrim pardner outa this almighty slick."

"You switched hides on us," said Stock Inspector Webb.

"I don't see how, Fancy Britches. One of you was ridin' close herd on that hunk of hide day an' night."

Webb cut a hard glance at Chet Ledbetter. "If I thought you got drunk an' went to sleep, Chet, I'd—"

"Stop at the Mercantile," grinned Steve. "Buy yourselves three big cryin' towels."

"There is another charge against Baxter." The prosecutor came up to where they were standing. His hands were shaky.

"Don't tackle it unless you feel mighty lucky," grinned Steve. "Waggoner will quit you like a yellow cur dog on the stand. He done the job he was hired to do. Bent a gun barrel across Baxter's head and pulled the trigger. Fancy Britches set his own hat on a fence post and shot a hole in it. Waggoner will fall apart on the witness stand. Mister Prosecutor, you better have that charge against George Baxter marked off the book."

"Oh so help me, I'll send Webb and Ledbetter over the road for perjury and hound you outa Montana and have you barred from law practice and mebbys so sent to Deer Lodge for conspiracy. And if you think me'n Baxter is runnin' some kind of a whizzer, have at it. I made the three of you look like cheap penny ante tinhorns. But I ain't even warmed up a good sweat at the job. Now shoot, Mister, or throw away the gun."

The prosecutor licked his dry lips. He turned his back on the two Ledbetters and the Stock Inspector and walked over to where Judge Arnold was still sitting like a white-whiskered king on his throne.

"All further charges against George Baxter are withdrawn, your honor." His voice was unsteady.

"Clear the court, Sheriff!" barked Judge Arnold.

"Well, Bax," said Steve quietly, "let's git for home."

Steve picked up Baxter's six-shooter from the table. It was tagged Exhibit B. He

took it by its barrel and shoved it, butt foremost at his pardner.

"You kin pound fence staples with ol' Exhibit B, Bax."

Baxter swallowed the lump in his throat. "You damn' Steve!"

The two Ledbetters and Stock Inspector Webb saddled their horses and left town and Jim Ledbetter sent his Slash L cowpunchers back to their round-up camp to move the outfit to the home ranch because the calf round-up was over.

Steve Sullivan and George Baxter ate fried prairie chicken at the Widder Black's and Wanda sat with them and later on Sheriff Pete West and Judge Arnold came in and they made the Widder Black sit down and eat with them. The sheriff took a folded reward dodger from his pocket and spread it out and shoved it across the oilcloth-covered table at Baxter.

George Baxter looked at the picture of the wanted man.

"That's him!" cried Baxter excitedly. "That's Sam Waggoner!"

#### IV

THE ground around George Baxter's fei was littered with empty cartridge shells. Both .45 and .30-30 shells. There were two targets. One was no further away than fifty feet and it was marked on its outer circle by one .45 bullet hole. The other bull's eye target was a hundred yards and unmarked. Sweat trickled down Baxter's face. His faint smile was self-derisive.

"It's no go, Steve."

"If you'd shot to miss, Bax, you couldn't do a purtier job. I've knowed blind men could do better. Hell, you can't be that lousy a shot!"

Baxter shifted away from Steve Sullivan's searching stare. Then grinned.

"I look like hell in 'em, Steve. Especially when I'm wearing a cowpuncher hat. And when I was lapping up the booze I'd forget to take 'em off when I got into a fight. And that's why I can't read the brand on anything fifty feet away or sight a rider in the distance—"

"Hold on, pardner. Start over once more. I don't foller yuh."

"Eyeglasses. I'm ludicrous enough as it is. But a four-eyed dude cowboy! No dice.

I'll stay blind. I'm nearsighted. Injured my eyes boxing at college. Resin or something on the gloves poisoned 'em. I had to stay in a dark room for weeks. Bandages. Blind as a bat. Best eye doctors in the country saved my sight. But I can't see any distance. And a dude cowboy wearing tortoise-rimmed glasses would give the local citizens too much of a laugh."

"The Ledbetters and Fancy Britches will laugh anyhow. At your funeral. Me, I'd rather be a live clown than a dead bonehead."

Steve was grinning but he was half angry, at that. He told George Baxter that eighty percent of gray-headed cowhands should be wearing specs but didn't just for that same boneheaded reason. Prideful about their looks. As if anybody gave a damn.

"When you identified the picture on that reward dodger, Bax, you signed your own death warrant unless you shoot first and shoot to kill. Your Waggoner happens to be Jim Ledbetter's older son, Sam. Sheriff Pete West dug up their back trail. From where they come from in the No Man's Land strip down near Oklahoma and Texas. Pete's layin' low. Playin' his cards close to his belly. Sam's done time in the pen. He's tougher'n a boot. He come from Wyoming all right. One of the hired killers in their Johnson County Cattle War. Pete West thinks Fancy Britches was another hired killer and the Slash L range has bin the dumpin' ground for the cattle that was stolen and trailed outa Wyoming. Sam's bin trail bossin' them drives. Fancy Britches polishes his Stock Inspector badge and passes them stolen cattle with a clean bill. Our Lazy Ladder range is in their road. They got to trail a long ways around it. And our lower range is badlands country and made to order for grazin' stolen cattle and hidin' fellers like alias Sam Waggoner. The Ledbetters want our outfit. They aim to get it. Them gents play for keeps. I didn't know I was lettin' you buy a keg of powder that's goin' to blow up in your face, Bax. Till Sheriff Pete West give me the lay of the land after your trial. When you identified Waggoner's face on that reward dodger. Your best bet, Bax, is to sell out. Ledbetter is makin' a last bid. It ain't a bad offer."

"After he tried to railroad me to prison?

I'll see him in hell first! Not if he offered a hundred times what the outfit's worth. It's mine. Yours and mine. Nobody can run me off!"

"Then put on your specs, pardner. And play your string out."

SO George Baxter put on a pair of tortoise-rimmed spectacles and shot the black centers out of both targets without putting a bullet outside the little black center. And he told Steve that one lopsided grin out of him and he'd knock his big ears down. Then they took turns tossing an empty tomato can in the air and shooting at it, two-bits a shot, and Baxter won ten dollars from Steve and Steve shooting his best. And that night about midnight they were wakened by the sound of shod hoofs and Sheriff Pete West rode up alone out of the pale light of a half moon. Looming up, Baxter said, like a battleship on the Atlantic.

"You don't have to come along, boys. I kin deputize some of the Pool ranchers. But it's the Ledbetters and Fancy Britches with a big drive of stolen cattle the Slash L bought off them Wyoming rustlers. Looks like our one chance to actually bear down on 'em. Jumpin' Judas! Your eyes, Baxter!"

"Don't laugh, Pete!" said Steve quickly. "Don't crack a grin."

"Laugh, hell! He scared the pants off me."

Baxter had put on his glasses when he and Steve had heard a rider coming and grabbed their guns. Now he yanked them off.

"They're Baxter's far-seein' specs, Pete. He's shortsighted blind without 'em. Gosh sakes, don't hooraw 'im or he'll bust 'em. I had hell enough makin' 'im wear 'em. He thinks he looks comical with 'em on."

"In this dim light," said the sheriff, "I couldn't make out the specs. Only your eyes. Magnified. Bigger'n mountain lion eyes. Spooked the gizzard outa me. Lemme try 'em on, will you, Baxter? Doc's bin after me a long time now to git me a pair."

Sheriff Pete West tried on the spectacles. They were special lenses and didn't make him see much better but he said they sure helped and the next time he got to Helena or Butte or Great Falls he was getting his

eyes measured for a pair. And he didn't give a damn if he did look like a drunk preacher in 'em because the Widder Black wouldn't have him anyhow, specs or no specs, till he cut down his quart a day to a pint. And for Baxter to put on his shooting specs and they'd get going after he got the loan of a fresh Lazy Ladder horse that was stout enough to pack somebody heavier than a race jockey.

"Somethin' gun broke, Steve, that I kin shoot off."

And the three of them rode away together. Packing saddle guns. And George Baxter the Third, tenderfoot cowman, was not much fooled by the easy joshing and hoorawing and careless talk that passed between Steve Sullivan and Sheriff Pete West. Behind their easy banter was a grimness that was like a cold steel core. Like a gun barrel in a leather scabbard.

It was that hour before dawn and the part of a moon still in the sky when they reached the upper end of the badlands and heard the bawling of cattle being moved. They reined up and Sheriff Pete West said this was it and for Baxter to stay close to Steve and for them to make every shot count because they were his deputies and he was the John Law and the odds were against them and the men they were after were killers.

"You know what to do, Steve. Keep Baxter with yuh. Good luck, boys!"

Sheriff Pete West rode away. Steve and Baxter called, "Good luck, Pete!" And then Steve slid his saddle gun from its scabbard and Baxter followed suit. Steve grinned and said, "Wipe your shootin' specs clean, Bax."

No handshaking or sentiment of heroics. It was just a grim sort of job to be done. Shoot first and don't shoot to miss. Steve led the way. A few minutes later he pulled up under the rim of a scrub pine ridge and waited. Dawn was graying the sky and then the cattle drive shuffled up out of the badlands. Weary, sorefooted cattle. The leaders setting a faster pace than the swing cattle and the cowpunchers behind fighting the drags along with dragging ropes that flicked out at the deft twist of the rider's wrist and the knotted rope end would spat against the rump of one of the drag critters.

TWO men rode the point. One on either side of the strung-out leaders. One of the point men was big Jim Ledbetter. The other rider was Fancy Britches Harry Webb. And a hundred yards or so behind them and on opposite sides of the moving cattle in the swing or middle of the trail herd rode Chet Ledbetter and the man Baxter recognized in the gray dawn as his man Sam Waggoner. And there were two more cowhands fetching along the drags. They were a couple of Slash L tough cowhands. Drawing fighting wages and about to earn their big money, Steve grinned at Baxter.

Baxter was uneasy and the palms of his hands damp with sweat and he wondered what had happened to Sheriff Pete West. He cut a furtive look at Steve Sullivan and Steve's eyes were slitted under the shadow of his slanted hat brim. Then Sheriff Pete West's big voice boomed.

"Hold up, Fancy Britches! You and the Ledbetters is under arrest!"

The broken hills threw back the echo and then the gray daybreak was shattered by the crashing roar of saddle carbines. Some of the cattle broke and ran. But the bulk of the long, hard driven, leg weary cattle balked in their tracks. Riders spurred for the nearest shelter of brush and rocks. The two drag riders headed straight for the brush that hid Steve Sullivan and George Baxter. Steve's teeth were bared in a mirthless grin.

"Hold everything, Bax. Keep your shirt on."

"The whites of their eyes, old sox," said Baxter. His voice dry.

The pair of Slash L tough hands charged their horses through the buckbrush. They sighted Steve and Baxter and their guns spat jets of fire and Baxter felt and heard the close whine of bullets and then Steve's saddle gun cracked and Baxter shot twice before he realized he'd squeezed his gun trigger and levered a fresh cartridge into the breech and fired a second time. One of the Slash L men was on the ground and threshing around and yelling for them not to shoot him any more. That he had a bellyfull. The other rider was hanging onto the saddle horn with both hands and then his horse whirled and he pitched off and his arms clawed the air and he lit heavily on his head and one shoulder and lay there with his head twisted under him and didn't move.

The two riderless horses tried to spook and they sidled off crabwise until the dragging bridle reins fouled in the brush.

A bullet nicked Baxter's shoulder and then he heard Steve yelling at him and realized they were under fire.

"You deaf, Bax? Quit that horse. Belly flop, you bonehead!"

And Baxter flung himself from his saddle and none too soon because one of the hail of bullets tore a deep furrow in the high cantle of his fancy-stamped saddle. Then he was lying flat on the ground behind the buckbrush. He heard Steve cursing and there was something like a dry sob in Steve's voice.

Then Baxter turned his head and he saw that Steve's horse was down. Hit through the shoulder and kicking. There was a brief second when Baxter's ears were filled with the almost human squeal of horse pain. Then Steve's six-shooter cracked and he'd put his suffering horse out of its misery.

"Oh, damn you!" yelled Steve. "You horse murderin' hound!"

"Just settin' you afoot, Mister. First the pony and then the man!"

"Waggoner!" Baxter's voice was a snarl. Waggoner was going to kill his, Baxter's horse! Like hell he would!"

"Bax!" yelled Steve. "Down you damn fool!"

But nothing but bullets could stop George Baxter the Third now. He went through the buckbrush and down the slant. Bullets snarled past his head but he kept on until one struck him in the thigh and he stumbled and fell headlong. And he had hardly hit the ground behind the meager shelter of a fallen lightning-blasted pine before his saddle carbine was cracking. And from the brush patch a hundred yards down the slope came a man's sharp yelp of agony. And alias Sam Waggoner's next shots went wild because Baxter's bullets were cutting twigs in front of his face and two .30-30 bullets broke both Sam Ledbetter, alias Sam Waggoner's shoulderblades and he was screaming with pain when Baxter's third bullet crashed into his open mouth and tore out his upper teeth and the back of his skull.

STEVE SULLIVAN and Chet Ledbetter were swapping shots but both were hidden by the brush and they were getting

nothing better than close misses. Until Baxter sighted Chet moving in behind the brush to get a shot at Steve's back. Then Chet was hidden by the brush before Baxter could shove fresh cartridges into the empty magazine of his gun. And Steve Sullivan hadn't seen Chet move out from behind the brush so Steve was wasting bullets shooting at the brush patch. Baxter was going to yell at Steve, then changed his mind. His bullet-ripped thigh was starting to hurt. He rolled over and over and into the shelter of some rocks and brush. And peered through the tangle of buckbrush to sight Chet. But he couldn't hear or see Chet. Until he looked over toward Steve's patch of brush. And sighted Chet Ledbetter crouched down on one knee and deliberately lining his sights for a bead on Steve's back. No time to aim or shout a warning. Baxter shot without lifting his carbine and the bullet struck Chet in the shoulder and spoiled his aim. Chet's shot whined over Steve's head. Steve whirled and his carbine whirled with the motion of his shoulders and he shot twice as fast as he could pull the trigger and lever a fresh cartridge into his gun breech. Both shots tore Chet's heart and ribs to slivers.

Up toward the point of the herd the shooting still sounded. Then Steve Sullivan and his tenderfoot pardner Baxter saw Sheriff Pete West crouched in behind a little patch of rocks and brush. With a six-shooter in his hand. And from a distance of about two hundred yards Fancy Britches Harry Webb was squatted behind a sandstone rim-rock and was sending shot after shot at Pete's rocks and brush. The bullets were hitting the rocks and ricochetting off with snarling, pinging whines. Pete West was in a bad tight. He had somehow lost his saddle carbine or run out of cartridges for the saddle gun, because he was using his six-shooter and the range was too far for a handgun and the soft-nosed .45 slugs were falling short or missing wide. And the big sheriff dared not quit what shelter the small boulders and brush afforded because that big bulk of his made too easy a target. And any one of Webb's bullets might find its mark now.

"You damned white-livered, glory huntin' Fancy Britches!" Steve's voice lifted to a wild yell. And it drew a couple of quick shots from the Stock Inspector's carbine.

Baxter was going to shoot but Steve's voice halted him.

"That purty fella tried to steal my girl. He's my meat, Bax! Lay off!"

Steve could have killed Webb with his first shot. But he wasn't doing it. He drove the Stock Inspector out from behind his shelter with a fast volley of shots. Webb dodged and ducked and ran and flung himself onto his horse. And by that time Pete West was out from behind his flimsy shelter and had mounted his horse to head off the Stock Inspector. They met almost head on and now it was close quarters and the sheriff's six-shooter was handier than the Stock Inspector's saddle gun. Sheriff Pete West shot Webb through the belly twice and then through the chest and Stock Inspector Harry Webb was dead when he slid from his saddle and hit the ground.

"I'm obliged, Steve!" Sheriff Pete West called out. "Ledbetter made a freak shot before I gut shot 'im. His damn' bullet smashed the trigger and magazine of my saddle gun. That Fancy Britches had me shore a-sweatin' there behind them pebbles."

So the gun fighting was over and big Jim Ledbetter and his younger son Chet and the older son Sam who had turned outlaw were dead. And the Stock Inspector Fancy Britches Harry Webb was dead. And two dead tough hands. Horses to catch and unsaddle and turn loose. Let the cattle scatter and spread out on feed and water. Sheriff Pete West had a couple of bullet rips in his big carcass and Steve had got off with a flesh wound in his leg and Baxter's thigh wound was painful but not dangerous. The sheriff and Pete West went over to where the tenderfoot cowman sat on a fallen log.

Baxter slid his six-shooter from its holster, aimed at a tree trunk about fifty feet away, shot at it and hit it. Then picked up his saddle gun, lined his sights on a pine cone at the tip of a scrub pine a hundred yards away, and shattered it.

"Hey, you Bax! Call it a day. It's all over but the hollerin'."

"I had to make certain sure." Baxter put down the gun and began peeling off his pants to get at the bullet rip.

"Sure of what, pardner?"

"Under certain stress of excitement the nerves are taut. Even the optic nerves be-

come affected. Of course I'm not completely relaxed. The chances are that when the last trace of excitement has died out, I'll be near-sighted. But the eye specialist who refused to operate claimed that eye exercises would better or even completely restore the eyesight. And while he didn't specify gun fighting— You saw those two shots I just made. Accurate enough, no?"

Then Sheriff Pete West and Steve Sullivan noticed that Baxter wasn't wearing his eyeglasses. And Steve said, "Where's your shootin' specs?"

"Lost 'em. The damn' things fell off when you yelled at me to belly-flop off my horse. Horse stepped on 'em. From then on it was the good old naked eye."

Steve grinned and shook his head. "Well I be damned."

They were patching up each other's wounds and Sheriff Pete West said that Steve Sullivan and George Baxter had to take over the big Slash L outfit—lock, stock and barrel—and he'd see that nobody disputed their claim. They could let the owners of the stolen cattle come from Wyoming and claim their stock or sell the cattle to Steve and Bax. And then he grunted like he'd been kicked hard in the paunch. And took a crumpled yellow envelope from his chaps pocket.

"Telegram for you, Baxter. Forgot it. Thinkin' about Queen and her pups. I'll keep one. You boys take the others out to the ranch."

It was addressed to George Baxter, III. Tenderfoot Badman. He grinned and then opened it. Then his lips puckered in a slow whistle.

"Wheeeew! Her name is Betty Lou and she's a You-all gal from the bluegrass country and savvies horses like Pete savvies his likker. She threatened, last time I saw her, to toss the engagement ring into the gutter with me. Listen. Hang onto your hats, boys." And he read the telegram aloud.

"Well, well," she wires. "You had to make the calaboose to get into public print. Anyhow it's one way for a gal to locate her missing man. Will arrive in Circle City with a second-hand hacksaw blade and a rusty horse rasp and grandpappy's squirrel gun. Stop. Two licenses. A feudin' license and a splicin' license. Stop. And a carload of brood mares. And a steeldust stud I bought

in Texas. Stop. If we have to spend our honeymoon in the Circle City hoosegow get busy and sweep it out and talk the jail manager out of a nice quiet cell. After all we'll want a smidgin of privacy. Stop. Three years, you missing son of a gun. Stop. Hope you salted down six-bits of your cattle rustler dough. I need it to pay the feed bill at Lexington Downs. They ran away from my colors. So I'm raising short horses. Quarter horses for the cow country trade. So get your pasture fence fixed. And move over, jail boy. For Betty Lou."

Baxter shoved the telegram into his pocket and grinned. "She's got hair the color of a crow's wing. Eyes the color of smoke. She's an orphan. She'd get the best room at the best hotel. Then pile some horse blankets on the straw and sleep in a box stall to be

near her horses. Owed a feed bill at the Arkansas Hot Springs stables when I met her the first time. Got her and her ponies out of hock. She got a winner at Saratoga and paid off with compound interest. Prideful. You'll like her. And she'll like you folks. And she'll really go for those pups!"

Sheriff Pete West and Steve Sullivan helped Baxter to his feet and he limped over to his horse. They mounted and headed for Circle City. The sheriff was sending a wagon for the dead men.

A week later Judge Arnold did a land-office business. He married the Widder Black to Sheriff Pete West. Pronounced Steve Sullivan and Wanda Black man and wife. And gave Betty Lou Langly to George Baxter III to love and to cherish and perhaps obey.

## THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

*(Continued from page 7)*

sands of pugs are fighting the war pretty good, and not many soldiers would be any good in a main event at the Garden. I like to write about fighters, because they are courageous, simple souls who love to fight. Some are heels and some are great men. Like people. Fighters ARE people. They even have families. Remember Jim Braddock?

"I even remember when Mickey Walker was a featherweight and fought Tommy Speno in Newark and licked Tommy too. Now look at Mickey—he's painting in oils or water colors or something with a beret on his skull. The greatest fight he ever had was against Benny Cohen when both were lightweights, eight rounds to a perfect draw, each down four times. Cohen became a dentist and quit the ring and if he also is painting pictures you could prove something or other by the analogy.

"But Greb was the best. He licked Mickey and he licked Dempsey in the training camps when he was a puffy middleweight. Greb was a dancing fool who loved ale and beer and women. Greb fought anybody anytime any place for any dough because fighting was Greb's business. Tunney still carries only one memento of his warring among the inferior folk. . . . Greb gave it to him,

over the eye and if Gene says he was butted, why did he let Harry get his head lower than Gene's? That's against good practise!

"In the end, Tunney became Greb's master, but Harry had danced away many a night by then. He had fun and it was a sorry day he died in Atlantic City or he would still be having fun laughing himself sick at the current heavyweights. . . .

"Although the lightweights are pretty good, and this Zurita is not a bad boy, ambidextrous like all Mexican fighters. I saw him on the Coast last year and he went good against a colored boy who can fight a bit himself. What ever happened to Allie Stolz, anyway? He was the best amateur lightweight I ever see . . .

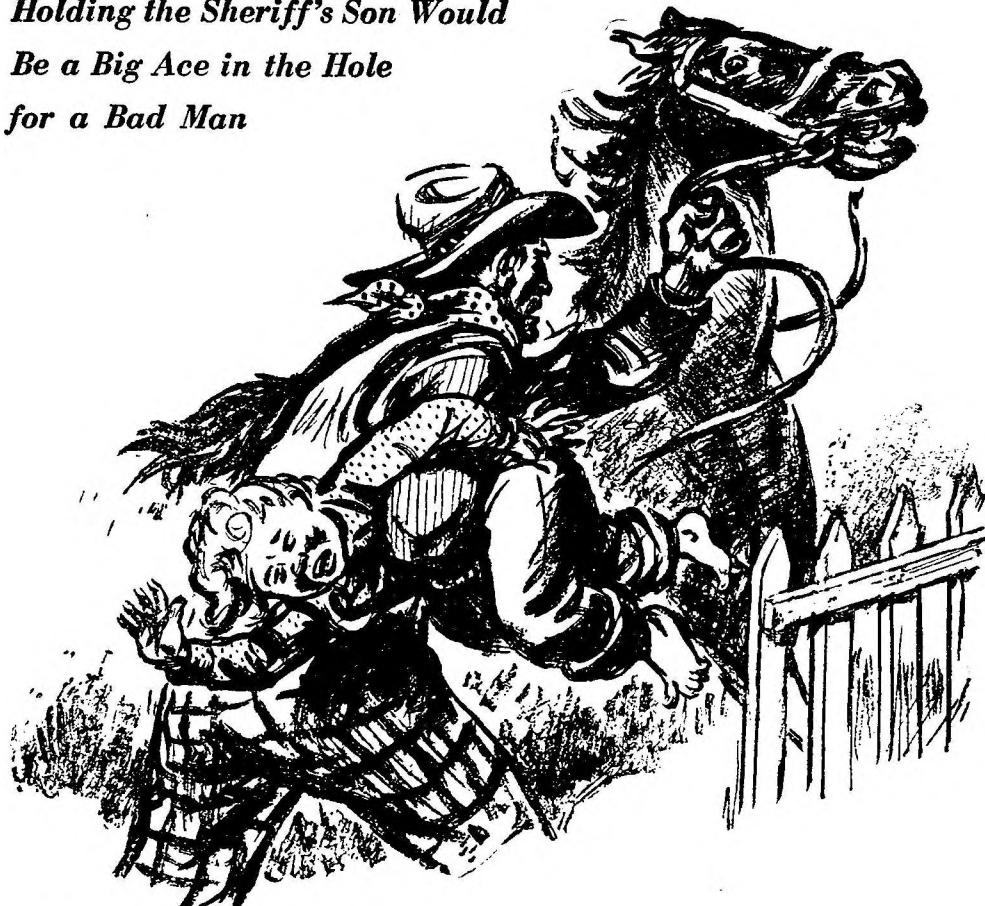
"Excepting maybe Benny Rothwell, the old Olympics fighter, who quit after six pro victories and went to running his dad's profitable Newark bar. Benny had a left hand like a knife and he was almost as tall as Georgie Ward, the old welter who belted Walker plenty in no-decision bouts in Newark. . . .

"You see how it goes? You start talking about fights and fighters and you go on and on. Hours and hours. If my favorite glama-zon had not walked in, I might be doing this yet tomorrow morning. . . .

"The lieutenant found most of his supplies, too. He is a very nice lad from Three

*(Concluded on page 143)*

*Holding the Sheriff's Son Would  
Be a Big Ace in the Hole  
for a Bad Man*



## THE RED-HEADED JONER

By GENE VAN

*Author of Many Stories of Red Harris and Little Pardner*

**R**ED HARRIS, physically exhausted from a twenty-four-hour search, sprawled on his bed and stared wide-eyed at the moonlight shadows on the wall of his little room. Next to his bed was a smaller one, unoccupied, where the moonlight made a blue streak across the pillow. It was Little Pardner's bed, but Little Pardner was not there.

Several posses were still searching the hills, not overlooking any place where the boy might be. Sheriff Spike Haslam, the youngster's father, Geography Jones, the deputy, and every man in Ocotillo City who was able to ride or walk, was on the search.

No one had any idea where he had got to. Red had left Little Pardner at their home, where he was playing with Glub and Fitt, his mongrel pup and tall, rangy cat, and thirty minutes later the boy was missing. It was unbelievable, but true. Kidnaped? Who would kidnap a little boy whose father had only the salary he drew as sheriff of that county? Red knew that Little Pardner wasn't lost either. Little Pardner wasn't the kind to get lost.

Little Pardner was missing at eight o'clock in the morning. It was now four o'clock the next morning, and no trace of the boy. Red tried to shut his eyes and visualize what might have happened. There

had been an attempted holdup of the Ocotillo Bank two days ago, by two men, in which the cashier had been badly wounded. The shots had awakened Ocotillo City, and before the bandits could get away, one of them was knocked down by a bullet, although the other escaped. The man who was knocked down refused to talk to anybody. The heavy bullet had cut a furrow around the back of his neck, shocking him so badly that he was unable to get up.

He was a big man, long-haired, bearded, hard-eyed, and as lithe as a wolf. His range clothes were threadbare, his boots worn badly. But he merely glared his hate at Haslam, when the sheriff questioned him. Who he was and where he came from, nobody knew. Haslam had told Red:

"Whoever he is, he's a killer, Red."

All this ran through Red's mind, as he lay there. Red was usually elated over a mystery, but this one struck too close to his heart, leaving him weak. He tried lying on his stomach, but he was too restless, so he flopped back on his back, unable to close his eyes and relax.

Red Harris was only sixteen years of age, but he possessed a brain of an older boy, which helped him make up for what he lacked in his slight build. He was still dressed in his overalls, which were held up by a short rope belt, a badly wrinkled white shirt, and he was barefooted. Red wanted to be ready in case any word of Little Pardner's whereabouts was announced. His face was lean, tanned, and freckled. His nose was straight, set between two bright blue eyes.

Red Harris had been an orphan, who had drifted into Ocotillo City after his old pardner had been murdered. Sheriff Spike Haslam had taken a liking to Red, given him a home, and later he adopted the boy. Red had one job in the Haslam household—looking after Little Pardner—and that was a mighty task in itself. Right now Red blamed himself for the youngster's disappearance. It was his interest in the prisoner at the sheriff's office that had taken him away from the house, during which time Little Pardner disappeared.

Little Pardner, just in case you should see him, was short and stocky, with a moonlike face, small pug nose, and large blue eyes which led him continually on the search

for bugs—large or small, he didn't care, just so they were bugs. He was four years old. He was dressed in bib-overalls, a faded blue shirt, and he wore dirty tennis shoes on his small feet. A few strands of blonde hair always managed to appear from beneath the brim of his battered old straw hat, which was held in place by a whang-leather strap that fastened under his chubby chin.

Red stretched, yawned, and tried to close his eyes and catch a few winks of sleep, but just as he was about to drop off into slumberland, he heard the front door of the house open. He turned his head and listened. He could hear voices belonging to Sheriff Spike Haslam and Geography Jones—but not to Little Pardner. Red sighed as he listened, but he was too tired to get up and join them.

Sheriff Haslam was a big, red-faced man. Right now his face was deeply lined, and his once bright eyes were tired and worried. He stood by the front window and looked outside. His broad shoulders seemed to sag, and as he turned from the window and walked over to a rocker, his gait was jerky, uncertain. He slumped down into the chair and looked over at Geography.

The deputy was tall, lean, with a thin, lined face. His eyes looked weary as he rubbed his hooked nose, then he tugged at his straggly mustache. His long legs were stretched out, and he kicked off his battered old high-heeled boots and wiggled his toes.

"This is hell!" grunted Geography. "Read that letter again, Spike."

Haslam pulled a soiled piece of paper from his shirt pocket. He unfolded the paper and held it close to the oil lamp. He cleared his throat, then read the note:

*When you turn my brother loose, you'll get yore kid back. I'll give you until midnight tomorrow night, and if he ain't loose, the kid dies! Don't tell anybody about this note. Make it look like a break, if you want to, I don't care. You can't lose if yore smart. You know who I am and you know I mean business!*

JACK HALLIDAY.

Red Harris, tense, had heard every word of the note. He swallowed hard as he sank back on his pillow. So that was where

Little Pardner was. Just then he heard Geography Jones' voice, as the deputy said:

"He came in here, with everybody huntin' his hide, an' put that note under the office door. But Jack Halliday would do that. This man we've got is Nick Halliday, as black-hearted a killer as ever wore a boot. They say he's just as bad as Jack—an' that's plenty."

Red drew a deep breath and stared at the window. Jack and Nick Halliday, hunted by every sheriff in the country. With three of their gang killed in running fights with officers, Jack and Nick had taken refuge in the Lava Bed country, two hundred miles north of Ocotillo City. From thence they had emerged—and now Nick was in jail.

And what a price for a sheriff to be asked to pay! Turn loose one of the worst killers in the country, in order to save the life of his own son. Red had heard men tell about the Hallidays, who would kill when it wasn't necessary. And to think that Little Pardner was in the clutches of the reputed worse one of the two!

Meanwhile Haslam replaced the note in his pocket and got back to his feet. He paced up and down the floor while Geography watched him. Finally the sheriff moved over to Red's door, opened it slightly, and peered inside, then he closed the door and returned to the center of the room.

"I reckon Red's asleep. He's been goin' since yesterday mornin'." He paused for a moment. "But hell, we can't even tell him about this note, Geography. We—we can't tell anybody."

"I know, Spike," nodded the deputy. "It bites kinda deep into yore hide—turnin' a man like Nick Halliday loose. But what can yuh do?"

Haslam turned and looked down at his deputy. "I don't know," he replied softly. "If I did it, I'd never look the world in the face again—an' if I didn't—well, I couldn't ever look myself in the face again. Seems to be a case of repudiatin' my sworn oath, or killin' my own son."

"I'd turn the devil an' all his angels loose to save that kid," said Geography.

"Let's go back to the office," said Haslam as he turned and started toward the front door. "I can't sleep. Larry McMann will need a little rest, an' we can't afford to leave the prisoner unguarded for a minute."

Geography pulled on his boots, got slowly to his feet, and walked out of the room. Haslam slowly walked up the road toward town.

Red sighed. At least, he was sure now that Little Pardner hadn't just wandered away and got lost. Red wondered what Spike Haslam was going to do. That was the last thought he had before he slipped off to sleep.

SADDLE-WEARY men dismounted in front of the Fill 'Em Up Saloon. Their faces were streaked with dust, and their eyes were nearly closed from the lack of sleep. Two of them left the group and crossed the street, heading for the sheriff's office. The others entered the saloon to quench their thirst.

Buck Ryan, tall, heavy-set, passed on the high boardwalk and looked down at the small, thin, wiry, bow-legged cowboy that was at his side.

"I hate like hell to tell the sheriff that we didn't find hide nor hair of that youngster, Jeep," he said.

"Jeepers, we done our best, Buck," grunted Jeep Carter, the stage driver who handled the big stage between Ocotillo City and Copperville. "'Course it's goin' to be tough on Haslam—but he's man enough to stand up under it."

Buck Ryan nodded as they moved down the walk to the sheriff's office, where they shoved the door open and entered. Larry McMann was sprawled on the cot against the wall while Geography Jones was tilted back in the sheriff's chair behind the desk. They looked at the two dust-covered men, and without a word spoken they knew the answer.

"Same thing, eh?" grunted the deputy.

"Yeah," nodded Buck as he sank down in a chair. Jeep leaned against the desk and rubbed his nose. "We never left a single stone untouched."

"Where's the sheriff?" asked Jeep.

"He went down to the house to get somethin' to eat," offered Larry McMann as he raised himself to one elbow, and yawned widely. Larry was a big, husky young man who was always ready to help Haslam, and at the present was serving as a deputy and guard over Nick Halliday.

"How's the prisoner, Larry," asked Buck.

"Onery as the devil," snorted Larry as he flopped back on the cot. "Won't talk much, except grunt. Mean as they—"

The front door of the office was flung open and into the room stepped Sheriff Haslam and Red Harris. They glanced at Buck and Jeep, then what hope they had built up within faded away, and they sighed deeply.

"Don't tell me," said Haslam. "It's the same old answer."

Buck and Jeep nodded as they got to their feet and moved toward the door. Geography started to get up out the chair, but the sheriff stopped him.

"Stay there, Geography," he said, "I can't sit still."

The two men left the office. Red sidled in beside the desk and climbed up on one corner. Haslam turned and walked to the doorway, where he fastened the door open, then he leaned against the wall and stared out into the street. His mind was busy working, trying to figure out what he should do. He turned from the doorway and looked at Larry.

"You'd better get some rest, Larry," he said. "You only slept a couple of hours this mornin'. Geography an' I'll stay here an' watch things. Don't come back until this afternoon."

LARRY sighed as he got slowly to his feet and stretched. "If yuh insist, Spike, but I'm glad to stay here if yuh need me."

"We'll watch things," assured Geography. Larry nodded as he left the office. Red got to his feet and sauntered outside, where he looked over at the hitch-rack. The posse was still in the saloon. He moved across the street and sat down on the edge of the saloon porch.

"If they only knew," sighed Haslam as he sat down on the cot. "Certainly funny not to be able to tell Red about it. He's eatin' his heart out."

"Everyone is," said Geography. "Is there anythin' else I can do to help yuh, Spike?"

The sheriff sighed and shook his head. "I wished there was, Geography, but it's all up to me. I have a duty to do—one to the enforcement of law that I swore to uphold; the other to the protection of my own child—a duty that the good Lord gave me. Is it fair to place any man in such a situation?"

"I dunno, Spike," sighed the deputy.

"Sometimes it's done jist to test yuh—yuh never can tell."

Haslam nodded wearily. "It's hell—that's what it is!"

Red Harris leaned against a porch post and watched the main street of Ocotillo City. People were moving back and forth, and here and there people stopped and talked, with Little Pardner's disappearance the main topic of conversation. People passed Red and spoke to him, but he merely nodded to them, as his mind was far away, trying to find the answers to questions that popped into his mind.

"Hyah, Red!" greeted a cheerful voice, and a hand slapped him on the back, bringing him to his senses. He turned and looked up to see a young handsome-looking cowboy towering above him on the porch.

"Oh, howdy, Crane," smiled Red. "Was you out with the posse?"

"Yeah," nodded Steve Crane, a newcomer to Ocotillo City, having purchased the Lazy S ranch north of town. "We sure did a lot of ridin' but without any luck."

RED nodded. He knew about Little Pardner, but he didn't dare say a word to anyone. Down deep inside him, he felt sorry for these men who had ridden all night, but he was thankful to know that they were all so interested in Little Pardner.

"What's the matter, Red?" asked Crane. "Didn't yuh hear me?"

"Uh-huh," nodded Red, "but I was thinkin' of Little Pardner."

"Grand youngster," smiled Crane. "Reminds me of my kid brother—but he was shot to death when he was six."

Shot to death! Those words flashed through Red's mind. Little Pardner's life was held in a balance—freedom of a killer or shot to death. He swallowed hard and was about to say something when Jeep Carter came from the saloon and joined them.

"Jeepers, Red, but that youngster's good at gettin' himself lost, all right. We never missed anythin'," he grunted.

"Where'd yuh ride to?" asked Red.

"All over," replied Jeep. "We started southwest o' here, an' made a circle, takin' in the Calicos, Mummy Canyon, Pancho's place, an' endin' up at the Golden Goose. Heard the others swung north o' here, so it looks like we done covered every

bit of land in this here county—an' no sign of Little Pardner."

"Yuh—yuh didn't cover everythin'," said Red weakly. In the back of his mind, he was wondering where Jack Halliday could be hiding out. He had been smart enough to be overlooked by the posse. Where could he have gone? Red was certain that Jack Halliday's hideout couldn't be very far from town if he had sneaked in and placed that note under the door of the sheriff's office.

"There's not a place left that we ain't been," declared Jeep.

"Yes, there is," snapped Crane. "We haven't been where Little Pardner's at."

"Jeepers, that's right," grunted Jeep as he produced a plug of tobacco and took a large chew. "Well, that kid's smarter'n the whole lot of us put together. He knows where he is—an' we don't!"

Red got to his feet, and without a word, moved up the boardwalk toward the Haslam home.

Jeep and Steve Crane looked after him, then Steve sighed and shook his head.

"He's sure takin' it mighty hard, ain't he?" he grunted.

"Jeepers, Steve, if yuh knowed that youngster like we do, it'd hit yuh below the belt, too."

RED HARRIS went directly out to his small stable in the rear of the house where he kept his black horse, Diamond. He caught the horse, slipped on the bridle, then in a few minutes had the big black saddled. Red lowered the bars that were used as a gate, and led the horse down to the house. He tied the reins to the porch post, then hurried inside where he secured a handful of cookies.

Mounted and riding west of Ocotillo City toward the low range that was just a short distance from town, Red ate his snack while his eyes searched the surrounding country. He swung Diamond up a dry-wash, then to the right along an old, partly hidden trail that led to a butte behind the town. He had finished his cookies by the time the horse halted.

Before him spread Ocotillo City, and further out was the open desert that reached out to the foot of the Calico Range. Red studied it for a few minutes, then he slipped from the saddle, dropped the reins, and

walked to the edge of the butte where he sat down.

Somewhere before him, cleverly concealed, hid Jack Halliday with Little Pardner as his prisoner. Red's blue eyes slowly swept over the country, noting every building. Red's mind switched back to the note. Jack Halliday hadn't mentioned any meeting place between himself and the sheriff for their transfer of prisoners. How could Jack Halliday know if the sheriff released Nick or not?

These things bothered Red Harris, no end. He was almost sure that the outlaw was near town, but where? There wasn't a good hideout around that Red didn't know about—and he had searched every one while looking for Little Pardner. Finally he got to his feet and picked up the reins.

"It's no use, Diamond," he sighed as he rubbed the horse's nose. "It looks like we're counted out on this one. It's goin' to be up to the sheriff."

Red swung wearily into the saddle. It wasn't often that he admitted defeat, but with all angles studied, Red was stumped as to where to turn. He only hoped that Jack Halliday would keep his word if the sheriff released Nick. With his reputation, he would be just as liable to kill Little Pardner as not. Red shuddered at the thought. If he could only find the youngster before midnight—!

He swung Diamond about, and followed the old trail back down the wash, but instead of heading east, he swung to the north, following the wash along the foot of the hills. It wound in and out of the hills, cutting deeply into the bank at places where the heavy winter rains had left their mark. Red cut away from the wash as it neared town. He swung Diamond to the right and headed for town, coming in near some of the old houses. The first one he came to was a tumble-down shack, with a sagging fence and a shed at the rear.

As Red rode past the old shack somewhere a horse nickered, and Diamond threw up his head, but there was no horse in sight. But Red wasn't interested in nickered horses, even if Diamond was. They continued on past the next house, where a man and a woman waved to Red as he rode past. At the third house, Red met Larry McMann as he came out of the door.

"Still searchin', Red?" he asked.

Red nodded as he drew up on the reins. "I'm not goin' to give up if I can help it. Little Pardner's got to be somewhere near town. He couldn't get far."

"Well, I hope yuh find him," said Larry. "I'm goin' back to the office and relieve the sheriff an' Geography. I managed to get a few hours' sleep."

Red rode beside Larry until they came to the main street, where he swung Diamond to the right toward home while Larry went down to the sheriff's office.

**SHERIFF SPIKE HASLAM** spent most of the afternoon seated in the old rocker on the front porch of his house. His eyes were focused off across the desert toward the Calicos Range, but there was very little expression in his eyes. He had a deep problem to solve, and only a few hours left before midnight.

Red Harris sat on the steps leading up to the porch, watching every move that the sheriff made, but he was thinking too, wondering just what Haslam was going to do. Beside Red lay Glub and Fitt, lonesome and blue because they missed Little Pardner, too.

Red had just caught himself in time on several occasions when he was going to say something to the sheriff about the note from Jack Halliday.

Finally Red got to his feet and entered the house, where he looked at the large, old clock on the mantel, then he returned to the porch. Haslam shifted his eyes to the boy.

"It's six," said Red softly. "Feel like supper, Sheriff?"

Haslam slowly shook his head, then he turned and looked out toward the road where four men were riding up. Another group of men who had been searching for Little Pardner. They reined in close to the front fence that stretched across the yard and called to the sheriff. The leader was Peter Falls, owner of the Golden Goose Mines.

"Nothing to report, Sheriff," he called. "We've combed the south side and no sign of the kid."

"Thanks," muttered Haslam, his fists tightly clenched.

"Anything else we can do?" asked Falls.

"No, I'm afraid you've done all yuh

could. Better rest up," replied Haslam. The men waved and rode on into town.

"Lord!" grunted Red. "Where can Little Pardner be?"

"I wished he could answer yuh, Red," sighed Haslam as he got to his feet. "I'm goin' back to the office." He stepped down the steps past Red. The boy watched the sheriff. Haslam had aged years in the past day. His footsteps were uncertain, like a feeble old man.

Red sighed. He knew what the sheriff was up against. Red also felt sorry for the posses that were still searching. If only the sheriff could tell them, and spare them, Red knew it'd take a load off Haslam's mind. Red got to his feet and entered the house.

It was getting dark, so he lighted the oil lamp on the table and sat down. Beside his chair was a large wooden box, and inside the box was Little Pardner's toys. Red's fingers ran along the edge of the box as thoughts of the youngster came into his mind. He had built the box for the express purpose of keeping the toys off the floor and perhaps saving someone's life from tripping over them.

One by one, Red removed the toys, looking at each one carefully. Fond memories crept into his mind, but quickly they were dimmed by what lay ahead. Red's blue eyes soon were filled with tears, and he wiped them, sniffed, and looked over at the clock. It was nine—three hours to go! Carefully he replaced the toys in the box, then leaned back in his chair and stared at the old clock as it ticked away the precious minutes, which soon turned into hours.

**A**T QUARTER past eleven, Red couldn't stand it any longer. He got to his feet, picked up the lamp, and went into his bedroom. He set the lamp on his crude dresser, then he opened the top drawer and picked up his Colt .45. He examined the gun, pushed shells into the empty chambers, then he shoved it inside the waist-band of his overalls.

Red replaced the lamp in the living room, blew it out, and hurried outside, where he paused on the porch. The moon was bright, lighting the landscape. Red went out to the road, turned to his left, and walked toward town. He walked slowly, his keen eyes searching each dark spot along the street.

He peered at everyone he saw on the street, and Red knew most of them.

He stopped in front of the sheriff's office and glanced about. There was a weak light inside, but the door was closed and a curtain was drawn across the front window. Red tried the door, but found it locked. He moved to the edge of the walk. Business was going on at the Fill 'Em Up Saloon across the street. So Red walked across the street and stopped at the foot of the steps which led up on the porch of the saloon. He glanced under the swinging doors.

There were several men lined up at the bar. One of them was Larry McMann. Red climbed the steps and halted near the door where he could obtain a better view of the interior of the saloon, but was backed down the steps as a cowboy staggered through the swinging doors. The boy stepped back into the shadows and watched as the man, with some difficulty, managed to get through the doors. He paused on the edge of the porch, then stepped off, missed his footing, and landed on his face on the boardwalk. He muttered a curse, and climbed unsteadily to his feet. He made his way out to the hitch-rack, where he stopped, grasping the railing for support as he looked at the four horses that were tied there.

"S' funny," he muttered loud enough for Red to hear him. "Shure I left him here." He turned and glanced back at the saloon door, then he shook his head. "Shomebody took him—that'sh what they done. My poor old Shpoons—rushtled!"

He staggered along the hitching rail, carefully examining each of the four horses.

He stopped at the end, turned, and started back into the saloon.

"Can't go home," he said thickly. "Shomebody shtole my horse."

A stolen horse! Red's mind clicked. If Jack Halliday expected the sheriff to release Nick, he would have to have a horse for his brother to ride on. Red glanced about quickly. Jack Halliday must be nearby, waiting for midnight. Just then one of the horses at the hitch-rack nickered. Red's head jerked back to the horses, as an idea struck him. An unseen horse's nicker! Red whirled and moved up the street at a run, keeping in the shadows as best he could.

Inside the sheriff's office, Spike Haslam watched the old clock on the wall while

Geography Jones sat slumped in a chair. It was ten minutes to twelve. The deputy watched Haslam as the sheriff got to his feet and moved back toward the cells. He opened a door that led to the hallway and the cells.

Seated on the edge of the bunk in the first cell was Nick Halliday. He glared at the sheriff as the officer lighted a small oil lamp that was fastened to the wall in the hallway.

"I reckon you know about yore brother's note to me," said the sheriff. "Couldn't help hearin' us talkin' it over."

Nick nodded. "Goin' to let me out?" he asked thickly.

Haslam leaned against the bars and studied the outlaw. "If I let yuh out, how'd yore brother know where to look for yuh?"

"You let me out that front door, I'll do the rest," snorted Nick Halliday as he got up off the bunk and started toward the sheriff, but Haslam backed away from the bars, blew out the lamp, and moved toward the door.

"Hey!" growled Nick, as he grasped the bars and shook them. "Whatcha goin' to do? Ain't yuh goin' to let me go?"

Haslam stepped into the office and slammed the door, leaving the prisoner's question unanswered. Geography looked up at the sheriff, then he glanced at the clock. It was two minutes to twelve.

The sheriff walked over to a hat-rack, where he picked up a dirty, old black sombrero. He fingered it, then placed it on his head. He turned and looked at the bewildered deputy.

"What in hell are yuh goin' to do, Spike?"

"We're about the same size, ain't we?" queried Haslam. "It's dark enough out there, an' I'd be wearin' Nick's hat."

"Spike, yo're plumb loco!" snorted Geography as he started to get to his feet, but Haslam shoved him back in his chair.

"Stay here an' watch Nick!" he ordered, then he turned on his heel and walked to the door. Here he paused for a moment, then he flung the door open and stepped outside. He banged the door behind him and stood in the shadows on the walk, glancing about.

A shrill whistle split the silence. Haslam glanced to his right. There was a man stand-

ing in the shadows of the alley between the office and the bank. He motioned for Haslam, and as the sheriff drew close, the man said in a husky voice:

"C'mon, Nick, we'll be movin' fast."

He started down the alley at a trot. Haslam started after him, and nearly caught up with him as they rounded the rear of the bank and went down the alley toward the first side street.

**T**HE tumble-down shack was a grotesque sight in the moonlight. The weeds and old trees about the building caused weird-shaped shadows against the crumpled walls. An old owl hooted now and then from up in the rafters.

Through the weeds sneaked Red Harris, his blue eyes darting here and there. He moved in beside the tumble-down fence, slowly, carefully he made his way over the top of the fence and dropped into the tall weeds in the yard.

Red sneaked through the weeds to the tumble-down shed at the rear of the house. He stopped and listened. He could hear something inside the shed. Slowly he drew his six-shooter and gripped it tightly in both hands as he stepped to the corner of the shed. This end of the shed was out completely, and as Red rounded the corner, he stopped dead in his tracks.

The moonlight was bright enough to allow Red to see two saddle horses inside the shed. He moved in beside one of the horses and stopped. The two horses were alone in the shed. Red shoved his gun back inside the waist-band of his overalls.

"Ready for a getaway, eh," he grunted as he noticed both horses were saddled, and their reins were dangling on the ground. He moved in beside the other horse. One of these belonged to the drunk back at the saloon. Red thought about stealing the two animals, but had a better idea. He took a sharp pocket-knife from his pocket, snapped open a big blade, and quickly cut the cinch away. He repeated this procedure on the other cinch, then he put his knife away and moved out of the shed.

Outside, Red paused and listened. He was sure that it was after midnight, and he wondered where Jack Halliday might be; and if the sheriff had released Nick. He cut through the weeds to the house, where he

stopped and glanced about. The old shack had been built on a high foundation. Red found the opening where there had once been a back door, and he glanced inside, but the place seemed empty.

Red wondered where Little Pardner might be. He wasn't in the shed, and he wasn't in the shack. Suddenly Red's knees became weak. Had Jack Halliday done away with the youngster? Was he trying to pull a double-cross on the sheriff? Thoughts flashed through Red's mind, and he glanced about the shack, spotting a hole in the foundation. He moved forward and peered inside.

It was pitch dark under the shack. Red decided that this would be a grand place to hide, because he could watch the shed from there. He crawled into something. Red stopped in his tracks, his right hand feeling out before him in the dark.

He felt flesh! Slowly, Red's hands felt over the human object that was in his path. He could feel ropes, clothing, and flesh. Suddenly a thought dawned on him, and he whispered hoarsely:

"Little Pardner, is that you?"

The person wiggled. Red's hands found a gag, which he carefully removed, his heart pounding rapidly.

"Red!" gasped a hoarse, excited voice.

"Are you all right, Little Pardner?" asked Red as he fingered the knots of the rope in the dark in an effort to untie the youngster. Red knew that his time was short, and he worked as fast as he could until he felt the last rope slip free.

"We've got to be careful," warned Red. "The man that stole yuh is liable to be around here any minute, an' we don't want him to find us because he'd kill us."

Red managed to turn around, and he started toward the opening, dragging the youngster by the arm behind him. A sound outside caused Red to freeze against the hole in the foundation. He heard footsteps! Quickly he drew his six-shooter from his waist-band and gripped it tightly in both hands. If anybody tried to get under there, he'd meet hot lead. Red listened.

"Let them find the kid if they can," panted a voice. "I cached my rifle under here. The horses are in the shed, Nick."

"Where's the kid, Jack?"

(Continued on page 144)

→ W. C. TUTTLE ←



Hashknife

Sleepy

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see a good deal of action  
in a splendid novelette

## "Border Buzzards"

RAY MILLHOLLAND — CLAY PERRY — MANLY  
WADE WELLMAN — WILLIAM LYNCH

All in our next issue

**SHORT STORIES—June 25th**

FRASER was a nice guy, an American who had been selling Packards in China.

WHERE did the war land him? In Portuguese Macoa, neutral territory in the midst of China—and the cock-eye craziest of all neutral countries.



ALSO to be coped with was the fact that Chinese public opinion is a steam roller; on a national scale, it has flattened emperors. For instance, all in all, it is not nice when you find a self-made corpse on your front steps. You can't hit back by committing suicide at his house.

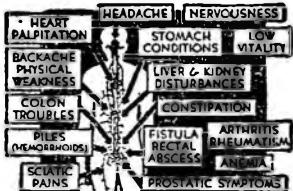
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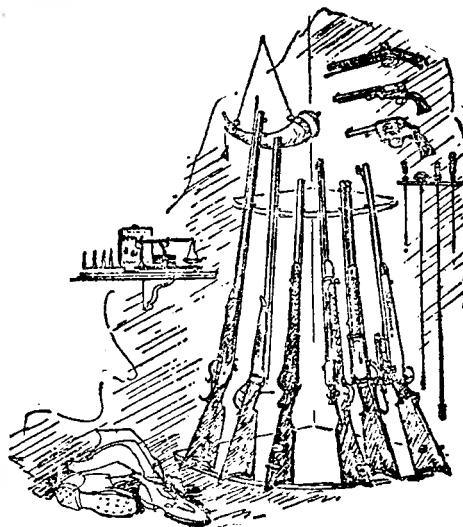
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# THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by  
PETE KUHLHOFF

### Ammunition Stuff

AT THE present time it looks as if we will have a bit more ammunition for hunting purposes this fall than we had last year. Personally, I'll have to see it to believe it. But the dope is that the big cartridge outfits are on the verge of going into production on a little sporting (?) ammo.

It seems that most of the stuff that cagey hunters have hoarded since before we got into the war is just about gone—or at least the letters I have received during the past year so indicate. In fact about 25 percent of my mail during this period has been from shooters who are almost out of fodder and want to know how they can roll their own.

Unfortunately it is just about as hard to find components as it is to find loaded car-

tridges. And loading tools are just about extinct.

Regardless of these facts I'd like to yap a little bit about this fascinating business of reloading—or more properly hand-loading ammunition.

It has always been my contention that every shooter should hand load his target and practice ammo. For one thing, he'll appreciate and understand his rifle a lot more—and in most instances he'll do quite a bit more shooting.

"Is it difficult to hand-load cartridges?" is generally the first question asked. The answer is "No!" In fact, it is quite easy, and not uninteresting.

The next question is, "How about the cost, does it run up into heavy folding money, or can you really save dough by shooting the home-made variety?"

If a fellow does much shooting he realizes quite a saving. But there are several types of reloading. Some cost more than others.

It is safe to reload? Yes, if certain precautions are taken. Of course the goof who can't remember not to smoke while reloading is bound to get in trouble and shouldn't have a gun in the first place.



"Let's take a look at the cost. Say a load is wanted for a .30 caliber rifle that can be used for target practice, also for small game and perhaps woodchuck shooting. Remember we are trying to make up a practical load as cheaply as possible.

First of all we will have to acquire a de-capper for removing the fired primer from the used cartridge case. Inasmuch as we are not going to use a regular reloading tool on this cartridge we will buy a little Re-and De-capper tool from the Lyman people which in normal times cost around \$3.50.



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The projectile we are using is the Ideal Pope bullet No. 308403. It is used as cast without sizing, is very accurate and can be seated in the case by hand without tools.

So far we've spent ten iron men for equipment. Now let's see what it'll cost to load.

Primers cost \$3.00 for a thousand.

DuPont powder No. 80 cost \$1.00 for a half a pound.

Lead for use in moulding bullets—nothing if you use old storage battery metal.

Let's see now! If we load each .30-40 Krag or .30-06 case with 12 grains of No. 80 we get 291 cartridges from half a pound of powder. 291 primers would cost \$.87. Therefore, we load 291 cartridges for \$1.87. I should mention that the bullets have to be lubricated but the amount of grease necessary for 291 bullets is negligible as for a buck you can make up enough compound to last a lifetime—or good cup grease can be used.

Anyway our cartridges have cost us quite a bit less than a cent each. And as the prewar list price per box of 20 of .30-06 and .30-40 ammo. was \$2.10 and \$1.93 respectively—figure it out yourself and you will find we have not only paid for our equipment but have realized quite a saving besides. And all this with only 291 cartridges. Many times I have fired more rounds than this in a morning.

It costs more to reload using jacketed bullets—but you always save if you do much shooting. Of course you can't count in the time element as costing anything. It's supposed to be fun anyway.

At one time I was only interested in loading at Maximum velocities. In fact, I considered it a waste of time to fool around with reduced (I called 'em sissy) loads. For these high-speed loads the best of equipment is necessary including a set of very accurate scales sensitive to 1/20 grain or less. It costs a lotta dough and believe me, it takes time on this stuff (otherwise it's unsafe). So I never encourage an inexperienced hand-loader to mess around trying to make up am-

munition for, say, his dear rifle. It's cheaper and one hell've a lot safer to buy factory stuff, especially when you consider the few rounds fired each year. But for general plinking you can't beat handloading.

The Ideal Handbook is published by the Lyman Gunsite Corp., Middlefield, Conn. at 50 cents per each and is a must for the handloader. It's interesting to the average shooter and he is almost certain to learn somepin.

For you collectors, Thomas Woroniecki, 47 W. 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y., had just published an illustrated (photos) catalogue (48 pages) at 50 cents a copy. It's really chock full of good pictures and interesting items. A Ferguson Revolutionary War breech loading flintlock is listed at \$599.50, while the least expensive item I noticed was an empty 10 gauge primed shotgun shell at 2 cents.

## THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

(Concluded from page 124)

Rivers, Texas, and has been promoted and is vastly more interested in glamazons than prizefighters. . . .

"And of course everyone hates the black market."

William R. Cox.

### A Chance on the Subs

**C**HANCE DEALS A HAND is the title of Lee Tilburne's latest yarn in this issue of *SHORT STORIES*, and we think it's a peculiarly appropriate name for a story by a U. S. Navy submarine lieutenant.

Born at one of our Naval Air Stations in Panama where his officer-father (now our illustrator, A. R. Tilburne) was attached, Lee, even then showed his preference for subs over planes by yelling almost continuously.

Lieutenant Tilburne has had Annapolis training and for over a year now has been one of the officers on a sub cruising our far-flung Pacific front. Of course he can't tell us the details of "where" and "how," but we hope the hunting is good.

For Tilburne, and the men of the submarines, chance has a way of dealing most of the hands. May their cards always run high!

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## THE RED-HEADED JONER

(Continued from page 138)

Jack Halliday hesitated for a moment, then he said harshly:

"Under the house—you double-crossin' skunk! Yuh didn't fool me any, Sheriff. I'll kill you an' the kid, too!"

"How'd yuh know?" panted Haslam.

"Nick always called me Boss!" snapped Jack Halliday. "Hold still, Sheriff. Don't make a move for yore gun!"

RED crouched even with the opening, then he lurched forward and grabbed a pair of legs, yanking as hard as he could. Jack Halliday yelled, fired once at the sheriff, but his aim was bad because he was off balance. He fell backward against the shack, and the sheriff dove into him, and they crashed to the ground. The outlaw's gun went spinning on the ground as they swung wildly at each other. Halliday, big and desperate, managed to whirl Haslam away from him. He scrambled to his feet, glanced wildly for his gun, but he couldn't find it, so he whirled and raced toward the shed.

Red Harris crawled out from under the shack as the sheriff got to his feet and started after the outlaw. Red left Little Pardner under the building, and followed the sheriff. Before the officer reached the shed, out came Jack Halliday, mounted on his horse, knocking the sheriff aside as he raced toward the low fence. Haslam snapped a wild shot at the outlaw as the horse shot over the fence, but the saddle left the animal in mid-air, hung suspended for a fraction of a second, then it came down with its rider.

Haslam got to his feet, but he had difficulty in getting the dazed outlaw upright. The fall from the leaping horse had knocked all the wind and most of the fight out of Jack Halliday. He seemed dazed and bewildered. He said:

"Wh — what happened? I — I must have—"

"You did," growled Haslam, who was somewhat the worse for wear himself. He took out handcuffs and slapped them on Halliday's wrists. "What was it, Red? Did that saddle come off the horse?"

"I found the two horses," panted Red. "I didn't know what else to do, so I cut both cinches."

"Good boy!" applauded Haslam. He shoved Jack Halliday against the shack while Red quickly brought Little Pardner out from under the building.

"How did you know about this, Red?" asked Haslam.

"I heard you an' Geography talkin' about the note last night. I wasn't asleep like yuh thought I was. Today I heard a horse nicker around here, when I rode past, but I didn't think anythin' about it until I heard that a horse was stolen from the hitch-rack at the saloon tonight. They—they had to have two horses—an' I thought mebbe that nickerin' horse might be here—so I looked. Is Nick Halliday still in jail, Sheriff?"

"Yeah, son, he's still in there—waitin' for his little brother Jack."

"Yuh—yuh fooled me for a while, Sheriff," groaned Halliday. "I never thought it might be yuh—until yuh called me Jack. Was—was this kid under the house, when he tripped me?"

"He was," replied Haslam. "He's my handy man—good old Red-head."

"Red-head, huh?" grunted Halliday. "Two damn kids—an' one a red-head. Red heads have been my Joner. I had a red-headed girl once. If I'd known what I know now—"

"You wouldn't have come to Ocotillo to get educated," finished the sheriff.

"I reckon I better take Little Pardner home an' wash him up, Sheriff," said Red. "He must be pretty dirty."

Little Pardner began to whimper quietly.

"Don't cry, Little Pardner—yo're all right now," said Red.

"I don't want wash," said the youngster. "Too hungry."

"Didn't he give yuh anythin' to eat?" asked Red.

"No. He say if I'm hungry—eat bugs."

"Eat bugs!" snorted Red. "That's a fine idea."

"Can't do it, Red," sighed Little Pardner. "He tied my hands."

"Get him home and fill him up, Red," chuckled Haslam. "I'll be up there with half the folks in town, as soon as I can put this rat in a hole."

"Did you catch a rat, too, Daddy?" asked Little Pardner, but Red picked him up and headed for town, before the sheriff could reply.

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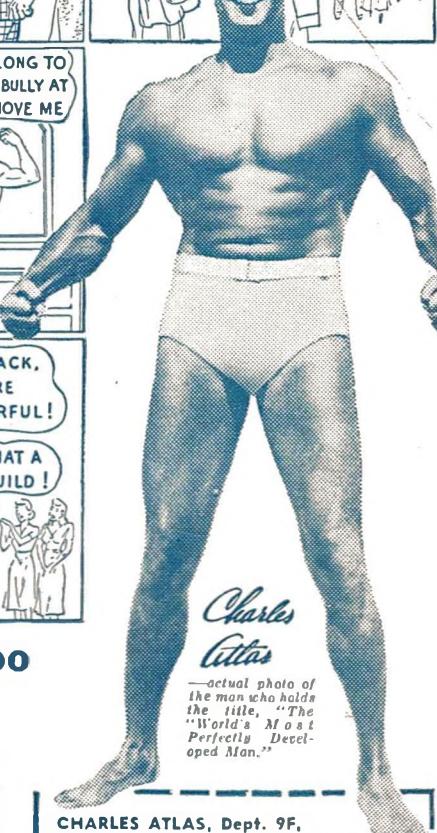
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