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# DETECTIVE ACES

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*The*  
**MASKED SCOURGE**

*Thrill-Packed 'Moon Man' Novel*

*By* **FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

*Also*

*'Capt. Murdock' Novolet* *By* **CARL MCK. SAUNDERS**

*And Eight Other Complete Detective Aces*

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for Men of Character

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### Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

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

### This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

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

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One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Georgia man made \$802.50 his first two weeks. A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

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TEN DETECTIVE ACES

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Vol. XXIV

AUGUST, 1935

No. 2

Ten Complete Stories—No Serials!

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Cover by Delos Palmer, Jr.

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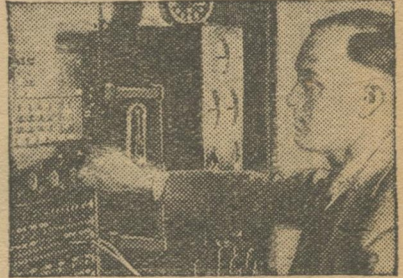
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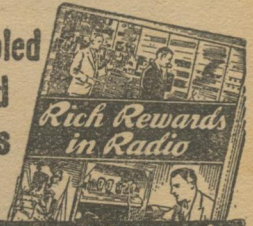
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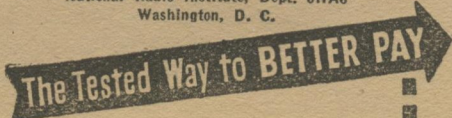
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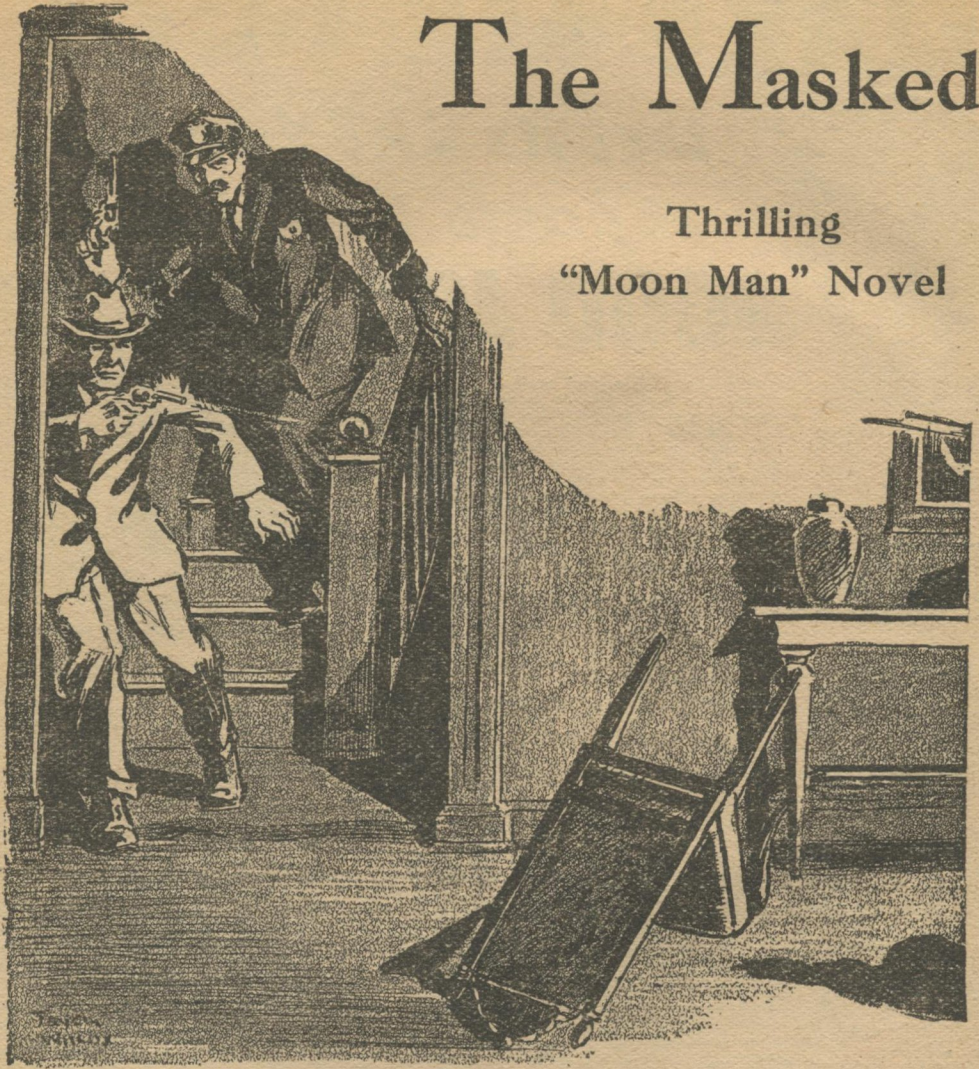
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# The Masked

Thrilling  
"Moon Man" Novel



*Hard-boiled, leather-jawed Detective Lieutenant Gil McEwen lifted a silk dress out of a washbowl of blood-tinted water. "This belongs to the Moon Man's woman!" he grated. Little did he know that six feet away, behind a secret panel, stood his own daughter. Sue McEwen was stricken with terror lest that silken frock, bought for her honeymoon, would be the net that drew to the electric chair the one she was to marry, Detective Sergeant Steve Thatcher—the Moon Man.*

## CHAPTER I

### THE ORCHID CLUE

**S**LOWLY, silently, the stocky man climbed the ladder of the fire-escape. He huddled on the platform, listened tensely through the window, heard quick footfalls in the room.

Bending far down, he peered through the narrow crack at the bottom of the drawn blind and watched the man who was nervously pacing back and forth, back and forth—a pallid-faced man gripping a revolver in one claw hand.

The hands of the clock on the desk were closing on midnight. A squat, black



# Scourge

By FREDERICK C. DAVIS

Author of "The Bleeding Skeleton,"  
"Dial of Doom," etc.



*Lead lanced the darkness.*

safe sat in the corner, its door closed. The lean shadow of the pacing man fell across it again and again. Several times he paused and coughed, and the spasms shook his gaunt body. He jerked when the telephone jangled.

"Yes, yes, it's here. I've got it," he snapped into the transmitter. "It's up to you—what do I care? All right—if you're not here in twenty minutes, don't come." He clashed the receiver down and coughed again violently.

These things the furtive man on the platform of the fire-escape saw and heard. He straightened, and soundlessly went down the iron flights. He stepped from the lowest section to the top of a

car parked in the alley. Slipping behind the wheel, he prodded the idling motor. He did not drive far. He swung out of the alley, around the corner, and stopped.

The glow of the dash limned his scarred face, showed that he had a cauliflower ear and no neck, as he wrote quickly on a slip of paper. He approached the softly lighted entrance of the popular night club called the Garden of Eden. He seemed no different than thousands of other taxi drivers to the doorman when he said:

"Please give this to Mr. Thatcher."

At one of the floor-side tables in the Garden of Eden, Stephen Thatcher, de-



tective sergeant, son of the chief of police, was sitting with the very pretty young woman whom he was engaged to marry—Sue McEwen, only daughter of Detective Lieutenant Gilbert McEwen, ace sleuth of the Great City plainclothes division. As swinging dance music filled the air, he said:

"Gil's expecting the move, but I think he's playing a wrong hunch. He's watching Graube's office, but Graube uses his apartment for big deals. It's directly behind this place, across the alley. If—" He glanced up as the head waiter extended a folded bit of paper and said:

"For you, Mr. Thatcher."

Steve Thatcher read three words which told him much: *Graube is waiting*. He smiled tightly, crumpled the slip and murmured: "Please excuse me, Sue." Her hand clasped his anxiously and her eyes searched his clean-cut face. He added: "Don't worry, I'll be right back," and strode with long, firm strides along the gleaming dance floor.

He was conscious that Sue's worried eyes were following him. He smiled when Ernst Fiermo, the owner of the night club, who was standing near the entrance, said: "That certainly was a big robbery last night, Mr. Thatcher!" Stepping out, he noted as he walked past the line that, as he expected, none of the drivers of the waiting cabs had a cauliflower ear.

He turned the corner, turned again into the alley. In the gloom beneath the fire-escape a taxi was waiting, lights out. The neckless, stocky driver slipped from it as Thatcher approached. Without speaking, he reached into the cab, lifted out a small black case, and clicked it open. He peered up the fire-escape at the blinded window as the driver exclaimed:

"Boss, this is getting me. Every time I see one of those damn' things, my flesh crawls. I dream about 'em. God, Boss, I wish you'd play it safe!"

Thatcher asked quietly: "One of what things, Angel?"

"Those warnings!"

The stocky man pointed to the white square tacked to the telephone pole that

rose at the rear of the apartment building. On it was a startling drawing of a figure seated in a massive chair. Heavy cables snaking from the chair proclaimed it to be the dread instrument of capital punishment.

A strong hand was pictured gripping a knife switch and throwing the deadly current on. Great black words declared: **THE MOON MAN MUST PAY!** Smaller type signed the promise: *Peter Thatcher, Chief, Great City Police Department.*

The figure strapped in the chair was one which every man and woman in the metropolis could recognize at a glance, one that haunted the detectives and patrolmen who had vainly sought, month after month, the notorious crook it depicted. The figure was wearing a dead-black robe. Its head was a featureless ball. The likeness was that of the infamous criminal known as the Moon Man.

Steve Thatcher smiled as he peered at it. "A good idea of McEwen's," he said grimly, "plastering those posters all over town, Angel. A move to break the Moon Man's morale—to throw such fear into him that he'll make a fatal slip and get grabbed. But—perhaps it won't work."

As he spoke he lifted a long black robe from the black case, and shook it over his shoulders. He pulled on black gloves. While the stocky man in taxi driver's outfit watched, he lifted the hinged hemispheres of a silver glass mask and fitted them together over his head. One moment wrought a weird transformation.

In the darkness of the alley Steve Thatcher, detective sergeant, vanished, and the Moon Man appeared.

**T**HE Moon Man tensed to climb to the top of the taxi—and abruptly paused.

Light footfalls were echoing between the walls of the alley. A girl, her slender figure silhouetted against the light of the street beyond, was hurrying toward the cab. The Moon Man's breath souged quickly past the deflector inside his spherical mask as a breathy, anxious call reached him:



"Steve! Wait!" Sue McEwen's hand trembled on the Moon Man's black-sleeved arm and she gazed imploringly at the baffling globular mask. "I'm afraid, Steve! What—what are you going to do?"

The Moon Man's silver head twinkled as he gazed at the girl's white face, at the stocky man disguised in taxi driver's uniform. Ned Dargan, ex-pug, had dared the law at the Moon Man's side from the beginning. Headquarters listed innumerable crimes against them.

A continual manhunt was in progress for them both. All men on the police force had standing orders to shoot them on sight, to capture them at all costs. Yet, tonight, the Moon Man was about to carry out a new, daring coup.

Sue McEwen had loyally kept the secret that Steve Thatcher was the Moon Man. She realized that he repeatedly challenged the written law only in order to serve the higher commands of human necessity and mercy. She knew that every cent of his loot was distributed by Dargan to the needy. But even more profoundly than Dargan, she realized what utter tragedy must result if ever the Moon Man were unmasked.

It would break the heart of kindly old Peter Thatcher, the chief of police, to learn that his son was the notorious criminal. It would crush the tough, grizzled McEwen. It would completely destroy all the dreams of happiness which the girl shared with Steve Thatcher. It would mean heartbreak, dishonor—and death in the electric chair for the man Sue McEwen loved.

Anxiously, suspecting that again Thatcher was defying McEwen, in spite of the thousands of placards that were scattered about the city, the girl had hastened after him. Now her fingers trembled on his black arm and her eyes pleaded.

The Moon Man could see the whiteness of her face, the tremor of her lips, though his face was completely hidden from her. The Argus glass of his mask was opaque as a mirror to her widened eyes, but to his it was clear as finest

crystal. His voice sounded muffled inside his mask as he quickly explained:

"Sue, last night three crooks shot the messenger who was carrying fifty thousands in bonds from Wilkinson & Company to the Day and Night National. They killed the messenger and got away with the securities. At this minute Gil is watching Nick Graube's office, expecting the loot to be turned over to him, a fence who handles hot stuff at twenty cents on the dollar."

"But, Steve—"

"Gil's playing the wrong angle. Graube's in his apartment, upstairs. The crooks are bringing the hot bonds to him tonight to sell. Graube is waiting now with ten thousand, ready to pay. There are sick and starving families in this city, Sue, who deserve that money far more than those three crooks or that fence. I'm going to see that they get it."

"You're running such a horrible risk, Steve!" the girl protested.

"Perhaps—but I'm going through with it," the hollow voice of the Moon Man persisted. "Please go back, Sue, and wait. Angel—after me. We haven't a moment to waste."

The girl watched in an agony of anxiety as the Moon Man lifted himself easily to the top of the cab. She followed his move to the lowest platform of the fire-escape. She saw him climbing the iron steps slowly, soundlessly, while Ned Dargan crept after him. She did not go back to the night club. She remained in the gloom of the alley and watched, her heart pounding with dread.

The ghostly figure of the Moon Man paused on the platform outside the window of Nick Graube, fence. His silver head glittered as he peered through the crack of the blind and saw that the bedroom was now empty. An open connecting door told him that Graube was in the next room, awaiting the arrival of the bond thieves. The Moon Man's hidden eyes turned to the black front of the safe in the corner.

Inside it, he was certain, were the ten thousand dollars he had marked for his loot.



THE Moon Man's black-gloved hand slipped in and out of a slit in the side of his robe. He withdrew a diamond glass-cutter, a small suction cup attached to the end of a short rod. He traced a white, curved line, almost soundlessly, on the pane in front of the window catch. He affixed the cup; and one sharp blow cracked the semicircular section out. He drew it away, reached inside, loosened the catch; and his silver head bowed as he listened.

He heard no sound. He slid the sash upward slowly, noiselessly. He raised the blind. Cautiously, like a black ghost, he drifted into the bedroom and stood beside the desk. Graube, he knew, was somewhere beyond the connecting door; he heard wheezing, quick breathing. There was a sputtering sound, as of a pen skipping across paper, as the Moon Man crouched in front of the safe.

His black-gloved fingers worked nimbly while Dargan watched breathlessly from the fire-escape platform. His glittering head bent as he listened to the almost inaudible fall of tumblers. Back and forth he twisted the dial of the old safe. He thrust at the handle, and it gave. He opened the door and reached inside to a green packet bound with rubber bands—ten thousand dollars in currency.

The loot vanished inside his loose black robe as the Moon Man straightened. He listened. There was no sound of a scratching pen in the next room now. The wheezing breathing was quicker, tighter. A guttural moan reached the Moon Man's ears: "Oh, God—God!" Puzzled, anxious, the notorious criminal drifted toward the connecting door. He dared peer through—and his blood froze.

He saw Nick Graube seated at a table—and one of Graube's lean hands was pressing a revolver to his temple. He saw a man in the act of committing suicide. The unexpected sight froze him an instant while Graube's fingers tightened on the trigger of the glittering gun. Suddenly the Moon Man took a long, swift stride through the door.

"Drop that!"

Even as an instinctive, jerking response came from Graube, the room rocked with the explosion. Flame singed the hair at Graube's temple. Powder smoke gusted before the fence's popping eyes. The Moon Man's move was swift; his hand gripped Graube's wrist with lightning speed; but the drilling bullet sent blood gushing down the man's pallid face.

The Moon Man stood breathless, stunned, as Graube rolled limp from the chair and sprawled on the floor.

"Boss!"

The husky, alarmed call came from Ned Dargan as he scrambled off the fire-escape platform, into the room. He jerked to a stop, staring at the man on the floor, at the black apparition of the Moon Man bending. Smoke wafted in the air as the Moon Man's breath beat inside his mask, as his globular head bent above the table.

A sheet of paper lay there, black scrawled. The invisible eyes of the Moon Man read it swiftly:

*Dearest Sarah:*

*Please forgive me for doing this. I can never get well, I would only be a burden on you. I have thought of suicide for months and now I know it is the only way. God bless you—*

NICK.

The Moon Man's eyes darted when a startling step sounded at the hallway door. He jerked up as the knob twisted. His automatic flicked level as the door swung wide. A man appeared. He stopped short just over the sill, thin-faced, rately-eyed, cruel-lipped. His hand slipped instinctively inside his tuxedo coat—toward a shoulder holster—as the Moon Man's muffled command sounded:

"Back! Get back!"

His black robe flapped as he took swift strides forward. The glitter of his automatic forced the man in tuxedo to recoil. His night-dark hand gripped the knob as he gasped over his shoulder to Dargan: "Angel! Get down—fast!" He backed from the door, gun leveled, conscious of Dargan's frantic move behind him. Abruptly he whirled and darted after Dargan to the fire-escape platform.



They sped down the flight—and stopped short, seeing a bright gleam on the next platform. The window beside it was open. A woman was peering out. She stared aghast at the apparition on the iron steps, the being enveloped in black with a head that was a shining, silver sphere. Again the hollow command came:

“Get back!”

The woman uttered a whimpering cry and recoiled. The Moon Man bounded from platform to platform. From the lowest he swung swiftly to the top of the taxi. As he dropped to the pavement, as Dargan sprang down beside him, a gasp of dismay echoed inside the globular mask.

Sue McEwen was standing beside the car, staring at him in terrified speechlessness.

The Moon Man's moves were swift. He lifted the fragile mask from his head and put it in the case. He snatched the black gloves from his hands. He whipped the black robe over his head. He closed the case while Dargan slipped behind the wheel and surged the motor. “Fast, Angel—to the house!” He reached for Sue's arm as the taxi lurched away.

He hurried with the girl to the entrance of the alleyway as Dargan sent the cab rushing in the opposite direction. He paused, breathing hotly, knowing that Sue's anxious eyes were searching his, as the taxi whirled from sight. He started away, and heard a woman's frantic voice echoing from the open, lighted window beneath the apartment in which a dead man lay.

“The Moon Man—the Moon Man was here!”

WHEN they approached the entrance of the Garden of Eden, Thatcher forced himself and Sue to walk casually. Their smiles were strained as they entered the soft lights and returned to their table. His pulse still pounding, Thatcher circled Sue's slender waist with his arm, and they danced. Couples stepped rhythmically around them, as the girl whispered anxiously:

“Steve, I—I heard the shot. What happened, darling? Did you—”

“Not here,” Thatcher cautioned. “Act it out. Nothing's happened—nothing.”

It was almost half an hour later that they left their table. Sue drew her fur-collared cape snugly across her shoulders while Thatcher exchanged a check for his Homburg. Fiermo, the night club owner, hurrying close, asked him excitedly:

“Mr. Thatcher—have you heard about the murder?”

Thatcher echoed tightly: “Murder?”

“It happened only a few minutes ago! Nick Graube—in the apartment just across the alley. The police are there now. I just heard it on the radio. They're looking—”

“Murder?” Thatcher repeated huskily. “Did the announcement say that?”

“That's not all, Mr. Thatcher! The Moon Man did it! The Moon Man robbed Graube's safe and killed him!”

Thatcher straightened. He mumbled an answer and his hand closed hard on Sue's arm. Her quivering lips suppressed a sob as he led her to a taxi, a cab driven by a man who did not have a cauliflower ear.

“Steve! Oh, Steve! You—”

“It was suicide, Sue,” Thatcher answered in a breath. “I saw Graube do it. He left a note to his wife that will prove it. You won't mind going home alone, will you, darling? Gil's probably at Graube's apartment and I've got to see him.”

His signal sent the cab off. Sue's eyes turned anxiously back to him as he hurried around the corner. He hastened into the apartment building on the next street; an elevator lifted him to the level of Graube's rooms. He found patrolmen on duty at the door. He stepped through and heard the familiar rasping tones of the veteran detective on the force, the sworn nemesis of the Moon Man, Gil McEwen.

“Plain as day, by damn!” McEwen was snarling. “Not a shadow of a doubt about it! By damn, the Moon Man can't get away with this!”



McEwen grunted a greeting at Thatcher as he paced from room to room. Two other plain-clothes men were standing beside the fallen body of Nick Graube. Thatcher peered at the top of the table, where he had seen the scrawled letter, but now there was nothing.

"You're sure," he asked the grim McEwen, "it was murder?"

"What else?" McEwen snapped. "Murder and robbery. I've already checked up. Graube drew ten grand out of the Day and Night National today. It must have been in that safe, but now it's gone. The Moon Man grabbed it, and killed Graube getting it."

"How can you be sure—"

"He was seen! The woman in the apartment below saw him skipping, by damn, and phoned headquarters. She spotted the Moon Man! He tried to make it look like suicide, but he's not fooling me, by damn! I'm combing this town for him now. The dragnet's out. This time, by damn, I'm going to make my promise good. I'm going to see the Moon Man get the chair!"

"Gil," Thatcher asked tightly, "by any chance did Graube leave a letter—one that might show he did kill himself?"

"A letter? No. Steve, why the devil are you asking about a letter?"

"It would prove suicide if Graube left—"

"Nothing like it, by damn! I tell you, there's no doubt of it. Graube was murdered, and the Moon Man murdered him." McEwen's steely eyes glittered. "What's more, Steve, I've got a new lead to that fancy crook. There's a woman working with him. Not only Dargan, but a woman! I'm playing that lead for all it's worth. I'm going to find that woman, and through her I'm going to grab the Moon Man!"

Thatcher's throat went dry and tight. "What makes you think there's a woman involved, Gil?"

"Because, down there at the bottom of the fire-escape, I found this!"

McEwen held it triumphantly in his extended hand—an orchid. Its fragile leaves were crushed. Its delicate color was blackened by a foot that had

trampled it in the grit of the alley, and the imprint was of a woman's small high heel. Thatcher peered at the orchid clue and his heart became ice.

Tonight, before they had gone to the Garden of Eden, Steve Thatcher had presented that orchid to Sue McEwen.

## CHAPTER II

### SUICIDE BARGAIN

STEVE THATCHER left his roadster at the curb beside the turreted headquarters building, strode through warm morning sunshine, climbed worn wooden stairs, pushed into his office. Sue McEwen turned from the window to face him, a deep concern shining in her eyes. She came to him quickly; her arms tightened around him. He held her close as she breathlessly asked:

"Steve, what can we do? Dad has the whole force organized and searching for—us both. Suppose he traces the orchid? I'm not worried for myself, but if dad learns I lost it, he'll know—he'll know it's you!"

Thatcher forced a smile. "That clue won't get him very far, Sue—I'm sure of it. Keep your chin up. Don't worry. I think we're safe, but—" His voice faded and his eyes narrowed. "Graube left a note speaking of suicide. It clears me absolutely. But Gil didn't find it and—"

He broke off as the telephone rang. A quiet, tense voice on the wire tightened Thatcher's nerves. It was disguised, but he recognized the tones of Ned Dargan. He listened to the ex-pug whisper:

"Look at the personals in the morning *Record*!"

Thatcher held the line as he flattened the newspaper on his desk. On its front page were great black headlines:

### MOON MAN MURDERS FENCE POLICE HUNT WOMAN ACCOMPLICE

He turned to the personal column quickly and his finger paused on the notice which quickened his pulse:

*XY—Have note clearing you. Business deal necessary. Address Box 216R.*

Thatcher's mind speeded. He said cautiously into the transmitter: "We've got



to follow it up. Get a letter to that box, asking terms. 'Address answer to John Wilson, General Delivery.' Hurry it!"

"Okay!"

Thatcher's lips pressed hard as he turned to face the girl. Grimly he declared: "That explains it! The man who came into the room while I was there, I forced him out, but he came back. He's got the suicide note. He's planning to use it for blackmail. I've got to see it through, Sue. There's no other way of clearing myself."

"Steve, darling—please be careful!"

Thatcher's lips curved wryly. "I have more reason now to be careful than ever before, Sue. Not on my account—for your sake. No matter what happens, I'm going to keep you covered. That's a promise!"

He strode to the door labeled *Chief of Police*, and Sue followed. He pushed in and saw Gil McEwen pacing the floor, gnawing on an unlighted cigar. The grizzled veteran's greeting was only a flashing glance. Kindly faced, white-haired Peter Thatcher, sitting in his padded swivel chair behind his ancient desk, gave his son and the girl an affable greeting. McEwen paused and glared at the desk, at a crushed orchid which lay there.

"A sweet job—tracing that damn' flower!" he growled. "It'll probably end up nowhere, but it's proof there's a woman working with the Moon Man. That's how I'm going to get him. And when I do, by damn, that woman's going to the chair along with the Moon Man!"

Sue's face went white. Steve Thatcher's eyes rose to two placards on the wall. One was a replica of that he had seen on the telephone pole in the alley the previous night, the drawing of the Moon Man in the electric chair. The other—

McEwen's growling voice continued. "This is the second time we've spotted a woman with the Moon Man. Last month, when I thought I had him cornered in the warehouse on the river, Dargan and a woman beat it out of there in a roadster. This time she's in deeper. She's going to get the chair because she's an accomplice to the crime of murder!"

Thatcher's aching eyes were directed at the second placard. It announced: \$25,000 *REWARD!*

A box of boldface type declared:

This amount, contributed by the Commerce Club and other local organizations, is offered for the capture of the criminal known as the Moon Man. It will be paid promptly upon the apprehension of the Moon Man to the person seizing him or supplying information which leads to his conviction for his many crimes.

And again the name signed was that of the chief of police, the kindly old father of the man who was that notorious criminal.

"If the Moon Man thinks he can keep on getting away with it," McEwen grated, "just let him go ahead! Over and over again I've sworn to get him—and I still swear it! No matter who he is! I'm going to see that crook fry, I tell you—no matter who he is!"

Steve Thatcher said tightly: "There's no doubt of it, Gil. The day's coming when you're going to send the Moon Man to the chair, and it may be very soon."

THATCHER eased from the office as McEwen's heels continued to hammer the floor. Sue's hand clung to his arm snugly while they went down the worn stairs. He led her to her car and as she took the wheel, he whispered:

"Sit tight, Sue, and say nothing. The suicide note will blow the murder charge to pieces. I'll stop at nothing to get it. Don't worry, darling. We'll—"

"But Steve." The girl's voice was a strained whisper; her eyes shone with worry. "You're facing far worse danger than ever before. The rewards—everybody coveting that money and willing to turn you in if they get a chance. Oh, Steve, if it happens now—"

"Chin up," Thatcher urged her again. "I've got to play it through, Sue, regardless."

He watched the girl drive away, and grim determination filled him that she must never be suspected of connection with the Moon Man. Lips pressed tight, he crossed the street, sidled into a tele-



phone booth, and dialed a number. It was one known only to him and Dargan and Sue—that of the phone in the far-away house which was serving now as the Moon Man's hideaway. The voice of the ex-pug answered the distant ring.

"Angel!"

"Boss! Listen, Boss! I wrote the message and took it right to the newspaper office. There's no telling when it'll be picked up, but whoever put the notice in the paper is playing for big stakes. What can you do, Boss, if they—"

"I'm going to get that letter at any cost, Angel," Thatcher declared. "For Sue's sake. It's the only possible way of clearing her of suspicion of murder. I'm going to the post-office now—"

"Boss! Whoever it is—what happened?"

Thatcher explained quickly. "Graube had an appointment with one of the crooks who pulled the bond robbery. You made sure of that. The man who came into the room while I was there is one of them. He came back, grabbed the letter, and slipped out again before McEwen arrived. He'll hold it over me for big money—"

"Gosh, Boss, we've got the ten thousand from Graube's safe, but that's all. If they ask for more—"

"No matter what the price is, Angel, I'm going to get that letter! Stay where you are. Wait for another call. I'm following it through now."

Thatcher sidled from the booth, and walked quickly in the direction of the post office. He was prepared to wait until an answer from the unknown black-mailer reached him; but he gambled that they were ready for quick action. He searched the broad steps of the federal building as he approached it; he made sure the general delivery window was not being watched. Of the clerk behind the grille, he asked:

"Anything for John Wilson?"

A letter was put in his hand. "This was just handed in," the clerk said as Thatcher turned away. Sharp glances searching the lobby, he ripped the envelope. He saw one brief, printed line without signature: *Call City 5678.*

Thatcher stepped into a telephone booth. He called City 5678. A cautious, low voice answered. He said tightly: "I'm calling about the letter." The reply was quick, rushing:

"You got ten grand last night. We want it. Get this straight. Ten o'clock tonight, sharp. Make it on the dot, or you won't connect. Tony's place, on Church street, the rear entrance. Come alone. Bring the ten grand and you'll get the letter. Try any tricky moves, and you'll get a bullet. Tracing this call won't get you anywhere. It's a drug-store phone and I'm skipping now. Got that, Mr. Moon Man?"

"Yes."

The connection broke. Steve Thatcher left the telephone booth with eyes shining darkly, with lips pressed to a line. He went slowly down the stone steps of the post office, chilled by the whispering coldness of the voice that had demanded blood money. His mind throbbed with the hope that this dangerous move would clear him and the girl he loved of the charge of murder.

**C**HURCH STREET was narrow, dark, flanked by low, sooty buildings. It skirted a warehouse district. It was cobble-stoned, dirty, lonesome. The glaring neon lights of a pool hall and the sign above the entrance of Tony's Bar threw a gaudy light upon the fronts of other buildings which were bleakly empty.

A taxi stood lightless near the alley that ran beside Tony's. Ned Dargan, at the wheel, peered into the deep gloom and glanced anxiously at his watch. The orders of the Boss had stationed him here an hour ago. He had been alertly watching the rear door of the dive. Dread filled him as he waited; and his eyes went again and again to two placards tacked on a telephone pole at the alley entrance.

One pictured the Moon Man strapped into the electric chair; and each glance at it froze Dargan's heart. The other proclaimed the offer of a fortune in rewards for the Moon Man's capture; and Dargan's eyes narrowed in grim thought each time he noted the tempting figures.



When his watch indicated nine forty-five—fifteen minutes until the zero hour—Dargan saw the dark figure of a man striding toward the front of Tony's. The glare of the bulbs lighted a thin, evil face.

Dargan's heart stopped, for he recognized the malevolent features of the man he had seen in Graube's apartment, the man who had stolen the suicide letter. His hand went cold to the butt of his revolver as the unknown crook stepped into the bleak darkness of the alley.

Steps gritted. A knock sounded. A door opened, flashlight across the alley, and closed. Dargan's eyes narrowed grimly as he slipped from the wheel and listened.

Slow, quiet steps carried him through the darkness of the alley. He drifted to a stop, peering at the black rear entrance of Tony's. He glided past, toward a window which was painted over. A dull green glow reflected in his eyes as he crouched to listen.

He heard a low, cautious voice asking: "If anybody spotted you, Jaxen—"

Another interrupted. "What the hell we got to be afraid of? Nobody connects us with the job last night. When we hand the Moon Man over, we'll collect plenty and the cops'll give us a vote of thanks!"

A third said huskily: "He's a tricky customer. He might pull something—"

"Let him try it," the voice of Jaxen interrupted again. "The reward cards don't say he has to be taken alive, do they? He's worth just as much to the cops with bullets in his heart. Get out of sight. Get set. He knows he's got to play ball with us, and he's almost due."

"You got the letter?"

Jaxen's husky voice answered: "Sure I've got it. And I'm keeping it."

Another of the trio blurted: "God, Max! If he gets onto it—"

A sneer rang in Jaxen's voice. "Do I have to spell it out to you? The letter is bait the Moon Man can't resist. He's bringing ten grand with him. He's worth twenty-five more to the cops. That makes thirty-five grand we stand to collect—and there's three of us against the Moon Man's one. Quit talking, and get set!"

A cold chill pervaded Ned Dargan's stocky body as he drew away from the window. Grim fury speeded his blood in his veins as he passed the black door. Once in the light near his cab, a glance at his watch told him that it was almost ten. His eyes narrowed alertly on the erect figure striding quickly toward him in the gloom.

Steve Thatcher paused near the cab. Dargan stepped close with breath beating hotly. As Thatcher reached for the black case, the ex-pug's hand shot out to grip his wrist.

"Boss! You can't do it! You can't risk it! They're planning to grab you for the rewards."

Thatcher froze. "What, Angel?" he asked huskily. "How do you know?"

Dargan's words rushed. "I saw the three of them go into the back room, Boss, one at a time. I slipped back and heard 'em talking. They've got the letter, but they're not going to give it to you. They're after the ten thousand and the rewards. They won't stop at killing you to collect!"

Thatcher declared grimly: "I've got to get that letter, Angel."

"God, Boss! Don't you understand?" Dargan's hand tightened imploringly on Thatcher's arm. "There are three of them waiting in there—killers. Going after that letter now, it's suicide. Don't risk it, Boss, for God's sake! Let the murder charge ride, and stay clear."

"You're forgetting something, Angel," Thatcher said quietly. "Sue's involved. I can't—"

"Then—listen, Boss!" Dargan was pleading desperately. "Let me go in there instead of you. Let me wear the robe and the mask. They won't know the difference. I'll try to grab that letter and—"

"Bless you, Angel, but it's my job, and mine alone. Let you face those three killers? No, Angel. That's final."

"Boss! It doesn't matter about me. If they grab me, if they turn me in—"

"It would mean the chair for you, Angel. No!"

"But you'd still be covered, Boss! It would keep your dad from finding out—and McEwen. Think of it, Boss—if they



learn! You can't take the chance of wrecking your whole life—and Sue's. Boss, you can't!"

Thatcher smiled tightly. "You're a friend in a million, Angel. But the risk is mine. Keep the car running—and wait."

"It's suicide, Boss—suicide!"

Thatcher did not answer that. Eyes shining grimly, hand closed hard on the handle of the black case, he turned into the darkness of the alley and took long, silent strides toward the black door.

### CHAPTER III

#### COUNTERFEIT CROOK

NED DARGAN glided after Steve Thatcher. He heard vague, furtive movements in the deep shadows as he drifted to a stop in the green shine from the window across the alley. He watched Thatcher open the black case and lift out the black robe, and his heart beat heavily with dread.

"I'm not going to let you go in there, Boss," he said in a tight whisper. "I'm not going to let you run that chance!"

He saw the robe drop and envelope Thatcher's body. He watched Thatcher reach into the case again and pull on night-black gloves.

"I'll do anything to keep you out of there, Boss! I'm asking you again. Don't try it!"

"My job, Angel."

Dargan's thick hands curled into fists, the hard fists of a trained fighter. His jaw muscles lumped and instinctively his head lowered. When Thatcher stooped again toward the case, to lift the fragile mask of Argus glass, Dargan's hand gripped his shoulder. Thatcher straightened, surprised, to see the ex-pug's square face thrust close.

"You're not going in, Boss!"

"I'm going—now."

"You're not going in!"

Dargan's blow was black lightning. His clubbed fist whizzed toward Thatcher's face. Thatcher side-stepped with a gasp, seizing Dargan's wrist. The desperate ex-pug sent a second blow hissing, straight from the shoulder. It clicked behind Thatcher's ear; and a soft moan

broke from his lips. He pitched and fell into the black grit.

He lay still.

"Oh, God, Boss!" Dargan blurted.

He peered at Thatcher, eyes burning, face haggard. He stooped, made certain that Thatcher was unconscious. He glanced at the gleaming dial of his watch and noted that only a few minutes remained until ten o'clock. "Oh, God!" he blurted again; and he started at a lope along the dark wall.

He paused, heart trip-hammering, near the mouth of the alley. The windows of the building opposite Tony's were black and grimy. Dargan cupped hands, peered through into the empty rooms. He tried a window and found it caught.

He gripped the barrel of his revolver and struck once, sharply, at the pane in front of the latch. He reached through, released it, flattened against the wall, listened with caught breath.

He raised the sash, then whirled and trotted back along the alley. Thatcher responded limply as he snatched the gloves away, worked the robe off. He lifted Thatcher into his arms and staggered toward the open window. He crawled through, pulled the unconscious man into the cold dankness of a black room and lowered him to a littered floor.

The creeping hands of his watch urged him to desperate haste. His anxiety to keep Thatcher out of the trap at all costs sent him crawling out the window. He darted to the waiting taxi, started the motor, left it idling, then shifted the front seat away and took a roll of tire tape from the tool receptacle. Returning the seat, he ducked back through the window.

Thatcher lay unconscious while Dargan, with frantic haste, bound his ankles and his wrists behind him with black, sticky bands of tape.

He crawled out of the window, lowered it, skirted through the shadows to the spot where the open case lay. He took up the black robe and shook it over his shoulders. He tugged the black gloves over his hands. With utmost care he lifted the hinged hemispheres of fragile glass and fitted them together over his head.



Dargan straightened, hand gripping his revolver inside the robe, transformed into the phantom being known as the Moon Man.

**D**ARGAN stole across the alley to the black door. He peeled back the black sleeve and saw that the hands of his watch were indicating precisely ten. His black-covered fingers gripped the knob and twisted it. His breath sighed swiftly past the deflector inside the silver sphere when he felt it give. The way was open—into a death trap.

He paused, finger tightening on the trigger of his revolver. It was covered in one pocket of the black robe; the bundle of ten thousand dollars in currency was in the other. The globular head of the ghostly figure bowed as he peered into the ominous darkness of a hallway. He stepped in quickly, closed the door behind him, listened.

He heard steps. His black hand reached toward the knob of another door under which a dim line of light shone. Suddenly, with a quick movement, he stepped through. A glare stung his eyes as he poised just beyond the sill, peering through the sheen of the mask at the rat-eyed man who spun to face him.

They faced each other during a moment of tight silence. Within the glass shell, Dargan's alert eyes darted right and left. He saw two closed doors, and sensed that men were hiding behind them. The lean-faced man—Jaxen—was alone in the room with Dargan, and now a sly, thin smile was curving his cruel lips. He asked harshly:

"Not so anxious to take a murder rap, are you, Mr. Moon Man?"

The hollow voice of the phantom figure answered: "I've come for the letter."

"Let's see the ten grand."

Dargan's nerves drew burningly tight as he slipped the bundle of currency out of the pocket of the robe and lifted it in his left hand. He sensed, rather than heard, a furtive movement in the hallway behind him and felt that one of the killers had shifted to cut off his retreat. Peering at the blinking rat eyes of Jaxen, he asked in a whisper:

"The letter?"

Levelly Jaxen said: "I've changed my mind about the price. If you want it, it'll cost you fifty."

Dargan blurted: "I—I haven't got that much!"

"Make it thirty-five."

"You'll take ten and—"

"You'll take the murder rap!"

Swift, menacing movement came from three points simultaneously, as though Jaxen's words were a signal. A door at the side of the room flashed open and a fat-faced man appeared gripping an automatic. The door behind Dargan snapped wide and a third evil-faced man charged in with gun swinging. Jaxen's hand darted inside his coat, toward an arm-pitted weapon. At the same instant these three moves occurred—and Dargan's answered.

His revolver crashed, sending a slug through the smoking fabric of the robe pocket. He leaped as a choking yell broke from Jaxen's lips, as the guns of the two other killers cracked. A lash of pain whipped across Dargan's left arm as he spun and fired twice more, swiftly. His one bullet sped to the light bulb overhead and his second flashed through spattering glass and darkness.

Guns blasted again, slamming bullets into the wall where Dargan had crouched. Desperately he ducked, reaching toward the spot where Jaxen had fallen. His gloved hand closed hard on a coat and he poised to back toward the door on the far side of the room. A moment of tight silence followed; and suddenly Dargan lurched, pulling Jaxen with him. The rustle was a warning that sent bullets cracking again through the darkness.

Dargan's heart raced as he lurched across the sill with Jaxen and slammed the connecting door shut. With frantic quickness, he probed his gloved hand into the inner pocket of the fallen man's coat.

He felt a crumple of paper; he tore it away. Bullets splintered through the closed connecting door, and he retreated with the paper clutched in fingers wet with blood. Quick steps in the hall told him that the two killers were shifting again to trap him in this room.



He reopened the connecting door. He sped into the darkness where the gun fight had begun. He heard a guttural "Watch 'em both!" as he groped to a chair and lifted it high. One powerful swing sent green-painted glass crashing into the alleyway. Dargan ducked through, jagged fragments in the frame ripping the black robe, clutching the letter, and whirled to face the window as he swiftly backed.

Excited voices reaching from the front room of Tony's warned him that the shots had raised an alarm. He realized that a few seconds might bring swift prowling cars speeding into Church Street.

He saw black figures spring through an open door into the alley as he darted to the taxi. He fired twice swiftly, whirled around the car, slipped beneath the wheel.

Still clutching the paper in a blood-wet hand, still masked by the globe of silver glass, Dargan spurted the cab away with roaring engine.

**S**UE MCEWEN stood in front of the mirror in her bedroom and adjusted a silk dress on her slender figure. She had just taken it from the box on the bed marked with the name of Claire Astor, modiste. It had been made to her order, and it was an extravagance; but it was a dress, she hoped, which she might wear soon on a honeymoon with Steve Thatcher.

Sue turned to listen. Downstairs the radio was playing, but the dance music had ceased abruptly with the clang of a bell.

"A special news dispatch through the courtesy of the Press Radio Bureau." The announcement carried clearly up the stairs. "A new alarm has sent the police department, with all reserves, into an even more urgent search for the Moon Man. He is reported to have appeared tonight in the rear room of a bar on Church Street. He took part in a gun fight with three men, one of whom was badly injured."

Sue, listening anxiously, took slow steps down the stairs.

"Lieutenant McEwen, the sworn enemy of the Moon Man, has ordered the

most thorough search of the city in the history of the police department. At the same time he is holding the three men who took part in the gun battle with the Moon Man. They are suspected of committing the daring bond robbery two nights ago. The Moon Man escaped the scene of the fight, but it is known that he is seriously wounded, for a trail of blood marked his flight to a waiting car."

*Seriously wounded!* The words chilled Sue McEwen. She hurried into the living room, snatched up the telephone. She quickly dialed a number—that of the house which was serving now as the Moon Man's hideaway. She heard the distant bell ring and ring again, but there was no answer.

"Steve!" blurted from her trembling lips.

Repeatedly the phone in the Moon Man's hideaway purred summons, but there was no response. Eyes shining with agony, the girl broke the connection. Again she spun the dial, this time flicking off the number of the police headquarters. She asked the phone Sergeant breathlessly: "Let me speak with Steve Thatcher!"

"He isn't here, Miss McEwen. Don't know where he is."

"Then—connect me with my father!"

"He's out, too, on the Church Street shooting, but we're expecting him back at any minute. Shall I have him call you when he comes—"

The girl broke the connection and hurried up the stairs. She thrust into her polo coat and ran down again affixing a pert felt hat to her head. She burst out the door; frantic anxiety possessed her as she backed her coupé into the street. By the shortest way, she began driving toward the house which served as the secret rendezvous of the Moon Man.

Ironically, the most direct route led her past the brick headquarters building. She peered up at the lighted windows, wondering wretchedly if there might be word now from Steve Thatcher: but she pressed the accelerator again. She could not dream that, at that very moment, in the chief's office, her father was



seizing upon a new lead to the Moon Man.

McEwen had come tramping into headquarters only a moment previous, gnawing on a cigar. Charging into the chief's office, he had found a uniformed patrolman waiting. Patrolman Wilks began talking excitedly as McEwen strode past and took up the telephone. What Patrolman Wilks said quickened McEwen's pulse and interested him so keenly that he put the instrument down again. He asked with a snap:

"What makes you think you've spotted the Moon Man's hideaway?"

Part of the relentless detective's city-wide campaign to trap the notorious criminal had been the setting of a watch on all office buildings, apartment houses and homes. He had issued standing orders that all four patrolmen and prowler men were to take notice of new tenants on their beats.

Large order that it was, the movements of vans and interviews with building superintendents aided in the search. Patrolman Wilks had taken part in the still manhunt because no member of the force was excepted by McEwen's inexorable orders.

Now Wilks was saying: "A little house on Grosvenor Street, lieutenant. Two weeks ago there was a 'for rent' sign on the front lawn, and now it's gone, but apparently nobody's moved in. I checked up today, but none of the neighbors have seen anybody around the place. There are lights in it at night. I checked up even farther with the renting agent, and it looks mighty suspicious."

"Well?" McEwen grated.

"The name on the lease is Wilson—John Wilson—but none of the John Wilsons in town know anything about it. It's a false name. The queerest thing is, the rent was paid in advance for six months. I tried the bell tonight, early, but nobody answered, then I took a look in the garage. Funny thing, there was a taxi in it."

"What!" McEwen sprang to his feet. "By damn! A taxi was seen beating it away from Graube's place last night after the killing! Didn't you know that,

Wilks? By damn! You've got it! That's the Moon Man's hideaway. By damn, I'm taking a look at that place right now myself!"

McEwen charged out the door, gnawing savagely on his cigar, bellowing the names of plain-clothes men, completely unaware that at that moment his daughter was driving toward the rendezvous of the criminal he had sworn to send to the chair.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOON MAN'S WOMAN

SUE MCEWEN rolled her coupé slowly past the dark house which was the Moon Man's hideout. She saw no glimmer of light in its windows, no hint that it was occupied. Cautiously she continued past the corner; she stopped the car in deep shadows. Walking quickly, searching the street, she hurried back toward the house.

She made certain that it was not being watched before she turned to the door. She took a key from her purse—one of only three in the world that fitted this lock—and stepped into the dark hall. "Steve!" she called anxiously into the blackness. "Steve!"

Her voice echoed from bare rooms. Quickly she made a circuit of the ground floor. "Steve—it's Sue!" she called again, and a note of hysteria crept into her voice. She ran up the stairs, snapping other switches. Each of the rooms she looked into was empty. The bathroom was empty. The closets were empty. The girl's anxiety became a burning torture.

Following a last hope that Steve Thatcher might be in the house, too desperately hurt to be able to answer, she ran down the steps and stepped into the front room. She pried with her fingers at the frame of a closet door. She pulled, and a whole section of wall swung out, based by wainscoting and topped by molding, disclosing an empty space beyond.

Ned Dargan, under Steve Thatcher's orders, had constructed this hidden door. It covered a cavity which once had been another closet, which now was used for



the storing of the Moon Man's loot and regalia.

It was cunningly concealed. The girl would never have suspected its presence if Thatcher had not shown it to her. She opened it with the agonized hope that he might be inside—because she was consumed with an anxiety to find him—but the hidden space was empty.

She closed it carefully, and turned away white-faced, fingers tightly entwined. She moved back and forth nervously, waiting, hoping that either Thatcher or Dargan would come, hoping that the telephone might ring, hoping for the safety of the man she loved. She lost all thought of her own danger in her almost hysterical concern for Thatcher. She moved in and out of the rooms, her lips trembling, her heart pounding heavily, until suddenly it almost stopped.

At the rear entrance she heard a stumbling step. She hastened into the kitchen breathlessly and saw a shadow moving, swaying, over the panes of the back door. She started toward it as the latch clicked back, as a stocky figure lurched into the room. She blurted "Angel!" and Dargan drew up, his breath beating, clutching his left arm with his crimsoned right hand.

"You're hurt, Angel!"

The girl pulled him toward the light and stared in dismay. Dargan's fingers were dripping scarlet drops. His whole lower arm was glistening with red. His face was white with the exhaustion brought by loss of blood; his eyes were dim. He had knotted a handkerchief around his biceps; he had used his revolver to tighten the tourniquet; but still the wound was flowing.

"Never mind me, Sue!" Dargan blurted. "It's not bad, if it would only stop bleeding. Look—look at this. See if it's—"

Dargan swayed as he extended a crumpled, red-spotted bit of paper toward the girl. He would have plunged to the floor if the girl had not supported him. She took the red-flecked wad of paper, but gave it no glance in her anxiety for Dargan. She looked closely at

his wound as he braced against the door frame and exclaimed in horror:

"Angel! The bullet cut partly through an artery. You've got to have a doctor."

"I can't—I can't!" Dargan gasped. "A doc would report it. It'd bring the cops. You can fix it up, Sue. Sure you can. God, if it would only stop bleeding!"

"Come upstairs, Angel. Hurry!" The girl seized Dargan's right arm and helped him along the hall. "Steve—have you seen Steve? There's a report that he was wounded, but—"

"He's—okay, Sue. I stopped him from going after the letter." Dargan was laboring up the flight, step by step, his lungs working like bellows. "I had to knock him out to do it—tie him up. I put on the robe and mask and went after the letter."

"Angel! Then it was you and not Steve—"

Dargan lurched from the head of the stairs to the door of the bath. "I think I've got it! I tried to read it, but I can hardly see. Look at it, Sue! Is it—is it—"

The girl uncrumpled the sheet and read scrawled words in the bright light of the bathroom:

*Dearest Sarah:—Please forgive me for doing this. I have thought of suicide for months.*

Her eyes rose shining with frantic relief and she blurted: "It is! It's the suicide note!"

Dargan's head was lolling. "God, I'm glad!" he blurted. "God, I'm glad I got it for the Boss! He's—clear—" He grasped the letter, thrust it into his pocket, then clawed at the wall, and slid to his knees, while Sue tried desperately to keep him on his feet. He braced up, fighting unconsciousness and mumbled again, "God, I'm glad!"

**S**UE MCEWEN worked swiftly. She brought bandages from the medicine chest and knotted loops above Dargan's streaming wound. With the tube of a toothbrush, she twisted it tight, until the flesh swelled around the strips and the bleeding stopped.



She plastered adhesive tape over the tube to keep it in place, and bathed the gash with astringent antiseptic. She powdered it with a surgical dressing, then bound it snugly with more bandage. Dargan's eyes, clinging to her face, shone with pathetic gratitude.

"I—I'd rather take the hot-squat myself than see the Boss get grabbed!" he blurted. "Gosh, you're swell, doing this for me. I guess—I guess I'd be a goner without—"

"You've got to have medical care, Angel," the girl told him desperately. "No matter how dangerous it is, you've got to have it."

Dargan gripped the edge of the bathtub and pulled himself up. He straddled, balancing himself, weakened. "Later—later," he mumbled. "I left the Boss tied up. I've got to get him loose. If—if the cops found him there, how could he explain it? I've got to get him loose and—"

"Angel, where is he? I'll go. I'll do it. You've got to get into bed and—"

Dargan's head wagged stubbornly. "No. Might—might get you into trouble. Me—it doesn't matter. I'll get him loose, and come back—"

"Tell me where he is, Angel!"

"I—I can make it—all right."

Even as he spoke, he sagged against the door. Again the girl supported him. She struggled with him across the hallway, to the bedroom. She steered him to the cot and he sank upon it weakly. He lay sprawled, eyes closed, breathing rapidly, as she bent over him.

"Angel—tell me where Steve is!"

She heard only an incoherent mumble from Dargan's colorless lips. She shook him and repeated her question, but aroused only a moan. Anxiously she straightened, baffled, her consuming worry increasing.

Turning to leave Dargan, she glanced down and blurted an exclamation of dismay. She had not noticed until now that Dargan's blood had made a ghastly blot on her dress.

Believing that Dargan must rest at all costs, trying to assure herself that Steve Thatcher was not in danger, she stepped

into the bathroom. She pulled the dress over her shoulders and ran the bowl full of cold water.

She immersed it, rubbing the stains, and the water became red. She was still attempting to remove the blots when a strange premonition came to her. She straightened, hurried into the bedroom, and stopped short.

Dargan was not now lying on the cot.

"Angel!" She called as she spun to the head of the stairs. "Angel, you can't go!" She hurried down the flight, along the hallway. She saw the kitchen door standing open and knew that Dargan had stolen out that way. She was hurrying toward it when gruff voices outside startled her. One, clearer than the others, rasped:

"Watch it front and back! Keep the doors and windows covered! We're going in!"

She recognized the voice of her father.

Ned Dargan also heard the grim, grating tones of Gil McEwen. He had struggled from the bed and down the stairs, once Sue had left him alone, because he was determined that she should not endanger herself by going with him to Steve Thatcher. Slipping out the rear door, he had seen dark figures moving silently toward the yard.

He had dragged himself over the rear fence; he was huddling now in thick darkness. Heart hammering, throat tight, he watched the plain-clothes men led by McEwen surround the house, while Sue McEwen was still inside it.

Huddled down in agony, Dargan kept his position. He saw McEwen quietly enter the rear door. He saw lights snap on and heard the tramping of other men entering from the front. He heard them climb the stairs and come back.

During an eternity of agony he waited, straining to listen through the pounding in his ears. At last he heard a phrase that brought a surge of momentary relief through his tortured body.

"Nobody in here."

Dargan knew that those words could mean only one thing, that Sue McEwen, seeing the approach of the headquarters



men, had slipped into the secret closet, that she was hiding there now while her father grimly searched.

**C**ROUCHING low, Dargan crept away from the fence, along the driveway of the house which sat backed to the Moon Man's hideaway. He had left his taxi in the next street, fearing that prowl cars might have trailed him, hoping in this way to divert suspicion from the true location of the Moon Man's place. The ex-pug's brain buzzed as he hurried along the sidewalk to the cab and climbed behind the wheel.

The weakness brought upon him by the loss of blood was a force pushing him toward unconsciousness, a force he fought with all his will as he sent the cab humming along the streets. His left arm was swollen and throbbing around the tourniquet.

Lights bleared before his eyes and the car swerved as he sought Church Street. He turned into it cautiously, numbed nerves warily tight, and peered into the darkness shrouding the empty store into which he had dragged Steve Thatcher.

Rolling past, he saw policemen through the windows of Tony's bar. Glimpsing no activity in the alley, he drew to the curb and slipped from the wheel. He stumbled and sprawled; he drew up and forced himself on through whirling lights and baffling shadows. He stole into the alley and sought his way blindly to the window.

He was scarcely aware of his own actions as he slid the sash up. He spilled down into the dank room and vaguely heard a startled exclamation: "Angel!" He muttered an answer and peered, but he could see nothing of Steve Thatcher in the gloom. Bracing against the wall, he slipped the sash down once more against the chance of discovery. He turned back, took one sliding step, and dropped.

"Angel!"

Steve Thatcher lay on the littered floor, helplessly bound by the sticky bands of tire tape. Consciousness had returned to him slowly. He had heard shots as if far away, the powerful roar of a

motor that swiftly diminished, while he lay pinioned.

Again and again he had tried to break free, but the strength of the tape frustrated his attempts, while police had hurried into the alleyway and Thatcher had heard gruff voices speaking the name of the Moon Man. Now he strained up, peering at Dargan.

"Angel!"

Dargan's head raised weakly. He pulled himself to hands and knees and crawled toward Thatcher. He slumped down again, breathing hotly, and his hands groped toward the bands that shackled Thatcher's wrists.

"Boss!" His voice was a mere breath. "Boss—McEwen's found the—hideaway! I got out—before he came, but Sue's there, Boss! She's there—and McEwen's searching it!"

"God, Angel!" Thatcher felt Dargan's fingers fumbling at the tape. "Get me loose! If McEwen's found her—"

"She—she's out of sight, Boss!" Dargan pulled slowly at the end of the tape and it peeled down with a sticky sound. "She slipped—into the closet. I know—she did. God, Boss, if McEwen finds it, if he sees her there—"

"Get the tape off, Angel! Quick!"

"I'm tryin', Boss!" Dargan was striving his utmost to unwind the stubborn bands with fingers that were numb and scarcely controllable. "I—I got the letter, Boss! It's here—in my pocket, the suicide letter. God, I'm sorry—I had to hit, you, but—I couldn't let you—"

"Angel!"

Steve Thatcher felt the stiff fingers of Dargan drop away from the circles of tape. He waited tensely for Dargan to try again, but during a long moment he felt no touch. He squirmed around, and peered at the limp ex-pug lying in the dirty litter. Dargan's hand was extended, but unmoving. Unconsciousness had claimed him.

"Angel!"

The name brought no response from Dargan. Desperately Thatcher pulled himself to a sitting position. He felt the loose end of the tape dangling, and



caught at it with his fingers. He pulled at it frantically, and felt it yield.

Inch by inch, he peeled it down, while a consuming anxiety filled him, concern for Sue. His muscles burned with tension, his teeth bared under drawn lips with the effort he made to free himself. Suddenly a breath broke from his aching lungs and he wrenched his wrists apart.

"Angel!"

He bent over Dargan, saw the seriousness of Dargan's wound. He realized that medical aid was a vital necessity to the ex-pug, that it must be obtained with the utmost care in order not to betray Dargan's identity as the Moon Man's accomplice.

He stripped the tape from his ankles, hurried to the window, peered out the grimy panes. He found the blackness empty and silent; he raised the sash and crawled out.

He hurried breathlessly to Dargan's taxi. Under the front seat he found the black robe wrapped around the fragile mask of Argus glass. He bundled the regalia beneath his arm—a burden which would damn him if he were seen with it—and hurried through the darkness toward the spot where he had left his roadster.

It was a car used by the Moon Man in the execution of his daring exploits. Now Steve Thatcher turned it humming toward the discovered hideaway.

## CHAPTER V

### MC EWEN SEARCHES

GIL MCEWEN stood straddled in the front room of the raided house on Grosvenor Street. His gray eyes glittered like burnished steel. His gaze was as stinging as the lash of a whip as it passed over the faces of the headquarters men. He spoke with tense restraint.

"Listen. We've been trying to grab the Moon Man month after month for years. He's slipped us repeatedly, laughed in our faces, challenged us, and got away with it. We're making it hotter for him than ever before. We've got to grab him this time, by damn!"

His men, led by the dogged Mark Keanan, who was as grimly determined as McEwen to capture the Moon Man, nodded determined agreement to that statement.

"This is his hideaway," McEwen grated on. "Apparently neither the Moon Man nor Dargan nor his woman is here. They must have spotted us coming and skipped. Whatever the reason is why this place is empty, we're going over it with microscopes. There *must* be a clue to the identity of the Moon Man here, and we're going to find it, by damn!"

Again tight nods.

"Maybe nobody spotted us coming. Maybe this place is empty for some other reason. They beat it out of here in a hurry, leaving the lights on and the rear door open, but they may come back. After we search this place from top to bottom, we're going to leave it just as it was and wait. If the Moon Man or Dargan or his woman comes back here then—they're grabbed!"

McEwen drove his teeth deep into a fresh cigar and crackled a final order: "Start hunting!"

His men moved quickly into all parts of the house. Two of them went down into the cellar. Another began a new examination of the rooms on the ground floor. McEwen and Keanan tramped up the stairs and took deep interest in the one furnished room. That it was Dargan's, they could not doubt. Returning to the hallway, McEwen stooped to study fresh red spots on the floor. They led from the stairway, into the bathroom. He stepped into the bath and exclaimed: "By damn!"

In red water in the washbowl, he saw an island of floating silk. He lifted it carefully, squeezed water from it, let it slip and slide into the shape of a dress. Gnawing his cigar excitedly, he wrung more water from it, held it up again. He peered at Keanan with glittering eyes and exclaimed:

"This belongs to the Moon Man's woman!"

Keanan observed: "That's queer. There isn't any other stuff belonging to a woman in the house. She was here, all



right, but she can't be living in this place."

McEwen held the sodden dress and tramped back down the stairs. His men were returning from scattered parts of the house. The detective who had searched the lower floor was blinking in puzzlement. The two who had hunted in the cellar shrugged as they approached McEwen. In a muttering chorus, they gave their reports.

"Nobody below."

"Not a soul on this floor."

"Nobody upstairs or in the attic."

McEwen glared at them. "A fine bunch of detectives you are! Nobody in the place, eh? Nobody anywhere. You're all a bunch of correspondence school dicks, by damn! There *is somebody* in this house. I'm absolutely certain of it, by damn!"

They stared at McEwen in bewilderment.

"A woman was here. She got blood on her dress. She took it off to wash out the stain. Maybe you think she beat it out of here without any dress—but I don't. She's here—in this house, hiding! You birds have got to find her!"

The words reached muffled into the concealed space that once had been a closet. They rang mockingly in the ears of Sue McEwen as she stood in the black cavity. Seeing men closing around the house from both front and back, she had slipped into it as the only possible means of concealing herself.

In her desperate haste she had not had time to reach the bathroom for her dress, though she had snatched up hat and coat. The coat was draped over her shoulders now, covering her blue slip; the hat was clenched in one tight hand. In the smothering gloom, she heard again the rasping voice of her father.

"The Moon Man's woman is somewhere in this house, and you're going to hunt until you find her!"

**S**TEVE THATCHER had driven rapidly from Church Street. He knew that in the residential section, in which his hideaway was located, there were few stores and these few would not be open

at this late hour. He swung to the curb at a corner, while still a mile from his destination, and stepped into a pharmacy.

Quickly he consulted the directory and called a number. The voice that answered was a girl's: "Fairview Sanitarium."

"Dr. Keller, please."

Thatcher strove to control his feverish agitation as he waited. The voice that answered at last stated that Dr. Keller was speaking. Thatcher forced his voice to seem casual.

"Steve Thatcher talking, doctor."

"Why, hello, Steve! What can I do for you?"

Thatcher answered earnestly: "One of the boys on the force—Mike Houston—was wounded this evening. He doesn't think it's serious, but his brachial artery was partially severed. He's very weak from loss of blood and he needs the best care."

"I'll be glad to do all I can, Steve."

"He—he's an active sort, who won't stay in bed," Thatcher went on. "If there's anything doing, he insists on mixing in. That's why I want him in your place, where it's quiet. I want him kept away from telephone calls, nobody to know where he is except me. He's in pretty bad shape and—"

"Bring him right out, Steve," the physician answered. "I'll assure you I'll do as you wish."

"Thanks," Thatcher said tightly. "Coming."

He left the booth quickly, returned to his roadster, started off again. The remaining mile to the house on Grosvenor Street was endless. As he neared, Thatcher clicked the lights of the car out, rolled over the pavement near the curb.

Keeping in the tree shadows, he braked just past the corner. He let the motor whisper at idling, and walked quickly, quietly, toward the house that had served as the Moon Man's hideaway.

Keeping himself covered, he peered at the windows. He could see nothing; the blinds were drawn. Making sure that no one was outside, that McEwen and the detectives were within doors, he ventured



long, low strides to the porch. He crept up the steps; he stationed himself near the entrance. He knew that if he were spotted now, he could pass off his coming with a ready excuse; but it would rob him of the opportunity to act as the Moon Man.

Through the door McEwen's rasping tones carried. "By damn, if anybody tells me again that there's nobody here, I'll break him off the force! Keep hunting! Keep going over this house until there's not a crack you haven't looked into!"

The grating words brought Steve Thatcher cold satisfaction. They meant that the secret panel had not yet been discovered, that Sue was still hiding in the darkness of the cavity. He turned back, crept off the porch, peered up and down the street.

Near the far corner he saw two sedans, the police cars that had brought McEwen and the men to the house. They were pointed in the same direction as his waiting roadster. A daring plan began to form in the mind of Steve Thatcher as he turned quietly away.

He slipped behind the wheel of his roadster, freed the brakes, and let it roll. The idling motor murmured an almost inaudible sound as the car moved along the curb. Thatcher watched the dark windows of the hideaway and coasted slowly until he reached deep shadows under a tree near the edge of the yard. There he braked. He slipped out, carrying under his arm the black bundle of the Moon Man's regalia.

McEwen's rasping tones, carrying out, told him that the search for Sue was still in progress.

He lowered the bundle, kept to the edge of the lawn, skirted to the rear of the house. He heard movements inside the kitchen, knew that men were searching it, and waited. When the sounds moved forward, he darted to the rear door. Cautiously listening, heart pounding, he opened it a crack. He reached through, drew the key away, closed the door, inserted the key in the outer hole, silently turned it.

He sped back to the roadster. He took up the bundle, unrolled the black robe,

shook it over his shoulders. He pulled the black gloves on his hands and in them lifted the precious mask of Argus glass. He fitted the globe together over his head and stood motionless, an automatic gripped and leveled.

From the thickness of the shadow, the Moon Man watched his raided headquarters.

**I**N the living room Gil McEwen was bending over the table on which he had unrolled the wet dress. He did not dream that, within six feet of him, hidden by a composition panel, his daughter was standing in darkness, listening with growing terror. His gray eyes narrowed as he examined the garment.

"Claire Astor," he read from the label. "That's a high-class place. They'll be able to identify this. They can tell me who bought it—and, by damn, that will identify the Moon Man's woman!"

Keanan, standing grim-faced beside McEwen, declared: "You've got her, Gil."

"Damn' right, I've got her! And through her, I've got the Moon Man! This is the end of that fancy crook, by damn! I've said it a thousand times, Keanan, and I say it again, I'm going to send the Moon Man to the chair, by damn, no matter who he is!"

"That girl," Keanan suggested shrewdly, "might be an otherwise respectable person, maybe the daughter of a well-known family, might even be connected with the force."

McEwen's eyes narrowed. "The law's the law," he stated flatly. "She's an accessory to the crime of murder. The same goes for her as for the Moon Man. No matter who she might be, she's going to get the works!"

Standing tensely erect, trembling, inside the secret closet, Sue McEwen heard—and her heart stopped.

Again McEwen's men began returning to the room. They blinked, looked sheepish, shrugged. McEwen glared at them, toothed his cigar, and growled: "Well?"

"Maybe we're a bunch of rookies, Gil," one of them remarked, "but none of us can find any hiding place in this house."



McEwen snarled: "All right! I'll look myself. You birds find yourselves places to slip into, in case somebody comes back to this place. At the first alarm, get out of sight. Keanan, you keep an eye on the front of this place, but stay inside. What are you standing around like a bunch of wooden Indians for? Move!"

Frowning, the men shifted to positions which Keanan efficiently assigned them. One stood near the door of a closet in the hallway. Another stepped into the kitchen and snapped the light out.

A third mounted to the head of the stairs and stationed himself there. Keanan took a position in the dark hall, peeled the blind aside, and peered out the pane. McEwen gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"This room," he declared, staring around, "is as good a place to start as any."

He stared at the walls. He peered at the floor. His keen eyes studied every square inch as he moved slowly from the side windows inward. There was silence as McEwen followed down his grim conviction that the Moon Man's woman was hiding somewhere within this house. He crept into the corner where there was no piece of furniture; and suddenly his eyes sharpened. He stooped, teeth driven deep in his cigar, and peered at faint, curved scratches on the varnish.

He straightened, stepped back, glanced at the sections of wall on both sides of the closet. His cigar shifted thoughtfully from one corner of his mouth to the other. Very quietly, but not so quietly that Sue McEwen could not hear, he bade the detective in the hallway: "Michael, come here."

Michael came. McEwen's stubby forefinger pointed toward the floor.

"Look at those scratches. They're curved, like the scratches a door might make swinging open if it scraped the floor. Is that right, Michael? Do you agree with me?"

Michael, very thoughtfully studying the marks, answered: "Looks like you're right, Gil."

McEwen bade: "Now step back here. Look at that section of wall on the far

side of the closet. Then look at this section, between the closet door and the corner. Does it seem to you, Michael, that this section right in front of us stands out about half an inch farther than the other?"

Michael blurted: "It does, Gil! There, you can tell it on the door frame! The edge is thicker on the far side than it is on this! Looks like half an inch thickness on this side laid over the real wall!"

McEwen stepped forward. He raised his hand. He whacked his knuckles sharply against the papered composition board. He rapped again, again—and each time the result was a dull sound. Michael, knuckling the opposite panel, got the result of firm, solid cracks. McEwen's fist pounded again—a knocking that echoed like the knell of doom in the ears of the frantic, imprisoned Sue McEwen.

"Hollow!" McEwen snapped. "I thought so! That's a secret panel! There's a space hidden behind it! The Moon Man's woman must be hiding in it now! Get at it, Michael! Help me find out how it opens! By damn!"

Sue McEwen, her heart speeding, agony numbing her mind, pressing her trembling fingers hard to her lips to suppress a cry of horror, heard her father's rushing words break off abruptly. She heard Keanan's voice in a sudden, hoarse whisper. She heard words that brought the name of the man she loved rushing silently, in terror, to her quivering lips:

"The Moon Man! Outside! Heading toward the front door now!"

## CHAPTER VI

### DEAD MAN'S WORD

THE Moon Man had appeared like a phantom in the dim light of the open lawn. He had glimpsed a flicker of light through the pane of the entrance, and he knew that he had been spotted. Deliberately, daring the danger he knew lay within the walls of this house, he drifted slowly toward the door.

His silver head bowed and he listened intently through his shell mask, and he heard no sound. The very silence told him



that the men inside were waiting—waiting for him to enter the set trap. And still he moved directly, soundlessly, toward the door behind which risk of discovery threatened, and all the tragedy that must inevitably follow.

His black-gloved hand closed hard on the knob. He opened the door an inch, then another. His fingers stole in. The tumbler lock which he had affixed to the entrance was a reinforcement of the ordinary device with which it had been originally equipped. The Moon Man silently drew out the key, silently inserted it in the outer hole, and opened the door wider.

Light gleamed from the living room, but there was no sound, no slightest movement, not a suggestion that anyone was present. In the shine the Moon Man poised, knowing that grim men with ready guns were waiting to spring upon him.

His long robe rustled faintly as he strode to the rear of the hall. He knew that his movements were so silent that none of the hidden detectives could be sure he had entered, and he watched warily that none of them glimpsed him.

Deftly, nerves singing tight, he turned the key in the closed door that gave into the kitchen. He twisted the key in another door which opened into a closet in the hallway. He sensed that at least one man, perhaps two, were stationed at the head of the stairs, and against these, he could not bar the way; but he moved back swiftly. He darted into the living room, toward the corner and the hidden panel behind which Sue McEwen was standing.

Again he turned a key—in the lock of the closet—without a sound. With desperate haste, he pried at the edge of the frame. On concealed hinges the hidden door swung. Light fanned in on the white, drawn face of Sue McEwen. She stared breathlessly, and sidled out, too terrified even to whisper a warning. The Moon Man gestured, but she held back with a desperate shake of her head, pointing to the wet dress on the table.

As she took it into her cold hand, a board creaked. The stairs rasped under

the weight of a man coming down. Swiftly the Moon Man's hand went to the light switch.

The click brought blackness and a bel- low from the stairs, a snarling order in the voice of Gil McEwen.

"Close in! We've got him!"

The Moon Man's automatic cracked defiance. Flame darted out of the darkness and a bullet cracked into the wall. The Moon Man backed, left hand gripping Sue's trembling arm. Again he snapped out a bullet as the girl jerked open the entrance.

She sprang out. He whirled after her. He flashed the door shut an instant after he sped another bullet through the darkness and with frantic swiftness twisted the key in the lock.

"Grab him! He's getting away!"

A bullet from inside spanged to the pane of the entrance and glass flew. The Moon Man and the girl, springing off the porch, heard muffled shouting voices and a pounding of fists from the men balked by locked doors.

He sped into the shadow near his roadster and glimpsed McEwen reaching out through the broken front door, striving desperately to open it. The grizzled detective's police positive crashed twice and bullets flicked through the leaves.

"Run to your car, Sue!" the Moon Man's muffled whisper rushed. "I'll follow!"

He forced the girl to hurry through the darkness as he whirled to the far side of the roadster. He bent through the door he had left open. His one hand thrust the clutch pedal down; his other meshed the gears in high, then darted to the hand throttle and twisted it full on. He let the clutch back as the engine roared, then whirled and sped crouching through the shadow of a hedge.

McEwen bellowed "After him!" as he saw the roadster spurt off. He wheeled back, grasped up a chair, hurled it viciously through a window of the living room. Keanan and another man scrambled after him as he spilled out. He bounded to the sidewalk, glowered at the roadster roaring down the street, aimed and fired three times. His bullet ripped



through the top, low over the back of the seat, as McEwen sprinted toward the police cars.

He had the engine of his sedan snarling when Keanan and the second detective clambered in. He blurted: "Look at it. He's hit!" He sent the car leaping from the curb. The Moon Man's roadster was sliding along the gutter crazily. It swerved out, lurched back, climbed the curb, ran off. Suddenly, as McEwen chased at top speed, it drove with a resounding crash into a parked car and bucked a wrenching stop.

McEwen slammed on the brakes, leaped out, thrust his service gat into the darkness beneath the roadster's bullet-punctured top. He stared and snarled. Keanan, crowding behind him, moaned. The third man's jaw dropped in wonderment. McEwen blurted in impotent rage: "By damn! Oh, by damn!"

The roadster was empty.

GIL MCEWEN sat slumped at his desk in police headquarters next morning, glaring at a letter that had come in the morning's mail, making growling noises in his throat. He kept staring at that letter when the door opened and scarcely heard the weary Keanan announce:

"Those three slick customers have come clean, Gil, Jaxen and the others. I played 'em against each other, and they all opened up. They've got the bonds. The case is cracked. Funny thing about that. If the Moon Man hadn't mixed in with 'em, and buried a bullet in Jaxen, we never would have grabbed 'em."

McEwen growled "Okay," and kept staring at the letter. He glanced up when the door opened again, saw Steve Thatcher and Sue McEwen come in, and heaved an exhausted sigh.

"Hell!" he said. "I spent two hours this morning with that snooty dame Claire Astor, trying to find out who she sold that dress to. Of course, I couldn't show it to her. The Moon Man slipped off with it. All she could say was: 'Really, Mr. McEwen, if that's the best description you can give me. I simply can't tell you a thing.'"

Thatcher, smiling broadly, said: "When it comes to describing a crook, you can do it down to the last wrinkle in his face even if it was twenty years since you saw him, but when it comes to describing a girl's dress, you're not so good—is that it?"

"What the hell more could I say, except that it had some kind of funny flower on it, and a kind of a doodad on the belt, with a whatsis on the shoulder, and stuff like that. By damn! If you'd seen that dress before the Moon Man got away with it, you'd have been able to tell her exactly what it was, Sue!"

"I think," Sue said quietly, "perhaps you're right."

"Now that lead's no good!" McEwen blurted. "The orchid clue is no good. Hundreds of women had 'em in town that night and there's no way of tracing 'em. Dargan's out of sight again, the Moon Man melted into thin air, and the woman rode off on a witch's broom. That damn' fancy crook is driving me screwy, and now I've got to strike off the murder charge against him!"

"Why, Gil?" Thatcher asked quietly.

"Because," McEwen snapped, "of this!"

"This" was the letter which McEwen had received in the first morning's mail. It was typewritten and it read briefly:

*My dear McEwen:*

*In connection with your groundless accusation that I am guilty of murdering one Nick Graube, please note the enclosed with the utmost care.*

*Yours sincerely,*

MM

The enclosed was a sheet of paper stained with blood, that once had been crumpled in a desperately clenched hand—the note written by the fence announcing his suicidal intention before he had turned the gun upon his own temple.

McEwen's fist slammed down. "But that doesn't mean I'm not going after the Moon Man just as hard as ever! That doesn't mean I'm not going to keep on looking for the woman who's worked with him. I'm going to find her. I swear it! I'm going to find them both, and when I do, they'll get the chair!"



McEwen chewed dejectedly on his cigar, as Steve Thatcher and the girl went out. They stepped into Thatcher's office. He lifted the telephone. He called the number of the Fairview Sanitarium, asked for Dr. Keller, and asked anxiously:

"How's your new patient this morning, doctor?"

"Resting easily, recovering rapidly. His arm is patched up and he's had a transfusion. He's a tough customer, that young man. It might have killed a weaker chap. I'm following your orders and keeping him strictly isolated."

"Take the best care of him, doctor," Thatcher urged. "He's a mighty valuable man, and the best friend I've got!"

He smiled at Sue; she went quickly into his arms. Her lips were warm upon his; he held her close. As her head rested snugly on his shoulder, he asked quietly: "What did you do with that very charming dress, darling?"

"Burned it," she answered. "In the furnace this morning. It broke my heart, Steve. It was the nicest dress I ever had, and I wanted it for our honeymoon."

"Sacrificed," Thatcher observed wryly, "to an excellent cause. I'll get you another—the best you can find."

"No, Steve!" the girl exclaimed, her arms tightening around him. "Just any old dress will do, cheap, ordinary, anything. Never again am I going to buy an exclusive model, darling—never!"

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"What detained you?" asks Abigail.



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*Scoop and Snooty are so hard-up for news that they listen to the raves of an old-time vaudeville actor. Snooty listens—while Scoop looks at the pretty girls. And when Scoop gets back to earth—it seems to him that Snooty has taken leave of the earth and his senses.*

ONE day me and Snooty Piper bring in an account of a shoe shine parlor getting robbed over in South Boston. Compared to other crime news in beantown before that, it seemed to us a scoop quite like the Dillinger rub-out.

"And you call that news?" Dogface Woolsey, the watchdog of the city desk, snorts, almost blowing out a gasket in his larynx. "Wait until I see Mr. Guppy! Get out of here, you two—"

"Well, you never can tell," Snooty Piper says to Dogface. "It might lead to

the capture of most any famous dishonest criminal. What do you think an oak tree would do if somebody didn't give it an acorn to start out with? Ha, ha!"

"We could kill Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy," I says. "The account of the crime should be good for at least a stick under a medicine ad. But you got to arrange a very good alibi. Oh well—"

"Get—out—of—here!" Dogface roars. "Go throw two sticks into the harbor and don't let go of them!"

"The keepers haven't come to you yet," Snooty says to him, "but be patient.



They're already feedin' the pythons. Would you have a guinea pig this P.M., or a nice fresh armadillo on the half shell?"

"You're fired!" Dogface hollers.

"He has no more vision than a bat at high noon," Snooty says to me. "Let's go to the Greek's. My throat is covered with lint, Scoop Binney."

As we empty two very large schooners of beers a few minutes later, Snooty says: "I think I will ask Mr. Guppy to transfer me to the City Hall. Crime news is all tied up like the orange business on St. Patrick's Day. It looks very much as if all the rough characters had turned sissies."

The next point of interest we pass is the Old Howard Theatre, and out in front are some very gaudy placards of dolls who took encores for strip acts while Dewey was cuffing the Spanish fleet around way off in Manila. There is also a billboard that says there will be vaudeville skits between the acts.

"I have always had quite a yen for vaudeville," Snooty pipes up. "Let's go in. Ha ha! Of course we will not stay for the second half of the burlesque as it is not very elevating to say the least."

I says: "Anyway, have you got any idea where we could gather together the necessary legal tender, Snooty Piper? It is very essential in places such as this."

"I am quite resourceful to say the least," the crackpot comes back. "I happened to pick these two passes up off the dramatic editor's desk. I have always wanted to criticize a stage performance."

I should have had more sense than to follow Snooty Piper into the Old Howard. He does not go to a seat when he gets by the gink at the door. Instead, he says for me to follow him as he wishes to interview the vaudeville performers themselves. A very large person dressed in a rusty tux tries to prevent him, but Snooty as usual is quite persistent.

"I am from the press," he insists, "and you have an old timer on the bill whom I've been sent to interview. It is of very human interest to my public. C'mon, Scoop."

I try to, but fall over a trained seal. It squeals at me, and then crawls over, and pats my cheek with a flipper until I see more stars than there are in a dream book. A dame passes me when I get up, and brushes close to me, and the back of my new blue coat looks like I slept in a flour bin for two nights. Snooty took her phone number. He would take anything that is not very tightly nailed down.

Well, we walk into a dressing room where there is an old guy putting on his makeup. He says he is going to play a scene from Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

"I am Dr. Jekyll first," he says.

"I don't want to be here when you're Hyde, then," I says. "Come on, Snooty, I like browsin' in morgues much better."

The actor is very hard to insult, and starts in telling Snooty his life history. It is quite dull. He yanks out a picture, and shows it to us. It is of two young guys with black moustaches as big as a ram's horns, and they are each standing like Napoleon just after he had put on his woolen union suit.

"There," the actor says, "there we are in our palmy days. Halligan and Smart, the greatest entertainers of the age. We broke up on account of a dame. I ain't seen Smart since. What that man could do with a rope! He could stand off ten feet, throw a loop over a guy and then hog-tie him to a chair in eight seconds flat. Ah-h-h, I wish I knew where Smart is. Well, here I am doing drama. Gad-zooks!"

"I was waitin' for that," I says. "You forgot Odds Bods, though, ha ha! Snooty, let's get to hell out of this dump. I see a snake charmer, and she has run out of ice. Of all the cock-eyed—"

It is then that a commotion starts outside. We go out into a hall where there is a very indignant person asking if two bums who said they were from the *Evening Star* were somewheres about.

"Come on, Scoop," Snooty says quick. "It's the dramatic editor. We—"

"Oh, there you are, you two—" a voice yelps. "Stole my passes, eh? Well, I'll see the boss. Here the show is over already and—oh wait, just wait until I see Mr. Guppy!"



"Oh button up your mug," Snooty says. "You'd think you missed a very fine opera. Why—er—look, Scoop! Do my eyes deceive me? If that ain't Mr. Guppy—why—follow me."

It is Mr. Guppy. He is coming out of the head of an aisle and is trying to keep his head well down in his collar.

"Good afternoon," Snooty says. "Ha ha, Mr. Guppy! Fancy meetin' you here of all very strange places! Oh boys, did you enjoy the dolls?"

**M**R. GUPPY'S face gets quite flushed like a lobster that has spent an hour in a hot spring.

"Why—er—Piper!" he says. "And Binney! Ha ha. Nice day, isn't it? Of course we can expect rain during this month—er—what're you two doin' here? Why aren't you tending to your jobs? You're both fired!"

"I wonder if Mrs. Guppy knows you are—er—here?" Snooty mentions. "Of course I hate informers but after all, ha ha! It is my career that is at stake. Well, Scoop, let's go over to the *Sun* and see if there are two openings for—"

"Piper—Binney!" Mr. Guppy yelps. "Come back. I was in quite a temper and forgot myself. If a five-dollar raise—"

It is back at the Greek's that there is a message waiting for us. It says to call Abigail Hepplethwaite at her house in Back Bay.

"Why," Snooty exclaims, "Abigail, huh? Maybe she wants two fill-ins for a coming out party. I will call the old girl."

It was quite some time back that we met Abigail. She lives in a swell joint in Back Bay and has rocks enough to build four more Panama Canals and a quintet of Taj Mahals. Even then she would have shekels enough left over to support the U. S. Army in very grand style. Abigail is a little old dame who is not afraid of anything.

"What do you think?" Snooty says as he jumps out of the telephone booth. "Abigail has been robbed! Her butler is all tied up. She has been calling us for an hour. She is quite impatient and says she will call the police if we don't hurry up."

"Ha ha!" I says. "That is Abigail, all right. Savin' a scoop for us. Whoever heard of such a thing?"

It is twenty minutes later that we walk in through the door of Abigail's very, very spiffy bailiwick. Abigail is wearing a black lace dress and is holding a lorgnette that has a big solid silver handle studded with sapphires. There is no doubt that even Abigail's parlor curtains are made of gold leaf.

"Well," she says, "you finally got here. It would have served you right if I had called up the police. I s'pose you were both in some dive drinking. How about a highball before we do anything else?"

Ten minutes later we go into a room that she says is a library. There is a guy sitting in a chair, and he has been tied quite securely to it. He has also been gagged.

"Why you didn't even untie him yet," Snooty says. "Why—ha—"

"I know my detective stories," Abigail says with a sniff. "I didn't disturb anything in case there might be clues—"

"Ha ha!" I says. "You are a scream."

There is a mean-looking gat lying on the floor a few feet from the chair. The door of a safe in one corner of the room is open.

"You've been robbed!" Snooty says.

"Why of course not," Abigail snorts. "I just had a scavenger hunt. Maybe I should have called a detective. He couldn't be worse. The thief got away with six rubies as big as bantam eggs."

"Were they valuable?" I asks.

"What do you think?" the little old dame says. "They belonged to Catherine the Great of Russia. Ivan the Terrible handed them down. Or wouldn't that be news to Guppy's scandal sheet?"

"We will untie the butler," Snooty says. "I imagine it would help us a bit. He looks quite cramped."

"There is quite an igloo on his noggin," I says. "Some rough citizen slugged him and it is very apparent that he used something more persuasive than an eclair."

"His name is McGillicuddy," Abigail informs us. "He is Scotch."



"I bet it is hard to make him give in, then," Snooty says. "Ha ha!"

Abigail laughs, too. She is quite some sport, that old girl. We untie the nickel-nursing butler. Snooty pours out a slug of grog for him. After he downs it, McGillicuddy starts opening up. We see he is quite cross-eyed.

"Well, start from the beginning," Snooty says. "What happened?"

The butler says he was in the library when a guy sneaks in wearing a mask. At first the dishonest person did not see McGillicuddy as he was very busy in a dark corner sorting out some books on a shelf. McGillicuddy says he grabbed a gun that was lying beside a clock on the same shelf and covers the intruder.

"Stick up y-your h-head!" he says he said. "Or I'll b-blow y-your hands off." Then the gent springs at him, and he fires. He misses and then something hits him on the head. When he come to, he was in a chair all tied up. That was all he knew.

"I was out," Abigail puts in. "I came back and found him the way you saw him. Well, let me see how smart you two reporters are. This should be fun."

"Well," Snooty says, "let me concentrate. I must study the crime for a few minutes."

"I am very sorry for the Insurance Company," I says.

**S**NOOTY takes a book out of his pocket. On the cover it says CAT'S EYE DETECTIVE SCHOOL—Primary Course. Abigail squints at it through her lorgnette, sniffs, and then plunks herself down in a chair.

"Let's just forget about the whole thing," she says. "I'll put in a claim and—well, now that you're both here, we can have a game of rummy. McGillicuddy, if you will get the cards out—"

There comes quite some ado from the front of the house. Somebody is bellowing like a bull calf that has missed its breakfast. A candelabra starts shimmying as very heavy footsteps pound against Abigail's very hard wood floors.

"It is Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy," I says.

"I am sure it is not Cinderella," Abigail says. "Who brought that moose in here? I'll find out! I'll—"

Just then Iron Jaw pushes his way into the library, and it becomes quite crowded. He looks quite aggressive as he eyes us. His derby is pushed back over his thick noggin, and he is chewing on the cigar stub that should have been thrown away quite some time before. Iron Jaw is very angry at us, we can see that.

"So it is you two smart-heimers," he shoves out and almost swallows his cigar butt. "Well, what did I tell you about interfering with police business, huh? Didn't notify us, did you? Well, I got you where I want you now! You messed up evidence yet, Piper? Now you get out, you two punks, or—"

"Don't you give orders in my house, you over-sized grain silo," Abigail tosses at him. "How would you like to have an andiron bent over your turnip head? It is my safe that was robbed and I will call in Baby LeRoy if I want to. Hmph, why don't you light your chewing tobacco? It seems to have gone out."

"Ha ha," laughs a cop. So do me and Snooty.

"I am in charge here," Iron Jaw says after he fights off quite an attack of blood pressure. "What's been stole?"

"Guess!" says Abigail, then she goes to the door and yells out a name. In comes a maid maybe two minutes later, and Abigail grabs her around the neck.

"Did you call up the police?" she yips. "Who told you to?"

"T-there w-was one callin' on m-me in the k-kitchen," the doll stammers. "I t-told him about McGillicuddy an' s-says it was a s-secret an' n-not to t-tell. The big lug must of told when he went out. And after I fed him doughnuts, too. You can't never trust no cops."

Any way you look at it, it is all very comical. The safe has been robbed while the maid was entertaining one of Boston's very finest in the scullery. And Abigail kept McGillicuddy tied up for over an hour before she sent for anybody.

"I get it!" Iron Jaw lashes out. "The doll is in on it. She gets the policeman in



off his beat so the crook can get in the house. She holds the cop in the kitchen until the job is pulled off. Hah, it is lucky I got here to clear this all up."

"I don't see how you do it," Abigail says. "There are no mirrors here. Well, Bridget, you better go quietly. I am quite disappointed in you."

"It is a lie," the dame says. "It is a frameup. I'll get me a lawyer—"

"Come on," Iron Jaw barks. "We will make you squeal down at headquarters. We will find out who was in on this with you. Ha ha!" He looks at me and Snooty. "You're a great pair of detectives! Could you find a date in Arabia, do you think? Well, it is too bad but I must report you to the commissioner. Look at how my eyes are watering."

"Iron Jaw," Snooty says, "I want very much to take back some things I have said about you. The way you have solved this case is quite remarkable. Would you give me some pointers in deducting crimes if I should ask you?"

Iron Jaw puffs up like a pooch that has absorbed quite a ration of arsenic.

"I will think it over," he says. "Brains will tell, huh?"

"All your secrets are safe then, I am quite certain," Abigail cracks. "Well, please clear out of here, O'Shaughnessy. I have no license to keep an elephant."

That makes Iron Jaw mad, but he don't go right away. He makes McGillicuddy review the crime again. Then he picks up the toy cannon that is on the floor and looks at it.

"A shot was fired all right," he says, and looks at a cop that has just come in. It is the one who was eating up Abigail's doughnuts. The maid says somethin' to him which she never learned out of an Emily Post book.

"That's why she kept detainin' me," the cop says. "Oh, I see it now. It was her pal that done it all right. I heard somethin' that sounded like a shot, but the dame says it must be a backfire out in the street."

"It's all sewed up," Iron Jaw growls. "Well, good evening to you, ma'am. I will have the rubies back for you in twenty-four hours."

"If you do," the old doll says, "then I will believe in Ouija boards. I still think you're eight brain cells short of being a moron. Would you mind crawling to the door? Those steamer trunks you have on might break through to the cellar."

"Ha ha," Snooty laughs. "You should be on the stage, Abi—Miss Hepplethwaite!"

"I fail to see very much humor in all of this," I says. "Iron Jaw seems to have been quite efficient on this case. I am afraid I don't feel quite myself. If I could have a snort—"

WHEN Iron Jaw is gone, McGillicuddy asks if he can be excused.

"I feel a bit on the balmy side," he says. "I must lie down for awhile. I will just go upstairs for—"

"Go ahead," Abigail says. "And I would wash my hands when you get a chance. What have you got on them anyway?"

"Oh," the butler chirps, "I was gilding a radiator out in the hall before I came into the library that time."

"I wondered why I smelled bananas," Snooty says. "Ha ha!"

When McGillicuddy goes out, Abigail looks at us.

"I'm getting old," she says. "I think I should consult an alienist. If I had all my marbles, would I take to a pair of goofs like you two? What do you think?"

"I am quite surprised at you, Abigail," Snooty says, very much hurt to the quick. "You are over-estimating Iron Jaw, I would say."

"Shake," says Abigail.

We do all around and then Snooty gets up and takes a look at the cord that had McGillicuddy tied up like Sunday traffic on the Newburyport Turnpike.

"Looks like clothesline," Snooty says.

"Marvelous!" chortles Abigail.

"Nuts!" I says.

"McGillicuddy is Scotch, huh?" Snooty goes on. "He did not have much of a burr to his voice."

"You would think an Indian was a fake if he didn't carry a tomahawk and a fresh scalp, wouldn't you?" I snorts. "What next?"



"You should take this much more seriously, Scoop," Snooty says. "You never can amount to much if—" He goes over to the portieres that hang between the library and living room and pokes around them. "It is where the butler's bullet went through," Snooty says. "Look at the hole. Now outside it might have hit somethin'."

"They generally do, those bullets," Abigail contributes. "But go right ahead, big boy. I have no place to go, and it is all very interesting."

All at once Snooty stiffens up like his blood had turned to starch. He points at the newspaper on the table. It has got three dark spots on it.

"Well, what do you see?" he asks Abigail.

Abigail shivers a might. "Well, it is not catsup," she says.

"Ugh," I says, "blood! McGillicuddy, I bet, nicked the rough character who lifted the rubies. So what?"

"The butler said he missed," Snooty says. "Who wouldn't believe it? That nickel nurser would buy a ticket to Texas to join the Canadian Mounted Police, he is so very cock-eyed!"

"Ha ha!" laughs Abigail. "If we found a closet full of corpses, I could still laugh at you, Piper. If I could only have you in the house instead of a radio. Ha ha! He would take a train to Texas—oh-h-h, my neuritis!" she groans.

You can easily see that Abigail misses the rubies like a sheep does its ticks. Abigail gets quite a kick out of Snooty. I would have liked to with an anvil tied to my foot.

Snooty starts prowling around again and then he spots something leaning in a corner.

"That," says Abigail, "is a shillalah. My grandmother brought it over from Ireland. It is quite old."

"That can be no lie," I says, and Abigail gives me a very mean look. Snooty sniffs at the big walking stick. It is quite a club and has a knob on the end that would come very close to denting even Iron Jaw's noggin.

"Well," I says, "he has got the scent, ha ha! I always knew he was part aire-

dale. Well, Snooty, I wish you would hurry up and expose the real dishonest citizen. You know I have a date with the doll who takes tickets in the—"

"Do you trust McGillicuddy?" Snooty says to Abigail. The old dame squints funny at Snooty.

"Would you take a bottle of White Horse if I offered it to you?" Abigail says. "Don't be as silly as you look, Piper. If McGillicuddy ever had a vice, it was nailed to a work bench. Ha ha!"

I have to laugh at that one myself. Abigail gets to be more of a card the longer you know her.

"Before we do anything else, we must phone Dogface," I says. "We've got to get this story in first. I will do that, Snooty, while you detect further."

It is ten minutes later that me and Snooty go up to see the butler. We find McGillicuddy sitting on his bed rubbing balm on his noggin.

"That igloo is still rising, isn't it?" Snooty remarks. "You must have yeast in your blood. How do you feel, Mac? A wee muckle gaga, huh? Did you know I could talk Scotch, Scoop?"

"You should," I says. "You drink enough of it, ha ha! I must pass that one on to Abigail."

**S**NOOTY clutches me by the arm suddenly as we stand there looking over the butler's room. There are pictures all over the walls.

"Look at the one over the dresser," Snooty says in quite a muffled voice. "But don't let it throw you. Grab aholt of yourself before you look at it and then start thinkin'. This is quite a case."

We stay in there talking to McGillicuddy for maybe fifteen minutes and when we go out, Snooty has got a newspaper in his hand. It is an *Evening Star*.

"You don't mind, do you?" he had said to the butler. "I haven't read the news today I have been that busy." He shuts the door, and then I see he is holding something under his coat. Out in the hall he holds it up to me. It is a fancy vest that would be a scream at a masquerade.

"It will go very chic with my green suits," Snooty says. "Abigail will buy



him another, I am sure. I will just ask her."

"You are dishonest, Snooty Piper," I says severely. "You take that right back." I grab at it and something falls out of a pocket. It is a card. Snooty picks it up and we squint at it quick before we go down to where Abigail is waiting. On it is some printing. It says—SOUTH END SOCIAL CLUB. McGillicuddy's name is also written on it.

"It is some clue," Snooty says. "You remember them raidin' that joint. They found wires there that led to the race tracks. Mr. Guppy called it a very ugly nest of crime in an editorial. Now what would the butler be doing in that joint? I will tell you."

"Why bother to ask me things?" I says nasty. "You always answer them before I have very much chance to get my larynx in gear. Snooty, let's get out of here. The insurance company holds the bag, and I have a feeling it will not be very healthy if we—"

"It is the law I think of first," Snooty interrupts. "It is my one thought."

"You have to have one, don't you? I wondered what it was."

"They rounded up quite an assortment of crooked citizens in that raid," Snooty reminds me. "There was Charlie the Gyp, Ed the Eel and all the others. Why do you think they belonged? They are quite noted in line-ups. Scoop, I think we will be famous in the morning."

"If I am," I says, "I don't want to be under glass and banked up with lilies, Snooty. Would you mind if I just run along and meet the doll who takes tickets?"

I do not know why but I stay with Snooty. Abigail wants to know if we have any more jokes.

"Why I have one, but you won't laugh," Snooty says to her. "Don't you think it funny that McGillicuddy would smack himself on the conk with the shillalah, or what do you think?"

Abigail did not laugh. Neither did I. I just look at Snooty like I never laid eyes on the crackpot before.

"Why—er—not unless he was batty," Abigail says. "I had an uncle once who

used to hit his finger on purpose with a hammer. He said it felt good when he stopped. Ha ha! Well, let's forget all about it. We've had enough fun. Thanks for coming over, boys. Before you go, though, have a snifter or two."

It all seemed very silly.

"I bet you a ten-spot," Snooty says, "that McGillicuddy asks for the night off."

"He won't have to. This is his night off," Abigail says. "Does that make it harder?"

"Good!" Snooty says. "We will follow him."

"I will go with you," says Abigail. "I certainly would like to see that Scotchman's wild oat field if you think he's got one."

"Now—er—it is very dangerous tracking rough characters," Snooty says. "They would just as soon shoot you as anybody. Ha ha, and you might have to do some running and—er—well, you are no Glenn Cunningham, Abigail."

"Oh is that so, Piper?" the old dame squeaks. "You try and stop me! Maybe they don't show, but I'm loaded with vitamins. Who tipped you off to this, Scoop? Who kept the butler tied up until—"

"All right," Snooty says, "but I will not stop to pick you up if your ticker goes into a slump. Did you know the butler played the ponies?"

"Huh?" Abigail chirps.

"Look at this paper—Mr. Guppy's paper. Look at the entries for the races tomorrow up at Salem. McGillicuddy has got horses all picked out."

"Well, the old coot!" Abigail exclaims. "Why—Snooty Piper—how did you know he crooked himself with the club?"

"Get a whiff of it. It smells like bananas. McGillicuddy should have washed his mitts after he painted the radiator. Well—"

"Who did he shoot, then?" Abigail pressed on.

"That is the catch," Snooty says. "What fun, huh? I would like to see Iron Jaw giving the maid the third degree right now, wouldn't you? I hope the news of the robbery spreads like smallpox, Scoop."



"If the butler shot somebody," Abigail says, "who tied him up?"

"He did it himself," Snooty says. "His real name is Smart. Ha ha! That's what he thought! Well—I will explain later. Here come McGillicuddy—sh-h-h-h!"

The cock-eyed butler sticks his head in the room and his hat don't fit as the igloo has got his dome warped out of shape.

"Are you quite all right, ma'am?" he asks. "I must get some air."

"Oh quite," Abigail says. "You have no idea how much air you might get tonight, McGillicuddy. Well—"

We watch the cock-eyed gent from the window. We see him go out and cross the street. He hails a cab.

"Come on," Snooty says.

**W**E are just opening the front door when the cab is driving away. Then a big black boiler shoots by and there is a very disagreeable sound like two riveters hurrying up on a job.

"It is quite a knock they have in their engine," the old girl says.

"That is a chopper," Snooty yips. "I will bet you another ten-spot that your flunkey will never open up another door for you. Look at the cab—oh-h-h!"

It is a yellow cab. It skids off the street, jumps a very high hedge and goes onto a lawn across from Abigail's layout. When we get to it, it is leaning up against a statue of Diana and the driver is draped over a bird bath twenty feet away. We look into the cab at the defunct McGillicuddy just as two voices come from behind us. It is quite apparent to me that they would not get by in a church choir.

"Grab the old dame!" one growls. "Git her into the boiler. I'll rub out these mugs. They seen too much."

"Oh you will, will you?" Abigail yowls, and tosses a head-lamp that came off the taxi. It bounces off the shins of the very murderous citizen with the chopper just as he tosses lead at us. He howls and swears, dropping the young arsenal he was clutching. But another mug pulls a toy cannon just as me and Snooty dive into a gold-fish pool. A slug hits a lily pad for a bull's-eye an inch from my dome as

I break water. It is five minutes before we come up. That is very close to a record. There is no sign of Abigail.

"Well it is quite a haul the rough hoods got," I says as I dig a very colorful tropical fish out of my neckband. "Them rubies from McGillicuddy—and Abigail was wearing trinkets enough to keep ten woodchoppers in steaks and chops for their natural lives. I think I will just drop everything and go home. Where is even one cop?"

Snooty coughs up water and puts it back into the pool. I was quite certain he gave up two small turtles, too.

"They will hold the old doll for ransom," he says. "What do you think?"

"I would rather not think, if you don't mind," I says very weary. "It is quite a cleanup you made of the case."

"Listen," Snooty says, "it is police sirens. Something has happened down the street. There goes an ambulance. Well, we are bumping into quite a lot of news items, aren't we? Come on, Scoop! It can be nothing less than the massacre of the governor and his staff."

We run down the street for a quarter of a mile. Half of Beantown and all the police department are parked at an intersection. There is a very big shambles all about. Up against a big elm tree there is a big black limousine and the front is all buckled up like an accordion. Right beside it, sitting on somebody, is Abigail Hepplethwaite. Her hair is quite messed up and her hat is tilted over one eye. She squints up at us when we come up and I see she has got the wreck of a lorgnette in her fist.

"Why," we says, "what happened? It seems you had quite an accident. It is lucky—"

Abigail hands me the lorgnette. The part that holds the peepers is quite devoid of glass and is bent out of shape.

"Heft it!" she says. "It proved quite efficient."

I took it and handed it to Snooty. It must have weighed a pound less than a soup kettle. Then I see an unlawful citizen sitting on the curb picking glass out of his snoot. He has also got quite a shanty over one eye and his coat is minus



a sleeve. There is a chopper lying on the street, also a baby cannon.

"Why, Abigail," Snooty says, "you mean you washed up these rough people? Why—"

"Oh it's nothing," she says. "They sat me in the middle when they drove off. One disreputable character had quite a paunch. I got up quick and sat down very hard on it. As I did that I just bashed the other criminal over the pate and he went out like last year's birthday candles. Then when the driver turned around with a very ugly looking weapon in his fist, I batted him over the eye. You can see him over there trying to get the bifocles out of his nose. Then we hit the tree. It was quite a jolt. I am afraid I am quite a fright. What detained you two?"

"We were explorin' in the bathosphere," Snooty says when we got our breath. "I have still a couple of fish somewhere about me, I am sure."

"So I would be a nuisance hunting down criminal characters, huh?" Abigail sniffs. "I did not do so bad. I caught three of them. I have the rubies and my other trinkets back, too. It's been quite a time, hasn't it, boys?"

Just then Iron Jaw comes up and you could have heard him howl all the way to Rhode Island. It is Abigail he barks at.

"So they had a moll, huh?" he hollers. "Well, well—ugh!"

**N**OW Abigail is quite a lady but evidently she had been reading the tabloids and knew very well what a moll is. She gets up and bats Iron Jaw with the handle of the lorgnette. It caves in his derby and raises a little Indian mound on his skull.

"What would I do without it?" she says and pats the lorgnette.

"Ugh—er—why it is you!" Iron Jaw stutters to Abigail as he gathers up his marbles. "And—and you two fresh—what is goin' on? Oh, so you got the gang the maid was workin' with, huh? Well, I will make her talk now. I'll just grab 'em up an'—"

"You won't get this one," Abigail says.

"He is for the policemen."

"Why what am I?"

"If you will come around the corner later where there are no children, you big ape, I will let you know," Abigail says. "Piper, help me up. Haven't you any manners?"

As we lift her up, you can hear her joints creak.

"I must be getting old," she says. "I'm not quite what I used to be."

"Where am I?" says the mug Abigail had been sitting on. "Who pushed that puma into the boiler? It was a dirty trick. I—I—why it is the bulls!"

"Did you think they were brownies?" Abigail chortles. "Are you satisfied that crime doesn't pay, my man? Well, I must get home as I have to call the agency to send me a butler." She yells at a motor cop. "Help me into that bathtub on the side of that thing," she says. "I always wanted to ride home in one. I might as well go whole hog today. Ha ha!"

It is down at headquarters that we get the rest of the dope on the very big crime. One of the rough characters has an arm bandaged up, and he says it was where McGillicuddy shot him. But the butler did not know he did. It is all quite a complicated affair. It seems McGillicuddy got in with the tough element and they talked him into ribbing Abigail out of the red rocks.

"Yeah," the mug says, "me an' the butler planned it for this afternoon. But he gits cold feet this mornin' an' calls me up an' says it is all off. He says let's postpone it until tomorrer night. I says he is double-crossin' me, the mug. So I says to the boys I will pull it myself today anyways and do my own double-crossin'."

"Well, I get into the livin' room winder an' then somebody takes a shot at me. I beats it and says to myself somethin' is screwy. So I goes back to the hangout and tells the boys I bet he tried to kill me an' will get the stones an' light out tonight. He did. We fixed his wagon, the dirty crook! An' if it wasn't for that old hell-cat—boys, how she can carry a crowbar without it bein' seen?"



"Well, that is the way I deducted it," Snooty Piper says as the commissioner looks on. "This butler's real name was Smart and he used to be in vaudeville tying people up. When I saw he hit himself with the shillalah, I says to myself, he tied himself up, too. He just happened to shoot the gun off before he did that and the slug hit the other crook. McGillicuddy figured he would have to make it look like a holdup so he batted his own noggin with the club and gagged himself. He was goin' to scam out to-night for places quite distant. Then he would not have to share with the other dishonest persons. What do you think, Iron Jaw?"

"It is just luck," Iron Jaw groans. "Some day I will show you two—"

"Tell Dogface," Snooty says to Guppy, "that it is the little things that grow to very big things. If I had not gone to the Old Howard, I would not have seen the

picture the actor showed us, the same picture that was tacked on McGillicuddy's wall. The old vaudeville team of Halligan and Smart. Ha ha! Rope expert, Halligan said Smart was. It is all quite simple when you know all about it, isn't it? I also found a card that said McGillicuddy was a member of the South End Club. We just had to wait until McGillicuddy went out. It was quite surprising how fast the butler jumped the River Jordan, though. Well, if that is all you need of us, we just must be going. We must call Abigail. The day has been quite strenuous for her and no doubt she has taken to her bed."

We ring up the Hepplethwaite mansion. The maid answers.

"The madame?" she says. "Oh she got cleaned up and went out to see the fights at the Boston Garden. Any message?"

"N-no—ha ha!" Snooty says and hangs up.

Next Month **Joe Archibald** will tell you about the

## FUGITIVE from a CHAIN LETTER

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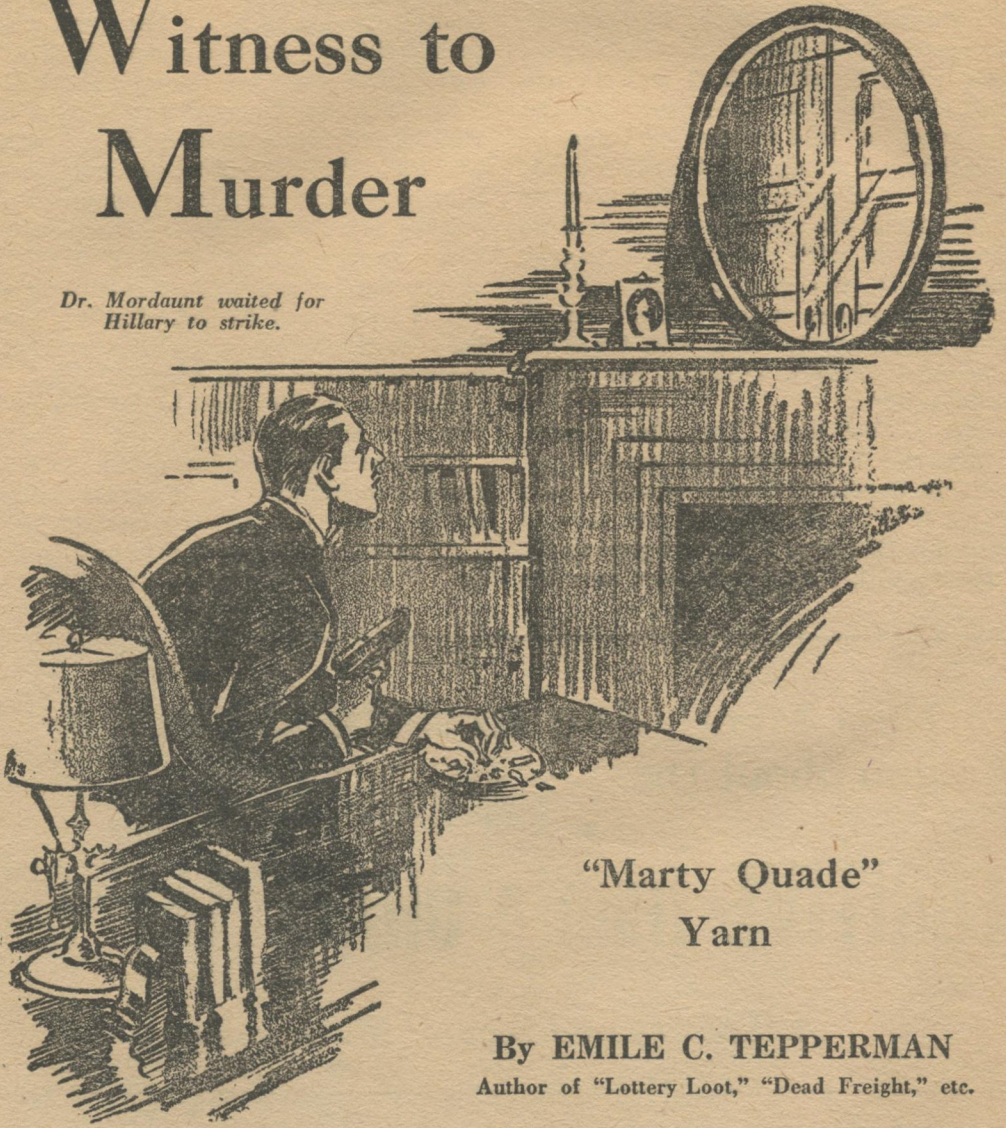




Marty Quade Is Hired as a—

# Witness to Murder

*Dr. Mordaunt waited for  
Hillary to strike.*



## “Marty Quade” Yarn

By EMILE C. TEPPERMAN  
Author of “Lottery Loot,” “Dead Freight,” etc.

*The killer waited years to destroy the person whose corpse was worth fifty grand. And Private Detective Marty Quade barged into a murder frame-up to nominate a man as a death-house candidate.*

**M**ARTY QUADE got out of the elevator at the fourteenth floor. He said to the operator: “A gentleman by the name of Dave Sayre is coming from headquarters. He’ll ask for me, and you’ll bring him up here to Dr. Mordaunt’s apartment. Till he gets here,

you’ll take no one up who doesn’t belong in this house. Understand?”

The operator took a quick look at the private detective’s badge that Marty had flashed on him, and nodded, looking a little scared. “Yes, sir, I’ll see to it.” Then he added timidly, “Is anything



wrong with Doctor Mordaunt, sir. The doctor looked kind of excited and worried when he came in. You know, if you ask me—”

Marty shoved him back in the elevator with a palm against his chest. “Save it till I ask you,” he told him. “Now get that cage downstairs, and keep your mouth shut, till Sergeant Sayre gets here.”

He waited till the steel door slid shut, till the rumble of the cable told him that the elevator was descending. Then he turned, made his way across the wide corridor toward the door of apartment 14D.

The Belleville was a swanky building in the west seventies. There were six apartments on each floor. To the left, along the middle of the corridor, was a door marked *Porter*. A little further on was another door which said *Service*. There was another service door on the other side of the corridor, and Marty knew that these doors opened on to the hallways through which deliveries were made at the kitchen entrances of the various apartments.

He passed this service entrance, passed the door of 14C, and started to put his finger on the bell of 14D, below which was a neat, expensively engraved card reading: *Dr. Ferdinand Mordaunt*.

But his finger did not reach the bell.

From behind him there came a slight shuffling sound, so slight that it might have failed entirely to register with a man of less sensitive hearing.

Marty whirled, his hand streaking for his shoulder holster. The service door which he had just passed was now partly open, hardly more than a few inches. Through that crack, he had a brief glimpse of a weirdly distorted face, of slitted eyes behind a pair of pince-nez; the whole thing topped by matted, disordered gray hair.

The muzzle of a gun came into view, with a silencer screwed onto the barrel. Before Marty's revolver was out of the holster, the silenced gun spat with a sound like the popping of a champagne cork. There was a flash, and a slug stung

past his head, smashed into the door of apartment 14D.

Marty dropped to one knee, swung up his revolver.

But he didn't fire.

The weird face disappeared, the service door clanged shut, accompanied by the clicking of the catch.

Marty leaped up, hurled himself at the door. It was locked.

He swung back to 14D, a puzzled look in his narrowed gray eyes. The distance from where he had stood to the service door was too short for anybody but a blind man to have missed with a rifle. Therefore the gray-haired person with the pince-nez must have missed deliberately.

Marty saw that the bullet had bored through the outer sheet of metal on the door of 14D, and was lodged in the thick wood beneath.

With the revolver still in his hand, he pressed the bell, kept his finger on it. He wondered why no one from inside had come to investigate the crashing sound the slug had made in burying itself in the door.

In answer to his insistent ringing, a feminine voice finally called out fearfully: “Who is it? What is it? What's the matter? Go away. We've called a detective!”

Marty called out irritably: “I'm the detective you called. Open up in there, quick. I got to phone down to the hall porter. Damn it—*hurry up*. There's a murderer escaping!”

The woman inside answered nothing, but a moment later a man's testy voice demanded: “What's the trouble, Mrs. Barth? Who's that outside?”

“He says he's the detective, Dr. Mordaunt. But he tried to smash the door down or something.”

“I tell you,” Marty shouted, “I'm the detective. I'm Quade. You sent for me. Let me in there!”

The testy voice inside ordered: “All right, Mrs. Barth. Let's take a look at him. If it isn't Quade, the detective, I'll shoot him to pieces.”

Marty was disgusted. By this time the one who had shot at him had had time



to run down the fourteen flights. He must be out of the building by now. He waited for the door to open, but instead the little grilled peephole swung wide, and a pair of gray eyes peered out at him.

He grimaced, took out his badge, and flashed it. "Listen, lady," he said earnestly, "this is no comic opera. There's a guy loose somewhere with a gun, and if he's the one that's trying to knock off Dr. Mordaunt, you're giving him every chance in the world to get away."

The woman said: "Wait just a minute, sir." And the peephole slammed shut. Marty's keen ears caught a low-voiced conversation. He heard the woman saying: "He looks all right, doctor. He has a badge, and there's an honest glint in his eye. I wouldn't say he was too smart, though."

Marty squirmed, and kept on waiting. There was another man in there beside the one with the testy voice—one who talked smoothly, swiftly. And there was a girl there, too, besides the woman. Marty heard her urge: "But, uncle, you phoned him to come up, and this must be he. His badge—"

"Bah! What's a badge! This might be Quade, or anybody else. I never saw him in my life. That's what I get for listening to you, and phoning somebody out of the red book. Anybody—"

Marty started, whirled. Behind him a door was opening. He twisted about, swinging his gun. It was not the service door this time, but the door of apartment 14C, next door. A woman was looking out into the hall, curiously. At sight of Marty's gun she screamed, slammed the door shut.

Marty cursed. He holstered his gun, banged on Mordaunt's door with his fist. "Listen, you people," he shouted. "My name is Quade, and I'm a private detective. I'm here because you called me. Now do you let me in, or do I go away and leave you to stew in there? Talk up quick. I'm sick of waiting out here like a sap!"

**S**UDDENLY the low-voiced colloquy inside was cut short, and the door swung open. In spite of himself, Marty

had to grin at the small group of frightened people that was revealed.

There were four of them. The big gray-eyed woman in the house dress must be the one he had heard addressed as Mrs. Barth. The thin, ascetic-looking man in the dressing gown and the house slippers was, of course, Dr. Ferdinand Mordaunt. Marty immediately associated his appearance with the testy voice.

Dr. Mordaunt held a long-barreled, old-fashioned rifle awkwardly in front of him, pointing it in the general direction of the door. His finger was crooked around the trigger, and Marty exclaimed: "Look out for that thing. Turn it away!"

Dr. Mordaunt kept it in the same position. "Not till you've proved who you are, young man. Let's see your credentials."

Marty sighed, took out his wallet and exhibited his automobile operator's license. Dr. Mordaunt involuntarily stepped closer to examine it, and Marty grinned again. The fiery doctor had unconsciously deflected the muzzle of the rifle from Marty's stomach in order to get nearer.

"Look, doc," Marty said. "If I were the guy that's trying to knock you off, all I'd have to do would be to grab the gun out of your hand."

Mordaunt flushed, stepped back. "All right," he said reluctantly. "I guess you're really Quade. Come in."

Marty was already in. He closed the door behind him, looked at the other two people. The man was stocky, heavy set, with his hair closely cropped. He was smiling tolerantly at the doctor.

Mordaunt said: "This is Mr. Sprague, my insurance agent." Then with a nasty glance at Sprague: "He's the cause of all this trouble."

Sprague exclaimed: "Oh, I say, doctor—"

But the old man paid him no attention, went on with the introductions. "This is Mrs. Barth, my housekeeper" indicating the gray-eyed, gray-haired woman—"and this"—turning to the fourth person—"is my niece, Irma Dawson, who lives with me."



Marty nodded to Mrs. Barth, and smiled broadly at Irma Dawson. She returned his smile, her wide blue eyes gazing at him in admiration.

"You know, Mr. Quade," she said, "I've never really seen a detective, except in the movies!"

Marty grunted. Irma Dawson was pretty, with flaxen hair and a fresh, creamy complexion. She wore a neat green print dress that set off her figure very nicely. She was about twenty-three or twenty-four, Marty judged — old enough not to talk like a sixteen-year-old about seeing a detective for the first time.

She went on gushingly: "It must be awfully exciting, chasing criminals and—"

"Excuse me, Miss Dawson," Marty broke in. "I'm trying to catch one now— if you'll give me a chance." He swung on Doctor Mordaunt. "I've phoned a friend of mine at headquarters, and he's coming up here. It's all right," he added hastily, as Mordaunt frowned. "I told him that you have a swell society practice, and you didn't want any publicity. He'll keep it under cover—unless you get killed."

He grinned as Mordaunt flushed, clutched his rifle closer. The doctor turned, led the way toward the library. "Who was that banging on the door just now?"

"That was no banging," Marty told him. "That was a slug from a silenced rifle. It was aimed at me from behind the service door. I ducked, but your door couldn't."

The doctor said almost under his breath: "My God, it's coming closer and closer. Right at my door now!"

Irma Dawson followed him down the hallway, casting an arch glance at Marty as she passed. Mrs. Barth came after her, mumbling something indistinguishable.

Sprague, the insurance agent, took Marty's arm, whispered confidentially: "Look here, Mr. Quade, you want to handle the old man politely. He's nervous as the devil, and he never had a very good temper. This business has just about made life unbearable for his housekeeper and his niece."

"Thanks," Marty said dryly.

In the library, Doctor Mordaunt seated himself in a deep armchair, making sure that the rifle was alongside him. He frowned at the others.

"Go to your room, Mrs. Barth; and you, too, Irma. Mr. Sprague, will you wait for us in the sitting room? I wish to talk to Mr. Quade in private."

Sprague said: "But, doctor—"

"Do as I say!" Mordaunt snapped at him.

Sprague shrugged, cast a significant glance at Marty, and turned to go. Irma Dawson and Mrs. Barth followed him out reluctantly.

Mordaunt held on to the rifle and kept tapping impatiently with his foot until the door had closed behind them. Then he began, speaking swiftly:

"Now, Mr. Quade, this is the situation — my life has been threatened, and I want protection. I've arranged for you to sleep here—"

"Just a second," Marty interrupted. "You know this is going to cost you dough?"

"How much?" the doctor demanded shortly.

"You can give me an advance of five hundred now—" Marty began.

"Five hundred! What do you think you are?"

Marty shrugged, went on unconcernedly: "An advance of five hundred now, and I'll tell you how much balance you'll have to pay after I size up the situation. In case you think that's too much, doc, you can let the police handle it. Your taxes will cover their services."

Mordaunt glared, but he reached across to a desk which was within arm's length of his chair, and started to delve in a drawer.

Marty wandered about the room, stepped to the window, which was open, and looked out. He frowned.

"You've got a terrace out here," he said, turning to the doctor.

"WHAT of it?" Mordaunt exclaimed. "Did you come here to protect me, or to talk about architecture?" He had extracted a sheaf of



money from the drawer, and he handed Marty ten fifty-dollar bills.

Marty raised his eyebrows as he noted that the drawer must contain two or three thousand dollars in cash. He folded the money, put it away.

Mordaunt remarked caustically: "Well, I suppose I'll get a lecture on architecture for my money."

Marty's face went a dull red. "Architecture," he said, "is what we're going to talk about now—whether you like it or not. You keep your door locked, watch it with a rifle, and you leave your windows wide open facing on a terrace."

"Nobody can get in through the terrace. It's a private terrace, and nobody can get on it. I have eight rooms in this apartment, and four of them face on the terrace. If Hillary can get in here through the windows, he must be a monkey."

"Who's Hillary?" Marty asked.

Mordaunt was plainly laboring under a severe nervous strain. He ran a hand through his thinning hair, snapped: "Who's Hillary! Five hundred dollars fee, and he asks me who's Hillary!" He took his right hand off the rifle for long enough to shake a finger at Marty. "Hillary is the one that's trying to kill me. That's who Hillary is!"

Marty drew up a chair and straddled it backward, facing the old man. "All right, doc, let's not waste any more time. So far all you've told me about this Hillary is that he isn't a monkey. If you want to get your five hundred dollars worth, suppose you tell me the story from the beginning."

Mordaunt lit a cigarette with shaking fingers. "Hillary is a chemist," he said jerkily, between puffs, "who was associated with me in developing a certain chemical invention. That was five years ago. Business was much better than it is today, and I had a good deal of ready money. I put up the cash to finance his experiments.

"Well, the invention was no damn' good. I found it out after Hillary had taken ten thousand dollars—all that was left of the money I had deposited to our joint account—and run off with it. I

swore out a warrant for Hillary, and he was caught, tried for grand larceny, and sent to jail for five years."

Marty was listening closely. "And now Hillary is out of jail, and after your hide?"

Mordaunt sneered. "You think he would risk the electric chair just to get revenge? Not he. He's got something better than that. He can make fifty thousand dollars by my death!"

Marty's eyes narrowed. "How?" he asked softly.

Mordaunt hitched forward in the chair. "When we entered into the partnership, Hillary and I took out a joint business insurance policy. It provided that if either of us died, the fifty thousand dollars was to be paid to the survivor. Sprague—the man you just met here—sold us the idea. Well, after Hillary went to jail I forgot about that policy. In fact, I forgot about it until this evening. As—"

The telephone jangled on the end table at his elbow, and Mordaunt picked it up, barked: "Hello, hello!"

He listened a moment, then handed the instrument to Marty. "It's police headquarters. They want to talk to you. Mind you now, I want no publicity!"

"Don't worry," Marty told him, "you won't get any. My friend, Sergeant Sayre, knows I'm on this case." He reached over the back of the chair, took the telephone. "Quade talking," he said.

It was Dave Sayre. "What the hell is this, Quade?" he demanded in a peevish voice. "I was in the radio room when a call just came in from a dame in the Belleville Apartments—apartment 14C. She says there's a wild man loose with a gun in the corridor. I thought I'd call before the flash goes out—"

"It's all right, Dave," Marty told him. "That was me. Somebody shot at me and scrambled down the service hallway. What the devil happened to you? Didn't you get my message to come over here to Doctor Mordaunt's apartment?"

"Sure I did," Sayre replied. "But I'm on homicide. You can call me when there's a stiff."



"Thanks," Marty grumbled. "I'll do as little for you sometime. Maybe you can do this without putting too much of a strain on your good nature—requisition the file on a guy named"—he glanced over at Mordaunt—"what's this Hillary's first name?"

"Roger," the doctor told him sourly.

"Roger Hillary," Marty said into the phone. "Did a term for grand larceny."

He said good-by to Sayre, and handed the instrument back to the doctor.

"Okay. You were saying you forgot about that policy till this evening. What happened to make you remember it?"

"Well," Mordaunt resumed, "I was coming home about seven-thirty. I got off the bus at Riverside Drive, and walked across. It's a bit dark over there, and lonely. Suddenly there was a flash of flame from across the street, and a bullet whizzed past my head. I must have started to run or something.

"I tripped over my cane and fell to the sidewalk. The person who had shot at me probably thought I was hit, and didn't wait for another shot. He ran back toward the Drive, and I caught sight of his face under a street lamp. I'll swear it was Hillary."

"I see," Marty said thoughtfully. "Did you call a cop?"

"No. There had been no explosion with the shot, and it attracted no attention. I got up and continued across, thinking if I saw an officer, I'd report it. But as usual when you need a policeman, there wasn't any. My niece, Irma, dissuaded me from notifying the police, because of the publicity, so I decided on a private detective."

"Where does Sprague fit in the picture?" Marty asked.

"I sent for him. I thought it would be wise to take out a little more insurance to provide for Irma and for Mrs. Barth in case anything happened to me. Well, do you know what Sprague told me?"

Marty grinned. "I bet he had no more application blank with him. He looks just hat dumb."

Mordaunt stirred impatiently. "He told me that the old partnership policy cover-

ing Hillary and myself was still in force. Somebody has been paying premiums on it all these years!"

MARTY whistled. "You mean to say that Hillary paid those premiums from jail?"

"I don't know how he managed it, but he could have done it easily enough if he had somebody working with him on the outside. We never recovered the ten thousand dollars that he embezzled."

"Where is that policy now?" Marty asked.

"I found it in my desk. It's in my work room. I'll get it for you."

Mordaunt rose, started for the door, then returned and picked up the rifle. "With all due respects to you, Mr. Quade," he said sarcastically, "I better carry my own protection with me."

"Suit yourself," Marty grunted. "As long as I have you five hundred."

The doctor left the room, closing the door behind him, and Marty picked up the phone, asked for headquarters. When he got Sayre again, he said:

"Thanks for the swift action, Dave. You got the speed of a caterpillar."

"I was just going to call you, Quade," the police sergeant explained. "The file just came up this minute. What about this Hillary? Why are you interested in him?"

"You better send out a general alarm for him, Dave. I'm still getting the story from Doctor Mordaunt—"

"It must be a complete novel, from the length of time it's taking," Sayre laughed.

Marty went on, disregarding the comment: "And it looks like Hillary is out to get the doctor. You better put out the flash: 'Wanted for attempted murder.' What's his description from the file?"

"Wait'll I see. Here it is—five foot six, weight a hundred and thirty. Sallow complexion. Gray hair, brown eyes."

"Any record of defective vision?" Marty asked.

"Nothing here, Quade."

"Okay, Dave. Shoot out the alarm. And send a couple of men up here—not snooty homicide guys, but just plain dicks."



Sayre started to protest: "Listen, Quade, since when are you running the department? Anyone'd think—"

Marty didn't wait to hear him finish. He dropped the instrument, kicked over the chair, and leaped for the door.

From somewhere in the apartment, a girl's voice had risen in a high-pitched, strident scream of terror. Twice that scream sounded, inarticulate; then it resolved itself into words: "Help, uncle! Help! He—"

The voice stopped as if cut off by a knife.

Marty had already yanked open the door, pounded into the hall. He swung toward the right, instinctively sensing the direction of the scream.

And suddenly the lights blinked out.

The entire apartment was plunged in darkness. Marty cursed, drew his revolver, and got his flashlight out. Before he could click it on, he heard a stealthy movement behind him, and a heavy body smashed into him. Something hard swished down, grazed the side of his head, and struck the bone of his shoulder with painful force.

Marty slammed out with his automatic, drew a grunt of pain as he struck soft flesh. He fought silently in the dark with his unknown assailant, dropping the flashlight and clubbing his gun.

The other began to pant heavily. Suddenly two powerful arms encircled Marty's waist, tried to heave him off his feet. Marty grinned grimly in the dark, chopped downward with the clubbed automatic.

The other uttered a gasp. The encircling arms went limp, and a body thumped to the floor. Marty's gun had connected with a skull.

Marty knelt beside the inert body, felt around on the floor for his flash, and found it. He clicked it on, and it lit. He directed the beam of light at the body, started in surprise. The unconscious man was Sprague, the insurance agent. There was a bloody furrow along his forehead, and a rapidly swelling lump. But he was not very badly hurt.

Marty got to his feet, hurried down the hall toward where he had heard the

girl scream. He passed an open door, looked in. His flash disclosed the figure of Irma Dawson, lying on the floor and stirring jerkily.

He rushed in and knelt beside her, raised her head. She opened her eyes, looked into the eye of the flashlight, and shuddered. She drew away in terror.

"It's all right," Marty reassured her gruffly. "This is Quade. Never mind the hysterics. What happened?"

Suddenly, as if his mention of hysterics had reminded her of something, she began to sob.

Marty shook her hard. "Quit it, you little fool, or I'll leave you here in the dark. Talk quick. What happened?"

She stopped sobbing as suddenly as she had begun, stammered: "T—there was a m—man out on the terrace. He—he had a gun—and the most awful face. He started to come in through the window, and I screamed. T—then—I—must have fainted."

"What'd he look like?"

"H—he had gray hair, and—and eye-glasses, and he was all twisted up. He—he must be Hillary." Suddenly she sat up violently. "Uncle! Where's uncle? Hillary will kill him!"

And just then, as if to bear out her words, there came from the next room the sound of shattering glass and a yell of rage. Almost simultaneously with the yell, there was the smashing sound of a bullet thudding into wood in the next room, followed at once by the crashing explosion of a single shot.

Irma Dawson clutched Marty's arm, exclaimed: "That's uncle's work room next door. He—he's shot uncle!"

Marty shook himself free of the girl, sprang out of the room into the hall. His flashlight picked up the bulk figure of Mrs. Barth, running toward him from the other end of the hall. She was holding a shoe in her hand, by the toe, and brandishing it.

"Police! Police!" she screamed.

**E**VEN as Marty watched her, Mrs. Barth tripped over the inert body of Sprague, whom she hadn't noticed, and went sprawling.



Marty swung away, ran to the next room, and tried the door. It opened under his touch. He sprayed the flashlight into it, stared at the figure of Doctor Mordaunt, standing over a body slumped on the floor, crumpled in death, and lying half in and half out of the French window.

Mordaunt was still holding his rifle. He turned, blinked into the flashlight, said weakly: "Well, I guess I—killed him. It's a good—thing I had the rifle."

Marty said: "Yeah. But not for Hillary." He strode into the room, stood beside the doctor, and stared down at the dead body of the gray-haired man. The dead man answered the police description of Hillary. Beside him lay a pair of pincenez which had evidently fallen off. The right lens was smashed.

Hillary's face in death was screwed into a mask of hatred. His features were broad, coarse. His coat was bloody around the heart, where the rifle bullet had caught him. Close to his right hand lay a heavy revolver to the muzzle of which was screwed a silencer.

Mordaunt said: "God, see if you can get the lights working again. I—I feel weak." He swayed, almost fell, but leaned against the rifle. "Never killed a man in my life before," he mumbled. "He—he shot at me and missed. I fired without thinking. Will—will they hold me for murder?" He walked unsteadily to a chair, slumped into it, dropping the rifle. "God! I never thought I'd really have to use it."

Marty bent, puzzled, beside the body of Hillary, picked up the eyeglasses, and pushed them on the dead man's nose. The skin cracked along the sides of the bridge as he forced them on.

Mordaunt exclaimed: "For God's sake, do something. What happened to my niece? I heard her scream just before he crashed in here."

"Your niece is all right," Marty told him. "She fainted, but she's better now. Wait'll I go out to the elevators and ring for the operator. He'll have to bring up new fuses, I guess."

Marty went out of the room. Irma Dawson was standing in the hall, her

hand at her throat. "Uncle—" she asked. "Is he—"

Marty scowled at her. "Better not go in there. Your uncle is okay. He got Hillary."

He went on, passed Mrs. Barth, who was just succeeding in reviving Sprague. She had heard what he said to Irma Dawson, and she did not stop him to question him. She merely looked up at him with a stunned sort of expression.

Marty opened the outside door himself, took a couple of steps toward the elevators, and stopped short. His eye had caught the open door of the porter's pantry. He distinctly remembered that it had been closed when he had come up.

His lips tightened into a grim line. "What a sap I am," he murmured to himself.

He did not ring the elevator bell, but returned to the apartment, using the flashlight.

Mrs. Barth was helping Sprague into Doctor Mordaunt's room. Irma Dawson was trailing behind them, trying to peer over their shoulders.

Sprague glanced at Marty, said sheepishly: "I guess it was you I jumped out there. I thought you were the murderer."

Marty made no answer, pushed into the room. He looked at Doctor Mordaunt, who was sitting with his head in his hands.

"Listen, doc," he asked gently. "Did you ever know Hillary to wear glasses?"

Mordaunt took his head out of his hands, exclaimed short-temperedly: "Do you have to bother about eye-glasses at a time like this?"

Sprague answered from the doorway. "He didn't wear glasses, Mr. Quade, at the time I insured him. But he might have developed poor eyesight in jail."

"Yeah," Marty said slowly. "But would it surprise you to know that this is the first time a pair of glasses were ever on his nose? *He never wore them while he was alive!*"

**S**PRAGUE stood away from Mrs. Barth, walked over to the body and looked down at it. Then he turned to Marty. "What are you trying to do—say



that this isn't Hillary? I'll identify him anywhere!"

Marty shook his head. "No, I don't say that isn't Hillary. I only say he never wore glasses."

Sprague stared from one to the other in the room. "But that's ridiculous. You yourself saw him out in the corridor—when he tried to kill you. Didn't he have glasses on then?"

"The man who shot at me," Marty said, "wore glasses. But it wasn't Hillary. It was the man who planned Hillary's death!" His eyes suddenly bored into those of the doctor. "What do *you* say, Doctor Mordaunt?"

Mordaunt stared at him, rigid, white lipped. "What do you mean, man?"

Marty laughed shortly. "I mean that you planned to commit legal murder! It was you who kept that policy alive all the time. When Hillary came out of jail, you brought him up here this afternoon, drugged him, and put him in the porter's closet. I couldn't figure that, until I saw the door of the closet open. The porter goes off at eight o'clock, so it wasn't he who opened that door."

Mordaunt was staring at him as if he were a ghost. Marty went on:

"This evening, after you had Hillary drugged, you stole out to the service door through the kitchen, and waited for me to come up. You shot at me and missed, so as to give me the idea that Hillary was alive and kicking at that moment. You put on a wig, and wore the glasses to disguise your eyes."

Irma Dawson cried: "What are you saying! Uncle is no murderer. Hillary attacked him. He was even at my window."

"Sorry, Miss Dawson," Marty told her, "but that wasn't Hillary. It was your uncle, all togged up in his glasses and wig. He first dragged in Hillary's body from the porter's closet, set it down right there where it is now. Then he poked his face at your window, came back here and staged the phony shooting act. He murdered Hillary while the man was unconscious—legal murder!"

Mordaunt said weakly: "You're mad. It's a wild story."

"Not so wild," Marty told him softly, "if you'll look in the mirror."

The doctor's eyes became like those of a hunted animal. He glanced from Marty to the others, inquiringly.

Marty said to him: "Your nose convicts you, doc. *You've got the mark of those pincenez on the bridge!*"

Involuntarily Mordaunt's hand went to his nose. "Damn you, damn you!" he screamed, and snatched up the rifle.

Marty had the flashlight in his right hand, and was handicapped in going for his gun. He did the next best thing; he hurled the light straight at the doctor. It caught him in the forehead with a nasty thud. The doctor dropped the rifle from limp hands, sank into the cushions of the chair, unconscious. The room became utterly dark as the flashlight blinked out.

In the darkness Irma Dawson shrieked. Sprague started to shout something, but stopped as the doorbell rang.

Marty felt his way through the hall, opened the door to two plainclothesmen from headquarters.

"As usual," he grunted at them, "you're just in time to pick up the pieces. The case is all solved. There's been a murder, and I got the murderer—all inside of five minutes!"

Costigan, the taller of the two detectives, exclaimed: "No kidding, Quade, is this a bump?"

Marty nodded.

"And you got the bumper?"

Marty nodded again.

"All right," Costigan grunted. "We'll bite. How'd you get the bumper that fast?"

"By a nose, my boy," Marty told him. "By a nose!"

Costigan winked at his partner, jerked his head at Marty. "Look at the lug!" he jeered. "We get sixty per, while he does our work for love. I wish there was more of him. We could get some rest."

Marty whistled cheerfully as he led them down the hall. "You boys will never believe it," he threw back at them cryptically, "but the murderer paid me in advance—five hundred berries! He wanted me to be a witness to the crime!"



# Directors of Doom

"Capt. Murdock"  
Novelet



Murdock staggered backward.

By CARL MCK. SAUNDERS

Author of "The Murder Web," "Death Cipher," etc.

*Hard-boiled John Murdock, captain of detectives, tried to chase a name. That name was "Brand." And everyone who mentioned that name to Murdock either hurriedly left town, or was dragged from the river. Murdock got sore, barged into a killer's bullet—and found himself on trial before the Directors of Doom.*

CAPTAIN John Murdock paced back and forth across his narrow office, his hands shoved deep in his pockets, a scowl twisting the flat features of his face. It was hot. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. It had wilted his collar before an impatient hand had loosened the blue tie that had

been a Christmas present and that he had been wearing daily since that time. His suit now in its second year of service looked much older. His shoes needed a shine.

The telephone on his desk rang sharply and he answered it, grunting his name into the mouthpiece. A moment later he



said: "Bring him in." Then he slapped the receiver back in place, ran his fingers through his unruly iron gray hair, and turned to face the door.

It opened, and Bert Andrews, tall, skinny and long of arm, stepped into the room, pushing a little thin-faced man in ahead of him.

Murdock said: "Hello, Siebert. Been a long time since I've seen you."

Siebert grinned. His teeth were yellow and uneven. "I've been away," he answered.

Murdock grunted. "You should have stayed away or did Brand call you back?"

Siebert's eyes narrowed. His lips tightened. Then he shook his head. "I don't get you, captain? Brand who, or Brand what? I don't know any guy named Brand."

Murdock crossed the room in three swift strides. His hand reached out and grabbed a fist full of Siebert's shirt and vest. He yanked the little man toward him, almost lifting him off of his feet.

"Memory gone bad, huh?" he growled. "Better think hard, Siebert."

The little man's face paled and a look of fear came into his eyes. He moistened his lips with his tongue. His breath came fast.

"Well, come on," Murdock snapped. "Speak up."

Siebert shook his head. "I—I—I don't know," he stammered. "I been away, like I told you. I—"

John Murdock shook him. He said over Siebert's head to Bert Andrews, "Let's put this worm in the room downstairs an' take him apart. Maybe we can find out what's wrong with his memory."

Siebert gasped: "No—no—"

The telephone on Murdock's desk rang insistently. Bert Andrews reached out and took Siebert by the arm. He said: "O.K., chief. I think maybe we can bring back his memory. Anyway, we can have a lot of fun."

Again the telephone rang, sharply, and Murdock turned away. "I'll be right down," he said to Andrews. "You go ahead an' get things started."

Andrews dragged Siebert out of the room and Murdock went over to the telephone and answered it.

A smooth, oily voice said: "This is Herbert Mallison, speaking. I think that one of your men just arrested a client of mine. A man by the name of Ranny Siebert."

Murdock grunted.

"Of course," Mallison continued, "the arrest was ill advised. One of the men from my office is going right over to the city hall to arrange bail."

"Well, what of it?" Murdock asked. "Why call me?"

"Oh, I just thought it might be wise to let you know that the man who arrested him made a mistake," Mallison explained. "I understand that at times it is necessary for the police to adopt rather—er—forceful methods in the discharge of their duties. I think you call it the third degree. It would be very unfortunate if you tried such a procedure on an innocent man like my client. You understand, I am sure."

Murdock's grip on the receiver tightened until his knuckles showed white. He said: "Thank you, Mr. Mallison," and hung up. Then he said some other things that made him feel better.

He went to the room in the basement. It was a small, bare room. Siebert sat on a stool under a huge light. He was perspiring freely. Bert Andrews and a couple other detectives stood around him. Murdock called Andrews out into the hall.

"Mallison just called me," he said. "He's sendin' a man over to arrange bail for Siebert. He warned me about tryin' to make Siebert talk."

Andrews whistled. "Mallison, himself, huh?"

"Yeah. Keep after Siebert, but don't touch him. Just try scaring him."

Andrews nodded, and went back into the room. Murdock went upstairs to his office.

HE sat down at his desk, cut the corner off of a plug of tobacco, and started chewing it. Twice he said a name aloud. The name was John Brand.



It wasn't the name of any person he knew. It was a name that he had first heard two weeks before from the lips of a dying man. The man, a criminal, had been shot down in an alley by unknown assassins. Hurried to a hospital he had regained consciousness for only a moment, and in that moment he had repeated that name. It hadn't been said as an accusation. His actual words had been: "Tell John Brand——" Then he had died.

Acting on Murdock's instructions, several of his picked men had gone out to try and discover who John Brand might be. Murdock hadn't really expected them to turn up any real information, and they hadn't. None of the friends of the murdered man seemed to know who John Brand might be. And that course of investigation might have been dropped if a stoolie, crazy for some money to buy the narcotic that he craved, hadn't spilled to Bert Andrews a weird and fantastic tale that without offering any proof or any clues, tied the mysterious John Brand into half a dozen recent crimes.

And even that tale might have been written off the books as impossible and fictitious if that stoolie hadn't been found with a knife in his back, within six hours of the time he had talked to Andrews.

Playing a hunch, John Murdock had gone out and picked up a man named Gooden. Gooden owed his life and his liberty to John Murdock. When the detective asked him about John Brand, he answered: "You know, Murdock, that I'm goin' straight, an' that I'm out of things so far as the underworld is concerned. When I say that, I mean it. I leave them alone an' so far, they've left me alone. I don't have any idea who John Brand is, but I've heard enough to believe that there is such a man and to feel that he may have worked out just the organization that you have heard about. Ranny Siebert might be able to tell you something definite."

And though Murdock questioned Gooden at great length, he didn't learn anything more than that. But it was an interesting coincidence that Gooden left Central City quite hurriedly within a few

hours of the time the detective talked to him. And now, within a few minutes of the time when Ranny Siebert had been arrested, the foremost criminal lawyer in Central City popped up to interest himself in securing the release of a man who had never been known to have a dime of his own in his life.

John Murdock leaned back in his chair, and put his feet up on the top of his desk. He scowled at his shoes without seeing them. Every bit of intuition that he had told him that there was something to the crazy story that the stoolie had told to Andrews, as wild and impossible as it had sounded. The stoolie had said that the man John Brand had approached all the leaders in the underworld circles and had made a proposition to them that they had accepted.

That under the leadership of John Brand, a central council had been established, and that this central council was coordinating and directing the varicous forms of graft and crime that existed in the city. And that this central council was so powerful that its strength reached even down to a control of petty thievery, exacting a tribute and offering an immunity.

Wild, crazy, impossible, any such thing as that. But John Murdock wasn't the man to overlook any bet. Several times before men had attempted to organize the underworld. Such organization had never been perfected because usually it was based on the attempt of one man to dictate to others. However the idea of a central council was new. Under a real leadership such a plan might get further. At any rate, Murdock knew that there wouldn't be any peace for him until the mystery of John Brand was solved.

**B**ERT ANDREWS entered Murdock's office and said: "Well, he's gone." "Get anything out of him?" Murdock asked.

"Not a thing. He stuck it out."

Murdock grunted. "Where did you find him?"

"I saw him walkin' down Center. Tailed him a couple of blocks, but he got



wise so I caught up with him an' brought him in."

"How in the world did Mallison get wise to the arrest?"

Andrews shrugged. "Easy. Some one tipped him off. Either some one who saw the arrest, or some one who was here when I brought him in."

There was a knock on his door and the detective called: "Come in." He watched the door open, and then added: "Hello, commissioner."

Police Commissioner Graves smiled as he crossed the room. He nodded to Andrews, and shook hands with John Murdock. He asked: "How are things going?"

Murdock said: "Swell. Sit down." He nodded to a chair, and dropped back into his own. Bert Andrews went out, and closed the door behind him.

The commissioner cleared his throat. "That was good work you did on the Balke case," he said. "Work like that gives the department a good name."

"It was an easy case," Murdock answered. "Nothing to it. Balke was guilty as hell. A school kid could have worked it out."

The commissioner shook his head. "You're too modest, Murdock, but we'll let that go. I guess you've read about the special meeting of mayors that the department of justice is calling in Washington."

"Yeah, I heard about it."

The commissioner grinned. "Well, Mayor Towne wants you to attend it with him. He thinks you can add a great deal to the discussions at the meeting."

Murdock frowned, shook his head. "I ain't any good at that sort of stuff. Besides, it's a mayor's meeting. It ain't for officers."

The commissioner stood up, the grin still on his face. "You're still too modest, Murdock. And even if you go there and don't say a word it's an honor to the department that is too great to be overlooked. Anyhow, you'll enjoy the trip. You've got a vacation coming."

Murdock said: "But there's a couple of things here—"

"Let Andrews handle them," Graves suggested. "The mayor's train leaves at

seven thirty tonight. He's arranging your reservation."

"But—but—"

Graves shook his head. "I'll be down to see you off. Some of the boys from the press will be there. They'll want an interview so you better think over what you want to say."

John Murdock shrugged. He walked to the door with the commissioner, chatted for a moment about the weather, told him good-by, and went back to his desk.

Aloud, he said: "Hell, I never did like ridin' on trains. I don't get any sleep. Besides—" He rang for Andrews.

SIX men sat around a table in a basement room beneath one of Central City's largest office buildings. It wasn't a large room nor was it well lighted. Originally it had been used as a store room. A damp and musty smell clung to the walls. There were three doors to the room. One opened to an elevator. The other two opened to passageways that led in different directions and that offered within a few hundred yards, six or seven means of egress.

There was also a trapdoor in the room, but the presence of that trapdoor to the vault like room below was known only to John Patavina who had once been the building's manager, and to the tall, thin oldish man who sat at the head of the table—and who was known to the others as John Brand.

With the exception of John Brand, the other men in the room were men whose names were well known in certain sections of the city. John Patavina, a boot-leg king in prohibition days now controlled the traffic in narcotics. He was short, dark. His face was swarthy and pock-marked. Hymie Berg, red-faced, obese, his fat fingers sparkling with rings, and his little eyes almost buried beneath the folds of flesh on his face, was the man who drew graft tribute from most of the rackets in Central City.

Hazen Fuller was the big-shot gambler. He didn't play much himself, but most of the houses in Central City were his, and the hard-faced men operating the games were men that he hired. He



was a tall man, but still heavy. His features were sharp.

The fifth man, Dal Higgins, was the head of a large, private detective agency. It was an agency that would do anything for money, that knew more about the private lives of the outstanding people in Central City, that anyone ever guessed. When Higgins' men weren't busy on a case he put them to work digging up information about certain key men and women. As a result of this work, Higgins had a good business in blackmail as a side line. In appearance he was something like Fuller, the gambler. He was tall, heavy, hard.

The other man Tizo Bordoni, short, thin, dark-featured, controlled most of the labor rackets, and his strong arm squad was as ruthless as any prohibition-time mob Central City had known.

In general, the elite of the underworld were gathered together in that basement room. Every one, with the exception of John Brand was the top man in his own field. Brand was a mystery, even to them. Who he was, they didn't know. What was the source of his power, they couldn't guess. But there wasn't any question about it. He had agreed to secure for them the services of Herbert Mallison, Central City's outstanding criminal lawyer, a man who had always been straight. And he had done it.

He had promised Bordoni that he would see that the governor pardoned Sidney Gaspard, one of Bordoni's men who had been sentenced to die in the electric chair. And in spite of public protest, Gaspard had been pardoned. At Higgins' suggestion, he had arranged to have one of Higgins' men put on Central City's detective force. Higgins had long wanted a man on the force, but had never been able to accomplish it. Brand did it within a week.

There were other instances, too, in which this man Brand had demonstrated his strength, but more than that, his council was logical. He didn't try to run things. His proposition to them had been merely that they meet together and talk over their common problems, that when advisable, they join forces. As much as

they wanted to, they could play a lone game. But the lone game didn't appeal to them so much any more. After two months' experience, they were discovering the strength that they had when they played together.

It was convenient to Patavina, the narcotic king, to call on Bordoni's strong-arm squad. It helped Bordoni's racket to know the secrets in the lives of some of the men on whom he was levying tribute. It was worth something to Higgins to know when some of the men he was interested in made a killing at a gambling table. All in all, the exchange of information, strengthened each of them.

Their meetings were informal. Any one of them brought up anything that he wanted to discuss. It was Hazen Fuller who started things off this evening.

"Jason Ellerby dropped ten grand at the Log Cabin last night. He's been losin' a lot lately. Know anything about him, Higgins?"

Higgins nodded. "President of the South Shore National Bank, director of a couple of railroads, married, a couple of sons. His wife is in Europe, an' he's been playin' around with a show girl named Arline Grey."

"Got anything on them?"

"Plenty. An' if I don't have, I can frame them."

Fuller grunted. "I've an idea he's skatin' close to the edge. If he's goin' over, we might as well be in on the clean up."

"You mean——"

"I'm guessin' that he's been losin' a lot of money that isn't his to lose. The way he's been actin', he's about ready to grab a wad of coin and head for Mexico. Let's push him a little."

Higgins said: "I'll have one of my men——"

John Brand's voice, cold and flat, cut into the conversation. "Not a bad plan, but you'll be missing a real bet to stop there."

"What do you mean?" Fuller asked.

Brand leaned forward. "Suppose we work it like this——" Low and monotonous, his voice droned on. The men at the table listened intently . . .



JOHN MURDOCK was nursing a cold, or at least, that was the general impression. Three days before it had come on him quite suddenly just as he was getting ready to leave with Mayor Towne for Washington. It kept him home for a day. But after one day away from his office, he showed up as early as usual, and the only thing wrong with him seemed to be that his throat was sore. And strangely enough, that only seemed to cause him trouble when the commissioner came to see him.

But this morning, at the commissioner's startling announcement, the cold seemed to mysteriously disappear.

"What's that?" Murdock gasped.

"Ellerby's dead," the commissioner repeated. "I just had the information phoned to me by his doctor. The maid found his body in his study at his home. He had been stabbed in the throat."

Murdock whistled, and grabbed his hat. "Let's go."

With the commissioner and Bert Andrews, he drove out to the Ellerby home on the west side of the city. Then, while the commissioner stood around and watched and prowled through the house, Murdock and Andrews got busy. They searched the house, questioned the servants, carefully examined every inch of the study. Police photographers came and took pictures. Fingerprint men went over the place for fingerprints. The body was taken away. Then, from someplace or other, the newspapers got wind of the murder, and descended on the Ellerby home en masse.

Murdock and the commissioner were interviewed and photographed. The commissioner made promises. Murdock said nothing. As soon as he could, he got away.

On the way back to the office, Andrews asked: "Well, what's your guess?"

Murdock grunted. "My guess is that we're in for a lot of trouble, or that it'll turn out to be so damn simple that a child could handle it. The place was lousy with clues. I picked up a stray cuff button that I couldn't match in the house. I found a woman's handkerchief, initialed "M." I picked up a shirt stud, the torn

half of a letter in a woman's handwriting, a woman's compact, and a note in Ellerby's vest pocket from some woman signed "J." You saw the note and the handkerchief."

Andrews said: "I saw the stud, too."

"What kind of a man was this Ellerby?"

"Pretty fast, I guess."

Murdock frowned. "I found too much. When there's too many clues, it messes up the real trail."

Back at the office he called in Jimmie Spence. "Jimmie," he said to him, "I want to know all that you can find out about this Ellerby—who he's been playing around with—what his associates think of him. Get right to work on it, and watch out especially for women with the initial J and M."

Spence said: "Sure, chief," and went out.

"You get busy on what his actions were during the last couple days, Bert," Murdock suggested. "Pick as much help as you need, but get some action."

Andrews nodded. He had hardly gone out before the telephone rang, and the commissioner on the other end of the wire, reported: "I've just had a call from the bank, Murdock. Things are apparently in quite a mess. They've already discovered a fifty thousand dollar shortage, and they think that they'll discover more."

Murdock whistled. He hung up the receiver, and scowled at the wall. Then he sent out for his lunch. He ate it in his office, topping it off with a couple of bottles of beer while waiting to hear from Spence or Andrews.

Detective Gluba came in just a little after one. "There's a woman outside who wants to see you, chief," he said. "It's about Ellerby."

Murdock nodded. "Bring her in."

Gluba went out and came back with a tall, slender woman. She was well dressed and young. She looked frightened. The woman said:

"Mr. Murdock?"

The detective grunted, and got to his feet. "It isn't often I'm called mister," he said. "You are——"



"Arline Grey."

"Won't you sit down," the detective invited.

The woman shook her head. She came forward to the desk. "I guess it'll all come out," she said. "So I thought I might as well come down here and see you. I—Mr. Ellerby—we—that is, I've been spending a good deal of time with him, lately. We've been—good friends."

**M**MURDOCK pushed forward a chair, and she sat down in it. Her hands were clenched at her sides, and she was biting at her lips.

"Tell me about it," Murdock suggested.

Arline Grey took out a handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes. She said: "Some one—that is, I think some one has been blackmailing him. He—he acted so strange the last few days. He wasn't himself. He was to take me to dinner last night, but he called me up and said that he couldn't. He said that he couldn't ever see me again—that he would write to me and explain it. He said that someone had found out about us, and that they wanted to be nasty about it—but that I wasn't to worry."

"He didn't tell you who?"

"No—that was all he said. But I thought you ought to know."

"You knew," Murdock suggested, "that Ellerby had been embezzling money from the bank?"

Arline Grey's eyes widened. "No—no—it isn't true. I know he wouldn't. It's his enemies that—that say things like that."

"What enemies?" Murdock asked.

"Bart Waggoner or G.K. Vance. Those men were always—that is, he told me that they were trying to get him. I don't know how, but I do know that they hated him, and that he hated them."

"How do you know?"

"He just said that he did. I don't know. But he wouldn't steal. I know that he wouldn't."

Murdock grunted. He listened to her talk. After awhile, he asked her where she was staying. She told him.

"This is goin' to be an unpleasant experience for you, Miss Grey," he said.

"But I want to protect you all that I can. Would it be convenient for you to go from here to some hotel and register under another name?"

Arline Grey nodded. "I could."

Murdock said: "Fine." He told her good-by, and thanked her for coming in. Then he got word to Gluba to follow her when she left and to arrange, at least for awhile, to keep her under constant surveillance.

Next he called in two more of his men, and sent them out to dig up what information they could about the two people Arline Grey had mentioned—Bart Waggoner and G.K. Vance . . . .

During the next three days John Murdock's investigations began to bear fruit. The enmity between Ellerby and Bart Waggoner and G.K. Vance was pretty definitely established. Both men had hated Ellerby, either had reason to wish him dead. Definite indications as to the identity of the owner of the handkerchief and the author of the note found in Ellerby's pocket, were also discovered. Bert Andrews felt that they were getting some place. Murdock wasn't so sure.

"We've got four possible murderers," he admitted to Andrews. "The two men, Bart Waggoner and G.K. Vance, and two women, Marie Thompson and Jessica Moore. But it's worse than that. As things stand today, indications are that all four did the job. Hell, the women didn't even know each other or know the men, so far as we have been able to discover."

"Well, we're only half through with our work. We haven't checked their alibis yet. This thing may clear up a lot before tomorrow night."

Murdock nodded. "Yeah, it may. I hope it does. The commish wants some action. We'll go after the men the first thing in the morning. Then we'll take the women."

**T**HE Central Council was again in session. John Brand, silent, watchful, sat at the head of the table. Dal Higgins had just finished his report, and the men at the table turned to look at Brand, awaiting his comment.



"It has worked out as we expected," Brand said slowly. "Threatened with disgrace, Ellerby passed over the money our representative requested. Then, following his unfortunate demise, the four people who had more reason than any others in the world to wish him dead, have been so frightened at discovering that they were suspected of his death that they, also, have contributed to us. The lesson that we should learn from this is that there is hardly an instance of blackmail that cannot be built up to be more productive than has heretofore been possible."

"Three people have become so frightened that they have kicked in," Higgins corrected.

Brand shrugged. "The Thompson woman will be handled."

Hymie Berg's fat face wrinkled into a frown. "Who killed Ellerby?" he asked.

An absolute silence followed his question, broken finally by Brand, whose cold, flat voice cut through the room like the chill of death.

"That is a question that we never discuss, Berg. This whole thing has been a joint enterprise of the Central Council. Fuller brought us the original tip. One of Patavina's men picked up the evidence that was planted to incriminate the men. One of your girls got the handkerchief, the compact and the half note that we planted to frame the women. Higgins furnished the contact man to collect the money. Bordoni stands ready to back up our bluff with a little rough stuff if necessary. Just how Ellerby died—isn't important."

Berg flushed and looked uncomfortable. He said: "I'm sorry, Brand."

Brand looked away and said: "That's all right. Now I've got a follow-up plan to suggest. Would you men be interested in a half million dollars apiece?"

"Would we be interested?" Bordoni repeated. "Try us and see."

"I will," Brand agreed. He took a paper out of his pocket and unfolded it. He spread it out on the table. The men crowded nearer . . .

When the telephone rang, Marie Thompson pushed aside the letter that

she was writing, and went over to the telephone stand to answer it

She said: "Hello."

The voice, a man's voice on the other end of the wire, asked: "Is this Marie Thompson?"

"Yes. Who is it? What do you want?" She listened for a moment, and then said: "Mr. Brand? But I don't know you, do I?" She scrawled the name on a pad of paper by the telephone, listened for a while longer. "All right. Come on right up."

Then she hung up the receiver, and moved into the bathroom to pat her hair in place. A moment later she heard a knock at the door of her apartment. She went to open it.

**J**OHAN MURDOCK and Bert Andrews knocked off at noon to grab a bite of lunch.

"We've narrowed it down, all right," Andrews said. "I guess there isn't much question but that the two men are in the clear."

Murdock nodded. "It looks that way. That Moore girl, too, seems to be out of it."

"That leaves Marie Thompson."

"Yeah, then what?"

"She may be the one we're after."

Murdock shook his head. "Not likely. The alibis we've bumped up against have all been too pat. I'll bet you a dinner this Thompson dame has as good a one as the Moore girl."

"It's a bet."

Murdock grunted and called for the check. He matched Andrews for the bill, lost, and grumbled as he paid the total. Then they moved out, and took a taxi to the north-side address of Marie Thompson.

The telephone girl in the apartment house rang her apartment, but couldn't get an answer. Murdock exhibited his shield, asked if she had had any visitors. The girl didn't know. She thought so, but she wasn't sure. Murdock got the apartment manager. He had to get hard with him to persuade him to take them up to Marie Thompson's apartment. The apartment manager said, as he unlocked



the door: "I'll probably get hell for this. You can see for yourself that—"

His voice broke off. Both Murdock and Andrews looking past him could see the body of Marie Thompson lying on the floor in the middle of the room. They pushed past the manager, and entered the room. Murdock bent over, felt the woman's body.

"Still warm," he said to Andrews. "I suppose it's too late, but get a doctor."

The girl's face was a mottled purple and black. There was a wire twisted around her throat. He undid the wire and tried artificial respiration. It didn't do any good. The apartment manager summoned a neighborhood doctor who had an office in the next block. The doctor took one look at the body, and said the girl had been dead for at least an hour. Then while Andrews telephoned in a report and called for help, Murdock started an examination of the apartment. One of the first things that he found was the scribbled name on the telephone pad.

"Bert," he called. "Look here."

Bert Andrews came and looked. He read: "Mr. Brand." Aloud, he said: "There might be a lot of Mr. Brands."

"There are," Murdock agreed. "But this is too much of a coincidence. It changes the whole complexion of the case."

"Yeah? I don't get it."

Murdock laughed, grimly. "Well, you will. You take charge of things here. I'm goin' to start out on a new line."

He hurried from the apartment, took a taxi downtown, and dropped into the First National Bank. The president was glad to see him. Murdock had a year before recovered the president's daughter from a gang of kidnapers and the president was grateful. He often helped Murdock out when Murdock needed the peculiar type of help that he could give. And Murdock needed it now.

"This is another of my highly irregular requests," he admitted. "But it's damn important. I'm goin' to write four names on a piece of paper. I want to know if any of those four people recently drew a good deal of money out of their accounts. Where they may bank I don't

know, but if they have checking accounts, I'd like the dope."

The president nodded. "Glad to do it, John. What are the names?"

**M**MURDOCK wrote down *Bart Waggoner, G.K. Vance, Marie Thompson and Jessica Moore.*

The president got busy on a telephone. Murdock accepted one of his cigars and chewed on it while he waited.

Within ten minutes the president turned to face him. "Here's your dope," he said.

Murdock looked at the slip, read:

*"Bart Waggoner—\$35,000 June 9th. G. K. Vance—\$40,000—June 9th. Marie Thompson—no . . . . Jessica Moore—no account."*  
.....

"This Marie Thompson has an account?" he asked.

The president nodded. "She's quite well fixed. Was married to an elderly man who died and left her a lot of insurance. Her money's in our bank. The Moore woman is wealthy, too, but I believe she keeps her money in a safety deposit vault."

Murdock said: "Thanks." He refused another cigar. "I never smoke 'em. Just chew 'em, an' this'll last me for a long time."

He went outside and across the street to an office building. An elevator took him to the tenth floor, and he went through a door that was inscribed *The Waggoner Investment Co.*

Mr. Waggoner wasn't glad to see him again. "You back?" he asked.

Murdock nodded. "You drew thirty-five thousand dollars out of the bank yesterday, Waggoner. Will you tell me why?"

Waggoner's face flamed. "It's none of your damn business what I do or don't do," he snapped.

"In this case it is," Murdock answered. "Let me tell you about what happened. You hated Ellerby, I know, and you probably weren't very sorry when you heard that he was dead. I don't believe that you killed him. But I do believe, as wild as it may sound, that some one con-



vinced you that you could be framed for the murder—and so strong was their case that you kicked in with a nice chunk of money to get off.”

Waggoner was a rather large man. His face stayed red, but his lips whitened. “It’s a damn lie,” he snarled. “Get out.”

Murdock shook his head. “Let me add this. The police had four suspects. Three of them paid up just like you. The fourth refused to pay. She was a woman named Marie Thompson, a woman whom Ellerby treated similar to the way he treated your wife—oh, don’t get angry. I know all about it. But the point is this—the woman who wouldn’t pay is this moment lying in the morgue—a wire around her neck—strangled to death.”

Waggoner stepped backward—sat down in his chair. Perspiration showed on his forehead. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. “My God!”

“Don’t think that thirty-five thousand bought you a clean bill of health,” Murdock went on. “Once you fall into the hands of a blackmailer, he picks you clean. I suppose you’re still pretty well off.”

Waggoner said nothing.

“Hadn’t you better tell me about it?” Murdock asked.

Waggoner said: “I—you know what Ellerby did to my wife?”

Murdock nodded. “I know.”

“They told me that even if they couldn’t prove that I had killed Ellerby the police investigation would bring out the story of what that scoundrel did to Alice. I—I—couldn’t let that happen. It was worth what they asked to have them—”

The detective grunted. “I want you to do two things for me, Waggoner. First I want you to give one of my men a job in your office. I want you to arrange a signal with him so that he will know and be able to follow any man who might come to see you with additional demands. I’m going to have your telephone tapped for messages. When they demand more money, I’ll know. I want you to play along with me. Will you?”

Waggoner nodded. “If you’ll promise—”

“Sure your wife stays out of it.”

Waggoner said: “Thanks.” He walked with Murdock to the door.

G.K. Vance and Jessica Moore were harder to handle than Waggoner had been, but before the afternoon was over, Murdock had made similar arrangements with them. Their wires were tapped, and the next morning a man from Murdock’s office would go to work for them.

Jessica Moore had agreed to take in Detective Allen’s wife as a temporary companion. Half a dozen times before Murdock had used Ethel Allen. She was a capable and wise girl. And the detective felt, as he topped off his dinner with an extra piece of pie that he might be getting someplace.

WHEN John Murdock entered his apartment that evening and switched on his lights, he discovered a man sitting in his best chair. The man was thin and old. His hair was white. But there was no sign of weakness in his attitude. His body was erect and his eyes seemed very much alive. The hand that held his gun didn’t tremble.

Murdock reached his hands into the air. He scowled at the man, and asked: “Well, what do you want?”

“Strange as it may seem,” the man answered, “I just want to talk to you.”

“Yeah? Well, how about comin’ down to the office in the mornin’. I try sleepin’ nights.”

The man shook his head. “I work nights. I’ll be busy sleeping myself, tomorrow morning.”

“The gun—” Murdock said—“is it necessary?”

“Perhaps,” came the answer. “You see, men call me John Brand. If that means anything to you—”

Murdock’s eyes narrowed. There wasn’t anything theatrical about the man’s attitude. He didn’t seem like he was a fanatic. He sounded, instead, as though he were deadly in earnest. The feeling came over the detective that he was facing the man whom he sought.

“Brand, huh?” he said. “Well, suppose you are—what do you want me to do about it?”



"Nothing. Nothing at all."

"Nothing?"

"That's the idea."

"I don't get what you mean?"

"Well," Brand suggested, "suppose I put it this way. Tomorrow morning you will get a letter through the mail. The letter will be signed by the name Carl Ditton. It will be in the form of a confession."

"A confession?"

"Yes. It will be a confession that the writer, Carl Ditton, strangled Marie Thompson. It will give as a reason the discovery of the fact that Marie Thompson killed Ellerby."

Murdock said: "Oh, yeah? An' just who is Carl Ditton?"

"His body will be found at the bottom of Mirror Lake."

Murdock's frown deepened. "When did you kill him?" he asked.

"About two hours ago," Brand answered.

The detective took a deep breath. His arm pressed against his gun, secure in its shoulder holster. He squinted at the man still sitting in his chair.

Brand said: "That will clear up the murders. All you've got to do is sit tight and drop a lot of the meddling that your men are doing."

The detective's laugh was ugly. "I don't work that way, Brand," he said shortly. "Sorry, but you're the man I'm after."

Brand got to his feet, and the detective noticed that he was quite tall.

"Stand away from the door," Brand ordered.

Murdock moved to one side. His right hand crept down. Brand noticed it, and his grasp on the gun tightened. He said in his curiously flat voice: "I wouldn't try it, Murdock."

Murdock shrugged, and pushed his hand back up.

"I was afraid that you would be a damn fool, Murdock," Brand continued. "I suppose I should kill you now. That would be the wisest thing. But I'm not going to. I shall wait a day. If you play cards the way they are dealt, you may live a long and happy life. If you don't—"

"I'll play 'em like they're dealt, but I'll make my own bets, Brand," Murdock answered. "Maybe you had better kill me now. My right arm's a little stiff. You'll never have another chance like this."

Brand's thin lips curved into a cold smile. "Get wise to yourself, Murdock," he suggested. "I'll drop in again some night."

He reached out, opened the door, stepped swiftly into the hall, and pulled it shut behind him. Murdock snatched out his gun. He jerked at the door, yanked it open and sprang into the hall. A gun roared and he felt the bullet rip against his scalp. He fired at the figure of a man dodging around a corner of the corridor. Then he ran after him. Down the two flights of stairs he hurried, but he didn't glimpse Brand again.

Feeling foolish and provoked with himself, he returned to his apartment, and called his office. He telephoned in as good a description of Brand as he could give, knowing that it would be broadcast to all patrol cars within a few minutes. Then he asked Bert Andrews to get some one busy finding out what could be discovered about a man named Carl Ditton. After that, he made sure that his door was locked, and went to bed. He slept soundly until seven thirty.

**E**ARLY in the morning, John Murdock called in Sam Gluba. "Tell me about that Arline Grey woman," he suggested. "The one that came down here the day after Ellerby was killed and who gave us the tips on Vance and Waggoner."

"She went to the Palace Hotel," Gluba answered. "Registered under the name Velma Harrison. She stuck pretty much in her room. Hasn't had any telephone calls or got any letters or sent any out. I got a couple of bell hops at the Palace who are keeping their eyes on her."

"Maybe."

Gluba grunted. "Well, they better. I know 'em pretty well, chief. They won't fool with me."

"What's her room number?" Murdock asked.

"It's twelve eleven."



"Well, she's gonna have a visitor," Murdock promised.

But though he meant to go earlier, routine business kept him well tied up until almost noon and it was just before twelve o'clock when he telephoned her from the lobby and told her he was on his way upstairs.

"I'm sorry," she greeted him, "that I can't shake you up a cocktail. If this were my own apartment——"

Murdock shook his head. "I don't drink in the mornings. How have you been?"

The girl smiled at him. "Personally I've been fine. But it hasn't been much fun. I imagine that I'm getting a little restless."

"Like to go back home, huh?"

She nodded. "May I? Is it all over?"

"Not yet, but I think you're clear—that is, so far as the papers are concerned."

Arline Grey crossed the room, looked out of the window, then turned to face the detective. "You've been very kind to me," she said.

Murdock shrugged. "Why did you come down to see me that morning?" he asked.

"Why—why I told you. I thought——"

"Yes, but why did you really come down?" Murdock's voice changed slightly. The casual, friendly tone disappeared. "Who told you to come?" he asked.

"Why—why no one, of course."

Murdock shook his head. "Listen, sister," he said to her. "That line went swell a few days ago, but it ain't any good any more. I know a little more than I knew when I first saw you. Yesterday I called to see a woman, and found her murdered. This morning, early, the police fished the body of a man named Carl Ditton out of Mirror Lake. Last night, the man responsible for those deaths paid me a visit. His name is John Brand."

Arline Grey's face paled. She gnawed at her lower lip. Her eyes, unusually wide, again mirrored the fear that the detective had seen in them when she had first visited him.

She said: "No—no—I don't know what you're talking about. I never heard of—Brand."

"It's no use, sister," Murdock snapped. "Better talk. You know, I might get a little unpleasant."

Arline Grey backed to the window.

In three swift strides, John Murdock stood before her. He didn't touch her. He just stared at her, his eyes narrowed, his lips twisted into a snarl. She started to shake her head. Again, she said: "No—no—no—" But her voice was hardly above a whisper, her breath was coming fast.

Murdock said: "Sister, if you don't—" Then, something inside his head seemed to snap. He staggered backward, his eyes void of expression, his jaw dropping slack. In the center of the room he stopped, swayed, and then toppled sideways to the floor, unconscious.

IT was late in the afternoon when he regained consciousness. His head throbbed violently. He put his hand up to it and felt a crude, blood-soaked bandage. The room was empty.

He sat up, cursing softly, then after a moment got to his feet. He walked over to the window before which the girl had been standing, and where he felt that he must have been when he was hit. Pulling back the curtain, he noticed a small round hole in the glass.

"So that was it," he grunted.

Across the street stood the New Amsterdam Hotel. From one of those windows across there, probably a window on the same floor, some one, who had been watching the girl, had fired the shot that had almost claimed his life. He crossed the room, found the hole in the wall where the bullet had entered, and dug it out. It wasn't badly mashed. He dropped it into his pocket, then telephoned Bert Andrews.

"I suppose it's too late," he said, "but get over to the New Amsterdam and see what you can discover. When I finish here I'll join you."

Then he went into the bathroom, and removed the bandage from his head. The cut looked bad. He washed up, went out,



and telephoned for the house doctor. While he was waiting for him, he carefully searched the room.

There was hardly a sign that the room had been occupied. He found a few cigarette butts, a couple of magazines, an empty tube of tooth paste, and a day-old newspaper. He didn't find anything else. The doctor came in, took a couple of stitches in his scalp, fixed a bandage on his head, and told him to go to bed. Murdock paid the doctor, got a receipt, and started over the room again. His second search wasn't any more successful than the first.

He called in the hotel manager. The manager wasn't of any help. He located Sam Gluba's bellhops. One of them told him that Arline Grey had left in a Checker cab. He had taken the license number. Murdock called a man that he knew at the Checker Cab Company, and asked that that cab be located and sent to him at the New Amsterdam Hotel. Then he crossed the street to the New Amsterdam, and hunted up Bert Andrews.

Andrews had located a room on the twelfth floor that had been occupied by two men who had checked out that afternoon. He was carefully going over it when Murdock joined him. Andrews said that a fingerprint man was on the way. After awhile the two detectives sat down on the bed and talked the case over. Then, just as the fingerprint man arrived, a telephone call announced that Murdock's cab was at the curb.

The detective went downstairs. He told the driver who he was and what he wanted to know. The driver said:

"Sure I remember the woman. The man, too."

"What man?" Murdock asked.

"Kind of an old man. He had white hair and was tall. His voice was sort of husky."

"John Brand," Murdock muttered.

The driver asked: "What's that?"

Murdock shook his head. "Nothing. Where did you pick up the man?"

"The man got in the cab at the stand near the entrance across the street. He

told me he was waiting for his daughter. I guess we waited half an hour before the woman came out. Then he had me roll the cab up to the curb, and got out and helped her in. She seemed a little surprised to see him."

MURDOCK grunted. "Where did you take them?" he asked.

"Morton street entrance to the McCullom building."

"Huh? What in the world—"

"They got out there, and went into the building."

Murdock muttered a curse. Aloud, he said: "Blind trail. They took another taxi from there, probably. Or maybe they walked a ways before they got another cab."

"What's it all about?" the taxi driver asked.

"Murder," the detective growled.

"Murder!"

"Yeah. That woman's probably dead by this time."

The taxi driver said: "Gee!" His eyes widened. Then he leaned forward, and took the detective's arm. "That woman," he said, "looked funny when they got out of the cab. Weak, sort of. The man almost had to carry her across the sidewalk. He wouldn't let me bring her bags along, but came back after them himself just a little while after he got her in the building."

Murdock scowled. He glanced across the street at the Palace Hotel; then, for some reason or other, he noticed the dark coach that was coming down the street. There were a couple of men in the front seat, a couple in the back. One of them he faintly recalled as having seen before, and that, combined with the slow, deliberate approach of the car sounded a warning in his mind.

He saw the man beside the driver lean forward and stare at the taxi cab that he was standing beside, stare at the number and then say something to the men in the rear of the car. He saw them lean forward, then look in his direction. Whether they recognized him or not he was never to know. He thought that it was only the taxi driver that they were



interested in. But he knew what was coming.

He didn't have time to warn the taxi driver. He saw the man in the back seat of the car raise his gun. And in that instant he acted, throwing his body violently against the taxi driver. He heard the taxi driver gasp: "What the—" And then they both fell heavily to the sidewalk. At that same moment, the sharp staccato voice of the sub-machine gun cut through the ordinary sounds of traffic.

Murdock got out his gun. He waited until he heard the roar of the coach's engine and until the gangsters' gun was silent, before he scrambled to his feet to throw lead after the racing car. And though he was partially conscious of the shouts and screaming, it wasn't until the gangsters' car was around the corner that he was aware that several bystanders had been struck by the flying lead. Fortunately, none of them was seriously hurt.

Andrews came down and took charge of things at Murdock's request.

"The trail leads to the McCullom building," Murdock told him. "I thought it was a blind trail but maybe it can be picked up from there. I don't think those men were after me. I think that they were after this taxi driver. Look after him, Bert, an' get him under cover. If I don't phone you here or at the office, try to pick up my trail at the McCullom. I'll leave word with one of the elevator operators if I can't get you."

Andrews said: "But chief, can't I—"

"Hell, Bert," Murdock answered. "Some one's got to look after things here. Look at the crowd. Besides, you've got several wounded people on your hands."

A TRAFFIC cop came up, and Murdock slipped away. Half a block further on he caught a cab, took it to the McCullom building. He got out, and walked into the lobby. It was five thirty. People were leaving the offices. All six elevators were busy. The clerk at the cigar counter didn't have time to talk to him.

For perhaps five minutes he stood in the lobby watching the people mill around. Then he moved over to the directory board and looked it over. While he was standing there, some one stepped up to him. As he started to turn, he felt something hard boring into his side.

"Looking for me?" asked a voice that he recognized.

He nodded. "Repaying your call, Brand."

John Brand said: "We're going over and get into one of the elevators. Don't try anything funny. I'd just as soon shoot you here as any place else." His voice sounded as though he meant what he said.

Murdock shrugged. He started for one of the elevators, but Brand said:

"Over here," he jerked his head to the left. They went over and stood by the third elevator. When it came down and discharged its passengers, Murdock and Brand stepped inside.

Brand said: "Down."

The elevator went down. It passed two levels, and stopped at a third. The operator opened a door. Murdock stepped out. He saw that he was in a room about twenty by twenty. It was equipped only with a table and chairs.

"The council room, huh?" he said.

Brand nodded. He had his gun out, now. His eyes seemed to glitter.

"Where's the girl?" Murdock asked. "Killed her yet?"

Brand said: "Sit down. You might pass over your gun. Be careful when you do it. I never miss."

The detective sat down, but made no move to reach his gun. He tilted his chair back. There was a grim smile on his lips. His left eye seemed more squinted than ordinarily.

"I never passed over my gun in my life, Brand," he said. "An' I'm too old to start doin' it now. If you want it bad, come an' try an' get it. But I never miss, either, an' I can reach it plenty fast." His words came slowly from his lips. His voice was cold and hard.

For perhaps a full minute, the two men glared at each other. Then, slowly,



Brand's gun arm tightened, and his lips drew into thin, bloodless lines.

Again, speaking slowly, his voice scarcely above a whisper, John Murdock said: "In a few seconds, Brand, you'll be as dead as that woman you strangled the other day, or as that boy you drowned, or as Ellerby—" He let his voice trail off and he slowly raised his right hand until it was just over his chest, his extended fingers within a few inches of his gun butt beneath his left shoulder.

He watched Brand's eyes, his face. He saw fear in those eyes, and he laughed, deep down in his throat. He knew that he didn't have a chance to escape Brand's shot. But he knew, too, that there wasn't a bullet on earth that could kill him before he got in one shot. And one shot would be enough.

There was a sudden knock on one of the doors. Murdock read in Brand's eyes a great relief, and he knew that his death was temporarily postponed.

Brand said: "Come in." His voice sounded hoarse, unreal.

The door opened. Murdock heard the man who entered gasp. He recognized that man, Tizo Bordoni, just as that man recognized him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Bordoni pull a gun. He thought that it wouldn't be long now. And a moment later he knew that it wouldn't be long, for Hymie Berg followed Bordoni into the room. And Hymie Berg held a gun, too.

Murdock said: "Swell, the vultures are gathering for the feast. Fifty gets a hundred that I can kill two of you before you get me."

The two who had entered looked at Brand. There was a puzzled expression on their faces. Finally Berg spoke.

"So this is the end of the famous John Murdock. Too bad, John, but you always did poke your nose too far into things."

Murdock made no answer. He slowly tilted his chair further back. With the first shot he knew what would happen, he would spill over backwards. Perhaps, if he judged things right, he could get a shot in even as he fell back. Maybe two.

Again there was an interruption in the form of a sudden loud hammering on the elevator door.

Bordoni asked: "Who's that?"

Brand shook his head.

A sudden, wild hope that it might be Bert Andrews excited Murdock for a moment. But he knew that it couldn't be. He had left Bert Andrews only a few moments before. He would hardly have had time to get to the building to say nothing of finding the sub-cellar where they were located. And even if it were Andrews, that couldn't help him much.

That realization decided him. The chair on which he was rocking suddenly overbalanced, but even as it started to crash, his hand whipped to the gun in his shoulder holster. The gun came out, lancing lead. He felt a bullet burn his neck, but his own first shot had found its mark. Brand still stood across from him, but his nose was gone, and deep, red blood was spilling from the place where it had been. In that split-second that that fact was recorded on Murdock's mind, Brand stood opposite him. Then, life gone from his eyes, he half turned and fell against the wall.

John Murdock didn't see him fall. He was on the floor firing at Bordoni, then firing at Berg. He thought that he must be dead. There was something terribly unreal about the whole situation. Neither Berg nor Bordoni seemed interested in him. They weren't even looking at him. Then, he saw them go down, and he heard Bert Andrews' voice and he knew that he wasn't dead or dreaming.

It came to him in a flash that Andrews must have burst in just after he had shot Brand and fell to the floor. And that Bordoni and Berg, feeling that he was out of things had turned their guns on Andrews.

"What the hell," Andrews said, gruffly. "I told you to wait for me."

Murdock sat up. "You big mutt," he growled. "It's a wonder that you're alive. Do you realize that when you bust into a room you ought to—" He broke off. Andrews was biting his lips and holding his right arm. Murdock scrambled to his feet.



"Hit, Bert?" he asked.

"Scratched," Andrews answered.

"Nothing much."

Murdock went over and examined his partner. Andrews had a nasty wound in his shoulder.

"Hospital for you, boy," he said.

"What about these fellows?" Andrews asked.

Murdock examined the three gangsters. Brand and Berg were dead. Bordoni was badly wounded. He was conscious. Murdock picked him up and carried him to the elevator. Andrews got in, and they rode up to the lobby. Murdock went with them to the hospital.

**B**ORDONI talked before he died. And the next day, John Murdock told Bert Andrews the story of how John Brand had organized the Central Council and of how Ellerby had been blackmailed and killed, how the clues implicating the two women and two men had been planted and used for blackmail purposes, how it was planned to go on levying tribute.

"We busted it on that last part of the plan by tapping the telephone wires and putting our men in their offices. An' in some way or other Brand found out about it. That's why he tried to get me. He sent that girl Arline Grey in with that story, too, so we would get after those people they had picked out to blackmail."

"What happened to her?" Andrews asked.

"I went back after I got you an' Bordoni to the hospital. I expected to find her dead, but she wasn't. She was tied up in a room below the one where we had our battle. I found a trap-door that opened down there. She talked, too. Brand had something on her, what it was she didn't tell me. But it was enough to make her do what he wanted her to do. I guess he had her watched, and the watchers tried to shoot me when I was trying to get her to talk. Then Brand got frightened and picked her up when she left the hotel.

"She talked enough to send John Patavina, Dal Higgins and Hazen Fuller to their death. And that funny mouthpiece is gonna get a nice long term in the pen."

Andrews grinned.

Murdock went on. "John Brand, when we fingerprint him, turns out to be a chap named Henry Yelkin. I looked up his record. He was a big-time crook on the Coast, but too clever for them to get anything on him. But one thing bothers me. An' that is I can't figure out how you happened to arrive at that building so soon an' how you found that sub-cellar."

Andrews grinned. "Simple. I let the traffic cop handle things back at the New Amsterdam. Then while I was on my way over to the McCullom building I remembered that Patavina used to be the manager there. I had a run-in with him in the early days. When prohibition first came in, he used to keep liquor in that sub-cellar. Well, when I looked over the building directory, and didn't get any ideas from that, I got in the third elevator and said to the operator that I wanted to go all the way down. I could tell from the startled way he looked at me that something was wrong. He wouldn't take me down, so I kicked him out of the elevator an' took it down myself."

John Murdock nodded. "You'll make a real dick, some day, Bert. Get well quick, will you?"

"I'd sort of like a vacation," Bert Andrews objected. "Besides my nurse isn't so hard to look at. And the last time you were in the hospital, you——"

Murdock said: "Yeah, but I'm the boss. Besides——"

Andrews frowned. "But hell, chief, you ain't seen this nurse I've got."

John Murdock grinned. "I'll go see her. Maybe she might like to take in a show."

He got up, started for the door. Bert Andrews called to him, but Murdock only waved back, and said: "I'll take good care of her, Bert."



# Torture Tool

No. 21. Clues that Caught Criminals

## A True Crime Story

By CLIFF HOWE

A SIREN moaned eerily through the chill gray streets of New York City on the morning of December 29th, 1927. A big, official-looking car left the curb at police headquarters, headed uptown, and raced swiftly forward.

Inside it were the picked men of New York's famous homicide squad, fingerprint and Bertillon experts, police photographers, detectives trained especially in murder work, and Inspector Arthur A. Carey himself, the bureau's chief, and one of America's ace manhunters.

A frantic call had come into headquarters a few minutes before. The body of a beautiful woman had been found under gruesome, mysterious circumstances, and Inspector Carey was responding grimly, quickly, as he had responded to hundreds of other such appeals. He didn't guess that he was about to begin a battle of wits with one of the most dangerous and elusive criminals in the country.

The police car turned into West 190th Street and slid to a stop before a large brick apartment house. Inspector Carey and his men leaped out. A trembling janitor led them to the door of a second-floor apartment, which bore the name *Emeline Harrington*.

The janitor was almost speechless with terror, but he pushed the door open. The detectives entered, and saw the body of a glamorous woman, somewhere along in her middle thirties, stretched out on the carpeted floor.

Gaping wounds in her head showed that she had been horribly beaten with some sort of blunt instrument. Yet these alone had not killed her. She had obviously fallen to the floor unconscious and had bled to death.

Carey, looking about the room, saw many souvenirs, knickknacks, and photographs which indicated that the dead woman had been connected with the stage. He also saw that a table and a bureau had been ran-

sacked and their contents scattered about. The woman's jewelry and money were missing, and it was apparent that robbery had been the motive for the crime.

Carey knew at once that he was up against one of the most difficult types of murder to solve. The killer might have been a complete stranger to Emeline Harrington. No one had seen him come or go. The one witness who might have testified against him, the victim herself, was dead.

The inspector began systematic questioning at once. A woman living across the hall remembered that, some hours before, she had heard what sounded like a scream come from Emeline Harrington's apartment. But shortly afterwards she heard footsteps moving casually about and did not suspect that anything evil was going on.

The janitor supplied an important bit of information. Emeline Harrington planned to sublease her apartment and had put a small ad in the newspapers. She had remarked to him on the day before the killing that a man had come to look the place over, and had promised to return the next day for a final decision.

Carey also learned that Emeline Harrington was married, but not living with her husband. She was a fairly successful actress, who had made an independent living and had acquired a good many valuable things in the way of clothing and jewelry.

There was nothing that might have been called a clue to the killer at this time. But Inspector Carey set grimly to work just the same. At first he constructed in his own mind what he termed a "picture" of the murderer. The fact that no one save the dead woman had seen him indicated that the man was a stealthy, cunning professional criminal.

He had craftily answered Mrs. Harrington's advertisement, had looked the place over, then had come back at a time when he was sure he would not be observed. He



had killed her, robbed the apartment, and left.

Back in headquarters, Inspector Carey began a careful examination of certain police charts which showed the sections of the city where robberies had been most frequent. He found at once that just about the time of Mrs. Harrington's murder, many mail boxes around the vicinity had been broken into, and some other apartments entered and robbed.

**T**HIS was further proof to Carey that he was dealing with a clever professional. He saw to it at once that far-flung police "feelers" were sent out. Police heads in all near-by cities were told to be on the lookout. Carey was a remarkable judge of human nature. The murderer of Mrs. Harrington had made a fairly successful haul.

The next thing the murderer would do would probably be to loaf for a bit and enjoy himself. For this reason Carey notified the heads of many hotels to have their detectives watch for guests who might have underworld connections.

Exactly a month later, a hotel in New Haven, Connecticut, had a troublesome time with a guest who had signed the name "Jones" on the register. He gave several wild parties in his room, then presented a check to the manager and asked that it be cashed.

When the manager refused, the guest named Jones left in anger and did not return. He had neglected to pay his bill, and the manager, remembering the instructions of Inspector Carey of New York, went to the guest's room and opened a suitcase which had been left there.

Inside were many articles of interest. A bunch of skeleton keys such as professional criminals use. A woman's wedding ring with the inscription *Guy to Emma*. A number of bills and check vouchers made out to Mrs. E. Harrington of West 190th Street, and some letters addressed to Frederick Edel.

The hotel manager instantly got in touch with the New Haven police. They recognized the name Edel as that of a criminal who used many other aliases. He had been paroled from Dannemora Prison, but had not reported recently to the parole authorities. He had been a suspect in two Connecticut murders, and had originally been jailed for robbing a cab driver.

Inspector Carey sent two men from his own office up to New Haven. They learned

that one more thing had been found in Edel's suitcase. This was a tool that was a combination hammer and jimmy—an evil-looking device with a metal claw and a blunt head. Moreover, there were faint reddish stains around the head. Carey ordered these stains analyzed. The report came back from the police laboratory—human blood.

But Edel, alias Jones, had disappeared after his brief splurge. The identity of Mrs. Harrington's killer now seemed certain, but his whereabouts was a mystery. In the next few days Carey had a circular drawn up describing everything the police knew about Edel. This he sent to over four thousand police heads in all parts of the country.

As an afterthought, he jotted down one particular criminal habit which Edel had and which the police knew about. This was Edel's practice of buying a small post-office money order, raising it to a larger denomination, and then trying to cash it. Several times he had got away with this.

Carey, knowing that Edel would be needing money soon again, warned post-office inspectors all over the country. These in turn got in touch with clerks at money-order windows. The forces of the law, set in motion by the guiding genius of Inspector Carey, were slowly closing in around Edel.

Months passed by, and no doubt Edel imagined he was altogether too clever for the police. But Carey's prediction that the murderer of Mrs. Harrington would eventually take desperate steps to get more money came to pass.

Hundreds of miles from the scene of the Harrington killing, in the town of Hopkins, Minnesota, a man, late in March, sidled up to the window in the post office and presented a money order to be cashed.

Carey's circular describing Edel was lying on the clerk's desk. He was wide awake. One glance at the man before the window was enough. He said: "Hold on a minute." Then he stepped toward a telephone. The man with the money order turned and dashed away, but was caught after a thrilling pursuit by the town marshal.

Detectives from Carey's office went all the way to Minnesota and brought him back. Then the fateful moment came when Inspector Carey and the murderer of Mrs. Emeline Harrington were face to face.

Even then Edel showed his desperate cunning. He admitted readily that he was a professional thief. He did not deny that he had opened mail boxes and broken into



apartments. But when Carey drove him to the address where Mrs. Harrington had been murdered, Edel snarled that he had never been in the house.

Shown the letters and the ring taken from his suitcase in New Haven, Edel had an answer. Mrs. Harrington, he said, had sent the things to him by mail. He hired a clever lawyer. There were no witnesses to prove that Edel had ever visited the murder house. He and his lawyer, to bolster up

his defense, cast reflections on the dead woman's character.

But two things impressed the jury unfavorably. Edel's defiant statement that he had never visited Mrs. Harrington at her apartment—and that sinister tool, the combination hammer and jimmy, with the bloodstains on it. He could not talk his way out of the web Inspector Carey had woven. The jury returned a verdict of guilty, and Edel was sentenced to death.

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# The M-P News Flash

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC. 67 W. 44<sup>TH</sup> ST., N.Y.C.



AUGUST 1935

## A New Supply!

## Introducing the Winners of the First Contest



**FREE!**

### Take Your Pick

SO great has been the demand for the beautiful antique silver-finished ZODIAC rings and the genuine Winchester pocket knives which we have been giving away ABSOLUTELY FREE—that we have just purchased another supply. Consequently, those readers who have not taken advantage of our offer may do so now.

We are continuing this unusual offer as an inducement to you—already a reader of M-P magazines—because we know you appreciate GOOD READING, and we want you to become acquainted with our other 8 publications. Each is an ACE, bubbling over with intrigue—action—romance! For instance, SPY STORIES and SPY NOVELS are great magazines of intrigue and adventure; WESTERN TRAILS and WESTERN ACES contain the best cowboy and outlaw yarns obtainable; FLYING ACES and SKY BIRDS are the two greatest aviation magazines on the newstands; TEN DETECTIVE ACES and SECRET AGENT "X" are always chock-full of thrilling, mysterious reading, while LOVE FICTION MONTHLY is truly the greatest magazine of vivid, human stories of love's tangles and triangles obtainable today!

We are aware that you buy magazines of our group because of their intense interest, and we want you to become acquainted with others of our group WITHOUT RISK OF ANY KIND. All you have to do is cut off and send us the tops of the front covers of 5 DIFFERENT M-P magazines of the AUGUST issues. COVER TITLES FROM BACK NUMBERS, AND FROM MAGAZINES NOT LISTED AT THE TOP OF THIS PAGE, WILL NOT COUNT. (Don't send full covers—just send the part illustrated at the top of this page.) In return you will receive ABSOLUTELY FREE either the handsome Winchester knife or the beautiful Zodiac ring. With the ring we'll send your astrological reading.

JUDGING from the widespread interest in our series of contests, we know that a large majority of our readers anxiously await the decision of the judges in connection with the first contest, which officially closed May 15th. With the winners picked, we will keep you in suspense no longer.

In the opinion of the judges, Norman Rochon, 46 Avalon Circle, Waterbury, Conn., wrote the best letter telling us what he liked about six of our publications, so the board voted him the first prize of \$50.00. Closely following was Mary Conaghan, 2269 Hampden Pl., Bronx, N. Y. C., with a well written letter which won the second award of \$25.00. Dorothy Whittaker, 306 Cherry St., Grand Rapids, Mich., was awarded the third prize of \$10.00, while the fourth prize of \$5.00 went to Esther M. Haskell, 116 High St., Bristol, Conn.

With the major prizes out of the way, the judges carefully awarded

ten \$1.00 prizes to the following: H. E. Neefe, La Farge, Wisc.; Alfred Pike, Jr., 201 W. 3rd St., Chester, Pa.; Albert Arledge, 801 W. Walker St., Denison, Tex.; Julia Bianco, 838 N. Locust St., Hazelton, Pa.; Donald Martin, Reno, Nev.; Marguerite Barnard, 16 S. Pleasant St., Middlebury, Vt.; Leslie Cleary, 6238 Northwest H'way, Chicago, Ill.; Roy McCourt, 1143 Laramie St., Denver, Colo.; M. V. Weeks, 606 S. 8th St., Waco, Tex., and Helen Lampe, 226 W. 78th St., N. Y. C.

To the winners go our congratulations, and to all—winners and losers alike—go our hearty thanks for the many fine things said about M-P magazines. We wish we could thank each personally, but this being impossible we again say: thanks and good luck!

Now—keep your eyes on this page for the winners of the second contest, officially closing June 26th.

## The M-P Line Offers for August

THE ever-increasing popularity of magazines of our group is strikingly evident at this particular time. Many periodicals command the greatest reader interest during the fall and winter months, but M-P magazine, by reason of their superior stories by the best writers in the business, command that interest all year 'round.

While in all probability you will be able to secure copies of your favorite M-P magazines where you plan to spend your vacation, don't take any chances—when you

pack your grip be sure to include several of our group. They'll come in mighty handy, on the train or boat en route; on rainy days, or in that delightfully cool spot where you lay in the hammock last year wishing for something good to read. Remember?

Space limits our telling you very much about our great August issues, but FLYING ACES hits the ceiling among air magazines! Gripping stories, thrilling articles, and latest model plans—it has everything! SKY BIRDS, for August, is a "Wow" containing, among other treats, Frederick C. Painton's "Legion of the Unlucky," a gripping novel about that strange brood of pilots known as the Squadron of the Dead. Let Frederick C. Davis thrill you with his latest "Moon Man" story in TEN DETECTIVE ACES, "The Masked Scourge"; and don't miss "Bandit Bait"—a "Duke Buckland" novel, in WESTERN TRAILS. Read "Siren of the Snows"—an amazing true story of Russia at the time of the World War, in SPY STORIES. Be sure not to overlook "Trail of El Toro," by T. W. Ford and "The Hell-Born Clan," a "Kid Calvert" novel by Phil Richards, in WESTERN ACES. If you run to the romantic, don't forget that LOVE FICTION MONTHLY is truly America's greatest love magazine—with its thrilling and glamorous stories, together with its special feature, HOLLYWOOD HIGHLIGHTS, giving you the very latest news of the screen world direct from the studios. And last but not least be sure to get your copy of the magazine that is thrilling a nation—SECRET AGENT "X"! If you want mystery, adventure and super-thrills, tuck away the August issue of this thriller in your suit case!

## Readers:

### Meet Frederick C. Davis

IN the first of a series of thumbnail sketches of well-known authors, we present Frederick C. Davis who writes the "Moon Man" stories in TEN DETECTIVE ACES, the "Duke Buckland" yarns in WESTERN TRAILS, and the new "Mark Hazzard" series in SECRET AGENT "X".

Many of our readers will be surprised to learn that Fred is only 33 years old. He is married to a charming girl, and has a sweetheart of a daughter. Fred's home town is St. Joseph, Mo., made famous by Jesse James. He works in New York City, and has a summer home in Connecticut.

Fred started at rock bottom in the writing game, and knows what it is to have to budget one's self on 50¢ a day for three meals and \$2.00 a week for a room. However, this is but a memory of the past now; for today he has an up-to-the-minute office, a secretary, and two electric typewriters.

Magazine Publishers, Inc., T.D.A.  
67 W. 44th St., N. Y. C.

Gentlemen:

I am attaching 5 cover titles from August issues. Please send the article which I have checked:

Ring  Knife

Name .....

Street & No. ....

City & State .....

Complete Birth Date (Ring) .....



*Horror stalked the ancestral halls of the Trumbull mansion. A murder and the disappearance of beautiful Joyce Bennet marked the sinister work of a hidden menace. Wade Hammond trailed a clue through the mystery maze on this domain of death, and found himself the quarry of ghoulish fiends who had formed a corporation of—*

# Corpse Cheaters



“Wade  
Hammond”  
Thriller

By **PAUL CHADWICK**

Author of “Diamonds of Doom,” “Murder Bait,” etc.

**W**ADE HAMMOND pivoted, stood stiff legged, and stared intently across the lushly sloping lawn of the Martha Trumbull estate as something stirred in the huddled shrubbery.

There was a prickle along his scalp. His fingers crooked toward the automatic in a shoulder holster under his coat. He was close to the spot where Detective Ross Scholtz of the Missing Persons Bu-



reau had met a violent and horrible death two nights before.

But he could see nothing. The thin wash of moonlight made deceptive shadows. The evergreens from which the sound had come formed a blot of somber darkness. He frowned and continued stealthily ahead.

Once again he was challenging death on a mission of investigation. The report of Scholtz' killing, the strange disappearance of Joyce Bennet, a girl from Associated Charities, had piqued his interest. He had driven out from town to pay a visit to the country home of one of the state's wealthiest widows.

In a bay window on the second floor of the big house, he could see a figure rocking behind yellowed lace curtains. It was Martha Trumbull herself, arrogant society belle of a half century ago, now a crotchety recluse, retired to the seclusion of her huge country home. A woman who would see no one but her doctor and a few servants, who kept a strange menagerie of pets for company, and who hated all things modern.

Wade glanced at the old-fashioned, slate-roofed carriage house behind the ornate residence. The only vehicles allowed around the Trumbull estate were horse-drawn relics of the eighties. The house itself was still lighted with oil lamps. It was a place of ancient customs and moldy memories of the past.

There was a glow in a cottage window beyond the hedged-in gardens. Wade walked cautiously toward this, passing a fountain that made a faint, eerie spatter, and moving along a crumbling brick walk to the door where he softly knocked.

Svensen, Martha Trumbull's estate superintendent, opened it and stood in the threshold, a skeleton-thin figure of a man with cavernous eyes set in a fish-jawed face. There was an expression of fear on his wrinkled features now. He peered at Wade suspiciously, said:

"Well! Who are you?"

Wade pushed by him into the lighted cottage before he answered. "I've just buzzed up from town. I want to talk to you about the killing here."

"You're another one of them detectives?"

"Yes. I want to ask a few questions. What did you think of Scholtz' death?"

He watched the thin man's face intently. Svensen only shrugged.

"No mystery there, mister. It was Old Blackie that done it."

"You mean Miss Trumbull's pet panther that escaped?"

"Sure! He's up back on the mountain now. The gang from the village couldn't find him. Blackie's too smart fer 'em. But I hear him screechin' every night. He's got the taste o' blood now. There'll be others that'll die around here."

Svensen looked at Wade sharply. There was a sudden gleam of malice in his cavernous eyes. He added harshly: "I warned the missus years ago not to keep such critters. But she wouldn't listen, an' now Blackie's out—an' they'll never catch him!"

"Why?"

Svensen came closer, tapped Wade's chest with a bony finger. There was a fanatical glitter in his gaze and he wagged his skull-like head prophetically.

"No ordinary panther would 'a' got out of a cage like his'n. Blackie's—a devil-cat! No wonder the folks around here is so scared they won't come within ten miles o' the place. An' you better get back where you come from, mister! Blackie's like the missus—he don't like strangers about!"

Wade Hammond nodded and tapped the hard bulge of his automatic. Svensen caught the gesture and showed snag teeth in a mirthless grin.

"Lead won't stop a devil-cat!"

"Thanks for the tip!" said Wade, and walked swiftly to the door.

Outside, the moonlight seemed more silvery, more ghostly than ever. He left the superintendent's cottage and moved straight toward the big house. Martha Trumbull was still rocking in her window with the solemn patience of extreme old age.

Wade skirted the front porch and approached a side entrance cautiously.



Martha Trumbull had refused to interview anyone on the subject of the missing girl or the killing on her premises.

Wade was determined to see her tonight even if he had to make a burglarious entrance. Joyce Bennet was said to have come here to try to get a charitable contribution from the wealthy old lady. It was the last anyone had seen of her.

Wade took a skeleton key from his pocket and silently attacked the door. The old lock turned at the end of two minutes. Wade stealthily entered the big musty house.

He was in a side hallway with a flight of stairs ascending. Listening, he could hear the faint squeak of Martha Trumbull's rocker. It helped him locate the exact position of her room, and he began climbing the stairway on tiptoe.

A brass oil lamp in a wall bracket made a funereal glimmer in the corridor above. Wade stepped into a shadowed recess behind the top stair railing as he heard a sudden sound of feet. Some one was coming up the main stairway in front, the landing of which was close to the door of Martha Trumbull's room.

A gaunt and ghostly shadow crept up the side of the wall ahead of the climber. Something was thrust out before it as though a specter was bearing gifts.

Wade saw a tall, thin, ugly-faced woman with a tray. She reached the corridor, hurried across it with her burden, and opened the door of the lighted room. With a swish of starched skirts, she passed inside and closed the door behind her. Wade moved cautiously forward. Now was his chance to enter Miss Trumbull's presence without the bother of being announced—and refused.

A moment after the servant entered with her tray, Wade heard the garrulous voice of the old lady raised in complaint. It was the bitter, parrotlike chatter of crotchety old age. The servant's soothing tones sounded as Wade neared the door.

But he did not turn the handle. A man's voice suddenly spoke close by. It was hard, ugly, laden with menace. Wade Hammond whirled and his whole body tensed.

THE speaker was close upon him, a big, slack-jowled man in a soiled linen coat. A man who held a double-barreled shotgun pointed straight at Wade Hammond's chest. In the man's small, close-set eyes was fear and anger.

"Lift your arms! Come out of there, you sneaking thief!"

To resist with those two sinister muzzles centered on him would be suicidal. Wade lifted his hands and walked slowly forward as the big man backed up, indicating for him to follow.

"Down the stairs—no funny business. I want to get a look at you!"

At the bottom landing, the big man still backed, and opened a door behind him with one hand.

"Elsa! Elsa!" he called.

The gaunt woman came down the stairs, sucking in her breath when she saw Wade Hammond, darting glances at him from eyes as bright as a serpent's.

"Light all the lamps. Don't get close to that fellow."

Elsa, the gaunt woman, ducked through the door, and a moment later oil lamps began to flare in all parts of the room. The man with the shotgun motioned Wade inside. He stood staring at Wade, scowling darkly, the gun held steady.

"Elsa—he's a burglar. You'll have to get Svensen to go for the sheriff."

Wade shook his head. "You've got me wrong, mister. There's a card inside my wallet that will show who I am."

"Don't move or I'll shoot! You want a chance to pull a gun!"

"Get the lady to take my wallet out. Look at the card yourself."

At a nod from the man, the gaunt woman came up to Wade and gingerly removed his wallet. She opened it and held it where the man could see. His special investigator's card, signed by the city police commissioner, was visible beneath the celluloid. The big man read it and slowly lowered his gun.

"What was the idea, coming into the house like that?"

"I wanted to talk to Mrs. Trumbull."

"She's ill. She sees no one. You might have scared her to death."



The man's small eyes fixed upon Wade sternly. The woman, Elsa, stood passive and hostile at his side.

"I've got to see her," said Wade. "A girl has disappeared, and Mrs. Trumbull may be the only one who can tell us anything about her."

The woman spoke up then, her voice coldly flat. "Mrs. Trumbull didn't even see her. I sent the girl away myself. I'm Mrs. Scruggs, the housekeeper. This is my husband—and we've received orders from Mrs. Trumbull and from Doctor Nordson that she is not to be disturbed."

"Put the doctor's signal up, Elsa," said Scruggs. "Let him come and explain things to this gentleman himself."

He had rested his shotgun against the wall now. He stood uncertainly, like a huge bear, blinking at Wade while the housekeeper lifted one of the lamps and set it on a high bracket jutting from an upper window frame.

"We have no telephone," he said. "Mrs. Trumbull won't allow it. We've arranged to call the doctor this way. His house is down the road."

Wade Hammond drew his black pipe from his pocket and started to light it; but the gaunt woman shook her head sternly.

"No smoking, if you please. She don't allow it."

Mrs. Trumbull's rocker was silent now. The whole big house was still. Even the walls seemed to be listening. The stillness was interrupted by the crunch of footsteps on gravel and a quick knock at the front door.

Scruggs threw it open, and a pale, worried-looking man entered. He glanced at Wade sharply, stared at Scruggs and the woman, said:

"Well—what's the matter? Is Mrs. Trumbull ill again? Who's this gentleman?"

Scruggs answered gruffly. "It's a detective, Doctor Nordson. I caught him breaking in like a thief. He wants to talk to Mrs. Trumbull, and was trying to slip into her room. I thought you could explain."

Doctor Nordson jerked his head impatiently. He waved his hand, and

Scruggs and the woman slunk away. The doctor came close to Wade and tapped him on the chest.

"Have you detectives no sense of decency! It is Mrs. Trumbull's express wish that she be left alone. Outside of that, I as her physician have given orders that she cannot, must not, be upset in any way. She is old and in delicate health. Any sort of shock might kill her. You will please leave this house without making a nuisance of yourself."

"Wasn't it a shock to her that one of her pets killed a man the other night?" asked Wade.

The doctor looked scared and annoyed.

"That was a terrible, a most unfortunate thing, but—we did not tell her. The man had no right to trespass—any more than you."

"He came in connection with a girl who has disappeared—Miss Joyce Benet, doctor!"

"Please! Please—Mrs. Trumbull never even saw the girl. Scruggs tells me that his wife dismissed her at the door."

"Is Mrs. Trumbull doing anything, Doctor Nordson, to have this panther that escaped killed or recaptured?"

The doctor passed a worried, trembling hand across his face. His eyes showed an uneasiness he could not conceal.

"She has sent for a man to come up from the city. She is going to have the creature shot. Meanwhile, I hope that strangers will take warning and stay away."

The doctor whirled suddenly and his body stiffened.

**T**HROUGH the window, out of the moonlit night, came a weird, high-pitched cry; a sound like a woman screaming in distress. It floated down from the mountain behind the house. Doctor Nordson's voice was thick as he spoke.

"There—there it is now! It screamed like that on the night this poor man Scholtz was killed."

A breathless silence followed the doctor's words. The scream was not repeated, but again there was the feeling



of prickling horror along Wade Hammond's scalp. The words of Svensen, the superintendent, echoed through his mind. "Lead won't stop a devil-cat!" There was something uncanny, devilish about that cry.

As though it had been a signal, the squeaking of old Mrs. Trumbull's rocker began again. Doctor Nordson turned and spread out his hands in an appealing gesture.

"For God's sake go away and—be careful!"

Wade Hammond shrugged and started toward the front door. Two people had told him now that Mrs. Trumbull had not even seen the missing girl. Outside of making a forcible entry into her room there was nothing he could do. He had no doubt that the death of Scholtz and the sinister screaming of the panther would keep people away until the animal had been killed.

But at the threshold of the door he paused. Loud, angry voices had broken out in a room somewhere at the rear of the house. One was a man's. The other a woman's. Scruggs and his wife seemed to be having a violent quarrel. Doctor Nordson had heard them, too. He turned in with angry annoyance.

The voices rose. There was a sudden, startling crash, then silence.

Wade Hammond, with Nordson close behind him, ran through a lower hallway to a door at its end. He flung this open and found himself in a dimly lighted kitchen.

Scruggs was nowhere in sight, but his gaunt, rawboned wife was lying on the floor, and a small table was overturned beside her. Wade leaped to her side, stooped.

The woman was breathing heavily. She was unconscious, and there was a skin abrasion on the side of her gaunt jaw. Doctor Nordson bent over her also and shook her shoulder.

"What's the matter, Elsa."

The woman moaned, stirred slowly and lifted her head. There was fear, anger in the depths of her eyes. This faded as she saw Wade and the doctor bending over her. She said in a flat, sullen voice:

"I—only fell!"

Wade Hammond's glance dropped from the woman's ugly face to the floor where her starched apron was draped in rumpled disorder. The open pocket had tipped up. Something had dropped from it. It was a small brown envelope about the size of a match case.

The woman's fingers slid toward it; but Wade Hammond grasped it first. There was something inside that rattled. One corner of the envelope was torn. He tilted it, and a dozen shiny phonograph needles fell into his hand.

"Give it to me!"

The woman made a sudden snatch and grabbed the envelope from his hand. She struck at Wade Hammond like an angry cat.

"You're excited, Elsa. Mind what you're doing!"

Doctor Nordson's voice had a professional tone. It seemed to quite the woman. She mumbled an apology to Wade, sank back trembling.

"My nerves—are jumping tonight. I can't stand that noise on the mountain much longer. I'm going to leave this house!"

"Don't be foolish, Elsa. You've been here ten years. Mrs. Trumbull couldn't get along without you." Doctor Nordson laid a soothing hand on the gaunt woman's shoulders. Wade Hammond helped her to her feet, took the brown envelope, poured the phonograph needles back into it, and handed it to her.

"Where's your husband?" he said.

The woman waved her hand toward the window. "Out there. We heard Blackie screech again. He's taken his gun and gone to get Svensen. They are going to try and kill the cat."

She did not meet his eyes. Wade Hammond frowned. Doctor Nordson said:

"That's madness. They should wait till daylight."

Wade made a movement with his right hand suddenly, drew out his gun. He clicked back the safety catch, said grimly:

"I'm going to help them. This thing's got to stop."



He strode to the kitchen door and slipped out into the moonlight. But there was a black patch of shadow at the corner of the house, and he ducked into it immediately. As he crouched, every nerve taut, filled with a sense of mystery and horror, the scream from the mountain behind the house came again.

It was clearer now, with no walls or windows to muffle it. A bubbling, sinister, banshee wail that echoed over the moonlit countryside. And Wade Hammond, world traveler, explorer, and hunter of big game, had never heard anything quite like it. His ears were attuned to the cries of jungle beasts. This was like a panther, and yet not like it. It seemed the hideous scream of some unearthly devil-cat.

**C**ROUCHED low, hugging the shadows like an Indian scout, he moved away from the old house, straight toward the wooded rise of the mountain. His gun was in his right hand, the round barrel of a flashlight in the other. But he didn't turn it on, for the moonlight made it unnecessary. He crossed an open field, keeping near a fence, slipped under the shadows of the pines.

Underneath his feet the soft needles made no sound. There was a ghostly, eerie quiet as though the forces of death were getting ready for some black carnival of horror.

Moonlight filtered through the branches overhead, spread ghostly radiance over a small open glade, and Wade Hammond suddenly paused.

The mat of pine needles here had been disturbed recently. His sharp woodsman's eye told him that. But the tracks, if they were that, stretched in a straight line up the mountain side.

Wade Hammond, his face bleakly grim, suddenly got down on his knees and began to dig. He scooped the pine needles aside, reached tense fingers down into the soft loam, and felt something that stretched away like a snaky root. He pulled it to the surface and gazed at the black length of insulated wire in his hand.

Then with a hissing breath, he leaped away, for something had plunged at him out of the shadows. There was a searing breath of flame, a roar in his ears. Buckshot slapped against a pine trunk close to his head.

Wade Hammond, resting an instant on one elbow, fired a single blasting shot from his automatic. A man screamed. A body fell with a thud, and kicked among the pine needles. Wade Hammond flicked his flashlight on, and its lancing beam picked out the figure of Scruggs, sprawled on the ground, his shotgun lying beside him.

Wade's bullet had struck his shoulder, smashed it, and the big man with the heavy jowls had fainted with the pain.

Wade left him where he was and turned back toward the house. Once again, he moved crouchingly along the fence, and his racing shadow moved ahead of him.

A human form, watchful and sinister, darted back into the house as he neared it. Wade turned to the left, skirted the big mansion again, and plunged to the side door. It was still unlocked, and he thrust inside quickly.

As he did so a lamp was extinguished somewhere. Flame lanced through the darkness. A bullet screamed close to Wade's head. There was a killer on the floor above. But Wade Hammond couldn't see him. He took the stairs three at a time, ready to fling a quick shot at any target that showed.

At the top of the stairs faint light came through a half-open door. Wade caught sight of a running figure, raised his gun to fire—but paused. Instead of shooting, he darted forward and clutched the skinny arm of Mrs. Scruggs as she raced toward the room at the hall's end. She turned with her ugly face screwed into a snarl, but cowered back at sight of Wade's gun.

Wade Hammond pulled her with him, and yanked open the door of the room. Lamps were still burning inside. The figure of an old lady sat in a rocking chair near the bay window.

But she didn't move or speak when he entered.



Wade Hammond moved up to her quickly and stood rigid in momentary horror. For the old lady's eyelids were closed. There was a fixed expression on her wrinkled, mummified face. The hands in her lap were withered, lifeless. Martha Trumbull was an embalmed corpse—and had been dead for months.

WADE looked down. There was a cord attached to one side of her chair, leading through a hole in the floor, and enabling some one in a room below to make the rocker move realistically. Seen from outside, with her chair going back and forth, Mrs. Trumbull looked lifelike enough to fool anyone.

Wade turned away from the corpse, jerked the cowering Mrs. Scruggs around and pointed his automatic at her. "Where's Doctor Nordson?"

"I—I don't know!"

"Where's Joyce Bennet—the girl who came here?"

Under the glare of his eyes and the seeming threat of his gun, Mrs. Scruggs pointed a trembling, skinny finger toward the ceiling.

"In the attic, sir—still alive. She's only drugged, and I can bring her around all right—but—"

Wade clutched the woman, drew her out into the hall, and made her show him the door to the attic stairs. Fear convulsed her, but his grip was relentless. His flashlight lit the way, and he sent its bright beam stabbing into the musty old room under the eaves. Across the floor he saw a prone figure stretched full length on a couch. A pale, youthful face rose amid a tumbled mass of brown hair.

A quick glance told Wade that this was the missing girl from Associated Charities. It was her determination to make Mrs. Trumbull contribute that had started a chain of mystery and horror still unended.

For at the moment Wade entered the stuffy attic room, gunshots blared again, and something that was like the stinging lash of a whip burned across his shoulder. His flashlight slipped from his fingers. In its streaking glow he caught a

brief glimpse of a murderous figure crouched in a corner directly beside the door.

He dropped, whirled, and hurled his body forward. There was no time to shoot. Another bullet streamed past his head. Searing flame scorched his scalp. But his fingers twined themselves around a man's legs. He struck upward, heard a hiss of breath, and grappled fiercely in the semi-darkness with the killer who had tried twice to slay him.

The man sought to turn the gun around, and press it against Wade's chest. Wade struck down with a slicing fist as the other triggered. The shot missed him by a bare few inches. Wade's fingers closed around the murderer's wrist. He twisted, and a scream of pain came from clenched teeth. The gun clattered to the floor. Wade Hammond lurched his full weight forward, and bent the other back. He tore loose the hands that tried to clench around his throat. He pinioned the thrashing arms at the man's side, straddled knees on either side of the kicking legs, and called a harsh order to Mrs. Scruggs. "Get that light!"

She still stood like a frozen statue in the doorway, and did not move, until Wade Hammond had repeated his command. Then she walked stiffly, fearfully into the room, picked up the fallen flash and approached.

She pointed it down, and Wade stared into the distorted face and bloodshot eyes of Doctor Nordson. There was a moment's tense silence, and then Wade Hammond spoke.

"You should stick to your killer's tricks, doctor! You don't make much of a showing—in a fair fight."

Nordson did not answer, but the cowering woman spoke in a thin whisper through bloodless lips.

"I'm—glad you've got him. He didn't tell us he was going to—murder people. He only asked us to help keep Mrs. Trumbull's death a secret when heart trouble got her last winter."

"I see," said Wade grimly. "She was the only rich patient he had. He wanted to go on collecting big fees. So he em-



balmed her and put her in the window where people going by on the road could see."

The woman nodded mechanically. "She never had any visitors, anyway. No one around here guessed what had happened."

Wade addressed the doctor again, his voice cutting. "You thought when you murdered Scholtz, and scratched up his throat it would make it look as though an animal had done it. That's why you circulated the story about Blackie's getting out. I suppose you killed him, and buried him somewhere out of sight. Then you rigged up that screaming electric siren on the mountain as part of the plan to scare people away and keep them from snooping. It would have been a nice trick, doctor, if Joyce Bennet hadn't come here

and slipped up to Mrs. Trumbull's room. When that happened, you didn't dare let the girl go—and it started all your troubles."

Wade turned to the woman suddenly. "He must have known Mrs. Trumbull was going to die—and he planned this thing ahead. That's why he made that talking record of her voice that you turned on tonight to fool me."

"Yes."

Wade Hammond laughed shortly. "You gave it all away yourself, Mrs. Scruggs, when you spilled that packet of phonograph needles. Mrs. Trumbull didn't like anything modern. She'd have no autos, radios or telephones around the place. I knew there was something pretty phony going on when I learned there was a phonograph in the house."



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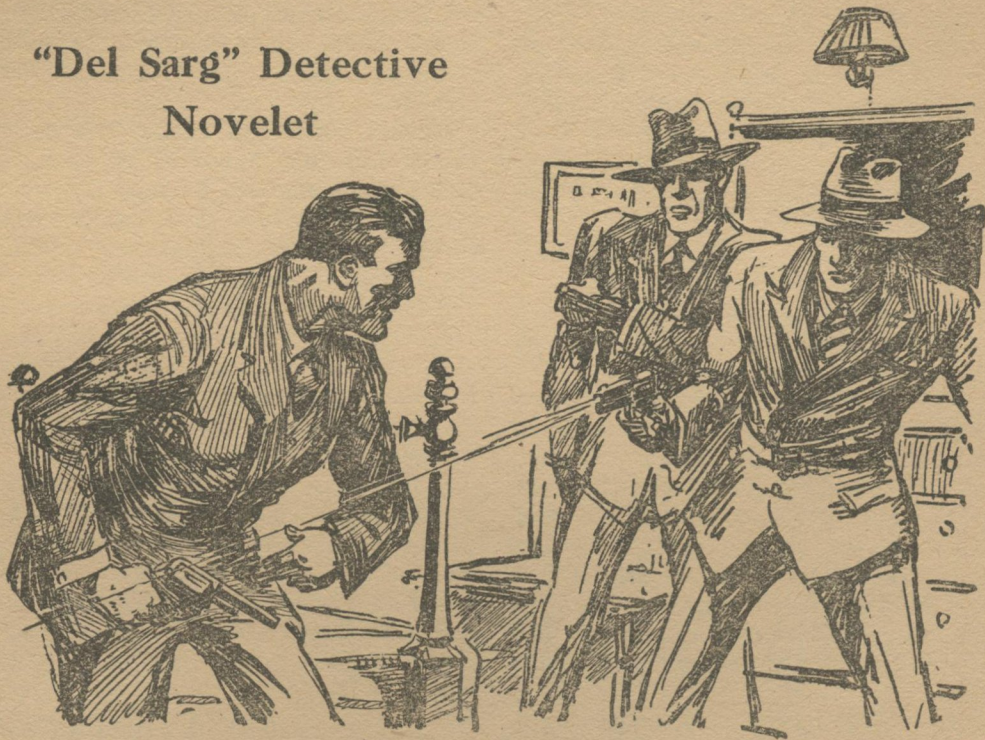
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# The Phantom Shamus

"Del Sarg" Detective  
Novelet



By MARGIE HARRIS

Author of "The Murder Wheel," and "I Kill the Dead."

*Del Sarg was too good a detective. That was the verdict of the crime czar whom Del Sarg was learning too much about. Death stalked the streets, struck at young kid messengers—sent them to a ghastly grave. And Del Sarg had learned too much. He was slated for a double-jawed treachery trap.*

EVERYONE has a personal devil. With some it's the sins of the flesh. Others run to the rum thing. There's a class that goes for greed in a big way.

Mine is Hap Caswell, the collar-ad, star reporter for the *Times*, incidentally heaven's supreme gift to the distilleries.

Without him I might have squeezed through life and never have been sentenced to the electric chair. *With him I couldn't miss.*

And if you don't think there's a kick in looking at some aged, judicial goat

while he pulls that "May God have mercy" line, you're a case for the goofy chateau. Your knees melt. Cold damp forms on your brow. Drawing a breath is like pumping air from two thousand feet down. And nobody knows it better than—

Del Sarg, one-time G-Man, then a private shamus, and now a pardoned death-celler. Myself!

It came about thus.

I'd picked Hap up on Boul' Miche, far out in the South End where he lived. On the way in we discussed a strange series



of recent hijackings of bank and bond-house messengers. Four of them had met with swift disaster and with them had disappeared huge sums in cash and negotiable securities.

But it was scientifically done, no stand-and-deliver roughness. When the bodies turned up either in the drainage canal or on some far-flung trash heap, each was found to be unmarked except for a tiny hypodermic puncture just inside the elbow.

Chicago coppers are anything but dumb. Skilful surgeons made dissections and discovered that some surgical-minded killer was injecting bubbles into the veins of his victims.

Naturally when the bubbles reached the heart it was just three strikes and out. The heart's like that, no dilution goes. It demands pure-D fuel or nothing.

We were speculating on the identity of the hijackers when I swung the bus around a corner. In a split second Hap had me by the sleeve, pointing toward the sidewalk. The hurrying crowd had paused to mill about three figures at the curb.

Two of the men were supporting a third. His face was pasty-white: his head lolled on his shoulder like that of a drunk at the pass-out stage. The men with him seemed capable, ordinary type citizens bent on caring for a sick man.

Hap buzzed: "Pull up a minute, Del." But the fixed-post cop at the corner blew three blasts on his whistle, a signal for all traffic to keep moving. I let in my clutch, rolled forward a few feet.

As I did that a long-snouted car swerved in behind us. In the rear vision mirror I could see the two Good Samaritans loading the sick man into the sedan. But that wasn't all—by half.

For the driver of the sedan was "Gats" Wilkie, known gunman and ex-heister of booze cargoes. He was tough. As I twisted about to tell Hap what I'd seen, he swung back to give me *his* bagful of news.

As a result we both talked at once, and neither understood the other. While we were getting our words untangled, the sedan slipped past us and buzzed down

street. I swerved, too, gunned the motor—and crumpled the fender of the car ahead.

An officious patrolman came bouncing out. He took a look at my card and badge, waved me on, but by that time the sedan was gone. And we didn't even have the number.

Dumb? Not a bit of it. Too many things had just happened at once. It didn't really matter, though, for what Hap was trying to tell me was that he'd recognized the two "Samaritans" as Calvin Digby, Canadian aviator-smuggler, and Joey Palatta, a Sicilian gun-tosser.

Add that to my recognition of Gats Wilkie as the driver and you've a pretty fair basis, particularly if the boys were playing games with the sick man. I said as much to Hap.

I think it struck us both at the same moment, when I said: "Sick man." Without doubt we'd been eye-witnesses to another of the bank messenger hijackings—and *we'd let them slip through our fingers with their victim!*

Hap gave me a dirty look, said: "Shamus, eh?"

"Dumb newshound," I roared back at him. "Hell, you saw as much as I did. Whyn't you crack a word or two—or didn't you know any?"

The color came flooding into his cheeks. He was mad, clear through, but at last the humor of the thing struck him, and he cupped his fingers over his lips, whispered confidentially:

"It's our own heavenly secret, sweet-heart. We'll never tell a soul!"

"Damn' tootin' we won't," I whooped, "not having any hankering to be laughed out of town."

We were rolling now but there wasn't any trace of the black sedan. We talked to a lot of traffic cops but none of them had noticed one speeding, or one that seemed to be carrying a sick man.

Hap turned to me at last and said: "It's our meat, Del. We know things the cops won't find out for weeks. What about it, are you on?"

If I'd had any sense, I'd have leaped from the car, and grabbed the first plane



for Havana, Rio Janeiro or any far place sufficiently distant from Hap.

Instead of that I said: "Sure, I'm on."

Just three words.

But they signed my death warrant. I wouldn't fool you.

**W**HATEVER of grim satisfaction there is in guessing right about some ghastly event, Hap and I enjoyed to the fullest.

What we'd seen was the capture of a bank messenger from the First National, who'd been carrying \$160,000 in big bills. It was in a steel-lined brief-case, chained to his arm. And Hap and I, except for the snatchers, were the only ones who knew the secret.

Naturally we couldn't be expected to walk up to the coppers and say: "We saw it all, Mister, but we were too dumb to know."

There was just one answer. The thing had been dumped into our laps and, willy-nilly, it was up to us to make a job of it. Then late in the afternoon it looked for awhile as though the responsibility could be divided.

Two of Detective Chief McCurdy's dicks went out and rounded up an eye witness who boasted that he'd recognize both of the bandits if he saw their pictures. Hap immediately suggested that we go down and call on McCurdy. "He'll be glad to see us," he urged.

That sounded reasonable, so we grabbed a cab and went over to the grimy old detective headquarters. McCurdy gave us a royal welcome. His coat was off, his eyes red-rimmed with worry and fatigue. But he was continually roaring over the telephone, barking new assignments into the speaker-box on his desk.

Presently, when he had a breathing spell he dashed the perspiration from his forehead and said:

"Hotter'n the hinges, huh? Well, you picked a fine night for a call. The 'jackers grabbed another messenger today, but this time we've got a chance at 'em. Kelly and Horn picked up a witness. He's down there in the corner room right now going over pictures."

"Should give a look," Hap suggested. "Come on, Del and Mac."

McCurdy shook his head.

"Too busy," he groaned. "You go ahead. Corner room, overlooking the street. Kelly's there. You know him."

So Hap and I strolled along the hall, rapped, pushed the door open.

A small chap who looked like some sort of high-class mechanic sat beside the open window, staring goggle eyed at the procession of photographs moving before his gaze.

Plain-clothes man Kelly looked up, said: "Greets, boys. We're fixing to put on a he-beauty——"

He stopped, stared at us miserably, put his hand up as though to dam the stream of red that suddenly was seeping out below his right eye. As we stared, he said: "Arrghhh—" and pitched forward on the table.

The little witness died harder.

There was a distinct crackling sound like fingers splintering a dry gourd. A shriek broke from his lips as he came to his feet jerkily. After a second he sat down again—but on the floor. There was a hole clear through his head, just above his ears.

There hadn't been the sound of a gunshot from outside. Hap cursed, started forward. I snatched him back, turned off the lights. There was no good reason for letting the hidden marksman add us to his bag for the day.

The opposite building rose stories higher than detective headquarters. There were at least a dozen windows from which the shots might have come, and there wasn't a light in any of them.

I jumped to the wall phone, said: "Gimme McCurdy. Shake it up."

There was a buzz on the line, and Mac said: "Yep?"

"It's Del," I told him. "Bust over here on the jump. Things have gone sour, but keep it to yourself until you see."

The clatter of the receiver rang in my ears, another, louder, grew as he came charging along the hallway.

I held the room black until he stood in the doorway. When I clicked on the lights I warned him:



"Careful, Mac, they got it through that open window. Don't walk into a slug."

"Sweet and gentle—" he whispered under his breath. "Poor Kelly. That blows our only chance at the snatchers. What'll I do, Del? The papers'll crucify us for this."

"I'm going to grab a piece of it personally," I told him gruffly. "Hap and I'll be running down some hunches. You'll be in on it if we stumble across anything."

He was our good friend; he'd proved that, but I'd be totally be-damned if I'd break down and tell him about the events of the afternoon.

He said: "Thanks," absently. He was staring at the dead man, gritting his teeth. Suddenly he was tearing down the hall at a dead run to order men out to hunt for the ambusher.

We went down to the main floor, Hap stopping to telephone to his paper. In a moment he was back again, all excitement.

"Claire Hester," he barked. "You know, the night-club gal. They found her half an hour ago in a Randolph street hotel with her face beaten in, and a knife between her shoulders. She's still alive, at Emergency. Let's go."

We went, Hap hanging out of the door of the taxi to wave his police card at the traffic men. We went in through the ambulance door, and within another minute were standing looking at what was left of the niftiest female barytone I ever knew.

Great stained pads of gauze concealed her features. A doctor stood at one side of the bed, an interne at the other. At the foot was a nurse. The head end was lifted high, and as we entered there came a choked groan from behind the bandages.

Hap asked the interne: "Has she a chance?"

The man said: "Sure, grand chance." But after that he shook his head, held up the fingers of his two hands.

Hap shivered, leaned forward; took the girl's lax fingers in his clasp.

"Claire," he said gently. "It's your pal, Hap Caswell. Snap out of it, kid. Tell me about it."

A muffled: "Uh?" came from behind the bandages. At a nod from the doctor the nurse moved them, baring lips bruised and split from terrible blows.

Hap was squeezing the dying girl's hand as though trying to give her some of his own strength. After a moment he said again:

"It's Hap, pal. Who did this to you? Why?"

The torn lips moved. With instinctive delicacy the doctor and interne moved back so Hap and I could get closer. We leaned over her, listening with stilled breaths.

At first there was only a wordless mumble. Then briefly she seemed to take on new strength.

"Who?" Hap prompted. "I'll help, sugar. Who was it?"

"Gats," she muttered brokenly. "Because I—had dope—on—Mel—needle kills—"

With the final syllable, the breath left her torn lips in a ghastly, shuddering moan. Hap straightened, looked at the doctor who touched her pulse.

"Gone," he said. "What did she tell you?"

"Words, a mumble, nothing connected," Hap lied. "I'd give a year off my life to know who did it."

The doctor bared the bruised face, touched the bony structure gently with his fingertips.

"Some powerful brute," he said quietly. "See how he crushed the delicate facial bones with sledgehammer blows. There isn't one mark of a weapon—except the stab wound between the shoulders."

Hap shuddered. "Them as gives—gets," he paraphrased grimly. "Thanks, doctor."

**T**HE night was still young so Hap and I went prowling through the South Side saloon belt, particularly in the side-street joints where there was hope of finding the man we wanted. Either Gats Wilkie or Joey Palatta would do, preferably Wilkie.



He wasn't any mental giant but he was boot-tough. And the tougher they are, and the dumber, the easier they listen to smooth cop-talk about double crosses from their more brainy higher-ups.

I knew we wouldn't run into Digby in that neck of the woods. Son of a good Canadian family, he'd come back from the war with nothing in his mind but booze. Uncle Sam grounded him from the transport ships, and he promptly went bad. But he had brains of the planning, protective type that would make him hard game.

We made the rounds for more than an hour. Hap would go in ahead of me and ask for Wilkie. When he'd leave I'd stand around with my ears open. Lots of times I've seen smarties slip to a phone to pass the word to wanted men. Some of them can't help boasting to their friends how they've fooled the stranger.

Finally we came to the Transfer Bar and, as Hap swung the door wide, I saw Joey Palatta down at the end. At the first glimpse of Hap in the door, he slammed his beer mug down and darted out through the rear.

I whirled down the side street to intercept him. But it was no dice. While I was still ten yards short of the alley, he buzzed out in a fast roadster, and was gone.

Hap delivered himself of a cussword and a shrill whistle when I told him.

"That cooks it," he growled. "They saw us this afternoon and now I suppose the whole bunch'll go to cover."

We went back to the loop then, turned in at my office. Just before we came to the side hall, I heard some one hammering on glass. We peeped about the corner. A tall man, Jamison of the Jewelers' Protective, was battering at my door with the butt of a penknife.

"Kick in the glass and turn the knob," I called. "Don't let a little thing like a locked door stop you."

He jerked a thumb toward the inside. "There's a light in the inner room; thought you might be sleeping, Del."

"In which case, Jamie," Hap said sarcastically, "Emily Post says you should

push your money under the door and tip-toe off."

Jamison eyed him quizzically. "Ten o'clock—still on his feet—almost sober," he soliloquized. "There's been a death in the family?"

We were old friends, and we thought nothing of his call until he said suddenly:

"The name 'Yarov,' Del; does it mean anything to you?"

"Yeah—black whiskers, vodka, Crown Princes—or is it a game?"

He shook his head. "It's a he, and he's a crook, killer, surgeon, has epileptic fits. Sometimes goes under the name of Melikoff. He's a handsome brute, distinguished enough in appearance to stand in for one of the royal family, no less."

There wasn't anything in the "Y" division of my files, but in the "M's" I turned up a red-hot number for one Serge Melikoff. It was a bulletin from National Identification with a cross reference to a Paris *Sûreté* warning. I read it aloud:

"Melikoff, Serge: Russian, 46, 5 ft. 11 in. tall; weight, 190. Hair black, eyes brown-black, skin pale; is crack shot. Wanted suspicion of *Sûreté* agent, Paris. Arrest and notify this bureau."

Hap snorted disapprovingly. "Like that, eh? He kills a policeman in Paris, so a New York gem dick pins his ears back and starts looking for him. What's the real story, Jamie?"

Jamison grinned maddeningly, stoked his pipe, lighted it before he answered. "Just killing a cop in Paris doesn't bar him from handling hot jewelry in New York."

"Then why not toss him gently but firmly into one of our better jails?"

"Because I want the rest of his mob. He's mixed in with an ex-ace who's credited with being a hot number as a dope-carrier—"

"Said flier being one Cal Digby," I interrupted.

His jaw sagged. "Right," he barked. "So you *do* know them?"

But I hadn't a chance to reply for Hap came out of his chair with a yell.

"Melikoff, Del, that's it! You remember what that poor kid said down at



Emergency? 'The dope on Mel—' And now here's Melikoff and Digby tied together in another caper."

My dirty look silenced him. Good friend though Jamison was, there wasn't any reason for taking him in with us on the bank stuff. But Hap's word has set him off, and he demanded:

"What's this about some girl having the dope on him?"

"Nothing for you and your jewel racket, Jamie. And now that's settled, is it proper to ask if the others in the Rusky's mob are Gats Wilkie and Joey Palatta?"

He nodded grudgingly, asked: "What is this, the runaround?"

I told him: "No, Jamie, it's just that you have one sow by the ear—Hap and I have another. It's somebody's hard luck that both concern the same group, but there's no way to work together."

An old-timer and smart, he thought it over for a moment before he headed for the door. "I'm taking my marbles out of your game," he said over his shoulder. "And I wish you luck. My hunch says you'll need it."

When the door slammed, Hap, all excitement, grabbed at my shoulders, and husked:

"That's the answer, Melikoff, Digby, Palatta and Wilkie. Hell, it's made to order for us. Let's get going."

"Where and for what?" I snapped. "You want to go out in the street and dance—or something?"

He grinned shame-facedly. "You're not a mind-reader, are you, Del? What I was trying to keep bottled up until Jamie left is that Melikoff's the new money back of that swank new Club Arcady on the Boulevard."

"Great," I told him, "but you've still got to have something more than a hunch before you snatch a citizen for a crime."

He scowled. "Take a chance and grab this bird. Give him both barrels on the messenger killings, and back it up with the Paris cop and the Yarov name. We're not out anything if it flops. Palatta's runout tonight proves that they know we saw them this afternoon at the heist. And

if it should work, Lord, what a cleanup."

Yeah. I let him talk me into it.

While he went hooting off to headquarters to look for some new dope on Melikoff and Digby, I went toddling obediently to snare Serge Melikoff and put him on the toaster.

Barnum was right about the fool-crop—and I was one full day of production.

CLUB ARCADY, I recalled, was one of those half-lighted, arty places where they charge three prices for everything but matches, and they only give you three of those.

I got out of the cab a block distant, walking along on the other side of the street to reconnoiter. I crossed over, came back from the other side, and was directly under the marquee when a big limousine drove up. The occupant, a handsome, pale-faced giant, was in full evening regalia.

A glance at the doorman gave me the answer. No menial could be so servile to a mere customer. This must be the boss, Melikoff.

So I got in his way blunderingly, buzzed: "Got to talk to you," in a half whisper. A real blue-blood would have brushed past after ordering the chauffeur and doorman to throw me two blocks downstreet. But a crook would do just what Melikoff did.

He answered in the same tone: "What about?"

"Over there," I said, pointing to the shadows. "There's bad trouble."

He came along like a lamb but all of the time his eyes were flicking over me, up and down the street, into the shadows across the way.

When he'd moved where I wanted him, I juggled my gun against his ribs, said: "We're going for a cab ride, and don't start anything. It'll go messy if you do, but you won't be there to see it."

He studied that over coolly before he asked: "It's a ride—one way?"

I let go of a loud laugh. Part of it was for him, the rest for the doorman and chauffeur.

"Nothing like that," I told him quietly. "I'm a better friend than you imagine,



but this thing has got to be worked quietly, and this is my way of doing it."

I had him puzzled, that was plain. So I applied the clincher. "It's about Cal and Joey, Melikoff. You've got to help."

He started to ask who I was, then decided to swallow it, hook, line and sinker. "Okay," he said suddenly. "Say where."

We left his car at the marquee, grabbed a passing taxi. I gave the driver my office address, piled in the back, and showed the Russ the blue steel of my gun.

"No talking until we get there," I warned. "If you cheep, I'll have to smoke you down."

He looked at his wrist watch. "Will an hour do it?"

"Half of that," I replied. "Maybe a quarter. Now hush up."

He sat quiet all of the way, got out and went up in the elevator without a murmur. But he got set to buck when he saw the legend on my door—*Sarg, Investigations*.

And there's a chance he'd have gone through with it but for the feel of my gun in his ribs. With that urge, he went in and sat down in the deep chair I indicated for him. But he kept silence, waiting for me to open the ball.

I dragged things along, too. Crossing to my desk I unlocked a drawer, got out an imposing looking bunch of papers, and rooted through them until I found the familiar blue folder of the French *Sûreté*.

"Yarov—alias Melikoff," I said slowly, distinctly. "Paris wants you."

He laughed scornfully, rumbled: "Not good enough. You'll have to try something better."

"I've got that, too," I slammed back at him. "Listen—"

"I'm all ears," he said coldly, "and when you're all through, you cheap, two-timing dick, I'll have something for you, too."

"You deny you're Yarov, alias Melikoff?"

"Positively."

"Or that you're the Melikoff wanted for disposing of hot ice; that you're the

Melikoff wanted for smuggling with Digby the Canuck?"

"That, too. You've landed the wrong fish."

I shook a finger at him. "Try this one, then. I suppose you'll deny that you're the Melikoff who heads the bank messenger hypo-kill ring; that you'll deny knowing about the death of little Claire Hester—or the killing of Detective Kelly and a civilian in headquarters tonight?"

"I certainly do."

He said it brusquely, but suddenly there had come a subtle change in his expression, even in the timbre of his voice. His tones were thick. He seemed to have trouble in breathing. A dull red was creeping up into his cheeks.

Then suddenly his eyes rolled back in his head: froth gathered at the corners of his mouth. He stiffened, rolled in his chair, fought gaspingly for breath.

It was a true epileptic seizure beyond question. To me it meant the final proof that Yarov and Melikoff were one. And when he came out of it, he'd be weak, shaken, easy game for a quick shake-down, for damaging admissions, maybe even a confession.

About then I began to wonder if he *would* come out of it. The rigidity of his muscles had increased until his body assumed the shape of a bow. His heels rested on the floor, his head against the back of the low chair. His breathing was horrible.

It didn't suit my book for him to die there on my hands, nor was I enjoying the sight of his suffering. I decided to administer first aid. Crossing to the hidden washroom, I fished out some towels and doused them in cold water. As I turned, the universe blew up. It took the top of my head with it.

**T**HE cold towels brought me back to consciousness quickly. They'd wound themselves about my right wrist. No, it was the left. Hell! They were about both wrists, *and they were tied*.

I opened my eyes, stared into the triumphant face of Melikoff. He was kneeling, grinning broadly. When he saw my brain was ticking he taunted:



"You're just a thick-headed copper, Sarg, but it takes a harder skull than yours to turn the lick of a brass book-end." He stopped, held the weapon up for me to see. Then he said: "You went for my act, didn't you, Sarg? Don't flatter yourself, it's fooled better men than you. I suppose while you sat there gloating, you were figuring how to shake me down when I came out of it?"

Deciding to humor him, I muttered: "How'd you know that?"

"Because I know the way detectives think, when they're allowed to think—which in your case won't be for long."

With the words he took a case from his pocket, drew a glass hypodermic from it, held it up so I could see it contained nothing but air. I tried to keep a poker face but he was watching my eyes.

"So you got that far in the thing," he muttered. "So now you'll have to go out the same way. Feel like telling me how you ran up on me?"

I decided now to bluff. It might mean a chance for life.

"Digby and Palatta," I mumbled. "They couldn't take what McCurdy dished out. They talked. They kicked in with everything they knew, and before they'd finished they'd dragged in Gats Wilkie."

The line got him, harder than he cared to admit. His eyes were narrowed, and there was a dead white circle about his mouth. So I gave him the other barrel.

"That's what gave me the idea of picking you off. I thought maybe we could make a deal. If you got away, it'd be no skin off my neck."

He thought it over carefully. I could see his mind flitting here and there, trying to separate possible bluff from fact. At last he said scornfully:

"Like the rest of the private dicks, eh? Out to feather your own nest first."

While I was trying to look ashamed, he slipped away to the phone, dialed a number. Not so good. He'd be trying Digby and Joey, and I'd be a gone duck in a minute if they weren't absent from their hangouts.

There was no response on the first number. He dialed another, frowned at the

continuous ringing. Then I heard a quick gasp and he said:

"You, Cal? Good. I was checking, Sarg, that private shamus, said you and Joey had been grabbed, that you'd talked." Quiet for a moment, he continued: "Yes, I'm doing that—quickly. He *gets the air*, like the others. Don't worry, there'll be no blood."

"*He gets the air!*"

That meant the bubbles from the hypogun. There wasn't much left for me to do, but damned if I'd go yellow and beg.

He came back to me, thrust my sleeve back, unfastened my cuff. After that he clamped the long fingers of his left hand about my forearm to make the veins stand forth and congest.

We've all heard a lot of hooey about the last second's thought before death. But the only thing in my head in that last, grisly second was Hap's silly phrase: "All dressed and nowhere to go where I'll be welcome."

He moved with an almost professional deliberation. The plunger was halfway back as I raised my head to watch the needle as a bird watches the snake which has charmed it.

It actually wasn't a hair's breadth from my flesh when we both heard a sharp, snicking sound. Some one was at the door, but I was one up on the Russky. He thought some one had tried the handle while I *knew* some one had turned the lock.

It might be only the janitor but even he would be salvation. To get all of the value out of the situation I half rolled, smacked my doubled knees against Melikoff's side and upset him. A split second later I was rolling in the other direction as fast as my tied arms would permit.

As I rolled I saw the door swing wide, saw Hap framed there. His hat was on the back of his head, on his lips was a vacuous grin. He was swacked, splendidly, gloriously tight.

"Look out, you fool," I bellowed. "It's Melikoff."

They drew at the same time, shot so that the explosions rang out together. Hap, drunk or sober, knows how to drag



a gun, but this time he was up against an expert.

Melikoff's slug caught him somewhere in the chest. It threw him back against the jamb like a blow from some enormous fist. But he held to his feet, pumping two more shots at the Russian.

And in tune with them, shrilling through their roar, came shouts from the hallway. Men were calling to one another. Feet rushed along the stone floor.

I twisted my head about. Melikoff was at the west window. His gun lay on the floor, and blood spurted from a wound in his right arm. Even as I looked, he thrust the window wide and leaped out onto the fire-escape.

I worked myself erect, puzzling dully over Hap's failure to send one more shot after him. I got the answer quickly.

Hap was down, groaning, one hand over his breast, and coughing miserably. There were men in the doorway now, a janitor and the watchman. The latter got Hap's head up off the floor while the janitor untied my wrists.

I hurried over, tore open Hap's shirt, fearful of finding a hole through the lung. Instead there was a great bruise with a purple hole in the center and, leading from it, was a fiery red weal that followed a rib around under his arm. The bullet was there, just under the skin, waiting for a lancet slash.

A quick telephone call brought a doctor on the run. He took out the bullet, flushed out the wound, and then put Hap in an iron maiden of bandages and broad adhesive that seemed to give some relief from the pain.

"Three days in bed will fix you up," the medico said, "but it will be weeks before you'll breathe comfortably."

Hap cursed softly, comprehensively. "I'll go to bed next year at two o'clock," he snarled. "Now we've got places to go. Come on, Del."

The doctor shrugged. "It's your body, your private and personal rib. If you want to raise hell with yourself, go ahead. The charge is ten dollars."

I paid him, followed Hap to his taxi at the curb. I didn't argue, just asked: "So what?"

"We're in the hottest kind of a spot," he snarled. "It's no time to be sitting on our tails singing *Schooldays*."

"Okey," I told him. "Hit 'em before they get another swipe at us, eh? Anyway, I found out we were right about the mob before that bird nearly brained me with my own book-end."

Hap snorted, swore as the sore rib gipped him.

"I told you not to buy a book, lame-wit. Tabloids are your speed."

HAP was wrong about knowing where we'd find Digby. We found the place okay but our bird wasn't in his cage. Worse, though we searched it carefully, there wasn't a thing we could use as evidence against him.

We spent the next two hours slogging about looking for leads, but without success. At last, along about two o'clock, we decided to turn in at my three-room, bath and kitchenette joint for a little snooze.

Hap went from the door right to the icebox, and started tinkling glasses and sloshing ice about. I stopped at the radio, turned on the police calls and rested my bunions which were squealing like pigs under a gate.

There was some routine stuff, a cutting match in the Black-and-Tan section and a bad traffic smashup on the bridge. Hap, in the meantime, brought in two highballs, and gave me one. Then, just as he sat down, there was the bell-like alarm that precedes a special bulletin. After that a voice said:

"Calling all officers, all cars, all sub stations. Pick up Private Detective Del Sarg for Code AB-3 and deliver at headquarters. Take no chances. He is a killer and is armed."

Hap and I stared at one another in paralyzed amazement. We both knew that Code AB-3 meant "murder and robbery." I hadn't murdered anyone, nor committed robbery.

Hap barked: "M-and-R, Del! Migawd, what is this?"

The repeat started coming through and we heard it to the end. There wasn't any fooling. I was wanted and I could stand a pinch or surrender. To run out



would be practically a confession of guilt.

I leaped to the phone, called McCurdy.

"It's Del," I told him. "What the pink hell's the matter? Whose general order is that?"

"Where are you?" he snapped, and there wasn't a trace of friendship in his tone. "What is it you want?"

"I'm coming in," I yelled. "What'd you think? Tell me what it's all about."

"Do that," he answered. "How soon will you be here?"

"Ten minutes, maybe less. Meanwhile call off your dogs."

Hap slipped into coat and hat. "I'll go, too," he said evenly. "We've been together all evening. That may help."

We went down quietly, but at the foot of the stairs there was a whisper of quiet movement, and a gun jammed hard against my spine.

"Hold it, Sarg," a voice said in my ear. "It's a pinch." Another voice was warning Hap not to get frisky.

I looked around, swallowed hard to stop the curse that welled in my throat. Our captors were precinct dicks, Hanecy and Williams—and I was bad news to both of them. Hanecy jammed his gun into my ribs again, said:

"Fixing to lam, eh?"

"Lam nothing, Big Ears," Hap yelled back at him. "Del was on his way to give himself up to McCurdy."

"But now he's going down to Chief Sweegan," Hanecy rasped, "instead of his pal, McCurdy."

Sweegan! Another sour dish who hated me like poison. Hap alternately pleaded and threatened, but he might as well have sent them a postcard.

In no time at all we were parked before Chief Sweegan's desk, and he was leering at me like some abandoned shrew who's just caught up with hubby and the girl-friend.

He licked his lips, catlike. "You!" he gloated. "I always said the day would come when I'd start you on the way to the chair."

"Thanks, and I wish you the same," I slammed back at him. "I'd dance to the chair—if they made 'em in pairs and put you in the one next to mine."

He let the crack ride. A bad sign. Instead of knocking out another divot of my hide, he leaned back, said: "Caught trying to escape after a general alarm, huh? Well, Smart Guy, that isn't the half of it. Look here."

He laid out a familiar looking hypodermic, a bundle of fancy colored paper I recognized as securities, a package of new century bills, and finally five small photographs with writing alongside of them.

The chief took his time, stopping to cast crafty glances at me. At last he said: "We frisked your office on a hot tip, Sarg, and here's what we found. The hypodermic tells its own story and those bonds were taken from the messenger you killed yesterday. The poor devil's fingerprints are on the wrapper, too.

"And here," he held up the packet of bills, "are the hundreds you never dared pass because their numbers were published two hours after the first hijack murder."

But it was the final exhibit, the photographs, which proved most damning of all.

*They were snapshots of the messengers who'd been killed and the writing showed the routes they usually took from bank to bank.*

Sweegan's little pig-eyes literally snapped as he said: "So we've got you, Smart Shamus. We're going to burn you to a crisp, just as soon as we can run you through the mill."

Give Hap credit. He reared, stamped, threatened. He got the district attorney, and McCurdy, and finally he got Pulsifer, the biggest criminal attorney. But all it got him—or me—was the assurance that he'd do well if he escaped being dragged in as an accessory, himself.

It was a frame, the sweetest, most airtight fix-up anyone ever had handed to them. At every one of my turns and twists they'd dig up something new, something that served to tie me tighter in the net.

THE days went by, and I laid in a cell. Hap came to see me each day as did Pulsifer. But even he didn't believe I was



innocent. I could see doubt in his lawyer-eye, hear it in the insincere ring of his voice as we planned my defense.

Gradually it came to me that *it wasn't a police frame*. All of them, Sweegan, McCurdy and the D.A., sincerely believed me to be guilty. And as the numbness of horror left my mind, I came to see the real picture—

Melikoff and his mob—the mysterious tip—the search and, well, what have you?

I had one other regular visitor, that is, after the D.A. had shaken her down about everything but the condition of her tonsils; Pinkie Bell, my hard-boiled secretary.

But even with her best efforts, we couldn't cook up a real alibi for my whereabouts on any of the murder days at the proper hour to fit the hijackings.

I was too smart to try one of the other kind.

They tried me, fairly, impartially, sticking to the rules of evidence, and giving me lots of good breaks. And they convicted me.

The jury just filed out, took a vote, told a couple of stories, and came back to say the one bad word—"Guilty."

A few days later, I stood before goat-faced old Judge Henry Koerth long enough for him to chant his little piece about the electric current and Divine mercy. So far as the public was concerned, Del Sarg was out of circulation from then on.

That was on July 5. My execution was set for a day in the week of October 19, exactly 106 days away, or about the time the average citizen needs to get hired and fired on a new job.

I asked for, and was given a week's stay in order that I might clear up my personal affairs. And through another application in civil court, I succeeded in having Hap named receiver for my business without bond.

I had to have those seven days. They meant the difference between life and sure death for me. If there were seven more important days in my career, they must have been the time the nurse dropped me on my head.

But that week gave us time for some long conferences, with Pinkie Bell sitting in on most of 'em, her funny nose twitching like a rabbit getting familiar with a new carrot.

She didn't break down until the end of our last meeting. Then she did a fine job of shanty Irish "keening." But finally she slapped the tears out of her eyes, and said:

"Mebbe they'll get you, chief, but if they do that Rooshian'll have more holes in him 'n they was in Paddy's britches."

After that, we called it a day, and I went back to my cell to lay awake all night and stare out through the bars.

Pin a flower on the Cook County sheriff. He sent me down to Joliet with two old-timer deputies, and though I was cuffed and leg ironed when we left the jail, he told 'em to take the irons off when we got on the train.

"That's a sort of break for you," he told me coldly. "But if you try to take advantage of it, the boys'll save the state one thunderbolt."

I shook hands with him, said: "That's decent of you, sheriff, and I'll promise you that the prisoner the boys turn in to the warden will be the dead image of me."

So finally we were on the train—in a pullman, if you please—with me riding backward and the two deputies opposite. And they didn't bother me with a lot of dippy talk, either.

I watched station platforms as we thundered along, watched mileposts in between. One, No. 313, held a special interest for me; it was near the crossing of another railroad.

After awhile, I slipped a capsule into my mouth along with the butt of a cold cigar on which I'd been chewing. In another mile I was turning gray, looking pretty sick. The deputies finally noted it, but I told them it was from riding backward; that I'd be all right soon.

But I wasn't. Anyone with half an eye could see that I was going to be sick—there or elsewhere—and quickly, too. So they suggested a trip to the men's room at the end of the car. I started off, with them tailing me.



It went over big, particularly when I let it be seen that things were becoming urgent. It went over bigger than ever when I literally dived into the lavatory.

The train lurched and slammed the door shut. Maybe I helped a little; it's a cinch that I slipped the lock closed very quietly.

It took them a minute or two to become suspicious. Then one tried the door, started hammering on it, calling on me to open up. I moaned loud enough so they'd know I was still there—and kept right on with some mighty important business; something that had nothing to do with an upset stomach.

And if they could have seen through that door—they'd have thrown catfits. I was there all right, but—

*There were two of me.* Two men with the same height, weight, coloration; the same clothing even down to the blue necktie and the tan shoes! We'd been very careful about details.

It couldn't be?

Well, it was. That's what all of the conferences had been about during that week's stay. Hap and Pinkie had followed my orders to the letter. Hap had gone down into deep Iowa and had dug up my cousin Oscar, whose biggest claims to fame were his affection for me, and the fact that he was a duplicate of the world's unluckiest shamus.

Oscar's a Sarg—and a game one.

He'd been tickled pink at the thought of hiding out on the train to trade identities with me, to take my death chair assignment—gambling his life that I'd clean up the bank murders in time so that he wouldn't be embarrassed by too much electricity.

We traded my hat for his cap and shook hands.

**T**HE train slowed at Milepost 313, came to a temporary halt. I slipped out of the smoker, and two minutes later Hap and I were buzzing back towards Chicago. The cap and a pair of amber glasses constituted my only disguise.

We went directly to the new hideout I'd told Pinkie to hire for herself and her "father." In no time at all I was

attired in shapeless, sawdust-and-oil smeared clothes, with an odd-jobs carpenter's tool kit by my side. Add to that an old slouch hat and a day's growth of beard and Antony could have slipped out on Cleopatra for a night among the huzzies.

I slept that night in a room—not a cell. The morning papers carried pictures of me being received at the Pen. There was a lot of hooey of my being knocked speechless when brought face to face with the stark reality of it all. Good old Oscar! There's strength in silence, particularly if you're the wrong guy.

But we used that paper for something vastly more important than mere reading matter. It bore two stars in the heading and in an "ear" at the right was the identification "Noon Edition." The dateline was perfect proof of its date of issuance.

Hap brought me an ink pad. With it I decorated the ends of my fingers and put my prints firmly on the margin of the paper just above the name vignette. To top it all, I signed my name, together with the hour of the day and the address where it had been written—all in my own handwriting.

That was to protect Oscar.

It proved, first of all, that I was in Chicago, not Joliet, at an impossible hour after my reception at the Pen. Pinkie and Hap both added their signatures to mine after which Hap took it to his safe deposit vault for hiding.

I figured it would take about a week for the police check-up on my fingerprints, and Oscar's at the Pen. Anyway, the newspaper stunt was a vital precaution. We were going against concentrated death when we bucked Melikoff *et al.*, and if we were killed, things would be pretty tough for Oscar.

Before noon we went out to give them the chance. I did my stuff on the hoof with Hap trailing me in his car. Results came in bunches. Within an hour I'd trailed Gats to Palatta. They didn't even look behind them as they got in Joey's car and drove off. That was understandable, I was in Joliet waiting for the hot squat and everything was hotsy-totsy.



Hap picked me up, and we trailed them. Originally I had planned to get Gats, take him off somehow and work on him until he told the truth or collapsed. One disappearance would make the others leary.

But now, with Gats and Joey together, my hunch told me that they were heading for somewhere that was "something." Hap got the same idea, for he turned to me suddenly and said:

"Del! What a break it would be if they're on their way to meet Melikoff and Digby."

We tailed them on and on, out into the suburbs where the houses stood in clumps and there was plenty of prairie. When they stopped to smoke and watch the back trail, we hopped over onto a cross road and waited for them.

They started after awhile, and I knew by the way they speeded, slowed and watched behind them that they were nearing their destination. I became fearful at last and made Hap drive into a wayside garage after I'd crossed up the ignition wires and had the engine popping like a bunch of firecrackers.

Hap laid down fifty plunkers and for it rented an elderly Ford, 1927 vintage—which was just what we wanted. But it could travel. We drew into sight of our quarry just as they turned into the gate of a ramshackle old house, a house of another day with another day's paint peeling off it.

It was ramshackle, seemingly unoccupied. Gats and Joey whizzed through the yard and disappeared in the back. When an hour had passed and they hadn't come out, Hap and I edged through a weed-grown orchard to a point where we could see the place clearly.

The car was under a ramshackle lean-to. The downstairs shutters were closed but a second story window at the rear was open—and cigar smoke was drifting out. Hap and I stared at each other triumphantly. We'd found the gang's hide-out. The rest lay in the lap of the gods.

While the thought was running through my mind, Joey came out through the rear, started the car, and went romp-

ing down the lane to the highway. We watched him out of sight.

Then Hap and I started belly-busting through the weeds toward that distant kitchen door. It was hot. The dust caked in our eyes, filled our nostrils, seemed about to choke us.

Finally we got a tottering toolhouse between us and the rear windows. Hap was all for taking the place with a rush, but I hung out the "No can do" sign. You see, I was an awful looking figure. No person in their right mind would consider me a menace. Between the old clothes and the dirt I looked about as dangerous as your Aunt Emmy in prayer meeting.

So I said: "Me first." And went ahead. I found the kitchen door locked, but there wasn't any key in the hole. One of the spares I always carry did the trick, and in another second I was inside.

I wasn't alone, either. Old nosey Hap, figuring he was being left out of something, had come hot-footing in behind me. We were in a kitchen, before us a hall leading to the foot of the stairs.

Some one up above was whistling through his teeth, scuffing heels against the floor. After a few moments there was the sound of phone dialing, and we heard Gats Wilkie say:

"Me, Babe, Gats. I'm out in the country waitin' for three other guys. You 'n me'll step out handsome t'night, eh?" There was a pause before he said: "Who, me? Another broad? Don't be goofy. I'm all alone, honest t' gosh, I am."

That was all I wanted to know. I twisted a ring about, knocked with it against the shiplap wall. The phone clicked into its cradle; feet moved to the top of the stairs. I knocked again, heard Gats curse, then start downward.

Pushing Hap back, I got onto hands and knees in the shadow, and waited. Gats stopped midway of the flight to call: "Who is it?" When there wasn't any answer he cursed, took the last stairs at a run.

In the last half second I caught him alongside the skull with the muzzle of my gun, knocking him to the floor in a



groaning heap. I was on him in a second, cuffing his wrists behind him. Then I turned him over, jammed the rod into his stomach.

He mumbled: "What th' hell?" After that he stared hard at me and by that strange intuition which only the very dumb possess, he recognized me.

I felt him shiver, saw the color ebb from his cheeks as he whispered:

"Jeeze! It's Sarg."

"Yeah, rat—it's Sarg. Now what'll it be? Do you talk—or take it?"

He cursed me vilely, comprehensively. He continued even after I'd slapped his filthy lips shut with backhanded blows. It was real desperation, not bravery. There was one thought in his mind, that I was there to even scores; that he hadn't a chance.

He was a killer, a part of the mechanism that had framed me. And he knew that I knew it. So though I alternately threatened him and promised him a break, he resolutely refused to open his lips except to revile me.

I turned to Hap, said: "Get the car ready; we're going back to town."

But when he was gone, I gave Gats his last chance.

"Talk," I told him softly. "Talk your head off; it's your ears if you don't."

He glared back at me balefully. "No," he roared. "No—and you haven't got the guts."

So I found a bit of rope, got one end around his neck, the other over the old-fashioned chandelier, and—

*I hung Gats Wilkie by the neck—until he was dead.*

On his breast I pinned a card which read:

"Score one for the Phantom Shamus."

**H**ANGING Gats might seem like bearing down a bit hard, but it wasn't a marker, after all, to what the law was trying to do to me. Too, there was a desperate gang to be cleaned up, and I had only days in which to do it.

Hap didn't go for the idea at first. To be truthful he looked at me like nervous old women look at rattlesnakes. But be-

fore we were back in town, he admitted it was good from the standpoint of terrorizing the others.

We drove back from town about midnight only to find the place dark and deserted. I unlocked the back door, and went inside. A drove of rats scampered across my feet, proving that the lower floor, at least, was unoccupied.

So we went in confidently, moved to the staircase. I chanced a quick flash of my light there—and gasped.

*For Gats' body still hung there from the chandelier just as I'd left it.*

Hap, who didn't care for the sight, muttered: "They took one look and beat it, Del."

I told him: "No, look on the floor."

On the second tread of the stairs was an oblong of white cardboard and on it was written:

*The cage is empty, but it will be full—soon.*

Hap came up to read over my shoulder. Because he's shorter, he stood on the bottom step. A sharp click followed.

After that the floor and the lower step of the stairway tilted out from under us, spilling us down into midnight blackness.

Yep, it was a booby trap—rigged to catch the first fool who started up the stairs.

We fell a dozen feet, landing with a crash on concrete. I'd clung to my flash though, and now I turned it upward, just in time to see a section of the flooring swing shut again.

We were in the perfect, unscalable trap, an old-fashioned, crock shaped cistern with straight, smooth sides.

Hap came out of it, cursing at the pain in his wounded side. A nip from my pocket flask made him practically a well man, however. That was something that had to be for already a plan was buzzing in my head, and Hap was a big part of it.

First I got him upon my shoulders, then came erect. He put his hands against the side of the wall, raised himself high on my shoulders and thrust with his fingers against the under side of the trap.



But it didn't move. He lacked inches of enough height for proper leverage. I started to rise on tiptoe but he called: "Wait." Then he scrambled back to the floor, sniffing at his hands.

They were wet with gasoline. And then, as I stood there, aghast, drops pattered down onto my forearms, my hands.

The answer? Death by burning. Then I sensed that it would be quicker than that, more merciful. For the gasoline, mixing with the stagnant air in the cistern would pack the black, would go off like TNT when the slightest blaze touched it. And when it went, we'd go blooey with it.

I don't mind admitting that my knees and nerve went pretty doughy for a few seconds. And Hap wasn't much better. But right then the Sarg temper flamed at the thought of Melikoff triumphing, of Oscar there in the death cell.

My first act was to assemble the three-part steel jimmy I always carried under my belt. I told Hap to use this as a pry, then took him on my shoulders again, and boosted him up.

The first awkward pry brought down a great sliver of the old wood. Another followed, and another. But now gasoline was running through the opening in a stream, spattering over us, settling in a pool on the bottom of our prison.

The volatile liquid started mixing with the air at once. It made breathing difficult, started our brains to reeling. Hap up there under the flooring was having a worse time than I. His legs trembled and he breathed gustily.

Just when it seemed that our luck was out, there came a crash and a segment of the floor tilted down. Hap jammed the jimmy into the joint and, as I hoisted with my hands on his ankles, managed to hook an elbow over the edge and pull himself up.

In a moment I heard him running down the hall toward the rear. He was back quickly, pitching down a kitchen chair on which I could stand. Then he let down a dusty chenille drape which he'd rolled into a rope, played anchor while I drew myself to safety. I was trembling, worse

than everything else, I was cold—chilled to the marrow.

Suddenly I realized what was causing it. I was drenched with gasoline from the river that was pouring across the floor—and Hap must be in a like predicament.

"Come on, get the hell out of here," I barked. "If the fire trap goes off while we're in here, we'll burn like a couple of candles."

We ran into the kitchen at top speed, slamming the door after us. In the same instant there was a sizzling sound, a flash of blue light and then a deafening explosion right in our ears.

It may have been a backwash from the blast, or maybe we were just good leapers—but when we started looking around again we were rolling in the dust of the back yard. A sheet of blue flame licked and curled about the window frames for a moment and then the hallway flared into a yellow inferno.

Gasping, plastered with the dirt which fortunately was absorbing most of the fluid from our clothing, we got up and staggered into the shadows of a high hedge. There was a low, wide shrub there, big enough to cover both of us.

And it was in my mind that we'd need cover. It was a certainty that the Melikoff outfit would have a watcher there to see that the death-trap didn't miss this time.

But the minutes dragged by without any sign of movement. At last, though, as the flames gained headway, there was the sound of automobile brakes out in the roadway. A second later I made out a long, black car, lightless, from which three men had emerged. Their collars were turned up; hats pulled low over their eyes.

"Get through the hedge. We've got to get behind them," I whispered to Hap.

**T**HE roar and crackle of the fire drowned the sound of our movements as we made it past the hedge and across the road in a cat-footed run. We turned then, came up behind the car. Scarcely daring to breathe we crept ahead. The others still stood within a yard of the opposite doors.



They'd been silent so far, but suddenly we heard Joey say:

"Anyhow, we won't have to explain now what happened to Gats." As he spoke there was a thunderous crash from inside the house.

Melikoff's booming laugh rang out. "There goes the floor and with it whoever called himself Phantom Shamus. Some one was in the cistern, otherwise the trap wouldn't have let go. We'll never know who it was."

"The hell you won't," I howled back at him. "Turn around and take a look."

A boob play? Who knows? It was as good a way as I knew to bring things to a head, and it had the advantage of complete surprise. Anyhow, Hap and I had them covered from two spots when they turned, and we didn't make any secret of it.

I'd made just one miscalculation—a bad one. Stand a man between you and a burning house in the darkness and he becomes just a sharp, black shadow. You can't see what he's doing with his hands.

Joey Palatta must have figured that—for his slug brushed past the end of my nose before I even knew he'd gone for his gun.

Instinctively, I fired at the flash. The slug brought an unearthly yell from his throat. He staggered, fell with a grunt.

The diversion gave Melikoff his chance. Instead of going for his gun though, he'd thrown himself into a shallow ditch and was crawling off. He was a dozen feet distant before I spotted him.

I buzzed a couple of slugs at him fast in the hope of stopping his sneak, but now Hap and Digby had started shooting. And some one's slugs were buzzing too close to my head for comfort.

Right after that I heard Hap say: "Hr-r-r-r-r" and I knew that he'd taken one—somewhere. Those thin wails come only when you're badly hurt.

It was up to me then to see about things. My first bullet dropped Digby, but it didn't kill him. I could hear him still threshing about as I ran over to look after Hap.

I found him leaning against the hood of the car, groaning with the agony of

his new wound. He shook his head at me though, waved toward Melikoff.

I turned, saw the Russ coming to his hands and knees out of the ditch, to crawl to the protection of some dense shrubbery that the firelight didn't touch.

It was long shooting, through tricky light, but my second slug knocked him sprawling. I'd aimed for his hips and I had two lonely bucks that said he'd be sitting-down shy for weeks to come.

He finished rolling to the bushes, remembered his gun, and for a few seconds literally plastered the air around me with his lead. It was fair shooting and out of compliment to it I dropped to one knee to make myself a smaller target.

After that came my turn. I shot low, fast, into the Russian's hiding-place, spacing the whole clip in such a manner that one of them *had* to hit him. And one did. Anyway, his gun went silent, and there was no sound of retreat.

I waited to slip a new clip in my gun. Then I came up and started a zigzag run to the bushes to see what sort of fish I'd caught—if any.

There was the chance that he was playing possum, that in the last yard he'd blast me with his slugs—but even that wasn't as tough as the hot-squat. So I crashed on through.

He lay there behind the shrub, hands outspread, the fingers of the right within inches of his gun butt. I flipped him over, saw that blood masked one side of his face. He was out, but his pulse was strong and he was breathing evenly.

A flash of my light showed a long groove down the side of his head. The bullet had caught him lengthwise, had torn off a part of an ear and had buried itself in his shoulder muscles.

After that I searched him for weapons, cuffed his wrists behind him and got him onto my shoulder. Hap came along a few steps to meet me. He looked pretty ragged, and he walked canted over to one side, but he still was on the hoof and operating under his own power.

"I got Melikoff," I told him. "Now, where'd Digby pink you?"

He started swearing slowly, monotonously. "The same damn' place where



everybody shoots me," he snapped. "Digby bounced a slug off my busted rib, if you've got to know."

That, being better than I'd expected, gave me time to dump Melikoff into the car and stomp over to see about Digby. He was conscious but in considerable pain. My slug had entered his right side and had nicked the spine, doing things to his legs.

When I found that he was paralyzed, I gave him a shot out of my flask.

He said: "Thanks," gratefully. Then he asked: "Melikoff, did—is he—dying—too?"

"Yeah, dying to turn state's evidence, and hang everything onto—"

He flicked a thumb, said coldly: "Skip that one, brother. I know all the answers. It's not decent to play games on a man who's dying."

I gave him another sup from the flask, and said: "You're lucky, Digby; going out clean like this. Otherwise it would be the chair."

He flashed a quick glance at me. "So you're the Phantom Shamus, eh? And who else are you?"

I answered merely: "Del Sarg."

He started in surprise, relaxed. "Oh, yes, Sarg," he said softly. "The neatest trick of the year. How did you do it?"

"A double substituted for me on the train so I could run down you frame-up birds. But forget that. You're the last of the bunch, the others are dead. How about a little talking before they send the Old Man with the Scythe for you, too?"

"About what?" he whispered.

"The killings. Wilkie was the driver, Palatta, the gunman. What were you, the guy behind the hypo—or was that Melikoff?"

"You say he's dead? You killed him, too?"

"Deader than a doornail," I lied. "I just want to get it all straight in my mind."

He was silent for a moment. Then he whispered: "Twice for me. Mel got the others."

"And the detective and witness in headquarters?"

"Joey and Wilkie; that was about their speed. Wilkie got the night-club girl, too."

Hap, who'd been kneeling beside us, suddenly rattled paper and said: "Here, Digby, sign this. I've got it all down."

Obediently the dying fingers closed about the pencil, and scrawled a shaking signature on the pad of copy paper.

After that Digby mumbled something unintelligible—and died.

WE got back to town at last with Melikoff. Pinkie helped to bandage his torn head, after which she got adhesive and repaired the torn place on Hap's bandage-and-plaster corset.

Believe me, we had a drink all around then. Washing and clothes changing followed. Then I put a dime under my tongue, dialed Chief McCurdy's number and told him:

"If you want to really clean up the bank murders and get your boy friend, Sarg, out of the death house, come right now to the Alamen apartments and rap on the door of Number Eleven."

"Who is this?" he barked suspiciously.

"None of your damn business, except that it's on the square and not a trap," I snapped. "Are you coming—or have you gone yellow?"

He barked the single word: "Coming," and slammed up the phone.

I opened the door for him when he knocked a few minutes later—and the sight of me in the flesh nearly knocked him for a row of pagodas.

He looked at me, blinked, shook his head, muttered:

"I see you—but I don't believe it."

"Come out of it, Mac," I told him. "It's Del okay, but over there on the bed is Melikoff—the guy who's due to take my place in the death house."

But all coppers have single track minds. He asked:

"How'd you get away from the death house, Del? Gosh, I haven't even been notified."

I chuckled. "It's a secret, Mac, deep stuff. Even the warden doesn't know. For there really is a Del Sarg up there—but he's a double, my cousin. I had to be out



to clean up the bank cases so long as you couldn't see past the end of your nose."

With that I showed him Hap's signed notes on Digby's confession; showed him Melikoff still dead to the world on the bed. He began to wake up then; in five minutes was cheering like a madman.

The next step was to tell it all over again to McCurdy, after that to the world through the medium of Hap's stop-press exclusive yarn which hit the streets as an extra about daylight.

But here's the payoff—

Though we had a perfectly good confession; though Melikoff cracked under third degree and confessed his crimes, and though I'd been an instrument of justice—

That cockeyed Cook County sheriff insisted on grabbing me as an escaped prisoner, and on holding me in a cell until the Governor of the State wrote out a pardon for me.

Which was better than the death cell—nicer than the cistern—but still a filthy way to treat a Phantom Shamus.

## NEW YORK STATE TROOPERS have their own SCOTLAND YARD

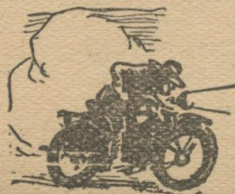


THE New York State Police have organized a Scotland Yard service of their own for aiding the local police when murder and horror swoop down on small towns. They have fingerprint experts, ballistics men, a toxicologist, and other crime specialists. These have been organized into a separate unit. But to appreciate the great aid this bureau will bring to rural villages, you'd have to know more about the troopers.

On April 11, 1917, Governor Whitman signed the State Trooper Bill. And on May 2, Major George Fletcher Chandler, Mexican border campaigner, was assigned to post of superintendent. The troopers had a fine start under Major Chandler. A part of his first order to this newly organized band was: "You must have the confidence in yourself which comes from knowing you are a trained horseman, a good shot, and a judge of what is right and wrong in a matter of simple laws. . . . Go about with the idea of helpfulness and a friendliness that wins the confidence of the people. Never permit a child to be afraid of you. If you hear a grown person say to a child, 'Look out or I will have this man take you away,' tell the child at once that if he goes with you, you will give him a good time, will teach him to ride. He will then become your friend. The parent, too, will learn from this that your attitude is one of friendliness to all."

So rural New York found the troopers from the first friendly, eager young men who jumped at the chance to be of service, whether it was tracking down a murderer or finding a lost dog. Problems and troubles at which other professional policemen would chuckle or sneer received grave consideration and helpful suggestion from the gray-clad troopers.

Now the people in the small towns and villages all over New York State have a deeper confidence in the Gray Riders. And a feeling of greater security in themselves. For their trooper friends now having a scientific, crime-fighting unit, will make crooks think twice before breaking the law in State Police territory.





# The Lethal Letter



By J. LANE LINKLATER

Author of "Murder in a Hurry," etc.

*Young Jake was the sort of a fellow who'd do anything for his girl Ann. And a scheming killer knew that . . . When the gunsmoke cleared, Jake's loyalty was given an acid test—and he framed himself for murder.*

IT was three o'clock in the morning. Jake Wister was sound asleep. A sharp rap on his door awakened him. He sat up in his bed, stared into the darkness. The rap was repeated. He got up, put on a bathrobe, went to the door.

"Who is it?" he called.

"Jerry," said a voice. "Open up—quick!"

The voice was subdued, yet urgent. Jake pressed a light button. The loose bathrobe made him look even smaller than he was. There was a worried look on his boyish face. Jake looked boyish in spite of the thin hair above his forehead; boyish and very earnest. He twisted the key in the lock. The door was

pushed open before he had time to grasp the knob.

A young man stepped in, snapped the door shut quickly. He was large, flashily dressed. The broad, domineering face was pale. He dropped into a chair. There was moisture on his forehead.

"Get dressed," he said, abruptly.

"Dressed?" said Jake. "What for—at this time of night?"

"You got to help me," said Jerry. He dabbed at his face. "I'm in a jam. You got to help me."

Jake gazed at him with troubled eyes. He didn't like Jerry. But he knew that he'd do anything he could to help him. He'd do that because of Ann, Jerry's sis-



ter. He had often thought of the difference between Ann and Jerry. Ann was gentle and honest and trusting; Jerry was egotistical and unscrupulous and cynical.

And somehow Ann had never lost faith in her brother. Jake had felt that it would be a terrible blow to Ann if anything destroyed that faith.

"Sure," Jake mumbled. "I'll help you. But what—"

"I—I drilled a guy!" stammered Jerry. In spite of his conceit, his bold front, he was a coward, and his nerve was almost gone now. "I drilled him—and he's dead!"

Jake was pulling on his shoes. He paused, sat up straight. Murder! It took his breath away. Yet he had been afraid of it. Jerry, left to his own company, would never have done it. But, like most would-be, bragging tough guys, he was a weakling. He was easily influenced—by the wrong people.

But murder! Jake was instinctively, intensely, lawabiding. It hurt him to be in the position of concealing crime—or a criminal. And to help a murderer to beat the law was wrong—dead wrong!

But then, there was Ann.

Jake pulled himself together, tugged at his shoelaces with numbed fingers.

"What you want me to do, Jerry?" he asked.

"I—I dunno," said Jerry.

"You don't know! But how—"

"You come with me," said Jerry. "Come with me to see Baldy Keeler. He'll figure things out, and you do just like he says."

Jake frowned. "Baldy? I'd rather not have anything to do with him, Jerry."

"You got to," said Jerry, loudly. He dropped his voice again, suddenly, as if afraid of being overheard. "Baldy's in this. He'll know what to do. We can't do a thing without Baldy."

Jake sighed heavily. He was almost dressed. He wasn't surprised to hear about Baldy Keeler, but it worried him a lot. Baldy was smooth, and dangerous—viciously dangerous. Jerry, without realizing it, had always been Baldy's tool.

"I'm ready," said Jake. He pulled on a cap. "Tell me what happened."

"On the way," said Jerry.

Jake jabbed out the light. He opened the door and they slipped out. Downstairs was Jerry's car. Jake got in beside Jerry. Jerry's fingers were trembling on the wheel as the car shot away.

The night air was cold. It brought alertness to Jake's mind. "What happened?" he said.

Jerry started his story, his teeth chattering: "It was a couple hours ago. I went up to Phil Logan's apartment—"

"Phil Logan!" The exclamation was startled out of Jake. Phil Logan was a gambler, wealthy, young, known for his violence and lawlessness. "You killed Phil Logan!"

"He pulled a gun on me. I went up there to get some dough from him, see? Just a little job for Baldy. I was to get a package of dough and take it back to Baldy. Well, instead of handing me the dough, Logan pulled a gun on me. I guess I got excited. First thing I knew my rod had gone off and Logan was piled on the floor. I—I beat it as fast as I could—"

"What was the money for?"

Jerry shifted uncomfortably. "You can ask Baldy about that."

Jake said no more. There was, he thought, not much mystery about the money—probably blackmail. In a little while Jerry stopped the car in front of a house. This, no doubt, was not Baldy Keeler's regular quarters; more of a hideout.

Jerry led Jake into the house and down a hall to a room at the rear. They entered. A man was standing by the window. He turned. He was very large, with a plump face, and his head was bald. He was smiling pleasantly, and when he spoke his voice was low and soft, yet Jake felt himself shiver. Jake had always sensed a peculiar, quiet desperation in Baldy Keeler.

"Glad you came, Jake," Baldy said amiably. "Sit down."

Jake didn't want to sit down. He wanted to run away. It was as if he was being swallowed up into something of-



fensive—something that made him faint and ill.

But he sat down.

THE room seemed hot. Jake rubbed the palms of his hands together, and they were wet. As he looked at Baldy, he was startled by the impression he got of intense desperation in the man; a desperation masked but not entirely concealed by a calm restraint of manner.

"Got a little job for you, Jake." It was Baldy speaking, and his voice was soothing. "You're just the man for this job!"

Jake managed a smile. "It's kind of late for me to be working," he said. "Or maybe I should say early—past three in the morning. I usually start at nine."

That was right. Jake's job started him to work at nine o'clock in the morning. He was a clerk of the court—an officer. And right now he was mixed up with a murder—shielding the murderer. All of Jake's instincts revolted against it. It was bred in him to uphold the law at all costs; his associates often gently jibed him with being a fanatic on the subject.

"Sure." Baldy's manner was bland, his voice a pleasant yet compelling murmur. "Jerry here had a little accident. It might mean a lot of trouble. I knew you were a friend of his, so I asked him to get you." Baldy paused a moment, impressively. "I knew you were a friend of his—and of Ann's!"

Jake started at the mention of Ann. But he merely nodded.

Baldy went on explaining: "Jerry went up to see Phil Logan on a little business. There was a misunderstanding—and now Logan is dead. No one knows that Jerry was there. And no one is likely to know—except for one thing."

"One thing?" Jake's voice was low.

"One thing. You see, Jerry was to get some money in exchange for some papers. However, for reasons of my own, I didn't give Jerry the papers. Instead, I gave him a note to Logan telling him how to get them." Baldy smiled. "Well, that note is still in Logan's apartment!"

Jake gazed at him. "A note! I didn't think you were that foolish," he said.

"Neither did I," admitted Baldy. "But, you see, Jerry was to have Logan copy the instructions and bring the note back to me. It didn't work out that way. Now the note is there in the apartment—and we've got to get it back!"

Jake understood. He moistened his lips. "You want me to get it for you?"

"That's right, Jake," said Baldy. "Luckily, we know just where it is." He turned to Jerry. "You tell him, Jerry."

"The note?" said Jerry. He seemed in a daze. "Oh, sure. Why, it was like this. I handed Logan the note. He read it and then started to bawl me out. While he was doing it he crumpled the note all up and threw it away without looking where he was throwing it. But I seen it—I seen it land behind the curtain, up against the window sill."

Baldy was gazing at Jake benignly. "You see?" he said. "All you've got to do is get the note. The police would find it sooner or later, but maybe they won't find it right away—"

"The police?" said Jerry.

"Of course. Someone heard the shot and phoned the police. We know that. The police are there now. That's why we need you, Jake. The cops all know you. They'll let you in—and they won't watch you. You can tell them that you heard about the murder and was curious. That's nothing new for you, anyway."

Baldy was right about that. The cops did know Jake; he was a favorite with them. And poking around the scene of a crime was a hobby of his. Sometimes he was even able to help a little.

But Jake felt that it was all wrong. A murder had been committed. The law should take its course. Some one should pay!

Still, there was Ann. Jake trembled to think what it might do to Ann. An idea occurred to him. "What about the gun?" he said.

"The gun?" repeated Baldy.

"Yes. The gun—Jerry's gun, that Logan was shot with. Where is it?"

Baldy exchanged glances with Jerry. "What's the idea?" he countered.



"Why, I just think it would be better if I knew," Jake urged. "Just in case, see?"

Baldy thought a moment. He seemed to come to a decision. "The gun," he said, "is at Jerry's house."

"Jerry's house?"

"That's right. Jerry stopped there on the way here. He let himself in the house and put the gun—where did you put the gun, Jerry?"

Jerry answered uneasily: "In a chest belonging to Ann. It's in the living room, and—"

"That's it." Baldy was smiling at Jake. "You see, Jerry didn't want to take a chance on throwing it away somewhere, so he just put it in that chest of Ann's. It's quite safe there."

Jake's eyes were starting from his head. If he had had the gun now, he thought he could cheerfully have shot Jerry. It seemed impossible that Jerry could have sunk so low as to plant a murder gun in Ann's belongings.

But he said nothing.

"You better get busy," Baldy suggested gently. "Better get over to Logan's before the cops find that note. It would be bad if they found it—bad for Jerry."

"And for you!" Jake put in suddenly.

"For me?" said Baldy. "Perhaps. But worse for Jerry—and Ann."

Jake got up. What he was about to do seemed incredible. But he could think of nothing else. The situation was clear enough. He was an officer of the law. The law rightfully claimed a penalty for a crime. On the other hand, it was impossible for him to refuse help to Jerry—because of Ann.

He made a decision.

Probably, he thought, no one else would be able to understand why he made it. But, to him, it was compelling. He simply couldn't cheat the law altogether. Besides, cold reason told him that, even with the removal of the note, in some way the attention of the detectives might be directed to Jerry—unless a substitute suspect was provided them at once.

It was, therefore, up to him to provide a substitute. Well, he himself would be

the substitute. He himself would pay the penalty.

Baldy had crossed the room and was accompanying him to the door. He laid a friendly hand on Jake's shoulder.

"You wouldn't think of double-crossing me, would you, Jake?" Baldy said quietly.

"No," said Jake, "I wouldn't think of it."

"I'm glad of that," said Baldy. "You see, that would be even worse for Ann!"

"Worse for Ann?"

"Worse for Ann," explained Baldy, "because the note was in her handwriting!" He chuckled. "I'll expect you back inside of an hour. Good luck!"

Jake was out in the night again. He could hear Baldy closing the door behind him.

**J**AKE walked briskly in the direction of Phil Logan's apartment. It was about a mile; just a few minutes' walk at the rate he was going.

The note, Baldy had said, was in Ann's handwriting. Baldy hadn't explained that, but it wasn't necessary. Jake was sufficiently familiar with Baldy's methods to understand without explanation. No doubt, at Baldy's suggestion, Jerry, on some simple pretext, had got his sister to write down the instructions for Logan.

Ann wouldn't have known what it was all about.

The note and the gun! Jake had to get them both. He needed them both to protect Jerry—and Ann. He also needed them to build up a case; a case against himself!

He needed something more, too. He had to supply himself with a motive for murder.

He realized that he must make the case a good one, otherwise some little detail might turn the attention of the detectives toward Jerry, and Ann. It wasn't going to be easy to convince others who knew him that he, Jake Wister, clerk of the court, had committed murder.

A motive for murder! Jake had one ready made. It was a good one, yet it wouldn't do. Jake was intensely devoted to Ann; she was the one love of his life,



and everybody knew that. Phil Logan, attracted by Ann's simple beauty, had been paying attention to her lately—not very sincere attention—and everybody knew that, too.

That was a good motive for murder. Yet it wouldn't do, because it would drag Ann into the case.

Jake was walking fast. His path took him within a block of the house where Ann and Jerry lived. He hesitated a moment there, then went on. It would be better, he thought, to go to Logan's apartment first.

It was an exclusive apartment house. Logan's apartment was on the seventh floor. Just outside and in the apartment there was still police activity; reporters, two or three policemen, two detectives.

"Hi, Jake," said detective Benton. He was eyeing Jake curiously. Then he grinned. "You know the killer?"

Jake did know the killer. But he had a part to play. He was acting nervously—and trying to look guilty.

"Maybe I—I did it myself," he said, with a weak smile.

Benton laughed heartily. "Nobody would take you for a killer, Jake."

"Killers that don't look like killers are the worst kind," argued Jake. "You can't tell by appearances."

"You're right about that," agreed Benton.

"Dig up any evidence?" asked Jake.

"Not much," Benton admitted. "No gun. No fingerprints that help any. Found some kind of a note back there on the window sill."

"Note!" The word popped out of Jake's mouth. So they had found the note! "That—that's great!"

"Yeah. Might help some. Woman's handwriting, I guess. Don't know whose—but we'll find out."

Jake nodded slowly. There was no doubt in Jake's mind that if the police retained the note, they'd find out who wrote it.

"Let's see it," he blurted.

"Over there on the desk," said Benton, indifferently. "Better not touch it."

Jake walked over to the desk. Lying on the desk top, now carefully spread out,

was a sheet of paper. Jake noted hastily that the message on it told Logan to go to a certain place at a certain time, but he wasn't interested in the details; it was clearly Ann's handwriting.

HE glanced over his shoulder. Benton had turned and was busy with something else. Quickly, Jake snatched the note from the desk and jammed it in his pocket. He made rapidly for the door. There a voice halted him.

"Going so soon?" It was Benton's gruff voice calling to him.

"Sure," Jake said thickly. "Got to be going. I—I guess I know plenty about this case already."

He sped through the door, down the elevator to the street. That had been easy—just about as he had wanted. It had been necessary to get away with the note, yet in such a way that Benton—when he discovered its absence—would connect Jake with its disappearance.

Now he must get the gun.

He knew Jerry's house well. When he reached it he stood for a moment outside. It was now nearly four o'clock in the morning, and he was fairly safe from observation. There was no traffic, no sign of life anywhere.

He had to enter the house without arousing Ann. Both front and back doors would be locked. At the side of the house, however, was a pair of large double windows, opening inwards. Jake recalled that there was a simple latch on the inside.

He reached up, inserted the blade of his pocket knife and flipped up the catch. He pushed open the windows gently and stepped into the room.

This was the living room. It was in this room that Ann kept the chest in which Jerry had hidden the gun. The chest, Jake knew, was in the far corner of the room.

He stood still for a moment in the darkness, listening. No sound came to him. Ann would be asleep in the upstairs bedroom.

Jake felt his way across the room, carefully. Almost there, his foot touched some article of furniture. Instantly, Jake re-



membered it then—a small smoking stand. It was rocking on its spindly legs. Jake reached out a hand to steady it, but instead it crashed to the floor.

The noise, to Jake, was terrific. He tried to tell himself that the walls and closed doors would hold the noise in, that no one else could hear it, that it was only his own startled imagination that made it seem so loud. He stood rigid, listened, for several moments.

The house remained still and silent.

Jake moved forward again. His groping hands presently found the chest. A rug of some kind was lying on the top of it. Cautiously he pulled the rug off. The chest was not locked. He lifted up the lid, rested it against the wall. In the chest were mostly cloth goods—embroidered household fineries made by Ann herself.

His hand touched metal. The menacing feel of it sent a chill through him. But his fingers closed on it, and he drew it out.

In a moment he had closed the chest again, replaced the rug, and was standing uncertainly, holding the gun.

He started suddenly as he thought he heard faint shuffling sounds somewhere above him. He listened intently, but could hear nothing more.

Jake Wister with a murder gun. It seemed unbelievable. But he thought of Ann, sleeping peacefully upstairs, and his nerve tightened. He thrust the gun into his pocket, started back across the room toward the window.

A door opened abruptly. The hall light was shining vaguely into the living room. Jake halted, swung about. Standing in the doorway, peering uncertainly into the living room, was Ann!

A dressing gown was flung over her shoulders. The sleep was still in her eyes. She was small and fragile; her attitude timid yet without fear.

"Is that you, Jerry?" she asked.

Jake's mouth opened and closed. But he said no word. He stood for a little while, unable to move. Then he turned and dashed through the open window to the walk, and ran madly out to the street.

HE encountered no one, and started rapidly toward his own quarters. Baldy Keeler and Jerry would be expecting him any minute, but he had almost forgotten about them. He had his own work to do. He had to complete a case against himself.

The note, and the gun. He would destroy the note. That would destroy Ann's connection with it. And the fact that he had taken and destroyed it would certainly incriminate himself.

The gun? Probably Jerry had removed his own fingerprints from it. In any case, Jake would make sure of that—and see that there were some of his own on it. The ownership of the gun would no doubt be difficult to determine; Baldy would have seen to that.

In a few minutes he was letting himself into his room. He locked the door, took the gun out of his pocket. It was an automatic, still loaded—only one shot had been fired. He returned the gun to his pocket, sat down on the bed to think.

A motive for murder—that was what he needed! He thought of the note in his pocket, and took it out, read it:

*Letters in L's box three feet from east window. You can get the key from T. M. at midnight tomorrow at usual place.*

That was all. Jake frowned. The note was no help to him. It told him nothing.

Still, that didn't matter. He had no use for the note except to burn it. What he needed was a motive for murder—a motive that would convince people who didn't want to be convinced. Sitting on the edge of the bed, his frown gradually vanished into a look of intentness, almost of triumph.

People might think that he, Jake Wister, a law-fanatic, would kill a man for the sake of the law!

Phil Logan had been a notorious law-breaker. He had never been caught, never punished. The law had never been able to reach him, and Jake had always deeply resented Phil Logan's ability to flout the law; he had talked to others about it, so that his feelings were well known.

Therefore, Jake reasoned, he could pretend that he had been driven a little in-



sane on the subject; that he had killed the lawless Phil Logan for the sake of the law!

Jake got up—then sat down again.

He needed something more—something that would help to make it convincing—something that would indicate that he had been working on it for some time, and perhaps would show that Phil Logan had been aware of it and was a menace to Jake himself.

A letter might do it; a letter dated several days back and then thrown carelessly on the floor as if Jake had changed his mind about mailing it.

Jake took pencil and paper and wrote:

*To District Attorney Brophy: A certain notorious law-breaker has been following me for some time. If anything happens to me—or to him—you will know who is responsible.*

JAKE WISTER.

Jake studied the message he had written for a moment. He actually smiled as he flipped it onto the floor, near the door.

Now he must dispose of the note he had taken from Phil Logan's apartment.

He rolled it into a loose ball, put it in a large ashtray, took a match and set fire to it. He watched it as the white paper turned to gray ashes.

He turned away, glanced about the room. The gun was in his pocket. He had to find a suitable place of concealment for it—a place that did not conceal too effectively.

He started back toward the bed.

A sound back of him held him motionless. He turned. Someone just outside his door was turning the knob slowly, pressing against the door. The door held. There was a moment of silence.

In a little while came a discreet knock on the door.

Jake thought a moment. Benton, the detective? Jake thought not; Benton would not have knocked so cautiously. But, whoever it was, Jake had to get him away before Benton did come.

He hesitated, then stepped to the door. He was trying to smile as he opened it. The smile disappeared. Standing in the doorway was the huge figure of Baldy Keeler.

BALDY pushed his way in, closed the door. With his hand behind him he turned the key.

He stood with his back to the door, staring down at Jake. Jake stepped back as if he had been shoved.

"You—you'd better go," Jake urged. "You'd better go right away."

Baldy didn't move. "Thought you'd double-cross me, eh?" he said, very quietly. "Well, give me—"

"You'd better go!" cried Jake. "The police are likely to be here any minute."

A slow smile broadened on Baldy's face. There was a jeer in his oily tone. "You trying to save me from the police?" He laughed softly. Then his face set. "Hand over that note!"

"I—I burned it!" protested Jake. "There are the ashes—over there on that ash tray. I burned it to—"

A gun appeared in Baldy's hand.

"Don't kid me. You may have burned a piece of paper, but not the note. I knew you'd get the note, on account of Ann, but I wouldn't trust you any further than that. You got that note. You also got the gun—"

"The gun! How do you know?"

"When you didn't show up at my place, I had Jerry phone Ann. She said someone had been in the house there—in the living room. She didn't know why, of course, but I knew—knew it was you who had been there after the gun. You wanted to shield Ann, but you figured on turning in Jerry and me. You've got the note and the gun—and I want them both—now!"

The gun in Baldy's hand was jabbed straight at Jake's middle, but he didn't see it, wasn't even looking at it. He wanted to get Baldy out of there; had to get him out before the police came!

"I'm telling you the truth," he pleaded. "I burned the note." He didn't want to tell Baldy about his own scheme, but he had to now. "I figured on taking the rap myself!"

There was nothing but incredulity in Baldy's face. It was not the kind of thing he would ever believe.



"Don't stall!" he snapped. "Give me—" "I tell you this is on the level! I'd do anything for Ann, and Jerry—"

"Jerry is dead!" cut in Baldy, sharply. Jake stared at him. It was almost as if Baldy had fired the gun at him and the lead had gone through him.

"Jerry—dead!" he whispered.

There was no vestige of a smile on Baldy's face now. "Sure. Now perhaps you'll understand that I mean business. The cops will find Jerry and figure it was suicide. They'll find him—after I leave town!"

After Baldy left town! Jake's frenzied brain pictured the situation in a flash. This case was extremely dangerous to Baldy—might terminate his career. He was desperate about it. He was wiping out anything that might connect him with it.

And when Jerry had killed Phil Logan, he had signed his own death warrant. Baldy couldn't trust Jerry not to break down. And if Jerry broke down, he was sure to implicate Baldy.

Jake was looking at the man who had killed Ann's brother. Everything was changed now—everything except the necessity of keeping Ann out of it. He couldn't protect Jerry any longer, because Jerry was dead.

A thought struck through Jake's head: If only Baldy were dead, too!

But he wasn't dead. And again the law was uppermost in Jake's mind. He was no longer shielding a murderer. Instead, there was a murderer standing in front of him that he wanted to hold for the law—if he could do it without touching Ann.

Baldy had advanced a step toward him, threatening. His big bulk seemed to hang over Jake, his gun touching Jake's chest.

"I'm in a big hurry," he said in a low voice. "Where's that—"

There was a knock on the door. Baldy halted. Jake gazed at the door. For a moment there was grim silence.

"Jake!" called a voice.

It was the voice of Benton, the detective.

BALDY spoke to Jake in an undertone: "Do just as I say. I'll get behind the door. You open the door and let him in. But don't put him wise, or—"

The pressure of Baldy's gun was heavy against Jake's chest.

Together they walked to the door.

"Jake!" Benton was calling again.

Baldy was behind the door. Jake was just in front of him, Baldy's gun against his back. He hesitated a moment, his fingers on the key.

In that moment, he was thinking, rapidly. What did Baldy intend to do? Baldy hadn't said, but Jake was sure—just as sure as if it had all been written out for him.

Baldy wanted to get away. He wouldn't want Benton to see him there—and remember it! He was utterly desperate.

He would shoot Benton down in cold blood!

When Jake opened the door for Benton, he would be admitting him to his death. But if Jake failed to open the door, he would be inviting his own death.

"Jake!" Benton accompanied his growl with another bang on the door.

"Okay, Benton!" Jake called.

He could feel the rim of Baldy's gun sliding across his back. That gun would be pointed directly at Benton the moment the detective stepped across the threshold.

Jake's fingers trembled on the key. *He had to kill Baldy!* That was clear. But even suppose he succeeded, how would he explain Baldy's presence there without dragging Ann into it?

"Open that door—quick!" It was Baldy's voice, close to his ear.

Jake's hand suddenly twisted the key, then left it instantly, dropped to his pocket. He wrenched out a gun—Jerry's gun—swung about. Baldy's gun slipped across his shoulder. Jake's finger was fumbling for the trigger; he choked as Baldy grasped his throat and flung him back.

Jake crashed to the floor. But he was still clinging tenaciously to Jerry's gun. Baldy loomed over him, like a mountainous threat, bringing his own gun quickly into line.



The gun in Baldy's hand belched flame. Jake found the trigger at the same moment.

Something stung through Jake and seemed to pin him to the floor. For a little while he could still see Baldy, vaguely. Baldy was standing up, and he looked very big to Jake. At first Baldy's head was flung back, then came forward. His right hand cocked upwards, with the smoking gun in it, but presently it dropped limply.

And then Baldy dropped, too.

The terrific thump he made against the floor, and the shouted curses of Benton who had lunged into the room, were very faint in Jake's ears. Jake was getting drowsy, and the only thing that was clear to him was that he had to tell Benton something—if he ever told him anything—about how Baldy Keeler happened to be there.

He had to tell Benton something that would keep Ann out of it altogether.

And in a little while—although it seemed a long time—he found himself lying on his bed. Benton had sent for the doctor and was talking to Jake, complainingly.

"You shouldn't have done that," Benton said. "You didn't have no right to take that note, Jake. I know you like to work on these murders, but taking evidence along with you like that—well, that just ain't right. Might get you into

trouble." He stared at the ashes in the tray. "Looks like you had to let him burn that note, too," he added, gloomily.

Jake smiled faintly. So Benton thought that he took the note to help him work on the case! Then Jake's smile vanished; he was still worried about Ann.

Suddenly, Benton stopped pacing the floor, glared down at Jake.

"Say," he demanded, "how did Baldy happen to come here, anyway?"

"To—to get the note," Jake faltered.

"Yeah. But how did he know you had it?"

Jake turned his head wearily. His eye caught the flicker of a piece of white paper on the floor. His message to the district attorney.

Jake looked at Benton, then motioned feebly toward the paper. Benton lumbered over to it—frowned at it suspiciously. He read:

*A certain notorious law-breaker has been following me for some time. If anything happens to me—or to him—you will know who is responsible.*

Benton paused as he finished. Then he grinned.

"So Baldy was following you around, huh? Well, something sure happened to him, all right. Anyhow, that explains it."

Jake didn't answer. He seemed to be going to sleep again. And he was dreaming—dreaming of Ann.





# High-Speed Vengeance



By EDWARD C. CLAYTON

*Albrite liked sports, the more dangerous the better. But he wasn't a sportsman—  
—for his business was killing, shooting from the back. A strange man,  
Albrite. And when he heard about the Harrimore necklace job,  
he took it—because the Harrimore home was the center  
of winter sports.*

THE beach ball zipped across the pale green surface of the athletic club pool with rocket speed. Albrite made a leaping sidewise plunge, his long arm outstretched, his hand cupped. Immediately three members dived, came up about him, trapping him. Albrite fainted, shifted swiftly to the left, whirled over and over and under, eluding his opponents. He dived the remaining length of the one-hundred-and-twenty-foot pool and emerged, cold and unsmiling, with the ball.

Albrite grimaced sourly. If he felt any emotion at his prowess, it did not show in his reddish-black eyes. Only the twist of his thin lips expressed the contempt he felt for the awkwardness of the others, especially the fat mem-

ber who was bending forward grasping his stomach which Albrite had contrived to give a vicious kick as he dived. With a sudden turn of his wrist, he sent the ball skimming to the other end of the pool, and chuckled as it struck the fat member in the mouth. The fat member, one hand grasping his stomach and the other his mouth, started for the ladder.

Albrite started to swim across to the locker-room side of the pool, and, as he turned and lifted his head for air, he glimpsed a pair of shiny brown shoes on the pool-rim. He rolled over on his back and his eyes traveled up the length of an immaculately trousered figure standing on the cement floor above him.

Albrite said, through sneering lips: "Hello, Madden."



Madden was plump, pink-faced and manicured. Carefully dressed, an overcoat hanging in the crook of his left arm, he looked as if he had just come in from the street. His face was flushed and his lips were trembling as he leaned over the water toward Albrite and whispered:

"Do you know what the mourning's for outside?"

Albrite ran his hand over his wet straight, black hair, eyed Madden narrowly.

"The mourning! The black drapes on the front of the club!" Madden snapped impatiently.

Albrite, annoyed, was silent for a moment. That soft, purry voice of Madden's now pitched with excitement, rankled him. There were other things about Madden he did not like, either—his softness, his cowardice.

"What's on your mind?" said Albrite.

"You never answered my question, Albrite. What are the rags for?"

"That's easy, Madden. For Mrs. Harrimore. She died unexpectedly in Honolulu two days ago. She was an honorary member of this joint. Her husband, Florin G. Harrimore, is a grandson of one of the founders. He's a banker—plenty of dough—always has had it. Jewels, too. Fortune in 'em."

"You seem to know a lot about California's wealthy families."

Albrite, the sneer still on his thin lips, said: "That's my business—knowing about rich people."

Then with a seemingly effortless motion Albrite slid face foremost under water. Madden's face suddenly grew sullen. He twitched about impatiently as he watched the swimmer make three swift turns up and down the pool under water and come up, body glistening, his broad chest rising and falling almost imperceptibly. Albrite swam over to Madden, who faded back from the edge of the pool to keep the splashing water from his shiny shoes. He liked water like a Maltese.

Pretending not to notice the other's finicky movement, Albrite deftly scooped a handful of water onto the floor. Madden jumped back—too late. He scowled

silently as he shook the drops off his shoes.

Albrite said: "Harrimore took the boat for Honolulu yesterday. He— But what's the quiz for?"

Madden asked, his tone filled with veiled meaning: "Do you know what that means to us?"

"No. But if you wait till I get my clothes on I'll listen while we play a game of billiards."

"Billiards!" Madden almost shouted, scornfully. "Billiards! Swimming! Sports! My God, man, don't you ever think of anything else! You know my specialty's skirts. All other games bore me."

"Dames'll be the death of you yet, Madden."

Madden spluttered: "And you'll die fightin' bulls, ridin' race-horses, or— or playin' parchesi."

Locking his hands about an iron column, Albrite swung his glistening body effortlessly out of the pool. Save for little purplish, dissolute pouches under his eyes, and a slight bulge under the belt of his swimming trunks he looked every inch an athlete.

He walked across the wet floor to the locker-room. Madden minced along behind him, his face screwed up impatiently. Albrite knew Madden was keyed up, tense, excited about something. That was the way of these inside men, safe crackers. They didn't have the cold, steady nerve, the guts, of the gunman—like Albrite. He flexed the fingers of his right hand involuntarily. Still, Madden was an expert—could crack a can quicker than any one else he knew. And he knew plenty. But Madden! Yellow!

Madden said: "Hurry into your clothes. I got hot news. Means a lot of coin to both of us." He stopped in the locker-room where it was dry, paced nervously up and down.

**A**LBRITE dallied under the shower, generously soaped his lithe body; purposely let Madden fume in suppressed excitement. Finally he came out, got into his clothes. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a contemptuous glint



of expert scrutiny in Madden's eyes.

Madden purred softly: "Don't you ever wear a vest! Your hair's sticking up in back; your belt's out of its loop. And in thirty-seven years you haven't learned to tie a tie. Damn good tie, too; but the designer's lousy."

Albrite muffed the slur. He started for the stairs to the lobby, said: "Come on, punk, we'll play some billiards."

Madden's round face grew red, apoplectic. "Billiards! Don't be a fool!" he shouted. "I come here to tell you about something hot—and you want to play billiards. I should have got Slim and Otto instead."

Albrite's black brows shot up. "Heels!" "Yeah!" snapped Madden. "Heels to you. You think a hell of a lot of yourself, don't you, Albrite. Otto's damn bad; so's Slim. I may need them both yet."

For a moment Albrite said nothing. Then: "We'll play billiards. I can think better when I'm doing something."

They walked upstairs and across the black and white terrazo floor of the lobby, took the elevator to the fourth floor. They found the billiard room deserted. Albrite selected a cue, weighed it expertly in his fingers; Madden picked up a stick mechanically.

Madden began. "I—"

"Save it," snapped Albrite.

Carefully, he spotted a ball on the table, stroked it gently with his cue. Madden watched him disinterestedly; then, as if in a daze, followed suit. They played for several minutes in silence, except for the soft clicking of the ivories.

Suddenly Madden threw down his cue, and swore. "Albrite, won't you listen!"

Albrite continued quietly stroking the ball. He said: "Spill it, then."

An animated light shone in Madden's eyes. "It's about Harrimore. He's got a swell joint—an English farmhouse—up in the mountains. At Lake Trantine. Spends his summers there. Didn't close it last Fall. He's been going there off and on all winter—for the skating and skiing. Three weeks ago, Mrs. Harrimore went on a visit to Honolulu. She intended to

be gone three-four weeks. She died there unexpectedly."

He paused, wet his lips. Albrite brought out a pack of cigarettes, lighted one, blew smoke through his nostrils.

Madden said: "Harrimore was here in town when he got the message from Honolulu. He left last night for Frisco to take the boat. He didn't have time to do anything about the house up at the lake. Now, I got it straight that Mrs. Harrimore left some ice up there when she went away—sixty thousand dollars worth—a diamond necklace with an emerald clasp worth about forty-five thousand, a bracelet, and some other stuff, too. And say, Big Boy," Madden waxed enthusiastic, "it'll be a cinch for us to go up and lift it."

"Where'd you get the info?" Albrite asked levelly.

"What's the dif, Albrite? It's on the level."

Albrite said: "What's the lay?"

Eagerly Madden explained: "It's like this. The place is in charge of a guy named Quinn—an old geezer who kind of putters about, looking after things. Harrimore don't keep no regular staff there. The day before he goes to the lake, he usually sends a half dozen servants from the staff of his own town house. There won't be anybody around but old Quinn. He'll be soft to take care of. We'll drive up there, crack the can and—"

Albrite laughed, shook his head.

Madden shouted: "What's the matter?"

"Sounds cuckoo," said Albrite. "Crazy. Too easy. Must be a catch somewhere."

Madden grinned, looked relieved. "You gave me a start for a moment. I thought you wasn't going through with it."

"I tell you it sounds cuckoo," said Albrite.

**M**ADDEN shrugged impatiently. "But it isn't, at all—once you know that Harrimore dame. She's nutty. All the time taking up some new fad or other. Running about from place to place. Flighty. Head in the clouds. Nothing solid about her. She forgot all about having the ice up there. And the



old man's too busy here in town to know what she's doing half the time. It's perfect, I tell you. Just one of those things. A cuckoo dame walks out and leaves sixty thousand dollars worth of swag in a summer home—unprotected."

Albrite, black brows knitted thoughtfully, said: "That's right, come to think of it. I remember that skirt now. She is nuts! We'll hop to it."

A thin grin writhed across Madden's plump face. "I knew you'd get it, Big Boy. Let's get going."

Albrite laid his cue on the table. They went out into the hall, took the elevator to Albrite's room on the seventeenth floor. From the middle drawer of a dresser Albrite took two clips of cartridges, slipped them into his pocket with his automatic.

"How're you fixed?" he asked.

Madden patted the bulge under his arm-pit. "Okay. But you know I ain't no good with a gun. That ain't my racket. The way you shot up those dicks at Carter's—"

For the first time, a grin settled over Albrite's somber features. "I hate dicks. And I never miss 'em." He pointed to a cabinet. "Better grab yourself a bottle of that whisky."

Madden opened the cabinet door, selected a flask, thrust it into his pocket. Albrite got an overcoat from the closet.

"I'll take this heavy one," he said. "It'll be cold at the lake."

"Cold," said Madden. "I'll bet the snow's six feet deep there right now."

They went out into the hall, Albrite locking the door behind him. They rode the elevator to the main floor. At a row of oak phone booths along the wall between the elevator shaft and the clerk's desk, Madden halted. He said:

"Wait a moment. I want to phone."

"Go ahead."

Madden pushed into a booth, then came out a moment later. "What's Otto's new number. I've forgotten."

"What do you want of Otto?" said Albrite, his voice metallic.

"I'm calling him and Slim—Marta, too—to go with us."

Albrite's reddish-black eyes glittered angrily. "Save your nickel."

"I'm going to phone Otto," said Madden. He began going through the pages of the phone book chained to the booth.

"I told you to save your nickel."

Madden looked up with flaring eyes. Then he turned back to the book, ran his plump, stubby finger down the column. "I've got it," he said, and started into the booth again.

Albrite swung out his hand, grasped Madden's plump wrist, swung him about sharply. His eyes were snapping dangerously.

"No cuts, Madden. We'll pull this job alone."

Madden, eyes angrily agleam, jerked back. Albrite held his wrist fast.

"No cuts, Madden. We'll take it alone." There was a metallic warning in Albrite's voice.

His face a sullen cloud, Madden said reluctantly:

"All right, then. No cuts. Slim and Otto are out. Marta, too. But they horned us in the Matear affair. We made ten grand out of that deal. Easy. I thought it—"

Albrite snapped: "They didn't have the guts to pull the job by themselves. I told you they were heels."

"Yeah!" said Madden. "Some day one of those guys 'll get fed up with your guff and—"

"Aw, forget it."

The wind was whistling noisily when they pushed thru the revolving door of the club into the street. Their overcoats flapped about their legs. They held their hats as they breasted the wind to the taxi stand at the nearest street intersection.

THERE was only one cab drawn up at the curb. A big eight-cylinder car. The driver, a mild-eyed little man with practically no chin, was hunched in back of the windshield, evidently trying to keep warm. There was a stubble of pink beard on his thin, chinless face. The patent-leather visor of his cap was broken.



Albrite leaned over the seat, shook the little driver erect. He said:

"Lake Trantine, Bunny."

The driver's mouth dropped open, his eyes popped.

"That's seventy-five—eighty miles," he gasped.

Albrite pushed Madden into the back of the car. He said to the driver: "You can make it in three hours, Bunny. If you're fast."

The driver slumped back into the seat, stalling for time. Evidently he did not like the looks of his prospective fares or the prospect of the trip.

"But I can't leave my stand that long," he yammered.

"This is an Independent, ain't it?" snapped Albrite.

"Yeh."

"Okay," said Albrite. "Get going. Out Sunshine Boulevard north; then cut over into the Granitetown Highway. Get it, Bunny!"

The little driver started to remonstrate further, but something in Albrite's reddish-black eyes and the movement of Albrite's hand in his right coat pocket made the man reconsider. He said, very reluctantly:

"Get in. And my name ain't Bunny. It's Crawford."

Albrite stepped into the car, and the door slammed behind him.

"I like Bunny much better," he shouted.

The driver whirled the motor, pulled the gear lever and the car melted into east-bound traffic. Two blocks up he turned left and headed due north for the highway. Albrite, a lighted cigarette in his hand, leaned back against the cushion. Madden massaged his plump chin with nervous fingers.

Albrite said: "Everything set?"

Madden pulled a flashlight from his pocket, thumbed the button several times. "It's okay. We'll be needing this later. Got one?"

"No. What the hell do I need one for?" said Albrite. "Have you got the layout?"

Madden touched his forehead with a plump forefinger. "Right here," he

grinned. "The safe's on the second floor, in Mrs. Harrimore's bedroom. That's in the right wing, above the living room and an enclosed porch. There's a dressing alcove at the extreme end of the room. The safe's in there."

"Good." said Albrite. He threw the butt of his cigarette on the floor, took the last one from his pack, lighted it.

It was snowing when they reached Granitetown. Big dry flakes beat against the car's windshield. Albrite pointed to a drugstore and Crawford pulled up at the curb in front of it. Albrite got out, bought cigarettes. Two minutes later he was back in the car. Crawford swung the big machine onto the mountain highway to Beavers. The road wound steadily upward along the rim of tremendous rock-filled canyons. Boulders and trees were covered with thick snow. Snow plows crawled up and down the mountain road, clearing it for traffic.

At Beavers, they struck the lake trail; came out high above the lake which was cupped in a long, narrow valley. The lake was long and narrow, too, rounded at both ends like a capsule.

As the frozen silver of the lake loomed before them, Albrite leaned sideways, pressed his face against the side window, peered out intently. Madden lay back against the cushion, half-asleep in the drowsy warmth.

"There's sport for you," said Albrite.

"Huh," said Madden.

Albrite shook his companion, said: "See, those people down there. That's sport."

Madden, now awake, growled: "Damn you and your sport, Albrite. What are they doing?"

"Skating. The lake's filled with 'em."

Madden sneered. "Well, I guess you're an expert at skating."

Albrite said: "I never was on a pair in my life. But there isn't anything like that I'm not good at."

"Skiing, too," said Madden, idly watching a man and a girl flash down a snowy decline.

"Yeah. Anything like that."

"Okay! Okay!" said Madden, nettled.



Crawford pushed down on the gas, the car purred around the eastern end of the lake toward the Harrimore farmhouse. It was still more than an hour's drive away, and, by the time they reached the hill-top on which the building was situated, dark had fallen against the thick blanket of snow. Crawford swung sharply to the left under the shoulder of a crag and up to a circular drive in front of the building. The snow had been cleared from the drive—evidently by old Quinn, as if he were expecting some one.

The little chauffeur rolled the car across the drive, stopped. Drawing their coats about them, Albrite and his companion sprang out. Albrite said:

"Keep that motor hot, Bunny. We may have to break out of here in a hurry."

Crawford did not answer, but rolled the car into the shadow of a conifer further down the drive.

The house itself was quite dark, silent. Albrite and Madden made their way softly to the back door, which Madden opened with a passkey without any difficulty.

Albrite, automatic outthrust, entered first, Madden, close behind him, swore softly as he thumbed the button of the flashlight and it failed to go on. Without waiting, Albrite proceeded cautiously into the darkness; then the rubber heel of his shoe skidded over something wet, sticky, and he pitched forward. As he struggled to regain his balance, his foot bumped against something soft, yielding.

Madden, still thumbing the button, growled: "What's the matter?"

Albrite swore, knelt, groped along the floor. His hand touched something stiff—a shoe—the blunt rounded toe upturned. For a moment he knelt there in the silent darkness. Then he opened his fingers quickly; closed them again about the blunt shoe-cap.

"The light," he snapped.

Madden shook the light, screwed savagely at the bottom, pressed the button again. The light flashed on, a funneling gleam boring into the darkness.

"Here, you fool!" said Albrite.

MADDEN held the light's eye down, moved the wavering gleam back and forth. The beam trembled onto the body of a man, inert, prone upon the floor. Madden gasped, and with a sudden crash the light dropped from his flabby fingers. Albrite pounced upon the light, grasped it with his left hand. In a lightning movement he straightened and heaved his balled right fist at Madden's dark bulk. There was another crash as Madden careened back against the door. Albrite snarled:

"Don't make so damn much noise!"

Madden, now thoroughly frightened, gasped: "What's the matter?"

Albrite pointed the beam to the floor again, he said: "He's dead!"

Holding his smarting jaw, Madden wheezed: "Oh!" as if there was something in his throat difficult to swallow.

The gleam revealed a small dark mass beside the body, with a streak across it where Albrite's heel had struck and skidded. There was another mass on the floor, too, just on the edge of the pool of light. The mass had an iridescent gleam. Albrite reached down and felt it. It was cold and wet. He threw the stuff from him, laughed shortly. He chuckled grimly: "He's dead. Deader than these fish. Quinn must have just come in from the lake with these fish when he was killed."

In the torch's glare the dead man's face looked broad and gaunt and lined. His hair was gray, matted.

"This is Quinn, isn't it?" Albrite asked shortly.

Madden, now timorously hovering above him, considered for a moment, said: "I don't know. I never saw him. But it must be from the description I got."

Albrite leaped in quick alarm. "The necklace! Has some one beat us to it?" He pushed Madden aside roughly, started from the room.

In a queer, strained voice Madden began: "I wonder—"

"What!" snapped Albrite, stopping short.

Madden gulped. "I said I wonder who could have done it."



Albrite ran through the narrow passage to the stairway in the front hall. Together they hurried up the stairs, down the hall to the door of Mrs. Harrimore's bedroom.

Behind a hanging picture in the alcove dressing room, Madden found the safe, the door tightly closed. Evidently it had not been tampered with.

Albrite said tersely: "Hop to it. Crack that can, and be damned quick about it. I'll take a look about."

Madden lost no time in busying himself with the safe door. Albrite left him there, sauntered back up the hall, looked into the other rooms. They seemed empty. He descended to the first floor, walked through the dark rooms there. No one was about. Evidently the place was quite deserted.

The cellar still remained to be inspected. The door to the cellar was in the narrow passage between the hall and the kitchen, where Quinn's body lay. Albrite descended the cellar steps. Down there it was quite warm. He heard the faint purr of a motor, saw a dark, bulky object in one corner, a dull red glow issuing from it out of a narrow slot. The furnace. Evidently old Quinn had attended to it before going to the lake.

Proceeding cautiously, Albrite entered what seemed to be a paneled recreation room, bumped against something sharp—the corner of a billiard table. He grasped the edge of the table, pressed his fingers into the rubber cushion. He stood thus for a moment in silence. His thin lips relaxed a little. Then he walked back to the furnace, threw open the door. A dull glow lit the gloom, suffusing the table with a soft, rose-colored light. From a rack Albrite selected a cue, began clicking away intently at the ivories.

Suddenly the electric lights in the cellar flashed on with startling unexpectedness. Albrite, in the act of making a shot, paused, his cue suspended, startled for the moment.

From somewhere above came the sound of hurried footsteps. Quite quietly, Albrite laid his cue on the table, whipped out his automatic, crept up the

stairs and listened. Some one was running lightly, descending the stairs from above. Albrite saw him first. It was Madden, his face pale with excitement. In his hand he held something that glittered—the Harrimore necklace!

Albrite said: "What happened! Why the lights!"

Madden quivering, gasped: "Where you been?"

Albrite snapped: "Why in hell the lights! Put 'em out! Quick! You'll have—" He sprang across the room to a wall switch, threw it over. The lights stayed on. He ran back across the hall, flung up another switch. Still, the lights did not go out.

"I didn't turn 'em on," said Madden. "They just went on. All of 'em. Let's get the hell out of here. They'll see these lights all over the valley."

"Okay," said Albrite. "Let's see the ice."

Mechanically Madden extended his hand. Albrite lifted the Harrimore necklace from it. His eyes fastened greedily on the glittering stones.

Madden, shifting nervously, said: "Come on. Step on it, Albrite. Let's get going!"

**S**HIFTING the necklace to his right hand with his automatic, Albrite started for the door. He reached for the knob, turned it. Then suddenly the door swung in without warning, crashed against Albrite flinging him back.

Behind him Albrite heard the sound of thudding footsteps and knew without turning that Madden had fled.

Two men, followed by a girl, flung themselves into the room. The men held automatics trained at Albrite's middle. Albrite's gun-hand jerked up.

"Steady, Albrite. Don't be so damn jumpy," said the man in the lead. He was a big man with his overcoat collar drawn tightly about his throat. His face was broad. Clayish-yellow. His eyes were small, close-set and quite bright now as they bored into Albrite.

"Hello, Otto," said Albrite evenly. He held his gun trained at the man. "Why,



hello, Slim—Marta. You gave me a start. It's damn dangerous business—busting in a door like that."

Otto peered hard at the glittering necklace in Albrite's hand. He said in a deadly even tone: "It's a damned sight more dangerous to double-cross a pal, Albrite."

Albrite laughed harshly, kept his eyes glued on the trio: "So what, fellows? You tried some crossing, yourselves. You skipped out here ahead of us and tried to pull a fast one. Bumped off old Quinn—"

"Damn him," interrupted Otto.

"Bumped off the old guy," continued Albrite. "You had the jump on us. If you didn't get the ice then it's just your tough luck."

"Yeah," Otto snarled. "Quinn fussed up the detail. Steered us to a phony plant. He got a little tough—"

"And you beat it before examining the phony stuff Quinn handed you," said Albrite. He smiled grimly.

"That's about the way of it, Bright Boy," snapped Otto, "but what you know ain't going to help you any. You—"

Then an amazing thing happened. The lights which had been blazing brightly through the house, winked out—all of them—quite suddenly. The house was pitched in darkness. For a space of five seconds, silence. Dreadful silence.

Albrite, now dangerously grim, dropped to the floor—just in time to escape a hail of lead that swept above him, that tore into the rear wall of the room. And before the racket died away, he had frantically rolled across the floor, through the open door into the next room. Rather unconcernedly he wondered where Madden was. He felt sure that Madden had run out on him. The heel! But if he hadn't, and if he had failed to drop when the lights went out, then Madden would be lying there on the floor—dead. Albrite smiled; he stuffed the necklace into his coat pocket. Madden would never share in the proceeds of this haul. Albrite was sure of that.

On the floor behind the door, Albrite listened for a tell-tale sound in the ad-

joining room. But there was only silence. He leveled his automatic to where he judged the front door ought to be. If they were still bunched there—Slim and Otto and Marta— He squeezed a stream of lead from his gun. Slugs leaped out into the darkness. He eased the pressure of his fingers, slipped another clip of cartridges into the magazine.

The rug in the other room—where Otto and Slim and Marta were—was quite thick and soft, Albrite now remembered. Anyone moving over it would make no sound. Then suddenly, without warning, slugs began tearing at him; came like leaden hail. He could hear the whine of them as they sped by; could hear the wood splinter as the slugs bit into the rim of the door-jamb behind which he crouched. The shots stopped. Cautiously, soundlessly, Albrite shifted his position. His thin lips twisted in a dangerous, murderous snarl. He thought now that he'd spotted some one in the right hand corner of the living room. He pumped three swift shots there and, without hesitating, flung four shots into the opposite corner. There came a dull thud, as of a heavy body falling. But there was no other sound.

With automatic poised, Albrite waited calmly, coolly. A chill current swept through the place. But he did not seem to feel it. Nor the silence, the darkness, which would have terrorized a normally sensitive person.

Then the lights flashed on again—all of them. Albrite blinked several times. His eyes slid about. The big room seemed deserted, save for a huddled form in the right hand corner—a form sprawled in an awkward sitting position on the floor, body twisted, right arm hooked over the upholstered arm of a chair. It was Otto, automatic still clutched in his hand, dead.

**A**LBRITE'S thin lips twisted in a smile. He slid his eyes to the left. The front door was open. Faint crimson drops led to it. Either Marta or Slim had been struck. But both of them had fled. And so, apparently, had Madden. Albrite sprang to the door, peered out, in time



to see the twin tail-lights of an auto speeding down the hill.

With a pantherish leap he landed in the driveway, his gun-barrel trained at the fleeing car. The red tail-lights slid rapidly out of sight behind the snowy crag-shoulder. The sound of its racing motor faded, died away. For a moment Albrite hesitated, peering down the road, then he turned back to the house. His thin lips drew together in a straight, grim line.

He passed through the door, closed it behind him. He glanced about the room at the faint blood-spots on the thick rug, the upholstered chair pulled slightly awry by the weight of Otto's slumped body. Then he remembered Bunny, waiting in the parked car. Drawing his overcoat about him, he once more started for the door, then stopped short. From the icy stillness outside soared the sound of voices raised in shouts and laughter. A man's voice, booming above the others, said: "Good Old Quinn. He's waiting for us with the eats. And, boys and girls, am I hungry?"

Albrite heard a babel of agreement. Then he sensed the situation—it was a party of young men and women from the lake, arriving on skis. They'd arranged with Quinn to have supper prepared for them. That's why the fish . . . . In a flash, Albrite was beside Otto's sprawled body. The big man had been struck, vitally, by only one slug. The wound in his chest was clean, bloodless. He had bled internally. Albrite grasped the huge frame and dragged it into the kitchen, then came back into the room, shutting the door behind him.

He stood in the center of the room, cool and somber-faced, as the front door opened and the group of boys and girls, loudly chattering, surged in, skis flung over their shoulders. They stopped suddenly, stared, ceased all talking, when they saw him.

Albrite spoke quietly. "You'll have to call off your party."

The group eyed him curiously, then began stacking their skis along the wall by the door. A slim, red-haired girl, in a striped sweater and long corduroys,

stepped in front of him, said: "Why? Is there anything wrong?"

"There is nothing wrong," said Albrite evenly, "but the party's off. You'd better leave."

The redhead drew off a knitted cap, shook her curls. "Where's Mr. Quinn?" she spoke quite levelly, too, and Albrite knew from the open, questioning gaze in her clear blue eyes that he would have to be very, very careful.

He said: "Quinn no longer works here. Mr. Harrimore got onto these little parties he's been giving. He didn't like it. So Quinn had to go."

The redhead gazed quite frankly at Albrite for a moment. Then she threw her cap onto a chair. "That's too bad about Quinn. And there's no supper ready, then?"

Albrite shook his head, smiled coldly. "No."

"Who are you?" she said suddenly.

Albrite thrust his hands into his overcoat pockets. His eyes swept the gathering in cold appraisal. He said suavely: "I'm a private detective—from Sacramento. Mr. Harrimore sent me to investigate. Now will you go!" The note in his voice was ominous.

Dropping quite unconcernedly onto a divan, the redhead said: "My feet are wet." She began unlacing her shoes. "And I couldn't think of leaving without first having something to eat, a highball—anything."

Albrite's mind worked rapidly. He'd get them settled down for a moment, in time to get out. He said: "Everybody sit down. Wait here. I'll mix some drinks for you . . . . No—" as the redhead arose—"I'll get them. Sit down."

There was a shower of caps and mittens, and a clatter of loud talk as the visitors made a rush for chairs. As Albrite closed the kitchen door behind him he glanced back, saw the redhead easing off her shoes, holding wet toes in her hands.

In the kitchen Albrite hurdled the bodies of the dead men, threw open the side door, sped around the corner of the house and across the circular drive. He stopped, cursed furiously. Too late! His



thin lips closed together in a straight line and he gave a short throaty growl as he realized that he should not have trusted that rabbit-faced driver. Crawford and the car were gone. He cursed Crawford—and Madden. It was now clear what had happened. Madden had rushed out of the house and ordered the driver to drive away as quickly as possible.

Albrite, thin lips still drawn, looked about—across the snow that covered everything, the farmhouse roof, the trees, the hillside. Escape across that white expanse was impossible—now. Then his thoughts went back to the group inside. He knew he would have to act quickly—get back into the house to prevent some meddlesome fool from stumbling into the kitchen, discovering the bodies.

Back across the drive, he streaked and in the kitchen door. Cursing, he hurried about, flinging open doors and drawers, searching for cocktail ingredients. As he flung the drinks together, he cursed himself for not having torn the phone from the wall. Then he remembered he had not seen a phone and that he'd really been too busy to look for one.

The drinks he finally poured into the glasses were sloppily mixed—but strong. He'd made sure to put a double quantity of gin into the shaker. With the tray-full of glasses, he walked gravely into the living room and served cocktails.

FOR a moment there was silence as the visitors sipped their drinks, passed cigarettes, lighted them. Then as Albrite was on his way to the kitchen again the front door opened softly, and a stranger entered. Albrite paused, turned about and saw a thick, heavy, dark-browed man, the brim of his felt hat drawn down over his keen, hard eyes.

The visitors paused in the midst of their drinking, looked at the intruder warily. The stranger closed the door behind him, strode into the middle of the room, eyed the gathering speculatively. Albrite placed the empty tray on a side table, and began to edge toward the front door. The stranger was a detective. Al-

brite was sure. It was written all over the man's features. Suddenly the intruder barked: "Where's Quinn?"

Members of the skiing party looked at each other questioningly. Then they made a series of amazed gasping sounds as there came a sharp scream from another room. Every light went out.

Albrite, sliding by the skis ranged along the wall, heard the detective cry: "The safe! Some one's at the safe! Closing it! The lights go off when it's closed."

In that awful moment of darkness, followed by the terrified scream of a woman, Albrite's fingers closed about a pair of skis by the door. He was tiptoeing forward when the lights flashed on again, just as suddenly as they had winked out. The detective exclaimed: "Now the safe door's closed again."

There came a sound of running steps, a woman's voice crying hysterically: "It's gone. The necklace!"

The room became a bedlam. Men and women jumped up, ran about shouting questions in utter confusion. But despite the commotion there were two in the room who were utterly calm. Albrite and the detective.

The detective, looking very hard at Albrite, thundered: "Quiet. Everybody quiet."

The noise subsided somewhat; the room became partly still.

Then from the landing on the stairs came the sound of some one furiously dialing the telephone. A woman's voice shouted: "Police! Mr. Harrimore's house has been robbed."

Silently Albrite cursed the woman for a prowling, meddling fool.

The detective, his keen, hard eyes darting about the room, said: "Sit down. All of you." Then as his eyes rested on Albrite, "You, too!" Albrite's lips twisted in a thin smile. His thoughts turned swiftly to the necklace in his pocket, the bodies on the kitchen floor. In that moment, standing there by the door with the detective's hard glare upon him, he knew he would have to kill the man. And the fingers of his hand flexed involuntarily. There was no other way out. Something



in the detective's manner told him plainer than any words that could be said that the detective was fully apprized of the situation. No doubt the detective had been sent there to watch Quinn—to do the very thing that Albrite had told the visitors that Albrite was there for.

The twisted smile still on his lips, Albrite's fingers plucked at the butt of his automatic in his coat pocket. All he had to do was to turn his wrist ever so lightly downward and the gun barrel would point directly at the detective's heart.

And his fingers were slowly, surely closing about the gun butt when another scream was heard, this time from the back of the house—the kitchen. Again members of the skiing party were thrown into a shocked silence. A voice, startled, high-pitched, said:

"My God—what's happened?"

Albrite's eyes, now filled with a murderous gleam, slid toward the kitchen door. He cursed the red-haired girl for a prying wench as she ran shoeless into the room, her blue eyes, wide, staring.

"He's dead! Quinn! Somebody else, too!"

The detective never turned. But kept his eyes glued on Albrite. Suddenly there was the sound of three swift reports—from Albrite's gun. And the murderous gleam in Albrite's reddish-brown eyes grew stronger as he saw the detective lurch forward and fall onto his knees.

**I**N the stunned silence that followed, Albrite grasped the pair of skis standing by the front door, sprang out into the night. For a split-second he stopped, threw the skis on the ground. On the driveway twenty feet away was the detective's car. There was one chance in a thousand that it would not be locked. Albrite opened the car door, pressed down the starting pedal with his hand. The starter gave a protesting growl, but the engine did not turn over. Albrite gave another push downward. Still the engine failed to respond.

With a throaty growl, he flung himself from the car, picked up the skis. There was a businesslike calm about him as he sped around to the rear of the house.

Back there was a barrier of trees. In the shadow of a thick-bodied pine he stopped, fumbled with the skis, awkwardly adjusting them onto his shoes.

Behind him, in the house with its blazing lights, there rose an excited clamor, the loud banging of doors, men's voices calling. There was a rush of footsteps; a spatter of bullets flailed about him.

Albrite smiled confidently as he straightened up on the skis. He started off in the shadows, then one leg slid from under him and he found himself floundering helplessly, sprawled in the snow. His smile vanished, his thin lips grew taut. With some difficulty he struggled up, tried again. This time he pushed forward a full dozen paces before he fell again. His confidence returned. In the dozen paces he had negotiated he'd learned something of the manipulation of the things. Another try and he'd have the knack of it. At least he'd be able to handle the skis expertly enough to elude the men following him.

In fact he did seem to be leaving them behind as he pushed through the deep shadows of the barrier and beyond it where he found himself looking down at the lake across a precipitous declivity. The treeless descent in front of him lay white and gleaming under the stars. While below the ice-covered lake, cupped in the hills, reposed in dark outline, motionless, mysterious.

As he sped down the declivity, the cold air whipping the blood into his cheeks, pressing his overcoat tightly against his bent knees, Albrite saw the lights of a village in the distance. The lights of Brewer—high up on the hill on the far side of the lake. Directly below him the lake should not be more than two miles wide. Traveling at sixty miles an hour as he was now, the momentum should cause him to ski halfway across the lake. The remaining distance across wouldn't take long to negotiate. At Brewer he'd take a taxi back to the city.

His hand flew to his side, pressed against his coat pocket. His thin lips twisted in a smile. The necklace was there. Safe. He felt its hard uneven out-



line. All his! There'd be no splits—with Madden, with anyone. Forty-five thousand dollars' worth of ice—right on his person. And the odds with him to make a clean getaway.

Below him, in black shadow, was the lake, its surface thickness cold and still and deserted in the night's small hours. Under him the curved toes of his skis dropped over the last thin ridge, plunged down the descent. The runners whined as they leaped forward across the snow.

Albrite's heart pounded to the thrill of it. Sport! Speed! This was something like it. Why hadn't he tried this sport before?

In a final burst of speed, the runners leaped toward the thick ice-surface of the lake. They straightened out—toward the lights of Brewer. Freedom! Then, suddenly, Albrite gave a furious twist of his body, tried to swing about, swerve, to avoid the black square that loomed directly ahead. But too late. Like a bird wounded in flight, his hurtling body dropped through the black hole made that very afternoon by the ice-cutters. The hole from which Quinn had snared the fish.

The next day they found him—Albrite—his skis tangled in Quinn's fish-net.



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# Powdered Clues

By RALPH POWERS

Author of "Bullet Bluff," etc.

**J**IM BROSSET drove along the lonesome dirt road in New Jersey at that stale hour of early morning when the very air tastes fagged and flat. Not a single light blinked in the windows of the few dwellings that bordered the back road. The three-quarter moon was high. Flying foxes, those thin wispy clouds, skirled across the face of it. A thin mist rose from the dank lowlands so that at times the beam from the one working headlamp of Brosset's car had difficulty in stabbing through. An hour before Jim Brosset had been roused out of a sound slumber by the persistent ringing of the telephone standing on his bed table.

"Ward man calling," a voice had crackled over the wire. "Had a call from Matteawan. Mandville's out. A keeper was found tied up in his cell. Must've been there four hours before he was found. Mandville's sure to go to that house of his on Saddle River I'm betting, Brosset. His wife's out there—alone. Better get going. You remember Mandville!"

As Brosset drove along, senses lulled by the monotonous whir of the engine, he recalled the Mandville case and all its lurid headlines. The man had been adjudged insane following the discovery that his aged housekeeper, suffering from an incurable disease, had been given an overdose of sleeping powders. Evidence that he had administered the dose had been damning.

At the trial, testimony had been given that Mandville had once put to death a collie dog which had been struck by an automobile. The State had pointed out that the animal had not suffered a mortal wound. Mandville was declared a men-

ace to society and alienists had rendered an opinion that he was mentally deranged.

"He'll probably head for that house," Brosset said to himself with assurance. "You never can tell what nuts will do. If Mandville was only half gone when they sent him up, he'll have gone the rest of the way by now. Generally they knock off the ones they like best, I've heard."

The Mandville house squatted on top of a bank that sloped down to a rushing stream, erroneously called a river. A tacky old colonial structure, the house was sadly in need of remodeling. On three sides there was a piazza through the roof of which a massive chimney penetrated at each end of the building. There seemed an air of grimness about the place as Jim Brosset swung his car off the road, and let it churn in second gear along the rutted driveway.

Brosset was halfway to the house when the stillness was shorn by the sound of a shot. He stopped the car instantly to listen. It seemed that he had heard a short cry above the protesting squeal of dirty brakes. Still another sound manifested itself—a disturbance that reminded Brosset of sounds he had heard up on a far-away lake during his vacation. It was the noise a trout makes when it breaks water.

"Sounds as if I got here just too late," Brosset clipped dryly, stepping on the starter to cover the remaining distance to the Mandville house.

Two more cars were parked in the shadows in the rear of the house as Brosset turned off the ignition, and climbed out of his roadster. Brows knitted, he studied them for a moment but was in-



terrupted by a woman's frightened scream. Instantly galvanized into action, Brosset yanked out his gun, ran for the house. He found the back door open, and plunged through the entrance. An olio of voices came from upstairs as he hurried through the kitchen to the front hall calling:

"Any help needed?"

A woman, eyes wide, hand clasped to her throat, stopped on the stairway. "Who are you?" she asked hoarsely.

"Detective," replied Brosset shortly. "What's happened? Did he get here?"

"He's somewhere in the house," the woman quaked. "He just killed Doctor Thorne." As if expecting Brosset's natural query, she hastened to explain. "I sent for the doctor when I heard about my husband's escape — also Mr. Tracey who was Mr. Mandville's attorney. I thought they'd be able to do something if he came here. But—"

Brosset waited to hear no more but ran up the stairs. He entered a bedroom where a man lay sprawled on the rich carpeting. A bullet wound just above the man's heart was causing a crimson stain to spread on his clothing. The detective knelt down. An odor of whiskey assailed his nostrils. Although already blanched by the hand of death, the dead face seemed unnaturally bloated. Brosset stood up, swept the faces of two men who were the other occupants of the room.

"I'm Henry Tracey," the taller of the two introduced himself. "I was Mr. Mandville's attorney — Mrs. Mandville sent for Thorne and myself. This man is from the Newark police." He designated the thick-set man.

"Yeah," the Newark officer put in, "I know you now, Brosset. I come here right away when I got the word that Mandville had escaped. Brought another guy with me. He's watchin' outside."

"Funny he didn't come in," said Brosset, "when he heard—say, I heard that shot! Mandville can't be far away. Tell me what happened."

Tracey swallowed hard, and spoke.

"We were down in the living room. We thought that it would be best to stay together. But Thorne seemed scared out of

his wits. He'd been drinking heavily before he got here. He felt a little sick so Mrs. Mandville suggested that he go upstairs and lie down. Thorne seemed willing enough so I brought him up here. Mrs. Mandville said she'd get him a blanket from the linen closet. I was no sooner downstairs again than I heard a shot. Mrs. Mandville screamed, and we ran upstairs fast. We found her outside the door of her room lying in a heap. Then we came in here and found Thorne dead. I ran down the hall toward the backstairs—and that's what I found." He pointed to something on the bed.

**D**ETEKTIVE BROSSET picked it up and studied it with an expressionless face. It was a felt slipper such as is issued to the inmates of asylums. A trace of mud was on the slipper, mud that had just begun to dry around the edges. Brosset shot a look at the detective.

"Where were you? Why didn't you watch the woman? You knew—"

"Brosset," the man declared seriously, "we searched this house from top to bottom when we got here. We figured that he couldn't be in the house. If he should come in when we were all upstairs, he would be able to hide somewhere and I wanted to make sure he couldn't. And with the guy outside—well, Tracey and Thorne were with Mrs. Mandville so I didn't think—"

Brosset nodded understandingly. "Sounds logical. No gun anywhere?"

"We couldn't find one," Tracey said. "Mandville must have it. We'd better look around. He must be hidden somewhere."

"Why don't you search the place?" the demented man's wife asked, her voice breaking hysterically. "He'll kill me!"

"Yes," agreed Tracey, "we'd better—"

Just then a voice cut in from below. It called out a name, then broke off. Brosset heard a gasp of pain, a heavy thud as if the person had fallen. He dashed down the stairs, saw a man slumped against the wall near the front door in the hall. He was struggling to rise when Brosset reached him. Clawlike fingers were digging into his hip. Blood soaked the man's trouser-leg.



"McGann," he called out painfully.

The detective from Newark shoved Jim Brosset aside and seized the stricken man by the shoulders.

"Did he get you, Nolan?"

"Somebody did," gasped the injured officer. "Through the hip."

"That's damned funny," Brosset shot at Tracey who stood by in stricken silence. "Two men shot at—and I only heard one gun go off. How many did you hear, Nolan?"

"Only one," came the surprising rejoinder, "but there might've been two. Maybe when that slug hit me I couldn't hear any more."

"You need a doctor," Brosset said grimly. "But the only one here is a stiff." He turned to Mrs. Mandville. "Get some hot water and some cloth—some anti-septic. You and Tracey fix this wound." He looked around. "Where is Tracey? Nobody gets out of my sight . . . Tracey!"

The attorney appeared from the kitchen, a heavy candlestick in his hand. "Thought I'd take a look around," he said. "Mandville must be here."

"He could have gotten out when Nolan here was shot, couldn't he?" Brosset gritted. "I'll bet he's nowhere near here right now. Say, was Thorne one of the doctors who—"

Mrs. Mandville nodded. "He was a psychiatrist," she said. "He was a close friend of my husband."

"Then if Mandville caught up with him," said Brosset, "he'd sure start in on Thorne, wouldn't he?"

Tracey nodded in agreement, brushing a white particle from his sleeve. "The maid left flour on the board out there," he explained to Brosset. "She up and scooted when she heard a crazy man had escaped and might be heading here."

Brosset sniffed and looked toward Mrs. Mandville. She was tearing a lacy handkerchief to shreds with agitated fingers. She seemed to sense that death was not far away.

"We should have gone, too," she said, eying Tracey angrily. "All this would not have happened. Poor Dr. Thorne and this man here—you were stupid, Mr.

Tracey. But you would insist that he might not be insane."

"There is no need for crying over spilt milk," the lawyer bridled. "I was John Mandville's friend. I did not want him subjected to any brutal treatment—"

Brosset waved a hand impatiently. "This is no time to argue," he snapped. "Get into that living room, all of you. Don't move out of it. You, McGann, you see that no one does. There's a demented man loose. He'll shoot anyone on sight. I'm going upstairs."

In the bedroom where lay Dr. Thorne's body he remained in puzzled silence for perhaps five minutes. At last he turned away from the body and began to study the room. Not a thing was disturbed. No possible hiding place for a weapon was overlooked by the detective. Mandville, then, was still in possession of the gun, perhaps was skulking somewhere close by, his twisted brain scheming to add another victim to his bloody night's work. Once a man escapes an asylum, Brosset mused, he will kill rather than be taken back. And, too, if those who were connected with his incarceration in the tomb of living men are all about him, as in this case, he will not be content to let a single one live.

He had started down the hall when a sound rooted him in his tracks.

The sound was repeated and this time Brosset resumed his way, shrugging. Some one down in the living room had coughed, that was all. He found the door of Mrs. Mandville's room open. It was a luxurious boudoir and the sweet night air, coming in through an open window, billowed dainty lace curtains draped around the frame. The window overlooked a rock garden and goldfish pool on the slope in the rear of the house. Stroking his stubbled chin reflectively, Brosset looked out. Suddenly his hand dropped. One curtain had been blown against his nose. As it fell away again he clutched at it and held it close to his nose.

THE detective's heart leaped as he dropped the curtain and went to a dressing table to snap on a light. Again he examined the curtain, saw that the



whiteness of it was fouled in one place. Brosset left the window and began to look about the room, opening closet doors carefully. But there was no trace of the deranged man. A call from downstairs scattered his calculations for the moment, and he hustled down to the living room. McGann's man, Nolan, was in great pain. The detective was stretched on a couch, face white and drawn, teeth clenched.

"I've called the medical examiner," said McGann. "The bullet must have splintered his hip."

Brosset turned to Mrs. Mandville. "Where's Thorne's medicine case? He'd have had sedatives and all that, wouldn't he? Maybe we could find something to give Nolan until the doc gets here. If Thorne expected to meet Mandville here, he must have been prepared to quiet him."

"Yes," Tracey agreed, "his bag is in the hall with his overcoat. I'll get it—"

Brosset said: "You stay here. I'll get Thorne's case."

Once in the hall, the detective picked up Thorne's overcoat. He reached into the inside pocket and drew out several papers. He examined them hurriedly, then put them into his own pocket before reappearing in the living room with the medicine case. He opened it up, began to remove various articles necessary to a doctor's profession. He brought forth a small bottle labeled *Morphine* which he regarded with a lowering of his brows.

"He carried the stuff all right," he said, "but where's the hypo syringe? Doctors never forget those things. That would be the logical instrument to quiet a mental case, don't you think, Tracey?"

The attorney nodded.

"I certainly would like to know what happened before that shot was fired," snapped Brosset. "Was Thorne—"

"A man who had been drinking could not be expected to remember anything," said McGann.

"I should think not," Mrs. Mandville put in nervously. "Thorne has been going to pieces the last few months. He neglected his practice entirely. Mr.

Mandville and he were close friends. He brooded—"

"For a man who had no business," Brosset remarked dryly, "he dressed well. He has a big diamond on his finger and the car outside, if it belonged to him, is good enough for a Wall Street financier. Maybe he saved his money, Tracey."

The attorney laughed. "Maybe. He had a very rich clientele at one time," he said. "But this is not finding Mandville, Brosset," he changed the subject irritably.

Brosset's hair lifted as a piercing scream shot from the woman's throat. Tracey whirled with a startled curse. Mrs. Mandville, face taut with terror, pointed to a window.

"He looked in," she said chokingly. "I saw his face!"

Detective Brosset was outside the house almost before she had finished speaking. But there was no sign of a living thing in the murk except the ceaseless serenade of insects. For two or three minutes Brosset hunted around the house, eyes probing the night. He was about to return to the house when he heard a plaintive creak of hinges. Going toward the sound, he found a cellar door swinging open. He stepped into the basement. A gust of wind slammed the door shut behind him.

As Brosset directed the beam of light over the place a snarl lashed out behind him. An arm encircled his neck, tightened like a vise. Blindly, the detective struggled while a confused, mad burst of mirth thundered in his ears. Senses reeling, he used all his might to wrest himself from the murderous grip. His body crashed against something, knocking it over, as he fought to keep his feet. Above the terrific roar in his ears sounded a voice—and he thought it shouted his name. The pressure on his throat was relaxed and he felt himself falling. Again that crazy laughter, again that voice yelling: "Brosset!"

A shot rang out, the report shocking the detective back to his senses. He was clambering to his feet dizzily when McGann reached his side.



"Just in time," exclaimed the Newark man excitedly. "Mandville jumped you."

"Yeah," Brosset grinned at his rescuer coldly. His eyes were drawn then to something on the floor. It was a can filled to the brim with ashes which had fallen over during his struggle with the madman. Something glittered in the scattered debris. Brosset stooped and retrieved it, a hypodermic syringe.

"Hidden in the ashes," he said to McGann. "Thorne was here before—"

"You're right," the other manhunter snapped. "He must have been. How did that madman get out of here, Brosset? He didn't go through the door."

"There must be a way to get into this cellar besides the door—and the kitchen stairs," Brosset said grimly. "You know, McGann, I found out something from those back windows upstairs. Both of them are only about twenty yards from that fish pool. And Nolan was standing down at the foot of the slope among the trees when he was shot at. McGann, come on—I've got it! You let me handle this thing my way—don't forget."

**J**IM BROSSET followed Detective McGann up the cellar stairs to the kitchen. There they met Tracey. The attorney's eyes were wide with alarm. Mrs. Mandville was behind him, face ashen.

"He got away," said Brosset, but his thoughts seemed to be far away from the people around him. In his mind he was racing back over the events of the last hour or two. His ears were conjuring up that sound once more, the sound trouts make when they leap for flies. A plopping sound. He preceded McGann, Tracey and Mrs. Mandville into the living room. There he whirled to face them.

"Take this gun," he said to Tracey. "You may need it. I'll trust to luck. We're going to search every part of this house. McGann, you remain here in this room with Mrs. Mandville."

"Now we'll get somewhere," declared the attorney as he took the gun from the detective's hand.

Brosset responded by saying: "You lead the way, Tracey. You know this

place better than I do. Shoot if you see anything move!"

The two men went upstairs, and began a systematic poking into every closet that opened off the big hall. Then they turned their steps into the bedroom where Dr. Thorne's body lay stiffening. Nothing appeared other than it had been in the first place. Each of the other rooms came under the men's scrutiny. Brosset, though outwardly cool, felt his scalp tingle as he and Tracey walked into a dank bedroom at the end of the hall.

Evidently it had not been used in all the time since Edmund Mandville had been committed to Matteawan. Although the windows were closed, a draught seemed to be coming from somewhere. As he passed the fireplace, the detective could feel it on his legs. He stopped, stabbed his flashlight beam that way.

Tracey mumbled something, took a step toward it. "That's peculiar," he said. "Looks to be something unbalanced about it. Brosset, look! It swung."

"Yeah," agreed the detective. "A secret passage. In an old house like this—just like you read in books. That's how he got down into the cellar. Maybe the way he escaped when he shot Thorne. Come on, Tracey. Lead the way."

The fireplace, as Brosset pulled, moved on hinges like a door. Gun ready, Tracey slipped through and almost fell headlong.

"Look out, Brosset," he said warningly. "It's a stairway leading downward."

Lips tight shut, Brosset followed the lawyer down two flights of wooden steps to a dirt-floored passageway below. At the foot of the stairway, the men stopped. Tracey caught the detective's sleeve. "I heard something," he whispered.

Brosset nodded, and murmured: "Go on ahead, Tracey. I'll light the way. You ought to make a good dick. You've got nerve."

"Thanks," Tracey said nervously, and walked down the passageway. Brosset allowed his own pace to lag. Abruptly Tracey froze, swung to the side.

"Here he is!" he ripped out. "Brosset, he's got a gun—"

The detective saw Henry Tracey stiffen, lift his weapon. But no shot split



the silence. A low curse came from the lawyer and the gun in his hand jerked viciously as he squeezed the trigger. Then he staggered back, face turned toward Jim Brosset. A moan sounded in the detective's ears as he walked slowly up to Tracey. A man staggered out of a crypt in the stone wall, fell to his knees. A gun dropped from his fingers, thudded on the dirt floor. It was Mandville!

Brosset's words were short and harsh. "Tracey, you're cooked!" He stabbed the light beam full into the lawyer's face. The man's handsome features were ghastly, ludicrous with shock.

Finally he found voice to jerk out: "Damn you, Brosset! You—"

"The gun wasn't loaded," the detective said quietly. "I saw to that before I gave it to you. I've got another one, though, and it *is* loaded. The one you planted on this poor devil. Stick out your paws!"

Mechanically Tracey obeyed.

"Get back up that passage!" Brosset barked at him. "Make a move, and I shoot." He stooped over the man on the earthen floor, his flashlight playing on Edmund Mandville's features. The eyes opened, and stared dully at Jim Brosset, the lips twitching with an effort to speak. The detective pulled him to his feet and dragged him along the passageway.

"Lead the way, Tracey!" Brosset said.

**M**ANDVILLE, with his senses returning slowly, became less of a dead weight as Jim Brosset made his way up the stairs. He was able to stumble along in the wake of the detective when they finally entered the living room.

The woman's eyes flashed with terror as she saw Tracey shuffle into the room, hands manacled in front of him. But the white face of the man who clung to Brosset robbed her of whatever composure she might have had in reserve. With a strangled cry she slumped to the floor in a dead faint.

Turning a deaf ear to the amazed McGann's queries, Brosset snapped: "Bring the woman around. I want her to listen when I start talking." He flung Tracey into a chair, nodded to the ambulance doctor who had arrived to attend Nolan.

The doctor soon revived Mrs. Mandville. As she was being settled in a chair, she stared blankly at Jim Brosset, white teeth biting into almost equally white lips.

"Tracey shot Thorne," began the detective, "the minute he showed the doctor into that room. He did it with a gun equipped with a silencer. Mrs. Mandville, you were in another room—your own. You fired a shot through the window while giving Tracey time to get downstairs. But you put the muzzle of the gun too close to the curtains. They were powder marked!"

"You lie!" the woman spat, her beauty erased by the venom beneath it. "You can't prove—"

"Tracey had powder marks on his sleeve, too," Brosset continued, unperturbed, "but they weren't flour. It smelled too sweet. It was powder that you use, Mrs. Mandville. I judge that you were quite friendly—"

The lawyer leaped out of his chair but McGann thrust him back into it.

"It happened that Nolan, here, was standing out there on watch," Brosset went on. "He stood right in line with that shot. It was an accidental hit, of course. But that was a bad break, too, Tracey! After you shot Thorne, you heaved your gun out of the window. It landed in the fish pool. You planted the slipper belonging to this—to Mr. Mandville here—"

Detective Brosset paused, and looked at the escaped madman. Madman? There seemed to be no light of insanity in Mandville's eyes. He simply sat staring at the face of his wife with an incredulous expression on his countenance. It was as if he were seeing something glaringly evident, yet something that he was reluctant to believe.

"When I got here tonight," he said slowly, "Dr. Thorne and Henry Tracey were here. They grabbed me when I spoke to them. I asked them to hide me—pleaded with them. But they just said that I was a lunatic and Thorne—he—"

"Go on," said Brosset kindly, "go on."

"I was in the cellar where I'd come to hide," Mandville continued in a suffer-



ing, timorous voice. "I called to them. Thorne and Tracey threw me onto the floor and the doctor plunged a needleful of morphine into my arm. I didn't know anything until I came to down there—with a gun in my hand." He shuddered, and covered his face with trembling hands.

"The gun that they wanted us to believe had shot Dr. Thorne!" Brosset grated. "Tracey, you and the woman framed him like you framed him once before. That's why she screamed although she saw no face at the window. She wanted to draw our attention away from you so that you'd get that gun she fired and take it down to plant in her husband's grasp. While you were down there, you lured me in by moving the cellar door. You were too anxious to start searching, Tracey!"

Tracey's face was livid.

"You were in love with each other, eh, Tracey, you and Mrs. Mandville? You had her husband railroaded to an asylum. Thorne was in on it. But he was bleeding Mrs. Mandville—blackmailing her. That was it, wasn't it, Tracey? He wanted money, kept on wanting it. He knew what price she could pay. So when he came here tonight, you and Tracey figured out this diabolical scheme. Dr. Thorne would be shot by Mandville, the maniac, just at the time that two detectives were on the scene. It would get rid of Thorne forever—and Mandville would go back there—for life unless—"

"Lies! All lies!" Tracey croaked, but guilt was etched unmistakably on his pasty face. "I didn't—"

"To think that you—Alice—" Mandville said in a voice that was barely audible. "You gave that woman the sleeping powders. You found them in my pocket. You sent me to—"

The woman was incapable of speech. Terror had gagged her. She sat like a corpse, eyes dulled and staring, possibly, at a vision of the grim instrument of death that would claim her.

"I found a note in Dr. Thorne's coat pocket," Brosset said. "It was a memo—it said 'Mrs. Mandville—\$500 by the 10th.' They had to get rid of Thorne all

right. Tracey would have gotten rid of me, too, if McGann had not shown up in the cellar. But when that arm went around my throat, I smelled that sweet aroma again—Mrs. Mandville's choice powder.

"The perfume lingered, Tracey. I knew you were the maniac, then, not Mr. Mandville. You thought I was getting to be too much of a problem. In our struggle we knocked over the ash can, and the hypodermic came to light. It was not very hard to gather up loose ends after that."

"Brosset," Mandville said hoarsely, "I owe you my life—my freedom. He would have killed me had that gun been loaded. He knew about that passageway. I remember showing it to him one time a few years ago. Thorne—her—"

"If Dr. Thorne had not been blackmailing Mrs. Mandville," put in Brosset, "you would simply have been shot by Tracey—in self-defense, of course. His story would have been that you came to kill the woman he wanted to marry. You would have been eliminated forever. But they wanted to keep you alive long enough to frame you for Dr. Thorne's murder. The doctor was an even greater menace to their plans than you were. It is all as clear as water. It just happened that I came in time to hear only one shot although two bullets had been fired. Time was the element in this case. Time! I imagine that Tracey will be interested in that element from now on for as it ticks away the chair will come closer."

"He made me do it!" the woman shrieked desperately, in a frenzy of fear. "He planned it—he fired the shot that killed—I'll tell everything! The gun is in the pool—the gun he used!"

"Shut up!" Tracey fairly screamed. "You can't save yourself by condemning me. I won't burn alone!"

"I think," said Jim Brosset, "that the fishpool should be drained. It contains the evidence that will convict both of them. Now I'll just pick up and get along home." He watched the officers taking the prisoners out.

"Powder marks, Tracey," he said. "Gun and face. They tripped you up."



# The Line-Up

By **MR. MYSTERY**

**F**OR long days and longer nights, I have been scheming how to make life miserable for detectives. In this issue you have just finished, my cloak of mystery has been badly damaged. Great holes have been torn in it by the Moon Man, Del Sarg, Captain Murdock, Wade Hammond, and those dizzy newshawks. But I have been figuring—and have found new ways to baffle detectives. And I have had admirable help, too. Frederick C. Davis has conspired with me to make the Moon Man the unhappiest fellow on earth. So now I'm ready to hang out Number One of my Worry List for the next issue. Here it is.

### The MASTER of MURDER RIVER

And that Master will give the Moon Man a great deal to worry about. So will Detective Lieutenant Gil McEwen. This time Gil McEwen will get a hot tip that will chill him to the marrow of his bones. For that tip will tell him pretty closely who the Moon Man is. And Sue McEwen—the lieutenant's daughter, and the Moon Man's sweetheart—will come in for grief. Frederick C. Davis will not forget the Angel, either. The Angel will be put to the greatest test of

his life—his loyalty to the Moon Man. So don't miss "The Master of Murder River" in the next issue.

Every one of you knows Captain Murdock. He is called "Hard-boiled" John Murdock. And he will need to be hard-boiled. He will need his guts and his guns—to meet the killer who will bring a reign of terror to Central City. So now I'll hang out my sign for Number Two on my Worry List.

### The SNATCH BUSTER

That is what my good friend, Carl McK. Saunders, has seen fit to call Captain Murdock. And Murdock will be smothered by my cloak of mystery while he carries that name. . . .

You might smile at my next sign for Number Four on my Worry List. Here it is.

### FUGITIVE FROM a CHAIN LETTER

Yes, you might smile. But Scoop and Snooty won't. Joe Archibald will tell you about it next month.

Now you might do a little checking-off here to let me know how you liked the work of my cloak this month.

**MR. MYSTERY.**

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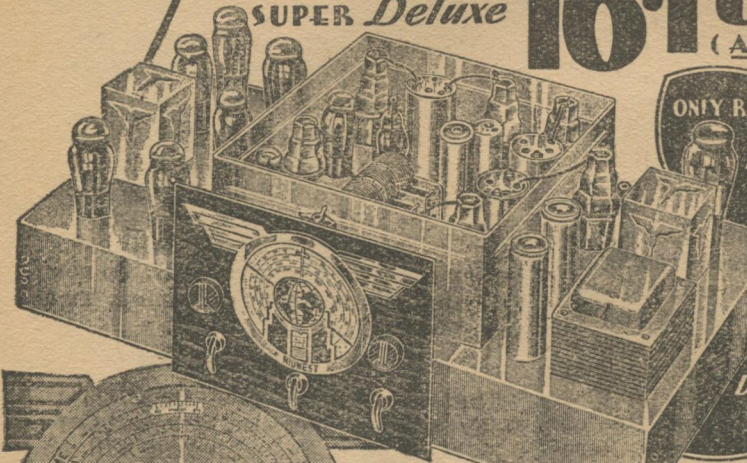
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Q. Will my son, born June 13, 1933, have good health?

A. Had your son been born a day sooner, he would not, I believe, outlived his infant years due to the Moon-Saturn opposition. However his health outlook is very excellent and he succeeds in life thru his magnetic personality. He will likely be an author.

Q. Before I married, I courted a girl who now threatens "breach of promise." How will this turn out?

A. You probably received this "threat" during the past 60 days when under adverse social aspects. You will never be sued by this person.

Q. Will I make more money in 1935 and what event of particular importance do you believe is in store for me during this period?

A. You will do much better in 1935 in a financial way. There's plenty of hard work and much success. Money you thought lost will be recovered.



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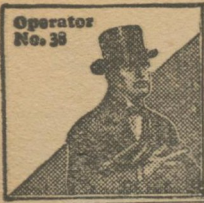
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28x5.50-18	3.25	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.25	1.15
... 6.00-16	3.75	1.45
... 6.00-17	3.40	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
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