

10-STORY DECEMBER ALL DIFFERENT! DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

10¢



THE KNAVES OF DIAMONDS

by W.T. BALLARD

NOW IT TAKES LESS THAN \$ / A MONTH TO



**INSURE YOUR
WHOLE FAMILY**

2 TO 6 PERSONS

Genuine LEGAL RESERVE
LIFE INSURANCE
FOR THE *Entire Family*

ONLY 3¢ A DAY!

Imagine being able to get \$1000.00 worth of genuine LEGAL RESERVE life insurance for your whole family, 2 to 6 persons, with DOUBLE and TRIPLE BENEFITS, for only \$1-a-month, or as low as 3c a day! Modern "DIRECT-BY-MAIL" insurance methods have made this possible . . . enabled old reliable Service Life Insurance Company to issue ONE policy at ONE LOW COST that covers every member of your family group.

Policy Pays For Death of ANY Member of Family Group From ANY CAUSE!

This remarkable policy provides TWO-WAY PROTECTION . . . pays YOU when any member of your family group dies, regardless of cause; and pays your family when you die. It also provides CONTINUOUS family protection. Death of one member of family does not terminate policy. Instead, it continues in force protecting other members of your family; and newcomers to family can be added at any time without extra cost.

**Policy Issued BY MAIL at BIG SAVINGS!
. . . NO MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS!**

Write for this policy today! Send no money! Let us mail you the Service "Family Group Policy" for 10 Days' Free Examination. No cost; and you need feel no obligation! Remember, a single dollar bill pays the monthly premium. NO medical examinations required. No red tape. No salesman will call.

Policy Sent FREE! MAIL COUPON FOR 10-DAY INSPECTION

Covers ANY RELATIVE, Ages 1 to 70! . . . Includes WIFE, HUSBAND, CHILDREN (married or unmarried, living at home or away), GRANDPARENTS, even IN-LAWS . . . in fact, ANY RELATIVE. NO medical examinations required; and the low rate of \$1 a month, or \$10.95 a year can never be increased. NO dues! NO assessments! This policy is everything you want! Write for it today for 10 Days' Free Inspection. No cost. No obligation.

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.

353 SERVICE LIFE BUILDING

Omaha 2, Nebr.

**FOR NATURAL DEATH OR FOR
ORDINARY ACCIDENTAL DEATH**

The Service Life "Family Group" Policy Pays up to . . . **\$1000.00**

PAYS DOUBLE BENEFITS FOR

AUTO ACCIDENTAL DEATH, up to . . . **\$2000.00**

PAYS TRIPLE BENEFITS FOR

TRAVEL ACCIDENTAL DEATH, up to . . . **\$3000.00**

EXTRA-LIBERAL BENEFITS above paid according to number insured under the policy and attained ages.

FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION COUPON

Fill in, Clip out, Paste on Penny Postal & Mail Today!

THE SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

353 Service Life Bldg., Omaha 2, Nebr.

Without cost or obligation, send me your FAMILY GROUP POLICY for 10-DAY FREE INSPECTION.

Name _____

Address _____ Age _____

City _____ State _____

10-STORY DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

ALL STAR
ALL DIFFERENT

Vol. X

December, 1944

No. 4

- ★ **THE KNAVES OF DIAMONDS (Novelet) W. T. Ballard 4**
Hired to guard hot-ice sparklers, Kennerson finds himself cut out for the main attraction in a .45 setting.
- ★ **CARBOLIC COCKTAIL William Rough 22**
To settle a vengeance mission in life, the doctor drinks to his own death.
- ★ **LADY-KILLER CHILLER ("Alvin Hinkey" Yarn)**
Joe Archibald 31
Gotham's defective detective looks for a blood-red Riding Hood to solve a wolf slaying.
- ★ **REPENT AT SEIZURE David M. Norman 39**
Heckled by the dead, Bob Blaine has to find a more effective muzzle than bullets.
- ★ **HOT ON SATAN'S HEELS Lawrence DeFoy 43**
Detective Saunders can't drop the case that had dropped him.
- ★ **PENNIES FROM HADES L. W. Carmichael 51**
The price of Wayne Bessemer's doom is three red cents.
- ★ **THE WHISTLING WITNESS Jim Kjelgaard 55**
Even the dark hills can find a secretary for gallows evidence.
- ★ **HOMICIDE HOAX Talmage Powell 57**
A murder he'd never committed traps Ralph Smith in the jaws of homicide justice.
- ★ **DOUBLE-CROSS FIRES Robert S. Fenton 63**
Because police dick Riker had burned his hands with crook gold, his partner is slated to roast.
- ★ **HOT-LEAD HEADLINES Emil Petaja 67**
The little newsy has an eye for a noose and a heart for a bullet.
- ★ **GOOD MOURNING, KILLER! (Extra Story This Month)**
Rex Whitechurch 71
Sid Marvaunt could hang any jury—except his own.

Cover by Ernest Chiriacka

10-STORY DETECTIVE, published bi-monthly by Periodical House, Inc. A. A. Wyn, President. Office of Publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield, 3, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 67 West 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y. Entered as Second Class matter, October 15, 1937, at the Post Office at Springfield, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1944, Periodical House, Inc. For advertising rates address Ace Fiction Group, 67 West 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y. While great care is exercised in the handling of manuscripts this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. Yearly subscription, 60 cents; single copy, 10 cents.





Now ANY AUTO REPAIR JOB Can Be "Duck Soup" For You!

MoToR's New AUTO REPAIR MANUAL
Shows You How to Service and Repair
ANY Part of ANY Car!

FREE 7-DAY OFFER!



NOW you can "polish off" the HARDEST jobs the EASIEST way! MoToR's AUTO REPAIR MANUAL is ready to show you how to repair anything from carburetor to rear end—with the least possible amount of time and effort!

Suppose plain-talking car engineers from every auto plant in America got together and showed you all the things you needed to know about repairing and servicing the cars they had designed and manufactured! That's really what you get in this big manual! Right at your fingertips, the main "dope"

from 150 Official Factory Shop Manuals, covering every make car built since 1935!

Easy to use, tool Quick-index leads you to right page in jiffy! Just follow simple instructions step-by-step.

SEE HOW MUCH YOU GET!

640 pages, 8½x11 inches, bound in sturdy covers. 200,000 service, repair, adjustment, replacement, tune-up facts on all makes and models, 1936 to 1942. More than 1000 cut-away photos, diagrams, drawings show you exactly WHAT to do and HOW to do it. Used by U. S. Army, trade and technical schools everywhere, thousands of auto servicemen.

Now YOU—without cost—can see for yourself what a wonderbook MoToR's Auto Repair Manual really is. TRY it—FREE for 7 days! Learn first-hand how it can pay for itself the first few times you use it.

SEND NO MONEY 7-Day Free Examination

Just mail coupon at right, without money! When the postman brings your book, pay him nothing. First make it show you what it's got! Unless you agree this is the greatest time-saver and work-saver you've ever seen—return book in 7 days and pay nothing. Mail coupon today! Address: MoToR Book Dept., Desk 35P, 572 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

Published by MoToR, The Leading Automotive Business Magazine. MoToR's manuals assure high standard repair work.

Covers All These Makes!

American
Bantam
Auburn
Austin
Buick
Cadillac
Chevrolet
Chrysler
Cord
De Soto
Dodge
Ford
Graham
Hudson
Hupmobile
Lafayette
La Salle
Lincoln

Lincoln
Zephyr
Mercury
Nash
Overland
Oldsmobile
Packard
Pierce Arrow
Plymouth
Pontiac
Reo
Studebaker
Terraplane
Willys

USED BY
U. S.
ARMY

Clear, Pictured Facts on Every Job on Every Car Built Since 1935!

Nearly 200,000 service and repair facts on all 30 makes. 640 big pages; including 50 pages of carburetor text, charts, illustrations, covering all models. Over 450 charts, tables; Tune-up Chart; Valve Measurements; Compression Pressure; Torque Wrench Reading; Starting Motor; Engine Clearances; Generator; Clutch & Brake Specifications; Front End Measurements, etc., Engines; Electric, Fuel, Cooling, Lubricating Systems; Transmissions; Universals; Front Ends; Wheels; Rear Ends, etc.

Same FREE 7-Day Offer Applies on New MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL

For mechanics, truck specialists, service stations, fleet owners. Covers EVERY job on EVERY truck made since 1936! 1400 pictures, 900 pages, 300,000 facts. Used by Armed Forces.

All types Gasoline Engines, Diesels, Hesselman, Fuel Systems, Governors, Lubrication Systems, Ignition Systems, Starters, Generators, Clutches, Transmissions, Axles, Torque Dividers, Transfer Cases, Brakes, Steering, etc.

ALSO SERVICES buses, farm and industrial tractors, contractor and road building equipment, stationary power machinery, etc. (on all parts described in Manual.)

Check box in coupon at right.



MAIL COUPON NOW FOR 7-DAY FREE TRIAL

MoToR Book Dept., Desk 35P, 572 Madison Ave., New York 22, N.Y. Rush to me at once: (check box opposite book you want).

MoToR's AUTO REPAIR MANUAL (formerly "MoToR's Factory Shop Manual"). If O.K. I will remit \$1 in 7 days, \$1 monthly for 4 months, plus 35c delivery charge with final payment (\$5.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book postpaid in 7 days. (Foreign price, remit \$7 cash with order).

MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL. (Described at left in the box.) If O.K., I will remit \$2 in 7 days, and \$2 monthly for 3 months, plus 35c delivery charges with final payment (\$8.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book postpaid in 7 days. (Foreign, remit \$11 with order).

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone No. _____ State _____
(if any)

Occupation _____

SAVE 35c! Check here if enclosing full payment (check, money order) WITH coupon. We pay 35c shipping cost.



Gripping Murder Novelette

CHAPTER I

DID you ever see a man fall from a ten-story window? I did. I was standing before the Marcus Hotel, trying to make up my mind to go in when I heard the cry.

It was like nothing that I've ever heard in this world. I hope I never hear a sound like it again.

I looked up to see him hurtling down. The fall took seconds only, but they seemed an eternity.

I was unable to drag my eyes from the falling figure. There was nothing to do, no way to save him, but I did manage to close my eyes. When I opened them he was an inert mass upon the sidewalk.

I should have run. That was my impulse. Instead, my feet carried me toward the broken body. For some

reason it was no surprise when I realized that the dead man was Henrick Arnst.

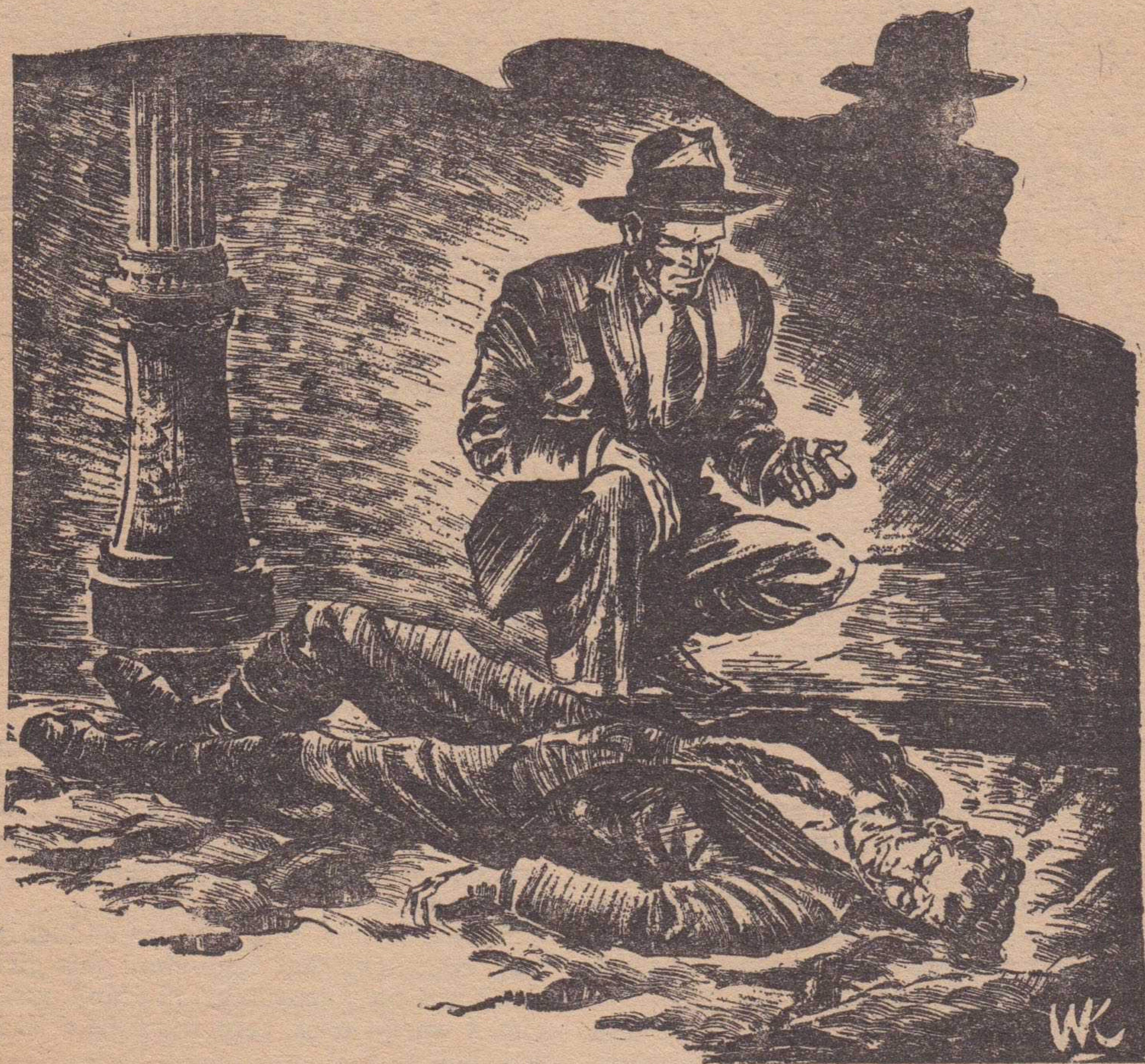
I bent down beside him, regretting that I hadn't contacted him sooner. I'd followed him to this hotel, watched him register, but I'd gone away then, back to Clark to ask for more instructions.

There was something strange about Arnst's actions. The man had an apartment on the far side of town, one he had occupied for months. Why then had he come to this hotel? Why had he asked for the return of the diamonds and carried

The Knaves of Diamonds

By W. T. Ballard

Strong-arm man Kennerson could toss those live gem-snatchers around with ease, but he couldn't cope with the dead. And when the ghost of the blockbusting diamond dealer returned to haunt the hot-ice trail, Kennerson found himself cut out for the main attraction in a .45 setting.



them away from the auction rooms with him?

I ran my hands over his broken body. I might have been seeking a sign of life. I wasn't. I was feeling for the money belt into which I'd seen him put the

stones. It wasn't around his waist, nor were the gems in his pockets.

His face was twisted from the fall, but it still showed thin, knifelike scars on each side. I stared at them, trying to recall if they had been there when Arnst

had first introduced himself several weeks before. I couldn't remember.

I started to rise. Then I saw the diamond in the dust at the edge of the sidewalk.

I picked it up, rising as I did so, holding it between my thumb and forefinger, hardly conscious of the little man who was standing at my side until he spoke.

"Pretty, isn't it?"

I turned. His face was thin, his nose pointed, and his eyes were blue, odd and blank as were the windows of an empty house.

"Yes," I said, wondering at the little shiver which ran its course up my spine. "Yes, pretty. I shouldn't drop it carelessly." I turned away, but his voice stopped me.

"Wait," he said. There was a note of mockery in his tone. "You dropped a second one."

I turned back to see him stoop, to see his long fingers pick another stone from the dust. I was amazed when he slid it into my palm. For I was certain that he knew the stones weren't mine, but that they had come from the dead man's hand.

I TURNED again. This time I went hurriedly away. A crowd had already gathered. I forced my way toward the hotel entrance, leaving them chattering like a cage full of excited monkeys.

I wanted to search Arnst's room. I had to search it before the police would arrive. It was suddenly very important that I get there first. I'd seen two of the stones; I didn't want the police finding the others.

The lobby was small, narrow and dark with leather seats strung along one wall. It was empty now. Even the clerk had hurried from behind the desk to join the sidewalk crowd. Far away a siren cut the late afternoon air, and the sound made me hurry.

I ignored the elevator, taking the stairs two at a time. It was too much to expect that the door of Arnst's room would be unlocked, but it gave as I grasped the knob. I slipped inside, shutting it behind me, pausing to give the room a quick inspection.

It was like any other room in a mid-priced hotel; yellow walls a little too close together, green carpet well worn, the bed slightly lumpy in appearance.

I gave it no more than a glance, mov-

ing directly toward the closet. What I sought would probably be locked in one of his suitcases. I couldn't imagine him leaving a belt full of diamonds lying carelessly in a drawer.

I pulled the door open and then stopped. There were no bags inside, nothing. The closet was entirely empty. I shrugged and turned back toward the bed, thinking that certainly the cases must be under the sagging springs. I dropped to my knees and peered under the frayed edge of the freshly laundered spread.

Nothing broke the expanse of the green carpet save a few grey-white clusters of gathered lint.

I was still on my knees beside the bed when I heard the door behind me open. I had no chance to rise, no time to free the gun from my pocket. I looked up into the plain mirror of the dresser and saw framed in its glassy depths the image of one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen.

Her hair was red, dark and rich like well-worn mahogany, with nothing caroty about it.

She wore furs, as if they belonged to her, warm mink, that had cost a fortune. Her costume was right, her appearance, perfect, but the gun in her small gloved hand certainly didn't belong.

"Well," she said, and her voice was low and warm despite its harshness. "Did you find them?"

"Find them?" I was trying to collect my scattered wits. "Find what?"

"The diamonds." Her eyes were as hard as stones as she looked at me. "You must have found them. If you didn't, it would be a terrible joke on you after the trouble you went to to push Arnst from the window."

"I didn't push him." It was suddenly very important that I convince this girl that I was not a murderer. "I didn't push him. I wasn't even here when he fell. I was below. I—"

"A pretty story." She did not move, nor did her expression change, but the cutting edge of scorn was sharp and vibrant in her voice. "You're wasting time, Kennerson. Oh yes, I know who you are, and why you're here. I know you're employed as a kind of special policeman by Gaston Clark."

"You make it sound like a crime," I said. I wasn't feeling humorous, but I

wanted to start her talking. I wanted her to do a lot of talking. She might get careless and give me a chance to grab that gun.

"It is a crime," she said. "Anyone who works for Clark couldn't be honest."

I laughed then. I had to. She was so nearly right. Opinion about Clark differed. He ran the world's most exclusive auction salon. Some thought that he was a genius, some were certain that he was the world's greatest criminal. Me, I didn't know. I just worked for him. The only thing I knew was that he scared hell out of me.

"Look, Chick. You—"

She moved the gun and I lapsed into silence as she said, "Turn out your pockets, one at a time. Keep your right hand in the air. Use your left. If you have a gun, don't try and pull it. I can shoot straight."

I believed her. I raised my right hand, palm out. My left I used to pull out my pockets. I didn't stall around. I reached first into the vest pocket and pulled out the diamonds between my thumb and forefinger.

I heard the girl gasp. She had come here to get some stones, but she hadn't expected me to produce them from the first pocket I emptied.

"ARE these what you're looking for?" I asked. "Here! Want them?" I flicked my hand, and the stones arched toward her through the air.

She'd have been less than human if she hadn't tried to catch them. She tried, pulling her eyes away from me, letting the gun move as she tried to make the catch with her free hand.

I moved too, hardly as fast as the thrown stones, but in plenty of time to grasp her wrist and pry her gun loose from the long fingers.

She didn't try to pull away. I sensed that she wasn't afraid. That surprised me. Most people are afraid of me. I don't know why. This girl wasn't. She brought up one hand and tore a groove along my cheek with her fingernails.

"Give me that gun." Her words were slurred a little as if with a faint accent.

I didn't give her the gun. I gave her a shove instead. It sent her stumbling backward to fall across the bed. She lay there for a moment, staring up at me,

her eyes burning with deep anger. In that instant I realized that I'd never seen a girl like her before and never would find another. My knees got a funny watery sensation.

I knew that no matter what Clark said, whatever anyone said, I'd do most anything for this kid. I just would never trust myself with her around. She was out of my league. I knew that, but somehow I didn't care.

I stooped and picked up the diamonds from where they had fallen to the green carpet. In that moment I got control of myself. My voice when I spoke to her was in a fairly level tone.

"Rise and shine, sister. Who are you, and where did you get cards in this game? What are the diamonds to you?"

She rose but before she could speak, the door burst inward and the room filled with cops. I didn't know what to do. The girl thought faster than I.

"Officer," she said. "Officer," the most horrible thing has happened. A man jumped out of this window. He . . . he . . . oh!" She dropped her face into her hands and suddenly began to sob. She did a good job. She almost fooled me, and the cop was duck soup.

He put out a hamlike hand and thudded her shoulder. "Quit it, lady. Quit it. Stop crying and tell me what you're doing in here?"

She turned tear-stained eyes to him. "Mr. Kennerson and I—we heard him scream. We ran in to see what had happened. My room," she waved vaguely toward the hall, "my room is right next to this one. We were in there. Oh, I wish I hadn't seen him."

"Seen who?" The big cop was looking more baffled than ever.

"That man," she shuddered. "I looked down, and he was lying on the pavement. It was awful." She leaned against the cop's broad chest and began to cry again.

He spread his hands and looked down on her dark head, sympathy twisting his ugly face into a grimace. Finally he took hold of her shoulders and set her away from him, and came over to me.

"You Kennerson?" he said. "That right, what she says?"

I nodded solemnly. "You heard her," I told him.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed. He put a big finger on my chin and pushed my

face around. "Where'd you get those scratches?"

I put my hand to my face, scowling, uncertain of what to say. I was saved the trouble, for the girl blurted out,

"I did it." Then she stopped in apparent confusion.

"He—was bringing me a message from Mr. Clark, about my father." She took a deep breath and plunged ahead. "You see, my father has just escaped from Europe. Mr. Clark helped him. He sent Mr. Kennerson to tell me that Father had arrived."

She reached out and laid one lovely hand on the cop's arm. "Please, would it be all right if I went to my room? I feel so tired."

The big policeman almost jumped. "Well, sure, Miss. I'm sorry. Sure."

"Hey, Jim," he turned to his fellow officer, still standing in the doorway. "Take the lady to her room."

I started after her. "I'd better go too," I said. "I've still got some of that message to deliver."

THE hall was crowded with the curious as we stepped through the door. I glanced around at the eager faces, and almost swore. On the back fringe of the mob I caught sight of a thin face, pointed nose and little screwed-up sharp blue eyes, sharp but blank. The little guy who handed me the diamond on the sidewalk below. He winked, and pursed his white lips for a whistle, nodding at the girl ahead of me.

Instinctively I glanced at her, and then back, but the little man was gone. I turned into the girl's room, wondering if my senses were playing tricks on me, wondering what was going to happen next.

I didn't have long to wait. I had hardly closed the door behind me when the girl turned on me, all trace of her tearful softness gone. Her voice was level with controlled anger.

"Now give me my gun, unless you want me to scream for that policeman."

I lifted my hat to her. "I wish you were working for me," I said. "I like a girl who can think on her feet. If you scream, I get arrested, is that it?"

One corner of her full mouth twitched in what I thought for a moment might be a smile. I lifted the little gun from

my pocket, broke the cylinder and spilled the bullets into my palm.

As I did so I noticed the gleam of engraving on the steel and took another look. *Suzanne Mercer* was scrolled in delicate letters.

"A pretty name," I said. "I'm glad to meet you, Suzanne."

Her eyelids drew down angrily. "Give me the gun. You have until I count three. One—two—" I tossed the gun and she caught it deftly.

"You now have a gun and two diamonds in your possession," I told her. "How do you propose to explain them to the police when they search you?"

She looked suddenly startled. "Search me?"

I laughed. "Sure. You put on a nice act in there, but you don't think they're just going to let you walk out, do you? I hope you've got some basis for that sad story about your father. Because if you haven't, you've put us both behind the well-known eight ball. You'd better tell me about it."

She stood for a moment looking at the gun in her hand, then turned and walked into the bathroom. "If you're thinking of hiding it in there, don't bother," I called. "The police know all about those places."

She turned and gave me a long scornful look, then shut the door. A moment later I heard water running and shook my head. Diamonds down the drain to lodge in the gooseneck. It was so old, it was funny. I lit a cigarette and walked to the window.

The crowd below filled the street. White-jacketed attendants were working around an ambulance. I watched them lift a sheeted form into the car, and heard the siren as they began the slow business of working through the press of people.

The ambulance had disappeared and the crowd was beginning to thin, when I became conscious that the water was still running in the bathroom.

I swore. Was she trying to wash the stones clear on down? I crossed hurriedly to the door and knocked on it. "Hey," I called. "You'll drown them. They won't melt, you know."

There was no answer. The splash of water continued unabated. I knocked again, louder. Then when I still got no answer, I tried the door.

It was unlocked. Suddenly I had a sinking feeling. I pushed open the door and looked around, grinning ruefully. There was no redhead in the little room, but the door in the far wall was slightly ajar. I crossed the tile floor in one step and shoved into an adjoining room, feeling pretty foolish at having been outsmarted by my beautiful gungirl.

The room I entered was also empty. I took the precaution of looking in the closet, although I didn't really expect to find her. Somehow she had gotten out of that room. The hall door was the only exit. If she had gone that way, how had she eluded the cop whom I had supposed was posted outside of the room he had seen us enter?

Had he picked her up so quietly that I hadn't heard? Was he now standing outside this door, waiting for me to stick my head out too? I couldn't guess, but one thing was certain. I couldn't stay where I was. If the girl had got away, I could picture myself sweating over a lot of tough questions the cops would be asking me.

I pulled a chair close to the door and climbed up to see if it was possible to look through the ventilator. It wasn't, the narrow screens blocked off all vision, but I learned something else. The crowd was still in the hall. I might have a chance.

I put the chair back and eased open the door. A fine crop of backs filled the space between me and the man in uniform who leaned against the girl's door.

I ducked my head and moved quickly through the throng. I found the rear stairs and went down them carefully. I wasn't certain that I was clear until I reached the alley and then the street.

I paused here to take a quick look around, then turning, moved in the opposite direction from the hotel. Once I stopped and looked back. I was sorry that I'd done so for the little chilly feeling chased itself up my spine. I had a glimpse of a small, thin face casually watching me from the alley mouth.

CHAPTER II

GASTON CLARK was angry. Not that he shouted or showed it. The only visible sign of emotion was a slight trembling of his extra chins.

"So you fell for the wench, my boy.

You decided to leave your old friend and employer and play her game."

I stared at him. There wasn't anything about this enormously fat man that should evoke fear. He was smarter than I am. He was the smartest man I knew, which I think is the reason that I stayed with him. Certainly it wasn't from any love. I hated his guts almost as much as I feared him.

"Keep her out of this," I growled.

He blinked his eyes a little, lacing the fingers of his pudgy hands together as if preparing for an afternoon siesta.

"Don't get tough with me, Kenny." His voice was dreamy. "You are a tough guy, aren't you?"

"I never said no," I told him.

"No," he admitted. "But you are tough. The racket boys around town are careful not to cross you. So are the cops. That's one reason I keep you around, because you scare away the crooks. But you amuse me also. I like to have people around who amuse me. But if you're going to double-cross me with this redhead, I'll have to do something about it, won't I, Kenny?" He was purring now. "I most certainly will."

I ran the back of my hand across my forehead, finding it damp although it was cool in the office. The place was always cool. I suppose the layers of blubber which encased Clark's big body insulated it. It couldn't be that he was saving money on fuel. If so, it was the only thing about the auction room that he had ever saved money on. The building and its furnishings had cost a fortune.

The salesroom was small, seating less than fifty people in its armed leather chairs. The public never came to Clark's sales. They weren't invited, for the sales were strictly an invitational affair, each guest list compiled separately from what Clark called his sucker book.

Clark was unique in other ways. He never touched ordinary merchandise. He would agree to handle the world's art treasures, jewels, almost anything which had huge value. These items he would appraise, put in the price at which he would guarantee their sale. Whatever he received above this price was split equally between Clark and the owner. If no bid reached the level of Clark's guarantee, he would bid the item in himself.

I flipped my cigarette toward the massive brass bowl at the end of his

leather-covered desk and growled, "I don't want any part of those diamonds. I hate to see people fall out of windows, especially when they were pushed."

"Pushed," mused Clark. "Yes, I believe that our broker friend was pushed. You didn't by chance see the pusher?"

I started to mention the small thin-faced man who had haunted me. Then I realized that the little man wouldn't have had time to push Arnst from the window and reach the pavement in time to see me pick up the diamond from the dust.

"No," I said. "I didn't see the pusher."

"Perhaps the girl?" Clark was purring again.

I knew he was goading me and didn't rise to the bait.

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"But you'll find the diamonds," he told me. "You'll have them here for the sale tonight. Remember, Gaston Clark never disappoints his customers."

"Find them yourself," I said, rudely. "You shouldn't have let Arnst take them back."

Clark sighed. He unlaced his hands, fished his pocket for a stick of chewing gum and took his time, peeling away the red wrapper. "You can't prevent a man from taking back his own property. That's why I had you follow him. You should never have let him out of your sight. You shouldn't have come back here after you tracked him to that hotel."

"Calhoun followed him too," I said. "I saw him, but he left before I did."

The fat man's jaw moved happily. "Are you sure he didn't go back?"

"I'm not sure of anything." I was peevish. "There's something screwy about the whole setup. Arnst was eager enough to sell the stones when he first brought them in. Why did he go to that hotel anyway? Why didn't he go to his apartment?"

"Such beautiful stones." Clark used the tone he reserved for art treasures. "It hurts me to lose them, Kenny, hurts me."

Simple-sounding words, yet they made my flesh crawl. I was angry at myself, at the fear this man could engender in me with a few words. There was nothing physical about this fear. It was a nameless quantity which was hard to understand.

MY THOUGHTS were broken by the arrival of Clark's secretary. Tall, thin, she looked as if she had spent her life teaching school. I wondered why Clark kept her around.

Disapprovingly she said, "The police." Then she stood aside and the police entered.

Clark's relation with the law was usually little more than an armed truce. Not that the police had ever succeeded in catching the fat man off base, but there had been many times when they questioned the ownership of the merchandise he sold. Clark was not one to look too closely into the record of ownership.

The law at the moment was represented by Captain Kelly of the Homicide detail and his partner, Lunstrum, a small Swede with a round, cherrylike face and pale blue eyes.

They stood in the doorway looking around like two ham actors waiting for their cue.

"Come in," I said. "He only bites on Wednesday."

Kelly gave me a blank stare. "Look, Kenny, I don't want any trouble with you."

I gave him back his stare. Lunstrum fidgeted nervously, his hand straying toward the pocket where he carried his blackjack.

Clark spoke without moving his bulk. "Did you gentlemen come here to argue with my assistant, or on business?"

"Both," said Kelly. He was an honest cop, tough and not too dumb. "A man fell or was pushed from a hotel window this afternoon."

"Strange." Clark had closed his eyes. "I had the same idea about the pushing, I mean."

The words startled Kelly. "You mean you know that Arnst was murdered?"

"I don't like to have words put into my mouth," Clark said peevishly. "I said nothing of the kind. I merely suspected."

"Why?" Kelly sounded triumphant as he glanced toward me.

Clark sighed. "It's no secret," he told them, "that I had arranged to sell one million dollars worth of diamonds belonging to the dead man. What is not generally known is that he came to me early this morning and reclaimed the stones. What he did with them, I don't know, as my assistant thoughtfully searched the room after the tragedy."

Kelly's mouth drooped at the corners. It was his way of showing surprise. "You don't expect us to believe that?"

Clark opened his eyes and raised his eyebrows slightly. "My dear friend, it is entirely immaterial to me what you believe or disbelieve. But to save argument, which I detest, I'll offer proof. Kenny, get Arnst's receipt from the safe."

As I opened the heavy door Kelly stood close behind me, staring over my shoulder at the tray of diamonds in the vault.

"Hey," he gasped, "what are those?"

Clark grunted. "Paste, my friend, a replica of the Arnst collection such as I always have made for display purposes. Cuts down my insurance, you know."

The big cop looked skeptical for a moment, then took the receipt from my hand. "Even if what you say is true, this receipt doesn't clear you. How do I know Arnst wrote it?"

"Are you by any chance accusing me of the pushing?" Clark chuckled. "My poor misguided fellow, I can hardly move from this chair. Weight, you know."

"But your errand boy might have helped." Kelly turned hostile eyes on me.

"Look," I said. "Let's have this clear right now. I wasn't in the room at the time Arnst fell. I was on the sidewalk downstairs. I know what you're going to say. You'll say that Clark is stealing the diamonds and is covering up by murder, or that Arnst took the stones back and we killed him to get them. Either way you're nuts."

Clark cut in, unhurried, unexcited. "This is sheer nonsense. I have a witness who was present when I gave the stones to Arnst this morning. Gregory Calhoun came to witness the transfer. He introduced us in the first place. Wait, I'll call him." He reached out and drew the instrument toward him, relaying the message to his secretary.

Kelly wet his lips. "Even if the receipt is on the level, that doesn't mean that Kenny didn't follow Arnst to the hotel, cop the diamonds, and push the Dutchman out of the window."

He swung toward me. "Who was the redheaded jane, the one with you in Arnst's room? The one you were supposed to be giving a message about her dad, some message from Clark?"

I didn't know what to say, but Clark saved me the trouble. Surprisingly he cut in. "That's right. Her name is Mer-

cer, Captain. Her father was an acquaintance of mine in France. She's a refugee from the German occupation. We've been trying to get her father out through Spain."

This was all news to me. I looked at Clark, but it was no use. From the expression of his face you could never tell whether he was lying or not.

GILBERT CALHOUN was a small man. His blue vest had an edge of white piping. There was a white carnation in his buttonhole. He wore a derby and faun-colored spats. So you can guess he was no favorite of mine.

I didn't know much about the man. He was a wholesale diamond broker with European connections, pretty well ruined by the war. From time to time, he had brought business to Clark. It had been he who had first introduced Clark to Arnst. I watched him hurry into the office briskly.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Trouble?"

"Not too much." The fat man had located a fresh piece of gum and was popping it into his mouth. "An accident has befallen . . . that's good," he chuckled slightly. "Befallen," he repeated, "a friend of ours. In fact he took a rather long fall. Ten stories."

Calhoun looked puzzled. If he had heard of Arnst's death he gave no sign. "You'll pardon me, I don't quite understand."

"Neither do we," said Clark, "nor, for that matter the police. Arnst fell from his hotel window an hour or so ago."

The little man started. "Dead? Henrick Arnst dead?"

Clark nodded. The little man dabbed at his thin lips with a handkerchief which he produced from his breast pocket. "Terrible, terrible." Apparently he could think of nothing further to say.

Captain Kelly wasn't used to being left out of conversation. He cut in now. "Clark tells me that Arnst took back his diamonds this morning?" His tone was heavy with doubt.

The little jeweler favored him with a questioning stare. "But of course. I was in this room at the time"

"And how did you happen to be here so handily this morning? Kelly shift-

ed the full weight of his attack from me to the jeweler.

"I didn't happen to," Calhoun was bristling. "Clark called me up. He said that Arnst had changed his mind, intimated that he thought I should do something about it. He pointed out that he had been put to considerable expense, arranging the sale. It ended by my coming over here and protesting to Arnst. After all, I didn't want Mister Clark to think because I introduced him to Arnst, I was in any way responsible. A man has to keep his business standing, you know."

Kelly's tone sharpened. "So, you introduced Arnst. And just what do you know about him and about the diamonds?"

The small jeweler shrugged. "If you put it that way, not very much. I know he was a diamond broker before the war. I know that he escaped from Holland when the Nazis moved in, that since then he has managed to smuggle stones out from the continent. Don't ask me how, through underground channels I presume."

The police captain's eyes narrowed. "If that's right, the F.B.I. will have a line on him. In the meantime—" he swung to look at me.

"This doesn't put you and Clark in the clear, Kenny. You might have chosen your own way to make this Arnst change his mind again and go on with the sale. You might have had an argument, and just happened to push him out of the window."

He glared as if expecting me to collapse and confess. I didn't. After a moment he swung on his heel, pausing in the doorway long enough to say, "I'm holding you responsible for this guy, Mister Clark, remember that. I'm holding you responsible."

Clark sighed. "That's quite a responsibility," he said. "Quite a responsibility. Maybe you'd better find those stones, Kenny, find them, at once."

I looked at him, then at Calhoun. "Got any ideas?"

The little jeweler was startled. "Have I any ideas? Why, what should I know about it?"

I shrugged. "Maybe a lot," I told him darkly. "At least you might know who Arnst's friends were. That might help some."

Calhoun spread his hands. "I don't know anyone," he said slowly. "Anyone. The only name I ever heard him mention was Van Ness, the head of a Holland refugee society."

CHAPTER III

I WAS walking slowly, thinking. From the phone book I'd located the offices of the Help For Holland Society. The girl at the office had been sorry, but Franz Van Ness was not there. He might be reached at his home. She'd given me the address.

I was so busy thinking that I didn't notice I was being followed. I usually notice things like that. My ability to stay alive and healthy depends on being alert.

I didn't notice the taxi either until it pulled into the cross street, blocking my path. Then a man came up to my side and said, nervously:

"You wouldn't want a scene here, would you, Kenny? Not here, right in broad daylight? You better get into the cab."

I looked around, annoyed, and was startled to recognize the speaker. "What the hell is this, Ike?"

He had a pointed, underfed face, and he was nervous. "I wouldn't want you should take this in a personal manner, Kenny. Me and you have been good pals, now, ain't we? Can I help it if the boss wants you should come see him and wants I should use force?"

I looked down then and found he was holding a small gun close to my side.

"I'm not going to forget this, Ike," I promised softly. "I don't like guns, not when people point them at me."

He looked more unhappy than ever. I thought for a moment that he would burst into tears.

"Please, Kenny. I gotta make a living, don't I? Tony says I'm to do this, so I does it, being as unpersonal as I can."

I got in, and he joined me on the rear seat. The driver already had his instructions, for the door slammed and we pulled away at once.

I wasn't feeling too good. Ike was afraid of me. His manner was no act. His boss had always gone out of his way to show that we were pals. I couldn't figure this kidnaping. I didn't know how I might have stepped on Tony's toes.

I'd known him a long time, and knew enough to burn him to a crisp if I wanted to talk. He was an ex-bootlegger whose ever-widening activities had given him an important place in the city's night life. He had a night club, but this was little more than a front to cover other things which were hardly as legitimate.

We found him in his office, behind a modern chrome desk, little and dark and spidery. My first impression was that he, too, was nervous as he grinned and said:

"Hi Kenny, boy, long time no see."

"Save it," I told him. "Your foot slipped on this one, cousin. You're not going to like what I do."

He narrowed his black eyes. I could see in their glittering depths that he didn't like me and never had. Still, he wanted no part of a quarrel with me. This was obvious for his voice got sugar-coated. He was a bully at heart and, like most bullies, a coward.

"Look, Kenny, I shouldn't have had you brought in this way, but I lost my head, see, I'm impulsive . . ."

"Like the time you had Roy blasted?"

The hate came out and stared at me, then crept back into the spider's eyes. He managed to grin. "You shouldn't make jokes like that, Kenny boy. Someday it might not be so healthy."

"I'm healthy," I told him, "and if you don't tell that jerk to put the gun into his pocket, I'll take it away from him and feed it to you."

"Put it away," he waved his hand at Ike. "We're friends here. All I want to know is what you and that dame did with the stones?"

I started then. The only stones I knew anything about were the Arnst diamonds, and I didn't see where Tony fitted into the picture. I said so, shortly, and watched his face.

TONY squirmed, but he knew he wasn't going to get a word out of me unless he talked, so after licking his lips a couple of times he said, "I've got a piece of those rocks. Some friends of the Dutchman brought them as far as Mexico. I arranged for them to come across the line, but I ain't had my cut, yet."

It was my turn to stare. I'd never given the diamonds much thought. A lot of Europeans had escaped the invader, and

managed to bring out part of their wealth with them. As far as I knew, it could be brought into the country openly. Why then, if he were on the level, had Arnst done business with this smuggler? Why had it been necessary?

"Go on," I said. "Keep talking."

"You won't tell the cops?"

I shrugged. "If I started yelling copper I'd be dead in five hours. The only reason I live is because I mind my business and other people mind theirs. The cops will get you sooner or later. Why should I worry?"

He sighed his relief. "That's right. Well, I brought these rocks in and turned them over to the Dutchman. He didn't have my price, but was to fork over as soon as Clark made the sale. I'm not dumb. I don't trust nobody. Leave us understand that it's not personal, merely business, so I have a man watching Clark's place, day and night, just in case."

"So . . ."

"So my watcher sees Arnst come there this morning. He listens outside the office door and learns Arnst is taking away the rocks, so he trails along. He sees you and that broker, Calhoun, who gets me into it in the first place, but you both leave after Arnst reaches the hotel. My man don't.

"He sees this redheaded girl also, sees her get a room next to Arnst. Arnst ducks out, but Paul's hiding in the broom closet and don't see him. A minute later Arnst comes back, and Paul hears a yell. He dashes out and tries Arnst's door. It is fastened, so he runs down to find Dutchy spread all over the sidewalk. When he comes back up, you are there, so is the girl, and so are the cops."

"What's this guy look like?" I demanded thinking of the sharp-nosed man who had seen me pick up the diamonds.

For answer Tony jerked a thumb toward the big fair-faced mug who had driven the cab. I glanced at him, then back at Tony.

"My good friend," I said. "There's someone else drawing cards in this game." I went ahead to tell him about the little sharp-nosed man.

Tony looked inquiringly at the cab driver. "What about it, Paul?"

The man shook his head. "I would not dispute Kenny's word, but I never seen no one like that."

"You've proved one thing," I told Tony. "Your man says the door to Arnst's room was locked when he heard the yell. It was unlocked when I came up a few minutes later. Arnst couldn't have unlocked it, because he was out the window. That means he was murdered, and the murderer was in the room when Paul tried the door."

Tony nodded. "For my money it was the girl."

I lost my temper. "It wasn't," I said, although I wasn't sure in my mind. "She hasn't got them. Neither have I, but I've got to find them. Clark's orders. I don't want any of your cherubs getting in my way, or they'll be hurt."

I turned toward the door. No one said anything, no one got in my way. I stepped out, loosening my gun. Beyond the curve of the corridor, I paused to wait, my gun ready. No one came out. No sound broke the stillness of the building.

FRANZ VAN NESS was living in one of the modernistic grey cement fortresses on a granite ledge above Hollywood.

I had my hand on the chimes when the scream reached me. It took me a moment to realize where it came from, and then I grasped the heavy brass door handle and threw my weight against it. I bounced off the door like a rubber ball.

I turned along the narrow parapet that hugged one side of the house. I ran around the corner to a sort of terrace, where glass doors let into the building. One of these gave as I pushed against it, and I ducked into the tiled room beyond, slipping as I ran.

It was an uncomfortable feeling, searching through the empty rooms that straggled without any apparent pattern across the structure. Then I found a den. It was a modernistic room, heavy with square chairs that seemed to be built into the floor.

One chair lay on its side, the back toward me. Beyond it a pair of silk-clad legs kicked in struggling effort.

I reached the chair in two strides and turned it upright. Then I went around and looked into the terrified eyes of my redhead. She was bound into the chair. I've never seen such horror in any face. She didn't even recognize me. She just saw a figure and opened her mouth for a scream.

I reached forward suddenly and slapped her. It was the only way I could stop the hysteria. "Cut it out," I told her. "You're all right. What happened?"

She tried to get up, fighting the ropes. I took time to untie them, then I caught her shoulders and shook her.

I watched her fight her fear. Finally she looked at me. "Arnst," she whispered. "Where is he?"

I kept my voice soft. "He's dead, baby. He fell out of his hotel room. Remember?"

Her eyes steadied. "That's right. Arnst is dead. He fell out of the window, but, he isn't. He's here. He—he tied me up."

I felt a tug at the short hairs on my neck and glanced quickly around the room. "You've had a shock," I told her. "There's no one here, and Arnst is dead. I saw him fall."

She shivered. "Then it was his ghost. I tell you I saw him. He spoke to me. He demanded that I give him back his diamonds."

I thought of the broken body, lying on the sidewalk, of the little man who had watched me pick up the diamond. Was he too a ghost?

"Look," I said. "Just assuming it was Arnst, or his ghost or something. What would make him think you had the diamonds? He got them from Clark this morning himself."

She shook her head. "He said something about me stealing them at the hotel."

I said, "Who are you anyway? Where do you come into this? What was Arnst to you? What is your claim to the diamonds?"

Her face lost some of its fear. "They—the diamonds belong to Holland. They were stolen from Holland by the Nazis. I'm—but what am I telling you all this for?"

"Why not?" I asked. "I'm your friend."

SHE stared at me for a long moment, then her face changed. "I'm being foolish," she said. "I'm sorry, but I'm terribly upset. I was waiting here for Mister Van Ness to come. Suddenly the man was here, choking me, demanding the stones."

"Tell me about them, the stones I mean. You indicate that they don't belong to Arnst?"

She shook her head. "They don't. Arnst was a small diamond broker in The Hague before the war. He did business with the Germans even then. When they invaded the country he turned collaborationist.

"The German government took everything we had, jewels, furniture, even food. But the government was not the worst.

"Individual Nazis also were busy lining their pockets with plunder. A man named Frankl was the worst. He was a Gestapo agent, and he could be bought. He accumulated many things, including diamonds, but he was worried. He had been in the United States. He knew the power of America. He knew that sooner or later this country would fight Hitler.

"He also knew that in the end, the allies would win, so he tried to prepare for that day. He arranged to smuggle Arnst out of the German-controlled territory. Arnst was to come to America as a refugee, to set himself up as a diamond broker. Some stones he brought in openly, as if he had saved them when he fled The Hague, but others were smuggled to him through Mexico."

I stared at her. "How do you know all this?"

She gave me a peculiar, twisted smile. "We of the underground know many things. We have to survive. We have our black list, men who are to be punished when this horror is ended. That time is not far off."

After a moment she went on: "We've known for a long time what Frankl was doing. We've known his connection with Arnst, but we couldn't touch him as long as he was in German territory, because—well, it would have meant death to some of our members and he wasn't that important."

"And now?"

"And now," she said, "the time has come when Frankl thinks the game is about up. He thinks that the war is already lost. That if he was ever going to get out, he had to get out before the collapse. So he gathered together what stones hadn't already been shipped and fled.

"We thought we had him trapped, but he got away. The Nazis are looking for him, but he managed to elude them also."

"What's Frankl look like?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know. I've

never seen him. Few have in Holland; he stayed well under cover."

"Then perhaps he and Arnst are the same. Perhaps Arnst turned Gestapo agent under the name of Frankl."

She shook her head. "No, Arnst has been in this country for at least four or five years. Frankl was in Holland six months ago. He gathered up a bunch of stolen stones then. The underground thought they had him cornered, but he slipped out. An agent in Mexico sent us word he was there, headed for the States. That's why I slipped through the German net and came here."

I stared at her. She was young and beautiful. It was hard to picture her battling the dread Gestapo, slipping through a German-guarded border, crossing the ocean.

"Haven't you any idea what Frankl looked like?" I was thinking of the little man with the pointed nose who had been trailing me.

Her voice got the tired defeated note which I hated to hear. "I haven't," she said. "Not the slightest."

"LOOK," I said. "We're getting nowhere this way. I think you ought to tell your story to Washington. This thing is too big for us."

She looked startled. "Please, I can't do that. We of the underground have to fight in our own way."

Suspicion leaped up into my mind. "But why? We're allies, we're—"

"Don't you see?" A note of desperation had crept into her tone. "I can't have publicity. People mustn't learn that we of the underground can come and go. A little publicity would ruin everything that we have worked to prepare. No, I can't tell anyone else. I'm sorry now I've talked to you."

"You're going to," I said grimly, for my unwilling suspicion was growing. "Come." I lifted her to her feet and keeping a firm grip on her arm, steered her toward the door.

She didn't struggle. She didn't say a word. Her face had frozen into a mask-like pattern which had no expression of any kind.

We went out through the main hall and down the steps. I was startled to see a second car parked down the drive from mine, partially screened by an oleander bush.

"Look out." I pushed her back and loosened my gun. "Wait here." Then I walked forward, carefully, watchfully.

There was a man in the driver's seat. It was the little man of the murder hotel, the one who had seen me pick up the diamond from the dust. There was no mistaking his pointed nose.

He turned his head, smiling faintly. His eyes still showed no more expression than they had held earlier. If he noticed the gun I held ready, he gave no sign.

"Good afternoon."

"Look," I told him. "This gets funny. Every time I turn around, I fall over you. I don't like it."

"Annoying," he nodded.

"You can say that again," I told him. "I've had enough. Who are you? What the devil do you want?"

He never answered for the engine of my car made sudden sound further down the drive. I swung around. The girl was just starting to drive away.

I shouted, running after her, hoping I could catch the car before it reached the roadway. I failed, and cursing, turned back toward the house. It was no use. My little man had seized time by the forelock. He, too, was driving away, headed toward the second gate. I was too far away to stop him. There was nothing left for it but a long, long walk.

CHAPTER IV

I HAD five hours left. I didn't seem to be any closer to finding the diamonds than when I'd seen Henrick Arnst dropping from his window.

I didn't know where to turn as I paused tiredly before my apartment door and fitted the key into the lock. I didn't know what to think about Suzanne Mercer, her story, and the way she'd run out with my car.

I shoved my door open, then stopped. The place was a wreck. It looked as if the commandos had fought a battle in the middle of my living room. The cushions had been chopped to pieces. It took no mastermind to guess that someone had been searching for something.

The diamonds. They leaped into my mind. Someone, probably Tony, thought I had the diamonds. I was burning. I went into the bedroom and found things

worse. Then I crossed to the closet wondering how my clothes had fared. I never found out for as I opened the door, Paul, Tony's gunman, fell out into my arms, nearly carrying me from my feet.

For an instant I thought he had been hiding there, had jumped me as I opened the door. Then, I realized to my horror that I was wrestling with a dead man. I leaped back, letting him slump to the floor.

I stared downward, shaking a little. Bullets had made a pattern of holes across the front of his shirt. Blood had turned it crimson. It was not yet dry. He couldn't have been dead long.

I turned, anger like a hot knife searing through me. Dialing a number, I picked up the phone.

"Tony," I said, when the spider-man answered. "Tony, my old pal. I thought I told you to lay off those diamonds."

His voice was nervous, hurried. "I'm laying off, Kenney, honest I am. I didn't search—"

"I warned you," I went on. "How'd you know my place had been searched if you didn't send Paul up here?"

He was unhappy. I could tell by the way that he fumbled for words that he didn't care for the way things were breaking. "If that lug told you—"

"He told me nothing," I snapped. "He's not talking, pal. He'd dead, in my closet, and I want him out of here. I haven't time to be playing with bodies or answering police questions. I want him out of here. You've got twenty minutes."

I cut short his profanity. I hung up and left the apartment. I didn't want to be around to argue with Tony's men when they came after the body. I didn't know who had killed Paul, but I thought I knew why.

I was certain that someone else was searching for the diamonds besides Tony, that whoever it was had chosen that time to search my place and run into Paul on the same errand. And Paul had lost.

I thought again of Suzanne Mercer. She wanted those diamonds. She had spent the last years, fighting for her country through the underground. Life over there was cheap and if this gunman had gotten into her way . . .

I punched the button of the automatic elevator viciously. I didn't want to think about it. I wanted to get away from the

TSD

building, away from the whole thing.

The lobby was empty. Help shortage had done away with the clerk. The janitor doubled in both jobs, and he wasn't around. I paused at the desk to glance at the mailboxes on the right. There was a mirror behind the desk. My eyes strayed across its gleaming surface. Then I froze, for reflected clearly in the mirror was my own image—but behind me, his hand upraised to strike, his lips grinning, was Henrick Arnst.

I tried to turn, tried to jump sideways, but I was too late. His clubbed gun came down, striking my head. It rose and fell, rose and fell as I slipped to my knees, then went forward onto my face.

THE blows seemed to keep coming, sharp, stinging, and painful. I heard my name called through the encircling fog and tried to open my eyes. The lids had leaden weights which I could not raise.

"Kennerson, Kennerson."

I got my eyes open somehow. There was light, bright light which hurt my eyeballs. Someone was bending over me, slapping my cheeks. "Kennerson."

Gradually his face came into focus, his nose looking more pointed from this angle. It was my little shadow.

"Hey," I said. "Lay off the slaps. I'm groggy enough as it is."

He gave me a thin-lipped smile as I sat up. "You're hard to kill."

"Or I'm dead and don't know it," I said. "What gives?"

He said, "Someone battered you down."

"Arnst," I told him. "For a ghost, that guy packs a hefty wallop."

The little man rocked back on his heels and his eyebrows went up. "So? I wondered who it was. I chased him away before he finished beating your head to a jelly, but he had longer legs—or maybe it was wings."

I knew he thought I was lying, but I didn't feel like arguing. "What else happened?" I said. I was wondering how soon Tony and his corpse snatchers would show up.

"Plenty," he said. "I was coming back when I saw three men, two of them carrying a body between them, slip out the side door."

I heaved a sigh of relief. Tony and his men had arrived while this guy was

chasing my attacker and gotten the body from my apartment.

"They get away?"

He nodded. "And took the girl with them. She drove up in your car just as they came out. She started to scream, so they grabbed her. I wasn't close enough to get their license. I couldn't shoot because of the girl."

I stared at him, trying to make his thin face look like Arnst. It wouldn't work. Whoever he was, he wasn't the man who had attacked me. I had to know and I was tired of asking questions. He was off guard, worried about me, and he was smaller.

I seized his wrist and flipped him over on his back. He was like an eel. Somewhere he'd been trained to take care of himself. So had I, by sheer necessity, and I was forty pounds heavier. I tied him up in a knot and proceeded to go through his pockets.

What I found made me feel foolish as the devil. After a moment I released him, sitting back on my heels.

"Okay, John Dixon, Federal Bureau of Investigation, you can get up." I handed him his papers.

In his place I'd have been boiling mad. This guy wasn't. He was cool as a cucumber. He straightened his coat as if nothing had happened.

"You didn't have to be so mysterious," I said, "or I wouldn't have manhandled you."

"You wouldn't again," he said, and I knew what he meant. "Who were the gentlemen carrying the body who made off with your girl friend?"

I thought of Tony, and the redheaded girl and got a cold spot where my stomach should have been, but I didn't answer. I could handle Tony with more safety for the girl than the F.B.I. could.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

He knew I was lying, and I knew he knew it. We stared at each other coldly for a moment, then I changed the subject.

"What do you know about Arnst and a certain Frankl?"

He stared at me. "And what do you know about diamonds?"

I laughed, without mirth. He wasn't talking, and I didn't dare, at least not until after I got the girl away from Tony's spidery fingers.

The thing now was to shake Dixon. Once in my car, I'd have a chance to lose him. I knew the town a lot better than he did.

IKE was on the high stool at the end of the bar. He looked up as I strode in, then he got busy examining his hands. He didn't try to stop me. He didn't even want to know that I was there.

I pushed open the door of Tony's office, ignored the two men standing near the window, jumped across to the desk and yanked the spider-man out of his chair before he got over looking surprised.

I held him struggling. "Okay, where is she? Two minutes stalling and I'll smash your nose on that inkwell." I shook him again, then catching movement from the corner of my eye, I gave Tony a shove which crashed him back into his chair and spun to face the man rushing me.

He had a gun, mine was still in my pocket. I grabbed the inkwell and sent it, spraying ink into his face.

He yelled, ducked, and I dove under the arm and wrenched his gun loose, spinning away, expecting the second man to charge. I realized that he hadn't moved. I had a second to recognize a very scared Gilbert Calhoun.

I swung back to see Tony fumbling with the desk drawer. "Leave it rest," I told him. "Keep your hands still. You, too," for the ink-spattered gunman was headed for the door. He froze, his back muscles quivering as if expecting a bullet.

Tony tried to speak lightly. "Okay, hot shot. So what good will it do to play tough? I've got the girl. She doesn't show until you tell me what happened to those diamonds."

"How would you like to swallow a few teeth?"

He shivered, but scared as he was, he was also stubborn. "No girl, no diamonds; if that's the way you want it played, okay. I don't care what you do."

He meant it. You can scare stubborn men only so far. I was so intent on his face that I hardly noticed the pressure on my back until the sharp point pricked the skin.

"It's a knife, Mr. Kennerson." Calhoun's voice had a slight tremor. "If you move, I'll shove it through your spine."

Tony's breath came out in a huge, relieved gasp. "Good work, Calhoun. Drop your gun on the desk, Kenny."

I dropped it. There was no argument. Ideas were racing through my head. Calhoun had introduced Arnst to Clark in the first place. I'd never considered the flowery little jeweler as anything but a fool. It was beginning to look as if I had underestimated him badly.

Tony had picked up my gun. He sounded braver with it in his hand. "Now, Kenny, I've got you, but I never wanted trouble with you, pal. To prove it, I'll still deal. The girl for the diamonds."

"If you want me to talk," I said, "tell this eager beaver to get this shiv out of my back."

For an instant Tony hesitated, trying to read my thoughts, then he waved the gun at Calhoun. "Put it away. Kenny's all over his mad."

That wasn't exactly true, but Tony had my gun. Reluctantly the knife pressure went away from my back and Calhoun stepped away.

"Look," I told Tony. "You and I are playing this game cross-wise. I don't care whether you get a cut for smuggling those stones or not, but I haven't got them."

He started to raise the gun suggestively but I stopped him. "Wait. You saw my apartment. I didn't tear it up, and I don't think your man Paul did. Someone else is in this game. Someone else is after those diamonds."

"Who?"

I shrugged. "The man that pushed Arnst out of the window."

"But if there was such a guy, why didn't he get the diamonds then?"

"Ask Calhoun," I suggested. "Maybe he was at my place when Paul walked in. What's he doing here anyhow? Working for you?"

"I sent for him." Tony's words were sharp. "I want to keep everyone in sight until I lay hands on those rocks."

I shrugged. "For a little guy, he gets around. He was with Arnst when the Dutchman got the stones back from Clark this morning. He knew Arnst had them today, no one else."

THE little jeweler started to back toward the door. I swung around and grabbed him, running quick fingers

over him before Tony could stop me.
"There's a belt around his waist."

Calhoun was fighting to free himself. Tony came forward as I ripped off the man's shirt and unfastened the chamois belt.

Calhoun broke free and charged. Tony hit him, once on the side of the head. The man went down, his head hitting the floor with a strange popping sound. I shuddered, certain that Calhoun would never move again.

But Tony had no interest. He had snatched the belt from my fingers and, ripping open the fasteners, spread its contents onto the desk, sucking his breath as the stones rolled forth.

I pushed to his side unnoticed and picked up one stone, then another, turning them over in my fingers.

I nodded. "You've got them. Now, what about the girl?"

Tony turned slowly, thinking. "It's a little different, now." He jerked his head at the quiet Calhoun. "You gotta forget that too."

"A deal's a deal," I told him. "The girl and I walk out without trouble. Stall and you'd better kill me or I'll make this country too hot for you to live."

He thought this over. He knew me and he knew I wasn't lying. I'd keep my bargain. "Okay," he said. "Go get the dame. It's a deal, Kenny. No hard feelings."

Steps came along the hall. The door opened and Tony shouted, "Not in here, you fool," but he was too late. The girl was already in the room.

She took one look at me, then she saw the still figure on the floor, and gave a little cry.

I knew the play was over then, even before Tony made up his mind. He could trust me, but not her. I reached over and seized his wrist, wresting the gun free.

"Hey!" he said. "Hey!"

"We're going to walk out," I told him. "You keep the rocks. A deal is still a deal. I thought you might change your mind."

I couldn't watch Tony, the ink-stained gunman, and still handle the girl without hurting her. I expected to get a bullet in the back before I reached the door. I didn't. The only way I can explain it was that Tony and his man must have been so shocked at my ignoring

the diamonds when I had a gun in my hand that they could not think clearly. But whatever it was, I breathed a lot more freely when we got outside.

CHAPTER V

CLARK'S private office looked like a convention hall when I ushered the girl through the door. Kelly and Lunstrum sat on the big leather couch, looking like a couple of buzzards waiting for a meal.

Gaston Clark was a placid Buddha behind his desk, peeling the red paper from a fresh gum stick, while the auctioneer and attendants moved nervously. All turned to stare as we came into the room. Clark did an unprecedented thing. He lifted his bulk from the chair and gave the girl a small bow.

"Good evening, Miss Mercer," he purred. "I'm happy to see you. Kenny's glowing description hardly did you justice. He glanced absently at me.

"I trust, my boy, that you have the diamonds?"

It gave me a lot of satisfaction to say, "I think I know about where they are." The girl started to say something, but I nudged her into silence.

Clark actually looked startled. Kelly and Lunstrum came off the leather couch as if it were hot. Kelly demanded, "All right. Where are they? Who killed that Dutchman?"

"Keep your shirt on," I told him, glancing at my wrist watch.

I gave Clark a long, steady stare. "You had paste replicas of the stones made, didn't you? All right. Get them out. Start your show with them. I'll guarantee that the auction will go through all right, that before the sale ends, you'll have the real stones."

His eyebrows climbed. He peered at me as if trying to read my thoughts. I stared him down. After a full minute he turned to one of the attendants:

"Get the imitations from the safe."

The girl was watching me with puzzled eyes. "Go out and watch the show," I told her. "Sit near Kelly. If you recognize someone familiar, someone you know, someone you fear, scream." Then I pushed her gently toward the door. Left alone in the room, I switched off the lights and waited.

A CLARK auction is like no other show on earth. The customers were in tails and white ties, looking more like the diamond horseshoe crowd at the opening night of the opera.

I watched through the door crack as Clark mounted the small rostrum. There were guards at the entrances—only invited customers were admitted.

"Gentlemen," said Clark, "there has been some difficulty. Since you have surely read the evening papers, I will not go into detail. You have all examined the stones in the past two weeks and noted their number, so it will not be necessary for you to examine them again. Therefore," he bowed to the auctioneer, "shall we proceed?"

I shut the door and sought a place on the couch. Faintly I could hear the auctioneer's voice, heard the bid which reached the million mark, then I heard something else.

The alley door which led directly into the office, and which was unguarded, had opened. I heard it close. From the faint sound of breathing I knew that I was no longer alone in the room.

I waited, the gun in my hand heavy and comforting, wishing the visitor would hurry. If I'd guessed wrong—but I hadn't. He'd moved across the room so silently that I did not hear him again until he reached the connecting door and eased it open.

The auctioneer's voice came clearly through the resulting crack. Then the lights in the big salon clicked off. I hadn't expected that. With an oath I was off the couch, leaping forward, praying I would not be too late.

There was bedlam in the salesroom, hoarse cries, shouts. The visitor and I met directly in the doorway; he coming out of the salon, I entering. The force with which we came together drove me backward and knocked the gun from my hand.

It was pitch black. He must have recovered before I did for he tried to brush by, shaking free of my groping hands. I dropped, wrapping my arms about his legs, bringing him down on top of me. My head struck the floor. Things revolved, but I clung fast.

The lights came on. I heard the girl scream. Kelly pulled my prisoner away and snapped cuffs on his wrists.

"It's Arnst," the girl cried. "Arnst!"

I climbed slowly to my feet, staring at the man. He hadn't felt like a ghost.

Clark pushed the suckers back into the salesroom and slammed the door. "Stop turning this place into a rodeo."

The prisoner was silent, sullen under Kelly's questioning. Clark's gum clicked as his jaws moved. "What is this, Kenny, your ghost?"

"No ghost," I said. "Arnst."

I heard Suzanne draw her breath sharply. Clark kept chewing. Kelly said, "But Arnst fell out of that window."

"No," I told him. "Arnst didn't fall. He pushed another man, a man named Frankl."

THE prisoner jerked as if a bullet had struck him, then was still. Kelly was bewildered. "Who's Frankl?"

"A Nazi Gestapo agent," I explained. "Apparently he and Arnst looked very much alike. That probably gave Frankl the idea in the first place. Arnst was a Dutch collaborationist whom Frankl smuggled out of Europe and set up here as a diamond broker.

"Calhoun was associated with Arnst; how much I don't know. It was Frankl's plan that when things got too tough in Europe he could vanish there, come here and assume the identity which Arnst had built up. What he meant to do with Arnst, I can only guess."

The silent prisoner spoke for the first time. "The swine meant to kill me."

"Probably," I nodded. "At any rate with things as they are in Europe, Frankl decided to get out. He slipped into this country through Mexico and went somewhere to have his face rebuilt to resemble Arnst more exactly.

"If you'll examine the body at the morgue, you'll note the scars, not entirely healed."

Kelly grunted. "Can you prove all this?"

I shrugged. "You should be able to make your prisoner talk. At any rate, that's the way I think it happened. Frankl's plans were perfect save for one thing. Arnst, the man he had sent over here, double-crossed him."

"The swine meant to kill me." It was the prisoner again.

I ignored the interruption. "In some manner," I went on, "Arnst and Calhoun learned that Frankl was in this country. They moved fast. They couldn't

sell the stones fast enough through private channels, so they contacted Clark who arranged the auction.

"Frankl learned of the auction. He decided on a bold plan. Instead of approaching Arnst, whom he no longer trusted, he came directly to Clark. He waited until the morning of the sale, letting his face heal somewhat.

"It was a good job of plastic surgery. Neither Clark nor I realized that it wasn't Arnst, but we did send for Calhoun. Calhoun realized at once that the man wasn't his partner, but he couldn't say anything. If he had, the whole story would have come out. Instead he remained silent, let Frankl retrieve the diamonds, then trailed him to the hotel and communicated with Arnst. Then Arnst slipped over and pushed him out of the window.

"But they had their trouble for nothing. The stones they recovered from Frankl's belt were paste."

Kelly looked startled. "Paste? Then where are the real ones?"

"There," I said, pointing to the tray the prisoner had snatched from the auction stand. I glanced toward Clark, but he seemed undisturbed.

Kelly was bewildered. "I don't get it."

I smiled. "Whenever we accept valuable stones for sale, we have paste replicas made and use them to show. This cuts down on the insurance charges. This morning, when the supposed Arnst arrived, we did not doubt his identity, but there was something fishy about the deal, so we gave him the imitations. Since Frankl was no jewel expert, he did not know the difference. His murderers did, and started trailing everyone, me, the girl—"

"Very clever," the words came from behind me. I swung around to see the pointed nose of the man who had trailed me all day. "You're a good guesser, Kennerson. The dead man was Frankl. We know when he entered the country, where he had his face rebuilt, everything. We were only waiting to close in until he contacted his associates. This morning I suspected that you and Clark might be the associates, but now . . ."

Kelly turned angrily. "Who's this?"

I introduced the G-man, and in a few minutes they took the prisoner away between them. I turned toward Clark, feeling a prickle along my spine.

"You might have told me about the stones," I said. "It would have made it easier if I'd known they were safe. Well, it was nice working for you, but don't think it was a pleasure. You can send the diamond money to the bank. Miss Mercer will present Holland's claim through the proper channels. Come on, Suzanne, let's get out of here."

"Wait," said Clark. Then to the girl, "Would you step into the salesroom?"

I DIDN'T want her to go. I didn't want to be alone with the fat man, but my tongue seemed paralyzed. I watched her leave, then heard Clark purr:

"You didn't think I would steal those stones, did you, Kenny? You knew I wouldn't, but how did you guess the truth?"

I wasn't sure what he'd intended. I never would know. I'd tried, but I couldn't figure Clark out. So I ducked the question and said instead, "I suspected something wrong when Arnst went to the hotel instead of his apartment—Frankl, rather. Then I saw the scars which I did not remember on his face, and picked up a paste diamond.

"Still, the man looked like Arnst, and I didn't believe in ghosts."

"But what made you certain that I had the real stones?" he persisted, smiling.

"You had to have them," I said. "No one else seemed to. Everyone was looking. Tony, the girl, me, the G-man, and a mysterious someone whom I guessed was the murderer. If he didn't have them, it meant that probably you'd never returned them. But I protected you with Kelly and the G-man, didn't I?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "you did. They never questioned my motives. And you don't think I'd steal? I'm sure you don't. You're a good boy. Anyone who could figure this out and force me to turn up the gems, yet protect me is smart, too.

"I need smart people. Besides, it wouldn't be healthy for me if I didn't have you under my eye I'd worry.

"Yes," he went on, purring again. "You have a crazy idea in your head. You think you'll marry that girl, go to Europe and help her and her people. But no, Kenny, you'd be out of place. Besides you're safer here."

I grinned sourly. I'd be safer with a blockbuster, but he was right, she was out of my league. I didn't want to, but I stayed.

When crime-makers broke that medico's coffin-bound whisky habit, they gave him a vengeance mission in life. So to jug those killers, the doc had to toast his own death with a . . .

Carbolic Cocktail

By William Rough



DOC did not see the black sedan pull up in front of his small-town cottage at midnight; Doc was in an alcoholic coma, slumped in his creaky office chair.

A girl and three men, a fat one, a thin one and a grey one, got out of the sedan

and made as little noise as possible hurrying to Doc's door. The fat man and the thin man supported the grey man between them. He had been shot at and not missed. At the door, they tied a handkerchief over the lower portion of the grey man's face.

The first Doc knew of this was when

the girl scampered through his unlocked anteroom door and clutched his scrawny shoulder, chattering, "Wake up! P-please wake up!"

The fat man and the thin man put the grey man on a couch, turned to Doc who was sputtering a little but hadn't quite opened his eyes.

"Slap him to, George," ordered the thin man.

George took three strides to Doc, hauled Doc's hundred and twenty pounds upright. *Slap-slap!* His ham hand rocked Doc's sunken cheeks.

The girl gasped, "Do you have to do that?"

"S-stop!" Doc bleated. He was a dried-up wisp of a man with faded blue eyes and thin sandy hair. He was in his fifties, looked in his seventies.

"I'm all right," he protested, clawing at his steel-rimmed spectacles which had rocked loose at one ear. "I'm sober."

"Yeah?"

"I HANDLE three quarts of whisky a day ever since my son and his mother died." Doc caught himself. His eyes dropped. He flushed. "But I do my work. I—once I was the best doctor in—"

"Show us," snapped the thin man. "Our friend has a bullet in him. Get it out."

"But I—"

"Get at it!"

Doc got at it. He was quivering like gelatine. It could be a drunken dream, he knew: two men and a girl commanding him to perform a midnight operation on a third, masked man.

Doc didn't think he could make it, but when he got the masked man's shirt and undershirt cut away and saw the bullet wound near the man's heart, his veined eyes sharpened, his shivery lips steadied. Here was a human being dying. Doc never thought of himself at all. He went to work.

"You might've been tops at that," grunted the fat man, George. "What are his chances?"

Doc looked at the conical pellet of lead he'd extracted, used his stethoscope, reached for more plasma. His words were brisker than they'd been in years.

"Give him the right care and he has a chance."

"Fine. Get him back to the car," said the thin man.

Doc yelped, "Yon can't move that man! You—"

"Get him back to the car!"

"Listen, man, if you move him—"

"Shut up!"

Doc watched the beefy George pick up the masked man and start out. Doc felt sick. He's saved the man's life, and now they were going to undo it all. Almost, Doc felt they wanted to undo it.

"It's horrible!" Doc felt a touch on his shoulder. The girl was no more than twenty-three, small, dark-haired, blue-eyed. "You've probably worked a miracle, Doctor, and now we're going to—"

"Shut up, Jean!" snapped the thin man.

"But, Mr. Mars—"

"Don't use names!"

George's heavy voice said, "What's the difference. Doc's going to get so drunk he won't remember a thing." George draped an arm around Doc's thin shoulders in a gesture that seemed friendly, but which held Doc viselike.

"Okay, go back to the car. This won't take long."

The thin man took Jean's arm, jerking her towards the door. She was saying, "I don't believe you care if he lives or not! All you're thinking of is concealing—"

George squeezed Doc comradely. "Well, Doc, where do you keep it? We've got a big thirst, haven't we?"

Doc trembled. George slapped him heartily. "What's the matter, Doc? Thought you liked your scnapps. Our friend said everybody figured you for a lush in these parts."

George went to a cupboard, keeping his arm around Doc. There was whisky in the cupboard, of course; there's been whisky here ever since Wake Island, when Doc's son, a young naval surgeon, got it and the shock killed Doc's wife.

George cracked a quart. "Ever drink a pint in ten minutes, Doc?" he said, showing large yellow teeth in a grin. He poured an eight-ounce glass full to the brim with whisky, handed it to Doc. "Down the hatch, Doc, down the hatch."

Doc fought. George took him by the scruff of the neck and shook him as easily as he would a rabbit. Doc choked down the whisky.

George gave him two minutes to get his breath, then filled the glass again. When the big man moved out of the of-

face, Doc was collapsed in his chair, mumbling incoherently.

"You're only pretending you want to keep that man alive," Doc was mumbling. "I'll prove it. I'll get the sheriff and state police and—and—" And that was as far as Doc got that night.

DOC'S telephone jangled around seven o'clock the next morning. Automatically, his palsied fingers found it. His voice rattled. "D-doc Denning talk-in'."

"Come down to the South Shore Road, Doc, 'bout a mile outa town. Make it snappy."

Doc recognized the voice of Sheriff Carson. "W-why?" Doc stuttered.

"You're the coroner, ain't you?" said the sheriff drily and hung up.

Doc dropped the phone and scraped his forehead with a shaking hand. He was on the verge of the d.t.'s and he knew it. He reached for the half-empty quart bottle George had opened last night, though he did not remember George yet, of course. He jittered the neck of the bottle against his glass, started to maneuver the whisky to his parched lips.

"No!"

The word, bursting from Doc's lips, made him jerk and peer around his office, as if he was sure someone else had spoken it. He moved his tongue over his lips. He put the glass down. He mustn't drink yet. There was a reason, he knew. What was it?

Doc grabbed the glass again, defiant. He got it almost to his mouth, then dropped it again. The glass landed flatly on its bottom, not breaking, but slopping whisky onto the desk. Doc watched the little trickles. He put a finger in the wetness, touched it to his tongue. His teeth chattered to the pull of the taste.

Panicky, slipping, Doc backed away from the desk. There was something rocketing around in his head; if he drank that whisky he'd never find out what it was. He grabbed his bag, started for the door. Then he knew he couldn't make it without support of some kind. He was going to pieces. His insides were jittering all over.

Doc dropped his bag, went to the sink and splashed water in his face. While he was drying himself, he couldn't help peeking around the towel at the whisky.

He knew he couldn't stay in the same office with his poison and not wallow in it, not for long, he couldn't.

"Benzedrine sulphate!" Doc's furred tongue licked out. He knew benzedrine was being used to fight alcoholism, but he'd never tried it on himself. He'd never wanted to stop drinking before.

Doc lurched to his drug cabinet, gulped ten-grain benzedrine tablets, and paced up and down, thin hands clasped behind his back to keep him steady.

It came back to Doc in pieces, a little one here, a little one there. Then the whole thing flashed alive again. Two men had pushed him around last night. A girl had called him, "Doctor." He had operated!

Doc stopped, legs spread. His shoulders straightened. For a brief moment, for the first time since his wife died, Doc was his own man again. He had operated last night competently.

Doc's narrow, grey-stubbled chin lifted. The rasp of his nerves eased. His hand was almost steady when he reached for the whisky.

He jerked. The ague got him again. Horrified, he realized he still reached for the liquor!

Doc reached for his bag again, eyes fascinated on the whisky. He backed away from the desk. He still wanted it. He cursed incoherently and fled towards his garage.

"NOTHIN' for you to do, Doc, but sign the papers. He's dead as they come," Sheriff Carson said when Doc skittered out of his coupé a mile south of the village.

"What happened?" Doc asked, starting toward a cluster of men at the edge of the road. There were a couple of farmers in sweat-stained shirts, a trucker, several other motorists, and two state police. "Accident?"

"Killing," said the sheriff laconically. He was a lanky backwoodsman who had lived most of his life up here near the Canadian border, but he'd been to state police schools and learned a thing or two.

"City-dressed man. Peppered good with a .38, I'd say. Couple kids found him in the culvert 'bout an hour back."

"Snap it up, Doc," said one of the troopers. He stepped back to give Doc room. Doc bent over what had been a man short

of forty, dark-haired, well set up, dressed in expensively tailored tan tropical worsteds. Doc never had seen the man before.

"What about it, Doc?" asked a trooper.

Doc examined the man, unobtrusively squeezing the pockets. Of course, the troopers had already searched him. "Five bullets from waist to"—Doc spied a scrap of paper, almost entirely concealed by the body, under it—"to neck," Doc said. His scrawny fingers squeezed the paper into a pocket. "Any one of them would have killed him."

"Yeah, we know. How long's he been meat?"

"Midnight," Doc said, and added absently but with conviction, "About ten to twelve, I'll bet."

The troopers muttered softly. Doc felt their eyes burn into his skinny neck.

"Now here's a sawbones for you," said one of them in an admiring tone which was sheer mockery. "He doesn't say within an hour or so of such-and-such time. He tells you right to the minute!"

"Uh-huh," said the trooper's buddy.

"He's too good! He's not giving a doctor's opinion. He's talking like a witness!"

Doc struggled to his feet, pale blue eyes watering. He was going to protest, but when he saw the intent gaze of a dapper, city-dressed man who hovered nearby, he felt his skin begin to crawl. The man's eyes were green, small—abnormally small.

Doc knew it would take narcotics to contract the pupils of a man's eyes like that, make them hate like that.

"I was just guessing," Doc said, so fascinated by the green-eyed man that he appeared to ignore the troopers. Such an attitude was better than a dozen arguments.

"Okay, okay. Give us an order for removal," a trooper said.

Doc fumbled for his fountain pen. He caught the sheriff's cold daze again. The sheriff hadn't been fooled.

"Here's your order," Doc said. If he was going to tell his story, he knew he'd better do it now. With the corpse in front of him, the sheriff might believe most anything.

But it was a wild yarn at best, especially from a chronic alcoholic. The fat man and the thin man had counted on no one paying attention to Doc, even if the pint

of whisky in ten minutes hadn't blotted out Doc's memory.

Doc snapped his fingers. The bullet! There was proof, even for a cop. The bullet Doc had extracted from the grey man was still in his office. Suppose it matched the bullets in this other man?

The troopers lugged the corpse to their car. The farmers moved off down the road. The green-eyed man jumped into a sleek convertible and drove off.

"Who's he?" Doc asked.

The sheriff drawled, "Just a rubber-necking salesman, I'd say."

Doc saw the direction of the sheriff's thoughts and said, "Give me fifteen minutes, sheriff. Meet me at the morgue. Bring along your comparison microscope. Maybe I'll have something for you to use it on."

"Now, wait there!" the sheriff barked, but Doc was scampering back to his coupé.

DOC'S knuckles were white on the steering wheel till he got out of sight. Then he snicked the scrap of paper from his pocket. It was a memorandum on the stationery of a New York brokerage house. No names were used. It said: *Selling as per instructions.*

Doc spat. "Why in Judas' name didn't I hand it over? Why didn't I tell everything? Ordinarily, I'd have—"

Doc's blue eyes glinted. Exactly! Ordinarily he'd have blubbered. But not today. "Because I didn't take a drink today," Doc said. "I won't either. By Judas, that benzedrine helps." And a little voice seemed to add in his ear, "If a man fights, there are lots of things that help."

Doc parked in front of his cottage, hurried inside, began poking in the slop tray for the bullet.

"Don't waste your time, Doc," said a voice indulgently. "The bullet you dug outa Warren didn't come from the rod that killed Giblin back there."

Doc spun. The green-eyed, dapper man was lounging in the door. "W-who are you?" Doc stuttered.

"Call me Jade, Doc. It's a nickname I got from my eyes. Now we're acquainted. Take me to them."

"Them? Who?"

Jade sighed laboriously. He ticked off his fingers. "John Warren, George Biers, Casper Marston, and the girl."

Doc squealed. "But I don't know where—"

Before he finished, Jade was on him, his right hand slashing, lashing. Doc staggered back, hit the operating table. Jade's eyes glittered. He pushed Doc back on the table.

"I can't waste time, Doc. Talk or I'll carve you with your own knives." Jade selected a scalpel from the sliding tray.

"I swear I don't know—"

"Cut it. Warren was shot last night. They'd have had to bring him to the nearest doctor. He'd need more medicine, or something, so they'd tell you where they were going."

"John Warren!" Doc gasped. Doc knew Warren well, had treated him often when Warren came up here to hunt and fish. John Warren was president of the Ajax Tool Co.

"Biers and Marston, did you say?" Doc demanded. "Why, they're in the tool company with Warren, aren't they?"

"Ain't you smart?" Jade mocked. "Where did they go! You think I'm kidding?" Jade moved swiftly, drew the scalpel across Doc's cheek until it drew forth blood.

"Spit it out!" Jade roared.

Doc saw the man's drug-crazed eyes. Doc knew Jade would use the scalpel more thoroughly this time. "W-wait! I'll tell you!" Doc cried. "Just give me t-time!"

JADE let him sit up. Doc realized that he probably could tell Jade where the party had gone. John Warren had a hunting lodge on Lake Ohm, about five miles from the village. Why shouldn't he tell? Doc certainly owed nothing to the fat man and the thin man, Biers and Marston.

"Say it!" Jade barked.

"Give me that w-whisky," Doc stammered, pointing a trembling hand at the glass, still on his desk.

Jade cursed, but got it for Doc.

"Listen," Doc said. And when Jade leaned forward, Doc pushed his scrawny arm straight out with the whisky glass, gave it a little fillip that sent the amber liquid streaking at Jade.

Jade pulled back. Too late. The whisky splashed his eyes. He screamed. His fists leaped to his face, rubbing, digging at his eyes.

For a second, Doc was fascinated. He'd

never caused pain before; he'd always relieved it.

Then he saw Jade tug at a pocket. Gun steel glinted. Doc groped for a book end on his desk. He cracked it down on Jade's wrist. The gun flew. Doc scrambled for it, his blood surging in strange and wonderful exhilaration.

"Now I'm boss!" Doc's voice rang sharp and clear. "You'll answer my questions, you—you punk!"

"My eyes!" Jade staggered. "They're burning! I can't see!"

"Answer my questions, and I'll relieve you," Doc said grimly. "Who is the man you call Giblin? What was he doing here?"

"Doc, gimme something for my peepers! Please!"

"As quick as you answer me. No sooner," Doc said.

"Okay, okay—only get me something! Giblin was hired to kill Warren. I drove the car. We laid for them, ran them off the road last night. Giblin plugged Warren. Then somebody in the back seat shot Giblin. It must have been Marston or Biers."

"Then what?"

"Then what?" Jade raged. "I got the hell outa there, that's what! But I swore I'd come back. Giblin was crossed up. There wasn't nobody supposed to shoot back at him. It was a deal, see?"

Doc had been busy getting a lotion for Jade's eyes, but he'd been getting adhesive tape, too. When he said, "Hold out your hands for this," and Jade pushed both hands in front of him. Doc wound the tape around Jade's wrists expertly.

"Why you—"

"Shut up," Doc commanded. "I'm going to take care of your eyes, but first I'm taking care of you."

He did. He left Jade, taped to the nose, in his closet.

DOC drove the road to Lake Ohm as fast as his thin tires would allow. He'd covered no more than half the five miles when whirlwinds of approaching dust revealed a big, black sedan.

Doc clenched the gun he'd taken from Jade. Neither George Biers nor Casper Marston would manhandle him again.

The big car screamed to a halt. "Hurry, Doctor!" It was the dark-haired, blue-eyed girl at the wheel. "Mr. Warren's

sinking fast," she called. "I was coming for you. Get in with me. We'll make better time."

Doc hesitated. He still didn't know who was trying to kill Warren and who was trying to keep him alive. But if it was a question of human life, Doc's oath gave no choice. He took his bag to the big car.

"I'm terribly sorry about last night," the girl blurted out. "But we just couldn't let anyone know Mr. Warren had been shot. Have you reported it, Doctor?"

Doc said automatically, "No, but—" He tensed. If she'd been fishing for information, he'd stepped neatly into her trap. His hand went to his pocket.

"Oh, I'm glad! It is important to Mr. Marston and Mr. Biers!"

Doc relaxed. He was glad the girl was not a criminal. In a way, he felt he owed her something. She had respected him last night. The memory of it had done much to help him keep his head up this day.

"Who are you?" Doc asked.

"Mr. Warren's secretary," she said. "Jean Blake. I came along to take notes."

"Jean," Doc said gravely, "somebody has to trust me. Will you?"

Jean brushed back a strand of her dark hair. Even teeth tugged at her lip. "Yes," she said. "I will trust you, Doctor. I saw how capable you can be last night."

"Good." Doc choked down a lump in his throat. "Why did they cover John Warren's face from me last night? What did your friends think I'd do if I recognized him?"

"They thought you'd report to the police and word would get back to the city that Mr. Warren had been hurt."

"What would have been so terrible about that?"

"Well, then the syndicate that is backing Ajax Tools would have withdrawn its support. Syndicates don't risk money when the brains of a firm is in danger." Jean held tight to the wheel. Doc was bouncing around like a bit of popcorn held over a fire. The road was terrible.

"You see, Ajax is broke," Jean said. "Mr. Marston and Mr. Biers have lived high, wide, and handsome these past years. Recently, the government canceled its contract. The only thing Ajax can do now is reconvert to civilian production. But Biers and Marston don't have any capital left. They had to go to a syndicate for backing. The syndicate agreed to

put up the money providing Mr. Warren signed a long-term contract to run things for Biers and Marston."

"I see," Doc said. "Biers and Marston had to get Warren's name on the line or they'd go bankrupt. Was Warren holding out?"

"No. There was no trouble at all. We drove up here to settle the details. Mr. Warren was perfectly agreeable to everything. It must have been someone who wants to see Biers and Marston go under who hired that gunman to kill Mr. Warren."

Doc fingered the scrap of paper he'd found under Giblin's body. The four words, *Selling as per instructions*, suddenly made sense.

"Who shot the man who shot Warren?" Doc asked.

"Mr. Marston," Jean said. "The man only fired once, and Mr. Marston shot back. It was self-defense, but, oh, it was horrible!"

"And who pushed the man's body into the culvert?"

"B-both Mr. Biers and Mr. Marston. They picked him up together and—" she shuddered.

"No hysterics, now," Doc warned. "We're here. Jean, look at me. Do you trust me?"

Jean's blue eyes goggled. "Why, yes, Doctor, but—"

"Then trust me," Doc said grimly. "No matter what happens, do as I tell you. You can not trust Biers and Marston. I can't explain, but one or both of them is a criminal. I'm going to turn them over to the police."

JEAN held her breath. She was half-scared, half-respectful. "You're going to d-do it alone, Doctor?"

"By Judas, they'll rue the day they picked on me," Doc said stoutly. But he was quivering.

"Here!" Jean drew a flask from the dash compartment. "You need a drink!"

Doc saw the amber liquid in the flask. There were little glistening beads on it. Doc's throat and tongue were like velvet. His hand started for the bottle. If ever a drink was deserved by mortal man, he, Dr. James Denning, deserved this one.

"Like hell!" Doc dived into his bag for more benzedrine. "Come on," he said,

and tried to stop his legs from wobbling as he led the way into the lodge.

"Doc! Well, harya?" George Biers' fat body bounced out of a chair. "Sorry about last night, Doc. Let's drink and make up."

"Where's the patient?"

"Upstairs."

"What's that?" Doc pointed over George's shoulder. George turned, and Doc brought Jade's gun down on George's head a good deal harder than necessary. George collapsed soundlessly.

"Tape his hands and feet and big mouth," Doc ordered Jean, tossing her a roll of three-inch adhesive. He shambled up the rustie staircase.

"Good morning, Doctor," said Casper Marston's dry, acrid voice. "You'd better let me have that."

Doc felt wiry fingers clamp his arm. The gun was twisted from his hand. From the top of the stairs, Doc saw that you could see below.

"Did you just hit George out of peeve for last night, Doc, or is it something more?" Casper murmured, drawing Doc quickly to a bedroom filled with the sound of John Warren's labored breathing.

"How much do you know? What have you told Jean?"

Doc's heart lurched. He wasn't thinking of himself, but he suddenly realized he should not have let Jean come back here. "I didn't tell her anything. I found out everything myself, and I kept it to myself."

Casper's gaunt face in daylight was sallow, his eyes hollow and dark. His pointed, long nose was bony and prominent. "And what did you find out?"

Doc couldn't have held his tongue for anything. "Enough to show you hired a man to kill John Warren—then killed the killer, too, to silence him," Doc panted.

"And how did you learn this, my little man?" Casper was calm, deliberate.

"You dropped a note from your broker when you pushed Giblin's body into the culvert last night. I'm no financier, but I can guess what you've been doing."

Casper's dark eyes glowed. "Go on."

Doc went to the bed, took Warren's pulse. It was feeble. The man was breathing with great effort. "He's dying, and you had him killed," Doc said, lips ragged.

Doc started to load a hypodermic syringe with adrenalin. "You hired Giblin to waylay your car on the way up here.

And as soon as Giblin shot Warren, you emptied a pistol into him. You removed the main witness against you, apparently in self-defense. But that was just why I decided you had hired Giblin. Jade, the man who was with Giblin, told me that Giblin had not expected any opposition—"

Casper looked worried for the first time. "Jade?"

"So when Giblin got shot, it was a double-cross. Well, who double-crossed him if not the man who shot him? And Jean said it was you who had a gun and fired."

"Jade?" Casper repeated slowly. "He could know enough to involve me."

"I know enough to involve you!" Doc crackled. "As soon as I tell the police to investigate your brokerage sales recently—"

Casper waved it away. "I'm not worried about you, Doc. Where is Jade?"

The man's cockiness burned Doc. Doc snapped triumphantly, "I have him tied hand and foot in my—" Doc's eyes rolled. He chewed his lips. He turned abruptly to the bed, swabbing the hypodermic needle with alcohol.

"GET away from him," George Casper ordered. "He's dying, and I'm going to see that he does die. You, too, Doc. You told me the one thing I wanted to know, where I can find Jade. I'll buy him off. A man like that will do anything to avoid the police." Casper's thin body uncoiled and came forward.

A knock sounded on the door. "Doctor, do you need me?"

Doc opened his mouth. Casper was on him instantly, clamping shut Doc's lips. "Are you going to make me kill her, too? Tell her to go away."

Doc wanted to scream with all his might when Casper released him, but he knew his life was as nothing compared with a young, innocent girl's.

"Never mind, Jean," he said. "Go downstairs and wait." Doc looked at Casper. There was a new, triumphant light in Casper's eyes. He'd found Doc's weak point.

"I can shoot you and make it look like suicide," he said softly, "but she'd suspect, then I'd have to take her out on the lake and drown her. Understand, dear doctor? If you want to save her, you'll write a suicide note and then kill yourself!"

Doc tried to talk, couldn't say a word. Casper said, "Yes, that's it! It'll remove any suspicion that we didn't give Warren the best treatment."

Doc croaked, "What about George?"

"That fat fool!" Casper scoffed. "The only reason I pretended to want Warren to live was so he wouldn't get suspicious. George will be ruined when Ajax folds. But the crack you gave him will keep him unconscious till everything is over. Sit down, Doc. Get your pen and prescription pad."

Casper pushed Doc into a chair, then fished in Doc's bag. "Name your poison, Doc," he said, lips cruel. "Here. This ought to do it—carbolic acid."

Doc couldn't keep still. He jerked, twitched, trembled. "Wh-what do you w-want me to—"

"Write a note," Casper ordered. "Say that you realize you're no good. Whisky got you. You bungled the job on Warren because you were drunk. You're ashamed and realize you can be prosecuted for criminal negligence, malpractice. You're taking this way out."

Doc's lips moved wordlessly. Casper was mad. Yes, but determined, cold, sure. After Doc had written the suicide note, Casper was going to force him to drink carbolic acid. Doc stared at the bottle in horror. It was a four-ounce bottle, half full. The fatal dose of carbolic acid was as little as a teaspoonful.

"I won't do it!" Doc groaned. "Shoot me, but I—"

"Then Jean dies, too!"

"But I—I can't!" Doc said, "I'm old. I don't have the nerve to d-drink that. I—" Doc's head spun dizzily. A crazy notion had whirled into him. "I need a d-drink. Maybe if I d-drink enough whisky, I'll s-steady down."

Casper's bony nose seemed to grow larger as he stared at Doc. "You can drink as much as you can hold for all I care," he snapped. He rummaged in a traveling bag, put a quart of whisky on the table. "You're supposed to be drunk, anyhow."

WITH a sob and a prayer, Doc seized the bottle. He put it to his ragged lips and gulped mightily. He was sputtering, gasping, when he put the bottle down. He'd swallowed more even than the eight ounces of the night before. The

whisky poured fire through him. His fingers steadied. He began to write.

Doc delayed as long as he could, gurgling on the bottle from time to time. When he'd finished the note, the bottle was more than half empty. Doc was in a fog. He wondered if he'd even feel the carbolic acid burn.

Casper read the note. Satisfaction glinted in his eyes. "Here. No tricks." He handed Doc the carbolic acid.

Doc took a deep breath. For a second, his watery blue eyes were lifeless. Then he put the bottle to his lips and threw down two ounces of carbolic acid.

Doc couldn't keep a scream from bursting out of his mouth. His throat was on fire. Carbolic acid burns, sears, eats the flesh, skin, and mucuous membrane. Doc clawed at his neck. He'd forgotten Casper entirely. He was in agony.

Doc grabbed the whisky bottle, drank. It did not help. The liquid fire was at his stomach now, his vitals. Doc fell back toward the chair, missed it, and hit the floor. Everything was blurred, dancing before his eyes. Through a haze, he saw Casper leering at him. He saw his black bag on the table. Instinctively, his hands went out toward it.

"I forgot that!" Casper rasped. "Think I'm going to leave this bag so you can get an antidote out of it." Casper grabbed the bag, went to the window, and threw it out.

"Nothing more for me to do," he said, his gaze cruising the room. "I'll tell Jean you don't want to be disturbed for an hour. Well, so long, Doc. I won't need to hurry to find Jade, since you've got him tied up somewhere in your house." Casper slammed the door.

It was a horrible, ghastly ten minutes Doc went through before he conquered the excruciating burning in his throat and insides and got to his feet. Then he clutched the hypodermic syringe which Casper had not bothered to throw out, struggled to the bed, plunged the hypo into John Warren.

Doc swayed and staggered and made little plaintive sounds in his throat as he went to a closet. Half unconscious from the whisky, half wild with the pain of the searing acid, he was living on borrowed time.

Fervently he prayed that John Warren kept his guns in his room. Warren did.

This was a hunting lodge. The gun rack in the closet held three rifles, several shot-guns. Doc strained a .30-30 to his burning chest and saw that it was unloaded.

Back to the dresser, he lurched. He found cartridges, loaded the gun. He was on hands and knees when he went through the bedroom door and started for the staircase. He was flat on his stomach, full-length, pulling himself by the broken ends of his fingernails when he got to the top of the stairs and saw Casper Marston below.

"I'm dying," Doc thought in those seconds of straining the gun to his shoulder. If the top step had not supported the gun barrel high enough to get Casper in the sights, Doc wouldn't have been able to lift it. As it was, it was just right.

Doc moved the gun a little, because he knew he couldn't yell, and sent a bullet whizzing past Casper's ear.

Casper whirled, face mottled. He saw Doc at the top of the stairs, covering him. Jean saw, too, and understood what she must do. She said:

"Put your hands behind your back." She stepped toward Casper with the adhesive tape.

"Damned if I will!" Casper pulled his pistol, crouched. Doc heard the gun roar, bullets chunk into the steps under his chin. Warily he pressed the trigger of the .30-30 again. Casper collapsed. Drunk or sober, alive or half dead, Doc couldn't have missed at that range.

Jean started running up to Doc, the back of her hand against her mouth.

"Phone the sheriff!" Doc croaked, blacking out. "Tell him to bring my stomach pump. Then pour milk in me, girl. And eggs. Hurry!"

DOC was on a cot in his office that night. The sheriff had worked on him earlier with the stomach pump and was now questioning him. Doc answered with nods and shakes of his head. His throat was raw.

"Jade gave me some of it when he started getting the shakes without no dope," the sheriff said. "That fat feller, George, checked up in New York by phone and Marston was doing what you guessed, all right, Doc."

"How's Warren?" Doc managed.

"Doin' fair now," the sheriff said. "Reckon you give him that heart stimulant just in time. Don't see how you managed it, Doc. A body oughta die when he drinks carbolic acid."

"I said I'd pull him through," Doc said proudly.

"Yeah. But what about you, Doc? You're a mortal man. How could you drink—"

Doc grinned feebly. "Alcohol neutralizes carbolic acid. Antidote for carbolic would be straight alcohol right off. I remembered it when Caspar pulled that bottle out of my bag. I asked him for whisky on purpose. You can't give a man a pint of whisky, then kill him with a little carbolic acid as I drank. I took the antidote before the poison."

"Well, now," the sheriff admired.

Doc grinned. "It burned me, naturally. But the way I drink—"

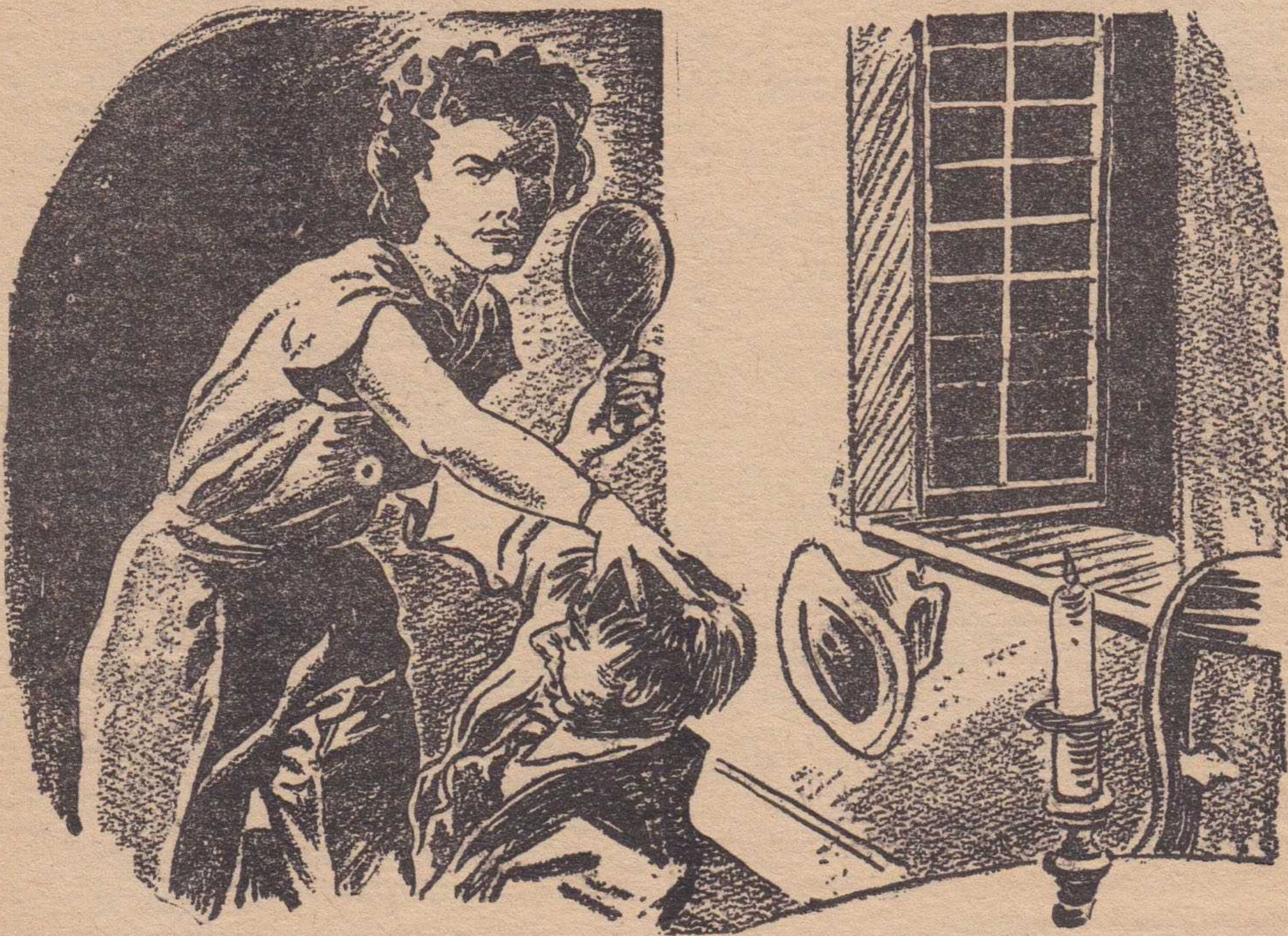
Doc stopped. Laboriously, he hauled himself to his cupboard. With one sweep of his arm he knocked the whisky bottles to the floor. His eyes were shining when he looked at the sheriff again.

"The way I used to drink," he said, "that carbolic acid didn't amount to no more than a cocktail."



Lady-Killer Chiller

"Alvin Hinkey" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

With every suspect in this Greenwich Village wolf-slaying a gold-hungry glamour girl, who but Gotham's defective detective would try to trap a blood-red Riding Hood by concentrating on bat-eared ant-eaters?

Sergeant Louis Garfunkle,
c/o Postmaster,
New York, N. Y.

DEAR LOUIE:
I see they promoted you again after you took Rome. Your last letter saying you was on your way to capture Leghorn reminds me of a chick named Eva, Louie. You are a worse sucker than I ever thought you was if you don't write and ask her for your Elk's tooth back. If she is true to you,

then Joe Stalin and Hitler are planning to wed.

I see her most every night with a different patriot, and they are calling her Miss Duffy Square of 1944. It is only I am a pal and cannot bear to see your affections sabotaged. It is a wonder Eva was not mixed up in a woo-pitching tangle here in which a character named Humphrey Lovering was rubbed out for keeps.

No flags were flown half-mast, Louie, when the news of Humphrey's passing

hit the journals. This geezer was a wolf by profession. After the case was finally cleared up, three mail order houses put in bids for his address books. But I will not get ahead of my story. First I must tell you about Hambone Noonan going to see a doctor for a check-up.

Hambone says to me one day he is feeling punk. But he could not put a finger on any part of his carcass that was out of whack.

"I wish you would go to the doctor with me, Alvin," he says. Which I do.

The M. D. looks at Hambone's tongue, which you know could be used for a welcome mat on any doorstep, taps his chest hard and listens to his ticker beat. The M. D. says everything is okay except that Hambone needs diversion.

"Awright, give me a prescription. I'll git the stuff right away," Hambone says.

"No, it is not medicine, Noonan. It is a change from what you do for a living. Get a hobby to work at. Even if it is cutting out paper dolls."

"I would suggest him collectin' black widow spiders," I says. "I hear you can milk them for silk."

"This is silly," Hambone sniffs. "Come on, Alvin."

"Five bucks, please," the M. D. reminds Hambone.

WALKING down the street later, I tells Hambone the M. D. is right. "Look at me, Hambone. It is a very interesting hobby I got. Well, well, right there in that window is a porcelain aardvark I must have. Isn't it a honey?"

You remember how I collect glass and china and porcelain animals of all kinds, Louie. Right now I have got almost two hundred. I am only missing an aardvark, a zebu, and a baby iguana. They want five bucks for the aardvark.

"You are nuts," Hambone says. "I can buy a live airedale for seven. If that is a hobby, I will stay in a rut. I wish there was some crime somewhere."

I guess Hambone is psychic among other things, Louie. We call up headquarters to see if he should continue watching butchers using their big thumbs too much. We are told about Humphrey Lovering getting expunged. It was done in an apartment in Greenwich Village, which has a private entrance. A wolf's den if there ever was one.

We find the remains draped over a divan and soon discover that some impulsive cupcake bonged his noggin too hard with a bronze statuette of Venus. All over the place are pictures of brunettes, blondes, redheads and otherwise. The joint smells like a perfume factory leaking.

"The war could be over before we questioned all these pin-ups, Alvin," Hambone says, picking up Venus. "Why is this dame always painted or sculpted with no dome and no arms? You don't use your dome when you are in love, I admit, but you gotta have arms, huh?"

"The guy has been dead at least nine hours," the stiff connoisseur says. "It is murder awright. No dough gone from his rompers. No desk drawers ransacked. An' it looks like the babe tried to bite off an ear as it is smeared with lipstick. Maybe she used up her red points too fast and was sick of fish, huh?"

"We can go, Alvin," Hambone says testily. "It must be the man shortage. Corpse appraisers are now detecting. Look, Doc, leave us be now. We are detectives, remember?"

"Why, lookin' at you, Noonan, I forget that easy," the cadaver technician apologizes with his tongue in the cheek. "Just go right ahead."

"If you are funny," Hambone says to the needler, "pigeons eat meat. Let's show him, Alvin. We will dust every part of the joint for fingerprints, photograff everything in sight. Look for handkerchiefs, lipsticks, cigarette butts—"

"If I can mention it, Hambone," I says, "I bet the dolls Humphrey liked the best are the five he has the nice frames on. After he got tired of his cupcakes he took them off his dresser and desk and hung them on the wall. Doesn't that sound awright?"

"You are like all beginners in this business, Alvin," Hambone snorts. "Jumpin' over conclusions. All of these dames here are guilty unless proved innocent. Don't you remember nothin' I taught to you?"

"I just wanted to help, Hambone," I says. "I noticed that the mush wrote on the five pictures is hotter than the porridge on the ones put on the wall. Well, I am goin' to jot down the names on these five anyway. Dolores, Dagmar, Sandra, Imogene, and Zona. I will check them in his

TSD

address books which have to be here, Hambone."

"Go ahead, Alvin, if it will keep you from botherin' me," Noonan grunts and has the statuette examined for prints. He does not find any. He says it means the babe was not inside the wolf's den long before she boffed Humphrey.

"Didn't have time to take off her gloves. He was nailed twice with the statue. The first one only left a bump. While he was waltzin' around bow-legged the doll pasted him for keeps— Haaa!"

"You find her, Hambone?" I yips.

"Of course not, you flathead, Alvin. A clue to her maybe. Here is a fingerprint on Humphrey's stiff collar!"

"Wonderful," I says. "You see there are signs of a struggle here, Hambone. The rug is kind of wavy. Here is something knocked off the table. Why, it is a glass aardvark, Hambone! It is a delicate piece of bric-a-brac, and its head got broke.

"Lock, it shouldn't have no murder evidence to it, so how about lettin' me have it, huh? I can collect the pieces, buy some glue, and fix it nice. Where would you git another aardvark, Hambone?"

"Go ahead, pick it up. And shut up, Alvin."

"Thanks awful," I says. "A aardvark like I been lookin' for everywhere. It is a beautiful shade of red, Hambone. Is there anythin' I can do to help?"

"Leave me do it alone for a while," Hambone gripes. "Why the D. A. ever hired you, I dunno. It will go hard with him next election."

I GATHER up the fragments of the aardvark's head, and have to be very careful as it was quite a fragile chunk of hobby. I put them in an envelope and don't dare put it in my pocket.

Hambone says, "Here is an address book, Alvin. It is full of more names of dames than there is in the roaster of the WACS. Maybe we should just look up the telephone numbers of the five that are framed in this room, huh?"

"That is what I said in the first place," I sniff at Hambone.

"Don't give me that stuff, Alvin. I guess I would of heard you."

Well, we go through the book and find the last names of Dagmar, Sandra, Dolores, Imogene, and Zona. "This murder

case is goin' to be fun, ha!" the mush-head says. "I been awful short of phone numbers."

"They are not zombies, Hambone. So don't git excited," I scoff. "Right now I don't know which looks more gruesome, you or the late Humphrey Lovering."

"Anyways, I am alive," Hambone points out.

We go to see Dolores Pipp first. Dolores lives uptown near the park and makes her dough posing for hosiery ads for two very good reasons. She is wearing an orchid negligee, Hambone's ears vibrate and he cannot talk, so I have to.

"Miss Pipp?" I asks. "We-er-are detectives. Humphrey Lovering was found early this A. M., ready for a morgue bassinnet. Did you kill him?"

"Let me think," the pin-up says. "After all, you was so sudden about it. I don't remember slugging him, boys. I saw him about nine o'clock last night and he was all right. He was going out with another girl and I fixed his bow tie for him."

"You mean his wagon," Hambone says, finally finding voice.

"So that's why a fingerprint was on his stiff collar or on the collar of the stiff. Ha?"

"Could be," Dolores says. "If you have your stamp pad with you, I will give you one to match up. You're eute."

"Now let's stop clownin,' Miss Pipp," Hambone says. "You kill him or didn't you?"

"I am afraid of guns," Dolores says, sitting down on a divan and giving out with the old cheesecake. "Why would I shoot him?"

"She is innocent," I says. "Humphrey was slugged with a statuette, Hambone. We are so sorry to have bothered you, Miss Pipp. We—"

"Must you go?" Dolores says to me. "I wish you would stay awhile, as you have eyes like the pomeranian I lost from distemper. It is like Rollo was back for awhile—"

"Ha," Hambone says. "You kill me, baby."

"You bother me again and I promise to," Miss Pipp says and walks out on us.

We go and call on Zona LaSalle. Zona warbles tunes at an East Fifty-Second Street bistro she tells us. She can prove she was at the jive joint from eight-thirty until three in the morning.

"If I killed him at three-thirty," she says, "how could he have been dead nine hours when you found him, which was nine o'clock A. M.?"

"Maybe the medical examiner was wrong," Hambone says.

"Oh, yeah? It would take a wolf like him plenty of time to go cold," Zona says. "Believe it or not, I only went to see Humphrey because of the etchings he owns. Isn't that a howl, boys? You see I have artistic temperament."

"You believe that, Alvin?" Hambone asks me.

"Sure," I sniff. "Once I ask a guy why he was loafin' around a certain corner, oncet. He told me he was waitin' for a street car, and what do you think?"

"He was," Zona answers for Hambone.

"Yeah. It's a small world," I says.

"We are gettin' nowheres, Alvin," Hambone yelps. "Awright, them other three babes better have worse alibis."

NEXT we go to see Dagmar Prezvotnikoff. She is a Russian doll born near the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn; she eats caviar out of the can. She has got a lot of the society babes thinking she is a real grand-niece of Ivan the Terrible. They get her to appear at parties to tell the suckers how Ivan killed off the peasants. Dagmar has on slacks and a peasant blouse. She throws a comic magazine onto a table when we walk in.

"You was with Humphrey Lovering las' night?" Hambone says right out. "He got murdered."

"No keedin'? Avery morning I axpect to hear he gat keeled," Dagmar says. "It is nyatting, so why the foss, yes?"

"Nuts," Hambone says. "Talk Brooklyn, Dag."

"Yeah, come to the pernt," I says. "Cut the old erl, an' leave us know did you do it."

"Oke, I'll talk your language, coppers," Dagmar says. "I admit I was chummy with the big bad wolf. There was something about the jerk that give a lot of us gals palpitation. You covered part of his face and he looked like Tyrone. He was very extinguished looking."

"He is, you mean," I says.

"A joke, yah?" Dagmar grins like we are only talking over a contribution to charities. "You call up room 1904 at the Hotel Charlatan and ask a fat boy there

from Shamokin, who was with him until four A. M. last night making the rounds of the hot spots. Look, when I left the guy, I was on a merry-go-round and couldn't have killed nobody with a shotgun full of buckshot, my eyes was so crossed. Was I plastered!"

"Come on, Hambone," I says.

"Yeah, I might as well, Alvin. Dames are somethin', ain't they?"

"Ask Napoleon an' Caesar," I says, Louie. Was I kiddin'?"

We go to a drug store and each get a coke with aspirin in it. I bum a paper bag off a clerk to put my aardvark in.

We look to see who is next and find out it is Imogene Puce. When she lets us in to a small apartment on West Sixty-eighth, she right away shows the jitters. She says we are cops before we can admit it.

She is a blonde. I says to myself I hope she did not do it. It is a dish I would not want to see the D. A. order in a rotisserie like they have on the Hudson. Imogene works in a hat shop on Madison.

"Awright," Hambone Noonan says again. "You got a pitcher of yourself in Humphrey Lovering's woo studio, sister! Humphrey, as you may know by now, which you do because that newspaper there has it, was removed from this world last night. He was bopped about eleven P. M. Why did you kill him?"

"I—I had to. He made advances. He—"

"Ha-a-ah!" Hambone says. "What did you expect in the way of entertainment in a wolf's parlor, baby? Maybe you expected to help him roll bandages fer the Red Cross or talk over the latest books? Well, Alvin, we found her at last. Confess, Imogene."

"Yes, I did it. We had a few drinks and then—oh, the rat deserved it. It was self-defence and I can prove it. My last chance was to pick up the statuette of Venus which I did. I hit him and then—I am glad you found out."

"Let's go downtown, Imogene," Hambone says. "You see, Alvin, like I said it was only a process of illumination. Nobody can git away with murder."

"I am relieved somehow," I says. "My feet were killin' me, Hambone. I hope you beat this rap, Imogene."

"Thanks so much. Are you going to handcuff me?"

"Nope," Hambone tells her. "Only

bracelets with diamonds would look good on you. I wish it had been that Dolores, Alvin. There's not enough blondes in the world as it is."

"Say, Hambone," I says quickly. "I just happened to think—"

"You always did, Alvin. Ha! Don't bother me now. You go along home as me and Imogene will take a cab. It costs exter for three."

"Hoggin' all the credit, huh," I sniff. "Look, it was me said t'he murderess would be one of the five, Hambone. Okay, but somethin' tells me—"

HAMBONE takes Imogene by the arm like she is made of blown glass and ushers her out. I look around the joint and notice things that makes me scratch my dome. But I leave the flat as I am anxious to go home and put the aardvark together. I stop and buy some glue on the way.

It is quite a delicate job. When I have the aardvark's noggin all glued together I see I have a piece left over. I have to go down to a library on Amsterdam to see what an aardvark looks like. I must make sure one does not have a horn on its nose like a rhinoceros, as that would only be the reason I had a chunk of stuff left over. But the aardvark has a plain nose, Louie, so I am stumped. Then I look at the red chip closer and suddenly feel quite faint.

A half hour later I am downtown in the D. A.'s office. Imogene is there with Hambone, and what do you know? The D. A. has busted the blonde's confession full of holes, as he thought of something Hambone forgot but which I didn't. He says to the doll:

"So after you killed Lovering, you cleaned up the bottles and washed the glasses nice and put them on the shelf, huh? There wasn't a single drink poured the night of the crime, because we made sure the guy was all out of grog. Who you coverin'?"

Well, it turns out she is trying to shield her sister whose name is Sandra. Sandra is just out of the finishing school, she says, and fell for Humphrey's mullarkey. She came home late that night and admitted boffing Humphrey with the statuette.

"She said she didn't hit him hard

enough to kill him," Imogene says and starts weeping.

"Nuts," Hambone says. "Samson couldn't of nailed him prettier. A doll pertect-in' her good name don't know her own strength. Too bad, kid. We gotta go an' pick up your li'l sister."

"It will ruin her," Imogene yelps. "Let me pay for the crime. Think of her future!"

"We are thinking of Humphrey," the D. A. says. "He has no future."

Louie, I look at Imogene and know she is innocent. Hambone goes after Sandra and finally brings her in. Right then and there I know no jury will ever convict her. She is about eighteen or nineteen and would be a cinch to toss Veronica back in the lake if she decided to crash the cinema. She weighs about ninety-two pounds carrying an anvil. I could have cried right there, Louie.

"Yes, I hit him," Sandra says. She starts tearing at a square of lace with her fingers and I keep watching her hands. I feel sorry for Hambone Noonan. You will soon find out why, Louie. "He invited me to the apartment down in the village and said he had an old mother there who wanted some help with an afghan—"

"Huh?" Hambone says. "What was his old lady doin' with a foreigner like that?"

"It is a shawl, Noonan. And shut up," the D. A. says.

"Well," Sandra says, "it was a trick. He tried to make love to me and I—"

Louie, the kid was not ribbing me. She was already making up the heart throbs for a jury. I do not see why her sister bothered to go to bat for her in the first place as it was like calling in the groundkeeper who had arthritis to bat for Ruth in a world series. This Sandra Puce could take care of herself on a troop transport, no kidding.

"We will get you the best lawyers, San," Imogene sobs.

"It was self-defence, Immy. Stop squallin'," Sandra says.

The funniest part of it all was that the D. A., Imogene, Hambone, and even Sandra think Sandra murdered Humphrey—but I knew she didn't. Hambone Noonan should get himself a hobby like that M.D. told him to. Well, I get up and pick up my hat.

"You should see that aardvark, Ham-

bone," I says. "You wouldn't ever think its dome got smashed. Only thing is I got a chip left over. Lots of luck, Miss Puce."

"Thanks, mink-face."

Right then and there I wished she was guilty, Louie.

THE papers carry swell photos of Sandra Puce the next morning. The reporters say Hambone Noonan did one of the fastest bits of criminal detection in history. He isolated five photos from almost two hundred and tracked the guilty Delilah to her lair. A sob sister went to town in one sheet, Louie. She went to bat for the gorgeous murderess right away. She asked the public who could have defended Sandra Puce but herself, when all her brothers and cousins were fighting a war? Were wolves going to be allowed to prey on the innocent flocks of cuties while an invasion was on? There were saboteurs behind the lines and they did not carry bombs and Betsys but smooth lines, perfume, and such.

They have to lock up the swell little dish, because she does not know a soul who can come up with fifty grand to bail her out. Hambone struts around like he is the head rooster in a barnyard. He spends most of his time the next few days asking photographers if they want pictures of him.

I go down to the late wolf's den and look over his Red Riding Hoods. You can tell if some pictures have been hanging on a wall longer than others, Louie, by the way they fade the paint or paper on the wall. Of course when you start a gallery, you work from the top down.

I find four pictures I know have been hung last. So I go through a process of elimination again. I look at the signatures on the pin-ups, then rummage through the late Humphrey Lovering's two address books.

Before long I have the names of four cuties. They are Marguerita LaFond, Chloe Zysmyk, Yvette D'Arcy and Anastasia Winkenbach. I am getting to feel like a wolf myself.

First I go to see Marguerita who is a wild animal trainer out of work. She has hair and eyes darker than Hitler's chances and curves like the Storm King Highway. I make out I am selling insurance, Louie.

"Look, I have not had my head in a lion's mouth in a year," the dame says. "I'm cancelling what I took out. Beat it, before my boy friend gets here. He's a wrestler and broke a brush salesman's arm only yesterday even though the guy did carry brushes."

"I just thought I'd ask," I says. Just as I walk out of the place, a citizen three times the size of Bendix barges out of the elevator, spots me, and lets out a roar. I go down the back steps, and hide in a coalbin until late that night. But I know the doll did not murder Humphrey.

I see Hambone Noonan in a tavern on Sixth Avenue. Hambone says he can tell I have been stealing coal which must be a Federal offense. He says I could have at least gone and washed up after.

"Alvin, the next big case I am goin' to see you get mentioned, whether you help much or not. I ain't one to fergit how I had to struggle up the ladder."

"You touch me," I says. "Have you got a hobby yet?"

"Yes, I am thinkin' of makin' a collection of old railroad roundhouses, Alvin. The only thing that stumps me is where will I keep them. Huh, if you would spend more time learnin' detectin' than collectin' brickabracks, you would stand in better with the D. A. Sandra got a good lawyer, Alvin. He sprung that chorine that they said put wolfbane in her husband's gin, remember?"

"She will beat that rap, Hambone. I wouldn't be surprised she never even went to court," I says. "Have a beer on me as you spilled most of your first down my vest."

I START out again late the next day as I figure that most dolls have to work at something or other. I am camping outside a flat on West Seventh Street at six-thirty, when up the stairs comes a dame I know must be Chloe Zysmyk. She is close to five feet eleven, and has shoulders like Minnie O'Rourke, the policewoman. I duck into a mop closet until she gets into her flat, then I come out and knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Chloe yelps.

"Income tax man from Washin'ton," I says fast. She lets me in, Louie. She is some babe and I asks what she does for a living.

"If you are what you say, you should

know," Chloe says, and gets a funny look in her peepers. She is wearing blue slacks and has a bandanna tied around her noggin.

"Oh, sure," I says. "You are in defence work, huh?"

"Riveter," Chloe says. "I got fifty a week hoofing in the Cococabana, but I get seventy at the navy yard. I owe Morgenthau some dough? Tell him to learn to add straight. Now beat it as I am going out stepping."

"I bet not with Humphrey Lovering," I says and know I have the right party at last, Louie.

"Meanin' which?"

"Why, you knocked him off," I says, wondering how I got the nerve.

"No kiddin', Buster? Maybe you can prove it."

"Maybe. Where's the fingernail off your left thumb, baby?"

Chloe's teeth click together. "It broke off when I was riveting. A sub's insides is no beauty parlor."

"Yeah. Then it was swept up an' the wind took it an' brought it all the way to New York. It flew through Humphrey's window and landed near a corpse. I am laughin'."

That was only a figure of speech, Louie. The next thing I know, I am being thrown around the flat like I am a dust cloth. Chloe tosses me into a corner, then jumps on me and bangs me over the pate with a lampshade.

The weapon does not seem to suit her so she reaches for a plant pot containing a geranium on the window sill. She nearly fractures my skull with it, but I just move it in the nick of time and squirm out of the corner.

Chloe chases me all around the room and into her boudoir, where it looks like I will make my last stand and hope I am luckier than Custer.

You know how some of the joints are, in the Village, Louie, thank heavens. They are as old as the story about the farmer's daughter and the salesman; some have tenants that do not pay rent. Well, in the corner there is one of those big wire traps. There is a very lively mouse in it. I am saved.

I spring the rodent. Chloe tries to climb a drape near the window and starts screeching like a banshee. The material gives way. Chloe pancakes quite heavily

on the seat of her slacks and some bridge-work pops out of her mouth. I wind the cretonne around her dome and almost smother her. Then I put the cuffs on her.

"You was a glamor gal off duty," I says. "You got the brush from Humphrey and slugged him with the statuette of Venus. Quite a love tap, Chloey."

"Ug-glub-plrpf-fff—"

"Oh, I fergot," I says. When I take the hood off Chloe, she owns up to bopping Humphrey. She says she had just as soon die as live without him, the rat.

"You can plead self-defence," I says. "But to convince a jury, you should diet all the time you are waitin' for the D. A. to make up his case, huh?"

I go out and call headquarters. "Send Hambone up here," I says. "I got the gal who really slew Humphrey Lovering."

"I don't believe it," Hambone yelps when he arrives. "It is just a rib."

"I'd say she was all here, Hambone," I says. "I found out why I had a piece of an aardvark left over. It came off Chloe's thumb. The way these dolls paint their nails while on the prow—but let's wait until the D. A. can git in on it, huh?"

WE TAKE Chloe Zysmyk downtown and put her in Sandra Puce's place. Sandra throws her arms around my neck and hangs on. It takes the D. A. and Hambone combined to pull her loose.

"You needn't have been so quick about it," I says and taste of the almond lipstick. "Mmm! Now, it was just the process of illumination, Hambone. Sandra did not lose no nail, so it had to be somebody else. And Sandra, like I figured at the time and tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen, has not got enough weight on her to come out on top in a fight with a hummingbird. Sure, she smacked Humphrey with the statue like she said."

"But," Hambone gulps. "Then she could of—"

"Naw. You fergit there was a bump on the coco of the deceased that was nowhere near the fracture," I says. "That was the lump Sandra handed Humphrey. Then later, Chloe visited the wolf. He bared his fangs when she asked maybe where she stood. Finding out it was not at the head of the class, she picked up the statuette and hit Humphrey the second time.

"You can just look at Chloe's muscles to know which doll finished the wolf. There was quite a struggle before she boffed him, and she broke off a thumbnail. I picked it up with the remains of the aardvark's noggin and wondered why I had a piece left over, Hambone.

"Look, wouldn't you think this thumbnail was a piece of thin glass at first? Same color as my aardvark—"

"What the heck is an aardvark?" the D. A. howls.

"It is an ant-eatin' mammal," I says. "It has a face somethin' like Hambone Noonan's. Now Chloe has confessed, you can let Sandra go, huh?"

"Nothin' to stop her, Hinkey," the D. A. says.

"Come on, Alvin, you darlin'," the little dish says. Hambone turns green and goes somewhere to hide.

I must knock off, Louie, as I have heard where I can get a china gemsbok, whatever that is. Eva told me last night she read where the Yanks are after Florence. She asks was she a spy? Don't marry a dope like her, Louie. By the way, who is Florence. Genoa? That's me, Alvin. Always there with a gag, hey, Louie?

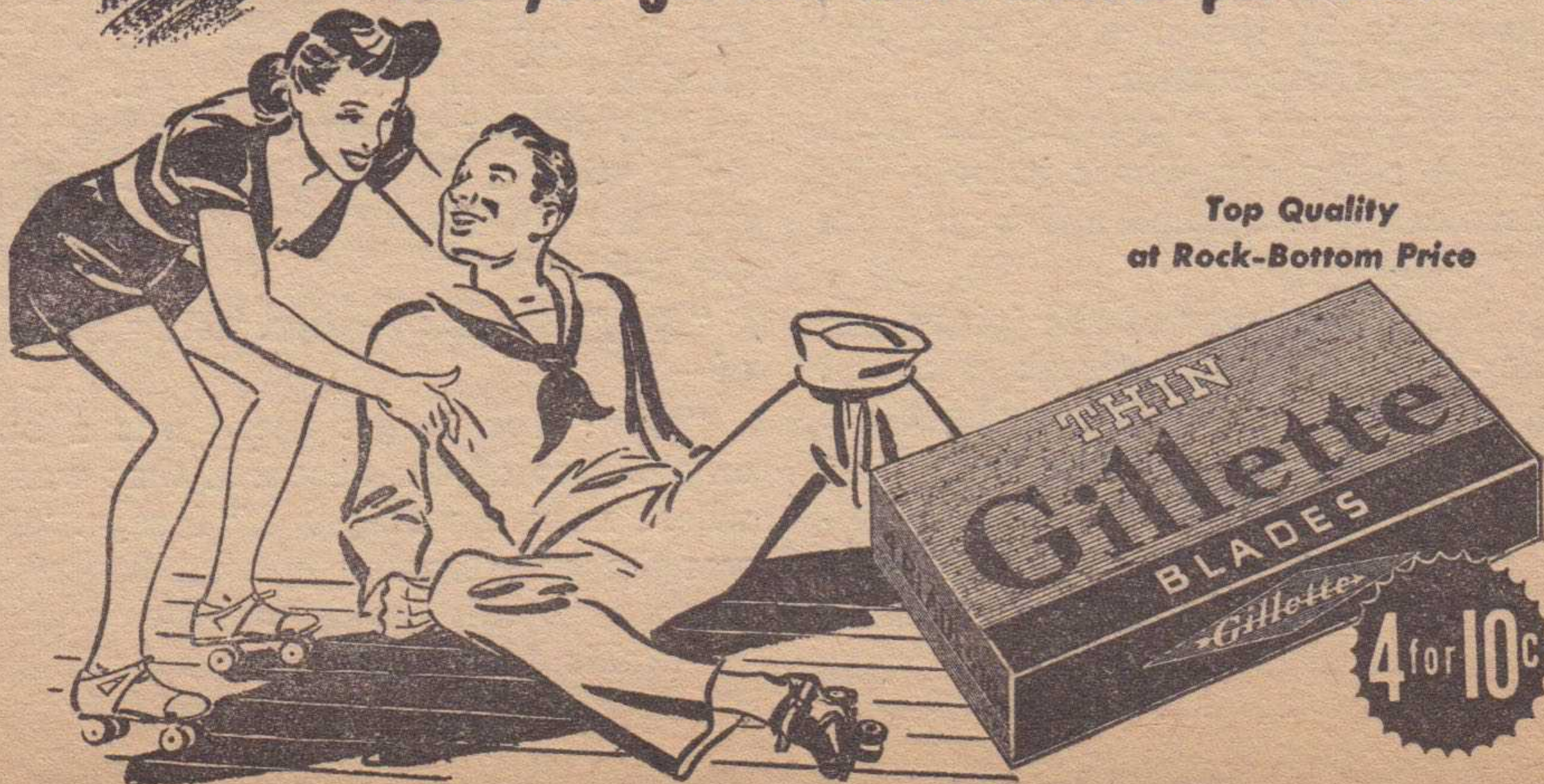
Hambone says to get him a gondola if you take Venice.

Yours for victory,

Alvin



**You skim off beards in swingtime, men,
With Thin Gillette Blades—four for ten!
Your face looks well-groomed, feels top-grade,
And you get lots more shaves per blade!**



Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

Repent at Seizure

By David M. Norman

B Bob Blaine had silenced his blackmailer with a .32 and there wasn't any doubt about it. Yet, when the dead man persisted in pestering him, Blaine had to find a more effective muzzle than bullets.



IT WAS as simple as it seemed to be urgent. Bob Blaine crouched outside the partially opened window at the rear of Hugh Giles' big living room. Giles sat at a desk, in a big swivel chair, with his back toward Bob

Blaine—and the gun Blaine was slowly and cold-bloodedly bringing to aim.

The necessity for Giles' murder was an impelling thing. He had learned certain facts of Blaine's life. A little term in prison for instance; the fact that Blaine's name had once been something else, and that his father had died in prison. All the unsavory things in Blaine's life, Hugh Giles knew and was ready to broadcast if Blaine so much as opened his mouth.

On the surface it seemed that all Hugh Giles wanted was Blaine's attentions and his labor, at a pitifully small salary given with plenty of abuse. But Blaine knew that Giles was working up to something. A crooked deal in which Blaine would take full blame, and, on the basis of his record, would be almost automatically convicted.

Therefore, Hugh Giles had to die. His time was growing short. Blaine rested his gun arm on the window sill and carefully sighted the bald head. He'd have one chance and one alone. If he missed, Giles would move fast, possibly escape. Then Blaine would pay for the whole thing dearly.

Blaine slowly squeezed the trigger. The gun exploded, with a roar that sounded like that of a sixteen-inch naval cannon. Giles' bald head jerked slightly,

then slid out of sight. In a moment his body appeared, slipping out of the swivel chair very slowly, as if it was all an exaggerated act.

Blaine watched it, breath held, forehead moist, and knew that what he'd just done was a ghastly mistake. Murder never relieved anyone of responsibilities. He shoved the gun into his pocket and cut through the darkness of the estate. The shot was bound to have been heard. Perry Giles, the adopted son of the now dead man, would give the alarm.

Blaine knew what it felt like to be a petty crook, a convict, the offspring of a tough and deadly gangster. He knew what it was never to have had a chance, but he had never before known what it was like to be a murderer.

ON HIS way to the cheap little two-room apartment where he lived, Blaine crossed over a bridge and hurled the murder weapon into the water. Even that didn't make him feel any better. He needed a drink, but liquor always made him sick and he was sick enough now. He walked fast, with frequent glances behind him as though he expected a dozen bald-headed ghosts and a horde of cops to be on his trail.

The quiet and security of his apartment did nothing to relieve his raw nerves. Nothing at all. He smoked cigarettes chain fashion, paced the floor, and contemplated giving himself up. Killing a man was a ghastly thing. He'd convinced himself it was necessary, but now that it was done, he recognized the futility of it.

If Hugh Giles had framed him, a prison term would have been better than the electric chair. He sat down at the

small desk, drew paper toward him and a pen. It was poised to write the first lines of a confession.

The telephone rang, its jangle startling every nerve in his body. He jumped up, shaking badly, but he had to answer the phone. It might help to serve as an alibi if the shot had not been heard, if the medical examiner set a more or less tentative time of murder.

The voice that greeted him was sepulchral—like the voice of a radio which seems to come from some remote spot in a vast hall and is called an echo chamber.

"Bob—it was a terrible thing to do. I didn't mean you any great harm. I had plans to get you out of trouble if anything happened. Now I am dead. You killed me. Give yourself up, Bob. Surrender. Or punish yourself if you like, but do either because you'll never have another moment's peace."

"Who is this?" Bob yelled. "Who is it?"

But he knew even though he asked. That had been the voice of Hugh Giles, whom he'd seen slide out of his chair with a bullet through his head. Cold horror seized him in an icy embrace until his wits cleared. He told himself a dead man couldn't speak. Yet a voice had spoken, and it had sounded like Hugh Giles' crabbed tones.

Bob Blaine sat down, staring straight ahead and puffing on his cigarette until it burned his lips. The pain brought him out of that lethargy, cleared his wits. He wondered if Hugh Giles' foster-son Perry, would be willing to help him. Perry hated the old man as much as Blaine did.

It was odd because Hugh Giles had adopted Perry and lavished a lot of care on him. Given him presents of great value—like the pocket watch which struck the hour with tiny but mellow notes. Yet Hugh Giles couldn't even restrain his ambitions to make money enough to keep his adopted son out of the crooked, larcenous schemes of his business.

Blaine tried to figure it out. He was a murderer. That voice had scared the wits out of him, but he didn't believe in ghosts. Someone knew he was a murderer. That meant exposure and conviction. The man who knew was giving him a

chance—to take his own life and cheat justice.

Blaine was still sitting there, half an hour later, when he heard a rustling sound and saw an envelope thrust under his door. He raced to the door, yanked it open, and the corridor was empty. No sound of retreating footsteps reached his ears. He picked up the envelope and ripped the flap. It contained a brief little note:

Blaine,

*You are headed for the electric chair.
There are easier deaths.*

That was all except that it was signed with the name of the dead man. Twenty minutes later, the phone rang again. Once more that sepulchral voice advised him to destroy himself. The ghostly intonations were so real that Blaine almost thought he heard a musical background to them. Then the connection was cut.

"It did sound like Giles," Blaine told himself. "It was his voice and his writing on that note. Maybe I—missed. Maybe he isn't dead and is trying to exact revenge in this manner. It would be exactly like him. He enjoyed torturing people."

BLAINÉ crushed out a cigarette and seized his hat. He was going to settle this even if his trip to Giles' house was the first leg of a journey to the electric chair.

He deserved nothing short of that anyhow. He'd been a weakling to resort to murder as a solution for his troubles. He should have gone to the police and exposed Giles as a crook, admitted his unwitting part in the game, and taken his punishment like a man. Instead, he'd turned into a sniveling, self-righteous murderer. He'd told himself that Giles deserved to die. Maybe he did, but it was murder nonetheless.

Blaine turned a corner and was two doors from Giles' big house. There were four cars parked in front, police cars, of course. The murder had been discovered. Blaine shuddered. Once his record was found, they'd throw him into a cell. They'd have a right to, even though that record was not entirely Blaine's doings.

The term in prison had been served as a stooge for a more important crim-

inal who would have been given the book. Served, because Blaine had been fool enough to try and think like his gangster father that cops were born to be outwitted. That stealing fifty thousand dollars was smart, even if in the end you served twenty years for the crime. Well, he'd fooled them all right—himself too.

Blaine resolutely marched up to the door. A patrolman opened it and glared at him. Then someone shouted his name and slim, dapper Perry Giles hurried to greet him.

"Bob, he's dead. Someone murdered Hugh."

"Murdered?" Blaine asked blankly and wished he was ten thousand miles away. Wondered why on earth he'd come back here.

"This man is a friend of mine," Perry told the patrolman. "Let him in. Come on, Bob. Upstairs where we won't be bothered. I'm half sick over it all. Terrible thing, ghastly."

But upstairs, in one of the bedrooms, Perry changed his tune. "We're in a nasty spot, Bob," he said in a low voice. "With the old man's death, his whole shabby business is going to be exposed and us along with it. You know he lived on blackmail."

"Of course I knew," Blaine admitted. "Didn't I help him enough with his dirty schemes? Perry, do they know who—killed him?"

"No, but they'll find out. It could have been one of a hundred people the old man preyed on. He knew it was coming eventually, but they got him when he wasn't prepared. He kept guns around the house. Like this, for instance."

Perry opened a drawer in the dresser and took out a thirty-two automatic.

"Loaded," he said, "and ready for action. The old man was scared stiff."

"But they don't know—who did it?" Blaine asked sharply.

Perry glanced at him with a peculiar light in his eyes. "You almost sound as if you killed him. No, they haven't the faintest idea who did it, Bob. Not yet, but they're getting ideas. A Lieutenant Black is in charge, and he's one of the cleverest detectives on the force. Oh, yes, if you have an alibi, you'd better get it ready. Black will want to see you. Bob—you didn't kill him, did you?"

"Do you think I did?" Blaine countered.

"No—no, I don't. Even if you had—oh, what's the use talking? I'd better get downstairs. Give you time to think. Make that alibi good, Bob. Remember the lieutenant is plenty smart."

Perry Giles hurried out of the room. The dresser drawer was still open and the blue-black automatic lay on a pile of handkerchiefs. Blaine picked it up. He could end the whole thing right here and now. They said a man never even heard the explosion. There'd be very little pain. He raised the gun a trifle.

That ghostly voice and the note was calculated to break his nerve. They were successful moves, for Blaine was at the end of his rope—almost. He sat down slowly, still gripping the gun. He had murdered the old man—no doubt about it. No doubt that Lieutenant Black was a clever detective either and bound to blame Blaine. There was no alibi, not even a shred of one. Blaine had acted in the white heat of rage without thought of consequences. He glanced down at the gun once more.

THERE were hurried footsteps outside the room. Perry barged in, very excited.

"Bob," he gasped, "tell me the truth! Did you kill the old man? Lieutenant Black asked about you, of course, and he did a lot of checking up on the telephone. I listened in. He knows you served time—all about your family. And, Bob—they found footprints outside the back window. Clear prints. They're taking moulage impressions of them now."

"Suppose I did do it?" Blaine said softly.

"I'll try my best to slip you out of the house," Perry said. "It won't be easy. The chances are much against us, because they know you're here. Did you kill him, Bob?"

"Yes," Blaine answered. "I shot him. Now let's see you stand by your promise."

Perry was pale and shaken. "I'll go downstairs and look over things. Don't budge out of this room. Be back as soon as I can. Bob, if the lieutenant returns with me, believe me, it won't be my fault."

Perry rushed out, down the steps, and saw Lieutenant Black. He started over toward him and was ready to speak when

the single shot rang out. It came from upstairs.

"That's Bob Blaine!" Perry shouted. "It's Blaine. I left him there with a gun. He's shot himself!"

Black grabbed Perry's arm. "Why should he shoot himself?"

"Because he stabbed the old man," Perry groaned. "He told me so. I—I wanted to help him. Now it's too late. I . . ."

Perry stopped talking abruptly, because Bob Blaine was slowly descending the staircase, and he held the automatic by its barrel.

"The gun went off by accident," Blaine said slowly. "Lieutenant Black? I want to give myself up for the murder of Hugh Giles."

Suddenly Perry leaped at the detective. He wound arms around him, hurled him against the wall and kept shrieking at Blaine.

"Run, you idiot, before any of the other cops come! Run! I'll hold him. Run, you fool . . ."

"Let the lieutenant go," Blaine said quietly. "I'm not running away. I shot the old man."

Lieutenant Black freed himself, glared at Perry, then did a double take at Blaine.

"Shot him?" he barked. "That man was stabbed to death!"

"Why did you kill him, Perry?" Blaine faced the adopted son. "That's a foolish question to ask. You wanted his money. Lieutenant, I did try to kill Hugh Giles. I shot at him and he slid out of his big chair. Then someone phoned me and suggested I commit suicide. There was a note signed by the dead man saying the same thing, followed by a second phone call.

"When I came here to surrender, Perry whisked me upstairs. He didn't want

me to know the old man had been stabbed, not shot. He showed me a loaded gun and made sly hints I might use it on myself. I purposely fired the gun to see what he'd do. He told you I'd confessed. Yes, I did, because I thought—I had killed him, but I said I shot him."

Black snapped handcuffs around Perry's wrist. "I figured this rat for the killer right from the first. You're pinched, too, Blaine, but I don't know what we can do to you. Explaining the shot solved the biggest mystery of the affair. I smelled cordite in the room, I saw part of the big chair chipped off, and I found a spent bullet on the floor. Yet that bullet never touched Giles. You're a very lucky man."

"Yes, I know," Blaine said. "But I rather suspected Perry. You see, in trying to frighten me into suicide, he pretended to be the dead man. He wanted to create the effect of a hollow voice from the grave. So he placed the mouthpiece of the telephone against his chest while he spoke. That produces a strange effect and also serves to disguise the voice."

"What's that got to do with it?" Black asked.

Blaine smiled wanly. "The old man gave Perry a watch that strikes the hour very faintly. It struck the hour when he had the phone pressed against his chest and I heard it. I reasoned that Perry wouldn't try to intimidate me unless he was the actual killer, so I came over to find out what it was all about."

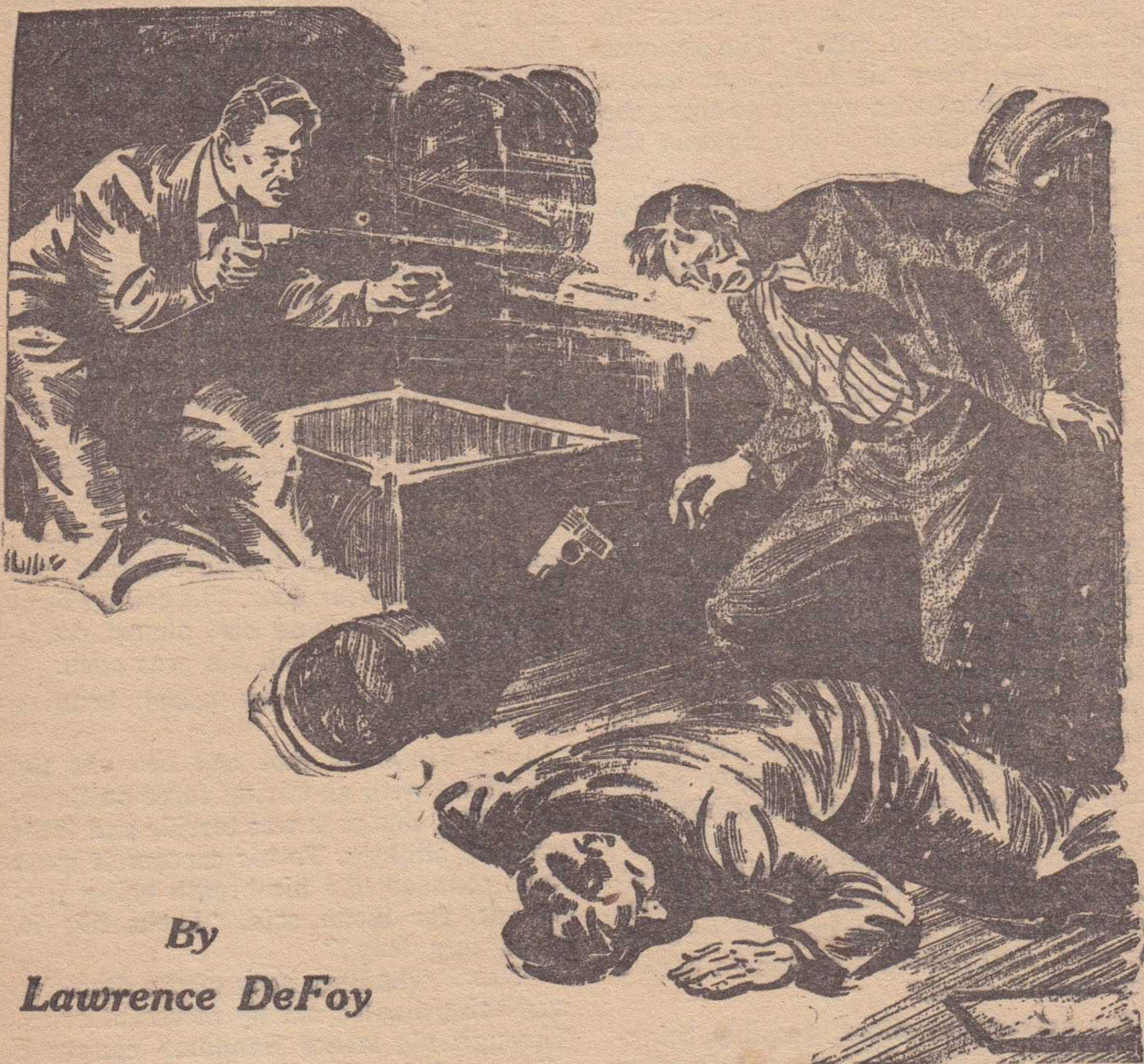
"Okay, Blaine," the lieutenant said. "Your testimony will cook him. Do I have to put the cuffs on you too?"

"No. No, it won't be necessary. I learned a lesson, lieutenant. For a little while I thought I was actually a murderer. It wasn't a nice feeling."



Thrown for a loss, Private Detective Whit Saunders tried to drop the case that had dropped him. Yet even after turning down his client's cold cash, Whit learned he couldn't quit being . . .

Hot on Satan's Heels



By
Lawrence DeFoy

THE Black-and-White taxi slid through splatters of light from the street lamps, coming closer. Whit Saunders drew back into the shadows of the doorway, watching it ease to a stop in front of 97. He waited, sharp features wooden.

Nothing happened. . . .

At length the detective left his shelter and crossed the street, coming up behind the driver on silent feet.

"Got a match, Mac?" he asked conversationally.

If the cabby was startled, he didn't show it. He turned leisurely to survey the tall, lean figure bending toward him. "Naw," he said briefly.

Whit peered into the gloom of the rear seat. "Cab for hire?"

"Naw. I'm on a call."

"At 97? Who called, a dame?"

The driver spread powerful hands on the wheel and looked at them. "What's it to ya?"

A menacing voice behind the detective said, "Stand still, bright boy!" Whit

stood still. Something hard dug into the small of his back.

"Doesn't the D. A. ever get tired of playing G-man down here?"

Whit frowned. Where had he heard the voice before? "You got me wrong," he said, wanting to hear it again. "I'm not from the D. A., punk." He sensed his error; there was an indefinable tension about the silence that followed.

Then the voice spoke once more. "Is that so?" it inquired silkily. The gun was taken away from his back; but before Whit Saunders had a chance to turn, the barrel of it chunked solidly against the side of his head. . . .

The sickening grinding, the detective discovered in a minute or two, wasn't entirely inside his blazing skull. The cab was moving and he was doubled up on the floor, his ear directly over the drive shaft. Before moving it, he fought back a groan and cautiously opened his eyes.

In the flowing light from passing traffic arcs, Whit discovered a pair of shapely, brown-painted feminine legs, not six inches from his nose. Furthermore, they were bound together at the ankles by what appeared to be a leather strap.

Slowly arching his neck and battling the nausea from the aching throb in his head, Saunders found another pair of legs, masculine this time, and in evening trousers. He closed his eyes again.

"Private dick, eh?" the driver spoke from the front seat. "Find anythin' else on him?"

"No," said the familiar silky voice, "but that's enough. Only reason a shamus would snoop around is because he's being paid. And nobody's paying to have a faro layout cased."

The driver was silent, possibly thinking. At last he said, "Ya mean he's after the babe, Ibbby?"

Ibbby! So that's who was behind 97 Hill Street. Ibbby Sloan, racketeer, night spot organizer, graduate gunman. And now, kidnaper.

"**M**AYBE," Sloan said. "Whatever he's after, it won't be what he gets. Stop at the North Glen bridge, Sam."

Sam felt disposed to argue. "That accidental fall gag again? Why not slug him and toss him in a ditch somewhere?"

"Because I don't want a stink about

this, that's why." Sloan was impatient. "Whoever hired him's waiting for a report. If he's found rubbed out, that party'll put two and two together. If it's an accident or a suicide, who knows what might have happened before? Let me handle it, Sam—you drive."

"Okay, but—what about the crack on the head?"

Ibbby laughed shortly. "When they pick him up from the macadam parkway at the bottom of the ravine, an extra bump on the head won't be noticeable. Isn't that the bridge up ahead?"

"Yeah. Ya want I should stop off of it?"

"No, stop in the middle. No traffic out this way this time of night."

Whit tried desperately to think, but nothing came. The picture was clear; the answer was not. Should he watch his chance and rise up to do battle? No, that would mean that both he and the girl stood a good chance of catching holes in the head. He decided to await further developments.

The cab came to a stop. The driver's door opened. Sloan leaned forward and unlatched the rear door. The ceiling light came on as it swung out, almost catching the detective with his eyes open.

"He still out?" Sam asked, bending over him.

Ibbby lifted his foot and brought the heel down with agonizing force on Saunders' ribs. The pain was terrific and Whit groaned slightly. To his captors it must have sounded like his breath being jolted out, for Sloan said, "Looks like it. Need any help?"

"Naw." The limp body of the detective was being hauled out by powerful arms. Through his lashes Saunders caught a glimpse of the girl's face, horror-widened eyes above the white spread of tape across her mouth. Then, as easily as a truckman handling a sack of potatoes, the driver slung him over one husky shoulder. A few quick steps took them to the stone parapet of the ornate viaduct.

It was beginning to rain, a nasty drizzle. The wide stone coping was wet with it when Sam shifted his limp burden onto it, head and arms hanging down into space.

Whit decided it was now or never. He was getting set to scramble back into whatever hopeless kind of action he could

best manage when his dangling fingers touched against something that gave his thoughts new direction.

Instantly his strong hands closed above the leaded cable conduit that traversed the outside of the bridge at floor level. In the same instant Sam, the cab driver, swung his legs over. The detective's long body fell downward to bring up with a jerk that almost ripped the conduit from its moorings.

Whit's body snapped, whiplike, back and forth, while he clutched desperately at the rain-slippery metal. Then it was over. He hung slack, red bombs of pain burst within his aching skull.

The rain, he knew later, was his luckiest break. Not only did it keep him from fainting, falling mistily on his upturned face, but it sent Sam scurrying back to the shelter of his cab. If the gangster-driver had looked over, there was a good chance he would have seen Whit hanging there, silhouetted against the lights edging the parkway, far below.

But the taxi's motor raced, then moved off in a hurried getaway. The detective wearily began the strenuous job of inching his way upward over the stone railing.

IN HIS offices downtown, taking up two floors of the Consolidated Steel Building, Hugo MacAllister was a dynamic, well-brushed business man in his early fifties. Here in the big gloomy library of his home, at five o'clock in the morning, he was disheveled, indecisive, strangely distraught.

"Confound it, Saunders," he bit out, pacing jerkily, "you were recommended to me as—er—competent, most competent."

Whit Saunders, seated on the arm of a chair, looked with cold eyes. "I'm competent, all right. But I was hired to trace a runaway niece. This is kidnaping—"

"How did you find her?" MacAllister stopped in front of the detective, seemed to hold his breath waiting for the answer.

"Professional contacts. I talked to a guy who knew a guy who had seen a guy, et cetera. Found that she had last been seen playing faro at 97 Hill Street. No trace after that. So I covered the dive, hoping she'd show. She did—but not as a

runaway. She was all trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey."

"I can't understand it," the steel magnate muttered.

"Can't understand what? She's being held for ransom; you'll hear from the gang shortly, I'd say. And that's why I'm bowing out. Time for you to contact the F.B.I."

MacAllister moved up and down the room, pinching his heavy lower lip between thumb and forefinger. "No, I've got to rely on you. If this—er—Sloan hears I've put the federal men on the case, he's apt to kill Jeanne."

Saunders snorted. "He's no more apt to hear the G-men are after him than that I am. Anyway, it's too big for me now." Saunders stood up. "I'm bowing out."

The steel king tossed a hand out. "You want more money, I suppose? To keep on? How about double your daily fee and a thousand dollar bonus?"

The detective laughed shortly. "The name is Saunders—not Joe Sap! Ibby Sloan is too big for any private investigator in this town to push around. The police, even, don't treat Ibby's boys with disrespect. Get the F.B.I. on this and save your money. They're the only lads who can make Ibby stop and think."

MacAllister was stubborn. "No, I tell you, I want you to stay on the case." He walked to a window, stood looking out into a greying drizzle.

"There's more to this than you think, Saunders. I can only tell you this much; it concerns my company. And if Jeanne's murdered, I'll be the next."

Whit Saunders narrowed his eyes at the twisted collar of MacAllister's dressing gown. "What makes you so sure?"

The magnate merely shook his head.

Running a lean hand through wire-stiff hair, the detective asked, "You won't tell me, eh?" He shrugged.

"Well, all the more reason why you shouldn't take chances. I'm bowing out as of now. No one but a moron would buck Ibby Sloan and his mob with nothing but a private dick's license to back him. Call the G-men or don't, just as you damn please. I'm washing my hands of the affair." He stalked angrily toward the door.

Hunching down the drive in the rain, Saunders was sorry he had bluffed. He

had fully expected the steel man to recall him before he reached the door, break down and give him the whole story. So far as he knew, MacAllister hadn't even turned around.

"Just as well out of it," he told himself, getting into his coupé and switching on the ignition.

But the dull ache induced by Ibbey's gun barrel against his skull wouldn't let him forget. And before him, constantly, were two dark, fear-filled eyes above a spread of adhesive tape.

Saunders stopped before his favorite lunchroom, near his office building. A truck driver and a cop were talking at the other end of the lunch counter as he entered and sat down. The counterman came toward him, making a salute with a forefinger.

"Black coffee, Marty. Now. Meanwhile cook me a mess of ham and eggs." Over the steaming cup, when it was placed before him, Whit Saunders sank into brooding abstraction.

It occurred to him for the first time to wonder where Ibbey Sloan might be taking the girl—in a cab. If they had, literally, dropped the detective on their way to some place. North Glen Road led into only two highways. One was a second grade road leading nowhere in particular, while the other . . .

Saunders jerked his head at the counterman, now presiding over a spluttering griddle. "Marty, whatever happened to that night spot out on Route 50? Golden something-or-other?"

Marty thought. "You mean the Golden Pheasant? About halfway to Corning?"

"That's the one."

"Closed up." Marty made a few sweeps with his damp counter cloth. "Been closed a couple years now. No gas, no liquor, no customers, no help, no nothin'."

Saunders tipped the last of the hot coffee in his mouth, looked at the ham-and-eggs sizzling on the plate. "Didn't Ibbey Sloan have a piece of that, at one time?"

Marty was bland. "That I couldn't tell ya."

The cop, overhearing, looked around. Whit said, "Ibbey still running his restaurant protection racket?" He stared at the cop until that individual turned away, red in the ears.

The counterman shrugged. "In this

town it's a good idea to keep your nose clean, Mr. Saunders. More cawfee?"

A PATH led through the grove about a hundred yards from where Saunders parked his car. Leaving the road, he took it. His coat sagged from the weight of the big automatic he had transferred from the glove compartment of the coupé; dampened from brushes with moisture-laden branches of the maples. It was broad daylight, but fog hugged the ground clamily.

"Just take a look around," Whit had told himself, driving out Route 50. "May find something to help the G-men when they get on the job." The detective knew he was kidding himself; the F.B.I. would not be brought into the case.

The path came out behind the Golden Pheasant. In spite of the exotic name, it was no more than a remodeled farmhouse with a long ell—probably housing the kitchen and storeroom—and, across a weed-grown yard, a big barn.

The place looked deserted, all right. The windows above the roof of the ell were black squares. Whit looked toward the barn. Two faint lines led up the short ramp and under the closed doors. Tire marks!

Circling, the detective found a loose board in a planked-over window at the side. He didn't dare pull it free, but he found he could push it aside far enough to peer in.

"Right the first time!" he said softly. "The Black-and-White."

He looked toward the house, considering. In spite of what he had told MacAllister, the private detective had no particular fear of Ibbey Sloan's gang. He disliked the idea of tangling with them in a business way for two reasons. One, it was too much like putting a price on his life—or taking out insurance. Two, the odds were against him. Whit Saunders hated playing the sucker's end of a gamble.

But the one thing he hadn't counted on had betrayed him. His curiosity. He wanted to see those dark eyes again—and he wanted to see them free of terror.

"Did I say my name wasn't Joe Sap?" he murmured.

The ell roof came within six feet of the ground. A barrel was as good as a ladder. Whit crept up the water-dotted

tarpaper toward one of the square blank windows.

The room behind the window had been furnished as an office—desk, easy chairs, deep carpeting. Whit slipped the blade of his knife up through the sash opening and pried back the catch. The sash slid up creakily, but the detective took his time with it. When he stepped in, he left the window open.

The office had gloomy corners. Whit took a quick glance around. His eyes stopped on a chair he hadn't seen from the roof. His breath drew in through his teeth in a hiss. A man lounged in the chair, eyes fixed directly on Saunders!

The detective's hand shot toward his sagging pocket—then dropped. He recognized the man in the chair as the husky little cab driver, Sam. Sam was very dead. The bone handle of a hunting knife stood out of his throat, which had bled a sizable river down his shirt and coat front.

Whit looked down at him dispassionately. "Looks like someone did better than throw you off a bridge, bud." He shrugged, turning away. "One less ape to worry about, anyway."

The door opened on a long, dark hall running the whole length of the house. Closed doors were set into both walls at regular intervals. At the front end was a stair well.

SUDDENLY there was the sound of tires on gravel and the brakes of a heavy car. Feet thudded on the porch and knuckles on a heavy door. From somewhere below a door opened, another. Voices mingled, raised angrily. The door slammed and the voices moved from beneath the opening of the stairs. Whit made his way toward the well, stepping cautiously.

The words of a heavy voice—a voice that narrowed the detective's eyes—became distinguishable.

"No need to send for me. Finish her off, as you agreed. What are you trying to do? Get more money? I won't pay another damn cent!"

"No?" That was the silken, slurred tones of Ibbey Sloan. Whit, by leaning far out over the rail, could see that they were congregated in what looked to be the bar, just off the lower entry. "Brother, you're going to pay plenty more. Chew on that!"

"Not another damn cent!" repeated the

heavier voice. Saunders remembered well how stubborn it could sound.

"What can you do, now?" it continued triumphantly. "If you let her go, you'll have the federal men after you as soon as she tells them what happened. You've got to kill her, now—for your own safety."

"Ah, that's where my good friend Doc comes in. Look, pal, we know what you're up to. And you won't get it unless you pay, understand? This thing's gone too far now, with two men getting rigor mortis over it."

"Two men—killed?"

"Don't like that, eh? I play for keeps. Caught one of my boys trying to shake me down for an extra cut just a little while ago"—Ibbey's voice was wolfish—"and shoved six inches of steel into his gullet. He's upstairs now; want to see him?" The other didn't speak.

"Just as well, maybe. He dropped a shamus over North Glen bridge for me. There'd have been worse than kidnaping in the books if he'd sung his song."

"No." The heavy voice sounded choked. "No, he isn't dead. The private detective, you mean. He's alive."

"What?" At least two voices asked that together.

"I saw him later. He reported to me." Hugo MacAllister seemed trying to make a point where none existed. Whit grasped the railing, leaning over to hear.

"You? You hired that dick?" Ibbey never sounded so menacing, so silky. "What for?"

"To show the police—when Jeanne's—when Jeanne was found. It was an alibi for me, don't you see? I never dreamed he'd trace you. But he did. Now he knows, too. You've got to go through with it, now."

"Hmm," Ibbey said. "Where is he now? Still after us?"

"No, he quit the case. Told me to go to the F.B.I., and walked out. But the point is, he'll go to them himself when he learns Jeanne's dead. What about that?"

Ibbey asked the detective's name, and Saunders heard MacAllister tell him. "When we go back to town, Ringo," the gang chief said, almost carelessly, "look him up. Understand?"

"Yeh, Ibbey. Sure t'ing."

Saunders, listening, didn't smile. Ringo he knew to be a fanatical devotee of

Ibby's who would never rest until he obeyed his leader's implied instructions to kill one Whitman Saunders.

MacAllister was evidently regaining his confidence. "Not good enough, Sloan," he said. "You still haven't told me what would happen if I refused to pay you more money, if you tried to turn my niece loose.

Ibby said, "Lay off that rum and tell him, Doc."

A hitherto unheard voice, slurred and sodden, said, "Li'l drug. Li'l drug I invented f'r horseshes. Makes 'em loco. Burns out their brains. Oughta work onna girl, too."

"It will work on humans," Ibby said softly. "Then, instead of getting what you want, friend, you'll still be her guardian—together with a committee appointed by the state lunacy commission. How'll you like that, big shot?"

The listening detective's knuckles were white with the intensity of his grip on the rail. His grey eyes icy with fury, Whit considered several agonizing deaths for the fiends below—reserving an especially slow and painful demise for the rumdum race horse "fixer" and veterinarian known as Doc Craigie.

"Understand, we've thought of everything," Ibby was gloating. "Hey, Ringo, close that door. There's a draft. Okay, now let's talk money. And it better be worth talking about—"

THE door closed on the racketeer's words. Whit moved like an automaton around the railing to the head of the stairs, hand clutching the butt of his heavy pistol. With any sort of luck he could crash their party and . . .

Then sanity flowed back. After all, he reminded himself, his immediate job was to find the girl and get her away; not act as executioner on a mob of rats. Time enough to go hunting when the dark-eyed Jeanne was safe. He worked his way back down the hall, flattening his ear against each door as he passed.

In the end room, opposite the office, he thought he heard faint sounds of breathing. The door was locked with a single throw bolt common to farmhouses. Whit looked around for a key. He found one in the office door.

As he had hoped, with a little juggling, it threw the simple lock. The girl, still

bound, lay on a cot in a far corner of the room. Her eyes were on him, still fear-filled, as he crossed and knelt beside her. At his words, hope surged in them.

"I'm here to help you, Jeanne," he whispered. "Don't be afraid of me." His pocket knife sliced through the strap around her wrists.

"Rub them. I know it's painful, but we haven't much time."

The pocket knife next sawed the leather bonds around her ankles. Whit began kneading and massaging the welted flesh of her legs. His lean cheeks creased in a bitter grin when she drew away.

"Don't be coy," he whispered roughly. "This is probably the last place I'd pick to play wolf!"

At length he got to his feet and stood over her. "Now for that gag. Compress your lips and make like a man getting a shave." When she was set, he seized one corner of the tape and peeled it off in a long, full-arm swipe. His free hand clamped on her mouth. Only a faint whimper burbled through his fingers.

"Golly, that hurt!" the girl whispered, as he released her and helped her to her feet. "Who are you?"

"Just a private detective hired by your uncle to find you. Name's Saunders—alias Joe Sap. You probably didn't see me too well, but I rode some of the way out here in the cab."

The girl's eyes widened. She was as lovely as Whit had imagined, except for the rectangle of gum from the tape across her mouth and cheeks.

"Last night?" she gasped. "But—but you—"

"Yes, I was dropped off a bridge. But it didn't take. I'll tell you later. Right now I've got some questions for you. What interest have you in Consolidated Steel? Stock? Bonds?"

"Why, Daddy left me his share. About thirty per cent of the voting stock and lots of preferred. You'd have to ask Uncle Hugo, though. He takes care of my interests. Why do you ask?"

"Just trying to get things straight in my own mind." Whit removed a sinewy arm from the girl's waist. "Can you walk, now? We've got to leave here, fast."

"Yes," nodded the girl, limping toward the door, his urgent hand on her arm. "What happened to that other man who came in? The cab driver. He said he would

TSD

get me away for a price, but he never came back."

Whit turned the knob. "He's across the hall, dead. He tried to put a squeeze on his boss, too, it seems. Easy now—no noise."

They stepped out into the dark hallway. From the direction of the stairs came a startled curse. Whit spun around, swinging the girl behind him. Evidently just come up the stairs, Doc Craigie blundered toward them, bawling a mixture of obscenities, alarms, and threats, a nicked object in one hand.

Whit watched the staggering advance. In his ears was resounding the drunken mutter, "Worksh on horshes—oughta work onna girl."

When the rummy was too close to miss, the pistol jumped in the detective's hand. The drink-sodden "fixer" went over backward, suddenly possessed of what appeared to be three eyes.

FEET thumped on the stairs. Whit shoved Jeanne MacAllister ahead of him into the office and locked the door with the returned key. Fog dripped through the open window.

"Quick! Out this window and take the path through the grove out there. My car's parked near the end of it. Wait ten minutes. If I don't come, head for town and the F.B.I. office in the Federal Building. Don't go home, you hear? The Federal—"

"No! Please," the girl clung to him, "they'll kill you. You've got to come with me!"

"I'm staying to cover you. Never mind about me!" The detective picked her up and pushed her through the opening. "Beat it!" he said. "I'll be along. I promise."

Heedless of the knob rattlings and shouts beyond the locked door, Whit Saunders stood before the window until the girl disappeared in the trees. Then he turned, a plan forming.

Seizing the stiffening body of Sam, he dragged it toward the door. His automatic splintered a hole in the door. There were sounds of men scattering in the hall.

As he expected, several shots came through the door in return, powdering pockmarks in the plaster ceiling. He grinned, heaved a tremendous groan,

throwing the dead body from him. It fell with a satisfactory thudding crash.

Silence in the hall for a moment. Then, "We musta got him. I can see his feet."

Ibby's voice answered, "We're taking no chances. Blast him again!"

More shots ripped through the paneling, jarring Sam's corpse. Then a foot kicked at the lock. Whit, pressed against the wall beside the door, brought up his pistol. The lock gave with a crash. Ringo, a swarthy young giant, rushed in, followed by the gang leader, still in evening clothes. Whit's gun bucked twice, three times, as they were turning, stupefied. Both men went down. Someone ran away down the hall, down the stairs.

The detective jumped toward the door, just as a shot blasted past his ear. He ducked and whirled. Ibby was on one elbow, trying to aim again. Whit shot him through the head this time. A door slammed downstairs, a car motor roared.

For a split second the detective relaxed, then a new thought hit him. MacAllister! He would pass his niece in Saunders' coupé. Who could tell what he would try, desperate now?

Whit landed off the ell roof running. Into the path through the maple grove he plunged, fumblingly reloading his almost exhausted cartridge clip. The scissoring of his long legs sent spray in all directions from the wet branches.

THE fog was clearing but still heavy as he came out on the road. He could see the outline of his coupé. Beyond it, parked on the wrong side of the road, the outline of a larger car. He increased his speed, shouting.

Two figures struggling beside the coupé separated. The white face of the steel magnate turned in amazement, then he was gone, heading for the sedan. It roared, flung mud from the road shoulder, and shot away in the white soup.

Whit, raging blindly, emptied his automatic after it. There wasn't a chance in a hundred of connecting, but the detective wasn't reasoning, he was reacting. Suddenly tires screamed in agonized crescendo. There came the long, tearing crashes of a car rolling over and over down the road and off into the ditch.

Saunders saw Jeanne coming toward him, holding her bruised throat. "Uncle Hugo," she sobbed. "He—he tried to kill

me! He was going past and he stopped and—and—"

"Yes," Saunders said grimly. "It was your Uncle Hugo who was responsible for everything. Your kidnaping, my finding you when I wasn't supposed to, everything. I think we'll find Uncle Hugo was in a spot and had to get control of the Consolidated Steel Corporation in a hurry. Such a hurry that inheriting your interest was the only way out."

From the direction of the wrecked sedan came a soft *Whoom!* A great red blossom showed through the white fog, widening and growing, until it lit up its own center—a heap of wracked and torn metal, flaming in a pond of ignited gasoline.

Jeanne pressed her face against the detective's wet coat. Her shoulders shook under the arm he put around them. "Don't cry," he shushed her. "Your uncle was a party to one of the most bestial schemes a human ever thought up."

The girl tried to pull away, but Whit tightened his hold. "On the other hand," he said equably, "maybe you just better go ahead and get it out of your system. You've been through a lot. Matter of fact, when I think of the fee money I missed out on—not to mention a certain thousand buck bonus—I feel like crying myself. My feelings need relieving, too."

The convulsive jerking of the sobs changed to a steady shaking of the slim shoulders. Whit tilted the girl's head back and saw she was giggling hysterically. He smiled.

"Better now? Okay, let's get out of here." He led her to the side of the coupé and lifted her into the seat. "We've got to report this to the F.B.I. and probably the local cops. Might as well let the papers in on my super deeds, too—get some publicity out of the affair to make up for the lost cash. Cash I practically had in my hand, too. Alias Joe Sap, all right. That's me!"

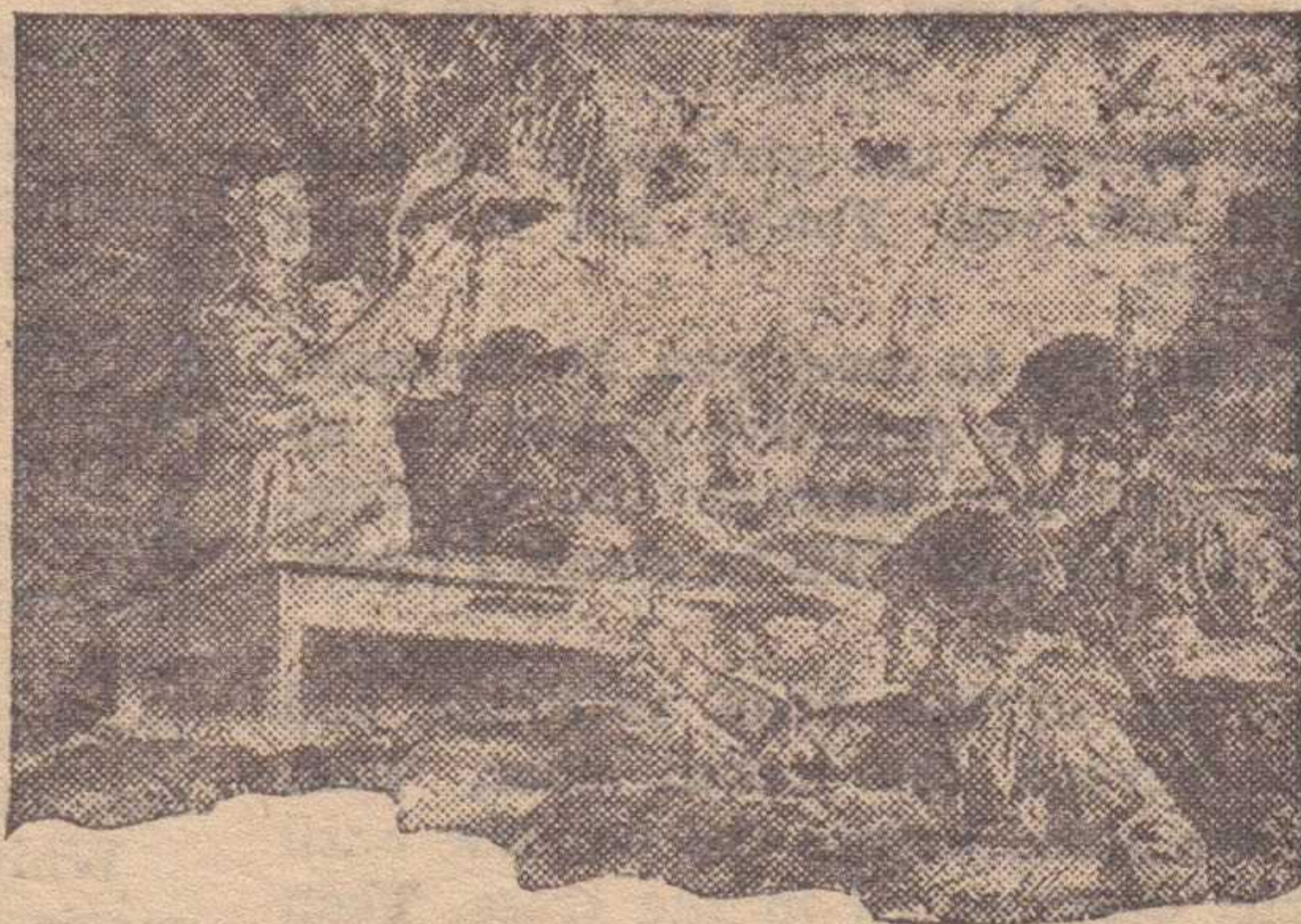


No Mother's Pies for those G.I.'s—But—

NATURALLY, you mothers and wives and sisters would like to be over there seeing to it that your boys have that good home cooking. For it's a long jump from K rations to strawberry shortcake.

But, though you can't cook for them, you can do this: you can help see to it that the food they get is in perfect condition! How? By doing everything you possibly can to save paper and to aid your storekeeper in saving paper:

For it's paper and paperboard, tons and tons of it, which protect our food shipments to the Army overseas.



Remember
**PAPER IS
WAR POWER**



Use Less Paper—Save All Wastepaper

This advertisement contributed by this publication and prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.

Pennies from Hades

By L. W. Carmichael

Wayne Bessemer gained a thousand dollars by murder and lost three cents by a gyp machine. And though Wayne was entirely free of suspicion, his doom was the price of those three red pennies.

NOW that it was done, Wayne Bessemer found that it had affected him not at all. The sight of that bleeding, twitching thing on the rug left him neither faint nor nauseated. Even the knowledge that he had killed this man couldn't make him feel that way.

His nerves were a little ragged, of course, but then they were rarely anything else. As always, they could be soothed by a cigarette. He pondered the question of smoking one at some length, decided that it would be quite safe to do so. There was little chance of anyone having heard the sharp crack of the .22. There was still less chance of the slain man having any visitors at this late hour. Once his tavern had closed, Pete Pollack had always lived the life of a recluse.

So Wayne Bessemer reached for a cigarette, smilingly congratulating himself at the thought that he, supposedly the town's most anemic, shrinking, and respectable young man, could remain so calm as to light a cigarette beside the body of the man he had murdered.

Then suddenly he wasn't so sure of himself. Nowhere on his person could he find a cigarette! His imagination began to kick up its heels. Without a smoke his nerves would surely go to pieces, and if that happened, well—Wayne Bessemer

shuddered. His life might be forfeit.

But it didn't have to happen, he told himself. There would be cigarettes out there in the barroom. Sure. He could go in and take all he pleased.

Comforted by the thought, he switched off the living room light, opened the door, and stepped into the barroom. The odor of stale beer and liquor met him. He

wrinkled his nose in disgust. Even now, with the blood of a fellow man on his hands, his pious loathing of alcohol was strong on him. Indeed, he felt almost inclined to congratulate himself on having erased one of the fiends who sold the foul stuff.

He walked into a barroom that was in darkness save only for the pale, yellow light that seeped in from the

street light outside. He walked along past the bar, his eyes scanning the bottle-lined shelves in quest of cigarettes. He found them eventually in a slot machine that stood beside the juke box near the front door. The light was somewhat better down there, and he could read the sign that was pasted across the machine's mirror.

*Your Favorite Brand 17 Cents
Insert Two Dimes for Cigarettes,
Matches and Change.*

Bessemer eyed the machine with interest. It wasn't the first of its type he



had seen, but it was the first he'd seen in this small town. It irked him a little to think that a common tavern should be so progressive. His mind went back to the last time he'd bought cigarettes from one of these things. That was in the city thirty miles away. He'd only paid a dime and a nickel then. Nowadays they cost a couple of cents more.

He felt mildly curious as to how the machine could give him three cents change. Killing a man had done nothing toward killing the sense of naïve curiosity that was ever present in the young bank clerk.

He fished out two dimes, put on his gloves, inserted the money as directed, jerked the lever under the brand he desired. A pack of cigarettes came tumbling into the dispensing pan, as did a book of matches. But he didn't hear the rattle of pennies coming out. He frowned. The thing was a gyp.

He didn't let it worry him, though. After all, what were three cents compared to the contents of the ironbound box in Pete's living room.

He went back to the living room, closed the barroom door, switched on the light, applied a match to one of the cigarettes and greedily drank down the smoke. After that he gave his attention to the box which Pete had dragged from under his bed shortly before his death.

The box lid was open. Bessemer grunted his gratified amazement. He'd expected at most to collect three or four hundred dollars. But there was more than that here. Much more.

He transferred the money to the table, riffled through it with the dexterity born of several years' work in a bank teller's cage.

It totaled up to one thousand, three hundred and forty dollars.

Nearly twice the sum required to replace the money he'd embezzled at the bank. Nearly twice the sum required to preserve his precious reputation for integrity.

He laughed aloud, stuffed the money into the canvas sack he'd brought with him, cast a quick glance around to make sure he'd left nothing incriminating behind, and switched off the light. He left by the door that led from Pete's living quarters into the tavern's backyard.

BESSEMER found that he was shivering. He tried to pretend that it was the cool night air that made him shiver, but he knew that it was nervous reaction setting in. He looked cautiously around. The night was full of shadows and the bright moon gave him the feeling of being spotlighted.

Before him stretched the vacant lot that separated him from his apartment house. He could see the apartment house blackly silhouetted against the moonlit sky a couple of hundred yards away.

He did not approach the place directly for that would have brought him too much into the open. Instead he slipped as quietly as possible through the trees and low bushes that fringed the lot. He heard the town hall clock strike the hour of two.

The river crawled sluggishly past the vacant lot. Into the river, as far as he could throw it, went the .22 Bessemer had used in the killing.

His legs were trembling as he reached the foot of the fire escape that led up to his room. He climbed the escape slowly, stooping low as he passed the open window of the Watson apartment. He heard Watson snoring. That was reassuring. Watson was a light sleeper. If Watson hadn't heard him creeping up the escape, no one else was likely to have done so.

He climbed the window sill of his own apartment, gently closed the window behind him, lighted another cigarette. But by now his nerves were too far gone to be picked up by a mere smoke. He was no longer the hard-boiled killer; he was just a terribly scared young bank clerk, appalled by what he had done, and even more appalled by its possible consequences.

He went to bed. But he did not sleep. That worried him. If he didn't catch some sleep, he'd look like the devil in the morning—people might suspect. He began to worry about the canvas sack he'd stowed under the dirty clothes in the closet. Bringing it indoors had been a mistake. He wouldn't have done it if he hadn't been so cocksure of himself.

The pendulum of his reasoning swung the other way. Why, he asked himself, should they possibly suspect him? His name was synonymous with everything that was respectable. There wasn't a soul in town less open to suspicion than

Wayne Bessemer. It was far more likely that the police would look for the killer among the many unsavory characters who'd been in the habit of hanging around Pete's Tavern.

These thoughts were comforting, but they did nothing to induce sleep. He got out of bed, paced restlessly up and down, paused before the window. His eyes traveled across the vacant lot in the direction of the tavern. It stood on the ground floor of a block of business buildings. Pete had been the only one who'd actually slept in that block, which was the reason why Bessemer hadn't worried about the crack of the .22 being heard.

A light suddenly sprang from one of the windows of a house that stood to the left of the business block. Automatically Bessemer picked up the powerful binoculars that lay on his bureau, focused them on the distant light.

For a long time it had been Bessemer's practice to pry into the affairs of the families that lived within range of his binoculars. That was how he'd come to find out about Pete Pollack and his strongbox. Pete was too careless with his window shade. Sometimes he drew it, sometimes he didn't.

Pete had kept the strongbox under the bed of the room he used for sleeping and living quarters. Every night at closing time he'd drag it out and lock the day's take in it. Then every Monday morning he'd empty the box and deposit the contents with the receiving teller down at the bank. The receiving teller was Wayne Bessemer.

Thus, when Bessemer's attempts to lick the stock market had led to his embezzling bank funds, Pete's treasure trove had begun to loom large in Bessemer's imagination. His debt to the bank didn't amount to so much—merely a few hundred dollars. However, that sum spelled the difference between a cherished reputation and jail.

So, shortly before one that morning, spurred on by desperation, Bessemer had stepped completely out of character, secured a length of lead pipe, opened the cheap lock on Pete's back door, drawn the window shade, hidden himself in a closet.

Bessemer started to live again the events that had happened after he had hidden in the closet.

At midnight Pete bade the last of his

customers good night. Then he spent a long time cleaning up his barroom. After that, humming contentedly, he started transferring the money from his cash register to the ironbound box under his bed. That task completed, Pete turned off his bar light, came back to his living room. He had no way of suspecting that Bessemer had slid out of the closet and was standing behind the door with the lead pipe poised. He didn't suspect a thing until the pipe smashed down on his head.

Bessemer had expected Pete to collapse under the blow. But Pete didn't. Instead he merely cried out, staggered sideways until he hit up against the chest of drawers that stood between the door and the bed.

Bessemer, paralyzed for the moment by the fact that Pete hadn't gone down, saw the barkeep tug open a drawer, saw the glint of what could only be a gun. Bessemer somehow pulled himself together, leaped forward, struck again. The lead pipe laid Pete's forehead open. The gun dropped to the floor. Blinded by the swift rush of blood, Pete couldn't see where it had fallen. But Bessemer could.

He snatched it up, shouted, "Stay where you are—"

But Pete either didn't hear or was too enraged to understand. His big hand swept the blood from his eyes. He started forward—and took a slug through his left eye.

He was already dead when he hit the floor.

THE night passed slowly and it was a heavy-eyed, wan-looking young man that saw the dawn spreading in the east. With daylight many of his fears vanished. He went to bed, fell into a restless sleep. . . .

Someone rapped at his door. It was an official, imperious kind of rap. He sat up in bed. Terror rioted through his breast.

He quavered, "Who—who's there?"

A deep voice responded, "Me—Jerry Caxton."

Sergeant Jerry Caxton of police headquarters!

Bessemer fought down his panic, told himself that Caxton's visit couldn't possibly be an official one, that it had something to do with the dramatic club to which they both belonged. There wasn't any reason in the world why Caxton

should have called about the killing. Why, they wouldn't even have found the body yet. They wouldn't find it until they made inquiries as to why Pete didn't open up on Monday morning. And today it was only Sunday.

Bessemer put on his bathrobe and opened the door. Caxton walked into the room. He was tall and broad and muscular. His face was strong and purposeful as Bessemer's was weak and pinched. He surveyed Bessemer, and with a good-natured smile said:

"What happened to you? You look like you've been through a wringer."

"Migraine headache," Bessemer explained weakly. "I often have them."

Caxton nodded sympathetically, tossed his hat onto the bed, sat down. "Yeah, I know you do. Matter of fact I've got the makings of one myself this morning. Yes, sir. And the rest of the department along with me."

He glanced around the room. "You wouldn't have a spot of something to drink, would you?"

Bessemer said virtuously, "No, I never touch the stuff. I've never possessed a bottle of liquor nor been in a barroom in my life."

"Okay, don't give us that routine again," said Caxton.

He leaned back in his chair. "Like I was saying, the police department's got a man-sized headache this morning. Pete Pollack's been murdered!"

Bessemer sank down limply on the edge of the bed. "No!"

"Yes," said Caxton. "During the night one of the boys picked up a drunken bum who spilled the information that Pete had been conducting an illegal lottery at his tavern. When the chief heard about it, he ordered us to raid the joint. When we got there we couldn't seem to make Pete hear us, so we broke in and found Pete with his head battered in and a bullet in his brain."

"How dreadful!" said Bessemer. "Suspect anyone?"

"No," said Caxton. "That's where the headache comes in. We're stuck. Here's the story: Pete's place was cleaned out.

There wasn't a penny in it. That indicates the motive was robbery. Now, did the killer just get the cash register dough or did he get the lottery dough as well? If he did, he got over a thousand bucks. You, as the receiving teller at the bank, should be able to answer that one. Tell me, did Pete bank anything in excess of his usual amount during the week?"

Relief surged through Bessemer. He stretched out his hand and took a cigarette from the pack on the table.

"No," he said, "Pete was very slack about his financial affairs. He only banked once a week. Last week he just deposited the normal amount."

"In that case," mused Caxton, "we can start quizzing Pete's clientele in the hope of finding which of them might know he had all that dough on the premises. It isn't much to go on, but it's an angle that can't go unexplored."

"Yes, indeed," nodded Bessemer. He lighted his cigarette. Then, all his old confidence restored, he extended the pack to Caxton. "Smoke?"

Caxton took a cigarette. "Thanks."

Abruptly his eyes hardened. He bit off, "Where'd you get these smokes?"

"Huh? I—I—Halligan's, of course. I always buy from Halligan."

"Sure of that?"

"Positive. Why?"

Caxton grunted, jerked Bessemer off the bed, rolled back the mattress, peered underneath it. Then he walked over to the clothes closet and looked inside.

"What's come over you?" breathed Bessemer.

Caxton's voice was cold and brittle. "I was just wondering if by any chance you'd brought that thousand odd dollars up into this apartment with you!"

Bessemer's flesh crawled. He tried to utter a protest, but all that came out was a terrified gurgle.

"Because," Caxton went on, "you got that pack of cigarettes from the machine in Pete's Tavern. I know that because the three cents change is still stuck in the cellophane at the side of the pack. And Pete had the only cigarette machine in town!"



When sullen mountaineer silence covered the trail, the dark hills themselves supplied a secretary to take down the gallows-bound evidence of . . .

The Whistling Witness

By Jim Kjelgaard



WHISTLING Johnny Barker had been gone for three days before Calvin Parks, warden of the Casimir, took his old, single action .44 from the closet. He oiled the gun and buckled it about his waist. Then he looked through the window at the rugged mountains that hemmed in Casimir's game warden's headquarters. Whistling Johnny had walked into those mountains. Something serious must have happened to him there, or he would have come in before now.

Cal stepped out to the porch, squinting as the noon sun sprayed through the young apple trees in his yard. The gun was heavy at his side, and pressed against his thigh. His gnarled right hand strayed down and shifted it a little. Cal raised his eyes once more to the mountains—a million acres of land.

Johnny might have fallen and broken a leg, but he was a good woodsman. More likely he'd had trouble with one of the hillbillies who lived in the district.

None of them would talk, all were quick on trigger and temper. Nobody would ever know how many of them, surprised at some outlaw work by a young game warden, would shoot without asking questions.

Cal walked to his neat white garage, backed his old coupé into the yard, turned around, and drove to the asphalt road that paralleled Casimir Creek.

He swung from it onto the dirt road that climbed Mary Dean Mountain, and shifted into second while the old car toiled to the summit. Cal eased back into high, and drove between the second growth trees that lined both sides of the road.

Three days ago Johnny, undoubtedly at his perpetual whistling, had walked along this road on his way to investigate deer poaching in the back country. But it had been only a general investigation. Johnny had had his sights on no one person.

Cal rounded a long curve, and saw ahead of him a lean, black-bearded man with a shotgun in one hand and a length of rope attached to the collar of a white and black hound in the other. The man stepped to the side of the road, pulling the hound with him. Cal stopped the car to get out.

"Howdy, Jabe?"

"Howdy."

"Vermint huntin'?"

"I reckon."

"Got a license?"

"I reckon."

"All right, Jabe."

Cal got back into his car and drove on. He had been chief warden of the Casimir for thirty years, and in all those years had not been able to command respect for the law he represented. But he had commanded it for himself. The hill dwellers had long since learned that when he went into the hills with a gun at his belt somebody was going to be arrested. Jabe Cahoon had seen that gun.

Cal snapped his lower jaw tight against his upper. His white mustache bristled like a terrier's as he whirled down the top of Mary Dean Mountain to a dust-ridden crossroads store with half a dozen overalled mountaineers sitting in the shade of its porch.

He braked the car to a halt and again stepped out, while he tried to read the unreadable faces before him.

"Johnny Barker passed this way three days ago," he said flatly. "Did any of you see him?"

A lean mountaineer with a jackknife in his hand sliced a long shaving from one of the porch's uprights. "Why no," he drawled, "we ain't a-seen him."

"If you do," Cal said, "report to my headquarters or to the state police. Whichever's handiest."

A half dozen heads nodded in unison as he re-entered and started his car. Whistling Johnny had come this way, and some of the men on the porch certainly had seen him. But the most useless thing an officer in the Casimir could do was ask questions. Still, he had followed the letter of the law.

Cal drove out of the clearing that surrounded the store back into the forest-shaded road. A million acres was a lot of land. A man could walk through dense forest within ten feet of a hidden grave without ever knowing it was there. But Whistling Johnny had walked up the Mary Dean Mountain road. Certainly he had talked with someone who lived along it. Just as certainly, insignificant though it might be, he had left some clue to that visit.

THREE miles from the crossroads store, Cal stopped beside a leaning wooden post on top of which was a tin mailbox and the name *Sanders Cahoon*. A footpath led through a fringe of trees to a clearing, and the air was heavy with the odor of apple blossoms.

Cal walked up the path, saw Sanders Cahoon's house shielded by a young, blooming orchard in the center of the clearing. A robin flew out of his path, and a mockingbird perched precariously on the very tip of a swaying apple twig.

Cal was within ten feet of the house when Sanders Cahoon came out to meet him and stood on the porch, waiting.

He was the replica of his brother, the man with the white and black hound. He stood balanced on the balls of his feet. The robin chirped throatily, and the mockingbird flung his song back at him. Cal smiled.

"Howdy, Sanders."

"Howdy."

"It's right good growin' weather. You should harvest a heap of apples."

"What are you lookin' for?"

"Whistlin' Johnny Barker. Did he stop at your house?"

"No."

"Well, I just asked you. Is that any call to get mad?"

"You ask a hell of a lot of questions."

"I like to pass the time of day."

"I got no time for it."

Down in the orchard the robin chirped again, then the mockingbird echoed it. Then he went through his entire repertoire, swaying on the branch and pouring melody from his swelling throat. Sanders Cahoon turned to walk back into the house, but was halted by:

"Wait a minute, Sanders."

The mountaineer turned to face him. "Somethin' else you got to know?"

"Yeah," Cal's voice was clipped and deadly, "I want to know what you done with Whistlin' Johnny after you shot him."

Sanders Cahoon leaped like a striking cat. Cal's big revolver roared. At the impact of the slug, Sanders Cahoon whirled half around and fell on his side. He rose slowly, to a sitting position, sagged forward as he looked wonderingly at the blood that ebbed from his broken shoulder. His shock-filled eyes rose to meet Cal Parks'. Cal's enraged eyes looked back.

"You did shoot him, didn't you?"

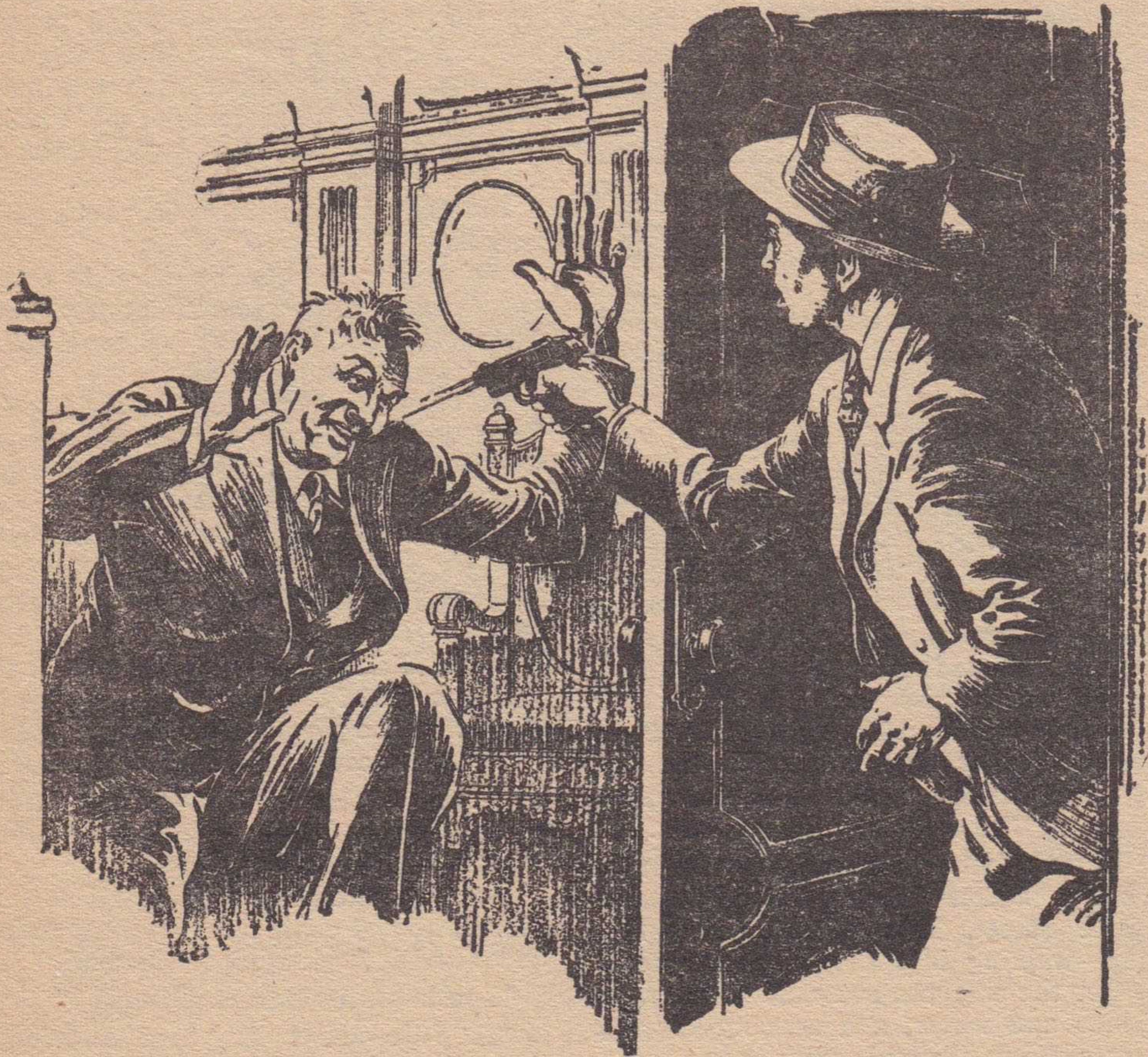
Sanders Cahoon looked away, then screamed, "Yeh! I did! I drilled him plumb center, jest like I'd drill any damn game warden that come sneakin' around where he ain't wanted!"

"Get up an' walk," Cal Parks said. "I'm takin' you to a hospital, where you'll have plenty of time to think about what the gallows is like before you stand on it. Just for your own good, you really should of shot that mockin'bird up there, too, Sanders. He sort of gave you away. The last quarter of his song is as good an imitation as anybody's ever goin' to hear of Whistlin' Johnny's whistle."



Homicide Hoax

By Talmage Powell



With an iron-clad defense, Ralph Smith still had to remain silent when his last mile came. For a murder he'd never committed had trapped him hopelessly in the steel jaws of homicide justice.

RALPH SMITH lifted his pale face from his palms as Chaplain M'Canless cleared his throat. He stirred on his hard cot, looking at the chaplain with blurred eyes. He swallowed the hard, startled knot out of his throat, wondering how long the skypilot had been standing in his cell.

"How do you feel, Ralph?" The chaplain's robes made rustling noises softly as he came forward.

Smith's rat face worked. "Not so good," he said.

Chaplain M'Canless sat down beside him, laid his hand on the prison grey shirt that covered Smith's quaking body. In three hours now Ralph Smith would die. For murder.

"I thought a prayer might help."

The words of the chaplain brought the hint of a sneer to Smith's hardened face. Then Ralph Smith heard the ticking of

his watch. Like the beat of a heavy hammer on anvil, the steady march of throbbing time reminded him that in one hundred and eighty minutes the life would be jerked from him by high voltage electricity.

His face, strong with an evil, cruel strength, fell apart. His hands shook; perspiration squeezed from his pores like a myriad of pricking pins in the hands of tiny devils.

"Yes! A prayer!" he choked. "But first—let me tell you about it, chaplain. I've got to get it off my mind! It filled my head 'til I didn't even hear you enter the cell."

The chaplain quietly offered Ralph Smith a handkerchief. Smith mumbled, "Thanks," and wiped his glistening face.

EVER hear (Ralph Smith said) of a guy being so smart he walked right into the electric chair? Oh, I don't mean none of that perfect crime stuff where a killer makes one tiny slip and a smart dick spots it. My crime *was* perfect! It was too damn simple to have a loophole anywhere. I was so smart I covered every angle. The crime couldn't have been pinned on me in a million years with Philo Vance, Sherlock Holmes, and all the rest of them working on it. I outsmarted everybody, Chaplain. Including myself. . . .

It was late afternoon, months ago, when I walked into the small café on Maple Street. That was the very first step—walking into that café. I'll never forget the way the sun was shining, all golden and warm, and sending the life just zinging through your bones. I especially can't get it off my mind right now; for I'll never see the sun shine again.

I tossed my smoke aside, giving it a flip and taking a gander at a blonde passing on the street. She smiled back, and I felt pretty doggone good when I went inside the gloomy little restaurant.

He was there, in a booth at the back. I'd never seen Sid Kilgo before, but I knew it was him. He was a big man, but his shoulders had a rounded, bent appearance, like he was lugging a heavy load. His eyes were that way, too. Full of pain, I mean. As I got closer to him, I could see the lines in his heavy face, the way he kept his mouth compressed, as if holding something in.

I slipped in the booth with him. "Kilgo?"

He nodded without speaking.

"I'm Smith. Ralph Smith."

I lighted a cigarette as he looked me over. I guess there was something about me to make him wary. Maybe it was the way he looked at me and I had to look away. A guy told me once that I inspired distrust. I dunno about that, but more than one guy's been afraid of me. I think Sid Kilgo was a little of both—distrustful and afraid.

But after a minute he said, "Let's go in back."

We walked back to his office. It was a small room, cluttered and stuffy. Just from looking at the joint you could tell a lot of work was done here.

From the small window I could see the large lot out in back. On the far side of the lot was a huge warehouse, a truck backed up to a loading ramp.

"Doesn't look like much," he said, with a wave of his hand toward the big lot, small fleet of trucks at one side, and warehouse.

No, it didn't. But I wasn't fooled. I'd seen enough of this and that business to know that the places where they're really on the move are always the unimpressive places. When you see a warehouse going in for swank, you'll always see a joint that is idle half the time.

He sat behind his desk and I took a cane-bottomed chair near him, sat down, and tilted it back against the wall.

"You know my business, Smith?"

"A little about it. You distribute liquor."

"That's right," he said. He leaned over the desk, eyed me harshly. His voice was firm.

"And we don't take advantage of the liquor shortage around here. You know as well as I do, Smith, that here and there over the country crooks are playing the liquor shortage for all it's worth. We're seeing a flurry of bootlegging that isn't minor any longer.

"The people don't notice it so much, this time. There are no gang killings and not enough trucks hijacked to take other news off the front pages. But the bootlegger is back, cleaning up. It's up to people like us to stop him. We're strictly legit in this outfit, Smith. I want that very clear from the beginning!"

"Sure," I said, puffing on my fag. "I'm just a shipping agent and nothing more."

Maybe he didn't like my grin. He stood over me. "Remember, Smith, you got to keep your fingers clean around here—no poison booze, no cutting the standard brands. We're fighting a little war all our own. If the bootlegger wins and the Drys come back, we're going to see racketeers ramrodding towns, people taken for a ride, innocent people made to suffer, and graft like an ugly disease."

"You make it sound big."

"It is big!" He thumped his desk. "So damn big I'm taking no chances with it! Half my trucks are idle—but I'll never run a single pint of bootleg booze under cover of night!"

"Sure," I said.

Well, I thought to myself, every guy has a right to his own opinion. Me, I ain't got any. Some people think Prohibition is the thing—maybe they're right. I'm not arguing that. But as I left his office and saw all those beautiful trucks standing idle, I started having ideas. Did I tell you, Chaplain, that I'm a guy awful long on ideas?

I knew I'd have to play it careful. I was a stranger in town and began sounding things out—talking to drivers, saloon keepers. You know the sort of thing.

I never tipped my hand once, but before the month was over, I had a couple of Big Names in my little black notebook, the knowledge of which drivers needed dough the most, and so on. It was perfect. The Big Names would cover a smart guy; a few of the drivers would haul the stuff at night; the rest of the bunch didn't even need to know what was going on.

In my dreams I saw hundreds of big, marching dollar marks; it was the sweetest setup I'd ever come across. Only one thing in my way—Sid Kilgo, who was too much a square John. I began thinking the problem over. . . .

I WATCHED Sid while I was working. He'd pass me with, "Hello, Ralph," and I'd mumble back to him. Then I'd stare at his back until he was out of sight. Honestly, I began to hate the guy. Or maybe it was just the fact that he was so damn dumb and honest.

But I covered all that. Chaplain, maybe I should have been an actor. I played it neat. After a few days I would slap him

on the shoulder, buy his lunch, tell him what a great guy he was. Then he invited me out to his house one night. And I knew I was making with the speed. I'd see the setup now from inside out.

He had a brick bungalow on a middle class street. Nice house. Venetian blinds in the living room, big, square modern furniture. As I walked in and shook hands with him, I was thinking. *Hell, this joint is a dump compared to what he could have—to what I will have when I take over!*

He was pouring us a drink when there was a faltering step at the doorway. I turned and saw a thin, old man. An ancient man. His body was like sticks in his blue suit, his face like leather that's aged and wrinkled in the dark for a hundred years. He squinted at me, coughed, and Sid Kilgo said:

"Ralph, this is my father, Justin."

I shook old Justin Kilgo's hand. "My son has told me how well you are fitting in the business," he said, smiling.

"Sure," I said. "It's an easy place to fit in." I stifled the urge to rub my palm on my trousers. Shaking his hand had been like holding a cold, slick fish.

"In fact," I said, turning to Sid Kilgo, "I like this town a lot. I like the people. I like the way Sid runs his business, his honest, upstanding attitude."

Chaplain, I ain't kidding—I got just the right inflection in my tone. It even made Sid Kilgo redden a little in embarrassment.

I paused, laughed nervously like I was flustered. "I'm no good at making speeches, but I been waiting to meet a guy like Sid Kilgo a long time. I . . . I knew that first day in the office—well, we know each other a lot better now. I think Sid thought I had ideas that first day." That nervous laugh again. Both of them joined in.

"But you know me now, Sid," I said, "and that's really what I wanted to talk to you about tonight. I want to buy in with you. I want to keep this thing going the way you've started." I fished in my pocket, and hauled out two grand I'd been hoarding for a rainy day.

"I've been saving years for this," I said, "for this very moment. I didn't know exactly what I was saving the money for. I just knew I wanted to be in business sometime. Now I know which business."

They looked sharply at each other. Sid

handed me a drink and we sat down. The old man coughed rattlingly in the silence.

"Let me get this straight," Sid said. "You want to buy a share of the company?"

"Right the first time! Look," I went on quickly, "maybe you've never had the idea of having a partner—but a good partner who knows his job as well as I've shown you I know mine never hurt any man. And think of this—when liquor becomes plentiful again, the business is going to grow. This two grand will help.

"We'll put our heads together, knock out ideas. When we can get merchandise again, we'll make real money. You, Sid, can handle the executive end. I'll take care of distribution. It'll be a mighty sweet team, pal."

His eyes began to get thoughtful, and I knew I had him. I painted a wonderful picture. I really painted it. When I left there that night, Sid Kilgo had my two grand to put in the bank tomorrow and I had his John Hancock on a piece of paper. I was his partner. In the event of his death, I controlled the business. He'd just put his John Hancock on his own death warrant.

AFTER that, Chaplain, I got pretty thick with the guy. I learned what had put all that misery in his face. He'd married a blonde from Chicago. They'd stayed married about two months and she had suddenly run away. He went to Chicago and found her—on a slab at the morgue.

She'd had a boy friend before she'd married Sid. She'd gone back to the boy friend, stayed with him in Chicago a few days, then decided to hightail it back to the husband. They'd had a violent argument, and the boy friend had knocked her off.

It was as simple and sordid as that—a crime of passion, the papers called it. The guy was a fellow named Alonzo Threkkle, and this Alonzo Threkkle got away clean.

But that wasn't all that was bothering Sid Kilgo. I was at his house the night the doctor told old man Justin Kilgo that he couldn't last over a couple of months. I watched Sid Kilgo's face go white as the doctor left his father's room. And do you know, Chaplain, I began to hate to have to kill Sid. There was the blonde, the crime of passion, Alonzo Threkkle,

a father who couldn't live more than a couple of months.

I lay and tossed all night, thinking of it. But I set my teeth against the pity. Business is business, and I knew I was going to knock him off.

Well, Chaplain, I had my own ideas about knocking a guy off. Nothing elaborate for me. I'd read the case histories of over a hundred murders by that time. I'd seen how guys had built elaborate schemes only to overlook some tiny detail that tossed them in the death cell.

I read how one guy rigged up an alarm clock with a razor blade on the hour hand which would cut a string and ignite a fire with a fancy contraption. He was going to roast his wife, while he had an airtight alibi at the time of the fire—but they found the alarm clock and some trick of fate had kept the razor blade from burning off the hour hand. So the guy walked the last mile.

None of that for me. I was going to be like the guy who shot a woman on a busy street with sixty-seven witnesses watching. The guy got off scot-free. Each one of the witnesses had become so excited at seeing murder done, he had told a different story from all the others.

Now I wasn't going to get no sixty-seven witnesses together, but I was going to keep it that simple.

I began inquiring into the private life of a Big Name. Sure now, I'm a pretty smart boy, Chaplain. I got the lowdown on a business deal the Big Name had turned. I had dope enough on him to shoot him in the pen for the rest of his life. And he had such a lovely home and a wife and kid he'd go through hell for. Which was just perfect.

The Big Name cursed and started to throw me out of his house. Then he begged and pleaded. Finally he sat down as if his short, fat legs could hold him no longer. His eyes shot wildly about his library. Then he said with a sort of groan:

"All right, Smith. I'll be at your house tonight at nine o'clock."

I fired a smoke, tossed the match on his Oriental rug and said, "Thanks, old top. I'll do you a favor sometime."

I left his house, drank in the sight of his wide lawn and shrubbery that must have cost a couple grand. That calmed my nervousness a little. It wouldn't be long now 'til I'd have a joint like a palace

with a lawn landscaped like this one.

The Big Name knocked on my door at exactly nine o'clock. I'd come up in the town by this time and was living in a small, neat cottage. I gave my housekeeper the night off. The Big Name and myself were alone.

He took the drink I offered him, his hand shaking so that he almost spilled it. "Take it easy," I said. "We're going to play some rummy. For one hour. Then I'll leave for a few minutes. But you're gonna tell the cops—if any ask you—that I didn't leave at all. Catch?"

He caught. He swallowed three drinks in quick succession. I laughed and dealt the cards.

No one had seen me. I was sure of that when I eased up on Sid Kilgo's front porch. I glanced at my watch in the moonlight. Ten minutes after ten.

I knocked on the door. Sid opened it. I don't believe he ever saw who shot him. But somehow I could see his face plainer than as if it were day. I saw his eyes widen as the gun in my hand roared once. I saw the blood spurt out of his forehead. I could almost see life itself washing out of him.

He clutched the door jamb, made a gulping noise. All the pain that his wife and Alonzo Threkkle and Justin Kilgo's swiftly approaching death had put in his face went away. His eyes rolled up in his head, closed, and his face relaxed. I had already wiped the gun—which I'd picked up years back and which wasn't registered—and I dropped it at his feet just as he began to crumple.

He hit the porch as his father began hobbling down the stairs. With the old man's faltering footsteps in my ears, I faded in the darkness.

SO THAT was that. Nothing to it, Chaplain. Murder is easy. Sure, I'm one smart boy. I kept the Big Name at my house until after midnight. No one could ever doubt the Big Name's testimony. I had enough stuff on him to know absolutely without a doubt that he'd swear I hadn't left my house from nine o'clock on. And when he swore that, he would be, of course, accessory after the fact. He could never go back on it.

See what I mean, Chaplain? What the hell if the whole town did know in its collective hearts that I'd killed Sid Kilgo!

I'd laugh at them and snap my fingers in their faces. Let them prove it! It was so damn simple nobody could ever prove it.

After the Big Name scurried out of my house, I had a couple drinks and went to bed. It was bad, then, for I kept seeing Sid's face and the pain and life washing out of it.

Then I heard their knock and went downstairs. There were three of them, but this Pete Blane did all the talking. He shoved me in a chair, fired questions at me. He told me that Sid Kilgo was dead. But after he had talked to the Big Name, Pete Blane apologized. I laughed at him, and he took his two stooges and left the house.

I was safe. I went to bed.

I was awakened by a hellish pounding on the front door. I stared at the window. It was just breaking dawn. I shivered, wondering what the hell was up, and slipped on a robe. I went downstairs, blinking sleep out of my eyes. It was Pete Blane and his two stooges.

Pete said, "I'm arresting you for murder, Smith."

"The hell you say! I'm clean. I got an alibi!"

"Not for this murder, you haven't." He clicked handcuffs on me.

"Take these damn things off! I'll have you busted. I didn't murder Sid."

"I'm not talking about that murder, Smith. I'm talking about old Justin Kilgo, Sid's rather."

I got weak in the knees. "Justin . . ."

"His housekeeper came to work just a few minutes ago. She found him dead in the kitchen. He'd been shot through the chest. The M. E. said he died about an hour ago."

"But that don't mean a damn thing! Why would I kill Justin?"

"Maybe because he saw you murder his son." Pete Blane gave me a hard jerk and I went stumbling after him. My blood was so chilled it caused knots to gather about my heart.

"But look, Blane," I pleaded. "You've got no evidence."

He laughed in my face. "I've got the best evidence ever given to a D. A. On the cream-colored linoleum of his kitchen floor, Justin Kilgo wrote your name as his killer, Ralph Smith, wrote it with his own blood while he was lying there."

I knew then what he had done, Chaplain. But how could I ever prove that Jus-

tin Kilgo, knowing he was going to die so soon anyway; knowing, too, that I was the only one who had any possible motive for killing his son—how was I to prove that the old man had committed suicide and pinned it on me?

THE chaplain looked about the tiny cell, not seeing anything really, just thinking. He looked back at Ralph Smith in his prison grey. He listened to the watch tick.

"And there was nothing you could do?"

"Sure," Ralph Smith said bitterly. "Plenty. In the first place there are several Ralph Smiths in this town. With a slick lawyer I could have tied the jury in knots."

"Yes?"

"Sure. I could have claimed my real name is something else. The slick lawyer could have planted a letter or note in

Justin Kilgo's things showing he knew days before he wrote that name on his kitchen floor that I'm not Ralph Smith. No jury would have believed, then, that he meant me."

"I know," Chaplain M'Canless said. "I can see that. But having lived here as Ralph Smith, you would have to prove that your name is something else."

Wearily, Smith nodded. "And I could do that. But they might have lynched me in this town. They called it a sordid crime of passion. . . ."

"You mean . . .?" the chaplain gasped.

"How do you think I knew of Sid Kilgo's setup in the first place?" Smith buried his shaking face in his palms. "Yeah—I could actually prove that I'm Alonzo Threkke. . . ."

The chaplain recovered his composure somewhat. "Shall we pray?" he said softly.



**Are You Doing Your Share? Buy U. S.
War Savings Bonds and Stamps**



Double-Cross Fires

By Robert S. Fenton

Detectives Kirby and Riker were both working on those fiend-set blazes when they had their fall-out. And because Riker had burned his hands with crook gold, Kirby found himself slated to roast in a blaze of double-cross fires.



DETEKTIVE MAL KIRBY knew there was something wrong with the picture of Vinnie Shan getting out of a cab in front of the Central Hotel with a guy like Pinky Larson. At various times in the past Kir-

by had had reason to talk to both shady characters, but never at the same time.

He stopped directly in front of them and said. "This is a surprise, boys. I didn't know you two were going together. Pinky, you still trying to set the world on fire?"

"That ain't funny, flatfoot," Pinky said and insolently banged a cigarette butt against the cuff of Kirby's trousers. "Come on, Mr. Shan."

"Mister—yet," Kirby said. "Out of your class, and you keep getting reminded of it, huh?"

"Keep out of our business, Kirby," Shan said. He was a beefy man and fond of loud patterns in his suits. He wore a diamond, which was quite large for a man with no visible means of support. Rumor had it that Vinnie Shan had his fat fingers in a dozen shady enterprises.

"Oh, it is my business, Vinnie," Kirby said. "You certainly didn't hire a punk like Pinky to keep your books? They could get burned."

"You'll throw your weight around too much someday," Pinky Larson growled. He had a thin lupine face and a frame that would not yield twenty cents worth of vital chemicals if it were boiled down. At the tender age of twelve, on the tacky West Side, Pinky had loved to see fire engines go by. To satisfy his yearning, he had arranged that the apparatus would

roar past the house in which he lived.

Pinky was removed from the neighborhood and put into a reformatory to get over his pyromaniac tendencies. Six years later, three big tenement fires took place. In one of them, six people were burned to death. Mal Kirby had gone over to the West Side to look around. Then he discovered that Pinky Larson was back. But he hadn't been able to prove a thing on Pinky.

"Come on, Pink," Shan said. "The hell with him."

"I'll be seeing you," Kirby said. He went into the subway. While it roared downtown, he thought of Charlie Riker who was also a detective. It had been Charlie who had given Pinky an alibi regarding the first fire.

He had claimed Pinky was getting the quiz from him anent a pawn shop break at the time the tenement house was touched off. The old woman, who claimed she had seen a man resembling Pinky run out of the vestibule of the tenement, must have had bad eyesight, Charlie had said.

"Kind of screwy," Kirby had told Riker at the time. "The woman proved she had good eyesight for her age."

"You got one good reason, Kirby, why I should cover for that kind of rat?" Riker had asked, angrily.

"No, Charlie," Kirby had admitted.

Kirby had never liked Charlie Riker. Sometimes you meet up with a man that antagonizes you on sight without really knowing why. There was the night at the police ball, when he and Charlie had come to blows over a dance with a blonde. They had barely managed to keep their badges.

Charlie Riker had been charged with accepting bribes from a gambling joint only a year ago, but lawyers had convinced the D.A. that Charlie had had

the dough planted on him. Mal Kirby knew that a lot of people still believed Charlie had been lucky.

FORTY-EIGHT hours later, there was a big blaze on the South Side. Ninety-four families were lucky to get in the clear. One family was trapped, and three out of the five were burned to death.

Mal Kirby and Charlie Riker found evidences of arson in the ruins. Chunks of unburnt wood betrayed the fact that inflammable liquid of some kind had soaked into it. They took the stuff downtown for chemical analysis.

"It's arson all right," Kirby said when the boys in the lab were finished. "The owner of that tenement house is a man named Burton. He owned the last fire-trap that went up, too. Before the insurance company pays off," the detective said to an investigator for the underwriters, "tell them to have a talk with the D.A. We'd better go see this Burton."

Henry F. Burton had an office in the midtown section. He was a loose-knitted man with a disarming, clerical countenance. He evinced outraged horror at the recent tragedy. He wanted the vandals brought to justice.

"Yeah, who doesn't?" Kirby lashed out. "This is the second bad fire you've had, Burton. Somebody got a grudge against you?"

"I don't know, Kirby. Maybe a tenant we evicted. Some of them make threats."

"They got a right to," Riker said. "Would you let your family live under those conditions?"

Burton was indignant. "I don't know what you mean, Mister. You realize that there is a war on, and a shortage of help and materials? It would ruin me to give tenants de Luxe apartments for thirty dollars a month. If you are insinuating that I—"

"If you did, it won't do you any good, Burton," Kirby said. "The insurance company is going to wait a long time, before you get a nickel out of those ruins. It was arson and no mistake. You know a man named Pinky Larson? Or Vinnie Shan?"

One of Burton's eyebrows jumped, and Kirby noticed it. "Never heard of them, Kirby. Who are they?"

"Rats," Riker cut in. "When they go to a library, they take out books like *While*

Rome Burned and *Flaming Youth*. Catch on?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't," Burton said.

"Come on, Charlie," Kirby said. "We got to start from the bottom and work up."

"Anytime I can be of assistance, Kirby—" Burton said blandly.

"We'll let you know," Riker concluded.

The department was still groping a few days later when Burton's body was found in a vacant lot six blocks from where he lived on the north end of town. There were three bullet holes in Burton's chest.

Kirby and Riker went to see Burton's widow. She said that he had gone out for a short walk after receiving a phone call. It looked to the detectives as if Burton had gone out to keep an appointment with somebody. Leaving the Burton home, Riker said, "They may have called for their dough. Burton promised to pay off when he got the insurance money and not before. One word led to another, and the next to a gun—crooks are very suspicious and nervous, Kirby."

"Yeah. We'll look up Pinky Larson."

Pinky had the answers. He sat on the bed in his hotel room, and grinned as he gave them out. "What makes you come to me, Kirby?" he mocked. "What proof you got I set that fire or was one of the guys killed old Burton?"

"This Burton was a big man, even though we figure he was a crook, Pinky. The department won't let up until they find his killer. We haven't forgotten about some burned bodies of women and kids."

"Then don't waste time trying to frame me," Pinky said.

Out in the street Kirby said, "Remember what that rat said? 'One of the guys—' And 'Old Burton.'"

"I got it, Kirby. You think you own all the brains in the department?"

"Don't get thick about it, Charlie," Mal Kirby snapped. "We got a job to do. Pinky admitted more than one guy killed Burton. Unless he had seen Burton he would not have known he was old."

"We got nothing to go on," Riker said. "If this was a story, we would have a dozen clues."

Kirby said, "A lot of crooks aren't sure about you, Charlie. You know a lot of them personally, I hear. Smoke their expensive cigars and drink their liquor. Play poker with 'em."

Charlie Riker whirled around and

TSD

seemed about to climb Kirby's frame. "You cheap flatfoot! How do you think a cop gets information? What's wrong in taking stuff for free, if you get in on the level?"

"Okay, I guess," Kirby went on. "But after that inquiry—when they said you took dough from the gamblers—people have to think—"

"I won't take no more from you, Kirby!" Riker said. "You close that big smart mouth or I'll—"

"Yeah? Let's go and see the D.A., Charlie."

LATE the next day the newspapers were treated to a dainty morsel. Charlie Riker was suspended from the force. There would be another inquiry. The D.A. hinted to the writers that Charlie knew more about the rackets in town than he chose to admit to his boss. Readers of the papers remembered and lifted their brows. Charlie Riker told the reporters he would talk all right. A lot of big heads might be lopped off along with his own.

Three days after the blowoff, Mal Kirby found Pinky Larson putting a nickel in a juke box in a tavern on the West Side. Pinky grinned. "You found the killer yet, flatfoot?"

"I will."

"Yeah? Riker said you couldn't catch a—" Pinky lopped off his words, but Mal Kirby had heard enough.

"Riker? Where have you been seein' that crooked cop, Pinky? He's been to Vinnie Shan, has he?" Kirby snapped.

"I ain't sayin'," Pinky said.

"What a sucker you are, punk," Kirby ripped out. "Let's take a table and have a beer, Pinky."

"Why not?" Pinky shrugged.

"Yeah," Kirby said after two beers. "It's pretty plain, Pinky. Charlie Riker can get back on the department, if he gets the guys who knocked off Burton. To get them, he has to ask Vinnie Shan, or he wouldn't be seein' him. Vinnie could get protection in exchange and tips from the feedbag which is the D.A.'s office."

"Vinnie Shan does not like it at all, Pinky. Knowin' there is another guy around who knows what happened to Burton, why did you step out of your class and come up here with the big operators?"

Pinky Larson put down his beer. The

stuff slopped on the table even though he had consumed half of it.

"What you gettin' at?"

"Murder is bad, Pinky. Vinnie Shan knows it. Can you prove—I mean could you prove Vinnie was with you, if you committed a murder? And would you keep the gun?"

"I dunno—I mean—look, copper, you are tryin' to kid me into—"

"No, Pinky. I was just thinkin' out loud. Vinnie Shan has the power to put Charlie Riker back on the force. The D.A. would have to put him back, if Charlie brought in a vicious killer and a guy who loves fires at the same time. Burton didn't pay off—or not enough—so they let him have it."

"Burton wouldn't do business direct with a punk like you. There was a brain he used. A brain like Vinnie Shan's for instance. Vinnie could get along nicely without you, he has so many sidelines. He doesn't need to set fires for a living no more."

"You know everythin', don't you?"

Pinky Larson sneered, but his eyes were feverish.

"What I don't know, I love to guess," Kirby said. "Well, Charlie's got the jump on me. I can't do a thing about it. I saw him going into the hotel where Vinnie lives just before I came down here. You seen the late papers, Pinky?"

Kirby took a tabloid out of his pocket. The headline said: ARREST NEAR IN BURTON SLAYING. "Newspaper men get all the dope. Sometimes I wonder how they do it. I got to beat it, Pinky."

Kirby walked out and left the crook sitting there and swishing the stale beer around in his glass. The juke box gave out with *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You!* Under the boards in the closet in Pinky's room was half a grand. He wanted to spend it as soon as he dared.

Kirby had to be right about Charlie Riker. Kirby hated that flatfoot's guts, all the crooks knew it. Riker would get the laugh on Kirby, and get his badge back. Pinky had to make sure. He had to go and get it straight with Vinnie Shan.

PINKY LARSON took a cab to Shan's hotel. When he started to get out, he saw Charlie Riker in the lobby, pressing the elevator button. From where he sat, he saw that Riker was pretty pleased. He

told the cab driver to take him back to the tavern.

Pinky's nerves were singing. He had never contemplated a few years in prison with any great amount of terror, but he was thinking of the chair now. He had read about executions. This was the first time Pinky Larson had ever committed premeditated murder. Once in his room he went to pieces. He called headquarters.

Kirby found Pinky Larson sweating and trembling when he arrived. Pinky said, "I ain't goin' to burn for that big shot. You'll see I beat the chair, Kirby? For singin'?"

"Okay," Mal Kirby said. "I want the gun, Pinky, and your confession. You're gettin' smart now, but you started a little too late. Then we'll go and pick up Riker and Shan, and take them down."

"I can't wait until I see that big shot's face," Pinky Larson said, his small soul getting nourishment out of the situation. 'Mister' Shan I had to call him. I was just a stooge he was goin' to frame. What'll I write?"

"I'll tell you. Sit down, Pinky."

An hour later Pinky Larson knocked on the door of Shan's hotel apartment. When the door opened, Kirby pushed Pinky in, and covered Vinnie Shan and Charlie Riker with a gun. Charlie was smoking a big cigar and drinking Shan's liquor.

"What's the idea?" Shan said, the muscles of his fat face hanging.

"I beat you to it," Pinky yelled in a high-pitched choking voice. "I've spilled it first, big shot. You'll sell me out to

Riker, huh? Well, you go to the chair alone, Shan!"

"Well, it worked, Kirby," Charlie said and got up. Vinnie Shan, chin sagging, spun around and stared at Riker. "Why, Pinky, we never even mentioned business. Me an' Vinnie was just bein' sociable all along. That was a gag, me bein' suspended."

Vinnie Shan tried to get rough. Kirby had to hit him, hard. Pinky was a slow thinker. He stood there, opening and closing his mouth like a goldfish, until he let out a crazy yell and rushed at Kirby. Riker hit him in the jaw and floored him.

"You got it all, Kirby?" he asked.

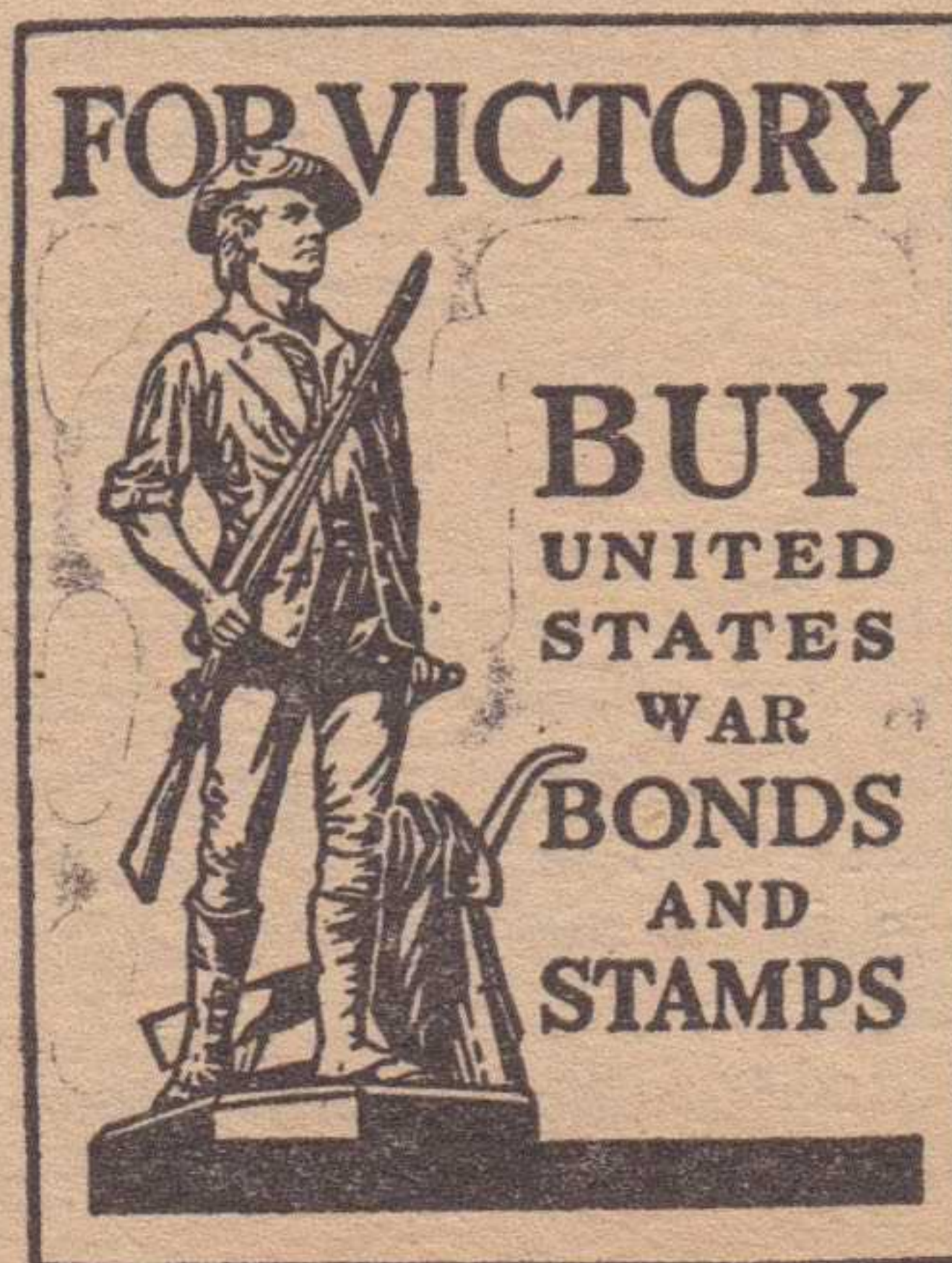
In the D.A.'s office, with the manacled killers of Burton looking on, Charlie Riker said, "Of course you'll take all the credit, Kirby. I was only a stooge. It's all hog or nothin' with you."

"Stop squawking, Riker," Kirby said. "I did figure it out, didn't I? I still say they ought to kick you out of the dep—!"

"I'm going to hang one on you for keeps yet," Riker stormed. "I never did like your face, Kirby!"

Pinky Larson shook his head from side to side. "Shan," he said. "They really do hate each other's stomach. How did they—?"

The little crook was not expected to know that a cop was a cop first and an individual afterwards. Pinky Larson was where he was because he was not very smart. There are many other angles besides clues.



Hot-Lead Headlines

By Emil Petaja

You could say that little newsy had an eye for a noose when he spotted the wanted gunmen. But when he hawked phony headlines, those mugs figured he'd a heart for a bullet.

PAPER? Late *Bugle*?" And another nickel jingles in my pants pocket. I'm Pop. You've seen me a hundred times, hustling my papers here at the downtown drug store corner.

"It's awful!" I yell. "It's terrible!" Then when everybody stops to gawk at me I grin and holler. "Catalina Island surrounded by water!"

I like to make with the gags. It sure sells papers.

I like to watch the mobs flood by of an evening, too. I learn lots about people that way. Most of them don't even see me. I'm just part of the scenery. But I got eyes and feelings, like anybody. I'm not so dumb, if I am getting on in years, and have got a schnozz bigger'n Jimmy Durante!

Copper Hannigan grins at me, and says, "Pop, I think you got a good nose for news!"

Up to a short while back I didn't have much use for coppers, but it was Hannigan who put me straight. It all had to do with a fight I had with another newsy who tried to muscle in on my corner. Hannigan sent him peddling his papers somewhere else. . . .

"It won't be long now!" I was using my old line.

It was a foggy Saturday night. My papers felt like they was wet. Getting pretty late, when Hannigan walked up.

He always took a minute to chew the fat while he was waiting for his bus. He

had a swell wife and kid expecting him home down in the Valley.

"What's all this?" I asked, staring. Instead of wearing his blue cop's uniform, Hannigan was wearing a grey suit and a slouch hat. And instead of striding with his curly head high he had his coat collar turned up and his hat pulled down, like he was a crook or something.

"It happened, Pop," he said huskily. His honest blue eyes looked sort of dead.

"Naw!" I couldn't believe it.

"You mean—they kicked you off the Force?"

He hunched his big shoulders.

"Yes. I'm not a cop any longer. I'm just a guy out of work. A guy with a black smear on his name!" He sort of spit the words out, like they tasted bad.

Say! Just to get you straightened out I'd better tell you what happened.

THREE days ago the Thrift-National Bank down the street was stuck up by three rats, just before it opened for business. I don't make it down here that early, so all I knew was what I read in the papers.

Hannigan was pounding his beat as usual. Bystanders saw the black sedan drive up near the bank. They also saw Hannigan walk over to it and climb in. He sat with the driver while the other two mugs opened the bank door with Hannigan's keys and took twenty grand



from the cashiers and a lot of bonds.

They shot two of them. The girl died. The guy is still in the hospital.

Then the bandits drove off, Hannigan with them. You can see how it looked.

The papers got real rough on Hannigan.

"Any policeman," editorials said, "who values his own skin so highly that he won't make any effort to prevent robbery and murder is as good as a murderer himself!"

Me, I was puzzled. *I* knew Hannigan wasn't yellow!

"I'd sure like to know the real low-down!" I told him.

Hannigan nodded grimly. "I was walking my beat," he said, "when this sedan drove up. I spotted something fishy right away, so I sauntered up to the curb to give them the once over.

"The guy in back had a long scar across his right cheek. I could tell right away he was their boss. He held up something so I could get a good look at it.

"Ever see this before, Copper?"

"I stared. I couldn't believe my eyes. But—there couldn't be two dolls exactly like it!

"It looks like my kid's doll," I said.

"It is your kid's doll!" he sneered. "All dressed up in a blue copper's uniform—*just like daddy!* That's what she said when we picked her up."

"I felt as if somebody's punched me in the stomach. Little Tessa in the claws of a gang of racketeers! I licked my dry lips, trying to think straight.

"Tessa was crazy about that doll—liked it more than anything she had. She slept with it by her on the pillow every night. She wouldn't let anybody else even touch it.

"So—hundred to one—if they had the doll, they had Tessa, too. But I was going to make sure.

"So you went to my house and kidnaped Tessa—"

"The scarface sneered.

"Wise guy, eh? Who you trying to out-fox? You know damn well your wife left the kid at a day nursery while she was out doing Red Cross work!

"So did we! We told the dopey dame at the nursery that we was friends of yours, and that you wanted us to pick the kid up. Then we brought her over to Flo's house.

"You don't know Flo, do you? She

don't like cops. Also she don't like kids. So a cop's kid she don't like double! In case we don't get right back there, Flo's apt to get nervous. No telling what might happen!"

"I got cold all over. I wanted to grab that scarface by the throat, and choke him until he told me where Tessa was. But the guy in front, with the greasy mustache, was toying with a rod. I knew it wasn't any use. These guys were heartless killers.

"If they didn't get back. . . ."

"You was in a tough spot, Hannigan!" I put in.

His eyes got all icy.

"Pop, if it hadn't been for Tessa, I'd have shot it out with them until I was plugged full of holes!"

"I know you would. It was your job."

"As it was," Hannigan went on, "I didn't really have any choice at all. If I'd said I wouldn't play ball with them, they'd of plugged me anyway—right then and there!

"So I told them they could have my bank keys, and I'd go along with them to help them make a getaway, provided they would bring Tessa right back to the nursery, before my wife got back and found her gone.

"Also I got them to promise one more thing. Not to use their guns. They said they wouldn't. Money was all they wanted." Hannigan groaned. "I should have known you can't trust a pack of rats!"

"Don't keep blaming yourself," I told him. "Like you said, they'd have done it anyway—whether you was with them or not. And you did save Tessa!"

"Yes, Pop," Hannigan said fiercely. "I guess that was worth my job, my good name—and more!"

I STOPPED long enough to sell a couple more papers, then went back to Hannigan, who was standing in the shadows.

"What I can't figure," I said, "is why they didn't believe your story down at headquarters.

Hannigan shoved his fists down in his pockets. His mouth was a tight line.

"They checked up with the girl at the nursery. She was the only one who could prove my story, since Tessa's too little to tell us about it. But the girl lied. She insisted that Tessa had stayed there all the time."

I didn't get it. "Is this nursery dame in cahoots with the bandits?"

Hannigan shook his head. "Don't you see, Pop? She's scared. She doesn't want to get in bad with the nursery people. Worse still, the scarface put the finger on her. She's afraid they'll kill her if she talks!"

I got it now. Plenty!

I wished there was something I could do. Hannigan was a swell cop. He didn't deserve a dirty deal like this. But what could an old newsy like me do?

"Paper! Late final!" I growled.

"What's the matter, Pop?" one of my customers wanted to know. "Income tax bothering you?"

I brightened as I turned back to Hannigan.

"Say! Don't you know this is Saturday?"

He shrugged. "So what, Pop?"

"Well, ain't you going to bring your wife a box of candy, like you always do on Saturday night?"

His eyes glowed a little.

"That's right, Pop! But—my bus—"

"You got a good ten minutes," I told him. "And the drug store is still open."

"Thanks, Pop!"

He squared his shoulders as he walked into the drug store. I guess it made him feel better to know somebody believed him. And my mentioning the candy reminded him his wife believed him, too.

"PAPER!" I yelled, feeling better myself. "Yanks blast Nip-held island! Real alla-bout it!"

It was getting cold now. Pushing on toward midnight. A chilling fog crept out of dark corners. The crowd was thin, now.

Suddenly I saw it. A long black sedan. It stopped when the street light flashed red.

There was three guys in it. And when the guy nearest to me bent over to light a cigarette I got a good look at his kisser. He had a scar slash across his right cheek!

I goggled. Could it possibly be—them? I was going to make sure, so I stepped off the curb and walked over to the car.

The driver was talking. "I tell ya, boss, I gotto call Flo and tell her—"

The scarface saw me and hissed, "Shut up!"

"Paper, mister?" I grinned, holding one out.

"No!" barked the scarface. "Scram away from here!"

"Okay," I mumbled.

I backed away and went on with my speiling. But I had found out what I wanted to know. It was the filthy so-and-sos who kidnaped Hannigan's kid and bumped the cashiers at the Thrift-National!

Flo. That did it!

If only there was some way I could get Hannigan out here! I knew by the bulge on his hip that he was still packing his rod.

But there was no time to run in and get him—and not another cop in sight.

In a couple seconds the light would change green, and they'd be gone.

I groaned.

If only Hannigan would come out now! But there was no sign of him. I guessed it was busy in there, just before closing time.

I watched the light change. The sedan moved ahead.

But I nearly let out a yelp of joy when it eased around the corner and parked. The driver was going to call Flo from this drug store, I figured.

He climbed out. He was a shrunken-up squint. He ran in the side door of the drug store, while the other two mugs got out and stood there by the car. I could see they were keeping an eye out for coppers.

The scarface was a big bruiser. I could see why they called him boss. The third mug had slicked-up hair and a greasy mustache. They all wore sporty clothes.

They kept watching me. I think they caught on I was suspicious.

The side street was dark and empty. Fog curled up around the curbs. I hopped around, yelling "Paper!" and waiting nervously for Hannigan to show up. But he didn't.

The driver came back. They gabbed together while he climbed in behind the wheel. Still no Hannigan.

They were going to get away!

Just then Beany Long, the trucker who handles the *Bugle* route, swung by in his big truck, dropping down a bundle of new editions for me.

"Okay, Pop?" he yelled.

"Okay!"

His paper-loaded truck rumbled off into the fog.

Right then a hot idea smacked me. I grabbed up an armful of the new editions and gandered at the headlines, pretending to get all excited. I held the papers so nobody'd see the scareheads, yelling:

"Extra! Read alla-bout it! Policeman Hannigan outwits bank bandits! Hannigan captures the mugs what robbed the Thrift-National Bank! Oh, it's *Hannigan! Hannigan!*"

THEY could of heard me three blocks away. All I wanted was for Hannigan—and the crooks—to hear me.

The bandits heard me all right. They stopped jabbering and began to walk up to me. They were curious to know who the suckers were that had taken the rap in their place!

The driver stayed at his wheel.

"I'll take one of those papers," the scarface said, with a dirty laugh.

I pretended not to notice them. Out of the corner of my eye I was watching the drug store doorway. Still no Hannigan.

I kept yelling, "Read alla-bout it! Hannigan slugs the mugs what robbed the bank! *Hannigan!* Read alla-bout *Hannigan!*"

"Hey, you!" snarled the scarface. "Gimme one of those papers!"

Before I could hop away he grabbed hold of my arm and snatched one of my papers. The greasy mug read it over his shoulder.

Their eyes scanned the front page. Then the scarface threw the paper on the sidewalk and started cussing. He grabbed hold of my shoulder.

"What's the idea, ya—"

"Drill him, boss!" squeaked the greasy mug. "He knows something!"

The scarface nodded, his mouth twisting. His face was hard as nails. His hand bit into my shoulder.

The greasy mug turned to nod at their driver. I heard the sedan purr up, ready to shove off as soon as they'd finished with me.

"I don't know nothing!" I choked, plenty scared. "Honest I don't! It's only a gag! I'm always clowning like that. It

helps sell my papers! Ask anybody if I don't do it all the time! Ask the guy behind you—the guy with the gun!"

"Yeah?" snapped the scarface. "You don't think Sentilla would tumble for that old gag, do you?"

He stepped back, keeping his eyes on me. His hand was in his coat pocket. I could see the outline of a blunt-nosed rod clutched in his fist. He was going to drill me through his pocket.

The greasy mug watched. An ugly smile lit up his pan.

Sentilla's finger closed over the trigger. The whining bullet plowed my way.

I fell flat on my face in the gutter. Just in time. The hot lead grazed my grey head.

I groaned.

Then another gun blazed. Behind Sentilla.

The scarface crumpled, holding his gun arm and swearing.

"See?" I mumbled, fumbling up on my pins. "It wasn't a gag! There was a guy behind you!"

It was Hannigan. And just in the nick of time.

The greasy mug whirled and saw him. He ducked Hannigan's spitting revolver and fled for the sedan.

He made it. The car door slammed, and it was smearing rubber down the fog-rimmed street.

Hannigan ran a few steps. Then his gun cracked loose again. His last shot hit a back tire. There was a wild explosion as the tire mangled. The sedan wobbled shakily, then smacked dead-head into a lamppost.

By now there was more people, including cops, clustered around my corner than I could shake a stick at.

Hannigan pulled Sentilla to his feet and started toward the smashed sedan. Then he turned toward me.

"Thanks, Pop," he said huskily. "I won't forget!"

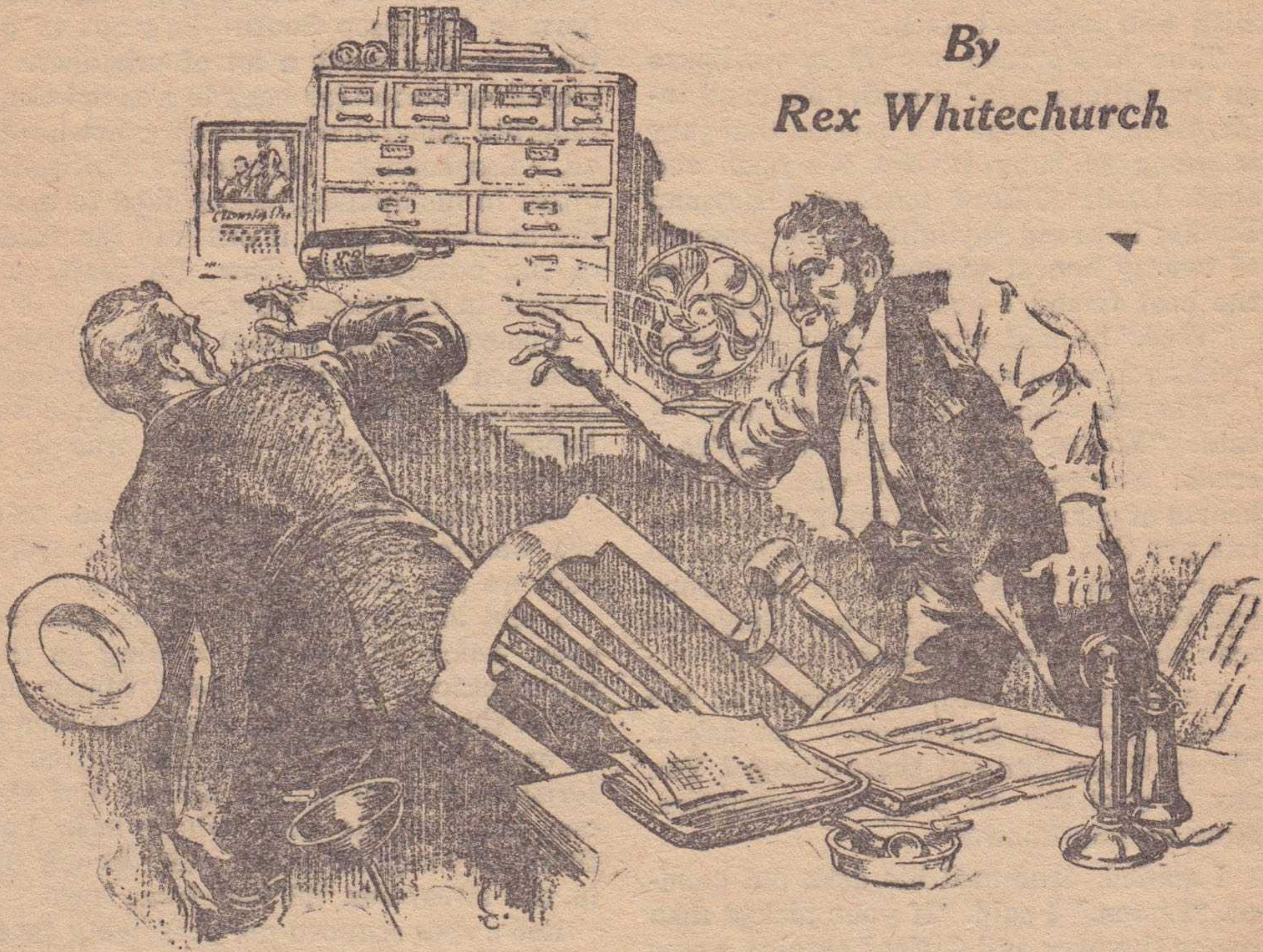
"That's okay," I grinned. Then I yelled out:

"Hannigan captures bank bandits single-handed in street gun-battle! Hannigan gets promoted to Police Sergeant! Read alla-bout it!"



Good Mourning, Killer!

By
Rex Whitechurch



Sid Marvaunt, the killer's friend, would hang up any jury rather than send a murderer to the gallows. But when his own neck was on trial, Marvaunt preferred to take the law into his own hands, rather than turn a hung jury into a jury of hangmen.

WESLEY NAGG sat at his creaky desk, watching me with grave apprehension in his rheumy eyes, not moving except to shift a heavy paperweight so that it would be more convenient just in case. I guess it was the way I shut the door behind me, turned the key, that upset him.

"Morning, Wes," I said amiably. "I trust I'm not intruding?"

"What do you think?" he growled. "When a man bearing your reputation slams into a fellow's office and locks the door behind him—"

I laughed, a bit unpleasantly perhaps. "Don't let my attitude fool you," I said.

"I'm just taking the precaution to see that we're not interrupted while we dispose of a serious matter."

"What're you up to?" he said, running a large hand through his thick grey hair. "Is this the beginning of another crime crusade launched by the *Journal* of which you are the fighting editor?"

I took my weight off my feet, helping myself to one of his hard uninviting chairs. From where I sat, through a corner window, I could see the roof of the courthouse. Wesley Nagg was one of the best criminal lawyers in the state. In forty years, he'd lost just two cases, won all the others with ease. He was a gifted

actor, would have made good on the stage. He understood all the courtroom tricks. Always Nagg, big, broad and red-faced, tried the dead man.

Right now what I wanted to discuss with him wouldn't keep.

"The jury's been out thirty-six hours on the Gifford case," I said. "From all indications the stooge you have on that jury is going to hang it. Yet it's open and shut. Leslie Gifford murdered Herman Banner in broad daylight, in the presence of twenty honest witnesses. Banner was the best friend I had in the world!"

"Well," he said, with an impudent grin, "what you want me to do about it—cry?"

"There's nothing you can do now," I said. "You're a swell guy, but you're a crook. You've cried your way into the hearts of countless jurymen in your time, but not this time, Wesley. They're on to your magic. They've knocked the props out from under your voodoo. Only one man stands between you and defeat."

He leaned forward, his elbows on the desk. "How do you know?" he asked. "How do you find out these things? You say it's eleven to one for conviction. How do you know?"

I smiled, drummed his desk flat-handed. "Listen," I said. "If your picked man hangs the jury and Gifford obtains a new trial, I'll write an exposé of you and your damned tactics that'll ruin you forever. I'll do that for Herman Banner!"

He looked startled, for a moment his breathing hung suspended. "That," he said, recovering quickly, "constitutes a threat. I'd suggest you read *Blackstone, Rights of People and Rights of Things*. If you want me to take the shirt off your back in a libel suit, you mention my name in connection with anything shady in your rotten sheet."

I arose, still mad. I'd been mad when entering the dusty, cobwebby, gloom-laced office. I wouldn't get over it in a hurry. I suddenly knew I'd lost my head in the first place or I wouldn't have come here.

I knew another thing. "I've got enough on you to hang you," I rapped, slamming to the door.

"Knowing it and proving it, son," he said, "are two different horses."

I dropped my hand to the doorknob. "Well, I can ride 'em Roman," I said. "Right now, beginning this minute, I'm

starting in to prove you're the biggest swindler in Mason City!"

I GUESS I've always been too quick and impulsive. You take a guy that was born in the Deep South—he's apt to be too fiery and made a lot of mistakes. I traced my ancestors back to a noted Confederate general who'd been a hot-headed, flamboyant stonewall, obstinate, bitter in his dislikes, who'd liked to taste fire as well as spew it out into the faces of his adversaries. Now, I'd really let myself in for something.

I poured myself a glass of raw whisky, slammed back to Red Galvan's linotype. Red looked at me, grinned and opened his hands, signifying he knew I was in a bad mood.

"Kill that church social," I said. "No use wasting space when we need every inch we can salvage. Start on this."

I slid an editorial before his startled eyes, which I'd been up working on the night before when I'd been tipped off about the way Nagg's stooge was bound to hang the jury. It was, I'd written, a foregone conclusion. I'd hinted that the one man on the jury who'd been put there to hang it, would stay locked up in the sweat-box till hell froze over.

Red's eyes scanned my perspiring face. "Jeb," he said, "this is dangerous stuff!"

"Maybe," I said. "But by the time you've run that out, I'll have another to substantiate what may 'pear to you to be wild claims. Everybody in this county knows Gifford's guilty of first degree murder. The jury stands eleven to one for conviction."

"Wes Nagg's never lost a murder case. He took this one with his neck stuck out. Always, before this, he's had something to work on. But Herman Banner was a swell old guy. He didn't deserve to be shot down in cold blood by a crook like Gifford!"

"Meanin' Wes didn't have no dead man's sullied past to drag before the jury," Red said, grinning expansively.

"You drove the spike clear in the first blow," I said. "There's another point—this guy, Sid Marvaunt, a supposedly honest farmer, has been on a dozen cases that Wes Nagg has tried. I can see it just one way. I've checked Marvaunt up and down, over and under, and he's always voted for acquittal in a murder case."

Didn't we carry a boxed feature on him about a year ago, handing him the blue ribbon for local jury service?"

Yes, that's what put the bug in my bonnet in the beginning. You take a place like our peace-loving rural community. It's not singular for the same man to be called for jury duty time and again.

Only in Sid Marvaunt's case, he'd been up a dozen times, to sit in judgment in murder trials, all handled by Wes Nagg. Couple with this the way Marvaunt always voted for acquittal. Furthermore, he was hanging this jury and trying to acquit an established killer.

My blood was still boiling when I emerged into Fredrick Avenue, crossed the asphalt, and slammed into the cool corridor of the antiquated courthouse. Judge Lawrence Peabody was crouched behind his desk, trying to keep himself comfortable and his shirt collar from wilting by swinging a palm leaf back and forth before his flushed corpulent countenance. The jury was still out. A mere scattering of determined spectators dotted the sea of chairs.

I could learn nothing there, only that if they didn't arrive at a verdict real soon Judge Peabody was going to call it a day. It now was eleven o'clock in the morning.

I was bee-busy for the next two hours. I nearly ran my legs off trying to get the dope I needed on Wesley Nagg and the county's champion jurymen. When I stopped at the Miami Club for a drink, Izzy Bacholdt told me the jury had come in and had failed to agree.

SUNKEN in spirit, I stood tracing circles on the bar with my glass. Suddenly when the door banged open with the influx of weary members of the ill-fated jury, who'd been released after forty hours of trying to agree, I saw Sid Marvaunt!

He was a gangling, high-cheekboned farmer in a straw hat and a hickory shirt. By trade he was a miller. He had sandy hair, bushy, sandy eyebrows. There was a stubble of sand-tinted beard on his lantern jaw. His huge hands curled around a beer mug, his light blue eyes were blood-shot and had glints in them.

I observed at once that none of the others associated with him. He loitered alone, sipping beer, scowling. Not once did he

glance around at those who'd been his companions in the hot stuffy juryroom. Obviously he didn't care a damn what they said or thought. I edged down along the bar.

"Drink up, Sid," I said, "and have another. I was just thinking—this is the thirteenth case you've heard as an august member of the jury."

"Don't want no more noospaper stories, Jeb," he said, with an attempt to match my cordiality. "I reckon I've had too much publicity as is."

"Why so?" I asked innocently.

He slued around, propped a foot on the bar rail and drawled, "I've had it slammed into my teeth that I've been on the jury so often I'm calloused, 'n' c'n fetch in only one verdict in a murder case, that's for acquittal. How come? You never said anything 'bout me always being for an acquittal in your *Journal* stories."

"No, sir," I said. But I felt enthusiasm glowing within me. Here luck was beginning to break in my favor at last. Marvaunt was the one man who could help me shatter the illusions Wes Nagg had spun in his forty years of practise in criminal jurisprudence.

But it would require tact to handle Sid Marvaunt. He looked like a rangy rube, a veritable apple-knocker, thick-witted, ignorant of book learning. Well, maybe he lacked book polish, but he wasn't ignorant. He was as crafty as a red fox.

"They was sayin' over to the courthouse," Marvaunt continued, wiping his lean face with a bandanna, "that I had formed an awful mean habit of votin' jist one way. That's the kind of talk they give me to keep me from hangin' the jury. But I went ahead 'n' hung 'er anyhow, because I happened to believe in the defendant's innocence."

"So they threw it up to you roughshod?" I lifted my eyes to scan the faces of the men revealed in the back bar mirrors. I observed two or three friendly expressions, but mostly I saw eyes gleaming with disapproval. I guess Sid Marvaunt was mighty unpopular right then.

"Come over to the office," I said abruptly, "where we can talk. This is no place to discuss our opinions. We're about as popular as a pair of polecats, Sid."

I was aware that a change had come over Marvaunt. All at once he'd gone nervous, perhaps suspicious of my aims. No



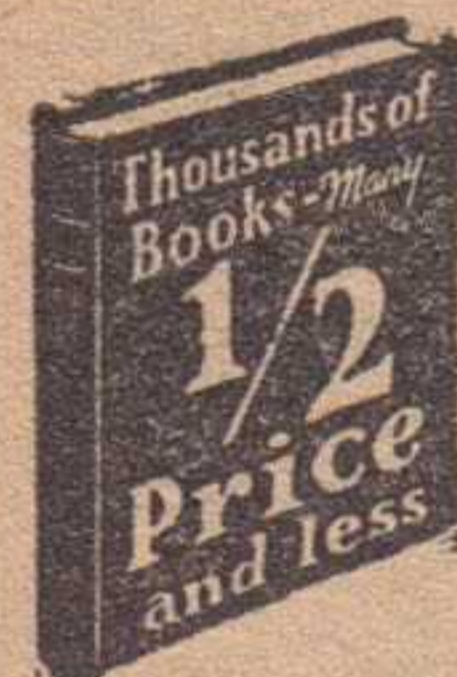
Do Men Admire You, Women Envy You?

Science has discovered the facsimile of Nature's substance which gives skin its youthful quality! TRUM contains this costly and amazing young-skin ingredient called Estrogen, which is actually absorbed by your skin to do its work under the surface to help firm, freshen and strengthen tissues. Let your mirror be the judge of its amazing benefits! Have this "vitalizing" substance bring "bloom" to your skin. **APPLY ON THAT PART OF YOUR BODY WHERE YOU WANT THE MOST GOOD DONE**, or your face, neck or hands. With each order for TRUM we will include FREE a Doctor's brochure for

"Bust Development and Care"

Send \$3.00, which includes Federal tax and postage. (If C.O.D. \$3.50.) TRUM, "BUST DEVELOPMENT AND CARE," and complete directions sent in plain wrapper. We are so sure you will be pleased that we GUARANTEE to refund the purchase price if you are not more than satisfied with results after using. Order yours NOW! TRUM, 220 Broadway, Dept. BM, New York 7, N. Y.

ANY BOOK IN PRINT!



Delivered at your door. We pay postage. Standard authors, new books, popular editions, fiction, reference, medical, mechanical, children's books, etc.—all at guaranteed savings. Send card now for Clarkson's 1944 Catalog.

FREE Write for our great illustrated book catalog. A short course in literature. The buying guide of 300,000 book lovers. The answer to your Christmas gift problem. **FREE** if you write NOW—TODAY!

CLARKSON PUBLISHING COMPANY

Dept. AC-4, 1253 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"



Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific
CRIME DETECTION!

I have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let me teach you in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Identification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. 58% of all American Bureaus of Identification employ I. A. S. students or graduates. I can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7469, Chicago 40, Ill.

BUY WAR BONDS!



WEDDING
AND
ENGAGEMENT **RING**
BARGAIN

**TEN DAYS' TRIAL —
SEND NO MONEY**

Introductory Offer: With every order for smart, new, Sterling Silver Solitaire engagement ring we will include without extra charge exquisite wedding ring set with eight imitation diamonds matching in fire and brilliance the beautiful imitation Diamond solitaire engagement ring (the perfect bridal pair).

Send no money with order. Just name, address and ring size. We ship both rings in lovely gift box immediately and you make just 2 easy payments of \$2 each, total only \$4. We trust you. No red tape as you make first payment and 20% Federal tax to postman on arrival then balance any time within 30 days. Money-back guarantee. War conditions make supply limited. Act NOW.

EMPIRE DIAMOND COMPANY
DEPT. ST-264 JEFFERSON, IOWA

doubt I'd given myself away, yet I couldn't see where. There was a definite air of guilt about this man. Sure enough, he declined my invitation.

"I'll have to get along, 'tend to some business in town, then go home. Sorry, Jeb, but I can't spare the time. Besides, I'd appreciate your leaving my name outen the *Journal*. S'long now, till another day." He skewed around, dropped his shaggy head and stamped out into Fredrick Avenue. The screen door clopped behind him.

Ostensibly the man was afraid. If I knew human nature, Sid Marvaunt was struggling with a grave fear—but of what?

Red came sauntering in. I bought him a drink. He said he was en route back to the shop. "What'll I do 'bout those Gifford salebills?" he asked. "We're supposed to have them out already; the sale takes place Saturday."

Gifford! The name crashed through my skull. I'd forgotten those bills. Gifford was selling out; it must've cost a lot of money to employ Wes Nagg to defend him. I wondered . . .

"I'll rush over and see him," I said. "I reckon he'll need 'em, but I got business with him anyway."

"If you do what you said you was goin' to," Red replied, "you'll have to see a lot of folks!"

LESLIE GIFFORD was a little man with a sharp, pinched face. He was immaculate in brown gabardine, blackish, alert-eyed. He waved me to a chair in his office over the American National Bank.

"Drink?" he said, yanking a quart bottle out of his desk and magically producing a couple glasses.

I accepted, downed the slug, and pushed the glass aside on a blue advertising blotter.

"It's about those salebills," I said, amicably enough. "You'll be needin' 'em Saturday, Les?"

He made a little grimace. "Gosh, I'd forgotten all about them, Jeb," he said. He scratched dandruff out of his jet black hair.

"No," he added, "maybe you'd better cancel the order. I ain't sellin' out now."

Surprised, I twisted on my chair, got up. "It couldn't be you've come out bet-

ter'n you thought you would," I insinuated.

He grinned, waved a ringed hand. "Maybe, maybe not," he said. "Folks around Mason City figured I'd get a ride, perhaps a long sentence to Jack's House. I felt if this did happen—you never c'n tell in a murder trial—I'd need money for an appeal, maybe for other things. I guess I owe a little money now, but can wait."

"Your lawyer perhaps," I said.

"Yes, and others," he admitted. "I'll have to conserve now, being there's another trial coming up."

"With Nagg to defend you, you'd ought to be okay," I said.

"You can't tell," he said, watching me.

I nodded, moved toward the door, then changing my mind, went back to Gifford's desk. I wanted to throw a barb into him, a feeler. "With Nagg representing you, and Marvaunt on the jury, all hell couldn't stick you," I said.

He didn't say anything, but I thought he winced.

"You felt better when you found out Marvaunt was on the jury," I said. "Didn't you?"

"What're you driving at?" he said. I saw a gleam dart into his little ratlike eyes.

"Nothing." I strolled to a window, stared down into Felix Street. "A mere statement of truth. You know as well as I, Gifford, that you were not entitled to a second hearing."

He half-sprang from his chair. "What's got into you?" he shouted. "Talking to me like that."

"I mean you killed old Herman Banner in cold blood," I said, losing my head. "If it hadn't been for Marvaunt—"

"You can't talk to me like this!" he roared. "You get the hell outa here!"

"Let me see you put me out," I said. "You low-down skulking murderer!"

He came at me, swinging his arms, swinging the quart bottle at my head. Whisky ran from this, saturated his clothes. He heaved the bottle. I ducked and the bottle whizzed past. He came charging in. I waited, then stabbed out a straight right.

My bunched knuckles smacked into his face. He sprawled backward, clutched at empty space, stopped, skewed around and crashed down on his side, with his knees buckling.

3¢ A DAY **PAYS YOU \$100 a Month**
PAYS YOUR FAMILY \$3000

IN SICKNESS AND ACCIDENT

You can collect \$100 a month for sickness or accident. \$3000 for loss of limbs or sight. \$3000 for accidental death. 3¢ a day insures any man or woman, 16 to 75. NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION. Get this policy for 10 days without risking a penny. Send coupon below.

ARCADIA MUTUAL CASUALTY CO.
 AMERICAN SENTINEL INSURANCE AGENCY
 176 W. Adams St., Chicago 3, Ill., Dept. 719.
 Tell me how to get your policy for 10-day inspection. No Agent will call.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____

***SONG POEMS WANTED TO BE SET TO MUSIC**

*Publishers need new songs. Submit one or more of your best poems for immediate consideration. Any subject. Send poem.
 *PHONOGRAPH RECORDS MADE
 *FIVE STAR MUSIC MASTERS, 650 Beacon Bldg., Boston, Mass.

CARD TRICKS



Most all Playing Cards are marked in making. TELL ANY CARD FROM BACK. Send \$1.00 for Key-marks for TEN different popular decks with complete instructions. No Gamblers.
 THE TELLURIUM CO.
 Box 678-AF, Wallace, Idaho

Asthma Mucus Loosened First Day For Thousands of Sufferers

If choking, gasping, wheezing, recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma rob you of sleep and energy, accept this liberal trial offer. Get Mendaco, a doctor's prescription, from your druggist; take exactly as directed and see for yourself how quickly it usually helps loosen and remove thick strangling mucus, thus promoting freer breathing and refreshing sleep. You be the judge. Unless delighted and entirely satisfied with results, simply return the empty package and your money back is guaranteed. Don't suffer another night without trying guaranteed Mendaco—only 60c.

DICE — CARDS



Bicycle Readers, Slick Aces, Shiners, Daub, Luminous Ink and Glasses. 2 and 3 Dice Combinations. Transparent Emeried Dice. Catalog FREE.
 D. SMYTHE CO. Box 8 NEWARK, MO.

HONEYMOON CHARM DROPS



Bewitch, allure and captivate with this rare, stimulating fragrance. Just one drop of this secret aroma will endure for hours and will add a more thrilling, irresistible charm to you! ALSO FREE PERSONAL DIRECTIONS tell you HOW to use if you want to win love. SEND NO MONEY! Full size bottle sent in plain wrapper. Pay postman on delivery 98c plus postage, or send only \$1.00 and we pay postage. One bottle FREE if 2 ordered. Money Back Guarantee.
 VELMO CO., 21 West 45th St., Dept. AC-15, N. Y. C. 10

YES, YOU WILL HAVE LOVELY CURVES

Don't let your life be spoiled by shame or embarrassment over a flat, undeveloped or sagging bust! Successful experience of thousands of women proves you can help develop glamorous contours and an alluring bustline of high, youthful rounded fullness. All you do is follow the tested, proven, easy-to-use methods given in the wonderful, scientifically authentic book, "Approved Methods for Care and Development of the Bust." Experience the thrilling joys of having your bust appear shapely, rounded, beautiful. Bring out the romantic curves which rouse envy, admiration and approval. Lifetime results, safely, easily and positively. If not satisfied, return within 10 days and money will be refunded.



SEND NO MONEY!

Take advantage of this extraordinary reduction. Formerly more than Double this price. Now only \$1.00. Order now C.O.D. plus postage. Pay Postman on arrival. To save Postage Send \$1.00 with order, and we ship Prepaid in plain wrapper.

SUCCESS STUDIOS

Baltimore, Md. Box 895-L

Now Only

\$1.00

Never before
so greatly
reduced

SONGWRITERS

Melodies supplied WITHOUT CHARGE by well known Hollywood composers. We record your song and make it presentable to the publishers. Lead sheets and records furnished. Send your song material for free examination. Write for details.

CINEMA SONG CO., Dept. 7-F, P.O. BOX 670, Beverly Hills, Calif.



LODESTONE

LIVE AND STRONG

\$1.00 per Pair

7 Keys to Power, \$1.00. Postage extra if C.O.D. Charms, oils, Powders, Herbs, Novelties, etc., described in FREE Catalog.

D. SMYTHE CO.

Box 8-L

Newark, Mo.

Protect Entire Family for \$1 a Month

Certificate Paying Benefits up to \$1,000.00. Sent for FREE Inspection FREE. Covers accidental or natural death. No medical examination. Age limits 2 to 75 years. SEND NO MONEY—Just your name and address. No obligation. No salesman will call. Postcard will do. Atlas Mutual Benefit Ass'n, Dept. 36-N5 Wilmington, Delaware.

SPEAK SPANISH!

Be prepared for Latin-American opportunities. It's profitable! It's fun! Lessons by experienced teacher who lived, studied and traveled in Latin-America. Send \$1.00 to Eeciones, 2315 Colcord, Waco, Texas, and buy yourself a chance for the future.

BUY FROM THE OLDEST ESTABLISHED
FIRM IN THE UNITED STATES SELLING
EYE GLASSES BY MAIL

GLASSES
as LOW as
\$1.95 PAIR



16 DAYS TRIAL

Choice of the LATEST STYLES—remarkably LOW PRICES. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or your money back. If you are not satisfied—they will not cost you a cent.

SEND NO MONEY Write for FREE catalog today showing all of our many styles and LOW PRICES

ADVANCE SPECTACLE CO.

537 S. Dearborn St. Dept. FA-11

BROKEN GLASSES
REPAIRED
AT LOW COST

Chicago, Ill.

I banged out of the office, shut the door. I was still mad, but gradually common horsesense was beginning to assert itself.

I went back to the office. Red was tapping out the conclusion of the lengthy editorial in which I'd hinted an exposé of Wes Nagg's nefarious tactics was to come. I sank down at my desk, mopped sweat. Well, my hot head had got me into trouble again.

IT WAS about three that afternoon when I'd finished unearthing all the evidence there was available to support me in my bold contentions. I'd no sooner parked myself at my battered typewriter, rolled in a sheet of copy paper, than the street door opened again.

Wes Nagg stood there, his straw sailor in his pudgy hand, sweat dripping from his crimson face. He wagged a frankfurter finger at me.

"Brother," he said, "this is one murder in which there will be no acquittal, no hung jury!"

Something started drumming in my head, my eyes burned, my face felt as dry and bleached as an old bone. His words tugged at my sensibilities.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"I simply mean," Nagg elucidated in his booming voice, "that you've just committed a weird diabolical murder!"

Stunned, I moved leaden feet to slue around. "You—"

"You killed Les Gifford," Nagg's voice tolled on. "You went up to his office, fought with him, and delivered a death blow to his jaw. When his skull hit the floor it was fractured. That put you on the spot, partner."

"You're a liar!" I lurched to my feet, groped out on the desk for a stone paperweight. Nagg seized a wrought-iron ashstand, lifted it above his head with both hands.

"You tried to scare him into talking," he went on, "so as to force him to reveal something. He didn't have anything to reveal. You were after me. You cared little what you did, what unscrupulous tricks you'd have to play, to find out what you wanted. Well, brother, you're going to hang, and you might as well prepare for doomsday. I'll spend all my money and exert every influence to put you where you belong!"

"You get out of here, you big bag of wind," I cried, "or I'll let you have a slug of this, smack in your sour puss!"

He dropped the ashstand, skewed around, and ducked out the door.

But even before his feet quit tamping the concrete, I knew I'd been framed!

Or had I been framed? It could've happened. Everything seemed to tie in against me. My own actions now encompassed me in a web I couldn't smash through with ease. For one thing, I couldn't deny I'd fought with Gifford. For another, I'd smacked him a good jolt. For still another, he had gone down like a sack of lead.

Red said, his voice seeming to come from far away, "You'd better take a powder till this thing's cleared up. If they've as much on you as Nagg claims, you ain't got a chance. You know, boss, you've the name o' bein' quick-tempered."

"Yes, sure," I agreed, "I know. But I'll not run away from something I didn't do. I guess what I started out to do has developed into a boomerang."

The sheriff was looking for me. I guess he missed me by about ten minutes. I'd loaded into my jalopy and started out to Marvaunt's Mill. I figured I'd find him there. Of course I didn't know then the officers were after me.

Marvaunt wasn't at the mill. He had been there. The man in charge said he thought Marvaunt was still in town. So I drove back to Mason City. By now the sun was sinking in a burst of incendiary red and orange. I stopped my car in the alley behind the shop, when up the complaining wood steps.

Red was waiting in the shadows of the great duplex press. "Boss," he whispered, "you'd sure better get outa here. Th' sheriff and four deputies come after you a while ago. They've been lookin' the town over to find you."

"Lock the front door," I ordered brusquely. "I'll be in the basement."

He came down the stairs in the dark.

"I got a hunch I can get this thing cleared up," I said, "if I have time. Red, I'll have to count on you. Walk out the front door and don't come back till you find out where Marvaunt is. If you can, fetch him here. Don't tell him I want him. That won't work. Make him think Gifford left some money for him."

Help Kidneys If Back Aches

Do you feel older than you are or suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Burning, scanty or frequent passages? If so, remember that your Kidneys are vital to your health and that these symptoms may be due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles—in such cases Cystex (a physician's prescription) usually gives prompt and joyous relief by helping the Kidneys flush out poisonous excess acids and wastes. Get Cystex from your druggist today. Take it exactly as directed and see the results in your own particular case. Under our guarantee unless completely satisfied you simply

Cystex
Helps Flush Kidneys

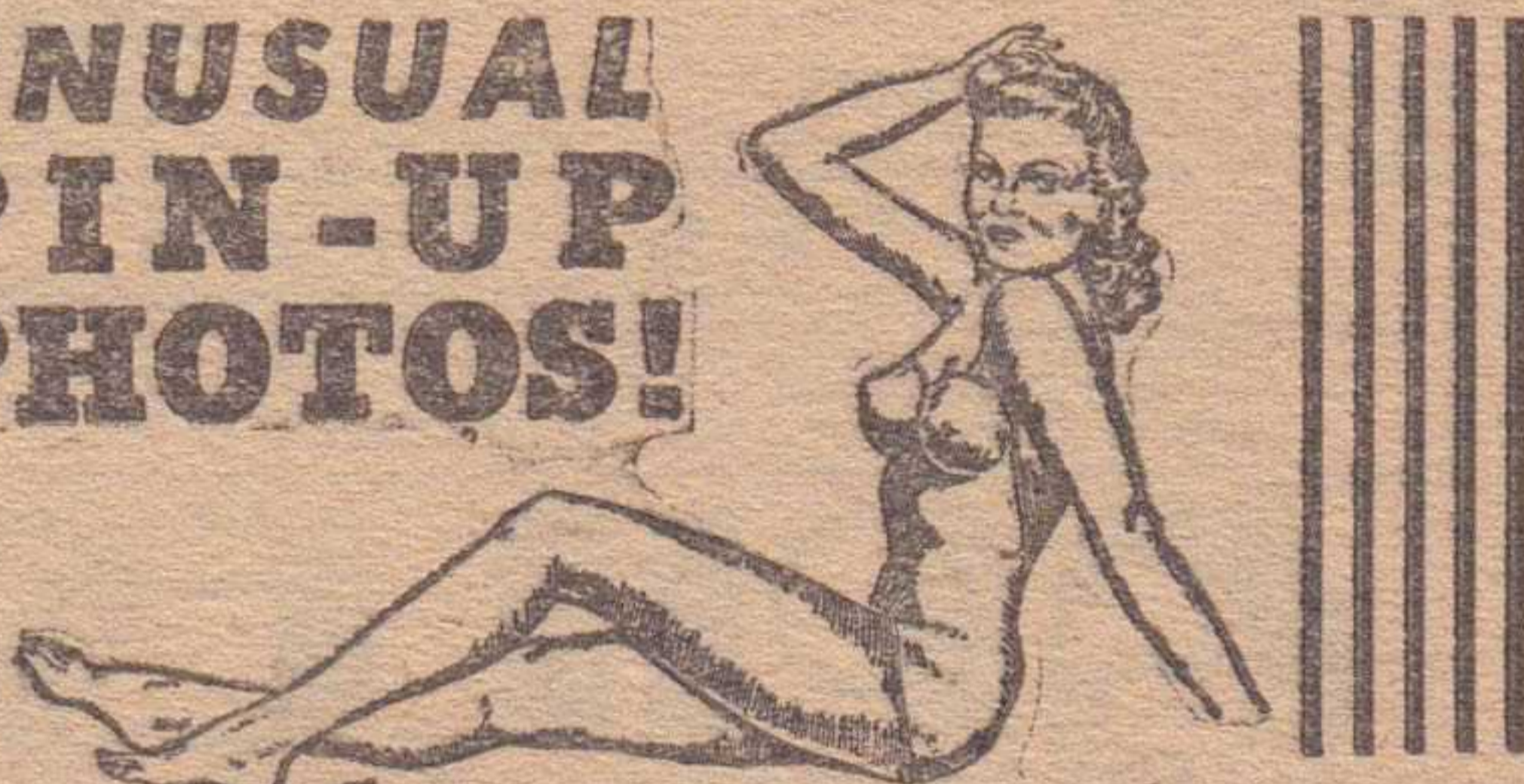
return the empty package and get your money back. So get Cystex today. Three guaranteed sizes: Only 35c, 75c, \$1.50 at your druggist.

DICE—CARDS

Inks, daubs, ink & tailor-made readers, three-way dice, tops, shapes, books, jokes, novelties, Magical supplies. Catalog Free.

VINE, HILL & CO., Dept. A, Swanton, Ohio

UNUSUAL PIN-UP PHOTOS!



Here's what
you get for
\$1

Want the real thing in glamour girl pictures—unusual photos of Hollywood Stars and famous models? Send me \$1 cash or stamps and I'll mail you postpaid twelve 4 x 5 or five 8 x 10 glossy photos. Each one different—ready for framing. These are exciting pictures—not a stale one in the lot. Rush \$1 today (or order as many different sets as you wish).

IRVING KLAU — "The Pin-Up King."
212 East 14th St., New York 3, N.Y. Dept. AB

LOSERS GET WISE

Secret methods used to win at cards and dice. Our "BEAT THE CHEAT" of 28 pages reveals some of these. Price \$1.00. The great and only "OPEN BOOK", 155 pages reveal all clever ways we know of being cheated. Learn to protect yourself. Price \$3.50. 1944 Catalogue 25c.

B. & B. Specialties Co., Box 2482-J, Kansas City, Mo.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H975, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37



ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS

for adults (vest pocket size). The kind you like! 10 different booklets sent for 50c or 25 assorted for \$1. Shipped prepaid in plain wrapper. No C.O.D. orders. Send cash or money order. No stamps.

GRAYKO, Dept. A-403
Box 520, G. P. O., New York 1



MEN

This Horseshoe Ring, Handmade, Hand-engraved, inlaid with simulated pearl, is a **KNOCKOUT!** Shoe and shank of everlasting Monel Metal is

GUARANTEED 20 YEARS

Supply is limited... rush your order! SEND NO MONEY. Pay Postman only \$3.85, plus excise tax and postage. Return for refund in five days if not delighted. State size. Address:

AMERICAN JEWELRY CO., Dept. 110-H
Wheeling, W. Va.

A THOUSAND LAUGHS

It's new—loads of fun, and inexpensive—this unique Jackass Cigarette Dispenser. Will astonish and amuse your friends, bringing chuckles galore. Simply press donkey's head down, tail rises—presto—out slips cigarette. Ideal for dens, etc. Holds 10 cigarettes. Satisfaction guaranteed. Sent postpaid for \$1.00 with order or \$1.10 C.O.D.



SANIMO INDUSTRIES Dept. A3 Spencer, Ind.

DETECTIVES

TRAINING—SECRET INVESTIGATIONS—FINGERPRINTS
Easy Method—Short Time. By Former Gov't Detective—Rewards.
Home—Travel—Secret Code—Booklet FREE—WRITE.
INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM
1701-Z MONROE ST., N.E., WASHINGTON, D. C. 18



PILES

Let us tell you of a mild, painless, low cost home treatment perfected by Dr. O. A. Johnson, for 28 years head physician of one of America's Finest Rectal Clinics where thousands of cases have been successfully treated. Write today for Free Trial Offer. No obligation. Address **JOHNSON RECTAL CLINIC, Desk 982, Kansas City, Mo.**



Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

IF you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LIEPE METHODS FOR HOME USE." Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. **Liepe Methods, Dept. 71-N, 3284 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.**

POEMS WANTED

—For Musical Setting—

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. **DON'T DELAY**—Send us your Original Poem at once—for immediate examination and **FREE RHYMING DICTIONARY.**

RICHARD BROTHERS 53 WOODS BUILDING
CHICAGO, ILL.

WAKE UP! MEN—WOMEN RENEW YOUR VITALITY

Don't feel "played out." **HELP NATURE! USE REX "GEMS!"** Recommended by Doctors for men and women who feel older than they should due to **VITAMIN "E"** deficiency. "REX GEMS," which contain wheat germ oil and are rich in Vitamin "E," will give you new **PEP and VITALITY.** Absolutely **SAFE.** Accept No Substitutes. Liberal supply only \$1. (C.O.D. \$1.18.) Shipped in plain wrapper. Full details. Money Back Guarantee. **ORDER TODAY.**

REX CO. (Dept. W.1)

G.P.O. Box 520

Brooklyn 1, N. Y.

"Gifford—money?" Red was taken aback. He pawed the sweat out of his eyes.

"Yeah, you don't get it of course. I'm not sure I do. But I'm playing a hunch."

Red hesitated. I sat down on a box, lit a cigarette. "You do as I tell you," I said. "At least we'll find out whether that works. If he comes here with you, thinking Gifford did leave money for him, then I'll know I'm following the right clue."

Red seemed to be gone for hours. But he was dependable, as loyal as could be. I'd trusted him before in emergencies; he'd always come through. He'd come through this time, too, with half a chance. I'd considered his resourcefulness, knew he wouldn't let me down.

IT MUST'VE been all of three hours later when I heard someone open the front door and come scuffling over the creaky floor. Two of them, both walking heavily, both big men. My breath stopped, swelled my throat. Was it possible my hairbrained scheme had worked?

I heard Red's voice but couldn't distinguish his words. The other man was my hickory-shirted friend, Sid Marvaunt. Now they emerged into the back room, paused near the duplex. I started up the steps.

"Hiya, Marvaunt," I said, stepping out before him and evidently scaring him out of a year's growth. "How you doin'?"

"Why," he sputtered, "I thought the sheriff had you. How come you're loose after killin' Gifford?"

"I didn't kill him," I said. "You did! We both couldn't have done it, Marvaunt. I guess you found out he wasn't having his sale and didn't intend to pay you for hanging the jury, like others have paid you. So you went up there, found Gifford unconscious, and butted his head on the hardwood floor to kill him!"

He laughed, but you could tell a mile off it was a forced, strained laugh. "You're crazy," he said. I could see his chest swelling out, how stiff his arms and hands got.

"Yeah, have it that way," I said. "He figured he had you over a barrel, you wouldn't dare squawk, because Wes Nagg knew you'd sold out to others in the same boat. So you were afraid Gifford would squawk. You found the job practically

cut and dried for you. All you need do was pound his head on the floor!"

"You ain't got no proof," he said.

"That's what you think." I swelled out my chest, too. "You and old Wes Nagg have been a disgrace to this community long enough. For years he's counted on you, and others of your same breed. You've never let him down. You knew how to do it, too. Practice makes perfect, I guess. You've been a juryman enough times to learn your way around."

"Sure," he said, "but I still say you can't prove it."

"Gifford told me this afternoon," I stalled, "he wasn't going to sell out, changed his mind after you got the jury hung so he'd get a new trial. Wasn't smart to get in a hurry about paying the bills he had out. You'd already rendered him service. Then you figured you could get me framed for the crime. You were stalling around there somewhere. You heard our quarrel and little scrap—"

Then it came in a thundering outburst. Maybe it only sounded like an outburst to my imagination. In fact, there wasn't much of a sound, just some scuffing feet, an overturned box that slapped the concrete, some deep breathing; straining muscles don't make noise.

But when our fists thudded home that was different. The smack of hard knuckles on wet flesh!

Red warned me Marvaunt had a Barlow. It was dark down there, but Marvaunt had scraped the metal on a box, ducking away from me. Then Red shot on an overhead bulb and we could see what we were doing.

I'd decoyed him, backing down the steps, dodging his windmill fists. He'd followed. Red had come behind him, but should've jumped him on the stairs.

I guess Red must've stumbled. When he fell he ripped Marvaunt's hickory shirt from one whole arm. This was all that saved my life. The fitful saffron beam of light glinted off the Barlow. It had snaked out at me, cut through my belt as Marvaunt brought the blade up with a quick stiffening flick of his wrist.

I must've hit him a dozen times, aiming for his jaw. But my blows were either too high or too low. But he was a gory mess and so close to me, working that Barlow, that his breath stung my face.

I took another crack at his jaw. We

Free for Asthma During Winter

If you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is cold and damp; if raw, Wintry winds make you choke as if each gasp for breath was the very last; if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address

Frontier Asthma Co.
462 Niagara Street,

442-N Frontier Bldg.
Buffalo 1, New York

LACK PEP?—Try VITA-BERLES



And See the Sun Shine Again!

VITA-BERLES provide the unusual stimulus of 1500 U.S.P. units of vitamin B-1 per day, together with vital blood-building material, to help overcome that always-tired feeling and bring thrilling new pep to men and women, to the extent that they may be deficient in these essential substances. Absolutely harmless; can only do good. Liberal supply \$1. postpaid. (C.O.D. \$1.37.) Write NATURE'S PRODUCTS 2175 Station H, Dept. AC-12 Cleveland, Ohio



DO YOU WANT TO

STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

30 Years in Business

THE NEWELL COMPANY

135 Clayton Sta., St. Louis, Mo.

FREE BOOK

Sideline Salesmen and Agents

Sell our ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS and other NOVELTIES. Each booklet size 4½ x 2¾. Ten different sample booklets sent for 50c or 25 assorted for \$1.00. Shipped prepaid. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No orders sent C.O.D. Send Cash, Stamps. Print name and address.

REPSAC SALES CO.

1 West 13th St., Dept. 412

New York City



JOKE BOOKS For Adults

The kind they like. You will be both a Riot and the Life of the Party with a set of these pocket size joke books. They are full of Entertainment, Fun and Humor. A set of six books only 50c or a special assortment of 12 books all different for \$1.00. Print name and address, send cash or stamps to:

TREASURE NOVELTY CO.

72-5th Ave., Dept. 3312, New York 11, N. Y.



MATCHED BRIDAL PAIR

\$5.95 EACH OR BOTH FOR \$9.95



DIAMOND RINGS

Just to get acquainted we will send you smart, new 10K yellow gold engagement ring or wedding ring. Romance design engagement ring set with flashing, Rose cut diamond solitaire in sentimental, sweetheart mounting. Wedding ring is deeply embossed, 10K yellow gold, set with 8 genuine chip Diamonds. Either ring only \$5.95 or both for \$9.95 plus postage and 20% Federal tax. SEND NO MONEY with order. Just name and ring size. Pay on arrival, then wear rings 10 days on money-back guarantee. Rush order now! EMPIRE DIAMOND CO., Dept. 732-DS, Jefferson, Iowa.

Misery of

Piles Fought In Few Minutes

Within a few minutes of the very first application, the doctor's prescription CHINA-ROID, usually starts fighting the agony of Piles in 3 ways: 1. Soothes and eases pain and itching. 2. Helps shrink sore, swollen tissues. 3. Promotes healing by easing irritated membranes and alleviates nervousness due to Piles. Has helped thousands while they worked and enjoyed life in greater comfort. Get CHINA-ROID from your druggist today under positive guarantee of complete satisfaction or money back. Don't wait. Fight your Pile misery with CHINA-ROID today. Tear this out; take it to your druggist. Be sure to get genuine, guaranteed CHINA-ROID, a Knox Company Quality Product. If sold out, ask him to order it for you. Only 75c.

"Facts about EPILEPSY"

This most interesting and helpful Booklet will be mailed to anyone while the supply lasts. I will send a free copy to anyone who writes for it. **C. M. SIMPSON**
Address Dept. A-27, 1840 W. 44th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio

PIN-UP EYEFULS

BEAUTIES IN COZY POSES

Glamorous, feminine curves in LIFE-LIKE, full-color . . . bewitching beauty pictures for your den or barracks. They're large size, suitable for framing — including "Getting Her Male," "Bear Facts," "Help Wanted," etc. ORDER NOW—Just send \$1 for set of 20 PIN-UP BEAUTIES, post-paid with PICTURE CATALOG listing (300 full color reproductions of original paintings by well known artists) included FREE of extra charge.



FRANK MATTHEWS, Publisher

111 W. Washington St., Dept. M,
Chicago 2, Ill.



CHARM PERFUME

An enchanting perfume of irresistible allure, clinging for hours with ineffable, fascinating fragrance. Just a tiny drop is enough. Full size bottle 98c prepaid, or \$1.32 C.O.D. Directions free. One bottle FREE if two are ordered.

REXBELL, Box 124, Dept. 327,

Huntington Station, New York

USED Correspondence Courses

WELSON CO., 321 S. Wabash

Complete home-study courses and self-instruction books, slightly used. Sold, rented, exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 92-page illustrated bargain catalog FREE. Write today!

Dept. 2-13 Chicago 4, Ill.

do you WORRY?

Why worry and suffer any longer if we can help you? Try a Brooks Patented Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance for most forms of reducible rupture helps hold nearly every rupture securely and gently—day and night—at work and at play. Thousands made happy. Light,

neat-fitting. No hard pads or stiff springs to chafe or gouge. Made for men, women and children. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Never sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All Correspondence Confidential.

Brooks Company, 101-D State St., Marshall, Mich.



were see-sawing now, the advantage promising first one then the other, but just kind of teasing us along.

I saw Red on his hands and knees behind Marvaunt. I knew what was meant. When I rushed him out of balance, he flung his long arms up and tripped backward over Red. His feet came up, his long legs scissoring the air. I heard his head crack on the cement like an egg dropped from a dizzy height. He just groaned and his legs stopped jerking.

Marvaunt's delirious talk bore out my contentions. He really thought I had it on him, or he would've closed up tight as a drumhead. We saw that Wes Nagg didn't get to him, and he signed a confession for us involving Nagg. Red ran upstairs to tap it out on the linotype. I didn't think of changing even a word of it.

Nagg sold out and left the community where he'd lived all his life, where he'd pulled the wool over our eyes too long. But I'll say one thing for the man, he was a genius. You have to give a guy credit for the ability he has whether you like him or not. As for Marvaunt—he was smart enough to plead guilty and avoid a jury trial.

You know how a fellow feels after he's accomplished something worth while? Well, that's how I felt.



JOIN THE C.B.C.!
(Civilian Bomb Corps)

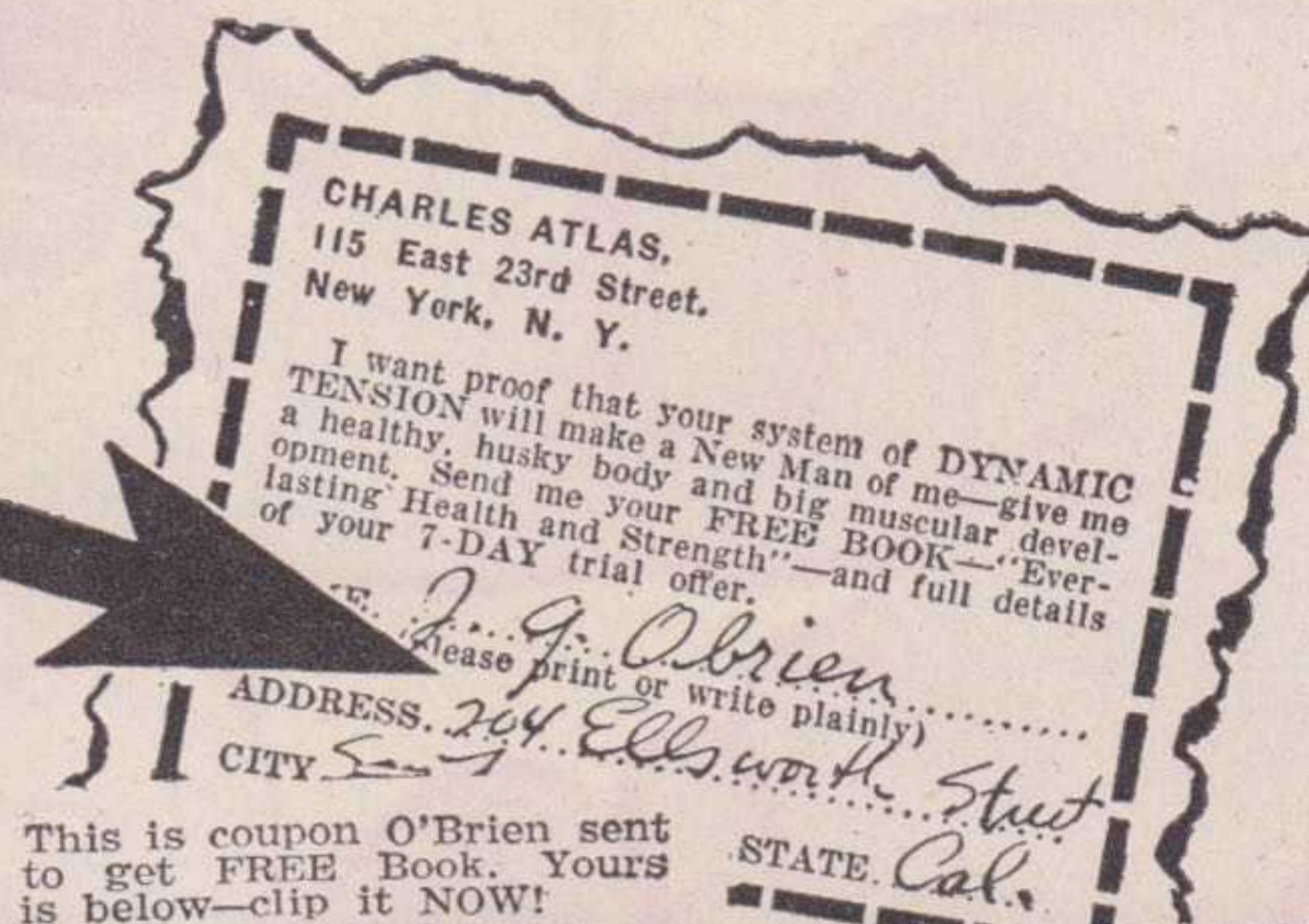
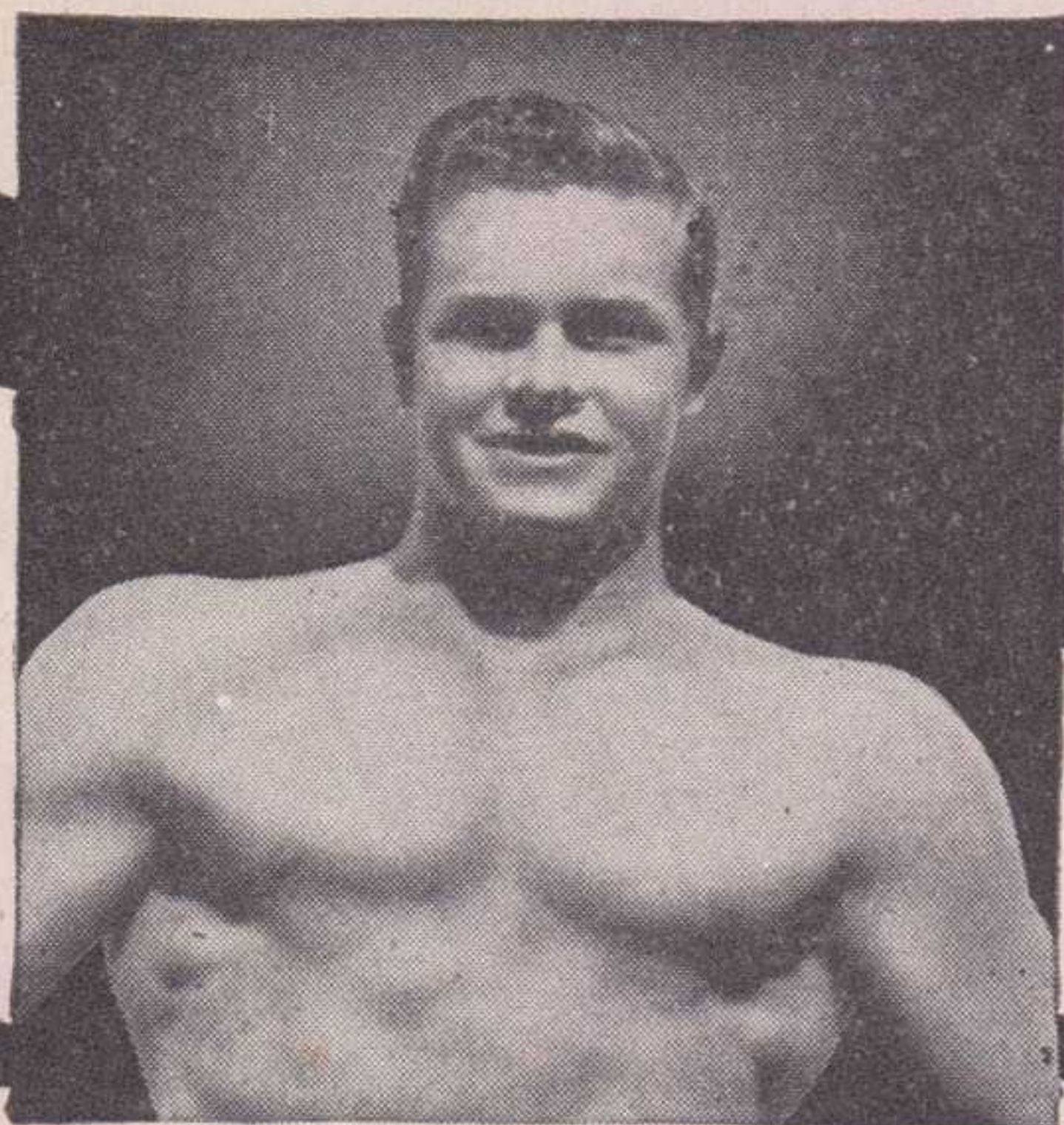
BUY
United States War Savings Bonds & Stamps

HE Mailed This Coupon

J. G. O'BRIEN

Atlas Champion
Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.



...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

J. G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man. NOW read what he says:

"Look at me NOW! 'Dynamic Tension' WORKS! I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"

J. G. O'Brien.

"I'll prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN"—Charles Atlas

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE; I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

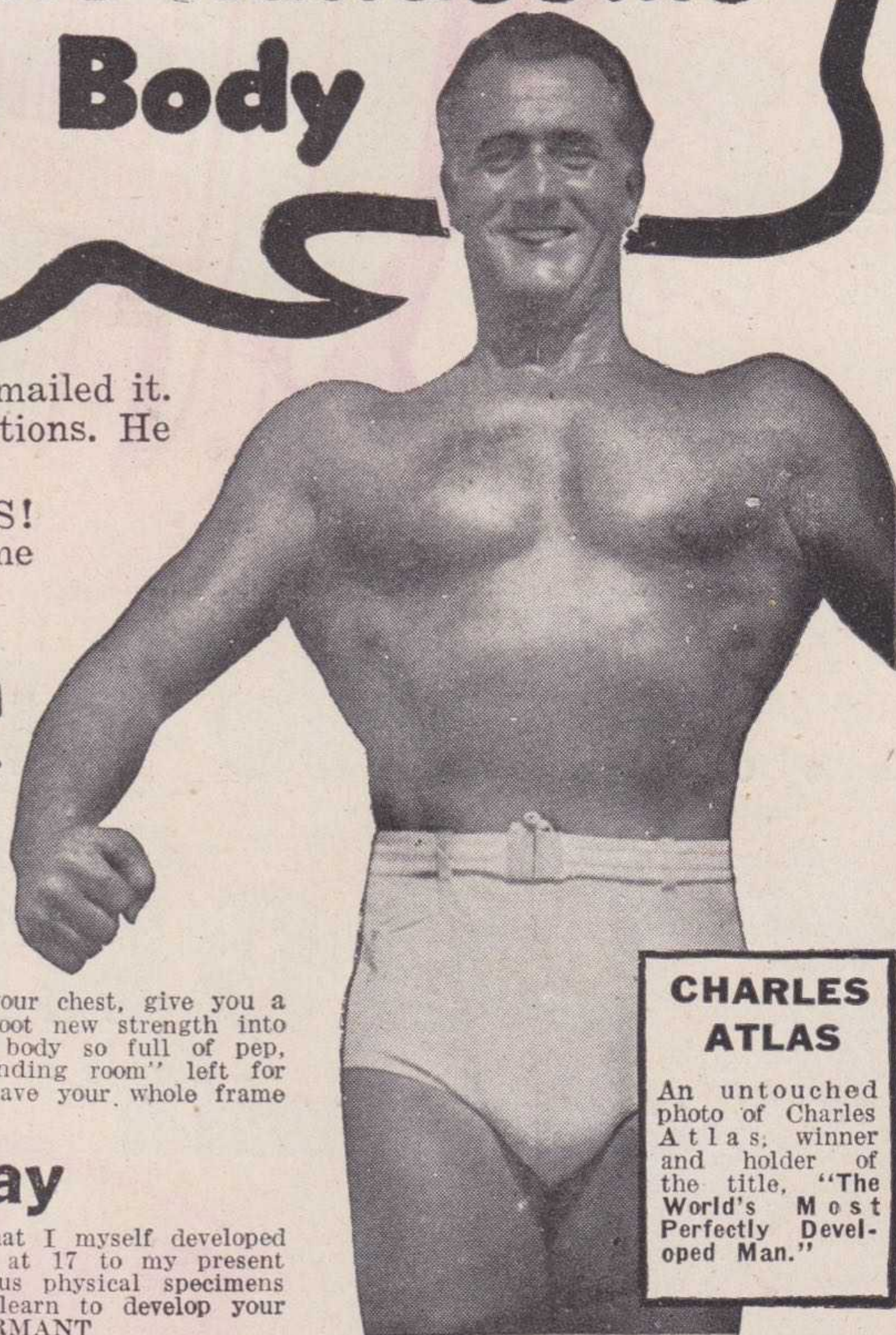
Only 15 Minutes a Day

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You learn to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension." You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

FREE BOOK "EVERLASTING HEALTH AND STRENGTH"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 49M, 115 E. 23rd St., New York



CHARLES ATLAS

An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 49M
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

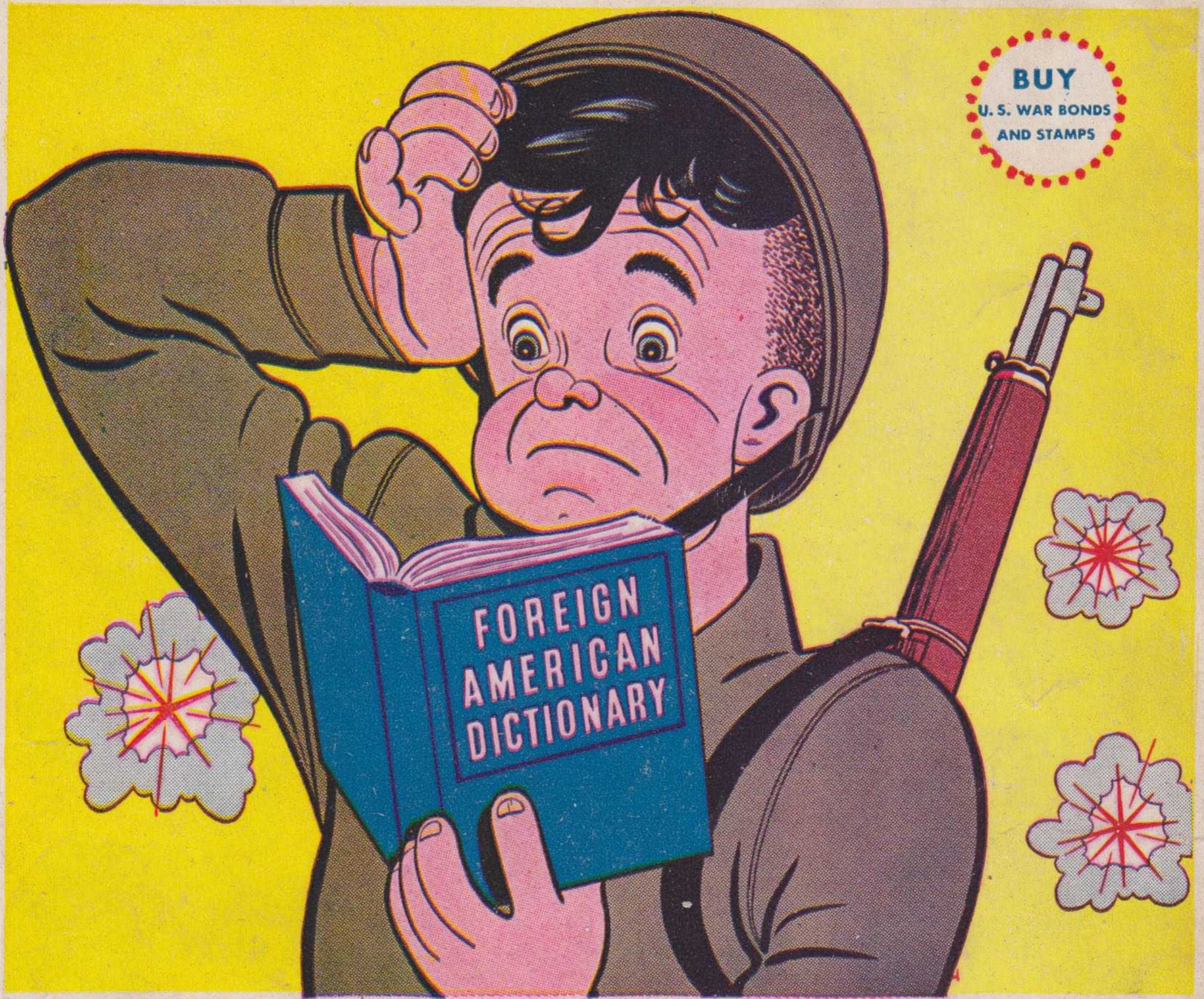
I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" can help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)

Address

City State

Check here if under 16 for booklet A



... How do yuh say
Cookies
made with



Candy



RECIPE ON EVERY WRAPPER

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY • Producers of Fine Foods • CHICAGO 13, ILLINOIS