

10¢

# ACE G-MAN STORIES



JAN FEB



**F.B.I. COFFINS COME HIGH**  
*FEATURE NOVEL OF FEDERAL GUN COURAGE*  
by **W. WIRT**

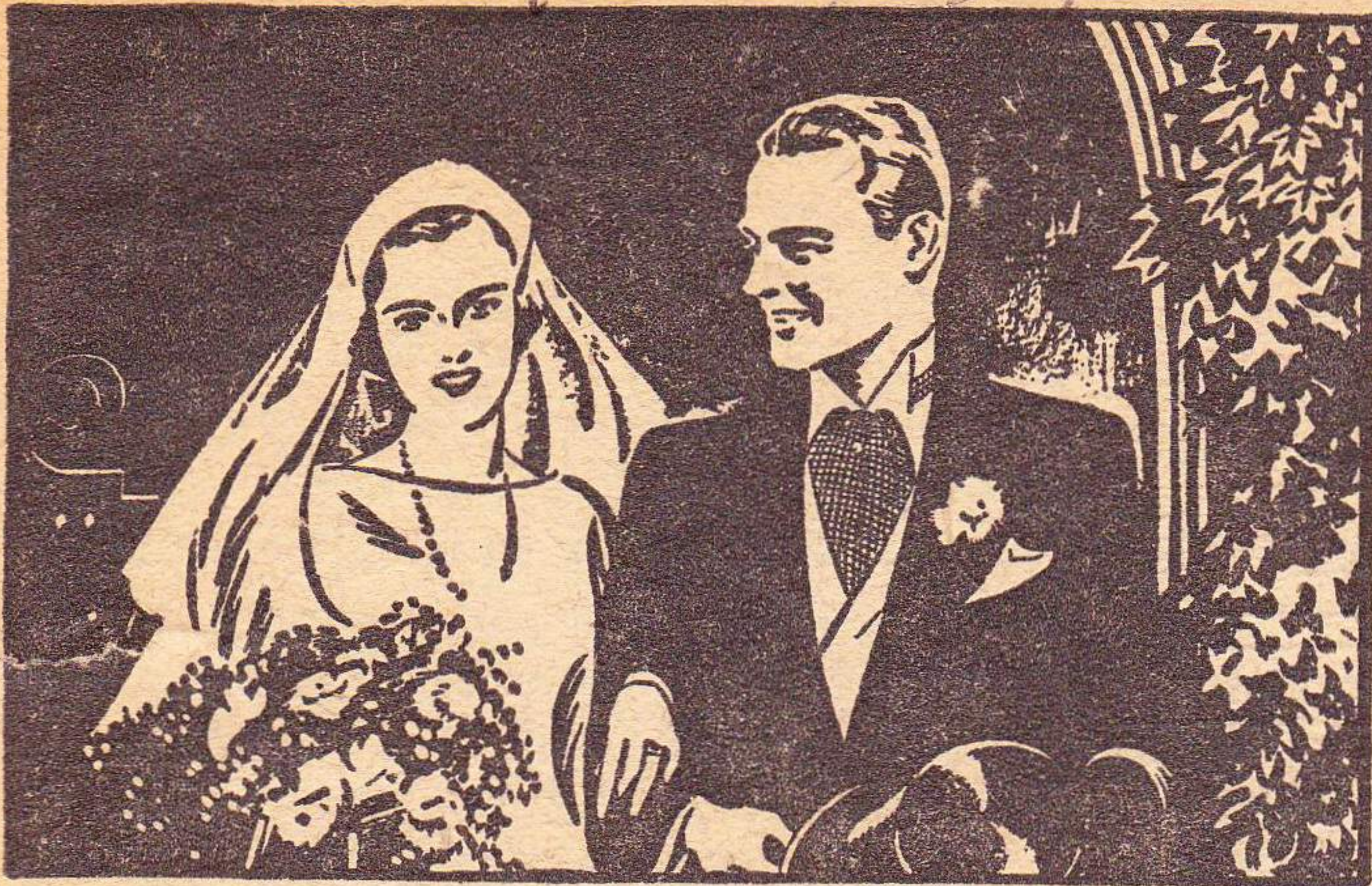
**G-MAN'S GUN-MOTHER**  
*A WARM, HUMAN NOVELETTE OF F.B.I. CRUSADERS*  
by **PAUL ERNST**

*QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING FOR  
THE F.B.I. RELEASED BY*  
**J. EDGAR HOOVER**

W. HARTLEY · DALE DeV. KIER · GEO. A. McDONALD



ACE G. MAN  
1-2/39



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MY LIFE!"

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## Blackout For Killers

INNUMERABLE have been the benefits conferred upon America by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Kidnaping, once the blackest blot on our escutcheon, is gradually being wiped out. Bank-robbing, as insurance rates indicate, is now becoming a rare crime. Even espionage, one of the most illusory menaces—and in consequence that much more difficult to combat—is being relentlessly rooted out by Special Agents.

However, inspiring though these F.B.I. achievements have been, they are eclipsed by one other priceless boon. *G-men have blacked out the killer!*

For many years the mad dog of the underworld spread terror in America's big cities. Known variously as gunman, trigger-man, cannon, he blasted a ruthless path through humanity. New York gangster or Chicagorilla, he held the police at bay. Gyp the Blood was such a mad dog, Dillinger another. The St. Valentine Day massacre was a killer's holiday.

Those of us who read the newspapers of several years ago will never forget those terrible headlines continually leaping up before our horrified eyes.

But the reign of terror is over now, and the G-man has been responsible for the change. He has proved that a courageous lawman, properly armed, can back down the worst killer. He has done more: he has shown the gunman a G-reign of terror.

Today, this comment on the killer can be made with all accuracy and truth:

"I have often expressed the view that the majority of criminals are quite courageous when armed and have their victims at a disadvantage, or when they are among their own group. However, when met by law-enforcement officers on equal terms, they are neither brave nor courageous."

The man who said that knows what he is talking about, because he brought this



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## BLACKOUT FOR KILLERS

condition to pass. His name is J. Edgar Hoover.

Would you like to know how the modern gunman acts today when the G-heat is on?

Take that notorious trio, Crowley, Oley and Geary. They burst out of Onondaga County Prison, vowing to raise hell and high water. When located, they surrendered without even going for their guns! Take the late Fred Barker, member of the terrible Karpis-Barker gang. You remember that, for fifteen hours, aided by his mother, he exchanged bullets with the G-men who were storming his refuge? You think that makes him tough? Well, here's the inside story. It was not Barker, but "Ma" Barker, who held the lawmen off. Likewise, when the autopsy was held on Barker's body, it was discovered that some of the bullets in him were not G-lead, but from his own mother's gun! In other words, "Ma" Barker shot her gangster son, *for cowardice, because he wanted to surrender!*

Machine-gun Kelly was another tough guy who turned tame. He almost sprained a shoulder, reaching for the ceiling when captured. All he could do in the way of come-back, was to say meekly, "Everything's okay."

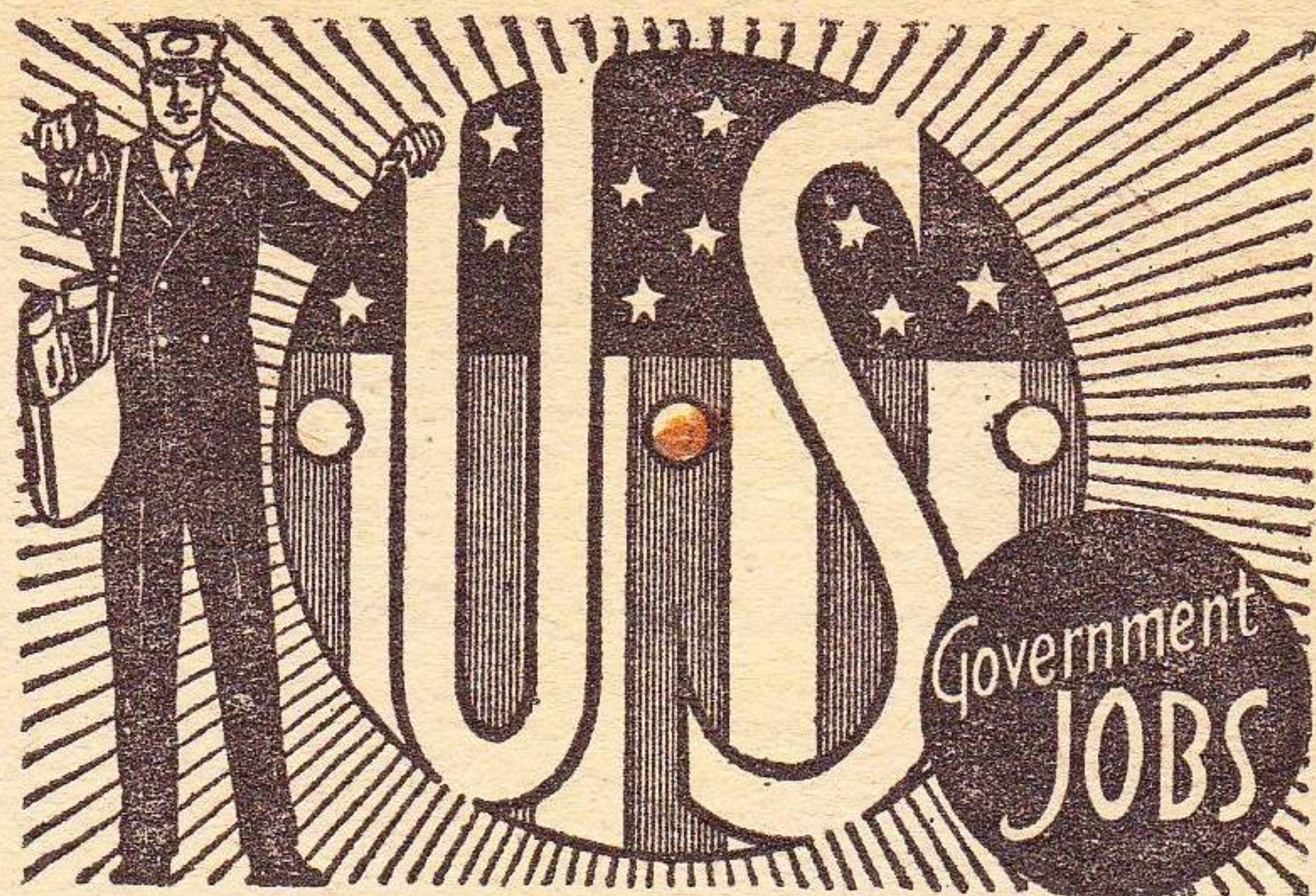
Louis Beitcher was so terrified, when captured playing cards, that he couldn't even let go the cards!

Alvin Karpis was armed to the teeth. But at his first glimpse of a G-man—up went his hands.

A list of sixty-one badmen, caught or killed in four years, reveals this fact—not one put up a fight when taken.

That's the way the F.B.I. has blacked out the killer. Tell our lawmen, "Shoot to kill," and the killer quits. G-men have taught us that!

—THE EDITOR.



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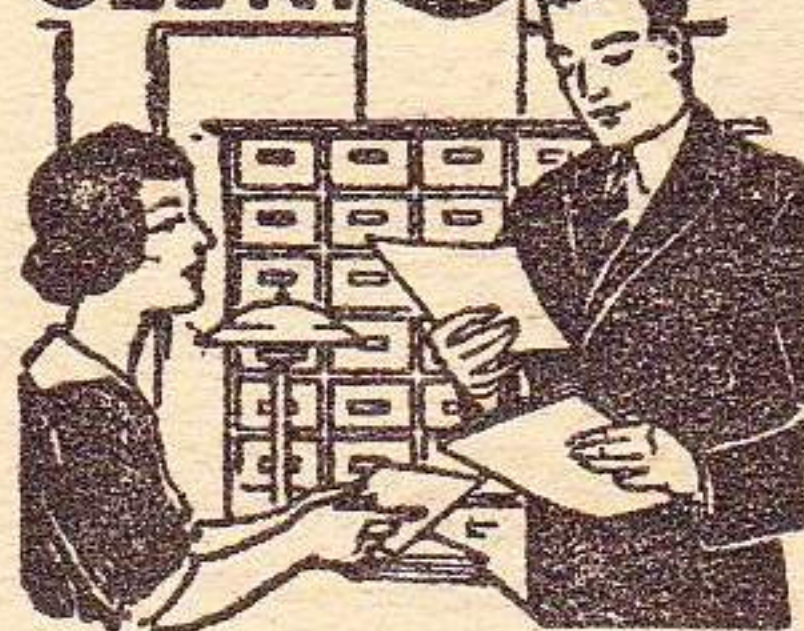
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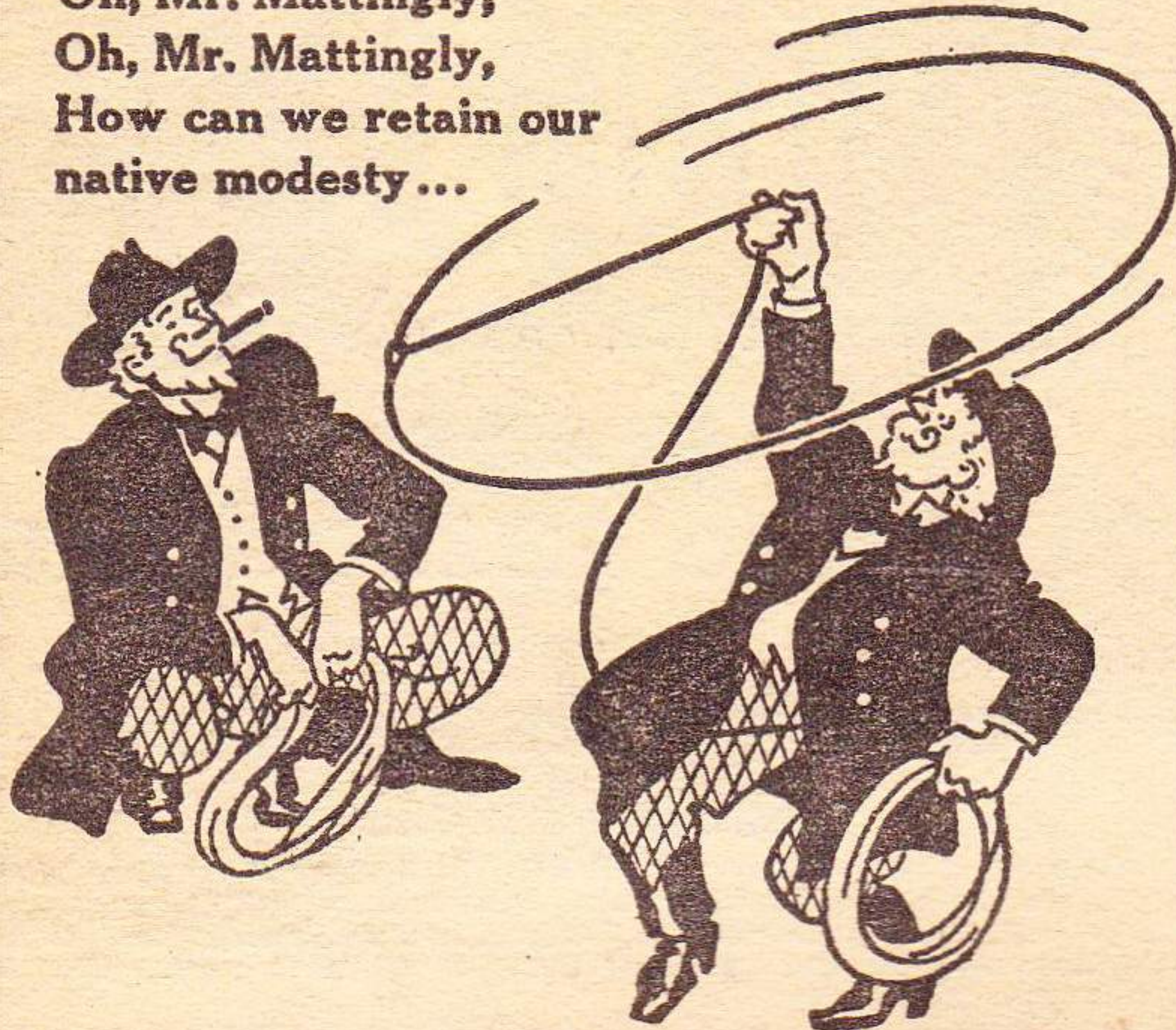
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Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
How can we retain our  
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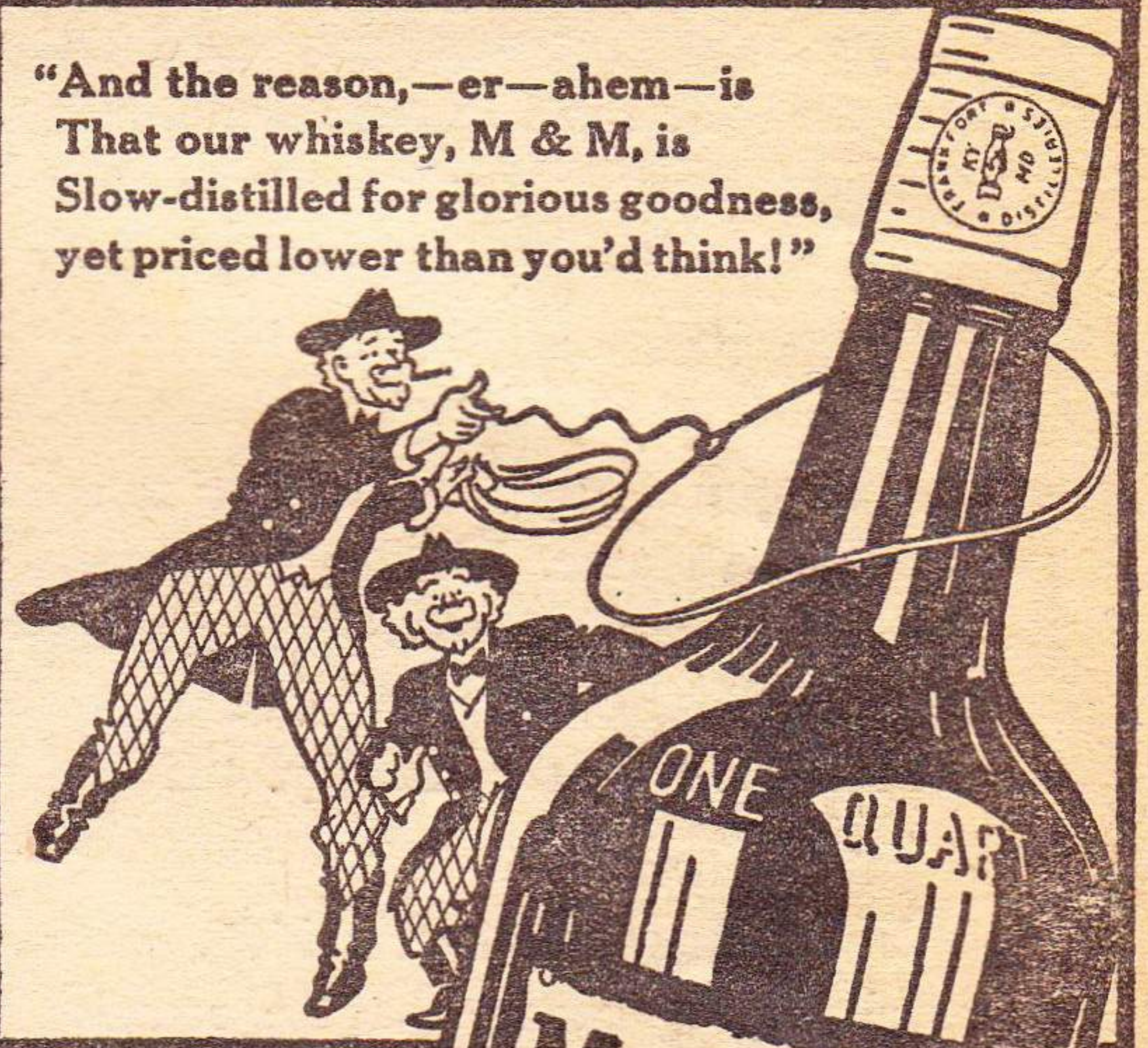
"When folks holler from the  
tree-tops:  
'M & M is really THE tops  
For its mellow flavor  
and its quality!'"



"Yes, Mr. Moore,  
Yes, Mr. Moore,  
These ovations make me blush  
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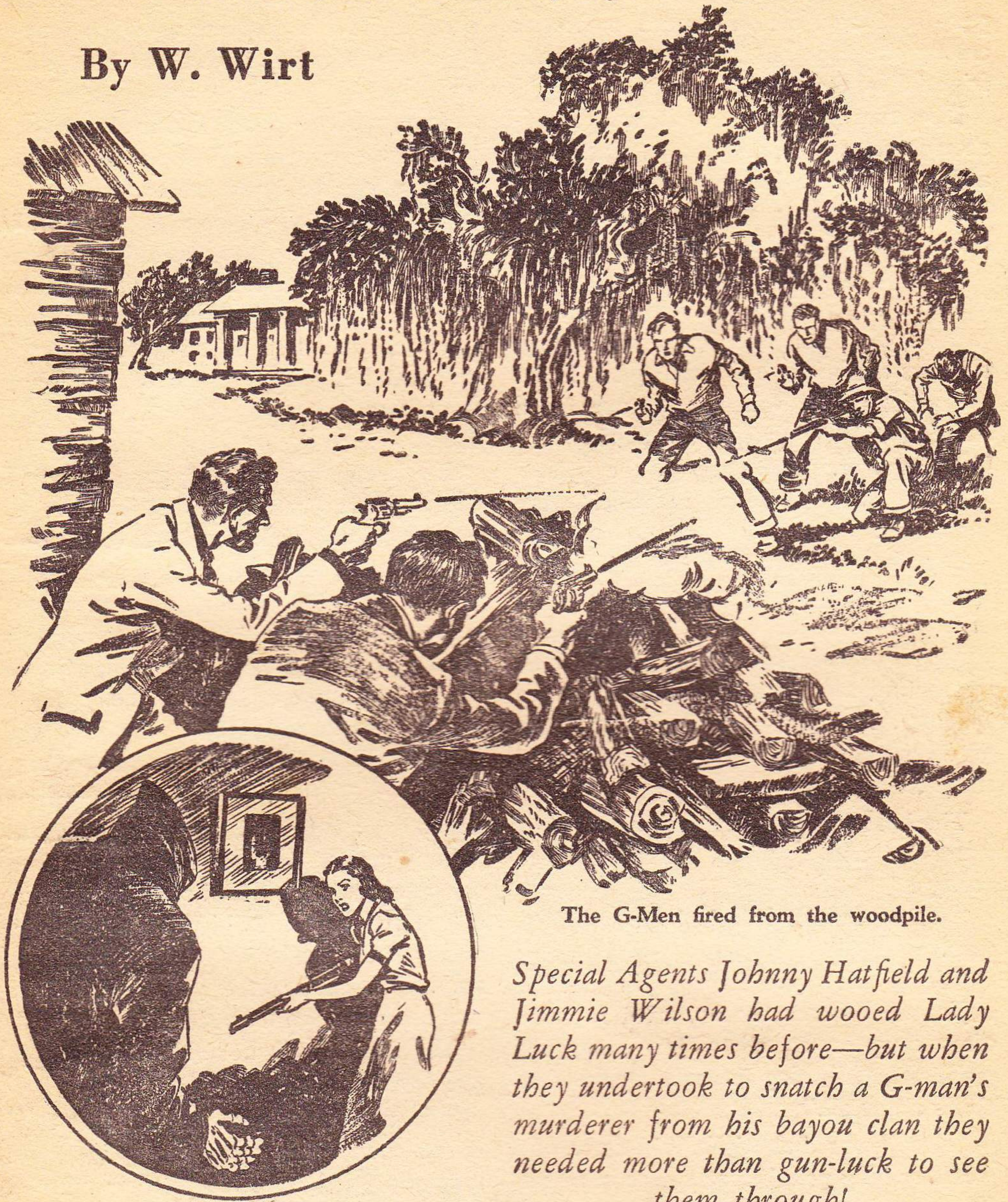




# F.B.I. CORPSES COME HIGH

*A Warm, Human Novel of G-guns in Action*

By W. Wirt



The G-Men fired from the woodpile.

*Special Agents Johnny Hatfield and Jimmie Wilson had wooed Lady Luck many times before—but when they undertook to snatch a G-man's murderer from his bayou clan they needed more than gun-luck to see them through!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Death Trail for G-Men

A FLAT-BOTTOMED boat was being poled slowly along in one of the canals of the Bayou de Parge, Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana. It

was hard going, owing to the thick growth of hyacinths and water-lilies. On either side were giant cypress trees festooned with Spanish moss. Japonicas, hibiscus, poinsettias and other tropical flowers bloomed everywhere

It was very beautiful—from a distance. Close up was the slime, the decaying



vegetation, mud, stagnant pools swarming with alligators, rattlesnakes, copper-head and cotton-mouth moccasins among the flowers. The heat was made frightful by the humidity.

The man poling the boat was broad-shouldered and lean-flanked, black-eyed and tight-lipped. He looked a good deal like the picture of an Apache or Sioux chieftain. Around his head, covering one ear, was a bloody bandage, made from the tail of a shirt. From the waist down he had on what had once been white linen trousers and white buckskin shoes. From the waist up he was naked, save for a shoulder holster in which was a .45 caliber Colt revolver. The strap of the holster had ten cartridge loops in which were cartridges.

Another man lay stretched out in the boat, his head resting on a pillow made of two blue serge coats. There was a bandage around this man's chest, high up, and another around his left leg above the knee. In his blue eyes flared the flame of fever yet, in spite of it, there was a smile on his lips.

The boat came to a stop as a tangle of water-lily and hyacinth barred further passage.

"Wrong number?" asked the wounded man.

"Yeah. How you feeling, Jimmie?"

Jimmie Wilson, G-man, tried to raise himself up on an elbow but could not make it, "My flag is still flying—but that's about all."

"Keep your belt tight, old-timer. It won't be long now before you're in a nice hospital with a red-headed nurse to hold your hand."

"That's fine," agreed Wilson. "You know the way, Kaintuck?"

"Like a sailor knows the sea," Johnny Hatfield answered, with a grin. He was lying, and Jimmie knew that he was. The canals or waterways of a bayou in Louisiana are like a labyrinth and unless the

correct turns and twists are known, to get to any certain place—in or out—is impossible. To be lost means death unless by chance someone is met who knows the way.

Johnny Hatfield, ace G-man, knew that unless he got Jimmie Wilson to a hospital, or to where he could get medical attention in a very short time, Jimmie would die. That he, Johnny, also needed attention badly, never occurred to him. All he thought of was that Jimmie Wilson, his side-kicker, had to be taken to a doctor and that he, Johnny Hatfield, was going to do that little thing, come hell or high-water.

He knew that not only must he find the way out but also he would have to guard against attack that might come from any direction and at any time. He would pole as far as he could up a canal, maybe some hundred feet—only to be stopped. Back and along another until stopped once more. It became automatic. Yet he kept steadily on in spite of the fact that his head felt like boilermakers had moved in.

The canal he was now in began to widen out a little and become deeper. As Johnny noticed that fact, a boat came into the canal from one ahead to the left, about a hundred yards. A big, fat Negro was poling and two young white men sat amidships, rifles resting across laps. It was a surprise on both sides.

The Negro yelled, "Oh, mah Gawd!" and dropped the pole.

The two white men tensed and then raised their rifles. But the split-second taken up by the tensing of their muscles was fatal to both of them. There is no split-second allowed when facing Johnny Hatfield. Before the rifles reached shoulders, Johnny's .45 Colt had detonated twice. Guns dropped from lifeless hands and two bodies slumped down in the boat.

The Negro screeched in terror and threw himself down. He yelled again as



his face came in contact with what once had been the back of a living man's head. A .45 bullet makes a fairly small hole, going in—but coming out, to put it mildly, it makes a mess.

Johnny Hatfield said, gravely, to no one in particular, "Reckon they wait to get an invitation to a party down here." He was further gone than he knew into the shadows, but not enough to interfere with his pistol shooting.

THE Negro floundered to his feet, pawing at his face. As he did he drew breath for another screech but held it when Johnny shouted, "You, boy! Stop that, you hear me? You better had stop that damn yowling. Let that breath out easy."

The Negro obeyed and began to whimper, "Yes, suh. Please don't shoot—"

"Stop that. I'm Capt'n Johnny Hatfield, and I'm not going to hurt you, boy. Bring that boat up here."

"Capt'n Johnny, please, suh, I can't. I let go of de pole and—"

"All right," Johnny said. "I'll come to you."

"Yes, suh. Oh, my goodness! I come along with Mis'tah Wes and Mis'tah Bud and—"

"That's plenty out of you, boy. You know the way out of here?" Johnny waited.

"Yes, suh," said the other. "I knows the way to the Galves and to de Aubrys and—"

"Which is the nearest?" Johnny demanded.

"De Aubry plantation, please, suh."

"Get in here and take us there," Johnny ordered. "Come on, boy. Step on it."

"Yes, suh, Capt'n Johnny. What we going to do with this boat and Mis'tah Wes and Mis'tah Bud in—"

"Why—we'll leave this boat with Mister Wes and Mister Bud in it to drift here among the flowers." Johnny Hatfield

smiled at the big fat Negro but it was not a warming, pleasant smile. It was a wintry smile that chilled the colored man to the bone. "Get in here and start poling."

Half an hour later the Negro poled the boat into a body of open water and skirted the right bank for a few minutes then turned left into a canal that led to another body of open water, larger than the first.

Johnny Hatfield saw a big, rambling white house set in a grove of trees. Jimmie Wilson could not see anything owing to the fact that when Johnny's gun had gone, 'bang! bang!' he had tried to sit up and reached for a .45 caliber Colt that lay beside his right leg. Instead of reaching it he had lost consciousness.

There was a girl sitting on one of the piers, fishing. A little colored boy sat near her, busy with bait. She saw the boat coming and rose, as did the colored boy.

The big Negro called, as he neared the pier, "Miss Louise, please mam! I got two wounded gent'mans here. Reckon one of them is plumb dead."

Johnny Hatfield, right after he saw the house, had slumped down, his head coming to rest on a thwart.

Miss Louise Aubry, aged eighteen, slim, lovely and graceful, took charge.

"Boy," she said to the colored boy, "go tell Caesar that there are two wounded men at the little pier. Let me see how fast you can run. Mose—" to the big Negro in the boat—"can you lift them up on the pier?"

"Yes, I can do it. Only I'm scared that Capt'n Johnny Hatfield here might wake up, and reached for a .45 caliber Colt something. He's mighty quick with that pistol of his'n. He killed Mis'tah—"

Louise Aubry knelt on the pier as Johnny Hatfield, on hearing his name, opened his eyes and sat up straighter. "I'm Hatfield. Who—"



"I am Louise Aubry, Captain Hatfield," the girl said, clearly and distinctly. "This boy is afraid to lift you to the pier because he thinks you might misunderstand and shoot him. You are at Aubry, Captain. Hand me your pistol."

It was not a request, it was an order. In Louise Aubry's veins there flowed the blood of the Philippe Aubry, who was governor of Louisiana in 1765 and, for all her dainty loveliness, she was a fighting Aubry to the marrow of her bones.

Johnny Hatfield looked up at her through blood-shot eyes for a long moment and then drew the heavy .45 Colt and handed it up, butt first.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Code of the Swamp

THERE were many bedrooms at Aubry but at Johnny Hatfield's request another bed was set up for Jimmie Wilson in the room to which Johnny had been carried.

The old army surgeon, called by Louise Aubry, stated to Johnny, "You're not so bad. I see you've had a damn sight worse wounds. But this fellow, not so good. It's touch and go with him—mostly go. You'll be up and around in a week but he won't. He'll be lucky if he ever gets up."

Jimmie Wilson said feebly, "Go on. I'll beat Johnny up and around."

To which the dour old medico replied, "You only think so, me lad. Let me catch you even trying to sit up until I tell you to and you'll go into a strait jacket—and no talking either."

Two days later Johnny Hatfield was able to sit up a few minutes at a time and Jimmie Wilson's fever had subsided. Both G-men were in the pink of condition and hard as nails—at least they had been when wounded—and that helped a lot. By dint of much, what Johnny called 'yelpin', Jimmie was allowed two pillows

which enabled him to see a little more than the ceiling.

The third day the nurse announced that Johnny Hatfield could talk a little but Jimmie Wilson could not, after which announcement she left the room.

A tall, heavy-set man entered. He was Philippe Aubry, ex-French Foreign Legion and fighter in the far places, for war lords and potentates. Upon the death of his father he had returned to become Aubry of Aubry Plantation. Mrs. Aubry had passed away when Louise was born and now there was left of the Aubrys only Philippe and Louise.

"I am Philippe Aubry," he said, his eyes a wintry blue.

"I am John Hatfield, Mr. Aubry, and the gentleman flat on his back is James Wilson. We are—"

"I know who you are and what you have done. I come to tell you that as long as you are inside Aubry lines you are safe."

"Safe? From what, Mr. Aubry?" Johnny asked.

"From the kinsmen of the men you have wounded and killed."

"Any man or men we wounded or killed, Mr. Aubry, tried to stop us from doing our duty—and incidentally shot at us, or went after their guns, first. We are United States government—"

"No matter what you are, Captain Hatfield. The fact remains that you and Mr. Wilson have killed and wounded kinsmen." Aubry's jaw set.

"Your kinsmen?" Johnny Hatfield inquired.

"Yes."

"Then why did you take us in?" Johnny persisted.

"I did not take you in," Aubry retorted. "The words my sister spoke, 'You are at Aubry, Captain. Hand me your gun' and your obeying, gained you sanctuary. You are from Kentucky?"

"Yes." Johnny nodded.



"Then you know what I mean. As long as you are inside Aubry lines you are Aubry's guests."

Johnny Hatfield grinned, "And one inch outside Aubry lines you'll shoot us with great pleasure."

Philippe Aubry smiled, bleakly. "I have given you fair warning, Captain Hatfield. Here at Aubry you are in sanctuary. Outside. . . ."

"I will also give you fair warning, Mr. Aubry," Johnny said quietly. "Many people have tried to fight the old gentleman with the whiskers and none up to date have won the fight. Can you and your kinsmen kill all the G-men and then all the marshals and deputy marshals and the army and navy and the marine corps? Let us say that Jimmie Wilson and I are killed. Do you think that ends the matter? I'll answer my own question. It only starts it. If you and other kinsmen of the men we shot down while on duty, kill us—you and they die in the electric chair . . . if not by hot lead."

"Are you by any chance trying to scare me, Captain Hatfield?"

"I know I could not do that," Johnny told him. "I am simply stating a fact to you. The days of feuding are over, Mr. Aubry."

"You think so? I will state a fact to you in return." Aubry frowned. "You die for what you have done in less than one minute after you leave Aubry lines—the old gentleman with the whiskers, his G-men, his marshals and deputy marshals, the army, navy and marine corps, electric chair and hot lead to the contrary."

"We came here to arrest a man who is a known criminal," Johnny pointed out. "A man who killed a G-man without giving him a chance. Men tried to stop us reaching him to make the arrest. We—"

"They seem to have succeeded, Captain Hatfield," was the answer. "If there is anything that will add to your comfort, do not hesitate to ask for it."

Johnny Hatfield grinned, "A company of marines might add to our mental comfort. You don't mind sending for them, do you?"

Philippe Aubry smiled once more. "All lines of communications are cut and in the hands of the enemy. I am sorry I did not meet you under different circumstances, Captain. Good afternoon."

"Wait a minute. As I understand it, as soon as we are able to navigate we leave Aubry?" Johnny waited.

"I thought you knew what sanctuary meant," said Aubry. "You leave Aubry at your own volition, when, where and as you see fit. You will not be asked to leave. Once more, inside Aubry lines you are in sanctuary. One inch outside, you die—by my hand if I can bring it about."

"I'm glad you qualified it with that 'if'." Johnny grinned. "Reckon we better take a flying start and cross the line at full speed."

"Let your conscience be your guide," was the answer. "Again, good afternoon. The nurse only gave me three minutes."

"Just one thing more. When we cross the line are we to have what we had on us when we arrived?"

"Meaning your pistols and ammunition? You are, Captain," said Aubry.

"That will help some. I hope we won't have to put holes in you after all you've done for us." Johnny smiled.

"You will—if you can," answered Philippe Aubry as he turned on his heel.

After the door shut, Jimmie Wilson announced,

"Out of the frying-pan into the well known fire. Lady Luck come and help your chosen people!"

"Cut that talking out," his partner ordered. "The doc will be in any minute. We'll stay here until we get well and then play ring-around-the-rosy with the kinsmen. What could be sweeter?"

"I know plenty things. Hey, Johnny, we better begin to frame a . . ."



The nurse came in followed by the doctor.

THREE men sat outside a hunters shack built on a patch of dry land deep in the swamp. One of them was young, with clean-cut features and reckless black eyes. The other men were older. Both were lean and lanky, hard-eyed and thin-lipped.

"So they got away—and to Aubry of all places," the young man said. "Reckon we'll just have to wait 'em out. They can't stay there forever, the dirty—"

"Well, suh," drawled Jared Laussat, "I don't reckon the Bienvilles see it that way, Henry, or the Thibodaux or the Galves either. Do they, Bert?"

Albert Galves, the third man answered grimly, "I ain't speaking for the Bienville or the Thibodaux. Reckon they can speak for themselves. The Galves don't see no waiting of any kind. There's two Galves lying dead and cold."

"And Medford Thibodaux and Buck Laussat bad wounded. There's kin dead and wounded, Henry—and you talk about waiting out the men who did it!"

Henry Laussat, Jared's cousin—known in the jungle of the underworld as the Jasmine Kid—reached for a bottle of whisky on the bench, "What the hell else is there to do?" he demanded.

"Why," answered Bert Galves, smoothly, "go to Aubry and get 'em and hang 'em to the nearest cypress tree—or toss 'em to the 'gators."

Henry Laussat stared at Galves for a moment and then laughed. "You reckon Philippe will give 'em up?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"You ought to know," was the answer. "Because he's an Aubry and every damn one of them believe in that 'to the guest in my house' stuff. Listen. Any of the Bienville or the Thibodaux or the Galves or the Laussat or any other family that goes

to Aubry asking for Aubry guests is liable to get all shot to hell."

"Those onery houn' dogs are G-men and they've wounded and killed Aubry kin!" came the angry protest.

"I know that and so does Philippe. According to Mose, this Captain Hatfield gave Louise his gun when she asked for it after telling him he was at Aubry. What does that make them?"

"It sure makes them guests all right," agreed Jared Laussat. "But Louise didn't know that they was G-men, or what they had done."

"I don't reckon he'll stand on that 'to the guest in my house', when we go after 'em," Galves stated as he put down the whisky bottle, "which same we're sure going to do."

The Jasmine Kid—formerly ace dropper for Paddy Moran, racketeer—laughed. "If Philippe has got 'em chalked up as guests—and ten will get you a hundred that he has—whoever goes after them had better make peace with *le bon Dieu* before they start, because Philippe will sure send 'em up the golden stairs."

"Anyone would think we was a bunch of old women," snarled Galves. "There's plenty of us who can outshoot Philippe Aubry. What can he do more than drop a couple of us before he gets dropped—if he wants it that way."

"Yeah? How about Louise? Do you think that little scoundrel is going to hide in a closet when guns begin to talk? Can plenty of us outshoot her, also?"

Jared Laussat laughed. "Henry's got you there, Bert! Louise can outshoot us all and she'll start doing it when it comes to defending Aubry. Don't you go getting it into your head that taking anything from Aubry is a picnic."

"I'm not getting anything in my head. There's two men at Aubry that have killed and wounded kin of mine and they ain't goin' to stay there, that's all."

"Henry, is it your idea that we wait



until they get away from Aubry, then—”

“Yes. Caesar told Pierre Bienville that the doctor said it would be two weeks, maybe a little longer.”

“And in the meantime more G-men will come,” Galves said, “I say to hell with Phil—”

“You behave, Bert,” Jared Laussat interrupted, coldly. “You’re drinking too much liquor.”

Galves, when sober, was a bad man to cross in any way. When he had liquor in him he was as dangerous as a diamond-back rattlesnake.

“From what I’ve heard about G-men,” Henry said evenly, “they play a lone hand as much as they can. What I mean is this: if the two at Aubry were detailed to get me, it’s their code to do it by themselves. They very seldom call on other John Laws for help, even their own gang. It’s their hunt and they’ll pull the game down or die trying. I don’t think they’ve sent for help. Up north we’ve studied their ways a lot. We *had* to,” he added with a grin.

Jared Laussat studied that for a minute or so, during which time Galves took another drink. . . .

**F**INALLY, Laussat said, “Henry, me and Bert here have known you ever since you was born and you’re right close kin of mine. We don’t give a hoot in hell what you done up north to get the law after you. You come home and you found us all, kin and no kin, just as ready as we always have been to stop any law comin’ into the bayou. We don’t care what kind of law tried to—”

“I know all that. Why the oration?” was the retort. “I’ve always fought the law—up north as well as here. All I say is that to go to Aubry would be damn foolish and only get a lot of us shot to pieces. Philippe will defend his guests to the death—you both know that. Supposing more G-men do come—so what? We can rub

out all the G-men that come before they get to Aubry.”

“We didn’t have much success doing what you call ‘rub out’ two of them a few days ago,” answered Jared Laussat, with a grim little smile.

“That was because we held them in contempt and left too many holes open. The next time it will be different. I don’t join in going to Aubry and—”

“We all know why,” interrupted Galves, his voice a slurring drawl.

“Yeah? Why, Galves?” asked Henry, his eyes narrowed.

“You’re in love with Louise and always have been,” the other snapped. “You don’t want anything to happen that would set her against you. You put that over the killing and wounding of your kin. All this talk about ‘guests in my house’ don’t mean a thing. You just want to keep sweet with—”

“Get back a little, Jared,” came the warning. “I’m goin to shoot those words down this lowdown’s throat. Go after your pistol, Galves.”

Jared Laussat instead of getting back, leaned forward between the two men, “Hold ‘er,” he ordered, his voice as cold as ice, “The first one of you that moves, I’ll kill. After this thing is settled you can start your comb-cutting anytime but until it is, all personal feuding stops. If you don’t think I mean what I say, reach for your gun.”

Both Henry Laussat and Aubert Galves knew that Jared Laussat could outdraw and outshoot them—and they also knew that when he said ‘I mean what I say’, he did.

There are cold, merciless killers among gangsters. Henry Laussat had been one for Paddy Moran. And there are men who have never been in a city, who do not know what the word racket means and have never been in a gang, who are just as quick if not quicker to take human life. Men who are faster and better shots



than any gangster ever was or will be. Men who do not need drugs to give them courage. Jared Laussat was one of these men.

Neither Henry Laussat or Albert Galves was afraid of Jared in any sense of the word. Either of them would have shot it out with him, a smile on their lips and in their eyes—if they had to do it. But to try to kill each other after Jared, within two feet of them, had ordered them not to try, would have been the act of a fool.

Henry finally laughed, "I will defer the killing until after the G-men are taken care of."

"I also," stated Galves curtly.

"Word of honor?"

"Word of honor, Laussat."

"Word of honor, de Galves."

It would have made quite a few gangsters and coppers laugh if they heard the Jasmine Kid give his word of honor but down in Louisiana it was given and accepted gravely in full faith.

Jared Laussat leaned back. "Go get another bottle of liquor, Henry. We'll drink it with you and then be on our way. I'll pass along what you say."

A half hour later, Galves, as he poled the boat away from the shack, asked, "You going with us to Aubry, Jared?"

"I dunno, Bert. Let's talk it over with the rest. Henry may be right in what he says but waiting don't sit right good on my stomach. You shouldn't have . . . turn left here! What's the matter, going blind?"

## CHAPTER THREE

### Eve of Battle

LOUISE AUBRY sat on the veranda—the side that faced the water. It was past twelve o'clock at night but so beautiful out that she was loath to go to bed. Philippe had been called to New Orleans on business and had not as yet,

returned. Neither he or Louise had the slightest idea that any person at Aubry was in danger. For over one hundred and fifty years, since the French Domination when a Philippe Aubry was governor, Aubry had been inviolate. And every living Aubry fought, if need arose, to keep it that way. In 1938, the Aubry tradition flamed as high and shone as bright as in 1765.

A voice came from near a magnolia tree close to the veranda, "Louise."

Louise answered, without turning her head, "What are you hiding there for? Come up here."

"Someone might see me in the moonlight," continued the voice. "You come down here."

"Reckon you've gone crazy, Ben Galves. What are you doing here at this time of night?"

Benjamin Galves, aged sixteen, answered. "Dad blame it! I can't be hollerin' all over the bayou. You come down here, I tell you."

These two had been tried and true fishing and hunting partners, and Ben Galves was as much at home at Aubry as he was at Galves.

"All right, I'll come down there," the girl said. "But if it's any silly game you're playing, you'll be right sorry, Mr. Benjamin de Galves."

"I'm not playing, doggone it," said the boy. "Come a-running."

Louise rose and sauntered around to the steps and to the magnolia tree, stopping to smell some flowers enroute. "Now tell me what you're talking about."

"Is Philippe here?" asked the boy.

"No, he's gone to New Orleans."

"Then I reckon you better hide out in our hunting shack until. . ." he stopped.

"Hide out? Ben Galves, you been drinking corn liquor?" she asked.

"No, I haven't. Bert and Jared Laussat and Henry Thibodaux and Steve and Louis Galves and—" the boy halted.



"Quit naming the parish now and tell me."

"I'm tryin to, ain't I? They been waiting for Hector Galves and Pierre Derbigny to get here, and they arrived to-night. Now they're all . . ." He went on, "They are coming to Aubry and get the G-men in spite of hell."

"When are they coming?" she asked calmly.

"At the break of day. I reckon I'm as much of a Galves as any of 'em but I ain't goin' to see you get hurt, kin or no kin."

"You're a nice boy, Ben, and I love you," she said gently. "I know exactly how you feel. Reckon I would have done the same for you. Well, I am goin' to defend Aubry. Now you go straight home and don't say a word about where you've been."

"What? And leave you here to . . ." The boy was aghast.

"Nothing will happen to me. You reckon any of them will shoot me? Don't be silly." She was scornful.

"Why, no—not deliberately. But you might get hit by chance. Aw, come on, Louise."

"Are you going, Mr. de Galves? You better had if you want me to keep on loving you," she said sweetly.

"Yes, I'm going, darling."

Young de Galves, to give him the 'de'

to which the Galves were entitled but seldom used, disappeared in the shadows.

Miss Aubry, a smile on her face and in her lovely eyes, instead of going to the telephone and calling the sheriff's office, or the state police station, went to Caesar's cabin. He was sound asleep and it was a hard job to get him to open his eyes.

"Caesar, get up!" she ordered. "Get right up this minute—hurry!"

Caesar sat up in bed. "My goodness, Miss Louise. What all is the matter?" Caesar, who weighed two hundred and thirty pounds and was the terror of the colored population of Terrebonne Parish, waited for orders.

"You go to le Moyne as fast as you can and say that Philippe is away and that I am defending Aubry against attack." The girl took a breath. "That's all you need to say." Louise Aubry's mother had been a le Moyne.

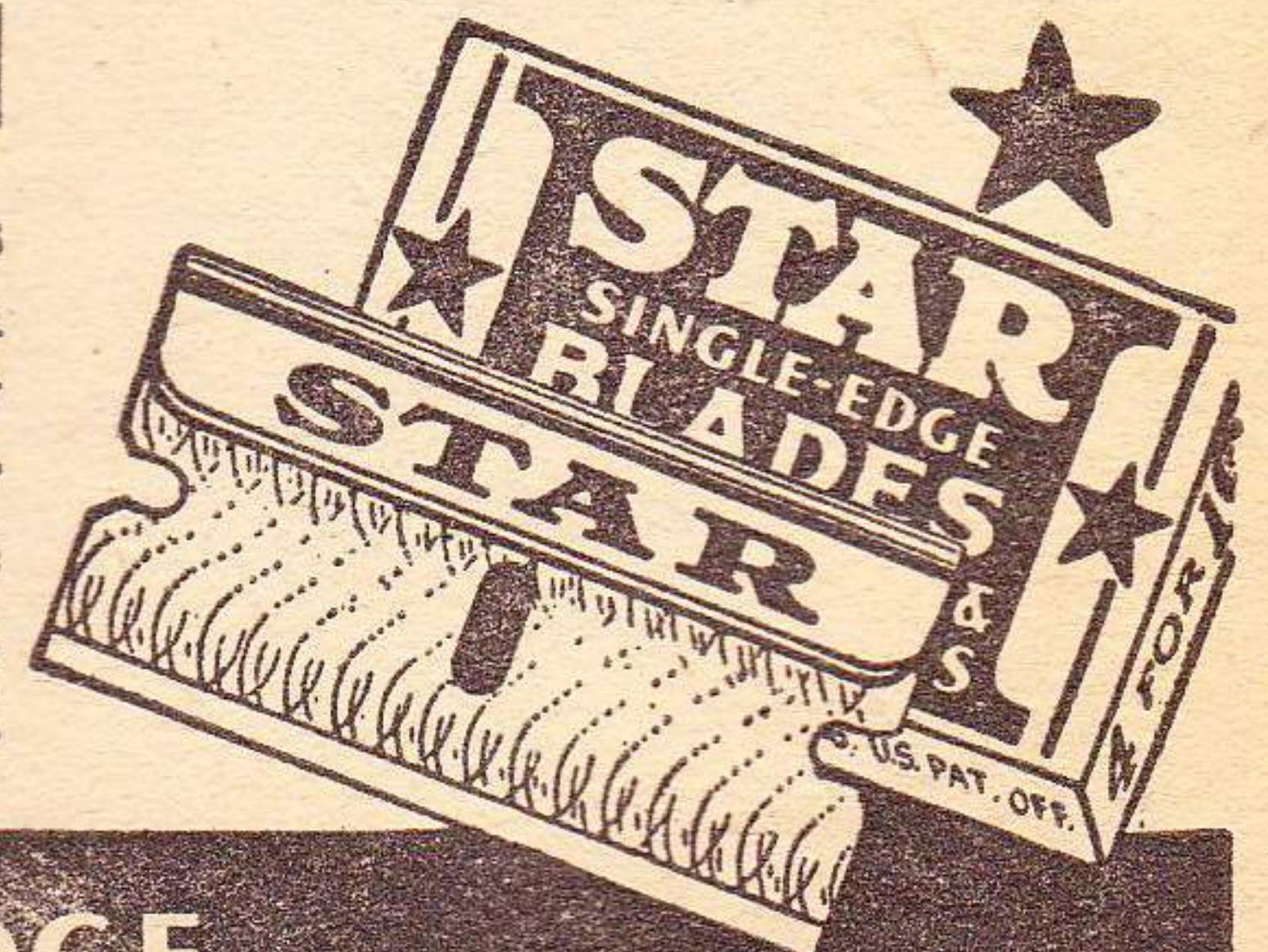
THEN Miss Aubry went to the sick room, very much pleased with herself and things in general. Johnny Hatfield was awake, as was the nurse. Jimmie Wilson was asleep. "You may go," Louise said, to the nurse, who had risen as Miss Aubry entered. "We are to be attacked at break of day. You had better hurry."

The nurse, a little older than Louise



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and quite as lovely, laughed, "By any chance are you drunk, Miss Aubry? No, I see that you are not. But you must know my name."

"Yes. You are Katherine de l' Epinay." Louise Aubry waited.

"And have you ever heard of a de l' Epinay running from danger, Miss Aubry?" the nurse demanded.

"What has that got to do with . . . No, I have not." Louise shook her head.

"I hardly thought you had. These men are my patients and I intend to stay right here until relieved by Doctor Mouton. Is that plain to you, Miss Aubry?"

"I have just told you that Aubry is going to be attacked by men who come for *these men*," the other girl insisted. "I am going to defend it. You are not an Aubry, neither are you kin of mine. Therefore I order you to leave."

"Your order is and will be disregarded, Miss Aubry. I will defend my patients with all the power I possess and—"

"Wait a minute," Johnny Hatfield interrupted. "What's this all about? You two girls behave. Miss Aubry, tell me just what is going to happen—or what you think is going to happen."

Louise turned to face Hatfield. "The kinsmen of the men you killed are coming to Aubry at break of day to take you both out and hang you to a tree. I am going to defend Aubry."

"One tree or two?" asked Jimmie Wilson, as he sat up. The talking had awakened him.

"What?"

Johnny Hatfield laughed, "Back at the old stand I see, Jeems. Miss Aubry, do you know where our pistols are?"

"Why—yes."

"Get them for us."

"But you—you are sick and cannot . . ."

"Honey, you be a nice girl now and do as I say."

Katherine de l' Epinay spoke, "Neither one of you will do anything but stay—"

"I've been hearing a lot about Aubrys and de l' Epinays," drawled Johnny. "Yes, suh, I sure have. Now you two younkens listen to a Hatfield. You go and get our pistols, Miss Aubry and you, Miss de l' Epinay, get our clothes. It isn't a G-man talking now, darling. It's Johnny Hatfield of Kentucky—a place where womenfolks obey their menfolks. At least they do when it comes to pistol-fighting. We are leaving Aubry, chilluns."

"But—you—you can't. You are both weak and—and everything, Captain Hatfield."

He grinned. "Not as weak as when we arrived, honey. Your brother Philippe gave us sanctuary and told us we could leave when, where and as we saw fit, with our pistols and ammunition. We are leaving right now. Go get our pistols."

"If you do," declared Miss de l' Epinay, "I will not be responsible for your condition."

"We relieve you of all responsibility," Jimmie Wilson answered cheerfully. "Of course what you have done to my heart you will always be responsible for."

"What? You dare say that to me?"

"Why not? Did you ever hear of a Wilson who didn't dare say anything to a pretty nurse?"

"Oh, you utter fool! You are going to your death and yet you—"

Miss Aubry suddenly laughed, "It is no use, Katherine. I'll get the pistols, Captain Hatfield."

After she left the room, Katherine de l' Epinay went to a closet and brought out the clothes the G-men had been dressed in when they arrived at Aubry. They had been washed—what there was left of them.

"Well! You certainly cannot go in these rags. I'll see if I can find some things in Philippe's room."

The two linen suits she brought back were too big for both G-men but at least were whole suits.



She helped them dress, after putting fresh bandages on Jimmie Wilson. Johnny Hatfield didn't need any.

"Do you know your way from here to the nearest town?"

"No."

She looked at Jimmie Wilson, who grinned at her and then at Johnny Hatfield who returned the look with impassive eyes. She opened her lovely mouth to say something, thought better of it and looked away. Then Johnny asked, "Were they kin of yours also, de l' Epinay?"

"No," she said, levelly, "But I am at Aubry, Captain Hatfield."

"Not as a guest."

"Why . . . that's true."

"And we are old and dearly beloved patients of yours," Jimmie Wilson reminded her.

Miss de l' Epinay looked at him and the corners of her mouth turned up a little, "Why, so you are, Mr. Wilson. That does make a difference, doesn't it? What I was going to say was that if you skirt the shore to the right you will come to an old railroad bridge. Follow the track also to the right and you will come to the town of Cajux where there is a state police station. Not that I think you will live to reach it."

Johnny Hatfield laughed, "G-men take a lot of killin', baby. If the de l' Epinays ever need help, just holler for the Hatfields."

"And also the Wilsons," added Jimmie, firmly. "Better holler for the Wilsons first, come to think of it."

As Katherine laughed, Miss Aubry came in with the holsters and guns.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### G-Deaths Come High

JOHNNY HATFIELD, poling the boat into a canal just as the bridge came dimly into sight, asked as he brought

the boat to a halt, "How you feeling, Jimmie? No fooling, now?"

"Well, no fooling—I feel all right. I wouldn't want to do much running or take Joe Louis on for more than twenty-eight rounds but outside of that, I'm there. To prove it to you, Mr. Hatfield, I have one of my justly famous hunches coming on."

"For Pete's sake sidetrack it," Johnny protested. "We just got out of bed. Be content with that. Every time you have one of those double-damn hunches of yours we land in a hospital. It was you who hunched we could go up and get the Jasmine Kid."

"That's water under the bridge, me good man," was the answer. "This hunch is that you intend to stick around instead of setting all sail for the states."

Johnny laughed. "For once, your hunch is a good one. That is, if you can stand the gaff. Now if the kin come to get us, who is liable to come with them?"

"What? Why, none other than Mr. Henry Laussat, alias the Jasmine Kid, in pusson." His partner was very attentive now.

"Double correct. My idea is to stick around and try to cut the Kid out of the herd. Did you hear what that little monkey of an Aubry said as we pulled away from the pier?" Hatfield scowled.

"I heard her say something to Katherine—what, I didn't get."

"She said, 'Now that they're gone we'll have some fun with the lowdowns that are comin' to attack Aubry.'" Johnny Hatfield laughed now.

"Meaning that she and our so dear nurse are going to let them think we are still there?" Wilson asked.

"That's right, young fella. The attackers will surround the house and close in mighty cautious, knowing—or rather thinking we are there. We will surround them, grab off the Jasmine Kid and pole away for home sweet home."



"I see. The two of us are going to surround the attackers. Why not just one of us? The other can take a nap."

"Sarcasm is the weapon of a brilliant mind, Jeems, me good man," his friend reminded. "We'll leave this palatial yacht here and sneak through the—"

"Not me. Too many snakes and what-nots. How about surrounding by sea instead of land?" asked Wilson.

"I thought you firmly believed in 'what is written, is written'?"

"So I do but not when it comes to cotton mouth-moccasins and diamond-back rattlers!" Wilson shuddered.

"Call on Lady Luck to take you by the hand. Come on, Jimmie. We can go along the shore line until we reach the cabins."

"That's different," Wilson said. "I love Mr. Whiskers but—"

"Yeah, I know," Johnny told him, "We'll hole up where we can see them land—which will be at one of the piers. Ten will get you twenty that the Jasmine Kid will be up in front."

"Then what?" asked the other G-man.

"Come on. I'll write you a letter about it."

Jimmie Wilson laughed, "Lead off. I'm with you, Kaintuck. Only—go slow."

"We can't go too slow, Jimmie," Johnny Hatfield said. "It's getting daylight."

The G-men, who should have been in bed, made it to the row of Negro cabins—most of which were empty—just as it became light. Aubry had once been one of the famous plantations in Louisiana and the Negro cabins were many. Now, all the Negroes at Aubry were the house servants and two or three aging field-hands.

"Here's one," Johnny said, "It commands the bayou and the rear of the house."

"Three cheers for that. My leg is hurting like hell and high water. You'll have to do the surrounding, Johnny. Cut the Kid out and herd him within range of—"

"Get in, quick!" Johnny Hatfield's ears had picked up the sound of a boat being dragged up on the shore a little to the rear of the cabin, which was Caesar's.

YOUNG Benjamin Galves had decided that he would go and tell Henry Laussat that Louise was going to defend Aubry against Bert Galves and the rest. He knew that Henry loved Louise and figured that, in some way, Henry would stop the attack.

The Jasmine Kid heard the news, laughed, oiled his .45 caliber automatic, saw that the clip was full, thanked Ben, ordered him to go home, and then started for Aubry. He would kill any man or men who would even threaten Louise, let alone attack anything she defended, kin or no kin. When he reached open water he decided that he would not take a chance and go to the pier because the attackers might already be in ambush around the house, even though he could see no boats. He knew they were all hunters, adept at setting traps. He would land below Caesar's cabin, go there and, if Caesar were there—which he probably would be at that time in the morning—send him out to do a little scouting before he, the Jasmine Kid, went to the house. . . .

"What is it?" demanded Jimmie Wilson, once the two G-men were in the cabin. "Holy cats, someone lives here, Johnny."

"I heard a boat being pulled up on shore. Take a look in that other room," Hatfield advised.

Jimmie Wilson obeyed and, as he turned to announce, "There isn't anyone," the door of the cabin opened and Henry Laussat, alias the Jasmine Kid, walked in.

There was no need of an introduction. He knew who the two men were and they knew who he was.

He and Johnny Hatfield spoke at the same time. The Kid snarled, as he started his draw, "For—sake!"



Johnny Hatfield, as he started his draw, commanded, "Put 'em up, Kid."

Jimmie Wilson did not draw his gun. He knew that Johnny Hatfield could 'take' the Jasmine Kid—or any other kind of a Kid of the jungle.

It was close, though—very close. The Kid was packing his gun in a shoulder holster as was Johnny Hatfield, and they both wore coats. There was ripping sound as buttons were torn loose by left hands and then right hands flashed to gun butts. The Kid's gun cleared his wreck of shirt and coat just as Johnny Hatfield's did. But Johnny stopped the pull to the right, as his gun muzzle came clear. His right elbow came to his side and his wrist turned. The Jasmine Kid pulled to the right—it might have been an inch further than Johnny did before he tried to swing his gun into line. He did not make it. A bullet through his brain put an end to all further tries for Henry Laussat, alias the Jasmine Kid. He had killed a G-man . . . and by a G-man was killed.

Johnny Hatfield looked down at the body. "Sorry, Kid. You asked for it."

"He did, Johnny," said Wilson. "We better hightail it out of here before. . . . Holy cats! Look what's tying up at the pier. Our goose is cooked this time. They must have heard the shot. Here comes Louise and our dear little nurse to meet 'em, carrying shotguns."

"My eyes are still good, Jeems," Hatfield reminded. "Will we make a run for it or stay right here to greet the kin?"

"Where'll we run? You take the door and I'll take the window. Well—I've had a nice time at your party but I guess I've got to go now. I think it's going to rain shortly."

Johnny Hatfield laughed. "I'm glad you came, blue-nose. Now is the time for you to call on Lady Luck. She brought us the Jasmine Kid. Maybe she'll yank us out of here."

"I'll do it, be gosh. Please, Lady Luck,

yank us out of here. We won't never go fooling around kin no more, honest Injun."

"She sure will have to strut her stuff, if she does," Johnny said, as he ejected the empty shell from his gun and put in a loaded one.

"DON'T anyone move," Jared Laussat warned, as Louise Aubry and Katherine de l' Epinay walked calmly up to the two boats. The eight men in them had just started to unload when the girls appeared. "Let me handle 'em. They'll listen to me."

"They better," Bert Galves answered, grimly, "Or I'll take those guns away from them and—"

"No, suh, you won't," interrupted one of the Thibodaux hotly. "You won't do nothin' of the kind, Bert Galves. You lay a finger on either one of those little old scoundrels and I'll cut your gizzard out and—"

"Me, too," announced one of the Laussat, gravely.

"You won't none of you do nothing," stated Jared Laussat coldly, "unless I order it. Honey chile, what are you doing with a gun in your little hands a-comin' down to greet your old Uncle Jared?" he called to Louise Aubry.

Miss Aubry did not answer until she got within ten feet of the boats. Then she halted and demanded, smoothly, "What do you men with guns in your hands want at Aubry?"

"Now darling, you be a nice girl and quit talking thataway to your own kin."

"My kin would not come with guns in their hands. You are strange men—all of you. Shove off those boats and go away," the girl said.

"Sugar, listen to me. We've come for the G-men and—"

"Oh, you have? You have come for Aubrey guests, have you?" she asked.

"Honey, will you please be a good girl



for Uncle Jared, who loves you? Don't you see that we all feel that we must take them, just the same as you feel that you must defend Aubry guests?"

"Why I reckon I do," Miss Aubry answered, a little uncertain. "But you come with guns in your hands and no man does that to Aubry. No, suh, he doesn't. If any one of you strangers thinks he does, step up on the pier. I'll right soon teach him different."

A young Laussat laughed, "Well, you doggone little ole bobcat of a Louise, you would. Don't look at me, darling. I'm stayin' right here in the boat."

"Honey, what was that shot? We heard one just as we was tying up?" Jared Laussat asked. "It sounded as if it came from the cabins."

"I don't know," the girl told him. "We heard it, too. I served out what pistols we had to the darkies last night. It may be that one of them is right nervous and pulled the trigger. Oh, I'm forgetting I'm talkin' to strange men. I'll give you until I count three to—"

"Darling, you know you're not talking to strange men. Put those guns down and—"

"Wait a minute," Katherine de l'Epinau said. She had just seen the boat that Henry Laussat had come in, pulled a third of the length up on the shore below the cabin. "The shot came from a cabin near that boat."

"What boat? I see it. Louise, you tell old Uncle Jared the truth. Is Henry here? That's his boat."

"No, he isn't," she denied. "That is, if he is I don't know it. Why, it is Henry's boat! Katherine, do you reckon that they came back and have—have killed Henry? That shot was too heavy to have been fired from the thirty-eight caliber pistols we gave the darkies—now that I think of it."

"What do you mean, Louise?" demanded Jared Laussat.

Katherine de l'Epinau laughed, "You

men! The G-men left here last night after we received warning that you were coming. We were going to pretend they were still here and . . . Louise, you reckon they did?"

"You girls quit your fooling, right now," said Jared Laussat. "I'm coming up on the pier. You tell me just what—"

"Not with a gun in your hand, you're not," Louise stated icily. "The G-men may be in that cabin instead of in the house but they are still at—"

"No, honey," Katherine de l'Epinau interrupted, "It is different now. Let Uncle Jared come up."

"What is different?" the other girl demanded. "They are here to take Aubry. You mean that the G-men are not guests—*now?*"

"That's right."

"Why, Uncle Jared, you put your gun down and come up here right away," said Louise Aubry.

THE other men sat in the boats and listened as best they could to the two girls telling Jared Laussat what had happened after Louise received the warning. She did not tell him who had warned her and he did not ask.

Katherine de l'Epinau finished with, "I watched them pole away and they got almost to the bridge before I lost sight of them."

"Almost to the bridge? Then they were off Aubry holdings?"

"Yes, Louise. Don't you see that, once off Aubry holdings, they weren't guests any more?"

"Here comes Philippe and my le Moyne menfolks!" somebody shouted.

The men in the boat spread out a bit, and more than one hand tightened around a gunstock. Philippe Aubry's temper was uncertain and just how he would react was problematical. The le Moyne men, four of them—all of them young and all heavily armed with pistols and rifles—



grinned at Louise and then surveyed the men in the boat through cold eyes. They knew them all and had since childhood, but at the moment they were le Moynes facing foemen, if their little kinswoman ordered it so.

Philippe Aubry looked first at Jared Laussat and then at the men in the boat. His face was impassive and so were his eyes. "Explain this—if you can, Laussat," he finally commanded Jared Laussat.

Laussat's eyes narrowed. "I don't like the tone of your voice, Aubry. We came here to get the men that killed and wounded your kin as well as ours."

"Knowing I was absent?" asked Philippe smoothly.

"We didn't know that when we started. Philippe, supposing we start from where we stand? We can take up our coming to Aubry later. Louise, tell Philippe what happened."

Philippe listened without interrupting and after Louise and Katherine also had finished, he said, "Then you think that the G-men came back, hid in Caesar's cabin and Henry Laussat walked in on them and was killed. If that is the case, they are still there."

"That's right, Philippe—they are still there," Jared Laussat answered.

"They left sanctuary at their own volition, with what they had on them when they arrived." Aubry scowled. "They, also of their own volition, came back inside Aubry lines and killed a man. To Aubry they are now as two snakes that crawled from the swamp into an Aubry cabin. I invite you men to assist me kill them. Wait a minute. I want to say this. After they are killed, I will take up with each of you the matter of coming to Aubry uninvited with guns in your hands. Is that fully understood?"

There was a chorus of "Yes, suh, that's understood. Anytime, Aubry. I'll be lookin' for you, Philippe. Come a-runnin', Aubry."

Philippe laughed, as did the le Moynes. "Doggone," one of the le Moynes said. "Reckon there's plenty of fightin' blood left in the bayou."

"All right, Philippe. You take the thing over. Unload, you men."

Philippe Aubry looked at the eight men and then at the four le Moynes.

"Gentlemen," Aubry said formally, "I thank you for your prompt response to my sister's call for help. There are two men in that cabin with which I and my kinsmen here have a personal quarrel. You are also kinsmen but not involved in the

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quarrel. Your help is not needed. I would ask for it as freely as I know you would give it, if it were. Will you escort Louise and Katherine into the house and remain there with them for a few minutes?"

The oldest of the le Moynes answered, just as formally, "We came here at the call of our cousin, Louise. You are our cousin also. If you say you do not need our help, we will not offer it. Will you come with us, Louise and Katherine?"

"No! I will do nothing of the kind!" said the girl. "I am going to—"

"You are going to do exactly as I say, Louise," Philippe Aubry said quietly. "Go into the house with our cousins of le Moyne."

"I—very well, Philippe. You are—reckon you're the head of the house."

Philippe laughed. "You know darn well I am. Run along, darling."

He had met the le Moynes enroute to Aubry on the dirt road that entered to the plantation from the east.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Shotgun Showdown

"IT LOOKS like the festivities are about to commence," Jimmie Wilson announced. "Four of the enemy are retreating, leaving Philippe in command of an army of eight. We can't hold this cabin, Johnny. They'll attack on all sides."

"Yes, sir, General Wilson," said his partner. "Private Hatfield has been thinking the same thing after seeing the size of the army. See that woodpile?"

"Yeah. By gosh, Johnny, if we can make it we can see on all sides."

The woodpile consisted of twenty or thirty cords of wood, piled breast high, forming more or less of a right angle, near the shore, about fifty feet from the cabin.

"We better make it, Jeems. Can you run that far?"

"After lookin' at what's coming after me, fella, I can make 'er in nothing flat." Wilson grinned.

Johnny Hatfield laughed. "Come on, then. We told Philippe we'd take a running start."

The G-men drew their guns and walked to the back door, as if sauntering into a dining-room where they were welcome guests. They both knew their chances of making the woodpile were extremely slim and, if they did, their chances of ever leaving the woodpile alive were slimmer. But both had what it takes, in full measure, and they were G-men and would be until their fighters' hearts finally stopped beating. . . .

The men on the pier were scattered out, on their way to places Philippe had pointed out. Once they were in position, there was to be a charge—Philippe, Jared Laussat and Bert Galves taking the front of the cabin which was commanded by a door and a window.

They were walking fairly close together from the pier when one of the Thibodaux, going to the right, yelled, "There they go!"

Jared Laussat and Bert Galves had thirty-thirty rifles in their hands and Philippe had drawn a .45 caliber automatic pistol.

The G-men ran for the woodpile, shooting as they ran. They had to—because they knew that they were coming into sight of hostile guns as soon as they cleared the cabin—what is known as 'an edge'. The hostile guns did not know the G-men were coming and so . . . the G-men secured that break.

Before the sound of the yell died away, Bert Galves was down, a bullet from Jimmie Wilson's gun in his heart. Philippe Aubry was also down with bullets in his right arm and leg. Johnny Hatfield got him with the first two shots. Jared Laussat threw himself to the ground and opened fire. Jimmie Wilson, aiming at



Laussat's head, put a bullet through Laussat's right hand where it grasped the rifle. Four of the attackers were where they could not see the G-men. The two that could, opened fire. Jared Laussat's bullet grazed Johnny Hatfield's head, just above the left ear. The next instant Laussat was put out of action.

The young man who had called Louise 'a little old bobcat' and the Thibodaux who had yelled, 'There they go', had never faced gunfire before, and while there was no question as to their courage, there was no doubt but what it affected their aim a little. Both missed the G-men.

To give Johnny Hatfield and Jimmie Wilson credit, neither of them shot to kill. They saw that their opponents were hardly more than boys and so shot at—and hit—right shoulders, high up. A .45 caliber bullet hits with stunning force and the impact sends a man down, even if not

fatally wounded. The fight, as far as these special Laussat and Thibodaux were concerned, was already over.

As they reached and got behind the wood, Jimmie said, "Not so bad. Five of the army gone already. You hurt, Johnny?"

"No. The old gent who lay down darn near got me. Get over there to the left, Jimmie. They'll rush us."

"Let 'em rush and be darned to 'em. Old Cappy Norcross will sure land on us all spraddled out for this shooting," grunted Wilson.

"Anyone would think you expected to get out of here alive," Hatfield jeered. "Four out here and four in the house. We only got a few shells and—"

"I have lived to see the day," Jimmie chuckled, "when a Hatfield gives up the ghost!"

Johnny laughed. "Get over there."



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Bullets began thudding into the wood but no rush came. By moving a few pieces of wood the G-men could see through enough to know when a charge was coming.

Three or four minutes went by with no change in the situation.

Then Philippe Aubry began inching his way along on the ground, using his left leg and arm to do it with. Johnny Hatfield put a bullet into the dirt less than a foot away from Philippe's head.

"Stay put, Aubry! The next one will go through your head."

Aubry froze, knowing full well that Johnny Hatfield meant what he said.

Jared Laussat had made no attempt to rise or move. He was holding his right wrist as tight as he could, with his left hand, to stop the flow of blood.

"Don't try it, Philippe," he said calmly. "They got us, cold turkey."

"I wish to High Henry they'd get a move on," Jimmie Wilson grumbled. "I'm getting as stiff as a poker all over."

"Yeah? Lie down and take it easy," Hatfield advised. "They're probably waiting us out. We can't stay here forever, and they know it. Wonder if the four gents that went with—"

Louise Aubry suddenly came from the rear of the house, carrying a white handkerchief tied to a broom handle.

"Hot damn! Here comes a flag of truce, Jimmie," Hatfield cried. "Got a clean handkerchief?"

Jimmie Wilson, who had sat down, answered, "I don't know. Maybe nursie tucked one in these clothes. Haven't you got one?"

"Maybe I have at that. Yes, here it is."

JOHNNY HATFIELD'S head and shoulders appeared above the wood and he waved the handkerchief. Louise marched up to within ten feet and halted. "What can we do for you, Miss Enemy?" Johnny asked politely.

"I ask permission to remove the wounded," little Miss Aubry stated haughtily.

"No can do. Very sorry—this is the same as Injun fighting." Johnny grinned.

"When you came to Aubry, we took care of you," the girl reminded him.

"You did," Johnny admitted. "And were going to defend us like the nice girl you are. Because you did that, we'll trade with you."

"You will trade with us?" She was puzzled. "What do you mean, Captain Hatfield?"

"First, who are the men who came with Philippe?"

"They are my cousins, the le Moynes. My mother was a le Moyne. I sent Caesar for them."

"Have you got them under control?" Hatfield asked quietly.

"I don't know what you mean by control. They will do as I ask, if you mean that." She was very straight and scornful.

But he merely smiled. "Will the men who came in the boats—I mean the ones who are indulging in a little target practice at a woodpile—do as you ask?"

"I reckon they will, if Jared Laussat tells them to," she retorted. "And if they won't, the le Moynes can make them do it."

"All right, here is the trade," Johnny said. "For safe conduct to the state police station, we will trade Philippe and the rest of the wounded. You go and see this Jared Laussat and the le Moynes and come back and let us know if you'll trade. You'd better hurry because the sun is getting hot and it won't be so good for the wounded out there—especially Philippe. You can say that we agree that once at the state police station we will forget all that has happened save the fact we killed the man we were sent to bring in, dead or alive."

"Then Henry is—is dead?" her face was grave.



"Very dead, Miss Aubry. Let me call your attention to the fact that the wounded need attention."

"I'll—I'll hurry, you—killers!"

Five minutes later, Miss Aubry was back. "Philippe, Jared Laussat and the le Moynes say that for the sake of the wounded men the trade is agreed to and the rest of the kinsmen say they will abide by the decision." That was her answer.

"Word of honor, Aubry?" Johnny asked gently.

"Word of honor."

"Where is this Jared Laussat?" he went on.

"There on the ground beside Philippe—the one holding his wrist."

"Go to him and have him call, 'Word of honor, Laussat'." Johnny was pretty stern.

"It is not necessary, Captain Hatfield," she said haughtily. "All gave their word of honor to me. And I, in turn, give you Aubry honor."

"Which we accept," Johnny Hatfield said, smiling. "Can you stand up, Jimmie? The war is over."

THEY were on the way to the state police station in the le Moynes car, escorted by three of the le Moynes. One of the men asked, "Are all G-men as fast with a pistol as you are?"

"We're considered slow," Jimmie Wilson answered.

"Doggone! I sure wouldn't want to be facin' any of the fast ones," grunted the other. "We don't hold with all this shooting foolishness, like they do in the bayou. We can do some if we have to, and they know it, but we don't go around making our brags. You fellas mind telling us what all happened?"

"Not at all," Johnny Hatfield answered with a grin. "Up north there was a man who belonged to a gang. He was what is called a dropper for a gang leader. You know what a dropper is?"

"Why—no, I don't reckon I do," was the answer.

"A dropper is a paid killer," Johnny explained. "He will kill anyone his boss orders him to kill—not from loyalty to his boss but for money paid him."

"Well, dog my cats!" exclaimed his lis-

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tener. "I never did hear of such a thing. Reckon he must be lower than a snake's belly. Yes, suh, he sure—"

"Hush up," ordered one of the other le Moynes. "I want to hear this thing before we get to the station. Go on, Capt'n."

"Well, this dropper was called the Jasmine Kid. One day he made a bad mistake—a very bad one. He killed a G-man who was in a bank when the gang this man belonged to held it up. Now, we don't care how many of each other they kill, and we'll get them if we can if they kill citizens. But if they kill a G-man, we get them if it takes from now until Kingdom Come. You sabe what I mean?"

"Yes, suh, we sabe."

"I thought that you would," Johnny said. "Well, the Jasmine Kid disappeared. But, like most gangsters he had a girl friend and again, like most gangsters, he made a mistake. He had told her his right name and where he came from and she had a picture of him taken at some summer resort. She tried to get away but the police knew of her and they picked her up for us. Once we had her, she did what is called in polite police circles—*sing*."

"You say she did? What does that kind of sing mean, Capt'n?" asked the man.

"It means tell all anyone knows. She sang plenty because if she didn't there was a charge that could be pressed against her that would have withdrawn her from circulation for quite a few years. The Jasmine Kid is, or rather was, Henry Laussat."

"Dad blame my eyes!" was the exclamation. "Henry Laussat sunk low enough to be a paid killer. Who'd have thought it?"

"I don't know, but that is what happened." Johnny nodded.

"He made a run for the bayou and holed up and you fellas come to get him?"

"That's right."

"Someone tells us that you went in all

alone, the two of you, to get him," continued the other. "How come you did a foolish thing like that, and how come you knew where his shack was? Answer that."

"G-men are noted for doing foolish things," Jimmie Wilson announced gravely, "and Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Wilson are the most noted of all in that respect."

"Conserve your strength, my good man," Johnny growled. "I'll do all the talking necessary. You see, Mr. le Moyne, we were the ones detailed on the case and whenever they can, G-men work alone. We could have called on all the men Mr. Whiskers has got to give us a hand but—"

"Who is Mr. Whiskers?" asked le Moyne.

"Our Uncle Sam. The old gentleman with the goatee."

"Doggone, I never did hear such language. Did you, Pete?" the bayou man asked.

"Keep that big mouth of yours shut and learn you something, boy," was the advice. "Lemme see. I got 'dropper' and 'Mr. Whiskers' and 'sing' already. Go ahead, Capt'n, please, suh."

"You understand why we went in alone?" Johnny said.

"Yes, suh, we do now. G-men work alone."

"As much as they can, remember. There are times when they have to call for help. We came down here as two biologists and—"

"What's that?" the other wanted to know.

"A biologist," Jimmie explained, "is a gent who studies the science of life or living organisms, treating of the phenomena, structure, growth, development, distribution and whatnot manifested by animals and plants, or the causes of those phenomena, the study of living matter."

"Man howdy! Listen to him sling words. I'm plumb dizzy. What's that all mean in English?"

"A man who studies bugs, plants and



animals to find out what makes them tick. Now you know all about it." The G-man grinned.

"And I know you better keep still. You're blue around the lips," Hatfield warned. "Step on the gas a little, will you, fella?"

"Capt'n, how did you find out where Henry was?" Le Moyne asked Johnny.

"Well, in our search for bugs and plants to look at we ran across quite a few white and colored men," the G-man said. "We didn't ask outright for Henry Laussat but we talked a lot about Louisiana families and so on. The white men told us a lot but nary a word about Henry Laussat. He had been seen at Sol's Landing where he got off the bus, so we figured he was heading for home sweet home and, once there, would hole up close to it. We met several Laussats but Henry's name was never mentioned. One day we met an old Negro poling along and talked to him. And Lady Luck had him volunteer that he had been takin' some liquor up to Henry Laussat. We said that we were friends of Henry's and would like to see him. So—"

"Capt'n, please suh, go on."

"There isn't much to go ahead with," Johnny admitted. "We offered to pay him to guide us to Henry Laussat and he said he didn't dare take anyone to Mis-tah Hen-ery's shack without permission. So we asked him to draw us a map so we could get there, and flashed two dollars at him.

"He drew us the map with a pencil in my notebook, explaining the turns as he went along. It looked simple but it wasn't by a darn sight. Either that colored man fooled us or we couldn't follow it. But at that we didn't get much of a chance. We soldiered along for the rest of the day and tied up to a cypress tree for the night. The next morning right after we started we ran smack into an ambush."

"You know what that darky did?"

"Well, I've got an idea. He went to the nearest place he could get liquor and whoever was there made him tell where he got all that money. He did tell, and word was passed that two men were going up to see Henry Laussat." Johnny laughed.

"Yes, suh, that's just what he did, I bet you."

"Anyway, we ran into an ambush and shot our way out. We got to Aubry and—"

"We know, Capt'n. Now that you got Henry, you're callin' it a day."

"That's right." Johnny nodded.

"Boy, I sure would like to be one of these here G-men," said the other. "Will you tell me . . . dad blame it, here's the station."

**I**T WAS a month later, when Johnny Hatfield and Jimmie Wilson, just out of a hospital, had endured a few choice remarks made by Captain Norcross, their F.B.I. chief. "So, you went gun-frolicking again, did you? After all I've said about you two so and so's keeping your hands off your guns and making arrests like officers should? What the hell did you try to do down there, de-populate the State of Louisiana? I ought to tie a can to you right now."

"We got the Jasmine Kid," Jimmie put in mildly.

"You did and who else did you get besides?"

"We only defended ourselves," Johnny Hatfield answered as mildly as Jimmie Wilson—if not a little milder.

"I know. I know. Damn funny you always have to defend yourselves. I . . . how you feelin', Jimmie? You look kind of pale around the gills?" His chief glared at him.

"Not so good," Jimmie lied very promptly.

"Why the hell didn't you say so, you ivory domed ring-tail monkey? Get out



of here and take thirty days' sick leave. Johnny, you do the same and take care of him." The chief was glowering.

"Where'll we go, Johnny?" Jimmie asked with a grin as soon as they were in the hall.

"Atlantic City," Johnny answered, "I know heap plenty people there."

He did and proved it once he and Jimmie arrived. One day, as they lolled on the beach, a pretty girl in a bathing suit came up and stood looking down at them, a little smile on her perfect lips. They looked up at her and then got up.

"Nurse!" shouted Jimmie Wilson, "By gosh, I'm glad to see you? What are you doing up here and how's all the—"

Katherine de l' Epinay laughed, "One question at a time, Mr. Wilson. I'm up here with a patient."

"Sit down, darling," Johnny said, "Doggone if you aren't the prettiest girl in the world, no fooling. How would you like to be Mrs. Johnny Hatfield?"

"I wouldn't," answered Katherine, gaily, "My goodness, I want me a man that isn't getting shot all the time."

"Take me then," Jimmy offered. "I'll agree to start running every time I hear a gun go off."

"You're every bit as bad as this scoundrel of a Captain Hatfield. Remember I'm your nurse and you musn't try to flirt with me."

At that they all laughed, and Miss de l' Epinay sat down.

"Tell us how Philippe and the kin made out," Jimmie ordered.

"Philippe and all of them are getting well."

"When you see him tell him I said I was sorry I had to wing him but he would stick his neck out," Johnny said.

"I will, Captain."

"Was Louise in love with Henry Lausat?" Jimmie asked. "She cried when they brought the body in."

"Why, she thought a lot of him, I reckon, but she wasn't in love with him. She's engaged to a man in New Orleans. She and Henry grew up together."

"Want to have lunch with us?" Johnny asked.

"I'd love to but I reckon I better not. I—I will though, up here."

"What do you mean, 'up here'?" demanded Jimmie Wilson.

"Well, suh, surprising as it may seem to you, down in Louisiana you gentlemen aren't thought much of."

"No foolin'? We'll go right down after lunch and correct that, won't we, Jimmie?" Hatfield winked.

"If I go, I'm going to take the regular army along," Jimmie Wilson answered firmly. "Lady Luck might decide we're getting too brash and quit us cold. Come on—let's go eat."

They moved on.

THE END

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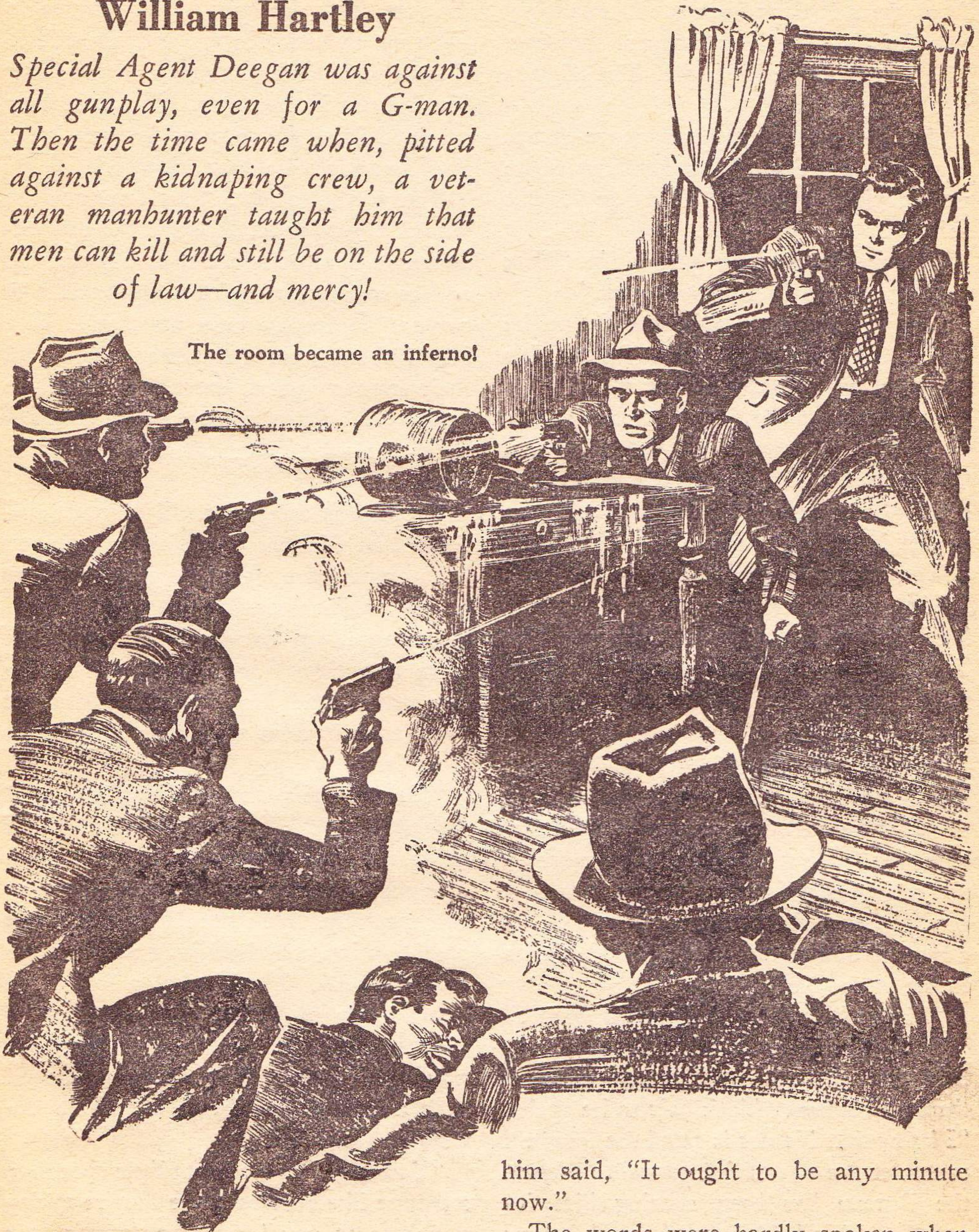


# THE COFFIN PATROL

By  
William Hartley

*Special Agent Deegan was against all gunplay, even for a G-man. Then the time came when, pitted against a kidnaping crew, a veteran manhunter taught him that men can kill and still be on the side of law—and mercy!*

The room became an inferno!



**T**IM DEEGAN sat in the parked black car, his big hands gripping the wheel nervously, his eyes scanning the dimly lighted street before him. The lines of his mouth were drawn tight, and he merely nodded as the man beside

him said, "It ought to be any minute now."

The words were hardly spoken when the roar of many shots whipped the still night air into a tumult. The bedlam lasted for perhaps five seconds, then silence, like a blanket settled again. There was a momentary pause, then the street about the car became alive with voices.



Doors opened, and curious and frightened people crowded out onto the sidewalks from the still dark houses. A small boy rounded the farthest corner shouting, "They got Buck Nevers! The G-men got Buck Nevers!"

But Tim Deegan made no move except a sudden shaking of his head, as if he were trying to get rid of an unpleasant thought.

The man beside him spoke again. "That does the trick. It's all over now."

Deegan nodded slowly, and when he spoke, his voice was bitter. "Yeah, it's all over now. Buck Nevers is lying on the sidewalk up the street and he's as full of lead as a watermelon full of seeds. There's a lot of blood in the gutter and a lot of our gents standing around with smoke in their gun barrels."

The other man looked at him and said, "What the hell's the matter with you, kid? You've got a funny attitude for an F. B. I. man who's been out of school only two months. What did you like about Nevers?"

"I didn't like anything about Nevers," was the answer. "He's kept me without sleep for the last three nights while we've been out trailing him. He's the cause of my sitting here for three hours in a cold car, watching this street so there'd be no chance of him getting away. All he means to me is trouble."

"Then what are you bellyachin' about?"

"Just this," Tim said. His strong young face was serious, and he ran a hand through his heavy black hair as he spoke. "I know that Nevers is rated the toughest customer we ever tried to nail. I know the Bureau has been chasing him for months. He's held up banks and factory payrolls. He's done a hell of a lot of harm with a gun. So we chase him for months and we finally catch up with him coming out of his wife's apartment. And what have we got? A chunk of meat that's full of holes. It doesn't make sense."

Johnny Evans lit a cigaret and said, "You're a tough guy to please, Tim. What did you think the boys were going to do—go up and ask Nevers and his wife to the movies? Hell, that guy's been sticking his chin out for too long. He was strictly no good from the moment he was born. And he didn't die soon enough."

Tim was impatient. "But don't you see what I'm getting at, Johnny? All this expense, in lives and time that was wasted, and in money, and what's the result? A *corpse!* It doesn't make any sense. If a lot of these guys had better control of their trigger fingers, everybody would be better off. When we use these methods we're not law-enforcement officers—we're butchers."

Evans was indignant. "I suppose you think that Nevers was glad to see our boys—gave them a glad hand and reached in his pocket for the cigarettes! Hell, that hopped-up hammerhead has killed more men than I have mosquitoes. The guy was a mad dog, and when you get close enough to a mad dog, you better shoot it."

"Nevers was a human being," Tim said resolutely, "and he shouldn't have been given the same treatment as an animal. The man's mind was diseased—he was sick mentally. That should be taken into consideration, and lead isn't the cure for mental illness. That's what a lot of our crowd seem to forget. They get rid of their problem by killing it—the easiest way out. Justice isn't usually pictured with a gun in her hand, but that's the way we paint her."

"You ought to read that little speech to someone like Nevers while they're taking pot-shots at you," was the answer. "It would fix everything up fine. How do you think they should have handled the guy?"

"We've got tear-gas guns," Tim said. "If they'd have done things properly, Nevers would be a prisoner now. Even



for a man like him, there might be some hope of rehabilitation. You can never tell."

Evans grunted. "They could have used tear-gas on him, and he might have held off long enough to hose down two or three of the boys. Then they'd put the cuffs on him and stick him in a jail someplace. The next thing you know he'd be out on the highways again. He's done it a couple of times before, you know."

"That was the law's fault," Tim said. "They weren't careful enough."

Evans said, "Well, they were careful enough this time. Nevers won't point a gun at anybody else, that's a cinch. He's broken out of his last jail." He threw his cigarette out the window and said, "For an otherwise normal young man, Tim, you've got some screwy ideas. The law is too fast with a gun! Shouldn't treat Nevers like an animal!" He grunted in disgust. "Come on, get this thing rolling. We'll report back to the chief and go catch up on some sleep. I've almost forgotten what a bed looks like."

**T**WO days later, Tim Deegan walked into the apartment he shared with Johnny Evans. His eyes were troubled and his face was creased in a frown. He lit a cigarette nervously.

Evans looked up from a book and asked. "What's the trouble, kid? You lose your dog?"

"I'm going on a job," Tim told him.

Johnny shook his head. "You've got my sympathy. No one likes work less than I do. But that's no reason to wear a long puss. We've all got to work. It's that kind of a world."

Tim didn't look at him. He said, "I'm going on a job with Dan Travers."

And Johnny said, "Oh."

Tim was glad that Johnny didn't have much to say while he packed his bag. He didn't feel like talking, even to Johnny. He felt pretty poorly about the thing.

It wasn't the job he was going on that affected him. It looked like a tough case to crack—a kidnaping that was already four days old. The relatives of the victim had kept their mouths closed tightly, intimidated by the outcome of other, publicized snatches. The trail was probably cold, now, when they had finally decided to call in the F. B. I., but that wasn't what troubled Tim. It was the fact that he was going to work with Dan Travers, known to the members of the Bureau and to various law enforcement agencies as 'Trigger' Travers—a smart, resourceful officer who was, above all other qualities, tough.

Travers was the embodiment of all those things which Tim deplored in an agent. He didn't hesitate to use his gun when he thought the occasion called for a gun. And that was the rub. Tim wasn't the only one who harbored the opinion that sometimes Travers created the occasion—that he was a killer, cold and merciless, but with a badge pinned to his wallet and the law's blessings on his bullets.

Tim had seen him several times at headquarters. Travers was a small, spare man of about forty years. His eyes were chips of blue ice that went through you like a cold wind. His hands were small and delicate, but when they moved, even to adjust his tie, they were like striking snakes. Every action his body made was methodical and without waste motion, and Tim imagined that he killed that same way—methodically and without waste motion. He wasn't going to like working with Travers.

He said good-by to Johnny and hopped the train for New York, where he'd been instructed to meet the older agent and take orders.

**T**RAVERS was waiting for him when he got off the train. Tim had only a single bag, and as he lugged it along the



platform, he saw Travers walking toward him. When they were close, the older man extended his hand.

"Hello, Deegan," he said. "They told me that you'd be on this train. Glad to be working with you."

Tim nodded, a bit surprised, and said, "Hello." He wondered how the man knew him, for they hadn't met before. He knew the famous Dan Travers by sight, but he'd never spoken a word to the man, was sure that Travers didn't know of his existence.

As they walked out of the station, Travers spoke, quickly and softly. "I've got a car outside. We're using it. I'll tell you the details when we're on our way." And that was all he said.

Tim had a chance to study him at close range, and his observations verified his already well formed opinion. He didn't think he was going to like this tidy, close-mouthed gent any better than he liked his reputation.

Once they were on their way out of the city, Travers began to speak. Tim was unconsciously aware of the cold, icy quality of his voice.

"You probably know most of the facts. A guy has been kidnaped, and his people thought they were smart in not calling in the law. Now they're getting scared, and when it's probably too late, they give us a ring. It's like this."

He lit a cigarette before he continued.

"A guy named George Leonard Jackson has been snatched. He is not really George Leonard Jackson. He is George Leonard Jackson, Junior. He is thirty-five years old, has a wife, two children, and a father. The father is George Leonard Jackson."

Tim nodded. He had been appraised of these details before he'd left Washington. But Travers ignored him and talked on.

"Junior's old man is *the* George Leonard Jackson. He's worth several million bucks, and he keeps it right in his pocket.

The only reason *he* wasn't snatched is because whoever pulled the job was afraid that nobody else in the family would know where to lay their hands on the dough. So they grabbed the son, the apple of the old man's eye. The son is a fine polo player and would probably be a useful citizen if there was anything for him to do. But all that is beside the point.

"Someone grabbed the son four days ago. They put an ad in the paper, after leaving a message instructing the family to look for it, and informed the Jacksons that the deal could be made for two hundred thousand. This is chicken feed for the old gent, and he inserts an answer that everything is perfectly fine, as far as he is concerned."

"How come the deal didn't go through? Tim asked.

"Well," Travers told him, "you can tie this, but you can't beat it. It has been raining for weeks, up around Plattsville, and the day the instructions about placing the money were to be in the local paper, a dam up above the town bursts and the newspaper is washed out of business."

Tim swore softly. "That's a hell of a note."

"It is, indeed," Travers told him. "But that's how we came in on the job. The family got no word from the kidnapers for the next two days, so they called up. The Bureau picked on you and myself because they think that a New York crowd is at the bottom of this. You've never worked out of New York, and my visits there have been very quiet. The chief is afraid this mob might be able to spot a man from the New York office. So we out of town boys get the assignment."

They drove on in silence for a half hour before Tim said, "How far is Plattsville?"

"It's about another seventy miles," Travers told him. "If you're tired, go get in the back and sleep."

Tim said, "I'm not tired."



They sat silently for the most part of the long ride. There were things Tim wanted to say, questions he wanted to ask, but he kept his mouth closed. He wanted to ask Travers how he was going to handle this thing, what methods he was going to use. He wanted to ask if Travers was going to Plattsville merely to kill, to feel a gun throbbing in his hand, or whether they were going to try to find the kidnap victim and bring the abductors to justice. He was quiet, contained within himself, while all the time he desired to talk to this man, to tell him how he hated his ruthlessness, his leaden conception of justice. But he said none of these things.

It was almost dark when they arrived at the town, and Tim was rather surprised at its size. The main street was brightly lighted by the glaring windows of many shops, and two moving-picture theaters advertised their attractions on the bulb-festooned marquees.

"There are two hotels in the joint," Travers said. "We'll stop at the National. It's the traveling man's hangout. If anyone happens to ask you, we're looking over real estate for a New York firm. We'll hop out to this Jackson place after we tie on the feed bag."

They took a couple of adjoining rooms at the hotel and went down and ate in the hotel restaurant. When they were finished, Travers said, "Come on. We'll see what the hell this is all about."

ONCE in the car, Travers consulted a well marked road map and drove westward out of the town. They branched off the main highway after about a mile, and in five minutes they were off the side road, traveling a broad, gravel driveway. The house loomed immense before them. There were lights in the lower windows.

A butler answered their knock at the door, and Travers said, "We'd like to see Mr. Jackson. Tell him that his friends from Washington have arrived."

They were shown into a drawing-room, and in a moment a side door opened and Tim watched the man entering the room. He was perhaps sixty years old, tall and lean, and his white moustache seemed to add to, rather than detract from, his height. His stride was long and firm, and Tim could feel the man's eyes keenly on himself and Travers, as he advanced.

"Mr. Jackson?" Travers asked.

The man nodded. "Robert said that you were from Washington. I imagine you're the men I've been expecting."

Travers nodded and got right to the point. "We know most of the details, Mr. Jackson, but you might be able to give us some further information. Have these people tried to contact you since the last time you spoke with our New York office?"

The tall old man shook his head. "I haven't heard a word from them. Not for three days."

"You don't have any idea who it might be? Some local person? Jealous, perhaps? Or an enemy you might have made in business?"

The old man shook his head again.

"We don't neglect any possibilities," Travers told him. "You might have avoided all this by informing us the moment it happened, you know."

"And just what would you have done?" the old man asked. "What miracle would you have wrought?" There was scorn, a controlled scorn, in his voice.

"What does a hound dog do with a fresh trail?" Travers asked him. "The scent is cold, now. It'll be difficult to pick up the trail."

"There have been instances in the past," the old man said coldly, "when you blood-hounds have been bothered by something—perhaps a cold in head. You've followed warm trails—and found only blood. I am not a fool. Money alone will do many things. Most things. If it weren't for that flood—"



"We'll forget all that," Travers said. "There are certain things that have to be done. Tomorrow there'll be another telephone line run in here, so we can trace all in-coming calls while you're talking with the party. They might not call, but let's hope they do. The local police will be informed of this, and all strange characters in the town will be picked up and checked. We'll make arrangements tonight with the local telephone company. Every call that comes here will also come to our room in the hotel. We'll be switched in on the line. If nothing develops within twenty-four hours, there will be several other men up here to help us."

The oldman's voice had lost its quality of aloofness when he spoke again. "I'm sorry if I seemed abrupt. But this has been a great strain on me and on my family. We would do anything."

"I know," Travers told him. "But there's nothing you can do at the moment. We'll be back in the morning."

They left, and Tim suddenly realized that he hadn't spoken once while they had been in the house. Travers hadn't wasted any time, but had asked the few questions that were on his mind and left.

"How about the original ransom note?" Tim asked. "Aren't you interested in that at all? There might be something—the handwriting, possibly fingerprints."

"It's in the New York office now," Travers told him. "There were two men up here last night, three hours after Jackson gave us the call. They did all the detail work—the note, biographies of the servants and relatives, photographs of young Jackson—things like that. They've been covering that stuff all day. We'll have all the dope in the morning."

"Oh!" Tim said, and felt slightly foolish. He should have known.

ON THE short ride back to the hotel, Tim began to revise his opinion of Travers. The man had been all cold busi-

ness, the entirely scientific crime hunter. There had been no vein of violence in his talk, no mention of possible shooting or bloodshed. Perhaps rumor was wrong. Perhaps this man had *his* slant on things. The thought pleased him, somehow, just as Travers himself was somehow pleasant, in spite of all that Tim had heard—in spite of his preconceived opinion of the man.

They went directly to their rooms, and Travers opened the door that joined them. Ted began to unpack the bag that he'd left there earlier in the evening, and when he had finished he walked into Travers' room.

The man was sitting on the bed, his gun in his hand. A small kit lay open before him on the coverlet, and Tim saw that he was oiling the .38.

A sudden wave of revulsion passed over him. Hell, he'd been right the first time! All this guy needed was a spare minute or two and he had the rod out, cleaning it. The man thought in terms of lead, and he was always willing to talk its language. He might have known.

His voice was heavy with sarcasm as he said, "You take good care of that thing, don't you?"

Travers looked up, and his face was expressionless as he answered. "Yeah, I take very good care of it. Sometimes it has to take good care of me. Most people are nice to their friends."

Tim didn't answer, but as he looked at the gun, a duplicate of the one he carried in his pocket, he was struck for a moment by a fantastic thought. How much like Travers was the gun. Cold and hard, shining and deadly—no excess parts, no false glitter, entirely utilitarian, compact and final.

How fitting that the instrument should resemble the craftsman.

They went out, presently, and it took them only a few minutes to identify themselves to the person in charge at the tele-



phone company and to make the necessary arrangements in regard to the Jackson phone.

On the way back to the hotel, Travers said, "I don't know about you, but I could go for a sandwich and a glass of beer."

Tim said, "It's a thought."

They stopped at a bar and grill, not far from the hotel, and seated themselves in a booth. Their order was taken and filled, and, when they had eaten, they sat for a few minutes, smoking, looking at the rest of the patrons.

There were three men at the bar, two of them evidently together, and the third by himself. The pair were obviously the drivers of the truck they had seen outside. Their rough and grease-stained clothes marked them immediately.

The third man was a farmer. He was dressed in overalls and a blue denim shirt. A battered hat rode his head, and his face was dark and tanned. He was drinking whisky, and Tim noticed that he got rid of three drinks in the short time that they'd been in the place.

He turned to speak to Travers, and he noticed that the older agent was staring intently at the man in the overalls. Travers spoke suddenly from the side of his mouth. His voice was almost inaudible.

"Go out and sit in the car, kid. Move it down the block a bit and keep the engine running. Wait for me."

Tim said, "What the hell—" then did as he was told.

He sauntered out of the place slowly, and he thought he noticed the farmer glance at him in the bar mirror as he passed. He lit a cigarette as he went out the door and walked across the street to the car. He drove it down the block about a hundred feet and sat there and waited, his eyes on the door of the bar and grill.

He hadn't long to wait. First the man in overalls came out. He looked up and down the street, then walked along and suddenly turned into an alley. Tim heard

a car starting, and was surprised to see a big black job pull out of the alley into which the farmer had gone. It turned into the street and drove eastward out of the town.

It wasn't two hundred yards up the street when Tim turned at a noise beside him.

Travers was opening the door of the car. There was a quality in his voice that Tim hadn't heard before. It picked him up, set him on edge.

"Follow that guy. I think we fell into something."

Tim put the car into gear and Travers cautioned him, "Not too close. Take it easy. This might be the whole job dumped into our laps, if we're careful."

Tim stayed a discreet distance behind the other car as they went through the town.

He wanted to ask Travers where the hell they were going, what was in the wind. But he knew the other man would speak when he wanted to. Travers didn't disappoint him.

"That mug!" he said. "I was sure I'd seen that puss before. And trying to get away with a stunt like that!" He turned to Tim and asked, "You see that farmer?"

Tim nodded, and Travers asked, "Notice anything funny about him?"

"He was pretty dirty," Tim said.

"He was dirty, all right. He had on a lousy blue shirt, crummy overalls, and a hat you wouldn't put on a scarecrow—and *patent leather shoes!*"

"What!"

"You heard me, all right. Patent leather shoes. What a dummy. All rigged out like the real thing, and didn't bother to think about his shoes. He's not as smart as he's supposed to be."

"You recognized him?"

"Once I saw there was something phony, I did. His name is Joey Morelli. He's a tough gunman and he's supposed to be bright."



THEY were leaving the town, now, and Travers told Tim to put out the lights. The car ahead of them increased its speed, and Tim had his hands full staying on the unlighted road. One eye on the edge of the concrete, the other on the preceding car's tail-light, he listened to Travers.

"It's just what we thought it would be. A smart New York crowd makes the snatch, hides out in some deserted farmhouse. If we can keep on this guy's tail, we'll walk right into them."

For five miles the car kept to the main road, then it turned off at a concrete intersection and they followed as closely as they dared. The man they were following evidently had no idea that he was being tailed, for every time he slowed they stayed far in the rear.

In five minutes he turned off the concrete and went to his right on a dirt road that was apparently little used. Travers was consulting a detailed map of the region, and he spoke to Tim.

"Okay. Park the car by the side of the road here. From now on we do a little walking."

Tim drove under a group of trees and turned off the switch. He followed Travers out of the car, and the other man said, "This road only goes back for a little more than a mile. They're in here somewhere, probably in an old farmhouse. We'll take a look."

"And what are we going to do when we find them?" Tim asked. "Stick a gun in the window and start blowing them down?"

Travers looked at him, and Tim could feel the scorn in his glance. He could easily hear it in his voice.

"What do you think we ought to do?"

"Get some more men up here fast," Tim told him. "We could take this whole crowd without a shot being fired."

"Having a little trouble with your heart?"

"No, I'm not. I just don't see any need

for senseless killing when it could be avoided."

Tim thought Travers was going to answer him, but the agent just said, "Hell!" Then he turned and started up the road, and Tim followed him.

They found the house in a half hour, through a combination of patience and luck. They were stumbling along the weed-grown road, trying to keep their progress as silent as possible, when they both stopped as if by signal. They had both seen the same thing—a flash of light, off through the woods to the right, as if someone had opened a door and closed it quickly.

Tim barely heard Travers', "Come on!" but it was unnecessary. He was into the brush at the side of the road before the older agent, making his way toward the house.

They proceeded cautiously, and when they were within a hundred feet of the dim shape before them, Travers put his lips to Tim's ear.

"On your belly, kid. If they open that door again, we're sunk."

They couldn't see the features of the house, as yet, and didn't know just where the door was located. But they crept closer on their hands and knees, and in a moment they were able to make out details.

The house was an old, two-story affair. There were no shutters on the windows, but the inner shades had been drawn tightly. No light issued from the place, but as they crawled slowly closer, they could barely catch the sound of voices. They made their way to what they believed to be the kitchen window and crouched there, beneath the sill.

The window was up an inch or so from the bottom, to admit air, and through the tiny space, the conversation within came to them clearly.

A heavy voice said, "So you go down to that joint and nose around and don't



see anyone. What the hell did you go for in the first place? We've got plenty of liquor and all the food we need. You're always sticking your chin out."

"I get sick and tired of hanging around this dump," someone answered from across the room. "You guys ain't no vaudeville show. How long we gonna stay here?"

"Two days. You think you can stand it? An ad goes in a New York paper in the morning, and tomorrow the old gent is phoned and told to read it. He's to answer the following day, then we can pick up the marbles and get out of here."

"What about the guy upstairs?"

"When we blow we leave him here—with a hole in his head. He's seen all of us, and we've all had our pictures taken. He could pick us out in a minute. We get rid of him."

TIM glanced at Travers, then silently raised his eyes to the level of the opening in the window. They'd been right. This room was the kitchen. The furniture was old and battered, but it was well occupied. Five men were in the room. The one who had done most of the talking was at the head of a small table, an open bottle and half-filled glass set before him. Two men were seated on an old sofa against one wall. Another leaned negligently against the cupboard, and the fifth was the man they had seen in the town. He was leaning back, his feet crossed, his haunches resting against a sink.

Tim noticed in a glance that all were armed. Three of the men had shoulder holsters in plain view, and the other two told, by the bulges in their pockets, that they were well heeled. Tim felt a hand on his elbow and he relinquished his spot at the window to Travers.

When they were back in the brush, away from the house, Travers whispered, "It's Louis Goldman and some of his nice friends. You heard what they said.

They've got young Jackson upstairs now."

Tim thought he knew what was coming next, but he waited to hear it.

"Morelli was careless when he came back from that trip into town. He came in the back door and forgot to throw the bolt. It's wide open."

Tim said, "So what?"

"So we walk right in," Travers told him. "It'll be messy."

Tim eyed the man. "You just can't wait to use that gun, can you?" he asked. "You know damn well what we ought to do. One of us ought to stay here and watch this crowd, and the other go to town and use a telephone. We can have fifty men here by morning, and we can blanket the place. There won't be a chance that anything will slip. We'll get every one of them as clean as a whistle. And there'll be no mess. You know that's what we ought to do, but you've got an itchy finger."

Travers looked at him closely.

"We can do that. And while one of us is phoning, anything can happen. The guy who stays here can sneeze—just sneeze—and it's all over. Or one of those hopheads might get high and decide to bump the Jackson guy tonight, instead of waiting. Anything can happen. The thing to do is to go to work now."

Tim tried to contain himself as he said, "It's your way of going about it, but it's a lousy way—and you know it. All you need for this sort of thing is a strong stomach and a gunful of lead."

Travers said quickly, "You need a gunful of lead—and a bellyful of guts. You've got one, but not the other. You'd kill a snake if you saw one; why be squeamish about these lice?"

He had just finished talking when they heard a hoarse shout from the house. There was fear in the cry, and pain. Then a voice said,

"The guy don't like a hot foot! He ain't got no shoes on, but what the hell.



One match, and the guy yells likes he's been really burnt."

Then there was laughter, and finally someone said, "Come on down out of there and leave the guy alone."

Travers merely said, "And you want to make a phone call! Stay here, you gutless wonder."

He started to the house, and as he walked noiselessly, almost without motion, like a shadow, Tim saw him drawing the gun. He cursed deep in his throat and followed, and he was almost surprised to find his own .38 in his hand. The cry of the injured man had done something to him.

He didn't know just what Travers was going to do, but it shocked him when the man walked up the back porch, with Tim at his very heels, and quickly thrust the door open before him. They were in the kitchen before Tim had time to draw his breath.

The circle of faces pointed their way, and Travers said, his gun underlining the words,

"The party's over, gents. Don't do anything foolish."

The men in the room were all on their feet, and they looked like a circle of wolves about a campfire—urged on by hunger, restrained by fear. Travers said to Tim out of the side of his mouth.

"Take their guns, kid. Keep them between you and me."

Tim felt a tiny pulse throbbing in his throat, and somewhere within him a voice was crying insistently and thwartedly, "Why don't they make a break! Why doesn't one of them go for a gun!"

He tried to silence the voice, but he couldn't. He was just in the act of stepping in back of the nearest thug when the voice was answered.

**M**ORELLI made the first move. His hand was a streak of light as it moved towards his shoulder holster, and

the crashing report of Travers' gun was the cue for bedlam.

Subconsciously, his mind busy with other things, Tim's eyes saw the bullet hit low in Morelli's shoulder and the man started to fall.

Then it all happened very fast.

The man nearest Tim suddenly had a gun in his hand, but he didn't get a chance to use it. Tim's first shot took him squarely in the mouth and he went over backward. He saw Morelli on the floor, his gun bucking in his hand, and he snapped a shot at the man. It hit Morelli and the man went limp.

Something tugged at his sleeve, and he turned the gun four inches and pulled the trigger twice.

The man who had been leaning against the sink dropped his gun and clutched his chest, his mouth full of unintelligible throat sounds.

The two men near the sofa were firing at him and he turned in their direction. He aimed at the nearest man and pulled the trigger until the awful empty *click* clutched his stomach in a hard, cold hand. And at that moment there was a terrific impact just below his right knee, and he dropped to the floor.

He saw the man he'd been shooting, fold, then, and he saw something else. He saw Travers' body lying full length on the floor, blood streaming from the head.

The only other man in the room, even as he fell, threw another shot at him and reached out an arm. The lights went out and the room was crowded with death and with darkness.

**T**IM was on one knee, and his hands were wet in a puddle on the floor. He moved one of them a bit and his fingers touched steel. The fallen automatic scraped on the floor as he picked it up, and two red blobs of flame roared from the other side of the room. His left arm



jerked as lead bit in, but he raised his right arm steadily and fired twice.

The flame showed him the other man, crouched near the window, surprise and fear stamped on the paste-white face. The man fell through the window screaming, the next four bullets urging him onward. There was silence in the room.

He crawled to where he had seen the man reach for the switch, and his fumbling fingers brought back the light. He looked about him at the shambles and his eyes rebelled. He glanced toward Travers, and the man was making a weak attempt to sit up.

The older agent looked about him once, then his hand came up with the gun in it. His eyes were alive once more, and he saw Tim out of their corners. The gun flashed toward him, then lowered.

He grinned and said, "Hell, I'm getting lousy. I had first shot at that guy, and still he creased me."

He was addressing Tim, but indirectly. There was a certain amount of shame in his voice, and the apology was mingled with approval. He looked around the room and said,

"Some score—Deegan 5, Morelli 0."

He got to his feet on unsteady legs and walked to the phone, fastened on the wall. He said, "You hit bad, kid?"

"In the leg," Tim told him.

Travers lifted the receiver from the hook. He said, "Got to make a phone call. Might be a bit late. Should have done it five minutes ago, eh, kid?"

Tim looked about the room. Morelli was in the middle of the floor, and obviously there was no bone in the back of his neck. Beside him lay a man whose mouth was one of the open ends of a small tunnel through his head. Under the sink was a third, his dead hands still clutched to his chest. Sprawled over the sofa was the fourth, a gaping wound where his nose had been. Tim glanced at the smashed window, and one foot, caught in the corner of the pane, attested to the whereabouts of the fifth.

It was messy. It wasn't scientific and cold and law-like. It was all the things he hated and despised. The orderliness of his legally trained mind rebelled at what he saw. But another, larger part of him rejoiced wildly. He remembered the scream they had heard just before breaking into the place, and he suddenly looked about him again and laughed.

The laughter was full of satisfaction and a strange pride. He looked over at Travers and said, "You're not late with that phone call, Travers. Not a bit late. Any other time would have been much too soon."

And he meant it.



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# G-MAN'S GUN-MOTHER

*A Pulse-Jolting Novelette of Fed Gun Fury*

*Chick Traynor was only a mild-looking guy. But when Sally Martindale, society deb, got mixed up with a murder-gang—she found out that the F. B. I. turns out men with quiet manners but guns that can blast the lid off hell!*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Phone Call From Hell

SARAH MARTINDALE, Sally to her friends, was not what you'd call rich. But she had an inherited trust fund, which she couldn't touch, the in-

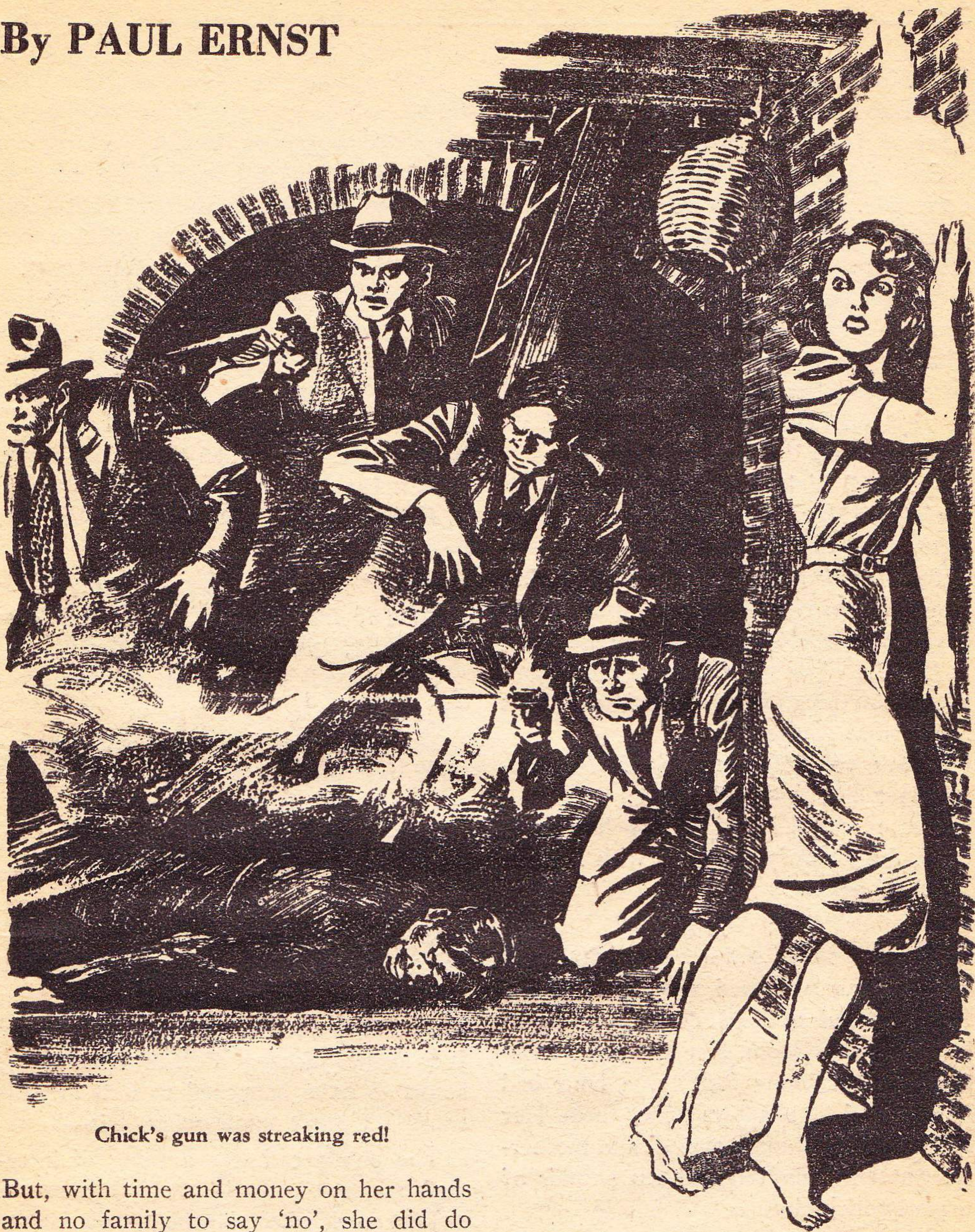
come of which gave her a nice little apartment, plenty for clothes, and a maid.

Sally was not so beautiful that she would stop crowds on Broadway. But she was quietly lovely in her twenty-two-year-old way, with red-brown hair and dark blue eyes that had a black rim to the pupils, and a small straight nose and creamy-smooth skin.

Sally was not what you'd call wild.



By PAUL ERNST



Chick's gun was streaking red!

But, with time and money on her hands and no family to say 'no', she did do some indiscreet things once in awhile. One of the indiscreet things was going around town one or two nights a week with the extremely good-looking but excessively slippery young gentleman, Jackson Perrot. She found that out on this gray winter morning when her phone rang at seven o'clock and her maid brought it to her in bed with the word that it was long distance, from Milwaukee, and that some man insisted on talking to her.

Sally Martindale blinked dark blue eyes, yawned, stretched creamy slim arms with a pale green negligee falling away at the shoulders, and took the phone. Next moment she was a scared small child huddling on a bed with a face as white as the snow outside on the window ledge.

"Look, you. I'm phoning about Jack Perrot," said the voice. "That handsome ham with the wavy black hair. The lad with the dimple in his chin and the come-



hither in his nice brown eyes. You'll keep your trap shut about him. See? No matter what happens, say nothing."

Sally stared at the phone. "I don't understand . . . Who are you? Where are you calling from? Why do you get in touch with me about Jack?"

"Look, you. I'm phoning about Jack because you've been trailin' with him. That's all you need to know. Just peep once about what he's told you—and you'll be next on the list."

"N-next on the list? I don't—"

"Look, I think maybe you'll be next on the list anyhow." The man's voice, purry, soft, was enough to send shivers down Sally's lovely back. "Yeah, I think that maybe if you try to run out on us, or tip anybody off, you'll get what Jack got."

"I . . . Whoever you are, Jack didn't tell me anything about—anything. I don't know what you're—"

"Look, you—stay put! See? One funny move outa you. . ."

There was a buzzing, the line went dead, Sally slowly hung up with lips the color of ashes.

**T**HAT was at seven. At eight, with breakfast untasted on the bed-tray, Sally walked up and down the silken-hung small bedroom. Her eyes were enormous in her white face. One hour had put faint violet shadows under them. Her maid, dark and anxious-eyed and motherly, was two hundred and ten pounds of urgent solicitude.

"What is it, honey-child? Tell Amandah. What's after you that's scared you so?"

"I'm phoning about Jack Perrot. Keep your trap shut about him!"

"Nothing's the matter, Mandy. I don't . . . feel very well, that's all."

Eight o'clock. *Keep your trap shut about him . . . no matter what happens!* But the purry, feline voice had added, "I think maybe you'll be next on the list."

Sally's father had been that John Martindale who had made three fortunes on the stock market by dazzling recklessness and had lost all but half of the third in the same way before dying. That John Martindale who had once said to old Jonas Horder, Wall Street emperor, "I'll buy when I please and sell when I please, and if you think you can break me, damn you, go ahead and try." That John Martindale who had died with his boots on, shooting two hold-up men and mortally wounding a third when they tried to get his fat bankroll in his garage one night. A brilliant, fighting, independent old boy, he'd been.

Some of John Martindale's look showed in his daughter's eyes at a little after eight. "Keep your trap shut!" But, "Maybe you'll be next on the list anyway. . ."

She picked up her phone. And her instructions made Amandah's eyes look all whites in her dark face.

"Operator. Give me the Chicago branch, or whatever it's called, of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Quick. I haven't time to look up the numb—Hello, Federal Bureau of Investigation? Will you please have one of your men come out to see me as soon as possible? It's about Jackson Perrot. Something seems to have happened to him in Milwaukee I don't know what, but—"

The phone call was a thing of interruptions.

Fast work when somebody calls for the local field office of the F.B.I. Operator had gotten the chief clerk before Sally could finish talking to her. The chief clerk in the field office had gotten her message and traced name and address from her number before she'd done much more than say 'Jackson Perrot.'

Fast work. But in less than ten minutes she found out why the F.B.I. worked fast.

There was a soft ring at her bell.



"You want I should answer, Miss Sally?"

"Yes, Mandy. It will be the men I phoned."

"Lawdy, the office of them G-men is miles from here. They couldn't be here so fast."

"Open the door, Mandy. It'll be them. . ." Sally shrank back against a small table, with a scream choked in her throat. The colored maid picked herself up slowly, painfully from the floor, where she had fallen after being hurled back against the wall.

Two men came into the apartment. One was as thin as a corpse and as white-faced. The other was a solid, chunky man with purplish-red cheeks who was stolidly chewing gum.

The white-faced man shut the door behind him, neatly and smoothly, and turned to Sally. She had never seen him before. But she knew his type, and why he was here. *You may be next on the list anyway. . .*

"This the dame, Fats?" the corpse-like man said. He said it as if he were sure enough of it, but wanted to hear some one else say so, too. As if he'd act with the corroboration, as a light goes on at the touch of a switch.

"Yeah, that's the doll," said the chunky, florid-faced man, stolidly chewing his gum. "I seen her with Jack lots of times. She can tell us what we want to know."

The white-faced man got out a gun. It was a .38, but to Sally it looked as big as something you put on a battleship's turret. She stared at the black muzzle, panting, hand at her throat.

"This joint ain't very sound-proof," said the chunky man, pausing in his gum-chewing for a moment.

"So what?" said the man who looked like something out of a tomb. "Did you come here expectin' to find her living in a bank vault? We'll be away from here before—"

Fast wheels clicking instantly into action when the spring is touched at an F.B.I. field office. Perfect coördination, fleet cars going at seventy through crowded traffic.

A voice at the door said diffidently, "We're in time, at that, Pedersen."

And another, harsher voice said, "All right, you two. Drop 'em, and turn slowly . . . It's Nick! Wanted in the Karl murder—"

A snarled curse and the flat bark from a .38 stopped the words. And then the small living-room seemed to rock with shots. One, two, four, many. . . .

On the floor lay the white-faced man called Nick. He lay very still, with a hole in his head and another two near his heart. Near him, Fats writhed on his side with his pudgy hands clutching at his protruding stomach. . .

**T**HE two men at the door came in. One was Detective Pedersen, six-feet-three, with a hard, bony face and steely, light blue eyes, and a pair of hands on him that made the gun in his right look like a toy. The other. . . .

Well, the other looked like a filing clerk who'd blundered by mistake into a scene of violence. He was small, about five-feet seven and quite slightly built. His shoulders drooped a bit, and his hands fumbled diffidently with a .45 that looked big enough to tip him over on his face by its sheer weight. He had an almost delicate-looking face, with pinkish cheeks. He peered through thick, rimless glasses, and with his left hand brushed back a strand of mouse-brown hair that had fallen over his forehead.

"I'm afraid another ten seconds delay might have been unfortunate," he said, in a dry, pedantic voice.

He was obviously no more than thirty, but the voice seemed to come from a professor of sixty.

Pedersen said nothing in reply. He



walked to Fats and kicked a near-by gun across the room. He looked with cool satisfaction at Nick, wanted for murder for the last four months. And then he strode solidly to Sally Martindale and caught her wrist.

Sally was looking with glazing eyes at one man dead and one man dying on her small neat floor. She looked up blankly at the bony, harsh face of the man who held her. The little, pale eyes in that face seemed to glint like small ice chunks with lights behind them.

"All right, we'll have a couple words with you . . . Hell!"

The mild-mannered little man with the glasses nodded to the cowering maid.

"Water, please," he said, then to Pedersen, "Naturally she fainted. Take these two out of here, will you, Pedersen? I'll talk to the girl when she comes around. . ."

**S**NOW on the window-ledge. Winter outside; ten above zero. Sally Martindale shuddered when she had come to and, under the mild small man's urging, drunk black coffee—shuddered as though the winter chill was right here in her warm small apartment.

"Miss Martindale, don't be so frightened. You're all right now."

She looked at him—diffident-seeming almost to the point of shyness, a bit round-shouldered, mild, with grayish eyes blinking through thick lenses. Like somebody's filing clerk, or a prim bank teller who had come by accident onto a stage set for blood and death.

"I'm Special Agent Albert Traynor," the man said quietly, "with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There wasn't much time to introduce myself before."

Sally stared at him. "*You* are a G-man?"

"Yes. Would you like a cigarette?"

He held a match for her, blinking. But Sally's laughter blew out the flame. It

was shrill, hysterical laughter, the kind you can't stop even when tears of nerve shock are streaming down your cheeks at the same time. Sally's eyes showed how she'd have like to stop laughing—she was a kind person.

"There, there," said G-man Traynor placidly. "Laugh if you want to. I don't look so very enormous, do I? But I've been with the F.B.I. for quite a long time. I can assure you it's quite safe for you to talk now."

A kindly, person, Sally. But she couldn't govern her eyes. They would insist on revealing her thoughts.

In a last extremity of fear, she had telephoned a service that made criminals tremble and honest men admire. She had gotten in touch with the world's finest and most fearless law-enforcement agency. And they had sent her—*this* man! She had expected a brawny-shouldered, ex-football halfback to walk into her door with the eyes of a hawk and the manner of a captain of Marines, and into her life came this—this hundred-and-thirty-pound little man with glittering glasses over nondescript gray eyes. Shots a moment ago, killing one gangster and dropping another to writhe in his tracks? Well, she knew who had fired them. They had come from the gun of the big detective, and not from the large automatic that had looked too heavy for this man.

She saw that he was reading her eyes and the hysterical tremor of her lips.

"I'm sorry," she breathed. "Really. . ."

"It's perfectly all right," said Bert Traynor, blinking a little. "Now, tell me all about it."

## CHAPTER TWO

### G-guns Shoot Fast

**S**HE had met him about six months ago. "A girl I knew very little introduced us one night at the St. Singer



Hotel, where I was having dinner with a friend," she said. "She just said his name was Jackson Perrot and he was from Chicago. The girl, by the way, was Doris Veelie. You may remember the name. She had a hideous thing happen to her a few months later. She was held up late at night in a car for her jewels, and then was shot down in cold blood afterwards."

G-man Traynor nodded silently. A look in his eyes indicated that he knew very much indeed about Doris Veelie. But he only said, "Go on, please."

Sally ground out her third cigarette, after having taken only a few nervous puffs. "Jack said he was in the advertising business—and I believed him for a little while. Then I noticed that he was free to meet me any time he pleased, and that he never seemed to keep office hours. He was good looking and he never tried to get too fresh. He took several of my friends out, after I'd introduced them. He asked me to marry him, a couple of times, but I only laughed at him. Because, after awhile I began to get a hunch about what he really was."

Sally stared at the attentive, quiet man sitting opposite her. Not much to look at—not the kind she'd expected to come in answer to a G-man summons—but he *was* easy to talk to.

"It was all my own fault. I'll admit that now," she said. "Several months ago I began to feel that there was something crooked about Jack Perrot. Several times, when we were out, tough-looking men acted as though they knew him pretty well. Once a man nodded for him to leave me, and then talked to him for a few minutes; and I learned afterwards that the man was a real gangster. His name is Mendell. You may have heard of him?"

Taynor nodded. "I've heard of him," he said solemnly.

"I also knew Jack carried a gun. I'd

felt it when I danced with him." Sally moistened her lips. "Now, after what has happened, I can't understand myself. I must have been crazy to have anything more to do with him when I began to suspect that he was playing around the fringe of the underworld."

"Perhaps you were a little . . . infatuated . . . with him," suggested the mild-looking little man opposite her.

"Not even a little bit," retorted Sally vigorously. "I guess it was because it gave me a thrill. Like some small town kid of twelve, I got a kick out of going around with a man who looked like a second-rate Valentino and carried a gun and knew notorious racketeers. He got anything he wanted in night clubs, and such places, too. I can see now that it was because proprietors and head waiters knew he had some racket connections. But I didn't quite know the answer then, and *that* was flattering—to be with a man who always got the best table and the best service, and had all the floor-show girls looking longingly at him."

"So you, a decent girl, from a decent family, went around with a smooth-talking racketeer," said Traynor quietly.

Pink spots showed over Sally's cheekbones for a moment, then paled again. She spread her hands.

"I did. And I more than half knew what I was doing, all the time. And now I'm paying for it."

"You may find out you haven't even started to pay for it," Traynor said quietly. "Any more to tell me?"

"Why, no. That's all."

"Didn't Perrot ever hint at just what his racket was?"

"He never said a single word to me that was out of line in any way," she said. "Though whoever called me up this morning at seven seemed sure he had told me . . . a lot of things."

"All right," Traynor said, with a trace of steel in his voice that made Sally stare



at him in quick surprise. "Now I'll tell you a few things. Jackson Perrot was in one of the filthiest rackets in town. Blackmailing. Next to kidnaping, that's the lowest of the low. And Perrot was an artist at it.

"Perrot worked for your 'notorious gangster' Chick Mendell—Who, by the way, is not just 'well known.' He is Public Enemy Number One of Chicago. Mendell has many rackets. Perrot was more or less first lieutenant of the blackmail division, specializing in wealthy women."

Sally was shaking her red-brown head, eyes wide and agonized. "Blackmail? It can't be! Not *that!* Why, I have a little money, and he never once tried anything with me."

"You served him in another way," shrugged Traynor. "You have said you introduced him to some friends of yours?"

"I—That's right."

"Think back. Every one of them was wealthy, wasn't she?"

"Oh, my God—yes."

"You see? You were an innocent go-between for him. He got some of his victims through you. That was enough. You probably hadn't enough real money at your command to be tempting yourself."

"What money I have is in a trust fund, not to be taken out," said Sally.

"So!" nodded G-man Traynor, looking at her through his thick, glittering glasses, like an accountant bringing a six-cent discrepancy in the accounts to the attention of a careless bookkeeper.

"But to have introduced friends to a man who bled them later . . . that's horrible!" whispered Sally. "I remember now, some of them seemed very nervous, afraid, at times later. But I didn't dream—"

"I CAN tell you something even more horrible," Traynor interrupted. "Your acquaintance, Doris Veelie, who

introduced you to Perrot in the first place, was not killed in a simple holdup. The gang got the idea that she knew too much about him. There was talk of a dictaphone record she'd had made of a threat of his, and of a visit to the district attorney. So she was gunned down by Mendell's men, who afterward took her jewelry to make it look like robbery."

Sally's hand crept to her throat again. "Murdered—through Jack?"

"That's right."

"And now—Mendell and his gang—think I know too much?"

"Yes. But it's worse than that. I'm going to speak freely because you deserve it—after letting yourself get tangled with a man like Perrot in the first place.

"Perrot was double-crossing Mendell. We've worked on the blackmail setup for some time, and we found that out. He was holding out thousands from every payment made by the women he victimized. Apparently Mendell found it out too, a little while ago. Perrot hid the loot in a safety-deposit box somewhere around Chicago, and started to leave for Canada. He got as far as Milwaukee when, at seven this morning, some of Mendell's gang caught up with him."

Sally was literally holding her breath, and staring with horror-stricken eyes at Traynor.

"They caught him in a hotel lobby," said Traynor. "He'd stopped his big roadster long enough to write a note, there. They killed him right in the lobby, cut him to pieces with a machine gun. Then they took the note he'd started, and raced away. Our men in Milwaukee got a few words of the note from the desk blotter. It was to some girl, and it started to say that she was to go to a certain person and get a key to a safe-deposit box—and that was all we could make out."

Sally looked as if she were going to faint again, but managed to hold on to herself.



"Your call for help a little while ago, cleared it up, of course," he went on. "Perrot, desperate, decided to trust you to get the contents of the vault box and send it to him to some address in Canada. Evidently your name, or at least the 'Sally' part, was in the beginning note. But *not* the name of the bank where he'd put the money he'd cheated from Mendell, or the name under which the box is held. So now you know the whole picture."

"I'm afraid I don't, quite. . . ." panted Sally.

"I think you do," he said. "But I'll make it entirely clear. It is obvious that Mendell thinks you were much more deeply involved with Perrot than you actually were. He thinks you know a great deal of Perrot's doings that are dangerous to him, Mendell. But far more than that, he is sure you know the whereabouts of the unknown thousands of dollars Perrot held out on him. So you are to be forced to tell where the money is—fast—and then you are to be killed so you can never talk."

"It—it isn't possible," whispered Sally. "Things like that don't happen—to girls like me."

"The two men Detective Pedersen and I interrupted a few minutes ago meant to do the trick. Half minute, while you were begging for your life, to wring the location of the safety-deposit box and the renter's name from you. Then a couple of shots and a getaway."

"But you got here first. They didn't do it. They won't try any more—"

"I think you know better than that, too," Traynor said, blinking mildly through thick glasses. "Mendell won't rest till he has silenced you. Particularly when he finds you've been talking to a special agent. Your life isn't worth—" he snapped his fingers—"that!" And he frowned.

"But if Mendell meant to just kill me

anyway, why did he phone this morning and warn me?"

Traynor peered thoughtfully through the thick glasses. "I don't think it was exactly a warning. He didn't know but what you knew all about Perrot's flight north. He didn't know but what you'd be expecting a wire or a phone call, and when you didn't get it, might be worried and leave town yourself. So he phoned the 'warning.' That was simply to frighten you to such an extent that you wouldn't dare set foot out of the building till a couple of his men had time to get here. Also so that you wouldn't get in touch with the police or the Federal Bureau—which, however, you did." Cool and calm and pedantic, his voice was.

And Sally looked at him in mounting terror. In deadly danger of her life—and the Federal authorities had seen fit to send a man like *this* to her. Why, he talked as if speaking of stolen candy to a naughty little girl.

"Please try to remember exactly what the man said over the phone this morning," Traynor said. "Word for word, if that's possible."

Sally said mechanically, "I can give it pretty nearly word for word, it scared me so." She repeated fairly exactly what the man had said.

"What was his voice like?"

"It was soft, the ugliest sound I've ever heard," Sally said with a shiver. "It wasn't the voice of either of the two who forced their way in here. It was almost like a cat purring."

"And he had the mannerism of saying, 'Look, you,' before most of his statements?" Traynor asked.

Sally nodded. "'Look you—I'm phoning about Jack Perrot . . . Look, you—you'd better stay put . . . Look, you, I'm phoning about Jack because you've been going with him,'" she quoted.

Then she caught at his arm. Under her distraction, she was a bit surprised,



in a corner of her brain, at the amount of arm there was to clutch. "What in the world am I going to do?"

"We'll have to guard you some way, for awhile. It would be safest to put you in a cell—"

"No, no, please! Not *that!*"

Traynor's lips pursed thoughtfully. It made him look more than ever like a prim bank teller. "I have a friend I might hide you with. And of course there would be at least one patrolman detailed to watch the house."

"A friend?" echoed Sally.

"Yes. A little old lady of nearly seventy. Quite a person."

Sally wet her dry lips. To be protected by a man who looked as if he ought to be teaching a junior Sunday school, and by an old woman of seventy! With all of Mendell's gang out after her!

"My God!"

"Oh, it would be all right," said Traynor calmly. "At least, it will be as 'all right' as you can expect to be anywhere under the circumstances. But I'll let you judge after you've seen the old lady."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Matron of Murder

**D**OWN in Washington, tabulating machines turned. Steel fingers delicately touched perforated cards, seeking just the right card with holes answering just the right pattern set.

A man with a soft, purry voice, and a mannerism of saying, "Look, you," before many of his statements. A man known to be connected with Chick Mendell, big-shot killer of Chicago. Swiftly the right card in the filing cabinets of the F.B.I. turned up.

"Robert 'Cat' Beatty," said an intelligent-eyed clerk. "That's our man. Who's the dope for?"

"Bert Traynor, Chicago," said the clerk

who had come to the vast filing-room with the telegram from the Chicago field office.

The other man pursed his lips in a whistle. "Little Bertie, eh? God help Cat Beatty!"

The man who had come with the wire was new.

"Who is the guy?"

"Who is Bertie Traynor?" was the answer. "You won't be around much longer without finding out. He's a half-pint of dynamite. He looks like a small edition of a deacon, wears thick glasses, talks as mildly as Caspar Milquetoast, and in general seems to be a man who wouldn't hurt a mosquito. But actually he's as fast as a mongoose, made of steel rope, and the second-best shot in the F.B.I. If I were 'Cat' Beatty, I'd rather have the entire Chicago police force right on my heels than have little Bertie even mildly interested in me! But you'd never think it to look at him!"

Traynor looked even more mild and diffident than usual as he helped Sally Martindale out of his car in front of a small frame house in northwest Chicago near Oak Park. From across the street and down the block a uniformed patrolman looked at them, then took up a slow walk to the corner and back. Already there was a police guard on this house.

"This is where I'm to stay?" Sally said doubtfully.

"This is where you're to stay," nodded Traynor, giving the bell a short, almost timid ring.

The door opened.

The house was a small, old-fashioned looking place. The person who opened the door matched it in appearance. Sally found herself staring down at a little old lady with white hair and a face that could be characterized as saintly. She had benevolent blue eyes that were remarkably clear and sharp without glasses, and stood with a little smile on her withered lips



and with her hands folded in front of her as if holding a hymn-book.

"This is the young lady you phoned about, Bertie?" she said. Her voice was high and tinkling and fragile, like her dainty person. She couldn't have weighed over eighty-five pounds, Sally decided.

"This is Sally Martindale," Traynor nodded. "Miss Martindale, Mrs. Wyke. If you were a bit older, Miss Martindale, and had had occasion to pass near this house some ten or twelve years ago, you'd remember Mrs. Wyke. She and Mr. Wyke, a man who looked even more angelic and pious than Mrs. Wyke does, used to sit on the porch rocking gently back and forth while the world passed. Such a sweet, old-fashioned picture. And all the time there was one of the biggest stills in west Chicago in the basement, and the house itself passed out more bottles than a good-sized liquor store does now. Then prohibition was repealed, and Mrs. Wyke settled down on a hundred and twenty-eight dollars and sixty-four cents a month, income from investments in bonds—without Mr. Wyke."

"Mr. Wyke shot one of Chick Mendell's men, the damned fool," the little old lady said in her tinkling fragile voice. "So of course Chickie sent three boys to shoot Mr. Wyke. Damn him to hell."

Sally gaped. She decided she didn't know whether she had heard correctly.

"Mary," Traynor said to the little old lady, "it's Chick who is after Miss Martindale now."

"My, my," said Mrs. Wyke. "She doesn't look like a moll."

"She isn't," said Traynor. "She is just a very indiscreet little girl who is going to be badly hurt if she can't be protected for the next few days. But it's a nasty job. I wouldn't think any the less of you if you didn't want to take it on."

Mrs. Wyke smiled sweetly. "Anything I can do against that — — —, Chick Mendell, suits me fine."

"How's your aim, honey?" Traynor said. "Can you still hit the side of a house?"

Mrs. Wyke shut the door behind them, and turned on a little light in the hall. The hall was about twenty-five feet long. Sally saw a picture at the far end of the hall, hung beside a door that was partly ajar to reveal a small, spotless kitchen. After a few seconds she recognized the picture. It was of Mendell. It had bullet holes in it.

"The right eye, Bertie," Mrs. Wyke said sweetly, gently.

She had a little .25 revolver in her hand, with a small cylinder protruding from the end. Sally gaped again. She hadn't the faintest notion from where the little old lady had got that silenced gun so fast.

There was a vicious little spat. The right eye of Chick Mendell's pictured face abruptly had a pupil four times too large. The little gun disappeared from Mrs. Wyke's veined, delicate little hand as suddenly.

Traynor nodded. "Very nice. But you can still back out of this—"

"Bertie," said the little old woman with the saintly face, "I'm nearly seventy. I've lived my life. It doesn't matter much to me if I go out of a life I have to live alone . . . since my damned fool husband got himself killed." She turned to the dazed girl, put her arm around her waist, and led her toward the stairs. "Come up, darling, I'll show you where you'll stay for the next few days."

Sally turned first to G-man Traynor, who was blinking mildly through thick glasses. "I—thank you. I don't know what more to say. . . ."

"That's plenty," said Traynor. He waved, diffidently, and went out.

"He's so . . . odd to be what he is," Sally said to Mrs. Wyke. "He seems so . . . frail."

Mrs. Wyke smiled her saintly smile



and patted at her neat white hair, parted in the middle. "Bertie? Frail?" she tinkled. "If he's frail, then so is an oak knot that's weathered in rain and storm for twenty years."

AT THE Chicago field office the chief clerk glanced up with a smile as Traynor came in. "Bertie," he said, using the somewhat belittling nickname by which Traynor was known from coast to coast, but using it very respectfully, "here's some stuff from Washington for you."

Traynor blinked through glittering, rimless glasses at the information wired from Washington.

"So Cat Beatty was the one who phoned the girl from Milwaukee," he mused, half aloud. "That means Cat was one of Jack Perrot's murderers. And probably he's detailed to kill the girl, if Mendell ever gets his hands on her."

"What?" said the chief clerk.

"Nothing," Traynor said. "Get headquarters on the phone for me, will you, please?"

He asked for Pedersen, and inquired as to the likeliest place to find Beatty.

"The Cat?" said Pedersen. "I haven't seen him around for awhile. And I don't know his latest hangout. But I can find out for you. . . ." His voice sounded again in a few minutes later. "You'd be most apt to find him at a dive on Rush Street called Stenkel's. It's a cigar store, with a bookie arrangement in back. He's usually there this time of day. Unless you have a job on."

"Thank you very much," said Traynor mildly.

Pedersen's voice took on a harshly anxious tone. You could fairly see him frowning down in the phone as he might have frowned down on Traynor personally had the little man been there.

"What're you aiming to do with the Cat, Bertie? He's pretty bad medicine."

"I just want a look at his gun," said Traynor. "A very simple thing to ask."

"Yeah? Well you might get a look at the wrong end of it. What's the lay?"

"The . . . er . . . lay is that one of the slugs in Perrot's body might have come from Cat's gun. You remember there were a couple in him besides the machine-gun bullets. I'll just bring him in on suspicion of extortion, and you can have ballistics check on it."

"You're going alone into Stenkel's joint and take the Cat out? Don't be a sap! There are always a bunch of the Cat's buddies hanging around. . . ."

"I think I can persuade him," murmured Traynor.

He got in his car and headed for Rush Street.

Stenkel's cigar store was the kind that has a few dusty boxes of cigars in a showcase but never sells any. Traynor knew the type well, though he hadn't been in this particular one before. He stared blandly at the heavy-set man with a pipe in his mouth who leaned across the counter on folded arms and stared bleakly back at him. He decided he had never seen Stenkel before, and took a chance that Stenkel had never seen him, either.

He wanted Cat Beatty, so, banking on his appearance as he had done many times, he simply asked for him.

"Mr. Beatty?" said the man with the pipe. "No, he ain't here. What you want with him?"

"I'm a bill collector," said Traynor, not bothering to add that the bill in question was one for murder and violence and was being collected for Uncle Sam.

A boy of sixteen or so came from the back room, stared at Traynor out of eyes old before their time in the ways of evil, and spat on the floor.

"You would be a bill collector," snapped Stenkel. "Well, Beatty ain't here."

"If you could please tell me where I



might find him? Perhaps I can catch him—"

The boy spoke up, jeering. "You got a fat chance of catchin' him. He went outa here in a big car, fast, with a couple pals—"

There was a crack as Stenkel's heavy hand caught him across the cheek and sent him ten feet back against the wall.

"Beat it!" he snarled at Traynor. "Where he went, and who he went with, how fast, ain't anybody's business. Lam, or you'll get one like the kid got for talkin' out of turn."

Traynor went, blinking in distress at the sight of violence—but with his brain clicking in high. He got in his car and went fast himself—toward Mrs. Wyke's house!

It couldn't be that Mendell had found out the girl's hiding place already, and sent men after her! It couldn't be! But he couldn't take chances. In a big car, fast, with a couple of pals. . . .

**I**T was a little after one when he got to the small old-fashioned house in west Chicago. He ran from car to steps, then stopped as he noticed that there was no patrolman in sight on the block. He pounded at the door. There was no answer. He didn't pound twice. The top half of the door had a frosted-glass panel in it. He broke the glass, reached in to turn the key in the lock, and ran into the front hall.

The cop was there, lying on the floor with a puddle of blood around his head. He was breathing harshly, unevenly, as a man does with a broken skull. Beyond him was a tough-looking customer Traynor had never seen before. He was dead, with a hole from a small-caliber bullet so exactly centered in his forehead that it seemed to have been marked there with calipers.

Traynor stepped over him, toward a doorway at the rear of the hall.

"Help . . . please. . . ." came a faint voice from there.

Traynor ran in. Mrs. Wyke lay on the floor of the small room. Near her, dropped from a nervous, fragile hand, was her silenced gun. She was ghastly pale.

"Oh, you, Bertie," she whispered. "Well, they did it."

"Mendell?" said Traynor, kneeling beside her.

She nodded a little. "I'm getting old," she whispered. "There was a knock . . . I saw a bull's cap through the frosted glass and opened the door. They shoved in, and knocked the cop out. I got one of them, and one got me. Guess I'm a goner, Bertie."

"And they left with the girl!"

"Yes. . . . Bertie, I was on the inside in Chicago a long time. I may know things even the F.B.I. don't. I think I . . . know where they might have taken her."

Traynor leaned close. He could hardly hear the frail old voice.

"One of two places Chick's used for a long time for his . . . fireworks, Bertie. Garage at Wismer Crossroads, and a falling-down old ice-house on Fox River. Two miles up from St. Charles . . . I'm so sorry, Bertie."

"Anybody might have fallen for the trick, honey," he told her. "They had the cop knock, at the point of a gun, and you opened. Doctor?"

"Bleeker . . . three doors down."

"Phone?"

"In . . . the . . . hall. . . ." The delicate, tinkling voice was stilled.

Traynor jumped to the hall phone, and got the field office. "Traynor talking. Get men to the garage at a place called Wismer Crossroads. More men go to an ice-house two miles up Fox River from St. Charles. Mendell's gang. They've got Sarah Martindale."

He hurdled the bodies of the slain gangster and the badly wounded patrolman on his way to the door, cut across



lawns to leave word with Doctor Bleeker three doors down to run to the Wyke house, then slammed into his car.

Of the two places listed he chose the ice-house. The Wismer place was south; men from the field office could get there from the loop as fast as he could from the west side. The ice-house, on the other hand, was almost due west. He could get *there* half an hour before men from the field office.

Of course, if that was the place selected by Mendell and the Cat, his arrival half an hour before reinforcements could show up might be extremely embarrassing. But Traynor didn't waste time on that thought. He thought only of a girl's face, animated and lovely—and then of how that face could look after Sally had been banged around for information she couldn't give, and then shot.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### F. B. I. Finish—for Killers

**I**T was such an important business that Mendell himself was there. Which meant that it was *very* important—or that Mendell thought so—because he didn't mix in much with actual work himself any more.

However, Sally Martindale didn't know the full significance of the presence of Chicago's Number One Enemy. She wouldn't have cared if she had known. She was too terrified, too desperate, to think of anything but Sally Martindale.

She sat on a broken straight-backed chair in the center of a dim space so vast that it looked like a cave. Cavelike, too, was the roof, leaking occasional slits of winter daylight, far overhead.

Cat Beatty, slim and feral, immaculate and deadly, stood in front of Sally. To one side Mendell, black-eyed and stocky and silent, smoked a cigar while he watched. There was a red mark on the

girl's right cheek, and a blue bruise on her left wrist.

"I tell you, Jackson Perrot told me nothing," Sally said desperately. "Nothing at all. I didn't even know what he was mixed up in until—" She stopped frantically, but it was too late.

"Until you opened wide up to the Feds," nodded the Cat. His hand lashed out. Sally's head rocked, and a red flame spread into being on her left cheek. "Talk, I say."

Mendell smoked his cigar in coldly thoughtful little puffs and stared with heavy-lidded black eyes.

"There's nothing to tell. . . ."

"Perrot was writin' you where to get the dough he held out. That shows he was close enough with you. He was crossing us with you as well as with the cash. Now—what bank's the money in? What name did he use? Who has the box key he started to tell you to get?"

"Oh," moaned Sally. "I don't know. I tell you I don't know a thing!"

She stopped as the Cat's hand came up again. But he didn't strike her. He looked at Mendell.

"We ought to get out of here fast. If the G-boys are in on it, and 'specially that guy Traynor, they might smell it out and pay us a call. Want to try this any more?"

"A little," said Mendell, smoking his cigar in calm small puffs. "Take her shoes and stockings off."

"*No!*" The exclamation broke into a scream which stopped as Cat Beatty lunged for her. "I *swear* I don't know anything! Won't you believe me?"

They all heard it: a scraping sound from the far end of the old ice-house. Then a man's voice, "Got you! Walk to where the rest are. *Move!*"

Cat stood with Sally's right shoe in his hand. Mendell had stopped smoking his cigar and was staring with level, heavy-lidded eyes at the man he had posted at



the ice-house door—and at that man's captive, a little man with a diffident air and with nondescript grayish eyes that blinked at them mildly.

"Dear me," said the man, "what are you doing with that girl?"

Mendell's voice was very still and even. "What are you doing in here?"

"I had a flat tire near here and it seems I have no jack," said the man. "I came in thinking I might find a beam to lever up the car with. A long one, with a good fulcrum, would do it. I didn't know there was any one in the place till this man spoke to me—and pointed a gun at me," he added perplexedly.

Beatty was staring at him.

"Seems to me I've seen that guy's face, Chick," he said.

It didn't matter. Mendell's slow look was a death warrant. But he wasn't done feeling around yet. "So you came in for a beam to pry your car up with," he said. "You're sure that's all?"

"Of course. What *are* you doing to that girl? I don't like the looks of this. I don't at all."

"Yeah, I've seen him before," said the Cat, eyes burning, yet with wrinkles in his low forehead. "Now where? And how was it different?"

SALLY stared, panting, wordless, at the three men—one with a gun in his hand—and at the lone small figure that had blundered in among them. A G-man! Well, even a boy-scout should have known better than to fall into a place like this. Now they would both die. She didn't know, of course, of the men speeding toward the place and only about twenty minutes away, now. She didn't know of an effort, deliberately made, to stall death till that twenty minutes could pass.

"I wonder if you gentlemen would mind helping me with my car?" Sally heard the little man's meek voice. "Or

perhaps you'd loan me a jack? I see you have a car outside."

"Is he nuts or blind?" rasped the man holding the gun.

"Neither," purred Beatty in his soft, deadly voice. "Yeah, I've seen him. And it's bad, him bein' here. But I can't . . . quite . . . spot him . . . yet. . . ."

He had his gun out, forehead wrinkled, eyes murderously puzzled. Sally moaned a little. Mendell whirled toward her.

"Know him, Snow-White?" he said, lips barely moving with the words. "Who is he?"

Sally was never to give the fumbling negative her lips were shaping. The Cat snarled suddenly.

"Glasses! That's what's different. He ain't wearing 'em. But it's him. The Fed, Chick Traynor! Burn him, d—"

Sally was never afterward able to tell coherently what happened. At one instant Traynor was standing, blinking at the three like a puzzled boy, at the next he wasn't there at all. Then she spotted him two yards to the left lying in the straw on the floor with a gun in each hand that seemed far too heavy for him to hold. Both guns were streaking red, as were the guns in the hands of Chick and the man who'd been on the door. After that she lost Traynor again even though she had been looking right at him. Some of that was due to the dimness of the huge, windowless place, and some was due to the fact that Traynor was moving faster than even a small man should be able to move.

The Cat was down, and his face was something for a girl to avoid seeing. Mendell was on one knee, with red coming from his right arm and with his left hand jabbing forward with a gun in it. The man from the door was firing again and again at the leaping, shifting shape that was Traynor.

Just flashes . . . of a face that had been mild and was now like something cut out



of ice—of eyes that had been mild and nondescript behind thick lenses and were now like gray steel, of guns roaring. . . .

Flashes . . . of the man from the door throwing up his hands and going down with a bullet in the middle of the face much the same way Cat had gotten hit; of Traynor dropping his right-hand gun as his shoulder jerked back and then began smearing his coat with blood; of the gun in his left barking once more; of Mendell seeming to lie down slowly, with a sigh, like a man who is suddenly very tired.

Then there was silence that seemed to ring more loudly in the echoing ice-house than the shots had. Silence, and Traynor putting away the gun he still held, mechanically, and in the same manner fumbling till he brought thick-lensed, rimless glasses from his breast pocket. Silence—till Sally's sobbing laugh rang out.

"You don't have to p-put them on. I know now that you don't have to wear them. You just do it to look harmless and t-timid."

Traynor dropped the glasses. He felt at his shoulder, and crimson covered his exploring hand.

"You're hurt! Oh. . . ."

Sally shook the hysterics and flew to his side. He was on his knees when she got there, looking up at her.

"Your shoulder. . . ."

His head was on her lap, and most of her dress was padding his shoulder, when the men from the field office got there and collected the pieces. . . .

AS frail as an oak knot that has weathered in storm and wind for twenty years, Mrs. Wyke had described him to Sally. He wandered into the old lady's room at the hospital late next afternoon with his arm in a sling, and a little pale around the mouth, but otherwise all right. He stared at her, and then cornered the doctor.

"She'll live," the doctor said. "She ought to be dead right now. But she'll live—to be a hundred, I guess." His tone was almost aggrieved. "Seventy years old—and she can pull through an abdominal wound! It isn't possible! But she's doing it. . . ."

And old Mrs. Wyke, fragile, saintly looking, with a face like wax on the white pillow, confirmed it herself a few days later. "The good die young, Bertie. I'll live—to be with you when that nice Martindale moll marries you."

"She's not a moll. . . . What on earth are you talking about? She isn't going to marry me."

"Oh, yes she is, Bertie. I can tell, the way she looks at you," said the old woman.

"You're crazy! A G-man shouldn't marry anybody. And anyhow, she has too much sense—"

The little old lady smiled and looked more fragile than ever.

"Besides she has money and I haven't. And also—but there isn't even any use talking about it. It's a joke."

Mrs. Wyke folded veined old hands and smiled more broadly.

"I wouldn't marry her even if you were right. I don't want to marry anybody. Do you hear?"

Bertie Traynor's face was no longer disarmingly mild and diffident looking. He scowled at Mrs. Wyke and took off his glasses as if to impress his determination more firmly on her with bared eyes.

The little old lady's laugh tinkled out in feeble amusement.

Traynor listened.

"You'll find out," she said, looking saintly and frail and old, "Mr. Wyke didn't want to marry me, but he did a little while after I began looking at him the way Sally is at you. And I don't think he was ever sorry about it, damn his soul to hell—and may he rest in peace!"



# QUALIFICATIONS and TRAINING FOR THE F. B. I.

AS RELEASED BY  
J. EDGAR HOOVER

## Introduction

This is the fifth of a series of articles based on material provided by J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and dealing with the training and education of a G-man. In preceding articles we have shown the manner in which the F. B. I. personnel is selected—unquestionably the most exacting examination applied to applicants in any law-enforcement organization throughout the world. In this article we shall show you how the Bureau staff works *after* it has become a part of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There has been so much false information broadcast about the activities of Uncle Sam's master man-hunters that we realize our readers will welcome this authoritative account of what *actually* goes on in the F. B. I.—the facts supplied by Mr. Hoover himself.

THE EDITORS

**A**S WE all know, field work is not in any way the sole job of the G-man. Behind his courage and ability stands the silent, smooth-running, powerful machinery of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Even if the field prowess of the Special Agent had never blazed in glory across the public vision, the F.B.I. identification system would still be famed. Its extensive fingerprint archives today remain one of the marvels of the law-enforcement world.

In conducting its identification work, the Federal Bureau of Identification is essentially a coöperative organization and can furnish to contributing law-enforcement agencies only that information which it receives from them. The assistance of the police, sheriffs, wardens, state identification bureaus and similar agencies has been very gratifying. But despite the splendid results which have been accomplished, it is felt that this Bureau can render even more effective service when it receives all the fingerprint records which law-enforcement officials are in a position to furnish. It is obvious that even better service can be given by the Bureau as its records become more complete. All peace officers are therefore invited to make the fullest possible use of this coöperative project.

Fingerprint records prove of value in determining if applicants for positions under the Civil Service of the Federal, State, county or municipal governments have a previous record on file which might show the applicant is not a proper character to receive the appointment. Applicant fingerprints, however, are only searched through the Bureau's criminal files when submitted by law-enforcement agencies.

"Wanted Notices" are one of the functions of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Law-enforcement officials, seeking the apprehension of fugitives, follow the practice of notifying the Bureau to this effect, whereupon "wanted" notices are posted on the fingerprint records in the Identification Division. If the individuals involved should subsequently be arrested elsewhere on other charges and their fingerprints taken and forwarded to the Bureau, the officials who placed the "wanted" notices are immediately apprised of the fact, either by air mail, special delivery or telegraph. Over five hundred fugitives from justice are located monthly through fingerprint comparison.

In March, 1932, the international exchange of fingerprint records was begun. This service not only provides a means for furnishing a subject's complete crimi-



nal history for assistance of prosecuting attorneys, judges and parole officials in their respective activities, but is also of the utmost importance as a medium whereby persons who are wanted in a country, other than that in which they are arrested, may be identified as fugitives.

The exchange of fingerprints is now carried on with eighty-one foreign countries, colonies, and territorial possessions of the United States, and the fingerprints of persons arrested will be sent upon request of the contributing law-enforcement agencies.

In addition, the Bureau maintains a separate collection of fingerprints of kidnapers, bank robbers, extortionists, and other notorious criminals, which are filed, each finger singly. This collection is an auxiliary to the main file and is used primarily for the purpose of identifying latent fingerprints left at the scenes of crimes by kidnapers, bank robbers and extortionists. Unless latent fingerprints of such offenders are those of the individuals whose separate impressions are filed in the finger-print collection, it is difficult for the Bureau to identify the latent prints. However, if the names or aliases of any suspects are furnished the Bureau, together with descriptive information, then the actual prints may be compared with the latent impressions and thus it may be possible to establish an identification.

The latest feature of the Identification Division is its civil identification section in which are filed the fingerprints of law-abiding citizens. The fingerprints of many distinguished people are included in this collection. By having his fingerprints on file in the civil identification section, the citizen can insure his identity being re-established should disaster or accident happen to him.

When other means fail, missing persons can be located and amnesia and aphasia victims can be identified through

fingerprints if their prints are on this file. Victims of wrecks, fires, earthquakes or other disasters may also be identified through fingerprints, when their identity is otherwise unascertainable. In cases of kidnaping, it is of assistance to the investigating officials to have available the fingerprints of the victim. These are but a few of the purposes which may be served by having one's fingerprints on file in the Bureau's civilian identification section. All citizens are invited to place their prints in record in these files which are kept entirely separate from those in the criminal file.

In the latter part of the year 1932 the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, established a Technical Laboratory to perform work of a scientific character, which might prove of assistance in its investigative cases. Previously, it had been customary in instances considered desirable for the Bureau to have technical experts outside its organization make scientific analyses. The importance and growth of this phase of the Bureau's investigative activity and the desirability of having the work under its close supervision, led to the conclusion that the establishment of a Technical Laboratory was essential. The development of this laboratory has been carefully planned by the Bureau with the assistance and advice of known and recognized authorities in the field of scientific endeavor.

At present, examinations are made in the laboratory of documents or letters to determine the identity of the handwriting appearing thereon, as well as any other information which may prove helpful in the investigation of the case—facilitated by the use of precision rulers, a synchriscope, binocular magnifiers, micrometer calipers, color charts, and special apparatus for ultra-violet light and infra-red sources.

In addition, comparison microscopes, a



helixometer and special photographic equipment are used in the important phase of the scientific work relating to the examination of bullets and exploded shells.

Reproducing by moulage or other methods is another feature which the laboratory is equipped to undertake. This consists of the marking of casts of objects of evidence or of parts of the human body for record purposes. Microanalyses of hair and textile fibers are likewise considered an essential and important part of the technical duties, and chemical analyses of stains, including blood tests, are performed from time to time. Spectrographic and spectrometer apparatus is available and X-ray equipment is in use.

Also among the equipment of the laboratory are reference collections of automobile tire-tread designs, various types and sizes of bullets and cartridge cases of both American and foreign manufacture, a fiber file of animal and vegetable fibers, a collection of handwriting specimens of many criminals, and so on.

Besides conducting technical investigations in current cases, the technicians at the Bureau Laboratory engage in research to develop new techniques for the solution of crime and to study methods and practices in use by police departments to effect constructive improvements.

The facilities of the Technical Laboratory are available to all law-enforcement agencies without charge. In transmitting evidence to the laboratory for the purpose of having it examined, it should be labeled "Evidence for the laboratory."

Each month the Federal Bureau of Investigation issues a publication entitled "The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin," which is sent to all law-enforcement officials who contribute fingerprints to its Identification Division. This publication lists the names, aliases, descriptions, fingerprint classifications and a reproduction of one finger impression of wanted fugi-

tives in aggravated state crimes, together with the names and addresses of law-enforcement agencies to be notified in the event the fugitives are located. The bulletin is also used as a medium for the dissemination of scientific information of interest to peace officers and as a forum for the expression of ideas furthering cooperation and crime detection.

More than 2,300 police departments throughout the United States, representing a population area of over 65,000,000 make monthly and annual reports to the Bureau. In addition, reports are received from more than 1,100 sheriff's offices, state police organizations, and agencies in possessions of the United States. The total number of participating law-enforcement agencies is 3,431, and they forward reports concerning offenses known and offenses cleared by arrest, and the number of persons held for prosecution. This information, together with data compiled from the fingerprint cards received in the Bureau, makes possible the collection of comparable crime statistics on a nation-wide scale.

In July, 1935, the FBI National Police Academy was begun. Thus, for the first time, the type of instruction and training offered to Special Agents was made available to local, municipal, county and state law-enforcement agencies.

The course pursued by these officers is of three months' duration, covering administrative features of police work, discussion and consideration of every-day police problems, and practical training in the performance of enforcement duties. The course is free, the only cost to those attending being transportation and living expenses while in Washington. Those officers attending are selected representatives under forty-six years of age.

Is it any wonder that the old reign of the Underworld is slipping, now that the G-men have established such a machine for Justice!



# NO FUNERALS FOR

*Bitter Fate drove Special Agent Trent's sweetheart to woo him into Death's close embrace, instead of her own. But Trent picked his own way to die!*



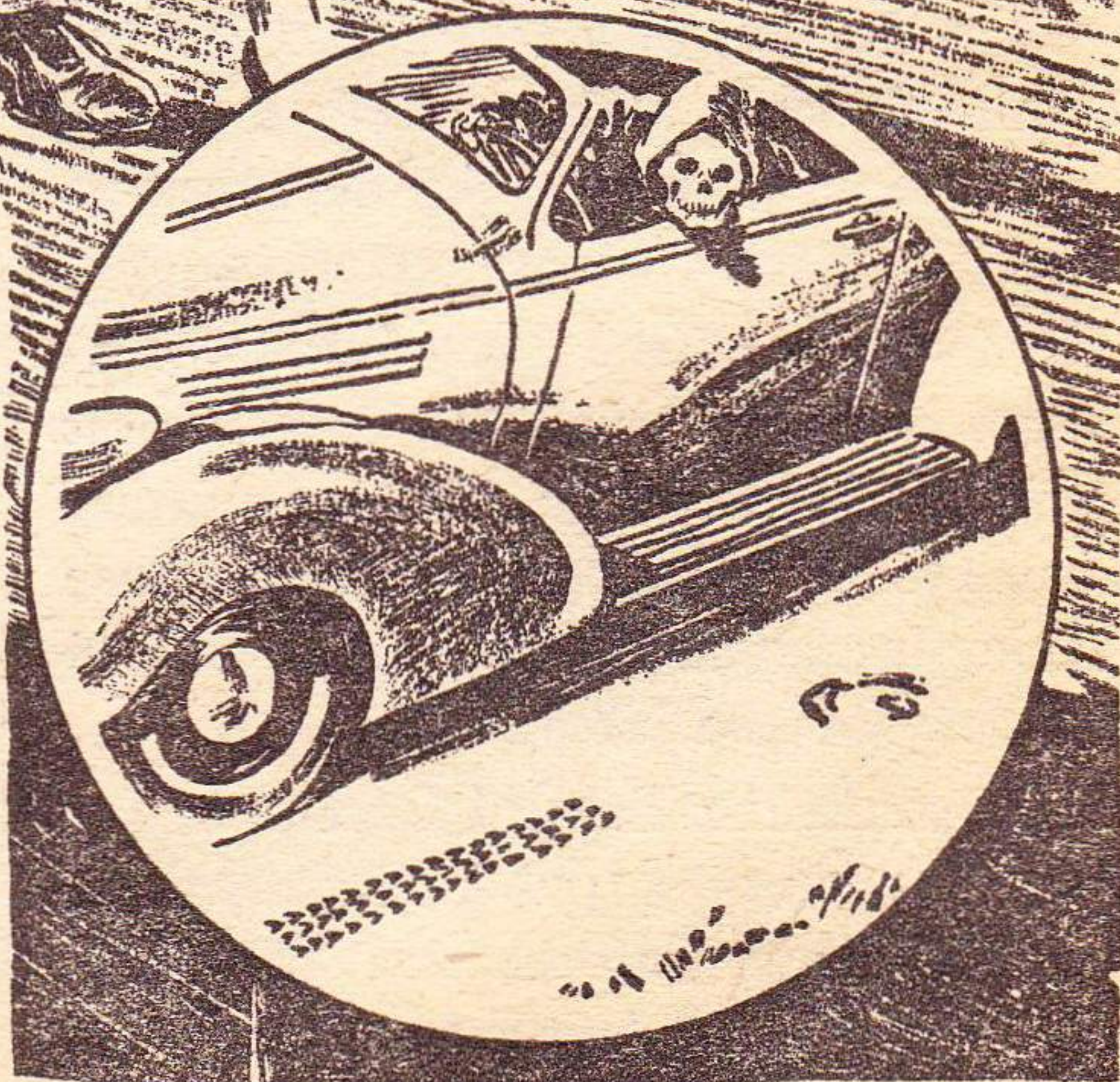
## CHAPTER ONE

### Too Young to Kill

**T**HE brakeman strode through the chair coach, bawling, "Garden City! Next stop, Garden City!" There was the usual bustle among passengers in the half-filled car to get off the train.

The lean young man with the steel-drill eyes and steel-trap chin, glanced at the swart, sullen youth slouched in the rear seat beside him, and said, "Put on your hat and straighten your tie, Rocky. We're coming into Garden City."

The youth laughed softly, sneeringly.



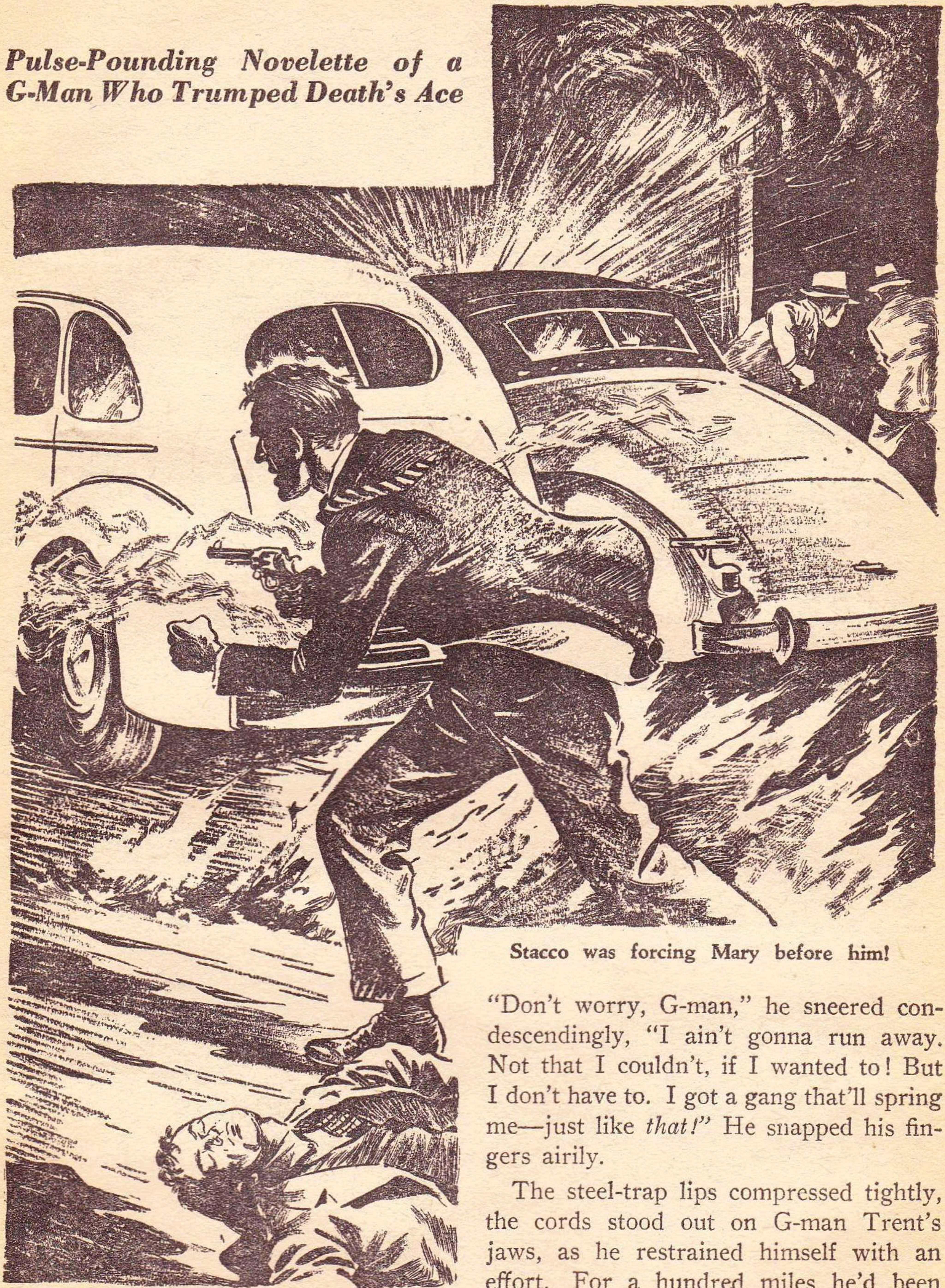
"How'd you figure it out, G-man? Are all G-men as smart as you?" He adjusted his hat jauntily, extended his wrists in a mocking gesture. "Better put the nippers on me, Boy Scout, for I'm liable



# FEDS

By Dale DeV. Kier

*Pulse-Pounding Novelette of a G-Man Who Trumped Death's Ace*



Stacco was forcing Mary before him!

"Don't worry, G-man," he sneered condescendingly, "I ain't gonna run away. Not that I couldn't, if I wanted to! But I don't have to. I got a gang that'll spring me—just like *that!*" He snapped his fingers airily.

The steel-trap lips compressed tightly, the cords stood out on G-man Trent's jaws, as he restrained himself with an effort. For a hundred miles he'd been enduring the youth's jibes. He couldn't shut him up. That is, he couldn't resort to physical measures—not a G-man in custody of a sixteen-year-old boy. Recourse to friendly lectures, and a stern

to slug you and—" Then he stopped.

"Shut up!" snapped G-man Walter Trent.

"Ha . . . ha . . . ha!" laughed the youth, and slouched back in his seat.



demand for respect for law and the peace of others availed nothing. So he'd tried to ignore the youth. But Rocky Drexel wouldn't be ignored. He was aware of his captor's discomfort, and basked with hoodlum pride in the attention he drew from the rest of the car, as he jeered at the law and boasted.

For any other G-man, it would have been merely a routine assignment. Rocky Drexel was no criminal of note. The police in a nearby city had arrested the youth in possession of a car, stolen several states away, which made his offense a Federal one. It was his second offense, too. The F.B.I. had been trying for months to crack a "phantom" car-theft ring, whose loot was running into millions. The district chief of the F.B.I. had requested custody, and G-man Trent was returning the youth to the field office for questioning. Just a routine job, surely. But not for G-man Trent. That wasn't the half of it. He'd lived through a dozen hells, as he cursed the fate that sent him to bring in the youth.

The train slowed perceptibly, and rust-colored buildings and cars on sidings flickered past. Rocky Drexel again laughed sneeringly. "The old home town!"

"Yeah," said Trent softly, "the old home town."

"I guess their eyes'll stick out when they learn Rocky Drexel's wanted by the G-men!" boasted the youth. "Not that it fazes me!" he added quickly, "but most of these saps think you G-men are hot stuff!" He sneered. "They'll change their minds when they find out that even *you're* one! And to think my Sis used to be nuts about you. Dumb copper!"

Trent's face colored a bit and his eyes showed his agony. He looked at the youth with a pitying shake of his head. Rocky Drexel would have been a pleasant, clean-cut chap, if it were not for his sullen, defiant demeanor. Trent would

never have believed that such a few years could change the mischievous youngster he had known into the misguided young hoodlum who now sat beside him. An average small-town youth of respectable family. . . Trent hated to think about it.

THE train wheezed into the station, and debarking passengers filed toward the door. Trent followed the youth, keeping a grip on his arm. "We've got a two-hour stop-over for our next train, Rocky," he said quietly. "For old times sake, and everybody concerned, I'll put you on your honor, if you'll—"

"Ha . . . ha . . . ha!" The youth raised his voice for benefit of the passengers. "Never mind the Boy Scout hokum, G-man. I don't *have* to run away. My gang'll take care of me. Better watch out," he added with youthful arrogance. "Remember the Kansas City station massacre!"

People looked about in the aisle, white-faced, crowded with alarm toward the door. A woman cried out hysterically.

Trent's fingers clenched the youth's arm, made him cringe with pain. "You little fool!" he grated. "One more word, and I'll break it off!" He called out reassuringly, "Take it easy, folks. There's nothing to get excited about."

Trent and his prisoner followed the debarking passengers onto the car platform and down the steps. Trent produced handcuffs, clicked one cuff about the youth's wrist, the other about his own. "I hate to do this, Rocky," he said shortly. "But I can't trust you. If you'll keep your arm down at your side—"

"Nuts!" sneered the youth, and swung his arm so that the steel chain and bracelet glistened in the evening sunlight. He raised his voice angrily, "When do we eat, G-man?"

Trent gritted his teeth, glanced quickly about the station platform. Garden City was not such a large town but what every-



body knew nearly everybody else. Trent hoped to pass unnoticed, unrecognized. But Rocky Drexel was taking full advantage of public attention and swaggered with hoodlum pride. People turned to stare. The G-man's keen ears heard low exclamations of, "There's Rocky Drexel!" and "There's Jim Drexel's boy, with an officer!" Trent pulled his hat down low and hurried toward the station lunch-room.

They hadn't quite reached the door when Trent heard a rush of light footsteps behind them, his prisoner was jerked about, and a girl's throaty cry rose, "Oh, Rocky!"

Trent flinched, at sound of the voice, turned slowly and faced the girl, who clasped the youth tightly. The G-man's bronzed features reddened a bit, and cords tightened in his throat, seeming to stifle him.

"Mary!" he said huskily.

SHE looked like a girl who would be called Mary, wearing a flowery print dress and a wide-brimmed white hat, beneath which golden curls hung in clusters, framing a soft, oval face set with level blue eyes.

Rocky Drexel pushed her away, muttered, "Cut it out!" and stood scowling darkly.

"But Rocky!" Her blue eyes glistened with tears, her voice softly pleading. Then her gaze caught the chain, and his manacled wrist, seemed to follow as though magnetized, to Walter Trent's wrists, up his arm, to meet the G-man's eyes.

Trent's face grew redder, and he thought he would choke. Of everything in the world that could happen, this was the one thing he had hoped to avoid.

There was no recognition in Mary Drexel's eyes, as she exclaimed, coolly indignant, "Is it necessary that you hound my brother—drag him around shackled like a common criminal?"

Trent spoke with an effort. "I'm sorry, Mary."

"Sorry?" Her stare was unrelenting. "Is that justification for your humiliating—your brutal treatment of children! Rocky's had a hard time!" she exclaimed passionately. "Everybody in this town will tell you that! It's men like you—the police—who make boys criminals!" She looked away, then, placed an arm protectively about the youth's shoulders.

Trent's face whitened a bit. "You're hardly fair, Mary," he said shortly. "It's too often the respectable, unworldly people in towns like this who contribute toward making boys criminals!"

Her eyes flashed again. "At least we give them a chance—"

"A chance to become public enemies!" snapped Trent. "Do you know that every public enemy of note in the last few years, with one exception, have been small-town boys with good American names, who the kindly people of the communities gave chance after chance, babied and coddled and—"

"I didn't come for a lecture," said Mary Drexel, "or to debate a subject about which I know nothing, and about which you are fanatic."

"That's the trouble," said Trent grimly. "You people who are really hurt by this sort of thing take no interest in what causes it, till your kid gets in a jam. Then you want things patched up. Rocky isn't a criminal—of course he isn't. But," he added bluntly, "he's got all the makings of one, if it isn't taken out of him now!"

"Ha . . . ha . . . ha! Save that for a Boy Scout lecture!" sneered the youth. "Wait till my gang springs me. I'll show you!"

"Rocky!" exclaimed the girl. She flashed the G-man an embarrassed, lowering glance. "I'm sorry, Walter," she murmured. "Please don't let's quarrel . . . again."



Again? Trent looked away. His voice was not quite steady, as he said, "Of course not, Mary." His eyes seemed to fight their way, of their own volition, to the girl's gloved hand on her brother's shoulder. He stared fixedly.

"Would it be asking too much, to bring Rocky to the house while you're waiting for your train?" she said.

Trent shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't, Mary."

"But, Walter!" Her voice sounded suddenly agitated. "You must! That is, well, we counted on seeing Rocky." Her gaze was frankly appealing.

"I'm not authorized to take him out there," explained Trent. "Couldn't your father come—"

"Father's sick," she said quickly. "And you have two hours, Walter. I'll drive you both ways, and—"

"I don't wanta see the old man!" growled Rocky. "Why ain't he workin'—"

Trent was looking at her curiously. "How did you know we were on this train, Mary? And how did you know we have a two-hour stop-over?"

She started slightly, looked a little confused. Then her blue eyes met his frankly. "Why, I don't know. I just came down." She gave a tuneless little laugh. "I should know the train schedules, shouldn't I?"

For seconds their eyes locked, the G-man's plainly puzzled.

"Won't you, Walter? *Please?*" she said.

He hesitated, and a frown crossed his face. Then he said, "Very well."

Trent followed her to her roadster, almost dragging the reluctant Rocky. They got in, Rocky slouched sullenly between them, and the girl sent her car spinning through town, then the residential sector and headed into the westering sun.

Trent was still frowning. For the more he thought about it, the more it seemed

that Mary Drexel had not been at all surprised to see him. As though she expected him. . . And she had evaded his question as to how she knew he was bringing her brother in on that train. That was what puzzled Trent. For G-men do not advertise their activities, and he had not even told the police in the city which train he was taking. . .

HE SAT meditatively watching by-gone familiar scenes flit past. "The old town's changed, Mary," he finally remarked, looking at her at last, his face thoughtful.

"I suppose you do notice it," the girl answered. She paused. "After seven years."

"But it looks dead as ever," added Trent, "and I'm sure glad I got out." His troubled gaze again fixed on her gloved hand on the wheel. "However," he said, carefully casual, "I suppose there are certain persons who will always make their fortunes in Garden City."

"I suppose so," she answered, her cool tones matching his own. "You've followed your star, and—"

"Yeah," sneered Rocky. "Now he's a great big G-man."

The girl looked at the youth with quick reproof, flashed Trent a hurt look of apology. She turned off the pavement, then, exclaimed with relief, "Well, here we are!" She drove down a straightaway drive that led to a vine-clustered cottage.

She parked on the drive at the end of the porch. Trent stared, almost rudely, as she tugged off her gloves. And then he got out, feeling somehow greatly relieved—and yet greatly disturbed.

Mary Drexel flashed a glance at the handcuffs, said, "*Please!* And will you wait out here, Walter? You understand. I'll be responsible for Rocky—"

"I told this Boy Scout I wasn't gonna run away!" exclaimed the youth arrogantly.



Trent unlocked the cuffs. "All right, Mary," he said. "I trust you."

The girl flashed him a wan smile, murmured, "Thanks," and she and the boy crossed the porch and went in, closing the door after them.

Trent sauntered to the porch swing and sat down. He relaxed, and in a few minutes was swinging drowsily in the late evening shade. And memories flooded his mind. . . .

He'd occupied this same swing many times, years ago. That was the summer he was just out of school, and had worked at the sawmill. He and Mary had been "that way about each other." Then the mill folded, and he was out of a job. There weren't any jobs in Garden City—none that encouraged an ambitious youth to matrimony. Trent wanted to get out in the world; Mary wanted him to stay in Garden City. They had quarreled. She had made a few uncomplimentary comparisons between Trent and Alva McCabe, the town's fair-haired son. So Trent left town. And since he was an orphan, he had not corresponded with anyone in Garden City.

He had worked his way through law school, then passed the rigorous requirements of the F.B.I. But now he was returning in a role that added fresh wounds to his still aching heart—a G-man in custody of the only girl's brother. . . .

He had feared Mary Drexel was engaged to Alva McCabe. He couldn't ask her, couldn't let her know he still cared. But he knew now she wasn't, for she wore no ring. That made him feel relieved . . . and oddly disturbed.

It was McCabe to whom he had alluded when he had mentioned that certain people would always make money in Garden City. McCabe made it—or rather his father and grandfather had made it for him. The McCabes owned the mill where Trent had worked. That summer, Alva McCabe, several years Trent's senior,

had been blossoming forth as a "business executive." Which meant he was a gentleman of leisure and man-about-town. Trent wondered vaguely how the McCabe fortune had fared, since the mill closed down, wondered if the mill were still closed, if . . .

He was almost drowsing, lost in reveries, pleasant and bitter, and in consequence did not hear the stealthy steps that crept up behind him.

A fist thrust through the foliage back of his head, gripping a Colt revolver. The arm raised slowly upward, as far as the matted foliage would allow. Trent leaned lazily back, unsuspecting.

And then the gun crashed down hard, above the G-man's ear.

He ceased to wonder about anything at all. . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

### G-Trail to Hell

**H**IS head hurt frightfully, and there was a ringing in his ears. He moved, and fell off the porch swing flat on his face. That shook him to full consciousness. He got to his knees, shaking his head groggily, fingered the swelling ache over his ear. He must have got an awful wallop, he thought—to stretch him out cold on that swing. His mind cleared with a rush, as he realized it was dusk. He looked at his wristwatch. Seven o'clock. He had missed his train! And Rocky Drexel—*What about him?*

He scrambled to his feet, felt for his pistol. It was still there. Grim-faced, he dragged it out and rushed into the house.

The interior was almost dark. He called hoarsely, "Mary!" No answer.

He switched on the lights, ran through to the kitchen, to the bedrooms. He looked everywhere—in the bathroom, the pantry, clothes closets. The house was deserted.

He came back into the front room,



his aching head all a-muddle. What had happened? Where was Rocky? Where was Mary?

Then he was aware that all the ringing wasn't in his head. The phone was shrilling at him. He picked it up, called, "Hello."

A man's voice said, "Hello, Alva? Thought I'd better give Mary a ring. We had a machine breakdown, and may have to work a couple of hours yet. You tell her, Alva. Good-by."

Trent replaced the receiver fumblingly, stood staring, perplexed. So Alva McCabe must mean something to Mary, if her father took it for granted McCabe was there. If her father. . . .

He stiffened, muttered a terse exclamation. Mary's father was supposed to have been home—*sick!*

Trent leaned weakly against the table, trying to marshal his rioting thoughts. It was Mary's father he had talked to, all right. The voice was familiar enough. But Jim Drexel apparently hadn't been home at all. *Mary Drexel had lied!*

Trent rubbed his aching head, bewildered and angry. She had lied to him, so he would bring Rocky out here and—and *what?* She had acted strange enough, he remembered. And he had thought there was something queer about *how* she knew they were on that train. But what did it mean?

Agony wrenched at his heart and soul. It meant he had been deliberately tricked by the girl he had trusted. Tricked, so that Rocky Drexel, a young criminal in the making, could escape! Was that her idea of giving her little hoodlum brother another chance?

He groaned with bitter despair. It meant, too, that he was through as a G-man!

The steel-trap jaws clamped and his steel-drill eyes hardened. Make a sucker out of him, had they? All right. Maybe he was through as a G-man. But Mary

Drexel and Rocky wouldn't get away with it—not if he had to go to hell and back!

He raced for the door.

THE roadster was still parked by the end of the porch. He eyed it, surprised. How had they gotten away without taking it? Then he saw the crushed hedge along the drive, both before and behind the roadster. The garage doors stood open. The doors had been closed, upon their arrival. It looked as if a car had come out of the garage, whipped around the roadster, and departed.

He studied the ground where the bushes were broken. Yes, it had been done by a car, all right. The tracks in the dirt drive were plain. They showed a figure-eight tread mark.

He stared frowningly. But whose car had it been—McCabe's?

He walked toward the open garage doors, and his eyes fell on another design. It was a half-circle, drawn in the dust to one side, as if with a stick or the toe of a shoe.

He stared, stood gazing down at the marks. Fresh memories flooded his splitting brain, tugged at his aching heart-strings. His thoughts leaped again to that summer he had worked at the mill when he and Mary had been so happy. There was a big tree near the mill where they often had met—just as many girls and boys do. And as most kid lovers have, they had a "code" by which they communicated. The half-circle represented the sky, and the position of the sun, or stars, indicated the time they could meet, morning, noon, evening, or night.

And now Trent was looking at one of those old signs, with the smaller circle representing the sun placed at sundown!

The confusion of his thoughts only increased. The only thing that was clear was that the sign was there, and had



been freshly marked. It could only mean that Mary Drexel wanted him to come to the mill at sundown—*now!* But wait. . . .

His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Rocky Drexel had often carried their messages back and forth. No doubt he had deciphered the code. Was this message left by Rocky—or by Mary? If by Mary, was it an appeal for help? If by Rocky, was it a jeer and a trap thought up by his warping little mind?

Trent ran for the roadster. He whipped the car out of the drive, sent it roaring down the river highway. His face was grim, and the pain in his heart was worse than the pain in his head.

**I**T WAS about four miles to the river, but seemed a hundred. At last he came within view of the bridge. A new inter-state free bridge—one of the first of the WPA projects about which he recalled reading. The mill set back half a mile off the highway, this side of the river.

Instinctively he turned off, braked to a sudden stop. He must have made a mistake. For ahead loomed a small oil station, set inconspicuously back among the trees. It was new, too. He turned on his lights, saw that the mill road led past the oil station. But the road was barred by a gate.

He drove the car to the gate and got out, glanced at the apparently deserted oil station. The gate was locked with a chain and padlock. There was no fence around the mill property, but the narrow road offered the only approach for a car. He'd have to go on, afoot.

He started around the gate, saw a man approaching from the oil station. He called, "Hello. I was going in to the mill."

The man came nearer. He was tall and gangling, with batlike ears and close-set bulging eyes, and he wore the grease-smear'd garb of an oil-station attendant.

He growled, "Nobody allowed."

"Apparently not," said Trent. "But you see, I used to work here, and I know the man who owns it. I thought I'd go in—"

"Nobody allowed!" again said the man harshly, and eyed the G-man as if with suspicion.

Trent was surreptitiously studying the man, too. His manner was almost belligerent, which was unusual, at least, for an oil-station employee. Then Trent spied the tire tracks near the gate. The figure-eight tread!

He said tersely, "You don't happen to be the watchman here, do you?"

The man started perceptibly. "Meanin' what?" he snapped.

"I thought you might have the key," said Trent.

"Listen, guy!" The man's manner became threatening. "I said nobody goes in. Savvy? Now scram!"

Their eyes clashed, the G-man's grimly quizzical, the other's angry, defiant.

"Okay," said Trent lightly, and got back in the roadster.

He swung out of the drive to the highway, turning back in the direction from which he had come. He drove slowly, but his thoughts were racing.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Heat Is On!

**W**HAT did it mean—the mill road barred? It had never been barred before. And what about the oil-station attendant? The oil station was innocent enough, but the bat-eared man hadn't acted like a bonafide attendant. He seemed only determined in keeping Trent from passing the gate . . . like a guard!

Trent's jaws set grimly, a determined glint filling his eyes. He thought of that code message back there in the dust, and the figure-eight tread marks that led



through the gate. He had to get in there!

He drove for half-a-mile—until out of sight of the oil station. Then he pulled to the side of the road, stopped, turned off his lights and got out. He tested his pocket flash, made sure his Colt .45 in its shoulder holster was ready for use. Then he made his way afoot down the highway toward the river.

Dusk was merging with night as he approached within a couple of hundred yards of the oil station, cut in and picked his way through the brush. It was plenty rough going—especially so because of the almost stygian darkness among the great trees, and the fact that Trent deemed it unwise to use his light. Past the gate, he worked his way toward the road, striking it about midway between the gate and the mill. He shielded his light and inspected the roadway. Then he straightened with grim satisfaction.

The car with the figure-eight treads had gone in there, all right!

He moved at a rapid pace toward the mill. The trees thinned, and he came out in a clearing at the edge of the river.

The mill was a long, rambling frame structure, extending out over a backwash. This was to facilitate the handling of logs, as they were usually floated in to the mill. The outer end was a boat-loading pier for finished lumber. The premises seemed eerily isolated amongst the trees and the black, sluggish river, dimly gloomy and death-like. Croaking of frogs and the sigh of the pines droned mournfully through the sultry night air. The mill was silent and dark, except for a light that shone through a window about midway the building. That would be the mill boss' office.

Trent crept toward the front of the building. He made out three cars, parked in darkness nearby. In the deeper darkness near the mill entrance he saw a man, moving slowly to and fro—a man who carried a tommy-gun!

Quickly, cautiously, Trent retreated, stood tight-lipped and grim at the edge of the clearing. So in addition to the barred roadway, watched by the oil-station lookout, a machine-gunner guarded the mill!

**T**HE steel-drill eyes grew hard, glinted thoughtfully. What did it mean? What was the connection between what had happened at the Drexel home, the car with the figure-eight tread, and this heavily guarded old mill? The steel-trap jaws clicked determinedly. He intended to find out!

He considered sneaking up and overpowering the guard—then rejected the idea. Not only would chances of success be slim, but the guard might also raise an alarm if attacked. He wondered how many more armed men were around. . .

Then he noticed the light bobbing out on the river, coming toward the boat-loading pier. And on the pier showed other lights. Trent slipped along the mill toward the river. He came to the water's edge, but he wasn't near enough to see what was going on on the pier. But the bobbing light was a boat, coming nearer, for now he heard the sputter of motors.

He was almost directly under the lighted window that shone in the mill boss' office. The office was a cracker-box affair, built out from the side of the mill-building proper. It was about twenty feet over Trent's head, for the piling supports began with the slope of the river bank. Along the side of the mill was a cat-walk, extending from the office both ways. Its purpose had been to give the office force freer access to all parts of the building.

Trent considered going back to the front and coming out on the cat-walk. But if the guard spotted him, he'd be fairly trapped. He would also have to pass the lighted windows, too.



And yet the cat-walk seemed his only chance.

He unbuckled his holster, hanging it about his neck so that his pistol dangled against his throat. Holding his flashlight, he stepped off into water and waded toward the pilings beyond the office.

The water wasn't deep, he knew. But it was stagnant and unhealthy smelling. He shuddered with discomfort, as slime oozed about him, but kept right on wading. It was sloshing under his armpits, when he reached the piling he sought. He wrapped his arms about it and began pulling.

He didn't think he could make it. For at water's level the pilings were slick and slimy, and he had to depend entirely on the pull of his arms. But at last he dragged himself clear of the river, locked his legs round the piling. He pocketed his flashlight, made certain his pistol was secure and dry, and climbed on. He reached the cat-walk, pulled himself up on it.

He was between the office and the pier-end of the mill, and the jutting office shack shielded him from view of the front guard. He took a few restful breaths, and guiding himself by the side of the building made his way along the ledge toward the pier.

He reached the end of the building proper, where the pier joined, and stopped. If he went on, he'd have no concealment, except darkness. He could see well enough where he was.

The incoming tugboat had a lighter in tow. The lighter was a large box-like contraption, used for short hauls of general cargo. A half-dozen men were busy in the glare of electric lanterns, opening the lighter's hatches—making ready to load, for the lighter rode high in the water, empty.

Trent peered into the open outer-end of the mill. He could see only dimly in the gloomy interior. But as his eyes

focused, he stiffened, caught his breath sharply.

The mill was packed with automobiles! Instant suspicion flooded his brain, and his pulse quickened.

A light flared within the mill, almost blinding him. He jerked back and stood still, scarcely breathing. But there rose no cry of alarm. He relaxed. He hadn't been seen.

Footsteps came clumping up the pier. He ventured a cautious look, saw a stumpy, unshaven man in the garb of a boat captain—clearly revealed in the bright light that still flared from within. Trent craned his neck and looked after the man as he entered the mill.

The boat captain stopped, spoke to a man who was standing with his back toward Trent. "Boss here yet?" he growled.

The man straightened, holding a blow-torch in one hand, a tool of some sort in the other.

"Yeah," he replied. "Up in the office. He's okayed all these buggies but this one—I'm touchin' it up to go. You can start loadin' any time."

"I'll size up the load," said the captain, and stalked on into the mill. The man with the blow-torch bent back over the engine and began tinkering.

The G-man's pulse raced with excitement. His suspicions were confirmed. Car thieves! The man with the blow-torch was "touching up" the engine number, of course! Trent wrestled with his immediate problem, forgot all else. What to do now?

He glanced at the half-dozen men working out on the pier, thought of the machine-gun-armed guard out front. And he wondered grimly how many more of them there might be? Their boss—he was in the office, was he?

Trent drew back, turned and felt his way carefully along the cat-walk toward the lighted office.



## CHAPTER FOUR

## Lair of the Lawless

HE APPROACHED a window on the pier-side of the office. He saw three figures in the dusty, unfurnished room, lighted by an oil lantern placed on one of the bookshelves built against the far wall. A burly, hard-faced man stood to Trent's left, near the door that opened into the mill. Beside him stood a flashily dressed blond young man, with that contented-cow look of one who had never had anything to do—and had done it. It was Alva McCabe! Across the room from this pair, near the door opening onto the catwalk, stood a swart, dapper, hard-eyed, little man puffing nervously on a cigarette. Trent caught his breath sharply, and again his pulse raced. Alex Stacco! Gambler, politician, big shot, for whom the F.B.I. had long been gunning!

So Stacco was the boss of the car-theft ring!

And then a fourth figure stepped into Trent's view from where he had been standing with his back toward Trent near the window. It was Rocky Drexel!

Evidently Rocky had been talking, for now he said, "That's about all I said to the G-man, boss." His voice came plainly through the warped wall-boarding.

"About all?" snapped Stacco.

"Sure!" drawled the youth. He lit a cigarette with a flourish. "Don't worry—he didn't get anything out of me. I told him I'd be taken care of."

Stacco said tonelessly, "So you told him that?"

"Sure! You know—just telling him where he got off."

Stacco ground his cigarette under his heel. His tone was crisp. "You pulled a dumb job, Rocky, gettin' pinched in that out-of-state car. You rung the G-men in on this. I can fix you boys with the cops, but I can't fix a G-rap!"

"But you have fixed it, boss. I'm sprung, ain't I?"

"You're hot!" snapped Stacco. "And—" his voice dropped, softly sinister—"I'm still wonderin' how much you did tell that G-man, Rocky."

"What do you mean?" blustered the youth, with an injured air. "You ain't afraid of *me* talkin'?"

Stacco smiled coldly and nonchalantly produced a little revolver. "No, Rocky," he said, in a tone that was meant to carry assurance. "I'm not afraid of you talking." He began adjusting a silencer.

The mill door opened and the tugboat captain came in. He growled a greeting, then asked, "What's the orders?"

"Same as before!" snapped Stacco. "Tie up alongside that ship at New Orleans and load direct. This shipment goes to South America."

"Did you fix the river cops?" asked the captain.

"What about 'em?" grunted the hard-faced man by the door.

Stacco smiled thinly. "They wanted to inspect the skipper's cargo, last trip, Jeff."

"But I convinced 'em I was carryin' lumber," grunted the captain.

"Which was true," said Stacco dryly. "And as long as they don't know that beneath that lumber is fifty grand worth of hot buggies. . ." He laughed mirthlessly. "If you snowed 'em last trip, it ain't likely they'll bother you again. After all, this mill shipped legitimate cargo for years. Go ahead."

The tugboat skipper left. Stacco resumed toying with the little revolver, adjusting the silencer.

Trent's thoughts were leaping. The whole scheme was clear, now. The car-theft ring was a juvenile crime organization, fostered by Stacco! Young boys, who were hoodlum worshipers, lured by easy money, easily led, and easily freed when arrested by police in cities where



Stacco held power. And McCabe? Trent wondered how he had become involved. Easy money, again, probably. Stacco had spotted the closed mill as a perfect set-up. Cars stolen in the state across the river, run here where they were free of local police interference, disguised, and shipped down river by the boat load and out to foreign ports. That was their game!

Stacco turned to the vapid-looking McCabe and said: "Bring the girl here."

McCabe went out.

The girl! Trent started, his thoughts grimly bitter. She was working with McCabe, too, and her hoodlum brother! What a sweet little community affair!

Still watching Stacco, Trent snapped suddenly taut. Stacco had completed adjusting the silencer. He hefted the gun, his eyes glittering. He repeated, "No, Rocky, I'm not afraid of you talking."

Trent caught his breath, glanced at Rocky, slouched by the near wall, cigarette dangling from his lips. Jeff was sidling away from the youth. Trent choked back a cry. My God! Didn't Rocky realize it—the little fool! Stacco had made it plain the youth was in a tight jam. Trent well knew the ways of the underworld, when a pal who knew too much got "hot."

*Stacco was going to kill Rocky!*

Stacco still stood by the cat-walk door. He deliberately raised the silenced gun. Still Rocky paid no heed, was looking toward the other door.

Trent dragged his .45 from its holster at his throat. But he hesitated to shoot—or shout. He was thinking of the machine-gun-armed guard out front and of the numerous hoodlums on the pier. He was hopelessly out-numbered. But he had to do something—*quick!*

**H**E LEAPED around the corner of the office and reached for the knob of the cat-walk door. He remembered that

the door had never been locked, in its misshapen frame. He prayed it would open now, as he twisted the knob and lunged.

The door bowed in from the top, stuck momentarily, then buckled open. It crashed against Stacco, knocked him sprawling. Jeff yelled and grabbed for his gun. Trent skidded to a halt, jerked his .45 and snapped, "Up!"

Jeff's arms went up. Stacco was getting to his knees, mouthing curses. He had dropped his revolver, well out of reach.

Rocky was staring pop-eyed. He cried sneeringly, "The G-man!"

Trent leaped quickly back, commanding, "Line up!"

Looking sullen and dazed, Jeff moved obediently alongside his boss. Stacco looked equally bewildered, and furious. His swart, ratty face was twisted with blind rage.

Still keeping an eye on Rocky on the flank, Trent produced handcuffs from his belt, ordered Jeff and Stacco, "Put out your hands!" He stepped forward to snap on the cuffs.

A voice rasped from the mill door, "Elevate, guy, or I'll drill you!"

Trent froze. A smirking smile overspread Stacco's ratty face. Rocky shouted exultantly.

"Reach!" snarled the voice.

Trent slowly raised his arms, turned his head.

The bat-eared oil-station man stood in the mill doorway, covering him.

Trent sized up the situation at a glance. He still held his .45, and his arms were not yet fully extended. He'd shoot it out!

But then just behind and beside the bat-eared man appeared Alva McCabe and Mary Drexel! Where the girl stood, she was right in line of fire!

Trent groaned inwardly, and the split-second he took debating, decided it. Rocky Drexel leaped at him from the side,



grabbed his gun arm. Trent saw him coming, could have shot him. But he didn't. And then Rocky was clinging onto his arm.

It was too late, then. Trent allowed his pistol to drop. Jeff seized his arms from behind. He offered no resistance.

Rocky snatched up the G-man's .45, waved it triumphantly. "How's that, boss?" he boasted. "Pretty neat, eh?"

Stacco's little eyes glittered venomously, as he retrieved his own gun, snatched the .45 from Rocky.

The bat-eared man growled, "I come in to report this bird trying to crash the gate, boss. I reckon it's lucky—"

"How'd he get here?" snarled Stacco.

"He had a roadster," said the bat-eared man.

"I mean who tipped him off!" Stacco glared at Rocky.

"You don't think *I* told him?" protested the youth.

"No!" grated Stacco through his teeth. "You didn't tell him!" His fingers tightened about the silenced revolver, and Trent saw the mad killer-glint in his eyes.

"We've known about all this for some time, Stacco," he lied quickly.

Stacco turned on him viciously. "Then somebody's talked!" he snarled. "Who was it?"

Jeff had released his hold on the G-man, stepped aside, pulled his gun. Trent drew a deep breath, stared levelly at the trio of gangsters. McCabe and the girl stood just within the doorway. McCabe looked blank, as usual. So did the girl. Trent looked at Rocky, met his sneer with a pitying shake of his head.

"Who tipped you?" snarled Stacco, and jabbed his gun in Trent's ribs.

Trent looked again at the girl, and his thin smile was bitter. Her blank, innocent stare didn't fool him. She had worked with the gang. She'd lied to him, and tricked him. Rocky's manner showed that

he hadn't left the code message. It'd been the girl. Had she intended to trap him, as well—because he was trapped. But if he told Stacco the truth, it would be hard to tell what reprisal the maddened little killer might exact of the girl. He said nothing.

Stacco snapped, "Get a torch, and a couple of the boys."

Jeff went out. In a minute he was back. He carried a flaming blowtorch, and was followed by a couple of hoodlums. Before Trent fully comprehended their intentions, Stacco ordered, "Grab him!"

THE two hoodlums seized the G-man by either arm, dragged him back to the wall. The bat-eared man holstered his pistol, grabbed Trent around the knees. Stacco coolly pocketed the G-man's automatic, covering him with the silenced revolver. "For the last time!" he snarled, "who tipped you, G-man?"

The steel-drill eyes bored through the little gangster, flickered to the girl, who was still staring bewilderedly—to Rocky Drexel, who stood puffing a cigarette and watching with a smirking smile of enjoyment. The steel-trap jaws snapped tight.

Stacco stepped back, said coldly, "Work on him."

Jeff ripped open Trent's shirt. He brought up the blowtorch, aimed the lancing flame at the G-man's bared chest.

Trent jerked back, but was held helplessly against the wall, weighed down by the three men who gripped him. Sweat seeped over the G-man's face in great drops. His lips grew thinly white.

Jeff grinned crookedly, pushing the stabbing hot flame forward. . .

Mary Drexel screamed.

McCabe clapped a hand over her mouth, held her struggling.

Trent jerked like a worm on a hook. Cords bulged in his jaws and neck, and



his eyes grew glazed, stared unseeingly. Then there rose the nauseating stench of scorching flesh. . .

Finally Jeff pulled the torch back, still grinning. Trent blinked his eyes into focus.

Alva McCabe was lowering the girl to the floor. She had fainted. Rocky Drexel was fumbling with a fresh cigarette. His hands shook and he looked sick.

Stacco snarled, "Well?"

Trent gritted his teeth. Again Jeff raised the flame.

Stacco said, "Hold it. The punk ain't gonna talk. Maybe he come along, but he may be stalling for time. We got to get the stuff loaded, clear out—and get rid of *these* punks."

The three men released Trent, and he sagged in agony against the wall. Jeff leveled his gun. "Shall I let him have it, boss?"

"You know killin' a G-man that way is poison!" snapped Stacco. "Why do you think I went to all the trouble. . ." He paused, glanced at Rocky Drexel, at the unconscious girl. "You say this G-man's got a roadster?"

The bat-eared man nodded. "He must have parked down the road a ways."

"Must be the girl's car," murmured McCabe. "We left it at the house."

"The girl drove this G-man and the kid out from the station, didn't she?" demanded Stacco.

McCabe nodded.

"Find that car!" Stacco ordered Bat.

"What for?" asked Jeff.

Stacco smiled craftily. "The three of 'em were last seen in that car, weren't they? If they're killed in a smash-up along the river road. . . Get it? The set-up is perfect. We get rid of the three of 'em, and stay in the clear."

Bat rushed from the room.

McCabe asked meekly, "What do you mean, the three of 'em?"

"That's what I wanta know?" blurted Rocky, and swaggered toward Stacco. "What's the idea?"

Stacco said coldly, "You and this girl and this G-man are goin' for a ride!"

"Ride?" The youth gulped, and terror leaped in his eyes.

McCabe's vapid face sagged. "Not that! You didn't tell me that, Stacco. You said you only wanted Rocky."

"Why, you poor sap," snapped Stacco, "I told you I couldn't fix a Federal rap. And this little punk is too wise for his own good. Give him a chance to spill his guts—and spike a million-dollar racket?" He laughed harshly. "We were going to burn him down, at the railway station over in the city, but that would have meant burnin' a G-man. And that's poison. You showed me a neat out, McCabe, when you recognized this G-man, and tipped me off about the old sweetheart stuff between him and the kid's sister. It was a sweet play. You started the game, McCabe. I'm ending it my own way."

McCabe's pasty face grew whiter still, glistened with sweat. "Not the girl!" he cried hoarsely. "I won't stand for it, Stacco!"

"*You* won't stand for it?"

Stacco stared at him stonily, and his voice grew as hard as his eyes. "When you pay off your I.O.U.'s to my Casino Club, we're through, McCabe. . . maybe. But till then," he added harshly, "I'm tellin' you what to do!"

McCabe's lips twitched. "But not the girl, Stacco!" he protested shakily. "I won't stand for it, I tell you. I'll—I'll. . ." He choked, staring wildly at the little gang chief, and his mouth worked without sound.

For Stacco was raising the silenced revolver. "So you won't stand for it!" he repeated icily, and his eyes glittered. "Just what would you do, McCabe?"

"Don't!" blubbered McCabe. "Don't, Stacco, for God's sake! Don't!"



Trent saw it coming, but there was nothing he could do. Jeff still covered him, watched him unwaveringly. The other two hoodlums stood alongside Stacco. Stacco was kill-mad.

The gun went *puff-puff-puff-puff*, and little spurts of flame and white smoke accompanied each muffled report.

McCabe's voice died in a gurgle; his vapid face grew more vapid still. Four little crimson spots appeared in his shirt front, spread, merged into a weltering red blotch. He sagged to the floor on his face.

Jeff never looked around. Trent stood fast.

Rocky Drexel's voice rose hysterically. "You killed him, boss! You killed him!" He sank to his knees, trembling and weak with terror. He crawled to Stacco, clasped him round the legs. "You ain't going to kill me, boss?" he begged. "Don't, boss, please don't. I'll do *anything!*"

Stacco's gun slashed down, knocked the youth sprawling across the room.

"Get going!" Stacco snapped to his men. "We can get rid of this stiff anywhere." He laughed mirthlessly. "I'll buy this mill, myself, and . . ." He broke off, jerked his head. "Take him out to one of the cars. Then you two boys keep a lookout, till Bat gets that roadster back here."

The two men who had aided in Trent's torture picked up McCabe, and dragged him out into the mill.

Trent stared past Jeff at the girl. She sat against the wall where McCabe had placed her, still mercifully unconscious. He looked down at Rocky Drexel, cringing white-faced and whimpering on the floor.

"They're *your* pals, Rocky!" he said through tight lips.

Stacco spun about, eyes hard and venomous. "I'll watch 'em, Jeff!" he snapped. "Find something to knock in their heads!"

Jeff went out into the mill, carrying the blowtorch, and Stacco stood watching the prisoners, his little revolver ready. . .

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Special Agent From the Pit

**S**TILL weak from the excruciating pain of his torture, Trent leaned in a little corner formed by the wall and the bookshelf rack. He felt his strength slowly returning, but he had to keep his lips tightly compressed to keep from giving voice to his suffering.

Yet his mind was clear. Bat had gone for the roadster, and in a few minutes would be back. Then he and the boy and the girl, with their heads bashed in, would be driven off a bluff, or otherwise smashed up, apparently victims of a wreck. It was quite simple. Stacco hadn't tied them, because that wouldn't do, and they had only minutes to live, anyhow.

Trent's pain-filled eyes raked the room, but he saw nothing to help him. The office, having long been in disuse, was barren of fixtures, except for the bookshelf rack.

Stacco stood in the center of the room watching them.

Trent groaned in agony of body and soul. He could hear Jeff clumping about outside, seeking a suitable murder weapon. He thought he heard a car. It could be only minutes now, at most. . .

He twisted painfully about, whispered hoarsely, "I'll talk, Stacco—if you'll make a deal."

Stacco laughed coldly. "I got no deal to make, G-man."

Trent said haltingly, "You wanted to know who tipped off your racket."

Stacco glared at Rocky, blubbing and trembling against the wall. "I take care of that!" he snapped.

"Not unless you know who it is that's stooling on you," said Trent.



Stacco's hard little eyes grew speculative. "Then who is it?" he demanded.

Trent said, "You'd be surprised."

Stacco seemed to consider a moment. His eyes glinted craftily. "All right," he said. "Sure, I'll make a deal. Who tipped you?"

Trent winced at the irony of it. As though Stacco thought *he* was fool enough to think Stacco would or could make a deal with him now! Or maybe he was! That would be typical of hoodlum ego. They thought all cops were suckers. Anyway, the gangster chief's suspicion and curiosity was aroused, which was what Trent had gambled on. He leaned against the bookshelves and mumbled incoherently.

Stacco snapped, "What did you say?" He took a step nearer.

Trent twisted wearily, as if with great effort, turned his head alongside the bookshelves, still mumbling. Stacco came closer, faced the G-man. But he kept well back out of reach. He again demanded, "Who is it, G-man, that's stoolin' on my racket. Tell me, and I let you go. Sure!" He laughed mirthlessly.

Trent twisted some more, rolling his shoulder to the edge of the book-shelf rack, his face still turned alongside a shelf. He whispered falteringly, "It's . . . ."

Stacco thrust his ratty face nearer.

Trent took a deep breath, as if to talk. But he didn't talk. Years of dust had accumulated undisturbed on the shelves. Stacco's face was as close to the shelves as Trent's own. Trent blew with all his might!

The dust swirled in a blinding gust into Stacco's face. Simultaneously, Trent rolled around the edge of the shelf rack and lunged!

The silenced gun made its *pfift* sound. Stacco could hardly miss the first shot, even though blinded. But Trent was charging low, twisting sidewise, and the bullet took him high in the arm. The gun

spoke again, as Trent grabbed the little gangster. That shot was wild. It was Stacco's last. For he'd fired four shots at McCabe, and the gun was now empty.

Stacco screamed curses, pawed blindly to ward off his attacker. Trent measured him, smashed him in the face, knocked him sprawling. He lay still.

From the mill now rose a shout. Jeff had heard the rumpus, of course, and was coming running. Stacco's empty gun lay on the floor. Trent's .45 was in Stacco's pocket, but there was not time to get it. Trent leaped for the mill door.

**T**HE door crashed open, and Jeff barged in, the blowtorch still in his left hand. Evidently he had been using it for a light. His right hand dragged a gun from a pocket.

Trent met him with a rush, before Jeff could draw or move. His fist smashed against the big hood's jaw, knocked him backward. Jeff dropped the blowtorch, lost his grip on the gun. He reeled half the width of the mill, slammed hard against the saw frames that extended down the center of the building. But he was not out. He recovered his balance, grabbed again for his half-drawn gun.

A weird, leaping light filled the mill. Trent, charging after Jeff, jerked about, stared with alarm. Jeff had dropped the blowtorch in a pile of shavings and sawdust that had been swept up against the walls. The dry refuse was ricked the length of the building, and the flames raced over it like a powder train.

Jeff's gun roared, and death screamed past Trent's head. Jeff fired again, as the G-man bored into him.

Straining, swearing, slugging, they struggled at death grips in the yellow light that danced with ghastly brightness, and flames licked hotly about them. The pier-end of the mill was still open, and Stacco's men, in their rush, had left open the front door. The resultant draft swept the fire



river-ward like fury. From the pier rose the shouts of the loading crew, and quick bleats of the tugboat whistle.

Jeff was a powerful man, and uninjured. Trent was sick and weary and weak from his ordeal of fire, from the numbing pain of the wound in his arm. As they struggled, he felt his strength waning. He slipped to his knees.

Jeff yelled with savage exultance, beat him about the head. Trent got him by the legs and yanked. Jeff sat down hard—and for a split-second Trent had an advantage. For he was already on the floor, whereas the fall had thrown Jeff off-balance. Trent leaped on the big man, put everything he had into one smashing blow of his good fist.

Jeff was rising, and his head was coming up from the floor as Trent's fist met his jaw. The *crack* sounded above the snap of the flames, and Jeff's head sagged limply.

The men on the loading crew charged through the mill. Fanned by the draft, the pier-end of the building became suddenly flame-filled, like a roaring blast-furnace. The air shook with dull explosions, as automobiles caught fire and exploding gas tanks added fury to the holocaust. The men retreated, screaming in terror.

Trent snatched up Jeff's gun and ran for the office. A figure emerged from the office door. It was Stacco. Stacco saw Trent, jerked up the G-man's .45 and fired. The gun in Trent's hand answered. Both shots were hasty and wild. And Stacco darted back into the office.

Trent leaped after him, gun ready in his fist. Was Stacco making his escape via the cat-walk? Or was he waiting for the G-man? Before Trent reached the door, a form emerged. Stacco was coming out!

Trent blinked the smarting pain out of his eyes, peered through the blinding smoke, lining his sights. His gun arm stiffened. . . Then a tight cry broke from his lips, and he held his fire.

Stacco was forcing Mary Drexel before him!

TRENT fell back, fear for the girl's safety mingling with his rage for the cowardly, kill-maddened gangster. Stacco moved wraith-like through the smoke, fired again. The slug smashed Trent's hip. He went down.

His whole side seemed paralyzed, and he couldn't rise. He still gripped Jeff's gun. He took aim. Stacco crouched behind the girl, pushed toward the G-man, his little ratty face peering over her shoulder like some demon from hell.

Trent fought to rise, but couldn't. He couldn't shoot, either. G-men are expert with all small arms, but he couldn't hope, in the dancing light and his weakened condition, to hit Stacco's face over the girl's shoulder.

Stacco marched steadily nearer. He mouthed curses and pointed his gun at Trent's head. Trent could only scrabble helplessly, as he waited for the blast of death.

A figure stumbled through the smoke, leaped on Stacco from behind. Stacco fired, but the shot went high, as he was jerked over backward. He lost his grip on the girl. She staggered a few steps, and collapsed. The smoke swirled away, and Trent saw that Stacco's assailant was Rocky!

But the youth was no match for the maddened killer. Stacco fought free, leveled his gun at Rocky!

Stacco's gun and the gun Trent held spoke together. Both Rocky and Stacco went down.

The numbing shock of the bullet was leaving Trent's side. He dragged himself up. The pier-end of the mill was falling apart in flames, and the fire marched rapidly against the strong draft toward the front.

Through the front door appeared several figures. The guard, the bat-eared



man, and the pair Stacco had posted as lookouts. The guard swung up his tommy-gun. Trent dived to the floor, and the death salvo crashed over him. He calmly returned the fire with Jeff's pistol. The machine-gunner dropped. Then the pistol in Trent's hand clicked empty.

Trent scrambled toward Stacco, seeking his own gun. He couldn't find it. He noticed that Stacco was shot through the head. His attention was jerked back to the doorway again.

The remaining trio of killers rushed, guns streaking.

Above the crackle of flames and the fall of beams rose a rending sound. The building creaked and shuddered. Joists strained and screamed as though with agony. The noise grew to a roar. The middle section of the pile-supported flooring, weakened by fire and taxed by the heavy saws, was falling away!

The floor sagged first in the center. The fiery gap crawled both ways, slowly at first, then with a rush, and heavy saws tumbled after burning timbers in flaming chaos.

Then it seemed strangely silent, with flames still licking softly along the roof and the sides.

Trent looked for Stacco's killers. Two of them stood beyond that fiery gap, staring in terror at where the others had gone down with the burning floor! Then they turned and raced madly through the front door.

Trent stared past the fiery gap, and new alarm gripped him. Escape via the front doorway was cut off!

**H**IS weary, aching muscles responded in agony, as he forced himself up, looked about in desperation. The entire pier-end of the mill was burned away. The vanguard of flame had advanced to the front, and the main body of fire ate steadily forward, like a rear-guard mopping up. He stared at the charred burning

nothingness behind him, at the fiery chasm before him, at the high windows along the flame-swept walls, at the flame-filled office doorway.

There was his only chance!

He picked up the unconscious girl under his right arm. He stooped over Rocky. The kid's head was matted with blood. Trent didn't know whether he was alive or dead. But he had not the strength in his wounded left arm to lift him!

Trent groaned in despair. He could never make two trips!

He lowered the girl, swung Rocky up with his right hand, got his left arm about the youth, hooked his numb fingers into his belt. Then he got the girl under his right arm again, and staggered toward the office.

He plunged through the flame-curtained doorway. The interior of the room was not yet afire. Being built out on the side of the mill had accounted for that. He stumbled to the cat-walk door.

The cat-walk extending toward the pier was gone, burned away with the rest of the building. But on the land side, it seemed still intact, although flames were already licking through the walls about it.

Trent stepped out onto the narrow ledge, carrying his limp burdens. He wobbled dangerously. It was fifty feet to the river bank . . . and safety. And it was also about thirty feet down. . .

Flames licked greedily through cracks of the wall, but he did not hurry. He got his balance, moved with careful, deliberate steps along the narrow fiery trail, finding his way by the hot firelight.

Burning embers swirled up, blinded him. He traversed the last few steps by instinct. His foot came down, found no footing. He plunged off, hit solid earth—only inches below.

He stumbled wearily across the clearing to the edge of the woods. It was cool there, and restful, and hot fire ceased to torture his eyes. He no longer thought



anything about encountering Stacco's men. He didn't care. Pain and exhaustion does that to a man. But he saw no sign of human activity. The tugboat and lighter were gone. So was one of the cars from the front of the mill.

He turned his back on the crumbling building, still carrying the boy and girl, and staggered with painful, leadened steps up the mill road toward the highway.

## CHAPTER SIX

### G-man's Judgment

**D**ISMAL dawn crept through the trees, revealed the mill a charred, sodden junk heap.

The oil station at the mill road entrance had been converted into an improvised hospital. The Garden City police and firemen had done that, when they answered the fire alarm. Mary and Rocky Drexel were asleep on canvas cots. The girl was unhurt, except for shock and minor burns. Rocky's wound was a gash through the scalp. G-man Trent was a hospital case, but he had refused to go until his chief arrived. And the chief had arrived shortly before daylight, in response to Trent's call over the oil station phone.

The chief quickly completed his investigation.

"Take the kid out to the car," he ordered one of the agents who accompanied him.

The agent roused the youth.

Rocky Drexel stirred uncomfortably, stared a little frightened at the chief. "Are you going to send me to jail . . . sir?" he stammered.

"You're going to the reformatory, young man!" snapped the chief.

The youth's eyes fell, and he swallowed hard. "I wish—I wish I didn't have to go, sir," he said, his voice trembling.

"I won't do anything wrong again, sir. Honest, I won't."

The chief's stare was cold.

"I know now I was wrong," choked the youth. "I thought gangsters were swell guys, who made easy money. I didn't know what kind of guys they really were, sir. I guess I never really thought about them torturing people, and shooting their own pals, and hiding behind women, and . . ." Again he swallowed hard, looked up at the chief earnestly. "I'll never have anything to do with them again, sir."

The chief's eyes bored through the youth. "I don't believe you will," he said finally. "But you'll have to tell that to the federal judge."

A G-man took the youth out.

Then the chief turned to Trent. "There are some things about your report I don't quite understand," he said frowningly. "How did this kid get away from you, Trent?"

Trent glanced at the girl, still sleeping, met the other's stare steadily. "I told you—he overpowered me, sir."

The chief snorted. "That doesn't make sense, Trent!"

"I'll submit my resignation immediately, sir."

"I'll tell you how it happened!" Mary Drexel was sitting up on the cot.

Trent said, "She knows nothing about it, sir."

"I'm conducting this inquiry!" snapped his chief.

Trent said, "Yes, sir. But you'll get very little truth from her!"

Mary Drexel gave a hurt little cry. "Walter!"

The chief looked from the G-man to the girl, frowned quizzically. "Go on, Miss Drexel," he said.

Trent stood in restrained, bitter silence, ignored them, as Mary Drexel talked to the chief. She finished, likewise relapsed in silence.



The chief paced the floor.

Finally he stopped, stared at the G-man stonily. "You realize, Trent," he said slowly, "that in any service there's often but a hair-line between glory and the gutter!"

"Yes, sir. I asked for permission to—"

"When you attempt anything on your own initiative," went on the chief quickly, "you're flirting with that hair-line."

Trent frowned. "I don't quite understand, sir."

The chief stared at the ceiling. "I know it didn't happen like either you or the girl said," he said softly. "You took an awful chance, Trent, letting them take that kid away from you like that, on the chance that they might lead you to the gang—"

The phone rang, and the chief answered. He spoke briefly, hung up and said, "The river police reporting. As I requested, they grabbed that tugboat and lighter, with half a dozen men and half a cargo of stolen cars. With what happened here, it looks like this car-theft ring is busted."

Trent said, "But I didn't—"

"As I was saying!" interrupted the chief, "you were flirting with that hair-line, Trent. If things hadn't turned out like they have—if it wasn't that the F.B.I. thinks there's something greater than routine crime detection and punishment—"

Again Trent said tersely: "I don't understand, sir. I allowed—"

"The most important phase of combating crime," snapped the chief, "is crime prevention! Which means deterring boys and girls from criminal activities. And I think that young Drexel is deterred. He'll go to the federal reformatory for a few months, but with the change of view the lesson he's had given him, he'll come out a worth-while citizen." The chief turned

toward the door. "I'll see you out at the car," he said, and went out.

TRENT stared after him, a little bewildered, greatly relieved. He knew from the chief's manner that there was little glory in store for him—but neither was the gutter waiting.

He started for the door.

Mary Drexel ran after him, clung to his arm. "Walter!" she exclaimed softly. "You hate me—because I lied to you?"

"You *did*, didn't you?" snapped Trent. "You told me your father was—"

"I *had* to tell you that!" she exclaimed, "or they'd have killed you and Rocky!"

"What?"

"Alva came to me," she went on hurriedly, "and told me that one of his political friends had to see Rocky—to talk with him and let him know they would help him. I didn't know that they were gangsters, or that Alva was involved with them. I guess that's how Rocky got in with them, too—through Alva. Alva said that if I didn't get you to bring Rocky out to the house, you would be ambushed and both killed! I *had* to tell you something—anything, to get you to do it!" She looked up at him tearfully. "What was I to do?"

Trent said huskily, "I don't know."

"When I saw what their intentions were, I managed to leave you a message, Walter. One of our old messages. You found it, didn't you? But you wouldn't tell Stacco. . . ."

She said tremulously, "There's nothing left of the old mill but ashes. Walter—does everything have to be always ashes. . . .?"

The chief had clambered out of his car, and now strode impatiently toward the oil station. "Trent!" he called, "it's time we—" He stopped at the door. Then he turned and walked hurriedly back to the car. "Get going," he growled to the G-man at the wheel. "I'll send a taxi out here."



# LITTLE POISON

By  
George A. McDonald

*Special Agent Bill Parsons was small in size and mild by nature, but when his partner was tortured by a ten-million-dollar crime clique — he showed them that dynamite can come in pint-sized packages!*



An iron poker was in the man's hand.

**B**ILL PARSONS blushed when the red-headed girl spoke. The long scar across his throat faded to a dull white. His Adam's apple bobbed in his thin neck. The accountant was so small that he almost had to look up at

Helen Forsythe. She saw his flush. "Are you kidding, Miss Forsythe?" he answered her question. "I haven't found anything wrong with the Ajax books. Earnings are poor but if they weren't the company wouldn't be in re-



organization under the Bankruptcy Act."

Helen Forsythe's brow wrinkled in a scowl. Her firm chin jutted stubbornly.

"Ajax Chemical has always been a profitable company," she said. "That's why my mother and lots of Centerville people put their savings in Ajax bonds, when the new plant was built three years ago. But when the founder, Elisha Brampton, died, and Fred Ewing was made president, the profits dropped. Ajax went into bankruptcy and the creditors want to have the plant auctioned. Old Fuzzy Lonewell, the trustee the court appointed to run Ajax, couldn't manage a newsstand, to say nothing of operating a big plant like this!"

"Did your mother invest much?" Parsons asked hesitantly.

The slim, red-headed bookkeeper nodded. Bill Parsons was a friendly little guy. The grey-eyed, sandy-haired young auditor always seemed flattered when she spoke to him.

"Ten thousand dollars," she said bitterly. "All Dad's insurance. If the plant is auctioned, mother will collect about ten cents on a dollar."

"That's tough," Parsons admitted. "Ajax should make a profit on the present volume of business. Lonewell doesn't know much about chemicals. Ewing, the former president, is co-trustee. He should be able to handle that end of the business."

Helen Forsythe's attention wandered. Her blue eyes followed a wide-shouldered, square-jawed young fellow moving around out in the main office. The big fellow's lean, tanned cheeks were almost the color of his close-cropped hair.

"The new shipping clerk's quite an Adonis," Parsons grinned wryly.

"Chuck Halford is good looking," the red head answered. "But he hasn't much ambition. He's been here nearly as long as you have—nearly four months—without showing any sign he'll ever be pro-

moted. He's just out for a good time..."

"You know him pretty well," Parsons said shrewdly.

Chuck Halford passed their glass-windowed offices, flipped them a salute. His brown eyes brightened, as he called, "Hi-yuh, Red?"

Parsons scowled, said gruffly, "Familiar pup, isn't he?"

"My friends all call me Red Head or Helen," she smiled. "I feel like an old maid when I'm called Miss Forsythe."

"Okay—Helen," Parsons said bravely. "My name's Bill." Then he got serious. "What makes you think the books might be off color?"

She shrugged shapely shoulders.

"I enter a lot of orders," she said. "Costs are up but so are prices. Several important companies in this part of the state have gone bankrupt in the last year or so. They were auctioned off cheaply and the bondholders got darned little return on their investment. Then the companies reorganized and seem to be doing all right. I'm afraid that's what will happen to Ajax. Could the trustees be keeping two sets of books or anything like that?"

Helen Forsythe was startled by the look in the young auditor's eyes. He looked suddenly older, and his thin face had a grim, bleak expression. Then she decided it must have been her imagination, for Bill Parsons was coloring again.

He dropped his voice, said excitedly, "I had to put some books in A. B. Lonewell's safe the other day. I've got a hunch there's a secret compartment in it. If I knew the combination, I'd check on it some night after Lonewell's gone."

"Would you?" she asked sharply. "I know the combination. Let's test your theory tonight."

"You can't take a chance like that," he protested. "We'd get fired if we were caught. You support your mother and need your job."



The red head's eyes got stormy, her firm little jaw hardening.

"I'll take a chance on being fired, if there's a chance of saving my mother's money," she clipped. "We'll come back about eight. I often work evenings. The watchman won't suspect anything out of the ordinary."

Parsons agreed reluctantly. His grey eyes were thoughtful as they followed her trim figure. He smiled crookedly. It wasn't always easy for Special Agent William Parsons to play dumb and bashful. He wondered if he'd been a pushover for a neat flock of curves, and if he had tipped off his hand to a company spy.

The young G-man had the same idea about Ajax Chemical that the gorgeous carrot-top had expressed. There had been too many suspicious bankruptcy actions in that territory. Bonds of most of the companies had been sold in interstate commerce, which justified investigation by the federal agents. Contrary to general belief, not all of the G-men are lawyers or man-hunters. One third of the F.B.I. men were accountants, engaged in undercover work like the detail Bill Parsons was working on.

**T**HEY had the office to themselves that night. Parsons and the girl occupied themselves with routine jobs for fifteen or twenty minutes, then went into the private office of "Fuzzy" Lonewell, the pompous, white-haired trustee appointed by Judge Gilmore of the district court.

Helen Forsythe's slim fingers made quick work of the combination. Parsons' keen eyes followed every movement of the dial. When the door swung open, the combination was registered in the G-man's memory.

He dropped to his knees, pulled out a stack of heavy ledgers. Helen Forsythe was right at his elbow. Her blue eyes sparkled, and a faint aura of perfume, set his pulse hammering. The little G-man

almost forgot his meek and humble role. He was grinning to himself as his sandy head went inside the safe. He rapped the walls and floor with hard, bony knuckles. Then he sucked in his breath sharply.

"There's a difference of several inches in the thickness of the back as compared with the other walls," he told her. "Just enough room for a false compartment with a sliding plate. A nice cache for books or papers."

"You've got something there, Bill," she agreed. "Can you find the spring?"

His fingers were probing the inside of the safe, when the sound of splintering glass shattered the silence of the office. Parsons didn't know whether it was the crack of the gun or the *spang* of the bullet against the open door of the safe that hit his eardrums first. He galvanized into swift, efficient action.

He dove toward the girl, dragged her to the floor and rolled her to safety beyond the safe. A second shot gouged the carpet a foot from his head as he shielded her with his body. Bill Parsons cursed, a healthy man's-sized oath, because he was unarmed. Apparently auditing like this needed a gun.

The softness of her body was against him, tendrils of her auburn hair brushing his cheek. Blood was hammering through his veins. His fingers itched for the feel of a gun to return the fire of the cowardly rat who was pot-shooting at them. The girl's face was white and set, but she didn't cry out. Helen Forsythe had plenty of nerve.

The firing ceased abruptly. He heard the pound of running feet. He crawled out from their shelter, made his voice mild and a little shaky as he said, "Someone objects to our sleuthing, Helen."

"I gathered the same impression," she gasped. "The objections were a little too violent. Maybe we'd better postpone our detecting."

The door of the main office crashed



open. Chuck Halford raced toward them. The watchman puffed noisily at his heels.

The big shipping clerk's face had a worried look. He asked the girl quickly, "Are you hurt, Helen?"

She shook her head, managed a stiff smile.

"What's going on?" Halford asked. "I heard the shots and a man was ducking between two of the buildings when I barged out."

He saw the shattered window and there was a question in the frosty stare he turned on Parsons.

"I don't know what it's all about," the little man said. "Miss Forsythe was helping me with some special work. When we put the books in the safe, someone shot at us from outside. I figured the watchman mistook us for burglars."

Halford's face darkened as he growled, "It sounds fishy to me. I don't get your play, runt. You put this kid on the spot. Another smart idea like that and there'll be a vacancy in the auditing department."

Bill Parsons' eyes got hard and shiny, and his lips flattened against his teeth. His youthful face, for a brief second, looked age-old and ugly. Then he ducked his sandy head, said meekly, "You're right, Halford."

The big, good-looking shipping clerk ignored the apology. He turned to the girl, said curtly, "Get your shawl and bonnet, gorgeous. I'll take you home. The mug that threw those shots at you may still be around."

The lovely red head still had her eyes fixed on Parsons. But the little G-man's thin face was blank now. She spun on her high heels, marched out stiffly. A minute later she walked out with Halford. She didn't bother saying good-night to Bill Parsons.

A bitter smile twisted the G-man's lips as he watched them. He called himself a *dope*, admitted he couldn't blame the girl for thinking he was ineffectual. He

shrugged, went over to the window, lined up the spot where the first bullet had hit the safe door. He searched the floor until he found the flattened slug. His grin was a savage snarl as he tucked the slug in his vest pocket, clicked off the lights and left.

NEXT morning he was called to the trustee's office. Lonewell had a pink round face, framed by a fringe of cotton-white hair. He scowled at the half-pint auditor, asked gruffly, "What were you doing in my safe last night, Parsons?"

"We needed the nineteen-thirty-seven cash book," the G-man said levelly.

Lonewell's bright, brown eyes were filled with suspicion as he questioned Parsons about the attack. When the G-man finished his story, the trustee snapped, "Where did you go after you left the office?"

"Straight to my boarding-house."

"This safe was robbed last night. You'd better have an alibi."

"I was in bed at nine-thirty," Parsons said quietly. "My landlady will vouch for that."

Lonewell's eyes narrowed. Before he could voice his caustic comment, his co-trustee, Fred Ewing, came in. Ewing was a big, beefy, loud-voiced man. He had spent more time on the links than at the office when he was president of Ajax. He nodded vaguely to Parsons, asked, "Reports ready for the bondholders' committee meeting this afternoon, A. B.?"

"They're ready," Lonewell said sourly. "But they won't help much. It's impossible to work out a reorganization formula with earnings the way they are now."

"Strickland's committee are going to petition the court to auction the plant," Ewing said. Then he remembered Parsons was present and shut his lips tight.

Parsons gulped, asked hastily, "Anything else, Mr. Lonewell?"



"Did you see who fired those shots?"

"We were behind the safe and couldn't see anything," Parsons said.

Lonewell dismissed him abruptly. Parsons wanted to mention the robbery to Helen Forsythe. He only saw the red-headed beauty once and she was with Chuck Halford then.

Parsons had to answer some questions at the committee meeting in the afternoon. Unobtrusively he studied the chairman, Paul Strickland. The youthful, prematurely grey banker was a vice-president of the First National Bank, the institution that was trustee for the defaulted bond issue. Strickland was head of the trust department of the bank. His questions were sharp and pertinent. He knew his stuff and his comments on earnings didn't flatter Lonewell or Ewing, the Ajax trustees.

Late that afternoon, Helen Forsythe came into Parsons' little office. She was ravishing in a green knitted suit that brought out all the good points of her perfect figure.

The G-man's pulse hammered and it wasn't because she said Lonewell had questioned her too.

He told her about the robbery and said Lonewell suspected him.

Her piquant face held a startled look, and her voice was eager as she clipped, "Did you, Bill? Did you come back?"

He shook his head, said slowly, "Lonewell isn't as dumb as we figured him. He may have had the safe robbed to cover the fact that he was keeping a double set of books."

"That's what Chuck Halford thinks," the red head said quickly. "He figures Judge Gilmore is working with Lonewell. Chuck wants to trail the judge and see if he can get anything on him. He wants to help me."

Parsons' face went blank. He said coldly, "Halford wants to watch his step. Gilmore is a federal judge. It's the job of

the F. B. I. to check up on federal crooks. Your boy friend will get his tail burned making cracks like that."

"I don't think you like Halford." She smiled wickedly. "I have a hunch Chuck is a G-man, investigating all these bankruptcies."

"G-men are lawyers or accountants," Parsons said loftily. "Halford couldn't count up to ten. If he learned any law it was up before a judge—on a drunk-and-disorderly charge."

She handed him an enigmatic smile, went back to her cage. Bill Parsons softly cursed to himself. The Forsythe kid looked like a million and was plenty smart—wise enough, perhaps, to be a spy for Lonewell or Ewing. The thought persisted, grew stronger that night when he saw her leave the plant in A. B. Lonewell's sleek limousine.

**H**E TRIED to call himself a sucker for falling for a two-timing wench like the red head. But he couldn't sell himself on the idea. She probably had a reason for riding with Lonewell. Maybe she was doing some sleuthing for Halford.

The thought sent a cold chill down his spine. For Bill Parsons was a smart, daring operative. He'd done enough snooping on this job to convince him that someone was gambling for a ten-million-dollar prize. Crooks with a stake like that wouldn't hesitate to add murder to their present crimes. The red-headed beauty was headed for trouble. And with the sinking sensation that gripped his stomach at the thought, the diminutive federal agent knew he'd gone overboard for a girl at long last.

He called her home after dinner, learned that Helen's mother hadn't seen her since morning. Fear and anger began to worry his brain. He decided to case Lonewell's big mansion up on Chestnut Hill. If Helen had been dumb enough to go up there for dinner, she might be in



all kinds of a jam. His palms got damp and clammy at the thought.

The rooms on the lower floor were all lighted when the little G-man slipped through the hedge and worked his way across the wide lawn like a furtive shadow. He found a dining-room window, saw that the table was deserted. He made his way around the house, peered under a drawn shade and felt his breath catch in his lungs.

There was no girl in the big library, but four men were in deep consultation. He could make out Fred Ewing's bulky figure, and the plump shape of Lonewell, wedged in a big chair. The spare, gaunt figure of Judge Gilmore was straight across the room. Parsons could not identify the fourth man.

He felt this was no legitimate business conference. Greed, hate and suspicion were registered on the faces he could see. Lonewell seemed to be on the spot. Ewing and Judge Gilmore were lashing him verbally. The round-faced man's explanations added fuel to the flames, for Judge Gilmore's voice lifted until Parsons could distinguish the words:

"Hell! You've got to find those books, or I'm ruined!"

Parsons strained to hear the answer to that one. Instead of words, a sharp, foreign sound, like leather on gravel, hit his keen ears. He whirled, nerves tensed and muscles taut. He saw a craggy-jawed man running at him. A blackjack in the thug's hand was swinging at the G-man's skull.

Frantic thoughts raced through Parsons' brain. He was no match physically for the big guard. Capture might mean exposure as a special agent, and months of work would be wasted, once the crooks were on their guard. The men inside were desperate enough to eliminate him completely, but that didn't bother Parsons as much as falling down on the job.

He gritted his teeth, dug in his toes

and threw his hundred and forty pounds directly at the guard in a headlong dive. The blackjack swished, a flash of excruciating pain numbed his left shoulder. Then his head hit the guard's belt buckle, doubling up the big man. Parsons caught his balance like a cat, sidestepped and whipped a hard, bony fist to the thug's jaw. Caught off balance from the butt, the big fellow went down half dazed.

Parsons went around him like a greyhound. A gun cracked behind him as he whisked around the corner of the building. His last backward glance picked up figures racing out of the house. . . .

THE Ajax offices were a scene of much unrest next morning. Lonewell was like a bear with a sore tooth. A whispered report went through the office that a gang of burglars had tried to break into the trustee's house. Bill Parsons mentally blessed the guard for being ashamed to admit that one half-pint intruder had knocked him for a goal. The little G-man even managed to smile blandly when Helen Forsythe told him later that she bet that Chuck Halford was one of the burglars and that the shipping clerk had probably been spying on Lonewell.

Then Parsons' jaw got pugnacious. He asked testily, "How come you went riding in Lonewell's car last night?"

"He offered me a ride," she said. "I couldn't refuse and keep my job. I knew he was looking for information. He asked a lot of questions about you and Chuck Halford—but I couldn't tell him anything he didn't know."

Parsons warned her about playing detective, then mustered enough nerve to ask her for a date. He looked peeved when she said she was meeting Chuck Halford.

"Some more detective work, I suppose," he sneered. "Your Adonis will be getting his neck in a sling. Lonewell suspects him now."



She looked grave, then blew him a tantalizing kiss and went out. . . .

Parsons was working on some books in his room that night when he heard Helen Forsythe arguing with his landlady. Her voice was high-pitched and hysterical. He shoved the books under his mattress, sprinted down the stairs. A single glance at her white, strained face told him she was badly frightened. He barked a curt question.

"Chuck's been kidnaped!" she said. "We were walking just outside of town when a dark car drove up. Three men jumped out. Chuck pushed me down a banking. They clubbed him with a gun barrel while he was fighting and dragged him into a car without any license plates."

Parsons swore once, turned and raced up the stairs, yelling for her to follow. Helen Forsythe was startled at the change in the meek little auditor. He snapped questions at her as he pulled a bullet-proof vest from the closet, wriggled into it. He slipped a shoulder holster quickly on.

She gasped, "What—what are you going to do, Bill?"

"To get Halford," he answered in a surprised tone. "What else?"

"But there's three of them," she said tearfully. "Don't risk your life to—to save a man you don't like."

Bill Parsons grinned and the grimace was like the snarl of a wolf. Passion and pride choked his voice a little.

"Halford and I are buddies, Helen," he said. "We're both federal agents, working on the bankruptcies in this district. When a G-man gets into a jam, his partners go through hell and high water to get him out. You see that's the kind of an outfit we belong to."

It wasn't a boast, nor was it grandstanding—just a plain statement of fact. And as she listened, Helen Forsythe began to understand how it was that the death of a G-man never went unavenged.

Because he was his partner on a job, this little fellow, who probably didn't know a pistol from a revolver, was going to try a rescue Chuck Halford.

She tried to persuade him to get help from the local authorities, but he shook his head grimly.

"Lose too much time," he snapped. "If we did locate him and the kidnapers saw a posse, they'd blast Chuck in a second. I want you to come along to start me on the right road."

They climbed into Parsons' battered coupe. She was surprised at the smooth flow of power that came from beneath the dingy, scarred hood. She would have been more surprised to know that the special-built motor could do better than a hundred miles an hour and that the glass in the coupe was all bulletproof.

Bill Parsons bent over the wheel like an expressionless little gnome, scarcely speaking, and when he did only to fire a curt question. She directed him to the spot where Chuck had been snatched. Parsons got out, examined the marks of tire treads in a damp spot of oil. He made a little note on the back of an envelope, then questioned her.

"It was a Bugatti, wasn't it? Tires with a white ring?"

"How could you tell that?" she gasped.

"We have all tire treads classified. The marks show an imported rubber—the kind they usually use on Bugatti jobs."

She nodded. Her admiration for the efficiency of the little agent was growing each minute. She pointed the road the car had taken. Parsons tooled his coupe over the road at seventy.

Twice he stopped at forks, got out and like a bloodhound sniffing on a scent he scouted around until he'd picked up the mark of the Bugatti tires again. A gas-station attendant told them they were about a half hour behind the black car, as their road swung north into thinly



settled country. When Parsons had picked up the trail for a third time on a fork, Helen Forsythe suddenly loosed an exclamation.

"I'll bet they took him to Hooper's Tavern. It's the only building within miles."

Parsons' sandy eyebrows asked a question.

"It used to be a roadhouse," she said in reply, "but a main turnpike came through about four miles east and took away all the trade. It's been up for sale, but I think the bank owns it now."

He parked the car in the shadows of the trees about two hundred yards from the roadhouse. Through clenched teeth he gritted, "You stick here. If I'm not back in fifteen or twenty minutes with Chucklehead Halford, take this coupe back to the nearest telephone, call the local gendarmes and tell them two G-men were just knocked off up here."

His bleak face choked the protest she started to utter. She sat silent, miserable and afraid as the little fellow slipped like a dark shadow along the edge of the woods, then faded from sight at the wide, winding drive that led back to the roadhouse.

The suspense was too much for her. She ducked out of the car, ran silently after him. At first she didn't see him. But she did see the man who was patrolling the roadhouse, sauntering around on a lax sentry beat. Then as the man rounded a corner, she saw a dark shape flit over the parking lot, to flatten against the wall near the corner.

Her breath caught in her throat, as the guard made another round. He was whistling to himself. Cold fingers of fear grabbed her heart, as she crouched and shivered at the edge of the woods near the drive. She wanted to scream a warning to Bill Parsons, but had better sense.

She saw the big bulk lurch around the corner. For a split-second there was a

blur of moving figures. Something gleamed dully in the starlight; she thought she caught a faint, choked groan. Then one of the figures went down. Breath caught in her lungs, to emit with an explosive sigh as a slim little figure raced around beneath the window.

For a second, Parsons seemed to listen, then he padded silently to the door. His gun was hip-high in his right hand, as he turned the knob, hit the door with his shoulder and dove in. Helen Forsythe's mouth tasted salty. When Parsons went out of sight, she found she had driven her teeth into her lower lip until it bled.

THE single glance Parsons had directed through the curtained window, touched off a fuse that made his brain an explosive cauldron of rage. Chuck Halford was bound hand and foot in a chair near the fire place. One man stood near the chair, with a gun only a few inches from Halford's head. Another was on his knees at Halford's bare feet. An iron poker, with its tip glowing red was in the second man's hand. Parsons saw the raw, red weals across his partner's soles. That was when his brain exploded.

He hit the door with a rush, went in, bent nearly double. His gun cracked as soon as he was inside, and the man with the gun at the prisoner's head choked and gurgled for a split-second. He couldn't make much sound with a .45 slug through his throat.

The man with the branding-iron dropped it, spun on his haunches, grabbing for his gun. He almost made it, for a third man, near the wall, had snapped into action with a draw that was nearly perfection. His bullet smacked against Parsons' chest, knocking the little fellow back nearly two feet when it hit the bullet-proof vest. The shot Bill had aimed at the man with the branding-iron went a little wide, tore through the muscles of the torturer's left arm.



Chuck Halford's pain-wracked face split in a wide grin as the little man came through the door. Halford whipped up his feet, tumbled the chair over backward. He was rolling toward the branding-iron as his half-pint partner caught the slug on the steel-linked, padded vest. The smell of searing flesh mingled with the odor of burning rope as Halford rolled and jammed his bound wrists against the hot iron. His brow was beaded with cold sweat—but one of the strands had parted. Chuck jerked his seared wrists free, grabbed the iron and started to put it on his ankle bonds.

Parsons had steadied himself, his third shot drilled the marksman who had nearly hit him. A new eyesocket showed in the man's forehead, just before he pitched forward on his face. A gun roared near Chuck's ears, and he groaned profanely. The man who had been branding him had gotten his gun free. His slug lifted the hat from Parsons' head, dropped him to his knees.

But as Parsons went down, his face now red with blood from a head wound, his finger tightened once more on the trigger and the torturer screamed and grabbed his stomach.

There was a fourth man in the room, and he had been pawing inexpertly for a gun in his hip pocket. He just got it free when Halford hopped at him, the hot end of the poker aimed at the last man's eyes.

"Drop that gun, or I'll take your eyeballs out," Chuck snarled.

The gun dropped to the floor. Chuck scooped it up, just as a feminine scream from the door, swiveled his head around. His eyes nearly popped from their sockets as he saw Helen Forsythe in the door. She stared at the motionless little figure on the floor, cried out.

"Bill! Bill Parsons! They've killed him, Chuck!"

The figure stirred. Bill Parsons sat up, ran his hand across his face to wipe

away the blood. "Killed, hell!" he growled thickly. "Just a scratch. He creased my scalp and knocked me cold." He staggered to his feet, stared at the white-faced man whom Halford had threatened. "Put the bracelets on him, Chuck," he snapped. "The jig is up with Mister Strickland!"

He heard the red head gasp, "Paul Strickland! The bank vice-president? Is he a crook, too?"

"Crook, hell!" spat Parsons. "He's the ringleader of the mob. His job was to finance these bond issues. He'd arrange with crooked managers to run the plants down, then have creditors petition them into bankruptcy. Strickland's got a big note belonging to Judge Gilmore, so he'd make the judge appoint another crook as trustee. Then he'd serve on the bondholders' protective committees and finally persuade the dupes that their chances were worthless. The properties would be auctioned off, Strickland would arrange to have them bought for a song, and the new company would start from scratch—while Strickland and his pals would clean up half a million or so on the transaction."

THE banker's face was as white as his prematurely faded hair. He said, "You can't prove a word of this. What does a miserable little pen-pusher know about law or crime? I'll have you jailed for this."

Chuck Halford laughed, a short, ugly sound. "Oh, no, brother," he rasped. "The miserable little pen-pusher is a G-man, too—one of the best in the F.B.I. The books your thugs were trying to get me to turn over to you—when they were torturing me—were snatched by the little pen-pusher, right out of your safe. They're part of our reports in Washington now. And if you can get around the entries Lonewell made, showing the disbursements of the graft between you,



Ewing, Judge Gilmore and him—then my law training was all wasted!”

Strickland collapsed, started to whine about turning state's evidence. Halford swung from the cringing prisoner, to meet the hostile glare in Helen Forsythe's blue eyes.

“You big tramp,” she stormed. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, putting poor Bill Parsons in a spot like this. You nearly got him killed. Why don't you pick a gunman for a partner, if you're dumb enough to get in scrapes like this?”

Halford stared, then, despite the torture of his raw feet, he threw his head back and laughed.

“Sister, that's one for the books,” he told her. “Poor little Bill Parsons, eh? Do you know what the boys in Washington call him? Little Poison! He's the niftiest lad with a gun in the outfit. That scar across his throat testifies to that. He got it dropping Legs Kinella, supposed to be the deadliest gunman east of the Mississippi. Cripes, lady—that's our act. I'm the stooge. Because I'm big and husky, when our suspects smell a rat, they always pick me for the fall guy.

Because Bill is so little and puny looking, they can never see him for dust—until he does the mopping up, like he did tonight. We never even speak on a job, if we can help it.”

“But I don't see how you keep each other posted,” she said.

Bill Parsons chuckled grimly. “That's where you came in, gorgeous,” he said. “You didn't know it—but you were acting as our go-between. I'd tell you something, and you'd relay it to this big lunk-head, and vice versa.”

Sparks began to kindle in her blue eyes. Her round little chin tilted forward.

“Do you mean you were just using me as a stooge?” she demanded.

A trickle of blood from the scalp wound ran down the side of Parsons' face. He brushed at it, swallowed hard. His Adam's apple did another bouncing act on the white line of his neck scar.

“Well . . . you see . . . it was that way when we started,” he mumbled.

Chuck Halford laughed softly, addressed no one in particular as he said, “Little Poison's just a soft drink now.”

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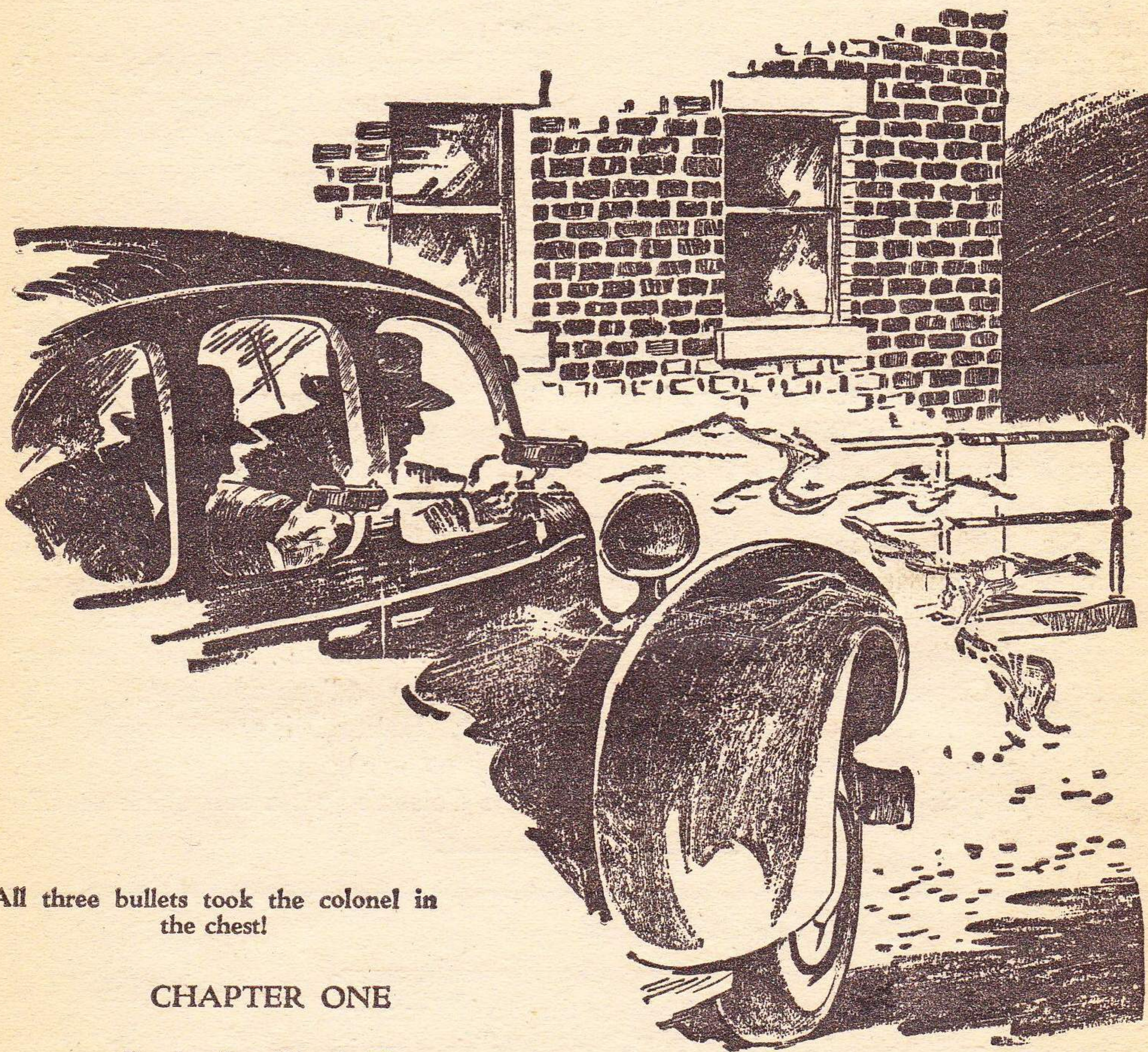
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# TRAITORS SPELL DEATH

*The espionage ring had murdered an inventive genius to obtain control of America's No. 1 war secret. Only one more obstacle stood in that ring's way to complete victory—but the barrier was thirteen G-men whose guns blasted a brand of bullets that spelled out bad luck for spies!*



All three bullets took the colonel in the chest!

## CHAPTER ONE

### Death of a Miracle-Man

**W**HEN Archibald Hendricks was eight years old and got his picture in all the state papers by working out new methods for solving problems in solid geometry, mothers of normal children regarded him as a kind of monster. Nobody wanted a little Archibald in their home, going around with his head full of trisected triangles, parabolas, ellipses, and such—or mentioning at the breakfast table that the moment of inertia of the body about a central perpendicular to any tangent plane is equal to the product of the

mass of the body into the square of the length of the perpendicular.

When, at thirteen, Archibald Hendricks graduated from the state university, mothers whose children were trying more or less desperately to learn the multiplication table said he was an unnatural freak, a flash-in-the-pan who would not be heard from after his school days. They were still sure of this when, two years later, he got his Ph.D. at Harvard.

At fifteen Archibald Hendricks' body had already started to catch up with his brain. At this point his father took him



# WITH A "G"

By Wyatt Blassingame

*Smashing Novel of the  
F. B. I. Spy-Hunters*



out of school and gave him three years on a cattle ranch in Wyoming. When he entered West Point at eighteen he was six feet two inches tall and weighed two hundred and ten pounds. His junior and senior years he was an All-American tackle.

In 1917 Archibald Hendricks was a first lieutenant in the air force, and among the first Americans to reach France. After a dog fight, in which he shot down his fourth and fifth German planes, he walked to his quarters and designed an airplane wing that gave more speed, safety, and lift. It was a simple application of the ergodic theorem, he said. So the powers that be took him out of a fighting plane

and put him in a laboratory where he complained loudly and violently in a language that even top sergeants found shocking—and where he contributed more to aviation than any other single man.

In 1938 Archibald Hendricks was a colonel, stationed at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, and with a blazing record behind him. They said he could stand on the ground and watch the air swirl around the wings of a stratosphere plane. They said he could count atoms with his naked eye and carried a wind tunnel in his vest pocket. And he was perhaps the only man who could explain these things in simple language, heavily punctuated with profanity. On the night of November third he



was the speaker at a dinner in the Jefferson Davis hotel.

During the meal a waiter came and tapped the colonel respectfully on the shoulder. "There's a soldier outside to see you, sir."

"Well, tell the — to wait," the colonel growled.

"He says it's very important—about your wife, sir. She's sick."

The colonel's ruddy face got pale. A sudden terror, a thing he had never known in his life, struck through him. Martha had been in bed with a cold when he left home an hour before—a slight cold, nothing serious. But there had been several cases of pneumonia recently. . . . The colonel's long legs moved so rapidly the waiter had to trot. "This way, sir. In the back."

"Damn it!" the colonel said. "Which way? Are you *frozen*? Show me!"

"Out this way. There—there's the car!"

It was a sedan, parked in the dark alleyway behind the hotel. The motor was running, but there were no lights. The colonel barged up to it, his eyes, accustomed to the bright glare inside, barely able to make out a man in uniform under the wheel. There was a keen chill in the air, but the car windows, front and back, were down.

The colonel grabbed the door. "What is it?" he shouted. "What's wrong with her?"

The man under the wheel moved slightly, and although the colonel couldn't see his face, he saw the dark shine of the automatic. "Get in the back," the man said. "And be quiet."

The colonel stared at him. He had been so worried about Martha that for perhaps three seconds he didn't realize what was happening.

"Get in," the driver said again.

The colonel said, "Well, you crazy —!" and his huge hand grabbed at the

driver's gun. His right fist swung a blow that would have knocked the lower jaw loose from the upper one had it landed, but hitting awkwardly through the open window he missed.

From the shaded back seat a gun flashed three times, all three of the bullets taking the colonel in the chest. For a moment he clung to the car door. Then the machine roared away.

Colonel Archibald Hendricks stood swaying in the dark alley. He put his left hand to his chest and felt the flowing blood and the bullet holes. He probed one with a finger.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said aloud. There was very little pain at first, then it came in hot, stabbing flashes. The darkness began to revolve, the stars overhead moving around him in flattened circles. "Ha!" the colonel muttered, "the — world's gone ellipsoid." He turned and began to walk steadily toward the door of the hotel from which he had come.

The waiter and two cooks were running forward. Then there were others, all revolving in those crazy circles around him. Voices made an insane medley. "*What's wrong? What happened? Are you hurt?*"

"Hell, no!" Colonel Archibald Hendricks said. "I'm not hurt—I'm murdered."

Blood was running out of his mouth now. The figures around him had faded into darkness. "Martha," he said. "Martha, where are you . . . ?" Then the great, fierce life went out of him, and he sprawled grotesquely in the dirty alley, a crumpled sack of clothing.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The F. B. I. Moves Fast

FIFTEEN minutes after the murder of Colonel Archibald Hendricks, the phone in Room 320 of the Federal Build-



ing, in Birmingham, began to ring; and three minutes later, in the home of John Reardon, special agent in charge of the fourth field division of the F. B. I., another phone was jangling. John Reardon was standing with his head tilted back, a helpless look on his face, and his knees bent so that his wife could more easily reach up to knot the bowtie about the winged collar of his dress suit.

John Reardon, still with his head tilted back, edged sideways toward the ringing phone.

His wife, working desperately at the tie, said, "I don't care what it is. You're going to that party tonight, if I have to carry you. You are—"

"Hello," John Reardon said into the phone. "What? Wait a moment." He pushed his wife gently away from him. She clung to the tie so that it pulled loose and one end hung down now across his chest.

"John!" she said. "You are . . ." His eyes stopped her. "Oh, damn!" she said tearfully.

John Reardon said into the phone, "All right now, go ahead." As he listened the muscles of his face hardened. That helpless, inane look with which he had waited for his bowtie to be knotted was gone. Something gaunt and deathlike took its place.

"All right," he said finally. "Get in touch with everybody we've got. Have them stand by where I can reach them."

He hung up and began to dial another number. As he did he said, not looking at his wife, "I'm sorry, sweet. You'll have to go with Jane and her husband. And don't worry if I'm not back tonight. I'll probably be in Montgomery."

"John, you promised . . ." She shook her head. "Oh, all right. But the next time I marry, it'll be a lighthouse keeper on a desert island."

"When I get back we'll . . ." He didn't finish his promise because the operator

was already saying, "Long distance. . . ."

John Reardon said, "I want Washington D. C., National seven-one-one-seven."

"Yes, sir," and he had his number in five seconds. . . .

The vast, oiled machinery of the Federal Bureau of Investigation rolled smoothly into action. Phones jangled in Richmond, Virginia, and in Chicago, Illinois, in San Francisco and Miami, in New York and in Denver. John Reardon, speaking to a voice in New Orleans, said, "Hello, Paul. You've got a man down there I've got to borrow. The chief's orders. Ryan McQuade."

The voice in New Orleans said, "When do you want him?"

"In Montgomery before morning, at my room in the Exchange Hotel—without being seen."

"He'll be there," the voice said.

And to a voice in Miami John Reardon repeated the same orders about a man named Ed Paley. And the voice in Miami said, "He'll be there."

Reardon called his own office. "Harris and Grogan are here," he was told. "I can reach the others when you want them."

"Tell Harris and Grogan to pack some clothes and be back at the office within forty-five minutes," Reardon said. "Get Bender and Carosi and Shurman. We'll have to leave the others to carry on here. I don't know when we'll be back."

"Yes, sir."

The machinery of the F. B. I. was rolling. In New Orleans a man put down his wine glass and grinned at the women grouped around him. They thought he was the most handsome and dare-devilish man they had ever seen. "I'll tell you the rest some other time," he said, and they cried, "But you can't go now, Ryan!" and a red-haired girl wrapped both her arms tight around one of his, and her eyes reminded him of something they had promised. "I'm sorry," he said, patting her



where her dress curved sleekly over rounded thighs. "Some other time."

And in Miami a man put down a copy of Frederick Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, yanked a worn bag from under the bed and began to carelessly toss clothes inside. Through the night, planes roared south from Chicago and east from Denver and west from Atlanta. Over thousands of miles of telephone wire voices cracked briskly. From one end of the nation to the other the great, majestic power of the F. B. I. was moving. . . .

**I**N ROOM 480 of the Exchange Hotel John Reardon shook hands with two men who had come there separately. Sam Paley was tall and gaunt, with the face of a man who has just consumed a green persimmon. He said, "I knew it. I knew I'd have to work with you guys again. I was born to bad luck."

"You *are* bad luck," Ryan McQuade said. He looked like a magazine artist's conception of a soldier-of-fortune. He was handsome in a bold, reckless way. His hair was black and wavy, his skin tanned the color of old leather, and there was the white line of a scar from jaw to eye.

John Reardon looked from one to the other and the faint hint of a smile touched his mouth. These men were closer to him than any other men had ever been—except one. They had fought together, lived together, worked together. They had come to know and love one another as only men can who have faced death side by side.

"We've got something this time," John Reardon said, "something bigger than we've ever had before." He paused. "Last night Colonel Archibald Hendricks was murdered in cold blood. He was probably the greatest engineering and mathematical genius the army ever had."

"I knew him," McQuade said.

Reardon said, "When he was killed he was working with a local scientist on a

new type of radio beam—one so accurate that it could be used not only for blind flying and landing, but blind bombing. It would have made bombing infallible, and from a height above the reach of anti-aircraft guns. I don't understand it, but that's what I've been told."

McQuade whistled softly. Sam Paley looked sour.

Reardon's voice was low now, barely audible, yet somehow taut with intensity. "Colonel Hendrick's murder was a case of sabotage—that and nothing else! He was murdered to prevent the completion of this radio beam, and of all the other devices he might have perfected."

"But who . . . ?"

"They are trying out a number of new machines here at Maxwell Field—and inexplicable things have been happening to them sometimes. The destruction of lives and property hasn't been here alone, but at other air fields and army camps and in the navy. But this last is the worst of all."

"But who . . . ?" McQuade asked again. "Why?"

"Who do you think?" Reardon said. "War is inevitable in Europe. The world knows that. Hitler will keep grabbing until the Democracies have to stop him. And they'll have to eventually. Mussolini has a hundred thousand soldiers in Spain he can't bring home because he has nothing to do with them—and because of what they would say if they had the chance. He's got to keep them fighting somewhere. It may be next week, it may be a year from now. But it's coming."

"That's their fight," McQuade said.

Sam Paley said sourly, "You're too handsome to have any sense. You know damn well we'd be morally aligned with the democracies. Even if we didn't actually fight, we'd supply them with munitions, all this whooping of professional politicians to the contrary."

"Then you know," Reardon said, "who



would want to prevent the United States from developing new types of aircraft and armament, who would be willing to murder in order to stop an invention that we would find useful in time of war."

His face had grown gaunt and grey as though he were suffering physical pain. "You're not looking for a criminal because he has committed his one murder and might commit one or two or a dozen more. What you must do is something that may prevent a thousand—hundreds of thousands of murders. It may prevent war. If we are so strong that nobody dares attack, not only us but the other nations that must survive, then we've got to . . . It seems to be the only way in a world gone mad."

They saw the pain in his face and knew the thing he was remembering. They watched him, waiting.

"Somebody inside Maxwell Field has been selling out to spies," Reardon said. "The person to whom he, or they, are selling is important, but not so much as the man on the inside. It might be any one of a hundred consuls, a thousand tourists—any government can keep men here to buy secrets. I have agents looking for this one. But it is the man inside that counts."

They watched him, quiet.

"I've talked to the commander of the field," Reardon said. "You'll be out there this afternoon, Sam. You'll be named Harry Bates, a private, transferred from Langley Field. You'll be a mechanic around some of the new planes they are working on. You'll be sour on the world, and especially this government. They don't pay decent salaries, they don't treat the men right, they are a bunch of lice. And you're the sort of a guy who might sell out if offered money enough."

"That's the sort of a job I would get," Paley said.

McQuade asked, "And me?"

"Your name's Wayne Bogart and you're a test pilot, transferred up from Panama.

You drink too much and you gamble and you're in a bad way for money. They are trying out a new bomber in a few days that you'll test fly. You can do it?"

McQuade snorted. He'd been a Hollywood stunt flier three years before.

"The whole world, the difference between peace and war, between kids and women carrying on their lives or being blown apart by bombs, may depend on you finding the traitor out there at Maxwell Field," Reardon said. And they were to remember his face after they were gone, the tight, grey skin, the bitter agony in his eyes. They would know what he was thinking.

John Reardon had been sixteen when the World War ended, too young to take part. But his brother was four years older—and John Reardon had worshiped that brother as only a boy can worship an older brother. He remembered the day Dave had left, laughing and very handsome in his uniform. He had seen Dave once since then—seen him back of bars in a padded cell, blind, with part of his face blown away and his mind a raging blackness. That was what war had done to Dave, and now the world teetered on the verge of another.

**H**E LEFT the hotel room and drove out to the office he'd been assigned at Maxwell Field. He had reached here at midnight, four hours after learning of Colonel Hendrick's murder. There had been no sleep, no time for food. Perhaps the chief was coming down from Washington to take charge of this case, but until then Reardon was in the saddle. There were already a stack of reports on his desk.

He went through them, carefully, tediously, hour after hour. He thought of McQuade and Paley and the other agents. To him, his own part looked like the bleak end of the job—the routine of office work. But John Reardon had never been one to



stick to the office longer than necessary. He was shrugging into a trenchcoat when the door opened, and Harris entered.

"I've been out with this scientist, this Weichman who was working with Colonel Hendricks," Harris said. "He won't try to finish his work here at the post. He says he can't work anywhere but in his own laboratory."

"That's what I was told," Reardon said. "We'll just have to keep a guard over him."

"Grogan's there." Harris shook off his wet topcoat. "That Weichman's worse than the absent-minded professor," he said. "He'll be talking to you and then he'll go wandering off to his work right in the middle of a sentence. He tries to walk through closed doors when he's thinking about something else."

Reardon told where he was going and left Harris to look after the office. He went out into the cold, drizzling rain. The sky was grey with darkness closing in. Somewhere, far overhead, an airplane droned, invisible. . . .

In Montgomery, Reardon stopped for a sandwich and a cup of coffee spiked with brandy. It was his first food in twenty-four hours.

The house to which he drove was on South McDonough Street, a quiet, tree-shrouded bungalow. A woman answered his ring. She was pretty in a quiet, mild sort of way. "Lieutenant Steeg here?" he asked.

"Come in." Turning, she called, "Eddie, there's someone to see you."

The man who entered was good looking, almost boyish. He was tall and blond and wore grey trousers, a white shirt open at the throat, and no coat. John Reardon introduced himself.

Lieutenant Steeg looked slightly annoyed. "Another agent was here this morning and took my automobile and I haven't got it back yet. I told him all I knew."

"I just wanted to check," Reardon said. "Your car's our only lead. There are a lot of prints on it, naturally, but most of them seem to be either yours or your wife's. We are still working on it."

"Come on back," the lieutenant said. "I'll tell you what there is."

Reardon followed.

He led the way into a small, office-like room where the only light came from a shaded droplight directly above a flat-top desk. Books littered the desk. A big, bulky man in the uniform of a private stood up swiftly.

Lieutenant Steeg said, "This is Tom Matson. He was here last night when we heard the car." And seeing the question in Reardon's eyes he added, "Tom and I were kids together in South Dakota. I got an appointment to West Point and Tom enlisted. He wants to work for a commission and I've been helping him study."

"You were helping him last night?" Reardon asked.

"Yes. We were in this room. It's near the back of the house, you see, and the car was parked in the drive near the front. About eight-thirty we thought we heard the car door shut. Somebody stole a jack from me a couple of weeks ago, so Tom went out to see if they were after something else. He saw this man walking down the sidewalk."

Tom Matson caught Reardon's glance. "I saw him look back, sir," he said, "but I didn't know who he was, or even if he'd been around the car. I just happened to put my hand on the hood and noticed it was warm."

"He called me," Steeg said. "I went out and we found the blood, found the bullet hole in the floorboards. Naturally I notified the police and Colonel Davies right away."

Reardon looked at the private. "You don't have any idea who this man was?"

"No, sir. It was pretty dark, but I'm al-



most sure he was in uniform." He stopped, wet his mouth, and something that might have been fear came in his grey eyes. "There was light from a window on me," he said. "I been wondering if that fellow, whoever he was, could *think* I recognized him."

Reardon said, "I've been thinking of that."

He asked other questions, but learned nothing his reports hadn't told already. Mrs. Steeg had been at a picture show with some neighbors; persons in the house next door had neither seen nor heard anything; Steeg had no ideas about the murder of Colonel Hendricks, except those shared by everyone else.

"He was a gentleman if one ever lived," the lieutenant said. "There wasn't a man anywhere with a personal grudge against the colonel. It was sabotage."

"A guy who would do that!" Matson said. His big hands clinched, the knuckles showing white.

And as he did so the back door of the room swung slowly open. There was something weird, something unnatural about that slow, steady movement. All of them saw it, stared at it without speaking. The door opened upon the back porch and now, against the taut silence they could hear the slow patter of the rain. Wind ruffled the pages of a book upon the desk.

Through the crack of the slowly opening door came a hand. It was thin and yellow and the fingernails glistened in the light. The hand touched the switch on the wall by the door. Blackness smashed down.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Killer

**J**OHN REARDON was leaping sideways, then diving for the door. Flame lashed ahead of him. Gun thunder shook the room, tore at it shot upon shot. Reardon's own gun was out now. Matson

screamed. And in front of Reardon there was only darkness. The gun had quit firing.

He jumped for the door, struck something and went down on his knees. His ears still whined with the crash of the shots. He lunged, struck against the door, flung it aside. There was wet darkness outside. He felt the rain on his face. Then the blow struck him above and behind his left ear and he went down.

Voices were shouting around him. Lights came on. His head was hurting like hell and the light stabbed at his eyes. He could barely see Lieutenant Steeg bending over him, Matson cringing in one corner holding his arm. Blood made a dark splotch between his fingers.

"He was trying to kill me," Matson whined. "He was trying to kill me."

"Are you hurt?" Steeg was lifting Reardon to his feet.

"Not yet." He almost fell when he stooped for his gun. Then he was out the back door, running.

There was only the wet cold drizzle that had continued since morning. The alleyway stretched alongside the house, and somewhere out front a streetlight threw a dim net of illumination against the raindrops, catching them for a moment before they slipped through and were gone. On the roof beside him the rain made tiny crackling sounds like the breaking of spider webs. He went down the alley to the sidewalk; he went fast and he knew that whoever had fired those shots had only a few seconds start.

But the walk was empty.

He stood at the junction of the walk and alley. He had left his trenchcoat inside and now the cold and the rain began to gnaw through him.

A man appeared in front of a house two doors down the street. Whether he had come out of the house itself, or had been in front all the time, Reardon could not tell—he could not see the house door



from where he stood. John Reardon strolled toward him.

It was a young man with a round moon face, a weak mouth, and a strong aroma of whisky. There was something familiar about his face—and then Reardon remembered he'd seen him at Maxwell Field that afternoon. The man got in an expensive car parked at the curb and drove away.

Only a moment Reardon hesitated. Anything that he might find in Steeg's home would be there later. It was only a blind guess that the man in the car was the one who had fired at Tom Matson, but it was his only chance. He followed.

And when the car ahead stopped, John Reardon drew a deep breath—for it had stopped in front of the home of T. C. Weichman, the scientist. The driver got out, whistling loudly.

John Reardon had driven a half block past. He parked and sat for a moment, waiting. The rain made soft spitting noises on the roof of his car. He got out and walked back to Weichman's home.

It was a great, sprawling, old-fashioned home, set far back from the street. A boxwood hedge hemmed in the walk. And out of this hedge a figure appeared suddenly in front of him. Whoever it was had a hand buried deep in a coat pocket.

John Reardon said, "Hello, Grogan."

"Oh, hello, chief. I didn't recognize you in the dark."

"Who was the man just went in?"

"A Lieutenant Courtney. He wants to see this Weichman's daughter."

"Thanks," Reardon said.

**J**ANE WEICHMAN answered his ring. She was a tall girl, firm-bodied, with a strangely beautiful face. Her eyes were dark and secretive. She took Reardon in and introduced him to Lieutenant Rud Courtney, then seemed to forget the officer. "You really think Father is in danger?" she asked.

"He'll be protected," Reardon said, "but it would be safer if you would persuade him to finish his work at Maxwell Field."

She shook her head. "He's had his laboratory here in his home so long, he says he can't work anywhere else."

Rud Courtney took a monogrammed cigarette out of a gold case and laughed a little drunkenly. "You never saw anybody like Mr. Weichman," he said. "He's a character."

Reardon asked the girl if there had been any attempts to get her father away from home or if anyone had tried to break in the house.

"Not that I know of," she said. "Ask him."

She led the way down a long hall, knocked, and there was no answer. She knocked again, then opened the door on a huge, dimly lighted laboratory. Reardon could barely see the cases around the walls, the experimental tables. Under a bright, shaded lamp a man was sitting. He was hunched far over, his shaggy grey hair touseled.

"Father," the girl said.

The man didn't move.

She crossed the room and touched him on the shoulder. A little shudder went through him; then he raised his head. "Oh, hello, Jane. I was working and didn't hear you."

She laughed softly. "Here's another G-man to see you, Father."

"G-man?" He blinked, puzzled. "Oh, yes. A quaint term, isn't it?" He stood up, smiling, and shook hands. "There have been several of you fellows around recently, I believe."

"They think you're in danger!" the girl burst out. "They think somebody will try to—to kill you as they did Colonel Hendricks!"

"Kill me?" The old man said it as though the idea had never occurred to him. His face got suddenly white with fear. "No! no! I'll get police! I'll get pro-



tection!" He walked up and down, rubbing his fragile, stained hands. And then, where a bunsen burner flamed beneath a bowl of some green fluid, he stopped. A complete concentration replaced the fear in his face. He sat down and began to watch the liquid.

Jane Weichman touched Reardon's arm. There was a strangely beautiful and tender look in her eyes. "He's forgotten all about us," she said, and led Reardon from the room.

They almost stumbled against Rud Courtney in the semi-dark hallway. "I was just peering in at the old fellow," he laughed, and added to Reardon, "He doesn't like me. I hang around Jane too much."

Outside again, Reardon stood for a moment beside his car, head tilted back so that the rain drifted down into his face. His eyes were heavy from lack of sleep and there was a coldness beneath his ribs. His head ached. He had accomplished nothing in all these long hours. But Harris and another agent would be at Lieutenant Steeg's home now—he had phoned from Weichman's house—and maybe they would turn up something on the wounding of Tom Matson. There would be more reports in his office at Maxwell Field—more long, dreary hours of routine work.

He got in his car and drove through the dark misting rain.

IT WAS nearly three in the morning when finally he left the office and drove back to his hotel. There was only one new development; Lieutenant Steeg's wife had vanished after the shooting. Reardon had been forty-four hours without sleep. He almost staggered as he got off the elevator and walked down the long, carpeted hall. He unlocked his door, reached in for the light—and at the same time he heard the running steps behind him. He whirled.

The woman must have been hiding at the far end of the hallway. Now she rushed toward him. Her face was white and strained so that for a moment he didn't recognize her. Then she was holding tight to his trenchcoat, and he saw that it was the wife of Lieutenant Edward Steeg.

She tried to speak but the words clogged in her throat. "I had to find you! I know—I know! I *saw* him!"

"Easy," Reardon said. His hands closed hard on her shoulders, holding her steady a moment. "Now what is it? Whom did you see?"

"The man who shot Tom Matson! I had to find you, but I was afraid to go to the field. He knew I saw him! He expected me to go there. I came here and hid—waiting for you!"

"You've been here since the shooting? Why didn't you come back in the room with your husband and Matson and me?"

"I didn't have a chance. I . . ." And then she screamed. The cry rocketed high and shrill. She was looking beyond Reardon and her eyes bulged horribly. "No! No! I . . ." The blast of gunfire stopped her.

Reardon tried to whirl. The woman fell forward, clutching him. He pushed against her and she held with the convulsive strength of death. Her face was gaping up at his, her mouth open with blood coming from it. Her lips worked without sound. He was dragging her, turning, swinging her around. Then her arms loosed and she slid down in a huddle at his feet. He stumbled as he leaped over her.

Doors were opening up and down the hallway, people coming out. Somebody began to yell, "Murder! Murder! Police!" A man grabbed at Reardon as he sprinted along the corridor. He twisted away, plunged down the stairs. He had his gun from under coat and trenchcoat now.

But the person who had shot Helen Steeg was gone.

Reardon went back up the stairs with huge strides. Men looked at his face and



backed away. He pushed through the crowd around Helen Steeg and knelt beside her.

Blood soaked the front of her dress. Her eyes were closed. But his fingers found a faint, fluttering pulse.

If only her life could be saved. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Poker Game of Death

THERE were reports on Reardon's desk from ten Special Agents. There were coded wires from Washington and Atlanta and San Francisco. North and south, east and west, the awful machine of the F.B.I. was moving.

Agents worked at Langley Field, Virginia; and Chenault Field, Illinois; and in Panama. Some of the things they learned might relate to murder and sabotage in Alabama—some of the things they learned might yet prevent war. There were howling blizzards in Alaska, and a clean bright sun in San Antonio; and through daylight and darkness federal agents worked from end to end of the vast expanse of the United States and its possessions.

On Dexter Avenue in Montgomery, directly across from the morning paper's building, there was a small restaurant. If you went up the dark stair beside this you came to a closed door, fitted with a peephole out of the old speakeasy days. But the town runs free and easy now, and the door stands open. If you went in you found a small bar and card tables in the front room. In the back room was a crap game.

Lieutenant Wayne Bogart, test pilot, dare-devil, just transferred from Panama, was in the ring of crap-shooters. There were a few bills in front of him, not so many, not nearly so many as had been there an hour before. His handsome face was drawn with worry so that a scar which ran from jaw to eye showed whitely.

"Shooting five," he said, and passed

three times and made his number. He let the ten ride, put ten more with it, threw an eight and then a seven. He cursed hoarsely and went into the next room for a drink.

There were a dozen others in the game, but only two of them were officers from Maxwell Field. There was Rud Courtney, his moon-like face with its weak mouth and chin flushed by excitement. And there was a lieutenant named Bruce Fannin. He was a dark, hard-faced man who might have been a professional gambler. His eyes were dark and filmed and showed nothing, but even when he seemed uninterested he was watching Wayne Bogart.

Courtney joined the test pilot at the bar. "Your luck's pretty bad tonight, isn't it?" he said.

"It's been bad for a hell of a while," Bogart said. Red veins spider-webbed his eyes and his mouth twitched. "If it doesn't turn soon it's going to be too late." He gulped his drink, sat the glass on the bar, and stared at it.

"Have another," Courtney said. He added casually, "You're to test that new bomber, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Bogart said. Ignoring Courtney he took a roll of bills from his pocket and counted them. He had thirty-two dollars. He grimaced.

"I know where there's a good poker game," Courtney said. "Maybe that would change your luck."

Bogart looked at the bills in his hand. "It would have to change damn fast," he said.

"I can lend you a little to get started."

Bogart turned full on him. "Yeah?" His eyes were reckless, almost desperate. "I sure need a stake. I got to make a killing! I . . ." he stopped as though he had said too much. His face went bleak. "How do you know you'd get it back?"

"You look all right to me," Courtney said.

"If you'll take a chance. . . ."



"Maybe you can do me a favor some time."

They went out together. From the crap table the dark, emotionless eyes of Lieutenant Bruce Fannin watched them. When they were halfway down the stairs he gathered his money and followed.

THERE were high stakes and lots of liquor in the poker game. Bogart borrowed a hundred, then another, from Courtney—and continued to lose. Bruce Fannin was in the game; he had seemed to wander in casually. He was winning. Courtney stayed fairly even.

It was nearly three a.m. and Bogart and Courtney were at the bar alone when the test pilot said, "I'm wiped out. And I owe you five hundred. Hell, I—I'm in a fix!"

"Five hundred isn't so much," Courtney said.

"That isn't all of it," Bogart said, and stared into his glass.

A moment Courtney watched him. Courtney's eyes were misty from liquor and he seemed unsteady on his feet. He said, "I know how you could call our debt even, and maybe make a little."

"How?"

"Nothing you couldn't do, easy."

"Yeah?" Bogart said.

Courtney said, "Later," and turned and walked toward the men's room. Someone had come to stand beside Bogart at the bar. After a moment he glanced up. It was Bruce Fannin.

Fannin sipped scotch and soda. His bleak gaze turned to Bogart finally. He said, "That's an odd game of poker you play."

"Yeah?" Bogart said.

"And the way you shot craps was odd too."

Bogart's expression didn't change, but the scar began to whiten on his face.

"You're the first guy I ever saw deliberately cheat himself," Fannin said.

"What do you mean?"

"That you've been stacking the cards—against yourself."

They were the same height and they looked full into one another's eyes, neither man flinching.

"You're crazy," Bogart said.

"All right. It's your own business." The lieutenant turned on his heel and walked off.

Bogart found that Courtney was at his side again. How long he'd been there, how much he'd heard, the test pilot couldn't be certain. He could make nothing out of the man's drink-stupid, moon-like face. Courtney watched him a long time before he said, "You still interested in that money?"

"Sure."

"I got a woman on my hands. She knows I have an income and she's got some letters and she's got me in a spot. But if you were to tell her you were rich, and make her think you were serious, she'd swap over fast. I know—she'd go for you, and she always goes for the most money."

Bogart said, "No thanks. I've got a wife somewhere already."

"You don't have to marry her. Just find those letters of mine and grab on to them. They're worth a thousand bucks easy to me."

Bogart wondered if that was the job Courtney had had in mind from the first. He thought of this before he said, "Where do I meet her?"

"She's out of town right now," Courtney said. "When she comes back I'll let you know."

"What's her name?"

Courtney looked drunk and secretive. "Don't worry 'bout that. Wait till you meet her."

WHEN John Reardon came out of the doctor's office into the long bare corridor of the hospital, Lieutenant Steeg



caught him by the arm. The lieutenant's boyish face was drawn. "What did he say? He won't tell me anything, Reardon. The nurses won't tell me. How is she?"

"There's a chance," Reardon said. "She's had several blood transfusions."

"They won't let me see her," Steeg said desperately. "Those damn guards of yours, they must think I'm the person who tried to kill her. They won't even let me look at her."

"She's still unconscious."

"But if I could only see her!" His face had grown old in the last two days. "Can't I look at her?"

"It's not my orders," Reardon said. "The doctors allow one guard in the room, not another outsider. They won't let me in."

The young officer stumbled back to his chair beside the doctor's door. When Reardon went out he was sitting there, his face in his hands.

The strain of these days had told on John Reardon also. He had gotten almost no sleep and there had been little time for food. Yet his progress had been nothing definite, nothing conclusive. Two dozen agents were in and around Montgomery now. They knew that the same gun which had killed Colonel Hendricks had put a bullet in Tom Matson's arm and had wounded Helen Steeg, perhaps fatally. They knew intimate details about the past life of at least two dozen men at Maxwell Field, and they were digging into the past of others.

Yet while all this was happening an explosion occurred in the hanger where the new bomber was being given its final land tests. Heroic work saved the ship with only minor damages.

It had been a bright, sunny day, but with twilight there came a chill in the air. Reardon rubbed the back of his hand across tired eyes, and bent to his work again. Then the phone on his desk jangled—and there came the first real break.

It was Sam Paley—Bates his name was now—and his voice was sour as ever. "Maybe I've got something about this Weichman, John. And maybe I haven't."

"What is it?"

"Suspicion. Meet me in the alley back of Courtney's cottage on McDonough Street a couple of hours from now."

"All right. But what . . . ?" The line had clicked dead. He stared at the phone, brows corrugated with thought. Paley had always had his own methods, but this. . . . He got half out of his chair, thinking he'd have a look at that alley now, then sat down again. Paley had said two hours. Blundering around sooner might spoil whatever the agent was counting on.

John Reardon worked for the next hour and a half with one eye on the clock.

It was seven forty-five when he parked his car on McDonough. A few leaves still clung to the elms that tunneled the street, and through these he could see the curled feather of a new moon. There was just enough chill in the air to make a man walk briskly.

He circled three sides of the block, casually it seemed. If anything was happening here the quiet night had no sign of it. He dipped into the alley.

It was dark. Ashes, spilled for years from garbage wagons, were thick underfoot and his shoes crunched on them. He tried to walk quietly, but there was still a faint *crunch-crunch* beneath his shoes.

Directly ahead of him, not thirty feet away, a match flared. Cupped hands threw the light up against the lean, sour face of Sam Paley, a cigaret between his lips. He lit the cigaret, shook out the match, said, "That you, John?"

"Yes," Reardon said. He had stopped dead still. His body was taut, eyes staring, puzzled. He could see only the black shadow of Paley's body now. He took a slow step forward.

"Sam?" he said.



He saw the slow, deliberate movement of Paley's hand. He stared, unbelieving, thinking, "He's got a gun in his hand. But what . . . ? He can't be . . ." And then he was hurling sideways even as Paley's gun crashed fire. A bullet tugged at his coat. Another left a welt of hot fire across his leg. He stumbled and went down hard. His own gun jarred from his hand.

Sam Paley, crouching ahead of him in the darkness, didn't know that. He saw Reardon's bulk go down in the alley, that

was all. He turned and ran. Out of the shadows another figure joined him, and the two disappeared together.

Reardon pawed desperately for his gun. It seemed years before his hand touched it—then he was up and running. His mind was stupefied by what had happened. His friend *shooting* at him . . . ! He couldn't be certain where Paley had gone. He swerved into the back yard of a cottage—and then his foot hit something rubbery, flinging him headlong.

Still on hands and knees he swung back





to the thing he'd stumbled over. A match flared and the light showed him the body of a man stretched face down.

It was Harris, the agent he'd had tailing Rud Courtney. He wasn't dead, but simply unconscious from a blow.

A sudden beam of light stabbed the darkness, found Reardon and the agent beside whom he was kneeling.

Then behind him a voice said, "Hold it!"

Rud Courtney was there, a gun in one hand, a flashlight in the other. Reardon realized that he was in the yard of Courtney's cottage.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Fires of Hell

"WHAT the hell?" Courtney was saying. "What's going on here?" His voice was shaky, uncertain—and he trembled like a man about to be mighty ill.

John Reardon stood up slowly, putting his own gun back in its holster. "I'll ask you that," he said. "What are you doing?"

"I live here," was the answer. "I was reading and heard the shots. Who's the guy you've killed?"

Harris began to moan a little, holding his head.

Finally he swayed erect. His eyes were dull for a moment, looking from Courtney to Reardon.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Everybody wants to know," Courtney said.

Harris understood the warning in Reardon's eyes: Courtney mustn't know he'd been tailed, if he didn't already know it. "You'd told me to keep watch on the house where somebody shot at you," Harris said. "Steeg's place a couple of doors away. I was standing back here in the alley when *bop!* That's all I know."

Reardon pulled the agent aside, snapped orders at him. His head was still spinning,

dazed by what had happened. It was incredible—impossible to believe. And yet it had happened. He had seen Sam Paley deliberately try to murder him. Paley was his friend—as close a friend as he had in the world.

But more than that, he was a member of the F.B.I., he had sworn, *I shall always be loyal to my duty, my organization, and my country.* And yet Paley had tried to murder him!

There was something crazy here, something beyond understanding. He remembered that in his telephone call Paley had said, "Maybe I've got something about this Weichman."

Reardon sent his coupe hurtling toward the scientist's home, leaving Harris behind with Courtney.

He heard the explosion when he was still two blocks away. A great black cloud, streaked with fire, pillared upward—climbed higher until it beat against the stars and smothered them. Then the flames ate through the smoke, consuming it, changing from red to a roaring white.

It had been a big, gaunt, old-fashioned house, set far back from the street and without close neighbors. By the time Reardon braked his coupe the whole place was one white-hot mass of flames. Even at this distance the heat seared at his eyeballs. This was no natural fire, but one fed by furious chemicals. He tried to run up the walk toward the house, but the heat beat him back.

On the far side of the lawn, in the white glare of the fire, he saw a man running. At first he thought it was one of the gathering spectators who had got closer to the fire than anyone else. Then, as the man raced toward the street, he turned, looking at Reardon.

*It was Sam Paley.*

Before Reardon could take more than five strides Paley had disappeared into the thickening mob of spectators.

Sirens were wailing now as fire-engines



screached to a halt. But it was hopeless to attack these flames. The firemen could try only to keep the blaze from spreading.

A hopeless, beaten reaction took possession of John Reardon. He thought of Paley and there was a dull pain around his heart. He thought, too, of the old scientist who had lived in this house, and of his daughter with her dark, secretive eyes. Both of them would be only charred bones by now. And the radio beam which the old man had been working on—destroyed forever. . . . What about the federal agent who had been here guarding the old man? He would be dead also.

John Reardon had lost his fight. At the time when there had seemed most hope of winning, he had lost heaviest.

At his elbow a voice said, "My lord, chief! How did this happen?"

He whirled, saw Grogan—the agent who had been guarding Weichman. Grogan was with the scientist and his daughter. Weichman hopped up and down, his shaggy grey hair flying wild. "My laboratory!" he yelled. "My laboratory! Oh, can't you—"

Reardon got Grogan by the shoulder. "Where have you been?" he yelled.

"To Maxwell Field," Grogan answered. "This crazy guy got the idea he was ready to take his stuff out there, and there wasn't any way to stop him. So I went along."

An almost sickening relief flowed through Reardon. "And his invention—this whatever-it-is he's working on—is it out there,"

"Right," Grogan said.

Weichman was yelling louder than ever. "He's in the house! He's in there!"

"Who?"

"Hertzstein!"

The name was faintly familiar to Reardon. "Who?" he asked again. And then he remembered—the man was a famous authority on radioactivity.

"He phoned!" Weichman was crying.

"He was to visit me at eight-fifteen, and I forgot. I was interested in seeing how. . . ."

But Reardon was no longer listening. He knew that the man who had made the engagement with Weichman was *not* the scientist he had pretended to be. He had simply wanted to be sure that Weichman would be at home at a certain time—be home to murder.

Out of the swirling faces around them one came into focus suddenly. It was a dark, emotionless face with bleak eyes—Bruce Fannin.

Reardon gave no sign that he had noticed the man. He wasn't supposed to have ever seen him. But there were always reports on Reardon's desk and they were always checked. Reardon said, "Grogan, get Mr. Weichman and his daughter away from here, quick. Down to a hotel. And park yourself where nobody can get to them!"

**B**ACK at his office Reardon went over his reports with a dogged intensity. As far as Harris knew Rud Courtney had actually been in his cottage when Paley fired on Reardon. Harris had been struck down in the dark with only a glimpse of the man who hit him—Sam Paley.

Lieutenant Edward Steeg had been asleep in a hospital room, exhausted by his long wait for information about his wife's condition.

Private Matson, who had been off duty during the afternoon and had lost the man tailing him, had been back at the post by seven o'clock.

Bruce Fannin had been off duty. There had been no one following him, and now it was difficult to check on his whereabouts.

There had been no word from Sam Paley since his phone call at six. As Private Bates he was supposed to be on duty but had vanished.



There were reports from other agents about other men, but these were the ones that most interested Reardon. The men who were trying to find the outside contact—the spy to whom the traitor, or traitors, inside the field were selling their services—had met little success. Reardon wanted this man chiefly because he might lead to the traitor inside the field. In time of peace any country can have plenty of men in position to finance sabotage and buy secrets—if they can get traitors to do the actual physical work.

He read and reread his reports until his eyes ached. He stared off into space, trying desperately to fit together all that he knew. At his fingertips was all the information gathered by two dozen men, and somewhere here must be the solution, if only he could find it.

There were hourly phone calls from the hospital about the condition of Mrs. Steeg. She was still unconscious. She might live, or she might not. The crisis was due soon.

There were afternoon papers on his desk screaming black headlines. Another war imminent in Europe. If the dictators felt confident enough they would march. The radio gave hourly bulletins. The warlords were uncertain; they would make up their minds soon. If they believed they could win. . . .

Mixed with the war bulletins were reports on college football games. It seemed incredible that here in a sleepy southern town where the young men quarreled most violently over whether Auburn could lick Alabama if the two were to ever play . . . it seemed unbelievable that here, in the quiet darkness, world history was being made. What happened here in the next twenty-four hours might mean peace or war, the lives of thousands of these young men who argued now about football teams.

But in one of the hangars at Maxwell Field there was a new-type bombing plane

that tomorrow would get its final test—that would fly a new type of radio beam so accurate as to make bombing infallible.

If the warlords in Europe knew this plane and this radio beam were destroyed, or that it was *not* so deadly as their spies believed, guns might begin to fire. But if they found out that the democracies were equipped with a weapon they could not match. . . .

John Reardon thought of the brother he had loved—and thought of him crouched in a padded cell, part of his face blown away, his mind a thing of black horror.

His own eyes ached with strain. His mind and his body throbbed dully from exhaustion. He rubbed his hand over his eyes and forehead. The lump just over and behind his left ear where he had been struck at Lieutenant Steeg's was still sore. He kept his left hand on the lump, gently, while he reached for the telephone. There was something horrible about his gaunt face. . . .

**T**HERE was the grey pallor of false dawn in the east. Lights burned dimly in the bleak hospital corridor. A nurse came out of one of the rooms, closing the door quietly behind her. A short distance away Lieutenant Steeg got up from a chair and walked over to her. His eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep, he was unshaved and his clothes were wrinkled. "How is she, nurse?" he said huskily.

"She's sleeping," the nurse said. "I think the crisis has passed. I think she's going to pull through."

"Thank God!" the man said. "Oh, thank God!" He put his face in his hands.

The nurse was an ugly woman. She had dreamed a great deal about love, and had none of it. Tears came in her eyes now. She said, "You go lie down, Lieutenant. You go get some sleep."

"I don't want to sleep!" Steeg said. "I want to get drunk. I want to celebrate.



You don't know how long I've waited. Can I see her, just glance at her?"

The nurse shook her head. "But don't worry. You go sleep for twelve hours. Then maybe you can see her." She went on down the hall.

Lieutenant Steeg stood there. He was trembling all over and there were tears in his eyes. His mouth worked. He was still there when the door of his wife's room opened again and the G-man Harris came out. He closed the door, leaned his back against it, and lighted a cigarette.

Steeg clutched him by the arm. "The nurse said my wife is better!"

"She seems to be," Harris said.

"Let's get drunk. Let's get blind drunk!"

Harris said, "I'd like to, pal. But I can't leave this door." He let smoke drift out through his nostrils. "I'd sure like a drink. This dead time before dawn gets me."

"There's a bar just down at the corner," Steeg said.

"I can't go." But Harris' mouth worked and he looked up and down the empty corridor. "How about you staying here while I run down for one."

"Sure," Steeg said.

After Harris was gone, he stood there wiping his hands on his trousers. They were wet with perspiration. His eyes were almost blood red. At the far end of the corridor a nurse passed into view and out again.

Lieutenant Steeg turned, opened the door into his wife's room, stepped through, and closed the door behind him.

A dim light burned in the far corner. His wife lay very still under the covers, her face white as the pillow over which her blond hair was spread. He stepped toward her. Her eyes were closed, her lips parted slightly.

From his vest pocket Steeg took a small pill. Holding it carefully between thumb and forefinger he leaned over his wife.

With his left hand he touched her lips.

They were cold, icy cold, and he screamed at the shock. He stumbled back.

Behind him the door opened and Harris said, "You can't murder her, Steeg. She's already dead. She died three hours ago."

Steeg only looked at him. His face was ghastly.

"A man who would murder his wife," Harris said, "and betray his own country! They'll hang you, Steeg, and the country will want to forget there was ever a person like you. But you can still do something for society—you can tell who you are working with."

The man's mouth worked and saliva drooled over his chin. His eyes were crazy.

"Matson helped, of course," Harris said. "It had to be Matson. But who else? Who were you contacting outside?"

The man sprang like a cornered rat. He jumped full at Harris' gun.

The agent didn't want to shoot. He wanted the man alive. He swung the gun for Steeg's head. It was a mistake, for Steeg had the strength of a maniac. He caught Harris' wrist and the two went down together, Steeg on top. His right hand clutched the G-man's hair and with savage fury he battered Harris' head against the floor.

Then with the G-man's gun in his hand he was up and running.

## CHAPTER SIX

### F. B. I. Finish Fight

NIGHT still crouched over the body of morning. Searchlights burned a white track down the concrete runway, but elsewhere the darkness and the mist held control. The hangers faded into the grey blackness out of which men appeared and vanished like ghosts. The huge bomber seemed to writhe gently with the fog like



some prehistoric monster. The sound of its four idling motors droned through the mist.

Inside the monster, Wayne Bogart, test pilot, grinned at Matson, his observer. "All set?"

"Set," Matson said.

"Okay."

Matson thought he saw the scar on the man's handsome face whiten an instant, then fade. The motors began to roar. The sound rolled through the night and hammered windows a quarter mile away. It grew to gigantic deafening thunder. The great ship began to move. It hurtled down the searchlighted runway. And then the eternal miracle took place and the tons of metal and tons upon tons of loaded sandbags that simulated the weight of bombs, rose like a blown feather into the sky.

At three hundred feet they could see the sun, far out over the world's rim, round and red. Looking down they could see where its white lance sank into the mists. The tops of hangars with their black-and-yellow checks were visible, shrinking away from them as things seen through the wrong end of a telescope. They rode up and into the sky on the smooth, invisible path of a radio beam.

Clouds pillowed close above, looking from this height a great deal as the mist had looked on the ground. They drove into them. The earth faded away. The universe became a floor of fluffy mist, a grey spaceless heaven with occasional long streamers of sunlight in between.

The altimeter moved upward—Eighteen thousand, nineteen, twenty. . . . There was nothing now beyond the windows but grey space, the majestic wings, the deep-throated motors.

"It's a dove!" Wayne Bogart yelled. "A honey!"

Matson nodded. Over the radio he was droning out reports to the field miles below and behind.

"Better get a snort of oxygen," the pilot yelled.

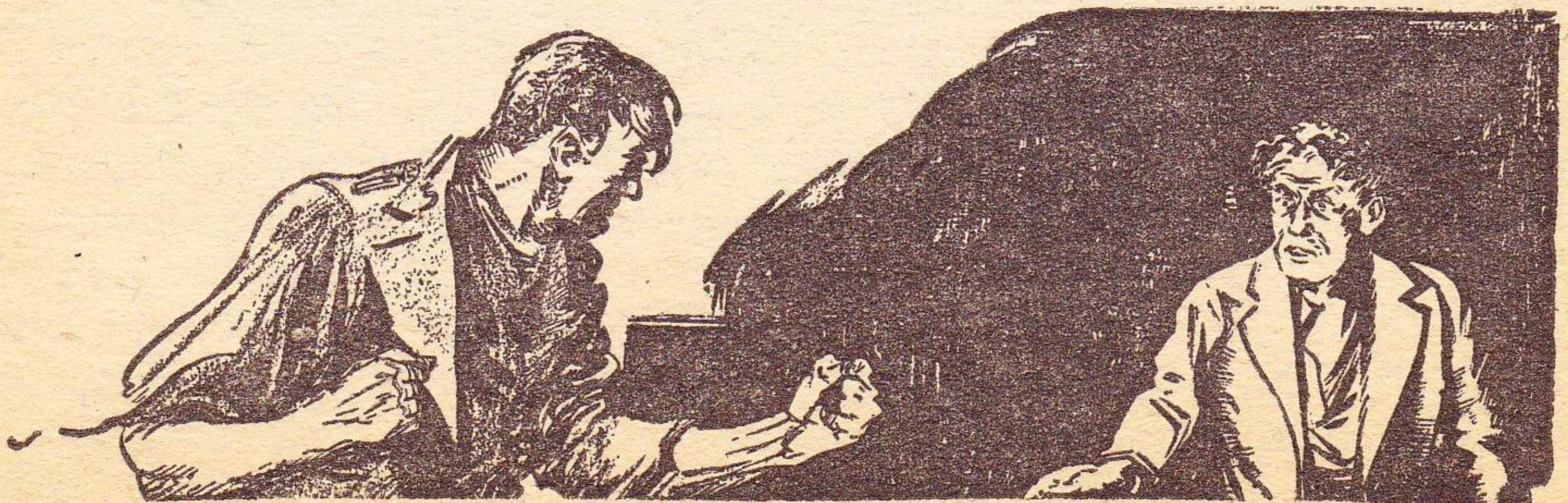
It was then Tom Matson took off his earphones, switched off his radio. He stood up and as though by magic there was a gun in his hand. "No," he said. "Not yet."

Bogart stared at him. His eyes got large and unbelieving . . . and watchful.

Matson didn't need to speak again. His gun showed what he meant when Bogart tried to move, and Bogart stopped. He was following the radio beam automatically, still upward. Matson signaled for him to level off. He backed into the compartment where the tons of sandbags had been stacked, still holding his gun on the pilot, and came back dragging a bag which hadn't been strapped into place—a bag which should have never been there, though it looked like the others, except for its lumpy shape. He slashed the bag open, and the body of Sam Paley spilled out.

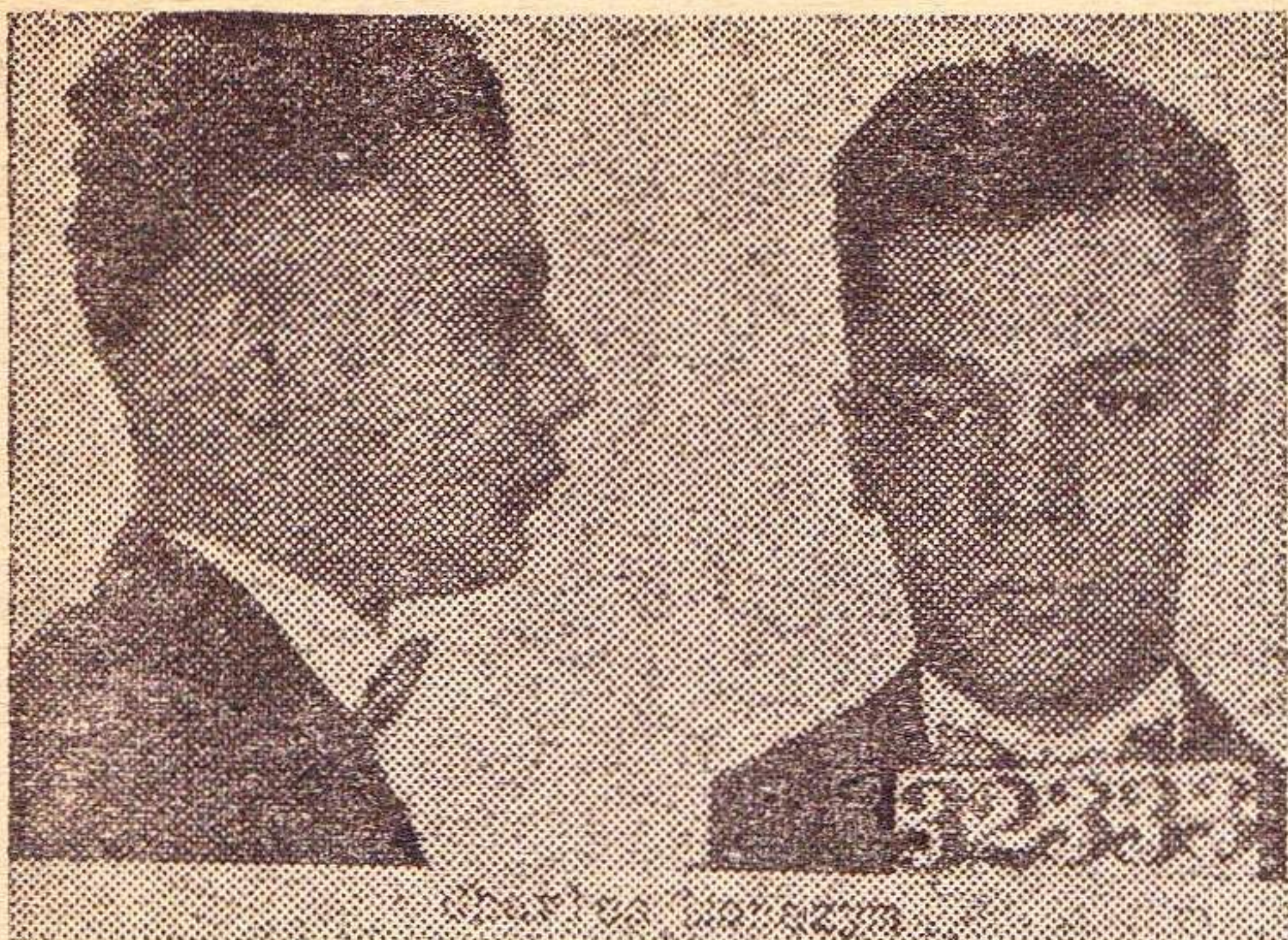
For a moment the pilot thought Paley was dead, then realized he was only unconscious. His hands and feet were tied

*(Continued on page 108)*





# WANTED BY THE F. B. I.



**CHARLES MONAZYM**

Description: Color, white; Born January 20, 1912, Pottsville, Pennsylvania; Height, 5 feet, 9¾ inches; Weight, 128 pounds; Build, medium slender; Hair, black; Eyes, brown; Complexion, dark; Nationality, American—Syrian descent.



**MARGARET ALLEN**

Description: Born November 10, 1900, Budapest, Hungary; Height, 5 feet, 2½ inches; Weight, 104 pounds; Eyes, blue-green; Hair, brown; Complexion, sallow; Build, slim; Race, Caucasian; Nationality, Hungarian; Occupation, domestic, thief and shoplifter; Scars and Marks: Teeth false, has upper and lower plates. Peculiarities: Speech is broken and foreign, whistles like bobwhite quail to attract attention, uses profanity profusely.

#### CRIMINAL RECORD

**M**MARGARET ALLEN, escaped Federal prisoner. Pleaded guilty to an indictment charging conspiracy to commit bank robbery, after she had been arrested when, in company with Mrs. Olive Evans, she endeavored to secure a safety-deposit box in a Pittsburgh Bank for the purpose of placing \$12,000.00—Rudolph Brant's share of the Monazym-Conley-Brant hold-up of the Oaklawn and Woodlawn Branch of the Detroit Bank. She was sentenced to two years in a Federal penal institution.

While being transported to the Federal

The man and woman whose faces appear on this page are wanted by the Law. In the ordinary course of your life, you frequent byways where the Law does not seek. Have you seen these criminals? They may pass you on the street, or live in your neighborhood. If you spot them—notify the nearest office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation at once!

#### CRIMINAL RECORD

**C**CHARLES MONAZYM, a notorious midwestern bank robber and hoodlum, is the object of an extensive investigation now being conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation inasmuch as he has been positively identified as a participant in the robbery of the Oaklawn and Woodlawn Branch of the Detroit Bank which was looted of \$64,740.00 by five bandits on May 1, 1936. During the course of this robbery, four of the bandits entered the bank and one remained outside seated in the getaway car. All of the bandits who entered the bank were armed with side arms and one carried a machine gun.

The bandit carrying the machine gun has since been identified as Monazym. Two of the bandits, John Carl Conley and Rudolph Brant, have since been captured, and sentenced to twenty-five years each in a Federal penitentiary. Monazym is still at large. He has served two years' prison service previously, and is reported to carry with him at all times, a .38 caliber automatic pistol.

Industrial Institution for women at Alderson, West Virginia, on October 20, 1936, Margaret Allen escaped from the custody of a Deputy United States Marshal, and an investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation resulting in her apprehension in Detroit on August 23, 1937. Thereafter, Margaret Allen was placed in the City Workhouse at Cincinnati, Ohio, to serve the sentence imposed on her in connection with the bank robbery, but on May 29, 1938, she effected her escape from that institution and is now being sought by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

If apprehended, please notify the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D. C., or the Special Agent in Charge of the Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation which is nearest your city.

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29x4.50-20		2.35 1.05	31x4	2.95 1.25	34x4 1/2	3.45 1.45
30x4.50-21		2.40 1.15	32x4	2.95 1.25	30x5	3.65 1.65
28x4.75-19		2.45 1.25	33x4	2.95 1.25	32x5	3.75 1.75
29x4.75-20		2.50 1.25	34x4	3.25 1.35	35x5	3.95 1.75
29x5.00-19		2.85 1.25	32x4 1/2	3.35 1.45		
30x5.00-20		2.85 1.25				
5.25-17		2.90 1.35				
28x5.25-18		3.25 1.35				
29x5.25-19		3.25 1.35				
30x5.25-20		3.25 1.35				
31x5.25-21		3.25 1.35				
6.50-17		3.35 1.40				
29x5.50-18		3.35 1.40				
29x5.50-19		3.35 1.40				
6.00-17		3.40 1.40				
30x6.00-18		3.40 1.40				
31x6.00-19		3.40 1.40				
32x6.00-20		3.45 1.55				
33x6.00-21		3.65 1.55				
32x6.50-20		3.75 1.75				
6.00-16		3.75 1.45				

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34x5	4.25 2.25	36x8	11.45 4.95
32x6	7.95 2.95	40x8	13.25 4.95
36x6	9.95 4.45		

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6.50-20	4.45 1.95	8.25-20	8.95 4.95
7.00-20	5.95 2.95	9.00-20	10.95 5.65
		9.75-20	13.95 6.45

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(Continued from page 106)

and he was gagged. Matson removed the bonds. He straightened, stepped forward. The thing he was going to do was clear enough now. He would knock the pilot unconscious, take the plane low enough to parachute out over a spot where confederates would be waiting, then let the plane with its unconscious burden crash. When it was found there would be only two charred skeletons and the burned remains of the ship to prove it wasn't as worthy as its builders and the army had hoped.

He raised his gun to strike.

In the compartment where Paley had been hidden there was a sudden movement. John Reardon was there, a gun in his hand. "Matson!" he yelled.

His gun still raised over the pilot's head, Matson went rigid. Then he screamed a curse and struck. The pilot tried to dodge. John Reardon fired. His bullet took Matson high in the right shoulder—Reardon didn't want to kill—but the gun was already coming down. It struck the pilot over the right ear. The pilot fell forward across the controls. The great ship nosed down. It began to whirl like a mad thing.

John Reardon felt his stomach turn over. He was flung crazily from side to side, battered, hurled madly about. He clawed his way until somehow he was at the pilot's side, clutching at him. "Ryan!"

He got the man upright for a moment, but Reardon wasn't a pilot. The maze of instruments before him meant nothing. He shook the pilot. "Ryan!"

All the blood in his body was being crowded into his head, it seemed. His temples were bursting from the pressure. Huge black spots beat at his eyes. Blackness gnawed at his brain. He fought back to consciousness. He got Ryan McQuade upright again. The man's eyes were fluttering now. Matson lay unconscious as he had since the bullet hit him.

A little glimmer of intelligence came into McQuade's eyes.



## Traitors Spell Death with a "G"

He got the plane out of its dive and righted it. Reardon was sick. His stomach and brain were swinging in crazy circles. But McQuade—who had been Wayne Bogart, test pilot, only grinned. "If she can come out of that," he said, "she can do anything." Then he laughed at Reardon's face. "Hell!" he said, "you should have been with me when I was stunt flying in Hollywood."

"FOR a long while," John Reardon said, "the fact that he had used his own car to murder Colonel Hendricks, and had then reported the bullet-hole in the floorboards and the blood on the fender, kept me from believing it could have been Lieutenant Steeg. When he used his own car he wasn't, of course, counting on either the bullet-hole or the blood. And he had Matson as an alibi—we didn't know two men were in the car. Steeg was hidden in the back and the waiter didn't see him. But I carried around the real proof on my head all the time and didn't have sense enough to recognize it."

"What proof?" McQuade asked.

"A bump," Reardon explained. "It occurred to me suddenly that whoever hit me there must have had to strike from behind, not from in front where the man who shot Matson had been. That bullet in Matson's arm had confused me too. That was a staged bluff to make it look as if the man who had killed Colonel Hendricks was afraid Matson had recognized him and was trying to get him out of the way. Matson wasn't supposed to be actually wounded, but in the dark, he was. The man who shot was an assistant to the outside contact man—we've rounded them all up since Steeg and Matson both started talking—and he ducked into another part of the house. Steeg was afraid I'd catch him and bopped me one in the dark."

"That bump wasn't all you had."

(Continued on page 110)

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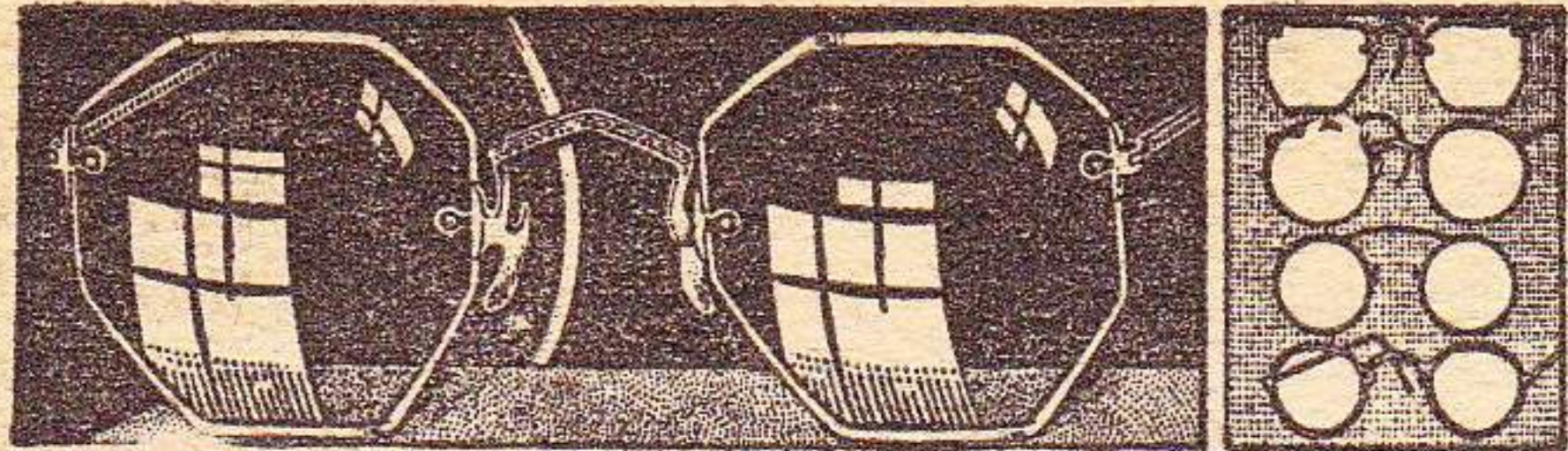
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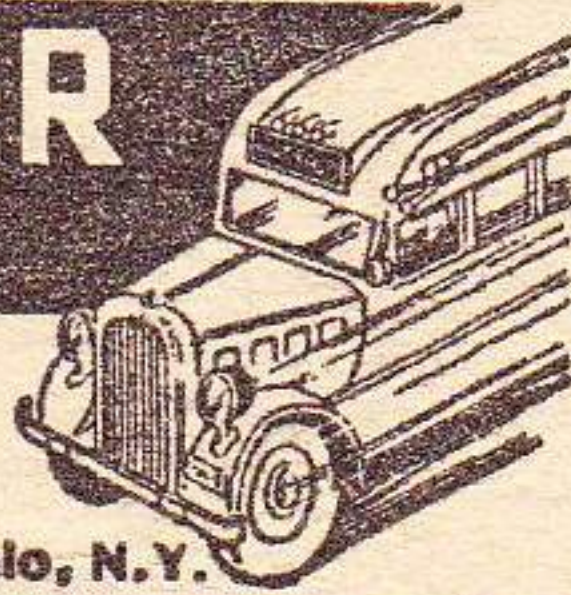
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ABOUT

**RUPTURE**

(Continued from page 109)

Reardon nodded. "No. I kept wondering why Mrs. Steeg, after she saw the man who shot, didn't run into the room where her husband and I were. She must have suspected the lieutenant all along. Then, when she saw this man who had called on Steeg before, she got wise. She was afraid to say anything in front of Steeg. Then his act of grief—after he actually shot her himself—was overdone. I had a couple of men checking, and they found he hadn't been as much in love in the past as he seemed to be. Then when I was shot at in the alley, Steeg was supposed to be asleep at the hospital. But I checked and found he could have easily stepped out. He had one of the outside men helping him.

"So after Mrs. Steeg died, I planned the trap for him at the hospital. He managed to knock Harris out, but there were men at both ends of the hallway, and they grabbed him. I had set the plan for Matson at the same time. I thought if he was told he was to act as observer, he wouldn't try to injure the ship until it was in the air, where he could get at the pilot, then escape himself.

I was never so surprised as when he pulled Sam out of that bag,"

McQuade laughed.

Reardon said, "We were keeping a pretty close watch on him, but not so close that he'd get suspicious. It took nerve to load Sam on there like a bag of sand, but he needed an extra body when the wreck was found. And in the dark he got away with it."

Paley's head was bandaged. He said, "As usual, I get the wrong end of everything. I'd overheard Matson talking on the phone to somebody, heard him mention meeting them at Steeg's, then something about that scientist. I was going to tell you that when the door of the phone booth opened and—bam!"

"They made a wax death-mask of your face," Reardon said. "Only you weren't



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dead, just a little case of concussion. They couldn't be absolutely certain how much you'd told me so they tried to knock me out. They let your clay face be seen again right after they blew up Weichman's. That was to explain your disappearance—it would look as if you'd sold out."

"I'll need an extra week of vacation," Paley growled. "I can't have any fun with my head in a case."

McQuade was smiling and thinking of a red-headed girl. "I've got some unfinished business in New Orleans," he said.

Reardon said, "And I have in Birmingham."

**T**HAT night Mrs. Reardon knotted her husband's black bowtie with fine deliberation. "This time," she said, "you are taking me to the dance, John, even if the President is shot."

"Sure," Reardon said, his head tilted back. "That would be a case for the secret service."

"I don't care who it would be a case for. You are going with me tonight. You are going if I have to carry you. You are going if—"

The phone rang. "Oh, damn!" she said.

"I'm sorry, honey," Reardon said. He was edging sideways toward the phone.

She said, "The next time I marry it'll be to a fireman. At least the bell rings louder!"

THE END

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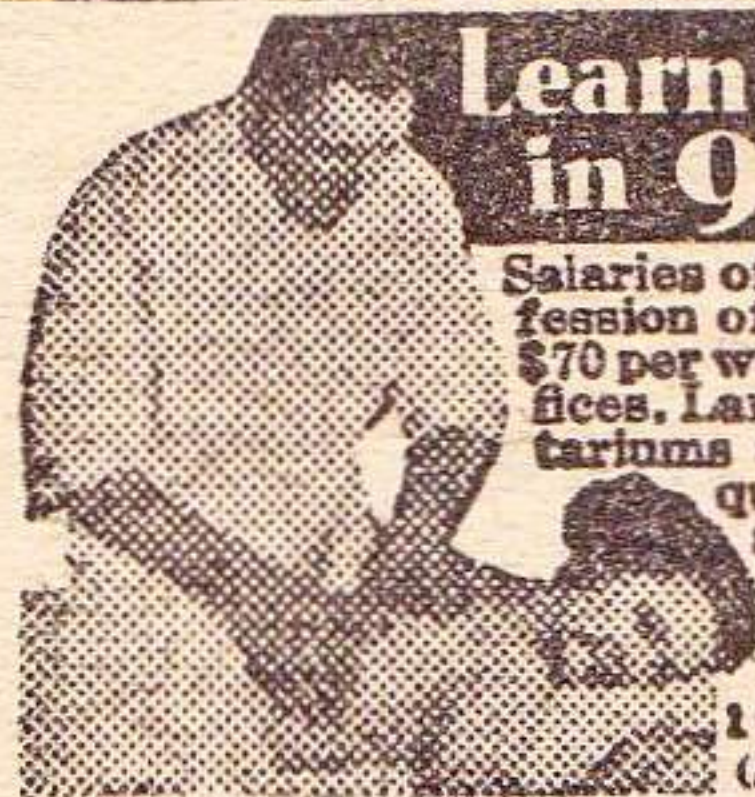
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THIS issue of Ace G-Man contains a novel called "Traitors Spell Death with a G." It is an unusual, gripping story of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's attack on an espionage ring. Yet, exciting though this story is, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the real spy-catching activities of the F.B.I. are not one whit less thrilling.

The success of G-men in bringing to book German secret agents, is but one reason more for our gratitude to Uncle Sam's ace law officers. It seems that no matter in which field Director Hoover's men operate, the results are always the same.

And again we have had it proved to us that life is stranger than fiction . . .

Consider the facts. We know now that the German agents included many extraordinary details in their plan—the use of the President's own memorandum blanks to forge orders to military officials; the capture of an American officer, taking from him important plans—and overpowering him with gas to be secreted in a special fountain pen. Surely, this sounds like fiction!

But as we knew, it is *not* fiction. It is real life—and a real plot, foiled by *real* G-men!

We all agree that the Special Agent is an almost incredible watchdog of our national interests. We have seen what he can do against crooks, killers and spies. There is small wonder that some skeptics scoff at accounts of G-man exploits.

But now we know that these exploits are *not* imagined tales: They are remarkable because G-men have met amazing problems—and solved them in practically miraculous style.

Because the F.B.I. is not composed of supermen, but flesh and blood mortals, our admiration must be even greater. In this world, we know that life may offer even greater dangers and more extravagant plots than fiction. And we can thank God that the real G-man is as astonishing a lawman as his fiction counterpart!