

11-4 *stereographed*
**10¢ BLACK BOOK
DETECTIVE**

JAN.

MAGAZINE



**THRILLING
PUBLICATION**

**THE WEEK END
MURDERS**

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH MYSTERY NOVEL
FEATURING JONATHAN DRAKE, ACE MANHUNTER,
ON THE TRAIL OF A DIABOLICAL MURDER FIEND

By DONALD STUART

ALSO: SHORT STORIES AND FEATURES





Rotating Forest Fire Lamp

See the Smoke Rise and the Forest Burn!

Here is a new, unusual Bedroom or Table Lamp with ACTION! Everyone who sees it will be fascinated, and it will never fail to be a source of interest and amusement to you and your guests.

The lamp is made of beautiful lithographed, brilliant, colors, really seems to burn. The flames leap into the air and the dark smoke rolls across the sky. An unusual lamp that has action. It represents a forest fire, and you have ever seen it and never fails to interest everybody. Aside from the forest fire in the background there is the beautiful lake and forest in the foreground. The automatic revolving cylinder gives the scene right after you plug it into the socket. It requires no electricity to keep it going and the ordinary heat of the bulb makes it turn. It looks like an oil painting. Artistic metal on an anodized aluminum base. The lamp is made of water seems to be flowing through the rapids and racing in a whirling motion. The scene is so realistic that it looks like an oil painting.

Can also be supplied with a view of Niagara Falls. In this lamp the water seems to be flowing through the rapids and racing in a whirling motion. The scene is so realistic that it looks like an oil painting.

FOREST FIRE LAMP. Price Postpaid... \$1.35

NIAGARA FALLS LAMP. Price Postpaid... \$1.35



SWORD & SCABBARD

Two metal sword with scabbard. Beautifully finished. Lovely. Realistic. Metal. Also metal scabbard. Length, 17 1/2 in. Price Each... **25c**

WONDERFUL X-RAY 10c

Apparently See Through Flesh, Etc. GREAT CURIOSITY! With it you can apparently see the bones in the fingers, hand, foot, etc. Price Only... **10c**

BROADCAST thru your radio TALK - SING - PLAY

BROADCAST your voice on programs coming through your own radio set—make announcements from any part of the house—inject wise cracks, jokes and mystify friends! Includes radio set, practice crooning, singing, etc. Do a Bing Crosby, Charlie McCarthy, Jack Benny, Benny Goodman, etc. **Price Only 25c**

World Mike

Made especially for home use, attached is a lively without tools. Not a toy. Put on your own program at home parties, club affairs, etc. Barrels of fun! Easy to operate. **Price Only 25c**

MIDGET POCKET RADIO \$1.00

Listen to Music and Sports Everywhere You Go. This amazing midget pocket radio brings in programs from all over the world. It is a real radio set, complete with all the necessary parts. **Price \$1.00**

PEA-MATIC REPEATER 1 SHOT

Shoots 15 Peas. More it is, boys! It is a real pea shooter. It is a real pea shooter. It is a real pea shooter. **Price 25c**

Pistol Cigarette Case 25c

It looks like a really handy one. It is a real cigarette case. It is a real cigarette case. It is a real cigarette case. **Price 25c**

HOW TO TAP DANCE

Why every dancer should have this. It is a real tap dance book. It is a real tap dance book. It is a real tap dance book. **Price 25c**

Sex Indicator

Fascinating discovery that the sex of eggs, handwriting, etc. in use for many years. **Price Postpaid 10c**

Learn to DANCE OVER 100 ILLUSTRATIONS

Kiss, Swing, Dances, etc. This is a real dance book. It is a real dance book. It is a real dance book. **Price 25c**

FACTS & LIFE

For Men Only. An interesting look which describes the laws by which nature works. It is a real facts and life book. It is a real facts and life book. **Price 25c**

FACTS & LIFE

For Women Only. Explains obscure words, terms and processes. Corrects many mistakes. It is a real facts and life book. It is a real facts and life book. **Price 25c**

HOW TO LOVE 10c

Every normal being is susceptible to love's tender caress. When love is the language of their hearts, they are in the language of their hearts. It is a real how to love book. It is a real how to love book. **Price 10c**

Does High Grade Work - A Practical Machine

Handy, PORTABLE TYPEWRITER that turns out high grade work for only 30c. Just what you need for your schoolwork, letters, envelopes, notices, etc. Makes your work look neat and helps you to spell correctly. The machine is typewriter made—no special "keyboard." Typewriter the ten times as much. There is no learning—no special "keyboard." Typewriter the ten times as much. **Price 30c**

Typewrite Your Own Letters, Schoolwork, Envelopes, Etc., Etc.

Paper goes in flat and comes out flat. No curling, slipping or crooked typing. Does not cut the paper. Envelopes feed freely and easily. Types with open spacing, clean writing and straight lines. Takes 5 in. sheets, any length. Characters complete and uniform. Rush the Coupon & 39c For This Typewriter

CHORUS QUEENS or Lives of Hotcha Chorus Girls

This book reveals the intimate secrets and fascinating pastimes in the lives of famous Broadway chorus girls. It tells you in vivid detail every move they make from the time they get up until the time they go to bed. Although there has been a lot of talk and discussion about chorus girls, few people seem to know exactly what they do. Now, for the first time a famous author takes you behind the scenes and gives you an intimate glimpse into the secrets backstage. **Price Postpaid Only 10c**

Confessions of a Minister's Daughter

An interesting and fascinating story which explains the delusions and fate of a minister's daughter. Few books are so good. **Price Postpaid Only 10c**

ALL 3 BOOKS IN ONE JUMBO VOLUME, Only 25c

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL REVOLVER STYLE

50c \$1.00. Fine for Protection. Wonderful effective. Patented. Revolver. Admired. **Price Postpaid Only 10c**

DELUXE MIKE

Larger, substantial, all-metal mike. Perfect for all programs, etc. Sound reproduces voice loud, clear, and without distortion. Can be used with or without a radio set. **Price Postpaid \$1.00**

REPEATING SLING SHOT

Automatic repeating sling shot with full 120 shot. With complete full designed for accuracy. **Price Postpaid Only 10c**

1-tube Pocket Radio

Complete in one unit with all the necessary parts. **Price Postpaid \$3.49**

Electric Baseball Game \$2.50

Stretcher, stool, and ball. Designed to give all the thrills of a hard fought game. **Price \$2.50**

COMPLETE CAMERA OUTFIT 45c

Although this outfit is so non-expensive, it is so complete, it will take splendid pictures. **Price 45c**

Live Chameleon Watch It Change Color! A LIVE PET

Get one of these most wonderful of all creatures. Watch it change color. Study its habits. **Price 10c**

BIG ENTERTAINER

220 Jokes & Riddles, 25 Tricks, 10 Parlor Games, 73 Tongue Twisters, etc. **Price 10c**

Live Turtle With Your Name On It

Each turtle is attached to its shell with a name. **Price 10c**

Box of 10 Explosive Cigarettes 25c

Box of 10 Explosive Cigarettes. **Price 25c**

Marriage License 10c

Printed with seal. **Price 10c**

French Photo Ring

A handsome ring, in imitation of a large diamond. **Price 10c**

How to Love 10c

Every normal being is susceptible to love's tender caress. **Price 10c**

Does High Grade Work - A Practical Machine

Handy, PORTABLE TYPEWRITER that turns out high grade work for only 30c. **Price 30c**

Naughty Nudies Glass Transfers

OUTSIDE . . . Her Charm is Modestly Concealed INSIDE . . . She is Handsomely Revealed!

From the outside of the glass, these beautiful little ladies are shown in modest poses. But turn the glass around, and lo! their costumes drop away leaving them in nature's own! Full glass with a liquid and also becomes "lively," revealing every curve of the body.

Transfers are lithographed in five beautiful process colors, so that the girls look startlingly lifelike and natural. They can be applied to any glass. **Price 25c**

Complete set of a different figure. **Price 59c**

NUDIES GLASSES

We can also supply the beautiful sparkling, crystal-like glasses with 5 different figures. **Price \$1.98**

TALK OVER THESE TELEPHONES

No Batteries, No Electricity - Just Talk! Perfectly for distances from 50 to 100 feet. **Price 10c**

THROW YOUR VOICE

Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun. **Price 10c**

Good Luck Ring

Very striking, diamond-studded. **Price 10c**

U-GOTTA-GO GUM

Wholesome, made of rubber. **Price 10c**

WHOOPEE 25c

Wholesome, made of rubber. **Price 25c**

Ladies' Panties Hanky

A perfect model of the most modern. **Price 10c**

Snake Matches

Front cover snake. **Price 10c**

Marriage License 10c

Printed with seal. **Price 10c**

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Be a wholesale manufacturer. Let the storekeepers sell your product. Frazier and Korick lined up 580 dealers their first two weeks in business and had an output of 180 pounds a day.



YOU can be one of a country-wide Chain producing Vita-Seald — the one, standard National Brand of Potato Chips, known everywhere as the most delicious of Potato Chips and at the same time, famous for its health-giving qualities due to our unique method of extracting excess grease and retaining the 9 vital minerals so essential to good health.

I'll Start **YOU** in the Potato Chip Business

and show you how you can "coin money"
right in your own kitchen

NOT long ago it took a lot of money to break into the Potato Chip business. Now, you can start with so small an investment you'll be surprised and "raring to go." You don't need a store or factory. Start right in your own kitchen and grow. My compact, efficient, Vita-Seald Machine represents years of engineering experience. This machine with its high-speed slicer and oil extractor, is all you need to turn out delicious, golden brown Vita-Seald chips which are the rage of the Century. No wonder they sell like hot cakes wherever introduced. When you get your Vita-Seald equipment, you are ready to start making money the very first day. I supply you with everything necessary including beautiful, embossed Vita-Seald trademarked bags and free advertising material. But I do not stop at that. I also furnish you a book of instructions telling exactly how to start and build a business which will produce profits to satisfy any man's ambition.

Experience Not Needed

Here's a business where selling is no problem. You don't need to create a demand for Potato Chips. Millions of pounds are sold and eaten daily. All you have to do is make the kind of chip I will show you how to make, and the orders will flock in.

This is where the Vita-Seald secret comes in. When I discovered how to make a greaseless, mineralized Potato Chip, I revolutionized the Potato Chip business and started to build a nationwide chain of small home-factories, all making and selling the same famous Vita-Seald brand of chips. When I start you in business, I give you full rights to the use of the nationally known Vita-Seald trademark. Just think what it means to produce a famous brand of food instead of a nameless product! Already hundreds of Vita-Seald manufacturers are cleaning up big profits—but the surface is hardly scratched. There's room for thousands! It takes lots of chips to supply the appetites of America's millions!

Few people realize what a big profit margin there is in making Potato Chips. Only \$2.50 invested in raw materials brings back \$10.00 in cash at wholesale. Profits roll in day in and day out. There's no limit to the volume you can do nor the territory you can cover—but "start small and grow big" is my motto. Who knows but some day you may be the Potato Chip King of your state?

Don't Buy Anything — Just Write Me Today!

If you think you want a part in this big-profit industry, let's get down to business. I don't expect you to jump in blind. I want you to make a thorough investigation. Put it up to me to explain and prove every detail. But for heaven's sake, don't hang back through fear I'm going to ask you to put up a lot of money. You'll be astounded at the liberal proposition I have to make you. Just send me your name and address on

a card and say, "Show me." I'll then give you the secret of making greaseless, mineralized Potato Chips and every bit of information I have gathered during years of experience in this line. There's no cost or obligation, yet this may prove to be the most important step you have ever taken to insure a future free from money worries. Address your letter or card personally to me:

George H. Hardt — 620 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. E-291, Chicago, Ill.

I'm Talking

to Men and Women who want to own
a permanent business that can pay

**Big Daily Profits from the Start
Without Overhead Expense**

**Think of it! You buy potatoes at 2c a
pound and sell them as potato chips
at 35c a pound**

That's what I call a *business*. Just
write to me and I'll give you without
obligation, the amazing facts about the
sweetest, soundest business proposition
you ever dreamed of.

• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE.

Vol. 8, No. 2

CONTENTS

January, 1939

A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

THE WEEK END MURDERS

By DONALD STUART

Jonathan Drake, New York's Foremost Sleuth, Springs into Action on the Trail of a Sinister Mystery when Multiple Murder Stalks a Country Estate! A Diabolical Killer Strikes Ruthlessly—and Creates a Baffling Crime Problem That Challenges Solution - - - - - 15

Other Gripping Stories

GENTLEMAN CROOK - - - - - Allan Pinkerton 90

A Thrilling True Story of Crime by America's Most Famous Sleuth

SUICIDES ARE SAPS - - - - - Donald Bayne Hobart 98

Mugs Kelly, Private Dick, Tackles an Amazing Case

DEATH IS EAGER - - - - - Norman A. Daniels 101

Detective Shea Roams Chinatown's Alleys and Rouses Up Rats!

AND

OFF THE RECORD - - - - - A Department for Readers 113

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE. Published bi-monthly by Better Publications, Inc., 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill. N. L. Pines, President. Editorial and executive offices, 22 West 48th St., New York, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter November 14, 1933, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill. under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1938, by Better Publications, Inc. Yearly, \$.60; single copies, \$.10; Canadian and foreign, postage extra. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the names of any living person or existing institution are used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk.

Read our companion magazines: Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Western, G-Men, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Love, The Phantom Detective, The Lone Eagle, Sky Fighters, Popular Detective, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Mystery, Texas Rangers, Popular Love, Everyday Astrology, West, Masked Rider Western Magazine, Range Riders, and Startling Stories.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?

TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.

BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT

TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES

TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST--

SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS--

OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN

YOU SURE KNOW RADIO—MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THAT'S \$15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME

THANKS!

I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW--AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO

OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many, good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9A09

National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9A09

National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS

Broad-
cast
Operator
After
Twenty
Lessons

\$10
to \$25
a Week
in Spare
Time

"When I had completed the first twenty lessons I had obtained my license as Radio Broadcast Operator and immediately joined the staff of WMPC, where I am now Chief Operator."
— H. O. L. I. S. F.
HAYES, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

"I am making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N. R. I.—WM. F. RUPP, 203 W. Front St., West Conshohocken, Pa.

\$3,500 a Year
in
Own Business

"After completing the N. R. I. Course I became Radio Editor of the Buffalo Courier. Later I started a Radio service business of my own, and have averaged over \$3,500 a year."
— J. TELLA, 637 Broadway, Buffalo, N. Y.



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914

The man who has directed the home study training of more men for Radio than any other man in America.

THIS
FREE BOOK
HAS HELPED
HUNDREDS OF
MEN MAKE
MORE MONEY

\$1 BRINGS YOUR CHOICE of these BUY NOW— get this SALAD SET FREE

10 MONTHS TO PAY
10 DAYS FREE TRIAL
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

FREE



This \$295
**7-Piece SILVERPLATE
SALAD SET** if you send \$1
with order, saving us
C.O.D. charges. Money
back if not
satisfied.



\$5250 A351—
Sworn
perfect Diamond;
2 other diamonds.
14K yellow gold. Af-
fidavit with purchase.
\$5.15 a month



A147—Sworn \$2995
perfect Dia-
mond Feature. Brilliant
perfect diamond;
14K yellow gold
mounting. \$50 value.
\$2.90 a month



A50—Bridal Pair
—Engagement-
Wedding Ring to
match. 14K yellow
gold. 5 dia-
monds in each.
\$5.25 a month



435—Massive 14K yellow
gold man's initial
ring. Diamond and ini-
tials on black onyx.
\$1.90 a month



\$3975 R356 — Bul-
ova's newest
feature — the Dolly
Madison. Tiny watch
with 21 jewel move-
ment. Case in charm
and color of natural
gold. Complete in
gift box.
\$5.88 a month



60 — The Dolly Madison
21 Jewels



P250—Ladies' Tiny watch, 2 diamonds in
newest style case—charm and color of
natural gold. 7 jewels. **\$1.70 a month**



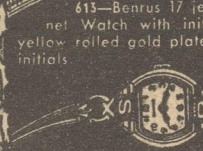
P514—Small size 20 diamond watch—14K
white gold—17 jewels. Worth \$65.
\$4.65 a month



K37—Man's watch—newest style. Roman
numerals on non-tarnishable chrome
case. 7 jewels.
\$1.40 a month



613—Benrus 17 jewel Sig-
net Watch with initials in 10K
yellow rolled gold plate case. Mention
initials. **\$2.38 a month**



615—Ladies' Benrus Signet Watch. Small
size. 10K yellow rolled gold plate case.
Bracelet to match. 7 jewels.
\$2.38 a month




R129—Lady Bulova—a 17 jewel
feature in charm and color of
natural gold.
\$2.88 a month

Bring Happiness this Christmas
with a gift of jewelry. It's simple
—here's how you do it. Put a dol-
lar bill in an envelope with your
name, address and the number of
article wanted. Tell us your age
(must be over 20) occupation, em-
ployer and a few simple facts
about yourself. Information held
strictly confidential—no direct in-
quiries made. Upon arrival of
your order, we will open a 10
month Charge Account for you
and send selection for approval
and your free gift... this \$2.95
7 pc. Silverplate SALAD SET. If
not satisfied, return merchandise
and your dollar will be refunded
immediately. If satisfied, pay the
balance in 10 small monthly pay-
ments. Send Coupon today.



W103—10K yellow
gold engraved
Cross with Chain.
Size illustrated.
\$1 a month



M211—Bulova
Minute Man—17
jewel curved
watch in
charm and
color of
natural gold.
\$5.28 a month



SEND COUPON WITH \$1

L. W. SWEET,
Dept. 729A 1670 Broadway, New York City
Gentlemen: Enclosed find \$1—send for ap-
proval and free trial No. _____ with SALAD
SET Free. If not satisfied, I will return articles
and you will refund my dollar.

Name _____
Address _____
Town _____ State _____
Send brief note with coupon giving age, occupa-
tion, employer and a few facts about yourself.
Our FREE Offer expires Jan. 30, 1939.

L. W. SWEET

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS

Dept. 729A 1670 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

FREE TO ADULTS
A Postcard brings our
52 page catalog.
Send for it today.

THIS MAN'S IDEA IS A GOD-SEND TO FOLKS WHO NEED MONEY

By P. H. Graham

This is a true story. I know this man personally. I know of the folks he has helped with his money-making plans. I know of widows with children to support who thank him for their cash income. I know of men who lost their jobs, but are now making more money than ever before. I can tell you of men and women who live better because of the opportunity this man gives them to add to their earnings. Yes, I know of literally hundreds of folks to whom this man's idea of doing business has been a God-send.

Do You Need Money?

Perhaps you, too, are in urgent need of money to meet pressing bills. You may have some spare time you want to turn into cash. Then you will want to write this man at once. There will be no obligation on your part. Costs you nothing. He will write and tell you about a wonderful opportunity he has for you and how others who were hard pressed have found relief with his common-sense plans.

He is President of a large, million-dollar manufacturing company. He does business in every section of the country—in your very locality. He started a few years ago with an idea. It was this: He said, "I'll help worthy people who are in need of money. My proven business building plans shall be given to the deserving so they, too, can have money." He prospered. His business became most tremendously suc-



ALBERT MILLS

cessful. And today is still growing.

Would Earnings Up to \$40 in a Week Help You?

Right now he needs 300 men and women in all parts of the country. He wants someone in your locality to handle the business there. To everyone who accepts his offer he guarantees a fair, square deal and an amazing opportunity to make money in a pleasant, dignified business. Everything you need is sent to you. You don't risk a penny of your money. He takes care of that. You don't need experience. He tells you the few things you need to do in simple, plain language. Just say you are willing to give his plan a fair trial. I'll be surprised if you don't make up to \$35.00

in a week for your spare time either in the daytime or evenings. If you decide to continue with the business you can devote full or spare time the year 'round and enjoy big cash earnings. Your earnings will be in proportion to the time you can devote. I know of other people who have made anywhere from \$40.00 to \$100.00 in a week.

Your Earnings Can Start at Once

I sincerely ask you to fill out and mail the coupon. You don't obligate yourself or risk any money. You will receive complete details by mail. Then you can decide if you want to start right away and have the money you need coming in at once. It will certainly pay you to give this offer a trial. Better sit down and write your name and address on the coupon or a penny postcard and mail to this man at once. Just address Albert Mills, 9211 Monmouth Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio, and say, "Send me your free proposition."

ALBERT MILLS, President
9211 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Yes, I want to make money. Without cost or obligation, send me full details of the wonderful opportunity now open in my locality.

NAME.....

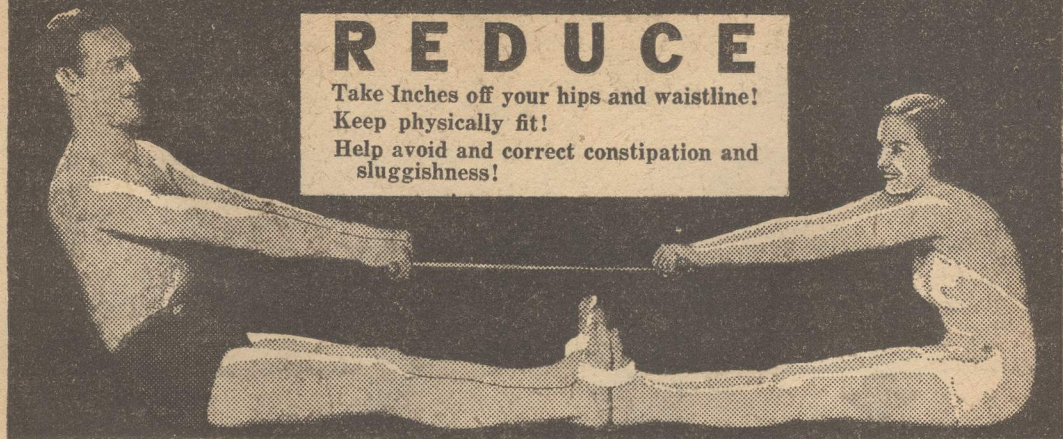
ADDRESS.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

COMPANION EXERCISER

REDUCE

Take Inches off your hips and waistline!
Keep physically fit!
Help avoid and correct constipation and sluggishness!



Exercise is FUN if you do it, the Companion Way!



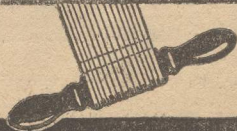
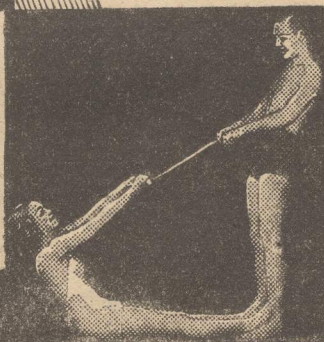
With circulation stimulated, and abdominal muscles freed of cumbersome fat, digestive organs will be able to function better.

Lots of fun and wonderful for reducing waist and hips!

The Bonomo
COMPANION
EXERCISER
distributed by
BLEIER & BROWN
1270 Sixth Avenue,
Radio City, New York,
N. Y.

ONLY
\$1.00

WITH EXERCISE
AND HEALTH
CHARTS



It isn't "work" when you exercise with your room-mate, your girl friend or your wife! Here's a simple, new exerciser designed by the famous physical culturist, Joe Bonomo, that incorporates the best features of the rowing machine and the pulley weights. It combines fun and exercise because it is made for two people to use at the same time. TWO people benefit from its stretching, limbering, strengthening assistance.

Only 10 minutes a day!

It takes but little time and will help to keep you feeling "fit as a fiddle." Watch the energy, pep and vitality come back. Watch the new sparkle in your eyes, the fresh color in your cheeks. By the end of a week you will count those ten minutes a day as time well spent.

Marvelous for Constipation!

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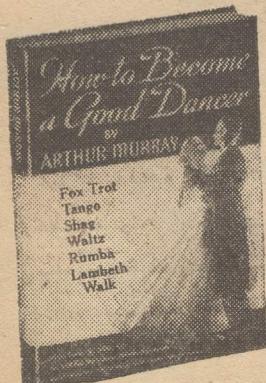
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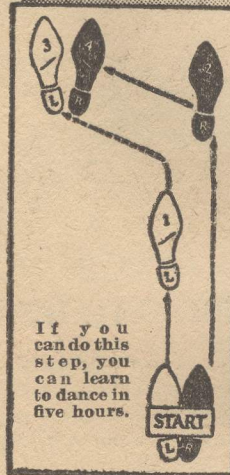
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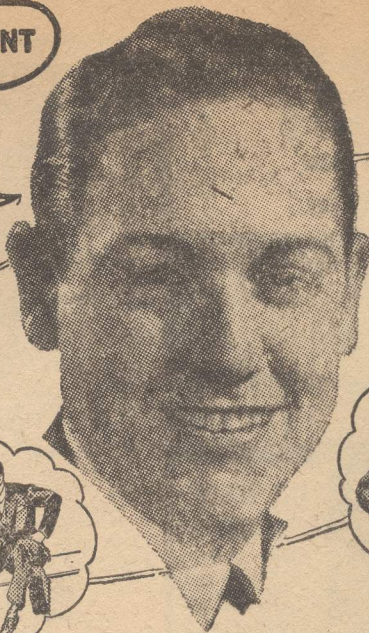
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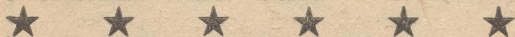
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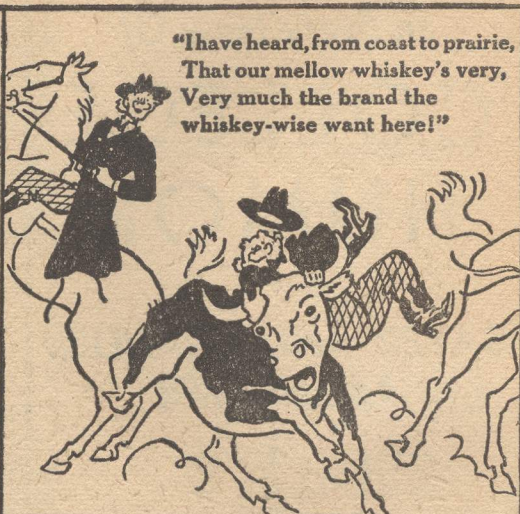
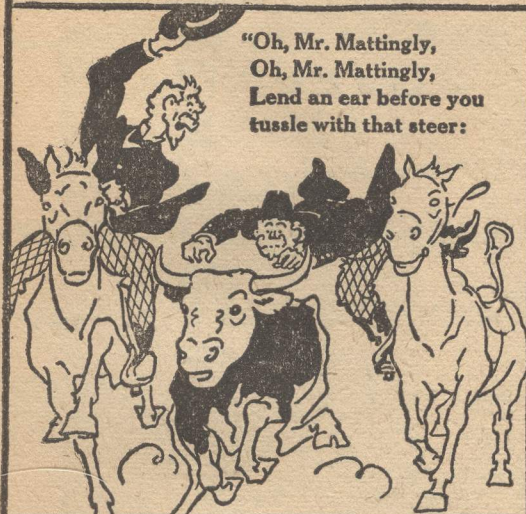
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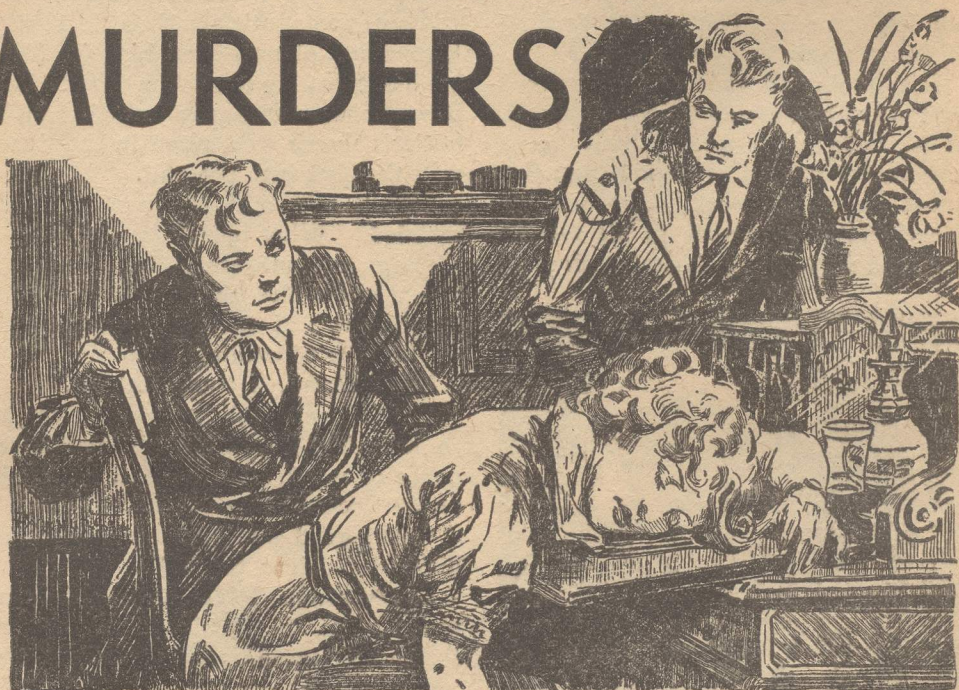
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THE WEEK END MURDERS



In the swivel chair, her head on the desk, was Venita Shayne (Chap. IV)

Jonathan Drake, New York's Foremost Sleuth, Springs Into
Action on the Trail of a Sinister Death Mystery!

A Complete Book-Length Novel

By DONALD STUART

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CHAPTER I

Fear

THROUGH the open casement windows came the gentle murmur of the river. The warm summer sunlight brought out the bright

green of the carefully cultivated lawns of Montague Hammond's beautiful estate at Tarrytown. Bees hummed about the flowers in the ornate gardens. Here to all appearances was peace and tranquillity.

But in the luxurious living room of his mansion Monty Hammond, theat-

FROM THE BLACK BOOK OF CRIME

Multiple Murder Stalks a Country Estate

rical producer, sat with a look of fear in his eyes as he gazed at the wrinkled square of paper on the desk in front of him.

"Again!" he muttered, his voice low and frightened. "The second warning within a week."

His fascinated gaze remained fixed on the crude drawing before him; and, as he looked, the quaint little figure it bore, of a man with a hangman's noose about his neck, seemed alive. Slowly Hammond rose to his feet—a big man in his late fifties, with gray



Montague Hammond

sprinkled through his thick dark hair. His white linen jacket was a perfect example of the custom tailor's finest work, as were his gray slacks. His silk shirt and shoes were the finest that could be bought. Hammond wore his clothes with an air and prided himself on his immaculateness. But underneath his immaculate toggerly he was a sorely frightened man.

He stared through the open case-ment windows at the rolling terraces that extended down to the river. "The work of some crank," he muttered, but he did not believe what he said. He

had a premonition of disaster. There was more on that wrinkled square of paper than the man in the hangman's noose. There were the words: "Death brings us sleep that's everlasting."

A soft apologetic cough made Monty Hammond glance over his shoulder, his heart leaping in sudden fright. But it was only a tall gray haired man in butler's livery who stood in the doorway that led into the hall.

"Well, Minter?" Hammond demanded. "What is it?"

"Beg pardon, sir." The butler's tones were like the rustling of old parchment. "I thought perhaps you might wish something."

"No, Minter. I want nothing."

If that were only true! he thought to himself. He wanted reassurance, peace of mind, safety. And these his servant could not give him.

"Very good, sir." Minter bowed and disappeared into the hall.

Reassurance. Peace of mind. Hammond went to the doors, made sure they were closed, returned to his desk, looked at the piece of paper again, with the fateful words above the crudely drawn strangling figure. He picked up the phone.

Operator answered and he gave her a New York City number.

"Hello," he said when connected. "Mr. Jonathan Drake, please— Oh, Drake, this is Monty Hammond— Yes, I'm calling from my place in Tarrytown. Something has come up about that matter I told you was worrying me when I saw you in town last week— Yes, that's right—I received another one this morning.

"Yes, I know—all the same I'm worried. Listen, Drake, how about you spending the weekend here at 'Backwaters'. I'm expecting some interesting guests." Hammond's voice grew pleading. "Can't you make it . . . I'm really frightened, Drake— You'll come then?— Good! See you tomorrow

as a Diabolical Killer Strikes Ruthlessly!



Both men lashed out in the darkness, and Drake felt his fist land against a chin (Chap. XXII)

then. Goodby. And thanks. . . ."

There was an expression of relief upon Hammond's ruggedly handsome face as he got to his feet

"With the smartest criminologists in the country here I won't have to worry," he murmured, and went upstairs to change his clothes.

SOME twenty-five miles away, in what had once been a millionaire's mansion on upper Fifth Avenue, a slender dark haired man frowned thoughtfully as he put down the phone on the desk in his huge library.

Jonathan Drake's keen analytical mind was going over the conversation he had just had with Montague Hammond over the phone. He knew quite a bit regarding the theatrical producer and had sensed the rugged strength of the man. Hammond did not seem the type who would be easily frightened, and yet there had been a note of fear in his voice as he talked over the wire. Besides, a man of Hammond's type interested him.

He knew that Hammond had fought his way up from poverty and obscurity to a position of wealth and power in the theatrical world. There had been no room for fear in Monty Hammond's life up to now—and yet three crude warnings that he had received from an unknown crank had thrown him into a state of terror.

"I want to know why," said Drake aloud. "Maybe Tommy and I will have a very interesting weekend at Backwaters after all."

Jonathan Drake possessed a keen brain, was an excellent judge of human nature and was absolutely fearless. It was this bravery in the face of danger that had stood him in good stead many times during his tumultuous career. That career was recorded in row after row of black bound volumes on his library shelves—the case-books of Jonathan Drake. On the neatly typed pages in these black books were the full details of the many cases on which

the criminologist had worked, and there was not one among them that had not terminated with Drake bringing the criminal or criminals to justice.

His first case, fully recorded in volume one of the Black Books, the Case of the Creeping Killer, had established his reputation. A single strand of hair on a murdered man's coat sleeve had been Drake's only clue, put through that he had finally tracked down a ruthless killer who had terrorized a whole city. But the affair most vividly etched in his memory was the one he had just completed a month or so ago. This was the Death Chair Murders, in which he had run down a diabolical murderer who had staged a series of ghastly murders by electrical execution.

Drake kept himself trained for his work. He was an adept in all types of physical combat. He boxed and wrestled, and had been instructed in the art of jiu-jitsu. His knowledge of firearms was extensive and he was an expert marksman with every type of explosive projectile weapon from automatic to machine-gun. He was also an excellent duelist, with sabre, broadsword and foil.

Such was Jonathan Drake, still young, but firmly established as a criminologist of note. His keen brain, his constant research, had placed him in a position to receive willing cooperation from all the high police officials throughout the United States and in most foreign countries. His house had become a complete miniature investigation bureau.

Yet success had not gone to his head. He remained modest and human. He was a firm believer in the old adage that two heads were better than one. Accordingly he had surrounded himself with a staff of capable assistants, men both young and old who had been trained to work under his direction, and who were always on call when he felt their services were needed.

IF all these Jonathan Drake depended on young Tommy Lowell the most. Though just twenty-one, Tommy had been with the detective ever since Drake had started his career. At that time he had been an orphan newsboy of eleven.

The criminologist had legally adopted the boy, had given him a good education, and in return Tommy Lowell had developed into an excellent assistant. The red-headed, freckled-faced youngster was bright and quick witted, and learned swiftly. Now the two men lived in the big house on upper Fifth Avenue with two servants who took care of the place. Here they devoted their time to a never ceasing war against crime.

Tommy's attitude toward Drake was that of a youth toward an older brother. He respected and secretly idolized the slender dark-haired man, but their attitude toward each other was casual, at times rather flippant, though Tommy always addressed the detective as "Chief" and there was a compliment in the way he used the word.

There was nothing that delighted the boy more than to type the details of one of Drake's cases from the detective's shorthand notes and place the pages in one of the Black Books.

Drake glanced at the door of the library as Tommy entered.

"Oh, hello, Tommy," said Drake. "Just had a call from Montague Hammond. He wants us to spend the weekend with him on his estate in Tarrytown."

"Still worried about those mysterious notes, eh, Chief?"

"Sounded like he was frightened to death," said the detective. "That's why we're going up to his place. I'm curious as to what it's all about. Hammond doesn't strike me as the type who scares easily."

The phone rang. "Hello? Yes, Drake speaking."

"Detectives also die," said a deep

masculine voice over the wire. "You'll keep away from Montague Hammond's residence if you know what's good for you, Drake!"

There was a click on the line as it went dead. Drake scowled and jiggled for the operator.

"Hello, operator," he said as he heard central's voice. "I was talking to someone and I was cut off."

"This is the Tarrytown operator," said the girl at the switchboard. "I'm sorry, sir, your party has disconnected and I am unable to give you their number."

"Thank you." There was a steely glint in Drake's blue eyes as he hung up. "That was a call warning us to keep away from Hammond's place," he told Tommy Lowell. The detective smiled grimly. "I suspect we're going to have an interesting weekend, Tommy!"

CHAPTER II

Hate



ITH Drake at the wheel and Tommy Lowell seated beside him, the detective's powerful gray coupe swung into the paved driveway that led to Montague Hammond's beautiful river-side home. The day had been swelteringly hot and the two men were glad to get away from the sun-baked streets of the city.

The cool, tree lined drive twisted and wound about so it was not until they rounded a bend that the house became visible. Drake was ready to admit that it was one of the prettiest places he had ever seen.

Backwaters was built of white stone, which showed here and there through a covering of ivy and flowering creepers. The house stood in a setting of well-kept and gaily hued flower-beds.

The rolling terraces and smoothly mown lawns were fresh and green, a blessed relief to eyes fatigued by the sun-baked pavements and sidewalks of the city.

Monty Hammond himself came out on the shady porch to greet them. His big figure was now clad in spotless white.

"Glad you've come, Drake," he said politely, even suavely, but there was a haunting fear lingering deep in his eyes, and Drake did not fail to notice that the hand he grasped was unsteady and perspiring. "Nice to see you too, Lowell. We're just having cocktails on the terrace. Will you two come along, or would you like to wash up a bit first?"

"A wash, I think," said Drake.

"Right!" Hammond signaled to the butler who was hovering expectantly in the shadows of the big hall. "Minter, show Mr. Drake and Mr. Lowell to their rooms."

"Very good, sir."

Minter came silently forward and picked up the two bags which Tommy had deposited on the drive in front of the porch.

"I'll have your car taken around to the garage," called Hammond as they followed the butler up the white painted staircase.

The bedrooms which had been allotted to them were side by side at the end of a corridor which ran at right angles to the square landing, and both were pleasantly furnished and decorated in restful shades of green.

While Drake was brushing his hair after his shower, he glanced out of the open window. A murmur of voices beneath told him that the terrace which his host had mentioned was immediately below. By leaning forward slightly he could see a broad flight of shallow steps that descended to a rose-garden. Beyond this a smooth stretch of grass sloped gently to the river bank, dotted with ornamental trees and flowering shrubs and brightened with

gaily cushioned chairs.

Through the drooping willows he caught a gleam of the blue water of the river. A motor-launch was moored to a little white-painted landing-stage from which a diving board projected. Farther along two rowboats and a canoe were just visible by a clump of bushes.

In the shimmering heat of the late August afternoon the vista was pleasantly cool and peaceful. Too bad that Monty Hammond, in his present state, was such a contrast to the beautiful house and grounds.

Jonathan Drake went in search of Tommy. "Quite a nice place," he remarked as he entered his assistant's room. "In fact, an ideal spot for spending a quiet weekend."

"It could be," said Tommy with a grin, "if Hammond weren't still scared to death, and that butler, Minter, didn't act like the chief mourner at a funeral."

"Exactly," said Drake. "I hope that the other people here are a bit happier."

THEY descended the stairs and found Minter waiting for them in the hall below. The butler escorted them to a big, low-ceilinged lounge, then through a pair of wide French windows to a loggia on which four people were lounging in wicker chairs grouped round a table on which was a cocktail shaker, glasses and hors d'oeuvres.

As Drake and Tommy appeared Monty Hammond hoisted his large bulk from his chair and came toward them.

"Come along, Drake," he said heartily. "There's a chair over there. Make yourself at home, both of you. You need no introduction, but this is my wife, and this is Marjorie Lovelace—you've heard of her, of course—and over there's John Moore." He waved a hand vaguely toward the group.

"Nice to have you with us, Mr.

Drake, and you, also, Mr. Lowell," said Mrs. Hammond, a thin woman seated close to the table. "Minter, I'm sure that Mr. Drake and Mr. Lowell would like a cocktail." She glanced at the detective. "Am I right?"

The slender dark haired man murmured a polite affirmative as he dropped into the chair Hammond had indicated. There was something about Mrs. Hammond that jarred. Her hair was too obviously dyed, the makeup she wore had been supplied by a too lavish and inartistic hand, her dress was too frilly, her voice a little harsh—and it was obvious that she, too, was worrying about something.

Drake observed the other two guests as he sipped his Martini. Marjorie Lovelace he knew by reputation as a very competent young actress, who had been in a number of Broadway successes Hammond had produced, not, however, in any leading part. She was a dark, pretty girl, with blue-black hair and violet eyes.

John Moore was a very ordinary type, the usual good-looking young actor. A visit to any theatrical agent's office would produce a hundred such juveniles.

"Venita Shayne should be here soon," said Monty Hammond. "Eric

Norman is driving her out from town."

Drake was gazing at Mrs. Hammond as her husband spoke. Her face changed, and for an instant stark vindictive hate gleamed in her eyes. The expression was fleeting, but the detective was startled by its intensity. It had been quite obvious that the thin woman hated either Venita Shayne or Eric Norman to the very depths of her soul.

Venita Shayne. Of all the stars in the theatrical firmament during the past two years, Venita Shayne was the brightest. She was not a particularly good actress but she was lovely and had personality. Also, she had an extremely efficient press-agent in Eric Norman.

Three years ago she had been playing small parts with one of the summer stock companies. Monty Hammond had seen her, had given her the lead in what had developed into a smash hit.

"I'm so glad that Venita is arriving," said Marjorie Lovelace, a slight acid edge in her voice. "It's such a pleasure to be with a real actress."

"A real actress!" exclaimed Mrs. Hammond. "That's what she thinks!"

"All the same she's good box office,"

[Turn Page]

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said Monty Hammond, "and that's the thing that counts. The public adores her, and her name in lights outside a theater means a lot toward the success of the play."

"Naturally you'd stick up for her," said Mrs. Hammond. "She's a protégée of yours."

"She's put a lot of money in my pocket," said her husband good-humoredly, "and I'm always ready to stick up for people who do that."

"Mostly due to her press agent," murmured Marjorie Lovelace. She had not meant the comment to be heard, but Jonathan Drake had keen ears. It was not so much what she said, as the vindictiveness in her tone, that surprised him.

TWO people in this group evidently disliked Venita Shayne intensely, so much so that it amounted to hatred. Was it jealousy because she was successful or for some other reason? Jonathan Drake wondered. He filed the question away in his mind.

Minter came hurriedly through the French windows. He appeared perturbed as he said something to the producer in a tone too low for even Jonathan Drake's keen hearing.

A startled expression swept over Hammond's face, but he gained control of himself in an instant.

"Thank you, Minter," he said. "That's quite all right." The butler bowed and went back into the house. Hammond glanced at the detective. "Oh, Drake," he said. "I have a little matter that I'd like to talk over with you. Perhaps we had better get it over with before Venita and Eric Norman arrive."

"Certainly." Drake put down his cocktail glass as he rose to his feet. "If you'll pardon me." He smiled. "Business calls, you know."

He followed Hammond into the house. He sensed that the producer was laboring to conceal his tense excitement.

"Minter just caught a glimpse of a man sneaking around the house! Didn't see who it was—and the man got away!"

They had reached the luxurious living room. Through the open casement windows came the gentle murmur of the river, so at variance with the atmosphere of danger which Drake had begun to feel was brooding over the house.

"It shouldn't have been difficult for Minter to recognize the man in this bright sunlight," said Drake thoughtfully. "Hammond, are you sure that you trust that butler of yours?"

A look of surprise came to Monty Hammond's face as he glanced at the slender criminologist.

"Why, I never considered the matter," he answered slowly. "Minter has been with me for two years and he came with the best of references."

Hammond walked over to the desk on one corner of the big room. He gave a startled gasp as he glanced at its polished top.

"Drake!" he exclaimed. "Look!"

The detective stepped beside him. For an instant the two men stood gazing at the paper on the desk. It was another of the crude drawings of the tiny hanging man and above it had been printed:

DEATH COMES SOON

"I'd like to talk to Minter," said Drake quietly. He drew a white handkerchief from the breast pocket of his linen jacket and spread it over the warning note before picking it up. "There might be fingerprints."

"That's right." Hammond nodded his big head. He reached out and pressed a button on the side of the desk. "I'm ringing for Minter."

The butler appeared. He bowed as he stepped through the door leading into the hall.

"Mr. Hammond tells me that you saw someone sneaking around outside

the house, Minter," said Drake.

"Yes, sir." The tall gray haired man nodded. "I did. Directly outside these windows he was, sir."

"You didn't see who it was?"

"No, I didn't," said Minter. "Frankly, sir, it sounds hard to believe, but that's the truth."

"Why is it hard to believe?" asked Drake.

"That I would not have been able to at least see who the man was, or rather what he looked like in the bright light outside." Minter spoke without the slightest emotion in his dry voice. "In fact, I would not blame both of you if you should feel that I have been lying."

"Suppose we do feel that way?" demanded Drake, his eyes fixed on the face of the servant. "What then, Minter?"

"I would understand, sir, as I said it would be only natural. Just as you might suspect me of being the one who has been sending those death warnings to Mr. Hammond."

"But that's nonsense!" exclaimed Hammond. "What reason would you have for doing such a thing, Minter?"

"If I were guilty I'd hardly suggest a motive." There was the faint shadow of a smile on the servant's face. "But I have had the opportunity, sir. I could have placed those notes on your desk."

"How did you know about the warning messages that Mr. Hammond has been receiving?" asked Drake.

"I realized that he has been quite worried about something," said the butler. "Naturally I became curious. I saw that Mr. Hammond was very perturbed yesterday," Minter coughed apologetically. "So I ventured to listen when he phoned you, told you about the warnings and invited you here."

"Thank you, Minter," said Drake. "That will be all now." He waited until the butler had departed, closing the door after him, and then the detective turned to Hammond.

"A remarkable servant!" he said softly.

CHAPTER III

Poison



VENITA SHAYNE and Eric Norman arrived at seven o'clock. Drake and Tommy were introduced to them when they came down after dressing for dinner. Drake had seen the actress from

the other side of the footlights, but this was the first time he had actually met her, and he found she looked even more lovely off the stage than on. That was going some.

She was a natural blonde with a complexion that owed very little to artifice, and although only of medium height she looked taller because of her slimness. Her eyes were a deep shade of blue that was almost violet and were fringed with unusually long lashes.

"I've been wanting to meet you for such a long time, Mr. Drake," she said conventionally in her soft husky voice as she let her cool fingers rest for a moment in his palm. "I've heard such a lot about you. It must be simply fascinating to be such a great criminologist."

"That's very nice of you, Miss Shayne," murmured Drake. "I saw your play a few weeks ago and thought you were marvelous!"

"So she was!" said Eric Norman in his deep voice. "Venita Shayne is always marvelous."

She looked up at him with the childish, half-whimsical smile that her public paid nightly to see.

"As my press agent you couldn't very well say anything else, could you, Eric?" she said, and he grinned.

Drake liked him. His rugged face was pleasant and his shrewd gray eyes hinted at a more than usual intelligence.

The rest of the party joined them on

the loggia, and presently Minter appeared with a tray of cocktails.

"I've got a surprise for you," said Venita as she sipped her drink. "In fact I think it will be a surprise to everyone who knows me." She looked at her host and there was a mocking, half defiant gleam in her lovely eyes. "I'm engaged to be married!"

Drake was immediately conscious of the tenseness that followed the actress' words. Monty Hammond slowly put down his cocktail glass. His eyes held a strange brooding in their depths, his lower lip had grown slack. Yet he was the first to find his tongue.



Venita Shayne

"Engaged to be married?"

Venita nodded, and the light in her eyes as her gaze swept over the faces of the others, Jonathan Drake saw, was mocking. He suddenly felt that here was a woman of ruthless steel, beneath the pink and gold. She was inwardly glorying in the consternation that her announcement had caused, and there was something as cruel about it as a beautiful cat unsheathing its claws.

"Yes," she said. "I thought you'd all be surprised."

"WHEN did this happen, Venita?" There was an edge to Eric Norman's voice, and his rugged face had grown hard. The gray eyes were as cold as the face of a cliff in winter.

"This morning." Her voice was no longer so certain and she seemed suddenly frightened. "Though we have been in love for sometime."

"And you never told me," said Norman. "I could have got it in the evening papers."

"I didn't want that!" protested Venita. "Must everything that I do become public, just another chance for you to get my name in the papers, Eric? I'm sick of it, pictures, reporters, interviews, never a moment's privacy."

"There are usually only two times in our lives when we ordinary folk become news," said Eva Hammond, her high shrill voice clear in a little lull. "When we appear in the birth notices and when we appear in the obituary columns."

"Eva!" Monty Hammond laughed nervously. "Don't be morbid."

"Who's the lucky man?" demanded Norman. "Or is that a secret?"

"Well—" Venita hesitated and she still seemed afraid. Finally she blurted, "It's Harry Cavendish."

"Harry Cavendish!" There was a little tinkle of breaking glass. Marjorie Lovelace sat gazing dazedly at the scattered pieces of her cocktail glass on the floor of the loggia. "So stupid of me," she murmured. "It slipped."

Venita smiled sweetly at the dark haired girl.

"Perhaps you should have said 'he' instead of 'it,' darling," said the actress.

Jonathan Drake stirred restless. He sensed the hidden undercurrents, charged with the high voltage of disaster. Harold Cavendish was not only the son of one of the richest men in the country, but he possessed a fortune of his own. Venita Shayne had certainly done well by herself.

Eric Norman alone seemed to react

to the announcement normally. "Engaged to Harry Cavendish; and I can't publish it!" he exclaimed. "The best piece of publicity for a month and it's got to be kept dark. It's—it's criminal!"

Lightly as he spoke, however, the detective detected beneath that lightness a very real annoyance based on something more personal than the mere loss of publicity.

"Perhaps Miss Shayne doesn't want it to become public in case she had to deny it later," said Mrs. Hammond venomously.

Venita's beautiful face flushed, her eyes flashed as she gazed at the other woman.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded. "Do you think—"

"I know what that kind of engagement is," interrupted the thin woman with a sniff. "On one day and off the next."

"Well, this one won't be!" declared Venita. "I think it's beastly of you to suggest—"

"Eva was only joking, Venita," said Monty Hammond quickly, with a sharp angry glance at his wife. "Don't pay any attention to her." His smile was a bit forced. "I congratulate you, my dear, though I do hope it won't mean your leaving the stage."

"I'm afraid it will, Monty," said the blond actress. "But not yet, anyway."

"The best of luck and happiness to you," said Hammond. "It won't make any difference in your playing in my new show anyhow, I suppose?"

"Of course not, Monty," said Venita. "I'm looking forward to it; my public is clamoring to see me in a new vehicle."

"Just like they did for Bernhardt and Duse," said Marjorie. "My public—my gawd!"

MINTER appeared and announced that dinner was served. The meal was a strange one. While it was perfectly cooked and the service of the

butler was faultless, the guests appeared to have little appetite. Only Drake and Tommy Lowell enjoyed their dinner. They had nothing on their consciences.

It was obvious that the announcement of Venita Shayne's engagement had put a damper over the members of the week-end house party. Drake could understand why both Eric Norman and Monty Hammond might resent the blond actress giving up her career. To the press agent the star was obviously a good meal ticket, and her retirement would also prove a financial loss to the theatrical producer.

But there was something else behind the attitude of the two men, though Drake was unable to decide exactly what. He did not believe that Hammond was the type of man who would be inclined to have a clandestine affair with his star. It was something else.

Eric Norman's attitude created the vague impression that he might be in love with Venita Shayne—and that the announcement of her engagement had proved a blow to him, but Drake did not find this surmise completely satisfactory.

The evening passed slowly. Marjorie, Mrs. Hammond, John Moore and Tommy played contract. Hammond, Norman, and Drake casually chatted with Venita.

It was not more than eleven when the three women retired to their rooms. Tommy Lowell had also gone upstairs.

"Guess I'll turn in, too." John Moore yawned frankly, and it was obvious that the young actor was frankly bored.

Drake sat gazing at him thoughtfully as the good looking juvenile ascended the stairs. Apparently Moore had met Venita Shayne for the first time this evening—yet he also had appeared a bit surprised by the announcement of her engagement.

"What do you say to a nightcap?" asked Monty Hammond when he found himself alone with Drake and Eric Norman.

"Splendid idea!" said the press agent.

Drake nodded. Hammond rang for the butler and gave Minter the order. In a few moments the tall gray haired servant returned with a tray containing two well known brands of whiskey, one Scotch and the other rye, glasses, cracked ice, and charged water.

"All right, Minter," said Hammond. "I'll pour the drinks."

The butler bowed and withdrew. Norman got quickly to his feet.

"Let me play host, Monty," he said. "I'd like to do it."

"Go ahead." Hammond smiled as the press agent busied himself at the table. "But make mine rye—I never take anything else—and just a dash of soda."

"Scotch for me," said Drake.

Norman fixed the drinks and handed the two men their glasses. As Drake took his the glass accidentally slipped out of his hand and dropped to the floor. He frowned. "Sorry, Hammond," he said. "It slipped right out of my hand."

"Forget it." The producer handed the detective his untasted drink. "Here, take this—I'll mix myself another."

"Looks like you don't like the way I mix them, Monty," said Norman with a smile as he dropped into a chair. "Well, every man to his own taste."

DRAKE took a good swallow of his drink. He was tired and anxious to get to bed. He had no desire to spend much more time in idle chatter.

Apparently both Hammond and Norman felt the same way about it, for it was not more than ten minutes later that the three men put down their empty glasses and went to their rooms.

A few moments after he had reached his room, Jonathan Drake realized there was something wrong. A wave of lassitude swept over him, and he felt dizzy.

"Poison," he muttered. "Somebody doped my drink. Got to get rid of it quick." He staggered across to the

bathroom, found soda in the medicine cabinet, poured two or three heaping teaspoonfuls into a glass of hot water and drank it quickly, then thrust his finger down his throat.

Ten minutes later he went weakly back to his room. The treatment had been drastic but effective. He had thrown up most of the drug before it could get in its work.

He sprawled out on his bed fully dressed. He found that he still could not think very clearly. "Chloral hydrate," he muttered drowsily. "Wasn't intended for me. Hammond gave me his glass. Wonder why Norman—" He lapsed into semi-consciousness, no longer able to reason.

Jonathan Drake didn't know how long he had been sprawled out on the bed when he heard someone knock softly on the closed door of the room.

He mumbled something that he thought was a request to come in, but he was unable to speak clearly. The door opened and a man stepped into the darkness that shrouded the room. Drake tried to sit up, for there was something menacing about the figure that moved toward the bed.

The man in the darkness turned away and Drake heard what sounded like a drawer being opened. The detective exerted every effort and managed to get to his feet. He saw a man just disappearing through the half open door, and then he fell back on the bed as everything grew black.

CHAPTER IV

Murder



THE bright morning sunbeams formed yellow patterns on the rug of the guest room when Jonathan Drake again opened his eyes. Apparently the effects of the drug had worn off during the night and he had slept. His head was clear, and

he found that he felt none the worse after he had bathed, shaved and dressed and put on fresh clothes.

He gazed thoughtfully about the room, vaguely remembering the shadowy figure who had entered, the creaking of a drawer, the unknown visitor's departure. There was a small writing desk in one corner of the room—the drawer in this had been pulled open and then not quite shoved back into place.

Drake went to the desk and drew the drawer open. It was empty. He frowned as he stared down at the bare wood of the drawer bottom.

"Came to get something out of there," he said thoughtfully. "But what?"

He could not answer, so he abandoned the riddle for the time being. He went to Tommy's room and found the red-headed youth dressing. Drake told him what had happened during the night.

"Looks like there really is something behind those warning notes Hammond has been receiving," said Tommy Lowell. "Do you think that Norman intended to dope Hammond's drink, Chief?"

"I don't know." Drake frowned. "He might have, but why?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not going to say anything to Hammond and Norman about what happened to me last night. Not yet, anyway. Come on, Tommy. Let's go down and see if breakfast is ready."

They went downstairs and discovered that, while it was nine o'clock, apparently none of the rest of the household was up yet. They went through the lower floor toward the loggia that overlooked the river. As they did so they heard voices. Two men were talking in low but angry tones.

"So I'm fired!" came in the deep voice of Eric Norman. "I suppose that you feel that Hammond Productions will no longer need a publicity agent after Venita Shayne retires from the stage. Is that it, Monty?"



Jonathan Drake

"Suppose we say that I feel a change might be good for both of us, Eric," said Monty Hammond. "We'll let it go at that."

"You fool!" Norman's voice was tense. "Don't you know that I made you by my publicity, just as I created Venita Shayne. I've built up that girl's glamor, made the public so conscious of her beauty, of her little fascinating tricks, that they don't even realize she can't act."

Drake nodded to Tommy and they stepped out into the loggia. The detective felt that any moment the angry words between the producer and the press agent might develop into something more.

Both Hammond and Norman lapsed into silence as they saw the two new arrivals. Moreover, they composed themselves. They had been far too much in the public eye not to be able to

assume an affable manner at will.

"Good morning," said the producer. "Glad to see you up, Drake. Afraid this is going to be another warm day."

Eric Norman made some casual remark and then engaged Tommy in conversation.

"Want to show you the view of the river from over here, Drake." Hammond took the detective by the arm and led him to one side. "Something I forgot to tell you about," said the producer when they were out of earshot of the other two men.

"SOMETHING besides those warning notes that have been worrying you?" asked Drake quietly. "you?" asked Drake quietly.

"How did you know?" Hammond looked at him in surprise.

"You don't strike me as the type who would be frightened by those crude warnings."

"I'm not entirely. There's more to it than just that. For the past month I've realized that I'm constantly being watched."

"Watched?" said Drake. "By whom?"

"There's been a man trailing me everywhere I go when I'm in the city. I've seen him standing outside the stage door when I've been at the theatre. Sometimes he is hanging around near my office building—and lately I've seen him hanging around outside of Backwater."

"Do you know him?"

"No, he appears to be a perfect stranger—but combined with those warning notes, well, it's a little unnerving."

Monty Hammond appeared reluctant to say any more and they returned to Norman and Tommy. John Moore joined them and in a few minutes Minter came out of the house.

"Mrs. Hammond has sent down word that the ladies will breakfast in their rooms, sir," said the butler to

Hammond. "They will be down later. Breakfast is ready for you gentlemen now."

Drake and Tommy spent the morning exploring the grounds of the estate, and enjoying the relaxation of just loafing about in the warm air. By noon the rest of the house party appeared.

Luncheon was served on the terrace, and it was a pleasant meal. Venita Shayne was in high spirits, and even Mrs. Hammond seemed to have lost some of her acidity of the previous night. There was no trace of the peculiar atmosphere which had been present after the girl's announcement of her engagement.

"Do any of you people know anything about watches?" Venita asked, during a lull in the conversation.

"Why?" said Eric Norman, looking across at her.

"Because something's gone wrong with mine," she explained. "It's stopped. It was all right last night, but when I put it on this morning it wouldn't go."

"Let's have a look at it," he said.

She took the tiny jeweled timepiece from her wrist and passed it across to him. With knitted brows he examined it.

"Stopped at two o'clock this morning," he muttered, and uttered a low whistle. "Look," he said. "The back's dented. Badly, too. You must have hit it against something. Only a jeweler can put that right."

He handed it back to her, and she replaced it on her wrist.

"You won't need it here," said the producer. "There are plenty of clocks about. Now, then, what would you people like to do this afternoon?"

"I've some letters I must write," said Venita. "I hate writing letters, but it must be done."

"You can use my study," said Hammond. "You'll find everything you want there—notepaper, envelopes and stamps. Now, what about you other people?"

His wife suggested bridge—Drake discovered later that this was a passion of hers—and Marjorie Lovelace, John Moore and Hammond hailed the suggestion with pleasure.

"You can count me out," said Norman. "I loathe the game, and I'm a bad player, anyway."

"And me," put in Drake. "I think I'll just make myself comfortable in one of those seductive-looking chairs and do nothing."

"I'll come and talk to you when I've finished my letters," said Venita. "It's too hot to do anything but sit about and doze. What are you going to do, Eric?"

"Read," answered Norman promptly. "I'm in the middle of a rattling good detective story and I want to finish it."

HE accompanied Venita into the house to fetch the book from his bedroom, and Drake strolled down to the lawn to find a comfortable chair in which he could laze away the afternoon. He found one and installed himself among the cushions with a sigh of content. Lighting a cigarette, he watched through half-closed eyes the others making preparations for their game.

Minter brought a card-table and set it in the shade of one of the willows. While he was collecting chairs from the terrace Eric Norman reappeared with a book in his hand. He came down and settled himself a few yards away from Drake, and began to read. Hammond went in to collect the cards and scoring tablets, and the bridge party settled down to their game.

Drake threw away the end of his cigarette and glanced at his watch with a yawn. It was a quarter to three.

The heat was stifling. The sun poured down from a cloudless sky and there was not a breath of wind. On the river a girl in a canoe paddled slowly past, making a soft ripple in the water.

Tommy, who lay sprawling on the grass near the water's edge, rose to his

feet and stretched himself.

"I think I'll go for a trip in that canoe," he said, and proceeded to put his suggestion into execution. "Care to come?"

Half-asleep, Drake shook his head. His lunch, and the oppressive heat combined, made him feel drowsy. He was nodding when he heard the sound of excited voices, and looked up quickly.



Eric Norman

For a moment he thought it was a row among the bridge players, but, twisting round in his chair, he discovered that it was Minter and Mr. Hammond. The servant, his face white and glistening, was speaking rapidly and shrilly to the stout man. He heard Hammond say "My God! I'll come at once!" and out of the corner of his eye he saw Eric Norman drop his book and hastily rise to his feet.

Wondering what had happened, Drake got up quickly and went over to the startled group. Their faces told him it was something serious before he put his question to Hammond.

"It's Venita!" muttered the producer hoarsely, his face the color of chalk. "She—she—"

"What's happened to Venita?" Eric

Norman snapped the question as he joined them.

"She's been taken ill or something," answered Montague Hammond. "I—" He broke off as, with a muttered exclamation, Norman went striding toward the house.

Drake followed with Minter. The agitated Hammond brought up the rear.

"What's happened?" asked the detective.

The white-faced servant licked his lips.

"I don't know, sir. Something rather dreadful, I'm afraid. Miss Shayne is either—ill—or dead!"

"Dead?" echoed Drake.

The man nodded, and swallowed with difficulty.

"Yes," he said huskily. "She's—she's huddled up on the desk—in Mr. Hammond's study—she wouldn't answer when I spoke to her. She wouldn't move when I touched her—"

They crossed the loggia and hurried through the coolness of the lounge. Norman was half-way up the stairs before they reached the hall, and they followed him to the door of the study on the second floor. It was half-open. As he reached it Drake saw Norman by the desk and heard the sharp, horrified intake of his breath. He looked up, his face haggard, as the detective entered.

"My God! Look here!" he said in a harsh voice—a voice so totally unlike his own as to be unrecognizable.

Drake looked, and his own face changed, grew grim. In the swivel-chair by the big writing-table sat Venita Shayne. One arm hung limply down by her side, the other, bare to the elbow, was flung out across the blotting-pad. On the edge of the desk rested the blond head, twisted half-sideways.

Drake came to Norman's side, and as he reached him he saw what it was that had caused that horrified intake of breath, for now the face was visible.

The eyes were wide and staring and suffused with blood; the fair skin blotched and mottled and of a horrible liver color. One glance was sufficient to tell him the truth.

Venita Shayne—beautiful no longer—was dead! And the savage fingers which had pressed out her life had left marks that stood out cruelly against the whiteness of her throat.

CHAPTER V

The Circular Mark



"DON'T touch her!" said Jonathan Drake sharply as Eric Norman made a movement towards the sprawling figure of the dead actress. "Nothing must be touched until the police have seen her!"

"The police!" The hoarse croak came from Hammond in the open doorway. "What do you mean, Drake?"

"The police must be sent for at once!" interrupted the detective sternly. "This is murder!"

The ominous word sent a little ripple of sound like the sighing of an expiring breath over the group by the door.

"Murder!" breathed Hammond. "But—how can it have been murder? Nobody could have—we were all outside—"

"All the same it's murder!" said Drake. "She's strangled, and she couldn't have strangled herself." He looked at the telephone which stood on a corner of the desk. "Shall I telephone or will you?" he inquired.

Hammond passed a shaking hand across his damp forehead.

"You telephone," he muttered huskily. "Good Heavens! Venita! Poor little Venita!" His voice choked as he stared at the pathetic little figure in

the chair, bathed in the full glare of the afternoon sun.

Drake lifted the telephone from its rack, and after a short delay was connected with the Tarrytown police station. Rapidly, and without waste of words he explained what had happened, answered a few questions that were put to him, and putting the instrument back, turned to the others.

"The police are coming at once."

"I can't believe it!" Montague Hammond was still staring at the crouching figure by the desk as though by the very intensity of his gaze he would instill life into that motionless body. "She was always so—so alive!" His voice cracked and his thick lips quivered.

Eric Norman said nothing. Since Drake had checked that first spasmodic movement he had remained rigid, his rugged face expressionless, his eyes fixed on the livid face of the dead girl with a peculiar fascination.

Drake touched Hammond on the arm.

"Come," he said kindly. "Pull yourself together. It's a dreadful thing to have happened, but it's no good letting it get you down."

The producer stared at him dumbly and there was pain in the brown eyes.

"Who could have done it?" he whispered. "Who could have done it?"

Drake was asking himself the same question. "That remains to be found out," he said. "Go and take your wife and the others away."

Hammond nodded, but made no effort to move. He seemed reluctant to leave that room to which death had come in its most dreadful form.

"Go on, Hammond." It was Eric Norman who spoke and his voice was level and emotionless. "You can do no good here. None of us can do any good."

"Yes," Hammond swallowed with difficulty. "I suppose—you're right. We can't do anything, can we?" He moved unsteadily like a drunken man,

towards the door. "Come on, Eva. Come on, Marjorie," he muttered. "We'll go downstairs." He pushed them gently away in front of him, and then with an abrupt movement pulled the door to.

"He's pretty cut up, isn't he?" remarked Norman when he had gone.

"It's not surprising," said Drake, bending over the desk and examining its neatly arranged appointments. "She was a protégée of his and he was practically entirely responsible for her success. It must have given him a terrible shock."

Norman silently nodded, watching the other as he peered about among the objects on the top of the desk. Apparently Drake found something that interested him, for suddenly he bent forward in an attitude of concentration and then looked around quickly.

"You must have received a lot of letters from Miss Shayne during the time you acted as her press agent," he said.

A little surprised, Norman nodded.

"You'll be able to tell me then," went on Drake, "whether it was a habit of hers to put the time and day instead of the date at the head of her paper."

"Yes, it was," replied Norman curiously. "Why?"

"There's a freshly started letter here," explained the detective. "You can just see it under her right arm. No, don't touch anything!" He laid a restraining hand on the other's arm as he came round to his side. "Look, there! It's headed: Saturday. 3.15."

HE showed the press agent the partly visible sheet of notepaper with the dead girl's sprawling writing.

"Yes, Venita always started her letters like that," said Norman. "What about it?"

"It may be very important," said Drake gravely. You see, it proves she was alive at a quarter past three."

"Well, supposing she was—" began Norman impatiently, and then, realizing what the other meant, "By Jove!

You mean she must have been killed between three-fifteen and—"

"The time Minter found her," broke in Drake, "which was roughly a quarter to four."

"In that case," exclaimed Norman excitedly, "unless Minter himself or one of the servants killed her—and that's a ridiculous supposition—some stranger must have done it, because everybody else was on the lawn by the river from three o'clock onwards."

Drake nodded.

"Half a minute, though," Norman cried. "Perhaps Venita made a mistake in the time. D'you remember she said her watch went wrong at lunch—"

Drake pointed to the silver clock which was ticking steadily a few inches away from the dead girl's head.

"She couldn't have made a mistake," he answered quietly, "whatever had happened to her watch, she had that in front of her, and it's dead right."

"But nobody in the house could have done it," said Norman.

"Apparently not." The detective was staring down at the dead girl's extended arm, flung out across the blotting-pad.

"What are you looking at?" asked Norman interestedly.

"This," said Drake, and pointed to a small, red, circular mark that stood out vividly on the white flesh.

"It looks like a cigarette burn," said Norman, staring curiously.

"It wasn't there at lunch," muttered Drake. "I'm certain of that."

"Perhaps the murderer was smoking a cigarette," suggested Norman, "and she got the burn in a struggle."

"Hardly," said the detective. "Murderers—strangers anyway—don't smoke when on the job. Besides, I'm not so sure that it is a cigarette burn. There's no blackening."

He stared at the mark with pursed lips, his brows drawn together, and then he straightened up. Four uniformed men had been led to the room by the butler.

"I'm Chief Cotter," said the man in the lead of the Tarrytown police, selecting Drake immediately as the man to address. "I presume you're Jonathan Drake."

Chief of police Cotter was a thin, shrewd-faced man, with a weather-beaten complexion and small, twinkling, black eyes. He was accompanied by a sergeant, two patrolmen, and a youngish, fair-haired man whom Drake rightly guessed to be the county coroner.

Cotter listened while the detective briefly told him what had occurred, took a quick look at the body, and clicked his teeth.

"Murder, all right," he said. "There's no doubt about it. I'm honored to meet you, Mr. Drake." His bird-like eyes fixed themselves on the detective. "What d'you make of this affair?"

DRAKE shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't make anything of it at all," he declared. "Except that the crime was apparently committed by some person who entered the house while the household was outside."

"What makes you say that?" asked Cotter.

The detective showed him the newly started letter.

"I see." The chief pursed his lips. "This appears to mean that everyone has an alibi, with the exception of the servants."

Drake nodded.

"I suppose"—a sudden thought seemed to strike Cotter—"that it is Miss Shayne's writing—"

"There's no doubt about it," broke in Eric Norman. "I've got a letter from her in my room. You can compare the two if you like."

"Thanks, I'd like to," said the chief. "I was just wondering, Mr. Drake," he went on, when the press agent left the room, "if someone hadn't been clever—"

"Faked an alibi, you mean?" finished

*From Mrs. Hammond's breast
protruded the hilt of a knife
(Chap. XVIII)*



the detective. "The same idea occurred to me, chief, but that sprawling writing would be difficult to imitate. No; I'm pretty sure she began that letter herself."

Cotter scratched his chin.

"In that case, it looks as if it's going to be a difficult business," he remarked. "Will you have a look at her now, doctor?"

He addressed the fair-haired man, who gave a quick nod and came over to

the desk. While he was making his examination, Eric Norman returned, carrying in his hand a folded sheet of paper which he gave to the chief. The comparison between the note addressed to Eric Norman and the writing on the freshly started letter left no room for doubt. The writing was identical.

"That's that," muttered Cotter. "I'll keep this, if you don't mind."

The coroner looked up from his unpleasant task. "I've finished!" he said curtly. "Death was caused by strangulation. There'll be an autopsy, of course—"

"The strangler must have been pretty quick," said Cotter. "There isn't any sign of a struggle."

"There wouldn't be," replied the doctor briefly. "She was unconscious when she was strangled!"

"Unconscious!" The exclamation came from Drake.

"Yes. Look here." The doctor skillfully parted the pale hair at the top of the head. A livid bruise showed through on the skin of the skull. "She was struck with some heavy instrument, not enough to break the bone, but sufficient to cause a contusion and immediate unconsciousness. After that, of course, it was simple."

The chief fingered his chin, and frowned.

"I wonder what she was struck with?" he muttered; and Drake, who had been glancing quickly round the room, pointed to a bronze statuette that stood on the mantelpiece.

"How about that?" he suggested, and the doctor swung around.

"Yes, that might have been the weapon," he said. "That, or something similar."

"About how long has she been dead?" asked Cotter.

"As nearly as I can say, two hours," was the reply. "It might be less, it might be a little more. It's impossible to be accurate within half an hour or so."

Cotter glanced at the desk clock. It was almost exactly five.

"That would fit in," he said, looking at Drake.

The detective nodded.

"What do you make of that mark on her arm, doctor?" he asked.

The coroner peered at it and wrinkled his brows.

"It's very slight," he said. "A burn of some sort."

"Would you say it was recent?" inquired the detective.

"Yes," was the answer. "Quite recent."

Cotter looked at Drake. "D'you think it's important?" he inquired.

"I DON'T know whether it's important or not," Drake said slowly. "It certainly puzzles me. It wasn't there the last time I saw Miss Shayne alive, and that was just before she entered the house after lunch, with the intention of coming in here to write her letters."

"I don't see how it can have any bearing on this business—" began the chief doubtfully.

"I don't say that it has," broke in Drake. "But it's curious, all the same, and has to be accounted for."

"Most likely it was caused by a cigarette," said Cotter, who was obviously not very much interested in the mark on the dead woman's arm. He sighed. "Well, I suppose I'd better get busy."

The police photographers arrived. Photographs of the room and the dead actress were taken from all angles. At last the pathetic remains were removed to the waiting ambulance.

Every object in the study was examined for fingerprints, after which Cotter took the statements of the various members of the household. But they were not very helpful. One thing, however, was proved. That thing, however, instead of making the mystery clearer, only made it more puzzling.

The evidence of the housemaid, combined with that of Minter, showed

conclusively that no stranger could have entered Backwaters at the time the crime was committed. The housemaid had been feeling the heat, and had strolled down the drive to the gate leading on to the main road. She had been there from a quarter to three to nearly half-past, and no one had entered.

There was a high stone wall surrounding Hammond's establishment on the land side, and this was topped with broken glass, and was practically unclimbable.

It was the ringing of the telephone bell which had led the tragic discovery.

When Minter had first heard it, he had thought that since Miss Shayne was occupying the study at the time, she would answer it herself. But when it continued to ring, he assumed she had gone up to her room. Going upstairs, he had found her—dead. This was at half-past three.

He had seen nobody, and had not expected to see anyone, since the entire household were out on the lawn, which ran down to the river bank.

Ironically enough, the call had not been answered—by the time Minter reached the study the phone had stopped ringing—the person on the other end had disconnected. This removed all chance of the call having been recorded by the telephone company.

Neither was there anything of value to be learned from the rest of the people at Backwaters. When Eric Norman had accompanied Venita into the house, he had left her at the door of Montague Hammond's study, and not seen her again alive. The only other person who had entered the house during the time Venita was in the study was Hammond himself. This had been just before a quarter to three, when he had gone to collect the cards and scoring blocks for the bridge game.

No one had moved from the lawn between five minutes to three and the time Minter had made his discovery,

therefore, since Venita Shayne could not have been killed, on the evidence of the letter, until after three-fifteen, it was impossible for any member of the household to have committed the crime.

It was equally impossible, or nearly so, for any stranger to have done so, and this was the problem Drake and the chief were faced with at nine o'clock on that Saturday night.

CHAPTER VI

Silent Death



"T'S a tough case," Cotter said, when they talked it over in the study. "So far as the evidence goes nobody strangled the girl."

"She couldn't have strangled herself," Drake said. "How about the prints?"

The chief shook his head. "None of any use. There were plenty of Mr. Hammond's, as one might expect, and one or two of Miss Shayne's, the housemaid's, and Minter's, but nobody else's."

"None on the bronze statuette?" inquired Blake.

"None," said Cotter, shaking his head again. "None at all; but there was a blond hair sticking to the head of the figure, so I don't think there's any doubt that it was used to stun the girl as she sat at the desk."

"Queer," muttered Drake. "She'd hardly have allowed a stranger to walk up behind her without making any attempt to give the alarm. And if she'd cried out, Minter, who was in the hall, would have heard her."

"Perhaps she wasn't aware there was anyone in the room," said Cotter.

"But she must have been!" answered the detective. "Nobody could walk to the mantelpiece, pick up the statuette,

and come back to the desk while she was sitting there without her being aware of it, unless the killer was invisible. And I don't believe in invisible men, outside of that novel and moving picture by H. G. Wells."

"Well, there it is!" said the chief wearily. The intense heat and his exertions had tired him. "It's impossible, but it happened."

At ten o'clock Chief Cotter and his sergeant departed, leaving the two patrolmen on guard with an order that no one should leave the house without permission from the police.

An atmosphere of deep depression held sway in the house. Dinner had been a silent meal, the end of which everyone had welcomed with relief.

Drake was anxious to question Montague Hammond concerning the dead woman's past, but the producer was still in a daze, and out of sympathetic consideration for him the detective decided to postpone what could only be an unpleasant ordeal. He was to regret afterward that he had allowed his sympathies to intervene.

Tommy Lowell had been made acquainted of the tragedy on his return from his river trip, and when the rest of the household had retired, which they did early, he came to Drake's room.

"Any fresh dope?" he asked, as he closed the door.

The detective shook his head.

"I've been wondering," said Tommy, perching himself on the edge of the bed, "whether there's any connection between Miss Shayne's death and those anonymous letters."

"You and me, both," said Drake. "That last one which Hammond received this morning hinted at something of the sort."

"It's a puzzling business," muttered Tommy, frowning. "So far as I can see nobody could have killed the girl."

"Better sleep on it, Tommy. I'm sitting up awhile."

"Okay. 'Night."

Drake made himself comfortable in a dressing-gown, pulled a chair to the open window, and began mentally sorting his impressions.

IN his mind's eye he conjured up a picture of the study, visualizing the desk and its contents. Near the telephone, he remembered, was a large ash tray, and this had been clean. The girl, therefore, had not been smoking. Neither had her murderer—there was no cigarette in the fireplace, or anywhere else in the room. He had already considered the absurdity of a person smoking in the act of murder. But whence, then, had come that burn?

Was there anything on the desk that could have caused the mark? The telephone stood on the right hand corner. Near it was the ash tray. Beside that a water bottle and glass.

Then there was a rack of reference books, an onyx pen-stand holding fountain pens, and a stationery rack. On the left was the clock. That, together with the big, leather-bound blotter and a calendar, was all. There was not even a desk lighter. Nothing, in fact, that could have supplied any form of heat.

The sound of a clock striking two came floating in through the window when Drake eventually gave it up and went to bed. Perhaps the morning would produce something that would give him an idea.

He had not forgotten the doped liquor of the previous night, nor the shadowy figure who had entered his room to take something from his desk. Drake carefully locked the door from the inside before he went to bed. He was not taking any chances of being the next victim of the ruthless killer.

* * *

Sunday morning came without any break in the almost tropical weather. Jonathan Drake was up early, long before the rest of the household was astir, and he went down to the river's edge, where he stood contemplating the smooth, slow-moving water.

The morning seemed to make the details of this case stand out in bolder relief. The hatred that he had seen in Mrs. Hammond's eyes when she had gazed at Venita Shayne the previous night.

The tenseness upon the part of Monty Hammond and Eric Norman when the two men learned of the actress' engagement.

Why had the girl been killed? Did anyone gain by her death? Was there a money motive?

Or was this murder engendered by hatred? Such a hatred that only death could satisfy.

Where did the other factors fit in? The sinister warning notes that Hammond had received? The man that Minter had seen lurking outside the house? The attempt to poison the theatrical producer's drink?



Minter

Soon the first of the swarm of reporters who were to cluster round the estate like flies throughout the day arrived. Chief Cotter had stationed uniformed men at all of the entrances to Backwaters—and they were kept constantly busy preventing the newspapermen from entering the place.

Tommy Lowell came downstairs to find Drake just having breakfast and joined him. The detective and his red-

headed assistant had finished their meal and Drake had just lighted a pipe when Monty Hammond appeared.

IF Hammond had looked harassed and worried the previous day, he looked positively ghastly this morning. He seemed to have shrunk. His face was pallid and gray, and the skin hung loosely at the corners of his mouth and beneath his eyes. He appeared to be laboring beneath a state of constant terror—as though he feared he might be the next victim.

"Give me some coffee. I want nothing to eat," he said hoarsely to Minter, and flung himself down in a chair.

As he took the cup which the butler handed to him, Drake saw that he was shaking as though he had a slight ague.

"I want to talk to you, Hammond," murmured the detective with a nod to Tommy, who quietly departed. The producer shot him a nervous glance.

"Talk! Talk!" he said irritably. "Nothing but talk! That Chief of Police yesterday asking all sorts of questions. Why was this—why was that? Questions and questions!"

"I'm afraid it can't be helped," said Drake soothingly. "You must realize, Hammond, that every possible source of information must be tapped."

"I know nothing!" declared the producer. "I didn't kill Venita! Poor child! I wouldn't have hurt a hair of her head!"

"I don't imagine that you did—but you invited me here for the weekend because you were afraid something might happen." Drake reminded him. "And I think you are in a position to tell me something that would help, something you haven't yet told."

Hammond looked startled and even more frightened. "What makes you think that?" he muttered. "Why, d'you think that I should know anything more than I've already said?"

"You knew Venita Shayne better than anyone," answered the detective. "Has she ever mentioned that she was

afraid of anybody?"

"No! Is it likely? Why should Venita be afraid of anybody? She was popular, she was successful. She had no enemies."

"She must have had one right here in this house, someone who was enough her enemy to take her life!"

Montague Hammond sprang to his feet. "Why do you keep reminding me of that?" he cried. "Why can't you let me forget it? Good God! I can see her now—"

Hammond's nerves were strained almost to breaking point. "Get me some brandy—neat!" he snapped to the waiting Minter, and the man hurried away.

When he returned with the glass, Hammond gulped down the spirit eagerly. Its effect was almost instantly visible. A tinge of color came into his flabby cheeks and his dull eyes brightened.

"I'm sorry, Drake," he apologized. "But this business has given me an unpleasant shock."

"It's given us all a shock," said the detective. "But I can realize how it affects you. Come down on the lawn."

He rose, took his host by the arm, and together they descended the steps of the terrace and strolled towards the river's edge.

"I'm sorry," began Drake, after a pause, "to have to bother you at the present time, but it's essential that everything possible should be done to discover who is responsible for that girl's death without delay. Time is an important factor."

"I realize that," muttered Hammond. "Good Lord, man, don't you think I want to do everything possible to help?"

"Then tell me," went on the detective. "Do you associate those anonymous letters you received with what happened yesterday?"

He felt Hammond start. But Hammond only muttered: "I—I hadn't thought about it."

Drake was convinced he was lying.

"I should have thought it would have been the first thing to occur to you," he said. "It did to me."

"I'd forgotten it," declared Hammond. "This other—this horrible thing drove it completely out of my mind. Maybe you're right—I don't know. What are you suggesting? That the person who has been sending me these letters and the person who killed Venita are one and the same?"

"I'm not suggesting anything," said Drake gravely. "I'm asking you to do that. I'm going to be perfectly candid, Hammond. You know more about this than you've said. You've been keeping something back."

"I—I don't know anything!" Hammond persisted hoarsely. "Good heavens, man, why don't you leave me alone? Haven't I had enough to put up with without these constant and useless questions?"

"Listen to me," said the detective patiently. "This is a murder case. Venita Shayne was murdered on your estate after you had received mysterious death warnings. I don't wish to be hard, Hammond, but in the present circumstances you can hardly expect me to study your feelings at the expense of the truth. Now, what do you know?"

Montague Hammond wilted. "I—I'll tell you," he burst out. "I've been trying to make up my mind to tell you from the first. I do know who wrote those letters, Drake. I think I know who killed Venita. It was—"

He broke off abruptly, and a thin, gasping cry issued from his open mouth.

For a moment he swayed unsteadily, and then crumpled up, to fall twitching at Drake's feet.

With an exclamation the detective knelt beside him. For a moment he thought the stress and strain which Hammond had undergone had proved too much for his nerves and he had fainted, but then he saw the blood on the big face and the tiny round hole in

the right temple from which it trickled.

An expression of horror swept over the face of the lean dark haired detective, his eyes were hard and there was a bitter twist to his lips as he gazed down at the still form at his feet. Monty Hammond had been soundlessly shot!

There had been no noise, but there was no mistaking that bullet hole in the producer's forehead. Drake knelt down, ripped open the silk shirt, laid a hand on the broad chest. He could feel no beat. The heart had stopped. Montague Hammond was dead.

He had been murdered at the very moment when he had been about to divulge all he knew!

CHAPTER VII

The Man on the Island



JONATHAN DRAKE jumped to his feet. His keen gaze swept the grounds of the estate basking in the warm morning sunlight. There was no one in sight. His eyes centered on the little island out in the riv-

er. He was convinced that the shot had come from that direction. Hammond had been standing with his right side to the river frontage when he had fallen.

"Rifle with silencer," his thoughts moved swiftly. "A .22 from the looks of the wound."

The island was a strip of land that divided the main stream, a slice of dense shrubbery and woods that extended three or four hundred yards; it was privately owned.

Tommy Lowell came running up. He had seen Hammond fall. "What happened?" he cried. "Did he faint?"

"Murder, Tommy!" Drake snapped. "Hammond is dead—shot through the head! Stay here with the body. I'm going across to that island. Silencer!" he hurled back to answer Tommy's unspoken question.

He was already dashing toward the boat-landing. There he leaped into a canoe, unhitched the painter, and paddled swiftly out upon the placid water. He was aware that he presented an even better target to the invisible killer than Hammond had done, but he had to take that chance.

He reached the island and drew the canoe up on the shore—there he paused and listened tensely. There was no sound save the twittering of the birds in the trees and the soft lap-lap of the river as it gently washed against the shore of the island. Yet somewhere, he was certain, death stalked.

He stared across the water he had just crossed. He could see the motionless figure of Hammond, Tommy Lowell standing beside the dead man,

[Turn Page]

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but there was no other sign of life visible. The place seemed lapped in somnolence. The lovely white house glistened in the sun.

The island was covered thickly by trees and dense masses of bramble. Rank grass grew almost to the water's edge. Drake forced his way through its tangle, his right hand close to the automatic in his shoulder holster.

He went up the shelving bank until he reached a spot where walking was easier. Here he stopped again to listen, but no sound greeted his ears. Yet without doubt the shot that had killed Hammond had been fired from somewhere on this piece of land, and not very far away, either.

A sudden crashing in the brush to his left made him glance in that direction. He was just in time to see a figure ducking into the deep shadows of some trees.

Drake plunged forward, but it was impossible to make speedy progress through this miniature jungle.

He saw the man ahead fling something into the brush as he raced on. Drake, as he reached the spot, caught his right foot in a creeper vine. He went down with a crash—but was up again in a moment.

He found that the island had again grown silent. No longer could he hear the other man crashing through the undergrowth. A little patch of sunlight gleamed through the thick branches of a tree.

In its light the detective saw the object that had been discarded. It was a .22 rifle with a silencer on the end of the long barrel. The murder weapon that had killed Monty Hammond!

Drake snatched up the gun and continued running. He swept past the trees and out into the clearing that loomed beyond.

He was a wild looking figure with his clothes rumpled and dirty from his fall, his thick dark hair mussed, and the rifle in his hand.

A YOUNG blond man stepped suddenly into the clearing! He gave a startled shout as he saw the detective racing toward him. He came rushing at Drake, and as the criminologist raised the rifle to ward off what looked like an attack, the blond man flung himself forward.

A flying tackle caught Drake about the hips and sent him to the ground with a jar that shook him from head to foot. The rifle was knocked from his hand.

He lashed out with his right fist and there was the crunch of bone against bone as his knuckles met the blond man's chin. Then they were fighting like two beasts of the jungle, rolling, threshing about in the grass and dirt.

"You crazy devil," gasped the blond man. "Try to kill me, will you!"

They scrambled to their feet, still fighting. Drake was wasting no breath in words. He was sure that the man with whom he battled was the murderer of Monty Hammond, and he was taking no chances of meeting the same fate that had befallen the theatrical producer.

Again he shot out a hard right to the chin, and then a left to the body. The other man staggered back—but came in again. A blow caught Drake just above the belt and made him gasp—a second just missed his eye as he ducked his head.

He let drive with both fists, right, left, to the blond man's body—and then an uppercut with all of Drake's weight behind it smacked against the other man's chin and he went down and out.

Drake stood over him, panting. Then he picked up the rifle.

The blond man moaned and opened his eyes. He sat up, glaring at the detective.

"Get up!" snapped Drake. "Hurry!" He was covering the blond man with the rifle, and his tone was hard and ominous.

The young man in the white slacks and the sweat-shirt got hastily to his

feet. He was a good looking chap, but there was a sullen expression on his battered face as he glared at Drake.

"Now what?" he demanded.

"Head back to the north side of the island," ordered Drake. "Get moving—I'll follow—and don't try to get away."

"And have you shoot me with that rifle?" growled the other man as he started back through the brush. "Do I look like a fool?"

Drake did not answer. He intended to take the blond man back to Hammond's estate and turn him over to the police.

They reached the canoe, and at Drake's command the blond man got in and took up the paddle while the detective still covered him with the rifle.

"Straight across to the opposite shore," commanded Drake.

The blond man sullenly started to paddle the canoe across. Drake never took his eyes off his captive. He had seated himself in the stern of the canoe while the blond man was paddling from the bow seat.

Once Drake glanced toward the estate. He caught a fleeting glimpse of figures near the bank—saw blue uniforms among them and realized that the police and Hammond's guests had gathered at the spot where the producer had died.

The canoe grated against the opposite bank. At a word from Drake the blond man climbed out—and Drake followed, still covering him.

A slender girl raced toward the spot where the two men stood, and the detective saw that it was Marjorie Lovelace who approached. The dark-haired actress was tremendously excited.

"Harry Cavendish!" she cried. "What are you doing here?"

"Ask him," muttered the blond man with a nod toward Drake.

Jonathan Drake gazed at his prisoner in surprise. The man that he had captured was the man who had been engaged to Venita Shayne!



Joseph Secket

CHAPTER VIII

"I'm Glad She's Dead"



CAVENDISH, I'd like to talk to you a moment," said Drake. The detective smiled at the girl. "If you'll pardon us, Miss Lovelace?"

"Of course," Marjorie turned away, as Drake drew the blond man to one side. "See you later, Harry."

"Well?" demanded Cavendish when he found himself alone with Drake. "What's this all about? Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"I'm Jonathan Drake."

"Drake, the private detective?" asked Cavendish in surprise, and then as the slender, dark-haired man nodded. "Why didn't you say so over on the island instead of rushing at me like a wild man? You looked like you were going to kill me. Naturally I tried to defend myself."

"This your rifle?" asked Drake.

"Why, no." Cavendish shook his

head. "Never saw it before. Why do you ask?"

"Because Montague Hammond was shot and killed with this rifle not more than twenty minutes ago," said Drake.

"Hammond killed!" muttered Cavendish, his good looking face growing pale beneath the tan. "How awful!" For the first time he appeared to notice the small group gathered on the lawn of the estate. "That—that's Hammond lying on the ground over there?" he stammered.

"Right," said Drake. "In the exact spot where he fell when you shot him with this rifle from the island."

"I shot him?" Cavendish glared at the detective. "Are you crazy, Drake?"

"You knew him, didn't you?"

"Of course. I knew him quite well—what's that got to do with it?" There was an anxious note in the blond man's tone. "You're not serious, are you? You don't really think that I—" He was unable to finish the sentence.

"What were you doing on the island?" asked Drake.

"I'm not talking," said Harry Cavendish sullenly. "I want to see my attorney first. You've accused me of murder and anything I say might only make it worse for me."

"That's quite possible," said Drake mildly.

Chief Cotter came across the grass to where the two men were standing. There was an expression of curiosity on the face of the police official, for it was obvious that these two had recently taken part of some sort of a physical combat.

Drake drew Cotter aside and related what had happened on the island. The chief listened intently, and finally shook his head.

"Look's bad for Cavendish," he said. "Have you told him that Venita Shayne is also dead?"

"Not yet," said Drake. "But I will."

With Cotter listening to every word, the detective broke the news of his fiancée's death to the blond man. To

their immense surprise, Harry Cavendish displayed no grief. That he was shocked and horrified there was no doubt, but he gave no evidence of the sorrow that a man might feel upon learning that the girl he loved was dead. In fact his attitude seemed almost one of relief.

"HOW did it happen?" he asked. "Was she shot, too?"

"She was strangled," said Drake. He looked casually at Cavendish's big fists. "By someone with powerful hands."

"Good lord! How awful!" muttered Cavendish, and he appeared genuinely horrified. "Have—have you any idea who could have done it?"

"You!" said Chief Cotter tersely.

"But I didn't—I tell you I didn't do it!" protested Cavendish.

"We'll make certain of that later," said the chief. "Come along."

"Oh, Chief," said Drake softly but firmly. "I don't believe that I would place Mr. Cavendish under arrest quite yet." He smiled at the blond man, who gave him a startled glance.

"All right, Drake," growled the chief. "But all the same I want to have a little talk with him."

Cotter and the blond man moved away. As they did so, the tall gray-haired butler came hurrying across the terrace to Drake.

"Will you go to Mrs. Hammond, please, Mr. Drake?" said the servant. His voice was husky. The Venita Shayne murder had left him cold, but evidently the shock of his master's death had been a severe one. "She wants to see you—urgently."

"Thank you, Minter, I'll go at once," Drake nodded.

He hurried into the house. He found a frightened maid in the hall and she directed him to his hostess's bedroom. It was on the second floor, and tapping on the door, he waited. A thin voice bade him enter, and he turned the knob and stepped into the room.

It was a large, airy room over the lounge. The windows faced the river. In a silk-draped bed lay Mrs. Hammond. Her thin face was ghastly; the shadows under her eyes were pronounced.

"So my husband is dead," she said, fixing her eyes on him in an unwavering and rather disconcerting stare.

He nodded in silence.

"Minter tells me he was shot," she went on. "Is that true?"

"I'm afraid it is," murmured Drake, sympathetically.

"The Shayne girl was strangled," said Mrs. Hammond. "It was a bad day for Monty when he took up with her. I knew that death would come to this house."

"Then he didn't tell you." The woman nodded quickly with little bird-like jerks of the head. "He didn't tell you. But he was. He was afraid of Venita Shayne! She made him do anything she wanted. Was it she who sent those messages?"

Again Drake was startled.

"You mean the anonymous warnings?" he said.

"Of course I mean them! He told you about them, didn't he? Isn't that why you're here?"

"Yes. But what makes you think Miss Shayne sent them?" he inquired.

"I didn't say that," answered Mrs. Hammond. "I merely asked if she did. It wouldn't surprise me. Nothing about Venita Shayne would ever sur-

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In

DOUBLE TALK

A Story of the F.B.I.

By MILTON LOWE

—in the Next Issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

"Are you suggesting," said the detective, "that Miss Shayne was indirectly responsible for what happened to your husband?"

"Of course," said the woman. "She was killed, too, wasn't she? The same person killed both of them."

"Do you know that?" asked Drake quickly.

"No, I don't know it, but I feel it." She tapped her flat breast. "I'm sure of it. If Monty had never met Venita Shayne he'd be alive today. Did he tell you why he was afraid of her?"

Drake was startled, the question came so suddenly and so abruptly.

"I wasn't aware he was afraid of her," he said.

prise me. You thought she was sweet and beautiful, and everything that was lovely, didn't you? Oh, go on! You might as well admit it," she said impatiently, as he hesitated. "Every man thought that about her—but she wasn't. She was a callous, calculating little devil! A cruel little devil! I'm glad she's dead!"

"Mrs. Hammond!" protested Drake.

"WHY shouldn't I say what I mean?" she asked. "Why should I be hypocritical and pretend to feel sorry when I'm not? I'm glad she's dead, d'you hear?" She raised herself off the pillows on to one elbow. "I asked you to come and see me," she

continued rapidly, and her excitement brought a spot of red into her cheeks, "because I want you to find out who killed Monty. I shall be a rich woman, and I can afford to pay for your services. Find out what was behind the killing of Venita Shayne. You'll stir up a lot of mud, but find out."

Before he could open his lips to reply there came a tap on the door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Hammond, and Minter entered.

He carried a letter on a salver, which he held out to Drake.

"For me?" Drake said in surprise.

"Yes, sir. Just come by the second post," Minter answered.

Drake took the envelope, saw the illiterate scrawl, and his eyes narrowed. With a swift movement and a murmured apology he put his thumb under the flap and ripped it open.

The contents was a single sheet of paper on which had been roughly printed, by the same hand as the superscription, the following message:

"The blonde's gone, and when you get this Hammond will have gone, too. A nice pair! There's more to follow, so watch out!"

In place of the signature was the scrawled drawing of the dangling man.

Drake turned over the envelope and looked at the post-mark. It had been posted in Tarrytown on Friday night!

CHAPTER IX

An Echo from the Past



WELL, Drake," said Chief Cotter, fixing his shrewd black eyes on the detective and gently pulling at the lobe of his right ear. "What do you make of it, eh?"

"I should like to postpone answering that question," said Drake. "It's a little early yet to think anything."

"In my opinion," said the chief, "there's not much doubt as to who is guilty now. This second crime has straightened things out."

"Do you think so?" murmured Drake.

Cotter nodded. "I most certainly do! To my mind the presence of this man Cavendish on the island clears everything up."

"Meaning that you're satisfied Cavendish is the murderer, the *double* murderer?"

Again Cotter nodded. "He hasn't talked but we'll screw a confession out of him, I have no doubt."

"It's rather extraordinary, chief," said Drake, "how thin the truth sometimes sounds."

"I'll admit that," agreed Cotter. "But in this case—" He shook his head. "No, I don't think we've got to look any further than Cavendish."

"What's your idea regarding the motive?" asked Drake.

"It's evident," replied Cotter. "I've checked various sources. It was general knowledge that this girl Shayne and Hammond were—well, pretty thick. In my opinion, jealousy was at the bottom of it. This fellow Cavendish found out and killed 'em both."

"How?" murmured Drake. "How did he kill Miss Shayne?"

An expression of complacency came into the thin face of the man before him.

"I knew you'd ask that, Mr. Drake. I've worked it out. The household were on the lawn, weren't they? And the servant Minter was in the hall. Miss Shayne was up here writing letters—he waved his hand round the study. "Well, Cavendish swam across! There's a border of foliage running right down to the water's edge, backed by arches of climbing roses, and behind it is a little path that leads up to the house. You've noticed that?"

Drake nodded. Cotter would have been surprised at how much he had noticed.

*Marjorie Lovelace*

"Well," went on Cotter, "this fellow Cavendish, as I said, swims across. He lands by the little path and he crawls out of the water. The people on the lawn wouldn't see him because he'd be screened by the roses. He creeps up the little path towards the house, and he finds a window open. He enters, makes his way up to the study, kills the girl, and departs by the way he came."

"Without leaving traces?" Drake queried. "He'd have been rather wet, don't you think?"

"No." Cotter shook his head. "It was a very hot afternoon. It wouldn't have taken him more than a few minutes to get himself dry enough not to drip."

Drake nodded. The theory was tenable, and he did not undeceive Cotter in his fond belief that he had been the first to think of it. There would be time enough for that later.

"Difficult yes, impossible no," the Chief went on. "Minter was in the hall, I know, but it would have been fairly easy for this fellow, once he was in the house, to wait until the servant's attention was attracted and then slip up the stairs."

"He would be taking an appalling risk," said Drake. He was prompting

the Chief. It was often instructive, he had learned, to hear one's own ideas coming from the lips of another.

"SCARCELY any risk at all," the Chief said. "Just you think for a moment." Drake smiled, recalling how often he had been referred to as "the thinking dynamo." "He was engaged to Miss Shayne and was known to Hammond. If he'd been spotted by Minter he had an excuse. He'd been camping on the island and he'd swum across to see his fiancée. If he'd been seen there'd have been no murder, but when he found he hadn't been seen he carried out his original intentions. I'm sure I'm right! It accounts for everything. Naturally Miss Shayne wouldn't have been suspicious. He could easily have got hold of that statuette and come up behind her. And no stranger could, that's definite."

"Yes, that's definite," agreed Drake. "The person who killed Venita Shayne was known to her."

"And it was Cavendish!" said Cotter stubbornly. "If I was a betting man I'd bet anything on it!"

"Well, I'm not so sure that you're right," said the detective. "Mind you," he added quickly, "I'm not suggesting that you're wrong. I'm maintaining an open mind."

"Well, we'll see," said Cotter. "Anyway, that's my general theory and that's the line I'm going to work on. There's one thing I'm rather curious to know, and that's what you were doing here. Were you just on a friendly visit—" he stopped. "Or weren't you?" he ended lamely.

"Not altogether," said Drake slowly, "and I think, Chief, when I tell you exactly why I came here, you'll have to reconsider your theory."

Briefly he gave an account of the anonymous letters which Hammond had received and the mysterious watcher Hammond had seen on various occasions, ending by handing the Tarrytown officer the last message

which had arrived that morning.

Cotter examined it and scratched his chin.

"I admit it's all very peculiar," he said, "but I still don't see any necessity for altering my original idea. Why couldn't Cavendish have sent these letters to try to scare Hammond?"

"At the time they started he and Miss Shayne were not engaged," Drake pointed out, still prompting.

"Cavendish may not have been engaged to the girl," said the chief, "but he must have known her for some time. A fellow hasn't got to be engaged to be jealous. But it seems to me to be common property that she and Hammond were as thick as thieves."

"What are you proposing to do, arrest Cavendish?"

Cotter shook his head.

"No. You advised me against that—and you were right. I haven't sufficient evidence at the moment. But I'm detaining everybody until after the inquest. And I shall put a man on to watch Cavendish so he can't make a bolt for it."

"I think you're wise," said Drake. "Wise, that is, in not arresting him. It's my belief we may learn a great deal if we go further into the history of Venita Shayne."

"I'm attending to that, too," said the Chief. "She had an apartment in New York, and I've arranged with the Manhattan police to take possession of it. I'm going into town this afternoon as a matter of fact just to do some investigating unofficially. I've also got the address of her bankers and her lawyers from that fellow Norman who acted as her press agent."

"Any objection if I come with you?" asked Drake.

"No, of course not," answered the chief. "I'd be very pleased."

"Then if you like," said the detective. "I'll drive you down. There'll be a post-mortem on Hammond, of course?"

Cotter nodded.

"You'll check the rifle for fingerprints of course," and then as the chief nodded Drake smiled. "You'll find more on it—but I'm wondering about those of Cavendish. Anything special in the coroner's report on Hammond?"

"He died instantly," said the chief. "The bullet lodged in the brain. I'm going to have a look through his effects. I've got all his keys." He rose. "Perhaps you'd care to give me a hand?"

THEY began on the desk. Methodically and carefully they went through every drawer, examining the papers and documents and replacing them. There was nothing at all that threw any light on the murders. There were receipts and bills concerning Backwaters, several letters dealing with the late Hammond's theatrical interests. There was a check book for a private account of Hammond's in a bank in New York. The checks were mostly drawn to self and various items connected with household expenses. There was only one which bore no notation on the stub—it was for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

"It'll be worth while to check that up," said Drake, and Cotter agreed.

"You thinking of blackmail?" he remarked.

"Chief," said Drake with a grim smile. "I'm not thinking of anything. I only see that every other check has been meticulously entered and this one hasn't. Therefore, it's worth looking into."

They turned their attention to the safe. It was locked by combination. But Jonathan Drake would have made a master cracksman. He had it opened in ten minutes. It contained account books, three hundred dollars in the cash box, and bundles of old checks. These were arranged in piles and neatly encircled with rubber bands. There was a folder bearing the name of the New York bank, containing the bank book.

But at the back of the safe, underneath all the other contents, they came upon a long envelope heavily sealed. It bore no superscription, and after a moment's hesitation Drake opened it.

It contained a marriage certificate. The ink was faded, the paper yellowish with age.

Jonathan Drake's keen blue eyes narrowed as he gazed at the date. It was April 8th, 1911—twenty-seven years ago. It certified the marriage of Molly Dwyer, whose occupation was described as "parlor maid," with James Hinkley, actor.

Drake was puzzled yet excited. Why had had Hammond carefully preserved this document? The marriage had been performed by a justice of the peace in a small midwestern town and Hammond's name did not appear, even



as a witness. What had the parties mentioned in the certificate—Molly Dwyer and James Hinkley—meant to the theatrical producer?

"Strange," said Chief Cotter who had also been scanning the document. "Perhaps his wife could tell us."

But Mrs. Hammond could tell them nothing. She had never heard of either of the people mentioned, and had not been aware that the certificate had been in her husband's possession.

"Probably hasn't anything to do with the case anyway," said Cotter, dismissing it from his mind.

But on this point he and Jonathan Drake parted company. Drake felt an inward excitement and did not think that excitement misplaced. He knew that feeling of old—the feeling that a break, a lead, had come at last. Here on one hand was an old marriage certificate mentioning the names of two people and yellow with age—there on

the other hand were two deaths, red with murder. There was nothing to connect one with the other, they were twenty-seven years apart. Yet Jonathan Drake, feeling an inward thrill, whispered silently to his restless brain: "Find the connection."

CHAPTER X

The Third Strike



THE city was still sweltering under the excessive heat when Jonathan Drake drove Chief of Police Cotter into New York that Sunday afternoon.

Venita Shayne's apartment was located in the upper fifties, east, on the third floor of a very modern building overlooking the East River.

An elevator took Drake and Cotter up to the dead woman's apartment, and they were admitted by a hard-faced woman servant. A uniformed officer of the New York police force had been placed on special duty with orders to keep guard on the apartment. He sat in the inner hallway, looking uncomfortable as he perched on the edge of a fragile chair.

"Jonathan Drake and Chief Cotter of the Tarrytown police," said the slender dark-haired man as the officer got to his feet. "It's all right if we take charge here. I phoned Commissioner Slade as soon as I got in town, and got his permission."

"Yes, sir," said the officer. "And you're welcome. I've been wondering if that meat-ax of a maid wouldn't try to knife me. She's got a nasty disposition."

"Really," said Drake. "That's interesting. Will you call her in, please?" The maid entered sullenly. "What's your name?" Drake asked her.

"Elizabeth Stokes," she said. "And I have been with Miss Shayne for two

years and I don't know who murdered her!"

"Nice to have that off our minds," said Drake quietly. "What sort of an employer was Miss Shayne?"

"Bad tempered and very difficult to please," answered the maid promptly. "Looked like an angle, behaved like a devil. Always finding fault. Nothing ever pleased her. Temperament, I've heard it called, but temper's more like it. Blistered the air with her tantrums."

"And yet you stayed with her for two years," Drake pointed out.

"A body has to earn a living, haven't they?" demanded the woman angrily. "And paid well, I'll say that."

"Did she have many visitors?" asked Drake.

"No, not many," replied the maid. "She used to give cocktail parties now



and again, but she hadn't many friends—not as far as I know. And I'm not surprised."

"Why?" demanded Drake.

"She was too snobbish and conceited. For no good reason, if you ask me. Just an actress that nobody ever heard of before she became famous." Elizabeth Stokes' eyes flashed. "There wasn't anybody else on earth so far as she was concerned except Venita Shayne. Always talking about how bored she was with it all, and how she had to suffer to please her public."

"Who were the people who used to visit her?" said Drake. "Do you remember their names?"

"Some of them." The maid wrinkled her forehead in thought, and it did not

add to her beauty. "There was Mr. Hammond. He was a pretty regular visitor, and then there was Mr. Cavenish. He came calling quite often, mostly to tea. Mr. Eric Norman was also dropping in. And there was a man who talked like an actor I seen in a play once—"

"John Moore, you mean?" interrupted Drake.

"No," the maid shook her head. "I know Mr. Moore—he's that young actor fellow. This was another man. He used to be dropping in at odd times when there wasn't anyone else here. I don't know his name. Miss Shayne used to call him Joe. Acted like he owned the place, he did." She frowned. "And—" she stopped.

"And what?" demanded Drake as she paused and sat looking at him anxiously.

"THERE was somebody here last night," she snapped, "and I don't know who it was, either. I only caught a glimpse of him."

"What d'you mean?" asked Drake. "Somebody called here last night?"

"They didn't exactly call," said the woman. "I'll tell you. I'd gone to bed early. I wasn't feeling too good, and with her away there was a chance to get some rest. You didn't get much when she was about I can tell you."

"I'd fallen asleep when I heard a sound that woke me. It was the faint rattle of a bolt being drawn, and it came from here. My room's along there at the back. I thought at first she'd come back, and I got out of bed and opened my bedroom door."

"The place was in darkness, but a light burns all night on the landing outside, and enough comes in through the fanlight to show up the hall dimly. There was someone fumbling at the front door and I called out. Then the door was opened, and I just caught a glimpse of a man as he slipped through and shut it after him."

"Isn't there a night man on duty?"

asked Drake.

"Yes," said the woman.

"Did you notify him?"

She shook her head.

"No, no. For all I know it might have been Mr. Hammond," she said. "He's got a key."

"What did I tell you about him and Miss Shayne?" Chief Cotter broke in. "Quite so," said Drake. "Was it Mr. Hammond? You said this man pulled back the bolt."

A puzzled expression came into the servant's face.

"I never thought of that," she admitted. "Of course, being on my own I'd bolted the door, which I don't usually do. He couldn't have got in that way, could he?"

"Why didn't you tell me about this, Miss?" put in the policeman.

"Haven't I said that I thought it might have been Mr. Hammond," she snapped. "I thought perhaps he'd been in town late and Miss Shayne had asked him to fetch something. I didn't want to advertise the fact that he'd got a key. I might have got into trouble for not minding my own business."

"Did the man's appearance suggest Mr. Hammond to you?" asked Drake.

"His appearance didn't suggest anything to me," answered the woman irritably. "I only caught sight of him for a moment, and then he was gone."

"The question is, how did he get in?" Drake persisted. "Is there a fire escape?"

She nodded.

"Yes. An iron staircase affair, that passes by a door in the kitchen."

"Is that kept locked?" asked Chief Cotter.

"Always," she answered.

"Show us," ordered Drake.

She led the way through to a spotless kitchen and pointed to a small door by the side of the window. The detective tried it. It was locked.

"Where do you keep the key?" he asked.

She pointed to a white enamel cabinet.

"There," she said, and then with a sharp intake of her breath; "Why, it's gone!" She went quickly over and peered along the shelf, but there was no sign of a key. "It's gone!" she repeated. "Who could have took it?"

"When did you last see it?" asked Drake.

She puckered up her brows in thought. "Friday," she answered after a pause. "I was cleaning the dresser, and I remember putting it back."

"**W**ELL, there's no question how the man got in, whoever it was," remarked Drake. "He came [Turn Page]

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up the fire escape, opened the door with the key, and relocked it behind him."

"And took the key away with him," supplemented Chief Cotter. "Now what did he come for? Did Miss Shayne keep any money or jewelry here?"

"No," said the woman. "She seldom carried much money; she didn't need to. When she went out other people mostly paid. The greater part of her jewelry she kept at the bank. What she was wearing she took with her, of course."

"So there's nothing of value to tempt a burglar—" began the inspector, but Drake interrupted him.

"I shouldn't waste your time over a burglar theory," he said. "At least, not an ordinary burglar. How could this man have got hold of the key?"

He addressed the last part of his remark to the woman.

"I don't know," she said.

"Perhaps Miss Shayne took it away with her?" suggested Cotter, and Elizabeth Stokes agreed that this was possible.

She had seen it last on the Friday, but couldn't remember whether it had been there or not after Venita Shayne had left to go up to Backwaters.

"She arrived with a Mr. Norman," said Drake. "Did he call for her?"

"Yes," said the servant. "He was one of 'em that was often here."

"Well, the person who used the key came for something," muttered Drake. "The thing is, did he get it or didn't he? I suppose you could tell if there was anything missing?"

"I don't know about that," said the maid. "Miss Shayne had a lot of things which she kept locked up."

"We'd better make a search," said Drake. "We came to do that, anyhow."

The apartment was a large one. There were three bedrooms and two reception rooms, apart from the kitchen, bathroom, and a tiny cupboard-like apartment that was used for the storage of trunks and oddments. The big-

ger of the three bedrooms had been used by the dead girl. It was here they began their search.

Cotter had provided himself with a bunch of keys, and with these he unlocked the drawers of the dressing-table. There were the usual articles of make-up and feminine appurtenances, but nothing of relevant interest. The wardrobe was full of clothing, and a dressing chest contained an enormous variety of flimsy underwear, night-dresses, stockings.

They turned their attention to the lounge.

There was a desk in one corner, and this contained an assortment of paid and unpaid bills, letters, and photographs. There were dozens of photographs, Venita Shayne in every conceivable pose and costume. One drawer was full of them. The letters were mostly invitations to parties from various friends.

The maid, who had followed them curiously during their search, came forward as they finished with the desk.

"She had her diary with her I suppose," she remarked, and Drake, who had gone over to a low bookcase swung around swiftly.

"Diary?" he said. "Did she keep a diary?"

"Oh, yes indeed!" said Elizabeth Stokes. "A thick, leather-bound book with a lock and key. It used to lie on her desk here."

"Did you find any diary in her luggage at Backwaters, Chief?" said the detective to Cotter.

"No." The chief of police shook his head. "There was no diary there."

His shrewd eyes looked at Drake with an unspoken question in their gaze. The slender, dark-haired man nodded.

"Yes, I think so," he said softly. "That's what the unknown man came for—Venita Shayne's diary!"

"He—" began the maid and then broke off abruptly as the phone in one corner of the room rang sharply.

"I'll answer it," said Drake as the woman started to go to the phone. She sank weakly into a chair.

"Hello—is Mr. Jonathan Drake there?" demanded a masculine voice over the wire.

"Speaking." Drake's eyes narrowed. It was the same voice that had warned him to keep away from the Hammond Estate just after the producer had called him and asked him to come there. "What do you want?"

The maid, looking pale, said "Excuse me," and went to the open window.

"There will be more trouble at Backwaters," said the voice over the wire. "You had better get back there quickly!"

The maid suddenly uttered a shrill scream and staggered back from the window. Slowly, she turned. There was a look of pain and horror in her hard face. But also—amazing and terrible—there was blood seeping through her uniform over her heart.

"I saw—" she gasped—"man—here las' night—looking for—"

She shuddered and pitched face forward on the thick Oriental rug.

Cotter and the police officer had already leaped toward her. Drake still stood with the phone in his hand—but the man on the other end of the line had hung up. He glanced at the dial phone and frowned as he realized that it would be impossible to trace the call.

"She's dead!" said Cotter, his voice hushed. "Shot through the heart."

One look sufficed Drake. He went to the window. There was another building directly across the street. He saw an open window in what appeared to be a vacant apartment and realized that the shot must have come from there.

"Hold things down here!" he cried. "Two of you men come with me! Don't stop to ask why, but come!"

He dashed out, two of the policemen following him. Down to the street he sped, and across—into the opposite building. "Get to the back of this building!" he directed one of the po-

licemen, "out into the court, and stop anyone coming down the fire escape. "You take the back elevator down the hall there, get off at the third floor and be alert for anything that shows. I'm going up on this one. Up!" he snapped to the elevator operator. "Three!"

The operator, who had seen the uniform, hastened to obey, slammed the door open when the car reached the third floor, and Drake dashed out. Unerringly his sense of direction guided him to the apartment from which the shot had come. For all he knew, the murderer might still be in it.

The apartment was empty, untenanted, recently painted, the door having been left open so that the paint would dry more quickly. That was all.

The policeman discovered nothing. The murderer had made good his escape in a matter of minutes, very likely by the skin of his teeth.

"A miss is as good as a mile," Drake said curtly, and the three went back to the late Venita Shayne's apartment.

Drake went to the phone and dialed police headquarters. He asked for Commissioner Slade, and to his relief found the head of the police department at his office.

"Hello, Commissioner," said the detective. "Jonathan Drake. I'm at Venita Shayne's apartment—yes, the actress who was killed at Hammond's estate in Tarrytown yesterday. Send down some Homicide Squad men—there's been another murder! Here, right here! The maid! Good. We'll be waiting. I'll be glad to see you."

Drake hung up.

"Who called on that phone before?" asked Chief Cotter.

"The man I thought was the murderer," said Drake slowly. "But now I don't see how that's possible, unless he's twins." He frowned as he gazed at the still figure on the rug. Not likely he phoned me and killed Elizabeth Stokes at the same time."

"No." Cotter shook his head. "That's

impossible!"

"Well, not impossible," said Drake, "but hardly likely."

CHAPTER XI

Love Above, Hate Below



MEN from the homicide squad arrived and took charge. With them came Police Commissioner Slade, and he drew Drake and Cotter aside and heard their story of what had happened both at the apartment and at the Hammond estate.

The police questioned the occupants of the apartment building across the street, but no one there had noticed anything unusual, nor had they seen any strangers lurking about the place.

The superintendent of the building did report that the vacant apartment on the third floor had recently been rented, and a phone installed, and the painters had just finished doing over the place the previous day. They had left the door open in order that the air entering the apartment would dry the paint more quickly. But these were things Drake had already learned independently.

"Anyone could have gone in there, shot the maid when he saw her over here at the window and then walked out again," he said.

And hour later Drake and Cotter departed, leaving the New York end of the murder investigation in the capable hands of Commissioner Slade and his men. It was not long until they were speeding back toward Tarrytown in Jonathan Drake's car.

"Well, Cotter," said Drake, as they sped along. "How does this new murder fit in with your theory?"

"It fits in very well," said the Chief. "It's my belief it was Cavendish who took that diary."

"You're not going to let Cavendish go without a struggle," murmured Drake with a faint smile. "What makes you think he should take all the trouble to come to New York to steal the dead woman's diary?"

"Because he hoped to find something in it," answered Cotter swiftly, "that would clinch his suspicion. And I believe he did. That's why he shot Hammond."

"I see. You're still convinced then that jealousy is the motive for these two murders? Then how do you explain the shooting of the maid?"

"I don't know," said Cotter. "I'm certain though, that I'm right about Cavendish."

"Surely," said Drake, "if Cavendish were certain his suspicions were correct, he wouldn't have killed the girl first and gone to collect the evidence after?"

"I'm not so certain of that." Cotter was evidently not going to have his original idea shaken. "She may have said something, taunted him with the diary—anything. You know how these things are, Drake. Whatever happened, I believe that's the solution."

Drake relapsed into silence. His technique of letting the other fellow talk was not bearing much fruit. He dropped it and listened attentively to his own thoughts.

What had Hammond been about to disclose when that shot had silenced him? He had known something, something had frightened him, something that was connected with those anonymous letters and the watcher who had dogged his footsteps. Something that also connected those incidents with the death of Venita Shayne.

Was there any truth in the rumor that there had been something more than friendship between the producer and the dead woman, or was it just the usual malicious gossip? It was obvious that Mrs. Hammond believed it. She had called Venita Shayne a callous, calculating little devil. And

Elizabeth Stokes had also declared that her mistress had been difficult and bad-tempered. What had the maid been about to reveal when she was shot?

According to these two women Venita Shayne's sweetness had been but skin-deep. It was not unusual to find such characteristics in a woman of Venita Shayne's beauty, but what bearing had this on her death? And on the death of Hammond, of the maid? It certainly helped to bear out Cotter's theory, but without further evidence Blake was not prepared to believe entirely in Cavendish's guilt. It didn't explain the anonymous letters, nor the two phone calls that Drake had received, and he felt certain that these were very closely connected with the crime.

What significance was there in the little drawing of the dangling man? It was obviously intended to represent an execution, for in spite of the bad draughtsmanship, the gallows and the noose was clearly recognizable. Had it any symbolic meaning, or was it just a rather grim fancy on the part of the writer of those scurrilous epistles?

THEY had reached Tarrytown before the detective came to any satisfactory conclusion.

At the police station he dropped the chief and drove thoughtfully to Backwaters. Tommy Lowell met him in the drive, a rather harassed look on his face.

"I'm glad you're back," he said with relief. "The reporters have been swarming round this place all day like bees."

"I guessed they would," said Drake, as he slipped from behind the wheel and stretched himself. "Any other news?"

Tommy shook his head. "No, except that confinement to the house seems to be playing the deuce with everyone's nerves," he answered.

"That's only to be expected," said the detective. "Then no one has left the

place while I've been gone?"

"Minter went to Tarrytown to get some things that the guests needed—and I haven't seen Eric Norman for two or three hours."

"You can't drop murder into the middle of a house party and expect everyone to go on behaving normally. Where's Cavendish?"

"Sitting on the lawn talking to Marjorie Lovelace," said Tommy. "Mrs. Hammond hasn't appeared all day. John Moore went on the river for a bit this afternoon, and now he's gone for a walk. Dinner'll be ready in about twenty minutes."

"All right, put the car away," said Drake, "and then come up to my room. I'm going to have a wash."

He was lathering his face when Tommy joined him. He swiftly told his assistant what had happened in New York. The red-headed young man listened with an expression of eager interest on his freckled face.

"I don't see what the murderer gained by killing the maid," he said when Drake had finished. "And it's queer about that diary. Must have been important or the fellow wouldn't have taken the risk. How d'you think he got the key?"

"I don't know, it's been puzzling me," Drake was changing his clothes as he spoke. "According to the maid no strangers entered the apartment between the time she last saw it, and the time we made the discovery it was gone."

"Which looks as if Miss Shayne must have taken it herself," said Tommy.

"That's possible," agreed Drake.

"In which case the man who killed her stole it out of her handbag," continued Tommy. "That seems plausible enough to me."

"It's plausible enough," agreed Drake. "But why did he take it? Why did he want that diary?"

"Why did he kill Venita Shayne?" retorted Tommy. "Have you got any theory?"

Drake shook his head.

"Not at present," he answered. "But Cotter has. And he's not only got a theory, but he's convinced it's the true one."

He gave a brief outline of the inspector's idea, and Tommy pursed his lips.

"I've been talking a lot to Cavendish during the day," he said, "and he doesn't give me the impression of being a murderer."

"If one could discover murderers by talking to them," said Drake, "police work would become a cinch."

"Yes, but Cavendish isn't the right type for this sort of crime," said Tommy stubbornly. "I can imagine him pulling a gun and shooting a man in a temper, but I can't imagine him strangling a woman. I like him."

THE silver tinkle of a gong warned them that dinner was ready, and they went downstairs. The meal was a gloomy one. The vacant places brought back to everyone the shadow that hung over the house.

Eric Norman ate scarcely anything, and Cavendish was obviously ill at ease. Drake tried valiantly more than once to start a topic of conversation, but he only received monosyllabic replies, and eventually gave it up. Marjorie Lovelace looked pale and tired. John Moore, although he made a good meal, scarcely raised his eyes once from the plate before him.

The evening was sultry and hot and coffee was served in the loggia. Marjorie Lovelace excused herself immediately after on the plea of a headache, and went up to her room. John Moore, after a few desultory remarks, took Drake to one side and inquired how long he thought they would be detained.

"Certainly until after the inquest," said the detective, and the young actor moved gloomily away.

Cavendish walked down to the river edge and stood staring at the glass-like surface of the water, leaving Eric,

Tommy and Drake alone.

"I've been waiting the opportunity of a word with you, Drake," said the press agent, after a quick glance around. "How are things going?"

"If you mean," said Drake, "have we made any startling discovery, no!"

He had deliberately refrained from telling the others of the murder of Venita Shayne's maid.

"It's a shocking affair altogether," said Norman in a low voice. "Poor Venita was terrible enough, but Hammond coming on top of it—who d'you think's responsible?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Drake, and then: "You knew Venita Shayne as well as anyone, Norman. What sort of a girl was she?"

"How d'you mean?" said the other quickly.

"Well, I mean what sort of disposition had she?" explained Drake. "Was she the sort of girl who made enemies easily?"

"Good Lord, no!" Norman's tone was emphatic. "Venita was one of the sweetest kids that was ever born. Why do you ask that?" He eyed the detective curiously.

"I was just wondering," answered Drake vaguely. "There must be some reason for her death, Norman. She was hated by someone. Hated so much that whoever hated her went to the length of murder to appease this hatred."

"It's unbelievable," Norman crushed out his cigarette in an ash tray, although it wasn't half smoked. "Unbelievable! I can't understand what reason anyone could have had for harming Venita."

"How long had you known her?" asked Drake.

"Let me see." The press agent took out another cigarette with nervous fingers. "Nearly three years. Hammond introduced us and asked me to boost her. Poor old Hammond. He thought a lot of Venita, too much, I've suspected more than once."

"So I've heard hinted," said Drake.

"Oh, I don't think there was anything—" Norman paused searching for words—"well, you know what I mean. People talk, of course. In the theatrical profession they slander one another very fluently, particularly anyone who's successful. But I think he had a soft spot for her all the same. It gave him a shock when she sprang that engagement on us."

"It gave you one, too," said Drake quietly, and Norman nodded.

"Yes, it did," he answered. "I'm willing to admit it. I was a little hurt, too, that she hadn't told me before. I've been talking to Cavendish. It's queer he doesn't seem nearly so cut up as I should have expected."

This had been Drake's view, too, but he said nothing.

WHAT was he doing on that island?" went on Norman. "Peculiar idea, don't you think, coming down to camp out with Venita staying almost opposite? I mean, it's so unnecessary. Hammond would have invited him here like a shot if she had suggested it."

"According to what he says," replied Drake, "he didn't want her to know he was here. She thought he was somewhere else altogether. As you say, it's peculiar. But then the whole thing's peculiar."

"You're right there," agreed Norman. "Reverting to Cavendish—to judge by his manner you'd think he was glad that Venita had been killed."

"Perhaps he's one of those people who object to showing their emotions," said Drake, "and the result of trying to hide his sorrow gives you that impression."

"That may be it," said the press agent. "But all the same—" he stopped as Drake gave him a warning glance, for the subject of their conversation was strolling towards them.

"It looks as though we're in for a storm." The voice of Cavendish floated

quietly through the gathering gloom. "It's pretty black over there."

Drake murmured a conventional reply as the young man joined them and dropped into a chair by his side. The conversation became fragmentary and desultory, and after a little while Eric Norman rose with a yawn and announced his intention of going to bed.

As he entered the house Drake gave Tommy a warning kick, and taking the rather pronounced hint he, too, got up, said "good-night," and followed in the wake of the press agent.

After they had gone there was a short silence broken at last by Drake.

"I'm under the impression, Mr. Cavendish, that you want to tell me something," he murmured. "Am I right?"

Cavendish stared at the slender dark haired man—and as he did so he grew conscious of the strength of character in Jonathan Drake's face.

"What makes you think that?" Cavendish asked slowly.

The detective shrugged his shoulders. "Your manner," he answered.

"Well, you're quite right." Cavendish's blond hair gleamed in the light as he leaned toward him. "I've been thinking it over all day, and I—I feel I ought to tell someone, and I'd rather it be you than the police. I—I did come down here to see Venita Shayne."

"I never doubted it for a moment," said Drake calmly.

"And I saw her," went on Cavendish, speaking rapidly. "I saw her on Friday night."

"Yes, go on," Drake said.

"After everybody had gone to bed," said Cavendish. "I don't know the exact time—about two o'clock, I think it was. It was so hot. I couldn't sleep, and I came down to the river. It was almost as light as day, with the moon. Looking across, I saw Venita on the lawn. I was in swim trunks, and I swam across."

"What was she doing on the lawn at that hour?" demanded Drake.

Cavendish shook his head. "I don't

know," he answered. "I didn't ask her." He was nervous and ill at ease, twisting a cigarette between his fingers.

"Go on," said Drake. "You've something else to say, haven't you?"

"Yes." Cavendish nodded. "I've this to say: You think I came down here because I was in love with Venita, didn't you? I wasn't! I hated her! I came down because I was going to persuade her to break off the engagement between us!"

CHAPTER XII

Detestable as Murder



GREAT deal was needed to surprise Jonathan Drake but he was surprised now. Not only surprised, but a little shocked. The other's statement went a long way to confirm Cotter's theory.

"I think," he said, after a slight pause, "you'd better tell me everything. Half-confidences are dangerous."

"I've already decided to," said Cavendish. "As I say, I've been thinking the matter over today, and it seems to me that I'm in rather a dangerous position. I've got an idea that Chief Cotter and you still suspect me."

"Naturally your presence requires an explanation," said the detective, evading a direct reply. "Particularly as you haven't been willing to say much up to now."

"Yes, I know," Cavendish struck a match and lighted the cigarette he had been fiddling with. "The whole thing's rather difficult. I don't like talking about it, particularly as Venita's dead; but for my own sake, I feel you ought to know."

He drew several jerky puffs at his cigarette, and then went on:

"I dare say you feel surprised when I tell you I hated Venita, considering that I was engaged to her. But the engagement was none of my seeking. She forced me into it!"

"Forced you into it?" asked Drake. "How?"

"By threatening to disclose something she knew about me to my father," answered Cavendish.

Drake pursed up his lips in a silent whistle. Here was a distinctly unpleasant light on the character of the dead girl. If the man before him was speaking the truth. Here, also, was a dangerous admission which, if it came to the ears of Chief Cotter, would result in the immediate arrest of Cavendish on a charge of murder.

"I know it's hard to believe," Cavendish went on. "To most people Venita presented the appearance of rather a sweet, doll-like little thing; but they didn't know her. She was shrewd, hard as iron, and completely unmoral. I don't mean that in the accepted sense of the term," he added hastily. "I mean if she'd set her heart on a thing, she didn't mind how she got it. And she set her heart on marrying a rich man. She told me so quite frankly. It was the one thing necessary to complete her ambition. I don't know whether you know, but my father is an invalid. It's doubtful if he can live very much longer, and when he dies, of course I inherit the entire estate, since mother has been dead for some time and I'm an only child."

"Venita fancied herself as the wife of a millionaire, and since she had in her possession means to achieve her object, she didn't hesitate to use them."

"What were these means?" asked Drake; and as the other hesitated, "You'd better be quite frank, Mr. Cavendish."

"Well, they were—they were letters," said the young man. "Some years ago I fell rather heavily for a girl who—well, she wasn't free. She was married to a man much older than

herself, a disagreeable type, jealous as blazes. There was nothing in it really, but we wrote rather stupid letters to each other. Somehow or other, she wouldn't tell me how, Venita got hold of them. She threatened to send copies of them to my father and to the husband unless I did what she asked. I wasn't so much afraid of Father knowing, as I was of getting the girl into trouble. It would have been a terrible scandal, a divorce which would have affected one of the best-known names

ished when I learned she'd announced it here at dinner.

"I came down here to make a last plea that she drop the whole wretched business."

"And when you saw her on the Friday night," Drake asked, "what did she say?"

"She laughed at me," said Cavendish. "Told me it was no use me trying to get out of my bargain; that if I did she'd carry out her threat. She told me that she was very annoyed at

DEATH VISITS the WINTER OLYMPICS

IN THE WINTER KING KILLINGS



A Complete Book-Length Novel Featuring Jonathan Drake,
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By CHARLES S. STRONG

—in the Next Issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

in the country. In fact, trouble all round.

I SAW nothing for it but to agree to Venita's terms. She said she'd give me the letters for a wedding present if I would become engaged to her. I agreed. There was nothing else I could do. But I asked her to keep the engagement secret for the time being. She wasn't very pleased at this, but she reluctantly consented. That's why I was so aston-

my coming to the island, and that I'd better leave first thing in the morning."

"I see," Drake nodded.

"I was hoping," went on Cavendish, "to get another opportunity of speaking to her. I'd made up my mind to try every possible means of persuading her to change her mind."

"I suppose you realize," said Drake seriously, "that you'll have to inform the police about this?"

"Is it necessary?" muttered Caven-

dish. "I want to avoid any publicity. Not for my sake so much as for the sake of the other people concerned."

"There need be no publicity," said Drake. "But the police will have to be told. Don't you realize that you've supplied a motive for Venita Shayne's murder, and a very strong one?"

"Yes. With me the murderer. But I swear to you, Mr. Drake—I had no hand in the killing of Venita Shayne."

"This concerns more than you and those you know," said Drake moodily. "If she went to the length of black-mailing you, she may have been doing the same to others. If that's true, there are others who had a motive for murdering her. That's why blackmail is such a terrible thing. People see only two ways out—both disastrous—either to resign themselves to the black-mailer, telling all, or to kill him—or her . . ."

"Yes, I see," muttered the young man. "Well, I'll be guided by you, Mr. Drake, but you realize my position."

"I quite realize," said the detective, "and you have my sympathy. D'you think Hammond knew about this?"

Cavendish shook his head. "I don't think so. I think she had some hold over Hammond, too. She seemed to be able to make him do just what she wanted. Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm convinced," said Drake, "that the person who killed Venita also killed Hammond, and, therefore, whatever motive applies in one case must also apply in the other."

He broke off as a figure appeared from the darkness of the lounge. It was Minter, come to clear away the coffee things.

When he had gone Drake rose to his feet. "I'm going to sleep on this, Cavendish," he said. "It will probably be necessary for you to see Chief Cotter in the morning and tell him what you've told me."

"I'll follow whatever advice you give," said Cavendish. "But I do want to avoid any publicity."

"Tell me one thing," said Drake as they entered the house. "These letters of yours, where did she keep them? We found nothing of the sort at her apartment when we searched it this afternoon."

"She was too cute," answered Cavendish. "She kept them at her attorney's. I know that, because I asked her once, and she said if I was thinking of trying to get them back by committing burglary I'd have my trouble for nothing. Then she told me where they were."

THEY parted in the hall, and Drake went up to his room. Tommy Lowell was sitting in a chair by the window glancing through an illustrated magazine.

"Hallo!" he said, as the detective entered. "What was the idea of shooing me off like that?"

"A very good idea," said Drake. "I had a feeling that Cavendish wanted to talk and I was right."

He repeated to Tommy the gist of the conversation.

"Nice little lady!" commented Tommy. "I'm beginning to think the person who strangled her did quite a number of people a good turn!"

"That's the way it looks," Drake said grimly. "There's nothing more detestable than blackmail."

"It looks bad for Cavendish," said Tommy. "He had the opportunity and the motive."

"Quite so," murmured Drake.

"Cotter will pinch him right away," said Tommy.

"Quite so," repeated Drake.

"I wonder what Venita Shayne was doing on the lawn," muttered Tommy, "at two o'clock in the morning?"

"I've been wondering that, too," said Drake. "But what I'm wondering mostly, at the moment, is the explanation for that mark on her arm. I've got an idea if we could find how that came there, we'd know a lot more than we know now."

Tommy left him soon after, but tired though he was, Drake did not go to bed immediately. Pulling up a chair to the open window, he sat down and thought over all the information that was in his possession, trying to sort it out so that it would make a coherent pattern.

When he failed in this he came back to the burn. What had caused that mark? The mark was the key to something. Where was the lock into which it fitted?

He was preparing for bed when suddenly, from nowhere it seemed, the explanation came to him. It was simple! He stood rigid, one arm in the sleeve of his pajama jacket.

That was it! It must be it!

And it wouldn't be difficult to prove! He determined, if conditions were favorable, to make the experiment the next day.

CHAPTER XIII

Drake Experiments



DRAKE was up early Monday morning, and the first thing he did, after getting out of bed, was to go to the window and anxiously inspect the weather. There was every promise of the heat wave continuing, but this time he gave a little grunt of satisfaction. He wanted it that way. In fact he wanted everything on this day to be as nearly a replica of Saturday's setting as possible.

He shaved, had his shower, dressed and went down to breakfast. Tommy was the only one up, and he and Drake had breakfast together on the loggia. After the meal he notified Minter that he would not be back until lunch, and set out for a solitary ramble round the district.

The test which would prove whether

his theory to account for the burn on the dead woman's arm was the right one could not be tried out until the afternoon, and he had much to think about.

With his hands in his pocket and a pipe clenched between his teeth, he strode leisurely along, striking out into the open country. The questions that had to be answered were many, and as he walked he tabulated them mentally.

Why had Marjorie Lovelace and Mrs. Hammond hated Venita Shayne?

Why had Hammond been afraid of the dead woman as his wife had suggested? Was this a fact, or was it merely Mrs. Hammond's imagination? Who was the man whom Hammond had detected watching, and for what reason had this surveillance been carried on?

Why had somebody gone to the trouble to break into Venita's flat in order to steal her diary? And who was the man called Joe whom the maid had described as "looking like a bank clerk"?

What connection with the murders had the anonymous letters and the two telephone calls Drake had received? What was the significance of the crude drawing of the dangling man which took the place of a signature?

And what was Venita Shayne doing on the lawn of Backwaters at two o'clock in the morning?

It was a formidable list, and Drake made a wry face. Perhaps some of the questions would answer themselves as more information concerning the dead girl's past came to light.

There was another thing: why had Hammond kept that marriage certificate so carefully?

Who were Molly Dwyer and James Hinkley, and what interest had the dead producer had in them?

Venita Shayne herself, if Cavendish had spoken the truth, had not been a pleasant character. A woman who would blackmail a man into an engage-

ment was capable of anything. Neither had the sour-faced maid been particularly enthusiastic concerning her mistress.

Yet Eric Norman had eulogized Venita to the skies. But then Eric Norman had been in love with her. There was no doubt of that. Drake could read the human heart—he had read Eric Norman's. A man in love was prejudiced. Hammond, too, though he may have been afraid of her, had been fond of her. He had been genuinely cut up at her death.

Why had Elizabeth Stokes been killed? What had *she* known?

The queer business was beset with currents and cross currents. Beneath the surface, something slimy oozed.

There was much to be done, Drake thought grimly, before the truth could be laid bare. Perhaps his experiment in the afternoon would help.

The door of the study had been locked and the key taken away by Chief Cotter, and since he would need this he called in at the police station on his way back.

COTTER handed it over without demur, but he was intensely curious to know why the detective wanted it.

"Come up to the house at four o'clock this afternoon and perhaps I'll have something to tell you," said Drake. "Until then I'd rather not say anything. There's a possibility the idea I'm working on may be wrong, and I don't want to explain it until I'm sure. What about the fingerprints on the rifle?"

"There were no prints except yours," said Cotter.

"Oh," said Drake thoughtfully. "I see."

"We've got in touch with Mr. Hammond's lawyer," said Cotter. "Crandell & Peck. Peck is coming down to Backwaters this evening."

"He may be able to supply some useful information," said Drake.

"Hope so but you know my opinion, Drake, and I haven't altered it. Cavendish is the fellow, and as soon as I've got a little more evidence I'm going to put him inside!"

Drake thought of what Cavendish had told him the previous night and wondered what Cotter would say when he heard of it. It would go a long way towards substantiating the police chief's theory.

He returned to Backwaters in time for lunch. Mrs. Hammond was still keeping to her bed, and the shadow over the house had not lifted. John Moore was still a little sullen at the restrictions placed upon his liberty, but Marjorie Lovelace had brightened a little, and she and Cavendish chatted quite normally. That young man still looked a little harassed, but he seemed in better spirits since he had unbosomed himself to Drake. Eric Norman was still grave, though he attempted to take an interest in Drake's remarks, and generally bear his share of the lunchtime talk.

Although, outwardly, he appeared calm enough, Drake was inwardly excited—the time drawing near for him to make the experiment which would prove or disprove what was in the back of his mind.

Immediately he finished coffee he excused himself and went upstairs to his room. Tommy who saw there was something on his mind, followed in the hope that he would learn what it was. But he quickly discovered that Drake was not in a confidential mood.

At half-past two, making sure that he was not observed by any of the household, Drake slipped out of his room down to the first floor, and unlocking the door of the study, let himself in, closing and locking the door behind him. His subsequent actions were peculiar.

Crossing to the desk he carefully placed a chair in the exact position it had occupied on Saturday afternoon when it had held the dead body of Ve-

nita Shayne. When he had done this he seated himself, took off his jacket, turned up his right shirt sleeve until his arm was bare to the elbow. For a moment his eyes searched the desk keenly, noting the position of every object and mentally comparing it with the picture he had in his mind. When he had satisfied himself that nothing had been moved he leaned forward, shifting about until he was in a similar position to that in which the murdered woman had been found.

And then he remained motionless, his eyes fixed on his watch. At three o'clock he came quietly out of the study, locked the door, and returning the key to his pocket, made his way back to his bed-room. His pale face was slightly flushed, and there was a brightness in his eyes. For the result of his experiment had been completely successful.

On his right fore-arm was an exactly similar burn to that which had interested him so much in the case of Venita Shayne.

CHAPTER XIV

The Time of the Crime



AT four o'clock, Chief Cotter arrived, and entered the lounge where Drake was waiting to receive him. The big room was empty. Cavenish and Marjorie Lovelace had taken

one of the punts on the river, and Tommy and John Moore had settled themselves with books on the lawn.

"Well," said Cotter, "I'm here! Have you got anything to tell me?"

"Yes, I've got a lot to tell you," said Drake.

Cotter eyed him shrewdly. "You've hit on something?"

"I've hit on quite a lot," said Drake,

"but I don't think we'd better talk here. Come up to the study, and I'll tell you all about it."

He led the way upstairs, and when they were secure from interruption he said: "I think I'm going to surprise you, Cotter."

To the astonishment of the chief, he took off his coat, rolled up his right shirt sleeve, and showed the amazed official his forearm. "Take a look at that," he said quietly.

Cotter's eyes opened wide as he saw the angry, red mark.

"Why—why, it's a burn!" he ejaculated. "Exactly like that on Miss Shayne's arm. How in the world did you get it?"

"I got it today," said Drake, "at exactly two-forty-one."

"But how—" began the chief.

"Wait a minute," broke in Drake, "and I'll tell you. You know, that burn worried me ever since I saw it on the dead girl's arm. Well, last night, while I was puzzling over it, the reason for its being there occurred to me. It was really a very simple explanation, and I found it by remembering an experiment I used to do when I was a boy."

Cotter was obviously bewildered.

"But what bearing has it got—"

Again Drake interrupted him. "If you wait you'll see. What I remembered was that when the sun's rays were concentrated through a lens onto a piece of paper, it was possible to set fire to that piece of paper. Now the sun, during the afternoon, shines directly into this room, and although there is no lens to concentrate its rays, there is something that has exactly the same effect." He pointed to the round, plain glass water bottle on Mr. Hammond's desk.

"Do you mean," gasped Cotter, "that that burn was caused by the sun?"

"I do!" Drake declared. "And if you haven't already guessed, I'll tell you how important it is. I came up here this afternoon and sat at the desk in exactly the same position as that occu-

pied by Venita Shayne when we found her. I bared my arm, and I waited. At exactly two-thirty-nine by my watch I experienced a warm, prickly sensation, and saw that the rays of the sun, concentrated through that bottle of water, were impinging on my bare flesh. By two-forty-one I had acquired a burn similar in every respect to that on Miss Shayne's arm."

Cotter frowned.

"I still don't see what you're trying to get at," he muttered.

"Don't you?" said Drake. "Well, listen. How long would you sit and bear the pain of a burn if you could move?"

"GOOD God, Drake!" cried the startled chief as the detective's meaning burst on him. "I see! She was dead at the time the burn was made!"

"Exactly," said Drake. "That's the only explanation for her sitting calmly while the concentrated rays of the sun bored into her flesh. It's the only sensible explanation, because she had only to move her arm an inch or two and there would have been no burn."

"But if she was dead at two-forty-one," cried Cotter excitedly, "then the alibis are—"

"Are not complete," finished Drake, triumphantly. "If she was dead at two-forty-one—we've got, of course, to allow for a slight difference in the time, because the sun would have taken a little longer to reach the same position today than it did on Saturday, but it would only be a matter of a minute or two—if she was dead at say two-thirty-nine, then neither Eric Norman's nor Montague Hammond's alibi holds good. Neither does the maid's evidence, nor Minter's that nobody came or went by way of the hall. In fact, nothing holds good!"

"Dammit, you're right!" exclaimed Cotter. But then he frowned. "What about the letter? There's no doubt that was timed at three-fifteen. You're not suggesting it was a forgery?"

"No." The detective shook his head. "But I think I can offer you an explanation. On Saturday, at lunchtime, Miss Shayne complained that her watch had stopped. Apparently it had received a blow of some description. The only time she had to go by was this clock on the desk." He jerked his head towards it. "Suppose the crime to have been premeditated, and I strongly believe it was; there was nothing to prevent the murderer putting that clock forward before the victim entered this room, and putting it back to the right time after he'd killed her. By that means he would have an alibi for the false time of the crime, from three-fifteen onward, but no alibi for the real time, which was before two-thirty-nine."

Cotter nodded slowly. "You've worked it out well," he admitted. "We'll have to consider all that evidence again, as far as I can see."

"A great deal of it will have to be reconsidered," agreed Drake, "in the light of what we now know. But it means that someone from outside could have entered without being seen, murdered Venita Shayne, and escaped. They could have entered at any time prior to two-thirty, set the clock, and escaped immediately after strangling the girl when there was no maid to see them and no Minter in the hall."

"There's a snag," said Cotter, after a pause. "There's a snag, Mr. Drake. If a stranger from outside had committed this murder, how did he know that Venita Shayne would be in the study at that time?"

"Right," said Drake. "We knew. As I remember, Hammond asked everybody on the terrace what they wanted to do, and Venita Shayne informed us that she was going to the study to write some letters."

"On the terrace, eh?" Cotter's eyes narrowed. "Then she could have been heard clear over to the island."

Drake saw which way his mind was drifting. "Yes," he nodded—"voices

carry clearly over water. Cavendish could have heard, if that's what you mean. Your theory about his guilt is reinforced. But it's wrong, Cotter. To this extent at least: "if Cavendish killed Venita Shayne, his motive wasn't jealousy."

"You think not?" said Cotter.

"I know it wasn't!" retorted Drake, and repeated the conversation he had had with the young man on the previous night.

COTTER listened with interest and growing satisfaction.

"Well, that clinches it!" he declared. "Absolutely clinches it! It's a bigger motive than the other. He was in the clutches of this woman, and he wanted to get out, and the only way to get out was to kill her. He tried to reason with her on the Friday night, and she wouldn't listen. It's as plain as a pike-staff!"

"And what about Hammond?" demanded Drake. "Why did he kill him? And how did he kill the maid in New York yesterday when he apparently never left here?"

"Maybe Hammond was in it," answered Cotter. "Probably he and the Shayne girl were working together. She was under contract to Hammond, and playing in all his shows, wasn't she? Well, it would have been good publicity if she'd married a title. It all hangs together, Drake."

He rose to his feet and began to walk up and down excitedly. "That's why he pinched her diary. He knew she'd made some reference to the hold she had on him in it. Perhaps she told him she'd mentioned the name of this woman. By gosh!"

He stopped and struck his fist into his cupped hand. "That broken watch! You say he saw her at two o'clock on the lawn. I'll bet what happened was they quarreled and he grabbed her wrist, breaking the watch. That's what put the idea into his head of altering the time here when he decided that

there was nothing left but to kill her. It's a perfect case, Drake. I'd take it before any jury!"

The detective nodded slowly. There was no doubt that appearances were very black, as far as Cavendish was concerned.

"I'll admit you'd be justified in arresting Cavendish," Drake said. "But an arrest isn't a conviction."

"Well, you can have your own ideas on the subject, Mr. Drake," said Cotter grimly, "but I'm going to make an arrest the first thing in the morning, and I don't think I'll be making a mistake."

The detective made no effort to dissuade him. He realized that the police official was doing no more than his duty. The evidence against Cavendish was strong enough.

But Jonathan Drake had reached definite conclusions of his own regarding the identity of the murderer—and it was not Harry Cavendish.

CHAPTER XV

Enter Mr. Secket



MR. HARRISON PECK, the junior partner of Crandal & Peck, the solicitors who had handled Montague Hammond's affairs, arrived at half-past six. He was a youngish, businesslike, little man, very affable, and considerably shocked at the fate that had overtaken his client.

Chief Cotter, who had returned to the police station at Tarrytown after his conference with Drake, came back in time to meet the lawyer, and the three of them held a consultation in the lounge.

"I thought it best to come out here," said Mr. Peck. "It will be necessary for me to see Mrs. Hammond. This is a dreadful affair! The papers are full of

it." He took off his glasses and wiped them vigorously on a silk handkerchief. "Have you any idea who could have been responsible?"

"We hope to make an arrest shortly," said Cotter.

"That's very gratifying, very gratifying indeed," said Mr. Peck. "May I inquire whom you suspect?"

"I don't think it would be advisable to disclose that at present," said the chief.

"No, no! Of course not!" The lawyer nodded wisely. "Stupid of me to ask. I understand Mrs. Hammond is prostrate? Very natural, very natural!"

"Was Mr. Hammond a rich man?" inquired Drake.

The lawyer pursed his lips.

"Well, not exactly rich," he answered. "But exceedingly well off."

"What was he worth, roughly, sir?" asked the chief.

"Well, I haven't had time to go into the matter," said Mr. Peck, with a glance at the briefcase beside him, "but I should say, everything combined, he was worth half-a-million at least!"

Cotter screwed up his lips in a silent whistle.

"As much as that!" he said. "I'd call that rich."

"He was very successful," said Mr. Peck. "His recent productions have all made money."

"How long have you been acting for him?" inquired the detective.

"A considerable number of years. Let me see now. Yes, it must be going on seventeen."

"Did you handle his private as well as his business affairs?" went on Drake.

"The majority of them," said Peck. "We looked after such things as insurances, which reminds me—Mr. Hammond was heavily insured."

Drake showed a gleam of interest.

"To the extent of one hundred thousand dollars," went on the lawyer. "That is one of the things I wish to see Mrs. Hammond about. She benefits."

"Added to the half a million," said Cotter. "She'll come into a nice little sum, then."

Peck looked a trifle disconcerted.

"Yes," he admitted. "In the circumstances she will."

Drake eyed him sharply. "How d'you mean, 'in the circumstances'?"

The lawyer cleared his throat. "Well," he said hesitantly, "had Miss Shayne still been—er—alive, half of the estate would have gone to her. Those are the terms of Mr. Hammond's will."

"You mean," said the chief, "that he left his money to be equally divided between Miss Shayne and his wife?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "But, of course, since Miss Shayne pre-deceased him the full amount will go to Mrs. Hammond. That is what the will provides, working both ways."

DRAKE frowned. Here was a fresh item of information. By the death of Venita Shayne and Hammond, Mrs. Hammond had become a rich woman. Had she known of the will in which her husband had left his fortune to the girl? And if she had, was this the explanation for the hatred which she had felt for the dead actress?

"When did Mr. Hammond make this will?" he inquired.

"Three years ago," answered Mr. Peck. "Shortly after he had first met Miss Shayne."

"Seems a queer thing to do," remarked Chief Cotter, glancing at Blake meaningly. "He must have been very fond of the lady."

"I believe he was," said the lawyer hastily. "As a matter of fact, I myself was a little astonished, and as diplomatically as I could I suggested that he should think the matter over before coming to a final decision. But he wouldn't listen. He insisted upon the will being drawn up immediately and the old one destroyed."

"The old one left everything to his wife, I presume," said Drake.

"Yes," said Mr. Peck.

The detective pulled gently at his lower lip with a thumb and forefinger. It was ridiculous to suspect the gaunt woman upstairs of the murders, but she certainly had a motive. The list of suspects would have to be increased.

But the shot that had killed Hammond had come from the island. As for the death of Venita Shayne, Mrs. Hammond had a perfect alibi. From luncheon until the discovery had been made, she had never gone inside the house. At the same time, this didn't entirely preclude her from knowledge of the murders. There was a possibility she might have been working in conjunction with someone else, someone who had actually carried out the killings.

"Knowing Mr. Hammond so well," said Drake, "you'll be able to tell us something of his private affairs."

"In what respect?" replied the lawyer with habitual caution.

"Generally," said the detective. "What sort of a man was he?"

"That's rather difficult to answer," said Mr. Peck, with a faint smile. "He was a very straight man. Scrupulously honest in all his business dealings. But beyond that I really knew very little about him."

"Then you wouldn't be in a position to say whether he had any enemies?" continued the detective. "Or whether there was anything in his past history that could have had any bearing on his death?"

"No. I'm afraid I can't." The lawyer shook his head. "Certainly there was nothing to my knowledge."

"Were you aware," said Drake, "that he had been considerably worried recently by the receipt of a number of anonymous letters?"

MR. PECK looked at him, startled. "No, I was not aware of that," he answered.

"The last arrived on the morning of the day on which Miss Shayne was killed," said the detective. "It con-

tained a rather broad hint that something would happen to her."

"But this is extraordinary!" said Mr. Peck.

"It was signed by the crude drawing of a man dangling on a noose suspended from a gallows," continued the detective. "Mr. Hammond had had several of them. Some merely abusive, some definitely threatening. That is the reason of my connection with this business. He came to me and asked me to try to discover who was responsible for these epistles. But I am under the impression that he knew. I think he was on the point of telling me when he was killed."

"He never mentioned the matter to me," declared the lawyer.

"He was also considerably worried and annoyed," said Drake, "by a man who was apparently keeping him under observation. Did you know anything about that?"

"No. All this is news to me," said the lawyer. "You think it can have any bearing on his death?"

"Personally, I think it has a considerable bearing on his death," said Drake. "And also on the death of Miss Shayne. Exactly how, I don't know yet. I was hoping that perhaps you would be able to suggest a connection."

"I'm afraid your hopes won't materialize, sir," said Peck. "I have no more idea than you why anyone should send anonymous letters to Mr. Hammond, or keep him under observation."

"Was he married when he first became your client?" Drake inquired.

"No, no," said the lawyer. "He didn't marry until eight years after."

"Did he ever mention to you anyone by the name of Molly Dwyer, or James Hinkley?" snapped Drake.

"No, I've never heard the names," said Peck.

"We discovered a marriage certificate in Hammond's safe," said Drake. "It was twenty-seven years old, and it certified that Molly Dwyer, parlor-maid, and James Hinkley, actor, were

married in the middle-west by a justice of the peace, on April 8th, 1911. It was carefully preserved, and I'm wondering why Hammond should have kept it. His name doesn't appear."

"Probably the people mentioned were close friends of his, or even relations," said the puzzled Peck.

"Yes, probably," said Drake. "And that's another thing I want to ask you. Had Hammond any relatives living?"

"That I can answer," said the lawyer with a smile. "He had not! His parents died, I believe, when he was quite a youngster, and some years ago an uncle, the only relation he had alive, died, leaving him a legacy."

Cotter had been fidgeting a little impatiently. He saw no reason why time should be wasted with such unnecessary questions. In his own opinion the case was obvious. Drake, however, was nearly through, and he put his last question.

"I take it," he said, "that Hammond has not always been well off?"

"No," answered the lawyer. "At the time he first came to us he was very poor, very poor indeed. It was this legacy which I mentioned which gave him his first start towards success. It was not a very large sum, a matter of about twelve thousand dollars, but it enabled Mr. Hammond to acquire a play and take it on tour. It was successful, and from then on he never looked back."

THERE was a tap at the door and Minter entered.

"Excuse me," he said, "but Mrs. Hammond would like to see you, sir."

Peck rose instantly to his feet. "Is there anything else you gentlemen would like to ask me?" he inquired.

"Not as far as I'm concerned, sir," said Cotter, and Drake shook his head.

"Then I'll go up to Mrs. Hammond at once," said the lawyer.

"What was at the back of your mind, Drake?" asked Cotter, when they were alone.

"Nothing," answered the detective candidly. "Only the desire for information, which"—he made a rueful grimace—"I didn't get."

"You can take it from me," declared the chief emphatically, "that you're wasting time. You're trying to find something intricate in this case, and there isn't. It's just plain and straightforward."

"The solution will be plain and straightforward—when and if we get it," said Drake. "The crime is not."

"Well, we'll see," said Cotter. "You'll find I'm right in this case. Cavendish is our man, and I'm pulling him in tomorrow."

He broke off as a sharp, peremptory knocking sounded from the hall. They heard the footsteps of the maid pass the door of the lounge, and the murmur of men's voices. Minter appeared at the door.

"Excuse me," he said apologetically, "but there's a—a person here who—"

"Hardly a person, my dear man," said a deep booming voice, and a tall cadaverous looking individual stepped into the lounge. "Joseph Secket has been called many things during the course of his career, flattering and otherwise I'll grant you—but not merely a person."

"May I ask what you want, Joseph Secket?" said Drake calmly.

"Ah, a man of force and spirit who speaks his mind," said Secket, and from the way he looked and talked it was obvious to Drake that this was the type of old-fashioned actor who might only be termed "Ham." "I seek those in authority—the one person who now rules this bereaved household—Mrs. Hammond, in fact."

"I've already told you that Mrs. Hammond is ill," said Minter impatiently.

"Words that escaped my ears like the babbling of a muted brook," said Joseph Secket. "But then I would seek someone else who is in charge—that I may speak my lines without

asides or faltered cues." His gaze swept over the three men and then he pointed a rather grimy forefinger at Drake. "You are in charge here—I see it written in the stars—a man of destiny."

"And if I say that I am in charge at the moment?" demanded Drake. "What then?"

"Then you can tell me what base fiend it was who murdered Venita Shayne. You can reveal to me the identity of this monster in human form," said Secket, and he appeared to find the sound of his own deep voice extremely pleasing. "I would like to know all that can be revealed."

"What business is it of yours?" asked Drake.

"What business is it of mine?" exclaimed Secket. "He asks me that when I stand beside him bowed down by my sorrow—my heart filled with bitter grief. Alas, gentlemen, the gracious, the glorious Venita Shayne, was my wife!"

CHAPTER XVI

Exit Mr. Secket



JONATHAN DRAKE'S expression did not change, but he was inwardly startled. He heard Chief Cotter give a gasp of surprise that was echoed by a long drawn sigh from the gray haired butler.

The detective's eyes swept over Joseph Secket and observed the shiny coat sleeves, the frayed cuffs to the trousers of what had once been an expensive custom fitted suit, the soft white shirt collar that was not as clean as it might have been.

Secket's statement that he had been the beautiful Venita Shayne's husband was hard to believe, and yet there had been a ring of truth in his statement

despite the flowery, melodramatic words in which it had been made.

"It appears that I have cast a verbal bomb-shell," said Secket. "You stand before me shocked, and yet I have but voiced the truth."

"Suppose you drop the fancy speeches and explain exactly what this is all about," snapped Drake. He glanced at the butler. "It's all right, Minter, we'll talk to this gentleman."

"Gentleman!" Minter muttered disdainfully as he departed.

"Splendid—excellent," said Secket as he gazed at the back of the servant. "He said that exit line with just the right inflection. The perfect butler for a drawing room drama." He turned to Drake and smiled. As he did so his thin face changed and his manner was appealing. "I really am Venita's husband."

"Can you prove it?" asked Drake.

"Naturally," Secket nodded. "The marriage certificate is still in my possession—though I do not have it with me at the moment. We were married six years ago on the road. The romance of two troupers. When Hammond found her and made her famous, a husband was a bit of excess baggage." Again he smiled. "It proved more productive for me financially to disappear."

"You mean that Venita Shayne paid you to keep out of sight?" asked Drake.

"Really, Mr.—I didn't get the name?" Secket looked at the slender dark haired man.

"Jonathan Drake."

"Thank you. I was about to say that you put it so crudely, Mr. Drake. It might be better to say that Miss Shayne as you knew her, or Mrs. Secket as I knew her, rewarded me for my discretion." The tall and seedy looking individual frowned. "Though to carry out her wishes went against my better nature."

"Why have you come here?"

Drake had decided that for all his affable manner Joseph Secket was a first

rate scoundrel.

"Isn't it natural that I should come upon learning that my wife has been murdered?" demanded Secket. "I told you that I wished to know all regarding her death." His tone changed, and greed came irresistibly to the surface. "Besides, Venita Shayne was quite rich and I am her next of kin."

"So that's it!" exclaimed Chief Cotter. "You rotten vulture—you were willing to keep out of sight as long as Venita Shayne was alive, but now that she's dead, you want to collect your share of her estate."

"Brutally but truthfully put," said Secket, looking at the police chief coldly and apparently possessing no fear of Cotter's uniform. "That is exactly what I do want!"

DID you murder Venita Shayne?" demanded Jonathan Drake so abruptly that Secket jumped. "I murder her!" There was a look of astonishment on the tall man's face.

"It's possible," said Drake coolly. "You suggested a motive yourself when you said that you were her next of kin. That you would inherit her money."

"Why—I—that is—" Secket mopped his face with a grimy handkerchief. "How dare you think of such a thing? I would never have harmed a hair of her pretty little blond head. I was devoted to her, gentlemen, absolutely devoted."

"So much so that you're going around trying to find out if you can collect from your wife's estate before she is even buried!" said Drake sharply. "Listen, Secket, I know your type. There's nothing that counts for you in this world except money—and you'll get it by any petty trick that you can use—"

"I protest!" interrupted Secket.

"Keep still!" snapped Drake, his blue eyes flashing. "You might have murdered Venita Shayne, though personally I don't think you have the nerve to

do such a thing. I do know this much—you have made yourself a suspect by coming here as you have now. It's up to you to assist us in every possible way in finding the murderer of that girl." His tone grew biting. "The wife that you so adored!"

"Naturally—of course," said Secket hastily. "I want to do everything in my power." He looked wildly about the lounge as though expecting them to instigate a search for the murderer behind the furniture. "Where do we start?"

"Did Miss Shayne ever mention to you that she was afraid of anyone?" asked Drake.

"Venita afraid of anyone!" Secket's laugh was as stacy as his speech. "That is funny. She wasn't in the least fear of the devil himself. I'm inclined to think it was the other way around. There were people who feared Venita Shayne."

"Who, for instance?" demanded Drake.

"Well, she used to boast that she could make Montague Hammond, do anything that she wanted. And there was a rich young man, a certain Cavendish—"

"Did you know these men?"

"Merely by sight," said Secket. "Venita did not want them to have the chance of discovering my identity." He bowed his head. "To think that I, Joseph Secket who have trod the same boards as did the great Booth, should be forced to become the skeleton in the closet!"

"Were you aware," said Drake. "That your wife was trying to force Mr. Cavendish into marriage?"

Obviously this was news to Secket, for his long jaw dropped, and there was an expression of genuine surprise on his face.

"So she was trying to get away with something like that," he said slowly. "And yet she dared to threaten me with—" he stopped abruptly.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Drake. "She threatened you with something to

prevent you from revealing the fact you and she were married. I thought there was more to it than her merely paying you to keep silent. What was it?"

"**N**OTHING, really," said Secket hastily. "A mistaken impression, that was all. The box office of a theater at which we were playing some years ago was robbed. The thief was never found. My — er — wife jumped to unfortunate conclusions when she discovered that I possessed a good bit of ready cash that week." He smiled. "I was fortunate enough to win a bit of money playing the horses."

"If you had really robbed the box-office you wouldn't be foolish enough to tell us about it now," said Drake. "Is that it?"

"Exactly." Secket nodded. "But to have Venita reveal her suspicions might have caused scandal. The great Secket implicated in a robbery—my honor was involved. So I was forced to do as she wished."

"We'll let it go at that," said Drake. He was convinced that Secket had probably committed the robbery—but he had no desire to go into that now. "What were you doing between the hours of two and four-thirty last Saturday afternoon, Secket?"

"It wasn't anywhere near here," said Secket quickly. "I'm living in New York at present."

"Which doesn't prove that you could not have been here last Saturday," said Drake. "Where do you live in New York?"

"West 49th Street," answered Secket, giving the house number.

"No doubt you have a letter or something on you that will substantiate that," said Drake smoothly. Chief Cotter paused in the act of putting down the address.

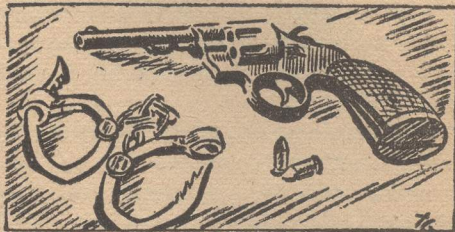
"Can't you take my word for it?" demanded Secket.

"I'd rather be sure," said the detective dryly.

"Very well then!" Secket plunged his hand into the inside pocket of his coat, produced a crumpled mass of papers. He selected a letter, extracted the contents and handed the envelope to Drake. "There you are!"

Drake glanced at the envelope, saw that it was addressed to Joseph Secket in care of a theatrical boardinghouse bearing the address he had given.

"And now may I depart?" asked



Secket. Drake and Cotter both nodded. "Also, it seems that fools like me rush in where angels dare not tread." Secket frowned as he went toward the door. "Not a good exit line—but it will do. Good day, gentlemen."

A moment later Drake was out on the loggia. He whistled softly to Tommy Lowell who was sitting out on the lawn, and his assistant hurried to him.

"There's a man just leaving here," said Drake. "His name is Joseph Secket." He described the tall man swiftly. "Follow him wherever he goes."

Tommy nodded briskly, crossed the loggia and slipped out into the hall.

"Do you think that's necessary, Drake?" asked Chief Cotter.

"I think it's very necessary," said Drake. "Take a look at that envelope." He took it from his pocket and held it out.

Cotter glanced at it with a puzzled frown.

"I don't see anything," he said. "Except that it's addressed in capitals."

"Exactly!" said Drake. "And the person who wrote it is the same one who sent those death warnings to Montague Hammond. The printing is identical!"

CHAPTER XVII

Creaking Floors

JONATHAN DRAKE sat at the open window of his bedroom, smoking thoughtfully. Harrison Peck had left after his interview with Mrs. Hammond, refusing that lady's suggestion that he should

stay to dinner.

The evening had passed uneventfully enough, although the day had certainly not been lacking in sensation. The advent of Mr. Secket had been both unexpected and interesting.

What had brought him to Backwaters in the first place? The detective entirely discounted Secket's own explanation. Secket was a shrewd, cunning man, with sufficient intelligence to know that the proper quarter to make his claim was Venita Shayne's lawyers. So why had he come to Backwaters?"

Secket joined the list of Drake's suspects. There were so many people who had a motive for killing Venita Shayne. Mrs. Hammond, Hammond himself perhaps, Cavendish, this man Secket. Secket's was in some respects the strongest of all. Yet Drake couldn't quite see him in the role of a killer.

Drake stared into the hot, airless darkness of the night, his brows drawn together. It was peculiar—the mystery that surrounded both the early life of Hammond and that of the dead girl. The early part of their existence seemed enveloped in an impenetrable veil of secrecy, and it was behind that veil, that the truth lay.

One thing had certainly emerged, and that was the unpleasantness of Venita Shayne's character. Without a doubt the girl had been completely unscrupulous, using any means that lay to her hand to gain her own ends. She had blackmailed Cavendish, she had

bribed her own husband. She had, apparently, held something over the head of Montague Hammond, and she had obviously been prepared to go to the lengths of committing bigamy.

How many other people had she terrified into submission to her desires? Perhaps her lawyers would be of assistance there. Cotter had arranged an appointment with them for the following afternoon, and Drake was accompanying him. Perhaps they would learn something.

There was her bank, too. She had apparently boasted to Cavendish that she had kept the letters which concerned him at her solicitors. Possibly there were other documents also.

It was an intricate business, full of twists and turns and side issues. Those anonymous letters with the crude drawing of the dangling man. How did they come into it. And the stealing of Venita Shayne's diary? and the murder of the maid in New York. Drake had phoned the commissioner on that but there were no further developments.

And what had Venita Shayne been doing on the lawn at two o'clock on the Saturday morning when Cavendish had seen her and swum over from the island? She hadn't been there to see him; she was not aware that he was in the vicinity.

Had she merely been hot and sleepless and gone out for a breath of air? Or had there been some other reason? Had she gone to keep an appointment made previously? Cavendish had seen no one, but the person, whoever it was, may have already been and gone; or, arriving and seeing the girl with someone else, had slipped away. Could—could this person be Secket? If so, why had he come?

Drake remembered the dented watch and Cotter's suggested explanation. That damaged watch pointed clearly to violence. But had the violence been Cavendish's? Why not Secket? Why not Hammond? Why not, even, Marjorie Lovelace!

IT was getting on toward two, and Drake had been sitting by the window for over two hours. He rose stretching his stiff limbs. The night was still and silent and unpleasantly hot. He had been sitting in the dark, finding it an aid to his thoughts. But now, having made up his mind to undress and go to bed, he reached out his hand toward the lamp. His fingers had touched the switch when he stopped—rigid, listening.

A board had creaked somewhere in the sleeping house! The detective slipped off his shoes and crept noiselessly to the door. Cautiously he turned the handle and opened it a few inches. Everywhere was silence. Perhaps the sound he had heard meant nothing. In the stillness of the night, houses did, occasionally, emit strange noises—

The creak came again, faint but unmistakable. This time from the direction of the staircase.

Silently as a ghost Drake slipped out into the dark corridor and felt his way along the wall towards the landing. And now he knew he had not been mistaken. Somebody was moving in the darkness below, moving stealthily, but unable to prevent the faint creaking of the floor beneath his or her weight.

He reached the head of the staircase and peered over. The hall was in pitch darkness, and he could see nothing. He heard a faint click and a thread of light gleamed for an instant.

Drake began very carefully to descend the stairs, testing each tread. He could hear vague movements as the unknown prowler went about his mysterious business. He came to the last stair and stood in the hall, straining his ears. There was a faint sound from the lounge, and rapidly and silently Drake glided across the hall to the door.

It was open an inch, and the faintest glimmer of light showed through the crack. He could hear the sound of movement within, the soft shuffling of feet. There came a gentle thud and a muttered imprecation. Stooping, he ap-

plied an eye to the keyhole, but he could see nothing.

Rising noiselessly to his feet he hesitated. The sounds had ceased. Either the unknown occupant had left by way of the window or he was standing still.

Drake moved the door gently, pushing it inwards slowly and carefully. He was determined if possible to find out who was alert and wakeful in that sleeping house.

By slow degrees the gap between the edge of the door and the jamb widened. Another two inches, and there would be sufficient room for him to see within. He pressed himself up close against the frame, and very cautiously craned forward. The lounge was dim and shadowy, looking abnormally large in the faint light from a candle which stood on the top of a low bookshelf.

Jonathan Drake squeezed himself round the edge of the door, and as he did so it seemed to him that the roof collapsed.

A violent blow caught him on the side of the head. For an infinitesimal moment of time he was conscious of an agonizing pain which seemed to burn up his brain, and then the pain vanished and he felt nothing.

CHAPTER XVIII

Dawn—and Blood



DRAKE opened his eyes and blinked dazedly, wondering vaguely why his head ached so. The bed seemed exceptionally hard, and he was unpleasantly aware of a soreness in his right arm. He moved gingerly. What on earth had happened?

And then memory came back to him. He had been on the point of entering the lounge when something had struck him on the head. He was still in the

lounge, lying on the hard floor just within the open doorway, and the light he saw came from the flickering candle which still stood on the edge of the bookcase.

The person who had been in that room must have become aware of his presence. Probably had seen the door move. The reason it had looked empty was because the occupant had come silently over to the door and stood behind it, awaiting his chance. But who was the occupant, and for what reason had he been prowling about in the darkness of the night?

Drake sat up, and the movement sent a twinge of pain through his head. Tenderly he felt the top of his scalp. It was sore, but as far as he could judge the skin had not been broken. There was no blood, he examined the tips of his fingers.

He edged himself towards the back of a big easy chair that stood near, and by its aid got to his feet. He was still feeling pretty groggy. The blow had been a heavy one, and it had caught him completely unawares. He rubbed his arm which was painful. In falling he must have struck it against the skirting.

The appearance of the lounge was normal, except for the lighted candle on the bookcase. What, then, had the intruder been doing? Why had he come stealthily to this room in the middle of the night?

Drake's head still ached, but his senses were normal. He moved over to the place where the candle stood, but there was no indication of the reason for the marauder's presence.

Glancing about, he saw something lying on the floor, picked it up. It was a heavy, bronze book-end, and he looked at it, frowning. Evidently this was the weapon which the unknown had used to strike him down. A nasty thing in the hands of a desperate man. It was lucky, he thought grimly, that he had got off as lightly as he had. Obviously none of the rest of the house-

hold had heard anything. The place was still silent.

He crossed over and peered through the windows on to the loggia. The darkness was beginning to disperse before the first tinge of dawn. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to four. He must have been unconscious for some time, time enough, anyway, for the person who was responsible for that blow to have returned to his or her room. *Her* room? That weapon, in the hands of a man, might have killed him. Yet—there was a way of striking a blow on the head that would merely stun, not kill. Male or female?

Drake stood thoughtfully in the center of the lounge, gently massaging the sore place on his skull. Nothing, so far as he could see, had been disturbed. The windows were latched and fastened. Only the candle showed that anyone had been there at all.

The candle! He examined it and discovered—nothing. It had been taken from the mantelpiece, was one of a pair of silver candlesticks containing four colored candles which matched the furnishings of the room.

DRAKE was uneasy, restless, aware of a premonition of evil. Why this nocturnal visit to the lounge? Who had struck him down? What had that person been seeking? There was nothing in this big room except a few books, a number of divans and chairs. Not even a writing desk where some paper might have been hidden.

Drake had picked up the bronze book-end with his handkerchief, and now he carefully wrapped the linen round it. There might be fingerprints there to prove the identity of his attacker. He took the candle, holding it carefully by the rim at the top, and moved over to the door. It was no good standing about in that gloomy room wondering. He might as well return to his own.

He crossed the gloomy hall and be-

gan cautiously to ascend the staircase. He reached his bedroom without hearing a sound or seeing anyone, and carefully setting the candlestick and the book-end down on the table near the bed, switched on the light. Cotter would be able to test for prints in the morning. He blew out the candle, removed it from the sconce, and put the book-end and the candlestick carefully away in a drawer.

Turning on the tap and filling the basin with cold water, he took off his coat, collar, and tie, and bathed his face. A lump was rising on the side of his head, but an examination of it in the mirror showed him that little damage had been done. Undressing, he got into bed with a sigh of relief, resting his aching head against the pillows gratefully.

But it was a long time before he fell asleep. Staring at the white ceiling he lay trying to puzzle out a solution to the events of the night.

The sky was crimson with the coming sunrise before he finally switched out the light and, snuggling down, fell asleep.

The sound of hurried movements and excited voices roused him, almost before he'd closed his eyes—at least so it seemed. Somebody banged violently on his door, and he remembered that he had locked it before turning in.

Getting out of bed, he slipped on a dressing-gown, went over, and turned the key. Minter, his face pale and frightened, burst into the room without ceremony and without apology.

"The mistress," he blurted incoherently. "The mistress—"

"Steady, man," said Drake curtly. "What's the matter with your mistress?"

"She's dead, sir!" wailed the servant. "She's dead, and the bed's all over blood! Oh, my God!"

Drake's eyes narrowed. "Pull yourself together!" he said.

"I found her," whispered Minter huskily. "I was in the passage when

Milly took in the tea. It was awful! Awful!" His breath came unevenly.

"All right! Let's get to Mrs. Hammond's room!"

Minter led the way dazedly along the corridor, across the landing and into the opposite passage on which Mrs. Hammond's bedroom door opened. A frightened maid, her hands covering her face, was sobbing against the wall.

"In—in there, sir," whispered Minter hoarsely.

"Take that girl away," said the detective. "Then come back here."

He crossed the threshold of the big bedroom, remembering as he did so his last interview with Mrs. Hammond. When he saw the bed he caught his breath.

The woman lay half in and half out of it, her head almost touching the floor. There was blood on her face, on the crumpled sheets, on the carpet—and, from her breast, protruded the hilt of a knife. Clutched in her hand was something that gleamed whitely in the rays of the morning sun ironically streaming its life-giving rays through the window.

Drake, his face stern and set, went over and looked down at the dead woman. Here was the explanation for the midnight prowler. Here was the reason for that stealthy excursion through the dark and silent corridors of the sleeping house. Had the unknown already committed the crime before going to the lounge, or had this been perpetrated while Blake had been unconscious? Perhaps the doctor's evidence would settle the question.

He peered at the white thing in Mrs. Hammond's hand and saw that it was a card. It seemed to be held loosely, and he received confirmation of this when, taking it by the edge, he attempted to draw it out. It came easily, the half of a torn post card. One side was blank. On the other was the crude drawing of the dangling man—nothing else.

CHAPTER XIX

Empty Nets

ONCE more Backwaters was in the hands of the police. A burly officer stood in the hall, staring before him and apparently unconscious of the scared looks that were directed at him by the members of the household as they passed. In the upstairs bedroom the coroner was making his examination while the photographers waited impatiently in the corridor without.

Chief Cotter, his face grave and worried, stood talking to Jonathan Drake. The detective had notified him of the tragedy at once, and Cotter had arrived post-haste. The rest of the household had been informed, and the chief, while he waited the arrival of the coroner, questioned them all, without, however, eliciting anything of importance.

They had apparently heard nothing during the night. Their shock was intense. Cavendish was apparently stupefied. Majorie Lovelace answered the questions put to her like an automaton. John Moore looked as though he had been wakened from a bad dream to find himself still clutched by a nightmare. The cook was in hysterics, and Minter went about with a dazed expression and a face that was still gray from the sight he had seen.

"This rather upsets your theory, Cotter," Drake said in a low voice. "It would be difficult to connect Cavenish with this latest crime."

"He could have done it," Cotter mumbled. "He was in the house."

"So were seven other people. Better take my advice, Cotter. Don't make any arrests yet."

Cotter said neither yes nor no to this. Instead he asked: "Was this person who attacked you a man, Drake?"

"I can't say. I didn't see the gentleman—or lady."

Cotter sighed. "What do you make of that card?"

"I don't make anything of it, except that it links the murders with those anonymous letters. It was put in Mrs. Hammond's hand after death, that's obvious. It was stuck in her fingers the same as you might stick it in a rack. She wasn't even touching it at all."

"It gets thicker and thicker," said Cotter soberly.

"Well, I intimated that you were being too optimistic," said Drake. "The things we see on the surface aren't always the things that count. The tide has cast up unexpected fish on the tragic shores of our investigation—Cavendish—Secket the latest. But we refrain from netting them as yet. The main motive lurks in the depths and still escapes us.

"What is the main motive?" growled Cotter. "You talk as though you knew it."

Drake shook his head.

"I am like a lonely fisherman adrift on the open sea," he said. "I lower my net and draw it up to see what it contains. I find conjectures in it, guesses, inferences, but as yet no conclusions to warrant the snap of handcuffs about a pair of wrists.

"I'm not even sure that the murder of Mrs. Hammond touches the main motive."

"What d'you mean by that?" Cotter's eyes were startled. "You're not suggesting that the person who killed Mrs. Hammond isn't the person who killed her husband and Venita Shayne?"

"No," said Drake in low tones, "but I'm inclined to believe that whereas the murder of Venita Shayne and Montague Hammond were premeditated, this one was not. I suspect that it was a murder of convenience, that Mrs. Hammond was killed because she knew too much—or guessed too much—"

THE coroner was approaching them and Drake broke off.

"Well," the coroner said, "another murder. But there's one thing I can say—she didn't know much about it. She died instantly."

"The state of the bed looks as if there'd been a struggle," said Cotter.

"So it would seem," said the coroner. "But I don't think there was. The knife went straight into the heart."

"Then, if there was no struggle, how do you account for the appearance of one?" asked Cotter.

"I don't pretend to account for it," the coroner shrugged his shoulders. "But if you want me to give an opinion, I should say it was done after death to suggest there had been a struggle—"

"Or," interrupted Drake, "the murderer was looking for something. That would seem more reasonable than that the murderer troubled to fake an appearance of struggle. Wouldn't you say so, doctor?"

"Now that you suggest it, yes," said the coroner.

"One more thing, doctor. I should imagine it would have been difficult for the killer to have escaped bloodying himself in a murder such as this."

"If you're asking me whether blood spurted, the answer is yes—plenty of it."

Cotter glided to the door, called to his sergeant. "Search the whole house," he ordered, "including everybody's luggage. You're looking for bloodstained clothing. Jump to it!"

Cotter came back. He discovered that Drake was not particularly optimistic about the probable results of the search. "There's the river," Drake said. "A weighted bundle of clothing is easily disposed of."

"I'll have it dragged!" Cotter snapped. "Better let the photographers in now, eh?"

Leaving the room in the charge of the photographers, they went downstairs, accompanied by the coroner. In the hall they met Eric Norman. The

press agent was stony-faced. "Have you found out anything?" he asked.

Drake shook his head.

"Dreadful, dreadful," Norman murmured. "Poor Venita, then Hammond, now—this!"

He looked from one to the other hesitantly, then went on: "D'you think there'd be any objection to my going to town? I've got business to attend to, you know, and—"

Involuntarily Cotter looked to Drake, as though he could not make up his own mind. Almost imperceptibly Drake nodded. "All right, you can go," said Cotter, "although I'd prefer you didn't."

"I'm not likely to run away," growled the press agent. "I wouldn't get very far if I tried."

"You're correct about that," said Cotter. "Okay. Go ahead, attend to your business, and get back here promptly. We don't want to have the trouble of bringing you back."

"Thanks, loads," said the press agent. "I'll be back by six at the latest." He hurried away.

COTTER turned to Drake. "You're coming with me to see Miss Shayne's attorneys, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," said Drake. "We might learn something there."

"Not much though, I'm afraid," said Cotter.

"Perhaps, but this fresh crime goes a long way towards vindicating Cavendish. Your theory may supply a possible motive for his killing Venita Shayne and Hammond, but you can't suggest any practical reason why he should have killed Mrs. Hammond."

"Can you suggest any reason why anyone should!" retorted the chief.

"Yes," said Drake. "I can. Suppose Mrs. Hammond knew something that was dangerous to the murderer's safety? Supposing he, or she, was aware of this and was also aware that Mrs. Hammond was going to speak?"

"But that would also apply in the case of Cavendish," Cotter cried.

"You're an obstinate fellow," said Drake with a slight smile. "You don't intend to be pried loose from your pet theory without a struggle, do you?"

"It isn't that!" protested Cotter. "But I can't see anyone else. Cavendish had the motive and the opportunity. Those are two strong arguments against him."

"I'm perfectly willing to admit that Cavendish is the star suspect," Drake murmured. "However, it won't do any harm to hold your hand for a day or two."

"I've already said I would," Cotter grumbled. The local police chief had no wish to make any precipitate move. After all, Cavendish was the scion of a wealthy and influential family, and an arrest without sufficient evidence to back it up would result in quite a lot of unpleasantness. There was always the possibility that the killer was no one they knew, a stranger who had gained access to the house from without.

Drake did not believe this, neither did Cotter, but they had to take it into consideration.

The sergeant whom the chief had detailed to examine the rooms and belongings of the various people in the house, reported failure. He had found nothing, no article of clothing that bore any trace of bloodstains.

Just before lunch, boats arrived, containing men who set about methodically dragging the river in the vicinity of the waterfront. They were still engaged on their fruitless task when Drake and Cotter, leaving the house in charge of the sergeant and a number of patrolmen, set off for New York.

Venita Shayne's attorneys, Messrs. Abercrombie and Smith, occupied a large and prosperous looking office on Fifth Avenue. Mr. Reginald Abercrombie, a gray-haired, extremely neat gentleman, received them gravely.

"I needn't say," he said, "how

shocked I was to learn of my client's tragic death. A terrible end to a life that was so promising." He coughed dryly.

"You acted as legal advisor to Miss Shayne for some time?" asked the inspector.

"For nearly three years," replied the lawyer. "Not so very long compared with other clients, but long enough to feel profound regret at a loss which the entertainment world will find difficult in replacing. . . .

JONATHAN DRAKE shifted a little impatiently in his chair. He was not at all impressed by Mr. Abercrombie's stilted expressions of grief. They were not sincere.

"You handled all Miss Shayne's affairs?" he inquired.

"Yes," Abercrombie nodded. "With the exception, of course, of her contracts. They were handled by her agent."

"Were you aware that she was married?" asked Drake bluntly.

The expression on the lawyer's face answered the question before he put the answer into words.

"Married?" he echoed in surprise. "No. I had not the least idea that Miss Shayne was married. When did this happen? Whom was she married to?"

"It happened six years ago and the man's name is Joseph Secket," snapped Drake. "You'll probably be receiving a visit from him shortly."

"Dear me," said Mr. Abercrombie. "Miss Shayne never mentioned this to me. I was under the impression that she was single."

"So was nearly everybody who knew her," said Drake. "I have only this man Secket's word, but I think it's the truth. He seemed prepared to back up his statement with the marriage certificate."

"Most extraordinary!" muttered the lawyer. "Most extraordinary indeed. The last time I saw Miss Shayne she hinted that she was shortly to become

engaged to the son of a wealthy man."

"We're aware of that," said Blake. "As a matter of fact, she did become engaged."

"But," said Mr. Abercrombie, "how could she if she was already married to this man Sackett."

"I rather think Miss Shayne was prepared to forget that," answered Drake.

"You surely don't mean," the lawyer said, frowning, "that she would have committed bigamy!"

"That's exactly what I do think."

"But my dear sir," Mr. Abercrombie waved a beautifully manicured hand. "Do you realize that that is a crime?"

"I'm quite familiar with what constitutes crime," Drake said with a smile. "I don't think it would have troubled her in the slightest."

"Really! Really!" Mr. Abercrombie's frown deepened. "I feel you are being harsh. My client was a most honorable lady. I cannot allow such a suggestion to be made without protest."

"So honorable," said Drake grimly, "that she only became engaged by blackmailing the person concerned!"

"Blackmailing!" Mr. Abercrombie infused an expression of horror into his tone. "Good gracious me! Have you proof of this?"

"I have been given to understand," said the detective quietly, "that the proof is right here in your office!"

CHAPTER XX

An Outstanding Discovery



REGINALD ABERCROMBIE surveyed him in amazement, an amazement which quickly changed to an expression of outraged dignity.

"Are you insinuating, sir," he demanded stiffly, "that

I was a party to this alleged blackmail?"

"Not at all!" said Drake, who understood the slander laws perhaps better than the legal light before him. "I merely cite the fact that certain letters which Miss Shayne held over this man's head are deposited with your firm."

The lawyer's face cleared. "Oh, I see—I see!" he said. "Yes, that is, of course, a possibility. Although I must have proof before I am prepared to believe this—er—charge which you bring against my unfortunate client."

"I think," said Drake, "if you examine the documents deposited in your care by Miss Shayne, you will receive all the proof you require."

The lawyer pursed his lips, hesitated, pressed a button on his desk. A clerk came in.

"Fetch me the deed-box labeled 'Shayne.'"

When the clerk departed Drake asked: "By the way, did Miss Shayne make a will?"

"No, unfortunately," replied the lawyer. "I had been trying to persuade her to do so for some considerable time, but she kept putting it off. People do, you know. Very unwise."

"Then," said the detective, "everything she possessed goes to this man Sackett."

"If he can provide satisfactory proof that a marriage took place between them," said Abercrombie.

The clerk returned, carrying a large box on the side of which was painted in white letters, "Venita Shayne." He placed it silently on the desk in front of his employer and as silently went out.

"Was Miss Shayne well off?" asked Drake as Mr. Abercrombie deliberately produced a bunch of keys from his pocket and selected one.

"She was not rich in the accepted sense of the word," replied the lawyer. "She earned a lot of money, but her expenses were naturally, considering her position, very heavy. I don't know what her current balance is at the bank,

but she had shares and securities approximating in value to—er—something in the nature of thirty thousand dollars."

Drake thought of Secket. A sizeable sum to go to that mountebank.

The lawyer unlocked the deed-box, opened it. "The bulk of the contents of this," he remarked, "is unknown to me. As you will see, the various papers have been enclosed in envelopes and marked, in the majority of cases, with initials. I must therefore disclaim all knowledge of what they contain. It is a little irregular for me to allow you access to these documents, but—er—in the circumstances, I suppose—"

"I'll take all responsibility," snapped Chief Cotter.

"Perhaps we had better examine the contents together," Abercrombie said.

He was obviously bursting with curiosity.

A number of stout, manilla envelopes, some thin and some bulky, were removed from the box and placed on the desk. Drake and the chief drew up their chairs, and the detective rapidly scanned the superscriptions. He picked up one marked H. C., slit open the top, shook out a number of letters. A glance, and he saw that Harry Cavendish had spoken the truth.

THESE concern the matter I referred to," he said quietly, and passed two of the letters over to the lawyer.

Mr. Abercrombie scanned them with ever-increasing concern.

"Dear me," he murmured, "there seems to be no doubt. I am amazed and horrified."

"You will, of course," said Drake, "treat this as entirely confidential?"

The lawyer stiffened.

"Everything that passes in this office, Mr. Drake," he replied, with dignity, "is confidential."

"Let's see what the other envelopes contain," said the detective, and opened them one by one.

As he examined the contents, his lips pursed and he whistled softly.

"Venita Shayne appears to have been much worse than we expected," he remarked gravely. "How any of these things came into her possession is a mystery. There's no doubt she was carrying on a very lucrative side-line of blackmail. Here's a confession signed by Secket concerning that theatre robbery he mentioned. She must have forced that out of him and held it over him, using the threat to ensure his silence concerning their marriage."

They went through the rest carefully. For the most part they consisted of indiscreet letters, some written to Venita Shayne herself, some to other people, but all bearing the names of high and influential men to whom a breath of scandal would have meant disaster.

Drake was eagerly searching for something concerning Hammond, but in this he was disappointed. Among all those papers and letters the producer was not mentioned even once.

"I think we have sufficient here to show what sort of a woman Miss Venita Shayne was," Drake said.

"I'm horrified!" said the lawyer. "I had no idea. She was such a child-like, innocent-looking girl! To bring herself to—to—"

Drake smiled. "I think the childish innocence was part of her stock-in-trade. She fooled most people."

Cotter sighed wearily. "Well, we know a little more than we did, but not much. I suppose, as a matter of routine, we'll have to inquire among these people mentioned here and find out what they were doing at the time of her death. Any one of them had a motive for getting rid of the woman."

"The trouble is," said Drake, "that although plenty of people had a motive for getting rid of Venita Shayne, it doesn't follow they had a motive for killing Montague Hammond and Mrs. Hammond."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Abercrombie. "You don't mean to say there's been another crime?"

"I'm afraid there has," said Cotter grimly. "Mrs. Hammond was killed during the night."

The lawyer clicked his teeth. "Dreadful! Dreadful!" he murmured. "A shocking series of tragedies!"

"Shocking enough," agreed the chief shortly. "What's that you've got hold of Mr. Drake?"

DRAKE had come upon an envelope which he had not previously opened. It bore no superscription. Sliding his thumb under the flap, he ripped it and withdrew the contents. It was a birth certificate, registered in Chicago, and certifying the birth of a girl. The date was twenty-two years ago, and the name of the baby was given as Vilma Nita Hinkley. He looked at the name of the parents and raised his eyebrows.

"D'you remember that marriage certificate we found in Hammond's safe?" he inquired.

Cotter nodded. "Yes. What about it?"

"Well, here's a birth certificate of a child born to Mr. and Mrs. Hinkley. It was born twenty-two years ago, which corresponds to the age Venita Shayne would be if she were still alive. I don't think there's any doubt that this is her birth certificate."

"You mean that Shayne was not her real name?" said Cotter.

"I never imagined it was," said Drake. "Most stage people select professional names, and Venita Shayne always sounded too euphonious to be real. I think her name was Hinkley, and she's the child of Mollie Dwyer and James Hinkley, mentioned in the marriage certificate."

"Well, who were they?" muttered Cotter. "And why did Hammond keep that certificate?"

Drake made no immediate reply. But after the pause he said: "If Venita

Shayne changed her name, James Hinkley could have done the same."

"I don't quite get you, Drake," said Cotter.

"It's only an idea of mine," said Drake. "Listen. We know nothing about Montague Hammond prior to his sudden success. Even his lawyer couldn't take us back farther than seventeen years."

A light broke on the puzzled Cotter. "You mean—" he began.

"I mean," said Jonathan Drake, "that a man doesn't usually keep a marriage certificate that isn't his. I mean—or I'm suggesting—that Montague Hammond's real name was James Hinkley, and that prior to his marriage with Mrs. Hammond he was a widower, and that first wife was Mollie Dwyer."

"Then," said Cotter slowly, his tones strangely hushed, "if that birth certificate refers to Venita Shayne, she was Hammond's child."

Jonahan Drake nodded his dark head a little sadly and murmured, "Which accounts for his fondness for her and the fact that he left her half his money. It's got to be proved, but I'm quite sure I'm right. Venita Shayne was Monty Hammond's daughter!"

CHAPTER XXI

The Missing Link?



DRAKE and Cotter took their leave, Drake carrying away with him Venita Shayne's—or Vilma Nita Hinkley's—strong box.

From the attorney's office they went to Centre Street where they talked to Police Commissioner Slade. The New York Police were working on the murder of the actress' maid, but as yet had been unable to discover any clues that would lead them to the killer.

Drake turned over the information regarding the possible real identities of Venita Shayne and Montague Hammond to the commissioner. Slade at once wired to the Chicago police to have a check made there and see if anything could be learned from that.

Drake and Cotter next visited the bank where the actress had kept her money. Here through the cooperation of a bank official the two men were able to check on Venita's account. Among the checks that she had deposited, there were none signed by the people whom she had been blackmailing.

Practically all of the checks that she had deposited in the bank had been signed by Hammond. If Venita had extracted money from the various people over whom she had a hold, she had done it very cleverly.

It was dark when Drake and Cotter finally drove back to Tarrytown in the detective's car. They were both weary and did very little talking on the way. With headlights gleaming, the car swung into the drive of the Hammond estate. A patrolman on duty had stopped them at the gate and then passed them through upon learning their identity.

Drake felt refreshed after he had taken a shower and put on fresh clothing. He went downstairs and found Marjorie Lovelace and Harry Cavendish. It was obvious that the actress and the rich young man had grown very much interested in each other.

Drake managed to draw the pretty, dark-haired girl aside. "I want to ask you a question, Miss Lovelace," he said. "That first night we were here and having cocktails on the loggia, you gave the impression that you disliked Venita Shayne intensely. Was I right?"

"Yes, you were quite right, Mr. Drake," said Marjorie slowly in a low voice. "I—I hated her!"

"Why?"

"There were two reasons. The first was that she took Harry Cavendish away from me. I knew him first—and

we were very good friends. It didn't matter to me whether Harry had any money or not. Like a fool I introduced him to Venita. We were both in the same show at the time, Venita and I."

"Then what happened?" asked Drake, as the girl paused.

"Venita learned that Harry was very rich—and she decided she wanted him for herself. She was simply ruthless about it. She was the star of the show and of course Hammond was the producer. Anyway, I was fired—even though I had received good notices after the opening performance."

"The more I learn about Venita Shayne the more charming she becomes," said Drake sardonically.

"Shortly after that Harry Cavendish dropped me entirely and started running around with Venita," went on Marjorie. "I didn't know just why until he told me today of the hold she had over him—and how she was forcing him into becoming engaged to her." The dark-haired girl's eyes flashed. "Knowing what I do about her, I'm almost glad that she is dead!"

"I SEE," said Drake. "I suppose you've no idea why Mrs. Hammond disliked her?"

"She disliked her because she was jealous," said Marjorie. "Anyone could see that. She worshipped Monty, and she thought he was altogether too fond of Venita."

"He was," said Drake quietly, "but not for the reason which most people imagined."

"What do you mean?" Marjorie Lovelace looked at him questioningly.

"He was fond of her in a fatherly way," said Drake, skirting around the truth without disclosing what he had discovered.

"Yes, I believe you're right," said Marjorie. "I personally never thought there was anything else to it. Venita took great pleasure in making other people unhappy and she flaunted her power over Monty in front of Eva. It's

no wonder that Mrs. Hammond hated her."

They both turned as Cavendish came toward them. Apparently he felt that Marjorie had been left alone with Drake long enough.

"Hope you won't mind me butting in, Drake," said the blond young man. He smiled at the detective, and touched a black and blue spot on his chin. "Is your face still sore—mine is from that fight we had on the island. You sure pack a wallop." He glanced at the dark-haired girl. "Did you tell him about us, Marjorie?"

"Why, no," she said, and a slow blush told Drake what was in the wind.

"We're engaged, Drake," said Harry Cavendish. "Thought you might like to know."

"Optimists!" Drake smiled at them. "Here Harry is Cotter's main suspect, and you two go right ahead, not bothering about anything but love. But congratulations to both of you."

"You don't believe Harry is guilty, do you?" asked Marjorie anxiously. A look of relief swept over her face as Drake shook his head. "I was sure you didn't!"

"There are other suspects." Drake was staring thoughtfully at Eric Norman as the press agent approached. "Suppose we let it go at that for the present?"

"Of course," said Cavendish quickly. "Come on, Marjorie—let's take a walk in the garden before dinner. There might be a moon tonight."

"There is!" Drake called after them.

"No more startling developments while I was in town today, I hope," said Eric Norman as he joined Drake.

"Not as yet," said Drake. "Though I am hoping to have some definite information before morning."

"Then you have a definite lead on the identity of the murderer?" asked the press agent in surprise.

"Can't say as yet, but I hope so."

Drake turned away as Minter appeared and announced that the detec-

tive was wanted on the telephone. The slender, dark-haired man went to the phone at once and found it was Commissioner Slade calling. The New York Police working with the Chicago officials had been able to discover the justice of the peace who had married James Hinkley and Mollie Dwyer.

The justice of the peace had been shown a photograph of Hammond and was able to identify the producer as the man he had married twenty-seven years ago, despite the changes that time had wrought in Montague Hammond's appearance.

"THAT settles that," said Drake over the wire. "Did you find out if they had any children?"

"Yes," answered Commissioner Slade. "Found that in the Chicago birth records. They had one child, a girl named Vilma Nita."

"Good!" exclaimed Drake. "Then Venita Shayne was Hammond's daughter, and she merely changed her name when she went on the stage. Was there anything else regarding Hammond or Hinkley's family?"

"Two things. First he had a brother about ten years older than he, who disappeared."

"Good!" Drake repeated. "That's the angle I've been looking for. Go on, Commissioner."

"James Hinkley, Senior, the father of the murdered man and of the missing brother, was hanged out in Texas thirty years ago as a horse thief," came the commissioner's crisp voice over the phone.

"Hanged as a horse thief!" said Drake, and he thought at once of the crude drawing of the hanging man on the death warnings that Hammond received. "Anything else? All right, thank you very much. I expect to have some news for you by morning—yes, I am sure I know who the murderer is now!"

Drake hung up and turned away from the phone with the brisk air of a man

who knew exactly what he had to do next. He gave a start of surprise as Tommy Lowell came hurrying into the room. The red-headed young man bore a look of chagrin on his freckled face, and it was obvious that something had gone wrong.

"What happened, Tommy?" demanded Drake. "I thought you would still be trailing Joseph Secket."

"I was," said Tommy ruefully, "but he got away."

"How?"

"Perhaps I'd better tell you what happened right from the beginning," said Tommy. "I followed Secket when he left here—and I don't believe he saw me. He went to Tarrytown and took a train for New York. So did I. In the city he went to that address he gave you. He has a furnished room there."

"If you were able to follow him that far how did he get away?" asked Drake.

"I decided that I would try to question him," said Tommy. "That was where I made a mistake, Chief. I'm sorry."

"Never mind about that, I merely wanted you to shadow him, but it can't be helped. Go on, Tommy."

"Well, Secket talked when I told him that I was your assistant and that there were some questions you wanted answered. He admitted that he was the man who met Venita Shayne out on the grounds of this estate at two a. m. on Friday night."

"I thought he was the man," said Drake. "Did he explain why he came here to see her?"

"Yes, he was quite frank about it. Seemed to be so anxious to help us in every way by telling all that he knew that he had me completely fooled." Tommy frowned. "He said that he had received this—" The red-headed young man produced a bit of paper which he handed to the detective.

Drake examined it carefully. It was a message printed in crude capitals on the same type of cheap paper used for

the warning notes to Hammond.

"YOUR WIFE IS GOING TO DOUBLE-CROSS YOU," it read, "WATCH OUT FOR TROUBLE."

It was signed by the drawing of the hanging man.

"AND I suppose that after he received this, Secket learned that his wife was here and came to see what it was all about," said Drake as he thrust the warning into the pocket of his jacket. "Was that it?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "Secket said that he phoned Venita Shayne at her apartment late Friday afternoon. She said that she was just leaving for Backwaters and would be unable to see him. Secket finally forced her to agree to meet him on the lawn of the estate late that night. They met and quarreled—and he got rough with her. He said he believed that she was up to something she wouldn't reveal to him, and he was trying to force it out of her."

"Naturally he failed," remarked Drake. He smiled at his assistant. "Then what, Tommy?"

"Secket moved casually toward the door of the room as we talked. All of a sudden he leaped out into the hall slamming the door in my face. By the time I got it open he had managed to run down a flight of stairs and get away."

"What did you do then?"

"Spent some time trying to find him, but no luck. Finally I phoned two of our men and gave them orders to keep watch on the house when they joined me there. If Secket turns up there again—they'll be waiting for him. Then I decided to come back here to you."

"Glad you did," said Drake. "I'm going to need you here tonight, Tommy."

"Then you know who did it?" demanded Tommy eagerly.

"I have a pretty good hunch," said Drake with a smile.

It was not until the members of the house party were at dinner that Drake

made an announcement that startled them all.

As Minter deftly served the meal, an air of tenseness had spread over those at the table. The slender, dark-haired man had been usually silent, apparently lost in thought, and the other guests had grown uneasily conscious of his mood.

Marjorie Lovelace and Harry Cavendish watched every move that he made, as did John Moore and Eric Norman. It was the press agent who finally ventured a comment.

"You seem to have something on your mind, Drake," said Norman. "What is it?"

"I have been going over the evidence in the case," said Drake. "And I shall tell Chief Cotter just what I have discovered in the morning." He smiled grimly as he saw that the eyes of everyone in the room were fixed on his face. "I know who killed Venita Shayne, Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, and Venita Shayne's maid!"

"Venita's maid!" exclaimed John Moore. "Do you mean to say that there has been a fourth person murdered?"

"I read it in a New York paper this morning," said Eric Norman.

"We haven't seen any New York papers here," said Cavendish. "So naturally we didn't know about that." The blond man looked at the detective. "How did it happen, Drake?"

Drake told them—going into detail. The four guests listened with intense interest.

"Then Venita brought her diary here," said Marjorie when Drake had finished. "Has it been found?"

"No, not yet," said Jonathan Drake. "But I am sure that it will be soon!"

As he sat there he was conscious of the startled expressions of the others at the table. Even Tommy Lowell and Minter appeared surprised.

"What makes you so sure?" asked Eric Norman.

"Because the murderer made a num-

ber of stupid blunders," said Drake.

CHAPTER XXII

Enter—the Murderer



SINISTER, brooding atmosphere lingered over the late house of the big Montague Hammond as the evening hours slowly passed. Everyone save Drake and Tommy Lowell were restless and ill

at ease.

All four of the other guests realized that they were actually being held prisoners on the estate as murder suspects, and this thought put a damper on their spirits. Even Marjorie and Harry Cavendish seemed to have lost the air of romance that had lingered over them during the early part of the evening. They had grown conscious of the stark reality of their surroundings, and it was obvious that the girl was frightened.

"I can't stand much more of this," she told Drake when she found herself alone with him for a few moments. "Up to now I couldn't quite believe that one of us here could actually be the murderer. It just seemed impossible in spite of everything." She shuddered. "But now I'm afraid of everyone except Harry."

"Don't worry," said Drake. "I'm sure you are quite safe. There is no cause for alarm."

"Thank you for telling me that." She went to join the blond man, but the fear still lingered on her pretty face. There were blue lights in her dark hair.

Eric Norman had been upstairs. He came down hurriedly with an ornate looking leather-covered book in his hand. There was a scowl on the rugged face of the press agent.

"Found this in my room," he said,

handing the book to Drake. "It's Venita's diary. Damn it, Drake, somebody is trying to frame me!"

"Looks that way," said Drake as he took the locked book. His keen eyes searched the face of the other man. "On the other hand, you might have decided to get rid of the diary since you knew that the police and myself have been looking for it."

For a moment Eric Norman stared at the slender investigator. Then the press agent shrugged his shoulders. "I never thought of that," he said slowly.

He turned away as Drake did not answer. The detective was gazing thoughtfully at the locked diary in his hand. He touched the strap that held it closed and it fell back. Venita Shayne's diary had been broken open and there was a drop of white wax on the handsome tooled leather.

"So that was it." Drake seated himself in a chair apart from the rest of the guests and began to read the entries in the actress' diary.

He found that the blond girl revealed a great deal of her character in what she had written. She was shallow, cruel, ruthless. She had even made notes regarding the various people she had been blackmailing, and she stressed the fact that she was always paid in cash. There had been no checks to give her away.

Drake finally dropped the diary in the side pocket of his coat and stepped out on the terrace for a breath of fresh air. He felt that he needed it, after what he had been reading.

As his eyes swept over the beautiful estate that had been given added glamor by the light of a silvery moon he suddenly grew alert. He had seen a tall figure duck behind a bit of shrubbery.

Casually he walked toward the bushes. His pace was that of a man who paid little attention to where he was going, that of a man apparently

lost in thought.

He reached the patch of shrubbery, strolled past it, then suddenly whirled, his automatic ready in his hand.

"Come out of there!" he said sharply. "I've got you covered."

There was a rustling—and Joseph Secket stepped out in the moonlight.

"When Fate's against one 'tis the better part of valor to be wise," said the tall man. "I believe you would shoot, Mr. Drake, and I have no desire to become a corpse."

"What are you doing here, Secket?" demanded Drake.

"I came to apologize for a bit of rudeness upon my part," said Secket. "I walked out on your assistant without telling him goodbye. Afterwards I realized that was an error—the act of one who might be considered a murderer."

"That isn't the reason that you came back here tonight," Drake snapped. "The truth, Secket!"

"Very well, since you insist," said Secket. "I managed to climb over the wall when the police on guard at the gates were not looking. It had occurred to me that if I succeeded in finding the murderer and turning him or her over to the police—there might be some sort of a reward."

Joseph Secket seemed to be running true to type—either that or he was playing an appallingly clever game. All his life had been devoted to getting money in many devious ways—was this just another of them?

"You were the man who was sneaking around Venita Shayne's apartment the night before last," said Drake. "You took the key off the bureau after you had climbed up and entered by way of the fire escape. Right?"

"Quite true," said Secket. "I had received the warning note, as you know, and I wanted to see if I could find a certain paper among my wife's possessions."

One of the policemen on guard at

the gate had seen the two men standing on the lawn—and had hurried toward them in order to be sure of their identity as guests in the house.

"You mean the confession you signed regarding robbing that theater box-office?" asked Drake.

"What confession?" demanded Secket much too quickly. "There is no such thing."

"Yes, there is," said Drake as the patrolman reached them. "Lock this man up, officer. Chief Cotter will question him in the morning."

Jonathan Drake smiled as the officer snapped handcuffs on Secket and led him away, protesting wildly.

"That will keep him safe until morning," murmured Drake as he watched the two men head toward the gate. And then he muttered something that would have startled a listener. "He'd likely be killed if he hung around here loose."

Drake returned to the house. He found that the other guests had all gone to their rooms, though it was only eleven o'clock. He spent a few moments talking to Tommy Lowell, who had been waiting for him, and then the detective and his young assistant went upstairs and separated.

DRAKE glanced along the long dimly lighted hall. He saw the door of Eric Norman's room close quickly and silently. Evidently the press agent had been watching the corridor.

Drake entered his own room frowning. He turned on the lamp beside the bed and glanced about him. He had left the door open when he entered and now he went to it and closed it, but he did not turn the key in the lock.

"If he reacts the way I think he will, we've got him," he said softly.

He was fishing now in earnest, no longer drifting, and he was using the best bait he knew—himself!

He drew off his coat, placed it neatly over the back of a chair, and then hung

the harness of the shoulder holster on top of the coat. The automatic he dropped into a back pocket of his trousers.

Then he stretched out on the bed, still fully dressed save for his coat, and turned out the light.

For a long time he remained there staring into the darkness. The house had grown very quiet.

From somewhere in the distance he heard a clock striking twelve. He realized that an hour had passed since he and Tommy had come upstairs. He was growing sleepy and it was hard to keep his eyes open.

But the next instant he was completely awake as he saw a thin streak of light to his left that extended from the floor almost to the ceiling. Someone was silently opening the door from the outside.

A moment later a shadowy figure glided in through the half-open door and was blotted out by the darkness as the door closed behind it. Drake was conscious of someone peering at him through the shadows but he remained motionless on the bed.

The figure moved toward the bed. In a moment the intruder was so close that Drake could hear him breathing. And then the detective rolled over just as a heavy object crashed down on the spot where his head had been but a moment ago.

Drake kept right on rolling until he reached the far side of the bed. Both sides were clear, for it was the head of the bed that was against the wall. As the murderer swung around, heading back toward the door, Drake lunged forward in a flying tackle.

He hit his target, crashed it to the floor. The two rolled over and over, the murderer cursing and snarling as he battled the detective. Both men lashed out wildly in the darkness. Drake felt his fist land against a chin—and then a hard blow caught him just as he was trying to get to his feet. He fell backward, landing on the

floor with such force that it shook the room.

The murderer jumped up and dashed toward the door. He caught the knob and tried to jerk the door open, but it would not budge.

"No use, Minter!" came Drake's voice. "The door is locked from the outside. My assistant saw to that!"

With the words Drake switched on the light by the bed. He had a picture of murderous hate personified in one man. Minter! The quiet of voice! The soft of tread! The gray-haired, gray-faced man of mildness!

"The game is up, Hinkley," Drake cried. "I thought you'd try to kill me, as you did the others, when you learned that I knew the identity of the murderer!"

"You've got nothing on me!" snarled Minter. "Not a thing!"

"Hey, Chief," shouted Tommy Lowell from outside the door. "You all right?"

"Yes!" called Drake. "You can unlock the door now, Tommy."

There was the sound of a key turning in the lock and then the red-head pushed open the door and stepped into the room with a gun in his hand.

"So it was Minter," said Tommy as he saw the tall gray-haired servant. "I didn't suspect him."

"Not Minter, Tommy," Drake said. "Monty Hammond's missing brother!"

"Hammond's brother!" exclaimed Tommy in amazement. "Then with Mr. and Mrs. Hammond and Venita dead this man would be able to claim the estate."

"Which is exactly why he murdered them!" said Drake, still covering the murderer with his gun.

"But did—did Monty Hammond know—?"

"This man could answer that question," said Drake, "but I don't suppose he will until we take his confession. I'd say Monty Hammond did not know. He hadn't seen his brother since they were boys. But Mrs. Ham-

mond, her woman's eyes sharpened by love of her husband, suspected or guessed. So he killed her. And now—now the State will kill him."

CHAPTER XIII

Case Closed



HALF an hour later a startled and amazed group had gathered in the big living room of Montague Hammond's house. Chief Cotter had arrived as swiftly as possible after receiving a phone call informing him that the murderer had been captured.

Now Minter, or John Hinkley, as was his real name, sat sullenly in a chair with handcuffs on his wrists as Jonathan Drake talked.

"I'll give you the details of the whole affair as briefly as possible," he said. "In the first place Hinkley changed his name some years ago and became a butler. That can be easily checked, if he refuses to talk."

"I'll admit that," growled Minter. "But you still have nothing on me, Drake."

"Minter discovered that his brother was Monty Hammond. He got a job as Hammond's butler and then waited his opportunity. He started sending Hammond the sinister warning notes in order to create the impression that some outsider wanted to take Hammond's life."

"And the picture of the hanging man was to remind Hammond that the sender knew that the producer's father had been hung as a horse thief," said Cotter as Drake paused.

"Right!" Drake nodded. "That was one reason Hammond was so worried. But it was worry—not terror. He had become a great man—and to have the world learn about his father would not

do him any good. Minter made one of his mistakes when he brought me the note that was addressed to me. He said that the postman had just brought it, and that wasn't likely."

"Why not?" asked the chief.

"Because it was Sunday, and no mail is delivered on Sunday unless it is sent special delivery," Drake smiled grimly. "Minter made another mistake. That letter was addressed to me and mailed on Friday evening. At that time no one knew that I would spend the weekend at Backwaters but Hammond and Minter."

"What else made you suspect him?" asked Cotter.

"On Friday I received a mysterious phone call telling me to keep away from here. I checked the call and found it had come from Tarrytown. Same thing applies as it did about the warning I received. No one knew I was coming here then but Hammond, Mrs. Hammond and their servants. The other guests had not as yet arrived."

"I never thought about that," said Cotter. "But how did Minter commit the murders?"

"Saturday afternoon he overheard Venita say her watch had stopped. Then she announced her intention of writing letters and Hammond told her to use his study. Minter went to the study, turned back the hands of the clock to allow for the change in time. Venita began her letter, timing it according to the clock.

"Minter appeared. Doubtlessly she paid no attention to him—we realized it was somebody she knew who killed her. He hit her with the statuette, stunned her and then strangled her. He then turned the clock back again to the right time and came down to the hall."

"That's where he made another mistake," said Cotter. "I'm sure of it—but I don't know just what."

"He said that he went to answer the phone, found it was a wrong number, and then discovered Venita."

DRAKE looked at the rest of the guests. "Do any of you remember the phone ring that afternoon?"

"Why, no, I don't," said Eric Norman, and Marjorie and John Moore shook their heads.

"That's just it," said Drake. "Minter lied about the phone. It didn't ring."

"What about his killing Hammond from the island?" asked Harry Cavenish eagerly. "Remember I have been suspected of that."

"Not by me." Drake smiled at the blond man. "What Minter must have done was to hide the silenced rifle and a pair of gloves over on the island. Sunday morning he put on a bathing suit, swam over there—got the gun and killed Hammond. He evidently discovered that you were on the island, Harry. He saw his chance to implicate you."

"How?" asked Cotter who still

[Turn Page]

College Humor

15
CENTS

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seemed reluctant to abandon the idea of the blond young man being guilty.

"Minter saw me paddling over to the island in the canoe," went on Drake. "He waited until I got there—and then made a lot of unnecessary noise crashing through the brush so I would chase after him as I did. He threw away the gun, and managed to hide. I thought Cavendish was the man I had been chasing—and fought with him."

"And you didn't fool about it," said Cavendish. "My chin is still sore."

"It was not until I learned that there were no fingerprints on the rifle except my own that I realized that Cavendish couldn't be guilty. The murderer was wearing gloves. Cavendish wasn't—and I didn't think he had had a chance to hide any."

"But Minter was here at the house when you got back from the island," said Chief Cotter.

"I know—he swam back—dressed quickly and appeared without being seen. That wasn't hard—swimming with all the brush along the river front to protect him from view."

"There's one very important thing you haven't explained," said the chief. "Why was Venita Shayne's maid killed?"

"Because she was unfortunate enough to grow faint and go to the window at the wrong time," said Drake. "The bullet that killed her was intended for me!"

"What!" exclaimed Cotter. "You mean that?"

"I do!" said Jonathan Drake. "Minter must have followed us to New York, probably by train. He knew we were going to Venita Shayne's apartment—that was easy enough to guess. I believe that he felt I knew too much and was anxious to get rid of me."

"Then he fired at you from that empty apartment across the street," said Cotter. "At least I mean he fired—and the maid got the bullet. But who made the phone call that you received then."

"Minter made it," said Drake. "There was a phone in that empty apartment. It had just been put in for the new tenant. Minter was careless there. If you remember, the apartment had just been painted and the walls were not dry yet."

"That's right." The chief nodded.

WELL, when we returned to the house I noticed a spot on Minter's coat sleeve and realized that it was dried paint. I was positive that he was guilty," said Drake. "So much so that I deliberately announced that I knew the identity of the murderer at dinner tonight. Minter and the rest heard me—and I stressed the fact that I had not told all I knew to you as yet, Chief Cotter."

"I see," said Cotter. "You were sure that Minter would try to kill you before morning—and in that way you would catch him in the act of attempting murder."

"Exactly!" said Jonathan Drake. "And I did." He looked at the tall gray haired man who sat glaring at him. "There is not a doubt that Minter—or John Hinkley—is guilty!"

"All right, damn you," snarled the prisoner. "I'll admit it—there is no use trying to deny it. I did it—I killed them." His eyes were wild. "But I wish I had got you, too."

"You nearly did," said Drake. "When you entered my room that first night I was here, what were you looking for, Minter?"

"The paper I used to write the warning notes," said Minter. "I forgot and left it in the drawer of the desk. Too bad that poisoned drink I fixed for Hammond by putting the poison in his glass didn't kill you when he gave the glass to you, Drake."

"It didn't make me feel very well," said the detective. "Take him away Chief. The case is closed—there's your murderer."

Two days later Jonathan Drake sat in his huge library. Not far away his

red headed assistant was swiftly typing from a sheaf of short hand notes.

"So Cotter released Secket," said Tommy as he paused at his work. "Why?"

"Wasn't much use of holding him on that old robbery business," said Drake as he filled and lighted his pipe. "The theater has been torn down—and no one knows what became of the old management." The slender, dark-haired man smiled. "Hammond's attorney phoned me. The man who was following Hammond around all of the time

was a detective hired by Mrs. Hammond to watch him."

"Well, this is another case finished," said Tommy. "Here are the notes all typed and ready to be bound up in another of the Black Books of Jonathan Drake. Wonder what will be next, Chief?"

Drake merely shook his head, but both he and his assistant realized that somewhere sinister brains were at work and once again they would follow a trail of crime. Follow it until they brought the guilty to justice.



In the Next Issue



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GENTLEMAN CROOK

The True Story of a Life of Crime

By **ALLAN PINKERTON**

AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS SLEUTH

IN all the annals of crime perhaps no more romantically Machiavel-
lian a figure ever rose on the
criminal horizon than Lewis C. Cler-
mont, bank robber, bigamist, forger
and confidence man.

Handsome as a movie actor, metic-
ulous in dress, debonair as a Beau
Brummell, Clermont could, by the very
forcefulness of his personality make
himself welcome in drawing rooms, or
in the inner circles of business. So
well did he enact his role of gentleman
crook that it was impossible to guess
that beneath his brilliant, captivating
exterior lurked a demon of crime.

This gay and friendly crook who
went through life consciencelessly
fleecing the gullible—only to die in
prison at last, thus putting an end to
another chapter on “romantic crime”,
if it can be so called, was always a
study in psychology to me. I often
pored over it with interest. And with
no answer as to why any man so pecu-
liarly gifted should choose a career
of crime—even though it was in a
way as startling and romantic as it was
consistent and successful—to a quiet,
honorable life.

Clermont had not even the excuse,
or alibi, of being an hereditary victim



Suddenly his head was enveloped in a hood

In this article, taken from his personal case-book, the world-famous detective, Allan Pinkerton, gives a thumbnail sketch of the exploits of an old-time "gentleman crook" whom he declares one of the most interesting characters to come to his notice in his long and varied career. Lewis C. Clermont, who plied his criminal calling not long after the close of the Civil War was a versatile criminal, equally at home as bank robber, forger, or confidence man.

This case is an interesting addition to the criminal gallery of Allan Pinkerton (1819-1884) whose brilliant achievements as a sleuth have never been excelled. Born in Glasgow, Scotland, Pinkerton emigrated to Canada to escape punishment for his part in the Chartist movement. When he later settled in Chicago, he opened a detective agency, having been rather accidentally made aware of his talents in that direction.

Even before the outbreak of the Civil War he had already become widely known, and was President Lincoln's guard on his trip to Washington for the inauguration. The President later commissioned him to inaugurate the Federal Secret Service Department, but he did not give up his private detective business, having established branches in many of the most important cities.

Pinkerton's men played a conspicuous part in some of the most outstanding disturbances of the last quarter century, at one time capturing robbers who took \$700,000 from the Adams Express Company safe on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad train, January 6, 1866.

After his death, his sons, Robert A. (died 1907) and William A., carried on their father's work.



Allan Pinkerton

of criminal tendencies. And yet, almost from earliest boyhood his career was a continuous episode of criminal operations.

Gay and Debonair

In the prime of his manhood, he was a singularly handsome man. Firm and erect, of medium height, his shoulders were broad and well set, while his waist was tapering and slender. His features were finely cut, and his large, expressive dark blue eyes could light up with sudden angry passion or melt with soft affection.

His black hair, slightly curling, was worn long and pushed back from his high white forehead, falling nearly to the collar of his coat; and his upper lip was ornamented with a long, gracefully drooping black mustache, which

became him well, and gave an added charm to his handsome face.

Faultlessly neat in his tastes, his clothing was of the most fashionable cut and of the best material, while his linen was of the finest quality, and immaculate in its purity and whiteness. No one to have seen him in the drawing-room or upon the promenade, would have imagined that this brilliant, captivating exterior was the mask under which lurked the demon of crime.

He had a liberal education, was an extensive linguist, and by varied reading had attained a degree of culture far beyond the average. His parents were of eminent respectability and of undoubted honor, his father at one time occupying an honorable public office of prominence, and they pain-

fully felt the disgrace and shame which this degenerate son brought upon them.

First Bank Robbery

The first criminal action in which Clermont was known to have been engaged was the robbery of a safe in Illinois, when he acted in collusion with "Billy" Wray, an old-time safe burglar of notorious character.

After this he started a banking institution in a small town in Minnesota, where, by his pleasing manners, he succeeded in gaining the confidence of prominent business men who became depositors and intrusted their funds to his keeping. Having received a large amount of money in this way, he endeavored to make arrangements with Bob Scott and Jim Dunlap—both later concerned in the famous Northampton Bank robbery—to rob his bank.

Well acquainted with the character of the man with whom they were dealing, they demanded ten thousand dollars in advance, before undertaking the work. As it was not forthcoming, the matter fell through, and a short time afterward Clermont committed the robbery himself, and fled to San Francisco.

Forgery

He was then quite a young man, and soon, by high living and gambling, his funds rapidly disappeared. He was forced to the disagreeable necessity of laboring for his subsistence.

He obtained a position upon one of the street car roads in that city, and while thus engaged his fine appearance and pleasing address attracted the attention of Walter Patterson and Ira Garside, two well known "check raisers" and forgers, who lured many young men into becoming criminals. Resigning his position in San Francisco, Clermont accompanied these two men upon a tour through the country and made considerable money.

Their system of operation was to

present at the desk of a bank in some country town forged letters of introduction from the cashiers of prominent banks to their correspondents, and a forged certified check upon the same institution. This check would be deposited in the bank, and they would then draw upon it for a lesser amount. Upon receiving the money they would suddenly decamp before the duped officials were aware that both check and letters were forgeries, and that they were the victims of the gentlemanly scamps now beyond their reach.

In all these operations they were successful and amassed a great deal of money. When suspicion attached to them, however, Clermont departed for Europe with his ill-gotten gains. He traveled extensively upon the Continent, visited the Holy Land and finally returned to Germany.

Here he was traced by my operatives. The German police, informed of his doings, watched him so closely that he deemed it inadvisable to ply his calling in any of the German spas, and returned to the United States in 1874. While abroad he visited Stuttgart, and was for a time the guest of Baron Shindle—the famous Max Shinburne—who was particularly desired by various parties in New Hampshire and Pennsylvania, and whose own adventures were remarkable.

Clermont was married to a charming little lady in Chicago, whose devoted attachment to him induced many acts of self-sacrifice upon her part, which I am afraid, were inadequately appreciated by her dashing, handsome and unprincipled husband. But having linked her fortunes with his, though she soon discovered the precarious nature of his calling, she never faltered in her love for him. She clung to him with fondness and devotion, remaining true and steadfast to the end.

Another Wife

Returning from Europe during the

summer season, while the various seaside resorts were populated by the country's wealth and beauty and fashion, Clermont went to Long Branch. Establishing himself at the West End Hotel under the name of Louis La Desma, the son of a rich merchant in Cuba, he soon ingratiated himself into the highest social circles.

Handsome and faultlessly attired as he always was, and with charming conversational powers, he soon was an admired favorite. Many little episodes of tender romance and stolen meetings with the fair daughters of wealth and aristocracy fell to his lot, while sojourning beside those sea-washed shores.

Among the belles whose hearts throbbed more quickly in his presence, whose cheeks flushed with pleasure at his coming, and whose eyelids dropped in confusion beneath his ardent glances was Josephine Dumel. She was beautiful, blonde, and the widow of one of the scions of Philadelphia aristocracy.

Being both wealthy and remarkably attractive, her suitors were legion, but until the arrival of the interesting, handsome Cuban, she had remained proof against their blandishments, continuing to mourn her departed husband.

La Desma, however, came and saw and conquered. In short order the beautiful widow succumbed to the fascinations of the romantic-looking stranger, and they were married. The ceremony took place in New York, after which they returned to Philadelphia.

Their short honeymoon was spent at the palatial residence of the bride. Clermont, pretending to be a prominent actor in the Cuban rebellion, stated that it was necessary for him to remain closely at home, as he might be pounced upon by the spies of his government, who infested all the eastern cities. He was always armed. His richly-jeweled pistol lay upon the

table when he sat down to write a letter or converse with his wife, and he never retired for the night without a small armory beneath his pillow.

Gone with the Jewels

His grand and gloomy airs and the peculiarities of his disposition seemed to exercise a strange fascination upon the lady of his choice, and his slightest wish was absolute law in the household.

After a few weeks of happy seclusion he suggested a short trip to Europe, and preparations were at once commenced for their departure. Madame La Desma converted all her portable property into ready money and, packing up her diamonds, worth nearly twelve thousand dollars, was prepared to leave.

Suddenly Clermont, with an exhibition of annoyance, remembered that he had forgotten something of importance in the city, and requested his wife to deliver a note which would arrange everything satisfactorily. Taking a carriage she proceeded to carry out his wishes. When she returned, to her chagrin and mortification, her husband had decamped, taking with him about twenty thousand dollars in money and her diamonds and other valuable jewels.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," says the poet, and the bereaved lady, drying her tears, at once commenced operations with the view of recovering her property and exacting punishment. My agency was employed, and upon looking over some of the wearing apparel the man had left behind him, the name of Lewis C. Clermont was found printed in one of the inside pockets.

Of course, his identity once known, the deserted wife was informed that her gallant husband had already been married before yielding to her own charms. Enraged she determined to have him arrested if he could be found.

California Escapades

My son, William A. Pinkerton, interested himself in the case, and soon traced the absconder to San Francisco. Upon acquainting the police authorities of that city with a description of the man and his antecedents, they were at once able to account for the appearance of a successful forger there who had swindled several of their prominent men of various amounts, aggregating nearly thirty-five thousand dollars.

His plan there was to offer raised securities to the moneyed men of the city, also to the various banking institutions, as collateral security for loans which he desired to effect. Being affable in manner, and welcomed socially by the first families of the city, he had no difficulty in being accommodated. Of course detection did not follow until the loans matured, when the valueless collaterals were presented for payment.

In San Francisco he operated as Lewis Raymond, and had disappeared before discovery overtook him. As he had mingled quite extensively in the social circles of the Golden City, the swindled men declined to pursue him for fear that some scandal might result.

From California he went to Peru, where he remained for some time under the name of Colonel Ralph Forrest, and but little is known of his career while there.

Early in 1876, a messenger from the office of C. & H. Borie, a prominent banking firm in Philadelphia, entered my agency there, and informed us of the suspicious actions of a woman who had attempted to purchase a small amount of Reading Railroad Stock. She had desired the certificates to be made out in those of one share each, and had seemed doubtful about the name in which they were to be issued. The bankers were convinced that something was wrong.

A "shadow" was placed upon the lady, and she was traced to the Bingham House, where a man joined her. They took a carriage to the West Philadelphia depot, took the train for New York, but when they arrived there the detective was on the same train.

From the description given of this man, I had no doubt that he was Lewis C. Clermont—Colonel Ralph Forrest—Lewis Raymond, and lastly Louis La Desma.

A Wife's Sacrifice

A requisition was obtained, and both the man and woman were taken back to Philadelphia, under the care of attaches of my office. A search of his effects discovered a full assortment of forgers' implements.

He was tried in Philadelphia at the instance of Mrs. Dumel, upon the double charge of bigamy and larceny, and here the man's first wife gave another evidence of self-sacrifice and devotion, as rare as it was heroic.

She appeared at the trial, and most emphatically denied being married to Clermont. Which, of course, disposed of the charge of bigamy—and with it all hope of convicting the man for stealing from the only legitimate wife he was proved to possess.

Clermont's true wife was enabled to swear thus successfully because the great fire in Chicago, where they had been married, had destroyed the courthouse, and all the records which might have disproved her testimony.

Clermont was discharged from custody and frequently, during his travels thereafter, my general superintendent, George H. Bangs, received letters from the bold and dashing forger, informing him of his whereabouts. Only a day or two before the last operation he ever attempted, he wrote to Bangs, stating that he would "no doubt hear of something important from him in a day or two."

Well Laid Plans

How important it was, the fol-

lowing will show.

In the month of July, 1875, there appeared at Chambersburg, in Pennsylvania, a man accompanied by his wife and an invalid younger man, who was introduced as the wife's brother.

The husband represented himself as Colonel Ralph Rolland, who had commanded the Louisiana Tigers, and had been finally promoted to a brigadier-generalship in the Rebel Army. He was affable, kind and gentle, faultless in dress, and well educated.

His wife was a beautiful, modest little woman, who appeared to be devoted to her husband and her invalid brother, and who won many hearts by her gentle and delicate attentions to them.

They selected rooms at the most prominent hotel in the place, and settled down to the enjoyment of the comforts and luxuries of life with all the grace and dignity of thorough aristocrats. Their object in coming to this place was stated to be the health of the young man. Finally finding no improvement he left for a more salubrious climate. The colonel and his wife decided to remain with the view of eventually settling there definitely.

Of course such a family did not remain long unacknowledged. Sympathy for the sick boy first attracted attention. Soon the winning manners and cultured minds of the husband and wife made warm friends for them among the wealthy citizens.

The Bank Cashier

Among them was George R. Messersmith, Esq., a man of thorough education and refinement who occupied the responsible position of cashier of the National Bank. A warm friendship developed, and Colonel Rolland and his wife became frequent visitors at the Messersmith home in the building used by the bank.

Messersmith owned a fine library of rare and valuable works. He and Colonel Rolland would indulge in

cultured criticisms of their favorite authors, and in friendly converse upon congenial literary topics, both evidently finding reciprocal enjoyment in the expressed views of the other.

When, upon several occasions, the colonel was absent from town, his wife was usually invited to the residences of some of her friends, in order that she might not be lonely.

Their residence in Chambersburg continued until March, 1876, when the arrival of another man from the South, who gave his name as D. Johnson, made an addition to the party. Upon his arrival, he deposited with the bank two large packages which he represented as containing valuables, and at once established for himself a reputation for wealth.

On the evening of the 24th day of March, Colonel Rolland and Johnson started from the hotel, apparently for a short stroll. Reaching the Messersmith residence they inquired for him. Being informed that he was not at home, but would return in a few minutes, they left, stating that they would call again.

Returning in about fifteen minutes, they were shown into the cashier's home by a Mr. Kindline, his brother-in-law, who resided with him. They found Messersmith writing.

Unmasked

For some time they conversed in a friendly business manner. Rolland wanted the cashier's opinion upon the merits of a farm in the vicinity, which he expressed himself as desirous of purchasing.

During the conversation Johnson presented a package which he alleged was very valuable, and requested the cashier to place it in the vault of the bank, as he was to leave for New York early the following morning. Messersmith declined to open the vault that evening, saying he would deposit the package in a safe place, and place it in the vault in the morning.

To this Johnson readily consented, and requested the cashier to forward the package to New York by express. Messersmith was noting down the address given him, when suddenly his head was enveloped with a hood or sack, and strong hands were clutching at his throat. A handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, and angry voices threatened to shoot him if he attempted to resist or to give an alarm.

Undismayed by threats, however, the courageous cashier resisted them manfully, and being quite muscular, in his random hitting he knocked one of his assailants to the floor. Realizing the situation fully by this time, he determined to foil the robbers, and loudly called for help.

Caught in the Act

His cries alarmed his assailants, and they fled precipitately, but before they could reach the front door, they were confronted by Kindline, who barred their passage. They threatened to shoot, but when Kindline defied them they turned about and ran toward the back of the house, intending to escape through the kitchen.

The alarm had been sounded, and frightened citizens came running toward the bank. Rolland jumped from the porch, but was immediately captured by Kindline, who had raced after them, and by two other men who had been attracted by the noise. An elegant revolver and a jewel-hilted dirk knife were taken from Rolland and he was placed in custody. Johnson succeeded in making his escape by scaling the fence.

Upon searching the quondam Rebel colonel a package containing thirty thousand dollars, which had been received by the bank that evening by express, was discovered. He had evidently seized it during the attack upon Messersmith.

Johnson was captured upon a railroad train at Mercersburg, Virginia, and brought back to Chambersburg to

join his accomplice in jail. A search of the hotel rooms they had occupied revealed a dark lantern and several burglar implements, while in the yard of the bank was found a sack containing a full set of cracksman's tools, several gags, and two bottles of chloroform. The intentions of the robbers to execute a thorough job was plain.

Upon the testimony of some of my operatives and others at the trial which followed, the "Colonel of the Louisiana Tigers" was proved to be the handsome outlaw, Lewis C. Clermont, known by several other aliases. The daring robbers were convicted and sentenced to a term of ten years in the Eastern Penitentiary.

The Tempter

An appeal was taken to the Supreme Court, and upon a legal technicality—it being shown that they were tried for robbery, and convicted of burglary—a new trial was granted, and they were remanded to Chambersburg.

While in the Eastern Penitentiary my son, William A. Pinkerton, in company with Charles Thompson Jones of Philadelphia, visited the two men, with the view of identifying the companion of Clermont, who had thus far escaped recognition. William at once recognized the man as Adney C. Weeks, of Chicago, who had been a carpenter there, and who was married to the sister of Mrs. Clermont. The romantic stories told him by his dashing and unprincipled brother-in-law had no doubt been too much for him and he had become a ready tool in Clermont's hands. Clermont urgently begged my son not to divulge Johnson's identity to his friends in Chicago, where he had hitherto been regarded as an honest man and an industrious mechanic.

While in the Chambersburg jail, awaiting their second trial, their conduct was most exemplary. Their observance of the prison discipline gained for them the favor of the

officials in charge. But upon their new trial they were again convicted, and this time sentenced to twelve years.

On the morning following their conviction the officer of the prison went his usual rounds, and on stopping before Clermont's cell discovered to his dismay that the bird had flown. Consternation and alarm followed, the prison was thoroughly searched and pursuit was at once begun. But the wily burglar had succeeded in making good his escape.

Escape Foiled

He was traced to Chicago, and finally arrested and taken to the Central Station in that city, awaiting a demand from the Pennsylvania authorities for his conveyance to that State. At the station, his wife gave another evidence of her faithfulness and devotion which, while being directed in an improper channel, was nonetheless the courageous act of a loving and undaunted wife. Disguising herself in male attire she reached the hall above the cell where her graceless husband was confined. She attempted to drop some saws and a pistol into his cell, with which she would undoubtedly have succeeded save for the fact that, seeking a confident in the transaction, she had been unfortunate enough to select a stool-pigeon who immediately informed the authorities of what was going on.

Clermont was taken back to Philadelphia and safely landed in the Eastern Penitentiary. He made frequent attempts to escape, but failed. He attempted to bribe keepers, feigned insanity, and secreted tools.

At one time he complained of a pain in his back, and a porous adhesive plaster was applied as a remedy. Shortly afterward, upon taking his bath, he evinced so much care for the medicinal application that suspicion was aroused, and between the plaster and his skin several fine saws were discovered, evidently being furnished him

by friends from without.

During his entire imprisonment his wife was assiduous in her attentions; never faltering in her love for him or in her efforts to minister to him.

Long confinement and the restraints of prison life soon began to have their effect upon him, however, and after a brief illness, he died in his cell, cared for to the last by the faithful woman who loved him.

Devotion's Votaries

This is but another evidence of talents wasted, another story of a weak yielding to the siren voice of temptation. This man fell a victim to the dazzling allurements of wealth dishonestly obtained, and punishment, sure and inexorable, overtook him.

Immediately upon his decease, his effects were examined, and several large stones were discovered in the hollow handle of his shaving brush. These stones were supposed to be diamonds and of great value.

Mrs. Dumel, who had been deceived into marriage with him, and who was in straitened circumstances, having lost nearly all she possessed through his dishonest machinations, immediately wrote to me in regard to the matter. She believed that the diamonds thus found were those of which she had been despoiled.

A visit was paid to the widow of the dead criminal, and according to her statement, the stones were simply paste imitations, designed to be used as bribes to her husband's jailers.

What occasioned surprise was the seeming forbearance displayed by these two women toward each other. Each married to the same man, each it is supposed, loved him. But no word of complaint was breathed and each sympathized with the other in the wrecking of their two lives.

The man is dead, his story is told. But what irony that he could leave behind him such devotion that many an upright man craves in vain.

SUICIDES ARE SAPS

"Mugs" Kelly, Private Dick,
Tackles the Case of the
Man Who Tried to
Kill Himself Too
Often!



I socked him and he dropped

By **DONALD BAYNE HOBART**

Author of "Cell Murder Mystery," "Hunchback House," etc.

YOU take a rich young dame, one of these smooth dark guys that might be a crook, a detective who is kinda repulsive-looking but nice, a string of pearls worth a hundred grand, mix thoroughly and what have you? I'll tell you, a hell of a mess, and I ought to know because I'm the detective.

"Mugs" Kelly is the name, and I'm big and tough, with a face that doesn't leave any doubt about it. Sometimes I can startle myself by just looking in a mirror, and vice-versa, for I stood in front of a glass one time and it cracked. But I'm a fairly good private detective, even if I have to say so myself with unbecoming modesty.

But this trouble all starts when Miss Susan Foster, of the society Fosters, comes tripping into my office. She takes one good look at me and sinks weakly into a chair.

"You're Mugs Kelly," she says, as though there wasn't the slightest chance of her being mistaken, and I might be Tyrone Power, or Robert

Taylor or something. "The face fits."

That last crack kinda got me. Sure, I have a face that a steam-roller would love to crush, but up to now I hadn't thought it was something that was just pinned on the front of my head careless-like.

"So does yours!" I snaps, and then when I get a good look at her I see that I wasn't lying. She's a young and pretty blonde with a figure that is something grand. "What can I do for you?"

"Keep my uncle from committing suicide, protect my pearl necklace from being stolen, and—" she looked at me anxiously—"perhaps prevent me from being murdered!"

"All right," I says flippant-like. "But no washing. I only do light housework."

"Please, Mr. Kelly, I'm serious!"

I realized that she meant it, so I dropped the patter and got down to cases. Seems that she lived with her uncle out in Westchester. They were rich, and he had given her the hun-

dred-thousand-dollar pearl necklace for a Christmas present.

DURING the last couple of months the uncle has been acting strange—talking about life not being worth living. I've heard that line of beefing more times than I can count, and I still claim that suicides are saps. Anything ain't never bad enough for them to kill themselves over; though maybe they think so at the time.

Anyway I learn that the uncle, whose name is Dawson Foster, has insisted that Susan keep her pearl necklace at the house, and not stick it in a safety deposit box where it would be safe. The Foster gal figures that somebody might try and murder her to get the necklace—she keeps it hid in her bedroom—but it don't make much sense to me.

I agree to take the job when she produces some nice new-looking folding money with large numbers on the bills, and I don't mean the serial numbers either. She leaves and it's arranged that I'm to arrive at the Foster residence that evening.

About seven that evening I arrive. Just as I'm strolling up the driveway to the house a slender, dark-haired guy comes running toward me.

"Get out!" he snarls. "No strangers are allowed on these grounds! Get out, I tell you!"

"Boo!" I says softly but firmly.

The dark-haired guy keeps on coming toward me and accidentally bumps his chin against my fist. Oh, all right, maybe I did sock him. Anyway he drops to the ground; out cold. From the house I hear two shots and then a dame screaming.

I made the front porch in nothing flat, and I have my .45 automatic in my hand. Those two reports I had heard hadn't been made by a cap-pistol.

I barge in through the front door. Susan Foster is standing in the living room, looking down at a gray-haired

guy sprawled on the floor. There's a gun close to him.

"Uncle Dawson!" says Susan. "He's done it! He's killed himself!"

"Let me take a look!" I tell her.

I drop my gun back into the holster and examine the old guy. He's got a powder burn on his left cheek where a bullet almost hit him, but that's all. Looks to me like Dawson Foster tried to shoot himself a couple of times, but didn't succeed, and then fainted from excitement. He's not even hurt.

"Is—is he—" asks Susan, then gives a gasp as the old boy sits up. "Uncle, are you all right?"

"Yes, I think so," he says, as I help him to his feet. "Who is this man?"

Susan tells him who I am, and things quiet down around the Foster place for awhile. I learn they have the usual collection of servants: a maid, cook, and butler. But I don't see the guy I had to sock outside. I'd thought he might be one of the help around the place, but it don't look like it.

JUST before dinner is announced a dark-haired guy dressed in dinner clothes shows up. Sure, it was the same guy who ordered me off the place. His name is Juan Manuel, and he seems to rate pretty high with Susan. I can see he doesn't like me any, and if I had my choice of being left alone on a desert island with him or a man-eating tiger I'd take vanilla.

After dinner the evening becomes a nightmare, for by ten that night Foster has tried to commit suicide four times, and made a mess of it every time. First, he tries to shoot himself as I discovered when I got to the house. Next I find him hanging in his bedroom and cut him down in time. There's an overturned chair about twenty feet away. Next I find him standing on a third-story window ledge just about to fall. I get the window open and grab him just in time. When I find him in the kitchen with his head in the oven and the gas

turned on I get tired of it.

"Listen, you!" I snaps when I get him revived. "I'm sick of this. If you don't stop this foolishness I'll put a bullet in you myself. You'll be dead then all right."

"No!" shouts Dawson Foster. "I don't want to die. I thought I did when I had Juan ask Susan to help me and she refused—but I've changed my mind. I don't want to die."

He means it, too. Here is a guy who has tried to kill himself four times and he don't want to die. It starts me thinking, and then it dawns on me. I remember that I haven't seen Susan or Juan Manuel for some time, and go looking for them. When I am passing Susan's room I hear voices—and I stop and listen. The door is standing open a little.

"You understand that I hate to do this, Susan," says Manuel. "But I must insist that you give me the necklace." He laughs nasty-like. "You see your uncle hired me to steal it."

I looked in through the crack in the door. Manuel is covering the girl with an automatic and she has the necklace in her hand.

"I won't give it to you," says Susan. "You—your thief!"

"Drop the gun, Manuel!" I tell him as I cover him with my automatic.

He tries to turn his gun on me, so I have to shoot him in the arm. He drops the gun all right.

"You nearly got away with it, Manuel," I tell him. "First trying to murder this girl's uncle—and then stealing the pearls."

"Murder!" snarls Manuel. "You're crazy! He tried to commit suicide."

"He did the first time," I says. "He

asked you to go to Susan, to tell her that he was in trouble financially." I glanced at the door. Foster is standing there listening and he nodded when he hears me. "When she refused Foster was so desperate that he tried to kill himself, but lost his nerve."

BUT Juan didn't tell me of Uncle asking my help," says Susan. "I would have given it to him gladly."

"Of course Manuel didn't," I says. "He wanted that hundred-grand necklace for himself. He faked those last three suicides that Foster was supposed to have attempted. A hanging man isn't likely to have strength enough to kick the chair he is standing on twenty feet away. Nor is he likely to climb out on a window ledge and then close the window behind him, or stick his head in a gas oven. Your uncle was knocked out then."

"That's true," says Foster. "I have been afraid to talk—even though he did try to kill me three times. He—he threatened to murder Susan also if I did not remain silent. And I did not think anyone would believe that I had not tried to commit suicide again."

"Most people wouldn't," I says. "But just like I always says suicides are saps—and when a guy like you tries it four times, Mr. Foster, I figure there is something wrong or you are just plain crazy. You didn't seem crazy to me. Besides Manuel is too anxious to keep me away from this place." I grin at the dark-haired guy who is glaring at me and holding his wounded arm. "Sure, suicides are saps, but most times murderers are just plain dumb!"

For Interesting Information About the Next Issue, See

OFF THE RECORD

—on Page 113

DEATH IS EAGER

Detective Shea Roams China-
town's Alleys and Rouses

Up Rats

By
**NORMAN A.
DANIELS**

*Author of "Hot Ice Gamble," "Village of the
Missing," etc.*

DETECTIVE Patrick Shea of the Chinatown Squad paced his beat restlessly. It was a far stretch from the brilliantly lighted windows of Broadway and Maiden Lane to the dark alleys, the smell of joss sticks and incense, and sometimes the significant odor of opium that emanated from some of Chinatown's doorways.

Shea had served two years on the Jewelry Squad before this transfer and he still didn't know whether he liked it or not.

He stopped outside Ah Foy's silk shop and regarded it with his customary suspicion. He had picked up scraps of information to show that Ah Foy had gained his auspicious start in life by the sale of the juice of the poppy. True, Ah Foy had stopped that long before and now devoted himself to the importation and sale of China's finest silks. "But with the war and all going on in China," Shea mused, "he can't be getting his silks so easy or so cheap. He might be tempted back into dope peddling—you



The blackjack had been wrested from him

never can tell."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw one of the thick curtains masking Ah Foy's windows draw back an inch and then drop into place again. Someone had been watching him, waiting for him to move on. Shea never disregarded anything that hinted of the illegal. He had learned that even the smallest things could hold significance, especially in Chinatown.

Darting into one of the evil-smelling alleys, he gained a vantage post from which he could observe Ah Foy's establishment. Not that he wanted to meet Ah Foy. He'd done that his first night on duty. From then on he had carefully avoided the yellow, wrinkled old man. For Ah Foy had a well earned reputation as being the fastest, most voluble talker in all Chinatown.

Ah Foy, hands deep in the wide sleeves of his black silk coat, shuffled out of the alley beside his shop, looked up and down the street for a long moment and then hurried north. Shea promptly followed, clinging to the shadows.

The elderly Chinese turned sharply and headed down another alley with Shea half a block behind him. Shea reached the mouth of the alley in time to see Ah Foy revealed by faint yellow light from a rear window. Two other men, similarly dressed in black silk garb, emerged from the darkness, ranged themselves on either side of the old man and the trio moved on with hardly a pause.

Shea flattened himself against a building. Ah Foy wasn't talking, wasn't saying a word. The detective was puzzled.

The three plodded on while Shea followed carefully to avoid tripping over debris. The men ahead came out on a quiet street, stopped. Ah Foy turned quickly. With the other men at his side he retreated deep into the darkness and huddled there, like a man afraid.

A car pulled up to the curb, the lights doused. A man alighted from the front seat, a man in evening clothes. He turned and lifted a small bag out of the car. It almost threw him, despite its small size. Whatever it contained must have been unusually heavy. He was half bent over as he scurried for the alley.

Shea drew his gun and stole forward. The four men, a hundred feet ahead of him, were engrossed in their bit of business, silhouetted against the light from the alley mouth.

Ah Foy fumbled in the sleeves of his coat, pulled out a long, fat envelope and passed it to the stranger in evening clothes. He accepted it, stuffed it into his pocket and with his foot moved the heavy bag toward Ah Foy. Then he bowed politely and turned.

Instantly things happened. One of Ah Foy's companions ran forward half a dozen steps. His right arm shot high and a blade gleamed. It swept down in a murderous arc. Raised again, it no longer gleamed. It was wet and red. The man in evening clothes staggered a few steps and caved to the cobblestones.

Shea blew a shrill blast on his whistle and let go with his gun. He sent the first shot high, hoping the trio might surrender. But they ducked for cover. Shea's cat-like walk had become a run. His footfall came down on something smooth and round—a tin can perhaps. His feet flew out from under him, he went over on his back, his gun clattering from his hand.

DAZED momentarily, he became aware that men were running toward him. He reached for his blackjack, had it free, but he didn't get a chance to use it. Someone kicked him alongside the head. The blackjack had been wrested from him. Another foot crashed against his windpipe, strangling him. He saw his blackjack upraised, start down; saw that his attacker was dressed like a Chinese.

Not that it made much difference. A dead man can't identify people and Shea figured he was as good as dead.

He had one last trick and he pulled it. His two feet shot up and out. They hit his strangler just below the knees, brought him down partially and the slashing blackjack whizzed harmlessly by instead of shattering his skull. He rolled over and over, pulled himself up and reeled a few steps. The three men were gone.

He swore softly, whipped out his flashlight and sent its ray sweeping through the darkness. He found his gun. Somewhere a radio car howled and heavy feet were running toward the alley. Shea broke into a run himself. He wanted the first look at the man Ah Foy and his cohorts had murdered, wanted a look inside that fat envelope Ah Foy had given him.

The dead man lay sprawled on the dirty cobblestones, his arms outflung. A small river of blood ran between the stones. Shea unbuttoned the dead man's coat, extracted the fat envelope. He ripped open the sealed flap. The envelope was filled with neatly wrapped decks of dope. Enough morphine, or possibly heroin, to put a hundred addicts in dreamland for a week.

Shea turned the ray of his flash on the dead man's face. He gasped. This was no ordinary drug peddling murder. The dead man was Jay Pennington, one of Maiden Lane's most prominent jewelers.

"What the devil was he doing in Chinatown at this hour of night, handing over a suitcase full of something heavy for that envelope of dope?" Shea breathed. "It doesn't make sense. This stuff is worth about one grand. What did he pay off in—pennies?"

A hail came from the mouth of the alley. Quickly Shea turned the flashlight on himself. Chinatown cops sometimes got a bit hasty, especially in dark, dismal alleys. Shea had no desire to be featured on the front

pages of the tabs as a victim of a brother officer's gun.

"What the hell?" the patrolman who had rushed toward him exclaimed, staring at the corpse. "What is this—a snatch? Or did some clip joint dump him here?"

"Neither," Shea snapped. "Radio car coming. You stay here. Send one of the radio boys to phone headquarters. The stiff is Jay Pennington, worth about a million. Three Chinks carved him up. I'm going after them."

He hurried to the street and rushed back toward Ah Foy's silk shop. It was dark, but he pounded on the door until a sleepy-eyed boy let him in.

"Ah Foy—him pray to ancestors," the boy answered Shea's question. "You want see—you wait."

Shea pushed the boy out of his path. His gun was again in his hand. Ah Foy had stood by while Pennington was murdered. Shea hated a double-crosser. Even if Pennington had entered the dope racket, he must have paid for the drugs. One thing puzzled Shea. Why hadn't the murderers taken the drugs back? He'd make Ah Foy talk, and talk plenty.

He brushed through thick drapes and found himself in a small room. There was an image of Buddha in a corner. A small altar gave off wisps of smoke from the joss sticks. Kneeling before the image was Ah Foy. There was no mistaking the elderly Chinaman's slender frame.

Shea leveled his gun. "Okay, Ah Foy, you're under arrest. Get up and don't stuff your hands into your sleeves. You catch?"

But Ah Foy didn't move. Shea sidestepped carefully, keeping one eye on the drapery covered doorway. Either Ah Foy was faking, enticing him close enough to strike—or—

Suddenly the kneeling man seemed to sway a little, then pitched over on his side. Shea gulped. He saw the narrow shaft of a Chinese dagger

(Continued on page 104)

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(Continued from page 103)

sticking out of Ah Foy's throat in front. One of the dead Chinaman's hands was still wrapped around the handle of the knife in the vain attempt he had made to withdraw it.

SHEA didn't touch anything until he spotted the light brown bag which Pennington had carried. It was in a dark corner of the room. He used his handkerchief in opening the catches and stared in amazement at a beautiful assortment of—muddy stones. A peculiar odor emanated from them—like the smell of fish just out of water.

"I see," Shea murmured. "Pennington cheated Ah Foy and Ah Foy had one of his men kill him. Then he came back and prayed at the altar a minute before he drove that knife through his own throat. A neat way out—except I don't believe it."

He found the chattering, frightened boy in the hallway.

"Telephone," Shea shook the boy. "Where?"

The boy pointed a trembling hand toward a door. Shea called headquarters.

An hour later he walked out of the place behind the men from the morgue. Ah Foy's body preceded him on a stretcher. He watched it stowed away in the morgue wagon before he turned north, hands clasped behind his back, eyes fixed thoughtfully at the sidewalk flags moving slowly by beneath him.

The medical examiner had declared it a suicide. Inspector Mallory of Homicide had listened to Shea's story and given his snap judgment.

"He killed Pennington and knew we'd get him, especially after you tackled him and his hatchetmen. He figured it was better to die by his own hand than be strapped in the chair. Too bad you haven't a line on the birds who helped him, Shea. See what you can do."

At one o'clock Shea pulled the box at the end of his beat, listened for the buzzer to see if the desk wanted him and then slammed the door shut. He started away, walking slowly, thinking things out. He heard the squeak of a window pulley above him and involuntarily glanced up. An object came hurtling down at him.

He ducked. The falling object crashed with an astounding noise. A glance told him that it had been a small, old fashioned safe. Now it was just a mass of broken, warped metal. If it had struck him, he'd have been on the sidewalk, minus whatever brains he was accused of having.

Shea wasted no time. He went up the rickety old steps of the building, three at a time, gun ready for action. Reaching the fifth floor he saw an open door. He headed for it, kicked the door wider and stepped into a lighted office. A man in overalls lay on the floor holding his head and groaning.

Shea helped him to his feet. "What happened?" he demanded. "I'm a cop so you can talk."

The man massaged his scalp and winced at the sight of blood on his fingers.

"I don't know for sure," he groaned. "I heard somebody in here so I looked in. There ain't supposed to be nobody in the offices at this hour. I saw a couple of guys, dressed in black silk suits. I just had a glimpse but they were Chinks sure enough. One of 'em cracked me with something that felt like the Chrysler Building. That's all I know, officer."

"They tried to crack me too—with a safe," Shea said morosely. "If it hadn't been for the creaky window pulleys, they'd have succeeded. Come back after you see a doctor. I may need your help."

Shea walked over to a desk in the office, consulted the phone book and noted Pennington's home address. He

(Continued on page 106)



Sells 19 Features in Six Months

"I have sold, up to date, nineteen features to the Detroit Free Press and have been made their correspondent here," writes Mrs. Leonard Sanders of 218 Union St., Milford, Mich., on completing the N. I. A. course. Her skilful handling of feature stories was the reason given by the editor for her appointment. Mrs. Sanders' first feature was sold less than four months after she enrolled with N. I. A.

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(Continued from page 105)

phoned for an ambulance for the injured janitor. Then he descended to the street and hailed a taxi. He was leaving his beat, a violation the rule book said could be condoned only in an emergency. Shea figured an attempt on his life was emergency enough.

He paid off the driver and bolted into the big apartment building where Pennington lived. Ascending to the jeweler's apartment, he saw a light under the door and jabbed the bell. Someone approached in almost a rush. Shea deftly transferred his gun from holster to side pocket and kept his finger on the trigger.

The door was not merely opened, it was flung open. But the welcoming grin on the face of the opener faded into a look of amazement and fright.

Shea chuckled. "Who'd you think it would be, Norse—Santa Claus?" Shea asked. The man Shea addressed as Norse stepped back, made an effort to recover his composure. "I—I figured it was somebody from the Homicide Squad," he said lamely.

Shea gave a derisive grunt. "Since when have Homicide Squad dicks been greeted by guys with big grins on their pans? You were expecting a bearer of good tidings. May I come in?"

This last was asked with fine Irish sarcasm.

NORSE backed away. Shea stepped into the luxurious living room. Curiously he beheld the room's odd feature: one complete wall had been turned into a glass tank in which scores of brilliantly colored fish swam about excitedly. The water was a bit muddy.

"You're crazy, Shea." Norse fell into a chair. "Somebody from headquarters phoned and said Pennington was dead. I figured they'd be up and I—I wanted to help."

Shea pushed his big fist close to the

cowering young man's nose.

"You're a damned liar," he said. "Talk straight and talk fast. Since when was Pennington mixed up in the drug traffic? You've been working for him four years now. Talk!"

Norse retreated into the depths of the chair, afraid that the big fist would strike. Shea, in his Maiden Lane days, had been known as the toughest of tough cops.

"I'll talk, Shea," Norse whimpered. "Yes, Pennington was mixed up in a dope ring. He peddled it to big shots. He used to get his stuff from some Chink named Ah Foy. But I didn't have a hand in it, honest I didn't."

"I can believe the last part," Shea said. "You wouldn't have the nerve. Okay, Norse. Get your hat and coat, we're going down town."

"Down town?" Norse gulped. "I haven't done anything. I didn't sell any dope."

Shea was yanking Norse to his feet when the door bell buzzed.

"Answer it," Shea ordered in a whisper. "And don't block the door unless you want a slug in your belly."

Norse obeyed. He let in a gangling, beady-eyed man who, upon seeing Shea, grinned.

"Whose your pal, Norse?" Shea asked.

The man answered himself. "Nick Ferrari. So what, copper?"

"How'd you know I was a cop?"

Ferrari laughed. "Flat feet and flat head. Put the rod away, copper. I haven't done anything, see? Neither has Norse. He's a pal of mine and we had a date to do some drinking, that's all. You gonna stop us?"

"Not at all," said Shea. "I'm just taking you both down to headquarters. I don't care how much drinking you do there, so long as it's water. Come on."

Shea had a fleeting premonition that things weren't right. The two seemed
(Continued on page 108)



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(Continued from page 107)

too willing to go with him. He stepped out into the hallway, stopped dead—and knew why. The wrong end of a gun was pressing against the small of his back. One of Ferrari's pals had been waiting.

"Drop the roscoe, copper. Come on—drop it or you'll get it right here."

Norse edged toward the stairway but Ferrari grabbed him. Norse squealed in alarm. Ferrari hit him a hard blow across the mouth, then dragged the struggling jeweler's assistant back to the door and kicked him inside.

The gunman backed Shea into the apartment. The door closed. The gunman came around to face the detective. He was a short, ugly man with a peculiar glitter in his eyes. Shea knew the signs. This gunman was a hophead, primed to the gills and ready to kill at the wink of an eye.

"So the wise dick got this far, huh?" the man sneered at him. "Too bad for you that the safe didn't land on your noggin, Shea. Your troubles would have been over."

Shea sized him up. "So it was you two mugs. That's one to mark down in the book, boys. I'll put it right alongside the charge of murder facing you. Two murders in fact. Nice, kind hearted guys you are. You let Ah Foy kneel at his little altar and pray before you jammed that knife into his throat."

"Shut up," Ferrari snapped. Ferrari was jittery. His courage had not been reinforced by dope. "Keep that trap of yours closed or I'll do it for you permanent."

"Yeah," the short man breathed. "Let him have it. He goes out anyhow."

"Not yet," Ferrari ordered. "First I want to find out how much this rat Norse told him. I never did trust this heel and there's no telling who else he talked to. Frisk the copper."

The hophead went over Shea. Shea

shuddered with distaste at his touch. The hophead overlooked the badge, pinned under the lapel of his coat, and Shea didn't remind him of it. The hophead jerked his neck toward a door at the end of the room.

"In there, while we sweat Norse. I'd let you watch and see a real third degree only I think maybe you might offer him some advice. He don't need none except from us. Move."

SHEA backed toward the door. Ferrari opened it, put the flat of his hand against Shea's face and gave him a mighty shove. Shea tripped and reeled backward. He fell heavily.

Ferrari spat in his direction and issued a warning. "You're on the eighth floor, copper. If you open the window and yell for help, I'll plug you in half a second."

The room was pitch dark. Shea wondered why the two killers had given him the grace of even a few minutes of life. He heard Norse give a muffled scream of agony. He found himself sweating sympathetically. Those two killers wanted to know how much had been spilled about the murders and they didn't care how they elicited the information. When they were finished with Norse, he would be next.

Another yelp from Norse told him he wouldn't have long to wait. Norse wasn't the type to stand much pain. He'd sing like a canary in a minute. Shea found a light switch. He was in a small study. There was a desk, a chair and a bookcase. He opened the desk, found a small black covered book, skimmed through it. Even in this tight spot he was doing his job.

He needed a weapon—a sturdy weapon that might be of some use against guns. He thought of ripping off the leg of the chair, but that would make a racket, arouse Ferrari and his drug soaked partner, and bring them in to murder him ahead of time.

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

"A break," he muttered, "even a small break like that creaky window that saved me from being smashed by the safe—"

Creaky window! Hastily he unpinned his badge, catfooted to the one window. He worked furiously, using the edge of his badge as a screw driver. His sweating labors were rewarded. The wall panelling came away, revealing the heavy cast iron sashweights. He untied them both, hefted them in his hands with satisfaction. No better skull-smashers could be imagined.

He placed one of them on the bureau where it would be available for quick use. The other he balanced in his right hand, standing well back from the door. Norse wasn't yelling any more, which meant he was talking a blue streak.

The minutes crawled by. The weight felt like a ton in Shea's hand, but the heavier it felt the better Shea felt, and at last he heard footsteps approaching the door. A key turned in the lock and the door swung open. Ferrari was the first to step in, his gun dangling carelessly in his fist.

Shea let fly with the iron weight. It hit Ferrari full in the chest, bowled him over and knocked him completely out. The hophead screamed. Shea snatched up the second weight and charged. The hophead fired only one shot before Shea was upon him. The bullet plowed into the wall. Shea brought the weight down and broke the hophead's gun wrist.

Norse was making for the door. Shea beat him to it, hurled the younger man into a chair and stood over him, feet spread apart.

The hophead moaned in agony. Shea kept him covered with his retrieved weapon. Ferrari was still unconscious.

"You talked to those mugs," Shea snapped at Norse. "Now you'll talk to me. You put stones in that bag which

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Pennington turned over to Ah Foy. Those stones came from his aquarium—they even smelled fishy. What did you take out of that bag?"

"I won't tell," Norse answered hoarsely. "You can't make me and if you torture me like those—those others did, I'll tell the judge and jury. You can't make me talk."

"I don't have to," Shea growled. "I know. I found Pennington's record book. He used to buy gold in the form of old rings, watches, pins. He melted it down, turned it into pure gold and fashioned it into bricks. He was delivering what he supposed was the bricks to Ah Foy, and the envelope which your two pals gave him should have contained money."

"Ah Foy was buying pure gold from private sources because he couldn't get it from the banks. He wanted the gold to transport to China as his donation to aid in the war against Japan. Ah Foy's brother is a general far inland. He told me that, months ago. American money wouldn't be of use to him but gold—pure gold—that would be of value. Ah Foy died for a cause. You—like the louse you are—exchanged the gold for stones taken from Pennington's tanks."

Norse said nothing but his face was confession enough.

Shea manacled the hophead and Norse together. He then phoned Inspector Mallory and detailed what had happened.

HANGING up, he straddled a chair and said: "Norse—you kept the gold bars here. Ferrari and his pal didn't want to take any chances on losing the stuff. You figured you wouldn't give it back until they turned over your cut in cash. You were smart there because if they laid their hands on that gold, you'd have been killed. Where did you hide the stuff?"

"Find it," Norse said sullenly. "Ferrari couldn't. Neither will you."
(Concluded on page 112)

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(Concluded from page 111)

I won't tell where it is until the District Attorney promises me immunity."

"You're in this right up to your neck, Norse. The gold won't mitigate the circumstances. Besides I know where it is. Give me two minutes with that big fish tank and I'll find it. I'm betting ten to one you buried the stuff in the sandy bottom of the tank. The water is still a little muddy."

Shea faced the hophead. "Punks like you deserve what you're going to get. To provide a motive for Pennington's death, you planted that dope on him and kept Ah Foy's money for yourself. You wanted to make it look like a drug ring murder. You dressed like Chinks too, only you didn't fool me. I saw you meet Ah Foy in the alley. You stuck guns in his ribs. I knew you weren't friends or Chinese because if you were, Ah Foy would have talked a blue streak. He was the fastest, most willing talker in Chinatown."

Shea—soon to be Lieutenant Shea—went on. "Norse was the only person who knew Pennington's business. He tipped you off."

Norse cursed weakly. Outside a siren howled.

Shea grinned. "You'll be going out of here between a couple of cops, Norse—while I disturb the poor fish again. In a way, Norse, you and your pals remind me of those fish, except that they're swimming and you've been hooked. You'll have time to think over the error of your ways in the deathhouse. Ah Foy has gone to join his ancestors, but where you're going is another place entirely."

READ

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

EVERY ISSUE

—FOR THE BEST IN MYSTERY

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

OFF THE RECORD

THE Black Book of Crime records the sensational, successful cases of Jonathan Drake—New York's ace manhunter—who brings the latest scientific discoveries, plus his physical strength and consummate skill, to bear upon the lurking crimes that fester beneath the surface of civilization.

This month we bring you the second of a new series of novels taken from the Black Book of Crime. We would like to have you drop us a line, telling us what you think about it. It is the policy of this magazine to invite the readers to assist in the editing, and your comments, suggestions and opinions are always gratefully received.

Death of a Star

In the next issue we will present another novel from the Black Book of Crime—**THE WINTER KING KILLINGS**, by Charles S. Strong.

When Jonathan Drake arrived aboard the *Griffith* in New York Harbor, he was expecting nothing more than a routine job of investigation into the business of a Winter Olympic Star Sports Group. He had no idea that before he reached the upper deck he would be faced with the fiendish murder of the piquant and attractive Scandinavian skating star, Svana Hanson.

She was found just inside the deck window of her cabin, with a knife buried deep in her heart. Evidence showed that the knife had been thrown from a sports deck on which scores of people were congregated. Some of them still engaged in a last game before docking, others lining the rails for a first glimpse of New York.

A Trail of Blood

The trail of bloody death moved along through the streets of New York, stalked the covered runways of Madison Square Garden, and then made a final rendezvous at Lake Placid's winter sports center.

Every page of **THE WINTER KING KILLINGS** is crowded with glamorous action and spine-chilling thrills. Remember—it's in our next issue—and it's one of the most baffling of all cases chronicled in the Black Books of Crime. You'll grip the sides of your chair as you follow a sensational series of events to their breath-taking conclusion in **THE WINTER KING KILLINGS!**

In addition, there will be several smashing short stories in the next issue, including **DOUBLE TALK**, a G-Man yarn, by Milton Lowe. Be seeing you then—and please remember to let me hear from you. Thanks!

—THE EDITOR.

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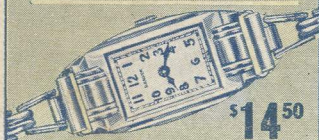
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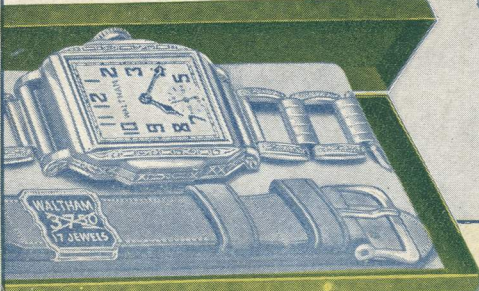


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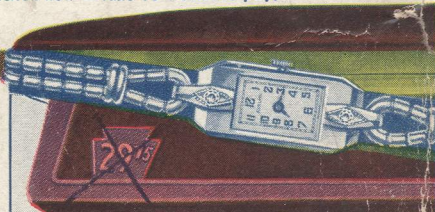
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