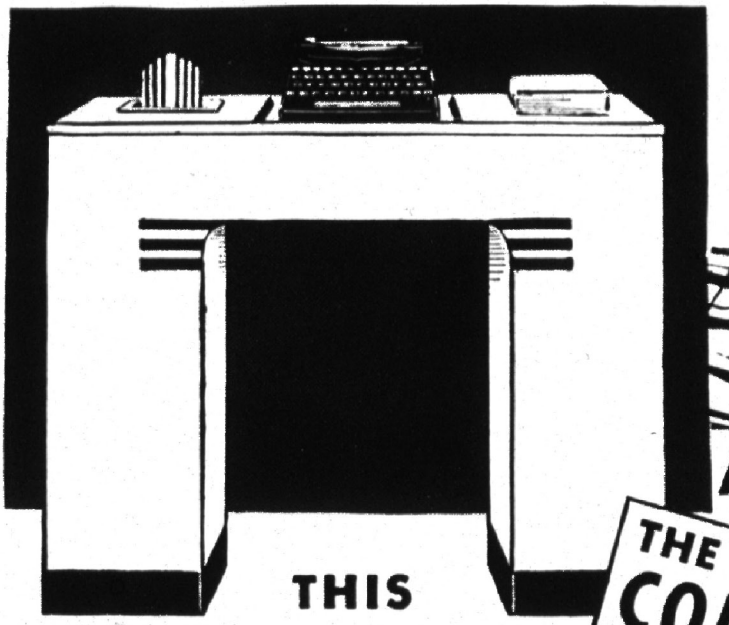

BULL'S-EYE
DETECTIVE
20c
THE JUDAS JACK-POT
by GEORGE BRUCE
FINGER MAN
by STEWART STERLING
HELL'S HARVEST
by TONY BEACON
PUPPETS OF THE MURDER MASTER
FROM THE FIRE AND BRIMSTONE OF THE LONG DEAD PAST CAME EL JEBEL HASSAM TO RULE THE LOST SOULS OF A 20TH CENTURY DEATH CULT.
A COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL BY
JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS
THE IRON RING
by JACK KOFOED
FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES



ACT NOW!

ON THIS BARGAIN OFFER.

THE COMBINATION

FOR AS LITTLE AS 10c A DAY

How easy it is to pay for this combination. Just imagine! A small good will deposit and terms as low as 10c a day to get this combination at once. You will never miss 10c a day. Become immediately the possessor of this combination. You assume no obligation by sending the coupon.

THIS BEAUTIFUL DESK FOR ONLY $1.00

WITH ANY

REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green trimmed in black and silver made of sturdy fibre board now available for only one dollar ($1.00) to purchasers of a Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble. It will hold six hundred (600) pounds. This combination gives you a miniature office at home. **Mail the coupon today.**

THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU

LEARN TYPING FREE

To help you even further, you get Free with this special offer a 24-page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent Free while this offer holds.

SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

The Remington Deluxe Noiseless Portable is light in weight, easily carried about. With this offer Remington supplies a beautiful carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood bound with a special Dupont Fabric.

SPECIFICATIONS

ALL ESSENTIAL FEATURES of large standard office machines appear in the Noiseless Deluxe Portable—standard 4-row keyboard; back spacer; margin stops and margin release; double shift key; two color ribbon and automatic reverse; variable line spacer; paper fingers; makes as many as seven carbons; takes paper 9.5" wide; writes lines 8.2" wide, black key cards and white letters, rubber cushioned feet.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

The Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable Typewriter is sold on a trial basis with a money-back guarantee. If, after ten days trial, you are not entirely satisfied, we will take it back, paying all shipping charges and refunding your good will deposit at once. You take no risk.

SEND COUPON NOW!

Remington Rand Inc. Dept 318-1
465 Washington St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Tell me, without obligation, how to get a Free Trial of a new Remington Noiseless Deluxe Portable, including Carrying Case and Free Typing Booklet, for as little as 10c a day. Send Catalogue.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

BULL'S-EYE DETECTIVE

T. T. SCOTT, President and General Manager — MALCOLM REISS, Editor

A Complete Supernatural Mystery-Detective Novel

THREE BIG MYSTERY NOVELS

FIVE DETECTIVE-MYSTERY SHORT STORIES

52

Vol. 1 — A FICTION HOUSE PUBLICATION — Fall, 1938

No. 1 — 461 Eighth Ave., New York City — 20c

BULL'S-EYE DETECTIVE: Published by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 461 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.

For advertising rates address: THE NEWSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Swift, salty drama of cow-country and action trails . . .

OUT in the great Southwest, in a dusty little cattle town, a man calls a name . . . Colts crash . . . a cowboy dies . . . and a range feud spreads like a grass fire. **Action!** The Pacific. . . . Night. . . . A hell-ship spawns murder beneath the Southern Cross.

ACTION STORIES specializes in the kind of hell-for-leather fiction that red-blooded men like. The stories are written by such famed names as Walt Coburn, Rollin Brown, Albert Richard Wetjen, John Starr, Frederick Nebel—the cream of fictioneers.

Get your copy today

ACTION STORIES

On Sale at all Newsstands

The romance of the West, written with action . . .

MONTANA badlands, purple deserts of Nevada, the tawny longlands of Arizona. . . . Tried-and-true LARIAT carries the smell of wind-worried junipers, the tang of range dust, the pound of stampede hoofs, the flash of Winchesters blistering the Western night.

Every issue packs at least one novel, two novelets, and half a dozen shorts by such outstanding writers as Walt Coburn, James P. Olsen, Bart Cassidy, Eugene Cunningham. The most for your money in ranch-and-range romance.

Get your copy today

Lariat
STORY MAGAZINE

On Sale at all Newsstands

FOOTBALL IS KING!

The Autumn's favorite—FOOTBALL STORIES—fields a potent line-up of fact and fiction. **THREE BIG NOVELETS: Mr. All-America** by William R. Cox, **Fight On—Army!** by Herbert L. McNary, and **First-Half Hero** by Linton Davies. Three big features: **Star!** by Wallace Wade, Duke's famed football mentor. **Gridiron Parade of '38,** and **Pigskin Queeriosities.** Also a large squad of short stories.

FOOTBALL STORIES ***On sale at all newsstands!***

From Persia's mystic minarets to Gotham's gleaming spires he came—sorcerer from the past! When Hassan raised his bloody claws, strong men and lovely women fell beneath his fearful spell—evil puppets of the murder master!

A Complete Mystery Novelet

PUPPETS OF THE MURDER MASTER

By JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

SAUNDERS GRAYSON moved restlessly in his seat in the lounge car of the train, impatient for them to reach the Pennsylvania Station. The trip from the Middle West to New York had seemed maddeningly slow—after that strange, frightened phone call from Evelyn the day before—even though he was traveling on a speedy Limited. His blunt nosed automatic, carried in a holster strapped under his left armpit, formed an awkward bulge and rested uncomfortably against his ribs.

Although he had done quite a bit of pistol target practice while in college, he had never since carried a gun. Something very strange must be happening at the Lafarge house in New York, or Evelyn would never have phoned him as she did.

People were more likely to take Saunders Grayson for an army officer or an explorer than a quite staid and very common-sense young business man. He stood just over six feet tall, and was broad shouldered and wiry. His square jaw and heavy eyebrows gave him a reckless, devil-may-care appearance that had often fooled people. They had told Saunders at college that he had a future in science if he cared to go on with it, but he had finally decided to take up a business career instead.

Next month Saunders was to marry Evelyn Lafarge. They had decided upon a spring wedding when his firm sent him out west to take charge of all their western branches. Evelyn was the daughter of Doctor Pierre Larfarge, who was a wealthy and distinguished scientist of world-wide repute. Saunders had not planned to come back East for two weeks yet, but Evelyn had reached him by long distance telephone at his hotel about dinner time the previous evening.

The girl's voice had sounded frightened, distraught, quite unlike her usual calm and light-hearted self.

"Saunders!" she had said without any preliminaries, her voice low and guarded as though she feared to be overheard, "Can you come to New York at once? I'm scared to death."

"But—but what's the matter?" he asked, "What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know, that's the worst part of it. But I'm sure that some terrible danger menaces Dad and all of us. Please come darling, and you'd better come armed."

"I'll leave on the midnight train," he said, "But can't you tell me something more about what has happened?"

"I've just slipped out to a phone booth around the corner and don't dare talk any longer," she said, "Hurry, darling. Goodbye!"

At last the train pulled into the station. Saunders gave his bags to a colored porter and followed him to a taxi, glancing at his watch. He should reach the Lafarge house a little before five-thirty. Thank God the journey was nearly over. Saunders was very definitely worried. Evelyn was not in any way a nervous or excitable type, and he was sure she would never have phoned him in that way without good reason.

Finally the taxi drew up before the big, old-fashioned brownstone house on the upper west side where Pierre Lafarge still lived with a calm disregard for the fact that most of the neighborhood had long since gone over to apartment houses. Saunders hurried up the tall stoop in the spring twilight, idly noticing that two roughly dressed men were standing in the shadows of an alleyway by one of the tall apartment buildings across the street. He was admitted by Hilsing, the elderly Lafarge butler, who greeted him with his usual impeturbable calm. Nothing seemed to be wrong.

"Miss Lafarge here?" Saunders asked breathlessly.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Grayson. She's in the drawing-room and expecting you."

EVELYN LAFARGE was tall and slender and beautiful, with coal black hair and her father's gray eyes. At the moment she was wearing a dark green satin evening gown whose simple lines lent added glamour to her slender beauty. A big white chiffon handkerchief was knotted around her left wrist. When Saunders stepped into the drawing-room she came to meet him with both hands outstretched. She was smiling as she gave him her lips, but in her gray eyes there was a trace of a haunting and repressed fear.

After a few minutes, Saunders drew her gently down beside him on the divan.

"Now," he said, "Tell me what it's all about."

"About what?"

"*You* know what I mean. That phone call last night. What is the matter? Why did you send for me so hurriedly?"

For a long moment she hesitated, twisting and untwisting the square of chiffon knotted to her wrist. Then she leaned back.

"Oh—I guess I wasn't quite myself last night. Some queer things have been happening, but they're probably not too serious."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, there have been two attempts to rob the house. An attempt was made on Dad's life. I myself have been followed twice when I have left the house."

"Has your father any enemies?"

"Not that I know of. He can't account for it either."

"What do the police say about it all?"

"That probably some gangsters were planning to abduct either Dad or I, but that they must have abandoned the attempt now that so much fuss has been raised. The detectives are watching the house. There's really nothing about the situation to hold you here, dear. Just visit with me for a few days, and then you can go back west again."

There was something wrong! For the moment Saunders pretended to take the girl's story at its face value, but he was not fooled. He knew his financée too well to believe that she could have been so agitated one night and then laugh it off the following day. In a way she seemed to be playing a part. It was almost as though she was shielding someone, or else had been threatened or frightened into silence. But he knew that Evelyn Lafarge was a courageous girl and probably not one to be easily scared. Well, he would let the matter drop for the moment until he learned a little more about the situation.

A little later Saunders went up to dress for dinner. He opened his bag, and hung his coat in the closet of the guest room assigned to him, and with a feeling of relief he unstrapped the shoulder holster. In any case, there was no need to lug the gun around with him at dinner tonight. For a moment he went to the window and peeped out through the curtains.

Two men still lurked in that alley across the way. A black touring car was rolling slowly by in the street, and one of the men raised his hand in a gesture that must have been some kind of a signal. Saunders supposed they were the detectives assigned to watch the house. The thing still didn't make sense. If gangsters had intended abducting either Lafarge or his daughter, as might conceivably be the case in view of the scientist's wealth, they would certainly have never made a second attempt after the first one was blocked. There were too many other potential victims for them to take that chance. No—there was something more than that behind this problem.

Evelyn was not around when Saunders came downstairs again, but her father called him into his study. Pierre Lafarge was a tall, lean man with a pointed gray beard and slightly stooped shoulders. The beard, and his high forehead, gave him something the appearance of a genial Mephistopheles. He was leaning against the fireplace in his study, a dim and cluttered room filled with the trophies of a lifetime spent in the twin pursuits of science and archaeology.

"COME in, Saunders, come in!" he boomed genially, waving a welcome with his cigar. "Glad to have you here. It will be a comfort to Evelyn."

"Just what *is* wrong, anyway?" Saunders asked.

"I wish I knew," Lafarge said with sudden grimness. "Shut the door and then sit down."

The two of them sat in a pair of easy chairs on either side of the hearth. Lafarge blew out a cloud of drifting cigar smoke, and scowled at it.

"Twice in the past two weeks," he said, "someone has tried to break into this house at night. The attempts were unsuccessful, for you know how I've always been a bug on burglar alarms and other precautions. Some of the things in this house are very valuable, sometimes I have large quantities of platinum and other precious metals in my laboratory upstairs. Most of my servants are armed, and are in a way a sort of little private army. But you know all that!"

Saunders nodded thoughtfully. In the past he and Evelyn had often laughed at the Doctor's unusual precautions against burglary or intrusion, a trait which they had always considered a harmless and rather amusing eccentricity. Just now it did not seem quite so funny.

"Evelyn is sure that she was followed several times when she left the house," Lafarge continued. "And two nights ago there was an apparent attempt on my life as I left my Club. Or else an attempt to abduct me—I'm not sure which. In any case, they were beaten off by Blake who killed one of the men and captured the other one. The police have him now—and I understand he has absolutely refused to say a word."

"Who s Blake?" Saunders asked. Lafarge smiled.

"A new bodyguard I recently acquired. I'll let you see him. Oh—Blake?"

HE had scarcely raised his voice above a conversational tone at the end, but instantly a door across the room was thrown open. In the portal stood a stocky, bow-legged young man whose heavily tanned face contrasted strangely with his flaxen hair and bright blue eyes. He wore a dinner coat, but somehow he did not look quite at home in it and there was about him a subtle air of open country and rugged things. At the moment his right hand was out of sight under his coat, and his eyes were watchful.

"This is Shorty Blake," Lafarge said, "He was working on a ranch near El Paso when I met him and persuaded him to come up here to New York and work for me. Shorty can just about make a six-shooter sit up and talk. Am I right, Shorty?"

"Well, I reckon I'm pretty handy with a shootin' iron," Blake said in a soft Texan drawl, grinning bashfully.

"I can't magine what is back of all this," Lafarge continued. "As I have no enemies that I know of. Evelyn has been pretty well upset by it, too. I guess it will be a great comfort to her to have you here."

"She seems very calm about it now," Saunders said slowly. Lafarge nodded.

"Yes, I have noticed quite a change in her today myself."

Just before they went into dinner another guest arrived, a man named Morley. He was introduced as a business associate of the Doctor's, and it was evidently the first time he had been to the house or met Evelyn. He seemed a rather silent man, dark browed and somehow sardonic, with a pointed mustache.

After dinner the three men had their coffee in the Doctor's study. Evelyn had gone upstairs for a while. The doorbell rang, and a moment later the butler came to the study.

"Two men to fix the radio, sir. I believe it is out of order."

"All right, Hilsing," Lafarge said absently, "Let them come right in. There's a program I want to hear later tonight."

The radio man was a short, middle-aged little chap in a badly wrinkled suit. He peered at them mildly through thick glasses and bobbed his head in greeting. His assistant, who carried a battered black bag, was a lanky youth in a soiled sweatshirt. They crossed the room to the big radio which stood against the far wall.

Lafarge and Saunders resumed their low voiced conversation. Morley was still leaning back in his chair, fiddling with a half empty cordial glass, his eyes heavy lidded and lazy. Suddenly he leaned forward, all the indolence falling away from him in an instant. He spoke in a low whisper that only reached the ears of Lafarge and the younger man, but though scarcely audible his voice was somehow sharp and compelling.

"Doctor! It is dangerous to let men in like that. Do you know either of them?"

"Oh, yes," Lafarge replied in the same low tone. "They have a shop around the corner and have done all my radio repair work for years."

"I guess it's all right then."

Morley again leaned casually back in his chair. Saunders glanced at his two dinner companions in open-mouthed astonishment, But Lafarge touched his lips in a gesture of caution and then resumed speaking of commonplace things. Saunders felt a rising excitement stirring within his breast. He could not figure what all this was about, but he sensed that there was something in the wind.

The two repairmen were at work on the radio, which they had pulled out away from the wall. The younger went in search of the butler to see if the household supplies held some tool they had neglected to bring with them. The fire on the hearth crackled softly, Lafarge's voice droned on as if he had not a care in the world. And then, from behind the closed door across the room, Saunders heard a gasping cry followed by a heavy thud.

The sounds were very faint, and for a moment Saunders thought he might have been mistaken. Then, from the suddenly tense expressions of the others, he knew that they had heard it too. Saunders leaped to his feet and crossed the room in three long strides. He jerked open the door. On the floor of the adjoining room lay the body of Shorty Blake, stabbed in the back. Crouching beside him, wiping the slim, shining blade of a long knife on the fallen

man's clothes, was the younger repair man!

For an instant there was absolute silence. The murderer looked up with his teeth bared in a soundless snarl. Lafarge and Morley had leaped to their feet. Then, from behind them, sounded a low voice that was venomous and deadly.

"Put your hands up! All three of you! Not a sound!" The elder repairman was crouching in the middle of the room, a short-barreled automatic in each hand!

THEY had no choice. Commanded to stand shoulder to shoulder by the far wall, they moved slowly across the room. Their younger captor jumped over the body of his victim and came in, shifting the knife to his left hand and pulling a black-jack from his pocket. He sidled slowly up to the three prisoners, while his companion commanded sharply:

"Turn around and face the wall!"

Saunders had no doubt that one or more of them would be struck down from behind as soon as their backs were turned. The younger man was directly beside him now. Saunders glanced at Morley, and received a just perceptible nod of encouragement. Well—he would take a chance. It was better than being stabbed in the back like the luckless Blake. Saunders had once been an amateur boxer of considerable note. Wheeling like a flash, he drove a hard right squarely to the jaw of the man beside him.

His head snapped back and he fell across a small table, overturning it with a crash. The knife and the black-jack flew across the room. A fraction of a second after Saunders' fist went home a shot rang out—but no bullet came toward *him*. At the same moment as Saunders struck, Morley had dropped one hand into the pocket of his Tuxedo and fired through the cloth. The bullet truck the elder radio-man squarely between the eyes.

"Stout feller!" Morley shouted, grinning wolfishly at Saunders. Then he bounded across the room, flung open one of the windows, and blew a shrill blast on a whistle. Through the open window Saunders saw half a dozen men appear from the shadows and race toward the stoop.

"Are you from the police?" he asked. Morley grinned again.

"Deputy Inspector Kingman Morley," he said. "I asked Doctor Lafarge to invite me here to dinner tonight and to tell no one, not even his daughter, who I am. Probably it's just as well—or I'd be lying dead like that poor devil in the next room."

Lafarge shouted to the butler to admit the police, and they all turned away from the window. Then Saunders leaped forward. The man he had knocked out had recovered consciousness and was crawling across the floor toward the knife. He reached the blade before Saunders could stop him—but he turned the keen point toward his own throat and plunged the long blade home up to the hilt. Three men had died in less than a minute, and the once peaceful study looked like a shambles.

A little later the bodies had been removed, and other rugs had been brought to replace those that had been stained by blood. Morley and Lafarge sat by the fire, Saunders and Evelyn were facing them on a leather divan. The girl was pale, apparently shaken out of her unnatural calm, and she leaned heavily against her fiancé's shoulder.

"Blake's death hurts me," Lafarge said heavily. "I had become very fond of the boy in our short association. Why do you think he was cut down in cold blood in that way?"

"Because they knew who he was and wanted to get him out of the way," Morley said. "They—whoever they are—have evidently been receiving information from someone within this household."

"But what I can't understand is how a man like little Blumberg—who has been running a radio repair shop in this neighborhood for years—could turn out to be one of the gang."

"There are a lot of queer angles to the case," Morley said moodily, thumbing through the pages of a note book he had taken from his pocket. "I suppose it was well known by all your servants that you would call Blumberg if your radio went bad?"

"I suppose so."

"Then it was probably a case of deliberate sabotage by someone in the house, to get Blumberg and the other man inside tonight."

"But that's utterly impossible. I trust all my servants implicitly!" Lafarge pro-

tested. Morley shrugged with a wry smile.

"At a time like this, Doctor, I trust no one. Not even you. No offense."

"Do you think they meant to kill me?"

"No. More likely to abduct you."

"For ransom?"

"Either that, or for your scientific knowledge. Let me tell you a few things."

He hesitated a moment, studying his note book. When he looked up, Saunders noticed that his eyes were tired.

"THIS is far from an isolated incident, Doctor," he said slowly. "In the past two months there have been a dozen major crimes in different parts of the country, crimes that seem to be separate things but are all alike in one feature. *People apparently above suspicion have been involved!* Just like your radio repair man."

"But haven't any of them confessed, or talked at all?" Saunders asked. Morley smiled wryly.

"They haven't had the chance. Without exception they have been killed during the crime, or have killed themselves when caught as did the young chap you knocked out tonight, or have been mysteriously murdered while in police custody. We are closely guarding the man who was captured in the attempt on Doctor Lafarge two days ago, and are still hopeful that he may talk in the end."

"Have you any idea what lies back of all this?"

"Well, I have my own theory." Morley hesitated, and sighed. Then he smiled at them wryly. "I have a theory, all right. I haven't been working on this matter steadily for a month without getting some ideas on the subject. My theory may sound fantastic at first, but the whole string of events is fantastic and bizarre."

"Then you think . . . ?"

"I think that some sinister intelligence is directing a systematic and well planned and nation-wide campaign of crime and terrorism. They are after money—vast sums of money. Also, I have reason to believe that they want to get their hands on some of the leading scientists of the country such as yourself."

"But it hardly seems possible, here in the United States in this day and age!" Lafarge protested. Morley shrugged, and gestured at the quiet room around them.

"Would you yesterday have believed it possible that this quiet study was to see battle, murder and sudden death in the space of a few minutes tonight? Anything is possible."

"But who could be the leader, the brain behind all this?" Saunders asked. Morley shrugged.

"God knows. That's my job to find out—if I live. The most inexplicable thing about the whole weird affair is the way men who have been sober and respectable citizens all their lives suddenly blossom out as ruthless and bloodthirsty members of the gang."

One of the detective squad, busy checking up on clues in another part of the house, called Morley from the door and the Inspector left the study. Doctor Lafarge went upstairs on an errand, and Saunders and Evelyn were left alone. He turned to the girl.

"Feeling better now?" he asked. She laughed easily.

"Surely, I feel fine. It was perfectly silly of me to have sent for you as I did. Why don't you go back west tomorrow?"

Her tone was easy and casual, but that same haunting shadow lay back of her gray eyes and there were lines that were not quite natural on her finely chiseled face. For an instant he touched her lustrous hair, then drew her toward him. She gave him her lips freely, but somehow her usual warmth was lacking. As he released her and sat back across the divan, he reached a sudden resolve.

FOR an instant he surveyed her hungrily, slender and graceful in her dark green gown. Her coal black hair was gathered in a knot low on her neck, her hands were clasped loosely in her lap. Saunders sighed. She was all the world to him, this lovely girl who had in some strange way become distant and aloof instead of lighthearted and companionable. He had no idea of the nature of the barrier that had grown up between, but he knew that it was there. Suddenly he bent forward and took her hands.

"Look here, darling," he said, "There's no point in waiting until next month for our wedding, now that I've come east. Marry me right away, tomorrow or the day

after, and then we can go back west together and get away from all this mess."

Momentarily it seemed as though an internal battle were being waged behind those gray eyes that had once been so frank and merry and which were now like mysteriously shuttered windows. Then the struggle passed, leaving Evelyn Lafarge as calm and aloof as before.

"I couldn't consider it, Saunders," she said, "And you really must go back tomorrow."

"Well," he said, stung to anger at last, "I'm not going. I'm going to stick around until you become yourself again, and what do you think of that? Furthermore . . . "

HE was interrupted by the abrupt return of Lafarge and Morley. The latter was jubilant, peering at a small sheet of thin paper that had evidently been folded many times and was covered with some sort of close writing.

"This is a stroke of luck at last!" he exclaimed. "We had the two bodies searched very thoroughly, and found this paper between the inner and outer soles of one of the younger man's shoes. It seems to be in some sort of code, but we can probably have it deciphered. Or else we can use it to surprise the prisoner in the Tombs into talking."

The telephone bell, located somewhere across the house, had been ringing while Morley talked. Now Hilsing appeared in the door of the study, as impeccable and emotionless as ever.

"Headquarters wishes to speak to the Inspector on the phone," he said. "You can take the call in the extension in here."

Morley strode across the room and picked up the receiver. He spoke only in monosyllables, but his face grew dark with anger and disappointment and a sort of defeat. At last he slowly replaced the receiver and turned about to face them, leaning against the table with his head thrust forward.

"Record one more victory for the forces of evil!" he said with a sardonic twitch of his lips.

"What has happened?"

"The prisoner we have been holding in the Tombs has been killed!"

There was a long moment of hushed surprise, and then both Lafarge and Saunders asked questions at once. Morley spread his hands in a gesture of weariness.

"Fifteen minutes ago he sent word that he wanted to talk to the district attorney. Within two minutes he had been shot dead by one of the regular guards, a man twenty years in the service. The guard then shot himself in the head. The one man in our custody who might have been able to tell us something has been effectively silenced!"

As Morley and Lafarge fell into a further conversation, Evelyn rose and left the room with the remark that she would be back in a few minutes. After a few seconds, Saunders got up in turn and went too look for Hilsing. It was in his mind that a drink would do him good, and he knew he was enough of a member of the family in this house to go in search of it without bothering his host. He met the butler just outside in the hall.

"How about a brandy and soda, Hilsing?" he said.

"Yes, sir. At once, sir," the butler replied in his pontifical manner. Saunders grinned slightly.

"Doesn't anything ever disturb your equilibrium, Hilsing?" he asked.

"I try to avoid it, sir."

"So I see! I don't suppose *you* are in league with the gangsters?" The butler's heavy eyelids flickered slightly for an instant.

"Hardly, sir. Crime, I might say, is not in my line. A brandy and soda, you said? Thank you, sir."

Saunders turned back toward the study, then hesitated. Through an open door to his right, from somewhere across the house beyond the far side of a darkened room, he could just faintly hear Evelyn's voice. She was speaking in guarded tones, and was apparently talking over one of the many extension telephones with which Lafarge had equipped the house.

Normally Saunders would never have considered eavesdropping. But there was something furtive about the girl's carefully lowered voice, and certainly her strange actions since his arrival here had aroused his suspicions. He glanced quickly down the hall to be sure he was unobserved, then darted into the darkened room to his right and stole half way across it on noiseless feet.

Now he was near enough to be able to

understand what Evelyn was saying. The girl was apparently just finishing up her conversation, but Saunders heard the last few sentences. What he heard was enough to make him feel suddenly cold and chill in spite of the springtime warmth.

". . . Tell the Master that the attempt failed. Blumberg was killed, and the younger one killed himself. . . . Tell him also that Grayson refuses to leave. . . . Yes, I understand I will follow instructions."

Saunders Grayson walked slowly across the hall and back into the study. Ignoring the others who were deep in low voiced conversation, he went to the front window which was still open and leaned out with his arms on the sill. He breathed deeply of the night air. He felt that he needed it!

HE would have liked to believe that the girl in the house was not his fiancée at all, but her double who had in some way temporarily taken her place. That could not be the case, for that evening they had casually discussed several past incidents that only Evelyn herself could know about. He was equally sure that he was wide awake and sane, and that what he had heard the girl say into the telephone was neither a nightmare nor a figment of his own imagination. Yet—it was equally impossible to believe that she could be in league with the murderous gang of whom Inspector Morley had spoken. Not of her own volition, at least.

Perhaps they had in some way obtained a hold over Evelyn Lafarge that compelled her to work with them. Saunders could not possibly imagine what sort of a hold they might have acquired over her, but no other explanation seemed remotely possible. Well—he would stick around and see what happened. And he was not going to tell the police of the phone conversation he had overheard. At least, not yet. Evelyn's well being meant more to him than anything else, and he hoped to get a little closer to the heart of the mystery before he revealed what he had learned.

Saunders turned away from the window then, and a little later Evelyn came back into the study. Watching the easy way with which she conversed with her father and Morley, and the coolly casual way she replied to his own remarks, it was hard for Saunders to believe that he ever had overheard those ominous words in the darkened room. After a few minutes Lafarge pointed to the sheet of thin paper which still lay on the study table.

"That is Arabic," he said, "I can't read it myself, except for a very slight smattering picked up when I traveled in the Orient, but I have no doubt of its identity."

"Arabic, eh?" Morley mused, "So the Orient enters into this picture! Perhaps that accounts for some of its strange and bizzarre twists. The East often works in ways that seem weird to the western mind. I wish there was some way of getting this translated tonight. It may help us a lot."

"I guess we can arrange that," Lafarge said, "I know Professor Beardsley of Columbia University pretty well, and he lives quite nearby. He's an expert on Oriental languages. Want to drop around to see him?"

"Let's go."

EVELYN went up to bed, and the three men started for the front door. In the hall they met Li, Lafarge's Chinese valet, a short but broad shouldered little man with slant eyes and an expressionless face.

"You are going out, Doctor?" he asked, bobbing his head in a sort of half bow.

"Yes, Li, but Mr. Grayson and I will be back in an hour. Tell Hilsing to leave out some sandwiches and the brandy decanter for us."

As they paused at the door, putting on their top-coats, Morley crooked his finger at a red-faced Irishman in plain clothes who stood in the hall with a derby hat clutched firmly in his big hands.

"Come with us, Sergeant," he said.

The two older men sat in the back seat of Lafarge's limousine, while Saunders and the sergeant sat on the two folding seats. Morley turned to their host.

"Do you trust your valet?" he asked.

"Li?" Lafarge said. He laughed. "With my life. He has been with me for fifteen years, and as a matter of fact has saved my life on two occasions in the past. You're barking up the wrong tree there, Inspector. You are certainly widespread in your suspicions."

"It's my business to be that way," Morley answered shortly. The police inspector was slouched low in his seat, hands in

the pockets of his coat and hat brim pulled low over his eyes. His lean, saturnine face looked sombre and brooding. "This thing is beginning to get me. I've never run into a case—or rather, a series of cases—so damnably illogical and confusing. I don't doubt that there's sense behind it somewhere, but I'm still in a fog."

Saunders turned to the stocky detective beside him.

"I didn't quite get your name, Sergeant," he said.

"It's Patrick Capelli, sorr."

"Sure, and what part of Ireland do the O'Capellis come from?" Saunders asked. The big detective fidgeted uncomfortably.

"My father was born in Cork, and my mother in County Roscommon, sorr. One o' me ancestors somewhere back was a spaghetti bender, but I'm as Irish as the old sod itself!"

"You don't read Arabic, do you?" Saunders asked casually. Capelli stared at him.

"Whats that, sorr? One of them new weekly magazines?"

There was quite a fair sized informal party going on at Beardsley's house when they arrived. The Professor himself, a thin and rather austere man with white hair, welcomed Lafarge and introduced the newcomers to the other guests. Only two of those others made any impression on Saunders. One was a swarthy and very earnest young Syrian student named Bucasha whose darting eyes seemed to be ceaseless surveying everyone in the room through his thick glasses. The other was the Countess Olga Rosloff, a blonde and exotically dressed Russian expatriate. Saunders had a few minutes idle conversation with her over a couple of cocktails, until he saw Morley crooking a finger at him from across the room.

Beardsley led his three newly arrived visitors into his library at the back of his house, and closed the door. He motioned them to chairs.

"You wanted to see me alone for a few minutes, Pierre?" he said to Lafarge.

"Right. Morley here is really a deputy inspector of the police department."

"Really!" Beardsley's eyebrows arched in surprise. "I would never have suspected it."

"Many people pay me that somewhat dubious compliment," Morley said with a twisted smile.

As Lafarge and Morley gave a brief outline of what had taken place, and of how the thin sheet of paper with the Arabic writing had come into their possession, Saunders glanced about the room in which they sat. The library of the famous Oriental scholar was like a museum. Rolls of ancient Egyptian papyrii were stowed in a glass case at one side . . . some Babylonian clay tablets covered with cunieform writing were piled almost carelessly on the central table . . . carvings and curios from half the world were crowded around the walls. It was interesting to wonder about the ancient, long-dead scholars and artists who had painstakingly made those things now gathered together here in the library of a modern college professor!

Then Saunders brought his mind back to the present as Lafarge abruptly finished his explanation and handed the sheet of writing across to their host. Beardsley spread the thin document out on his desk and bent over it, one long forefinger tracing the curly Arabic script which ran from right to left across the page. The others watched him in expectant silence.

Beardsley's expression became suddenly very intent, and he frowned. Twice he shook his head as though unable to believe what he read, and once he pursed his lips in a soundless whistle. At the end he sighed and took off his glasses and sat back, looking at his companions in a sort of startled wonder.

"GENTLEMEN," he said, "This is incredible. If it came to me from any other source, I would consider that it must be some sort of a practical joke. Have you ever heard of the Hassani?"

Lafarge nodded, but Saunders shook his head.

"Never," he said. Beardsley leaned back, and his manner took on something of the precise dryness of the class-room lecturer.

"About eight hundred and fifty years ago there lived in Persia a man named Hassan Sabbah," he said, "In his youth he was a friend and companion of Omar Khayyam the poet, but he went wrong. He became the leader of a gang of outlaws and murderers who preyed upon everyone

and became very numerous and powerful. Hassan Sabbah ruled them from his castle on Mount Alamout. He was called the Old Man of the Mountain, or the Sheik el Jebel, or simply the Master. His murderous followers were called the Hassani after his own name, and it is from there that we derive our English word 'assassin.' This paper indicates that the 'secret empire' of the Hassani has been revived and is again in existence, under the leadership of a man claiming to be the original Hassan Sabbah who has discovered the secret of immortality and has survived to this day. And what, gentlemen, do you think of that?"

"I think it's madness!" Lafarge grunted sourly.

"Did the original Old Man of the Mountain discover some way of binding his adherents to him in such a fanatical and unreasoning royalty that they would do whatever he told them?" Morley asked suddenly. Beardsley glanced across at him.

"It is very interesting that you should ask that, Inspector. Yes—he did. Apparently he drugged new recruits with the powerful drug called hashish, and let them spend a little time in the garden of his castle which was filled with wine and slave girls. Then he convinced them that he had magically allowed them to visit the Mohammedan idea of heaven, and that they would go back there when they died so long as they obeyed him implicitly. His system worked beautifully—in that day and age."

"This is just a question," Morley said slowly, "It sounds insane, but I'm ready to believe almost anything after some of the things that have happened lately. Is there any chance that the original Hassan Sabbah could really still be alive?"

"No." Beardsley shook his head. "He is supposed to have lived for several hundred years—more likely succeeding leaders of the outlaws claimed in turn to be the original man to keep up the pretense—but in any case the Golden Horde of the great Tartar conquerer Ghengis Khan stormed Mount Alamout and hanged the Old Man of the Mountain hundreds of years ago."

They left a few minutes later, returning to the Lafarge house. Morley said good bye at the front stoop, promising to have the place well guarded. Evelyn had gone to bed, so Saunders and Doctor Lafarge went to the study where the faultless Hilsing had left a tray of sandwiches and the mixings for highballs. They sat talking for quite a while, and it was late when Saunders finally went up to his room.

Saunders could not seem to sleep that night. After all, it was not so surprising when one considered all he had been through that afternoon and evening. For a while he tossed restlessly, then he slid out of bed and put on his bathrobe and went across the room for his pipe and tobacco.

Again he began to worry about Evelyn. She was certainly not herself, and that sinister phone call that he had overheard preyed upon his mind. Suddenly he wondered if she had really gone to bed! It was Li who had reported the fact, and Saunders had not quite liked the look in the Chinese valet's almond eyes as he told them about it. Was there something wrong again?

SAUNDERS had been a guest in the Lafarge house many times, and he knew the location of Evelyn's room. It was on the floor below, near the head of the stairs. He would like to go and see if she were really asleep in her room—but it might seem a little queer if anyone saw him prowling around the house at this hour of the night. Well—he could always go down toward the study, and if questioned could say that he was wakeful and wanted to smoke downstairs. The route to the study would lead directly past Evelyn's door.

Slipping a flashlight into the pocket of his robe, Saunders stole quietly out into the hall. The big old house was silent and still, a single dim light burning on each floor. He descended to the floor below, and as he passed the door to the girl's room he gently placed one hand against it. He intended to listen and see if he could hear her stirring within. Then he drew a quick breath of alarm. Not only was the door unlocked—which seemed surprising under the present troubled conditions—but it was not even properly latched. It gave under his hand and swung open an inch or so, moving silently on well oiled hinges!

Saunders pulled the flashlight from his

pocket and directed its beam into Evelyn's room. The place was empty, the bed had not been slept in nor disturbed at all. The green satin evening gown she had worn at dinner lay across the foot of the bed, hastily thrown down. Saunders was still staring into the deserted room, a rising panic gripping his heart, when a pistol muzzle was thrust against his spine and a calm voice warned him:

"Put up your hands and be quiet!"

It was Kingman Morley, still wearing his dinner coat. He prodded Saunders with deft fingers to be sure he was unarmed, and the younger man gaped at him.

"How did you get here?" he gasped.

"That—is a little beyond the point," Morley replied with a thin lipped smile, "Suppose you tell me just what *you* are doing wandering around the halls at this hour."

"I was going to the study for a smoke," Saunders said, "And I happened to notice that Miss Lafarge's room was empty."

"Empty!" Morley exclaimed in sudden alarm. He glanced over Saunders' shoulder, then pocketed his gun and stepped quickly into the girl's room. He snapped on the wall switch beside the door.

Kingman Morley stood glowering in the center of the room, the fingers of one hand nervously stroking his close cropped mustache. His sharp eyes roved about the room in an all-embracing survey. He grunted angrily to himself.

"Hmmmm," he muttered, more to himself than to Saunders, "I don't like this at all. Don't like it. Evening dress hastily discarded . . . closet door left open after she quickly got out some other clothes . . . bed not slept in. I don't like it!"

A soft, deprecating cough sounded from the hall behind them, and they both spun around. Morley's hand instinctively went to the butt of the gun in the pocket of his coat, then fell away again as he recognized Li. The Chinese valet was resplendent, and strangely dignified, in an embroidered silk robe and a small black cap that bore the carved button of a mandarin.

"YOU look for Miss Evelyn?" he asked in his flat voice.

"Yes. Do you know. . . ."

"She took her night things and went to sleep in one of the spare guest rooms on the floor above. She said she feel safer up there."

"Oh. I see," Morley said slowly.

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?"

"That is all. Thank you."

"You are welcome, sir. Good night."

Li bowed ceremonially, and departed. His slant eyes seemed to hold a latent mockery. Morley glanced at Saunders, shrugged, and switched off the light.

"Go on back to bed," he said, "I know you really came down to see if Miss Lafarge was in her room. Her attitude has puzzled me too. There's an Ethiopian under the cord-wood somewhere."

"Finding her room empty *did* give a shock," Saunders admitted, "But at least it's a relief to know that she was simply sleeping in another room."

"Yes, quite a relief—if it's true," Morley said grimly.

"Do you mean that you doubt . . .?"

"I don't doubt that she's in that other room *now*. The question is whether she has been there all along, or where else she has been and what she was doing. I don't trust that Chinaman, or anybody else just now. I'm not entirely sure I'll trust myself for long. Good night. Pleasant dreams."

AT breakfast next day, in the clean and fresh atmosphere of a spring morning, with a warm breeze stirring through the open windows, most of what had taken place the night before seemed as unreal as a nightmare. If it had not been for the prescence of a plainclothesman quietly lounging in the front hall, and two more men strolling unobstrustively along the sidewalk outside Saunders Grayson might have found it hard to believe that he had really been plunged into such a maelstrom of murder and mystery. Then he glanced across the table at Evelyn Lafarge, and again a weight seemed to descend upon his chest.

Evelyn was down to breakfast, as lovely as ever but still strangely and inexplicably aloof. She wore a dark tailored suit with a plain white silk blouse, and the severity of the ensemble enhanced her dark beauty. Saunders could scarcely keep his eyes off her face, but though she answered pleasantly enough when he spoke to her, she mostly ate in silence with her eyes fixed on her plate.

Just after breakfast Saunders encount-

ered Evelyn standing before a mirror in the hall. She wore a narrow-brimmed hat, and at the moment was pinning a white silk scarf high about her throat.

"Hello, there!" he said, "Going out? Suppose I go along with you."

"Not this time, darling," she said coolly, "I have some shopping to do. I'll be back by lunch time and see you then. Good bye."

She pulled her close fitting mesh veil down to her chin, kissed Saunders lightly through the dotted meshes, and then turned to the door. It slammed behind her, and through the glass he could see her trim figure hurrying down the stoop and then turning briskly up the street.

FOR a long moment Saunders Grayson stood motionless where he was, a black anger seething in his heart. What was the matter with the girl? She treated him almost as though he were some casual acquaintance, not the man she was supposed to marry next month. Until this moment Saunders had been very patient and considerate in the face of her strangely changed attitude, but now his patience came to an abrupt end. He swore savagely through his teeth, and then shouted for Hilsing to bring him his hat.

"Stepping out a while, sir?" the stately butler inquired in his sonorous voice.

"Obviously!" Saunders snapped.

"Will you be back for lunch?"

"I don't know," Saunders retorted, and turned quickly to the door. He thought a walk might clear some of the cobwebs from his brain.

Several hours of tramping through the crowded streets brought Saunders Grayson very little peace of mind. When he arrived the night before, he had thought it was simply nervousness that was making Evelyn behave so queerly, or at the worst a fear of what might happen next. Now he wondered if there was not something more behind it. It appeared that she had ceased to love him, and it might even be possible that some other man had come into her life.

It was nearly noon when Saunders paused on the street in front of a fashionable mid-town bar. Then he heard someone speak his name just behind him, and turned to face a fair-haired woman in black —Olga Rosloff who had been at the Professor's the night before.

"I believe you've forgotten me, Mr. Grayson," she said in her rather throaty voice.

"Not at all, Countess," he said without any particular enthusiasm, "Can I persuade you to stop in here for a cocktail."

They were seated at one of the little modernistic tables near the front windows. When the cocktails were brought, she threw her loose mesh veil back over her hat and brought out a long ivory cigarette holder. Saunders lit a cigarette for her, then she raised her glass to her lips.

"Your health!" she said.

"And yours," he responded mechanically.

The countess did most of the talking. Elbows resting on the table, a thin trail of smoke always rising from the cigarette in her long ivory holder, she sat across from Saunders and engulfed him in a ceaseless flood of conversation. Saunders was rather glad, for it passed the time and he was feeling very low.

It was half an hour or more later that Saunders, idly glancing about the room, saw a swarthy youth sitting alone at a table by the far wall. He sat stiffly erect, and he surveyed everyone and everything through his thick glasses with a curiously concentrated eagerness. It was Bucasha, the young Syrian student.

Saunders bent forward and touched Alga Rosloff lightly on the arm, interrupting one of her endless monologues on life in old Russia.

"Do you know that young man at all well?" he asked. She glanced around to see who was meant, then shrugged.

"Ah, yes, it is my young friend Mikhail Bucasha. Always he follows me around. Mikhail is young and passionate and thinks he is in love, but he is harmless."

"Have you known him long?" Saunders asked.

"Two weeks. Three weeks. Why do you ask?"

"Just curiosity."

THE countess had again started on her reminiscences, and Saunders' attention wandered for a moment as he stared out through the big plate glass window near their table, watching the changing crowds along the sidewalk. Then he stiffened, and slowly clenched his fists till the nails bit into the palms. Evelyn Larfarge was walk-

ing slowly past, deep in conversation with a tall and rather foreign looking man!

At the moment the girl's face was averted so that he could not see it, but he had no doubt of her identity. The dark tailored suit, the white silk ascot, the felt hat with the close-fitting dotted veil—it was undoubtedly Evelyn. She and her companion had halted now, the girl's back toward him, and he could see that she was resting her gloved hand on the tall man's arm as they talked very earnestly. Then the man turned and signaled a nearby taxi.

Saunders abruptly kicked back his chair and rose to his feet. The Countess stared as he muttered some conventional apology he could never later remember, and then quickly strode out to the lobby. He saw his waiter, handed him a bill to cover the check, and then darted out to the sidewalk. The taxi taken by Evelyn and her companion was just moving off, but another cab waited at the curb directly in front of him. The driver opened the door invitingly, and Saunders leaped forward.

"Follow that cab ahead!" he panted as he jumped in, "Don't get too close, but follow along behind them till we see where they are going. Understand!"

"Right!"

For a while the leading cab moved quietly along through the heavy mid-town traffic, while Saunders' car kept about a half block behind. Then, as they got further over toward the river and the traffic thinned out, both cabs increased speed. Saunders tried to open the glass back of the driver to warn him not to arouse the suspicions of the people in the car ahead, but the glass was stuck.

Saunders told himself that it was not entirely jealousy that prompted him to trail Evelyn in this manner. He had to admit that such an emotion played its part, but it was not the only thing. From the beginning he had thought that Evelyn was either living in deadly fear of something, or else had come under the influence of sinister elements in some other way. It might be that he was on the trail of her secret now!

Both cabs were now rolling down an almost deserted street close to the river, flanked by shuttered warehouses and condemned tenements. The driver of the cab ahead suddenly thrust his head out and looked back, and then waved. His own driver returned the signal! An instant later a sweet, sickish odor of gas began to pervade the interior of the cab in which Saunders was riding. He was in a trap!

Frantically Saunders tried to open the glass of one of the windows, but they were immovable. He wrenched at the handles of the doors, but they would not move. The gas was gripping his throat, and his head had begun to swim. He knew now that he had blindly and foolishly walked right into a trap, a trap where Evelyn Lafarge had been the bait. The driver glanced back once, grinned sardonically at Saunders' vain efforts to escape, and then looked ahead again. One hope came to Saunders. He had not actually seen Evelyn's face, and it might be that he had been lured on by the clever use of a girl of about her size dressed in identical clothes. He could not believe that Evelyn herself had been a willing tool in his capture.

SWIRLING mists seemed to surround Saunders now. In a last effort he pulled off one of his shoes and hammered furiously at the glass with the leather heel. But the glass was shatterproof, and would not break. Then all strength left him.

Saunders did not quite lose consciousness. That was not the effect of the gas that had overcome him. He lay sprawled in the back of the cab, half on the floor and half propped against the seat, unable to move but aware of what was going on. The two cabs slowed down before a big warehouse, the door opened, and they both rolled inside. The door swung shut behind them, and they came to a halt. An instant later the door of Saunders' cab was wrenched open and he was pulled out by two men who held him upright while a third tied his wrists behind him with a piece of rope.

The fresh air revived Saunders in a very few seconds. Almost by the time his captors had finished binding him he found his head clearing and his legs again able to sustain his weight. He looked about him in a puzzled wonder, knowing that he must have been brought to the headquarters of the Hassani.

They were in a big garage on the ground floor of the warehouse. Half a dozen other cars were parked there, as well as the two cabs that had just come in. The men who

held Saunders were dressed in greasy overalls, as were half a dozen others who were loitering around. By a door at the far side stood several people in ordinary clothes, including two girls—and one of them was Evelyn Lafarge!

Saunders had been hoping against hope that the girl in the taxi ahead had not really been his financée. Now that hoped faded. It was Evelyn all right, and she was looking across at him with a rather amused smile. Then one of her companions said something to her, and the girl laughed and turned away. The callous indifference of her action seemed to numb Saunders, and he felt as though he no longer cared what was going to happen to him.

A GONG chimed softly across the garage, and Saunders' two captors started to lead him toward the door.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked, wondering if they would answer at all. They looked at him curiously, as though he should know the answer himself.

"Why, we are taking you to the detention room until the Master of the Hassani is ready to see you!" they said.

The group of people that included Evelyn were moving through the exit door ahead of Saunders. Just before she went through the door, Evelyn opened her pocketbook and took out a chiffon handkerchief. She pinned it across her face so that it covered everything up to the eyes. The other girl in the group veiled herself in the same manner. Saunders was puzzled. The filmy chiffon did not conceal either girl's face enough to avoid recognition.

They passed in rapid succession through a number of store rooms. In one there were hundreds of rifles stacked against the wall. In another there were a number of sub-machine guns. It occurred to Saunders that his captors had not the slightest fear of his escaping, since they were letting him see all this and since they knew he must have noticed the address of this secret fortress. He knew now that Morley had not exaggerated the magnitude of the threat of the Hassani, and that if they continued to develop they might soon be able to terrorize the whole city in one bold stroke.

From the garage they came into what might have been a part of the Orient. All the workmen and guards wore fezzes or turbans, the rooms that were lounging or living quarters were hung with silks and piled with cushions. Even the men in the group of newcomers had laid aside their ordinary hats to don fezzes, and he understood now why the two girls had veiled themselves. All the women in the place wore the yashmak, or harem veil.

Saunders was turned over to two of the Inner Guards, dark skinned men who wore a sort of uniform and carried curved scimitars. They turned him aside, through a barred door, and into a bare room that had a row of iron rings set around the walls. With the rope that bound his hands behind him they lashed him to one of the rings, then left him.

This must be the detention room of which one of the outer guards had spoken. There were three other captives therein. A girl in her teens, white faced and trembling, drooped half conscious in her bonds. An elderly man and two younger ones were also pinioned there. They all looked up dully as Saunders was brought in, and the elderly man said grimly:

"Another one! Do *you* know why we are all here?"

"I'm afraid I have a good idea," Saunders answered. "Do you happen to be a scientist?"

"Why, yes! I'm Henry Drew, the chemist. How did you know?"

"And you other men?"

"We're both tellers in the Third National Bank," one of the others answered.

"That fits in, too," Saunders said slowly. "And the girl?"

"She's a nursemaid in the home of Randerson the financier."

"All I can tell you is that we are in the hands of the most dangerous criminal gang the modern world has ever known! I don't know how they do it. But you are all likely to be working for them soon."

"And you?"

"I don't think I have any talents or connections they want," Saunders said slowly. "Probably I am simply in their way and am to be removed."

Before he could give any further explanations, there came a sudden interruption. Two of the Inner Guards returned, loosed Saunders from the wall, and took him away with them. The men left behind shouted

encouragement after him. It was, Saunders thought, much like the farewells that must have taken place when victims selected for the guillotine were led away from prisons during the French Revolution.

They went to an upper floor, and here it was as though they had come into the heart of the Orient itself. The air was heavy with the scent of incense as blue smoke swirled up from bronze braziers. The floors were covered by thick rugs, the walls were hidden behind colorful hangings, the light was dim and subdued. Bearded, turbaned men sat cross legged beside low tables of carved wood and smoked water pipes while veiled slave girls waited upon them. Then the two guards knocked upon a carved door, and at a summons to enter they led Saunders inside.

They were in a large, square room whose walls and ceilings were completely concealed by black hangings. There was a raised dais at the far end. Incense burned in a tall brazier on each side of it, and in the center a carved chair rested before a black banner that bore in gold the symbol of the Hassani. Seated on the throne was a tall, very old man.

Saunders Grayson knew he had never seen a face so old and evil. The sunken eyes were bright, but the face itself was shriveled and heavily lined as though it had been embalmed for years in the essence of evil. A girl knelt before the throne, and as he came nearer he recognized Evelyn.

SHE was dressed like some houri of the old Orient, in a swirling silken skirt and jeweled breast-plates and flowing head-dress. A filmy yashmak covered her face up to the eyes, pointed red slippers were upon her feet. She knelt there in silence, as though waiting the answer to a request, while the Master studied Saunders. His chin rested on his hand, and his evil old face was expressionless. At last he turned back to the girl.

"Very well, my daughter," he said, speaking in a strangely dull and flat voice.

"Thank you, Master!"

The girl rose swiftly to her feet and left the room. As she passed Saunders she smiled at him through her veil.

"Everything will be all right now, darling," she said. "You are to become one of us. You will soon understand."

When Evelyn had gone, the old man again studied Saunders in silence. Then he said something in Arabic to the guards. They led Saunders away to a small, bare room that had a plain iron chair fixed to the floor in the center. His hands were freed from behind him and strapped to the arms of the chair, then he was made fast by ankles and throat and chest with broad straps. One of the guards stood silently by with folded arms, while the other went away.

Saunders Grayson had plenty of time to think while he sat there helpless, wondering what was going to happen to him next. The chair in which he was strapped closely resembled an electric chair, save that it was surrounded by a mass of strange coils and electrical instruments that were like nothing Saunders had ever seen before. Overhead and directly before him were several glass tubes that looked much like giant X-ray tubes.

One thing, he mused, they obviously didn't intend to kill him. Had they so wanted, they would probably go about it in a more direct way. Also there was the matter of Evelyn's reassuring but mysterious remark as she left the chamber of the Master.

Saunders wondered about the identity of the old man who ruled this strange, secret, outlaw empire. Perhaps the man was mad, but he must certainly be a perverted genius in his way. Many of his men, particularly the guards, were Levantines of some sort who had probably joined up with the Hassani of their own volition for the loot and wealth they hoped the movement would bring. Saunders had as yet no idea of how the Master held the loyalty of his misguided other followers, such as Evelyn LaFarge.

In the midst of his perplexed wonderings, the other guard returned with a man who wore a rubber apron and thick rubber gloves. A bent and shriveled little hunchback he was, whose wide eyes held the distant look of a fanatic. He shuffled forward across the room and patted some of the strange pieces of machinery as though they were pets, crooning to them softly. Then the guards stepped to the door, and the hunchback threw a switch.

Two of the giant globes began to glow with a strange purple light. It hurt Saunders' eyes, but when he closed them the glow still came through his eyelids. The hunchback threw another switch, and a high-pitched humming sound filled the room. He stood with his hands on the control board, watching a maze of dials and humming softly to himself. His interest and attention were all for his strange machinery, and he had scarcely glanced at the man strapped in the chair.

More switches were thrown, and now the tubes were glowing brilliantly with an unreal and pulsating light. There were crimson and purple, and the green of virgin emeralds, and an occasional flash of that bluish silver that is only seen when flying fishes leap beneath the moon. Saunders fancied that he heard a sweet and distant music. The light no longer hurt his eyes, and he lay back relaxed and drowsy in the chair. Then there was the sound of millions of little golden bells, and Saunders drifted away into unconsciousness.

WHEN Saunders Grayson awoke he lay on a pile of cushions under a palm tree, gazing up at a starry sky. Just beyond was the tall outline of a minaret, bathed in silvery moonlight. There was a sound of music, and singing, and the low murmur of happy voices. He struggled up to a sitting position and sat cross legged on the cushions. He was dressed in silken garments, but there did not seem to be anything strange about that fact.

All about him was a flower-filled garden, lighted by the stars and by colored lamps swinging under the trees. A slave girl came up and handed him a goblet and then filled it with wine from a tall jug she carried. The scented gossamer of her veil brushed his shoulders, and she turned her lips to be kissed through its meshes before she glided away. Many groups sat about on cushions piled here and there under the trees. A group of bearded musicians played soft music in a corner of the wall. Saunders knew, without knowing or caring how the knowledge came to him, that these gardens were reproductions of the heavenly gardens of Khorassan in far-off Persia. The knowledge was sweet and pleasant to him.

It did not matter that the grass and flowers were not real, or that the stars were only painted on a domed ceiling overhead. The air was just as sweet scented, and the wine was rich and heady, and the hips of the slave girls swayed provocatively as they glided among the artificial trees.

A young man and a girl passed by arm in arm, her anklets jingling musically as she walked. The face of the young man was vaguely familiar to Saunders, so he touched his breast and forehead and said: *"Salamun aleikum!"* He knew that this was a greeting and meant "Peace be upon you." The young man responded with: *"Aleikum eus salaam!"* "And upon you be the peace!"

Saunders seemed to know many things that he had never before realized. He knew that he was one of the great brotherhood of the Hassani, and that it was right and proper that he should be such. He served the Master without question as they all did, and as the whole world must do before very long, and it was well for him to do so. So long as he obeyed the Master in all things, he could return to this heaven-on-earth from time to time. The Master's word was law. Nothing else mattered. It never occurred to him that he had been subjected to the effects of some strange rays that had robbed him of his will-power and his mind and made him little more than an unthinking, obedient automaton.

Evelyn came slowly toward him through the garden, hands on hips and full skirt swaying as she walked. Her bracelets and anklets jingled, her lips were smiling under her thin veil. They sat there on the pillows for a long time. It might have been hours, or weeks, or years—it did not matter. Saunders knew that the passage of time and all other things were also under the control of the Master.

"Father's scientific knowledge will be valuable to the brotherhood of the Hassani," the girl said. "He does not yet realize that the Master is destined to rule the world, but you and I together will bring him here and then everything will be well." She clung to him in a burst of passion.

Some time later one of the Inner Guards sought out Saunders and Evelyn and told them that they were wanted. Hand in

hand they knelt in the chamber of the Master and listened to his instructions:

"It will be dinner time when you return to the outer world. You will simply go home and say that you spent the afternoon together. The knowledge and inventions of Doctor Lafarge are necessary for our purposes, and instructions will be given later on the method of bringing him here. Meanwhile, Morley, the policeman, must be put out of the way. You, Grayson, will get him alone tonight and kill him. There must be no mistake or failure!"

"There will be none, Master!" Saunders replied confidently.

"It is well. If by chance you fail, you will kill yourself at once to avoid capture. Is it understood?"

"Hearing is obeying, O Lord of the World!" they replied in chorus.

They went to the dressing rooms and resumed their ordinary clothes. One of the Inner Guards carefully instructed Saunders in the pass-words and secret signals and reminded him not to fail to report back to the headquarters by the evening of the fourth day. Then guards led the two of them down through the various rooms and lower floors until they stood by one of the outer doors. Evelyn unpinned the chiffon veil from her hat and knotted it around one wrist as a handkerchief, and then they slipped quietly out into the street.

KINGMAN MORLEY was at the Lafarge house when they arrived just before dinner, but he did not seem suspicious as they told their tale. Saunders was smiling quietly as he went up to his room. What fools were these barbarians who were not members of the brotherhood of the Hassani! From under his coat he drew the long and very keen knife the Inner Guards had given him. A worthy weapon! He tested its edge, then laid it on the bureau and began to change to his dinner clothes.

Before dinner Saunders took cocktails in the library with Lafarge and Morley, talking to them casually and biding his time. There was no hurry. In due course he would sink his knife to the hilt in the throat of the persistent police inspector, but he would wait until they were alone together. Evelyn came in for a cocktail and their eyes met with a secret laughter as they lifted their glasses to each other.

During the meal Saunders found his thoughts again and again returning to the delights of the scented gardens of Khorassan to which the Master had admitted him. He was careful to answer when any of the others spoke to him, lest anything arouse their suspicions, but otherwise he paid little attention to what they were saying. Now and then he pressed his left arm against his body, making sure that the knife was still safe in its sheath.

After dinner, when the four of them again sat in the study, Evelyn looked across at Saunders. He nodded quietly. The time had come for her to do her part! She spoke to her father, asking him to come to a different part of the house on an errand with her, and the two of them excused themselves. Saunders was alone with Morley, the moment for which he had waited.

Things could not have been easier. Morley turned his back on his companion and walked to the table, taking a fountain pen from his pocket and opening a note book. He was helpless and unsuspecting! One swift thrust from the back would do the work, a thrust right under the left shoulder blade that would go straight through to the heart. Saunders bent forward, rose noiselessly to his feet, and took three steps forward. He drew the keen knife from under his coat, and fixed his eyes on the point in the other man's back where he would strike, and raised the blade.

Suddenly Morley spun around. From the fake fountain pen in his hand spewed clouds of a choking, blinding gas. The apparent note book was revealed as actually a mirror in which he had watched Saunders' movements behind him. He shouted, and many men came running into the room. Baffled and blinded by the tear gas, Saunders remembered the Master's instructions and tried to turn the point of the knife toward his own throat, but they seized him and twisted the knife away before he could kill himself. He cursed them then, and despair filled his heart, and he wondered how he could make excuses to the Master if he ever came to the gardens of Khorassan again!

SAUNDERS GRAYSON dwelt amid dark mists. He knew that he was in a bed somewhere, in a small and darkened room, but somehow it was difficult for him

to think. Apparently he was under the influence of drugs or narcotics most of the time, for he had little sense of the passage of the hours or days and mostly seemed to be in a sort of coma. Whenever things started to clear up a little, someone jabbed him with a hypodermic needle and he drifted off to sleep again.

In his rare moments of wakefulness, Saunders saw that two men always sat by his bed, one on either side. He still clung to the Master's instructions to kill himself, but these men seemed to know of that intention and to be determined to prevent it. Once, coming out from under the effects of the drugs a little sooner than was expected, Saunders lay still for a long time and gathered his strength for a quick leap to the window. He almost made it that time, but one of the men felled him with a flying tackle just as he reached the sill and then they dragged him back to bed again.

At last there came a time when Saunders awakened from a troubled sleep and suddenly knew that something had happened and he was himself again. A bright morning sun was pouring in the open windows of the little room in which he lay. For a few seconds he lay still, feeling very weary. The horror of the shadows through which he had passed was heavy upon him, but it was good to know that he had returned to sanity. He turned to one of the men who sat beside his bed.

"Where am I now?" he asked.

"You're all right," the man said soothingly, but there must have been a different note in Saunders' voice for the man exchanged a hasty glance with his companion. One of the men had taken off his coat, and a silver badge was pinned to his vest.

"Are you a policeman?" Saunders asked.

"That's right."

"Can you get me Inspector Morley? I'd like to talk to him?"

"Can I get him?" The man grinned broadly and jumped to his feet. "He's right downstairs now, and he's been hoping for the past four days that you'd be in shape to talk."

It was only a few minutes later that Kingman Morley strode into the room, his lean and saturnine face was wreathed in smiles.

"By God, it's good to see you yourself again, young feller!" he said.

"It feels good. There's a lot I'm anxious to tell you."

"That emotion," Morley replied with a characteristic twitch of his lips, "Is as nothing compared to *my* anxiety to hear what you have to tell."

"But first—can you get me something to eat? I feel as though I've been starved."

"That's not surprising. You've had nothing to eat for the past five days but soup."

"Do you mean to say that I've been in a coma for that long?"

"That's right."

"So that's why I was instructed not to fail to come back by the evening of the fourth day!" Saunders said slowly, "It must be that the effect of the ray tubes wears off in that time."

Slowly, with all the detail that he could remember, Saunders told everything that had happened to him from the time he left the Lafarge house in a rage that morning that Evelyn snubbed him. Morley listened in intent silence, his eyes never leaving the younger man's face. When Saunders finished at last, telling the second half of his story between mouthsfull as he gulped down a hearty meal one of the policemen brought up to him on a tray, the Inspector sighed and leaned back.

"SO that's it," he said. "The Hassani have a queer ray machine that numbs the brain cells and makes people walking automatons, completely subject to the Master's commands, for about five days before it wears off. I suspected something of the sort. There was no other way to account for people who had been sober and valuable citizens all their lives suddenly turning into murderous and suicidal maniacs. It's a great system!"

"You can see its value."

"Certainly. Pick a few key men like prison guards or bank tellers, abduct them and subject them to the ray, and then the whole stage is set."

"But how did it happen that—that I failed to murder you? How did you happen to be so well prepared."

"I was never entirely sure of you from the start," Morley said with a deprecating smile, "No offense—I told you that at a time like this I don't trust anyone. That caution of mine probably saved my life."

"And incidentally kept me from being a murderer," Saunders said soberly, "Go on."

"Watching you closely, and already convinced that there was something wrong with Miss Lafarge, I noticed a difference in your attitude when the two of you returned to the house that night. There was a funny look about your eyes, and a curious sort of repressed eagerness in your manner. I thought our bloodthirsty friends might try to get me out of the way as their next move, and so I was prepared for trouble when the others left the room and we were left alone."

"And thank God you were!" Saunders said, "But tell me—what has happened while I've been out of the picture."

"Several things!" A grim anger filled Morley's eyes, and deeper lines appeared in his tanned face. "I tell you, young-feller-me-lad, that I'm fighting this thing to a finish no matter what happens to me or whether the Police Department backs me up or not ! I wouldn't be surprised if the man you call the Master abducts the Commissioner and subjects him to the ray and has him try to call me off! The Hassani have won several more victories. For one thing, Henry Drew the famous chemist has mysteriously disappeared and I think they got him."

"They have," Saunders said, "I saw him there. Next?"

"They got over a hundred thousand dollars in cash in a daylight robbery of the Third National Bank. Two of the tellers turned out to be in league with the bandits. One was killed during the hold-up, and the other has not been seen since."

"I know," Saunders said grimly, "They were both in the detention room while I was. Poor devils! Anything else?"

"Professor Beardsley has disappeared. I suppose Hassani Sabbah—or whatever his real name may be—has added him to his collection of scientists and scholars."

"What about the Lafarges?"

"I have been able to keep Doctor Lafarge so well guarded that they haven't got him yet. Six of my best men never leave the house—and so can't be abducted for ray treatments. Incidentally, you are dead."

"What?" Saunders gasped. Morley smiled thinly.

"DON'T get excited, it's for your own protection. We gave it out that you were killed in the attack on me, and a body from the morgue was buried with appropriate ceremonies. This is one of the top floor rooms in the Lafarge house allotted to the use of my men, and no one else knows you are here."

"What about Evelyn—Miss Lafarge?"

"She has taken your death rather hard," Morley said, and again the lines in his face deepened, "I'm sorry, old man, but it can't be helped. She has insisted on going into mourning for you. She is evidently still a creature of the Hassani, but her affection for you cuts through the ray influence to some extent."

"All right," Saunders said after a long moment, "Now what?"

"Are you with me in this thing?"

"Certainly. To the limit. I have a long score to settle with that fiend they call the Master."

"Good. Can you find the headquarters again?"

"Without any trouble."

"Then we raid it tonight. But first, for your own protection, I'm going to have the police department transform you so that you will be unrecognizable. Didn't you tell me that you speak Spanish? Good. You are about to become Jose Garcia, a Porto Rican detective from the uptown precinct that includes New York's principal Spanish quarter."

SHORTLY after dinner that night Inspector Kingman Morley left the Lafarge house accompanied by several of his plain-clothesmen. Among them was a swarthy man with heavy eyebrows and a black mustache who answered to the name of Jose Garcia. The make-up man had done his work well, and Saunders was convinced that even his own family would not know him. In the lower hall they passed Evelyn, all in black and with an expression of hopeless dreariness on her face, Saunders' heart went out to the girl, but she scarcely glanced at him and he tramped by without turning his head.

Seated beside a police chauffeur in a plain black touring car with a riot gun across his knees, while Morley and two others sat in the back with more riot guns and a box of tear gas bombs, Saunders found himself

possessed by a fierce eagerness. At last they were about to strike a direct blow at the Hassani! They believed it to be unexpected, and it should therefore be doubly effective. He guided the chauffeur while they drove past the unobtrusive warehouse that housed the outlaw headquarters, and the others marked its location, then they returned to a quiet side street across the city to await the gathering of the raiding party.

Car after car drove quietly up, filled with laconic men who listened silently to their instructions and nodded their understanding and then drove down the street to await the signal. At last they were all ready and the caravan of cars drove off, splitting into several sections in order to surround the warehouse from all sides.

The car in which Saunders and Morley rode was the only one to draw up to the front door, though four others were halted half way down the block with their motors running. His blood was pounding in his temples from the excitement. In accordance with the plan, Saunders was in the lead as they went to the small door at the side and he knocked on it with the peculiar staccato signal that had been told to him as the sign of the Hassani. The door opened a crack, and a suspicious face peered out.

"What do you want?" someone inquired.

"*El Jebel* rules the world," Saunders replied, giving the pass-word of the brotherhood. There was a rattle of loosened chains, and the door swung open a little wider. Saunders nodded to the men with him, and an instant later the door swung violently open under the impact of three brawny policemen. At the same moment Kingman Morley set a whistle to his lips and blew a long blast.

The first of the raiders went staggering into the dim interior of the garage that formed this part of the warehouse. The guard who had admitted them reached for his gun, then dropped in his tracks as Morley shot him through the head. Other shots rang out as the police shot swift and straight at the startled Hassani who were reaching for their weapons. In the confined space the sound of the reports was deafening. The street outside echoed to the roar of racing motors as the other cars came tearing up, and someone fired three shots in the air as a signal to the other divisions of the raiding party to close in on the other sides of the building.

For a few moments that handfull of police that first arrived were fighting for their lives, but as the other cars arrived and more men came storming into the building the tables turned. Some of the outlaws threw down their weapons while others ran for the door that led into the warehouse. They had it slammed and bolted behind them before the police could reach it.

THERE was a brief pause for a few seconds, and in the comparative stillness Saunders could hear the faint sounds of fighting on other sides of the big building. The air in the garage where they stood was rank with the stench of smokeless powder, and half a dozen bodies were sprawled on the stained concrete flooring. Then the place was filled with a rocking thunder as a group of police took one of the long bars of the big outer door and swung it as a battering ram against the portal that led to the inside of the warehouse. Morley watched them with a grim smile on his lean face, his nostrils quivering like those of a hunting dog on the trail.

The door gave in a few seconds, and as the police burst into the room beyond they found any further progress blocked by a heavy steel door as solid as a partition. By the time they battered through it, the warehouse was deserted. The other raiding parties found the same thing. They had captured many of the supplies and stores of the Hassani, but all the surviving outlaws had escaped. Saunders found Morley standing silent and discouraged in the midst of the artificial gardens on the top floor.

"But where did they all go?" he asked.

Morley shrugged.

"Out through some secret tunnel that led to some other building. We haven't even found the tunnel entrance yet. We will—but it won't do us any good as they're all well away by now. They even had time to take the ray apparatus with them."

"What do we do next?" Saunders asked.

Morley looked at him and shrugged, discouragement written on his face.

"Start all over again, I guess."

A POLICE guard still remained at the Lafarge house, but Morley thought the Hassani would abandon any further efforts to get hold of Lafarge for the present. Morley had officially removed his field headquarters from the house, but as a precaution he had rented a vacant ground floor apartment in the building across the street.

Several afternoons later Morley and the still disguised Saunders sat alone in the bare and dusty front room of the apartment which was their vantage point. The room held a plain table and two chairs, and an emergency telephone rested on the table. The venetian blinds were drawn, but from between the slats they had an easy view of the Lafarge house across the street.

"The Hassani have been very quiet since the raid," Morley said moodily. He was gaunt and unshaven, and had scarcely moved from this room for the past two days, using the phone to keep in touch with operations. "They must realize what a narrow squeak they had and be planning to lay low for a while."

"It's an hour since Evelyn went out," Saunders said, glancing at the watch which lay on the table before him.

"She's our only hope, the one person we know for certain to be one of their group. So long as we keep her closely shadowed, she must sooner or later lead us to their new hiding place. She'll soon have to return for a new application of the rays."

The buzzer of the telephone sounded and Morley grabbed the receiver. He gave a few monosyllabic replies, and then hung up. There was a new hope in his eyes.

"The girl simply walked the streets for a while, then went into a drug store and telephoned. My man wasn't able to get close in time to hear the number she called, worse luck, but he did hear the end of her brief conversation. She said: 'I understand. I will come tonight!' At last we're getting somewhere!"

A little later Saunders was looking out through the cracks in the blinds when he saw Evelyn come along the street. She was all in black. A dotted mourning veil hung loosely from the brim of her hat. Her walk was slow and deliberate, with none of its former spring and verve, and her slender shoulders drooped. It hurt Saunders to see her so dejected and forlorn, and he swore savagely under his breath. Morley dropped a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Buck up, old man," he said, "If we have any luck tonight it shouldn't be long now!"

SOON after darkness that evening a small, unobtrusive coupe turned into the street and drew up to the curb half a block from the Lafarge house. It remained there with its dim parking lights lit, while its two passengers sat quietly in their places. Kingman Morley was at the wheel, and Saunders sat beside him. As their mission tonight was one of observation and not action, they had no one else with them.

The hours passed slowly and the two men held their places in the car, smoking endlessly but saying little. The theater hour passed, the early evening traffic faded away, and there were few signs of life along that quiet side-street. From time to time Saunders glanced at his watch. At last, a little after eleven, Morley suddenly gripped his arm with a tense grasp. Someone was coming out of the Lafarge house!

Even in the dim light from the street lamp opposite, they could recognize Evelyn's graceful figure. She walked down the stoop, glanced up the street in both directions, and then turned in the opposite direction. As she walked rapidly up toward Broadway, Morley started his car and rolled along the street at a snail's pace, still keeping about half a block behind the girl. At the corner she hailed a taxi and got in. Morley speeded up till he was close behind the cab as it turned down Broadway. The traffic was heavy enough so that it would not look as though he was following the car ahead.

"I'm glad she took an ordinary cab instead of having them send a special car for her," he muttered, "That driver will never suspect he's being followed."

"Looks like they're turning east toward the Queensborough Bridge."

"Right! Probably headed for Long Island. So that's where the Master has his hide-out now!"

Across the river the chase led, and out through Queens, and then over the roads of Long Island. As they turned off the

main highways to less traveled roads, Morley dropped further and further behind the car ahead. Then, as the cab abruptly turned in between stone gateposts of what looked like a large estate, Morley unhesitatingly drove right on by and around the next curve in the road ahead. He parked the car, turned off the lights, and tapped Saunders on the shoulder.

"Come on," he said.

They crawled through the bushes at the side of the road and made their cautious way across the dew wet grass, moving slowly and with infinite care to avoid giving any alarm. At last they lay flat on the ground under the shelter of a clump of underbrush a few yards from the gate posts. The moon had come out from behind a cloud, and though far from full and giving but little light it enabled them to see a neglected and overgrown lawn beyond the posts and then the mass of a large and old fashioned house. Only a few dim lights showed in the windows. Morley placed his mouth close to his companion's ear.

"We'll stay here," he said, "To go closer might tip them off."

The wisdom of that course was evident a few minutes later, when another car came down the lane and turned in between the gateposts. For an instant the swinging beam of its headlights shone on the ramshackle front of the big main building. Then the driver switched his lights off. Forty of fifty feet inside the gate the car slowed down, and at that instant four men appeared out of the shadows to leap on the running-boards. There was a whispered colloquy. Then the guards returned to their hiding places, and the car rolled on up toward the house. Morley touched Saunders' shoulders to attract his attention. Then he began to crawl slowly back the way they had come.

Safely back in their own car again, Kingman Morley was jubilant.

"We'll raid tomorrow night," he said, "And this time we'll surround the place so thoroughly that they can't slip away."

"What about Evelyn?" Saunders asked.

"She'll undoubtedly go home during the night, after she has her ray treatment."

"I realize that. I mean—can't we make sure she isn't involved in the raid tomorrow night? We've discovered their hiding place now, you don't need her for a decoy any longer."

"Fair enough," Morley said, "We'll turn her over to a couple of police matrons tomorrow and let them hold her until the effects of the ray wear off. Now—there's a way that you can help a lot in this little tea-party. It's going to be pretty dangerous, but . . ."

"After the way those fiends have kept Evelyn under the effects of their damnable ray," Saunders interrupted grimly, "I'll do anything you suggest."

"Stout feller! Here's the idea. You know the pass-words, you know Hassan Sabbah himself by sight and are familiar with the general set-up. Do you believe that the Inner Guards, as you call them, know all the ray-people by sight?"

"Impossible. There are too many of them, and new ones are always being added."

"Then I want you to lead a few picked men into that place before the raid tomorrow, just so we will have some of our own men on the inside when the fireworks start."

THE two of them slept on cots in one of the back rooms of the apartment for what remained of the night. The man on watch in the front room reported that Evelyn had returned home about two hours later. In the middle of the morning the two police matrons sent for by the Inspector arrived, and Morley went across the street with them. He came back half an hour later.

"Well, what happened?" Saunders asked.

"She's safe now. When I told her she would have to stay in her room, and she saw the matrons, she tried to pull a knife she had hidden in her bureau drawer. When we disarmed her, she fought like a demon to get to the window and jump out. Finally we had to tie her hand and foot, and strap her to the bed. But she's safe now, and the effects of the ray will wear off in a few days."

The day passed slowly. Elaborate plans were being laid for the raid that night, and Saunders Grayson was filled with a sort of savage eagerness. Now that he knew that Evelyn was safely out of danger at last, he was anxious to come to grips with the Old Man of the Mountain.

"Hassani Sabbah certainly *looks* as though he were many hundreds of years old," he said to Morley during a lull in the preparations, "but of course, that isn't possible."

"Hardly. Has it occurred to you that he may be a much younger man than he appears, or possibly even a woman, perhaps even somebody we know?"

"What do you mean?"

"That lined and wrinkled face you speak of may be only just a very clever mask of rubber or something of the sort, to disguise the real identity of the Master."

"That's possible," Saunders said slowly, "Did you find out anything about that house to which we followed Evelyn last night?"

"Yes. It's what they call the old Brosting estate, and has been vacant for years until it was rented two months ago."

"But who rented it?"

"That information," Morley said dryly, "Is not very illuminating. The tenant signed the lease in the name of John Jones! As he paid six months rent in advance, he was not investigated."

In the early part of the evening, Saunders stood with Morley and five other men in a back room of a suburban police station on the Long Island side of the river. Saunders had just finished coaching the others in the passwords of the Hassani and all other information that might be useful to them, and Morley stood up to give a few final instructions.

"You men are to try to get in and mingle with the others. We will have the place completely surrounded before you go in, just in case your masquerade is discovered, but you should get by. Even when the raid starts, keep your identity secret and pretend to be part of the gang to the end—unless they all start to escape in some way you know we have not thought of or guarded against. Then use your own judgment! It's to guard against such a contingency, remote though it may be, that I'm sending you in. Good luck!"

Late at night, when Saunders drove up to the gaunt gate posts of the old Brosting estate with one detective sitting beside him, this lonely part of the Long Island countryside seemed to be very quiet and still. The usual night noises came from the woods across the road as he slowed down for the turn, and some frogs were croaking in a pond somewhere off to the right, but otherwise nothing but the purr of his motor disturbed the stillness. He knew that hundreds of police and state troopers were stealthily closing in about the borders of the estate, but there was nothing to betray their presence or alarm the Hassani sentries.

HE drove in between the gate posts, shut off his headlights, and slowed down about fifty feet inside. Four armed guards leaped out of the deep shadows that lined the drive and hissed a low-voiced challenge. Saunders lounged casually behind the wheel, though one hand was on the butt of the automatic in his pocket, and gave the necessary passwords. The guards spoke to each other in Arabic a moment, then stepped down from the car and waved it through.

"Enter by the small door to the right," one of them said.

As the car rolled slowly up to the house, the man sitting beside Saunders leaned toward him. He was a detective carefully selected for this purpose, a man who spoke Arabic.

"One guard said that he did not recall seeing us before," he whispered, "and the other told him that there are many new ray-people and that all have been summoned here tonight by the Master's order."

So that accounted for the great number of cars parked back of the house! Tonight there was to be a great general gathering of the entire murderous brotherhood of the Hassani and its dupes. Saunders was not sure whether that would prove fortunate or unfortunate from the point of view of the projected raid, but he was triply glad that Evelyn Lafarge had been placed under restraint and could not come.

As they stepped through a narrow side door to the house, they were challenged by a pair of swarthy Inner Guards who stood just inside with drawn scimitars.

"What do you want?" one of them demanded.

"*El Jebel* rules the world," Saunders replied.

"Where is his throne?"

"In the mists on Mount Alamount."

"Pass in, brothers. *Salemun Aleikum.*"

They walked down several corridors

hung with tapestries, and eventually to what had apparently been the banquet hall in the long ago Victorian days when this had been a rich man's estate. The somber heaviness of the decorations contrasted strangely with the Oriental hangings and ornaments that had been added. At least a hundred people were crowded there, sitting about on cushioned divans while veiled slave girls passed about among them with jugs of wine. Saunders and his companion unobtrusively took their seats in a corner and accepted goblets of wine.

The strangely polyglot nature of the throng showed just how deeply the Hassani had penetrated into the various strata of society. There were men who looked laborers and mechanics, and men in evening dress. Saunders recognized a world-famous banker, sitting with his fez slightly askew as he fondled a houri who was serving him wine. Behind the thin veils worn by the women he recognized the faces of several prominent society women whose pictures were often seen in the papers. There were even a couple of uniformed policemen in the throng, their fezzes contrasting strangely with their blue uniforms.

"Do either of those patrolmen know you by sight?" Saunders whispered to his companion in sudden alarm.

"No. Anyway, even if they did they would probably think I am one of their own group."

AGAIN surveying the motley throng, and realizing how the possession of the ray enabled the Hassani to break down all ordinary defenses, Saunders understood anew just how dangerous the brotherhood was. Already they had looted banks and wealthy homes of a million dollars in money and jewels. If they had been left undisturbed a few weeks longer, they might easily have had half the negotiable wealth of New York City in their possession. If they were able to establish enough additional stations containing the ray machinery in different parts of the country, the possibilities were almost endless.

Two more of the detectives coached by Saunders came in and took seats across the room without even glancing at them. Saunders began to breathe a little more easily. It seemed that his men were getting through all right, and that no suspicions were being aroused.

Saunders heard a vaguely familiar woman's voice behind him then, and half turned. It was Countess Olga Rosloff, wearing the costume of the harem and talking with several men. So she, too, was a dupe of the Hassani! Now that he thought of it, she had probably played her part in the scheme the day he was abducted. Most likely she had followed him, accosted him in front of the restaurant where politeness demanded that he invite her in for a cocktail, and then taken a table near the window so he would be sure to see Evelyn play her little part in the street outside. They had correctly counted upon his anger and jealousy leading him to dash out and follow her.

He was careful to keep his back turned toward the Countess. She was not likely to penetrate his disguise, particularly since she undoubtedly thought him dead, but there was no use tempting fate by giving her too good a look at him.

There was a sudden stir in the big room, a gong chimed softly, and everybody rose to their feet. Through a small door at the far end came the gaunt figure of Hassan Sabbah himself. He took his seat in a chair that stood on a small raised platform, while a pair of Inner Guards stood on either side. Then the others took their seats and the hum of conversation resumed again, while the Master simply sat there silently and motionless. Studying that lined and evil old face under the dark hood of the black cloak he wore, Saunders began to suspect that it might be true that Hassan Sabbah's face was simply a clever mask concealing his real identity.

Saunders saw the other two men of his party come in, and knew that the main raid should soon begin. His fingers itched for the trigger of the gun in his pocket, and he longed to take a shot at that hellish, black-robed figure at the end of the hall, but he forced himself to sit quietly in his place and chat idly with the man beside him.

And then something happened that shook Saunders Grayson completely out of his enforced calm and almost made him betray himself. Two newcomers had come into the room and were walking quickly toward the dais at the far end. One was Li, La-

farge's Chinese valet, and the other was Evelyn herself! She again wore her tailored suit, and she was smiling happily. Saunders' agitation must have been evident, for his companion gripped his arm and hissed warningly.

The fact that Li was also one of the Hassani—he must be under the influence of the ray, for his long and faithful service to Lafarge must have precluded any chance of his being one of the inner circle that used the dupes to their own advantage—explained many things that had happened around the Lafarge house. It also explained Evelyn's presence here now.

"You were long in coming," Hassan said to the Chinese in his strangely flat voice. Li bowed.

"It could not be helped, Master. The girl was held by two women of the police department. I finally managed to slay them and get her out of the house."

"You have done well."

SAUNDERS was frantically trying to place an elusive recollection. There was something faintly familiar about Hassan's flat voice. As though it were a voice that he had heard somewhere before, and that Hassan was deliberately trying to disguise by speaking in a flat and expressionless manner. The Master suddenly held up his hand for silence.

"You have all been gathered here for an explanation of our future plans. But first—there are spies and traitors in our midst. I call upon them to stand up before we hunt them out!"

His words rang out hollowly through the long room, and when he had finished there was an utter silence. Saunders' fingers stole again to the butt of his gun, but he sat motionless and tried to copy the expression of shocked surprise he saw upon the faces of most of the people around him. He heard his companion breathing heavily, but that was all. Hassan shrugged.

"Very well, there are means of finding our enemies," he said, and turned suddenly to Evelyn. "You understand, daughter, that it may be necessary to take your life for the good of the Brotherhood?"

"Whatever you wish, Master."

The Master spoke to one of the guards, who fetched a coil of light but strong rope. Two more of them moved a low table directly under one of the heavy chandeliers. Saunders felt the cold sweat beginning to trickle down his back, and with his thumb he slipped the safety catch from his automatic. He did not yet understand just what was to be done, but he was certain that Evelyn and himself and the five detectives stood in deadly peril of their lives. One of the guards threw the rope up over the chandelier, then tied a loop in one end. Saunders began to understand then, and he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. Why in God's name didn't Morley start his raid?

"Prepare your throat for the noose, daughter," the Master said tonelessly.

Evelyn smiled and took off her hat and veil, handing them to one of the guards. She took off the jacket of her suit and loosened the scarf at her throat till it hung loosely about her shoulders. Then, almost gayly, she crossed her wrists behind her while they tied her hands securely with a short piece of rope. They helped her up on the table, and she stood with her feet close together while they tied her ankles. The noose was placed about her throat, and the rope drawn tight and made fast, and she stood there unable to move but with that fixed smile still on her face.

"Fetch the Master of the Rays!" Hassan commanded.

The little old hunchback shuffled in, carrying what looked like a smaller edition of his fiendish ray machine. Electric cables trailed off behind it, leading to some source of power supply in the next room. He set it up, threw a switch, and the strange glass globes began to glow with their weird light.

Saunders understood what was happening as he watched the changing expression on the girl's face. The smile faded, her eyes filled with understanding and horror, her lips began to tremble. They had used an apparatus that would abruptly remove the effects of the hypnotic ray, and she was herself again. She moaned softly, and struggled against the cords that bound her, but she was helpless.

"Now!" Hassan said, and two of the Inner Guards took hold of the table.

They moved the table a little. Evelyn swayed, and choked as the noose tightened about her throat, then managed to regain her balance. Her breast heaved

convulsively, and her crossed hands twisted furiously where they were bound behind her. Saunders began to shift his weight forward, ready to leap to his feet.

"WILL the spies reveal themselves, or must we hang the girl?" Hassan Sabbah inquired tonelessly.

Saunders jerked the gun from his pocket and leaped to his feet. He could no longer wait for the raid to begin, could not stand seeing them kill Evelyn in cold blood before his eyes.

"Everybody stay where you are! I'll shoot the first who moves!" he shouted. The five men who had come with him were also on their feet, guns drawn. A hollow and mocking laughter came from the Old Man of the Mountain as a dozen additional Inner Guards stepped out from behind the various hangings about the room with sub-machine-guns aimed and ready.

"*You* must cast aside your weapons or we blast you with a hail of death," Hassan said. "Choose!"

Saunders glanced swiftly about the room, at the rows of faces staring at him. No hope there! Guards and ray-people alike, their faces showed only a certain sadistic excitement . . . no trace of sympathy. He and his companions could manage to kill a few, but they themselves did not have a chance before the muzzles of the machine-guns that menaced them. They were beaten! He knew that many of the poor dupes around them would also die if the machine-guns spewed forth their deadly hail, but he also knew that Hassan Sabbah would never hold his fire because of that.

Saunders shrugged wearily, and threw down his gun. There was nothing else to do. The five detectives also realized the futility of resistance and gave up their weapons.

The noose was removed from about Evelyn's throat and she was lifted down from the table. She stood, still bound, between a pair of guards and after Saunders had been secured he was brought over beside her. At a word from the Master they stripped off the false mustache and heavy eybrows and side-burns that had been part of his disguise.

"I thought so!" Hassan said slowly. "So Grayson did not die as reported. He and the girl shall both die soon—but slowly. Take those others to the detention-room and we will deal with them later."

The other prisoners were herded away, but Saunders and Evelyn remained together in a corner of the room. She was staring at him wide-eyed, while joy and fear fought for dominance in her face.

"So you didn't die as they told me!" she exclaimed, and even at a time like this it was good to hear her voice warm and natural again. Saunders managed to smile.

"Not yet, darling. I'm hard to kill."

They kissed then, lips and bodies straining together, though the hands of each were tightly tied behind them. A moment later the guards roughly pulled them apart.

Hassan was talking in low tones with some of his lieutenants, and Saunders wondered what was coming next. Once more he wondered at the real identity of that sinister figure in the black robes. The man was undoubtedly mad, whoever he might be, to have conceived such a fantastic scheme. Yet, mad or not, he was a genius in his way to have carried it out as successfully as he had.

Saunders never knew what would have been next, for there was a sudden interruption. One of the uniformed guards came bursting into the big room and ran toward the dais.

"Master!" he cried. "The alarm bells are ringing on all sides of the house. The place is completely surrounded by many men."

"So soon!" Hassan brought one clenched fist crashing down on the arm of his chair, and for once the monotony of his voice was varied by a note of anger. He turned to the crowd in the great hall and snarled a command. The place began to clear rapidly as men and women alike went streaming out to defend the house against the police, but Saunders noticed that none of the Inner Guards went with them. He understood the plan now. While the luckless dupes of the Master, the victims of the hypnotic ray, went out to fight off the police and probably get themselves killed in the process—Hassan Sabbah and his real followers would attempt to make good their retreat.

AS the Inner Guards trooped off toward the rear of the house, the Master pointed to the two prisoners standing bound in the corner.

"Bring them along," he said in his toneless voice. "They have caused me too much trouble to die easily, and we will settle with them later."

Sounds of rifle and revolver fire had already begun by the time the Inner Guards started their swift descent to the cellar of the house, showing that some of the Hassani were already fighting the police closing in about the grounds. There were occasional duller and heavier notes which Saunders supposed were the explosion of tear-gas bombs. He noticed that the hunchback went with them, and that he hovered jealously about several big packing cases, each carried by two men.

Down to the cellar they went, a vast and dusty place filled with the accumulated rubbish of years. Many of the guards carried flashlights, and their stabbing rays gave the scene a strange and eerie quality. The two prisoners were herded roughly along near the head of the column, and as they came to a jagged opening at one side of the cellar Hassan again pointed at the captives.

"Gag them," he said.

One of the guards seized Evelyn by the hair and pulled her head back while another crammed a wad of cloth into her mouth. Saunders was similarly gagged. Then they all began to file through the opening that had been knocked in the cellar wall, into a newly dug tunnel shored up and partially walled with rough planks. The air was filled with the scent of moist earth. It was a macabre scene, with the turbaned and strangely garbed Hassani shuffling along in a closely packed mass while the glow of many flashlights flickered and danced against the rough walls.

Saunders was not greatly worried. He knew that Kingman Morley had expected that Hassan might have prepared such a means of escape from this hide-out, and that the Inspector did not intend to be caught napping a second time. This tunnel probably ended in some old stable or outbuilding, and as the whole estate was surrounded Hassan Sabbah was due for a surprise when he emerged. Then as the minutes passed, Saunders began to worry.

This tunnel led for a surprisingly long distance! He had not thought to count his steps, but the passage led on and on. The air had become very bad, and men were swearing under their breath as they hurried forward. The tunnel obviously led far beyond the boundaries of the Brosting estate, probably to some adjoining property that Hassan had leased in case of just such an emergency as this. A slow despair began to take hold of Saunders' heart.

They came up through a trap into a ramshackle barn. A pile of mildewed hay was thrown aside, and the guards threw aside their gaudy uniforms to don the ordinary clothes packed in boxes concealed under the hay. The organizing genius of the Hassani leader was again saving the day. A little later they all filed quietly out of the barn.

They stood in what had once been a plowed field, but was now a waste overgrown with stubble. Behind them was a fence, and a thin line of gnarled trees that were gaunt and grotesque under the starlight, and beyond that was the rise on which stood the Brosting house. Groups of fighting men surged all about the house, the rattle and roar of firing was a steady drum-roll, and the flashes of the guns twinkled like myriads of fireflies. Here, in this field well beyond the borders of the estate, everything was quiet and still.

Hassan Sabbah laughed softly. He had won the game again. Then he pointed to a distant clump of buildings beyond a road, and his men turned in that direction with the battle behind them. The cases containing the ray machinery were still carried in the midst of the group, and the two prisoners were herded along by their captors.

THEN, from somewhere in the shadows just ahead, Saunders heard a heavy metallic click. He knew that sound from old experience, and his heart skipped a beat. It was the snap of a breech block being driven home on an army rifle. An instant later the glow of a giant searchlight stabbed out of the darkness full in the faces of the startled Hassani, silhouetting them like moths around a lamp.

"Halt or we fire!" a deep voice shouted.

The Hassani were trapped, and knew it, but they also knew that they were out-

laws without hope of mercy or pardon. They opened fire at once, trying to scatter away from the stabbing beam of the searchlight. A terrific blast of fire from rifles and machine-guns answered them, and the low roadside hedge toward which they had been walking seemed to vomit flame. Saunders deliberately hurled himself against Evelyn, knocking her off her feet, and then flung himself flat on the ground beside her.

The beam of the searchlight swung slowly to and fro, picking out scattered groups of Hassani who were fighting to the last. A handful had taken refuge behind the big cases that held the ray equipment, and when a machine-gun opened on them the stream of bullets ripped smashing through the cases. The little hunchback screamed shrilly and ran forward, but a bullet caught him in mid-stride and he collopsed in a quivering heap. The next swing of the light picked out a tall, black-robed figure running toward a distant corner of the field, and an instant later he faltered in mid-stride and went sprawling. Then a whistle trilled, and a line of steel-helmeted men carrying rifles with fixed bayonets swarmed forward, and the fight was over.

A LITTLE later Saunders and Evelyn sat with Morley in one of the rooms in the Brosting house which was still swarming with police and state troopers and national guardsmen.

"What about the ray-people?" Saunders asked. Morley sighed.

"Most of them were killed or else killed themselves," he said. "But we saved a good many by overcoming them with tear gas. They'll be all right in a few days when the effects of the ray wear off."

Saunders relaxed contentedly, and tightened the grip of his arm about the shoulders of the girl who sat beside him.

"I guess it's all over now," he said. "What about the ray machinery?"

"It's completely smashed, and the hunchback was killed. So we will never know its secret! Probably it's just as well at that."

"And the Old Man of the Mountain?"

Instead of answering, Morley gestured toward the door where two men were just bringing in a stretcher that held the body of a man in black robes. Even in death that evil old face was unchanged. Then the police inspector bent down and peeled off the ingenious rubber mask, revealing the auster features of—Professor Beardsley!

"And there's the end of the greatest criminal genius of modern times," he said. "He combined his scholarly knowledge with an utter ruthlessness and a fantastic scheme that nearly succeeded. Probably the madness came upon him slowly throughout the years."

"But why did he ever translate that paper for us that night?" Saunders asked.

"Because he knew we would get someone else to do so if he did not. Then, a few days later, he arranged his own disappearance so that we thought him another victim."

"Well, I'm glad it's over," Saunders said. Evelyn sighed happily and dropped her head on his shoulder, and Morley grinned at the two of them.

"Me, too," he said. "I'm going to see if anyone has a flask around here. I think a drink would do all of us good."

FINGER MAN

By STEWART STERLING

The way to pin a murder rap on an undercover Racket-King is to panic him into doing his own killing.

THE big man with the saddle-leather complexion stepped back into a shadowed doorway as the touring car slewed around the corner and slowed down. It was more a matter of habit than reflection; most of the men who might have been expected to poke Tommy-guns through curtained tonneaus in his direction

were safely located in institutions which do not provide automobiles for the inmates.

Nevertheless, he watched with wary eyes while the car pulled up in front of a store which bore a sign:

J. SCHULTZMAN DYEING & CLEANING CO.

He watched more closely as a figure in a loose topcoat, its face well hidden by a low-pulled felt, slid from the front seat to the sidewalk, glanced up and down the empty street, and vanished into the store.

Mike Hansard shrugged, eased out of his dark hallway. The license number was not on the missing car list; he had no interest in cleaning and dyeing establishments further than a daily trouser-press. But a match flared suddenly between cupped palms in the driver's seat; and the plainclothesman stopped abruptly.

It took only a fraction of a second for Shivy Lewes to light his cigarette—less than that for Hansard to recognize him.

"A break," muttered the detective. "What's Calini's wheel-man doing up in this neck of the woods?"

A muffled scream knifed the dusk; the driver of the black car shifted nervously and raced the motor, keeping his eyes on the door of the cleaning shop.

But nothing more happened. Mike Hansard fingered the revolver in his coat pocket and swore silently. Something was going on in there; he had to know what. He couldn't go in the front way; Shivy might take a pot-shot at him; certainly the man inside would get warning.

He walked casually out of the hallway and around the corner without a glance at Lewes. Once out of sight, he sprinted for the alley which opened to the rear entrance of the cleaning shop. There was a high wire-topped fence and a thick, strong gate. The gate was padlocked; the barbed wire too high.

He hot-footed around the block to the apartment house which backed up the tailor shop, to the stairs to the roof three at a time, dropped ten feet to the adjoining factory . . . and found the fire-escape.

He located the rear entrance of the shop by the drums of naphtha and carboys of tetrachloride. The door was bolted. But there was a nearby window—which gave under the persuasion of his pocket-jimmy.

Inside was storage space, a workroom with ghostly rows of suits and dresses on hangers in the darkness. . . . Finally an office. He wrinkled his nose at the stench of chemicals, put his ear to the office door.

"Last week only," complained a frightened baritone in the front room of the shop, "you get three hundred. So soon again, two hundred dollars . . . it's impossible. . . ."

"Shut up!" The voice was flat and deadly. "You get it on the line fast, you know what's good for you."

There was a silence, punctuated by the rattle of a desk drawer and the rustle of paper.

". . . There—twenty tens," whined the first speaker. "I'm ruined already. You should tell him . . . the shop I will have to close. . . ."

"Listen to me, cluck," the monotone continued, "maybe you'd rather have me go to work on you with the acid? Sulphuric will burn holes in your face just like it did in them suits, hey?"

The only answer was a gasp of fear. A chair fell over; Mike tensed himself, but the stabbing screams which came from the front room caught him off guard. Desperate screams—a woman in terror.

He turned the knob. The door was locked.

"Ah! No! My God! Don't do that . . . don't . . .!"

Two heavy, flat reports. Mike knew the sound of a Colt thirty-eight too well to hesitate.

He stepped back a couple of paces and dived at the door. The lock burst; the door burst open and Mike rocketed into the room.

There was an acrid smell of burnt powder. A woman with black hair and a wax-white face lay in a faint on the floor, beside a short, fat man with red bubbles oozing from his mouth. His eyes were open but they weren't looking at anything.

THE street was alive with cries, shouts, running feet. Hansard backed into the hall, closed the door as the first of the crowd boiled in the front door.

An under-cover man is no good unless he is under cover, and the man was dead; the woman in a faint. Mike hadn't seen

the killer, couldn't identify him. But he had one live lead: Shivy. He knew Shivy, thought he knew what that white-faced, yellow-bellied dope-sniffer would do in a jam. He'd go for an alibi—in a rush. Mike wanted to be around when he got it.

By the time he had this doped out, he had bolted the door and was making pace, up the fire-escape, through a window into an empty room. The door was unlocked; Mike went downstairs on the run.

First, he got to a drugstore, went into the phone booth and talked to headquarters. Then he grabbed a taxi, barked out an address and shoved his gray matter around while the cab bounced toward Mott Avenue.

A lot depended on Schultzman's wife. Maybe she'd talk—or maybe she'd be too scared to talk. Calini would get word through to her, all right. If she opened her mouth, she'd head for the morgue. Maybe she wouldn't mind, if her man was there already. Women were funny—you couldn't figure them. But suppose she did gab—still they'd never pin anything on the murderer.

The killer would get an alibi first, a good one . . . that is, if the boys on the Homicide Squad could find him. Which was doubtful, the number of cases they had to work on these days.

But supposing they did locate the rodman, Hansard considered. Then the Calini fixer would go to bat. A high-priced mouthpiece. A little pressure in official places. A threat to the witnesses . . . a bribe to some juryman. Any or all of these, as needed. No, the gunman wouldn't be worrying.

But Mike had to do something. This kill would make his job of small retail racket-smashing impossible, unless he worked fast. He had been assigned to help the local business man's association clean out the muscle boys. And Calini was kingpin of the pressure-gang. He had to get the goods on Calini . . . for now, this affair would loosen purses and tighten lips all over the Heights. A cold-blooded warning, this butchery—a gruesome threat to those who disregarded that warning.

Not that Calini would be personally involved—no chance of that. Some hired torpedo would do the collecting, take the risks and handle the dirty work.

But if the wheels of Justice couldn't grind out retribution to this murderer, maybe Mike Hansard could. He smiled grimly as his cab pulled up before the Cafe Vesuvius. Maybe Shivy wouldn't be here in his usual haunt; maybe Mike would have to spend the rest of the night looking for him. He paid off the taxi, went into the cafe.

In the barroom a score of men were busy with glasses and loud talk. At the far end of the shiny mahogany, talking to a bluecoat, was Shivy Lewes.

MIKE nodded to the barman, elbowed his way to Shivy's back.

"Howya, stinky!"

Shivy spun on his heel, muttered something.

"Don't be like that." Mike waved at the white apron. "Make mine a sour . . . an' lean on the bottle."

The bluecoat got outside his beer, drifted away.

"What's on ya mind, shamus?" The watery blue eyes made an attempt to appear unconcerned.

"Coupla riddles, Shivy."

"I should give you answers! Nuts!"

Lewes ordered a rye, gulped it. Mike took a pull at the whiskey sour.

"You been right here the last hour or so?"

The other nodded.

"It might be an alibi, if you could make it stick," continued the big man. "Best alibi there is, a cop's. Only it won't stick this time. I saw you, myself. Over at Schultzman's."

The thin lips tightened, but Lewes said nothing.

"What's the sense, Shivy?" Mike was mildly persuasive. "Why take a rap for a mug you hardly know? A guy that'd turn you up as soon as he'd eat breakfast. . . ."

"Talk sense, shamus."

"The Homicide boys'll be talkin' sense to you with a rubber hose, Shivy. They'll want to know where you get them marked ten-buck Federal Reserve notes; the ones Schultzman had the bank fix up this afternoon. Maybe you'll understand that sort of sense."

The laugh which came to the thin lips was forced.

"Be ya age, Irish. I don't know any

Schultzman. I ain't got a tenspot in the world, an' I been here since four o'clock —see?"

Mike finished the drink.

"That's *your* song," he said sorrowfully. "The boys at Center Street will line you up against the witnesses who saw you in the heap and watched you drive away; Schultzman's woman will identify the rat who shot her husband. You'll be charged as an accessory, and you'll get just as black as the punk who did the kill—once the juice is on."

"Hell with you, you fat slob," snarled Lewes. His fingers trembled as he tightened the knot of his necktie. Also, he glanced at the phone. It was a wall-instrument, with no chance for privacy.

Mike left without a good-bye, waited outside the Vesuvius in a nearby doorway, saw his man sneak through the side door, walk rapidly away.

Half a block behind Lewes and on the other side of the street, Hansard drifted along as unobtrusively as the shadows that concealed him.

SHIVY LEWES looked over his shoulder, nervously, every block. Finally he stopped to study a store window which reflected the street behind him—then he vanished up a brightly lighted staircase, above which flashed a neon sign:

GIRLAND
DANCING

Mike gave him time to check his hat; then he followed up the stairs, paid the fifty cents admission.

He saw a long hall, dim under orange-shaded bulbs—a chocolate rhythm unit and a dozen couples doing the shag. At the far end of the room was a railed-off enclosure with little tables and a bar.

At one of these tables sat Shivy with a flat-faced, broad-nosed youth with greasy hair and dead-fish eyes. Mike knew the other by reputation. Augie Sado, trigger-boy for the Calini mob, was no snow-drifter or booze-fighter. A calculating killer, a money murderer. So Hansard kept his hands in plain sight as he walked down to the table. . . .

"Ah! There!" he smiled.

"Jeeze! You get in my hair, gumshoe. Why don't you peddle your papers?" Lewes was white with rage.

Augie sat impassive.

"Don't say that." Mike sat down. "We're all pals, ain't we?"

"Who's your wise friend?" Augie stared at Hansard's chin.

Lewes spat on the floor. . . . "No double-talking dick is a friend of mine."

Augie licked his lips. . . . "What you after, louse?"

"Just wanted to give Shivy here a tip. I just learned they got the numbers of them tenspots, so watch your step."

"What tens?" The rod-man spoke tonelessly.

Mike looked surprised. . . . "Ain't Shivy told you? Some cheap gun knocked off a bird named Schultzman an' walked off with twenty tens the bank marked up for him."

Sado slumped down in his seat; his dead-fish stare went from the plainclothesman to Lewes.

Shivy bent low over the table. . . . "You goddam liar," he exclaimed. "Tryin' to shake down on th' boss. Two yards you got from Schultzman . . . you told me you didn't get a dime." He started to get out of his chair.

"Sit still!" The whisper was a command. A pudgy hand flashed to a coat-lapel, stayed there.

Mike sighed, put both hands on the table. Shivy watched the hand at the lapel, wiped beads of sweat from his forehead.

"Stand up! Close together. One yelp, you get it. Walk! To the washroom—now!"

One look into the staring eyes brought Mike to his feet, started him walking. Augie meant business.

Three men strolling to the washroom caused no comment in *Girland.* The clarinet said *"Woe-woe-woe"* as Augie closed the door.

•

LEWES blubbered. . . . "Lissen, Augie you can't do it, Augie. Give it to th' dick, Augie—not to me. . . . I'm *with* ya, Augie. F' God's sake, Augie . . . don't . . ."

Mike thought fast. No use playing for time. Only way out was a window . . . they were up one story. Well, a broken neck couldn't hurt more than a slug in the belly. Thank God the window was open!

Shivy was bawling now. Augie had the automatic out of his shoulder holster. Four steps to the window was about right, he figured. Mike gave the sobbing Lewes a smashing shove in the back, right into the muzzle of the automatic . . . then he turned, dived.

He heard a high-pitched scream, a crashing roar and then he was in the air. A sickening moment of dropping through space, a roaring blackness, a sensation of floating—then sinking. . . .

He tried to move his head—it weighed a ton. He opened his eyes, groaned at the splitting ache in his head. Slowly his brain started to function . . . something about Augie—Shivy—the gun—the window. He had jumped through a window and he was alive! He spat out bits of gravel, licked at a warm wetness, recognized blood. His legs felt numb—maybe he had broken them. He stirred heavily. . . . Then he *wasn't* dreaming. There really was a weight on his neck. He gathered all his energies, heaved to his knees.

The weight rolled off, fell with a sickening thur beside him. He put out a tentative hand, felt warm flesh and grimaced in the darkness at the sticky wetness of his fingers.

Painfully he got to his feet, took a step, tentatively . . . and crouched in fear. There was nothing under that foot but air. He got a match out of his pocket, lit it. He was at the edge of a low roof, a dozen feet below the washroom window. He looked up, blew out the match quickly. Suppose Augie was waiting up there to take a pot-shot at him! But the washroom was dark. There was no sound of the swing band.

He ventured another match. There was only one bullet hole, but it was exactly between Shivy's eyes.

Mike crawled to the edge of the roof, got a grip, swung over and dropped. He felt as if his head would jounce off his shoulders when he hit the ground, but he stayed on his feet.

He kept on them until he stumbled into a saloon, where he mumbled something about a fall, a nosebleed. He got three drinks under his belt, washed up, and put a cigarette between puffed lips.

Then he climbed into a cab and said, "Merrit Lakemin Social Club."

IT wasn't a club; yet, after its fashion, it was quite social—to the right people. No one knew who Merrit Lakemin was, but he certainly had nothing to do with the pool, billiard and bowling parlors which masqueraded under his name.

Those who know their upper East Side simply call it "Jack Calini's place." There is a nice little bar, a couple of poker and black-jack rooms, and on the top floor—according to rumor—private apartments wherein Calini's friends or enemies are entertained or looked after, as the case may be.

Mike climbed the stairs to the second floor wearily. No one paid much attention to him. Augie was not visible, which relieved Mike considerably.

"Where's Jack?" he asked a desk-man.

"Back there." A nod indicated the bar.

The plainclothesman strolled in casually, said "Hi" and "Hello" once or twice, and found Jack Calini sipping a glass of Three Star. He was a short, squat, swarthy man with the face of a prize fighter, the mind of a shyster and the manners of a head waiter.

"'Lo, Mike. What's wrong?" he grinned genially.

"Been foolin' around with one of your boys. He plays too rough for me."

"Who?" Calini was watchful, suspicious.

"Augie Sado. I had to jump through a window to get away from him. But that wasn't what I came to see you about."

"No?"

"No. A client . . . uh . . . of yours got hurt tonight."

"Bad?"

"Yeah. Sort of bad. But what I dropped in to tell you was this—the bird that did the work got away with two hundred of Schultzman's dough."

"Herman Schultzman? That's too bad." Jack Calini shook his head sympathetically.

"Yeah. Sure. But about this dough. It's hot money, Jack. Twenty tens—Federal Reserves—marked. Numbers taken at the bank before they were turned over to him."

Calini looked interested.

". . . Now, somebody's got that green. Shivy Lewes hasn't, because he's cold meat now."

Calini put down his whiskey glass, smiled disagreeably.

"*You* probably haven't got it," the detective continued, "because you wouldn't be that crude. But if you see . . . um . . . the punk that has got it, you might tip him off. It's bad medicine."

"Drink, Mike?"

The detective thought it was a first-class idea, said so.

"I'm obliged to you, Mike," murmured the Italian, when they had hoisted. "Much obliged. But not for the reason you think. . . ."

"Never can tell, Jack. Well . . . so long."

Mike went downstairs, strolled slowly to the corner, climbed the long flight to the elevated station. He dropped a nickel in the slot, walked to the southern end of the platform and let six trains go past.

At the end of that time, he saw Jack Calini and his bodyguard come out the front door of the Social Club, climb into a limousine and move north.

Hansard grinned, as if pleased at something, walked downstairs and hailed a cruising cab.

"I better buy me a car," he sighed as he relaxed on the cushions. "Cabs cost too much coin. Drive me to Hundred Eighty-first and St. Nick."

Then—sitting on the back seat of the taxi—he went to sleep.

AFTER the taxi-driver shook him awake at St. Nick, Hansard entered a dingy office building and cursed at the thought of climbing more stairs. He went up one flight, sat down and took off his shoes. The next three flights were accomplished with less noise than would be made by a prowling cat.

Which was the reason for the sudden and painful shock sustained by Bug Fister, Calini's personal bodyguard. Bug was guarding the hall which gave entrance to the offices of the Heights Commercial Protective Association, one of Calini's most prosperous ventures.

The clubbed gun which caught the Bug back of the ear would put him out of business for at least half an hour; and Mike fixed wire bonds and an old sock-gag to keep him that way. Then he got set outside the door bearing the name, *G. Calini, M'ngr.*

Inside, voices were raised in argument. The detective recognized both of them.

"I tell you, th' Yid wouldn't come across. He said he'd put in a squeal and then he pulled a rod on me. I hadda burn him."

"You didn't get any dough?" Calini's voice was a threatening purr.

"Not a lousy nickel."

"Where's Shivy?"

"How th' hell should I know? Sleeping off a jolt, probably."

There was a silence.

". . . Jeeze, boss, don't you believe me?"

No reply. In the hall, where he could command the door as it opened, Mike smiled grimly and thought of the dead man in the cleaning shop; of the woman.

"I swear to—what's th' idea, boss?"

"Up, Augie. Way up . . . turn around!"

"You gonna let some crummy John Law fill you up with dirt about me, boss? You ain't. . . ."

There was a vicious crack, the sort of noise that might be made by an open hand slapping a mouth.

"Jeeze, Jack . . . gimme a chance. . . ."

Silence. A rustle of crisp paper.

"You had the crust to try that on me! With th' roll right on you. Thought you'd have a little time for yourself, eh, Augie? Well, I will see that every dime is spent on you, Augie—for flowers."

The gurgling sound that followed made Mike a little sick to his stomach.

THE door swung open softly. A pair of heels showed in the light which streamed into the hall, then legs. The body of Augie Sado slumped down crazily, as if stuffed with sawdust.

"Oh, Bug!"

Mike crept forward. . . . "Hold it, Jack! Make one bad move and I'll let you have it!"

A breathless second—then a slamming door, the click of a key.

"No use, Calini. You can't get away. I've got Fister in the bag out here. You're licked. Maybe you can fix up a self-defense plea. Better take the rap."

The light went out in the offices of the Heights Commercial Protective Association, but there was no noise.

Mike took his shoes out of his coat pockets, put them on. He had no proof that Calini had slashed a knife into Augie Sado's heart. He knew it, but he hadn't

seen it. He hadn't seen Calini either. He'd recognized the voice, to be sure.

He fished through Sado's pockets, extracted a thick roll of ten-dollar Federal Reserve notes. Then he got a piece of wire from Fister's bonds, crouched beside the door. It took a lot of fiddling, but finally Mike turned the lock and kicked open the door. . . . He got the light on . . . the office was empty.

He looked in the closet—nothing. The window was closed. He opened it, looked out. Five stories straight down to concrete pavement. No fire-escape.

"Now, how th' hell did he get out of here?"

He stuck his head out of the window again, looked up. A window was open directly above him. A rope ladder dangled from that window right down to the top of the Protective Association sash.

He went back to the hall.

Bug Fister was gone, and there was nothing to indicate that Augie Sado's body had ever been in the hall. He groaned and took off his shoes again.

He got to the stairwell without making any noise; kept close to the wall as he went down. At the second floor landing he felt a prickling at the back of his neck, stopped, crouched.

A jet of orange flame gashed the blackness, blinded him so that his return shot was pure reflex. His ears were still ringing with the roar of the discharge when he heard a body crash to the floor of the landing.

"Get him, Bug?"

Mike made his voice hoarse. . . . "Okay, Jack—here he is." Then he waited.

He heard Calini's quick, jerky steps; jabbed savagely with the muzzle of his service special. Calini squalled warningly:

"Look out, you damn fool—"

"Up, Jack. Up fast! That's it . . . now, let's frisk you."

Calini cursed obscenely.

"Don't carry a roscoe, do you?" Hansard kept the gun in the gangster's belly, backed him against a wall, turned him around and marched him up the stairs.

"No, I don't, flatfoot. And everybody knows it."

"You carried a knife, though. Augie Sado found out you carried a knife."

"Try and prove it!"

They got to the Protective Association offices. The detective made Calini stand against the wall, his hands on top of his head.

"The headquarters boys'll find Augie around somewhere, Jack. And I can testify to what I heard a little while ago."

"Frame up," snarled Calini. "And the knife you put in my pocket won't show any prints of mine, either."

"That wasn't a knife I put in your pocket, Jack." Hansard spun the phone dial: Spring 7-7100. . . . "That was the two hundred bucks Augie took off Schultzman."

"You ——!"

"So you can take your choice. If they indict you for the tailor's murder, you'll go out of that little room up the river, but you'll go out feet first. If you plead to getting Augie in self-defense, you might get out in twenty years."

Calini was quiet for a minute.

"If I'm going to get it, I'm going to get it. Only I wish it was you I used that knife on instead of Augie."

Hansard was still trying to lace his shoes with one hand when the wagon got there.

At the midnight hour it came—a ghoul from the grave. And he who wore the gleaming girdle must follow—helpless slave of that murder monster!

SATAN'S SLAVE-GIRDLE

By GREYE LA SPINA

THE funeral obsequies of our esteemed fellow-townsman, Dr. George Mersey, who was accidentally shot Tuesday night, took place at his home yesterday afternoon. Mrs. Mersey was unable to attend them, as she has been in a critical condition since the tragic occurrence. Brain fever is feared by the attending physician, Dr. Howard Beggs. The sincere sympathy of neighbors and friends is hereby extended to the widow in her bereavement. . . .

—*Clipping from the Evanston Daily Bugle.*

WEBB ANNISTER'S STATEMENT TO THE CORONER, AUG. 5, 1938

I live next door to Dr. Mersey, on the

south side. I am not a very heavy sleeper, consequently the noise of an automobile was sufficient to waken me about half after one o'clock on Tuesday night. I jumped up hurriedly, slipped into a dressing-gown, took my revolver from the dresser drawer and went to the window. I was afraid it was a burglar, as there have been so many automobile robberies around town the past couple of months.

I was just in time to see the tail-lights of an automobile entering the doctor's garage. I called to my wife, who had also waked, that the doctor was home. We were both surprised, for he had not been expected until the end of the week, owing to two out-of-town calls he had recently received. One was from some woman back in the town where he used to live when he was a young fellow, and the other was to attend a cabinet minister's wife in Washington, for a consultation, Dr. Mersey being, as you know, a specialist in obscure diseases of the mind. I might mention the fact that Mrs. Mersey told my wife after he left that she was considerably disappointed because he went to his old friend first, planning to go on to Washington later.

I WAS just about to return to bed when I saw an immense black dog, a great shaggy beast, bound out of the doctor's garage. I was very much astonished, as I had long known that the doctor had a deeply rooted antipathy to dogs; he told me once that they seemed to him to resemble wolves, which animals he detested. This great dog cavorted about the doctor's yard, as if quite mad with delight to get out of the automobile, where it had probably been tied in.

I wondered what had overcome the doctor's prejudices and stood watching the animal for quite a few minutes, my wife finally joining me at the window. She at once declared that the dog must be some kind of Alaskan breed; I detected a strong resemblance to wolf, myself. I am laying stress upon the incident of the dog, because it is odd that only three people have seen it, and it disappeared from sight shortly after we saw it, in the fashion I am going to describe, and has not been seen since.

Although I saw Dr. Mersey's automobile going into the garage, I did not see him emerge. In fact, my wife—who still stood at the window watching, after we heard the shots—assures me that she did not go away for a second, but that no one came out of the garage. Of course, the doctor must have slipped out somehow, and we missed seeing him.

The dog jumped about in the yard for a few moments, and I was puzzled to observe that it had some kind of belt or harness around its middle; the thing, whatever it was, sparkled and glittered as if set with cut steel. My wife rather imagined it a new kind of harness, decorated as some ornate dog-collars are.

Suddenly the dog sprang up to the house and stood on its hind legs, peering in at the doctor's consulting-room window. That particular window is fairly low and is mostly open, with only a thin screen to protect the opening. The animal struck with its huge paws at the screen, broke it easily, and then scrambled up over the sill and out of sight into the darkness of the room.

My wife and I were so intrigued by the beast's behavior, that we remained at the window, intending to call over to the doctor when he came out of the garage, and tell him what the dog had done. But the tail-lights of the automobile were not extinguished; evidently the doctor was busy inside.

I hardly realized that half an hour had passed, when I heard three shots from the doctor's house, accompanied by a shrill scream that quavered out as if the vocal organs of the screaming woman (I knew it must be Mrs. Mersey, for she was alone in the house) were inadequate to express the horror and fright she felt.

I still had my revolver, which I had dropped into the pocket of my dressing-gown. I told my wife to remain on watch, while I ran across to see what the trouble was. I got over and looked into the garage in passing, but there was no one there. As I arrived at the consultation-room window I heard footsteps from the other side of the house, and Arthur Doone—who lives on the north side of the doctor's residence—came running toward me. He was waving a revolver in his hand and came near shooting me, until I yelled at him who I was.

We climbed in at the window with the

broken screen and went into the front hall. When we got there we stopped, for we heard the doctor's voice, very brusque and imperious, evidently talking to his wife. What he said made Doone and me stare at each other.

"I'm afraid your curiosity has cost me my life, Alice," I heard him say. "It serves me right, though. I shouldn't have tried to prove it to you. I should have been content to have known it myself."

"George! George!" wailed Mrs. Mersey piteously, between sobs.

"Now you must do what I should have done in the beginning."

"No! Oh, no! I'm afraid of it! Please don't make me touch it."

"DON'T be a coward," came the doctor's voice. "I am too weak to do it myself. Take it off, I tell you! It cannot harm you unless you put it on. Ah!" His voice died away. After a short pause he spoke again. "Put it on to the fire. See that it is burned to a cinder—the accursed thing!"

"Oh, this is terrible," Mrs. Mersey moaned. "Why did you do it? Oh my God, my God!"

"Why did I do it?" came from the doctor in tones of scathing sarcasm. "The woman tempted me! Now, listen. I want you to get the second volume of my diary and burn it here, before my eyes. Don't let any living being get his hands on it. Do you understand? And—Alice—for your own sake, don't tell anyone the truth of this night's experience. People would believe you out of your head."

DOONE and I didn't like to stand there listening, so at this point I called up to tell the Merseys we had heard the shots and had come in at the window. I heard them talking in lowered voices, then Mrs. Mersey came to the head of the stairs. The hall switch was on, and we could see her face plainly. She looked as if she'd been through a particularly grilling experience.

She spoke directly to me, as I'm rather better acquainted with the Merseys than Doone. "Will you please get doctor the little diary numbered II on the back?" Her voice was uneven; I could see that she only maintained her poise by a powerful effort. "And will Mr. Doone please telephone Dr. Beggs to come up at once? I've shot doctor by accident, thinking he was a—a burglar," she added in a voice which was pitiful, "and I don't know how seriously he is injured."

Doone jumped over to the hall telephone at once, while I went into the doctor's private office. Mrs. Mersey had asked me to get the diary because she knew I would understand just what he was asking for. I had had the whole series bound for the doctor. That is, I had had flexible, removable bindings made especially for doctor's notebooks by a friend of mine in the business. I picked out Volume II and took it upstairs.

There was a blaze of light in the front room on the side of the house next the Doones' residence, and Mrs. Mersey was on the floor beside the doctor, whose head lay on a pillow. His face was dead white and drawn with pain. When I heard his labored breathing, I augured the worst. But he had no thought except for that little volume. Under his directions, I took off the removable cover and his eyes followed the book itself as I gave it to Mrs. Mersey.

"The fire! Put it on the fire!" he gasped out, chokingly.

His wife laid it, spread out, in the middle of the fireplace, where there was a smoldering fire of great logs. The paper caught at once, and little by little it flamed as she pushed it down with a poker into the heart of the fire, until it began to turn into a blackened mass. The doctor relaxed then.

"Thank heaven," he sighed out. He turned his eyes to meet his wife's and smiled faintly, but with a touch of secret irony that surprised me. Then he rolled them to my face with an effort. In a surprisingly loud voice he cried out, "It was not her fault. She took me for a burglar. It was not—her—fault!"

With that, he slumped together and was perfectly still. I knew that his will-power had been keeping him alive until he had accomplished his purpose of destroying certain records—whatever they were—and defending the innocence of his wife with his last breath.

Mrs. Mersey flung herself down with a wild scream. "George, George, I have killed you! Oh, Lord!"

DOONE and I waited there with Mrs. Mersey until Dr. Beggs came. Doone suggested that I send my wife over later. Then we went down to the garage. The tail-lights of the automobile were still burning. We put them out and closed the door.

Doone seemed terribly strange and abstracted, but he said that the evening's experience had naturally affected him deeply, so much so that he couldn't talk about it. He said that he felt there was more in that burning of the doctor's diary than appeared on the surface. He asked me if I had made sure that the cover numbered II coincided with the notebook inside.

That made me feel like going back to find out, for it had never occurred to me to ascertain whether or not the right or wrong cover was on the little book.

My wife was waiting for me when I got home. We compared notes, and I was considerably astonished to learn that she had not left the window, but had not seen a sign of the doctor. We could not imagine how he had gotten out of the garage so unobtrusively. While my wife was getting dressed to go over to Mrs. Mersey's, I told her that Mr. Doone had said—

Signed, WEBB ANNISTER.

(The speaker was here instructed to close his report, as Mr. Doone would be given an opportunity in due time to speak for himself.)

ARTHUR DOONE'S STATEMENT TO THE CORONER

I happened to be awake Tuesday night at one-thirty because my daughter Dolly had a nightmare and woke me up with her screaming. As my wife was out of town for a few days and our maid comes in by the day, there was no one but myself to sit up with Dolly, which I did until she fell asleep. I was crossing the hall to return to my room when I was attracted by a blaze of lights from the sitting-room of Mrs. Mersey.

This was rather unusual, as she generally retires early, especially when the doctor is out of town on professional visits. I was so much surprised that I stopped and looked to see if anything was the matter, because I knew the doctor had not been expected back so soon. I could see Mrs. Mersey distinctly through the first one of the two large windows. She stood directly before the door leading to her chamber. She had evidently been aroused from sleep by someone, for she had slipped on a negligée of lace and ribbons over her nightrobe and her hair fell in two great plaits over her shoulders.

AS my house is nearer the Merseys' than is Annister's (there is a lawn on his side, and the doctor's driveway, while on mine there is only my own driveway), I could hear her voice distinctly through the screened windows.

"Prove it! Prove it!" she was crying, sharply. "I'm tired of listening to your absurd claims."

I thought to myself, the doctor was getting a call-down, and was surprised, for we have all considered the Merseys an ideal couple.

"I tell you, I *did* prove it. Otherwise, I would have come in at the front door with my pass-key. Go down and look at the broken screen in my consulting-room," I heard the doctor's voice, and as he spoke he moved forward and so into the range of the other window.

He was holding something like a long, glittering serpent in his extended hand; it shone in the electric light as if it were set with many-facetted jewels.

There was a laugh, very bitter and sarcastic. "That is no proof," retorted Mrs. Mersey bitingly. "If I cannot see you do it with my own eyes I don't see why you should expect me to believe it."

The doctor gave an exclamation of impatience. "You are goading me to desperation, Alice. Do you still insist? Understand, I cannot in any way be answerable for consequences if I yield to your curiosity."

I have no adequate excuse to offer for having stood there watching and listening, but I felt as if rooted to the spot. There was something out of the ordinary about the doctor, although his words were more or less innocent, on the surface. Yet I had the feeling that it was important for me to witness whatever it was that was about to take place; that it would be something both unusual and astounding. I therefore remained in my dark hallway, on watch.

THE doctor, still standing before that second window, unstrapped his belt, to which was fastened a holster. (He always carried a pistol when he went out alone in his car at night, because a few years back he had been held up.) Mrs. Mersey took the girdle from his hand and stood observing him with a half scornful expression on her face. I think—but of this I cannot be sure—that she laughed once or twice, a kind of irritating laugh.

Then I saw the doctor lean over to pick up the long, snake-like, glittering thing which he had tossed to the table while he took off his belt. He clasped it about his waist, stepping back as he did so until he was out of range of the window. As he disappeared I saw Mrs. Mersey spring backward, her face distorted with a terrible expression of horror and incredulity, and a shuddering fear that it was not good to look upon. I felt my blood run chill at sight of her.

And then into the range of the other window there came a great shaggy black dog, a dog with ugly red eyes and slobbering jaws. The beast looked like an enormous great wolf as it stood, whipping its tail from side to side like a tiger. It raised itself up—oh, it was a hideous thing to see!—until it stood straight upon its hind legs like a man, and then it began to walk thus toward the terrified, shrinking Mrs. Mersey.

I was frozen to the spot. I could only wonder, what could the doctor be doing, to let this threatening beast—. Then what happened next took all power of thought from me. I saw Mrs. Mersey stagger back, fumbling with the belt her husband had given her to hold. She pulled out the pistol with a jerk. She fired at that great beast three times, and the scream she gave afterward will ring in my ears for a long time to come.

I saw the black form crumple up and fall upon the floor. But I felt that here was something more than appeared on the surface. I lost no time in getting my automatic, ran out of my house around to where I remembered the consultation-room window was usually open. I intended to break the thin screening and go to the assistance of Mrs. Mersey; perhaps, also, of the doctor—.

And then, as you have already heard, I ran into Webb Annister, on the same errand.

From here on, our stories are the same, except that before I went out of the doctor's house I had the curiosity (unpardonable, perhaps, but very natural, I think, anyone will admit) to examine those little diaries for one of which the doctor had called, to have it burned. And then I made a discovery. In putting his notebooks into the leather covers Dr. Mersey had accidentally put Volume II into the cover for Volume III, and vice versa; the book that Mrs. Mersey had burned at his request was really Volume III.

FOR a moment I hesitated. Then I slipped the real Volume II into the pocket of my dressing-gown. I make no excuse for the action. It was dishonorable to the last degree. But I felt as if impelled by something stronger than my own sense of ethical values. I simply *had* to have some explanation of the thing that puzzled me more the more I dwelt on it, and it occurred to me that the solution of the mystery might well lie within that little black volume. How was it, for instance, that having seen a great shaggy dog shot down by Mrs. Mersey in her sitting-room, I enter immediately to find no trace of a dog anywhere, but the doctor himself dying where the dog had fallen to the floor? I think you gentlemen can understand my motives and my temptation.

I have since read the little volume in question. I am willing to make the contents known to you, Mr. Coroner, and to Mr. Annister, who has the right to learn them also, as he shared in the nocturnal adventure. But I feel it is wise not to let the contents of Dr. Mersey's diary become public property. You will understand and agree with me when I have read it to you, I am sure.

Signed, ARTHUR DOONE.

VOLUME II OF DR. GEORGE MERSEY'S DIARY

(Read aloud to the coroner and to Mr. Annister by Mr. Doone, and then, by common consent, committed to the flames in the presence of all three. Extracts here were marked in blue pencil, evidently by the doctor's own hand.)

June 10th. Ivan Sardoff in my office

this a. m. to consult with me on a digestional disturbance. Found he'd been confining himself to an almost exclusive meat diet. Told him to eat fresh vegetables and green things. Threw back his head and shouted with his strange laughter as he echoed my words. Can't like the fellow. Hope he doesn't succeed in making trouble between Rose-Marie and Hugo Mallin. Hugo is right man for that little Rose-witch.

June 11th. Rose-Marie came to ask me for an opiate, so that she wouldn't dream. Asked the child what she dreamed that could be so disagreeable. Said she dreamed every night that she changed into a white wolf and went hunting with another wolf, killing young lambs. She declares that these nocturnal journeys have so exhausted her that she can hardly move when she wakens in the morning. She did look worn out, poor child; face drawn, eyes purple-lidded.

She was wearing that girdle that Ivan Sardoff gave her. There is something sinister about the thing, for all its wonderful workmanship and glittering beauty. I wish the child wouldn't wear it. I asked her if she ever took it off, and she told me she wore it day and night. One could almost believe that Ivan had cast a spell upon her. I don't like it. Neither does Hugo!

June 13th. Hugo dropped in this afternoon. Has been out at the Skidderville sheep farm. Said there was a pair of wolves there nightly, a white and a gray, killing lambs in the most wanton fashion.

Poor Hugo is much distressed over Rose-Marie's ostentatious favors to Ivan Sardoff. She won't let Hugo have the banns read for their marriage.

. . . Stopped in to give some tablets to Rose-Marie, to make her stop dreaming! I told her quite seriously that her dreams were no doubt due to confining her body with that belt of Ivan's. Said she should relax completely when sleeping. She promised not to wear it tonight.

ASKED her point blank if Ivan had been threatening Hugo or herself. She admitted that he had; is actually afraid of him. Seems he made all manner of terrible threats against Hugo and herself, and then apparently repented and presented the girdle as a kind of peace-offering. Told her it was most valuable thing he had in the world. Of course, Rose-Marie was flattered, especially when he made her believe that only if she wore it could he believe himself forgiven. He told her something marvelous would happen to her and to Hugo if she would wear that girdle day and night until after her marriage. Now, what did he mean by that? Am persuaded he meant nothing good. If there ever was a bad man—thoroughly, efficiently evil—that man is Ivan Sardoff.

June 14th. Had a rather strange experience last night that somehow weighs heavily on my spirit. On my way to Father Dupré's about eleven, something like a great gray dog burst through the gap in the hedge around Rose-Marie's house and came to a stop under her window. I could have sworn then—although I am questioning it now—that it was a lank gray wolf that waited there! Of course, the fact that it whined querulously, looking up at her window, is only a coincidence, but it troubles me somehow.

. . . Hugo came in a few minutes ago to tell me that Rose-Marie has at last given permission for their banns to be read by Father Dupré, who has been duly notified, and is delighted, for he is fond of both Hugo and the little maiden. Hugo says she talks and acts like another person. She sent word by him that my medicine had made her sleep so soundly that she hadn't dreamed last night. Why, then, should I feel this depressing presentiment, as if her not dreaming had something to do with that girdle, the girdle she did not wear last night?

. . . I felt so troubled after my talk with Hugo that I felt I had to see Rose-Marie about that girdle. I am sure Ivan does not mean her well, and that his gift carries a curse with it. I cannot reason about it; I simply know. The intuition is always higher than mere intellect; it is of a loftier plane of existence and does not always make itself known through the avenue of reason.

I found the little maiden in her garden, among the flowers. Like a fool—or a man—I told her that the reason she had not dreamed was because she had not worn the girdle, not because of my opiate. She

laughed at my point-blank remark. Then I told her of the gray wolf that had called under her window. She went quite pale.

"Of what are you accusing me?" she said directly.

"You have heard of the loup-garou?" I countered. "Do you wish to do in fact what you have done in dreams? Until last night there was a pair of them—but *last night the gray wolf hunted alone.*"

"Does Hugo believe this hideous thing of me?"

I did not know, and said so.

"Tonight I shall wear poor Ivan's girdle, for I cannot rest until I have proved to you how unjust and silly you are."

I tried to dissuade her—vainly. Premonitions are depressing my spirit again.

. . . I have seen Hugo. We have determined to trap the gray wolf. I have digged a pit in front of that gap in the hedge before Rose-Marie's window. I have covered the opening lightly with branches. Rose-Marie knows nothing of this; she has been praying in the church since I talked with her.

THERE is something—fearful—about Ivan Sardoff. I mean about his personality. I cannot feel that he is altogether human. I have talked with Hugo about it today. We can hardly credit our own vague suspicions. Can it be possible that today, in this era of science—?

Hugo has gone to Skidderville. He is going to remain on watch among the lambs and will try to lame the gray wolf. In this way we can trace it to its den, or to—

I am to conceal myself before the little maiden's home tonight, *to see if a white wolf emerges from her window.*

I keep asking myself if it is possible that I am suffering a slight attack of brain-trouble, or if it is really true that I am considering as facts the old stories of lycanthropy?

I have begged Hugo not to leave town. I had a presentiment that I was talking with him for the last time. Of course he laughed at me when I told him.

June 15th. Have just been through a frightful and grilling experience. Heaven only knows what this hideous thing would mean to the world, if I were to make it public.

It is a ghastly thing to set down on paper, but I shall see to it that in case of my death this portion of my diary shall be burned, unread—unless I shall have decided meantime that the facts ought to be given the world of science. But I fear the story would be discredited. Who could believe, even after their own eyes had seen?

(*Here follows a notation on the margin, in another color of ink.*)

This is what Alice is always telling me. But the proof, if it were possible, would be fraught with too dreadful consequences. She is not to be persuaded and continues to taunt me, saying that my mind cannot be right or I would not attempt to make her believe such childish foolishness.

. . . The old-world tales of the werewolf or loup-garou, are not fairy tales to frighten children and thrill their elders. They are actual verities. I know. I have seen two such creatures with my own eyes, only last night.

I must be brief. I must put it all down while it is still fresh in my mind. And yet —some day I am sure I shall believe it all a dream, a terrible nightmare.

I have seen the white werewolf. It came from Rose-Marie's chamber window. Yes, the gray one called her from below, and I saw the flashing of the Balkan girdle about the middle of the white wolf as it sprang—the Balkan girdle—the girdle that Rose-Marie said she would wear all night to disprove my suspicions!

When I recovered from the shock of this confirmation of my suspicions, and peered from my hiding-place, both wolves were gone. I knew that Hugo would be at Skidderville, and I prayed that he would be led to spare the white wolf.

IT must have been four o'clock when the wolves returned. I heard the faint sound of their leaping feet through the darkness. My hair rose on end, pricking my scalp. I remembered tales of children, women, men, slain and devoured by werewolves. My gorge rose at the bare idea of falling prey to such a monster as Ivan Sardoff— While at the thought of that other—oh, it was frightful!

I maintained silence, scarcely daring to draw a full breath. The two came rushing through the woods, passing me so close by that I felt the wind of their rapid motion. The white one paused abruptly, for a snarl

of astonishment and dismay issued from the gray, which was ahead, as it fell, dully thudding, into the pit. I put my hand on my pistol, to rush out and finish it at once, and paused. I did not wish, heaven knows —I would rather have died, than to have encountered the *white* wolf.

Startled at the fate of its companion, the white wolf stood irresolute for a moment, turning its graceful head this way and that. At last it sprang from where it stood and leaped over the low hedge into the garden instead of going through the gap. As it went down on the other side I heard the sound of a human voice, a woman's voice, like the cry of a suddenly awakened sleeper! And then I saw that the branches of the hedge had caught at the glittering girdle that had encircled the white wolf's slim body, and had pulled it open; it hung glittering there in the starlight on the hedge top.

I hesitated only a moment. What lay beyond the hedge—? I did not go, for my plain duty, my awful duty to humanity, lay closer, lay at my very feet. I went cautiously to the edge of the pit and fired several times into the gloom. I was greeted by the snarls of a wild beast, snarls that altered strangely, that became like human cries and moans—and then died away into silence. It—he—was dead, thank heaven. I got my shovel and in a short time had filled in the pitfall that had now become a grave. A grave—for what? Or for whom? I dared not let my mind dwell on it.

At last I was free to see what lay on the other side of the hedge. I went through the gap, trembling in every limb as I warily approached the white, limp form that lay upon the damp grass. Ah, there was little need for fear; it was the slender figure of Rose-Marie that lay so death-like there. She was uninjured, save for possible bruises, I ascertained.

Then, my heart heavy with foreboding, I carried her into the house and put her on her own white bed. It is fortunate that Claude Devereaux is a heavy sleeper; it is also well that he never locks his doors, saying he has nothing to tempt thieves. Otherwise, I could not have gotten her into her room secretly.

Her secret is safe, locked within a faithful breast. For I—I am the only living creature, now, who knows it. Poor Hugo! When they brought his mangled body back from Skidderville this morning, they carried it first to Rose-Marie's house, for they knew she was promised to him. She would have thrown herself upon him—until her own guilty knowledge restrained her. Then she—but I cannot write more. She lies now, hovering between life, and merciful death. Better for her if she never regains consciousness!

NO one has mentioned Ivan's name. I hardly think his absence will be noted, except in relief. I have no scruples for my part in last night's work. I consider that I did well.

July 21st. Rose-Marie has been here to tell me what she could of her nocturnal wanderings with their tragic denouement. She wanted to say good-by, too. For I cannot remain longer in this town.

She has refused Father Dupré's prayer that she enter the Convent of the Bleeding Heart. She says she does not consider herself fit to live among the holy sisters. She told me that she would spend her life praying for her lover's soul and doing whatever she can to help mankind.

She still has the Balkan girdle. She found it dangling from the hedge the morning her lover was borne to her, dead, and she knew she had worn it the night before. I have remonstrated with her, but she is obsessed with the belief that she must continue to fight off nightly the terrible desire that nearly overpowers her, the longing to put on the girdle and once more gain her nocturnal freedom in wolf form. She says her hope of paradise is in her triumph over this temptation.

One thing she has made me swear to perform. In case of her illness or death she wishes me to receive from her hands that polluted, unholy thing that brings upon its wearer the curse of lycanthrophy, and to burn it to ashes.

(*Note by Dr. Mersey, in another ink:*)

Alice will not believe that I am serious when I refuse to discredit lycanthropy. I am beginning to fear that I may be gravely tempted to prove my contention if ever the chance comes to me. She is so unutterably exasperating. Heaven help me—and—lead me not into temptation!

THE IRON RING

By JACK KOFOED

BEAUTIFUL AMERICAN GIRL TO DIE! Those hard-boiled newshounds of war scooped Madrid's greatest spy-story. But if they let this glorious Mata Hari die, they too died at dawn!

MASTERS put down the telephone, over which he had been conversing with New York. He was chief of the Madrid bureau of the Associated Press. Red Knickerbocker and Dorothy Thompson, and others who ought to know, said Masters was the best newspaperman in Europe. They might have added that he was by long odds the toughest, too.

I was sitting in the office with Doc Parker, wondering what was going to break, and keeping an ear cocked for the sound of rebel planes coming over. You never knew when they were going to lay a steel egg in your lap.

The combination of Masters and bomb-

A Novelet of the Spanish War

ing raids was enough to make anybody nervous. It never seemed to bother Parker, though. He was one of those lean, sandy-haired fellows, who could eat a double portion of bacon and eggs while sitting on the edge of an erupting volcano.

He hadn't been on foreign duty more than a year, and the Spanish Civil War was the first armed conflict he had seen, but he took it in stride.

Masters ran his fingers through his gray thatch, and said: "Doc, you're probably the worst reporter I've ever known in my life."

Parker grinned amiably.

"Sure I am," he agreed. "There's nobody even close. It's all caused by negative psychology, though. I've seen too many movies where newspapermen forget to marry girls like Myrna Loy and Madeliene Carroll just because there was a story to get. I'm not screwy enough for that. What's the big boss in New York want you to do, fire me?"

"He would," said Masters, "but we're short-handed now, what with Eddie Nielson being killed, and Poggenberg down with pneumonia. Why couldn't you have learned something from Neilson? There *was* a man!"

Doc nodded. "The best in the world, but we can't all be cut on the same pattern. Besides, I've got something more important on my mind."

I knew what it was. She called herself Kira Petroskaya, and until the war started had danced in the better night clubs. Kira was the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life, but she wasn't any more Russian than Doc was. Her real name was Kay Cassel, and her people still lived in Flatbush. That was all right with me. If she thought Kira Petroskaya looked better on the billboards it was her business, not mine.

Still, there was something queer and mysterious about her. The night clubs, where she had drawn a big salary, had been closed for a long time, but she still seemed to have plenty of money. Not a woman in Madrid dressed as well, or lived in such a magnificent apartment.

Masters looked disgusted.

"A little more interest in your work and a little less in that dancer wouldn't do you any harm."

"Boss," said Doc, "a man who would think about a story when he could think about a woman like her should be in the psychiatric ward at Bellevue. Did you ever see Kira dance? She moves like the quick, vivid notes of Debussy."

"You've been reading the *Times* music column," growled Masters. "Debussy! Quick, vivid notes! You're enough to drive a guy insane. But I've got a job for you, and it hasn't anything to do with music. New York asked me to run down a story they've been tipped off to about a woman spy in Madrid . . . a woman more glamorous than Mata Hari or Argentina ever thought of being."

"Those pinheads in New York," said Doc Parker, "were brought up in Wappingers' Falls, and never got over it. They believe everything Bob Ripley tells them. A beautiful woman spy! You know as well as I do there never was such a thing. Mata Hari herself couldn't have gotten into the second row of a Minsky chorus."

Masters smiled. It seemed to hurt him a little, because he wasn't used to it.

"You think Kira Petroskaya is pretty good looking, don't you?"

"Good looking? Say, anyone who would describe her that way would say the Taj Mahal was a fair piece of architecture. She's the most gorgeous thing an indulgent heaven ever sent to earth. . . ."

Doc wasn't talkative on most subjects, but when he got around to Miss Petroskaya he could go on like an old man river. The boss hardly seemed to be listening, but at the stage he held up a warning finger.

"Well," he said, "it looks as though you've ruined your own argument. All right, Kira *is* beautiful. That makes one pretty spy, because she is the girl New York was talking about!"

DOC leaned across the desk, and his long, bony fingers wrapped around Masters' wrist. I thought for a moment he might let the old Sunday punch go.

"Look," he said, "I don't mind a gag now and then, but stop mixing Kira up with your idea of humor. It's not funny, and I don't like it."

"You ought to know by this time," said Masters, jerking his hand away, "that I don't go in for kidding. New York says the girl is working for Franco. Maybe she is. How do you know?"

Parker walked over to the window, and looked out into the Spanish sunshine while he considered. Then he said, without turning:

"Even if she is, do you think I'd turn her up for the sake of a story? I'm not that kind of a newspaperman. Nobody is, except you, maybe, and that's because you've got iced tea in your veins instead of blood. Kira isn't going to do her stuff in front of a firing squad just so a newspaper in Joplin, Missouri, can have a headline for a hardware dealer to talk about with his frowsy wife."

This time Masters laughed out loud.

"Why don't you grow up? Do you think for a minute I'd hand you an assignment like this if it meant any danger to Kira? I don't want her killed. I want her story. Smuggle her across the French border, and if she loves you she ought to be willing to talk, once she's safe. This is a big thing, Doc. Put it over, and it will mean more salary . . . a bonus . . . maybe even the Pulitzer Prize."

"The devil with the Pulitzer Prize," Parker said. "They'll give it to a guy who finds out that green apples give you a bellyache. That's their idea of a smashing story."

"Well, my idea is this one about Kira," retorted Masters angrily, "and you'll get it, or go out on your ear. Here's a thousand dollars for expenses. You may need it to get her away. You go with him, Kelley. Doc will need help."

"Me?" I said. "Haven't I trouble enough?"

"You'll have more if I hear another word out of you. Scram! And make sure you get the story in before the war's over. If those Moroccans bust into Madrid we won't have any wires to send it on."

Parker crammed the bills into his pocket, and we went out. The City was reasonably quiet, because at the moment pressure was being put on Barcelona, and Madrid had a little breathing spell. But we all knew it probably wouldn't last long.

While we were walking toward Kira's apartment, Doc said: "There's something wrong about this set-up. If she is a spy, how did the New York office find out about it? And, if New York knows, the Iron Ring probably does, too. We've got to get her out of town in a hurry, if they haven't grabbed her already."

The Iron Ring was the name we had for the dread secret police of Madrid. They were as ruthless men as I have ever encountered. If they were wise to Kira, our goose was cooked!

While I was thinking, we arrived at Kira's apartment, and rang the bell and kicked on the door, but nobody answered.

When the military authorities of any country catch a spy during war-time they don't waste any formalities. A quick court-martial and a firing squad. That's all there is to it. Parker knew it as well as I did, and when we were sure Kira wasn't in her apartment, he began to bite his nails.

"What do we do now?" I asked.

"Let's look up Tom O'Brien," he said.

Tom was an ex-prize fighter from Brooklyn. He had come over five or six years before to fight Paulino Uzcudun, and liked Madrid so much that he settled down there. When the war began Tom enlisted in the International Brigade, was wounded and invalided out of the service. He knew everybody and everything that was going on. If the police had caught up with Kira he would be bound to know about it. At that time of the day he was always in Querida's wine-shop, drinking porto. We started over there.

MADRID looked like an old coat turned inside out, with the lining all frayed and worn. Trolley rails stood up like snaggled teeth. One of the houses across the way had its front blown in, and I could look into the kitchen, where pots and pans still stood on the shelves, and strings of onions hung against the wall.

It would be just about ten o'clock of a summer morning in New York, and if I was back home I'd be working on the *Post* and wondering whether to ask Dorothy or Lily to a jam session at the Onyx Club that night. And here I was in Madrid, with a war on my hands, to say nothing of this screwy assignment. I liked Kira, but if she was a spy I didn't want to get mixed up with her, because those Spaniards are awful impulsive, and sometimes do things they're sorry for afterward. I wanted to be in a position where I could be sorry. . . not them!

We found O'Brien without any trouble. Doc asked him about Kira.

"I haven't seen her today," Tom said, "but I can give you a tip. Be smart and stay away from her."

"So you know about it, too, eh?" said Parker.

"I know what I know, and I'm not talkin' about it. You're a couple of newspaper guys . . . and a word to the wise is supposed to be enough." I thought so, too, because O'Brien was awfully big, and had a quick temper, and I didn't aim to be around if he let that temper get the best of him. So, we left . . . still having no idea where Miss Petroskaya might be. Personally, I would just as soon have been looking for a grain of sand in a bushel of rice.

II

SUDDENLY a siren began to screech. That meant an air-raid to add to our troubles. We flattened against a wall. So did everybody else in the street, waiting like runners at the start of a race. For a moment there wasn't any sound at all, except toward University City, where the machine guns nibbled bits out of the stillness.

A woman was standing next to me with a baby in her arms. It began to whimper. I had a queer idea the pilots up there in the sky could hear the child. Why didn't its mother keep it quiet? The airmen were getting their bombs ready to drop on the infant. Of course, it was silly, but hammered nerves get that way. You imagine foolish things.

The siren stopped. I thought: Maybe it's just a false alarm. Everybody is so jittery a flock of crows would make those things go off.

But it wasn't a flock of crows. A bomb exploded in the next street. It hit the eardrums with a smash that was almost deafening. Everyone began to run . . . some yelling . . . some mumbling . . . some in stark quiet. They wanted to get something over their heads. I ran, too, and Doc was right at my heels.

We raced into an alley that smelled of garbage. A girl in a black dress was standing there. Of course it was Kira. Frank Capra himself could not have staged it any better, and I might add that Clark Gable could hardly have improved on Doc's performance when he took Kira in his arms. It did seem a little silly, though, making love in any alley full of slops, with bombs exploding, and a dead man in the gutter ten paces away.

But the meeting didn't look on the level to me. Of course, coincidences happen. Life is full of them. Still, this was a little too queer. It just didn't hold together.

After a little while I asked:

"What's this all about, kid? You don't want to tell us this meeting is just chance, do you?"

"No," Kira admitted, "I followed you and Doc. I need your help. I've got to get away."

"There's nothing to worry about," Parker said. "We know all about it. The New York office telephoned us, and Masters sent us out to get the story. But what's a story compared with you? I don't care if I ever get it, so long as you're safe. Newspaper loyalty, my eye! I've only got one job and that's to take care of you."

"Wait a minute," I protested. "Maybe you don't care about losing out with the A.P., but I do. Imagine what will happen if we walk into the office empty-handed. I'll help you get her out of Spain . . . but she's got to come through afterward."

"She will if she wants to, and not otherwise. Say, you fathead, don't you realize that if she talks too much they might catch up with her no matter where she is? Isn't that so, Kira?"

The girl smiled.

"Look," I said. "You don't need to worry about what may happen next week or next year. Right this minute is what we've got to bother about. You really are a spy, aren't you, Kira?"

She nodded.

"That means that if our New York office was tipped off about you the Ministry of National Defense probably is wise, too, and the Iron Ring is looking for you at this very minute."

Kira agreed that this was doubtless true.

"And, if they get you," I went on, "our story goes boom! . . . like that . . . and there will be neither raise nor bonus, to say nothing of giving back the thousand dollars expenses."

That aroused Doc. "I ought to bat you on the nose for considering anything but Kira at a time like this."

"I'm considering something else, too," I added. "Unless we keep under cover, the the Iron Ring is likely to take us as well as Kira. They are so excited now that they might give us a dose of lead poisoning before finding out we are American newspapermen. When people are in the middle of a war like this they shoot first, and ask questions afterward. Maybe I'm a little silly about all this, but I aim to go on living."

A soldier, with a bayonetted rifle on his shoulder, walked past the alley, and we shrank deeper into the gloom.

"All right, all right," said Parker. "Let's find Kira some men's clothes, and get started."

"Wait a minute," the girl interrupted. "Before I go I'll have to see the people I've been working with. I can't walk out on them without a word."

"Sure," said Doc. "Sure you'll have to do that."

Well, in my imagination I could hear the tramp of the Iron Ring's agents coming to grab all of us. But the story and the money were with Kira . . . so I just shrugged my shoulders, and said: "Let's go!"

THE air-raid was over, and we walked out of the alley. I had my shoulders hunched, and the skin still pringled along the back of my neck. It wasn't that I was afraid of more bombs, but any minute I expected a squad of doughboys to come along and place us under arrest. But Kira walked with a free stride and a swing to her hips, and Doc shuffled along in his usual careless way.

Three blocks down. One to the right. Two more to the left, in silence except for the drone from University City. Nobody seemed to notice us. Maybe everything would be all right, after all.

We stopped in front of a bakery shop that Kira said was her destination and pretended to scan the small supply of cakes and brown-crusted bread in the window, while we looked up and down the street to see if we were being watched.

"Doc and I will wait out here," I said.

"By no means," said Kira. "I want you to come in."

Well, we had gone that far. We might as well go the rest of the way. But it seemed to me that we were sticking our heads in a noose that was hanging invitingly before us. Kira pushed open the door, and we went in.

Behind the counter stood a man, with apple cheeks and a monstrous belly that shook when he laughed. He giggled as he jerked his thumb to the door behind him.

"They're in there," he said.

Kira led the way into the back room. Five men sat smoking cigarettes and talking. I knew all of them, though I had no previous idea they were spies. There were Calderon, who was long and sallow, and worked on a morning paper; Larita, who had been a matador in Belmonte's time; Montes, tall and handsome, who operated one of the night clubs in which Kira danced; Poseda, a gnome-like man, with the eyes of a fanatic . . . and Tom O'Brien!

They looked at us suspiciously. I think they would have cut our throats with pleasure. After all, they were in a business that left them no chance to accept anybody that happened along.

"I had an idea something like this would happen," O'Brien said. "These lugs came snoopin' around, lookin' for you only a little while ago. They're newspapermen, and before you know it there'll be front-page stories all over the world about what we're doin'. Do you know what that means?" He ran his finger suggestively across his throat.

"Don't be any dumber than you have to be," Kira answered. "I'm all through here, and you know it. They're going to get me away to France. . . ."

"And afterward," said Poseda in a sibilant whisper, "tell what they know about us." He took out a snub-nosed automatic. "We are much safer with them out of the way."

"Look," I said. "We were tipped off to this story from New York. If we wanted to turn anybody up we could have done it without sticking our noses in here. Don't you see Doc and Kira are nuts about each other? They want to get away. I'm Doc's pal. I want to help him. That ought to be clear enough."

Poseda looked doubtful. He had an itchy finger, that guy, to say nothing of homicide in his heart, and it would have pleased him to put a couple of slugs in each of us.

"All right," said O'Brien disagreeably. "If Kira says it's all right I guess it is."

At that Miss Petroskaya stepped across the room to talk with the Irishman. Poseda still had the gun in his hand, and I didn't like the look on his face. He never was the sort of person you could talk out of anything. When he made up his mind it was made up for life.

No sooner had Kira turned her back than the little man whipped the black barrel toward Doc. Expecting that sort of thing, I made a flying tackle, my shoulder hitting Poseda amidships. The roar of the exploding cartridge and the little man's anguished grunt came out simultaneously. There I was down on the floor, trying to pull the automatic out of his iron fingers, and an astounded gabble of voices filling the room. O'Brien yanked me off, and several of the others took hold of Poseda.

"You saved Doc's life," said Kira in a shaken voice. "Oh, thanks, Kelley . . . thanks. . . ."

But apparently the others were not concerned about it, or anything but the fact that the shot might bring unwelcome people to investigate.

"Let's get out of here," I said.

"Of course," added Kira, looking around

the room. "I didn't want to go without telling you. Wish me luck."

"You'll need it, senorita," said another voice from the doorway. I looked around, and there was an infantry lieutenant, with a gun in his hand, and back of him the store full of soldiers with bayonetted rifles!

III

THERE would have been no use of our companions going for their guns, for the place would have turned into a shambles. Most of us were white as vanilla ice cream, but not Kira. She opened her vanity, and made some repairs to her makeup. Funny about women. When you expect them to get hysterical they are as calm as a lake on a summer afternoon. I was feeling pretty shaky, though, for I had covered the action at Valencia and Barcelona and when the rebels took the hydroelectric plant at Tremp. The Spaniards weren't careful of anybody, and I was afraid they might be none too careful with us.

Out in the store the apple-cheeked man was raising a fuss, and one of the soldiers clipped him on the chin with as pretty a right cross as you ever saw in your life. The lieutenant didn't even turn around to see what was happening. He had little round black eyes, with yellow whites like a mule's and an irritating grin. Cute as a wrestler's ear, if you ask me, and just about as pleasant to look at.

All of us held up our hands. There wasn't much else we could do.

We were marched down the street in the middle of the clump of bayonets. Lots of people passed by, but nobody paid any attention to us. It was a good thing to mind your own business in Madrid.

The little lieutenant was within a pace of me. I said, "Look, General, I'm Kelley from the Associated Press, and this is Parker from the same office. We're newspapermen . . . not spies."

He laughed.

"Señor, nobody will care what you were after we get through with you."

It sounded bad, and I was afraid it would turn out to be worse than it sounded.

We came abreast of a church, the façade of which had been hammered and battered by shells. The officer gave a brisk command in Spanish, and we turned into it. The place was full of other prisoners, all of whom seemed to be as dejected as we were.

The three of us—Doc, Kira and I—sat down in one of the pews. The others were over in another corner of the church.

"Well," I said, "this is a fine note. These guys are awful quick on the trigger . . . and when they pull 'em they'll be sure to have the muzzles pointed right at us."

Kira was poking through her handbag for some cigarettes. I looked at her profile, and thought: no wonder Doc fell for her. But, then, it's always the prettiest women who drag a man deepest. If she had big hips and legs like a Percheron we wouldn't be in this jam now.

"Don't worry, Kelley," the girl said, finding a mashed pack under a litter of compacts and handkerchiefs and whatnot.

I tried not to be too sarcastic when I said, "Oh, no, there's nothing to worry about. What do Spaniards or anybody else do with spies in war-time . . . give 'em turkey and champagne and tickets to the movies?"

"But you're not spies," Kira said.

"Do you think they'll take our word for it? *You* are, by your own confession. So are the others we were caught with . . . and if it's really true you are judged by the company you keep, we're in a terrible fix."

"Besides, if they . . . they . . . kill you," Doc said, "they might as well kill us, too. I can't live without you."

"I don't like to sound catty," I broke in, "but I can . . . and we've got to do something to get out of here."

Miss Petroskaya said nothing for a moment as she looked around the gloomy interior of the church. There were men and women of all ages and all conditions of society, to judge by their clothes. Here was a man in a morning coat, spats and top hat . . . there a Basque peasant in beret and baggy pants. One woman looked like a society dowager; another like the laundress who ruined my shirts with such meticulous and loving care each week. There must have been a pretty general kind of roundup to net such a motley group.

"Kelley," said the girl, "Doc tells me you are a good newspaperman, a much better one than he is. But there are some

things even the best reporter can't find out. Do you know why I have been so calm and undisturbed by our arrest?"

I shook my head. How can you tell about women? They never run true to form.

"Well, then, listen closely," Kira said, lowering her voice to the faintest whisper. "I am a spy, true enough, but I'm not working for Franco. I am in the employ of General Espada, head of the Madrid government. Counter espionage, they call it . . . and I have done my job by exposing the crowd we were arrested with!"

IV

DID you ever stand on the fifth floor of a burning building, with all hope gone just as the firemen arrived and hauled you out?

If you have, you'll know how I felt at that moment. Sixty seconds before, I had been trying to make up my mind that whatever happened I'd keep a stiff upper lip when the death sentence was read. Now, in a few minutes I'd be able to go back to the office as though nothing had happened. The only fly in the ointment was that if we didn't have to smuggle Kira across the border we'd have to return the thousand dollars . . . and I had already figured on pocketing a few hundred of it myself. But . . . well, you can't have everything, and it's awful nice knowing that some rough men are not going to pat you in the face with a spade.

"Tell us now," I said. "This is the most interesting news I've heard in a long time."

Kira found the cigarette she had been looking for, and lit it.

"When I was dancing at the Club Hernandez I met General Espada. He is a charming man, handsome, accomplished, sophisticated. Several months ago he told me a spy ring was endangering the cause for which he was fighting. He needed someone, a woman preferably, to uncover it. I accepted his offer, because the reward was great, and I felt it would give Jim and me a great start when we married. If there ever was an undercover agent I'm it, for no one except Espada himself knew I was on the job. I never went to his office at all. He came to my apartment at odd hours for reports.

"Well, all that's perfectly ducky," I said, "but if Espada was the only one who knew you were a spy, how did they find out about you in New York? The General's not working for the Associated Press, is he?"

Kira smiled, and if you have never seen her smile you can't know how the slight movement of red lips and white teeth can affect a man.

"You can see through a knot hole, can't you, Kelley? No, General Espada wasn't working for the A.P. I was . . . or, rather, for Doc, who is the only thing about the A.P. I care anything about."

"I don't get it," I said, and there was no reason why I should.

"It's easy when it is explained," Kira said. "You know as well as I do that Doc isn't the best newspaperman in the world. Still, it is the only business he knows, and I want him to succeed at it. When we get married and go home I don't want to keep on dancing in night clubs. That's what I'll have to do unless he makes more money."

"That's reasonable enough," I agreed, "but I still don't know what you're talking about."

"You ought to. I knew my job was all through here . . . and once these fellows were arrested I would be useless. So I sent a cable to the New York office, telling them about me, and that Doc was my sweetheart . . . and he was the only one who could get the story. Now he'll be able to come through with it. That means maybe he'll make enough for us to live on."

It seemed to answer everything. Kira had told her story to the little lieutenant, and since it seemed so important he had gone off to the Ministry of Justice himself. Very likely he'd return in a few minutes, and then we could go back to the office. This wouldn't make a bad feature story, and maybe we could kid Masters into believing we had spent the thousand bucks getting it. Certainly the job had been done fast enough.

Back of the church was a little yard, with a whitewashed stone wall. Every once in a while a squad of soldiers would stamp in with accoutrements clanking, pick out three or four people and march them into the yard of the doomed. Each would be given a cigarette and a few moments in

which to say good-bye to his friends or relatives. Then, a few minutes later, we'd hear the dry crash of rifle fire from the yard. After a while your sensations get numbed. You knew those people were going to be killed, but it made no impression on you. War is like that. It stupefies your emotions.

Our friends, who had been arrested with us in the bakery shop, were huddled together, talking earnestly. Occasionally they cast bitter looks in our direction, and I assumed they were blaming Parker and me for what had happened. Poor chumps. They should have known the truth!

Then our little lieutenant, with the mule eyes appeared. He strutted importantly. A show-off. That's what he was, and I liked him less than ever. He came directly to our pew, and Kira greeted him with her dazzling smile.

"May we go now?" she asked.

"No, señorita, you may not. Orders are that you all must be held for a court-martial tomorrow."

"But, surely the general can tell you that we. . . ."

The officer drew himself rigidly to attention.

"General Espada was killed in this afternoon's air raid!" he said solemnly.

BEING a newspaperman, my first reaction to this startling news was that I must get it to Masters right away. Espada was the strong man of Madrid, a military strategist of the first water, and a great political leader. His death might mean the end of the war. It might mean anything. No doubt it would be kept a secret for a while, and if I could get hold of the office, we could scoop the other news services. I'd have bet a million dollars Doc Parker would never have thought of that. Then I looked at his face, and knew why.

With General Espada dead no one knew Kira had been employed by him. . . . and we would all be shot as spies!

My heart went right down into my boots, and the rumble of another execution volley didn't help me at all. But, if we were to be knocked off there was one thing I'd have to do before I died, and that was to break the Espada story. It was the biggest since Hitler went into Austria.

Doc and Kira were slumped down in the pew, pale and shaken. Without Espada's help she was in an absolutely hopeless position, and the evidence she had given the general would doom her, and us, too. Not a single glimmer of hope, not a ray of sunshine. We were licked. But, no matter whether or not they filled us with lead slugs I'd have to get that story to the A. P.!

Apparently those who were to be held for trial were slated for prisons. At any rate, we were taken away by a detail under an Asturian sergeant, who had served with the dynamiting battalions earlier in the war. He talked about his experiences continually in a high pitched voice. Probably the sergeant was shell shocked. He acted that way. I was shoved into a barrack with Tom O'Brien and Poseda. The others were taken somewhere else; where, of course, I had no way of knowing.

Poseda was sardonic and sneering, a fanatic who expected to die and wanted to die in the cause he was serving. O'Brien glowered and chewed gum, and refused to talk to me. That was all right. I wanted to figure out how I could get out of this place.

It did not look so difficult at first glance. The barrack had been hastily constructed of wood, with a tarpaper roof, and several unbarred windows.

The only difficulty was that guards were stationed at each door, and on the roof of another barrack across the way was a machine gun that could sweep the street from end to end. Next to the gun was a high power searchlight that could pick a rat out of the darkness. It was my first thought that night would be the only time to make a run for it, but then I realized that after dark the guards would be more vigilant, and the staring white beams would make a prisoner even more conspicuous than in the sunshine. The odds were a thousand to one against getting away, but I had to try it. The Espada story burned hot in my mind, and the only chance Kira and Doc would have lay in reaching the American minister. I like my life as well as anybody . . . but this was once when I'd have to take it in my hands.

Masters used to say a smart newspaper man could figure his way out of any situation. I wished he was here to think

a way out of this one. A lot of things look easy in theory . . . but there isn't any theory about those rifles and machine guns. They are awfully practical.

Suddenly there came a clump, clump of marching feet. A squad, with a captain at their head, turned the corner of the barrack, and came to a halt. What was this? What was coming off? O'Brien and Poseda got to their feet. Even the man with the waxed mustache woke up, and yawned.

"Attention!" the captain barked. "The prisoners are to appear at once before a court-martial. You will come with me!"

WITHIN fifteen minutes we were in a huge, arched room in the Ministry of Justice. Kira and Doc were there, and the others who had been taken with us. The officers of the court-martial sat behind a long mahogany table, resplendent in bright uniforms and decorations, six of them, grim men who had seen much service on the firing line. There was neither prosecutor nor defense counsel. The president of the court simply called each defendant, and asked the questions himself.

Kira was first. She was pale, but self possessed, with no quiver in the smooth music of her voice. She told of her contact with General Espada . . . of his request that she become his personal agent. She recited the steps she had taken to become one of the espionage ring that the general feared so much. The pot-bellied man of the bakery, Calderon, Larita, Montes, Poseda and O'Brien stared at her blackly as she spoke. There was murder in their eyes. They shifted uneasily in their seats. Their fingers clenched and unclenched. They muttered to themselves.

Kira spoke of us, of her love for Doc Parker. The court must know Parker and Kelley, of the Associated Press. We were registered as correspondents. There could be no question of our innocence. There would be none of hers were General Espada alive to testify that she was telling the truth. She was as magnificent as she was beautiful. What a scene this would make for the movies, I thought, forgetting for a moment that I was a defendant just as much as she was.

When Doc and I were called we told the truth as simply as we could; the assignment from Masters; the meeting with Kira; our capture in the bake shop. I asked that Masters be called to verify what we said. The court listened. I scanned their faces, trying to guess what was going on in their minds behind the grim masks. It wasn't any use. They might believe us, or they might think we were liars. There was no way of knowing.

The men who had been captured with us made no defense at all. They cursed the Madrid government. They shook their fists and yelled in their impulsive Latin way. All except Tom O'Brien. He said: "Everybody in Madrid knows me. I fought and was wounded with the International Brigade. You got my record in your books. If you think I'm a spy there ain't nothin' I can do about it." Then he sat down, sullen and impassive.

The guards led us out to a great, bare ante-room, where we were to wait until the court had arrived at its verdict. Apparently the captain, who commanded the squad, realized the situation that existed among the defendants. Kira, Doc and I were kept in one part of the room; the others at a distance from us.

Kira looked at us miserably.

"If they don't believe me we're sunk," she said. "I don't care for myself, but you . . . oh, Doc . . . my darling . . . if I should bring you to. . . ."

"Forget it," Parker said. "We'll take whatever comes together, and I can't ask any more of life."

Then I popped up. "That just proves what Masters said was right. You're a lousy newspaper man. I'm thinking about my neck, but I'm thinking about the Espada story, too. It's the biggest thing of the year. We've got to get it to the office . . . a scoop that'll pin back the ears of every other news service in the world."

"What a time to think of a story!" Doc said. "You're built along the same lines as Masters."

The captain approached with grave courtesy. Maybe he had believed our stories. I don't know. Anyway, he was nice.

"Will you follow me, please? The verdict is to be announced."

I hope I didn't look the way I felt. My heart was banging like a bass drum. I felt tight from head to heels. They hadn't

had time to send for Masters. Maybe they had telephoned him. I hope so, anyway. There was no inkling to be gained from the faces of the judges. They looked just the same as they had when we left the court-room.

We lined up before the table. The captain barked, "Attention!" in a strained voice.

The Colonel-president looked at the sheet of paper in his hand; then shifted his keen gray eyes to us.

"The court," he said, "has arrived at a verdict. There is no doubt of the guilt of all concerned. The sentence of the court as applied to the defendants Calderon, Larita, Montes, O'Brien, Poseda and Kira Petroskaya is death at the hands of a firing squad; the sentence to be carried out at dawn tomorrow. In the case of the defendants, Parker and Kelley, twenty years imprisonment at hard labor. Dismissed!"

The court rose as one man. The captain shouted. "About face! March!" We turned automatically toward the door.

Kira was to die! Kira, with her gorgeous figure and angelic face. Doc tottered. His knees were like water. He didn't care about his sentence. We'd both be out as soon as the war was over; probably a lot sooner, once the American minister took an interest. But Kira. If she died Doc's heart would die with her.

V

I WAS back in the barrack once more with O'Brien and Poseda. I don't know what had happened to the man with the waxed mustache. He was gone, and I never saw him again. The prizefighter was laughing.

"This time tomorrow I'll be out of it," he said, "but you . . . say, Kelley, do you know what a Spanish prison is like? Devil's Island is a playground compared with it. Masters will never hear what happened to you and Parker. You'll just disappear and nobody will know anything about you. Maybe you'll go nuts in the dungeons. Better men than you have."

I didn't answer. There was no adequate reply, anyway, and besides I was still thinking about getting away. I had to. It was impossible to imagine Kira standing before a firing squad, and the bullets specking red spots on her dress. Besides . . . Doc. It would kill him. The whole thing was up to me. It always was when Parker was concerned. I had pulled him out of a dozen scrapes before . . . covered stories he had forgotten. A grand guy, but helpless. Why he ever went into the newspaper racket I'll never know.

Someone was hammering on the roof. Presently a section of the board and tarpaper was removed, and a grizzled face looked through.

"Don't mind me, señors," the face said. "I'm only fixing your little cage so the rain won't come in. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Jose, the carpenter, and a first class workman, if I may be so immodest as to say so."

O'Brien grinned.

"Hello, Jose," he said. "Fancy meeting you here."

The carpenter waved a cheerful greeting. "I am sorry to see you here, Tomas. No good ever come of this place."

"Look," said O'Brien. "Nobody ever showed up at a better time. You can do me a favor."

"I should be happy to do so," said the carpenter, "considering that you saved my life at the front. But I have no desire to endanger myself, either. Cigarettes, perhaps . . . whisky, no? What is it you want? Tell me, Tomas."

"Have you a rope there?"

"Yes."

"Then slide down. They're goin' to knock me off tomorrow, and I want to give you a message. No one else must hear. Besides, I got five hundred pesos, and they won't do you no harm. Come down. That's a good guy."

Jose slipped his hammer into his overalls pocket, and dropped a length of rope through the opening he had made in the roof. A moment later he slid down, landing with a thud on the floor.

"Hurry, hurry, O'Brien," he said. "For you . . . and the money. . . . I would do much, but this is dangerous. It might even mean my life if I were caught here."

The prizefighter had been stalling. That was evident in the way he talked. Now I caught his drift. He meant to don the carpenter's overalls and floppy hat, climb

down off the roof and walk away under the eyes of the guards. But he wasn't going to do it if I could help it. I would, instead. This was my only one chance . . . the only one to help Doc and Kira, and get the story of General Espada on the A. P. wires. But how? O'Brien was bigger and stronger than I, and could knock me out with a punch. But the hammer . . . the hammer in Jose's pocket! That might be my salvation.

O'Brien explained his idea. Jose protested. He couldn't do it. They would give him the firing squad for helping a prisoner escape. No . . . no.

Tom's grim face grew darker.

"Take your clothes off, Jose," he said. "I'll tie you up, and you can explain that you fell through the hole, and I pounced on you. If you don't. . . ." He doubled his great fists and shook them under the man's nose. . . . "I'll knock you unconscious first, and do it myself."

The carpenter began to undress, whining about the ingratitude of man, and the trouble that was bound to descend upon him. The overalls fell in a crumpled heap on the floor. O'Brien tore up a sheet, and tied Jose hand and foot with expert speed. Then he fashioned a gag, and crammed it into the fellow's mouth.

I edged closer, trembling a little with excitement. Tom was so busy with his task that he paid little attention to me. The hammer lay on top of the overalls, within easy reach. I glanced at Poseda. He was watching me with suspicious eyes. The time had come. A slip would ruin me. I grabbed the hammer. O'Brien straightened up, and came for me as fast as he could. If those gorilla arms ever wrapped around me I was done for. I hit him, and he let out a gurgling sort of moan and collapsed. With that, I spun around. Sure enough, Poseda was right after me, whimpering with hate and eagerness. I let him have it, too . . . and he went out like a light.

There I was with the chance I had been praying for. I was into the overalls in a jiffy. With the hat pulled well down over my forehead to cover my face I climbed the rope, and emerged on the roof. The sun was setting. Long, black shadows crept down the street. I looked over the edge, and I could see the guards below. Why hadn't the machine gunner seen Jose's descent into the barracks? Was he just waiting for me to go down the ladder before unloosing his blast of death? But no. The barrack had a peaked roof, and the side Jose had been repairing was hidden from the gunner's eyes.

I collected the carpenter's tools, and put them in his box. Then I began clambering down the ladder, with my ears strained for the challenge I expected to hear. If any of the guards knew Jose, I wouldn't get ten feet from the barrack before they shot me down!

TEN feet . . . fifteen . . . then one of the soldiers called, "All through, Jose?" I nodded and waved and walked on. A trolley car came limping along the twisted tracks, and I swung myself aboard with as much nonchalance as I could muster. I had escaped. It was incredible . . . impossible . . . but I had. But I had to get out of sight in a hurry. It was only a matter of minutes, likely enough, before the guards found the two unconscious prisoners and the trussed up carpenter. Then the hue and cry would be on in earnest.

Masters! I'd have to get to him as fast as I could. Kira had only a matter of twelve hours before she faced a firing squad. The Espada death had to be checked and the details verified. There was much to do.

A wheezing taxicab labored past the trolley. I leaped out, and hailed it, giving the address of the A. P. office. I took off the overalls and hat, and stuffed them into the tool box. The box I intended leaving in the cab. It wouldn't be a clue. The people who were chasing me didn't need any. They knew I was Roger Kelley, of the Associated Press, and would head for the office like a homing pigeon. I didn't expect to get out of Madrid. All I hoped was that I could reach Masters and tell him everything before some soldiers took me back to the barrack. The boss would literally rip the city apart to find Doc and Kira, and get us straightened out . . . and what he'd say about the Espada story would be plenty.

When I was within a block of the building where the A. P. was housed I left the taxi, and edged around the building in a

semi-circle, coming up behind it. Something was wrong. I didn't know what it was, but the feeling was in my bones. What could it be?

I slipped in through a rear door, and saw Gonzalez, the janitor. He looked like a man who had just seen a ghost.

"Come on, out with it," I said. "Where's Señor Masters."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows? Who knows what goes on in this city? There is no one in the office. It is closed. Everyone is gone."

"That's impossible."

"You can see for yourself if you choose. Señor gave me the keys before he left."

"But where has he gone?" I demanded. "I've got to get hold of him. It's life and death, I tell you, Gonzalez."

He had seen too much of death in the harried city to be perturbed by my excitement. I couldn't get anything out of him. He didn't know where Masters or any of the others were . . . and he didn't care.

What was I to do now? I looked at my wrist watch. It was sixteen minutes after five. Less than a dozen hours before they would lead Kira before the firing squad. Something had to be done about it . . . and Masters was the only one who could do it . . . and I had no idea where he might be found. Where could I go? What could I do? As soon as I went into the street I might be picked up myself. The Iron Ring was everywhere, saw everything.

Someone was looking through the rear door . . . a man in uniform. He had a sleek and confident look, as though he knew the chap he was waiting for was somewhere in the building. He was waiting for me. I hadn't any doubt of that.

I WENT into the lobby. There was a side entrance that led into the building next door, and I slipped through it . . . and a moment later I was in the street. A little way down the block was a restaurant belonging to a friend of mine. I headed there because I was tired and hungry, and figured maybe Pancho might know where Masters was. He didn't, but brought out wine and food, and let me eat in a back room, where nobody could see me. I told him what had happened, and he promised to keep an eye open for suspicious characters while I stoked up the old body, and tried to figure out what the next step ought to be. So much had happened in a few hours that it had me groggy. I telephoned everybody I could think of. Nobody knew where Masters was.

Several hours must have passed. Then Pancho came in. He was a little pale around the mouth.

"I'm afraid they're here," he said in a thin voice.

"They?"

"The police, I suppose. They are in the back. As soon as it became dark somebody came into the yard."

"Have you got a gun?" I asked. They weren't going to take me without a struggle . . . not at this stage of the game. Pancho slipped an automatic into my hand.

"You are a brave man, señor," he said. "I hope you are a good shot."

I wasn't, but as a general thing the Spaniards aren't, either, so I figured the odds weren't too heavy. Gripping the gun tightly, I slipped to the window, and peered into the yard. A silver platter of a moon had just sailed over the edge of the roofs across the way, and gave the yard a certain illumination. I could see someone crouched back against the wall. No doubt that was the same fellow, who had been looking for me at the A. P. building.

To get an idea of what might happen I took a pot shot at the shadow . . . not trying to hit it, but just knock off some plaster above its head. If the shadow ran it would be someone who wasn't dangerous to me. If it fired back then the chances were odds-on that it was an agent of the Iron Ring.

Well, it fired all right. The bullet smashed the window and showered me with glass. I shot back again and the shadow took refuge behind a pile of debris.

This was going to get me no place. Of course, a few shots would not excite the populace of Madrid, used as they were to the sound of combat day and night. But this fellow who was trailing me might have comrades in the neighborhood. It was more than likely that he had . . . and that meant they'd surround the restaurant, and knock me off.

Then Pancho came up with an idea.

The Spaniards—even the non-combatants—have learned a lot about strategy during the past year or so.

"Look, Señor Kelley," he said. "I weel stay here by the window, and shoot once in a while to keep thees man interest'. You crawl along the wall and jump down on heem. Then we'll tie heem up until you are well on your way."

I thought that sounded all right, because my experience with the gun convinced me I couldn't hit a fifty-foot target at ten paces. Even a machine gun wouldn't have done me much good.

Within a few moments I found myself in an alley that ran at right angles to the wall behind Pancho's restaurant. I clambered up on the wall, which was about three feet thick in the Spanish fashion, and inched along on my hands and knees. Just when I was figuring it was going to be hard to locate the government hunter I saw the spitting red flash of his gun. I crawled down the wall until I was directly over him.

Pancho had said he would give me five minutes, and then stop firing, because he wasn't an Annie Oakley, either, and might put a slug into me by accident. Well, I guess the five minutes were up because the shooting stopped. My man seemed undecided what to do. I could see the outline of him, fumbling down there back of the trash pile. Then he holstered his pistol, and half rose from his crouching position.

I jumped, crashing down on his shoulders. He sort of crumbled under me, then began to fight furiously and silently. The muscles under the coat felt like steel rods. But I was desperate. Somehow I managed to get a grip on the throat with the left hand, and hit him in the face with my right. I felt the warm drench of blood under my knuckles, and it inspired me to greater efforts. I kept smashing him with my fists. The man was on his back, writhing and twisting like an eel.

At that moment the moon slid out from behind the clouds, and washed us in silver illumination . . . and the man on whose chest I was sitting . . . the man whose face I had bashed so badly . . . this supposed government agent with whom I had exchanged pistol shots was none other than Jim Masters!

VI

MASTERS looked up at me, grunted and wiped the blood off his face.

"You unutterable fathead," he said. "What's the idea of trying to kill me? You'll never get a raise that way."

I helped him up.

"Forget it," I said. "There are a lot more important things than your life on the scales right now, and besides you tried to knock me off yourself."

I told him about what had happened to us: of the danger Kira and Doc were in; of the death of General Espada. Masters sat down on an upturned garbage can, dabbing at his swollen nose with a handkerchief while I talked. Nothing ever excited him. "And on top of all that," I added, "what's the idea of the office being closed? Has the A. P. gone out of business? And why were you chasing me with a gun?"

"No, the A. P. hasn't gone out of business," Masters said, "but for a minute it looked as if I might. You and Parker may be lousy newspaper men, but I'm not. I found out you people had been arrested as spies. Nothing much gets by our office. Then I was tipped off that the officers who had put the arm on you decided that maybe your little playmates were implicated, too. They were coming down to clap us into durance vile, so I locked up and took it on what your Broadway friends call the lam. I wouldn't be of much use straightening out this mess if I was behind bars."

"Did you think you were going to clean up by killing me first?"

Masters grinned a little foolishly.

"I started to follow a guy I knew to be an agent of the Iron Ring," he explained, "because I figured he might know where you and Doc were locked up. But, with darkness coming on I got kind of mixed up and apparently fell onto your trail. When you started to shoot I thought it time to do a little on my own hook."

Well, that was cleared up, and I was tickled to death that Masters was here to help. But what about Doc and Kira, and the Espada story?

"We've got to get those kids out of the jam they're in," said the boss. "We can check about the General afterward."

I looked at him in amazement. That didn't sound like the hard-boiled newspaper man I had worked for so long. A good story was more important to him than his own mother, and here he was putting Doc and Kira first!

"Maybe you haven't iced tea in your veins after all," I said.

Perhaps he blushed. I wouldn't put it past him, though a blush on Masters' cheek would probably set a new world's record.

"It's quite a job at that," he said thoughtfully. "In the first place we don't even know where they are held, and in the second it would be impossible to have the verdict of the court-martial overruled. Only Espada could have done that, and according to you Espada doesn't live here any more."

I knew all about that, but Masters was supposed to be the brain trust, not me. It was up to him to figure out what the next step was.

"I've got it!" said Masters suddenly. "Look, Kelley. Nobody is sent to the firing squad without the consolation of religion. That means priests must be assigned, and since they do things in a very orderly way here in Madrid, it may be that Father Vicente knows Kira is to be executed tomorrow, and where she is held. Why, it's an inspiration. We'll get hold of him right away."

It was an inspiration at that, and it took a cold, calculating mind like Masters' to figure it out. He had eliminated every possible source of information, and then settled upon this. The two of us hustled to the church of St. Magdalene, and had the good luck to find Father Vicente. He was a thin, kindly man, gray at the temples, and with tragedy in the deep bitten lines of his face.

"But, señors," he said, when Masters had explained the situation, "I cannot help you."

"Why not?" we echoed.

"We are not informed in advance by the military authorities," the priest explained. "If there is an execution at a prison or detention camp, where no one in orders is stationed, we are requested to send a priest. But, we are never told until we arrive who the victim is."

Masters looked at me, and I looked at him, and if I had as much despair written on my face as he had on his we must have made a smashing picture. It was the finish of our hope of saving Kira. If he couldn't help us nobody could!

Suddenly Father Vicente clapped his hands.

"Perhaps . . . ah, perhaps, I *can* help you after all. It just occurred to me. Brother Dominic today saw a beautiful girl in the prison that stands near the Plaza del Toros. Her name he did not know, but she was blonde, and, he thought, American!"

"Kira!" I said.

"The Plaza del Toros," cried Masters. "Let's go!"

Mumbling thanks, we rushed out into the starlit night, with no idea in the world how we would get Doc's girl friend out of jail, but happy at the thought that we had found out where she was, anyway.

ONCE we had seen the prison our hopes flattened out like a pancake under a steamroller. It was a heavy, gray stone building with iron barred windows, and enough guards in the vicinity to have started a fair-sized battalion. Getting Kira out of that bastille would tax the ingenuity of a Houdini. But it had to be done quickly. Night was getting on, and every tick-tock of our wrist watches was another step toward death for Miss Petroskaya, and unutterable heartbreak for Doc. Besides, we had to get on that Espada story before any of the other news-service men found he had been killed.

"An aerial bomb wouldn't put a dent in that place," said Masters thoughtfully. "Say, I know a lot of soldiers in this town. Maybe one of them is on guard, and we can bribe him to help us."

"What do you think will happen when you start talking to him?" I asked. "Don't you realize the agents of the Iron Ring are looking for us? The minute we show our faces . . . boom! there we go."

"Maybe," agreed Masters, "but the chances are no alarm has been issued, and if there's anyone here I know he'll think we're after a story. We'll have to take the chance, anyway."

We circled the prison, which had once been the residence of a stuffy old hidalgo. Masters failed to recognize any of the sentries, and began to get more down in

the mouth every second. Then he suddenly gripped my sleeve.

The sergeant of the guard had appeared, to make his round of inspection. He was a thick shouldered, mustachioed man, with his chest full of medals, and a pistol belt slung around his hips in the fashion of an American cavalryman.

"We're saved!" Masters grunted. "That's Manuel Diaz. I've known him for years. A good egg, if there ever was one! Why, he's been on guard duty ever since he recovered from the wound he got at Salamanca. He was in to see me just a week or two ago . . . and said something about the Plaza del Toros. It didn't seem so important to me, and I forgot about it: Hs-s-t . . . Manuel!" he called in a sharp whisper.

The sergeant turned, his hand going instinctively toward his gun butt. Then he recognized Masters, and smiled like a huge Chesire cat.

"Ah, señor," he said, "what are you up to now?"

"Plenty. I'm on the trail of the biggest story in years. There's an American girl in that prison."

"Señorita Kay Cassell, alias Kira Petroskaya," said the sergeant. "Spy. To be executed at dawn."

"You've got her name right," Masters agreed, "but she's not a spy, and if they knock her off it will cause Spain the most tremendous complications. You will be doing your cause a favor if you help us get her out . . . and, incidentally, make a lot of money for yourself?"

"Money?" the sergeant's eyes glittered in the light of the street lamp. "How much?"

Masters took out a roll of bills. "I've got two hundred and sixty-nine dollars. That's a lot of pesos. Can it be arranged?"

"Well," said Diaz, looking thoughtfully at the money. "She is locked in a room at the rear of the house. Three steps from the door is a stairway leading into the cellar, and down there is another doorway that opens into what was once the garden. Now, if I should send the guard off on an errand. . . ."

"Great." Masters jammed the bills into the sergeant's hand. Diaz put the money into his pocket. "Follow me at ten paces," he said.

He walked around the building, with us dogging him like a couple of secret service sleuths. Waiting until the sentry in the rear was at the other end of the block, we slipped into the tangled mass of shrubbery that had once been a formal garden. Then into a dank and mouldy cellar.

"Wait here until I signal you," the sergeant whispered. He went quietly up the steps, while we stood there in the darkness, shivering with excitement and apprehension. Each minute seemed an hour long. Then there was a splinter of light at the head of the stairs, and Diaz's hard voice, tuned down to a whisper, said:

"All right, señors, come up."

We tiptoed up to the landing. The long hall was empty. Diaz motioned us toward a door opposite, and turned the knob softly. We walked in, and there was Kira, as beautiful as ever, but with her eyes red rimmed from crying.

The first thing she said was: "Where's Doc?"

"Don't bother about him," I told her. "He's in no immediate danger. You are. Come on, now. There's no time to talk. That sentry Diaz sent away may come back any minute now."

"He's here already," the sergeant's harsh voice broke in. "I am sorry I had to do this, because you were very friendly in other days. But I have my duty, and no alternative."

"You mean. . . ?"

"I mean," said Sergeant Diaz, "that you two are prisoners, and the chances are very much in favor of you being shot with Miss Petroskaya at dawn. We are simple people, señors, and have simple rules for those who are enemies. I imagine that you will be condemned without the formality of being called before a court. But, be of good cheer. You have a few hours of life remaining, and a little while in such charming company will compensate for much. Adios, señors, and if there are any such small things as wine and cigarettes that you desire, please do not hesitate to call on me. I have plenty of money."

He grinned sardonically, and banged the door.

VII

ALMOST before we knew it dawn broke. The edge of the sun came

peeping over the horizon. Kira clasped her fingers tighter in her lap, and looked at us pitifully.

A key grated in the lock. We rose, our hands instinctively gripping each other's, trying to hold our heads high. After all, we were Americans, and had to face the worst as well as we could.

Sergeant Diaz, very impressive in his medals and immaculate uniform, opened the door. Behind him was a file of soldiers, their rifles grounded on the floor.

"Is it time?" Kira asked in a low voice.

"It is time," said the sergeant, averting his eyes. Apparently he felt ashamed of what he had done.

"Do you want us, too?" I asked.

"You are not to be executed," Diaz said stiffly, "but my commanding officer has instructed that you must witness the death of Miss Petroskaya."

I looked at Masters. He was white as a sheet, and I guess I was, too. If we saw Kira killed it would be a sight that would haunt us as long as we lived.

"Don't make them do that," the girl said.

The sergeant was obviously disturbed. "I have no alternative, Señorita. Those are my orders, and I must carry them out. Attention!" he bawled savagely at the guard, trying to cover his own confusion. Then to us: "If you please!"

Still holding hands, and walking three abreast, we went down the hall, and out into the dawn. Everything was so beautiful and fresh, with a spray of purple and gold on the horizon and the grass lance tipped with dew.

BUT we really saw only one thing. That was a white wall, ominously marked with the pits of bullet holes. It was monstrous that such a thing should happen. Kira looked at the wall and shivered.

"Sergeant," she said, "I have one favor to ask you."

"Anything in my power, Señorita."

"Then, when you administer the coup de grace, will you place your pistol against . . . my heart . . . instead of my temple. . . ."

I knew. The brave and pitiful little vanity of woman. Even in death Kira didn't want her perfect beauty spoiled. After a firing squad has finished, you know, the officer in charge makes sure the victim is dead by firing a bullet into the brain.

"Of course," said Diaz. "But, please, Señorita, this is hard on all of us. Shall we not hurry?"

"Yes," she said.

Kira kissed us both. "You have been sweet. Try to keep Doc from breaking his heart. That is all I ask."

She walked quickly to the wall, turned, faced the soldiers. Not a tremor of her body.

"Squad, attention!" shouted Sergeant Diaz. "Aim. . . ."

I shut my eyes tightly, and pressed my hands against my ears.

I waited, with the pound of my heart shaking me from head to heels. Why didn't they fire? Why didn't they get the whole, damnable, tragic thing over with? Did they want to torture us with cat-and-mouse tactics?

There was confusion in the yard with the terrible wall, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I knew Masters had his eyes closed, too. He was hard boiled and sophisticated, but not enough to take this in stride. Well, I couldn't endure it any longer. I opened my eyes.

The firing squad had sunk their rifles to the ground. Sergeant Diaz stood at rigid attention, chest out like a pouter pigeon. And, standing directly in front of Kira was a slim, bearded man in a khaki uniform and glistening puttees. No medals, no insignia of rank, but he needed none to proclaim his leadership.

He was General Espada!

MASTERS had opened his eyes at the same time. Now, you would think his first thought would be that Kira was saved, and so we were. But no.

"So Espada was dead, eh?" He said it in a grating whisper. "How many times have I told you to take nothing for granted; to verify every story before accepting it as true?"

Well, I had him there.

"Nuts!" I said. "You took my word for it, didn't you?"

As a reporter, my first instinct was to ask General Espada what it was all about. I stepped forward, but Sergeant Diaz, who seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, swung his arm out and blocked my path.

"Later," he said through his teeth.

Espada was talking with Kira, waving his hands in the expressive Latin way. His teeth looked very white against the blackness of his beard. The girl had recovered her poise. The color was in her cheeks again. They leaned against the tragic wall, as though they were at a garden party and were discussing pleasant trivialities.

But the surprises were not over yet. Espada turned from Kira. His face had grown suddenly grim.

"Lieutenant Sanchez brought the man, O'Brien. He is confined in the prison. Have him brought here at once."

The sergeant saluted, spoke crisply to his men. Two of them went off at a half trot, and returned within a few minutes, leading Tom O'Brien between them. He was truculent and strutting. The general walked quickly toward him, and they met half way between us and the wall. Their upraised voices were clear now.

"O'Brien," Espada said, "you have been responsible for this whole affair, and have acted reprehensibly and inexcusably. You entered my service as a counter-espionage agent, and I accepted you as a faithful man because of your service at the front. My immediate subordinates knew about you. They knew nothing about Señorita Petroskaya. So, when I flew on a secret mission to Barcelona you ordered the arrest of the spy ring you were observing . . . and also that of the lady here. Since the Ministry of Justice knew nothing about her the court-martial was permitted to sentence her to death. Why did you do that?"

The fighter scowled at all of us.

"She was gettin' bigger than I was in the racket," he said. "Teacher's pet! Well, there ain't nobody bigger than I am in any game I tackle. She didn't mean anything to me. If she was knocked off. . . ." He shrugged his thick shoulders . . . "so what? . . . I was top hand again."

I felt like taking a crack at the big baboon. So that was how the whole thing started, eh? But, if Tom was one of the Iron Ring why had he tried to escape from the barrack, where I was being held a prisoner? Then O'Brien cocked his evil eye at me, and cleared that point up in his next sentence.

"I wish I'd have done a better job on that Kelley guy," he said. "He's the one that crabbed the act. I almost got him, though. In the prison barrack I had another agent from the ministry come through the roof disguised as a carpenter. I figured Kelley would try to make a break, and I'd kill him when he came at me, but he was too fast with a hammer. I'd have shot him while he was walking around, but there was another lug there . . . a guy with a waxed mustache . . . and I was afraid he might have been put there to keep tabs on me."

"You were wrong on both counts, O'Brien," said General Espada briefly. "The gentleman with the waxed mustache has already paid the penalty for disloyalty, and Señor Kelley had nothing to do with this, shall I say, happy ending?"

"I should have knocked him off, anyway," the fighter said gloomily. He seemed bitterly depressed. Suddenly his hand shot out and ripped a pistol from the holster of the interested soldier beside him. O'Brien stepped behind the general, and jammed the muzzle into his ribs. "Now I've got my out. You've never broken your word, General. Promise me a safe conduct . . . and I'll let you live."

"No," said Espada quietly.

"Think what it means," O'Brien urged. "With you dead, your guys won't hold out another month. I don't mean nothin' to you, but you mean a lot to Spain."

"You've got to do it, General Espada," said Kira.

"Oh, no, he doesn't," said another voice. "I've got you covered, O'Brien. Drop that gun, or I'll put a slug right through your thick skull. And love it, O'Brien."

I give you my word that at that moment I almost dropped dead.

The voice was Doc Parker's!

VIII

I GLANCED around. There was Doc leaning out of one of the rear windows of the prison, a big automatic pointed at O'Brien.

"I won the state pistol championship when I was in college," he said, "so don't do anything you'll be sorry for, Tom."

The fighter's eyes flickered, and for a minute I thought he was going to let Espada have it, even if he paid for the job with his life. But he didn't have the nerve.

With a crackling oath, O'Brien dropped his weapon to the ground. The soldiers seized him and hustled him away.

General Espada had taken the dynamic situation coolly. There was a man for you! Now he said in his precise English: "This is a most depressing place. Let us go to my house for a bit of wine, perhaps, and a little conversation. Are you agreed, gentlemen?"

We all said "yes" at the same time. I never disliked a place so much in my life as I did that prison in the Plaza del Toros.

A huge Hispano, with a sergeant chauffeur and orderly, rolled up to the rear of the garden. Doc, Kira and the General sat in the rear seat, Masters and I on the folding chairs.

"Now, look," said the chief of the Madrid Bureau, "I've kept my mouth shut as long as I'm physically able. I understand that you are the fair-haired boy of this episode, Doc. Will you please tell me what you did while Kelley and I were practically breaking our necks rushing around town?"

Parker didn't seem particularly anxious for conversation, because he had his arms around Kira, and a man in that position naturally feels talk to be superfluous. Still, under the circumstances, there was nothing for him to do but answer the boss.

"I didn't do anything really," he said, "except follow the rules you laid down, and they say you're the best newspaperman in Europe."

"Well, maybe I am," agreed Masters, "but all I did was bang my head against a stone wall. Spill it. What did you do?"

"The first thing you told me when I came to Madrid was never to believe anything without verifying it. When the lieutenant told us General Espada had been killed I thought it was kind of queer. The air raid only took a few minutes, and none of the bombs that dropped struck near the government buildings or his house."

"I never thought of that," I said.

"You wouldn't," said Masters.

"If the general hadn't been killed," Doc went on, "somebody was trying to pull a fast one. Our only chance was to get to him, so I decided to try a bluff myself. I had that thousand bucks you gave me for expense money."

"Oh, ho," I thought. "That's the end of my share!"

"So, I called the lieutenant to my cell. I showed him the dough, and told him I was carrying it to the general for a special mission. You see, I had it figured that if somebody was trying to put the finger on Kira it would be while Espada was away. So I said I knew he was away, and that it was worth the shave-tail's commission, and maybe his life, if I wasn't taken to him as soon as he came back. Well, General Espada did come back last night, and since mule eyes was more afraid of what the general would do to him than he was of O'Brien, he took me to the commanding officer right away. I can say I never saw anybody act faster than General Espada did. At that, we didn't get here any too soon."

"You're darned right you didn't," I returned.

"But that isn't all. The general seemed to feel he should make up in some way for the trouble we had undergone, so he gave me an exclusive story. Boy, it's the hottest of the year!" Doc leaned forward and whispered the sensational news.

Masters let out a yell.

"What? And we're riding around here? Let me out. I want to get to the cable office."

"Don't bother," said Doc. "They're getting out extras about it in New York right now. I wrote the yarn and sent it while General Espada was getting the situation well in hand."

Masters relaxed.

"And I said you were a lousy newspaperman! You'll get a bonus and a raise and anything else you want for this."

"Just one thing," said Kira. "A transfer to New York. We'd rather hear the elevated than a bombing raid." She leaned forward, turning her charming face away from Masters and toward me. "Doc has half of that expense money for you, Kelley," she added in a little whisper.

"Forget it," I said; "that can be my wedding present to the pair of you. It will be bonus enough for me to know that Mr. Masters, the Wise Guy of Madrid, was outsmarted by a fellow he said was the worst newspaperman in town!"

HELL'S HARVEST

By TONY BEACON

Murder. Suicide. The shadow of a severed head. Grisly clues that led Mart Grey, hard-boiled newshawk, to a shuttered room where hate had reaped its hellish harvest!

LONG, lean Mart Grey, news-hawk and trouble-hunter, stood on the porch of the boarding-house which he had moved into a few days before. He was unconcerned with the night's romantic grandeur. His eyes were fixed on an object which hung silhouetted in a lighted third-floor window across the street. He was so engrossed that he did not notice the approach of his landlady. She, too, looked at the window and shuddered as she drew her head down between her shoulders. Over her chubby, folded arms, she said in her rich brogue:

"Weird, ain't it, Mr. Grey."

Grey jerked his head. "Plenty weird," he said. "Everybody notices it who comes along this way.

"When you look at it, Mrs. Beeson," he continued, "what do you make of it? I mean, what do you see?"

Mrs. Beeson wagged her head.

"Why, it's a head, of course, Mr. Grey.

Anybody can see it's a head hanging in the window."

Grey grinned.

"That was my impression too, but I wanted to be sure I was sober. Of course, is must be just an odd effect of the lighting. . . ."

Mrs. Beeson shuddered again.

" 'Taint nothing of the kind. It's a head. I guess I know a head when I see one. With a rope 'round its neck! See, how the head hangs limp? A head without a body. Awful sight, ain't it!"

Grey glanced down at the short but generously proportioned landlady. She probably read weird stories in bed.

"But, Mrs. Beeson," he said after a moment, "what does it look like in daylight?"

"You can't see it then. There's a curtain between it and the window."

"It's there every night?"

"As regular as clockwork. He comes home at seven and when he turns the light on—there it is! At ten—off it goes. I've watched the clock."

As the words left her mouth, the light went out and the silhouette disappeared. In the distance, the city hall tolled the hour.

It gave the dry, hardboiled reporter a queer sensation. Staring at that dark, blank window he could feel an ice-water chill crawl along his scalp. "Nonsense," he thought, and turned to enter the house. Yet, he paused.

"By the way," he said, "who lives in that place?"

"A flower seller. Louie Jacquise. He's French or something."

"Thank you, Mrs. Beeson." He looked back and devilment lit his eyes. "Pleasant dreams," he said.

AS he tossed his trousers across the room and followed them with his socks, Grey thought about the shadow in the window.

Probably nothing. People got to acting oddly in these ingrown Southern towns. Staying here much longer would make him a little screwy too.

It struck him that if he could crack a good story he might squeeze a bonus out of the sheet. Then he could put the dust of Branderville, Pop. 22,000, far, far behind.

Grey was up at seven. He gulped his breakfast as usual and sauntered out to the porch to watch and wait.

How would he know Mr. Jacquise from Adam's off-ox? I'll know him when I see him, decided Grey. As a flower seller, the man would be neat, innocuous and unobtrusive. He would be the epitome of precision and a master of detail. Grey took out his watch.

Exactly at one minute past eight, Jacquise appeared. Mart knew him instantly. Louie Jacquise was stamped all over him. But he was older than the reporter had expected. Probably fifty, maybe fifty-five. He wore a brown felt hat and brown pointed shoes. His coat, brown also, was short and did not match his trousers. He was an ordinary-looking man, and yet there was something still and dangerous about him.

Jacquise moved down the steps and turned onto the sidewalk without a glance to right or left. He walked slowly like a plodder, swaying from one side to the other. His arms swung like pendulums. One, two. One, two. Mart had seen men walk like that in prison—like automatons.

The newspaperman realized he would have to revamp his original conception of Jacquise. Instead of being a man with a purpose Jacquise had no objective in life. He lived from day to day, probably finding peace and diversion in his flowers, studying the faces of those who passed his stand, living in memories. There was a story in this Monsieur Louie Jacquise!

Grey arose and walked down the steps. Whistling a blues tune he wandered to the corner but Jacquise had disappeared. The elm-lined street was empty of his thick broad-backed figure.

Grey turned back to the boarding house. In front of Jacquise's place a neatly-built girl was sweeping the sidewalk.

Grey walked up to her in his most business-like manner.

"Have you any vacant apartments?"

She held the broom still and smiled without parting her lips.

"Don't try to kid me, big boy. I saw you move in." She nodded toward the boarding house.

Grey smiled. He had a pleasant smile and he knew how to use it. "I really wanted to ask you about the tenant on the third floor—Mr. Jacquise," he confessed.

"He seems to be quite an odd duck."

"Oh!" Her manner changed. "He's the sort of odd duck you want to stay away from. He's kinda strange. Not crazy or anything like that. But different. I can't quite explain it."

"How long has he been here?"

"Over a year."

"That thing hanging in his window last night—do you know what it is?"

The girl swallowed once, and swayed to the other foot.

"No. I don't go into his room. That was his order when he moved in. He keeps it locked with a special lock. He does his own cleaning and everything. He has a little flower-stand near the corner of Bienville and Royal. That's all I know, mister."

Anyway, that was all she intended to tell him, Grey saw. He had a sort of forgotten respect for people who minded their own business. Nodding, he turned and walked away.

THE flower shop of Louie Jacquise was at the outer edge of a wide sidewalk in a busy district. Jacquise wore a blank face as he stood there. His eyes seemed fixed, most of the time, dully on some shop across the street.

Often customers walked up to him with friendly talk. "Heh, Louie!" they would say. "How's business today?" And Louie would lift his shoulders and move his lips slowly, "Not so bad."

But more often he made his sales in silence.

Grey, leaning his long, relaxed back against a lamp-post, felt a stab of disappointment. This man was no Bluebeard. No Captain Murderer. His great and mysterious Mr. Jacquise of the bodyless window marionette had turned out to be a very prosaic flower vender. And yet . . . . Grey strolled over.

"How much are those five-pointed ones there?" Mart asked, pointing to some red flowers.

"Poinsettias? Twenty-five cents for each. Gardenias are ten cents."

"A gardenia will do as well."

Grey placed the white flower in his wrinkled lapel. "I think we are neighbors. I moved into the big white house across from your place yesterday."

Grey's eyes met only a bland, walled look.

"So?"

"I am writing a story. A novel, really. The chief creep is a flower fancier. I thought I might come over and get some dope from you sometime?"

Jacquise stared through him. "I sell flowers only," he said. "I know nothing about them."

Grey shrugged. Nodded. But before he turned away he let his eyes follow the line of Jacquise's dull withdrawn gaze.

Across the street stood a small white-fronted candy store. Kitty's Kandy Korner. Something clicked then in the back of Mart Grey's mind. Good lord! he thought. Suddenly he was afraid of the silent little man standing there.

But he turned to the flower vender.

"In a very short while I may be able to buy a dozen of those poinsettias."

Jacquise shrugged, and tried to work his blank, tired face into a smile.

As he walked slowly away, Grey's mind was racing like a motor. Could there possibly be any connection between Kitty Carson and this bird, Jacquise, he wondered.

Her murder, according to the reports, had been perpetrated by someone familiar with her routine and the interior of the shop. Grey remembered the details of the case fairly well, although he had just hit town at the time. That was before he had talked himself into his present lousy job.

Kitty Carson had been a very pretty and friendly and charming young woman, with many friends. But sometimes her easy, natural friendliness had been misinterpreted. More than one man had tried to push his acquaintanceship—and gotten turned down hard. Working where he did, Jacquise must have known her. Maybe he had made love to her, given her a rose, and she had laughed in his face. His was the type to resent an affront. Perhaps he had suddenly gone insanely jealous and had killed the little candy girl in the rear of her store. The body had been dismembered.

Maybe that was the head in the window!

Grey, taking a cigarette from the pack, found that his hand was trembling. Jacquise could have done the job all right. He would know the shop. He would know the best time for doing away with

the girl. He might have slipped in and locked the door while the girl was in the rear preparing to go home. . . .

Grey straightened his shoulders, took a deep drag, and walked over to the candy store. A rosy-cheeked girl smiled across the glass showcase.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions, d'you mind. I am a reporter."

"Well. . . ." she said uncertainly.

He gave her the grin and said, "Not you. This is Miss Carson's private life I'm after."

The girl flared at him. "She didn't have a private life. She was as swell as they come."

"I know," Grey said soothingly. "Who might have had something against her. Did you give the cops any steers."

"Why, I—I said the flower seller could have, but. . . ."

"Good. Was he questioned?"

"Yes, but the police found some fingerprints and said he couldn't possibly have been the murderer."

"Did Miss Carson ever say anything about the flower seller. Had he ever annoyed her?"

"She said she wished he would move to some other corner."

"Anything else?"

"He gave her a bunch of flowers just about every day. Pink carnations. And Click Raynor gave her a bouquet of roses almost every day, too. It was funny sometimes. Louie would come in with his flowers, and a few minutes afterward Click would arrive."

"Click Raynor?" asked Mart.

"He worked in the cigar store four doors down. He was found hanging in his apartment four days after the murder. It was suicide. There was a paragraph in the paper about it."

"Oh, yes. Suicides don't get much play. So Click Raynor was crazy about her, too?"

"Naw! He was just another masher. He was always trying to get her to go on parties with him."

"I see."

"And he gambled some. Sometimes you could tell he'd lost heavily, but he always brought the flowers. Other times when he was flush he would try to give her a bracelet or something."

Grey fingered the flower in his lapel. Suddenly, he handed it to the girl.

"For your kindness," he said. "It's not very much, but I intend to get a dozen poinsettias very soon. I'll give them to you."

The girl looked a little startled but she managed to say, "Thank you."

GREY left the shop feeling less sure about some things. That suicide, for instance . . . where did that fit in? He stopped at the cigar sore.

"I'd like to see Click Raynor," he told the fat, bald clerk

"Click Raynor!" snorted the man.

"Sure. Ain't this where he works? He told me to look him up if I ever came down here."

"You can't see Click Raynor. He's dead!"

"Dead?" Grey tried to look startled. "What happened to him?"

"They found him hanging from a chandelier one morning."

"Suicide?"

"Sure."

"I never read about it."

"Guess not. What's a suicide when a murder was done just across the street! Read about that, I suppose?"

"Sure. Did you know her?"

"Everybody did. So did Click. He was kinda hot for her. But he couldn't get to first base. It was kinda funny in a way. He took her flowers every day, and every day she'd ask him not to bring any more. Kinda made him sore."

"I didn't know he went for dames much."

"He was a hard one to figure out. Never could tell what was going on in his mind. But I think she sorta got under his skin."

"Don't know why he croaked himself?"

"Naw. He might have been drinking."

"Sure. Well, I gotta be moving along. See you again. Thanks."

Grey spent the rest of the day in the library going over the files of newspapers. At the coroner's office he picked up the transcripts of testimony of the murder and suicide. The more he thought about the whole mystery, the more convinced he was that these cases tied up in some way or other. Just how, though, he couldn't figure.

Returned to his boarding-house, Grey went to his room to rehearse his theory of the murder.

At eight, he walked out on the porch.

There, on schedule, was the head in the window!

Grey drew a deep breath. The street was quiet, almost deserted, for winter had come down and it was cold. The reporter stood on the steps a moment touching the flat automatic that sagged his coat pocket.

The prospect of confronting that strange, twisted murderer held no particular joy. But if he was going to crack this story he had to crack it alone.

AS he stood before the door of Jacquise's apartment and rapped. Grey could hear the man moving about like some heavy, soft-padded, caged animal. There was no answer.

Grey rapped again, a little louder.

"Who is there?"

"The young man from across the street, Mr. Jacquise. I want to talk to you."

Silence. Then, the door opened wide enough only for Jacquise to peer out. His dark eyes searched the reporter suspiciously.

"What do you want?"

Grey slammed his shoulder against the door and piled into the room.

"What do you want?" Jacquise said.

Grey said, "I came to ask you about the murder of Click Raynor. Why did you kill him?"

If Jacquise felt any emotion, he did not show it. Only his eyes never left Grey's face. Suddenly he slumped into a chair.

"Yes—I killed him!" A simple statement, void of any emotion. "I killed him, but he had it coming to him. He killed Kitty Carson. But I should have known it would not remain hidden forever. When I heard your first knock, I knew that it was over."

"How did you kill him?" Grey snapped.

"It was simple. I followed him to his apartment. I go to his room, which was in the back. I tell him what I knew. He gets wild and angry but before he could do anything I strangle him with a cord. Then I put him up on a chair on top of a table under the chandelier. I fix the rope and drag away the chair and the table. Then I leave. The next morning they called it a suicide. That is all."

"How did you know about the other murder? About Kitty Carson? Why didn't you go to the police?"

"The police! I gave them four days, but they look in the bushes for an apeman! While *he* struts around under their noses. It was too much for me. She was so pretty and sweet. I stand there every day and watch the police come and go and ask a lot of foolish questions. Click Raynor, I never did like. Miss Kitty says he annoys her, and I tell her I kill him if she say so.

"I leave my stand one night—it is nearly six. I cross the street and then look back to see him go into her shop. I think nothing. I walk on. But, then I turn back again. I feel something is wrong, but I do not know what. And the next morning they find her!

"I cry, and then I wait—and then I get him on the table and his face is blue, and he gasps for air. . . ."

What was there to say? Grey's eyes shuttled to the window. Jacquise looked also.

"A symbol," he said quietly. "Candy flowers like a bouquet. She gave them to me. Made them herself, and I placed them in the window. At night I can see them as I go to sleep. Ah!" Jacquise reached for the light overhead and turned it off. There were the flowers in silhouette against the light from the street. But not like a head from the inside, merely an intangible shadow.

The light came on. Grey arose from his chair, looked at the candy flowers a moment, and quietly said goodnight. Here was one big story that would never be cracked. At least not by him.

On the porch of his boarding-house, Grey turned and looked again at the window. There was the head hanging as before. He was surprised to find it still chilled him. To the reporter, it was the head of Click Raynor, a silhouette of hate; but to Louie Jacquise, it was the candy flowers from Kitty Carson, a symbol of love.

The head disappeared as the tower clock in the distance struck the hour of ten.

On March 4, 1918, shortly before the War was over, the 19,000-ton naval collier, "Cyclops," with a crew of 295 men and loaded with manganese, sailed from Barbados, West Indies. She was never seen again. Her powerful wireless never spoke. She went to her death, a dumb, pitiful thing.

A Complete Mystery Novelet

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE

By JOEL MARTIN NICHOLS, Jr.

NORTH latitude, 25°; west longitude, 62° 7′.

A tremendous black hulk hurtling through the night. Not a sound save the throb of mighty engines and the muffled swish of the Atlantic's hungry hands, whose clutching fingers slip vainly from towering sides of bolted steel.

Two officers pacing the bridge. On the caps of both the insignia of the United States Navy—one a captain, the other a lieutenant. The captain stops before the wheel for a moment and glances at the compass. The dull glow from the binnacle lights up a face drawn and pale, where lines of rugged determination shade off into a strange mixture of cruelty and fear. The two—officer and helmsman—glance into each other's faces. A slow, understanding glance. Half triumphant, half fearful. That look—what strange, sinister message does it convey?

The captain consults his watch. It is half-past two. He nods his head. The helmsman, who has been holding the wheel almost motionless, gives it a half spin and the great bulk begins the first arc of a gigantic curve. A second spin of the wheel a few moments later brings her back on a straightened course. A bell in the engine-room rings out half speed.

Two hours later. Somewhere, afar off on the horizon, a gleam appears in the sky. It is a rocket. And then, scarcely a mile off on the port beam, a long, black object slowly emerges from the sea. On the starboard bow there is already another. They draw near—cautiously.

A bell in the engine-room clanks and the propellers cease to turn. There are voices below. Scuffling knots of men roll and clatter over the steel decks. The black objects have drawn alongside, conning towers pop open, a rope is thrown, and men swarm up the steel sides. There are curses and revolver shots. A scream of almost maniacal laughter. After a while —silence.

One hour later. The men again swarm down those ropes into the yawning pits from whence they came. This time there are more of them than before. One of them makes an awkward job of it and nearly falls into the black water. There is the sharp staccato of commands and the others hasten to help him. How carefully and solicitously they aid him into that narrow hole!

All disappear seemingly into the bowels of the deep. The covers snap down tightly and the two objects pull off gradually to the distance of half a mile, where, as if by common agreement, they come to a stop. But what are they waiting for?

As, yes, that great black hulk they have left behind them. But what has happened? It sits lower in the water. It wabbles drunkenly in the trough of the sea.

There is the unmistakable pounding of helpless hands against unyielding steel. But they do not seem to be cries of fear, though doom has already climbed the lurching prow and stalks the decks. Rather, there is within them an unmistakable note of helpless rage, of baffled hopes.

She fairly staggers now. The gigantic derricks on her decks skim the ridges on that steady line of green rollers marching triumphantly over her as she lurches first to starboard, then to port. Those cries from below—they have been drowned out, now, by the reverberating thunder of tons of sea water thumping over hollow decks. Cold, black seas crashing through bulkheads, and rushing madly and irresistibly through holds and corridors. Rising swiftly, swirling and sucking, until the once-proud vessel is but a doomed, water-filled hulk.

Ah—the last lurch! She cannot recover from this one, surely! But she does.

This one—now! She can never survive a second like the first! She does it by the breadth of a hair.

The third!

It is too much for her! Wearily now she heels to port. Her huge bilge hovers for a moment and then, with something akin to a shudder, she disappears in a smother of white foam.

She is gone! Not a trace! Not a solitary stick of wreckage bobs up from that sucking whirlpool where she went down!

The black waters had opened and closed silently, and over the place where she disappeared they eddied furiously for a moment, and then returned to their silent, midnight-mirrored tranquillity.

The hovering objects in the darkness to leeward slowly swing about and thrust their blunt noses eastward, soon to be lost in the gray of a sunless dawn.

II

I WAS sitting in my rooms at the Fort William, contemplating in disgusted fashion the pattering raindrops on the stone ledge outside my window and wondering if in all the world there could be a more dismal place than Washington on a

late February afternoon, and in all the earth a more sodden and discouraged plot of ground than that beneath my window which the hotel proprietors were pleased to call an Italian garden. Having had some experience in the way of Italian gardens, myself, I remembered with a sigh of longing a certain place where green-mantled hills thrust their distance-empurpled shoulders into the azure of a matchless sky; where tiny puff-ball clouds float in lazy unconcern far above a group of white-painted villas whose red-tiled roofs blink drowsily in the face of a noonday sun.

My reverie was broken by a quick double rap on the door—a rap which I immediately recognized as that of "Fieldy" Garrett, who did something or other over in the Department of Justice—just what, nobody in the world but the innermost favored few of the American Secret Service were privileged to know. I am not connected with the service myself, being merely an itinerant writer for various periodicals, with the good fortune of having known Fielding Garrett in college years, where his acute mind and thirst for adventure already presaged his brilliant success as a secret service officer in combating the innumerable international conspiracies which have surrounded the American Government since the war. Having shared in some of his adventures with some little aid to him and considerable profit to myself, I naturally welcomed him with open arms.

"Can you be ready by midnight to drive to Philadelphia?" he asked, refusing the proffered chair. "I have a weird case up in New Jersey. Read this letter. I received it only last night."

He handed me a folded paper which on opening I found to be a letter written in a small and curiously intricate, although apparently masculine, hand. Holding it close to the reading lamp, I followed it along:

Lispen Manor,
New Jersey,
February 26.

Mr. Fielding Garrett, Esq.
The Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

Please come at once to Lispen Manor, where—if God wills it—you will find an old and remorseful man who would make atonement for a great wrong done. Come quickly, for God's sake, for already death draws near me.

It was signed simply "John Helmuth," with nothing to indicate what or whom John Helmuth might be.

Frankly, I was disappointed. "Looks to me like a hoax. Surely you're not falling for anything of this sort?"

"I am convinced it is no hoax. Here is a clipping I cut from the paper this very morning. It would indicate that this gentleman's fears for his safety were not altogether unfounded."

He handed me the clipping and paced the floor while I read:

KEYESVILLE, N. J., February 27 (Associated Press).—With a knife buried to the hilt in his breast and his face burned and blackened almost beyond recognition, the body of John Helmuth, wealthy recluse and "man of mystery" along the Jersey coast, was found early this morning in the library of his home at Lispen Manor, twenty miles from here. Close beside his body were the corpses of two unknown men, evidently his assailants, who had met death in some mysterious manner and by the same mysterious agent that had scorched the skin on their bodies to parchment.

The tragedy was discovered in the morning by Thomas Wilkins, Mr. Helmuth's only servant, who noticed that the library window, several feet above the ground, had been left open contrary to his employer's strict orders. What particularly attracted his attention was a piece of what he took to be black cloth hanging from the window sill, but which on further examination proved to be the remains of the heavy velvet window draping, charred to such a point that it crumbled in his hands as he took hold of it.

Thinking that perhaps there had been a fire in the library during the night, and that perhaps his master, who made a practice of sleeping there, had been burned to death, Wilkins hurried into the house and up into the

tower, where he found the bodies.

Completely overshadowing the murder itself, and constituting the enigma of the whole case, is the want of explanation for the condition in which the bodies were found. That there had been no fire in the library was evidenced by the fact that the woodwork was intact and that even the half-burned wood in the fireplace had evidently smoldered and died out several hours before the murder was committed.

Notwithstanding these facts, indisputably controverting any theory that the men were burned to death, every bit of clothing on the victims, the draperies, the carpet on the floor and even the covers on some of the books were scorched to the point of disintegration. The condition of the skin on the dead men bore similar marks of this terrible and mysterious scourge.

Wilkins has been Mr. Helmuth's only servant since he first took up the Manor, three years ago. During the last six months or so the recluse had been under the care of Dr. Gerald Surratt, a retired physician, whose estate adjoins Lispen Manor and who therefore constitutes the only neighbor within nearly twenty miles.

THE clipping gave a lot more about Helmuth, that man of mystery, that eccentric recluse who had come to live at Lispen Manor three or four years previously. His serving man, Wilkins, an Englishman, knew as little about his employer as did those who were separated from the Manor by a distance of twenty miles. The Manor itself, it would seem from all reports, was a place of mystery in that it was a huge, rambling structure of brick and stone built, it was said, in early Colonial days by some disgruntled individual who had fled from New England for reasons best known to himself.

"It certainly reads interestingly," said I, after I had finished the article, "but I have my suspicion of these newspaper mysteries. Too often they turn out to be the most commonplace affairs dressed up for the occasion and shrouded in mystery by the pen of some ambitious reporter."

"Well, I've already put a stop to that," said Garrett. "Just asked the Chief for a little of our old wartime voluntary censorship. His wire has gone out to the editors today, and so we may expect no more trouble from that source until we are ready to talk about it ourselves."

That was the last argument that Garrett needed to convince me. If he thought enough of the case to invoke the old wartime censorship it certainly looked promising.

THERE was nothing about the trip so far which would have been of my choosing. Gradually, however, my feeling of irritation was replaced by one of strange foreboding as we pushed over the hummocks in the last ten miles of that impossible road. Out from among the sombre pines which lined the roadside came the peculiar, moldy odor of long-dead vegetation, but worst of all were those pallid splotches of gray snow among the trees, fairly ghastly now in the halting light which sifted in through the network of branches overhead.

I was shivering with suppressed unnatural alarm when we finally got our first glimpse of Lispen Manor. It was a huge rambling structure, two stories high in some parts and one in others, situated on a low knoll overlooking the sea. From the two curious, almost medieval turrets built at opposite corners of the front wall there was a distance of perhaps one hundred yards to the shore, which fell abruptly away from a high cliff or bluff. Under the bluff was a narrow strip of beach visible now because of the receding tide.

"Not a particularly cheerful place," was Garrett's only comment as we swung up the road leading to the house.

He brought the car to a halt amid a clutter of nondescript wooden outbuildings. Almost at the same moment a pale-faced, white-haired old man stepped out of the house and came toward us.

"You are Mr. Garrett?" he asked almost before we had an opportunity to get out of our seats.

Garrett nodded.

"Thank God, you have come at last, sir," he almost whispered. "The others have been here for two days, sir, but they have found nothing. As Mr. Helmuth's serving man I have something—"

I had been oddly aware of a pair of keen eyes surveying us from the doorway, and at this juncture a tall, heavily bearded man stepped out and cut in on the old man's half-finished statement.

"My name's Surratt," he announced without waiting for another word from old Wilkins. "I suppose you are from the county prosecutor's office? If there is anything I can do to aid you in solving this gruesome riddle I am at your service. As Mr. Helmuth's physician, I may perhaps be of use to you in some capacity or other."

Garrett did not correct this assumption that we were county officers, and Surratt went on:

"The coroner has removed the bodies to an improvised morgue in the barn, and I presume it is there that you will first care to go. Ah, here is Captain Twombly, who is in charge of the case."

"Care to view the bodies?" Garrett asked of me after the amenities of introduction were over.

"No, thanks," said I in some haste. "I'll just browse about a little until you get your bearings."

I SAW nothing further of them until late in the afternoon, when Garrett joined me. Surratt had gone to his home and Twombly was making his report preparatory to turning the case over to us.

"I have questioned both Wilkins and the physician," he was saying, "but there is little that I can add to what you already know. Yet I feel that we have not found everything. Personally, I think that Wilkins is holding something back, but I have been unable to get anything out of him so far."

"Surratt appears to be quite an intelligent fellow," said Garrett, ignoring, apparently, Twombly's comment. "Thought I might have met him before, but of course can't place him. A mere passing fancy, of course—and yet—but what's the use of bothering about it?"

"I may as well admit," went on the monotonous voice of the Jersey detective, "that this place has just about unnerved all of us. For the last two nights we have heard a strange knocking or tapping sound somewhere about the library tower. I have kept a man there constantly, but we cannot even locate the direction from which it comes."

"Umph. Well, we may as well make the rounds of the place. Weird old building, this. Would make a good castle if it had a moat and those two wing towers were a little higher. By the way, Mr. Twombly, you did not mention in your report the nationality of the two men whose bodies were found with that of Helmuth."

"Neither I nor the coroner knew. Their condition precluded—'

"I should take them to be Japanese, but it is not entirely a matter of certainty," Garrett cut in. "Well, now, Mr. Twombly, if you'll be good enough to show us about this place I shall be much obliged to you. Nothing like getting the lay of the land."

TO Twombly, Garrett's remark about the Japanese was only a casual guess, but I, who knew Garrett's casual way of referring to what he already was convinced were facts, was startled. What mysterious quest had brought two Japanese to this lonely spot to murder a helpless old man and in their turn meet retribution so swift, so strange and so horribly sure?

I was turning these thoughts over in my mind when we began exploring the old structure where the recluse had made his home. At Garrett's request we left the library until last. As was customary with me, I did not attempt any hypotheses of my own on what we saw, but watched Garrett closely, for I knew that in his reactions there lay many clues to what was going on in his mind.

Therefore I had become thoroughly bored when we had explored the old structure from top to bottom. Its general nondescript architecture was expressive of no one period, but a curious mixture of the colonial and the medieval. The only features worthy of note were the two low towers, one at either end, fronting the sea. As it was in the north tower where Helmuth's study was located, it was with impatience that I waited for Garrett and Twombly to complete their seemingly aimless examination of the building.

"Does it not strike you as singular," said Garrett as we were at last ascending

the stone steps to the library door, "that the south tower should have a cellar under it, while this one is apparently built on solid masonry?"

"That is what makes it all the more strange," replied Twombly. "That peculiar tapping sound we have been hearing for the past two nights seems to be centered right here. Now if there were a chamber beneath the library one might suspect the presence of some hidden assassin, but as it is—" he shrugged his shoulders.

THE study was situated at the top of the tower, a flight of stone steps leading up to it from one of the long passageways below. It was here, according to Twombly, that old Helmuth had spent almost all of his time since he had been taken ill six months or more before. There was but a single window looking out toward the sea, and it was but a short drop to the ground below. The intruders had evidently made their way up the outside wall by crevices in the masonry.

Everything, with the exception of the bodies, had been left as the room was found on the morning of the murder. Still hanging out of the half-opened window was the old-fashioned window drapery, once of heavy velvet, but now so charred and burnt that it crumpled at a touch of the hand. On the walls were rows and rows of books, their bindings, wherever exposed, scorched and blackened under the same livid breath. On the table was an unrecognizable heap of ash, probably the remains of papers which had not escaped the common destruction. Even the leather upholstery of the chairs had crumpled to the point of disintegration, and the bedding of the small cot where Helmuth had met his death was now nothing more than a scorched mass of blackened fabric.

Garrett busied himself about the room, poking into corners, pulling the furniture about, sniffing and even tasting the crumpled draperies. Twombly, meanwhile, was moodily wandering about the room, gazing in abstract wonderment at the ruin which lay before us.

Watching Garrett out of the corner of my eye, I saw him suddenly bend over one of the books he was examining and then carry it to the window for closer inspection. Whatever had caught his eye for the moment I had no opportunity of learning, for after a second glance he slipped it into the pocket of his ulster. A further examination of the books on the rack about the walls followed, and soon afterward two other volumes joined their fellow in his voluminous pockets.

A few moments later he announced his intention of knocking off for the day, and together we returned to the dining-hall, where Wilkins already had a meal waiting for us.

"I may as well leave you at this point," said Twombly, not without apparent relief. "There is nothing further that I can tell you and, of course, I have my orders to return to Trenton, as you are aware."

Garrett thanked him, and a few moments afterward we heard the rumble of his motor as he and his two men pulled out of the yard.

And so we were left alone with the mystery.

III

IMMEDIATELY following the meal in which old Wilkins served us in shuffling silence Garrett evinced a desire to retire, and a few moments later the old man was preceding us up the rickety stairs at the rear of the house, holding high aloft the old-fashioned oil lamp, alternately smoking and flaring from the sudden draughts which seemed to assault us from every nook and cranny of those moldy walls.

With the departure of Twombly the echoing silence of the uncanny old building was beginning to play hob with my nerves, and I gave an involuntary start or stumble every time a stray bat—there seemed to be thousands of them—crossed our path, or a cobweb tickled my nose. Leaving the light in our room and stirring up the flickering embers in the moldy old fireplace, Wilkins departed without a word. Garrett, I noticed, watched him closely, but did not attempt to detain him.

His uncertain footsteps had scarcely died out down the long corridor when Garrett, throwing himself into a chair, drew from his ulster the three books which I had noticed him bring from the library. Pulling the lamp toward him on the table at his side, he motioned me to come near.

"Something for you to use your imagination on, Peter," he said, nonchalantly. "See what you make of this. Can't connect it myself but perhaps you can make a suggestion."

Glancing at the fly leaf of the book as he spread it before my eyes, I saw sketched there the emblem of death, a skull and crossbones. Beneath it, scrawled in crude characters, was the single word "Remember" and the date, "March 7, 1918." What immediately arrested my attention, however, was not so much the date, or the drawing in general but rather the skull which evidently had been drawn with considerable care and not a little skill, and bore but a single eye socket located in the center of the forehead.

"It means nothing to me," I said finally. "The date is meaningless but I don't see why the artist should have taken so much care to put the eye socket in the center of the forehead.

"Exactly," said Garrett. "It was very evidently meant to convey some particular message or meaning, although what, I have not the faintest idea. However, I think perhaps our good friend Wilkins may be able to give us a little more information. It struck me, both when we rode into the yard this morning and when we were eating this evening, that he would like to say something, but did not quite dare. And did you notice how he watched us go up those tower stairs this afternoon?"

As if in answer to his remark, there came a knock at our door and to my "come in," it opened slowly, revealing old Wilkins standing on the threshold before us.

"I HAVE come to you, sir," addressing himself to Garrett, "with such information concerning this terrible mystery as I possess, since it was to you that Mr. Helmuth, three days before his death, directed a letter and therefore I feel that if he had a friend in this world it must be you."

I saw Garrett start in surprise, but he made no comment.

"You did not, then, tell everything you knew to Mr. Twombly?" he asked.

"No, sir. I did not. Partly because he seemed to regard me with some suspicion and partly because I could not see where these things could help any—they were so strange and unreal—but mostly because of a certain loyalty to Mr. Helmuth. He seemed to live in constant dread lest these things get to the ears of the world and only a few days before his death, when he wrote a letter to you, he cautioned me not to say anything to anybody about the letter. He seemed to feel, sir, that you would be here within a few days and I am quite sure he had a very important matter to discuss with you. Therefore I feel that I am carrying out my trust by telling you all I know."

"You are English?" asked Garrett, with seeming irrelevance.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Helmuth brought me from England about three years ago."

"Ah, yes. Well, go on and tell us what you know."

"As I was about to say, sir, I have come to believe that this house is haunted. Within the past six months we have had many strange doings here. Do you want that I should begin from the beginning?"

"Yes, go on."

"Well, as it was, sir, Mr. Helmuth ran across me in England when I was down on my luck and in bad need of a place.

"He asked me if I wanted a place bad enough to come to America with him, and I told him I'd consider myself lucky to get such a chance.

"So we came here to live. From the very first I found Mr. Helmuth to be a very peculiar old man, if you'll pardon my saying it, sir. He went to live in his tower and ordered me never to go into that wing of the house except to bring him victuals, twice a day. On occasions when he walked on the beach he gave me strict orders to remain in the house but under no circumstances to go near the tower. At the first of it he wrote letters and it was often necessary for me to drive to the city where there was always an express to be brought back. What was in these packages I never knew as he always carried them directly to his study and never permitted me to aid him in any way.

"Well, sir, he was getting pretty old and feeble, so sometimes I disobeyed his orders and went down on the beach to watch him, feeling that he might fall among the rocks and break a leg or something which, with nobody to hear his cries

for help, would be a very bad thing.

"Well, I was down there one day, sir, sort of keeping one eye on him from behind a rock on the bluff, when a very strange thing happened. He was walking along, slowly, his head down and thinking very deeply, it appeared. Suddenly I saw him bend over and pick up something. From where I was I could see that it was a bottle that had been washed up there and left by the tide.

"As I waited there I saw him make as if to toss the bottle back into the sea, but something caused him to hesitate and look closer at it. Then I saw him pull out the cork and with a small splinter which he picked up, he began to poke at something inside it. Even as far away as I was, I could see that it was a rolled-up piece of white paper. Not being able to get at it easily, he finally broke the bottle on a stone and unrolled the paper.

"And then came that strange thing I spoke about. Mr. Helmuth seemed to look at the paper very intently for the full space of a minute and then, with a sudden cry that I myself would call almost a shriek, sir, he threw it as far as he could into the sea and ran up the embankment toward the house, waving his arms like a madman.

"Having some natural curiosity, if you'll pardon my mentioning it, sir, I waited until he had gone out of sight and then went down the bank and picked the paper out of the water. It was an odd bit of a thing and it meant nothing to me, sir, but I decided to save it and so I've brought it with me here tonight if you care to look at it, sir."

Garrett almost snatched the bit of paper Wilkins held out to him and together we both bent over it in the glare of the smoky lamp.

THERE, slightly obliterated by seawater, was that same weird drawing, its single unwinking eye glaring up at us in peculiar malevolence, very evidently drawn by the same hand which put it in Helmuth's books but bearing beneath, instead of the cryptic "Remember" a complete message: "The souls of two hundred drowned dead are awaiting vengeance. You can atone for your double treachery in only one way. You know that way. You cannot escape. This is our first warning, but not our last. Remember, March 7, 1918."

Garrett slowly folded the paper and placed it in his wallet. "Go on, Mr. Wilkins," was all he said.

"Well, sir, things were very different with Mr. Helmuth from that time on and strange things began to happen in Lispen Manor.

"The next occurrence that I remember was the driftwood. Mr. Helmuth was very fond of driftwood fires and it was my daily task to go down to the beach, gather up such scraps of wood as I could find and bring them up for the study fireplace.

"I had done this in my regular way one night and had retired to my room. As I remember it there had been several large pieces of wood washed up on the beach which was rather unusual for this stretch of the coast, but I paid no particular attention to them before lighting the fire. I had scarcely gotten the blaze to burning well and had gone downstairs when I heard the most despairing scream from the library.

"Thinking something terrible had happened to Mr. Helmuth, I rushed from my room toward the tower just in time to catch sight of him standing at the top of the tower stairs waving a piece of the blazing driftwood above his head and shrieking like a maniac. Without seeming to notice me at all, he ran down the stairs and out of the house toward the shore. Thinking he had gone completely mad and fearing he would do himself bodily harm, I ran after him. Before I got halfway to the shore, however, I saw him stop on the bluff overlooking the beach and hurl the blazing brand as far as he could into the sea. Then, without so much as a glance in my direction, he rushed back into the library. The next day he fell very ill and bidding me come to the library told me never to have any more driftwood fires."

"Did you find that particular piece of wood on the beach again?" asked Garrett.

"Yes, sir, I did. I——"

"Did you save it?"

"No, sir—that is, I did not purposely save it. It seemed to me to be only an ordinary piece of wood and I tossed it up among some refuse on the beach. It is

probably there yet if you care to examine it—"

"Not just now, Wilkins. Go on with your story."

"There isn't much more to tell, sir. Mr. Helmuth's illness went from bad to worse and in the course of a few days I was obliged to call in a physician, even against his strict orders, but I could not see him die. I understood that our only neighbor, Mr. Surratt, was a physician, and he consented at my request to look after the patient."

"Were there any more incidents in the nature of those you have just related?" inquired Garrett.

I thought the old man hesitated. "Yes, there were and it was these things that Mr. Helmuth asked me never to reveal to anybody. In view of what has happened, however, I think I am justified in telling them now.

"Despite the efforts of Dr. Surratt, Mr. Helmuth seemed to get only worse, but if I may venture my own opinion, sir, I felt that his ailment was more mental than physical. He lay in what appeared to be a coma most of the time, but during such intervals as he was rational he seemed to live in constant fear and dread of something or somebody.

"One evening, soon after Dr. Surratt had left him, I heard one of those awful screams of his from the library and rushing upstairs found him in his bedclothes standing before the open fire into which he was throwing some of his books. He had a very valuable library of books on chemistry, and thinking he was having one of his irrational spells, I attempted to drag some of the blazing volumes out of the fireplace. At this he fairly sprang upon me, uttering such shrieks and curses as I have never heard in all my life before, and fairly drove me out of the room."

"Did you mention any of these things to Dr. Surratt?"

"I ought to have added, sir, that Mr. Helmuth begged me constantly to say nothing of it to anybody and as he had been a very liberal and fair employer in spite of his eccentric ways, I felt morally bound to comply."

"Is there anything else you can tell us, Wilkins?" Garrett asked after a short pause.

"No, sir, there seems to be nothing else else that I can remember. Of course, there has been that tapping noise we have been hearing around the south tower. I suppose Mr. Twombly has already told you of that?"

"Yes, we will look into that later. Meanwhile I wish, Peter, that you and Wilkins go down to the beach and find, if you can, that piece of driftwood. I shall do a bit of prowling about that tower on my own account. I had thought we might leave the matter go until morning, but what Wilkins has just told us seems to need investigating—the sooner the better. And oh, by the way, are you both armed?"

I had my heavy army automatic in my bag and Wilkins said he had a pistol belonging to Helmuth.

"You'd better go and get it at once," said Garrett. "I think we should be prepared for almost anything."

"Wanted a chance to go over this with you, alone, Peter," he continued as the old man shuffled out.

"Well, what do you make of it?" I asked.

"Humph, a very strange case. Old Helmuth, very evidently mad—and yet—he wouldn't have been leaving those drawings about just to frighten himself with. It appears they mean something to him which we do not understand. How they came there is also another very interesting question."

HE picked up the books he had brought in with him one by one and began to study the drawings, comparing them with the message found in the bottle.

"Skull and crossbones," he murmured, in abstract meditation. "The sign of some secret order, very possibly, and meant to convey a message of warning, very evidently. But why the single eye? Why that lone eye? In every one of these drawings that single eye—in the center of the forehead. And that date, March 7, 1918. Twenty years ago. What happened on that date, March 7, 1918? A sea disaster very likely, judging from the reference made in the bottle message. A sea disaster on the 7th day of March. No, I do not recollect any."

And then, pulling himself together, he went on, addressing me: "But let us con-

centrate on the significance of that single eye. Think of everything you can, Peter, which might have any relation to a human being having a single eye in the center of his forehead."

"There is only one thing I can think of," I said after a moment of close thought. "But I don't see how it is going to help us any. It was Grecian mythology, I believe, which gave to the world its conception of the man with a single eye. It originated, as I remember it, in the story of Ulysses and his mariners who in one of their numerous adventures were captured and entombed in a cave by the one-eyed giant, Cyclops, who proceeded to eat them alive one by one until Ulysses hit upon a plan for blinding him as he slept and then escaping by strategy. As I remember it—"

I never finished my account, cut short not by anything Garrett had said, but simply by the look on his face of puzzled concern giving way to shocked surprise—and then, apprehension.

"My God, Peter," he finally gasped, his face losing its customary ruddiness and assuming an unnatural pallor. "You may have hit upon it—and yet—but no—it is too fantastic for belief. And yet, on the other hand, Goff reported after the Armistice that he was quite sure he had seen—in Germany. No, no, no, by heaven I cannot believe it—not that—it would be too terrible."

Then, gripping himself, again he turned to me: "Peter, you get Wilkins and hurry to the beach. Bring that piece of driftwood back to me as soon as you can. And, Peter"—he drew nearer—"do not hesitate to shoot should you run across anybody who is not willing to stop and give some reason for his presence. And by all means shoot to kill. There is somebody, somewhere in this place besides us and they must not leave it alive."

At this moment Wilkins, clad in great coat with a rickety lantern in his hand, appeared in the doorway. Pulling my pistol hastily out of my bag, I followed him out into the passageway, down the steps and out into the night. Side by side we began running toward the beach. Behind we had left Garrett prowling about alone in that old pile whose sinister shadow even now seemed reaching out to halt us as we scrambled down toward the bluff which overhung the shore.

We had reached the bluff and were running slowly along the lip of the promontory when Wilkins, who was ahead now, suddenly stopped and reaching out his hand as I came up pulled me behind a rock. His teeth were chattering from either cold or fear, or both.

"Look!" he whispered in my ear.

Shuddering, some of the old man's fright entering into my own veins, I peered around the rock. I could see nothing.

"There, there, against that rock. Can't you see it move?"

The moon flicked for a moment from behind one of the scudding clouds and there, partly crouching, partly leaning against a rock from which he must have had a full view of the Manor, I thought I could make out the dim outlines of a man.

Even as I watched I saw him slip around the rock and disappear over the edge of the bluff.

"Quick," I whispered in Wilkins' ear. "We must stop him at all costs."

Pulling my revolver, I ran to the edge of the bluff, thinking to hail him as he scrambled down the steep embankment. He would have had time, I calculated, to get only part way down it and I should have him at my mercy. The moon conveniently flooded the place for a moment with pale light. I peered over the bluff.

There was not a solitary sign of the individual anywhere.

I felt old Wilkins shudder beside me.

With an effort I pulled myself together. "Well," I said, "he, or it, or whatever it was, is gone now. That's plain enough. There seems to be no trace of him here, so we might as well get that driftwood and go back." They were brave words on my part but inwardly I was cold with fear.

IV

AFTER some stumbling about, both of us keeping one eye on the edge of the bluff over which that lonely keeper of vigil had disappeared, we began pawing about in a pile of refuse. In a few moments Wilkins had unearthed a charred piece of timber, easily recognizable as the stern piece of a ship's small boat. I tucked

it under my arm and with a distinct feeling of relief, turned back to the house.

As we rounded the tower in which was the library, a figure stepped out of the shadow and Garrett's voice in low tones bade me to come near.

"Listen here," he said, putting his ear against the brick wall. I listened intently.

Seemingly, far away, but nevertheless apparently coming from within, I could hear a steady muffled tapping.

"Peter," he said, "it's in there somewhere, but by heaven, I can't tell where. I've been over this brick and stone, inch by inch, but I can't seem to find a stone that's not as solid in its mortar as the day it was put there. But we'll let it go for the moment. I see you have the driftwood. Let's look at it inside under the lamp."

Together we hurried back into the house where I handed Garrett the wood without a word. Holding it closely under the lamp, he scrutinized it long and carefully. Finally, with a glad cry of "I thought so, I thought so," he handed it to me.

"Hold it sidewise to the light so that the rays strike it at an angle of about 20 degrees," he said, "and tell me if I see aright."

I glanced along the burned surface of the board, and, finally, by getting it at the right angle, caught in faint outline underneath the scorched gloss the letters "U. S. S. Cyclops."

Cyclops? Cyclops? I cast my thoughts back over the years. And then I remembered. The naval collier *Cyclops,* of course. She had been lost during the war. Practically new, she had dropped out of sight somewhere in the north Caribbean on a trip home from British Barbadoes and not a solitary trace had ever been found of her since. And now, here on the Jersey coast, twenty years later almost to a day, is washed up a piece of one of her boats.

"It's almost too impossible to believe," I finally managed to say.

"If you mean the drifting part of it—that's not so impossible," said Garrett, interpreting my thoughts. "Things of that sort have been known to drift about for years before they happen to come to the notice of human beings. That's not the hard part of it, however. As I happen to be in a position to know, the *Cyclops* had nothing but steel boats and anybody but a man who had been systematically and purposely terrorized for the past six months should have known it. But it fits in with all the rest of it. These secret warning messages have been just a little too theatrical and bombastic to be genuine. There must be an ulterior purpose behind it all."

"But why should Helmuth have known about the boats? He was not a seafaring man." I was frankly puzzled.

"Because he was on her during her last trip, if I am correct in my hypothesis. When the *Cyclops* went down in March of 1918 she carried with her the devisor of, and the formula for, the deadliest lethal gas yet evolved by man—a formula which had been the property of the United States Government but which was supposed to have been lost along with everything else on board when months of systematic searching by half the naval forces failed to reveal a single trace of the lost vessel."

"But where does Helmuth come in?" I asked.

"Exactly in this manner. As I see it now, Helmuth and the inventor of the gas must have been one and the same person. It was his own gas which destroyed him and the Japs, but how the old devil came back from the bottom of the ocean is more than I am prepared to answer. What I do know, however, is that in that tower, or under it, or somewhere concealed about it, is that formula. It was that which the Japs were after. But what is more important to us now is that the Japs were not the only ones who were after it. Somebody is around here, somewhere, and if they get it, Peter, we're done for. But listen—"

Somewhere close to us and yet apparently coming from no one direction, I caught, again, that faint, unmistakable tapping—tapping. Catching him by the arm, I told him in a few rapid sentences what we had seen on the beach.

"Yes, yes, of course, the beach. We should have thought of that before. By heavens, if these people are alive and real, we will find them. Come on. Let's go!"

WE must have presented a weird sight—the three of us, old Wilkins bringing up in the rear with his lantern, running and stumbling down toward the sea. At the edge of the bluff I told Garrett just

where and how we had seen that wraith-like figure slip over the cliff to be swallowed up by the semi-darkness below. We examined the spot but not a trace had been left on the hard surface of the rock. Down on the beach we went and stood there, peering helplessly up the rocky wall into the blackness.

As I stood there I became gradually aware that water was trickling into my shoe and glancing down in some surprise—we were far from the water's edge—I saw that I was standing in a shallow ditch through which a thin stream of water was sluggishly making its way. Following it with my eye, I saw that it came from among the rocks at the foot of the bluff. Almost at the same moment Garrett, who had been impatiently striding up and down the beach, splashed into it over his shoe tops.

With a half-uttered imprecation he was about to seek a firmer footing when his eye also caught sight of the stream and followed it, as mine had done, to the bluff where it seemed to spring from among the small rocks and stones. "Wilkins," he called. The old man came up with his lantern at a half run. "I do not remember that there was a brook running down from the Manor to the shore," said Garrett, pointing to the stream.

"No, sir, there is no brook but there is, I believe—an—"

"Where does this come from, then?" Garrett demanded, impatiently indicating the trickling stream of water.

"I was just about to say, sir," went on the old man, "that there is an old drain somewhere which runs down from the Manor and serves the house—"

"The drain, the drain. Of course. What a dolt I have been! Quick, Peter! Up and find that hole. That's where they are."

Without another word he scrambled up the steep embankment, jutting with rocks and overgrown with weeds. Even as I started to follow I heard the sharp crack of a pistol from above us, followed by the wicked "ping" of a steel jacket against a nearby rock. Three orange flashes just ahead of me, followed by a triple report, told me that all was well with Garrett. A few moments afterward I had wriggled up through the rocks and weeds to his side. To my surprise, I found there a thin, upstanding ledge of rock behind which was a narrow crevice, just about three feet in width and perhaps six feet deep. The crevice was effectually concealed from above by the overhanging bluff. Before us, across that narrow space and plainly visible even in the darkness, was a round hole in the opposite ledge just about large enough to permit the entry of a human body. Already Garrett's electric flashlight had lit up the rounded cavern, the walls of which we could now see were of moss-grown brick. At the bottom, trickling down into the crevice, was a small, sluggish stream of water.

"He went back in there," whispered Garrett. "We've got to go in after him. Tell Wilkins to go back and stand guard over the car and under no circumstances to allow anybody to come near. I don't see how they can get away from the blind end of this thing but we must be prepared for anything."

I scrambled back and gave the old man his directions and a few minutes afterward had joined Garrett at the mouth of the drain. Together, partly crawling and partly stooping, we made our way up the slimy, sloping pathway, the cold water numbing our hands and the uneven set of bricks scraping our knees. Ahead of us now was only the blackness of that sinister passageway, pierced at intervals by cautious flashes from Garrett's pocket torch. At any moment death in the form of a bullet might come smashing down upon us, utterly unprotected as we were except for the meandering crookedness of the drain.

Foot by foot we made our way along. Already a half-hour had elapsed and the gradual increasing slope of the tunnel told us we must be approaching the house. Suddenly Garrett stopped.

"Listen," he whispered.

Far ahead I thought I caught the distinct metallic clink of steel against stone. There were subdued voices. The thudding stopped, I started to squeeze in by Garrett's side but he halted me with a push of his hand.

"Wait," he whispered, "they have stopped digging, for some reason. I thought I heard them crawling down this way."

We waited—luckily.

With a muffled roar which nearly crushed our eardurms and a blast of foul air that hurled us both back into the tunnel behind us, the whole drain ahead of us seemed literally to rise under our very feet and shake itself like some giant constrictor. Bricks and dust dropped down upon our backs, pushing us almost flat in the clammy ooze.

Choking and struggling, I scrambled again to my knees. Garrett was already there before me.

"Quick, Peter," he cried. "They must have blown up the tower. We've not a moment to lose."

V

STUMBLING and slipping, we scrambled along the drain, the increasing débris telling us that we must be nearing our goal. My hands were already torn and bleeding on the broken bits of stone and brick when we were halted by a pile of shatttered stone which blocked further progress. With a cry Garrett threw himself upon it, hurling the bricks into the tunnel behind us. Five minutes of work made an opening large enough for us to wriggle through. Here the tunnel branched off sharply to the right. It was not walled with stone and I could see by the intermittent flashes from Garrett's electric torch that it had been newly dug. It dawned on me then that they had been tunneling off at right angles from the old drain in order to get to the tower. Twenty feet farther on we came upon a pile of loose earth and it was into this that Garrett plunged headlong, digging into it like a terrier. A few feet of frantic scraping with our hands and we stepped down into a large opened space. Above us was the sky partially shut off from view by shattered stone walls about us.

It was the secret crypt beneath Helmuth's library.

I have vague recollection of floundering about amidst a confusion of stone and broken glass, of the peculiar, pungent odor of some explosive mixed with the dust of powdered masonry. Cutting into the blackness went the beam of Garrett's flashlight. Rising from the débris, it swept slowly around the walls of the crypt. For the first time I saw row upon row of bottles and flasks once arranged in orderly fashion on the bracketed walls, but most of them now shattered and dripping their contents into the débris below. Foot by foot the beam crept on. Instinctively I knew what it was seeking. Had we come too late, after all? Had they made off with the formula? The silence, broken only by the slow drip, drip, of the leaking chemicals, was ominous. It would have been child's play to pot us there from above had they remained behind. Garrett, with the caution and skill born of years of just such situations, was holding the flash at arm's length from his body, thereby concealing to some extent our actual position. Had they shot into it then, their bullets would have gone over or under his extended arm or, at best, given him but a slight wound.

But there was not a sound. Foot by foot that narrow beam crept about the walls, searching, searching for what we both feared to see. At last it came to a stop on what appeared to be a hole in the wall. Peering closer, I saw that it had been a small cylindrical safe set in the masonry. But now the door had been torn off and the hole yawned back at us in expressive silence.

The formula was gone.

I heard a gasp from Garrett. "My God, they've got it after all," he cried. And then, "Peter, we must be out of here. They must not get away with it."

Another sweep of the light and I saw an iron ladder leading apparently to nowhere in the darkness above our heads. Up this I scrambled at Garrett's heels to find myself on a narrow shelf—that part of the floor of the library which had not been blown into the night. A half spring, a wild scramble and we were in the passageway leading to the yard and the shed where Garrett had placed his car.

A BLACK shadow rose to meet us out of the darkness, the arm extended, menacingly.

"It's all right, Wilkins," said Garrett placing a restraining hand on my pistol arm just as I was about to raise it. "Did they try to get in here at all?"

It was almost a sob of relief from the darkness. "Thank God, sir, you are alive. I thought you had—yes, sir, they tried

about twenty minutes ago but I let them have it—though it was so dark I don't think I hit anybody—and then they ran out the gate and a few minutes later I heard a motor car shooting up through the drive. I could just barely make it out through the trees, but couldn't see any light on it."

"Must have been waiting for them," said Garrett. And then, tersely, "All right, Wilkins, you'd better go back and stand guard over the crypt. Don't think you'll be bothered again tonight, but it is best to be prepared. We may not be back for some time. And, oh, Wilkins, should you hear nothing further from us before tomorrow noon, or should you hear that anything has happened to us, telegraph this message immediately to the War Department at Washington. Don't forget to give this number."

With that he handed me his light and I held it while he scribbled on a piece of paper: "Foreign agents recovered gas formula lost *Cyclops* 1918. Stop all sailings. Watch all frontiers. 392,674." Hastily pulling his little code book from his pocket, he rapidly coded the message, signing his name by the number and tearing up the original into small bits. By the next night I knew that every port would be watched and every traveler examined, but even with that it was a poor chance.

"I hope we shan't need this," he said, handing the message to the waiting Wilkins, "but we must be prepared for the worst. And now for the car. By heaven, we'll give them a good run for their money. Come on, Peter."

The roar of the engine drowned any further conversation and a few minutes afterward we swung out of the drive with Garrett at the wheel.

THE steady, reassuring purr of the twelve cylinders was a comforting sound as we swept up over the ridge and into the long stretch of dirt road beyond. I was prepared to have the keen, cutting air of the night revive my flagging spirits and my exhausted limbs, but again that dreaded, dank odor of sodden vegetation smote my nostrils and again I was assailed by that eerie, creepy feeling which had seized upon me when we first drove through that dripping forest to Lispen Manor. The night was already well advanced and the moon, which had passed its zenith, threw a wan, ghastly light among the trees, outlined ghostly fashion against the pallid splotches of soiled snow.

More than once I thought I should be thrown from the car by the terrific jolting and watched with fascinated eyes the big, taped wheel jerking and twisting like a live thing in agony under Garrett's iron grasp.

It had been a strange night. What could it all mean?

Had the *Cyclops* been lost after all? I remembered there had been much speculation as to whether she had not been the victim of submarines, but this had been officially denied by the German admiralty after the war. Yes, she had undoubtedly gone to the bottom with all on board. Whence, then, came Helmuth and the formula? And these mysterious Japanese? Seeking the formula, of course. And these who had tunneled their way to the secret crypt and blew up the library now had in their possession the most powerful lethal agent ever contrived by human hands—powers whose effect we had already seen demonstrated on those burned bodies in the library. And now, in that car, speeding along the road somewhere ahead of us, was fleeting death, and death glared at us from among the trees which lined the roadway.

Helmuth, that crazy recluse, had unleashed his evil upon those Japanese even as they murdered him in his bed. That he had prepared a quantity of his gas for just such an emergency seemed probable. And down there under the library, sealed and mortared up, was his laboratory.

I was awakened from this musing by a jolt that fairly flung me on the floor of the car, striking my already bruised knees against the dash. Faster and faster we had been tearing along that impossible road, fairly leaping from hummock to hummock, swerving and skidding in the deep, snow-filled ruts. It was the delicate choice Garrett was making between a little higher speed and certain annihilation against the tree trunks along the roadside; trees waiting, it seemed, for just that miscalculation of a hair's breadth which would send us crashing to a mangled death among them.

We had been pushing in this manner

for about half an hour—it seemed ages to me—when we came to the top of a hill leading, as I had remembered it, to the paved road beyond.

"Listen," said Garrett, suddenly shutting off the engine.

I strained my ears as we shot almost noiselessly down into the gloom below. Far ahead on the opposite rise I thought I caught the distant thrum of a panting motor.

It was the other car!

Without a word, Garrett shifted into high and with a roar we shot down to the level and up the rise on the other side. Far ahead, just topping the summit, I saw a black bulk limned for the moment against the waning moon.

"We've got them now," he shouted in my ear. "The road is just beyond and I can beat anything this side of hell on a road like that."

In our turn we topped the rise. With a feeling of relief I felt the heavy wheels grip the smooth asphalt of the state highway. And there, far ahead of us was that sinister fleeting shape.

The motor steadied down to a droning hum as the speedometer began to climb. Sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty.

Out of the blackness ahead came a slash of orange and purple fire. Even above the drone of the motor I heard the sharp whine of a bullet.

A second flash and a second bullet with a peculiar "thwoop" chugged into the upholstery between us. A third twanged against the hood in front of us, a spark indicating the impact of steel upon steel.

"Pretty good shooting," Garrett growled. "Must be a bunch of 'em all right. Let 'em have a few of your own, Peter." I emptied my automatic into the blackness, but as I was no marksman I knew there was not much hope of my even hitting the car. At any rate, it had a salutary effect upon them, for after that, although they continued to shoot, their marksmanship was poorer.

VI

BY this time there was not a hundred yards between the two cars. Yard by yard, foot by foot, we crept upon them. Here a curve slowed us down a bit, but again we were dogging their very shadow. The shooting had now ceased.

"Crowd them off the highway!" I shouted in Garrett's ear. It was an ideal place for it. On our right was a fringe of trees, on our left a steep bank sloping somewhere off into the blackness below. As if reading our purpose, they clung tenaciously to the right of the road, and as we had no desire to be caught as we were hoping to catch them—between us and the embankment—the best we could do was to cling to their heels.

And then just ahead of us we saw that the road turned sharply to the right. This was our chance! Could we take a shorter curve than they, we would have them on the outside. I saw Garrett take a firmer grasp on the wheel. One hand descended to the emergency brake. It was a question of our nerve against theirs, and we won.

THE brake was not needed. They took the curve at an angle too wide by a few feet and we edged in between them and the safe side of the road. On their left now yawned the open hillside, sloping away into dark oblivion. Gradually Garrett edged in against them. Our long hood was now even with their knees.

I shuddered to think of what was coming. The miscalculation of a hair's breadth on Garrett's part and both cars would be piled up in a hopeless mass of wreckage at the bottom of the embankment. But even with this thought uppermost in my mind, that peculiar curiosity which forces men to watch in fascination every step of advancing death caused me to rise and peer over Garrett's shoulder.

The searchlight was focused on the narrowing space between the two cars.

Inch by inch—now they were almost touching—were touching.

I closed my eyes.

There was the sharp crack of rending wood. We seemed to give a half leap in the air, only to snap back to the highway again to the accompaniment of grinding brakes and the shuddering jar of skidding tires. I opened my eyes.

Just to the side of us a huge black object seemed literally to rise off the road and hurl itself into the blackness below!

We had thrown them!

Scarcely waiting to come to a stop, we sprang to the road and stumbled down the embankment, Garrett tugging at his automatic as we ran.

But there was no need for weapons. The wrecked car was lying on its side, the engine still running, the rear wheels whirling at futile high speed. One black form still huddled over the twisted steering wheel. Two others—broken, sickeningly inert masses—lay a few feet away.

It was the man behind the wheel to whom we both turned our attention. In the blackness there even then his features seemed oddly familiar. Taking out his flashlight and pulling the low peaked cap from the man's forehead, Garrett turned the light full in his face.

Even without the beard and the heavy mustache I would have known those hawk-like features in a thousand.

It was Surratt!

VII

GARRETT whistled through his teeth and pushed the flashlight nearer. I saw the dim outline of a scar running diagonally from the corner of the mouth part way across the cheek, almost reaching the ear. There was another and smaller scar below the eye.

With a muttered exclamation Garrett feverishly pulled open the man's coat and shirt front. I saw a third scar, a livid, star-shaped thing over the right breast. And there, lying close against the skin, was a leather packet. Snatching eagerly at it, Garrett unwound the leather thongs and plunged his fingers inside. Out came two packages wrapped in oiled silk. Out of the silk came two thick sheafs of paper.

Garrett handed me the flashlight and motioned me to stand over him while he spread them out on the side of the car. Almost at once I recognized the curiously intricate handwriting which I had first seen in the letter Garrett had received at Washington. The writing consisted for the most part of cryptic figures and algebraic equations which, from my college days, I recognized as complicated chemical formulæ. There was a second sheaf, closely written, without the formulæ, of which Garrett read only a paragraph and returned to the packet.

I saw him breathe a sigh of relief as he leaned for support against the side of the overturned car, wiping huge beads of perspiration from his brow as he did so.

"Well, Peter," he finally gasped, "we've got the formula. A little more and they would have gotten away with all the knowledge of that breath-of-hell in their grasp. Peter, we've done a good night's work. And now for the Count. I fear he may be badly hurt."

"The Count?" I asked in surprise. "Why, this is Dr. Surratt—"

"Ah, yes, the Count. None other than Count Ehrich von Firstenau, own cousin of William Hohenzollern and undoubtedly one of the cleverest and boldest of the German agents whose tastes and, I may add with some respect, whose natural talents have made him a thorn in the side of every nation in the world, since the time when the late German Empire first turned its face toward a place in the sun. The others"—pointing to the dark, inert masses on the other side of the car—"are very evidently done for."

Done for were the words for it. I examined them and couldn't find an unbroken bone in their bodies. But search as closely as we would we could find nothing more than a broken arm and a large and growing lump over the temple of the unconscious Count. As is common in most motor accidents, he, as the man behind the wheel, had escaped serious injury. Between us we carried him up the embankment, placed him in the car and drove slowly along the road to Keyesville.

Three hours later we had the nobleman safely stowed away in a hospital with a policeman by his bedside. Now that the excitement was over, I began to feel the effects of barked knees, raw, bleeding and bruised ribs. It was nearly noon when I dragged myself to a nearby hotel and, scarcely waiting to undress, dropped across the bed and into the sweet oblivion of dreamless sleep.

THE sun of the following day was already high in the heavens when I awoke to find Garrett, debonair and calm as ever, standing over me.

"I've ordered breakfast in bed for you," he cried jocularly. "I want to talk to you and I feel that I need to give you

an explanation which will be in the way of an apology for not telling you more as we went along."

"It's about time you began to straighten out this thing a little," I grumbled. "I've got the tail end of the yarn with a vengeance, but all the rest of it is rigmarole to me."

He laughed. "You deserve to know every angle of it, my dear boy, since without your chance idea about the *Cyclops* we might have lost several valuable hours and, of course, the formula—a contingency which I don't even like to think about. What I knew of the background of this case, added to by Helmuth's confession, which he was good enough to leave along with the formula, pieced together with a few things I have been able to glean from the Count as to the later happenings, has given me a fairly complete story."

"The Count came out all right, then?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. This morning we had a very amicable conference. That is, it ended up very much more amicably than it began, due in part to the fact that I rather unfeelingly brought to his attention the possibility that he may face a charge of murder. I must confess I don't think, under any possibility, we can get anything on him other than a charge of conspiracy, guilty of premeditating murder as he certainly is. And then, although I took care not to tell him so, we are somewhat indebted to him for getting those Japanese agents so conveniently disposed of."

"They were after the formula, then?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly. But lacking in Von Firstenau's finesse they killed the goose that had laid the golden egg, so to speak. Helmuth, the old arch-fiend—though I shouldn't speak so about him when he did try to make good in the end—had already produced a quantity of the gas and, fearing just such a circumstance as this, had rigged up a secret apparatus by means of which he could flood the room with the vapor through a minute slit in the masonry. All he had to do was to pull a cord—something which he could do even as he lay in the throes of death. One of the extremely valuable properties of the gas is that all trace of it completely disappears within an hour after it has done its deadly work. Von Firstenau, who was the first on the scene after being summoned by Wilkins, had opportunity to search the room and remove anything which might have indicated the existence of the secret crypt before Twombly and his men arrived.

"IT would seem that the Count recognized me—we have met under weird circumstances before—the moment I came, although I'll do him the honor of saying that he completely fooled me. Without the beard concealing those scars—those on his face are mementos of college duels, and that on his chest was a bit of shrapnel during the war—he would have been recognizable anywhere.

"He had already noted the existence of the old drain and hit upon the plan of tunneling off from it to the library tower. Working underground with a man at the shore end of the drain, he was sure to be unmolested. Things were getting too hot for him and, knowing it would be only a matter of a few hours before we would also discover the secret laboratory, he determined to play his trump card in the way of a little dynamite. It was his plan to blow the tower sky high while we were peacefully asleep and be off in his car before we knew what it was all about.

"Fortunately for us, we stumbled on to the drain ourselves and thus cornered him at the blind end of his tunnel, where he had either to fight or to blow his way out. He chose the latter.

"But, of course, the whole story goes back much farther than that, and I can see that you're anxious to hear about the drawings and the *Cyclops*. Well, I may as well begin at the beginning.

"YOU remember, as the late war drew to a close, there were constant rumors that the United States Government had evolved a new kind of poisonous gas which, as the newspapers had it, was more powerful, more deadly, than any lethal agent theretofore developed by the ingenuity of man. Even gas masks, it was said, were useless in defense, inasmuch as the gas ate its way through rubber or any of the fabrics known to science. As I remember it, the sudden collapse of Germany and the ensuing plea for peace was brought about, according to the general

idea, by the fear that the United States was about to unleash this new terror against which no enemy could stand.

"All these reports were crediting Germany's downfall to this gas. Oddly enough, weird and fantastic as they seemed at the time, they did have a certain basis in fact, and those facts were this:

"There came to the War Department late in 1917 one John Helmholtz, professor of chemistry in a small college of the Middle West, who asserted that he had evolved a lethal gas which would make phosgene and mustard seem by comparison as harmless as attar of roses. In due time his claims were looked into, the gas was tested, and it was discovered that he had not exaggerated—that he had, in fact, unleashed the very fumes of hell.

"So great were the possibilities and so profound was the fear that the secret might be snatched from under our very noses by the Germans, who had their spies even in the secret service, every precaution was taken to keep the formula an absolute secret. A large number of men were assigned to that duty from the secret service, and everyone connected with the affair supposed, of course, that the matter was well in hand and that it would be only the matter of a few months before we would be knocking at the gates of Berlin itself. But with all our care, all our tremendous and minute precautions, we completely overlooked the arch-traitor and spy of them all."

"Helmholtz?" I asked.

"The same. It seems that he had a hyphen somewhere in his makeup and had never gotten over it. After he had turned his secret over to the Government some half-made sense of devotion to the fatherland got possession of him, or he may have been approached and in some way tremendous pressure brought to bear on him; at any rate, he became the center of a gigantic conspiracy to steal the formula back from the Government and turn it over to the Germans.

"For extra precaution only one copy of the formula was kept in existence. Among the many ingredients used in the chemical reaction which produced the gas, great quantities of magnesium were necessary. I am not a chemist and cannot, therefore, tell just how it was used in this connection, but Helmholtz, early in 1918, went to South America for the purpose of superintending the mining of a quantity of this material and shipping it back to the States. For reasons which seemed plausible enough at the time he insisted on carrying with him the formula and as not the slightest suspicion as to his loyalty had yet fastened itself upon him, he was able to get away with it without any trouble.

THEY were down there only a few weeks and on March 4 the Collier *Cyclops,* with her cargo of magnesium and Helmholtz aboard, set sail from British Barbados bound for Newport News. The *Cyclops* disappeared on that trip, not a solitary trace of her ever being found afterward.

"Of course, the War Department was fairly distracted. The natural supposition was that she had been sunk by submarines, and the only hope was that those aboard her who knew of the formula had gone down like good Americans carrying the secret with them. As I said before, Helmholtz had been hailed as a hero in the little circle who knew of his project and not the slightest suspicion had been attached to his name from that day until this.

"Not being absolutely sure, however, that the Germans, if it was they who had destroyed the *Cyclops,* had captured the formula, the War Department was in an uproar for the next six months as we were living under the constant dread that Germany might at any moment turn loose that hellish stuff on our unprotected troops. Of course, if they had, it would have meant the end of everything for us and the coming of a Germanized world. You can imagine how some of us, who were close to things, felt during those days of the spring and summer of 1918. That, too, will perhaps explain some of the disastrous drives attempted by the allied commanders—just a desperate attempt to smash them before they got that stuff to working.

"Much to our growing relief, the expected terror was not forthcoming. Furthermore, the reports of our army intelligence seemed to indicate a feeling of apprehension on their part similar to our own, although it was not until this little mystery at Lispen Manor was cleared up

that I began to recognize it as such. It was not until that German drive of August, 1918, that we began to feel at all certain the Germans did not have the formula. It seemed to us that not even they, prodigal as they were with human life, would have wasted so many lives in a drive of this nature had they, within their power, such an agent of death as the gas we had just lost. I can see now that they were equally afraid that we had it all the time ourselves."

"I don't know how you make that out," I put in. "They must have known that the formula was at the bottom of the Atlantic if they didn't have it themselves."

"Well, to take up the narrative in the document which he so kindly left for our perusal—as soon as he had made up his mind to betray his trust to the American Government Helmholtz gathered about him a group of German spies who, under the guise of colleagues, were supposed to aid him in the more routine work of producing the gas in quantity. Several of this group went to South America with him and there they completed their diabolical scheme to turn the *Cyclops* over to the Germans on the homeward trip.

"Everything was planned to the minutest detail with the German admiralty—two submarines were dispatched to an ocean rendezvous just out of the steamer lanes between North and South America and the *Cyclops,* crew and all, poor fellows, sailed into the trap without the slightest suspicion that anything was afoot.

"Helmholtz and his crowd had so arranged it that, unknown to the crew, they were able to seize the bridge on the appointed night and there, in the uniforms of the murdered officers they shifted the *Cyclops* off her course and ran her in a few hours to where the submarine lay in wait.

"APPARENTLY it was all as simple as A, B, C. The crew and loyal officers put up a fight when they found out what had happened, but they hadn't a chance. That whole gang of Germans had them where they couldn't do a thing. Those who survived the scuffle were either murdered in cold blood or locked below, everything which would float and thus reveal the fate of the *Cyclops* was put under hatches, her seacocks were opened, and the *Cyclops* went to the bottom forever, truly *spurlos versunkt.*"

I shuddered. "Like rats in a trap."

"Like rats in a trap," he answered. "But now for Helmholtz. Observing the old adage that one should not put all the eggs in one basket, and to make assurance doubly sure that they should get either Helmholtz or the formula through the blockade and the North Sea mine barrage, they put the inventor in one submarine and the formula in the other.

"The submarine bearing the formula never got through, and that infernal document now lies somewhere at the bottom of the sea. This gave the Germans considerable cause for worry, as they knew they could never be sure that the missing U-boat had not been captured and the formula consequently recovered by their enemies. But they had Helmholtz, and they put him to work in producing a quantity of the gas.

"Needless to say those were hopeful days along the Wilhelmstrasse. Helmholtz was feted and honored, was created a prince of the new German Empire, soon to be, and was made head of a new order of nobility, membership in which was limited to those who had taken part in the plot to recover the formula. I mention these things in passing since they have a peculiar significance in the fact that the newly established order had as its insignia a death's head and crossbones, the skull of which contained the single eye of the Cyclops of mythology, and the whole bearing as its only inscription the date March 7, 1918.

"But with all this rejoicing of the inner circle their great plans came up against something which they had utterly failed to take into consideration. That obstacle was just the harassed, shaken nerves of a human being. Helmholtz, arch-traitor, devil and conspirator that he was, had been completely unmanned by the successful outcome of his plottings, and this, coupled with the long, tedious and by no means safe voyage across the Atlantic and under the mine barrage had brought home to him the full enormity of his crime.

"The German Government gave him everything to do with and put him to work among his chemicals in confident expectation that it would be the matter of only a

few weeks before the secret formula would again be in their hands. In this they had counted without Helmholtz. He had a complete breakdown. He would not, or possibly could not, in his condition work up his formula again. They tried inducement, threats and cajolery. All of it was of no avail.

"Meanwhile, fearing that the Allies might have captured the U-boat with the only existing formula, they launched the drives of August, 1918, hoping by sheer weight of numbers to force a peace before their enemies, if they had it, could let loose the gas upon them.

"As you know, they put all they had into it, hoping against hope that the little, shifty-eyed devil back there in Berlin could eventually be forced into giving them what they sought. I suppose this supreme effort, this outpouring of resources and human life explained their somewhat sudden collapse a few months later.

"ON the other hand, a new policy regarding Helmholtz had been evolved in Berlin. It was the work of one of the cleverest brains that Germany has ever produced—that of Count Ehric von Firstenau, friend and adviser of the Kaiser and directing spirit of the German war- and peace-time intelligence systems. This part of the story, by the way, is Von Firstenau's revelation of a few hours back, and you can take it for what it is worth. I, myself, see no reason to doubt it since it dovetails in very nicely and I can vouch for the fact that he is all he claims to be.

"Well, it was Firstenau's policy which he finally imposed on the general staff, to give Helmholtz a free foot, turn him loose, so to speak, but keep on his trail, ready to pounce upon him should he ever evolve the formula again.

"Accordingly, immediately following the Armistice, Helmholtz was turned loose, the idea being allowed to percolate into his mind that, since the war was over, the Germans had no further use for him and he was free to go where he pleased. By some ingenious faked-up deal they saw to it that he came into the possession of a moderate fortune, and it was with this in his possession that he returned to the States, seeking the solitary existence at Lispen Manor.

"In due time came a Dr. Surratt, none other than our good friend Von Firstenau, who either purchased or leased the property adjacent to that of Lispen Manor, posing as a retired physician.

"Von Firstenau was too clever to get himself suspected by attempting in any way to make the acquaintance of Helmholtz, now Helmuth, but bided his time for two or three years, living side by side with his quarry and waiting patiently for the day he was almost certain of seeing Helmholtz evolve his formula once more and turn the thing over to the American Government.

"MEANWHILE, Helmholtz, screening his work even from the eyes of old Wilkins, had equipped the secret laboratory beneath the library and set himself to the task of working out the formula. He produced a quantity of the gas, sealed up the secret crypt beneath the library and prepared to settle down and live out the rest of his life among his favorite books.

"It was then that the cunning of the Count began to assert itself. Being profoundly steeped in the lore of psychology and psychoanalysis, he went to work to play upon the morbidity which would naturally have resulted in the mind of a man of Helmholtz's experiences. Thus it was that Helmholtz, strolling for exercise on the beach, found the crude but, to him, extremely significant drawing with its warning. Thus it was that Wilkins, bringing driftwood from the beach for his master's study fireplace, was the innocent bearer of that terror-inspiring message written in the single word *Cyclops* on what he naturally supposed was a piece of one of her boats come back to taunt him from the deep. All of these things were manufactured by the hand of Von Firstenau not a half-mile distant.

"And then the master stroke. Helmholtz fell very ill. I have no doubt that the Count had a hand in that, too, although he emphatically denied it this morning. Well, anyway, if he didn't poison his stomach he certainly did his mind, and the ultimate effect was the same. As I was saying, Helmholtz fell violently ill and, of course, the very natural thing for the frightened servant to do was to summon

the nearest physician, who, incidentally, was Dr. Surratt. By the use of certain narcotics administered in the correct proportion, it is possible to get information from the most tight-lipped individual and it was thus that Firstenau worked on poor old Helmholtz. The poor old villain didn't have a chance. He couldn't even look into his books any more without finding there that terrible reminder, the one-eyed skull and crossbones. He believed that all the forces of hell were hanging by him at his bedside. In his ravings he told practically everything to the German; the location of the laboratory, the formula—everything. It was also during these ravings that the Count learned of the secret apparatus by means of which the old man could turn loose a small quantity of the gas. That naturally called a halt in the Count's schemes for the time being, as he had no desire to wind up his efforts as a victim to the secret he had been working hard to unearth.

"But here again good fortune stepped in to aid him. The mysterious Japanese appeared in the neighborhood, and Von Firstenau, being nobody's fool, immediately realized that other hands than his own were angling for this strange fish.

"With his characteristic genius for turning to advantage everything which the ordinary individual might consider an insurmountable obstacle, the Count gave the Jap agents a free hand, meanwhile playing on the fears of Helmholtz to such an extent that the old fool was ready to touch off his little gas trap at the first sight of an unfamiliar face. It was about this time, I believe, that he wrote to me, having known of me when we were detailed to look out for him during the war. He didn't get the letter off any too soon, for that very night the Japs paid him a visit and when they awoke him there in his library and proceeded to knife him, he must have let them have it while he was still struggling in the throes of death. You, yourself, have seen what that hellish stuff can do. Thank heaven, we have the formula at last. I hate to think what would have been in store for us and for this country if they had escaped with it."

THE COKEY KILLERS

By RAY ST. VRAIN

Killers all! Seven sisters of snow and sin; seven smiling gun-molls—ready to turn loose their itchy rods at a nod from the King of the Coke-Ring.

THE narcotics squad had been doing good work. Several opium, snow and heroin dens had been successfully raided—two uptown in fashionable localities, one in Doyers Street, one on the East Side, and two in Greenwich Village tearooms, the round-up including a hundred or more addicts. Then the squad ran into tough luck. Police, a dozen strong, descended upon the most palatial den of all, a dream of Oriental luxury known to the initiated as Mahomet's Paradise, a big brown-stone house in the West Seventies, and the men were shot down to a man with dumdum bullets from behind Chinese tapestries.

It was the worst slaughter in the history of the force. The news sheets blazoned it from coast to coast, and a wave of popular indignation swept the country.

"A round dozen of the bravest of the boys shot down like dogs," said Chief Terry Owens, mouth working, "Swear to me, you men, you'll clean them up."

A month—a month and a half—went by.

Not one of the murderers was caught. Who were they? How many had there been? Millionaire addicts had been known

as habitues of Mahomet's Paradise, some of the richest wastrels, young and old, of New York. But these men had not been at the house on the night of the raid; each had an unassailable alibi.

"Why were you not there on that particular night?" asked the Chief sternly of the pasty-faced group. "Were you tipped off?"

The addicts replied in a unanimous negative. It was only on certain nights of the week that they frequented Mahomet's Paradise. The night of the raid happened to be an off night.

"Describe some of the attendants of the place."

"We never saw any. Everything was handed through the openings in the tapestries."

The rich snow-birds were sweated unmercifully, but there was no evidence to hold any of them.

CHIEF TERRY OWENS was in a somber mood when Dr. William Bokan, proprietor of Heartsease, the well-known retreat on Long Island for wealthy victims of the drug habit, called upon him to offer any assistance he could in capturing the culprits. Doctor Bokan was a large, rather elderly man, grey, ruddy, with clear blue eyes, a wholesome smile and a hearty handclasp.

"I don't know that I can do anything, Chief," he said. "I have an idea that drug-addicts rather than the servants at the place fired the fatal shots. I can at least keep an eye on people who apply to me for treatment and if they look suspicious I can immediately inform you."

The Chief was interested. "Thank you, Doctor Bokan. Why do you think addicts were the guilty ones?"

"The servants would have had no motive in killing the policemen in that wholesale, brutal way. The psychology of drug-addicts just now is a rather fierce one, Chief." Doctor Bokan smiled. "The recent very effective raids of your narcotics squad have served to make them sullen and quite dangerous. So—in reprisal—and as a warning to you to cease your activities—they shot down your men."

"Not a bad theory," commented Chief Terry Owens. "There's only one that's better. It's this: the proprietors of Mahomet's Paradise, seeing their business going to smash, themselves shot the police—or had them shot."

"Plausible," said Doctor Bokan. "But in that case they defeated their own object—for the slaying of twelve policemen will in itself put all dens out of business."

"Exactly, Doctor; and the same can be said for your addicts. When they go on a rampage of wholesale murder of officers they'll find it harder than ever to get their dope, for we'll redouble our efforts to plug up all underground channels of distribution."

There was a moment of silence in the room.

"Who owned the house—or rented it? Have you investigated?" asked Bokan then.

"Certainly. The agent hasn't the least idea who really paid the rent. Every month the sum, a huge one, was sent to the office by registered mail. The house was let originally to one John Smith, a dummy most probably. Smith appeared at the agent's office once—and thereafter was invisible. He never asked for any repairs, never made a complaint, and always paid the rent promptly. It was only a short while before our raid that the agent discovered the premises were being used as an opium den."

"A most baffling case," observed Doctor Bokan, rising to go. "All I can say is, I'll keep an eye on every addict who applies to me for treatment."

"Who is at your place now?" queried Owens with sudden interest.

"A houseful of all sorts—cocaine fiends, opium and heroin users; a few victims of the exhilarating drug, *cannabis;* a distinguished general of the Bolivian army who contracted the cocoa-chewing habit of the native Aymara Indians—and so on. Would you like to come out and look them over? There might be a suspect among them."

Owens accepted this invitation; the next day he personally motored out to Heartsease, which he found to be a magnificent Italian Renaissance mansion set in the midst of native elms. Doctor Bokan afforded him every facility for examining his patients. In the role of a consulting alienist and drug-addiction specialist the Chief interviewed each inmate rather exhaustively—even to the cocoa-chewing Bolivian general. But he learned nothing.

"Well," grunted Owens as he left, "we know just as much—and just as little—as on the night of the crime." He smiled grimly. "Some of the newspapers will be demanding a police shake-up and the removal of the Chief of Police any day now."

"Don't give up," Doctor Bokan encouraged him. "Any day we may uncover something. I should think every drug victim in New York would want to be cured now for fear of being landed in jail as a suspect. Some of them may apply to me for treatment. Remember I'll keep my eyes open—and that I'm at your service at all times."

IF there ever was a main-liner drug-addict, the man ringing the Heartsease door bell looked it. His body was emaciated, his face greenish-yellow, his eyes dull, his lips livid, his hands colorless and trembling, his whole demeanor dejected in the extreme.

Doctor Bokan received him at once.

"Opium," he said. "You've been taking enough to kill two men. How many grains a day?"

"Forty."

"Whew! Worse than I thought. Well, we'll have to get busy; I think I can pull you out of it." The doctor smiled encouragingly. "I've cured more hopeless cases than yours, so don't be downhearted. What drove you to it?"

"Facial neuralgia."

The man gave his name as Willison Hawes; residence, Sioux City, Iowa.

"Sioux City?" repeated Doctor Bokan with casual interest. "I have friends there." Then even more casually: "What part of town did you live in?"

"On Prairie Street," answered Willison Hawes promptly, "311 Prairie Street —not far from the business district."

Doctor Bokan nodded.

The newcomer was well dressed and seemed to have plenty of money. "I don't want to be assigned to a ward, Doctor," he said. "I want a private room."

"Heartsease has no wards," answered Bokan. "All rooms for patients are private. I am justly proud of my institution, Mr. Hawes," he continued. "It's the finest and most up-to-date—though by no means the largest—in New York. Did anybody in particular recommend it to you?"

"Yes; my home physician, Dr. James Waxham, 236 Bateson Building, Sioux City."

While Doctor Bokan was taking down the data of Willison Hawe's case on one of his regulation patients' cards he wrote the name of the addict's physician and the two addresses he had given him.

An hour later Hawes had received his first treatment. "You must be patient," said Doctor Bokan. "I'm afraid this will be a stubborn case. Are you a man of family?"

"No."

Doctor Bokan with a final word of encouragement left his new patient and five minutes later dispatched two telegrams to Sioux City, one to the chief of police, the other to Dr. James Waxham, Hawes' alleged physician. By mid-afternoon he received replies. Both sustained Hawes' claims. The chief of police wired that Hawes had lived at 311 Prairie Street; and Doctor Waxham stated he was Hawes' personal physician and that he had advised him to apply to Doctor Bokan for treatment.

Notwithstanding the fact that these telegrams were so favorable to Willison Hawes, Doctor Bokan telephoned Chief Owens regarding his new patient; and that afternoon the Chief sent one of his most aggressive and persistent aides, Lieutenant "Blister" Delaney of the plainclothes squad, to take a look at the stranger.

Doctor Bokan had Hawes out on the elm-shaded lawn in a reclining chair when Lieutenant Delaney, in plain clothes, arrived. There was a tragic contrast in the appearance of the detective and the opium-eater. One was big, beefy, belligerent, the picture of health. The other looked like a cadaver with his hollow cheeks, dull eyes, and bluish lips.

Doctor Bokan considerately retired after he had introduced Delaney to the addict as "my colleague Dr. Driscoll, with whom I sometimes consult on difficult cases like yours."

At police headquarters Blister Delaney was known as a man-breaker, precipitate in his accusations of suspects, relentless in forcing them to confess.

He passed a few words with Willison Hawes, enacting the role of a physician awkwardly enough. His feeling of the

addict's pulse, his examination of his tongue were both unnecessary and amateurish.

"Mr. Hawes," said Delaney with a solemnity that sat rather farcically upon him, "I'm a doctor who believes in mental purges. Your system is full of dope and your mind is full of things you're afraid to tell. I'm a doctor all right, but I can't help you unless you begin by helping yourself. Clean your soul first, then we'll rid your body of the damnable dope you've filled it with."

"Your theory, Doctor Driscoll, is very interesting," said Hawes between curiously labored respirations. "Of course there's nothing particularly novel about it. The town marshal of a hamlet I used to live in back in Iowa used to try it on vags suspected of stealing a turnip or a parsnip out of somebody's garden."

Blister Delaney flared up menacingly at this suave baiting, while a spark of humor managed to come to life in Willison Hawes' drug-dulled eyes.

"LOOK here, dopy," said Delaney, "the mere fact you're a snow-bird at all is enough to make any man suspect you . . . "

"Of what?" Hawes caught him up with a ghastly smile. "Of having been a sufferer from facial neuralgia?"

Delaney's face was growing redder and redder. "Facial neuralgia? Bunk! Don't come that over me."

"No? Haven't you, as an eminent specialist, Doctor Bokan's consultant, ever heard of facial neuralgia?"

The drug-dulled eyes gazed calmly into the angry, glittering ones.

"Come, Delaney, admit it—you're no doctor; you're just a detective and the storybook sort at that."

"Storybook, is it?" cried Blister. "If it wasn't you was only the dirty shadow of a human, all ballasted with dope, I'd brain you where you sit."

"You told me I'd have to clean out my mind by telling you everything that's in it," continued Hawes. "Well, there's only one thing in it—at present; and that is this—you're in imminent danger of making a big 200-pound fool of yourself."

Delaney looked decidedly wrathy.

"Now, my friend," went on Hawes, "since I've told you what's in my own mind I'll tell you what's in yours. You've come here today with the intention of trying to fasten the murder of the twelve policemen in Mahomet's Paradise on me whether the facts warrant it or not. Well, don't do it—if you value your official hide. Believe me, you wouldn't get very far in any glory-seeking adventure of this sort. You'd better say goodbye and then motor back to police headquarters and report nothing doing in connection with dope fiend Willison Hawes, of Sioux City, Iowa."

By now Blister had managed to send more or less of a smile across his face. He lighted a cigar and offered one to Hawes with spectacular good humor.

"It's entirely harmless you are," he said, "poor windjamming pipe-dreamer. You're only crazy in the head, and so I'll report to Doctor Bokan."

DOCTOR BOKAN'S suspicions were not yet lulled, and he evidently did not have much respect for Lieutenant Delaney's abilities for, unabserved, he watched Willison Hawes very closely for several days. But the addict acted in such an entirely normal, innocent way, begging for more opium and then dozing or staring vacantly into space for hours at a time, that at last the proprietor of Heartsease paid no especial attention to him.

Hawes had a well-furnished room with a southern exposure. It was several doors down the hall from the assembly room, where the patients met for religious services, entertainments, and the like.

One night at about one o'clock as he was lying on his bed dressed, with eyes—and ears—open, he heard footsteps out in the corridor. He waited a moment, then rose, hurried to the door, opened it slightly and peered out. He was just in time to see two black-dressed women disappearing into the assembly-room. Women . . . ! And Heartsease was supposed to be a retreat for male addicts only.

Hawes quickly undressed, donned his pajamas and bedroom slippers and entered the corridor. Then, staring glassily into space and enacting the role of a somnambulist, he stalked softly, rigidly toward the assembly-room. The upper panels of the double doors were of glass, but heavy portieres hung before them. The portieres extended out several feet beyond the door

frames; and Hawes, suddenly sluffing his role of sleepwalker, stepped behind one. Thus he was secreted from the view of anyone passing in the rather dimly lighted hall.

He peeped into the assembly-room and saw eight women in black, their backs toward him, seated in a row before Doctor Bokan, who was standing on a slightly raised platform. The physician was speaking, but Hawes could not hear what he was saying.

Hawes dropped to his knees, crept toward the doorknob, then noiselessly opened the door a few inches. Putting his face to the aperture, he could now see and hear all that went on in the room.

Doctor Bokan, smiling affably, was holding up a small bottle.

"Now, girls," he said, "the Sneeze Club has been meeting and trying long enough to develop one sneeze—a little sickly one if not a big robust one. To the first of my girls who presents me with a sneeze tonight I will give a fifty-dollar hat—when you recover enough of the drug-dulled roses in your cheeks to match the hat." He uncorked the bottle and waved it in the air. A barely visible powder, like white mist, flew around lazily and descended on the eight black-robed women.

"Sneeze! Sneeze!" begged Doctor Bokan. "For God's sake, somebody—anybody—sneeze!"

The eight mysterious ones sat motionless, receptive. Willison Hawes, listening at the door, almost fancied he could hear the pounding of their hearts in their eagerness to gratify Doctor Bokan's strange desire.

"Sneeze!" pleaded Doctor Bokan again. "The powder I've used tonight is a new one I compounded only this afternoon—better than any of the others. If you resist it you are more than human! Sneeze, girls, for your own sakes! A sneeze may save your lives! It sounds like a joke, but I assure you I'm talking soberly—solemnly. If this powerful powder can't tickle your nasal nerves sufficiently and get them in the habit, I'll have to place you in a draught—and thereby risk pneumonia. *For you must sneeze.*"

Hawes, amazed, scarcely believing his senses, saw the backs of the women tremble in their desperate endeavor to sneeze.

"Sneeze!" adjured the proprietor of Heartsease once more. "Concentrate your minds, yogi fashion, on sneezing. Force your olfactory nerves by sheer mental dominance to do your will. Members of the Sneeze Club, I command you to sneeze!"

At last somebody *did* obey Doctor Bokan—but not one of the blackrobed eight. Suddenly Willison Hawes, listening at the door, without warning to himself, burst into an old-fashioned, hearty, irrepressible, unmistakable—sneeze.

The eight women wheeled around. Doctor Bokan, his ruddy cheeks turning as pale as his addicts' own, half staggered from the rostrum. The bottle of sneeze-powder dropped from his limp hand to the floor.

"Somebody has sneezed—out in the hall!" he cried. "A spy!"

He picked up the sneeze-powder and rushed toward the door; and this particular session of the Sneeze Club broke up in confusion.

MEANWHILE Willison Hawes had run back to his room, hurriedly plugged his nostrils with cotton, jumped into bed, and was simulating the deep, regular breathing of a sound sleeper when Doctor Bokan rushed in after him and halted precipitately by his bed. The eight women peered in with drug-decorated faces from the hall. A full moon beamed tranquilly in through the windows; and Hawes was plainly visible on his pillow, breathing laboriously through his mouth.

"Hawes!" shouted Doctor Bokan.

Hawes answered with a snore.

"Hawes, I say!" yelled Doctor Bokan, bending over and shaking him.

The man from Sioux City rolled over and opened a pair of heavy-lidded eyes.

"Yes," he yawned, "I'm coming, I'm coming!"

"Listen, you fool—was it you that sneezed?"

"Sneezed?" repeated Hawes incredulously. "*You* ask *me* that?"

"Answer me! Did you sneeze?"

"I wish I could. I'd give anything in the world to be able to sneeze. . . ."

Doctor Bokan took from his pocket the bottle of sneeze-powder. "We'll see whether you're telling the truth." And he shook some of it directly over Hawes' face.

The man from Sioux City underwent

the test triumphantly. His plugged nostrils imparted immunity. No sneeze.

"Well," muttered Doctor Bokan, his face again taking on that curious pallor Hawes had noticed in the assembly-room, "*somebody* sneezed." He turned toward the women in the hall. "Did one of you do it as a joke?"

The members of the Sneeze Club all shook their heads solemnly. Doctor Bokan with an impatient exclamation hurried from Hawes' room and slammed the door. Hawes unplugged his nostrils and smiled.

THE next day Hawes, keeping his eyes open, discovered that the eight members of the Sneeze Club were quartered in one of the smaller buildings on the place. Supposedly this building was being used as a storehouse. Through the dust-dimmed windows, boxes and unused furniture could be discerned; but Hawes, quite by chance while strolling in the grounds, saw one of the nightmare faces of the sneezers—or rather, non-sneezers—peering out sullenly. This face was followed by several others, each seemingly more hideous than the preceding one. All looked from a certain small corner of one of the windows behind which boxes were piled.

That night at about one o'clock Hawes heard the rather heavy footfalls of the Sneeze Club as the women marched to the assembly-room. He sprang from bed, peered out furtively, then in his pajamas stalked slowly down the corridor, as on the preceding night, with all the galvanized rigid rhythm of a confirmed somnanbulist.

He had not gone a dozen steps when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He went on with somnolent unconcern.

"Here, you might as well come out of that faked trance," said a musical voice.

He turned quickly and looked into the eyes of the one member of the Sneeze Club who had an attractive face.

"Margo Dale!" he exclaimed.

"Johnny Cleave!"

"JOHNNY CLEAVE," repeated Margot Dale. "Are you working on the case of the twelve policemen?"

"Certainly. And you?"

"Of course." She glanced around. "Sh-h-h! You were the one who sneezed last night?"

"Yes."

"We mustn't be seen together here in the hall. I'm due at the meeting of the Sneeze Club. Meet me in two hours—at three o'clock—under the big elm near the sunken gardens."

He nodded and she hurried on up the hall and entered the assembly-room.

Margot Dale! Cleave was amazed—yet not more so perhaps than she was at seeing him here also. Both were detectives, singularly adroit and successful ones, who had worked together on many a case.

AT three o'clock—an hour and a half after the Sneeze Club had adjourned—Cleave was at the elm near the sunken gardens. He did not have to wait long. The night was black and Margot's frock was as dark as the darkness. Her approach was so noiseless he did not hear her. She even wore a black mask.

"The Women's Anti-Narcotic League put me to work on the case," she explained. "I suspected Doctor Bokan was the man who had planned the murder of the twelve policemen. I had been gathering evidence for the League for some months previous to the crime and had discovered that Bokan was the proprietor not only of Mahomet's Paradise but a score of other dens of like character. Thus, you see, he worked a double game. He made drug addicts of rich persons and then brought them here to Heartsease to cure them, impoverishing many of them by the time he was through with them. You knew these facts?"

"Yes," answered Cleave. "I had been trying to trail Bokan for some time before the murders. The agents and owners of the various houses he leased employed me to learn the identity of the mysterious man who paid such lavish rentals and who never demanded repairs. I traced him here in Heartsease. That much done, I put two and two together and made up my mind he was the man who had the raiding policemen shot. Every criminal has an off-streak in his mental make-up, and Bokan illogically thought the wholesale murders would intimidate the police and discourage further raids. He was curiously reckless, too, as was proved by his call on Chief Owens to offer his services to help find the culprits. Naturally he was eager for my arrest, as he has been trying to find a victim. To

tell you the truth, I don't think he is quite right in the head. And you, Margot, did you become an out-and-out dopefiend to gain admittance to this institution?"

Margot smiled. "I was given injections which simulated the appearance of the drug habit. I looked like a veritable wreck when I applied for treatment. I had plenty of money and he accepted me as a patient. Your own drug habit is of recent acquirement, not really a habit at all—yet?"

Cleave laughed grimly. "I've taken some morphine, of course, but have been stalling a good deal and resorting to make-up. The Sneeze Club might as well be called the Murder Club? Do you think those seven women killed the policemen?"

"I couldn't swear to it—though I'm almost positive. I've been trying to gain the confidence of one of them, the worst wreck of the lot. They're all terrific main-liners—confirmed addicts. Doctor Bokan is trying to cure them—refuses to give them any of their favorite drugs—and they're sullen. The one I mentioned confided to me they're crack shots, Bokan's firing squad she called them—and laughed mysteriously when I spoke of the murder of the policemen. But what mystifies me is the Sneeze Club! Why is he trying to make us sneeze and why can't we? I . . ."

Suddenly from out of the darkness a flashlight played upon them.

"Hands up!" snapped a thick voice, "or it's lead I'll fill you with. I've decided not to swallow your Sioux City fairy tale, Mr. Willison Hawes . . ."

"Is that you, Delaney?" queried Johnny Cleave. "Well, I'm Cleave and this lady is Miss Margot Dale."

LIEUTENANT BLISTER DELANEY, glad to have a hand in whatever sensational success there might be in prospect, hurried to the nearest telephone, called up Chief Terry Owens, and had him under the elm tree conferring with Cleave and Margot by four o'clock—with the sky still as black as ink and one window-light gleaming in Heartsease, Doctor Bokan's.

"Your plan is all right, Johnny," said Margot. "But what has sneezing to do with it."

"Yes," added Chief Owens, puzzled. "Why the Sneeze Club? I don't get it."

"Come along," said Cleave.

They entered Heartsease and went up to Doctor Bokan's door and knocked.

In lavender pajamas and heliotrope dressing-gown, he opened it.

"Doctor Bokan," said Cleave, "you're done. You've been trying to make your gunwomen sneeze—for *no opium-eater can sneeze*. That was the reason you became so agitated last night when you heard *me* sneeze—you discovered then and there that there was someone in your house who was not an opium-addict, hence in all probability a detective. You see, I can still sneeze, as I am in no sense an addict."

Chief Owens indulged in a surprised grunt. Doctor Bokan was stonily silent.

"I repeat, 'no opium-fiends can sneeze,'" continued Johnny Cleave. "It is utterly impossible. This is a curious yet incontrovertible fact. The system has to be thoroughly cleansed of the drug before the addict can sneeze. Sneezing is the sign of a cure. Opium paralyzes the nasal nerves and sometimes it takes months before the addict, in the process of cure, can sneeze. The gunwomen of yours who murdered the twelve policemen by your order are dopefiends of the worst description. You were afraid suspicion would eventually lead to drug-addicts as the culprits—to your seven gunwomen—*seven,* I say, for this lady, Miss Dale, like myself, is a detective. So you went about the business of curing them—you formed the Sneeze Club; you tried desperately to make them sneeze; but you didn't have time enough; their systems were too thoroughly impregnated with the drug. You told them why they *must* sneeze. If arrested for the crime they had to be able to stand the sneeze test in order to protect themselves—and you. . . ."

Doctor Bokan was fumbling with his ears.

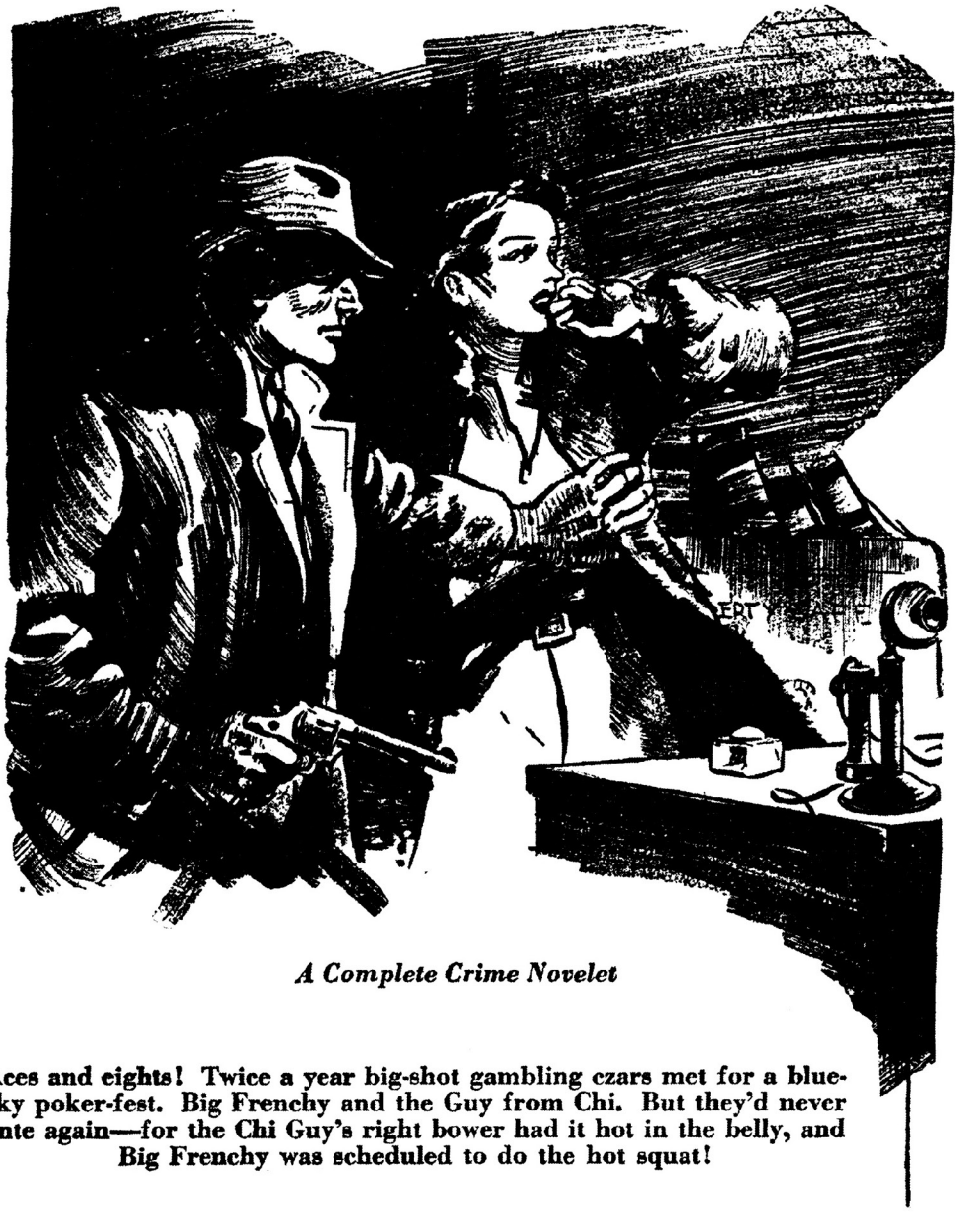
"I have a most painful earache," he said. "I . . ."

"Doctor Bokan," began Chief Owens.

With catlike quickness Doctor Bokan took a white substance from his ears, put it in his mouth and swallowed it.

"Poison," said Johnny Cleave.

Doctor Bokan died quickly, smilingly, in a graceful pose, in his lavender pajamas and heliotrope dressing-gown.



A Complete Crime Novelet

Aces and eights! Twice a year big-shot gambling czars met for a blue-sky poker-fest. Big Frenchy and the Guy from Chi. But they'd never ante again—for the Chi Guy's right bower had it hot in the belly, and Big Frenchy was scheduled to do the hot squat!

THE JUDAS JACKPOT

By GEORGE BRUCE

PARDEE was dying on his feet but he staggered along. His face was a clench-jawed mask, a thousand iron claws were twisting and ripping inside him, his legs were weak as water—but Pardee staggered on. *Click* said his right heel to the bright tile floor. *Shuff* his left foot whispered, dragging after. Right . . . left. Pick 'em up and lay 'em down. Got to get away!

Across Pardee's hunched shoulders a heavy yellow coat was hung, a coat far too large for his slight frame—the coat of a killer. Across the bridge of Pardee's crooked nose was the jagged, welling wound where the table-edge had caught

Rongetti could do nothing but stand there and watch. He saw that corded, clenching hand reach out, and he saw the fingers clamp . . . .

him when he fell. Tight around Pardee's belly a bloody towel was wrapped. Under his ribs were the two bullet marks that a Judas hand had branded.

Pardee watched his feet, head bent and body bowed in agony. He tried to concentrate on them to keep the dizziness out of his brain, but it was no dice. Sometimes the brightness would dazzle him, and then again everything would be dark. Off and on—gloom and glare—like a winking Loop electric sign. Now he could see other feet reeling by, could see colors and hear the sound of voices. And now the

world was a foggy blank, all mixed up and horrible. Like a nightmare.

His free hand, under the coat, clutched tighter at his belly.

There was a whirling and a buzzing and a great sickness within his brain. Through the fog it seemed that all the voices were in the shoes, and all the shoes were red as blood. All the shoes were shouting, running back from him. Thin, shrill voices, shouting from far away.

"He's drunk!

"Stop him—

"Blood. . . ."

Pardee staggered on. *Click . . . shuff.* Look at the red shoes run! They were all afraid of him—all the voices afraid of the gun in his hand. He'd make it now. They couldn't kill Pardee. He'd make it out there where the air was clean, out of this darkness into the sunshine. Then he'd be all right. . . . He spat the sickish, salty taste out of his dry mouth.

Make it. . . .

He lurched, tottered, ran into something soft. Something grabbed at him and his head jerked up. A terrible black haze of pain swept him, but through it Pardee saw a dim face above. He struck with his gun, and the top of the face fell off. A warm wetness ran along his arm. The gun slipped from limp fingers and broke with a crash against the glittering tile.

A gun crashing like so much tinkling glassware. . . .

Pardee tried to laugh but the sound was a hissing whisper. The pain slashed and burned and ripped inside until the gay tiles at his feet were a spinning blur. He was jerked forward—this much he knew—and something struck hard in his face. He fell forward, clawing, into the dizzy blackness. . . .

WITH his fall the afternoon calm of the Park Manor lobby went *phfft!* The desk-clerk banged his little bell like a third alarm. A blonde lady screamed and fainted—conveniently—into the arms of the plumbing-accessories salesman who had been stalking her since lunch time. Bellboys appeared miraculously out of nowhere; heads popped up from behind every potted palm. In fifty seconds there was a milling ring of humanity, elbowing, questioning, staring, hemming in the huddled figures on the glittering promenade.

The man who had struck the staggerer and who had toppled down with his fall, was bent over him now. He was a tall and lean and swarthy man with hair that was startling in its whiteness. A purple birthmark on his forehead made his face sinister. He snarled at the ring around him and shouted in a rasping voice that cut through all other sound:

"Get back. . . . Get them the hell away from here!"

The crowded pressed closer. All about was the incense of cheap perfume and raw whiskey.

There was a heave of bodies and three men burst through. The stocky man in the derby said huskily, "My God, Nick, why did yuh sock him?" and dropped to his knees on the floor.

The dapper little man with the nose glasses, and the gardenia in his afternoon-coat lapel, cried out in a sharp voice: "Arrest them, McCoy—arrest the two of them. Brawling in my lobby. I'll swear the complaint, McCoy. . . ."

Purple-Mark ignored them both. His nostrils flared and his lips were a thin line. He growled to the uniformed bell-captain: "Get your boys and clean these yaps out of here. Double time." And he shielded the prone man with his body while he hastily snatched the too-large overcoat to cover him.

He rapped, "Grab his head, McCoy—snap out of it—the office. . . ."

McCoy, house detective of the Park Manor, obeyed mechanically. The bellboys were moving the crowd back. The dapper little manager grabbed the arm of the white-haired man.

"Here—here—what's going on? What is the matter with this fellow?"

The white-haired man spun him away fiercely with a single sweep of his arm, sent him whirling into the crowd.

"He's drunk—just a bad bump. Get a doctor."

They lifted up the body under its overcoat shroud.

But the crowd had seen. They saw the bloodless face, the limp white hand trailing. They saw the red blotches where he had sprawled. And the whispers flew:

"Blood—

"Murder. . . ."

They carried him away. Through still aisles of staring faces two men shuffled where one had staggered before. They carried him back into the gloom, away from the bright sunshine that had beckoned him. Behind them on the floor they left the shattered bottle that Pardee's dying brain made a gun. They left the dark hat that a dying blow had toppled from the head of the white-haired man. And behind them on the bright tile they left a sinister mark—the darkening red coins that were the mark of Judas.

THE doctor's name was Samuel T. Van Sweringen, his neatly printed card affirmed. He was a member of the Board of Selectmen, Kiwanis, and the Better Business Association of Sulphur Rock, Kansas, and this was his first visit to New York. A wonderful town, gentlemen—yes, sir! His wife and daughter were waiting for him now at the Paramount mezzanine, but in view of the unusual situation. . . .

"Yeah, yeah, that's very interesting," snapped the man with the purple scar. "That's fine and dandy, mister, and we're glad you like our little city. Go slow and see our boulevards—go fast and see our jail. Welcome to Hoboken. Watch Podunk grow! Yeah, and all the rest of that booster junk. But now we got that off our chests how the hell about Perfumery Joe—that hook-nose baby over there with the bullets in him?"

The doctor started and his face flushed. He looked at the manager of the Park Manor.

The manager was giving his hands a dry wash and his piercing voice was shriller than ever. "This is Detective Sergeant Rongetti," he explained. McCoy had wised him. "I—uh—Mr. Rongetti is in charge here."

"Let's get down to cases," Rongetti barked unpleasantly. He had been working fast and hard, running all over the joint, bawling out orders, asking questions, raising hell in general. He was nervous and irritable, and he wanted to sock somebody. "Will this baby live?—can you fix it so he'll talk?—leave me have it without the flourishes."

The doctor shrugged angrily. He did not look at Rongetti. He waved a hand at the figure stretched out on the lounge in the corner of the manager's office.

"He should have been dead ten minutes ago. Both bullets are still inside him and he's had a double hemorrhage. He must have the stomach of a goat. If we had rushed him to a hospital for a transfusion he might have talked, but nothing could have saved him. I'll stake my professional reputation. . . ."

Rongetti turned away. He had a minute to breathe now, and he pushed back a window curtain to look out into the street. Everything jake—all set. Guards at all exits, the seventh floor blocked off, the ambulance on its way, the newspaper lads piped down. Everything setting pretty for Captain Comiskey.

Rongetti twiched long, slim fingers nervously and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. They'd be on deck any minute—Captain Comiskey and all his pilot fish—barging around and exercising their bridgework. Blowing off at the mouth with dizzy questions, trying to show Rongetti how a real policeman handled a murder.

"Mother of angels!" Rongetti growled under his breath. He stared at his own grim face in the mirror of the window.

Wouldn't it be sweet when he explained to Comiskey just how he happened to belt that walking corpse a haymaker on the button? Wouldn't that be a honey?

"I thought he was drunk, Captain. He smelled like a pansy, but he swung on me with a bottle when I stopped him. He knocked my hat off and I let him have it. I didn't figger. . . ."

Yeah!

Rongetti clenched the fist that had struck the blow, tensed suddenly. There was a click against the glass, and a coin spun crazily on the outside window ledge. On the sidewalk a man was signaling with his arms for attention. Rongetti frowned, and a wave of his hand said, "Scram!" The sidewalk gestures became more violent, and a little group of pedestrians stopped to watch. A thick crowd was already thronging at the main entrance.

Rongetti jerked up the window with a bang and leaned out. The sill was only about six feet above street level. Rongetti said:

"Nothin' doing. I'm deaf and dumb and

blind until Comiskey gets here. See Comiskey—see the Commissioner—see the Governor—but lay off of me, Kaplan."

THE man below gestured expansively. "Listen, Nick—wait a minute. I think I got something for you. But listen—what's up? Give me a break, Nick. . . ."

Rongetti's face darkened. "Some day I'm going to treat myself to the pleasure of skulling one of you birds, and you'll be my first choose, Kaplan. As far as this goes I no spick Eengleesh, and you know it. You'll get your dirt from Headquarters."

"Headquarters? Aw, Nick, be human. That means no soap until morning. Listen, Nick. . . ."

"William Randolph's got an A.M. rag," Rongetti growled. "It's all in the family." He started to draw back but the reporter grabbed the ledge and chinned himself:

"Wait, Nick. . . . I think I got something. I couldn't see his face in that mob but I think it's the same one. The bellboy described him. I think he's the one I saw two nights ago at the Stork Club, asking for Big Frenchy. Maybe. . . ."

The window was on its way down but Rongetti held it there. Big Frenchy . . . the Stork Club! Something almost clicked in his brain. Almost but not quite—he couldn't get the picture clear. But the window banged up again and he grabbed Kaplan by one wrist. He heaved as Kaplan leaped, and the reporter sprawled inside. He sat on the floor, staring up at Rongetti and kneading his wrist reproachfully.

"Why don't you warn a guy. Holy James Q. Smoke, Nick, you got a grip like Charles Atlas."

Rongetti said nothing; there were too many half-formed ideas whirling in his brain. Big Frenchy—the Stork Club—a little sweet-smelling bird with a hook nose. . . . He pushed Kaplan toward the lounge and they looked down on the motionless, hueless face with the long bruise across it. Above him the heavy scent of his cheap perfume still lingered. Through thin purple lips the faintest hiss of breath still came.

"That's him," Kaplan said in a whisper. "They. . . ."

"What's his name?"

The reporter shook his head. "The little guy from Chi, was all they called him."

Rongetti grabbed his arm and looked at him. He cursed under his breath. Kaplan started for the door but the detective stopped him.

"Ixnay. No victory march, kid. Every sheet in town is howling outside there and they tear the house down if you prance out. Take your bow out the window, but don't forget I'm good on the remember."

He lowered the window after him and drew the curtain. He looked at the coin he had picked up from the ledge—a 1910 dime. Inside he had that warm tingling that always came when something big was in the air. He had a hunch something good was on the fire—something worthy of Rongetti. He flipped the dime in the air and dropped it in his pocket.

"A rare relic," he said to the wide-eyed manager of the Park Manor. "What they call a musseeum piece, maybe. I thought it would be a penny."

His white teeth showed in a tight, even smile. Doctor Samuel T. Van Sweringen stared at him.

The door banged open.

"What the devil is it all about, Rongetti?" boomed the big voice of Captain Comiskey.

IF Broadway's favorite columnist had been there to chronicle the meeting he would certainly have noted the obvious fact that Captain John Comiskey and Detective Sergeant Rongetti "No Longer Cared." They never had. Between them was the mutual antagonism that starts race-riots and dog fights.

Captain Comiskey had been known to thank his God, in a firm voice faintly tinged with a Connemara brogue, that he was a policeman. "Not one of them damn Eyetalian tango dancers, half gigolo and half stool-pigeon. . . ."

And Rongetti had often remarked—at various times, and in various semi-public places—that a strong back and a weak mind seemed to be the ideal qualifications for promotion in the Department. He may have been referring to the fact that Patrolman John Comiskey once held the police record for tossing the fifty-six pound hammer.

Yet now, facing each other, there was

much they held in common. They were tall men. Comiskey was the older—five years or so—and he carried more meat on his bones, but his blue eyes held the same keenness that glowed in Rongetti's darker ones; he carried himself with the same dynamic vigor.

They looked at each other.

Rongetti said drily, "A little shooting, Captain." He jerked his head toward the lounge in the corner, nodded to the police surgeon and to Feeney and Lutz, Comiskey's blue-ribbon bloodhounds from the 14th Precinct.

Comiskey nodded. The four trooped over to take a slant at Hook-Nose. Rongetti lit a cigaret, and listened idly to the drone of talk that sprang up between the two doctors. He listened, but their words didn't register. His mind was busy elsewhere. In a few minutes they brought in the stretcher and carried him away. Lutz went along in case he snapped out of it.

"But he won't," said the police surgeon. "Not in those pants. We may as well fix up a prelim for the Medical Examiner. What's the dope?" He sat down at the desk and shuffled a sheaf of papers from his pocket.

Comiskey broke out of a huddle with the hotel manager and came over.

"Well, Rongetti. . . ."

Rongetti said, speaking to both of them, "He was registered here as Thomas Gunn —double 'n'—from Sedalia—"

"Thomas Gunn," said the police doctor, writing busily. "Ain't *that* somethin'?"

"—from Sedalia, Missouri. Registered in Suite 7B since Thursday. Some big, tall man, name unknown, was with him when he checked in. Had two suitcases but no identification in room or on his person. Has been throwing a poker party —no women—since midnight yesterday. McCoy, the house man, is in his place now, keeping an eye on the empty bottles. Nobody on the premises when we investigated. The bellboys, the clerk—everybody that seems to know anything about him—is either up with McCoy now or on the way. . . ."

He went on to detail the other arrangements he had instructed. His voice was dry and formal. He stopped suddenly and the house manager's shrill voice broke in:

"And I want to object furthermore, Captain, to the high-handed way in which this man has brutalized and man-handled the guests of the Park Manor. I demand, as a representative of substantial taxpayers. . . ."

"Pipe down," growled Rongetti.

"Age about forty," droned the police doctor. "Eyes blue. . . ."

"—a disgrace to the Force, Captain. I can show you the bruise. . . ."

"Let's get upstairs and get busy," Comiskey boomed. He looked around at all of them. "This man was shot no more than thirty minutes ago. There'll be no Rothstein stuff here. We got the jump on this now—let's keep it. Bring along that junk of his; we'll keep it all together."

He said to Rongetti gruffly, "Good work. You handled things just right. Maybe you're learning to be a detective instead of a prima donna from Headquarters."

Rongetti took it, kept his face stiff.

They were headed for the door when two things broke—*bang, bang,* just like that.

The bell of the phone on the manager's desk clanged and the police doctor grabbed it.

"Yes . . . yes, he's here, Lutz. . . . Okay, kid, I'll tell him."

He swung around in his chair and surveyed them triumphantly. "What did I tell you? He died before they got him out of the ambulance."

The second bang was McCoy, the house detective. He stuck a red face in the door, and his eyes were like big marbles.

He said, "For God's sake, Nick—that dame in 716. The one you told to—" He gasped and glared around wildly. "She's up there with nothin' on, throwin' a fit. She found another dead one in the ladies' toilet."

II

BUT he wasn't dead. He was tightly bound and gagged—there were cruel bruises on his bloody head—but the man they carried from the place marked *"Ladies"* had a lot of life left in him.

He was one of those birds too small for a horse and too big for a man. About six feet-four, Rongetti figured, and in the early forties. When the police doctor ripped off his shirt they saw the flat stomach of a trained athlete. Under one

shoulder blade was the blue pock of an ancient bullet. The doctor whistled at the criss-crossing weals that marked his abdomen.

"No appendectomy there," he said. "Looks like somebody tried to carve the Chinese alphabet on his wishbone once upon a time."

The injury was a simple concussion—no fracture apparently. He had been struck three times, and whoever handled the black-jack must have known his business plenty. The doctor patched his head and then went to work to revive him. After a while the man began to breathe more audibly and to twist his legs around. His big fingers clenched.

"Ah'm okay," he moaned. His eyes rolled in his head, white and sightless. "Ah'll take 'im, Doc. Don't—throw in—that towel. . . ."

There were only three in the room to hear—Comiskey, Rongetti, the doctor. They had propped him up on a bed next door to the murder-suite, and through the open door they could hear the sounds of the police probe carrying on. He started to roll, to thresh his arms, and the doctor had to hold him. Comiskey exclaimed under his breath, and his bright eyes locked with those of Rongetti.

"Get it?" he whispered. "Get it?"

Rongetti shook his head. Half-remembered things chased each other in his brain, but they didn't click. He studied the moaning man's heavy, craggy face, the close-cropped hair, the battered, swollen ears.

Doc—Big Frenchy—the Stork Club. . . .?

Comiskey said in a quick whisper, "If you read the Police Gazette instead of them scandal sheets you wouldn't miss the mugg of Alabama Kitts. And maybe you might pick up the name of little Doc Pardee." He whispered the words, but in his voice was triumph.

Rongetti did not make a sound. He just stood there stiffly while *click*—like a light snapping on!—ideas fell into their proper slots in his brain:

Alabama Kitts—the Dixie Dreadnaught. The Tuscaloosa Typhoon, the sports-writers used to call him. Terror of the white-hope days with K.O. wins over Jeff Clarke and Sam McVea. They said he would have been champion instead of the Pottawatomie Giant if things had been different that certain night in New Orleans. That night, victim of a vicious foul, he had killed his man in the ring, after the bell had clanged and with the referee trying to stop him. The ring lost a mighty fighting man when Alabama Kitts was flagged into the Big House.

And little Doc Pardee had been Alabama Kitts' manager. From one coast to the other his name was known. Doc Pardee—gambler, sportsman, right-hand man of the notorious Mike Colosso. Out in Chicago Doc Pardee was aces. He won a fortune at the Hawthorne track by betting the favorites to show. He had been a state senator. To him they traced the spectacular rise of Colosso, who had only to say the word to make the South Side jump. Doc Pardee was the brains behind Colosso's mob—the pay-off man, the fixer. Even the school kids knew his name and could tell you his latest light-of-love. Every hood in the country had laughed at Pardee's hate of cigaret smoke, at the little atomizer he always carried to spray the smoke scent from his nostrils.

Rongetti's fingers clenched.

Alabama—Doc Pardee—Big Frenchy. . . . Now it made a complete picture.

THE tall man on the bed had hushed his groans. His twisting hands relaxed and his eyes opened. He stared at them blankly, licked dry lips with his big tongue.

Comiskey bent over the bed and his voice was as smooth as silk.

"How's it going, big fella?"

"Ah—Ah'm all right."

"Your head pain?"

Alabama Kitts nodded. His blood-shot eyes ranged around the room, surveyed the three men one after another.

"You-all are the law, Ah reckon?"

Comiskey's tone changed abruptly. "Right, Kitts. We got everybody else's story but yours—now what do you have to say about it?"

No expression on the big man's face. "Got nothin' to say, gen'ril."

Comiskey rapped, "You started the brawl, Kitts. You and Pardee started it. I got two eyewitness statements. The man you slugged may die, and if he dies you burn for it. You got a record, Kitts

—you better talk. Pardee is giving his statement now and we got to check on it."

Kitts looked at him steadily. "You mean he's—Doc's goin' to—he's okay, Chief?"

"Sure, he's all right. A bullet in the shoulder won't stop Pardee. Now listen, Kitts, if your story checks with what Pardee says. . . ."

Alabama Kitts said slowly in a deadly, toneless voice, "He's dead. You lousy, lyin' screw, Doc's dead. They killed him! The straightest, gamest guy that ever walked—an' they killed him."

He pushed the doctor's arm away and sat up. Color rushed into his cheeks, and his bloodshot eyes were glittering and terrible. Words tumbled out of his mouth, rising in power and tone until he was almost screaming:

"They killed Doc Pardee. . . . You lousy dicks, why don't you say it? He didn't have a chance. He didn't do a thing or say a word—and they gunned him in the belly. But what do you care? What the hell is it to you except somethin' in the papers? Go on home an' play casino, you cheap stools, and guys that know how will settle this. Why should I spill my guts to some flat-faced Mick with Doc Pardee waitin' down in hell for us to send down the guy that killed him?"

The doctor tried to force him back but the big man was too strong. Comiskey had to grab his other arm, and Rongetti kept his legs from threshing. They held him so until the madness died out of his eyes, until he stopped his awful twitching. He lay back finally, panting, his rolling eyes staring at them like the eyes of a cornered beast.

Comiskey wiped the sweat from his forehead. He said, breathing hard, "You'll change your tune—tough guy—when I book you at the station. There's a couple of boys down there—that specialize in hard cases."

"They better be good," Alabama Kitts panted. His voice was low again, and the soft drawl was back in it. "Doc Pardee taken me off a road gang twenty odd yeahs ago. He bought me the first pair of shoes Ah ever owned. He got me from the big jail house, another time. Ever'thing Ah ever had, Ah owed to Doc Pardee. He was the only man alive Ah called friend. . . . So if yo' men down there can figger out somethin' to hurt me after what happened a while ago—" he jerked his head in grim gesture—"then they are awful damn' good, Mr. Officer."

FEENEY and Lutz came in with two other men; McCoy, the house detective, trailed behind. Comiskey stiffened and Rongetti snapped to attention.

The Commissioner of Police nodded to Comiskey and said, "Hello, Nick." Thomas M. Whitman, of the blue-blooded Park Avenue and Newport Whitmans, was already beginning to establish the reputation for organization and military efficiency that made him known later as the most effective head of the Police Department in Tammany's history. The famous Hot-Spot squad—covering the night spots from Red Hook to Harlem—was Whitman's pet idea. Nick Rongetti, acting Lieutenant under Major Whitman in France, was one of the survivors of the original five that had composed it in the beginning. It was said that Rongetti knew by name every bartender, and most of the waiters and doormen, from 40th Street to Columbus Circle.

Donaldson, who was bald as the cue ball, and who, at 57, was still known in the D. A.'s office as the "Boy Orator," cried in a deep voice, "Don't give us another Rothstein business, Comiskey. Smash this one right now—eat it while it's hot."

"It ain't no push-over," Comiskey rumbled, "but it's shapin' up. Lutz, Feeney, tell the Commissioner what you got."

Lutz said, "He was shot with a .38, probably while he was sitting down. They dug out both bullets. We're fine-combing the place for the gun, but we draw a blank so far."

Feeney went into his monologue with gestures. He was a careful man, and his words were clipped, precise. "We have complete pictures of the murder suite, and eight different sets of fingerprints. It would seem there were five of them—" he held up his hand, fingers spread wide—"in the poker game. All of them were drinking. Five glasses—" again the spread-hand gesture—"on the table. No money in sight but lots of poker chips. Three employees of the hotel entered the room during the past sixteen hours. They described this big guy here—" he jerked his thumb

—"the little bird that croaked and a big red-headed bird in a yellow coat that came in alone later. Nothing on the other pair. We'll take 'em down right away and give 'em a slant at the gallery."

The Commissioner nodded. Lutz buzzed something in Comiskey's ear and scrammed.

McCoy sidled closer to Rongetti and whispered in a hoarse voice that everyone could hear, "The dame in 716, Nick, she says. . . ."

The rest of them were all looking at him. Rongetti ran a thin brown hand through his hair and growled out of the corner of his mouth.

McCoy said reproachfully, "I can't say that to a guest, Nick. I work here."

Rongetti was trying to tie loose ends together in his mind. He had a complete picture, but it was too perfect—too simple. Things didn't happen like that with the wise boys of Broadway.

"Well," Comiskey boomed sarcastically. "Let's see how the big Broadway man figures it," his eyes seemed to say.

RONGETTI flashed a look at him. He said to the Commissioner, "Before Mike Colosso went West he ran a needle farm over in Jersey. Every Saturday night—regular as clockwork—Big Mike used to go into a certain gambling house and drop his load. This boss gambler had the Indian sign on Mike—craps, faro, stud, high-spade—anything. Everybody on the drag knew about it. When Mike got to be the Big Shot out in Chi, he got the Napoleon bug. It hurt him, they said, to think this gambler had the edge on him. So Mike looked this bird up and told him he'd like to do some real gambling. They'd each take out a hundred grand stack and go at it head and head until one or the other was busted."

His harsh voice was a rasp.

Rongetti wiped the sweat from between his eyes and moistened dry lips with the tip of his tongue. Comiskey coughed loudly. Feeney, keeping a watchful eye on Alabama Kitts, was whistling through his teeth. Of them all, McCoy alone seemed interested.

"Listen," Rongetti said, his dark face flushing, *"Perdonna*—do you think I'm tellin' you a bedtime story? These guys got jack, and I don't mean hay. They like to get their action. They gamble that way twice a year, home and home. When this gambler I'm talking about ain't got the ready cash he gets a syndicate to back. There's guys in this town would throw their back teeth in hock to put in with him against Mike Colosso."

Comiskey coughed again.

The Commissioner said, "Okay, Nick, we're listening."

Rongetti choked out two words in his mother tongue and his fingers came up clenched in a fierce gesture. "Blood of the Virgin—I'm telling you what I know. Mike Colosso is under Federal indictment in Illinois. Suppose he sends this Pardee, his right-hand man, up here to do his gambling. Mike Colosso is Italian—he is a proud guy. Suppose they gamble—they fight—they shoot—and Pardee walks out of the room and dies in the lobby. What the hell's wrong with that picture? Is there anything screwy in it?"

He glared at the calm face of Captain Comiskey. And Captain John Comiskey yawned.

"It sounds logical to me," the Commissioner answered. "Who's your gambler?"

Comiskey said swiftly "His name is Hugo Lafarge, a French-Canadian, known as Big Frenchy. He operates the Club Biarritz, the Coral Gardens and lesser places. Lutz probably has his gallery photos now—they're being rushed over for identification. I've already sent out a general pick-up order on him. All airports, stations and docks have his description. We're putting it on the air with the five o'clock special broadcast to nearby states. Unless he's a Houdini we'll have him hooked by midnight."

There was a silence. . . .

Donaldson and the Commissioner did an exit. Alabama Kitts was weak on his pins, but Feeney dragged him along. Lutz came in then with a batch of papers in his hands.

"They all identified him. They were playin' in a room with all shades down—a spot light over the table—but they couldn't miss his red hair and that beak of his even under the eye-shade. Both bellboys and the elevator-man spotted him."

He snapped his fingers.

Comiskey said, "Well, maybe the Com-

missioner will see he's got *some* brains in this precinct."

Rongetti jerked up the collar of his coat and slanted his black hat over his left eye. He looked at McCoy, as if he were trying to pound home a point to the house detective.

"Wise guys," he said. "Just a bunch of wise so-and-sos wantin' to look good and get their pictures in the papers. Why, even you know, McCoy, that Big Frenchy is no red hot. The only kind of Colt's he knows are on the racetracks. He wouldn't do a bump—or have nothin' to do with one."

McCoy said, staring at the door, "There's that dame in 716, again, still squawking."

"Guys go screwy with their load on," Comiskey observed dryly.

Rongetti rapped at him, "Big Frenchy don't drink when he's in a game. He's no sap, I tell you. He'd never mix cards and whiskey."

"Oh, yeah?" Comiskey brushed imaginary lint from his sleeve. "The boys delivered eight flukes of rye and two bottles of Scotch to Suite B during that party. Only one guy was drinkin' Scotch—a big, red-headed bird, who tipped the boy a fin for bringin' him three bottles of seltzer."

Rongetti looked at McCoy and said, "Nuts. I'm going out and scoff."

"Why don't you drop in at the Capitol?" Comiskey called after him. "They're showing a swell detective picture with Myrna Loy."

III

FROM somewhere in the rear of the Excelsior Sandwich Shoppe, a radio voice announced that this was Station WADC. When you heard the musical note it would be seven o'clock, Eastern Standard Time.

Rongetti was paying his check at the cashier's desk. He selected a likely looking toothpick and stood at the window facing Broadway. It was already dark, and the crowds were beginning to thicken. A brisk, cold wind was blowing and faces were buried in fur or up-turned collars. Rongetti watched them, half-seeing, thinking of other things. It was his favorite pastime.

The faces went by in an endless stream. Thin faces, fat faces, old faces and young. All races—all kinds. Dolls from the cabarets and dames from Gimbel's basement. Lads in evening dress and grifters in battered hand-me-downs. Girls with scarlet lips and roving eyes. Boys with scarlet lips and roving eyes. Big shots and bums—

Broadway. . . .

McCoy was finishing his coffee. He came up behind Rongetti now, and Rongetti said over his shoulder, "If you mention that dame in 716 again I'm going to coal-cock you."

McCoy held up a paper. "You see what they said in the *Bulletin?*"

Rongetti nodded. In his mind he could see the newsstand headlines "Aces and Eights for Gambling Czar," a green sheet shouted. "Chicago Racketeer in Hot-Spot Murder," a pale pink brother blazoned. "Killer Loose in Streets," announced another.

"Listen to this," McCoy insisted. He folded the paper so Rongetti could see and droned out words in a solemn voice. The article was captioned "Murderer Captured! Another Escapes!" it read:

The Police Department batted .500 today in its effort to control the epidemic of wanton murder, thuggery and racketeering that is making our streets about as safe as a shooting gallery for John Citizen. The six-o'clock score on the Park Manor murder shows the following results:

Dead 1
Captured 1
Escaped 1
Injured 1

The dead man—see page three for complete story and photos—is Frederick C. (Doc.) Pardee, known in Chicago as the Power behind the Throne of King Colosso. The captive is Hugo Lafarge, notorious Broadway gambler, gathered in by a spectacular raid on a 33rd Street love nest. The raid was made by Captain John Comiskey, and detectives attached to the 14th Precinct. (Photo on Page 7.) Acting on a mysterious telephone tip Captain Comiskey was able to bring in the suspect within three hours of the crime.

The escaped is Alabama Kitts, former heavyweight pugilist, who was being held as a material witness. The injured are the said Alabama Kitts, slugged in the murder brawl, and Detective First-Class Mortimer Feeney, attached to the 14th Precinct. The escape of Kitts was effected spectacularly in full view of assembled reporters, cameramen and other bystanders, almost within sight of the Tombs. Kitts skipped the gutter by the simple expedient of a one-two punch to solar-plexus and chin of said officer Feeney, and a dive into the crowd. His recapture is expected momentarily. . . .

"Now who would of thought," McCoy muttered, "that Feeney's first name was Mortimer."

"I wish he'd slugged Comiskey," Rongetti said bitterly.

Inside of him now was the same irritation, the same urge that had sent him chasing the wild goose before, running around like a headless chicken, asking dopey questions, angering people. There was something in the wind and Rongetti wanted to be dealt in on it.

His logical mind admitted that Comiskey had the Pardee case sewed up. Sewed up tight, all wrapped and ready. Big Frenchy was the key-man, and Comiskey had hooked him. And in all New York there was no better crew than Comiskey's when it came to sweating out answers to their various little questions.

And yet. . . .

Yet why should Big Frenchy start to traveling with a gun mob all of a sudden?

How come the Big Frog to mix his cards with whiskey?

And why in the name of ten thousand devils—if he did kill Mike Colosso's segundo—should he be sap enough to stick in town and let them grab him with his pants down in some babe's apartment almost around the corner?

THE first bitter flare of his Latin anger was past now, but Rongetti still simmered underneath. He felt that Comiskey had made a sap of him, shown him up, and the idea rankled. Rongetti was one of those men who have to have pride in themselves to keep going. He could not take a licking lying down. Sometimes, when the wine was red and Rongetti was among friends, he would speak out about himself.

"Anybody with a single-track brain in this business," he would say, "is like a handcuffed guy steppin' in with Louis. I keep an open mind. I do things first and then think about 'em."

Which was only a half truth. Nick Rongetti was as stubborn a man as any born of woman. In him was that bulldog trait which never gives up. Block him, put obstacles in his path, and he fought all the harder. Little things that hampered him only strengthened his blind determination to push on to an end. Under fire he created in himself the cold fury that is the hall-mark of a born man-hunter.

He did things subconsciously and then figured out a reason for them. This he admitted. Every black mark against his Department record traced back to this single fact. Yet when his tail was up and his nose was on the scent he couldn't help himself.

He said to McCoy abruptly, "Well, how about it? You want to take that little walk with me?"

McCoy bit off the end of a cigar and spat. "I ought to be gettin' over to Flatbush," he said dubiously. "The Mrs. is—uh. . . ."

"Aw, come on," Rongetti urged. He did not want to be alone with his thoughts tonight. He needed a stooge like McCoy to listen to his patter. "We'll kick around and see what they're using for excitement."

THE cold wind bit at them and they turned up coat collars. They moved through the crowd up to 50th, dropped over to the six-day bike races. Rongetti talked to five men in the enclosure and drew five blanks. The boys on the wheels were saving up for the nine o'clock sprints, traveling around at a snail's pace. They headed back to Broadway again and dropped in at The Tavern. Lots of talk there—all of it bunk.

But, somehow, as they went on, the conviction grew in Rongetti's mind.

Something was up. This deal of Comiskey's was screwy.

He moved indecisively. Then he said, "Come on," to McCoy and went back up the drag. At Forty-seventh is a small office building. Small-fry music publishers and fly-by-night promoters have headquarters there. They got off the jerky elevator at the third floor and went down the hall. There was a light in the office at the end, and letters against a frosted pane proclaimed that this was the firm of Yalger, Arrowsmith, Sloskin, Real Estate Developments.

The door was locked, but the click of a typewriter sounded inside. Rongetti rattled the knob and a woman's voice called sharply, "Well. . . ."

"Say 'Telegram, miss,'" Rongetti whispered, rattling the knob.

McCoy called, "Telegram, miss," in a startled semi-tenor.

There was a shadow against the lettered glass and the lock clicked. Rongetti pushed the door open and slid in quickly. The girl looked from him to McCoy with dark, angry eyes. She was a brunette, slim, smart, pretty.

Rongetti clipped, "I want to see Sol for a minute. Important."

There was fear beneath her anger, but she did not raise her voice. She held the door open and said, "There's no Sol here, Mister, you're in the wrong office. Beat it."

Rongetti smiled. "Calm yourself, sister, it's all right. Close the door and forget that yelling business if that's what's on your mind. I'm from headquarters. I want to see Solly Abrams. And I'm in a hurry."

"Mr. Abrams isn't here."

Rongetti looked around. There were three stiff chairs in the little room. In the center was a stenographer's desk with a telephone on it, and on the wall dangled a big calendar and several battered subdivision charts. There was a splinter of light at the bottom of the connecting door that led to an inner office.

The girl followed Rongetti's eyes. She said quickly:

"Mr. Abrams is busy. He's in conference. He can't see anybody."

"No?"

"No!"

"He'll see me, sister Just tell him I'm here and see if he won't."

She closed the door slowly and walked beyond them. Rongetti followed her, smiling and affable.

"Who shall I say is calling, puhleese?"

"Just tell him a tall, handsome gentleman. Solly will know me."

She backed up against the connecting door, opened it quickly and ducked inside. The white mechanical smile vanished from Rongetti's face and he leaped forward quickly. He twisted the knob and pushed. The girl gave a little scream as the door banged open. The two men at the desk by the window leaped up to face him.

"Hello, Solly," Rongetti cried jovially. "You ain't gone exclusive, have you?"

SOLLY ABRAMS had leaped aside so that his body was shielded behind the roll-top desk. He straightened at Rongetti's voice and his hand came out of the open drawer beside him—came out empty. He was a middle-aged man of medium stature with the fat beginning to bulge at his middle. He pushed his swivel-chair back into position and sat down.

"What's the idea of the vaudeville stuff?" he demanded. "Where do you get this Six Tumbling Robinsons' entrance stuff? This is a business office."

Rongetti said, "I'm on business—officially." He sat down on the window-sill and looked at the other man—a tall lad with a strained, pale face, smooth black hair and a nervous mouth. "Do I have to show my badge or something?"

McCoy came up to prop himself in the doorway. The girl stood by a bookcase, rubbing her hands. The tall lad in the spats said nervously that—he'd be going.

"I'll be only a second," Rongetti told him, "and it ain't private. Stick around." He looked up and smiled with those white teeth of his.

This nervous lad with his fancy coat and spats could be reasoned with, Rongetti figured, and there might be a long shot that he knew something.

When Rongetti got started he did not want to miss a bet.

He leaped forward and jabbed a finger at Sol Abrams. His tone was confidential:

"Listen, Sol, and get this straight: I come here tonight for only one reason, and that's to help you."

His hands spread dramatically.

Sol Abrams said dryly, "Yeah, you coppers are always nice that way. Always helpful."

"That's all right, Sol. I know. But tonight it's different. I'm not working with Comiskey on this—I'm on my own. And I got somethin' up my sleeve besides my elbow. I got some certain dope nobody knows, and if you'll give me a square shake. . . ."

He paused. His voice lowered.

"—we'll crack this case against Big Frenchy like you crack an eggshell."

Silence in the little room. The tall lad shifted nervously, licked dry lips.

The girl stared from one to the other. Sol Abrams sat in his chair, face like a wooden Indian, cracking his knuckles.

"Well—" Sol Abrams snapped.

"You're his partner, Sol. There isn't

anybody in the world as close to Big Frenchy as you are. You want to save him—I want to save him—so let's get together. Big Frenchy claims he never knew Pardee was in town—never even seen him. He took a drink in that apartment the night before the killing—about midnight—and then don't remember anything. He claimed the liquor was doped, but the stuff in the bottle found was okay, Coakley. He got a note from this doll to meet her there—a letter with a key in it—but he couldn't produce it. The note disappeared, Sol. The apartment was rented, furnished, three days ago from an agent. A man's voice handled the deal by telephone."

The girl moved restlessly.

Rongetti looked around at all of them, spread his brown hands with a Latin gesture.

"If I can get a bead on three things," he said, "I can go places. You know me, Sol. Name of God—" he made the sign of the cross—"I swear I'm shooting straight. I want to help you. I want to. . . ."

The girl went out and closed the door. McCoy sidled closer.

Solly Abrams said in his flat voice, "All right—spill it. Whistle the patter."

"First," Rongetti said, "who's out after Big Frenchy's scalp? Who's got an X marked down against him? Who's he been framing or double-crossing lately?"

Solly Abrams laughed mirthlessly. "Nobody!" he clipped. "And you know it. Frenchy is just a big dumb, good-looking clown who knows poker. The only frame he knows has got a picture in it."

"Okay. Then when did he start hitting heavy on the whiskey, and why?"

Solly Abrams said, "Frenchy hasn't taken more than six or eight an evening since he grew up. He can't hold it. Now what else, Mussolini?"

Rongetti thought: Yet the big guy downed two quarts of Scotch down there at the Park Manor. He said:

"The last is important. Who are the dames he's been playing lately?"

For the barest split of a second the wooden mask of Solly Abrams face cracked. His fat hand cracked down on the desk with a booming thump. He got up from his chair and glared at Rongetti.

"That's enough," he cried. "I've stood enough of your chatter, Rongetti, and I'm wise to you. You smart cops think we'll spill our hand now? You'll get your answers when Bill Hallihan gets up to plead this case for us. If you want to know anything take it up with my lawyer."

Bill Hallihan was the famous mouthpiece of Broadway's Big Shots—the most sensational criminal lawyer in New York's history. You could start to chisel information out of him when the Pope gave beefsteak dinners on Friday.

RONGETTI got up and shrugged the collar of his coat higher on his neck. He said quietly. "Okay, Solly, whatever you say is good with me. If you won't talk, you won't talk, and that's strictly jake as far as Rongetti is concerned. Forget about it."

His voice was soft, but inside an electric thrill was going on a jag. He could feel the tenseness of the room, in the people who stood there, an undercurrent of something big—something about to break. Some word of his had probed under the surface. The boiling point was near. The thing to do now was to hit hard—to keep stirring—force some overt move.

He nodded to McCoy and rapped, "Okay, Mac, we're sold down the river. Let's lam," but he made no move to go. His eyes veered from the stiff face of Sol Abrams to the dark, mobile features of the big lad who wore the spats.

"Goin' our way?" he asked. "We'll drop you off if you're headed downtown."

"Thanks. I live in the Bronx."

Rongetti laughed. "Now ain't that funny. We're going up that way first and then come down again."

Dark eyes shuttled between Rongetti and Sol Abrams. The big lad shifted nervously, cleared his throat. From his talk, from the look of him, he was either an actor or chorus boy, Rongetti thought. And when you stared at him close he wasn't as young as you thought he was.

He said suddenly, "I'm not going home. I'm going over to Jersey. I can catch the. . . ."

Rongetti looked at McCoy. "If that ain't what they call a coincidence! I just remembered, Mac, here, has to go over . . . ."

"What's the idea?" Solly Abrams growled. "What is this, Rongetti—a joke or a pinch? If you think you can get

away with stuff like that on me, I'll show you." He grabbed for his desk phone.

Rongetti bit out, "Keep your pants on, Abrams. We both saw you reach for that gun and if I tie you up in a little fat knot, you ain't got a ghost of a comeback. Resisting an officer, Solly."

McCoy echoed, "Sure we did. Sure we saw you."

Solly Abrams got up from his chair. Both hands were clenched on the desk. The muscles of his jaw were bulging ridges under the blue-black of his beard.

He was breathing heavily.

"Sit down," Rongetti told him "There's too much fat on your paunch for you to try slugging."

Clenched hands relaxed and Abrams sat. He said throatily, "All right, Nick, I'll give you the dope you want."

Rongetti shook his head. "You had your chance, Solly. Keep your dope—and you know what you can do with it. . . . Come, on, big boy, all aboard for the Jersey taxi."

"I—I'm staying here. I want—" he stared at Solly Abrams. Rongetti watched them both. Then he took the tall lad by one arm.

"Don't be like that," he said. "Come on—be regular."

It was McCoy's firm opinion—stated loudly and frequently later—that Rongetti hypnotized the big fellow by looking into his eyes and muttering Italian incantations under his breath.

Rongetti contended that he was merely scared. "He was scared of Solly and scared of me. He had to get moving or break down right there—and I pushed him a little harder."

Whatever the reason—he went. Rongetti walked him to the door. Twice he looked back and almost stopped, but Rongetti's hand was firm. Solly Abrams sat at his desk, staring straight before him, ignoring them.

At the outer door he did stop.

"My hat. . . ."

"That's all right," Rongetti soothed. "A night like this is good for your hair."

The tall lad stumbled. He must have hurt his ankle for a look of pain flashed in his face. But Rongetti wasn't going to stop now. Maybe this was another of those wild crazy things for which Rongetti was famous at Headquarters. Maybe this tall fellow was a blank—what he knew might have nothing to do with Big Frenchy. Maybe this would be another black mark on Rongetti's record. But what the hell? Rongetti was a man of hunches, and he played them to the limit. He had been wrong before—plenty wrong—the hand looked like deuces, but when the pot is tall, the thing to do with deuces is bet 'em big, bluff it heavy.

They walked down dim lit stairs—no waiting for the elevator—and zig-zagged across the street against heavy traffic. Rongetti kept a firm hand on the nervous lad's arm.

They pushed out of the Broadway crowd into a quieter cross-street. Three doors down was "The Tavern"—a quiet place, a warm place, a place for talk. Rongetti nodded to the doorman and went down the stairs.

The clock above the mirror-backed bar registered 8:20.

IV

RONGETTI rubbed his hands together and smiled his white and even smile. "Nice and warm, hey? A little drink won't go bad before that ride to Jersey. How's the brandy, George?"

"Same as ever, Mr. Rongetti," the waiter stated. "Best brandy in the city."

"Make mine rye," said McCoy. "Rye and ginger."

The tall lad said, "I'm not going to Jersey. I don't want a drink. Why don't you two lay off me?"

Rongetti stared at him: "What you drinking?"

"I'll take—bring me some rye. . . ."

The waiter came back to their booth with the drinks and Rongetti put a ten-spot on the tray. He tipped the waiter a quarter.

McCoy said, "This is good stuff, but when did you start decorating the mahogany?"

"I always pay for mine," Rongetti said. He always did. Cash on the line and you didn't have to hand out favors. He poured the pony of brandy in to the seltzer and stirred. He hoisted his glass.

"Here's luck!"

But he did not drink. He was watching the face of the man across the table

and his glass slowly lowered. The tall lad lifted his rye and held it close to his mouth. He winced, downed it at a gulp and dropped the glass on the table top. A splash of the liquid fell on Rongetti's hand. He kept watching the tall boy, but he was thinking of something that happened a few hours before in a bright hotel lobby. Liquor had splashed on him when a dying man swung a bottle. Rongetti remembered the smell of it. . . .

He half-rose and thrust up his arm just in time to escape the sudden blow. The tall boy hooked another but Rongetti grabbed his arm and his head, and jerked him forward across the table. He lashed a kick at McCoy—he was shouting in a hoarse frightened voice: "No, no, no. . . . Damn' you, don't look at me like that. . . . I won't talk. . . . I don't know anything. . . . I won't talk, damn' you."

He shouted it over and over, striking out and kicking.

Rongetti banged his face against the table-top and McCoy clamped him from behind and dragged him back. His nose was bleeding and McCoy held him fast, pulled down into his lap. The men at the bar thronged over and the waiter came on the run with a sawed-off pool cue in his fist.

"What the devil, Nick—?"

Rongetti stood there staring queerly, glancing from that bloody face to the back of his liquor-wet hand. He said in a queer voice:

"George. . . ."

The waiter pushed up, swinging his bludgeon.

"George, Big Frenchy came here a lot. . . ."

"Sure. Sure, Mr. Rongetti. He's been coming here for years."

"What did he drink, George?"

"Him? Why I never give *him* anything but rye and water."

Rongetti stared at the bloody face. "I knew it," he said slowly as if he spoke to himself. "I knew it all the time, but I couldn't remember. That guy that killed Pardee drank Scotch—and Big Frenchy was a rye-hound."

"I won't talk," screamed the bloody mouth. "Don't look at me. I won't talk, I tell you. I don't know anything."

Rongetti said, "Get me a taxi, George." He slid the cuffs out of his hip pocket. "I got a little present here for Captain Comiskey."

They dragged him out.

THE cold air felt like wine in Rongetti's mouth. Smooth, soothing, exhilarating. He wanted to talk loud—to see Comiskey's face—to wave his arms. So Rongetti was a crazy sap, huh? Rongetti was always trying so hard to see gnats he stumbled over elephants, eh? Well, get a load of this bird, Captain Comiskey.

He didn't know what this baby had on his mind, or he didn't care now. That would come later. He didn't know what happened down in 7 B today, but he knew damn' well that guys who drink rye all their lives ain't going to switch to Scotch—not guys like Big Frenchy!

They stood there inside the little barred gate, waiting. McCoy was mumbling something, but Rongetti didn't hear. The tall lad was whimpering, bleating over and over again his song-and-dance of "I don't know. . . . I won't talk. . . . Don't look at me!"

They could hear the doorman's whistle, up on the corner, trying to signal a cab out of the theater jam. Traffic was all one way at this time of night. No turns in the theater section. They'd have to wait.

Then a squeal of brakes outside. The waiter opened the door and they walked up the steps. A voice asked, "Rongetti in there?"

A green cab was at the curb. A man peered down the dim steps. Rongetti jerked the tall lad around and gave him a shove ahead.

"Rongetti in person," he called out. He remembered later he was on the fourth step, one more to go. The man with the bloody face was climbing ahead, cuffed to Rongetti's left wrist. McCoy was a step behind. There was another man standing near the cab, and the cab-door was wide open.

This much he saw. Then they started shooting.

No words—just bullets cracking sharp and whip-like in the night. The man at the head of the steps opened the ball and the other one joined in. *Spat-spat-spat*—lash of flame—the tall lad screaming—and then they were all down in a heap at the bottom of the steps with Rongetti clawing

at a shoulder holster and shouting curses in Italian.

A motor roared.

His police positive jerked free then and Rongetti was up. He leaped at the stairs and was jerked back. The hand-cuff! He shouted at the tall guy to snap out of it, yelled at McCoy. McCoy snatched the .38 and leaped ahead. The gun barked, but Rongetti saw he was shooting in the air. Whistles shrilled and running feet smacked concrete.

Voices shouted.

AN overhead light flashed on and men poured out of the grilled gate of The Tavern. Rongetti fumbled in his pocket for the key to his cuffs and snarled at the tall lad to get the hell up. The war was over.

But suddenly he stopped snarling and forgot the keys. He dropped to his knees beside the slumped figure. From somewhere on the man's head blood was drooling, painting his ghastly face a ghastlier crimson. He lay there as if he were stunned, eyes open, breathing jerkily through a mouth that was wide open.

Rongetti shouted, "A doctor—get a doctor."

He said, "Where is it, kid?" and his fingers fumbled at the tall lad's head. They probed through the hair—and for the first time in his life, Rongetti was close to fainting. For the whole scalp came away in his hand and dangled from his fingers.

It was a wig, blood soaked and loosened. The head it had covered was freshly shaven.

The tall lad said in a calm, steady voice, eyes staring as if he spoke to somebody beyond Rongetti, "The red dye would not come out. It was good dye. . . . I looked just like him. It was easy for a man who played Hamlet. I even laughed like him."

He laughed—Big Frenchy's laugh—and Rongetti's mouth opened as if he would scream. But the laugh stopped abruptly in a rattling choke.

Rongetti shouted—"For the love of God, a doctor! He's got to talk. . . ."

He leaped erect and the huddled body jerked on his arm. He fumbled for the key, but his fingers were useless. There was no feeling in them.

McCoy panted through the crowd with a patrolman at his heels.

"They got away—!"

McCoy had to get the key and free Rongetti's wrist from the handcuff. . . .

In the Manual of Police Procedure, hand-book of every rookie on the Force, it states clearly that:

"Article B (3): A police officer must at all times conduct himself in such a manner that he presents an appearance of restraint and poise to bystanders and others. Under all circumstances, an officer must be calm in voice and manner, an example. . . ."

Nick Rongetti had thumbed that page time and again, but he was no example of restraint and poise that night, down there at the bottom of the steps that led to The Tavern.

He had lost his hat, and his bright, prematurely white hair was a wild tangle. He hopped around as if they'd slipped him the hot-foot. He waved his arms and spouted words in two languages. He kept bellowing for a doctor, forgetting that the Polyclinic Hospital was just around the corner. And when a hatless, white-coated interne did break through to him, he called the doctor "George" and ordered him to help get those yaps away from here.

He pushed people.

He was a wild man that night, all right. He lived up to Comiskey's taunt of "Prima Donna."

The doctor bent over the huddled man and called for more light. The patrolman clicked his flash on. Rongetti kept moving around, peering over the doctor's shoulder. He kept saying, "They only winged him. Just a nick, Doctor—he's all right. He'll be okay—he's got to talk."

The Polyclinic interne looked up at him. He took the flash in one hand and with the other he lifted the body so that Rongetti could see the back. His finger pointed: There—there. . . .

McCoy said over Rongetti's shoulder, "They got him when he tumbled. If he had not stopped 'em it would have been oops for you, Nick." He handed over the black hat that had toppled off for the second time that day. Through its crown was the gash where a bullet had traveled.

Rongetti grabbed his arm. He said one word:

"Abrams."

V

A YELLOW bulb lit the long halls dimly. The exit light at the end was an evil crimson eye. The words "Yaeger, Arrowsmith, Sloskin" were black marks against a dark glass. But as they came along—walking softly without effort, as trained men do—there was a wink of light across the shadowed pane. Rongetti held out his hand and they stopped. They watched, but there was no flash again. No sound.

They stood for a moment, waiting, two dark blobs against the semi-darkness.

There was no plan arranged between them, and none was needed. Both understood that Rongetti would lead the way; McCoy would follow. Selah—Amen—So be it! And protect yourself in the clinches.

It was a different Nick Rongetti now, walking toward the gloomy glass of that office. The ranting, swearing Italian of The Tavern bore little likeness to the dark, grim man in that dingy hall. His lean jaw was set, his eyes had the fixed, narrow stare of the hunting beast.

He knew what he was up against—knew it too well. He was up to his old tricks again, making one of his grandstand plays. Yet what else could he do? He pictured himself trying to sell his wild tale to Comiskey—to any of them. He could see the look in their faces. Could hear them say, "Another Rongetti nightmare. Don't Peter Rabbit come in on it?"

So what the hell! He was Rongetti and his hunch was hot. He'd ride it high and wide and sleep in the Ritz or sleep in the gutter.

He touched McCoy's tense arm and they went forward, cat-footing, taking it slow. Outside the door they crouched and listened. No sound. McCoy looked at him and Rongetti nodded. He took off his soft black hat, folded it into a tight pad and slid it under his coat to cover the edge of his shoulder. He shifted his gun to his top coat pocket. Then he crouched until his eyes were on a level with the bottom of the outer lock, and braced his hands against his knees. McCoy shoved his arm straight out, palm flat against the outer edge of the door.

Rongetti tensed and his body swayed. Forward—one. Back—two. Forward. . . .

He uncoiled with a terrific lunge, hitting the door just below the lock and driving upward as his shoulder struck. McCoy's stiff-arm, with all McCoy's weight behind it, rammed at the same time.

THE glass shivered, cracked and Rongetti sprawled inside on the dark floor with McCoy tumbling over. They scrambled up. Rongetti's gun was in his fist when he hit the inner door where the faint crack of light gleamed. He clicked his gun and came in crouching.

This time she screamed. She cowered against the window, alone there, and her voice was shrill anguish, ripped out of her. Rongetti cried, "It's all right, sister," but he had to put his hand over her mouth and hold it there. She was pretty and her body was soft against him. He held her a moment before he sat her down in Abram's chair.

She said, "I thought it was—" and began to sob. Her head dropped and she covered her face with her hands. They watched her, helpless. When her shoulders stopped shaking, Rongetti touched her.

"It's okay, kid. You're all right. Who did you think—?"

"I don't know," she said. "He's been calling here, been trying the door. I heard him in the hall."

Rongetti patted her shoulder again. "Where's Sol?"

"Out—I don't know. He went out. He told me to wait and take a long-distance call when it came. He said it was important and I had to stay. . . . I'm afraid, mister—and I don't want to stay here."

Rongetti told her, "Don't worry—from now on you got company. . . . Who's going to call and when?"

"A lady. Before ten o'clock."

"No name?"

She shook her head. "He said just to tell her to sit tight and wait. He'd call her later."

Rongetti said to McCoy. "Let's fix that door up." To the girl, "We're going to turn on those lights outside and you're going out to your desk and type something—quick brown foxes and lazy logs—anything. We're going to turn this light off in here and wait. If anyone comes in, be a clam. We'll see you don't get hurt, sister."

The door sagged on its hinges and there was no way of fixing it. They propped it wide open with a wad of paper and let it go at that. Solly Abrams' dark stenographer sat at her machine and pecked away. In ten minutes her nervousness was gone. When Rongetti looked at her she smiled. Rongetti wished he could get rid of his own buck fever that easy.

He tried to take it soft in the inner room. No dice. His cigarettes tasted harsh to his tongue. He didn't want to jabber with McCoy. So he paced back and forth, like a cat, padding from room to room.

Then the phone rang and they all jumped. The girl jerked away from her clicking keyboard. Rongetti spun and his hands clenched on her shoulder.

"Answer it. Say anything but keep 'em talking. If you don't know what to say muffle it and ask me."

The girl said, "It's him—that man—that nigger voice again." Her hands touching the 'phone trembled. Rongetti bent closer. White hair touched black hair.

It was a woman's voice, hard and husky. She said, "Solly—hello, Solly?"

The girl said, "Mr. Abrams isn't here now, Mrs. Abrams."

For an answer the woman cursed. Her voice went up a pitch and crackled in Rongetti's ear.

"The dirty dog—" she cried. "The dirty, lousy dog—where is he? I want to see him, you hear? Tell him I want to see him. Tell him I'm back. I changed at Baltimore and I'm back to stay. You get him and tell him that, you hear me?"

The girl said, "Yes, Mrs. Abrams."

"I'm back in town. He knows where I'll be. I'm grabbing a cab and going there now, you tell him. And you tell him, too, he better see me before midnight. Before midnight, understand, or I'll see somebody."

The phone clicked.

The girl said mechanically, "Hello . . . Yes, Mrs. Abrams. Hello . . . hello . . ."

FOUR HUNDRED West Seventy-sixth was a five floor, high-front brick—a modest house on a pleasant, quiet street of modest houses. There was no light on the third floor so Rongetti figured he'd beat her there.

This had to be the house. The girl had checked—yeah, Amos and double-checked! —her list of numbers Solly called, and this was the ticket.

Rongetti lit a cigarette and climbed the steps. He felt uncomfortable without the feel of the automatic, but the McCoy stood more chance of needing it back there at the office than Rongetti did. Otherwise okay and roll 'em. He was hot tonight—dice hot. The sevens were pouring out of him. And this spot didn't look to him like snake-eyes.

Not tonight, Genevieve!

Inside the entrance lobby little black buttons with neatly printed names on top of each: Superintendant . . . Swanson . . . Dallaire . . . Petofsy . . . Yaeger . . . But no Abrams.

Rongetti smiled, a dark, tight smile. Little Solly—always up to his cute tricks! He pressed the "Yeager" button and waited. No click—no answer. Which was what he expected. He jabbed the Petofsky bell and twisted the handle of the inner door. When the answering click of the lock came he slid inside and closed the door quietly. He darted back beyond the stairs and waited.

A voice called from above: "Vell . . . Who is it, please . . ." Then a door slammed.

Rongetti waited for what he thought was three minutes. Then he went softly up the narrow, carpeted stairs. Each flight was in the shape of an L. Rongetti climbed three and half of them and sat down. He was spang between the third and fourth floors and could see both landings. No matter which way anyone came he could bluff at being a visitor.

He felt like another smoke, but didn't take it.

Maybe he waited there twenty minutes. Maybe longer. But there was no traffic up, no traffic down, until she came. It was so quiet he could hear her key in the lock, and the door slam behind her. He waited until she had started up and then he walked up to the fourth landing. When he figured she was at the second he started down slowly.

She wasn't as big as her voice suggested. Her coat was mink and she had a red hat. When Rongetti reached the bend of the L she was just starting up the hall and she

had her key in her hand. She glanced at Rongetti, slid the key in the lock—and Rongetti took those last three steps plenty pronto.

He said, "Mrs. Abrams. . . ."

She turned quickly.

"I'm from Headquarters," Rongetti clipped. "I want you for complicity in that Park Manor murder."

He jumped fast then, but not fast enough. She fainted in a heap before he could catch her.

The key was still in the lock. Rongetti lifted her up and swung inside. He saw a couch with the aid of the light from the window and put her down on it. He locked the door on the inside and pulled down the shades before he turned on the light. There was no glass in the bathroom, so he soaked a towel in cold water. He went over to the couch and looked at her. He saw three things.

She was young—not more than twenty. She was pretty. And she was going to have a baby.

She was wet and the couch was wet, and Rongetti was plenty scared before she managed to snap out of it. Rongetti thinking of her voice over the phone, was expecting something tough. He didn't get it.

When she opened her eyes she didn't gasp or goggle around or any of that stuff. She just looked at him with those kid eyes that gave her face the softness her thin red lips denied. He didn't recognize her voice, but he knew this was the same woman who had spat a curse in his ear not so long before.

She said slowly, "I came back to tell. He thought I'd go away without knowing, but I heard it on the train. The radio shouting Hugo's name, describing him, calling him a murderer. I changed at Baltimore because I knew it was a lie. When I came here I saw what they said in the paper. He told the truth about that note and that key. I sent it to him."

Rongetti clamped his jaws together. He knew when to keep his mouth closed.

"I love Big Frenchy," she said, and her eyes fell. Her coat had fallen open and she pulled it tight around her.

She was the wife of Big Frenchy's partner and she loved Big Frenchy. Solly Abrams was a little bald and a little fat, and Big Frenchy was tall and smooth and knew how to make the ladies laugh.

Do you need a diagram, Rongetti?

Solly married her when she was seventeen, out of a pony chorus. Then he forgot she was just a kid and got too sure of her too soon. He started staying away on little "business" trips, and Big Frenchy stepped in, all tall and handsome. The Frog was known on the Street as a man who wouldn't touch crooked cards. But with the dames—no conscience!

"I told Solly six months ago," she said. "Before—before anything. I told him I wanted a divorce, that I loved Hugo. He just laughed and said all the dames thought that, one time or another. He sent me away to think it over. Then he found out that Hugo had been coming up to Montreal to see me. . . ."

Solly told her she could have her divorce. He gave her tickets to go home and money to take her to Reno. She wrote the note and sent the key Solly gave her. Sol Abrams had never spoken to his partners since that day, six months before. To Broadway they were the same pals they always had been. But now was the time to have it out.

"Solly wasn't sore," she said. "He was just hurt. He just wanted to have a showdown there where nobody would bother them. He wanted to protect me—to make sure Frenchy wasn't fooling. . . . But I love him, Mister, and Frenchy loves me. We're going to be married."

Rongetti told her to lock the door after him and not to open it to anybody. Don't answer the telephone, and if anything happened just to yell out the window and a man would be there to take care of her.

He told her, "You done the right thing, Mrs. Abrams—talking like this. Try to go to sleep now and don't worry."

Before he left he called a certain number. He wanted no more murder tonight. And he wanted to be sure that Mrs. Sol Abrams stayed in a spot where he could put his finger on her.

VI

THE cab was making forty-five through fairly heavy traffic, but that wasn't fast enough for Rongetti. He hunched forward on the seat and growled unheard instructions to the driver up ahead. He

swayed as the car swayed, his pulse bumped with the tick of the meter. He wanted to get out on the running-board with the whistle in his mouth and feel the wind whipping him—to hell with traffic lights!

But that would be a sap trick. And Rongetti was no sap.

In Rongetti's mind the whole plot was clear, obvious. But even now he had not one shred of evidence to prove what he knew was gospel. The lad who had dyed his hair to impersonate Big Frenchy was dead. The two murder gunmen were probably a hundred miles away and still going. The woman's story might help, but really it proved nothing.

No—there was only one real bet. One man on whom the whole deal centered. Tricky Sol Abrams, that cold-blooded little devil!

Rongetti thought of Solly's blue-black face and his hard bleak eyes. He thought of the woman up there on the couch—of McCoy keeping the death-watch inside that shattered office. And suddenly he thought. . . .

We busted that door plenty. . . .

The kid screamed. . . .

Where was the watchman and why didn't he answer?

Solly Abrams' dark little secretary had said, "I'm afraid—noises in the hall." And she said: "It's him—that nigger—calling again. . . ."

Rongetti lunged forward and yelled "Step on it! Bear down and forget the stop light. . . ."

But the driver swung in at the curb and squealed his brakes. Rongetti banged his nose hard against the glass, yelled protestingly.

The driver said, "Hell, Mac, we're here. You said 47th."

Rongetti tossed a bill through the window. A buck for a forty-cent ride, and Rongetti was not a liberal man with his dinero.

But tonight. . . .

He spun, the revolving door and ran through the dim, deserted lobby. He took the stairs three at a time, swinging his arms, panting. He forgot he had no gun. His long brown fingers were like talons clenching.

There was no light now on the third floor, only the red exit-bulb like an evil eye staring. The open door at the end was a blot of black. For a second he did not hear the dull voice moaning nor see the crawling man.

It was McCoy. He dragged himself along with one leg trailing limp behind, with his head hanging. He was crawling blind—a hunched and awful shape in the murky crimson glow. And he babbled words in a groaning singsong.

Rongetti propped him up against the wall. His eyes were open, but glazed in a wall-eyed stare. Like the stare of a drunk or some palooka punch-bag. His shirt was ripped down the front, his black tie dangled under one ear, but there was no blood on him—no apparent wound. The gun was gone.

He gargled: "Downstairs . . . quick . . . he murder him. . . ."

Rongetti didn't hesitate. He left him there, swaying against the wall, and ran on. He hit the black office of "Yaeger, Arrowsmith, Sloskin" and busted right on through. He shouted, "All right, boys—if they start anything, let them have it!" He slammed into the inner room boldly, with one empty hand thrust stiffly in his pocket and one long finger pointing.

The overhead lights were on full-strength and the room was glaring. In his own swivel chair sprawled Solly Abrams, feet outstretched, arms dangling, blue-stubbled chin pointing straight up to the sky.

Something hard jabbed Rongetti right where his suspenders crossed. "He ain't dead," said the voice of Alabama Kitts, "but you will be dead, copper, if yo' hands don't act pretty."

RONGETTI slowly lifted his fingers from his pocket and held both hands out in front of him, waist high, palms down. He said softly, "Don't be a damn fool. Why pick a squat in the hot chair?"

The pressure on his back increased. A hand slapped at his pockets, under his arms.

"Walk over," Alabama Kitts ordered. "Stand by the window. . . . Now turn around."

He had Rongetti's police gun in his hand. Somewhere he had found an overcoat that pinched tight across his huge

shoulders and was short four inches at the sleeves. He had no hat. A white bandage criss-crossed over his hair.

He said in a harsh voice, "This bird is my meat. Ah want 'im. When Ah'm through, copper, you-all can have him. Play nice, an' you'll be all right. Get tough an' you get what Ah gave yo' sidekick an' the janitor."

RONGETTI stood there, hands still at his sides, fingers outstretched. He kept his trap closed.

And Alabama Kitts said, "He knows who killed Pardee an' he's goin' to tell me. Big Red was a sap—a come on fo' the other two. One slugged me from behind an' the other pumped little ol' Doc with a hush-gun. An' all fo' nothin', copper. Ah saw it—layin' there an' couldn't move. Ah saw it. An' when they tied me they talked—'Solly this an' Solly that.' He knows 'em and he's goin' to tell me."

Solly Abrams' legs moved and they could hear the faint hiss of his breath now in the silence. One of his arms half-lifted and he gasped. His eyes shuttered open, bloodshot and terrible in his mottled, bloated blue-black face. His neck was still red with the welts of clamping fingers.

Alabama Kitts hunched over him, one big hand held like a menacing claw. His battered face was a death-mask, grim and relentless.

"Squeal, you rat. . . . You know what I want—squeal it."

In Solly Abrams' throat a ghastly sound. His lips moved and his head dropped back. And his staring eyes saw Rongetti.

"Who were they, you rat? Or I swear to . . . ."

Abrams' lips writhed.

Rongetti stood there and watched. Like a man cut out of black stone he stood—only his eyes alive. He saw that corded, clenching hand reach out, and he saw the fingers clamp. He saw Sol Abrams' arm lift up and then droop limply. And he watched that blue-black face drain of its blood, then slowly turn to purple. His eyes turned back, bulged, until they were sightless, yellowish lumps staring out of bleeding sockets.

But what happened after that Nick Rongetti does not remember clearly. He knew that he cried out in a cracked, rasping voice, but all the rest was mechanical—like the things men do in nightmares. They were without body. There was no thought behind them.

He struck out, and his fist crashed in the big ex-fighter's face. He struck again and dodged as the gun in the left hand swept out at him. Somehow he managed to grapple that gun with his fingers and to hold on to it, and that kept him busy. Fists smashed in his face and beat at his gasping belly but they were blows without pain. Just dull shocks like waves beating against him. His own fists were flailing and he was driving short, quick blows with every sinew of his shoulders behind them. He put all he had in every one. But that big ugly devil just shed them like rain.

Nick Rongetti weighed one eighty-one. He looked thin, but there was solid meat on his big bones—lean meat and muscle. He knew how to punch and how to bring his man down. But Alabama Kitts took all he had, and it wasn't enough to stop him.

Through it all Rongetti remembered just two things: Once he spat blood in the big man's face. And he knew his right hand was broken.

They went around and around. Somehow they came back and tumbled down on Solly Abrams in his swivel chair. And that time big arms almost crushed the life out of Nick Rongetti. But he kicked his way clear and then they were up again. The gun had disappeared from the big man's hand, and they smashed and tangled across the room. There were books in glass cases along the wall and they crashed into them. Kitts was shouting in a bull bellow, battering him back and back with pile-driver blows. His knees were sagging. . . .

And then the room was filled with blue-coats and flailing nightsticks. And Rongetti was sitting in a corner staring at his bloody hand while a voice kept asking:

"You hurt? You all right, Rongetti?"

"I'm all right," he said. But he didn't know where he was until he got down on the street and saw McCoy sitting against a fire-plug with his head between his knees and very sick at the stomach.

THEY were in the lobby of the precinct station house. McCoy was trying to fit a size 17 shirt—borrowed—onto his eighteen-plus neck. "The boys in the force

ain't what they used to be in my day," he panted.

Rongetti stood at the mirror fingering his swollen lip with his good hand. His right was an awkward thing of splints and bandages, and his head ached with a steady throb. It was like sixteen Rockettes were doing a tap dance routine on a tin stage right behind his eyeballs.

Feeney said, "You're lucky, Rongetti. Look what that big ox done to me with one punch." He made a gesture as if he were swinging one. "My nose is busted."

Rongetti looked at Feeney's bandaged face as the mirror reflected it. "Yeah," he said. "Lucky Rongetti. I'll probably get assigned to Canarsie for busting the D. A.'s case wide open."

"Aw, he'll squawk, Nick," McCoy panted. "They'll convince him."

Rongetti shook his head. "Two will get you five on that. You don't know the whalebone in that guy Abrams."

It was two a. m. by the big clock when they went into Comiskey's office.

McCoy said, "I ain't been out this late without her along since my brother Dennis died in Boston."

Rongetti told him that was a good place to die, and sat down on the long wooden bench.

The door banged and Comiskey bustled in with a sheaf of papers in his hand, and drops of sweat on his red forehead. He looked at Rongetti from under shaggy gray brows and sat down at his desk.

He said into the phone. "Dry Dock 3-7044. . . ."

He fumbled with the papers. And without looking at anyone he muttered, "You dumb, lucky Wop, you!"

". . . yes, Commissioner," he said into the mouthpiece, then, "I wanted to ask you about releasing to the papers. Yes, he confessed—I am sending you a copy as soon as we get them . . . No, not much we didn't know. He maintains the three of them had absolute orders to carry no gun. He merely wanted to get Big Frenchy in bad with the Chicago crowd and make a lammister out of him. Neither Pardee nor the other one had ever seen the Big Frog, and Abrams cooked up his idea as soon as he heard they were coming. He wired them to come a day ahead, signing Big Frenchy's name. The big lad who was shot at the speakeasy was a card-sharper. He was supposed to get himself caught in some crookedness and ruin Big Frenchy with Mike Colosso. That's Abrams' story anyway. . . ."

He listened for a while. Then he said in a hurt voice, "No, sir. Why of course not, Commissioner. The confession was voluntary. Not a police officer laid a hand on him. . . . Yes, sir, we've already attended to that. We wired ahead of the train and expect to nab them at Binghamton. . . ."

Then he listened some more and his face seemed to take on a deeper shade of red with every sentence. He hung up the receiver quietly.

He said to Rongetti, "Ain't you a swell mess to have your picture in the paper?"

"That confession will never stand up," Rongetti growled darkly. "The courts won't take rubber-hose tales—not with a guy like Hallihan pleading for him."

Comiskey bristled.

"Are you trying to call me a liar, Rongetti? Me that's been on the force for twenty-nine years? We never laid a hand to him and I have witnesses to prove it. Reliable witnesses, too, the scums—newspaper men."

Suddenly he smiled.

"But I don't mind telling you—in confidence now, Rongetti—that we had to put him back in that cell with the big Kitts man four different times before he saw reason."

Rongetti sat down. He knew an apology when he heard one. He lit a cigaret and now they tasted better. He exhaled deeply, stood up and stretched. He licked tentatively at his swollen lip. Tomorrow. . . .

Comiskey went out. McCoy said he'd be getting on home, but Rongetti didn't seem to hear him. He was watching smoke clouds lifting to the ceiling.

"You know, McCoy, I been thinking." Smoke trickled out of the corner of his mouth and he followed its climbing spirals. "That dame in 716 now. . . ."

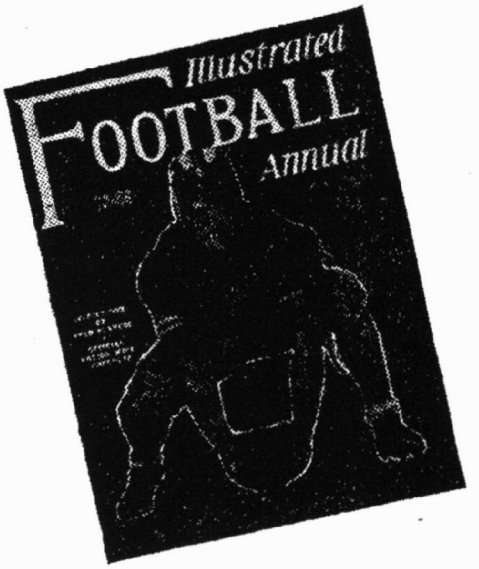
McCoy stared at him.

"She wasn't bad," Rongetti said. "I wonder if she's seen that film they're showing at the Capitol."

Can You Pick this Season's Football WINNERS?

Edited by EDDIE DOOLEY, Football's foremost commentator and former Dartmouth All-America quarterback.

PITT?
U.S.C.?
L.S.U.?
MINNESOTA?
NOTRE DAME?
DARTMOUTH?
CALIFORNIA?
CORNELL?
NEBRASKA?
NAVY?
ALABAMA?
WASHINGTON?
ARMY?
RICE?
DUKE?



WHAT do you want to know about 1938 football? Whatever it is, you'll find the answer in Illustrated Football Annual. For the 9th year the nation's leading sports scribes give the up-to-the-minute grid dope on each of their own sections: The East—the Big Ten—The Big Six—The South—The Southwest—The Pacific Coast. Also game pictures, coaches in the news, All-America . . . The entire panorama of 1938 football.

600 Rotogravure Pictures of the Nation's grid standouts.
THE STARS OF '38—The season's All-America timber.
THE TEAMS. A complete exhaustive review of over 100 college teams.
LINE-UPS and **SCHEDULES** and **PROSPECTS.**

On sale at all newsstands

ILLUSTRATED FOOTBALL ANNUAL

Published by Fiction House **461 Eighth Avenue, N. Y. C.**

DEAD MAN'S ALIBI

By ROD ALLEN

The newspapers called it an accident. But West knew it was clever, devilish murder—masked by an airtight alibi that only a dead man could break!

HE was white, shaken. His whole body twitched. One hand tremblingly held a cigarette while the other grasped the smooth handle of my paper cutter. In short, he was a man in deadly fear of death.

"I might be killed any minute," he said. "God!" His voice broke. His eyes met mine for a second, left them, fastened on the floor. "I'm as good as doomed. Do you understand me? Doomed! You know Herbie Jenson. When he says a thing—he means it."

For a second he frankly sobbed. His head dropped to his arm. He was a disgusting sight, the very symbol of cowardice. But I couldn't help feeling some pity for him.

I lit a cigarette. "There's nothing I can do in matters of this kind," I said. "You'd better go to the police."

I saw him start, suddenly, at the word "police." "I can't do that! Not the police. You see, they'd get on to me. I'd be arrested. I'd—"

He stopped, sobbed horribly again.

"Just what is your connection with Jenson?" I asked. It was almost an unnecessary question. A person could have but one kind of a connection with Jenson—dope. He was well known to me and to the police—our nearest approach to a Chicago gunman. And while he wasn't exactly at the top of his profession, he wasn't a man to be played with.

Driscoll stared past me, at the bookcase against the far wall. "Business," he muttered. "You get me. I'm a lawyer, you know. Couldn't make a go of it—I got in some trouble. And I met Jenson—hooked up with him. He claims I cheated him on a deal—says that if I don't fix it up he'll rub me out."

"It would seem to me," I said, "that you'd better fix it up."

He started again, wilted. "Don't you think I would if I could? But I can't. I'm broke. Spent it all. You know how—women, cards."

He paused a second. "Protection is what I want! Protection! I used to know Jefferson in the—the old days, when I was straight. So I went to him. And he sent me to you. Said you could help."

I rose, paced the floor a minute. I felt sorry enough for this cowering wreck—but I was impotent. "I'm not a bodyguard, you know," I said.

"I thought—thought that maybe you could get Jenson some way. I haven't got money now, but later—I'd pay well."

"No!"

"Then—then you can't, won't help me?"

"I can't do anything," I said definitely. "Out of my line. Probably you exaggerate your danger, anyhow. Why don't you get out of town for a while?"

"Guess I'll have to. I don't want to go—got a deal on—but I'll have to." He tottered to his feet. "I'll get tonight's train south."

"Best thing you can do," I said. "Here." I poured him a drink, and he downed it in a hurry, helped himself to another.

Then he was gone.

I sat down and tried to work. But for a while I kept thinking about Driscoll. Things like that get on your nerves.

I glanced at my watch. Eight-thirty-five.

The train south pulled out at nine-thirty. I was glad he was going to take it.

Finally I managed to shove the thought of him from my mind and applied myself to work. In another moment I had forgotten all about him.

THE phone woke me up at nine the next morning. Sleepily I answered it. I snapped out of it at the sound of Jefferson's voice. There was something ominous, deadly serious, in his tone.

"Did a chap named Driscoll come to see you last night?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I suppose you couldn't do anything for him?"

"No. Out of my line entirely."

"I thought so. Did you give him any advice?"

"Told him he'd better skip. He said he'd take the nine-thirty train south."

Jefferson chuckled, grimly. "Well, he didn't. See the paper?"

"No." And before he spoke, I knew about what he'd say next.

"Driscoll was run over by the nine-thirty train. Body found by a couple track-walkers early this morning."

For a moment I said nothing. What was there to say?

"I thought you might be interested," Jefferson went on.

"I am." I hung up and opened the door and found the paper.

The article was brief. The body of a man, identified as Henry Driscoll by papers found in his wallet, had been picked up on the Coast Limited track at five this morning, ground almost to bits. He had obviously been run over by the Limited, as that was the last train to pass over that part of the line. The theory was that he had been walking along the track, perhaps drunk, and had fallen and been stunned, etc.

That was bunk, of course. People don't walk along railroad tracks at night, least of all Driscoll. And his body was found about two miles from the Union Station, just outside a tunnel, where the engineer wouldn't have seen it due to a curve. The trains always made fast time on that stretch, as there were no crossings.

I thought a minute, then called Chief Brent. He was in, and I dressed in a hurry and caught a taxi. Ten minutes later I walked into his office.

He grinned at me across his littered, scratched desk. A soggy, chewed cigar dropped from his hand. He was a big man, fat and a little stupid, but he was fairly honest. We'd each done good turns for the other at various times.

I sat down, refused one of his atrociously strong cigars, and lit a cigarette. "It's about this Henry Driscoll that I called," I began.

The chief slung one leg up on his desk, at the expense of a pile of papers, and spit toward the brass cuspidor on the floor. He missed.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Yes. You read of it, I suppose. The papers are giving out the idea it was an accident. It wasn't."

Brent stared reflectively at his cigar. "Maybe not."

"You know damned well it wasn't. He was murdered. Get a load of this."

He listened in silence while I told him what Driscoll had told me. Then he shook his head and tried another shot at the cuspidor, missed again.

"This Herbie Jenson's bad medicine."

"Pretty bad. But I've met worse. So have you. I feel a sort of responsibility

about this. And I want you to go after Herbie."

"He'll have an alibi."

"Sure he will. Break it. I understand that Herbie does his own killings. He's afraid of anybody getting anything on him. And in a case like this he'd have to play safe. If he muffed it, the whole works would be spilled and it would be the rock-pile for Herbie. And Driscoll had friends, even if he had gone down hill pretty fast. Herbie gave that job his personal attention, all right."

Brent took a long time about lighting the remnant of his cigar. "Maybe," he said non-committally.

I stood up. "You'll look into it then?"

"Yeah. It won't do any good, but I'll try. One smart fellow, Herbie."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll call you this afternoon. By the way, I suppose Driscoll was pretty well mashed?"

"Hamburger," Brent grunted. "He was laying right across both tracks and the whole damn train went over him without knowing it. They got him up with a blotter."

"Very pretty," I said. "So long."

I COULDN'T work that morning. I kept visualizing the crime, wondering about it. And why had his body been thrown on the railroad's right-of-way? There seemed to be but one reason—so that it would be mutilated. Yet Herbie hadn't tried to hide the identity of his victim—it was unquestionably Driscoll. The whole thing was beyond me.

However, I passed the time, in one way or another. At one I had lunch. Directly afterward I called Brent on the phone.

"He had an alibi," Brent said.

I was impatient. "Naturally. But how solid?"

"Pretty damn solid. We quietly interviewed some people that know things. He was in Vasco's restaurant from before eight to eleven. A hundred people saw him there, and he didn't go out. And Driscoll didn't leave your place until after eight and the Limited came by at nine-thirty. So that's that."

"Looks bad, all right. Find out anything more about Driscoll?"

Brent grunted. "Routine stuff. We admit officially it was a suspicious death, of course. Seems he's divorced, no family. Lived in a residential hotel. He was seen by the doorman at six-thirty, when he left there in a taxi. And that's about all."

"Not much food," I murmured. I was disappointed. I heard Brent chuckle.

"Maybe it was an accident after all," he said.

"The hell it was! You know damned well he was murdered. By the way, I suppose he was too mussed to let the doctor find out what killed him."

"Yeah. You can't find bruises and pin-pricks on shredded meat, you know."

"No. Well, go after that alibi for me, will you?"

"I'll do my best. But don't be hopeful. It's plenty good."

I hung up. Then, because I hadn't anything else to do, I decided to drop into Pete's, where Herbie hung out when he wasn't busy. I've got a few good friends with police records, and I thought some of them might be able to help me. There was a clue somewhere—a fact—that would lead me to the truth. I couldn't stomach the idea that someone else had bumped off Driscoll. That would be too miraculous a coincidence, and it's been my experience that the law of average is a sure thing. And, of course, accident was absolutely out of the question.

A yellow cab took me down Mission Street, congested with traffic, and lined with inferior stores. I got out at the corner of Gibraltar Avenue and strolled up an alley. Half a block, and I was at the head of the stairs that led down into Pete's. During prohibition it had been a pretty rotten dive. Now it was worse. The sounds of clinking glass, rough voices, hard laughter, floated out to me from under the swinging doors.

I went down the stairs, pushed open a door and stepped in. It was fairly full even at this time of day. Groups of hard-faced men, and an occasional woman, sat at the dozen or so small, bare tables that were spread about the room, drinks before them. In the corner a mechanical piano was blaring.

Three men, wearing dirty aprons that had once been white, manned the long bar.

I walked to the end of the room, where the slot-machines were. One woman and two men were rhythmically inserting coins

into them, apparently not hoping for gain. Their expressions were blank.

The machines were for the little suckers—the two bit, four bit and dollar customers.

Opposite me was a closed door, marked private. I opened it, stepped through, closed it after me. And I was in the room reserved for the big suckers.

THE room was brilliantly lit, and occupied by about twenty men, many of them well-dressed. Thick clouds of cigar smoke eddied in the air. The murmur of voices was low, fairly well controlled. A roulette wheel spun, while six people played it. The rest were occupied with *chemin de fer* and stud.

I glanced around. Suddenly a voice spoke in my ear. "Hello, West. Making a social call?"

I whirled. It was Herbie. For a moment I stared at him, appraising his short, slim, overdressed body, his muscular, ring-covered hands, his shiny hair, beady small eyes, hooked nose, loose mouth.

"Hello, Jenson. I'm just looking around."

About a third of the people in the room were staring at us. I recognized several well-known gamblers, a small-time gang chief, a dope peddler. For a second I felt a twinge of nerves. Then I steadied myself. I was as safe here as at home; safer because this would be the last place in which they'd commit a murder.

Jenson lit a cigarette, offered me one. I took it. "Yeah? Well, I understand you're playing around with this Driscoll business."

"Maybe. Matter to you?"

"No." He shrugged. "Of course I'm interested—he used to be my partner in a couple of little business deals. Crook—double crosser. Can't say I'm sorry for him."

"I understand you'd threatened him."

Herbie grinned, maddeningly. He was having sport at my expense, I knew, and that meant he could afford to—his alibi was cast iron.

"Sort of. A guy talks tough sometimes, you know. But if he'd lived long enough I might have rubbed him out—can't tell. You're damn sure I did, aren't you?"

"Why?"

"Hell, you had Brent look quietly into it, didn't you?"

I drew on my cigarette, exhaled. "How do you know?"

He laughed. "I make it my business to know things." His face grew serious, even ominous. "Listen, West." He leaned closer to me, subdued his voice. "I haven't got anything against you. Get that. And I'm talking as a friend. The less you monkey in the Driscoll business, or any other stuff of that kind, the better for you. It was an accident. See? He got tanked, got on the railroad track and—bing! See?"

I grinned with him. "Maybe. Thanks for the tip, Jenson, anyhow."

"It's a good one. Now, how about a drink?"

I nodded and he lifted his finger at a Filipino boy who immediately appeared with a tray on which were glasses, a siphon and a bottle of Scotch. Herbie poured long ones. We drank. It was damned good Scotch. We drank another.

Then I said, "So long," to Jenson and walked aimlessly over to the roulette table and looked on a few minutes.

AFTER a while I left. Herbie was taking a drink with a blonde girl in one corner of the room. And behind him was a tall man, his hat pulled well down over his eyes, covertly watching me. I glanced at him. There was something dimly familiar about what I could see of his face, but I couldn't definitely place him. . . .

Why the railroad track? And where had Driscoll gone before he came to see me? Where had he gone after he left my apartment? And how had Jenson killed him when, to all intents and purposes, he was in a restaurant? The questions kept repeating themselves, annoying, in my mind. And I didn't have a single answer.

The doorman of the residential hotel where Driscoll had lived had seen him take a taxi. Perhaps—

I grabbed a passing cab and rode home, opened my filing cabinet and got out a photo. Then I looked up Driscoll's address in the phone book—it gives you an odd feeling to see the name and number of a man who's just been murdered—and rode to the hotel.

The same doorman was on duty. I explained as much of my business as it was necessary for him to know. Then I started the question-and-answer game.

"You didn't hear Driscoll give the driver an address?"

"No, sir."

"Tell me, did you call for this taxi or was it here?"

"It was here, sir. It had parked itself in front there some time before."

"I see. Is there a taxi stand here?"

"No, sir."

"Then is it usual for cabs to hang around waiting for business from the hotel?"

The ancient doorman shook his head. "No, sir. This is a small hotel, you know, sir, and we have practically no transient trade. Consequently, there isn't a steady demand for cabs. I usually call them for our guests when they're wanted."

"Can you remember a cab waiting here, when not engaged, ever before last night?"

The doorman reflected for a long minute. "Can't say that I do, sir. Of course, I might have forgotten—"

"That'll do. Now, when Driscoll told you to get a cab you signaled the driver, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see his face?"

"Yes, sir. Pretty well, that is. It wasn't a good light, of course. I remember he had a mustache—"

"Just a minute." I pulled the photograph from my pocket and pencilled a mustache on the upper lip of its subject. "Did he look like this?"

The doorman stared. "Why, he did, sir. Just like that, I think. It's almost as if it was his photograph that you've got there in your hand."

"It is," I said. "I don't suppose you happened to notice the cab's license number?"

The doorman chuckled. "Well, sir, you know I sort of make a hobby of looking at the auto licenses that pass by here. When I'm not busy, of course. I make poker hands out of their numbers. Sometimes me and Jim—he's one of the porters—will make little bets on 'em, sir. Anyhow, I looked at this one. It didn't make a poker hand, but I can remember it because—odd thing, sir—it was the same as my house number when I used to live in Oakland. Two three nine seven J, it was. And I used to live at 2397 J Street—"

I slipped a bill into his hand and shut him off. "One thing more. What company did the cab come from?"

"Green Taxi Company, sir. Strange about that number, isn't it? I—"

"So long," I said and left. I walked to a corner drug-store and called up the manager of the Green Taxi Company, whom I happen to know.

"Got a cab with license number 2397J?" I asked.

"Nope. Our numbers run from 1M to 678M."

I grinned to myself. Then I called the Division of Motor Vehicles. They told me there was no such license number as 2397J.

"Out of the darkness into light," I murmured banally. Then I made one more call—to Chief Brent. We talked twenty minutes. Finally he gave me an "All right" and hung up.

TWO hours later I strolled casually into the Chief's office. He grunted at me.

"Got him?" I asked.

"Yeah. But he won't spill a thing."

"He doesn't have to." I tossed a silver paper knife onto his desk. "Don't touch the handle. Fingerprints are on it. Compare them. And did you pick up Herbie?"

"Yeah. We got him. And is he sore—man!" He picked up the knife by the blade and stared at it. "Straight goods?"

"Yes. Have them developed. The boy friend in there will spill everything then, all right."

"I guess so." He grinned at me. "To give the devil his due, you did pretty well on this. Damn' smart." He pushed a button.

The door opened and Riordan came in. The Chief gave orders. Riordan nodded, winked at me, and went out.

"Want Herbie now?"

I lit a cigarette. "Yes. Bring him in here, will you? I'm entitled to be in on the death."

Brent nodded, grunted, and pressed another button, gave more orders. A few minutes passed. Then the door opened again, and Herbie Jenson appeared between two husky officers, his hundred-and-fifty-dollar suit hopelessly mussed.

He gave Brent a dirty look, then turned to me. "If you're the wise guy that fixed

this up, I'm sorry for you. Wait till I get out!"

I grinned at him. "You won't get out, Herbie," I said. "That's the funny part of it. You're going to the hot seat for the murder of Driscoll."

He turned pretty pale, but he kept his back up. "Yeah? Bunk! I got an unbreakable alibi."

"Very nice alibi, Jenson," I agreed. "Very nice. Unbreakable. So far as it goes you couldn't have a nicer one. But it doesn't go far enough."

"What do yuh mean?"

He glared at me, his hands trembling, itching for the gun that had been taken from him. The two officers had stepped back against the wall, and he stood alone in the center of the room, facing Brent and me.

"I mean that it covers the time between eight and eleven, Jenson. But no other time."

"That's plenty, ain't it?"

"No, it's not enough. You might as well come through, Jenson. Your friend Jackson squealed."

Herbie started—drew himself together again. "Don't know what you're talking about."

"No? Well, I'll tell you. I wondered why you threw his body on the track. There was only one reason for that I could see—to mess it up. Make it unrecognizable."

"That gave me the idea, Jenson. I made investigations. I found out, for one thing, that you drove the taxi that took Driscoll from his hotel at half-past six. Not that it makes any difference—I've got you, anyhow—but it helped confirm what I thought. The doorman saw you. And he remembered the license number. It was a Green cab. But the Green cab people haven't got a car with that number."

Jenson was white, silent, staring.

"YOU wanted to kill Driscoll," I went on. "You thought it safest to do it yourself. In some manner you found out he was going to call on me, looking for protection. Maybe somebody in Jefferson's office told you. Maybe Driscoll talked—he was that sort. Anyhow, in some way, you found out.

"And you thought to yourself that it would be a perfect alibi if you could be seen somewhere during the time Driscoll was in my office up to after he was killed. Good idea, all right, Jenson. It almost worked. But not quite.

"I'd never seen Driscoll before. So what could be simpler than to take him from his hotel, hit him over the head, throw him on the track—the Limited was the only train passing over it—and then fix up your bodyguard to look something like Driscoll and send him to call on me? Driscoll was so messed up that I'd never know the difference, and, in reality, Jackson and Driscoll looked more or less alike. It was clever, Jenson, I'll admit that. And as I said it almost came off as you planned. But not quite.

"So that's all there was to it. You were in the restaurant, and the man I thought was Driscoll was in my office. It was very clever, Herbie. If I hadn't seen through it I'd have been one of the witnesses to your alibi!"

Jenson came near cracking then—I could see it in his face—but he held himself together. "You're crazy," he cried. "Plain crazy!"

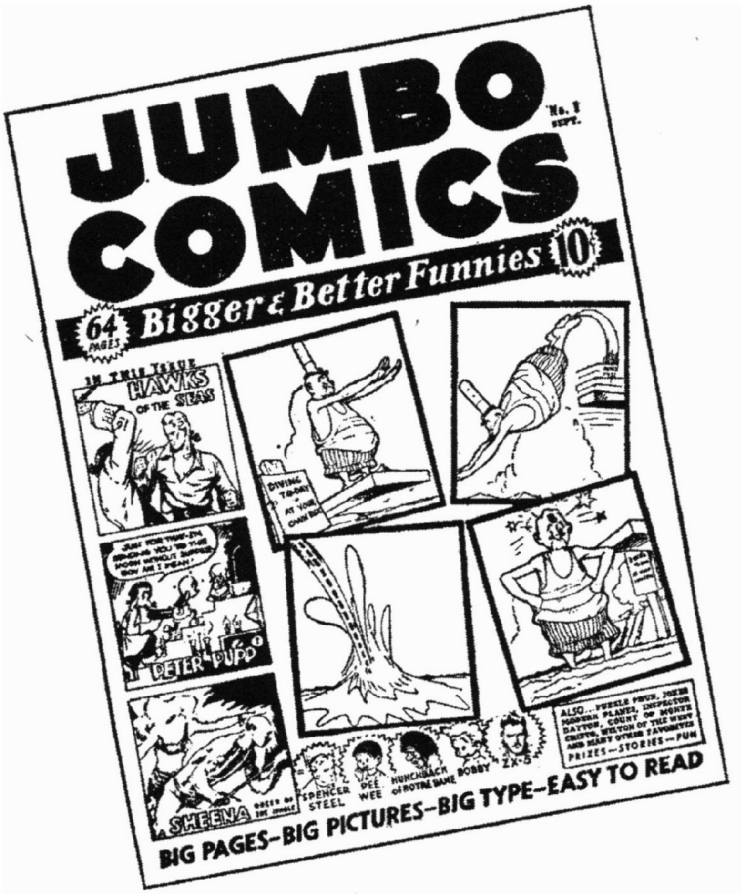
Before I could answer someone knocked on the door. Brent said, "Come in." It opened. It was Riordan.

"Okay," he said with a satisfied grin. "He spilled it."

I turned to Jenson. "That's Jackson he's talking about," I said. "I wasn't quite truthful a while ago when I said he'd given it away."

Then Jenson really cracked. He seemed to grow smaller, paler. "The dirty—!" he yelled. "I'll—"

"He couldn't help it," I said. "You see, he was a damned good actor. In my office he acted the part of a person in fear of death perfectly. And in order to add to the effect he kept fiddling with my paper knife. I happened to remember that, and I brought the knife down here. It had his fingerprints all over the handle."



THE BIGGEST!

THE BEST!

THE LIFE

of comic magazines

JUMBO COMICS

JUMBO is the big elephant of comic-strip magazines. It's big all over. BIG pages. BIG pictures. BIG clear type, easy for everyone to read. A BIG magazine—64 super-sized pages—and a whale of a BIG dime's worth!

Reading JUMBO is like watching a circus parade of fun and adventure. You'll see all your favorite features—Peter Pupp, Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, Pee Wee, Hunchback of Notre Dame, Bobby, ZX-5 Spies in Action, The Diary of Dr. Hayward, Uncle Otto, The Adventures of Tom Sherrill, Wilton of the West, Spencer Steel, and Gilda Gay, the Modern Girl. Also Jest Laffs, Modern Planes, thrilling Short Stories, Heroes of Sport, Stars on Parade, Prize Contests and other great features.

JUMBO is new. It's different. It's chock full, bigger, cleaner, clearer—a better buy. Get your copy today and see if you don't agree.

64 pages **JUMBO COMICS** **10¢**

On Sale at All Newsstands!

Here's the Kind of NEW MEN I Build!

Do YOU Want to Be One?

Charles Atlas

An actual, untouched photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—who offers you this amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER.

..And I'll PROVE in Just 7 DAYS I Can Make YOU One!

MEN—meet J. G. O'Brien, of California, one of my Silver Cup Winners! A smashing example of what my **Dynamic Tension** can do! Look at that strong neck—those broad, handsome, perfectly-proportioned shoulders—that muscled chest and stomach. Read what he says: "It seems only a few days ago that I mailed you that coupon. Look at me NOW! **Dynamic Tension** works like magic. Those **7 days** certainly **proved** that you can make a fellow a NEW MAN—right in the privacy of his own home. I'm proud of the **natural**, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"

THIS STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

Do you want a prize-winning body like this? Are you fed up with having no strength, no vigor, being only HALF-ALIVE? Then listen—

YOU'LL SEE AND FEEL RESULTS IN ONE WEEK!

That's all I ask—SEVEN DAYS! In the FIRST WEEK I'll absolutely PROVE that I can give you, too, the kind of body men respect and women admire! You will actually see and feel the improvement in even this short time. And as the weeks go by you will see yourself transformed into a NEW man—a stronger, healthier and more handsome man!

I was once a skinny, timid weakling of only 97 lbs. I didn't know what real health or strength were. I was afraid to fight, ashamed to be seen in a bathing suit.

Then I discovered the amazing secret that changed me, like magic, into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—the title I won **twice** and have held **ever since**, against all comers. My secret is **Dynamic Tension**. It is the **tested, natural** method of developing you **inside and out!** It not only can give YOU the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror. . . . It **also** digs down into your system after such needless, joy-killing conditions as ordinary constipation, pimples, indigestion, underweight and overweight.

My **Dynamic Tension** method will make a NEW MAN of you in double-quick time—and I'm ready to PROVE it to you in a 7-day TRIAL OFFER. Unless you get results in the first week it costs you absolutely NOTHING!

FREE BOOK

Let me show you the amazing results produced for thousands of other men! I'll send you FREE my famous book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It shows actual photos. It tells exactly what I can now do for **your** body! Write your name and address carefully on coupon. Mail to me personally **today.** I'll rush your free copy to you AT ONCE! Charles Atlas, Dept. 110, 115 E. 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS,
Dept. 110, 115 East 23rd Street,
New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength" and full details about your 7-day TRIAL OFFER.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

SOME OF AMERICA'S GREATEST JEWELRY VALUES

$1 Brings Your Choice of this GIFT JEWELRY—

10 MONTHS TO PAY

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Here's how simple it is to own one of these Jewelry Gift Bargains. Put a $1.00 bill in an envelope with your name, address, and the number of the article wanted. Tell us your age (must be over 20), occupation, employer, and a few simple facts about yourself. Information will be held strictly confidential — no direct inquiries will be made.

Upon arrival of your order, we will open a 10 month Charge Account for you, and send your selection for approval and free trial. If not satisfied, send it back and your $1.00 will be refunded immediately. If satisfied, pay the balance in 10 small monthly amounts you will never miss. Send order today.

$52.50

A351—Sworn Perfect diamond with 2 other diamonds in 14K yellow gold mounting. Affidavit of Perfection with purchase. Regular $75.00 value.

$5.15 a month

$33.50

A50—Bridal pair—engagement and wedding ring designed to match in 14K yellow gold. Each set with 5 brilliant diamonds.

$3.25 a month

$29.95

A147—Sworn Perfect diamond feature. Brilliant perfect diamond in 14K yellow gold mounting. Regularly $50.00.

$2.90 a month

K162—21 JEWEL watch for men. Attractive case in charm and color of natural gold. Regular price $25.00.

$17.95

$1.70 a month

P230—2 DIAMONDS in ladies' tiny watch. Charm and color of natural gold. Guaranteed 7 Jewel movement. Regular price $28.00.

$17.95

$1.70 a month

R129—The Barbara — a 17 Jewel Bulova feature. Tiny watch in charm and color of natural gold.

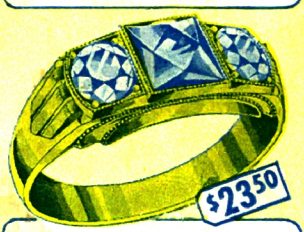
$29.75

$2.88 a month

$19.95

1455—Massive 14K yellow gold initial ring for men. Diamond and initials on black onyx.

$1.90 a month



$23.50

D8—2 diamonds and blue sapphire in massive 14K yellow gold mounting for men. A real bargain.

$2.25 a month

$29.75

M127—The Bulova "Rite-Angle" watch —a 17 Jewel feature in charm and color of natural gold. Tilted at the right angle to your eye. It's new.

$2.88 a month

$5.95

W2—10K yellow gold cross with chain to match. Cross beautifully engraved. Splendid value.

$1.00 a month

FREE TO ADULTS. Complete catalogue of Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry and Silverware on our 10 month deferred payment terms. Sent free upon request.

L. W. SWEET
MAIL ORDER DIVISION
OF FINLAY STRAUS
1670 BROADWAY
DEPT. 838-L NEW YORK