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# \* BLACK MASK \*

DETECTIVE, WESTERN  
STORIES OF ACTION

Nov., 1932 • 20¢

"SINFUL  
CIBOLA"

By

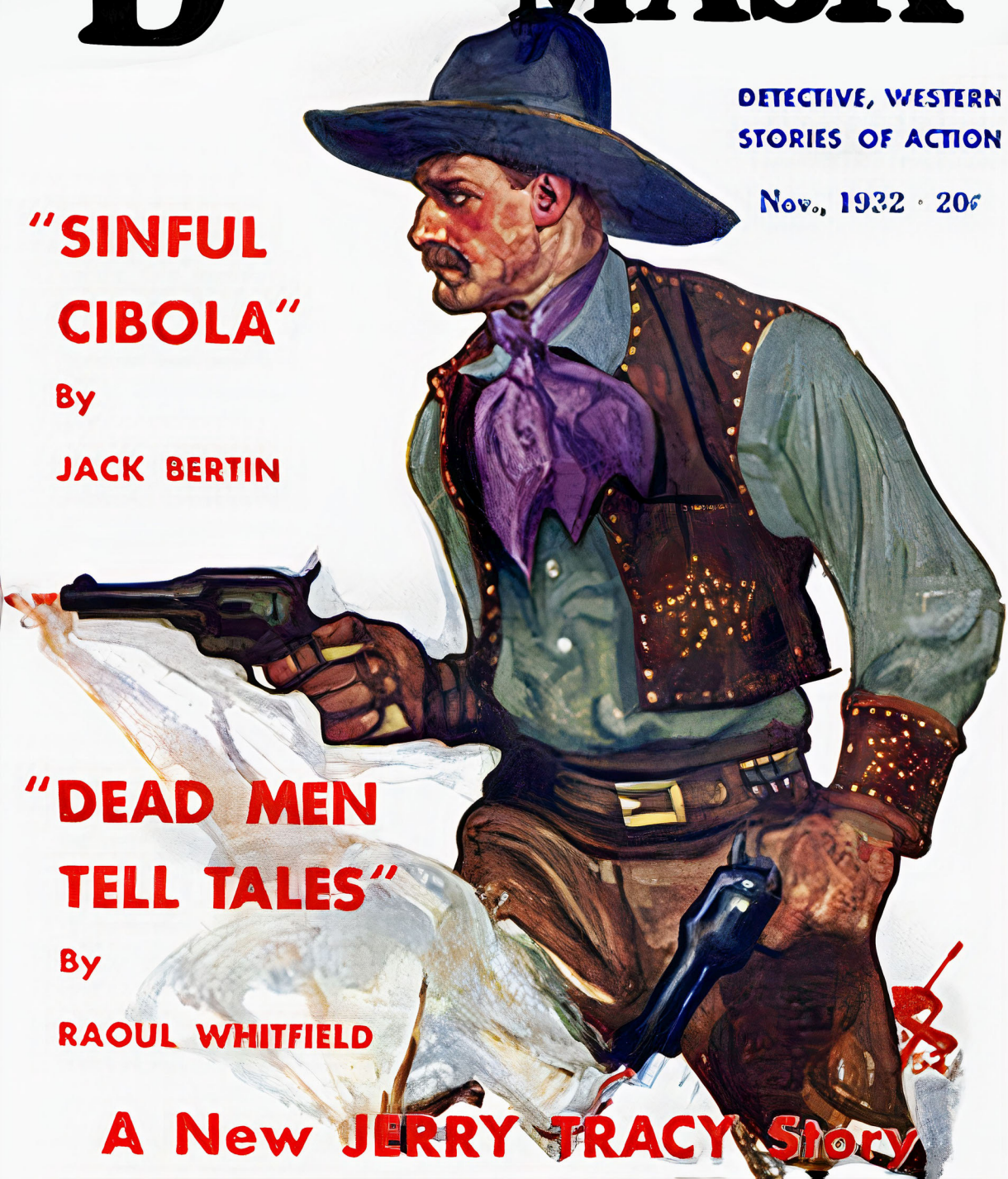
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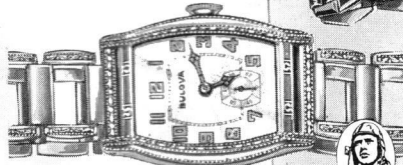
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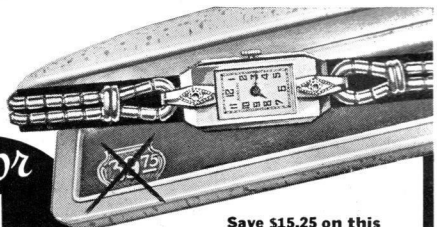
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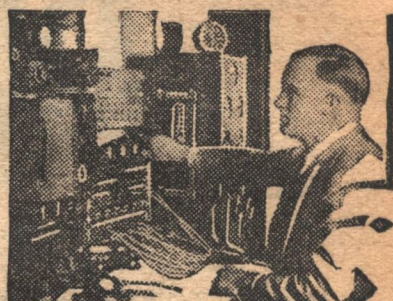
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# BLACK MASK

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JOSEPH T. SHAW, Editor

VOL. XV No. 9

NOV., 1932

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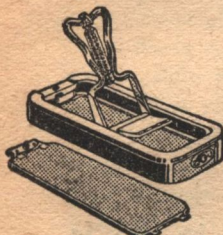
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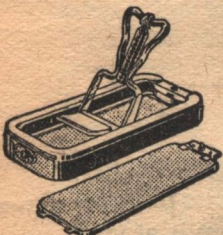
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# Dead Men Tell Tales

By RAOUL WHITFIELD



*Editors can be hard-boiled, too*



AMERON slumped low in his chair, looked over the tops of six or seven telephones and saw Grindell threading his way between battered typewriter desks, towards the facing dais of the city editor. The wire machines weren't making much racket, and Cameron could hear the slap of Grindell's heels on the concrete of the city room floor. There was a smile on the big man's face—a pleasant smile. It was as though he were coming along to congratulate Cameron. But the city editor knew Grindell was coming along to do no such thing. The big man could smile hatred; he was smiling hatred now.

The fire alarm, hooked into the city room, clanged monotonously and Vance,

the only copy reader on the job, said in a flat voice:

"Second alarm, Jay."

Cameron narrowed his brown eyes on the big head of Grindell and nodded slightly, another thought in his mind.

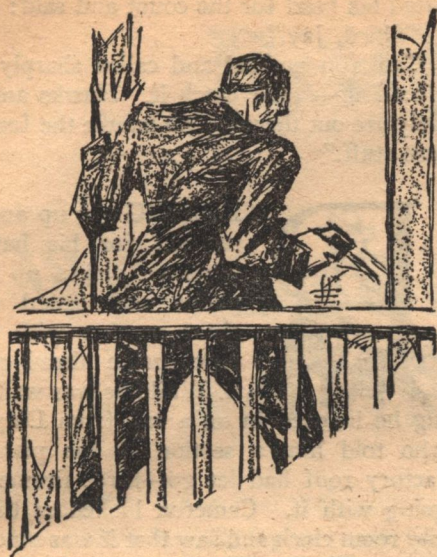
"Yeah—second alarm," he said slowly and softly. "It's a piano factory and I hate the things—let it burn."

Grindell came around one side of the raised platform and got close to the city editor. Their heads were about level. Grindell had bushy black hair and black eyes. His lips were straight, solid and thin and his face looked oily. He wore a brown suit and a brown soft hat was pulled low over his low forehead. He kept the smile on his face and spoke in a casual tone.

"Hello, Cameron. How's things?"

Jay Cameron lighted a cigarette with-





out offering the pack to Grindell and smiled back.

"Good," he said. "A white woman got murdered yesterday and a piano factory is burning down just now. Like to go out and watch it?"

Grindell continued to smile and broke into a low chuckle.

"Love to, but I haven't time," he said. "Just dropped in to ask a few questions."

Cameron nodded. "Sure," he replied. "A lot of our customers do that. News first—service next."

Grindell looked thoughtful. "What kind of service?" he asked. "Stool pigeon?"

Cameron looked over Grindell's head at the huge picture of Horace Greeley that was accumulating Pittsburgh dirt on the wall above the dramatic editor's desk.

"It depends," he said quietly.

Grindell shoved his right hand deep inside the right pocket of his brown suit coat and the smile went from his eyes and lips.

"Like hell it does," he said in a sharp tone. "You pull Britton away from the *Green Fan*, Mr. Cameron. And you pull him away quick!"

Cameron frowned and made clicking sounds. "Quickly," he corrected.

Grindell drew in a sharp breath. "Just so long as you know what I mean," he said. "When Ecker was running this sheet he didn't use his reporters as stool pigeons, or hire any."

Cameron made more clicking noises. "For the last six months of his life Ecker wasn't running this sheet," he said very steadily. "Maybe you know who *was* running it."

Grindell smiled again. It was a hard, shifty smile.

"I don't know and I don't care," he stated. "But you're running the sheet now. And you're pretty young to retire in a hurry."

Cameron looked at the glow of his cigarette. "I'm not thinking about retiring," he said gently.

The big man shrugged. "Some people retire without thinking about it," he suggested. "If you get my idea."

Cameron looked puzzled. "I'll try to figure out what you meant, after you've gone," he said.

A phone made tinkling sound and the city editor lifted a receiver. He said: "Cameron" and waited. After a few seconds he said cheerfully: "All right, Britton, forget about her. Drop out to the *Green Fan* around ten and see what happens. But be nice."

He hung up. Grindell was breathing slowly and heavily, still close to him. The big man spoke very softly:

"Don't be a fool, Cameron."

The city editor looked towards the far end of the long room.

"Take a walk, Mr. Grindell," he said very coldly. "Right down to the end of the room, and then down two flights of stairs. Outside and north. Across the river and out to the *Green Fan*. See that the floor is well polished and that the waiters are on the job. Saturday night's a big night."

Grindell's eyes were very small beneath heavy lids. Both hands were jammed in the pockets of his suit coat



and his body was stiff. His breath made sound coming in and less sound going out. Then, suddenly, he relaxed.

"Okey, Chief," he said with sarcasm. "No hard feelings?"

Cameron raised his eyebrows. "Hard feelings?" he said. "Why?"

Grindell shrugged. "I just thought maybe you'd be sore," he said easily. "You can see my side of it."

Cameron narrowed his brown eyes and ran the palm of his right hand down his smooth-shaven right cheek. His cheek bones were rather high and his face thin and strong. He had a fine mouth; his body was tall and lean. He was thirty-five.

"Yes," he replied. "I can. You run a rotten spot. It's tony enough to pull in decent people. It isn't a cheap joint. You've had a murder out there and I've had ideas about it. That's why I've had a reporter out there. He isn't a stool pigeon—he's out there because news may be out there."

Grindell was smiling in his hard way. "I wouldn't want any *Press* reporter to get hurt," he said very reflectively.

Cameron spoke sharply. "It would be bad—damn' bad."

"Yeah," Grindell replied. "But it might be bad only for him."

He smiled more cheerfully and nodded his head as though agreeing with himself. Then he said: "Well, so long—"

Cameron didn't speak. Grindell moved away from the city editor's desk and walked slowly towards the far end of the room. A short distance from Cameron he stopped and lifted a book from one of the reporter's desks. He looked at it, then lifted it higher so that the city editor could see the title. The title was "Dead Men Tell No Tales." Grindell smiled and dropped the book almost carelessly on the desk. Then he moved on, his heels making slap sound on the concrete. Cameron slumped low in his chair and watched him go, over the tops of the telephones. His face was expressionless.

Another alarm clanged in and Vance

lifted his head for the count and said:

"Third, Jay."

Cameron nodded and called sharply: "Redding—better catch it. Hawks and Daly are out there. You handle the feature stuff."



REDDING got up and reached for his hat. Cameron picked up a phone and called a short number with a short name ahead of it. While he was wait-

ing he listened in on a call from Daly, who told him a section of the piano factory roof had let go—three firemen going with it. Cameron looked at the city room clock and saw that it was nine-fifteen. The dead-line for the first morning edition to reach the streets was ten-twenty.

"Hang on and phone the stuff in," he said. "If I'm not here—give it to Vance. Watch the dead-line."

He hung up and looked at Vance. Vance said:

"You're not going out, Jay?"

A voice sounded over the wire of the other phone and Cameron asked for Britton. He got the desk sergeant and was told that Britton had left a couple of minutes ago, not telling anyone in the particular precinct station he reached about the same time every night where he was going. Cameron thanked the sergeant, swore and hung up.

Fire apparatus screamed along Liberty Avenue. Vance said in a louder voice: "You going outside, Jay?"

Cameron looked somewhere beyond the copy reader. "You heard what Grindell said, Vance?"

The copy reader said: "Only part of it."

The wail of the fire apparatus grew fainter. Cameron sat up and leaned across the desk towards Vance.

"He told me to pull Britton away from his night-club—the *Green Fan*. I said no and called Britton while he was listening. I told him to go over there



around ten and stick around a bit. Grindell got cold, said no hard feelings and walked when I told him to walk. On the way out he picked up a book from Sandy's desk and held it so I could see the title, 'Dead Men Tell No Tales.' Then he went on out."

Vance whistled softly. "He's a killer, Jay," he said quietly. "Britton's a good man, too."

Cameron closed his eyes and nodded. When he opened them Vance was looking at him narrowly. Cameron said:

"Don't forget what I just told you, Vance. I just called Britton at the South Side station. But he'd got away. I'm going out to the *Green Fan* and head him off. Grindell thinks he's been doing stoolie work, and I may have handled him wrong. I'll put a new man out there."

He stood up and reached behind him for his soft gray hat. Then he leaned over, opened a drawer and took an automatic from it. Keeping it low he inspected the clip, shoving it back in again. Vance said:

"For God's sake—be careful, Jay."

Cameron slipped the Colt into a hip pocket. He swore tonelessly.

"I'll run the sheet my way," he breathed. "But I'm damned if I kill reporters doing it."

Vance looked at the clock and then at the city editor.

"For God's sake be careful, Jay," he repeated. "Grindell would rather get you than Britton."

Cameron smiled a little. "Sure he would," he agreed. "But he's got to be more careful—getting me."

The city editor pulled the gray hat low over his forehead. He stepped down from the slightly raised platform that held the crescent-shaped desk.

"Watch the dead-line on the fire, Vance," he said. "If Rallings wants to know why I'm not around tell him I said I had a tip on something big enough to take me outside."

Vance was frowning. "I'll take care

of the sheet, Jay," he said grimly. "But for God's sake—"

Cameron lifted his right hand slightly, in a gesture of protest.

"Don't," he said sharply. "I hate repeaters."

Vance swore. "Grindell likes 'em," he said tonelessly. "With ten shots in 'em."

The city editor's eyes were narrowed as he walked away from the desk, towards the far end of the room. There was rubber on his shoe heels and they made little sound on the concrete. He went down the stairs and reached the street. The factory that was burning was more than a half mile distant, but smoke from it was in the air. A police machine sped past the newspaper office, filled with uniformed men.

Haddon, the Headquarters Police reporter, came up to him.

"I spotted Grindell going somewhere in a hurry," he said. "He seemed to be thinking hard. I tagged along, without letting him see me. But it was only a phone call."

Cameron's eyes looked hurt. "Where's he making it?" he asked.

Haddon was short, heavy and almost white haired. His eyes were shot with red.

"The U.S. drug-store on the corner," he replied. "Anything up?"

Cameron spoke tonelessly. "Smells like the town's burning down."

The veteran nodded. "They're using up the reserves fast," he said. "From Central and the precinct stations."

The city editor nodded. "Better stick around—Vance is handling things for a while," he said.

He saw the curiosity in Haddon's eyes as he turned away. Rallings, the managing editor, would be curious, too. He seldom left the editorial room within an hour or so of the dead-line. And the fire had the makings of a four-alarm.

Cameron went to the U.S. drug-store, went inside. Near the doors was a book counter and he read the title he'd read



minutes before. His eyes went away from the book. Grindell was moving away from the counter, breaking open a pack of cigarettes. He looked up from the pack when he was near Cameron. There was an expression of flickering surprise in his eyes, which smiled. He offered the pack.

Cameron shook his head. Grindell spoke softly.

"Forget to tell me something—or did you just happen in?"

He watched the city editor closely, smiling. Cameron smiled a little, too.

"Just happened in," he said. "But I did forget to tell you something, Grindell. Britton didn't tell the police that he figured you knew something about the Carters' murder, at the *Green Fan*."

Grindell put a cigarette between his thin lips and snapped lighter flame under the tip of it.

"No?" he said. "Who did?"

Cameron continued to smile. "I did," he said quietly. "Britton gave me a tip and I thought things over. I told him what to tell you, and when he came back and said you didn't seem to understand—I took a walk around to Central and had a talk."

Grindell's black eyes were small. "That so?" he said a little huskily. "Well—the dicks asked questions and I answered them. But I didn't like it, Cameron."

The city editor nodded. "Carters was an interesting character—the murder happened at your club. News is news."

Grindell shrugged. "I didn't murder Carters, and I don't know who did. It didn't happen in my club—it happened outside. You can't pin it on me to make news."

Cameron looked towards the cigar counter. "You hated Carters," he said. "But the thing I'm trying to get across is that Britton was just a reporter—"

He checked himself as he saw Grindell's body jerk, and his black eyes widen in a swift expression of surprise. There was a short silence, then Cameron said slowly and grimly:

"Who did you just tell to get him, Grindell?"

Grindell looked puzzled, his eyes still wise. Then he chuckled; his lips parted in a smile.

"You kidding me, Cameron?" he breathed.

The city editor shook his head. "It's a bad time for kidding, Grindell. It's a bad time for me to be away from the sheet. You just made a phone call from here."

Grindell grunted. "Like hell I—"

He stopped. Cameron said: "Go ahead—change your mind and admit you did. It's safer."

Grindell's eyes were not smiling. "Any law against me using the phone?" he asked.

Cameron said softly: "No, but God help you if you don't change your mind on that phone order."



GRINDELL let smoke come from between his lips in a thin stream.

"Don't be a fool, Cameron," he muttered.

The city editor shook his head. "You said that upstairs. I won't. I'll be damn' sensible and damn' soft. Softer than I've ever been. Call the deal off and I'll pull Britton away from your spot. I'll keep him away."

Grindell was smiling again. "Decent of you," he said. "But I don't give a damn about that—he can stick around. It just made me sore, that's all."

He started to move towards the doors but Cameron caught him by an arm.

"You do give a damn, Grindell. You think Britton knows more than he does. He was the first man to get to Carters, after the shooting. You figured that if I wouldn't call him off—you were right. When I called him and told him to go out to your place tonight—you got very nice. And then you came down here and used a phone. In a hurry. And you told someone to finish Britton."



Grindell swore very softly. Cameron said: "When I said: 'Cameron *was* just a reporter—' that gave you a jolt. You showed it. I'd put it in the past tense, without thinking. But *you* were thinking. Thinking of Britton as already out of things."

Grindell said huskily: "I don't know what you're getting—"

Cameron interrupted. "Yes you do," he said sharply. "You started to deny you'd made a phone call until you realized I might have been told you'd made one. Then you changed the story."

Grindell spoke coldly. "You've been drinking too much lately, Cameron. You're imagining things. I don't give a damn about your reporters. I was just a little sore, that's all. If he comes in tonight I'll stand him a beer."

Cameron said harshly: "You're generous. You know he won't come in."

Grindell looked at the city editor with small eyes. "Accidents happen," he said very slowly. "Britton's been messing around in a lot of stuff for your dirty sheet. If anything happens to him—you can't tie me in."

Cameron took his fingers away from the arm cloth of the other man's coat. He stood with his lean body relaxed.

"Britton isn't a cub reporter, and he isn't an angel," he said quietly. "He's been in jams before this one. But maybe they haven't been so tough. If you do what I think you're doing—"

He stopped. Grindell's eyes met his coldly. A man came into the store and nodded to the night-club owner. Grindell nodded back and spoke loudly.

"Britton's a good reporter. I like him, even if he isn't giving me a break."

He beckoned to the man who had come in, introduced him to the city editor.

"Cameron—meet Jess Wilkes. Wilkes is the new manager of the Liberty Theatre."

They shook hands. Grindell smiled and said to Wilkes:

"Getting publicity on the Carters'

murder, outside my club. Cameron thinks I've got it in for a reporter of his named Britton. I was just telling him I like the fellow." He patted Wilkes on the arm, smiled at Cameron. "Got to run along," he said. "See you again."

He turned and went from the store. Wilkes nodded to Cameron, said the usual thing and moved towards the counter. The city editor stood motionless and watched Grindell go outside. There was a bitter smile on his face. The night-club owner had made two mistakes, but they weren't important. And he'd thought quickly, fixed up an alibi for himself. Wilkes would remember what he'd said about Britton.

Cameron drew a deep breath, looked at his wrist-watch. He went from the store, didn't see Grindell. He hailed a cab and said to the driver:

"The *Green Fan*—North Side."

The driver frowned. "Pretty early for that spot, Mister," he suggested. "Things don't get going very early out—"

Cameron interrupted. "The *Green Fan*—North Side."

The cab driver shrugged. "It's Saturday," he said. "Things may get going earlier tonight."

Cameron got inside and slammed the door. While the cab was picking up speed he slumped low in the seat. His eyes were small and hard. After a few blocks he said in a half whisper:

"And maybe things have *already* got going—tonight!"

2



N the way to the *Green Fan* Cameron had the driver stop the cab twice. It was nine-thirty and he doubted that Britton would reach the night-club before ten. He wanted to head him off if possible, and he wanted to ask some questions. But Britton wasn't at the Fifth Precinct Station nor at the North Side Hospital. Tony Sanders



was at the hospital; he blinked at the city editor as he entered the corridor that led to the emergency dressing room.

Cameron said: "Come along with me, Tony."

He went outside and they climbed into the cab. Sanders was short and broad-shouldered; he had blue eyes and reddish hair. He was a good leg man, without imagination and with a nice memory. He had been on the *Press* for five years.

The cab moved northward and Cameron slumped down in the seat again. Sanders said:

"That's a sweet blaze across the river—I figured they might drag some of the overflow patients to this side."

Cameron nodded. "Maybe," he agreed. He was silent for several seconds, then he said: "This is confidential, Tony. When someone murdered Harry Carters outside of the *Green Fan* three nights ago—Britton happened to be coming in. He was the first one to reach Carters. The playboy was on the grass in that fake grape arbor Grindell fixed up outside the club. Carters was dying, but he got out a few words. Grindell is a killer with political pull. He's killed two men. Both kills in self-defense. Britton came to me and told me the words Carters had got out before he died. I didn't play it up, but I've had Britton sticking around the club. Grindell had an alibi—and so did everyone else in the place. Grindell's claim was that someone had it in for Carters, knew he was out there—went out and got him."

Fire apparatus passed the cab, not moving at high speed, and Cameron said:

"They're working the move-in system." He swore very softly and went on. "Tonight Grindell came to the sheet and told me I was using Britton as a stool-pigeon, and to pull him off. I said no and he got very nice. Then he went down and put in a phone call, after he'd heard me tell Britton over the phone—to go out to the club around ten."

Tony Sanders said nothing. Cameron spoke in a hard voice.

"I've had damn' few hunches in my life—but I've got one tonight. Grindell wants to get Britton. He doesn't know how much Britton knows or how much he's told me. He wants to play safe. With Britton out of the way anything he's told won't count so much. I want to head Britton off—I'm not a reporter killer."

Tony Sanders was frowning. "He wouldn't risk doing the job on Britton, or having it done, knowing that you'd be suspicious," he suggested.

Cameron smiled grimly. "I think he would," he disagreed. "He went out of his way to let a friend of his hear him tell me he liked Britton. He doesn't like him—and he hates my insides."

Sanders swore tonelessly. Cameron said: "When we get out here I'll go right in and look around. It's a bit early. You stick outside and if Britton comes along tell him to stay outside and to watch himself."

The reporter nodded. "Right," he replied.

Ahead there was the green glow of lights on green. Beyond trees and the fake grape arbor was the shape of a two-story frame house that had been converted into a night-club. A large, spread green fan advertised the place—green spotlights giving it a vivid color.

Cameron leaned forward and said: "Pull in here—don't go in front of the place."

The driver pulled in and Cameron and Sanders got out. The city editor paid up, spoke softly to Sanders as the cab moved on.

"If he comes along—get him away from here. Don't let him come in. I won't be long."

Sanders nodded, and Cameron walked to the entrance, went through the fake arbor and entered the night-club. The fan effect was carried out inside, and the lighting was a dull green. A few couples were at tables, in dinner dress, and the dance orchestra was playing softly. A tall, slender man came forward and



bowed to Cameron. He was just a little too sleek to be handsome.

Cameron said: "Grindell around?"

The sleek one smiled cheerfully. "No," he said. "I just talked to him on the phone. He'll be here in about half an hour."

Cameron smiled. "Know where he was when he called you?" he asked.

The sleek one nodded. "At the Detective Bureau," he said pleasantly. "You can call him there, Mr. Cameron."

Cameron kept the smile on his lips. "I've never seen you before," he said.

The sleek one bowed, still smiling. "Grindell said I should expect you, and he described you. He said you were to consider yourself the *Green Fan's* guest. I'm Jim Cline, the director."

Cameron nodded. "Nice of Grindell," he said with irony. "I'm not drinking."

Cline raised his eyebrows. "We don't serve liquor," he stated.

Cameron shrugged. "Pardon me," he replied. "You know Ed Britton?"

The sleek one nodded, smiling more pleasantly than ever.

"The reporter?" he said. "Yes—a fine fellow. We all like him, out here."

Cameron looked towards the dance floor. "He hasn't been in tonight?" he asked.

The director shook his head. "No," he replied. "But Grindell said to expect him and to treat him right."

A uniformed hat girl came to the director's side and spoke in an affected tone.

"Someone at the *Press* wants to talk with a Mr. Cameron, if he's here or as soon as he comes in, if he comes in."

The director smiled at the city editor. "This is Mr. Cameron," he said.

Cameron looked at the girl without seeing her. "Where's the phone?" he asked.

She made a gesture that was as affected as her voice, and turned away. He followed her to a green booth, went inside, shut the door. As he reached for the receiver he breathed hoarsely: "If they're telling me—"



He broke off, lifted the receiver. He said: "This is Cameron."

Vance's voice said: "Benson, the dick from the River Precinct, just called. 'Two river men just found Britton's body. About two blocks from the piano factory that's burning, near a sand barge. He'd been struck on the head and shot twice. Dead.'"

Cameron said very softly: "Oh,—!"

There was a long silence and then Vance spoke.

"You still there, Jay?"

Cameron said: "Yes—still here." He waited several seconds. "All right, Vance. Use it for what it's worth. Reporter murdered. Police haven't any clues. Don't know the motive. Keep it out of the first edition, and hold it down to a couple of sticks. I'll read copy on it. What sand barge was it—know?"

Vance said. "Barkley Brothers. White Street and the river. No one heard shots—almost everybody is at the fire, in that section. Lots of smoke around, Benson said. Large caliber bullets—is his guess. Body at the barge until the coroner gets over there. Benson says he'll get right on it—"

Cameron cut in. "All right, Vance—and don't talk to anyone about Grindell coming in tonight. I'll handle this my way."

Vance said shakily: "Sure, Jay."

Cameron spoke tonelessly. "Fire stuff coming in all right?"

Vance said: "Yeah—and Rallings is in. Wanted to know where the hell you were. I said something pretty big was on."

Cameron said grimly. "It's still on. You get the sheet out, Vance. I'll be moving around tonight."

Vance's voice was husky. "If that rat Grindell is running this—you've got to be careful, Jay."

Cameron said: "Use fire pictures on Page One. If Redding gets good fea-



ture stuff—play it up for what it's worth."

Vance spoke flatly. "Right, Jay."

Cameron hung up the receiver, lighted a cigarette. His fingers were trembling just a little. He stayed in the booth until he'd had a few long pulls on the cigarette, then he opened the door and went outside. The music was playing a livelier tune and more couples were coming in. The uniformed girl smiled at him and he gave her a tip. Cline stood looking at the dance floor, rubbing his palms together and smiling. He turned towards Cameron as the city editor headed for the door.

"Not waiting for Grindell?" he said cheerfully.

Cameron shook his head. There was a hard smile in his brown eyes.

"Got to get back to the sheet," he replied.

The director nodded. "No message?" he asked.

Cameron shook his head. "No message."

He started on and Cline spoke again. "And if Britton comes in I'll say you've been here?"

Cameron's lips twitched, but his eyes were expressionless.

"Yeah," he said. "Do that."

Cline bowed and Cameron went outside, pulling his hat low over his forehead. Tony Sanders was crossing the street, coming towards the entrance arch, beyond the arbor. When Cameron, walking slowly, reached his side the reporter said:

"Thought I saw Britton across the street. But it was just someone that looked like him."

They walked southward. Cameron spoke slowly.

"We won't have to stick around. Vance phoned here and happened to catch me. Britton's dead."

Sanders sucked in his breath, stopped moving. Cameron walked on. A cab came along and he hailed it. When he got inside Sanders climbed in behind him. The driver twisted his head and Cameron said:

"River and White Street. Keep over near the river so the fire lines don't hold you up."

The driver nodded. The cab moved forward. Cameron slumped low and kept half-closed eyes on the rubber mat on the cab floor. Tony Sanders spoke in a steady voice.

"Murdered?"

The city editor nodded. "Struck in the head—and two bullets. I called him at that precinct out there while Grindell was right beside me. That was the tip-off. I called him again, after Grindell left, but he'd gone. Grindell was using the phone, too. Britton had some time on his hands and he probably started for the blaze. What happened after that—"

He tossed the butt of his cigarette out a window. Sanders breathed softly:

"That dirty, killing—"

Cameron cut in sharply. "Take it easy. Don't do any guessing. I'll do the guessing. What I told you—you keep quiet. This is going to be tough. But I got Britton in the spot—and I'll get his killer—"

He checked himself. "You go over to the Detective Bureau and if Grindell's still there, just stick around. Keep out of his way. If he isn't there, find out when he got there and how long he stayed. And what excuse he made for being there—and fixing himself an alibi while Britton was getting the dose. But don't let anyone know what you're after."

Sanders said: "Okey."

They rode in silence until the cab crossed the bridge. Cameron said:

"Better get out here—grab another cab. When you get what I want—come into the office. You're not supposed to know anything about Britton being dead—unless they tell you at the Bureau."

Sanders nodded, told the driver to stop. He opened the door on his side. Cameron said:

"Don't waste any time, but go at it easy, Tony."

The reporter nodded and slammed the



door. The driver turned and looked back at Cameron.

"River and White—nothing there but sand barges," he breathed. "You sure—"

"I'm sure that's where I want to go," Cameron said steadily.

## 3



WHEN Cameron got back to the editorial room it was almost midnight. He walked between reporters' desks without speaking to any of his men. Rallings was standing beside Vance, who slid out of Cameron's chair as he came around. Rallings said:

"Britton is dead—murdered. You know that?"

Cameron dropped heavily into his chair. "What the hell do you think pulled me out of here tonight?" he replied. "A picture show?"

Vance spoke from beside him. "We've got the fire stuff right, and the copy on Britton is there. Just what you told me—no more."

Cameron nodded. The managing editor spoke briskly.

"Any ideas about it, Jay? He was a good man. You had him on the *Green Fan* murder, didn't you?"

Cameron smiled grimly. "He was a good man and I had him on the *Green Fan* murder," he repeated. "I've got ideas, but that's all they are. Maybe I can make them become facts. I knew things were getting tough, but I didn't know they were getting this tough."

Rallings said quietly: "They can't murder newspaper men in this town. We'll spend money and we'll use all our resources. When you get things straightened out come into my office and tell me what you know."

Cameron lifted his right fist slowly and brought it down hard on the desk.

"I don't know anything," he said in a hard voice. "They *have* murdered news-

paper men in this town. Britton isn't the first one. And they can spend money and use resources, too."

The managing editor frowned. "If you don't know anything—why were you outside tonight?" he asked.

Cameron drew a deep breath. "I had an idea—and I tried to stop something. I was too late. We've got to go easy or we won't get anywhere. I *think* some things, but there isn't any evidence. It would be a mess to rush in. I'm sorry as hell about it—and I'll get the murderers if I have to quit my job—"

Rallings said: "That's all right, but Britton's dead and the paper isn't. We've got to get it out. The police are working on the case and if they don't work hard enough we'll make them so sick—"

Cameron looked down at the copy before him. The managing editor let his words trail off and went towards his office. Cameron read copy and heads mechanically. When he looked up Vance was watching him closely from across the curve of the desk. The copy reader said:

"Grindell?"

Cameron nodded. "He gave the word," he said slowly. "But he wasn't there. He was at the Detective Bureau—and he went there with Jake Collins. He happened to meet Collins outside the drug store. In the drug store he talked with me. Before that he was up here. He's covered. But he gave the word, Vance."

Vance said: "Are we going to *prove* it?"

Cameron's eyes looked somewhere beyond the copy reader. He shrugged.

"There's something wrong somewhere along the layout," he said slowly. "Britton swore he was telling me all he knew about the Carters' murder. Carters was a playboy with plenty of enemies. He gambled and he chased around with women. Someone got him. Britton told me that when he reached Carters he could distinguish only three words. 'Grindell sent me—' Just those three. Remember that, Vance. Grindell was the



next one to reach Carters, but he was dead then. Grindell didn't know how much Britton knew. He may think that Britton talked to me, but he doesn't know that I've talked to you."

Vance said thoughtfully: "Those three words might mean a lot—and they might mean nothing."

Cameron smiled bitterly. "I didn't tip the police to the words. I did tip them to the fact that they might not have gone at Grindell hard enough. I had an idea he might be pretty well protected, and I wanted to see if they'd go after him. They did—and he answered the questions."

Vance nodded slowly. "You figure that Grindell gave the word to finish Britton. Then he must have been pretty sure that Carters had said more than he actually said. If he'd known that Britton had only used those three words he wouldn't have been too worried."

The city editor spoke softly. "Right. Grindell either murdered Carters or knew who did and was protecting that person. He got worried and came in here to see how much I wanted Britton at his place. He was pretty sure Britton wasn't just working the Carters' murder. When I failed to call Britton off—Grindell worked fast. And he practically let me know it was coming. That was the tip-off on how smooth it was going to be."

Vance swore. "But the fact that Britton was sticking around the night-club must have made Grindell wise—must have made him see that we didn't have enough on him."

Cameron frowned. "He decided not to risk it, or maybe he figured Britton had just enough to use to get closer. He wanted him pulled off. When I didn't do it—he decided to work fast."

Vance said: "That's closer to it."

Cameron looked over the heads of the reporters and saw Benson coming towards him. The River Precinct detective was medium in size, gray haired.

He had a gray mustache and his eyes were the same color. He came around beside Cameron.

"Sorry as the devil, Jay," he said. "What do you think?"

Cameron shook his head. "He was a good newspaper man, and he'd been on some nasty assignments. I suppose he had enemies."

Benson said: "How about a woman being mixed up in it?"

The city editor shrugged. "I don't think so. But you never can tell."

Benson looked at the city room clock. "The last human I can find who saw him was Young, the copper out in my precinct. He was coming in from the fire. He met Britton going towards it—that is, heading around behind it and going for the river. Britton said something about taking a quick look and keeping out of the smoke. It was pretty thick. The crowd was all around on the other side, because it could see more. Another thing—the street lights were out. The fire messed the wires up. The next thing was when the river men found the body."

Cameron tapped on the wood of the desk with his lean fingers.

Benson said slowly. "Doc says the bullets were .38's—fired at close range. He thinks he got the blow on the head first; it knocked him out. One bullet in the heart—the other lower. Not robbery. Twelve dollars and his watch on him."

The city editor nodded. Benson looked at the clock again.

"That's all I have. He happened to be at the *Green Fan* when Carters was killed, didn't he?"

Cameron nodded. Benson said: "They aren't getting anywhere on the Carters' murder. But that was different. He was a fool spender with a lot of money. He was a gambler, too. Don't think there might be a tie-up, do you?"

The city editor narrowed his eyes. "In what way?" he asked.

Benson frowned. "He might have



learned something that worried somebody," he said.

Cameron nodded. "He might have," he agreed. "But what, that worried who?"

Benson swore. "That's a tough crowd out there," he muttered. "Grindell is a louse—a cold and clever louse. He never knows any answers and he always shoots in self defense or has an alibi."

Cameron said nothing. Benson spoke quietly.

"How about a drink—when *thirty* comes in?"

The city editor shook his head. "I've had a drink—and *thirty* may be pretty late tonight. I'm going to move around, after I get out of here."

Benson watched Cameron closely. "Don't hold back on me, Jay," he said. "Britton was a good guy. If you're saving something for the paper—"

Cameron smiled grimly. "To hell with the paper!" he breathed. "I'm just going to move around. I move around better when I'm alone."

The plain-clothesman nodded slowly. "Carters—and now Britton. There was that Freese woman that got it yesterday, but she talked before she went out. That wasn't hard." He looked towards the wire machines, then back at Cameron. "Dead men don't talk," he said grimly.

Cameron slumped in his chair, his eyes half-closed, his body motionless.

"That's one of the chief reasons that some of them get dead," he said harshly.

## 4



T was one-thirty when Cameron left the River Precinct Station and turned down the street where Young had met Britton. Fire apparatus was still making pump sound, several squares distant. There was the odor of burnt wood in the section and it was still fairly thick with smoke. The street lights were out. Cameron moved

slowly and kept his eyes on the cracked pavement of the street. The section was a mean one.

When he heard light footfalls behind him he tightened his grip on the Colt; stopped and turned. A voice called to him, huskily:

"Mr. Cameron—"

The girl was moving rapidly towards him. She was slender and not very tall. A fire truck, a block distant, was turning; the lights of it swung across the girl's figure. She held her right arm out and there was a piece of paper in her hand. She said:

"I think you should—have this—"

She stopped and her fingers spread. The paper drifted downward as she turned away, started to run. Cameron called sharply:

"Wait—please!"

She didn't wait. She swung to the right and started to cross the street. Cameron moved forward, scooped up the paper and stuffed it in a pocket. He ran after the girl, gaining rapidly. When he was close to her he called:

"Better stop—I'll use lead—"

She stopped near a billboard and faced him with her back to it. The light was better; the billboard was near an avenue along which the street arcs were still shining. The girl had a white powdered face and very red lips. Her eyes were small and dark. She was breathing heavily.

Cameron stood very close to her. "What's written on the paper?" he asked.

She shook her head and her eyes glanced towards the avenue. They came back to Cameron's.

"I don't—know," she breathed.

Cameron said: "You know. What's written on the paper?"

Her eyes were suddenly defiant. She shook her head again. Her clothes fitted her figure tightly; she was cheaply dressed. She was pretty in a cheap, obvious way.

Cameron said: "How did you know I was Cameron?"



She smiled a little. "I didn't know, until I called your name. I just thought—you might be."

The city editor shook his head. "You're lying," he said. "I don't like little girls who lie."

She stood very straight, her eyes small. "I'm not lying! I went to the paper and a man said you might be at the fire or the police station out here. I came out and saw you leave the police station. I went back in and asked and the sergeant said it was you. Then I ran after you."

Cameron shook his head slowly. "You're still lying," he said quietly. "The sergeant isn't in the station just now, and no one at the paper would have told you I was out here."

She said: "Damn you!" in a rising tone and turned her body away from the billboard. Cameron caught her by an arm and shoved her back against it again.

"Keep calm," he advised. "You can't be hurt for following me and calling my name. Or for dropping a piece of paper. What's written on it?"

There was defiance in her small eyes again. "Go back and pick it up!" she snapped.

The city editor smiled. "I've already picked it up," he replied. "If you won't tell me what's written on the paper—we'll go somewhere together, and I'll read it."

She said harshly: "Like hell we will!"

Cameron got the Colt from his right-hand pocket and watched her eyes widen on it. He backed away from her and turned so that light from the avenue struck over his shoulders. The girl said:

"I haven't done—anything—"

He nodded. "Maybe not, but you'd like to do something. You'd like to run away. I wouldn't."

He got the white paper from his other pocket with left-hand fingers and worked it open, keeping his eyes on the girl. She was leaning against the billboard. He held the Colt low and close to his right side and lifted his left hand, keeping

the spread paper below the level of his face.

The first time he lowered his eyes he read in rough, pencil printing: "*I know who killed Britton—see Carey on the Elsie beyond—*"

He lifted his eyes as the girl moved her body forward. His right hand came up a little and she said:

"I'm not going anywhere."

He nodded. "You're going somewhere," he replied grimly. "But I'll say where."

He dropped his eyes again and finished reading the rough printing. "*—the Show Boat. Won't talk if you bring police.*"

The printing wasn't signed. He stuffed the paper back in his pocket and smiled at the girl.

"It's lousy," he said quietly. "Who was it thought I'd fall for this stuff?"

She shrugged. "I don't know what was written on it. I did what I was told. I've been hunting for you for an hour."

Cameron's brown eyes were smiling coldly. "We'll go around to the police station and coax the truth from you," he said softly.

There was fear in the girl's eyes, and they grew large with it.

"No!" she said. "I won't go—"

Cameron smiled more broadly. "Better be good, Kid," he suggested. "Tell me the truth and you won't get hurt—you won't have to go to the police station. If you don't—"

He moved closer to her. She said in a husky voice:

"I was home and a man called me. I don't know who he was. I never heard his voice before. He said to go downstairs—there was a folded piece of paper in my box. I was to give it to Cameron, city editor of the *Press*, and then I was to beat it. I was to do it right away. It was important."

Cameron said: "All right—what did you do?"

She was breathing slowly. "I got the paper and went to the *Press* office. A



short man with red hair said you might be almost anywhere. I tried some places I thought you might be—and then I thought about the fire. I came out here and saw you leave the station. I wasn't sure at first, then I ran after you."

Cameron smiled. "What made you think you knew me?" he asked.

She said huskily. "I've seen you—across the river."

Cameron whistled a few soft notes. "Who were you with when I was pointed out?"

She smiled tightly. "A cop," she said. "I asked him who the good looking guy was and he said Cameron, city editor of the *Press*."

Cameron nodded slowly. "If you hadn't mentioned the good-looking part I wouldn't have believed you," he said sarcastically.

They stood silently, watching each other. Cameron's voice was hard.

"Who do you *think* called you on the phone?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I never heard the voice before—I couldn't figure it."



HE city editor put the Colt inside his right coat pocket.

"Then why did you deliver the note?" he asked.

She shrugged. Her tongue tip wet her lips. "Sometimes I'm called like that," she said very softly.

Cameron nodded. "Sure, and you know pretty well who calls you. Who?"

She looked at the sidewalk. "I never know," she replied.

The city editor swore. "Listen, Kid," he said evenly, "I'm going to be nice to you. I'm going to play you haven't read the writing on the paper. A reporter of mine named Britton was murdered tonight."

He paused as a fire truck made a siren racket as it approached the avenue. It went past and turned southward. When the sound of it had died the

girl said slowly, almost tonelessly: "Murdered? That's terrible."

Cameron nodded. "It's bad," he agreed. "The point of this note is that the fellow who wrote it knows who murdered this reporter. I'm to go to a certain spot and he'll tell me who did it."

The girl's dark eyes widened. "No?" she breathed.

"Yeah," Cameron said grimly. "That's the way the note reads."

She was silent for several seconds, her back against the billboard and her eyes on his.

"I didn't know," she stated finally.

"You're not curious," he mocked. "A voice you've never heard tells you where to find a note and who to give it to—and you don't give a damn what's written."

She shrugged. Cameron said: "All right—only be careful. If you hear a strange voice again tonight, after you get home or somewhere—just say that Cameron got the note and thought it was funny. Funny as hell. Tell the owner of the strange voice that I said I'd come right along to the *Elsie*, whatever that is, and that I'd come without any cops and unarmed. I'll sort of back into the place, tell your caller—so that the bullets can get me without any chance of my seeing who's using them."

He smiled coldly. "All right—trot along!" he said.

Her eyes were staring into his. She stood straight, her hands clenched. She leaned forward a little.

"You're not—"

She stopped, and Cameron's brown eyes smiled. It was a mocking, half bitter smile.

"No, I'm not following instructions," he said. "I'm taking a chance that the note isn't on the level. I'll find the killer of Britton another way. And a safer one."

The girl raised her narrow shoulders and let them fall. She moved out from the billboard, watching him closely. He turned as she walked past him, facing her.



"It's a tough racket, Kid," he said. "Better quit it before it's too late."

She raised her shoulders and let them fall, again. She didn't speak, and she didn't look back at him. At the corner of the avenue she turned southward and he lost sight of her.

Cameron breathed: "Might have dragged her along to the precinct—"

He heard the sound of a car engine, highly accelerated. It came from the avenue and the direction the girl had taken. It wasn't the sound of a car in motion. The self starter had just worked and the engine was being tested. The sound died away.

Ten feet away was a break in the billboard fence. Cameron started for it, moving fast. He was several feet from it when the car swung around the corner from the avenue. He glanced over his right shoulder and saw the black color of it. At the same instant the car's headlights went out. Cameron reached the break in the fence. It was narrow; he was squeezing his body through when the guns started to bark. He could hear the bullets thud into the pavement and the dirt near the fence. They made crackling sound as they struck the wood.

His soft hat jerked on his head as he let his body drop. He struck dirt, rolled over once, dropped several feet to the level of the fenced-in lot. The bank of dirt between him and the fence saved him. Lead made seconds of racket, battering and tearing at the fence. Then the gun clatter died away; engine sound replaced it. A police whistle shrilled, somewhere along the avenue.

Cameron pulled himself to his feet, found his hat. His fingers found a hole in its highest fold. He brushed dirt from his clothes, heard the engine roar die in the distance, towards the fire and the river. He climbed up the bank of dirt and squeezed back through the fence break again.

Feet were making pounding noise on the pavement in fast time. Cameron stood looking down the street, but the speeding car was out of sight. He went

towards the avenue, glancing at the bullet marked billboard. The advertisement was for a mouth wash and the biggest two words in it were *Play Safe!*

The city editor smiled tightly and reached the avenue. The big figure of Johnny Bestor came up to him.

"Gun racket?" the detective breathed heavily.

Cameron nodded. "Plenty of it," he said. "A black, closed car. Turned the corner here, got the headlights out, and let loose. Two guns, I think. Went east towards the river."

Bestor swore. "Who'd they get?" he breathed.

Cameron shook his head. "Nobody," he replied. "They tried to get me."

Bestor whistled softly. "How in hell did they miss?" he asked.

Cameron smiled. "I got through a break in the fence and down in a ditch." He took off his hat and showed Bestor the bullet hole. "I heard them coming—had a hunch. It was pretty close."

Bestor swore again. "It was close, all right," he muttered. "But I'm damned if it was pretty!"

## 5



T two-thirty Cameron walked through the fake grape arbor of the *Green Fan* and reached the entrance. The doorman did his job and the city editor got inside. Cline blinked at him, then smiled and came forward. The place was crowded, and the music was making a fast tempo noise. A babble of he and she voices drifted from the big room.

Cline said: "Back again, Mr. Cameron?"

Cameron smiled a little. "Yeah," he replied. "Back again. Grindell around?"

The director nodded, flicking a spot of confetti from his dinner jacket.



"In his office. I think. You'd like to see him?"

Cameron shook his head. "No," he said slowly. "But I *have* to see him."

Cline's eyes were expressionless. "Business, eh?" he said pleasantly. "Just a minute."

He turned away and went back past the phone booth and the check room. There was a narrow corridor beyond. He went along it and mounted the stairs at the end. The music played very loudly and a youngster with rouge on his right cheek chased a girl out into the grape arbor. The hat girl passed Cameron and winked.

"Romance! Ain't it swell?" she said thinly.

Cameron said: "Swell." He thought of Britton and something hurt somewhere around his heart. He moved a few feet and looked out at the crowded floor.

Cline came towards him, smiling sleekly.

"Grindell says to go right on up. Down the corridor all the way, then to the left and up. First door at top."

Cameron said: "Thanks."

He lighted a cigarette, went slowly past the phone booth and along the corridor. When he climbed the stairs he got his right hand in the gun pocket, closed the fingers of it over the grip. The door was closed and he knocked on the wood with left-hand knuckles.

Grindell called: "Sure—come on in."

Cameron opened the door and went inside. When he closed it behind him he used his left hand. Grindell's black eyes saw that, and he looked at Cameron's right pocket. The office was small. There was a desk, two chairs and a divan. The walls had photographs of people in dinner clothes and of dancing girls not in dinner clothes. There was a picture of Harry Greb over the desk.

Grindell said: "I expected you, Cameron. I'm sorry to hear about Britton."

The city editor stood with his back to the door. "Naturally," he replied. "It's pretty tough."

Grindell ran a big hand through his bushy hair. His lips seemed straighter and thinner than ever, and his face more oily.

"It just goes to show you that it doesn't pay to joke," he said a little thickly. "You might have thought I was really sore, up in your place tonight. Might have figured I'd get Britton, the way I was putting things."

Cameron made a little gesture with his left hand.

"I might have," he agreed.

There was a short silence, then Grindell said:

"I can give you a tip, Cameron."

The city editor nodded. "Fine," he said tonelessly.

Grindell was watching his right coat pocket as he spoke.

"Carters was a foolish guy. He liked to gamble but he didn't always like to pay. There were some pretty important boys in town from Chicago last week. I hear some things, you know. Some things you might not hear, even on your job. I hear Carters played and lost a lot. But he didn't feel like paying. Claimed it wasn't on the level. They threatened him, but he didn't pay. So they got sore and let him have it. Britton happened to be around, and Carters may have mentioned some names. This bunch learned that Britton was with Carters when he died, so they played safe—they got Britton."

Cameron smiled with his lips tight-pressed. Then he opened his mouth very slowly and yawned.

"Lousy," he said simply.

The night-club owner straightened in his chair. Red showed through the oily yellow of his skin.

He said in a hard tone: "You don't like it, Cameron?"

The city editor shook his head. "I wouldn't like it even if someone besides yourself had thought it up," he replied coldly.

The red stayed in Grindell's cheeks. His eyes were slitted on the city editor's steady brown ones.



"Going to try and drag me into it, Cameron?" he asked.

Cameron shook his head. "No," he replied. "I just came in to tell you something. About thirty minutes ago they pulled Nan Boggs' body out of the Allegheny."

Grindell's knuckles got white on the arms of his desk chair. His body lifted a little, then sagged. He breathed very slowly, through his nose. Then he smiled.

"Nan Boggs, eh?" he muttered. "It seems to me—I remember the name."

Cameron smiled almost pleasantly. "You should," he stated. "She was your particular girl friend for a couple of years, until you got fed up with her. But you never got so fed up with her that you couldn't use her now and then—on business matters."

Grindell stood up and said harshly: "Now, listen—Cameron—I don't have to take—"

"Now listen, Grindell—" The city editor's voice was steady—"you sit down and let me do the talking."

The cloth of his right pocket moved slightly and Grindell looked at the shaped-out bulge of the Colt. He sat down heavily.

Cameron said in a quiet tone. "The police tell me the girl'd been using coke. She bungled her job tonight and someone didn't think you'd mind much if they finished her. So they did."

Grindell half-closed his black eyes. "What job?" he breathed.

The city editor smiled thinly. "The job on me," he replied. "The play to get me down along the river, to a barge called the *Elsie*, if I was that dumb. And if I wasn't that dumb, and it didn't look as though I were to fall for it, the idea was to get me on the street."

The night-club owner looked puzzled. "Someone tried to get you?" he muttered.

Cameron nodded. "That's it. Now you're thinking fast. Several of them tried to get me. If I'd gone to the *Elsie*

—they'd have done it without too much trouble, unless I'd brought cops along. And then they'd have waited. The girl was shaky and lost her nerve before she got to me. She wasn't cool enough. You probably spoiled her, Grindell."

The night-club owner shrugged. "I remember the Boggs girl," he said. "Haven't seen her in months."

Cameron looked at Grindell's hands. "Why don't you go down to the morgue and take a look?" he suggested.

Grindell half-closed his eyes. "What do you suppose they wanted to get you for, Cameron?" he said softly.

The city editor looked at Grindell's eyes. His own held a hard smile.

"They figured that Britton knew who had killed Carters, or was pretty close to it. They got him. And then someone was very bright and figured he might have told me."

Grindell nodded his big head very slowly. "That's just about what it was," he said. "Sure."

Cameron looked at Grindell's hands again. "Sure," he repeated. "Sure as hell, Grindell. But why would gamblers worry about me? They might get Britton, but what would make them think I knew what he knew?"

"They were just trying to play safe," Grindell said.

The city editor stopped smiling. "You were just trying to play safe, Grindell," he said steadily.



THE night-club owner stared at him. His lips twitched and he started to smile. Cameron said:

"Don't laugh too soon, Grindell. That's the way you've been working this—getting in close and laughing. Staying right alongside of me, and figuring you could do the job so perfectly you couldn't be touched."

Grindell chuckled hoarsely. His eyes got suddenly hard and he gestured towards the door.



"Outside, Cameron!" he ordered. "Down the corridor and to the right. Just keep going—"

Cameron took the gun out of his pocket and held it low at his right side. Grindell stopped talking and look at it. The city editor spoke quietly.

"Remember the title of the book you saw on one of my men's desks?" he asked. "It was '*Dead Men Tell No Tales*.'"

Grindell frowned at the gun. "Good book?" he asked.

Cameron said: "I don't know—I never read books. But it's a lousy title. Because dead men *do* tell tales."

The faint beat of the dance orchestra came into the room. Cameron was smiling again, a hard, unpleasant smile. Grindell looked at him with narrowed eyes.

"And you're going to hear a dead man tell one—in a few minutes," Cameron said. "I don't think you're going to like it, either."

The night-club owner put his left hand on the edge of the desk and his fingers jerked a little.

"I don't know what you're getting at, Cameron," he said harshly.

The city editor's eyes were very cold. "I'm going to play a phonograph record for you," he said softly. "It isn't a jazz record. The recording isn't perfect, but you'll recognize the voice. It'll be Britton's."

Grindell's fingers stopped tapping the wood of the desk. His thin lips parted and he breathed slowly through his mouth. Cameron said:

"I got the record through the mail, yesterday. Britton made it right after he learned what he talked about. He always has fooled around with discs, making his own. But you know that."

Grindell said shakily. "How in hell—would I know anything about what Britton did?"

Cameron's smile went away. "Because he became important to you, Grindell," he said very slowly. "You murdered Carters, and when you doubled

back, after getting rid of the gun, you found Britton at Carters' side."

The night-club owner stood up and half raised a hand. Cameron moved the gun slightly and Grindell lowered his hand. Cameron said:

"You asked Britton questions, but his answers didn't suit you. You were pretty sure Britton knew something. And he did. He came in and told me what he knew. We both figured he was in a bad spot. We both knew you were a killer. So Britton went to his place and made the record. Then he sent it through the mails to me. It's a good record. But you won't like it."

Grindell's black eyes were staring at Cameron's. The city editor said slowly and softly, his voice coming above the beat of the dance orchestra:

"Carters said to Britton: 'Grindell sent me this load—he's been cheating on me, running my place here. Grindell got me.' That's on the record, in Britton's words. And there are other things on the record, Grindell. Britton tells what you asked him, after you came out and found him with Carters. He gives his replies. You were anxious, Grindell—damn' anxious. And at the end of the disc Britton suggests that if anything should happen to him that looked like murder—the first part of the record explains who murdered, and why."

Grindell said hoarsely. "It's a lie—a rotten, dirty—"

Cameron smiled with his eyes almost closed. "Carters was running this place, backing it. I've known that for months. You were cheating on him and he found it out. So you got him right out here, and tried to make it look like something else. Britton blundered in, and that made it tough. You finished him, and you tried to finish me. You weren't worried about what I know, but you knew that with Britton dead I'd go after his killer until I got him. You thought I might run into something."

Grindell touched his fingers against desk wood and breathed evenly and slowly.



Cameron spoke quietly. "I've got the record at the paper. We'll pick up a couple of dicks and go over there. Then we'll dig up a phonograph and all sit around and listen. After that—things will move fast. It may take five or six months, at that. But you're taking the drop for *this* one, Grindell."

Grindell's left-hand fingers trailed along the wood of the desk and Cameron saw the button they were moving towards. He said sharply:

"Never mind that stuff, Grindell! When I said we'd pick up a couple of detectives I didn't mean we'd have to go far to do it. There's one in the corridor and a couple more in the foyer. You weren't bright enough, Grindell."

Grindell let his body sag forward, as though he were going down in a faint. When his knees had almost touched the floor he leaped forward. Cameron squeezed the trigger of the Colt once, and the room was filled with crash sound. Cameron twisted his body to one side and Grindell battered against the wall. He went down to the floor heavily, rolled over. But his right hand was digging under his left armpit as he rolled. Cameron said:

"No—"

He backed away slowly, caught the glint of steel in the office light. He squeezed the trigger of the Colt the second time. Wood of the desk spurted close to him as Grindell's gun made racket on top of the second crash. Cameron lowered the muzzle of the Colt a little and fired for the third time.

There were shouts and footfalls beyond the room, in the corridor. Through the drifting smoke Cameron saw Grindell's gun slip from his fingers. The big man said weakly:

"Don't—I've had—enough—"

The door swung open and Benson came in, gun in his right hand. He looked down at Grindell.

Cameron said: "He came for me, and I let him have it. He murdered Carters because Carters had caught him cheating

out here and he was in a bad spot. It looked easy, but Britton blundered into things. Grindell had him finished."

Grindell said weakly, from the floor: "Carters was no good—he was born to be cheated on. I wouldn't go to stir—for him—so I—got him. Two of us did the—job on Britton—but you'll never know the other name—not from me. Britton knew—too much."

He smiled up at Cameron, weakly, twistedly. "Dead men—don't talk—" he breathed in a whisper. "That is—not much—"

His head and shoulders swayed, he fell heavily to the right. Cameron lowered his gun arm slowly and Benson bent over the club owner. He straightened slowly.

"Finished," he said.

Cameron nodded. Benson was looking at him with a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"What did he mean by that last 'not much—'?" he asked.

The city editor said tonelessly. "I bluffed him into getting scared enough to try a break for it. I told him Britton had made a disc of Carters' last words. And I told him I had the disc, and that Britton said on it that Carters had told him Grindell was his killer. And I told him that Britton said on the disc that if anything happened to him it would be easy to figure why."

Benson blinked. "And there wasn't any disc?" he said huskily.

Cameron shook his head. "I remembered that Britton had a pretty fair voice. And he made records of it on a cheap little machine he had. A couple of them were pretty good. That gave me the idea—the rest was bluff."

Benson swore softly. "I had an idea Grindell was mixed up in it," he breathed. "But I didn't see how we were going to hang it on him. He was a tricky guy."

Cameron looked down at the club owner's body. "The trickiest ones get scared," he said simply.



# South Wind

By THEODORE A. TINSLEY



*Jerry Tracy, maker of wisecracks,  
cuts in on a bit of Southern tragedy*

**B**UTCH'S big feet always shuffled when he was worried or puzzled. As he led the old man into the private Broadway cubby of the *Planet's* famous columnist, he squirmed his huge shoulders sidewise and his soles dragged like twin ashcans.

He shot a brief glance at Jerry Tracy and resumed his fore and aft scrutiny of the visitor.

In the canny experience of Butch old guys like this worked the novelty grift between Longacre Square and the lobby of the Republic Theatre. They were

hired by the Minsky Brothers or maybe Luckyfield cigarettes. Every few yards on their strolling they pressed a button and an electric sign lit up on their shirt-front, or maybe on the seat of their pants. They all wore crummy Prince Alberts like this in the daytime and changed to dress suits with shiny shirt-fronts after dark; and they all sported that white, goatlike whisker under the lower lip. Must be a rule of the union, Butch figured.

Butch waited stolidly to get the office from Jerry—either a discreet scam for himself or a swift bum's rush for the old bird.

"Mistuh Je'y Tracy?"



A soft, blurry voice. Southern. The columnist looked at the straight back, the mild eyes. Sixty, he guessed. His gaze dropped to the veined back of the hand resting on the knobbed cane. It was puckered and fragile looking, spotted on the skin with faint brown marks like overgrown freckles. Jerry changed his guess. Seventy, at least.

He answered the formal query with a brisk; "Check. What's the complaint?"

The old man sat down.

"Why, no complaint, I reckon. It's merely that I've been info'med, suh, that you're in a position by virtue of yo' knowledge of theatrical matters and Bro'dway, to render me a kindly service—"

Uh, uh! Here comes the bee, Jerry thought. He could almost hear it buzz. In a moment it would alight painlessly on his wallet and fly away with a buck. Well, maybe two, damn it! The old fella looked pretty tired; the hand that mopped his face was trembly . . .

"I've come to see you about my granddaughter, Mist' Tracy. I tho't—I've been reliably info'med—that you could probably help me find her."

Tracy's eyes narrowed. Might be the McCoy; might be a build-up. Too hot to speculate. The dead pan of his bodyguard wasn't much help.

"Outside, Butch," he suggested curtly.

The old man was fingering the edge of an inner pocket. "I've got a photograph—"

"Just a minute, Colonel."

"Major, suh," he corrected courteously. "Major Geo'ge Fenn."

"Okey by me . . . What makes you think I find women? Somebody tell you I was a private op? And who gave you the address? Been over to the *Planet* office?"

"Yes, suh. I forgot—I saw a gentleman named Hennessey, I believe, and he gave me this yere note."

"Let's have a look, Maje," said the columnist grimly. Dave Hennessey was getting to be pretty much of a lousy nuisance lately! Him and his nose for

news! Jerry would put a cover on his can the next time he saw him!

He ripped open the envelope and read the thing with a scowl.

*"The attached prize package has been getting under our feet and walking around presses looking for you. He refuses to spill the plot except to Mistuh Tracy, suh. Maybe there's a gag in the guy. If there isn't, toss him to Butch. D. H."*

Jerry crumpled the message disgustedly and flipped it into the wastebasket.

"That makes everything as clear as the depression," he grinned. "Who sent you over to the *Planet* in the first place?"

"The clerk at the hotel. Mr. Collins. A ve'y nice man. Most helpful an' courteous. When I explained to him that Alice Anne was in the theatrical profession he said that—"

"I know. He said Jerry Tracy, just like that. He's not Snitch Collins, by any chance, of the dear old San Pueblo?"

"That's right. That's where I'm stoppin'. I like it first-rate, suh. Ve'y quiet. No noise. The cab driver recommended it."

His wrinkled eyes smiled.

"New Yo'k is a real homey town. As nice an' friendly folk as you'd find in the hull of No'th Ca'lina."

Tracy nodded absently. Friendly, all right . . . The friendly hackman, cruising around Penn Station in a gyp-wagon, hauling fresh meat to the San Pueblo, pulling down his commission. The friendly Snitch Collins, steering the old guy to the *Planet* on the off chance that his joint might horn in on some publicity for a change. The friendly Hennessey, his Irish nose alert for a cheap hot-weather gag for his lip-reading customers . . . Just a great big friendly town!

And quiet! You couldn't find a quieter spot than the San Pueblo Hotel



if you started at the Aquarium and walked all the way to Gun Hill Road. The San Pueblo specialized in dense silence. The hard-pan dicks who dropped in for an occasional chat with the guests and the management, did all the loud talking. A month back they had carried out a small blonde exhibit from a room on the fifth floor. The Tabs made an awful noise. "*Dance Hostess Slain by Fiend!*" But the San Pueblo merely said: "Tsk, tsk!" got a pencil and a *Racing Form* and stretched out in its underwear to study the Pimlico results with the shades discreetly pulled.

Tracy said, in a flat murmur: "Yeah, it's pretty quiet . . . The granddaughter's in show bizness, you say—her name's Alice Anne Fenn and you say she's been up here—"

"Fo' years, suh. But I haven't had any letters since—"

"Let's see the photograph."

He studied it with a scowl. The picture was about as helpful as ear-muffs in August. A faded three-quarter pose of a girl about sixteen in a fluffy white dress, with a white ribbon on her hair and a rolled diploma in her left hand.

"Her graduation picture," said the old man proudly. "First in her class. Smart as a buggy whip."

"What's her stage name? Never told you, eh?"

"No, suh. I always wrote to Alice Anne at general delivery. She wasn't much hand at answerin' letters and for the last two years—"

"I know."

Damn' right, he knew! An actress, eh? that meant she might be anything. A waitress in Childs, a salesgirl in Gimbel's basement. Or she might be demonstrating corn-razors or opening day-beds in a store window. Pounding the sidewalks of Sixth Avenue or doing a strip act in a cheap burlesque show. Hell—for all he knew she might have a coupla kids and be living in the Bronx, married to a shoe-clerk. Try to find a stage-struck kid from the South in this burg!

New York was lousy with Southern gentlewomen trying to get their monickers up in the lights.



He picked up a sheet of paper, folded it, tore a semi-circle out of the crease. He opened the paper and laid it flat on the photograph with the girl's face in the hole.

He studied it, looked away with eyes closed, studied it again. There was something vaguely familiar about that isolated head in the center of the white sheet. Add a few years, subtract the schoolgirl simper . . . Hmm . . . Lower-lip pout, round face and movie chin; moonlight and honey-suckle in the slow drawl of that famous second act exit . . .

Behind his own closed eyelids jigsaw letters joined hands and formed a name. Lola Carfax, by —! Lola . . .

When he opened his eyes his face was wooden.

"Can't place her at all, Major," he said. "Some more dirt, please."

"Suh?" The old man looked puzzled.

"Details. Dope. Information."

Major George Fenn wiped his moist face and began tremulously to recollect. Jerry sucked a pencil end and listened.

Alice Anne was the only kin—his only granddaughter—all he had left—he was gettin' old, powerful lonesome. Smart little tyke; she used to play with his watch-chain an' call him Marse Geo'ge. The Fenns came from Thunder Run, in No'th Ca'lina. Not much of a place, but pretty, suh . . . Saggin' fences an' houn' dawgs blinkin' lazy, with their paws couched in the red dust o' the road. Thunder Run warn't much of a crick but it certainly did thunder, by Judas Priest! when the stars made everythin' else quiet an' the spray kep' brashin' an' gurgling in the dark over them flat stones. An' the hills—blue, suh!—with hawks driftin' like dots an' fat white clouds that never moved . . .



"So Alice Anne packed up and left," Tracy reminded him.

That was correct. She went No'th. Grandpap couldn't hold her, not after she married that damn' Jeff Tayloe. Only seventeen, she was. Headstrong as a colt.

Jerry stopped sucking the pencil abruptly. So La Carfax was married! Well, well—and also, hum, hum!

Jeff Tayloe was a scamp, it seemed. A damn' cawn-pone hill-billy with white teeth an' a big laughin' voice—an' she ma'ied him. Three months later Jeff was in jail and Alice Anne smiled calculatin' an' far-away, packed up and went North. Plenty o' spunk. She wrote letters for a while, then they stopped coming. Never told him her new name—he always wrote to Alice Anne Fenn at general delivery, and after a while his letters came back with big carmine rubber-stamp marks all over them.

"How long since she left, did you say?" Tracy murmured.

"Four years this Fall."

Humm . . . Lola Carfax—seventeen and four—check! Three years since Hymie Feldman picked her out of thin air and gave her the juicy lead in "Southern Charm." A natural! Couldn't act worth a plugged dime, but her drawl—oh, man! And her luscious innocence in the second act—oh, ma-a-a-an! And her wise, case-hardened persistence in the part after the smash-hit closed. Little Lola knew instinctively what the wise critics didn't—that Southern Charm was a golden racket in a big evil-minded burg, if you played the role on Park Avenue and met the right people and your voice was as soft and velvety as pollen on a bee's thigh . . . A luscious peach from the Southland with a small, rotten pit tucked snugly away in the fruit. Jerry knew the outlines; Patsy would know a hell of a lot more!

He said, absently, "Beg pardon?"

"—my declinin' years," the old man was saying in a slow, stately murmur.

"The last prop of my house. If you could only find her—"

"I thought you said she had a brother," Tracy lied in an odd voice.

The old man hadn't said anything of the kind, yet he nodded.

"Did I mention him? Her brother, Henry Fenn, made the supreme sacrifice in France, suh. She's all I have left."

"Check," said an odd, gasping voice in Jerry's brain. "No brother to guide her. Then who whelped Buell Carfax? And—holy sweet hominy!—can it be that young Massa Buell has white teeth and a big, laughing voice? Also, how tight are Southern jails, I wonder?"

He was burning with a desire to get to Patsy and soak up her slants on the subject. Patsy could spear a fish like Lola Carfax with a dozen well-chosen words.

He got to his feet, smiled, held out his hand.

"Tell you what, Major. You've got me interested. I don't recognize the photograph but I'll keep it, if you don't mind. You wait for developments at the San Pueblo—I'll have Butch ride you over in a cab. It may take a little time to trace Alice Anne—"

"I was hopin' you might find her for me in the next fo'ty-eight hours," Major Fenn said faintly. "Circumstances at Thunder Run make it impe'ative, I'm afraid—"

Busted. The old fella had his fare probably and a small, carefully counted roll . . .

"We'll do the best we can, Maje," said Tracy cheerfully.

He stepped into the outer office and leaned over Butch's cauliflower ear.

"Take this guy over to the San Pueblo. After you've parked him, go up to Snitch Collins at the desk and tell him I said to keep his hooks off the major. Tell him if he doesn't I'll send someone over there that'll take him by the ears and smash every—chair in the lobby with his heels! Tell him that from me."

Butch made a slow spittle-noise with



his lips. He pulled his unfailing joke, a high-pitched falsetto: "Is that a pwomise?"

He went out with the major and Tracy walked to the window and stared across at the dirty façade of the Times Building.

He put on his hat after a while and went out.



TYPEWRITERS were clicking busily in the *Planet's* big news room. Hennessey looked up from the city desk as Tracy breezed by.

"Hi, Jerry! Get any belly laffs outa the old gempmum?"

"Shut up, you ape, or I'll raise a high hat on your skull!" Tracy grinned. "Patsy around?"

"Where d'yuh get that Patsy stuff? Lay off! I happen to know she don't like it."

"Brrr! You happen to know! You wouldn't know if your collar was unbuttoned, Dave. See you later when you got money."

He turned a corner, went down a corridor and stepped into the third cubby on the left.

"Hawzit, Patsy?"

"H'lo, Bum." She sat back. "Lousier an' lousier. This place makes me sick. I could be fired right now for what I think. I've been toying with the quaint notion of expunging myself from the payroll."

"So what? And if same occurs?"

"I could try newspaper work for a change."

"Ouch! That hurt!" He looked at her with alert eyes.

"No kiddin', Jerry," she said gravely.

She was tall and slim, almost loose-jointed. Nice face, dark hair and eyes, small mouth. She dished up society news and could write with a cruel, jewel-like hardness when the need arose. It seldom did. Her customers rode in the Bronx Express and liked prose

poems about Piping Rock. She could turn that stuff out in her sleep. She and Jerry were the twin stars that made the circulation manager of the *Planet* sing in his bathtub. Doris Waverly's Chat, syndicated . . .

She had been born in a beery flat on Tenth Avenue. Kicked loose, saved up, pulled a grim A.B. out of Vassar—talked nice to strangers and tough to friends. Her real name was Veronica Mulligan. Tracy called her Patsy and she liked it. Hennessey, the city editor, tried it once and she curled him like Cellophane with a brief, pungent description of his type, straight out of the Elizabethan drama.

"Ever hear of Lola Carfax, of the ole Southern Carfaxes?" Tracy asked her.

"Ah reckon Mistuh Beauregard. . . . Why ask me? You've got the rat assignment, Jerry."

"Come, come, child! Poppa wants the dirt."

"Want it brief?"

"Uh, uh."

"I'll say it slowly. She's a wise, crooked, honey-drawlin', little—"

"I getcha. B as in bird-dog."

"And not the Poppa, either. . . ." She grinned. "Why the sudden interest?"

"Her grand-pappy's in town. The real name, if you'd like to know, is Alice Anne Fenn. Take a long look and say yes or no."

She studied the photograph.

"It's Lola, all right. That's one dame that can make the hackles rise on me. She and her pretty brother!"

"What's he like, this brother? Wait—don't talk! Has he got nice strong, white teeth and a big laughing voice?"

"That's Buell. Add the professional drawl and the phoney courtly manner and he's yours."

The columnist's smile cut a little crease in his face.

"What makes you think I want him? Listen, Patsy! She married him when he was Jeff Tayloe, when she was shy



and seventeen, in the dear old deep Southland."

"Tell me some more," Patsy said slowly. Her dark eyes were like agate.

He told her a lot. When he had finished she nodded.

"I've often wondered about Buell Carfax," she admitted. "He's only been on the scene for a year or so. Her graft is no mystery but I never could figure brother Buell. They're smooth workers. Right now I'd say they're both definitely in the inner sanctum. I've only heard one 'no' since Lola gave Park Avenue the office. It came from old Miss Lizzie Marvin of Sutton Place. Somebody said: 'Dear little Lola! Such a sweet child!' And the ancient virgin from Sutton Place smiled her wise old smile. 'The little girl in white? Ah, yes. . . . She fairly stink-ks of Southern charm!' I had all I could do to keep from hugging the old warhorse!"

Jerry lit a cigarette, leaned over the desk and blew smoke against his trick Panama.

"Scene changes. What about this Doctor Altman? Profile, please."

Her lips curled.

"There's a suspicious nose in the profile, but the good doctor is Church of England. Edgar Louis Altman. He gets around. Surgeon, polo, squash—maybe Lola Carfax."

"Why maybe?"

"There's always a big maybe about matrimony—did I tell you the girl was smart? She's been in the money for months, but like old Robert E. Lee, she won't surrender without a ceremony. If I were you I'd bet on matrimony. Altman has sunk enough dough already to make a wedding look like good economy. He's chasing her hard, Jerry."

"I'll make a note of that," he grinned. "The little girl is chased."

She said irritably: "Stay sober. How about Buell Carfax? The big brother with the nice teeth."

"You asking me, Patsy? A nice boy like Jeff Tayloe gets out of a North

Carolina jail, sees something in a roto-gravure, reads something else in the social chatter, picks a few pockets and comes North. What a lovely reunion *that* must have been! I'd say the split was 50-50, but we know Lola is smart so maybe he's only cutting a straight 10 per cent. Even at that, he could play ball—it's a life job, Patsy, and a handsome brother with a smooth line is worth 10 per cent of anyone's dough."

Her face clouded. "And the old grandpappy's in town? He sounds nice. It's nice to find someone that's McCoy once in a while. . . . Where's he parked?"

Jerry chuckled. "You'd never guess. San Pueblo. Nice and quiet, he says."

"Holy cats! Well—what are you going to do?"

"None of your damn' business."

"I'd like to talk to the old fella."

"You'd *better* like it," he said. "You've been talking to too many phonies lately. It spoils your temper. Go on over and pump him. It's a tonic. Tell him I've got a lead. If you have time you might drop in on the Carfax suite and smell the air. . . . What would you like to do tonight?"

"You wouldn't understand, you heel."

"The hell I wouldn't! I'll shoot an arrow, just to show you. Let's go yokel for the evening."

"Are you kidding?"

He pulled on his Panama, snapped the trick brim, waited.

"A corned-beef dinner," said Doris Waverly, Inc. "With cabbage, or you can go to hell! A ride on the Staten Island Ferry. We'll sit on the top and you'll keep your mouth shut and hold my hand. Did anyone ever tell you you talk too much?"

He leaned over and kissed her on the tip of her sharp nose.

"You simple-minded ape," he said, and went out the door, grinning.

She's got the summertime heebies, he decided mentally. The poor kid looked seedy, tired. He'd siphon a coupla



drinks into her tonight and try to wise-crack her out of the gloom.

**B**UT Patsy wasn't to be blarneyed. She was glum over the corned-beef, sour on the boat ride. She borrowed his butts and stared morosely at the lights of St. George. The boat thudded monotonously; the vibration tickled their feet.

"How'd you enjoy Lola and the boyfriend?" he inquired.

"Dead fish," she snapped. "Must be a few more in the Harbor tonight. Get that sweet whiff! Do you s'pose it's true that Indians used to paddle around this lousy burg in clean water before the smell era?"

"Don't go Noble Redman," he grinned. "Friend of mine went to Taos once. According to him, the Injun kids learn to smell long before they learn to eat."

"I wouldn't be surprised. . . . I saw a clean show today, Jerry."

"You're telling me! How'd you like the old fella?"

He watched the slow smile come and go.

"Ni-i-ce. An old-fashioned road show crammed full of hoke. . . . I don't think it was good for me. Made me think of Dennis Aloysius."

"Do I know Dennis?"

"Why should you?" she said, sweetly. "He was the respected sire. The ancestor. Tenth Avenue. Waterfront whiskey. Beer by the scuttle for a chaser."

Her cigarette end glowed jaggedly, once, twice, and then went over the rail in a long arc.

"You're swell company," said the columnist feebly.

They stood outside the gaunt cavern of the South Ferry Terminus and a hackman threw open his door invitingly.

Tracy said: "You need a coupla highballs, cheerful!"

"No." She hesitated. "But if you knew where we could get a tall glass of good old-fashioned beer—"

Tracy grinned. "With pretzels." "And some Roquefort and crackers—and a slice of Bermuda onion."

Jerry turned to the chauffeur.

"Okey, Rocco. Click us uptown till you hit Third Avenue. I'll tell you where to stop."

They downed a couple of tall ones, found out they were hungry, and fixed that too. They walked over to Fifth.

On the downtown bus the girl said, suddenly: "What are you going to do about Anne and the last of the Fenns?"

"Have I got to tell you that again? None of your damn' business."

"You always were a consistent rat!" she said with cold rage.

Tracy chuckled without rancor.

"Here's the schedule. Go over to see Massa Geo'ge Fenn tomorrow morning. Tell him that Old Sleuth Tracy knows all and that the search has been successful. Take him over to the Consolidated Ticket Offices and if they roll Pullmans as far as Thunder Run, say Pullman as though you meant it."

"Any other little jobs?"

"Sure. Check him out of the San Pueblo. See that Snitch Collins behaves himself on room extras. Then I'll let you bring the major over to me. I'll be in the Times Square hideout. Any questions? Dismissed!"

He pressed the stop buzzer.

She wrenched around to look at him. Her voice was a whisper, a mere thread.

"You lousy heel, if you do anything or say anything to hurt that old man, I swear to — I'll —"

"My corner. I get off here," said the columnist.

He tipped his hat, swayed down to the rear of the bus and swung off. He called up from the sidewalk: "So long, Babe."

She leaned over the rail and gave him a furious farewell—a loud and rather fruity bird.

"Ding, ding," went the bell. The grinning conductor leaned way out to stare. He hung like a swaying chimpanzee for the next five blocks.





**M**R. BUELL CARFAX was tall, handsome, with cold eyes and a small ash-blond mustache. He bowed briefly to Tracy and shot a quick flicker at the stolid Butch. Tracy had forgotten to mention Butch over the wire.

"I hardly think, Mister Tracy," said the courtly brother of Lola, "that Mis' Carfax would care to be interviewed. Any news of plans, social engagements and so fo'th is, of co'se, sent to yo' readers regularly by Mis' Carfax's secretary."

Tracy said: "This is different."

"If there is anything that I personally might—"

Tracy said, again: "This is different."

The cold eyes focused on him. After a moment they blinked.

"Very well. This way, please."

Nobody said anything to Butch. He trailed after Tracy. Lola Carfax was standing on the far side of the room, examining a small hunting print on the wall. She didn't turn around.

Buell said, in his stately drawl: "Lola, honey, here's that newspaperman."

She paid no attention. Tracy walked swiftly across. His smile was as thin as a hacksaw blade. He stood and looked at her back for a moment. He caught her eye reflected in the glass of the picture frame.

He said, deliberately: "Turn around, you cheap little grifter!"

She whirled. Her beauty was like the flash of a blinding ray. Tense, wordless, carved in ice. Her red lips were parted slightly, she seemed scarcely to breathe. Her eyes had the cold, hard glaze of a cat's.

Across the room, Buell Carfax gave a thick bellow of rage.

"Why, dam' yo' filthy Yankee—"

As he sprang forward his hand came away from his vest pocket. The light glinted on the muzzle of a tiny derring. Butch's hand thrust out with

the speed of a striking snake. His hairy fingers closed around the slender wrist and bent arm and weapon upward.

There was a muffled report; a short, straining tussle; Carfax squealed shrilly as his pinioned arm snapped.

Butch's left hand caught the slumping man by the throat and pinned him upright against the wall. He held him there almost casually. His attention was on the little derringer in his own right palm. Butch had never seen a toy like that before. He stared at it with the absorbed curiosity of a monkey.

Tracy smiled into the lovely eyes of Lola. She was lifeless, stiff, except for the candle-flame in her eyes. There was something eerie and horrible in the intensity of her fright. Her voice was barely audible.

"Is this a hold-up?"

"You're damn' right."

"What are you after?"

"Everything you got."

They were like conspirators whispering together in a dark cave.

"You can't get away with this. You must be insane. You're a madman."

He said to her: "No, I'm not—Mrs. Jeff Tayloe."

The flame he was watching was quenched for an instant and then blazed up brighter than before.

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

"Oh yes you do, baby."

There was no humanity in Tracy, either. Two lumps of ice whispering together.

He paused a moment.

"Thunder Run," he said. "It's in North Carolina. No comment?"

She watched him with that horrible immobility.

"Just an old-fashioned story about an old-fashioned gal. Once upon a time there was a gal. Pretty name. Alice Anne Fenn. Lots of brains but no judgment. She was always a sucker for white teeth and a big bass voice.



So she married a lousy hill-billy home from the wars, name of Jeff Tayloe—and Jeff carved a yaller gal in a particularly nasty way and went to jail—and little Alice Anne saw the Big Town beckoning, packed her cotton underwear and scammed North."

Tracy grinned like a wolf. Butch had pocketed the derringer. His left hand still pinned the boy friend against the wall. He was listening to the bedtime story with a puzzled interest.

"Only trouble was Jeff Tayloe was smart, too," the columnist resumed. "He wangled a pardon after a while and saw a photo and read the papers. He had pretty sharp eyes. It all worked out swell after the first dirty argument. Then they got down to business. Jeff got a break; Alice Anne got a well-built husband that she had kinda missed; Lola Carfax got a brother and a protector. Background means a lot on Park Avenue. Brother Buell was well worth the percentage he held out for."

His voice sounded friendly, quite cheerful.

"A swell arrangement for all hands except the fish. But the fish has dough, so who cares? This fish even thinks about marrying, believe it or not. Good old Doctor Edgar Looie Altman. Let's see; he lives at the *Mayflower*, doesn't he?"

The movie chin trembled. The little-girl eyes were grown up now and haggard. A bead of sweat gathered in the hollow under the red pout of her lower lip.

"Blackmail," she whispered stonily.

"You tellin' me?"

"You can't prove it. He'll throw you out on your face."

Tracy said, mildly: "I forgot to tell you. Grandpa's in town. Major Geo'ge Fenn. As innocent as a child—proud of his race and his lineage—as simple and honest as they come. I thought I'd take him over to see the Doctor."

Her throat made an ugly rattling sound.

"Damn your soul, if I had a knife I'd rip your belly—"

Slow tears welled from her eyes. He waited.

"How much?" she said, finally.

"I told you once. Everything you got."

"Five thousand, cash."

Tracy laughed at her.

"Put on your hat, lousy. Go get your bankbook. We're gonna take a walk and close an account."

"It's all I've got in the world. You'll strip me."

"That's a good start. You'll get along. . . . Keep an eye on the boy friend, Butch. We'll be back. Look this joint over."

Butch nodded and his big forehead creased with a self-conscious and intelligent frown. "Sure, sure." Buell Carfax's face was a dull purple. He was out on his feet. His broken arm hung limply.

She looked at him with a cold loathing as she went out. Tracy held open the door ceremoniously. He had a brief case with him. He had brought it along because he preferred cash.

When they returned Butch was sitting alone in an armchair, smoking a cigar. The top of his breast pocket looked like a pipe organ of Havana Specials. He nodded towards an inner room.

"On the bed in there, Mr. Tracy. I hadda slough him. How'd yuh make out?"

"Fair. Did you go over the joint?"

"Yop. Small change. . . . Got a baby roll outa his hip pocket. Coupla saw bucks in the bureau, wrapped up in a silk pantie."

He grinned, got up and took the heavy brief-case.

Lola Carfax watched them go. A faint moaning reached her ears from the inner room. She stood rigid, listening to the monotonous sound for a long time. A haggard face swam back at her from the small antique mirror on the wall.



She screeched at it suddenly. Sprang at the mirror and wrenched it down. Whirled, flung it viciously with both hands. Then she stood there shaking, looking dully at the jagged fragments.



PATSY brought Major Fenn into Tracy's little Times Square office with a slow, solicitous smile for the old man and a quick, stabbing scowl at the bland columnist. There was not much of Doris Waverly about her—and a whole lot of Veronica Mulligan. She looked worried, vaguely suspicious.

Tracy sprang up and gave the old man his chair. He hooked another one closer with his toe and Patsy snapped shortly: "Thanks," and sat down.

Tracy fiddled with a pencil and laid it down again.

"I, er . . . I promised I'd try to find your granddaughter, Major. It's been quite a search. I, er . . . I've been successful."

"You've found Alice Anne?"

"I've found out about her," Tracy said evenly.

"Where is she? Have you her address?"

The *Planet's* playboy hesitated.

"Do you want the truth? You'd like to know the truth, even if it—hurt?"

The shaggy eyebrows twitched. The pink face went gradually gray.

"I reckon the plain truth will suit me, suh."

The girl at his side made a sudden hopeless gesture.

"Listen, Jerry! You didn't find her. You're lying. You made a mistake."

"Shut up!"

His shaking voice became even again.

"I found her under her stage name. The identification is proved. The photograph of Alice Anne and the facts you gave me were conclusive evidence. . . . Did you ever hear of the Arcadia Theatre?"

No. George Fenn hadn't heard.

Neither had Veronica Mulligan, from the look on her face.

Jerry told them about it. It stood on Fifth Avenue and 59th Street, opposite the Park. The pride of New York—the old Arcadia Theatre. It housed nothing but the best, the finest, the cream. Alice Anne was its greatest star—its last glorious star.

The girl was staring at Tracy with amazement.

"A little over a year ago," Jerry said, "Alice Anne played her greatest role. In the middle of the second act there was a blinding flash backstage, a sheet of flame shot out from the proscenium. . . . There's a new hotel where the grand old playhouse stood. The theatre was totally destroyed."

The columnist's forehead was glistening with sweat.

"Alice Anne Fenn was standing in the wings in costume, waiting for her cue, when the flames came. She refused to leave the theatre; shook off the hands of rescuers. She knew there were two chorus girls, hemmed in by flame in a blind corridor on the dressing-room level. Alice Anne gave up her life in a vain effort to save those two girls."

He added, tonelessly: "When the ruins were searched she was not—found."

Patsy's palm rested suddenly on the back of the major's veined hand. Her eyes were hard and bright, enigmatic.

"Thank you, suh," George Fenn managed to articulate. He drew in a deep breath. "I certainly want to—to thank you for your—efforts—"

"Why, that's all right, . . . There—there were a few legal matters connected with your granddaughter's estate. I took the liberty of acting as your agent, signing for you. The trust officials were quite sympathetic, friendly."

He touched the fat brief-case awkwardly.

"The estate, of course, goes to you. I thought you'd like it in cash. It's



here—a little over ten thousand dollars.”

The columnist shifted slightly in his chair to avoid the angry challenge in Patsy's eyes. The old man wasn't listening at all; the talk of money was a meaningless buzzing on his ear-drums.

He said, gently: “She could do no other, being Fenn. She was suckled on gallantry, suh. . . . She used to twist my watch chain with her little fat fingers, call me Massa Geo'ge. . . . My dead son's child. . . .”

“You've got his ticket bought?” Tracy whispered to Patsy.

“Yes.”

He pressed a buzzer with a fierce, fumbling jab.

“All right, Butch. Take care of the brief-case. Go over to Penn Station with him. See him aboard.”

The major got slowly to his feet. He turned at the door and Patsy turned with him. Her arm braced his.

“I want to thank you,” said the major, “for yo' kindly help. New York's been mighty fine to me. Nothin' but friendliness in the two days I've been here. I'd feel it remiss not to thank you, not to let you know my deep gratitude.” He patted the hand on his arm. “You too, Mis' Waverly.”

They passed outside and the columnist heard Patsy's strained voice. “Wait a minute, Butch. Just a second.”

She came back and closed the door.

“Listen, Rockefeller! I'm in on this. Your damn' dough's no better than mine! I've got a half interest in the racket or I'll swing on your lip right now!”

He grinned at her in startled wonder.

“—! you're as pretty as a picture, Kid. . . . Don't be silly. It's not my dough.”

“Whose?”

“I went to the proper window for it. Carfax. I pumped her for every nickel she had.”

“Are you lying, you —?”

“Stop snuffling and show sense. Do I dig for ten grand of hard-earned Tracy jack because some old bozo

comes drifting in to put the bee on me? Grow up, baby; you're living in a big town.”

“It stinks,” she shrilled suddenly.

“Who said it didn't? So does Thunder Run. So does every other damn' burg. You're still soft, baby; get back in the water and boil some more.”

She stared at him with brimming eyes that jeered at him.

“Tell your friend Hennessey to run a *want-ad* in the *Planet*.”

“What do you mean?”

“I'm through with this lousy town. I'm going where I can breathe clean air.”

She fumbled in her handbag, threw an envelope on the desk in front of him. Jerry could see Pullman tickets—two seats—to Thunder Run.

She looked at him defiantly. “What the hell do you think of that!”

She swept the tickets into her purse and the door slammed.

A moment later it opened slowly.

“Jerry. . . . Hey, hardboiled. . . .” Her eyes were soft. “Any time you get sick of this crooked game, come on down to Thunder Run. I'd be awful glad to see you. . . . Anytime. . . .”

The door swung with a small click.

Tracy leaned back in his chair, cupped the back of his skull with his clasped hands. After a while he grimaced wanly.

“I'm not so tough,” he thought. “I gotta be careful or they'll have me pitchin' hay in Wichita—or wherever the hell you pitch hay!”

He dragged a notebook out of his pocket and flipped open the pages to a recent entry. He got up and went over to the dictaphone.

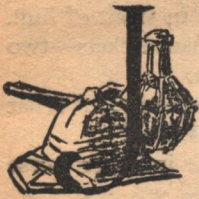
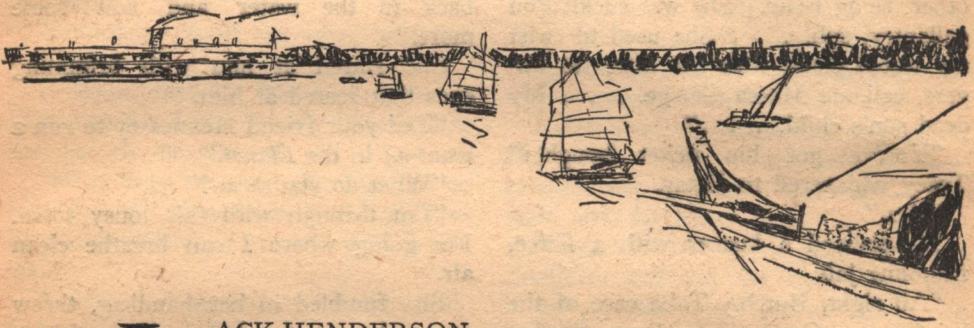
He shrugged and spoke nasally into the flexible tube of the instrument:

“Harvey Smith, feed and grain impresario, and his wife, the former Claire La Tour, are ffft-ffft. . . . Mrs. Smith has left for Reno to establish legal residence. . . . It's a girl. . . .”



# Fugitive

By JOSEPH T. SHAW



**JACK HENDERSON** sat dejectedly in his chair, at the familiar desk in Carrington's in Rangoon.

It was approaching midnight, the hour of the boat's departure to take him back to America, away, in disgrace; for he had forfeited his chance of substantial success. "Old Carry" had fired him, for the "good of his soul."

Henderson, sunk in a lethargy of despairing thought, was oblivious of his surroundings. Abruptly he raised his head to see before him old Danny Service, the night watchman, a friend of Henderson's years in Rangoon and at Carrington's.

Danny was yelling something—"Don't! It's me, Mister Jack—"

There was the roar of a pistol shot. Henderson saw Danny falling, caught a glimpse of a grimy, thumbless hand at his side; then the world crashed upon him.

He awoke to a dark hold of a river-boat, a fugitive, wanted for attempted murder and robbery as well. He fled upriver, following the trail of the man with the mutilated hand.

In Mogok, in the valley of the rubies, he came upon his quarry, a dark, surly brute, Somers.

In Mogok, too, Henderson, on the chance that seems to attend the discovery of all nature's treasures, found a ruby of great value.

At once, his plan to persuade Somers downriver was abandoned; with his newly found fortune his life was at stake. He fled again, before ten thousand natives.

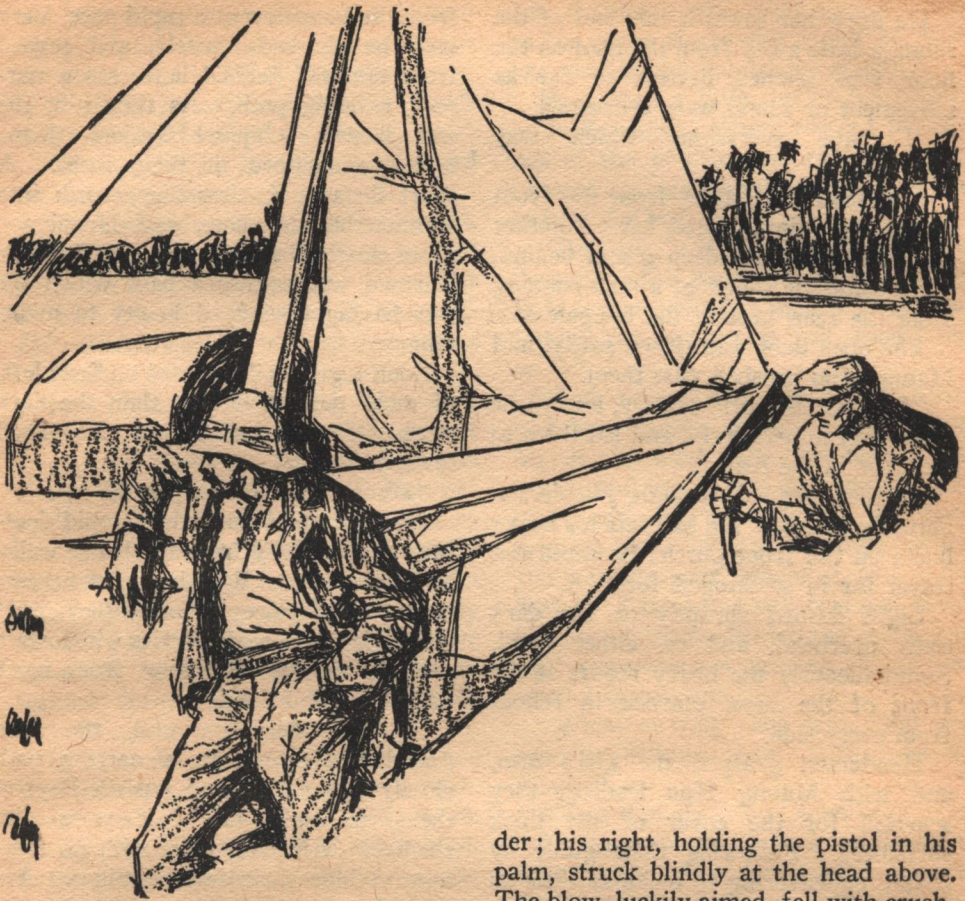
Two roads lead from Mogok to the world outside; one, the more direct and shorter, to the nearest landing on the Irawadi, Thabeit-kyin; the second, by a roundabout way through Momeit, to another landing much farther upstream.

Henderson planted evidence of his own murder on the Thabeit-kyin Trail, and fled to Momeit. On the way he saved the life of a Burmese miner, Maung Hpo, who guided him through the forests to the town.

He found a rest bungalow for the night; and to him came Helen Bassington, who was seeking escape from the place. There also came an under-officer whose suspicions were aroused by Henderson's appearance.

When the officer left, the girl, who had secreted herself outside, returned to tell Henderson that a guard was set about the bungalow.





They planned to attempt their escape just before dawn. Helen took the couch, while Henderson and Maung Hpo lay down on the veranda, either side of the closed door, to watch.

The stealthy opening of the door aroused Henderson, while the night was yet black. Noiselessly, he followed the intruder in, surmising that he must be the florid-faced officer who had kept Helen prisoner.

In the darkness, the man ahead stumbled against the table. Helen awoke with a little cry.

Henderson, holding his heavy pistol flatwise, was poised and ready.

JUDGING distance by sound alone, Henderson leaped forward. His outstretched left hand touched a shoul-

der; his right, holding the pistol in his palm, struck blindly at the head above. The blow, luckily aimed, fell with crushing force. There was a half uttered groan. A body thudded heavily to the floor—a startling noise on the preceding quiet, that was followed instantly by a tinkling sound, as of some metallic object spasmodically thrown aside.

"All right, Miss 'Bassington!" Henderson called in a loud whisper. "Come on, we'll have to run for it now."

He heard her feet lightly strike the floor as she swung from the couch. As he moved closer towards her, his feet struck a motionless form.

He stepped around it, stretched out his hand, and encountered hers.

"Are you all ready?" he whispered hurriedly.

"Quite—what has happened?"

"Reimer—knocked him out. We'll have to make a break for it. Where's your pack?"



He drew her towards one end of the room, a little away from the man on the floor who seemed lifeless so far as movement or sound were concerned.

"I have everything—which way shall—?"

A sudden loud shout from the front of the *sayat* interrupted her. Another answered from the deep gloom behind. Then came the sound of a man running from the rear, around the bungalow.

The open door was closed softly, and Maung Hpo brushed past them.

"*Meean! Meean!*" (hurry, hurry) he whispered imperatively, and led them to the door in the rear.

As they stepped through, Henderson abruptly paused. He had left his heavy boots on the front porch; he could not travel far in stocking feet.

Light flashed abruptly on the dark trees overhead, and on either hand. Simultaneously the heavy report at the front of the *sayat* crashed in echoes from every side.

Henderson grasped the girl's arm, and with Maung Hpo leading, they scurried for the cover of the thick shrubbery. Following their guide by sound, endeavoring to make as little as possible themselves, they dashed through bushes, between trees they could scarcely see, for a hundred paces, when Maung Hpo stopped and as Henderson came up thrust something into his hands. It was his pack and heavy boots.

Following the alarm of the gun shot, the guards had broken into excited cries. Now while Henderson drew on and laced his boots, answering shouts came from other directions.

The falling of that heavy body had startled the guards who were undoubtedly natives, and, true to form, they had gone into immediate panic. One had fired his gun for help. Soon they would summon courage to investigate, and once their officer was discovered, the news would spread like wild fire.

Henderson stood up; Maung Hpo stepped into the lane to listen an instant, then started in the direction away

from the bungalow at a rapid pace. Very soon he checked himself, and turned from the well-defined lane into a narrow, winding path. As they ran, the wet bushes whipped against them; branches snapped in their faces. A short distance farther they struck into another broader lane, and Henderson again caught the girl's arm, for the little Burman was setting a pace which she was having obvious difficulty to maintain.

Soon a great pile loomed on their left, of more definite outline than the dark trees. Henderson turned his head towards it.

"Monastery," Helen panted.

As they raced past, their rapid footfalls echoed dully from the blank walls, but there was no light in the structure; no sound of voice, although they could plainly hear the excited cries which were growing fainter and now from more directly behind them.

At the building's end, the lane dwindled abruptly to a narrow path closely bordered by low bushes. Beyond them, to right and left were dim shadows of broken form with no trees now to hide their faint outlines. Apparently, they had come so soon to the ruins of the older city fringing the outskirts of the present town.

The little Burman, however, kept steadily on, with his easy, distance-covering stride. Soon the path again broadened, and led through groups of many little towers and columns, showing weirdly in the dusk.

Beyond the pagodas they stepped abruptly into a well-defined roadway, and here, as if it marked the end of her endurance, Helen Bassington dragged to a stop, gasping heavily.

Maung Hpo turned his head, and came back to them.

Henderson, himself badly out of breath, supported the girl with a hand on her arm, and looked overhead where the stars were like glittering points of light.

He turned to look towards the hori-



zon where they were paler in a whitening glow, and saw a familiar outline—the great pagoda *Shwe Myindin*.

"Twinngé?" inquired Maung Hpo's soft voice at Henderson's elbow.

"Hmmm," said Henderson, and did not answer at once.

His awakening had been so abrupt, their flight so precipitate that he had given the matter no thought. Now, that he was forced to consider it, Twinngé did not seem such an obvious destination after all.

They had succeeded, as they had planned, in eluding the guards set around the bungalow, but the affair was altogether different now. If Henderson's blow in the dark had chanced to kill the officer, his plight could hardly be more serious. Even the native officials knew of his occupation of the *zayat*. No one else could possibly be suspected of the deed. He would be wanted for murder, and the country would be scoured for him.

In Momeit were military as well as civil police; the military post at Bernardymo was not so far away. Should he be captured, he might plead justification in the present matter; but there was the affair at Rangoon—and there was his ruby!

Henderson clamped his teeth savagely. He turned staring eyes into the dusk about them. Plainly, if faintly, the shouting in the town came to his ears. Before the general alarm could be given, and the actual pursuit started, he should be miles away—but in what direction?

He had been seen to enter Momeit along the Twinngé Trail; his assumed destination was Mogok. Obviously, they would search for him on the road to the valley; as certainly they would search his back trail—and Twinngé was fifty miles away.

There seemed to him no alternative except to take to the nearest thick forest with Maung Hpo to guide him.

But there was the girl, Helen Basington. She could not follow them through the unbroken forest into in-

definite hiding while they sought a way to the great river—nor could he leave her now in the immediate situation.

He cursed a little, under his breath, in futile anger. There seemed no way out of the predicament except to give himself up, and thereby gain protection at least for her.

"Tell me," Helen asked abruptly, "exactly what happened in the *zayat*? It is not entirely for myself I ask, but I think my own action will depend upon it."

"Fell asleep," he said hastily—"expect Maung Hpo did also. The creaking of the door awakened me—I followed, and heard that man crawling on his hands and knees across the floor towards you. S'pose he knew where you were by your breathing, as I could hear it. I tried to reach him and choke him into silence—he hit the table, and you spoke—he was getting to his feet when I struck him."

"When he fell," she said, "did you hear something ring with metallic sound?"

"Yes; thought it was a knife."

"I also thought that; I only wanted to be sure. It's sordid—but he evidently suspected I was there and was so angry that he wanted to murder me. He must have got in past the guards and probably thought he could escape, and the crime would be laid to you."

"That sounds reasonable," Henderson murmured, "and in that case they can hardly hold it against me, but I just don't want to be caught here."

"No," she said a little tensely, "and neither do I—I don't want all that story to get out here. If we could only get somehow to the river—to Rangoon—to Mr. Carrington—then we could tell the whole thing. Can Maung Hpo get us through?"

"Are you game for it?"

"At any rate, it's worth the try—and I can't bear to stay here longer," she breathed in lowered tone.

"Then," he asked abruptly, "what is this road?"



"The trail from the Yunnan—the road to Twinngé is several hundred yards over there to our left."

"The Yunnan Trail—that goes through Myitson, doesn't it? And Myitson is on the Shweli. If we can get a boat, we might do it down to Taguang—there you can get a steamer."

He turned to the little Burman and spoke hurriedly, and Maung Hpo gave his slow response.

"Maung Hpo says that we can surely get a boat!" he explained excitedly to Helen. "Myitson is not nearly so far as Twinngé, and they would hardly expect us to go in that direction. What say—it will be hard, but if you are game for it—"

The abrupt report of a gun interrupted him.

Almost immediately, another sounded, somewhat nearer.

"That's the summons to the barracks," Helen said. "I think we'd best start."

## CHAPTER XX



HEY crossed the flat of Momeit plain, at first in darkness, then in the twilight of coming dawn. Henderson led, and gauged their speed by the pace of which the girl seemed capable.

Helen's actions were mechanical. She walked when Henderson slowed his stride; she ran when his light grasp of her arm urged her.

Neither spoke to the other. Helen seemed apathetic, and while Henderson appeared to pay her scant attention, nevertheless, his change of pace each time was peculiarly adjudged to her reserve of strength.

They came to the shallow Nam-meik, and without a word, Henderson caught her up in his arms and carried her, dryshod, through the ford.

If he was conscious of the weight and

touch of her pliant, supple body, the faint fragrance of her brown hair against his shoulder, he gave no sign. He set her down immediately they reached the bank. She did not thank him; they hurried on.

With the dawn bright about them, they reached the first ascent, where the hard-packed trail wound up into the foothills—a long, steep climb to the height of the ridge beyond.

Maung Hpo brushed past them with a gesture and a warning word to Henderson to watch carefully behind. The little Burman loitered a little, while he casually observed Helen's stride.

Hours had passed since they had fled the bungalow, and their pace had been a steady one. The air had been cool, however, and so far, Helen showed no great fatigue.

Maung Hpo nodded at her encouragingly with his beaming, wholesome smile, then ran lightly ahead to lead them by fifty yards.

Watching him, Henderson noted how cautiously he approached every bend in the trail, and turned to nod or wave to them before going on. Each time they, too, paused, and Henderson studied the white trail over the flat, which grew longer in his vision as they went higher and higher.

With the greater height, the trail narrowed from the broad, beaten roadway on the plain until, on the steeper slopes, it was little more than a path. At these places, Henderson silently helped the girl with his hand on her arm.

As they reached the top of one of these abrupt rises, and Henderson turned to scan the road behind, an exclamation from Helen caused him to look quickly in the other direction.

Ahead and above them, Maung Hpo was faced in their direction, imperatively signaling towards the bush at one side of the trail.

"Something's coming," Henderson muttered. "He wants us to hide."

Grasping the girl's arm, Henderson forced their way through the dense



undergrowth of *thit-e* into a growth of hill chestnut.

He urged Helen onward until he found a spot sufficiently concealed from the trail, although by peering between the leaves he could make out a portion of it.

Helen sank to the ground a little wearily. He crouched on his knees beside her, and for moments intently listened and watched the vestige of path within his vision.

When he neither heard nor saw anything he twisted his head in the other direction where stretches of a light gray line marked the roadway on the plain. Not reckoning the speed or the height of their climb, he was surprised to find it so far below him.

Listening for sounds nearer at hand, he studied closely the bits of roadway until the line faded into the gray haze which the warmth of the sun was drawing over the flat land. He saw no moving creature.

His gaze wandered back to the nearby trail, and when nothing showed, he turned with apparent indifference to look where Helen sat with her slender shoulders against a convenient trunk.

The sunlight filtering through the leaves above her, touched her hair with tinges of gold. Her eyes, half closed, were gazing steadily, half dreamily down towards the plain which Henderson's own gaze had so recently scoured. Her strong, slender hands rested listlessly at her sides, giving a suggestion of dejection to her attitude that did not seem allied with fatigue.

Henderson frowned unconsciously.

Her eyes raised, and met his glance impersonally, with a wealth of sorrow and trouble in their depths.

He coughed a little embarrassedly.

"Tired?" he asked. There was no expression in his whispered tone.

She shook her head slightly, her eyes still on him but obviously with her thoughts not on his appearance.

A slight sound from behind caught

his attention. He turned, and carefully parted the leaves.

In the middle of the narrow roadway, a wiry little pony was trotting steadily down the grade. Another and another followed in single file; then several in a closer group.

By stooping slightly, Henderson could see the faces of the riders—tall, lean men, with coarse, black hair to their shoulders; low, broad foreheads and high cheek bones, with narrow eyes aslant.

"What are they?" Helen whispered at his elbow.

"Taiche, or Panthay, from Yunnan. Nice looking chaps."

"The most cruel, evil-appearing men I ever saw," she answered in the same guarded tone. "I had been wondering if it would not be better to turn eastward towards the coast rather than to go down the river—but with such men in the country—"

"They are tough, all right," Henderson whispered, "but they did me one good turn."

"How is that?"

"Maung Hpo. We had a little brush with a half dozen just like these."

"On the Twinngé Trail? I thought they rarely went that way."

Henderson frowned a little, as he watched the last of the riders disappear down the path.

"No; in the other direction."

Helen glanced at him quickly.

"I was sure something of the sort must have happened," she said after a moment. "Probably you saved his life. I have never seen such gratitude and devotion as show in his eyes when he looks at you. I like these true Burmans. They believe in caste, but like Maung Hpo, many of them have self-respect and are independent. I would trust him in anything."

"Yes," Henderson answered slowly, with a peculiar inflection, "*he* is perfectly reliable."

Helen looked at him again, quickly. "You are thinking of my careless re-



mark of last evening," she said without expression. "You should—"

"Hello," he interrupted her, "what is Maung Hpo up to now?"

She turned from him to the trail in time to see the little Burman trotting steadily past their hiding place, down the path.

Henderson gave a low, guarded whistle.

Without turning his head, Maung Hpo raised a hand directly before him, and quickly disappeared.

"Must have been caught, and has to bluff it out," Henderson muttered, "yet he knows where we are and we'd better wait."

A minute dragged by in strained, silent watching. Then a curious object bobbed into their view—tall, covered by rough cloth, whose motive power was not apparent until, by craning their necks, they saw the muscular brown legs twinkling underneath. Others followed close upon the first—a long line with a rider bringing up the rear.

"Packmen," Henderson whispered. "Remarkable what they can tote, day in and day out. Now, we've met the day's traffic from Myitson, and I expect we will have to wait until—"

A slight sound from behind them caused Henderson to turn swiftly.

Maung Hpo's broad, smiling face beamed through the leaves. In his eyes, however, was an expression of concern. The little Burman beckoned them towards him.

Henderson held the bushes apart for Helen until they had joined their guide. At once, with many glances behind and unusual care at the first of it, Maung Hpo led them directly away from the trail for a considerable distance. Then, instead of seeking a suitable place to rest and wait the passing of the caravans, he turned abruptly and continued straight up the steep ascent.

The way led constantly upward, and although Maung Hpo sought defiles and avoided the steepest rises, it was hard, rough going in the bush.

Henderson helped Helen wherever he could. He frowned unconsciously as he noted the tax on her strength; but the little Burman plodded steadily onward, while setting his pace to that of his companions.

An hour passed.

With the sun fairly overhead, Maung Hpo finally stopped where a clear rivulet trickled from a cool spring, and started preparations for their meal.

Helen dropped wearily to the ground, and half reclining, turned her gaze back towards the light haze that marked the plain now far below them.

Henderson swung his pack from his shoulder, and set out cold fowl and bread on the broad leaves which the little Burman brought to him.

Helen roused herself as Henderson brought to her a stout leaf which the little Burman had fashioned to hold cool water from the spring. She drank thirstily. They ate in silence, with the watchful eye of Maung Hpo upon them.

When they had finished, the little Burman turned to Henderson, and made a long speech in his native tongue. The words were outside of Henderson's vocabulary, and the only thing he could gather from it—and that more from the manner and tone of the speaker than from the speech itself—was that it formed some sort of an explanation.

He turned to Helen Bassington, who was listening with little show of interest. "I don't get it, at all," he confessed, "but I imagine it's an explanation why we have kept on going rather than waiting for the traffic from Myitson to pass."

"It may be," she said, "that he is worried about pursuit from Momeit."

At the word, Maung Hpo vigorously nodded his head. He commenced to speak again, and Henderson recognized, at least, that this was on a different matter, although the meaning missed him. A repetition of the one word, *sayat*, suggested that the little Burman was trying to explain something that had to do with the affair at the bungalow.



Henderson shook his head. "It's too bad," he said to Helen, "but I think it must be of importance. Maung Hpo rarely talks. He wants to tell me something about last night but it's beyond me."

Maung Hpo smiled resignedly. Gathering what was left of his own frugal stock of food, he turned to Henderson, and with gesture and simple word indicated that they should wait until he should return for them. With an encouraging smile for the tired girl, he set off with his quick soundless stride.

Henderson casually took up Helen's small pack and his own, and placed them behind her for support. She thanked him coolly, and, reclining against them, settled herself to rest.

Filling his pipe, Henderson seated himself with his back against a convenient trunk in such a position that he did not face her directly. He smoked silently through the minutes. His slightly frowning gaze wandered from time to time towards the distant plain, from their height barely visible through the filmy haze. As often his glance fell upon the girl's motionless form, who, with head averted, appeared to be dozing. At such times his eyes dwelt upon her for long moments, but whatever his thoughts, he gave them no expression.

About to knock the ashes from his smoked-out pipe, the snapping of twigs caused him to glance up quickly. In a moment Maung Hpo appeared; his usual, cheery smile lighted his face, but in some manner his expression indicated that he had a surprise in store.

"*Thi-ba*" (come), he said.

At the sound of his voice, Helen looked up; her eyes were dark, but showed no evidence of sleep.

Henderson stepped towards her, but she sprang to her feet without his aid and caught up her pack.

Swiftly, Maung Hpo led them back in the direction whence he had appeared. In a very few moments he moderated his pace to cautious creep-

ing, and, shortly, he stopped altogether. After a keen glance ahead, he beckoned over his shoulder, and they crept forward to the thick bush where he stood.

Almost immediately Henderson heard a faint clank of metal against stone; and a moment later the sound of voices.

Pressing the leaves gently aside, he was surprised by glimpses of narrow, rough trail, much nearer at hand than he had supposed. Then, abruptly, two men crossed his view, riding abreast. A third followed.

They were *Sikhs* of the police, in uniform, and armed.

The sound of shod hoof on stone, the clank of scabbard against stirrup, grew fainter down the trail and was soon lost altogether.

"Mounted police," Henderson whispered to the girl beside him, "and they are going back towards Momeit. That's one of the things Maung Hpo was trying to tell me. He must have seen them coming up the trail, and has kept us climbing so that we should not lose time in case they did not return so soon. Wonder what the story about the *sayat* can be. You know—"

"*Thi-ba*," Maung Hpo called from the open trail.

## CHAPTER XXI



ON the long mountain slopes to their right lay the shadows of the western peaks, when finally they came to the height of the divide, and commenced the steep but easier descent.

The trail, narrow here, led through a defile, walled by rugged cliffs that towered on either hand. Blue in the distance stood the mighty crests of another range rising beyond the valley which marked the course of the river Shweli.

Soon they had glimpses of the broad, placid stream, and once they saw, far away to their right, a white stretch of swiftly running water—a bit of turbu-



lent Shweli above the great pool.

Presently, seemingly at their feet, although still some way off, appeared the thickly clustered dwellings of Myitson. At sight of the town, Henderson stopped with an abrupt exclamation.

"What is it?" Helen asked quickly. "Surely, now—we can get there before dark. I can walk faster if you wish."

Henderson slowly shook his head. "That isn't it. Those *Sikh*—don't you see, they were here before us; we would be walking straight into a trap."

Helen turned, and let her glance wander dubiously to the town below them. They moved onward.

Henderson noted her attitude of weary dejection. It seemed that she had set her endurance to the goal now so plainly in sight, and doubted her strength for further long effort without such definite aim. He moved close beside her.

"I'd still go on," he said in the expressionless tone he had used throughout the day, "and try to place you in safe hands, but I am afraid there wouldn't be a chance. I doubt if they think we came this way, and only covered Myitson as a matter of routine, but they were here, and if we show up they would certainly pack you back to Momeit."

Helen turned her glance towards him, briefly, with no more expression in her eyes than had been in his voice.

"What then are we to do?" she asked. "I hope there won't be any more mountains."

"No," he said slowly, "there won't be any more hard work. You should be all in; you've stuck it out like a brick," he added a little gruffly.

"I haven't thought much of it," she answered coolly. "But you haven't told me what we are to do."

He swept an arm towards their left. "Get down there as far as we can, and camp for the night. We cannot possibly reach the river before dark. At the first light we'll hit the shore below the town, and get a boat."

Helen glanced once into the formidable shadows of the forest now near at hand.

"It doesn't matter," she murmured, as if to herself.

Henderson turned to Maung Hpo who had been watching them closely.

"*Teh—ake de; laung—nepinga,*" (shelter tonight; boat tomorrow), he said, with the inflection of a question.

The little Burman nodded instantly. It seemed that already he understood the situation.

He glanced once at the shadow's edge on the far slopes, marking the sun's declination, turned, and slightly increased their pace.

From time to time on the zig-zag trail, they caught sight again of the little houses of the town, drawing steadily nearer, appearing to rise towards them as they hastened downward.

When finally they passed the last of the evergreens marking the higher level, Maung Hpo turned abruptly from the trail to the left, and skirted the lower slopes in the general direction of the river's wide bend.

In the lighter growth, and tending steadily lower, the walking was not particularly difficult, but they rounded many knolls and short hills, crossed awkward gullies and ravines, before their guide, with an eye to the waning sun, commenced to gaze about for a suitable encampment.

At length he came to a little stream of clear water, which, turning at right angles from their course, he followed until it led around the foot of a broader ridge into a bowl-like depression in whose center was a space thickly grown with bracken.

The little stream cut through this clearing which was closely surrounded by dense thickets of small and giant bamboo, interspersed with a few chestnut of fair size.

With good water at hand, the ridge and low hills all about to break the cold night winds from the mountains, with a space already cleared for their camp—



Maung Hpo beamed his satisfaction.

Long before they attain manhood, all Burmans are expert with the *dah*, that implement—or weapon, as need determines—so serviceable in a cane country.

Maung Hpo set Henderson to gather the dry, fragrant bracken into convenient piles. Then loosing his *dah*, he stepped into a close-by thicket, and with as many slashes, cut a score and more light bamboos which he chopped into eight-foot lengths, and laid temporarily aside.

From the branches of a sturdy chestnut, close to the edge of the little clearing, he procured four forked sticks, which he stuck firmly into the sandy ground at one side of the clear space. As many lengths of *wabo* were then laid over the forks for the sides and ends. When the light bamboos were placed lengthwise, and secured with pliable withes, he had the foundation of a couch that was remarkably firm and springy, and above the ordinary height of the many things that creep and crawl in Burma.

Evidently, this was designed for Helen, as could be judged from the smile with which the cheery Burman turned from his work to bestow upon her.

Now he showed Henderson how to lay the *kaukaudan* through and over the bamboos in a manner that provided a mattress of depth and stability.

When this was satisfactorily done, he started him on a second layer for a coverlet, woven through a warp of long roots which he had torn up meanwhile.

Not a single moment did Maung Hpo waste. He was here, there and everywhere. His eyes, when necessary, watched Henderson, while his busy hands flew, and the broad *dah* flashed. In no time at all he had put up the frame for a second and wider bed, close to the bamboos at the other side of the clearing; and immediately proceeded to gather *tin* with which to cook their supper and provide a fire for the night.

So active and diligent was the little fellow, that by the time Henderson had bedded their own couch, Maung Hpo

had gathered a huge pile of dry firewood between the two, and had a blaze, without smoke, crackling cheerily close to the brook.

Splitting three of the dainty jungle fowl, borne from the day before, he spitted them on strong, green sticks which he set in the ground at an angle that brought the birds well over the hot, smokeless flames.

Helen came to him to offer her services, and when Maung Hpo assigned to her the responsibility of turning the birds properly, he laughed aloud at her very evident satisfaction.

Henderson, his immediate work done, joined her, and opened his pack a little way from the flames. He stood a moment, idly looking down at her—frowning a little unconsciously.

She glanced up at him, and a slight smile momentarily crossed her face.

"You're a wonder," he grumbled, as if to himself, and turned hastily away.

Maung Hpo brought to them a couple of shallow rough-hewn *bu-sin-swe*. Filling the halved gourds with water, he set them close by the blaze, then dropped some clean stones from the brook into the glowing embers.

Into Henderson's hands he thrust a couple of sticks, and indicated the effective method of providing hot water for their tea, of which he gave him a small packet.

When their meal was ready, Henderson glanced to where the indefatigable little Burman was still whacking away.

To his surprise, he noted that Maung Hpo had thatched a light roofing above Helen's couch, and had set about it a series of sharp-pointed giant bamboo, in the form of a crude *cheveaux de frise*.

Henderson shuddered a little at the sinister implication of this defense. Calling Maung Hpo, he turned quickly back to where Helen was placing the roasted fowl on broad, fresh leaves.

In the depression under the branches of the chestnuts, dusk gathered swiftly as they ate; night was stealing onward over the eastern hills.



Often, with bamboo cups suspended, they paused to listen with delight to the evening call of the *Shama*—the most sweetly singing bird of all Burma—whose mellow, liquid notes were chorused from all sides by equally enthusiastic, if less melodious of its feathered brethren.

In the fading light, diminutive parrots of brilliant color flitted among the low tops of the bamboos. Once, a gorgeously plumaged *Trogon* flashed across the clearing, to seek shelter in the denser wood beyond.

Jungle fowl whirred noisily through the cane; and more than once, Henderson bent his head in surprise to listen to a hoarse barking. He attributed the sound to some wandering pariah dog, until Maung Hpo pronounced it to be the call of the *Gvi*—the barking deer of Burma.

A little later, as they sat quietly sipping the last of the refreshing tea, a leopard cat stole noiselessly into view, crouched suddenly as its nostrils caught the smoke scent and its pale green eyes fell upon the strange, motionless forms.

Flattened to the ground, it slunk swiftly into the underbrush, its padded feet giving no sound as it glided stealthily out of sight.

Helen shuddered, and turned quickly to meet Henderson's reassuring smile upon her.

Night stole upon them, with its shielding, hiding darkness, its cooling breath, its voices of mystery that were beginning to echo faintly from the crags above them, and the jungle below. Night's own particular world was awakening to moving, stealthy, preying life.

Maung Hpo added larger sticks to the cooking-fire. As the blaze sprang up, Helen turned towards her little shelter.

Maung Hpo gave her his own cheery benediction for repose; Henderson a light word, although his eyes were sober. She replied to both a little chokingly; an impression of complete loneliness had suddenly stepped from the gloom of the

dark, whispering forest and enveloped her.

A little away from the crackling blaze, she found the night filled with strange sounds.

The leaf-thatched roofing was light; the low wall of slender bamboo tips fragile; the sticks of *wabo* very far apart. She observed them now with a little shudder of dread. Between them the impenetrable velvety shadows of the wood edged close.

She lay down on the soft, rustling *kaukandan*, with a sense of utter despondency. As she sought a place for her head, she discovered something had been thrown over the bracken as a protection from its roughness. Her hand and cheek touched it simultaneously. It was a coat.

She glanced towards the fire where the two men were sitting—smoking and laughingly attempting to converse. Henderson was half turned; his bronzed forearm showed bare to the elbow. A khaki shirt alone covered his broad shoulders.

Helen moved to a more comfortable position, and her shoulder pressed upon a hard object. So smooth and even was the rest of the couch, it seemed that a short end of stick had fallen among the bracken, and then been covered by the coat.

She thrust a hand beneath it and immediately her fingers felt something that was cold to their touch.

Moreover, it fitted to her clasp, as her fingers involuntarily closed around it. A pistol.

A quick change of feeling came over her, dissipating the loneliness. Her cheek rested on the coat whose faint tobacco scent mingled pleasantly with the sweet fragrance of the bracken. Her fingers were clasped around the butt of the automatic, as if it were the hand of a friend.

Once—twice, she raised her head a little to glance towards the firelight; the men were still there.

Then she didn't look again. \* \* \*



SOME hours later, before the night was ready to yield to dawn, from sound, dreamless sleep, Helen suddenly awoke.

In the first moment she did not sense her surroundings. Her eyes opened to darkness and saw nothing at all. She lay quiet for a short while, her thoughts wandering, seeking coherence.

Her head was pillowed on something soft and fragrant, which seemed to envelop it. She started to raise her hand to put this covering aside and felt the weight in its clasp. Then she knew instantly where she was.

The fire had burned low; she had fallen asleep with its bright flames lighting the whole cleared space. Now the spasmodic glowing of its dying embers showed only the dim outlines of the slender bamboo wall, the larger posts of *wabo*. She wondered if she could see even to the edge of the clearing.

She raised her head a little and peered intently between the upright sticks—and then deadly terror clasped her in its icy grip.

Seemingly just beyond them, hovering between the fire's feeble glow and the dark, depthless shadows, hung twin points of amber.

They were still when she first saw them—a hand's breadth apart. Then, as if drawn by an invisible cord, they commenced slowly to swing off to one side, a little way—and back again; farther in that direction; back again—and stopped. There was no sound.

Now they sank low to the ground and hung there an appreciable moment—then slowly they were drawn upward, higher and higher until they were above the level of Helen's terror-stricken, staring eyes.

A vagrant gust of wind puffed the embers to an instant's brighter flame.

Just below the pale green lights, she saw something that gleamed white—a shining row; behind them was the dusky outline of a huge shape.

She tried to scream. She even believed she was shrieking at the top of her voice.

Not a sound issued from her parched lips. Her breath seemed strangled; her heart suffocated.

## CHAPTER XXII



IN the space of seconds only, although they seemed long minutes, Helen stared at the two fixed spots of pale green that stood out like round bits of jade against black velvet.

One was as luminous, as full as the other, showing that the beast faced squarely in her direction. The horrifying conviction that they clearly saw her, held her in a species of fascination which rendered her incapable of moving a muscle of her body.

She was vaguely aware that the tiger had only now approached the clearing; else already it would have sprung upon her.

Its first, heavy, padded step when it leaped the brook, the rustling of bamboos as it forged stealthily through the thicket must have caused her sudden awakening. Apparently the beast had been momentarily checked by the fitful glowing of the smoldering embers, endeavoring to catch the scent of what was concealed in the denser blur that was her frail shelter.

But it must have discovered immediately that something lay there; from the first, its two glaring eyes faced constantly towards her as it moved doubtfully a little to one side and back.

This was no nightmare fantasy; it was real. Her eyes were open, wide, staring. She could feel the suffocating heat of the *kaukaudan* that covered her; she could hear its soft rustling under her uncontrollable trembling. The sticks of *wabo* were dimly outlined before her. Between them she could see those lambent spots of faint light. . . .

After one little spurt of flame, the light glow appreciably lessened. Again the shadows crept closer, blotting out the



shape of inanimate, harmless things, accentuating those two luminous spots that were living evidences of the cruel ferocity behind them.

And all this time of her palsied terror, they had remained fixed, motionless, higher than her own quivering head, telling the enormous size of the horrible beast of prey. The tiger was standing, sniffing the scent, glaring steadily as if to fascinate its victim.

Now they commenced to sink lower and lower, as it crouched. And—slowly—slowly—at last they were starting to draw towards her. She was sure of it. They were weaving slightly to and fro and growing brighter and larger.

The great beast was creeping forward. It must be at the very edge of the clearing.

In the hypnotic clutch of terror that paralyzed every muscle of her body, her unconscionable agony was robbing her of the sense even to think.

Suddenly, the two round spots rose swiftly; then became one, faint, barely discernible slit of light.

About to spring, the tiger had turned its head. Something had momentarily drawn its attention from its prey.

Catching at the faintest ray of hope, Helen's straining ears heard a faint rustling in the direction where the two men were sleeping. Probably one had stirred. If only she could command her voice to shriek its alarm; She tried to draw a longer breath into her strangled lungs.

Then she heard the soft thud of a footfall, the crunch of light steps on the sand. She lacked the power to turn her gaze away, and now she saw the slit of green sink again low to the ground. She clearly heard a quick, angry threshing.

The fire glow became suddenly brighter as a stick raked the coals. A little finger of flame spurted upward—then the clearing seemed actually to shake with a vibrant, snarling growl.

"*Chai!*" gasped the horrified voice of Maung Hpo.

The human sound instantly broke the

spell that had immobilized Helen's muscles. She tore her gaze from the huge, tawny shape, now showing with terrifying clearness in the sudden light, and turned her head towards the Burman.

With frantic haste, Maung Hpo was striving to bring the dying flames to brightness. Kneeling, with his terror-stricken eyes fixed on the great tiger, he blew desperately upon the embers and the light twigs which his hands blindly scraped together.

An exclamation echoed Maung Hpo's frightened cry. Henderson sprang from the couch to the fireside. In the partial light, his tall figure seemed even larger and broader than it actually was. Strength and resoluteness appeared to radiate from him. Helen felt a quick thrill touch her crushed heart.

He glanced instantly towards her; and as she lifted her face, she saw him smile.

With both men working upon it, the fire sprang swiftly into crackling brightness.

Now she could see the whole of the clearing—the couch with its scant protection where the two men had lain, the dark trunk of a chestnut just beyond it, the slender stalks of the first bamboos—even the expression in the faces bending over the flames.

She thought Henderson appeared calm and altogether unafraid; she was conscious of an instant's reassurance. Then she looked at the little Burman.

There was no mistaking his conception of their peril. Somehow his face seemed whiter, his deep set eyes more prominent; no smile now beamed from his broad features. Perhaps, he better comprehended the danger. Her sudden ray of hope was as quickly quenched.

At that moment, Maung Hpo drew a burning stick from the fire and tossed it in the direction of the tiger.

Helen did not want to look again; but unconsciously her glance followed it.

The beast had slunk back a meagre length until it was just beyond the first bamboos. She could see it plainly. It



was strangely unafraid of the light. Without knowing the reason, she surmised it; the thought made her shudder.

As the blazing ember fell close in front of it, there came a frightful roar and the crashing of slender stalks as the tiger leaped lithely sidewise and then stood facing them, fangs bared, ears flattened, tail angrily swishing.

Hastily, the two men seized other sticks and waved them frantically, but the tiger did not charge; neither would it be driven off, drawing back only a pace at a time when they threw more faggots towards it.

Maung Hpo recklessly heaped on wood until the little clearing seemed light as day. Then Henderson came to Helen.

For the first time, she attempted to rise, and swung her feet to the ground. Her knees trembled under her and she leaned against the low couch. One strong arm went around her waist and he half led, half carried her close to the fire.

"Pretty tough experience," he remarked, with his easy smile. "Nothing to worry about now—with this fire. Been awake long?"

"Oh!" she gasped. "It seems hours I have watched those terrible green eyes. It was dark and they came nearer and nearer—it was just going to spring when Maung Hpo got up—"

"Poor little girl," he muttered, unconsciously tightening the clasp that now supported her arm. "Wish you had called—although it was perhaps best to keep quiet."

"I tried to—I thought I was screaming. Didn't you hear me?"

"The first thing I heard was Maung Hpo's yell. I am sure if you had—"

"He looks terribly worried—perhaps he knows it will come soon. He hasn't taken his eyes away from it a single moment. I—I can't bear to look at it again—it is so—"

"Well, it isn't going to harm you now—you can be sure of that," he hastened to interrupt her. "By the way; did you find the pistol?"

"Yes—yes—you were so kind. But I

forgot that I had it—it is still there—on the couch."

"Then I'll get it," and he started to turn away.

Involuntarily, her hand clutched his arm.

"Please don't—," she began; and then abruptly controlled herself. "It is right on your coat," she added in a different tone which Henderson was quick to observe.

Her *teh* was scarcely four paces from the blaze; yet her eyes followed him until he had found the pistol and came back with it and his coat which he put over her shoulders.

An abrupt exclamation from the Burman drew their attention. He pointed into the cane where a dusky shape was stealing slowly to one side. When they could no longer see the long, lithe form, the swaying and crackling of the dense bamboos showed where the beast moved.

At first, it seemed drawing away. A moment later, Maung Hpo pointed in a different direction. Beyond the chestnut back of the men's couch, two pale amber spots were glowing. It had merely circled to another position, away from the fire's direct light. Its persistence could mean only one thing. It had not yet found its food; it was hungry and "on the kill." Before daylight at best, it could not be driven off.

Henderson took a step aside and, shielding his eyes, gazed intently upward towards the eastern sky. He was not able to detect the faintest suggestion of coming light. A glance at his watch confirmed his fear that dawn was still some distance behind the rugged bulk of the mountains.

And now Maung Hpo touched his arm and drew his attention to their supply of *tin* which, from the recent extravagant use, was almost exhausted. Then the eyes of the faithful Burman turned doubtfully from him to the slender girl who was making obvious effort to master her trembling.

Henderson saw the glance; and for an instant his look was desperate.



Carefully they gathered every dry, unburned stick they could see anywhere close about them. Their number was dishearteningly small. Already the light in the clearing was visibly lessening. It increased momentarily as Maung Hpo pushed the fire into more compact form which also hastened the speed of its burning.

Peering again where those baneful twin spots hung stubbornly motionless, Henderson's eyes encountered the dark trunk of the chestnut, with sudden perception. It stood ten feet back of their couch, a small, low tree at best. Twelve paces or so directly beyond it, as if in its shadow, the tiger crouched.

It was from this tree Maung Hpo had obtained his forked branches. Their stubs remained, a few inches in length, partly split by the *dah*. They had been the lowest.

A short distance above them the tree broke into two main forks, spreading abruptly apart with low turning branches. A safe place for one; possibly two might clamber up, one on either fork, if there was time. For three—it looked precarious. At that, it was the largest tree in sight of the clearing, and the only one of any size near at hand.

Henderson pointed it out to Maung Hpo, and he comprehended instantly. Little by little, the Burman commenced to move the fire in that direction; but it was at the cost of its brightness and their fast diminishing stock of wood.



HENDERSON explained their plan to Helen.

"I am going to lift you until you can catch the first uncut branches," he added.

"Don't trust to the stubs. You will have to climb as high as possible on one fork. Are you sure you won't slip and can hold yourself up there?"

"I shall be all right," she answered more steadily. "But—you—and Maung Hpo?"

"Don't worry about us," he responded with a heartiness that did not deceive her. "Are you ready now?"

"If you promise to come too," she replied with unexpected firmness.

"Most surely we will."

He signed to Maung Hpo who promptly threw every last stick of their wood on the fire; the dry limbs blazed up instantly. Henderson gave him a quick smile of appreciation, although he knew very well this protecting light would last but a matter of moments.

The Burman drew from the flames three burning ends and passed one to Henderson. Then all three moved swiftly towards the chestnut.

Instantly, the green lights shifted a little to one side, rising, then sinking low. A throaty growl reverberated from the rocky cliff behind; again there was the sound of angry threshing.

They reached the tree. Maung Hpo waved his torches wildly.

"Put your foot in my hand," advised Henderson, stooping and dropping his faggot. "Now watch above you."

Helen had not guessed he was so strong. With her fingers reaching for the branches, she rose swiftly up until she had clasped one. Her free foot, at the height of his shoulder, sought a hold on one of the short stubs. Still higher he lifted her, to the length of his arm, and both hands and knee found something secure.

"Take this," he called; and when she looked down, he tossed his belt up to her. "Get up as high as seems safe and fasten it around your waist and the tree. Do it immediately and don't fail to buckle it."

"Aren't you coming?" she cried, already climbing higher.

The growling was now an angry snarl. There came a sudden, heavy movement in the cane.

"As soon as you are fixed. Take it easy," he sought to reassure her, visualizing trembling, fumbling fingers. "Don't look down—and for God's sake, don't slip!"

The snarl broke into a sudden roar.



Henderson grasped his torch from the ground and sought to wave it into flame.

"Jack! Jack!" wailed Helen's agonized voice above him. "Come—hurry! Hurry!"

"Look out for yourself!" he shouted. "Tie that—"

"*Meean! Meean!*" shrieked Maung Hpo, and darted towards the fire.

There was a crashing in the cane just before Henderson. He saw the dark, tawny shape creeping swiftly forward. He could even see the bared fangs of glistening white.

Backing rapidly, with his face to the tiger, he dropped the torch and tore the heavy pistol from its holster.

"*Nay thenat pyit de boo!*" (don't shoot)—shouted the Burman, in frantic warning, whirling his flaming sticks.

But the beast was already crouching for the spring.

Henderson stood still for careful aim, waiting for the last fraction of the instant before it would launch itself into the air.

And Helen, clinging with both arms about the slender trunk, never could forget the camera-like impression that pictured itself upon her wide-staring, horrified gaze.

She saw only him. His broad shoulders were squarely set. He was as motionless as a statue on his feet. One bronzed arm, thrust before him, held steadily without a tremor; the other hand was clenched by his side.

She even saw how his lips were firmly set, his brow frowning with the aim, the dark brown hair ruffled above his tanned forehead, his gray eyes like steel.

She tried again to call to him—only a sobbing moan came from her lips.

Then, just as Henderson was slowly tightening his clasp on safety and trigger, a small, bright flame leaped up before him, and sprang into a sudden glare.

His torch, dropped at random, had fallen upon the dried bracken of the couch and burst quickly into flame. He had been only subconsciously aware that

his knee pressed the edge for greater steadiness, that it stood between him and the crouching tiger which, with legs tensed for the spring, half turned at the abrupt flare in its face and dashed into the cane at one side.

"Come now—quick—while it is burning!" cried Helen.

Henderson saw in that lay their only chance. But the blaze of the inflammable material was as quickly dying. He turned to call Maung Hpo and perceived him just emerging from Helen's shelter, bringing the woven *kaukandan* that had served for a coverlet. The little fellow had been quick at comprehension. What other bracken there was left in the clearing was drenched with the heavy dew.

Henderson met him at the fire, and putting away his pistol, armed himself instead with the brightest burning ends he could grasp. His choice was meager; the last dry sticks were fast becoming embers.

A few paces only separated them from the chestnut. One could scramble up in no time at all. The opportunity might be lost for the second who would be obliged to wait; and from the manner in which the tiger was circling the clearing, it was apparent only another glaring light could check its charge upon the prey that seemed about to slip from its eager claws.

However, they had but one pile of dry material, from which two could scarcely be made. Henderson had observed, also, that only a portion of their bedding had yielded to the tinder-like blaze.

Maung Hpo carried it half way to the tree and paused to discover why his friend was not beside him. Henderson had turned in the other direction. Stepping into Helen's *teh*, he applied his torch to the bracken that remained on the couch and which Maung Hpo had failed to tear from the bamboos through which it was woven.

He remembered now, a little late, that this had been the greenest *kaukandan* he could find, selected by him for its thickness.



A small flame sprang up brightly and ran over the couch like a partly damp gunpowder flare. In the brief light, he raced to join Maung Hpo and together they sprang to the tree, waving their torches and dragging the loosened mass of bracken.

Maung Hpo knew very well the difference between going first or second; it had been his intention that *Thakin* Jack should precede him, and he halted a pace away. Abruptly he felt himself grasped around the waist and lifted bodily into the air. There was no time now for argument. His hands grasped the trunk and he was up like a cat.

Down below, Henderson heard the great beast leaping through the cane towards him. Again he caught Helen's stifled cry of his name.

Stooping, he thrust one torch into the bracken, threw the other at random behind him and sprang upward. A meagre flash lit the trunk before his face, and as quickly died.

One hand caught a stub that broke in his grasp, causing him to swing half around and nearly fall. The other, however, found a firmer hold, and with hands and legs, in frantic haste, he swarmed higher, sensing that his margin of safety, if any, was desperately small.

A horrible roar sounded close behind and below him and the great cat leaped. Simultaneously, Helen screamed.

Guessing the instant, not yet high enough, Henderson tried to work around the trunk, and just then a powerful arm was thrown around his shoulders, pressing him to the wood.

The shock of a heavy body struck immediately under him, setting the light tree aquiver. A claw caught the leg of his heavy boot, ripped the strong leather like the blade of a knife and would have torn him from his loosened hold if it had not been for Maung Hpo's quickness and the strength of that one binding arm.

An instant more and both scrambled to safety in the swaying top.

Henderson saw that Helen was slightly above him, and balancing himself be-

tween the forks, he spoke to her cheerily.

She made no answer. In the faint, last glowing of the fire, he made out that she was barely keeping her hold. Her feet rested in a strong crotch; one arm was thrown over a higher branch, but her legs were bending and her whole body appeared to sag.

Cautiously, he climbed to her level and at once perceived that his belt, fastened around her slender waist, must alone have saved her from falling. For the moment, her entire strength seemed to have left her. And this somewhat amazed him, since she was altogether in safety.

In rather precarious position himself, he supported her with one arm around her drooping shoulders, saying nothing, waiting for the shock of reaction to pass.

Down below, he could occasionally see the lambent eyes of the great cat as it slowly paced a circle about the tree. The fire was only smoldering now. It must have been like that when Helen first awoke to discover those menacing green spots drawing towards her. An involuntary shudder swept over him, and he drew a deep, long breath.

Helen stirred under his supporting arm; he felt less of her weight and could dimly see her raise her head to look up at him.

"Thank God! Thank God!" he heard her softly murmur.

After that, they both were strangely silent, facing the east together until presently the flaming lights of night paled before the coming glory of day.

## CHAPTER XXIII



T dawn, having satisfied themselves that the tiger had finally taken its reluctant departure, they descended from their cramped perches in the chestnut, gathered up their packs and made straight for the river.

Just above Myitson, the Shweli, rush-



ing from the north down the formidable rapids of Kyauktabo, plunges into a broad, deep pool that is world famed for its gamy *mahsir*.

A short distance below the town, it is turned abruptly to the west by the rugged mountain range, and flows languidly onward for many miles to seek the giant Irawadi.

They struck the southern bank at the wide bend of the stream while the calm surface still lay under its gray mantle of filmy mist; and at once Maung Hpo left his friends on a deserted stretch of shore and sought the nearest *nga-ywa* to determine the possibility of purchasing a boat.

The ordinary rowing craft, *tet-hle*, of which they saw many drawn up on the bank close to detached groups of little shacks on their high stilts, would scarcely serve the purpose of their long journey. Consequently, Henderson had cautioned the Burman to seek one of the long, narrow boats commonly used for transporting farmland products on the upper reaches of the big river, and if successful, to buy it at any price.

At the end of an anxious half hour, he was greatly relieved by the appearance of the little Burman placidly guiding one of these heavy craft down the current which set against the shore where they were waiting.

They were aboard the *laung* and off with the first stirring of the thick mist to the approaching warmth of sunrise. Under its protection, the two men bent to the heavy work with the long, awkward sweeps, eager to put a bend of the river between their craft and curious eyes before the gray curtain should be altogether raised.

At midday, they went ashore to broil their fowl and brew hot tea. Subsequently, after working the *laung* to mid-stream, both Maung Hpo and Henderson were quite content to leave their progress to the current while they enjoyed a brief rest.

Neither sought sleep. They were now miles below Myitson, and its straggling

villages of river fishermen; but they had need to be watchful not to approach other craft or drift too close to either shore. Consequently, Maung Hpo hung over the steering oar, while Henderson lounged amidships, making pretense of putting his meagre equipment in order. It was hot, breezeless, on the placid surface of the broad stream.

"Hullo!" ejaculated Henderson suddenly, interrupting the peaceful quiet that for many minutes had enveloped the lazily drifting *laung*. "Well—well; see who's here!"

Catching the interest in his tone, Maung Hpo took a turn around the oar, fastened the loose end of the line to hold the long sweep in position straight astern, and stepped amidships where Henderson was sitting with his back against the low bulwark.

A little forward, Helen raised herself on her elbow, from a soft couch of fir and *kaukaudan*, and looked at him curiously.

Henderson was sitting cross-legged on the flooring, holding his unloaded pistol which he regarded with an expression of puzzled surprise. Presently he glanced up at Maung Hpo, standing patiently beside him, and then towards Helen whose rounded chin rested on her palm as her dark eyes watched him.

"That Reimer chap—back at the *sayat*," he remarked interrogatively; "as I remember, he was a very good looking, movie type—florid face, lightish hair—Is that right?"

Helen nodded, without in the least understanding his reason for recalling the man at this time. Surely there were days ahead of them now when they need not think at all of anything so disagreeable.

At her affirmation, he rose to his feet, stepped over and sank on one knee close beside her. Maung Hpo followed, with curiosity exhibited on every curve of his rounded face.

"Just look here," and he held the automatic for her inspection. "On this left side—see? That's where it hit, since I



held it in my right hand and struck with it flatwise. Can you make out those long, coarse hairs? There were more of them, I expect; but these are sufficient—jet black, aren't they?"

Helen started, and reaching out her hand, touched the indicated spot with a slender fingertip.

"There is no doubt about it," she confirmed.

"Then—don't you understand—it wasn't Reimer at all!"

An exclamation followed by a volume of rapid speech, broke from Maung Hpo. Henderson glanced at him; then turned to Helen with an amused laugh.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "That is what he tried so hard to tell me, back there on the trail—do you remember? That was the second thing," he added, half to himself; "and he had a good idea it might make a difference."

Helen smiled at their staunch little friend. For some vague reason, it seemed more natural and less difficult for her to smile today.

"Then," she queried; "if it wasn't that man, who could it possibly have been? How can we ever know?"

Henderson rose slowly to his feet. A different expression had come into his eyes, which she observed wonderingly, for, if it had not been the officer who was struck, matters might not be so bad for them after all.

"I think I could make a pretty good guess," he answered quietly, unconsciously frowning a little as he stood regarding her in sudden perplexity.

Setting aside the pistol, he turned to seek his pipe which he had laid on the warm planking to dry. Maung Hpo went back to the raised steering seat, cast off the lashing and proceeded to scull with slow, powerful strokes that satisfied his yearning for work if it did not add visibly to their sluggish speed. Helen sat more upright and gazed off at the densely wooded shore with untroubled eyes. The quiet restfulness of their surroundings was acting upon her with strangely soothing effect.

Henderson drew several deep puffs of the fragrant tobacco.

"You know," he began a trifle constrainedly; "the deuce of all this—our coming this way at all, your horrible experience of last night seem now to have been altogether unnecessary."

Helen turned towards him in very mild curiosity.

"You are like Maupassant and his bit of string," she said. There was a distinct tone of lightness in her rich voice. "Do you mean to assure me you have discovered all that from a few black hairs?"

"Nothing less," he affirmed. "I'm going to tell you something—it's a bit of a story," and he seated himself on the low side of the *laung*, facing her.

"You know—you need not—"

"Oh, it isn't so bad as that," he cut in a little too hastily and with his short laugh. "You'll have to take my word for it; but after all I owe it to you, and in view of the risks you've already run, it may serve to prevent you from taking further unnecessary chances."

She looked puzzled at that.

"Of course, if it had occurred to me that I had cracked on the head anyone else in the world than that conceited, blond ass, I should have taken you on to Twinngé, and then you wouldn't be in for this Robinson Crusoe party headed for goodness knows what!"

For the first time in their brief acquaintance, he heard the rippling melody of her laugh.

"You know," he asserted suddenly and with unaccustomed decision; "you're just one good sport! You haven't complained of one single thing, big or little, even when I tell you that I ran away from a scarecrow and brought you up here! Well—I expect we can't very well turn back now."

"Not even if we wished to do so," interrupted Helen impulsively. "You—and Maung Hpo have been like two brothers to me. You at least rescued me from an unbearable situation. Just now I am only glad to have escaped it, and



still feel I am better off than if we had gone on the Twinng Trail—and—something tells me you are, too," she added in a lower tone. Then she smiled at him frankly. "You know, you haven't yet told me why we are not."

Henderson took himself in hand. He had been thinking of Reimer's account of what he was about to tell. She had overheard it—which would she believe?

"Here," he began with a lightness he did not entirely feel, "we have—what? Three hairs, coarse of texture and uncommonly black. We know how they came into our possession; what more interests us is that once they sprouted from a round, bullet head surmounting a thick neck and the shoulders of a Farnese Hercules.

"The chap that used to tousle them would scale close to two hundred—a brute in strength, a brute in character, an inveterate quarreler, a bruiser, a thief and, I believe, a murderer. At least, he tried hard enough to murder you—or was it me?"

Helen, smiling at first, now gazed at him with eyes grown big and round with wonder.

Henderson blew the offending hairs from his fingers, with a short laugh at Helen's expression. At the moment, she looked as fascinated as a small child looked to some magic tale.

"The conjurer's tricks appear so simple when they are explained. Do you remember—in the *sayat*—when Reimer told the plausible object of his visit? He had his hand on his pistol when I opened the door—you didn't see that. An inspector had been shot on the Mogok Trail. When he finally decided I wasn't the man he wanted, he described this chap I have been picturing.

"Well—you see he turned up eventually. That was the fellow. Reimer's only mistake was in the matter of time. Lucky for us we were expecting Reimer—and did for him first."

Helen's puckered brows, formed an intelligible question.

"Yes—this dark brute was after me.

That's one main reason why I'm telling you about it. We won't meet up with him here—no chance; lower down, on the big river, he is quite apt to come into evidence.

"I came upon this surly brute—by chance, let us say; and I have a very definite idea our paths will cross again—

"I don't mean to tantalize," he added, smiling; "but while I have been talking—in fact, ever since I made this discovery, I expect I've been trying to figure out what he is most likely to do. We'll come to that when I've explained what a mess I have really let you in for. Only—please keep in mind, I didn't then know this fellow was following me and thought all the time we had to deal with an officer I had mussed up.

"I ran across this man—Somers," he continued hurriedly, "one evening in Mogok—yes, I came up from the Valley; but there were reasons why I couldn't let Reimer know it. Somers and I had a run-in and I knocked him down. He tried to shoot me, and I had to run for it. Later—when I had my pistol—I went back to find him, but he had gone. I was going to make it my business to locate him—then other things happened and—"

"And he followed you to Momeit and was going to stab you—just for a blow?"

Henderson regarded her for a moment fixedly.

"No—it was more on this account, I expect"; and before her astounded gaze, he dropped the magnificent ruby into her palm.

"Oh—Oh—Oh!" she cried in a crescendo of amazement. "Why—why it is the most marvelous I have ever seen! It must be the largest in the whole world! Can it really be a ruby—a genuine stone—of such size?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Then—then it must be worth a great fortune—oh, now I remember Reimer said—"

She stopped abruptly and a quick flush spread over her cheeks. She bent closer down to the gleaming gem as she turned



it in her palm. Henderson caught up the unfinished remark instantly.

"No; I did not steal it," he said quietly.

"Neither did I believe you had!" she flashed at him.

For a brief moment they were silent. His face now showed a dull red through its dark tan. Helen observed it and lowered her bright glance to contemplate the deeper crimson of the stone.

"May I tell you about it?" he asked presently.

"Will you—please?"

And as she twisted the wondrous ruby this way and that, studying its rich depth of color, he related the simple facts of his story.

He told how he had been followed and his discovery observed by the Shan and the half-caste, the speed with which rumors of the great find commenced to stir the town and his visit to the Chinaman, Wong Sin, in quest of a guide who might lead him to Mandalay by the jungle trail.

He gave her a vivid picture of his flight through the dark alleys of Mogok before the crowd of his pursuers, and then explained by what method he had endeavored to bring the chase to an abrupt ending.

"It seems odd to me," she suggested, "that, while apparently you threw everyone else off your track, just this man Somers should have seen through it and followed you so promptly."

"It merely confirms my estimate of the sordid brute," he answered lightly. "He is shrewd and crafty and, I believe, is capable of great rascality. He is no ordinary crook and bad man. It is possible he heard of my fracas with that band of Panthay on the Momeit Trail, and recognized me where the story meant nothing to others. But that would hardly explain his getting to Momeit so soon. More likely, he figured out just what he would do in similar circumstances, and played the chance. . . ."

"Oh, but I had forgotten," exclaimed Helen, suddenly brightening. "They

won't be so eager to find us now—will they? And surely, you need fear nothing further from this man—he must have been found in the *zayat* and arrested. He could hardly escape—even if—"

"No," replied Henderson promptly to her unspoken suggestion; "he is altogether too tough and too ugly to have been killed by a blow like that. The fellow is a giant in strength and fears neither God, devil nor man. If they actually caught him, somebody was certainly hurt; they could not hold him long."

"Then—?"

"Oh—he is probably on my trail again; his sort never gives up. I've an idea he won't tell anyone his secret, particularly if he has learned that his guess was right. He would follow me all over the world for that."

Helen glanced more soberly at the bright, scarlet face to which he pointed—its color that of blood.

"But—you do not seem in the least to fear him—"

"No," Henderson answered very quietly. "I'll tell you—I would rather meet him again than any other man on earth."

Helen continued to look at the gem, with eyes that grew dreamy. After a moment she spoke, without raising her glance.

"You had better let me take this for you—down to Rangoon. You would be safer without it."

"No," he said, a little sharply. "It would be too great a risk for you."

"But no one would suspect that I had it."

He shook his head, frowning.

"I would not take the chance—for all it is worth. Besides—"

"Besides, what?" she asked, when he hesitated.

"There is still the story of its finding. That has to be squared first. I don't want you involved until that is settled, anyway."

"But, don't you see," she said eagerly,



"all that is very simple. You must have forgotten that Mr. Carrington is a director in the Ruby Mines Company. They'll take his word, and all we have to do is to tell him the story."

Henderson smiled grimly.

"There's a lot I have to tell him first, before I can speak of this," His look hardened. "I won't have you mixed in it in any way until decks are cleared. No; I appreciate it more than I can tell you, right now, but I can't let you do it."

Helen looked away across the placid water; he could not see her eyes. With head still averted, she held out her hand, and he took back the stone.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**L**OWER and lower swam the sluggish *laung*, an argosy of hopes and fears, of fleeting happiness and impending tragedy . . .



It was the evening before their expected arrival at Twinnge.

Tagaung and the other upriver Iravadi landings were many miles behind them, at any one of which Helen might

have taken a steamer for Rangoon.

She had learned, however, that Henderson was determined to put in at Twinnge, and she had no difficulty in persuading herself it, also, was her logical port. She would get a Rangoon boat there; he would follow later, he told her, after his purpose at Twinnge was satisfied. He did not explain further; and in the days of peaceful quiet she had thought no more of the brutal Somers.

Lately, in the daylight, they had grown accustomed to loiter to one side of the downriver traffic that followed the more rapid flow of the current, and make their greater progress at night.

On this last evening, as usual, the two men put out the sweeps with the coming of dusk, gained midstream and silently

bent to their long hours of steady work.

At such times, Helen always mounted the raised seat in the stern where she could steer the craft wide of the long rafts of giant teak which were frequently encountered and more sluggish in their drifting.

This particular night was unusually warm; in consequence, the river mists gathered early and soon enveloped them in so dense a cloud that it was with difficulty Helen could distinguish even the monotonously swaying forms of the two rowers.

And nothing could better have suited the purpose which had recently shaped itself in her mind.

She had decided to take to herself Henderson's great ruby!

She reasoned that it would be more safe in her keeping; it could not possibly be suspected that she would have it. The whole matter anyway was the question of his safety. Besides there was the affair at Rangoon to be cleared up; his innocence—if he was innocent—established. He had told her at the first that he was going to Rangoon. Well—he could redeem his treasure there. Meanwhile he was safer without it.

In the swimming mist, Helen smiled to herself. She did not analyze the reason that impelled it. In the days now behind her, it had grown upon her, perhaps unconsciously.

The open side of the shelter faced her. She already knew just where his holster lay, put aside for greater ease in the rowing. He had taken no pains to hide from either her or the Burman that in it he carried the stone.

From amidships came the regular chocking of the heavy sweeps. Once more, she peered intently in that direction; listened an instant longer, then noiselessly slipped from the seat.

Her face burned as her hands groped over the matted *kaukaudan*; but not from the pricking of conscience.

Her strong, slender fingers found the belt. She drew out the heavy pistol and, with more difficulty, the gem that was



wedged below it. She returned, unnoticed, to her seat. Her heart fluttered, strangely . . .

In the early afternoon of the following day, the *laung* drifted slowly, with the sluggish inshore current, down towards the Twinnge landing. Maung Hpo discarded the heavy sweep for a stout setting pole and commenced to push the craft to better purpose. Already the steamer was whistling her departure from the opposite bank and was heading for Twinnge. The stop there would not be long.

A string of loaded flats crowded the upriver space, waiting for their tow. Maung Hpo swung wide of them to drop just below where a great swarm of all varieties of boats were drawn to the shore.

Helen sat with Jack Henderson on the low bulwark forward, screened from the landing by the shelter which had given her so snug a home.

A moment earlier they had been chatting lightly; now a silence fell between them that each seemed loath to break. Neither had quite guessed what this time of separation would mean.

Something clutched her throat and she glanced up quickly at him—to discover his gray eyes fixed steadily upon her. He looked down at her slender, browned hand, and caught it impulsively in his strong clasp.

She did not withdraw her hand. He felt the light pressure of her fingers.

"I am coming down to Rangoon," he told her, and she wondered at the seriousness of this simple statement. "I want to see what is here first—"

The sudden touch of the bow on the soft bank interrupted him. Maung Hpo hurried past them and sprang ashore to make fast. A long wail came from the siren of the approaching steamer. They had not observed its coming; they would have to hurry. Reluctantly they stood up.

Henderson fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a sealed envelope. Slitting it roughly with his finger, he pulled out the

contents and gave a quick exclamation of surprise. There were two one hundred pound notes.

He replaced one in the envelope and thrust it into Helen's hands before she was aware of his purpose.

"It is this way," he explained, as he caught up her rucksack and helped her ashore. "This was a gift which I cannot return, although I do not feel that I have a right to all of it. Moreover, the giver is an excellent friend of yours, and I can assure you that nothing would make him happier than if he should learn in what manner it was used."

A glance—and a smile—over her shoulder, showed that Maung Hpo was following. She had altogether forgotten the important question of money, and now she had not the least idea whether her purse was in the sack Henderson carried or had been left behind in her precipitous flight from Momeit.

Henderson promptly found the captain, introduced him to Helen and received his assurance of her proper care. Then he led her back to the rail.

"I suppose it is time to say *au revoir*," he remarked quietly, but with a suspicious gruffness. "You see I'm hoping to meet you sometime again—in Rangoon."

"Yes—of course," she answered. "But where—we have entirely forgotten that." She was watching to perceive how nearly ready the steamer was to start. They made little of these upriver landings.

"No," he answered slowly and in a tone that she had not heard before; "we had not settled that. Suppose we say—through Carrington's—in Rangoon."

A long blast of the whistle drowned all other sound.

She turned towards it.

When she looked back she was alone.

She stared beyond the rail, into a sea of swaying forms and faces, distinguishing none at all.

She became aware that the steamer was moving. She sensed a lengthening stretch of water to the shore—the first



visible evidence that she was leaving forever behind her that recent world of golden sunshine.

Then suddenly she saw Jack Henderson, a little ahead of the crowd of natives, towering above them, facing her. She cupped her hands to call across the widening space.

"Don't worry about your holster. I have it!"

Then she laughed.

She saw him start, violently, saw the keenly worried look that swept over his face. He turned abruptly, forced his way through the crowd packed behind him, and disappeared.

Dragging the flats away from possible contact with the curving bank, seeking deeper water for her own draft, the steamer headed directly towards mid-stream and the river channel, before straightening to her course.

Helen slowly raised her eyes and saw nothing but water before her. Strangely, it seemed to her a desolate road. She wished he had not been so abrupt in his departure. Then she smiled. She looked the other way, searching the mass of receding faces.

Abruptly she was aware of a man standing beside her. His uniform told that he was an officer of the vessel. Smilingly, he held towards her a pair of binoculars. He had observed her sustained scrutiny of the shore.

Mechanically, Helen took the glasses. The vessel had now swung side on to the shore; they were still abreast of the Twinnge landing.

She raised the glasses to her eyes and leveled them upon the dense crowd that still lined the bank.

Strange, odd faces sprang into her view and passed aside with the movement of the steamer. The last of the crowd was gone—then came a short stretch of bare shore—a small boat—a curious jumble of deserted craft—a tall figure leaning against the high prow of *their laung*! Jack Henderson.

He was gazing steadily in her direction. The lenses were powerful; she

could see him with startling distinctness. His face was set and stern; his frowning eyes did not waver—they appeared to be looking straight into hers—

Then a sudden spasm of terror clutched her heart.

Just beyond Henderson's shoulder, in the same round vision, appeared another face, dark, evil to look upon. There was the round bullet head, the massive bulk—the man was stealing upon Jack Henderson unawares— She remembered now. Somers, the killer, the man Henderson had fought, had struck down in the Momeit bungalow.

Then she caught the glint of a knife—

Another boat, a group of native shacks abruptly cut off her view with no chance left to see again.

She started to cry out in alarm. The curious, perplexed look of the officer, who turned quickly around, checked her.

They could not turn back in time to save him. Already, those two must be locked in deadly struggle—the place was momentarily deserted; all the natives had left their boats to go to the landing. And Maung Hpo was not to be seen at all.

## CHAPTER XXV.



N Rangoon a number of days after her arrival, Helen was sitting at dinner with Old Carry. At best, their conversation was rather desultory and was altogether led from his side.

Bluff Old Carry was greatly disturbed over her and not a little perplexed. He expected to find her in sorrow; but her deep, inexplicable worry—no secret to his keen eyes—was proof against his best endeavor and seemed to him destined to wear her out. A change of scene and environment might help, although he was not sure even of that; however, the rainy season was at hand, and in her low spirits, it would hardly do for her to stay on.



Not for worlds would Old Carry have obtruded upon her personal affairs. Nevertheless, in his bluff way he had tried to discover her trouble, not in the least suspicious that he himself had forced her reticence.

Helen wanted to talk with him. She still guarded the incredible fortune that was Jack Henderson's ruby; she wished to share its secret with Old Carry, get his advice. But she saw at once its impossibility.

It was old Danny Service, who brought this enlightenment. Danny, night watchman at the Carrington building, had his room in Old Carry's big town-house. Soon after Helen's return, Danny spoke with regret of Henderson's absence and, with a wink at Helen, stoutly declared that everyone missed him.

Old Carry blew up. Never had Helen seen him so angry. In measuring the fault of the absentee, he left nothing unsaid, making clear his determination that once Henderson was apprehended, Carrington would personally see that he should receive his full and just deserts.

With that avenue of confidence closed to her, Helen brooded and worried in silent despair. She longed for Henderson's return, some news of him, to learn if he were safe from bodily harm. Yet she dreaded his appearance and the storm of disgrace that would inevitably engulf him.

Old Carry knew of the marvelous discovery; everyone did. He had the Mines Company's garbled story from the half-caste watchman, and he believed the worst of Jack Henderson. . . .

The Carrington dinners were always perfunctory—it was the way in which Old Carry kept himself up. From course to course, he had talked himself inordinately dry both in its physical aspect and in choice of subject. Latterly, as it drew near the end, he had fallen more silent and become, unobtrusively, more observant.

Helen saw this and chafed under it, with a strange feeling of rebellion

against this staunch old friend. Her cheeks grew flushed; her eyes were bright. But she bit her lip on the torrent of words she longed to pour forth from her bitter heart.

Helen drank her thick, black coffee at one swallow and resolutely raised her glance—to discover Old Carry studying her with most disconcerting intentness. Moreover, there was very evident suspicion in his keen gray eyes.

Abruptly, the bell of the telephone rang loudly in the adjoining room. It was promptly answered by the butler who almost immediately entered the great dining-room, with the step of an adept porch climber.

"Hit's the hoffice, sir," he announced to Carrington's frown of annoyance. "Hi can't get hany satisfaction, sir." 'e hinsists 'e wants to talk with you, sir, and 'e hisn't a bit polite!"

Carrington gave Helen a quick, appraising glance, and believing she was on the point of imparting some very interesting information, judged that a moment's interruption would allow her the better to adjust her thoughts. With a word of apology, he leisurely left the room.

"Well!" he growled into the inoffensive receiver. He mostly growled in those days.

"It's me—Danny!" rang loudly in his ear. "Yer're wanted down here ut th' buildin' in wan hell uf a hoory!"

"What the ——" began Old Carry's angry bellow; then in time he remembered the intervening door was wide open. "Huh!" he amended, and paused a moment in grim thought. Probably the old scalawag had taken a little, or a good deal, too much and was no doubt seeing things. "Anyone there?" he asked.

"Shure—thut is to say, they're on their way, an' I'm after tellin' ye to git a divil av a move an'!" came the answer impatiently.

Old Carry saw red.

"You impudent old jackanapes!" he roared. "What's it all about?"



"Now don't be after wastin' av valu'ble toime. I can't tell ye an this public talkin' machine—an' I'll be dommed if I wud if I cud!" added Danny in a perfectly audible whisper.

Carrington slammed up the receiver, slowly retraced his steps to the dining-room, and still standing, rang for his man.

Helen glanced interrogatively into his frowning face.

Silently the butler floated into the room. With a start, Carrington discovered him at his elbow.

"Can't you make some noise when you walk?" he demanded irritably. "Have the car brought around at once."

"Yes, sir—yes, sir—very well, sir. Thank you, sir."

The man glided swiftly across the room under Carrington's baleful glare, recollected himself near the threshold and went out stamping his feet.

"Call from the building," explained Old Carry. "I imagine Service has gone crazy—or else is infernally drunk. Actually ordered me to come down there—and hurry up, mind you! I'll go down all right, and put the proper fear of God and man into the old rascal. You will excuse me, won't you?" he added, in milder tone. "Be back in half an hour. Let me see—you were just about to tell me something, weren't you? Would you prefer that I wait?"

"Oh, Mr. Carrington—let me go with you. I'd be so lonely here. I'll promise not to be in the way—and I will cover my ears at the right time."

"Huh!" was Old Carry's gruff but expressive comment.

"I'll be down in just one moment."

There was an unusual brightness in her eyes, an engaging remnant of the color that had flushed her cheeks. Her step was light and swift as she crossed the hall and fairly ran up the broad stair.

Old Carry watched her with perplexed eyes, tossed off his pony of red-amber curaçoa, and turned to receive his hat and stick. By what ordinary sense can

a woman's intuition he gauged? Helen was sure that Jack Henderson's show-down was at hand. She wanted to be there.

In no time at all, Helen met him at the door. She had thrown a long, light coat over her dinner gown; her right hand was thrust deep into one pocket. She had an air of defiant, rebel decision that gleamed through the suspicious moisture in her dark eyes.

## CHAPTER XXVI



O more than the usual lights showed in the great, solid building when the motor stopped beside the silent Buddha.

Old Carry assisted Helen to descend and silently led her to the massive door. As he extended his key to the lock, the grille was swung open. Danny Service appeared in the dim light of the entrance, peered at them with squinting old eyes, jerked a thumb peremptorily over his shoulder and, without a word, led the way around through the shipping-room to the corridor at the further side of the main office which was in semi-darkness.

"Well—I'll be damned!" rumbled Old Carry ominously, trying in vain to overtake the swift, shuffling footsteps.

At the door to the office, Danny paused.

"Whisht, now! Yer're not to sphake a word if ye bust an' blow up!"

A guttural, incoherent growl answered him and Danny skipped hastily through the door. Carrington followed closely, with his hand holding Helen's arm. He observed its trembling. The fact may have had something to do with the saving of old Danny's hide.

Just inside, were several men in uniform. At sight of them Helen gave an involuntary gasp that was almost a sob. They bowed respectfully, and Carrington recognized the alert young chief of police and some of his men. Thompson,



the manager, was just beyond them. No one spoke even a word of greeting.

Curious of Helen's remarkable demonstration of nerves, Carrington glanced down at her, and in the dim light of the big office, saw that her face was deathly pale. She looked just like a timid forest creature, suddenly alarmed but too frightened to run away.

Her burning eyes were fixed on a farther corner of the room in such a wild stare that, somewhat confused, he turned in that direction; and just then all the lights were abruptly switched on and he, too, gasped, in complete amazement.

From that distant side of the room, John Henderson was coming straight towards them—John Henderson, darkly tanned on forehead and neck, curiously white where a beard had recently been, tall, rugged, easy of stride, altogether assured in his determined bearing.

He stopped half way—not far from his old desk—and glanced at each intently, as if to assure himself not only who were there, but also to glean what he might from each expression.

Two of the officers at Carrington's left made a simultaneous move forward. Henderson raised his hand.

"Wait!" he ordered sharply.

Opening his coat, he unbuckled a shoulder strap and tossed holster and heavy pistol to one side.

"I have not the least intention of resisting or running away," he announced coolly, breaking a dumfounded silence. "In fact, I've brought you all here for the one purpose of allowing you to do with me as you may see fit."

There was a peculiarly defiant ring in his voice that set Old Carry's brows in a heavy frown. He was conscious of a tight, spasmodic clutching at his arm, of Helen's short, quick breathing; but just now he was altogether too absorbed in the spectacle before him to take his eyes from the man he had once loved as a younger brother and then despised as an arrant blackguard.

The men of the police were shifting restlessly in the prolonged silence. They

glanced doubtfully to their chief for orders; but the lieutenant had eyes for Henderson alone.

This young officer—of about Henderson's age—was something of a man himself. It is possible that he entertained a certain admiration for one who, after successfully eluding all efforts to apprehend him, had thus come voluntarily to surrender himself and take his bitter medicine with head held high. At any rate, he evinced an entire willingness to permit Henderson to have his say.

Old Dan Service was off at the side, with one hand resting on the wall where a moment before he had pressed the light button. There was a stubborn, fighting gleam darting from under his grizzled brows. There was no question, whether right or wrong, where he stood in this matter.

"Now then—" Henderson began again; and every person in the big room was sensible of relief that the suspense of the protracted strain was at last broken; "I have a mind to clear this whole ugly business once for all.

"I realize that it is not altogether regular," he continued steadily; "that it more properly belongs to the courts. I expect also that it may appear a bit melodramatic. However, since I am giving myself into the hands of the law, I do not consider it too great a favor to have your indulgence for a very few moments—especially as in this way you will have all the facts, which I fully understand is tantamount to a written confession.

"Lieutenant," he said briskly: "I will need a little assistance. Have one of your men empty his pistol and give it to me."

At a nod from the officer, a man shook the cartridges from his revolver, and tossing the weapon to Henderson, stood back.

"Danny!" called Henderson. "Leave the lights as they are, and show them just where you were standing— Yes; that's about right. Now, group yourselves as closely as you can behind him," he added to the others.



There was a compelling ring in his voice that left no thought to do otherwise than he suggested. Even Carrington stepped unhesitatingly forward with the rest and peered over Danny's shoulder. As if entirely without volition, Helen kept close beside him.

As the group formed silently in front of him, Henderson seated himself at his former desk, facing them grimly. He leaned slightly forward, with his left elbow resting on the desk and his chin in his open palm. His right hand with the pistol hung out of sight below the flat top.

Watching intently, with little comprehension, they all saw it slowly rise until the revolver was pointed directly towards them.

Abruptly, Henderson stood up.

"Just one thing more," he said evenly, "and the show will be over. You have seen this thing in full light. I have a reason to wish you to receive Dan Service's exact impressions and will reproduce the scene under similar conditions, where the element of surprise will be more apparent. I shall also employ someone in my stead so that I can, at the same time, explain the whole thing more forcibly. In this way, there will be no question of reluctant witnesses.

"Dan, turn off all the lights except this one over the desk; good—now get back exactly where you stood that night, in the act of approaching. Lieutenant, have one of your men at the switch. Thanks. Now, Thompson, come here a moment, please."

Rather dazedly, nevertheless the manager stepped obediently to the desk, a part of which was now bathed in the sharp cone of light from the shaded bulb overhead which was tilted a little forward. The rest of the room lay in comparative darkness.

Henderson placed him in the chair and in exactly the attitude he himself had assumed. As Thompson leaned forward, his face, left shoulder and arm stood out clearly in the bright light.

"Now—" Henderson was speaking

from the obscurity back of Thompson—"to understand fully Danny's feelings at that precise moment, you must look at the matter with his eyes. He was just stepping forward to speak to me, assuming that I was a friend and suspecting no harm. I could recall his exact words—but they are unessential at the moment. What I want to impress upon you is to fix your attention on Thompson's eyes—as Danny looked at mine.

"Hold them there—just a moment—until I call out—which will stand for the pistol shot!"

In absolute silence, one long second succeeded another.

Abruptly, the staring audience saw the pistol again rise into view—just as it had before; although, as Henderson had warned them, its coming now was more startling, more in the nature of surprise. It was leveled directly towards them—a grim menace, notwithstanding they believed it harmless. So, trusting, old Danny Service must have seen—

"Lights!" cried Henderson's voice, with a suddenness that caused tensed nerves to jump.

The room sprang into full light.

The pistol still held steadily upon them. Thompson sat motionless. From directly behind his shoulder, Henderson, stooping low, was peering at them.

With a gasp of amazement, each saw that it was his hand—not Thompson's—which held the revolver.

A sudden oath broke involuntarily from Carrington. Helen felt something throb upward from her constrained heart with overpowering strength. There was an excited murmur of voices.

"Begorra and the Saints be praised!" yelled old Danny suddenly. "I have ut—I have ut! See there—all av yez!"

In his excitement, Danny skipped forward, one shaking finger pointed at the pistol.

Then they all saw that Henderson was holding it in curious grasp. His thumb, behind the stock, could not be seen.

"Now—th' devil take me—that's wot



I've been tryin' so dommed hard to remember. I knew all the toime it weren't ye at all, at all, Misther Jack—spite o' wot they tried to make me say"— Old Carry winced under his baleful glare—"Th' lad thut shot me didn't have no thum'. I seen it thin clear as daylight, but th' crack on me head made me forget. I'll swear it before all th' powers av hell. His fist, too, was nigh half again bigger'n yours—an' all black an' hairy. Glory be! Yer're all right, me lad. Danny knew all th' toime ye couldn't a done ut!"

Henderson, calm, the tenseness of his manner entirely gone, avoided looking at just the two he had cared to convince and glanced at the young officer who, to his surprise, was smiling broadly as he stepped to him.

"That was all fine, Mr. Henderson," he assured him warmly. "By Jove—it couldn't have been done better, and the place to do it was right here. It was quite enough to have convinced me—even if I had not already suspected half the truth.

"I do not hesitate to say that, with all of us repeating our exact impression, it will go far to exonerate you. Of course—and you will understand—the arrest of the real culprit would clear you entirely; and I rather expect you can give us a sufficient description of him. Meanwhile, I myself can furnish some evidence to your advantage. Will you allow me to take a print of the fingers of your right hand?"

"Willingly," assented Henderson promptly.

The others crowded forward to the desk. Only Carrington and his companion kept a little behind. Old Carry was taking himself to task in no uncertain manner. Besides, this was no opportunity, before all these men and this girl, to tell Jack just what he had in his mind.

An inked pad was produced by the suddenly efficient Thompson, and the imprint of Henderson's four fingers was made on a piece of white paper.

From his pocket, the lieutenant of police drew another paper and placed it on the desk. This also held four separate islands of little concentric circles. The most casual glance at the two showed their marked dissimilarity.

"Where did you get these?" asked Henderson, with the first suggestion of a smile softening his rather stern expression.

"On the door of that big safe over there," replied the officer promptly.

"When did you take them?"

"On the night of the robbery—of course."

"In case you should want a fresher record—might I suggest that you try again on the door of that big safe over there—now?"

"What!" yelled the astounded officer.

As comprehension broke upon them, the others in the group started as if a bomb with burning fuse had suddenly been thrown at their feet.

"Do you mean to tell me—?" gasped the lieutenant.

"Unless there is some other way out," was Henderson's calm assurance. "He is in there, all right—and I expect pretty mad by this time; unless he's half suffocated. Now that I have caught him for you, shall I go in and handcuff—?"

"No—by Judas Priest!" snapped the officer. "Is he armed?"

"To my certain knowledge, he has a knife and at least one pistol. He's also rather powerful—pretty mean sort of chap, all in all."

But the young lieutenant was no longer listening. Already he was disposing his men close in front of the safe door, and warning noncombatants to leave the room altogether. Some of the men had drawn pistols; one at either side of the door wielded a heavy night-stick. The officer stooped to inspect the lock.

"Er—Mr. Thompson; can you manage this for us? You will be perfectly safe behind the door when it swings open."

Mr. Thompson came resolutely forward—with face suddenly gone pasty



white—and bent hastily to his task. As his fingers essayed to twirl the knob, they trembled so violently that the mark was passed and he was obliged to start all over again.

"Here—let me have it," ejaculated Henderson abruptly. "What's the count, Thompson?" and he repeated the numbers as the manager called them off. "I'm not sorry for Somers," he went on, as he turned the dial; "especially on Danny's account and that of others as well—twenty-four and the other way—but it's rather nasty tripping a chap even if he is a rotter—thirty-six and back—All set? Let's finish the ugly business."

It was, as Henderson aptly described it, an ugly business. Somers did not wait to be dragged, but came out of the dark safe, a raging, snarling beast. He had suspected his predicament when the safe door had gone softly to behind him; he realized it to the full at sight of the uniformed figures leaping upon him.

Yelling hoarsely with rage, he savagely fought the men who grappled him, while seeking the one man who had led him into this trap.

He had one shot—fortunately at harmless random—and then the pistol was struck from his hand. He was outnumbered a half dozen to one—Henderson took no part in it, and Thompson was nearly suffocated between the safe door and the wall; at that, more than one of the force was in need of the surgeon before he was finally clubbed into senseless submission and lay hopelessly bound and handcuffed on the floor.

A patrol wagon was waiting in the neighboring side street, into which Somers was bundled and carried off to a cell. Then the lieutenant returned for a further word with Henderson.

As he re-entered the office, Thompson had shaken hands and was about to take awkward leave. Old Danny Service had lit up his awful pipe and was sitting meditatively at one side, close to a sturdy young Burman who had come in meanwhile from somewhere and whose face

was just beaming in one all-embracing smile.

Mr. Carrington and Helen stood a few paces off—and one glance at them was quite sufficient to speed up the lieutenant's errand.

"Do you mind telling me only one thing, Mr. Henderson? Time enough tomorrow to get your whole story. How did you bring such a brute back here and cage him up? I shouldn't sleep for sheer curiosity."

"In the first place," answered Henderson slowly, aware that others were listening no less intently than the officer; "just before he shot at Danny, I came out of my trance, saw the pistol and his peculiarly scarred hand. I succeeded in shoving it aside, so that Danny was only creased. Before I had a chance to grip with him, I was clean out of it—See here!" Bending his head, he parted the hair above his temple where the trace of a long scar could be seen.

"When I came to, I found myself on a boat. Thought of course it was the *Bison*—when it came daylight, I discovered I was headed upriver. Evidently I had been dumped among the merchandise, for that is where I awoke—although that has little to do with the matter, except to prove to me that Somers never did get one square look at me.

"I think he just sacked me over to the dock and tossed me aboard like a bag of meal; and then came back—"

"Yes," interrupted the officer, with a nod of quick comprehension. "We had a guard around here all night."

"Well, that explains something," remarked Henderson, with a glance towards Thompson; "but I'm getting ahead of my story.

"Things came to me pretty quickly—when I was so I could think at all; and it did not take me long to appreciate what a fine mess had been rigged up for me. That's why he let me live, I expect; it was certain to be pinned on me. You can tell, yourself, that even Danny probably saw no one but me—and that hand.

"Well, I quickly saw the only thing I



could do to help my case was to get that chap, keeping out of sight meanwhile. The one clue I had was his maimed hand. I have never seen anything just like it—even in the war. I ran across him by sheer luck—and nearly spoiled the business first off to get in one good punch for old Danny—

"As to how I brought him here—" Henderson paused to turn deliberately and look at Helen, and for a long moment he held her gaze— "Do you know, lieutenant," he continued, with a subtle change of tone: "Do you know what a man won't do for something he wants most on earth? In Somers' case, it was money or its equivalent; and he wanted something he thought I had.

"When it was actually proved to him that I did not have it, he was considerate enough to withdraw the point of his knife from my throat—he had taken me a bit by surprise—

"It was a close call. There was no one near; my man had gone for supplies. I made him believe me finally, for I knew, of course, where it was to be found. We struck a bargain, and there you are—or rather there Somers is.

"By the way, Thompson," he added, a little quickly, turning to the wholly bewildered manager; "if you are a bit off in your balance—say, a matter of ten thousand pounds—have a look in that fuel hole in the yard. It was to be part of our deal that we were to pick up on the way out," he explained to the lieutenant. "Your guard must have frightened him off, and then he had to run without a chance to get it."

A silence fell on the big office as the door closed upon the eager Thompson and the smiling lieutenant of police.

Old Carry suddenly remembered his neglect to bring his case and absent-mindedly searched in Henderson's desk for one of his formidable Javas. He felt the need of a smoke. And no one else seemed to have anything to say.

"The only thing I want you to do, John," he presently rumbled, as he peered and poked in the drawers, "is to get up to the house and put on the gloves. You can have three swings at me before I proceed to pound the everlasting daylight out of you— Why the devil don't you ever have anything to smoke!" The last drawer closed with a bang. "Oh—I forgot—John, I want you to get acquainted with the finest— Bless my soul! God bless my soul!" he ejaculated fervently, and turned hastily in another direction.

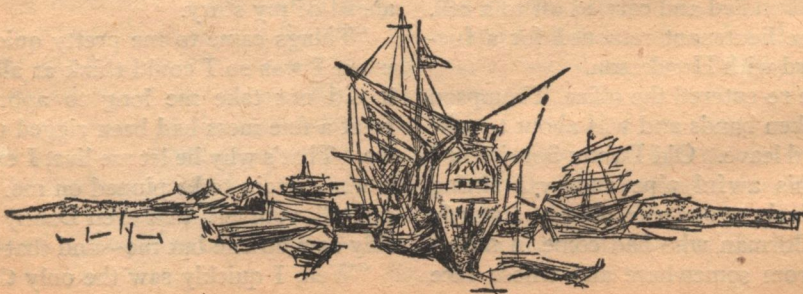
Introduce those two! Bah!

Helen was crushed in Jack Henderson's strong arms. Moreover her head rested contentedly against his shoulder and she was crying through smiling eyes . . .

Old Carry had another shock when Helen drew the magnificent ruby from her pocket. He looked it over and appraised its worth before stowing it away in the safe, dismissing Henderson's story of its discovery with a gruff "We'll fix that."

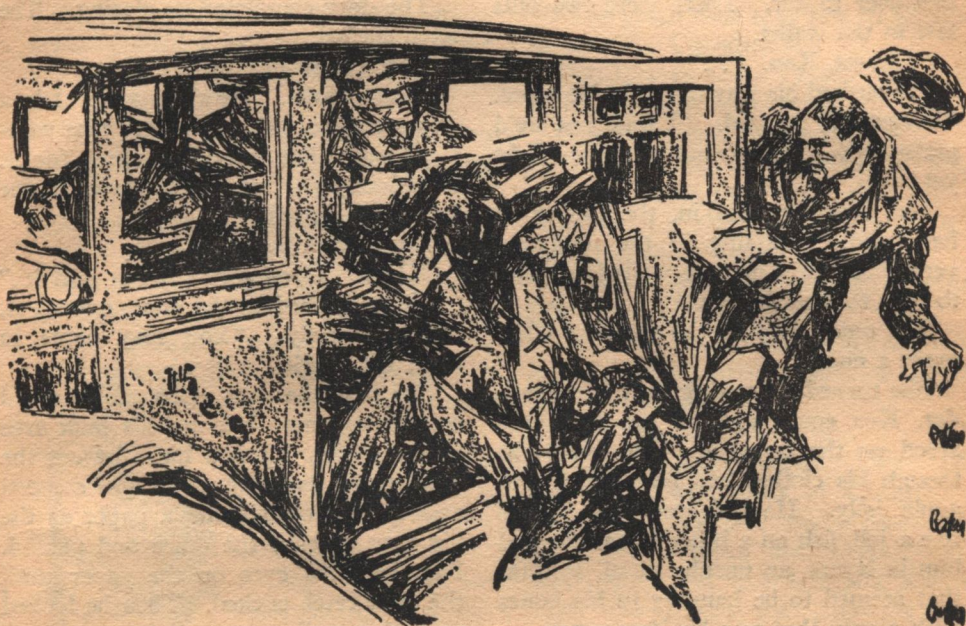
Then the three of them rode home together, with Maung Hpo seated beside the chauffeur and smiling steadily into the night.

THE END





# Honest Money



By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

*Ken Corning, fighting young lawyer, tries to earn an honest living in a city of graft*



THE clock on the city hall was booming the hour of nine in the morning when Ken Corning pushed his way through the office door. On the frosted glass of that door appeared the words: "*Kenneth D. Corning, Attorney at Law—Enter.*"

Ken Corning let his eye drift over the sign. It was gold leaf and untarnished. It was precisely thirty days since the sign painter had collected for the job, and the sign painter had collected as soon as his brush had finished the last

letter of the last word of that sign.

The credit of young attorneys in York City wasn't of the best. This was particularly true of young lawyers who didn't seem to have an "in" with the administration.

Helen Vail was dusting her desk. She grinned at Ken:

He reached a hand to his inside pocket.

"Pay day," he said.

Her eyes glinted with a softness that held a touch of the maternal.

"Listen, Ken, let it go until you get started. I can hang on a while longer. . . ."



He took out a wallet, started spreading out ten-dollar bills. When he had counted out five of them, he pushed the pile over to her. There were two bills left in the wallet.

"Honest, Ken. . . ."

He pushed his way to the inside office. "Forget it," he said. "I told you we'd make it go. We haven't started to fight yet."

She followed him in, the money in her hand. Standing in the doorway, very erect, chin up, she waited for him to turn to meet her gaze.

The outer door of the entrance office made a noise.

She turned. Looking over her shoulder, Ken could see the big man who stood on the threshold. He looked as though his clothes had been filled with apple jelly. He quivered and jiggled like a jellyfish on a board. Fat encased him in layers, an unsubstantial, soft fat that seemed to be hanging to his bones with a grip that was but temporary.

His voice was thin and falsetto.

"I want to see the lawyer," he shrilled.

Helen turned on her heel, called over her shoulder: "All right, Mr. Corning. I'll enter up this retainer." To the man she said: "You'll have to wait. Mr. Corning's preparing an important brief. He'll see you in a minute or two."

The pneumatic door check swung the door to.

Ken Corning turned in his swivel-chair and sent swift hands to his tie. From the outer office sounded the furious clack of a typewriter. Three minutes passed. The roller of the machine made sounds as the paper was ripped from it. The door of the private office banged open. Helen Vail pushed her way in, in an ecstasy of haste, crinkling a legal paper in her hands.

"All ready for your signature," she said.

The pneumatic door check was swinging the door closed as Ken reached for the paper. On it had been written with the monotony of mechanical repe-

tition, over and over: "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

The door completed its closing. The latch clicked.

"Get his name?" asked Ken.

"Sam Parks. He's nervous. It's a criminal case. I'd have kept him waiting longer, but he won't stand for it. He's looking at his watch—twice in the last sixty seconds."

Ken patted her hand.

"Okey. Good girl. Shoot him in."

Helen walked to the door, opened it, smiled sweetly. "You may come in now, Mr. Parks."

She held the door open. Ken could see the big man heaving his bulk free of the chair. He saw him blot out the light in the doorway as the girl stepped aside. He was signing a paper as the big man entered the office and paused. Ken kept his eyes on the paper until the door catch clicked. Then he looked up with a smile.

"Mr. Parks, is it?" he asked.

The big man grunted, waddled over to the chair which was placed so close to the new desk as to invite easy intimacy. He sat down, then, apparently feeling that the chair was too far away, started hitching it closer and closer to the desk. His voice was almost a shrill whisper.

"My wife," he said, "has been arrested."

Ken laid down the pen, looked professional.

"What," he asked, "is the charge?"

The big man's shrill voice rattled off a string of swift words: "Well, you see it was this way. We had a place, a little restaurant, and the officers came busting in without a warrant . . . tell me, can they come into a place without a warrant, that way?"

Ken said crisply: "They did, didn't they?"

"Yes."

"Okey, then they can. They're not supposed to, but they did, they do and they can. What happened?"



"Well, that was about all. They claimed we were selling booze."

Ken's voice was sharp.

"Find any?"

"A little."

"How much?"

"Ten or fifteen gallons."

"Then they arrested you both?"

The fat man blinked glassy eyes.

"Just her. They didn't take me."

"Why?"

He fidgeted, and the layers of fat jiggled about.

"Well, we sort of outslicked 'em. There had been a guy eating at one of the tables. He got wise as soon as the first man walked in on the raiding party. He ducked out the back. I sat down at his table and finished up his food. The wife pretended she didn't know me, and asked the officers if she could collect my bill before they took her. They said she could. I paid her fifty cents for the food and gave her a ten-cent tip. Then they closed up the place, took the booze away with 'em, and put me out. The wife said she ran the place alone."

Ken Corning twisted a pencil in his fingers.

"I'll want a retainer of a hundred and fifty dollars," he said "and then I'll see what I can do and report."

The glassy eyes squinted.

"You ain't in with the gang here?"

"I'm a newcomer."

The man opened his coat, disclosed a wrinkled vest and shirt, soggy with perspiration. He pulled a leather wallet from an inside pocket and pulled out a hundred dollar bill and a fifty. The wallet was crammed with money. He tossed the money carelessly on the desk.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to see the wife. Tell her you're going to represent her, see? Let her know I'm on the job, and tell her to keep a stiff upper lip, and to keep quiet, see? Tell her to keep quiet, see?"

Ken Corning folded the money, got to his feet, stood there, signifying that the interview was over.

"Come back when I send for you. Leave your name and address and your wife's name with the girl in the outer office so I can get my records straight. Leave a telephone number where you can be reached."

The man turned on the threshold.

"You ain't in with the ring?" he asked, and there was a note of anxiety in his voice.

Ken Corning reached for a law book, shook his head.

The pneumatic door clicked shut.

Ken set down the law book and fingered the money. He turned it over and over in his fingers. He cocked his head on one side, listening. After a moment he heard the click of the outer door catch. Then Helen Vail was standing on the threshold of the inner office. Her eyes were starry.

Ken Corning waved the money.

"Start an account for that bird, and credit it with a hundred and fifty."

She was smiling at him when the door opened. Broad shoulders pushed their way across the outer office. From his desk, Ken could see the man as he crossed the outer office. Helen Vail barred the inner office door.

"Whom do you wish?" she asked.

The man laughed, pushed past her, walked directly to Ken Corning's desk. He flipped back a corner of his coat with a casual hand.

"Who," he asked, "was the guy that just left here, and what'd he want?"

Ken Corning pushed back the swivel chair as he got to his feet.

"This," he said, "is my private office."

The broad shouldered man laughed. His face was coarse skinned, but the gray eyes had little lights in them that might have meant humor, or might have meant a love of conflict.

"Keep your shirt on, keep your shirt on," he said. "I'm Perkins from the booze detail. There was a speak knocked over last night. The woman who was running it tried to slip a bribe,



and she's booked on a felony. That big guy was sitting in there, eating chow. He claimed he was a customer. I happened to see him come in here. He looked phoney, so I tagged along. I want to know what he wanted."

Ken Corning's voice was hard.

"This," he said, "is a law office, not an information bureau."

The gray eyes became brittle hard. The jaw jutted forward. Perkins crowded to the desk.

"Listen, guy," he said, "you're new here. Whether you're going to get along or not depends on whether you play ball or not. I asked you who that guy was. I asked because I wanted to know. . . ."

Corning moved free of the swivel-chair.

"You getting out?" he asked.

The lips of the broad shouldered man twisted in a sneer.

"So that's your line of chatter?"

"That's my line of chatter."

The man turned on his heel, strode towards the door. He turned with his hand on the knob.

"Try and get some favors out of the liquor detail!" he said.

Ken's tone was rasping. He stood with his feet planted wide apart, eyes glinting.

"I don't want favors," he said, "from anybody!"

The broad shouldered man walked from the office, heels pounding the floor. Slowly the automatic door check swung the door shut.



EN was ready to leave his office, seeking an interview with his client at the jail, when the door of his private office framed the white features of Helen Vail.

"It's Mr. Dwight," she said.

"What is?"

"The man who just came in. Carl Dwight. He's outside. He wants to see you."

Ken whistled. "Show him in," he said.

She motioned towards the desk.

"Shall I get you some papers?"

"Not with him. He's a wise bird. He knows. Shoot him in."

Helen stood to one side of the door and beckoned. Carl Dwight came in. He walked with a slight limp. His lips were smiling. He had pale eyes that seemed covered with a thin white film, like boiled milk. Those eyes didn't smile. His skin was swarthy and oily. There was a cut on his forehead, a slight bruise on his left cheek bone.

He wasn't large, and yet he radiated a suggestion of ominous power. He said, crisply: "I'm busy. You're busy. You know of me. I know of you. I've had my eye on you for the last week or two. You're a likely looking young man. I want to give you a retainer. Here's five hundred dollars. That'll be for this month. There'll be five hundred dollars more coming next month, and the month after that."

His gloved hand laid an envelope on the desk.

Ken picked up the envelope. It was unsealed. There were five one hundred-dollar bills in it.

"What," asked Ken cautiously, "am I supposed to do?"

The gloved hand waved in an airy gesture.

"Just use your head," said Dwight. "I've got rather extensive interests here. You've probably heard of me, know who I am."

Ken Corning chose his words carefully.

"You," he said, "are reputed to be the head of the political machine in this county. You are reputed to be the man who tells the mayor what to do."

The filmed eyes blinked. The swarthy skinned man made clucking noises in his throat.

"That, of course, is an exaggeration, Mr. Corning. But I have interests in the county, interests which are rather



extensive. Now you can sort of look out for those interests. And, by the way, there's a criminal case, the matter of a woman who was running rather a disreputable joint, gambling, hooch and all that. Parks was the name, I believe.

"Do you know, I think it might be rather a good thing to have that case disposed of rather rapidly. A plea of guilty, let us say. I'm certain you'll agree that it's a dead open and shut case. She tried to bribe an officer. There were witnesses. She gave him fifty dollars. Having such things aired in front of a jury don't do any good."

He got to his feet. The swarthy skin crinkled in a smile, a sallow, bilious smile. The filmed eyes regarded Ken Corning with the wisdom of a serpent.

"So now," he smirked, "we understand each other perfectly. I think you'll like it in York City, Corning."

Ken slowly got to his feet.

"Yes," he said, "I understand you perfectly. But you don't understand me, not by a long ways. Take back this damned money before I slap your face with it!"

Dwight teetered back and forth on his feet, made little clucking noises with his mouth.

"Like that, eh?" he said.

"Like that," agreed Corning

Dwight sneered.

"You won't last long. You can't..."

He didn't finish. Ken Corning reached out with the envelope which he held by a corner, and slapped it across Dwight's mouth. The filmed eyes blazed into light. The mouth twisted in a snarl. Dwight snatched at the envelope, crammed it in his pocket, whirled and started to the door. He paused on the threshold.

"Wait," he said, significantly.

And Ken Corning, standing by his desk, feet braced wide apart, jaw thrust forward, said: "You're damned tooting I'll wait. I'll be waiting long after you think you're finished with me!"



THE attorneys' room in the county jail was a dull, cheerless place. There was a long desk which ran down the center of the room. Above this desk was a heavy wire screen. The prisoner could sit on one side of the desk, the attorney on the other.

Esther Parks came into the room through the doorway which led to the cell corridor. Ken Corning watched her with interest. Her face was heavy, her walk plodding. She was a big woman, broad-hipped and big-shouldered. Her eyes were like oysters on a white plate.

She plowed her way forward.

The attendant who had charge of the room stood at the doorway, beyond earshot, but where he could see everything that went on in the room.

The woman sat down on the stool opposite Ken Corning. Her face was within three feet of his. Her big hands were folded upon the scarred wood of the long desk. The heavy screen separated them.

"Hello," she said.

Ken Corning kept his voice low pitched.

"Hello. I'm the attorney that your husband engaged to represent you. He thought you were just charged with unlawful possession of liquor. You're not. They've got you on the charge of offering a bribe to an officer. That's a felony."

He paused expectantly.

The woman said: "Uh-huh."

Ken stared into the oyster eyes.

"Well," he said, "I'm to do the best I can for you. Can we go to trial and beat the charge?"

The eyes didn't change expression. The heavy face rippled into dull speech.

"I was running a speak, me and Sam. We went in mostly for cheap food with drinks to sell to the right parties. I don't see why they had to pick on us. Everybody's doing it, that is, everybody



anywhere round our neighborhood."

Ken frowned and shook his head.

"I'm telling you it isn't the liquor charge they've got you on. I could square that with a fine. It's the bribery charge. Can we beat that?"

The woman's voice was blurred in its accent, indifferent and stolid in tone.

"I don't know. I gave him the money. They all take the money. Twice before I've had men call on me and say they was the law. I've given 'em money. I gave this man money. Then he collared me. They didn't spot Sam. He sat down at a table and ate some grub."

Ken Corning made little drumming noises with the tips of his fingers. He regarded the woman through the wire mesh of the screen.

"Have they asked you for a statement?" he wanted to know.

A flicker of intelligence appeared in the pale, watery eyes.

"I ain't so dumb. I told 'em to wait until my lawyer showed up, then they could talk with him."

"Who was it?" asked Corning, "the one who wanted the statement?"

She moved her head in a gesture of slow negation.

"I dunno. Somebody from the Sheriff's office, or the District Attorney's office. He was a young fellow and he had a man with him that took down what I said in shorthand."

"What did you say?"

"Nothin'."

Corning squinted his eyes thoughtfully.

"How did it happen that they didn't spot Sam as your husband? Usually when they make these raids they've had a stoolie go in and make a purchase or two. They have all the dope on where the stuff is kept and who runs the place."

The woman's head turned again, slowly, from side to side.

"I dunno. They just didn't spot Sam, that was all. I was behind the counter at the cash register. They came walkin' in. I think I heard somebody say

'There she is,' or 'That's her, now,' or somethin' like that. I didn't pay so much attention. They made the pinch, and I tried to hand 'em the dough.

"It was their fault I slipped 'em the money, too. One of the men held up the jug that had the hooch in it, and said: 'Well, sister, what are you goin' to do about this?' I seen he had me, dead to rights, so I opened the cash register, an' asked him if he'd listen to reason. He said he would. I slipped him the cash, an' then they said something to each other and told me to come along with them.

"Sam had got wise to what was goin' on, an' he'd gone over to the table an' was boltin' down food. I asked the law if I could close up the joint, take the cash an' collect from the gent at the table. They said I could, an' I did, an' that's all I know about it. They took me here."

Ken Corning clamped his mouth into a thin line.

"Then we've got to plead guilty," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That's your job. I dunno. I'm tellin' you what happened. I figured Sam would get a mouthpiece an' spring me."

Corning continued to drum with his fingers.

"Look here," he said, "there's something funny about this case. I'm going to keep a close mouth for a while, and see if I can find out what's back of it. You seem to be on the outs with the ring that's running the town. Do you know why?"

The big head shook slowly.

"Well," said Corning, "sit tight for a while. Don't talk to anyone. If anyone asks you any questions, no matter who it is, tell them to see your lawyer, Mr. Corning. Can you remember to do that?"

"Uh-huh."

"I'll have you arraigned and get bail set. Can you raise bail?"

"How much?"

"Maybe three thousand dollars?"



"No."

"Two thousand?"

"Maybe."

"Any property you could put up as security with a bail bond company for the purpose of getting them to issue a bail bond?"

"No. Just cash. We had a lease on the joint. It paid fair money. Lately it ain't been payin'."

Ken Corning got to his feet.

"All right," he said. "Sit tight. Remember what I told you. Don't talk. I'm going to see what I can do."

The attendant moved forward.

"This way," he said to the woman, in a voice that was a mechanical monotone.



ON GRAVES, the Deputy District Attorney in charge of the case of the People vs. Esther Parks was almost totally bald, despite the fact that he was in his early thirties. His face ran to nose. The eyes on either side were round and lidless. He had a peculiar peering appearance like that of a startled anteater.

He turned the nose directly towards Ken Corning, so that the twin eyes bored unblinkingly into those of the attorney, and said: "We won't reduce the charge. She bribed an officer. That's a serious offense."

Ken kept his temper.

"That's a hard charge to prove, and you know as well as I do that the officer kept angling to get her to give him money. You get a jury of twelve people together, and some of 'em are going to think it's a hell of a note to send a woman to the pen because she had some hooch and an officer kept sticking his palm out at her. It's only natural to slip a man something when he makes a stall like that. That isn't being criminal. That's just human nature."

The deputy licked his lips with the tip of a pale tongue that seemed, somehow, to be utterly cold.

"The penal code don't say so, brother."

Ken Corning frowned.

"The penal code says lots of things—so does the Constitution."

Don Graves said: "Yeah," and made as though he'd turn away.

Corning raised his voice.

"Well, listen, about bail. If you'll suggest to the magistrate that bail be reduced to a thousand dollars cash, I think she can raise it."

Graves turned back to Corning, stared lidlessly at him.

"You heard what the magistrate said: ten thousand bucks cash, or twenty thousand bond."

Corning's rage flared up.

"A hell of a bail that is. You'd think the woman was guilty of a murder or something. If you don't know that these cheap dicks are sticking their palms out right and left and shaking down the people that run the little speaks, you're just plain crazy! You keep riding me around, and I'll take this jane before a jury and see what twelve men in a box have to say about the way you're getting so damned virtuous in York City all of a sudden."

The lidless eyes remained hard and peering.

"Go ahead," said Graves.

"I will!" snapped Corning.

Graves spoke as Ken Corning was halfway to the door.

"Tell you what I *will* do, Corning."

Corning paused, turned.

"Take her into court right away, plead her guilty as charged, and I'll ask to have a minimum sentence imposed."

Corning asked: "Fine or imprisonment?"

"Imprisonment," said Graves. "To hell with a fine."

Corning's retort was emphatic. "To hell with *you*!" he said, and slammed the door.

HELEN VAIL had the afternoon papers for him when he walked into his office.



"News?" she asked.

He grinned at her, took the papers, touched her fingertips as he took them, and suddenly patted her hand.

"Good girl," he said.

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. You just are."

"How about the case?"

"I don't know. There's something funny. You'd think the woman had done a murder or something. And Graves, that billiard ball guy with the snake eyes, told me he'd let me cop a minimum sentence if I'd rush her through the mill and make a plea."

Helen Vail's eyes were sympathetic.

"You mean send the woman to the pen because she slipped one of these dicks a little dough?"

"Exactly."

"What'd you tell him?"

Corning grinned.

"That, precious, is something your little shell-like ears shouldn't hear."

And he walked into the inner office, taking the papers with him. He sat in his swivel-chair, put his feet on the desk, turned to the sporting page, browsed through the headlines, turned back to the front page.

The telephone rang.

He called out to Miss Vail: "I've got it, Helen," and scooped the receiver to his ear, holding the newspaper in one hand, the telephone in the other.

The shrill, piping voice of Sam Parks came over the wire.

"Listen, is this Corning, the lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Okey. This is Parks. I was in to see you this morning about my wife. Listen, I know why they're trying to give her the works. I can't tell you over the telephone. I'm coming over. You be there?"

"Come right away," said Corning.

"Yeah!" shrilled Parks excitedly, and banged the receiver into place. Ken Corning hung up, turned to the paper. There was a frown creasing his forehead. He looked at his watch. It was five minutes to four. Street noises came

up through the open window. The afternoon was warm, the air laden with the scents of late summer.

Ken's eyes drifted unseeingly to the front page of the newspaper. Why should so much stir be made over the matter of a commonplace woman in a third-grade speakeasy giving some money to an officer who held out his hand for it? Why should a raid be made on a place where the officers hadn't collected enough information to know who was running the place, and had let the husband slip through their fingers?

He stared at the newspaper, let his forehead crinkle in thought, and tried to fit the ends of the puzzle together.

Minutes passed.

The clock on the city hall boomed the hour of four, and the big gilt hands crept around until the minute hand marked the quarter hour.

There was the sound of a truck back-firing in the street.

Something came trebling up through the window, the scream of a child, or of a very frightened woman. Then there was the sound of rubber tires, skidding into a turn on pavement, the shout of a man.

There was a second of silence, and then the noise made by many voices, the sound of feet running on cement. A siren wailed in the distance.

Ken Corning, lost in contemplation, did not interpret the significance of those sounds until the siren had become a scream, until the clanging bell of the ambulance sounded almost directly beneath his office window, and until the door of his private office opened and Helen Vail stared at him.

"There seems to have been a man hurt," she said.

Ken Corning put down the paper and went to the window. Helen put her hand on his shoulder as they leaned out. Corning was conscious of the touch of her hair against his cheek, the pressure of her hand on his shoulder. He slid his right arm out, around her waist.

They looked down upon the street.



There was no traffic. Such vehicles as were on the street were stalled. Men swarmed about like busy ants, moving in seething disorder. An ambulance was backing towards the curb. A uniformed officer was clearing a path for it. Stalled cars, their motors running, belched forth thin smoke films which made the air a light blue color.

A black circle of men were not moving. They were grouped about something which lay on the sidewalk. From that form there was a dark stain which had welled along the cement until it trickled in a thin, sluggish stream into the gutter.

The man was big and fat. He was lying on his back.

"Good heavens!" said the voice of Helen Vail, "it's the man who was in the office."

Ken Corning swung from the window. He reached the doorway of the private office in three strides, and gained the stairs. He went down them two at a time. He reached the sidewalk as the men were loading the stretcher. He pushed his way through the crowd. Men muttered comments, turned and stared at him, growled warnings to watch what he was doing. Corning paid no attention to them.

He reached the inner circle, saw the stretcher bearers heaving against the weight of the bulk that they strove to place in the ambulance.

Parks had been shot twice. To all appearances he was dead. The bullet holes welled a red trail which dripped from the stretcher. The eyes were half open and waxy. The skin was like discolored dough. The hands trailed limply at the ends of dangling arms.

One of the stretcher bearers spoke sharply.

"Give us a hand here, some of you guys!"

Ken Corning pushed through the circle as two of the spectators swirled forward. A uniformed officer also bent to give a lift. Corning asked a ques-

tion: "Who saw it? How did it happen?"

Men stared at him with blank curiosity. He was hatless, wandering about asking how it had happened, and men regarded him as a part of the incident which had broken into the routine of their daily life. They watched him with that expression of impersonal curiosity with which fish in an aquarium stare at spectators who press against the glass tank.

On the fifth repetition of the question, a man gave an answer.

"I saw it. He drove up in an automobile and parked the car. He started walking along the street. The guy that shot him was in a roadster. He pulled right in to the curb, and he didn't drive away until he was sure the guy was dead. The first shot smacked him over. He shot again when the guy was on the cement. I seen him twitch when the second bullet struck!"

Corning led the man to one side.

"Drove up in a car, eh? Which car?"

He indicated the line of parked machines.

The witness shrugged his shoulders. "I ain't sure. I think it was the flivver over there. I remember that it was a car that had a smashed fender. You know, there wasn't no reason why I should notice him until . . ."

"Yes," said Corning, "I know. Now you want some advice?"

The man looked at him with curious eyes.

"Huh?" he asked.

"Get away from here and don't tell your story to a soul. Go to headquarters, get the homicide squad's office and ask for Sergeant Home. He's on the square. Tell your story to him, and ask that your name be withheld. Otherwise, if you got a good look at the man that did the shooting, you might find yourself parked on a marble slab. Killers don't like witnesses."

The man's face paled. "Gee," he said; then, after an interval: "Gee whiz!"



He spun on his heel, started walking rapidly away. From time to time he glanced over his shoulder.

His tip gave Ken Corning the chance to be the first man to examine the light car with the bent fender.

He looked at the registration certificate which was strapped about the steering post of the car. That showed the machine was registered in the name of Esther Parks, and the address which was given was the same address as that of the place which had been raided when the woman was arrested.

Ken felt of the seat. It was still warm.

He noticed an afternoon newspaper



lying on the floorboards. He picked it up. There was nothing else on the inside of the car to give any inkling as to who had driven or owned it. Ken felt in the flap pocket of the right-hand door. His groping fingers encountered a lady's handkerchief, a pair of pliers, the cap from an inner tube, and a bit of pasteboard. He pulled out the pasteboard.

It was red, bearing the insignia of the police department. It was, he found when he deciphered the scrawled lines which were placed in the printed blanks, a ticket for parking within fifteen feet of a fire hydrant on Seventh Street, between Madison and Harkley. The time was checked at three-forty-five, of that day.

Ken pocketed the ticket and walked around to the front of the car, inspecting the dent in the fender. There was but little paint left upon the nondescript car which Parks had been driving. That little paint had been cracked and chipped where the fender had crumpled. And, on the tip of that crumpled fender, was a spot of bright red enamel, evidently taken from the car with which the flivver had collided.

Ken examined the front of the springs, the radiator, found further evidences of a collision, further bits of red paint. The accident had evidently been very recent.

Aside from those things, there was nothing to indicate anything whatever about the occupant of the car, or the errand upon which it had been driven.

Ken walked to the curb, looked at the crowd which was commencing to move along under orders of the uniformed police. The traffic was moving now, crawling past at a snail's pace, horns blaring. An officer, accompanied by a woman, moved along the parked lane of cars, inspecting them.

Corning felt that this woman had seen the fat man emerge from a machine, but couldn't identify the machine. Ken let himself drift away with the scattering spectators. He walked around the block, and back to his office. He climbed the stairs, smiled at Helen Vail's white face.

"Was it . . . ?"

He nodded, passed into the inner office. She came and stood in the doorway. Ken smoothed out the newspaper he had taken from the car Parks had driven. He spread it out.



A knife had cut away a section of the front page.

"Was it because he came here?" asked Helen, mustering her courage.

Ken Corning reached for the other afternoon newspaper he had been reading when the sound of the shots had interrupted him. He nodded absently as he spread the two front pages out on the desk, one over the other.

The paper from the death car showed the page of the other paper through the opening where the knife had cut. That which had been cut out was a picture with a small paragraph or two below it.

Ken looked at the picture.

It showed a man with a square-cut chin, shell glasses, a firm, thin mouth, high cheek bones and a high forehead. Below it appeared the words *Mayor Appoints Harry B. Dike as New Head of Water Department*.

Corning read the few paragraphs appearing below the headlines of the accompanying news article. Those paragraphs recited the enviable record Harry B. Dike had enjoyed in connection with his own business enterprises and such civic activities as had claimed his time. It also mentioned that Dike was firmly opposed to the granting of contracts and concessions to those who enjoyed political pull, and that, in the future, the water department would be conducted upon a basis of efficiency with all work thrown open to the lowest responsible bidders, although the department would reserve the right to let private contracts.

The article sounded very promising. It gave the location of Dike's office in the Monadnock Building. The Monadnock Building was on Seventh Street, between Madison and Harkley.

Helen Vail watched Corning as he clamped his hat down on his forehead.

"Ken," she said, "you're going out . . . on this thing, into danger?"

Her face was a dead white. The eyes were starry and tender.

He laughed at her, saw the pale lips stiffen, quiver and tremble into the first

sign of a sob, then lift into a half smile. He patted her shoulder, grinned at her.

"Listen, kid, I'm a newcomer here. I'm here to stay. Some of these chaps don't recognize that fact yet, that's all. It's time they did. I'm just going out and let a few of them know that when I hung out my shingle in this town I did it with my eyes open. I planted my feet here, and I'm staying here."

And he strode across the office, went through the outer door, made time to the street, caught a taxi. "Monadnock Building," he said, as he settled back against the cushions, "and make it snappy."

The cab lurched into motion.

"Man shot here a while back," said the communicative driver. "Raised hell with traffic."

Corning said: "Yeah," without interest and the conversation languished. The cab swung in to the curb at Seventh Street, Corning paid the meter, consulted the directory of the Monadnock Building, found that Dike's office was on the seventh floor, and took the elevator up.

There was no one in the reception office except a typist who was tapping frantically at the keys of a noiseless typewriter, and a rather stern-faced but pretty secretary who sat stiffly behind a desk in the corner of the room, three telephones in front of her.

Corning walked to her, smiled.

"I'm anxious to get in touch with a man who was to have met me here earlier this afternoon, but I had a puncture and was delayed. He's a great big man, fat, about forty-eight, wearing a gray suit that's in need of pressing . . ."

Her voice was crisply efficient.

"You mean Mr. Parks. He's been here and gone."

Corning made a gesture of disappointment, but his mouth clamped shut to keep from showing his elation.

"Mr. Dike's in?"

"Yes. He's busy. You haven't an appointment?"



"No. Can you answer the question? What kind of a car does he drive?"

"A Cadillac. It's a sedan. Then he has a roadster, a Buick."

"Thanks. I think I'm interested in the Cadillac. It's a bright red, isn't it?"

"It's red, yes."

"I'm afraid I've got to disturb Mr. Dike. Tell him it's Mr. Corning, and that I'm in a hurry."

She shook her head.

"He's not to be disturbed. You haven't an appointment, and . . ."

Corning gained the door to the inner office in a swift stride, without waiting for her to finish the sentence.

"And I'm in a hurry," he said, and opened the door.

Harry B. Dike was even more dignified in his frosty appearance than the newspaper photograph would have indicated to a casual observer. The light glinted from the bald reaches of his high forehead. His eyes were steel gray and bored steadily out from behind his shell spectacles. He looked up from a desk which contained a sheaf of papers, stared at Corning and said: "Get out! I'm busy."

His eyes went down to the papers.

Corning walked across the room.

Dike didn't look up again. He was moving the point of a pencil along the typewritten lines of a document. "Get out," he said, "or I'll call a cop and have you thrown in for disturbing the peace. I've canceled my appointments. I don't want any life insurance, any books or a new automobile."

Corning sat down.

Dike scowled at him, banged the pencil down on his desk and reached for the telephone.

"I'm Kenneth D. Corning, attorney for Sam Parks, the man who called on you a little while earlier this afternoon," he said.

Dike dropped the telephone. His eyes widened, darkened, then became fixedly steady in gaze and expression. He said coldly: "What's that to me?"

"It has to do with your acceptance of the position of Superintendent of the Water Department," said Corning. "I think it would be far better for you to refuse the appointment—particularly in view of the fact that Parks was murdered about twenty minutes ago."

The face did not change by so much as a line.

"You mean that you think I had something to do with the murder?" asked Dike coldly.

Corning's tone was equally cold.

"Yes," he said.

The two men stared at each other.

"Corning," said Dike, as though trying to place the name. "A newcomer here, eh? I presume you're crazy. But if you've got anything to say, I'll listen."

Corning spoke, his tone dispassionate.

"He made the mistake of coming to you first. I presume he wanted a shakedown. When things didn't go to suit him here he called me. It was Dwight's men who put him on the spot. You probably weren't directly connected with it. You notified Dwight, that's all. You weren't entirely surprised to hear of the murder, but you hadn't exactly expected it."

Dike got to his feet.

"All right. You've had your say. Now get out."

Corning held his ground.

"You accept that position of Superintendent of the Water Department," he said, slowly and forcefully, "and I'll have you before the grand jury for murder."

Dike laughed scornfully.

"A man calls at my office. Later on he's found murdered. I have been sitting here all the time. Simply because he came here you think that I should give up my career, eh?"

Corning played his bluff.

"Forget it," he said. "I know what I'm doing. Parks talked before he died. It was on the road to the hospital. I rode with him in the ambulance."

That statement shook Dike's self-



control. The eyes wavered. The mouth twitched. Then he gripped himself and was as granite once more.

"I presume he said I ran alongside his flivver and stabbed him!" he snorted.

Corning grinned.

"So you know it was a flivver, eh? Well, I'll tell you what he said. He said that he and his wife were out driving and that they had an automobile accident. The car that they ran into was your car. You were in it, and there was another man in it, Carl Dwight, the head of the machine that's milking the city of millions in graft money. The people had been demanding a change in the water department because of that very graft. The mayor made them a gesture by putting you in charge. You were supposed to put an end to the graft on water contracts. Yet you were out riding with Dwight, the man you were supposed to fight.

"You didn't get the man's name. But you found out about the woman. She was driving the car. You learned she was running a speakeasy. You thought it'd be a good plan to get her where her testimony wouldn't count. So Dwight raided her place and framed a felony rap on her. She didn't know the full significance of what she'd seen. You thought it'd be a good plan to forestall developments. The testimony of a convicted felon wouldn't go very far in a court of law."

Corning ceased talking. His fists were clenched, his eyes cold and steady.

Dike's gaze was equally steady.

"Corning," he said, "you are a very vigorous and impulsive young man. You are also either drunk or crazy. Get out and stay out."

Corning turned towards the door.

"I thought," he said, "that I would have the satisfaction of telling you what I know, and showing you that you can't gain anything by railroading this woman. Also you'll either resign your post, or you'll be mixed up in murder."

Dike scooped up the telephone.

"When you go out," he said, "tell my

secretary to put the spring catch on the door. I don't want any more crazy guys busting in here."

Corning grinned at him.

"I'll put the catch on the door myself," he said, and pushed the thumb snap down, walked out and closed the door behind him. The typist paused in her pounding of the keys to watch him. The secretary stared with wide eyes. Corning walked to the corridor and took the elevator.

He stepped into a drug store on the corner and called police headquarters. He asked for the homicide squad, and got Sergeant Home on the line.

"This," he said, "is a tip."

"What is?" gruffed the sergeant.

"What you're hearing. A man named Parks was killed this afternoon. He'd been driving a flivver that had collided with a red car. Harry B. Dike owns a red car that's been in a collision. Parks had been to call on Dike just before he got killed. Carl Dwight has been in some sort of a smash. There's a cut on his forehead, and he walks with a limp. Sam Parks has a wife, Esther. You've got her in jail right now on a felony charge."

Sergeant Home's voice betrayed his excitement.

"Tell me, who is this speaking? Where do you get that dope?"

Ken snapped his answer into the transmitter.

"Have a man you can trust at the *Columbino* at eight tonight. Have him wear a white carnation and sit near the front door. Look up the information I've given you in the meantime."

And Corning slammed the receiver back on the hook, waited a moment for a free line, and then called Harry Dike's office on the telephone. The line was busy. He called three times with the same result. The fourth time he got Dike on the line, after some argument with the secretary.

"Corning," he snapped crisply. "I'm giving you one last chance to get out of the tangle Dwight's got you in. I'll



be at the *Columbino* tonight at eight. If you want to make a written statement and get out of the mess I won't put the screws down."

Dike's voice was smoothly suave.

"Kind of you, I'm sure, but I don't think I care to see you there. However . . . where are you now?"

Corning laughed into the transmitter.

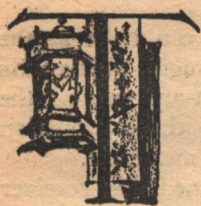
"Wouldn't you like to know!" he said, and hung up.

He waited in front of the drug-store, keeping in the background, yet being where he could watch the entrance to Dike's office building.

Carl Dwight didn't show up. But a speeding automobile, slamming into the curb at the fire hydrant, disgorged Perkins, the detective. Half a dozen minutes later a taxicab paused to let out Fred Granger, who was Dwight's right-hand man.

Perkins came out, almost on the run, within fifteen minutes. Granger didn't come out for half an hour. Dike followed him. Ten minutes after that, a police car bearing a detective stopped in front of the office building.

Ken Corning terminated his vigil, stepped into a barber shop, had a shave, hot towels, massage, haircut and shampoo. He was careful not to go near any of his regular haunts, or leave a trail which could be picked up.



THE *Columbino* ran fairly wide open. Anyone could get in there who had the price. It went in somewhat for music, atmosphere and an aura of respectability. The liquor was very good.

It was early when Ken Corning walked into the place, exactly eight o'clock, and there were but few patrons, most of them eating. The dance floor would fill up later on, and by midnight the place would be going full blast.

A man in evening clothes, with a conspicuous white carnation in his button-

hole, had a table in the front of the place. Ken heaved a sigh as he saw that Home had investigated his tip, found out enough to go ahead on the lead.

Ken Corning ordered a full dinner with a cocktail at the start, a bottle of wine with the meal, a cordial afterwards. Momentarily he expected action, and the action did not come.

It was nine-fifteen when he reluctantly called for the waiter and paid the check. The man with the white carnation continued to sit by the door.

Evidently the powers that ruled the city had decided to ignore Ken Corning, and Ken was disquieted at the thought. Things were not turning out as he had anticipated.

The waiter was gone some little time. Ken waited for the change. The man in the dinner coat with white carnation looked at his watch, pursed his lips. Ken got the idea that this man had a definite time limit fixed. At nine-thirty, probably, he would leave.

The waiter returned.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but the manager wants to see you in his office. There's a bit of trouble, sir."

Ken got to his feet, followed the waiter. He was walking lightly, his hands slightly away from his sides, his head carried alertly, eyes watchful.

The manager stared coldly from behind the desk.

The waiter turned to go. Ken thought that something brushed against his coat. He couldn't be sure. He glanced at the waiter's retreating back.

The manager said: "I'm sure it's a mistake, but it's something I'll have to investigate."

"What is?" asked Corning.

"This," said the manager, and placed on the desk in front of him the bill which Ken Corning had given the waiter. "It's counterfeit."

Ken laughed.

"Well," he said, "it happens that I can give a complete history of that bill. It was paid me this morning by way of



retainer in a legal matter, in the presence of my secretary. What's more, I don't think it's counterfeit."

A door opened. A man stepped purposefully into the room.

The manager waved his hand.

"I'll let you discuss that with McGovern, of the Secret Service. You probably don't know it, but we've been flooded with clever counterfeits here the last week. McGovern has been waiting on call."

Ken turned to meet the man's eyes.

McGovern smiled, and the smile was frank.

"If you can tell me where you got it, that's all I need to know," he said. "One look at you's enough to convince me you're no counterfeiter."

Ken smiled in return, then let the smile fade.

"Look here," he said, "this bill came from a client. I have an idea certain interests would like to frame something else on that client and his wife. The man is dead. The wife isn't—yet. I don't want to play into any frame-up. . . ."

The other smiled, waved his hand.

"Just a formality, but you'll have to tell me. You're dealing with the Federal Secret Service now. You won't find any political frame-ups with us. As a matter of form, would you mind letting me see the rest of your money?"

Ken laughed, reached in his coat, took out his wallet.

That wallet felt strangely bulky. He stared at it. It wasn't his wallet. It was crammed with currency. He made a move as though to put it back in his pocket. The Federal man whipped down a swift arm.

"Here," he said, "none of that. Acting funny ain't going to help you."

He grabbed the wallet, opened it, whistled.

There was a moment of silence.

"That," said Ken, "is not my wallet. I demand that the waiter who brought me in here be called. I want to have him searched. He slipped this wallet

into my pocket and took mine out. He's a professional dip, and this is a plant."

The lip of the Federal man curled.

"Yeah," he said. "How often I've heard that one! You've got to come along. Want to go quietly, or would you rather make a fuss?"

Ken stared at the wallet.

"I'll go quietly if you'll pick up that waiter and take him along, too," said Ken.

The Federal turned to the manager.

"Who was it?" he asked.

"Frank," said the manager.

"Get him," said the Federal. "In the meantime I'll take this guy along in a cab. Come on. You can tell your story where it'll be appreciated. They don't pay me to listen, only to do things."

Ken went out through the cabaret.

The man in the dinner coat, who wore the white carnation, was looking at his watch with an air of finality. Ken walked rapidly so that he was a step or two ahead of McGovern. There were couples standing on the floor. Many of the tables were vacant. The music stopped when Ken was some twenty feet from the table occupied by the man in the dinner coat who wore the white carnation. There was a perfunctory spatter of applause and then couples stood, waiting, staring at the orchestra expectantly.

Ken Corning raised his voice and called over his shoulder to McGovern: "This is just a frame-up, because I've got some evidence in that Parks murder case."

McGovern spoke in an even, ominous tone. "Shut up!" he said.

Ken flashed a glance to the man who wore the white carnation. He was signaling a waiter for his check. There was nothing on his face to indicate that he had heard what Ken had said; or hearing, was in anywise concerned with it. The orchestra struck up an encore. As the couples started to twine and twist to the strains of the dance, Ken flashed a glance at McGovern, then at



the man who wore the white carnation. The man was handing the waiter a bill. The waiter was pushing an oblong of pink pasteboard at him from which had been figured the items of the check. The man pushed away the pasteboard, made a sweeping gesture with his hand as though to indicate that the waiter should keep the change. Staring at his face, it was impossible for Ken to tell whether the man had hurried his exit because Ken was leaving, or whether he had simply grown tired of waiting, and decided to knock off for the day.



BEHIND him, McGovern said: "Get your hat and coat and don't try any funny business."

Ken moved up to the checking stand. A girl with a beautiful face flashed him a smile that was meant to be dazzling, but was only mechanical, took the square of pasteboard which he handed her and pushed Ken's hat out over the counter.

The man who wore the white carnation in his dinner coat had evidently found some people he knew. He was chatting with them, a young man of about thirty, and a red-haired woman who could not have been over twenty-three. As he chatted, he reached up and plucked the white carnation from the dinner jacket, dropped it to the floor and stepped on it.

Ken said to McGovern: "Can I talk with you? Will you listen to reason?"

McGovern said: "Sure, I'll listen to any guy who wants to talk; only remember that anything you say will be used against you."

Ken lured him over to the far corner of the checking counter and said: "All right now, listen. I told you that this thing was a frame-up because I was a witness in the Parks case. You don't seem to be interested."

McGovern said: "Why should I be interested? That's a state case, I'm a Federal. You tell me where you got

this counterfeit money from and where the plates are and I'll sit here and listen to you until daylight. But if you've got anything to say on the Parks case you can tell it to the state authorities—I'm not interested."

Ken fixed his eyes on McGovern and said: "Listen, suppose that I could show you that this man Parks had something on the administration and was going to keep Dike from accepting the position of Superintendent of the Water Department? Suppose I could show you that Carl Dwight is mixed up with Dike; that, in place of being enemies, those two fellows are working hand in glove regardless of all this newspaper talk about Dike wanting to clean up the graft. . . ."

McGovern took his arm above the elbow and gave him a push.

"Listen, guy, I told you I wasn't interested in all that stuff. Are you going to tell me where you got the plates or where you've got the rest of this queer cached?"

Ken Corning's eyes narrowed.

"Okey," he said, "I tried to give you the breaks and you wouldn't listen. Now I'll take a look at *your* credentials before I leave this place."

McGovern grinned easily and dropped his right hand to the side pocket.

"Gee," he said, "you sure are full of alibis and stalls. Come on and let's get going. This is all in the day's work with me and I want to get home and get my beauty sleep. You can stall all night, but you can't keep me from taking you to jail and booking you on a charge of possession of counterfeit money. If you want my authority, here it is."

Ken felt something hard prodding against his ribs. He glanced down to where the right hand of McGovern was holding the gun concealed by the right-hand side pocket of his coat. He said: "Oh, it's like that, is it?"

McGovern said: "Yes, guy, it's like that. You're going to take it and like it. Get started out of here. You've



got counterfeit money in your possession and there are witnesses that you tried to pass it. You can either go quietly or you can get your insides blown out right here. Which is it going to be?"

Ken grinned and said: "Under the circumstances, I guess I'll go quietly."

McGovern said: "Now you're talking sense. You can't gain anything by talking any other way. I'm on the square and I'm going to take you in, but I ain't going to stand here all night and listen to a lot of hooey and I ain't going to have you pull any smart aleck stuff on me. Get started!"

Corning moved towards the door. He noticed that the man who had worn the white carnation was moving towards the door also and that the man who had been with the red-haired girl was walking with him. The red-haired girl moved off towards the left and went into the women's dressing room. The man who had worn the white carnation lit a cigarette. He seemed in no hurry. Ken Corning went out of the door painfully conscious of the pressure of the gun which was held against his ribs. The doorman looked at them and said: "Taxicab?"

McGovern shook his head and said: "No, I've got a car."

The big limousine which had been parked near the curb with motor running slid smoothly up to the front of the cabaret and stopped. The doorman started to open the door and McGovern spoke sharply: "That's all right," he said, "I'm a Federal dick and this man is a prisoner. He's desperate and may try to start something. Keep back, I'll handle this!"

He reached out and opened the door. His gun prodded Ken in the ribs. "Get in," he said.

Ken put his right foot on the running-board of the limousine. He could see two men seated in the back seat. They were grinning. Ken swung his body in a pivot, grabbing with his left hand at the gun which McGovern was holding

against his ribs and pushing down with all his strength.

McGovern fired twice before Ken's fist connected with his jaw. Neither shot hit. Somebody shot from the interior of the limousine but the bullet hit the plate-glass window, shattered it into a thousand fragments and deflected. McGovern went down like a sack of cement. Ken swung himself on him and reached for the gun. Over his shoulder he could see the swirl of motion from the interior of the limousine. A man jumped to the running-board while Ken was still struggling for the possession of the gun. Ken heard him say: "All right, guy, take a load of this!"

Two shots roared out as though they had been one explosion. The man who had stood on the running-board of the limousine pitched forward and struck on his face. Ken jerked the gun from the pocket of McGovern and saw that the man in the dinner jacket was standing on the steps of the cabaret, an automatic in his hand. The man who had been with the red-haired girl was standing on the sidewalk a little bit to one side with a double-action revolver spouting fire. The doorman was running heavily, his gold-braided coat flapping grotesquely behind him. The limousine had lurched into motion. Somebody was rolling down the back window, which had not been shattered. Guns blazed over Ken's head. A bullet whistled past his cheek. The two men standing in the front of the cabaret answered the fire.

Ken got McGovern's gun in his hand and took a couple of shots at the limousine. He heard the bullets give forth a clinking sound as they struck against the metal of the body. The limousine swung far over to one side as it rounded the corner to the accompaniment of screaming tires.

The man in the dinner coat ran towards Ken as McGovern, recovering from the daze of Ken's blow, started to struggle to his feet.



Ken said: "Those men were trying to take me for a ride. This guy posed as a Federal agent . . ."

McGovern spoke up and said: "I am a Federal agent. This crook's been shoving the queer. He's got a wallet of phoney stuff on him right now."

The man in the dinner coat laughed and said: "Federal, hell! I know you, you're Jim Harper, and you've done time!"

A uniformed policeman, on beat, ran up. The man in the dinner coat spoke to him sharply: "All right, Bell. Get the crowd back. I'll handle what's left of this."

A curious crowd was commencing to form a ring around the men, and the uniformed policeman started to herd them back.

The man in the dinner coat said: "That's all right, buddy, I know this guy, he's a crook. You're a witness in the Parks case, huh?"

Ken Corning stared at him with round eyes and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I'm not a witness, I'm attorney for Mrs. Parks and I came here to meet a witness but he didn't show up."

The man in the dinner jacket stared at Ken Corning for a long five seconds. Then his right eyelid slowly closed in a solemn wink: "So," he said, "that's your story, eh?"

Ken Corning kept his face perfectly straight and his eyes perfectly steady. "That," he said, "is my story and I'm sticking to it. I'm not a witness, I'm a lawyer. I was to meet a witness here. These guys tried to keep me from meeting him, that's all."

The man in the dinner coat said: "Who were they? Would you recognize any of them if you saw them again?"

Ken Corning shook his head.

"No," he said, "the light wasn't good enough. I couldn't see them."

The man in the dinner coat turned to the fake Federal agent. Ken Corning slipped away. No one tried to stop

him. There was the sound of a police siren, approaching fast, as he turned the corner.



EN CORNING walked into his office.

The morning sun streamed in at the east window. Helen Vail stared at him with eyes that were dark with emotion, warm with pride.

"Got your name in the papers, didn't you?"

He grinned at her.

"How about our client?" she asked.

He spread his hands, palm up, made a sweeping gesture.

"Gone. Case is closed, dismissed."

"And all we get then is the hundred and fifty dollar retainer?"

Ken nodded.

"That's all. The woman was driving the car. Her husband wasn't with her. I figured that he must have been, but he wasn't. Dike and Dwight had been having a secret meeting. They'd been out in the country at a road-house where they were safe. Coming back they were riding in the same car. Dike was driving and he was a little bit 'lickered.' The woman was driving the flivver and they had a smash. She was a little bit belligerent and insisted on taking down the license number of the automobile. They paid her for her damage but she acted a little suspicious so Dwight got the license number of her automobile and found out who she was. They knew that she was running a speak, and figured that she was too dumb to know what it was all about, but they wanted her out of the way, just the same. With the deal Dike was planning to pull, it would have been fatal if somebody had uncovered this woman as a witness, so Dwight decided that he'd get her convicted of a felony. That would have discredited her testimony if she'd ever been called as a witness.

"She probably was suspicious, because



she told her husband about it. Nobody knows just how much she told him or how much he knew, but it's a cinch that he knew enough to put two and two together when he saw Dike's picture in the paper with the blurb about his taking over the Water Department and eliminating graft."

Helen Vail watched him with wide eyes.

"Can we prove any of that?" she asked.

Ken Corning shook his head. "We can't prove anything," he said. "Wouldn't do us any good if we could. They've dismissed the case against the woman, released her from custody and she's gone. They probably made a deal with her, gave her some money and started her traveling."

"Why would they do that?" asked Helen Vail. "Her testimony is just as damaging now as it ever was."

Ken Corning smiled and motioned towards the morning paper.

"Read the news," he said, "and you'll notice that Dike has declined the appointment. He said that his private business was taking up too much of his time for him to make the sacrifice of accepting a public position."

Helen Vail blinked her eyes thoughtfully and said: "How about the people in the automobile—don't you know any of them?"

Ken Corning said: "You mean the ones who were trying to take me for a ride?"

She nodded her head.

Ken laughed and said: "Sure I do. Perkins was one of them. He was the detective who barged into the office here. He's a cheap heel who does dirty work for the Dwight machine."

"But," she said, "you told the officers that you couldn't recognize any of them."

Ken Corning laughed mirthlessly and said: "Of course I did. I'd never get

anywhere trying to pin anything on Perkins. He'd produce an alibi and get acquitted. Then they'd turn around and prosecute me for perjury. I'm bucking a machine in this town, and the machine is well entrenched with a lot of money back of it. I'm not a fool!"

"How about the man who pretended to be a Federal officer?" she asked.

"He's got to take the rap. They've got the goods on him. They might have managed to make some sort of stall there, only I knew it was coming. I had worked the wallet that the waiter had planted on me out of my pocket. When they opened the door of the limousine I tossed the wallet in with my left hand before I grabbed at this guy's gun and socked him with my right."

She shuddered and said: "Oh, Ken, I don't like it."

He stood with his feet planted far apart, his jaw thrust forward, hands thrust into the pocket of his coat.

"I like it," he said, "and I'm going to make them like it. I'm going to bust this town wide open. They're going to stop me if they can. They'll try to frame me, try to take me for a ride, try to freeze me out. I'm going to stay! I'm going to be here after they're gone."

"But, Ken," she objected, "you've done all this work and risked your life and we only get a hundred and fifty dollars out of it."

Ken Corning nodded and laughed.

"A hundred and fifty dollars," he said, "and it's honest money."

Then he walked into his private office and the door clicked shut.

Helen Vail could hear him moving around in the inner office. He was whistling cheerfully as though he didn't have a care in the world.

She opened the drawer of her desk, took out a ledger which was innocent of entry, took a pen and wrote in a hand which trembled slightly: "People versus Parks—cash retainer \$150.00."



# The Magician Murder

By RAMON DECOLTA

*A baffling case—and  
Jo Gar, the Little  
Island detective*



**F**ROM the spot in which Jo Gar was seated the two fighting cocks were whirling, feathered forms bouncing from the dark earth of the pit. Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, Malays and Portuguese filled the rising tiers of wooden benches; their shouts were shrill and fierce. The betting was good; already there had been several fights. The

event now under way was the last fight of the evening; one of the cocks, a small bird named *Riazo*, was the champion of a distant Philippine province. *Riazo* seemed to be winning and the majority of the crowd liked it.

The Island detective rolled the brown-paper cigarette between two short brown fingers of his right hand. His face was expressionless; it was as though he were unconscious of the excitement around him. At intervals he raised his



right hand so that it was before his brown face. The fingers of the hand were spread carelessly; his blue-gray eyes looked between them.

Cardoro sat on his right, some twenty feet away, in the small box reserved for persons of importance. Cardoro was a magician—Cardoro the Great. He was Spanish, but spoke several languages. Only five days ago he had reached Manila from Australia, and already he was the talk of the city. Crowds stormed the box office of the theatre at which he executed his magic. His name was on the lips of the mixed breeds of the Islands. He was a savage magician, working with knives and poisons. He made incisions on people and there was blood in evidence. Yet it was only a trick. The audience saw incisions that did not exist, and blood that was only colored water. But they liked it, and Cardoro was great. Therefore he occupied the box of honor.

The shrill shouts now became a scream. Jo Gar smiled slightly as the favorite sank on the dark ground. It rose and launched itself into another attack. The larger bird met the attack with a more vicious one. The silver spurs glittered in the light shooting down on them. *Riaso* was battered back, fell on its side. The larger bird was on top of it now, spurs working. *Riaso's* movements were convulsive. Suddenly there were no more movements. The shrill of the crowd hushed. Filipinos were in the pit—bending over the birds.

Jo Gar said very softly: "Another champion is dead."

He raised his right hand again, spreading the fingers. Cardoro was on his feet in the box. He was staring towards the ground of the pit. He had large black eyes and a face that seemed very pale among the brown ones about him. His body was straight; he was a big man. His face seemed strained.

A Filipino standing in the pit raised a short arm and said into the silence:

"*Riaso* is dead!"

He spoke in Spanish, and before he could repeat the announcement in another language Cardoro had cried out. His voice carried over the close-packed circular arena.

"No!" he cried in Spanish. "It cannot be!"

Heads were jerked in his direction. A jeering voice from somewhere below reached Jo Gar's ears.

"It is so—*Riaso* is even too dead for your magic, Señor Cardoro!"

Jo Gar narrowed his blue-gray eyes very little. There was the edge of a smile on his tight-pressed lips. He looked down at the one who had jeered up at the magician. It was Markden, an American who handled many bets. Many bets that were large. Markden was a gambler; it was rumored that he made good sums on the fighting cocks. It was also rumored that some of his bets were placed after he had advance knowledge of certain facts. The Chinese did not trust him, and the Chinese were known as the wisest of the gamblers.

Cardoro's big body was swaying a little from side to side. His arms were drawn upward, the elbows extended, and his fists were clenched. There were white gloves on his hands; he wore them to protect his fingers, which were long and extremely sensitive. He called above the murmur of the crowd:

"I will not—"

His voice ceased abruptly. Jo Gar watched him turn from the box, saw a rather pretty girl lift a hand as though to stop him. But the magician paid no attention to her. The Island detective watched Cardoro move down wooden steps to a narrow exit. When he looked at Markden again the gambler was facing the direction in which the magician had gone. He was a small, slight man—slighter even than Jo. There was a set expression on his face. His body was tense under the glare of the lights, but as Jo's eyes watched he saw the man relax. He shrugged his narrow



shoulders, looked down at the form of the dead bird.

The Filipino official who had announced the defeat of the champion now lifted the live winner in his hands. He turned slowly with the fighting cock above his head.

"The new champion!" he called, "*Garcia the First!*"

There was shrill sound in the arena. A group of Portuguese sailors started down towards the pit. There was the odor of varied tobaccos and of heat of people. Betel-nut chewers passed Jo, and there were red stains on the planks. It was very hot.

The Island detective went slowly towards an exit from the cock fight arena. The crowd milled around the dry ground beyond the entrance, chattering excitedly. *Calesos* and noisy, battered cars were making sound. Cardoro was not in sight, but there was talk of him. A well-dressed Chinese near Jo stated to his companion that the great one had lost much money. He had backed *Riazo* to the limit. Such a bet had not been made in many Sundays.

Jo Gar moved slowly to his *caleso*, nodded to the driver, who drowsed on the seat. Señor Ronisa passed close to the *caleso*, spoke cheerfully to Jo.

"I was lucky," the fat one stated. "I have won many *pesos*. But most have lost."

Jo Gar's eyes were very small. He placed a Panama carefully over his gray hair.

"It is not good—when most lose," he said quietly.

The fat one shrugged. "It is good for the few who win," he replied. "The winning is greater."

Jo Gar smiled a little, climbed into the *caleso*. The driver lifted the reins and spoke shrilly to the ancient horse. Jo said in a toneless voice:

"And the hating of the losers is greater."

He closed his eyes and relaxed in the seat. The *caleso* jerked forward and the light wind fanned greater heat

against his face. When he opened his blue-gray eyes they were smiling. But the smile was a hard one, and very thoughtful.



ADI RATAN frowned across the few feet of Jo Gar's office that separated the two. He looked cool despite the heat; his khaki uniform was spotless, well pressed. He said with a slight accent, speaking in English:

"You have perhaps seen that the magician, Cardoro, is dead, murdered?"

Jo Gar leaned back in the wicker chair. He nodded very slowly.

"Yes," he replied.

The Manila police lieutenant's frown deepened. There was a short silence broken by the whistle of small craft on the Pasig.

"The crime was committed by the American, Markden," Sadi Ratan announced. "The gambler, Markden. He has been in difficulty before this. He has vanished. The Constabulary has been notified."

Jo Gar smiled pleasantly. "Is that so?" he said thoughtfully. "So it was Markden who knifed Señor Cardoro?"

Lieutenant Ratan nodded again. He stood erect, but did not smile.

"That is the way it was," he stated. "He had been betting against Markden three nights since he has arrived here. Large sums. He had lost each time. Last evening he made a big bet. It was Sunday and he had little money. He agreed to cable his bank in Australia this morning, if he lost. He lost and he refused to pay. At dusk tonight he was knifed to death by Markden in his room at the Manila Hotel. Markden escaped, but he will be caught."

The Island detective continued to smile. "Of course," he said simply.

There was another silence, and during it Sadi Ratan watched Jo closely.

"The knife we have not found. Perhaps it was not a knife. Beside the



body was a blood-stained spur such as the cocks fight with. A knife spur. The wounds were on the back of the neck—many of them. The spinal column was struck. Markden was seen drinking very much at six o'clock. He talked of what he would do to Cardoro if he failed to pay. Perhaps it was that he fastened the silver spur to wood, and used it that way. He entered the room while Cardoro was sleeping. There was no struggle. Cardoro was stunned with the first blow and before he staggered from the bed to die on the floor Markden had struck many others. Then he fled."

Jo Gar lighted a brown-paper cigarette. "Why did Señor Cardoro refuse to pay his bet?" he asked, after a short time.

Lieutenant Ratan smiled a little. "He had been told, before the cock fights, that the champion bird, *Riazo*, had been drugged. The fight was not fair. Markden had bribed the Filipino who cared for *Riazo*."

Jo Gar smiled with his eyes almost closed. "Why did he not cancel his bet?" he asked.

Sadi Ratan shrugged. "Perhaps he was not sure. Perhaps Markden would not allow it. The fight was not a good one. *Riazo* did not attack. Cardoro refused to pay. Markden drank *sake* and thought about it. He murdered the magician."

Jo Gar looked at the ceiling fan that whirled at slow speed, spreading tepid air around the small office.

"A foolish man," he observed. "He knew that murdering Cardoro would not get him the money he had won. He knew that leaving the knife spur behind would betray him. He knew that running away would make matters worse. Yet he did all three of these things."

Sadi Ratan smiled narrowly. "He hated," he said simply. "It is a hot country. He drank and he brooded. Perhaps he did not *intend* to leave the spur behind. He fled when he discovered it was lost, or when he sobered.

He knew the police would think of him."

"And they *did* think of him," Jo said pleasantly.

Lieutenant Ratan frowned again. "I attended the cock fights and was near Cardoro. I saw Markden mock him, jeer at him. And I heard the magician call out: 'I will not—' I knew that he meant he would not pay his bet."

The Island detective nodded. "It was fortunate you were so near," he observed. "After the murder you thought instantly of Markden. You questioned the bird handlers and learned that *Riazo* had perhaps been drugged and was unfit to fight, and that Cardoro had been warned of this fact. You have had the red on the spur knife analyzed and you know that it is human blood. It is common knowledge that Cardoro was betting heavily. Markden has vanished. Thus, he is the murderer."

Sadi Ratan's dark eyes had widened. They narrowed now. He spoke in a tone of triumph.

"That is so."

Jo Gar inhaled deeply on his cigarette. He regarded the police lieutenant with faint interest, reached for the palm leaf fan that was on the desk near his chair.

"And it being so, why do you visit me?" he asked softly.

The police lieutenant smiled, his white teeth showing.

"The Señor Markden was seen with you, not long before the hour of the first cock fight," he said slowly and clearly. "You were walking along the bank of the Pasig, talking seriously. You were seen by the police."

Jo Gar chuckled. "One never knows who watches," he said half to himself. His blue-gray eyes narrowed on the dark ones of the younger man. "It is true. We walked and talked together."

Sadi Ratan smiled coldly. "I think I should know what you talked about," he said.

The Island detective said thoughtfully: "I think you should. Señor



Markden wished me to learn if the cock fight—the final one—was to be honest. He stated that he had a large sum of money involved."

He paused and after a few seconds Sadi Ratan said impatiently:

"Well—did you accept the commission?"

Jo Gar nodded. "I made inquiries. I did my best. And I reported to him during the cock fights."

Sadi Ratan said: "You learned that the bird Cardoro was betting on was unfit to fight?"

The Island detective shook his head. "I reported to Markden that I felt the birds were evenly matched physically. It would be a matter of skill."

Sadi Ratan's brown face showed red color. He swore in Filipino. He said thickly:

"I do not think—"

He checked himself. Jo Gar smiled. "That I tell you the truth?" he asked quietly.

The police lieutenant's body was tense. "You are protecting an American. You have always protected them. You like them. He was your client."

Jo shrugged his narrow shoulders. "I was not paid that well," he said with irony. "I doubt that I could ever be paid that well. *Riasco* was not drugged. You have no proof of it."

Sadi Ratan said hotly: "I stood over Juan Derigo when he told me—"

Jo chuckled again. "A Filipino does not like to be beaten," he said. "He preferred to let you think as you wished."

The police lieutenant said: "It will not be good for you to protect Markden, Señor Gar. When we have caught him—"

The Island detective fanned himself. His smile was gone and he said slowly:

"The birds were in condition. Each of them. *Riasco* was defeated. That is all."

Sadi Ratan said excitedly: "It is not all. Markden was betting against Cardoro. Cardoro stood up and shouted

that he would not pay. I saw Markden's face—there was hate in his eyes. And Cardoro was murdered. A spur knife was used. Markden has vanished. We have searched the city for him. He is the killer of the magician!"

Jo Gar sighed. "Then it is all very simple," he said quietly. "You will find him, and that will be the end."

His calmness infuriated the police lieutenant. He said fiercely:

"And you will be brought to trial for lying to me, a police officer!"

Jo Gar placed the palm leaf fan on the desk. It was almost midnight. He said thoughtfully:

"He was murdered at dusk—that would be about eight-thirty. You have been searching for the American for three hours. That would give the *real* murderer sufficient time to travel far."

Sadi Ratan swore again. He pointed a brown finger at Jo.

"We will not accept the alibi that you establish for the American," he said. "Remember that."

Jo Gar smiled pleasantly. "That is unfortunate," he said.

The police lieutenant went to the office door, turned and faced the Island detective.

"Markden was seen on the grounds of the Manila Hotel, at eight-fifteen," he stated grimly. "The sun was very low over the Bay. He was seen by several servants. And then he was not seen again. At the time he was seen the magician was in his room, sleeping. There is a porch through which one may enter."

Jo smiled cheerfully. "In a hot country the screened porch is desirable," he said softly.

Sadi Ratan pointed a finger at him again. His voice was rising as he spoke.

"It will be bad for you," he warned. "A murderer is a murderer."

Jo Gar leaned back in the wicker chair and closed his almond-shaped eyes.

"It is so," he agreed almost tonelessly.



"And I think it would be wise for you to find this one."



AM MARKDEN sat slumped on the bench that faced the door of the dully lighted hut. A faint, hot breeze rustled the thatch roof. Markden seemed smaller than ever; his eyes moved at every sound. He was perspiring heavily. He spoke in a thick voice, softly and unsteadily.

"I tell you—they'll get me. They hate me in Manila. The fight was on the level. Maybe some haven't been in the past. This one was. They'll get me and frame me. You've got to do something, Señor Gar."

Jo Gar shook his head. "I have not got to do something," he corrected. "But your position is unfortunate. The police will not even believe me when I tell them you wished me to learn if the cock fight was to be fair. They will laugh at that. If I told them Cardoro had asked me that—they would have believed. But you—"

He checked himself. Somewhere beyond the hut on the edge of Manila, a dog howled. Markden shivered. Jo Gar said slowly and firmly:

"You have sent for me—you trust me. Do not trick me. Did you murder Cardoro?"

Markden sat up straight and struck clenched hands together.

"No—no!" he said desperately. "I threatened him, yes. That was in the afternoon. But I didn't kill him. I went to the hotel grounds, to talk to him again, just before dusk. But I was afraid to trust myself. I didn't see him. I went away. Then word reached me of what had happened. I hid out here—and sent for you."

Jo nodded. "It was difficult for me to reach you without being followed," he said. "The police are watching me carefully."

The American groaned. "They'll get

me," he breathed. "I'd won from Cardoro. So much that I wanted this last fight to be absolutely fair. It had to be, or I knew he'd squeal. That's why I went to you."

Jo frowned. "It's a bad alibi, in any case. In this case—it's impossible."

Markden covered his soaked face with both palms and rocked on the bench. The dog howled again. Jo Gar said:

"You do not know of any enemies Cardoro might have had?"

Markden removed his hands, shook his head. "I didn't know him well. He was just a man with money, who wanted to bet."

The Island detective frowned. "You drank—and talked. Made threats before others?"

Markden's eyes were staring beyond Jo. "I drank *saké*. But I didn't make any threats. Only to Cardoro, and we were alone. I was careful not to make threats."

Jo sighed. "It is difficult," he said. "It was a good thing for someone who hated him enough to kill—this hatred of yours. But if we do not know the one who could have made use of it—"

He broke off. Markden muttered: "Billibid—I'll hang for it! They won't believe me."

Jo Gar half closed his eyes. He said in a calm voice:

"If you hang for it—I will be forced to leave the Islands. I think you are telling the truth. I do not wish to leave Manila. You do not wish to hang. You will stay here and I will do what I can."

Markden stared at him with blood-shot eyes.

"But what can you do?" he muttered. "All the evidence is against me. All that they have."

Jo Gar rubbed moist fingers together and smiled grimly down at the gambler.

"Perhaps there will be some evidence they do *not* have," he said softly. "There is a chance."



The American said bitterly: "It's a hell—of a chance!"

Jo Gar drew a deep breath, shrugged. "Even a *hell* of a chance is worth while," he observed steadily and softly, and went cautiously from the thatch-roofed hut.

THE girl said: "It seems to me it's pretty late for me to have to talk about—this terrible thing."

Jo Gar stepped inside the large, high-ceilinged room, smiled apologetically.

"It is so, Miss Rayne," he said. "It is almost one o'clock. I am sorry."

The girl stood aside as he moved to the center of the room. There was moonlight beyond the Manila Hotel, on the water of the Bay. The girl was pretty, but her mouth and eyes were hard. She said huskily:

"I've been questioned—by the police."

The Island detective nodded. "Yes," he replied. "I suppose so. I am not of the police."

She watched him very closely. "I know. You're Señor Gar, a private detective."

Jo bowed slightly. The girl said: "Markden did this terrible thing. I was to have—married—Dario—next week—"

The Island detective said gently, looking at the older woman seated in the room.

"You think Markden killed Dario Cardoro?"

The girl said: "Yes—yes, I do! I'm sure of it. I was with Dario at the cock fights. He was sure he had been tricked. He said he would never pay. *Riazo* had no life, no fight. Dario left me in the box, hurried away. He was terribly upset."

Jo gestured towards a chair. "Please sit down," he said.

The girl went slowly to the chair, sat down. She looked at the older woman, said:

"This is my companion—Señora Rig-gia."

The Spanish woman bowed, her eyes

on Jo's. She was short and thick-set. Her body relaxed in the chair.

"It is terrible," she said with an accent.

Jo Gar nodded. "It is bad for Señor Markden, the American," he stated. "He was owed money by the dead man. It was refused him. He threatened the dead man. He was on the hotel grounds not long before the murder was committed. He has vanished."

The girl said: "They will find him—the police."

The Island detective nodded. "I think so," he agreed. "But he is not the murderer of the magician, Cardoro."

The girl's brown eyes widened. She said in a half whisper:

"Not the—murderer—"

Jo smiled gently. His eyes were on the older woman. Her hands were gripping the sides of the wicker chair. Far out in the Bay a big boat whistled. Jo spoke slowly.

"Markden has been in trouble with the police before. He has shot a man. He possesses a gun. He did not use it on Cardoro."

The older woman said sharply: "That was because he did not wish to give himself away. He wished the police to think it was some other person—not an American. Americans do not use knives."

Jo Gar said: "That is good reasoning, Señora. Almost *too* good. He looked at the girl again. There was a short silence. Then Jo said pleasantly:

"I have been looking at the body. Cardoro was killed by a strong person."

The girl said: "A strong person? That is not so. The doctors have said that the spur blade did not penetrate more than an inch. A blow to the base of the brain—"

The Island detective interrupted, but his tone was cold and his words unhurried.

"And Markden is not a strong person?" he suggested.

The girl said with scorn: "Of course not. He is smaller even than you."



Jo bowed slightly. "That is so," he agreed. "I felt that you were aware of the fact that Markden is not strong."



HERE was a knock at the door of the room. The girl rose. Before she reached the door it was opened. Sadi Ratan entered. He said quickly, looking at the Spanish woman: "I felt that you should know, Señora—"

He stared at Jo, broke off. The Island detective smiled at him.

"I came to talk with Miss Rayne, Lieutenant," he said.

Sadi Ratan frowned. Then his eyes narrowed until they were slits in his brown face.

"We have captured the American, Markden," he said grimly. "He has admitted that Señor Gar visited him to-night. That is bad for you, Señor Gar. You were protecting a murderer, one wanted by the police."

Jo Gar said quietly: "One wanted by the police, but not a murderer."

The police lieutenant said in a hard tone: "He will confess very soon. And even if he does not—"

The Island detective smiled with his lips. "You will try to hang him, anyway," he finished.

Sadi Ratan let his right hand go back towards a hip pocket. He said in a hard tone:

"It will be necessary for me to place you under arrest, Señor Gar, for interfering with the police and for aiding a murderer."

Jo shook his head. "Señor Markden is not yet a murderer," he reminded. "He has not been found guilty."

The girl said with scorn: "His record is not good. He has shot a man. He is a gambler and he has been caught cheating, before this happened. He killed Dario—because Dario refused to pay him."

Jo shook his head. His eyes were very small.

"You know much about the American," he said calmly. "Almost *too* much."

Sadi Ratan was watching him closely. Jo looked at the girl, addressed the police lieutenant.

"The Great Cardoro has done his tricks here often—for a period of years. He is Spanish—there is a bond between him and the Spanish here. There is a Spanish paper in Manila. News of Spaniards all over the world reaches it and is printed or filed away in the paper morgue. I have been looking through the morgue files. I find that Cardoro was worth twice as much two years ago than he was six months ago. His losses were due to gambling. I found a later item stating that Cardoro the Great had become engaged to an American girl of the theatre, Miss Jessie Rayne. And I found one more item of three months ago. In Melbourne a gambling place was raided. One of the heaviest losers had been Cardoro. He had stated then that he was willing his money to Miss Rayne, his fiancée, and that on the day of their marriage he would never gamble again."

The girl was watching him narrowly—her breathing was heavy. The older woman was tense in her chair. Jo said, smiling a little:

"So there you are."

Sadi Ratan said sharply: "There you are—where? What of it?"

Jo Gar shrugged. "But Cardoro has continued gambling. Continued losing. His fortune is willed to Miss Rayne. But will there *be* any fortune—would there *have been* any fortune—if Cardoro had not been—"

The girl shrieked at him: "You are telling me that *I* killed—Dario! You dare—"

Jo Gar shook his head. "I am not," he said quietly. "You did not love him, but you did not kill him. You do not know so much about knives, and you are not strong enough."



The girl's eyes were wide; her face was pale. Sadi breathed something that the Island detective did not catch. He said softly:

"But you realized, Miss Rayne, that the money you had married Cardoro for would not be for you, unless something was done. And you decided that something should be—death."

The girl cried: "No—"

Jo Gar said steadily: "Yes. You waited for the opportunity. The American, Markden, offered it. He had reason to hate Cardoro. He had a record and you knew about it. He was a gambler on cock fights, and that was why the blood-stained knife spur was found beside the dead man. But you went too far. Markden is an American, and he would not kill and then boast about it as a Filipino or a Spaniard might do. He would not hate that much."

He paused and said very slowly: "Cardoro was killed with a knife—not a cock fight spur. He was killed by a strong man or woman, who knew how to handle a knife. He was killed by—"

He turned and looked at the girl's companion. He said quietly:

"You murdered Dario Cardoro. You did not throw the knife far enough into the Bay, in your hurry. And you were seen throwing it. I have the knife."

The woman sprang from the chair. She screamed in Spanish, terribly. From the folds of her dress steel color caught the light of the room. Her right arm was lifted.

Jo Gar said: "Stop—"

The woman's right hand went down into the folds of the black dress she wore. She said in a hysterical tone:

"You lie—"

Jo Gar's right hand made swift movement; his Colt was low at his right side.

"No," he said steadily. "I do not lie. You murdered Cardoro. Drop the knife you were about to throw—on the floor."

The woman was breathing heavily; her eyes held a wild expression. But

her hand remained in the folds of her black dress.

Jo said: "Quickly—drop it!" He raised the gun slightly.

The knife made clattering sound as it struck the wood of the floor. The woman in black slipped downward, slowly, in a faint. Jo said:

"Well, I have the knife *now*, anyway." He went over and picked it up. "She did not throw it into the Bay—and she was not seen throwing it. But I was coming close—and her nerves—"

The Rayne girl was on the divan, rocking back and forth. Her eyes stared somewhere beyond the figure of Jo Gar. She spoke in a monotone.

"She made me—tell her when Dario slept. She used the knife and left the knife spur, touching it in his blood. She hated him. He loved her once, but he sent her away. He was losing, gambling away all the money he had willed to me. She made me help her—she was to have some of—the money. I didn't want—to do it."

Jo Gar looked at Sadi Ratan. "I thought at first that he had been murdered outside, carried in. That was wrong. And I thought that the knife had been thrown away. That was wrong, too. But when I saw the woman's eyes, saw her watching me—"

He shrugged. The woman on the floor stirred and moaned. The Rayne girl said:

"He was brutal—it was self-defense. He was brutal to both of us—"

Jo Gar smiled slightly. "Your defense is your own affair," he said gently. "I am very little interested."

Lieutenant Ratan frowned and swore. Jo Gar said:

"You were so sure of the American. So sure he was guilty. Now you must free him."

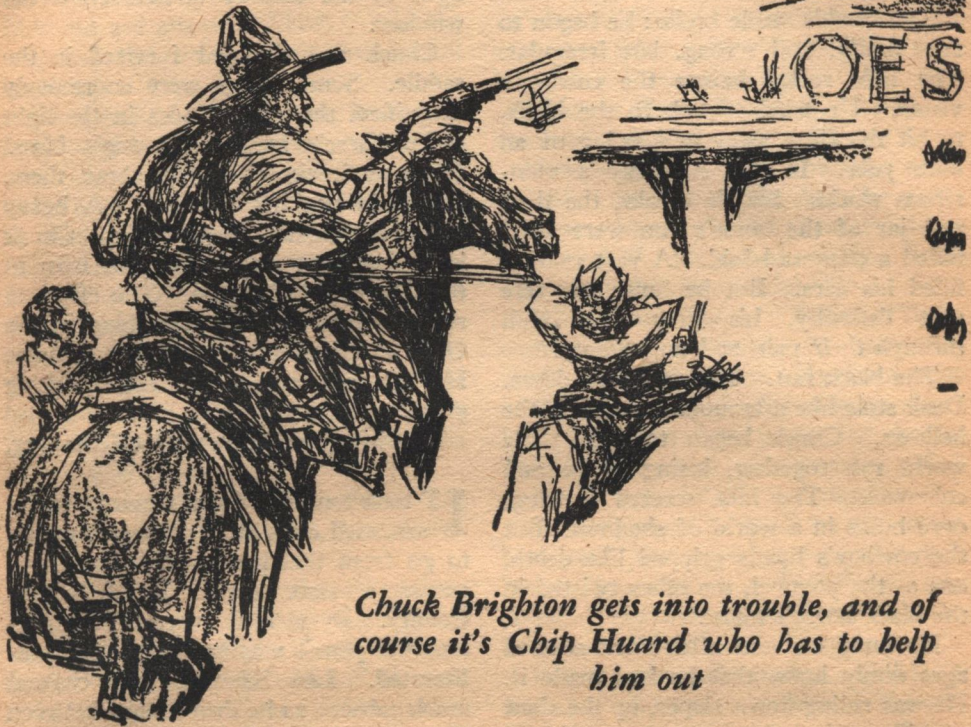
Sadi Ratan muttered: "All the evidence we had—pointed to him."

Jo Gar sighed. "That is so," he agreed softly. And that was why I had to go to a newspaper and seek the evidence—you *did not* have."



# Sinful Cibola

By JACK BERTIN



*Chuck Brighton gets into trouble, and of course it's Chip Huard who has to help him out*

CHUCK BRIGHTON, cowpunch by force of circumstances, and wit by choice, was neither punching cows nor telling jokes. He was riding, some seventy miles south of the O B O; riding west, yelling to a



lathered horse. His sombrero graced a mesquite clump two miles to his rear. It had holes in it. There was a hole in Chuck's shirt where it flapped in the wind, not an inch from his side, and there was a hole high up in his shoulder, from which blood trickled quite

steadily, spreading in a dark daub.

The O B O man did not return the shots from his pursuers. There were at least six of these, coming fan shaped behind him, losing ground very, very slowly. Chuck thought of badger holes, a toppling horse, and a man, himself, with drawn Colts facing the leaden death which would come to him—he thought of this, and dismissed his mental picture. "Run, you four-laigged snail, run!" he yelled savagely.

His horse struck no badger holes. It was a full-chested black, with stamina and power. Slowly the gap between Chuck and his pursuers widened. The sun, directly ahead, was down to the brow of low, dirty hills. Chuck spat



hardily, and urged the black on. But his tight lips were a bit gray. It was when all danger of being hit again seemed past that the second slug got him, in the opposite shoulder, low down.

The black's stride broke; he began to run wildly, still strong, but irregular. The hills reeled before the cowboy's vision. He tried to talk to the black, to hit the right sway and swing of an even pace. It was suddenly a monstrous world. Saddle creaks, the thud and jar of the horse's run were magnified a thousand-fold. A vast roaring filled his ears. But he hung on. He spat defiantly, his gray eyes chill through their pain and uncertainty.

The black ran. The sun went down. Dusk stole like a tenuous liquid into the hollows. Chuck began to slip. The world ran together, losing shape and coherence. The hills seemed dancing, ogre hulks in a world of shadows. But the cowboy's hands gripped like death, one at the pommel, the other twisted in the black horse's mane.

He hung on, and after what seemed ages dimly knew that he had made it. He was riding down slopes, up the slant of hills, safe. Alone in the world of growing gloom with the snorting black. From time to time the O B O puncher muttered encouragement to the animal.

The horse finally slowed. It was a badly spent horse, its nostrils wide and quivering. The cowboy hung in the saddle, trying to make out his position with respect to the stretch of country across which he had raced. But the objects he saw were blurred. He peered a long time into the darkness. There seemed to be a yellow spot, to the left of him, and down—a light. The idea entered his mind slowly. Finally he made the effort. "Get along Jim-horse—go on," he muttered.

It was a half hour later that Jim-horse came slowly down a hill slope to a cabin with a lighted window that shone yellow in the gloom. A dog

barked fiercely, running out from beside the hut to circle the black horse, its protest merged to a throaty growling. Somewhere, water gurgled steadily. The door opened, adding an oblong of light to the thinner stream from the window.

Chuck was slumped forward in the saddle. Some things were enormously magnified, the grass blades in the light—Jim-horse's flanks, the dog's bared fangs as it circled warily about them. He could not lift his head. A heavy voice questioned suspiciously. Chuck knew, without seeing that the man in the doorway had a gun. The effort to reply seemed to snap something in the O B O puncher, and he lost balance. He fell with inert weight into the long grass.

The heavy voice warned off the dog.

IT took ten days for a message, badly scrawled on a strip of brown paper, to go from that hut in the hills, north across a state corner to Arlington County. By time it reached Los Palmas the pencil writing was largely obliterated. Len Samson, who chewed much tobacco as he drove stage between Talmer and Los Palmas, handed it to the postmaster with a short account of its travels, and the postmaster passed message and tale over to Buck Orleans when the O B O foreman came to town.

"Len had it in his pocket," the postmaster explained. "Those pockets of Len's are hell on writing, Buck."

"They sure are," agreed the powerfully built Orleans. He had a strong face, which did not change at all as he read the message. The postmaster peered hopefully through his lattice.

"Looks like Chuck's in trouble, eh? Who's he askin' for—Huard?"

Orleans shrugged. "He ain't askin' for nothin'. Probably broke an' workin' out some gamblin' debt. I'll fire him soon's he gets back." Buck strolled out, putting the scrawled message carelessly in his pocket.



Outside, Orleans watched three of his punchers come out of the Eye Opener, a saloon across the street. A hundred yards to the right, in front of a building which had a sign marked "Sheriff" above its one doorway, sat a man who also looked with pointed interest at the three emerging cowboys. Sheriff Preston was always interested, cynically interested, when Chip Huard was in town.

The arm of the law studied his special irritation. Huard was growing. Preston remembered him when he was a brown-faced kid with energy, brains and an ambition to raise hell generally and constantly, an ambition realized. Preston knew more about Chip Huard and his ways than he did of any man in the section, and Preston had come to Los Palmas when the O B O was unclaimed range. He had seen a tough breed of men in all their varying activities, but the Huard kid had always been the outstanding interest.

Preston rose. He strolled over to the Eye Opener. With every year Huard was getting to look more like his dad. His shoulders had the same lithe carriage—he was solid as a rock. But it was not muscle which explained the O B O puncher. Preston did not know what explained him.

"Shoot anybody today?" he queried evenly, leaning against a porch support to gaze up at Huard.

"Not yet," casually replied the puncher.

Preston watched his eyes. Steel gray, level eyes. Preston tried to catch what he had missed for years. He knew men, but he couldn't figure Huard. Confidence, that was the best guess he could make.

"Say," said Danny Thompson, who stood by Huard. "When you old ladies gonna run a dance in this town?"

"Soon as Orleans fires you fellers," promised Preston, watching the foreman leave the post office and come towards them. "Looks like he's goin' to do it right now."

A buckboard came by, and the dust

of its passing settled slowly over Orleans as he crossed in the hot, white glare. Orleans paid no attention to it. Chip Huard's idle gaze steadied. Something was wrong.

"Chuck," the foreman explained laconically after reaching them. "Can't quite make this out." He took the piece of brown paper from his pocket. "What does that mean?" Slowly he voiced his doubt. "I get 'Cibola' all right. But 'Big fandango out here. Sam'—Sam what?"

"Sam's cashed in," Huard said evenly. Preston watched the gray eyes. "Him an' Chuck musta run into trouble," continued Huard, moving slowly towards the stairs. "Buck—yo're firin' me for about a month. I needs a vacation."

There was a pause while the portent of his announcement sank home.

"Make it three vacations," said Thompson tersely. "This ain't no one-man job, Buck!"

Orleans frowned. Roundup was due in little over a week, and he could not spare the best men in his outfit. But an O B O man was in a jam, somewhere on the Border. And Sam Atwell punched for the D X, across Orleans' north line. Practically one of his own boys.

Huard settled the case. Too far. "Near a hundred miles, Buck," he reminded him. "An' Appleton wants that beef on time. Ain't no need of more'n one. If there is, I'll send for yuh."

"Yo're a liar," said Orleans slowly, worried. "Mebbe I can fix things here."

"I ain't waitin'," Chip said evenly. "An' I *ain't* takin' you muttonheads with me," to the eager Danny and his companion. "Stay here till Buck straightens out."

"That's bad country!" snapped Thompson resentfully. "Chuck was a fool to head that way. You'll be worst, 'cause they're expectin' a comeback. They'll blow you apart!"



"Who'll know me?" queried Huard. "Cibola ain't Talmer."

Preston moved forward. He had been silent all the while.

"Yo're a marked man, Huard. That section's filling up, and it's filling from up north. You can't ride into Cibola without being spotted."

Huard shrugged. "Reckon we're wastin' time. So long, boys." He strode down the street.

The postmaster left the doorway and walked rapidly to meet the puncher by Dolby's hitch-rail, where a big roan horse nosed the wood, tied alone. Huard's horse seldom had equine company at hitch-rails. The postmaster kept a respectful distance from the animal.

"Chuck hurt?" he asked when the cowboy reached his mount.

"Ain't sure," said Chip. "Get over, Big Ears," to the horse.

"I hear that's the section where Purdell raids, around Cibola. Maybe—"

"Maybe," agreed Huard, mounting. He swung the roan's head, and waved to the group by the uptown saloon.

"Purdell's got a bad crew," pressed the man below.

"Yeah, I know," said Huard. "Get goin', Flat Feet," to the roan.

The postmaster watched them head out of town.

**T**RAVELER made the Border in less than four days. Huard talked to a few riders, ate a supper in a bunkhouse, but for the most part he was alone, in a world as primitive as the Cro-Magnon. The hot days he slept away with the roan in draws. They traveled nights, under the blanket of star-studded sky. It was at the end of the third night that Traveler loped into the Border town of Cibola.



Chuck's message had started by stage from Coldbrook, some twenty miles to the west, and perhaps clues could be

best picked up there. Huard knew that Shorty and Thompson would probably go to Coldbrook if they followed him. But it was in Cibola that Sam had cashed in. And Chip had a hunch that Cibola would yield results. He loped Traveler up the street.

A man, the only moving thing besides Chip and the roan, was coming out of a saloon door. He emptied a bucket of odds and ends into the alley between the saloon and its adjacent building.

Chip grunted. It was not an auspicious beginning. In the first light of dawn Cibola sprawled out before them, evil smelling. "Move, Cow," he instructed the roan, and Traveler, tossing his head, went towards the man with the bucket, who was regarding them with bovine interest. He had amazing mustachios. Chip asked the whereabouts of a good American hotel.

"La," informed the bucket emptier, pointing a grimy finger farther down the street. His gaze dropped to the O B O man's guns, swept over the powerful horse. "La," he repeated.

"Thanks," said Huard. "Come on, Snail. We're goin' *la*." Half an hour later he was eating bacon and eggs on the ground floor of a passable lodging house, watching through open doors Cibola wake and move.

After the meal the O B O man strolled about town. He wanted information as to the whereabouts of Rior-dan's ranch, and other things. He kept his eyes well open. Most of the buildings in Cibola were 'dobe, yellow brown, submissive to the fierce sun. One section had a board walk and false-fronted wooden gambling halls. Here Chip, feeling at home, rested against a building corner, and smoked cigarettes. His level, steel gray eyes shifted gaze from one object to another.

A coquettish señorita flashed him a glance as she went by, her heels tapping quickly on the walk. Groups passed, several of them, composed of young, bold-faced men, with wide belts, who



looked Chip over with the instinctive hostility of males appraising a stranger built for speed, and other things.

Across the street, a saloon-keeper, face in a window corner, studied the observant puncher. Memory tugged at his mind. He was not sure and called his partner, Eaton.

"Ain't that Huard, of the O B O, from up north?" he queried tersely.

Eaton swore. He swore in a string. "Nobody else. An' that bein' so, hell's liable to tear loose. An' come our way."

"Easy!" soothed his partner. "We keep out of it, that's all." He watched the man from up north throw away a cigarette butt, and start across the street. "Here he comes now. Don't talk too much! Remember!"

Eaton remembered. Chip pushed through the doors, walked to the bar, and tilted back his sombrero. But he did not order at once. He looked at Eaton intently. "Ain't I seen you before, barkeep?"

"No," lied Eaton, who had served bar in Talmer long enough to pick Huard from any crowd. "I reckon you ain't, stranger. From up north?"

"A ways. I'll take rye—small." Chip fingered his glass. "Do people get answers to questions in this town?"

"Depends on the questions," parried Eaton, his eyes blank.

"Well, here's one of 'em—where was Sam Atwell plugged? What saloon? He was here with a friend, Chuck Brighton, an O B O man, from Arlington County. What they run up against?"

Eaton looked at a fly walking along the bar edge. He seemed vastly interested in its movements. But his mind was far from flies. It was weighing things in the balance.

"I don't know," he lied, and was sorry for it. The man across did not like liars. He said so, coldly.

"Put yoreself in my place, stranger," said Eaton hurriedly. "Me an' my partner's just settled here. We're

makin' money. We'll be here after yo're gone."

"When I'll be gone, there'll be no one botherin' you about what you say now," said Chip tersely. "Besides, I ain't makin' a beeline from this place to the other. Nobody'll know where I got my information."

Eaton watched the fly. It did not help him. He shifted gaze to the other's eyes, and decided rather hurriedly.

"We heard of trouble in Tortilla Joe's," he said in a low voice. "That's all I can tell yuh, stranger. An' I'm askin' yuh to forget I said it. More, if yo're alone, you better steer clear of this trouble. They say Purdell's gunmen were mixed in it." He wiped an imaginary spot on the bar. "Course I don't know."

"No, 'course not!" agreed Chip heartily. He drank, and carefully placed his glass down. "You ain't said a thing." He turned and began to move towards the doors. Halfway across the room he stopped. "I got one more. How far from town is Cliff Riordan's ranch? Which way?"

Eaton moistened his lips. "Twenty miles. West. It ain't a ranch—just a shack." He watched Huard lazily push through the doors. Beyond the bar, his partner, Andrews, edged out from an inner room, into which he had ducked to avoid questioning.

"What in hell—" he began, but Eaton cut him off. "This hombre's Huard, of the O B O, brother. An' he was real serious about liars."

Andrews snorted. "Why pick us out?" He shook his head, and went to the front doors. Gazing out, he stiffened.

"Art!" he whispered. "We're in for it! Vesey's across the street, watchin' the place!"

Eaton gazed intently at the fly. He cursed monotonously. Vesey had brains enough to put two and two together. The resulting four would mean trouble for somebody. Eaton cursed again. That somebody was himself.





HIP, stepping off the stairs of Eaton and Andrews', saw Vesey, who wore a scowl and a low-tied Colt, but the O B O man, unfamiliar with local history, was not impressed. Scowls in any case did not impress Huard. He surveyed the man calmly, before turning down the board walk.

The señorita with the snappy heels, returning from a downtown store, passed him with another flash of eyes. A loose board caught one lively toe, and in the resulting confusion Chip found himself rescuing red peppers from spilled streaks of cornmeal. He straightened the mess as well as possible after helping the girl to her feet. She had wide black eyes, expressive eyes.

"*Muchas gracias, señor—muchas gracias!*"

"It ain't nothin' at all," Chip grinned. "They oughta fix this walk." He stooped for the last pepper.

"The Americano ees kind!" said a voice behind him.

Chip, straightening, saw the girl's eyes dull with a mixture of emotions.

"No, Pedro!" she said earnestly. "No!"

But Pedro had his own ideas. Chip, turning, read intentions in a brown face. Pedro was a young man, well set up, and pugnacious. He had come from somewhere while Chip was busy with the scattered grub.

"Rosita, she do not need you any more!" he informed the cowboy with-out politeness.

Huard caught the drift of something below the surface. Cibola, the section of it within vision, was interested, very interested. Heads protruded from windows; a buckboard was halted in mid-road, and pedestrians began to move towards the scene. But Chip's roving gaze lingered on a scowling man coming down at a slant. Somehow there seemed a connection between this man and the Mexican who was looking for

trouble much, very much too eagerly.

"I talk—you no hear?" queried Pedro in a grieved tone.

"My hearin's bad," said Chip slowly, balanced. He wondered what the game could be. The Mexican had no gun. A knife hilt protruded from a sash at his waist. Chip saw a split in the horn handle, dirt filled. He waited, putting conjectures out of his mind. The Mexican before him was tensed. He was a crazy Mexican, decided Huard, coldly now, sensing what was to come. Pedro suddenly closed in.

It was a suicidal move for an unarmed man to make, for ninety-nine out of a hundred unarmed men. But Pedro was the exception. He was a tigerish fighter, moving with a speed that would have beaten most gun draws.

Huard did not draw at all. His gray eyes like glinting metal, he rocked forward and around on his slim hips, smashing his fists, one after the other, into the Mexican's face. It was speed matching speed, and for a few moments the flurry was an interesting one. The horn-handled knife came into play, but one of Chip's vicious uppercuts connected with Pedro's chin, and knife and Mexican ended up in the dust of the street.

There was a moment of almost painful inactivity. The girl Rosita had fled up the walk, but stopped, with the curiosity of her sex, to see the outcome of the fight. She looked like a frightened deer. A man in the buckboard in the street stared, jaw dropped, tobacco staining his beard. Chip saw surprise, a blank surprise, on the face of the scowling man, now no more than ten feet away. The O B O puncher looked at him coldly.

"Friend o' yours?" he asked, jerking a thumb towards the inert Pedro.

Vesey moved forward. His eyes were slits. "Kinda," he sneered, recovering from his surprise. "An' I ain't used to seein' my friends kicked in a fair fight!"

"Yo're a liar," Chip told him evenly, moving close.



Vesey's right hand had jerked towards his hip. He did not draw the Colt. A gun muzzle jammed into his stomach. For the second time surprise widened Vesey's eyes, this time merging on amazement. He stumbled back. Chip pushed his open hand into the other's face, throwing him to the building wall. He sheathed his Colt.

"Try again," he invited. "This time I'll shoot you where I hooked my front sight."

Vesey edged aside. His surprise seemed a heavy weight upon him, for he stared at Chip with sunken head, keeping up that sidewise shuffle along the building.

"If I meet you again I'll blow you all over town," said Chip delicately. Vesey kept moving.

Pedro stirred in the street dust. He groped for the knife. Chip stepped over, took the businesslike weapon, and placed it in his gun belt. He stepped back, and watched Pedro rise. The Mexican did some admirable thinking. He said nothing, but walked up the street after Vesey.

The man in the buckboard closed his mouth. He got off his seat and went to the nearest saloon. It was still early and the place was empty. He drank greedily, as if to awaken himself. Then he told the barkeep. But the barkeep had seen. Pedro Orta had been beaten in a muscle fight. Vesey's stomach had been jammed with a Colt muzzle before the gunman could draw. The two men left the bar, to go to the doors and peer downtown after the stranger. Then they both went back for another drink. Things were happening in Cibola.



HE hotel had a crowd on its porch. Chip's walk grew leisurely as he approached. He was being pointed out to a man with a badge. Only a badge would glint like that from a distance. Sheriff Allison, probably. Rumors about Alli-

son had come as far north as Los Palmas. Chip strode up. He was conscious of general tenseness. Allison came down the steps to meet him.

"You the hombre that owns that roan stallion in the yard, stamped O B O?" asked the sheriff, who had rather shifty eyes.

"Yeah," said Chip.

"Yo're the feller beat up Pedro Orta this mornin', an' shot off yore mouth about blowin' somebody else all over town?" There was curiosity in Allison's uncertain eyes.

"Yeah," said Chip. "I'm the feller."

"Well, mister—that sort o' doin' don't go here. We got enough of our own bad men, without you fellers from up north joinin' in. I'm told yore name is Huard, Chip Huard. Somebody here, a feller named Blake, says yo're well known up yore way!"

Chip made no reply. A faint flush tinted Allison's face. He was standing in the sun, which seemed to affect his eyes. They had difficulty meeting Huard's.

"Well—I'm warnin' you. Next time you make trouble, I'll lock you up. Savvy? Things are gettin' too raw. There was a couple of fellers from yore way down here—" the sheriff trailed off, as if he sensed the disapproval of the crowd.

"Yeah. One of them two fellers from my way," said Chip metallically, "is dead. Where's the other?" he snapped. "What happened in Tortilla Joe's?"

"We don't know," said the sheriff, frowning. "They say these two hombres started shootin'."

"Who's *they*?" asked Chip coldly. "Mebbe they'll tell *me* the same things."

"Now, easy, Huard, easy!" Allison blustered. "I'm the sheriff here, not you. *They* is everybody who seen the argument. These punchers were gamblin' in Joe's place. There was words, an' shootin'. Everybody seen it different. Seems like there was a gang in that night—"



"What gang?" asked Chip. "Purdell's?"

Allison frowned.

"Lots of people figger that way, but Purdell's boys wouldn't have slipped up like that—he's got some mighty bad men, Purdell."

"Yeah—I hears that," said Chip evenly again. "You ain't told me what happened. One of my friends got away?"

Allison seemed to hesitate. "There was a big mixup. One of the punchers got out. We ain't seen him since. The other's in Tucker's backyard, buried proper. You kin help us get word to his boss. His horse is stamped D X."

Chip's level gaze seemed to bother Allison. "I know it's bad," he continued. "But I'm tellin' you, Huard—keep quiet. I understand how you feel about yore friends, but you can't run around and take it out on the general population. Savvy?"

Huard frowned. "Guess yo're forgettin', Sheriff, that the Mex jumped *me* this mornin'. You advisin' me to stand still an' get knifed?"

"No," said Allison quickly. "I'll see Pedro, and Vesey, too."

"Vesey." Chip repeated the name. He looked at the sheriff, and turned. "Reckon I'll take a ride, an' cool off. You people pass the word to Vesey I ain't shootin' him on sight, long as he behaves." He passed around the porch into the yard, and heard somebody snicker. The joke was on Allison.

Ten minutes later, saddled and mounted, Traveler loped out of the yard, tossing his head to the stares of the group on the porch. Huard heard comments as he went by.

"They say you look good, Barrel Belly," he confided as they went towards the plaza. "Mebbe you are, at that," he conceded, his gaze ranging both sides of the street. A Mexican girl, standing in the doorway of a low 'dobe building, tried to turn in out of sight, but Chip, recognizing Rosita, ran his gaze up to

a sign. He kept on, without a backward glance, but the steely glints were again in his eyes. Tortilla Joe's. Inside that squat structure, very close to Cibola's central plaza, Sam Atwell had been killed, and his friend Chuck hurt, perhaps badly.

"Get goin', Traveler, get goin'!" the rider grunted. It would not do to put too many ideas one on top the other, without being sure whether the first rested on anything. He slapped the horse's neck. "Stretch out." Traveler stretched. They left Cibola in a cloud of slowly settling red dust.

It was buzzards' country, west of town. The Rio Grande seemed anxious to hide its course through the dun-colored hills, speckled with grass clumps, humping, rise after rise, towards a brazen horizon. A land of stabbing sun, winding, dusty cattle trails, of twisted, spined growths that hung tenaciously to life. There were stretches where the range was fair, but for mile after mile, the desolation stretched out, on the flanks of every slope waving the red ropes of the snake weeds.

Dusk was stealing into the hollows when Traveler came down an incline to a squat shack. A spring gurgled somewhere in the growing darkness. Its overflow was banked by green grass, towards which the roan stepped at once.

Chip, off the horse, walked warily. A hunch troubled him. This was the place where Chuck had scrawled his message. But for the first time since the news had come to him, Huard felt the grip of anxiety. It had seemed, all along, that Chuck must be all right. Sight of that cabin, its door closed, not a sign of life about it, caused Huard's jaw to tighten. Something was wrong.

He glanced towards an empty corral, its fence a dim square in the dusk. He tried the door. It was locked from the inside. A frayed bit of hemp, protruding from a slot breast high in the rude boarding, gave Huard a clue to the way the door opened. The inner bar must



have fallen into place at the violent slam which had torn the latch rope. He could work it with a knife. Before using Orta's blade, the puncher moved to the window, peering into the gloomy interior.

He stayed a long time. Back of him the spring water bubbled. Traveler stamped, occasionally snorting his content. Huard stayed there, the broad-bladed knife in his hand, looking through dirty glass. His eyes held cold, small lights. Perhaps he would enter that cabin to bend over what was left of his best friend. For a dead man sprawled on the floor, face downward.



HE dead man was not Chuck. Huard found matches over a cupboard in the hut, and lit an oil lamp which rested below the window on a solid table of cottonwood planking. The shack was a bare place with cot, Dutch oven, table and a bench, leaving a scant five or six feet square in the center. Huard's shadow, magnified, moved on the wall behind him as he turned the body over. A big, whiskered man, with evil-smelling clothes.

"Riordan, I'll bet a hat!" muttered the puncher. "Knifed. Two, mebbe three days ago."

Straightening, Chip went to the lamp and brought it down to shed more light upon the body. Riordan, or whoever the man was, had been stabbed with terrific force squarely in the heart.

The wound had bled freely, clotting all about the knife plunge. It was a wide cut, and parallel with the blade width were two grooves showing plainly in the clot.

Outside, Traveler whinnied.

Chip slowly rose. He drew Pedro Orta's knife from his belt, and held the base of its hilt into the light. Outside, Traveler whinnied again, and Chip's senses, dormant for a moment, now took note of the sound. He moved quickly,

aware as he did so, of being in line with the open door.

He had scarcely pivoted when the shot came. Huard saw the quick red stab, some fifty feet away, up on the slope which fronted the cabin. The light shattered in his hands.

The puncher felt the splash of kerosene. He moved by instinct, his right foot stamping with spasmodic violence upon the puff of flame which rose as the burning wick reached the floor, and in the same motion he fell forward, out of line of the open door. Scarcely touching the floor, he came erect past the table, slipping into place by the window corner. Except for a stray tongue of flame on the floor, the cabin interior was now dark.

Another flare of red showed on the slope, outside, and Huard's .45's roared again and again, booming with deafening rapidity. Stepping around the table, he plunged for the door, the Colts balanced in his hands.

A dark bulk moved in the thickening dusk on the slope—its center spat fire. The guns below returned the compliment at once, flaring viciously again and again. The echoes rolled, and died to silence.

Filling his empty Colts, Huard moved up the trail. He felt no alarm, for a clear hunch told him the man had been alone. He was connected with the dust puff, made by a single rider, which Huard had seen dodging around the hills earlier in the day. Huard found him, huddled by a grass clump, a six-gun clenched in his stiffened right hand. The O B O puncher scraped a match.

Vesey. Chip jerked the match in a short arc. It went out, leaving him in the growing gloom on the slope. He stayed there a while. Two dead men, himself, and a horse, alone in a vast, graying world. The stars came out, one by one, winking serenely, aloof from the game, unsympathetic. Huard's jaw was tight. He roused himself after a time, hearing the crackle of flames. Traveler was coming up. Back of the



horse the outlines of a door showed against a growing red glow. Riordan's cabin was burning.

Chip went down, passing Traveler. Smoke was thick in the hut when he entered. It required effort to drag out the dead Riordan, and move him some distance away, past the green line of the spring seepage. Chip debated whether to bury the nester or let him lie, to be identified by the sheriff and his posse when they rode out to investigate.

Investigate. Huard, going to Traveler and quieting the nervous stallion, thought of Allison's shifty eyes. The law in Cibola did not inspire confidence. It would take no pay for Sam Atwell, and perhaps Chuck. Huard did not curse at the new uncertainty about his friend. His feeling was too deep for words. He brought Traveler back past the spring, and tied the roan's reins to a mesquite clump. "No, Big Jaw," he muttered, "we won't tell Allison."



LATER next morning, Eaton, serving bar, looked up at an entrant with unwelcoming eyes. It was about ten o'clock, and patrons at that hour were scarce, but Eaton's mind was far from business. Pedro Orta walked over to the bar. The door of the inner room creaked, and Andrews thrust out his head. He swallowed. There was talk in town about Pedro. Besides being a very bad customer personally, it was said he had Purdell's backing.

"You talk too much," Pedro was informing Eaton, whereupon the barkeep stiffened.

"It ain't my fault if this puncher walked in on us an' asked questions. He didn't get any answers," he lied. Eaton knew something that was keeping him awake nights. If Pedro ever suspected that he knew—he watched the Mexican's hard black eyes. Sometimes it seemed that Pedro did suspect.

A bruise discolored Orta's right cheek and his lips were split. Eaton had heard the story. Pedro sneered, sensing the other's thoughts. "He pay—pay already," the Mexican boasted confidently. Eaton's face was blank. But he felt surprise and disappointment. Huard hadn't put up much of a show.

"Don't tell us!" protested Andrews, coming towards them. "We don't want to be in on anythin'. We been neutral here for a year, an' we aim to stay that way."

"No!" Pedro shook his head. "Tortilla Joe buy your place pretty soon. You talk too much!" he repeated, looking at Eaton.

Eaton's eyes chilled. "Look here, Orta—we ain't ever—"

The Mexican held up a hand. He was a graceful, insolent man, Pedro. Plainly, there was to be no discussion. "Look outside an' see my frien' Steele," he said, his white teeth bared in a smile.

"Steele?" Eaton felt chill. "Flash Steele in town?"

Andrews went to the door. He came back. His face was sober.

"It's Steele all right. An' he's 'bout as nervous as a grizzly in a prairie dog village. It's pretty raw, I'm sayin'."

"What about Allison?" muttered Eaton futilely. "Look here, Orta—"

"Today you sell to Tortilla Joe," concluded Pedro. "Maybe Steele have hees friends in Cibola," he grinned cruelly, his strong teeth bared. "Conroy, Rioux. They like to see Joe buy thees place."

Eaton was silent. He looked over the crotch of his doors, to Cibola's sunlit street, and somewhere within rose a self-contemptuous protest. Taking orders from Mexicans was hard medicine to swallow. But Flash Steele, Conroy, and Rioux would be displeased, very displeased, if he did not sell. Eaton shrugged hopelessly. He was about to speak when sound of voices from outside made a rigid statue of Pedro Orta.



Andrews stopped, midway between the bar and the entrance. Slowly Eaton put down the glass he had been cleaning.

"I asked where did you get that hat?" came the voice again. "An' I ain't talkin' for my health."

Eaton cursed. Huard. Huard, asking someone about a hat. The voice which answered caused Eaton to wet his lips. Somebody was going to die over a hat. For Flash Steele was wearing it.

STEELE was a bad man. It showed in his eyes, his face, in a certain deadly laxness about his shoulders. He was standing by the hitch-rail, with Huard facing him not ten feet away. Confidence sneered out of Steele's gaze, tinged with a growing rage. Pedro Orta came through the saloon doors in a quick sweep, his powerful shoulders hunched.



"That ees the O B O vaquero, Steele!" he warned.

Steele's eyes changed. The contempt in them died. The careless confidence wavered, gave place to a quick alertness. "Huard!" he said, his mouth crooked.

Chip walked lazily. The gunman was between the hitch-bar and the saloon stairs. He was now taut as a string. And Steele recognized that lazy, slouching walk—it was warning, clear as bells to him.

"That sombrero," said Chip with deadly evenness. "Where's the man who wore it down from Arlington County? Talk fast?"

Pedro prowled along the E and A's short porch like a cougar. The powerful young Mexican was half animal—he had a flawless nerve. But a strain seemed to be in the air. Steele's face was strangely drawn. Pedro could not make up his mind to jump down, and at, the vaquero from the north.

"I'm askin' a question!" snapped Huard, cold, glinting lights far back in his eyes.

Steele, his bronzed face hard, moved clear of the hitch-rail.

"You ain't polite," he sneered, gripping himself. He was going to the left. "No, you ain't polite at all. But I am. I'm tellin' you to go to hell!" He reversed motion with a jerk, his right hand flashing with eye-baffling speed to and from the holster at his hip. Pedro crouched as the roar of Colts jarred through the morning quiet in Cibola's main street.

White, acrid smoke drifted over a horse at the rail. Steele lurched forward, the Colt dropping from a nerveless hand. An ugly red stain ran along his bared forearm. Below the fringes of his red hair the gunman's face showed pale. He went to his knees. Chip's right Colt spat warning to the advancing Mexican. Pedro, who had jumped the stairs, twisted around and back, one hand to a torn ear, fear licking for a moment into his beady eyes.

"I aimed to miss that time," said Chip evenly. "I'll put the next one plump between yore eyes."

Pedro froze. He was supplied with an imagination, and the O B O vaquero was plain spoken.

Men were running towards the scene. They jolted about Chip, asking questions. Allison's new deputy, Bill Turner, arrived, a sawed-off shot gun in his hands. Allison himself reached the disturbance as Steele was being helped to his feet. The sheriff's face twisted slightly at sight of the gunman. He whirled towards Chip.

"What in hell you doin', Huard? I warned you to keep quiet!"

"Doin' yore work," replied Huard calmly, his eyes on Pedro as he sheathed both Colts. "You start it," he told the Mexican, "an' I'll shoot yore ear off!"

Pedro did not start anything. He began to edge away.

Somebody in the crowd spoke to Allison: "That hombre's Flash Steele,



Sheriff. We heard him an' Vesey was throwin' in with Purdell. Reckon Huard ain't done nothin' out of the way."

"Hold him!" said Allison gruffly. His lips were twitching. "How bad is he hurt?"

"Bone scraped," informed Chip. "Wait a minnit. I was askin' him questions." He walked to the gunman, blocked a vicious kick aimed at his groin, and removed the sombrero from Steele's red hair.

"This hat," Huard said, "belonged to my friend, Chuck Brighton. I know it by the band, with diamonds cut in it." He turned the huge hat. "An' here's a O B O cut in, too."

"Sure it was his hat!" snarled Steele, his face twisted with pain. "He's dead—dead as you'll be before tomorrer!" He laughed a bit falsely at the look in Huard's eyes.

"I'm wishin' we could go back ten minnits," said the puncher thickly.

A growl rose from the crowd.

"All right," ordered Allison, "take him to jail, Bill. We'll question him about yore friend later, Huard."

"Where's Pedro Orta?" the same voice asked out of the crowd. Its possessor was a solidly built man, who evidently did not like Allison. The sheriff, in reply, called him Seton. Seton had a mind of his own. "You better lock Orta up with Steele," he suggested loudly, and continued, as Steele was escorted away, "I got a Ranger comin' here, Allison."

The sheriff frowned. "I'm doin' the best I can!" he defended himself.

"Yore best ain't good enough," growled the persistent Seton. "I lost fifty head last week. Purdell's been this side of the Border for two months. I wouldn't be surprised if he's been in to Cibola pretty often in these two months. Him an' that killer, Rioux."

Eaton, watching from his porch, stared with round eyes at the speaker. Seton would be interested in knowing what he, Eaton, knew.

"Purdell wouldn't ride into town," the sheriff disagreed. "I'll try to pry somethin' out of Steele. Where's Huard?" he asked, missing Chip.

"Goin' downtown," Seton pointed. "What you aimin' to do?" he asked. "Lock Huard up because he beat Steele's draw?"

"He ain't lockin' *that* bobcat up!" muttered a man beside him. "Huard's on the warpath, an' bein' from up north, I know what *that* means."

"It means nothin'!" snapped Allison. "There's law in Cibola, Drake, an' the law'll take care of Cibola. Savvy? All of you!" he said authoritatively. "Get next to this—there'll be no vigilante stuff pulled in Cibola while I'm sheriff!"

"You won't be sheriff long!" jeered a voice, and a low mutter of approval arose. But there were some in the crowd who spoke for Allison. Eaton, upon the intrusion of this note, prudently withdrew within the saloon. He knew too much. He did not want to be drawn into any argument.

Seton grew angry. Before leaving the group he warned Allison. "If Huard is plugged while yo're preachin' about the law, let me tell you there *will* be vigilante stuff seen right here in Cibola. Them ranchers from up north won't let it go anyway. An' we may as well wipe Cibola clean, as them."

"Who's *we*?" growled Allison, aroused. His small eyes were venomous. "If Huard gets shot, why blame me? He's honin' for trouble—wants to settle things hisself!"

Seton's lips curled. "I told yuh, Allison. This town's full of pot-shootin' polecats," he said loudly, his gaze ranging over the crowd, and resting on several individuals in turn. "An' mebbe Steele ain't alone. You better find out. For what I said goes. Huard's killin' will start one hell of a ruckus. Remember!" He strode away, to a buckboard waiting him some distance down the street.

The man from up north, named



Drake, a short, thin individual who knew he had talked too much, walked after Seton. "Huard ain't killed *yet*," he muttered. "Reckon these hombres ain't ever *seen* gunplay."

Back of his doors, Eaton watched the crowd disperse. He turned to find his partner, Andrews, was in the back room, oiling a Colt.

"What you doin'?" asked Eaton nervously.

"Playin' marbles!" grunted Andrews. His face was resolute. He turned to his partner. "We *don't* sell to Tortilla Joe this afternoon. Purdell or no Purdell!" He spat. "They ain't so much. You see what Huard did to Steele?"

"Steele ain't Rioux," muttered Eaton. "They won't let this go—not that bunch. They can't let it go." He paced the room, wondering if he should tell Andrews about Purdell. Andrews might tell Huard, or somebody else—Eaton cursed. Rioux and Conroy would not play, after what had happened to Steele.

"They'll plug Huard sure," he muttered. "He ain't got a chance. Not in *this* place."

"We ain't sellin' to Tortilla Joe!" said Andrews emphatically. "Get Allison. After the way that crowd acted, I'm bettin' *he'll* act like a sheriff. Spread the word. Let the hull town know we was ordered to sell our place."

Eaton stared. "Yo're *loco*," he said slowly.

"No." Andrews started for the door. "Just human. I'm goin' to find Huard, an' bring him here." Eaton stared after him as he went out.

Andrews found the O B O cowpuncher downtown, leading his horse to a water trough by the hotel.

"Me come in yore place, an' lay low?" Chip repeated the saloon-keeper's warning. "What for?"

Andrews glanced up the street. The heat waves were beginning to waver the building bases, shadows were black and clear cut. He shied away as Traveler swung his great head. "There's been

fellers like you shot in this town, Huard, shot from cover."

Chip's eyes were cold. He masked them. "Thanks, Andrews. But they won't plug me. I got too much sense. I'm leavin'."

"Leavin'?" Andrews looked his unbelief.

"Yeah. I'm headin' for real country. Reckon there's nothin' I can do about my pals."

"You ain't a good liar, Huard," said Andrews slowly. "But if you want me to pass the word, 'case anybody asks, I'll do it."

Huard nodded. "Sure. Tell 'em I'm gone. About that call this afternoon—they won't come. Not after what happened to Steele. Tonight, mebbe. But lots of things might happen tonight."

"Meaning?" asked Andrews.

"Nothin' a-tall. Enough, you hog!" to the drinking roan. Andrews walked away, puzzled.



N hour later, going uptown to find his partner and the sheriff, the saloon-keeper met Seton, in company of a tall, keen-faced man.

"Where's Allison?" asked the cattleman curtly. The owner of the Double S ranch had a grim look on his face.

Andrews shrugged. "The Oasis, mebbe. Let's go see. I'm lookin' for him myself."

They found the sheriff by the Oasis bar, already engaged by Eaton, who was talking earnestly. Andrews and his companions walked across the worn flooring. A few card-players, already more interested in Eaton than their game, ceased playing altogether.

"They won't bother you," Allison was answering as the trio approached. "Mebbe it was a joke of that fool Orta's. Think the Mex would tell the truth about Rioux bein' in town if he *was* in town, an' the Mex is connected with him?" He turned, and his small



eyes fastened at once on the tall stranger with Seton. "Howdy, boys," he said shortly.

"This is Ranger Jim McAllister, Sheriff," the cattleman said. "I was driving out of town when I met him comin' in. He's got news."

Eaton drew aside and listened. His eyes were round. The equally intent barkeep served Andrews a drink, slowly, spilling some of it.

"I found 'em buried," Ranger McAllister concluded his story. "An' the cabin burned. I uncovered 'em. The big feller'd been dead two or three days, stabbed. The other was shot not more'n twenty-four hours ago. I found a hoss in a hollow back of that hill, an' took it in."

Allison's face was drawn. "Let's look at it."

They went out, in a body, Eaton and Andrews bringing up the rear. Seton had tied his buckboard at the turn around the plaza. Somehow the word of the double death at Riordan's shack had leaked out. There was a crowd around the carriage, and the horses behind it. Eaton cursed.

"One of 'em's Vesey's hoss," he said. Allison, his face strangely corded, repeated the words.

"An' who's Vesey?" asked the Ranger.

"Worked for Tortilla Joe," Seton answered for the sheriff. "Place across the street."

Eaton muttered under his breath. Something in Cibola was going to explode. His gaze went to a shuttered upper window of Tortilla Joe's. Then back to Allison's drawn face. The heat wavered over the street. Beyond the plaza, past the dejected palms, upreared the dirty hills of Mexico. Eaton tried to move even his eyes cautiously. Things were growing tight, for the worst band which had ever cursed the Border, Purdell's. And when things grew tight for Purdell, Rioux and Conroy, they had ways. Eaton moistened dry lips. He moved away from Mc-

Allister and returned to his saloon.

McAllister looked at Tortilla Joe's. His gray eyes were blank.

"I want to speak to you alone, Sheriff," he broke up the gathering. "Come on, Tom," to Seton. Going down the walk he addressed the cattleman. "Find this puncher Huard right away, Tom. Take him to the sheriff's office."

Allison took the hint and led the Ranger to a structure of badly painted boards attached to the 'dobe jail. Seton continued downtown to the hotel where Huard was lodging, parting from the two law men with the assurance that he would return at once with the cowboy.

The interior of the law building was cool. One side was partitioned off to an entrance, through which could be seen the grating of bars. Allison sat behind a desk. "Shoot," he said.

McAllister took a chair. He talked plainly. "This bunch is headin' in about sundown, I guess. I came over ahead, to figger out who to turn 'em loose on. Now I want the goods from you, Allison."

Allison's face was twisted by various emotions. His mind ran the situation over in all its angles. There was but one way out. Slowly his right hand reached a shelf below the long desk. But one way out. He took it.

SETON came back after an hour's fruitless search for Huard. The O B O man was not in evidence in



town. People had seen him ride out earlier in the morning. Seton growled to himself as he moved towards the jail. It was by now past noon, and the sun's direct glare had driven even the dogs to cover. Cibola sprawled, a mass of brown brick and blackened wood, cut up by two street lanes wherein the air quivered gently.

Seton removed his sombrero, and wiped a moist brow. The cattleman was



fuming inwardly. The call to war had sounded, and here was Cibola, asleep. He reached the jail, and nearly collided with a refractory door which did not yield to his push. He twisted the knob, to no result. "Mac!" he called. But Mac did not answer. "Hell!" said Seton, and the word might have meant anything.

He wiped his brow again, looked up and down the empty street. About to move away, a glint of suspicion formed in his eyes. With a few hurried strides he reached the center of the 'dobe structure, pausing below the one small window cut in the dried mud brick. It was some distance above him, but Seton was an agile man. He jumped up, gripped the sill, and drew himself up. He released himself with a grunt, landed a bit awkwardly, and stood, wiping his hands, frowning.

Steele was safe in jail. Seton had seen a man on the cell cot, face downward, apparently asleep.

"I'm a fool," the cattleman complimented himself, walking uptown towards the plaza. But a hunch bothered him. "Where in hell is Mac?" he muttered. It was no time for disappearances, yet everybody he wanted to see had vanished. Seton plodded uptown, glancing with unveiled hostility in the direction of Tortilla Joe's. "Yo're in for a bad time tonight," he promised somebody.

"Hey!" a voice called.

Seton stopped. "Glad somebody's alive in this town," he told Eaton, standing in the saloon door. "Where's McAllister, the Ranger? See him?"

Eaton shook his head. "Saw Allison 'bout a half hour ago, goin' towards the Mex place"—he jerked a thumb. "Come in, an' have a drink."

"I ain't loco," politely answered Seton. "Say," he strode up closer, going up the steps. "You look like a man nursin' somethin'. I noticed it more'n once. What's yore idea about Allison's ways?"

"Me, I don't know a thing," an-

swered Eaton hurriedly. "I'm just a saloon-keeper—"

"Tryin' to get along," observed Seton, as he followed the other within. "Well, you won't get along any too good if yo're coverin' what I'm after, an' Huard's after. This Huard's a bad customer when he's riled—Drake says so. He's from up north."

"I know Huard," muttered Eaton, as he went around the bar. "But—"

"But nothin'." Seton ordered a small drink. Leaning on the bar, he said: "Do you know who McAllister left in Coldbrook?" He talked evenly. "An' they're hittin' town tonight!"

"No?" said Eaton. "Well, I'll be damned," he muttered. "I gotta tell Andrews. He's asleep. He sleeps most of the time. Say, don't you know about Huard? He's left town for keeps. Told Andrews so this mornin'. But we're all figgerin' it's a dodge."

Seton frowned. "Well, he ain't come back yet. How about spillin' what you know about things in town?" he persisted. "It's writ all over you—that you know somethin'."

Eaton moistened his lips. Suddenly impulses formed in him. "Lissen, Tom," he said, and gazed nervously towards the entrance. He came around the bar, his face working. "Purdell—" he began, and never finished his words.

Seton cut him off, pushing him away with tremendous force, just an instant too late. Eaton struck the bar, sank slowly down, his face twisted in a horrible surprise.

The cattleman fired towards the rear door, again and again, his Colt roaring angry protest. That rear door had opened as Eaton had approached him, framing the figure of a Mexican, throwing something which glittered as it left his hand. It was now buried in Eaton's back, a heavy-hafted knife. Seton ran across the room, cursing savagely.

The backyard was all a glare of sun, a square patch of earth closed in by a sagging fence. Seton saw no one. But across a bush-dotted dump to the



left, over another fence, he caught a movement, some impression on his retina remembered after it was gone. Seton knew that other fence enclosed the property of Tortilla Joe. His eyes cold, the cattleman ran around the saloon, up the deserted street, reloading as he ran, and swung into the yard back of the Mexican cantina.

**C**IBOLA slowly stirred to commotion. Within the saloon Andrews came fumbling out of the inner room, a Colt in his hand. Wisps of gray smoke floated horizontally in midair. The rear door was open. Andrews went to it. There was no one outside.



"Art!" he called, puzzled. "Art!" Turning back, he had almost reached the bar before he saw Eaton on the floor. "Hell!" he breathed hoarsely, stiffened.

Men came through the front doors. Abe Turner, whose spacious backyard was used to bury Cibola's citizens and visitors, had been talking, far downtown, with his boy Bill, recently made deputy to Allison, when the shots had sounded. They came on the run. Young Turner pushed through the crowd.

"Get that damned sheriff!" roared Andrews, beside himself. "Get him here! How long we gonna stand for this—this damned—" He choked.

The crowd shifted, muttered.

"Art's stabbed, not shot," said Deputy Turner. "Who fired the shots? And why?"

"I was in the back room, asleep," groaned Andrews. "All I saw was smoke, an' Art, like this."

Minutes passed, while a medley of conjectures filled the air. Then a man entered, pushing hurriedly through the crowd.

"Hey!" he called sharply. "Allison's just come out of Tortilla Joe's. I saw him from across the street! He's nailin' up the door." Part of the crowd surged

out, curious to verify the statement.

"Don't move the body at all," ordered Turner. "I'll get the sheriff here." He pushed out, went down the stairs, and hurried uptown. Men were converging towards the scene, from all directions. Cibola was awakened, taut.

Turner, passing one building, came in view of Tortilla Joe's. Sheriff Allison was swinging a hammer at the door-facing of the cantina. The sharp blows could be heard, carrying clearly in the languorous heat. With a final smash, Allison turned, tossed the hammer to one side, and came down the cantina steps.

Turner thought the sheriff's face wore a queer look. A strained look. He asked a quick question, and upon the deputy's answer seemed relieved. The play of changing expression on his face lasted but a moment.

"Oh, yes, somebody saw the killers," he said loudly. "There *was* somebody on the street. Me an' that Ranger McAllister. We saw three fellers making a getaway from back of Joe's place."

A knot of curious citizens gathered around the two lawmen as they walked downtown, towards the E and A Saloon. Turner spoke hurriedly.

"So Art was knifed?" Allison's tone kept its jerky, quick note. He had a resolute air. "We didn't know anything about knife work. Orta, mebbe. Me an' McAllister were standin' over there," jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the general direction of the plaza, "when we heard shots. Couldn't figger where they come from. But McAllister, when we got down to this end, saw riders foggin' out from that dump back of Tortilla Joe's place. He cut back for his bronc, an' went after 'em. I headed into Joe's. Not a man in there, upstairs or down. Guess the bunch made a skidoo."

They had reached the E and A, entered, and to the angry, suspicious saloon-keeper, Allison repeated his words.

"We'll get 'em, Andrews," he reassured him. Slowly he looked around.



"You, Donelly," to an oldish, stern-faced man—"do somethin' for me. Watch the jail. Steele's in there. Don't let any man get near the door. Same thing with Tortilla Joe's. I blocked it up. Anybody hangs around too much, talk plain. We can't trust nobody in this town now."

Donelly was ex-sheriff of Cibola, and the crowd muttered approval.

Allison stood looking down at Eaton. "They sure got him. Well, no use moonin'." He surveyed the crowd, which seemed impressed by his manner. "I just need about five of you. Tim, Shale, an' Turner, you get the Seller brothers. Get hosses ready. Move!"

Drake voiced the general satisfaction. "Yo're workin' now, Sheriff. But where in hell is Huard? An' Seton?"

"Huard's left town," said Andrews. "But how about the man who fired the shots?" he persisted. "He didn't shoot at Art." Andrews was pugnaciously uncertain. "How we gonna figger it—he knifes Art, then shoots in the air to signal his friends? It's one hell of a' idea, if yo're askin' me."

"No time to puzzle over this!" snapped Allison. "So Huard left. Too bad. Come on, boys." He led the way out.

Andrews heard Donelly mutter under his breath: "Why Tim an' Shale? They ain't posse men."

"They're his idea of posse men!" snapped Andrews, his eyes glinting. He went to the crack in the doors, and watched Allison and the small posse mount horses and ride away. Andrews cursed. If they catch anybody I'll be a surprised man."

"Meanin' what?" growled Donelly. "Yo're talkin' too fast, Andrews. Too fast." But a puzzled frown marred the ex-sheriff's brow.

TEN miles out of town, Chip Huard was loping his roan stallion along a depression in sun-baked ground, when on

the face of the jagged rock outcroppings to his left there showed a tiny spit of flame. Huard heard the unmistakable spang of a Winchester, and lead that whispered close, very close, to his head.

Springs seemed to move the O B O man. He left Traveler's back with the celerity of a mountain cat, jerking his rifle free from the scabbard. The following shots from the rocks searched him out as he hugged the hot ground in the depression, cheek snuggled to his own weapon, the sights lining.

Traveler, startled by a wild yell from his rider, bolted straight away, dipped into a draw ahead, turned, and ran at breakneck speed towards the river, his hoofs sinking into damp sand.

"You got more brains than me, Long Ears," muttered the man on the ground tonelessly. His whole body was taut, his mind racing. For presently, unless the man in the rocks was a very poor shot, he would be neatly drilled.

Little, angry puffs rose all around him. His nerves perfectly steady, cool as ice, Huard leveled his Winchester, and drove slug after slug into the rock nest. Then he rolled over swiftly, rose, and sprinted for the draw ahead. It was probably suicide, but suicide on the move, not lying down.

He cursed as he ran, thinking of Chuck's perforated hat, left in Cibola, thinking of himself falling, riddled with lead, before he reached cover. Him, Chip Huard. The O B O wasn't so much, down this way. The queer strain of thought was mingled with the wild muscular exertion of his dodging run. He heard lead whisper by, felt tugs at his shirt.

His breathing grew labored, gasping—it was a pace impossible to hold. The glaring ground seemed to mock him. He was nearing the draw when the shot hit him. The blow seemed a solid, smashing thing, a heavy impact on his forehead. But he stumbled through, and dived by instinct into the cover of a dry water course which appeared out of



nowhere, practically under his feet. He went down in a scraping fall, bruising his shoulder, and lay inert, his mind working almost calmly, gazing at a white cloud in the sky.

He, Huard, was a fool for luck. He had been ambushed by the worst shot north of the Rio Grande, a man who couldn't hit an open target at three hundred yards.

Sticky, salt stuff was at the corners of his mouth. His head ached dully. Creased, when he should be dead. Huard removed his neckerchief, and bound it around his forehead. He needed clear vision.

"You got no right to play like this," he said softly to the general direction of the rock pile. "No right at all. Me an' my lil' pal," reloading his rifle, "are goin' to show you *how* to play." His eyes gave the lie to his casual tone. Anger glinted in them. The O B O was being too contemptuously defied.

The draw had chapparal on its edges, a thin, meager growth. Chip kept his head below it, and ran up the stream cut. His shoulder, rock torn, hurt more than his head.

"Yo're a damn' pore shot, but that ain't excusin' yore *intentions*," he muttered as he slowed his run, and inched up the slope. He was still breathing quickly. Common sense told him to keep under cover, but Huard's banked anger was beginning to break its bounds. He peered through the brush.

At first sight, the outcropping was bare of any living thing. It just sprawled there in the sunlight, a mass of vari-colored rock, with patches of shadow in the hollows. Chip felt around for a stone, and threw it into the grease-wood some twenty feet down the draw edge. A spit of flame showed in a crack well up in the rocks, and the O B O puncher, his jaw set grimly, drove slug after slug into that split, his rifle sounding with the regularity of a clock.

Chip swerved to the right, getting bulks and bulges of rock between him

and the man. He had not gone fifty feet when he saw and heard several things at once. One was a horse, picketed among the first breaks of ground—a horse that pulled its rope free and bolted as Chip, crouched low, came suddenly running into view.

The O B O man, his nerves reacting by instinct to the sudden apparition, dived for cover, and as he lay thoughtfully on the ground, again knew himself for a lucky fool. For that quick dive, caused by a harmless horse, had taken him to shelter from spatting, whining lead, that flirted up dust two feet from his gravely contemplative gaze, smashed against the ledge above him, and slobbered off in the general direction of the Rio Grande.

His eyes now steely, filled with little dancing lights, Huard rolled over. He saw, from under the ledge of stone, three riders running their horses at breakneck speed towards him. Huard rose to his knees.

"This country is plumb full of fools!" he said tonelessly, and as he leaned out from his shelter the Winchester seemed to freeze at his shoulder. Its muzzle spat angrily, again and again. One of the riders went off his horse backward, as if he collided with an invisible rope hung across his path. The other two swerved with comical haste, and raced parallel with the draw, still two hundred yards beyond it. Chip's rifle spat its final cartridge. He saw one of the riders lurch. But he kept his saddle, and raced, neck and neck, with his companion.

Beyond them, to the south, Traveler broke into a wild run away from the advancing riders. Chip grinned slowly, and shifted his gaze to the nearer horse of the man he had shot. It was standing some twenty feet from the figure sprawled limply on the ground, its head upraised. Then it shied, and Huard ducked as a Colt woke the echoes in the rocks behind him. The O B O man heard no spatting of lead.

"Just shootin' to tell me he's alive,"



he muttered, his gaze on the fleeing riders beyond the draw. One of them was hit, and badly. He had looked vaguely familiar to Chip. But there was no time to puzzle over identities.

The O B O man left his rifle by the ledge, and went scouting among the bigger outcroppings, Colt in hand. A half hour went by.

A stone rattled to the left of him—he heard a low, muttered curse. The curse of a man in pain. Motionless, Chip watched. A hand, dirty, blood-smeared, with reddish hair going up to an equally dirty and blood-smeared arm, came into view around an upthrust in the shale. Painfully, the body attached to the arm followed it. Chip's eyes glittered. Steele! The poor shooting of his ambusher was explained.

"You keep quiet," he told the gunman evenly. "Or I'll make a mess outa what's left of you."

Steele slowly looked up. He was a gory sight. He had been inching forward, on one side of his body. A maimed left hand held, uselessly, a Colt; his left leg dragged behind him. His bent head slowly raised. Chip sat not ten feet away, a six-gun aimed point-blank at Steele's face. "How'd you get outa jail?" he asked.

The gunman tried to shoot, to snarl reply. But something snapped in him—he crumpled up like a bag suddenly emptied of wind. Chip shook his head.

"Yo're probably the skunk who killed Chuck. But I can't plug you. Too bad."

He stood up, sheathed his Colt, placed the forefingers of both hands in his mouth, and blew a piercing call for Traveler. "Reckon I'll tote you back to Cibola." He looked for the horse of the man he had shot. It was still wandering beyond the draw. Once on Traveler's back, he probably could catch the animal and ride Steele back to town before nightfall. The gunman was in a bad way.

DUSK, falling over Cibola, had increased the feeling of uneasiness which gripped its citizens. South of the



plaza, the population was largely Mexican, and fat women stood in doorways, exchanging comments. The friends of Orta were the in-

vulnerable Purdell and Rioux. The sheriff was gone, and it was said that the *rancherio* Seton could not be found. The Mexican males made trips across the plaza, surveyed Tortilla Joe's boarded-up entrance, and came back to voice the suspicion growing in Cibola.

Andrews finally succeeded in gathering a mass of decisive citizens. Under the three drooping palms, the saloon-keeper voiced his ideas.

"It may sound kinda crazy," he summed up, "but I'm bettin' Orta's right in that buildin' now!"

"Allison said it was empty," Abe Turner reminded him.

"It won't hurt to look an' see!" snapped Andrews. "He boarded it up to keep *them* out, not *us*." The speaker was about to add something else but curbed himself. Someone interrupted. "Where's Tom Seton?" the new arrival asked.

Recognizing him, Andrews growled: "Slim, we don't know where yore boss is. He just disappeared. There you are!" he raised his voice again. "What about Seton? The Double S buckboard is right there," jerking a thumb. "He didn't ride to the ranch. He ain't in town." The speaker looked evilly towards Tortilla Joe's. Donelly, who had been listening gravely, asked: "You figgerin' Seton's in there, too?"

Smiles broke over the puzzled group, relieving the tension. "Mebbe Huard's in there, with Seton an' Orta an' others," continued Donelly gravely. "Reg'lar party."

"Aw, hell!" said Andrews slowly. "I know it sounds foolish. But damn it



—there's somethin' *wrong!*" he added with conviction.

"Look out, fellers!" warned Donelly, stepping aside. A group of riders were coming upstreet. But they did not cross the plaza. One of them veered his horse, and the whole group slowed up in the full light of Keaton's store windows. Andrews' eyes grew round. Donelly stiffened. "Allison!" he grunted, then joined the others in a run towards the stopped riders.

Two of these had dismounted and were making for Keaton's stairs. The others were grouped around a hurt man, supporting him. Sheriff Allison. Donelly asked questions as he approached.

The two cowboys going towards the stairs stopped and retraced their steps, as the surprised group reached them.

"We met him 'bout ten miles out," explained one, a short, hard-looking man who had turned to spit a stream of tobacco juice over Keaton's stairs. "Heard shots, an' cut north off the trail. There was another feller with this one, but he ducked out. Where we gonna leave him?"

"Wait!" ordered Donelly. He was frowning. "Just one with him? He had five when he left. That's Sheriff Allison, compadre. He rode out this afternoon with a posse, after a bunch of killers. We'll take him right to Doc Ainslee. Down the street a ways."

Andrews, his eyes round, followed every move of the proceedings. Donelly tried to get Allison to speak, but the sheriff remained slumped, motionless. Andrews scarcely noticed. It was the strangers which interested him, very much. He came closer, and started as if deluged with cold water.

The riders were not strangers at all. He, Andrews, knew these men. He knew the short, tobacco-spitting individual, the red-haired man holding Allison, the one beside him, with the bandaged arm. "Hell!" said Andrews loudly and emphatically. He pushed past Donelly. "Brighton! Chuck Brighton!"

"Himself," said the man on horse-

back. His gaze was intent. "You expectin' me? Where's McAllister?"

Andrews was stiff with surprise.

"Brighton!" he repeated foolishly. Then, slowly, as he looked around, "Shorty Harrison, Thompson, Dean, of the D X. Hell!" he suddenly raised his voice, addressing Chuck. "Huard's been figgerin' you was dead! Everybody was figgerin' that way. Wait a minnit—wait a minnit," he remonstrated as the short individual and his companion moved over to him at once, asking quick, terse questions. "I don't know where Huard is. We don't know where McAllister is—"

"Lissen!" interrupted Donelly. "What's the racket? Downtown?"

A man came sprinting around the corner of the plaza. Andrews recognized Drake. He was yelling for Donelly. "Steele!" he said upon reaching the group. "Steele!" And choked in his anxiety to speak.

"What's the matter, Drake?" growled Donelly. A quick suspicion rose in him. "Steele broke jail?"

"No." Drake shook his head. "Steele's all shot up. He came into town on *Shale's* hoss! He wasn't in jail a-tall! The door is locked! An' there's a man on the cot!"

Donelly stared. A tenseness was upon the group. A bit to one side, Shorty Harrison looked on, his hard face intent. Chuck Brighton, holding his left shoulder rigid, curbed a restless black horse.

"Steele—on *Shale's* hoss!" Donelly muttered. "What in hell—Shale went out with Allison—Steele was in jail—man on the cot—" He turned suddenly. "Come on, boys. Quick! Tote Allison to Doc Ainslee's, some of you. The rest come down to the jail! We been a bunch of fools!"

Fifteen minutes later, after breaking into the jail to find McAllister, almost choked to death, strapped to the cot, Donelly repeated his words. A crowd milled around the entrance as the coughing Ranger was led out.



McAllister was in a savage mood. He briefly explained. "Jammed a gun into my stomach—caught me by surprise. Then him an' Steele tied me up, an' gagged me." He spat angrily. "'Bout an hour later I heard someone at the window, then nothin' but sweat, an' flies. What's happened?"

Voices explained. Andrews stayed apart. He was looking uptown, towards a dark, squat building, the front door of which was boarded across. After a time the mixture of voices quieted. Andrews, his tone even, interrupted.

"What's the use of seein' Allison? He can't talk. I'm askin' you to figger, Donelly. Allison came out of Tortilla Joe's 'bout ten minnits after Art was knifed, an' boarded the place up, sayin' it was empty. Allison said it was empty."

Donelly turned slowly to look uptown.

"Allison said he saw Orta an' two others make a getaway in back. He said McAllister had gone after 'em."

Donelly swore. "Tim, yo're warm. Warm as hell!"

A tenseness spread over the crowd.

"Nobody left that building *after* Allison rode out—not in daylight," continued Andrews. He frowned. "An' mebbe I wasn't so loco about Seton, at that. What's become of Tom? An' Huard? Where in hell is Huard? He never left for keeps. How did *Shale's* hoss get back in town with *Steele* on its back? Steele didn't climb into the saddle—he was *put* there. I tell you somethin's gonna bust. Any minnit!"

It did. The roar of Colts woke echoes uptown—muffled explosions, coming from Tortilla Joe's. In a body, the men by the jail raced for the cantina.



UARD had stopped on the edge of the main street and set the horse bearing Steele on a run towards the plaza. He looked after it for a moment, then ran back

around the shed. He paused a moment to draw the reins over Traveler's head, leaving them dangling before the stallion's nose, thereby picketing him as securely as to any tie-bar.

Little metallic clicks sounded as the O B O man broke his Colts and spun the cylinders. Sheathing the weapons, he moved around the back of the shed, the darkness masking the cold purpose in his eyes.

Like an Indian, he moved among the fences, earth mounds and bushgrowth forming a ragged terminus along the western edge of Cibola. Through the alleys he could see the main street. There seemed to be a great commotion, up near the plaza. Then somebody yelled, below his position. Some excitable citizen had discovered Steele.

Huard vaulted a fence, peering at the building to his left. By rough judgment, it was the E and A.

Then a sound stiffened him. He edged across the yard, nearer to the black bulk ahead. Tortilla Joe's was dark but not empty. Things were happening in its backyard.

Huard heard the stamp of horses, a man's low curse. Somewhere a window scraped open. "That you, Pike?" asked a voice cautiously, and received a cautious answer.

The man in the E and A yard stood rigid for a few seconds, debating. Then, smiling thinly, he passed through a break in the fence. Pike was due to change identities.

Chip, edging silently into Tortilla Joe's yard, balanced a Colt in his right hand. The silhouette of Pike showed up in the gloom, a squat man, half hidden by the larger bulks of horses. The animals shied away from the creeping figure to the left of them.

Pike cursed. His nerves were evidently on edge. Through the alley leading to the street came sounds of a continuous commotion—a body of men had passed in one direction, and gone back in another. Pike swore earnestly. "Come back here, you mule!" he mut-



tered to a nervous horse, pulling savagely at the bridle rein. Then he saw the figure materializing out of the gloom.

Chip covered the distance in one pantherish leap. His Colt jarred across Pike's head. The horses broke away with loud, frightened snorts, thudding and thumping about the yard. One of them went through a break in the fence, and made noise in a collection of tin cans beyond. Chip crouched for a moment in the gloom, holding his rough palm over Pike's mouth. The other's sombrero had dulled the shock of the Colt butt, and he was squirming about.

An iron latch made metallic sound at the back of the cantina. Huard's eyes, accustomed to the gloom, made out the opening of a door, the bulks of men, thicker shadows in a mass of shadow. The O B O puncher grew cool as ice. He had trapped himself by waiting too long in the center of the yard.

"Pike!" A voice snapped, authority in its tone. "What in hell you doin'? Get them hosses close. One of 'em anyway! The boss can't move!"

Chip froze to immobility. They were carrying someone out of the building.

"Wait!" another voice whispered sibilantly. In the gloom, some fear seemed to grow, an intangible sense of things gone wrong. "Get back!" snapped the first voice. There was a surging commotion, and the dark bulks were gone. But the door remained open.

Chip moved. He sheathed his Colt, jerked Pike around, and smashed a solid fist against the squirming man's jaw. Rising from the limp figure, the O B O puncher ran across the yard, intent on gaining the shelter of the back stairs. He had not covered half the distance when a figure edged swiftly through the doorway at top of the dimly seen stairs, jumped the steps with catlike quickness, and sprang sidewise to close with Huard.

Something about the movements of his assailant, the suicidal courage, told Huard it was Pedro Orta. He was

making no noise—the leap was silent—he did not even curse as Chip dodged under the murderous sidesweep of his knife arm. The two went down in a twisting tumble.

Huard felt the bite of steel in his shoulder, a glancing cut, and a vision of Riordan's chest, stabbed with terrific force, glowed in his mind, and passed. He reached up, getting his steel fingers into Pedro's throat. The other hand was below him, twisted. A Colt, which had leaped to it by reflex action as Pedro materialized in the doorway, was pressed around against his own body. Pedro was striking again, at the rigid arm holding him away.

Chip let go of the six-gun. He rolled with spasmodic violence, spilling Pedro. The Mexican clutched savagely, sensing the danger of a breakaway. Chip's right fist hooked into the snarling, dimly seen face. He reversed his spin, every muscle in his supple body snapping to the effort. They broke away, and rose, but the animal-like Mexican was back in a split-second, a raging, silent killer.

Primal instincts in the O B O man urged him to meet the charge bodily, to pit his muscular power and skill against Orta's strength and knife. But there was noise on the stairs. A Colt roared at Huard's left hip, spitting its red flare into Pedro's stomach. The Mexican's choked yell was lost in a sudden burst of shots from stairs and doorway. Huard instinctively went down. He rolled over the dark ground, came up, emptying the Colt at the flares on the steps and within the entrance.

The booming died out. Something rolled on the stairs, came to rest with a soft thud. Huard set cartridges into a Colt chamber with lightning speed. He edged along the raised framing at top of the stairs, around to their front, stepping over an inert form. His right hand, fumbling, found a Colt.

"Rioux!" a voice suddenly called from within the building. "Damn you—stick with me! They'll get you anyway!"



A window tinkled, somewhere towards the opposite alley. Chip sprang up the stairs and through the dark opening of the rear door. He stumbled over a moving man. Almost in his face a Colt roared. The flare showed pain-twisted features beneath him, a wounded man shooting by guess.

Huard kicked himself free, and flattened against the wall of the entry. From within a gun spat again and again, sending slugs through the doorway, tearing at the framing. Huard heard a groan, a soft sigh. The man on the floor was done for, finished by his own friends.

The window tinkled again. "Rioux!" someone yelled again, hoarsely.

Shots sounded from outside. Chip slipped through to the inner room of the cantina, moving fast, but not fast enough. The waiting gun spat again, and Chip felt the shocking tear of lead. He pulled trigger as he lurched down. There was a dark form turning from a window. Its front showed red, quick flares. Huard, on his knees, drove his slugs into the target, and then went down as the first Colt spoke again from the back of the room.

Chip came back to his knees. His left side, shoulder and waist smarted and burned. But the bullets had not struck him squarely. He had heard a Colt hammer click on empty cartridges. The hidden man was reloading. Others were moving in the building front. Huard heard a Mexican curse. He tried to rise, cross the distance to the hidden man reloading in the gloom.

Then from somewhere beyond came sounds of a great crashing. Huard heard a scuffle. After a time he was conscious of lights, of voices, of being supported as he made a way through a hazy world, filled with gray smoke, to the coolness of outside air. He could walk but his left side was numb.

Then he saw Chuck Brighton sitting

a horse out in the street. Someone wanted him to drink whiskey—others bellowed for Doc Ainslee—some asked questions. Huard muttered. He waved them away with his free hand.

The cantina front was a mess. Men were coming out of the broken doorway, carrying limp figures. Then a puncher came down the steps, half supporting the cattleman Seton. That explained his disappearance. He'd been a prisoner in Tortilla Joe's.

Huard heard cries of "Purdell!" "Purdell was in there." A great commotion arose. "Purdell was wounded. Brighton shot him before he got away." The cry went over town. Chip stared at the figure on horseback, out in the street.

"Hey!" yelled Chuck's unmistakable voice. "To hell with Purdell! Get that doctor!" Chip grunted, and made a wavering way towards the speaker.

"Doctor?" he queried pugnaciously. "Who needs a doctor?" He balanced himself, pushing away assisting hands. "I thought you was dead?"

Chuck grinned slowly. "I'm near as hard to kill as you," he replied. "They put some holes in me the night Sam went under, but I got out of a winder after I'd plugged Purdell. A bunch of 'em found me some ways outa town next day, and chased Jim-horse clear to Rior-dan's. The nester was scared, and took me to Coldbrook. Shorty an' the boys hit town day before yesterday. Orleans is all tied up." He watched Chip stagger. "You go to bed now, like a good boy. We'll talk it over later."

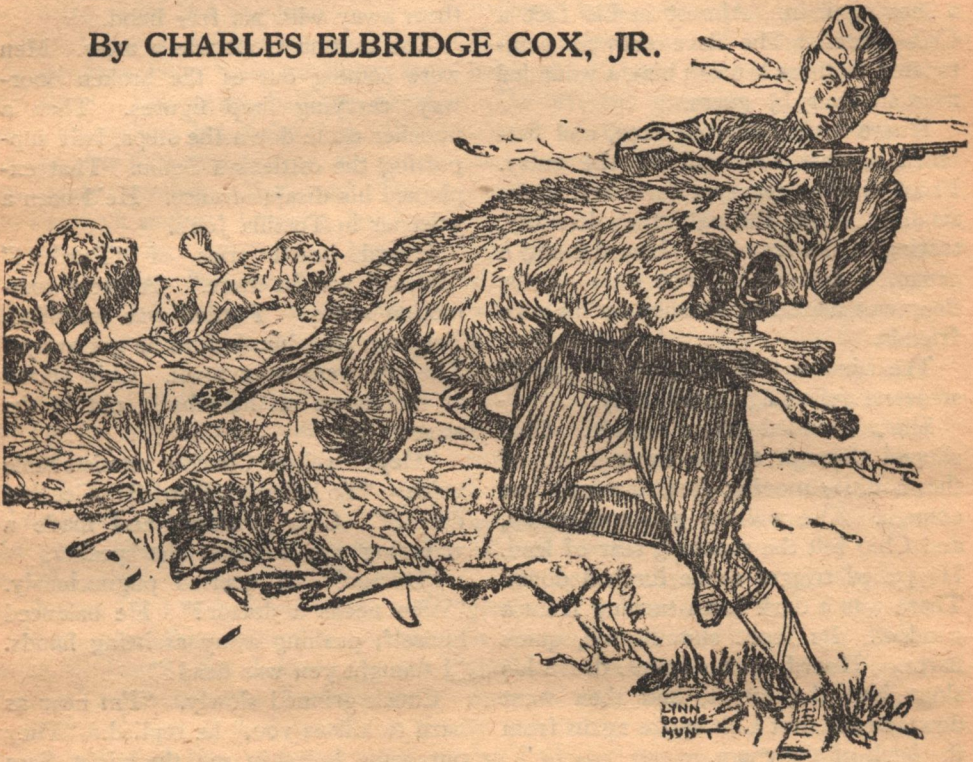
Chip leaned a hand on Chuck's saddlehorn.

"There ain't nothin' to talk over," he said, a little wearily notwithstanding his grin, "now you been found. We gotta get back an' help Buck. Me—I got a few scratches. Beats hell how some fellers shoot when they're in a hurry. Come on off'n that hoss an' let's go 'n' bed down."



# No Quarter

By CHARLES ELBRIDGE COX, JR.



## *A "Narrowest Escape" Story*

**I**F a map of Europe is handy, follow the Italian coast line down the Adriatic shore past Ancona, almost to Barletta. Inland, you will find the city of Foggia. I detrained there one January midnight in 1918, one of a detachment of American flying cadets. We had spent the three months before in France, where snow swept about our flimsy shacks. This starless, sultry night, stumbling with fatigue, we were ushered into a clean adobe barrack. It was home after many hardships.

The first morning, routed out before dawn for setting-up exercises, we watched the sun come up out of the Adriatic Sea twenty miles away. The light grew stronger, and we saw that our camp was located in the center of

a level coastal plain, but for miles to the left and right and behind, mountains hemmed us in.

Later we ate our breakfast of tree-ripened oranges and figs washed down with black Moroccan coffee. Life seemed very good. I was excited at the prospect of flying after so many months of inaction, and the country thrilled me. It was new and strange. The purple mystery of the mountains beckoned me on. What kind of people lived in the white villages that nestled on those dark, rugged slopes? In the States I had hunted ducks at Corpus and shot my moose in Quebec. I was young, and here was a new land to explore.



But the commanding officer said we were to start flying at 6:45, and he meant it. For weeks we had no opportunity to seek adventures other than our work.

However, a day came when clouds rolled down over the mountains, accompanied by wind and storm. Flying ceased. I dug into my trunk, brought out a .22 rifle, and with a friend started out to explore. The rain was light and pleasant after the heat, and we put the miles behind us. We had seen from the air that the country was not so level as our first impressions had led us to believe, and on foot it was enchanting.

In great swells the prairie sloped to tiny, meandering streams. Trees bordered the water—trees that were flat-topped and fragrant with bloom. The land was wild—for miles we saw no one. When we crested a rise, foxes—sometimes two or three—would start up from scant cover and run a mile before gaining the concealment of the next ridge. We would take shots at them with the rifle to hurry them on their way.

Finally, upon topping a long swell, we came upon a flock of sheep—thousands of them—grazing. Below, by the stream, an impressive adobe house stood surrounded by white plastered corrals.

We halted to gaze at the picture—the grazing flock, the shepherd who tended them and the white house by the water. As we looked, three shaggy white dogs arose from about the flock and rushed towards us. The herder—a wild figure in sheepskins—shouted at them and then started running towards us. The dogs came on in long bounds, snarling deep, thunderous warning.

**I** WAS scared. I was used to dogs—but I couldn't talk to these brutes. They were thirty inches at the shoulder and weighed nearly as much as a man. I didn't know Italian for "That's all right, pup! That's a good dog!"

They sheered off at fifty feet and surrounded us as we stood back to back. The herder's yells began to take effect, and we felt easier. When he approached, a huge ragged fellow, he threw rocks at them until they slunk back to the flock.

The herder was very friendly. His Italian was a provincial jargon and hard for us to understand. However, we interpreted that he invited us to the house for a glass of wine. We accepted.

He told us about the dogs: "They were good dogs for sheep, but bad for strangers. They were particularly bad in the spring, as they ganged up and ran about the country. Occasionally a pack would go berserk and kill a hundred sheep in a night. The herders then killed the bad pack. Yes, sometimes they attacked people." We got that much of the story.

**S**TEVE was tired, and decided to rest and take a short cut home. But I felt refreshed. It wasn't noon yet, and although the rain had stopped, the wind still blew a gale. I knew there would be no flying.

The stream wandered to the left, and I followed it. The sun came out hot. I walked and walked, circling to the left towards camp. Finally I saw Foggia miles away and judged the flying field lay over one of the long swells in between. Then, very suddenly, the wind, which had been rushing across the plain, quieted. The world grew still, and I could faintly hear birds singing. I began to feel uneasy; a vague warning shivered up my spine.

Something about this eerie, lonesome land was all wrong. "Too old to be so wild," I thought. What was it that made me wish I were safe at camp? I looked towards the mountains, as if they could tell me why the prairie was so still. Rolling over the dark range to the north came the answer—the most evil clouds I had ever seen. Jagged lightning ripped through the black, towering barrier; but



I heard no thunder, just a moaning rush of sound far away.

The birds stopped singing. The air became stifling and hard to breathe. I started for camp at a jog-trot.

Then I looked behind me again. I had to—something was watching me back there. I've never had my blood really chill before, but it did then. For in a line, one behind the other, six great dogs were coming after me. They didn't make a sound. Leaping, leaping, they came on in long, terrible bounds. Heads hung low between their shoulders, silent—I knew they were coming for me. The little gun felt like a toy in my hands.

The black billowing scud of storm reached up and blotted out the sun. With it came a gust of air—cold as off an arctic flow. The world was half darkness and ominous.

In great bounds the dogs came on, the stiff hackles on their backs bristling up. It was hard to believe. Italy was an old country—things like this couldn't happen in Italy. Yet I knew, in the bottom of my heart, that I would need my gun, and that if it jammed or if they rushed more than one at a time—

Something about the storm—the black, rushing madness of it—was in the hearts of these grim mongrels. Storms did that—crazed the universe; threw over law and order. The pack felt the madness. I was a stranger in strange clothes; my face was too white. I was to be dragged down. The pack willed it—centuries ago it had been willed.

I know dogs, and I knew what was in the hearts of these! Later in the war I had tracer bullets fan my cheeks, but this day I was condemned to die.

I faced them, fear pounding in my heart. If they would only bark like ordinary dogs! But this low throat sound was war—war to the death!

THE leader came straight towards me. I could hear the thud of his heavy feet. He was snarling in his chest and slobbering at the mouth. I was running backwards, yelling them off. Fifty yards away! If I stumbled, God help me! Thirty yards—ten!

He left the ground. I pressed the trigger of the automatic. He was in mid-air and on a level with my chest. I saw the little hollow-point bullets flick the hair along his neck and kill him. His eyes, even with mine, lost the fierce intensity of hate. His heavy body crashed into my shoulder and spun me sidewise, nearly knocking the rifle from my grasp. Teeth tore open the back of my upraised hand. He struck the ground and jerked a time or two, the slobber at his mouth flecked with red. I whirled in panic to face the others, my nostrils filled with the rank, pungent odor of his wet coat.

The second brute was leaving the ground in a running spring. I hit him in the teeth with the hard steel barrel and as he stumbled from the blow I squeezed the trigger. I had never liked an automatic trigger pull, but on this day I blessed the man who designed it.

Then the rain came—a cold, bucketing sheet of water that almost knocked me to my knees. Out of breath and half blinded by the downpour, I watched the remaining four dogs fan out in the weird half light, their heads weaving—mouths open—snarling. 'I didn't give a rap now. It was victory—I had won! I cussed 'em in good old American and shot the dirt from under their big feet.

They turned and loped away into the storm. I stood and watched them go, trembling and a little sick at my stomach. Looking up, I smiled at the rain that beat my face.

Italy—old civilized Italy, where I'd been challenged to a survival of the fittest without quarter.

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# \$20000 REWARD!

Undoubtedly many readers of Black Mask have had one or more narrow escapes from death at the hands of some human being—perhaps a criminal resisting arrest, perhaps a highwayman or burglar, perhaps a bandit or savage in some other country. We want to know about these narrow escapes, and we offer you the chance to make some good money quickly by telling us about them. We are staging a contest. Here it is—

## "MY NARROWEST ESCAPE FROM DEATH" CONTEST

**First Prize . . . . . \$75.00**  
**Second Prize . . . . . 50.00**  
**Three Prizes . . . . . 25.00 each**

### Rules and Conditions

1. Contest free and open to all.
2. Contest begins August 10 and ends October 31. No stories received after 5 P. M. October 31 will be considered.
3. Stories must be true in every particular. Every contestant must write at the end of his story, and sign, the following statement: "I swear and affirm that this story is true in every particular."
4. Stories must be not more than 2,500 words nor less than 1,000 words in length.
5. Stories must be about a narrow escape from death from attack by a human being, whether in performance of police duty, special guard duty or ordinary self-defense. War experiences, ordinary accidents and attacks by animals are barred.
6. All stories submitted thereby become the property of Black Mask, with full rights to publish when and where desired. Nonprizewinning stories that we wish to publish in Black Mask will be paid for at a fair price.
7. The editor and staff of Black Mask will be the sole judges of this contest, and there can be no appeal from their decisions.

If you have had such adventure, tell us about it. Write a true story, not more than 2,500 words, giving all particulars leading up to the narrow escape and describing clearly the fight or whatever it was. We will award the prizes named above for the five stories that the judges consider the most interesting of those received, and announce the winners in Black Mask at the earliest possible date after October 31. If you have had a really thrilling adventure, with the pearly gates staring you right in the face, wide open, there is no reason why you should not win one of these prizes. Don't be afraid to tackle it just because you are not a writer. We don't want literature: we want a straight-from-the-shoulder, plainly written true account of your escape. And if you know someone who has had such an experience, tell him about this contest.

Field & Stream, America's leading magazine of hunting and fishing (published by the publishers of Black Mask), has conducted a similar contest about escapes from death from attacks by animals, etc. On the preceding three pages you will find one of the stories it received. You'll enjoy it and it will give you an idea of what we are after, except that **our** stories must be as stated in rule 5 above. A new Field & Stream contest is beginning now. Get a copy of the current number and read the rules and prizes. Maybe you can win one of those prizes also.

## BLACK MASK

578 MADISON AVENUE

NEW YORK CITY



# December's Gripping Stories

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## **"RED PAVEMENT" - - - by Frederick Nebel**

Late one night, a man reels past "tough dick" Donahue and falls to the pavement. A door opens as a face looks out; then is closed. Donahue gets the helpless man into a cab, agrees to meet, for him, the girl "coming from the West," takes his wallet with the girl's picture and checks for "baggage." Another car passes close; Donahue ducks as a gun crashes, gets up to find the man shot, killed. The police come racing up. Donahue has the murdered man's wallet, and no explanation to offer. He has to go on. He does—and that's the story.

## **"MERGER WITH DEATH" - by Carroll John Daly**

Race Williams isn't long on brain work and crime deduction. He likes to have them come for him in the open, with guns out, shooting. He'll meet 'em that way, any time, any place. But if a trap is set for him he goes into it to find out what it's all about.

## **"PARK AVENUE ITEM" - by Theodore A. Tinsley**

Jerry Tracy is a wisecracking little guy. He has to be—for his living. But this knowing everyone, having the lowdown on both good and bad, sometimes leads him into a tough jam, such as, "Park Avenue Item."

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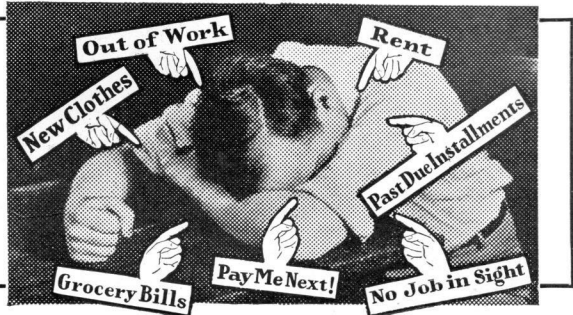


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