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OCTOBER

# BLACK MASK

**MURDER BY  
THE EARS**

A REX SACKLER NOVELETTE  
by D.L. CHAMPION

**BLOOD  
ON THE  
BOOK**

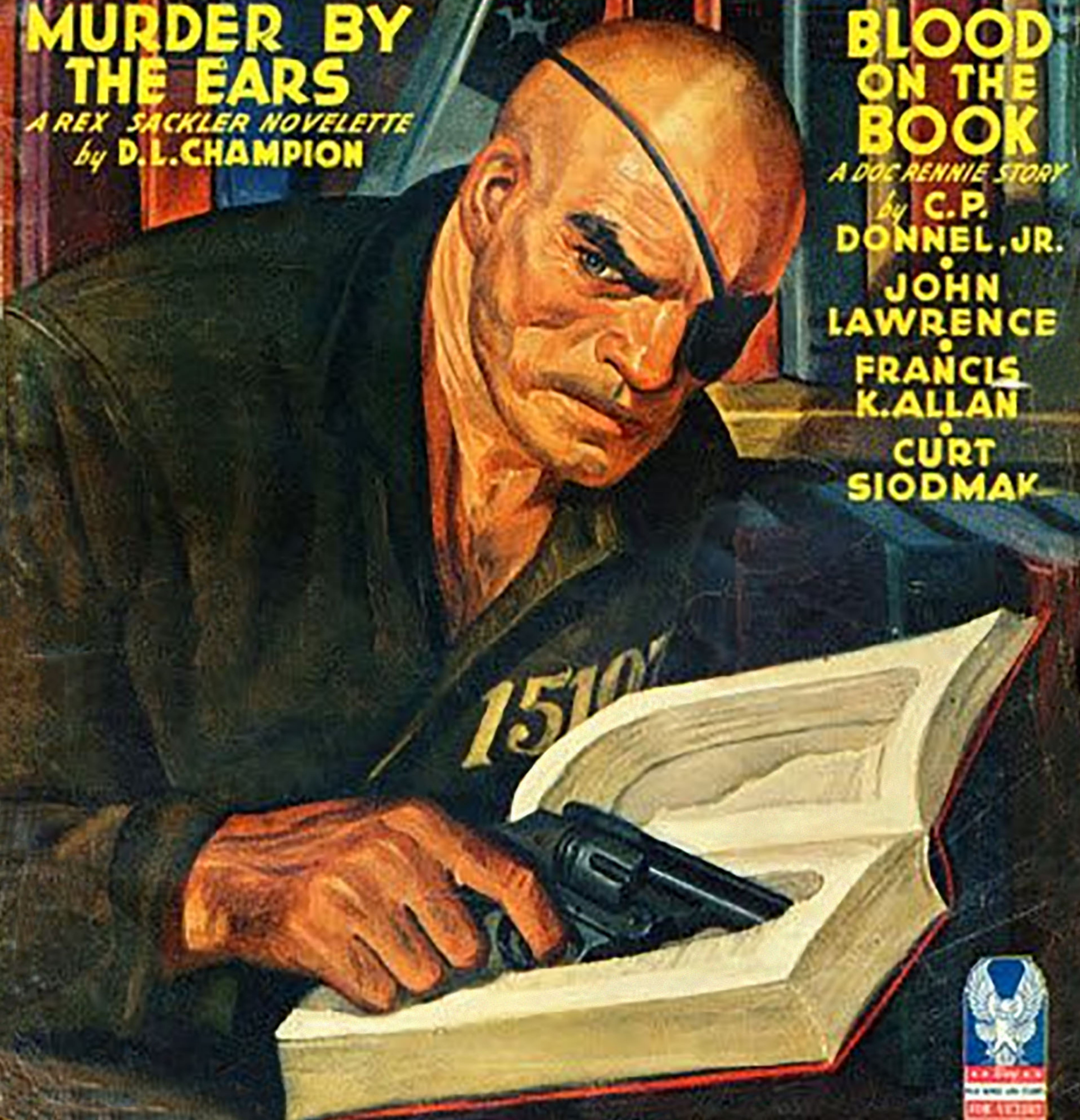
A DOC RENNIE STORY

by C.P.  
DONNEL, JR.

JOHN  
LAWRENCE

FRANCIS  
K. ALLAN

CURT  
SIODMAK





# KNOW RADIO

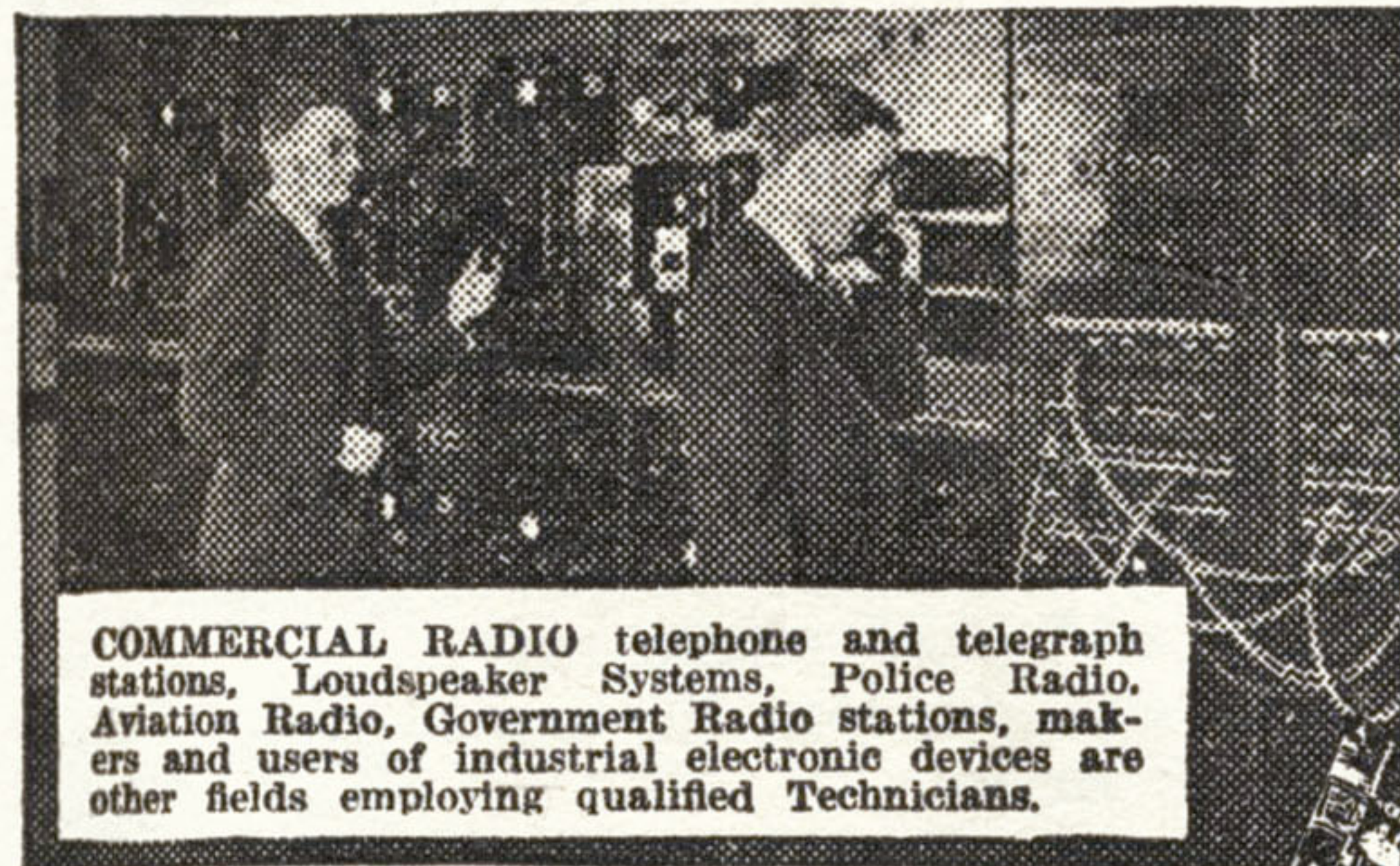
## AS WELL-PAID TECHNICIANS KNOW IT



**FIXING RADIOS** in spare time pays many \$5 to \$10 a week extra while learning. Full time Radio servicing pays as much as \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Many operate their own Radio Service businesses.



**BROADCASTING STATIONS** employ Radio Technicians and pay well for trained men to fill interesting technical jobs with real futures.



**COMMERCIAL RADIO** telephone and telegraph stations, Loudspeaker Systems, Police Radio, Aviation Radio, Government Radio stations, makers and users of industrial electronic devices are other fields employing qualified Technicians.



**EXTRA  
PAY IN  
ARMY,  
NAVY  
TOO**

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, much higher pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Hundreds of service men now enrolled.

Government Civilian Radio Operators and Technicians are needed for a great variety of essential Civilian Radio jobs. As one example, listening posts with Radio equipment are used to detect and report the approach of enemy aircraft, ships and submarines. Many trained Radio men are needed to install, operate and service this and other vital Radio equipment.

## Train At Home To Make \$30 \$40 \$50 a Week

Here is a quick way to more pay! Right now—in nearly every neighborhood—Radio offers the chance to make \$5, \$10 a week **EXTRA MONEY** fixing Radios in spare time. Hundreds of spare time Radio Technicians are stepping into **FULL** time Radio jobs at good pay. Many are starting their own service shops . . . making \$30, \$40, \$50 a week! Do **YOU** want that kind of money? I train you right in your own home for the rich rewards of this growing Radio industry. Mail the Coupon!

### Jobs Like These Go To Men Who Know Radio

Today the Radio repair business is booming because no new Radios are being made. My **EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS**, beginning with my first lesson, give you special training to cash in—earn while you learn. The 882 U. S. Radio Broadcasting Stations employ hundreds of Radio Technicians and Operators. Radio manufacturers are busy filling millions of dollars of Government orders. Hundreds of additional Civilian Radio Operators and Technicians are needed for good-pay Government jobs.

There is a shortage of good Radio Technicians in Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. And think of the jobs that Television and other Radio developments will open after the war! I give you the required knowledge of Radio for these jobs.

**Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn**  
**\$5, \$10 a Week EXTRA in Spare Time**  
My "50-50 Method" — half learning-by-doing with Radio

parts I furnish, half studying my illustrated lessons — makes learning Radio at home as interesting as a game. I give you the parts and instructions for building test equipment. I tell you how to conduct fascinating, practical experiments. I show you how to cash in fast. **MAIL THE COUPON!**

### Find Out Today about the Rich Rewards in Radio

Train for good pay now—and a steady job in a live-wire field when war is over. If you're in a rut—dissatisfied with your present pay—worried because your job has no future — find out about Radio! Mail the Coupon! I'll send you my **FREE** 64-page Illustrated Book, "RICH REWARDS IN RADIO." It tells how N.R.I. trains you at home in spare time. Shows you many letters and photographs of men I trained, so you can see what they are doing, earning. It describes the many fascinating jobs Radio offers. No obligation. No salesman will call. Just mail the coupon **AT ONCE!**

**J. E. SMITH, President,**  
Dept. 2KS9, National Radio Institute,  
Washington, D. C.

**TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS**

**MAIL TO GET 64-PAGE BOOK FREE**

**Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2KS9**  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail me **FREE**, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Please write or print plainly.)

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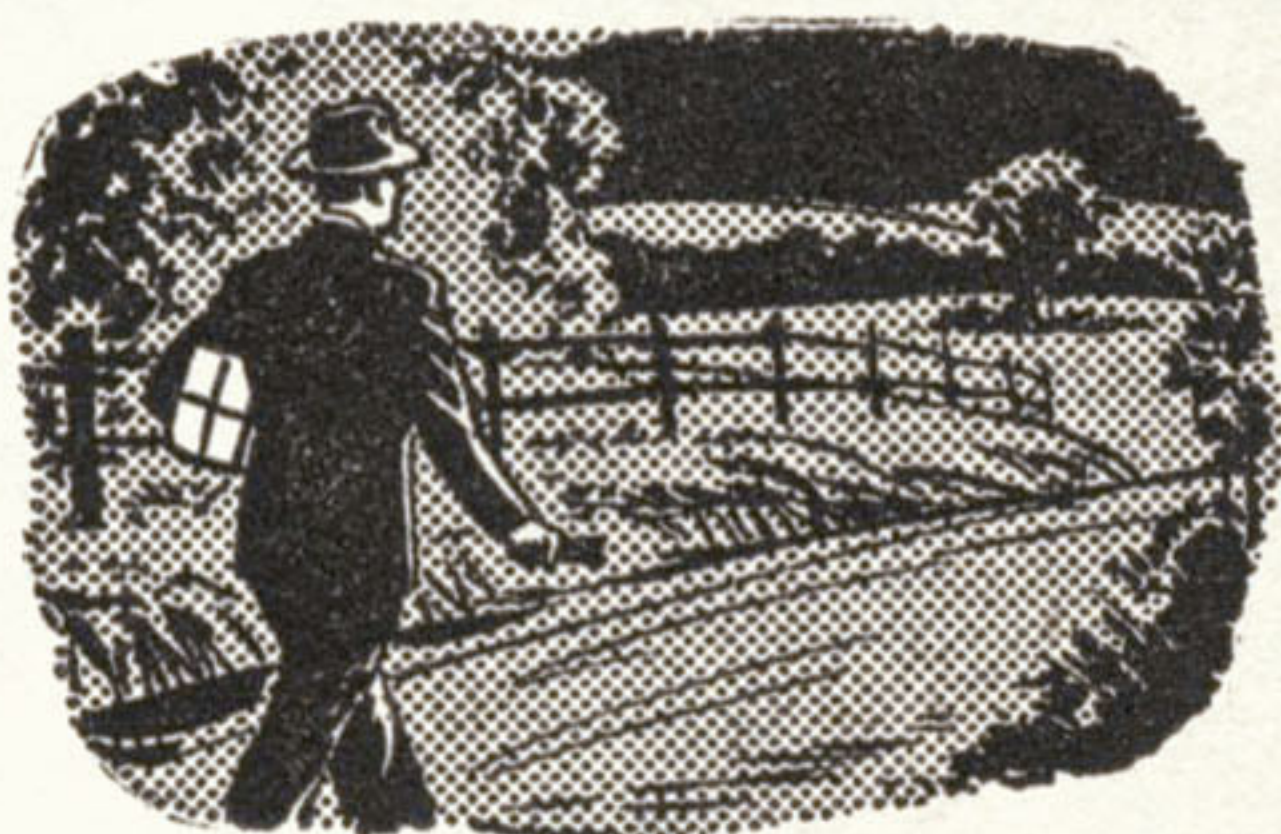
*This book  
has shown  
hundreds how  
to make MORE  
MONEY*



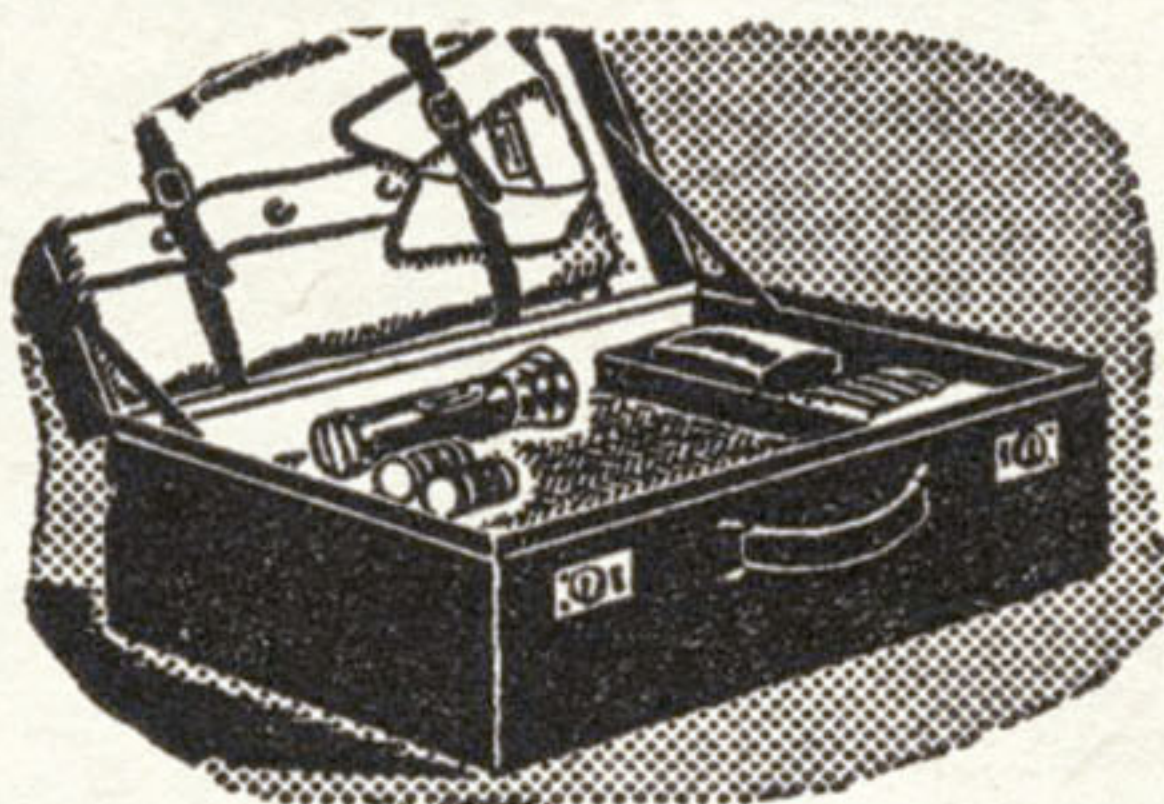


# How to make your FLASHLIGHTS and BATTERIES LAST LONGER

These Wartime Suggestions have been Reviewed  
and Passed by the Office of Price Administration  
and the Office of Civilian Defense



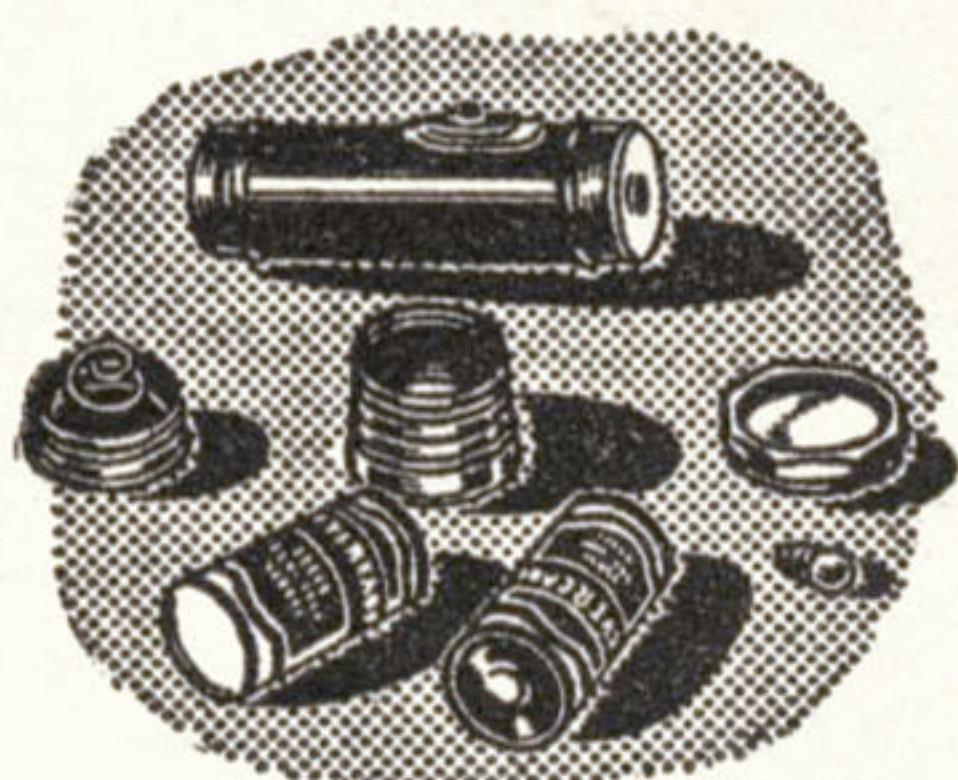
**1 DON'T USE FLASHLIGHT CONTINUOUSLY.** Snap it on when you *need* to see—then snap it off. *Needless* use of flashlight merely wastes "juice."



**2 WHEN STARTING A TRIP,** don't toss your flashlight *loaded* into your suitcase, haversack or toolbox. Unscrew, or remove batteries—then switch can't "catch" and waste batteries.



**3 KEEP FLASHLIGHT OUT OF CHILDREN'S REACH.** It is not a toy—but a tool for your convenience and safety. *Know* where it is at all times—so you can put your hand on it quickly when you *need* it.



**4 DON'T THROW AWAY A BROKEN FLASHLIGHT** until you're sure it can't be fixed. Minor repairs can quickly be made, lens or bulb may be replaced.



**5 DON'T "HOARD" BATTERIES**—keep one extra set for each flashlight in case of long-continued use. Others want and need batteries too. *Do your share* in conserving the nation's battery supply.

## BUY FRESH DATED BATTERIES

Fresh batteries last longer. Dependable "Eveready" *fresh* DATED batteries will give long life and reliable service.

**NATIONAL CARBON CO., INC.**  
30 East 42nd Street, New York  
Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation



The word "Eveready" is a registered trademark of National Carbon Company, Inc.

**FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER...**  
*Look for the DATE-LINE*



# EVEREADY

TRADE MARK

## FLASHLIGHTS AND BATTERIES







# BLACK MASK



K. S. White, Editor

VOL. XXV No. 6



October, 1942

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Black-and-white illustrations by Peter Kuhlhoff

**Every story in Black Mask is new and, to the best of our knowledge, has never before been printed in any publication.**

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# LIFTING THE NOVEMBER



## BLACK MASK



CELLINI SMITH is back! The dog-eat-dog dick from L. A. has been booted into action once again by ROBERT REEVES and put to work whetting *A Taste For Murder* that almost equals his appetite for bonded bottled goods. Hooper's Number 7 is the curb-service eatery where the whetting goes on. It was salami with mustard—not murder—Cellini intended to ask for when he honked his horn at the luscious car-hop with *Tanya* stencilled on her blouse. But murder was what he got, before the gal could take her thumb out of the soup that came with the order. The blackmail set-up that begot the kill was as quick-and-dirty as the rest of the joint and by the time Smith had cleaned it up, from kitchen to curb, he was content to eat home for a while, out of cans if need be, and wash his meals down with good wholesome Scotch for safety's sake.

DALE CLARK gives us another

great novelette of San Alpa's hard-luck house dick, O'Hanna. *Now I Slay Me*—it's called and with the first snow of the season blanketing the *haut monde* hostel the ski-wacks descend in force, first among them a gal with a sense of Yuma. Unfortunately she wasn't among those murdered but there are other kills to keep you guessing, and the Irish cop on the verge of losing his job right up to the last paragraph.

Remember John Collins, the refugee piano player of *Don't You Cry For Me!* back in the May issue? NORBERT DAVIS lets him give us an encore in a smashing novelette, *Beat Me Daddy!* next month. The guy's working in a jukeless joint outside a military camp now and pounds out the sweetest swing solution to murder we've listened to in ages.

Then there's the final spine-chilling chapter of *Donovan's Brain* by CURT SIODMAK, plus other gripping shorts.

This thrill-packed NOVEMBER issue will be on sale SEPTEMBER 18th.



**BILL, YOU SURE HAVE A SWELL BUILD! DID YOU TRAIN FOR A LONG TIME?**

**ABSOLUTELY NOT! THE ATLAS DYNAMIC TENSION SYSTEM MAKES MUSCLES GROW FAST!**

**Here's the Kind of MEN I Build!**

*Charles Atlas*

an actual, untouched photo of Charles Atlas, holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."



**Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?**

**I DON'T** care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE**! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

#### **What's My Secret?**

"*Dynamic Tension!*" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—*my way*. I give you *no gadgets or contraptions to fool with*. When you have learned to develop your strength through "*Dynamic Tension*" you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the **DORMANT** muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid **LIVE MUSCLE**.

#### **Only 15 Minutes a Day**

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No *theory*—every exercise is *practical*. And, man, so *easy*! Spend only 15 minutes a day in our own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "*Dynamic Tension*" almost unconsciously ever minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to **BUILD MUSCLE** and **VITALITY**.

#### **FREE BOOK "Everlasting Health and Strength"**

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became **NEW MEN** in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped **THEM** do. See what I can do for **YOU**! For a real thrill, send for this book *today*. **AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 83Z, 115 East 23rd Street, New York City.



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83Z, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of "*Dynamic Tension*" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "*Everlasting Health and Strength*."

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly.)

Address .....

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



# BEHIND THE



## BLACK MASK



ABOUT his "Bible-story" in this issue C. P. DONNEL, Jr. writes: "I checked the facts about the Bible and they are O. K. However, I was unable to get an accurate physical description of that edition and had to write around that part with some assumptions and generalities. But the main idea about the Bible is absolutely correct, likewise the names of the printers and the final disposition of the case."

**F**RANCIS K. ALLAN, whose name appears on our contents page for the first time this month, writes—

Born in Hillsboro, Texas, 1916. Thereafter, until the age of seventeen, life was undistinguished. At such time, in Dallas, I almost decided to become an influential lawyer—mainly as a result of discovering the gifts of a loose-tongue. I was a high school debater. A brief stop-over at Texas University corrected this opinion, and my formal education came to a quiet close.

The CREATIVE urge was waking,

even then: A writer's life looked particularly easy. In fact, one beautiful love story, in long-hand, was offered to various editors, complete with instructions for mailing the check. The occasion to use such information never arose.

In the next few years I wheelbarrowed concrete, raised pigeons, met a girl, quit playing the violin, wandered around the Southwest writing more unpublished stories, two solemn novels (also unpublished), and studied criminal and abnormal psychology.

Then the day arrived!

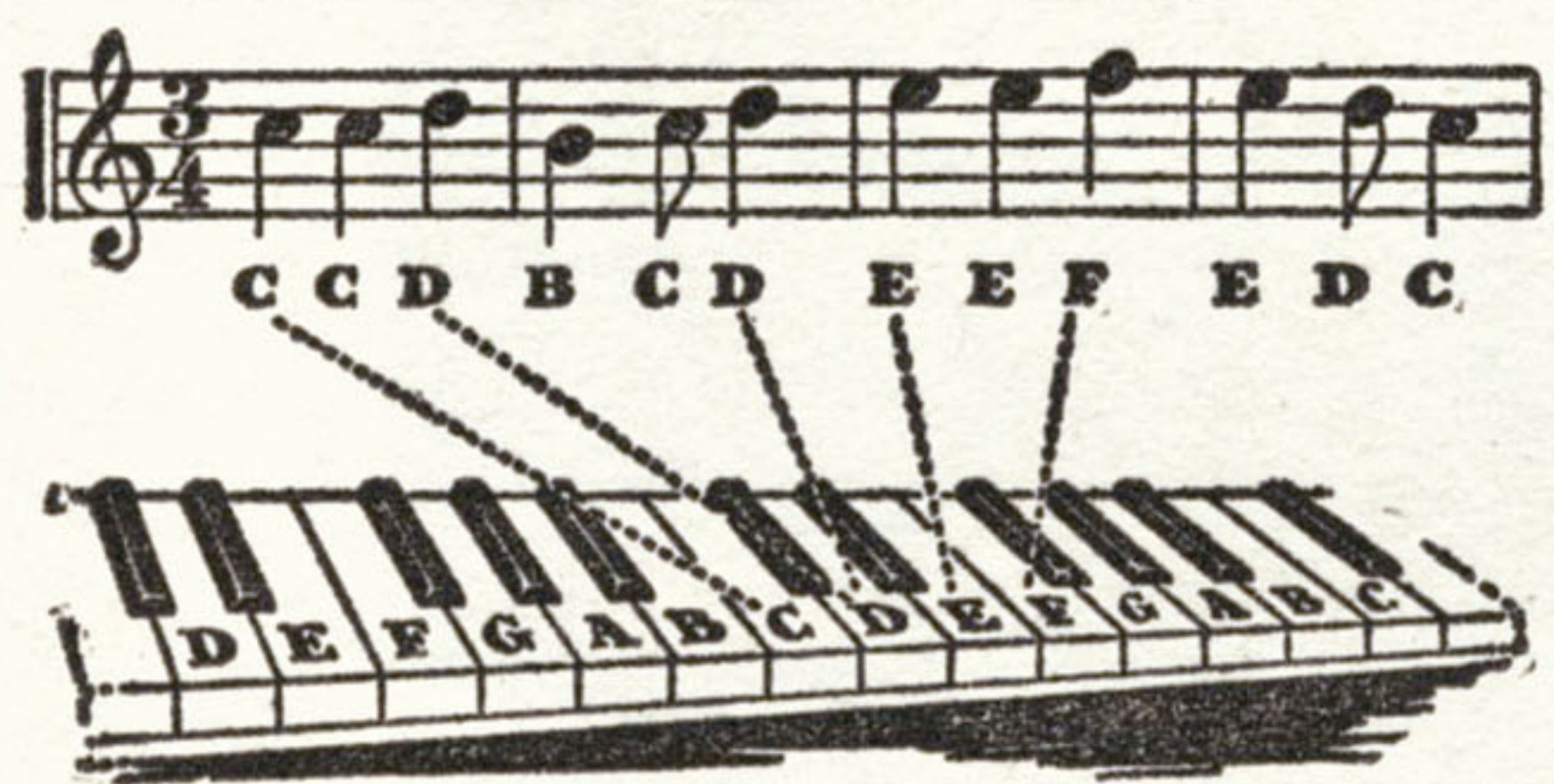
An editor in a heady moment bought a detective short. The check was for fifty dollars. Bus fare from Dallas to New York was a good slice; New York landlords also want theirs. Fortunately editors wanted more stories. At least until yesterday.

I write only detective copy now. That, with the continued study of criminal and abnormal psychology, the acquisition of one wife (aforementioned girl), and the cooking of Mexican food leaves little unreported time. The rest is wasted, looking for the Easy Life in writing, and an Understanding editor who will buy my rejects.

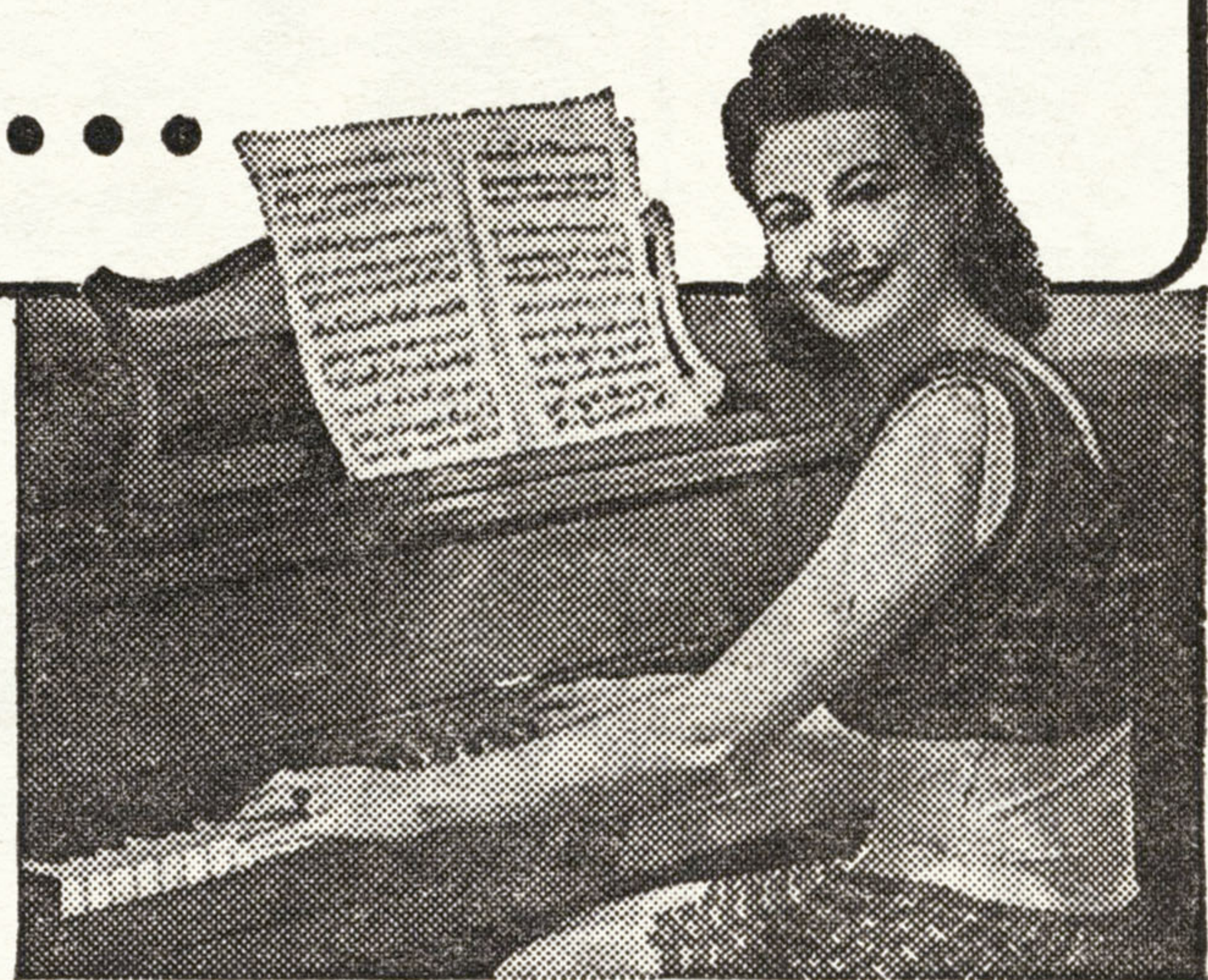


# To those who think LEARNING MUSIC is hard...

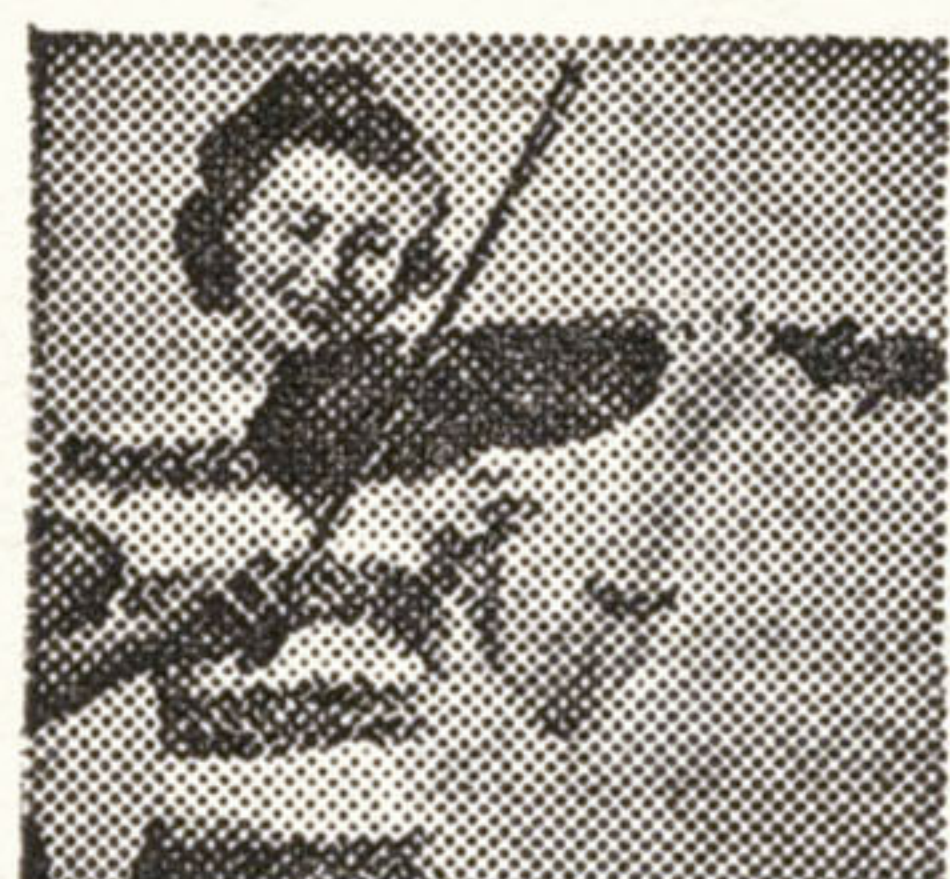
MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE,  
SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY



Strike these notes and you're playing  
"America". TRY IT—IT'S FUN



**Enrolling for 3rd Course**  
I learned more about music from your course than many of my friends who studied for years. The fact that I've already taken 2 courses with you and am now enrolling for a third should speak for itself.  
\*F.A.S., Indiana



Plays from Start

Your advertisements are true to the letter. I can actually play my favorite instrument even though I'm only at the beginning. How can I ever express my joyful gratitude.  
\*F.R.O., Illinois

\*Actual names on request  
Pictures by Professional Models.

## Easy as A·B·C this print and picture way

● Perhaps you think learning music is a tedious grind. It isn't any longer! Long hours of practicing humdrum scales and hard-work exercises are over and done with.

You have no excuses...no alibis whatsoever for not getting started toward musical good times *now!* For, through a new, easy, pleasant method, you can now learn to play right at home—without a private teacher—for only a few cents a day.

### Learn to Play by Playing

The lessons come to you by mail from the famous U. S. School of Music...complete instructions, large, clear diagrams and all the music you need. You study with a smile. You learn to play by playing real tunes by note. And it's all so easy to understand. First you are *told* how to do a thing. Then a picture *shows* you how. Then *you* do it yourself and *hear* it.

If you're tired of just looking on at parties — if you've envied those who could en-

tertain others — if learning music has always been a never-to-come-true dream—let this time-tested home-study method come to your rescue.

Over 700,000 people have studied music this modern, easy as ABC way. And remember, no matter what instrument you choose, the cost will average only a few cents a day.

Our illustrated Free Booklet fully explains this remarkable course. It shows how you can learn to play quickly, and for a mere fraction of the cost of old, slow methods. So decide which instrument you want to play and mail the coupon today. The fascinating Free Booklet will be sent to you at once together with a "Print and Picture" Sample. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 36710 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

### FREE! PRINT AND PICTURE SAMPLE AND ILLUSTRATED BOOKLET

U. S. School of Music, 36710 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. City  
Please send me Free Booklet and Print and Picture Sample. I would like to play instrument checked below.

(Do you have instrument.....)  
Piano      Accordion      Trumpet      Ukulele,  
Violin      Mandolin      Trombone      or any  
Guitar      Saxophone      Tenor Banjo      Other Instrument

Name .....

Street .....

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

NOTE . . . If you are under 16 years of age parent must sign this coupon.

Save 2c—Stick Coupon on penny postcard





His gun leveled as Joe Burma twisted in the chair.

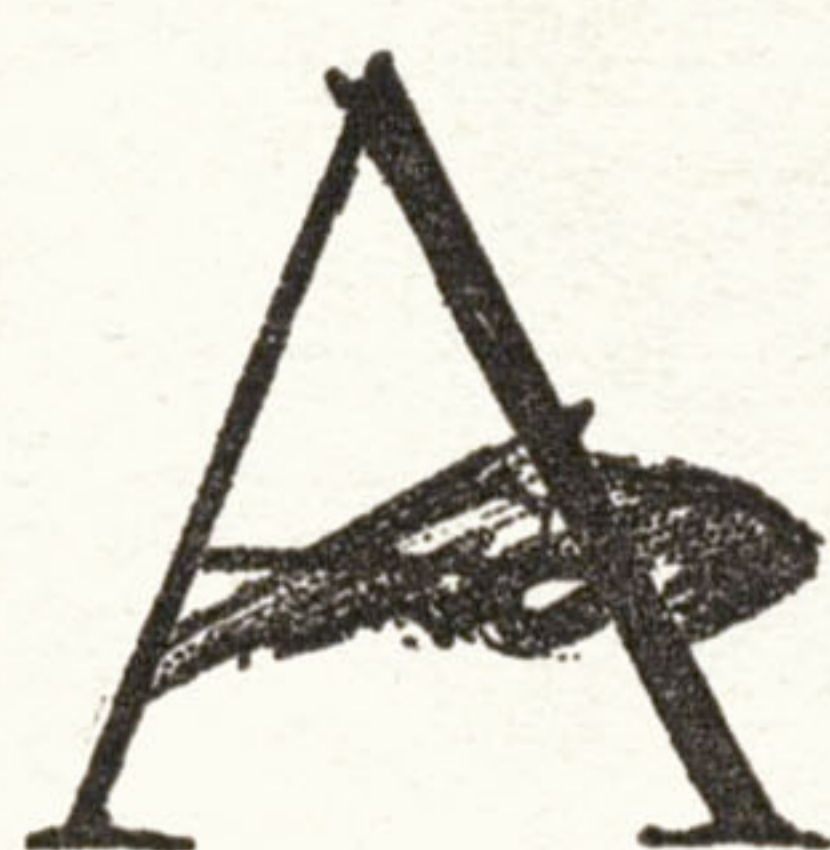
The day his partner, Branch, got the answer to the Kid Glove killing and died before he could spill it, Shamus Tim Hall met the sun-tanned siren in the lobby. Framed for a fall-guy, he knew he had to run with her in the maddest murder marathon ever staged in order to find—

# THE SECOND ANSWER

By FRANCIS K. ALLAN

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Girl in the Lobby



AT FOUR THIRTY Friday afternoon, Timothy Hall squeezed his two bulging grips into the slice of revolving door, kicked, and followed the turning panel in a half-circle. It fed him out in

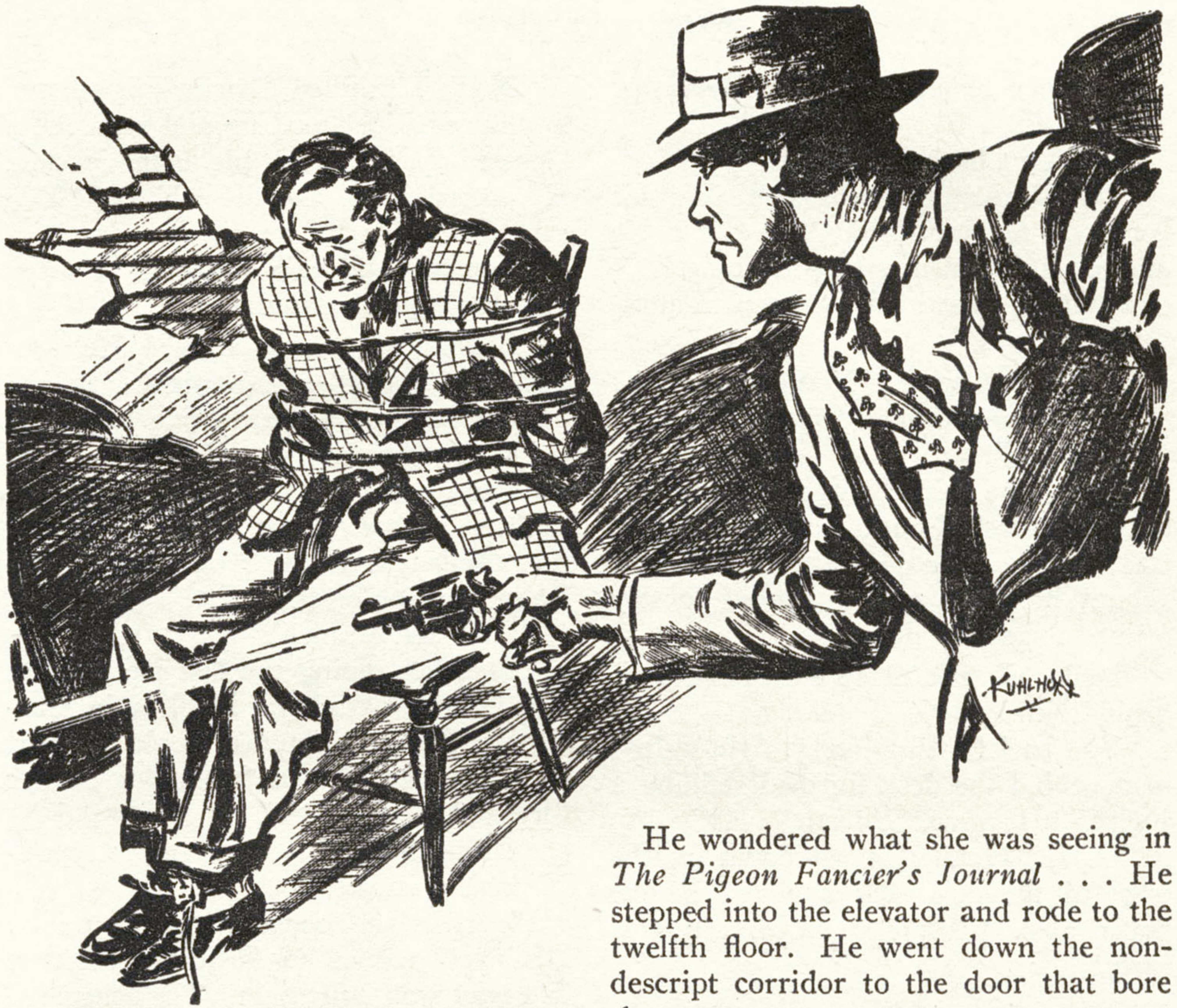
the lobby of the Paley Building and snapped at his heels.

He crossed the worn floor to the cigar stand. The grips dropped limply, and he fished in his pocket for money.

"Just get back, Mr. Hall?" the man behind the counter greeted.

"Half an hour ago. Hot trip." He took out a quarter. "Package of cigarettes." He waited for the change. "Do you know if Branch is in the office?"





He wondered what she was seeing in *The Pigeon Fancier's Journal* . . . He stepped into the elevator and rode to the twelfth floor. He went down the non-descript corridor to the door that bore the names:

## HALL & BRANCH

### Private Investigation

"I guess he is. I saw him going up after lunch. Haven't seen him leaving yet." He laid a book of matches on the cigarettes and made change. "Good trip this time?" His eyes were hungry for talk.

"Same stuff. Feels good to get back," Hall said mechanically. He tore out a match and raised the flame to a cigarette. Absently his eyes drifted to the girl. She stood there by the magazine rack. One hand was idly releasing the pages of a magazine, one at a time, and letting them fall back into place.

He looked at her shoes first: brown crocodile shoes. He looked at her legs: good legs. He looked at her face: pretty, if you liked deep sun-tan and brown hair. He looked at her hand: no ring.

"Nice to get back," he said again. He reached for his grips. He took one more look at the girl as he turned toward the elevators. She was still dealing the pages back into place.

He put down one grip, turned the knob, kicked, and bumped inside the small reception-room.

Nonnie left-hooked her typewriter and punched out a last line.

"Mr. Branch is busy. Mr. Hall is out of town," she announced through the clatter. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Mr. Hall *was* out of town."

The clatter stalled. Her swivel chair spun around.

"Hello," she said matter-of-factly. "You're not coming back till tomorrow. How did Mrs. Ellington's diamond bracelet do?"

"I got it. Moe Scan was trying to hock it for two grand. I persuaded him to trade it for a ticket to Mexico." He propped a shoe on the edge of her chair



and nodded toward the office door that was shut.

"What's Charlie doing?"

"Mr. Branch is having a drink to his success," she informed. "He got a big answer to something this morning."

Timothy raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"I wouldn't know," Nonnie answered. "Probably something a woman shouldn't understand."

"Now," he said, "you are being bitter." He mashed out his cigarette in her tray, tucked a loose wave of her hair behind her ear, and wandered loosely toward the closed door.

"Hello, Charlie." He closed the door behind him.

"You back!" The heavy, light-haired man behind the desk finished refilling a jigger. "How was Philadelphia?"

"O. K. Hot." He sat down on the edge of the desk and squinted at the bottle-label. "Why? I mean, why this early?"

CHARLES BRANCH swallowed his drink. His eyes crinkled as he faced Timothy.

"I'm going to Harrison tomorrow morning. When I come back, I'll bring the killer of Kid Gloves."

"My God! Are you still on that?"

"For ten months I've been picking moth-balls on that case. Yesterday I got my first break; a Brooklyn bookmaker named Geddy is about to get tapped for homicide. He popped in here and said he'd spill the Gloves case if I'd ease things for him at the D. A.'s. And Geddy wasn't fooling! I listened. I put in a telephone call. I've got an appointment at seven o'clock tonight with the boxing commiss—"

"Don't," Tim requested flatly. "For a week I've been listening-to and having-appointments-with. I came by here to say I'm taking a vacation. Going to Maine for the weekend."

"But listen! This case is going to make—"

"No." Tim filled Charlie's jigger and swallowed. He stood up and removed a German Luger from his inner pocket. He tossed it on the file-cabinet. "You can coddle that for me till Monday."

"Sometimes," said Charlie, "I think you don't give a damn."

"Sometimes you are right." He went out. He stopped at Nonnie's desk and put his hand over the clicking keys.

"We're quitting you, honey. If you want to get me the next three days, you can't. If anybody comes in, get the name, the number, and the money. Tell 'em we're working on it."

"And Mr. Branch?"

"Says he's doing the last lap on that Kid Gloves marathon. He'll be in Harrison." He straightened, took the curl from her ear, and patted it out on her forehead. "Be good."

"On my salary"—she began to type—"it isn't a choice."

He rode the elevator to the lobby. His eyes roamed to the cigar counter. The girl was still there. The magazine was still in her hand. But her eyes were watching him. Only one moment their glances met, then she looked away.

Tim frowned lightly. He didn't wonder if she was watching him. He wondered why. He started to wander toward her.

The revolving door spun suddenly. A small, sweat-streaked man spilled into the lobby. His wide eyes fled toward the elevators; none was waiting. They found the stairs. He started to run.

The door spun again. Another man was emptied in. His hat was pulled low, shading his face. His body was compact and medium-sized. His hands were in his pockets. Straight from the door he went to the small sweating man. He stopped behind him.

The little man started to turn. His arms started up. He froze. There was a whispered word from the second man, then the little man slowly moved. He moved back toward the revolving door. The second man walked close behind him.



Just before the men went out, two things happened. The little man tried to turn. His wide, dark eyes threw a glance around the lobby. Then the fingers of one hand moved. A crumpled ball of paper bounced over the floor and settled beside the cigar counter. The two men disappeared, huddled into the same slice of door. And the gun was clearly outlined within the second man's pocket.

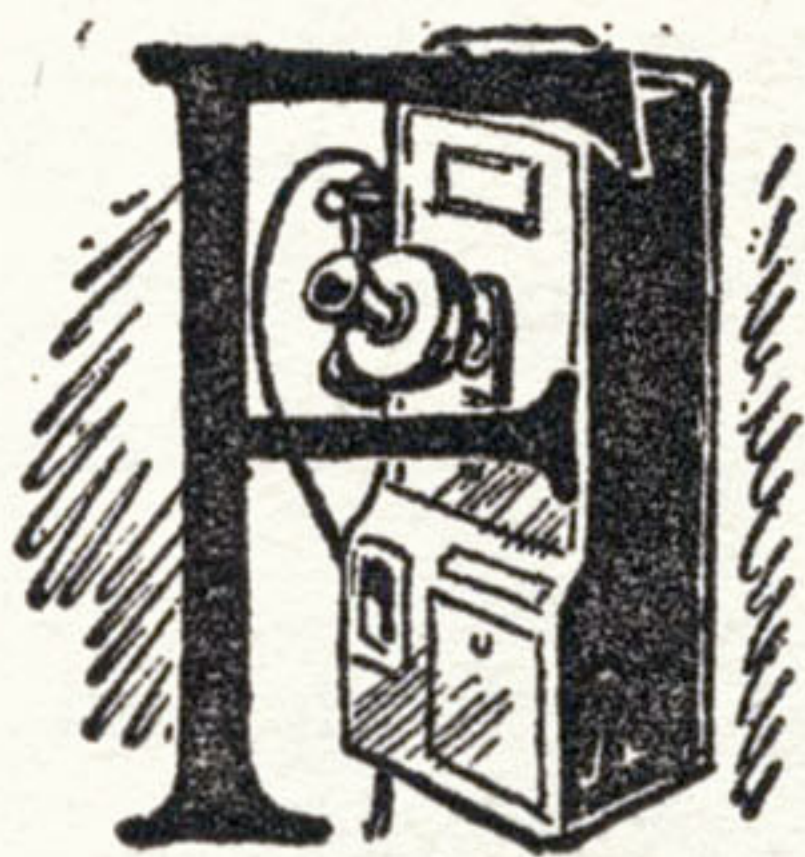
Tim glanced again at the crumpled paper; it was almost hidden among old cigarette packs and newspapers. It could wait.

He moved to the door. When he reached the walk, the car was leaving the curb. Fast. In the back were the two men. The little man was talking. Tim could see the sobbing twist of the lips. The motor's roar absorbed the words. The shoulders of the second man were visible, only the shoulder and a fringe of blond hair.

The car disappeared. Tim watched it round the next corner. His memory filed away the number. Then he turned back into the building. He walked to the cigar counter and knelt down. He searched carefully.

"Damn." The crumpled paper was gone. He straightened.

The girl was gone.



FROM the Paley Building, Tim drove to the Doeman Athletic Club and parked his car. He started toward the side entrance. The taxi stopped and the man got out. When Tim turned the corner, the man was walking slowly, a hundred feet behind him. When Tim's hand touched the door-latch, the man stopped. He lit a cigarette and stared at the sky.

Tim entered. He waited in the dim alcove. He could see the sidewalk outside. At last he could hear the measured footsteps. He saw the shadow of a man lengthen and move nearer.

The door opened softly and closed again.

"Hello, Burma. Looking for me?"

The man jerked. His eyes narrowed, then widened sleepily.

"Just walking, Hall." The words were slow.

"It's a pretty day for walking. In a dark hall." He came away from the wall and held out his hand. "You haven't been around lately."

"You haven't seen me, maybe." Carefully Burma took the hand. Tim shook. He shook hard. He watched the rise and fall of the man's coat. He released the hand.

"Working these days?"

"No." The man studied his cigarette. "No."

"I just asked once." Tim smiled. "Coming on in?"

"No. I got the wrong door."

Tim smiled again. "The hell you did." He turned down the hall. He had gotten to the bend of the corridor before he heard Burma close the door. He was frowning as he entered the shower-room. Again he didn't wonder if. He wondered why Burma had been tailing him.

He took a shower and rub-down. He called Pennsylvania Station from the locker-room telephone. The train to Bangor, Maine, left in an hour and twenty minutes.

"Damn!" he said flatly when he went back to his locker.

"You feel that way?" Fred, the trainer, asked.

"Every clean shirt I've got is in my bags at my office. And I've got to eat, dress, and get a train by seven thirty." He stared glumly at his bare feet.

Fred looked at the clock. "I'm off now."

"Yes?" Tim picked up his pants and fished out a dollar bill and the office and car keys. "Don't take all night."

"Thirty minutes," Fred promised. He tucked in his sweat shirt and started toward the door.

"Here!" Tim tossed his coat across



the locker-room. "The top's down."

He put on his discarded suit and ate in the grill. At ten minutes till seven, he returned to the locker-room. Fred had not returned.

At seven Tim called the office. There was no answer. He thought: "Somebody ought to be there! Charlie had an appointment . . ."

At five after he called again. Furiously he cursed.

"Look, Marty," he told the manager, "when my car and stuff gets back here, put it up till Monday. I've got to catch a train."

"Sure," the man agreed.

He took a taxi to Penn Station.

He started his vacation with a Scotch in the lounge car.

"That girl," he mused at the glass. "I'd like to see her again. There was something in that ball of paper. Something the little guy had to get rid of before he died." He remembered her lips and her eyes.

"I'd like to see her again."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Man With Red Hair

**A**T TWO O'CLOCK the next Sunday afternoon, Tim Hall left his cabin, four miles outside of Bangor. He walked to town, bought a ticket for New York, picked up a New York morning paper, and sat down to wait for the train.

The Dodgers were doing all right.

He wondered how Charlie was doing. . . .

On the fourth page, he found out how Charlie was doing:

### BRANCH, HALL DEATHS CALLED MURDER!

With the discovery late Saturday afternoon of the body of Timothy

Hall, member of the firm of Hall and Branch, Private Investigators, police were confronted with their second murder within twenty-four hours. At nine o'clock Saturday morning, the body of Charles Branch was found in his office. Examination revealed that Branch had been shot to death at about six o'clock Friday afternoon.

The body of Timothy Hall was taken from the East River, near the 23rd St. pier. Immediate identification was rendered difficult due to multiple bruises and lacerations, and the effect of water. Doctors believe that Hall died at approximately the same time as his partner, Branch. He had been shot once in the back of the head.

Hall's car, a Packard convertible coupe, has been located in the East River where it plunged after crashing the restraining wall. It is assumed that Hall was fleeing from his assailant at the time a bullet struck him. His car went out of control, carrying him through the wall, and into the river. Inspector Inor Jacobin, already handling the Branch murder, immediately assumed—

Tim put down the paper. He took out a cigarette and struck a match. It burned until the flame picked his fingers. He threw it away. His eyes watched it smoking on the floor. Slowly at last he rose. He wandered to the news-stand.

"I need a New York paper. Yesterday's," he said gently.

The man grunted and burrowed under the counter. "Got one kind of torn."

"Torn is good enough." Tim put down a dime and returned to the bench. This time he found it on the third page

### INVESTIGATOR KILLED, PARTNER MISSING!

Charles H. Branch, former Professor of Criminology at Gerkins Institute, and a partner in the firm of Hall and Branch, Private Investigators, was



found dead at his office desk at nine o'clock this morning. Branch had been shot through the heart. When discovered by the office secretary, Miss Nonnie Carr, Branch had been dead about fourteen hours, police stated, thus setting the time of the shot at about seven o'clock Friday evening.

Authorities attempted to contact Timothy Hall, partner of Branch. Hall could not be located at his apartment, nor was Miss Carr able to furnish information as to his whereabouts. It is known, however, that Hall returned from Philadelphia on the afternoon of the crime, and that he visited his office briefly around five, the afternoon of Branch's death.

Thus far police are mainly concerned with the whereabouts of Hall, as well as his disappearance without trace. Inspector Jacobin, in assuming the investigation, made clear that he harbored no suspicions as to the identity of the guilty party. "We have only

one thing to work on," he stated. "We know that Branch was killed by a single shot, fired from a German Luger pistol."

TIM folded the paper once, again. His eyes traced the crack of a floor board, while a line gathered between his wide-spaced brows. His cigarette glowed to his fingers. He ground it beneath his shoe and studied the smudge of ashes. Thinly he smiled.

"Jacobin didn't guess it came from a Luger. And he doesn't guess what Luger. He just dug the slug out of Charlie and matched it with the police sample of my registered Luger. And maybe the killer used my gun because he liked the initialed handle." Once more Tim smiled bleakly. "It's nice to know I'm not suspected. . . ."

Across the street from the station, he found a walk-up hotel. He paid a night's rent in advance, signed the register with a scrawling Ed Morgan, and walked out

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 LOOSENING HANDLE, THEN RINSING IN  
 HOT WATER AND SHAKING. WIPING THE  
 BLADE IS LIKELY TO DAMAGE THE EDGES**



on the street again. Half a block away, he entered a drugstore.

"A pair of scissors," he told the clerk, "and a large tube of tooth paste."

At another drugstore he bought a small can of raw sienna.

Before he returned to the hotel, he bought a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

He climbed the two flights of stairs, locked the door of his room, filled the wash basin a third full of warm water, and squeezed in the tube of tooth paste. He opened the can of raw sienna and mixed the paint thoroughly with the end of a pencil. Then he dipped out a small portion and mixed it in the basin. For thirty minutes he worked the paste, from time to time adding more paint, or diluting with more water. All the while his eyes watched his hands without seeing his hands at all.

His lips made tiny curls, working from one corner of his mouth to the other, and usually ending with a soft sucking sound.

At last he took off all his clothes except his trunks and tied a towel about his neck. He bowed his lean, long frame over the low table and pushed his black hair into the thin paste. Slowly he worked the paste into the hair, into the scalp.

At the end of another half-hour, he washed out the bowl and rinsed his head with clear, warm water. He dried and moved to the mirror. There he parted and combed the hair that was now deep, dull red and stiff. He picked up the scissors and began to cut.

When he was finally through, there was not a hair on his head longer than two inches. Stiff and wire-like each glistened separately. The small sideburns were gone, emphasizing the prominent bones of his cheeks. The bonal structure of his skull was nakedly evident. His once-thick eyebrows were thinned to a pair of slender arches above the sharp blue eyes.

He put on the horn-rimmed glasses and studied himself. The two harsh circles seemed to thicken his nose and

enlarge his nostrils. The total effect was of bony brutality and an animal roughness that was shaded only by the two keen eyes.

Tim smiled, then he smiled again, studying his tooth structure. When he smiled the third time, it was wide and mirthless.

That was the one that fitted.

He cleaned the room. He dressed and went down the stairs to the street floor. He found the rear door, and left the hotel. It was dark when he went on the street.



IT WAS black deep dawn when he entered a taxicab at Pennsylvania Station in New York. It was still dark when he left the cab and waited for it to disappear.

There was the slightest smear of dirty gray at the window when he closed the door of the room behind him. He turned the lock, crossed to lower the shade, then moved to the bed. He reached down and shook the half-covered shoulder.

"Nonnie . . . Nonnie, wake up."

A white arm moved through the shadows. The bedside lamp flashed on. Her sleep-masked face was pale in the sudden light, her eyes blinded. She started to blink. Then her vision centered at a point of his nose. He saw the surge of a scream well from her throat. Even before his hand closed her lips, her eyes met his. The scream melted into a small choke.

"For God's sake," she breathed. She swallowed.

"You like it—the face?" he wondered.

"No." She swallowed again and the sleep was gone from her eyes. "Where have you been?"

"Maine. And a damn good thing I was."

"But you know about—"

"I read a couple of papers. What did Jacobin ask you?"



"The first day he wanted to know where you were. He didn't believe it when I said I didn't know."

"Was it my Luger that killed Charlie?"

"I think so, the way they acted after the test. Jacobin kept leading with suggestions that you and Branch had had a fight. When you didn't show up all day Saturday, he made up his mind. He gave the office and your apartment a working over."

"Find anything?" Tim asked as he pulled her ashtray from the dresser and lit a cigarette. She gestured, and he lit one for her. "I asked if he found anything?"

"How would I know?" The girl pushed herself up and leaned back against the pillow. Her gray eyes watched him gravely for a silent moment. "What did happen?" she asked finally.

"How would I know?" he countered. He got up and walked around the room. At the window he paused and pulled out the shade a fraction. Daylight was clearing. It was going to be a hot day.

"Have they checked this place?"

"I don't think so. Why?"

He came back and sat down. "Oh, nothing. Now tell me about Charlie," he instructed.

"You know when you left the office—about five. I stayed till about five thirty. He was still in his office when I left."

"Alone?" Tim wondered.

"No, a girl was with him. She came in just after you left. I told her Mr. Branch wasn't in. She was starting to go when he shouted to me to phone downstairs for some more Scotch. Before I could stop her, she'd opened the door and walked into his office. She said something to him—told him who she was or what she wanted. When I tried to get her out, he waved me away and told me to shut the door. He said, 'Forget the Scotch.'"

"What did she look like?"

"Oh, the clean-ears type," Nonnie shrugged. "Lots of sun and vitamins.

Tan skin, and purple lipstick to make you look at the tan again."

Tim grinned. "You mean she was pretty." He studied the glowing tip of his cigarette. "What was she wearing?"

"A brown suit and white jacket. She didn't have a hat. And brown crocodile shoes. Oh, yes—she had nice legs. I thought you'd like to know about that."

TIM looked at the cigarette a long moment more before he mashed it out. "And she was still in there when you left. . . . The next morning you opened up, and there was Charlie, dead?"

"Yes," Nonnie agreed quietly. Her eyes started at the top of the dull red hair and went slowly down to the tip of his chin. They stopped.

"You don't seem to give a damn," she observed pointedly.

"No?" His sharp glance flicked hers. "What do you want me to do—sob and shudder?"

"I—don't—" She stopped and reformed her lips slowly. "I don't know. I just wonder sometimes if you ever do feel any—" She shut her lips again. "Nothing," she finished.

"All right, I'm sorry!" He stood up and walked to the window, pulled back the shade, walked back to the bed, and stared down at her, at her bare shoulder and white arm. His blue eyes were dark and pointed.

"I'm sorry he's dead. I'm sorry as hell. And what the devil good does that do?" He lit another cigarette.

"What did Jacobin say when they pulled that body out of the East River?"

"He said, 'Damn!'"

Tim laughed shortly. "I'll bet it broke his heart. Did you take a look at it?"

"Yes. They wanted my identification."

"And you said it was me?"

Her glance shifted down to her fingers. "Yes, I said it was you."

"Smart girl." He traced a little line on her white shoulder with his finger. Her eyes watched him, then lifted to his.

"Well," she said softly at last. "Do



"I or don't I get to know, Timothy?"

"Know what?" he asked.

"Your gun killed Branch. They all know it."

He frowned a moment, then he laughed. When he stopped she was still watching him, and her eyes were unchanged.

"No, honey," he said flatly, "I didn't kill Charlie. I liked him. He irritated me. But I liked him. Charlie was a great man for Theory. He spent a lot of time thinking. But I still didn't kill him."

"Then who?"

"If I knew, I might tell you. Right now you can get out of bed, dress, and get down to the office. I want you to get Charlie's file on the Kid Gloves case and bring it back here. Don't bring Jacobin. And don't take all morning."

"The Kid Gloves case," she repeated. She moved to get up. "Are you staying here?"

"Yes." He sat down. "I'm going to take a nap. Lock the door again when you leave."

SHE woke him up when she returned at nine o'clock.

"There isn't any Kid Gloves file any more," she announced.

"So . . ." He frowned at his shoes. "I guess Charlie wasn't just dreaming." He stood up, stretched, yawned, and patted her cheek as his arm came down.

"If you want me the next few days, you can write a letter to William Hawkins, care of General Delivery, Harrison. Also, you can cash a check today and send me a little money there."

"Are you still dead?"

"Until I prove I didn't kill Charlie. Until I can get who did. Until I get the bird that knocked off Fred when he thought he was biting me. Is that enough?"

"And Harrison was where Branch was going, wasn't it?"

"And where somebody didn't want him to get." Tim moved toward the door. "I might have to call you some-

time. I'll put it through to the house here. You know the rest: big ears and no lip. Jacobin isn't through yet."

He turned the knob.

"Well, what the devil is it now?" he asked.

She was still looking at him. It was more of a study, as though she were trying to fix him in a definite perspective. Then his question sank to her consciousness.

"Nothing," she said.

"Oh, damn," he sighed. He closed the door and walked back across the room. He pushed away the hand that started toward him. He kissed her, hard and full on the mouth. First her lips were stubborn, then they were warm. He kissed her once more, and stood away.

"No, honey. I still didn't kill Charlie," he smiled. The door opened, and the door closed behind him.

## CHAPTER THREE

### At the Golden Moon



AT FIVE o'clock that afternoon, Timothy Hall got off a seaboard local train and took his first look at Harrison. One wide paved street stretched downhill from the station to a modest business section, half a mile away. A few cars were parked before the distant buildings, and they shimmered in the heat that still lingered from mid-day. A tangy breeze was beginning to play in from the Atlantic, two miles east.

Beyond and to the left of the cluster of buildings were small green hills. An occasional roof or chimney rose above the tree tops. Those, Tim decided, were the summer houses of the city crowd.

To the right and beyond the business section was a compact nest of cabins. In the center Tim could see the top boards of a small arena. And there, he concluded, was the training camp and hangout of the ring crowd.



His eyes wandered once more to the town proper. A couple of thousand population, he guessed. Probably lived off the summer crowd and the training camp, and hibernated in winter.

It reminded him a little of a summer stock colony he'd once visited in Maine.

"Wanting a ride in?" a voice asked.

He turned. A small, leathery man was about to get into a battered station-wagon. The back seats were piled with boxes off the train—boxes bearing sporting-goods labels, liquor cases, beer cases, a bundle of newspapers, and an assorted collection of bags, grips, and hat-boxes, variously tagged and checked.

"Where can I get a room?"

The small man looked him over. "Going to the camp, or the other way?"

"How about staying somewhere in town?"

"I guess you want the hotel, then. Most people don't."

"Why? What's wrong with the hotel?" Tim asked as he got in.

"Nothing wrong with it. Just nobody goes there." The man lurched the car backward, then cut forward. He pulled a limp cigar butt from the dashboard holder and gathered its frayed end between his teeth.

"Down for a look at the Champ?"

"The Champ?"

The driver abandoned the road to glare at Tim. "You didn't know Eddie Sondon's training here?"

"Oh," Tim said. "Eddie Sondon."

"Yeah. Training here," the little man emphasized again. "He's going four rounds tomorrow night with Turner. They're talking about it's maybe his last tune-up before the championship."

"Sondon fought a man named Kid Gloves once, didn't he?"

"Fought him!" The little man lost his patience in a fury of amazement. "Kid Gloves killed Sondon in every round! I was listening, see? The Champ never won a point! Coming out the Kid nailed him, one-two, one-two. Geeze, I said to the wife, quit rattling the skillet and set still." He clutched for the fall-

ing cigar. "Why, if that fight had been for the title, Sondon would be peddling pencils now! I tell you, the guy that murdered Kid Gloves is the best friend Sondon ever had!"

"They were signed for a return bout, weren't they?"

"Hell, yes! Stoli couldn't run from that one. Stoli's Sondon's manager, you know. The commission plain told him that Sondon had to meet the Kid for the title. The papers was signed when bango! The Kid is full of lead and Sondon's still the Champ!" He leaned closer. "If you ask me, something was funny there."

Tim nodded. "Quite possibly you are right. And wasn't that the hotel back there where the sign said Hotel?"

The man grunted and put on the brakes. He backed a block, then stopped before a two-story frame building.

"They'll fix you up. Tell 'em Rudy brought you."

"**R**UDY brought me," Tim reported dryly. "I want a room and bath for a week."

"Got a room. No private bath, but nobody else is here so it's just the same."

Tim paid, signed as William Hawkins, New York, and followed a shirt-sleeved individual across the lobby and up one flight of stairs. At the front of the building, the man opened a door.

"Looking right down on the boulevard," he said with a flourish.

"Perfect. Where's the telephone?"

"Back where we started upstairs. And see that cafe across the street?" He pointed out the window. "Best food in town."

"Your wife runs it," Tim said.

"Yeah, she—" The man turned and stared. "Yeah, she does," he agreed. "You been here before?"

"No. You and your wife are a lot of other places."

The individual departed. Tim washed his hands, combed the stiff red hair, wiped the thick glasses, and went downstairs. In the lobby he saw the poster—



Four—Rounds—Four!!!

World Champion  
EDDIE SONDON

vs.

Joe Turner

The printing was glossed over the poster-sized face of Eddie Sondon, World Champion. The ears lopped out and down on the sides of the thick head. The eyes were close-set and small, deep within fleshy pockets. The hair was close-cropped and curly. The mouth huge and open, revealing a line of ragged teeth.

Tim rubbed the side of his nose slowly, then walked out.

In the cafe across the street, he ordered the club dinner. While he waited, his eyes found another poster tacked on the wall above the cash register. It was identical with the one in the hotel. He was starting to look away when he noticed the two men paying their checks. One man he had never seen before: a large man, fat and dark.

The other man he had seen, somewhere. He was tall and lean-shouldered. His face was abnormally narrow and long. His hair was gray; his face was a lighter gray; his suit was gray and well-tailored. Tim frowned, wondering where he had seen . . .

"Pardon me." The waitress brought his soup.

"Going to the fight tomorrow?"

"I don't—" She looked at him, filled his water glass, then glanced at him quickly again. "I don't know," she said tentatively. Her face was young and flushed. Her hair was gold.

Tim let it pass. "They say it's his last tune-up before the September championship."

"Yeah. I— I might get off and go. Maybe." She picked an imaginary crumb from the table. "I met Eddie one time I was out there. I know—" She leaned near and dropped her voice. "I know his manager, Mr. Stoli. That's him now, up at the front."

"The big one or the tall one?"

"With black hair—the big man. I talk to him sometimes."

Tim picked up his soup spoon slowly. "The man with him is a fight-manager too?"

"He used to be, I think. He's always talking about fighting."

Tim's spoon stopped stirring the soup. He didn't have to look up. He remembered where he'd seen the gray man before. He remembered his name.

He was Marco Vane. He had been the owner-manager of Kid Gloves. Tim had seen him just once—ten months ago when Vane had left Charlie's office after dumping the Kid Gloves case in Charlie's lap.

"O. K., Mr. Stoli!" a voice called. Slowly Tim's head lifted, just enough for him to see the speaker, to be certain.

He felt a small cool excitement fill his throat. The speaker in the doorway was Joe Burma, who had trailed him the day Charlie and Fred were murdered.

"Nothing but a little ignition trouble," Burma was explaining. He held the door while Vane and Stoli went out, then he glanced back into the cafe. He started to wink at the girl beside Tim.

He didn't. The muscles around his eye froze. He wasn't looking at the girl. He was looking at Tim. His expression didn't change—it was no expression at all.

He closed the door slowly and went outside into the deepening dark.

Tim waited until a motor fired, then faded in the distance.

"The little fellow a friend of yours?"

She shrugged noncommittally. Her eyes were still remembering the fight. "Sometimes after the dinner rush, I can get off . . ."

"I'm new in town. Where do people go? I mean, isn't there a place, like a night club, where people hang out?"

"Oh, sure! Everybody goes to the Gold Moon. It's halfway."

"Halfway?"

"Between the camp and the summer houses."



"The ring crowd goes there?"

"Everybody goes to the Gold Moon," she said reverently.

"Look, my name's Bill Hawkins. I'd like to see this Gold Moon."

She studied her fingers carefully. "Well, I don't—"

"How about tonight? About ten o'clock?"

She glanced at his chin. She looked at her fingers again.

"Maybe I could. Not much trade that late . . ."

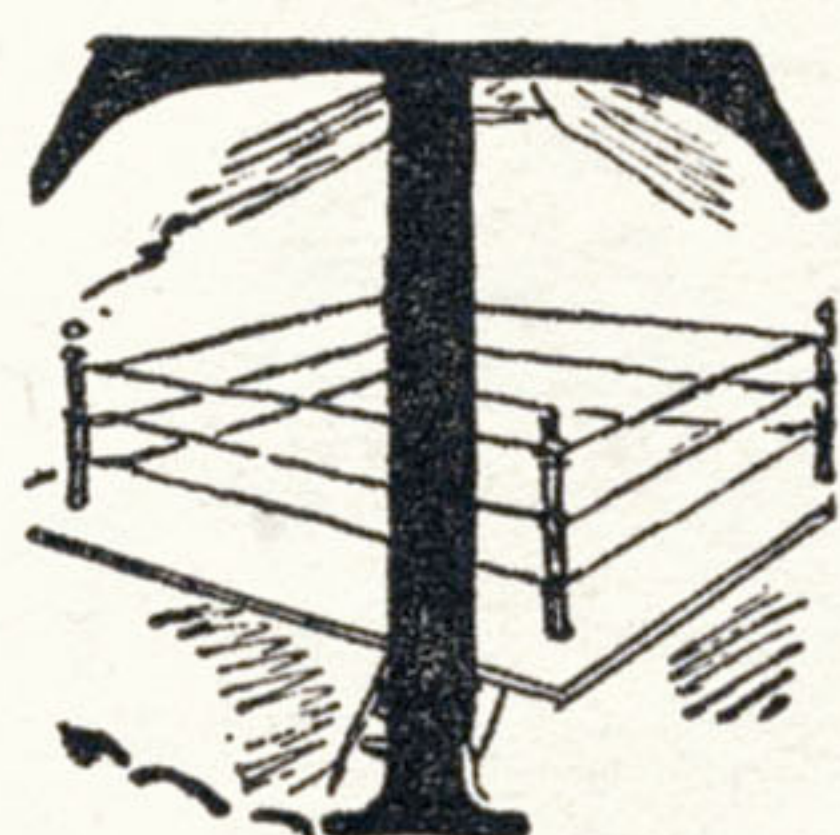
"Ten o'clock. I'll meet you here."

He remembered to hold her fingers lightly.

She remembered to leave them. And take them away.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Girl Again



THE GOLD MOON had once been a summer mansion. It still retained a certain quiet dignity. It was set back from a narrow lane. A curving drive led to the parking space at the rear. A rambling porch circled the white colonial walls.

The muted music from a small string orchestra seeped out into the August night. The front door opened into a small hall; the self-service coat-room was to the left. To the right were thick drapes that parted, opening up a small cocktail lounge. The lights were soft, the woodwork dark and gleaming with age. To the far end of the lounge, two steps went down into the main room. This room was white and crystal. The white-clothed tables circled three sides, leaving a space for dancing in the center and to the fourth side; there too was the small orchestra platform.

The tinkle of silver and the murmur of voices touched Tim's ears. He held the drape aside to let the girl come in. He saw two couples dancing in the main

room. He hesitated, then nodded to a small table in the far corner of the lounge. It was dark there. From it one had a half-view of the main room and floor.

"I like it in here," he said.

They sat down. The bartender came over eventually and they ordered two Scotches with soda. The girl shrugged off her light jacket and looked about the room. She looked at Tim.

"Do you do something in the prize-fight business?"

"Not regularly." He lit a cigarette for her and studied the walls of the room. There were several photographs of fighters, past and present. Most of them were signed. Some of them showed the bartender shaking hands with the fighters. Those were usually signed, To Jerry.

"You sure don't talk much" the girl said slowly. "I bet you don't even know my name."

"I don't," Tim agreed. "What is it?"

"Goldie," she answered. "My hair is really this color." She said it rather proudly. He started to smile. He didn't.

The drapes opened and they came in. The man was perhaps thirty, compactly built and light-haired. His face was square and strong with a hint of ruthlessness. He moved easily.

The girl who was with him was slender. Her skin was deeply tanned, her lips were lightly shaded. Her hair was brown above the ivory-white of her sports dress.

She was the girl in the lobby of the Paley Building.

She didn't notice Tim. She and the man went through the lounge, back to the main room.

"What's the matter?" Goldie fretted. "Don't you like it?"

"Yeah. I like it a lot." He smiled this time, and picked up his drink. "This is just what I was hunting."

Goldie smiled quickly. Tim regarded her idly. Her eyes were good—child-like and candid. Her face was anxious and pretty, her figure small and full. It



wasn't class that she had, but she was ready to learn.

"Goldie," he told her, "you're pretty."

She tilted her head and waited for more.

"Drink your drink," he suddenly ordered. "Then we—"

He stopped. The drapes were parted again, and the narrow gray figure of Marco Vane crossed to the bar.

"Good-evening, Jerry," he told the bartender. "Has Miss Vane come in?"

"Just got here, sir. She's back with Mr. Bond."

"I'll take a brandy in here. Next time you're back, tell her I'm here. Ask her to come out a moment."

"Sure thing, Mr. Vane." Jerry reached for the brandy. "Going up to New York for the championship, I guess?"

"I suppose I will."

JERRY inspected a glass. "Guess it gives you a funny feeling, seeing Sondon up there and still the champion."

Vane didn't answer.

Jerry's eyes turned reflective. "You know, I saw Kid Gloves in his last fight with Sondon. I said to Mike—he was with me—I said, 'Mike, there's the next champ! He'll be good for five years.'"

Vane studied his liquor. "Yes," he agreed slowly, "The Kid would have been the champion. Nobody could touch him."

"That was a real fight that night. I knew the Kid had Sondon. I saw it the third round, the way the Champ was breathing. I said to Mike, 'If this was for the championship, there'd be a new champion in three more rounds.'" He put down the glass and folded his rag carefully.

"I think about it every once in a while. If some guy sticks up a bank for fifty thousand dollars, they call it a hell of a robbery. You never hear of any million dollar robbery. But the way I see it, Kid Gloves was a cinch to beat Sondon in the return bout for the championship. He was young and strong

enough to stay up there four, five years. O. K., add it up. Five years as champ. At least five big fights, not counting the junk. What do you get? Two or three million dollars, I say. Just like a three million dollar robbery when Kid Gloves got murdered!"

Vane downed his drink.

"Guess it makes you feel kind of funny—"

"Tell Miss Vane I'm here!" Marco Vane interrupted harshly. His voice was rough and low. Jerry straightened and disappeared into the main room. When he returned, he was followed by the girl. The girl in the white dress, with the brown hair.

"Hello, Dad," she greeted quickly.

"So that," Tim thought, "is Marco Vane's daughter."

"Who are you with?" came the muted question.

"Sam Bond. We just got here. What's the matter?"

He gestured to a small table not far from Tim's. "Another brandy, Jerry," he called. He and his daughter sat down, and Vane started talking swiftly, softly.

Goldie shifted impatiently. "You haven't been listening to a thing I said! I don't know why you asked me to—"

"Hush!" he breathed. "Trying to remember a telephone number," he modified more softly. From the corner of his eye, he watched Vane take a section of a newspaper from his pocket—a New York paper. He handed it to the girl.

She read something he pointed to. She stared at him a brief moment, then read it again.

". . . got to know the truth." Tim caught that much of Vane's sharp comment to the girl. "You sure it was Hall?"

". . . man at cigar stand said, 'Hello, Mr. Hall.' He looked like you said he looked. He went in the elevator. After a while he came back. He was standing there when it happened. I don't know whether he knew who—"

"Did he know what was happening? Did he see you pick up—"



The girl stopped his words. The muscular, blond Sam Bond appeared in the doorway. He saw Vane and the girl at the table.

"Hello, Marco." The greeting was lazy, almost insolent. He remained standing, looking down at the man's face.

"Come out here to read your paper these days?"

Vane glanced sharply at the paper. His fingers closed, crumpling it into his pocket.

Sam Bond smiled. "I read it an hour ago. Wonder who's kidding who."

His eyes moved to the girl. "We came to dance. You wanted to talk . . ."

Her eyes flecked with a sudden dark shadow. A muscle moved in her throat. For an instant she looked at her father. Then she rose beside the waiting Bond.

"I'll be home. It may be late," she told her father.

"I wouldn't get excited, Marco," the lazy voice advised.

Marco Vane watched the man and his daughter leave the room. His face was lined and pale. His mouth was parted thinly. His hands were locked on the table's edge.

Suddenly, abruptly, he drained his glass.



**T**IM turned back to Goldie. "What were you saying?"

Her eyes were furious. "Her name's Roberta Vane, if you're interested. Don't let me get in your way."

Tim faced her deliberately. "And what makes you think I'm interested?"

"I'm no damn fool!"

"Not a big damn fool, anyway."

That was when she walked out, precisely as he expected. He watched the sassy switch of her skirt as she went through the draped door. He grinned.

"She'll get along."

He got another drink and lit a cigarette. Ten minutes later, Marco Vane

stood up. His face was pale, now. The mouth was a hard line. The eyes were afraid. He went out.

Tim gave him half a minute, then stood up. Jerry had disappeared into the main room. Swiftly, quietly Tim went out. He stepped out on the dark porch and closed the door noiselessly. He listened until his ears picked up the crunch of feet on the distant gravel driveway. Then he started around the house.

As he passed the rear door, he saw the dim shadow opening a car door. His steps moved more swiftly.

"Marco," he called when he was ten feet away.

The shadow paused and turned. "What? Who is—"

Tim's fist caught the thin, long jaw with a short, shattering jolt. His arms caught the falling figure before it touched the drive. Gently he let it down. His hand moved. Then he turned. Back around the house he went, back to the door and inside. He followed the little arrow that indicated the Men's Room. Inside he locked the door.

He unfolded the paper he had taken from Vane's pocket.

Inspector Jacobin revealed today that his office was investigating a report that Timothy Hall, private investigator believed dead, may be alive.

As a result of a photograph of Hall published in this paper yesterday, Jacobin received a wire from a hotel keeper in Bangor, Maine, saying that a man resembling Hall's picture had rented a room from him on the Sunday night following the Saturday on which a body was taken from the East River and identified as that of Timothy Hall. Adding credence to the hotel keeper's identification were additional communications from two drug clerks in Bangor, both of whom say they sold merchandise to a man resembling Hall on the Sunday in question.

It was further learned that Hall



owns a cabin four miles outside Bangor, and it has been established that this cabin was occupied during or around the time that Hall is supposed to have been killed.

Inspector Jacobin requested a re-examination of the mutilated body, at first identified as Hall's.

For perhaps ten seconds Tim spoke, very quietly and slowly to the walls. He described a hotel keeper, he spent another ten seconds on Jacobin. When he was through, he felt a little better.

He tore up the paper, flushed it down the commode, straightened his tie, and went back to the lounge. He got another drink. He waited. It took an hour and fifteen minutes.

Then Sam Bond came through the lounge, going to the Men's Room. Tim studied the back of his neck, the fringe of hair.

Tim waited until the drapes closed behind him, then rose.

**H**E WENT down the two steps into the main room. He saw Roberta Vane, sitting alone at a far table. He made his way toward her. He stopped and waited until she looked up.

"Hello."

She blinked. She frowned slightly. "Hello . . ."

"Mind if I sit down?"

"I'm with someone. I'm not sure I know—"

"You don't. And I'll be leaving soon." He pulled out the chair, sat down, and leaned one elbow on the table.

"Why did you kill Charles Branch?" He watched her eyes as they widened, her throat as it moved suddenly.

"What did you—"

"I asked you why you killed Charles Branch last Friday."

"I—Who are you?" she breathed. Some light of latent recognition kept puzzling behind her eyes. She was trying to recall.

"My name is Bill Hawkins. But you haven't answered my question."

"I didn't kill him! I didn't even know—I don't even know—"

"Quit lying!" Tim snapped savagely. "You know damn well who he was. You knew what he was doing. You saw him in his office late Friday afternoon. Now—did you kill him?" The question was flat and final.

"No." Her face had become deathly pale.

"Who is Sam Bond, the man you're with?"

"Why, he's—he's just a friend of mine," she said quickly.

Tim reached across the table and gripped her wrist. "If you think I'm stupid, you can think again, Miss Vane! Now listen: last Friday afternoon you were standing in the lobby of the Paley Building in New York. A little man came in, and Sam Bond came in behind him. Bond put a gun in the man's back, and they went out again. The little guy threw away a piece of paper. You got it and disappeared. You—"

"I . . . I don't know what you're talking about!" she exploded softly. "Perhaps I was in New York, but I never heard of any—"

"How would you like for Bond to know you had that paper?"

The girl's lips stilled. She stared silently.

"How would you like for the New York police to know you were in Charlie Branch's office last Friday afternoon?"

She started to speak.

"That's what I thought. Now: get rid of Bond. Get a car and come to the hotel in town. Park across the street and blink the lights three times. When you drive around the block, I'll be waiting in front of the hotel. Got it?"

"Why, I—I have never heard of such a—"

"But you'll be there." Tim stood up and turned. The figure of Sam Bond was approaching. The blue-green eyes were icy and pale beneath the blond lashes. The strong mouth was gently quirked.



"Hello, Bond." Tim held out his hand. The man looked at the hand. He looked at Tim. "I don't believe I know you."

"I met you one time, in a way. In New York."

"Yes?" Carefully the man took the hand. "Where?"

Tim shook till the gun in Bond's coat shook. He let go.

"In the Paley Building. You were meeting a man, I believe."

Bond's face settled into smooth blankness. And his blue-green eyes widened childishly.

"Was I?" he asked softly. "And when?"

"Wasn't it last Friday?" Tim frowned, then smiled apologetically. "Or perhaps I'm mistaken. The man I'm thinking of had a gun. I could have sworn that he was just about to kill someone."

"You could?"

Tim shrugged. "Probably mistaken. . . . Good-bye, Bond."

He walked out, paid his check in the lounge, and went outside.

"Taxi?" The station wagon was waiting.

"You know where." Tim climbed inside.

He noticed the lights a few minutes later. Two headlamps. The car stayed well behind, neither gaining nor losing. Following.

Tim put out his cigarette. He began to frown petulantly.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Empty Rendezvous



THE hotel lobby was deserted. One yellow bulb burned beside the telephone booth, half-lighting the stairs. Tim climbed to the second floor hall and went to his room. He snapped on the light, then closed the door again. He remained in the hall. He turned off the hall light and returned through the darkness, past the pencil of light beneath his door, to the hall's front window.

He looked down on the dark main street. He saw a car stop at a distant corner. He heard the muffled slam of the door. He waited. Perhaps a minute later he saw the figure of a man pass the one lighted store across the street. Then the dark figure crossed the street. Tim's ears picked up the whine of the hinges on the door below. He waited.

A step of the stairs creaked. Tim drew himself back from the window. He stilled his breath. His hand went into his pocket. It returned.

At last there was a final sound; a softest breath from the door of Tim's room. Then the knob turned quickly. The door swung in. The man stood in the rectangle of light, hunched, taut, holding a gun in his hand.

"O. K., Hall!" he said.

**NO FINER DRINK. . . under the sun or moon**





Tim tiptoed four swift, quiet steps.

"O. K., Burma!" His hand went against the man's back. "I'll take that gun."

Joe Burma cursed. He didn't move. He didn't try to turn. He stood there, covering the empty room with his gun. Then, slowly his hand went down to his side. Tim's fingers removed the weapon.

"Go on in."

Burma walked to the center of the room and turned as Tim closed the door. He watched with narrowed eyes while Tim returned his fountain pen to his pocket; he put Burma's gun in the other pocket. He grinned thinly at Burma from below the thick lensed glasses. He rumbled the short red hair. He lit a cigarette and locked the door behind him.

"What were you after?" The words were spaced and cold.

Burma didn't answer. He stood there, swallowing away his angry humiliation, scratching his fingers against his pants.

"How long have you been working for Stoli?"

"As long as you been working for Vane," Burma countered.

"I'm not working for Vane. I'm working for myself."

"Branch was working for Vane."

"Branch is dead." Tim circled the room and gestured to a chair. "Sit down." He sat down himself on the side of the bed.

"Let's get started even, Joe," he said quietly. "You hate my guts and I hate yours. You're working for Stoli, Sondon's manager, and Branch was working for Vane, hunting whoever murdered Kid Gloves, Vane's fighter. Friday morning Charlie Branch got the answer. He told me so that afternoon. He didn't tell me who. That same Friday night Charlie was murdered, just before he cracked the case. That same Friday somebody killed somebody they thought was me. And that same Friday I caught you shading me outside the Athletic Club. You said you weren't working.

But you were carrying a gun. Are you following me?"

"Nothing wrong with my ears." Burma edged himself back to a chair and slipped down. He fingered a cigarette from his pack, then struck a match. His eyes never left Tim's. He watched him through the match-flame.

"Then maybe you can hear a question: Did Stoli have Kid Gloves murdered?" Tim waited. "Did he?" he repeated softly.

"You tell me," Burma taunted.

"I will, maybe. Kid Gloves whipped Sondon in a non-title fight. Stoli had to sign for a return, for the championship. He knew his man was through before the first bell rang. And that was too bad. Without Kid Gloves, Sondon could hold the title a couple of more years. The Kid was the only real contender in sight. So what happened?" Tim mashed out the cigarette. He pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"The papers were signed for the return bout, this one for the championship. And about a week later, Kid Gloves was shot to death in a New York hotel room. And nobody ever got pinned." He lifted his thin brows archly. "What's your answer?"

"Suicide. And the ghost took the gun away."

**T**IM got up. He moved casually, easily, quietly.

He moved across the room until he stood above Burma. Burma got up. A nerve flicked across his face.

"What's going, Hall?" he whispered.

"Nothing much." Tim hit him, first a left to the stomach, then a hammer-right to the mouth. He slapped the frozen face as the man melted down.

Tim left him there and returned to the bed. He lit another cigarette and watched the unconscious figure. His eyes, behind the glasses, were smoldering and black, his mouth was sullen and pouting.

He was on the third cigarette when the man moved. The fingers touched the mouth; they were red when they came



away. He blinked. Slowly his eyes settled on Tim. They held no expression, nothing but bottomless nothing. He pushed himself up with one hand. He got to his knees. He pulled his feet under him. He stood up. Again the hand moved over his mouth. Still his eyes were frozen on Tim.

Tim mashed out his cigarette and cupped his chin in his hands. He hunched forward, resting his elbow on his knees.

"You're not even a two-bit crook, Burma. You don't have the guts to be down-crooked. You rat your way in the back door, stealing the gravy you can with your bucket-shop detective racket. You don't have a crook's yellow nerve, and you don't have a dick's half-brain. You don't have a damn thing but a gun. And you're too yellow to use it."

Tim stopped. One hand left his chin and went into his pocket. It returned with Burma's gun. He balanced it a moment, toying it in his palm. Then he tossed it across the room. It slid to a stop at Burma's feet. Tim's lips curled wryly.

"Pick it up."

The man did not move. His eyes did not blink.

"Pick up that damn gun!"

Slowly Burma's knees bent. His fingers searched while he kept watching Tim. He found his gun.

"Now—what're you going to do?"

There was no answer.

Tim laughed brittlely. "Nothing!" he answered. "And you can wipe off that little idea of tipping Jacobin. That murder party last Friday hasn't been tied up with the Gloves case yet. And that's the way our outfit wants it to stay. You turn me in, and I'll kick the whole dirty play-house open for Jacobin." Tim paused. "You've just got one way. You know it. You wish your finger would pinch that trigger. But you know down inside you it won't."

Burma sobbed. His shoulders shook. His lips moved silently.

"You wouldn't say that out loud."

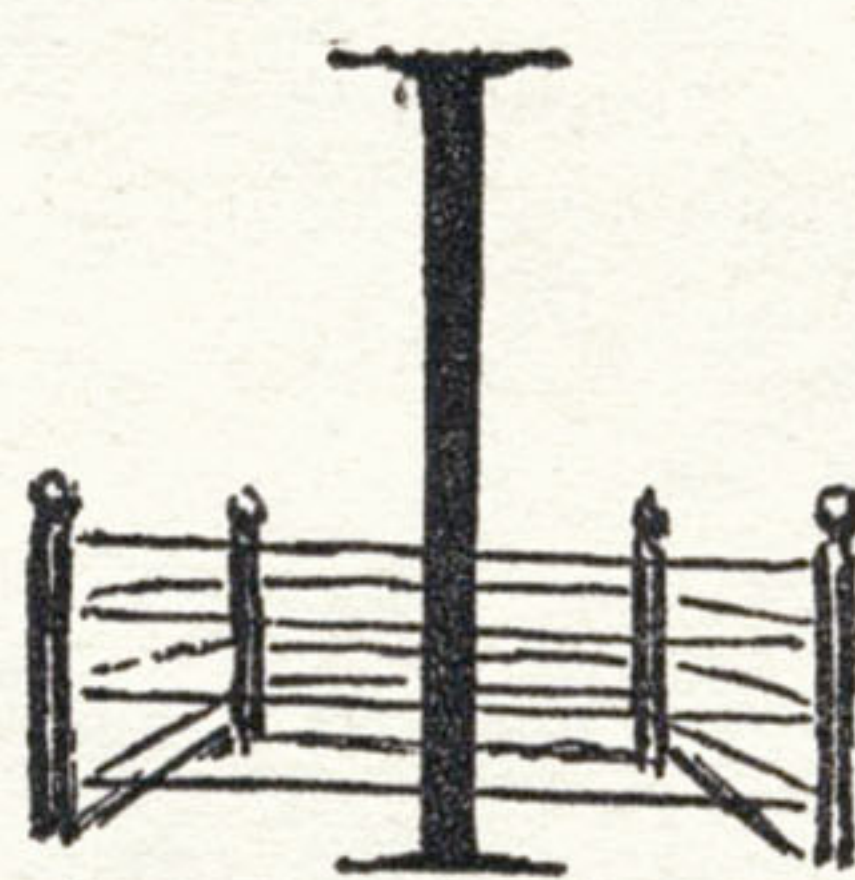
Tim smiled. Then he stood up. "Get out. Go tell whoever sent you here to come himself. Tell Stoli that. Tell him who I am, if you want to. But be damn sure it doesn't bring Jacobin out. Now—get out!"

Joe Burma went, backing across the room. He touched the wall and found the door. His fingers fumbled the key. The door opened. He backed out. The last Tim saw were his eyes, still fixed and unblinking—and the dark steel of the gun.

The door closed. Tim waited perhaps thirty seconds, then took a slow, deep breath. "Rattlesnake," Tim whispered dryly.

He took out his handkerchief. He wiped a mist of sudden perspiration from his face. He wiped his hands. He lit another cigarette, then studied the burning match as it magnified the tremble of his fingers.

He ground it out, turned off the light, and sat down by the window to wait for Roberta Vane.



T WAS ten minutes after two. Only the street lights were burning when the coupe turned in from a side-street and slipped noiselessly to the curb before the cafe. The lights went out. Then they came on again. Three times the lights blinked. Then the gears meshed softly. The car moved away.

When it returned, Tim was waiting on the walk. Quickly he opened the door and slipped in beside the girl.

"Go somewhere and park. Where we won't be disturbed."

She did not answer. Her body was taut in the darkness. She shifted the gears. The car whispered down the main street, then took the left road leading out to the summer houses.

Twice Tim looked back. They were not being followed.

Two miles out the road, the girl chose a narrower lane. A half-mile further on,



she slowed and turned into a private driveway. The car rolled past a dark house, painting its walls with the headlamps, and sending shadows angling off in the night. On back to the double garage the car went. Inside the girl killed the motor and turned off the lights.

She sat there. Her hands did not move from the wheel and the light switch.

"Whose house?" Tim asked.

"Dad's," she said. "He's staying at the camp tonight."

"No one here?"

After a long moment she answered. "No."

Tim opened his door and got out. "Let's go inside."

Again she waited, then sighed. She got out. He followed her across the drive and to the back door. They entered a dark hall. The girl snapped on a light and led the way to a small study at the front.

Tim lowered the shades. He closed the hall door till there was only an inch crack. He turned and looked at Roberta Vane. She was standing, watching him.

"Sit down," he suggested. He wandered past a card table and drew up a chair. He picked up a loose pencil and rolled it around between the palms of his hands. He waited until he heard the girl sit down. He drew a square on a bridge tally-pad.

"Have you ever killed a man?" He lifted his eyes. "Did you kill Charles Branch?"

"No." The word was low.

"But you knew he was going to be killed."

"No! No, I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

"Then why did you go to his office?"

"I—I wanted—had to talk to him! But he wouldn't listen!"

"You wanted to talk about the Kid Gloves case?"

"I—" She opened the brown eyes wider, just one instant. Then the lashes veiled them. "I don't know what you mean," she breathed softly.

"You're lying!" he snapped. "Branch

was ready to crack the case open. You knew it. So you went up to talk to him. He wouldn't listen. He wouldn't listen to what?"

"I can't— Nothing! It wasn't the case about Kid Gloves! I told you it wasn't about—"

"What time did you leave Branch's office?"

"Six thirty."

"And he was alive when you left?" The girl nodded. Tim drew the rough figure of a pigeon on the tally-pad. Then he leaned forward. "Do you know who did kill Branch?"

"No." Tim watched her—and he knew she was telling the truth.

"Do you know who killed Kid Gloves?"

"No." And this time he knew she was lying.

HE LEANED back and rumped his red hair. Roberta Vane watched. There was still the puzzled half-recognition teasing behind her dark eyes.

"Who," he asked, "is Sam Bond?"

"Just a man—a friend of mine," she said. "He works for Vincent Stoli."

"Oh. And what does he do?"

"He's a sort of a business manager and scout."

"Hell!" Tim lit a cigarette. He tried to keep calm. It didn't work. He got up and walked around the room one time. He stopped before the girl.

"Listen, dear," he started acidly, "there's too damn much you don't know! It's all right to be dumb, but it's stupidity to abuse the privilege!"

"You can't talk—"

"Shut up!" He threw the cigarette away. "You know who killed Kid Gloves! You knew Branch was about to crack it! Maybe you don't know who killed him, but you could make a close guess. You go out with Sam Bond, but you hate him. You and your dad are both scared to death of him! And you know and I know that Bond's no business manager. He's poison, plain and ugly. Now—do you want to start all



over, and tell the truth this time?"

She clenched her teeth. "I told you—" she started thinly. She choked. Her fingers roamed nervously through the brown waves of her hair. Her eyes left Tim's and fled down a far wall.

"I don't—don't know! I told you everything I can tell—"

"And it wasn't enough." He knelt down till his face was level with hers. He took a deep breath.

"Then let's say this, Miss Vane: Just suppose that Tim Hall, Branch's partner, isn't dead. Suppose. And he knows the answer on the Kid Gloves case. Branch gave it to him the afternoon he was killed. Where are you then?"

"But he—the papers said he—"

"But the papers are saying something else now. They're saying Hall may be alive. Maybe he is. Your dad's scared of it. Remember the little piece he showed you at the Gold Moon tonight?"

She stared at him. The brown was gone from her eyes, leaving a fragile blackness. The color was gone from her cheeks, leaving the tan a pale gray. Her breath was gone.

"I—I've seen you before—" she whispered.

"Where?"

"In that building where—" She stopped. The eyes suddenly woke. Her breath blew back.

"You're Timothy Hall!"

"Now," he smiled, "where is that piece of paper? Who was the man?"

"Oh, God, how I hoped—I thought that—" She clutched at his shoulders. "Please, please don't tell! If you know, don't—I'll give you—"

She fainted.

Tim stared. He looked at her limp hands.

"I will be damned," he said vaguely. He picked her up and carried her to the couch. He straightened and stared at her again. He scratched his hair furiously. He frowned.

"God damn it all!" he exploded. "This is the hell of dealing with a woman!" He went to the door and down the hall.

He found the kitchen and filled a glass with water. He went back to the study and closed the door behind him. He turned toward the couch.

He stopped. His jaw dropped.

Then he heard the roar of the motor in the garage. There followed the whine of tires on gravel, and a pattern of light and shadows streaked down the drawn shade at the window. The tires screamed again on the turn into the lane.

Slowly Tim set down the glass. He looked a long moment more at the empty couch. Slowly he grinned to himself.

"Foxy," he mused. He lit a cigarette.

Without haste or without waste of motion, he began to open drawers. Swiftly his fingers probed and searched. He exhausted the study. He listened, then he moved down the dark hall to the steps that led upstairs.



IT WAS four thirty in the morning when he went through the dim lobby of the hotel and entered the telephone booth. He pulled the door shut behind him. He got long-distance and gave a New York number. He waited.

"Hello? Hello, Nonnie?"

"Who else would it be?" she demanded sleepily. "Are you all right?"

"No. I just had to walk five miles. What's Jacobin doing?"

"Among other things, he's identified that body. It's not you any more."

"Oh." Tim frowned at the wall. "What else?"

"They broadcast for you on the midnight pick-up. Jacobin brought me home last night. Said it was for protection, but then he wanted to sit and talk."

"What about?"

"About how if I didn't talk now, he'd charge me with complicity later. He kept mentioning five years in prison. He was very considerate and sorry, but he couldn't help thinking what a long time five years would be."

"What did you say?"



"What do you think I said? When you jump off a building, you can't change your mind when you're falling. I'm still riding."

Tim closed his eyes wearily. "Are you scared, honey?"

She waited a moment. "How are things there?" she countered.

"Everybody knows the answer but me. I've spotted the girl that walked in on Charlie that afternoon. She is a little smarter than dumb."

"Do they know who you are?"

"Yeah. Joe Burma's in on the party. He picked me first. After that it wasn't worth peanuts."

"You don't think they're all going to keep the big secret?"

"Don't be ironic. I give them about tomorrow to think up an idea. It's a toss-up whether it'll be Jacobin or a private gun."

"Then you'll pull out your rabbit, I suppose?"

"Did you ever hear of a Sam Bond?" He ignored her question.

"I've seen him a couple of times. He's been in Branch's office on the Gloves case. He was in Thursday, when you were in Philadelphia."

"What for?" Tim asked softly.

"I'm only the secretary," she reminded. "Why? Is he down there too?"

"Yes, he is," Tim agreed sweetly. "I wish I'd let Charlie tell me a little about this damn case." He sighed and fumbled for his cigarettes. "Anything else?"

"No." Her voice waited in the silence. He heard her swallow.

"Tim," she started slowly. "You—how is it really. I mean, without the double-talk?"

"It's O. K.," he said. Then he closed his eyes. "It's a Mickey, honey. I haven't won a chip yet."

"What—what's going to—"

"Don't know. See tomorrow," he said tersely. "Good-bye."

"Tim—" The word held a little rush. "Tim, can I—"

"No. There's not a thing. Just keep still. Don't let Jacobin rag you."

"It's not that! I mean, it's not me that—"

"Good," he said quickly. "Good-bye, honey."

"Tim—Tim, don't you—" She stopped.

He took the cigarette from his mouth and cupped his hand about the telephone.

"Sure. Sure I do, honey. You're sweet."

Even as he hung up, the bitter taste stayed in his mouth. He looked at the blank wall. He kept on seeing Roberta Vane, her eyes and her hair.

He mashed out the cigarette and opened the door. He went up the stairs toward his room.

"Damn Jacobin!" he said viciously, softly. "Damn the whole outfit. Damn that Vane girl!" Then he sighed wearily.

"This is a lousy way to make a living."

## CHAPTER SIX

### Deadline



AWN stretched gray across the floor of the hotel room when Tim stirred. His nostrils twitched. He opened his eyes and sniffed. *Then slowly he rolled* over and propped himself on his elbow.

"Hello, Stoli," he said.

"Hello, Hall." The man moved the cigar from his lips and smiled. "Finish your nap. I've got plenty of time."

The man sat in the straight chair beside the small table. In the cafe, Tim had gotten the impression Stoli was fat. Now he saw the flesh was hard and unyielding. The hands were immense and briary with thick, black hairs. The hair on his head was well-groomed and black. The eyes were luminous and large. They seemed to melt with innocence and humor. His face was bland and olive, dominated by the eyes and the huge wide-lipped mouth. Tim looked it all over. Then he looked at the little table.

He looked at the gun that lay there,



just beside the ashtray. His gaze returned to Vincent Stoli.

"So you sent Burma, and he sent you?"

"No-o." Stoli rolled it out. His voice had the tone of a good-natured, lazy pipe-organ. "I've been under the impression you were dead. Burma did correct that. His visit was made on his own initiative. I criticize his wisdom."

"Now you're here to do it a different way." Tim punched the pillows against the headboard and sat up. He lit a cigarette. "Want to talk first or listen?"

"I prefer to listen."

"Good." Tim took a deep drag. "Here goes: About eleven months ago your champion, Eddie Sondon, took a beating in a non-title fight from Vane's fighter, Kid Gloves. You had to sign for a return bout for the title. You did. Then, fortunately for Sondon's title and your bank-roll, Kid Gloves got himself murdered. So the gravy-train got saved—Kid Gloves was the only real challenge in sight. Now we ask: Who had a motive for killing Kid Gloves?"

"You're too smart to gab, Hall," Stoli said quietly. "I had the motive. There it is, four little words. Now, go on."

"All right!" Tim snapped. "You had the motive. You killed him. Vane dumped the case in Branch's lap, and he got the answer last Friday. He got murdered last Friday, too. You weren't sure how much I knew about the case, so a man driving my car and wearing my coat got murdered that night. You added the touch of killing Branch with my Luger, just to give Jacobin something to chew on." He stopped and took another hard drag.

"I'm still listening," Stoli assured gently.

"Now you find out I'm not dead. I haven't been dead since Friday, and I've had a little time to play around here and there. You're wondering what I've dug up. Maybe you'd like to kill me now, but you're not sure how much it would back-fire. Or where. Maybe you're wondering what Branch told me the day he

was killed." He stopped and mashed out the cigarette.

Stoli shifted heavily in the chair and rolled his cigar around in the ashtray. His liquid eyes returned to Tim's.

"Your theory is all right, Hall," he commented. "It lacks reality. It reminds me of a punch-drunk prize-fighter trying to win on points." He smiled apologetically and folded his massive hands across his stomach.

"Let's be frank. You don't know much about the Kid Gloves case. You don't know who killed Branch, and you don't know who tried to kill you. You are not in a comfortable position as regards the New York police. That's that. As for me, I'm not certain what you know and don't know. I would rather reach an understanding with you satisfactory to us both than gamble on your complete ignorance. Of course," he admitted, "I could kill you, as you say, but it might raise several questions—"

"That you'd rather avoid," Tim injected.

"Yes. So," Stoli leaned forward, "I have an offer: you forget the Kid Gloves case, and I'll produce a murderer for Branch and the man in the East River. You can tell me what evidence you'll need. I'll get it for you. I'll give a motive. You run the show."

TIM rubbed the side of his nose. "Who's the fall-guy?"

"Joe Burma."

"Hell!" Tim snorted. "Before Burma got through talking, we'd all be in prison but Joe."

Stoli smiled. "I neglected to mention a detail: Burma won't be handed over alive. You see, you're going to kill him."

"Oh. I am?"

"Aren't you?" Stoli countered. He removed his hands from his stomach and clasped the balls of his knees. His head wagged forward. "Why not? The Kid Gloves case is nothing to you. Branch is dead, he's nothing any more. You're stuck for murder—here's a way out. Big headlines! Thumb your nose at Jacobin.



"Don't be a fool, Hall." The benevolence faded from his limpid eyes.

"Don't be a fool," he repeated more softly. "If you keep picking at that Gloves angle, somebody's going to get annoyed."

"Scared is the word, Stoli. If you weren't scared now, you'd be shooting instead of talking."

"No, Hall," Stoli said very quietly. "I'm not afraid because nothing's going to happen to me. I know precisely where I stand. That's more than you do. I'm simply suggesting a clean, simple solution to our problems. Take it or leave it."

"Why do you want to get rid of Burma?"

"Make your choice. Kill Joe Burma. Then we'll discuss the details."

Tim swung his bare feet out of bed and stood up. His eyes were dancing darkly, a pulse tugged at his mouth.

"Guess what my answer to that one is!" he exploded.

Stoli sighed. Wearily he pushed himself up. Almost absently he picked up his gun and inspected it idly.

"You're a stupid damn fool," he said regretfully. He raised the dark eyes. "I admit that your death will cause some embarrassment. I hoped to avoid that. However—"

"And just when am I going to die?" Tim watched the fingers on the gun. Stoli's eyes twinkled a moment.

"Not now. You misjudged me. I would only kill in self-defense."

"But you'll send Sam Bond around?"

Stoli's eyes widened. "So you've met Sam, too?" Then he shrugged. "We won't discuss it further." He moved slowly toward the door.

"How about a different fall-guy," Tim started. "Make it Sam Bond and I might listen. After all, I came to get the killer."

Stoli faced around squarely. He watched Tim's face, curiously, attentively. A frown hinted at his forehead, then smoothed away.

"I understand why they call you a good detective," he mused. Then he remembered the offer. "No, Hall. I'm

afraid not." He opened the door. He looked at Tim a last time. The door closed behind him.

Tim gave him five minutes to get away, then went downstairs to the telephone. He called New York.

"Nonnie? Me, Nonnie."

"Jacobin knows where you are, I think!"

"He—hell!" Tim glanced at his watch, then hunched nearer the phone. "Did you ever see a man named Geddy who visited Branch?"

"From Brooklyn. I saw him once when he was in."

"What did he look like?"

"Little and sort of—oh, just little and plain. Nothing stood out about him. Just a sticky little man."

"That could fit. Listen: call Avery Harmel. Ask him if he knows a book-maker in Brooklyn named Geddy. Get a description. Tell Avery to see if Geddy is around now. If not, when he went. Got it?"

"Then what?"

"Call me back—William Hawkins—at the Harrison Hotel. Make it quick, Nonnie." He hung up.

He lifted the receiver again. A weary masculine voice answered.

"Marco Vane?"

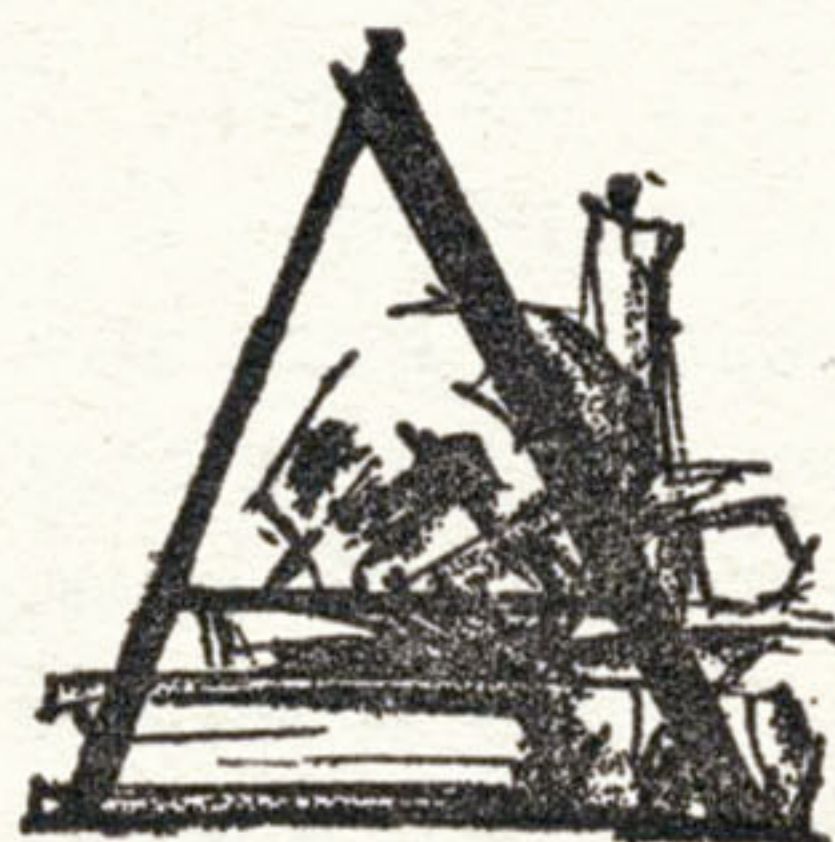
"This is he. Who is calling?"

"Tim Hall. I want to talk—"

"Oh, Hall! I want to see you! I was just going to come—"

"I'll wait. Miss Vane told you where you could find me?"

"She—she told me she'd met you. I'll be down immediately." The receiver clicked. Tim returned to his room and left the door open. He lit a cigarette. It was seven twenty.



T EIGHT TEN the manager shouted. "Telephone, Mr. Hawkins!"

"Nonnie?" he answered. "What did you find?"

"Avery says Geddy's been missing



since sometime Friday. The D. A.'s office is beating it up for him. They want him on homicide."

"Good! Now one more thing: Get Avery to check up a bird named Sam Bond. Find out what he does and why. This ought to be the last call. Get it in before Jacobin gets here."

"Is anything—"

"Maybe. Not yet." He hung up and returned to his room. He looked at his watch and frowned. Vane should have arrived . . .

He sat down by the window and stared out. The frown deepened in his forehead. A sulky curve turned down his mouth. He cursed.

Marco Vane arrived at nine o'clock.

"I must apologize. I was delayed at the last minute." He closed the door and mopped his damp face. "It—surprised me to learn that you were in town." He attempted a smile.

"What was Stoli saying that detained you?"

The man's eyes sharpened. The handkerchief stilled.

"I didn't understand what—"

"Stoli reached you before you left your house. What orders did he give you?"

"Why, I haven't seen Mr. Stoli since yesterday!"

"You're a damn liar."

Wearily Tim sighed and sat down on the corner of the table. He lit a cigarette and gestured to a chair.

"Is Geddy alive or dead?"

"Wh—who?" Vane gasped.

"Oh, hell!" Tim threw down his cigarette and stalked around the room. "Nobody knows anybody else! Nobody knows the sun shines! Look, Vane, if you were willing to bring the Kid Gloves case to my partner, why can't you talk with me? What has Bond got on you? What's Stoli got?"

"Nothing! Nobody has anything 'on me,' as you put it. The idea is absurd. Absurd," he reiterated too strongly. His gray eyes jumped jerkily about the room, always returning to Tim. "And as for

talking to you," he continued, "I'm perfectly willing. I took the case to Charles Branch because he was the only investigator I knew personally. I'd met him half a dozen times. I felt that the police weren't pressing the case strongly enough. Branch took it. I don't know what he learned. I don't know what he thought. A month before his death, he seemed discouraged. I suggested he abandon it as hopeless. He asked for a little more time."

"So you gave him more time, but no help, huh?"

"There was no way I could help him! I had no more idea than—"

"The hell you didn't!" Tim exploded. He reached down and hauled the man up before him. "You know damn well who killed Gloves. Bond did it, and Stoli told him to! If you'd talked straight with the police, the case would have ended ten months ago. If you'd given the truth to Charlie, he'd have cleaned it up. Instead you paid him to follow a red herring!"

"I did not! Stoli didn't have anything—"

"What's Stoli got on you that makes you protect him?"

"I told you that. You can't handle me this—"

"Can't I!" Tim rasped. He shoved the man back in the chair. "Maybe you'd like to know what I'm going to do. I'm going to get Bond nailed for the murder of a Brooklyn bookmaker named Geddy. If I can't prove it, I can damn sure frame it! I'm not a dick for a dime. When the boys get through with him, a lot of other people will be lead-pipe cinches for a workout—like Stoli and you. Oh, yes. And your daughter. She saw Bond pick Geddy up for the ride. She palmed a little evidence." He stopped and took a slow breath. "Now, would you like to talk?"

The man's oblong, thin face drained into purple grayness. For a fragile moment, nothing about him moved. He did not breathe. Then he choked.

"You—you don't know what you're



doing! Bond didn't— You can't frame a man just to force— I swear it's a mistake. You—"

"All right! If I'm wrong, what's right?"

"I—I can't—Oh, God, I—You don't understand what—"

"Get up, Vane!" Tim ordered. The man rose shakily.

"It's nine fifteen. I'll be here another hour, maybe. After that the deal gets rough. You can make up your mind by then."

"But—but listen, Hall. I don't—don't know you very well, but you look like an understanding—"

"No. I am not," Tim corrected flatly. "You may be in a hell of a spot, but so am I. And I'm getting out if I have to hurt somebody. You've got about an hour. Make it eleven o'clock."

"But I—" Vane sobbed. "Bond will kill—" Then his eyes flashed at Tim. "Bond will kill you! You'll never frame—"

"Oh, no. He's just going to try." Then Tim smiled suddenly. "Maybe he'll kill you, too."

The instant the words left his lips, Tim knew he'd touched the man's deepest fear. He saw the gray eyes fill with the reborn desperation. He saw them strive for control. He watched them, and he laughed aloud.

"I wouldn't talk to Stoli or Bond again. You might not get back here again."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Death in the Lodge

AT ELEVEN o'clock he watched the coupe stop outside. He watched as Roberta Vane looked toward his window. She slammed the door behind her and hurried toward the hotel. The sun made a shimmering arc across the brown waves of her hair.

Her heels beat a quick staccato from the stairs to his door. She knocked softly, quickly.

Tim took his time. He was frowning slightly. His lips were a little angry. He opened the door.

She brushed past him without speaking and turned in the center of the room. When he looked at her after closing the door, he saw she had been crying. Now the eyes were hot and angry.

"What did you do to him?" The question was low and throaty.

"Told him what I was going to do." Tim didn't want to say any more than was necessary.

"Don't answer that way! What did you say?"

"I told him to talk to me by eleven o'clock. Or talk to the police after that. I'm about through waiting."

"You're going to arrest— You can't arrest him! You can't just—"

"I'm not going to arrest anybody. It's just going to happen. Maybe," he smiled, "Joe Burma's going to get killed. And I think Bond is going to look guilty. Before he gets clear, he'll have to do some talking—"

She studied him slowly a long moment.

"Tell me one thing: can you prove who killed Kid Gloves?"

"No," Tim answered quietly. "But I found Geddy's note you took."

She sobbed. Her eyes never left his. "Do you know who killed your partner and the man they thought was you?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Sam Bond."

"That's—right, I guess," she accepted. "You're going to have Bond arrested?"

"For the murder of Joe Burma. I'm going to open some mouths. Burma doesn't count. Bond knows all the answers. He won't cover up for his mother. If he's trapped, he'll get nasty."

"And so you're going to kill—"

"If I have to," Tim said flatly. "I'm looking for proof to save my skin. I'll take it the way I can get it. If your dad—"

"You can't threaten him any more," she said wearily. "He left the house



thirty minutes ago. Sam Bond took him."

Slowly Tim sat down. "You better tell me—"

"Dad came home just before ten. I was upstairs. He came up and sat down on my bed. All he said was: 'I've just talked to Hall.' Then Bond drove up. Dad saw him. He stood at the window, just staring, until Bond called from downstairs. Then dad turned around. He looked at me the longest time. 'Tell Hall that Bond came by for me,' he said. Then he went out. But first, the last thing, he kissed me."

Tim looked at her eyes, at her lips. He looked at the wall. He stared at the sunlight outside the window. He walked to the table and picked up a cigarette. His fingers forgot the match.

"Do you—will Bond—" a slow voice started behind him.

"I don't know! How the hell do I know?" He broke the cigarette and threw the pieces away. He turned slowly.

"I guess Bond will," he said.

"I see." Her eyes settled on the point of his chin. Her lips moved mechanically. "Then you'll arrest him. You'll prove he killed dad. You'll prove he killed Branch and that other man. You'll get him to tell who killed Kid Gloves. That's the way it will be?"

"I don't know. I—I was going to use your dad."

"You've used him," she said quietly.

"I didn't mean this way. I wanted him to talk."

"I'm glad he didn't." She started toward the door. As she passed Tim, she paused. Her brown eyes leveled with his. She started to speak. "He couldn't even fight, the way you made—"

"Don't!" Tim cut sharply. "Get out!"

"What are you going to do? Just let—let Bond kill—"

"I don't know! For God's sake, get out!"

"IF BOND kills dad, then you'll have your case," she mused distantly. Then slowly she lifted her shoulders.

She closed her eyes and opened them again.

"If—if you'll keep Bond from killing dad, I'll tell you who murdered Kid Gloves," she promised very quietly. "I swear that I'll tell you. That note of Geddy's was wrong."

"And where would Bond take your dad?"

"I don't know. Maybe the camp. Maybe his lodge in the hills."

"Where is this lodge?"

"On the same road to the camp. Seven miles past the camp. It's the last thing. The road ends there."

"Lend me your car."

She nodded.

"If I get your dad alive, you'll tell me who killed Gloves. Can you prove it?"

"Yes. Yes, I can prove it," she whispered. "I—promise."

He went to the pillow on the bed and opened the tick. He dug his gun from the feathers and put it in his pocket. He reached for his hat. He froze.

He saw them across the street, three men. One was the cabbie who had picked him up at the station. The second was the hotel-keeper. The third was Inspector Jacobin of the New York police.

The third man turned. He left the others. He walked slowly across the street, and the sun shone brightly on his slender olive face. It glistened from his polished shoes as they flashed back and forth, step . . . step . . . It gleamed on a ring on his finger.

He entered the shade below. The door sighed as he entered the hotel.

Tim straightened and turned back to the girl.

"Get in bed. Hurry. Get under the covers." His voice was edged with steel. She got in without speaking. He pushed the covers about her, covering her head.

"When the door opens," he whispered, "move around under the cover. Don't get up. And this time," he stated, "you're playing me straight."

He heard the steps coming down the hall as he went in the closet and pulled



the door to a narrow crack. His fingers tightened about his gun. He watched the bed across the room.

The knock came, measured and hard. "Come in." He said it sleepily.

He heard the door open. He heard one step, two, three. Then Jacobin crossed the slice of room that Tim could see. He stopped.

"The nap's over, Hall," he said. He bent down.

Without a sound Tim left the closet. His arm went up. His arm came down. There was almost no sound.

Jacobin gave a small sigh as he sank to the floor.

"Get up," Tim ordered the girl. She stood up. She stared at the unconscious man. A word came to her lips.

"Get out. Go out the back way if there is one!" He pushed her toward the door. "Get home some way. I'll be there some time today. And keep your mouth shut."

She nodded silently. They left the room together. At the empty lobby, she turned toward the back. Tim waited till she was gone. He moved to the front door. He looked out.

The cabbie and hotel-keeper were not in sight. Quickly he crossed the street and got into Roberta Vane's car. The motor caught. He turned a half-circle and headed out of town. As he passed the first intersection, he saw her from the corner of his eyes. She was standing on the curb. Watching.

As she vanished, the thought crossed his mind: this could be a neat trap . . .

The speedometer climbed on.

When he passed the camp cut-off, he looked at the mileage gauge. The last numbers were 22. When 28 appeared, he put on the brakes.



HE WAS on a one-way lane, enclosed by barbed wire. Thick undergrowth and trees crowded beyond the fence and stretched back to the small rolling hills. The motor died and left a brittle sun-sharp silence. There was no movement or life on the lane, only heat and loose sand. Then, far ahead, a gun spoke once. That was all.

Tim found a pair of pliers under the seat. He cut the barbed wire and rolled it back to a post. Slowly he drove the car through the brush; a hundred yards from the lane he stopped. He took out the keys, turned down the rear-view mirror, and returned to the fence. He tied the wires back together. Then he left the lane. He made his way through the underbrush toward the lodge.

Thirty minutes later he stopped. Through the trees he saw the weathered walls ahead. He saw the glint of sun on a parked car. The car was the same one Bond had used for Geddy.

He retreated into the brush and circled to the back of the rambling, low building. There was a door and one small-size window. He touched the gun in his pocket. The safety clicked. Quietly and swiftly he crossed the cleared ground to the door. He stopped and listened. He heard nothing. Then he heard the car roar. Slowly it faded in the distance.

He touched the knob and turned. The weathered door groaned. It swung in, revealing a crude kitchen and another door, closed.

He smelled tobacco smoke. At last he heard the creak of a chair, then silence. He took out the gun. He pushed and followed the swinging door in.



**HELP  
AMERICA  
WIN!**



**BUY  
WAR BONDS  
NOW!**





His gun leveled as Joe Burma twisted in the chair.

"Easy!" he ordered.

Burma didn't hear. Even as he turned, his hand was reaching to the floor. To the gun that lay there. His eyes were small and bottomless.

"Don't—do—it." Tim rasped.

The fingers closed on the gun.

Tim's lips curled petulantly, a frown winked down his brow. A nerve jerked in his eyes as his finger tightened. The gun kicked against his palm. It roared.

Burma's gun bumped as it fell from his shattered hand. He stared at the hand. Then he began to cry.

Tim looked at him. He glanced at Vane. He looked at Geddy.

Tim walked over and picked up the weapon. He put it in his pocket. He put his own away. He pulled Burma's head back and slapped him across the mouth.

"Where did Bond go?"

"Camp. To the camp—"

"Sit still." He inspected the still-warm body of Geddy.

Tim turned to the rough couch where Marco Vane lay. He loosened the knots of the rope and removed the gag from the mouth.

"Get up." He nodded toward the body. "Bond do it?"

Vane moaned. The man's grayness had deepened to green. His body shook.

"Sick—I'm sick," he whispered.

"That's better than being dead." He turned back to Burma and took out his handkerchief. He tore it in half and tied it around the bleeding wrist and above the elbow.

"Come on—both of you. We're going to town."

**I**T WAS after one o'clock when they reached the car. Tim loaded Burma into the back and pushed Vane into the front seat. Slowly he drove back to the fence, broke the wires with the car, and turned into the lane. The rush of hot air burned as the car gathered speed.

"Where—where are we going?" Vane asked mechanically.

"To your house."

The man watched the uncoiling road with fevered, listless eyes. At last he formed words behind his lips.

"Why did you—come out there?"

"Your daughter decided to talk. When I bring you back alive, she tells me who killed Kid Gloves."

"She promised you that?" Vane whispered.

"And she's going to tell."

"Yes—she will," the man agreed quietly. He watched the road.

"What was Bond waiting for?" Tim asked after a while.

"He went back to camp to get your gun."

"The one that killed Branch." Tim smiled thinly. "If he keeps it, everything's set."

"He will. He has to, now. He can't do anything else."

Vane closed his eyes and his head swayed on the cushion. His face was green no more. It was scarcely gray. It held the chalk-ivory of death.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Stage for Murder



**T**IM turned the car into the driveway of Marco Vane's house. It rolled back to the garage. He opened his door.

"Before we go in, Hall . . ." Vane began. "There's no use in making Roberta do this. I might as well tell you myself."

Tim looked back at Burma. "Going to be good?"

The man licked his wet lips and swallowed. His eyes drained back to his hand. Tim got back in the front seat and lit a cigarette.

"All right. You tell it, Vane."

Twenty minutes later Tim picked up the semi-conscious Burma and followed a weary, stoop-shouldered Marco Vane toward the house.



Halfway down the hall, Roberta Vane met them.

"Dad! Oh, dad! I didn't hear the car! I haven't known—"

"He's all right," Tim said brusquely. Her glance traded to his face, then back to her father's.

"I told him," Vane said quietly.

"Oh."

"It's O. K. Don't think about it. It's O. K.," he repeated.

"Well, my witness is going to die if you don't stop talking!" Tim pushed past them into the study. He laid Burma on the couch and straightened. "Get some clean rags and hot water," he told Roberta. "You watch the road," he instructed Vane.

He pulled down the shades and took off his coat. Roberta brought a pan of water and clean towels. Tim went to work on Burma's wound. The man was unconscious now.

Half an hour later, Tim was through. He turned to the girl. She had been standing behind him. He hadn't heard her move or breathe the entire time. Even now her eyes alone seemed alive. They followed each move he made.

"Where's the telephone?"

"Telephone?" Then she seemed to come back from the distance. "In the hall."

Tim went in the hall. He asked the operator for the hotel.

"Hello . . . Hello, is Inspector Jacobin there? Tell him that Tim Hall is on the phone—"

"Stop! Wait just a minute, please!" Roberta begged. "You're calling the police, aren't you?"

"That's what I'm doing," he agreed bluntly.

"Won't you—won't you let me talk to you just a minute first? Don't call the police yet! If you'll only—only let—"

"No."

"Please! Please don't tell—"

"No! I don't like it that way! I don't want to hear it!"

"Listen to me! You don't understand how—"

"I don't want to understand! I'm just a goddamned detect—" He turned toward the telephone. "Jacobin . . . Hello, Jacobin."

"Where are you, Hall?"

"At a Marco Vane's house. They can tell you down there how—"

"Don't tell—Oh, God, don't—" the girl sobbed.

"I'm waiting here," Tim continued harshly. "Come on."

"How's it going to be—the hard way or easy, Hall?"

"I wouldn't know." Tim hung up. He turned to the study. He heard the girl follow him. He heard her close the door. He lit a cigarette and frowned at the dying flame before he turned.

"I'm going to say it now. Straight." He took a deep breath. He looked at her chin instead of her eyes. "It won't do you any good to beg or cry. I don't like it and Jacobin won't like it. It won't cut any ice. The whole thing's coming out, from Kid Gloves' death on down. Nothing you can say or do will stop it. Not a damn thing." He took a hard drag. His fingers were mashing through the cigarette paper.

"Now I'll say the rest: I'm sorry. It doesn't do a damn bit of good, but there it is. It's not me or you or people. It's just the way it is."

"Just because the law—" she started bitterly.

"I don't know anything about law. I'm not going to talk about that part! I'm not going to talk about anything. I'm just a guy that comes in and goes out doors. What's inside is none of my business. I don't want to touch those things."

"I hate—" she began to whisper.

"You hate me," he supplied. He looked at her eyes one moment, then he mashed out the cigarette on the floor.

"You can sit down," he said quietly, "and wait for Jacobin."

**F**IVE minutes later Jacobin entered the room. He came in with his gun in his hand. His face was pale-olive and



lean. His eyes and lashes were slender and Oriental. His silent grace belied his height and size.

"Hello, Hall," he said gently. He had a soft voice.

"Hello. My gun's on the table there, if you're hunting."

"One gun." Jacobin moved to Tim. One hand moved over his pockets. Then he retreated to the table.

"You better leave it out. Guests may be coming."

"Who? Why?"

"Sam Bond or Vincent Stoli or both. They'll be coming to murder." He gestured to the couch. "You remember Burma. Move him over and sit down. He won't mind."

Jacobin quirked his brows, then looked at the girl.

"I don't know you."

"Roberta Vane, Inspector Jacobin. We'll get to Miss Vane later. Please sit down."

Jacobin waited until Tim settled in a chair across the room, then he pushed Burma's legs back and perched on the edge of the couch. His gun waited in his long brown fingers.

"Why?" He gestured quizzically to the room in general.

Tim picked up a stray pencil and cocked it, up and over and down again against the palm of his hand. "Remember a fighter they called Kid Gloves?" Jacobin nodded. "Remember he was murdered? And you boys haven't racked it up yet."

"All right. I remember." The tone was indulgent.

"Charlie Branch was working that case. Marco Vane brought it to him about a week after the Kid was killed. Vane was Kid Gloves' manager."

"I know all that."

"But you don't know that Charlie got the answer. He got it the day he was killed. And when Charlie died, he still had it."

"No," Jacobin agreed curiously, "I didn't know that."

"That Friday Charlie was killed, I

came in from Philly. I was tired and wouldn't listen to him. I only knew he was coming down here to Harrison to get the murderer. Before I got through in New York that night, I knew something else: first, that Miss Vane had something on her mind besides pigeons; second, that Joe Burma was tailing me with a gun. Anyway, I was going to Bangor for the weekend. I got to the Doeman Club and remembered I'd left my bags at the office. I was undressed. I sent Fred, a trainer, back to get them in my car. I gave him my coat and keys. We can guess what happened: he got to the office and walked in on the guy that killed Charlie. Or the killer met Fred as he came out and confused him with me. Anyway, Fred tried to run. The killer of Charlie finally got him down on the east side and the car went in the river."

"And why is all this happening?" inquired Jacobin.

"The guy that killed Charlie knew he was about to crack the Gloves case. The guy assumed I knew what Charlie knew."

Jacobin smiled indulgently. "And then you went to Maine."

"Then I went to Maine," Tim agreed flatly. "I didn't leave my cabin till Sunday. At the station I bought a paper and read that Timothy Hall and Charles Branch were dead. I read the paper of the day before, before my body was discovered, and figured out who you were itching to hang. Can you blame me for getting a shampoo?"

"So then you came down here?" Jacobin prompted. "How have you done?"

"I've got one killer. We can get the other."

"Oh." Jacobin rounded it mockingly. "There are two now?"

"Yes, Inspector, there are two," Tim echoed. "The murderer of Kid Gloves and the killer of Branch and Fred. Also a bookie, Geddy."

"And now you're going to tell me about it. Including Mr. Geddy?"

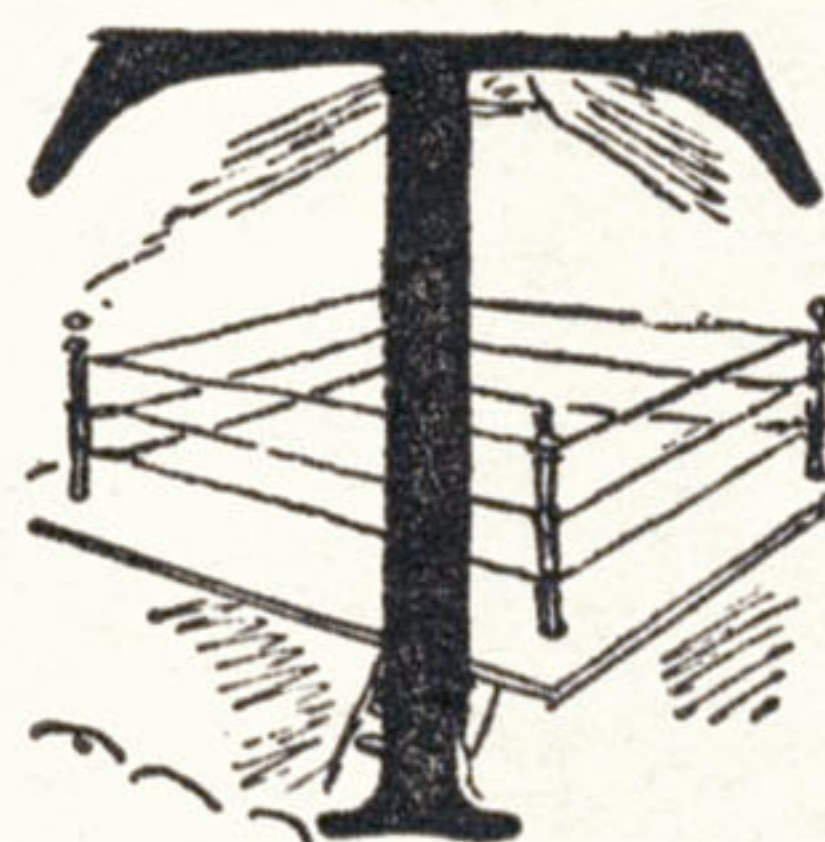


Tim laid down the pencil. He stared at Jacobin through drooping lashes. He almost smiled; it turned to a half sneer. Then he sighed and his face turned remote and lined.

"It all goes back to the fight between Kid Gloves and Eddie Sondon, the Champion. Kid Gloves whipped the Champion."

"I know that, too."

"You know a hell of a lot!" Tim suddenly snarled. "What you don't know is that Gloves was supposed to be fixed to lose! Fixed—get it? Gloves won when he was set to lose."



HE gun stopped swinging in Jacobin's hand. "Yes?"

"Stoli, Sondon's manager, knew the Champion was on the coaster. He could win, but he couldn't win the hard one. Stoli signed with Marco Vane on condition that Gloves would drop the decision. In return Stoli gave Vane a return bout for the championship—this time on the level."

"I don't think I'm going to believe it, Hall," he said gently. "The lie you're telling doesn't have a motive for murder. The fight Gloves won was a non-title. So there was a cinch return bout whatever happened. Any way it falls, you still have two fights, two gates to split—"

"Stop wishing you could nail me, and start thinking!" Tim lit a cigarette and leaned forward. "The first Sondon-Gloves fight was in November, last year. Now, when did Gloves come out of sticks? Last year. There wasn't a strong contender for Sondon's crown in January of last year. Sondon was due to last."

"Did you say," Jacobin asked softly, "that Sam Bond was in on this?"

"So now you start to see," Tim said acidly.

Marco Vane opened the door. "Stoli's here," he said wearily.

"Send him back," Tim directed.

Vane went away. Presently heavy

feet padded down the hall. Stoli's huge figure loomed in the doorway.

"Good afternoon, Hall. And Miss Vane," he greeted genially. "And Inspector Jacobin! We met before, I believe."

"You've just talked to Bond, after he returned to his lodge," Tim announced drily. "You've done some thinking."

"Frankly, yes," the man agreed. He settled himself on the couch beside Jacobin and took out a cigar. "I'm afraid Sam has handled things badly." He shook his head and sighed. "Very badly."

"And you're here to do your washing before Bond goes to the laundry?"

"That is one way of saying it." Stoli lit the cigar and smiled. Then his face sobered. He looked at Tim, then at Jacobin. His eyebrows kinked in a question. "I think we understand each other now. I'll get to my point: There have been murders. I grant that I have been somewhat involved—indirectly, but involved nevertheless. It seems that I waited too long with you, Hall. A mistake, but that is done now. Now, if you are interested in my cooperation—"

"That's Jacobin's affair," Tim said. "You'll have to do your trading with him."

Stoli faced the slant-eyed man. "I've hired enough lawyers to know about where I stand. I think that, now, you'll be able to convict me as an accomplice to murder. I am willing to give a complete statement to the district attorney, if, in return, I have some assurance that my sentence—"

"I had a hunch this would be it, Stoli," spoke a quiet voice. Four pairs of eyes swung to the doorway. There, green-eyed and pale, stood Sam Bond. He was leaning a little forward, balancing his muscular body on the balls of his feet. The long blond lashes half-shadowed the cast in his eyes. His light hair was stained with perspiration. His lips were bloodless. The hollow of his throat filled and faded with a cadenced throb.



The gun in his hand seemed a living part of his body.

"Open your fingers, Jacobin. Open them now."

Jacobin took his time. His olive face deepened color. His eyes thinned. At last he released his gun. It made a soft bump on the floor.

"Kick it. Over here."

Jacobin didn't move.

"Kick it, Stoli!"

Stoli's face was wet. He kicked twice. The gun slid into Bond's feet. He left it there.

"This is from me to you," Sam Bond said very softly.

He fired. Not a muscle in his face changed, the pulse in his throat throbbed on. The explosion shimmered into silence. The wet face of Stoli relaxed into stupefied blankness. An almost child-like surprise hovered a moment in his eyes. Then he relaxed completely. The childish astonishment remained in the eyes as they stared without sight into nowhere.

Roberta Vane gasped. Tensely Jacobin swallowed. His eyes were merest slits now, fixed on Bond.

"Are you—going to—" he whispered.

"Yeah. I'm going to."

## CHAPTER NINE

### Tim Says Good-bye



IM wet his lips. He swallowed, too.

"You can't, Bond," he spoke quietly. "You can get Jacobin. You can get the girl. You won't get me."

"Why?"

"You're not going to have time. I've got the girl in front of me. It'll take two shots to get me. Jacobin will have you by then."

"I'm taking Jacobin first."

"When you pull that trigger, I'm coming after you. I'll have the girl in front of me."

"You better shoot the girl first," Jacobin advised softly. "Then you can shoot me. Then Hall."

"I'll get it done!" Bond snapped.

"It's going to be hard," Tim taunted. "You're going to have to click three straight times. Three times, Bond—"

"Pretty hard, with three people ready to move," Jacobin pursued mockingly.

"I'm not a damn fool! I've got a gun! I know where I stand!"

"You should have picked up Stoli's gun. One of us may reach it. You've got my old Luger. I quit using it. It jams."

"We just have to reach it, you know," Jacobin continued. "You can swing us, and we can still reach it."

"It's tough, getting three—with a gun that jams."

Bond's eyes flicked at the gun on the floor, then back to the men.

"Shut up!" he breathed.

"Getting edgy, maybe?" Tim wondered. "Nerves a little tight?"

"My nerves are O. K.!"

"You're starting to sweat," Jacobin said. "A little noise would make you jump to—"

"Just any little noise," Tim agreed. His slow-creeping hand touched the ash-tray. His finger flicked.

Crash! The sound seemed to speak as the tray crashed to the floor. Bond's eyes darted down.

Scuff! Jacobin rasped his feet on the floor.

Bond whirled back.

"You damn—"

Tim's arm lashed around the girl's neck and jerked. As she rolled to the floor, he threw her empty chair toward Bond's face.

Tim ducked under the roar of the gun. Then he leaped for the gun at Bonds' feet. His fingers closed on the steel as the gun spoke again. He heard a curse from the couch.

Then he began to fire. With his face to the floor and the gun pointed blindly upward, he squeezed. He squeezed again. Again.



Slowly he turned his face upward. He watched Sam Bond start down. He did it very slowly, sinking first to his knees, to his hands and knees. Then the arms began to fold.

**T**IM walked out and down the hall. He found Marco Vane in the front room, unconscious. He picked him up and carried him back to the study.

"Here it all is," he said. "Do I have to draw a picture?"

"Light me a cigarette." Jacobin's slanting dark eyes watched the match.

"Kid Gloves whipped Sondon when he was supposed to lose last year? I gather that Bond's betting-syndicate was riding Sondon?"

"They gave two-to-one that Sondon would hold the title through 1941. They covered four hundred grand. Then the Kid came along too fast. Bond got Stoli to fix the fight. The fix blew up. Bond's syndicate lost eight hundred thousand."

"Who crossed who on the fix?"

"The Kid crossed them all. He agreed to throw the fight, then hustled around to the boys who were bucking Bond's syndicate. They offered him more than he was getting from Vane. He got fifty grand from Geddy's outfit for the super-cross."

"So he got killed. Who by?"

Tim looked at Roberta. He looked only at her eyes. They were speaking silently. He knew what they were asking.

He looked at Bond—Bond was dead. He looked at Stoli—Stoli was dead. Geddy was dead. Burma didn't count.

That left just Vane and Roberta.

He looked at her again. He knew what she was thinking, in that place behind her eyes.

They're all dead, she was thinking. Why can't it end now? Why does it have to go on?

Tim looked at her. He knew he'd never be able to show her why it couldn't end now. He wasn't sure he knew himself. It was just there.

He looked finally at Jacobin. Jacobin looked at him.

"I asked you who killed Kid Gloves."

"You asked me. I'm telling. He was killed by Marco Vane."



**H**E CLOSED his ears to the one quiet sob from the doorway. His lips moved on. "He didn't want to. Bond and Stoli forced him. They set the time and how and where. They went to Atlantic City for an alibi. That's why you couldn't nail them. They made Vane use his own gun on the Kid, then made him surrender the gun to them. Vane had no alibi. They forced him to leave himself wide open."

"What was the pressure?"

"His own life. His daughter's. Two days before the Kid was killed, she disappeared. The next morning Bond made his proposition; pull the murder and leave yourself open—the girl gets to come back."

"I see." Jacobin leaned forward and let the cigarette drop from his lips. He ground it out on the floor. "And Charlie Branch got all this answer. Why did Charlie ever get in on the case?"

"No." Tim shook his head. "Charlie never had the right answer. The reason Bond let Vane live was to recover the fifty grand the Kid had gotten. Vane was stalling, saying he couldn't touch it yet. He knew when he paid, he was out. They could kill him, or they could sell him out with his murder gun and no alibi. He was desperate."

"He knew Charlie. He came to him with a tale that he'd been framed by Bond, that Bond pulled the murder. He told Charlie that Bond killed the Kid to stall the championship fight. He said Bond had stolen his gun for the murder. He hired Charlie to recover the incriminating gun first. After that, Vane planned to get out with his daughter and the money. He'd be clean."

"And what happened to cause the fuss?"

"Charlie got the gun back some way."



Geddy, the Brooklyn bookmaker who'd paid the Kid, spilled the dope to Charlie about the super-cross. Charlie immediately figured he had the case cinched! He had a gun. He had proof that the Kid had sold Bond and Stoli out. He was ready to cut loose against Bond and Stoli."

"And they didn't have the axe on Vane any more—"

"No. All of a sudden their case didn't look so good to them. Especially to Bond, with his record. He got word that Geddy was trading out. He came to New York, picked up Geddy as he was trying to reach Charlie with more information, held Geddy somewhere while he knocked off Charlie. He took Fred for me, and figured he'd cleaned house."

"Got anything on Miss Vane, here?"

"Nothing for the record," Tim said quietly. "She knew her dad was guilty. She knew why he'd had to kill. And when she heard that Charlie was breaking the case, she thought he was nailing her dad. She went to see him that Friday to plead with him. By that time Charlie was on his horse."

"Well," Jacobin said finally, "that leaves Vane to stick and Burma to talk. Call the hotel and see if the boys have come."

Tim went to the telephone. Presently he returned.

"They're coming." He put his hands in his pockets. "You won't need me. I'm going."

Jacobin looked up. "A ride to the station?"

"No, thanks."

Tim turned. The girl still stood there. She watched him as he moved toward her. He had to pass her. He stopped.

"I said it before, I'm sorry. You don't understand why I—I wish I—" He stopped. He knew she hadn't understood. He knew that she never would.

He walked past her and his arm brushed hers. He didn't look back.

**I**T WAS ten o'clock in the morning when Tim Hall walked into his office. Nonnie put down the morning paper and turned.

"What can I do for—" She stared. "My, God," she commented. "Hello, Tim!"

"Hello, Nonnie."

"Congratulations!" She patted the paper. "You got along down in Harrison."

She stood up and shook the wrinkle from her skirt. Her lips were parted and smiling. She was waiting.

He stood there. He saw her image, and he saw it slowly blending. The cheeks became tan, and the eyes were brown. Not like Nonnie at all.

The laughter faded in her eyes.

"Something's the matter, Tim—"

This has got to work, he whispered silently. This is one of those rules.

"Don't be a fool!" He grinned. He pulled her to him. He kissed her long and hard.

**NO FINER DRINK...**





# MURDER BY THE EARS

By  
D. L.  
CHAMPION



The body had been dragged  
across the study floor.

A Rex Sackler Novelette

CHAPTER ONE

The Sackler Luck

The World's Champion Nickel-nurser is back to defend his title against all-comers—including the greedy refugee who smuggled a pair of diamond earrings into the country which gave him sanctuary, and the blackmailer whose itching palm reached out once too often.



in front of a paying teller.

REX SACKLER snatched up the pencil, seized the gin rummy score pad and laid down his cards with the air of a man slapping a cashier's check



"With a hundred point bonus for game, Joey, that makes two hundred and eighty points net. At two cents per, it'll be five sixty. And I can change any bill up to a hundred."

Disconsolately, I pushed my chair away from the table. After playing cards with Sackler I felt like a horse who was always running against Sea Biscuit. I reached for my wallet with no enthusiasm whatever and extracted a ten dollar bill. I handed it to him sourly.

He took it with a grin as broad as a chorus girl's mind. He withdrew his own wallet which looked as if he had ringed it at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1900 and plucked out four bills which were a thin decimal point away from complete disintegration.

He laid these on the desk and groped in his coat pocket for a leather change purse. He unclipped this and fingered out forty cents in change. He pushed the whole amount across the desk to me and said with dripping con-man affability: "Well, that's the way it is, Joey. I win today. You win tomorrow."

I stuffed the change bitterly in my pocket. "You mean you win today, *you* win tomorrow," I said, crossed the room and stared morosely out the window to the Madison Avenue traffic below.

There was a three minute silence behind me. Then Sackler said: "Joey, I've been doing a little figuring."

I knew I was supposed to ask what he had been figuring. But I didn't. Whatever it was it would only result in my being taken for even more of my salary. Thus far, this week, Sackler had won back about thirty per cent of what he had paid me last Wednesday.

"Yes, sir," said Sackler. "On my figures, Joey, I make it that during the last two weeks seventeen men have come into this office and only two women."

I turned around and looked at him. "Startling intelligence, indeed," I said. "So what?"

"So," said Sackler, "working out the odds on past performances there are two chances in nineteen that our next visitor

will be a woman. In other words it is seventeen to two against. Phrased differently, it is eight and a half to one that the next person to enter this office will be male."

I STARED at him coldly. "My wallet," I said, "is locked. My money is buried in my pocket deeper than the bullion at Fort Knox. I decline to bet you that night will fall. I have ceased to be a gambler."

Sackler sighed. He ran thin, sensitive fingers through hair as black as the raven's wing. He stared at me with dark and avaricious eyes. His nostrils quivered as they invariably did when the scent of money was in the air.

"Joey," he said, "if you don't speculate you can't accumulate. However since you're a little behind I'll give you a break."

"A Greek," I murmured, "with a gift."

He ignored that. "I'll offer you a price," he said. "I'll be a golden-hearted fool and give you a price even you can't afford to refuse. I have already stated that the odds are eight and a half to one that our next visitor will be a man. Joey, I throw money at you. I toss it in your lap. Instead of eight and a half, give me six and a half and I'll bet you the next person to cross this threshold is of the feminine gender."

I considered this. I checked back in my mind to make sure his figures were correct. As far as I could remember the deal seemed all right. Certainly less than 15 per cent of our visitors were women. Certainly the odds were, for once, in my favor. Certainly, I was due to win a bet from Sackler.

"I am weak," I said. "I should be confined. I take you. I'll give you thirteen dollars to two."

I crossed the room and opened the door which led to the outer office. Then I returned to my desk. From where we sat we could see the frosted glass panel of the outside door which opened into the office. Now we sat in tense silence



watching it for a silhouette which would decide whether I collected two dollars or paid out thirteen.

Unfortunately, experience was a teacher to whom I rarely listened. By now I should have known better than to bet Rex Sackler on anything at all. Each Wednesday he paid me a totally inadequate salary and devoted the remainder of the week to winning it back again. He was usually successful.

Sackler loved money as Abe Lincoln loved the common people. He fought for a dollar as a bull buffalo fights for its mate. The clink of silver in his ears was finer music than Beethoven's Fifth and the rustle of folding money was to him a gentle, perfume-laden spring zephyr.

And once a buck finally reached Sackler's grasping fist it could safely figure it was home. He spent with all the wholehearted enthusiasm of an Italian soldier laying down his life for Mussolini. He had a fortune stashed away in War Bonds and I fear his motive was security and the interest rather than undiluted patriotism.

His room rent ran about four dollars a week and his meals were bought on a meal ticket plan which gave five fifty in calories for five dollars. The cash he spent for clothes would hardly have decently garbed a Hottentot. And as far as I had observed his sole expense for amusement was whatever he won gambling with me.

I stared at the frosted panel of the door and my lips moved in silent prayer. Sackler leaned back in his chair and his gaze, directed at the same point as mine was the gaze of a man watching a horse race in which he had several potatoes invested.

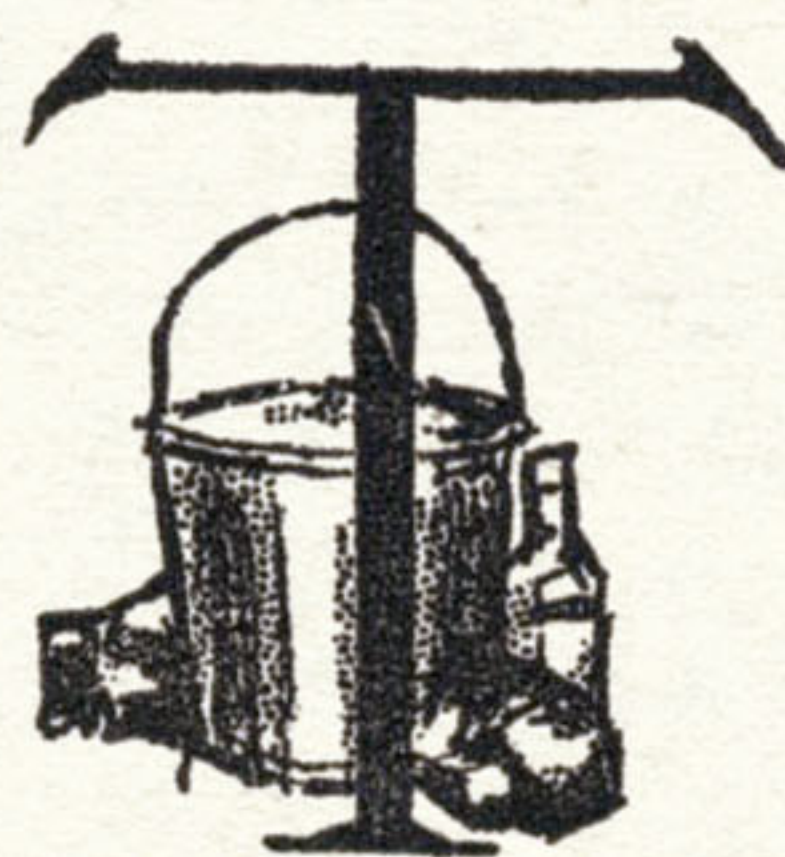
My watch ticked off four tense minutes. A shadow loomed up on the other side of the door. It was quite obviously the figure of a man in shirt-sleeves and my heart picked up a beat. I glanced over at Sackler. His brow was corrugated in a black frown and he ran his hand furiously through his hair.

The knob turned and the door opened.

Across the threshold stood a man with a bucket in one hand and an assortment of cleaning apparatus in the other. He peered at us inquiringly. He said: "Want your windows cleaned?"

One certain fact came to both Sackler and myself simultaneously. If our answer was affirmative he would enter the office and I would win the bet. If negative, he would go away and Sackler would get a second chance.

At exactly the same moment, I said "Yes," and Sackler said "No."



HE window cleaner stared at us uncertainly but did not move. "Come on in," I said hastily. "I'll pay you out of my own pocket."

"Stay out of here!" roared Sackler. "This is my office and I'm partial to dirty windows."

"Damn you," I yelled, "you're cheating! He'd come in if you'd let him and I'd win."

"He shouldn't count anyway," shouted Sackler. "He's neither a client nor a bill collector. Window cleaners shouldn't count."

The window cleaner still stared at us, blank wonderment in his eyes. An idea came to me and I stood up. So did Sackler. He seized my arm.

"Oh, no, Joey," he said. "I know what you're up to. You're going to pull him over the threshold."

We stood there struggling angrily, while the window cleaner goggled at us as if we were insane. Then Fate and Miss Madeline Draper tossed my thirteen dollars into Sackler's bursting coffers.

She strode past the dazed window cleaner who still held the door ajar. She was tall, long-legged and brunette. Her face reminded me of one of the better jobs of Perc Westmore and her figure convinced me that perhaps that stuff in Esquire wasn't so exaggerated as I had thought.



Sackler said "Scram" to the window cleaner, "That's thirteen dollars, Joey," to me, and "Sit down, Madam," to the girl.

He sank into his swivel chair, relaxed, with a benign grin on his face. He had won thirteen bucks from me; he had saved the window cleaning fee, and it was quite in the cards that he had a client. The girl came to the point like a setter.

"I'm Madeline Draper," she announced. "My brother was killed yesterday."

Sackler breathed deeply and his eyes lit up with that odd glitter which invariably came to them when he smelled money. He looked Madeline Draper over like a guy casing the First National Bank of Peoria, which, in a manner of speaking, he was.

He noted her expensive suit with satisfaction. He remarked mentally the gleaming wrist watch on her arm. He observed the brilliant ring upon her finger and he actually drew his breath in sharply when his eyes fell upon her earrings.

Their perimeter was diamonds set in platinum around a dark green emerald. That center stone was so big I failed to understand why her lobes didn't droop. I essayed a fast calculation as to their cost, then gave it up. Anything over two hundred bucks was calculus to me.

I knew from the ecstatic glow on Sackler's face that he, too, had appraised those earrings nicely. I knew, further, that he was engaged at the moment in figuring precisely how much the traffic would bear. Even before he knew what a client wanted he almost always knew the amount of his fee.

He bowed his head with disgusting servility and said in the accents of a society doctor at the bedside of a decaying plutocrat: "Miss Draper, you have my sympathy in this hour of sorrow. I read about your brother's death in the papers. My heart goes out to you. If there is anything I can do, command me."

He did not add that her command was going to cost her a pretty penny. The girl took a handkerchief from her bag and dabbed it at her huge black eyes.

"I want you to find out who killed him," she said. "If you succeed money is no object."

I winced perceptibly. Sackler grinned like a dragon.

"But," he said, "I understand from the papers that the police have—"

Madeline Draper forgot her sorrow for an instant while she achieved a magnificent sneer. "The police!" she said.

Sackler nodded again. "My sentiments exactly," he said.

They certainly were getting along beautifully together. I watched them morosely. I was thinking of two very depressing items. First, I had lost my bet; second, it looked as if Sackler was once again going to collect a juicy fee from a client. I relished these things as Tokio relishes a bomb.

"Anyway," said Sackler, "according to the report I read, the police believe that a burglar entered your brother's study, shot him, broke open a safe, took several thousand dollars in cash and some jewelry. Is that right?"

"It's right that the police believe that," said the girl brittlely. "It isn't right that it's true."

Sackler's eyebrows lifted. "You have evidence contrary to the official theory?"

"Some evidence and a great deal of suspicion."

"Of whom?"

MADELINE DRAPER looked at him steadily for a long moment. "It's hardly my place to tell you," she said. "There are reasons why I shouldn't, reasons why I won't. Now let us understand each other. First, I want my visit here, our relationship as client and investigator, kept absolutely secret."

"With us," cooed Sackler slimily, "discretion is only surpassed by efficiency, eh, Joey?"

"You've left out fee collecting," I told him. "We're not so bad at that."



He glared at me. But the girl smiled.

"I'm glad you mentioned that," she said. "Mr. Sackler, I've followed your career in the newspapers for a long time. I admire you. You like money; so do I. You work for money; so do I. I want a man who wants a fee and will work for it. Frankly, I'm suspicious of those who prate of justice and nobility. If you're working for profit we know just where we stand."

Well, that was laying it on the line. Sackler blinked at her thoughtfully and did not answer.

"I think my brother was killed by someone other than ordinary robbers," she went on. "I do not think the motive was burglary. I shall write you a check for five hundred dollars as a retainer. If you can prove that the police theory is wrong you shall have forty-five hundred more. If not, nothing. Will you take it?"

Would he take it? Will the Air Corps fly over Japan? Will a duck enter a natatorium? I lit a cigarette and sighed unhappily. Sackler held out a fountain pen while the girl groped in a capacious bag for a checkbook.

She said, as she wrote: "I like your methods, Mr. Sackler. I've been a vocal and loud partisan of yours for years. I think we'll get along very well together."

And why not? For five hundred dollars Sackler would get along very well with the man who murdered his mother for the rubber in her girdle.

He folded the check with the tender care of a mother folding the diaper of her first-born and stowed it away in the depths of his wallet.

He said: "If you'll leave the details, addresses, et cetera, with my assistant there, I'll get to work on the case within the hour."

I scribbled down what data she gave me while Sackler, quite pleased with himself, leaned back in his chair and rolled himself a cigarette.

I finished jotting down the details. Madeline Draper smiled a farewell at

Sackler, tossed her head entrancingly and walked toward the door. Sackler stared after her, his eyes focused on those fabulous earrings.

As the door slammed behind her he turned his head and stared at me. I returned his gaze blandly, pretending I didn't have the slightest idea of what was on his mind. He scratched his palm with the subtlety of a bass drum solo and said primly: "It is a virtue to pay one's debts promptly."

"Really?" I said. "The landlord would be delighted to hear that sentiment."

But now he was too financially elated to be downcast at the mention of the overdue rent. He held his hand out and his fingers twitched.

"Thirteen dollars, Joey. Won fairly and squarely. Pay me."

I took out my wallet and paid him. I said: "You are in league with Satan. You always win. You take thirteen bucks from me and five hundred from that girl. Is there no end to your cursed golden luck?"

As if in answer to my question the outer door opened. An elderly man thrust his head through the doorway and said in guttural accents: "Mr. Sackler, could you take another client?"

I clapped my hand to my head. The joint was raining clients. Sackler stood up, beamed and bowed.

"By all means. Come in, come in."

"And bring your checkbook with you," I added bitterly.

## CHAPTER TWO

### One Case—Two Fees



UR visitor was gray-haired, of medium height and clad in an oddly cut suit. He wore glasses and a professorial air. He seated himself on the far side of Sackler's desk and sighed heavily.



"Mr. Sackler," he said, "I am an Austrian. I do not know much about your American private detectives. However I am here to put myself in your hands."

Through a cloud of disgust, I watched Sackler grin. While I starved slowly to death on the meager salary he paid me, it seemed as if absolute strangers came up to him and handed over their watches and pocketbooks.

"My name," went on the elderly man, "is Fritz Kruger. I have heard of you often through a friend of mine who thinks you are the greatest detective in the world. So I have come here. I am prepared to pay you any reasonable fee if you can do what I ask."

Sackler promised heartily to perform whatever task was desired.

"Of course," continued Kruger, "this task must be absolutely confidential. Moreover anything I tell you here today must be absolutely secret."

"Of course, of course," said Sackler impatiently. He disliked dialogue which held up the first installment of his stipend.

"I escaped from Europe," said Kruger, "with great difficulty. I was forced to leave all my cash and nearly all my property behind. I did, however, salvage my wife's jewels. They are worth a great deal of money."

"Yes, yes," said Sackler. "Go on."

"I got those gems into this country." Here Kruger hesitated, glanced with some embarrassment over toward me.

"Continue," said Sackler. "That is Mr. Graham, my trusted assistant."

"Well," said Kruger, "I'm afraid I brought those gems into this country without the formality of paying duty on them."

With an effort Sackler forced away the expression of serene joy which lighted his face and substituted in its place sanctimonious horror.

"Mr. Kruger!" he exclaimed in shocked accents. "That is a serious offense. How could you commit a crime against the country which offers you shelter and sanctuary?"

I glared at him, annoyed. Despite the noble sentiments that fell from his hypocritical lips, I knew damned well that mentally he had jacked up the fee. He could add a little subtle blackmail to the amount he would ask now that Kruger had confessed he had broken the law.

Kruger averted his gaze before Sackler's righteousness. "I shouldn't have done it," he said. "It was my wife's idea. I regret it now but I'm afraid to offer to pay. I've had enough of prison in Austria. But anyway I want you to help me, Mr. Sackler. I want to tell you what I want and discuss the matter of your compensation."

The last word struck a responsive chord in Sackler's mind. He groped in his pocket and produced his wallet. Already he had held Madeline Draper's check for the better part of an hour and that was strictly against all his principles.

The moment he obtained a check he converted it into cash. This time he had forgotten that procedure. But now he remembered.

"Joey," he said, "take this down to the Federated Bank. Get it cashed. Hurry."

I took the check from him, donned my hat and coat and left him to the solitary pleasure of extracting a fee from old man Kruger.

I returned with five crisp one hundred dollar bills in my pocket. They burned my fingers as I handed them over to Sackler. His grin split his face in two. His eyes were alight with a happy flame. He actually hazarded an awful off-key fragment of song as he stowed the cash away in his wallet.

"Well," I said sourly, looking around the room, "where is it? Don't tell me you have it in your pocket?"

"What's that, Joey?"

"Kruger's shirt. Don't tell me you didn't get it?"

He didn't get sore. "In a figurative manner of speaking, you might say I did, Joey. Don't take off your hat. We're going."



"Going where?"

"To the residence of Mrs. Draper, the widow of the man who was killed."

"Oh, we're doing the Draper case first, eh? I thought maybe Kruger was more important."

"We're doing them both together, Joey. As I figure it, it's practically the same case."

More than that he would not vouchsafe as we went downstairs, climbed into our ancient coupe and drove through traffic uptown.

IT WAS obvious as I looked at the Draper estate that Robert Draper, the murdered man, had money. About a hundred green well-tended acres surrounded a huge colonial house set in the center of a smooth lawn.

I parked the car and we disembarked. I rang the bell and adjusted my tie to look well before the scrutinizing eye of the butler whom I expected to open the door. A moment later I got the scrutinizing eye all right. But no butler. Inspector Wooley of police headquarters stared at us from the threshold.

There was little warmth in his gaze. His suspicion and dislike of Rex Sackler was equaled only by Sackler's suspicion and dislike of him.

"Well," he said, "and what do you two mugs want?"

Sackler came to the fore. "There has been murder done," he said dramatically. "Naturally in the interests of justice I am here to see that the culprit is apprehended."

"In the interest of what?" snapped Wooley. "How much dough are you making this time?"

"A pittance," said Sackler with the phoniest sigh I have ever heard. "Times are hard in my profession. It must be wonderful to have a regular job like you, Inspector. Paycheck laid on the line twice a month whether there's any crime or not."

A red flush crawled into Wooley's face. He knew damned well that Sackler made eight times as much money as

he did. This was a fact which invariably nettled him.

He opened the door wider with marked reluctance and stood aside.

"Well," he said, "if the family's retained you I suppose you'll have to come in. But I tell you, Rex, this is no spot for a mastermind. The case is open and shut."

Sackler lifted his eyebrows.

"You mean you have the killer?"

The flush on Wooley's face became deeper. "No, not that. But it was simple robbery. Draper was at his safe when a thug came in the window. Draper dove at him and the thug shot. Then he rifled the safe and made away with the loot. We're picking up every known crook in the vicinity. We'll have him before forty-eight hours have passed."

A voice in the hallway behind Wooley said: "Come in, Mr. Sackler. I'm glad you wasted no time."

It was Madeline Draper. Wooley stood aside with ill grace and the girl escorted us down a long, magnificent hallway to a broad living-room. As we entered the first person I saw was Fritz Kruger.

I looked indignantly at Sackler who avoided my eye. Kruger's presence indicated that he, too, was paying Sackler to find out who had killed Robert Draper. In short, this time he was collecting two fees for the same work.

Kruger stood up. Seated near him was a small blond woman of about thirty. Her face was swollen and in her hand she held a handkerchief. It was apparent that she had been crying.

Madeline Draper introduced the woman as Helga Draper, her brother's widow. Then she proceeded to introduce Kruger. Neither he nor Sackler gave any indication of having met before. Rather bewildered I picked up the cue and played it the same way.

"Now," said Sackler, "may I have what facts there are in this case?"

"The facts are simple," shouted Wooley. "And I already gave them to you. Robbery. Armed robbery. We'll



have our hands on the killer within—”

“Forty-eight hours,” said Sackler. “Sure, I know. Miss Draper, will you tell me what happened?”

She nodded her head and those damned earrings rattled like gold coins. I stared at them fascinated.

“Certainly,” she said. “Come along to the study. I’ll tell you what I can.”

She led the way from the drawing-room with Sackler and myself following her. Wooley brought up the disgruntled rear.



HE study was a room lined with bookshelves. A huge French window opened out on to the lawn and against the far wall was a square steel safe.

“Helga discovered the body,” said Madeline Draper. “She didn’t hear the shot as she was in her room in a distant part of the house. Looking for Robert later, she came here and found him with a bullet in his head. The safe door was open and it had been rifled.”

Sackler grunted. “What was missing?”

“A little over eight thousand dollars in cash. Some jewelry and several bonds. To the value of about twenty-five thousand dollars.”

“What about the window? Was it open?”

Madeline Draper nodded. “Helga says it was. But she closed it while waiting for the police to arrive.”

Sackler scratched his head. Tremendous fee or no tremendous fee there was very little to go on here. True, Inspector Wooley was marvelously consistent at being wrong but I found myself hoping to heaven that this time he was right.

“Anything else?” asked Sackler hopefully.

Madeline Draper shook her head and smiled intimately at him. “Nothing I can tell you,” she said. “But doubtless there’s lots you can discover for yourself. Why don’t you look around?”

This time Wooley grunted. “What can he find that we haven’t found?” he demanded. “Although if you know this much, Rex, you may as well know about the body. Not that it means anything.”

“The body?” said Sackler alertly. “What about it?”

“It was moved after the killing,” said Wooley. “As we figured it from the bloodstains the shot must have been fired while Draper was directly in front of the safe. Then it was dragged away all across the room behind the table there. But we figure the murderer did that to make it easier to get to the safe. Draper’s body was in the way where it fell.”

Sackler’s brow corrugated. “Interesting,” he said. “At last we have something to work on.”

Wooley and I regarded him with frank skepticism. We were both of the unspoken opinion that the last observation came under the general heading of impressing the client. For the life of me I couldn’t see anything particularly illuminating in the fact that the body had been pulled out of the way of the safe door after the murder had been committed.

“All right,” said Sackler, “if that’s all you have we’ll pick up from there. We’ll need no more help. Joey and I will just wander around the house looking about. Come on, Joey.”

He strode from the room with me at his heels and Wooley glaring after us.

An hour later it seemed to me that there were several hundred rooms in the mansion. Sackler and I went carefully through each one. Why, I didn’t know. We looked in drawers, desks and closets. After twenty minutes of this, I said: “Don’t you think I could look more thoroughly if I knew *what* we were looking for?”

“I don’t know myself, Joey.”

“Then why—”

“There’s something about this case,” said Sackler, “that gives off an odor of halibut. Something very odd. I don’t know just what it is but I sense it. I’m looking for anything that may help me. But I don’t know what specifically.”



We continued our futile hunt for nothing and my temper mounted. Then at least three hours later, while we were in the rooms of Mrs. Draper, Sackler, who was in the bathroom, uttered a low piercing whistle.

Like an obedient hound I trotted into the lavatory and stood at his side. He was standing over the toilet. He had lifted the china lid off the water tank and was peering inside.

"Joey," he said, "roll up your sleeve."

"For what? I—"

"Joey, look!"

I peered over his shoulder into the tank. There, at the bottom beneath the water was a rectangular metal box.

"Get it, Joey," said Sackler.

I plunged my hand into the water and brought up the dripping box. I handed it to Sackler.

**H**E examined its exterior carefully. It was obviously watertight. Yet when he tried its lid it opened easily. It had not been locked.

"Odd," said Rex Sackler.

I stared at the currency in the box and the shining jewels, at the gilded bonds within and echoed, "Odd, indeed."

"I don't mean the loot," said Sackler testily. "I mean the fact of its being unlocked."

I shook my head. "You," I said bitterly, "are one lucky thus and thus."

He turned and looked at me in mild surprise. "Why, Joey?"

"First," I said, "you have been promised two fees for solving one case. Second you stumble on to this which breaks it for you as easily as breaking an egg."

"Really, Joey? And how do you figure that?"

"Obvious," I said. "Even to Wooley. His wife knocks him off. Rifles the safe and stashes the stuff here. Then gives out a tale about robbers. God, you're lucky."

Sackler shook his head. "Joey," he said, "you have a very simple soul. You are several miles away from the truth. It isn't quite as easy as you think. Even

your theory about the two fees isn't quite accurate. However, come along and let us interview Mrs. Draper."

Downstairs in the hall, Sackler put the metal box in the pocket of his overcoat which hung in the closet. Then he went back to the drawing-room. Mrs. Draper was there alone. She was staring into the glowing embers on the open fireplace. There was morbid melancholy in her eyes.

Sackler cleared his throat and she looked up at him.

"Mrs. Draper," he said, "if I may I'd like to ask you a few questions."

She bowed her head in assent.

"First," said Sackler, "do you know accurately exactly how much money your husband had in his safe?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid only my husband knew that. He was accustomed to keeping large sums of money and other property in the house."

"But you don't know exactly how much?" persisted Sackler.

Helga Draper shook her head. "Only his secretary would know that. You can find him at Mr. Draper's office."

Sackler thanked her and left the room. I trailed along behind him.

"What are you doing?" I asked. "The cat and the mouse? Or are you pretending to work for the fee to make the high price look more reasonable. It's obvious she killed him and hid that stuff to make it look like robbery."

He looked at me and clucked like an old hen. "Joey," he said, "you should've been a copper. You've one of those leap-at-conclusion minds which is convenient when you don't know what the hell is going on. Now, take a short walk for yourself. I wish to think."

With no reluctance I left him. I idled through the tremendous house and made my way to the enclosed sun porch on the east side of the house. While strolling down a vast corridor I saw Madeline Draper emerge from a side door and walk hastily along ahead of me.

She passed beneath two hanging portieres and over the clacking of her spike



heels on polished wood I heard a tiny tinkling sound. As I reached the curtains I noticed something gleaming on the floor. I picked it up and gasped.

It was an earring. One of those two earrings which must have been worth a small fortune. I stood for a long time staring at it. Mentally I translated it into terms of cash. I had a glorious picture of myself telling Rex Sackler to go to some frugal hell, resigning and setting myself up in a neat bungalow on the Pacific Coast.

It was a pleasant dream but a short one and I am constrained to say that it was not honesty alone that made the decision to return it necessary. Of course the girl would miss it. There would be a search. The servants were quite probably trusted and since Sackler knew he didn't have it he would naturally believe that I had. Wooley would probably demand that we all be searched and I would get stuck.

I dropped the earring in my pocket and followed Madeline out into the grounds. When I caught up with her I would give it back. She seemed lavish enough with money where Sackler was concerned. At least I could expect a reward.

However as I wandered aimlessly about the estate I saw no sign of her. I was not particularly concerned. The grounds were large enough to account for that and doubtless I would meet her again at the house before Sackler decided he had acted impressively enough to break the case and collect his dough.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Murder Note



**I** MUST have strolled about for the better part of an hour before returning. Then as I reached the house I heard a shrill and terrifying feminine scream from somewhere inside.

I galloped along the corridor in the direction of the yell and came, finally, to the butler's pantry. Helga Draper stood in the doorway looking very panicky indeed. Doubtless, it had been she who had uttered that awful shriek. At her side, holding her hand, was Fritz Kruger.

Sackler stood in the center of the room.

I pushed my way inside and came up at Sackler's side. I stared down at the floor. Lying there was Madeline Draper. There was an ugly hole in the side of her head and a thirty-eight clutched in her inert fingers.

Blood ran in a crazy rivulet along the slick linoleum of the floor. The girl's black eyes stared blankly at the ceiling and her left hand was twisted in an odd position behind her head. In the fingers of that hand was a slip of paper.

Footfalls, heavy and authoritative sounded behind me and Inspector Wooley, wearing his hat and coat, burst into the room.

"What's this?" he said. "I was just going home when one of the servants told me—"

He caught sight of the body and said: "Good God, what's this, Rex? What happened?"

Sackler turned to him. "This?" he said with soft irony. "It's easy, Inspector. A thug came in the window, killed Miss Draper and rifled the butler's pantry."

Wooley glared at him. "Damn you," he said. "Stop clowning."

He knelt down at the side of the corpse. From the doorway, I heard the gentle sobbing of Draper's wife. I heard the consoling voice of Kruger as he essayed to calm his sister.

"She's dead, all right," said Wooley. "A young, handsome girl like that. It's—"

He broke off as Sackler suddenly clapped his hand to his head. There was an expression of a lost soul upon his face. His eyes were wide with horror.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Have you lost a nickel?"



"A nickel?" echoed Sackler and his voice was a quivering tragic vibration. "I've lost a client. My God, she'd only paid me a retainer. Who's going to pay the rest of my fee?"

Wooley stood up and looked at Sackler in horror. I grinned happily. Sackler's expression was agonized and it would not have surprised me in the least had he suddenly begun to beat his breast and wail like a banshee.

I walked around the body and bent over. As yet, it appeared neither Sackler nor Wooley had seen the paper in the dead girl's hand. I bent over to pick it up and as I did so my heart picked up a beat. The second earring was missing!

WITH an effort I retained my dead pan. There was an angle to be figured here but I had no time to figure it now. I took the paper from the cooling fingers of the girl. I held it out. I said: "Did you guys notice this?"

Wooley snatched it from my fingers as if it held the murderer's name. It appeared, as he read it aloud, that it did.

*I killed my brother (it read) for personal reasons. Then my conscience compelled me to kill myself.*

"The signature," said Wooley, "is Madeline Draper's." He breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, that explains that all right. For a moment I thought—"

Sackler who had been looking over his shoulder interrupted. "That note's typewritten, Wooley. It doesn't mean a thing."

"Why not?" snapped Wooley. "It's just as likely she'd type it as write it in longhand."

"Maybe," said Sackler. "But since her signature isn't written in her own hand it proves absolutely nothing."

They bickered back and forth. I didn't listen to them. I had a weighty problem on my mind. Where in hell had that other earring gone to? It seemed most unlikely that she dropped the second one accidentally as well as the first.

Had it been Sackler who had dis-

covered the body I wouldn't have given the matter another thought. I would have known damned well that the valuable bauble was reposing in his wallet. Sackler would easily become a ghoul for the amount which that earring would bring.

The question was, then, where had it gone? Who had taken it? And what should I do with its mate which was at the moment burning a hole in my vest pocket?

I thought once again of what I could do with a neat little bundle of cash. Of course I would have to deal with a rat-faced little fence I knew in Harlem and he would, in the manner of his kind, chisel me out of a good fifty per cent. Nevertheless there should be enough left over to keep Joey Graham for some time in a manner to which he was completely unaccustomed.

Then, after the fashion of a congressman, who six months ago claimed we couldn't be attacked, I proceeded to a beautiful blinding rationalization.

Suppose I turned the earring in? Who'd get it? From what I'd learned about the Draper family there weren't any relatives left save the widow. Helga would certainly be picking up enough from her husband's estate to keep her in luxury for the rest of her life. So I really wouldn't be taking anything from anyone who couldn't well afford it.

Three more minutes of this sort of thinking and I was thoroughly convinced that selling the earring and keeping the cash was not only honorable and right but the only possible course for a thinking civilized man.

I returned to reality as Wooley, hurling an epithet at Sackler, stalked angrily from the room to the telephone in the outer hall. Sackler sighed heavily and walked over to me.

"Come on, Joey," he said. "Let's go back to the office. There's nothing more to be done here."

As we got into our coats in the foyer Kruger came out of the drawing-room. He shook his head sadly.



"A bad two days for my sister," he said. "These killings have upset her terribly. But at least everything's explained now. Inspector Wooley tells me that he is sure Madeline killed her brother, then remorsefully killed herself. At least the mystery is cleared up."

Rather to my surprise Sackler didn't argue with him as he had with Wooley.

"Yes," he said, "it's a comfort to have the mystery solved anyway. Of course, that other deal of ours goes, doesn't it?"

Kruger looked at him oddly, then nodded his head. "Yes," he said, "of course. If you care to deliver now, I'll settle."

Sackler appeared nettled. "Not just yet," he said. "I'm not quite prepared to deliver."

Kruger seemed somewhat puzzled. "Oh, I thought you were. I believed you were ready now. However, I'll wait. You'll get in touch with me?"

"Sure," said Sackler, "probably tomorrow."

We left the house and clambered into the battered coupe. As I put it in first and pulled out of the driveway, I said: "What's this deal you have with Kruger? It looks funny to me."

Sackler was staring broodingly through the windshield. He said, "Does it, Joey?" and nothing more all the way into town.



WE SAT in the office for two days while Sackler registered heavy and profound thought. I saw by the papers that Inspector Wooley, despite Sackler's protest, had accepted the obvious theory, which, incidentally, I was inclined to believe myself.

Sackler however was worried. I was certain now that Kruger had also promised to pay him for the solution of the murder. It wasn't like Sackler to concern himself with a case when the client who had retained him was dead, incapable of signing any more checks.

Then, too, I had a problem of my own. I still had the earring in my vest pocket. I had decided to wait a little while until the Draper killings had been forgotten before I tried to get rid of it. Besides, another point worried me. Who the devil had swiped my earring's mate?

Sackler still had the waterproof box he had taken from the toilet tank, in the bottom drawer of his desk. It puzzled me that he had not turned it over to the police. I did not believe he intended keeping it. It would be a little too raw.

At least no one knew that I had the earring. But I knew Sackler had that box and Mrs. Draper could probably make a damned shrewd guess that he had. So keeping it came under the general heading of professional suicide.

So exactly what went on in his head I didn't know. Withholding the evidence that he had was going to get Wooley very sore. So when he did expose it he'd better have a good story to go along with it.

Midday of the second day we had spent in silent brooding, Sackler got up, sighed and reached for his hat.

"Joey," he said, "I'm going over to Draper's office. There are a couple of questions I want to ask. Then I think I'll know all the answers."

I regarded him quizzically.

"Then you still don't accept the story Wooley has given out to the papers?"

"Why should I? There's no money in that theory."



FOR  
VICTORY . . .



BUY  
WAR BONDS!





The door slammed behind him and I was alone. I had been alone for the better part of an hour when a uniformed messenger entered, handed me a small package and a receipt and said: "Sign here. It's for Rex Sackler."

I signed and he left me alone again staring at the name on the little box in my hand. It was a familiar name and, under the circumstances, one that disturbed me a little—that of a well-known firm of jewelers.

I turned the package over in my hand dubiously. I calculated mentally the time it would take Sackler to reach Draper's office and return. I decided there was enough to enable me to open the box and tie it up again before he came back.

I picked at the string which fastened it. I carefully removed the paper. I lifted the lid of the blue plush box and stared with wide eyes at the missing earring.

I blinked at it for a long time. I figured all the angles. I glanced at my wrist watch again to see how much time I had left before Sackler returned, then I sprang to the classified directory and thumbed rapidly through the A's.

In less than three minutes I found what I was looking for. I snatched up the plush box and raced out to the elevator. Twenty minutes later I was back at my desk with the earring rewrapped neatly and placed on Sackler's desk.

I was reading the afternoon paper and looking as innocent as a choir boy when Sackler came in.

His eyes lit up as he saw the package. "Ah, Joey," he said, "and when did this arrive?"

"A little while ago," I said guilelessly. "What is it?"

Sackler waved the question aside airily. "Oh, nothing. Just an inconsequential gadget, Joey. Now get your hat on. We're going out to Draper's at once."

"Draper's? For what?"

"To earn an honest penny. And incidentally to tell that moron, Wooley, who killed Robert and Madeline Draper."

He opened the desk drawer and withdrew the box he had taken from Helga Draper's bathroom. He tucked it under his arm, dropped the package containing the earring in his pocket and said: "Are you ready, Joey?"

"For anything," I said and I meant it literally.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Thousand Apiece



As I drove the coupe out to the Draper house I was aware that Sackler was fumbling in his pocket. I heard the rustle of paper and realized that he was taking the earring from its package. I grinned happily to myself. I wasn't quite sure what turn events would take when we arrived but the way I saw it there should be an honest dollar in it for little Joey Graham.

Wooley, whom Sackler had phoned, was already at the house when we arrived. He stood in his favorite position, leaning against the mantel-piece in the drawing-room. Helga Draper, white-faced and nervous sat in a rocking chair whose movement never ceased.

Kruger munched an unlit cigar. He looked oddly at Sackler as he shook his hand.

"I thought I'd hear from you before this on that other matter," he said.

"Relax," said Sackler, "I'm prepared to take that up now as well as a couple of minor matters. Murders, to be precise."

Wooley looked daggers at him. "Damn you," he said. "You're a money-grubbing louse. We have this case neatly wrapped up. Explained to everyone's satisfaction. Now, just for money you're going to wreck our theory."

Sackler spread his palms in a gesture which implied helplessness. "Justice," he said. "Justice makes her demands, Inspector, what else can I do?"

"Well, go ahead," said Wooley. "Go ahead and get it over."



Sackler helped himself to a free cigarette from a silver box on a taboret. He drew a deep breath and said: "First, I wish to consummate a private business deal with Mr. Kruger. For the return of certain property of yours, Mr. Kruger, you promised me a sum of money in cash. Is that right?"

Kruger nodded. Sackler plunged a hand into his coat pocket. He withdrew a pair of earrings. He held them out and they shimmered in his palm.

"Are these they, Mr. Kruger?"

Kruger nodded again. Wooley craned his neck forward. "Wait a minute," he said, "aren't those the gadgets I saw this Madeline Draper wearing the other day?"

"True," said Sackler, "but Mr. Kruger will have no difficulty in proving ownership, will you, Mr. Kruger?"

Kruger glared at him. "Well," said Sackler, "I'm waiting."

"For what?" said Wooley. "What's going on here anyway?"

I said nothing but I knew I was vastly more interested than the inspector.

"For my fee," said Sackler. "Here are the earrings, Kruger, as per contract. Pay up."

Kruger took the earrings. He sighed heavily and reached for his wallet. He counted out a number of bills and I counted silently with him. He handed two thousand dollars to Sackler and I hastily divided that sum by two and my grin was as wide as Sackler's when he took the money.

"One minute," I said, "do I understand that when Kruger came to the office that day he offered you a fee to produce those earrings for him?"

"Right," said Sackler. "And, as usual, I have come through. The job is done, the fee collected. Everything is neatly consummated."

"Not quite," I said grimly. "There is something I would like to say. I—"

"My God," said Wooley, clapping a hand to his forehead, "I came here to listen to the solution of a murder case. I'm not interested in how much dough

you guys collect. Get started talking, Rex."

"Wait," I said, "I—"

Sackler waved me to silence. "The inspector is right, Joey. Whatever you have to say will keep."

I shrugged. That last statement was true enough. The longer I waited the louder I could laugh.

"Now," said Sackler, "I state categorically that Robert Draper was killed by his sister Madeline."

Both Wooley and I blinked at him. "Now how do you figure that?" asked Wooley. "My burglary theory is sounder."

"Your burglary theory," said Sackler, "gives off a ghastly odor."

"Why?"

"Primarily because the body was moved, dragged halfway across the study floor and parked behind the table."

"What does that prove?"

"That the killer was an amateur with a weak stomach for corpses. A thug would have shot Draper, rifled the safe and that's all. If an amateur, particularly a relative who would object to having a pair of dead eyes staring at her while she robbed the safe, had done it she would move the corpse where she couldn't see it."

**I** THOUGHT that one over. It seemed logical. "You're arguing, then," I said, "that Madeline shot her brother. She rifled the safe to make it look like a hold-up but couldn't stand the sight of the body while so engaged. Hence she dragged the corpse behind the table where she couldn't see it."

"Right," said Sackler.

Kruger nodded with what seemed to me, enthusiasm.

"That's reasonable," he said. "It makes that suicide note she left understandable."

Wooley scratched his head. "Maybe," he said slowly, giving up his thug theory with utmost reluctance. "Have you anything else?"

"Sure," said Sackler. "Both Mrs.



Draper and Draper's secretary assure me that the exact amount of money and bonds kept in Draper's safe was known to no one but Draper. Yet Madeline mentioned numbers. She said eight thousand dollars in cash, which was correct and twenty-five thousand dollars in bonds which was also correct."

"How the devil do you know it was correct?"

Sackler pulled the tin box he had found in Mrs. Draper's bathroom from his pocket, laid it on the table and said, "Count it."

Wooley opened the box and stared at the contents. Kruger peered over his shoulder. I glanced across the room toward Mrs. Draper. She looked no more upset than before. She appeared neither surprised nor concerned at the appearance of the box.

"Where'd you get this?" snapped Wooley.

"All in good time," said Sackler. "The point is that Madeline Draper was something of a tramp. She had few scruples. She decided that if her brother was dead she would get the estate."

"How could she?" I asked. "Naturally, the dough would go to the widow."

"If she was here, it would," said Sackler.

Wooley took a cigar from his vest pocket, bit off the end and put it in his mouth. He chewed it savagely and glared at Sackler.

"What the devil are you talking about? Say it in simple English, will you?"

"If Mrs. Draper killed her husband, she couldn't get the estate, could she?" asked Sackler. "The law won't permit a killer to benefit by his crime. She would get neither the estate nor the insurance, if any."

I was beginning to get it now. "And then the dough would, of course, go to the next of kin which was Madeline."

"That's right, Joey."

"What's right?" howled Wooley. "What the devil are you talking about? First you say Madeline killed Draper,

then you announce that if Mrs. Draper killed him she wouldn't inherit the estate. What is this? Choctaw?"

Sackler sighed the sigh he reserved to indicate that the stupidity of the police department was a heavy cross for him to bear.

He said: "You're not very bright, are you? The point I'm making is that Madeline killed her brother, then, after thinking things over planted the evidence on Mrs. Draper."

Kruger inhaled sharply. His sister sat on the edge of her chair and looked at Sackler with terror-filled eyes.

"You see," said Sackler, "Madeline, wanting dough, knocks her brother off. She makes it look like robbery. Then she plants the stolen stuff on Mrs. Draper. She expects the coppers to find it, to believe that Helga Draper pulled the phoney robbery and killed her husband. The coppers pinch Helga, send her away, maybe to the chair, and Madeline collects, get it?"

Wooley frowned and grappled with the theory. Sackler, enjoying himself, continued: "However, the cops were dumber than usual. They looked over the house casually never thinking to peep inside the toilet tank in Mrs. Draper's bathroom. Hence they never found the stuff that Madeline had planted."

"So," I put in, "since she couldn't very well find it herself she called us in."

"Me," said Sackler arrogantly, "not us."

I didn't retort. I would make him pay for that in a little while. I licked my lips in anticipation.

"All right," said Wooley, "so then she got the horrors about what she'd done and killed herself, is that it?"

Sackler took another free cigarette from the box. He said, "No."

"Well, damn it," snapped Wooley testily. "So what did happen?"

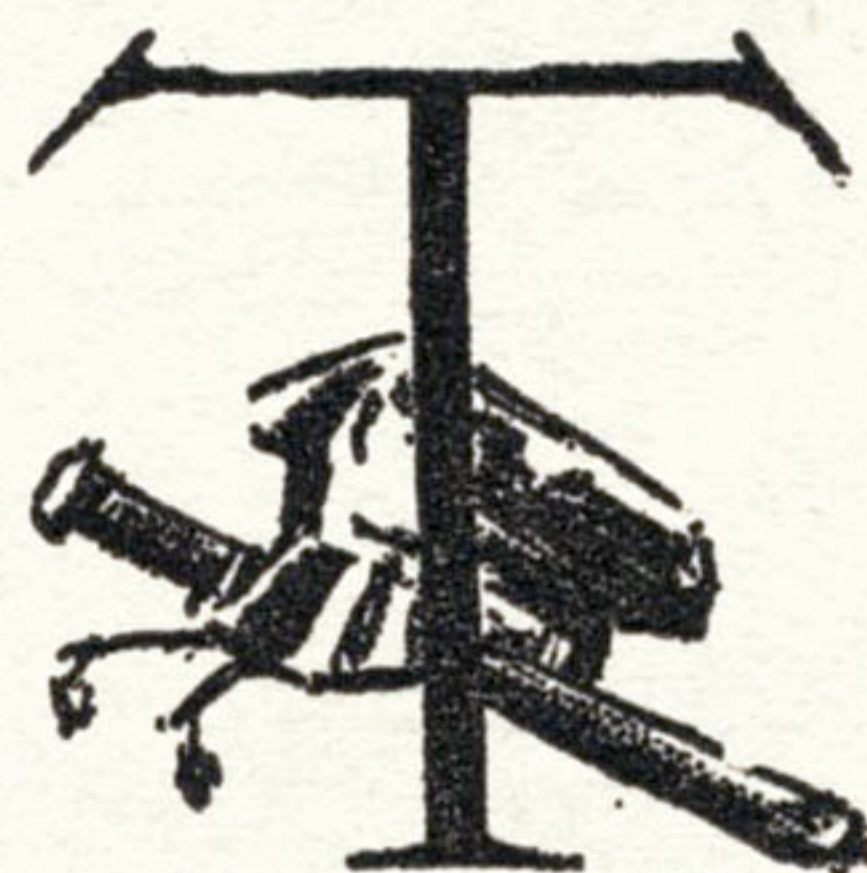
"Recall that note?" asked Sackler. "That typed suicide note? The last sentence in it read: 'My conscience *compelled* me to kill myself? Note that word *compelled*. It's the past tense. Would



someone who is not yet dead, who intends killing himself write 'compelled'? No, she would have written 'compels.' On the other hand, someone faking it, someone already thinking of Madeline as dead *would* use the past tense."

"Who killed her then?" said Wooley.

Sackler glanced at Kruger. He pointed a finger at him and said, "He did."



HERE was a long silence. Helga Draper uttered a little gasp. Wooley stared at Kruger as did I. Kruger stood absolutely still, staring at the opposite wall. He did not speak.

"Get this," said Sackler. "Kruger is greatly attached to his sister. He disliked Madeline who, as I remarked, was something of a tramp. She mentioned my name several times in front of Kruger, because I am not entirely without fame and she thought I was good."

"She came to me, engaged me to look into this case—actually to find the evidence she'd planted and your coppers had overlooked. On the same day Kruger came to me. He wanted me to get back for him a pair of valuable earrings that Madeline had swiped from him."

"Why didn't he call the cops?" said Wooley. "Why did he have to pay you for a job like that?"

"Because," said Sackler, "he'd smuggled the earrings in from Europe. The cops would ask questions and he'd get pinched. He—"

Kruger uttered a cry. "This is unfair," he shouted. "This is unethical. What I told you was confidential. You promised that you wouldn't mention it. You—"

Sackler lifted a silencing hand. "It won't matter," he said. "It won't make any difference to you."

"The hell it won't," said Wooley. "If he's a smuggler, I'll turn him in. He'll serve time for this."

"He may even burn," said Sackler. Kruger's face paled.

"Let me tell it in my own way," said Sackler. "As I told you, Madeline, knowing Kruger couldn't squawk because the stuff had no duty paid on it, calmly helped herself to those earrings. Kruger offered me two grand to get them back from her. I accepted the offer. But when I told him that Madeline had already engaged me on the murder case, Kruger looked quite worried."

"Why should that worry him?" demanded Wooley.

"He didn't trust Madeline and he loved his sister. He was afraid that Madeline had done exactly what she did do. He spoke to her about it. She laughed at him. She told him that it was possible his sister killed Draper, that if that could be proved she would inherit the estate. Then he realized that she had engaged me to try to pin the killing on Helga. Kruger, a neurotic sort of gent after his experiences in Europe, shot her, typed out that note and planted it in her hand. He figured that would clear up everything."

Kruger bit his lip. "All right," he said, "I was certain Madeline killed her brother. Your theory about that is correct. But you can't prove I killed her. You have nothing that would hold up in a court of law."

Wooley looked worried again. "No, Rex," he said. "You haven't."

"True," said Sackler, "that's why we need a confession."

Kruger laughed and there was a touch of hysteria in his tone.

"Confession?" he said. "From me? I've stood the tortures of a concentration camp. Do you think your third degree methods will make me confess?"

"Yes," said Sackler. "Look here. If you don't admit the killing, I'll keep my mouth shut about Madeline killing her brother. We'll simply announce that we found this box and where we found it. You will go free, but your sister will be charged and doubtless convicted of murdering her husband."

Kruger was silent for a long time. Across the room I heard his sister sob



quietly. Then Kruger nodded his head. "All right," he said. "I killed her. I hated her. Not only did she steal my wife's earrings but she blackmailed me, too. Threatened to tell the authorities about my smuggling. All right, Inspector, I'll go along with you."

I took a step forward. I said: "Wait a minute."

They all looked at me. "Those earrings," I said. "May I see them?"

**K**RUGER took them from his pocket and handed them to me. I took a penknife from my pocket. I opened it and ran its blade over the face of the diamonds on one earring. It left no mark. I did it again on the second earring. It left a visible scratch.

"Look," I said. "One of these is phoney. You're entitled to your money back, Mr. Kruger."

For the first time in my life I saw Rex Sackler reduced to absolute speechlessness. Wooley said: "Are you trying to run a fast one, Rex?"

Then Kruger uttered the most awful words that Sackler had ever heard. He said: "I demand my money back."

Wooley grinned delightedly.

"You said something about justice a little while ago," he said. "Very well, I shall see it done now. Either return that dough or I'll take you in for swindling this man."

Sackler opened his eyes and glared at me. He put his hand in his pocket and withdrew his wallet. He said from the side of his mouth, "Judas!"

"One moment," I said. "Naturally, Mr. Kruger, you want to retrieve those earrings. Naturally if it took two of us to produce the pair of them you would pay the fee and split it between us. Right?"

Kruger nodded slowly. I whipped the second earring from my vest pocket.

"This is genuine," I announced. "I will submit it to any test at all."

I scraped it with the knife, which left no mark. I handed it to Kruger. "Now," I said, "I believe I get one thousand dollars and Mr. Sackler the other."



**WE** SAT silently in the coupe as we drove out to the main highway. We had gone eight miles when Sackler spoke.

"You are a wicked, iniquitous louse, Joey," he said vehemently. "Where the devil did you get that earring?"

I told of Madeline Draper's dropping it, of my picking it up in the hall. He looked at me with accusing eyes.

"Why didn't you return it at once?" he said. "Don't answer me. I know. You were working on some scheme to keep it. To sell it and retain the tainted proceeds. Joey, you are a thief as well as a traitor."

"You," I said, "are a ghoul. You found Madeline's body. You took the remaining earring. Then you went away and kept your mouth shut waiting for someone else to find the corpse. You were afraid that someone might miss the earring and if it had been you who found the body they'd believe you took it."

"You are mad!" roared Sackler. "It was my job to recover the earring. What if I did take it from the corpse? You have stolen one thousand dollars from me as surely as if you had used a gun."

"Sure," I said. "I'm a wicked character. As I figure it you must have come along right after Kruger killed her. He left the earring figuring that if he took it you'd think he'd killed Madeline. He left it for you to pick up. Only finding one you searched for the second. When you couldn't find that you took the original to a jeweler and had a phoney made in order to collect the fee."

"How did you know it was phoney?"

"Because I had the real one. Besides I took it across the street to an appraiser while you were down at Draper's office."

He clapped his hand to his head again. He lifted his eyes to heaven. He cried in tortured accents: "What perfidy! I have nurtured a serpent in my bosom."

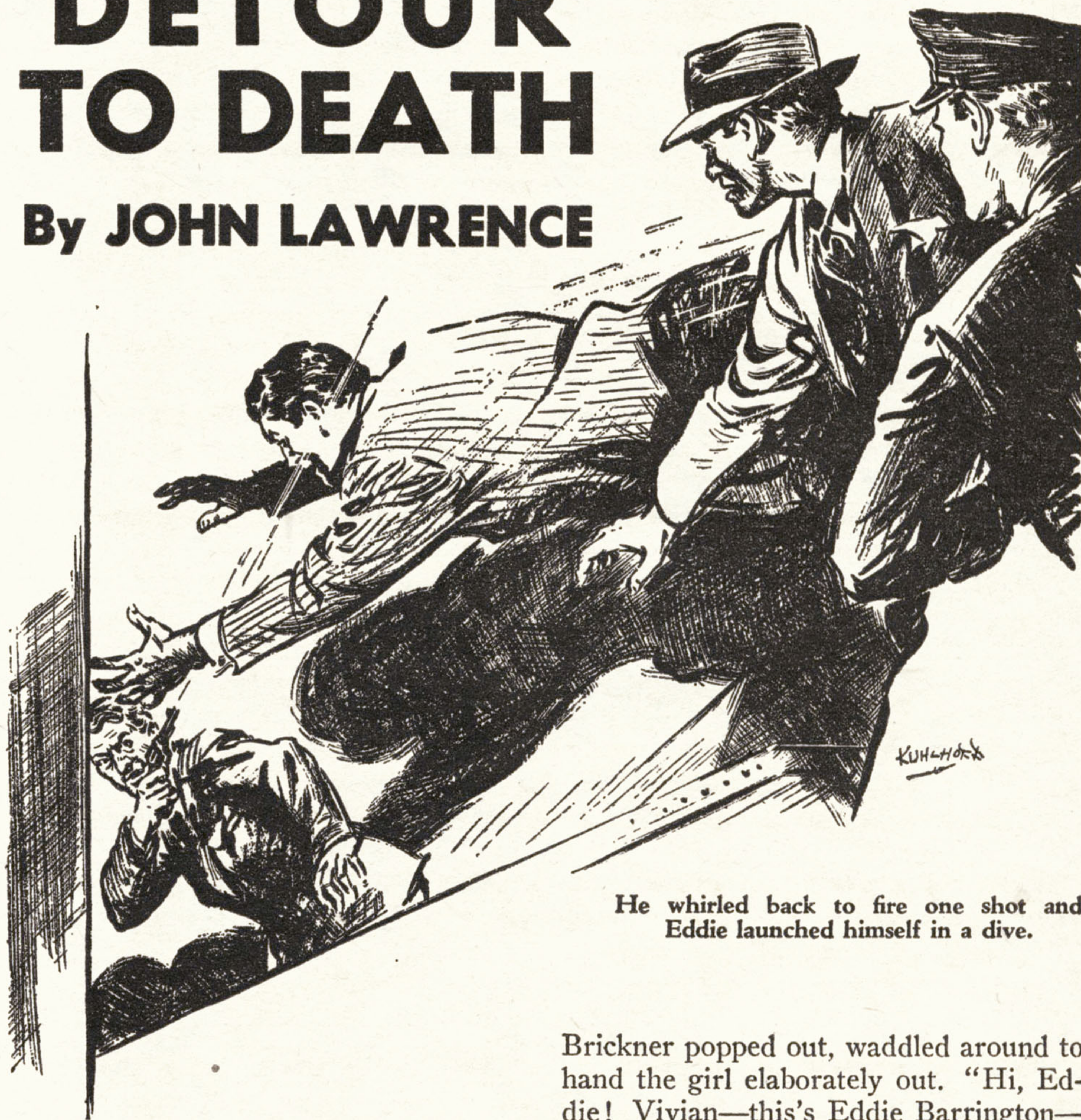
I didn't answer. I hummed happily as I drove along.



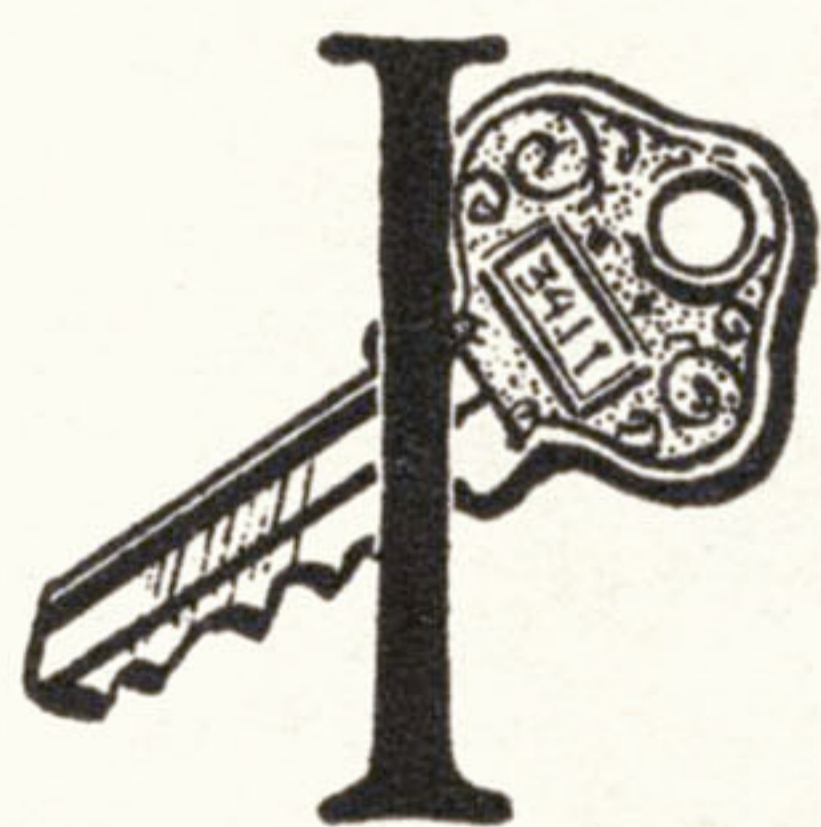
Eddie hated Brickner. He meant to ruin him as Brickner had ruined Eddie's father. But Fate took a hand before Eddie's plans were complete. It all started with the girl from Iowa, who got caught on a . . .

# DETOUR TO DEATH

By JOHN LAWRENCE



He whirled back to fire one shot and Eddie launched himself in a dive.



IT WAS in the third month of Eddie's grim vigil in the garage that the break finally came.

Brickner brought the shining-eyed girl in.

He nosed his convertible in from the dimmed-out street around theater time, just as Eddie was coming out of the little gray-painted front office, buttoning the throat of his dungarees. The long, sparkling car stopped four feet from him and

Brickner popped out, waddled around to hand the girl elaborately out. "Hi, Eddie! Vivian—this's Eddie Barrington—best damn mechanic in New York City. Eddie—any time Miss Donald comes in—give her the car. 'Sperfectly all right, see?"

She was mostly blue eyes, blue-black hair. The intense shine of her eyes made her look eager, excited. She had a trim, small figure in a modest black silk-and-net evening gown, a white bolero of anonymous fur. She gave Eddie a hesitant smile and, to his own startled disgust, he found himself thinking in slow wonder: *Why, she's all right. . . .*



He smothered it sourly, quickly assumed his habitual obsequiousness. "Yes, sir, Mr. Brickner. Any time."

"There's something wrong with the feed line, Eddie. Give it a look-see. We're going to a show and then maybe a spot or two. Be back around two or three."

"Right, Mr. Brickner."

He watched somber-eyed while the red-faced, sloe-eyed playboy palmed the girl's arm and strutted out, but it did not occur to him that he finally had the touchstone. He did make a vague, hasty effort to see the girl as the center of some scheme by which he might finally put the noose around Brickner's fat neck, but this was indefinite and automatic. He would have done the same had Brickner come in carrying a pair of roller skates or a fly-rod.

That, of course, was the flaw in his whole program—he did not know what to do, now that he *had* caught up to the fat crook. The blazing rage that had, eighteen months ago, sent him flying on the slippery swindler's trail, had eventuated into cold, vengeful—but stumped—fury, now that he had his finger on him.

**H**E RAN the beautiful convertible upstairs, went to work on the feed line with his hands, and with his mind—for the thousandth time—on the stinging impasse through which he seemed unable to break.

Murder—although he thought of it undisturbed—was out. At one time—just after reaching San Francisco and learning of his father's nervous explosion and subsequent death—he was enraged enough to consider nothing *but* getting his hands on Brickner. Conceivably, at that point, grief and rage might have stung him to killing, had Brickner—or Helmuth as he was then known on the Frisco Diamond-Traders' register—been in reach. But he was long gone. The investigation was long over. The letter carrying the grim news to Eddie's last known address in the Orient had simply never arrived, and when, in the ordinary

course of events, he returned, it was to hear the bitter news from the lips of his father's lawyer, long after the event.

There was nothing particularly new about the story. Eddie's father, his small, one-man jewel business already seriously hurt by the long depression, had extended trust too far—even in a trade where exaggerated trust is the rule. He had "consigned" a matched set of emeralds, valued in six figures, to Helmuth overnight. There had been—or was supposed to have been—a burglary. Helmuth was cleaned out, leaving him a bankrupt. Eddie's father's capital was wiped out and more than wiped out and he was pulled down by the other's fall. The old man's nerves and heart had given way.

Every jeweler in town was unequivocally certain that the burglary—an ancient dodge of the trade—was synthetic. But there was nothing of a provable nature that could be shown in court. Helmuth had stood up under all the grilling the district attorney could give him, had been reluctantly discharged, and had dropped from sight.

It remained for Eddie to ferret out the fact that, prior to the "burglary" Brickner—or Helmuth—had been spending recklessly in the border towns—spending, and gambling disastrously, to the point where threats were supposed to have been made to him, to induce him to cover his obligations. If Eddie had run into him at the time he was finding this out, his feelings might have overruled his good sense. But he hadn't—hadn't found him for eleven gruelling months—identified him as Billy Brickner, a hometown product of New York who had dropped out of sight a few years back, evidently because of matrimonial trouble.

The frenzy was out of his fury by now, and cold-blooded killing does not come natural to a well-brought-up American youth of twenty-seven—particularly one quixotic enough to go direct from M. I. T. to China, to tinker with the pitifully few war engines with which that gallant army was attempting to stem the Nipponese steam-roller.



Furthermore, the element of preserving his own safety had re-established itself as a factor now. Having journeyed all the way back across the ocean with the aim of tinkering with his own country's war engines—now that they were actually engaged—he had no urge to feel a policeman's hand close on his shoulder. Uncle Sam does not issue uniforms to jailbirds. He loathed and despised the very heart of the four-flushing craven who had palmed off his piper-paying on an innocent third party and scuttled for cover. He had an unshakable determination to take it out of the fat skulker's hide, but he was depending on his brains, not his hands, for the blueprint of bringing it about.

To date, maddeningly, he was still clutching at air. The pitiful best that he could muster was to have Brickner fired from his job—he was now a salesman for a large New York importing firm, and, ironically enough, riding a mounting wave of prosperity—on the basis of his Coast performance. It was too puny a move to be considered, of course, and he went from day to day in a sort of feverish hope that, among his still-swelling, painfully-pieced together scraps of information about the fat man, he would come on the proper stratagem.

And there was the still unexplained matter of the pawn ticket. Conceivably, if he could get to understand that, *that* might hold his chance. . . .



HE clog in the feed-line was located—a squashed section of copper tubing under the rear end. Eddie rolled himself out from under the convertible and stood up, wiping his hands on a piece of waste.

He opened the door of the convertible, pulled down the flap of the glove compartment, to see if the pawn ticket was still there. It was—exactly where he had left it—stowed under road maps and grimy typewritten papers. It was a Bow-

ery pawnshop's check, with \$1800 scribbled in the margin.

The check, together with a receipted bill for full cash payment for the convertible, had been in the car when Brickner first brought it in six weeks or so back. And Eddie's cautious inquiries had satisfied him that Brickner was again about his spending habits along Broadway—to the tune of several hundred dollars a month. Why, if he could toss money around at night spots, and pay cash for expensive cars, did he let this pledge, whatever it was, go unredemmed? A matter of front? Did putting every cent into the show window help Brickner peddle his imported stones? Or what?

Still unable to puzzle it out, Eddie stood up, closed the door scowling. He walked over to the elevator, rode down to the office for a new piece of tubing.

Rusty and MacKay, the jumpered attendants in the front office, were immersed in a game of gin-rummy. As Eddie bent over the desk, scribbling out his requisition, Rusty said: "Why tell him? I'd *like* to see that fat pup get it in the neck. He irritates me."

"So what? He's a customer, isn't he?" MacKay said.

"Are we supposed to play watchdog to the customers? Rush over and tell them when we think somebody's tailing them? Hell, we may be imagining it—McVeigh might be after somebody else entirely."

"Not twice in a row, chum. The first time, yes, we could have been mistaken. But not the second time. He's taking their dust and you know it."

Eddie impaled the carbon of his slip on the spindle, and stood up casually. "Who's this?"

"McVeigh—a little hustling shyster, a divorce specialist, a love-nest smeller-outer."

"And who's he following?"

"Your pal Brickner. It looks like his wife has caught up with him again."

Startled, Eddie hastily opened his mind, waiting for this new nugget to fuse into something.



It didn't fuse. He strained, riding back upstairs, to force something out of it, to line it up into a situation he could use.

Then he found out how strongly the girl actually had impressed him. The main thing that jumped into his mind was a sudden sinking worry about where she would wind up on a deal like that. If she were about to get tangled in a divorce mess with a heel like Brickner—the kind of mess that a slippery Broadway shyster would cook up. . . .

He caught himself in consternation, wondering what in the name of God he was doing worrying about *her*. A babe. A Broadway babe. One of Billy Brickner's babes.

He couldn't quite swallow it. Whatever she was, she was a little hayseed, as green as grass. Or was she? Was he himself as Broadway-wise as he thought? What was the percentage in actual figures—the chances of a cute little face and a pair of hungry eyes on Broadway being genuine? A thousand to one that she was strictly from hunger. And yet—she wasn't. He knew damned well that she wasn't. She was all right. A sweet kid.

It dawned on him finally, just how deeply she had laid the finger on him, and he went queasy all over. Hell, it made no sense! He, of all people, was in no position to go for a girl. And if he did have to go for one, why in heaven's name pick one in her position? And why pick *her*?

She jumped back into his mind's eyes. She was no dazzling beauty. On two continents and in a score of cities, he had seen plenty who were. Her skin was like cream, but there was the ghost of freckles across the bridge of her neat, short nose. Moreover, her features were too—too straightforward: nose, short upper lip, soft cherry mouth and round little chin. Without the electricity of her shining eyes and her long bob of midnight hair, she would be colorless.

He stared at himself in the dim washbasin's mirror. His taut, almost raw-boned dark face under its snarl of burl-

mahogany hair reassured him. Whatever fool he might make of himself, no girl was going to fall for that homely dial and those sludge-colored eyes. Especially not with a black smear of grease across his lean jaw.

He set his jaw, swept the whole disturbing argument from his mind. He could—and would—drop her a word of warning about this McVeigh, and to hell with the rest of it. He had grimmer business to worry about. Once he tipped her off, she would be off his mind, where she ought to be.

He did not tip her off that night. He made it a point to be down on the main floor when Brickner came in for his car. He came in, sullen-eyed, tight-lipped, and silent, growled for his car and, when it was brought, climbed in without a word and drove off, alone.

Eddie watched him with vaguely questioning eyes as he snarled the convertible down the street.

At his shoulder, Rusty said in an undertone: "There he is—there's McVeigh now—the shyster I told y'about."

Eddie looked sharply across the street. He was just in time to see an inconspicuous little man in a gray suit and dark fedora slip into a light sedan opposite and drive quickly off in the wake of the big car. He had a mournful, down-in-the-mouth expression, sad granite eyes, a little round face and an unmistakable toupee.

**L**UCK made him miss the girl until the next Tuesday night—or rather, Wednesday morning. She came in at three o'clock A. M. and she had Brickner's stub in her hand. He had neglected to inform Rusty and McKay of Brickner's authorization and he spotted her as she argued with them up front.

She had on a black moire evening dress with minute pink rosebuds down one side of her waist, but still the same white fur bolero. Her shining eyes thanked him when he walked over and told the others that the matter was arranged.



"You going to take it out yourself?" he asked.

"Oh, no. I'm meeting Mr. Brickner here."

He brought the car down and climbed out. Her eyes were on him—almost, it seemed, eagerly. She said quickly: "You're not from Iowa, are you? There were some Barringtons near where I lived."

Since Barrington was strictly a "nom de garage"—one breath of his own name being as good as a warning signal, should Brickner overhear it—Eddie shook his head and mumbled something about Michigan. Then, as something seemed to inhibit his telling her what was on his mind, he said inanely: "You're from Iowa, eh?"

"But definitely. A farmer's daughter—meaning housekeeper, cook, slavey, and bottle-washer. In the dullest, deadiest end of nowhere. And not even one traveling salesman." She said it lightly, hastily—and it made him irrationally furious, in its desperate straining for sophistication.

He had not had the slightest intention of being gruff, but his voice came out that way. He said: "I don't know if you know it, but your boy friend's wife is checking up on you."

The girl's shining eyes went wide, then darkened with fury. She drew herself up. "My boy friend! Well, really! Suppose you mind your own—"

"O.K. Skip it!" he raged.

He went back and hammered mercilessly at a crushed fender. All right, to hell with it! Let her smarten up the hard way, like better girls had done before her. There must be something wrong with his brain anyway, to go falling all over himself to help a dumb little wren like her, anyway.

Brickner came in drunk the following Monday night—with the girl—around eight o'clock. Eddie was hanging up the air hose, was close enough to smell the excess alcohol ten feet away. Brickner

didn't see him. His flushed face was even darker than usual, his eyes bloodstreaked and sullen and there was a twist to his red mouth.

Eddie looked him over viciously. His widow's-peak of gray-white hair was plastered down to his round head and his unpleasant mouth always looked moist. What a Romeo!

He was suddenly furious. There were two doors to the garage—IN and OUT. Eddie went out the far one and leaned his back against the wall to let the rage cool out of his head.

Presently, while he was still standing there, the convertible nosed out, tipped down across the sidewalk and stopped, for traffic. Eddie could have stretched out and touched Brickner's neck.

He almost did. The fat playboy was looking down at the girl and his voice was slaty. "... too damn bad about my language! All right sister. I've let you get away with the Goldilocks stuff too long and you're getting dizzy with it. You'll come out with me tonight to Long Island."

The girl gasped. "I'll do no such thing! If—if that's what you think of me—"

"Stow it! Stow it! Good lord, what kind of sucker do you take me for! I run you around night after night, anywhere you want. I get you a job in the Sinners. I even let you steer me to Joe Plaktis' crap joint—"

"Steer! Billy—I just happened to know—"

"Oh, yeah—you just happened to know! Do you really think I don't know you've been getting a cut of my losses there? I'm dry back of the ears, sister—but *dry*! And it's all O.K., see—only don't get flossy with me. I might drop a little word to the Broadway cops. . . ."

Traffic opened. The convertible bumped forward, swept away.

Eddie stood there for five minutes with the blood pounding in his head before he went in and told Rusty: "I'm off."





HE Sinners was a cocktail-bar and nightclub in the ill-named Puritan Hotel, on Fifty-second Street. It was primarily a bar, with mirrors, chromium and red-and-black enamel making the room gaudy. The entertainment took place on the minute dance floor. He got there as the nine o'clock show opened.

He breathed again as she was announced, and then he watched her routine and his heart sank. There was nothing modest about the strapless, backless—and almost frontless—white sequin evening gown she worked in. Presumably the exposure of her upper body was her selling point. Certainly it couldn't be the patter songs she sang, leaning against the piano, an inept aping of a Ramona or a Hildegarde, as closely as he could figure.

Tonight even the body exhibition didn't win out. The frightened look around her eyes was too noticeable. She went off to only a smattering of applause. Eddie saw her eyes scurry over the room as she bowed off via the bandstand curtain. She beckoned a waiter.

He watched somberly when the waiter reappeared and went over to speak to a customer at a table. Presently the customer—a wooden-faced man with pencil-line mustache and ironed-sleek blond curls—got up, buttoned a double-breasted dinner jacket. He picked his way casually around the bar, strolled out through a narrow door which opened on the corridor to the hotel proper.

A minute later, through the door, Eddie saw the girl hurry along the curving corridor, in the same direction. She wore a little black silk jacket now and carried a black purse.

By the time he had determined to follow her out into the corridor, and had made his way out into the marble-and-gilt of the domed rotunda, he could spot neither her nor the man. He stood irresolute, in the shadow of a line of tall, drooping potted plants.

Just as he set his jaw and started for the desk, the girl's frightened choked voice reached him from the niche behind the plants. "... know I didn't do anything of the sort, Joe. I—Mr. Brickner wanted to gamble. The girls told me you ran an—an honest game. I just—"

The man's voice was cold. "And who says different?"

"Nobody—no, that isn't it. He said—well, he thinks you're paying me. He threatened to tell the cops you were. You—you've got to tell him you're not."

The man swore. "A fat lot my telling him would do. He'd believe *me*, wouldn't he? What . . . Wait a minute! Gentle hell—have you got him sore at you and now he's going to take it out on me?"

"No, no—that is," her voice was desperate with fright, "he wants me to go—go home with him tonight and if I don't, he says he'll get a cop he knows and—"

The blond man's voice was fretful. "I don't get it. Why *won't* you go home with him?"

She sailed out from behind the plants so suddenly that Eddie was left flat-footed. He caught just a glimpse of the handkerchief pressed to her mouth, as her heels click-clicked her rapidly around the bend of the corridor. The wooden-faced man came out, too, stared bleakly, then went on back into the bar.

The corridor, Eddie found, had a half a dozen doors opening from it, some of them blank and unmarked. He traversed it to the stationery shop at the end, without being able to determine which door had swallowed her.

He returned to the bar just in time to spot the wooden-faced blond man near the street door. He was receiving his hat and stick from the checkroom girl, settling the black fedora carefully on his blond curls. Eddie watched him out, vaguely worried.

He breathed a little easier when he learned from the bartender that the performers remained strictly in their balcony dressing-rooms when not actually working, until after the final show at two thirty.



He had no inclination to spend the four hours drinking, so he presently went out to get the cool night air on his face. He was grimly furious with the girl's dizzy-headed behavior, but the last two years had ground a deep forbearance into him. And the last few months had educated him as to the incredible daze that seems to spread over female brains on Broadway—a daze that seemingly only experience can cure.

He sat through a movie to kill time, wandered up to Central Park, dropped into a Broadway billiard-room. He watched two expert players till the hands of the clock crept close to two, then washed up and set out slowly back to the Puritan on foot.

Something unexplained made him stop as he passed the doorman—Soldier Magowan—under the hotel canopy, and ask casually: "None of the floor show girls have gone out yet, have they?"

"Nope. Only that singer of Billy Brickner's. She was sick or something. He took her home, cryin', half an hour ago."

**H**E STOOD on the curb, cold, for nearly three minutes, before he turned and hurried to a pay phone and called Rusty at the garage. "How do I get to Brickner's place on Long Island?"

"Over the Fifty-ninth Street bridge, to the Grand Central Parkway. That leads into the Northern State Parkway. Drop off at the Turnpike and drive ten miles and there's Maquasset. What the hell? You want a car?"

He sped blindly over the route. The coupe that Rusty'd brought had a fresh ring job and he was ruining it. It wasn't worth a thought. Even the war-time forty-mile-an-hour speed limit was scarcely worth a thought. Nothing was, except overtaking the fat playboy before he spoiled—well, something that was pretty nice.

He was almost to the drop-off of the Northern State Parkway when he saw a car's lights at rest on the side of the road. A sailor ran out, semaphoring

urgently. Eddie braked down and the sailor, bug-eyed, stammered hoarsely: "Hey! Over there—on the golf course—dead guy! What'll I do?"

Eddie jerked the handbrake, piled out. The golf course that flanked the parkway here sloped down to a hollow. In the hollow was the green of the twelfth hole. On the velvety oval green were angry tire burns and Brickner's glittering convertible.

Billy Brickner sat inside, and anything that Eddie might have wished to happen to him was no worse than what had happened. His left hand was caught in the spokes of the steering wheel. His head was thrown back. There were parallel scratches down his dough-white face, a bruise on his temple, and a blue-agate tipped hatpin nearly buried in his right eye.

Eddie stood without breathing, and stared. The sailor's flashlight beam wavered, reflected light from the dead man's glassy eye and from a ring on Brickner's trapped left hand. The ring was a thick gold band with a grayish, uninteresting stone. Eddie had never seen it before.

He put a handkerchief over his fingers and snapped on the car's own lights. His thinking was thick. He opened the glove compartment. It was bare and empty.

The sailor said in a hushed voice: "Hey—you shouldn't touch nothing. That guy's been knocked off."

"That's right." Eddie's voice was dry. He shut the convertible's door. "How'd you find him?"

"I was just driving along and I saw the car over there and I thought it was kind of funny."

"Wait here. I'll get a cop."

He wondered giddily whether he should, or not, as he turned the coupe hastily around and sent it back toward the city. He finally pulled into a police booth four miles back. "There's a sailor back there by the golf course asked me to send a cop—something serious," he told the beefy thick-looking cop on duty, and drove on, leaving the other scowling uncertainly.



When he was out of sight, he let the coupe out to the last notch he dared. But it was a long drive back. By the time he rumbled back over the bridge, dawn was turning the sky a vague oyster-gray.

In a drugstore, he found a phone listed for Vivian Donald and drove rapidly downtown and across to the Chelsea district, parked, walked a half block to Twenty-fourth Street. He forced himself to saunter casually around the corner into her narrow, slanting little street.

He picked out with his eye the uninspiring little white, high-stooped house just around the corner. Cards under brass mailboxes in the vestibule assigned her to Apartment 2R. He had pressed the bell, long and urgently, before he made out, through the ground-glass panel, a man's shadow.

The door clicked and he went in to the dimly-lighted hall. A blocky-shouldered man with flaming red hair and a brown tweed suit had his back turned to him, cupping a match to a cigarette. Eddie went on up to the second floor, wiped sweat from his palms and raised a hand to knock on the panel that bore the girl's card.

The door was pulled inward, by an immaculately-dressed, slight little man with a spiked gray moustache and a round, pleasant face. Sunny blue eyes looked up at Eddie pleasantly. "Come in, friend. Come right in."



IT WAS a colorless one-room apartment—maple furniture, a hooked rug, framed silhouettes on the cream walls. A bathroom door was at Eddie's left and beyond it a sleeping alcove. A second man, a giant with bushy blond hair and dull yellow eyes, leaned a shoulder against the alcove doorjamb.

Vivian Donald stood over between two windows. She wore a chalk-striped gray suit and white silk blouse. The blouse was torn at her neck.

"You're a friend of Miss Donald's?"

the little gray man asked cordially. "What's it to you?"

The other quickly, gracefully, extracted and opened a black wallet, exposing a gold shield. "Lieutenant Garrick—Homicide Squad."

Eddie's throat went dry. "Cops? Why cops?"

"The way we do it is—you answer our questions first."

"Hey!" the scowling, bushy-haired giant said. "He sounds like the guy that tipped off the Long Island bulls."

The little gray lieutenant turned friendly eyes on the big man. "I'll tell you when to speak, Frankie."

The redheaded man who had been in the hall below suddenly followed a quick knock into the room and said: "We've got hold of that ambulance-chaser that Brickner's wife had following him around."

The lieutenant ran warm eyes thoughtfully from Eddie to the girl, back again. "Bring him up."

Across the room, Eddie met the girl's hollow, desperate eyes. "Miss Donald—whatever this is, I'm on your side." She swallowed, tried to speak. Her soft little face was set in ghastly lines. The gray-haired lieutenant eyed Eddie sharply.

"Who did you say you were? Oh, yes. Well, what brought you here at this hour?"

Eddie stood silent. The door opened to admit the meek little man he had seen up near the garage—the one Rusty had pointed out as McVeigh. His sad, round gray face was puffed with sleep, his mouse-gray toupee slightly askew. He tendered a fold of papers. The lieutenant reluctantly took his eyes from Eddie.

"Come right in, Mr. McVeigh. What's this?"

"I brought along my last three days' reports on Mr. Brickner's movements. I've already sent the others in to the client."

"Good. Which is tonight's? O. K. Go over there and sit down."

The little lawyer slid around onto the sofa just inside the door, as Garrick



perused the report. The big, bushy-haired Frankie wandered curiously over and gawked over his shoulder.

The big man's lips moved as he read. "Plaktis?" he blurted suddenly. "Joe Plaktis! Hey!"

Garrick nodded, his eyes still absorbed. "Get hold of Plaktis—phone up-town."

The dapper lieutenant flipped the last page, looked somberly at McVeigh. "You know what's happened?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. Al told me. The lady knocked him off."

"Well—she says she didn't."

"I thought he had one of her hatpins in his eye."

"She claims she lost it some time back." He ran back through the reports. "This says Brickner was bucking Joe Plaktis' game? How much did he lose?"

"That I don't know, Lieutenant. He started playing the joint a month ago at least. I've tailed him there a dozen times."

The lieutenant read slowly. "'Tonight he ate dinner with Miss Donald, dropped her at the Puritan, went over and played at Plaktis' till quarter to two. Then he came back and picked her up again. He was drunk and she was crying. They started north on Fifth Avenue.' Where's the rest?"

"I—well, to tell you the truth, Lieutenant, he give me the slip. I still don't know how."

Garrick fingernailed his mustache, lifting his eyes to the girl. "What were you crying about, Miss Donald?"

"Because he—he insisted—he was going to make me go to Long Island with him."

"It says here you got into his car willingly enough."

Her voice was a whisper. "He threatened—I—I'd heard that Mr. Plaktis ran an honest game. When Mr. Brickner wanted to gamble, I suggested—well, he went there. He lost a good deal of money." She swallowed desperately. "Tonight he threatened to tell you that I—I was capping for Mr. Plaktis unless

I agreed to do what he asked me to."

A phone rang thinly downstairs.

GARRICK cocked his ear for a second, then re-focused on her. "And?"

"Oh, I told you—I told you! I got sick at my stomach when we got to the bridge. He put me out on the street and I came home in a taxi."

"But nobody saw—" He broke off as the redheaded detective opened the hall door from the outside, put his head in again and motioned him to come outside.

He went out. He came back in after a minute. He asked the girl casually: "Did Mr. Brickner have on a star sapphire ring when he drove you out to Long Island?"

Eddie's heart contracted, for fear she would fall into the trap, but she put her chin up and said huskily: "He *didn't* drive me out to Long Island. I didn't see any ring."

A sudden silence fell on the room. Garrick said, "Hmmm," and fingernailed his mustache again. "Well—we'll wait a little while." He nodded the harsh-faced Frank over to him, conferred in low tones.

Sweat ran down Eddie's back. With cold, frightening clarity, he saw exactly where he stood. He was gone, the minute they concentrated on him. The minute the shrewd, bright-eyed Garrick thought of peering into Eddie's background . . .

He flayed his brain in a panic. Who *had* killed Brickner? Who was there in the picture that could possibly have done it—apart from the girl? Only Plaktis, the gambler. Or—was it conceivable by any fantastic stretch of imagination that Brickner, caught again in the inevitable gambling crisis, had elected this gruesome way to commit suicide?

It wouldn't wash, and he knew it. In his heart, he was perfectly certain that the shifty fat man had died at somebody else's hand. Of all the scores of ways of committing suicide that there were, it was beyond belief that a man would run a hatpin into his own eye.



Who? Who had? Eddie swallowed. He was trapped—standing on a tight-rope, juggling that question in his hands. If it were not answered before they left this room—if they once got him down to headquarters—even in a routine investigation, his *nom de guerre* would come to light, and then the inevitable disclosures. Somehow, by some fantastic miracle, the truth had to come out now, before the crazy situation smothered him—and perhaps the girl, too.

A siren moaned faintly in the street below. The big, bushy-haired Frank went swiftly over and parted the window curtains. "It's Plaktis," he announced after a minute. "He must've been at the first place they looked."

The wooden-faced man with the immaculate curly blond hair with whom the girl had talked in the Puritan supper-room, was ushered through the door a moment later. He was still in the double-breasted dinner jacket. His cold gray eyes were bloodshot.

"We were wondering," Garrick said conversationally, "about Billy Brickner. Word comes to us that you were reaming him."

The gambler's eyes jumped, showed a flash of yellow light behind the gray. "Reaming? You're crazy. I took him for a few bucks."

"That's not the way we heard it."

Plaktis' cold gaze jerked to the girl and his eyes shrank till they were venomous dots. "What is this? Has that little twist . . . ?"

The big, yellow-haired Frank moved in. "Hell, this rat wants to be straightened out a little first, chief—"

"Now wait a minute—wait a minute," Plaktis hurried. "I'm leveling. He lost a little—no more'n he could afford—maybe a grand or two."

"Up till this morning."

"Including this morning."

"Well—we heard you cleaned him out, Joe."

The gambler's chin jutted belligerently. Big Frankie growled, grabbed for his shirtfront and spun him round to

face a big pink fist. "Get it out, louse—the McCoy!"

"Quit it," the pinioned man choked. "That's the McCoy."

"Lay off, Frankie," Garrick ordered. "For a minute, anyway. So he didn't lose anything much, eh Joe?"

"No, he didn't."

"Did he have a star sapphire on when he was in your place?"

"Tonight? I don't know. I didn't notice."

"You'd notice this one. It was worth plenty—three or four grand. I'm wondering why you didn't get that, too."

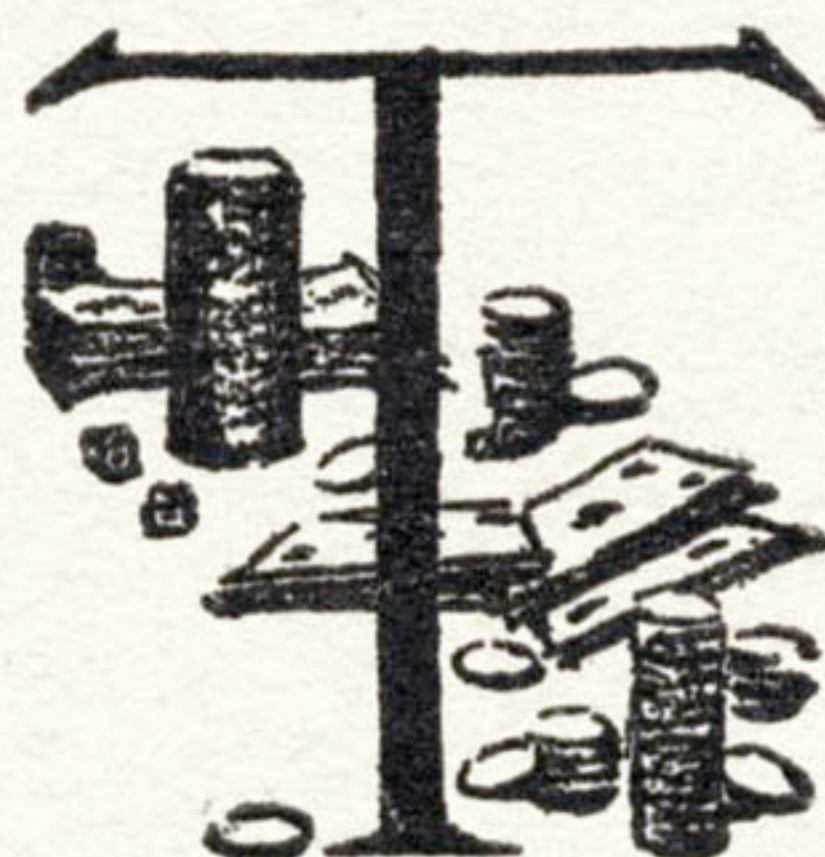
"Cut it out," the other said hoarsely. "I guess he didn't have it on. But I *didn't* break him."

Garrick seemed to relax into thought. He bent his head a long minute. Then he sighed deeply and turned back to the girl. "Well, Miss Donald—I guess you see how it is. When did you say you *lost* this hatpin?" Eddie, following his swift glance, suddenly spotted a second blue-agate-headed pin on the dresser—a twin to the one in Brickner's eye out on the Island.

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know," she cried brokenly. "I've never worn it since the day I arrived. I didn't know it was gone!"

Garrick seemed depressed. "Well—get your things on, Miss Donald."

"Oh, no, no—I didn't do it! I *didn't*!" She covered her face with her hands, and burst into great racking sobs.



HE fever of frantic thought had Eddie's head bursting. Somehow he found himself beside the girl, patting her shoulder. She turned and buried her face in his chest. He mumbled thickly: "Take it easy, baby—take it easy. These blockheads can't get away with it. I know you didn't do it."

"Well, well, *well*," Lieutenant Garrick said. "Now we're making progress. You're the boy friend, eh? Well, that



makes *everything* extremely simple."

"I'm not her boy friend," Eddie said through tight teeth. "I only know her from the garage. But if you had half a brain, you'd see she couldn't do a thing like . . ."

Light bannered across his roiling mind.

It was like a lantern slide suddenly focusing. He choked: "Hell and damnation—wait—wait! I—he—" He stood open-mouthed, gasping.

"Make it good," the yellow-eyed Frank snarled.

Eddie took his arm away from the girl. The big vein on his forehead stood out and his eyes drove to the wooden-faced blond gambler's cold gray ones. He took a rigid step towards him, his hands tight to his trouser-seams.

"You—" he said huskily. "You're a liar in spades."

"Why, damn you!" the gambler blustered.

"Shut up. I get it now. Good lord, I get it now. Billy Brickner *didn't* lose just a little to you tonight. He didn't lose a lot either. He didn't lose a damned thing. You didn't take him. *He took you.*"

The gambler's face was pasty. "Are you crazy?"

"No—but you are. Crazy to try to pretend that you won from him, when the truth is that he took a slice out of you—and a substantial one."

The lieutenant's eyes opened and he swayed forward. Eddie slashed a hand without taking his eyes from Plaktis. "Keep away—don't interfere now."

"I wouldn't think of interfering. I love it. Only how do you make out . . .?"

"That star sapphire. I don't know why I didn't get it the moment I—the moment it was mentioned. Brickner's been carrying a pawn ticket in his car for weeks. For eighteen hundred dollars. And he never had the star sapphire on him since I know him.

"He didn't have it on tonight—early. But he *did* have it at three o'clock. It was in hock at eight o'clock. He un-

hocked it sometime between then and three o'clock. It would even cost him extra to get the pawnbroker to open up at that time of night. The only possible answer is that he came into money—a wad of it—enough to toss around. And what's your guess as to where he came into it?"

Sweat beaded Plaktis' dead-white wooden face and his eyes were shiny. He licked his lips.

"Well?" Garrick bellowed unexpectedly.

Plaktis licked his thin lips, his eyes darting around. He swallowed, blurted: "All right. So he won. Yeah, he won."

"How much, rat?"

"He—if you gotta know, he cleaned me. He went crazy lucky—twenty-four grand—my roll. O. K. Wait—I'll give it to you straight: He took my dough and went out giving me the ha-ha."

The yellow-eyed Frank started, a queer rumble in his throat. "And you after him to get it back! You tail him out to the Island—"

"I didn't," the sweating gambler groaned. "I swear to God I didn't! I knew damned well you'd tag me like that! That's why I said he lost something."

"I see," Garrick's silky voice cut in. "And now, Joe, for the punch line: How did you know to *think* up that little gag. How did you know he was dead?"

Fever discs of color were in Plaktis' cheeks. "Some guy—I don't know who—called me on the phone."

Garrick winced. "Oh, Joe! That stinks. Let's take it over again. How—"

In Eddie's hot head, the lantern slide suddenly whirled, focused again. He caught his breath.

He burst out: "Wait! Wait! It could be! Some guy *could* have called—the louse who tried to frame Miss Donald by using her pin."

Garrick's forehead V'd. "Hell, if Plaktis killed him, Plaktis did the framing."

"But how would he get hold of the hatpin?" Eddie flung hastily. "It was stolen from this room. If Plaktis made



up his mind on the spur of the moment to kill Brickner tonight, he'd hardly know to come up here and prowl the place. Somebody else had a damned sight better chance. Somebody else who was willing to go overboard for twenty thousand dollars—especially when he saw a red-hot chance of getting away clean—"

He dived sideways, jammed a foot against the barely-opened door, just as the little shyster, McVeigh, tried to scuttle through.

The door was driven tight on the hand that the meek-looking, evil little schemer had wriggled through it. He screamed in agony—and his free hand flashed to his armpit, whipped out. The gun in his hand exploded fire and roared downwards at Eddie's foot—and white fire creased the edge of his calf.

He stumbled back hastily, gasping—and McVeigh darted through the door. Furious, Eddie plunged after him. The little lawyer, scurrying down the stairs, whirled back to fire one shot over his shoulder—and Eddie launched himself in a dive. The bullet whistled past his ear and McVeigh screamed as Eddie's rawboned bulk hit him, smashed him from his feet, and they rolled and tumbled to the foot of the stairs.

As they hit, a cascade of bank notes sprayed from McVeigh's pockets, fluttered all over the floor, and as Eddie picked himself up from the unconscious schemer, Garrick stood a few steps above looking down. "Not bad. Not bad at all," he said thoughtfully. "He figured he was safer from a search of his clothes than from a search of his room. So he packed the loot right on him."

**E**DDIE stood in the quiet room a half-hour later, alone with the girl. She was huddled in a chair, half-sick from reaction. He noticed, for the first time, the empty closets in the alcove, the packed bag on the bed, and looked quickly down at her tear-ravaged face and sick, shining eyes.

"Uh—you going somewhere?" he asked her.

She swallowed, blurted, "Oh, yes—yes—if they'll let me come home. They—the men are all going to war—maybe they'll need me. Oh, Eddie, I didn't imagine what a fool I was . . ."

"Well," Eddie said worriedly, and sat on the edge of a chair. "I'm personally, myself, going to war. But there's—uh—a couple of things I'd like to talk to you about, first."



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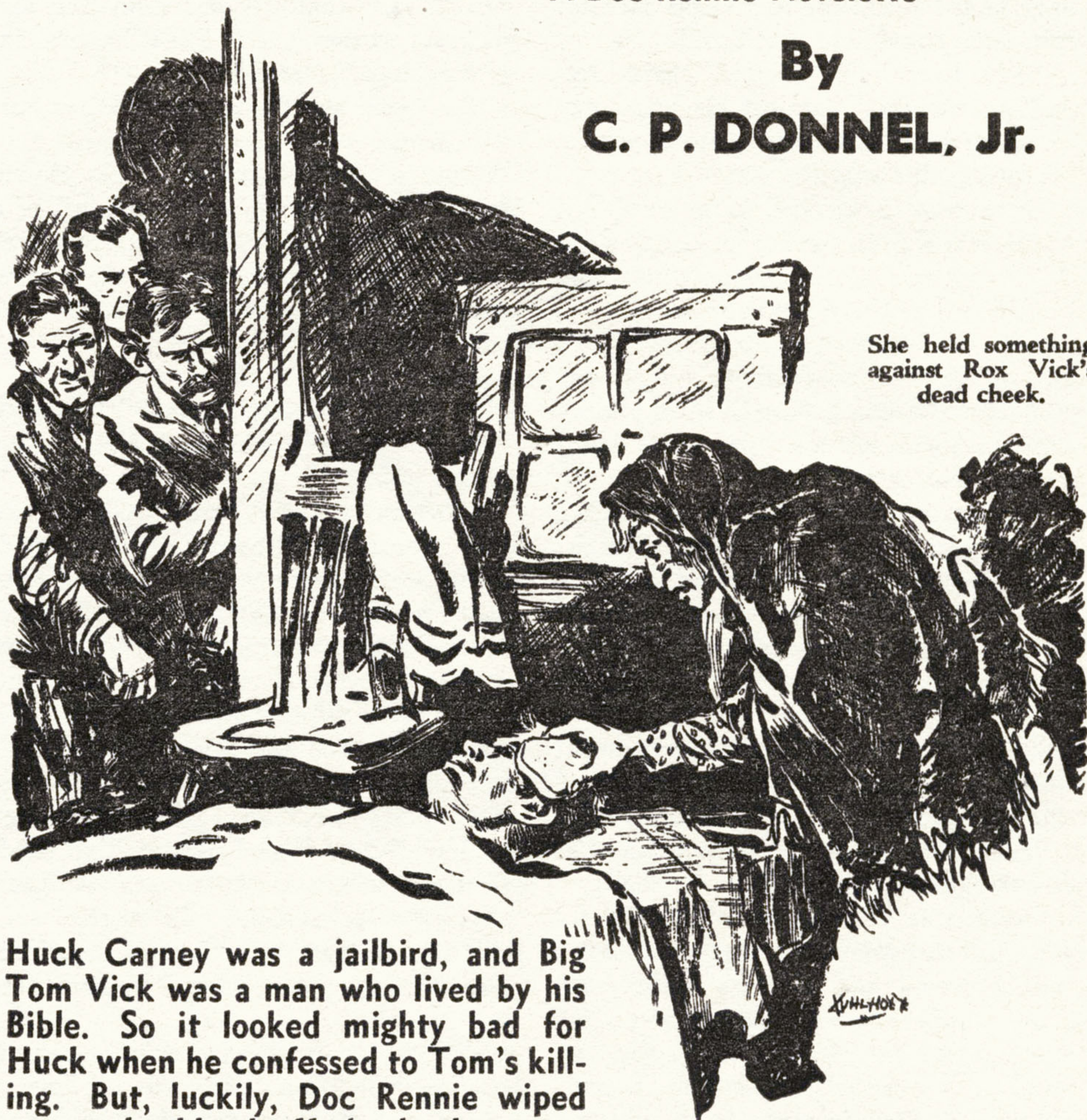
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# BLOOD ON THE BOOK

A Doc Rennie Novelette

By  
**C. P. DONNEL, Jr.**



She held something  
against Rox Vick's  
dead cheek.

Huck Carney was a jailbird, and Big Tom Vick was a man who lived by his Bible. So it looked mighty bad for Huck when he confessed to Tom's killing. But, luckily, Doc Rennie wiped the blood off the book.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Death From a Black Box

**M**AYBE you read about that anonymous gift of \$185,000 to the U. S. O. the other day? No details were given. That was because the gift was born of wickedness and murder.

Doc Rennie (I can't get used to "Col. Walter Rennie, Army Medical Corps")

so I'll just keep calling him "Doc") was directly responsible for that gift, but I like to think that Dave Tyson, my deputy, and I had a small part in it.

It all started that day in my office when Doc Rennie muttered something about "Abe Lincoln."

He was standing at the window looking for a break in the rain, his hands itching for that bass rod in the corner. Poor Doc! Three days' furlough from that blistering job of his in Washington, and here it had to rain the very first day. Dave and I swore to him it would clear



by noon, but he was restless as a cat.

Dave and I looked up from the cribbage board (cribbage is a swell cure for rain-fever) and said, "What?"

"Abe Lincoln in Illinois," said Doc, without turning. Against the gray day his wiry red hair was almost brown. "Heading this way."

Dave and I ditched our hands—it makes talk if folks catch the county sheriff playing cribbage in the morning—and joined him at the window.

"That's Huck Carney, Ed," Dave said. "You know—that queer lay preacher who's built himself a log church over Vick's Mountain way. But who's the girl with him?"

"Never saw either of 'em before," I said. I'd heard talk of Carney, though: something about some trouble between him and the Vick boys. I took another look at the girl. Something about her reminded me vaguely of. . . . But no, it couldn't be.

A moment later the street door opened and they brought the rain in with them. They were a grim couple, those two—hatless, hair plastered down, clothes drenched, shoes squelching.

"Which one o' you gentlemen is Sheriff McKay?" asked the man in a husky voice. Seeing him close, I understood Doc Rennie's reference to Lincoln. Except for the beard, this Huck Carney could have posed for Lincoln. He was tall as Doc Rennie and rawboned as a starved mule, and his hands looked hard as plowhandles.

"I am," I said. My eyes kept straying to the girl—or rather, woman. She looked about thirty, and she'd been pretty once, but now she was pitiful. It wasn't so much the sleazy dress and splayed shoes. It was the drawn cheeks and sagging mouth, and the dull eyes that watched this fellow Carney like a whipped dog.

**D**AVE TYSON bent over the wood-box and straightened up with an armful of kindling. Doc Rennie lifted my old stormcoat from its wall-peg and

draped it around the woman's shoulders.

"Please sit down," he said. He saw what I saw, that she was dead beat and rocking on her feet. "We'll have a fire in a minute," he said.

She never moved, never took her eyes off Carney.

Carney nodded at her. "Sit down, Julie." His feverish eyes were all of a sudden gentle, and his husky voice was kindly. Doc Rennie pulled my swivel chair out, and she sank into it like she was hypnotized.

Julie!

"You're not Julie Tanner?" I gasped.

It was Carney who answered, "Yes, sir."

I felt sick. Julie Tanner couldn't be over twenty. She'd been a handsome kid, bright as a dollar, when they lived next door to us. Her father, Ollie Tanner, had been a good friend to me, and my wife and I had played aunt and uncle to Julie. Then Ollie died, and Mabel Tanner had married Big Tom Vick and taken Julie to live at Big Tom's place behind Vick's Mountain. Some years later we heard that Mabel Tanner had died. That was about all we'd heard. Vick's Mountain people don't talk much.

Huck Carney's eyes read my face. "Julie ain't had much fun," he said simply.

"Where's her stepfather?" I asked, tingling. Big Tom Vick was a giant of a man, and I'm crowding forty-five and paunchy, but at that moment I think I could have whipped him.

The "Reverend" Huck Carney squared his sloping shoulders.

"Dead," he said. "That's what I come to see you about, Sheriff." A queer note in his voice made Dave turn quickly from the stove, a lighted match in his hand.

"I killed him," said Huck Carney. "Last night."

I swallowed. "How?"

For answer, Carney spread out his great, knobby hands. The knuckles were nicked and purply and swollen. I had a vision of Tom Vick, built like a water tank, with the sinews of a cinnamon bear.



Huck Carney read my face the second time.

"He was a powerful man," he said quietly. "But I'm a powerful man myself." He talked calm enough, but you could feel that something was torturing his mind and twisting his heart. Suddenly he joined his fingers together. "Lord," he said, "I know I done wrong. I lost my faith for awhile there." There were no frills about this; no oratory. He was looking down and talking like you would to a friend. "I'll try and do better," he went on. "And Lord, I know you won't hold it against Julie for something she had nothin' to do with."

I was embarrassed. Listening was like eavesdropping on a strictly private conversation. Doc Rennie, his hands on the back of the swivel chair, his ice-blue eyes weighing Carney like a pair of scales, said: "Why did you kill this man—this girl's stepfather?"

"He hexed Julie," said Huck Carney. He flushed. "I know that ain't part o' regular religion, and I shouldn't have believed it, but he said he was going to, and . . ." Carney moved to Julie's side, one hand brushing her shoulder. His attitude said: "And look at her."

"Couldn't stand it," he said tightly. "Seein' her grow more poorly every day."

Something in the way Huck Carney stood, in the way his arms hung, made me blurt: "You ever been in jail?"

"Yes, sir." Carney might have been answering a warder. "In Tennessee, where I come from." That explained his accent.

"What for?"

He looked me in the eye. "For killin' a man."

"How long?"

"Seven years, sir. Paroled last fall."

"Why'd you come to Vick's Mountain? And you can quit calling me 'sir.'"

"Just happened to light there. I was wanderin'—lookin' for a place to do a bit of farmin' and preachin'. I got religion in jail." His knuckles cracked as he

twisted his hands together. "I was drunk when I killed that feller back home. I got things to—to make up for." The words were slow, and came from deep in him.

I glanced at Doc Rennie. The way he'd been staring at Carney suggested that he had something on his mind. But his eyes didn't tell me a thing.

"You and Julie married?" I shot at Carney.

His gaze never wavered a bit. "No. She came to me because she had no place to go." He rubbed her thin shoulder awkwardly. "I ain't lettin' her marry a man on parole." He hesitated, like something was hurting his throat. "I've never touched her," he said. Strangely enough, I believed him.

"Why did Miss Tanner go to you?" asked Doc Rennie softly.

"Tom Vick wanted me." We all started a little as Julie Tanner spoke. Her voice was dead, like her feelings had been burned out. "He kept after me. I was scared of him and that black box. So I run away." Her slack mouth trembled, but that was the only sign.

Before I could speak, Doc Rennie said: "Tell us about the black box, Miss Tanner." His tone would have made a wooden Indian open up. Doc Rennie was a brain surgeon once, and he's a psychiatrist now, and sometimes I think he can see inside people's heads.

Julie Tanner's eyes began to resemble a human being's. "Tom Vick was tied up with the Devil," she said. "He had powers. They come from a black box he had."



DOC RENNIE was politely interested. "I see. How did he use these powers, Miss Tanner?"

"In bad ways." She was as earnest as a child. "He run the mountain, Mr. McKay. All them fellows that made liquor up that way had to give him money. He made them come to meetin's at our



house, every so often, at night." Her whole body began to quiver, and I saw Huck Carney's hand tighten on her shoulder.

"They'd sit around a table with just one candle," she went on shakily. "I never seen what they did. But once or twice fellows who'd made trouble about payin' up came to those meetin's, and after that they always paid up like the rest. The whole mountain knows Tom Vick did witches' work with that black box and whatever was in it. I used to see him puttin' it away behind the mantel when they'd gone."

Part of this, at least, was true. I'd tried more than once to get evidence that Tom Vick was tied up with the liquor-making on the mountain. Once I even got hold of a fellow he'd beaten up, bad. But would that fellow talk? Nary a word. Now I knew why.

"You say your stepfather wanted you?" said Doc Rennie.

"He come to my room one night about a month ago," said Julie Tanner, so low we could hardly hear her. "I was in bed; he knew that. I fought him. He smacked me and dragged me into the living-room and lit a candle. He said he'd take my body and soul at the same time, so I'd never get away from him. Then he went to the mantel and fetched out that black box."

There was hysteria in Julie Tanner's voice now. Dave Tyson made a growling sound in his throat. Doc Rennie looked away. I knew how they felt.

"Soul and body," she shrilled. "I run away while he was fetchin' the box. If he'd opened that box . . ."

I thought, "Here it comes," and waited for her to break down and cry, like another woman would have done. Instead, she went rigid. Doc Rennie leaned forward, worried. His eyes searched her face.

"I can't cry," she ground out between her teeth. "I want to cry, and I can't."

Doc Rennie said, "I'm sorry." He said it half to himself. Then his freckled hand shot out and caught her a sharp

whack across her sallow cheek. It was just short of brutal, that blow.

But the tears came, great floods of them, with choking sobs that tore at her inside. For an instant I was sore at Doc Rennie, but the next moment the relief of her tears loosened me up.

From the corner of my eye I saw Dave Tyson shift his bulk quickly to Huck Carney's side, and saw why. Huck Carney had cocked his fist to swing on Doc Rennie, but the tears and sobs froze him. Now he understood.

Doc Rennie stood up and looked at Huck Carney. "So she ran to you, eh?"

Carney had himself in hand. He nodded. "I took her in. Then a week later that nephew o' Big Tom's brought her a note from him. Big Tom said in that note that he was puttin' a hell's curse on her out o' that black box, and that she'd sicken and die if she didn't come back and—and live with him." There was thunder and lightning in Huck Carney's face. I wouldn't like to be the man who crossed him when he was mad.

"I told her the Lord would look after her," he went on, "but that devil Big Tom had beaten down her faith. She sickened and couldn't eat none. Then last night I thought, why maybe the Lord's expectin' me to take some action. So I went to see Big Tom."

Julie's sobs had worn themselves out now. And I don't think Doc Rennie or Dave or I moved so much as a finger.

"I told Big Tom he'd have to take that curse off'n Julie," said Huck Carney. "I didn't preach at him none—just told him, man to man. He told me to git out before he broke my back—that he'd take the curse off'n her when she come back to him, and not before."

There was a soft glow behind Carney's dark eyes. I gritted my teeth. Here was a man who'd gone for Big Tom Vick barehanded.

"Then he begun to talk filthy about me and Julie." Carney's voice was down in his chest. "So I smacked his lyin' mouth. He laid holt of my arm."

Carney pulled up his sopping sleeve.



I told you Tom Vick was a strong man. This Carney had bunches of rawhide for muscle, but there were five black blotches on his brown arm where Big Tom's fingers had marked him.

"He tried to knee me," said Huck Carney. "So I smashed his mouth proper for him. He come back at me. I ain't tryin' to excuse myself when I tell you gentlemen he was goin' to kill me if he could."

I believed that, too; twice over. A blow in the face is a killing matter up Vick's Mountain way. And I doubt if anybody's had the guts to hit Big Tom Vick for twenty years.

"He was goin' for my throat." Huck Carney's hands shook just a trifle. "I knew if he laid holt of me there, I was a goner. So I smashed his face a couple more times and he went over backwards. His head hit the stone fireplace and he lay there. He was still breathin' when I left."

"You were afraid?" This from Doc Rennie, and a damn silly question, I thought.

CARNEY looked a little surprised. But he nodded. "That's right." He gripped the back of the chair. "The smell of those stinkin' words was still in my nose—that and the thought of what he'd tried with Julie. I ain't safe when I'm mad. I'd have torn his lyin' throat out if I'd stayed. So I run while I could still keep my hands off'n him."

"When did you find out you'd killed him?" I asked.

"A man come to my house 'bout two hours later—around eleven," answered Carney. "Ad Wilkins, his name is—the only half-decent feller in Vick's whole crowd. He told me Ben and Rox Vick—you know them, Sheriff?—they're Tom Vick's—"

Dave Tyson said, "I know 'em," like he was talking about being acquainted with a pair of skunks. Which was nearer right than it sounds. Ben is Tom's brother, a gray-headed, fat little jackal who took what Tom gave him, then

passed his own leavings on to his son, Rox—a lean, shifty-eyed specimen about twenty-five that never did an honest day's work in his life.

"Go on," I told Carney.

"Ad Wilkins told me Ben and Rox had seen me run from Tom's house. Then they'd found Tom was dead, and begun spreadin' a tale that I'd sneaked in and bashed his head in with a club. He told me Ben and Rox were rousin' up the other men . . ."

Carney looked squarely at me. "I was comin' in to give myself up today. But when Wilkins told me they was talkin' about me and Julie livin' in—in sin, and that they was goin' to fix me for killin' Big Tom and then tar and feather Julie and run her off'n the mountain . . ."

Carney's calm was cracking. Dave began to pat his foot.

"I figgered we'd better leave right then," Carney finished up, talking quick. "It was rainin' but we walked it—thirty mile." His eyes were a little wild. "I'm ready for to go in your jail," he said, "but if you can only find some place where Julie can be comf'table—where nobody won't badger her none."

"Julie's going straight to my house," I promised him. The words came out husky. "Then we'll go have a look at Big Tom. You aren't scared to go back with us?"

Carney just looked at me. Then he touched Julie's shoulder. "The sheriff's takin' you to his house," he said. She stood up, and her face had that same blank look it had when she first came in.

So we piled into the car and went to my house. The rain had stopped, and my wife was in the garden. She came over to the car.

Huck Carney helped Julie out. I saw my wife's eyes bug out when she saw her. She knew her right away.

"Julie's staying with us for a while," I said, like Julie had just come for a social visit.

What my wife thought, I couldn't tell.



She put an arm around Julie and said: "Why, that's just wonderful! Now you just come straight in the house, Julie, and get out of those wet clothes."

Huck Carney stammered: "Could you wait a minute, please ma'am?" Julie turned. The numb, hopeless longing in her eyes took me by the throat.

The sun was hot between the clouds. As Carney drew breath, things were so quiet that the drip-drip on the leaves was like a drum-beat in my ears.

"I wish we could ha' been married," he said to her, staring down at a puddle. "I ain't ever had a girl in my whole life except you. In my whole life." He bit his lip. "I'm sorry I made all this trouble for you, Julie," he mumbled, and got back in the car.

Julie's big eyes widened and filled up. You could tell from his voice that these were the first words of that kind he'd ever spoken to her.

I shot the car in gear and we took the road through the foothills toward where Vick's Mountain bulged blue-green in the rainy haze. Nobody had much to say. Huck Carney had things on his mind that I wouldn't have liked to have on mine.

And I had my job to do. And this wasn't the first time I hadn't wanted to do it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Reception Committee



WE DIDN'T see anybody on the road, but in a whiskey country news travels like chain lightning. When we turned up the driveway that led between fat oaks to Big Tom's old farmhouse of whitewashed logs—the Vicks had been solid people once, and respected—we could see the men waiting for us on the front porch. They had shotguns. I sneaked a look at Carney, who sat beside me. He'd seen the men,

too, but nothing of it showed in his gaunt face. Seeing his profile, I realized for the first time that he wasn't as old as I'd figured at first. Thirty-five would cover him.

We pulled up in front of the house and the first thing I heard when the motor died was the mutter running between the dozen-odd men on the porch. I saw Ben Vick's badger-gray head in the background. He was talking to Cam Fowler, who'd been close to Big Tom, and one of the Christy boys. Rox Vick got up from where he'd been sitting with his feet on the railing, and slid into the rear rank.

As we got out, I noticed the gang kind of bunching together on the steps, like they didn't mean to let us through. I started up the steps, but they didn't give way. Dave moved up beside me, breathing heavy through his nose.

Cam Fowler pushed through from the rear and stood on the top step looking down at me.

I said: "Break it up, boys. I've got a job to do."

Cam Fowler spread his lips back from his buck teeth in a grin I didn't care much for. He hitched his old ten-gauge up under his left arm.

"Go ahead," he said, real easy. "We got a little job to do ourselves." He glanced around. Several men nodded slowly. "We'll just take this preacher guy off your hands, Ed," he said, his eyes turning wary as Dave moved. Dave's temper is short. Things were getting tight. I couldn't think of anything to say, so I did the next best thing. I laughed. Not a chuckle, you understand, but a big, loud laugh, like this was the funniest set-up I'd ever run into.

That puzzled them. It checked Dave a second, too. They'd been priming themselves for gun-trouble. They couldn't quite figure a laugh.

Cam Fowler clumped down the steps to where I stood. He waited till I was through laughing.

"Tell us," he said, still easy. "We'll



laugh too." His eyes were ugly now.

"Why, you bunch o' morning glories," I said. "Trying to kid yourselves you got guts enough to do in the daylight what you didn't have guts enough to do last night." From the corner of my eye I saw Cam Fowler flush.

"That yellow dog run out on us last night," he said. "Him and that little——of his."

I heard Huck Carney draw breath. I said: "Say that again, Cam. I didn't quite hear you."

Fowler shot out his lower lip. "I said him and that little——of his run out on us."

I spread my hand over his beefy face and pushed, hard. He lit on his shoulders in a flower-bed, his gun clattering against a rock.

"Come on," I said over my shoulder, ignoring Cam.

**D**AVE TYSON waited until Doc Rennie and Carney had closed in behind me, then followed as rear guard. I marched straight up the steps. The shorter Christy brother and a green-eyed man in overalls blocked me. I plowed between them like I didn't see them, bulling them apart with my shoulder. The others began to shuffle aside and clear a path to the front door.

Before you hang any medals on me, let me remind you that the more guys I got between us and Cam Fowler, the safer we were. By the time Cam had picked himself up and got his wits together, he couldn't bear down on us with that ten-gauge without ripping up half the men on the porch.

I booted open the screen door and ushered Doc Rennie and Dave and Carney in. Then I said, officially: "I'll need you, Ben Vick, and you, Rox. The rest can go."

Rox Vick's eyes slid aside as I glared at him, but he sidled toward the door like a chicken-killing dog. Ben Vick was wearing a vest, and I guess that made him think he was a justice of the peace or something. He swelled up like a toad

in a tree and brayed: "You can't get away with this rough stuff around here, Ed McKay. We got some rights, and we mean to—" I could tell from his attitude that he saw himself as head man now that Big Tom was gone.

I interrupted him by rapping his shoulder. "Inside," I said. He squeezed past me. "Hurry up, Rox," I ordered. Rox Vick slunk in. He stunk of corn liquor.

I faced the rest of the crew. My hands were in my pockets, but not deep. My right one felt lonesome so far from my gun. I'd bluffed this bunch so far, but the longer they stayed together on the porch, the more chance there was that one of them might get his nerve back and touch off bad trouble.

"Any more witnesses?" I asked.

Not a peep out of them.

"Then you fellows had better beat it," I said.

Cam Fowler scrambled up the steps. A couple of them eyed him hopefully, thinking he might give them a lead. But he just roared: "I'll fix you, damn your soul!" He turned to the others. "You gonna let Ed McKay walk in and tromp all over you?"

Dave Tyson grunted to himself as he pushed past me. His big paw dropped on Cam's shoulder. "You're under arrest," he said. The back of Dave's thick neck was fiery red.

Cam goggled. One of the others yelled, "What for?" Dave hesitated.

"Inciting a riot," I put in, quick. While they were digesting that one, Dave hauled Cam inside, took his ten-gauge away, and fished out a handful of home-loaded brass shells from the pocket of Cam's dungarees. "Wait here, Cam," he ordered, pointing to a chair. "O.K., Ed."

Doc Rennie's blue eyes twinkled and his mouth twitched at the corners. The nod he gave me was like a pat on the back.

I felt Huck Carney, beside me, stiffen as he went into the living-room, Ben and Rox Vick trailing silent behind us. I



gulped as a rat skittered across the floor.

Before the fireplace a houseflies' Battalion of Death was holding services in the air over the blotchy sheet that covered Big Tom Vick.



DOC RENNIE replaced the sheet over Big Tom's surprised eyes and stood up, wiping his hands thoughtfully on a scrap of newspaper. There was a new expression on his face as he looked at Huck Carney. He beckoned me closer with a little jerk of his red head, and said something in my ear. I looked at Carney, too.

"I thought you said you just used your hands," I barked, reddening at the thought of the sympathy I'd been wasting on him.

Huck Carney didn't answer. I thought I saw a furtive look cross his face.

Ben Vick strutted forward, thumbs in the armholes of his vest, a brass collar button doing collar-and-necktie duty in the grimy neckband of his shirt. He snorted. "Ask the 'Reverend' what it was he threw away when he run from the house last night."

"I didn't throw nothing away," said Huck Carney, to me. "I never hit him with nothing but my hands."

Ben Vick's dirty forefinger aimed down at the hulk on the floor. "You never killed my brother with your hands." He laughed sarcastically. "You sneakin' rat, he'd of torn you to pieces."

I glanced at Doc Rennie. Hands on his hips, he gazed down at Big Tom. There was puzzlement in his face, like he was reluctant to believe he'd been wrong.

I got it. Those arms of Big Tom's, those awful shoulders—it was almost beyond belief that Huck Carney could have killed him like he said he had. Big Tom must have weighed close to 300, and now, after seeing him, I had trouble swallowing Carney's yarn that it was

his fists that had driven Big Tom back so hard that a corner of the stone mantel could have punched those wounds into his thick skull. Wounds! Huck Carney had said Big Tom's head had hit the mantel only once.

I'd tabbed the case as manslaughter. This was shaping into second-degree murder at least, if not first-degree.

Doc Rennie must have followed at least part of what was passing through my mind, for he said: "Waiting won't make it any easier, Ed."

"No, it won't," I said. I wheeled on the Vicks. "You say you saw Carney throw something away when he left the house?"

Ben Vick scratched his head. "Not exactly," he admitted finally. "But we seen him—just a short piece from the house—swing his arm, and a couple seconds later we heard something crash into them bushes over beside the tool-house." Ben looked at his son for confirmation, and Rox bobbed his head.

"Did you look to see what it was?"

"We had another little matter on our minds 'bout that time," answered Ben grimly.

"Take Dave out now," I ordered, "and show him where to look." They went like they were glad to get out.

"By the way," Doc Rennie called, just as the Vicks and Dave were going out the front door, "where did Tom Vick keep his black box?"

Dead silence. Ben Vick reappeared in the doorway.

"Where did your brother keep his black box?" repeated Doc Rennie, gazing down at him. "Miss Tanner told us that her stepfather kept some mysterious object in a black box and used it for what she described as witches' work."

Ben Vick's pale eyes widened and he laughed. "You ain't payin' any attention to *her*, I hope. Everybody around here knows Julie Tanner ain't quite right."

"You didn't answer me," said Doc Rennie, frosty. "Where did he keep his black box?"

"I don't have to answer you," Ben



flared. "And I don't know nothin' about no black box—unless he kept money in it." He turned to Carney. "You been beggin' nickels to build a Sunday School with, Carney. Sure you didn't help yourself after you killed Tom?"

Carney took a step in Ben's direction, shaking all over. Ben stood his ground, knowing he was safe with us there.

"If you want to look for something," Ben rasped at me, "look for the money Tom had here. He told me last week he had a couple thousand dollars in his old hideaway behind the mantel. He was goin' to take it down to the bank this week."

"Whiskey money?" I was sarcastic.

"I never ast him," said Ben sweetly and went out.

**D**OC RENNIE'S mouth was wry. "I have an uncomfortable feeling," he said slowly, "that you and I have been taken in by our emotions."

"I wish you hadn't mentioned that black box," I snapped. "I was saving that for later." To Carney I said: "You want to change that story of yours? It doesn't sound so good now."

Carney shook his head, heavily.

"Did Julie tell you where Big Tom kept that black box?"

"She just said it was behind the mantel."

"And you never looked for it?" The more I thought about it, the weaker his story became. "That box that had the curse on Julie—why didn't you find it and burn it up?"

Carney's square chin, his dark eyes, were obstinate. He said: "I told you, Sheriff—I was afraid I'd kill Big Tom if I stayed. I didn't know he was dead then."

I turned away, disgusted with myself for not having caught the soft spots in his tale when he first told it.

Doc Rennie's fingers crawled up and down in the angle of the mantel like a spider's legs. A second after I joined him he said, "Ah!" and pulled out one brick, then another. His hand, wrist, and elbow disappeared into the hole. He shook his head. "Empty," he said, brushing mortar dust from the sleeve of his old canvas hunting jacket.

Big Tom had an old-type rolltop desk in one corner of the room.

"While we're waiting," I told Carney, "how about writing out your story of the killing, just for the record." I wanted to be fair with him. To my surprise, he shook his head.

"I ain't writing out a thing," he said, sullen.

"It's your funeral," I said.

Doc Rennie said quickly: "Surely, Carney, you won't mind dictating a short

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version of what you told us this morning. It won't incriminate you. And after what the sheriff has done for Julie . . ."

That fetched Carney, although I thought it was kind of cheap of Doc Rennie to throw Julie up to him, even at this time. But I knew the Doc was only trying to help. In another minute he was at the desk with a quill pen in his fist and a sheet of clean paper before him.

Carney began to talk—almost the same words he'd used in my office. My attention wandered. I didn't want to hear that yarn again. The pen scratched and the flies buzzed. I wished we were out on the cool lake with our bass rods; not tied up in a case that smelled of death and lies and heartbreak.

I heard Dave and the Vicks coming across the yard. Ben Vick was excited. I looked out the window. Sure enough, Dave had something in his hand. I thought, "Oh, hell."

The pen-scratching stopped. Doc Rennie said: "Just read it over before you sign." Huck Carney took the sheet of paper in his knobby hands and ran his eyes over it. He took the pen from Doc Rennie and scrawled something on the bottom. I saw Doc Rennie's eyes glisten, like he'd pulled off a smart trick, but all he said was, "Thank you," and folded the paper up and stuck it in his pants pocket.

Dave lumbered in, the Vicks right on his heels. "See what I told you, Ed," crowed Ben.

Dave said, "Shut up, Ben," and handed me a round bolt of firewood with brown dried blood on one end. "Found this in the bushes," he said.

I fingered the rough, dry bark. Not a chance in the world of getting a print from it.

"You'll swear in court you saw Carney throw something away last night—something that landed about where you found this?" I asked the Vicks.

Rox Vick's restless eyes lit up. "You bet your sweet life we will," he said.

"Supposin'," added Ben, real gently,

"that this case ever comes to court."

I gritted my teeth. I knew what he meant. That gang with the guns hadn't quit. There were places on the road back to Essexville where they could bushwack us and take Carney. Safer for them that way, too, because there'd be less chance of us identifying them, particularly at night. I decided right then to run it by daylight, and run it fast.

"Go home and get ready to go to town with us," I told Ben and Rox. "I'll need you for material witnesses."

"It'll take me some time to git ready," drawled Ben, deliberate. "Got things to do around the farm before I can leave."

"You'll be ready in a couple of hours," I said, hard. It was after two then. "Or I'll come and hurry you up. I suppose you want an undertaker for Big Tom?"

"Yeah," said Ben, edging out. "Call Chronister for me, will you? Phone's in the back hall."

They left.

Doc Rennie said, quick and sharp: "Don't do it, Carney."

Dave and I jumped. I saw for the first time that Carney's eyes had got wild, and that he was glancing around like the room had suddenly become a trap. He was getting ready to make a break for it as sure as you're born. It was lucky Doc Rennie had spotted the signs when he did. Otherwise we might have had to hurt him. And it would've been suicide for him to be loose on the mountain once it got known he was free.

"It's no use," said Doc Rennie calmly. His tone seemed to penetrate. Carney sat down and put his face in his hands. I saw a pulse ticking behind his right ear. But he was licked, and he knew it.

I was just about to go call old Doc Frisbie, our county coroner, and Sam Chronister, the undertaker, when Dave's hand closed on my arm. I saw him and Doc Rennie cocking their ears toward the hall. I froze.



A creak of Big Tom's floorboards had given the fellow away. He was treading quietly as a stoat. He must have come in the back way. I tiptoed one step toward the door, reaching for my right hip. The fellow must have heard me, because he stood still, listening. In another second he'd run. I charged out, gun in hand.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Death in the Woods



I HAD been expecting one of the porch crowd. Instead, I found a wizened little guy about sixty, with a fringe of white hair around a foxy face. He had no gun, and when he saw the shiny barrel of my thirty-eight he gulped and turned green.

"In there," I said, standing aside. He eased past me like he was afraid I'd clip him.

Huck Carney glanced up. "Hi, Ad," he said dully.

"Howdy, Reverend." The little guy gulped again when he saw what the flies were buzzing around. He turned to me, his green cheeks whitening. "Big Tom's reelly a dead 'un?"

"He really is," I said.

Ad—this must be Ad Wilkins, the one who'd tipped Carney off the night before—sighed with relief and seemed to grow a size larger, but his eyes stayed cautious. He took a long look at me and Dave, and a longer one at Doc Rennie.

"You give yourself up, Reverend?" he asked Carney.

Carney said: "Yep, Ad. Now they say I beat his head in with a club."

"You didn't do that, Reverend?" Wilkins was shocked.

"Nope." Carney bowed his head.

"Julie Tanner all right?" asked Ad sympathetically.

Carney winced. I was getting tired of

this. "Who are you and what do you want?"

Ad Wilkins cringed under my tone. He was shaking like a leaf. "I come to tell you something," he said. "You're Sheriff Ed McKay, ain't you?"

"Go ahead," I told him.

"Rox Vick stole some money off'n me—two hundert dollars." Wilkins' gray eyes wavered toward the fireplace like he was afraid Big Tom would rise up and go for him.

"When?" I wondered why Doc Rennie sounded so interested.

"'Bout eight months ago."

"Why in hell did you wait so long to report—" I began. Ad Wilkins just looked at the humped-up sheet and I understood. "How'd Rox do it?" I asked.

"Come and told me Big Tom wanted it," said Ad resentfully. "Ain't that the same as stealin'—after he tole me Big Tom'd hex me with his black box, didn't I give it to 'em."

"Extortion by threats and violence, Ed," put in Doc Rennie, like the lawyer for the prosecution.

"Listen," I said to Ad, "this is a murder case, and I haven't got time . . ." Then I thought of something. "You'll press that charge?"

"Yep." Ad Wilkins was scared but game. "Those devils was gonna get the Reverend here lynched. I'll do anything I kin to mess 'em up, the dirty dogs. And the money them and Big Tom have scared outa folks on the mountain—Sheriff, you wouldn't believe me—"

I said, "Choke it off a moment, Ad," and started for the door.

"Where you going?" asked Dave, quick.

"To fetch Rox Vick," I said. It had come to me that this spiel of Wilkins', weak as it was, was a godsend. Now I could stop Ben Vick from stalling until dusk. With a charge to hold Rox on, I could grab Rox and be away from there in half an hour. I had a pretty good idea that Ben would come along, too.



Dave said: "I'll go with you."

"You'll stay here with Carney." I stomped out. Dave's always afraid I'll get hurt. By the time I reached the porch I was ashamed of myself for yelping at him. When I looked at the path that led through the woods to Ben's place, I began to wish Dave was along. Suppose Cam Fowler was laying for me. A crawly feeling moved up my spine at the vision of what that tenguage of Cam's, with her choke barrel, would do to me.

"Let's go, Ed." Doc Rennie was beside me.

"I suppose Dave sent you. Well, let me tell you, Doc—"

"I came out for a breath of air," said Doc Rennie, bland as suet.

I LOPED into the woods. Doc Rennie's long legs carried him along easily beside me. The path twisted around a couple of giant oaks. Then, way ahead, like in a tunnel, we saw Ben and Rox Vick stepping along pretty brisk. I was puffing, but I kept going, and we were halfway to them when they heard us and looked back, still walking.

"Wait," I shouted.

They stopped, and Ben Vick cupped his hands to his mouth. The words seemed to take a long time to reach us. "What you want?"

"Rox," I shouted, and hurried on. Even at that distance we could see the quick movement Rox made.

"What for?" came Ben Vick's voice.

"None o' your business," I shouted, then saved my breath for hurrying. Rox and Ben began to argue. We were close enough now to hear their voices, but couldn't catch the words. Rox Vick kept glancing our way and shaking his head at his father.

Doc Rennie panted: "Ed, that young fool's getting ready to—" He didn't have to finish. We were within fifty yards of them now. Rox Vick gave one final look in our direction before he faded into the underbrush.

Doc Rennie went ahead of me like a deer, and I sprinted after him. He didn't stop to talk to Ben—just dived in where Rox had vanished, and I plunged in after him. I caught up with him when he stopped under a spearhead oak to listen. I stopped, too. Not a sound. Rox was hiding. But he couldn't be far from us.

"Come out, Rox," I yelled, "or we'll come get you."

"Careful, Ed." Doc Rennie was down on one knee, squinting along the ground.

"Careful, hell! That long drink o' water hasn't got the—"

*Whap!* Doc Rennie dragged me down. The bullet must've clipped a dead twig overhead, for bits of bark rained down on my neck.

*Whap!* I unshipped my gun. The second one had been closer. He must be able to see us. Then we both saw the powdersmoke drifting out of a sassafras clump a couple of dozen yards away; then heard the sound of feet crashing over dead leaves and dry branches. We were up and on our way in a second. We slid down the steep bank of a small creek and were starting up the slope on the other side when Rox Vick stepped from behind a fat stump at the top of the rise, gun in hand.

Doc Rennie yelled: "Put that gun down. All we want—"

Rox Vick, face pasty, drew a bead on Doc. Our two shots came together. I had to shoot by Doc's right arm. Later we found powder burns on his jacket-sleeve.

Doc Rennie went "*Ugh!*" like he'd been punched in the stomach. That made me wild. I didn't know, for the moment, whether to stay with Doc or run ahead and kick Rox Vick's head into his spine.

Rox staggered forward and, just as I was about to pull again, fell flat on his face. Doc Rennie reached him before I did. He rolled Rox over on his back and clawed at his shirt. When I got there he was shaking his head.



"Where'd he get you, Doc?" I gasped.

"Leg, I think," said Doc Rennie. Rox squirmed a little. Doc Rennie pointed. My bullet had bored Rox an inch or so off the heart.

Rox's eyes opened and his lips moved.

Doc Rennie yelled, "What? What?" and raised Rox up. He sounded frantic. He put his ear close as Rox's lips moved again. I heard a couple of whispering sounds, then a long breath like a sigh. Doc Rennie laid Rox back gently and stared at him. There was no need to ask if Rox was dead.

"What did he say, Doc?" I asked.

"Something about getting an 'eater.' Some kind of an 'eater,'" said Doc Rennie, thoughtful. "And something about hell. Now just what in the devil do you suppose he . . . ?"

"Let me see that leg of yours," I said, and Doc began stripping down his corduroys. It was a flesh wound in the left thigh. I got water from the stream and was wrapping my wet handkerchief around the hole when Ben Vick stumbled up and said, "Oh, my God!"

I slung Rox's body over my shoulder and we headed back for Big Tom's. Doc Rennie hobbled behind me, and Ben shuffled after him. Ben was broken. He couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me why Rox had got panicky and made a break. I heard Doc Rennie telling him what he thought Rox's last words were, but Ben said he had no idea what Rox could have meant. He shut up after that, and seemed to be thinking.

We laid Rox out on Big Tom's four-poster bed. Ben wanted to tell some of their cousins what had happened, and I let him go. I got on the phone and found we'd have to stay all night. Sam Chronister had been called over to the county seat, and old Doc Frisbie was having a baby and couldn't get away.

Dave and Ad Wilkins and Carney and Cam Fowler went out to the kitchen to dig up some food. I wasn't hungry. I'd been through too much and had too much on my mind. Not Rox, you under-

stand. Rox had asked for what he got. But the deeper I got into this whole thing, the less I liked it.

Doc Rennie dragged an easy chair out on the front porch and propped his leg up and went into a sort of coma. Not a real one, however, because he was able to snap at me when I tried to talk to him.

It must have been after eight o'clock—it was dark—when I heard Doc Rennie holler my name.



BOUNDED out on the porch.

"Sin-eater," he said. I could see his eyes shining. "Sin-eater!"

"What're you talking about?" My temper was

down to a nub.

"Ed, don't let anyone go in to see that boy's body."

"Are you crazy?" I was sour. "There'll be relatives here in a short while. We'll have real trouble on our hands if we start something like that. Besides, why?"

"Not even Ben Vick," went on Doc Rennie, like he hadn't heard me.

"I can't do that," I objected. "These people have a right to see Rox's body. We'll be taking it to Essexville tomorrow morning. Besides, it's a custom up this way for folks to sit up with a dead person the first night."

"Not tonight. Not here," said Doc Rennie firmly. "Ed, you've got to do what I say."

"Suppose you give me one good reason."

"If I had one good reason," he snapped, "I'd have told you right off. I haven't. But if what Rox Vick really said was 'Sin-eater' . . . Ed, there's about one chance in ten we may learn something that'll help the little Tanner girl."

"That's hitting below the belt," I said. "You know I'll do what I can for Julie. But going into it blind—"

Just then we heard people coming up



the drive, talking low. They came up the steps. It was Ben Vick and two women and a man. I cursed Doc Rennie under my breath as I stopped them.

I thought Ben Vick would bust when I told them they couldn't go in. He raved, and I couldn't blame him. Doc Rennie hobbled along the porch and stood beside me.

The man—he was Ben's cousin, like the women—said: "You're taking a mighty high hand, Sheriff."

"I'm sorry," I said. "But that's the way it'll have to be."

Ben Vick muttered, "But I've already—" and checked himself.

"What?" This from Doc Rennie, over my shoulder.

"Nothin'," said Ben. They went into the yard and talked some more. I couldn't hear what they were saying, except one of the women said something about "an outrage."

The cousins left. Ben came back. "I want to use the phone," he demanded. "I'm going to call Judge Avery over at Bellowston and git you put where you belong, Ed McKay."

"The phone's out of order," said Doc Rennie. Which was a lie.

I was getting hotter every minute. Ben Vick might be a rat and all that, but it was his boy who was dead in there.

"Listen," I began.

"Let's all go inside and talk this thing over," suggested Doc Rennie. We tramped in after him, and he led us into the room next to the bedroom where the body lay. Through the half-open door we could see it. Ben walked to the door and looked in, but didn't try to go in.

Down the main hall came the sound of dishes clinking. Doc Rennie closed the hall door, but left the door to the bedroom like it was. Then he turned down the kerosene lamp as far as it would go without going out entirely.

"It's about time she was getting here, isn't it, Vick?" he said, stretching himself out in a dusty morris chair.

THE red glow of the lamp fell across Ben Vick's face as he turned in the doorway. I felt a pang of pity, and my nerves began to knot themselves up. Ben Vick looked ten years older than he had that afternoon.

"You've got to let her see him," said Ben thickly, like someone had him by the throat.

"Let who see him?" I was fed up. They didn't seem to know I was in the room.

"Tell him, Vick," said Doc Rennie. "It's nothing to be ashamed of. But I'll tell you this: she won't be allowed to see him."

"You can't—" Ben Vick broke off and listened. I heard a light step on the porch, a light rapping on the screen door. The chills chased themselves right up into my short hairs.

Ben Vick made a little run for the door, but Doc Rennie's long arm sneaked out and held him.

"Keep him here, Ed." With that, Doc Rennie stepped out into the hall and shut the door.

The Doc's tone had been urgent. "Sit down, Ben," I said. He tottered to a chair and fell into it. He wiped his face with a dirty handkerchief. "My God, Ed"—the fight had gone out of him—"you wouldn't . . ."

We heard Doc Rennie talking on the front porch. The voice that answered him was high and cracked, like an old woman's. They were arguing. Finally we heard Doc Rennie say, real curt: "You'll get your money if you wait." Then his limping footsteps were in the hall again.

He came in and stood over Ben. There was a dead hush until Ben looked up. The play of dim light on Doc Rennie's high cheekbones and his broad mouth turned his face evil.

"There's one way you can get her in to see him," said Doc Rennie, and the words seemed to hang in the air. I knew perfectly damn well this was just one of his "effects." But it was getting me just like it was getting Ben.



From Ben's chair, like a dying breath, came, "How?"

Very slowly: "By telling us what really happened here last night."

I saw Ben Vick's thin lips open, then shut again.

"He was your son," warned Doc Rennie. "It's up to you, Vick. His spirit is in that room. Do you want him to have a chance, or . . . Hell's hot for a man who goes the way your boy's going, Vick."

Ben Vick moaned. My hands were clenched into fists. Doc Rennie, standing there, might have been a judge standing over a condemned man. The lamp-light glistened along the beads of sweat on his forehead. I heard him draw breath.

His slow voice went on like a man beating a muffled drum. "It's too late to think now, Vick. You'll have to talk; tell us everything. Or do you want those things that are waiting to seize your boy by the heels and drag him down . . . ?"

Ben shot up from his chair. "I'll talk!" he shrieked. Then the chair squealed as he dropped back into it. His head went down on his knees, and he began to sob.

Doc Rennie opened the hall door. "Dave," he called. "Dave."

The noise in the kitchen stopped. Dave's big voice boomed, "Yeah, Doc?"

"Bring 'em all in here, will you?" called Doc Rennie. "Including Fowler."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Sin-eater



DOC RENNIE turned the light up a little as they filed in, Dave puzzled, Cam Fowler's face sullen. Ad Wilkins looked frightened, and the "Reverend" Huck Carney's eyes were deep-set and weary. Carney might have been in another world.

They ranged themselves in the door-

way like—yep, like a queer kind of jury. That was what this scene reminded me of—a trial.

Doc Rennie tapped Ben's shoulder. Ben raised his head. Tears had cut channels in the dirty stubble on his cheeks. Doc Rennie's hands were deep in his pockets and his shadow seemed to fill a whole corner of the room.

"Vick," said Doc Rennie, "what was in Big Tom's black box?" In the silence I had the feeling that even Rox Vick, in the next room, was listening.

"A Bible," answered Ben, husky and low. There was a rustle in the room. Watching Doc Rennie, I saw he was surprised.

"An old Bible," went on Ben, and shuddered. "It give him power to make folks do what he wanted them to."

"How?" asked Doc Rennie. "How?" he repeated, when Ben didn't answer.

It was Cam Fowler who said, hoarse as a crow: "The Devil had changed that Bible to suit himself. Whoever had that Bible had the Devil working with him."

"I never seen the part the Devil changed," mumbled Ben. "I told Tom I never wanted to."

Doc Rennie brought his bushy eyebrows to bear on Fowler. "How do you happen to know?"

Cam Fowler said bitterly: "Because once when I wouldn't kick in with his cut on my whiskey money he got me by the neck and made me look. The Devil had touched that Bible, all right."

"So you wanted that black box and the Bible to . . ." Doc Rennie left it hanging. He was talking to Ben.

"He'd pushed me and Rox around all our lives," said Ben Vick. "Always mak-in' us do things for him. Made Rox collect whiskey money. Give us nothin' but scraps of all that money. Rox and I figgered the Bible 'ud put us on top around here, like Big Tom had been."

"Where is it now?" asked Doc Rennie.

Ben was watching him like a bird watches a snake. "Down cellar. We hid it behind some sacks o' potatoes. We



was aimin' to take it home after the funeral."

"Now for last night," went on Doc Rennie, and Ben flinched. "You and Rox saw Carney and Big Tom fighting?"

"We'd come over to git some money. We saw 'em through the side window. After Tom's head hit the mantel, and he went down, Carney run right past us in the dark."

"Did you see Carney use that club?" Doc Rennie threw a top-sergeant's rasp into the question and Ben Vick went rigid. "Did you?"

So this was it! I held my breath.

"He didn't use nothin' but his hands," said Ben Vick.

Huck Carney said: "Thanks, Lord. I shoulda known You'd look after me."

"Why was it Rox who used the club on Big Tom, instead of you?" Doc Rennie's voice was almost a whisper. Knowing him the way I do, I knew he felt the same awful sense of relief that I did.

"Rox'd been drinkin'. And then there was Julie . . ."

"Julie!" Huck Carney blurted out the name.

"Rox liked Julie. He wanted to marry her. But Big Tom told him no: he was savin' Julie for himself. So when we seen Big Tom was out cold, Rox run out and got the club and fixed him before he could come to. Then we got the black box from behind the mantel and hid it, and then we threw the club where we found it today, and—"

"It was Rox, then, who suggested putting the crime on Carney—because of Julie?"

Ben nodded painfully. "He figgered with Carney out of the way. . . . And then we went and got the boys roused up." The black shame in his face sickened me.

Cam Fowler said, very quiet: "Damn your soul, Ben Vick."

But Ben was watching Doc Rennie, his eyes pleading. "Mister . . ." he began.

Doc Rennie nodded. There was real

pity in his face. Dave and the rest made way for him as he went out. We heard him, on the porch, say: "You can come in now."

A light footstep in the hall and an old woman came in, stepping brisk, with Doc Rennie right behind her. She was about eighty, with a hooked nose and eyes like needles. A shawl was draped over her stringy white hair, and in one of her claws was a little package of brown paper.

Ben Vick jumped up. "In there," he said, pointing to the room where Rox lay. She went in. We crowded to the door.

**I**T DIDN'T take half a minute. She unwrapped the package and held something against Rox Vick's dead cheek, holding it there about five seconds.

Then she put it in her mouth and began to mumble it with her toothless gums. She was still chewing whatever it was when she came out—chewing on something that she had held against Rox Vick's cheek.

She swallowed, and went up to Ben Vick and held out her skinny old hand. Without a word Ben Vick shoved a ten-dollar bill into it. Still not speaking, she went out, and the sound of the front door brought us back into a normal world again.

Dave Tyson said: "Doc, what in the name of—"

Doc Rennie turned to Cam Fowler. "I think you can tell them, can't you, Fowler?"

"That was Mammy Turner, the sin-eater," Cam said. "That piece o' bread she touched Rox with drew his sins into it. When she ate it she ate up his sins. That kept hell from layin' Rox by the heels."

I began to understand how Doc Rennie had made Ben Vick talk. It must be an awful thing to believe your son will go straight to a broiling hell unless you can get a sin-eater to save him.

Doc Rennie said to Dave: "Take Ben



Vick down the cellar and get that black box, will you?" He rubbed his eyes with his fists, like he was about played out. "O.K., Ed," he said. "What now?"

"We'll take Ben and Carney back with us tonight," I said, coming out of my trance. "Cam," I said, "I've got a feeling that some friends of yours are waiting along the road somewhere to see us off."

"I'll just step over and tell them fools to go home," said Cam Fowler.

When Cam had gone, Doc Rennie said sleepily: "It was all part of twisted religion and witchcraft mixed up, Ed. Sineating is, or was, a respected custom in Ireland and some of the European countries. I suppose it got into these mountains when they brought it over with them years ago. The religious phase probably got lost and the pure superstition of the thing hung on, and got tangled up with some eerie ideas of witchcraft." Doc Rennie smiled thinly at Huck Carney. "You'll have a job on

your hands up here, Reverend, even now."

"Julie'll help me," said Huck Carney. "We'll straighten these folks out. They ain't bad people. And I think"—it wasn't boasting—"I'm a better man than I was a while back."



ACK in Essexville we stowed Ben Vick in jail and went straight to my house. Gray streaks of dawn were in the sky.

Huck Carney was first out of the car. He stood in the half-light and watched us climb out. We were stiff and rusty, but I never felt better in my life. Doc Rennie had a shiny black wooden box under one arm. We hadn't opened it.

"Can I see Julie now?" said Carney.

I got my wife up and she got Julie up and Julie came downstairs with one of my old bathrobes over her nightdress, her dark hair like a waterfall over her

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shoulders. When Huck Carney went up to her, Dave blew his nose like a fog-horn and I caught Doc Rennie staring at the same spot on the wall that I'd picked out for myself. Somebody had slipped a hen's egg into my throat and it was stuck just below my Adam's apple.

"Things is all right, Julie," said Huck Carney. "I didn't do it. And you're goin' back with me—will you?"

He had to say it over three-four times before she got it. Then the tears came, without any smack in the face this time.

We went into the parlor to watch Doc Rennie open the black box. Huck Carney had an arm around Julie's shoulders. Julie's eyes were like diamonds, and her cheeks had filled out, and she looked eighteen instead of thirty.

Doc Rennie raised the lid. Like Ben Vick had said, it was an old Bible in that box—heavy, dark leather binding, a real old book. It looked like a good book, not an evil one.

Doc Rennie picked it up gently in those long, strong fingers of his and turned the thick pages till he found what he was looking for. Then he set the book down and said, "Look." We gathered around.

It was Exodus, Chapter 20, Verse 14. I could hardly read the heavy, black-letter, odd-looking type at first, but when my eyes got used to it . . .

"Thou shalt commit adultery," it read.

I looked again. Dave read it, too, and my wife did. Yep, that's what it said: "Thou shalt commit adultery."

Doc Rennie read it aloud. Huck Carney said: "We've got to put that thing in the fire." And Julie nodded.

"How much do you need for that Sunday School you want to build?" asked Doc Rennie abruptly.

Huck Carney looked surprised. "Three hundred will cover it. But why?"

Doc Rennie said: "This Bible belongs to Julie now. Julie, will you sell it to me for five hundred dollars?"

Julie said slowly: "If you'll not use it to do bad things, mister."

Doc Rennie didn't laugh. He said: "I think I see a way to use it to help a great number of people."

"Then you can have it for nothin'," said Julie.

But he insisted, and said he'd send them the money from Washington. They still didn't understand, but they said if he thought it was right, they'd take the money.

We left them together in my parlor and went out on the porch. The sun's rim was showing over Vick's Mountain way and the birds were talking back and forth down by my grape arbor, and there was dew on the grass. Doc Rennie stretched luxuriously.

"How can that Bible help people?" I asked him. I knew my wife's mouth was watering with curiosity, and so was Dave's. Not to mention my own.

"I'm a little vague on the facts." Doc Rennie shut his eyes and teetered on his heels like a schoolmaster. "But as I remember them, that Bible must be one of a batch printed in London around 1630. The printers—a couple of gentlemen named, I think, Barker and Lucas—sold quite a few before somebody discovered that they had accidentally left out the 'not' in the Seventh Commandment."

"Then it was just a misprint," I said, disappointed.

"They took such things pretty seriously in those days," said Doc Rennie gravely. "Barker and Lucas barely escaped execution by the church authorities. Finally an archbishop—Laud, I believe—commuted their sentence to a fine of several hundred pounds (a great deal of money in those days) and had all copies of that particular printing destroyed by the public executioner. But a few copies survived—a very few. I imagine one of the Vick ancestors brought one over when he came to America, either as a curiosity or—maybe the early Vicks had some Big Toms among them.

"This edition, by the way, is known variously as the 'Wicked Bible' and the 'Devil's Bible' and—more accurately—



the 'Adulterous Bible.' Twenty years ago I read that one had been sold to a collector in France for \$160,000."

We gaped.

"I think I'll turn my newly-acquired copy over to the U.S.O. when I get back to Washington," he said. "It'll bring a good price—and the U.S.O. can use the money. We'll turn that copy into a Good Book in spite of the sins Big Tom Vick laid at its door."

**H**E JAMMED his hands into his pockets and his wide mouth widened in a grin. He fished out a folded piece of paper and beckoned us closer. "This has nothing to do with the case," he said, dropping his voice, "and it's not quite fair to show it, but wouldn't you like to see the signed statement Huck Carney gave me at Big Tom's house yesterday?"

I remembered then—him sitting at the desk and scribbling down Huck Carney's story as Huck gave it to him.

I opened it up. There was Carney's signature, a curiously cramped scrawl like a child's, at the bottom. Then I read the statement and gasped. Doc Rennie chuckled.

Here's what Doc Rennie had written down, and Huck Carney had signed!

I hereby swear that pink rabbits march over the hills carrying machine guns every Tuesday afternoon from May to October, and that is one of the chief reasons the bass fishing is unusually good during these months.

Dave said: "But he read that over before he signed it. I seen him read it."

Doc Rennie shook his red head. "He *looked* it over. I'd had a suspicion that Carney doesn't know how to read and write. I guess he's sensitive about it—and it's rather an embarrassing position for a preacher to be in. I suppose they taught him in jail how to sign his name."

"Well," I said, "I guess that won't bother him much on Vick's Mountain. His gospel is good and maybe Julie will teach him to read and write before anybody finds out. Now, Doc, it's time you were putting that game leg of yours to bed."

"Bed my eye!" snorted Doc Rennie. "I thought we were going out after bass."

"But your leg—"

"I don't hold a rod in my toes," snapped Doc Rennie. "Great heavens, man! Two days' furlough left and you want me to go to bed!" Then he smiled. "I'll let you and Dave do the rowing," he said.



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# DONOVAN'S BRAIN

By  
**CURT SIODMAK**

## SYNOPSIS

**I**T ALL began, appropriately enough, on Friday the 13th. That was the day the Mexican organ grinder passed through Washington Junction with the tubercular Capuchin monkey. I bought the monkey for use in experiments I was conducting in my laboratory, in the desert near Phoenix, Arizona.

I, DOCTOR PATRICK CORY, had long been interested in the possibility of cultivating living tissue outside the body. I killed the monkey, removed the brain and placed it in an artificial respirator. But it died after three days.

DOCTOR SCHRATT, elderly physician for the emergency landing field at Konopah, nearby, was fascinated by my work but frightened by its implications. He called it "invading God's own hemisphere." Schratt once had the makings of a Pasteur, but he had drowned his genius in cheap tequila.

At three o'clock in the morning, while I was

at work, the phone rang. The excited voice of RANGER WHITE told me a plane had crashed near his station on a lonely mountaintop. Schratt was too drunk to go. As I packed my instrument bag, I saw my wife, JANICE, standing in the doorway. I realized I had not spoken to her for weeks. She brought me food, but never bothered me with questions. She was not well, but she refused to leave me. She wanted to accompany me now—she had been a nurse—but I ordered her back to bed. When the men arrived with mules and horses, we started up the mountainside.

Not much was left of the ship. The impact had been terrific. One survivor, who had suffered compound fractures of both legs and other injuries, required an immediate operation. I examined the unconscious man's papers. He was the internationally famous tycoon—WARREN HORACE DONOVAN! After amputating both legs, I had him carried down the trail and taken into my laboratory. The men left me





He had spread the banknotes on the floor and was walking on the money in his bare feet.

alone with him. When I saw he was going to die, an idea came to me. Here was an extraordinary brain—the perfect specimen a scientist might wish for. My hand reached for the scalpel. . . .

Donovan's body was taken to Phoenix. I told Schratt of my theft of Donovan's brain. He was horrified lest the authorities find out, but he signed the death certificate.

Next morning when I went to the laboratory, the brain was alive in its respirator—the pump faithfully supplying blood to the main artery. I switched on the current. The brain waves recorded on the encephalograph. I touched the glass and the waves rose sharply. I had succeeded. Donovan's brain would live, though his body had died!

Would it be possible to communicate with the brain?

News of Donovan's death swept the country. The papers speculated where he might have hidden vast sums of money withdrawn during the last years of his life. Donovan's son,

HOWARD DONOVAN, and his daughter, CHLOE BARTON, insisted on seeing me. They wanted to know Donovan's last words. I told them he had been in a coma until he died. At the investigation, Schratt was discharged from his job at Konopah. Janice asked my permission to let him live with us. I could hardly refuse. It was her house and her money enabled me to carry on my experiments.

I read everything I could find about Donovan. I wanted to know all about him. Janice left for Los Angeles but I had no time to think of that. Schratt had become deeply interested in my experiment. We were determined to find a way to get in touch with the brain. Schratt suggested telepathy, but I feared the brain waves were too weak. I prepared a new blood plasma, greatly enriched, and installed another ultra-violet lamp. The brain reacted sharply to the new diet. The encephalograph showed powerful new wave patterns!

One morning, when I awoke, my left hand was ink-stained. A message was scrawled on



my note pad. Donovan was left-handed. I found a reproduction of Donovan's signature in a magazine. It matched exactly. The brain had found a way to communicate with me! I sat on my bed for hours, too exhausted to move. I wanted proof, more proof!

## PART TWO

*October 30th*

**T**HE proof came today. I had not administered a shock to the brain again, for the electric voltage has risen to two thousand five hundred microvolts, and I do not know how many ohm resistance the brain has.

I was waiting at my desk when I suddenly felt tired. It was a strange, soft fatigue that entered not my body, but my brain.

I was still thinking, but in a hazy, drowsy fashion. Then I saw my left hand move, take the pen and write.

The name was written out stronger this time: *Warren Horace Donovan*. The long flourish encircled it again, as if to prove its authenticity.

My hand put the pen back and my own thoughts slowly returned from the back of my mind. They reappeared as if emerging from water, wavering first, then shaping up clearly.

I walked over to the vessel. Donovan's brain was awake.

"Did you ask me to write your name?" I tapped out against the glass in Morse.

I waited. I repeated the message again, slower. A third time.

I walked back to the desk.

Suddenly I felt the same sensation again, as my mind retreated into dimness. I was completely aware what I was doing, only the motor impulses were out of my control.

I saw my left hand pick up the pen and in firm letters I wrote: *Warren Horace Donovan!*

*November 3rd*

The human brain cannot work on continuously, without restoring itself at reg-

ular intervals to transform potential into electric energy again. The more intense the activity, the more sleep is needed. Donovan's brain lapses into sleep more than half the time.

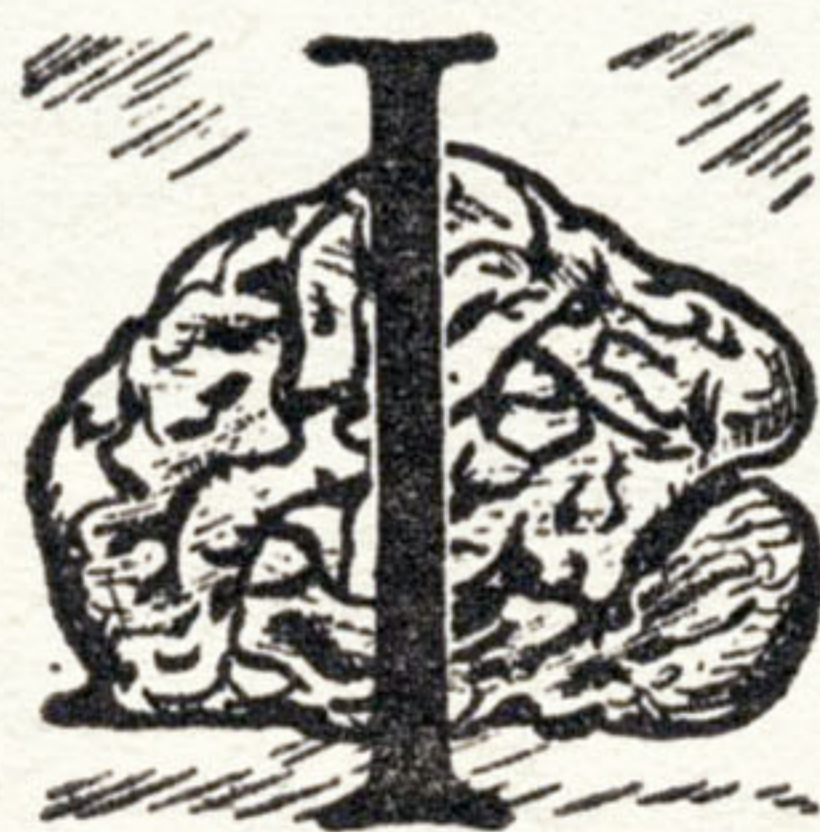
Around its bare tissues a new layer of grayish-white matter is forming. Donovan's brain is growing into a new shape.

A new species of creature is building here, which never before existed in this mortal world. A ball of flesh whose life depends on an electric pump and artificial feeding, but capable nevertheless of sending out energies of thought surpassing our limited strength. Every day it grows in potentiality.

It can impose its power over my thoughts whenever it pleases.

First I have the strange sensation of another will compelling the movements of my hands and feet, commanding all the motor responses of my body.

Then other thoughts from mine enter my mind. The brain, bodyless itself, uses my body to achieve an independence of its own.



**I** LIVE a double existence. My thoughts retreat into the back of my mind as I observe, detached, the phenomena which Donovan's brain directs. I am then a schizophrenic, a person whose personality is split. Unlike a man suffering from intra-psychosis ataxis, however, I am at all times conscious of my actions.

When Donovan's brain is asleep I am undistracted. I use this precious time to continue this report of the case.

Donovan's thinking is still incoherent. Occasionally I seem to receive a logical reply to the questions I communicate in Morse through the glass vessel. Do the vibrations thus created transmit the message to the brain? It acts like a man in fever or in sleep. It always orders me to write down the same names, which seemingly have no connection with each other.



Roger Hinds is one of the names. Anton Sternli another. Donovan's son, Howard, too, is named, but no memory of his daughter seems to enter his mind. Katherine appears quite frequently. She was Donovan's wife I found out by reading the stories in the magazines. Fuller was his lawyer.

I am able to trace many of the names my hand writes to Donovan's past.

But there are a score of others as if his memory is swept by a strange whirlwind of faces.

#### *November 5th*

To test whether it still has power over me at a distance I tried leaving the brain by itself today while I drove toward Phoenix.

After fifteen miles from the house I was summoned by the brain. I turned and drove back to my house at top speed.

This incident proved a new fact. The brain is aware of what I am doing even at a great distance.

It could not know where I had gone, but it was sure I was not in the room or in the house.

I assume that the relative strength of the microvolts generated by my brain tells Donovan whether I am present.

#### *November 6th*

The brain discharges approximately 3500 microvolts.

I do not know how much more new substance will attach itself to the brain. There must be a limit. Or is it theoretically boundless, like a cancerous growth?

#### *November 10th*

Schratt entered the laboratory today while the brain was ordering me to write. I heard him speak, but I did not turn my head to answer. I did not want to sever the fine thread which connected me with the brain.

My left hand, like that of a child learning to write, slowly formed words.

Schratt called my name again and, when I did not answer, stopped hesitant-

ly, in the middle of the room. At first he thought he was interrupting some train of thought. Then, alarmed at my strange behavior, he stepped closer and looked over my shoulder.

I continued to scrawl words on the paper. For the fifth time I wrote Hinds' name. Then I began to spell: *California Merchants' Bank*. Then the name Hinds appeared again.

Schratt became alarmed. He bent forward to look into my face, which was hidden from him as I sat hunched over the table. A good doctor, he was careful not to touch me for fear of shocking me.

HE TOOK the small mirror from the wall and, holding it in front of me, looked into my eyes. He saw I was in a trance. My eyeballs rolled, my mouth twitched. I seemed unaware of his presence.

The brain discontinued its orders. I moved again. Schratt put down the mirror and asked, half fearfully: "Didn't you hear me?"

I nodded.

"Why didn't you answer?"

I shoved toward him the papers covered with the childish scrawls of the brain's dictation. He stared at it and his eyes shifted in fear to the glass vessel.

"I have contacted it," I explained. "Or rather it has contacted me."

I described everything I had experienced, glad to be able to talk to someone about it. He would understand, I thought, but Schratt grew more than alarmed. His bloated face became livid and he shook his head in despair.

I made a last attempt to reason with him.

"Why can't you rid yourself of your inhibitions?" I asked. "Human emotions should have no part in scientific research. They obscure our observations. We cannot permit ourselves to be afraid. Reason, observation and courage make the scientist, but you seem to lack at least two of these essentials."

"Don't be facetious," Schratt retorted laboredly. "We have debated too long



about the right and wrong of this experiment. I beg you now to stop while it is still in your power to stop. Please, Patrick—turn off the pump and let the brain die!”

Suddenly tears ran down his cheeks; his huge body shook with his uncontrollable emotion. It was a disgusting sight. He was growing more helpless and senile every day.

I stepped over to the work table and busied myself with some instruments. I did not turn around when he left the laboratory.

### *November 11th*

I had fallen asleep exhausted, my strength and nervous energy drained by the double life I am leading.

A wailing, muffled shout echoed in my dream and woke me. It came from the living-room. The cry rose to an insane shriek as if someone were losing his mind from fear. I had never heard the voice before.

I jumped to the door. The bulb flickered as if the brain was shaken by the strange commotion too. As I ran past the vessel, I switched on the encephalograph to be able to study the brain's reaction later.

The insane scream was silenced as fast as it had risen. A scuffling noise replaced it, as if a big body were rolling across the floor, upsetting the furniture.

I switched on the living-room light and saw Schratt's heavy body on the carpet. His own thick fingers around his throat were strangling him. His rattled breathing, his red face and his protruding eyes showed he was suffocating.

I tried to loosen his grip at his throat, but I could not unbend the fingers.

Unexpectedly, while I was still working over Schratt's body, a hand wheeled me about and I stared into Franklin's frightened face. Surprised by his attack, I struck out to defend myself and Franklin stumbled, protecting his face with his arms.

I turned back to Schratt, who had fainted. His hands had fallen limply to

his sides. I ordered Franklin to help me lift him onto the couch.

Schratt's pulse had nearly doubled its normal beat, his heart was pounding heavily, and I was afraid he might die of a stroke. I quickly opened his collar and shirt and ordered Franklin to bring some ice.

When Franklin returned with the ice bag, I put it over Schratt's heart. Soon the extreme palpitation slowed and the pulse came back to normal. Schratt sighed and opened his eyes. He stared at me in terror. I spoke soothingly and forced him to swallow some milk, but his teeth chattered so he spilled half of it.



CHRATT had been in the act of leaving. His luggage stood near the door, and his coat lay on a chair. I was puzzled at his sneaking away by night. I could not figure out why he had come through the house at all when the nearest way from his room was by the garden.

“What's the idea?” I asked, pointing to the luggage.

I stood up and Schratt's features froze in terror. I could not make out what ailed him; it was no cataleptic fit. Then I followed his gaze and understood.

The fuse box for the house and the laboratory had been pried open. Schratt's hat lay on the floor near it.

I suddenly understood and a cold murderous rage gripped me.

“You wanted to kill the brain!” I shouted. I nearly lost control of myself.

He stared at me. I had frightened him more.

“You tried to strangle me,” he said, his mouth quivering. I had never seen him so out of control.

I was shocked. He thought I had attacked him.

Quietly and precisely I explained how I had found him. I actually had saved him from committing suicide!

“Nobody can strangle himself,”



Schratt said scornfully. "You know that is impossible, Patrick."

Schratt got up and stood on trembling legs.

"I'll see you in the morning," he croaked.

When I tried to help him, he refused my aid.

I returned to the laboratory. The bulb was dark, the brain asleep. The encephalogram showed extremely irregular delta waves.

I sat down to reconstruct the accident.

That shout for help had wakened me. I could clearly remember the sound of the voice, and it did not seem to have been Schratt's. Still it is very difficult to recognize a voice which is strangled with terror. It must have been Schratt's. Whose else could I have heard?

To dispel a suspicion—the consequences of which were too complex for me to follow up now—I went to Franklin's room.

He was throwing his few belongings into a battered old suitcase. My appearance seemed to frighten him.

His sudden decision to leave me after so many years of service made me more doubtful of myself.

"You leaving too, Franklin? In the middle of the night?" I asked.

Franklin slowly sat down on the bed, watching me with the same helpless terror Schratt had displayed.

To put Franklin at ease, I told him he was free to leave any time he liked, but I would regret it very much. He calmed down a little and I asked if he had heard Dr. Schratt calling for help.

To my relief he nodded. But when I asked why he had dragged me away from Schratt, he frightenedly confessed he had found me attacking him.

"Dr. Schratt was having a cataleptic fit," I answered curtly. "I was only helping him."

Franklin nodded, but I could see he did not believe me, and when I went back to the laboratory, I felt upset and uneasy.

I tried to unravel the complications.

Franklin too had heard Schratt's cries for help. He had pulled me away so vigorously I still felt the pain of his grip on my shoulder. He would never have dared to touch me except in an emergency.

A man cannot strangle himself.

Schratt was right in stating the absurdity of what I said. It seemed beyond a doubt that I had attacked him.

**H**AS the brain reached such strength it can order me to kill? If it has, what is the limit of its power? As human energy in a moment of mortal danger rises to its highest peak, it is conceivable that the brain, spending all its resources, called me to its rescue.

It was aware of Schratt's decision to cut off the electricity. The machinery and the electric circuit are as vital to the brain's existence as heart and lungs to a normal being. When Schratt approached the fuse box, the brain felt itself threatened.

We understand scarcely any of the unpredictable phenomena of human brain power. We only know that electric potentials travel through the billion cells which form the gray matter of the brain.

While I slept, my receptor neurons received a strong stimulus from Donovan's nervous center. Its potential, increased by the new cells, was strong enough to influence the motor neurons and to compel me to come to its rescue. Only when Franklin pulled me back, I woke from my murderous dream.

The brain could not influence Schratt, for he was not asleep as I was. This leads to the conclusion that the brain can command only persons who are asleep or willing to submit.

The voice I heard in my dream was Donovan's, inaudible except to the secret ear of my mind.

*November 12th*

Schratt came into the laboratory at noon. He looked rested, had shaved carefully, and wore an expression of youth-



ful determination that surprised me.

To my further surprise, he greeted me with a smile.

"Franklin has deserted. We'll have to get used to each other's cooking," he said gaily.

Deliberately I talked of last night and of my regret at having attacked him while under the influence of Donovan's brain. I promised to prevent a repetition of such an occurrence.

He nodded soberly, seemingly without misgiving, and excused himself of having tried to interfere with the experiment.

Suddenly he enlarged on the unlimited possibilities of my researches. He congratulated me on their success as demonstrated last night and added jokingly that he saw me getting the Nobel prize soon.

I could not account for this sudden change of attitude.

I explained the misadventure by elucidating my theory of the brain's new powers. Pointing out the new cell formation which had twisted the brain out of shape, I stated my conviction that the telepathic power might have its source there.

Schratt agreed with me and, rationalizing his sudden change of attitude, he said: "I had a bad night, Patrick, but I deserved it. I had no right to interfere with your researches. I'm getting old and wacky, and repentant as an old trollop. You have your genius and you'd be a fool not to use it to capacity. Envy made me fight you. Forgive a jealous old man."

I still could not see the reason for his sudden change of attitude, but I took it at face value, glad to have him for a collaborator as I had always wished.

Franklin has left for good.

*November 21st*

I am at the Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles.

Schratt has taken over the job of nursing the brain. He was so enthusiastic about his duties, he silenced my apprehensions.

I can trust him to record the brain's reactions minutely. I will talk to him every day by phone.

Before I decided to leave Washington Junction I got in touch with the brain by Morse and signaled it my decision.

I have trained myself to receive its reply at once. I can make my mind blank and completely receptive.

The brain seemed eager for me to go. What the purpose of my journey is I do not know yet, but the command to go was clear.

The same dream had haunted me for nights, and I am sure it contained the message Donovan wants me to communicate.

Donovan never saw me, for he was in a coma when I found him. Consequently, the brain cannot picture me and I did not actually see myself in the dream. Since the brain is incapable of receiving new visual impressions, it must rely on its memory, and in its memory I do not exist.

But Donovan knew the California Merchants' Bank. In my dream I entered and walked over to the teller, a sallow-faced man with a small mustache. I asked for a blank check, stepped to a desk and filled out the form for a huge sum, signed the check with the name of Roger Hinds, of whom I have never heard except through the brain.

Before I took the check to the cashier, I drew an ace of spades in the upper right-hand corner.

The dream repeated itself without a single variation, like a story told for a child to remember.



WHEN I woke I always found on my desk a paper with a crudely drawn map of Los Angeles on which some of the streets and the Merchants' Bank were plainly marked.

The message was clear enough, but it did not make sense. I asked Schratt's



advice and he urged me to leave at once.

I stood at a crossroads in my work. If I took orders from the brain, I, no longer the scientific observer, would be practically a tool.

The brain could not force me to go. My free will was not impaired yet, and I was still strong enough to refuse this fragment of living tissue which I was cultivating in a glass respirator.

Once Donovan had almost compelled me to murder, but an eruption of force could not be produced at will. It was generated by most extraordinary circumstances.

My money was running low. I found a few hundred dollars Janice had left for me and gave them to Schratt. I was acting for the brain according to a plan which had been conceived in its inert matter.

Since its experience had stopped at the moment of the plane crash, it must be carrying out some plan it had nursed since before the accident.

#### *November 22nd*

This morning I had an annoying interference. I was ready to leave the hotel for the bank when the clerk informed me that a Mr. Yocum urgently wanted to see me. I did not know anybody by that name, but I said to have the man wait for me in the lobby.

As soon as I came down in the elevator, I recognized Yocum. He was the shabby photographer who had taken my picture outside the Phoenix hospital. The man was pretending not to see me. He had an old leather briefcase under his arm. When the clerk pointed him out to me, he came over quickly and stood so close he almost touched me.

"Dr. Cory?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

He stared at me as if he hoped to intimidate me, but when I stared back his gaze dropped.

I was sure he had planned this entrance carefully, but he lacked courage to carry the scene through. His whole appearance was of a man unstable in his



YOCUM

emotions, shaken by fear. I could tell he was up to something and his anxiety betrayed his desire to carry out the plan.

I did not speak. I kept on staring at him. Neurotics soon lose courage. It was obvious that he needed money. He had been on my trail ever since the accident, taking photographs at the hospital, spying on me and my household. Suddenly I guessed what he was after. He had photographed Donovan in the morgue and examined the bandages.

My concern must have shown in my face for he suddenly found his courage again and said: "Could I see you alone?"

We walked into the cocktail bar and sat down.

"I took a picture of you in Phoenix. Here it is," he began nervously, opening his briefcase.

His fingers, long, thin and stained with tobacco, held the photo in front of me. I did not look at it. I waited silently. Again he lost his poise and for a minute nothing was said.

"I don't care to buy the picture." I finally spoke and my words gave him a cue.

He nodded and quickly drew another photo from the briefcase.



This one was of Donovan in the morgue. I could not help looking at it. Donovan's face had grown dim in my memory and, seeing it, I was intrigued to identify those features with the brain I had learned to know so intimately.

YOCUM watched my obvious interest with growing boldness.

"I knew you'd like it," he said with an expression which alarmed me. "And here is one which will really interest you."

He had photographed Donovan's head without bandages. The skull was lifted up and the cotton wool I had stuffed into the cranium was visible. It was a good clear job of photography.

For a moment I was too shocked to move. Then I picked up the picture and turned it face down on the table.

"You can have the negative," Yocum proposed quietly.

As I leaned forward he stood up quickly, afraid I might strike him. I managed to look impassive.

"I don't want it. What would I do with it?" I asked.

He smiled, but his chin trembled. He had been working himself up to this moment so long. He wanted money. It seemed actually within his reach.

Obviously he needed it badly. His suit was shiny and the shirt front beneath it nothing but a starched dickey. When he moved I saw he was naked inside his coat.

He grew pale as he saw how I stood there just smiling. His eyes, red and hungry and deep-sunk in his gaunt face, glared desperately.

"Who gave you permission to photograph the body?" I asked.

He did not answer, but sitting down again he said passionately: "Donovan's family would pay a big price for this. They'll be interested in knowing you stole W. H.'s brain!"

I leaned back in my chair, shocked by his outburst. What did he know about Donovan's brain?

"And here is another one," he said

with relish. He felt he had me in a corner now, and he thoroughly enjoyed the advantage.

He put the picture on the table. It had been photographed through the window of my laboratory at night. He used a flash bulb; the vessel and electric apparatus showed up clearly. He had touched up the picture with a brush and marked the brain.

Yocum sighed and licked a film of saliva across his lips. The typical neurotic, he had maneuvered himself into a spot where he could not back out without losing his skin.

I wondered what Donovan would have done with this desperate imbecile. I was not used to dealing with blackmailers, and the fool might ruin my whole experiment.

There was no use trying to buy him off. If I got the negatives, he would go to Donovan's family with other prints he had made.

He was not going to miss any tricks. His single-mindedness increased the danger. His type stops at nothing.

I had no money.

"How much do you want for the negatives?" I asked.

He grinned and nervously touched a dirty handkerchief to his lips.

"Five thousand dollars."

I got up. He hugged his briefcase close to him. His eyes were pleading. He had lost all his air of assurance and was only pitiful.

"All right," I said. "But I don't have that much money on me. And you don't want a check."

If I could stall him off for a day I might find a way out. Donovan had to do something to save us. If only I could get in touch with him!

"You'll find me at the Ontra Cafeteria, Hollywood and Vine, at eight tonight," he said, looking past me with an expression of mingled sullenness and excitement.

Abruptly he turned and walked away, his narrow shoulders hunched up to his ears.





THO hundred miles from Washington Junction and my laboratory, I suddenly felt incapable of the task which had been set for me. It presented seemingly unsurmountable difficulties now.

I sat down in one of the soft chairs in the lobby and tried to organize a campaign. When I closed my eyes, I felt the strange sensation that always preceded the brain's messages, creeping upon me.

My mind dimmed and though I could still recognize my own thoughts, they were hidden behind a transparent screen, cut off from my full consciousness.

I felt a strong urge to get up. Obediently I rose and left the hotel, walked down the street, stopping for traffic signals, moving perfunctorily, guided by Donovan's will.

I did not resist the powerful impulse which propelled me.

Donovan's brain did not vacillate. It was closed to new impressions, shut off from new ideas which flow across the ordinary mind in an unending stream, always to distract it. Donovan's brain was thinking straight and to the point, the one point only. Its single thought propelled me.

I stopped at the California Merchants' Bank which I had seen in my dream. I pushed open the door and walked over to the teller, who, as I had visioned him was sallow-faced and black-mustached. I asked for a blank check, stepped back to the writing desk and picked up a pen in my left hand.

I filled out the check to cash, fifty thousand dollars, signed the name Roger Hinds in Donovan's handwriting and carefully drew an ace of spades into the upper right-hand corner.

Not for a moment did I doubt that the cashier would give me the money. He picked up the check, then looked startled.

"Mr. Hinds?" he asked.

"In big bills," I answered, disregarding the question.

"Please endorse the check yourself on

the back, sir," he said, to find out my name.

I wrote Patrick F. Cory in my own handwriting.

He stared at it irresolutely.

"Make it big bills," I heard myself repeat as the man disappeared with a murmured excuse.

The policeman at the door moved forward to keep an eye on me. I knew I must have aroused his suspicion, but still not the slightest apprehension, or even the thought of preparing an explanation entered my mind.

It was Donovan who acted. I was perfectly at ease, let him take care of everything.

"The manager wants to see you, Mr. Cory." The man with the mustache had come back and was leading me over to a small office.

A bald-headed man sat behind a brown desk. He got up, muttered his name and asked, "Mr. Hinds?"

"I am Patrick Cory, M.D.," I said and the man turned over the check and nodded. He offered me a chair, waited in silence till the door opened again and another man entered.

"This is Mr. Mannings, Dr. Cory."

The newcomer had the unmistakable look of a private detective. We shook hands.

"Would you mind answering a few questions, Dr. Cory?"

"Is anything wrong with the check?" I asked.

The manager looked at the detective, but at the same time answered my question with a nod.

"No. We have compared this signature with the original signature of Mr. Hinds. It is the same, undoubtedly. Also the sign in the corner proves it, the ace of spades. Mr. Hinds demanded that only checks so marked be honored."

He was speaking quickly, eager to convince himself he was not making a mistake.

The detective entered the conversation. "If you made out the check yourself, you must be Hinds, not Dr. Cory."



Instead of answering, I put my doctor's credentials down in front of him.

"Am I obliged to inform you about my private affairs?" I asked quietly.

"Of course not," the manager hastened to assure me. "Only this account was opened under extraordinary circumstances."

**H**E WAITED for me to say something, but when I sat silent, he continued: "We received quite a large sum of money and a letter from Mr. Hinds, who did not give us his address and is unknown to us, with the request that we open an account for him. A commercial account. No interest."

He stressed the fact that he found it strange for so large a sum to be deposited where it would earn no interest. It was against his business principles.

"That was nearly twelve years ago. Now the first check is drawn against the account, and you have signed it. If you are not Mr. Hinds, we would be happy to receive some information about the gentleman, because," he smiled wanly, "the bank likes to know the clients it is serving."

"You mean in case of stolen money?" I asked.

"Oh no. We know what bank the notes came from. We always check on that." The manager spoke with professional pride. "But Mr. Hinds. . . ."

"I am Dr. Cory. Will you please cash the check now? I am in a hurry!" I got up.

The manager rose too. He appeared distressed.

"You're within your legal rights, Dr. Cory, not to answer questions," the detective said, but there was a hidden threat in his voice.

Half an hour later I walked out of the bank with my pockets bulging with money. What should I do with it? Pay the blackmailer?

I bought a briefcase, stuffed the money into it, and went back to the hotel. I felt tired as always when the brain had communicated with me. I went upstairs to

rest and to wait for further orders.

Janice was in town. She had left a message for me to ring her at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. Schratt had told her where I was staying.

I was at a loss to understand what the brain intended to do. To all appearances it had prepared itself to meet Yocum's demand, or it would not have sent me to the bank.

The brain seemed to want me to pay Yocum and get the negatives, but still I had received no definite order.

Lying on my bed in the hotel room waiting for Donovan to communicate with me, I felt that I had reached the borderline of sanity beyond which the firm rational ground falls away from under our feet.

I picked up the phone to call Schratt, but I must have asked for the hospital, because Cedars of Lebanon answered. Since I was connected anyway, I asked for Janice.

When I heard her voice, distant and full of happy surprise, I suddenly felt calm.

Promising Janice to see her one day soon, I quickly hung up.

I had to meet Yocum, and after that I would go back home to continue the research myself. There was nothing to gain by staying away from the brain longer. I knew now that distance did not lessen its influence, and with this proved, the purpose of my journey was achieved.

I told the clerk I was checking out next day. Then I opened the briefcase and put half the money into my pockets. Yocum had said five thousand dollars; he might ask for more. I did not care how much I paid him. It was not my money and I wanted to get rid of it.

I had never had so much money in my hands before, but it was just so much paper to me. My sense of property was limited to the instruments I used in my laboratory. Janice bought and took care of all the rest, my suits, shirts, shoes, our food, the house.

I had fifty thousand dollars in my pocket belonging to a character named



Roger Hinds. Did he exist at all, or was this a secret account Donovan had kept for some purpose I could not guess?

Why had Donovan sent me for fifty thousand dollars when the blackmailer only asked five?

I left the briefcase with the rest of the money in the hotel safe and went out.

I was curious as to how Donovan treated blackmailers. He must have had plenty of experience. His success was built on fraud, threat, bribery and foul play. This little man should present no great problem to him.



I WALKED down Hollywood Boulevard toward Vine. It was eight o'clock and Donovan had not told me what to do.

When I arrived at the cafeteria, a big place crowded with people, I was still at a loss what to say to Yocum. For a few minutes I walked up and down at the entrance, hoping for advice, but no command reached me.

Perhaps the brain was asleep? Should I telephone Schratt and ask him to wake it?

"Dr. Cory?" a voice whispered behind me.

It was Yocum. He clutched his briefcase close to his chest and even by the yellow light that shone through the bright windows of the restaurant, I could see that his cheeks were flushed with fever.

He led me to a shabby car in the parking lot next to the cafeteria. It had a California license plate with a very easy number to remember.

He moved his lips in a soundless attempt to talk. I could tell he had tuberculosis of the throat; the glottal ligaments were affected already and his voice had given out. But in his excitement he was unaware that I could not hear him.

I took the money from my pocket and he dropped his case to grab the notes with both hands.

I picked up the briefcase and opened it.

Three negatives and some prints were in it, wrapped in newspaper.

Yocum made no other attempt to talk. He stepped into his car, slammed the door, and rolled up the window. He smiled at me showing big yellow teeth, moved his lips again and drove off.

As soon as he had left I stepped into a taxi. Donovan had called it. In an excited voice I ordered the driver to follow the small yellow coupe, but I could not figure out what the brain purposed by pursuit.

Yocum drove his car down the Boulevard, weaving in and out of traffic. Brakes shrieked and cars skidded to a stop.

"That guy will get a ticket!" the driver called back through the window.

We drove up Laurel Canyon, but the yellow coupe had disappeared. At Kirkwood Drive, having lost Yocum, I dismissed the taxi and walked on climbing the grade.

I was not following a plan, just leaving it to Donovan to show me where to go. Up an unpaved road, deeply rutted with rain, I discovered Yocum's car, its door open, parked at the bottom of a small hill. A hundred feet further a ramshackle hut was half hidden behind tall eucalyptus trees.

I climbed the hill and peered through the window of the cottage. In the middle of a dirty room stood Yocum, in front of a fireplace stuffed with rubbish, old paper and discarded photographs. In one corner a mattress was covered with torn blankets. There were a couple of kitchen chairs and a table. The windows were so dirty they looked paint smeared.

Yocum was acting very strange. He had carefully spread the bank notes over the floor and had taken off his shoes and socks. He was walking on the money in his bare feet, careful not to disarrange it.

He stomped like an ostrich, lifting his feet high. Then he jumped into the air, hit the floor again with knees bent, and balanced there, elbows lifted, hands dropped like a big bird flapping its wings. All the time he uttered little cries, his



eyes glowing with a feverish ecstasy.

I pushed the door open. Yocum froze in his tracks, then fell on his knees and grabbed the money.

He turned toward me, his mouth hanging open with fright, stepped behind the table and pressed the money to his chest. The tattered dicky he wore slid aside and showed his bony thorax.

"What do you want?" he asked hoarsely. He had got his voice back.

"The other negatives," I said, "and the rest of the prints."

YOCUM retreated, alarmed, into a corner of the room. "I have no other negatives," he said dully, but he was sizing me up.

"Five thousand more if you hand over everything you have," I said.

His chin began to tremble and he leaned against the wall for support.

"Ten thousand," he said slowly.

"Then there are other negatives!" I stepped closer and he retreated at once.

On the mantelpiece lay matches and an old pipe with a much bitten stem. I lighted a match and threw it into the fireplace. The paper and photos flared up.

Yocum stared at me, petrified. He did not dare run past me, though he was crazy to get out of the room.

"You can take everything for five," he stammered.

The fire, fed by the celluloid on the photoprints roared brightly. With one foot I kicked a hunk of flame onto the rug-covered mattress.

When Yocum jumped forward to pass me, I grabbed him by his thin neck and dragged him to the door. The money fluttered out of his hands. He did not try to fight; paralyzed by fear, he simply collapsed in my hands. His voice left him again and he screamed soundlessly with wide open mouth.

I pulled him out of the house, his feet dragging in the dust. Behind me I heard the crackling of the flames, devouring the old shack.

I walked on, yanking Yocum behind me. I stuffed him into the car, slid be-

hind the wheel and drove rapidly off.

At the bottom of Kirkwood Drive I turned left and followed the road up Laurel Canyon. Distant fire sirens shrieked and a white pall of smoke drifted up over the canyon.

At the intersection of Laurel and Mulholland Drive, I had to stop to let some fire engines pass. Then I slowly drove the car up a dirt road.

Yocum did not move. His bony head had dropped onto his knees.

When he finally lifted his face, he looked punch-drunk.

"You burned the money," he whispered.

I stared at the valley below me, at the mountains behind Burbank. Suddenly I was uneasy. Donovan had stopped giving me orders and I was on my own.

"All my life I wanted a little money," Yocum murmured. "Now you burned it."

His despair overcame his fear and he began to accuse me.

"Look at me. Rotting away." He opened his dirty coat to show his fleshless body. "I don't want to die. I wanted to live for once, and you burned my money!"

He did not remember that he had blackmailed me. The money had been in his grasp and to take it away from him was robbery.

Sliding out of the car, he stood tottering at the edge of the embankment. He was at the end of his rope.

"I'm thirty-eight," he murmured, bending over me as if accusing me with these words. "I haven't had a decent meal in years! I have to have money now! I can't get it by working; I'm sick and they don't want a man who coughs and loses his voice. They want them healthy and strong. Not like me."

He stared at me. His eyes were colorless.

"Just once I got a break when I had typhoid and they kept me in a hospital for three months. They put me with twenty other guys, but still I had a whopping good time. Somebody to feed me,



somebody to look after me. I kept thinking how nice it would be to be sick alone in a room, with a bell to ring for the nurse and everything quiet if I wanted to be quiet. Can't be so bad to die first class. I've been thinking of it for years!"



HE GRINNED, baring his stained teeth. It seemed to give him pleasure telling me his misery.

"When Donovan cracked up, I got the scoop. The only photographer in Phoenix! And how much did they give me? Ten bucks! I could have held out for more but they knew I needed money. And when they know you need money, they'll pay you a dime for a gold nugget!"

He seemed to be pleased that life had been consistently cruel.

"I photographed Donovan's empty skull to show how he was killed. I had no plan when I made the shot. Maybe they always take out dead men's brains, I wouldn't have known. Then I took pictures of your house and your wife and your car. I got one shot through the window of your laboratory, and when I enlarged the photo, I saw the thing swimming in the glass bowl. It looked like Donovan's missing brain to me. I put two and two together and knew you were up to something. They don't just casually take out people's brains and dump them into goldfish bowls!"

He laughed at me as if the joke pleased him.

"Then I found out everything about you. You didn't have much money, but when I trailed you here and saw you go into the bank, you stuffed bills into that briefcase. It wasn't very smart to carry all that around. I had asked for five thousand and I could just as well have said a million, but what difference would it have made. When I had the money you burned it!"

He sobbed but he had no tears left. His mouth hung open and the sound

strangled into an inaudible croak.

Now I was sure I had burned all the rest of the prints and negatives. I stepped out of the car and he was afraid I might leave him there with his car on Mulholland. When hope ends the world ends too.

He may have been an honest man all his life only because he was convinced that if things were ever too bad, he could be dishonest and change his luck. Now that this had not worked out either, he despaired. Every experience of his confirmed his pessimism about the world he knew, and he had lost his foolish optimism about the world he had not lived in. He was disillusioned.

"You burned my camera too!" he said. "A Graflex. Seventy-five dollars second-hand. It took me a year to pay for it."

He was coming down to earth; his misery had focused on concrete facts. He had lost a camera. The five thousand dollars was dream money. The camera was real.

He was going to die soon. I did not give him more than six months. Why shouldn't he die on Donovan's money? I took a bundle of bank notes from my pocket and passed it to him. I held out the notes and I felt no interference. Donovan did not object.

Yocum stared at the money in my hand not daring to touch it.

"Buy yourself a golden camera. Rent a room in a sanitarium," I said. "Get yourself into shape again!"

He took the bills and moved his lips convulsively.

I walked away. I preferred to hike the mile down to Ventura Boulevard rather than be embarrassed by his sentimental outburst.

A cab on Wilson Drive took me back to the hotel.

I PHONED Schratt before I packed to leave for Washington Junction to tell him I was on the way. The operator had to ring several times before there was an answer.



"I was asleep," Schratt explained, but his voice sounded wide awake. "How are you, Patrick?"

I told him I would be home next day. He indicated no enthusiasm; I had the impression my return embarrassed him. I was afraid something had gone wrong with the brain.

"Oh no," Schratt answered hastily. "Everything is fine. I just measured the electric discharge. It increases rapidly in output, close to five thousand microvolts now. The brain has grown twice its original size, too. If this continues, we shall have to have a bigger flask. I have enough brain ash for the serum. You needn't worry, Patrick!"

He was very eager to dispel my uneasiness, but did not encourage me to return. He wanted me to stay in Los Angeles and go wherever the brain told me to. He talked as if he were carrying out the experiment and I were the apprentice.

"But there is no reason to stay here." I was surprised to find myself on the defensive. "I have found out everything I wanted to know. No use hunting down facts I already have."

Schratt objected as glibly as if he had thought this out in advance.

"But you still don't know why Donovan ordered you to Los Angeles! Is the brain's thinking logical or not? Have you found out whether it works according to a preconceived plan? Are its orders just a blurred outburst void of reason, or is it proceeding systematically toward a fixed conclusion? I think you are obliged to find out whether this apparently exuberant growth of cell tissues destroys the organized process of thinking or augments it. Only then will you know whether the brain alone can carry out the process of thought or the whole central nervous system is interdependent."

I was at a loss to answer. Schratt had swamped me with questions. His feverish interest puzzled me and I could not dismiss the suspicion that he assumed this urgency to keep me away.

"By the way," he went on, "how is Janice? Did you see her? She is at Cedars of Lebanon."

"I've talked to her," I answered, "but haven't seen her yet."

"You ought to," he said. This time there was honest concern in his voice.

"I may," I answered, "but even so I'll be back tomorrow."

Schratt had nothing to reply. We hung up.

It was close to midnight, but before I went to bed, I put a pad and pencil within reach. I was drowsy. The street noises grew dim. Someone in the next room was talking on the phone, but soon his voice lost its animation and his words grew meaningless.

In the half dream which dulled my mind, I repeated a name I had heard somewhere before: Anton Sternli. The thought ran in circles in my half consciousness, and followed me into my sleep.

#### *November 28th*

Today, for the first time in a week, I am able to continue my record. The night after I burned Yocum's shack, I did not dream of anything so far as I can remember, but Schratt's voice repeated a single sentence, unendingly. The phrase made no sense to me, but all the time it echoed in my sleep, a terror gripped me as if the words were a threat of mortal danger.

"Amidst the mists and coldest frosts he thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts."

Unmistakably it was Schratt's voice that spoke again and again. It followed me into the day.

I got up. On the floor I found a message I had written in the night. Anton Sternli, Pasadena, 120 Byron Street, was clearly put down in Donovan's handwriting.

Five hundred dollars I have written after the name, and following it the number: B1425.

I dressed and went out to find that man.





HE DID not live at 120 Byron Street, but at 210. That proved that Donovan's memory is not infallible. He can make mistakes like an ordinary human being.

When I rang the bell, a young girl of fourteen opened the door. I asked for Mr. Sternli and she let me into a small library where an old man, bent and white-haired, sat alone.

He was so nearly blind, his eyes could not focus me, but he did not wear glasses. He looked vaguely in the direction from which my voice came, groping along the desk as he rose to move toward me.

"I am Dr. Cory," I said. "W. H. Donovan sent me."

My words had a curious effect. He stopped in his tracks. His sightless eyes shifted nervously.

"Mr. Donovan is dead," he answered uneasily.

"Of course," I said. "He died in my house at Washington Junction."

Sternli asked me to sit down and felt his way back to the desk.

"What can I do for you, Doctor?" he asked.

"Donovan told me to get in touch with you. He wanted me to bring you five hundred dollars."

I took the money from my pocket and put it on the table, but Sternli was too near-sighted to see my motion. He looked toward me irritably, as if he had not understood, then repeated: "Five hundred dollars."

I got up and laid down the money in front of him. He bent down to peer at it. Suddenly he smiled and said in a humorous tone: "It comes just in time. As a matter of fact, money always comes in time or too late, but never too soon. I have broken my glasses and could hardly afford new ones; they are very expensive. I am nearly blind."

He picked up a broken lens from his desk and looked through it toward me.

"You don't mind if I stare at you like

this? It is all that is left. I sat on them!"

He chuckled ruefully.

We sat silent until he questioned in a kind voice: "W. H. thought of me before he died? Then I certainly misjudged him all his life."

He shook his head and carefully put down the fragment of glass. "What else did he tell you?"

"Nothing. He was in no condition to talk."

"He did not tell you who I am?" he asked. At once, not to embarrass me, he added: "I was Mr. Donovan's secretary for many years. To be more precise, during all the years a man can work to provide for his old age."

The room was poorly furnished, except for the rows of expensive books carefully arranged on sturdy shelves. The walls were dingy with age.

"Didn't he leave you any compensation?" I asked politely.

Sternli smiled and nodded.

"The memories of interesting times, yes. But money? No! He never would! That's why I am surprised he thought of me at a moment when every man should think of himself. Death was the last word that could be mentioned in Mr. Donovan's presence. We spoke of it only once and he said: 'Making a will is resigning life. Better not get the idea in your head at all, or it bores into your consciousness like termites in a house. They eat away in secret until one day when you least expect it, the roof crashes onto you. Never mention death to me!'"

Sternli turned his face toward me and I saw he was not so old as I had thought. He could not be more than fifty, but his erudite appearance, his gentle manner, his white hair, made him look twenty years older.

"How can I serve you, Dr. Cory?" he asked.

My curiosity got the upper hand.

"Well—could you tell me something about Roger Hinds?"

He looked up sharply, a strange look in those myopic eyes that did not focus, then he smiled.



"Roger Hinds is the name W. H. used on a bank account," he said. "I deposited money to it. I even remember the amount of the first deposit. Eighteen hundred thirty-three dollars and eighteen cents. W. H. always liked my memory for things which do not have much significance."

"You mean Roger Hinds never existed?" I asked.

"I don't know. He may have, but I never saw him and W. H. never corresponded with him. He used to be very interested however in everyone named Hinds and collected information about them. I don't know why. One of this family is quite notorious recently. You'll find his name in the headlines. He has been accused of murder. A very cruel case of homicide. It happened the first of August of this year, at nine thirty at night."

**H**E TOUCHED his forehead with a thin hand.

"I can never forget anything I read or hear," he said apologetically. "Cyril Hinds! He is in the county jail if that is of any interest to you."

In that strange conglomeration of reality and the almost supernatural I did not know where my own thinking began and Donovan's commands ended.

"He did not mention Hinds' name," I said truthfully.

Sternli looked at me and slowly lifted the piece of broken glass to his eye. I realized I had contradicted myself. Donovan must have talked to me about Hinds, otherwise Sternli could not understand, for I had mentioned the name in the first place.

I got up.

Sternli held out his hand rather timidly and smiled.

"Thank you, Dr. Cory. It was nice of you to bring me the money. But should we not inform Howard Donovan of this gift? He is the heir and he might object to my receiving it."

The last thing I wanted was to tip off Horace Donovan and his lawyers where

the money came from, and I lied: "It does not belong to him. It was in an envelope with your name. Donovan gave it to me before he died."

That did not sound very credible, but there was no way of proving I was lying.

"Thank you so very much," Sternli said. "If I can be of any service to you, please let me know. I have a great deal of leisure, unfortunately."

He took my arm to go to the door with me. I suddenly felt Donovan trying to get a message through to me.

"I should ask you for the key," I said in the doorway.

Sternli peered at me, surprised I had brought up an important request at the moment of departure.

"The key . . . what key?" he asked, uneasily.

I took the slip of paper with Sternli's name and the serial number on it out of my pocket and showed it to him. He held the paper so close to his eyes it nearly touched them. When he dropped his hand, his face was flushed with amazement.

"W. H.'s writing," he murmured. He groped his way back into the room and returned with a key. It was small and flat, for a safe deposit box.

Alarmed by the erratic instructions the brain had been giving me, I walked back toward town. Donovan made mistakes; his memory was slipping. The deposit box number had been written down, but the brain had forgotten to mention the key in its message. It had certainly intended to inform me about it for the number was pertinent to the key. But something had gone wrong with its process of thinking lately. It had been precise before.

I made a note of the hour and date I had received the instructions the night before the twenty-third of November, after midnight. I must ask Schratt if he found irregularities in the brain's reactions at that time. Is the organ sick? Is mental decomposition setting in?

It irritated me that the brain only remembered to complete its message when



I was leaving Anton Sternli's house.

Walking along, I crossed a street where road gangs were digging ditches. Machines made a deafening noise, shoveling out dirt and throwing it onto a moving band which conveyed it to the trucks.

I did not watch where I walked. Concentrated on Donovan, I was trying to force him to complete instructions concerning the key and code number.

Donovan could get in touch with me any time he chose, but I was still cut off from him. It was only a one-way communication system, but as the brain was growing steadily stronger, it should soon freely receive my thoughts.

I walked in a trance, willing Donovan's brain to hear me, with all the power of concentration I possessed.

Suddenly I heard a shriek of brakes beside me. Instinctively I stopped and stumbled. Something heavy hit my back. The groaning and clatter of the big iron shovel was close to my ears.

As I felt a tremendous wave of fear engulfed me. I lost consciousness.



**I** T WAS night when I awoke.

Even before I opened my eyes, the faint odor of antiseptics told me I was in a hospital. The brownish walls were familiar. They had taken me to Cedars of Lebanon where I had worked as an interne.

Janice sat by the bed, motionless, watching me. When I stirred she stepped over to me at once. They had packed my thorax in twenty pounds of plaster. Lying motionless, I examined myself mentally, going over my body inch by inch until I was convinced that this was nothing fatal.

I could move my head a little, bend my fingers, lift my arms.

Janice watched me anxiously. She was not sure yet that I was fully conscious, for my eyes were still closed.

"Pain?" she asked in a low voice.

Again I listened to my body. I felt

suspended in mid-air, as if my back was not compressed in a plaster cast but supported by gentle hands.

I had a strange sensation of being bodyless.

I could feel no effect of a drug. My head was clear, and my mouth did not have the dry, greenish after-taste of anesthesia.

"I don't feel anything," I finally said.

My words alarmed her more than if I had screamed with pain.

"It's spinal concussion," she said.

I closed my eyes. I ought to be suffering the pains of hell, if that diagnosis was right. Janice got up to ring for the doctor, but I stopped her.

"I can move my toes and fingers," I said. "I am not paralyzed. There must be some other reason I have no pain. Did they dope me?"

I knew she would deny it and she did.

"You were in pain while you were unconscious," she said. "For hours. In great pain."

She spoke calmly, submitting to me an observation of symptoms, like one doctor to another. She knew enough of medicine to be as surprised and alarmed as I was. Spinal concussion is usually accompanied by severe pain.

"What happened to me?" I asked.

"The silliest thing," she said cheerfully. "You fell into a ditch in the street and a steam shovel crushed you."

She looked very well, and I noticed that she was attractive in her white nurse's uniform. She had lost that anemic look and I was half convinced she had not really been sick at all. It was our unhappy marriage that had broken her down.

"Is that the outfit they give patients?" I said, looking at her uniform.

"I got permission to come on this case myself."

I looked at her face, white and transparent in the yellow light of the lamp behind the screen in the far corner of the room. Her eyes were enormous, dark.

Everything seemed larger than life, everything moved with a slow motion.



Shadows and light became one great waving veil. The sheets that covered the cast towered like mountains.

Janice's light hands adjusted them so that I could see the wall opposite.

It was not unpleasant to have her around. I didn't mind if she stayed.

I closed my eyes again.

Then the pains stabbed me.

I tried to shake off the plaster cast which suddenly weighed like tons of steel. My hand clenched in a cramp and the fingernails buried themselves in the flesh of the palms.

"Codein!"

I tried to make her understand. I could not hear my voice myself; it was lost in a shattering noise that seemed to come from the direction of my spinal cord and filled my ears with an increasing howl.

Strangely that same senseless phrase underlined the torture: "Amidst the mists and coldest frosts he thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts."

THE pains disappeared as fast as they had attacked. I saw Janice bending anxiously over me. She wiped the perspiration from my forehead. I was floating again, suspended in soft air. Not a memory of my suffering was left.

The door opened and a doctor entered. A nurse behind him rolled in a table with glasses and instruments.

"Hello," the doctor said with professional cheerfulness. "Still in pain?"

He was filling a hypodermic with morphine.

"Thanks, I don't need it," I said definitely.

The man looked astonished. "The pain can't have stopped so quickly," he said.

"I'm surprised myself," I answered, and looked down the length of my body.

There was nothing I could feel. As if I were only a brain, I was hardly aware of arms or legs, or even my injured back.

"Would you mind testing my nerve reactions?"

He stuck me in the arm with a pin, but I experienced no pain reaction.

I felt like a patient under a spinal anesthetic.

"Are you sure your diagnosis is right?" I questioned.

He indicated that he was.

I closed my eyes; I wanted to think out clearly what had happened to me. I heard the doctor whisper to Janice and leave.

As soon as he had gone, I asked her to get Schratt on the phone.

She hesitated and I repeated the order.

A few minutes later I was talking to Schratt.

"How are you, Patrick?" he asked, relieved to hear my voice. "Janice told me about the accident."

Janice stood at the window with her back turned.

"I wanted to ask you," I said slowly, prepared for the pain to return any moment, "if the brain has acted differently during the last forty-eight hours."

He did not reply at first.

"I did not want to alarm you as long as you were ill," he said finally, "but it seems to have a fever. I can't make out why. The temperature rises quickly, then drops to normal when it is asleep."

Suddenly the pains attacked me with increased fury. I thought I could not stand them. Even the bones of my skull hurt as if a fist were pushing from inside.

"Wake the brain!" I cried into the phone. "Wake it up! Knock at the glass! Frighten it! Don't let it sleep!"

The receiver dropped out of my hands. I bit my lower lip until blood filled my mouth.

Janice grabbed the hypodermic, but the pain evaporated like steam.

I took the receiver again and heard Schratt come back to the phone.

"The brain is awake now, Patrick. The lamp is burning." Then, "What did it do to you?"

My head sank back on the pillow. I knew what had happened and tried to tell Schratt.

"It suffers my pain when it is awake,"



I said, controlled. "It suffers the pain instead of me. It seems to have penetrated my thalamus. Its cortex now receives the reflexes of my nervous system. My body's pains are experiences in Donovan's cerebrum. It takes possession of me more and more. Before it controlled only my motor nerves, but now it dominates that part of my brain where pain registers."

Schratt was breathing so loudly I could hear him.

"If this continues," he said, "it soon will control your will."

"What of it?" I asked, trying to speak lightly. "Some men have given more than their identity to science."

"Yes," he said, and suddenly hung up.

Groping, I put the receiver back on the hook.

"Now I'll be all right," I said to Janice. I forgot she had listened to our conversation. Schratt's voice had been loud enough for her to hear.

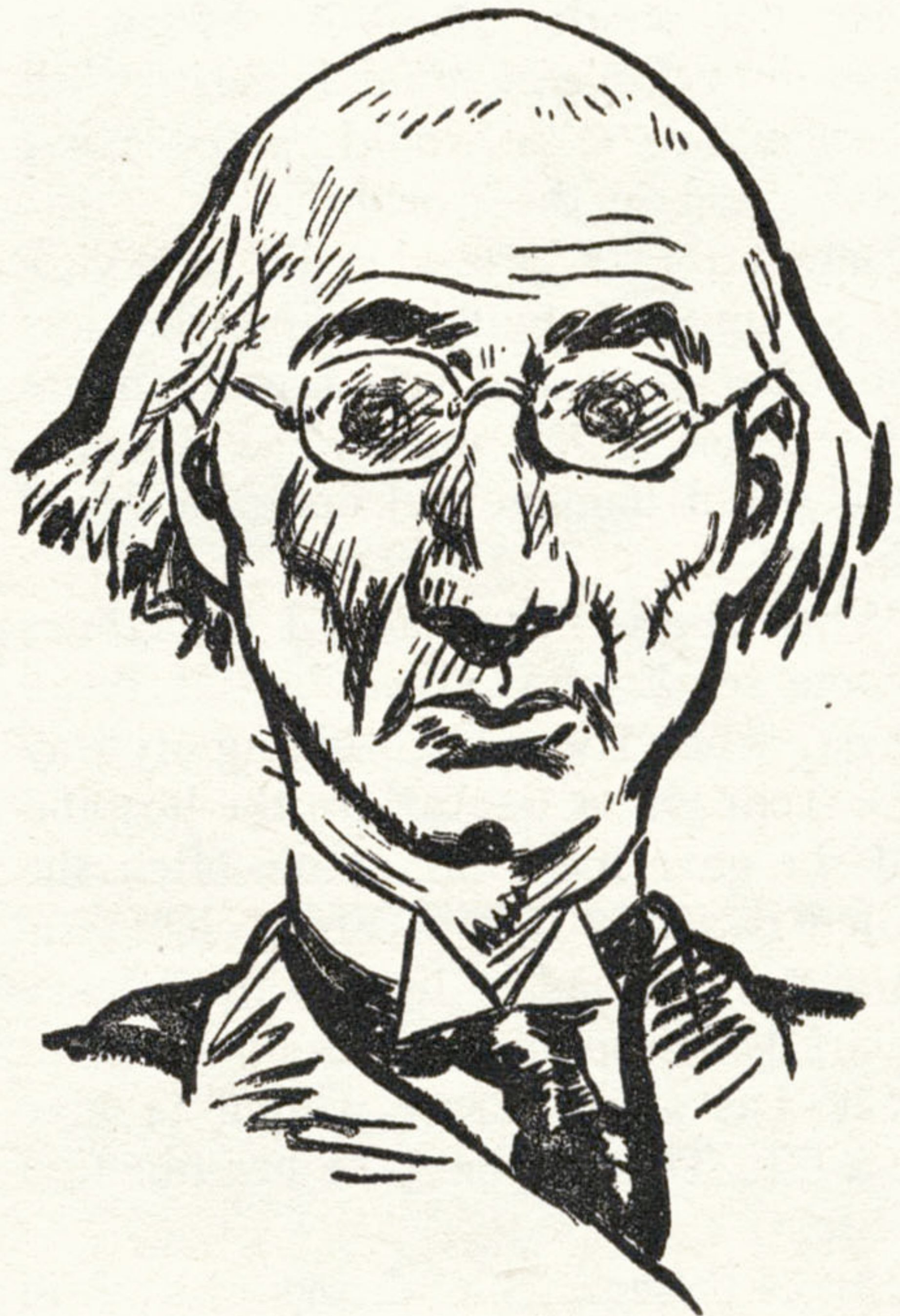
Janice stared at me, her eyes wide with terror and despair. I had not known how much she knew, but now understanding some of the consequences, she divined the abyss of self-destruction to which the experiment had led me.



**D**URING the last few days the pains have bothered me less, but I am still confined to my plaster prison. Even when I get up, I will have to carry twenty pounds of cast around with me.

The brain has given me some addresses: of one Alfred Hinds, in Seattle, and of a Geraldine Hinds in Reno. It insistently repeated the names last night.

Once, impelled by telepathic command, I tried to get out of bed, but Janice, hearing my moans, gave me a shot of morphine which immediately severed communication with the brain. It was like cutting off a telephone connection. When I am drugged, the brain cannot get in touch with me. It seems at a loss to understand why I do not follow its orders.



STERNLI

It is not aware I have had an accident. I tried to tell Donovan about it. Lying quietly, putting myself in a trance of concentration like a yogi, I tried to transmit the message. I could not.

In my dreams and lately during the day that strange sentence returns again and again: "Amidst the mists and coldest frosts. . . ."

Its unending repetition tortures me as much as the pain. There must be some meaning. The brain must have a purpose in repeating it.

I phoned Schratt and told him about it. He seemed amazed when I spoke the sentence to him, but he insisted he had never heard it before.

I asked Janice. Finally, after thinking it over for a day, she came to the conclusion it must be a rhyme to cure people of lisping.

That sounds likely, but why should the brain repeat such a line?

Janice and I avoid mentioning the brain. She is waiting for me to speak first, but I have not the slightest intention of bringing up the subject. She knows too much already; it disturbs me



to see her ponder about it. Whatever comes into Janice's mind is written all over her face. She would be the worst secret agent in the world.

But I am getting used again to having her around. Actually during the few hours she leaves me with another nurse in her place, I feel uneasy, as if something might happen and only she could help me.

When she is not around I sometimes become sentimental about her. I recall the day when I was hitch-hiking my way back from Santa Barbara to the hospital and she gave me a lift. How often she waited patiently in her car to chauffeur me around; I had to live on the twenty dollars the hospital paid its internes.

She has always been willing to give me a lift. That seems to be her function in life.

She is patient. She always was. And persistent.

She made up her mind to marry me. She did. She wanted to get me away from Washington Junction—here I am. Now she is waiting to win me back to her.

She knows when to be around and when to leave me alone. She is like a fine voltmeter, recording the slightest variations in current. How much happiness she could give to some people, instead of wasting her strength on me.

I must talk to her about that one day.

#### *November 29th*

Anton Sternli visited me. He rang up from the reception desk first. Janice answered the phone and stepped out to meet him at the elevator.

She kept him in the corridor nearly an hour, talking to him before she let him see me.

When we lived on the desert, Janice limited her activities to running our house. Now, taking advantage of my helplessness, she has extended her field to the people connected with me. She has always had Schratt in the palm of her hand, and Sternli has been easy.

Sternli looked more like a Swiss pro-

fessor than ever, when he came into the room, peering at me through heavy glasses that made his eyes look the size of hazelnuts. That suit could never have been made for him; the trousers bagged over his knees. He carried a white cane like a blind man's.

Sternli had seen about my accident in the papers and would have come before, but he only got his glasses yesterday. He wanted to tell me how sorry he was.

**H**E TALKED about insignificant things until Janice left us. She had seen in his eager face that he wanted to be alone with me.

"You startled me with that memorandum in Donovan's handwriting," Sternli began. "You see, before he left for Florida he gave me the key and wrote down a number. All his life he was over-cautious about everything. Even when he signed his name, he would shield his left hand with his right so no one could see what he wrote until he had finished. I am astonished he should have thought of me at the hour of his death! And why did he have my name on an envelope with money in it in his pocket? He was never generous unless there was advantage to himself! It makes me uneasy, Dr. Cory."

"You judge him too harshly," I said. I saw complications ahead.

"Oh no."

Sternli took off his glasses and cleaned them studiously with a small piece of chamois, holding them near his eyes.

"W. H. was my whole life. How can I hate what I was a part of? When W. H. dismissed me there was nothing left to live for. I have no family, not even a friend. To make friends one must be tolerant and interested and with advancing age we become less and less adaptable. One has to give to keep friends, and my larder is empty. There are two species of man, the creative and the imitative. I am the latter. And those people are very barren if no inspiration comes from outside."

*(Continued on page 114)*



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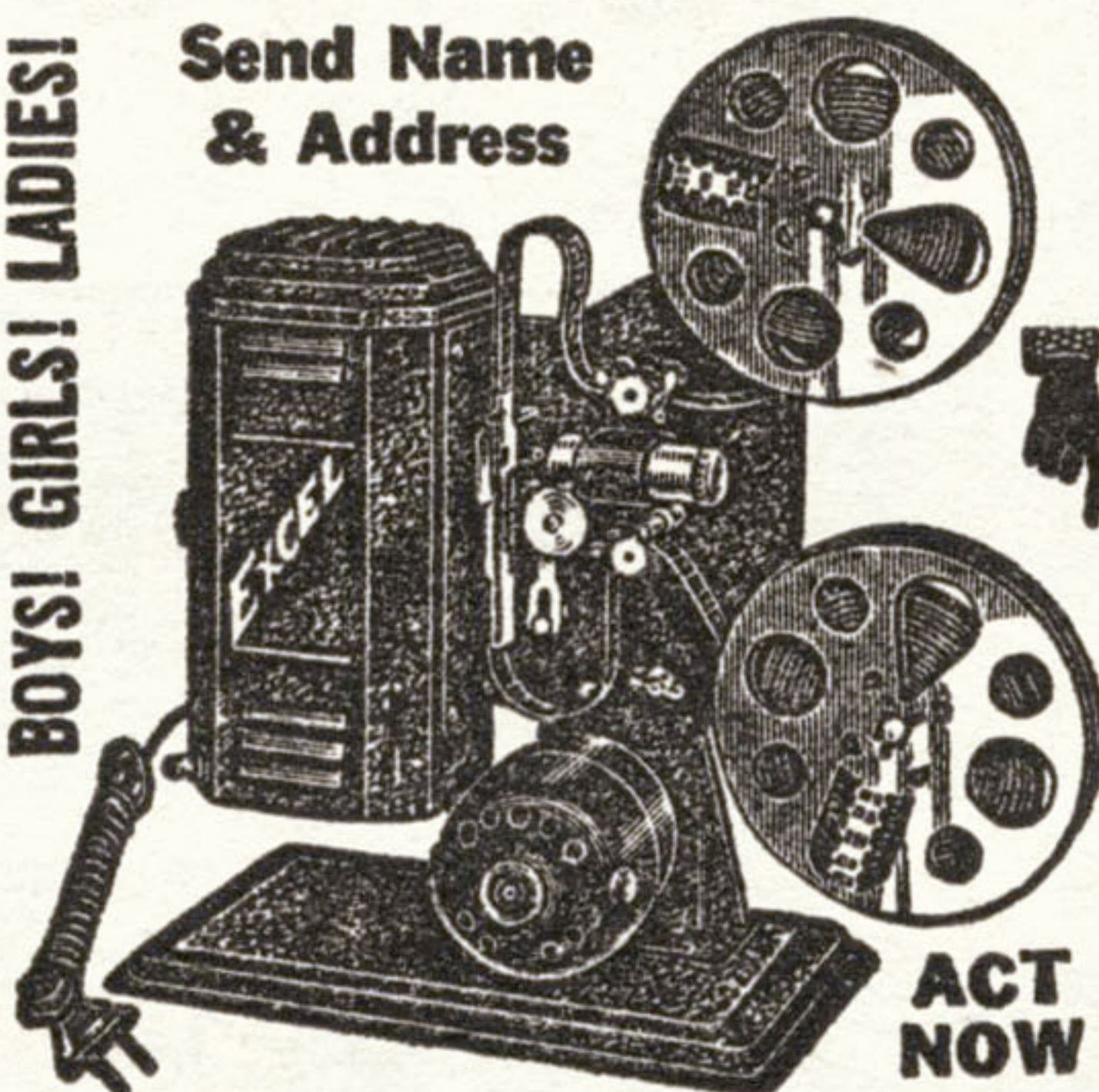
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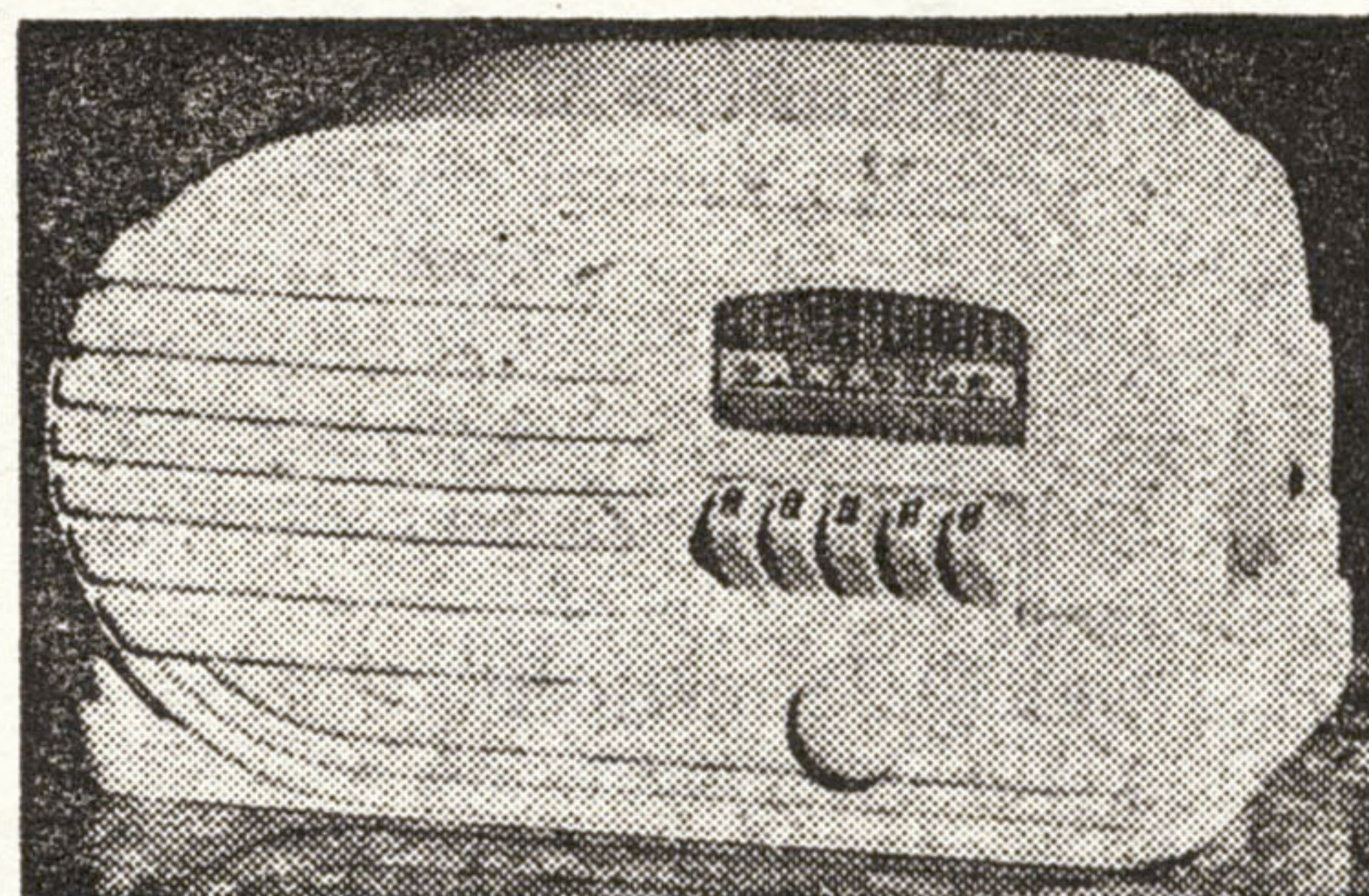
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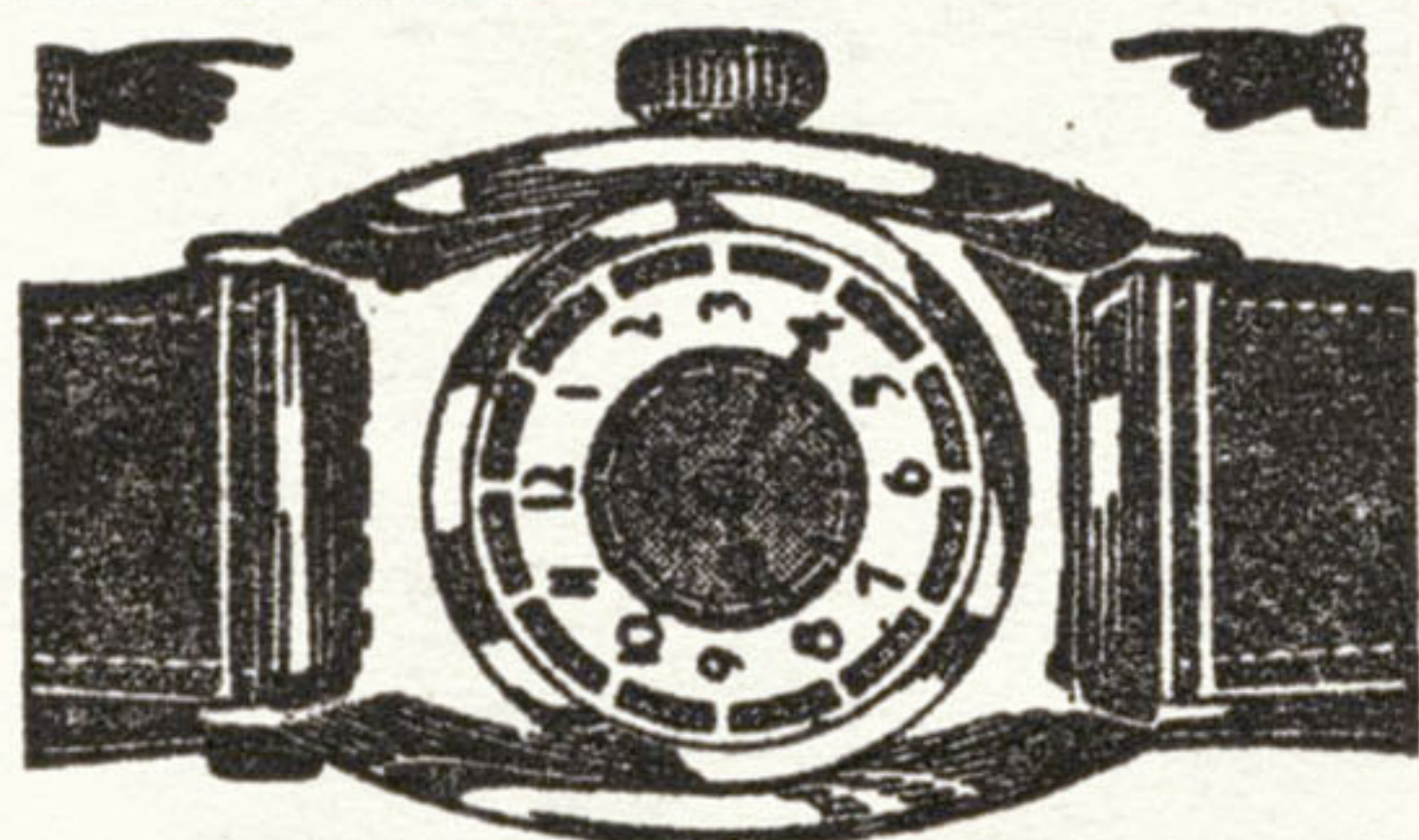
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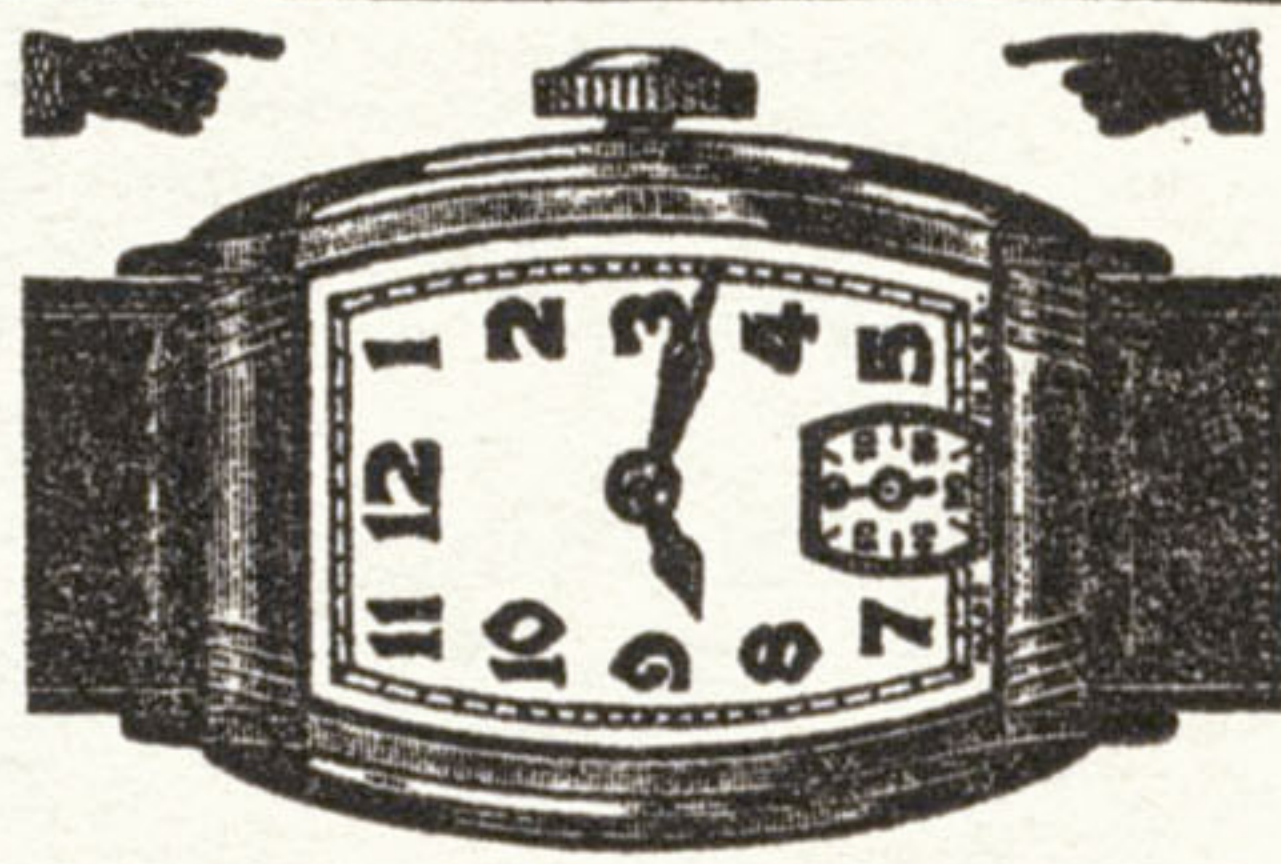
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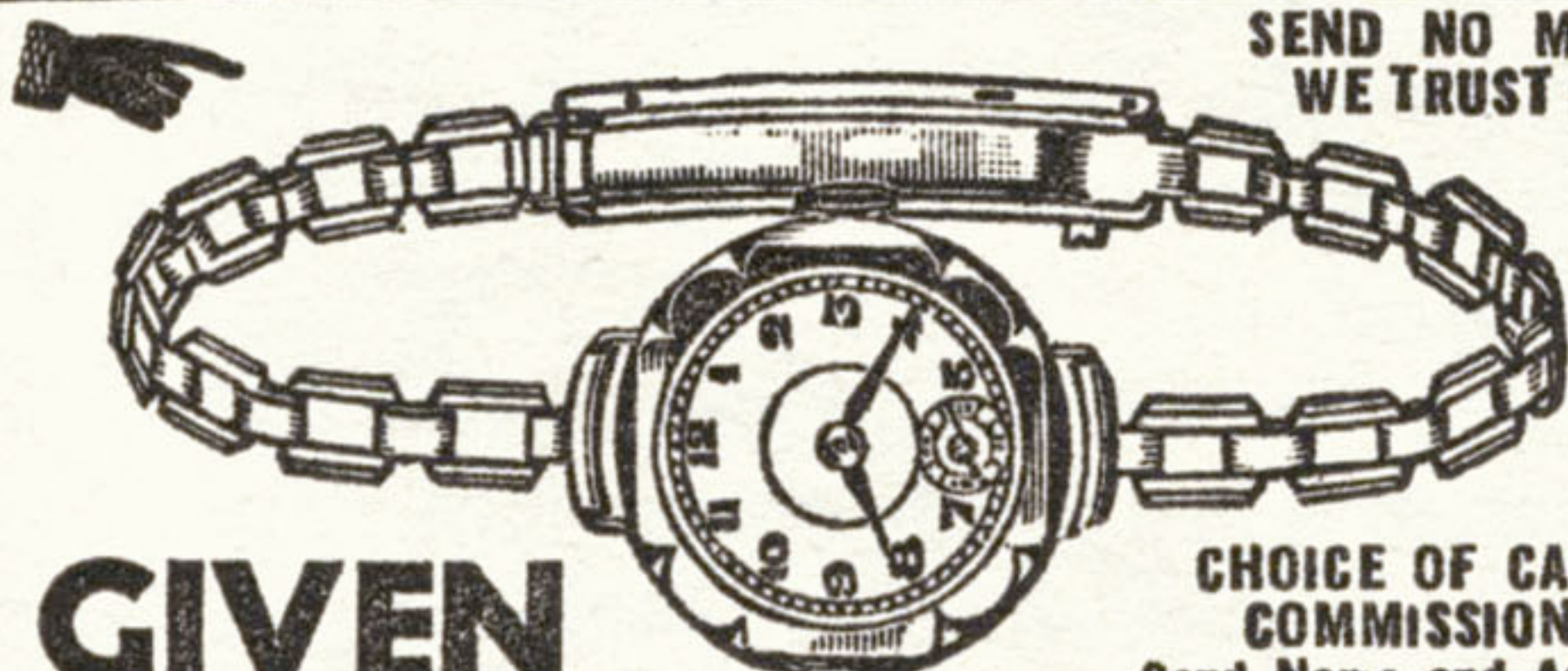
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*(Continued from page 112)*

He spoke quietly. This was his philosophy, expressed without bitterness.

"I have been approached by a publishing house to write a book about W. H. They offer me a great sum of money and I need it for the future; my salary was too small for me to save."

Sternli was eager to talk. He sensed that my relation to Donovan was closer than just that of the one disastrous meeting. He could not define the bond between me and his former master, but he felt impelled to talk with me to free many unspoken words.

He never had spoken to Donovan as he did to me. His natural shyness and fear of his master had prevented it. Still, for years Sternli had hoped in his heart that some day he would find the courage to talk to him as one man to another. Sternli never did.

Now with Donovan's death that hope had died, but speaking to me was like confessing crimes of which, though only as his master's tool, Sternli was somehow the villain.

He told me his life story, typical of a retired, studious fellow like him, secluded from the world.

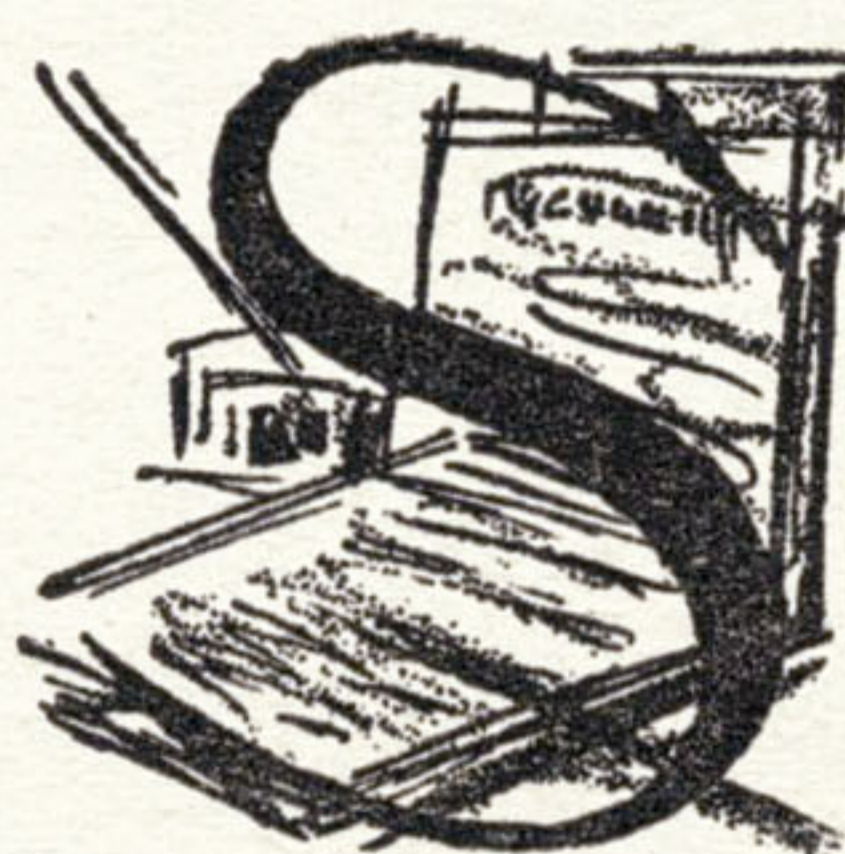
Sternli had worshipped Donovan to a degree which destroyed his own personality. Donovan had accepted this devotion and, without any qualms, had taken every possible advantage of the man who would not or could not live a life of his own.

In Zurich, Switzerland, where he was studying languages, Sternli met Donovan. When he saw the millionaire for the first time, in the most expensive hotel, of course, the scholar was immediately fascinated by this powerful personality.

That afternoon Sternli had bought himself a cup of coffee at the Baur-au-lac-Hotel, just to see for once how the rich of the world lived. While he was drinking his coffee slowly, Sternli heard Donovan's booming voice calling for a man to translate some wires into Portuguese. He could hear the frightened desk clerk's apologetic reply.

In a rare fit of courage, which marked the turning point of his life, Sternli offered his services.

Donovan kept him around while he stayed in Zurich, and when he left he asked Sternli to accompany him as his secretary. The young man jumped at this opportunity to see the world.



STERNLI became Donovan's shadow, intimate to him as a pair of spectacles. He slept next door to Donovan, followed him from conference to conference, from town to town, from country to country, from continent to continent.

Donovan's secretary, letter writer, interpreter, but never his friend, Sternli grew into his job, became the walking, living memory of the intricate machine which was Donovan's brain.

He never took a holiday; he would not have known what to do with himself. Only once, when his mother was dangerously ill, he asked for a short leave of absence to visit her.

Reluctantly Donovan agreed, and when Sternli asked him for money for the trip to Europe, Donovan made him sign a note for the five hundred dollars.

In telling this story, Sternli skipped over a part of his life. I could only guess at what he wanted to conceal.

He had been in love once. As fate ironically decided, it was Donovan's wife, Katherine. She must have been a beautiful woman, aloof and unhappy. She did not encourage the shy young man; I assume she never even knew his secret adoration.

One day Sternli could not stand the conflict that raged in his conscience. He felt he was not working honestly; it seemed disloyal to him to be in love with his employer's wife.

So he asked Donovan to release him from his duties.

Donovan immediately offered Sternli

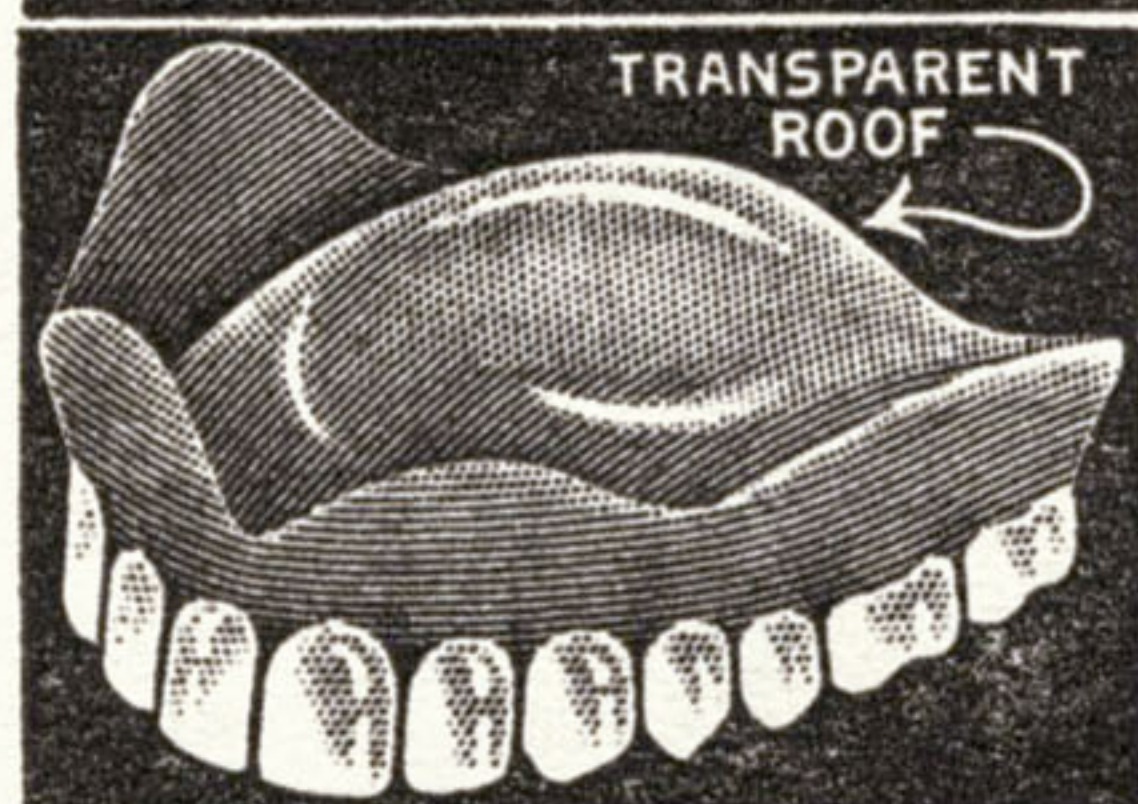
*(Continued on page 116)*



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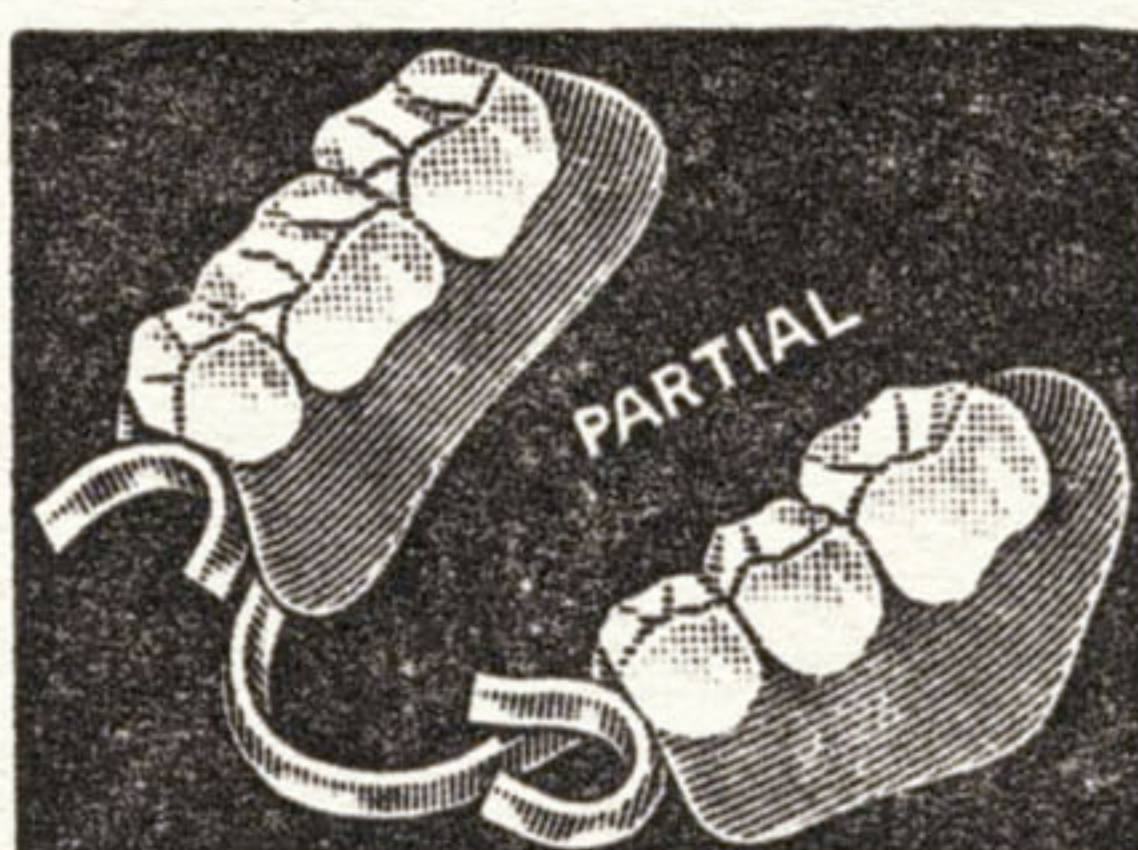
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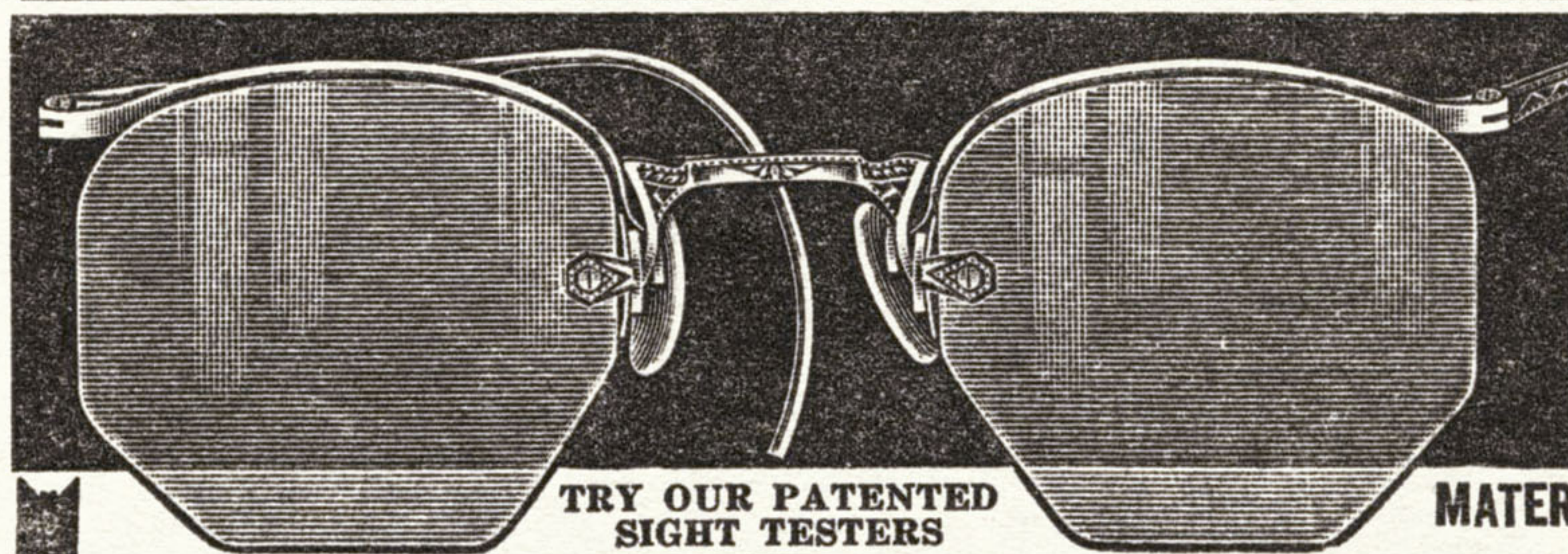
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**Curt Siodmak**

(Continued from page 114)

a raise. Discontent could always be cured with money. But Sternli wanted to confess.

"You are in love with Katherine!" Donovan said calmly. "What does she say to that?"

Sternli, of course, had never talked to Mrs. Donovan about it. For him, to fall in love with a married woman was a plain violation of one of God's commandments.

"If you haven't told her, there is no reason to quit," Donovan said sanely, and added, "There is no reason to raise your salary either."

With this decision, Donovan settled the incident to his own satisfaction. Sternli stayed on. His mind had been made up for him, even in this most intimate and important concern of his life.

A few months later Katherine died.

Sternli talked on, unpretentiously. He wanted to get closer to me, and with this story he succeeded in doing so.

I learned more about Donovan from listening to Sternli's life story than about Sternli himself.

It interested me very much. I had overlooked this obvious approach. Donovan's story, as told in the magazines, was exaggerated, falsified, yellow-journalized. Here his real self unfolded.

I began to understand the brain's workings. If I could search Donovan's character thoroughly, exploring every emotion of his heart, every reaction of his consciousness, I would understand many of the brain's paradoxes.

**S**TERNLI had an idealized picture of Donovan. He was blind to his master's faults. He did not even divine how this man had distorted the pattern of his existence, cunningly, patiently and thoroughly.

It became clear to me that from the moment Sternli confessed a love for Katherine, Donovan had plotted his destruction. Not that Donovan was jealous. He was too big to permit himself that



## Donovan's Brain

weakness, but somebody had trespassed on his property.

Sternli told me about Donovan's habit of having people spied on by detectives. Everyone close to him was under secret supervision. Number one of his suspects was Katherine. I was sure Donovan had known every step she took, was informed how she spent every minute of her time. He had checked on Sternli, too. His watchdogs had trailed this little man.

Sternli's eyes got bad. He slowly lost his sight and became unfit to take Donovan's rapid dictation. Another secretary had to be engaged.

Sternli was of no other use than as a living filing system, an infallible record of things past. Since his usefulness was now cut by half, Donovan logically cut Sternli's salary in half too. And one day he began to collect the five hundred dollars he had advanced years before—in five and ten dollar installments out of Sternli's curtailed salary.

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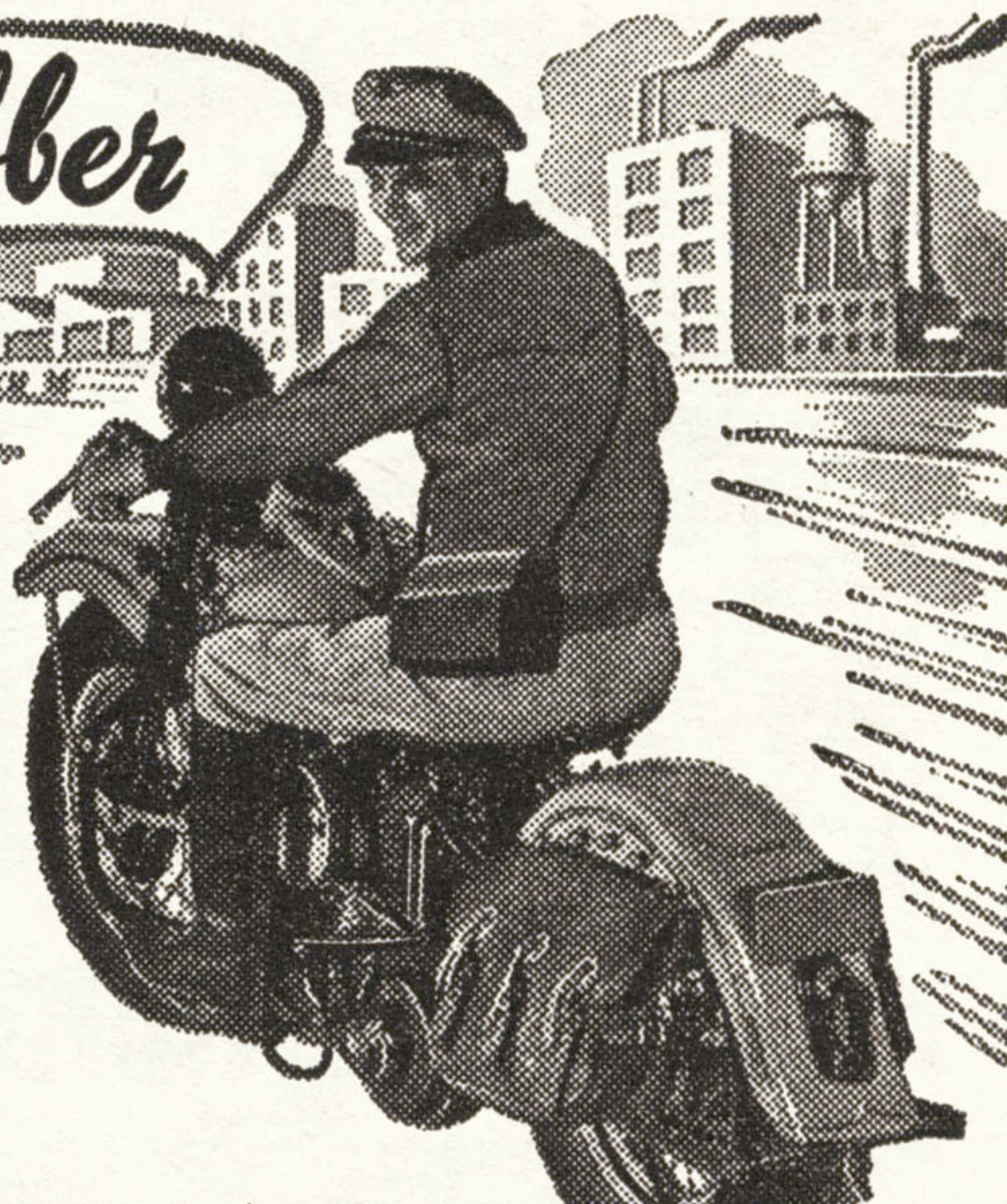
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## Curt Siodmak

When Sternli found himself hard-pressed, Donovan acted surprised.

"Don't tell me you have no money! You must be rich!" he said. "You must have made enough on the side."

Sternli, deeply hurt, defended himself.

"I am not insinuating you filched coins from my pocket," Donovan said. "But surely you threw in a few hundred dollars too, when I bought stocks?"

Sternli had not even thought of such a thing, and according to his strict code, it would have been dishonest.

Only once Sternli had seen Donovan weak and uncontrolled. The day Katherine died. She escaped Donovan's domination by quietly slipping out of his hands. By dying, she had deprived him of the final victory of subduing her. To hold her, he had forced her to give birth to one child after another. Only the first and the last had lived: Howard and Chloe.

When Katherine died, Donovan made Sternli stay in the room with him constantly. Sternli watched the big man walking up and down for nights, mumbling to himself.

To have seen Donovan in an hour of weakness, was a sentence of destruction, as if a slave had known where a king's treasure was hidden. Opposite me sat a man of fifty, who looked seventy, half blind, helpless, penniless.

"I don't know why Mr. Donovan sent me the five hundred dollars, Dr. Cory. Exactly the sum he loaned me and then collected again! Five hundred dollars. Did he choose just that sum with some purpose? Did he want me to believe he regretted many things he had unconsciously done to hurt me? I am sure he always meant to be kind, but he did not die without remembering me! It is not the money, it is the thought that makes me happy."

"He did not know he was going to die," I said.

"Oh yes," Sternli replied quietly. "He had known for more than a year that his days were numbered."



## Donovan's Brain



HE revelation shocked me. It suddenly put Donovan in another light. It gave me a perspective on his character I had not had before.

"How could he have know about the accident in advance?" I asked surprised.

"Oh, he did not," Sternli answered with a wan smile, "but he knew he was ill. There was no hope. The doctors gave him only one more year."

"Nephritic," I diagnosed, remembering the color of Donovan's face, whitish, with a yellow tinge. He had suffered from nephritic degeneration of the kidneys, which is usually associated with a similar process in the liver.

"Yes," Sternli nodded. "That is what they told him. W. H. used to drink alone. Solitary drinkers are dangerous. I sometimes thought he chose to get drunk, not because he liked it, but because he wanted to blank out his thoughts. He was tired from considering so many new and powerful projects. He was hounded by his own intelligence. Often he called for me in the middle of the night and dictated for hours. I gave him a dictaphone once for his birthday, but he still kept sending for me at the most ungodly hours. Then during the last years he started to drink in secret. He did not like anybody to see and he never invited me to share a bottle with him. I think he hated alcohol, really."

Sternli suddenly fell into contemplation, forgetting me.

So Donovan had been trying to escape himself. Did he have a conscience, then? And what was he trying to forget?

"He had coaxed the truth out of his physicians. Nobody could lie to Donovan. When he learned his days were numbered, he underwent a change," Sternli said.

"Became kinder, I suppose," I prompted to help him on, but Sternli shook his head.

He polished his glasses again, and



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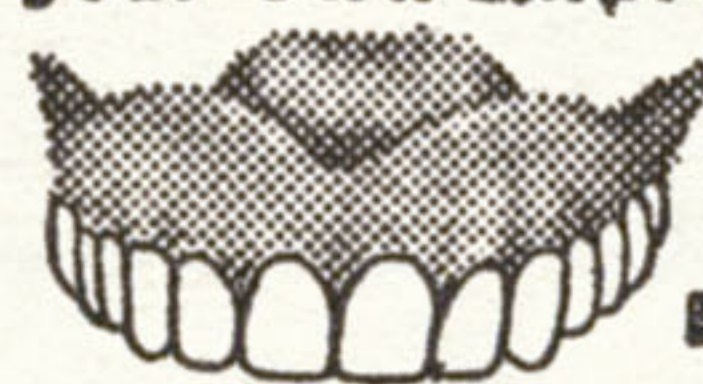
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## Curt Siodmak

smiled. His myopic eyes were wide open.

"No. Not what is generally under-  
stood by the word kindness. The first  
thing he did was to fire me, without a  
pension. He gave up his chairmanship  
to his son. He turned over to his family  
everything but the houses and apart-  
ments where he used to live. He had a  
score of mansions all over the country,  
and an apartment in every large city.  
In each of his personal dwellings break-  
fast was brought in every morning  
whether the master was there or the  
bed empty. The servants had to knock,  
to enter, to take away the tray after a  
reasonable length of time. The same at  
luncheon. In each house, each night, full  
dinner for eight was served at the same  
time. Donovan loved to pay surprise  
visits, arriving just as the first course  
was served. He had found this custom  
described in a book about Spain in the  
reign of Philip the Second, and it ap-  
pealed to his sense of seignory. 'I am  
omnipresent,' he used to say, 'and if I  
pay I expect service!' But when they  
told him he was going to die, he closed  
all the houses. He had a plan for the lim-  
ited time he had left."

"What plan?" I asked. I felt I was  
close to Donovan's secret now.

"He said he wanted to balance his  
books," Sternli answered. "I do not  
know what he meant by that."

Suddenly Sternli became restless, and  
looked at his watch.

"I must not talk any longer," he said,  
as if only now he were aware he had  
been telling me a story he had never re-  
lated to anyone before. He felt so great-  
ly embarrassed, he had to apologize.

"Forgive an old man for talking too  
much."

He was in a hurry to leave but I  
asked him not to go. I suddenly received  
the brain's commands more strongly  
that ever before. As if the brain had  
been listening all the time and was go-  
ing to take its part in the conversation  
now.

"Since you are unattached," I said,



## Donovan's Brain

prompted by the brain, "would you mind working for me? I can pay you as much as Donovan did."

"Work for you?" Sternli's face flushed in happy surprise. "But how could I be of service to you?"

"I want you to open an account at the Merchants' Bank on Hollywood Boulevard. You will find a roll of bills in my overcoat pocket. Please deposit them," I said.

Sternli looked myopically toward the closet, and while he was opening the door, I took the checkbook from my wallet and wrote: *To the order of Mr. Anton Sternli, \$100,000—Roger Hinds.*

STERNLI returned with the money in his hands.

"How much shall I take?" he asked.

"All of it. Don't count it. Just pay it in. And take this with you."

I handed him the check.

The brain's orders suddenly stopped. I felt pain creeping on me and grabbed the hypodermic which Janice had prepared for a return of the attack.

Sternli took the key and the check. He held the paper close to his eyes, stared at it open-mouthed.

He had recognized Donovan's handwriting.

*December 2nd*

Today I got up for the first time. I will have to wear this plaster cast for weeks to come. My back still hurts and when I move I feel like a turtle.

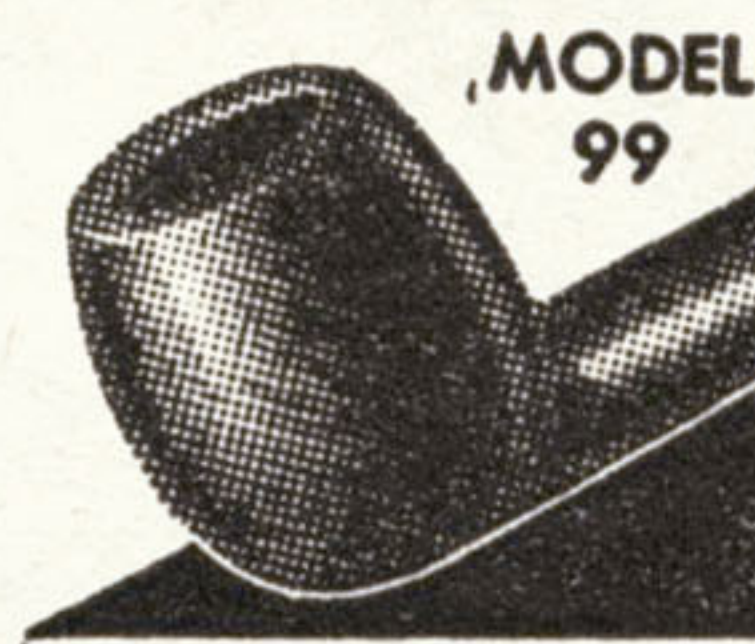
I can't stay in bed any longer. Donovan is ordering me to get up, and my body aches with his commands.

Janice has to dress me; I cannot bend over. She has bought me enormously big shirts and a suit large enough for a Barnum giant, to fit over the cumbersome cast.

The brain has gained strength enormously. Its commands enter my mind as clearly as if I heard it speak, loud-voiced and determined, close to my ear.

If only I could inform it that I am

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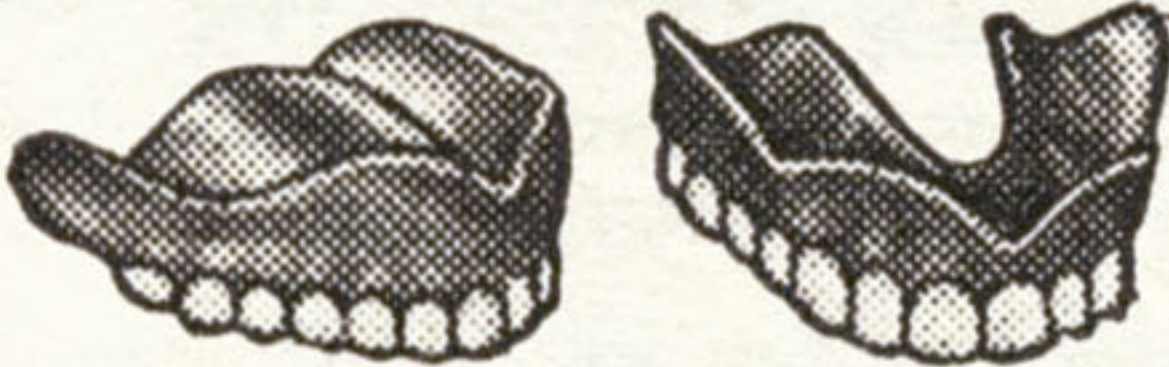
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**Curt Siodmak**

out of the running. I ordered Schratt to convey that information to the brain in Morse, but I am not sure he knows Morse well enough to tap out a clear message.

I want to go back to the desert. I want to watch the brain's development myself. But it orders me to stay here.

It has told me to get in touch with the murderer, Cyril Hinds, whose trial comes up soon.

*December 3rd*

Sternli has opened the account in his own name and brought back a power of attorney for me. Now I can sign checks and won't have to wait for Donovan's signature. I asked Sternli how it feels to earn fifty dollars a week and be able to write a check for thousands.

He seemed to be shocked at my harmless joke, and stared at me aghast through his thick glasses. He stammered a few words, and I had to put him at ease again. He often watches me doubtfully since I "forged" Donovan's handwriting so cleverly.

When Janice came in, Sternli's blue eyes lighted up, and he forgot I was in the room. He adores her. I don't know what Janice does to make all these men idolize her.

She is unselfish. Whatever she does, she never considers herself. That may be her simple secret.

*December 4th*

The brain paralyzes me at certain times. Formerly, when it gave its orders I willingly followed the command. At first I was even obliged to concentrate to follow what it wanted. Otherwise my own personality interfered with the response. Now I cannot resist.

I have tried. I have fought. In vain.

Today it told me to pick up a pen and write. Janice was in the room and I did not want her to see me acting like a hypnotist's subject.

She had just brought in my dinner and we were talking about Sternli and



## Donovan's Brain

his strange adoration for her, which she protested smilingly, when the brain cut in. I felt my tongue tighten. I was forced to get up and go over to the writing desk. I watched my performance as detached as a stranger standing yards away from me. I wanted to stop. But I still moved mechanically.

Janice had never before witnessed a manifestation of Donovan's will, and she was frightened. She was level-headed enough however not to call the floor physician.

I sat down at the desk and began to write. Janice spoke to me, astonished at first, then quickly alarmed when I did not answer.

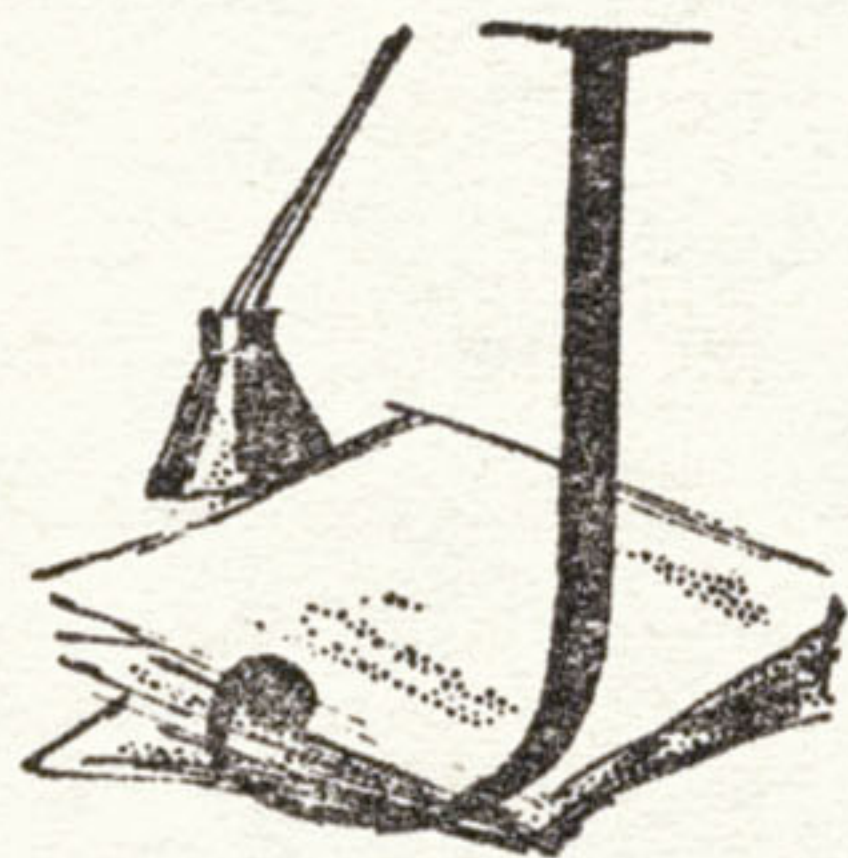
There was nothing unusual in my attitude, except the expression on my face. During this period of telepathic communication, my eyes stare, my face loses all expression and looks blank as if it were made of wax.

Janice knew me well enough to be sure immediately that something like a hypnotic trance was holding me.

I wrote on the paper: *Cyril Hinds, Nat Fuller.*

Cyril Hinds was the murderer. Nat Fuller's name appeared for the first time.

The spell ended as quickly as it had come and I gained control over my movements again.



JANICE'S face was chalk. Her eyes held depthless horror.

"You were writing with your left hand . . ." she stammered. "The brain. . . ."

I went back to the table and began to eat, trying to act as calmly as I could, shaken to find that for the first time I had been unable to resist the brain's command.

"What of it?" I asked. "You know the brain is alive. It communicates with me from time to time. This step forward in my experiment will make history. Since the human brain never

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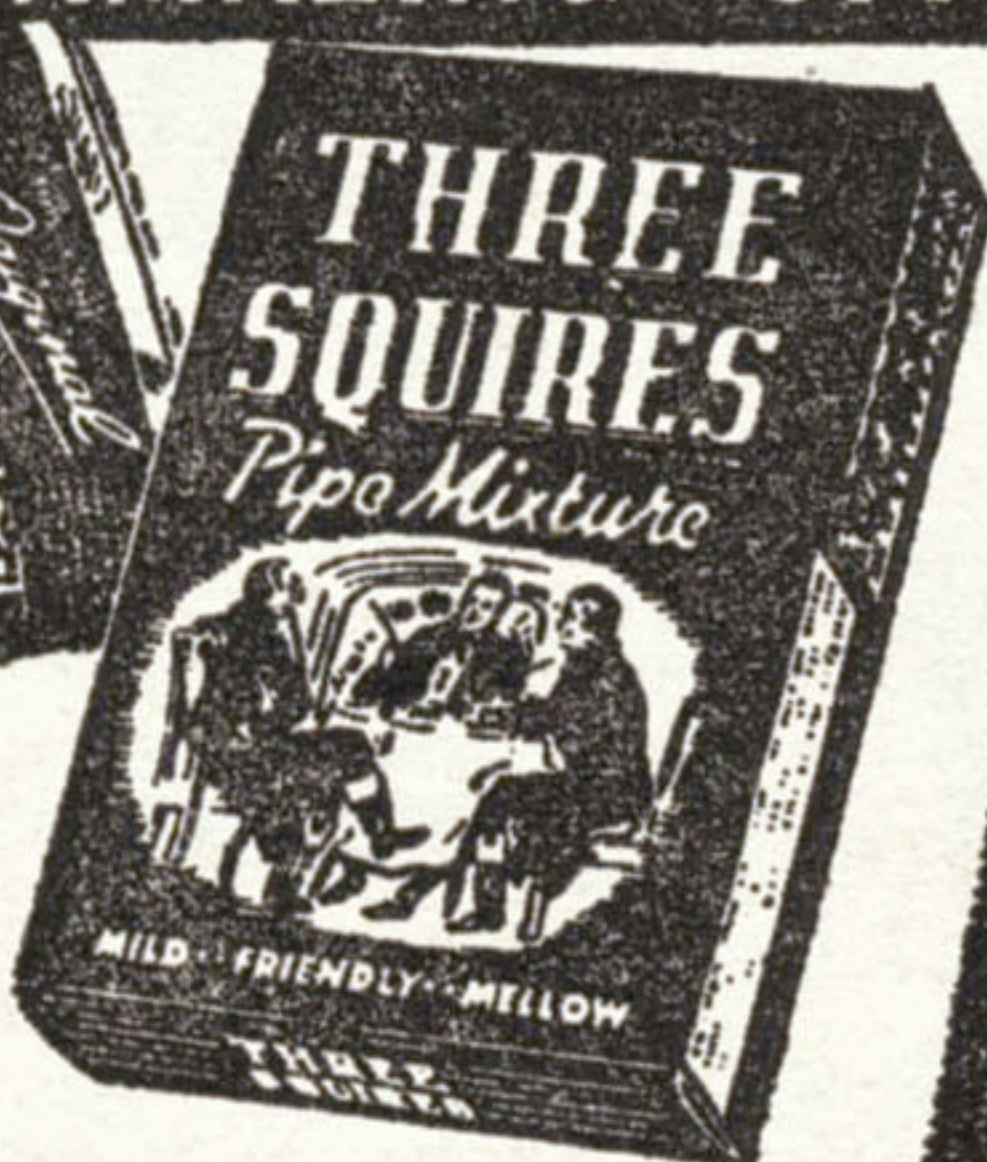


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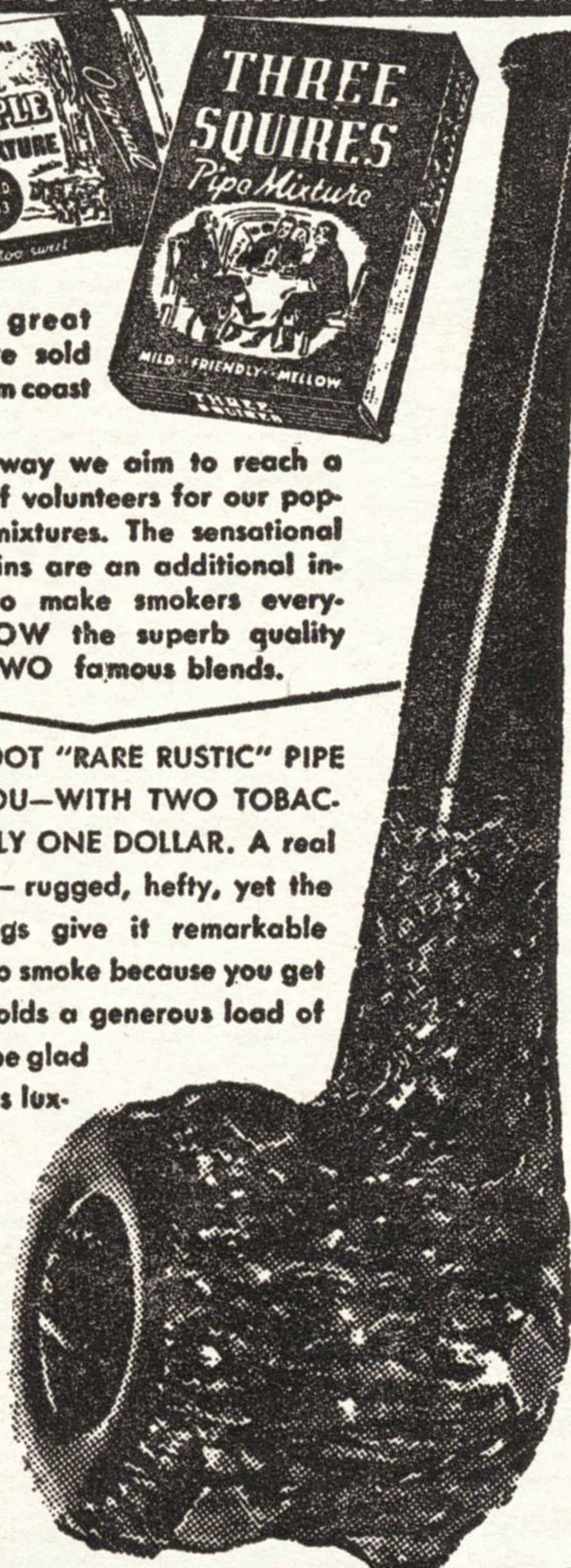
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## Curt Siodmak

reaches full development during the life of the human body, I may be able to let the brain mature by keeping it artificially alive. This telepathic contact is only the beginning. Have you never heard that the man who experiments must be willing to take any personal risk? The world has to thank many scientists who became their own guinea pigs to achieve great discoveries."

"But it is controlling you—not you, controlling it!" She was upset.

"You are mistaken," I answered, wanting to break off the discussion I had foreseen and dreaded. If only she had been a hired assistant, she would not have dared to challenge me. But she was my wife.

"I am submitting to the brain's control deliberately, and I can stop any time I choose."

Janice looked at me, pale, her big eyes dark. She knew I was lying.

"Donovan is dead!" she said.

"Dead?" I said slowly. "The definition of death is different for a doctor than for a layman. Even when a man is legally declared dead his brain may continue to send out electric waves. Sometimes a man is already dead for the physician while he is still breathing. Where does life begin and where does it end? In the eyes of the world Donovan is dead, but his brain lives on. Does that mean Donovan is still alive?"

"No," she said, "but he lives through you. He forces you to act for him!"

"That is a contradiction," I said. "That will not stand up under analysis."

Janice looked at me. Her face seemed to have shrunk and it was transparent as Chinese silk. She had worried about me for years, and the conviction that I had lost myself in this experiment now broke through her self-control. I knew she wanted to avoid any serious discussion on any subject, but her concern was stronger than her resolution.

"Donovan is dead and cremated," she said. "What you call his living brain is a scientific freak, a dangerous morbid



## Donovan's Brain

creation you have nursed in a test tube."

"Donovan is still alive and kicking. He even has written messages."

"You derive your conviction from science," she stated. "Mine is from faith."

"Listen to Schratt's disciple," I jibed. "Don't judge my task by common codes of living. I go beyond them."

"How far?" she asked.

"Until I understand the functioning of this brain, its will, its desires, its motives," I said. "I am penetrating more deeply into human consciousness than any man has done before."

**WE** SAT silent opposite each other. "It has too much power over you. You cannot resist it any longer," Janice said finally.

"Any moment I choose I can stop the experiment!"

"You can't. I just saw what is happening myself!"

I got up, walked over to the desk and picked up Donovan's message.

"I wish you would leave me alone. There is no use arguing with you. I did not ask you to interfere with my work. You are disturbing me."

She turned and left the room.

*December 4th*

The futile discussion with Janice upset me and the tiring repetition of the lines: "Amidst the mists . . ." kept me awake half the night. When I got up I was shaky.

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**Curt Siodmak**

Is Donovan's brain going insane? This repetition of phonetic expressions is alarming. If the brain becomes measurably insane and can still influence me against my resistance, this case will become difficult to handle. I must think of an emergency brake to paralyze the brain at the extreme moment. I must find a solution, and soon!

*December 5th*

Today I went back to the Roosevelt Hotel. I feel strong enough but still must wear the plaster cast. It inconveniences me less than before.

The human body can adjust itself to most unnatural conditions.

*December 6th*

Nathaniel Fuller.

The name has repeated itself in Donovan's messages. Two Nathaniel Fullers are listed in the telephone directory. One at a gas station at Olympic Boulevard, the other a lawyer in the Subway Terminal Building, on Hill Street.

I was sure the brain means the lawyer.

I rang the office of Fuller, Hogan and Dunbar, and asked for an appointment.

"Who recommended you to Mr. Fuller?" Fuller's secretary asked.

I mentioned W. H. Donovan's name and immediately she became very polite. A few seconds later I had Fuller on the phone.

He asked me to come in any time during the afternoon and did not ask questions. He seems a good lawyer.



IT WAS one of the warm pleasant Indian summer days. I took a taxi downtown. For the first time in years I felt relaxed and happy. The tension which had gripped me so long, never letting me breathe freely, driving me on and on even when I slept, had suddenly left me.

(Continued on page 128)



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Curt Siodmak

(Continued from page 126)

I announced my name to the girl behind Fuller's reception desk. She picked up the phone in a hurry and a few seconds later Fuller came out. He was small and stocky, dressed by an expensive tailor and his gray hair carefully groomed.

Packed as I was in the cast, I presented a strange appearance, but he registered no astonishment and took me straight into a room with a sign on the door: *Library. Quiet Please.*

The silence which suddenly engulfed us was abnormal, as if the walls were specially sound-proofed. Though early afternoon, the Venetian blinds were drawn and neon tubes threw a diffuse light through the room.

He asked me to sit down and took a chair opposite me at the long, glass-topped conference table.

"W. H. sent you," he said in a pleasant, unaggressive voice, and looked at me with an air of friendly lassitude.

"Yes. He mentioned your name before he died. He told me I could talk to you frankly, if I ever needed legal advice."

"You need it now?" he asked and looked squarely at me. "What can I do for you?"

"I want you to take over the Hinds murder case," I said.

He leaned back in his chair which he slowly rocked on its slender legs.

"Hinds is guilty of first degree murder and this is one of the most cruel cases I have heard during my twenty years as a criminal lawyer!" He looked down at the table and spoke slowly as if to gain time.

"I am prepared to pay you a bonus of fifty thousand dollars, besides your ordinary fee, if you can exonerate Hinds," I said.

He sat silent and pondered a moment. He did not take my offer seriously, and was trying to decide how he could get rid of me without offending me.



## Donovan's Brain

I LOOKED on the glass-covered table and our eyes met as in a mirror. It seemed a trick of his, watching people in the glass top. It annoyed me.

"Exonerate. You mean acquittal by the jury?" he asked to gain time. He was reaching for the bell.

I took a wad of money from my pocket and laid it in front of him.

He pulled back his hand from the bell.

"Will you please tell me your motive in this, Dr. Cory?" he said.

"Just assume I am fighting capital punishment," I answered.

He nodded. This was a basis for discussion. Many people in the world will support their convictions with good cash.

"I understand. You want Hinds spared, as an example. We might be able to save him from hanging, and later get him released."

"You misunderstand me," I said. "I want Hinds acquitted. Pronounced innocent by jury."

"But there is no doubt of this man's guilt!" Fuller exclaimed. "And I never touch hopeless cases."

I got up, ready to leave.

Fuller said hastily: "You must give me a few days to study the case."

"I am sure you will take it," I said.

He went with me to the door.

"Would you object to depositing the amount of the fee until the trial is over?" he asked.

"Of course not," I said. "Ring me at the Roosevelt Hotel tomorrow morning, and you can have the check."

I stopped in the reception-room.

"Could you get permission for me to talk to Hinds?" I asked.

"Of course. I assume he is related to you?" Fuller asked politely.

"No," I answered.

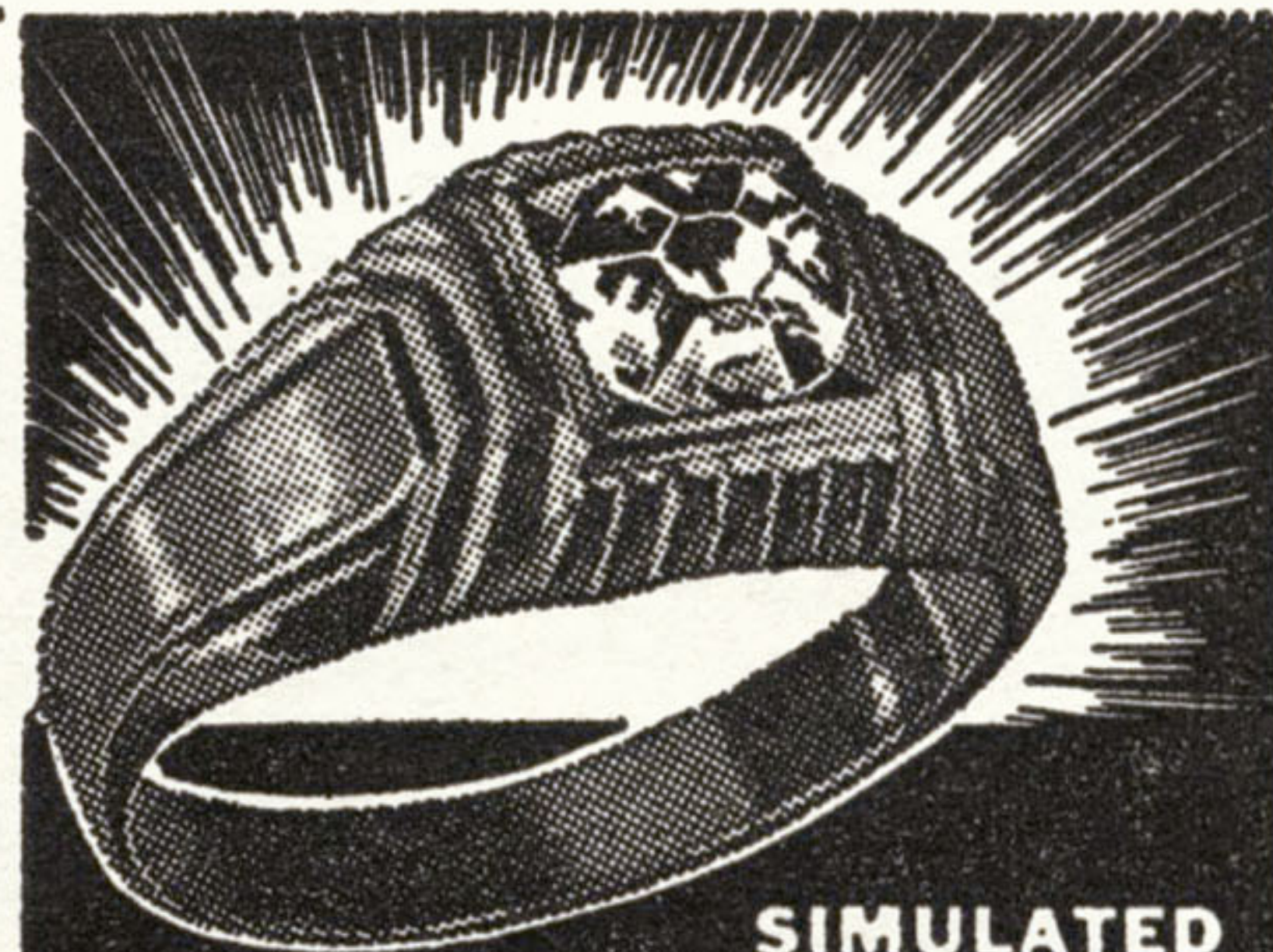
Fuller hid his surprise.

"He must be a good friend of yours!"

"To tell the truth," I said, "I have never seen Hinds in my life, and only came across his name a few days ago."

This time Fuller was dumbfounded.

(To be concluded)



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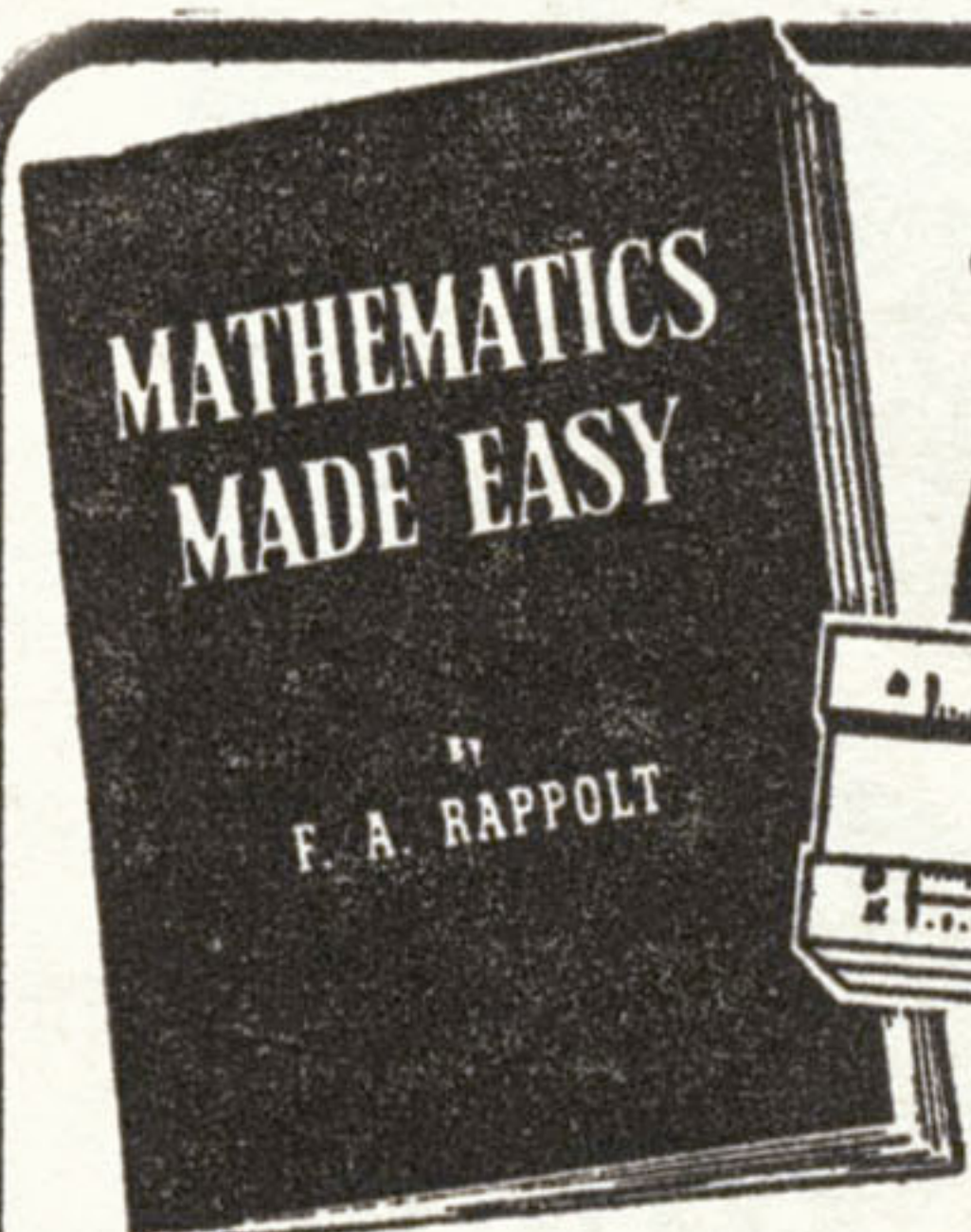
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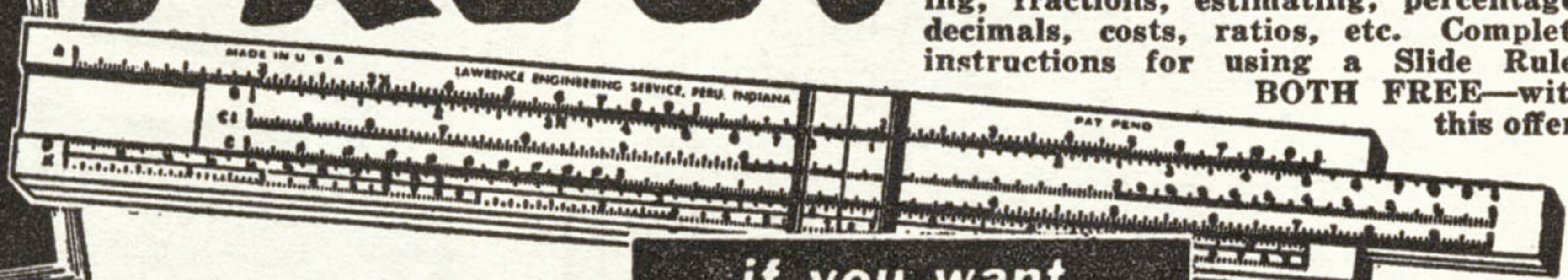
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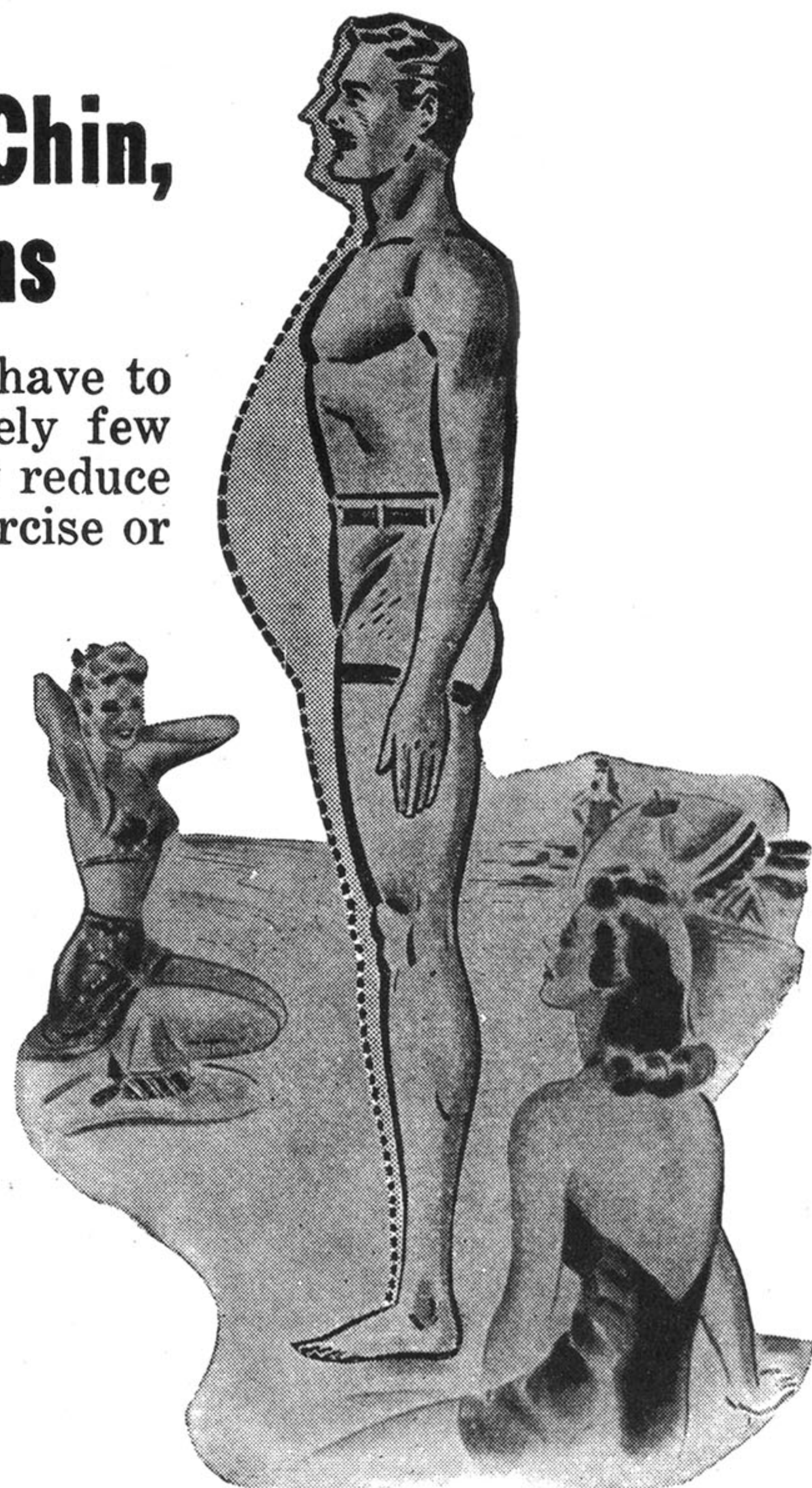
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