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THE ITCHING MEN

CHAPTER I.
GHOST WITH NIPPERS.

THE governor of the State was superstitious. He practically believed in ghosts,
That explained a lot.
It explained how Clickell Rush came to be sitting on top of a telephone pole as the clock on the village courthouse struck the ungodly hour of midnight.
Perched on top of the telephone pole, Rush looked, he rather suspected, like an owl. Most owls are brown, and Rush preferred to wear
It was nice work and the Gadget Man got it for ten grand—if he could save a condemned man from the chair!

all his clothes in shades of browns; so he thought it appropriate to think of an owl. He was tempted to hoot and see how it sounded.

However, while he was hooting, a man might die.

Also, it was obvious that straddling the topmost crossarm of a telephone pole at the stroke of midnight, and hooting like an owl, was a procedure naked of dignity. It was also shy on common sense. It lacked any kind of sense at all.

Rush had to keep telling himself it was not as crazy as it looked.

Moreover, nobody would ever know.

This was going to be a secret. Just this once, he would keep it to himself. Not a word of it was going to get into the newspapers.

The newspapers had the habit of
blatting out his doings for everybody to read and—Rush strongly suspected—laugh at. Clickety-Rush, the "Gadget Man," was excellent printing-press fodder. The things he did had that wacky touch which reads well in print; for instance: Sitting on a telephone pole at dark midnight.

But this once, he'd fool the newspapers; they weren't going to know a thing about this night's doings.

They could think it was the work of spooks.

The governor of the State certainly had to believe that spooks had functioned. A man's life depended on it.

"Here goes," Rush remarked.

He had brought along a jointed pole, a pole that was of a hard rubber composition, stronger than wood. To one end of this pole was fastened a nipper which could cut through very thick wire. From the nipper handle, a cord ran to the other end of the pole, a strong cord that was a nonconductor of electricity. The whole thing was a wire-cutter.

Rush reached out and hooked the wire-cutter onto the high-tension electric power line. He could just reach the high-tension wires from the top of the telephone pole. The line carried he-didn't-know-how-many thousand volts of electricity and if the pole and the cord hadn't been a nonconductor of electricity, doubtless Rush would have been killed instantly.

Probably the electricity would have slain him as quickly as it was going to kill the man named Jonathan Noble in the electric chair at the State penitentiary.

Or rather, like it would electrocute Jonathan Noble if the governor of the State didn't happen to be sufficiently superstitious.

Now Rush could cut the power line any time he wanted.

THE electric high line was the only one that ran to the State penitentiary. It fed current to the prison lights, to machines in the overall factory, broom factory and to devices for stamping automobile license plates; all these activities being located inside the penitentiary walls, along with the big generator which converted current from the high-tension line into the most suitable kind of juice for taking a man's life. The electric chair stood in a room all its own.

In the room with the electric chair were now assembled about fifteen men. They were waiting to see Jonathan Noble die.

Ten of the spectators were in various stages of drunkenness. They were newspaper reporters. And newspaper reporters almost always get drunk when they have to see an electrocution. It is supposed to make it easier.

"He still claims he's innocent," one reporter muttered.

"I wish it was over," croaked another.

The warden said, "Bring him in."

The word went back to the death cell where Jonathan Noble had been talking to the chaplain.

"Bring him in."

Two penitentiary guards gripped Jonathan Noble's arms. One guard walked ahead, followed by the chaplain, and four guards followed behind; and every man in the procession had his lips pressed tightly together and took each step in a slow, conscious way.

There is something about leading a condemned man to the death room that makes you think about your own mind and your own body, and wonder what gave you the right to
turn God and take away the life of a human. You wonder what will be done about it later on, when your earthly total is added up. You try to think, "Well, the court and the judge ordered this, and they've got a guy in there who gets a hundred dollars for throwing the switch, so it's really not my fault." But thinking that way doesn't help much.

A pin could not have been heard dropping as the death march reached the black room which had the one grim piece of furniture, but that was because the generator in an adjoining room was making too much noise. The generator was humming loudly.

They put a stereotyped question to condemned men before they kill them.

"Have you anything to say?"

Jonathan Noble stood straight. He looked like a young man who would always stand straight, no matter what hardships befell him. He was tall; his jaw and his shoulders were square. He appeared to be a nice two-fisted young man with a clean mind and a pure heart.

The prosecuting attorney for the State had made him out a two-fisted devil-may-care with nerves of steel. But then, the prosecuting attorney was coming up soon for election as mayor. He hadn't presented any really tangible proof that Jonathan Noble had a black character.

But with all the circumstantial evidence they'd had against Jonathan Noble, they hadn't needed anything else to send him to the electric chair.

The warden repeated his question. "Have you anything to say?"

Jonathan Noble stood straighter. He lifted both his arms slowly. His fists clenched.

"I am innocent," he said. "But if you are to believe that, the proof must come from some omen, I suppose."

He stood there, very still, with his arms lifted rigidly.

"There must be a Power that saves innocent ones," he added in a low voice.

And then, as if the invisible Power had come to his aid—as though the ethereal cavalry had galloped up to save him at the last minute—the electric generator moan faltered.

The lights grew dim, went black. There was utter stillness in the room of death.

"The omen!" a reporter croaked.

Said the more practical warden, "The blasted power has failed."

Yes, the power had failed. They telephoned the substation and learned nothing could be done about it, because the high line carrying the juice had parted. The substation men explained that they had dispatched their linemen, but it might be hours before the trouble was corrected.

The warden telephoned the governor. Jonathan Noble was supposed to die between midnight and one o'clock, and the warden wanted to know what to do about it.

The governor of the State listened intently to all the warden said. Then the governor asked questions. Particularly, he was interested in the ghostly aspects of the power failure.

"I grant the condemned Jonathan Noble," said the governor finally, "a one-week stay of execution. He will not be electrocuted until one week from today—if nothing else happens."

The governor of the State was superstitious. That he often went to séances given by professional mediums was a fact a great many people knew.
CLICKELL RUSH was one of those who knew how superstitious the governor was.

Rush still sat on top of the telephone pole, but now he felt rather more like an angel than an owl. He had cut a wire and saved a life. There is nothing like saving a life to make a man feel good.

It was not the first life Click Rush had preserved, but that did not keep him from feeling angelic over having done it again.

True, he had not witnessed the events in the penitentiary, but he knew the exact time the electrocution was scheduled, and he knew that with no current there couldn't very well be an electrocution; and he also knew enough about the governor to bet his bottom dollar that the superstitious executive would give the condemned man a reprieve.

Also, Click Rush, at the moment, was hating to think of sliding down the telephone pole to the earth. He had dropped one of his climbing spurs, hence the only way to get down the pole was slide. The pole had splinters, he suspected.

By rights, he should have left the top of the pole long before now. But he remained perched, feeling angelic, and thinking of splinters.

Click Rush was an average-size man, but he was very muscular. He was frequently mistaken for a circus acrobat by people accustomed to knowing circus acrobats when they saw them.

Moreover, according to the newspapers, Rush also had brains. He was an inventor, and he had concocted over ten thousand unique gadgets for catching crooks, gadgets so unique that he had not been able to sell them to any police departments. The only way he seemed to be able to make any money out of his unusual gadgets was use them himself, which he had been doing for several months. As a result, the newspapers had conceded that he had brains.

Muscle and brains he might have, but still the only way to get down from the telephone pole was to slide.

He said, “Whew!”

He was referring to the splinters.

It was too dark to see the climbing spur he had dropped. The night was so black that the surrounding woods were nodulose wads of sepia, and the concrete highway near by was only a faintly gray ribbon, while Rush's car on the road was a box-shaped shadow. Somewhere in the distance, a farm dog was baying; but there certainly wasn't any moon to encourage the canine.

Rush reflected again that it was a fool business to be sitting on top of a telephone pole at the hour of midnight.

But nobody would ever know.

Rush set himself to slide.

Instead, he came within an ace of jumping right off the top of the telephone pole.

When lightning strikes, there is noise. This time, there was only a flash. A white flash—so white as to be utterly blinding. It couldn't very well be lightning.

The flash lasted almost as long as it takes to snap two fingers together. But it was completely blinding. There was no sound.

Rush hung to the telephone pole for dear life. His knees knocked against the pole. The white flash of light had surprised him so much that he had all but jumped off, and it was a thirty-foot telephone pole and there was a thorn thicket below.

So his knees knocked the pole.

After a while, he slid down.

He looked all around the vicinity with a flashlight. Having found
nothing, he started telling himself that the snipped electric power line wires might have short-circuited with the ground and made a flash as white and as brilliant as that one.

But he couldn’t quite sell himself that idea.

He drove away in his car, talking to himself, principally about the splinters.

Thank blazes, nobody would ever know about them.

CHAPTER II.
SO NOBODY KNEW!

CLICKELL RUSH had taken a two-year lease on an apartment. The place had four rooms, and he had decorated two chambers in modernistic style for comfortable living; and two of the rooms he had rigged up as a workshop and laboratory, where he intended to do some more inventing.

He was hoping to invent something sensible, so that he could sell it to a police department. He intended to endeavor to restrain his impulse to invent fantastic gadgets. The apartment was equipped with a number of his devices, and he liked everything in the place, with one exception.

The thing he didn’t like was the toad named “Bufa.”

Bufa, the toad, had warts. Bufa was green on the back and muddy-looking underneath, and could sit in a medium-size suitcase and still leave room for a little cotton packing all around. Bufa’s skeleton was brass, his hide of papier-mâché composition.

Bufa’s entrails were coils, vacuum tubes, and the rest of the parts of a compact wired-radio “transceiver.” The toad could transmit and receive conversation over the city’s electric light system.

It was merely necessary to insert a lighted electric light bulb in Bufa’s mouth. The heat from the bulb closed a thermostat, and this switched on the apparatus, all ready to function.

Rush put a lighted bulb in the toad’s mouth.

He leaned close to the ear of the thing. The microphone was in the toad’s left ear, the loud-speaker in the roof of its mouth.

“I resign!” Rush said.

“You what?”

The toad’s voice was obviously disguised, probably by the speaker keeping two fingers in his or her mouth.

“I quit.”

“But,” said the toad, “you’ve just got started.”

“I’m turned around and going the other direction.” Rush glared at the toad. “Beginning now, I have nothing more to do with this business.”

“Haven’t you got a heart?”

“My heart pumps red and white corpuscles through my body,” Rush explained grimly. “It is only poets who are guided by their hearts. Mine does practical work.”

“You’re hard-hearted! You’d let an innocent man die in the electric chair.”

“Didn’t the governor give him a stay of execution?”

“Yes,” the voice of the toad admitted. “But Jonathan Noble isn’t out of the penitentiary yet.”

“Why should he be? A judge and a jury put him in there legally.”

Rush grew indignant. It was easy for him to work up a stew while talking to the toad. Nothing he had ever known had aggravated him like this silly toad.
Rush yelled, "What makes you think Jonathan Noble is innocent?"

"I just have a hunch," the toad said.

Rush made an angry swiping gesture at his own ears.

"I'm full up to here on your hunches!" he shouted.

NO private detective, Rush thought heatedly, had ever been hired by an employer as dizzy as this one. Likewise, Rush wondered if he wasn't the first private detective in history to solve a string of fantastic crimes without having any idea who had hired him. It made his temper give off sparks to think about it.

Months ago, he'd found a toad sitting on half a ten-thousand-dollar bank note in his hotel room, along with instructions about how to use the thing. When Rush tuned in, the disguised voice had told him, "I am Bufa, of the species bufonidae, and I feed on slugs and insects—of the human variety."

Crazy as a bat, Rush had thought. The voice of Bufa had had a hunch that a crime had been committed, unknown to the police—and the voice had wanted Rush to use his gadgets to solve the crime. Because ten thousand dollars was real folding money, Rush had turned private detective and solved the case, and gotten the other half of the bank note.

For months now, Rush had been trying to stop being a detective, but a ten-thousand-dollar bill, or some other bait, was always defeating him.

In this present case, Bufa's hunch was that a man named Jonathan Noble was innocent.

Rush did not know anything about Jonathan Noble, except that the newspapers said he was to be executed for the murder of a man named Romero Enterline.

Rush had found the usual half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill under Bufa, and he had connected up, and Bufa's voice had told him that his new job was to stop the electrocution of Jonathan Noble. That had been only this afternoon, so Rush had been too busy in the meantime to think of anything but a method of stopping the execution. Having succeeded, he considered the job done.

Rush had been looking away from the toad and thinking. He could not think when he was looking at the thing.

"You've got a faculty for spotting a crime," he admitted grudgingly. "Call it hunch, or whatever you want."

"I believe I have a supernatural gift for spotting a wrong that has been done," the toad said.

"I believe you're nuts," Rush said. "I am wealthy," the toad continued unperturbed, "and few things entertain me. I enjoy seeing wrongs righted. However, being a great physical coward, I much prefer looking on to taking part in any excitement. That is why I hire you."

He had told Bufa he did not have a heart, but this must be an exaggeration, because something inside him was making him want to go ahead and learn whether Jonathan Noble was innocent, and if he was, to save him.

Rush felt that here was a case he would tackle because he wanted to, not because of Bufa's ten thousand dollars. He had yelled that quitting talk at Bufa just to keep in form.

"All right," he said. "I'll go ahead."

Bufa's voice turned astonished. "You will save Jonathan Noble if he is innocent?"

"I'll try."
Buza made a clucking noise of regret. "I guess I had better apologize."

"Apologize for what?"

"The dirty trick I done you."

"Eh?"

"I figured," Buza said, "that you wouldn't want to take another case for me."

"Well?"

"So I took measures to embarrass you into going ahead with the case."

Rush yelled, "What the blasted blankety-blank do you mean—embarrass?"

"Go buy a late newspaper," Buza said regretfully.

RUSH went out and bought the newspaper, and his ears got red.

The picture on the front page was very good. The focus was perfect. Clarity was remarkable. The photographic composition was excellent. And the news value would be hard to excel. If that picture did not win a prize competition somewhere, there would be something wrong.

It showed Clickell Rush, the Gadget Man, sitting on top of the telephone pole near the hour of midnight.

"But nobody was to know about that!" Rush said hollowly.

The picture had been taken by means of the bright flash which had nearly startled Rush into leaping off the telephone pole. The photographer had then sneaked away silently into the night. Also, the photographer had been on the spot because of a telephone tip to trail Clickell Rush and see what developed. The cut lines below the photograph contained this information.

Rush knew that the voice of Buza, the toad, had telephoned the tip to the picture man.

The story with the picture clarified other points. There was a statement by the governor of the State, a bitter one. The governor had been told by the newspaper that the "omen" which had led him to postpone the electrocution of Jonathan Noble, had been nothing else but a man named Clickell Rush cutting the electric power line.

Said the governor's statement:

The sovereign rights of this State have been invaded by the man named Clickell Rush. Quite plainly, he has broken the law.

I have issued orders to find Clickell Rush and arrest him.

RUSH gritted, "The political clown!"

He leaned against a lamp post beside the newsstand where he had bought the paper, and thought violent things about the governor. Then he read the rest of the story. Down toward the end, the executive's statement said:

In view of the strange aspects of this matter, the reprieve of Jonathan Noble will stand. Noble will not be executed for one week.

Rush amended, "Maybe the governor isn't so clowny, at that."

The Gadget Man continued to lean against the lamp post for some time, painting a complete mental picture of the bear he seemed to be holding by the tail.

"This thing is screwy and complicated," he said grimly. "I've got to keep it simple. Let's see now—"

He had stopped the execution of a condemned man by a trick, and for that he was going to be arrested.

There was a few hours less than one week in which to learn whether the condemned man was innocent or guilty, and if innocent, get him out of the death cell.
In order to keep from being arrested, the first thing for Rush to do was get away from his apartment, and go into hiding. He’d better take such gadgets as he might need.

“‘There it is, all in a nutshell,” Rush said doubtfully. “And quite simple it is, too.”

CHAPTER III.
THE WORDY WENCH.

THE science of electricity, without argument, is an advanced art, and any technical explanation of one of its devices is jammed with such terms as microfarads, lines of force, impedance and henries, these being words which confuse an average individual.

But for that matter, the automobile sharks use a technical jargon composed of such terms as octane ratings, rypoids and torques, but such things are not necessary to know that an automobile runs.

By the same reasoning, anyone who has ever tuned in an old-time radio receiver knows that the contraption will whistle if a hand is brought close. Hence that human body coming near a certain type of electrical circuit will cause a whistle. If the electric circuit is connected up with a mesh of fine wires under rugs in rooms, anyone standing in any of the rooms will cause the whistle. If the receiver doing the whistling is hidden behind the mail box outside, and turned on simply by pushing hard against the mail box, that makes it convenient.

That was how Rush knew there was an invader in his apartment.

Rush got down on his knees, took a mechanical pencil out of his pocket, put the point of the pencil into the keyhole, then worked the cap of the pencil like a small pump. This injected tear gas silently into the apartment.

A little tear gas will go a long way on closed rooms.

There was an ornate brass knocker on the door. Rush carefully lifted this off, and held it ready to tap the skull of anyone driven out of the apartment by the tear gas. The knocker had been designed for exactly that purpose.

Almost everybody has had the feeling that he would like to have a club in hand when walking into his darkened home, and Rush had supplied himself with this door knocker for such occasions.

Nobody came out of the apartment. Later, Rush went in.

She lay face-down across Rush’s bed, and she was so rigid that at first he thought she was dead; so that he had a devil-size vision of trying to explain a dead girl in his apartment to the police, on top of the telephone-pole-at-midnight thing.

Then she began kicking her feet. She kicked them like a swimmer in a race. She gave out hissing noises and words. The words were foreign.

Rush went around in front of her and saw that her face was very pretty; also that she had been carrying a gun, but had put it down on the floor while she rubbed her tear-gas-irritated eyes.

She had not heard Rush. He dived, and got the gun. She stopped kicking and hissing. She was too blinded to be able to see him effectively.

Rush opened the windows and turned on electric fans. His own eyes were wet and stinging, but the gas was weak enough by now that it had not blinded him.

When he went back, the girl was feeling around on the floor for her gun, which was in Rush’s pocket.
“What say,” Rush suggested, “that we get acquainted?”

They had a fight. The girl was off the floor and around his neck before he got his mouth closed. Rush immediately made a mistake. Past experience had told him that women either bit you, scratched you, or pulled your hair. He put a hand up quickly to protect his hair.

But this girl knew jujutsu, or something worse. She took hold of Rush in different places, and did not keep her holds long, but it felt as if she had six-inch knives for fingers.

Rush was very glad to get her locked in a closet.

He started to put the closet key in his pocket.

“I’ll take the key,” a strange voice said.

RUSH looked at him, said, “I guess you may, at that.”

The man came in—and Rush made a mental note to put some kind of an attachment on the fire escape to show when it was occupied.

The man was not a Negro. It must be the utter whiteness of his hair which gave that impression, at first. His features were not Negroid; they were finely chiseled. His age, judging from the amount of flesh on his body more than anything else, might be near sixty.

The man stepped to one side.

Four more men came through the window behind him. They were very smooth, very serious-looking young men who must have come, Rush decided, from South America.

The revolvers they held, however, were of a United States make noted for efficiency.

“I bring company, you see,” said the older man.

Rush scowled. “Humorist, eh?”

The white-haired man smiled. He had a fancy for gold in his dental work. Smiling, he suddenly made Rush think of an old snow-headed buzzard who had been picking gold, not flesh, off men’s bones, and some of it had stuck in his teeth.

“I doubt if I’m a humorist,” the man said. “But I’m very happy at this moment.”

“That’s nice.”

“You are the Gadget Man, aren’t you?”

“According to the newspapers.”

“We have heard of you.”

Rush said, “Which adds up to what?”

“It explains,” the white-headed man said, “why we were shocked to learn you have apparently decided to prove that Jonathan is not guilty of the crime of which he was convicted.”

Rush looked incredulous, and demanded, “What on earth gave you such an idea?”

The other showed his gold-spotted teeth. “We’re not dumb.”

“You’re certainly not behaving so it makes sense.”

The white-haired man said, “Search him, caballeros. Search him good.”

They surrounded Rush very carefully, and went through his pockets; but they found nothing except some silver coins and a billfold containing small bank notes and one half of a ten-thousand-dollar bill.

Seeming surprised that they had not found more, they returned the stuff to Rush’s pockets.

“We wouldn’t want you to be found dead with empty pockets,” the white-haired man said. “Someone might think it was robbery.”

Rush swallowed. Sometimes he
suspected he could get several times as scared as an average man.

The man turned to the others. "See if you can find the stuff which he used to cut the power line."

They searched and made a pile on the table of the climbing spurs and jointed wire-cutter pole which Rush had employed.

Rush said, "I don't get this."

"You're going to fall off a telephone pole," the other explained, "and break your neck."

The girl had been extremely quiet in the closet.

"Get her out," the man said.

One of the raiders opened the closet door.

The fellow who had opened the door put his hands to his throat and walked backward from the closet, taking steps as if he were drunk, and getting drunkeer with each step.

The girl was lying huddled in the closet. She was perfectly motionless, but did not seem unconscious, for her eyes were open.

"What the blazes!" ejaculated the white-haired man.

RUSH went into action then. It seemed as good a time as any. He clutched at his own throat and looked as horrified as he could.

"Maybe the girl broke the container of poison gas in that closet!" he croaked. "I had one stored there!"

Then he flopped over on his side and lay stiffly.

The men were horrified. The leader jumped and seized the one who had first opened the closet. This man was now on the point of giving up and lying down.

"Gas!" the afflicted one managed to croak.

The leader yelled, "Put your guns away, you fools! And give me a hand with him!"

They shoved their weapons into pockets, and obediently helped hold up the man who had opened the closet.

"Let's get out of here!" a man gasped wildly.

"Shoot that damned Rush first!" their chief ordered.

Rush had been afraid of something like that. So he had carefully taken hold of the rug with both hands. The rug was soft enough that he got very satisfactory handfuls. He jerked, and there was a general upsetting.

Unfortunately, the floor was slicker than he had anticipated, and a moment later he was flat on his back holding the whole rug, and his opponents were picking themselves up off the floor.

Rush came to his feet, snatched the girl out of the closet and raced for a door. He got through the door just as a bullet hit the floor and sent a shower of splinters after him.

Rush was now in one of the workrooms. He seized a bottle off one of the chemical racks. The bottle contained about a gallon of yellowish liquid.

Rush hurled the bottle into the room with the men, and it broke on the floor.

Then Rush slammed the door and snapped the lock, after which he felt much better. All the doors were bulletproof, or so the salesman from the steel company had told him.

The men thumped the door, yelled some horrifying threats, and fired bullets at the lock. They had no luck. Then, frightened by the talk of gas and the yellowish stuff from the bottle—it was steaming all over the floor—they fled through the
apartment window and down the fire escape.

Rush, grimacing at the way he had neglected to fortify the fire escape, got a container of tear gas. But by the time he reached a window with this, the enemy had gained the ground.

When he put his head out, they shot the glass from the window immediately above. Rush promptly ducked back.

"Watch the newspaper want ads!" he yelled, as loud as he could.

After that advice, he retreated to another room, on the chance the apartment house walls might not be bulletproof.

Hearing a car leave the vicinity, he presumed the foe had taken flight.

He also heard a neighbor put his head out of a window and yell, "Telephone the police, somebody!"

"I've already done it!" shouted another voice.

Rush ignored the yellowish vapor that was coming like ocherous steam off the stuff from the broken bottle.

He got a large suitcase, hurriedly dumped gadgets into it, then balanced the girl across his shoulder and carried both girl and suitcase down to his car, dumped them inside and drove off.

The girl was still acting as if she were asleep without actually sleeping. That is, she was limp, but her eyes were open.

Rush drove to the most convenient park and stopped in a lonely spot.

HE looked at the girl. She had slumped limply on the seat, and she showed some of the signs of being intoxicated, but not all of them. She had limpid dark eyes, unusually perfect features, and a mouth which made Rush's toes want to curl a little.

"Who are you?" he asked.
He had to shake her before she answered. She seemed sleepy.

"My father was the murdered man," she said.

Rush frowned. The man Jonathan Noble was supposed to have murdered had been named Romero Enterline.

Rush thought he saw why she had been in his apartment.

"So you want the State to go ahead and electrocute Jonathan Noble?" he said. And added disapprovingly, "Whether he's guilty or not?"

The girl's voice had been low and thick. But now it was clearer.

"Young Noble is not guilty," she said.

"How do you know he's not?"

"I just know it."

"But why? You must have some reason."

"Because I love him," the girl said.

Rush frowned again. He had enough natural male instincts to feel irritated that another man should have the affections of a girl as pretty as this one.

"Are you engaged to him?" Rush demanded.

"Yes."

"But you're not married?"

"No."

"Always think twice before getting married," Rush warned. "Think several times." He rubbed his jaw while he got his mind back on the right track. "What were you doing in my apartment?"

"I was told to do what I could to help you."

Rush, astonished, asked, "Who told you to do that?"
“The voice on the telephone said to tell you it was Bufo. It said you would understand.”

Rush scratched his head.
“I’m getting confused,” he said. “Who were the men with whom we just had the big fight? Who was your father and why was he killed? Who is Jonathan Noble, and why was he framed?”

Instead of answering, the girl began to squirm around and rub her face.
“What have you done to me?” she asked.

Rush grinned. “You remember back in my apartment, when I shoved you in the closet?”

The girl nodded slowly.
“That is the last thing I recall,” she said in a puzzled voice. “What is wrong with me?”

“That closet,” Rush explained, “was rigged up as a gas chamber to administer a truth serum in vapor form which I’ve been experimenting with. The stuff seems to work. You’ve been telling a lot of truth.”

“What kind of truth?” the girl asked anxiously.

RUSH was ordinarily a disciple of the truth. But like all detectives, he had learned that a little lying can work wonders if done in the right place at the right time. The end frequently justified the means, he believed.

He said untruthfully, “So you and the boy-friend put your heads together and murdered your old man, eh?”

“Boy-friend?”
“Jonathan Noble.”
The girl looked completely horrified.
“If your truth serum made me say that,” she gasped, “it does nothing but make a person tell awful lies.”

“Then what would the truth be?”
The girl looked at Rush, obviously doing some thinking. At last, her lips curled in a way that was not complimentary to himself.

“I’m going to make up my mind about you,” she said, “before I tell you anything.”

Rush complained, “I don’t understand that.”

“I know you don’t.”

“Then why confuse me more? I’m plenty mixed as is.”

She shook her head. “The whole matter is more important than you probably think. The welfare of a lot of people is vitally concerned.”

“Now you’re making me dizzy,” Rush grumbled.
“I’ll put it simply,” the girl said.
“How simple?”
“My name is not Enterline, and my father’s name was not Romero Enterline.”

“That sure helps clear it up,” Rush said disgustedly.

The girl continued, “If the newspapers got hold of my father’s real name, and published the fact that he had been murdered, it would terrify a lot of people who think my father is going to help him. Those people would lose hope. As long as they think my father is alive, they will keep courage. As long as they have courage, they may go ahead and help themselves, we think. Now, isn’t that simple?”

Rush started the car engine, drove out of the park and headed for a part of the city given over to rooming houses of the kind where not too many questions were asked.

“I keep a hide-out apartment rented,” he said, “under a fake name. I go there when I get headaches.”
CHAPTER IV.
ADVERTISEMENT FOR TROUBLE.

THE hide-out apartment was dark, grubby, impoverished; and practically its sole assets were three routes by which the tenants could depart in a hurry—a front door, a back one, and also a trapdoor which gave access to a stretch of rooftops and assorted fire escapes. If the neighbors were at all interested, which was unlikely, they believed the place was occupied by Mr. Thomas Ducker, a traveling salesman who was on the road a great deal.

"First," Rush said, "we both take a bath."

"But I don't need a bath," the girl protested.

"That's what you think."

Rush went into the bathroom. From the suitcase he had brought along, he removed a cardboard box which was labeled:

ELIXAR
THE PERFECT BATH SWEETENER

Rush ran the bathtub half full of warm water, dumped in part of the box of "Elixir," and stirred until the stuff was dissolved.

"Now," he said, "you get in the tub and stay five minutes."

"I won't do it!"

"Want me to undress you and give you the bath?"

"You wouldn't dare!" the girl snapped, and glared.

"With a figure like you've got, it'd be a pleasure."

"Oh!"

She entered the bathroom, locked the door, and he heard her in the tub.

"Full five minutes," he warned.

Later, she came out grimacing and fooling with her hair.

"What did you put in that water?" she demanded.

"Elixir, the Perfect Bath Sweetener."

"I thought it was a dead polecat."

Rush then filled the tub again, added more Elixir, and took his own bath. He sat for an entire five minutes completely submerged except for his nose, which he frequently held.

"Phew!" he said often.

He towed himself, dressed, and walked back into the other room with jaunty steps.

"Great stuff, the Elixir!" he said.

"Peps you up."

The girl made a face.

Rush sat down at the telephone and repeated the number which was on the instrument, several times to memorize it, then picked up the receiver.

The girl asked, "What are you going to do?"

"Advertise."

"What?"

"Sure. Advertising sells merchandise and makes the world go around, I've heard."

He telephoned each of the leading newspapers, and inserted a classified which read:

IF THE WHITE-HAIRED MAN WILL CALL NATIONAL 0-1131, WE MIGHT MAKE A BUSINESS DEAL.

"Now we'll set back," Rush announced, "and see if advertising pays."

THE girl spoke as little as the law allowed during the rest of that day. But she was pretty enough that even her silent presence was exhilarating. Furthermore, she showed no inclination to leave; so Rush was satisfied.
Late in the evening, Rush went out, bought newspapers, brought them back, and showed her the advertisement he had inserted.

"It sounds crazy," she said.
"I've got a knack for that."
"For what?"
"Zanies. They were my downfall as an inventor. I can't seem to think up anything that isn't fantastic. They call me that crazy inventor."

The girl studied him. "You're an odd one."

Rush didn't care for her tone. He'd been trying to impress her favorably, and had changed into a new neatly pressed brown suit—and shirt, necktie, shoes and socks all of matching browns—so that he cut a rather natty figure, he believed, even if his presence was a little rank from Elixir.

But she wasn't approving of him.
He sighed and pointed at the newspaper headlines.
"Look," he said. "The governor of the State says they can send me to the penitentiary for twenty years."
"Can they?"
"I don't know. If this keeps up, it may be the insane asylum instead."
"What makes you talk like that?" the girl asked sharply.
"What do you think? Here I am trying to save a man I've never seen from the electric chair. Some other fellows have tried to kill me to stop my saving efforts. And the girlfriend of the condemned man is here with me, but won't tell a think because it might get in the newspapers." He looked at the young woman to see if she appreciated his troubles. "Don't you feel sorry for me?"

She shook her head.
"No, I'm not sorry for you," she said. "I'm just wondering how you got mixed in this."
"Why," Rush said dryly, "a toad told me to do it."

The girl winced, as if that was too much for her, and settled back with a sigh of resignation. If she was confused now, Rush wondered what state her mind would be in if she didn't know any more about the whole thing than he knew.

They were sitting there, looking as though each one thought the other a trifé wacky, when a funny-looking wooden bird came out of a clock on the wall and said, "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

The girl stared at the clock.
"Why, this is the first time that thing has worked today!" she exclaimed.
"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" said the wooden bird.
"O. K.," Rush told the bird. He went to the window and looked out. "Nice and dark."
"What has dark got to do with that clock?" the girl demanded.

Rush pretended not to hear her, and from his suitcase he took a large black bag and a flashlight.
"Goin' snipe huntin'," he told her.
He climbed the stairs to the trap-door in the roof. This trapdoor was heavy, old and rusty, but it opened as silently as a mouse going through a feather bed. Rush flowed out on the roof, took up a position behind a chimney and waited.

The roof was flat. The sky was dark. The traffic in the near-by street made a steady but low noise. Sounds of home life in the slums—babies bawling, wives complaining, and husbands yelling out what they had told the boss right to his face—was louder.

When a man came creeping around
the chimney, Rush first squirted white flashlight glare into the fellow's eyes, then knocked him down, hit him again to make him senseless, and searched him. He collected three guns. Finally he put the bag over the man's head, shoulders and arms, and tied it around the fellow's waist.

The girl stared in astonishment when Rush arrived with the prisoner.

THE man in the sack started kicking. Rush selected one of the fellow's guns and clubbed the sack until it stopped jerking around.

He took the sack off and showed the man to the girl, as well as looked at the fellow himself.

The man was one of the gang of South Americans who had raided Rush's apartment under the leadership of the white-haired fellow.

His skin looked red and inflamed.

"What's wrong with his skin?" the girl asked.

"Know him?" Rush asked.

The girl nodded.

"Once upon a time, he was eleventh assistant secretary to my father," she said.

"How many secretaries did your father have?" Rush asked, eying her wonderingly.

"Nineteen," the girl said. "Of course, some of them were really secretaries to members of my father's cabinet. But it meant more to them to be called secretaries to the president, so we let them call themselves that."

"Your father was the president?"
"Yes."
"Of what?"
"Of a South American country."
"Was Jonathan Noble another secretary?" Rush asked.

"No. He was the bodyguard my father hired after we came to the United States."

In a patient voice, Rush asked, "And why was your father in the United States?"

The girl made a weary gesture with her shoulders.

"Where else could we go after the revolution?" she asked. "We wanted to be close enough to organize a counter revolution, so Europe was too far away. The United States was the only place where we thought we would be safe from the agents of the new government."

"But you weren't?"

"Not as it turned out," she said miserably. "The agents found my father, murdered him, and put the blame on Jonathan Noble." She pointed at the man Rush had captured. "He is obviously one of the agents of the new government."

Rush rubbed his jaw wonderingly.

"You know, it does make sense after all."

"Of course. It is very simple."

Rush said, "You didn't want your country to be sure its ex-president was dead, because being without a leader might discourage the counter revolutionists?"

The girl nodded grimly. "The new president is a tyrant and a dictator."

"Politicians," Rush said, "always claim the other man is a tyrant and a dictator."

The girl started to object to that, but caught her breath instead and pointed.

"The light in the bathroom just went out!" she exclaimed.

"I saw it," Rush said. "I've been waiting for it to happen."

RUSH took his flashlight and another black bag, but this time he also got a leather sack about the size
of one of the long wiener which Frenchmen like. This was full of buckshot.

"These jaws are hard on my fists," he explained.

He went to the rear door, which was locked. He listened to someone trying a skeleton key in the lock, and waited until the person drew the key out to see why it was not working; after which Rush squirted a small amount of tear gas through the keyhole with his mechanical pencil gadget.

He opened the door a moment later and knocked another man senseless.

He searched and sacked this one, too, then carried him in and showed him to the girl.

This one also had a skin which looked as if it were terribly sunburned.

The girl said, "He looks as if he had been scalded."

"Another secretary?" Rush asked. "No," she said. "He was one of the presidential chauffeurs."

After the explanation, she looked at Rush wonderingly.

"How could you tell they were around?" she wanted to know.

"Burglar alarms," Rush explained. "One of them is hooked to the cuckoo clock, and another one is fixed up with a relay to the bathroom light. If the light is off, and comes on—or if it is on, and goes off—there is a prowler around."

But the girl was still puzzled.

"How did they find us?" she asked. "They got the telephone number from the advertisement I put in the newspaper," Rush surmised. "All they had to do then was go through the telephone book and find what street number the telephone belonged to."

The girl paced back and forth nervously. "What do you intend to do, anyway?"

"Keep on with my collecting," Rush explained. "And later, I'll try out my new truth serum on them.

She was still not satisfied. "But that advertisement—I don't understand—"

The white-haired man's voice spoke up.

"He's a hard guy to understand!" the man said.

CHAPTER V.

LEG TROUBLE.

RUSH gave the surprised jump that he had almost given that time when he was sitting on top of the telephone pole at midnight. He came down flat-footed, with his hands in the air. The white-haired man's tone had told him that he had better get his hands up.

"Huh-how—huh-how—" He was so astonished that he stuttered, so he gave it up.

"I came in," the white-haired man said dryly, "while you were at the back door. After you got the man on the roof, we figured out that you had a burglar alarm rigged up here."

Rush shuffled his feet around on the floor. The floor was old, and it seemed to sag somewhat when he stepped on it.

The rest of the white-haired man's assistants entered. They had all come down through the roof trap-door.

Each man's skin was reddish and inflamed.

"You're sure a half-boiled-looking bunch," Rush said dryly.

The white-haired man showed his teeth unpleasantly.

"What was the stuff in that bottle you broke on the floor of your apart-
ment?” he snarled. “The stuff that looked yellow.”

“A chemical,” Rush said promptly. “It burns you, and the burn keeps getting worse and worse, and maybe you die.”

“Can it be cured?” the man demanded.

“Sure,” Rush said. “Sure it can.”

“Then cure us!”

The other men had been acting as if they had a bad case of the itch which they were not supposed to scratch. Now one of them gave up the effort, and began to claw his red skin madly, making mewing noises of pain.

“This fellow was in the yellow stuff!” the fellow croaked. He jabbed a hand at Rush. “Why didn’t it burn him, too?”

Rush said, “I took a bath.”

“Bath, hell!” the man snarled. “We took baths first thing!”

Rush grinned. He began to see that his position was not so bad, but he still had trouble getting the grin to stay on his face.

“Elixir,” he said. “You didn’t put Elixir in the bath water.”

The girl made a startled sound.

“Oh!” she gasped. “So that’s why you took a bath in that horrible-smelling stuff, and made me take one!”

Her remark was exactly what was needed to convince the men that there was a cure for what was wrong with them.

“Search the place for some of that Elixir!” the white-haired man snarled.

THE search was conducted with frenzied speed, and netted them nothing. They came back and surrounded Rush and the girl in an ominous circle. The two men whom Rush had captured got to their feet and scratched themselves.

“I said in the advertisement,” Rush remarked, “that we might make a deal.”

The white-haired man growled, “What do you mean?”

“You confess to killing your ex-president, and get Jonathan Noble out of the penitentiary,” Rush explained, “and I’ll cure you.”

“You think we’re crazy?”

“Of course,” Rush said, “if you didn’t kill the president, that complicates matters.”

The white-haired man fished in one

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NEXT MONTH

Here’s a bird’s-eye view of what’s coming in our next issue:

“Doubled Barreled Magic”, by Maxwell Grant

“High Jack”, by Theodore Tinsley

“Espionage Island”, by Steve Fisher

“Death Comes Home”, by Frank Gruber

KENNETH ROBESON—PAUL ERNST—ETC.

all in the great issue of CRIME BUSTERS that’s on sale in October.
of his pockets and got out a penknife, which he opened.

"Now, I'm going to cut one of your eyes out," he said grimly. "And I'm going to make you look at it with the other eye until you decide to cure us of whatever is wrong with us."

"And then you're going to kill me and the girl?"

"Of course not!"

Rush said, "It'd be danged inconvenient if you were a liar."

The girl had started trembling. He took her by the arm, led her to the table; she leaned against the table, grasping it tightly, her fingers seeming to take strength from the solidness of the wood.

Rush started patting his own pockets slowly.

"I'm going to smoke a cigarette while I think this over," he explained.

He never smoked.

"None of that!" the white-headed man snapped. "We've had enough trouble with your gadgets!"

Rush stared at them indignantly.

"Now look here, I want a smoke and I'm not in the mood to argue all day about it," he scowled and looked as firm as he could about the thing. "If you're afraid, one of you give me a cigarette and a match!"

There was some scowling back and forth, and finally the men gave in. One of them produced a cigarette; another a match.

Rush was careful not to move fast enough to excite anyone as he put the cigarette between his lips and scratched the match on the table. He held the cigarette on his lips, tilted upward, applied the flame to the end, and drew in smoke.

He held the burning match out to one side with his right hand, took the cigarette away with his left hand and held it up to draw attention to it.

"You smoke a good brand," he said.

He dropped the lighted match on the old rug. The match was still burning when it fell on the rug. There was a sputtering—the rug caught fire.

Instantly, a whoosh! The rug burned as though it were gunpowder. In a fractional second, greenish flame was all over the floor, and the room was full of stifling gray smoke.

Rush grabbed the girl, yanked her up on the table. They rolled off the other side, hit on the burning rug with Rush carrying the girl.

He ran with the girl, gained a door and went through. The men were too occupied with the fire around their feet to do anything to stop him.

The girl stared questioningly at Rush.

"That rug was one of my gadgets," Rush explained. "It's practically the same as made out of guncotton."

The men in the other room began making an uproar.

"If there's not enough tear gas left in that pencil," Rush said, "we may be embarrassed."

THE two police detectives did not look much like doctors, in spite of the white smocks which they had donned, the shiny mirror things for looking into people's mouths which they wore on their foreheads, and the stethoscopes they carried in their hands. They came out of the hospital room and found Rush in the hall.

Rush said, "I'll bet you didn't put it over!"

Both detectives grinned.

"Sure we did," one said.

"Two of them didn't actually take
part in the killing of the ex-president," the other detective explained. "They broke down, and will turn State's evidence. We got a confession."

"What about Jonathan Noble?" Rush asked.

"The governor is going to give him a full pardon," one detective replied.

"What's the governor going to do about me?" Rush asked anxiously.

"He says to throw you in jail. He's hot about you playing on his belief in the supernatural."

"Why, the blasted politician!" Rush said indignantly.

The detective grinned. "The thing for you to do is run when we're not looking."

Rush asked, "Are you looking now?"

"No."

The girl was very grateful, but Rush's appreciation of her gratitude took a slide after she said, "Jonathan and I are going to be married as soon as he is pardoned."

"After what I told you about watching out for marriage!" Rush grumbled.

When Rush opened the door of his apartment—his other apartment, where the first fight had taken place—he saw that the yellowish vapor was still present in the room. The stuff would not kill a man, but it would burn painfully if not neutralized at once by the Elixir, and Rush had no liking for the odorous Elixir. He ventilated the apartment before going in.

The other half of the ten-thousand-dollar bill was under Bufa, the toad.

There was also a note.

"Glory be!" Rush chortled.

He was suddenly delighted. The owner of the voice of Bufa, the toad, had been here to leave half a bank note. The fellow had gotten into the yellow vapor. He would be burned. He would have to come to Rush for treatment.

Rush said cheerfully, "I'm finally gonna learn who that guy is!"

Then he read the note.

THAT ELIXAR SURE SMELLS,
DOESN'T IT?
BUFA

He dashed to the hiding place where he kept a supply of the Elixir. Four boxes were missing.

Rush sat down, held his head with both hands, talked to himself violently, and wondered who in the name of mystery the voice of Bufa could be.

After a while, his head ached.

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MOUNTAIN FEUD!

Clean the whiskers from the hills and valleys of your face without a struggle—use extra-keen Star Single-edge Blades. Famous since 1880. 4 blades for 10¢.

Star Blade Div., Brooklyn, N. Y.

STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS
CHAPTER I.
DEATH TRAP.

IT was hard to see clearly ahead through the rainy darkness, so Aleck was driving carefully. He kept both hands taut on the wheel.
The road was narrow and unpaved.

Aleck's eyes gleamed with the eager expression of a man confronted with a tricky puzzle. His face tilted briefly toward Carrie Cashin.

"I've heard of plenty of guys who walked out of their homes and vanished without trace," he murmured.

A man walks into his home and vanishes! Can Carrie Cashin track down the clues in this new kind of snatch racket!

It curved crookedly through the hilly countryside of northern New Jersey. Rain had made the dirt road spongy-soft, almost as slick as grease. Occasionally the sedan skidded and recovered.

"But this is the first time I ever heard of a guy who walked into his home—and presto!—where the heck is he?"

Carrie Cashin laughed softly.

"That's exactly why we're out on
such a dismal night," she said. "The case sounds like the kind I enjoy. The voice of our client over the telephone was frightened—and yet, not frightened. I got a distinct impression she was hoping we wouldn't take the case."

Carrie looked exactly like Little Red Riding Hood. She was wearing a crimson cellophane slicker with the hood pulled loosely over her chestnut hair. Her short tweed skirt disclosed a pair of slim, girlish legs.

But Aleck knew that under the tweed skirt was an efficient little
palm gun, tucked discreetly into a garter holster. He also knew that the "CASH AND CARRY DETECTIVE AGENCY—You Pay and We Deliver!"—was a grim reversal of the name Carrie Cashin. She had built the agency to one of the most successful enterprises in New York.

Aleck drove the sedan cautiously ahead through the torrent of rain.

Suddenly, he gave a faint exclamation. His gaze lifted to the rear-vision mirror. He had heard the pulsing roar of a fast car somewhere behind him.

Still out of sight beyond the last turn in the road, it seemed to be rushing onward at reckless speed. In another instant, it plunged into view.

It rounded the curve with a wide skid, from which it barely recovered. It raced past the slowly moving sedan. With an oath, Aleck swerved perilously close to the ditch. Then the reckless automobile was gone with a whoosh! like an express train. Its red tail-light vanished like a crimson firefly around the curve ahead.

ALECK'S mouth twisted with anger at such insane behavior on a winding mud road. He exclaimed:

"I wish I'd caught a glimpse of that guy's face! I'd like to punch him in the nose!"

"I'd like to have seen his face myself," Carrie murmured. "He was bent low over the wheel and he was wearing a peaked cap. The car was a blue Buick. Last year's model. Jersey plates. The first two of his license numbers were a 7 and a 4."

"Why the hell was he in such a hurry, I wonder?"

Carrie laughed suddenly. Aleck had rounded the curve ahead and the mystery car was again visible. It was skidding to a quick halt directly in front of a grade railroad crossing at the foot of a long hill.

"One of those impatient fools who tries to beat trains," Carrie said.

"It didn't do him a damn bit of good," Aleck growled.

The upraised zebra-striped arm of the railroad gate was dropping horizontal in front of the halted car. The gate-tender, in a black slicker and a dripping felt hat, was turning the crank that lowered the arm. Aleck rolled slowly down the hill.

"I'm going to pull alongside that reckless idiot and tell him a thing or two!"

But a sudden, unexpected happening spoiled Aleck's intent.

The driver of the Buick yelled something to the gate-tender. Instantly, the man reversed his cranking. The wooden arms lifted momentarily and the Buick scudded past the crossing. It sped away.

By the time Aleck reached the railroad, the gates were again lowered. The employee in the black slicker had hurried off with his kerosene lantern, toward a wooden shack well to the left of the road.

"Looks like it pays to have gall," Aleck fumed.

Carrie didn't reply.

She was staring at the crossing. There was only a single track. The rails were badly rusted. Weeds grew high between the ties. There was no sound of an approaching train—and Carrie realized suddenly there wasn't going to be any train!

She jerked her tweed skirt upward for an instant to the tops of her silk stockings. The palm gun which she always carried slid from her garter holster.

"Stay here," she told Aleck curtly. "What's the idea?"

Carrie flung open the sedan's door
and backed into the warm, pelting rain.

"It's a trick of some sort. There's no train coming! This railroad looks like an abandoned spur. The driver of that Buick speeded up in order to tip us off to the gate-tender. The gate-tender let him through and stopped us! I want to know why?"

She darted across the road, a slim, resolute figure in her red cellophane slicker.

CARRIE could see no sign of the gate-tender as she crept along the cinder path that bordered the track. Bushes almost covered the path. They swayed in the storm, deluging the girl with spattering, wet drops. The wind tugged at Carrie's transparent slicker.

Suddenly, she saw the yellow glow of a lantern. It seemed to be beyond the gatekeeper's dark shack. The man was evidently crouched in the pouring rain.

Carrie tiptoed around to the back. Her palm gun was level and steady. She sprang suddenly forward to cover the man from the rear.

There wasn't any man! His lantern was standing alone on the ground.

The next instant, a stunning blow crashed against the red cellophane hood that protected Carrie's head from the lash of the rain. Her piled chestnut hair saved her from a cracked skull. But she crumpled in a heap, dazed and limp.

The gate-tender had leaped from a clump of bushes. A handkerchief mask clung sopping wet to his face. Eyes glared murderously at his limp victim from slits in the cloth. He bent with a creak of his long black slicker and grabbed Carrie.

He dragged her into the dark wooden shack.

Carrie was still paralyzed from the blow on her head. She lay on the floor, unable to move. She could hear the scrape of the man's feet, then the rasp of a lighted match. The match flame was blown out almost instantly.

The masked man darted outside for a moment and returned with the lantern. He left it standing on the floor. He also left the shack door wide open as he fled.

Carrie wondered dazedly why her assailant hadn't tried to kill her. She had caught a glimpse of a gun sagging in his raincoat pocket, but he hadn't attempted to draw it.

Then Carrie smelled the smoke.

IT roused her from stupor. She crawled dizzily to a narrow crack in the floor. A thin spiral of gray was ascending. The acrid smell was that of a powder fuse! Carrie couldn't reach the writhing red spark below the crack. Fear clutched at her heart as she realized what it meant.

Reeling, she gained her feet. She stumbled into the pelting rain. The man in the black slicker had already raced across the weed-grown railroad track. He had turned for an instant, and he saw Carrie. His rubber-clad arm jerked up with a gun.

But he didn't pump bullets toward his swaying victim. He fired upward at the rain-swept sky. Then his mouth opened in a shrill cry.

It was the knifelike scream of a woman!

It rose in the darkness, edged with counterfeit terror. Then, with a quick whirl, the masked woman in
the concealing black raincoat and slouch hat, who had pretended to be a railroad gate-keeper, vanished from sight.

Carrie heard a distant yell from Aleck. The pistol shots and the shrill scream of terror had reached his ears. He was racing pell-mell toward the wooden shack where a lighted lantern glowed through the open doorway.

Carrie gasped at the thought. She ran desperately to head Aleck off. She was clear-headed now. She realized that both Aleck and herself were meant to be blown to bits.

Twenty feet from the shack, Carrie plunged head-on into Aleck. It was the only way to stop him. He swayed on his heels and she whirled him fiercely.

“Get back! Quick!”

He didn’t understand. She had to drag him along with her.

“Down!” she shrilled. “Flat on your face!”

They had reached the road. Aleck stared at Carrie as if she had gone suddenly mad. She thrust her leg between his, tripping him. They both rolled headlong.

Behind them the black night split apart in a dazzle of flame. The roar was deafening. Shattered planks from the gate-man’s shack whizzed overhead like chunks of shrapnel. Then there was queer, buzzing silence through which could be heard dimly the hiss of the rain.

There was no sign left of the detonated shack. Where it had stood was a blackened hole in the earth.

CHAPTER II.
MAN ON THE ROOF.

ALECK helped Carrie to her feet. He raced across the road to their stalled sedan. There was a lick of flame on its roof. One of the blazing embers from the explosion had landed atop the car. But Aleck reached upward from the running board and scooped it off before it could do any damage.

“Raise those crossing gates and let’s get out of here,” Carrie ordered. Her voice was calmer. “I don’t want to be answering questions when people get here. I want to ask a few—as soon as we get to our client’s house.”

Aleck cranked up the wooden arms and slid again behind the wheel of the sedan. Two of its windows were cracked, but nothing else was wrong. The car crossed the railroad and whizzed up the long hill on the other side.

Carrie explained tersely what had happened.

“I think,” she concluded, “that two people—the man in the Buick and the woman disguised as a man—are extremely anxious to keep us from investigating the disappearance of Clarence Baylor. So anxious, in fact, that they attempted murder as a last resort to stop us from conferring with Baylor’s frightened daughter.”

She added hastily: “Snap on your bright lights!”

The sedan was still climbing the long dirt hill that led onward from the railroad. In the white glow from the headlights, the broad tire treads of the fleeing Buick were clearly marked in the wet earth. Presently, the marks curved to the side of the road. The blurred pattern showed where the driver of the Buick had jammed on his brakes.

“That’s where the girl in the slouch hat and the black slicker rejoined her confederate,” Carrie murmured quietly. “My guess is that the trail will probably lead us straight to the Baylor home.”

The location of the house had
been described over the telephone by the missing man's daughter. Kate Baylor had said it was the first house to the left, about three miles from the railroad crossing. The tire marks of the fleeing Buick disappeared presently. The soft dirt road had changed to hard macadam. But Aleck's jaw was grim as he turned into the driveway that curved through the spacious grounds surrounding the Baylor home.

"Maybe I better take a quick look at the garage in the back before we ring the front doorbell," he suggested.

"No." Carrie said. "I prefer to see our client first."

The grounds were thickly planted with shrubs and small birches. Beyond the driveway was a denser growth of scrub oak and pine. The house itself looked gaunt and lonely in the slant of the rain. It was three stories, with a high, peaked roof out of which poked a large square concrete chimney. It was dark except for the faint gleam of light from a shuttered living room window on the ground floor.

Aleck had snapped off his lamps as soon as he turned into the driveway. He locked the sedan carefully and followed Carrie. He asked:

"You sure you don't want me to have a look in the garage for that Buick?"

"No. There's something of more immediate importance. Observe carefully every person we meet inside—and listen for the sound of my pencil."

Aleck grinned. "The pencil gag, eh? Okay."

In another moment, the front door opened. A very pretty blonde stared out at the two dripping figures on the doorstep. Aleck did the ex-plaining. The blonde's pale face lighted with quick relief.

"Thank God!" she said. "I was afraid the storm would keep you away. Come in."

She led them to an attractive living room where a big wood fire was crackling cheerfully in a perfectly enormous old fireplace. The room was warm, almost uncomfortably so.

"Tell me about your father's disappearance," Carrie prompted.

"Clarence Baylor isn't my father," the girl said. She had blue eyes and a shy, attractive smile. I guess I forgot to—"

"Aren't you Kate Baylor?"

"No. I'm Mrs. Marjorie Baylor. Kate is my sister-in-law. I married her brother Ned. We both came here to help take charge, as soon as we learned of—of what happened. Kate is upstairs, asleep. She's been terribly upset and nervous. She didn't want me to call in a detective, but I—"

Her voice broke off in sudden surprise. Stealthy footsteps sounded in the hallway. A girl appeared from the direction of the rear staircase.

"Kate!" Marjorie exclaimed. "You startled me! I thought you were fast asleep."

"I couldn't sleep," Kate replied. Her tone was hurried and sullen. "A little while ago I heard a queer noise that woke me up. It sounded like a distant explosion—perhaps down near the railroad."

Her eyes flicked toward Carrie Cashin.

"Did you people come from that direction?" she added.

"Yes," Carrie said. She added coolly: "There's a WPA road gang down there. They were blasting stumps."
“Oh,” Kate said.
She sounded indifferent, but there was no indifference in her dark eyes. Her hair, too, was dark, almost blue-black. She was fully dressed. Carrie noticed, without glancing directly at her low-heeled shoes, that there was a film of fresh mud along the soles of Kate Baylor’s shoes.
Aleck had noticed the mud, too. His eyes narrowed. Carrie took a notebook and a pencil from a pocket of her tweed jacket.
“Suppose you tell me the facts of your father’s disappearance,” Carrie suggested.
“Marjorie can tell you what little there is,” Kate Baylor said shortly. “I wasn’t in favor of calling in detectives. I’m not so sure there is any crime to investigate. My father may have vanished for perfectly sound reasons of his own. I—I—”
She began to cry suddenly. She sat down, her tremulous hands over her eyes. Her blond sister-in-law begged her to go back to bed, but Kate refused. She kept sniffling softly while Marjorie told Carrie Cashin the facts surrounding the strange disappearance of her father-in-law.

ONE week ago, Clarence Baylor had entered the rear door of his home while his daughter Kate delayed a few minutes outside to put the car in the garage. When Kate entered, she bolted the door on the inside, as she always did. She called to her father, but got no reply. Alarmed, she searched the ground floor, but found no trace of him. Nor was he in any other part of the house. He had simply entered—and vanished!
“Why couldn’t he have slipped out by the front door, through one of the windows, or perhaps down the cellar?” Carrie asked.

That was impossible, Marjorie declared. The sobbing Kate lifted her face for an instant and nodded agreement. The house was an old one, with old-fashioned bolts on the inside of all the doors. Kate had bolted the kitchen door on the inside when she had come in. The front door was likewise barred. So was the door leading to the cellar. And there were steel, burglar-proof catches on all the windows, none of which had been tampered with. Obviously, Clarence Baylor couldn’t have slipped out and then rebolted a door or a window behind him.
Somewhere inside the house he had swiftly dissolved into nothingness!
“Do you know any reason why your father should deliberately disappear?” Carrie asked Baylor’s dark-eyed daughter.
“No. He was a retired broker with an ample income and no worries.”
Kate had stopped weeping. She relapsed into silence, staring at the roaring flames in the fireplace, as if she found the questioning a nuisance.
Marjorie described how she and her husband Ned had called in the local police to search the house, after arriving in response to Kate’s telegram. The police had tapped every inch of the old structure in a hunt for secret rooms or passages. They found no hollow spot. The walls were solid from cellar to garret. And the scuttle to the roof was nailed tight from the inside!
“By the way,” Carrie asked casually, “is Ned here tonight?”
“He went to town on an errand,” Marjorie smiled wanly. “We call it town; it’s really just a village.”
“A bad night for driving a car,” Aleck drawled.
“Ned didn’t take the car. There’s
something wrong with it. He told me he was going to use his motorcycle.”

CARRIE’S pencil began to tap idly against the cover of her notebook. Aleck leaned forward, listening.

“Any servants in the house?” Carrie asked.

Kate Baylor’s dark eyes swung away from the fire before Marjorie could reply.

“We used to have an old fool here named Peter. A man of all work. He was impudent and lazy. Father fired him last week.”

Without being asked to, she got up suddenly and rummaged in the drawer of a desk. She handed Carrie a faded snapshot of the discharged servant. Peter was an untidy, powerful-looking man with tousled gray hair and a stubble of beard. His eyes were clear and alert. He didn’t look at all like an “old fool.”

Carrie’s pencil began again its idle tapping against the cover of her opened notebook. She was calmly tapping out dots and dashes in the Morse Code. Her message was terse:

Examine garage. Check on condition of Buick. Look for black slicker and slouch hat worn by girl at railroad crossing.

Aleck rose to his feet. “I forgot to close the window of our sedan to keep out the rain,” he told Carrie. “I’ll be back in a few moments.”

He put on his hat and raincoat and went out the front door.

He had scarcely left when Clarence Baylor’s daughter swayed suddenly on the sofa. She got up with a smothered gasp. Marjorie went over to her with a murmur of concern.

Kate’s face was pale under her dark hair.

“I feel a little faint. If you’ll excuse me, I think I’ll go upstairs to my room and lie down again.”

She disappeared toward the rear staircase. Carrie Cashin made no comment. She was staring into the dancing flames in the fireplace. There was a faint smile on her lips. But her eyes were enigmatic.

ALECK went first toward his own sedan, in case anyone might be watching from the house. Instantly, he made a startling discovery. There was a pool of spilled gasoline on the rain-soaked earth behind the car. A few lazy drops were still oozing from the bottom of the tank.

The tank had been deliberately pierced with a sharp-pointed tool!

The inference was plain. Someone had made grimly certain that the two detectives would remain at the Baylor house.

Shielded by the car, Aleck studied the house through the pelting rain. His eyes lifted slowly toward the roof. Suddenly, he stiffened with amazement. A crouching figure was dimly visible on the peak of the slanting roof.

The dark figure rose to its feet. A knotted rope hung downward from the stout branch of an oak tree that swept diagonally above the roof. The man caught at the rope and began to climb with swift agility. He disappeared into the thick foliage of the tree, drawing the rope up after him.

Aleck tiptoed along the edge of the driveway. He moved cautiously, taking advantage of the cover afforded him by clumps of dripping bushes. Reaching the foot of the oak in the rear of the house, he waited, his gun steady under the flap of his raincoat.

No one descended from above.
Nearly five minutes went by before Aleck realized the truth. Having made sure that the oak was sturdy and its trunk solid, without any hollow, he stepped backward and glanced aloft.

The foliage was thick. It spread like a dark, interlaced curtain in the rain. Other trees were close by. A powerful man, moving quietly aloft, could easily swing from one limb to another and make his way overhead to some point farther back in the grounds.

Crossing the driveway, Aleck discovered something else. The print of a tire mark on the soft earth! Just a single impression, and narrower than the tire of an automobile would make. A motorcycle track!

Beyond the edge of the drive a pale face seemed to peer for an instant as the wind lashed at the thickly planted shrubbery. Aleck made a wide circle toward the spot. He cursed under his breath when he reached it. The thing he had noticed was the pale, whitish bark of a birch. The swaying bushes had made it seem like the glimmer of a peering face.

But there was a narrow dirt path winding past the birch. The mark of the motorcycle tire was plainly visible. Aleck followed the trail deeper into the grounds. It ended at the door of a small shack that looked like a tool house.

Aleck hesitated. Carrie Cashin's tapping pencil had directed him to search the garage and examine the automobile which Kate Baylor's sister-in-law had said was damaged. From the heavily wooded spot where he now stood, Aleck could no longer see either the house or the garage.

But he fought down his uneasiness. He decided to examine the tool house first.

CHAPTER III.

CARRIE'S CLUE.

In a moment or two, he had the wooden door open. Closing it behind him, he snapped on his torch. The first thing he saw was a motorcycle. It stood near the wall, supported by the metal stand beneath its rear wheel. The engine was warm. Someone had driven it recently through the rainy fury of a black, unpleasant night.

Aleck's mind veered instantly to the man he had seen climb upward from the Baylor roof to the overhanging oak tree. It could be none other than the mysteriously absent Ned Baylor! Aware of Aleck's accidental discovery of him, Ned Baylor had beaten a hasty retreat from the roof in order to hide his motorcycle. He had hidden it in the one spot where it was reasonably safe from discovery—the abandoned sleeping quarters of a man who no longer lived on the estate.

The hut belonged to the gray-haired man of all work, Peter. There was a bed, a cheap bureau and a chair in the room.

Two or three snapshots of the old handy man were stuck in the corner of a bureau mirror, that stood alongside the bed. The bed was neatly made up, its covers folded back. The only jarring note to the effect of neatness was the pillow. Someone had dripped two or three blobs of muddy water on it.

Aleck turned back the bed covers. Underneath was a hidden rifle.

Aleck examined the weapon. For a moment, he was mystified. One shot had been fired very recently. And yet Aleck had heard no sound. The weapon itself provided the answer to the riddle. The rifle was operated by a powerful spring, its mechanism released by the pressure
of compressed air. The lever under the barrel was an air pump. Someone with a knowledge of firearms had converted the small-caliber rifle into a grimly silent air gun!

The discovery prompted Aleck to make a swift and complete search of old Peter's room. He didn't find anything more until he moved the bureau away from the wall. Then he discovered the very objects for which Carrie Cashin had ordered him to search. A black slicker and a gray felt hat were wadded in a tight ball behind the bureau. They were still soggy from rain!

Sniffing the inside of the slicker, Aleck smelled the faint odor of perfume. He was aware, with sudden tension, that he had found the garments worn by the disguised girl who had tried to blow up Carrie and himself at the railroad crossing!

Snapping off the torch, he stepped out into the storm. There was no sound except the beat of the rain and the rustling of wind-tossed branches above his head. He raced onward like a flitting black shadow, emerged in the clearing between the rear of the Baylor house and the garage.

THE garage door was locked. A powerful padlock protected it. But Aleck grinned as he slipped a short, tapering bar of steel from an inner pocket. He attacked, not the padlock, but the hasp which held it in place. People always forgot that a lock was no stronger than the hasp which secured it. This one was cast iron, and rusted from long service. It snapped under evenly applied pressure, leaving the expensive padlock hanging uselessly.

Aleck was opening the door cautiously when a sudden feeling that he was under observation caused him to whirl and peer backward. The rear of the Baylor home loomed dark and silent. But lifting his eyes, Aleck saw sudden movement at one of the windows on the second floor. There was a gap of six inches or so at the bottom of the window, where the shade had been lifted. The shade descended as Aleck peered.

But in that quick instant, he recognized a vanishing face. It was the pale countenance of Kate Baylor. Hidden in her bedroom, she had been watching Aleck's movements through a pair of opera glasses! The same dark-eyed girl whose shoes had been filmed with mud when she had appeared with a yawn in the living room, to announce that she had been fast asleep! "Asleep hell!" Aleck thought.

He moved grimly inside the garage. As he had expected, the car parked inside was a blue Buick, the same one that had passed him and Carrie on the road just before they had halted at the railroad crossing.

Aleck tried the motor as soon as he discovered the car was not locked. The engine didn't work! He lifted the hood and found that the stalled engine was merely the result of a hasty attempt to provide an alibi. Someone had tampered clumsily with the distributor points. The moment they were adjusted, the engine purred with power.

Aleck sniffed inside the car, hoping to get a whiff of the same perfume he had smelled on the slicker he had found hidden in Peter's sleeping shack. He was disappointed. But he smelled something equally unusual—the faint reek of kerosene.

He backed out of the Buick. "Stand still!" a voice snarled behind him. "If you move, I'll blow your spine apart!"

ALECK could see the reflection of his enemy in the glass of the open car door. The man was standing
near the rear wall of the garage. He had entered from the back without sound. The gun in his hand was grimly steady.

"Drop your pistol!"

Aleck obeyed. He had plenty of courage, but he was not a fool.

"Okay. Kick it toward me."

Aleck turned slowly, both hands raised above his head. He had never seen his captor before. A young man with a lean, taut face and eyes as hard as his aimed pistol. He said:

"Caught you, eh? Where the hell did you drive that car tonight?"

"I didn't drive it anywhere. I found it here."

"You lie! You stole it. It was missing a while ago."

He circled warily behind his prisoner. His gun muzzle prodded into Aleck's back.

"What were you doing up on the roof?" Aleck asked softly.

"Huh?"

"Where did you learn to climb trees like Tarzan?"

"Damn you, what are you talking about?"

The pressure of the gun in Aleck's spine lessened for an instant. It was all the break Aleck needed. He knew his captor was not a professional crook the moment the gunman had stepped directly behind his victim. No professional crook would have ever made that mistake—and Aleck proved it with lightning speed.

His right leg kicked fiercely backward. The heel of his shoe crashed against the gunman's shin. There was a howl of pain and the man bent over in agony.

Aleck's fist cocked itself as he whirled. The blow crashed against his captor's jaw, dropping him in a tangled huddle. Aleck grabbed the fallen gun and picked up his own.

"Get up on your feet! Walk ahead of me into the back door of the Baylor house—or I'll do a little spine-smashing with a bullet!"

They crossed through the dark slant of rain and climbed the short flight of wooden steps that led to the Baylor kitchen. The door was bolted on the inside. Aleck yelled.

THERE was a quick rush of feet inside, then the door opened. Carrie Cashin was visible, her business-like little palm gun ready for instant action.

Her red lips hardened at sight of the prisoner.

"Take him into the living room, Aleck!"

There was a scream as Aleck prodded his captive into the warm room where flames leaped cheerfully in the big fireplace. The scream came from Marjorie Baylor.

"Ned! What in heaven's name is——"

"Is this man your husband?" Carrie asked evenly.

"Yes." Marjorie Baylor's eyes were suddenly sick with apprehension. "Ned, what have you done? These people are here to help us. They're detectives!"

"Detectives?" Ned's eyes blinked and became suddenly veiled.

"I—I guess I made a mistake. I thought this guy had stolen our Buick. I—I caught him out in the garage"—his face twisted into a ghastly smile—or rather, he caught me."

Rapidly, he told a story of finding the Buick missing, of scouring the dripping countryside on his motorcycle to overtake the thief, of returning to find Aleck prowling in the garage. His story sounded glib and not very convincing. Yet Carrie smiled dimly and apparently accepted his explanation.

Footsteps became suddenly audi-
ble from the back staircase of the house. Kate Baylor entered the room, her dark eyes sleepy and puzzled. She stared at Marjorie and at her brother, Ned.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked dully. "I—I thought I heard the crash of glass and a scream down here! I was almost asleep when I heard it. Has—has anything happened?"

"Nothing much," Carrie said dryly. "Merely a second attempt to murder me. Somebody fired a bullet from an air gun through that window over there. The slug missed my head by about two inches."

She turned toward Ned Baylor. Her voice was almost indifferent.

"You didn’t see anything of a prowler outside with a rifle, did you?"

"No," he denied hastily. "I went straight to the garage when I saw a light inside."

"Where did you leave your motorcycle?" Aleck interrupted. He shot the question swiftly.

"Huh? I left it parked under the trees. I leaned it against one of the birches. Why?"

ALECK didn’t reply. He was staring at the round bullet hole in the living room window. Ugly cracks radiated from it like the jagged spokes of a wheel. There was a hole in the wallpaper opposite, where the silent bullet from outside the house had narrowly missed Carrie’s head.

"When did all that happen?"

Aleck asked.

"Less than two minutes after you left the house." Carrie said.

"Did you rush outside after the killer?"

Carrie shook her head. Aleck knew she was waiting patiently to hear his report, but he didn’t quite know how to get rid of the three people who sat staring curiously at him, waiting to hear what he had discovered.

Carrie ended his dilemma by making a sudden and queer request to Ned’s blond wife.

"Will you please get me two pair of heavy woolen gloves? I shall need them to solve this case. If you can’t find gloves, heavy mittens will do."

Marjorie looked puzzled at the odd request. It was not a particularly cold night. In fact, the fire from the open hearth of the chimney made the living room uncomfortably warm. However, Marjorie made no comment. She left the room to find the gloves.

Carrie Cashin turned instantly to Ned.

"I want you and your sister to examine the locks on every window upstairs. Find out if they’re all bolted tight. I’ll explain why as soon as you return. Hurry back as quickly as you can."

Ned looked puzzled and wary. The dark-eyed Kate gave Carrie a long, suspicious scrutiny. But neither of them disobeyed the order. The moment they departed, Carrie’s ear bent toward Aleck’s lips.

"All right. Talk fast—and don’t skip a thing. Keep your voice low. What did you find out?"

Aleck’s disclosure of the presence of a mysterious figure on the roof didn’t seem to surprise Carrie. Her eyes merely narrowed slightly when he told about the air gun hidden in old Peter’s sleeping shack. She was more interested in the odor of the perfume that Aleck had detected on the lining of the hidden slicker. But her eyes sparkled with triumph when he told of the kerosene odor in the rear seat of the Buick.
"That's what I wanted to know!"

Carrie was calmly ready when the three members of the Baylor family returned. She took the heavy gloves from Marjorie with a polite murmur of thanks. She nodded at Kate's report that every window in the house was properly locked on the inside. Ned confirmed his sister's statement.

"Excellent," Carrie murmured. "It may please you to know that I have solved this case."

CHAPTER IV.
CRIME'S END.

CARRIE had expected shocked surprise, and she got it. All three of them gaped at her. Even Aleck, who was used to Carrie's bold methods of crime-busting, looked incredulous.

"Your father didn't vanish voluntarily," Carrie told Kate Baylor. "He was kidnapped! I still don't understand why? But I have a pretty good idea of how—and where! Unless I'm completely wrong, your father is still inside this house. I propose to find him."

Quick exclamations greeted this confident announcement. Carrie silenced them with a curt gesture. Her face was grave.

"Two attempts at murder have been made tonight. I expect a third and final attempt. Everyone in this room is exposed to that peril. Therefore, I want you to do exactly as I say in order to protect your lives. Please come upstairs with me, all of you."

They followed her up the back stairs to the second floor. Carrie led the way to Kate Baylor's bedroom, the one through whose window Aleck had seen the missing man's dark-eyed daughter staring at him through opera glasses. Carrie directed:

"Ned, I want you to lock yourself in this room with Kate. Bolt the door on the inside and be ready for trouble from a sly criminal. Alec, give Ned his gun."

"What about my wife?" Ned protested.

"I'll need Marjorie downstairs to help me bait a trap outside the house," Carrie explained. "I promise you that she'll be in no danger from the kidnaper."

There was a brief argument, that ended with Ned obeying with ill grace. He took the gun Alec handed him. He closed himself and Kate in the bedroom and shot the bolt on the inside.

"Don't leave that room until I give you the signal," Carrie shouted through the closed door. "Keep away from the window—and shoot if anyone tries to enter!"

She turned to Ned's blond wife.

"And now, Marjorie, we'll examine your room before we leave the house to set the trap."

SHE opened Marjorie's door. The minute they were inside, her whole manner changed. Her voice dropped to a cautious and barely audible whisper.

"Your room is almost directly opposite Kate's. Stay here in the dark and watch through the keyhole! If Kate sneaks out of her room—or Kate and her brother together—rap three times on that radiator pipe with your knuckles. I'll hear the sound downstairs—and this case will be finished!"

Marjorie looked frightened.

"Surely you don't suspect that Kate or my husband—"

"Unless you follow my orders, I shall drop the case. Only with your help can I solve it. Do you agree?"

Carrie knew how to overawe people with less agile minds. Mar-
jorie nodded her head tremulously. Aleck and Carrie returned to the head of the stairs, leaving the frightened blonde on guard at the keyhole across the corridor. The two detectives descended noisily. Carrie pretended to talk all the way downstairs to an imaginary Marjorie.

The minute she reached the living room, she drew on a pair of the heavy gloves Marjorie had brought and gave the other pair to Aleck. She led him toward the hot blaze of the chimney fireplace. That blaze had puzzled her all evening. It was entirely too warm a night for a fire of that size. Aleck’s story of the man on the roof had confirmed her suspicion. The fire had been built to discourage investigation of the chimney.

Carrie didn’t attempt to quench the fire with a pail of water. To do so would be to reveal her shrewd purpose to the crooks she was after. She laid three or four stout logs across the fire.

While Aleck beat out the sparks that flew against her silken legs, Carrie stood precariously on her log bridge. She sent the glow of her electric torch up the chimney.

There was nothing visible on the right side but sooty bricks. On the left side, however, hidden from view by the fireplace arch, was a metal rung. It was painted black to camouflage its existence. There was another rung above it—and another one—

Flames were already licking between the fresh logs, scorching Carrie’s shoes. Her gloved hands reached upward. Her muffled whisper ordered Aleck to follow. Their eyes burning and filled with tears from the heat, choking, they started upward.

Carrie didn’t climb all the way to the roof. She halted a little below the square mouth of the chimney, through which rain drizzled downward from the open air. Her light threw a tiny oval of brilliance on the steep walls that inclosed her.

Suddenly, she saw a white mark. It was an X scrawled in chalk. Carrie judged that it pointed toward a chamber midway between the attic and the roof. It was obviously an air space to provide insulation to the house. The fact that the local police had not discovered this air space above the attic was easily explained. The attic trapdoor had been nailed tight on the lower side. The police had taken things for granted. But to Carrie, the nailing of that trapdoor had been a significant clue.

Her voice brought Aleck higher on the rungs of the chimney ladder. He began to work in complete darkness to find a concealed mechanism that operated the chalk-marked brick.

Carrie’s open hand rested an inch or so below the chimney top. In her palm was a flat mirror from her vanity case. Tilting it slightly, she was able to view the thick bough of the oak tree that slanted across the peaked roof.

Presently, she saw a reflection in the mirror that stiffened her into alert attention. The wet leaves of the oak were spreading apart. A face peered downward! A sinister face with gray tousled hair and a stubbled chin. Peter—the house servant who had been discharged shortly before Clarence Baylor had disappeared.

An instant later, a knotted rope dangled from the oak. Peter began to descend.

Carrie retreated swiftly down the metal rungs of the chimney ladder.
Below her, Aleck uttered a low exclamation.

Carrie felt a fierce surge of relief as she realized the cause of Aleck's excitement. He had found the secret of the chimney! A square section of brick had pivoted, disclosing utter blackness beyond.

Aleck's palm had already assured him that there was a solid floor beyond the opening. He squeezed inward. With a lithe twist, Carrie followed. She shut the panel noiselessly behind them. A second later, she was on her feet, gun in hand. Aleck waited tensely in the darkness, for Carrie's whisper warned him what to expect.

They heard the grunt of a man crawling through the panel opening. He rose to his feet. A match flared in his uplifted hand.

Peter's eyes glared like a trapped animal as he saw the two detectives. The match fell to the floor and went out. But he had no chance to shoot. Aleck's gun barrel struck against his skull. He hit the floor with a thump.

Carrie's torch glowed briefly. It showed Peter, crumpled and unconscious. It showed other things that made Carrie leap to an electric-light switch on the slanting wall of the hidden chamber.

THE room appeared to be a queer combination of an office, a library and a laboratory. Books lined the shelves of a big bookcase. There was a desk under a metal-shielded lamp attached to a thick wire from the peak of the roof. A bed stood near by in an angle beneath the sloping eaves.

The body lay face-downward on the bed.

Aleck sprang forward and rolled the figure over on its back. It was Clarence Baylor! He was tied and gagged. His body looked emaciated and starved, in spite of the supply of canned goods and groceries piled on a table near by. Someone had viciously tortured him. There were burns extending upward along his bared arms from wrist to elbow.

But he was not dead. His eyelids fluttered feebly in the glare of an electric light.

Aleck started to release the captive. But Carrie checked him. Under her curt order, he swung back to the crook he had slugged. With Carrie's help, he moved Peter. They rolled him under the bed. The hanging sheet at the side hid the unconscious kidnapers.

Aleck didn't realize Carrie's grim purpose until he saw her swift camouflage. She rolled up the blanket into a tight cylinder and shoved it lengthwise beneath the sheet. Then she punched the pillow into a tight ball and placed it partly under the sheet in a rough approximation of a sleeping man's head.

She snapped out the light. With Aleck like a noiseless shadow at her side, she opened the chimney panel cautiously and peered down the black flue.

For a moment, nothing was visible but the distant red blaze of the grate. Then two arms appeared. They were the smooth slim arms of a woman. They were holding a pail of water. The fire hissed as the water sloshed over it.

The woman sprang inside the chimney. It was impossible to tell from above who she was. She began to climb swiftly. Once more, Carrie Cashin gently shut the panel.

The delay was nerve-racking. Not a sound came from the closed chimney. The climbing woman was as silent as a cat. They didn’t realize that she had opened the panel until they heard her panting breath and
the faint thump of her knees on the board floor.

The woman rose lithely to her feet. She didn't attempt to turn on the light. The floor creaked slightly in the darkness as she glided straight toward the bed where Peter was accustomed to sleep while he guarded the trussed prisoner.

The pale gleam of a knife lifted in the air. The woman drove it downward so savagely that she grunted when it stabbed the bundle in the bed. Her whisper of pitiless laughter made the hair prickle on Aleck's scalp.

He had removed his shoes. He took a step forward in his stocking feet. Across the blackness of the chamber, he knew Carrie was doing the same.

The goal of the murderess was how the helpless body of Clarence Baylor. Her breath hissed as she again lifted the knife.

ALECK had no hesitation in driving his fist blindly against her jaw. The blow was a glancing one. The woman screamed and tumbled backward. She twisted on the floor with the lithe ferocity of a jungle cat.

In an instant, she was on her knees. Her knife slashed through the darkness at Aleck's legs. He felt the cloth rip and leaped backward.

Then Carrie sprang from the rear. Her steady fingers closed without mercy on the throat of the murderess.

The two fell in a thrashing huddle. Teeth bit into Carrie's arm. She lost her hold and the knife point drove toward her breast. Aleck caught at the plunging arm. This time he twisted until the blade tinkled on the floor. The sharp click of handcuffs put an end to the nightmare battle against the most dangerous woman Carrie had ever encountered.

In the darkness, Aleck's voice was stony with horror.

"She tried to stab her own father! I suspected that damned black-haired she-devil from the very first."

"Not black-haired," Carrie said in a tired whisper. "If you turn on the light, I think you'll discover she's a blonde. Not Kate Baylor—but Marjorie! A ruthless blonde who went to the almost incredible length of marrying Baylor's innocent son in order to worm her way into the

More good stories about Carrie Cashin to come! Next issue, "High Jack", in which Carrie Cashin faces a really tough case! And, in addition, you'll have novelettes by Kenneth Robeson, the famous "Doc Savage" author; by Maxwell Grant, of "The Shadow" fame; by Steve Fisher, Paul Ernst, Frank Gruber—all great names, producers of the best detective fiction you can get anywhere! And it comes to you regularly, by these and other famous authors, in every issue of this great book——

CRIME BUSTERS

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family to steal what she was after.”
Aleck sprang to the light switch. Carrie's prediction was correct. It was Ned Baylor's treacherous wife. Her lovely face was contorted with fury as she stood helplessly fettered in steel handcuffs.

Carrie leaned over Clarence Baylor's desk. She turned on the queerly shielded lamp that hung over it. It gave forth a leprous glow, half-greenish, half-purplish. Carrie knew it was a mercury lamp, the type used to detect secret writing, before she examined the books piled on the shelves of Clarence Baylor's bookcase. The volumes were all treatises on cryptography.

"YOU'RE a foreign spy, aren't you?" Carrie told Marjorie tonelessly. "Which continent do you serve—Europe or Asia?"

The woman spat an oath. Aleck sprang to where Clarence Baylor lay and untied his bonds. When the gag fell from his mouth, he tried feebly to talk and couldn't.

"You're a government cipher expert?" Carrie asked him.

He nodded eagerly. Then he uttered a hoarse cry. Marjorie had raised her steel-cuffed hands to her mouth. Aleck tried to grab the gold pendant which the woman was crunching between her white teeth. The dangling pendant wasn't gold at all, but enameled glass. Milky liquid spurted on the woman's tongue. She swallowed convulsively.

Suddenly, she toppled; her head hit the floor with a thump. For a moment, she writhed, her silk-clad legs twisting horribly. She cried something in a foreign language which Carrie recognized, but Aleck didn't.

She was dead almost before the words left her lips.

"You saw her grab for the locket," Aleck said dully to Carrie. "Why did you let her kill herself?"

"Because death is the best solution for her—and for the decent young man she married," Carrie said harshly. "Ned Baylor is innocent. So is his sister Kate. The only criminals were this woman—and her partner, whom she just tried to murder in order to shut his mouth. We'll prove it when we force Peter to confess. He's the one who actually kidnapped Clarence Baylor."

It was some time before Baylor could talk clearly.

He was an ace decoding expert employed confidentially by the United States government. Captured diplomatic documents were sent to him from Washington. He had built the secret room above the attic to avoid suspicion of his real profession. He never went near Washington. Not even his own son or daughter had any knowledge of the real nature of his dangerous and patriotic work.

Baylor had suspected that Peter was a foreign spy, and had fired him. Peter had bided his time and had found a chance to enter the house from the roof. He slugged Baylor in the living room and carried him up the chimney to the secret laboratory above the attic. The crooks didn't know that Baylor had actually destroyed the code message they were seeking. Baylor, knowing the peril that threatened him, had burned the paper after completely memorizing it.

Peter and Marjorie used starvation and torture on him to force him to produce the damning document. They didn't know it existed only in Baylor's trained memory. It was the complete air and naval plan of a nation overseas, which was almost ready to start a swift, undeclared war on the United States!
DEATH IN THE DARK

Carrie Cashin had forced a blow-off by her swift methods of detection. By pretending to suspect Kate and Ned, Carrie had encouraged the cunning Marjorie to try a double murder in order to hide her own guilt. Having descended quickly through the chimney, Marjorie would have tricked Ned and Kate into leaving their locked bedroom; then she would have signaled Carrie on the radiator pipe to arrest them. The soaked embers in the fireplace would have led to the discovery of the two bodies in the secret air chamber above the attic. Planted evidence would frame two innocent people.

Aleck looked puzzled as he listened to this quick recital by Carrie Cashin.

"But how in heck did you know it was Marjorie? She was inside the house when Peter fired the shot from the air gun. And it was Kate, not Marjorie, whose shoes were smeared with mud from the railroad crossing."

CARRIE'S faint smile deepened.

"I suspected Marjorie the moment I shook hands with her at the door when we arrived. Her hands smelled of kerosene! She was the girl who had carried the lantern at the railroad crossing. Before she had time to remove the telltale odor— I was ringing the front doorbell.

"Had Kate been guilty, she never would have been foolish enough to wear those muddy shoes. She was actually asleep upstairs as she claimed. Marjorie switched the shoes a few moments before we arrived."

Aleck drew a husky breath.

"You've got more brains than any girl I ever—"

"Brains—poof!" Carrie sounded angry. "That's a heck of a compliment to hand a lady. Don't you know that's the worst thing you can tell a girl?"

"Wait!" Aleck protested. "Let me finish what I started to say. You have more brains than any girl has a right to possess—when she's as dog-gone beautiful a girl as you are!"

Carrie's pretty face was suddenly pink under Aleck's admiring gaze.

"That's better!" she said shortly, but her voice was soft.

There was something in her brown eyes and in her voice that made Aleck flush, too.
DEATH’S PINK

CHAPTER I.

"EDDIE IS DEAD!"

The police called him "Doctor Trouble." They swore he attracted trouble as a magnet attracts iron. Past events seemed to prove the police right. But tonight, he believed, would be different.

Douglas True, M. D.,
prescribes lead pills
to cure a bad case of crime!
Gold letters on the black leather bag that hung from his right fist spelled DOUGLAS TRUE, M. D. Light from a near-by street light glinted on the letters and on the chromium of his small coupé. It was parked behind a dark sedan at the curb. True hardly noticed the larger car.

An anxious frown pulled at his straight brown eyebrows and drew lines in the clear skin of his face. Haste spurred each of his movements as he slammed the coupé door and hurried across the sidewalk toward the front door of Camen Britt's Mortuary Parlors. He made the last few feet at a
run, as though racing to save the life of a dangerously ill patient in the establishment of death.

That was actually his purpose.

A shoulder thrust nudged the door open. He went into the broad reception room. Shirred cream silk covered the plate-glass front windows and gave the place a feeling of somber privacy. A very dim overhead light gave it a cool dusk well in keeping with its artificial palms and faintly flower-tinged air.

The reception room was deserted, but True heard the low, throbbing notes of a pipe organ. It sounded peaceful and far removed from trouble. The instrument was playing slowly, as though the organist were practicing. The sound came from an open doorway directly opposite the front door of the parlors.

Through the opening, True saw a long hallway that led back to the open door of a brightly lighted room at the rear of the building. Closed doors on either side of the hall led, he knew, to Britt's embalming rooms, small chapel and casket display rooms.

Britt's was a large business. In addition to the mortuary parlors, the mortician operated a cremation plant on the edge of town.

True started for the open hall door. The anxious frown was deeper over his calm gray eyes. He was mentally checking the exact treatment for the patient who had called him from the mortuary parlors a few minutes ago.

The patient was asthmatic, the worst case he had seen in five years of practice. The usual adrenalin treatment did not have the desired effect. Today, he would try a glonoin-oil injection. He had obtained a small vial especially for this case. It was in his bag, nested in a cotton wrapping. It should—

He was about halfway across the reception room when the black, tall figure of a man suddenly appeared in the bright rectangle of the door at the end of the hall. The man yelled something hoarsely. His right arm moved, jerking up.

Then a bright gout of flame blotted out the figure. It seemed to fill the hallway and race swiftly toward True. Before it reached him, something crashed into his head and he heard a noise like sharp, sudden thunder.

He knew the black figure had fired a gun. He knew that Douglas True had started attracting trouble again. This time, the trouble came in the shape of a bullet. It had struck him.

Dazedly, he wondered why the gun had been fired. Then the reception room floor tilted up at a sharp angle and he lost his balance. His initialed, dark-gray felt rolled from his head. His hands went out as the floor came up toward him. He felt his palms strike the somber rug. Instinct pulled his head around to save his face from striking.

The bullet from that gun, he knew now, had struck him in the head.

TRUE felt so queerly hazy. Nothing at all like he had supposed a bullet wound to be. There was no pain. Nothing but a strange numbness.

Fleetingly, he diagnosed his condition. Pulse and respiration depressed, but not alarmingly so. Probably a slight concussion. It could not be very serious, for he was conscious. The skull bones did not seem to be perforated. Very probably, the bullet had glanced from his skull over the motor area of his brain and caused partial and temporary paralysis.

Very probably, he would live.
DEATH’S PINK CASKET

He listened for the throb of the organ, but did not hear it. Instead, there were men's voices, arguing excitedly. He could not understand them.

Then he heard the quick thud of feet coming along the hall toward the reception room. The thought that the black figure was coming to give him the coup de grâce leaped into his mind. He tried to move his arms and legs and get up on his feet to meet the black figure. His muscles would not function.

His diagnosis was correct, he realized with small satisfaction.

It was paralysis.

The thudding feet moved closer. A man came out of the open hall door and into the reception room. Another man followed, about four feet behind the first.

Both men were moving at a half trot, and they kept the interval between them. True's vision was so blurred he could not make out the features of either man. He could tell only that the front man was tall and was dressed in dark blue or black. The other man was shorter, and wore gray.

The two men trotted across the reception room, holding the four-foot interval all the way. Then Douglas True saw the two men were carrying something between them. It was a casket. It was of just about the right size to accommodate the body of a child. Its color was a pale pink.

The two men trotted the casket out of the reception room. The front door hissed shut. True heard a car door slam. A motor started and moved rapidly away from Camen Britt's Mortuary Parlors.

TRUE stayed motionless on the floor. The muffled throbbing of the organ was gone. The pain was beginning to come in his head. It came in long, pulsing throbs. The pain wasn't so bad yet, but he was certain the throbs would become shorter in interval and more severe. He stared down at the worn nap of the rug, pondered the facts of his being shot and the two men carrying a child's pink casket from Camen Britt's Mortuary Parlors.

Separated, the two facts were not startling. Physicians were shot occasionally, and men carried caskets from mortuary parlors quite frequently. Physicians, however, were not shot every time men carried a casket from a mortuary parlor.

There was no sensible connection between the two facts.

Involuntarily, True shook his head over the problem, and the resulting pain jerked a moan from his tightly pressed lips. The throbbing in his head became shorter in interval and more severe. It was as if a clumsy surgeon were trephining his skull without anesthesia.

Then he thought of the dangerously asthmatic patient who had called him from the mortuary parlors a few minutes ago.

True sighed resignedly. He moved. His long legs stirred. Laboriously, he struggled to his feet and lunged for the framing of the open hall door to stay erect. He stared down the hallway.

The lighted doorway at the end of the hall seemed to quiver and jump before Douglas True's eyes. He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment and opened them again. His vision seemed a little clearer, but his skull felt as if it were split wide open.

A door snapped open on the left side of the hall and a plump, blond young woman ran out into the hall. Her green dress fluttered as she ran toward the doorway at the other end
of the hall. True knew she was Ruby Doyne, Camen Britt’s mortuary chapel organist.

Then, beyond Ruby Doyne’s running figure, he saw Camen Britt. Britt was the living counterpart of a cartoonist’s conception of John Barleycorn, except for the black gloves and tall hat.

The girl reached the lighted door and went in. Then she screamed shrilly. There was hysteria and horror in her voice. She was beside Britt. They were staring at something in the lighted room that True could not see.

Then he heard Camen Britt yell nasally, over and over:

“Eddie is dead! They killed Eddie!”

CHAPTER II,
ONE PINK CASKET.

DOUGLAS TRUE released his hold on the door framing, teetered around drunkenly for a moment, then stumbled back to his black leather medical bag on the floor of the reception room. Recovering the bag, he made it to the doorway of the lighted room. He thought he spoke to the girl and Britt, but it was only a croak.

Ruby Doyne’s horror-filled blue eyes jerked around to him braced in the doorway. She screamed again, red mouth going wide. Then she fainted, her plump body falling against Camen Britt.

The gaunt mortician caught her clumsily, both arms about her waist. She arched over like a loosely jointed doll, head and arms hanging down one way, high-heeled shoes barely touching the floor the other.

Britt’s bony face was livid. His black eyes stood out in startling contrast to his pale, bony cheeks. He looked at True. His thin lips jerked, and he said again:

“Eddie is dead! They killed Eddie!”

Douglas True stumbled into the brightly lighted room. His gray eyes moved about. He saw a small printing press under a bright, hanging light. There was a shelf with a telephone on it, near the press.

On the floor beneath the shelf was a man. He was young, black-haired and emaciated, as though by disease. He was lying on his back, dark eyes staring at the ceiling. His arms were bent at his sides, the hands up on his torso. Slanting from his abdomen was a bright, silvery shaft of metal about the size of a small lead pencil. A thin stream of blood dribbled from the exposed end of the metal shaft.

Douglas True’s teeth clicked together. Straight brown eyebrows twisted over gray eyes. He forgot about his creased scalp.

The silvery metal shaft was a trocar, a long, sharply pointed and hollow needle used by physicians and embalmers for draining internal organs. The exposed part of the needle was slanting back toward the prone man’s feet. From the angle of the needle and from his knowledge of its length, True knew the sharp point of the instrument was buried in the man’s heart.

The man was dead. He was Camen Britt’s embalmer. He was also the dangerously asthmatic patient who had called Douglas True from the mortuary parlors a few minutes ago. His name was Eddie Maxell.

True turned his attention to the girl. She was living, though unconscious. Camen Britt still held her draped over his bony arms. Her head, plump features obscured by disarranged blond hair, was almost touching bare, dimpled knees. Chubby arms hung straight down,
fingers touching the floor. True exclaimed:

"Here! Get that girl on the floor!"

TRUE'S voice was crisply professional, yet his tall body swayed as he moved toward the gaunt mortician. His gray felt hat was gone and blood matted the curly brown hair on his scalp.

He set his medical bag on the floor and caught Ruby Doyne's plump arms. Camen Britt released her, and the girl's lax weight almost jerked True off balance. The jar started fresh agony in his head. Jaws hard, he broke the girl's fall to the floor and rolled her over on her back. Kneeling, he dragged the medical bag close and started working over her.

Camen Britt stood motionless, black eyes staring dazedly at the girl.

Then True heard the reception room door burst open. The heavy thud of men's feet came into the hallway. True glanced over his shoulder and saw the broad figures of two men. He caught the glint of brass buttons and the blue of a police uniform. He sighed resignedly and turned back to the girl. She was beginning to stir. The heavy footsteps stopped at the room door.

"What the hell! Doc Trouble!" boomed a big voice from the door. "You mixed up in another murder!"

"That," True said crisply without turning, "seems to be the natural interpretation of the existing circumstances, officer."

"H-m-m. Looks like that to me, too." The blue-clad patrol car officer turned to the other cop, who was peering over his shoulder. "Call the boys, Johnny," he said, "and tell 'em Doc Trouble's loose."

Johnny left, clattering along the hall. The patrol car cop h-m-m-ed again and shook his head.

"Never seen the like, Doc," he complained. "Every time you turn up, so does trouble. Somebody heard a shot and called in. They always do. Saw your initials on the gray hat up front and knew you were somewhere around. It's got a hole in it. What's it this time? This guy the stiff? Who stuck the do-hickey in his gizzard, or don't you know yet?"

"Not—yet."

True helped the girl to a near-by chair. She slumped down, covered her face with her hands and sobbed dryly. True turned to the patrol cop, who was standing in the doorway, big red hands propped on broad hips. True did not recognize him, but then, he had seen so many cops. The patrol car officer spotted the blood in True's hair.

"Hell and Maria, Doc!" he boomed. "Did they get you? Wha—"

"A scratch."

True looked around for a chair. His knees were wobbly. The girl was using the only chair in the room.

"If you don't mind, officer," he said warily, "I'll tell it only once, to Sergeant McCann."

The patrol car cop's mouth went down at the corners. He glared at Camen Britt.

THE gaunt mortician had not moved, except to lace bony fingers before him. His pallid face was twitching.

"All right, guy," the cop boomed, "you're Britt, eh? Run this joint, don't you? Know the guy who got bumped, don't you? Who is he? What happened in here? Who done it? What's the idea of a printing press in a undertaking joint, eh? Come on! Come on! Don't clam up on me! Start talking!"
Doyne’s and Eddie Maxell’s prints on the telephone. Eddie Maxell’s and Britt’s prints were on the printing press. The medical examiner, with Douglas True’s help, established the fact that Eddie Maxell’s death was caused by the trocar being thrust into his abdomen at just the right angle to plunge up into his heart. His death was virtually instantaneous.

Then True was telling his story.

“Maxell,” he explained briefly, “has been a patient of mine for several weeks. Asthma. The worst case I’ve ever seen. There was something else. Extreme nervousness. I did not ascertain the exact cause. His asthma was contributory, of course, but not the source. I talked with him about the nervousness. He called me tonight and was in a highly nervous condition. He could hardly talk for asthmatic spasms. I did not understand what he said over the telephone. Suddenly, he stopped talking. I thought he was in a serious condition and came here.”

Rapidly, he told about the shot. Long fingers touched the bandage on his head. The medical examiner had given him first aid.

“I did not recognize the man who shot me,” he admitted. “I would not know the two men who ran from the place if I saw them again. I do know that Miss Doyne was not implicated. She was playing the organ in the chapel. I saw her run from the chapel after the shot. Maxell was already dead. Very probably, he was killed while talking to me over the telephone.”

“Anything in that?” Sergeant McCann’s eyes were blue gimlets in his weathered features.

“Nothing I can think of now.” Douglas True touched Ruby Doyne’s quivering shoulder. “As a physi-
cian, I insist that this young lady be allowed to leave immediately. I shall take her home and give her medical treatment."

The Homicide detectives looked at each other and stirred uncomfortably. Sergeant McCann looked at the girl, then at Douglas True. He nodded.

"All right," he said sourly, "take her along. But I'm holding you responsible if she's wanted again. Anything else you got to say about this mess of trouble you've dumped in my lap?"

"I imagine the thing the two men carried as they left the mortuary parlors might shed considerable light upon what you are pleased to term this mess of trouble, Sergeant McCann." Douglas True got the sobbing girl on her feet and headed along the hallway toward the reception room. "It was a casket. Have Camen Britt check his stock. I am quite sure he will find a casket missing, a small pink one."

CHAPTER III.
SHOT GUN.

DOUGLAS TRUE got the girl into his coupé. A frown twisted his straight brown eyebrows as he pulled out around the two police cars parked at the curb in front of Camen Britt's Mortuary Parlors and wheeled the coupé out into the early evening traffic.

He had recovered his dark-gray felt hat from the reception room floor. The hat was ruined. There was a bullet hole just above the black band in front, another in the back. There was dried blood smeared on the sweat band. Yet True was wearing the hat perched uncomfortably on the bandages the medical examiner had put on his head. He would have felt half naked without the hat.

Ruby Doyne was huddled on the coupé seat beside him. Her face was in her hands and she was crying, occasionally breaking out into dry sobs. Ordinarily, she wasn't a pretty girl, though her long hair was naturally blond. Her dress was of fairly nice green material, but it lacked that something. What True had seen of her face wasn't particularly interesting. Just a plump, blond girl's face.

But with her hair and clothing disarranged and her plump figure quivering with sobs, she had a strong appeal for True. Maybe it was because she was just a girl in trouble.

True cleared his throat and started to speak, then didn't. His gray eyes lifted to the rear-view mirror of the coupé. He saw the headlights of a car behind him. The lights were spaced widely, as though placed on the front fenders of the car. There was something vaguely familiar about the arrangement. He tried to remember if the dark sedan he had seen in front of Britt's had wide-spaced lights. He couldn't remember.

His lips tightened. At the next corner, he turned the coupé west. The wide-spaced lights followed. He turned south at the next corner. The lights hung on.

The name the police had given him leaped into his mind—Doc Trouble. He seemed to be living up to that name tonight.

True glanced up at the mirror again. The lights were moving along behind, keeping their distance. He thought of the two men trotting through Britt's reception room, and maintaining the four-foot interval between them. He thought of what
had caused them to hold that spacing—the pink casket. His jaws hardened.

"Miss Doyne," he said gently, "perhaps you had better tell me where you live. It so happens that I do not know."

He glanced up at the mirror again. The lights were still behind his coupé.

"Merrill Apartments. Second floor," the girl said. "Apartment 2-B. I have two rooms." She looked up. Her eyes were red and wet. Her make-up was ruined.

TRUE turned east at the next corner, toward the Merrill Apartments. The building was about twenty blocks from the turn on the next street. The wide-spaced headlights followed as he made the left and right turn. True cut his speed, and the lights fell back.

He rolled a block at fifteen miles an hour, then a light caught him. He looked back. The following lights turned east at the intersection a block away. He breathed easier and relaxed. His black medical bag was on the seat between him and the girl.

"Miss Doyne," he said gently, wheeling the coupé along at a low speed, "Eddie Maxell was a friend of yours, was he not?"

The girl murmured: "Yes. We were friends. We were trying to save enough to get married. Mister Britt didn't pay us much. Eddie did the printing for two dollars a week extra. We were saving that. Eddie was so sick with asthma and he had to spend most of the extra money for treatments."

True squirmed. He looked at the girl. She was staring at the coupé dashboard.

"Then Eddie got some kind of extra work. I don't know what it was. Something about tickets, I think. Maybe he was printing them. I don't know. He said we'd soon have enough to get married on. He was nervous and jumpy all the time. It was the extra work, I think."

"You did not see the two men leave the place after Eddie was—found?"

The girl's blond head moved slowly from side to side.

"They might have been anybody. Mister Britt doesn't have regular hearse and flower truck drivers. He just picks up drivers for each funeral. It's cheaper that way."

Then the girl must have thought of Eddie Maxell's funeral. She started crying again and put her face in her hands.

True turned his attention to driving. They were nearing the Merrill Apartments. He looked in the rearview mirror. The wide-spaced lights were not in sight. He sighed as he stopped at the curb in front of the apartment building.

Trouble, apparently, was through for the night. He hoped it was. The name the police had given him—Doc Trouble—was beginning to irk him. After all, he was a physician, not a criminologist. Crime belonged to the police, not to the medical profession.

True sighed again as he started helping the girl from the coupé. He would like to know by whom and why he had been shot; why the two men ran from Britt's with the pink casket between them; why and by whom Eddie Maxell had been killed?

HE helped the girl out on the sidewalk. She gave little trouble. She was moving as if in a daze, but well able to walk. They went into the building and up the stairs. The
second floor was carpeted. The girl stopped at a door marked 2-B. She knelt and pulled a door key from under the edge of the carpet.

True’s lips moved. Ruby Doyne might just as well have left the key in the apartment door. The hiding place was glaringly obvious.

Sniffling, the girl put the key in the door lock and turned it.

True glanced down again at the hiding place under the edge of the hall carpet. Then he saw something that held his puzzled gray eyes.

The something was a short length of bright-green cord. He could see it plainly against the neutral-colored carpet. The cord was apparently new and extremely strong. The exposed end of it was cut cleanly, as though with a knife.

The other end of it was hidden under the edge of the girl’s apartment door. The cord did not look like a piece of ordinary wrapping twine. It appeared to be strong new fishing line.

True’s gray eyes lifted to Ruby Doyne. The plump blond mortuary chapel organist did not impress him as being the type of person to have strong new fishing line in her possession. She was shifting forward, moving to push the apartment door open.

True’s eyes went back to the fish line. Then the brown hair rose under the bandage on his head. A swift panorama of two men trotting with a pink casket between them, a body with a trocar thrust into it, and a car with wide-spaced headlights flashed through his mind. His mouth went dry. He moved. He dropped his bag.

Long arms shot out and caught the girl around her plump waist. He jerked her away from the door and flung her down the hall. She screamed. Then he was diving to the carpet beside her. They were well to one side of the apartment door.

The apartment door, released, swung open of its own accord, as though something inside were pulling it. It opened halfway, then flame and noise and smoke exploded inside the room.

THE blasting double roar hammered True’s ears and started his head to throbbing. A disastrous something smashed into the door, slamming it violently.

Splinters rained in the hallway, pattering down on True’s feet. He saw a ragged hole appear in the door. The hole was large enough for two persons to crawl through. Plaster was dribbling from the hallway wall opposite the door.

True saw exposed lath, hanging chunks of plaster and white, deep holes. The torn area in the hall wall was somewhat larger than the hole in the apartment door.

Beside him, Ruby Doyne’s eyes, red from crying, were staring wildly with terror.

True sneezed as plaster dust tickled his nostrils. The sneeze made his head hurt. He heard voices yelling excitedly somewhere in the Merrill Apartments. One of those voices, he knew, would soon call the police. He frowned.

Deliberately, he got to his feet, recovered his ruined hat and set it on his bandaged head. Ruby Doyne was lying on the floor, whimpering, all but paralyzed with terror. He left her and went to recover his black bag, which was on the floor near the wrecked door.

As he leaned over to recover the bag, he looked through the hole in the door—and directly into the twin black barrels of a double-barreled shotgun wedged with books on a
table inside the room. The gun was about to fall from the table. He saw a snarl of bright-green cord, one end of which was tied around two books on the floor.

True straightened. He sighed, went back to the girl and helped her to her feet. She was jerking in every muscle. True shook her gently.

"Miss Doyne," he said crisply, urging her toward the stairs, "I should like to leave here before the police arrive. Control yourself, young lady. You are not hurt. I am going to take you to my office."

"But—wha—"

The girl's eyes went to the wrecked apartment door. "I imagine," True explained wearily as he hurried the girl down the stairs and across the sidewalk, "someone is rather anxious to remove both of us. It seems that we are supposed to possess knowledge detrimental to the welfare of someone in connection with a trocar, some kind of tickets, a pink casket, and Heaven knows what else!"

He got the girl in the coupé and started away from the Merrill Apartments. There was a faintly wailing siren in the distance.

"Someone," Douglas True continued, wheeling the coupé around the corner, "visited your apartment before we arrived." He thought of the car with the wide-spaced headlights. "This someone arranged a mechanical contrivance to give us a rousing reception when your door was opened. The arrangement involved the use of strong green fishing line, a few books, and a double-barreled shotgun!"

CHAPTER IV.
FOUND: ONE PINK CASKET.

DOUGLAS TRUE was frowning as he wheeled the coupé toward his office, across town. His head was throbbing. A glance into the rear-view mirror showed him that his eyes were bloodshot. His pulse was a beat above normal, slightly increasing the pain in his head. His respiration was accelerated. He was nervous.

Not all of it could be attributed to the crease in his scalp.

He looked down at Ruby Doyne, and his frown deepened. His lips tightened. He had not only attracted trouble tonight, but he had trouble—very serious trouble—riding in the coupé with him!

The shotgun trap in Ruby Doyne's apartment had been arranged for the express purpose of killing the girl. There was no positive assurance that he would go to the apartment with the girl, therefore the fact that he had almost been killed at the same time and by the method was incidental.

The occupants of the car with the wide-spaced headlights had arranged that trap. They had been watching when he put the girl in his coupé at Britt's. They had followed until certain he was carrying the girl to her apartment, then they had turned into a parallel street and speeded to reach the Merrill first. A few minutes would suffice to arrange the gun trap, then——

True's square shoulders lifted. He glanced up at the mirror again. He thought for a moment that he had seen the headlights behind him, but was not positive. He watched the mirror as much as he could for a few minutes, then decided he might have been mistaken, as the lights did not appear again. He looked down at the girl beside him, and sighed.

If Ruby Doyne possessed enough knowledge to warrant her being murdered, the would-be killers would try again. It was his responsibility to
see that any other attempt upon the girl's life would prove as unsuccessful as the first.

Trouble, most positively, was not over for the night.

THE girl could not, of course, go back to her apartment. She could not be abandoned to shift for herself. Her death, in that case, would be merely a matter of a few hours. He could turn her over to the police, but that would be contrary to his actions so far.

He had taken the girl from Britt's to prevent the police detaining and questioning her as a material witness. The girl was highly excitable, and the questioning, in addition to seeing Eddie Maxell's body, would have been extremely disturbing.

He looked down at the girl again. Ruby Doyne sat as though dazed, staring at the coupé dashboard. Her plump hands were lax in her lap. Slight quivers shook her shoulders about every eight seconds.

True diagnosed the girl's condition as extreme nervousness resulting from shock. His lips moved. His own nerves had not been entirely free from wear and tear tonight.

The girl shivered again. He frowned and turned the coupé into the street upon which his office and bachelor apartment were located. Both were in the same building, a narrow brownstone front bordered on one side by a mid-block alley. The building was well beyond the outer fringe of the business section proper. It was not far from Britt's.

True parked at the curb and helped the girl out. She still moved as though dazed. Shock, apparently, had numbed her senses so she did not realize just exactly what had happened during the past two hours. True led her into the building and into his consultation room. She took the indicated chair and watched him dazedly as he moved about, doffing his ruined hat and stepping into the small lavatory to wash his hands. She was still shivering. It was getting on True's nerves.

"Try to relax, Miss Doyne." He spoke with a forced cheeriness as he dried his hands on a paper towel and stepped from the lavatory. "You are perfectly safe here in my office. No one could possibly harm you while you are here. Just——"

"That," said a low, hard voice to True's left, "is what you think!"

True's head jerked around, and the movement seemed to tear his creased scalp open. Tears of pain came into his gray eyes. His jaws were hard.

A SHORT, heavily built man in a gray suit was standing just inside a glass-paneled door to the left of the consultation room. The door gave access to a hall that led to the door opening upon the alley. The short man in the gray suit had an automatic in his heavy fist. The muzzle of the weapon was pointed at True's chest.

Then True heard a slight noise to his right. It pulled his head in that direction. His pulse picked up four beats in as many split seconds. Lines formed in the clear skin about his mouth. The lines were grim and white.

The sound had been caused by the closing of the consultation room door. A tall man wearing a dark-blue suit was standing inside the closed door. He, too, had an automatic in his bony fist and the muzzle of the weapon was trained on Ruby Doyne. The girl stared at him uncomprehendingly.

True's mind churned. The two
men were the pair who had trottled the pink casket from Camen Britt's Mortuary Parlors!

True felt sweat come out on his forehead. His mouth was dry. Swiftly, he thought of a dozen things to do, and as swiftly discarded each one. He had the girl's safety to consider. Any drastic action would endanger her.

He forced himself to relax, forced a professional smile to his cold lips. "Well, gentlemen," he said briskly, "what can I do for you?"

"Nothing." It was the tall man in the dark-blue suit speaking. His voice was unpleasantly flat, as expressionless as his close-set, beady eyes. "It's us who're going to do something for you, Doc, and the dame." He moved swiftly toward the girl as she shivered.

The action seemed to snap the girl into full realization of what was happening. True saw the daze go out of her eyes. He saw her mouth open to scream. Then the tall man was beside her, his automatic flicking out toward her blond head.

Instinctively, True's body flexed. Long legs started him across the floor to stop the swinging automatic before it reached the girl's head. He heard the swift thud of feet behind him, heard whistling breath.

True heard the beginning of Ruby Doyne's scream, just a bare squeak. The sound stopped almost as it started, chopped off by the quick twuck of the tall man's gun barrel on the girl's skull just above the left ear.

In almost the same instant, something slammed into his head from behind and knocked him forward.

TRUE stumbled and went to his knees on the worn linoleum of the consultation room floor. The blow and jar of falling made a raging hell of pain in his head. His ears roared. A wave of dizziness swept over him and he fell forward as the consultation room floor seemed to dip and sway. Somehow, he got his hands out and stopped his fall. He heard the rasp of feet on the linoleum, then heard the flat voice of the tall man.

"Don't hit him again, Luke! We want him to walk out."

True heard a sullen mutter beside him.

"If you hadn't missed him before, Oden, all this wouldn't have—"

The tall man snarled a curse. The sullen mutter stopped. Things went blank for a moment, then True heard feet rasping on the linoleum again. He heard a man grunting and cursing.

"Damn! This dame's hefty. You would have to crown her. By——"

"Chop it off, Luke! Get moving! I'll handle the sawbones."

True felt hands grip his shoulders. They jerked him up on his knees. Dazedly, he got to his feet with the tall man's help. One thought burned in his half-numbed mind. A thick film clouded his eyes.

"Get my bag," he murmured over and over. "My bag must go with me. Miss Doyne will need medical treatment. I've got to have my bag. I must——"

"Okay, Doc." The tall man's breath touched True's cheek. There was a reek of cheap gin on his breath. True shuddered. He felt the handle of his bag thrust into his right hand and clamped his fingers on it. "Freeze onto the damn thing, and here's your lid." True's hat was jammed down on his bandaged head. He winced. "And be nice," warned the flat voice, "or I'll give you what I gave the dame."
True felt himself urged toward the glass-paneled door leading into the back hall. He stumbled along, helped by the tall man.

His foot struck the door riser, and he knew he was in the back hall. Somewhere ahead, he heard the short man grunting and cursing. A few more steps, and he felt cool night air on his face. He knew he was in the narrow alley that bordered the building containing his office and bachelor apartment.

In the alley, he was urged toward the right, away from the street. The short man was still grunting and cursing somewhere ahead. A few steps, and he heard the sound of something falling. Then Luke said sullenly:

"Damn! That dame's hefty. All I could do to boost her in."

A few more steps, then Oden said flatly:

"Okay, Doc, climb in, or I'll knock you in."

True felt cold metal against his hand. It seemed to be the door of a car, but it was much too high to be the door of an automobile. The film over his eyes blocked his vision. Fleetingly, he wondered if that last blow on his head had affected his eyes permanently; if—

"All right. All right. Luke and me ain't got all night." He felt Oden's hand on his shoulder. He was shoved forward against what felt like the edge of a truck floor. "Give a hand, Luke," snapped Oden.

Hard fingers gripped True's legs and arms. He was boosted from the ground, shoved up and forward. He fell heavily on what seemed to be a wooden floor covered with close-spaced, smooth iron strips. It was the floor of a truck body. Doors slammed behind him. A lock snicked. Then, presently, a starter whirred and the truck floor quivered and lurched into motion.

TRUE put out his hand to steady himself, and touched warm, limp flesh. It was a hand. He felt plump fingers. The hand was Ruby Doyne's. Instinctively, his long fingers slid to the wrist and located the base of the thumb. He felt a slow, regular pulse. He sighed with relief.

The floor dipped and leveled again as the vehicle pulled from the alley into the next street. A quick turn, then the motor rumble quickened.

True knew he was in the locked body of a speeding truck with Ruby Doyne. Together, they were being taken—somewhere.

He sighed again, but not with relief.

The name the police had given him was fitting him tonight as a rubber operating glove fitted a surgeon's hand—Doctor Trouble.

He pushed up to a sitting position, swaying with the movement of the truck. His teeth met as his head throbbed with the movement. A swinging hand located the black leather medical bag beside him on the truck floor. Long fingers found the bag latch and opened it. Those same long fingers moved delicately, understandingly, over the orderly chaos of things in the black leather bag. They felt the cotton-wrapped bulk of a small glass vial thrust into a side pocket of the bag.

A moment later, the wrapped vial was snuggled carefully in the pocket of True's conservatively cut gray vest.

His long fingers slid back into the bag. They located the cool metal handle of a scalpel. The blade of the scalpel was thrust into a small leather sheath.
Another moment, and the leather-sheathed scalpel was in another pocket of True's vest.
His long fingers went back into the bag and located the small barrel of a flashlight. Taking the light out, he pressed the switch and turned the ray on Ruby Doyne. She was huddled limply against the truck side, swaying slightly with the movement of the truck.
True eased to her side.
An examination of the girl's head showed no wound over the left ear. The skin was not broken. There was a bad lump, but the bone seemed to be all right. Apparently, the girl was merely knocked unconscious by the head blow. She should recover consciousness within thirty to fifty minutes. Nothing could be accomplished by reviving her now.
True turned the flashlight on the back doors of the truck. They were solid. There were no glass panels. The truck sides were also solid without glass panels. He swung the light toward the front of the truck.
His tall body stiffened. He almost dropped the light. The beam jerked with his nerves, then he had himself under control. His gray eyes glistened in the reflected glow.
The ray of light was picking out something at the front of the truck. It was pushed up against the solid wall between the truck body and the cab. The something was low, narrow and about four feet long. It was the pink casket which Luke and Oden had carried from Britt's Mortuary Parlors.

CHAPTER V.
ASHES TO ASHES.

DOC TROUBLE pushed up to his hands and knees and crawled over the swaying truck floor toward the pink casket. His head was hurting badly. The throbs were coming closely together. They were almost unbearable in intensity. The truck made numerous turns. He braced on hands and knees like a spent horse, to keep from being thrown off balance. He reached the pink casket.
Playing the light over it, he saw that the short head section of the lid was turned toward him. He braced himself on his hands and held the flashlight in his left hand.
The long fingers of his right hand slid along the rounded edge of the short head section. It came up under his pull. He folded it back against the truck side, hitched forward and directed the flashlight beam down into the pink casket.
True's gray eyes went wide. There was no body in the casket, yet it was not empty. It was almost filled with what appeared to be long, narrow tickets bound into books about a half-inch thick. The books were tied into bundles of about ten each with string. There were hundreds of the bundles.

True's jaws grew hard. The calmness went out of his eyes. He took one of the bundles from the casket, untied it and selected one of the books. He opened the book.
The top sheet of the book was covered with ornate printing. The paper seemed to be an odd type of so-called "safety" paper. By the fancy printing on the narrow slip, he knew the book contained a number of sweepstakes tickets on an English horse race. The date of the race was in the early part of 1939.

True nodded slowly. His fingers were shaking as he retied the bundle of tickets and replaced the package in the casket. He lowered the casket lid, clicked off the flashlight and crawled back toward Ruby Doyne.
The truck slowed before he reached the girl. It made an abrupt left turn and stopped. The floor dipped slightly as a man left the cab. A door squealed somewhere in front of the truck, then the vehicle lurched forward, ran a moment, and stopped. The door squealed behind the truck. Another moment, and someone was fumbling with the locked rear doors of the truck.

TRUE saw a streak of dim light. It widened rapidly as the doors of the truck opened. He saw Oden’s and Luke’s tall and short figures chopped off at the waist by the edge of the truck body.

Ruby Doyne was huddled limply against the truck side. Luke pawed at her and dragged her from the truck. True himself was lying in almost the same position he had been when the truck doors were closed.

“All right, Doc.” It was Oden’s flat voice. “End of the line. Crawl out.”

Oden caught True’s right ankle and started pulling.

For a split second, True thought of kicking him in the face, then discarded the idea. Ruby Doyne was already out of the truck, being taken somewhere by the grunting Luke. Both Luke and Oden were armed. Drastic action at this time would have an entirely unsatisfactory result.

He moaned. It was convincingly realistic. His head hurt with every movement. He slid from the truck floor onto concrete. Oden was gripping his left arm. The black leather bag hung from his right hand. By a single small electric globe, he saw he was in a covered driveway.

It was more like a garage, for double doors barred the end of the driveway. Then Oden was urging him toward a wooden door set in a brick wall to the right. They went into a building. The air in the building was very warm and filled with an odd odor.

By another dim overhead light, he saw what appeared to be a broad, short corridor. The right wall of the corridor was of ornate brick. There were two iron frames set low in the brick wall. A heavy, brownish curtain hung over the opening of both frames.

Directly before each frame was a low conveyor belt. Each conveyor was about the right length to accommodate a casket. The floor of the broad corridor seemed to quiver, and True heard a hissing roar. It seemed to be coming from behind the brownish curtains hanging from the iron frames at the ends of the conveyors. There was a smell of intense heat in the air.

True’s long body stiffened. He knew where he was.

LUKE was standing near the farther conveyor. He was holding Ruby Doyne’s limp figure, trying to place the girl on the conveyor belt. Luke was grunting and cursing.

Sweat came out on True’s forehead. Luke, the girl, Oden and himself were in Carmen Britt’s crematory on the edge of town. The hissing roar came from the huge burners that reduced cremated bodies to a handful of dark ashes. The incandescent heat from those burners was behind the brownish curtains in the iron frames. The conveyors were used to slowly thrust casketed bodies through the brownish asbestos curtains and into that incandescent heat.

Start the girl rolling. I'll handle the Doc. We got to get that damn pink casket next and burn it. The cops'll be looking for it and——"

Then True heard a sharp, excited rapping to his left. He looked in that direction and saw a plate-glass window set well up from the floor in the left wall. Someone was behind the glass, rapping on it. Reflections from the glass made the figure unrecognizable. Then True saw the figure move toward the left edge of the glass. It went out of sight.

Luke finally rolled Ruby Doyne on the broad belt of the conveyor. The girl was beginning to stir.

Someone opened the door leading into the broad corridor containing the conveyors. True turned his head and saw Camen Britt. The gaunt mortician's nasal voice was whining.

"Not the pink casket, Oden." He washed bony hands before his gaunt body. "I can put it back in stock and nobody'll know. It cost——"


Luke left the conveyor that held Ruby Doyne's plump figure and went toward a black switch box set on the end wall.

Doctor True moaned again, realistically, and put his hand to his forehead. His head was throbbing, but his vision was clear. He saw Luke near the switch box. Moaning again, True swayed—away from Oden, who was standing behind him.

His long-fingered right hand dropped from his forehead and found the cotton-wrapped vial in his vest pocket. He slid the vial from the cotton wrapping. Luke was reaching for the switch that would set in motion the conveyor upon which Ruby Doyne's body was lying.

True's long arm snapped back, forward, and he flung the small glass vial toward Luke. The short man in the gray suit had his hand on the switch handle and was pushing it up. Then the vial struck the end wall within three feet of his head, almost on a level with his throat.

A LOUD, sharp explosion sounded deafeningly in the broad corridor. Luke screamed, once. Glass smashed to True's left and he heard a series of jangling crashes as the plate-glass window burst and dropped in fragments to the floor. Oden yelled hoarsely, and from the corner of his eye True saw the tall man's right arm swing up. There was a gun in the right hand.

Luke spun away from the switch box. The switch was not closed. The short man in the gray suit came all the way around. He had no face. His head was a blood-streaming mass of flesh from chin to forehead.

Oden brought his gun-armed hand down toward True's bandaged head. True swiveled on his heels. His right hand now held the bright-bladed scalpel which he had slipped from its leather sheath in his vest pocket. Oden saw the hard glitter of the razor-edged steel. He dropped his gun, yelled, and scrambled for the door.

True scooped up the dropped weapon. Long legs drove him after Oden. The tall man was clawing at the door when True came within arm-reach. Oden's automatic, now in True's hand, flicked out toward the tall man's skull. As steel met bone in a clean thud, Oden's terrified yelling chopped off and he dropped
as though all his bones had turned to boiled spaghetti.

True's gray eyes gleamed with satisfaction. The ancient medical process of producing anesthesia by a well-placed head blow was not entirely without merit. Oden would be completely unconscious for quite some time.

True wheeled around to Camen Britt.

THE gaunt mortician was standing rigidly, paralyzed by the swift happenings of the past minute. He whimpered as True moved toward him, gun in his right hand, scalpel in his left. His black eyes were pools of stark terror in his bony, pallid face.

True's gray eyes made a swift arc. Luke was on the floor beneath the switch box. His short, gray-clad body was twitching and odd, gurgling moans were coming from what had been his face. Ruby Doyne was stirring on the belt of the conveyor. Oden was crumpled into a motionless heap by the door. The plate glass was gone from the window in the left wall. Glass slivers were strewn on the floor beneath the empty window frame. True saw that much, then his eyes were back on Britt. The gaunt mortician was shivering.

"Get to a telephone," True ordered crisply. He followed Britt as the tall mortician went out of the door, then up a few steps to the room behind what had been the plate-glass window.

The room was small and had a few chairs in it. It was used, True knew, as a place from which sorrowing families could watch the casket containing a loved one glide from the conveyor belt into the cremating apparatus. The telephone was on a shelf near the empty window frame. From it, True could watch Oden, Luke and Ruby Doyne. The girl was moving more now.

A motion of True's gun sent Britt to the telephone.

"Call the police and ask for Sergeant McCann," True ordered crisply. Then, after Britt had made the connection: "Repeat what I tell you—Sergeant McCann, this is Camen Britt, the mortician. I want to make a confession. Have a stenographer take it down and I will sign it later."

True's gun moved suggestively as Britt hesitated. The gaunt mortician repeated the words.

"I killed Eddie Maxell, my embalmer and printer," True prompted. He touched Britt with the gun and the mortician repeated the words. "Eddie Maxell was involved in an illegal action with me, and I knew he had become frightened and would talk. Maxell called Douglas True tonight and was about to tell him of the illegal action. He did that because Doctor True had questioned him about his nervousness, and Eddie Maxell wanted to break with me.

"Maxell wanted to enlist Doctor True's help in getting him free of my influence. I killed Maxell before he could say anything that implicated me. I used a trocar as the weapon. I thrust the instrument into Eddie Maxell's heart in exactly the same manner that I have used in draining the hearts of the bodies I have embalmed over a period of years."

"Doctor True came into the parlor before Luke and Oden, whom I had summoned, could decide what to do. Oden shot at Doctor True, intending to kill him, but only creased his scalp. We knew the shot
would be reported and would bring the police.

"In the room with my printing press were hundreds of books of counterfeit sweepstakes tickets which I had forced Eddie Maxell to print on my press."

BRITT hesitated again, but repeated the words as True nudged him with Oden's gun.

"We had to get those tickets out of the building before the police arrived. There were too many of them to carry without some sort of container. The child's pink casket was the most accessible container. Luke and Oden carried the counterfeit tickets from the building in the pink casket. Ruby Doyne was not implicated in any way, either with the murder of Eddie Maxell, or with the printing of the counterfeit tickets.

"Luke and Oden went to Miss Doyne's apartment and placed a trap-gun there. It was to kill her before she could divulge any such information as Eddie Maxell might have given her. The trap-gun failed. Luke and Oden followed Doctor True and Miss Doyne to the Doctor's office, kidnapped them, and brought them here—to my cremation plant. Luke, Oden and I were determined to cremate them, fearing that they might cause our arrest and conviction in connection with the murder of Eddie Maxell."

"Doctor True"—True hesitated, then instructed crisply—"brought our nefarious intentions to an abrupt end by flinging a small vial of glonoin-oil, or nitroglycerin, which he had obtained to treat Eddie Maxell's asthma, against the wall. He is now beside me with a gun in his right hand and a scalpel in his left. He says he will wait twenty minutes, and if the police have not arrived by that time, he will fire a bullet into my filthy carcass, then dig it out with the scalpel, just for surgical practice."

Camen Britt's voice went squeaky with terror.

"For God's sake hurry, Sergeant! He'll kill me! He——"

"I was going to add the admonition for haste," True broke in crisply. "Tell Sergeant McCann I should appreciate his coming out as quickly as possible to receive another mess of trouble in his ample lap. I have other things to do. My head hurts and I have two patients in need of my services—a man with a badly lacerated face and a young lady with the hiccups."

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CHAPTER I.
DEATH RIDES A HUNCH.

CLAY HOLT swung into his outer office door and pounded across the floor toward his secretary. His blue eyes widened; he pulled at the lapels of his coat, dusted a bit of lint from his blue suit. The door to his private office was closed.

The girl behind the desk looked up, regarded Clay through thick-
rimmed glasses that hid the sparkle and made bright-brown eyes seem sandy.

“That's right.” Her voice was very low. “You've got a client. As usual, she offered no retainer, and as—”

“And as usual”—Clay grinned at his secretary—“she's divine—just my type.”

For a long time he regarded the cold, finely chiseled face. Wrinkles came into his forehead. She wore no rouge, no powder; had no plucked eyebrows—even the beauty of long lashes was hidden. As for her hair, it made her little turned-up nose lose all the attractiveness it might have had with a different coiffure. That brown, almost reddish hair was combed back so severely over an intellectual forehead.

“Listen, Awful”—Clay walked over and stood looking at her—“why don't you take off the disguise now? I've seen you radiantly beautiful. Why not brighten up the office?”

“Not a chance.” The girl shook her head. “I wouldn't be safe a moment, and we wouldn't do any business. I told you the truth when you hired me. You're a sucker for women.” She clutched at the hand he laid on the desk. “You're tops, Clay. You could be rolling in wealth—real money that you could spend and not just talk about. You're the best private detective who—”

“Personal adviser,” Clay cut in quickly.

“It reads private detective on your license,” Agatha Cummings said stiffly. “You should do something about it. Your business is too private.”

“No clients, eh? How about this one?” He jerked a thumb toward the door. “A knock-over?”

The girl shook her head.

“Not in the daytime. She may have the skin you love to touch, but you'd have to dig through cement to reach it.” And as Clay turned, “Your tie is close to a quarter of an inch out of kilter—”

Mechanically, Clay jerked at his tie, turned and made a face at “Awful,” tried to picture the vision she had been that one night; then, opening his office door, he walked in and closed it behind him.

THE strapping blonde turned and looked him over, then gripped his hand.

“Clay Holt—the man who fears no one—would face anything.”

And looking down into bright-blue eyes in the dimness far from the window, Clay said:

“Anything for you—perhaps.”

And after a moment, as he thought of Awful's lie about her. “I can't just place you.”

The girl snatched open a tiny gold case, offered Clay a cigarette, even gave him a light. Then she crossed the room and sat down on the broad window sill.

Even before she turned her head, something sank in Clay's stomach. Awful was right. Beautiful only after dark. But her blue eyes had a misty film over them that was not entirely unattractive. Her voice, too, was a little hard. But the legs she crossed were not hard to look at.

She spoke suddenly, and certainly to the point.

“I'm Mike Finnigan's woman—Dolly Vernon.”

Clay started, sat down on the edge of his desk. Here was dynamite. After a moment, he said:

“Michael Joseph Finnigan—the coming political boss?”

“Mike Finnigan.” The girl was on her feet now. “Mike Finnigan to me seven years ago; Mike Finnigan
to me now. He may hire Fifth Avenue guys to put him into tails and a high hat, so he can attend the funeral of some guy he had killed, but he's still a punk and a rat to me—even if he knows where too many bodies are buried. He's collected information of importance on most every politician in the city."

"Yeah—I know." Clay flicked the ash of his cigarette on the thick rug. "I heard—don't know where—just a rumor that Finnigan was engaged to Senator Stromer's daughter, Alice."

"He's going to marry her." And after a moment, "At least, he thinks he is."

"And you—the woman scorned?"
"I made a squawk, if that's what you mean." She paused, looked toward the ceiling. "He used to beat me when I squawked. This time, he didn't. He put his arm around my shoulders, kissed me on the neck. Told me I was beautiful—that he was going to give me an income of fifty thousand a year and buy me a summer home up in New England. That he couldn't bear to lose me even for short periods. He said the Stromer dame was window dressing; he needed her simply for that. But I seen the kid, and I seen Mike put aslims on her, and I know better."

"And he kissed you—on the neck?" Clay was trying to think, to think why she came to him, and what there could possibly be in it for him.

"Yes, and he looked into my eyes. His eyes were tiny points of steel—those tiny points that always come before he decides on a kill. He suspected me then, suspected I was going to squawk about him. His kiss was cold—a death kiss."

"Why do you come to me?"

"To give him what he suspects before he can stop me. You never heard of a dead dame squawking all over her face, and neither did Mike."

"You wish to pay me to protect you from him? You have money?"

"Not much. A few grand, I suppose, that I need for myself. She lifted her pocketbook. "We'll get the money from him. He'll be glad to pay."

"I DON'T go in for blackmail," Clay Holt told her seriously. "You've come to the wrong—"

"Wrong, hell!" she burst in. "I got stuff others want. Take me as your client. Mike and me are breaking up an association. He'll be glad to pay me a million in cold cash. Look"—she gripped Clay by both shoulders; the long, heavy black bag that she still clutched in her hand was heavy against Clay's face—"I've given the best years of my life to Mike! Maybe it won't be a million, but you'll get ten percent of whatever he offers."

"How much do you know about Mike?"

Her lips became a single red gash. Her eyes burned through the film as she looked straight up into Clay's own.

"I lived with Mike for seven years. There was no other woman in his life. I pushed him up the ladder. And I know everything that Mike knows."

"Everything?" Clay gasped. Here was big stuff if it were true. Stuff that would blow the roof clean off the city hall, and some of its occupants with it.

"Everything. I—I—" The girl stopped and swung, moved quickly toward the door, jumped to the left of it as it burst open. Clay Holt jerked his hand under his coat and out, spoke to the small stocky man who stood there, gun in hand.

"Drop the gun, Pouchy," Clay said easily. "Drop it!"
The little man stared at him. His eyes popped. The gun dangled in his hand. He sputtered:

"No—no, Holt! It wasn't you—wasn't you. I knew the dame come in. I didn't think you were——"

He turned, and frightened eyes lost their fear as he looked straight at the girl. "So——" the man said excitedly. "I told Finnigan, and I was right. You keep your nose out of this, Holt, if you know what's good for you. It ain't my threat. But I told him."

The girl said very calmly:

"You told him what?"

"I told him you would go straight to Clay Holt. I told him there wouldn't be any other dick who'd even dare listen. It was just a hunch."

"Just a hunch," the girl echoed.

"He don't know then. No one knows but you."

"Me—just me," the little rat that Clay knew as "Pouchy" said.

"There'll be ten grand in it for me—no one but me. Just a hunch."

"Just a hunch," the girl said again, slowly. Then she raised her right hand and closed her finger twice on the trigger of the .32 caliber automatic she held in that hand.

CLAY thought that Pouchy died on the first shot. The girl was not more than three feet from the man when she fired; both bullets entered the side of his head.

Clay didn't speak, and he didn't move, except to bring his right hand up as his own gun covered the girl.

He was listening, too. The shot might have been heard, but probably not in the activities of the modern office building. He smiled slightly as he saw Awful in the doorway, a gun in her hand—a gun that also covered the girl.

And the girl, Dolly Vernon, placed her .32 slowly and with unshaking fingers back in her huge bag. She looked down at the dead man. Her lips parted slightly. She nodded her head. Then she said to Clay:

"I'll be moving along. Work it out your own way, but don't let Finnigan know that I burned his killer down." And as she stepped over the dead body and thrust Agatha Cummings aside, "Nor don't let him know that I saw you."

She was across the room, out the hall door. A minute or two of silence, and Agatha Cummings said:

"Don't fool around, Clay. Call the police."

"Not yet—not yet." Clay shook his head. "That girl brought to me the biggest client I ever had, the entire population of the city—of the State, maybe. She is walking the streets with more information under that dyed blond head of hers than the district attorney and his entire force ever hope to have."

"But she murdered him, Clay. I saw her raise the gun and shoot."

Clay came from his kneeling position beside the body, looked at her steadily.

"Her life depended on his death. It's not really murder, Awful. If it was you who needed him dead, I'd have knocked him over just like that."

"Clay——" She moved toward him, tried to draw back. But it was too late. He had clasped her in his arms, was holding her tightly. She fought for a moment, kicked against his shins, then looked suddenly up and he made a little grimace.

"When I can't see that puss of yours, I think of you as I saw you that once. But come on. Let's get out."

"But the body, Clay? You can't leave it here."

"No?" He put an arm around her.
"I'll make someone a present of it. Think of it, Awful. A blond dame alone in the city with the hidden knowledge of Michael Joseph Finnigan in her brain!"

CHAPTER II.
A GIFT OF A CORPSE.

MICHAEL JOSEPH FINNIGAN had pretentious offices which took up an entire floor of the New Cloud Building. The firm name read, "Holland, Powers and Johnson," a small real estate business that had suddenly jumped into prominence. Although Finnigan's name was not on the glass, there were a dozen or more names of important local people, including the name of Senator Stromer, Alice Stromer's father. Clay Holt was far from being the only one who knew that Michael Joseph Finnigan controlled the entire corporation, and that the building itself belonged to him.

Michael Finnigan was a shrewd man. His sudden success and wealth had not gone to his head. He had slowly and without fanfare pushed himself into the best clubs in the city, and a country club or two. Clay Holt had no trouble in seeing him.

Finnigan got up from behind his mahogany desk in his sumptuous private office, bade the secretary close the door, and walking around the desk, gripped Clay's hand.

"Things change—at least for me they're changed," Finnigan let his eyes run up and down Clay Holt. "Me—I've come a long way. You—you're just the same—dapper, full of assurance, and I dare say, shooting yourself in and out of trouble as you always did. And women——"

"I didn't come here to talk to you about women."

"Well, one woman then." Finnigan stroked his hard, strong chin; his big, soft brown eyes widened; he flexed his muscles as he stretched out his arms. A rather tall man, decidedly leaning toward weight, but also strength. He did not look his forty years. His hair was smoothed back, slightly gray close to his ears, which he fondly thought gave him a distinguished look. His nose had been changed by a plastic surgeon from a great, flat-nostriled one to a more shapely one which looked too small for his huge, sensuous mouth.

Clay said:

"I came to see you about a man, Mike."

Big eyes narrowed; at least, they drew in around the circle making them still round, but smaller. A big hand gripped the side of the desk.

"That name," he said slowly, "has died with the years. I never use it. I never permit it to be used."

"Permit?" Clay stiffened.

"Permit." Michael Joseph Finnigan nodded. "I do not permit it to be used by my friends." And he stressed the last word, "friends," left an ominous strum to it. "About a man, eh?"

Clay looked toward the curtain behind and to the left of the desk. He had noticed the slight bulge, guessed what a steady hand held behind it, and said:

"I want to talk to you about a man—not a live man, Michael."

MICHAEL FINNIGAN looked toward the curtains, walked leisurely to them, pulled one slightly and raised his hand. A moment later, a door closed. Finnigan returned, sat down behind the desk, pulled out a box of cigars; but he left the drawer open, and plainly Clay could see the heavy butt of a high-caliber
automatic—a German Luger, he thought.

For a full minute, the two men looked at each other. It was Finnigan who spoke first. His words were simple and direct.

"All right—begin."

Clay Holt said slowly:

"You and I never crossed, Finnigan, except once with Pervy. How come you send a cheap punk up to my office to do me in?"

Finnigan's eyes popped; he looked toward the automatic. He thought of the man he had sent from behind the curtains, half pushed his fingers toward a row of buttons on the desk, cleared his throat, said huskily:

"You'd never get out alive, Clay—if that's what's on your mind. I never sent any cheap punk. I never sent anyone to your office."

"He may not be cheap to you—though he isn't worth much now. He ran in, gun in hand, and hollered something about Finnigan and—"

"And?" Finnigan leaned forward.

"And I laid a couple of slugs in his head."

"Dead." Finnigan thought aloud.

"Dead? I've never seen one deader than Pouchy."

"The damned jackass!" Finnigan banged his fist down on the desk, but carefully avoided the push buttons. "You know I never sent him."

And after a pause, as he watched Clay's hands hanging by his sides, empty, "Anyone else in your office? He might have been looking for someone."

"He might have," Clay lied easily. "But no one else was there."

"He was looking for someone else." Finnigan's popping eyes ran from Clay's hand to the push buttons, the open drawer and back to Clay's hands again.

"That's right." Clay nodded.

"You'd never get a chance to use it."

Maybe you didn't send him after me, Finnigan, but I came to tell you about Pouchy. He's lying dead in my office."

There was a long silence. Clay understood it. Finnigan wasn't sure about the girl, Dolly Vernon. He couldn't be sure.

"Well"—Clay stroked his chin—"Pouchy was your lad, one from your racket days. He hasn't got a good name. It wouldn't help your business to have him found in my office—and wouldn't help mine, either. So—"

"So?"

"I'm making you a gift of the corpse, Finnigan. He's yours, dead or alive. I want him off my premises." And before Finnigan could answer, Clay chucked a key over on the desk. "That's to make it easier for you. The key to my office."

FINNIGAN hesitated, got up and paced the room. Then he lifted the key from the desk, glanced once at Clay. Leaning down, he pressed a buzzer beneath the desk. He did not press it just once, Clay thought. A half minute, a full one, perhaps, and a door opened. Curtains parted before it. A tall, slender dark man walked into the room. He stopped abruptly, dropped back a step; his right hand moved quickly.

"Cut it!" Finnigan spoke sharply, and as he saw the gun that had sprung so suddenly into Clay's hand, "What's the matter with you, Pervy? That's Clay Holt—old times—you remember?"

"Sure, sure; I remember." Pervy Abbot's thin lips curved, but his eyes remained the same. The left slightly higher than the right, as if he had long ago arched his eyebrows and drawn the eye up with it—and it stuck there.

"Sure," Pervy went on. "He's the
lad that put me in the hospital, and before that killed my brother. It's nice to find him alone in the building—on this floor with us. Nice, eh?"

Clay Holt looked from the gunman to Michael Joseph Finnigan. Killers both, these men—rats that had crawled from their sewers. Finnigan's eyes were wide round balls of fire as they looked straight at the mud-colored ones of the sleek, handsome Pervy. Pervy didn't move his feet exactly, but certainly he grew uncomfortable on them.

"Pervy," Finnigan said, "we all struggled together in the old days, when money was made the hard way. You and I succeeded, have become honest, respectable citizens. Clay here—well, he needs a friendly trick turned. We can't forget and turn him down."

"What does he want—his mother killed?" questioned Pervy.

Finnigan crossed the room, and putting an arm affectionately around Pervy's shoulder, said:

"Same old fun-loving boy. Always a crack, always a joke." And suddenly, "Here's a key to Clay's office. Go up there and take a body—a dead body—out."

Pervy broke in:

"It's Pouchy. Pouchy and his lousy hunch. It's that two-timing tart, Dolly, that I never——"

The blow came; came from the very hand that was around Pervy's shoulder. Finnigan's eyes blazed; his arm and hand moved out and whipped back again. Pervy staggered slightly, rocked on his heels; there was blood on his lips.

FINNIGAN placed the key into Pervy's hand, put his arm back around Pervy, said:

"It's three o'clock, Pervy. He'll have to be out before dark." Finnigan went on, "We like Clay. We'll treat him to a new filing cabinet, steel, about six—no, five drawers high. Pouchy's a small man and can be squeezed into the packing case when you take him out. Look for blood; wipe it up. See that nothing dropped from his pockets." And looking at Clay, "Gun still on him?" And when Clay nodded, "Beat it along."

Almost before the door behind the curtains closed, "Glad to do you a favor, Clay. Drop in again. Maybe we can sneak off and have dinner downtown. Might get a hold of Dolly Vernon—remember her?"

"No," Clay said abruptly. "I thought you were thinking of getting married—congressman's daughter or something."

"Or something is right." Finnigan dropped a hand upon Clay's shoulder. "Senator Stromer's daughter. Sweet—pretty—best people, best background. Had more opportunities than I had. I'm a self-made man and she loves me for it—just a kid and crazy about me."

He poked Clay in the ribs now. "I'm not like you, Clay. Women—they never make a sucker out of me. Don't remember Dolly?" And with meaning, "Thought maybe you could find her. Haven't seen her in some time. A sort of a get-together dinner—old times. I'd like to give her a present—something to remember me by."

And looking steadily at Clay, "If you should see Dolly, tell her about the gift. I wouldn't want her to go away and forget me."

Clay grinned.

"I don't think Dolly's one to forget." He turned toward the door. Finnigan said:

"Just a minute, Clay; just a minute, boy. About Dolly. Oh, I don't say you know where she is. But it's
your business to find people. That's your work."

"And it's my business to be paid for that work."

"Fine." Clay had never had a roll of bills slapped into his hand so quickly. "That's for making a guess where she is."

"Just a guess?"

"Just a guess, and if it proves a right guess—I'll lay ten grand on the line."

"Well—" Clay smiled. "It's only a guess, of course. But women are jealous creatures. She might have gone up to the senator's to talk with the girl, plead with her. Get down on her knees and beg her to give you up. Or again, Dolly might feel in a different mood and leave a knife in the girl's chest."

Clay gasped in amazement. He thought surely Finnigan would fly into a rage, demand the return of the money. But Finnigan hadn't. He turned and grabbed up a phone just before he said:

"By God, that's right! That's exactly what she'd do!"

CHAPTER III.

DEATH LURKS ON THE STAIRS.

CLAY HOLT was smiling when he reached the sidewalk. Then the truth struck him. He had not joked with Finnigan. He had earned that roll of bills—every one of them and more.

Dolly Vernon was exactly the kind of girl who'd go straight to the senator's house.

He grabbed a taxi, hesitated, spotted another one where the driver had a somewhat weather-beaten but honest face.

"Senator Stromer's house," he said, and when the taxi driver turned and gave him a blank look, "Okay—move the cab along, get across town out of the traffic and find me a drugstore."

Clay cursed. He should know where the senator lived! He had been thinking enough about him lately, wondering if the columnist's hint that Alice Stromer would marry Michael Joseph Finnigan "any day now" was true.

He stopped at a drugstore and tore through the telephone book. The name was not there. He called Awful's aunt. It was Awful who answered; businesslike, confident. She said:

"Yes, I know the senator's address. It's under his widowed sister's name. Of course, it wouldn't be in the directory. My God, Clay, you've talked about him enough! Senator Stromer doesn't live in this State, wasn't elected in this State and—So you do remember!"

After that, she listened carefully to his directions. She hesitated a long time after she repeated them. Then she said slowly:

"Do you want my advice—or is that orders?"

"That," said Clay, "is orders. If I got to take it, I might as well take it today. And listen, Awful. If you have to take it, too, look like something nice; be the Princess. I'd hate to be found dead with you as is."

"I'll do you proud in the morgue, Clay," she said.

Clay Holt left the booth and was back in the cab issuing quick orders. He knew now. The senator was only a visitor from Washington; elected by another State. And the girl—she had been at school in the South, but lately had come North to live with her aunt. He remembered when he first heard that address, too. The same columnist—and Awful must have filed it away in that trigger mind of hers. What
would he do without Awful? What would he do, anyway, at the senator’s house? What would he—

The cab had stopped. Clay stepped to the sidewalk, saw the car at the corner; saw the four men climbing from it. It was a touring car. It was dark blue. The top was up and the curtains were lowered.

"Here." Clay handed the driver a ten-dollar bill. "Wait for me." And as the men moved from the corner, "Don’t turn yellow on me, buddy. There’ll be a century note in it for you. I’m going to murder a man in that house, and I’ll need a getaway car."

HE didn’t think the men saw him as he dashed up the steps. They were congregated at the corner, talking—as if waiting for orders. Clay turned to see his own taxi jump from the curb, dash up the street. There was another car, an empty coupé across the street. He smiled, nearly lost his balance, felt of his gun as the figure dashed from the house, almost hurling him from the stone steps and over the railing to the areaway below.

It was the girl—Dolly Vernon. He half jerked at his gun as she reached the sidewalk, hesitated, and she was across the street. He heard heavy breathing behind him, a sudden clank as if wood hit metal. And it had hit metal. An excited butler was attempting to close the heavy door. A chain that was now outside was caught, preventing the door from closing.

Clay hurled his body forward as the butler got the chain loose. Clay’s right foot settled against the molding on the side; his two hands gripped the knob of that door. There was no click of a lock settling; no clank of a chain being thrust into place. The door flew open, the butler with it.

Clay slipped inside, drew the door closed, the butler coming with it as if his hands were riveted to the knob. Clay got the door shut and the chain on as another door opened far down the hall to the right. A stout man in a dressing gown, partly bald and with a round florid face, came into the hall.

"What’s this, Jackson? This man—this intrusion?"

His voice was steady enough. The hand that held the pipe to his mouth was also steady. Yet he seemed much older than his pictures, and Clay wasn’t thinking of posed pictures, either. Jackson, the butler, said:

"It was a woman, senator. She went out the door, and he—this man came in."

"When did the woman arrive—and what was her mission?"

"She didn’t come in, sir. She just went out. I—"

The senator puffed, started his words in his chest, and Clay stopped them right there.

"The woman might have come through a window—and she came for a purpose."

"But, my dear man! There’s the cook and the maid and—and— Just who are you?"

"I was sent by Finnigan to forestall a possible death. Where is your daughter?"

"My daughter is— Why—what death—whose death?"

Clay said simply:

"If the woman left, she entered. If she entered, it was for the express purpose of murdering your daughter Alice. Now will you—"

CLAY beat them to the stairs, beat them to the turn halfway up, where he could see back to the front door
and the butler preceding the staggering senator. There was a decided angle in the stairs as Clay raced to the hall above.

"Where?" Clay cried.

The butler called, "Left," and Clay smacked his face against the wall. The butler reached him, panted something about meaning "Right," and Clay was down the hall

Clay looked down at her throat, and he saw the marks . . .

after him, at the door—the locked door.

"It's locked!" The senator was in a panic after he had shouted "Alice!" three times without an answer. "Get a doctor, Jackson. And the police—the police!" He hesitated, and then, "No, not the police."

It was an old house, but that bedroom door was a modern job. Clay nearly tore it apart at his first jerk, and the second pulled it clean off its hinges. They were in the room.

Clay Holt saw her first as he looked over the end of the bed. She was about eighteen; very white, very beautiful. Hair stretched out above her head, auburn hair that showed plainly a tiny ear. And lips—lips that—

Clay looked down at her throat, and he saw the marks; plainly the marks of fingers that had gripped at the flesh, but not torn it. Choked to death and she was too young, too beautiful to die.
But she wasn't dead. She sat up suddenly, her eyes wide with fear, then with a terror, a hysterical terror that was a living thing and rattled in her throat as she looked at her father.

"You, you—" was all she said. Then she saw Clay for the first time. Only one hand braced her now. The other arm had come out; a finger pointed directly at Clay Holt.

"You are Clay Holt," she said seemingly without meaning, and almost breathing the words. "Yes, she said you'd look like that—like you look. Like you act, like—Oh, God! Oh, God, don't let him come near me!"

Clay stretched out an arm, but the senator did not move.

The girl gripped at her throat, talked to him with her eyes, half nodded toward the door.

The father mumbled incoherently and left hurriedly. The butler departed at the first suggestion of violence. Clay closed the door as best he could, turned to the girl, helped her to her feet. She was fully dressed for the street, but for her hat and coat.

"She came—and you're all right. She didn't—" Clay half swung the girl. Did he expect to see a knife sticking in her back? Dolly Vernon had been Mike Finnigan's woman for seven years, and the girl Finnigan was going to marry still lived. Nothing but those finger marks on her throat.

"Those," Alice explained when he questioned her, "I made myself. I couldn't breathe; her words stifled me. She was very kind—very kind after she had locked the door, swung me from the window and threw me on the bed. There was something in her hand. A knife, I think. She held my head. Called me a funny little baby; laughed maybe; cried a little. Yes, it was a queer sound, but I think it must have been crying. She told me terrible things about Mr. Finnigan and—father. And then that you would come and—What was that?"

WHAT was that, was right. Clay told the girl to put on her hat and coat, and wait. Then he got the jammed door open and went along the hall toward the staircase. People were talking below. The butler was saying:

"The cook was knocked on the head; the maid bound and gagged in a chair."

A rough voice answered:

"To hell with them! We've got him trapped above. Plenty of the boys—detectives of mine here now, senator—two at the bottom of the back stairs. A couple more in the back yard. No, no; they'd attract attention standing out in front. There is myself and three others, besides you and the butler and—Bless his old heart, Jackson's out cold. He must have fainted. Okay, Reardon, start up the stairs."

The voice was that of Michael Joseph Finnigan. Clay ran quickly to the stairs, slid down a few steps on his stomach and said:

"Just the first step—just one step!"

A dark shadow near the foot of the steps disappeared. Clay backed up those steps, ran to the bedroom. The girl! Yes, she had cotton face daubs. Clay gave her instructions, implicit instructions as he rolled the cotton tightly into little balls and wet them with his tongue.

"It's for you, Alice. Your dead mother, too. You must leave. While you're gone, Finnigan can't act."

She shook her head, listened to every word Clay said. Then she put both her hands upon his shoulders.
"I know—I know you will protect me and—and him—my father."

Clay didn't like that. Already she was changing her thoughts of loathing to thoughts of duty to her father. But he stuffed the moist cotton into her ears; dried cotton followed it. She mustn't slip now, and neither must he. Her wondering eyes still stared into his; her little hands still rested on his shoulders. Her soft red—Clay Holt leaned down quickly and kissed her.

"A sucker for women," he whispered to himself, "But what a woman!" It was action—romance, drama. It was in his blood.

He couldn't ask her questions now as he stood on the top of the stairs which led straight down to the turn at the little landing. She couldn't hear a thing—not even the bark of guns, he hoped, but certainly not Finnigan's threats below nor her father's pleas.

He watched her as she swayed there on the top of the steps, gripped her arm tightly a moment; then, lying on his stomach, he slid in a single motion to the landing—straight down—ten steps below.

It was from there he would have a complete view of the hall to the front door, and a view of the girl's passage; of perhaps four—well, three feet on each side of her. They were talking downstairs in the large hall when Clay Holt spoke from his position on the stairs, halfway between the ground floor and the second floor.

"Mike Finnigan!" He took pleasure in using that name; certainly they were not going to be friends now. "You punks, too, who are with him—and you, senator. Alice is coming down the steps. She is going to walk straight toward the front door, lift the chain, turn the knob and go out into the street."

"Better not be a fool, Clay," Finnigan said. "Come down unarmed and we'll let you go. I have three men here in the hall with me. They can shoot pretty fast."

Clay said:

"You have two others by the back stairs. Better bring them into the front hall. You're going to need them—all of them."

He nodded toward the girl, said sharply, "Any attempt to stop Miss Stromer means death. Any appearance within my vision means death. Any hand stretched out means—She's coming, Finnigan."

"You'll die for this."

"Easy does it, Finnigan." The girl had passed Clay. He crouched there on the landing, his eyes glued on her, his twin .38s trained one on either side of her.

Finnigan spoke to her in soft tones as she moved steadily down those stairs. Her father called to her to stay with him as she reached the hall. But she kept her eyes straight ahead and heard neither the pleas nor the threats. Would she make it? Clay saw that her feet were uncertain and that her shoulders wavered, but she went on—went as he had instructed her.

Clay held his breath. She was close to the door; she staggered slightly, half tripped, moved slightly to the left of the direct passage Clay had ordered her to follow. He heard Finnigan whisper:

"Ten grand, Rocco, if you get her."

An arm shot out, a white wrist; long thick fingers gripped at the girl's arm, almost touched it. Clay closed his finger once. The white wrist turned red. The arm and hand disappeared, leaving a tiny spot of red upon the floor. The girl reached the door. Mechanically she lifted
the chain, turned the knob and—
And was gone. The door closed
very softly behind her.
Finnigan hollered from a front
room:
"There was a car there for her!
Empty, too! She hopped right in
and drove away. The car's wab-
bling; it's out of control. No, by
God, it's straightened out again!"

Then Finnigan's sharp orders:
"It's a small car—green sedan. Li-
cense——" Running feet through
the hall. The chase was on. Clay
Holt leaned back and grinned.

CHAPTER IV.
THE TAXI DRIVER.

BELOW, in the hall, Finnigan
was giving orders:
"Now, Reardon, drag the butler
back into the room off the kitchen,
where the women are. Don't threaten
—don't hurt them. Give them the
impression you're a police officer.
Yes, yes, senator; I know how you
must feel. The girl will be caught
and brought back. If we have to
blast this second-rate dick out, why
we have to do it, that's all."

Clay called down the stairs:
"Okay, Mike—come and get the
body." He stopped. Plainly, he
heard men on those back stairs. It
would not be such an easy position
to hold after all. He grinned crook-
edly. It would not be too easy a
position to take, either.

The police. They would be the
last ones Senator Stromer would
want in his house. Finnigan, either,
for that matter. Where were they?
What had happened to that dumb,
honest taxi driver?

"No, no!" Finnigan was echoing
aloud Clay's thoughts as he ad-
dressed the senator. "The last thing
we want is the police." A moment's
pause, and then, "Okay, boys—
watch! Freddie and Maxie will come
down the upper hall from the back,
after they bust that backstairs door.
You watch the front stairs care-
fully."

Clay set his teeth grimly. He
knew Freddie and he knew Maxie.
Finnigan still kept the best of the
old boys with him. But they were
rats—both rats. They wouldn't face
him. He wouldn't even see them.
Just guns around the wall at the top
of the stairs and blind shots fired
down at him. But they would be
bound to hit him in time.

Clay came to his knees. He
thought he heard feet along that
upper hall. But only darkness
there; lights below. He'd shoot it
out then—the senator, Finnigan,
Reardon—the others.

He called out to Finnigan:
"I'm coming down, Mike, and I'm
coming shooting. Want to play?"

"If you toss your guns first, noth-
ing will happen to you." Finnigan
didn't even pretend to make his
statement sound like the truth, and
then, as Clay came to his feet,
"We're ready, boy. We want to
play."

Clay lifted his guns slightly,
picked out a step about four below
him where he could land and start
shooting, took a deep breath, damned
the dumb taxi driver who had taken
him to the house and beat it; then
he moved forward.

Clay stopped, grabbed the banister
to keep him from making the jump
and slunk down in his square little
fort again. Men were pounding on
the door. There was a sharp voice
of command.

THEY opened the door, of course.
Clay saw Reardon cross his vision
of fire, and with some difficulty re-
frained from putting a shot in the
middle of his back. He knew well
enough the real Reardon, former killer for Finnigan, now head of the Reardon Private Detection Association, that Finnigan owned. Things were done better in these days.

A sergeant and two police detectives walked through the open door. One of the plain-clothes men held a third man. The sergeant hollered something over his shoulder at the other man coming up the steps, and finally said to the man the detective held:

"Well, there they are. Who told you about murder?"

The senator puffed, gasped:

"Murder!"

But Finnigan was in on him.

"Good God, sergeant, what are you talking about? There's nothing wrong here. And send that other car away. You'll be drawing a crowd. This gentleman is a prominent man—and my name's—"

"I know who you are, Mr. Finnigan." There was a hardness and a bitterness in sergeant Laughton's voice. "I was an inspector when you weren't called Mr. Finnigan—but I still got my uniform." He paused, and when Finnigan waited, "This man here said he left a fare at this house." He shoved Clay's trembling taxicab driver forward. "Said the man gave him ten dollars; told him he was going to commit a murder—and not to mention it. And he didn't for a bit. Drove around to the precinct and waited until I came in. So you're senator—"

"No names, please. No names—"

The senator had climbed into his front again, and his voice had trouble coming out through it. "Most unfortunate notoriety."

Men moved again in the hall above. Clay Holt crossed his hands. When his hands appeared again they were both empty. He walked easily down the stairs.

"There, there, Sergeant Laughton," he said. "The man is not entirely crazy. He was a curious driver who wanted to know things—wanted to know how long I'd be if he waited, and I told him about long enough to commit a murder. It was just my joke." Clay walked over to the driver, stuck another bill into his hand, said to the gaping man, "Don't tell the fire department, but I'll be burning the city hall down at two a.m. next Wednesday."

Finnigan's smile was genuine; the senator's like an open gash in a hog's throat.

Finnigan walked across the room and let one of his huge feet rest on the tiny splash of blood. The sergeant followed the foot, but said nothing. Then he turned his head. A heavy-set man whom Clay did not know, or at least did not remember, stood grimly against the wall, his right hand in his jacket pocket.

Sergeant Laughton jerked out the words:

"Pull that hand out of your pocket empty!"

THEY were all looking now at the man who held his hand in his pocket. Blood was seeping through that pocket, splashing in great drops upon the floor. The sergeant crossed to the man, ignored the cry of pain as he jerked the hand from the pocket, looked at the torn, blood-soaked and broken wrist.

The man said: "It was an accident and—"

Sergeant Laughton rapped in: "I know, I know. Don't tell me how it happened. You were cleaning a gun and it went off on you."

And to Finnigan, who wanted to talk, "No, I know. I haven't any warrant. Mistakes must happen. There is no complaint." The sergeant moved toward the door, pushed
the taxi driver ahead of him. "Go on," he said. "Be ready to report that bit of arson."

Finnigan followed the sergeant to the door, held him with an arm on his shoulder as the other officers lingered outside.

Finnigan said:

"There is no mistake, sergeant—and certainly no complaint. It's nice to feel that the police follow up even such a palatable practical joke. It was stupid of our friend, Clay—yet so like him. But it shows efficiency on your part, and the right people will hear of it. Take that for your trouble and courtesy. Nonsense, man!"

The sergeant's face reddened; his eyes flashed; his right hand came up and he flung the bills with great force into Finnigan's face. His voice trembled when he spoke. Clay thought he was going to strike Finnigan; but he didn't, and Finnigan never moved.

The sergeant flared:

"You ripped one shield after another from me," he said viciously. "But you never made me one of your crooks and murderers, and you never had the guts to go farther than the sergeant part, because Inspector Mackey—yes, I mean Mackey, and I don't care who the hell hears it—because Mackey might be suspected and a valuable man would be lost to you.

"Don't try to shut me up with your big roll and your big mouth." This though Finnigan never said a word. "Maybe you don't do as much personal killing, but more than the other kind—the rotten kind—where you alibi yourself with the likes of him." He pointed directly at the senator. "Yep, I know you for what you are. Michael Joseph Finnigan, what hock-nobs in Washington—Mike Finnigan, hoodlum and punk."

Finnigan never even changed the expression on his face while the sergeant let go his flow of words, unless, Clay thought, at the name "Mike" his mouth might have tightened slightly. But he didn't speak. He took Clay by the arm as Clay followed Sergeant Laughton to the door.

"Why not stay and have a talk, Clay?" Finnigan's arm moved up, around Clay's shoulder. "Miss Alice Stromer will be taken proper care of." And before Clay could answer, "Very good, sergeant. Mr. Clay Holt is staying for a bit."

"That's right, sergeant," Clay said as Sergeant Laughton's eyes regarded him doubtfully. "Oh, I haven't forgotten our little date. I'll call you up as soon as I leave here. If I don't call you, why tell the commissioner where I am."

The door closed. When Clay turned, he held a revolver in his hand.

Finnigan pinched his arm, said, "A sane, clever man. I like your type, Clay. Never fool around—always mean business."

FINNIGAN was an efficient leader. It didn't take him long to clear his men out of that house. He arranged for the wounded man to be taken to "my doctor." He saw that the blood was carefully cleaned up. He personally attended to the servants, complimenting the butler on his bravery, explaining that the attempted robbery had failed, the unpleasant notoriety of it all. The police had come and gone.

Then he addressed the still pale butler.

"Now, Jackson, a little brandy for the senator. Nothing for me, you know. And you, Mr. Holt?"

"Jackson can have mine," said Clay. "He needs it."
“Indeed he does.” Finnigan took Clay’s arm, led him back through the hall to the large library where the senator sat very straight on the edge of a big chair.

“No”—the senator raised himself stiffly—“I am a great admirer of Mr. Finnigan, Mr. Holt.”

Clay smiled, said:

“There is no reason to apologize to me, senator.”

The senator tried to sit straighter, saw that the smile still remained. Then slid back in the chair. Jackson brought in the tray.

“Tonight,” the senator said, when the butler was gone, “I’m acting myself, Mr. Holt. You have three minutes to explain your entry into this house. Then I shall call up my friend Inspector Blake.”

“I came,” Clay said slowly, “because your daughter sent for me.”

The senator jarred slightly. Brandy trickled onto his tie. He gulped the remainder.

“Dolly told her—that damned woman told her!” Finnigan broke in. “Yet you’d double-cross them, Clay—both of them for a few dollars. You told me where Dolly was.”

“You got your money’s worth.” Clay chuckled over that.

“You forced my daughter from the house at the point of a gun.” The senator eyed the brandy bottle, but did not trust his shaking fingers. Finnigan poured the drink for him.

Clay Holt said:

“She wanted out—and she got what she wanted. What she’ll pay for.”

“What she’ll pay for!” Finnigan leaned over the table and talked fast. There was a roll of bills in his hand. He was like a magician the way he could always produce money. Finnigan went on:

“She hasn’t any money, Clay—not a cent. Now I’m a guy who wants things right. Here—they are big bills. Take them. Let it pay for tonight’s little job, and for keeping your nose out of my business in the future.”

CLAY shoved the money back. He was thinking of the girl who had stood with a hand on each of his shoulders. Fresh, young beauty. And lips—

“She’s nice tricks.” Clay looked toward the ceiling. “There wouldn’t be so much work sitting out dances with her as a bodyguard. A guy’s got to have some fun, Finnigan.”

And when Finnigan began to pace the room, “Well, you didn’t ask me to stay just to bellyache, did you?” And when Finnigan didn’t answer, “I liked the kid, Finnigan; the way she took it—stark terror in her eyes when she went down those stairs. I stayed to talk to the senator alone—and about you.”

“And me?” Finnigan laughed. “Why take the trouble? I’ll tell him in your words. I’m a low, uneducated gutter rat that came—”

“Tut, tut,” said the senator. “I know all that. I know all that.”

“All what?” Finnigan demanded hotly.

“Er—your past—your lack of education. Things people like this man might say. But I like a man—a self-made man.” And as the phone on the desk rang, “You take it, Michael. There’s a good fellow. I’m out to anyone but—er—Alice.”

Finnigan said:

“It’s for me. I left word where I was going.” He lifted the phone, whistled softly into the receiver and after a moment said: “Let me have it, Persy. Hell, man, no details over the phone! . . . Fine! I am sure Mr. Holt will be quite pleased and should be appreciative. Not a word of Dolly, eh? . . .
Yes, I've heard, in a way. . . .

Just a moment, Pervy. I renewed a very old acquaintance—Sergeant Laughton. . . . Yes, Sergeant Laughton. He was quite friendly. He—he—and Finnigan couldn't keep the venom out of his words. "He called me Mike. . . . That's right."

He hung up the receiver, said to Clay:
"Your body is gone. Come here."

He led Clay out into the hall, closed the library door, spoke at once. "You want to talk to the senator. You want to tell him about me. I guess he knows about everything, but he won't admit it even to himself. He's on the rocks, Clay—like many others." Finnigan tapped his head. "It's all in there—no book, no confident, no little ledger—just in my head. We all make mistakes in life. I've buried most of mine. I'm going to bury one more."

There was a sudden noise. Both men turned.

CHAPTER V.
THE GIRL IN THE LIBRARY.

THE front door jarred suddenly open. A hard face was there. The mouth opened and the face said:
"We got her, boss—out in the car. It cost a thousand bucks."

Finnigan said:
"What do you mean—a thousand bucks? You just had to take her from that car to yours."

"That's what you think!" Wide jaws worked like a mechanical trap. "We run her to the curb all right. Told her she was wanted back, took her arms and dropped them again."

"Why?"

"Why? She squealed, boss. Just hollered. And a cop at the corner—he looked straight at her. We told her the police would ruin every-

thing for her, and she said to grab her again and she'd shake a dozen cops right out of their sleep. She said she wasn't Alice Stromer. Then she laughed, and said she'd come along for a thousand bucks cash on the line. Those weren't her words. But she took the cash—near seven hundred, all we had—slipped it in an envelope, addressed it and put it in the box, not thirty feet from the cop."

"She did?" Finnigan was thinking. "She sent it to a friend to keep for her. She intends to run out again. She wouldn't have hollered. She made suckers out of you. She'll talk to her father. Bring her into the library and get out. Come on, Holt. We'll wait in the library. It's time you heard things."

Finnigan walked straight to the senator, put a finger on his chest and talked fast:

"She's back. Don't holler at her. Don't tell her what a swell guy I am. Tell her I have big influence; tell her that if I opened my mouth you'd take a trip to Leavenworth. Say you did it for her mother—anything. Remember, I'll make you worth millions; make you the biggest man in Washington. I'll give her—Sh-h! —— Clay Holt and I will be over close against the curtains at the window."

Clay walked to the curtains, but he didn't turn his back entirely. The girl came in. She didn't have the same dress on. She was beautiful. Her hair—brown eyes sparkling, jumping across the room at him. Finnigan had to pull Clay to the curtains. Finnigan kept his body bent; his own head well down. She wouldn't recognize him. But Clay was watching.

The senator raised his head slowly from his hands. He was ready to
put on his act. And he suddenly exploded.

"Good God!" he cried. "You're not my daughter."

The girl said: "Correct—I'm not! Now what do you mean by picking a girl up on the street and pulling this daughter act? And the fat guy hiding his head—"

But Finnigan wasn't hiding his head now. He was across the room, had her by the arm, was firing questions.

"Who are you? What do you mean coming here? What—"

Clay smiled, dropped the hand that was about to grab Finnigan by the neck. He was proud, mighty proud of the way that gorgeous creature jerked her arm away and flicked Finnigan across the mouth with her hand.

Sure, Clay knew her. Wouldn't have known her if he had not seen her once before just like that. No spectacles now, no severe comb to her hair. There was color on her cheeks, across her mouth. Agatha Cummings—"Awful" to Clay—had once more waved the wand and turned into the Princess.

Agatha Cummings looked at Clay, said to the senator:

"And the boy with the laugh—the big hyena. He seems to enjoy the joke." She was a little tough for her artistically chiseled face.

Finnigan was out in the hall questioning the two men. The door was closed and voices grew loud, then dim, then loud again. He came back leaving the door open.

"There was a mistake," he said to the girl gruffly. "The daughter of the house is not well. Those—private detectives were new." He didn't seem to like the way the girl put her eyes on him, so he changed his tactics. "She was very lovely, very much like you. Is there any way I can make amends for the trouble you were caused?"

"Well," she said, "there was a matter of money—two hundred and fifty dollars short on the promise. I come from the West, want to write stories, and this seemed—Thank you."

She took the money. "You might take me out to dinner and tell me just—" And Agatha paused. Finnigan was looking at her differently now. Not as a disturbance, but as a woman. She said quickly, "The grinning boy will do. You'll be busy—and he looks like a sucker for women."

Clay just stared at her, but it went big with Finnigan. He looked at her in open admiration for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders. Surely he had plenty to do. But he said:

"You called his number all right. He's God's gift to women—hungry women; hungry for fur coats, diamonds—" And with a laugh, "He's dough-heavy." He crossed to Clay. "Call me up in the morning, Holt. We might talk, iron this out. I'll know if you're a friend or an enemy."

"How?"

"Call me Michael or Mike." He hummed the words, a mean sort of hum. "Don't forget—it will mean life or death to you."

"Or to you," Clay nodded.

"Not me." Finnigan grinned broadly. "For if it's Mike, you'll never see me again."

"And you'll see me?"

"I'll identify you," was all he said as Clay passed out the door with Awful clinging to his arm.

IN the taxi, she gave it to Clay straight.

"I followed all your instructions,
Clay. I saw Alice Stromer plainly as she got behind the wheel, and I called to her from where I was crouched there in the rear. I told her to drive like blazes and around the first corner. She did, and nearly wrecked the boat. She was unsteady but game. She had ducked into the vestibule of the corner house and was hidden from view as I took the wheel. I'm a good driver, but I just couldn't make it. They forced me to the curb. I had to go back with them."

"What about the cop on the corner?"

"I didn't think you'd want publicity."

"And the cash?"

"Oh, Clay," she laughed, "they were so stupid. I couldn't resist the opportunity, and I mailed the money to myself. Besides, I—I was so worried about you."

Clay looked down at her upturned face under the passing street lights. "You're a honey, kid." He took her in his arms.

She thrust him away. Not in panic, not even roughly. She patted her hair into a fluff at the sides, said:

"You don't do that in the office."

"You don't look like that in the office."

She shook her head as he suggested that they dine at one of the swanky night spots.

"Hell, Princess. I'm noted for being seen with the most beautiful women in town. Now I want to be seen with the most beautiful woman. Come on, give a guy a break."

"No, Clay." Her eyes were soft, but she meant it. And then, "This marriage means everything to Finnigan. This girl, Dolly Vernon, with the head full of knowledge, means disaster to Finnigan if she lives to talk. There's nothing in this for you but trouble."

"I like trouble," Clay nodded.

"Well, your trouble is over tonight. This is my apartment here. Tell the driver."

"Why—why, you live with your aunt uptown!"

"Yes, but I have my own little private hide-out. When I want to read and think. That's the private telephone number you have." She stepped from the taxi.

"And the girl—Alice Stromer?"

"I told her what hotel to go to as you advised."

"Right, Princess. I'll remember that private wire of yours. Now I have to call Sergeant Laughton."

Clay waved a hand and drove away. Awful—He tried to picture the girl to whom he had just said good-by. It wouldn't be so bad running a business with a secretary like that. But he had become used to that intellectual dead-pan in his office.

His cab turned the corner. There was a brightly lighted drugstore. This was as good a place as any to leave the taxi. He should telephone Alice. He remembered the name under which he had told Awful to have her check into the hotel.

BUT she wasn't at the hotel. He turned from the booth, frowned, turned back again. There wasn't a telephone number connected directly or indirectly with the police department in the city that he couldn't rattle off without a moment's hesitation. He went into the booth again, dropped a nickel in the slot, got his number. He didn't like the voice of the man who answered; he liked it less when he asked for Sergeant Laughton.

"Who's calling?" And a wait as he felt orders were being given to trace the call. Clay said abruptly:
"Clay Holt. He was expecting me. This isn’t Lieutenant Robbins, is it?"

"No, no; it’s Patrolman Hunt, Clay. Hell, you might as well know. It’ll be all over the streets in a few minutes. It was right under the light in front of the cop house. They just opened up from a car with——"

"What? What happened!" Clay choked in.

"Sergeant Laughton, Clay. Yeah. . . . Shot dead right in the middle of the sidewalk."

There was more talk over the phone. Something about a machine gun—ten bullets in his body—maybe more. But Clay didn’t hear it. He let the ear-piece drop back on the hook.

Mike or Michael. The one meant death. That was right; the one meant death. It was clear enough—toe clear. Finnigan’s simple statement to Pervy on the phone that the sergeant had called him Mike. It was Finnigan’s order to kill—an order delivered while Clay was within a dozen feet of the phone.

Clay stood in the doorway of the drugstore, looking out into the darkness. Mechanically he pushed a cigarette into his mouth, let the match blaze up and blacken the end of it just as a figure passed the window.

It was the figure of a girl. Agatha Cummings—but she did not look to right nor left as she hurried down the street. For a moment, he stood there like a man in a daze.

Sergeant Laughton, a clean, honest cop who fought against crooked control. A passing car, the staccato notes of a machine gun, and a dead man on the sidewalk. Michael or Mike. Life or death. And Sergeant Laughton had chosen death.

Clay Holt’s right hand slipped up under his left armpit as he moved out onto the sidewalk. He thought there could be pleasure as well as a sickening feeling in the thud of lead in another man’s body. Pleasure—yes, for he wasn’t thinking of Sergeant Laughton then. He was thinking of Pervy Abbot, and his lips were tightly set.

CHAPTER VI.

A CRY OF TERROR.

AGATHA CUMMINGS walked briskly along the street. She had fooled Clay Holt completely. She had no apartment in the building she had entered. She had simply waited in the hall while Clay had plenty of time to drive away.

Of course she had done right. And she did have her own private apartment a few blocks farther down and two blocks across town. Money—often she went without a salary for weeks, but Clay did not realize his own generosity. It was nothing for him to toss her five hundred dollars—sometimes even more when he was in the money—just the same as it was nothing for him to borrow fifty or a hundred from her when he wasn’t.

She knew of Finnigan, of the crowd he had worked with; knew all there was to know about criminal life. She read all the papers, books, magazine articles, but mostly listened in on Clay’s chats with the mighty and the lowly—the police and the criminals. This case she had figured out for herself. There was nothing in it for Clay, but his good deed—and the way he would handle that good deed would make him powerful enemies.

Alice Stromer was now at Agatha Cummings’s apartment. She had left the latch off and whispered hurried instructions to Alice before she
jumped from the car. She hoped to talk Alice into taking a long trip into the country.

Agatha Cummings's lips set tighter. Did she do right? Not by having Alice at her apartment, but by not telling Clay? She had never stepped so far over the bounds before. But detective work had to be brain work—clever work. Clay left death and destruction behind him. This time she was afraid that it would be his death—his destruction.

It was with some misgivings that she reached the walk-up apartment, put her key in the door and without pressing the hall button of 3-A, went up the stairs. She didn't pause on the third landing; just ran quickly to the apartment, thrust her key in the lock and pushed the door open.

"Hello!" she cried cheerfully and stopped, reached too late for the knob of the door, heard it click closed. There was nothing to alarm her. Yet she was cold. There was sweat on her forehead as she stood beneath the very hall light that she had carefully left lit before she went out. She shivered slightly.

Nonsense! She was getting the jitters, attempting too much alone. There was nothing different about the apartment, nothing—And she put her hand to her mouth. She saw the difference now. It was on the wall; a large black patch that had suddenly seemed to straighten and form a shadow—the huge shadow of a man, a man who carried a gun in his hand.

She screamed, started toward the door when her scream came echoing back to her—not so loud in her own ears, perhaps, but more terrifying, more horrible. The low moan of a woman, a woman in pain. And that cry was not an echo of her own. It had come from her own apartment, her own living room.

Agatha Cummings's cry of terror had been only a scream in her own ears. An arm had stretched around her neck; a huge hand had closed itself over her mouth. A gruff voice said:

"Shut up your mouth." And after a pause, as he pulled her head back and looked down at her face, "Hell, what a catch!" And in a louder voice to the man in the next room, "Pervy, this ain't the dead-pan dame. This ain't the dame with the homely puss that works for Clay Holt."

Agatha Cummings was thrust forward along the hall into the living room. The man tossed her into a big chair, shook a gun at her.

"Comes it a rap right on the conk if you make even a peep!"

Agatha looked around that room. The tall, dark, sleek-looking man, she thought, was Pervy. He looked like a man you might want to kill. Evil face—the left eye raised as if permanently set there. But she didn't look at him then. She looked at the woman strapped in the chair; her torn dress, the blood-red necklace made by a rope about her neck. She saw, too, the knife in Pervy's hand. The blond Dolly sat very stiff and straight. There was no film over her eyes now; they were clear and bright and hateful.

Pervy turned and said:

"Who are you?"

Agatha Cummings then thought quickly, and she thought wrong. But she said without hesitation:

"I was sent to tell you to get out of here quick and to send the other girl home."

"Where's home?" Pervy was locking her over.

"The senator's. And this woman you got was to be sent uptown."

"Sure, I know." Pervy walked over to the chair as Agatha started to get up. His right hand shot out;
the heel of it caught the girl on the chin. She went back—hard. The chair slid slightly, caught, started to turn. The other man caught it, straightened it, said:

“Nix, Pervy. You can’t tell. Things ain’t right.”

Pervy sneered, shook Agatha by the shoulders, said:

“Come on, sister. You’re a good-looking dame. It wouldn’t help your beauty none if I knocked all your teeth down your throat. Who sent you?”

AGATHA CUMMINGS was not afraid now—at least not as far as physical fear goes. She saw the way Dolly was taking it; saw the knife with the blood on it in Pervy’s hands. She answered quickly:

“Clay Holt sent me. He’ll be up in a minute.”

“Holt!” The little man jerked erect. “Good God, Pervy, he—”

“He’ll do what, Martin?” Pervy looked at his friend. “Yellow, eh?”

“Not me, Pervy,” Martin said, and his stocky little figure quivered like an animal’s. “And I don’t take such talk from anyone—not even you. It was me who located this apartment, though Pouchy had the hunch. He followed Holt’s secretary here many times—you know, the one with the sour face. Then I took over his job watching here.”

“Yeah.” Pervy parted thick lips. “Me—I had a little misunderstanding with a certain sergeant, and trotted right in here to find this double-crossing, yellow-haired rat. I move fast. I give action. I want action.”

Martin said: “If it wasn’t for me tipping you off that this was a good hide-out—and the blonde might be here—you wouldn’t have known enough to drop out of the car.”

“That’s right, Martin.” Pervy nodded. “You and Pouchy were always guys to play hunches.”

“It was no hunch.” Martin set his chin hard down on his chest. “If Dolly came to Holt, it was a cinch he’d have to have a hide-out for her. Pouchy and me figured this was the place. Clay Holt’s secretary came here a few times a week; other times she went uptown to her aunt’s. The build-up was good. But when things broke, I knew that Dolly Vernon would show up here.”

“You knew?”

“Well, I guessed right. Dolly came smack into the place right on the heels of the senator’s daughter. I was in behind them before they could close the door. I let the senator’s daughter run out—she wanted to go home.” Thick, high shoulders moved up and down. “Finnigan always gave orders that she was never to be bothered. Then you hopped from the getaway car and stepped into a nice hide-out. Don’t forget, it was me who sent you the word you’d be safe here if you did the kill. And don’t forget that if it wasn’t for me, you’d’ve missed the blond terror.”

“That’s right, Martin. That’s right,” Pervy agreed. “We’ll split the dough two ways.”

“Sure, sure. Exactly two ways. So how is it for sticking a knife in Dolly, leaving it there and getting out?”

“And this other dame?” Pervy looked at Agatha. “She’s not like the girl in Holt’s office, but like the ones he carts around places. We wouldn’t want her leaving and across a glass of champagne saying to Holt,” and he mimicked: “‘Oh, Mr. Holt, I saw the cutest things today! A tall man called Pervy and a short man called Martin stuck a knife in a big blonde. Don’t you think that’s terrible?’”
Pervy jerked up his right hand. Agatha screamed. Pervy spoke.

“Knock the little pretty for a loop, Martin. Now—”

A gun started up above Agatha’s head as she mechanically raised her arm. A knife started toward Dolly Vernon’s once beautiful throat, and both knife and gun seemed to stick fast in air. The sudden split-second silence was broken by the fall of glass. Then the entire window, shade and all, was gone. A man stepped into the room. He said:

“You, Martin—drop it!”

THE gun fell backwards out of Martin’s hand. Agatha Cummings cried:

“Clay—Clay Holt!”

Clay cut in sharply; there was no humor in his voice now, no light, boyish sarcasm. Agatha saw plainly the deadly points of steel back in his blue eyes. He faced Pervy, but spoke to her.

“Don’t give me any of your talk when I don’t need it. When you should have talked, you remained silent.” And advancing toward the man who still held the knife, “Okay, Pervy, if that’s the way you want it, that’s the way you’ll get it.”

He swung the gun in his right hand. It was a peculiar loping movement, and instinctively Pervy lowered his arm—the knife. Pervy didn’t stagger; he didn’t even drop to his knees; he just shot out sideways, hit the floor, his body striking the wall. He did not move.

Martin was bending, reaching for his gun. He was quick, too. But he had misjudged Clay’s movement; had figured that Clay would have to regain his balance after striking. But Clay’s right hand and his gun in it had followed Pervy’s hurrying body. When the stocky man lifted his gun and faced Clay Holt, he also faced a gun. He didn’t fire. Clay closed a finger once.

A single rear, and a man dead sprawled there on the floor.

“Come,” Clay said. “Get Dolly untied fast.” This to Agatha, whose trembling fingers had become steady. He walked over to the huddled body of Pervy, turned him over on his back with his foot, picked up the knife and stood above him.

“People won’t bother about the shots. People aren’t that way,” Clay said as he looked grimly down. “But I can’t chance another shot. I never gave it to a man with a knife before.”

Dolly was untied now, standing, leaning against the chair. Agatha forgot Clay’s words of a minute before as she saw the knife in his hand, the expression on his face. She was across the room, clutching at his shoulders.

“You can’t, Clay! Not like that. It’s murder—brutal murder like he’d do. Clay—Clay!” This as he threw her roughly off.

“He killed Sergeant Laughton—shot him down with no chance. I—I—” Clay dropped the knife to the floor. Agatha’s sigh of relief was for the second only, for Clay had lifted his gun now, held it over the man’s head.

“Hell,” he said again. “I’ve got to give it to him. He’ll have watertight alibis furnished through Finnigan. He’ll laugh it off. The sergeant wouldn’t like it that way. I’ve got to give it to him.” Clay straightened, stepped back a pace, took careful aim, and the doorbell rang.

CHAPTER VII.

“A MILLION DOLLARS CASH.”

CLAY HOLT stiffened, hesitated above Pervy, who now moved his right arm listlessly as if to protect
and although the film was over her eyes again, deep hatred blazed back behind it.

"Let me have the rod." She tried to grasp Agatha's arm. "I haven't any feeling of horror about emptying it into his stomach. He would have cut me to ribbons."

Clay knew that Agatha had grabbed the wrist of the blonde, turned it suddenly and sent her spinning onto the couch. He nodded at that. Smart girl, Agatha. He had taught her that trick in two or three afternoons at the office.

The blonde cursed something. Wanted to know where the "dummpanned cluck" from Clay's office was who had promised to meet Alice there.

Clay shoved the chain into place before he opened the door; was relieved to see the janitor. A man and a woman looked out a door across the hall.

He answered the janitor's dreary statement that neighbors had heard and complained. Clay looked at him with pretended drunken gravity, and finally, shaking his head, said:

"Imagine—disturbing people at this hour! Just a little anniversary—all going out to dinner in a minute." Would the janitor like a drink?

The janitor wouldn't, but he took the money Clay slipped into his hand. The janitor was leaving.

his face from the glare of the lamp.

Clay raised his hand, listened; the doorbell rang again.

"Wait," he said to Agatha as she moved toward the hall. "They heard the shots then. Here—" He gave Agatha the gun in his right hand, slipped his left hand beneath his right sleeve and let another gun drop into his left hand. "If he moves, give it to him while I find out if it's cops or not. Is there a chain on the door?"

"There's a chain." Agatha nodded, "I'll—"

The blond Dolly came from across the room. She staggered slightly
Clay talked on and finally closed the door. He turned back to the living room.

The blonde screamed, cursed wildly. Agatha's tones were sharp, clear.

"Stop! Another step and I shoot."

"Don't shoot," Clay cried.

But no shot came as Clay plunged into the room. He saw the figure clearly enough; saw Pervy crossing the room, disappearing onto the fire escape, then into the darkness.

CLAY could have killed Pervy. But those people were still by the open door—the janitor hardly to the steps. Clay would not chance it.

Agatha said: "I would have killed him, but you said, 'Don't shoot.'"

"You—you with your talk of murder! You'd have shot him in the back. Funny little Princess." Clay took her closely to him, leaned his head down—and came erect again. The blonde clutched Agatha, complained:

"What the hell do you think this is—a love nest? In another five minutes, this street won't be safe for
me. Your boy-friend, Clay, was right in the beginning. He should have stuck the knife in Pervy's chest."

Clay said: "Don't you worry, Dolly." And to Agatha, "I'm running this show. Life—or at least death—is my game. And when I'm playing it, I'm the boss."

"I know, but I'm part of the firm, Clay. What's in this for you? You can't just take a girl away from her father and hold her forever. You can't fight Finnigan any length of time and win. And you have no reason for doing it, and Dolly should skip."

Clay thought aloud: "There's the senator's kid, Alice. No money, but young and spunky. I like her."

The blonde cut in: "I've got a case of real dough for you, Holt. To hell with Alice. I picked her up in my coupé and came here with her. I told her what a skunk Finnigan was, and how she'd better run away before her old man got his hair shaved off and a new suit of clothes. I gave it to her straight. Finnigan had put her as the price to keep her old man from taking the rap. And she was the price of that piece of change the senator owes Finnigan."

"You didn't! You didn't!" Agatha cried over and over. "The poor kid. She ran away. What did she do?"

Dolly snapped: "The little fool went right back to her father. Put on an act to me first. Family love, trust—the great Stromers; and that if her father trusted Mr. Finnigan, he must be an upstanding citizen." And turning on Clay almost viciously, "That's your job, guy. See that he doesn't stand up any longer. Come on, let's get out of this joint."

AND out they got. Agatha packing her suitcase, taking any little things that might identify her.

The blonde was vehement in her speech as they hurried around the block, got a taxi and Clay told her of the hotel she was to hide out in, the name she was to take.

"That suits me if you're going to take care of me and keep me alive. But I got to talk to you alone. Cart this little dame some place. Only you are going to hear what's on my mind."

Clay smiled in the darkness as he looked at Agatha. She didn't look anything like Awful now, though her hair was mussed up a bit. But he just leaned over to the driver and gave him orders to drive straight to Agatha's aunt's house uptown.

"She'll be surprised if she sees me like this," Agatha objected. "Besides, Clay—this woman—You are—"

"Don't you worry about me," said the blonde. "I got the biggest comer in the city without half your looks. Besides, I ain't trying to grab your big moment for myself. Clay and me are going to talk a lot of money and a lot of death."

When Clay left Agatha Cummings and returned to the taxi, Dolly Vernon did just that. Talked money—a lot of money.

"It's a million dollars cash on the line or I blow my mouth off all over the city. My head's full of names and dates I'm afraid to put down on paper. But I'll put them down on affidavits and talk inside and outside my mouth unless—What?"

And the girl listened as Clay talked.

"Five grand a week for life!" she breathed back his words. Clay nodded.

"Less ten percent to me as your agent. Can't you see it, Dolly?"
Finnigan won’t go a million in cash—no man would. At so much a week, he’ll be buying protection just like he sells it. If you talk, he won’t need to send you the money. A million—he’d be too wise for that in one lump. You could take the dough and talk too.”

“Yeah,” the blonde nodded, “I thought of doing that. I hate his guts. At first, I was going to kill the kid, Alice. Then I couldn’t. It struck me funny. She’s just a child; her romance still settles on the football field. Maybe you as the hero who saved her from a life worse than death.” Her laugh was like fingernails along a wall. “Finnigan—he wants a woman. I’ll do it. Where did you say I’d have to live?”

“OUT in Kansas. It’s a big farm. It belongs to an aunt of a lad I know.” He didn’t tell her it belonged to Agatha’s other aunt.

“A farm—a ranch, eh? I’d go nuts. No one to talk to; no one who’d even speak my language—”

“We could smuggle you out of the country a little later.”

“No,” she said. “I want to get out of the country now. He’d suspect after you made the deal. I got to get out. I got to have dough.”

“To France, and then—Italy—the Riviera. It’ll take a day or two to arrange that. He’d watch the ports. Finnigan has an in every place.”

“I ain’t got the money for it.” She shook her head.

“Hell,” Clay told her. “He’ll come across at once, but you’ll be started then. I’ll raise the wind to get you over the pond, make the fix, too.”

“No—I got to move quick—tonight even. I—I—”

Clay said: “Give me time. I’ll buzz you or call on you later—an hour or two. Finnigan won’t wait much longer. He won’t be giving a few guys close to him the word to knock you over. He’ll put a price on your head by tomorrow morning. Fifty grand—a hundred grand—to any one who gets you. Remember that’s a lot of jack, and half the town knows you by sight—most of them by name. Finnigan took you places. He never hid you except with diamonds.”

“The dirty louse!” The girl climbed from the cab. “Those diamonds were worth a fortune. He’s got them all in a safe-deposit box under his name. The little squirt Alice will get them. I should have knifed her—up and down!”

Clay looked at her for a long time. Heredity, environment, everything was against her. She was still young in years, in active physical movement, but her face had grown hard and lined—and Finnigan had seen the senator’s daughter. Clay finally asked:

“Why didn’t you kill her, Dolly?”

“I don’t know.” Dolly shrugged her shoulders. “Maybe I felt sorry for her; maybe I thought Finnigan deserved getting her—or maybe she just made me laugh. It’s just one of those things you can’t explain. Finnigan lies when he pretends it’s simply social—a build-up for him. She’s rather beautiful, rather delicate. I could see in a second she wasn’t my kind—Finnigan’s kind. He’ll strangle her, beat her horribly. Okay, come back with news—real, fast-moving news.”

**CHAPTER VIII.**

**THE SHIP SAILS.**

FIFTEEN minutes later, Clay climbed from a taxi and watching the area ways carefully, mounted the steps and rang the bell of Senator Stromer’s house.

“Hy—” Clay put his foot in,
forced the door open. "How are you feeling, Jackson? I thought surely you'd be given the night off. Well, it's early yet. Senator back from dinner? There, don't scowl. Orders or no orders, I've got to see him. I was here before, you know, and I don't kid around."

Jackson opened his mouth to speak. But before the words came, the senator was in the hall. He beckoned toward his library.

"Come in, Mr. Holt." And as Clay entered the library, studying it carefully, even going over by the windows and looking behind the curtains, "You are a very stupid man to come here again—tonight."

"And you are a very stupid man not to receive me more cordially. You haven't any money. Might I ask you how Mr. Finnigan explained my interest—since I know you're broke? What can I gain by coming to see you?"

"You might wish to find out things detrimental to Mr. Finnigan."

Clay laughed. He sat down in the seat near the desk and laughed.

"Things detrimental to Mr. Finnigan, eh? Why, I could spend the entire night telling you things—and not be finished by breakfast time."

"Certainly," said the senator calmly, "you didn't come because you like me." And after a long pause in which Clay just stared at him in astonishment, "Well—come then—what do you think of me?"

"I think you're a mutt," Clay said flatly. "I don't believe you're doing what you're doing for the good of the family name. And don't think you're doing it for greed. For if Finnigan were out of your life, you'd make a lot of honest money. With him in your life, married to your daughter, you'll be in bigger dough—crooked dough. Contractors will build dams that will wash away and kill thousands. People will—"

And as the senator's face turned from a milky white to a pasty yellow, "Well, I think you're doing it through nothing but fear. Sure, fear for yourself."

"No, no!" The senator straightened and gripped the arms of his chair. "Finnigan said you know nothing. You can't blackmail me—you can't frighten me into giving you money."

"Money? Hell, that's a hot one! Why even the clothes on your back belong to Finnigan. Probably the clothes that kid of yours wears. And now—you toss her to him. It's fear, senator—just plain, cringing fear. Well"—Clay got up from his seat and walking over, clutched the senator by the lapels of his coat—"I'll give you something to fear. It's Finnigan. I'm going to get Mike Finnigan. I'm going to put him in the electric chair. And you? You won't be cringing behind the bars you fear now. God, you'll wish you were! He'll be warming the seat for you. For Senator Stromer, who threw his dead daughter to—"

"Dead—dead? What do you mean 'dead'?"

"You know the girl. I've only seen her. Finnigan has a penthouse thirty-three stories above the street. You know the girl; you know Finnigan. Just how long do you think it will take her to make the leap and kill—"

CLAY saw her coming all right. No one—even so swift and silent, could have entered and surprised him. He was half turned before she reached up and put long, slender fingers on his shoulders. Her eyes blazed; the words stumbled at first, then poured from her lips.

"How dare you? How dare you
talk to my father like that?” She repeated the words over and over. “Get out of this house. I love Michael Finnigan. I have always loved him. It was father who was against our marriage. He thought me too young, Mr. Finnigan too much a man of the world. I—I—”

When she faltered now, Clay supplied the words:

“You didn’t love him so much this afternoon when I spoke to you. Nor your father, either. Listen, kid, this noble business is fine at the moment—great stuff before the deed is done. But it will kill both of you in the long run. Then the mud will stick on the name. No one to carry on the name but mud—dirty rotten mud—Finnigan’s children and your children.”

Clay thrust up his hands and caught her tiny wrists, the hands of which were beating—well, simply trying to beat at his face. Then she turned and knelt beside her father.

“Don’t mind what he says. He wants to blackmail us or Mr. Finnigan.”

“I’m afraid he’s right, dear.” The senator ran a hand through her hair. “I’m afraid you won’t be happy. I’m afraid I’m thinking too much of my—or our own interests. I’m afraid Mr. Finnigan is perhaps not—”

“‘Afraid—afraid!’ ‘Perhaps.’ ‘Our own interests,’ ” Clay cut in sarcastically. “Why don’t you come out and say you’re just afraid for yourself?”

The girl turned, faced Clay. Looked steadily at him. There was nothing of hatred or even anger in her eyes now. She said simply:

“Please leave father alone now.”

She took Clay by the arm and led him into the empty hall and toward the front door. Then she spoke:

“You mustn’t talk to him at all—any more, Mr. Holt. He’s in a very morbid condition. I have just convinced him that suicide will not help. That would leave me in your mud—and helpless. He’s a fine man inside. We’ve been companions for years. The old records tell the many fine things he has done. Then mother’s sickness—her death, poor investments and my education. It was a very little mistake that so easily became a big one. He’s still a great man—a great man ripped apart inside.”

She clutched both of Clay’s hands very tightly. “Don’t tell me anything more about Mr. Finnigan. I don’t want to hear any more. Perhaps he will change. I shall try to make a very good wife to Mr. Finnigan.”

Clay didn’t laugh. He couldn’t look down at that sweet, honest face and laugh. The girl believed every word of what she was saying. She went on:

“It might have been a great deal worse. I should feel grateful that a man who could ruin my father should bother to marry his daughter.”

Things sort of gulped in Clay’s throat. He couldn’t speak. The girl had the door open now, held one of his hands. He wanted to say something to her and couldn’t. Instead, she spoke:

“You are a very brave and honest man.” She looked straight at him when she said it, and somehow Clay’s eyes wandered and came back—wandered again and came back. She asked:

“Why did you come?”

Clay was stumped. But he answered promptly and without effort.

“I don’t know.”

“It was to help me, of course.”

“It was to help you, of course,” he repeated like a man in a trance. “Good-night.” Clay was on the
stone steps when she spoke now. "There has been something beautiful about just knowing you. I'm not afraid—not afraid anymore."

CLAY thought she repeated the words again and ran away crying after the door closed. He hesitated, his finger on the bell; then, he went very slowly down the front steps.

Women—sure, he knew plenty of them—knockouts too. People turned when he entered a hotel with them. But he didn't know women like this girl. He pushed his hat far back as he entered the taxi. Unless—well, there was Awful, of course.

Clay thought of Dolly. There was real money there—easy money. An income that would come to him without any future effort. He had a plan now, and went straight to Dolly's hotel.

Dolly grinned as he cursed about the passport, went to her bag and opening it, tossed a folded leather case to Clay.

Clay looked at her picture in admiration, said:

"You sure had the stuff, kid, or that photographer would——"

"What do you mean 'had'?" Dolly flashed up. "Finnigan was mad about me. That passport is good for another six months yet. Oh, I've done Paris. Yeah." She strutted up and down a bit, even stood before the mirror. "I'm young yet. I've got the stuff yet. Finnigan used to sit and look at me by the hour. I was his inspiration he used to say. It made a girl think good—look good, threw a swagger into her walk. And then——"

"And then?" Clay said when she did not speak.

"He still looked at me and thought. He let it out once. I was a rope of rocks around his neck. After that, he looked at me different. He didn't think of my throat in the same way, didn't want to caress it with his hands in the same way. It came slowly on him—and luckily I seen it. Yeah, seen the truth before he fully realized it himself. He was going to kill me."

Twice Clay talked on the phone. Finally he got the police commissioner. He said:

"It isn't going out of your way any, and she may be the biggest material witness you ever had. Hell, he doesn't have to know her nor you don't, either. It's legal—and many a picture star gets the same courtesy for a smile. I'm telling you, some day I'll bring her back to the city, and she'll knock the props from under the secret power that gets under your skin." He named a couple of men then and added, "I don't want Malone or Schaffer in on it. . . . Yeah, I know, but I don't want those dicks. The boat sails at dawn."

Clay turned. "It's as good as done, kid." For a long time he explained things to her, handed her the entire thousand dollars he had received from Finnigan. "I'll take a grand beside my ten percent out of the first five. Remember, after you cross the pond, it's Muriel Todd—sort of a quiet name." He thought a while and then, "Write to the Hotel Nathan Hale, here in New York. Just Room Number 1196. I'll get it okay."

"And the money will reach me—every week?"

"First me, and then you. Look, Dolly. I'm fixing it for you to enjoy yourself. Finnigan will believe absolutely that you're in the United States."

Clay worked hard all that night. He had the girl on the big freighter long before dawn. He was on the dock, shielded from the wind by a
large packing case, her note to Finnigan in his hand. He saw the boat turn and go down the river. It wasn’t until it was lost in the mist that he left the dock, went straight to his office.

CHAPTER IX.
MR. FINNIGAN.

AGATHA CUMMINGS, her hair pushed severely back, wearing spectacles, make-up gone, woke him up at eleven o’clock.

“Any engagements?” she said.

“Engagements—no—Yes, of course! You should have waked me, Awful. God, what a pan today! And I wanted to get in touch with Finnigan.”

“Mr. Finnigan called. I told him you were in conference and would call him back at eleven.” She looked very prim, very severe as she waited with notebook in hand. “Senator Stromer called, too. He seemed very excited; said he wished that he were dead. I told him you would very likely oblige him, but you would have to have a fee in advance.” She smiled. “I think his words meant that. This is a business office, Clay. You told me to make—understand, make you run it as such. Now, tell me the blond dame has the grand, and you’re going to make a fortune out of the investment.”

“I am, Awful.” He leaned over and grabbed her hand. Then he talked rapidly. He finished with, “You’re a fine kid. I couldn’t get along without you. You’re so far above ordinary women. Honest, Awful, I could get up and grab you now.” He moved one foot off the desk listlessly as he noticed the peculiar, unpleasant sandiness those damned silly glasses gave to her eyes.

“That’s nice.” She nodded. “Go ahead. What do you want me to do? I fall for flattery just like the others.”

“Don’t be silly,” Clay told her. “I don’t want you to do anything. Why, last night, I thought of sending Dolly out to your aunt in Indiana. Aunt what’s-her-name?”

“Aunt Clara,” Agatha stood stiffly watching him. “But I didn’t.” Clay shook his head. “Oh, I’d have paid for it all right, but I was afraid she’d be too rough.”

“Well,” Agatha said. “Aunt Clara is a rather wealthy woman and wouldn’t need the money. Besides, she’s strong in mind and body, and might have cracked Dolly over the head with a shovel. Aunt Clara’s got religion.”

Clay grinned like a boy. Agatha Cummings moved behind him. She liked him when he was like that—caught in something. Maybe she loved him. She didn’t know; but she set her lips, drew back the hand that stretched toward his shoulder. She didn’t want to be in a harem—even if she ran it herself. She said:

“All right, Clay. What do you want? And where does Aunt Clara fit? I’ll work it.”

“WILL you?” Clay brightened at once. “It’s like this, Awful. I don’t want those five thousand dollar weekly checks made out to me. Finnigan’s boys would be following me day and night. I want them made out to someone else. Now—your Aunt Clara could cash them at her bank, send me her own personal check, and I could shoot the money to Dolly in Europe. Get the idea? Finnigan would hunt all over Indiana for Dolly.”

“But they’d come back to him with Aunt Clara’s endorsement. He’d
spot the bank and easily trace where the checks went.

"Sure, sure. But he wouldn’t know personal checks came back to me. He’d be convinced Dolly was in this country, though. Later, I’d notify him to make the checks out to someone else."

"I haven’t any more aunts," Awful said stiffly.

"But your Aunt Clara—her respectability? Don’t you understand, Awful?"

"Sure." Awful nodded. "I understand perfectly. You don’t want cash, for they might mark the bills and trace them. And you don’t want checks in your name. If Dolly was killed and couldn’t talk, then Finnigan would lay a murder rap or even a blackmail rap on you."

Clay came to his feet.

"It’s five hundred dollars a week for the office, for the firm. I haven’t got your aunt’s respectability."

"They’d never convict Aunt Clara of anything out in her country. All right, Clay; I’ll fix it for you."

"Can you? Her position in the community and all that. Won’t she think it funny—want to know?"

Awful laughed.

"Aunt Clara is a spinster. She’d believe anything bad of men. Dolly, the orphan, pursued, threatened—even robbed by a man. Why, it’s a natural!"

"Great!" Clay lifted the phone. Awful jabbed his hand down.

"Not yet," she said. "What about the other girl? The senator’s daughter? Are you thinking of her now, Clay! Do you—are you in love with her?" And after a pause, "She’s in love with you."

"Her? No—I—What do you mean, she’s in love with me?"

"I don’t know, Clay. Maybe it’s just all women, but with her I don’t think so. You’re something new, something different. She told me, kept telling me she’s going to marry Finnigan; but down inside her she believes she won’t have to. Do you know why?"

Clay scratched his head.

"No," he said finally. "I don’t—but I wish the hell I did. Oh, I’ll find out something to do."

"Maybe kill Finnigan?"

"Yeah—that might turn the trick."

Clay was thinking how he’d talk to Finnigan, how he’d present his proposition about the five grand a week for Dolly. It was a lot of money. But he had Dolly’s note in his pocket, the one she had written for him at parting.

"So you’d kill Finnigan—let the five thousand a week go!" And at Clay’s startled look. "Dead men don’t sign checks."

"That’s right. That’s right." Clay stroked his chin. "I’ll get this off my mind first, Awful." He reached for the phone.

She stopped him again.

"There’s a condition about Aunt Clara. I must go and meet Finnigan with you, be there when you make your agreement."

Clay argued, but the girl was insistant.

"Oh, all right," Clay agreed. "I’ll see what Finnigan says."

Clay stretched his hand toward the phone again, but this time it rang before he reached it. He lifted the receiver. It was Michael Joseph Finnigan.

"LISTEN!" Mr. Finnigan started right off. "Another body is taken away for you and you don’t even ring up to thank me. . . . Yes, yes, it was Pervy again. He didn’t go far from the building, and he has a thick skull. Did you look at your morning papers and notice there was nothing about your little bit of
shooting? But there's plenty about poor Sergeant Laughton. Nice chap, too—damn nice. Would have gone far, but he couldn't get along with people. . . . Well, why don't you say something? Are you taking your face out of my business—all my business? And are you going to let me know where a certain girl is? In plain words—is it Mike or Michael?"

Clay hesitated. Enemy or friend—dead or alive—that was what Finnigan meant. Clay said very slowly and very distinctly:

"For the moment—it's Mr. Finnigan. I want to come down and see you and talk about—about Dolly."

"On the fence, eh? But I don't play ball that way—never did—never will."

Clay's voice was still slow; his words distinct.

"I want to come down and see you—talk to you about Dolly first."

"Fine!" Finnigan seemed pleased. "You won't be sorry, boy. I'm not a mean man, Clay. I've got five grand that says you can't put your finger on her."

"I've got—" Clay hesitated, kept the chuckle out of his voice. "I can get five grand that says I can."

"Good! Come down right away. Holiday, you know—just the porter on the front. I've got something special on for this afternoon."

"I'm bringing my secretary with me, too."

Finnigan hesitated over that, finally said:

"Okay, bring a parade if you want. I only want a lady's name and address. Personally, I don't care if you bring the D. A."

"This girl knows a lot."

"So does the D. A." Finnigan laughed. "But he keeps it to himself. Now the commissioner knows nothing and tells it to everyone. You're a good guy, Clay. If things go right—well, I'm not a mean man."

Clay dropped the instrument back in its cradle.

"Come on, if you must, Awful. And keep my mind on business. Here's real money, and I keep thinking of that girl! She's so very—er—clean, Agatha."

"Yes," said Agatha. "I know what you mean. It's a wonder Dolly didn't get you."

Clay laughed.

"Dolly and I were both thinking of one thing—money." And growing more serious, "If Alice had a million, I couldn't collect a cent of it. No, not if I laid Finnigan stiff right in the center of Madison Square Garden." And with a shrug as he grabbed his hat, "I didn't know it was a holiday."

**THIS** time Clay didn't find Finnigan's offices a buzz of activity. There was the porter to let him in and start him off down the long corridor to Finnigan's office at the end. He was glad, and he wasn't glad when the steel door shut behind them. It cut off possible escape in that direction, but forebode, also, a hail of lead from behind him.

There was little danger of death, for Finnigan thought Clay brought information; and he wouldn't have him killed until he had received that information. Clay's lips set tightly. And he couldn't have him killed after he received it, either. Not with a woman on the high seas whose head was also a mental filing cabinet of Finnigan's misdeeds.

Finnigan must have loved her, then—but she was young when Finnigan started up the ladder, and seven years is a long time. Clay understood. There were times when a man just had to get things out of
his system. Had to talk to someone. With him, there was Awful. He trusted her absolutely. He looked down at her now as they passed the row of empty offices.

The door of Finnigan's private secretary's office was wide open, as was Finnigan's private door behind it. Clay and Agatha could plainly see Michael Joseph Finnigan sitting at his desk admiring something in a long plush box.

He lifted his head, showed wide even teeth, called:

"Come in." And as they entered the office, "God in heaven, is that your secretary! But any woman would admire this." He held up the box. "Come and have a look at it. White pearls—cost me a lot of dough. It should look good on a certain young lady's throat. What the hell, Clay!"

Clay had covered the entire room with his eyes. He was now looking at the curtains behind which was the door that Pervy had passed through when he was there the previous day.

"The curtains," Clay said. "Anyone behind them today?"

Finnigan laughed.

"Not a soul, boy—not a soul. This is friendly. But there, don't hold a gun in your hand like that. Go take a look."

Clay walked across the room, parted the curtains with his gun. He felt that he was safe after he once talked to Finnigan. That meant safe as far as Finnigan was concerned. But not Pervy. Pervy was conceited—a swaggering, dangerous, venegful man. Clay knew Pervy; knew the hate Pervy held for him; knew now that that hate must have doubled—tripled.

NO one was behind those curtains. Clay turned, walked over to the desk and sat down opposite Finnigan. Agatha Cummings took up her stand between the two men.

"Okay," said Finnigan. "A holiday, you know—right to business. What about Dolly?"

"Yeah, that's right." Clay took Dolly's note from his vest pocket, carefully opened it and tossed it across the desk.

Finnigan read it through twice. The second time his lips moved. Then his face grew slightly purple, turned again to a dull white. He read:

Dear Mike:

Clay Holt is my agent. He is to receive five thousand dollars every week or I'll fry the pants off you.

Dolly Vernon

"What," gasped Finnigan as he saw Dolly's name scrawled in large letters at the bottom of the note, "what does this mean?"

"About frying the pants off you?" Clay grinned. "Your cultured mind wouldn't understand that, but I gather she means the electric chair, up the river. It's all clear, Finnigan. Take your time to think. Dolly's got a hide-out. She's commissioned me to get the money. If I don't—well, she's taken a memory test and will repeat all she knows about you. In the old days, Finnigan, I think you called it 'squawking all over one's face.'"

Finnigan rubbed at his chin. He was thinking just as Dolly thought he would think—as Clay thought he would think. Five grand. It wasn't so much money, and he'd have another week to find her before he paid again. He reached suddenly into his desk, pulled out a small check book that he used for very private accounts.

But he made no objections when Clay stuck his own hand into that
drawer and removing the large German Luger, shoved it into his own jacket pocket. As if he had not seen the movement, Finnigan said:

"There came a time when my work and my position made our association impossible. What would the senator think of a girl like Dolly? Why, if she had come to me, been a good sport, I would——"

"Have slit her throat from ear to ear," Clay cut in.

"By God, I——" Finnigan paused. He didn't argue over the amount. He said simply, "You'll take a check?" And when Clay nodded, "Made out to you?"

"No, to Clara—er——"

Agatha broke in.

"Clara Ogden Heath. That is the name I believe, Mr. Holt."

"Correct," said Clay.

Finnigan wrote rapidly.

"A long name, not a simple name, but somehow a name I won't forget." He waved the check in the air. "You take the check?"

"I take the check." Clay took it, examined it carefully, waved it once or twice more for the ink to dry; then folding it carefully, he placed it in his vest pocket where Dolly's letter had been.

"Well," Finnigan capped his pen and stuck it back in his pocket.

"I'm glad to give it to her. Sorry I couldn't settle a big sum on her.

Fine girl, Dolly, but she's a wildcat at times. I liked her that way. If she ever needs money——" And suddenly, "I guess that's that. Almost noon. I never liked politics, Clay. Never liked it at all. But today—well, it was nice to be able to pull a few strings. A marriage license, you know. There—don't stare so stupidly at me. Alice Stromer and I are going to be married this afternoon."

"By God, if you do——" Clay half lifted his gun when Agatha yelled. He nearly pressed the trigger, too, as he saw Finnigan half leap, half throw himself from his chair. Then another gun blazed, and Clay swung; glass broke as a picture on the wall behind him crashed to the floor.

CHAPTER X.

DEATH AND DINNER.

CLAY saw the man. The wild-faced man; the man who wanted vengeance. He hardly recognized him at first—the horribly contorted face. He didn't think he would have recognized it if it weren't for the lifted eye, the one higher and wider open than the other.

Clay fired as the man dashed through the curtains. There was an answering blast. Clay knew that he had missed, for the man's foot had

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CRIME BUSTERS

79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y.

Gentlemen:

Enclosed is $1.00 for which enter my name on your subscription list for one full year of Crime Busters magazine, to be mailed to me at this address:

Name

Street and Number

City and State
caught in the curtains, brought them down into the room. Pervy was already falling when Clay jerked the trigger, the nose of the gun directly at Pervy’s head which had been nearly a foot higher the second before.

Clay felt the bullet strike him as Pervy catapulted through the air by the force of his own plunging dive. Then he wasn’t sure about the bullet, for Pervy’s head struck Clay in the stomach, staggering him back, knocking him across the room, his gun—gone. Then he crashed against the wall in a half-sitting, half-lying position.

Clay was dazed, but he didn’t think he was shot. If he was, he didn’t feel it. But he did know that his gun was out there on the floor and that Pervy was climbing to his feet, looking from the gun to him.

Clay wasn’t frightened. He didn’t seem to think clearly enough for that. And suddenly, he did think—or perhaps he didn’t exactly think, for Pervy put the idea into his head.

“Never mind, Finnigan,” Pervy fairly shouted. “This is my kill. Clay is big-time stuff. He’s got another gun. Let’s see him use it.”

That was the thought that cleared Clay’s brain. He had another gun. Pervy was a fool to mention that—or was he? Pervy had his own gun up now.

“So you’ll take it lying down, eh?” Pervy moved his gun back closer to his body. His finger started slowly to close upon that trigger. “And that’s the way you’ll get it—lying down.”

Clay did two things at once. He reached for his gun and hurtled his body across the floor at the same time. He was swinging his body around on his stomach six feet away when Pervy fired.

The shot hit Clay that time, all right. But Pervy had shot at a moving target, a target he hadn’t been covering—a living target that was reaching for a gun that every crook in the city feared. The bullet pounded some place inside Clay’s right arm, crashed across the side of his body—and Clay closed his finger once.

Pervy fired again. This time his slug must have gone directly through the ceiling, for Pervy was staggering backward, both his hands raised in the air; but he didn’t fall. His left hand came down and gripped at the gash in his throat. Then his right lowered—the gun in it. He turned, and suddenly leaning across the desk, stuck his gun flat against Agatha’s head.

To scare Clay into not firing? To kill the girl? Perhaps just to kill—to kill before he died. But that question was never going to be answered.

Clay never shot faster in his life. He never shot with more assurance, either. The rather large ear was an open target. He sent a .38 slug into it.

Pervy rolled completely over, hung for a moment on the edge of the desk; then slipping off, he hit the floor with a thud. Just his feet were visible.

CLAY knew that Finnigan was back in the chair. He knew that he tried to speak once; couldn’t. Then he let Agatha lead him to a chair. The girl lifted Clay’s gun from the floor, didn’t give it to him, held it in her own hand.

“You’ve been hurt,” she said to Clay. “You’ve been hit.” She reached for the phone. “I must get a doctor.”

Finnigan grabbed her wrist despite the gun.
"Are you mad?" he said. "A wounded man and a dead body need explaining. Holt will be all right. Get him to hell out of here."

Clay shook himself, staggered to his feet, gripped the desk, then straightened.

"It's nothing, Princess." He was looking right at Agatha, and she wondered if he could actually see her. "So long, Finnigan." And looking over the desk, "There's one body Pervy won't take care of."

"He was a good lad, Clay." Finnigan leaned heavily upon the desk. "Got your own doctor—or will I give you a boy that will fix you up?"

Clay shook his head.

"I got my own. I don't want to be fixed up with a spade slapping me in the face." He looked at the gun he held in his hand, shook his head, shoved it back in its holster. He said:

"Don't forget, Finnigan—on the dot every Monday. Dolly isn't a girl to be kept waiting."

"Sure, Clay, sure. Sorry you're not in condition to attend my wedding this afternoon. Understand the little bride admires you greatly."

And with his mouth closing, and the first show of emotion in his voice, "But I'll beat that out of her."

Clay swung, staggered, reached for his gun.

"You—" he started, stopped. Agatha had jerked down his arm.

"You forgot to tell Mr. Finnigan all of it," she said. And when Clay looked at her dumbly, "I mean why he can't be married today—or for a long time to come. Shall I tell him for you?"

"Yeah." Clay nodded. "You tell him, Awful."

"It's Dolly." Agatha Cummings's voice was very sweet. "She said if the money from you was ever over two days late, she'd blow all—tell all."

Finnigan said:

"Well? What's that got to do with my marriage? The money won't be late."

"It might." Agatha fairly let the honey roll from between her lips now. "Alice Stromer admires Clay so much—and he likes women to admire him. I guess he admires her a little, too. But he's dead set against your marriage at this time. Don't you understand yet, Mr. Finnigan? The day you marry Alice Stromer is the day that Clay tears up your check. Oh, he won't mention it to you. He won't even mention it to Dolly. And Dolly doesn't strike me as a woman who'd wait long. Indeed, I think she'd call the district attorney by long distance—reversing the charges, of course. Good-day, Mr. Finnigan."

"One moment, Clay." Finnigan turned, faced him fully. "I rather fancy that gun of mine. Will you return it to me?"

And Clay did. It all rose up inside of him in a single burst of anger. The meanest, cruelest man in the city, and nothing could be proven against him. Clay lifted the German Luger from his jacket. He couldn't kill him then, though he felt that some day he would. But he lifted that gun, drew his hand back, then out again.

There was a dull thud. Michael Joseph Finnigan's face crashed down upon the desk.

"He'll remember that," said Clay. "Come on, kid."

ALTHOUGH Agatha closed both the door from Finnigan's office and the door from the secretary's office, that walk down the silent corridor was the longest one Clay ever re-
membered taking. And it wasn't his wounds, either. The two hits amounted to nothing—the doctor laughed at them, later. Still it took them a good ten minutes to walk down that hall—back to back.

"You're always right," agreed Agatha when they safely reached the end of their journey. "A machine gun could certainly sweep down this narrow steel passage and scatter death. But don't you see, Clay, that if Finnigan killed you now, Dolly would never receive the money? And if she didn't receive the money—but then both you and I and Mr. Finnigan have met Dolly."

"That's right—that's right." Clay was coming around. He turned, gripped her arm, and led her straight out into the hall and the elevators before he said, "Why, Finnigan will be watching over me! And the girl. Listen, Awful, I'll get myself straightened out at doc's. You make a dinner date with Alice Strome for me."

Agatha Cummings looked at herself in her tiny glass. Didn't Clay see behind the mask women wore? She would have liked to have had that dinner date with him. But she smiled when he gripped her arm.

"Think of it, Awful! Finnigan my guardian angel. That's a hot one. An angel from Hell. You'd better let me take this cab."

Clay climbed into the taxi. "I'm leaking blood all over the place." She heard him laugh.

She turned. A hand gripped her shoulder, swung her around. Clay's teeth were showing; his eyes were bright. He said:

"Make that dinner date for the Carlton at seven. I can think of a girl much better-looking than Alice Strome. So if you want to make my date with her instead, don't call up Miss Strome. There—not a word. I'll know when I reach the Carlton—and damn it, Princess, look your best!"

The cab was gone, but like the Cheshire cat's grin, Clay's laugh remained in her ears; his smile was a dancing vision before her half-closed eyelids.

After a moment she shrugged her shoulders much as she had seen Clay shrug his, and walking into a drugstore, put through a long-distance call. Her voice was cheerful and enthusiastic even if Aunt Clara's was not.

She was dining at the Carlton at seven.

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M-31-14
Chicago's Famous Crime Buster

Frank J. Loesch, at Eighty-five, Retires With Amazingly Successful Record

ALL of us who are prone to think of the country's leading crime busters as young men of strong physique, unending youthful energy, and flaming guns in hand, ready to follow the criminal into the darkest of cellars, or step into what may be a gun-trap, can change our minds about all this right now, for here's an example of a crime buster par excellence, a leader among the men who fight for the law and win its greater battles, a war-horse of the anti-crime campaigns—the eighty-five-year-old Frank J. Loesch, just recently retired head of the Chicago Crime Commission, a member of the Wickham Commission appointed by former president Hoover, and probably the best-known menace to crime in the world!

All of that sounds like a big order for a man. It sounds as if it would take half a dozen men to fill the bill. If it sounds that way now, imagine how tremendous the task sounded a dozen or more years ago when Frank J. Loesch was faced with the problem of cleaning up Chicago, then famous the world over as the worst crime-ridden city in history! People actually avoided Chicago because of this fear; businesses refrained from establishing branches there because of their fear of the racketeers and their effect upon business. This was no joke, either; no mere newspaper publicity. It was a fact, and the residents of Chicago knew it better than any one else. When they picked Loesch to do their fighting for them, they picked the right man. That was back in 1928. The Chicago Crime Commission had been operating for a number of years, doing what it could to keep the city clean, working always against great odds, for politics, crooked money and crime were working hand in hand in the fourth-largest city in the world. Mr. Loesch himself had been a member of the Committee since 1920, and had a great deal to do with what was accomplished in that time. But, somehow, the Commission couldn't do enough to prevent the crime that was springing up at every corner. There was something more needed; something had to set the spark of public opinion aflame.

Whatever it was, probably no one can actually say. But what it easily might have been is the word "Public Enemy." That title was coined by Frank J. Loesch to designate the citizens of Chicago who were a menace to the peace and safety of the community. It was a stigma to be attached to any individual who was on the wrong side of the law, and it was a general classification which could be used for the purpose of having laws and regulations passed to make it harder for the crook and the racketeer to ply his business.

Though many others have, at one time or other, claimed or inferred that the popular term "Public Enemy" was their own work, there is
no real argument against giving the full credit to Mr. Loesch. If he was not the first to coin the title, certainly he was the first to give it to the public, and it was because of his efforts that it began to mean what it does mean today.

Previous to that time, it was difficult to talk about problems which racketeers brought about. You could not mention known crooks by name, unless everything you said could be proven absolutely in court. But you could refer to the whole tribe as "Public Enemies," and in that way put across your message, and still be on safe ground. It was under such conditions that it became possible to gather information, to keep the public posted, and generally to bring the force of the law upon racketeers.

But before we go on to the work of Loesch as head of the Crime Commission, let us get some of his background. When he was appointed president of this commission, he was not a young man. He was seventy-six years old—an age at which most men have already retired. He was just beginning his greatest work.

EXPERIENCE and background were his when he started on this task. By training, he was a lawyer with a tremendous practice. Specializing in corporation law, he was retained by some of the biggest Chicago enterprises. His interest in the law naturally made him a worker for the law, and as early as 1908 he became actively engaged in doing definite things toward protecting society against crime. He prosecuted election frauds even at this early date, and uncovered so much thievery, so much crooked politics and the general unsavory atmosphere of crime, that he probably resolved
then and there to do something more about the situation.

Even this early experience proved several things to him. First, he found out that there was nothing wrong with our laws or with our system of law. Whatever fault there was lay in the way the law was enforced, the people who were to enforce it, and the method used.

For example, later in life he was successful in his efforts to make the
judges sit full time. He has also worked hard to have grand juries sit longer, and generally did all he could to speed up the process of the courts.

In one of his cases, he had the experience of being unable to convict the accused because the witnesses were held out of the State’s jurisdiction. After several requests for trial by the accused, and failure to obtain the witnesses, the case automatically was closed. But that can’t happen any more. The law now provides for the extradition of witnesses whenever necessary. It is another step toward making it harder for the crook to beat the courts by bribing or intimidating witnesses.

He feels that as long as there is work to do, everybody should get together in doing it, and formalities which have grown up as a result of years of tradition, etc., should give way to modern needs. Certainly he has a right to think such things, for he has defied tradition and formality completely in his work. Were it not for this aggressiveness, he could never have accomplished the task he set out to do.

IT was toward the end of his first year as head of the Crime Commission that Loesch had his first big chance to deal a blow to crime, and he took it. It was another election-fraud case, with a killing included. Loesch went to town on that one!

He did not simply go after the person who committed the crime. He went after those behind the scenes. He called in every person, big or little, who might in any way have been connected with the crime, or with any plans or plots before or after its commission. He didn’t pick and choose; he did not worry about the connections of those he summoned. They were all put on the fire; big-shot politician and big-shot racketeer, as well as the small fry in each case.

This action was amazing. At first it stunned the city. Here was a man who did not hesitate to crack down on men who controlled wards and entire sections of the city; men who were kings in their own territory. He did not handle them with kid gloves, either. Whenever he had evidence that pointed toward such people, he made that evidence stick, and he treated such suspects exactly the same as if they were nothing more than tramps picked up on the street. Influence, money, or even “gang” tie-ups, meant nothing to him.

It didn’t take Chicago long to get

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**TWO "DON'TS" FOR FOOTBALL FANS**

**Don’t Fail to Read**

**WHAT I THINK OF PRO FOOTBALL**

by Slingin' Sam Baugh

**Don’t Fail to Enter**

**THE BIG CASH-PRIZE FOOTBALL CONTEST**

—open to all readers

Both in the 2nd October issue of

**STREET & SMITH'S SPORT STORY MAGAZINE**

READY AT YOUR NEWS DEALER’S SEPTEMBER 16th

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over its first shock at this amazing action. And when it did, then things really started! Loesch really received, then, the help he needed—the support of the public in a way it had never given it to any law enforcers before. The people were behind Frank J. Loesch! The grand old man who had lived a life most useful by any standards you wished to choose, was adding to that usefulness in a way that would mean tremendous gain to the great lakeside city.

The public rallied around him. The cry was all against crime. People who were afraid to talk before came to Loesch and his Crime Commission and told their stories without fear or hesitation. They knew they had a champion of the right here; they knew a crime buster when they saw him in action. And they were all ready to help with a little busting of their own. They'd been holding back because of fear for a good many years, and when the floodgates were opened, there really was a flood of information forthcoming!

The result of the first investigation was quite satisfactory. It was not complete—but this was only the first skirmish, and no one before had even attempted such a thing. So the conviction of several dozen of the people brought to trial was quite a successful accomplishment. It

(Continued on page 126)
The cards were stacked with aces and jokers—and Death was wild!

Drake Deals Death

CHAPTER I.
ACES AND JOKERS.

The cigarette girl was nice-looking, dark-haired, with an oval face and a Spanish hat. Her cigarette tray was supported by a crimson ribbon which made a splash of color across her dark costume.

The tip had come from some woman in the club. It had come by
telephone. I knew, because I'd taken the call. I was sure I'd recognize the voice again. I paused before the girl and said, "Cigarettes," pointing to the kind I wanted.

She gave me the package. I made my voice careless. "Seen a guy named Webster?"

Her eyes changed, narrowed, then she turned her head. "He's down there—the room at the end of the hall. The game is poker."

I looked at her sharply. Maybe she recognized my voice, too, but I couldn't be sure. I went on past the little bar, wondering what a kid like her was doing in a joint like this. There was a short hall with a door at the end. I pushed open the door and went in.

Four men were hunched around a little table. They looked up, startled. Nobody seemed very pleased to see me. I staggered a little as I walked—not too much—but enough to make them think I'd been drinking heavily.

I said, "Oh! A poker game?"

Lou Zellar came half out of his chair. Lou Zellar was a killer, Clarion's right-hand man.

I said, "Hi, big boy! How's about me sitting in? I got dough. I got it to burn." I pulled a big roll out of my pocket.

Zellar's eyes went toward Clarion, questioning, uncertain. Clarion was looking mad. He was a big, heavy-faced man with a diamond horseshoe pin in his tie. I knew who he was.
He was head of the gambling ring, but the cops couldn’t tie anything to him.

The boy across the table from Clarion was short, black-haired, good-looking. I knew him, too. Brad Webster was a former cashier at Shady Lawn race track. The cops had had him downtown sweating him on the race-trace hold-up.

There was a lot of money on the table. Webster was a little drunk himself. He said petulantly, “Come on. Plays Cards. Let him sit in. His money’s as good as anyone else’s.”

I didn’t wait for a second invitation. I pulled up a chair. “What are the chips worth?”

Lou Zellar was banking. He snarled. “Ten bucks. You can’t buy less than a thousand.”

I didn’t bother to answer. I peeled two one-thousand-dollar bills off my roll. “Gimme a couple of stacks to start.”

They couldn’t keep their eyes off the roll. There was a cold, little grin on Zellar’s lips. He said, “You asked for it.”

I grinned back. “Never mind me. I cut my teeth on a deck of cards, big shot. Watch yourself.”

HE grunted. They sat down to play. It was Zellar’s deal. I stayed out of the pot, and watched young Webster lose eighteen hundred dollars. It was pretty raw. The deal came to Clarion, and I watched the cashier drop a thousand. It was pretty obvious what these men were doing.

The boy had a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in stolen money and they wanted it.

The deal came around to me. I was conscious of Zellar’s eyes on me, watching every move. I grinned faintly to myself. He could watch me all he wanted. I’d been raised with a deck of cards. I dealt them out carefully, swaying as I did so, making it look awkward—as if I were so tight I could hardly deal.

I dealt Webster three little aces and knew as well what he had as if the cards had been lying face-up on the table. I gave Zellar two pair; Clarion got four hearts—the five, six, seven and eight. The other punk didn’t count. His hand and mine were blanks.

I could see the boy’s face change when he picked up his cards. He wasn’t a very good poker player. Clarion opened the pot. The boy stayed. Clarion gave Zellar a signal and Lou raised. It was a nice job of whipsaw. They kept raising before the draw, trying to crowd him out. They weren’t sure of me, but I’ll give young Webster credit. He was game.

He hung on. Finally, they got tired of raising and called for cards. I dropped the fourth ace into Webster’s hand, filled Zellar’s pair into a nice full house and gave the nine of hearts to Clarion. I could see Clarion roll his cigar. He still wasn’t sure about this.

He shot a glance at me, but my head was down on the table resting on my arms as if the strain had proven too much, as if I’d passed out cold.

Clarion’s voice sounded a little funny. “Fifteen hundred.” It’s not every day in the week that a gambler holds a straight flush.

The boy said hesitantly, “I’ll raise you five hundred.” His lips were trembling a little.

Zellar took a long time, then he got the sign from Clarion. “And a thousand.”

Webster started. “Jeeze! I haven’t got that much on me.”

Clarion said in a large voice,
"Your I O U's okay with us, kid. But I warn you. It's going to cost another thousand." He shoved his chips into the pot, pulled out a well-filled wallet, found a thousand dollars in paper and added that to the chips.

The boy ran the tip of his tongue around dry lips. "Gee! I——"
I wanted to kick him under the table. I was afraid he wouldn't call. He did, finally, scribbling the I O U and tossing it in with the last of his chips.

CLARION and Zellar settled back, satisfied. They had him hooked for more money than he had with him. That's what they'd been playing for. They knew as well as I did that the money from Shady Lawn's armored truck was cached somewhere.

But the kid had been clever. He'd hidden that money well. The cops had held him three weeks, grilling him day after day. The cops were interested in more than the money. An old man named Harmon had been riding that truck, and the guy who held it up had put a bullet through him. The bullet hadn't done him any good. He'd died.

Webster said, "Okay, fellas. Read 'em and weep."

He threw down his four aces.

Zellar tossed his hand into the discard. He'd known all along, from Clarion's signal, that he had been beaten.

The gambler laid down his cards one by one. I could feel the tension in the room grow as they counted — Five—six—seven—eight and nine of hearts. A straight flush!

Zellar sucked his breath sharply. Webster's chair slammed back, his yellow face a mask of fury. "You don't get away with——"

I said, "Sit down!" My gun was peeping at him over the edge of the table. He looked funny.

Zellar swore. Clarion let his breath out slowly. The third punk didn't count. Webster was staring at me narrow-eyed, his hand close to his pocket.

I said, "Take it away, punk."
His face was very white. "That was a crooked deal. You guys aren't getting away with this."

I said, "Stop yapping. What's the matter, yellow-belly? Can't you take it?"

He said, "I can take it all right."
I walked around the table. "Then start taking it and shut up." I reached into his pocket and got the .38.

Clarion and Zellar were watching me. They didn't understand, and they didn't like things they couldn't figure out.

I said to Clarion, "Pick up the dough, big shot. Or maybe you don't want it?"

His thick-fingered hands went out and gathered it in. He said to Zellar from the corner of his mouth. "Take Webster out and buy him a drink."

The boy didn't want to go. Zellar locked a couple of fingers around his coat collar and pushed him toward the door. Clarion nodded to the other punk, and he followed. When the door closed, the big gambler looked at me.

"ALL right, Red. Who are you? What's the idea of butting into the game?"

I said, "What are you beefing about? I gave you a straight flush, didn't I? What do you want—a royal?"

"I still don't like it," he said. "I don't like things I don't understand. And I don't savvy this."

I grinned at him. "And I heard that Max Clarion was a smart hom-
bre. Okay, big shot. Play this on your violin: That punk who just walked out of here has a hundred and fifty grand that was stolen from Shady Lawn race track. You boys are after it. Well, so am I!"

He said, "Who are you?"

I told him. "Just a smart guy who knows all the answers. I was going to grab it all for myself, then I got to thinking about it. You've got a nice little organization here, Clarion, what with the slot machines, the take from the bookies and all the little angels. I could go ahead and get this hundred and fifty grand for myself, but I got to figuring things out. It might be better to cut you in on it and build myself a permanent hook-up."

He said, "You've got a lot of nerve walkin' in here. I'm not sayin' that Webster has got that dough. I'm not sayin' that any of this you're talkin' about is right. But just supposin' it is? Why should we cut you in on it?"

I said, "Because I'm a good guy to have around."

"And how do I know you're a good guy?"

I offered, "Didn't I just prove it with that deck of cards? Now listen, Clarion"—I made my voice hard—"and get this through your fat head. I dealt Webster from a cold deck. I did it for a reason. You've got his I O U for a couple of grand. He hasn't got the dough on him. He'll have to go get it. So what? So, we follow him. That's where we get our fingers on that hundred and fifty grand."

He sneered. "You're a smart boy to figure that out all by yourself. What in the hell do you think we were playing poker with that punk for? Fun? We had it all framed before you stuck your snout in it. And we're going ahead just as we planned. You may be declaring yourself in, Red, but you picked the wrong spot to try and muscle." His big hand leaped toward the front of his coat. He was fast, but he wasn't fast enough.

My gun was already in my hand. I laughed at him. "Don't be a damn fool, Clarion. If you want to start something, I'll smear you all over the carpet. Am I in or not?"

He made quick decisions. He said savagely, "You're in."

I said, "Swell. Now, go out there and raise hell about that I O U. Tell the punk you want the dough and you want it tonight. He'll have to go get it. That'll give you a chance to tail him. I'll be in the bar."

He nodded and, turning, left the room. I followed him out, paused at the bar for a drink. I needed one. Then I looked around for the cigarette girl, but she wasn't in sight.

ZELLAR came through the door, stopped when he saw me and motioned to the bartender. The man went up and talked to him, then he came back. He stood there polishing glasses, waiting for me to order. I didn't.

He said, finally, "Have a drink on the house?"

He didn't wait for me to nod, but poured a drink. He didn't pour it on the bar; he poured it underneath, then he lifted the glass and slid it toward me. For a moment I stared at it, then shook my head.

"Drink it yourself."

The bartender's flabby face lost color. I shot a look over my shoulder. Zellar had disappeared. My hand went into my shoulder clip and brought out the gun. The bartender got almost cross-eyed looking at it.

I ordered, "Go ahead. Drink it."

His hand came out hesitantly, started to carry the little glass up
to his colorless lips. Suddenly the glass slipped, crashed to the floor with tinkling sound, spilling its contents across the front of his bulging stomach in a splash of dampness.

My lips twisted. "So, Zellar told you to hand me a Mickey? What's the idea?" I moved the gun for emphasis.

He shivered as if struck by a sudden draft of icy air. "I—I—"

I said, "Where'd Zellar and Clarion go?"

He jerked his head toward the door. "In the office." He was pretty scared.

I turned without a word and went back along the hall. The office was the second door on the left. I pushed it open, saw Zellar standing behind the desk.

He swung around as he heard the door. His lips drew back in a snarl. "What do you mean butting in here without knocking?"

I said, "What do you mean having the bartender try to slip me a Mickey? I should blast you."

There was noise in the room beyond and Clarion came to the door, his heavy face red. "Look. Will you guys cut it out?"

I stared at him. "Listen," I rapped. "Either I'm in on this or I'm not. Now's the time to decide."

He said, "You're in."

I nodded and flashed Zellar a mocking grin of satisfaction. "Then tell this louse to lay off, will you? He tried to hand me a doped drink. Where's Webster?"

Clarion said, "He's in the back room. I don't trust him."

I stared. "But I thought you were going to send him after the dough?"

Clarion shrugged. "I tell you I don't trust him. I made him send somebody."

I said, "And who'd he send?"

Clarion told me, "The cigarette girl. They're pretty friendly."

My eyes got narrow at that. I didn't like it at all. I said, "Send Webster. Don't be a damn fool."

His face started to get purple. "Hold it, Red. I'm running this. The cigarette girl goes. You stay here. Zellar and I will tail her."

I laughed harshly. "What do you think I am—a sap? I stay here. You walk out with the dough, and I can whistle for my cut."

Clarion said, "You don't think I'm going to walk out and leave this joint, do you? Don't worry, I'll be back. Come on, Zellar. The girl's changing her clothes. She'll be leaving in a minute."

CHAPTER II.
COP KILL.

I WATCHED them go. I didn't like it a bit. It spoiled all my plans. Then I got another idea. I went back to see my friend the barkeep. His face lost what little color it had gained while I'd been away. He didn't like me. Not only he didn't like me, but he was afraid of me.

I hooked my elbow on the bar and pointed with my thumb to an unopened bottle of Scotch. I said, "Pass it over. And give me a clean glass. I'll pour it myself. That way, I'll be certain of what I'm drinking."

He grunted and obeyed. I jerked the cork, poured a good shot and downed it.

Clarion and Zellar came through the bar on their way to the front door. Clarion stopped to say, "Don't try anything, Red. Just hang around and you'll get your share. If you try to mess things up, it'll be just tough."

I didn't even bother to answer. I watched them go, waited until I heard a cab's motor outside; then, I
turned around. My gun had hopped out into my hand.

The bartender got cross-eyed again. Another night like this one and he'd need glasses.

I said, "Where's that punk, Webster?"

He ran a little red tongue around dry lips. "I don't——"

I picked up the whisky bottle in my free hand. "Which would you rather have—a slug in the tummy or a piece of this across your skull?"

He was looking around desperately for help. There wasn't any. The bar was deserted. The whole gang was in watching the floor show. He said, "They've probably got him downstairs. But you'll just run into trouble, punk. Pete's watching him."

I said, "I like trouble. How do I get downstairs?"

He told me I had to go through the kitchen. I warned him that if he opened his big mouth about me, I'd come back and fill it full of loose teeth. Then I went out through the kitchen and down the stairs to a lighted basement.

The chef and the short-order man looked at me, but they didn't say anything. They weren't part of the mob. I went along the concrete-floored passage toward the end of the hall. The other mug, Pete, who'd been in the poker game, got up off a straight chair, his eyes watchful. I already had my gun in my hand. He didn't have a chance, and he knew it.

He protested, "Clarion's going to be very mad about this."

I told him, "You're not going to like it so well, either," and slapped him along the side of his head with my rod. I caught him as he slumped and eased him down. I was afraid he'd crack his dome on the concrete. Heads are funny that way.

I TOOK the key out of his pocket and unlocked the door. There were bars at the window. There was no more chance of crashing out of that room than there would be from a tomb. Webster was walking around the room like a penned-up jungle cat. He swung around when he heard the door open, saw me, and his face got livid.

"You dirty——"

I said, "Save it. While you're cussing me, Zellar and Clarion are grabbing your hundred and fifty grand."

He gasped, "You're crazy!"

"All right; I'm crazy. You told the cigarette gal where to go. They're tailing her."

He swore hoarsely. "If I could only get out of here—— If I only had a gun——"

I said, "I'll get you out of here, but I won't give you a gun."

He stared at me, his eyes pin points. "Why are you doing this?"

I said, "For seventy-five grand. That's what you're going to give me. It's a fifty-fifty split, Webster."

He cried, "Go to hell!"

I shrugged. "All right. If that's the way you feel about it. You went to a lot of trouble to hold up that armored truck. It's a shame you're not going to see another nickel of it."

He snarled, "You chiseling rat! You dirty, low-down——"

I said, "Go ahead. Names never hurt anyone. Get it off your chest. Enjoy yourself. Meanwhile, Clarion and Zellar are getting away with your dough."

He stopped raving. "All right. Let's get going. What are we waiting for?"

I said, "For you to tell me where the cache is. If I'd known where the dough was, I'd have gotten it myself."
He hesitated on that one, too; but it was his only out. He either played ball with me, or he didn't play at all. He said, "It's in an old house out on Pine Street. The house belongs to an uncle of mine."

I nodded. "Sure! Come on. I've got a car in the parking lot."

Pete was still unconscious when we passed him. There wasn't any trouble from there. We went out through the kitchen, through the back door onto the alley. There wasn't any trouble at all. We got in the car and started across town fast. I wanted to get to the money before Clarion and Zellar, if I could. We didn't make it.

I KNEW a block away from the house that we hadn't.

Shots hammered out through the still night air. I stepped the throttle down to the coupé's floor boards and we tore ahead, wheeled around the corner, our rubber screaming. I pitched the coupé right up over the curb and drove it into the tangled, unkempt garden. It was faster that way. I had the door open and hit the ground running.

Webster was at my shoulder as we barged onto the porch and tore through into the hall. Zellar had his back to the door. His gun flashed as we came in, and a cop pitched out of a room on the right.

The cop was a big man in a nice, blue uniform. He was dead before he ever hit the floor. Zellar spun around as I said:

"Drop it!"

He let the gun slide, his yellow face whitening, staring first at me, then at Webster.

I said, "Where's the dough? Where's Clarion?"

He jerked his head toward the stairs. "Clarion's on the landing. He's got a slug in his shoulder."

I called, "Come on down, big shot, or I'll start blasting."

He came down slowly, swaying, his face white. The gun was dangling from his hand, but he made no effort to raise it. The bullet in his shoulder had taken a lot of fight out of him.

I said, "What happened?"

Clarion swore, said, "The girl came in and got the dough all right. It was in a black bag. We waited until she got downstairs with it, then we jumped her. But I never got my hands on her. There were a couple cops in that other room. They started blasting. We got them both."

I asked, "Where's the girl?"

Clarion swore again. "She scammed out. Must have gone through the window. She took the dough with her."

I looked at him. "If you're lying—"

He said, "Dammit—why should I lie?" Then he swung to face Webster. "Where is she? Where would she go?"

I said, "She worked at your club, Clarion. You ought to know."

"Well, I don't," he snapped. "But this punk does. Come on, Webster. Where would the dame go?" He started to raise his gun.

I said, "Drop it." My rod was steady on his vest.

His face looked paper-white. "What is this, Red. Are you crossing?"

I said, "Nuts to you, Clarion. Turn around and walk back upstairs. You too, Zellar. Walk fast."

They obeyed sullenly. I snatched up the rods they had dropped, shoved them into my pocket; then, I grabbed Webster's arm.

"Come on, kid. Let's scram out of here. There'll be more cops in a minute."

We turned and ran toward the
coupé, Clarion and Zellar's guns bouncing against Webster's. I felt like a moving arsenal.

We threw ourselves into the coupé. I backed it around, bumped down over the curb and started up Pine Street fast. We'd gone about five blocks when I picked up lights in the rear-view mirror.

THEY were coming fast. They might not be following us, of course. I couldn't be sure, but I couldn't afford to make a mistake. The muscles at the back of my neck tightened. The coupé was doing all she'd do, the old rods hammering as the motor turned over. And yet the pursuing car gained.

I shot a glance at the dark road ahead. There was no help there—nothing. Suddenly, lancelike flame leaped from the side of the pursuing car.

I barked at Webster, "Get down on the floor!"

He was pretty cool. He said, "Gimme a gun."

I didn't. I didn't want him to have one.

I kept pushing the coupé; but it was no use. The engine simply lacked guts. It wouldn't turn up any faster. I guessed that Zellar and Clarion must be in the car behind us. It wasn't a cops' car, so they weren't cops. I wondered where the two had gotten guns. I had their rods in my pocket. Then I remembered the dead police. They'd had guns, of course. I cursed myself for being so stupid, but it was too late now.

The lights of the pursuing car came on, looking enormous, like twin full moons hurtling toward me in my mirror. Then, suddenly, the coupé lunged across the road. I fought the wheel, guessing that a bullet had found our tire. The coupé jumped the road, plowed through a ditch and hit a fence. Something crashed across the top of my head, then everything went black.

The first thing I was conscious of was cutting my finger on the shattered windshield. The car was over on its side, the moon coming through the broken door above my head. I started to get up, felt something hard in my coat pocket, fumbled and pulled out the two rods I'd taken from Zellar and Clarion.

I turned around, expecting to find the boy unconscious; but he wasn't in the car. I struggled out of the coupé. I wondered where he was. I looked around the wreck carefully, but there was no sign of him.

I swore under my breath. Had Clarion and Zellar gotten him? If they had, why had they left me alive? It didn't seem to make sense. Then I remembered that Webster's gun wasn't in my pocket.

An automobile was coming down the road. I turned and limped toward the pavement, got out in the car's way and held up my arm. The driver stopped.

A big man in evening clothes jumped out and shoved a gun against me. I guess he thought it was a hold-up.

I said, "Accident," and pointed to the overturned coupé.

He came over to the ditch and looked at the car. Then he drove me into town. I didn't have the slightest idea where to find either Webster or the girl. There was nothing for me to do but go back to Clarion's club.

THE bartender wasn't glad to see me. His mouth dropped open like a stuck hog's. He said, "You—back—"

Continued on page 118
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Continued from page 114

I nodded. “I’m back. Where’s Zellar and Clarion?”

He shook his head. “I haven’t seen them. I hope I don’t. I’m quitting this job. It’s too hard on the nerves.

“It’ll be harder if you’re lying,” I told him.

He started to answer, then his eyes widened as he looked across my shoulder. The punk named Pete was coming through the door at the end of the bar. There was a strip of tape across one side of his head. I guess I’d hit him harder than I meant to.

He saw me and stopped, but my hand was already on the gun in my side coat pocket. I shoved the cloth forward a little and walked toward him. He backed through the door ahead of me.

I said, “Where’s Clarion?”

He shook his head. “They haven’t come back.”

I said, “We’ll just walk around the joint and find out.”

We did. We went over it from top to bottom. There wasn’t any sign of either Clarion or Zellar. I parked myself at the end of the bar finally.

I kept Pete with me. I didn’t want him wandering around starting things. I kept an eye on the bartender, too; but still nothing happened. Finally, I gave it up when they got ready to close the joint, got in a cab and rode over to my hotel.

On the way, I stopped at the office. Jimmy Murphy was in charge. He said, “I’m glad you showed up. Some dame’s been calling for you every half hour.”

I said, “Did she leave a name?”

He shook his head. “No. And she didn’t know yours. She asked for the red-headed guy with the nice voice.”

I said, “It must be one of my public.”

He said, “She must be screwy if she thinks you’ve got a nice voice. Here’s the phone number.”

I took it and called, not having the slightest idea who it was; but the minute she answered, I knew. It was the cigarette girl from Clarion’s club.

She said, “Can you come over here right away?”

I said, “Sure. I’m practically there already. What happened, kid? Is Webster there?”

She said, “No. I want to talk to you.”

I hung up. Jimmy Murphy suggested, “Maybe I’d better go with you. She sounded nice over the telephone.”

I said, “Maybe you’d better not.” I pulled the two guns out of my pocket and tossed them on the desk. “A couple of cops died out in an old house on Pine Street. The bullets came from these.”

He said, “Where do we come into that?”

I shrugged, said, “Use your own judgment,” turned and went out the door.

CHAPTER III.
HELL AND HELEN.

The girl lived at the Albert Arms on East Sixty-sixth Street. I rode my cab over there, got out in front of the place and looked the building over.

It was swanky, new. I wondered, as I paid the driver, just how a cigarette girl could pay the rent in a joint like this. There were a lot of ways she might have done it, but I didn’t like to think of them.

I hadn’t seen much of the dame, and I couldn’t seem to fit her into
the picture. On the face of it, she was Webster's girl, but she'd done a lot of screwy things that I couldn't explain.

The elevator was automatic. I rode it to the third floor, went along the hall, my feet not making any sound on the thick nap of the rug. I was just about to knock, when I heard loud voices from inside. I was pretty sure the man's voice was Webster's. I tried the knob, found the door unlocked and pushed it open gently.

The girl was saying, "I tell you, I haven't got it. I tell you, Clarion's crazy. I never got it. When those cops started shooting at the house, I scammed; but I didn't take the bag with me."

Webster's face was pasty. There was a bump on the back of his head. I guess he'd gotten the bump when the coupé had gone into the ditch. He had a gun in his hand, but he wasn't using the gun. He had the girl's wrist in his other hand and was twisting it.

She cried out just as I got the door wide enough to see. I shot a quick look around the room. There was a phone on the stand. My mouth tightened. This would probably work, too.

I said, "Let go of her, Webster," and jumped toward him. I figured he'd swing shooting. That's just what he tried to do. But I was so close that I caught him around the waist and rammed my gun against his spine. His tense body relaxed.

He said, "Oh, it's you!" and let his gun slide to the carpet.

I said, "Yeah. It's me. I thought we were partners? Now you're crossing me."

He licked his lips, trying to think fast. He wasn't so good at thinking, anyway. He said, "I thought you were—dead. You weren't even breathing. I was scared the law would come along and ask questions. I had to lam, but I'm not trying to cross you, Red. I made a deal with you. It still goes. Fifty-fifty. Only this dame has the dough."

I turned and looked at her, taking my gun out of Webster's back and pointing it in her face. "Come on, sister. Cough up. Where's the dough?"

She looked at me and her eyes got an incredulous look. "But—I thought—"

I cut her short, harshly. "Never mind thinking. Get the dough."

She looked at me a minute longer, then she turned and went into the bedroom. I followed her in. She went over to the window, opened it. The bag was hanging out of the window on a short rope. She pulled it up, handed me the bag wordlessly. Her dark eyes glittered like a couple of live coals. It wasn't hate in her eyes—just contempt.

She said, "Help yourself, double-crosser."

I opened the bag. The money was there, all right—neat packages of it, still with the race-track wrappers on them. I closed it and walked back into the front room, then I stopped.

WEBSTER stood in the middle of the floor. He'd picked up the gun and it was pointed directly at my wishbone. He said, "For a smart punk, you're awful dumb."

I didn't answer. I let my rod slide to the rug at my feet. He grinned as he scooped it up, grabbed the bag and started backing toward the door.

"Listen, redhead! If either you or the dame stick your snoots out of this apartment in the next five minutes, you'll get them blown off. I'm not kidding."
I said, "Blown off just like that armored truck driver got his?"

Webster snarled at me, "One more crack like that and I'll blast you." He backed through the door, slammed it.

The girl was in the way. I pushed her to one side, raced across and caught up the phone, barked, "Police headquarters!" into it. "Snap it up, sister! Emergency!"

The sergeant answered. I said, "This is Red Drake, undercover man for the State Racing Commission. Now get this straight: Brad Webster is somewhere in the neighborhood of East Sixty-sixth Street and Arlington Boulevard. He's carrying a black case that has a hundred and fifty grand in it which was stolen from that race-track truck. Pick him up. The money's still done up in the original wrappers. You'll have him dead to rights on it. Get the flash on the radio. Have all cars stand by."

He was already barking orders, hardly listening to me. I hung up and turned around.

THE girl was staring at me. The contempt had disappeared from her dark eyes. She said, "So that's the way it is?"

I said, "Yeah. That's the way it is. Webster's the guy who held up that armored truck. He used to be cashier at Shady Lawn race track. The cops knew he did it, but they didn't have any proof. He pulled the job alone and hid the money out in that old house on Pine Street. The house used to belong to his uncle."

She nodded. "Where do you come into it?"

I said, "I was loaned by the Racing Commission, to help out. We knew about the house. We found the money, but we couldn't tie Webster to it. We got the cops to turn him loose and sat around for days waiting for him to come to get the money. We wanted to catch him with the dough in his hands. Then a stool pigeon tipped us off that he was loafering around Clarion's club; that Clarion was trying to get the money."

The girl said, "I know. I paid that man ten dollars to give the police that tip."

I stared at her. "And you called the police tonight?"

She nodded. I said, "I came to the club in answer to your phone call. I knew you'd made the call as soon as I heard your voice."

She smiled. "And I recognized yours. Clarion and Zellar had Webster in the poker game. They were going to make him lose so he'd lead them to the money. I thought the cops should know."

I nodded. "That's exactly what I wanted to happen. I wanted Webster to go to the old house because the cops were still watching it. I dealt the cold deck so he'd have to go out to Pine Street after more money. It only led to killings. Those cops got killed. I've got Zellar's and Clarion's guns down at headquarters. A ballistics man will check on the bullets in the dead cops."

"But we still didn't have anything on Webster. That's why I played it dumb. That's why I let him walk out of here with the bag, so the radio men could pick him up with the evidence."

She said, "I hope they do. It's what I've worked for—for months."

I stared. "And just why have you worked for it? Where do you come into this?"

Her lips twisted a little, but she wasn't smiling. She said, "I'm Al
Harmon's daughter. My dad was—killed in that armored truck hold-up. The cops didn't do anything about catching dad's murderer, so I was doing the best I could."

I was stuck for words. I said, "It was a game thing to do, kid."

She went on as if she didn't hear. "Now we've got them. The cops'll pick up Webster. You'll get Clarion and Zellar for shooting those two cops out on Pine Street. I can testify that they were there. I——"

She whitened. She was staring beyond me, and I swung around.

THE door was wide open, Zellar standing in it, a gun low against one hip. He stepped forward and Clarion pushed Webster in. The boy still carried the bag, but he looked sick.

Clarion said, "So you can testify that we killed those cops?" He was leering at the girl. "Well, sister, you aren't going to testify to anything—neither you nor this stool pigeon. You're through. Washed up!"

I looked at them. "Where'd you come from?"

Clarion said, "We followed you from the club. You were just leaving when we came in the back way. We wanted to see where you'd go."

Zellar cut in, "Shut up! Let's blast them." His gun came up in front of him, steady, rigid.

Clarion was watching us more than he was Webster. The punk suddenly swung the bag against Zellar's arm. It was heavy. Paper is light, but there was a lot in it—a hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth.

Zellar twister; his gun kicked back against the heel of his hand twice and the bullets crashing into Webster, driving him downward to the floor.

I leaped forward, swinging. Clarion jerked around and drove a shot at me. The bullet caught me

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COMPLEXION
in the left shoulder, the heavy slug stopping me. I threw myself sideways into the girl, knocking her frail body back into the kitchen. I knew somebody had to die in that room, but I didn't want it to be her.

Clarion blasted at me again, the bullet just nicking my ear. I dived for him low, and the third shot ripped along the back of my coat. Zellar was still busy with Webster, but he turned around as my shoulder hit Clarion directly in the middle.

The big man and I went down together, a tangled heap on the thick carpet. The fingers of my right hand were locked around his gun wrist. I tightened my grip, rolled over. The action saved my life, for it dragged Clarion's bulk on top of me just as Zellar fired. Clarion relaxed suddenly, dead weight across me.

I grabbed the gun from his inert fingers and snapped a shot at Zellar. He was at a disadvantage. Clarion's body was a shield for me. The big man's very bulk was a protection. Zellar dived through the kitchen door. I thought I had him bottled up in there. A minute later I knew my mistake.

HE reappeared holding the struggling girl before him as a shield. I could see his snarling face across her shoulder, but I didn't dare shoot. My bullet might have struck her. He snapped another shot at me as he charged across toward the hall door. It grazed Clarion's dead shoulder and kicked dyed wool from the rug beside my ear; then, he barged through into the hall, still carrying the fighting girl.

I pushed Clarion's body from me. He was heavy and it took me a minute to get to my feet. When I made the apartment door, Zellar and the girl were just disappearing into the elevator. I swung toward the stairs. There were three flights of them. No one ever went down faster than
The elevator was a slow, automatic affair.

I made the ground floor before they did. I was beside the cage, flat against the wall when the steel door slid back. Zellar stuck his head out to look around. I chopped at it with my gun, missed. He jerked it back like a turtle seeking the shelter of its shell, tried to get the door shut, but I spun around into the cage before he could succeed.

I couldn't shoot. The chance was fifty-fifty that I'd hit the girl, but that didn't bother Zellar.

His gun roared directly in my face. I felt the sharp sting as the bullet caught me in the chest. The force of it stopped me for an instant, but the very drive of my charge carried me on. My hands found his throat, locked on it and we went down together.

I tried to shout to the girl to run. My voice was only a hoarse croak. I didn't have enough wind left to really make a sound. I don't think it would have made any difference, anyway. She wasn't the running kind.

Zellar and I were tangled up on the bottom of the cage. My gun had fallen somewhere under me. I couldn't find it. My fingers were still clawing desperately at his throat. He was trying to break my grip; his fist hammered out and caught me in the chest. It struck about where the bullet had. I never had anything hurt so much in my life.

The cage seemed to be swinging around on the end of a long, dangling rope. Fire, in little pinwheels, shot in and out around my eyes. My grip on his throat relaxed, but not consciously. I just lacked the will power to keep my fingers tight on his skin.

Then feet were pounding along the hall and the place was jammed with cops. They picked me up and laid me on the bench till the am-
baculence came. I stared up at the captain, asking him how they'd gotten there.

He said, "They traced your call. They came over as soon as they could."

I didn't tell him I was glad to see him. I didn't need to. He knew it. I was just twisting around trying to get more comfortable when I saw two big flatfeet leading the girl out between them.

I yelped at that. I made them bring her back, cussed them out plenty. I told them, "That's one dame who doesn't take a ride tonight. That's Al Harmon's daughter, the guy who got shot on the truck. She's about the gamest kid you'll find in a long time."

But I was wrong about one thing. She did take a ride that night. She rode down to the hospital with me in the ambulance. Not only that, but she insisted on staying. She was a swell kid. I even found out what her first name was. It was Helen. Somehow, I've always thought Helen was a nice name.

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(Continued from page 105)

whetted the appetite of the public. The start was made; more should be done in the same direction.

ALL this, of course, was not done in a day or a week. It took months, and years, to bring about some of these convictions. In that time, there were changes in the political set-ups, but so strong a hold did Frank J. Loesch have on the public, so well did he do his job, that he was carried on through political changes in order to keep on with his work.

So he went ahead. He added more and more convictions to his list. He conducted his campaign so effectively that after a while politicians found it best not to be even seen with gangsters, or those connected with gangsters. He had really put a wedge between gangsters and politics, and the start of that was the beginning of the end for organized crime in Chicago.

His investigations continued. He cleaned up groups of gangsters; he cleaned up crooked business in city departments; he cleaned up everywhere where dirt, corruption, and crookedness could be found. Finally, he had made enough impression on city politicians, and public workers, and on the public in general, to stage his great fight against gangsters in general.

He compiled a list of two dozen “leading” gangsters; names of men who were known to be engaged in crime, and against whom he had enough evidence to begin action, but not quite enough to bring about conviction.

This was the list he published as that of the leading “Public Enemies.” Name after name was read by the public. With most of those
names, the people were familiar. Most of them the people knew to be crooks and gangsters. On many of them, citizens had information which would lead to an easier conviction, but up to now they had no way of knowing the position of these crooks as regards the law.

Now they had. They could see, now, that the finger was pointing on these would-be big-shots. And they were not afraid. One after another, the citizens again made a trek to the office of Frank J. Loesch, and told him and his investigators what they knew about the names on this list.

The pressure was beginning. Gangsters started to feel it, too. They attempted to do something about it, but found out that every move they made was investigated or stopped. Those that thought they were succeeding in putting one over on the Crime Commission learned, too late, that they were merely hanging themselves on the rope the Commission let them have.

That started the "great exodus" from Chicago. Crime began to move. Most of it did not move fast enough. Convictions came rapidly, one after the other, and the rule of crime in Chicago was definitely broken.

The effect on Chicago, of course, was remarkable. It meant that the city was untrammeled, uncontrolled by the hand of crime. Once this hand was lifted off the great me-
tropolis, other divisions of the city government, business, and life in general felt better. There was a great deal less thievery and "influence" in city politics, because there was no longer that heavy pressure which crime exerted upon even the smallest of city servants. Property values, which declined badly in sections where crime "headquarters" were known to exist, came back to normal. The saving in city expenditures meant a saving in taxes. The let-up on crime meant that the city police department could function more efficiently, since it no longer had to carry an excessive load, and this meant that every one in the department worked much better.

WHAT about Loesch? Was his task done?

Almost. There were just a few more odds and ends to clean up, and the major part of the work would be cleaned up entirely. Loesch, of course, was getting older all the time. His really "big push" started when he was seventy-six. Ten years later—early in 1938—when he had gotten things rolling smoothly, he decided that he should not press too hard. At almost eighty-six, he thought he should have some rest. But only after everything was cleaned up did he retire; only after he could turn to the city and say that crime had been conquered, did he quit the job that a long-suffering public placed on him.

All this work was done unostentatiously. True, his name became a byword in police circles. He was known as the man who could get things done. But personal publicity he never sought. He merely did his job as best he could, and that best was as good as any one, young or old, could have done it!

So youth must bow, in this one case, to age and the wisdom of the years. Other cities have their younger heroes, their more dramatic,
sensational figures who go after crime and beat it. Chicago has its Frank J. Loesch, its grand old man, its hero. It certainly need not bow to any other city, to any other man, for in Frank J. Loesch it has a man to really honor. Perhaps, some day in the future, that honor will be given in a more material way. Loesch doesn't much care. He wants to have some rest and relaxation after a tough job; and regardless of what the future brings, or how posterity remembers him, he can feel extremely happy and contented in the knowledge that a mighty metropolis owes its life to him, and is truly grateful.


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THIS MAN Doubted:
He said: "Yes, I need money. I am tired of penny pinching. Your generous offer sounds good to me. It costs nothing to investigate—I have everything to gain. I am going to send my name and find out just what you have to offer me."

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A FEW WEEKS LATER

FAILURE

Now look at these two men as they meet in the street. One is a success and the other a failure. One has the courage to risk everything—his future and his daughter—he is still in back luck. The man in the car is a success because he was willing to listen to reason. He was not afraid to send in his name and get the facts. When he saw my public announcement stating I would give a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan to producers as a bonus in addition to their earnings, he broadcast the fact. Why don’t you, too, investigate?

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Albert Mills, President
6414 Monmouth Ave.
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